

# THE FINAL DESTRUCTION OF BETH SHEMESH AND THE *PAX ASSYRIACA* IN THE JUDAHITE SHEPHELAH: AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

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## *Abstract*

*Recently, Bunimovitz and Lederman suggested that the final destruction of Beth Shemesh illuminates Assyrian policies in the Judahite Shephelah. According to their reconstruction of new data unearthed at Beth Shemesh, the Judahite Shephelah was devastated and depopulated during the pax Assyriaca. This study questions Bunimovitz and Lederman's reconstruction from both the archaeological and historical perspectives. It is suggested that the renewal of the Shephelah, which might have already began in the days of Manasseh, shows signs of cooperation between Judah and Ekron under both the pax Assyriaca and the pax Aegyptiaca, rather than the other way round. This fruitful cooperation was halted as a result of Babylonian destructions, as reflected inter alia in the renewed excavations of Beth Shemesh.*

## INTRODUCTION

In an article recently published in these pages (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003), the excavators of Beth Shemesh presented a detailed description of the archaeological evidence for the final Iron Age destruction of the site. According to their reconstruction Judah and Philistia suffered different fates following Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BCE: While the Philistine coast and hinterland flourished under Assyrian rule, the Judahite Shephelah was devastated and depopulated. The excavators claimed that the new data unearthed at the renewed excavations at Tel Beth Shemesh illuminate the fate of the Judahite Shephelah during the main part of the 7th century BCE—the era of the *pax Assyriaca* in the Levant. In the present article I will challenge the excavators' conclusions from both archaeological and historical perspectives.

The main archaeological feature discussed by Bunimovitz and Lederman (2003) is the water reservoir discovered in Area C on the northeastern side of the tell. The construction of this impressive reservoir should probably be linked to the period when Beth Shemesh was being transformed into a Judahite administrative centre. The date of this transformation, however, accompanied by a fortification system and additional public structures, is debatable. Bunimovitz and Lederman suggest that the fortification system was built around the mid-10th century BCE, pointing to crystallization of the United Monarchy during the reigns of David and Solomon

(2001:144–147). An opposite “Low Chronology” view, advocated by Finkelstein (2002:121–123), suggests that it could have been built in the middle or second half of the 9th century or even early in 8th century BCE.<sup>1</sup>

According to Bunimovitz and Lederman (2003:4–5), this settlement, with fortifications and monumental buildings, was destroyed sometime during the first half of the 8th century BCE. The remains of another settlement, they claim, were unearthed on top of this destruction, with its end attributed to Sennacherib’s campaign of 701 BCE.<sup>2</sup> The 7th century BCE pottery assemblage, attested solely in the reservoir, definitely points to its re-activation after Sennacherib’s destruction.

In what follows, I will concentrate first on the final destruction of Beth Shemesh, traces of which were discovered in the reservoir. Thereafter, I will address the question of the date of re-activation of the reservoir. I will present a new interpretation of Bunimovitz and Lederman’s archaeological evidence, and this will lead to an alternative view regarding the *pax Assyriaca* in the Judahite Shephelah.

#### THE FINAL DESTRUCTION OF BETH SHEMESH

The date of the destruction of the reservoir, like the date of its construction (see above), raises serious questions. The main entrance into the reservoir was found completely blocked by approximately 150 tons of earthen fill, which included structural and habitational remains. A cistern shaft located at the centre of the gate plaza that might have been used for drawing water was found blocked by a stone vat-press. The pottery in the fill blocking the main entrance is composed of two assemblages that differ in function and date. According to Bunimovitz and Lederman (2003), the lowest part of the fill contained the pottery associated with the re-activation of the reservoir. The vessels, which were stored in the immediate vicinity of the main entrance, were swept first into the mouth of the reservoir when it was blocked. The upper part of the fill included mainly earlier material, taken from the abandoned

<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, the fact that the walls of the reservoir’s entrance structure were laid directly above the Iron Age I occupation layer does not necessarily mean that the reservoir was constructed during Iron Age IIA, contemporaneous with the other monumental buildings. It might have been constructed later, as well. Even so, I found Bunimovitz and Lederman’s suggestion that the reservoir was an integral part of Beth Shemesh’s transformation into the Judahite administrative centre the most plausible option.

