A new analysis of the Iron Age I 'chiefdom' of Tel Masos (Beersheba Valley)*

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[Interpretations of the Iron Age I site of Tel Masos have frequently characterized it in sociopolitical and economic terms, but no subsequent study of the reasons for the choice of these categories has been carried out. This article reviews previous opinions and builds a framework for understanding the development of this autonomous polity. Archaeological research points to a relatively simple sociopolitical structure, with characteristics that correspond to the anthropological term "chiefdom". The local development was built upon –and its fate ultimately depended on– the economic structure that emerged during the Egyptian hegemony. The analysis of this sociopolitical phenomenon shows the flaws in certain theoretical models which have been applied to interpret the archaeological data.]

The 12th century BC witnessed the breakdown of the Bronze Age Mediterranean world system. Generally speaking, it could be said that the great change produced in this century was triggered by two interrelated facts: the end of the Egyptian imperial hegemony over Palestine, and the collapse of the Mediterranean exchange networks.

The Egyptian retreat from the Levant involved several consequences for the Negev area: a) the exploitation of the Timna copper mines concluded; b) there was a drastic decrease in the central demand for copper and other Negev-produced goods (though never to zero level); and c) a political vacuum was produced in the zone. That the course of development of this periphery was not directly tied to the fate of the central society is indicated by the subsequent history of the Beersheba Valley at the beginning of the Iron Age. The political vacuum left by the Egyptian retreat was filled in few decades by an autonomous peripheral polity situated in the Beersheba Valley.

During the Early Iron Age –in contrast with the nearly complete absence of sedentary settlements in the Late Bronze– a slow occupation of the Negev began, still restricted to its northern area. An entirely new array of settlements is founded, most of them in the Beersheba Valley, being the earliest and most important Tel Masos. Other later and smaller sites were Beersheba, Tel Esdar, Arad and Nahal Yatir (see Fig. 1).

*This paper has been awarded the "Sean W. Dever Memorial Prize" 2003, of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research.

Tel Masos (Hirbet el-Mšāš), located on front of the Nahal Beersheba, has attracted most of the attention since the excavations carried out during the 1970s by a team headed by Y. Aharoni, and later V. Fritz and A. Kempinski[1] (Fig. 2). The archaeologists discovered three Iron Age strata (I, II and III), exposed in Areas A (northeastern part of the tel), B (eastern part), C (southern part), F (western part) and H (central/southwestern part). The earliest phase (Stratum IIIB: first half of the 12th century BC) was characterized by ash pits, ovens and silos. The ceramic typically belongs to the Canaanite tradition. In Stratum IIIA (mid-12th century BC), the earliest permanent structures were built, particularly four-room houses. During Stratum II (late 12th to the second half of the 11th centuries BC), Tel Masos reached its largest extension and complexity, especially taking into account the existence of some public buildings and great quantities of imported vessels. In Stratum I (late 11th and early 10th centuries BC), it was erected a citadel in the southern area. It seems that the site was later abandoned.

This settlement was interpreted from the most different perspectives. Aharoni identified it as the site of Horma (hmrj) of Num 14:45; 21:3; Jos. 12:14; 15:30; 1 Sam. 30:30, etc.[2], and interpreted it in terms of the model of peaceful infiltration of the Israelites, hypothesis followed on a somewhat different manner by Fritz[3] and Kempinski[4]. According to W. Dever, the settlement was inhabited by Israelites, though they were formerly part of the lowland Canaanite population[5]. Similar opinion had G. Ahlström, who also proposed that it "may have developed into a chiefdom or a small kingdom" under Egyptian and later, perhaps, Philistine sovereignty[6]. For E. Oren, Tel Masos reflects the Egyptian activities in the Beersheba Valley, by means of Canaanite sites[7]. N. Na'aman wonders whether it was an independent town that just maintained close ties with the Philistines, or a part of the Philistine territory[8]. Following an earlier suggestion of M. Kochavi[9], who proposed that the site was the "town of Amalek" (qlm[rY[) of 1. Sam. 15:5, I. Finkelstein claimed that Tel Masos was not an Israelite site, and that its development was the outcome of the sedentarization of local pastoralist people. In fact, its economy was largely based on the prosperity originated in the copper mining of the Arabah Valley by local elements after the Egyptian retreat, and on the beginning of the Arabian incense trade. Tel Masos thus might have been a "chiefdom"

1. Y. Aharoni, V. Fritz and A. Kempinski, "Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen auf der *Hirbet el-Mšāš (Têl Māšôš)*. 1. Kampagne 1972", *Zeitschrift des Deutchen Palästina-Vereins (ZDPV)* 89 (1973) 197-210; *id.*, "Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen auf der *Hirbet el-Mšāš (Têl Māšôš)*. 2. Kampagne 1974", *ZDPV* 91 (1975) 109-130; V. Fritz and A. Kempinski, "Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen auf der *Hirbet el-Mšāš (Têl Māšôš)*. 3. Kampagne 1975", *ZDPV* 92 (1976) 83-104; *id*., *Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen auf der Hirbet el- Mšāš (Têl Māšôš)* (=*EAHM*), Wiesbaden 1983.

2. "Nothing Early and Nothing Late: Re-writing Israel's Conquest", *BA* 39 (1976) 55-76. At the same time, F. Crüseman equated it with the biblical Ziklag (glqx), the city that the Philistine Achish gave to David (1 Sam. 27:6): "Überlegungen zur Identifikation von Hirbet el-Mšāš (Têl Māšôš)", *ZDPV* 89 (1973) 211-224.

3. "The Israelite 'Conquest' in the Light of Recent Excavations at Khirbet el-Meshash", *BASOR* 241 (1981) 61-73; *id.*, "Conquest or Settlement?: The Early Iron Age in Palestine", *BA* 50 (1987) 84-100. See also *id.*, "Überlegungen zur Identifikation von Hirbet el-Mšāš", *EAHM*, pp. 235-238, where Fritz tends to favor the identification with some of the places named in 1 Sam. 30: 27-31 (laAtYb, bgn twmr, hmrj, twmpc, lkr), but does not reach any decisive conclusion.

4. "How Profoundly Canaanized Were the Early Israelites?", *ZDPV* 108 (1992) 1-7.

5. "Archaeology and Israelite Origins: Review Article", *BASOR* 279 (1990) 89-95.

6. *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Paleolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*, Sheffield 1993, pp. 359-360; also *id.*, "The Early Iron Age Settlers at Hirbet el-Mšāš (Tel Masos)", *ZDPV* 100 (1984) 32-52.

7. "'Governor's Residencies' in Canaan under the New Kingdom: A Case Study of Egyptian Administration", *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* (*JSSEA*) XIV (1984) 47-48.

8. "Israel, Edom and Egypt in the 10th Century B.C.E.", *TA* 19 (1992) 87. However, in an earlier paper, Na'aman proposed the identification of Tel Masos with the Simeonite "city" of Baalath Beer (rab tl[b), Jos. 19:8; id., "The Inheritance of the Sons of Simeon", *ZDPV* 96 (1980) 146.

9. "Rescue in the Biblical Negev", *BAR* 6(1) (1980) 24-27.

of considerable importance[10]. According to Z. Herzog, Tel Masos was the "central place" of the Beersheba Valley, inhabited by a mixed ethnic population, which operated as the administrative and distributive center of the zone[11]. Moreover, for D. Edelman the settlement reached the statehood level, as it was the seat of Talmai, king of Geshur (rwvg Jlm ymlt)[12]. J. Holladay, who dates Tel Masos' Strata II-I to the 10th century BC, argues that it could have been an officer's post to control the Arabian trade, which was then supposedly controlled by the King Solomon[13].

