

## In Quest of the Arameans in Northern Jordan

Aram is a term which calls forth many associations, ethnic, linguistic, geographical and historical. Here I prefer to speak about the geography and archaeology of Aram—laying chief stress upon the area north and south of the Yarmūk—in order to draw certain historical conclusions the results of which will be compared with the “history” of Aram given in the Old Testament.

From handbooks you will get the impression that the Arameans were Semitic settlers in the fertile areas on both sides of the River Euphrates, and that they had come from the Syrian-Arabian desert around 1200 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps such statements were formulated with the biblical stories of the emergence of Israel in mind, first the wanderings of the Patriarchs and then the Exodus out of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> In Amos 9,7 we are told that the God of the Israelites brought up Israel from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and Aram from Kir. Naturally this is an ideological and simplified way of writing history, but there is something in it.<sup>3</sup> The three main peoples living in the

western part of Near East are given an origin, and, whichever gods the Philistines and Arameans may have had, the God of the Israelites gave each of them their countries (Deut 32,8). But then history is directed by the same god and the peoples are punished for their sins. The Israelites are brought out of their country to places east of the Euphrates (2 Kgs 25,11), and so are the Arameans. The Assyrians conquered Damascus and brought the people to Kir east of the Euphrates (2 Kgs 16,9), the place from where they were said to have come. The Philistines are not mentioned in such a punishment.

The Bible tells us another difference between these three peoples. Israel succeeded in creating a kingdom first through Saul and then David,<sup>4</sup> a kingdom split into a northern and southern part. The Philistines and the Arameans are never said to have held together a unified kingdom in the same way; they were but city states. Aramean states such as Damascus<sup>5</sup> and Hamat<sup>6</sup> were certainly vast. Names like Geshur, Ma'acah,<sup>7</sup> Aram - So-

<sup>1</sup> See H. Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen ATD 4/1* (1984) 57: “Eine ‘aramäische Völkerwelle’ allerdings, die aus den Einöden der Wüste gegen die Kulturländer brandete, hat es sicherlich nicht gegeben.”

<sup>2</sup> How to interpret the OT traditions from an historical point of view is still an enigma. All interpretations rest on one's understanding of the age and the character of the texts. See f.i. J. van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (1975), who maintains that the Abraham traditions were written in the time of the Exile. A diffuse figure of Abraham was associated with fairy tales and legends of different ages and origins. Hence it follows that the Yahwistic traditions cannot be regarded as historical documents. N. P. Lemche, *Early Israel* (1985) 416ff. has followed up van Seters' opinion and also strengthened it: “a saga or legend is ahistorical until the opposite has been proved; it is not historical until its ‘historical’ contents have been proved.” We cannot enter here the often enflamed debate, but my impression is that the Patriarchal traditions—they may be legendary—describe the Israelite consciousness of Aramean origin. The activities of the Patriarchs are understood in light of subsequent history, at the same time later history is legitimated by the deeds of Israel's ancestors. Thus Laban and Jacob's settlement in the mountains of Gilead (Genesis 31) not only describes the Israelite break with their Aramean origin but also substantiates the Israelite claim of the area west of the mountains of Gilead—by Jacob's wrestling with “the god of the area” (Genesis 32). See M. Ottosson, *Gilead: Tradition and History*

(1969) 36ff. Concerning the history and background of the biblical Patriarchs, see the thorough investigation by G. G. Reinhold, *Die Beziehungen Altisraels zu den aramäischen Staaten in der israelitisch-judäischen Königszeit* (1990) 39ff.

<sup>3</sup> The hegemony of these three peoples covers an area equal to the Israelite Land of Promise. Naturally the Israelite god governs it. See M. Ottosson, “Eden and the Land of Promise,” *VT Supp* 40 (1988) 177-188; *idem*, Ideology, History and Archaeology in the Old Testament, *SJOT* 8(1994), 206-223 and R. Sollamo, Ideology, Archaeology and History in the Old Testament. A Brief Response to Magnus Ottosson's Paper, *SJOT* 8, 224-235.

<sup>4</sup> David's political and military rise has been analyzed by B. Mazar, *BA* 25 (1962) 98-120; A. Malamat, *BA* 21 (1958) 96-102; *idem*, *JNES* 22 (1963) 1-17; *idem*, *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien . Phil.-hist. Kl. Bd.* 407 (Wein, 1983), 4-42.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. H. Klengel, “City and Land of Damascus in the Cuneiform Tradition,” *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes* 35 (1985) 49-57.

<sup>6</sup> H. Sader, *Les états araméens de Syrie depuis leur fondation jusqu'à leur transformation en provinces assyriennes* (1984) 235ff.

<sup>7</sup> B. Mazar, “Geshur and Maacah,” *JBL* 80 (1961) 16-28, and now M. Kochavi, “The Land of Geshur Project: Regional Archaeology of the Southern Golan (1987-1988 Seasons),” *IEJ* 39 (1989) 1-17. Kochavi suggests that al-'Amarna letter No. 256 mentioning “the cities of the land of Garu” refers to “the land of Ga(su)ru.” So also W. Moran, *Les Lettres d'El Amarna* (1987) 597.

bah<sup>8</sup> are more difficult to judge. Certainly Damascus was the head of the Aramean states, at least from an Israelite point of view (Zech 9,1; Isa 7,1ff). Rezin is called "King of Aram" (2 Kgs 16,5) and "Head of Damascus" (Isa 7,8), and Damascus the head of Aram (Isa 7,8).

There are reasons to believe that in the wars fought between North-Israel and Aram, Damascus was the main Aramean center north of the River Yarmūk. This river is never mentioned in the OT and therefore we do not know if it was regarded as a frontier to the Arameans in the same way as Wādī az-Zarqā' (Jabbok) was to the Ammonites (Num 22,5). But I would suggest that this was the case. The conception "Aram" is very general, telling us nothing about frontier points of the Aramean kingdoms. Once it is mentioned that Sobah's King Hadad'ezer extended his dominion as far as "River..." (2 Sam 8,3). Usually this is thought to be the River Euphrates. That seems to be the right interpretation, as the chapter in the following verses describes David's wars against the Arameans and when To'i, the king of Hamat,<sup>9</sup> asks for peace, it means that ideologically David has extended his dominion until the northern ideal border point of the Israelite empire. We know very little about the geography of the southern Arameans. We have only a vague idea where names such as Ma'acah, Geshur, Tob, Beth Rehob<sup>10</sup> and Sobah could be localized. Geshur was just "in Aram" (2 Sam 15,8). The OT is the main geographical source for the areas of the Arameans, but as the mentioning of cities and landscapes functions as a description of an Israelite dominion within the frames of the Davidic empire, we do not get much information about the groups of peoples living there. In the OT these peoples are named "Amorites" living throughout the area east of the Jordan governed by the two kings Sihon and Og. The latter had two capitals, Edrei and Salkah, usually identified with Dar'a and Şalkhad. Then we are told about Kenat, a city which was given an Israelite name (Num 32,42). The landscape is named Bashan (Num 32,33 etc.). Two other

cities mentioned are Golan and Astaroth (Deut 4,43 and Deut 1,4). The latter is to be identified with Tall Ash-tara.<sup>11</sup> This is just to underline that the OT-tradents did not know much about the geography of Aram, not even of southern Syria and northern Jordan. David's wars against the Arameans were fought on the east side of the Jordan at Helam (2 Sam 10,17). The Arameans were then in coalition with the Ammonites. The cities Betah and Berotai producing copper belonged to Hadad'ezer (2 Sam 8,8).

