

LET THE STONES SPEAK

The magazine of the
ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2024



**EXCAVATING
IN TIMES OF**

WAR

OPHEL EXCAVATION 2024 **UPDATE**

LET THE STONES SPEAK

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2024 | VOL. 3, NO. 5 | CIRCULATION: 11,566

FROM THE EDITOR

A Perfect Example of *Letting the Stones Speak!* 1

The Message of the Tel Dan Stele 4

Israel's War Reveals the Need for Biblical Archaeology 8

OPHEL EXCAVATION 2024 UPDATE

Overview 10

Area D 12

Area D1 14

Small Finds 16

INFOGRAPHIC

2024 Ophel Excavation 18

Meet the Ophel Family 20

The Golden Earring Pendant of Jerusalem 26

The Earliest Biblical Text Ever Discovered! 32

It has been an honor and privilege to support the State of Israel all these years and to work alongside some of its great people and institutions.



Tel Dan Stele
The Tel Dan Stele is a large, yellowish-brown stone fragment with ancient Hebrew inscriptions. It is mounted on a black metal stand. The stone is broken and irregular in shape, with visible characters in a cuneiform-like script.



FROM THE EDITOR | GERALD FLURRY

A Perfect Example of *Letting the Stones Speak!*

A lesson for us all from the Tel Dan Stele

THE ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL Archaeology has participated in some thrilling archaeological adventures in Israel over the past 56 years. We were there for the massive Temple Mount excavations between the 1960s and 1970s. We were there for the discovery of King David's palace and Nehemiah's Wall from 2006 to 2008. This summer, amid the ongoing war, our excavation on the Ophel (our seventh at this site) was one of only a handful of excavations conducted across the country.

It has been an honor and privilege to support the State of Israel all these years. We have loved working alongside some of the nation's great people and institutions, including the late Dr. Eilat Mazar, Hebrew University, the Israel Antiquities Authority, the City of David and the Israel Museum. After all these years, and plenty of challenges and grueling work, our love for Israel and its biblical history and archaeology has only grown stronger. We believe the job of sharing Israel's biblical history has *never* been more important than it is right now.

On September 17, something truly wonderful happened at our "Kingdom of David and Solomon Discovered" exhibit in Edmond, Oklahoma. In fact, it was historic—at least for us. This was the day we installed the Tel Dan Stele, effectively *completing* this important exhibition. (We displayed a replica stele in the exhibit prior to the installation of the original.)

The Tel Dan Stele—or as I prefer to call it, the "house of David" inscription—is one of Israel's most important

artifacts. I believe it is one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made, and one of *humanity's* most important ancient treasures.

The inscription was made by King Hazael of Syria in the mid-ninth century B.C.E. This king had recently led his Aramean forces into battle against the allied forces of Jehoram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah (2 Kings 9). Hazael's campaign was successful, and he boasted about his military victory on a basalt victory stele that he set up as a monument in the northern Israelite city of Dan. On the ninth line of the stele, this is recorded: "[I killed Jeho]ram son of [Ahab] king of Israel, and I killed [Ahaz]yahu son of [Joram kin]g OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID. ..."

This expression, "house of David," is used 26 times in the biblical text. Discovered in 1993, the Tel Dan Stele provided the first conclusive archaeological evidence of King David's existence as a true historical figure. Beyond that, it proved that he was the head of a royal dynasty—just as the Bible describes. It showed that his dynasty was so well known that a Syrian king—*living more than 150 years after David*—still referred to that line of kings as belonging to David's dynasty.

This artifact is uniquely special because of how powerfully it complements the biblical text, and especially the history of David, Solomon and the kingdom of Israel. The Hebrew Bible, which records the riveting, detailed history of biblical Israel, is central to the origins and identity of Western civilization. So many of our institutions, beliefs and traditions, huge parts of

our culture and religion, our justice system, our Judeo-Christian values, are *rooted* in the Hebrew Bible. This is one reason the “house of David” inscription is crucial for Western civilization: Archaeology establishes the credibility and authority of the text that is at the core of our identity!

This priceless piece of ancient history has been to America only once before: In 2014, it was briefly exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Armstrong Auditorium and the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology are honored and enormously grateful to display this item, and to share it with the people of Oklahoma and beyond.

First, we are thankful to the State of Israel and its wonderful people. We understand the importance of this precious artifact to your history, and we are honored to share it with those who visit us. We are also grateful to the Israel Antiquities Authority, to its director, Eli Eskosido, and especially to Dr. Orit Shamir, head of international exhibitions. Bringing an object this important to America was a long and somewhat precarious journey, and we couldn't have navigated it without Orit's counsel.

We are grateful to Dinesh D'Souza, the award-winning author, filmmaker and podcaster, who joined us for the opening event celebrating the stele's arrival and delivered a brilliant keynote address. We have reprinted Mr. D'Souza's address in this issue (page 4). Be sure to read it. It explores the importance of the stele in a profound and compelling way.

Finally, we are grateful to our friends at the Israel Museum of Jerusalem, one of the finest museums in Israel, where the stele is usually on display. Thank you for sharing your most important artifact with us. We are especially thankful to Dr. Haim Gitler, chief curator of archaeology at the museum; Suzanne Landau, the museum director; and to our friend Pirchia Eyall, curator of Iron Age and Persian Period archaeology, who was instrumental in making this loan happen and delivered the artifact to Armstrong Auditorium.

I watched Pirchia install the “house of David” inscription in its cabinet in Armstrong Auditorium. Seeing it on display against the backdrop of the larger exhibit about David and Solomon, I couldn't help but

The inscription on this stele brings to mind a remark Eilat made often: “We must let the stones speak.” I heard her make this statement countless times.



Gerald Flurry examines the stele prior to installation at Armstrong Auditorium.

think about the late Dr. Eilat Mazar, and even her grandfather, Prof. Benjamin Mazar, and all our history together. Dr. Mazar spent most of her professional life searching for King David. I think she would have been thrilled with our exhibit—which features her excavations and includes a lot of her research—and so excited to see the stele with us in Oklahoma.

Dr. Mazar is no longer with us, but it is important to recognize her place in our exhibit and in our archaeological work. This is the greatest biblical artifact in the world, and I believe Dr. Mazar deserves some of the credit for it being displayed in our exhibit.

The inscription on this stele brings to mind a remark Eilat made often: “We must let the stones speak.” I heard her make this statement countless times. She used it in interviews and in all her tours of the Ophel and the City of David. In a way, it perfectly embodies Dr. Mazar's approach to archaeology. (This phrase is so etched on our minds that we named our magazine and podcast *Let the Stones Speak*.)

What does it mean? Essentially, it means *listen to the science*, which includes ancient texts. Archaeology is the science (and art) of excavating history—ancient walls and buildings, pottery and vessels, inscriptions and writings,



Pirchia Eyal and Brad Macdonald with the Tel Dan Stele at Armstrong Auditorium

coins, seal impressions, religious objects and a host of other items. Almost every object found will tell us *something* about the ancient past. When several objects from the same period are found *together*, the message can be clearer and more complete. Letting the stones speak means listening objectively to the message they tell.

For Dr. Mazar, letting the stones speak included using the biblical text, which records much of the history of people she was resurrecting through her archaeology. When the documented biblical history harmonizes with the archaeology—the story told by the stones—then the message could be considered accurate and trustworthy. Often, very little interpretation was needed.

There is no better example of archaeology harmonizing with the biblical text than the “house of David” inscription. The text inscribed on the stone slab is literally the same as the text written in 26 verses in the Hebrew Bible.

THE TEL DAN STELE IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A STONE THAT SPEAKS!

And what a message it has. King David was *real*. The kingdom of Israel was *real*. The dynasty of David was *real*. This discovery, then, points to the reliability of the Bible as a historical text.

This lesson about the veracity of the Hebrew Bible has never been more important to Israel, or to America and the West. Even now, Israel is engaged in war with an enemy who wants nothing less than to vanquish the Jewish state and the Jewish people. And these terrorists want to take their war beyond Israel.

Sadly, many today have forgotten Israel’s history. They have forgotten about its deep connection to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, to David, Solomon and the Hebrew prophets. They have forgotten about the Bible’s role in Western civilization. This is why our exhibit, and the “house of David” inscription, is so crucial. It reminds us of this history. And when you understand and appreciate this history, you understand why Israel must defend itself, and how, as it defends itself, it is defending the Hebrew Bible and even Western civilization.

Dr. Mazar understood this well. “If you don’t understand our history, you won’t be willing and prepared to defend the nation, our people and culture,” she said. “This history unites our people.”

The Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology is proud to exhibit the beautiful history of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. The “house of David” inscription will help us do this more effectively. We look forward to many future projects in Jerusalem and Israel, and will remain fervent in our support and love of the Jewish state and her brave people.

Finally, if you can, I encourage you to visit our exhibit, “Kingdom of David and Solomon Discovered,” at Armstrong Auditorium in Edmond, Oklahoma. The “house of David” inscription will be on display until November 30. To learn more about the exhibit, visit ArmstrongInstitute.org. ■




The Message of the Tel Dan Stele

On September 22, the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology celebrated the arrival of the Tel Dan Stele in America. The stele is on loan from the Israel Museum and the Israel Antiquities Authority and is currently featured in the “Kingdom of David and Solomon Discovered” archaeological exhibit in Edmond, Oklahoma. The stele will be available for public viewing till November 30. (For more details, visit ArmstrongInstitute.org.)

This sensational object, perhaps Israel’s most important archaeological find ever, is the key that unlocks the archaeology of King David and his royal dynasty.

The keynote address at the “house of David” inscription opening was delivered by the award-winning documentarian, bestselling author and esteemed political commentator, Dinesh D’Souza. This is a slightly edited version of Mr. D’Souza’s outstanding speech.



I FEEL UTTERLY UNQUALIFIED TO BE GIVING this keynote address. My own work on Israeli archaeology is woefully incomplete, to put it mildly. But I want to approach this marvelous artifact, this stele, from a somewhat different point of view.

Dr. Eilat Mazar often said, “Let the stones speak.” But what is this particular stone saying? What is the message of the stone? Well, to me, to put it in almost crude terms, it is kind of God’s “Leroy was here.”

The figure of David has been considered over many centuries, even by skeptics, a kind of marvelous literary creation. David is the ultimate story of the underdog. There’s the account of David against Goliath, and then the astounding story of David and Bathsheba, which I think establishes David, not just as an adulterer, but a horrific criminal who sends an innocent man to his death and for no other reason other than the fact that he has designs on the man’s wife. How can a figure so dubious, so suspect, be one of the great heroes of the Bible and of Western civilization?

It’s important to note here that we’re not talking merely about the history of ancient Israel or the Jewish people. We’re talking about *our* history. When America’s founders crossed the pond, when they came here to America, they brought with them Athens and they brought with them Jerusalem. They brought with them the *legacy of David* and the teachings of the Hebrew Bible.

In the story of David, you have this climatic scene where the Prophet Nathan approaches the king on his throne and tells him a story about a rich man who had many lambs and was planning a great banquet, but instead of using one of *his* lambs, or several of his lambs, he goes to the poor man and takes his lamb. The Bible tells us that David’s anger burned, and David says, *This man deserves to be severely punished—if not killed!*

Then the Prophet Nathan points to David and says, *You are that man!* The remarkable thing about this incident—and this explains David in a nutshell—is David’s reaction. The *normal* reaction would be, *Execute that man!* But that’s not David’s reaction. Instead, David says, *I have sinned before God.* And so, it is the *repentance* of David, the humility of David, that in a sense is morally etched on the Western soul through the centuries.

Yet it appeared until relatively recently that David was kind of a story. *These people can’t be real! Could these figures in the Hebrew scriptures actually be real? And even if they were real, how would we know?* What possible record could be left that would attest to the historicity of these figures? David and the other biblical figures seemed to be lost in the mist of time.

Speaking to a Skeptical Age

In a sense, you may say that the entire system of beliefs of the West, the idea of Jerusalem—which of course is an idea that is embraced not just by the Jews, but also by Christianity—appears to be entirely in the province of faith or revelation. Meanwhile, the tradition of Athens appears to be squarely in the province of reason.

Athens reflects the critical mind; it’s the place of Socrates, the birthplace of philosophy. Athens taught us how to use our brains. Jerusalem is essentially the antithesis of that. Jerusalem is, “God says so” and “Take it on faith.” Jerusalem is “Faith is somehow better than reason.” And this has created in some sense the bifurcation of the Western mind. Much of the attack on Jerusalem today comes in the name of Athens. You could almost say that the enlightenment in a nutshell is mobilizing the spirit of Athens against the spirit of Jerusalem. *Reason reigns supreme; you can’t believe the Bible!*

Yet it seems that this secular age—this age of skepticism, of disbelief—is also the age of the utter flouting and rejection of the moral code that comes out of Jerusalem.