Characterizing a site

It is interesting to observe how several of the above proposals have interpreted Tel Masos with different sociopolitical terms, but without a subsequent close analysis of the reasons for the choice of these categories, not even a discussion of what they meant for each of them. Obviously, to adequately interpret a site with the characteristics of Tel Masos, we must contrast it with the contemporary Iron I Palestinian settlements.

It must be said that Tel Masos' size and complexity clearly exceeded those of the central hill country and Beersheba Valley sites. These settlements were generally small (0,5-0,6 hectares), most of them unfortified, and they typically used very simple methods of grain storage (stone lined pits excavated into the ground). The repertory of ceramic forms was very restricted, imported vessels being almost absent[14]. Social differentiation had not developed fully yet. Archaeological data attest a social organization based on the family and lineage –and at intersite level, the tribe– corporate groups that were at the same time kinship, production and consumption units[15]. Instead, Tel Masos –at its largest extension in Stratum II– had a built-up area of about 3 hectares, the total area being about 6 hectares[16]. Estimates of population vary according to the diverse methods employed. Supposing an average of 4-5 people per domestic

10. "The Iron Age 'Fortresses' of the Negev Highlands: Sedentarization of the Nomads", *TA* 11 (1984) 189-209; *id.*, "Arabian Trade and Socio-Political Conditions in the Negev in the Twelfth-Eleventh Centuries B.C.E.", *JNES* 47 (1988) 241-52; *id.*, *Living on the Fringe. The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighboring Regions in the Bronze and Iron Ages*, Sheffield 1995, pp. 103-126; an opinion shared by D. Eitam, "The Settlement of Nomadic Tribes in the Negeb Highlands during the 11th Century B.C.," in M. Heltzer and E. LipiØski, eds., *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1500-1000 B.C.)*, Leuven 1988, pp. 331-334. Both authors are criticized by Z. Meshel, "The 'Aharoni Fortress' Near Quseima and the 'Israelite Fortresses' in the Negev", *BASOR* 294 (1994) 60. Finkelstein has recently lowered the date of Stratum II to the 10th. century BC because of his new low chronology (*ibid.*, "The Campaign of Shoshenk I to Palestine. A Guide to the 10th Century BCE Polity". *ZDPV* 118 (2002) 114.

11. "The Beer-sheba Valley: From Nomadism to Monarchy", in I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman, eds., >*From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 122-49. For an earlier and rather different view see *id.*, "Enclosed Settlements in the Negeb and the Wilderness of Beersheba", *BASOR* 250 (1983) 41-59. Similarly, F. Frick interprets Tel Masos as an early Israelite chiefdom: *id.*, *The Formation of the State in Ancient Israel*, Sheffield 1985, pp. 159-168 (I was not able to read this work). On the other hand, N. Lemche supports the view that, due to our lack of written sources, we cannot determine whether it was the residence of a local chieftain or the dwelling of a "provincial governor", the "local representative of a Canaanite state"; see *id.*, *Early Israel*, Leiden 1985, pp. 218-219.

12. Cited, for example, in 2 Sam. 3:3; 13:37; D. Edelman, "Tel Masos, Geshur, and David", *JNES* 47 (1988) 253-58.

13. "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA-B (*ca*. 1000-750 BCE)", in T. Levy, ed., *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, London 1998, pp. 383-384. For a similar view, see J. Blakely, "Reconciling Two Maps: Archaeological Evidence for the Kingdoms of David and Salomon", *BASOR* 327 (2002) 49-54.

14. I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*, Jerusalem 1988, pp. 30-31; V. Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, Sheffield 1993, pp. 50-75.

15. L. E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel", *BASOR* 260 (1985) 17-22; A. Faust, "The Rural Community in Ancient Israel during Iron Age II", *BASOR* 317 (2000) 17-39.

16. Tel Masos was even larger than the Beersheba Valley sites of the Iron II, which was the period of greatest urban settlement during the overall Iron Age. Several of these sites had an average size of 1 hectare; *cf.* M. Broshi and I. Finkelstein, "The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II", *BASOR* 287 (1992) 53.

building, the lowest estimate gives ca. 400 residents for Stratum II[17], while other numbers 598-955 inhabitants for the same period[18], at a moment when a standard rural site had about 100 villagers[19].

According to the excavators, a belt of closely set buildings surrounded Stratum II, creating a kind of defensive perimeter[20]. Stratum I had a building that has been interpreted as a fortification. Although in Stratum I storage was made in ground pits, during Stratum II it was achieved by means of large architectural structures. Occurrence of these public buildings points to a social organization more complex than the existent in contemporary rural settlements. Ceramic types are also more diverse, including Canaanite-style and different sorts of imported vessels.

As far as ethnicity can be discerned in these cases, it is possible to say that Tel Masos' material culture, size, and architectural elements were thoroughly different from the central hill country settlements', which for most researchers were Israelite (or proto-Israelite) sites. In our opinion, these finds support the view that the population of Tel Masos was not Israelite. Otherwise, we would have to accept the too improbable scenario of the existence, in the middle of the Beersheba Valley, of an Israelite site at least three times as large as the other Israelite villages, completely isolated from the central highlands, which according to the Archaeology of the Early Iron Age and the biblical text was the core of the initial Israelite settlement. It seems rather that Tel Masos was the center of a different settlement pattern, one which was based on the Beersheba Valley and comprised several surrounding villages, having a quite distant relation to the central hill country sites[21]. Moreover, the ceramics and architectural layouts that appear at Tel Masos, mainly derived from coastal models, strongly suggest that Tel Masos population was mostly composed of Canaanite people.

On the other hand, Tel Masos was not large and complex enough as to match the Canaanite and Philistine cities and city-states. Canaanite cities had a great range of size variation: an important site like Hazor reached 60 hectares of extension (during the Late Bronze, but it was not the standard); generally, cities were surrounded by minor villages. Palaces, temples, walls, ramparts, gates and towers also were normally present[22]. Tel Masos had no defensive wall; even so, had the site possessed a peripheral belt of buildings, it would have been totally unlike the size and sophistication of the Canaanite defensive systems. Still, Building 402 (Stratum I, identified as a fortress) was perhaps incorporated into the peripheral belt with the other buildings. Similarly, Tel Masos' buildings might have not matched the palaces and temples of Canaanite cities, although some of their plans were likely provided by the Egyptian and Canaanite architectural traditions. It seems that, at least during Stratum II, the construction of these structures and some houses followed a careful planning[23].

17. Z. Herzog, "The Beer-sheba Valley", p. 133.

18. L.E. Stager, *BASOR* 260 (1985) 21. Y. Shiloh suggests a population of 64 in Area A-Stratum II, assuming a too large coefficient of 8 people per family, or 47 individuals per dunam: "The Population of Iron Age Palestine in the Light of a Sample Analysis of Urban Plans, Areas, and Population Density", *BASOR* 239 (1980) 29. If it is applied to the total area, this estimate will give 2820 inhabitants for Stratum II.

19. 'Izbet Sartah, Stratum II: I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*, pp. 268-269.

20. This pattern is hard to believe, since the entrance of the houses of the Area A faced the exterior side, consequently making impossible a defense in front of an attack; instead, it has been suggested that the settlement was formed by two or three belts, which would explain the Area A's "anomaly" (Z. Herzog, "The Beer-sheba Valley", p. 132).

21. Relatively few sites occupied the mountainous bloc immediately to the north –the Judean hills– as the real settlement in this area would begin in the Iron IIA; see A. Ofer, "'All the Hill Country of Judah': From a Settlement Fringe to Prosperous Monarchy", in Finkelstein and Na'aman, eds., *From Nomadism to Monarchy*, pp. 92-121.

