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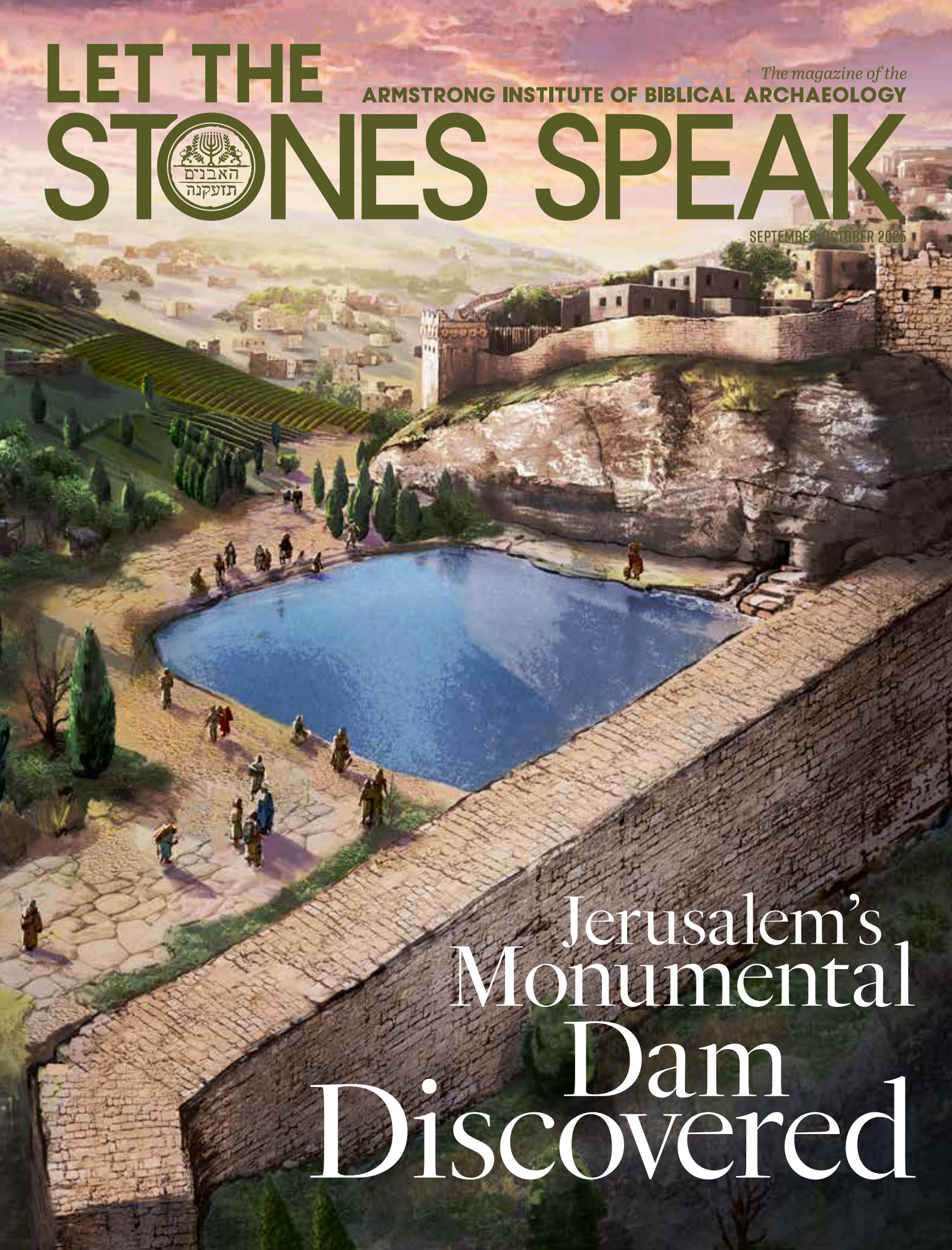
LET THE STONES SPEAK

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 2025



Jerusalem's Monumental Dam Discovered

FROM THE EDITOR
GERALD FLURRY

Archaeology Beautiful

A message on what makes archaeology

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COVER: JULIA GODDARD/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY
TOC: BRENT NAGTEGAAL/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

THERE ARE MANY REASONS TO LOVE AND PRACTICE archaeology. Uncovering the past gives clarity, meaning and perspective to the present. By studying the civilizations before us, we can better understand our own.

But the rewards and fulfillment of archaeology go beyond just studying the past. As those who have worked on our many digs know, there is also something very special about working alongside diggers from different nations and cultures. It is a mixture of different religious backgrounds and even different languages, but everyone works toward a common goal.

Because of that, each dig team quickly becomes like a family. Our students have experienced the camaraderie and unity that come from passing buckets down a line of volunteers, or from young men working together to move giant stones, or from engaging in discussion about

Furnishes a Lesson in Family

great from our friend, Prof. Uzi Leibner

the meaning of life with volunteers from all parts of the world. No matter one's background, the dirt and dust show no respect for race, religion, age, wealth or ethnicity. Everyone on the dig site gets hot, tired, sore and filthy.

I believe some of the joy of practicing archaeology was captured in an especially profound way in a special address from the man who has overseen the past few digs that we've been involved in: Prof. Uzi Leibner.