Historically we are on firmer ground when the OT tells us about the perpetual wars between Aram and North-Israel.<sup>12</sup> Although the traditions are written from a Jerusalemite point of view—*id est* they contain an ideological trend negative toward the north-Israelite kings—there is certainly a kernel of real history in these confrontations. In any case from the Assyrian inscriptions we get for the first time a historical source outside the OT telling about the relationship between Israelites and Arameans around 850 B.C., and then it is interesting to notice how history has been interpreted differently. According to the OT there are several skirmishes between Israelites and Arameans from the time of King Omri until the so called Syro-Ephraimitic war around 740 B.C. During this period of around 100 years the Arameans are said to have besieged both Samaria (1 Kgs 20,1 ff.) and Jerusalem (2 Kgs 12,17 ff.) without success. There are battles at Aphek (1 Kgs 20,26) and at Ramoth in Gilead which town is besieged by Hazael also without success (2 Kgs 9,1 ff.). But here the Israelite kings Ahab and Joram are wounded (1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 9). According to 2 Kgs 13,22 ff. the Aramean King Hazael had oppressed Israel but his son Ben-Hadad was beaten three times and the Israelite cities conquered by Aram were taken back. The only time a covenant between Israel and Aram is mentioned is in the legendary story of the war at Aphek (1 Kgs 20,34).<sup>13</sup> In this connection we are told that the Aramean king gave back to Ahab the Israelite cities which had been taken from Omri (v. 33). Cities were al-

<sup>8</sup> Aram-Sobah was a mighty kingdom which extended its borders from Anti-Lebanon towards Tadmur between Ḥamāh and Damascus. It is impossible to draw exact borders as the sources are silent.

<sup>9</sup> For the extension of the land of Ḥamāh, see the discussion in H. Sader, *op. cit.*, 235ff.

<sup>10</sup> Beth Rehob has traditionally been identified with Rihab, 20kms northeast of Gerasa, but after his survey of northern Jordan S. Mittmann prefers Tall al-Mu'allaqa, 2kms northeast of Irbid. The old name could be preserved in the modern names Wādī ar-Rāhūb and Kh. ar-Rāhūb, and the suggested site holds a very strategical position; cf. S. Mittmann, *Beiträge zur Siedlungs- und Territorialgeschichte des Nördlichen Ostjordanlandes* (1970) 226ff. I should like to verify an Aramean kingdom south of the Yarmūk, but it does not seem probable that it could be the Rehob mentioned in 2 Sam 10,8; cf. M. Weippert, *Edom* (1971) 270 and H.-J. Stoebe, *ZDPV* 93 (1977) 242ff. who place the site in the Valley of al-Biqā', and this is also Reinhold's opinion (*op. cit.*, 80f) when discussing a real union between Aram Sobah and Bet Rehob (see his footnote no. 71 on p. 324). E. Lipinski thinks there has been a

confusion in 2 Samuel 10 between Beth Rehob in al-Biqā' and a city Rehob situated south of Beth-Sean, *TRE* 3 (1978) 593.

<sup>11</sup> See D. Kellermann *ZDPV* 97 (1981) 45-61.

<sup>12</sup> Reinhold gives in his dissertation (see note 2) the hitherto most ambitious analysis of the OT versions of the wars between Israel and Aram which were frequent. The battle accounts are intermixed with legendary material and we would not know much at all about the Omrides were it not for the appearance of Elijah and Elisha. On 1 Kings 22 see especially H. Weippert, *Biblica* 69 (1988) 457-479; J. M. Miller, *JBL* 85 (1966) 441-454; *idem*, *VT* 17 (1967) 307-324; *idem*, *ZAW* 80 (1968) 337-342; G. W. Ahlström, "The Battle at Ramoth-Gilead in 841 B.C.," *Wünschet Jerusalem Frieden. Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the IOSOT* (1986) 157-166.

<sup>13</sup> The coalition between Israel, Aram-Damascus, Hamat, and eight other city states at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. is never mentioned in the OT, nor also in any Aramaic inscription found thus far. For discussion about the identification of Qarqar see H. Sader (*op. cit.*, 237) who suggests that it is modern Ḥamāh.

ways the most outstanding target. Seldom do we hear about areas in this connection.

If we accept "Aram" as an ethnic term in the same sense as Israel, Moab, and Edom we also get a general geographical idea. The borders of Aram are vague, but we do get from the OT the impression that the term "Aram" covers at least all land north of the Yarmūk River. But since the wars between Aram and Israel were fought at "Ramoth" in Gilead<sup>14</sup> we may suspect that the borders between Aram and Ammon were fluctuating. Indeed there are traditions which tell us that Aram from time to time was able to keep her hegemony down to Wādi al-Mūjib (2 Kgs 10,32 ff), yes, to the very town of Elath/ 'Aqaba (2 Kgs 16,6). In the last text scholars mostly read Edom instead of Aram.<sup>15</sup> From the OT we also get some chronological idea about when the Arameans kept political and cultural pressure on the area of present-day Syria and Jordan, namely around 900–600 B.C.<sup>16</sup> As I said earlier the term "Aram" in the OT is used in a general way. Sometimes it appears to mean a special city or kingdom like Damascus par préférence, and the OT-tradents knew about an Aramaean language which the Assyrians could speak (2 Kgs 18,26; Rab-Shaqe knew "the Jewish language", v. 28 ff.). I have the impression that "Aram" and "Arammim" in 2 Kgs 8,28 ff. are simply terms for the peoples living to the northeast, as "Sidonim" is a term for the peoples living to the northwest (Deut 3,9 etc.). Damascus and Sidon, from an Israelite point of view, are the leading centers of opposition to Israel representing the worship of alien gods (2 Kgs 16,6).

In comparing the OT traditions with texts outside the OT mentioning the same area and peoples, we soon notice that early sources do not offer any certain references to "Aram" or the "Arameans" and their origins.<sup>17</sup> In the Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1077 B.C.) the king praises himself for having beaten "Ahlamû(mat)armaia". The word-pair has been the object of intensive discussions as to how it should be understood.<sup>18</sup> The Arameans referred to in the Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I lived in the country of Amurru,<sup>19</sup> a term which covers the area of Syria. Their main area seems to be in the north and

middle parts of Syria, but geographically Aleppo, Ḥamāh and Damascus were the natural centers for the rise of Aramean states. There is some congruence between "Amurru" and "Aram". According to Deut 3,9 "the Amorites" called Mount Hermon "Senir". The name "Senir" is mentioned in one of Shalmaneser III:s (858–824) inscriptions where it says King Hazael made Senir his fortress. Shalmaneser says in the same inscription,<sup>20</sup> "I besieged Hazael in Damascus. I marched as far as the mountains of Hauran destroying innumerable towns. At that time I received tribute of Tyre, Sidon and of Jehu, son of Omri." I quote these lines in order to show the Assyrian terms used for the same area and people which are suggested by the OT term "Aram". The Assyrian apprehension of the geography west of the Euphrates is further elucidated in one of Adad-Nirari III's (810–783) inscriptions.<sup>21</sup> The king captured in this order "from the banks of the Euphrates, the country of the Hittites, Amurru-country in its full extent, Tyre, Sidon, Israel (mat Humri), Edom, Palestine (Palastu), as far as the shore of the Great Sea of the Setting Sun." The Assyrian term "Amurru" seems more or less to be synonymous with the OT term "Aram".

The king of Damascus seems to be the strongest and richest of all his colleagues.<sup>22</sup> Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727) took from Rezon "592 towns ... of the 16 districts of the country of Damascus sa-Imeri-su...".<sup>23</sup> In subsequent inscriptions of Sennacherib (704–681) and Ashurbanipal (668–633) there are no further Assyrian terms which can elucidate the OT term "Aram". It is a pattern in the Assyrian texts just to use the names of the cities and their kings. This is also common in the OT, but in the Hebrew there seems very often to be a need to add "Aram".

If we look at the old Aramaic texts known thus far, there is very little historical information which connects with "Aram" of the OT traditions. The major corpus of inscriptions belong to the area of northern Syria. There are some common linguistic features which can now be dated to the ninth century B.C.<sup>24</sup> From a geographical point of view there is very little material here in common

<sup>14</sup> See now Reinhold, *op. cit.*, 153ff.

