LET THE STONES SPEAK

Nimrod: Hunting the Hunter

**FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR
BRAD MACDONALD**

SWORDS AND SPADES: ANOTHER SUMMER OF WAR AND EXCAVATION

I will never forget Friday, June 13, 2025, the day Israel began its ferocious and necessary 12-day fusillade on Iran. I was in Israel visiting our archaeology institute and directing the Irish dance production *Celtic Throne,* a show we had announced to our readers in the January-February 2025 issue.

The 56 dancers and crew, which included several children and teenagers, had arrived in Israel the week prior and had a packed three-week schedule of shows, PR events and touring. At our Institute office in Jerusalem, Christopher Eames and Nicholas Irwin (and their families) were also preparing for the arrival of more than a dozen dig volunteers the following week. It was going to be a busy, productive summer!

Earlier in the week, *Celtic Throne* had performed two shows to large and rapturous audiences in Tel Aviv. The flood of excitement, joy and *tearful gratitude* from the Israeli people at the shows, in the media and on the streets was overwhelming and unexpected. But as wonderful as this was, we knew that it reflected the sad and growing reality that Israel is becoming increasingly isolated and lonely. (Our show was the first major foreign production to perform in Israel since Oct. 7, 2023.)

Two days before the war began, Chris, Nick and I took a trip to Tel Shiloh, a one-hour drive north of downtown Jerusalem. At Shiloh, we met with Dr. Scott Stripling and his dedicated crew of diggers, many of whom have been excavating the site for many years now. Shiloh was biblical Israel's political and religious capital for roughly

300 years during the period of the judges (recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges). Dr. Stripling and others before him have done extensive excavations at this site for many years now, and the ancient biblical city coming to life is remarkable! While we were there, Chris interviewed Scott for our podcast, *Let the Stones Speak.* You can watch the full interview (and several others) on our *Let the Stones Speak* YouTube channel (*YouTube.com/@ArmstrongInstitute*). We have published a transcript of this interview on page 29.

The following evening, the night Operation Rising Lion began, *Celtic Throne* performed in Haifa to another bouncing audience of 1,500. Many stayed around afterward to meet the troupe, take photos and to once again express gratitude for bringing the show to Israel. By the time we arrived at our accommodations in Israel's capital it was after 1 a.m.

Looking back, it's sobering to think that while we were climbing into our soft beds in tranquil Jerusalem in the early hours of Friday morning, dozens of Israeli Air Force pilots were climbing into the cockpits of their fighter jets. Their dangerous mission fought over the next few hours and days would ensure future generations of Israelis, and visitors like us, could do what we were doing—sleep in peace.

When I woke Friday morning (nearly all of us slept through the sirens), everything was normal. That is, until I switched on my phone and read the explosion of texts from our Israeli friends. "Are you guys OK?" "I'm so sorry this happened—stay safe!" "Are the children terrified—keep them safe!" Not knowing what had happened, I bolted outside. But the streets of Jerusalem were quiet, though perhaps eerily quiet. Checking the news online, I immediately realized—Israel was now a war zone.

It's incredible how *suddenly* life can change. Most of us don't appreciate our frailty, our vulnerability to forces beyond our power to control, *until the sudden change happens*. It's humbling really. When I fell into bed early Friday morning, I had a clear, detailed plan for the next few days. When I woke a few hours later, it had all been swept away. The *Celtic Throne* tour was canceled, our flights were canceled, and our excavations were on hold.

That evening, from the safety of the enclosed, bunker-like veranda at the Institute in Talbiyeh (Jerusalem), we watched awe-struck as Tamir surface-to-air missiles were fired with astonishing precision by Israel's missile defense system to intercept ballistic missiles fired from Iran and Yemen. It was a surreal experience. On the ground, the streets of Jerusalem had never seemed so tranquil. There was no traffic, no pedestrians, no protests. Yet a few hundred meters away, and accompanied

Celtic Throne **performs in Tel Aviv's Charles Bronfman Auditorium on June 8.**

by the loud and chilling whir of sirens, the night sky was lit up by missiles smashing into one another—missiles capable of killing the humans just below.

In moments like this, all men are philosophers. *What if one of those contained uranium?* I thought to myself. *Iron Dome wouldn't protect us. It might actually be an accomplice, colliding with the nuclear payload hundreds of meters in the air where it would be dispersed by the wind over all the nation.* Watching missiles collide overhead and watching the people of a rich, powerful and sophisticated nation like Israel take to bomb shelters night after night, you can't help but realize how small and powerless we are in the face of human nature. We are, in the words of King David and Winston Churchill, *but a worm.*

The next few days were a blizzard of commotion and uncertainty. The *Celtic Throne* troupe had to travel to England, where we had six shows planned. Our first show was in eight days. Meanwhile our diggers, students from Herbert W. Armstrong College, were scheduled to arrive in five days. But Ben Gurion Airport was closed indefinitely and all flights in and out of Israel were canceled. On Sunday morning, we purchased tickets to London flying out of Amman, Jordan. These were canceled four hours later, and it was impossible to rebook. At one point, I was in negotiations with the captain of a boat to take us to Cyprus. But by Monday, a plan had coalesced and seemed to be holding: We would travel via coach to the Taba border crossing near Eilat, cross the border into Egypt, then take a bus to Sharm el-Sheikh, a resort town on the Red Sea. From there, we were able to

The *Jerusalem Post* review

Celtic Throne has unfinished business in Israel, and to borrow the famous words of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, **WE SHALL RETURN!**

book flights to England. The ancient Israelites left Egypt for Canaan—this was the Exodus in reverse.

By Thursday morning, six days after the war began, the entire 56-member *Celtic Throne* troupe—a mixed-multitude of men, women and children loaded with more than 175 bags packed with clothes, show costumes and expensive tech equipment—arrived exhausted but safe in London. Miraculously, not a single item was lost and not a single person came down sick or injured. The show went on!

Unfortunately, we had to cancel our shows in Be'er Sheva and Jerusalem, as well as a special pre-show reception with some of our friends in Israel. This was disappointing, but the enthusiastic response to the first shows followed by the sudden cancellation of the last two performances only grew our enthusiasm to share the show with the Israelis. *Celtic Throne* has unfinished business in Israel, and to borrow the famous words of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, *we shall return!*

In addition to working on the tour, I planned to use the summer trip to Israel to check-in on some of our activities on the Ophel, where the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology (AIBA) is involved in two exciting and important projects.

First, I was keen to see the progress being made on the Ophel Development Project. This is a venture that we are working on in support of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) together with the Berkman-Mintz family, Hebrew University, East Jerusalem Development Ltd. and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. Ultimately, the goal is to create a state-of-the-art tourist park on the Ophel,

a place people can visit to learn and enjoy the history, biblical and otherwise, of this area. Phase I of this project began in March, with an excavation exposing some monumental Iron Age architecture and remains associated with the biblical kings of Judah, including King Solomon (read about this dig at *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1238*).

In May, when the dig had ended, IAA employees began restoring the monumental architecture, a laborious yet vital process that, when complete, will give visitors a clear understanding of this part of Jerusalem from the 10th century to its destruction in 586 B.C.E. When Phase I is completed in fall 2026, visitors will be able to experience— that is, walk through, touch and read about—the world of some of Judah's greatest kings, priests and prophets.

This relatively small section of the Ophel (together with the City of David, which is next door), contains much of the greatest archaeological evidence we have of *biblical* Jerusalem. This is why we believe the restoration of this area, *and resurrecting its story,* is so important: Every king and prophet from Solomon to Zedekiah *lived* on the Ophel!

(Some readers have inquired about how they might support this project, financially or otherwise; we'd be happy to give more detail, just send us an e-mail at letters@armstronginstitute.org.)

The other Ophel project slated for this summer was the next phase of our excavation with Hebrew University and Prof. Uzi Leibner and Dr. Orit Peleg-Barkat. Work at the site was set to begin June 22, eight days after the war began and the same day *Celtic Throne* performed in Birmingham, United Kingdom. We had 14

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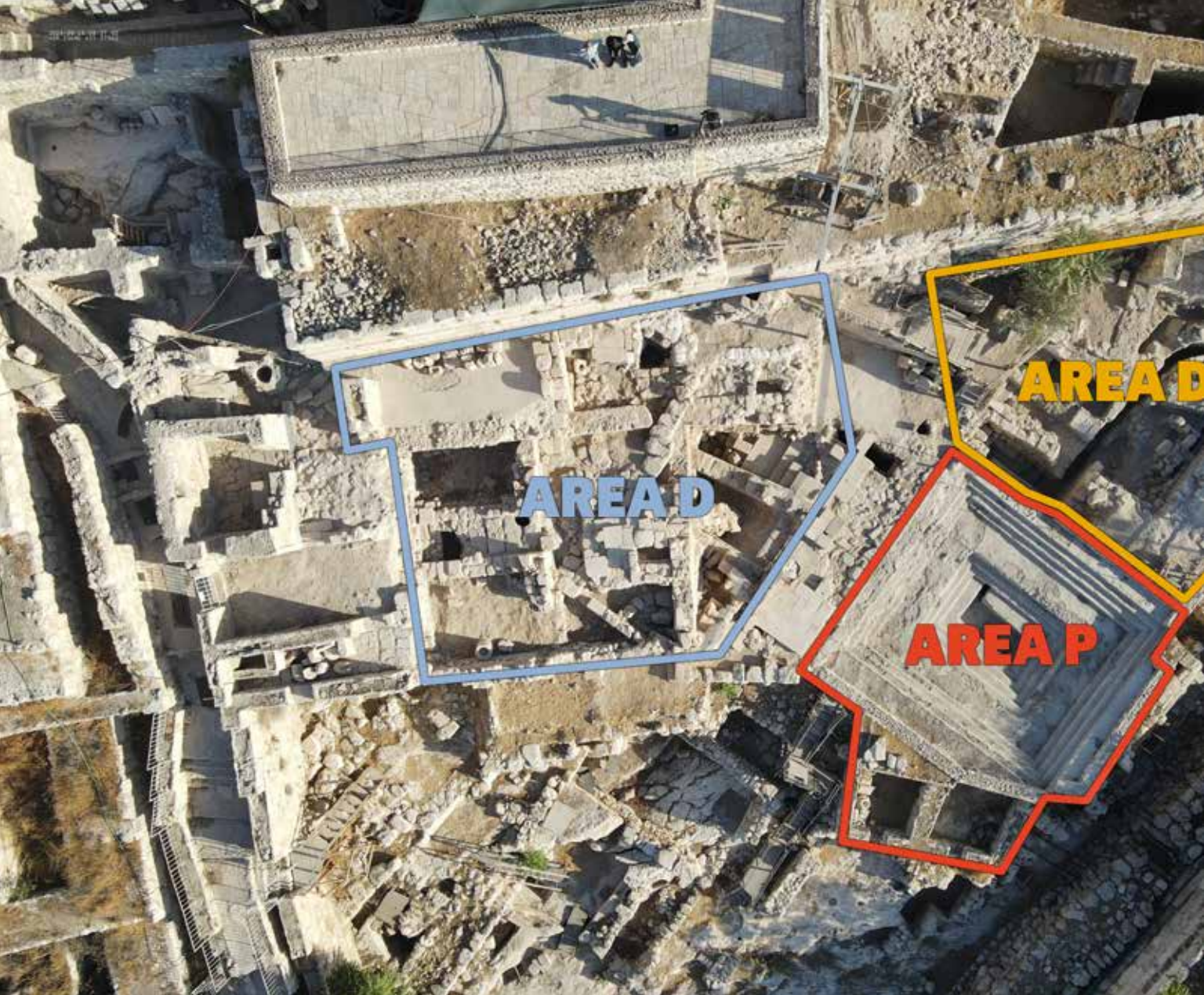
volunteers lined up to come over from the United States on June 18. Of course, everything had to be postponed, and it seemed inevitable that it might be canceled, like so many other digs across Israel.

As journalist Gordon Govier wrote on July 21, "Conflict in the Middle East has once again had the unintended effect of stalling efforts to excavate biblical history. Across Israel, digs were canceled when war broke out in mid-June. Though the war between Israel and Iran lasted only 12 days, it came in the middle of the dig season, when weather conditions and schedules align for archaeological work" ("War Interrupts Biblical Archaeology").

With digs across Israel closing down, we remained in close contact with Professor Leibner and Dr. Peleg-Barkat and let them know we were keen to get our students to Israel and dig. They were keen too, and told us, *If you can get your students here, we will dig!*

Securing tickets to Israel for 14 diggers in the aftermath of war was like putting an octopus to bed. Just when we had one flight booked, another was canceled, postponed or redirected. But we persisted and our diggers arrived in Israel Tuesday, July 1—exactly one week after the war had ended. Some of the crew was onsite that afternoon, preparing for the first full day of work on Wednesday, July 2.

Although delayed and completed in a slightly shorter time frame, the 2025 Ophel excavation was able to go forward unhindered. In the space of just five weeks, we removed eight truckloads and 16 dumpsters worth of material from the area, exposing 2,000-plus-year-old remains across nearly the entire Upper Ophel excavation site. It was a short but incredibly successful excavation. If you haven't already, you can learn more about this dig, and see plenty of photos, by visiting our blog page at

Ophel 2025 summer excavation areas

Christina Dattolo excavates in Area D1.

Workers clean around Area P.

Christopher Eames
@Chris_K_Eames

July 1 ... the missiles have stopped flying (for now) ... and our Ophel excavation site begins to stir again #archaeology @ArmstrongIBA

ArmstrongInstitute.org/1253. We also hope to reveal more about this excavation in the next issue of this magazine.

We're very thankful to Professor Leibner, Dr. Peleg-Barkat, the Hebrew University office team, and all the volunteers who came out and excavated even during these unique and trying times. This took a lot of sacrifice, and even boldness, and we are very grateful to be part of such a dedicated Ophel family.

The situation that led into this year's excavation is not unlike the circumstances that surrounded last year's, which was bookended by missile attacks and canceled flights. In so many ways, this seems to be the new normal for our excavations, and for Israel.

As these situations become increasingly more common, we've had some ask why we continue to visit Israel. Traveling to Israel isn't easy or simple; it's often expensive, exhausting and difficult. But the reason we keep coming back is simple: because we love Israel and we love Israel's archaeology—especially Jerusalem and its archaeology. Israel's history is our history, and Israel's story is our story.