I’m sure if you lived in America 50 years ago, you walked around the country, you talked to people, and you said, “Do you agree that the Ten Commandments are a really good way to live? If everybody lived by the Ten Commandments, would America be a better society? Yes or no?” I think you’d find that 99 percent of Americans—whether Christian or Jewish or nothing at all—would respond, *Of course, obviously!* While Western civilization was built, the belief of God and the belief in an external, moral code was obvious.

We are living at a time when it is not only *not* obvious, but we are living in a time when there is a multidimensional attack on not just the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob but also the *moral code* that was in a sense given by

that God through Moses and, in other forms, through the commandments. This is all under siege today! And it's under siege from people who make remarks like, *I don't know, Dinesh. You've got a sacred book; the Hindus have a sacred book; the ancient Greeks believed in all kinds of Greek mythology. If you have a holy book and they have a holy book, how do you know your holy book is real?*

Enter Biblical Archaeology

I believe this is the context in which we should think about biblical archaeology. When we think about biblical archaeology, it is almost as if God has decided in this most secular time to start speaking back. And He is doing it through the stones—the artifacts. Of course, the stones actually aren't speaking—stones can't speak. God is speaking through the stones. And what is He saying? God is saying, *I'm going to take some of the most iconic moments in the astounding Hebrew scriptures, and I'm going to show you that they are real!*

The Bible makes some astounding claims that, on the face, appear not only unverifiable but somewhat ridiculous. Think about David, king over a huge, powerful dynasty in Israel that dominated the region. Wait, what? What about the Egyptians? What about the Babylonians? What about the Assyrians? What about the Hittites? We know that these were massive, powerful, empires, and you're telling me that little Israel sort of whipped them all and became the greatest of all?

Well, as it turns out, and as we learn now and *only* now, those dynasties had almost mysteriously subsided around the period of Solomon and David. During this period, all of these people, oddly enough, seemed to be kind of flat on their back and you have a period of Israelite ascendancy. And then that period of ascendancy was over, and those dynasties experienced a revival. This is not a matter of faith; this is actually now a matter of fact.

The Bible tells us all these things from the first lines of the Old Testament: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—and the insinuation is that God did this out of nothing. Now, right there you have something that contradicts what the ancient Greeks believed. The Greeks believed that out of nothing can only come nothing, and therefore, God has to be some sort of a divine Craftsman who takes existing materials that must have been there forever, and then, carpenter-style, *remakes* them into the world we have now. But the idea that you could make something out of nothing—well, that's crazy. Yet that is asserted as a *fact* in the Bible and by a group of Hebrew writers who have not conducted any experiments and not done really any philosophical speculations, but essentially have said, *God told me.*

And yet, if we fast-forward to today, to the most recent discoveries of modern physics and cosmology, we

learn in fact—and you learn this in a physics classroom in any decent university in the first three weeks—that first there was nothing, and then there was a universe. We now know that the biblical account is *supported* by the latest knowledge of modern physics and cosmology.

The Bible also talks about this remarkable group of people: the Jews. And it says categorically that these are the people of God. God chose them. Now, it's why God chose them that I think is just as big a mystery in Israel as it is to us. The writer Hilair Beloff many years ago composed a poem that went like this: "How odd of God to choose the Jews." That's the poem. And it's not because of the supreme virtues of Abraham or the spotless moral life of David.

It appears that God chose the Jews to represent something in the world. To represent, if you will, God's laws, God's preferred way of life for man.

And very interestingly, the Bible says that this people, scattered, will return to their ancestral homeland. Now you have to really just look at history to see what an implausible prophecy that is!

Prophecies, by the way, are valid in direct proportion to their implausibility. What I mean by that is that if I say, *Hey, I'm going to toss a coin and guess what? It's going to come out heads.* I've got a 1 in 2 chance of that happening. But if I say I'm going to spin a roulette wheel that has numbers 1 to 100 and you're going to get number 89, that's a somewhat more impressive prophecy because the chances of that happening are pretty low.

When you consider that the Jews dispersed around 70 C.E.—that they scattered to the far winds of the Earth—the idea that they would not just return and reunite but reunite *exactly* in the place where they started—what's the chance of that? This is a people that have very much, in the spirit of biblical prophecy, persisted.

My wife and I visited Israel for the first time not too long ago. We have been to lots of places, but Israel had a very peculiar and dramatic impact on us for a number of reasons. Right away upon arriving in Israel you know that you are in a modern society *but one that remains anchored in the old world.* The world of the Bible is visible in Israel even today!

But the thing that struck us even more than that was meeting archaeologists in Israel who, in the spirit of Dr. Eilat Mazar, told us, *We approach archaeology with the Bible in the left hand and our tools in the right hand.* What does this mean exactly? Let's say if we're looking for Sodom and Gomorrah, we don't just go start digging. We read the Bible, and it gives you clues about what Abraham saw, where the mountain was, and where the smoke came from. And we apply those clues and we go look there and we see what we find. I want to emphasize here that this is not some kind of theological or religious

That's exactly what Dr. Mazar did. Again, that is not biblical speculation. This is, in fact, using an ancient text as a clue, a marker, to then go and look and dig for artifacts.

hocus-pocus. This is actually very sound archaeology. In fact, it's a very sound way to go about finding things out in general.

Let's say you were trying to figure out whether the Trojan War really happened. How would you do that? Let's say you were trying to find not only whether it happened but where it happened. Well, you'd obviously pick up Homer's *Iliad* in one hand and Homer's *Odyssey* in the other, and you would look for clues. You might see that there are two whirlpools—Askilla and Coribnis—and then you would study the ocean to see where that kind of current can be found, where ships can be lost if they go left or if they go right. In other words, you would use the ancient text to make predictions, and then you would go search to see if those predictions proved to be corroborated.

That's exactly what Dr. Mazar did. Again, that is *not* biblical speculation. This is, in fact, using an ancient text as a clue, a marker, to then go and look and dig for artifacts!

This concept of biblical archaeology is astounding. It's not something that I knew a lot about. And I feel silly admitting this, because I spent several years (between 2008 and 2012) debating a lot of the world's leading atheists in universities around America and sometimes abroad. I debated people like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and the philosopher Daniel Bennett, and we would debate cosmology and physics and history. But when it came to the field of biblical archaeology, I knew *nothing*. And yet I think this is the field that is going to make the difference in the years ahead! This is because people all over the world with a secular mindset are going to be able to see artifacts like the Tel Dan Stele, either firsthand or through media.

Past, Present, Future

In the future, I hope to make a film that encompasses these themes. I want people who aren't lucky enough to see the Tel Dan Stele in person, who aren't lucky enough to go to Israel, to see for themselves the way in which God is speaking back through the stones.

For me, this is a story that is not just about the past, and it's not even just about the present. It is about the

deep linkage between the past—the *ancient* past—and the present and the future. Why? Because if one looks around the world, it doesn't take a great deal of strategic genius to recognize that the conflicts of 3,000 years ago are, in only a slightly modified form, back with us today. How can that be possible?

Here's Israel, circa 1000 B.C.E. and it's surrounded by hostile enemies. And if the Israelites are the people of God, then the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Moabites and the Philistines are the enemies of God, at least in this context. So there is an actual battle that reverberates with, you may say, *cosmic* significance because it involves good and evil in the widest scale.

Then we fast-forward to now, and what do we see? The *same* people, the Israelites, the Jews, in the same place surrounded by hostile enemies, enemies dedicated to "wiping Israel off the map." Who are the Palestinians? Where did we get that name? Well, the name *Palestine* is derived from the word *Philistine*, an ancient enemy of Israel. I'm not saying it's in the identical form, because obviously we've had the intervention of Islam. But the enemies of ancient Israel were pagans, worshipers of idols. Now we have an enemy, radical Islam, that oddly enough is *within* the Abrahamite tradition; radical Islam claims to be the final revelation of the God of Israel, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And we have a new conflict going on *now*. You have the remote past connected to the present.

From the beginning, the Bible draws us in with mystery, and yet as I said, you have the remote past connected to the biblical present. The role of the prophets, the Israelite prophets, is to make critiques of the present as a way of pointing to the future. There is a beautiful completeness to the Hebrew Bible.

The only question that we have is, will that completeness be somehow reflected in the actual history of the world as it plays out? Because the history of the world is still going on. We don't know the end—that's a story that hasn't achieved completion. But there are hints about it in the Hebrew scriptures.

So for me, all of this is a way of illuminating more than just the ancient past. There was this great King David. He's a moral exemplar, and we can learn a lot from him. But also, how does this cosmic drama play out in our own lives? And how does it play out in the actual history that is unfolding before our eyes?

Finally, I want to commend and congratulate the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology for convincing the Israelis to part with this priceless artifact and to bring it here. I don't know how you did it, but you did it, and I commend you. Debbie and I are delighted to be here, and thank you for having me be part of this marvelous exhibit and this wonderful exhibition. ■



Israel's War Reveals the Need for Biblical Archaeology

Excavating, publishing and sharing Israel's biblical history has never been more important.

BY BRAD MACDONALD

THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARILY CHALLENGING AND sobering time for Israel. The nation is engaged in an intense war with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran—a three-headed genocidal war machine that seeks Israel's annihilation and the extermination of the Jewish people.

To make matters worse, Israel hasn't received much wholehearted or meaningful support from the international community, including its longtime allies. There

was an initial outburst of encouragement following the shocking events of Oct. 7, 2023, but this quickly turned tepid.

This is a pivotal moment for Israel. Nothing less than the preservation of the Jewish people and the sovereignty of the Jewish state is at stake. While the people of Israel understand they are fighting for their lives, many people outside of Israel fail to get this. This means we do not understand another stark, much more *personal*, reality: This war is also a pivotal moment for Western civilization—and the outcome will impact all of us.

The Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology (AIBA) is not political. We do not support a particular politician or political party, and we avoid political discussion or debate. This magazine, sent to 81 countries, has readers from every faith, race and political persuasion. We appreciate and respect *every* single reader.

AIBA's primary focus is on exploring and sharing Israel's biblical archaeology. Through this magazine, our website (ArmstrongInstitute.org) and our various archaeological enterprises in Israel, we show that archaeology complements the Hebrew Bible and that the Hebrew Bible complements archaeology. We show how science and archaeology bring the Hebrew Bible and all that it encompasses—its history, its poetry and writings, its prophets—to life. And we show how the *biblical text* can bring the practice of archaeology to life. Again, we are not political.

But today we all face a sobering reality. This assault on Israel is, at the same time, an assault on the *Hebrew Bible* and on *archaeology*. It is an assault on the field of biblical archaeology.

We must strive to fully comprehend the stakes. Those seeking Israel's destruction do not merely seek the eradication of the Jewish people or the sovereignty of Israel; they seek the destruction of the *history* and *identity* of the Jewish people. Given the opportunity, they would vanquish even the *memory* of the Jews and their presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. For the people of Israel, the horrors perpetrated by Hamas last year made this reality extremely personal, which is why the large majority recognize the need for war.

But this is personal for the rest of the world too, especially the West. Why? Because the assault on Israel is an

assault on Western civilization. How? It's simple: Israel's history is *our* history.

No other people or place on Earth can make this claim. The history of Israel, and more specifically *the history and teachings of the Hebrew Bible*, is pivotal to the *identity* of Western civilization. The Jewish people have made invaluable contributions in various fields, including religion, philosophy, science, literature and ethics. Judaism, one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, laid the groundwork for the development of Christianity. The Jews and the Hebrew Bible have shaped and molded Western culture and thought, influencing everything from morality to politics, medicine to justice to religion.

The effort to eradicate Israel isn't merely a war on a sovereign nation or group of people. It is an attack on the Western world, on our history, culture and origins. It's an attack on the land of our earliest forefathers: on the prophets, kings and apostles who define our religious, political, cultural and philosophical beliefs—on the book that defines who we are and supplied many of our morals and values. When we talk about our Judeo-Christian heritage, we are talking about Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the land of the Hebrew Bible.

This is why the events unfolding in Israel are so deeply personal. And this is why AIBA supports the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

This is not to say Israel or its government is above reproach. Israel's government and leadership—like every nation and every government—have major flaws and defects. But we believe that Israel, its land, people and history are supremely important to Western civilization. Why? One reason is that Israel's story is *our* story.

