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# The Northern Kingdom in the Late Tenth–Ninth Centuries BCE

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THE SOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS

A MAJOR PROBLEM IN THE DISCUSSION OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL in the late tenth–ninth centuries is the evaluation of the Books of Kings as a source for historical reconstruction. In addition to Kings, there are some late tenth–ninth century Egyptian, Assyrian, Aramaic and Moabite royal inscriptions that refer to various events in the history of the kingdom. However, the number and scope of these inscriptions are limited, and on their basis plus the archaeological data alone we would be unable to draw even a schematic history. Moreover, when discussed in isolation, the contribution of the royal inscriptions turns out to be minimal, but when set against the biblical account they fill some gaps in the history and help us to evaluate the authenticity of other closely related descriptions. Therefore it is necessary to establish to what extent we can trust the Books of Kings for the historical reconstruction.[1]

It is accepted today by almost all scholars that the early edition of the Books of Kings was written either in the late monarchical, or in the early exilic period. Hence, there is a gap of about two to three hundred years between the recounted events of the late tenth–ninth century and the time when the history was written. In view of this enormous gap, the study must shift to the sources available to the author of Kings (for my earlier discussions of the problem of sources and composition in the Books of Kings, see Na'aman 2002a, 77–102; 2003, 1321–46; 2004, 245–54; 2005, 105–20; forthcoming).

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[1] An enormous amount of literature has been written on each subject discussed in this chapter, and listing full references would be too long. To avoid this, I have decided to add notes only where they are absolutely essential. In some cases I cite the latest work, where readers can find lists of the older literature on the subject.
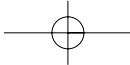
The main tool for researching the sources is the above-mentioned royal inscriptions. They do not illuminate most of the biblical descriptions, but the corpus of royal inscriptions that refers directly to the histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah may be used as a sample against which to check the historicity of the Books of Kings (Na'aman 1999, 3–17). Their analysis indicates that the author had some written sources on which he based his history of the late tenth–ninth centuries. It also shows that the source material available for the history of Judah was richer than that for Israel. For example, the Books of Kings make no mention of a payment of tribute to foreign rulers by the kings of Israel in the ninth–early eighth centuries, although the royal inscriptions mention the payments they paid to Assyrian kings. But payments of tribute or 'presents' by Judahite kings to foreign rulers are well attested (1 Kgs 14.26; 15.18–19; 2 Kgs 12.19; 14.14).[2]

The number of sources originating in the Northern Kingdom and available to the author was limited, and included some kind of an early chronicle and prophetic stories. The former must have combined material extracted from early sources (such as a king-list with notes on the changes of dynasties). It must have included the names of kings, their years and dynasties, details of the rebellions and the overthrow of dynasties, and sporadic events relating to some Israelite kings, (such as building operations and the wars with the Arameans). Details concerning the relations between the kings of Judah and Israel were probably extracted from Judahite sources. The other sources about the Northern Kingdom were prophetic stories. These stories were written after a long period of oral transmission, are novelistic in character and tend to magnify the figure of the man of God and his deeds. Although some of these stories retain memories of the time of the Omride and Jehuite dynasties, they also include elements that are far removed from the historical reality.

Finally, an overall analysis of the Books of Kings leads me to conclude that the author made an effort to assemble all the sources available to him and used them in writing his work. The space here does not allow me to introduce the evidence for this conclusion, but the historical reconstruction below takes it into account (Na'aman 1997a, 155–58, 172; 2002a, 117–20).

[2] For the suggestion that the author of the Books of Kings drew most of his sources from the temple library of Jerusalem, see Na'aman 1996, 180–82; 2002a, 68–77.
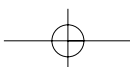
THE POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR THE HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The reconstruction of the early history of the Northern Kingdom must begin by tackling a major problem: that of the historicity of the United Monarchy. This broad subject is debated among archaeologists, historians and biblical scholars and there is no way of bridging the gap between the so-called 'minimalists' and 'maximalists'. It is not my intention to go into a detailed discussion and I merely express my opinion on this fundamental issue.

Excavations and surveys conducted in the territories of Israel and Judah indicate that the two kingdoms developed along the same lines as other kingdoms in the Syro-Palestinian region. The rise of prosperous urban centres and a hierarchical system of settlements, as well as of a royal court and extensive commercial and administrative activity, was gradual and lasted a long time. The slow development of the state and its institutions is in marked contrast to the biblical history of the emergence of the United Monarchy. In that account, monarchy, with all its institutional, administrative and economic components, had reached completion by the reign of Solomon, about two generations after the emergence of the monarchy. Monumental buildings were erected, long-distance trade developed and luxury items piled into the treasury of the kingdom. It goes without saying that the Israelite kingdom could not have developed so rapidly into the stage that sociologists call a 'grown state', and that the picture drawn in the Bible cannot be sustained. Hence, the biblical representation of the United Monarchy can serve neither as a basis for the history of the tenth century, nor as a point of departure for reconstructing the history of the kingdom of Israel in the late tenth–ninth centuries. I accept the notion of a United Monarchy and the authenticity of the named kings, but assume that it was a transition between local leadership of a tribal society to the foundation of two neighbouring kingdoms in the late tenth century BCE.