About our namesake Herbert W. Armstrong, Prof. Benjamin Mazar said: "Mr. Armstrong loves and admires Jerusalem, and wholeheartedly believes in the future of Israel and the Holy City, and for him, the unified Jerusalem is not only the metropolis of Israel and the spiritual center of monotheistic religions *but also the symbol of a great past and the hope of a better future for mankind*." We hold fast to this belief. Israel is rich in history. There is so much yet to be uncovered. And we love being a part of the work of uncovering Israel's history in Jerusalem.

That is why, when others are rushing to leave, we are doing everything we can to get into the country. ◼

Redating the DEAD SEA
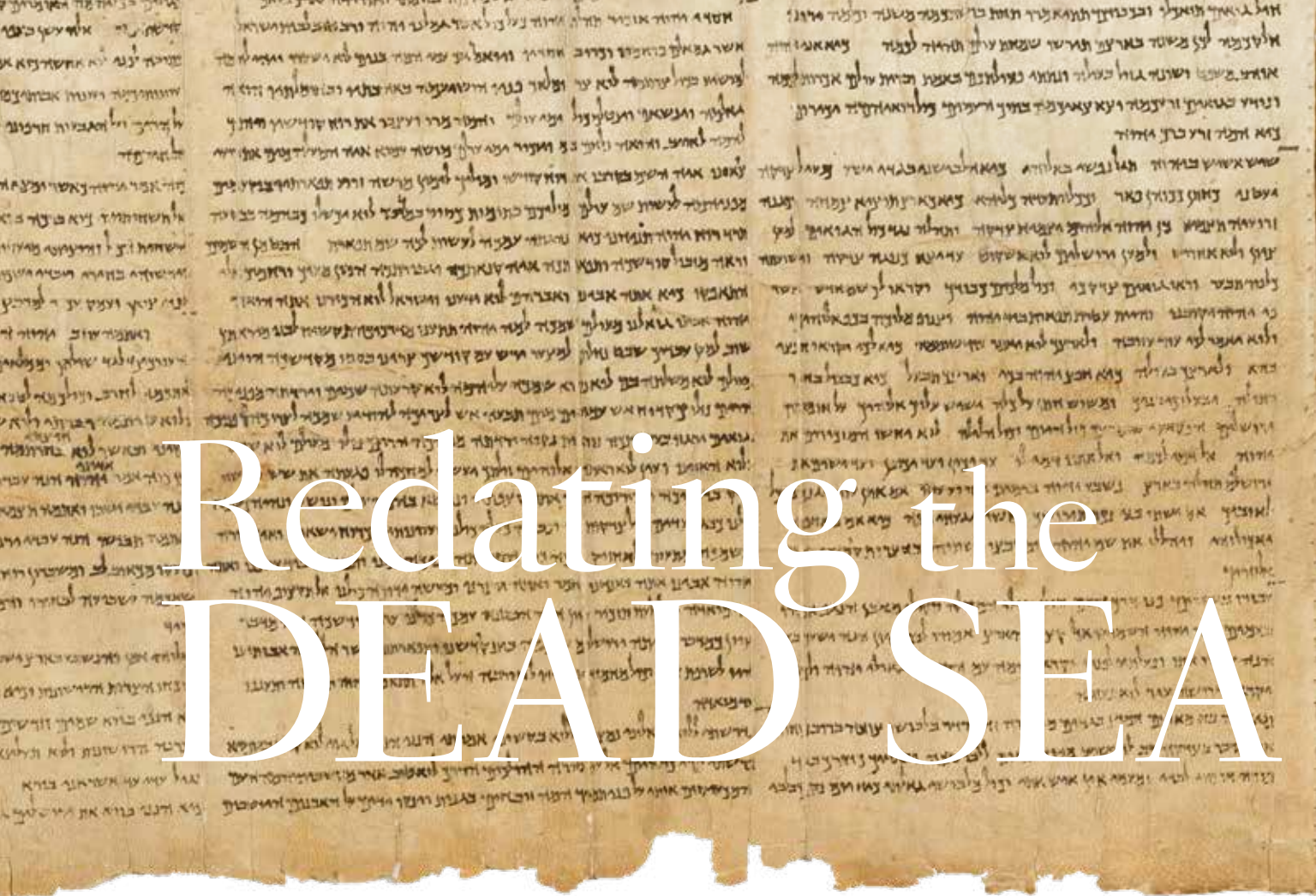
An extremely consequential new study—
with especially interesting implications for the book of Daniel

BY ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE STAFF

BRAND-NEW RESEARCH, UTILIZING ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI)—in conjunction with radiocarbon dating (^{14}C)—is serving to corroborate the earlier composition of biblical texts, upending various theories of much later development.

This research concerns the famous Dead Sea Scrolls—a massive early trove of thousands of fragments of biblical (and other) texts found buried within caves in the Judean Desert—most of which have been dated to between the second century B.C.E. to second century C.E. According to the new research, however, many of these manuscripts should be dated significantly *earlier* than researchers previously thought.

Former research and dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls relied on more cumbersome paleographic approaches, manually analyzing the development of writing style in order to determine dates, with very few firmly established, securely dated time stamps to go on. The new AI program, named Enoch, is now calling into question the original dating of many of these scrolls.

In a new paper published in June in the scientific journal *PLOS One,* titled "Dating Ancient Manuscripts Using Radiocarbon and AI-Based Writing Style Analysis," authors Mladen Popović, Maruf A. Dhali, Lambert Schomaker, Johannes van der Plicht, Kaare Lund Rasmussen, Jacopo La Nasa, Ilaria Degano, Maria Perla Colombini and Eibert Tigchelaar reveal "Enoch, an AI-based date-prediction model, trained on the basis of 24 ^{14}C-dated scroll samples."

Multiple thousands of Dead Sea Scrolls manuscript fragments exist—obviously, not all of them can be subjected to the expensive and somewhat-destructive process of carbon dating. Further, manual analysis of the fragments can often miss the tiniest

The Great Isaiah Scroll

of marks and strokes left behind on the often sorely degraded scrolls. The digital program Enoch—trained on the smaller number of ¹⁴C-dated scrolls and then tested and proved for accuracy against other scrolls of likewise-known dates—can be turned loose on the broader collection.

The authors explain: "By applying Bayesian ridge regression on angular and allographic writing style feature vectors, Enoch could predict ¹⁴C-based dates with varied mean absolute errors (MAES) of 27.9 to 30.7 years. In order to explore the viability of the character-shape-based dating approach, the trained Enoch model then computed date predictions for 135 non-dated scrolls, aligning with 79 percent in paleographic post-hoc evaluation. The ¹⁴C ranges and Enoch's style-based predictions are *often older than traditionally assumed paleographic estimates,* leading to a new chronology of the scrolls and the redating of ancient Jewish key texts that contribute to current debates on Jewish and Christian origins" (emphasis added throughout).

The exciting new research has remarkable potential and significant implications—not least in the redating of some of the key prophetic biblical works found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Bringing Back Daniel

The text of Daniel is a key case in point and is "one of the most significant findings of the ¹⁴C results," the authors wrote.

The biblical setting for the Prophet Daniel and his book is during the sixth century B.C.E. Most scholars, however, place the origin of the text centuries later, broadly in attempts to postdate the composition of its many detailed events and prophecies contained within its latter chapters, especially concerning the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires (312–63 B.C.E. and 305–30 B.C.E., respectively) and in particular, the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.E.).

4Q114 is a Dead Sea Scrolls manuscript preserving the text of Daniel 8-11, "which scholars date on literary-historical grounds to the 160s B.C.E.," the authors wrote. Granted, even this date is long prior to certain early theories for the composition of the book (with relation to the much-debated subject of Daniel's prophecies

concerning even later events and entities, such as the Roman Empire). Yet the new research tantalizingly takes this back a step further again, with an "accepted 2σ calibrated range for 4Q114, [of] 230–160 B.C.E." for this particular copy of the text.

The 4Q114 Daniel fragment is not the only biblical manuscript from the collection that has been significantly predated. Some of the scrolls already believed to be the oldest in the collection—fragments of Jeremiah and Samuel, originally dated to the third century B.C.E.—have been submitted as dating to as early as the *fourth* century B.C.E. Ecclesiastes is another text whose fragments have been dated much earlier within the third century B.C.E. by Enoch, pushing the boundaries of the late-composition theories for this text held by many scholars.

It's worth noting that the accepted 79 percent of dates returned by Enoch following "post-hoc evaluation" are just those dates believed by the researchers to be "realistic"—the "remaining 21 percent judged to be too old, too young or indecisive," reported *Haaretz,* following an interview with the lead researcher ("Dead Sea Scrolls May Be Older Than We Thought, AI-Based Study Says," June 4). "Given that Enoch produces a range of likely dates for an artifact rather than a specific date, it's hard to specifically say how many scrolls should be back-dated, as parts of those ranges often overlap with those provided by radiocarbon or traditional paleographic analysis, Popović says." Nevertheless, "broadly speaking, it now seems that the oldest scrolls date to the fourth century B.C.E., and there is a larger amount than we thought from the third century B.C.E., in the Hellenistic Period," as opposed to the later Hasmonean Period (and theories of Hasmonean development of these texts).

On this, there are two particular script-types that have long been highlighted among the Dead Sea Scrolls trove: the earlier "Hasmonean type" script and the later "Herodian type" script. The AI-based findings reveal the "Hasmonean type" script to be significantly older, and the "Herodian type" to be likewise—also, that the "Herodian" existed concurrently with much of the use of the "Hasmonean" (contrary to assumptions of an evolutionary sequence).

"Scholars often assume that the rise and expansion of the Hasmonaean kingdom from the mid-second century B.C.E. onward caused a rise in literacy and gave a push to scribal and intellectual culture," wrote Popović et al. in their *PLOS One* paper. "Yet the results of this study attest to the copying of multiple literary manuscripts before this period."

"The results of this study thus dismantle unsubstantiated historical suppositions and chronological limitations," they conclude.

Prophetic Pushback

Since its publication, the new research has piqued an immense amount of interest—particularly concerning the dating of the prophetic text of Daniel, in manuscript 4Q114.

Unsurprisingly, the authors themselves do not make a case for the prophetic nature of the text, simply presenting in their article the dates that Enoch returned. Rather, as highlighted especially in follow-up interviews concerning their publication, they attempt to explain 4Q114 as possibly representing a copy of Daniel in circulation at least during the lifetime of its postulated early second-century B.C.E. author—one that would have to be penned almost immediately after the events that occurred during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes had taken place (if taking the latter range of the dating for this scroll—still, most of its dating range predates even this). Yet it would be remarkable for such a text to have not only been penned and entered general circulation, but also a copy to have made it out as far as this esoteric, fringe, cloistered community of ascetics living in the Judean desert.

Regarding this, epigrapher Prof. Christopher Rollston was quick to contest the new dating of 4Q114. A June 20, *Biblical Archaeology Society* article titled "Can AI Date the Dead Sea Scrolls?" quoted Rollston, saying: "Enoch's calibrated date range for 4Q114 is: 230–160 B.C.E. This manuscript contains portions of Daniel 8-11. Chapters 7-12 of Daniel reference the desecration of the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 B.C.E.), something which occurred in 167 B.C.E. Therefore, it has been recognized for centuries that *this block of Daniel cannot be dated prior to 167.* This has been known all the way back to the Neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyry, who lived in the third century C.E. Thus, in this particular case, which is the one case where we can really fact-check Enoch, it is crystal clear that Enoch's dates are much too high."

That, or perhaps the text really is prophetic.

In the more deferential words of Dr. Yonatan Adler—himself a prominent proponent of later compositional theories: "If the reason why scholars critique the results is that it doesn't necessarily fit in with what they have always thought about dating, then that is not a good critique" (ibid).

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls trove in the late 1940s set off an earthquake in the archaeological and biblical studies communities. With Enoch's findings, it seems like we may well be experiencing the foreshocks of another. Put succinctly in a social media post by Ph.D. student in Septuagint studies Camilla Recalcati: "This will have extraordinary consequences on our field." ∎

New Bulla Discovered—
Mentioning
the Servant of
King Josiah?

The Temple Mount Sifting Project announces the discovery of yet another seal impression from Jerusalem.

BY ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE STAFF

In July, the Temple Mount Sifting Project (TMSP)—an initiative that painstakingly sifts through tons of earth illegally excavated from the Temple Mount and dumped by the Islamic Waqf—announced the discovery of yet another First Temple Period bulla (clay seal impression). This one is especially exciting, given the possibility that it may reference a figure mentioned in the biblical account.

