SETTLEMENT PATTERNS OF PHILISTINE CITY-STATES

Alon Shavit

An analysis of a regional study conducted in Israel’s southern Coastal Plain (Shavit 2003) showed that the settlement pattern of most of the cities in Philistia, from the beginning of the Iron Age until the 8th century BCE, was characterized by urban centers and by an almost total absence of a rural hinterland; that is, the absence of a hierarchal settlement complex in the vicinity of the cities, as could be expected in a system of “mature” settlements.

In order to examine the cultural sources of the settlement complexes of the important urban centers in Philistia, from the beginning of the Iron Age onward, we should compare them to the following relevant settlement complexes:

• settlement patterns prior to the settling of the Philistines in the research region at the end of the Late Bronze Age;
• other settlement patterns in the Land of Israel, contemporary with those in the Philistia region;
• settlement patterns in the Aegean world at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age.

Diagnosing the settlement pattern that characterized Philistia throughout most of the Iron Age and defining its cultural sources are important instruments for defining the cultural identity of urban centers in Philistia, and for understanding the mutual relationships between the centers themselves and between them and nearby political entities.

A Survey of Israel’s Southern Coastal Plain during the Iron Age II

This study is based on the reconstruction of the settlement patterns that existed in the southern Coastal Plain during the Iron Age II (Fig. 1). The reconstruction work combined a critical study of finds from 63
excavated sites; a field survey of approximately 240 days; the results of previously conducted surveys; as well as gathering of substantial information from researches and archive reports that have not yet been published. As of today, 248 sites have been dated to the Iron Age II in the southern Coastal Plain. They are spread across 3,260 km², stretching from the Yarkon River in the north to Nahal Besor in the south, and from the Judean Shephela in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

**Methodological Remarks**

A regional study of settlements in ancient periods cannot be based solely on data obtained through fieldwork. Subjective evaluations made by the surveyor play an important role in interpreting this data. This is particularly true in research dealing with the Iron Age II, a period about which information is so scarce. The following evaluations refer to the populated area of each site in every sub-period, and to the population density of each site.\(^1\) Below are some of the problems encountered during this study:

It is hard to estimate the life span of a settlement, the number of times it was abandoned and resettled during one period of time, and whether or not it was inhabited simultaneously with other sites; yet these distinctions are significant for demographic estimates. The presupposition of the present study, adopting the methodology of regional archaeology, is that sites that yielded finds from a particular period were populated during at least a part of that period.\(^2\)

Differences in survey intensity of different areas may affect the reconstruction of the settlement picture.

Geological and geomorphological processes impede fieldwork, result analysis, and consequent reconstructions of ancient settlement patterns. For example, beach sand in coastal areas, silt deposits in riverbeds, and layers of loess covering short-lived sites obscure site remains thus

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1 For the methodological problems of regional studies in ancient periods, see Portugali 1988.

2 For a discussion of problems involved in demographic evaluations based on this assumption, see Schacht 1984.