Since the biblical account cannot supply the point of departure for the discussion, we must turn to the archaeological data. The emergence of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah may be described as the expansion of highland territorial entities to the surrounding lowlands (Finkelstein and Na'aman forthcoming). The phenomenon is well known in different periods in the history of the Levant, namely Lab'ayu, the ruler of Shechem, and 'Abdi-Ashirta and Aziru, the rulers of Amurru, in the Amarna period; the Hasmonaean state in the Hellenistic period; Fakhr ad-Din in the mountains of Lebanon and Dahir al-'Umar in the Galilee in the Ottoman period (Abu Husayn 1985; Cohen 1973, 7–18). Its roots lie in the rise of large territorial entities in the highlands, bigger in territory—but not necessarily population—than the city-states of the lowlands. Some attempts at expansion by highland leaders
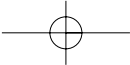
failed, whereas others succeeded. The evidence for success is found in destruction layers in the lowland cities and the initial process of change in their material culture. In other words, archaeology is the key to establishing the date and stages of expansion. Unfortunately, the dating of the archaeological strata formerly attributed to the tenth century is debated among archaeologists and there is as yet no consensus, although the gap between the higher and lower chronologies is gradually narrowing. This is mainly the result of dates obtained by the radiocarbon method, which fit the low chronology better than the higher (Gilboa and Sharon 2001; 2003; Mazar and Carmi 2001; Bruins, van der Plicht and Mazar 2003; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2003a; 2003b; Gilboa, Sharon and Zorn 2004; Boaretto, Jull, Gilboa and Sharon 2005). The archaeological dates that I use are therefore closer to the former than to the latter.

For the first half of the tenth century the northern valleys still featured the late-Canaanite material culture and were probably organized in a city-state system (Finkelstein 2003a, 75–83; 2003b, 189–195; 2005, 15–22; Ben-Tor 2003, 50–54). To date the spread of highland tribes to the northern valleys we must date the transition from the late-Canaanite phase to the next one, of a very different material culture assemblage that characterized the Israelite monarchy of the ninth–eighth centuries. The key to the dating is the parallel between the pottery assemblages attributed to Shishak's campaign in south Palestine (Arad XII, Tel Masos II–I, the Negev Highland settlements) and the post-Megiddo VI horizon in the north (Mazar and Carmi 2001, 1333–42; Finkelstein 2002, 117–22; 2004, 181–88 [esp. p. 186]; Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004, 209–44 [esp. p. 231], with earlier literature). Attributing the wave of destruction of the Iron I cities (Megiddo VIA, Yokneam XVII, Taanach IB, Beth-shean Upper VI and Chinnereth V) to a series of raids from the northern highlands is a better explanation of the archaeological data than ascribing it to the campaign of Pharaoh Shishak. It fits the assumption that Shishak established a victory stele in the inhabited city of Megiddo Stratum VB rather than the ruined city of Stratum VIA. We may conclude that the expansion of the Northern Kingdom into the Jezreel and Beth-shean valleys took place in the second half of the tenth century BCE. This fits the conventional date of the emergence of the Northern Kingdom in the late tenth century BCE.

The earliest Iron IIA strata in the valleys (Megiddo VB, Yokneam XV, Taanach IIA and Tel Rehov V), which are contemporaneous with Shishak's campaign, represent the first stage of the establishment of the Northern Kingdom. These strata are characterized by modest buildings and material culture with no evidence yet of monumental architecture. The second stage of this development features the rise of monumental architecture and administrative centres, and may safely be dated to the Omrides (Megiddo
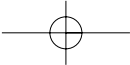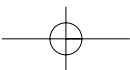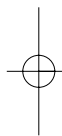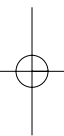
VA–IVB, the Jezreel compound, Yokneam XIV, Taanach IIB and Tel Rehov IV). This phase can also be detected at Gezer (Stratum VIII), in the kingdom's south-western border.

More complicated is the problem of dating the strata in north Palestine. The pottery of Hazor X–IX is contemporaneous with that of Megiddo VA–IVB (for the debate on the chronology of Hazor, see Zarzeki-Peleg 1997, 258–88; Ben-Tor and Ben-Ami 1998, 1–37; Finkelstein 1999, 55–70; 2000a, 240–44; Ben-Tor 2000, 9–15). Some architectural features of Hazor X resemble Omride architecture, but other elements differ (e.g. massive casemate walls with no ashlars in the construction) (Finkelstein 2000b, 117–18). Since each stratum of Hazor X–IX is divided into two phases, I prefer dating the building of Stratum X to the late tenth–early ninth century. The fortification of Hazor is probably due to the efforts of the early Israelite kings to control the north, in their struggle with the emerging Aramean kingdom(s) east of the Jordan. The excavations at Tel Dan failed to yield conclusive dates for the monumental architecture elements uncovered there (fortification, gate and the platform erected for the temple).