The bulla was analyzed by expert epigrapher Dr. Anat Mendel-Geberovich and TMSP codirector Zachi Dvira. It bears the following inscription:

ליד[ע]יה
(בן) עשיהו
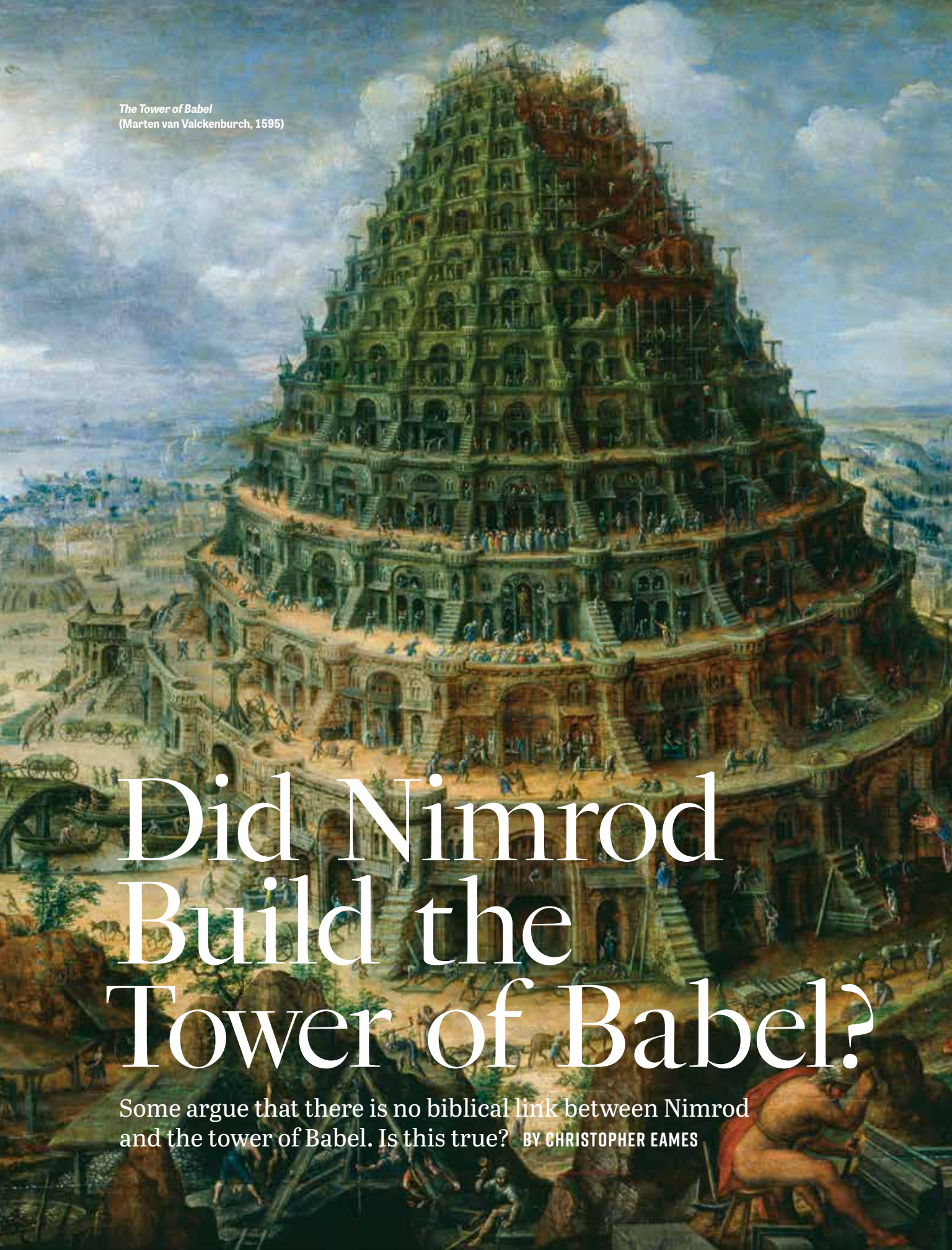Belonging to Yed[a']yah
(son of) Asayahu

The clay item was used to seal a bag or storage container (based on its reverse impression). Paleographically, the text fits best with the end of the Iron Age period, within the late seventh to early sixth centuries B.C.E. Chronologically, during this very time period the Bible mentions a figure in the Jerusalem administration bearing the very same name as Yedayah's father—anglicized as "Asaiah the king's servant."

The biblical Asaiah (with the shorter theophoric ending -iah or -yah, rather than -yahu—note that both forms can be used interchangeably) was a servant of King Josiah (r. circa 640–609 B.C.E.). He features in the parallel accounts found in 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34, which describe the rediscovery of the "book of the Law" during temple renovations. When King Josiah "heard the words of the Law … he rent his clothes" (2 Chronicles 34:19),

The Tower of Babel
(Marten van Valckenburch, 1595)

Did Nimrod Build the Tower of Babel?

Some argue that there is no biblical link between Nimrod
and the tower of Babel. Is this true?   BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

D ID Nimrod really build the tower of Babel? Put another way—setting aside questions of historicity for now—does the biblical account imply that Nimrod built the tower of Babel?

For many, the answer likely seems obvious. It's a popular biblical story almost taken for granted: Nimrod rebels against God and constructs a great city and tower at Babel, an act that results in the divine confusion of languages and dispersion of peoples across the Earth.

Yet there exists a significant Bible apologetic, literalist opinion that Nimrod did *not* build the tower of Babel—that he instead may have been on the scene either long prior to or long after the events surrounding the tower of Babel and the confounding of language.

An example of this was highlighted in a recent "reaction" video "Nimrod Built the Tower of Babel??" from popular Christian YouTube apologist Michael Jones. He responded to an individual claiming that "Nimrod was the one who built the tower of Babel to go and try to defeat God."

"Oh come on, Ryan, I have to debunk this again?" Jones retorted. "For the one millionth time, the Bible does not say Nimrod built the tower of Babel. He's not even mentioned in Genesis 11. This is a conspiracy theory that goes back to Alexander Hislop in his nonsensical book, *The Two Babylons.*" Hislop's now-infamous 19th-century work made the case for Catholicism as promulgating pagan Babylonian rituals first initiated by Nimrod and his consort at Babel—that "papal worship" represented the rising great "mystery" religion warned about by the Apostle John in Revelation 17, "Babylon the Great."

It *is* true that Nimrod is not mentioned by name in Genesis 11. But is the notion of Nimrod leading the construction of the tower of Babel really such a modern phenomenon? *The Two Babylons* aside, is the enduring association of Nimrod with the tower of Babel really so tenuous?

Long Before, or Long After?

The name "Nimrod" is found just four times in the Bible: twice in Genesis 10; once in a parallel genealogical passage in 1 Chronicles 1; and once in Micah 5, which mentions the "land of Nimrod." Of these passages, Genesis 10:8-10 record the most detail: "And Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; wherefore it is said: 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.' And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar." Certainly, there is no direct statement here specifically saying that "Nimrod built the tower of Babel." Nor does Genesis 11 specifically mention Nimrod's name in the context of the construction of the tower.

On this basis, various alternate schemes have been proposed. A good example is in Prof. Douglas Petrovich's recently published book *Nimrod the Empire-Builder: Architect of Shock and Awe,* in which he makes the case for Nimrod as coming on the scene many centuries after the construction of the tower (using a longer Septuagint chronology for the dating of the Flood and tower of Babel events). On this basis—opposing "the uncritical assumption of many that Nimrod lived *before* the calamity at the tower of Babel, rather than *after* this set of events"—Petrovich in his book reviews a number of proposed historical "Nimrod" candidates.

Similarly, Prof. Michael Apka in his *Asia Adventist Seminary Studies* paper "Did Nimrod Build the Tower of Babel?" concluded that "the claim that Nimrod built the tower of Babel does not appear to be feasible." For his part, Apka suggests the very opposite to Petrovich—that Nimrod long predated the tower of Babel event. Not only that, Apka argued that "the Bible does not portray Nimrod negatively" at all; instead, this is the result of "postbiblical sources, based mostly on speculative traditions, that portrayed Nimrod with the negativity that has persisted up to the present. Therefore, it is unsafe to conclude, based on nonbiblical sources, that Nimrod's activities were hostile and directed against God or that he built the tower of Babel."

End of story? Is Nimrod really so divorced from the tower of Babel episode?

Not quite.

Testimony of the Earliest Writers

One assertion needs to be addressed from the outset: This is the notion that Nimrod's construction of the tower was a 19th-century

"conspiracy." Regardless of what one thinks of Hislop's *The Two Babylons,* nothing could be further from the truth. The belief that it was Nimrod who directed efforts to build the tower has currency across *thousands* of years and is present in Jewish, Christian and Islamic writings.

The earliest-known extrabiblical source to clearly describe Nimrod in any detail associates him with the tower. The Jewish philosopher Philo—on the scene more than 2,000 years ago, from the late first century B.C.E. to the early first century C.E.—wrote the following in *Questions on Genesis:* "[O]n which account they said, 'Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord?' ... [I]n truth he who is an emulator of earthly and corruptible things is always engaged in a conflict with heavenly and admirable natures, *raising up earth as a bulwark against heaven*" (2.82; emphasis added).

In the decades proceeding Philo, we find the following testimony from the first-century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus: "Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. ... He also said he would be revenged on God, if He should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!

"Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God; and they built a tower .... The place wherein they built the tower is now called Babylon, because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before; for the Hebrews mean by the word Babel, confusion" (*Antiquities of the Jews,* 1.4.2-3).

The belief that Nimrod was directly responsible for building the tower of Babel continues from the earliest extrabiblical references on throughout later Jewish and Christian accounts. Numerous first- and second-millennium rabbinic writings attribute the tower to Nimrod, even calling it "the house of Nimrod." The same is true of the early Christian writers: The fourth-century Augustine wrote in *City of God,* "Nimrod ... with his subject peoples, began to erect a tower against the Lord, which symbolizes his impious pride." For Islam's part, while the Qur'an does not refer directly to Nimrod or the tower of Babel, later Muslim sources do. The 11th-century Abu Ishaq al-Tha'labi states that "Nimrod ... built a tall tower in Babylon" and proceeds to describe events in relation to this (*Lives of the Prophets*).

Jones's remark that the notion of Nimrod building the tower of Babel is merely the product of a 19th-century "conspiracy theory" is clearly wrong. This is a

known claim promulgated by assorted historians and religious figures for more than 2,000 years. The belief that Nimrod built the tower of Babel is mentioned so often by so many authors of differing religious and cultural backgrounds. So, then, where does this association stem from?

Back to the Bible

The reason Philo, Josephus and others associate Nimrod with the tower of Babel is simple: The biblical text does the same!

This is seen immediately in the name of the figure we are introduced to: *Nimrod* (נמרד). It is a matter of debate as to whether this was a title, his real name or a play on his real name (see article, page 14). Whatever the case, the most straightforward interpretation of the Hebrew word is "we will rebel" (נ-מרד). This alone would be a perfect synopsis for the Genesis 11 story, which clearly associates the tower of Babel as an act of rebellion. This was granted by Apka: "Admittedly, it was rebellion that fomented the building of the tower of Babel." It is quite plausible that this was a tweaked Hebraization of a similar original name in order to render this meaning (see page 21).

We see the same theme in the description of Nimrod as "a mighty hunter *before the Lord.*" The word "before," *lifne* (לפני), literally means "in the face of (פני) something/someone"; thus it is typically rendered "against," "in front of" or "before." In Hebrew usage, it does not have to have a negative connotation, but it certainly can. That this negative sense is the true interpretation comes from another early source, centuries earlier than Philo—the Septuagint (LXX).

Put simply, the Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible; the Torah portion of which was translated at the behest of Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the early third century B.C.E. In cases of textual ambiguity, such early translations can help determine original meanings of since-lost words, as well as interpretations of various themes among early communities—and the LXX is the earliest such known translation. In the LXX, this word "before" was rendered by its translators into Greek as the word *enantion* (ἐναντίον). This is a decidedly negative word, meaning "contrary," "opposing," "hostile" or "against." To whom is Nimrod contrary, opposing, hostile and against? "The Lord."

Note further that this characterization of Nimrod is repeated twice for emphasis: "He was *a mighty hunter before the Lord;* wherefore it is said: 'Like Nimrod *a mighty hunter before the Lord'*" (Genesis 10:9). In the words of the New Living Translation, "his name became proverbial"—this repetition serves as another hint at the negative notoriety of this individual.

Small wonder that Nimrod's name has indeed become proverbial to this day in its negative notoriety. And we haven't even arrived at Babel yet.

'The Beginning of His Kingdom'

Genesis 10:10 provides the primary link: "[T]he beginning of his kingdom was *Babel"* (meaning "confusion"). The tower is not mentioned here specifically, but it would seem prodigiously coincidental for Genesis 10:10 to describe a kingdom beginning at Babel and the following chapter to describe the details of such a beginning at Babel, and for them *not* to be referring to the same event.

To that end, we only see this city "Babel" named in these two side-by-side passages—Genesis 10:10 and 11:9—in the *entire Torah.* It doesn't appear again until the end of 2 Kings—*9,732 verses later.* It hardly seems much of a stretch, then, to associate these two virtually side-by-side mentions of Babel—just 31 verses apart—as part of the same narrative, describing the same series of events.

Especially not given the same pattern of dispersion found in both Genesis 10:10 and 11:9. Genesis 10:10 calls this establishment of Babel "the beginning of his kingdom." This word, *reshit* (ראשית), is variously translated as "beginning," "start" or "the first part" (especially in the literal translations). From there, Nimrod's kingdom diverted to other territories, from Erech (Uruk) onward. This is the same theme in Genesis 11: A collective city/civilization *beginning* at Babel and, following the confusion of languages, spreading out. Again, these parallels seem oddly coincidental: In Genesis 10, a beginning at Babel and a spreading out; in Genesis 11, a beginning at Babel and a spreading out.

Then there was Peleg.

Bring in the Second Witness

Genesis 10, the "Table of Nations" as it is often called, is a broad genealogical list. The Nimrod inset stands out, therefore, as a case of particular added detail for a notable individual and a notable event (and what more notable event than the one detailed in the following chapter?).

But it is not the only inset in Genesis 10. There is another that refers to a suspiciously similar event. Enter Peleg.

Peleg is a descendant of Noah's son Shem. His inset, somewhat more brief than Nimrod's, reads as follows: "And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg; for *in his days was the earth divided;* and his brother's name was Joktan" (verse 25).

As with the Nimrod inset, there has been significant debate about the nature of Peleg's. But a long-standing interpretation has been to associate it with *precisely*

the same event heralded in the earlier Nimrod inset and explained in detail in the next chapter: the tower of Babel incident. Genesis 10:25 clearly associates Peleg with a "division" of mankind around the Earth, matching well Genesis 11:9, when "the Lord scatter[ed] them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

The word used for "divided" (נפלגה) in Genesis 10:25—from which Peleg's name (פלג) is derived—is rare; it is found only three other times in the entire Hebrew Bible. It is used once in the parallel account of Peleg in 1 Chronicles 1:19, once in Job, and once in Psalm 55 *in describing confusion of languages:* "Destroy, O Lord, and *divide their tongues:* for I have seen violence and strife in the city" (verse 9; King James Version).

For this Peleg inset of Genesis 10 to apply to the tower of Babel event would only strengthen the conclusion that the other inset does too (let alone the other connections in this earlier Nimrod inset, including the very use of the name *Babel*).

Genesis 11:16 states that Eber begat Peleg at the age of 34. In the genealogical list, Eber is the great-great-grandson of Noah. Nimrod, on the other hand, is listed as the great-grandson of Noah, and on the basis of this generational comparison, it would be logical to infer that he was somewhat older than Eber. Despite arguments of generational "telescoping" (the practice of skipping generations in a genealogical list) from those disassociating Nimrod from the tower of Babel incident—thus putting him long after—this comparable generational placement of Nimrod and Eber-Peleg is another clue among the rest that is surely more than coincidental. This puts the "dividing of the earth" as well as the exploits of Nimrod at Babel during the same general period, thus drawing the same logical conclusion that all events are associated directly with the more detailed account we read in the following chapter—the construction of (and dispersion from) the city and tower of Babel.

In Sum

Is Nimrod's association with the tower of Babel really so tenuous? Certainly not—quite the contrary. There is good internal biblical evidence connecting the man and his tower, together with the abundance of extrabiblical textual material drawing the same logical conclusion. It seems to me that attempts to separate Nimrod from the tower of Babel are done primarily to try to reinterpret the biblical data into other perceived and preconceived historical or archaeological frameworks.