<sup>15</sup> J. R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*. JSOT Supp. 77 (1989) 127.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Num 23,5 and Num 22,5 as to whether Dayr 'Allā is the home site of Balaam. On the Dayr 'Allā Inscription see H. and M. Weipert, *ZDPV* 98 (1982) 77–103, and J. A. Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Allā* (1984); cf. additional references in S. C. Layton, "Old Aramaic Inscriptions," *BA* 51 (1988) 183.

<sup>17</sup> Reinhold, *op. cit.*, 23ff.

<sup>18</sup> Reinhold, *ibid.*, 34ff. Armaia is regarded as a gentilicum Arameans.

<sup>19</sup> *ANET*, 275; A. Haldar, *Who Were the Amorites?* (1971); Reinhold, *ibid.*, 41ff.

<sup>20</sup> *ANET*, 280.

<sup>21</sup> *ANET*, 281.

<sup>22</sup> See H. Sader, *op. cit.*, 285ff. and W. T. Pitard, *Ancient Damascus:*

*A Historical Study of the Syrian City-State from Earliest Times until Its Fall to the Assyrians in 732 B.C.E.* (1987). The history of the early period of the Iron Age until the Assyrian attacks in the 9th century B.C. is sketched out only in the OT. For the first time in the Omride period can we critically judge the OT traditions, and then the biblical story is mostly misleading.

<sup>23</sup> *ANET*, 283a.

<sup>24</sup> The Tall Fakhariyah Inscription throws some light on "loaded" terms in Gen 1,26; 2,8ff., viz., *slm*, *dmwt* and *'dn*; see J.C. Greenfield, "A Touch of Eden" in *Hommages et Opera Minora IX. Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin Emerito Oblata* (1984) 219–224 and A. R. Millard, "The Etymology of Eden," *VT* 34 (1984) 103–105; A. Abou-Assaf, P. Bordreuil and A. R. Millard, *La statue de Tell Fekheryé et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (1982).

with the OT. Disregarding names such as Hazrak (cf. Mic 9,1) and Ḥamāh (common in OT in the phrase *lebo' hamath*) only Damascus is once mentioned: in a phrase “from Damascus to Assur”.<sup>25</sup> The Aramean kings never described the frontiers of their kingdoms. Especially in the Sefire texts do we learn to know the word *'rm*.<sup>26</sup> There we are told of a political treaty entered into by the king of Ktk and other kings from “all Aram” and “all Upper and Lower Aram”. Both expressions suggest that although there were many small Aramean kingdoms or city states, there seemed to be among them some consciousness of affinity. How “Upper” and “Lower” Aram are to be understood is unclear. It is tempting to think in northern and southern categories.<sup>27</sup>

In the OT Rezin, the king of Damascus, was called “the king of Aram”, and we also find this expression used by Bar-Hadad in his dedication to Melqart. We do not know where Bar-Hadad was king. Although this name—in the OT “ben Hadad”—is always connected with Damascus, the opinion by W. T. Pitard is that Bar-Hadad of the Melqart stele ruled the Aramean tribes in northern Syria.<sup>28</sup> From this part of the country nearly all the Aramaic inscriptions have come. From southern Syria there are no inscriptions at all, just a handle with the consonants *lmr'*<sup>29</sup> (site unknown) and a sherd announced from 'Ein Gev with the word *lšqy*.<sup>30</sup> Very few extensive excavations have been done in southern Syria, one season at Tall aš-Šālīhiya in 1952<sup>31</sup> and two seasons at Tall Ashtara in 1966–67.<sup>32</sup> The situation was the same in Jordan until excavations on several sites revealed remains from large and important settlements, also inscriptions, which, while they do not throw any light on the history of the Arameans show nevertheless Aramaic influence (Dayr 'Allā). In Num 23,5 we are told that Balaam was brought “from Aram”, and when the texts found at Dayr 'Allā described Balaam as a domiciled prophet in this place it was tempting to see a relationship between the OT and information in these texts. “Aram” in the OT is then a very vague term and could be a synonymous with “the mountains in the east” (v. 5). The inscriptions found at Tall al-Mazār just north of Dayr 'Allā are late and throw no light on the Arameans, though the language is judged

Aramaic (and Ammonite).<sup>33</sup>

The East Jordan Valley Survey, 1975, included 106 sites between the River Yarmūk and Wādī Rājib, which is about six kms north of Wādī az-Zarqā' (the Jabbok).<sup>34</sup> Of these only six sites show remains from the Late Bronze Age, and it has not been possible to determine if the sites were fortified during this period. There was a clear decline of settlements from the Middle Bronze Age II (14 sites). In the Iron Age 19 sites represent Iron IB and nearly the same number of sites show continued settlement in Iron II. The Ghawr was inhabited all during this period. Most settlements were very prosperous. The area just north of Wādī az-Zarqā' seems to have been somewhat of a crossroads. The main roads passing the Jezreel Valley reached the Ghawr between Wādī az-Zarqā' and the Yarmūk, and here as in the valleys running up into the Gilead mountains are many large sites which were certainly important road stations and commercial centers. In the area between Wādī al-Yābis and the Wādī az-Zarqā', 14 LB-sites are reported, and some are settled also in the Iron I–II. But the Iron Age sites seem mostly to be spread along Wādī az-Zarqā'.<sup>35</sup> Their number was doubled (25) in the Iron II. The results of these important surveys are not yet published in detail but recently there have been extensive excavations on Tall Dayr 'Allā,<sup>36</sup> Tall al-Mazār<sup>37</sup> and Tall as-Sa'īdiya.<sup>38</sup> On the last-named site J. N. Tubb reports at least eight Iron Age strata between 1100–800 B.C. Tall as-Sa'īdiya showed in the Iron I–II well developed city planning with streets and houses of “Three Rooms-type”. A water stairway belonged to Stratum XII. It is impossible to tell what people lived in the Ghawr at this time, but there are cultural relations with the Cisjordan and Stratum XII is said to represent “a significant pre-Philistine Sea Peoples element.” The pottery repertoire anticipates Iron II especially with regard to the cooking pots, and still others reflect the final traditions of the Late Bronze Age. Contemporary with the graves on Tall as-Sa'īdiya at-Taḥta, Stratum XII falls into the Late Bronze-Iron I transition of the 13th–12th centuries B.C.

The survey in the Maqārīn area just south and on the slopes of the Yarmūk included 31 sites.<sup>39</sup> Of these only “Site 6”, situated between the Yarmūk and Nahr al-Harir,

<sup>25</sup> KAI Nr. 215, 18.

<sup>26</sup> KAI, Bd 3, 60.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. KAI, 244f.

<sup>28</sup> Pitard, *op. cit.*, ch 5.

<sup>29</sup> See M. Heltzer, “An Old-Aramean Seal-Impression and Some Problems of the History of the Kingdom of Damascus” in *Arameans, Aramaic and the Aramaic Literary Tradition*. Ed. M. Sokoloff. (1983) 9-13. Cf. G. Reinhold, *op. cit.*, 194ff.

<sup>30</sup> B. Mazar *et al.*, “Ein Gev Excavations in 1961,” *IEJ* 14 (1964) 27ff.; cf. G. Ahlström, *Tel Aviv* 12 (1985) 93-95.

<sup>31</sup> H. H. von der Osten, *Svenska Syrienexpeditionen 1952-1953: Die Grabung von Tell Eš-Šālīhiyah*, I Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen, 4<sup>o</sup>, IV. (1956).

<sup>32</sup> A. Abou Assaf, *Tell-Ashtara in Südsyrien: Erste Kampagne 1966*

and Tell-Ashtara 2. Kampagne 1967. *Annales Archeologiques Arabes Syriennes*, Tome 18, 103-122 and *Annales Archeologiques de Syrie*, Tome 19 (1969) 101-108.

<sup>33</sup> K. Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports* (1988), 137-142.

<sup>34</sup> M. Ibrahim, J. A. Sauer, K. Yassine, *BASOR* 222 (1976) 41-66.