On the final day of the excavation, the crew gathered for dinner at our institute in Jerusalem. Those in attendance shared a meal, stories, anecdotes and memories from the four weeks of excavation. But it was Professor Leibner's address that contained an especially powerful and poetic message. He beautifully captured the joy of practicing archaeology and revealed what it is like to be a part of an archaeological family. This is what he told us.

Dear friends, as we gather here today at the end of this season's excavation in the heart of Jerusalem, I feel deep gratitude and humility—gratitude, for each and every one of you.

These past weeks have not only uncovered stones and pottery sherds, but also revealed something far more precious: the strength of friendship, the spirit of collaboration, and the quiet determination that comes from working side by side in the dust and heat, driven by curiosity and care.

We came here not only to dig but to understand, to recover fragments of memory from a city layered in history and meaning. And we did it together—teachers and students, workers and volunteers—each of us bringing hands, hearts and minds to the shared task.

We toiled shoulder to shoulder. We puzzled over pottery in the shade. We lifted each other's spirits

when the days grew long. And in doing so, we built a community. That, too, is part of Jerusalem's story.

But as we celebrate what we've achieved, we must also remember what was lost.

Beneath our feet lie the echoes of a city that more than once was torn by fire and sword, by exile and lament. As we uncovered walls and burned layers, we stood in silent witness to ancient trauma. We were reminded that archaeology is not only about stones, but about people—hopes dashed, lives disrupted, yet stories preserved.

We recall the voice of Jeremiah, who walked these same hills and foresaw the city's fall. Saturday night will be the eve of the 9th of Av, the day in which Jerusalem was destroyed twice, first temple and second temple. The Jewish custom is to read the book of Lamentations, traditionally attributed to Jeremiah, which opens with the verse:

"How lonely sits the city
that was full of people!
She that was great among the nations
is now like a widow."

Yet even in mourning, Jeremiah offered a seed of hope:

"I will restore you to health
and heal your wounds, declares the Lord. ...
I will bring you back from captivity
and rebuild you as you were before."
—Jeremiah 30:17-18

That is the paradox and the promise of Jerusalem: destruction and return, exile and rebuilding, memory and renewal.

Our work here honors that legacy. Every layer we documented, every artifact we registered, adds a thread to the tapestry of this city's ongoing story. We ourselves are a part of its repair—not only by reconstructing lost knowledge but by living and working here together.

In the tour we had this week, Orit mentioned the poet Yehuda Amichai. He was not only one of the best poets of modern Israel but also a great lover of Jerusalem who wrote a lot about it. He had this beautiful metaphor: "Jerusalem is a port city on the shore of eternity."

A short poem that faithfully reflects our experience in the excavation goes as follows:

"Who has ever seen Jerusalem naked?
Not even the archaeologists.
Jerusalem never gets completely undressed.
But always puts on new houses
Over the shabby and broken ones."

Every time we get excited about a new structure or find we uncover, I am reminded of another poem of Amichai, which praises the people and their daily lives rather than the spectacular remains:

"Once I sat on the steps by a gate at David's Tower, I placed my two heavy baskets at my side. A group of tourists was standing around their guide and I became their target marker. 'You see that man with the baskets? Just right of his head there's an arch from the Roman Period. Just right of his head.' 'But he's moving, he's moving!' I said to myself: Redemption will come only if their guide tells them, 'You see that arch from the Roman Period? It's not important: but next to it, left and down a bit, there sits a man who's bought fruit and vegetables for his family.'"

So let us leave this site not only with sore muscles and full notebooks but with full hearts. Let us carry forward the friendships we have forged, the wisdom we gained, and the quiet pride knowing we gave our best—to the past, to each other, and to Jerusalem.

I have lots of people to thank for this wonderful season. First of all, each and every one of the volunteers. Many thanks to the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology for the financial help, lasting support and especially for sending this amazing team to work with us.

I especially want to thank the staff members of the expedition: area supervisors Amir, Chris and Akiva—we are blessed with great professional area supervisors; assistant supervisors Nadav, Shoham, Aviv and Amichay; registrars Gal and Nadav, assisted by Shlomo on the sifting and washing area; administrators Asher, Aluma and Yedidya.

There are various qualities you would look for when choosing staff members for an expedition: professionalism, ability to perform and deliver, etc. In my experience, among the most important are a good spirit and a good sense of humor. So thank you all for a hilarious season.

Above all, I want to thank Orit for this great partnership. Thanks for sharing not only the vision and leadership but also the weight and responsibility—the endless logistics, the daily decisions and, yes, the long, unglamorous hours of post-excavation work: the sorting, cataloging and interpreting of finds long after the thrill of the field has passed. Your partnership has been a source of strength and joy, and this excavation would not have been the same without you. Thank you for being willing to walk this journey together.

May we all meet again next year in peace, in curiosity and in shared purpose. ■

OPHEL EXCAVATION SUMMER 2025 OVERVIEW

Our Ophel site has never looked more different. Not only has the site changed dramatically from when we first began excavating this location in 2012, but it also looks completely different from the start of this year's excavation. All of the volunteers worked hard, and we're very grateful for their contributions during the five weeks of excavation.

