Culture and History of the Ancient Near East

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VOLUME 31
Bene Israel

Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein

edited by

Alexander Fantalkin and Assaf Yasur-Landau

LEIDEN • BOSTON

2008
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THE APPEARANCE OF ROCK-CUT BENCH TOMBS IN IRON AGE JUDAH AS A REFLECTION OF STATE FORMATION

Alexander Fantalkin

Introduction

The emergence of statehood in Judah has been the subject of numerous studies over the last few decades. Although the matter is still debated, the archaeological data collected so far supply, in my view, no clear evidence for the existence of a fully developed state in Judah before the late 9th–early 8th centuries BCE. In what follows, I will point out several factors that agree with the archaeological record and which may also be interpreted as reliable signs of statehood in Iron Age Judah. The main issue I wish to concentrate on is the appearance of burial practices connected with the use of so-called bench tombs in Iron Age Judah. The consensus among most scholars is that rock-cut bench tombs are a Judahite phenomenon, characterizing both the United Monarchy and the Kingdom of Judah. Such a reconstruction, however, fails to provide a reasonable explanation for the fact that bench tombs in the Judean core area (the Jerusalem Hills) appear only in the 8th century BCE, while in other areas such tombs arrive significantly earlier. Is there a connection between the appearance of bench tombs throughout the Kingdom of Judah during the 8th century BCE and its emergence as a fully developed state? I argue that the widespread appearance of

1 References regarding the emergence of statehood in Judah are numerous; for collections of essays addressing the subject, see, e.g., Lipiński 1991; Finkelstein and Na’aman 1994; Levy 1995; Fritz and Davies 1996; Handy 1997; Gitin et al. 1998; Vaughn and Killebrew 2003; see, also Finkelstein and Silberman 2001; 2006; Halpern 2001; Na’aman 2002; Routledge 2004: 114–132; Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004; Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006.

bench tombs throughout the Kingdom of Judah during the Iron Age IIB is a reflection of state formation, accompanied by the creation of new elites, who apparently adopted this burial practice. But first a few introductory notes are necessary.

The intensive research of rock-cut bench tombs in Iron Age Judah, as well as of relevant biblical sources, has resulted in numerous summaries, which offer a wide range of chronological, architectural and sociological viewpoints (e.g., Loffreda 1968; Brichto 1973; Ribar 1973; Abercrombie 1979; Spronk 1986; Lewis 1989; Bloch-Smith 1992a; Ussishkin 1993; Barkay 1994; Burkes 1999: 9–33; Yezerski 1999; Friedman and Overton 2000; Schmidt 2000; Wenning 2005). This extensive database, developed since the undertaking of the Survey of Western Palestine in the 1870s, provides considerable information regarding burial customs of the inhabitants of Judah during the monarchic period. Recent summaries include nearly 300 rock-cut bench tombs dated to that period (Barkay 1994; Yezerski 1995), and archaeology is likely to increase this number.

From a typological perspective, bench tombs may be divided into several main groups (for the most up-to-date summary, see Yezerski 1999). The first attempt to demonstrate continuity in development between the different types of bench tombs was made by Loffreda who discerned five basic types and three sub-types, arranged typologically and chronologically from the simplest to the most complex (Loffreda 1968: 265–287). However, Loffreda’s evolutionary scheme is misleading since it has been shown that some types existed simultaneously (e.g., Borowski 1994: 46). According to Barkay (1994: 162; 1999), the typological differences between rock-cut bench tombs may reflect various dwelling types in Judah, as well as the social status of those interred. In addition, the simultaneous existence of several typological-architectural groups probably attests to regional differences as well (Yezerski 1999). But despite architectural differences, rock-cut bench tombs most probably reflect an identical conceptualization of the afterlife (cf. Osborne 2007; Suriano 2007).

The absolute dates of the bench tombs are based on limited ceramic finds; those discovered looted are dated by stylistic comparison with

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3 For the purpose of the present article, the typological differences between bench tombs are insignificant, since all cases (including so-called arcosolium type) share a common concept of a bench on which the deceased was laid.
securely dated tombs. A number of similar elements in the funerary architecture of neighboring countries may provide additional information for the absolute chronology of bench tombs in Judah (Ussishkin 1993: 303–316). A few inscriptions that were found in several caves may serve as further supporting evidence for the accepted chronology. Their chronology and paleography have been discussed sufficiently elsewhere (e.g., Naveh 1963; Dever 1969–1970; Cross 1970; Lemaire 1976; Zevit 1984; Hadley 1987; Ussishkin 1993: 241–254; Mathys 1996). 4

The distribution of bench tombs, at least during the 8th–7th centuries BCE, corresponds, on the whole, to the territory of Judah at that time (Yezerski 1999). 5 Concentrations of a number of burial caves from the same period in one place may indicate cemeteries. These have been discovered proximate to large and medium-sized settlements. In addition to Jerusalem, where the density of burial caves is the largest, bench tomb cemeteries are known from numerous other Judahite sites (for the list of cemeteries, see Barkay 1994: 114, n. 55 with earlier references). On the other hand, sometimes a single cave is found in the hinterland, unaccompanied by any other architectural remains. Such caves, as Barkay (1994: 105) points out, should most likely be attributed to farms, the remnants of which have disappeared over time.

Discussion

Can Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah Serve as an Indicator of Social Rank?

Any scientific investigation of the burial customs of ancient societies should first consider the finds themselves (the tombs and their contexts) as well as historical sources, if such exist. Such evidence is obviously not sufficient to create a complete picture of the significance and implications of an ancient society’s burial customs. It is a difficult task to analyze funeral finds in an attempt to uncover what light they may shed on societies with complex social and economic hierarchies.

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4 Parker’s (2003) recent suggestion that it is possible to interpret a considerable part of Iron Age graffiti found in caves in Judah as expressions of refugees hiding away from enemies does not diminish the chronological value of these inscriptions in establishing the absolute chronology of the bench tombs.

5 The presence of bench tombs in Transjordan (e.g., Meqabelein, Sahab, and Dhiban) is of minor significance compared to that in the Cisjordan and does not weaken Yezerski’s main argument.