<sup>35</sup> *ADAJ* 22 (1977-1978) 126ff.

<sup>36</sup> H. J. Franken, *Excavations at Tell Deir 'Allā I* (1969); continued by M. Ibrahim.

<sup>37</sup> See note 33.

<sup>38</sup> J. B. Pritchard, *Tell es-Sa'īdiyah: Excavations on the Tell, 1964-1966* (1985); J. N. Tubb, “Tell es-Sa'īdiyah: Preliminary Report on the First Three Seasons of Renewed Excavations,” *Levant* 20 (1988) 23-88.

<sup>39</sup> *ADAJ* 22 (1977-78) 114f., 119-126.

showed Iron Age pottery, predominately Iron IB. "The site" seems thereafter to have been un-occupied until Hellenistic and Early Roman times. This pattern is very interesting. Nelson Glueck reported also Iron Age sherds from Tall Qurs, No. 28, but we are told nothing more. Al-Baidar, No. 19, was littered with pottery of the Late Bronze Age and visible on the surface was a circular wall built with large boulders and basalt blocks. This survey gives the impression that the southern slopes of the Yarmūk and its side valleys were very sparsely inhabited in the Iron Age. Especially in the Iron II when the Arameans reached their political peak, this area did not interest many settlers. The land usable for settlements and cultivation is to be found north of the Yarmūk. I would thus suggest that the Yarmūk more or less served as a magnificent Aramean "moat of defense" to the south.

In the Wādī al-'Arab area just three sites are reported. None show Iron Age material.<sup>40</sup>

If we want to get an idea of the Iron Age settlements in the northern part of Jordan we have to refer to the extensive and detailed survey by S. Mittmann.<sup>41</sup> He has made a very useful division of the area he surveyed using the points of the compass. For his area "der Norden" he used the asphalt road between ash-Shūna - Irbid and Tall ar-Rumayth as the southern border, delimited further by the Jordan to the west and the Yarmūk-Syrian border to the north and east. In this area he reported 88 sites; of these nine show LBII-pottery, 22 Iron I and 22 Iron II sherds. Naturally several periods are represented at the different sites, but when following the Iron Age periods of this area, I want some geographical subdivisions in order to find out whether there are any chronological differences between the settlements along the valleys of Wādī al-'Arab, Wādī ash-Shallāla and the concentration of sites in the area north of Irbid along the asphalt road between Irbid and Umm Qays. Along Wādī al-'Arab there are around 30 sites surveyed and of these four are said to show a multitude of Iron Age pottery. Most of the sherds are of early Iron type belonging to the 12th century B.C. Sites No. 70, Sawm, and 81, Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān, have all had a long Iron Age settlement running to the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Sawm is just northwest of Irbid and Umm al-Ghuzlān further to the northwest, next to Kufr Asad. These circumstances, with only two sites of certain Iron IIB Age, will be of interest below when we attempt to draw some historical conclusions.

North of Irbid are at least seven sites judged to contain Iron I-II remains from the 12th to the ninth centuries. Site No. 64 is littered with pottery from Iron I, and although

the ninth century is mentioned we get the impression that sherds are all of early Iron type.

Irbid itself, which lies in northern Jordan, must have been a center in ancient times. Salvage digs done by C. J. Lenzen *et al.* show major gaps in the stratigraphic profile.<sup>42</sup> But the period around 1200 B.C. was one of the high points of occupation. Lenzen counts three phases: I ca. 1150-800 B.C.; II ca. 1300-1150; and III ca. 3200. The city wall was built in Phase II; how then the transition between Late Bronze and Iron Age took form it is not possible to describe. If the date "ca. 800 B.C." is correct, Irbid could have been a main center for an Aramean civilization in the Iron IIA-B. Still it is interesting to note that the Late Bronze II was such a prosperous time in this area. In the absence of evidence, however, we can not say much about the early Iron Age.

The Wādī ash-Shallāla, running north-south from the Yarmūk for at least 40kms in length must have been an important link for cultural communication with peoples in southern Syria. Let us suggest that they were Arameans. Mittmann's survey of the sites representing the Iron Age in this meandering valley gives this impression, so also the areas west of Wādī ash-Shallāla. Pottery of the earlier periods of the Iron Age preponderates, although sites No. 1, 8, 10, 12 and 33 especially are said to represent later phases of the Iron II.

A very interesting area of Mittmann's survey is "der Westen". Here 151 sites were surveyed south of the road Irbid-Umm Qays down to Wādī Rājib on the western range of 'Ajlūn. Four sites show LBII sherds, 40 sites Iron I, and 23 sites Iron II. This area is situated just north of Wādī az-Zarqā', which is the main nerve in the historical evolution of central Transjordan. In the beginning of the Iron Age this valley and the area around it were densely settled, but the number of settlements in Iron II was reduced nearly 50 per cent.

Mittmann's area "der Süden" lies east of Gerasa and goes west as far as to the middle part of Wādī az-Zarqā'. Seventy sites are counted, namely those not visited by Nelson Glueck. It is difficult to get any reliable statistical material from here as I do not know how many sites there really are in the area. But of the 70 sites one shows LBII sherds, ten represent Iron I, and six Iron II. This area belongs to the central part of Transjordan and it was certainly during most of the Iron Age governed by the Ammonites.<sup>43</sup> It is not likely that the Arameans laid any political claims to it. The pressure may have come from the west.

The area "der Osten" would be central in a discussion

<sup>40</sup> ADAJ 22, 129f.

<sup>41</sup> S. Mittmann, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> C. J. Lenzen *et al.*, ADAJ 29 (1985) 151-159; *idem*, LA 36 (1986) 361-363; *idem*, BN 42 (1988) 27-35; D. Homès-Fredericq and J. B. Hennessy (eds.), *Archaeology of Jordan II I*. Field Reports. Sur-

veys & Sites A-K (1989) 298ff.

<sup>43</sup> In Gerasa F. Braemer made two campaigns and found remains of settlements from LBII-Iron II. The site seems to have been deserted after the seventh century B.C. until the second century B.C. Fragments of collar rim jars are reported in ADAJ 31 (1987) 525-530.

on the “Jordanian Arameans”. It covers the mountains north of the Midwar-Mafraq road and the plains next to Irbid. Here Mittmann counted 25 sites. One represents LBII, and another one Iron II, but two sites show remains from Iron I. The number of sites counting Late Iron Age pottery is very low. And sketching Mittmann’s survey results over the entire area north of the line ash-Shūna - Irbid – Tall ar-Rumayth we get the impression that the Iron Age II is not abundantly represented. It is very difficult—not to say dangerous—to write history using survey results only. But all the areas surveyed in northern Jordan give obvious hints about the time when they were densely settled, which is the early Iron Age. It is a time when written sources so far are missing and the moves of people are not known. The survey results anyway tell us that there was a stationary tendency in the social structure, people settled upon or in the ruins of the LB II-cities. Here seems to be a consensus among the scholars. The transition period is well known on nearly all sites in both Trans- and Cisjordan, also further to the north in Syria.

But how to interpret the term “Iron II” used by Mittmann? It seems to cover a long period of nearly 500 years. He is completely right to offer such a general picture of the settlements in the late part of the Iron Age and leave it to the excavations to give the detailed stratigraphy of a site. According to Mittmann’s “Preface” the late Dr. Paul Lapp co-operated with him in reading the pottery. We have to assume that he at the time knew the Transjordanian Iron Age pottery from his excavations at Tall ar-Rumayth.<sup>44</sup> Mittmann’s survey was done more than 20 years ago, and after Nelson Glueck he has to be regarded as one of the pioneers among the surveyers of Jordan. In a survey without stratigraphical proofs it is impossible to tell if Iron II pottery is early or late. The forms do not change that much and the red burnished slip is common over the whole period. It seems to be a scholar’s “Fingerspitzengefühl” which sometimes turns the scales. In our quest for the Arameans I would suggest that the Iron Age II period is the main era of their hegemony—according to both the Old Testament and Old Aramaic inscriptions. Therefore precision in the pottery of the Iron II together with stratigraphy on several sites is highly needed. I will pick up on this discussion below in a short report of the excavations at Tall al-Fukhār.