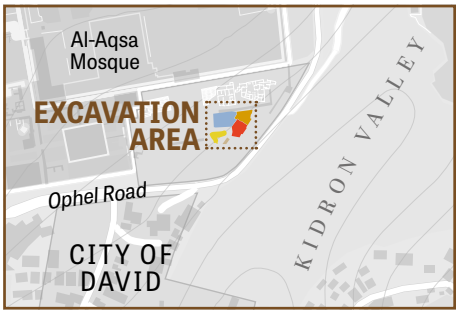
Between July 6 and August 7, we removed eight truckloads and 16 dumpsters worth of dirt, stone and material from the site.

While every year we remove a lot of earth and reveal new and exciting developments, this year was especially exciting as we phased out the majority of the Byzantine layer and revealed more Second Temple Period remains—and even some Iron Age.

Our summer excavations generally consist of between two and three areas. In 2012, there were two areas (A and B); in 2013, there were three (A, B and C); in 2018, two (D and M); 2022, two (D and D1); 2023, four (D, D1, E and F); 2024, two (D and D1).

This summer, once again under the direction of Prof. Uzi Leibner and Dr. Orit Peleg-Barkat from the Institute of Archaeology at Hebrew University, we excavated our largest number of active areas: a total of five. In addition to areas D and D1, we added the brand-new Area P (the Ophel pool) and returned to areas M (the Ophel cave) and B (lower Iron Age area).

Let's examine what we accomplished in these five areas, highlighting some of our more important discoveries.




Entrance to Area M cave

Monumental Iron Age wall in Area D

Vaulted room in Area D

AREA D

This was our fifth season of excavation in Area D, the uppermost area, led once again by area supervisor Amir Cohen-Klonymous and this time supported by assistants Shoham Buskila and Aviv Shalom. The primary focus of the work in Area D during previous seasons has been excavating through several major phases of the large Byzantine structure in this area, with aims of exposing the monumental Early Roman/Second Temple Period structure below—the very edges of which have been taunting us since they were first exposed in 2013.

After four seasons of excavation, the area still primarily represented the Byzantine Period. This season that finally changed, as we removed the final phase and began to see more of the first century B.C.E.-first century C.E. structure that the Byzantine building was built on top of: 2,000-year-old monumental architecture that likely incorporated even older, Iron Age II (biblical kingdom period) elements.

Excavating through the final floor of the Byzantine building meant that most of our effort this year went toward removing a significant fill layer. This layer was made up of exceptionally large stones that the Byzantine builders would have taken from the earlier walls to make up the foundation of their own structure.

Of the Second Temple Period structure in Area D, we have now revealed four main sections with a monumental wall framing its western side and a series of walls integrated into it from north to south, dividing the building into separate rooms. We believe that this large western wall is most likely an Iron Age wall reused and incorporated into the Second Temple Period structure—this is based on the unusually large boulders used to construct the wall (atypical of our early Roman period structures) and the large amount of Iron Age pottery and finds next to the wall (more on this further down). This wall, thickly plastered on its eastern face, was revealed to a height of around 3 meters over the course of the summer excavation, with probably another meter or so of fill yet to be excavated.

Our Second Temple Period structure consists of vaulted rooms on the northern and southern ends. The northern arch is exposed and preserved all the way across; the southern is only partially preserved. In the central area are two stepped rooms—the southern one consists of a deep plastered mikveh (Jewish ritual purification bath), and the northern one, a dry-stepped descent, constructed of exceptionally well-cut stones. This prominent structure was fronted by the impressive outer porch that leads to the iconic four-sided Ophel pool/mikveh (Area P).

Additionally, a very large and deep underground cistern system was opened in the western half of Area D. This cistern has been digitally mapped by an experienced cave archaeologist and will need to be further probed to see its phases of use and how it relates to the structure above.

A major surprise was the wealth of Iron Age material within fills, especially those associated with the large western wall of the Area D structure. We discovered pottery from the Iron Age II era (10th–sixth century B.C.E.); the majority, however, came from the end of the Iron Age—the period just before the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian army led by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E. Massive amounts of Iron Age fills had evidently been used inside the construction of the earliest phase of the Byzantine structure.

These rich finds are being analyzed by Iron Age ceramic expert Dr. Ariel Winderbaum, long-time friend and colleague of the late Dr. Eilat Mazar (and supervisor of Area C in 2013), who received his Ph.D. based on his

study of the early Iron Age pottery from the Ophel excavations and is currently working on the final reports for all the Iron Age pottery from the previous excavations.

Along with all manner of vessels, there were some interesting small finds within the Iron Age fills. These are finds that are most typical of the decades leading up to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. One such find was a beautiful bronze triple-bladed Irano-Scythian arrowhead. Similar arrowheads have been found at En Gedi, Azekah, Ramat Rachel and at other sites in Jerusalem. We found several of this same type in Dr. Eilat Mazar's excavations of Area G in the City of David. Examples of this type have also been found in the destruction levels at Nineveh, Nimrud and Carchemish—Assyrian cities destroyed at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army.