But is it necessary to separate Nimrod from Genesis 11 and the themes of tower-building and confusion of languages in order to fit with the historical evidence? We'll explore this topic in the following pages. ∎

Nimrod: Hunting the Hunter

Strongman of legend—and actual history?

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

THE MYSTERIOUS POST-FLOOD biblical figure Nimrod—the "mighty hunter before the Lord" (Genesis 10:9)—is an individual of infamy, regarded as the first empire-builder, original despot and the man responsible for leading the ill-fated construction of the tower of Babel. Naturally, the quest to identify the historical Nimrod has been a long one.

The fifth-century B.C.E. Greek historian Ctesias of Cnidus, working from the courts of Persia and purporting to have access to royal archives, recorded that a man named Ninus founded the Assyrian Empire and the city of Nineveh. Though much of Ctesias's original work has been lost, it was preserved through secondary references. From his writings, we learn that Ninus was "by nature warlike and ambitious" and that he was married to a "glamorous prostitute" named "Semiramis, the most famous of all the women," who had a "son named Ninyas." Ctesias also described Semiramis's role in the founding of Babylon.

Ctesias dated the reign of Ninus, mentioning a space of three centuries prior to the reign of Cyrus (r. circa 559–530 B.C.E.), preceded in turn by "more than 1,360 years" to Assyria's founding by Ninus. Depending on the exact interpretation of these dates, various scholars have calculated Ctesias's Ninus as having ruled sometime within the mid-late 23rd century B.C.E.—fitting rather well with the general Masoretic time frame for the biblical Nimrod. (For quotes and analysis, see Andrew Nichols's *The Complete Fragments of Ctesias of Cnidus: Translation and Commentary.*)

The identification of Ctesias's Ninus as Nimrod was made as early as the third century C.E. in the Clementine *Recognitions.* This equivocation continued to be popular until the 19th century, when it was propounded most notably by the theologian Alexander Hislop in his book *The Two Babylons.* Yet during this same century, the historicity of both the biblical Nimrod and Ctesias's Ninus began to be called into question.

An avalanche of archaeological discoveries from the power centers of Assyria and Babylon began emerging—most notable among them inscriptions, including detailed and newly deciphered king lists reaching back into deep antiquity. None bore the name "Ninus"—or "Nimrod," for that matter. Without any scientific data to support the claim, Ctesias's Ninus was rejected by scholars as a "wholly fictional" figure. (A little more nuance is given to his consort, Semiramis—see sidebar, "Searching for Semiramis," page 23.)

What, then, of Nimrod? He, too, is widely held to be a fictional figure, unmentioned in the earliest Mesopotamian records. That is, of course, unless he is to be identified by a different name within them. This is the premise on which the search for Nimrod has continued.

Possibilities

Various researchers and enthusiasts have proposed different options. These identifications are typically based either on name similarities or parallels to the brief biography for Nimrod found in the biblical account. Options include identifying the consonantal Hebrew name נמרד, *NiMRoD,* with the likes of Mesopotamian deities such as *NiNuRTa* (note that the *m/n* and *d/t* consonants are easily confused and interchangeable, cross-culturally), or the deity *MaRDuk,* whose first three consonants are the same as the last three of Nimrod's.

An alternative approach is to select the ancient Mesopotamian ruler seen as best-befitting the cities attributed to Nimrod. These are listed in Genesis 10:9-10 (or verses 9-12, depending on whether one takes Asshur or Nimrod to be responsible for those mentioned in the latter verses; more modern translations attribute these latter cities to Nimrod). Prof. Douglas Petrovich takes this approach in his recent book *Nimrod the Empire Builder: Architect of Shock and Awe.* Petrovich considers a number of proposed Nimrod figures and ultimately settles on Sargon of Akkad—otherwise known as Sargon the Great—as the best fit for ruler over the cities

Nimrod
(David Scott, 1832)

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An alternative approach is to select the ancient Mesopotamian ruler seen as best-befitting the cities attributed to Nimrod.

mentioned. This, however, is on the basis of Nimrod *not* founding any of them nor having anything to do with the tower of Babel episode.

Yet if our search for Nimrod also takes into account the connection of the tower of Babel and confusion of languages episode recorded in Genesis 10 and 11 (see article, page 10), I believe a stronger candidate for this epic biblical figure emerges.

Enter Egyptologist David Rohl.

Rohl's Nimrod

Rohl is one of the more controversial figures in the world of biblical archaeology. He is most famous (or perhaps more accurately, *infamous*), for his radical "New Chronology" of ancient Egyptian history. Rohl's model dramatically shrinks Egypt's Third Intermediate Period, thus down-dating the pharaohs on through the famous New Kingdom Period by several centuries. These views have recently been heavily

THE 'SUMERIAN PROBLEM'

History books identify Sumer (biblical Shinar) as the "cradle of civilization," with the Sumerians often called the "first civilization." Alongside the Sumerian city-states, another civilization, centered at Akkad, emerged—eventually overtaking Sumer as the dominant entity in the region. While these groups existed together, the Akkadians and the Sumerians shared close relations and similarities, even to the point of being described as "symbiotic." "It is impossible to tell the story of one without the other," notes Paul Cooper in his documentary series *Fall of Civilizations.*

There was one problem, however: Even though they practically lived together, Akkadians and the Sumerians both spoke entirely *different,* completely unrelated languages! The same is true of the neighboring Elamites. Both the Sumerian and Elamite languages are known as "language isolates" (languages with no known links or roots to any other ancient language). How did it happen?

This conundrum is known as the "Sumerian Problem." There are many theories for its cause. One is

that the Sumerian people migrated into the region from the East, via the Indus Valley: a migration perhaps driven by a rise in water levels in the Persian Gulf, leading to traditions of a great flood. Yet there are problems with this interpretation. There is no evidence for such a journey and no linguistic links with the East. It doesn't explain how the Akkadians and Sumerians are so closely tied, with the Akkadians likewise preserving flood traditions. And the Sumerian civilization was the *first* to be established in Mesopotamia—Akkad emerged later. Why, then, is Sumerian the isolate?

Modern theories aside, the ancients had their own explanation: Such linguistic confusion was caused by a deity at Eridu, as told in the late third millennium B.C.E. Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (as highlighted in the main article). Another is told in a later, early first millennium (eighth or seventh century) B.C.E. Assyrian document, likewise describing an event in ancient Babylon. The damaged inscription reads: "… he the father of all the gods had repudiated; the thought of his heart was evil. … of Babylon he hastens to the submission, small and great he

Fragment of *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (circa 1900–1600 B.C.E.)

confounded on the mound. Their walls all the day he founded; for their destruction in the night … he did not leave a remainder. In his anger also his secret counsel he pours out; *to confound* [*their*] *speeches he set his face.* He gave the command, he made strange their counsel …" (translation by Assyriologist George Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*).

The word "confound" here is the Assyrian-Semitic word *balel*—and precisely the same word is used in the *biblical* account of the building of a *tower,* and a subsequent *confusion of languages.* "Therefore was the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there *confound* [*'balal'*] the language of all the earth …" (Genesis 11:9). The language of this Assyrian inscription dramatically parallels the biblical account.

For more on this subject, see "The 'Sumerian Problem'—Evidence of the Confusion of Languages?" (*ArmstrongInstitute.org/280*). ◾

Cradle of Civilization

Pictured are the territorial entities of the kingdoms of Sumer (biblical Shinar) and Aratta (biblical Ararat?) during the third millennium B.C.E. A series of texts relating to Sumerian King Enmerkar describe his interactions with the "Lord of Aratta." In *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,* Enmerkar demands materials from the mountainous land of Aratta for his construction projects. In *Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana,* the ruler of Aratta refuses to submit to Enmerkar, and the two argue over who has the favor of the goddess Inanna. In the *Lugalbanda* poems, Enmerkar leads a military force to Aratta and besieges the land; after a lengthy campaign and a number of setbacks, Inanna instructs Enmerkar on how to wrest control of Aratta.

Significant Mesopotamian and Anatolian sites are identified, as well as posited locations of the biblical tower of Babel and Mount Ararat.

"And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. ... And it came to pass, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there" (Genesis 8:4; 11:2).

🏛 **Possible locations for the tower of Babel**

▲ **Possible locations of Mt. Ararat**

BLACK SEA

ARATTA

CASPIAN SEA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

SUMER

CANAAN

● **Jerusalem**

PERSIAN GULF

NUBIA (KUSH)

RED SEA

SUMER

Sumer is often te[...]
tion." Located in t[...]
Mesopotamia re[...]
building material[...]
Genesis 11:2-3). T[...]
the biblical "Shina[...]
of mankind's eme[...]
Hebrew term for[...]
the Hittite term fo[...]
derived from the[...]
are some of the p[...]
the tower of Bab[...]
later-period) site[...]

ARATTA

Ağrı Dağı (modern Mt. Ararat) ▲

Durupınar ▲

ARATTA
(URARTU/ARARAT?)

▲**Karaca Dağ**

●**Göbekli Tepe**

▲**Cudi Dağı**

●**Urkesh**

●**Nineveh**

Kalhu (Calah)? ●

ASSYRIA

Euphrates

●**Asshur**

Tigris

ELAM

...ermed the "earliest-known civiliza-... the alluvial plains of the southern ...gion, the territory has little natural ...s, besides mudbrick (compare ...he term "Sumer" is cognate with ...ar," center of the biblical account ...ergent post-Flood civilization. The ...r this area, *Šin'ar* (שנער), parallels ...r the same, *Šanhar*, in turn ... Akkadian *Šumer*. Indicated here ...popular candidates for the site of ...el, including at the traditional (albeit ...e of Babylon, Borsippa and Eridu.

●**Akkad (Accad)**

Babylon 🏛 ●**Kish**

Borsippa 🏛

SUMER

Uruk (Erech) ●

Eridu (Babel) 🏛 ●**Ur**

PERSIAN GULF

publicized, most notably in the popular *Patterns of Evidence* films.

Although I disagree with Rohl's New Chronology model (read *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1156* and */1216* for more information), disagreeing with a researcher's position in one area does not mean one cannot agree with his position in others. Unfortunately, we live in a tribalistic world of personality cults, in which there is little room for disagreement and nuanced positions—something seen most starkly in politics and media but that has also bled into academia.

Setting Egyptian chronology aside, when it comes to the topic of the early Genesis accounts in general, and the identification of Nimrod in particular, I believe Rohl makes an excellent case for one particular figure: The third-millennium B.C.E. Sumerian king *Enmerkar.*

Introducing Enmerkar

"When I first came across the Sumerian epics of *Enmerkar* and *Lugalbanda,* I was immediately struck," Rohl writes in *Legends: The Genesis of Civilisation,* noting the parallels between the Sumerian, Assyrian and biblical texts. "Enmerkar ... turn[s] out to be a major player in our story and a famous, but historically lost, biblical character."

One of the best-known artifacts mentioning Enmerkar is Weld-Blundell 444, better known as the Sumerian King List (or rather, a copy of it). This clay prism was found in 1922 during an excavation

WHAT WAS THE TOWER OF BABEL?

FOR MOST, THE TOWER OF Babel probably conjures up images of a tall, narrow tower spiraling up into the heavens. This classic depiction is found in numerous famous works of art. Yet it is rather anachronistic—most likely influenced by early Islamic minarets (towers for calling to prayer), such as the Samarra minaret in Iraq.

In reality, the tower of Babel would have been a *ziggurat,* a known temple-tower phenomenon from ancient Mesopotamia. These mountain-like, brick-built stepped structures (compare Genesis 11:3)—perhaps the most famous and

well-preserved example being the Ziggurat of Ur—bore up to seven successive levels of sanctity, culminating in a temple structure located at the summit—the residence of the city's patron deity. In identifying Eridu with Babel, David Rohl believes that the remains of the massive early ziggurat there are none other than the remains of the biblical tower.

This somewhat different tower concept to that commonly portrayed in art actually fits well with the account of Josephus about the tower of Babel—that though this tower was certainly tall, "the thickness of it was so great, and it was so
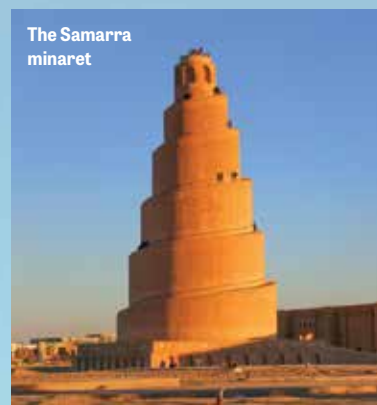
The Samarra minaret

strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick ..." (*Antiquities of the Jews,* 1.4.3). A tower wider and more mountain-like, rather than tall and slender, fitting well with the description of a ziggurat. ◾

The Ziggurat at Ur (with only the lower levels preserved)

at the ancient city of Larsa (in modern-day Iraq). Dating to circa 1800 B.C.E., the artifact—housed in Oxford's Ashmolean Museum—lists the ancient rulers of Sumer and surrounding regions. This "Sumer" is the Akkadian form of the biblical name Shinar—the name of the great southern Mesopotamian plain where post-Flood mankind descended to (and where the Bible says Nimrod began his rule—Genesis 10:10; 11:2).

The Sumerian King List begins by describing a list of rulers of vast ages, until "the flood swept over." Further down in the list, after the time of the Flood—when lifespans began to rapidly decline from the 900-year range (paralleling the pre-Flood ages of biblical figures)—a certain Sumerian king emerges by the name of Enmerkar. He is recorded on the list as having reigned about 420 years. While the Bible does not give Nimrod's lifespan, the lifespans given for some of his generational contemporaries—Eber lived to 464 years, Shelah to 433 (Genesis 11:14-17)—point to this same range.

The name *Enmerkar* is also a tantalizing fit. Rohl writes: "[S]cholars tend to write the Sumerian hero's name as 'Enmerkar.' However, one copy of the Sumerian King List, found at Nippur and published by Arno Poebel in 1914, gives En-me-er-ru-kar. We might, therefore, justifiably vocalize the name as Enmerukar. ... The four syllables En-me-ru-kar can be understood as a name plus an epithet—once it is realized that *kar* is the Sumerian word for 'hunter' (Akk. *Habilu*). Thus we have King 'En-me-ru, the hunter'" (ibid).