It is not easy to delimit a “Land of the Arameans” in northern Jordan and southern Syria. Again the Old Testament speaks geographically in very vague terms, and only

some city names without any definite borders can be combined with “Aram”. The ethnic term “the Arameans” appears in plural form only as the enemy defeating the North-Israelite king Joram at Ramah. The singular is used for the Patriarchs and once for Naaman of Damascus, also interestingly for the mother of Macir, father of Gilead. She was an Aramean. The geographical terms Bashan and Gilead are otherwise never mentioned together with the Arameans, only together with the Amorites. The Amorites are regarded as the earlier population of the area. One of their two kings is Og who governs over Bashan from three main cities: Ashtaroth, Edrei and Salcah. These cities can be localized with rather fine precision. This area is more or less identical with the term *ša-Imeri-šu*; it is (the land of) Damascus.<sup>45</sup>

Because of the modern political situation it has not been possible for archaeologists in the last twenty years to do any fieldwork in the area west of the main road between Dar‘a and Damascus. We have to rely therefore on older investigations, especially on results of the excavations at Tall Ashtara.<sup>46</sup> Some survey has been done by the Syrians, but mostly by F. Braemer<sup>47</sup> in an area east of Buṣra. It seems as if the historical remains are scantier the further we go east of Ḥawrān. And remains from the Iron Age are either few or not to be found. We know that the Assyrians divided the southern part of Syria into two districts in 723 B.C.: Haurina to the east and Qarnaim<sup>48</sup> to the west. The most outstanding site in Haurina is Tall Dabba situated about 15kms north of Suwayda. Still visible are strong and well-preserved walls of defence, and according to the layout of the site a city seems to have been built in the Middle Bronze Age and then reused in Hellenistic and Roman times. But no Iron Age pottery is reported. It is very tempting to accept Abou-Assaf’s suggestion that Dabba hides the name Du-bu in Amarna letter No. 205.<sup>49</sup> In this connection it can be mentioned that Qanawāt, 10kms southeast of Tall Dabba, is traditionally identified with Kenath (Num 32,42). Braemer reports some circular structures without dating them.<sup>50</sup> Such type of architecture is always spectacular but hard to judge. These will be commented upon below together with similar structures found in Golan and in Jordan.

The western part of southern Syria has naturally been very central in the history of the Near East, and here we also find remains from both the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. The continuation of “the Kings’ Highway” running up to Damascus passed through this area. Here are some

<sup>44</sup> See D. Homès-Fredericq and J.B. Hennessy, *Archaeology of Jordan II 2* (1989) 494-497. P. Lapp made his first excavation on Tall ar-Rumayth in 1962.

<sup>45</sup> For the meaning of the word—possibly it has something to do with the breeding of donkeys—see H. Sader, *op. cit.*, 279ff. The term is mentioned for the first time in the Annals of Salmaneser III. How large an area the term *sa-Imeri-su* covered it is difficult to say. Sader suggests up to Hums in the north and down to Ḥawrān in the

south.

<sup>46</sup> See note 32.

<sup>47</sup> F. Braemer, “Prospections Archeologiques dans le Ḥawrān (Syrie),” *Syria* 61 (1984) 219-250.

<sup>48</sup> The city of Qarnaim is suggested to be Shaykh-Sa‘ad north of Tall Ashtara.

<sup>49</sup> A. Abou Assaf, *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 7 (1974) 17.

<sup>50</sup> *Syria* 61, 228ff.

important sites which unfortunately have not been the object of extensive fieldwork. Egyptian texts from the Bronze Age mention several places in this area and some ancient names are still preserved in Bušra (ancient Busruna),<sup>51</sup> Tayyiba (ancient Tubja), Dar'a (ancient Edrei), Tall Ashtara (ancient Ashtaroth), and Shaykh Sa'd north of Tall Ashtara which is identified with Qarnaim.

The most extensive excavations have been carried out on Tall Ashtara by A. Abou-Assaf in 1966–67, and these really looked promising. But the war in 1967 stopped further fieldwork and the possibilities nowadays for survey are limited or impossible. Two short seasons naturally could not offer much material. Recalling also that this work was done more than twenty years ago without any excavated sites nearby to compare with, we cannot draw very profound conclusions. The material anyway shows that there was a settlement on Tall Ashtara during the Iron II, dated through the red polished ware. Abou-Assaf calls this pottery "aramäische Keramik",<sup>52</sup> and since in recent years he has directed fieldwork at 'Ayn Dar'a north of Aleppo—definitely an Aramean/Neo-Hittite site—he is inclined to maintain that both sites show generally the same type of pottery.

One area mentioned in the Old Testament in relation to the appearance of the Arameans is the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and the southern Golan. Some trial soundings were taken up at 'Ein Gev by B. Mazar *et al.* in 1961,<sup>53</sup> and in 1967 Israeli scholars made a survey of 209 sites over a vast area.<sup>54</sup> Around ten sites mostly situated along the road between Fiq and Rafid show remains from the Iron Age. This pattern fits well with the texts of the OT telling us that the Arameans and the Israelites fought several battles along this road (1 Kgs 20,26 ff. and 2 Kgs 13,17 ff). There is one common denominator for all the areas so far mentioned: Investigations began there in the sixties—B. Mazar at 'Ein Gev, A. Abou-Assaf at Tall Ashtara, P. Lapp at Tall ar-Rumayth, followed by the extensive surveys of northern Jordan in 1963–66 and southern Golan in 1967–68.

At that time there was a tendency to read OT history into the results. The terminology used indicates this fact. 'Ein Gev Stratum V, founded on virgin soil, is said to belong to David's time and the first half of Solomon's reign, and Stratum III to an Aramean settlement dated to 886–841. In the next 100 years the settlement was thought to have been re-conquered by the Israelites until it came to an end in connection with Tiglath-Pileser III's campaigns against Israel. The earliest Stratum had a city

wall some 1.85m wide built of medium-sized field-stones filling in between. There were no Late Bronze remains or any signs of a transition period. The pottery was compared mostly with finds from Megiddo, Hazor and Samaria. The cooking pots had no handles and were of the shallow carinated type with concave rim. There is no explanation why Stratum V is dated to David's time. An earlier date is therefore not out of question. It can at least be suggested that the southern Golan was in the same cultural sphere as south Syria. At Tall Ashtara the same type of cooking pot appears as at 'Ein Gev. Stratum III is said to represent an Aramean settlement. There is a new layout of the site. In this period it is impossible to say if the settlers of a site were Israelites or Arameans. They used the same type of pottery (cf. Tall Ashtara) and certainly maintained the same cultural traditions. An inscription on a storage jar consisting of one horizontal line, inscribed before the jar was fired, reads *lšqy*, "belonging to the cup-bearers". It is Aramaic and paleographically dated to about 850 B.C. We may thus suggest that the language spoken in this area at this time was Aramaic. That could have been the case for centuries.

Ten years ago M. Kochavi presented "The Land of Geshur Project"<sup>55</sup> and so far reported trials and excavations at four sites, three of them very interesting for our quest of the Arameans. Stratum V at 'Ein Gev was founded on a site without any settlement traditions into the Bronze Age, but at Tell Soreg, situated about 5kms east of 'Ein Gev, people settled in the Intermediate Bronze Age and continued there without interruption until the Hellenistic period. In both the transition periods the pottery shows resemblances with types found in Jordan and the Jordan Valley. Finds of collared rim jar fragments date the beginning of the Iron Age at the site to about 1100 B.C. There are no Iron Age fortifications before Iron IIB, and although they are described in just a preliminary report the layout of the site seems to be the same as in other places from this time. This means that the settlement is assembled inside a rectangular citadel or fortress. Only sections are uncovered so far.