Along with the arrowhead, we also discovered a number of zoomorphic and humanoid figurines. These figurines were likely used as idols by the Judeans in the lead-up to the Babylonian incursion. They were covered with a whitewash paint, which is typically associated with cultic use. The animal figurines are normally associated with the well-known "Judean Pillar Figurines." While the exact use and function of the figurines is debated, the fact that they are almost always found broken has led some to associate them with Josiah's religious reform at the end of the seventh century B.C.E.; around the same time as Jeremiah the prophet. The discovery of such a wealth of Iron Age material was a pleasant surprise for our excavation season.

AREA D1

This was our fourth consecutive season of excavation in Area D1, supervised once again by *Let the Stones Speak* contributing editor Christopher Eames and assistant supervisor Nadav Rosenthal. Area D1 began as the designation for an underground drainage system located directly beneath Area D. Over the years of excavation, we've followed this drainage system in its full continuation toward the east. The walls of the drainage system form part of the foundations of the Second Temple Period structure (monumental building, porch and pool) above, thus the remains excavated from it are crucial in helping date the construction of the overall structure.

In following the continuation of the drainage system to the east, Area D1 has expanded to include the excavation of a series of eastern Byzantine rooms, and as with Area D, this year has now seen the removal of most of these walls and a near-complete representation of Early Roman/Second Temple Period remains, primarily consisting of mikvaot (plural of mikveh)—mikveh remains that have proved rather confounding

The main drainage system cutting through Area D1 was built to facilitate two mikvaot in Area D and the large four-sided Ophel mikveh/pool. Excavation of


First-century Citadel oil lamp


Iron Age horse figurine head


Early Roman stone bowl


Late Bronze Age Cypriot ware


Iron Age I pottery from a foundation trench in Area B


Babylonian arrowhead


Mikvaot in Area D1


Drainage channel in Area D1

Area D1 revealed an earlier, grand mikveh that was cut (and thus canceled out) by this later drain—the steps of which were entirely cut from bedrock, and the walls of which were shaped of well-cut white stones, preserved to a height of over 3 meters. This mikveh was found to have at least two, possibly three phases, with steps reworked in different directions.

A later, much narrower mikveh was found alongside it. The fill within this mikveh was full of pottery, including complete vessels and oil lamps. And an even later period mikveh was found to have been built on top of these, with a preserved continuation to the northwest. This mikveh, in turn, had been cut by a deep shaft that led to a large bottle-shaped underground cistern.

Confused? Join the club. The sheer number of ritual purification baths in this area, built so close and even on top of one another, and within such a narrow time frame, is striking—and fits the almost desperate picture of fulfilling purification needs so close to the temple complex at this time.

Additionally, a number of associated Second Temple Period walls and rooms were discovered in Area D1 over the course of the 2025 season, and even a small area of preserved Iron Age floor and fills rich in Iron Age remains—including zoomorphic figurines.

AREA P

The major new area opened during the 2025 season was Area P for "pool"—consisting of the large four-sided Ophel pool/mikveh and adjacent rooms to the south. This area was led by supervisor Akiva Goldenhersh and assistant supervisor Amichay Lifshits.

With its unique four-way staircase, consisting of an upper and a lower flight of stairs, this pool has become somewhat of a landmark of ancient Jerusalem. However, it is also very unusual. Debate remains as to whether or not this functioned as a pool or ritual purification bath (hence the typical qualifying name, "pool/mikveh"). Typically, mikvaot have a single descending staircase. Ours is a rare four-sided example.

That debate aside, a key function of opening this new area has been to re-reveal just how much of the pool/mikveh is original.

The pool was first excavated in the 1970s; however, almost all documentation about it is missing. Large-scale preservation work in the 1980s included rebuilding the pool around all four sides, pouring cement over the original stonework and plaster. Significant questions have remained, however, as to how much of the pool was original and if it was indeed correctly reconstructed as a four-sided pool.

This year a picture of at least part of the pool as it appeared pre-reconstruction was discovered by a good friend of the late Dr. Eilat Mazar, Herr Alexander Schick. This picture shows that the lower four-sided flight of stairs was original, but much of the upper, eastern and southern sides were not.

The goal of Area P, then, was to investigate and make sense of the pool and better understand why it was reconstructed in the way it was reconstructed. In the words of Goldenhersh: "Sometimes we try to understand the motivation of people 2,000 years ago; we're trying to understand the motivation of people 50 years ago." The excavation of several probes around the pool confirmed that most of the northern, southern and eastern upper flights of stairs were the product of reconstruction. Essentially, as far as the original upper flight goes, we have a U-shape course of stairs around the western end of the structure, descending from the porch. It is now evident that these steps only wrapped around and continued along the northern and southern sides of the pool for about 4 to 5 meters before leveling out into a stretch of flagstones. We do not have any evidence of stairs occupying the eastern side of the pool.

Excavation of Area P also included the investigation of two Byzantine rooms on the southern side of the pool, which had likewise been heavily reconstructed—these, and some of the original Byzantine remains,

were excavated over the course of the 2025 season. We already know of the presence of Early Roman and Iron Age period walls that continue under this area and will hopefully continue to expose these next year.