22. V. Fritz, *The City*, pp. 27-49; R. Gonen, "Urban Canaan in the Late Bronze Period", *BASOR* 253 (1984) 61-73.

23. Yet, to give a fair trial, we must compare Tel Masos' size with that of the Iron I sites of the southern coastal plain. The largest cities of this area were Ashkelon: 30 hectares; Ashdod: 28 hectares, Gaza: 20 hectares, and Tel Miqne (Ekron): 20 hectares; although secondary sites (as Tell el-Far'a, Tell Jemmeh, Tell esh-Shari'a) had an average size of between 0,7 and 2

The hypothesis of Tel Masos as an Egyptian administrative or military post can also be put aside, given the fact that Egyptian objects (scarabs, different types of vessels) and architectural models ("governor's residence": House 480) were wholly isolated in a thoroughly local Canaanite context. Egyptian goods must have come by way of trade, while House 480 could have been an example of the "elite emulation" of the high-social classes[24]. Moreover, if we contrast Tel Masos with indubitably Egyptian settlements located in Palestine, we will realize that the former lacks the large numbers of Egyptian domestic ceramics and texts that do possess the latter. Likewise, it is not likely to have been founded by Philistines, inasmuch as Philistine bichrome vessels are a small part of the total ceramic assemblage; in fact, existence of bichrome vessels can again be attributed to trade.

Therefore, Tel Masos hardly can be called a state or city-state, though it was fairly different from the contemporary small rural settlements. It is our view that "chiefdom" is the term that fits better the characteristics of Tel Masos.

The term chiefdom has been used for several decades in Political Anthropology, basically to characterize stateless social complexity. Criticism has correctly shown that the concept is based on a 19th century evolutionist framework, and on abstract and highly general typologies. Moreover, it has been argued that chiefdoms' features were drawn from modern ethnographic studies, which cannot be applied to ancient societies[25]. Nowadays, scholars who use the term emphasize more the organizational dynamics of chiefdoms than their structural characteristics. Though the term was firstly coined to create an ideal political type to fill the gap between non-ranked tribal societies and hierarchical states, now it is considered a kind of political unit which not necessarily may evolve to state[26]. While we argue the convenience of using this term in our specific case, we are nonetheless prevented from accepting all the neoevolutionist, unilinear framework in which it was originated.

We believe that the archaeological evidences we had for the Early Iron Age Beersheba Valley strongly suggest the existence of a non-state political organization that can be called chiefdom. The burden of our argument is that the essential feature of a state-level organization, the monopoly of physical coercion, was absent in this peripheral polity. Unfortunately, in Tel Masos textual or iconographical materials are almost nonexistent. Most researchers have based their conclusions on the biblical text; on the contrary, we will rely mainly on archaeological data. Chiefdoms have various recognizable archaeological features, which can be related to several traits found at Tel Masos: a settlement hierarchy, organized productive activities that transcend households, social differentiation, and an ideological framework that supports social ranking[27]. We are fully aware that these are secondary, quantitative attributes, nevertheless

hectares; *cf.* I. Finkelstein, "The Philistine Countryside", *IEJ* 46 (1996) 237-242. It can be said that, had Tel Masos been situated in the coastal area, it would have been a satellite settlement of a large city.

24. C. Higginbotham, "Elite Emulation and Egyptian Governance in Ramesside Canaan", *TA* 23 (1996) 154-169.

25. See the criticism of N. Yoffee, "Too Many Chiefs? (or Safe Texts for the 90's)", in N. Yoffee and A. Sherratt, eds., *Archaeological Theory: Who Sets the Agenda?*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 60-78; *id.*, "A Mass in Celebration of the Conference," in T. Levy, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 542-548; R. McGuire, "Breaking Down Cultural Complexity: Inequality and Heterogeneity", *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 6 (1983) 91-142; R. Paynter, "The Archaeology of Equality and Inequality", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989) 369-399; also D. Master, "State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel", *JNES* 60 (2001) 117-131.

26. See M. S. Rothman, "Evolutionary Typologies and Cultural Complexity," in G. Stein and M. S. Rothman, eds., *Chiefdoms and Early States in the Near East: The Organizational Dynamics of Complexity*, Madison 1994, pp. 1-10.

27. Bibliography on the subject is too extensive, and the scholars' views are quite distinct. See, for example, the classic works of T. K. Earle, "Chiefdoms in Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987) 279-308; *id.*, "The Evolution of Chiefdoms", *Current Anthropology (CA)* 30(1) (1989) 84-88; *id.*, "The Evolution of Chiefdoms," in T. K. Earle, ed., *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology*. Cambridge 1991, pp. 1-15; *id.*, *How Chiefs Come to Power: The Political Economy in Prehistory*, Stanford 1997; C. S. Peebles and S. M. Kus, "Some Archaeological Correlates of Ranked Societies," *American Antiquity (AA)* 42(3) (1977) 421-448; H. T. Wright, "Prestate Political Formations," in G. Stein and M. S.

they are the only we have. Therefore, the term should be used as an ideal concept, a tool to comprehend the few, scattered evidences. Our goal is not to enumerate a number of characteristics that do appear at Tel Masos, but rather to expose the ways by which the social power was constructed in this polity.

Settlement hierarchy

It is frequently recognized that chiefdoms possess a number of villages under the permanent control of a chief. This hierarchy may be formed –according to the chiefdom's size– by one or more control levels above the local communities, thus archaeological correlates may imply the existence of small sites operating as subservient of the largest ones, owing to centralized administration, taxation and decision-making control.

The chiefdom of Tel Masos presented a hierarchy of different settlements. In the Beersheba Valley, the oldest, largest and most complex settlement during the Iron I was Tel Masos: in other sites, occupation only began when Tel Masos was at its peak of complexity, in Stratum II (since the second half of the 12th century BC). Nahal Yatir is a relatively large site (4,5 hectares), constituted by an assemblage of domestic buildings. At Tel Esdar (0,4 hectares), ten buildings were discovered, arranged in a belt surrounding an open space[28]. Iron I Tel Beersheba comprised several phases: Stratum XI, which just contained pits and silos spreading on 0,2 hectares; Stratum VIII, when the first permanent structures appeared; and Stratum VII, recreated by the excavator as an open area surrounded by a belt of houses (0,3 hectares), although this reconstruction is purely hypothetical[29]. At Arad, scattered remains of structures are under the Iron IIA fortress, but the plan and size of this stratum are very difficult to recreate[30]. The settlements of Tel Halif[31] and Tell Beit Mirsim[32] are located on the Negev-Judean hills border: their small size points out that they were simple rural places. Despite the difficulty to establish the exact dimensions of these settlements, average size is clearly smaller than that of Tel Masos, and we can consider them as small villages.

A short comparison of the contemporary Beersheba Valley sites with Tel Masos shows a quantitative and qualitative difference in both sociopolitical organizations. The former can be called "tribal" villages, which are, essentially, decentralized societies without structural leadership[33]. This explains why buildings are in most cases small domestic units, large public buildings and differentiated tombs being rare enough. Objects unearthed in these sites are modest, whereas there is a shortage of imported goods, in particular vessels. On the contrary, Tel Masos is a much larger settlement, formed by differentiated architectural structures, with strong indications of specialized extra-communal productive activities, social hierarchy and centralized storage. Even though it is not possible to establish whether the neighboring sites were politically subordinated to Tel Masos, they probably worked as socioeconomic satellites of the largest site. Settlement patterns show probably one level of control over the surrounding villages, since these contain

Rothman, eds., *Chiefdoms*, pp. 67-84; R. Carneiro, "The Chiefdom: Precursor of the State," in G. D. Jones and R. Kautz, eds., *The Transition to Statehood in the New World*, Cambridge 1981, pp. 37-79; W. Creamer and J. Haas, "Tribe versus Chiefdom in Lower Central America", *AA* 50 (1985) 738-754.