There are many reasons why this is so crucial. Let me give you one, from the perspective of our field of biblical archaeology. In many ways, Israel's war for survival and our efforts to uncover and document Israel's history in the Holy Land are the same effort, and they mutually reinforce each other. Here is one example, from one of the most towering men in the Hebrew Bible.

A Lesson From King David

King David is one of the most famous figures in world history. Even today, 3,000 years on, he remains a household name. If the West created a Mount Rushmore of its greatest figures, one could make a strong case David should be on it.

The life and history of David, recorded and expounded throughout the Hebrew Bible and perpetuated in the Western psyche for 3,000 years, has significantly influenced the religion, politics and culture of Western civilization. David's life embodies the

The effort to eradicate Israel isn't merely a war on a sovereign nation or group of people. It is an attack on the Western world, on our history, culture and origins.

enduring themes of leadership, faith and human fallibility. For thousands of years David has been a symbol of unity, strength and physical and moral courage; flawed but humble, and bestowed with divine favor—he is a prototype of the ideal king.

The psalms of David, which are some of the greatest, most enduring literature ever published, have formed the basis of so many of our religious teachings and traditions and have enriched the lives of millions. Culturally, David's narrative has inspired countless works of art, literature and music, from medieval manuscripts to modern adaptations. There's Michelangelo's famous sculpture, Caravaggio's masterful *David and Goliath* painting, and the myriad literary references to Israel's king by iconic authors like Shakespeare, Milton and Dickens.

David was a warrior-king, a poet and musician, a shepherd and farmer, a husband and father. He was the patriarch of an enduring royal dynasty, one that echoes into modern times. The Bible records that David was unique, exceptional, a “man after God's own heart”—yet his life also epitomizes the human condition, one so familiar to us all: conflicted, flawed, incomplete.

King David was an epic figure—but was he real?

There was a time when this question was widely debated. Many scholars were convinced that David was a work of fiction and that the Hebrew Bible was unusable as a historical source. In 1992, Bible skeptic Phillip Davies summarized the view of many scholars when he published a book in which he wrote: “Whoever is living in the Palestinian highlands around 1000 B.C.E. [the time of David and Solomon] they do not think, look or act like the people the biblical writers have put there. *They are literary creations*” (emphasis added).

This was an assault on David and the Hebrew Bible.

Unfortunately for Davies, the timing of this scorching denunciation couldn't have been worse. About six months after his book was published, the “house of David” inscription was discovered in Tel Dan, causing an earthquake in the world of biblical archaeology and Bible scholarship. The “house of David” inscription is the *key* that unlocks the archaeology of King David!

After the discovery of the Tel Dan Stele, the conversation around Israel's greatest king suddenly and

SEE WAR
PAGE 36

OPHEL EXCAVATION OVERVIEW

JERUSALEM'S OPHEL IS A raised hill situated directly between the Temple Mount (to the north) and City of David (to the south). The Ophel—a name used for the area in several biblical passages—was the royal acropolis for the kingdom of Judah, the seat of the palace and administration from the time of Solomon until the fall of the city in 586 B.C.E. During later periods—namely the Roman, Byzantine and early Muslim—the Ophel was a site of significant construction and development.

The Ophel is a unique site in Jerusalem because in the centuries since it has remained largely undeveloped. Other than intermittent archaeological excavations, the site remains virtually untouched, which is surprising given its unique setting and tremendous historical significance.

From 1968 to today, the area spanning the southern wall of the Temple Mount complex has experienced multiple excavations. The first major excavation was Prof. Benjamin Mazar's "Big Dig" of 1968–1978 (this was a joint project between Hebrew University and Ambassador College, a liberal arts institution created by our namesake, Herbert W. Armstrong). Between 1986 and 1987, Professor Mazar excavated the Ophel with his granddaughter, Eilat Mazar. In 2009, Dr. Eilat Mazar returned to the eastern side of the Ophel, this time with Herbert W. Armstrong College (this latest excavation was our seventh on the Ophel). This part of the Ophel has been variously labeled by officials as the "most important archaeological site in Jerusalem" and even the "most important site in all Israel."

The 2024 Ophel Excavation, once again codirected by Prof. Uzi Leibner and Dr. Orit Peleg-Barkat—and again, in joint participation between Hebrew University (HU) and Armstrong College—continued in the same general area as the previous two excavations (2022 and 2023): on the eastern edge of the Ophel, overlooking the steep Kidron Valley. The team continued to excavate through primarily Byzantine material and continued to expose significant remains of an earlier complex, from what could variously be termed as the late Second Temple, Early Roman, Herodian or New Testament periods.

This earlier Second Temple Period complex, which we continue to expose, constituted a significant ritual purity/washing area, with pools and a drainage system, facilitating the needs of pilgrims and worshipers before entering the temple precinct, up until the destruction of the site in 70 C.E.

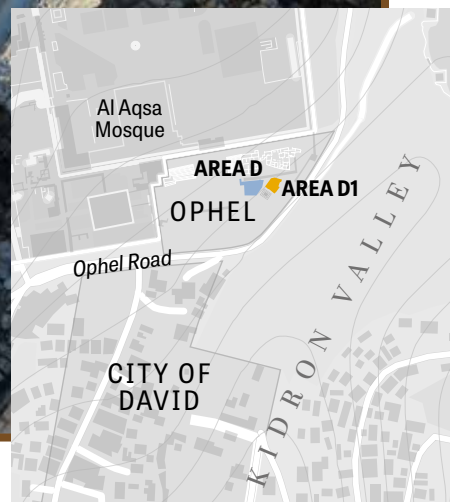
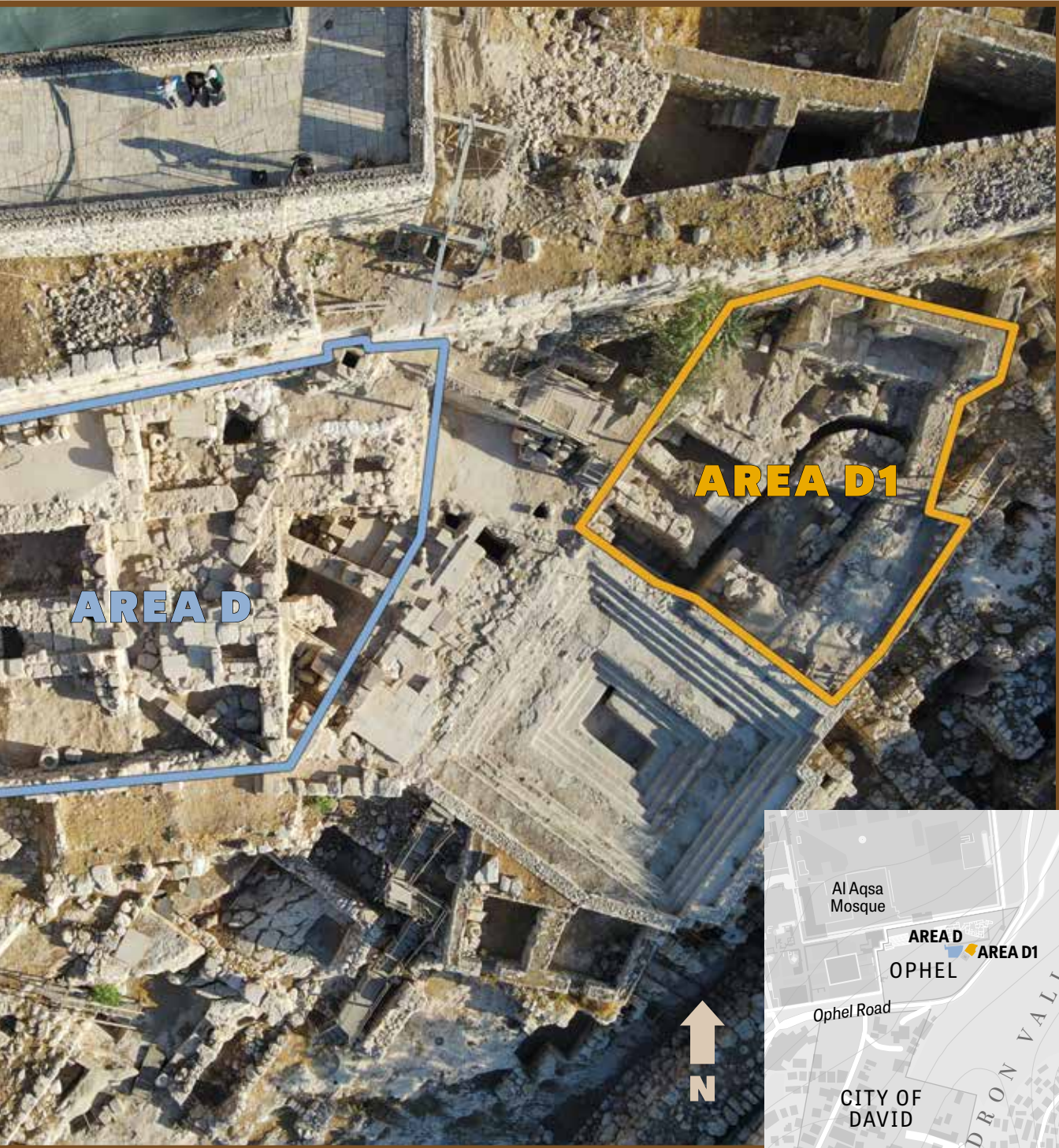
The 2024 dig consisted of two areas of excavation: areas D and D1. We excavated both these areas last season. The aim this year was to expand both areas, in terms of numbers of workers, territory covered and work accomplished. In just five weeks of work, the team—which varied between 30 to 40 volunteers—filled four 30-ton truck trailers and 21 large construction site skips with excavated earth and stone. We removed around 300 tons of material from the site and, more importantly, filled boxes and crates with valuable artifacts to be studied in the coming months and years.

The following is a snapshot of what we accomplished in areas D and D1, including a few of the discoveries we made.



ELURAN HARIRI

ION 2024



AREA



AERIAL PHOTO: ELIRAN HARIRI. EXCAVATION PHOTOS: AUBREY MERCADO/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY (6)

D



AREA D IS THE LARGER OF THE two areas. It is higher in elevation and is primarily occupied by a large multi-room Byzantine structure. This structure exhibits several phases of construction (up to four) and obscures the majority of the monumental Second Temple Period building underneath (the side walls of this earlier structure can be seen primarily at the southwestern end of the Byzantine building).

The goal this year was dual. First, to continue excavating the Byzantine structure, documenting its phases of construction. This is a significant structure with a surprising richness of finds, especially of a liturgical nature, suggesting a church was situated somewhere in the vicinity of the building. The various phases of construction exhibited allow the opportunity to examine the advancement of the domestic Byzantine neighborhood that developed in this Ophel location during this time. Second, our goal was to further reveal the significant Second Temple Period building underneath. The initial discovery of parts of this structure in 2013 and 2018 (during our excavations with Dr. Eilat Mazar) was exciting—particularly given the exceptional quality of construction, with finely dressed ashlar stones and steps.

Several surprises came from the 2024 season of excavation.

We were surprised to learn how extremely high the preservation of the late Second Temple Period building was

within the Byzantine structure. When the dig began, we assumed that there was still a significant way to go to descend to the level of the earlier Herodian Period remains. However, these remains began appearing almost immediately across Area D. This high preservation of several early walls indicates the presence of more archaeological remains from this earlier period than we originally anticipated.

Another surprise was the tantalizing possibility that we may have discovered a large Iron Age (First Temple Period) wall. This is not something we expected considering the high elevation of Area D (Iron Age remains have been discovered on the Ophel, but they are all in much lower elevation sections to the south and east). Right now, it appears our Herodian Period structure may have been integrated with this wall. Further excavation is needed to prove that the wall dates as far back as the First Temple Period, but the surprising quantity of early pottery indicates this as a possibility.

Another surprise came at the very end of the season: the discovery of part of a Herodian vault at the southern end of Area D. This matches another parallel vault found at the end of the 2023 season on the eastern edge of Area D.

Numerous small finds discovered this season include nearly 150 coins, pilgrim flask fragments, figurines depicting Roman goddesses, Roman legion tiles and an ornate Roman table fragment.

AREA

AREA D1 ORIGINATED IN 2022 AS the designation for a complex subterranean drainage system that carried water from the mikvaot (ritual purification baths) built into the grand Second Temple Period monumental building contained within Area D (hence the diminutive name, Area D1). With this underground tunnel system now cleared, this year Area D1 significantly expanded east into outer, adjacent areas.