Extremely interesting is the report from Tall Ḥadar. This site was settled also in the Bronze Age, but the preliminary report devotes all of its interest to two strata of the Iron Age. Stratum II is dated to the end of the eleventh century B.C. Remains of a major building were uncovered, and according to the finds it had been used as a storage house for agricultural products. This building was surrounded by concentric double walls.<sup>56</sup> The distance be-

<sup>51</sup> M. Kadour and H. Seeden, *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 1 (1983) 77–94. No Iron Age remains are reported so far.

<sup>52</sup> *Tell Ashtara* (1967) 105f.

<sup>53</sup> See note 30.

<sup>54</sup> *Judaea, Samaria, and the Golan: Archaeological Survey 1967–1968* (1972) 244–298.

<sup>55</sup> See note 7.

<sup>56</sup> This pattern of double walls for defence is reported from several sites in Syria. One wall ran around the city and the inner wall around the acropolis. H. Sader (*op. cit.*, 287) says Sendjirli and probably also Tall Ashtara had a similar system of defence.

tween them seems to be about 20m. In Stratum I, dated to the eighth century B.C., the outer wall was used as the only wall of defence. Tall Ḥadar is situated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, 7kms north of 'Ein Gev. It seems to have been an administrative center in the area. The concentric double walls are an original pattern of defence, so we have to be aware of an early date. They could be typical for the Arameans. In the beginning of the Iron Age settlements often had an elliptic layout, simply to avoid building towers in the outer walls.<sup>57</sup> So perhaps it was most practical to defend Tall Ḥadar with walls that followed the terrain. The hill is circular. Without knowing any date—as no excavations have been done on the site—al-Baidar situated south of the Yarmūk across from the Zayzūn station shows a similar structure. A circular wall, approximately 45m in diameter surrounds the hill. On the east side is a gateway of dressed basalt blocks. According to the survey report the pottery belongs predominantly to the Late Bronze Age.<sup>58</sup> The area is somewhat isolated. Looking at the picture of the site there is room for another circular wall at the foot of the hill, but the report does not mention anything about that. In the transition period between the LBII and Iron I, we have to expect original layouts of the sites. Isolated as Tall Ḥadar and al-Baidar and built up in the same way are some sites in Ḥawrān. Khirbat aṭ-Ṭwāl has two concentric walls, the outer one 24m in diameter. The distance between the walls is about 5m. It is impossible to say anything for certain about the date except “certains fragments font penser à des formes de l'âge du Bronze”. There are other circular structures such as 'Ayn al-Jadida, diameter 25m, Kafr Lawfa, diameter 18m. etc. Some of these structures may have been built for the storage of grain; at the same time they were built strongly enough so they might be a defence for the grain supply.<sup>59</sup>

It is tempting to mention the sites of Khanāširi and Aydūn<sup>60</sup> in this connection. Less than 20kms west of al-Mafraq, Khanāširi holds a strategic position of the first order and is well fortified by a circular structure with a diameter of 65m. A moat 10m wide and still 6m deep surrounded the place. Date is unknown but pottery of the Early Iron Age has been found on the surface. Aydūn, situated about 3kms from al-Mafraq and al-Fidayn, has a circular construction of 90m diameter. The inner space is divided by radiating walls and vast cisterns have been cut into the rock on which the walls rest. The area around these two sites is very fertile and these sites too seem to have been built as easily defensible centers for the storage

of grain.<sup>61</sup>

### Tall al-Fukhār

A Scandinavian project on the Arameans was initiated by Professor Magnus Ottosson, University of Uppsala, who, together with Professor Svend Holm-Nielsen, University of Copenhagen, in 1989 drew up a plan to begin excavations in Syria. Due to practical circumstances, however, the project was moved to Jordan, and after discussions with Professor Dr. Moawiyah Ibrahim of Yarmouk University, Irbid, and Professor Dr. Siegfried Mittmann of Eberhard-Karls-Universität, Tübingen we were advised to open field-work on Tall al-Fukhār which was included in Dr. Mittmann's survey of northern Jordan in 1963–66. Excavation began on May 6, 1990, and the team included Professor Dr. John Strange, University of Copenhagen, and Professor Dr. Hans Barstad, University of Oslo. We were fortunate that Dr. Patrick McGovern, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, could join as pottery expert along with Mr. Flemming Andersen, University of Copenhagen, as typologist. The main intention of our work was to throw light on living conditions in northern Jordan during the Iron Age, especially in the Iron II, a period when according to the traditions in the Old Testament we could expect to find eventual proofs of an Aramean culture.

The excavations of Tall al-Fukhār went on for four seasons in 1990–1993. In the last two seasons Professor John Strange was the director of the excavations, financially supported by the University of Copenhagen. A final report is forthcoming.

Tall al-Fukhār may not have been the most central town or village in the area, but situated as it was about 6kms west of ar-Ramthā on the route to Irbid, remains there could tell us when the area was settled and how people made a living. The site is found at a sharp bend of the Wādī ash-Shallāla. It could easily be defended on the southern, western and northern sides which create natural glacis, and a gate system to the northeast would make the place fairly safe. There was certainly also a moat. On the north side there are remains of a solid wall dated to the LBII. The western slope is heavily eroded and bedrock is visible. On the southern very steep slope are cisterns cut into the bedrock, possibly for water although there are excellent water supplies in the valley to the southeast. Here tunnels—the length of which is as yet not known—have been cut into the hill next to the neighbouring site, Tall Umm Jurayn, about 250m southeast of Tall al-Fukhār.

<sup>57</sup> For a comparison see E. Olávarri, “La campagne de fouilles 1982 à Khirbet Medeinet al-Mu'arradjeh près de Smakieh (Kerak),” *ADAJ* 27 (1983) 165–178.

<sup>58</sup> *ADAJ* 22 (1977–1978) 122f.

<sup>59</sup> F. Braemer, *Syria* 61, 228ff.

<sup>60</sup> See Homès-Fredericq and Hennessy, *op. cit.*, 347f. (Khanāširi) and 125f. (Aydūn).

<sup>61</sup> Silos have a long tradition of being circular; see the very impressive system of nine circular structures with diameters between 7–9m in a building covering an area of 1200m<sup>2</sup> built of basalt at Kh. Karak, west of the Sea of Galilee. This building has most probably been a terminal for grain or a public granary, *IEJ* 2 (1952), 89–103. The same type of structures have been found in the Greek islands and in Egypt.



About 2kms north of the site is a concentration of ancient settlements with Khirbet ar-Rāḥūb as the center. Wādī ash-Shallāla has offered possibilities for people to settle from oldest times. Large fields in the area are convenient for cultivation. We can thus suggest that people living here have been agrarians. According to Professor Mittmann's survey we could expect to find remains from both the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

We started excavating in three areas, two on the top of the site, and a third trench was made on the northeast side. On top of the site the main structure, a villa, belongs to the Hellenistic period which can also be confirmed by the find of a coin dated to 240 B.C. Well-dug, stone-dressed and deep circular pits belong to the pattern of the Iron IIC period when the site was a threshing area.