28. Z. Herzog, "The Beer-sheba Valley", pp. 130-137; I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology*, pp. 38-41; *id.*, *Living on the Fringe*, pp. 118-120.

29. D. W. Manor, "Beersheba", in D. N. Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I, New York 1992, pp. 641-645.

30. Z. Herzog, M. Aharoni, A. F. Rainey and S. Moshkovitz, "The Israelite Fortress at Arad", *BASOR* 254 (1984) 2-6; D. W. Manor and G. A. Herion, "Arad," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I, pp. 331-336.

31. J. D. Seger, "Investigations at Tell Halif, Israel, 1976-1980", *BASOR* 252 (1983) 1-23.

32. R. Greenberg, "New Light on the Early Iron Age at Tell Beit Mirsim", *BASOR* 265 (1987) 55-80.

33. See Creamer and Haas, *AA* 50(4) (1985) 738-754.

similar dimensions and characteristics. At the present level of knowledge, there was not any intermediate-hierarchical site between Tel Masos and the undifferentiated villages[34].

Also, it is necessary to keep in mind that the nearest settlements with larger dimensions than Tel Masos were in the southern coastal plain (Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gaza, Ekron, etc.), outside of the geographical environment of the Beersheba Valley, which makes them highly unlikely to have established a permanent political hegemony over the Northern Negev hinterland[35].

The economic base

The debate on Tel Masos has focused mainly on the economic factors that boosted its development. Previous works on the subject have stressed the major importance of Tel Masos in the Early Iron Age commercial networks of the Southern Levant. Rarely have they invoked ideological or political reasons. In this sort of stateless societies, an ideological framework, which legitimatized the centralization of decisions into a chief, backed economy. It is not only a matter of whether social leaders had strict control of the source of power or just had access to it, but rather how ideology was related to all aspects of daily life. In this respect, Tel Masos' archaeological material shows three economic activities –copper processing, storage of goods and trade– which were somehow associated with a nonmaterial framework.

Suprahousehold productive activities indicate that at least part of the labor force or productive surplus is aimed to support the finance structure on which the chief's power is based. Generally, evidence of this takes the form of monumental buildings, which owing to their large size required a lot of planning and labor. Another indicator is the existence of part-time craft specialization.

The archaeologists discovered at Tel Masos various buildings identified as public, principally clustered in the southern side of the tel. Building 1039, placed in the northern zone, was considered an administrative center that had a room for storing, which equally operated as a defensive strong point[36]. Holladay[37] claimed that it was a horse stable, but no proof of this has yet been discovered. More interesting remains were uncovered in House 314, a Canaanite-style rectangular structure. Within several of its habitations, rests of metallurgical activities were visible on the ground, possibly connected to a ritual function, as has been suggested by the appearance of human figurines very similar to those found at the Hathor temple of Timna. Vessels recovered were, to a great extent, imported from Phoenicia and the Arabah area. The excavators interpreted the building as the home of a high-ranking person, who controlled craft activities and had connections with the interregional trade[38]. A complex of several structures, Buildings 411/410 and 419, were believed to be, according to their layout, defensive positions[39]. In Stratum I, this building complex was replaced by a rectangular construction with monumental outer walls –Building 402– interpreted as a fortress or citadel[40].

House 480 lies few meters from this area. Its square layout is thought to be derived from the Egyptian Amarna house or the Canaanite hofhouse tradition. Inside of one of its rooms were a great number of

34. Except, perhaps, Nahal Yatir (4,5 hectares), but the archaeological evidences are still too scarce to reach further conclusions.

35. Anyway, there is not any hint of Philistine domination over the region, except in the western approaches to the Beersheba Valley (Tell el-Far'a, Tell Jemmeh, Tell esh-Shari'a, etc.).

36. *EAHM*, pp. 17-20.

37. "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah", pp. 383.

38. *EAHM*, pp. 36-43.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-50.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-58.

storage jars, so it was interpreted as a storage area[41]. Comparisons made by E. Oren with other similar Palestinian structures confirm the Egyptian layout of the house, as it is included in the list of "governor's residences" that were spread on certain areas of Palestine, possibly to impose the Egyptian administration. Moreover, storage jars reflect the main function of the building, which was the collection of agrarian products and taxes[42].

The combination agriculture/pastoralism was the subsistence base of populace[43]. Storage of grain was practiced since Stratum III, normally in pits excavated into the ground. In later levels, storage in buildings was the most common practice, as is shown by Building 1039 and House 480. This evolution points to a development towards a more complex society. Larger capacities for storing indicate larger agricultural surpluses; also, that in the society certain sociopolitical institutions have originated to manage and control the increased output.

Tel Masos was interpreted by some with a Social Sciences' model, the "central place" theory[44]. This term was originally intended to designate sites that concentrate goods that are later going to be distributed to smaller sites in the neighborhood[45]. Anthropological studies have normally associated storage with redistributive functions in early complex societies, especially since the work of E. Service. This scholar argued that chiefdoms emerge from diverse ecological niches, a situation that promotes specialization, thus giving chiefs the power of coordinating the redistribution of goods among villages[46]. Although Tel Masos was located on a zone of conjunction of diverse ecological areas, villages in the Beersheba Valley were actually in the same environment; hence it is not clear why they might have required redistributive functions from Tel Masos. Another possibility is that vulnerability of the local production in front of climatic fluctuations indirectly benefited Tel Masos, since it was situated on an area of permanent springs. Nonetheless, the importance of redistribution might have been minimum, seeing that villages were ordinarily self-sufficient economies[47].

Analyses recorded common economic activities, such as textile manufacture and preparation of food[48]. Evidences of metallurgical technology are by far more interesting. Houses 96 and 314 concentrated traits of copper-processing activities: copper remains, slag, crucibles, work stones, ovens and ash layers. The most obvious copper source was the Arabah –plus recycled materials– while tin could have been brought from Iran or the Caucasus (though these are just possibilities)[49].

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-68, 88-89.

42. E. Oren, *JSSEA* XIV (2) (1984) 47-48; but see C. Higginbotham, *TA* 23 (1996) 161.

43. Analyses of animal remains have been interpreted as proof of the nomad or semi-nomad origin of Tel Masos inhabitants (E. Tchernov and I. Drori, "Economic Patterns and Environmental Conditions at Hirbet el-Mšāš during the Early Iron Age," *EAHM*, pp. 213-222), though the high percentage of cattle bones is strong indication that they were expert agriculturalists; see W. Dever, "Archaeology and Israelite Origins", p. 63.

44. For example, Herzog, "The Beer-sheba Valley", p. 138.

45. See C. Renfrew, "Alternative Models for Exchange and Spatial Distribution," in T. K. Earle and J. Ericson, eds., *Exchange Systems in Prehistory*, New York 1977, pp. 85-86; also R. Mc. Adams, "Anthropological Perspectives on Ancient Trade", *CA* 33 *Supplement* (1992 [1974]) 144.

46. See E. R. Service, *The Origin of the State and Civilization*, New York 1975.

47. Instead, the site fits better the term "gateway community", a concept that stresses the importance of long distance exchange networks. These communities met certain important requirements for ancient trade systems: a) fulfilled the demand of goods, and b) reduced transport costs (See K. G. Hirth, "Interregional Trade and the Formation of Prehistoric Gateway Communities", *AA* 43 (1978) 35-46). Nevertheless, more important than assigning different labels to the site is to comprehend the economic forces that lay behind its development.