THE GROWTH AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

The pattern of growth of the Northern Kingdom has probably many things in common with the expansion of the kingdom of Shechem in the Amarna period (fourteenth century BCE). The course of action was a combination of military moves and diplomacy. The initial stage must have been the consolidation of power in the hill country, probably by forming coalition(s) among the tribal groups living there. The next stage included the forming of a coalition with local powers, as a way of gaining political and military power, pressing hard on the neighbouring city-states, and combining forces with the allies for decisive battles. An important stage in the growth of the Northern Kingdom is probably reflected in the Song of Deborah. The song, and its interpretation in the story, describes a coalition of Canaanite city-states assembled for battle 'in Taanach by the Waters of Megiddo', and defeated in the plain by a coalition of highland tribes. The commander of the Canaanite coalition, Sisera, came probably from the Sea Peoples, which may indicate the participation of the Philistines in the effort to block the expansion of the highland tribes (Singer 1994, 319–21). The battle near Mt Gilboa, which is also commemorated by a song and narrative, may reflect another stage in the struggle between the highland tribes and the Canaanite city-states, supported by the Philistines. Be that as it may, the weakened city-states were unable to resist the growing power of the inhabitants of the hill country, and even the

intervention of the Philistine city-states did not rescue them. Though details are missing because of the antiquity of the events, the end result is clear: the city-states in the north were conquered and destroyed, or subjugated, and the way was open for further expansion. The strong city of Ekron (Stratum IV) might also have been destroyed in the course of the struggle between the Philistines and the highland tribes. The process of conquest and gradual expansion could have lasted a few generations from the mid-tenth until the early ninth centuries. It ended with the emergence of the Northern Kingdom as a dominant power in Palestine under the Omrides, in the first half of the ninth century BCE.

The expansion over all the areas of the future kingdom of Israel must have included an early stage in which a network of Israelite centres linked by communication routes was established. Neighbouring sites were later conquered, or subdued, and the centres of government gradually transformed to nuclei of districts.[3] Thus, the conquest of large territories in the lowlands and north Palestine was only the first step, which ended when the 'network kingdom' expanded and became a territorial state. Creating a permanent set of borders, the development of urbanism, economy and commerce, forming an administrative apparatus and installing an official cult, took a few generations. I therefore suggest that the historical role of the early kings of Israel was the gradual expansion of the kingdom and the early stages of its consolidation.

What might have been the role of Shishak's campaign in the emergence of the Northern Kingdom? I have already suggested that the expansion of the highland tribes to the nearby lowlands antedated Shishak's campaign. The campaign was mainly conducted in the lowlands, avoiding the difficulties and dangers involved in widescale operations in the central hill country. The despoiled territories (namely, the coast, the northern Shephelah, the northern plains and the central Jordan Valley) are mostly the same as the areas that were of primary concern to the Egyptians in the time of the New Kingdom, when Egypt ruled Canaan. All the places are located outside Philistia, indicating that Shishak avoided plundering the Philistine kingdoms. Hence we may assume that the campaign was intended to rescue the Philistines and their allies, the Canaanite city-states in the lowlands. Whether or not Shishak planned to re-establish the Egyptian empire in Asia, there is no evidence that he made any attempt to establish permanent rule in the ravaged territories. He soon retreated, and neither he nor his successors returned to the area.

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[3] For a similar paradigm for the growth of the Assyrian empire, see Liverani 1988, 81–98; Kühne 1995, 69–79; for criticism, see Postgate 1991, 255–57.

Thus the campaign was no more than a large-scale razzia, and its impact on the history of the Northern Kingdom must have been minimal.[4]

THE EARLY DYNASTIES OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

From the reigns of Jeroboam and Rehoboam on, the years of each king in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are accurately enumerated. The reigns of the kings of the United Monarchy, on the other hand, are either missing (Saul) or ascribed round numbers (David and Solomon). It is evident that Jeroboam and Rehoboam opened the king-lists available to the author, and that the period of the United Monarchy was not included in the list of kings available to the author, and the years of earlier kings were artificially assigned by the late authors. This indicates the age of trustworthy sources available to the author for writing the history of the two kingdoms, and fits well with the reference to the campaign of Shishak in Rehoboam's fifth year (1 Kgs 14.25), which is confirmed by his topographical inscription.

From the time of Adad-nirari III in the late ninth century onwards the Assyrians called the kingdom of Israel by the name *Bīt Ḫumri*, referring to Omri as the founder of the kingdom. It reflects the Assyrian practice of calling kingdoms by the name of the dynasty's founder at the time of their first encounter with it. However, the designation does not indicate that Omri was the historical founder of the kingdom. Thus, for example, the Assyrians called Damascus by the name *Bīt Ḫazaili*, referring to Hazael as the kingdom's founder, although other kings (notably Adad-idri) antedated him on the throne of Damascus. Establishing the emergence and growth of the kingdom must rest on different foundations.

The author of the Books of Kings consistently portrayed Jeroboam I as founder of the official cult in Israel, and I tend to accept this, though certainly not on the scale attributed to him by this late author. The discovery of an Iron I metal figurine of a bull in an open cult place in the northern highlands of Samaria lends support to the tradition that Jeroboam made calves and erected them in his cult centres. Also, the accounts of Jeroboam's seat in Shechem, his building of Penuel (1 Kgs 12.25), possibly as a cult centre for the Gilead, parallel to the establishment of a cult centre at Bethel (and possibly at Dan, although the inclusion of Dan in Jeroboam's building operations might be anachronistic), and the transfer of the seat of the ruling dynasty to Tirzah by Baasha, were probably derived from ancient sources.