AREA M

Area M designates the large Ophel cave ("M" for "m'arah," the word for cave in Hebrew). This area was last excavated in 2018. Work is underway on preparing the material from that excavation in a forthcoming publication. Some remaining questions about the area prompted a return to the cave to further excavate two main sections. This area was directed by Dr. Evie Gassner and overseen by Dr. Rachel Bar-Nathan, both of whom are working on the forthcoming publication, and facilitated by the late Dr. Eilat Mazar's sister, Avital Mazar-Tsairi, who is leading the effort to wrap up Eilat's unfinished excavation publications.

The Ophel cave functioned as a cistern during the Iron Age and contains significant Hasmonean Period fills, as well as a brief 70 C.E. occupation level—the final year of the Great Revolt, in which Josephus wrote that inhabitants of the city sought their "last hope … in the caves and caverns underground." During our 2018 excavation, we discovered one of the largest-ever Year Four coin hoards—dozens of coins from the final full year of the First Revolt in Jerusalem, bearing the phrase "For the Redemption of Zion" (a sober change from the coins of earlier years of the revolt, which bore the more triumphant message "For the Freedom of Zion").

Our cave excavation this year consisted primarily of cutting two large sections left from the 2018 season, in order to secure a better pottery chronology. Finds included rich quantities of pottery from the Hasmonean Period (second century B.C.E.) onward—as well as the peculiar discovery of a 2,000-year-old canine skull, probably belonging to a jackal that was scavenging within the city. This brings to mind the prophecy of Jeremiah: "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a den of jackals …" (Jeremiah 9:11; New King James Version).

Finally, samples of plaster were also taken from the cave by visiting radiocarbon experts from the Weizmann Institute of Science, Prof. Elisabetta Boaretto and Dr. Johanna Regev. Their analysis of the samples will hopefully determine the earlier periods in which the cave had been originally plastered.

AREA B

Area B originally constituted a large Iron Age area on the southern end of the upper Ophel site. Excavated in 2012 and 2013 under the supervision of Brent Nagtegaal, a large number of Iron Age IIA (10th century B.C.E.) walls and small finds had come from the area, including a Phoenician earring pendant whose research and publication made headlines in 2024.

Nagtegaal, visiting from the United States for the 2025 excavation, took the opportunity to complete a final area of excavation within his area, carefully uncovering, dry-sifting and wet-sifting a preserved Iron Age IIA floor fill abutting a stretch of wall from the same period. While no significant small items were found, a number of typical early Iron Age vessels were, including one particularly beautiful, highly burnished example.

After a successful summer 2025 excavation, we look forward to what next year has in store! ■

Putting Solomon Back Into the *Song of Songs*

Critics claim the Song of Songs is a late composition, certainly not the 10th-century B.C.E. product of King Solomon. They are wrong, says Prof. Gabriel Barkay.

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

"The song of songs, which is Solomon's." So begins the Song of Songs, the Bible's great *poème d'amour*. But no one *really* believes this book was written in the 10th century B.C.E., the time of King Solomon, right?

There's a reason many scholars and critics reject the 10th-century B.C.E. authorship of this book: It contains several late, post-exilic language elements, including Persian loanwords (e.g. *pardes* for "orchard"; *egoz* for "nuts") and late forms of Hebrew spelling. It uses אני as a personal pronoun, where earlier texts typically use אנוכי; the longer דויד for "David" found throughout Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles, where earlier texts almost ubiquitously use the shorter דוד. Still, at least a hint of earlier elements is present (e.g. the shorter spelling of Jerusalem as ירושלם, rather than the longer ירושלים).

The use of language elements from both late and early periods has led a few scholars to believe the book was written early and then later edited. In *Dating the Old Testament*, the very conservative Craig Davis suggests, "Song of Solomon was probably originally written at the time of Solomon," but that the "language of the book was thoroughly revised in the post-exilic period, around 400 B.C.E., to reflect the spoken vernacular Hebrew of the time."

From a Bible-literalist standpoint, this is hardly problematic, as the Bible itself reveals such a practice. Proverbs 25:1, for example, announces that the continuing texts of the book "also are proverbs of Solomon," but those "*which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.*" In similar manner, the Talmud contains recognition of the Song of Songs as a later-compiled text—attributing it to "Hezekiah and his colleagues" (Bava Batra 15a). Yet as noted above, given some of its linguistic elements, even this attribution is likely centuries too early. Nevertheless, from a strictly biblical standpoint, the point is made that such an early preexisting composition *could* have conceivably been reassembled during a later period (such as during the time of Hezekiah or Ezra), "reflect[ing] the spoken vernacular Hebrew of the time."

Still, for many, the notion of the Song of Songs in its original form going back to King Solomon *almost 3,000 years ago* remains difficult to swallow. And it doesn't help matters that the text does not identify period-specific, geopolitical events. It is, after all, an abstract love song, not a detailed record of wars or international relations. Again, in the assessment of Davis, "Song of Solomon stands largely alone in the Old Testament, with no major dependencies on other books and without lending information to other books," and with "verbal ties [that] do not seem long enough or numerous enough to draw major conclusions" (ibid).

For many, the genesis of this text in the 10th century B.C.E. can be based only on faith, with the lack of any appreciable outside, corroborative evidence for the setting or authorship.