When dealing with burial practices in complex societies, particularly in cases such as Iron Age Judah, where the number of known burials is impressive, one should always keep in mind that despite their visibility in the archaeological record, these remains might represent only a small portion of an ancient population. It is very likely that the majority of the population of Iron Age Judah used simple pit graves, which left no trace in the archaeological record (De Vaux 1965: 58; Spronk 1986: 239; Bloch-Smith 1992a: 149–150; Hopkins 1996: 129–132; Barkay 1999: 100). Thus, rock-cut bench tombs discovered in Jerusalem represent, according to Barkay (1990: 103), only about 1.5% of all the deceased in the city during the Monarchic period.6 It seems that most of Jerusalem’s population (most probably consisting of the lower classes), as in other parts of the Land of Israel, were buried in simple pit graves. The existence of this custom is firmly attested in the Bible (e.g., 2 Kings 23: 6; Jer. 26: 23; 31: 39–40).7 From an archaeological perspective, on the other hand, the evidence for this practice is scarce, and so far it has been found only at Lachish (Tufnell 1953: 171–249). The limited survival of such practices in the archaeological record should not come as a surprise, however, since a similar pattern is attested toward the end of the Second Temple period. So far, only four sites in Jerusalem from this period have yielded a limited number of simple pit graves, consisting of a shallow pit ca. 0.5 m deep (Kloner 1980: 244).8

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6 This is based upon Broshi’s estimates (1974; 1977; 1990; see also Broshi and Finkelstein 1992). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the reliability of methods for estimating population size based on archaeological finds (cf. Lipschits 2003); but in fact, even if Broshi’s estimates, especially for Jerusalem, are exaggerated (cf. Na’aman 2007 with earlier references), there is still an enormous gap between the number of preserved caves and the estimated number of inhabitants.

7 It should be noted that some of these biblical references may also point to the existence of mass burials in the vicinity of Jerusalem. These may have been used at times of exceptional mortality brought on by epidemics, earthquakes, or significant military conflicts. From an archaeological perspective this practice may be observed in the case of Lachish (Tufnell 1953: 193–194). An additional example of mass burials attested at Area D in Ashdod, where the communal burial pits were located within the dwelling units, remains unclear; although, most probably, these mass burials should be connected to the assault of Sargon II (Bachi and Ben-Dov 1971: 92–94; Bloch-Smith 1992a: 29; Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2001: 250, n. 18). The existence of collective burial pits outside the city of Rome (so-called puticuli), confirmed by literary sources and archaeology (Hopkins 1983: 207–210; Morris 1992: 42), may provide a good parallel for communal burial pits that presumably existed in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

8 These simple pit graves should not be confused with the so-called Qumran-type graves (Schultz 2006 with further references), recently discovered at Beth Zafafa (Zissu and Moyal 1998; cf. also Puech 1998; Hachlili 2000).
Even though it is obvious from a demographic point of view that most of the ancient population must have used archaeologically invisible pit graves, this fact is often overlooked during discussions of burial customs. For instance, concerning burial practices near the end of the Second Temple period, several scholars believe that the gathering of bones in ossuaries was a ritual practiced by the Jewish nation as a whole (Kloner 1980: 252; Hachlili 1994: 187). The scarcity of rock-cut tombs, in comparison to the assumed population size, suggests, however, that mainly the aristocracy practiced this burial custom, while the majority of the population, unable to purchase a family rock-cut tomb and ossuaries, is likely to have been buried in simple pit or cist graves.9

The assumed simultaneous existence of many simple pit graves and the concentration of groups of rock-cut bench tombs in the vicinity of numerous Judahite cities during the Late Iron Age (8th–7th and the beginning of 6th centuries BCE) may be examined in accordance with Saxe’s “Hypothesis 8.” According to Saxe (1970: 119), “to the degree that corporate group rights to use and/or control crucial but restricted resources are attained and/or legitimized by means of lineal descent from the dead (i.e. lineal ties to ancestors), such groups will maintain formal disposal areas for the exclusive disposal of their dead, and conversely.” Saxe’s method was modified by Goldstein, who had already pointed out that considering the wide range of variability in cultures, the major problem found in the applications of “Hypothesis 8” is “the low probability that certain groups, even when in similar economic and environmental conditions, will symbolize and ritualize aspects of their organization in precisely the same way” (1979: 61). In line with trends in New Archaeology, Saxe’s attempt to construct a body of theory about the sociological significance of burial, formulated as a set of eight hypotheses tested by statistical method, received a great deal of attention from the postprocessual critics of the 80s (for a recent summary, reopening the previous debate, see Morris 1991 with earlier references; and Pearson 1999: 29–30). The general outcome of this critique was expressed by Morris in the following manner: “while Saxe’s theories clearly have relevance, they are always only one among many arguments being voiced about funerary behaviour” (1991: 148). While I accept this postulate, I still find it appropriate to scrutinize the emergence of Judahite rock-cut bench tomb cemeteries, most probably accompanied