This compliments the biblical text, which identifies Nimrod as *"the hunter."* Note too, the name *Enmer* carries within it the first three key consonants found in the name *Nimrod,* N-M-R. It therefore stands to reason that this may have constituted the original name—with the Hebrew *Nimrod,* meaning "we will rebel," likely being a play on the core name to reflect this negative meaning. (Other biblical examples of this sort of symbolic name-tweaking include Chushan-Rishathaim, Jerubbesheth, Ishbosheth and Mephibosheth—see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/296* and */851* for more detail.)

TOP AND LEFT Weld-Blundell 444 with a section of Stephen Langdon's 1923 translation
RIGHT An alabaster statue found in Uruk depicting an unknown priest-king from the general period of Enmerkar

7. Enmerkar, son of Meskemgašer,
8. king of Erech, who built Erech
9.
10. became king
11. He reigned 420 years.

Heredity and Environment

In genealogy, biblical Nimrod is listed as the son of Cush, meaning "black." (Interestingly, the Sumerians were known as the "black-headed ones.") Rohl equivocates Cush with Enmerkar's listed father: Meskiag-KASH-er. (For an interesting tidbit connecting this individual with the biblical Cush, see sidebar "Cushite Conundrum," page 24.) Meskiagkasher is in turn listed as the son of a solar deity called *Utu,* also known as *Shamash* and *Amna.* Perhaps this corresponds with Cush's father, *Ham* (meaning "hot")?

"Nimrod, as the grandson of Ham, belongs to the second 'generation' after the Flood (Noah—Ham—Flood—Cush—Nimrod)," continues Rohl. "[T]his is also true of Enmerkar who is recorded in the Sumerian King List as the second ruler ... after the Flood

The original tower of Babel? Ziggurat bricks can be seen emerging out of the long-obliterated, ancient site mound of Eridu.

Rohl and certain other researchers (including Dr. Petrovich) identify this city of Eridu—whose god Enmerkar pleads with to restore the unity of language—as the original Babel.

(Ubartutu—(Utnapishtim)—Flood—Meskiagkasher—Enmerkar)" (ibid).

In its basic form, the Sumerian King List is a list of names; it provides only brief detail about a select few kings. Enmerkar is one of the few names to have added information. He is recorded to have founded the city of *Uruk* ("who built Uruk"). This alone is notable, as Uruk has long been identified as the biblical city *Erech,* the second city attributed to Nimrod: "And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and *Erech ...*" (Genesis 10:10). But Uruk was not the only place ruled by Enmerkar. He also ruled the region of Sumer, further fitting with the biblical Nimrod as king of territory throughout the "land of Shinar" (Sumer).

Not a lot is known about the historical reign of Enmerkar. Proposed chronologies for the very early rulers on the Sumerian King List vary significantly. "[G]iven the paucity of documents recording kings' names found in an archaeological context, it has proved difficult to pinpoint exactly when specific rulers reigned in relationship to the archaeological stratigraphy or pottery periods," Rohl writes. "Many of the famous rulers of Sumer—heroes such as Enmerkar ... have not been fixed with any real confidence into the early archaeological eras" (ibid). Enmerkar's rule is typically placed somewhere within the early to middle part of the third millennium B.C.E.

Setting the Sumerian King List aside, there is, at least compared to other Sumerian figures, a treasure trove of narrative information available about Enmerkar.

There exists an ensemble of inscriptions in relation to this monarch mentioning *tower-building enterprises*—and not only that, these enterprises are mentioned in the context of a *confusion of languages.* A state of confusion, however, *not* in relation to Enmerkar's city of Uruk but another city entirely.

The Matter of Aratta

These Sumerian inscriptions date to around 2100 B.C.E. and collectively comprise an original story known as *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta.* The record describes dialogue between Enmerkar and a ruler of Aratta, a mysterious and distant mountainous land, equated by some scholars with the Urartu of Assyrian texts and biblical Ararat, generally located in the region of modern-day Turkey, Armenia and northwest Iran. (This is another detail that fits nicely with the biblical account, which identifies Ararat as a key location in the post-Flood world.) Another interesting fact is that Enmerkar refers to *himself* in the text as one "reared on the soil of Aratta," nicely paralleling the biblical portrayal of Nimrod leading an entourage down from the Ararat region to the plains of Shinar/Sumer (Genesis 11:2).

In the Sumerian text, Enmerkar threatens the ruler of Aratta, warning him that if he does not support the construction of a tower for "the great queen of heaven," he will wreak havoc on Aratta "like the devastation which swept destructively" (a nod to the Flood?).

Partway into the long text, there is an astonishing paragraph addressing a state of linguistic *confusion,* as well as territories biblically associated with Nimrod. "Chant ... the incantation of Nudimmud: '... may the lands of Cubur and Hamazi, *the many-tongued,* and *Sumer* [Shinar], the great mountain of the *me* of magnificence, and *Akkad* [biblical Accad—the third city attributed to Nimrod], the land possessing all that is befitting, and the Martu [Amorite] land, resting in security—the whole universe, the well-guarded people—may they all address Enlil *together in a single language! ...* Enki, the lord of abundance and of steadfast decisions, the wise and knowing lord of the land, the expert of the gods, chosen for wisdom, *the lord of Eridu, shall change the speech in their mouths, as many as he had placed there, and so the speech of mankind is truly one'*" (emphasis added throughout).

Rohl and certain other researchers (including Dr. Petrovich) identify this city of *Eridu*—whose god Enmerkar pleads with to *restore the unity of*

SEARCHING FOR SEMIRAMIS

WHILE CTESIAS'S NINUS IS WIDELY REGARDED AS ahistorical, some nuance is given to his wife, Semiramis—although not much. She is widely regarded to have been based on the much later, late ninth-century B.C.E. Queen Shammuramat (the Akkadian equivalent of the Greek name Semiramis), wife of Assyrian King Shamshi-Adad V—an equivocation based largely on name-similarity.

This figure is, of course, nearly 1,500 years *later* than the period ascribed by Ctesias to Semiramis. And her husband is certainly no parallel to Ctesias's Ninus in name or deed.

Yet do not be too quick to pass off Semiramis as simply referring to this later-period queen of the same name: There is reason to suspect this name was already well established and renowned from earlier periods. And the evidence for this comes from the Bible itself.

An early equivalent name is found in the Hebrew Bible. 1 Chronicles 15:18, 20, and 16:5 mention a certain "Shemiramoth" (paralleling the Akkadian *Shammuramat* and rendered in the Greek Septuagint as *Semiramoth*). This individual is described as being on the scene during the early part of King David's reign (circa 1000 B.C.E.)—predating Shamshi-Adad V's Shammuramat by two centuries. Another figure of the same name is mentioned during the early ninth-century B.C.E. reign of King Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17:8)—likewise predating Queen Shammuramat. Of this biblical name Shemiramoth, *Ellicott's Commentary* notes, "This peculiar name resembles the Assyrian *Sammurramat,* the classical Semiramis." The existence of such a name prior to the later queen for not only one, but two biblical figures, logically implies an already-established use in antiquity, perhaps deriving from some earlier figure of renown.

Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon offers the biblical name as meaning "'most high heaven,' *Semiramis,*" based on the first part of the name שמי, שמירמות, reflecting a contraction of the plural word "heavens" (שמים), and the last part, רמות, meaning "heights." If so, this could befit the divine appellation for the Mesopotamian goddess, "queen of heaven"—known to the Sumerians as Inanna, the Assyrians and Babylonians as Ishtar, and the Levantines as Astarte and Ashtoreth.

Many traditions have developed around Nimrod having a wife of renown, with the attributes of Semiramis. In identifying Enmerkar as Nimrod, are there any indications he had such a partner? There is one particular, intriguing possibility.

The fifth-century B.C.E. Greek historian Herodotus attributes to Semiramis the creation of artificial riverbanks and systems. "Semiramis: It was she who built dykes on the plain, a notable work; before that the whole plain was wont to be flooded by the river" (*Histories,* 1.184). The first-century B.C.E. Diodorus Siculus wrote at length about Semiramis's canals, ditches and river works, particularly in relation to the founding of Babylon and a reworking of the Euphrates watercourse. Other early historical accounts do the same.

Interestingly, an ancient Sumerian inscription known as AD-GI4, or "Archaic Word List C," mentions a consort of Enmerkar, bearing a feminine form of his name, "Enmerkar-zi," constructing waterworks of various sorts. "Enmerkar and (his) wife Enmerkar-zi, who know (how to build) towns (made) brick and brick pavements. When the yearly flood reached its proper level, (they made) *irrigation canals and all kinds of irrigation ditches*" (translation from "Remarks on AD-GI4," Miguel Civil).

Additionally, earlier this year, new research was published in the journal *Antiquity* mapping at Eridu a "vast and well-developed network of artificial irrigation canals, including more than 200 primary and large canals ... between 1 and 9 kilometers long, and between 2 and 5 meters wide," with "more than 4,000 minor and branch canals connected to the main canals." This canal network is being hailed as demonstrating a level of sophistication in hydraulic engineering and agricultural planning. The researchers hope to "conduct additional research on the chronology of the canals ... comparing the character and dimensions of the canals and farms with contemporaneous descriptions in the texts of the cuneiform tablets" relating to these waterworks ("Identifying the Preserved Network of Irrigation Canals in the Eridu Region, Southern Mesopotamia"). ■

Semiramis
(William Wetmore Story)
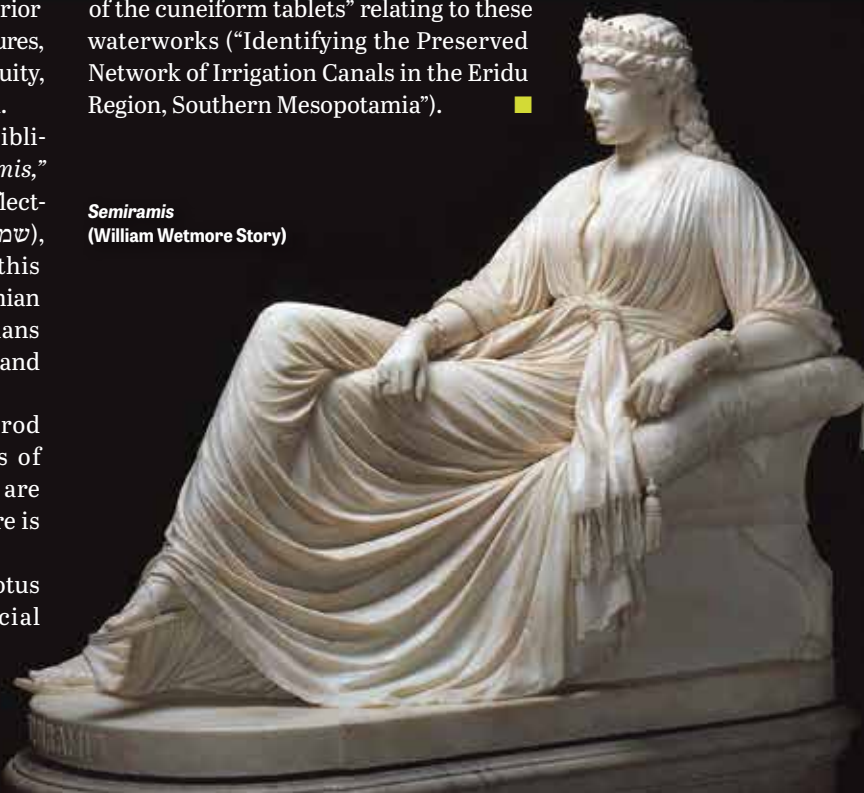
language—as the original *Babel.* In Hebrew, the terms Babel and Babylon are used interchangeably. Yet the more well-known "Babylon"—capital of Nebuchadnezzar's empire—is archaeologically a comparatively late city, certainly compared to the others mentioned in the Genesis 10 account. This has led many to question its nature as described in these earliest biblical references.

Eridu, on the other hand, is a city from deep antiquity. Traditional dating of this site—Tell Abu Shahrain—puts the first establishment of Eridu somewhere around the fifth millennium B.C.E. (with potential links even to the family of Cain; see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/886*). The extreme antiquity of the site is evident from its sorely degraded ruins; its construction on untouched, virgin sands; and Eridu's place as the "first city" on the Sumerian King List. But its connection with Babylon is even more direct: Eridu bears the very same cuneiform logogram name as that of the later Babylon, NUN.KI., thus leading to the conclusion that *this* was the original city of Babel and that the name simply shifted to the later, more well-known site of Babylon.

Confusion at Eridu

In *Readings From the Ancient Near East,* scholars Dr. Bill Arnold and Dr. Bryan E. Beyer provide an interesting alternate translation of the passage from *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta:* "Once … the whole universe, the people in unison, spoke to Enlil in one tongue. … Then Enki … lord of Eridu, *changed the speech in their mouths,* brought contention into it, into the speech of man that had been one."

This variant reading is even more striking, especially in relation to the biblical account. Whatever the most precise translation is, the text's association with the biblical account of confusion of languages is unmistakable.

This connection was first confirmed by Assyriologist Dr. Samuel Noah Kramer in his 1968 *Journal of the American Oriental Society* article "The 'Babel' of Tongues: A Sumerian Version." The *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* text had already been partly translated and tentatively associated with the biblical confusion of languages, but the discovery of an additional fragment made the meaning of this particular section clear. "Our new piece, therefore, puts it beyond all doubt that the

CUSHITE CONUNDRUM

ONE PARTICULARLY CONFUSing point for scholars about Nimrod's heredity and accomplishments is that while the territory described in Genesis 10:10-12 is clearly that of Mesopotamia, Nimrod is a son of *Cush*—the progenitor of the tribes of sub-Saharan Africa. This term (Cushite/Kushite) is used ubiquitously throughout the Bible for such individuals.

"One puzzling detail in the Nimrod story is his genealogy," says Dr. Andrew Henry, host of the popular channel *Religion for Breakfast.* "He's listed as the son of Cush. But Cush is the Hebrew name for ancient Nubia, an African kingdom south of Egypt. In the biblical Table of Nations, Cush is a descendant of Ham, while Mesopotamian nations are usually traced through Shem. So Nimrod's

placement here is odd. It's also geographically confusing, since Nubia and Mesopotamia are nowhere near each other" ("Nimrod: The Bible's Most Mysterious King"). Henry offers an alternate solution from Dr. Yigal Levin, that the name may instead be confused with the Mesopotamian site of Kish.

Rohl offers a different solution in light of identifying Enmerkar as Nimrod, and his father Meskiag-*kash*-er as Cush (the shorter Hebrew/Semitic name representing a hypocoristicon of the longer—similar to the biblical "Pul" used for Tiglath-Pileser III). Of Meskiagkasher, the Sumerian King List adds a single line of detail alongside his name: He "entered the sea *and disappeared"* (emphasis added).