Archaeologist Prof. Gabriel Barkay, Israel's 81-year-old living legend—a man affectionately referred to by some as the "dean of biblical archaeology"—begs to differ. And he made his case in an extraordinary book released in 2024.

'For Your Eyes Only'

Professor Barkay is one of Israel's most esteemed archaeologists. He has practiced archaeology in Israel for more than 50 years and is cherished as one of the last of the "old guard." Born in Hungary in the Budapest Ghetto during the height of World War II and the Holocaust, Barkay immigrated to Israel in 1950. He studied archaeology, geography and comparative religion, graduating from Hebrew University and later Tel Aviv University with a Ph.D. Among the many highlights of his storied career, he is most famous for the 1979 discovery of the 2,600-year-old Ketef Hinnom Scrolls—the earliest biblical text ever discovered (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1123*). Also notable is his role as cofounder and co-director of the Temple Mount Sifting Project, alongside Zachi Dvira.


Prof. Gabriel Barkay

Last year, Barkay—despite a difficult struggle with deteriorating health—published a brand-new book on the subject of the Song of Songs in its early historical context: *'For Your Eyes Only': Song of Songs Through Archaeological-Historical Eyes.* It is a remarkable book that has largely flown under the radar—undoubtedly due to it being available only in Hebrew. An English version is in the works. (The quotes to follow are our own translation and are likely to differ slightly from the final English text. Note also that the above-mentioned title is provided in English within the Hebrew text; it differs slightly in translation from the Hebrew original.) In assembling the book, Barkay was aided by his research assistant Amichay Lifshits (who served as my own assistant during our Ophel 2024 excavations). The Hebrew-language text, produced by Ariel Publishing, is available for purchase from the Israeli Institute of Archaeology website (*israeliarchaeology.org/product-category/ariel*).

At its core, Barkay's book rejects the common premise that the Song of Songs is total abstract allegory (with no serious historical underpinning) and instead sees it as grounded in historical realities that anchor the time and place of its original composition. "Throughout its history of research, the Song of Songs has not been attributed historical importance," Barkay writes. "[T]his work renders it a historical source …. Our goal is to reveal the tangible in the love poetry. That is, the world of material culture that stands behind the text of the Song of Songs. … Our basic assumption is that the material culture reflected in the text allows us to determine the time of its writing."

"Many generations of commentators have hardly dealt with the realities behind the chapters of the Song of Songs. Most of them have dealt with the literary, theological and linguistic aspects of the text," Barkay observes. Yet "[t]here is no doubt that the text reflects a historical reality," a "clear tangible background … in the pre-classical world of the First Temple Period. Archaeological analysis of material cultural items mentioned in the text brings us closer to this period and allows us to establish the background for the love song in the early Iron Age II."

In progressive order, Barkay expounds on numerous different features of the text—linguistic, geographical, horticultural, architectural, etc (each presented in a dozen separate chapters)—and explains how the foundation of the book is rooted firmly within the Iron Age II period generally, and the Iron Age IIA specifically (the time in which Solomon lived). What follows are some highlights from Professor Barkay's book. (Note that our default Bible translation is the Jewish Publication Society, which follows the Masoretic divisional system, also used in Barkay's book. Several verses of Song of Songs are numbered differently in other translations, which follow the more common Geneva numbering system. Where there are differences, corresponding verse numbers are indicated.)

Linguistic Features

Song of Songs has long been recognized for its unusual quantity of *hapax legomena*—words that appear only once in the Hebrew Bible. These words can prove a real challenge to later readers and translators, with their rare use and lack of comparative context often resulting in their original meaning becoming forgotten over time. There are some 30 to 50 such words in Song of Songs (the exact number differing based on how they are counted and categorized). Given the comparatively short length of the text, this puts it statistically in second place for percentage of such words in the Hebrew Bible, after the linguistically confounding book of Job (see Prof. Frederick Greenspahn's "The Number and Distribution of Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew").

Yet over the last century of archaeological discovery, certain of these unusual words in Song of Songs have been paralleled and illuminated by a number of Iron Age inscriptions, including those going back to the 10th century B.C.E. In his book, Barkay highlights these and other interesting linguistic parallels—"words and concepts from the text of the Song of Songs that appear in Hebrew and Phoenician inscriptions from the Iron Age." Here are a few:

- שחרחר (Song of Songs 1:6)—this hapax legomenon, typically rendered as "black," is paralleled by two extant (albeit unprovenanced) seals featuring this as a personal name.
- זמיר (Song of Songs 2:12)—this hapax legomenon, typically assumed to refer to a time when birds sing (based on the context of the verse), appears on the 10th century B.C.E. Gezer Calendar, where it refers specifically to a two-month agricultural period of pruning.
- סמדר (Song of Songs 2:13, 15; 7:13; verse 12 in other translations)—this term is found three times in the Bible—all only in Song of Songs—and is generally understood to relate to grapes. The term is found on an eighth-century B.C.E. vessel inscription from Hazor.
- תרשיש (Song of Songs 5:14)—this term is used to refer to a precious stone and also a related place-name (whose location has long been debated); it appears on a ninth-century B.C.E. Phoenician stone inscription from Sardinia.
- אגן (Song of Songs 7:3; verse 2 in other translations)—this rare word refers to a specific type of wine basin and is paralleled on a seventh-century B.C.E. Arad ostracon.