This season Area D1 primarily consisted of four Byzantine rooms east of Area D; the excavation of which also revealed numerous Second Temple Period walls and fully exposed the remaining drainage system.

This final, outer stretch of the Herodian Period drainage system provided the biggest surprise, particularly given its exceptionally high walls (preserved up to nearly 3 meters in height) and sweeping, curved—rather than straight—continuation. An even earlier Second Temple Period room was also discovered in Area D1, including a doorway and threshold.

Additionally, a sealed Herodian stepped water reservoir was discovered, brimful of complete or near-complete vessels. Currently, just the outline and upper part of this reservoir has been exposed; this reservoir will be fully excavated next season. More of an even earlier, large Second Temple Period mikveh (ritual purification bath) continued to be revealed in Area D1 this season (the very edge of which had been first

revealed last season); the preservation of some of the well-worked walls of this mikveh is also impressive, one of which stands at well over 3 meters tall. This earlier mikveh was most likely a public one. Its discovery has significant implications for our understanding of the development of the Ophel as a public area serving pilgrims in different stages of the Second Temple Period.

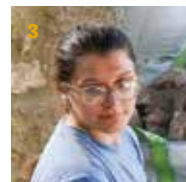
Among the extensive small finds were nearly 250 coins, numerous worked bone objects (part of a Byzantine bone-working industry), crucifix pieces, complete oil lamps, a large Herodian architectural fragment (with designs unique to the temple complex), and Roman legion tiles.

Additionally, as part of the Area D1 excavation, a small section was probed of the iconic four-sided Ophel mikveh/pool in order to ascertain phases of construction. A painstakingly slow, hammer-and-chisel excavation of the plaster layers was completed by volunteers Dara and Rachel. Samples of the pool's several individual plaster layers were separated and taken for scientific analysis. We hope to eventually get a dating for each.

Area D1 had a number of assistant supervisors in succession. Unfortunately, partway through the excavation, Hebrew University student Nadav Rozenhal had to leave for military service in Gaza; fellow student Amihai Lifschitz likewise could only stay through part of the excavation; Armstrong College student Willow Powell served as assistant for the final weeks of the dig.



D1



ASSISTANTS:
1 Nadav Rozenthal
2 Amihai Lifschitz
3 Willow Powell



STONE BASIN



STONE MONOPODIUM TABLE LEG



DRAINAGE CHANNEL



AERIAL PHOTO: ELIRAN HARIRI, EXCAVATION PHOTOS: AUBREY MERCADO/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY (8)



HERODIAN TABLE EDGE FRAGMENT



BYZANTINE PILGRIM FLASK



LATE



BONE-CARVED GODDESS FRAGMENT



COMPLETE JUGLET



ROMAN 10TH LEGION TILE



ROMAN TERRACOTTA GODDESS HEAD



HERODIAN CORNICE FRAGMENT



ROMAN OIL LAMP



ROMAN 10TH LEGION TILE



BYZANTINE OIL LAMP



BYZANTINE BONE OBJECTS



BYZANTINE CRUCIFIX

2024 OPHEL EXCAVATION

This illustration portrays part of the eastern edge of the Ophel. The two areas of the 2024 excavation—Area D and Area D1—are highlighted, showing general periods of construction as they stood at the close of the excavation.

BYZANTINE BUILDINGS

Buildings from the late Roman Period onward are cardinally oriented and run parallel with the southern wall of the Temple Mount.

HERODIAN BUILDINGS

Buildings from the Herodian/early Roman Period and prior—from the Second Temple Period back through the First Temple Period—are ordinarily oriented on this part of the Ophel on an easily discernable 45-degree shift to later-period structures.

HERODIAN OR IRON AGE BUILDINGS

LOWER IRON AGE PERIOD STRUCTURES

FOUR-SIDED OPHEL MIKVEH

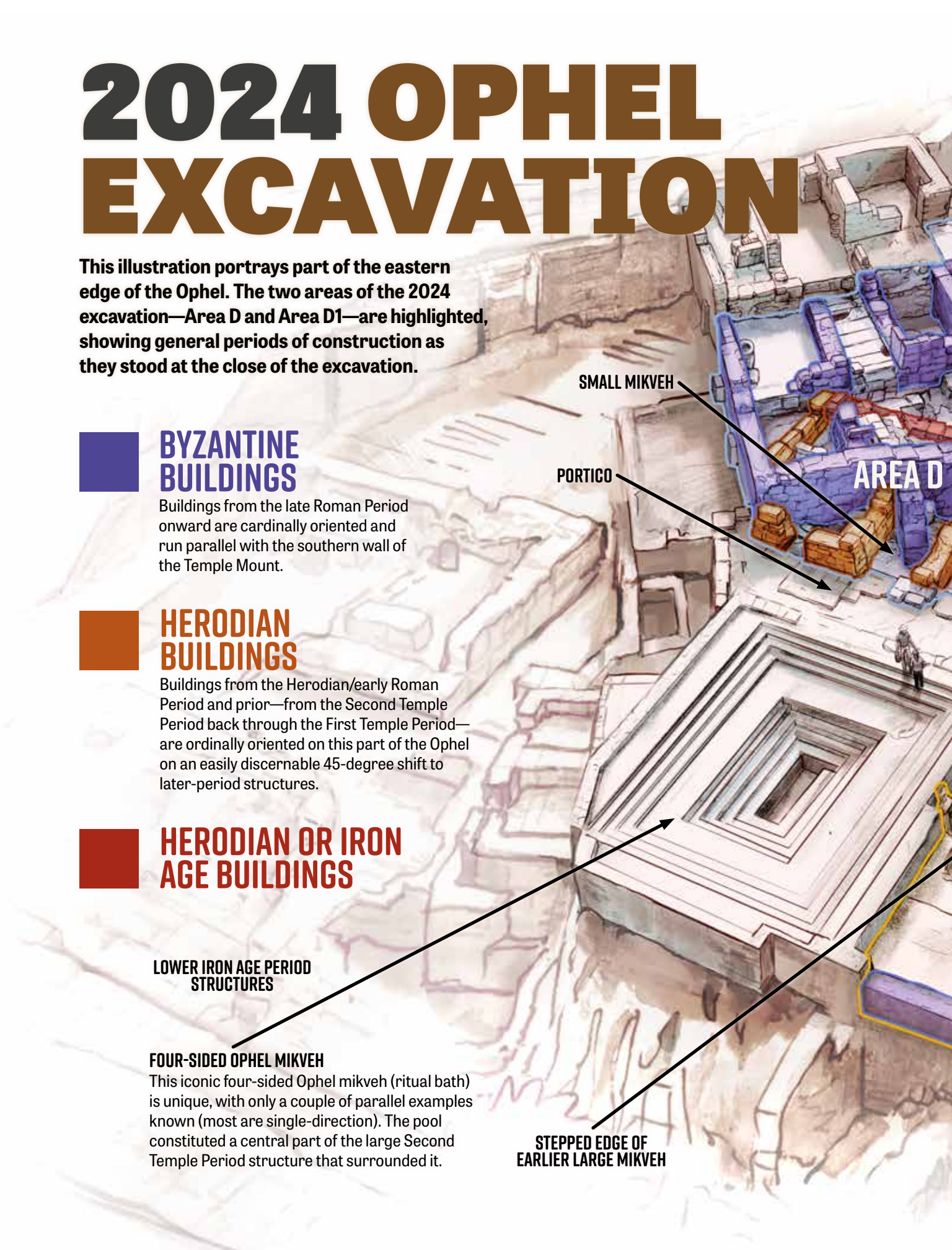
This iconic four-sided Ophel mikveh (ritual bath) is unique, with only a couple of parallel examples known (most are single-direction). The pool constituted a central part of the large Second Temple Period structure that surrounded it.

STEPED EDGE OF EARLIER LARGE MIKVEH

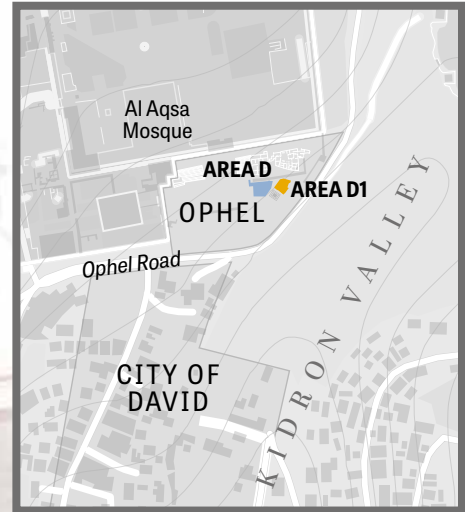
SMALL MIKVEH

PORTICO

AREA D



EXCAVATION OFFICES (WITHIN RESTORED BYZANTINE 'MONASTERY OF THE VIRGINS' BUILDING)



ORNATE DESCENDING STAIRWAY

VAULT

MONUMENTAL UMAYYAD (EARLY MUSLIM) PERIOD WALL

UPPER BYZANTINE PERIOD STRUCTURES

AREA D1

CURVED, TALL DRAINAGE CHANNEL FOR LARGE, FOUR-SIDED OPHEL MIKVEH



MEET THE OPH



EL FAMILY



What it's like to volunteer on the Ophel excavation

BY NICHOLAS IRWIN

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT part of an archaeological excavation? Some might say it's the discoveries. After all, the goal of archaeology is to collect and examine data so you can learn more about ancient cultures and peoples. Perhaps it's the coins, which allow you to date layers on the excavation site. Or maybe it's the monumental architecture—the walls that give insight into how people lived.

But what about the individuals who make the excavation possible? Without the directors, area supervisors, logistics managers, office workers and volunteers, there wouldn't be anyone collecting and examining the data.

During this year's Ophel excavation, we had between 30 to 40 people on the dig site each day. Every volunteer performed an important role, and we are very grateful to each person who participated in this year's excavation. With the war situation in Israel, the circumstances under which we excavated were unique. Those who participated showed a degree of tenacity and commitment to the field of archaeology by coming to the dig site each and every day. For that, we are extremely grateful.

The Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology (AIBA) would like to take this opportunity to recognize and introduce to you what we consider to be the Ophel family.



Professor Leibner
during show and tell

PROF. UZI LEIBNER

Prof. Uzi Leibner studied at Bar Ilan University. He received his bachelor's degree in 1997, his master's degree in 1999, and his doctorate in 2004. He was a post-doc fellow at the University of Michigan between 2005 and 2006. In 2007, he began working at Hebrew University. From 2021 to 2024, he was the head of the Institute of Archaeology.



Excavation volunteer Dara
takes heights in Area D1.

DEDICATED DIRECTORS

Any successful excavation has to have leadership at the top directing it all. At AIBA, this is our founder and editor in chief, Gerald Flurry. Mr. Flurry has studied biblical history and ancient Jerusalem since 1961; his vision and love for Jerusalem fuels our participation. His interest and involvement in all of our archaeological endeavors gives our team tremendous comfort and encouragement.

Then there is the leadership on the ground. Two of the first faces you'll see on the dig site when you arrive each morning are the codirectors: Prof. Uzi Leibner and Dr. Orit Peleg-Barkat. Both are professional, experienced archaeologists and both work at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Like many successful leaders, both directors throughout the course of the excavation day visit the trenches and cheerfully circulate among the troops. Visit the dig

on any given day and you'll likely see Professor Leibner or Dr. Peleg-Barkat helping with field work, be it participating in bucket lines, operating the metal detector, or on their hands and knees excavating within the various loci.

When not in the field, they are in the office, handling various responsibilities and dealing with the respective authorities that allow excavations to take place.

They also provide constant guidance and education. Every morning, the crew pauses for the first break: "breakfast." During this break, the directors will often conduct a "show and tell" of finds from either that day or the day before. They use the opportunity to explain the significance of the finds and what they tell us about the Ophel.

Both directors are born teachers. In a way, they encapsulate the maxim in Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (King James



Dr. Peleg-Barkat gives an introductory tour of the Ophel to excavation volunteers.

DR. ORIT PELEG-BARKAT

Dr. Orit Peleg-Barkat completed her bachelor's, master's and doctorate at Hebrew University. In 2007, she worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oxford. She specializes in Hellenistic and Roman art and architecture, and currently works as a faculty member in the Classical Archaeology Department at Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology.

Version). They know that for each volunteer to remain motivated—to endure the scorching heat and blistered hands—we need to catch the vision. That we need to *understand* what we are seeing and unearthing, and why it is important that we dig it from the ground. These daily “show and tell” sessions with Professor Leibner and Dr. Peleg-Barkat are among our favorite moments of the excavation.

