

WHAT WOULD THE EGYPTIAN PHARAOH SHOSHENQ I HAVE SEEN IF HE HAD VISITED THE CENTRAL JORDAN VALLEY?

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Combined archaeological data from the Central Jordan Valley indicates that small agricultural villages and a few public buildings occupied the area during the first half of the 10th century BC, all grouped along well-organised irrigation systems. A regional conflagration ended the occupation around 950 BC, after which most of the Central Jordan Valley was deserted for approximately one century. This occupational gap coincided with a period of decreased precipitation. During this arid phase the area was visited by mobile groups who used the summits of the settlement mounds for animal holding and sparse industrial activities. According to the topographical list of Shoshenq I, there were at least four settlements in the Central Jordan Valley: Adamah, Succoth, Penuel and Mahanaim. These places were apparently important enough in c. 925 BC for the Egyptians to neutralise them. But where are the remains of these settlements? This study deals with the intriguing disjunction between archaeological and textual evidence.

Keywords: Central Jordan Valley, 10th century BC, chronology, Iron Age, Shoshenq I

I. INTRODUCTION

The Central Jordan Valley (Fig. 1) is known archaeologically through its Late Bronze Age settlements and cemeteries (e.g. Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, Tell Deir 'Allā and Katārat es-Samrā'), its scribes and readers (e.g. the Bilaam text found at Tell Deir 'Allā and Ammonite and Aramaic inscriptions from Tell Mazār) and dispersed Neo-Assyrian occupation (e.g. Tell al-Mazār and Tell Dāmiyah). The attention only to distinct phases is partly because the final occupation histories of the three most prominent sites in the area, Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, Tell al-Mazār and Tell Deir 'Allā, are still awaiting publication. However, this omission can also be explained archaeologically. Excavations have stated that, during Iron Age I–IIA (c. 12th–9th century BC) the character of those sites was less impressive than that of the occupation phases mentioned above. The archaeological remains are limited to superimposed courtyard layers (so called 'camping' levels; see Franken 1964, 418; 1969) and scarce evidence of permanent structures (cf. van der Kooij and Ibrahim 1989, 81).

This article is of interest from several perspectives. It presents afresh old and new evidence of Iron Age I–IIA settlements in the Central Jordan Valley. It focuses not only on times of occupation, but also on periods of abandonment. It advocates the high potential of archaeological work in sub-optimal and semi-arid zones, as settlements and the material culture show a high degree of dependency, and it promotes a stronger role for the archaeological record in the occupation histories of sites and regions.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

In this article the Central Jordan Valley encompasses the semi-arid area between Tell es-Sa'idiyeh in the north, Tell Dāmiyah in the south, the foothills of the Transjordanian

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