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[4] For a similar evaluation of Shishak's campaign, see Redford 1973, 3–17 (esp. p. 11). For a different evaluation of the campaign, see Finkelstein 2002; 2005, 19–22. For a recent detailed discussion, see Wilson 2001, with earlier literature.
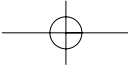
The accounts that Nadab and Elah, kings of Israel, were murdered when the Israelite army besieged Gibbethon was probably derived from an ancient Israelite chronicle, or an extensive king-list, which included remarks on the changing of dynasties in the kingdom. Gibbethon, today Ras Abu Óamid, about five kms north-west of Gezer, lies near the southern border of Israel with Philistia (for the identification of Gibbethon, see Schmitt 1980, 107–9; Na'aman 1986, 107–8 n. 49). The siege of a Philistine city indicates the attempt of the kings of Israel to take advantage of the destruction of Ekron and expand their territory into north Philistia.

The story of the pressure that Baasha put on Jerusalem, Asa's appeal to Aram, and the king of Aram's attack on Israel, was probably derived from 'the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah', which rests on an ancient Judahite chronicle. Some missing details in the chronicle, such as the name of the Aramean king and the list of cities he conquered, were probably filled in by the author of Kings and may be inaccurate, but the essence of the episode rests on an ancient source, and should be integrated into the historical reconstruction. Other wars and conquests, as well as building operations, must have taken place in these years, but since they were not recorded, they were forgotten, and the later author was unable to include them in his work.

THE OMRIDE DYNASTY

With the Omrides the historical reconstruction rests on a more solid ground. A cross-reference of the archaeological and documentary evidence reveals that the Northern Kingdom extended its territory, stabilized its boundaries and reached the stage that sociologists call a 'grown state'. The southern border of the Northern Kingdom ran south of the important cult centre of Bethel. Gezer was the main centre on the kingdom's south-western boundary. Dor was the main Israelite port on the Mediterranean coast. Mount Carmel marked the border between Tyre and Israel. Hazor was the Israelite centre of government in the north, and a few highland strongholds (at Har Adir and Tel Harashim) were built to control the wooded, sparsely inhabited region of Upper Galilee, facing the territory of Tyre in the west (Finkelstein 2000b, 124–25; Ben Ami 2004, 194–208). The fortified farmhouse of Óorvat Rosh Zayit was probably located near the south-eastern Tyrian border with the kingdom of Israel (Gal and Alexandre 2000). Tel Dan was a major cultic and administrative centre near the northernmost border of the kingdom, and the erection of Hazael's victory stele in the place clearly indicates its importance.

In the east the border ran along the Jordan up to the Sea of Galilee. Ramoth-gilead, probably located at er-Ramta in the north-eastern Gilead, south of the Yarmuk River, must have been the main Israelite stronghold on
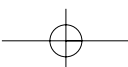
its north-eastern border with Aram (for the identification, see Knauf 2001, 33–36). In southern Transjordan, Israel controlled the Mishor of northern Moab and established forts at Ataroth and Jahaz, on the western and eastern flanks of its front with Moab.

We may conclude that the Northern Kingdom dominated the central hill country up to the area of Bethel, the Ayalon Valley, the Sharon coastal plain up to Mount Carmel, probably much of the mountainous Galilee, the Huleh Valley, the territory west of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee, the Gilead and northern Moab. The result was a diverse, multicultural state, which was ruled from the highlands, with major administrative centres in key areas of the lowlands: Gezer in the Ayalon Valley, Dor on the coast, Megiddo and Jezreel in the northern plains, Hazor and Dan in the Huleh Valley, Ramoth-gilead in northern Gilead, Penuel and Mahanaim in central Gilead, Medeba in northern Moab and possibly Jericho on the main road leading to the Mishor.

Of all the building projects of the Omrides I will mention only the foundation of the new capital at Samaria as the seat of the dynasty and for economic and administration activities, and that of Jezreel as the kingdom's military headquarters. In the following generations the new capital steadily grew, becoming the permanent seat of all future kings of Israel. Evidence of its prominence and prestige as early as the beginning of the eighth century is the designation 'the Samarian' for Joash (*Yu'asu*), son of Jehoahaz, by Adad-nirari III (Grayson 1996, 211, line 8, with earlier literature), and the name 'Yahweh of Samaria' for the god of the Northern Kingdom in an inscription from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Renz 1995, 59–61, with earlier literature on pp. 47–48).