48. F. Crüseman, "Die Kleinfunde," *EAHM*, pp. 95-96; J. Gunneweg, "The Ovens of the First Campaign," *EAHM*, pp. 106-112.

49. H. G. Bachman, "Metallanalysen: Kommentar zu den Analysentabellen", *EAHM*, pp. 198-201. Z. Meshel (*BASOR* 294 [1994] 60, 63 n. 27) criticizes the importance given by some authors to the function of copper in relation to the position of Tel

Tel Masos doubtless owed its importance to its role in the Early Iron Age interregional trade, indicated by the large number of imported vessels discovered in the settlement. Philistine bichrome ceramics lay principally in Stratum II, although they already existed in Stratum IIIA. House 314 had Phoenician bichrome and Arabian "Madianite/Qurayya" vessels. Egyptian New Kingdom ceramics and a "Negvite" vessel were found in Stratum II. The local ceramic assemblage is mainly composed of vessels of Southern Canaanite style, plus Helladic, Philistine and Phoenician imitations[50]. Other imported goods are two Egyptian scarabs (the Monogram and the Lion Scarabs, no archaeological contexts)[51]. A small ivory lion head, probably an importation from Northern Canaan or Phoenicia, was uncovered in Stratum II[52].

These discoveries point to the strategic location of Tel Masos, which was situated in the confluence of two Late Bronze/Iron Age commercial networks: the Mediterranean, indicated by the Phoenician, Philistine and Egyptian goods; and the Negev/Southern Transjordan, shown by the Madianite and Negvite vessels. In addition to this, two major axes constituted the Negev/Southern Transjordan network, one passing through the Beersheba Valley, the other through the Transjordanian plateau. Both axes intersected each other in the Southern Arabah, a fact that points out the major function of these ways, which was the transport of the copper extracted in the Arabah copper mines[53].

Although copper, strictly speaking, is not a luxury item, it had nevertheless a strategic importance in the Late Bronze/Early Iron Ages[54]. Major sources of copper in the Late Bronze/Early Iron Mediterranean where principally in Cyprus[55], Attica, the Egyptian Eastern Desert, Sinai[56] and the Arabah[57]. Replacement

Masos in the trade networks. Notwithstanding, as we argue below, it is also necessary to consider the findings of imported ceramics and the location of the site in the broad framework of the Negev/Transjordan networks of the Early Iron Age. Moreover, the fact that some copper ingots originated in melted objects does not invalidate the assumption that elaborated metallurgical activities took place at Tel Masos.

50. *EAHM*, pp. 73-91; T. Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture*, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 86-97.

51. R. Giveon and A. Kempinski, "The Scarabs", *EAHM*, pp. 102-106.

52. F. Crüseman, "Die Kleinfunde", pp. 99-102.

53. J. M. Tebes, *Las relaciones comerciales entre el Delta de Egipto y el sur de Palestina durante la Edad del Bronce Tardío y el Hierro Reciente*, BA Thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2001, chap. 3:2. The Transjordanian branch, the later known "King's Highway", is believed by some to have already functioned in the Late Bronze Age; see M. Artzy, "Rutes, Trade, Boats and 'Nomads of the Sea'", in S. Gitin, A. Mazar and E. Stern, eds., *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE. In Honor of Trude Dothan*, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 439-448; *id.*, "Nomads of the Sea," in S. Swiny, R. Hohlfelder and H. Swiny, eds., *Res Maritimae. Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean from Prehistory to Late Antiquity*, Atlanta 1997, pp. 1-16; L. G. Herr, "Tell al-'Umayri and the Reubenite Hypothesis", *Eretz Israel (EI)* 26 (1999) 64*-77*; D. B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, Princeton 1992, p. 193; an opinion not shared by others, as E. J. van der Steen, "The Central East Jordan Valley in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages", *BASOR* 302 (1996) 65; *id.*, "Survival and Adaptation: Life east of the Jordan in the Transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age", *PEQ* 131 (1999) 182. It is significant that, from the total of the marine shells found at Tel Masos, 20 of them came from the Mediterranean (which is 60 km. away), and 18 from the Red Sea (located 200 km. from the site; *cf.* D. S. Reese, "Marine Shells", *EAHM*, pp. 224-226), which shows the strong connection that existed between Tel Masos and the Arabah area.

54. S. Sherrat has defined three primary dimensions along which materials can be ranked: convertibility, preciosity, and added value. While copper lies in the convertible dimension, its important role in the Bronze/Early Iron Age economy paralleled the significance of the precious metals: S. Sherrat, "Commerce, Iron and Ideology: Metallurgical Innovation in 12th-11th century Cyprus," in V. Karageorhis, ed., *Proceedings of the International Symposium 'Cyprus in the 11th century B.C.'*, Nicosia 1994, pp. 62-63.

55. *Ibid.*, P. Keswani, "Models of Local Exchange in Late Bronze Age Cyprus", *BASOR* 292 (1993) 73-83.

56. M. Abdel Tawab, "The Role of Copper-Gold-Iron in Ancient Egyptian Politics", in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Ancient Egyptian Mining and Conservation of Metallic Artifacts, Cairo, April 1995*, Cairo 1998; Z. Stos-Gale, N. Gales and J. Houghton, "The Origin of Egyptian Copper Lead-Isotope Analysis of Metals from El-Amarna," in W.V. Davies and L. Schofield, eds., *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant. Interconnections in the Second Millennium B.C.*, London 1995, pp. 127-135.

of bronze by iron during this period was quite gradual, finishing only in the 10th century BC. Decrease or cease in copper supplies from Cyprus during the 12th century BC increased its importance. Thus, this metal's value was so high that a least part of the control of its distribution gave Tel Masos a great source of material and symbolic power. Furthermore, workshop processing at Tel Masos added considerable value to the copper, thus increasing its final price.

In conclusion, Tel Masos was both at the gates of an area of mineral productivity –the Arabah Valley– and of a zone that had a high demand for scarce resources –as was the Egyptian/Palestinian search for copper. It is possible to draw a general outline of the mode by which this metal was distributed: copper –processed or not– arrived at Tel Masos from the Arabah, brought by pastoralist traders; then, bulk copper was refined in the workshops of the site, and at last it was re-exported to the Mediterranean coast by local or coastal traders. Tel Masos' revenue came of the transport, collection (and possibly the taxation) of imported goods, plus the processing of copper –which supposed an added value. In return, from the Mediterranean coast came certain goods not available in the arid environment of the Beersheba Valley, such as wine and oil, as well as manufactured products. Some of these goods remained at Tel Masos, the rest being re-exported to the Negev and Transjordan.

Social differentiation and political-ideological framework

Social ranking is supposed to be archaeologically indicated by clearly differentiated mortuary arrangements and residential segregation. Nonetheless, there are not tombs at Tel Masos[58], although the excavated area is quite small to reach any decisive conclusion. Similarly, few burials have been reported in the Iron Age I central highland sites. Though this phenomenon can be related to cultural customs, it can also be the result of the nonexistence of well-developed class structures[59].

Regarding the residential location, it is no coincidence that most of the largest public and private buildings were situated in the southern edge of the tel, whereas smaller structures were concentrated in the north. A suggestion can be made that the southern area was the "elite quarter" for the high-ranking people.

There are almost no clues which could be associated with a highly differentiated society. Tel Masos shows a relative temporal stability, without violent destructions or successive growing-collapse cycles[60]. Moreover, it lacks depictions of warfare scenes[61] (thought fortified structures were present), differentiated mortuary arrangements and great amounts of luxury/exotic goods. The spatial organization appears to have been a one-level control system, which was supported by a stratum of undifferentiated satellite villages. As far as we can tell, Tel Masos' political structure was fairly simple.