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9 For additional discussion, see Regev 2000; Peleg 2002.
by simple pit graves (not always necessarily in the immediate vicinity of the rock-cut caves), in the light of several of Saxe’s claims. In both cases there is a clear tendency toward exclusive disposal of the group’s dead by creating well-defined areas, which function as formal cemeteries. It is reasonable to assume that this spatial organization points to monopolization of crucial but limited resources by the members of the group buried in rock-cut bench tombs. These limited resources included the land and the water, as well as the bedrock suitable for hewing tombs, and were further limited by their necessary proximity to the city.10 The biblical tradition of family burials (cf. 2 Sam. 17: 23; 21: 14; 2 Kings 14: 20; 23: 30) and the archaeological evidence for prolonged use of rock-cut bench tombs agree with the assumption that monopolization of power was achieved through inheritance. On the other hand, the second, much larger group, the archaeological evidence of which is scarce, consisted of simple pit graves. It is most probable that unlike the former group, disposal of this group’s dead in well-defined bounded areas was not related to lineal descent. In this case such linkage, if it existed at all, was probably more generalized: All those buried in a particular field belonged to a distinct group connected by “mythological” ancestors (Patriarchs? Eponyms? Heroes?). Assuming that crucial yet restricted resources, at least within city limits, were monopolized by the population buried in rock-cut bench tombs, it may be suggested that the emergence of formal cemeteries consisting of simple pit graves was inspired by the elites buried in rock-cut bench tombs in an attempt to organize the immediate space, shared by both groups.11 This brings us to the conclusion that every possible reconstruction concerning burial customs during the period of the Late Monarchy, based on the database of rock-cut bench tombs, must take into account the assumption that they mostly reflect the customs of a wealthy elite population. Such an observation appears to be in accordance with Tainter’s conclusions regarding the importance of energy expenditure in mortuary practices (i.e. the overall amount of energy expended on disposing the body, including body treatment, grave construction, funeral duration, and material contributions to the funeral), as a good indicator of social rank (Tainter 1978; see, however, McHugh 1995: 8–13 and Pearson 1999:

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10 For a wide range of material and social issues, such as access to natural resources, management of waste, and proximity to kin and social equals, which might have appeared because of the population’s agglomeration within the cities, see, e.g., Fletcher 1995; Morgan and Coulton 1997.

11 According to Tubul (2007: 195–196), there may be even a deliberate semantic distinction between the use of the two plural forms for the word “grave” in the Bible.
31, 74–5). To sum up, the numerous rock-cut bench tomb cemeteries attested near Judahite cities during the Late Iron Age may reflect the high “vertical” position of the deceased, united by belonging to elite status “corporate” groups, which in turn reveals their “horizontal” social position (cf. Carr 1995).

**Can Bench Tombs in Iron Age Judah Serve as an Indicator of State Formation?**

The affiliation of 8th–7th-century Judahite bench tombs (at least those near the cities) with urban elites is of particular significance, though the importance of this fact is not always clearly acknowledged. The transformation of traditional Judahite culture of the 10th–9th centuries BCE, characterized by patrilineal and individual kinship, to an elite one near the end of the 8th and during the 7th centuries BCE was demonstrated in two extensive studies (Halpern 1991; 1996; see also Simkins 2004). According to Halpern, the emergence of the monotheistic urban elite, which gained ascendancy in Judah under Kings Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah, is reflected *inter alia* in Israelite burial customs. Halpern notes that Israelite rock-cut tombs prior to the 7th century BCE were multichambered, with space for at least four generations, and as such, may reflect what he calls “clan section.” In the 7th century BCE this type was replaced by a single-chambered type, where “the old clan sections were breaking down as tomb groups; the extended family now cared individually for its own dead” (Halpern 1996: 326).

I agree with Halpern’s suggestion that 8th–7th-century Judahite bench tombs mainly reflect newly created urban elites; however, his suggestion regarding the change in burial practices in the 7th century BCE lacks evidence in the archaeological record. Firstly, it is virtually impossible to differentiate typologically between Iron Age burial caves of the 8th

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12 For the general acceptance that rock-cut tombs probably reflect the higher classes, see De Vaux 1965: 58; Spronk 1986: 239; Bloch-Smith 1992a: 149; Kletter 2002: 38.

13 In fact, quite a similar approach may be detected already in Causse’s works (1934; 1937). According to him, the establishment of the monarchy led to increased social differentiation, and as a result of it a “group” collective mentality of the tribal and early Monarchic period was replaced by a more individualistic way of thinking toward the end of the monarchy and thereafter.

14 For a view that in both the urban and rural environments these tombs might have represented extended families, see Barkay 1999. According to him, it is hard to accept Faust’s reconstruction regarding the differences in family structure between cities and villages during the Iron Age II. Faust (1999a) suggested that extended families are represented in the rural sector, while nuclear families dwelt in most of the small four-room houses in the urban sector.
and 7th centuries BCE (Yezerski 1999: 263). Secondly, it is a well-known fact that the vast majority of the single-chambered tombs were used by many generations, since the skeletons were removed to the so-called repositories. Thus, for instance, the repository of one of the caves at Ketef Hinnom, established toward the end of the Iron Age, yielded the remains of about 100 individuals (Barkay 1992: 371; 1999: 97). Another example comes from a 7th-century-BCE cave on the western slope of Mount Zion where the remains of 43 individuals were identified (Arensburg and Rak 1985). Besides this, multichambered bench tombs are attested toward the end of the Iron Age, especially in the area of Jerusalem. Ample demonstration of this practice may be seen, for instance, in the elaborate tombs of St. Étienne Monastery in Jerusalem. Halpern apparently confused his attribution of multichambered Late Bronze/Iron Age I caves with the Israelite clan sections (Halpern 1996, 297, n. 17). Those caves, maintaining the Late Bronze tradition, have nothing to do with the “proto-Israel” of the Iron Age I or inhabitants of Judah of the Iron Age IIA. Despite this, Halpern is correct in pointing out that there is a change in Judahite burial practices during the final stages of the Iron Age. However, the real change is not in the shift between multichambered rock-cut tombs to single-chambered ones, but between the lack of rock-cut bench tombs in the central highlands during the Iron Age I and IIA and their sudden appearance during the Iron Age IIB (8th–7th centuries BCE).

The lack of burials in the central highlands of Palestine during the Iron Age I has recently been addressed by Kletter (2002). According to him, this is a meaningful phenomenon, which together with the change in settlement patterns and diet habits may serve as an additional indicator of a radical change in the central highlands between the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I.15 In fact, the same lack of burials is attested during the Iron Age IIA, mid-late 10th–9th centuries BCE,16 at least in the Judean Highlands.

In what follows, my main objective is to find a reasonable explanation for the striking dissimilarity in the appearance of burial practices

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15 Bloch-Smith’s critique of Kletter’s suggestion is not convincing since the number of Iron Age I burials attested in the central highlands and gathered by her is extremely small (Bloch-Smith 2003: 424; 2004). Faust (2004), on the other hand, suggests that the lack of Iron Age I burials in the central highlands points to an ideology of simplicity and egalitarianism among the “proto-Israelites.”