The city of Jezreel, on the other hand, functioned for only a short time and was destroyed, probably by Hazael in the course of his conquest of the Northern Kingdom, and remained uninhabited (Na'aman 1997b, 125–27; Finkelstein 1999, 60–61; 2004, 185; Mazar 1999, 40–42; Bruins, Plicht and Mazar 2003, 315–18; Coldstream and Mazar 2003, 43–44). It is mentioned in two prophetic stories of Elijah and Ahab (l Kgs 18.45, 46; 21.1, 23) and in the detailed story of Jehu's rebellion (2 Kgs 8.29; 9.10, 15, 16, 17, 30, 36, 37; 10.1, 11), but is absent from the story cycles of Elisha and other prophetic stories that are dated to the time of the dynasty of Jehu (see below). The place of Jezreel in the prophetic narratives that refer to Ahab and Joram corresponds well to the results of the excavation conducted at the site. It demonstrates the survival of some authentic memories from the time of the Omrides in these stories. The oral narratives underlying these stories must have taken their initial shape at a time when the memory of Jezreel's importance in the kingdom was still very much alive, otherwise its historical place would have been forgotten and replaced by another city.

Assyrian, Moabite and Aramaic royal inscriptions indicate that under the Omrides Israel became one of the leading powers in the Syro-Palestinian

arena. It conquered and held the territory of Moab for two generations, invaded an Aramean territory in an effort to expand its area northwards,[5] and participated in the alliance that successfully fought Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria. Although Israel is mentioned only in the inscription that describes in detail Shalmaneser's sixth year campaign (853 BCE), it certainly participated in all four battles waged between Shalmaneser and the coalition of twelve kingdoms headed by Adad-idri (Hadadezer) of Damascus in the years 853–845 (Yamada 2000). The success of the 'southern alliance' in barring the invading Assyrian army shows its military strength and cohesion. In the battle of Qarqar, Israel appears as one of the three main powers that made up the alliance, accounting for the largest number of chariots for battle. In estimating its military strength we must set aside the exact number of chariots and troops, which is greatly exaggerated for many members of the coalition, and examine the relative number of infantry and cavalry of the participants in the battle. The comparison shows how powerful Israel was in the mid-ninth century, a conclusion supported by the Tel Dan Aramaic inscription, in which Hazael claimed that he killed powerful kings 'who harnessed a thou[sand] chariots and thousands of chariot horses' (Biran and Naveh 1995, 13, lines 6–7; Lemaire 1998, 4, lines 6–7, 8–10).

The Omrides participation in the alliance that fought Assyria and the conquest of Moab by Omri are not mentioned in the Books of Kings. This is because of the antiquity of the events and the small number of sources of North Israelite origin available to the author. Other wars attributed to kings of the dynasty of Omri are described in the Books of Kings, but in the form of narratives rather than chronicle-like accounts. Two prophetic stories that describe wars with the Arameans are included in the history of Ahab; the Elisha story cycle and the narratives describing the campaign against Moab and the war with Aram are included in the history of Joram, the son of Ahab.

Much ink has been spilled in analysing the text and literary unity of these stories and establishing their date and historicity. It is commonly accepted today that the story of 1 Kings 20, that narrates two wars conducted against Ben Hadad, the king of Aram, relates to events of the time of the Jehuite dynasty. The story cycle of Elisha was also erroneously inserted into the history of Joram, and should be assigned to the history of the Jehu dynasty. Moreover, many scholars support the assumption that the four battle stories (1 Kgs 20; 22.1–38; 2 Kgs 3.4–27; 6.24–7.20), as well as the Elisha stories,

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[5] In the opening lines of the Tel Dan stele, Hazael, king of Aram, says that 'the king of I[s]rael penetrated into my father's land'. See Biran and Naveh 1995, 13, lines 3–4; Lemaire 1998, 4, lines 3–4, 5–6.

were inserted into the Books of Kings by a post-deuteronomistic editor.[6] However, the majority of these narratives were written earlier than the composition of the Books of Kings, and even if inserted at a later stage, their contribution to the history of the Northern Kingdom must be carefully examined, each story in its own right.

Contrary to the commonly accepted view that the narrative of Ahab's death in battle (1 Kings 22) is legendary, and that the king died peacefully ('slept with his ancestors', as related in 1 Kgs 22.40), I believe that the kernel of the story is historical and preserves an authentic memory of the king's unusual death (Na'aman 1997a, 162–71). According to the prophetic story of 1 Kings 22, Ahab was killed by an Aramaic arrow in the war waged at Ramoth-gilead. We may ask why, if Ahab died peacefully, would anyone at a later time invent a story about his death in battle? All biblical references to Ahab indicate how negative the impression he left was in the historical memory.[7] The story of his death is exceptional and stands in marked contradiction to the way he is portrayed in all other biblical accounts. Moreover, Ahab is presented in the story as devotee of Yahweh (vv. 6–8, 10–12), in marked contrast to his negative evaluation in the historiography (1 Kgs 16.28–33; 21.25–26; 2 Kgs 8.18, 27; 21.3, 13) and his sinful depiction in all other prophetic stories. His leading role and determination in the story is in marked contrast to his depiction as a weak, indecisive ruler (contrary to his audacious and determined wife) in the other prophetic stories (1 Kgs 18.17–20, 40; 19.1–2; 20.1–9; 21.1–16, 27–29). Finally, verse 38 ('And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the harlots washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord which he had spoken') indicates how difficult it was for the editor to fit the story of Ahab's death into the history of the king. There are good reasons, therefore, to believe that the narrative of 1 Kings 22 preserves memories of the participation of Ahab and Jehoshphat in a battle, and Ahab's death by an enemy arrow.