"If Meskiagkasher can be identified with the biblical Cush then

we are entering new territory in both the literal and metaphorical senses," Rohl writes. "The Bible tells us that the sons of Noah were the progenitors of all the great nations of the ancient Near East. I am referring here to the famous so-called 'Table of Nations' which takes up the whole of chapter 10 of Genesis. …

"Josephus, having retold the story of Nimrod's tower of Babel and the subsequent confusion of tongues, goes on to explain that Cush, his three brothers and their followers journeyed to their new homes across the sea. … [T]he traditions of Sumer and the Bible may hold, between them, a vague memory of a great seafaring adventure which brought Meskiagkasher/Cush and his family to Africa" (*Legend: The Genesis of Civilisation*). ◼

Sumerians believed that there was a time when all mankind spoke one and the same language, and that it was Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom, who confounded their speech," wrote Kramer.

Reaching Unto Heaven

There is another Sumerian text associated with Enmerkar, titled *Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana.* This inscription is considered a sequel, of sorts, to *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta.*

Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana begins by mentioning one of Enmerkar's towns as a "city which reaches from heaven to earth." This is almost verbatim the language of Genesis 11:4, which describes Babel as a "city, and a tower, with its top in heaven."

The *Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana* text goes on to describe some chest-thumping antics between Enmerkar and the ruler of Aratta, En-suhgir-ana, with each one threatening to subjugate the other. Enmerkar brags that the great goddess Inanna, "queen of heaven" (a goddess later known variously by the famous names Ishtar, Astarte, Ashtoreth and Isis), is on his side. Apparently, Enmerkar had "brought the goddess of Aratta down to the Mesopotamian plain and erected for her a magnificent sacred precinct called the *Eanna* or 'House of Heaven,'" notes Rohl (op cit).

Enmerkar proceeds to boast about his sexual escapades with her ("even though she is not a duckling, she shrieks like one"). The text goes on to feature sorcery and trickery. Ultimately, the ruler of Aratta submits to Enmerkar before the text tails off, becoming too fragmentary to read.

Back to the Classical Authors

In the introduction, we highlighted the Ninus figure described by the fifth-century B.C.E. Ctesias—the "first king" of note, the first to attempt an empire. But Ctesias was not the only classical period author to mention such a notable "original king." A similar individual is described by the third-century B.C.E. Babylonian historian Berossus.

In his work *Babylonaica,* Berossus wrote: "After the Flood, Euechsios ruled over the land of the Chaldeans four *neroi.* And after him his son Chomasbelos took over the kingship ...."

Berossus's first post-Flood king, Euechsios, has long been equivocated by researchers with the Enmerkar of ancient Sumerian literature. Stanley Mayer Burstein's *The Babylonaica of Berossus* wrote in a footnote to this passage: "Euechsius = Enmerkar (Jacobsen, King List, 86 n. 115). Jacobsen suggests that the reading Euechsios is corrupt and that Berossus actually wrote Euechoros (cf. Jacoby, FGrH, 3Cl, p. 384 note *ad* line 4). ... Apropos of this William W. Hallo ('Beginning and End of the

Sumerian King List in the Nippur Recension,' JCS, 17 1963, page 52) noted that Berossus was strongly interested in the apkallu tradition and that Enmerkar is the first post-Flood king associated with an apkallu (cf. van Dijk, 45, line 8; Reiner, 4 lines 10-13)."

This "apkallu tradition" is specifically the association of a demigod "sage" with a particular ruler. An example of this is found in the "Uruk List of Kings and Sages," a copy of a text dating to 165 B.C.E., found in the Seleucid temple of Anu at Bit Res. Similarly to Berossus's *Babylonaica,* it reads, in part: "After the flood, during the reign of Enmerkar, the king, Nungalpirigal was sage, whom Ishtar brought down from heaven to Eana."

Andrew Nichols, in *The Complete Fragments of Ctesias of Cnidus: Translation and Commentary,* further highlights the connection between the sources utilized by Berossus and Ctesias. "[Robert] Drews ... like [Georges] Goossens, asserts that Ctesias's Assyrian chronology almost certainly comes from Babylonian records and may reflect the same tradition as Berossus's date for the beginning of Babylonian history."

Gathering Thoughts

Speculation about the exact identity of rulers mentioned by much later classical authors aside, the parallels between the ancient ruler Enmerkar of Sumerian lore and the biblical Nimrod are striking.

"Look at what we have here," concludes Rohl, summarizing the evidence at hand. "Nimrod was closely associated with Erech—the biblical name for Uruk— where Enmerkar ruled. Enmerkar built a great sacred precinct at Uruk and constructed a temple at Eridu [Babel]—that much we know from the epic poem *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta.* The Sumerian King List adds that Enmerkar was 'the one who built Uruk.' Nimrod was also a great builder, constructing the cities of Uruk, Akkad and Babel. Both Nimrod and Enmerkar were renowned for their huntsmanship. ... Both ruled over their empires in the land of Shinar/Sumer. ... We have now learnt so much about Enmerkar that he has naturally become our prime suspect" (ibid).

It is true that other Nimrod candidates have certain interesting individual links either in name or in deed with the figure recorded in Genesis. And it is certainly possible that these candidates and deities could perpetuate attributes originating from a common core individual.

But as far as accounts relating to a singular, early individual go, Enmerkar and his related texts have Genesis 10 and 11 written all over them. As such, I would agree with the words of Rohl, that we have in Enmerkar a figure who is "none other than the first great potentate on Earth—the biblical Nimrod." ◼

Unmarked Graves: Death in the Early Iron Age

Where are the bodies?

BY SAMUEL MCKOY

GOLDEN FURNITURE. WALLS emblazoned with intricate images. Priceless statues. Jewels. If you were to step inside the tomb of an Egyptian pharaoh, you'd be surrounded by treasures and immense wealth. And while the pharaonic tombs have been some of the most dramatic discoveries in the field of archaeology, they have also provided a lot of information about ancient Egypt, its religious practices, belief systems and royal culture.

Whether a tomb, catacomb, sarcophagus or crypt, burials are some of the most important discoveries in archaeology because of what they can tell us about ancient cultures. Humans have almost always attached sentimental or ceremonial significance to the treatment of the dead.

Yet when it comes to the highlands of Israel in the Iron Age I (1200–1000 B.C.E.), there are very few known graves. According to Prof. Avraham Faust in "'Mortuary Practices, Society and Ideology': The Lack of Iron Age I Burials in the Highlands in Context," "evidence [of burials] remains meager and most of the data is far from conclusive." This is in comparison to the Late Bronze Age, which had an especially high number of tombs and burials despite a significantly smaller population.

The dead were certainly still buried in the Iron I highlands. Dr. Raz Kletter suggested that these Israelites simply buried their dead in graves without any markers. These simple burials are rarely discovered for two main reasons. First, they probably occurred on the outskirts of towns where modern excavations seldom occur. According to Professor Faust, only one such burial has been discovered at Khirbet et-Namlah, and it was by accident.

Second, farming in later periods would have occurred above these burials. "Even simple agricultural activity would destroy

them," Faust wrote. "In other words, even if the inhumation [burial] did survive, it is highly unlikely that any archaeologist would know about it and excavate it."

Archaeology, therefore, has shown that Israelites of the highlands in Iron Age I buried the dead in a more elementary fashion than all of their neighbors. Why?

Phenomenal Possibilities

There is significant debate about the reasoning behind this archaeological phenomenon. Some have attributed it to a poor and remedial civilization too focused on survival to enshrine and memorialize their dead.

However, ornate burials have been discovered in far poorer civilizations. "[G]rave goods, including pottery of all types, were not expensive," wrote Faust. "Even 'poor' or 'simple' societies (e.g. in the Neolithic) could afford them, let alone the Iron I society, which clearly possessed material surpluses." So impoverishment does not appear to be the reason for these simple burials.

Kletter further explained the phenomena as resulting from a combination of factors, such as "limited archaeological database, a lack of technology, the short time span of the period in question, the limited population in the highlands during that period, and a lack of destructions. None of these accounts, however, is entirely satisfactory. Instead, a combination of all of them may be sought for" ("People Without Burials? The Lack of Iron I Burials in the Central Highlands of Palestine").

Many of these factors, however, are even more pertinent and applicable to the Late Bronze Age, and yet many burials and tombs have been discovered from that period. Rather, there seems to have been something in the Israelite identity to explain this phenomenon.

Prof. William F. Albright, who has been called the father of biblical archaeology, attributed this lack of evidence to the egalitarianism (the equal treatment of all members) of Israelite society. Prof. William Dever wrote, "[A]t all levels, one is struck by the lack of any evidence for elites in the Iron I village."

Based on newer discoveries, Faust refuted this assumption: "It is clear that the highland society was not really egalitarian, as such a society does not exist. ... This can be seen in various traits, e.g., the differences in size and form of houses in 'Izbet Sartah and other sites (e.g. Finkelstein 1986) and the development of relatively elaborate architecture in the 11th century B.C.E." Israelite society was not truly egalitarian, but could this ideology have influenced the burials of commoners? Failure to enforce a belief in every facet of life does not mean it did not influence some facets of life—or death.

Faust focused rather on what he called an Israelite ideology of simplicity—the belief that the less ornate and complex is better. There is evidence for this ideology in the archaeology of Iron I Israel.

The Archaeology of Simplicity

The only valid way to test for the existence of an ideology of simplicity is not through making assumptions based on an absence of discoveries, as with the burials, but to search for this ideology in other aspects of Israelite archaeology. Several facets of Israelite culture show a similar ethos of Israelite ideological simplicity. Professor Faust wrote, "Is the same ideology mirrored in other archaeological remains? I think it is" ("An Egalitarian Society").

Take, for example, pottery. Israel's Philistine neighbors produced what is called "Philistine bichrome ware," terracotta-colored vessels painted with black-and-white stripes and designs.

Israelite pottery, on the other hand, is famously simple. "It is well known that the Iron Age (both I and II) highland pottery is non-decorated, in contrast to the Late Bronze Age and to the Iron I lowlands," wrote Faust. "Pottery decoration is used to convey various types of messages, and the lack of decoration is a suitable channel for a message of egalitarianism and simplicity."

The four-room homes of the highland Iron I are another sign of an ideology of simplicity in Israel (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1072*). Four-room homes are marked by a long communal central courtyard surrounded by rooms. "Each room is easily accessible; there is no hierarchy in the structuring of the rooms," wrote Faust. "Once in the central room, a person could go directly to the desired space. If a 'better' space was reserved for a superior person, this is not reflected in

the spatial arrangements." Each room was simple and the same for everyone, as the burials seem to have been.

Pottery and structures are two of the most prominent artifacts from this period. Both indicate an ideology of simplicity at the same time that burials were so simple that they cannot, in most cases, be found. There is, however, one more source that could shed light on these burial practices.

The Biblical Depiction

The Hebrew Bible consistently shows that it was considered shameful to die and not be buried. Enemies would leave their foes' bodies rotting in the open air (1 Samuel 31:10). Just before the destruction of Jerusalem, the Prophet Jeremiah warned the people, "They shall die of grievous deaths; They shall not be lamented, *Neither shall they be buried, They shall be as dung upon the face of the ground* ... And their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, And for the beasts of the earth" (Jeremiah 16:4). Isaiah 14 and Jeremiah 8 provide similar depictions.

According to the Bible, the upper echelon of society was buried amidst regalia. For instance, despite being enemies, Jehu intended to bury Jezebel simply because "'she is a king's daughter'" (2 Kings 9:34). The Bible also indicates that there were particular tombs reserved for nobility or royalty, especially those of the Davidic dynasty. 1 Kings 11:43 says Solomon "was buried in the city of David." 2 Chronicles 35:24 says Josiah "was buried in the sepulchres of his fathers."

For the most part, however, these are all Iron IIA-IIB examples. Despite dozens of mentions of burial practices in the Hebrew Bible, there are almost no details regarding burials in the Iron I in central Israel. The only mention from the period is that of Saul, whose body was desecrated by Philistines at Beth Shean at the close of the Iron I.

For the Late Bronze Age, there are mentions of the burials of men such as Joseph and Joshua; the Iron II, the burials of David and subsequent kings. The lack of textual evidence for the Iron I is well matched with the lack of archaeological evidence regarding these burials.

During the Iron I, Israel was in the judges period, when the nation was led by a succession of judges and not a king, with the exception of Saul at the end of this age. The biblical description of this period provides a few reasons burials may have been so simple.

There were few notable burials because there were few notable leaders. Only a few of the judges may have qualified for regalia, and many of those were not from the central highlands of Israel (such as Jephthah or Samson).

Even for those who could have qualified for burial paraphernalia, there might have been little hope of protecting their graves from robbers. Many burials throughout the ancient Near East were robbed in antiquity. The rule of law in Israel throughout the judges period appears to have been practically nonexistent; it was a time when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Also, the Hebrew Bible ascribes a certain humility to death. Less than a century after the Iron I age ended, King Solomon wrote, "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other .... All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all return to dust" (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20). If man dies as a beast, why bury him with so much wealth and material goods?

Solomon also wrote, "Whatsoever thy hand attaineth to do by thy strength, that do; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). If Israelites believed they could carry nothing with them into an afterlife, why bury the dead with such items? Why embellish the grave at all? This religious belief stands in stark contrast to lands that have yielded tremendous burial finds, like Egypt.

An argument based on the absence of discoveries is always fraught with uncertainty and is open to a variety of interpretations. It's certainly unusual that Israel's highlands in the Iron Age I have produced so few burials, but it could also reveal a lot about Israel's society at that time.

Based on other discoveries and the Hebrew Bible, the simple burials were not the result of a poor or backward society. Rather, they were the result of a chaotic society believing in an ideology of simplicity. This changed once the nation was stabilized and the culture enriched under the leadership of the united monarchy. ■

Touring Tel Shiloh

The tabernacle at Shiloh was the central focus of Israelite society during the period of the judges. In June, Let the Stones Speak *podcast co-host Christopher Eames visited the site on the final day of excavation and received a tour from excavation director Dr. Scott Stripling. This is an edited transcript of their conversation.*

CHRISTOPHER EAMES (CE): Dr. Stripling, here we are again. We like to come out every year to interview you and see how it is going at the end of the season. This is year four or five for us doing this. How many seasons has it now been for you?

DR. SCOTT STRIPLING (SS): This is season seven. We started in 2017 and missed two years digging with the pandemic. So, it has been nine years since we started, but seven seasons of excavation.