16 For suggested chronology, see Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004; Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006.
connected with the use of rock-cut bench tombs throughout different parts of the Land of Israel. The main question that should be addressed is why bench tombs in the Judean core area (the Jerusalem Hills) do appear only during the 8th century BCE, while in the coastal area—the Shephelah and even the northern Negev—this practice was adopted considerably earlier?

Previous explanations, based on scholarly consensus regarding the historicity of the United Monarchy in the days of David and Solomon, fail to explain this dissimilarity. According to these explanations, the Shephelah, for instance, in accord with biblical testimony, must be seen as a part of the United Monarchy. In turn, that would imply that already in the 10th century BCE the use of rock-cut bench tombs was attested in the areas ruled from Jerusalem, the kingdom’s capital. Thus, according to Barkay: “Judah had its own development in this field (bench tombs, A.F.); it seems that besides the most general connections, it is impossible to pinpoint a continuous typological development of the burial caves, as well as no link can be found between those in Judah and those in other regions of the country where the neighboring kingdoms existed” (1994: 162; translated from Hebrew, A.F.).

A similar opinion is expressed by Yezerski, according to whom the distribution of bench tombs within the borders of Judah suggests that “...the architectural tradition of burial caves was quite well-established in Judah at the beginning of Iron Age II” (i.e. already in the 10th century BCE, A.F.) (Yezerski 1999: 257; cf. also Amit and Yezerski 2001: 192). It seems that from a factual perspective it is difficult to accept these statements, which contradict available archaeological data. Indeed the numerous examples of bench tombs seem to be quite well established at the beginning of the Iron Age IIA, and even as early as the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I, though they are admittedly outside the proper Judean core area. These occur mostly at sites in the Shephelah (Bloch-Smith 1992a: 41–52), but also along the coast (ibid.; Badhi 2000; Mazar 2000). The most important point, however, is that sites like Tell ‘Eitun in the Shephelah reveal clear continuity between rock-cut bench tombs of the Late Bronze Age and those of the Iron Age (Ussishkin 1973; Edelstein and Aurant 1992 with earlier references). This evidence

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17 It seems that a similar situation may have existed at Tel Halil, which was occupied continuously from the Late Bronze Age until the Late Iron Age (Seger 1993: 557–559). So far, all excavated and published tombs from Tel Halil are dated exclusively to the Iron Age IIA–IIB. Unlike the Judean core area, however, their initial appearance in
accords well with the first appearance of bench tombs during the Late Bronze Age (14th–13th centuries BCE) in the region discussed, given their limited distribution in areas of the southern Coastal Plain (Tell el-‘Ajjul) and the Shephelah (Gezer, Lachish, Tell ‘Eitun, and Tell el-Far‘ah [S]) (Gonen 1992: 22–3, 124–130). In Barkay’s opinion it is impossible to find a direct and continuous link between these Late Bronze rock-cut bench tombs and those that begin to appear in Judah from the 10th century BCE, since this burial custom developed in Judah independently (1994: 163). Conversely, Bloch-Smith suggests that all the elements of the standard Iron Age IIIB bench-tomb type were already present in the region toward the end of the Late Bronze Age (1992a: 41–52, 137; 1992b: 217). Though acknowledging the fact that there is a clear continuity in burial practices from the Late Bronze Age through the Iron Age I and II, at least in the regions of the Shephelah and the southern coast, Bloch-Smith apparently considers the 10th–9th BCE Shephelah within the boundaries of the United Monarchy (1992a: 15; 1992b; 2002: 123). Both Barkay and Bloch-Smith, despite the differences in their approaches, fail to explain why bench tombs began to appear in the Judean Highlands during the 8th century BCE and not sooner. The available data, however, suggests that there is a link between the adoption of this custom by newly emerged 8th-century BCE Judahite elites and the conversion of Judah from a dimorphic chiefdom to a fully developed state (cf. Finkelstein 1999).

Tel Halif is attested from at least the 9th century BCE (Biran and Gophna 1970; Borowski 1992; 1994). The presence of possible 9th century BCE bench tombs at Tel ‘Ira (Beit-Arieh et al. 1999: 129–169), Horbat ‘Anim (Yezerski and Lender 2002), Zahiriyye (Yezerski 1999: 258 with earlier references), and Khirbet Za‘aq (ibid.: 257–258) is in line with the assumption that during the Iron Age II this burial practice was concentrated outside the proper Judean core area; and see below.

It should not be forgotten that there is disagreement over the appearance of rock-cut bench tombs within the context of the Palestinian Late Bronze Age. According to Waldbaum (1966), trapeze-shaped bench tombs with dromoi, which were exposed at Cemetery 500 at Tell el-Far‘ah (S), were inspired by Aegean (Mycenaean) prototypes. Stiebing (1970) and Gonen (1992: 22–23, 124–130), however, have suggested that the rock-cut bench tomb, as a type, originated in Cyprus and its appearance in Late Bronze Palestine shows Cypriot influence (see also Gilmour 1995).

Bloch-Smith’s views should not be confused with those of Spronk (1986). According to Spronk, there are no typical Israelite graves even in the Iron Age II. Spronk’s theory, however, appears to be unacceptable. Despite the continuity between the Late Bronze and Iron Age burial practices, at least in the southern coast and the Shephelah there is no other alternative but to see the vast majority of 8th–7th centuries BCE bench-tombs as the clear Judahite type (cf. Yezerski 1999).
Scholars who recognize the appearance of bench tombs as a purely Judahite phenomenon, characterizing both the United Monarchy and the Kingdom of Judah, tend to disregard the archaeologist’s inability to pinpoint a political entity that fits the definition of a state in anthropological-sociological terms (cf. Wright 1977; Spencer 1990), which supposedly existed in Judah by the 10th century BCE. Archaeological evidence concerning Jerusalem, the kingdom’s capital, in the days of David and Solomon and up to the late 9th – early 8th centuries BCE, has so far revealed data insufficient to support the existence of a developed state, characterized by hierarchically organized administrative specialization (cf. Spencer 1998: 17). A recently suggested “view from the border” (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 144–147 with earlier references; cf. also Blakely 2002), which shifts the focus from the problematic core of the Judahite polity, i.e. Jerusalem in the early Iron Age IIA, to its periphery, offers no real help. According to this approach, the crystallization of the United Monarchy during the reigns of David and Solomon may be detected in monumental building activity revealed, for instance, at Tel Beth Shemesh, located at the border zone with Philistia. Bunimovitz and Lederman argue that this may indicate that the emergence of governmental organization in Judah took place much earlier than the 8th century BCE (2001: 145; cf. Finkelstein 2002a).