We may further note that the author of the Books of Kings attributed a peaceful death ('slept with his ancestors') to every king about whom his sources did not describe an unnatural death. The attribution was based on a negative inference and the author had no written source about the kings of Judah and Israel who died a natural death. Assuming that the story in chapter 22 was inserted in a post-deuteronomistic stage, it may be suggested that

[6] For the inclusion of the prophetic stories in the Books of Kings, see e.g., Hölscher 1923, 184–86; Miller 1966, 449–51; Schmitt, 1972; Würthwein 1984, 205, 496–98, 502–03; Stipp 1987; McKenzie 1991, 90–98; Otto 2001, with earlier literature; 2003, 487–508.

[7] In addition to the prophetic stories, see 1 Kgs 16.28–33; 21.25–26; 2 Kgs 8.18, 27; 21.3, 13; Mic. 6.16.

Ahab was killed in battle but the event—like so many other events of that early period—was unknown to the author of Kings, so he attributed to the king a peaceful death (Na'aman 1997a, 158–71).[8]

In light of these considerations, I would suggest a daring hypothesis: that Ahab was killed at Qarqar by an Assyrian arrow, and that in the course of a long oral tradition the story of the battle was shifted from the Assyrians to the Arameans, the closer neighbour and best-known enemies of Israel in the ninth century. The biblical chronology of the Omrides fits my hypothesis exactly. Ahaziah, son of Ahab, reigned for two years (1 Kgs 22.52), and his brother, Joram, reigned twelve years (2 Kgs 3.1). Counting backward from Joram's death at about 842/41 to Ahaziah's ascent of the throne after Ahab's death, we arrive at exactly 853, the date of the battle of Qarqar. Accepting this suggestion also solves the problem of Israel's apparent change of sides vis-à-vis the Arameans in the last year of Ahab, even though the two kingdoms were allies and had together fought against the invading Assyrians in the years 853–845 BCE.

Ahab's unexpected death in battle with the Assyrians in a far-away land must have raised serious theological questions in Israel, similar to the questions that arose after the death of Sargon II on the battlefield in Anatolia (705 BCE) (Tadmor, Landsberger and Parpola 1989, 3–51; Frahm 1999, 78–90). Sennacherib, the son of Sargon, searched by extispicy the sin of Sargon in order to discover why he had been killed in battle and left unburied in a distant land (Tadmor, Landsberger and Parpola 1989, 10–11, lines 7–20). A similar search for the reason for Ahab's unexpected death must have taken place in Israel, and the story in chapter 22 is the literary answer to this question. According to common ancient Near Eastern practice, a second query (*piqittu*) that should repeat the results of the first was sometimes required to confirm its authenticity (Kitz 2003, 25–27, with earlier literature). In the prophetic story, Micaiah's prophecy fills the role of a second query, and indicates that the divine answer obtained in the first query was false. Ahab's belief that he can manipulate the prophecy by using the ritual of substitution (see below) led him to disregard the prophecy and proceed for battle, in which he was killed by an Aramean arrow.

The author combined the decision to proceed to battle with the ancient Near Eastern motif of the so-called 'substitute king' (*šar pūḫi*) (Na'aman

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[8] I have contested the assumption of a post-deuteronomistic date at which the story of Ahab's death in battle was inserted into the Books of Kings, and tried to show that the story was known to the author of Kings when he composed his work. According to the Books of Kings, the Israelite kings who died violent deaths were left unburied, unlike Ahab who was buried in Samaria (v. 37). Either the author of Kings made Ahab an exception, and did not include his brave death in battle among the other violent deaths, or he made a mistake and erroneously appended the statement to his reign (v. 40).

1997a, 165).[9] Ahab's disguise before battle and Jehoshaphat's dressing in his royal armour (v. 30) marks the exchange of roles between the two kings. Jehoshaphat, in the role of a substitute king, was attacked, and just before the ritual proceeded in its natural course was miraculously saved (vv. 32–33). As a result of Jehoshaphat's escape, the prophecy of doom threatened once again the 'real king' (i.e. Ahab) and was fulfilled when he was struck by a stray arrow and died (vv. 34–35). As noted above, Ahab is presented in the story as a devotee of Yahweh who failed to perceive that true prophecy cannot be manipulated, and his refusal to heed the words of Micaiah, Yahweh's true prophet, cost him his life.
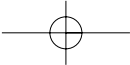
According to the narrative, Ahab was brought from the battlefield and buried in his capital, Samaria (v. 37). This is contrary to all other kings of Israel who, according to the Books of Kings, died violent deaths and were left unburied (Nadab, Elah, Joram, Zimri, Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah and Pekah).[10] Sennacherib's search for the sin of Sargon shows the religious gravity of the situation of a king who died on the battlefield and was left unburied, and how important it was to appease by rituals the spirit of the dead, who might otherwise harm the living (Tadmor, Landsberger and Parpola 1989, 28–29, 33–35, 45–49; Frahm 1999, 74–80). The emphasis on the burial of Ahab in Samaria must be interpreted against this background. The author deliberately states that Ahab was properly buried and his spirit appeased. The emphasis on the proper burial is similar to that of the author of Kings, who emphasized that the three kings of Judah who were killed far away from their capital (Ahaziah, Amaziah and Josiah) were brought to Jerusalem and buried there.