SUPERIOR SUPERVISION

The 2024 excavation was divided between two areas: Area D and Area D1. Work in each area is overseen by an area supervisor, each of whom reports directly to the directors.

Volunteers in Area D, a large Byzantine structure on the western edge of the site, were supervised by Amir Cohen-Klonymous. He studied archaeology at Ben Gurion University. This was his seventh season working on the Ophel. In 2006 and 2007, he worked in the City of David under the leadership of Dr. Eilat Mazar.

Amir was assisted by Akiva Goldenhersh and Aviv Shalom, students at Hebrew University.

Area D1 was supervised by Christopher Eames. This was his sixth year excavating on the Ophel and his fourth season supervising.

During the end-of-season dinner on September 26, Professor Leibner said: “We were blessed with two outstanding area supervisors who are not only professional field archaeologists, but they also know how to lead people.”



Excavation volunteer Mitchell moves buckets in Area D1.

OFFICE AND LOGISTICS

Excavating during the months of August and September means excavating in some of the hottest and sunniest conditions. Temperatures often exceed 90 degrees Fahrenheit and there isn't a cloud in the sky. This is the reason the entire site is covered with shade cloth. But these shades don't just appear, and they don't always stay in place. Someone has to coordinate their assembly. To make sure such tasks are carried out, we have a logistics manager: Yedidya Tzabari.

Yedidya doesn't just play in the shade. It is his job to make sure the entire Ophel team is equipped with the proper tools and can safely walk around the site, which is a minefield of walls, stones, ledges, pits and makeshift wooden ladders and paths. If the sledgehammer breaks, or your gloves develop holes, Yedidya is the man to see. He also provides each meal on the dig site, oversees the safety of the diggers, and gives general guidance on the best way to remove walls or break stones.

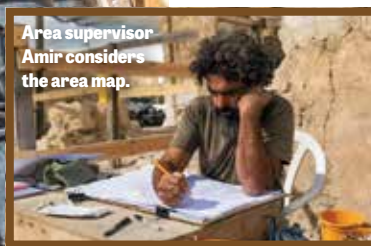
Yedidya is a trained archaeologist and actually made one of the season's first discoveries: a coin lying on top of a wall. The coin caught his eye as he was walking the dig site on the first day. (The first discovery of the year



D1 sends hundreds of buckets up the stairs to the crane to be hauled out of the dig site.



Ella excavates a tiny space.



Area supervisor Amir considers the area map.



Parker (front) and fellow volunteers take down walls in Area D1.

photographer was Aubrey Mercado, a graduate of Armstrong College and a much-loved member of the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology team. At the September 26 dinner, Professor Leibner highlighted what a unique “privilege” it was to have Aubrey as the on-site photographer. Many excavations typically bring a photographer in at the end of a dig. To have Aubrey there from start to finish, photographing the progress in each loci, was a unique privilege, and we’re very grateful for her many hours of labor to capture and process each photo.

THE WORKFORCE

The majority of the labor at the Ophel excavation is provided by volunteers, many of whom signed up through Hebrew University to work for a portion or the entirety of the five-week dig. It is an eclectic group too; this year we had, among others, a banker, a high school teacher, a cybersecurity officer, a nurse, engineers, tour guides—great people from all walks of life.

They come from all over the globe too. We had volunteers from Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, India, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States. Almost all of these people pay their own expenses, which is remarkable considering the experience, while tremendously rewarding, is also tremendously challenging.

The excavation schedule is grueling. Dig volunteers arrive on-site at 6:15 a.m. (We start early so we can avoid excavating in the heat of the day.) For many, the alarm sounds between 4 and 5 a.m. The dig day ends at 1:30

was made that same day by Christopher Eames; he found a Herodian cornice stone.)

In addition to the logistics manager, you also need staff in the office coordinating volunteers, registering the finds, and organizing all documentation. This job was carried out by Shoham Buskila, the registration manager. She was assisted by Daphna Shen. On occasion, they could also be found in the field observing the excavation progress. Daphna also tried her hand at breaking rocks and joining in bucket lines.

Shoham and Daphna also worked closely with Shlomo, who managed the pottery-washing and wet-sifting station. A handful of volunteers would be assigned to Shlomo every morning, and together they would spend the day emptying buckets of fill onto screens, where it would be washed with water, a process that separated worthless soil from important pottery and other tiny artifacts.

Finally, there’s the official dig photographer, responsible for documenting the whole process, including finds as they come from the ground. The 2024 Ophel

Professor Leibner shows volunteers an ancient hair-pin discovered in Area D1.



p.m. After arriving at the site, each volunteer goes to his or her respective area. Area D, on average, had about 20 people, while Area D1 had 10 to 15.

Volunteers are given instructions from the area supervisors. Some might begin cleaning an area for photos; some might continue excavating a particular locus; others might grab sledgehammers and start smashing gigantic stones (large stones cannot be lifted from the site; they need to be broken into smaller pieces that are easier to handle).

As the day progresses and buckets are filled, the moment eventually arrives when dozens to hundreds of buckets need to be removed from the area. It's time for a "*sharsheret*," or bucket chain! The signal goes out, and the team gathers. Each person stands about an arms-length from the other, and the line stretches from the bucket pile to the large steel bucket connected to a crane. With everyone in place, the buckets are passed down the line and eventually emptied into the steel bucket. Everyone loves these *sharsheret* moments, which are always accompanied by plenty of jokes, friendly banter and even sing-alongs.

Once the large bucket is filled, the crane operator lifts it to the top and dumps the fill in a pile. It's ready for Alaa and his minitractor to come along and scoop it up and take it to a gigantic dumpster, where the excavated earth will finally be removed via truck.

This isn't the only method for removing the dirt and stones. This season, we also did two "*baalot* nights."

Since Area D1 is the lower of the two areas, it wasn't always efficient to haul all the large stones and rubble from the area up the stairs to the crane bucket. Instead, D1 volunteers filled large bags called *baalot*, which varied between half-ton and 1-ton bags. Like the smaller buckets, these massive *baalot* bags would pile up and would eventually have to be taken away.

On *baalot* nights, a good friend of ours named Moti (short for Mordecai)—someone we have worked with since the early days excavating with Eilat Mazar—brought his large crane truck to the site. He parked on the Ophel Road across from Area D1 and used his crane to lift the bags from the large mikveh to a dump truck, where two of our student volunteers stood ready to cut the bags. This whole process occurred between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m., when the Ophel Road is less busy.

The first *baalot* night, Moti hauled away 120 bags; the second night, he took 100 bags.

This year, it's roughly estimated that we removed around 300 tons of dirt and stones from the site. That would not have been possible were it not for the dedicated volunteers who gave of their time and energy.

It's a sacrifice to volunteer for the Ophel excavation. But it's also a fantastic opportunity to learn about archaeology and the history of Israel and to develop friendships and long-lasting bonds in the Ophel family.

Thank you to all involved. We look forward to another productive season in 2025! ■



The Golden Earring Pendant of Jerusalem

Uncovered a decade ago, this exquisite gold object is perhaps the best evidence yet for a Phoenician presence in Jerusalem at the time of Solomon.

BY BRENT NAGTEGAAL

“AND HIRAM KING OF TYRE SENT HIS SERVANTS unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father; for Hiram was ever a lover of David” (1 Kings 5:15).

The Bible relates that during the period of the united monarchy in the 10th century B.C.E., a close relationship developed between Israel and the Phoenicians, a people situated northwest of Jerusalem in a collection of city-states on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Immediately following David’s capture of Jerusalem around 1000 B.C.E., King Hiram of Tyre (a dominant city-state) sent Lebanon’s famed cedar wood, along with stonemasons and carpenters, to help Israel’s king construct a lavish palace in the northern part of the City of David (2 Samuel 5:11). 2 Samuel 24:7 even includes Tyre in the census David commissioned Joab to undertake near the end of his reign, suggesting that Tyre was an extremely close ally.

The friendship between Israel and Phoenicia continued after David’s death (2 Chronicles 2:2). 1 Kings 5 states that when Solomon was crowned, King Hiram sent a delegation to Jerusalem to congratulate the new king. Solomon later hired the Tyrians to supply cedar for the construction of the temple (2 Chronicles 2:7, 15). Along with the Phoenician builders, King Solomon also requested King Hiram supply cunning artificers and craftsmen skilled in metalworking and clothing manufacturing. These skilled Phoenician laborers worked in Jerusalem during the construction of Solomon’s new royal quarter on Jerusalem’s Ophel (an area located between the City of David to the south and the Temple Mount to the north).

The Bible records King Hiram’s description of one particular craftsman: “... He is trained to work in gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and in purple, blue, and crimson fabrics and fine linen, and to do all



sorts of engraving and execute any design that may be assigned him, with your craftsmen, the craftsmen of my lord, David your father” (2 Chronicles 2:14; English Standard Version). The biblical account clearly reveals that numerous Phoenician representatives were in Jerusalem’s royal quarter during the 10th century B.C.E.

Now, thanks to the discovery of a uniquely Phoenician piece of jewelry on the Ophel, we have the best archaeological evidence to date of a 10th-century Phoenician presence in Jerusalem.

A Tale of Discovery

The renewed Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology Ophel excavations, directed by the late Dr. Eilat Mazar, began in 2009 and continued until her last excavation season in 2018. The area had previously been excavated in the 1970s by Eilat’s grandfather and former president of Hebrew University, Prof. Benjamin Mazar. Motivated by the encour-

agement of her grandfather, and thanks to the generous donations of Daniel Mintz and Meredith Berkman, Eilat was able to conduct multiple large-scale excavations on the Ophel, together with a large contingent of volunteers and students from Herbert W. Armstrong College in Edmond, Oklahoma.

Monumental walls were discovered throughout the area, which Dr. Mazar dated to the 10th century B.C.E.—the time period that included King Solomon. Equally important were the numerous tiny artifacts discovered in the occupational layers. These finds would have been missed were it not for Eilat’s trailblazing use of wet sifting. (Wet sifting involves taking excavated earth, putting it through a sifter, and spraying it with water to wash away soil and reveal miniature objects that might otherwise have gone undetected.)

It’s an extremely labor-intensive process, but Eilat insisted that we wet sift all Iron Age material. This meticulous practice led to the discovery of the two oldest pieces of writing ever found in Jerusalem—cuneiform tablet fragments from the 14th and

13th centuries B.C.E.—as well as dozens of seals and seal impressions, the most notable being the bulla of King Hezekiah.

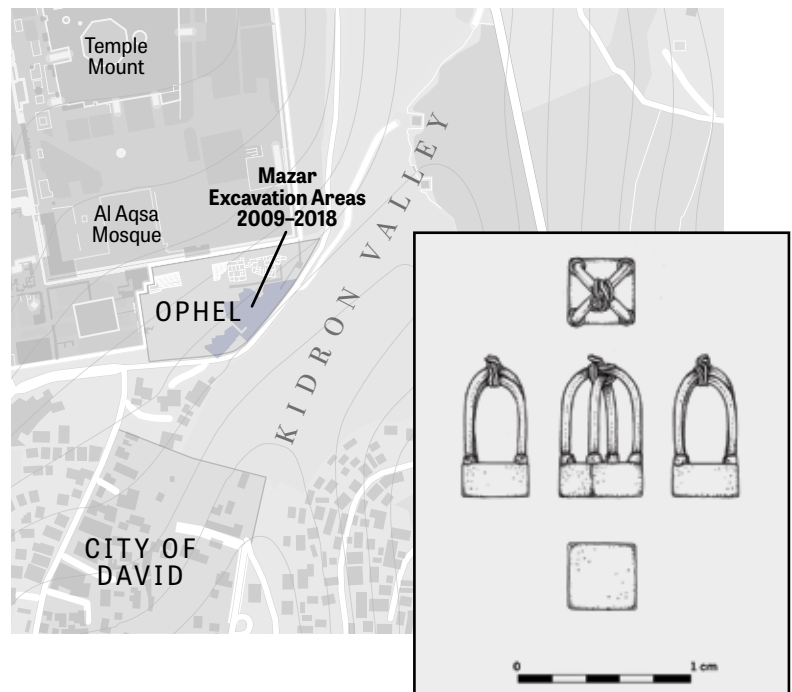
In the world of archaeology, it is not unusual for significant time to pass between the moment an artifact is dug from the ground and the moment it is finally studied and identified. On the Ophel dig, small artifacts discovered during wet sifting were documented, boxed up, and taken to the lab to be analyzed at a later time. In the case of Hezekiah’s seal impression, there was a five-year gap between when it was first taken from the ground and eventually identified and revealed to the public.