<sup>2</sup> Most recently, Finkelstein and Na’aman (2004:68–69) expressed uneasiness with Bunimovitz and Lederman’s interpretation, according to which Beth Shemesh of the high days of the state of Judah, i.e., the late 8th century BCE, was an unfortified settlement, and the evidence for its destruction by Sennacherib is meagre at best. However, as Finkelstein and Na’aman have pointed out (*ibid.*:69), it would be best to await the publication of the final report before drawing any conclusions.

structures near the reservoir. Those structures seem to have been destroyed in the course of Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BCE. These late 8th century BCE remains were apparently thrown down the stairway shaft when the blocking of the reservoir was in progress, and should not be associated with the re-activation of the reservoir. It is, therefore, clear that the latest datable assemblage, the pottery from the reservoir<sup>3</sup> and from the lower fill of its blockage, is the most decisive in the dating of both the re-activation and the final destruction of the reservoir.

This assemblage seems to be typical of the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE, i.e., the Babylonian destruction horizon. Bunimovitz and Lederman, however, claim that "despite its resemblance to 'classic' assemblages from 586 BCE destruction levels in Judahite sites, it should not be attributed to such a chronological horizon" (2003:19). They rightly emphasize that due to a well-known problem of tracking 'intermediate' assemblages from the first half of the 7th century BCE (cf. Finkelstein 1994) the destruction of the reservoir is not necessarily connected to the Babylonian destruction horizon of the early 6th century BCE. They further suggest "that the assemblage related to the re-operation of the Beth Shemesh reservoir should be dated to the third quarter of the 7th century BCE, on the basis of the presence of certain vessel types—and the absence of others" (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003: 20). Placing this assemblage sometime between 650 and 625 BCE provides a basis for Bunimovitz and Lederman's far-reaching historical implications regarding the nature of the *pax Assyriaca* in the Judahite Shephelah (2003:20–23). Thus, according to them, a small group of Judahites tried to return to Beth Shemesh in the third quarter of the 7th century BCE, re-opening the abandoned water reservoir. "However, they did not anticipate the strength of the opposition of their Philistine neighbours and their Assyrian masters to any Judahite attempt to settle the Shephelah" (*ibid.*:23). The Assyrians, according to this reconstruction, destroyed the reservoir, which was never brought into use again. Based on this interpretation of the archaeological data, and on the assumed geo-political changes in the region during the last third of the 7th century BCE, Bunimovitz and Lederman claim that Judahites were able to return to the Shephelah only after the Assyrian withdrawal.

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<sup>3</sup> The material unearthed on the floors of the reservoir presents a classic case of 'primary deposition', exposed in the original space of usage (cf. Schiffer 1985: 24–25; LaMotta and Schiffer 1999:20–21, with further references). This deposition was created through a series of accidental losses of the vessels that fell or were broken in the course of drawing water. Since material that pre-dates the 7th century BCE is basically absent from the reservoir, it is clear that it was cleaned before the re-activation. In addition, the lower part of the reservoir's halls was re-plastered. Excavators were able to postulate that this re-plastering was carried out prior to the accumulation of silt on the reservoir floor (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:9).

Bunimovitz and Lederman's dating of the assemblage unearthed in the reservoir does not, however, bear up under close inspection. Consequently, the historical reconstruction suggested by them is flawed, as it is based on an erroneous dating. But first let us take a closer look at the pottery from the reservoir and the lower fill.

According to the excavators (2003:17–18), both the complete vessels (some 15 whole or partially broken vessels) and the numerous sherds found in the reservoir suggest that the pottery assemblage is composed almost entirely of three types of vessels. These types are: pinched-mouth jug with a ridged neck (the most common type, 44 percent), holemouth jar with a flat rim (20 percent) and globular cooking-pot (12 percent). A few additional types of storage jars and jugs are attested as well.

The pinched-mouth jug with a ridged neck seems to have been particularly popular near the end of the 7th and early 6th centuries BCE, as it is mainly attested in the Babylonian destruction layers (cf. Fantalkin 2001:71, Type Jg 1; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:120, Type JG 35; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:18; all with further references). The same holds true for a narrow-necked jug with a thickened rim and a handle extending from the rim (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003: Fig. 9: 3). It is difficult to pinpoint chronologically the initial appearance of this type, which probably had a high degree of variability (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:115–116, Type JG 21). It is noteworthy, however, that in nearby Tel Batash this type appears only in Stratum II, and only four examples have been registered (*ibid.*:115).