In summary, although many details in the story are legendary, the core of the story is historical and may fill a gap in the history of the Omrides. It may teach us a lesson that caution is advisable before deciding that a certain ninth-century prophetic story is entirely deprived of historical reality.

Ahab's death in battle, and the unexpected death of his son Ahaziah soon after, could well have been perceived in Moab as indications of Israel's weakness, and as an opportunity to shake off its domination. Moreover, at least part of Israel's armed force must have been pinned down by the wars against Assyria in the kingdom of Hamath in central Syria, and unable to help suppress the revolt. Finally, the participation of the Israelite and Judahite troops

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[9] For the Mesopotamian idea of a 'substitute king' (*šar pūḫi*) and its classical and Arabian parallels, see Parpola 1983, XXII–XXXII, with earlier literature; Bottéro 1992, 138–55. For the Hittite ritual, see Kümmel 1967.

[10] The author showed bias with regard to the burial of the kings of Israel and Judah. In Israel, no one took care to properly bury the kings who were killed in the course of rebellions, whereas in Judah he emphasized that even those kings who were assassinated (Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, Amon, Josiah) were given a proper burial with their ancestors in the city of David.

in the campaign against Moab suggests that it took place in the time of the Omrides. I am therefore inclined to accept the biblical statement that Mesha's rebellion broke out soon after Ahab's death, and date its onset to the time after Ahaziah's passing. Such a date puts the narrative of 2 Kings 3 in a clear and coherent historical context.

When the rebellion broke out, Joram set out to suppress it. The expedition probably advanced from the south, perhaps intending to surprise Moab, and was led by the allied kings of Israel and Judah. The first stages of the campaign must have been successful, but Joram failed to achieve his main goal of re-subjugating Moab and forcing it to resume paying tribute, and had to retreat to his kingdom.

Making alliances with its neighbours and taking part in the coalition against Assyria must have been the essence of the Omrides' foreign policy. Alliance cemented by marriage between the two royal houses was a well-known practice in the ancient Near East, and Israel's relations with Phoenicia and Judah were also sealed by marriage. Josephus, following Menander of Ephesos, mentions 'Ithobal, priest of Astarte, who lived forty-eight years and reigned thirty-two. He was succeeded by his son Balezer, who lived forty-five years and reigned six' (*Contra Apion* I, 123–24). Balezer is probably a corrupted form of Bale<ba>zer and should be identified with the Ba'li-manzeri whom Shalmaneser mentioned as king of Tyre in 841 BCE (Lipinski 1970, 59–62). His predecessor, Ithobal, is doubtless Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, the father of Jezebel, who gave his daughter in marriage to Ahab (l Kgs 16.31; see *Ant*. VIII, 316–18). Athaliah, the daughter of either Omri or Ahab, was given in marriage to Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs 8.18, 26) (Lipinski 1970, 59–65; Liver 1953, 113–20; Albright 1955, 1–9; Katzenstein 1973, 116–19, 129–34; Green 1983, 373–97; Briquel-Chatonnet 1992, 102–7).

In the time of the Omrides, Judah was still a small, sparsely inhabited highland kingdom that gradually developed its own urban centres, administration and economy. Israel was much larger in area, more urbanized and thickly populated, more developed in its economy and commerce, militarily much stronger, and therefore dictated the relations between the two allied kingdoms. The participation by the kings of Judah in campaigns initiated by the kings of Israel is known only from this period, and demonstrates the primacy of the kings of Israel in the relations. The statement attributed to Jehoshaphat, 'I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses' (1 Kgs 22.4; 2 Kgs 3.7), reflects the outlook of author(s) of the two narratives, rather than the historical reality. It is difficult to estimate the extent of the Israelite involvement in the internal affairs of its southern neighbour, but, unlike some scholars, I would not go so far as to assume that Israel dominated Judah, and that Jehoshaphat was Ahab's vassal (Miller and Hayes 1986, 275–80). The alliance and cooperation of the two neighbouring
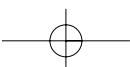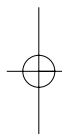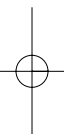
kingdoms was useful to both, and although Israel was the leading power, it was in their mutual interest to keep it up.

The issue of the cultic policy of the Omrides is not clear enough, because of the antiquity of the related events and the kind of sources available to research. A few local cult places were discovered in archaeological excavations in strata that can safely be ascribed to the Omrides (Megiddo VA–IVB, Taanach, Tel ʿAmal). They were probably destroyed by Hazael, king of Aram, and unrestored in the late ninth–early eighth century BCE (Naʾaman 2002b, 595–97). Yahweh was no doubt the national god of Israel and sanctuaries were built to him at Bethel and Dan, and elsewhere.[11] The ostensible conflict of Yahwism versus Baalism described in the Bible, and adopted by many scholars, is artificial and reflects the theological presentation of the deuteronomistic authors in the seventh–sixth centuries. The so-called Baalism was coined by these authors in order to better define what was prohibited by the new reforming movement of the seventh century. It goes without saying that the new norms were alien to the reality of the ninth century BCE.