In this case, it was *more than 10 years* before we learned what we had excavated!

The Ophel Electrum Basket Pendant

During the 2012 excavation, which lasted five months, I was area supervisor (under Dr. Mazar) of Area B. The final two months were largely devoted to excavating early Iron IIIA walls, fills and floors. [The full stratigraphy study of Area B will be published by Dr. Ariel Winderbaum in the forthcoming Volume III of *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount, 2009–2013, directed by Eilat Mazar, Final Reports–Iron Age (Qedem)*.] The excavations were completed in conjunction with the National Parks Authority, East Jerusalem Development Fund and with the approval of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Overseeing an area is a full-time job. The wet-sifting process occurs on-site but at a different location and by a different team, which makes it virtually impossible to keep abreast of the finds revealed through wet sifting. I



When we initially inspected the piece, no one in the office could identify the basket pendant for what it was. Based on its discovery context, the best we could do was label it as a stunning piece of jewelry from an early Iron II A context. So this is what we did, and then we returned to our other work.



had no idea that this exquisite gold object, smaller than a shekel, from Area B had been found in wet sifting. I didn't learn about it until years later (after Dr. Mazar had died) when we began work on publishing the final reports of the excavation. Officially known as the "Ophel Electrum Basket Pendant," the full publication of this object will be included in the aforementioned final report, coauthored by myself and Iron Age jewelry expert Dr. Amir Golani. It was also recently published in Hebrew in the *City of David Studies of Ancient Jerusalem, Vol. 19*.

I first came across the pendant in early 2023 while searching through some unpublished finds from Area B in Eilat Mazar's office (which once belonged to Prof. Benjamin Mazar and is now a hub of activity as Eilat's sister, Avital Mazar-Tsairi, oversees the important task of completing the remaining publications of Eilat's excavations).

The pendant, with its intricate design and impressive golden luster, arrested my attention. Picking it up, I was struck by how heavy it was for such a tiny item.

The base of the golden basket pendant jewelry piece is flat and solid, and measures 4 millimeters square with a height of 2 millimeters. Two parabolic wire handles measuring 0.5 millimeters in diameter spring crosswise from the upper corners of the basket and rise 6 millimeters above its top. The four joints between the corners of the basket and the parabolic wires are concealed by a short, seamless wire strip. A thin gold wire is tightly wrapped three times around the apex of the parabolic handles, creating a kind of knot that probably continued upward as a small loop (missing) that served to suspend the pendant. The wire was most likely produced through the strip-drawing method. In most such pendants, this suspension ring is usually attached to another small ring to form part of an earring hoop, which is missing. Most pendants of this type have a small protrusion, usually in the form of a small pyramid of minute metal spheres or granules, soldered on top of the basket. A close inspection of the top of the basket did not reveal indents or other traces of an attachment, which may have fallen off.

Examples of basket pendants found around the Mediterranean

IBERIA

La Fonteta

Tharros

SARDINA

ITALY

GREECE

SICILY

Palermo

Motya

Carthage

ASIA MINOR

Tarsus

CRETE

Rhodes

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Cadiz

Tangier

Les Andalouses

- Classical type from 8th–6th centuries B.C.E.
- ▲ “Antecedents” from 11th–8th centuries B.C.E.



When we initially inspected the piece, no one in the office could identify the basket pendant for what it was. Based on its discovery context, the best we could do was label it as a stunning piece of jewelry from an early Iron IIA context (typically associated with 10th-century B.C.E. Jerusalem). So this is what we did, and then we returned to our other work.

A couple of months later, on May 30, I decided to read Dr. Amir Golani’s 2013 definitive text, *Jewelry From the Iron Age II Levant*. I began to wonder: *Did our Ophel jewelry piece have a parallel?* The answer was on page 243, which identified a series of basket pendant earrings native to Phoenician sites found across the Mediterranean. There was only one “problem”: The Ophel pendant *predated* most of Dr. Golani’s basket pendants. Four of Golani’s examples were from Phoenician sites in Sardinia and dated to the seventh-to-sixth centuries B.C.E. Two were from Cyprus and dated to the same time period.

There were many more examples; all of which were found at exclusively Mediterranean sites *directly connected* to Phoenician settlement and colonization. They are also a highly personal object.

According to Dr. Golani, this made this type of pendant a clearly Phoenician “cultural marker.” They are a purely Phoenician phenomenon, found only where there was a physical Phoenician presence.

By this point, it was clear that this pendant was significant and that it needed to be studied much more deeply. Avital Mazar asked if I could complete the

scientific report on the Ophel Basket Pendant.

The next step was to take the artifact to Prof. Naama Yahalom-Mack, excavator of the northern Israel site of Abel Beth Maacah and head of the metallurgy lab at the Institute of Archaeology at Hebrew University. We needed to study the metal composition of the pendant.

Scientific analysis showed that the pendant was made of electrum—an alloy of gold and silver, comprising Au 63±2%, Ag 32±2% and Cu 5±0.2%. Other elements—among them iron, silicon and lead—were present in trace amounts. Electrum is a harder metal than pure gold, providing greater durability for jewelry. This test confirmed that the Ophel Basket Pendant is one of the earliest “gold” artifacts ever discovered, to date, in an archaeological excavation in Jerusalem.

Next, I reached out to Iron Age jewelry expert Dr. Golani and asked for advice on how to proceed with the research and publication process. He was delighted to meet and discuss.

Dr. Golani was immediately struck by the craftsmanship. “This is really good craftsmanship,” he told me. “I mean, it is really good craftsmanship, in terms of the goldsmith’s work himself.” He then noted that it was indeed slightly different from the other later examples from Phoenician sites (shorter base cube, no pyramidal structure of granules, a higher level of craftsmanship in hiding joinery with gold strand). And yet it was also far more intricate in design than the earlier, bulkier examples found in the southern Levant.



1. A copper alloy object dated to the 12th century B.C.E. from Tel Beth Shean



2. Example of a typical Basket Pendant made of gold, from the 7th–6th centuries B.C.E., found in a tomb at Carthage

University Prof. Amihai Mazar. Dated to the 12th century B.C.E., it depicts a flat square platform or shallow box decorated on its sides with circular medallions, from the four corners of which are depicted suspension ropes, ending in a small ring. On top of the platform is a crouching ram in a sphinx-like position and wearing an Egyptian-style Atef crown.

The depiction of the “handles” as ropes clearly suggests that this is a representation of another, possibly well-known object made of perish-

able materials (such as rope and possibly wood for the platform), of which no examples are known. Thus, it’s feasible that basket pendants are even more miniature representations and schematic representations of a portable shrine or altar.

Stylistically, in its general form and proportions, the 12th-century B.C.E. object from Tel Beth Shean is more similar to the Ophel Basket Pendant than to the more commonly known examples of the eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E. In contrast to the well-known examples from the second half of Iron Age II, where the basket is shaped as a cube, both the Beth Shean model and the Ophel pendant show the basket as a low platform.

On the other hand, in general size and precision of design, the Ophel pendant is closer to the later Phoenician examples than to the bigger, clunkier antecedents found in southern Levant.

Thus, it is likely then that the miniaturized representation of the shrine in pendant form was adopted by the Phoenicians, who grew out of the Canaanite cultural milieu of the Iron Age I. Soon thereafter, the basket pendant was apparently worn as an earring pendant, and then later became widely popular among Phoenicians primarily during the late eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E. The widespread use of this form as a pendant representing a shrine may have been believed to provide protective powers for those who wore them and may have also served as an ethnic symbol or cultural marker, identifying their bearer as a Phoenician; in the same way that many today may wear a cross or a Star of David in order to identify themselves.

Watching Dr. Golani inspect the item and then talk in detail about its exquisite design parallels though the Mediterranean world, I realized he needed to be involved in the research and publication of the pendant. If the pendant ended up being the earliest golden jewelry ever found in Jerusalem, one of Israel’s leading experts had to be involved. Dr. Golani was delighted by the proposal for a joint venture, and we teamed up.

The Symbolic Significance and Development of Basket Pendants

Given that there is no ancient text describing the symbolism or purpose of the pendant, we are left to comparative analysis with other pendants, as well the dating of the find spot, from which to make conclusions as to their purpose.

Throughout the Iron Age, the regularity and constant design of basket pendants, wherever they are found, naturally suggest a known symbolic significance and possibly even religious importance.

According to Golani, basket pendants may have been a miniature and schematic representation of another, larger object that was possibly well known to the creator’s culture. The basket with handles, capped by a suspension ring, suggests that this object may have been portable. Since the first appearance of basket pendants in the late Iron I (late 11th century B.C.E.) period was in the Southern Levant, their significance should be sought among the local cultural elements of that period. Perhaps the best example of comparison to a religious object is a copper alloy object discovered in excavations at Tel Beth Shean, directed by Hebrew

Jerusalem-Phoenician Connection

The discovery of the Phoenician-style pendant in a 10th-century B.C.E. context in Jerusalem illuminates the relationship between the united monarchy in Jerusalem and the Phoenicians, who occupied the Lebanese coast through the late second and into the first millennium B.C.E. and specialized in maritime trade. Outside the biblical text, the seafaring exploits of the Phoenicians are supported by the discovery of Phoenician colonies throughout the Mediterranean region from as early as the 10th century B.C.E. By the late eighth century B.C.E., the Phoenicians had firmly established many colonies in North Africa, Sardinia and Iberia, which correlates directly to the earliest discovery of basket pendants at those locations.

Archaeological evidence also shows that the Phoenician trade network (particularly in silver) between the western Mediterranean and the southern Levant was active during the 10th century B.C.E. The discovery of silver hoards at Dor and Akko, dated to the second half of the 10th century B.C.E. and the 10th to ninth centuries B.C.E. (respectively), which had been transported to the Phoenician/Israelite coast, have been shown to originate in western Mediterranean sites associated with the Phoenicians.

The discovery of 10th-century B.C.E. silver hoards in the southern Levant originating in the western Mediterranean is important in providing an archaeological baseline for Phoenician influence in this region. Interestingly, this dating also parallels the biblical text in terms of both the commodity of trade in silver and the 10th century B.C.E.

1 Kings 10:22 states: “For the king [Solomon] had at sea a navy of Tarshish with the navy of Hiram [of Tyre]; once every three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold, and SILVER, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.” The Bible tells us that this relationship lasted from King David through King Solomon’s reign—or most of the 10th century B.C.E. In addition, though the Phoenicians are usually recognized for their role in maritime trade, their part in overland trade should not be overlooked. A growing body of evidence from the Iron Age II shows Phoenician trade and traders at both inland and coastal sites throughout the southern Levant.

Until now, archaeological evidence of Phoenician involvement in Jerusalem during the 10th century has been relatively scant. Parts of three volute “Proto-Aeolic” capitals have been found in excavations on the eastern hill of Jerusalem, which have stylistic ties to the Phoenicians. However, two were found in secondary contexts and another in a collapse dating from the end of Iron Age II.

In 2005, two small items linked to Phoenician trade were discovered by Dr. Eilat Mazar while excavating

the Large Stone Structure at the summit of the City of David: 10-centimeter-long stylized ivory inlay consisting of two identical halves that would have adorned either side of an iron shaft, perhaps part of a knife or mirror. The ivory item was found alongside an elegant black-on-red Cypriot juglet in a late 10th-century context. According to Dr. Mazar, an identically designed inlay was discovered attached to a sword at the excavations of the Phoenician site of Achziv on the northern coast of Israel. The sword, alongside other funerary goods, is dated to the 10th century B.C.E.

In 2013, a seal of Cypriot origin was discovered in the Ophel excavations. The conical seal portrays a lion facing left and a schematic depiction of a human figure. Seals with this same motif are typical of Cyprus’s Cypro-Geometric I (circa 1050–950 B.C.E.). This period overlaps the beginning of the Phoenician presence and trade in Cyprus. Othmar Keel writes that these are “most certainly” an import from Cyprus, providing further evidence of an early relationship between areas of Phoenician influence and Jerusalem.


Now we can add the Ophel Electrum Basket Pendant to this list of objects attesting to Phoenicia’s connection to Iron Age Jerusalem.

But this pendant may signify more than just an Israel-Phoenicia connection. Jewelry at this time is not just an object of aesthetic beauty. These objects are not mass-produced trinkets but require a high level of craftsmanship and were manufactured only on demand. When worn as an earring, in frontal display, a jewelry item transmits information about the wearer, just like a Star of David or cross would represent something about the bearer in modern times.