The holemouth jars are of no help for precise chronological dating. It seems to be generally accepted that, on the whole, the 8th century BCE types have a rounded shoulder and bulbous rim, while the 7th century BCE types are angular with a flat rim (mainly after Kenyon 1957:16; cf., e.g., Aharoni and Aharoni 1976:83; Holladay 1976:288–289).<sup>4</sup> Those attested in the reservoir seem to be of the second type (cf. Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003: Fig. 9:6–7), and as such could be placed anywhere in the 7th or early 6th centuries BCE. One can say no more.

Other attested storage jars, however, appear to be at home near the end of 7th and early 6th centuries BCE. Thus, those found on the bench at the entrance to the reservoir (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003: Fig. 7:2–3) clearly belong to this horizon (*ibid.*:18, with further references). This type is not attested in Arad, for instance, prior to Strata VII-VI (Singer-Avitz 2002:145, Fig. 17: SJ 7). The same might be true for the upper part of a jar with an everted rim discovered in the northeastern hall of the reservoir (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003: Fig. 9:2). Similar everted rim jars with elongated bodies and without shoulder or neck were attested in Mezad Ḥashavyahu, one of the key assemblages for the last quarter of the 7th century BCE

<sup>4</sup> For a general discussion regarding the holemouth jars in the Judahite assemblages, see most recently Barkay, Fantalkin and Tal 2002:59–65, with further references.

(Fantalkin 2001:66, Fig. 26:8–11, Types SJ 6–7). It is true that in both cases we have no way of knowing exactly when during the 7th century BCE these types began to appear. Their presence in the layers connected to Babylonian destructions, however, is certain.

The last category, chronologically the most important, is the cooking-pots. According to the excavators, the globular cooking-pot, characterized by flattened neck ridges, is the predominant type. They state that “its morphology clearly suggests that it is a transitional type between the globular cooking-pot with protruding neck ridges, common in the late 8th century BCE, and the globular cooking-pot with a single neck ridge, typical of the end of the 7th and beginning of the 6th centuries BCE” (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:30). While I accept this observation, I must point out that it would apply only to the example illustrated in Bunimovitz and Lederman’s Fig. 9:1 (*ibid.*:15). This example perfectly corresponds to Arad Type CP 8, which was attested at Arad in Strata X–VIII only (Singer-Avitz 2002:141, Fig. 14). On the other hand, an example that Bunimovitz and Lederman are referring to (2003:20, Figs. 7:1; 12) is the one found on the bench at the entrance to the reservoir. Although quite similar to the previous example with multi-ridged neck, it has a few new features, such as a splayed rim and a pronounced ridge at the bottom of the neck. In Arad it was labelled Type CP 9 and, according to Singer-Avitz, it was found in Strata VII–VI only (2003:141, Fig. 15), which would place it near the end of the 7th or early 6th centuries BCE. Due to the preliminary nature of Bunimovitz and Lederman’s report it is unclear whether the Arad Type CP 8 or CP 9 is ubiquitous in the reservoir pottery assemblage. For dating purposes, the answer to this question might be crucial.

It seems, however, that the most important evidence is emerging from the presence in the reservoir pottery assemblage of the closed cooking-pots with a single neck ridge and the shallow cooking-pots with everted grooved rim (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:20). The excavators do not specify how many of these clearly late 7th/early 6th century cooking-pots were found. All they say is that a few sherds of these types were found in the reservoir. It is worth mentioning, however, that on another occasion, Bunimovitz and Lederman (2001) did not hesitate to date a fortification system uncovered at Beth Shemesh on the basis of a few latest datable sherds found in its construction fill (see Finkelstein 2002:121–122, in greater detail). One wonders why the latest datable sherds in the reservoir were not treated similarly. It appears that the main reason is based on the presence of certain vessel types and the absence of others. Thus, according to Bunimovitz and Lederman: “Conspicuous in their absence were jars with rosette impressions, mortaria bowls, as well as the two types of decanters typical of the late 7th to the early 6th centuries BCE—the small degenerated decanter and the large unburnished decanter. The absence of these

vessels, which apparently began to appear in Judah towards the end of the third quarter of the 7th century BCE, provides a *terminus ante quem* for the blockage of the reservoir” (2003:20).