The Baal cult mentioned in the opening verses of the Omrides and in the prophetic stories probably referred to the building of a cult centre for Melqart, the national god of Tyre, at Samaria, the kingdom's new capital. We may assume that it was introduced by the Tyrian princess and her retinue. The building of cult places for foreign princesses was probably normative in polytheistic ancient Near Eastern society, which had no difficulty in adopting foreign gods to the local pantheons. Whether opposition against the cult of Melqart had already begun under the Omrides is hard to tell, although new cult practices might have provoked opposition in the conservative society of the hill country in the ninth century. In my opinion, the denigration of the Tyrian Baʿal was initiated and fostered by the Jehu dynasty, which sought to justify Jehu's massacre of the former royal house and his usurpation of the throne. Polemic narratives that presented the Omrides in an utterly negative light probably took their initial shape under the Jehuites, but it is not clear when the stories received their fixed written form.

JEHU'S REBELLION AND THE END OF THE OMRIDES

It is not easy to explain the fall of the successful dynasty of Omri. Obviously, many details are missing because of the paucity of sources. Thus, for example, the social condition in the country is unknown, and it is difficult to estimate

[11] It is evident that the two sons of Ahab were given Yahwistic names, Ahaziah and Joram, his sister (or daughter) was called Athaliah and her son was named Ahaziah.

the impact of the extensive building operations and the growth of economic activity on the population in different regions of the kingdom. Often, when one sector prospers and accumulates wealth, the other sectors pay the price. The extent of mobilization of the free population for wars and building activity is not known, nor do we know the strength of the opposition to the cult introduced by the Tyrian queen to the capital city of Samaria. We have already noted that in the multicultural nature of the state and the differences between its regions, the degree of internal integration in the kingdom in the mid-ninth century remains unknown. Given the many unknown variables of the puzzle, different scenarios may be drawn for the fall of the Omrides. Hence, all the historical pictures drawn by scholars must be treated with caution.

The immediate cause for the change of power was the ascent of Hazael to the throne of Aram Damascus. Following the death of Adad-idri, the leader of the 'southern alliance', and the rise of Hazael, 'the son of nobody', to power in Damascus in about 843/842 BCE, the alliance which had successfully fought off the Assyrians between 853 and 845 fell apart. Irḫuleni, king of Hamath, and Joram, king of Israel, Adad-idri's chief allies, refused to cooperate with the new ruler, a refusal that led to an armed struggle between Damascus and Israel. Hazael attacked Joram in an effort to force him to join his forces against the invading Assyrians, and in his inscription he claims to have killed Joram and his ally, Ahaziah, and devastated their countries.

Contrary to the claim of the Tel Dan Aramaic inscription, the prophetic story of 2 Kings 9 states that it was Jehu who killed the two kings near the city of Jezreel. Some scholars have tried to harmonize the two contrasting sources by suggesting that Jehu did kill the two kings, as related in 2 Kings 9, but since he had acted as Hazael's ally, the latter claimed credit for the act (Halpern 1996, 47 n. 10; Schniedewind 1996, 82–85; Lemaire 1998, 10–11; see Yamada 1995, 618–22). However, in 841 BCE, when Shalmaneser led a campaign to southern Syria, possibly prompted by news of the collapse of the alliance, he was confronted by Damascus alone. Having triumphed over Damascus, the Assyrian ruler reached the border of Israel and received tribute from Jehu, 'son of Omri'. It is evident that in the course of the Assyrian campaign Hazael and Jehu had conflicting policies vis-à-vis Assyria. Moreover, after the Assyrian withdrawal, Hazael conquered the kingdom of Israel and subjugated it to his yoke. The chain of events clearly indicates that Hazael and Jehu were rival kings, contradicting the assumption that Jehu had acted as Hazael's ally.

I have already expressed the opinion that the data of Hazael's inscription are preferable to the highly literary prophetic story in 2 Kings 9 (Na'aman 2000, 100–04). A possible scenario for the chain of events is that, following the death of the kings of Israel and Judah in the battle against Hazael, Jehu

revolted, massacred the descendants of the Omrides and their supporters in Jezreel and Samaria, and seized the throne. When the Assyrian army arrived in the region, Jehu refused to join Hazael and preferred to surrender and pay tribute to the ruler of the distant power.

In examining the policy of Jehu it becomes clear that he systematically reversed the policy of the Omrides. In place of an alliance with Israel's neighbours (Aram, Tyre and Judah) and participation in the coalition that tried to stop the invading Assyrians, he surrendered to the latter and took steps that impaired his relations with his neighbours. Among these steps were the murder of Jezebel and her court and the abolition of the Tyrian cult she had introduced, thus distancing himself from the kingdom of Tyre. By killing members of the royal house of Jerusalem he cut the ties with Judah. His policy was probably pursued by all the kings of his dynasty. Israel would soon be subjugated by Aram, and lose not only the Moabite territories conquered by Omri, but some other territories in Transjordan and north Palestine. With Jehu a new era began in the history of Israel, but describing it in detail goes beyond the scope of this chapter.[12]

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