Accordingly, since these basket pendants are found at sites clearly associated with Phoenician settlement, these pendants may be seen as a cultural marker signifying the presence and identification of a Phoenician individual. Thus, when you find a Phoenician style basket pendant in Jerusalem, it’s the best indication yet that a Phoenician was literally on the scene in Jerusalem’s royal quarter.

When we pair the archaeological evidence with the Bible, this tiny artifact resurrects the biblical history of the golden age in ancient Israel. It recalls the time of the united monarchy, when Israel and Judah were unified under a single king ruling from Jerusalem. It tells of the time when Phoenicians of the Lebanese coast partnered with this king in his most important building projects in the capital city. 1 Kings 5:15 states, “And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father; for Hiram was ever a lover of David.” ■

With assistance from Dr. Amir Golani



Caves in the
Valley of Hinnom

The Earliest Biblical Text Ever Discovered!

You've heard of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Have you heard of the Ketef Hinnom Scrolls, which are even older and just as extraordinary?

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS REMAIN ONE OF THE PREMIER discoveries in biblical archaeology. Until their discovery, the first of which was discovered in 1946, the earliest-known Hebrew language biblical manuscripts available dated to just over 1,000 years ago—the 10th century *C.E.* The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls pushed that date back more than a millennium—to the final centuries of the first millennium *B.C.E.*

But for all the justifiable excitement and drama surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls, they are *not* the earliest examples of biblical Hebrew text available to us. That record is claimed by *another* remarkable, yet often-overlooked, discovery made in 1979, which predates the Dead Sea Scrolls by 500 years. These texts, while far more miniature and fragmentary, date to the *First Temple Period* and match *letter-for-letter* text found in four different biblical passages. They represent the earliest biblical text ever discovered and constitute one of the most significant biblical archaeology discoveries of all time.

They are known as the Ketef Hinnom Scrolls, or alternately as the Priestly Blessing Scrolls or Silver Scrolls.

In this article, we'll review the scrolls—their dramatic discovery and curious nature—as well as just how closely their text matches with the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible.

A Most Unexpected Discovery

Israeli archaeologist Prof. Gabriel Barkay, who turned 80 this year, is sometimes affectionately referred to

as the “dean of biblical archaeology” (a title formerly applied to the late, great Prof. Benjamin Mazar). In 1979, Professor Barkay began excavations on the western edge of Jerusalem's Hinnom Valley (“Ketef Hinnom” simply meaning “shoulder of Hinnom”—along the upper part of the valley's steep western edge). The location was an ancient tomb area adjacent to the modern St. Andrew's church.

Professor Barkay was working with a team of youth archaeologists at the time. He later described the discovery of the scrolls rather humorously in an interview with tour guide Gila Yudkin: “We excavated by the outer apse of the present-day church. The graves were in bad shape with collapsed roofs. The caves had all been looted. ... [W]e discovered a repository where they buried the bones and I looked into that repository and saw something that looked like a rock floor. I was disappointed.

“Among the 13-year-old diggers, there was one annoying kid named Nathan, who was always tugging at my shirt. I thought this was an ideal place to put him—he would be out of my sight. I told Nathan the repository had to be as clean as his mother's kitchen, even if he had to lick it. It had to be clean for the photography. Not too long afterwards, I felt him tugging at my shirt again. Nathan had in his hand almost complete pottery vessels. This time, I pulled at his shirt, took him back to the area, and asked where he found them. Bored, Nathan had banged on the floor with a hammer. Under the rocks, he found the pottery.



The Ketef Hinnom 1 (left) and 2 (right) scrolls

“Little Nathan was sent home with his peers. Then I recruited archaeology students from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem [and we] worked 24 hours around the clock. In one chamber more than a thousand objects were found. They included 125 objects of silver, 40 iron arrowheads, gold, ivory, glass, bone and 150 semiprecious stones. There was 60 centimeters [2 feet] of accumulation filled with objects and skeletal remains. There was a lot of dust and a lack of oxygen. It was very hot. We had to change teams every few hours. ... Everyone was sworn to secrecy—they weren’t allowed to tell parents, spouses or friends. If word got around Jerusalem that there was such a treasure, the California gold rush would be nothing compared to what would happen here.”

What an experience! Among the treasures discovered in the burial cave were two objects that looked like “cigarette butts.” Upon closer inspection, they turned out to be extremely tiny, tightly rolled silver scrolls. They were 99 percent pure silver.

Given the tiny, brittle nature of the scrolls—one is 27 millimeters wide, the other is just 11 millimeters—the task of unrolling them was extremely risky. The scrolls were sent to universities in Britain and Germany, both of which refused to open them because such an operation was “too risky” and would damage the items entirely. Finally, the scrolls were given to the Israel Museum, where conservator Joseph Shenhav came up with a genius way of opening them. First, he soaked the items in a special acid solution to remove corrosion. After this,

he applied a strong elastic emulsion to the exposed back surface, providing a strong and supple support to the artifacts as they were gradually unwound (an excruciatingly slow process that went on for months).

The newly opened scrolls, to Barkay’s joy, each revealed paleo-Hebrew text from top to bottom. Now the task was to put each scroll under the microscope to decipher them—quite literally. Ketef Hinnom I, the larger of the two, measures just 97 by 29 millimeters unrolled, and Ketef Hinnom II measures a minuscule 39 by 11 millimeters.

No one could have expected the significance of the text that was inscribed: They bore the earliest biblical texts ever discovered. As *The Incredible Journey’s* “The Mystery of the Silver Scrolls” wryly summarized: “Leave it to a 13-year-old troublemaker to make one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time”!

Publication—Pushback—and Republication

The two inscriptions were originally published in Hebrew by Professor Barkay in 1989. In 1992, an updated English version was published; the report was titled “The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques From Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem.” This initial research dated the scrolls, based on paleography and context, to the seventh century B.C.E. It also highlighted scriptural parallels between the inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible, particularly the book of Numbers.

There was significant pushback from certain scholars who advocated reassigning the scrolls to a much later date, perhaps in the Persian Period or even deep into the Hellenistic Period. Part of the intrigue is that one of the Mosaic Torah passages found on the scrolls is dated, according to the infamous minimalist Documentary Hypothesis (which theorizes a much later formulation of the biblical texts) to long after the time period of the scrolls.

This pushback prompted a major reanalysis of the scrolls by Barkay and his colleagues. This was necessary, they wrote in 2004, because “*although the vast majority of scholars support the late Iron Age date for the artifacts, a vocal minority of scholars persists in advocating a later date*” (“The Amulets From Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation,” by Barkay, Marilyn Lundberg, Andrew Vaughn and Bruce Zuckerman, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*; emphasis added). This 2004 article presented new analysis that reinforced the dating of the scrolls to the late Iron Age, just prior to the Babylonian destruction.

This assessment, wrote Prof. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., “settle[s] any controversy” over the dating of the inscriptions.

This 2004 article, which also highlighted traces of letters not previously identified in the earlier analysis, will serve as our guide in examining the inscriptional content on the artifacts (with text examples following those that were produced by Barkay, Lundberg, Vaughn and Zuckerman).

Scrolls of ‘Confession’ and ‘Benediction’

Both scrolls, Ketef Hinnom I and II, are funerary amulets. Each contains “blessings,” as well as professions of faith, paralleling passages found in the Bible.

The scrolls are written in the original paleo-Hebrew script, a more angular script (the same Hebrew-Phoenician script from which the English alphabet derives). Over the course of the post-exilic period, this script changed into the Aramaic script (adopted during the exile) and then into the same square script used in the Masoretic Text of our Hebrew Bibles to this day. (Note: Even though the shapes of the letters evolved, the structure of the biblical Hebrew text remained the same.)

The majority of the textual content on each scroll is an excerpt of the so-called “Priestly Blessing” text found in Numbers 6:24-26. This is why the scrolls are commonly called the “Priestly Blessing Scrolls.” Both scrolls also bear other texts, including text found in three other parallel biblical passages. This text can be found in the introductory text of the larger amulet of the two, Ketef Hinnom I, which we will examine first.

Amulet I: The ‘Confession’

Lines 1 through 3 of Ketef Hinnom I are poorly preserved, and it is next to impossible to restore the text found on these lines. Beginning with line 4, however, we start to see our first clearly legible passage. This text is referred to by the 2004 authors as a “confessional statement [paralleling] verses found in Deuteronomy 7:9, Nehemiah 1:5 and Daniel 9:4, in which blessing from the Lord is made conditional upon obedience to the covenant and the commands from Yahweh.”

This text, as it appears on the inscription, is shown in the next column, transposing the paleo-Hebrew text into its square script equivalent. Note that the scrolls are extremely fragmentary and are damaged along their edges; missing or partial letters are restored by the authors within brackets, although there is certainly more room for debate about these edge letters. (Also note that in ancient Hebrew it was not unusual to split words into new lines.)

This text is the famous biblical statement (with the passage preserved on the scroll italicized), “God, who

keepeth *covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments.*”

This statement is found in three parallel biblical passages—Deuteronomy 7:9, Nehemiah 1:5 and Daniel 9:4. There are slight differences between these three biblical texts, with different beginnings and endings. For example, Deuteronomy has “the faithful God” while Nehemiah and Daniel both state “the great and awful God.” Though the upper lines of the scroll are extremely fragmentary, it is possible that the text aligns more closely with the Nehemiah and Daniel passages, based on the extremely fragmentary remains of what could be the word “great” (גדול) in line 3.

Below is the equivalent Masoretic Text (in this case, from Deuteronomy 7:9; note that in the Nehemiah and Daniel passages, the final word is suffixed slightly differently as מצותיו rather than מצותו; although the meaning is exactly the same. The authors identify the latter as the best fit for what would have been contained on the scroll—still, this area is obscured by the scroll’s damaged periphery). The letters in black are those that are clearly preserved on the scroll; letters in green are those obscured or damaged on the fragmentary edges of the scroll; letters in red are those not found on the scroll.

The parallel with the biblical text is remarkable. Of the nearly 20 preserved letters, only one letter (ל) is different from the biblical text. This omitted prefix letter—essentially meaning “to” or “with”—does not change the meaning of the passage. In fact, it would be a logical choice for the amulet, given the limited writing area available. Effectively, the omission of this letter changes the passage from saying to *them that love Him and to them that keep His commandments* to simply, *to them that love Him and them that keep His commandments*. (Even in many Bible translations, this secondary “to” or “with” is omitted, since it is implied.)

Given the minute size of the amulets, there are a few deliberate “shortcuts” in text. We will see a couple of additional examples as we proceed. Nonetheless, the overall letter accuracy of this 2,600-year-old amulet to that contained in the Masoretic Text that we use today is astonishing.

הברית ו
[ה]חסד לאהב
ו [ו]שמרי [מצ]
... [ותו]

הברית
והחסד
לאהביו
ולשמרי
מצותו

Amulet I: Intermediate Text

Lines 8 through 14 on Ketef Hinnom I contain an additional passage of text that is difficult to reconstruct in its entirety and that has no direct biblical parallels. The text is reconstructed by the authors as something like, "... the Eternal? ... [the?] blessing more than any [sna]re and more than evil. For redemption is in him. For YHWH is our restorer [and] rock."

Though there are no complete biblical parallels to this section of the amulet, similar themes and word usage can be found in Zechariah 10:6 and Psalm 80:4, 8 and 20 (in the JPS; verses 3, 7 and 19 in most other translations). Barkay and his colleagues describe this in further detail in their 2004 report.

Amulet I: The 'Benediction'

In lines 14 through 18 (the end text) of the first amulet, we have the famous "Priestly Benediction" or "Priestly Blessing" of Numbers 6. The text on the amulet is shown to the right, as provided in the 2004 publication.

This is the famous biblical statement (the passage preserved on the scroll italicized), "*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee*" (Numbers 6:24-25).

Verses 22-23 explain that this special "blessing" should be given to the Israelites by Aaron and his descendants. "And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: 'Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying: On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel; ye shall say unto them.'"

In the next column is the equivalent biblical text to that found on the scroll, taken from verses 24-25. Again, the letters in black are those that are clearly preserved on the scroll; letters in green are those obscured or damaged on the fragmentary edges of the scroll; letters in red are those not found on the scroll.