I find it difficult to accept such a claim. The absence of these groups of vessels from the assemblage of the reservoir does not necessarily provide a chronological clue, but rather emphasizes the functional purpose of a given assemblage. Jugs, holemouth jars and cooking-pots—the three predominant types unearthed in the reservoir—do not constitute a typical household assemblage, and, as rightly observed by the excavators, these vessels were apparently used for drawing water. Thus, according to Bunimovitz and Lederman, the assemblage uncovered in the reservoir presents the vessels which “fell or were broken in the course of drawing water and became embedded in the soft silt layer” (2003:18). While accepting their statement, one still wonders why mortaria bowls and decanters, for instance, should even be expected to be found in such an assemblage. After all, both mortaria bowls and decanters are not suitable for drawing water. The former is an open vessel, a bowl; the latter is a closed vessel for serving drinks but its long, narrow neck makes it unsuitable for drawing water. Although in the coastal area mortaria bowls indeed present a common type near the end of the 7th century BCE, its occurrence in Judah is rather scarce, and it is attested mainly at the southern fringes of the kingdom (cf. Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:51, with further references). One might expect it to be found at a coastal site, although not necessarily, but not in the Beth Shemesh reservoir. Besides, from a chronological point of view, it is quite clear that given the presence of mortaria bowls in 8th century BCE contexts, such as those of Ashdod and Ḥorvat Rosh Zayit, but especially in the 8th century BCE assemblage retrieved from the Phoenician shipwreck in the deep water off Ashkelon (Ballard *et al.* 2002:162–163, Fig. 9:3), this type cannot, as scholars once believed, be seen as a chronological marker for the end of the 7th century BCE (e.g., Lehmann 2002:196; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:20).

Although decanters may indeed be seen as a clearly Judahite type, they seem to be common throughout the country. As with mortaria bowls, however, their presence in Tel Beersheba (Singer-Avitz 1999:17), Arad (Singer-Avitz 2002:155) and Lachish (Aharoni 1975: Pl. 44:17–18) would place their initial appearance in the 8th century BCE. On the other hand, those referred to by Bunimovitz and Lederman, the small degenerated decanters and the large unburnished decanters (2003:20), should indeed be seen as a clear late 7th–early 6th century BCE type. But as I have already pointed out, taking into consideration the special nature of the uncovered assemblage, the absence of decanters does not necessarily lead to chronological conclusions. Given the dimensions of the rosette-stamped jars, it is also clear that no one would use them to draw water via the cistern shaft. Like the mortaria bowls and decanters,

their absence in the given assemblage is meaningless from a chronological point of view. Besides, both historically and archaeologically there are no reasons to relate all the rosette stamps to the reign of Jehoiakim, as Cahill suggested (1995; 2000, with further references). The reasons for this were sufficiently discussed by Kletter (1999: 34–37) and Naʿaman (2001:273–274). Bunimovitz and Lederman are aware of these publications (2003:20, n. 11), but it does not stop them from considering the absence of the rosette-stamped jars as a precise chronological indicator. An additional observation made by Kletter (1999:37), however, with regard to the distribution of the rosette-stamps seems to be overlooked. Indeed, contrary to *lmk* stamps, the distribution of rosette stamps presents a different picture, since only a limited number of the latter type is attested in the Shephelah and the Negev. The most striking for our purpose would be the fact, for instance, that only a few rosette-stamps are attested in Tell en-Naşbeh, located only about 12 km. northwest of Jerusalem; the site, about two-thirds of which had been excavated, doubtless continued to be occupied during the Babylonian period (Zorn 1994). Thus, it is obvious that, chronologically speaking, the absence of the rosette-stamped jars from the Beth Shemesh reservoir means nothing.

Furthermore, Bunimovitz and Lederman's argument on the absence of certain vessel types is not entirely clear: Are they referring to the absence of certain vessels types from the lower fill of the blockage of the reservoir or from the reservoir itself? The former would make more sense, since, as I maintained earlier, there is no reason to expect jars, bowls and decanters to be found among the "primary refuse" on the reservoir's floor. On the other hand, the absence of certain vessels types from the lower fill of the blockage of the reservoir has a better chance of being considered 'conspicuous'. However, from a methodological point of view, the absence of certain types of vessels should not necessarily be viewed as a chronological indicator. There are numerous possibilities that may have affected the site formation of the lower fill blockage of the Beth Shemesh reservoir. Thus, for instance, the small dimensions of decanters would have made them easily transportable to the next occupational site and their absence may, therefore be explained as a result of the 'curate behavior' of Beth Shemesh's inhabitants when they abandoned the site. The spatial analyses for the assemblage unearthed at Mezad Ḥashavyahu, for instance, have shown that all the oinochoai and jugs, as well as the vast majority of the decanters, were taken by the residents during the abandonment of the site (Fantalkin 2001:117–118).

