Chapter Twenty-Seven

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS

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General

The first part of this chapter discusses the overall picture of el-Ahwat as it emerges from various factors: its location, environment, the contemporaneous sites in its vicinity, its architecture (design and masonry), pottery, small finds, stones, flint, economy of the population, and special finds — among them the iron furnace.

The second part of the chapter attempts to identify the possible inhabitants of the site, based on an analysis of historical sources of the period.

Several of the conclusions have already been discussed in the introductory chapter or touched upon in other chapters of this volume, while here various interpretations will be elaborated.

Archaeology and Economy of the Site

Location and Environment

El-Ahwat is located on the moderate, western slope of a high hill facing north, west, and south. The site is situated about 1,200 m southeast and 200 m higher than the main road (the ‘Arunah pass) meaning that, from the settlement itself, inhabitants were not able to control the road. While, naturally, they could descend to and use the road, differences in elevation and distance kept them relatively isolated from it. Visibility from the site is excellent, but only to far distances. By contrast, the close vicinity would have been almost completely hidden by the dense Mediterranean forest (maquis — Chapter 1), so that the erection of a system of stone towers (Chapter 11) in the wood around the site seems logical and even inevitable.

The environment of the site is not particularly suitable for settlement. The closest spring, Ain ez-Zeituneh, is 400–500 m to the north; the coverage of dense wood makes both movement and visibility difficult; and the prevalence of large stones and rocks dispersed in the soil necessitates intensive stone-clearance before agriculture can be undertaken. Within the maquis surrounding the site, only small, terraced patches of agricultural soil were discerned, meaning that the agricultural fields of the site must have been relatively distant — pre-
sumably in the Bart’ah valley, some 1–1.5 km from the settlement and at a lesser elevation.

Under these conditions, the choice of this location for the founding of a settlement must have been dictated by considerations other than economical or agricultural, the nature of which can only be surmised.

Sites of the Period in the Vicinity

An examination of the area depicted in the survey map (Zertal and Mirkam 2000, Fig. 18) reveals the relative isolation of the site. To the east of el-Ahwat, the area is almost completely void of Iron Age I sites, whereas 2–3 km to the south there is a cluster of ten sites belonging to this period (ibid., Nos. 87, 94–96, 104, 106–108, and 114–115).

Determining the ethnicity of the settlements from this period is always uncertain, but several factors seem to indicate that the population of these sites was mainly Israelite. This consideration is important in the context of the preceding issue, i.e., the geographical location of the site. One may suggest that the stronghold or citadel founded in such harsh and isolated environment might very well have been an outpost of settlers — Egyptians and/or Shardana — purposely situated opposite the Israelite settlements. Bearing in mind the geopolitical situation in 12th century BCE Canaan, where Sea Peoples competed with Israelites and Canaanites for the settlement of territories, this would appear to be a reasonable assumption, and would provide a logical basis for the location of the fortified city (cf., for example, Weinstein 1992; Lesko 1992). A quite similar phenomenon of fortified, hilly, and isolated sites is also known from Crete of the same period (Heiden 1988), though the geopolitical conditions there were different.

Architecture

From the thorough discussion of this subject in earlier chapters, we can conclude that certain elements of the fortifications (their overall design, the “towers,” the city gate and its “approach”) are of possible western Mediterranean influence — mainly from Bronze Age Sar-dinia and Corsica. At the same time, the “korridorhaus”-type of Complex 32 in Area C1 displays Aegean (Mycenaean) influence. However, the other buildings at the site (Areas C1 and D) are of the local three- or four-room house type. All in all, the architecture of the site is a mixture of local Iron Age I elements (the city itself and its buildings) together with foreign elements in the fortifications.

An analysis of architectural details reveals differences from the “classical” masonry of the period.