57. For the Timna mines see B. Rothenberg, "Archaeo-Metallurgical Researches in the Southern Arabah 1959-1990. Part 2: Egyptian New Kingdom (Ramesside) to Early Islam", *PEQ* 131 (1999) 149-175. For the Wadi Feynan area see P. Bienkowski, "Iron Age Settlement in Edom: A Revised Framework," in P. Daviau, J. Wevers and M. Weigl, eds., *The World of the Aramaeans II*, Sheffield 2001, pp. 257-269; T. Levy, A. Adams and R. Shafiq, "The Jebel Hamrat Fidan Project: Excavations at the Wadi Fidan 40 Cemetery, Jordan (1997)", *Levant* 31 (1999) 299-314.

58. Only a completely sacked stone burial was found on a hill just N.W. of the site, which contained a few remains of vessels and bones; V. Fritz, "Grab 1200", *EAHM*, pp. 112-113.

59. R. Kletter, "People without Burials? The Lack of Iron I Burials in the Central Highlands of Palestine", *IEJ* 52 (2002) 28-48.

60. Although the excavators found remains that suggested a sudden conclusion of Stratum IIA, this was nevertheless attributed to an earthquake (*EAHM*, pp. 75-76); however, evidences of this kind were discovered in isolated loci, not in whole layers.

61. The Egyptian Monogram Scarab discovered at Tel Masos, which shows a Pharaoh killing a bound prisoner, is a stereotyped image that likely does not have any direct relation to the sociopolitical situation of the Negev area.

If high-ranking people were prevented from developing great social inequalities, then how did they achieve a privileged access to the economic resources of the society? Since in stateless societies kinship is dominant, there is a limit against the constitution of any outright social inequality and the monopoly of physical coercion, which by itself is the essence of the process that implies the emergence of the state[62]. An archaeological indication of kinship practices is the distribution of space in cemeteries, but, as we have mentioned above, no rests of these are yet found at Tel Masos. As noted for other Iron Age Palestinian sites, findings of domestic buildings, particularly the four-room type, show the dominant presence of kinship units[63].

One likely strategy is that the chief's authority might have derived in its pristine form from the manipulation of communal organizations –principally those based on kinship, as the family or lineage communities–, which gave access to productive or labor resources controlled by them. Given the constant shortage of lands for cultivating and pasturing in the Beersheba Valley, it was essential for the chief the access to the rural surplus, which would be achieved by his ability to accentuate his belonging to the communal group. As such, as noted by Stein in a similar case, "an egalitarian facade of this sort helps explain the lack of conspicuous display of status differences, even when the evidence of house size and artifact inventories argues strongly for the existence of an economic elite"[64].

The activities that were under the exclusive control of the local elite were the storage of goods and the work of copper, which were concentrated in workshops placed in only two buildings (Houses 96 and 314). The dimensions of these indicate their belonging to individuals of high status. Except for this case and that of trade, commoners performed most of the productive activities[65]. Because the chief kept a simple administration and the individual producers performed most of the tasks, the burden of the administrative structure might have been reduced.

A second strategy could have implied an emphasis on the foreign relations of the small polity. Namely, since kinship is dominant in the inside of stateless societies but cannot transcend the limits of the local community, interstitial spaces between communities are the most valid place for practices incompatible with kinship rules, especially any kind of physical coercion over the enemies[66]. The main links between stateless societies are exchanges and warfare, so strategies might have been related to these.

62. M. Campagno, "Kinship and the Emergence of the State in Egypt," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre of Egyptology* 11 (2000) 35-47.

63. Faust, "Differences in Family Structure Between Cities and Villages in Iron Age II," *TA* 26 (1999) 233-252; *id.*, *BASOR* 317 (2000); L. E. Stager, *BASOR* 260 (1985). In the Iron Age Tel Masos' layers, the archaeologists discovered coarse stamp seals with simple geometrical patterns, plus beads and pendants which were believed to have served as amulets or have functioned to magically expel demons (*EAHM*, pp. 96-99), but it is possible to add a communal or kinship belonging function too, as these items frequently symbolize a delineation of group identity.

64. G. Stein, "Economy, Ritual, and Power in 'Ubaid Mesopotamia", G. Stein and M. S. Rothman, eds., *Chiefdoms*, p. 43.

65. Theoretically, we can suppose that, knowing that ancient elites monopolized the acquisition and distribution of imported goods, such products were exchanged with the individual producers for subsistence goods and labor, thus maintaining the fiction of reciprocity. In our case, it is not very clear which goods were so necessary at Tel Masos to compromise the commoners in such a relationship. In fact, we can only theorize about the importance of the subsistence products brought from the coastal zone, bearing in mind that the combination agriculture/pastoralism gave the local producer a minimum base for subsisting –although in drought periods he might have required external assistance. Nonetheless, it is not discarded a growing importance of special products from the coast, as wine or oil, for local consumption. This is maybe attested, for instance, by the finding in Stratum III of fragments of a Philistine "stirrup jar", a kind of vessel employed in the Mediterranean trade to contain oil; see V. Hankey, "Stirrup Jars at El-Amarna", in W. V. Davies and L. Schofield, eds., *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant. Interconnections in the Second Millennium B.C.*, London 1995, pp. 116-124. Goods, like ceramics, can be produced independently; even so, dependency was clear with respect to metal tools or bulk metal.

66. M. Campagno, *op. cit.*

Occurrence of fortified structures at Tel Masos likely represents reliable indication of conflicts in the Early Iron Age Northern Negev. The reasons underlying local struggles should be looked for, in our opinion, in the interregional system of exchange. Certainly, the contemporary Philistine settlements, which had developed more complex defensive systems, had a major interest in the Beersheba Valley hinterland. Similarly, during the end of the 11th and beginning of the 10th centuries BC, Israelite pressure from the north increased to a great level. Bearing in mind the shortage of copper and the concomitant growing importance of this metal, conflicts grew in order to control copper exchange networks. Albeit we should not take the biblical narrative too literally, it does provide us with some clues about the geopolitics of the area. The raids of David from Ziklag, on behalf of Philistines (1 Sam. 27:8-12), and the repeated accounts of the struggles between Israelites and southern tribes (for instance, Jdg. 1:17; 6:1-6; 1 Sam. 15:2-9; 30), show that the Northern Negev had a strategic importance for these polities. Furthermore, provided that conspicuous ostentation of imported exotic goods was extremely important for the reproduction of the social status quo of these communities, pursuit of a continuous flow of these products led to an increasing rivalry between Southern Palestinian neighbors.

It was the central location of Tel Masos in the distributive networks of the Arabah copper which gave this place a relatively autonomous position in Southern Palestine. As this situation was largely due to the demand of the central societies, one could expect –and indeed this is the case– certain political influence of the more complex neighboring polities upon this peripheral formation. When pre-capitalist trade goes far beyond centers' boundaries and penetrates into peripheries, typically it tends to generate political developments –such as chiefdoms or states– by reducing local competence for status and power. This process takes place as result of the importation of goods from core societies, which are employed by local elites as "political currency" to forge the loyalty of clients, then enhancing the chiefs' ability to mobilize labor and encourage surplus production[67]. In this respect, it is possible to say that the sources of power of Tel Masos were divided into two parts: control over raw material exchange –i.e., intermediation in the trade of copper and in the importation of agricultural production from the coast; and monopoly over special goods imported from the Mediterranean and Egypt. The latter, as the Egyptian scarabs, the Phoenician-style ivory lion head, textiles and certain types of imported vessels discovered at Tel Masos, were used as prestige and authority symbols in front of the local population[68]. Importation of special goods was related both to commercial activities and political relationships, but both ways provide a case of a local chief connected to an "international style"[69], who justified its authority thanks to its contact with an external source of power inaccessible to others, or otherwise was imbued with a supernatural matrix which legitimatized him before the commoners.