All in all, the ceramic evidence as presented by Bunimovitz and Lederman suggests that the termination of the reservoir must be associated with the Babylonian destruction horizon. I believe that the interpretation I present here is in better agreement not only with the reported archaeological data but with the historical background as well.

Indeed, viewing the deliberate blockage of the Beth Shemesh reservoir as the outcome of Babylonian rather than Assyrian policy makes more sense. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why Assyrians did not block the reservoir in the first place, i.e., during the destruction of 701 BCE.<sup>5</sup> Due to the careful excavation, we know that a significant amount of energy was spent on the reservoir's blockage: 10,050 buckets of dirt (3,500 tons) were removed before the excavators could reach the entrance. Without embarking on a proper estimation of the energy expenditure, one may assume that it might have taken a few days for a group of approximately 50 people to accomplish such a blockage in the first place. If the Assyrians did not destroy the reservoir in 701 BCE, why did they do it in the third quarter of the 7th century BCE? Only to drive out a few Judahite families, as Bunimovitz and Lederman want us to believe? I assume that if the Assyrians indeed opposed any Judahite attempt to re-settle Beth Shemesh, as Bunimovitz and Lederman have suggested (2003: 23), their control would have been strong enough to tackle the issue by merely giving an order to the king of Judah, via an Assyrian supervisor at Ramat Raḥel (cf. Na'aman 2001), who would have prevented any Judahite penetration into the area of the Shephelah. But as one observes, this is definitely not the case here; since the renewal of the Judahite settlement in the Shephelah might be attested already in the days of Manasseh (cf. Finkelstein and Na'aman 2004, and see below). What could have changed in the Shephelah in the third quarter of the 7th century BCE that would necessitate the destruction of the Beth Shemesh reservoir? Only the fact that Assyrian control became even tighter?

Since the current state of research does not permit an unequivocal differentiation between local pottery from the end of the 7th century and that from the beginning of the 6th, there are two possible scenarios for dating the blockage of the reservoir to the Babylonian destruction horizon. First, the reservoir could have been destroyed by Babylonians as early as 604 BCE, as an integral part of the destruction of Ekron IB (Ekron was an Egyptian ally, and as such was utterly destroyed).<sup>6</sup> If this indeed was the case, it would mean that reactivation and operation of the Beth Shemesh reservoir was conducted on behalf of Ekron, perhaps with Judahite cooperation (and see below). Therefore, the blocking of the reservoir may be seen as a part of the deliberate process of destroying Ekron.

<sup>5</sup> Bunimovitz and Lederman (2003:17, n. 8) have suggested that "the Assyrians employed the same practice in Beth Shemesh as they did at Hazor: deliberate blocking of the main water source of the conquered settlement". But Hazor's case shows that such an operation was conducted during the Assyrian military conquest of 732 BCE. It seems, therefore, that the blockage of the Beth Shemesh reservoir by the Assyrians during the *pax Assyriaca*, as suggested by Bunimovitz and Lederman, cannot be compared to the case of Hazor.

<sup>6</sup> For Gitin's proposal to date the destruction of Ekron IB to 604 BCE, see Gitin 1998:276, n.2.



The second scenario, namely the 586 BCE Babylonian destruction, is no less attractive, since it fits the military logic behind the long Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. Thus, discussing the destruction of the fortified cities in the Shephelah in the early 6th century BCE, Lipschits points out that it “may be seen as the ‘opening of the door’ to the heart of the kingdom of Judah by Babylonian army” (2003:324). Furthermore, he correctly observes that the conquest of the Shephelah region was dictated by military logic and, as such, was essential for the Babylonian advance to the mountain region. The continued siege of Jerusalem<sup>7</sup> doubtless necessitated Babylonian control of the major supply roads from the coast, via the Shephelah, into the hill country (*ibid.*:342, n. 72; see also Lipschits 1998). Under such circumstances the deliberate blockage of the Beth Shemesh reservoir is best explained against the background of Babylonian policy. The absence of a fresh water source near Beth Shemesh (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:7) makes its underground reservoir a focal point for refugees, but also, and more importantly, for potential Judahite guerrilla fighters. Numerous burial caves in the immediate vicinity of Beth Shemesh, such as the northwestern cemetery, might have offered a suitable shelter for both groups.<sup>8</sup> The use of burial caves as a place of refuge has recently been re-addressed by Parker (2003), who has collected abundant evidence of this phenomenon, especially in Iron Age Judah. From a military point of view, the most strategic action to be taken in the region of Beth Shemesh in order to prevent guerrilla warfare and the concentration of hostile refugees was simply to destroy the reservoir. Whether the year was 604 or 586 BCE, or somewhere in between, judging from the data unearthed, it was the Babylonians, not the Assyrians, who destroyed the Beth Shemesh reservoir.