CE: How has it been going this season? We are still in the middle of the war at the moment [referring to Israel's ongoing war, not the 12-Day War with Iran that began two days after this interview was conducted].

SS: Well, we were aware of that, but we came anyway. One hundred thirty-five great people came with me. Last year we had 75, when the war was still sort of new. The year before that, 225. But we have had a great season, great finds. Everybody is healthy and enthusiastic. We have had the best weather we have ever had for a dig.

CE: Even still, I think your dig must be one of the biggest in terms of numbers.

SS: I have no doubt that it is definitely the biggest dig in Israel this summer. They say, "You people are crazy."

CE: Well, I think it is great what you are doing here. And for this episode, we are going to do it a little different. Usually we sit down and do an interview. But you are kind enough to take us around the spots that you have been excavating. And where we are now is one of the key spots at the tabernacle site of Tel Shiloh. If you could tell us about where we are standing and why it is significant.

Location 1: The Gate

SS: If you had asked me back in 2016, "Scott, in your dream world, what would you like to find at Shiloh?" I would have said, "Well, evidence of the tabernacle of course, the gate of Shiloh that is mentioned in the Bible, and thirdly, evidence of the sacrificial system." There is a picture of me in 2016 on this path when all this was underground. There was a huge terrace. I walked up and across that terrace, and drove the first stake for the excavation in June 2016—not realizing that where I drove the stake was the monumental building, where we now believe is most likely the location of the tabernacle. And to the north of it was the

gate complex. I was very fortunate that at the area we began to excavate were the three things that were most interesting to me.

CE: As far as gates go, this is the money area for an archaeologist—finding a city gate—especially at Tel Shiloh because of its connection with some of the biblical account of what happened. Perhaps you could give us a summary of that account.
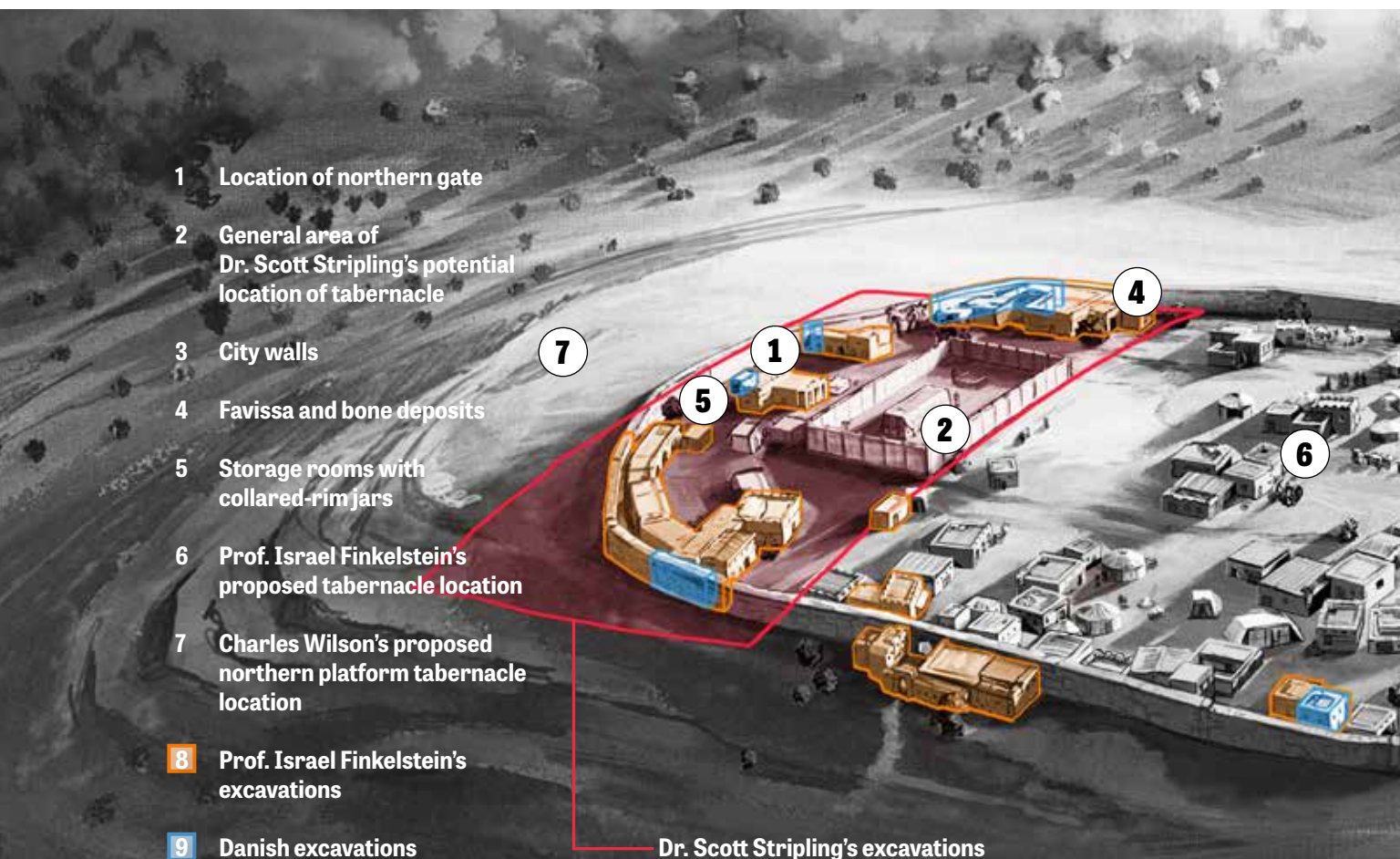
SS: First, let me give a shout out to the Armstrong Institute and Hebrew University for their work in the gate area in Jerusalem. I was just there a few days ago, and I'm convinced that you have a six-chambered gate there; so, congratulations. You're right, this is the money spot because of what you find in gate complexes. You can find evidence of judicial activity, archival material, economic activity, even cultic activity within the gate, and the security function. Our gate is a Late Bronze Age complex; it was used into the Iron Age I, but it is different from the one you are working on in Jerusalem. We don't have chambered gates. We have an outer arm that leads into an inner gate—so an outer gate and an inner gate.

CE: So that Late Bronze-Iron I period is late second millennium B.C.E. judges period for those linking it to the biblical account?

SS: Conquest-judges period if you're trying to connect to the biblical account: 14th through 12th centuries.

CE: There is a link to the priest Eli, correct—as far as the account of what happens at Shiloh and in the gate?

SS: Yes, it's a tragic story. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 3 and 4 that Eli is in the gate of Shiloh, and he is watching the highway—what we assume to be the Patriarch's Highway. The ark has been sent to Ebenezer. He sees this runner coming with tragic news that the ark has been captured. Eli hears it and falls over backward in the gate and dies. Now, until last year we never found any human bones here at Shiloh. You don't find human bone inside a city because they bury outside the city. If you find bones in the city that means trauma, a murder, something tragic has happened. Just behind us here, we are finding pieces of just one human being in the gates. It's interesting because we have this story and El Amarna letter 288 refers to Silu,

1   **Location of northern gate**

2   **General area of Dr. Scott Stripling's potential location of tabernacle**

3   **City walls**

4   **Favissa and bone deposits**

5   **Storage rooms with collared-rim jars**

6   **Prof. Israel Finkelstein's proposed tabernacle location**

7   **Charles Wilson's proposed northern platform tabernacle location**

8   **Prof. Israel Finkelstein's excavations**

9   **Danish excavations**

Dr. Scott Stripling's excavations

which probably refers to Shiloh. It names two people who were murdered in the gate of Silu: Turbazu and Yaptih-Hadda. So we have three accounts of death in the gates of Shiloh, and now that's what we are excavating.

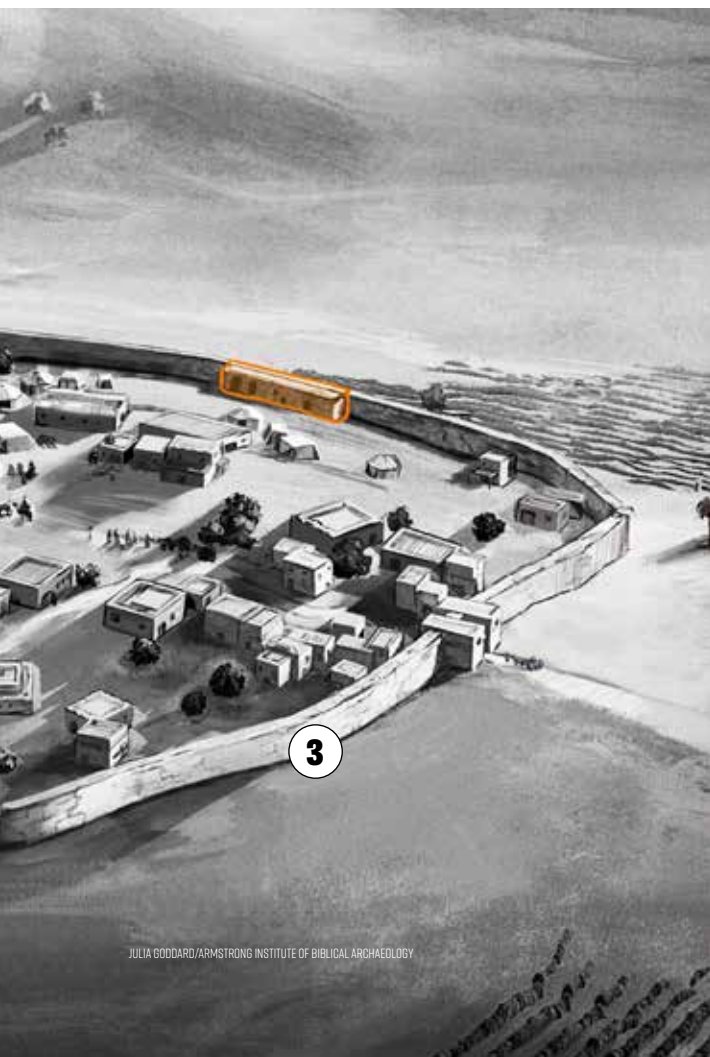CE: To quickly explain what this is behind us, what are we looking at here?

SS: The first clue I had was this big wall, that is Middle Bronze Age; let's say MB3. We were way above that; so as we began to excavate it, we began to see there was no glacis or rampart here. On the other side of that wall is a rampart, and the rampart goes around the entire side. I asked myself, "Why is there no rampart here?" I thought there might be a gate or something like that. We continued to excavate and found an opening in the wall, a symmetrical opening that had a patch over it. When we removed the Byzantine patch, there was a symmetrical opening. There is only one reason you would have an opening in the wall. I thought it was at least a postern gate. As we began to come down, these pillars began to emerge. And Chris, they are preserved to their original height. You can see the niche: We put a

beam in there last year to go across the top; just incredible that they are preserved to their original height. You can picture the activity going on here. On the other side of the middle pillar is in-situ pavement from the Bronze Age that is geometric in shape: diamonds, hexagons, triangles and so forth. We know that from the Second Temple Period, but it is unheard of in the Late Bronze Age. This is what's so fun about archaeology; we think we know everything in archaeology, and all of a sudden, our paradigm gets turned upside down.

CE: You have Frankie Snyder on your team. She was the famous one who re-created this tiling for the Temple Mount compound with all of the shapes. And so, that's what you have here essentially in the Bronze Age.

SS: It couldn't have been any better. Yes, she used simple math to help us know what the flooring in the Second Temple looked like because she was able to crack the geometric code. Now we have geometric pavers from the Late Bronze Age. She's excited, and I'm excited.

CE: Alright, let's move onto the next one.

3

Dr. Stripling drives the first stake for the excavation in 2016.

Shiloh's northern gate complex

Location 2: The Favissa

CE: Dr. Stripling, where are we standing and what is it?

SS: You are standing right in the midst of the ancient favissa of Shiloh that dates to the biblical times. About right here, Chris, from your shoulders to your feet, this was solid bone—bone on top of bone mixed in with Late Bronze Age pottery—beautiful painted pottery, chalices, goblets, bowls—that you would associate with the sacrificial system. The building that we believe was the building of the tabernacle is due west of here. So you leave the tabernacle building and walk about 30 seconds to the edge of the site. And then they had dug a pit here where they would deposit the bones of the animal that had been sacrificed, along with the drink offering vessels. So the pottery are goblets, chalices, bowls and things that are cultic in nature, maybe a libation has been poured out. And then the vessel itself has value; it's given over, not to be reused again. So far, we have found eight gold and silver objects in this immediate area.

CE: You were telling us last year you found some gold stars that had been found, including a very interesting one with a face on it?

SS: That's right; it's very exciting. We have an article that will be coming out about those findings. In the 1980s, Bar Ilan University excavated this area for four seasons. They left the balks behind. Eighty percent of the material is in the squares; only 20 percent is in the balk. In the squares, they found one gold piece. In the balks, we found seven gold and silver pieces, and it just has to do with new technology, different and better technology. So you can extrapolate out and say, "Wow, in the dump pile, there must be 20 or 30 gold and silver objects as well." Gold was so valuable in the ancient world; people didn't lose it. This is something of great value. They come to Shiloh, not only with this animal and drink offerings, but they're also depositing something that means a lot, that costs them something.

CE: What we are talking about here is sacrificial remains and remains of offerings in relation to the use of the tabernacle. And, it's interesting that you have this burial here. Is it similar to Judaism and this concept of the genizah reburial of perhaps damaged biblical texts? You don't want to throw them away but carefully rebury them and preserve something that is seen as sacred.

SS: That's a very good analogy; it's very similar to a genizah.

Shiloh favissa location and gold star found there

CE: When it comes to this area, you guys at [Associates for Biblical Research] had done a great video a few months ago clarifying some things about how this favissa or ritual burial ground operated. You mention Israel Finkelstein, who was one of the lead archaeologists back in the 1980s. He had his own ideas about when this favissa was operational, which affects when the tabernacle was potentially operational. You've been able to clarify some of the dates about when we start having these remains laid down. What can you tell us about the dating for the use of this favissa?