Pushing their evidence still further, one might suggest that the early appearance of rock-cut bench tombs in the Shephelah is in line with the assumption that the earliest traces of statehood, including growing social inequality, will be particularly visible at the borders. It seems, however, that applying the “border approach” to Iron Age IIA Judah would be avoiding the real question. Jerusalem, the supposed core of the “border approach,” is no longer terra incognita, and has not been so for some time (Ussishkin 2003a; Na’aman 2007). In Barkay’s words: “in more than 120 years of archaeological investigation in Jerusalem, not one tomb has been found that may be dated to the golden age of the Israelite monarchy, the tenth century BCE” (1992: 371). In fact, the same holds true not just for the tombs: archaeologically, early Iron Age IIA Jerusalem is represented merely by meager pottery and possibly also by the stepped stone structure found in the City of David (Steiner 2001: 42–53; Finkelstein 2001: 108). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that applying Max Weber’s “patrimonial model” to the emergence of the United Monarchy in the Land of Israel (Stager 1985; 1998; Master 2001; cf. Schloen 2001: 49–73, 360, passim) would not
be of help either. Although this explanation may fit numerous cases in the ancient Near East, it does not explain the lack of archaeological evidence for the existence of even a patrimonially operated state that ruled over vast territories from Jerusalem in the 10th century BCE. It seems that, given the present state of research, one should look for an alternative explanation.

In my opinion, the available archaeological data suggests that there is no clear evidence for the existence of a fully developed state in Judah before the late 9th–early 8th centuries BCE. This does not negate or deny the existence of a political entity of some sort in the central highlands during the 10th and the better part of the 9th centuries BCE, but it does limit its scope. Most probably, local chiefs/kings/rulers, as in previous periods (cf. Bunimovitz 1989; Na’aman 1992; 1996a; Finkelstein 1993; 1996), ruled from a few small mountain strongholds (such as early Davidic rulers in Jerusalem) over the sparsely inhabited surrounding region (Ofer 1994; 2001; Lehmann 2003), which included a few agricultural hamlets, while the majority of the population consisted of pastoral or semi-pastoral groups (Zadok 1996: 722; Finkelstein 1999; 2001; 2003; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 238–240).

20 Perhaps the most suitable parallel that could bridge the gap between the idea of a great United Monarchy and the lack of archaeological evidence in Jerusalem may come from the Carolingian Empire. The administration of this early medieval empire was focused on a series of palaces (such as Aachen, Paderborn, and Ingelheim), which the emperors, who stood at the heart of a system of patronage, visited as part of their peripatetic routine (Moreland 2001: 396). But even in this case, already during the reign of Charlemagne (768–814 CE), the royal government was increasingly based at Aachen (ibid. with earlier references), implying the necessity of establishing a permanent core-base. This parallel, however, should not be examined cautiously with regard to the historicity of the United Monarchy, due to the fact that, inter alia, the biblical narrative describes Jerusalem as being a capital of the kingdom already during the reign of King David, and as a large and rich city, especially during the glorious reign of King Solomon.

21 It should be noted that based on various interpretations of the same archaeological data, different scholars have reached opposite conclusions concerning the status of Jerusalem (for a rather minimalist, middle-way approach, see Jameson-Drake 1991; Knauf 1991; Niemann 1993; Na’aman 1996a; 2007; Steiner 1998; 2003; Finkelstein 1999; 2001; Ussishkin 2003a; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001; 2006; for the opposite view, see Cahill 2003; Kletter 2004; Faust 2005; Mazar 2005).

22 The reference to the “House of David” in the Tel Dan inscription (Biran and Naveh 1993; 1995), as well as possibly on the Meshia Stele (Lemaire 1994), definitely point to the existence of a political entity of some sort in the Judean Highlands already during the 10th–9th centuries BCE. The suspicions raised by some that the Tel Dan inscription is fabricated are not convincing (for the latest attempt, see Gmirkin 2002 with earlier references).
With regard to the absence of Iron Age I highland burials, Kletter has recently pointed out that it “may indicate a relatively poor society, without a developed class structure and consolidation of wealthy, upper classes. It does not mean complete lack of classes, only that distances between ranks were not large” (2002: 39). Indeed, it is a well-known fact that a certain degree of inequality is inherent even in the most egalitarian groups (Hamilakis 2002: 14 with earlier references). What appears to be of particular importance, however, is that the assumed accumulation of power through the hands of the highland chiefs in Jerusalem, which may have started during the early Iron Age IIA, was not accompanied by the appearance of rock-cut tombs, which began to appear only later on. We do not know how the Tell ‘Eitun or Tel Ḥalif inhabitants defined themselves in the 10th–9th centuries BCE: maybe it was as tribes of Judah or Simeon, or perhaps their true names were entirely different. In any case, their affiliation with the authority ruling in the area of the Jerusalem Hills looks problematic. Based on the archaeological evidence alone, the elite population of the southern Shephelah apparently continued to be buried in rock-cut bench tombs following the tradition prevalent in these areas since the Late Bronze Age. Perhaps what we see here is the renewal of a “New Canaan” of Philistia and the Shephelah, which lasted at least through the better part of the 9th century BCE. It would be logical, then, to assume that the integration of the southern Shephelah into the Kingdom of Judah did not take place before the end of the 9th century BCE (cf. Thompson 1992: 292, 409–410).