#### THE *PAX ASSYRIACA* IN THE JUDAHITE SHEPHELAH

Although the destruction of the Beth Shemesh reservoir can be dated with a high degree of certainty to one of the Babylonian punitive campaigns, the date of its re-opening is far from clear. But before I suggest several contesting alternative dates, I would like to emphasize that I am basing these possibilities on the assumption that the re-activation of the reservoir is indeed connected with the Judahite settlers. To my mind, however, the pottery evidence in and of itself is insufficient for

<sup>7</sup> Depending of the system of calculation, the siege of Jerusalem lasted 18 or 30 months (Eph'al 2003:183, with further references). Whatever system one prefers, it appears that the siege was long enough.

<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that one of the tombs, Tomb 14, yielded the assemblage that perhaps may be placed in the second half of the 6th century BCE (Grant and Wright 1939:78, 144–145; Stern 1982:77), similar to those of Ketef Hinnom and Mamilla. It is not of little interest that there were no additional finds from this period either on the tell or in the cemetery (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:5, n. 4).

postulating the ethnicity of those who re-activated the reservoir. Although the pottery unearthed in the reservoir indeed points to a Judahite milieu (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:22, n. 14), identifying the new-comers from the pottery alone is not altogether a necessary deduction. Identifying them becomes even more difficult in the case of a border city such as Beth Shemesh (cf. Bunimovitz and Lederman 1997; Weitzman 2002) and against the background of the 7th century BCE, when the regional frontiers of material culture (and especially pottery) were blurred due to the *pax Assyriaca*. Thus, although I tend to accept Bunimovitz and Lederman's conclusion that the re-activation of the reservoir was undertaken by the Judahites (for the reasons discussed below), one should keep in mind the hypothetical nature of this assumption.

The first scenario is that the re-opening took place only as late as the days of Josiah, after the Assyrian withdrawal from the region. This would be in line with the conventional theory that the Judahite Shephelah was abandoned after Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BCE and remained abandoned until the days of Josiah (cf., e.g., Barkai 1992:356; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:22–23). The most recent re-evaluation of the archaeological data, however, suggests that a number of sites in the Shephelah were actually re-occupied shortly after the destruction, apparently in the days of Manasseh (Finkelstein and Na'aman 2004). The renewal of the Judahite settlement in the Shephelah might, therefore, be seen as a gradual process that began in the days of Manasseh, rather than a sudden expansion that took place in the days of Josiah. Indeed, given the present understanding of Josiah's modest territorial advances, if there had been any, save, perhaps, for Bethel, the traditional view that connects Judahite re-settlement of the Shephelah with the Assyrian withdrawal appears to be outdated. This view doubtless has its roots in the long-standing scholarly consensus that Josiah's kingdom extended over most of the territory of western Palestine, and that therefore the re-settlement of the Shephelah should be viewed as a result of Josiah's policies. This view is no longer plausible. It is quite clear that despite certain disorder after the Assyrian withdrawal from *Ebir nāri* in the twenties of the 7th century BCE (Na'aman 1991:33–41), the region did not experience significant change due to immediate Egyptian intervention; and the time-span between the end of Assyrian domination and the beginning of the Babylonian invasions shows a high degree of continuity under Egyptian hegemony (Fantalkin 2001:146–147). The fact that Ekron continued to produce olive oil in large quantities under Egyptian domination is the best evidence for such continuity, at least in the region discussed.