On the northeast side of the site was a hill-like section which could easily be noted on the surface. Since we suspected that the east side, Area B, must have been the entrance way, we started to excavate there. After only two days we reached stone pavements along with robbed or broken stone walls laid directly on the ground. The humus level was sometimes very thin and naturally contained mixed pottery. The stone pavements next to the surface could be dated through a lamp found *in situ* on the floor and ovens made of two storage jars, one put inside the other, to the Iron IA-B period. The ovens had never been used. A beautifully dressed grinding stone or weight gave a complete picture of one floor section, dated by the lamp to about 1050 B.C. Stone pavements showed up, one above the other, laid in heavy clay material. The earliest ones are dated to the Transitional period, LBIIB-Iron IA. They were built up of material from the looted LBIIB town<sup>62</sup> and the builders used mostly the same floor level. The very hard clay was typical for all layers on the site. During rainy seasons the settlers must have had enormous problems living in this clay, and we could easily understand that preparing the ground with stone pavements was the only reasonable way to exist. All the stone pavements next to the surface in Area B could be dated to Iron IA-B. Half a meter below them there were the pavements laid in the Transitional period when the LBIIB walls had been looted and levelled out. A scarab of late Hyksos type, dated to around 1500 B.C., was found on stone pavement 8.<sup>63</sup> Some EBII-III sherds appeared. It seems as if the site was deserted for some time between the pavements. Heavy layers of reddish-burnt material had washed down the slope. A 150cm wide wall built of large boulders with cobble chinking running east-west was excavated to a length of around 15m. In one section it was combined with a casemate which formed a corner joining a southern wall to a strong defence system of the

LBIIB period. The joint wall running south was robbed down to the level of a stone pavement of the LBIIB-Iron IA period. Then the area looked like a camp site. The stones in the pavements were taken from previous structures, and parts of circular columns were "reused" to carry an eventual "roof". No remains of roof material were found. Fragments of pottery and tools of stone showed the repertoire of agrarian settlers. They had used cooking pots, storage jars of collared rim jar type, and bowls along with grinding stones, stone bowls, mortars, spinning whorls and loom weights. Most of the stone pavements from the different periods showed irregular lines.

As the name of the site is Tall al-Fukhār, "the hill of pottery", we expected to find remains of kilns and potters' work shops. Indeed there was very little pottery.

Tall al-Fukhār may not be a site where the remains can tell us all the history of the area east of Irbid and next to ar-Ramthā. There had been a beautifully built town in the LBIIB period, the Amarna time, but completely robbed and converted to a campsite in the following period. There was a small four-chambered gate with a narrow entrance way 110cm wide which had served the settlers of the Transitional period. In the Iron IA-B period the town followed in its layout the pattern of the LBIIB town with a city wall, 90cm wide, thus continuing the living traditions of the Bronze Age. In the periods Iron IIA-B nobody settled the site.

It is in these periods, however, that the Arameans should have governed the area according to the Old Testament. In the pottery repertoire on Tall al-Fukhār there was nothing indicating an Aramean presence. The red polished ware typical for the Arameans and the period (cf. Tell Ashtara) was totally missing. Instead there were sherds of western and south-western import. Only one body sherd covered by incised lines forming squares, possibly a game board, could be compared with a similar object in an Aramean context found at Ḥamāh (cf. B. Otzen, *The Aramaic Inscriptions in P. J. Riis and M.-L. Buhl, Hama. Fouilles et recherches de la Fondation Carlsberg 1931-1938, II 2. Les objets de la période dite Syro-Hittite (Age du Fer)*, 316. København 1990).

Since the excavations already in the first week were so negative regarding the Aramean period, we made a very thorough but limited survey on the west side of the site in order to find out if the result of the excavations thus far was locally limited, but all the Iron II sherds found there were judged as late from Iron IIC/Persian period, about 650-350 B.C. It can be said that there is relatively little change in pottery styles during the Iron II period, and the amount of pottery found in a limited survey cannot give exact information. Although it can also be said that the ex-

<sup>62</sup> See J. Strange, Tall al-Fukhār 1990-1991: A Preliminary Report, *SHAJ VI*, 399-406. 1997.

<sup>63</sup> M. Ottosson, *Syria. Chronique Archéologique Jordanie 70* (1993), 214-217.

cavations done thus far are very limited, nevertheless both stratigraphy and pottery ware types show no traces of Iron IIA–B. Excavation in other areas may reveal missing periods but I doubt it. A definite result, however, of the limited survey was the very great number of LBII sherds in comparison with the number of Iron Age specimens.

Since the survey results from about 32 sites—including Tall al-Fukhār—in northern Jordan are reported to show sherds from the periods Iron IIA–B, the excavators of Tall al-Fukhār are at this moment a bit confused. Our intentions were simply to reveal these periods as we thought they might be representative for an Aramean culture. But so far remains of the Iron IIA–B are totally missing. After four seasons we need to stress that our results are still preliminary, but there is no chance to find a settlement of the Iron IIA–B on the top of the *tall*. The strong erosion could naturally be an explanation. Further attention to this problem will be given in the future. Now we should be aware that the surveys of northern Jordan and the excavations at tell er-Rumeith are nearly 25 years behind us. And we have not had any opportunity to compare the pottery of the surveys with our own from Tall al-Fukhār. A complete “gap” of 500 years’ settlement in such a fertile area during the Iron Age must be regarded as very strange.

The main impression is that Tall al-Fukhār in the Late Bronze, LBII–Iron IA, Iron IA–B, Iron IIC/Persian and Hellenistic periods was an agrarian center. To judge from the small finds in the Transitional period the settlers had been breeders of sheep. Three teeth of a camel (domesticated?) were found next to an oven.

The heavy wall at Tall al-Fukhār can clearly be dated to the LBII and it was not used for defence in the Transitional period. A small section of it was used as support for a “citadel” and a glacis in the Iron IA–B. Possibly we can compare it with structures excavated at a couple of sites to the east in order to get an approximate idea. I am thinking of Tall ar-Rumayth and al-Fidayn. At the latter site Professor J.-B. Humbert reports a cyclopean fortress of large dimensions, about 70x45m dated to the Iron Age (11th–10th century?).<sup>64</sup> The stratigraphy thus far is preliminary, but Professor Humbert thinks that the region around al-Fidayn attracted the interest of the Arameans when they episodically penetrated into northern Jordan in the beginning of the Iron Age. Even if such a reconstruction of the history cannot yet be definitely proved, the existence of a fortress from the early Iron Age gives substance to the theory that during this time the area had a role of some importance. It is not so unusual that fortresses were built in fertile areas in the Iron Age; they

were in fact built to house garrisons, provide safety for the people, and for the storage of necessities.

The layout of an Iron Age site the same as al-Fidayn is found at Tall ar-Rumayth, situated some 10kms south of ar-Ramthā and 25kms northwest of al-Fidayn. This places the site in a suggested “Aramean” area. Here a fortress measuring 37x32m was constructed in Stratum VIII, considered to be Solomonic.<sup>65</sup> The next layer, Stratum VII “is attributed to the Arameans as the ceramic evidence indicates”. Conflicts between the Israelites and the Arameans as reported in the Old Testament are then read into the result of the excavations: “Pottery of the Syrian tradition dates to the middle of the 9th century. B. C.” A mudbrick fortress was strengthened by a stone fortress in the middle of the 9th century B.C. The destruction of the site is credited to Israelite kings, but Stratum VI is attributed to Aramean control. According to the excavator ar-Rumayth is the site where the Arameans are to be found. I have not succeeded in finding out what is meant by “pottery of Syrian tradition” since very little archaeological work was done in southern Syria until Abou-Assaf started his excavations at Tall Ashtara. According to the discussion held at the symposium on Jordanian archaeology in 1984, Professor M. Ibrahim expressed a similar sentiment. The bulk of the Iron I pottery at Saḥāb, southeast of Amman, showed connections with Palestine and northern Syria.<sup>66</sup> Such a statement gives the impression that a settlement in northern Jordan ought not be called “Aramean” until we find material which can be said to be typical for the Aramean culture, that is, inscriptions and maybe a special layout of structures surrounded by elliptic walls. But elliptic walls mostly surround a limited area scarcely fit for a settlement of town type, therefore the most natural explanation for them is that they were used as storage houses for grain. This cannot be typical just for Arameans but for any agrarian people. Silos are by tradition circular already in the Early Bronze period.<sup>67</sup> The finds made thus far do not give us any special ethnic hint, but if any guess in an ethnic direction is to be made, it is the Ammonite culture which has leavened the northern part of Jordan. But since the Kings’ Highway passed through the area foreign influences could be expected, and “cultural pressure” from the north is not out of question; it is in fact rather likely. North of the Yarmūk is naturally Damascus, the main Aramean center, and we can imagine that to the south it was important to keep strongholds in order to prevent enemies from this direction to entry into the Aramean area. From the OT we are informed that the Arameans now and then widened their political hegemony by attacks in southern Golan and along the Kings’ Highway in northern Jordan, and naturally they tried to go as far south as

<sup>64</sup> J.-B. Humbert, “(El)Fedein” in Homès-Fredericq and Hennessy II 1, 221–224.