23 It is worth noting that unlike in the Judean Highlands a modest number of Iron Age IIA rock-cut caves are attested to the north of Jerusalem in the Benjamin Plateau. A few examples were reported from Gibeon (Dajani 1953; Bloch-Smith 1992a: 168–169) and Tell en-Naṣbe (Ba‘ed 1931; McCown 1947: 77–100; Bloch-Smith 1992a: 195–196, 207). It is tempting to explain such an “early” appearance of these tombs in this particular area with the rise of the early Israelite polity which was concentrated around Gibeon (Finkelstein 2002b). According to Finkelstein (ibid.), this presumably Saulide polity was assaulted by Shoshenq I in the late 10th century BCE.

24 Bloch-Smith (1992a: 51–52): “It is unclear how early the bench tomb was adopted by the Judahites or when the bench burying population in the southern highlands first identified itself as Judahite. Therefore, for the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE, the burial evidence illustrates only that the cultural group burying in bench tombs was concentrated in the ‘Tell Aitun to Tell Halif’ region of the Shephelah.” It seems, however, that on the whole this observation appears to be correct during the Iron Age IIA as well, with possible extension to the northern Negev.

25 The term “New Canaan” here is in accordance with a reference to the “New Canaan” that lasted in the northern valleys until Shoshenq’s campaign (Finkelstein 2001: 108; 2002b; 2003).
According to Finkelstein, however, the “missing link” in Judah’s state formation may be found in the 9th-century-BCE Shephelah and in the Beersheba Valley (Finkelstein 2001). He states that there is no alternative but to attribute the massive building activity of Lachish IV, Beer-sheba V, and Arad XI to the Kingdom of Judah. If this was the case, the periphery of the kingdom had already shown signs of statehood prior to the 8th century BCE. Finkelstein’s main reasoning in looking for the transitional phase in the history of Judahite statehood is based on the reasonable assumption that “it is illogical that Judah sprang into life from a void; there must have been a transition phase between the two stages: the sparsely settled tenth century and the densely settled late-eighth century” (ibid.: 106). According to him, this transition phase was achieved within a few decades in the first half of the 9th century BCE, under Omride dominance, and as an outcome of Omride political and economic ambitions (ibid.: 110–112). Although such a reconstruction might be possible (Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006: 28–30), it still takes us back to the “view from the border” (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001). It seems to me that the same argument made for the case of 10th-century-BCE Jerusalem should apply to the 9th century BCE as well. Thus, as with 10th-century-BCE Jerusalem, the meager archaeological remains for 9th-century-BCE Jerusalem make it difficult to accept Jerusalem’s control over the Shephelah and the Beersheba Valley during the better part of the 9th century BCE. It seems that in order to bridge the gap between the establishment of Lachish IV, Beer-sheba V, and Arad XI, which might have been affiliated with the Judahite state, and the two contrasting archaeological pictures in the history of Jerusalem (the meager remains from the 10th–9th centuries versus the impressive remains from the 8th–7th centuries BCE), one should look for a stronger hypothesis than those previously suggested.

I accept that the transformation from an Amarna-type dimorphic entity to the Judahite state was sudden and rapid (cf. Barfield 2001: 36–38). There are several reasons, however, for believing that this

26 Using the Low Chronology perspective (Finkelstein 1999; 2002a, both with earlier references), one may attribute Jerusalem’s stepped stone structure, a small part of a casemate wall, and a few other occupational remains to the 9th century BCE (cf. Reich et al. 2007); nevertheless, these elements are insufficient evidence for the existence of a capital of a large state (Steiner 2001: 42–53, 113–116). Moreover, Finkelstein states that even an (early?) 8th-century-BCE date for the stepped stone structure is plausible (2001: 106).
transformation was achieved not at some time during the first half of the 9th century BCE but rather near the end of that century. Two major factors seem to contribute to this significant event, which created a new paradigm shortly thereafter. The first is the short period of decline for the Northern Kingdom, throughout the days of Jehu and Jehoahaz, when Israel was pressed by Aram-Damascus. The second is new developments in the region of the Shephelah. During the 10th century BCE, this area seems to have been dominated by Ekron, at least until its destruction, perhaps in the course of Shoshenq’s campaign (Finkelstein 2001: 111; 2002b: 116). Thereafter, it is most plausible that Gath controlled the area of the Shephelah and maybe the Beer-sheba Valley as well, at least until the decline of Gath in the course of Hazael’s campaign. If the historicity of this event is accepted, the Judahite expansion into the area of the Shephelah might be seen not as the outcome of Omride policy, but as an independent Judahite move, fully exploiting a new opportunity, apparently in the days of Jehoash. The assumed growth in the number of settlements in the hill country to the south of Jerusalem in the 9th century BCE (Ofer 1994: 102–104) provides additional corroboration for this suggestion. In this regard one should also reconsider the historical role of Amaziah and Uzziah in the establishment of Jerusalem’s rule over the territories of the Shephelah and the Beersheba Valley. It seems that the aggressive expansionist policy of Aram-Damascus, resulting in the decline of Gath and the temporary weakening of the Northern Kingdom, may have paved the way for Judah’s expansion and transformation into

\[\text{\textsuperscript{27}}\text{ In both cases it is plausible that their power spread in the north up to the Yarkon area. If one looks for the core—periphery relationships in the southern part of the Land of Israel, the core, at least during the 10th and perhaps most of the 9th centuries BCE, should be placed in Philistia (Knauf 2000: Fig. 4). I cannot accept, however, Knauf’s suggestion (ibid.: 85) that during the early Iron Age II “Jerusalem should have prospered under the conditions of the Rift Valley trade system together with Philistia.”}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{28}}\text{ A major destruction layer recently uncovered at Gath (final Stratum A3) points to the late-9th-century-BCE horizon and was reasonably assigned to Hazael’s campaign (Shai and Maeir 2003; Maeir 2004; Ackermann et al. 2005).}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{29}}\text{ The historicity of the conquest of Gath by Hazael king of Aram Damascus (2 Kings 12: 17) is accepted by many scholars (Na’aman 1996b: 176–177; 1997: 127; Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2001: 242 with earlier references; see also Schniedewind 1998). However, as rightly pointed out by Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz (2001: 242): “A reconstruction of a wide-scale Hazael campaign in the south should await additional support; historical and/or archaeological.”}\]
a real regional power (cf. Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006: 30–32). If this assumed Judahite expansion actually took place, it is necessary to hypothesize a possible confrontation with Ashdod for control over the southern trade network, which Judah apparently won.\textsuperscript{30}