It is, therefore, more tempting to suggest another scenario which links the re-opening of the Beth Shemesh reservoir with the days of Manasseh. Moreover, the presence of certain types of pottery in the reservoir, such as what Bunimovitz and

Lederman call the “intermediate cooking-pot type” (see above), points to its re-opening before the late 7th century BCE.<sup>9</sup> Based on the archaeological data alone it is virtually impossible to deduce when exactly in the 7th century BCE the reservoir was re-opened. The best one can say is that the presence of the pottery preceding the late 7th–early 6th century BCE horizon points to the reservoir’s re-opening sometime in the days of Manasseh.<sup>10</sup> If this is indeed the case, it would mean that the Beth Shemesh reservoir was re-activated during the period of *pax Assyriaca* and continued to be operated uninterrupted, through the period of *pax Aegyptiaca*, until it was destroyed by the Babylonians.

Indeed, quite contrary to Bunimovitz and Lederman (2003:21–23), it is cooperation rather than hostility that we witness in the relations between Ekron and Judah during the *pax Assyriaca*. Given the long and complicated history of Judahite/Philistine antagonism, one may hypothesize that these relations were not necessarily truly friendly, but that the realpolitik adapted by both sides dictated different dynamics in their attitudes toward each other.

The establishment of a massive oil production centre in Ekron doubtless demanded access to Judahite olive-orchards in the hill country as well as to the fertile lands in the Shephelah. Although large parts of the Shephelah seem to have been annexed by the Philistine cities, the advantages of cooperation might have been overwhelming at a time when both sides were forced to cooperate under the umbrella of their Assyrian masters (cf. Gitin 1989:50).<sup>11</sup>

Taking into consideration the fact that the borders between kingdoms were open following the *pax Assyriaca* (contrary to the 8th century BCE; cf. Naʿaman 1993: 119), the assumed cooperation may be observed on different levels. Thus, as Gitin (1989) and Naʿaman (1995:113) have pointed out, the area of Ekron became attractive for some of the refugees who fled Judah in wake of Sennacherib’s campaign. In this regard the role of the experienced Judahite farmers should not be underestimated. After all, contrary to their Philistine counterparts, they most probably were highly

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<sup>9</sup> In addition, 1751 rims collected from the reservoir (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003:17) may point to a sufficient time-span between its reactivation and termination.

<sup>10</sup> Strictly speaking, the early days of Josiah cannot be ruled out either. Such a statement should not be taken, however, as support for Josiah’s independent expansionist policy after the Assyrian retreat. Following Naʿaman’s observation that the great crisis in the Assyrian empire did not begin until after the outbreak of the revolt in Babylonia, with its zenith following the outbreak of the civil war in 623 BCE (1991), there is no reason to suspect Josiah’s independent policy before 623/622 BCE. And, as Naʿaman has pointed out, it is not a coincidence that Josiah’s cultic reform began only in 622 BCE (*ibid.*:38). But even after that date Josiah was not able to free himself of the burden of foreign rule, this time, Egyptian. It seems, therefore, that if the re-activation of the reservoir took place in the early days of Josiah, it should be seen as a continuation of Manasseh’s policy of cooperation with the Assyrians, which resulted in gradual resettlement of the Judahite Shephelah.

knowledgeable and more capable of cultivating olives. In addition, a number of four-horned incense altars found in Ekron suggests that some Judahites might have been present in Ekron as well (Gitin 2002, with further references).

The crucial question, however, is who stands behind the initial decision-making process that led to Ekron's transformation into an oil-production centre. Was it deliberate Assyrian imperial policy, with the aim of fostering economic development in this region, or, alternatively, was it the local economies that fully exploited the new opportunities provided by their integration within the *pax Assyriaca*. To answer this question in the absence of direct documentary evidence would be pure speculation. It has been suggested that Ekron enjoyed preferred status among the western vassals of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and as such was apparently chosen as a focus of Assyrian economic activity (Gitin 1995; 1997; 1998; 2003). The analysis of the available textual sources, recently undertaken by Na'aman (2003), does not suggest, however, that Ekron indeed enjoyed any preferred status among the western vassals. Na'aman therefore concludes that "the prosperity of certain vassals arose from the stability produced by the *pax Assyriaca* and from the new economic opportunities created by the empire rather than the result of a deliberate imperial policy of economic development of these states" (2003:7; cf. also Master 2003:50). To what extent this statement would apply to the establishment of the Ekron olive production one cannot postulate with certainty. Na'aman's analysis, however, suggests that to apply simplistically Wallerstein's world-system paradigm to this "contested periphery" (after M.J. Allen 1997) of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (e.g., Gitin 1997) could lead to erroneous conclusions if one does not take into consideration other possibilities.<sup>12</sup> It is worth remembering that understanding the processes of the incorporation of people and regions into different world-systems is one of the most problematic issues in world-system approaches (Hall 1986); and as Hall has pointed out, "to do it will require more detailed local studies which attend to peripheral actors and their attempts to control, shape, and resist the encroaching world-system" (1996: 13). This is not to say that the Assyrian empire had no role in Ekron's transformation into an oil-production centre. But, using Kardulias' phrase, "the point is that core/periphery exploitations need to be demonstrated, not simply assumed" (1996:1). It seems, therefore, that the potential of the self-organization processes (cf. Na'aman 2003), including the possibility that the economic cooperation between Judah and Ekron was developed in an independent manner, in their own interests and without