Here, again, is a remarkable letter-for-letter parallel with the biblical text. Note that the initial word in the biblical text contains an additional *kaf* (כ, or ך at the end of a word, in square-script Hebrew. The original paleo-Hebrew script does not have such differing end-forms for letters). This word is split across the damaged edges of the scroll at this point. While it can be argued that this additional *kaf* was originally present (thus shown in green), the authors believe there was only one, serving "double-duty"—part of

יבר
ך יהוה [ו]
[י]שמרך [י]
[א]ר יהוה
פנ[יו] ...

the small scroll's abbreviated nature. Even if not, here again, we have no difference in meaning—merely *bless and keep you* versus *bless you and keep you*.

Amulet II: Introductory Text

It bears reemphasizing that the second amulet, Ketef

Hinnom II, is extraordinarily small—less than half as wide and half as long as the small Ketef Hinnom I. Like the center text of Ketef Hinnom I, the introductory text of Ketef Hinnom II (lines 1-5) contains text not paralleled in full in any other biblical text. These lines are translated by the authors as follows: "May he/she be blessed by YHWH, the warrior/helper and the rebuker of evil."

While there are no complete biblical parallels to this section of the amulet, there are similar biblical themes and word usages, such as that found in Zechariah 3:4 (as expounded upon by Barkay, Lundberg, Vaughn and Zuckerman).

Amulet II: The Longer 'Benediction'

The remaining text on Ketef Hinnom II (lines 5-12) bears the same "Priestly Benediction" found on Ketef Hinnom I, with a slight difference: In the case of this scroll, even more of the biblical blessing is given. Below-right is this text preserved on the scroll.

This represents the following from the wider blessing passage (preserved text italicized): "*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace*" (Numbers 6:24-26). The first part of verse 26 (unitalicized) is omitted on the scroll, with the artifact preserving what could be seen as an abbreviated form of the blessing, in jumping straight from "be gracious unto thee" to "and give thee peace."

Following verse 26 in the biblical account—the end of the blessing—the passage concludes with the following instruction to Aaron and his sons: "So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them"

יברך
יהוה
וישמרך
יאר
יהוה
פניו

יברך
יהוה י
שמרך
יאר יה
[ו]ה פניו
[א]ל יך וי
שם לך ש
[ל]ם

(verse 27). One imagines a descendant of Aaron doing the same for his deceased.

Below is the equivalent passage from the Masoretic Text—letters in black clearly preserved, letters in green obscured or damaged on the periphery, and letters in red not found on the scroll.

Again, the letter-for-letter exactness is extraordinary. We have one obvious difference—the lack of the prefix *vav*, ו, (meaning “and”) in the scroll. As with the earlier referenced prefix ל (meaning “to”) in Ketef Hinnom I, the omission of this prefix is not surprising, and it does not change the meaning—effectively going from *the Lord bless thee, AND keep thee, to the Lord bless thee, keep thee*. And again, as with the first amulet, though it is edged by the fragmentary scroll border, the authors believe there was only one *kaf* at the end of the first word, serving as a double-duty

יברכך
יהוה
וישמרך
יאר
יהוה
פניו
... אליך
וישם
לך
שלום

abbreviation. They also believe the final word “peace” (שלום) was abbreviated without its *mater lectionis* “helper vowel,” ו (thus שלם). Yet this fragmentary word is split along the fringes of the artifact, so there is room to debate whether it was originally present or not; further the word can be spelled with or without this letter.

Interestingly, there is a slight difference in the lettering of verse 25 between two of the major historical textual variants of the Bible—the Masoretic Text and the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Samaritan Pentateuch is the common name for the Torah belonging to the Samaritan community, regarded by adherents in the community to be the original as given to Moses (in the same manner that observant Jews, as well as many Christians, hold the Masoretic Text to be the original, divinely inspired text). Though both of these Torah texts are at least broadly the same, there are notable differences throughout (particularly in the case of the Ten Commandments—the Samaritan version including a mandate for the community’s iconic worship at Mount Gerizim).

When it comes to Numbers 6:25, the Masoretic’s “אר” (meaning “to shine”) is given in the Samaritan Pentateuch as “יאיר.” The meaning is the same—the Samaritan merely contains the addition of another

WAR
FROM PAGE 9

dramatically changed. Scholars could no longer claim King David, the kingdom of Israel or the “house of David,” was a work of fiction, a “literary creation.” Since 1993, the conversation (and debate) has revolved around the nature of—the size, the power and influence, the regional importance of—Israel under King David and his descendants.

The discovery of the “house of David” inscription reveals the importance of archaeological excavation and biblical archaeology. Think about the ramifications of *not* excavating Israel’s biblical sites. What if the excavations at Tel Dan had never happened? What if the “house of David” inscription were never found? What if biblical archaeologists like the late Dr. Eilat

Mazar and Prof. Yosef Garfinkel, and before them Prof. Yigael Yadin and Prof. William Albright, were never able to excavate?

This is *exactly* what those seeking Israel’s destruction want.

Without archaeology, it’s likely that King David would now be widely dismissed as a “literary creation,” a fictional figure in a fictional story. What would that mean? If David were accepted as fictional, then the biblical text would also be fictional. There would be no Davidic dynasty, no King Solomon, no kingdom of Israel. The biblical text would have little-to-no credibility as a historical source. The text most responsible for shaping and defining huge parts of Western civilization would be dismissed as myth.

Israel’s war against enemies who seek to eradicate Jewish history and archaeology dramatically highlights the importance of biblical archaeology. Biblical archaeology is some of the strongest evidence of the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Hebrew Bible. And the biblical text documents the history of the Jewish people—and to a great degree, the history of the Western world.

This is why biblical archaeology is so crucial. It establishes Israel as a people and as a nation. And the Jewish people, through the writings, teachings and traditions of the Hebrew Bible, establish many Western peoples as nations.

The Prophet Isaiah, writing more than 200 years after David died, emphasized the importance of his life and legacy: “Behold, I

STAFF

EDITOR IN CHIEF
GERALD FLURRY

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
STEPHEN FLURRY

MANAGING EDITOR
BRAD MACDONALD

SENIOR EDITOR
JOEL HILLIKER

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR
NICHOLAS IRWIN

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
BRENT NAGTEGAAL
CHRISTOPHER EAMES
RYAN MALONE

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
GEORGE HADDAD
MIHAILO ZEKIC
SAMUEL S. MCKOY

PROOFREADERS
TERI BAILEY
DOTTHE KIMES
AUBREY MERCADO

DESIGNERS
REESE ZOELLNER
STEVE HERCUS
KASSANDRA VERBOUT

ARTISTS
JULIA GODDARD
MELISSA BARREIRO
GARY DORNING

PRESS AND CIRCULATION
DEEPIKA AZARIAH

LET THE STONES SPEAK

September-October 2024, Vol. 3, No. 5 is published bimonthly by the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology. Address all communications to Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology; David Marcus 1, Jerusalem, 9223101, Israel.

How your subscription has been paid: *Let the Stones Speak* has no subscription price—it is free. This is made possible by donations freely given to the Armstrong International Cultural Foundation. Those who wish to voluntarily support this worldwide work are gladly welcomed as co-workers. © 2024 Armstrong International Cultural Foundation. Unless otherwise noted, scriptures are quoted from the *Jewish Publication Society of America of the Tanakh* version of the Bible.

CONTACT US

Please notify us of any change in your address; include your old mailing label and the new address. The publishers assume no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts. The editor reserves the right to use any letters, in whole or in part, as he deems in the public interest, and to edit any letter for clarity or space. WEBSITE ArmstrongInstitute.org E-MAIL letters@ArmstrongInstitute.org; subscription@ArmstrongInstitute.org; request@ArmstrongInstitute.org PHONE Israel: 972-02-372-3591 MAIL Contributions, letters or requests may be sent to our office: David Marcus 1, Jerusalem, 9223101, Israel

MAGAZINE FEEDBACK

We find *Let the Stones Speak* to be very interesting and absorbing. It is full of information we have not been exposed to.

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

I was absolutely thrilled to receive my first *Let the Stones Speak* magazine the other day. I teach history class at a small school here in Ontario. I especially love bringing archaeology into my classes.

ONTARIO, CANADA

I am enjoying the magazine and all other materials you are providing so much. Thank you for your willingness to share your work without cost. I'm especially impressed with the articles, photographs and diagrams in your excellent publications.

UTAH, UNITED STATES

Let the Stones Speak is the only magazine that I subscribe to and the only publication that I read from cover to cover. I am very grateful for the work you do and want to thank you for the joy and excitement I feel every time I hold a new issue in my hands! Your contributions help me to better understand and visualize the world of the Bible. Thank you so much!

GERMANY

LET THE STONES SPEAK PODCAST FEEDBACK

I have listened recently to the interview of Christopher Eames on the subject "Who Was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?" and I have downloaded the article from your website. Absolutely fascinating and of great value in dispelling the sad, secular views of the Exodus being myth and make-believe.

UNITED STATES

mater lectionis, the letter *yod* (י, signifying a longer "ee" pronunciation). Still, it is interesting to note that of these two textual variants, it is the Masoretic form that is preserved in these earliest discovered biblical texts.

Christian readers may find this ironic, in light of the famous New Testament passage: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot [Hebrew *yod*] or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18; King James Version). That it has not—in the case of the Masoretic version's parallel to the Ketef Hinnom scrolls.

We are now nearing half a century since the discovery of the Ketef Hinnom Scrolls—and still they remain some of the greatest discoveries in biblical archaeology, right alongside the likes of the Tel Dan, Merneptah and Mesha stelaes, as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Small wonder, then, that Professor Barkay—in his storied career in biblical archaeology—considers them "the most important find of my life."

Although they contain no reference to any mighty biblical characters like David or Hezekiah found in other such inscriptions, they do bear witness to the early existence and circulation of these sacred biblical texts—the earliest direct scriptural parallels we have, from more than 2,600 years ago. ■

have given him [David] for a *witness to the peoples*, A prince and commander to the peoples" (Isaiah 55:4). Notice, King David is "a witness to the peoples"—that is, David's sublime example is for all nations, peoples and races.

It is the same with biblical archaeology. This isn't a field of study for Jews or Christians only. And it's not solely for the religious, or "believers." You don't need to be religious to observe and appreciate the intersection of archaeology and the Hebrew Bible. Biblical archaeology is a wonderful "witness to the peoples"—to every open-minded person willing to study and learn about history. And not just the history of the Jewish people, but the history and origins of Western civilization. ■

The 'unofficial ambassador for world peace'

He had no political party, no royal office, no government commission. He possessed no personal fortune, nor was he backed by any state or corporate interest.

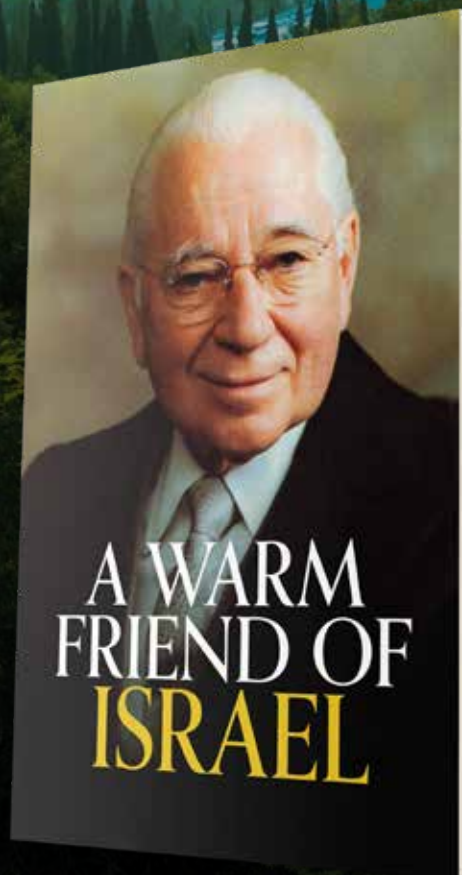
Yet he met personally with dozens of heads of state: prime ministers, presidents, kings, emperors, princes and princesses—as well as legislators, ambassadors, cabinet ministers, first ladies, governors, mayors, generals, chief executives, judges and other leaders of government and industry.

But his greatest passion was for Jerusalem. Following his first meeting in the Knesset in 1968, the final two decades of his life he was welcomed by every prime minister and president of Israel. To learn why, request a free copy of ***A Warm Friend of Israel***.

ONLINE ArmstrongInstitute.org

E-MAIL letters@ArmstrongInstitute.org

MAIL David Marcus 1, Jerusalem, 9223101, Israel



NO CHARGE • NO FOLLOW-UP • NO OBLIGATION