"These ancient inscriptions indicate that the world of the Song of Songs is connected to the culture of the First Temple Period," concludes Barkay.

Geographical Features

Things get even more interesting with the geographical information. In this, Barkay is, in a sense, breaking new ground—he notes the surprising lack of research on Song of Songs from a geographical perspective. "Traditional and modern commentators have not dealt at all with the historical geography of the Song of Songs" on the premise that for an allegorical love song, the "geographical-historical aspects of the text have no significance."

"Most of those who have studied the history of the land of Israel and the interpretation of the Song of Songs have never thought twice about learning history or historical geography from the Song of Songs," he writes.

Barkay enumerates 20 cities and places mentioned in the text—most of which are known with "reasonable certainty" and "in light of biblical sources and archaeological data, there is evidence for the existence of these sites during this [Solomonic] period." Remarkably, "[a]mong the cities mentioned in the Song of Songs, there is not a single one that is known to have been inhabited solely in the later stages of the monarchical period or during the Second Temple Period. There is not a single place-name of Greek origin, as we would expect to find if the text was indeed composed in the Hellenistic or Roman periods. Therefore, none of the place-names mentioned in the Song of Songs indicate anachronism, or that the text was composed after the monarchical period."

Almost as remarkable as the mention of certain Solomonic locations is the *lack* of mention of certain others. In describing in eyewitness-detail the beauty of certain minor Solomonic districts (comparing them to the lover in the text), it omits some of the most powerful and notable cities belonging to the king—cities like Gezer, Hazor, Megiddo and others. The very opposite would be expected in the case of a much later author, composing a narrative with the intent of drawing more obvious links to Solomon for his readers, in sourcing material from the books of Kings and Chronicles. Barkay

emphasizes that the geographical information in Song of Songs points to an independence from these other, later biblical sources in the composition of the text.

Of additional note is the use of double meaning throughout Song of Songs, especially in relation to geographical terms. Certain locations are invoked, both in the meaning of the Hebrew word generally and a corresponding location of the same name.

Barkay highlights these geographical features in the order they appear in the text. Here are a few highlights:

- ***Turak*** (Song of Songs 1:3)—a hapax legomenon that seems to function as a place-name. If so, this is the only such mention, and its location has become lost over time.
- ***Tamar*** (Song of Songs 7:7-8; verses 8-9 in other translations)—apparent use of double meaning, referring to both Tamar as a place-name and reference to dates. This was a location built by Solomon (1 Kings 9:18—note that there is some debate about the place-name in this verse; Barkay prefers the link with Tamar based on the Masoretic Text).
- ***Hills of Bether*** (Song of Songs 2:17)—identified with the Iron Age II settlement of Tel Betar, west of Bethlehem, in the Judean mountains.
- ***Mount Gilead*** (Song of Songs 4:1)—mentioned twice in Solomon's list of regional districts (1 Kings 4:13, 19)—this territory gradually became lost to the Israelites from the ninth century B.C.E. onward.
- ***Amana, Hermon, Senir*** (Song of Songs 4:8)—three mountain ridges overlooking Lebanon. The mention of these ridges reflects an intriguing level of detail about the landscape of the far north—mountainous territory to which the Bible describes Solomon sending workmen (1 Kings 5:27-29; verses 13-15 in other translations).
- ***Zaphon, Teman*** (Song of Songs 4:16)—probable examples of double meaning, referring to "north" and "south" respectively, but also fitting with locations of the same names. The former is located in the Succoth Valley, mentioned as having been conquered by Sheshonq I (Shishak) in the 10th-century B.C.E. Karnak Inscription (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1149*); the latter is a synonym for Edom, likewise under the control of the united monarchy (2 Samuel 8:14) with references to this name including an early eighth-century B.C.E. vessel inscription from Kuntillet Ajrud.
- ***Tirzah*** (Song of Songs 6:4)—mention of this location is notable, given its position as the capital within the early years of the breakaway northern kingdom of Israel, from the late 10th century B.C.E. onward (before being supplanted by Samaria). This was likely as a function of Tirzah's already notable position in the kingdom. Still, this location is not mentioned in Song of Songs for any administrative function, but rather simply for its beauty. This city is likewise mentioned in Sheshonq I's 10th-century B.C.E. Karnak Inscription.
- ***Meholah, Mahanaim*** (Song of Songs 7:1; 6:13 in other translations)—another probable example of double meaning. The former likely refers to Abel Meholah, one of Solomon's settlements (1 Kings 4:12), located in the Jordan Valley south of Beit Shean (possibly Tell Abu Sus); the latter generally identified with Tell edh-Dhahab, which served as a regional capital during the days of Solomon (verse 14) and is likewise mentioned by Sheshonq I in the 10th century B.C.E. Notably, this city—mentioned multiple times during the period of the united monarchy—appears to fall out of importance rather suddenly, with no further reference to it following the reign of Solomon. In Barkay's opinion, the metaphorical reference of these two sites in the context of the "dancing Shulammite" is "one of the most beautiful examples of the author's linguistic literary style."
- ***Damascus*** (Song of Songs 7:5; verse 4 in other translations)—this important Syrian city was won by David (2 Samuel 8:6); however, it was lost during the latter part of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 11:24).
- ***Gaza*** (Song of Songs 8:6)—another likely example of wordplay, in which "*strong* as death" (עזה, italicized—the same territorial name) aptly reflects this hostile enemy Philistine territory.