In archaeological terms, such a scenario would mean that Lachish V, for instance, was not integrated within the Kingdom of Judah. There are more reasons to believe that it was under Gath’s jurisdiction. Finkelstein states, however, that both Levels V and IV must be affiliated with Judah. According to him, Lachish V developed, without interruption, into the fortified city of Level IV, which is the forerunner of the impressive late-8th-century-BCE Judahite city of Level III (Finkelstein 2001: 109). However, according to Aharoni (1975: 12, 26–32, 41), the cult room discovered at Lachish V was found destroyed. Remains of the destruction were also reported from Area S (Ussishkin 1997: 319; 2004: 77). In view of the Low Chronology, Level V might be placed in the first half of the 9th century BCE (Finkelstein 2002a; Ussishkin 2004: 78; Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006: 21–22).\textsuperscript{31} One may infer, then, that the possible destruction of Level V is connected with the expansion of the Kingdom of Judah, which may have taken place in the last third of the 9th century BCE. Most recently, however, Ussishkin (2004: 77) has suggested that the ash remains uncovered in Area S are the product of domestic activity rather than traces of destruction. Moreover, according to him, the destroyed sanctuary discovered at Level V is Aharoni’s fanciful reconstruction and no such structure existed (Ussishkin 2003b). It seems, however, that in any event Lachish became

\textsuperscript{30} If there is any validity to the story portrayed in 2 Chron. 26:6 (Finkelstein 2002c: 139 with earlier references) it would corroborate the assumed confrontation with the Philistines for control over the southern trade network in the days of Uzziah, in the early 8th century BCE.

\textsuperscript{31} Such a scenario would make it impossible to accept Faust’s suggestion to connect the massive appearance of slip and burnish on pottery vessels used for food consumption with the formation of the United Monarchy (2002). According to him, the level of social complexity peaked around 1000 BCE with the formation of the United Monarchy. This process deepened the gender inequalities, and required a new elaborate treatment of vessels used for “masculine” activities (see also Joffe 2002: 442–443 with earlier references, who attributes the appearance of the red burnished pottery to the emergent “royal” culture in the 10th century BCE). It seems, however, that even using the conventional chronology, there is no basis for Faust’s main claim that the use of slipped and burnished pottery reached its peak at some point during the 10th century BCE. Moreover, the wide distribution of slipped and burnished pottery all over the southern Levant, including the Phoenician (Bikai 1978; Lehmann 1996) and Philistine milieu (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 146, n. 59), would undermine Faust’s reconstruction as well.
part of the Kingdom of Judah not before the foundation of Level IV. A new architectural plan, beginning at Lachish IV and continuing through Level III, may reflect a system of higher-level administrative control, i.e. the Kingdom of Judah (Ussishkin 2004: 82).32

The same scenario most likely accounts for the foundation of the fort of Arad XI.33 It seems that the establishment of the administrative centers at Lachish IV, the fortification system at Beth-shelemesh, and the fortress of Arad XI and their affiliation with the Kingdom of Judah, may be placed sometime within the last third of the 9th century BCE.34

Keeping in mind the proposed reconstruction, let us return to the starting point, i.e. the sudden appearance of rock-cut bench tombs in the Judean core-area. Now, it appears that the integration of the southern Shephelah into the Kingdom of Judah near the end of the 9th century BCE led to the dispersion of rock-cut bench tombs throughout the kingdom and their rapid adoption as the accepted Judahite custom, and that these tombs characterized mainly a wealthy (elite) Judahite population from the 8th to the beginning of the 6th centuries BCE. Such an observation appears to be in line with some of Portugali’s theoretical speculations on the emergence of statehood in Judah (1994).

Using the “evolutionary” approach of Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981), as well as Haken’s “synergetics” approach (1985),35 he suggests

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32 Such a reconstruction agrees with the suggestion that the Lachish palace (on Podia A and B) was first built in Level IV (Aharoni 1975: 41; Ussishkin 1996: 35, n. 4; 1997: 319). It should be noted, however, that even if Podium A was built in Level V (Tufnell 1953: 52–53), the new architectural plan that continued to Level III, started only in Level IV. However, a certain similarity between the pottery of Lachish V and IV (Zimhoni 1997: 171) may suggest that, except for the new masters, the local population around Lachish did not change.

33 It should be emphasized that though the fort of Arad X is similar in size to Arad XI, it differs in numerous details: the architectural layout; the type of fortifications; the erection of the temple; and the construction of a water system (Herzog 2002). Moreover, the pottery of Stratum X is remarkably different from that of Stratum XI (ibid.; Singer-Avitz 2002). It seems that unlike Arad X, whose attribution to the Kingdom of Judah must be certain, the suggested status of Arad XI should be examined with caution.

34 If the fortified administrative center of Beer-sheba V was founded earlier than Lachish IV and Arad XI (Zimhoni 1997: 206–207; Finkelstein 2001: 112, n. 16), it could have been dominated by Gath, at least until Gath’s decline toward the end of the 9th century BCE.