SS: Professor Finkelstein's view was that the tabernacle had been on the summit of the tel. He believed the Israelites arrived around 1200 B.C.E. There was all this material from Canaanite sacrifices that had been piled up for hundreds of years. I suppose he envisioned that in Canaanite temples they just had big mounds of bones. He thought they removed them from the summit and dumped them all here on the edge of the tel all at one time, and so the favissa was created in 1200, the very end of the Late Bronze Age. What we have found is different from that. We have seen microstratigraphy; you can see it in the balk. There are bones sticking out of the balk, and there are layers and so forth within that. The pottery is Late Bronze Age II, not Late Bronze Age I. He thought it was a Canaanite sacrificial system. Our view is that it synchronizes perfectly with the biblical sacrificial system. The bones coming out of this core favissa are 99.9 percent kosher as per our zooarchaeologist Prof. Haskel Greenfield. The pottery is all Late Bronze Age II pottery. The stratification, the dating of the pottery, the radiocarbon dating, which they did not do in the 1980s and which we are now doing, all point to deposition over time. In my view, the Israelites arrive here at the beginning of the 14th century, and it matches very well with that.

CE: That's something I would agree with about that early Exodus and early conquest model. I think it fits perfectly to what you have here, because if you take the comparatively popular late view, you have to conclude that these are Canaanite remains from these earlier periods.

SS: That's right, because you're talking 150 to 200 years difference, and so you would have to conclude that. Now, challenges are: Why are the bones all kosher? Why are they disproportionately from the right side of the animal? On the rest of the site, the bones are equal distribution 50/50. Here, about 55 percent derive from the animals' right side. So it's not one thing, but it's sort of inductively that we draw conclusions. It's a lot of things that build up to give us a high degree of confidence that this is an Israelite favissa.

CE: The biblical account speaks to the use of the right side of the animal.

SS: Yes, Leviticus 7. The right side of the animal is the priestly portion. Who lives at Shiloh? The priests.

CE: It all makes sense. This is amazing. On to the next one.

SS: Alright, here we go.

Location 3: The Tabernacle Site

CE: Alright, Dr. Stripling, you brought us here to the more central, northern part of the tel. Where are we standing now?

SS: We are inside a monumental building that dates from the Late Bronze Age IIB to the Iron Age IB—in other words, about 1250 B.C.E. to about 1175 B.C.E. A permanent structure has been built at Shiloh according to 1 Samuel 3 and according to two places in the Mishnah. So, we find a building that is east-west oriented, matches the biblical dimensions, and it is divided on 2:1 ratios. Within this building we are finding miniature pomegranates with loops for attachment (four so far), which is a motif of the tabernacle, a demolished altar, horns as well. And as we are bringing all this area down in what we might call the holy place, then we moved into the most holy place and that is where the ark of the covenant would have been for over 300 years.

> "The tabernacle at Shiloh had no roof; it was just a stone structure with curtains on top."
> Zebahim 14.6

CE: Alright, Dr. Stripling, you have brought me a little further west; I feel like I should have ritually purified myself.

SS: So do I.

CE: Where are we right here?

SS: If our theory is correct, Chris, we're in the holy of holies and literally where the ark of the covenant would have been. This is all one open area. The ark would have been about where we are standing.

CE: And do you have a parallel with the measurements for what we know of the tabernacle at that time?

SS: Right. Of course, none of us are exactly certain what the cubit was, but what's most important is that it's a 2:1 ratio. And so it does closely match the biblical account if we're accurately understanding what a cubit is. But most importantly to me is it is perfectly east-west and it's divided on a 2:1 ratio. Right here in this area is where the pomegranates are coming from. Now why is it that nowhere else on site are we finding pomegranates? Why do we only find them here?

CE: Because this must have been the place the priests were wearing them.

SS: The Bible says that the high priests, at least, were wearing bells and pomegranates on the hems of their garments.

CE: Yes, that makes a lot of sense. As far as the structure itself here, I think a lot of people will be wondering: *Wasn't the tabernacle a simple tent structure?*

SS: Let me give you a short response to that. Yes, it was a tent when it was brought here. I don't know where it would have been at that period—perhaps on the northern platform. A lot of people like that idea. But 1 Samuel 3 talks about the temple of the Lord at Shiloh. In Hebrew, the wording is very clear. Commentaries

Proposed Shiloh tabernacle structure

have long noted that it seems like a permanent building had been built there. Then the Mishnah says in the Zebahim 14.6 and Seder Olam 8 that a permanent building was built there at Shiloh with a tent over the top as a roof. So, it's a quasi-tabernacle tent structure at Shiloh. Then we come along as archaeologists and what do we find? Something that matches that very description.

CE: That makes a lot of sense. The tent structure for the sojourn going place to place, but once you're here and set up to have that permanent structure and the tent over the top.

Now, back to Israel Finkelstein. He said his theory was that it had probably been located on the top of the tel. For people thinking about where a tabernacle would be located, that would be a typical assumption: right on the very top. Is there any reason to believe it wouldn't be on the top? Any biblical hints as to being on the north?

SS: No, in fact, I agreed with Professor Finkelstein about that. I wrote an article in 2016 stating that I thought the most logical place would have been on the summit of the tel. I never liked the idea of it being on the northern platform and being unprotected. I thought this made a lot more sense, so I was more surprised than anyone. This was the first wall: Wall 10. When that began to emerge and that was east-west, I was very interested. The next year, the perpendicular walls began to appear, then I was even more interested. And then the next perpendicular wall, and it started unfolding each year.

CE: Amazing. For me, it at least brings to mind that passage in Isaiah 14 where it talks about the throne of God in the sides of the north. And here we are on the north side.

SS: We are uncertain why Joshua chose Shiloh for the *mishkan* [tabernacle]. When we arrived the last two mornings, and it is almost every morning like this, there are no clouds, no fog, until you get to Shiloh. So, you're going through Judah, through Benjamin, and when you begin to approach Shiloh (Ephraim territory), there is a big cloud hanging over it. And of course, in their mind, God dwells in the clouds. And so as we pulled in this morning, here was this cloud hanging over Shiloh. We drove up to the very top with our bus and then we were above the cloud, and we were able to look down at the cloud hovering over the proposed tabernacle area. In their minds among other reasons, that must have been an awesome thing: God descends in the cloud.

Portion of four-horned altar

Ceramic pomegranate

CE: There's some amazing phenomena at the site. Some of our listeners might not be aware of the acoustic studies that have been done in this area as well. It would have been a perfect place for addressing large crowds as Joshua did, and to your point about the clouds: Amazing pictures of this site, especially in electrical storms, you see some lightning coming down right on top of the tel.

SS: Yes, of course, they interpreted that as God speaking when they saw that through the natural phenomenon, clouds and lightnings

CE: To wrap things up, what are the future plans for you guys here as the site? You're wrapping up another season. Many more seasons planned in the same areas?

SS: Probably three more years, I think, to finish these three critical areas: the favissa, the monumental building and the gate complex. I'm going to focus all our labor, all of our attention, on those three areas. And that's just a brilliant stopping point as far as I'm concerned. That will be 10 seasons of excavation. Although we are publishing stuff right now, we'll put our efforts into final publications and try to get it out as quickly as possible.

CE: We appreciate that you've got some of the leaders in these areas who are doing Ph.D.s on this.

SS: Yeah, each one of our areas has one of my students doing Ph.D.s. Others, like Abigail, sort of sitewide; her expertise is the transition between LB II and Iron I. So, to me that means a lot. I think we'll have seven Ph.D.s that will come out of the dig. So not only are we understanding and clarifying the ancient record, but we're also training the next generation of leaders.

CE: Amazing; we really appreciate the interview. What you guys are doing here is just amazing. And coming in these times as well, it's not easy. So really appreciate it. Thanks very much for this.

SS: Thank you, Chris. We're grateful. ■

Using 'Cosmic Rays' to Map Ancient Subterranean Jerusalem

New technology being utilized in the City of David

BY MICAH VAN HALTEREN

Jerusalem is a challenging location to excavate. Not only is there layer upon layer of rubble, but on top of that lies a crowded modern city with high-powered religious sensitivities. What if there were a way to map what is under the surface of Jerusalem without having to break through the modern layers of habitation?

In recent years, a new technology has been under development that could revolutionize archaeology in Jerusalem: muon tomography—a "noninvasive imaging technique" that makes use of subatomic particles called *muons* generated by cosmic rays. These muons can penetrate deep under the surface and are detected by specially made muon detectors. The data from these detectors can be used to reconstruct a 3D map of subsurface spaces.

In April, researchers from Tel Aviv University (TAU) published a report showcasing how they used this technology in the City of David. For 10 days, the team operated a muon detector in a cistern near the Gihon Spring to determine how the detector would measure the open space. The study "successfully demonstrated the utility of muon imaging as an effective noninvasive imaging technique for mapping underground features, specifically within the archaeological context of Jeremiah's cistern in the City of David, Jerusalem."

With more development, this technology could allow archaeologists to identify tunnels and other

The Gihon Spring

(2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:3-4). One lesser-known tunnel is a shaft late archaeologist Dr. Eilat Mazar identified as the potential *tsinnor*—the passageway the Bible describes Joab using to conquer Jerusalem for King David (2 Samuel 5:8).

In his description of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 c.e., the first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that the Jewish rebels "escaped into the subterranean caverns" (*The Jewish War*, XI). In 2011, archaeologists announced the discovery of a sword, oil lamp, pots and coins in a 2,000-year-old drainage tunnel under the City of David. They believed the discoveries were linked to the rebellion and that the tunnel was used as a place of refuge for the Jewish inhabitants.

cavities underneath the city that they could later confirm through excavation.

Jerusalem has an abundance of underground tunnels, cisterns and caverns. Prof. Yuval Gadot from TAU's Institute of Archaeology, one of the leaders of the project, stated, "Underground passages and tunnels were a cardinal component in Jerusalem's political life, and so far, we have explored the spaces located by the spring, but there are many more tunnels that were exploited by the ancient elites of Jerusalem for all sorts of reasons."

The Bible discusses some of these underground systems—the most famous being Hezekiah's Tunnel

This technology could potentially significantly aid archaeologists in making more discoveries in Jerusalem. It could help them better understand the underground geography of Jerusalem and help them decide where to dig.

Sometime in the future, researchers from the TAU team hope to install more detectors around the City of David in search of secret passageways connected to the Gihon Spring.

Along with the Gihon Spring, a great number of other areas could be explored and mapped using muon

fearing the curses that the nation would suffer for failing to obey. Josiah dispatched a group of men—among them the servant Asaiah—to "Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe …" (2 Kings 22:14). Huldah prophesied to the men that destruction would indeed come upon Judah and Jerusalem—although thankfully, the righteous King Josiah would not live to see it during his lifetime.

Unfortunately, that lifetime would not last long. Following the young Josiah's shock defeat and death during an ill-advised battle against the Egyptians at Megiddo, the nation of Judah quickly spiraled into a series of disasters and Babylonian invasions, culminating

in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, circa 586 b.c.e.

While the researchers do not regard the identification of Asayahu/Asaiah with the biblical figure as entirely certain—this usually requires an additional level of proof, such as a two-generation match paralleling that found in the Bible or a parallel title—they nevertheless point out that the particular name, general dating, Jerusalem location and the fact that such seals would have been used only by royal affiliates are all points in favor of it, calling the identification "highly plausible." As such, our "Yedayah" would represent an otherwise-unmentioned son of this royal servant Asaiah and the bulla would join the growing number of such seals and seal

impressions already discovered on excavations referring to biblical figures, including Hezekiah, Ahaz, Jeroboam II, Isaiah, Nathan-Melech, Jehucal, Shelemiah, Gedaliah, Pashur, Gemariah, Shaphan, Azariah, Hilkiah, Eliakim and another Hilkiah.

The discovery of this bulla is additionally significant from a numeric angle. As highlighted in a recent *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* corpus of inscriptions, coauthored by *Let the Stones Speak* contributing editor Christopher Eames and Prof. Yosef Garfinkel, hundreds of First Temple Period bullae and dozens of seal stamps have been discovered in Jerusalem. Jerusalem in this regard stands head and shoulders above all

tomography. It could aid in the search for the "sepulchers of David" (Nehemiah 3:16)—possibly located near what Dr. Mazar identified as David's palace—as well as lead to the discovery of many underground waterways and tunnels on the Ophel.

A century ago, excavations conducted in the northern reaches of the City of David by R. A. S. Macalister documented the existence of cave entrances. Some of these caves and cisterns remain unexcavated to this day. Muon tomography could clarify the dimensions of the caverns and help archaeologists determine whether costly excavation is worthwhile.

The use of this technology in archaeological research in Jerusalem is still in its early stages. But TAU researchers are constantly improving the calibration of the detectors as well as refining their design, enabling them to be used more effectively. While more field testing will have to be done to make muon tomography a reliable tool for mapping underground Jerusalem, the TAU study illustrates the potential this technology has to change the way archaeologists excavate and understand ancient Jerusalem.

Hopefully in the future, muon tomography can be used to shed light on the illustrious past of Jerusalem's underground spaces and aid in making new discoveries. For now, the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology will continue to follow and cheer on the development of this remarkable technology. ∎

other cities in this region of the Levant—both Judean, Israelite and neighboring—in its quantity of such inscriptions from the First Temple Period, speaking to the administrative importance of this capital city (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/930* for more information).

The exciting discovery of this new bulla only adds to the impressive trove of such Iron Age II/First Temple Period epigraphic finds from the city that will have to be added to a future update of the corpus—a corpus that, despite having been published less than a year ago, is already out of date thanks to the rich discoveries continually being made in Jerusalem (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1107*).

Congratulations to the team for another remarkable find! ∎

MAGAZINE FEEDBACK

May I compliment the Armstrong Institute for its activities concerning biblical archaeology. Your staff is the most professional and your reports are the most reliable and well written that one can find anywhere around. Your regular collaboration with the Israeli archaeological institutions adds to your credibility. You truly "let the stones speak" without unnecessary religious speculations.

Thank you very much for your work and publications, which I enjoy tremendously.

KIBBUTZ EVRON, ISRAEL

I would like to thank you for the beautiful, informative free magazine. Learning about biblical archaeology is a wonderful experience!

CANADA

I want to thank you for sending me the Exhibit Edition of *Let the Stones Speak* magazine. It is such a wonderful, informative, educational magazine, and I deeply appreciate your sending it to me.

INDIA

I have just received my first issue of *Let the Stones Speak.* Thank you so much. It is so exciting! I have now read two hours past my bedtime. Even though I love history, I have never enjoyed reading the Bible. Now I am feeling inclined to read the passages referenced in the articles of the magazine.

UNITED STATES

OPHEL EXCAVATION BLOG

Thank you for the Ophel Excavation 2025 blog showing us all the pictures of the great work that is going on in Israel. Also for the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology articles and videos. May God help keep up this great work. Thank you.

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