<sup>65</sup> See picture of a section of the fortress in Homès-Fredericq and

Hennessy II 2, 495.

<sup>66</sup> Report in *Syria* 64 (1987) 335.

<sup>67</sup> See note 61.

possible. But such forward moves were certainly very sporadic as the east side of the Jordan was governed by the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites. Only infiltrating Israelites tried to prevent the Arameans from advancing south of the Yarmūk.

Leaving the OT outside the archaeological discussions we get the impression from the recent excavations in northern Jordan that the transition periods between Late Bronze II and Iron I and early Iron Age seem to show the most substantial remains. This is the case at Tall as-Sa'idiya in the Jordan Valley, Tall al-Fukhār and maybe al-Fidayn. Modern archaeological research has paid great attention to these periods in order to get some idea about human history during this time in the Near East. In many ways this is when the formative period of subsequent history began. The old system of city states suffered for many reasons: the climate of the area changed, rain failed,<sup>68</sup> and the economy weakened as the Egyptian influence on Cis- and Transjordan waned. The situation was such for about 300 years. As dry farming was the traditional way of cultivation we may expect that people would gather in places where there was moisture. People living on the fringes of the deserts with herds of cattle and sheep would suffer as the farmers could not produce enough bread for them; they therefore had to leave their anonymity "in the deserts" and organize themselves together with farmers of the Canaanite city states to become Habiru. Possibly some of them settled in the mountains and were strong enough to conquer the towns. We can expect that the area of northern Jordan with its valleys running into the River Jordan and into the Yarmūk would be convenient for starting a "new" sedentary life of agriculture. The pattern is nearly the same over all the Near East. It was not a peaceful time, and if we are engaged in a quest for the early history of the Arameans we should certainly start in the Transitional period LBII–Iron I. The "Ahlamu Arameans" appear in the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1077) as living in villages on the upper and middle Euphrates and in Syria. From here they made raids into the Assyrian area and often became lords of the caravan routes.<sup>69</sup> We do not know how far south the Ahlamu reached in the early beginnings of the Iron Age, but since some of them are described as Shasu<sup>70</sup> there could be early connections with the South and es-

pecially with southern Syria where they founded kingdoms. In their early history the Arameans appeared as raiders,<sup>71</sup> but in the second half of the Iron Age their economy was based on animal husbandry and agriculture. Each Aramean tribe, land, or city was governed by a Nasiku, a shaykh.<sup>72</sup> The Arameans themselves used the word *mlk*, "king", and possibly *mr*, "lord" or "king". But although the Assyrians mostly called them "raiders", the Arameans lived in villages and certainly got their income being peaceful farmers. If we imagine that Aramean groups both invaded and settled in the area south of the Yarmūk in the LBII–Iron I period, the remains on the stone pavements of Tall al-Fukhār indicate that they were rather poor agrarians and must have been shepherds rather than raiders.

Maybe the finds at Tall al-Fukhār are too early to represent a genuine Aramean culture, and perhaps also too late—when, according to OT traditions and the Assyrian and Aramaic texts there was hectic political activity in Syria and Palestine. During the Iron IIA–B Tall al-Fukhār seems to have been unsettled (cf. Fidayn). My proposal is that the Arameans lived mostly north of the Yarmūk in these periods and used the deep wadi to the south as a "moat of defence". According to the OT nearly all the battles between the Arameans and the Israelites were fought in the area south of the Yarmūk. This must mean that the Arameans made sporadic attacks south of the Yarmūk and then withdrew to their safe homeland.<sup>73</sup> Lacking Aramaic inscriptions and other finds said to be typical of an Aramean culture south of the Yarmūk, there is little likelihood that a sophisticated Aramean culture existed in the area. Historically informative texts have not even been found in Ḥamāh, one of the main Aramean centers in Syria.

### Postscript

Since this article was written, two monographs on the Arameans in the Iron Age had been published. P. E. Dion, *Les Araméens à l'âge du fer: histoire politique et structures sociales*. Paris 1997 and Carl-Johan Axskjöld, *Aram as the Enemy Friend. The Ideological Role of Aram in the Composition of Genesis-2 Kings*. Uppsala 1998.

Dion's book is a very comprehensive work and offers the reader an analysis of everything which so far is known about the Arameans through inscriptions and archaeolog-

<sup>68</sup> See E. Olausson, "Tephochronology and the Late Pleistocene of the Aegean Sea," in A. Strid (ed.), *Evolution in the Aegean. Opera Botanica* 30. (1971) 29–39. W. A. Ward and M. Sharp Joukowsky (eds.), *The Crisis Years: The 12th Century B. C. From Beyond the Dānube to the Tigris*. 1989, 13 ff. and 19 ff. M. Ottosson, *The Iron Age of Northern Jordan, History and Traditions of Early Israel. Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen*, May 8th 1993. Edited by André Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen. 1993, 90–103.

<sup>69</sup> J. A. Brinkman, *A Political History of the Post-Kassite Babylonia 1158–722 B.C.* (1968) 277ff.

<sup>70</sup> See Reinhold, *op. cit.*, 29ff.

<sup>71</sup> J. A. Brinkman, *op. cit.*, 267.

<sup>72</sup>

See most recently Ran Zadok, *Some Problems in Early Aramean History ZDMG Supp* 6, 22; *Deutschen Orientalistentag* (1985) 81–85.

<sup>73</sup> The modern monographs hitherto edited which analyze the archaeological and historical situation of Transjordan have not even mentioned the Arameans. I think of R. H. Dornemann, *The Archaeology of the Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (1983); R. G. Boling, *The Early Biblical Community in Transjordan* (1988); P. E. McGovern, *The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Central Transjordan: The Baq'ah Valley Project, 1977–1981* (1986).

ical finds. The results of previous authors are scrutinized and commented on in very substantial footnotes, as are all inscriptions also those found outside Syria. In the Iron IA-B-period the Arameans are characterized more or less as breeders and villagers with cultural traditions emanating from Amorite times. Sometimes it is difficult to give a definition of genuine Aramean culture. Dion divides the Arameans in a northern and a southern group with the demarcation line drawn east-west on a level with the sources of the Orontes at Libwa south of Ḥamāh. The main groups of the Arameans lived in northern and north-eastern Syria but in a very complex world until they were subjugated by the Assyrians around 850 B.C. With the fall of Ḥamāh in 720 the southern part of Syria and the roads to Palestine and Jordan were opened for the Assyrian armies. From Dion's book we get an impression how little historically is known about the southern Arameans from sources outside the Old Testament. Dion will not fall "in the OT-trap". He is very conscious about the tendential history writing of the Israelites. His book is an enormous work of scholarship.

Concerning the "southern" Arameans we have so far to refer to the archaeological work in the Golan and in northern Israel, especially Tall Dān with the inscriptions recently found. The language is Aramaic, but what is the difference between an Israelite and Aramean culture?

Carl-Johan Axskjöld was one of my students and he joined the Tall al-Fukhār project in 1990 in order to get material for his dissertation on the Arameans. He soon found out that the only possibility to be fair to the Hebrew text was to use it in an ideological way. Mostly the Arameans in the OT are regarded as unreasonable enemies but they are also collaborators. The investigation shows that the function of Aram is more often positive than not. But although there are some geographical names and historical episodes mentioned in the confrontations between the Arameans and the Israelites, Axskjöld finds it impossible to use this material in order to draw a realistic history of the period of the Iron II A-B. On Tall al-Fukhār we had the same situation. But I am inclined to judge the looters and settlers of the LBIIB town as Shasu or Ahlamu/ Arameans.