<sup>11</sup> Most recently, S. Dalley (2004) has suggested, perhaps too optimistically but not without reasoning, that even Hezekiah's short-lived attempt to reject the alliance with the Assyrian masters did not have a grave effect on a close relationship between Judah and Assyria.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Schloen has pointed out (2001:83–89, with further references), to apply simplistically the world-system model to the pre-capitalistic societies might not be at all possible.

strict Assyrian pressure, should not be ruled out.<sup>13</sup> However, the possibility that Judah was forced to send its olive produce to Ekron as part of levy imposed by Assyria (Finkelstein 1994:180) still exists. In this regard, one may speculate that the annexation of large parts of the Shephelah by Ekron triggered the establishment of Ekron's oil-industry, followed by necessary cooperation with Judah.

The absence of 7th century BCE permanent habitation remains at Beth Shemesh, except for the water reservoir, permits one to assume the existence of farmsteads and shelters scattered around the site that utilized the Beth Shemesh reservoir in order to cultivate the olive orchards. It is possible to hypothesize that a number of Judahite farmers with knowledge of the cultivation of olives were allowed to return to their fields at the bequest of Ekron.

On the other hand, to make matters even more complicated, Stager's suggestion that the olive oil industry at Ekron was propelled into the international sphere by a rising Egypt and not a dying Assyria (1996:70\*) might still to a certain degree be valid. Although, in the most recent reply, Gitin claims that Stager is wrong in assuming that the bulk of the olive presses should be placed in the period of the Egyptian domination over Ekron (Gitin 2003), "the fundamental problem raised by Stager concerning the dating of the material culture discovered in the destruction debris of Ekron should not be dismissed" (Na'aman 2003:6). An additional point in favour of Stager's reconstruction would be an undisputed presence of thousands of Greek and Carian mercenaries in the Egyptian army during the last third of the 7th century BCE (Fantalkin 2001, with further references). The reciprocal dependence between the mercenaries who needed the patronage of the pharaohs, who hired them, as much as the pharaohs needed their support (Kaplan 2003:11–13), might have resulted, *inter alia*, in constant demand for the olive oil as a part of mercenaries' wages.

To sum up, as may be easily deduced from this brief survey, there is no shortage of possible scenarios regarding the initial decision-making process that led to Ekron's transformation into an oil-production centre. Whatever the case, the re-activation of the Beth Shemesh reservoir sometime in the days of Manasseh and its destruction during one of the Babylonian punitive campaigns, as suggested here, provides an important piece of information for the history of the Judahite Shephelah in the days of the *pax Assyriaca* and shortly thereafter. It strengthens the view that the renewal of the Shephelah began in the days of Manasseh and continued uninterrupted until

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<sup>13</sup> Although they originated in the exact science, the general principles and methodologies of the self-organization theories entered the social sciences and humanities a long time ago. Thus, for definition and theoretical framework of the 'self-organization' paradigm, see Nicolis and Prigogine 1977; Prigogine and Stengers 1984; McGlade and van der Leeuw 1997. For the implications for applying this method to archaeology, see Allen 1982; 1997; Weidlich 1988; cf. also Schloen 2001:57–58.

the Babylonian destructions (cf. Finkelstein and Na'aman 2004). Contrary to the historical reconstruction suggested by Bunimovitz and Lederman (2003:20–23), this renewal shows signs of cooperation between Judah and Ekron under both the *pax Assyriaca* and *pax Aegyptiaca*, rather than the other way round. But further debate will have to await the publication of the forthcoming final report of the Beth Shemesh excavations, which has already been announced (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2003: 17, 24). It will doubtless enable a sharper focus for future arguments.

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