35 For definition and theoretical framework of the “self-organization” paradigm, which is the core of the “synergetics” approach, see Nicolis and Prigogine 1977; Prigogine and Stengers 1984; McGlade and van der Leeuw 1997. For the implications of applying this method to archaeology, see Allen 1982; 1997; Weidlich 1988; Schloen 2001: 57–58.
that the emergence of a monarchy in Iron Age Judah might be seen as a socio-spatial mutation of the Canaanite and Philistine system of city-states. Thus, the traditional Israelite societates were “enslaved” by the newly emerged urban civitas, creating a more complex and hierarchical system than its prototype (cf. Frick 1985; Gottwald 2001). In this reconstruction, Portugali apparently refers to the establishment of the United Monarchy. In light of recent understanding, this theory would apply rather to the establishment of the Northern Israelite Kingdom during the 9th century BCE (Finkelstein 1999; 2000; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 149–195).36 His basic conclusions, however, seem to be useful with regard to state formation in Judah as well. Thus, one can always suggest that since the use of rock-cut bench tombs in the Canaanite and Philistine milieu is not connected to state formation there is no such a linkage in Iron Age Judah. However, if we employ Portugali’s approach, the adoption of bench tombs by Judah’s new urban elites may be seen as an imitation/mutation of burial practices existing among the urban elites in the neighboring Canaanite and Philistine city-states. These burial practices, borrowed from city-states, were adapted to the newly created system of the national state.37 It seems that the appearance of numerous rock-cut bench tombs in the Judean Hills during the 8th–7th centuries BCE, especially around Jerusalem, may be explained by hypothesizing the formation of a wealthy social class composed of new executive cadres (high-level positions such as the king, king’s family, ministers, executive officials, office heads, etc.).38

36 It should be noted that Faust’s (1999b) analysis of the abandonment of the Iron Age I rural sites in the hill country north of Jerusalem may apply to the rise of the Kingdom of Israel rather than to the establishment of the United Monarchy. It becomes particularly clear if one employs the Low Chronology (cf. ibid.: 25, n. 59).

37 In Israel, i.e. the Northern Kingdom, the situation appears to have been different, because the major urban centers emerged during the 9th century BCE. It is hard to explain, however, why the urbanization of the Kingdom of Israel was not accompanied by the emergence of rock-cut tomb cemeteries, as occurred in the Kingdom of Judah in the 8th century. The known Iron Age II burials from the area of the Kingdom of Israel, despite their modest numbers (Kletter 2002: 30, n. 7 with earlier references; Vitto 2001; Braun 2001), may reflect a multi-ethnic society with a variety of burial practices (Faust 2000; Finkelstein 2000; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 191–194). Perhaps the Assyrian destructions of the late 8th century BCE halted the crystallization of standard burial practice in the Kingdom of Israel (Bloch-Smith 1992a: 143–144; Kletter 2002: 30). On the other hand, following the conquest of the Shephelah, the homogenous Judahite elite quickly adopted the bench tomb burial practice, of course modifying and standardizing it.

38 Interestingly, the emergence of statehood in Urartu, during the 9th century BCE, is accompanied by the appearance of elaborate rock-cut funerary caves, which, apparently, served high-level officials (Burney 1995).
Their appearance serves as the clearest indicator of a newly created social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{39} It can be reasonably assumed that the representatives of the peripheral Judahite cities (local elites), as well as wealthy farmland owners, also rapidly adopted these burial practices (Halpern 1996; Barkay 1999).

Conclusions

It has been emphasized that bench tombs can serve as a reliable indicator in attempting to reconstruct the boundaries of the Kingdom of Judah near the end of the Iron Age (Yezerski 1999). Their distribution throughout the kingdom near the end of the Iron Age matches, on the whole, the spatial distribution of the material finds clearly identified as Judahite (cf. Kletter 1999). In this paper I have tried to point out several features that allow us to make a connection between the widespread appearance of rock-cut bench tombs throughout the Kingdom of Judah from the 8th century BCE until the Babylonian conquest and Judah’s emergence as a fully developed state with a material culture of its own. I suggested that Judah’s expansion into the area of the Shephelah and the latter’s integration into the Kingdom of Judah near the end of the 9th century BCE might be seen as a major event in Judah’s transformation into a fully developed state. It should be clearly stated, however, that the appearance of rock-cut bench tombs in Iron Age Judah does not itself indicate state formation. It should be considered rather as

\textsuperscript{39} In addition to the widespread adoption of this burial practice, a parallel trend, including imitation of certain architectural elements in funerary architecture at the end of the Iron Age, may be attested as well. Thus, the style of the “Pharaoh’s Daughter” tomb includes Egyptian elements such as an Egyptian cornice and pyramid. This tomb appears to have been a result of pure Egyptian inspiration (Ussishkin 1993: 319). Further examples illustrating Egyptian inspiration are the headrests in Cave No. 2 at St. Étienne Monastery in Jerusalem. In Barkay’s opinion, these headrests were shaped like the hairstyle of the Egyptian goddess Hathor (1994: 150–151). It can be reasonably assumed that in both cases the imitation of Egyptian elements by the local elite was the source for inspiration (so-called elite emulation, and see Higginbotham 2000: 6–16 for a general explanation of this phenomenon). Accepting this explanation, perhaps we are able to date the above examples more precisely to the last quarter of the 7th century BCE, bearing in mind that during that period Judah became an Egyptian vassal following Assyrian withdrawal from the region (Freedy and Redford 1970: 478, n. 79; Miller and Hayes 1986: 38; Na‘aman 1991; Fantalkin 2001: 128–147). Although the uncertainty of this reconstruction should be definitely emphasized, I see no basis whatsoever for Bloch-Smith’s (2002: 129) suggestion to attribute the tomb of “Pharaoh’s Daughter” to the 9th century BCE.
just one of the signs of statehood in Iron Age Judah, in addition to the appearance of monumental architecture, urbanization, widespread writing, literacy, etc. (cf. Finkelstein 2002b with earlier references). Thus, as I have argued that during the formative stages, the elites of the newly emerged Judahite state adopted this type of burial. Thereafter, this modified burial practice became normative and ritualized and, as such, was characterized by uniformity in both the belief in the afterlife and the material expression thereof.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to E. Bloch-Smith, S. Bunimovitz, I. Finkelstein, R. Greenberg, B. Halpern, E. Lytle, C. Morgan, N. Na’aman, O. Tal, D. Ussishkin, and I. Yezerski for their valuable comments on this article. Any responsibility for the ideas expressed here is mine alone.
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