This "elite emulation" explains the occurrence of an architectural element of Egyptian style –Building 480– whose administrative and ideological function linked the local ruler to the principal center of power and civilization, then enhancing his own position in the regional context. It is noteworthy the nonexistence of obvious indications of ceremonial or religious buildings, as these structures are believed to have the function of showing the cosmological affiliation of chiefdoms' elites. Although this is perhaps due to the incomplete excavation of the settlement, it can also be related to the ideological base of the local ruler. That is, his legitimization relied on the connection with the Egyptian administrative

67. R. S. Kipp and E. M. Schortman, "The Political Impact of Trade in Chiefdoms," *American Anthropologist* 91 (1989) 370-385.

68. Several scholars have argued that Philistine bichrome ceramics were actually the luxury vessels of the Philistine population. If so, to what extent did these ceramics concede prestige to their Tel Masos owners? Tel Masos' Philistine vessels were imported, not locally produced, and found in relatively few numbers; even so, their distribution in the site is uniform and apparently there is not a pattern of special concentration around public or private buildings.

69. T. K. Earle, *Chiefdoms*, p. 7.

domination in Canaan, which in turn made unnecessary a strong religious framework to sustain his power (though the linkage with the Pharaoh had by itself a cosmological foundation)[70].

For the excavators, who considered the site as Israelite, the end of occupation after Stratum I was caused by the moving of the inhabitants to a more secured and protected settlement not far away (Tel Malhata)[71]. Other scholars argue for a decisive conflict between the emergent Israelite Monarchy and the Northern Negev polity. As the latter was defeated, Tel Masos was deserted and the Negev trade taken by the United Monarchy[72]. There are not evidences of a violent conclusion of Stratum I, which was characterized by a huge transformation of the site, in particular the incorporation of the citadel in the southern side. Significant shortage of imported vessels in this phase[73] can be attributed either to the bad conservation of the stratum or the inability of the archaeologists to distinguish Stratum I's ceramics from Stratum II's, but also to the decreasing importance of Tel Masos in the interregional trade system.

The hypothesis of conflict with Israel is the most attractive one, but we must add that the great importance that trade had for Tel Masos meant that the chiefdom was highly vulnerable to the changing conditions of the exchange networks. At first, the Egyptian decadence brought to Tel Masos high levels of political and economic (though not ideological) autonomy –whose peak was Stratum II– but the interruption of the copper supplies from Timna and the decrease in the central demand for copper implied that, towards the end of the 11th and beginning of the 10th centuries BC, Tel Masos/Stratum I was already in decadence. Further, the renovation of exportations from Cyprus –evident from the findings of Cypro-Phoenician ceramics in the Levant– shows that the sources of copper from that island were available again, hence decreasing the relative importance of the Timna mines' supplies[74]. It is possible that the economic crisis of Tel Masos –attested by the scarce quantity of imported vessels in Stratum I– prepared the way for the expansion of the Israelite United Monarchy.

Conclusion

Social power is built in diverse ways in all societies. By choosing the idea of chiefdom to characterize the phenomenon of Tel Masos, it has not been our aim to insert it inside the already plentiful typologies of the anthropological literature, but to point to the dynamics by which the social power was constructed in this polity. We could have alluded to Tel Masos as a "simple" chiefdom, connected it to the wealth/staple finance dichotomy, and even suggested the presence of a "prestige-good" polity, but rather we have preferred questioning how and why such an assemblage of social relations was organized and structured.

We have seen that the sudden conclusion of this community and the fluctuating trajectories of the local sites were related to the changes in the interregional exchange networks. The different sociopolitical developments of the Beersheba Valley settlements undermine the neoevolutionist notion of a simple linear mode of change. Contrary to what a tribe-chiefdom-state model would argue, Tel Masos did not emerge from a previous tribal framework; rather, it developed as an alternative branch from the cities of the southern coastal plain. In other words, its foundation was the result of the geopolitics of the Northern Negev in the Early Iron Age, specifically the expansion of the coastal Canaanite population to the Beersheba Valley hinterland. Furthermore, this polity was not the formative stage of a state-level society; instead, it was a non-state political unit which could perform face-to-face with the contemporary state

70. Several "governor's residences" lack evidence of associated ritual activities, therefore the possibility is not discarded.
71. *EAHM*, pp. 233.
72. Finkelstein, *JNES* 47 (1988) 250-251; Z. Herzog, "The Beer-sheba Valley", pp. 140-143.
73. Except for some Philistine bichrome vessels found in Area C (Stratum I).
74. See E. A. Knauf, "Jerusalem in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages: A Proposal,", *TA* 27 (2000) 84.

neighbors. If we are looking for the forces that underlay the development of Tel Masos, we should turn our attention more to the core-periphery and peer polity[75] interaction in the Northern Negev than to supposed evolutionist trends.

Tel Masos' finance was certainly diverse, as it had not a completely one-sided economic structure. Indications of agricultural or tax storage were present, but do not point to the preponderant situation that some researchers on ancient economies have proposed for chiefdoms. Rather, craft activities –in which copper work seems to have overshadowed all the others– and interregional trade appear to have had a more important role.

Social hierarchy was –in the light of contemporaneous neighboring societies, and compared with polities of the same scale– relatively underdeveloped. The nonexistence of burials and great iconographies, even if partial result of postdepositional processes, indicates a non-complex hierarchical structure. Settlement patterns show a fairly simple one-level scale that connected the central site to the lowest order of the settlement hierarchy. Simple economic activities were performed by commoners, and only copper processing and trade were under the elite's command.

We have hypothesized that, as we are dealing with a stateless society, kinship was a strong limit against social inequalities; on the other hand, it was an intense source of social power, because it conceded access to ancient land rights and labor. Not only did external relations allow the elite to supersede kinship's limits –by means of warfare and trade–, but they also gave a connection with the centers of civilization of the time. It is no coincidence that the most visible prestige symbols –external-style architectural elements, special imported goods and ritual figurines– are in diverse ways linked to economic activities that relied upon foreign relations. Consequently, any crisis in the external/regional front might have caused serious consequences in the chiefdom. This therefore indicates that the fate of Tel Masos depended, in last instance, on his relationship with the more complex societies of Egypt and Canaan.

At the end of the Late Bronze Age, the Egyptian presence ceased in Palestine and Syria. Though in most places the retreat was complete, in the Negev area Egypt's influence was enduring. Obviously, the foregoing era of bureaucratic and imperial management was gone, and the presence of the Egyptian society was mediated by some local polities that emerged from the political vacuum. The autonomy reached by some communities did not implicate the end of the distinctions with the core society, fundamentally because the structural socioeconomic base did not change, that is, Egypt continued keeping control of more sophisticated productive and labor organizations. In the case of the Negev this is even clearer, given the fact that its environment made it extremely difficult or impossible the development of productive and technological structures comparable with those of the center –with a sole exception: the metallurgical activities at Timna.

75. C. Renfrew, "Introduction: Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change," in C. Renfrew and J. Cherry, eds., *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change,* Cambridge 1986, pp. 1-18.

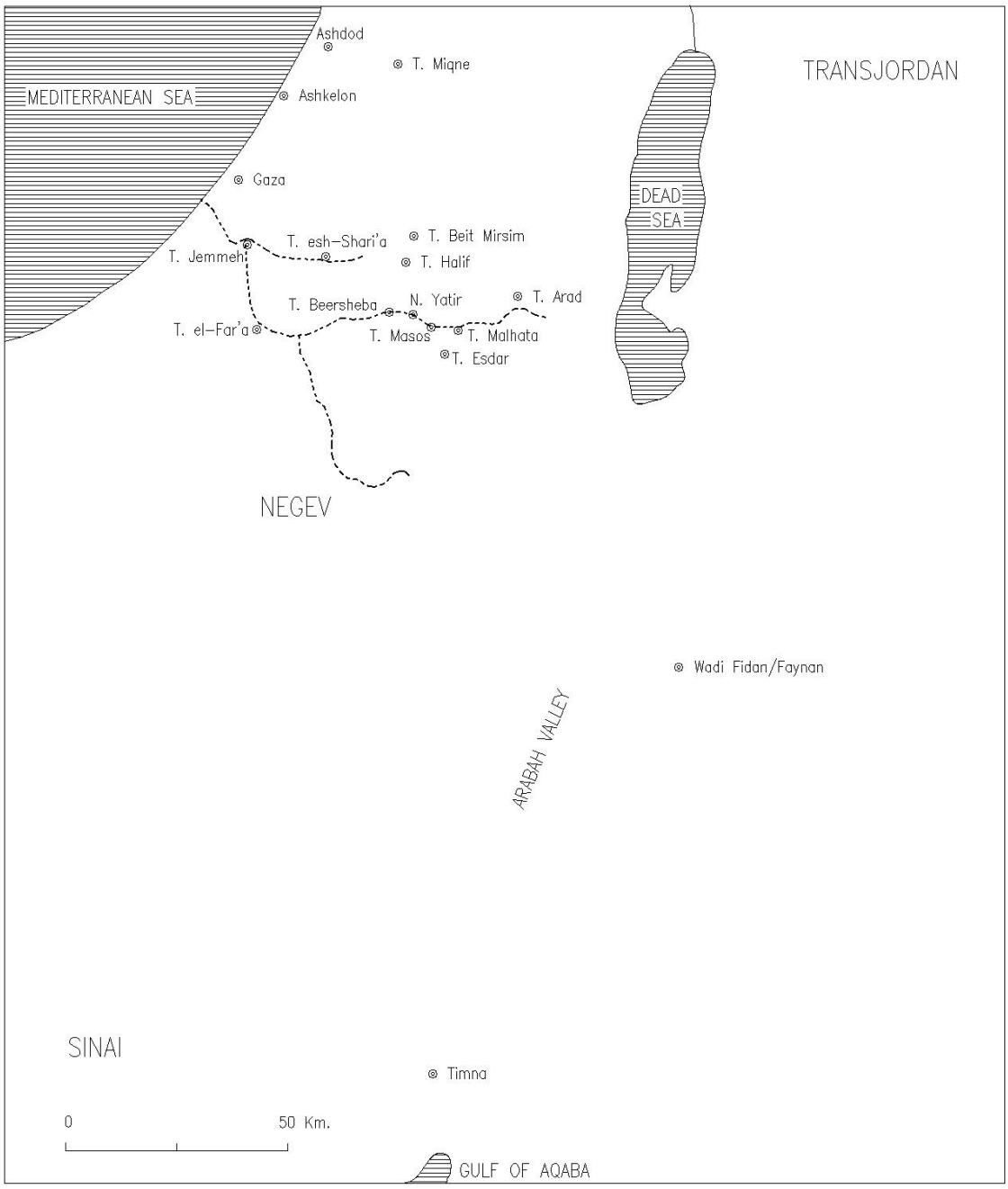

Figure 1. Main archaeological sites in Southern Palestine and the Negev in the Early Iron Age

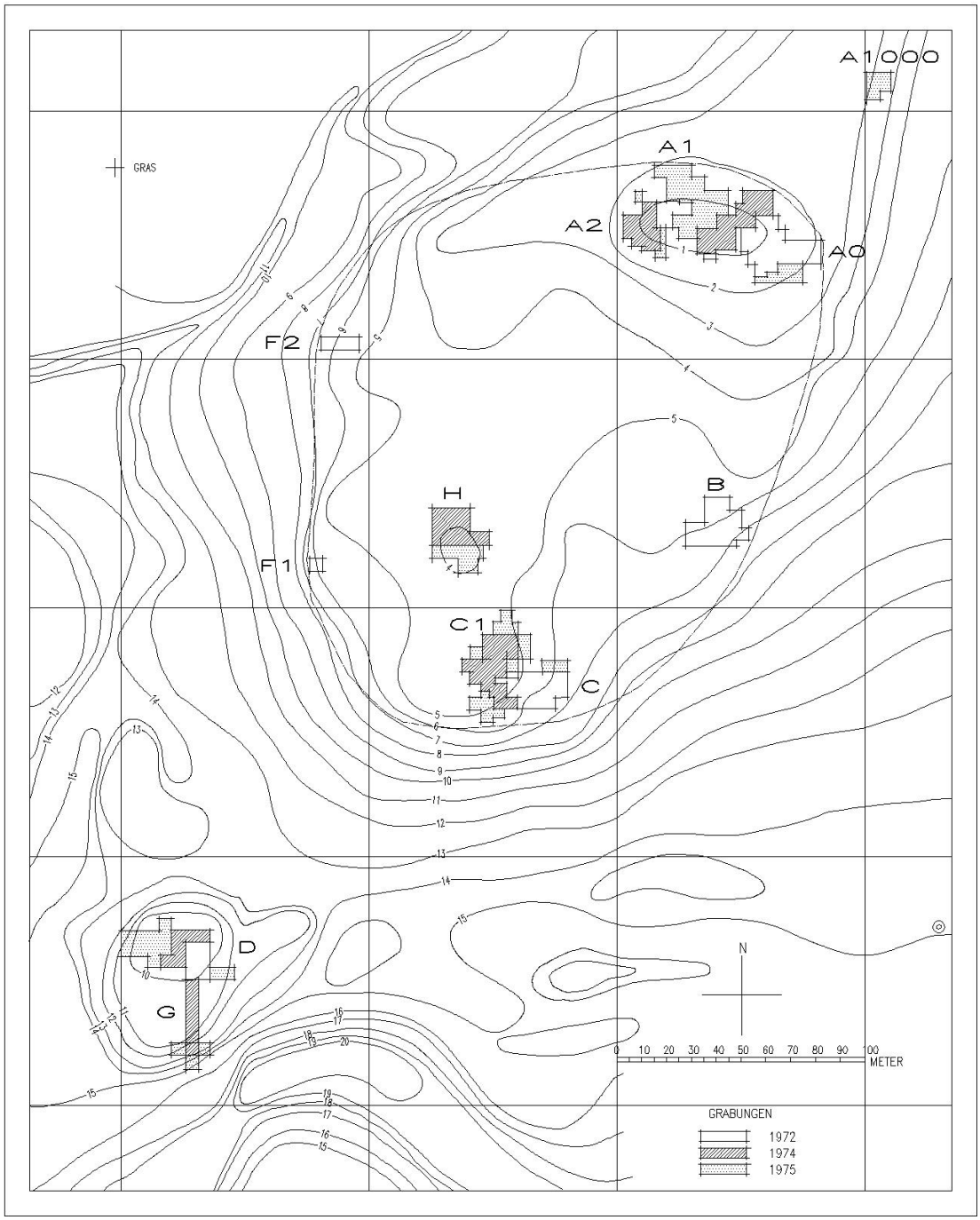

Figure 2. Tel Masos: general site plan showing excavated areas (From Fritz and Kempinski, *EAHM*, pl. 1)