Two particular locations in Song of Songs are mentioned frequently: Jerusalem and Lebanon. Both of these, of course, have special significance to the reign of Solomon—Jerusalem as his capital and Lebanon as the territory of Phoenician King Hiram, with whom David and Solomon shared an unusually close relationship (e.g. 1 Kings 5; 2 Chronicles 2). The Lebanon connection is further reflected in one of Solomon's key administrative buildings in Jerusalem: the House of the Forest of Lebanon (e.g. 1 Kings 7, 10; see also *ArmstrongInstitute.org/935*). Note also 1 Kings 9:19 and 2 Chronicles 8:6, in which these two entities—Jerusalem and Lebanon—are singled out together as the key locations of Solomon's focus.

Barkay treats Jerusalem, the most-referenced location, in its own separate chapter. What is perhaps most interesting is what is *not* said about the city. Nowhere is it emphasized for its size—something that is highlighted by later texts (e.g. Jeremiah 22:8, "this great city"; Lamentations 1:1, "great among the nations"). This makes logical sense when comparing the layout of the

city during the Iron IIA period with the later Iron IIB city—the latter having expanded to triple the size of the original, with the late ninth-to-eighth-century B.C.E. expansion and bustling metropolis around the Western Hill. The original city plan was comparatively small, occupying only the southern City of David and northern Ophel/Temple Mount ridges.

Based on the description of Jerusalem in Song of Songs, "there is no escape from the conclusion that the city mentioned in the text did not include the areas of the Western Hill. In other words, the text was composed before the significant urban growth of Jerusalem, and the city represented reflects the smaller ancient core," writes Barkay.

Military Features

Surprisingly, the love song features quite a number of military particulars—though it knows of no war (broadly comparable to the reign of Solomon). These military details "represent the world of the Iron Age II period, and there is no data that clearly belongs to later periods," writes Barkay. Here are two examples:

- ***Pharaonic chariots and horses*** (Song of Songs 1:9)—Solomon was known for his trade with Egypt in horses and chariots (e.g. 1 Kings 10:28). This interesting positive reference to Egyptian chariotry—infamous elsewhere for its negative, Exodus-related imagery—fits well with the picture of peace and intermarriage between the kingdoms during the time of Solomon. Additionally, the added detail in the following verse, referring to "cheek-circlets" and "neck beads" (verse 10), parallels early depictions of royal Egyptian decorated horse harnesses and bridles.
- ***Shields hung atop towers*** (Song of Songs 4:4)—this practice of hanging shields along the top of fortifications, also recorded elsewhere in the Bible, is aptly demonstrated in the circa 700 B.C.E. reliefs of Assyrian King Sennacherib, depicting the fortifications of Lachish as lined with circular shields.

Additional Features

The list of details goes on. The following are additional teasers:

- ***Horticulture:*** The word שושן, generally translated as "lily," is found more often in Song of Songs than anywhere else in the Bible (eight out of 15 times). It more likely refers to the lotus flower—something "prevalent in Egyptian, Phoenician and Assyrian artistic depictions, and especially in Iron Age ivory art."
- ***Jewelry:*** "Set me as a seal upon thy heart" (Song of Songs 8:6)—this imagery is reflective of the typical royal and administrative seal stamps, which would often be worn around the neck, thus lying effectively "on the heart." "Seals have been used from prehistoric times to the present day, but they are most characteristic of the culture of the royal period in Israel and Judah, from the 10th century B.C.E. to the destruction of the first temple," Barkay notes. Hundreds of seals and seal impressions have been found in Jerusalem, a significant percentage of which date to or around the 10th century B.C.E. (see "A Corpus of Iron Age II Inscriptions From Jerusalem: The Background for the Writing of Biblical Texts," 2024, by Christopher Eames and Yosef Garfinkel).
- ***Currency:*** Song of Songs 8:11-12 describe payment in "pieces of silver," the system of transaction during the Iron Age (and earlier). During later periods, especially beginning in the sixth century B.C.E., this shifted to a system of coinage. "The language mentioning the price and value of agricultural produce is certainly 'at home' in the Iron Age," writes Barkay.
- ***Apiculture (beekeeping):*** Song of Songs 4:11 and 5:1 mention the consumption of honey and honeycomb. "Until recently, it was claimed that honey was known in the land of Israel during the biblical period only from beehives that happened to be encountered along the travels of people at that time," writes Barkay. This changed following the excavations of Prof. Amihai Mazar at Tel Rehov, in which "an industrial beehive was discovered where honey was produced," dating "to the Iron Age IIA (10th–ninth century B.C.E.)." Further, analysis of the remains revealed that these hives contained a very select species of bee imported from *Anatolia*—a species that is "less aggressive, and produces a greater amount of honey than native bees," Barkay notes.
- ***Spices:*** There are numerous references to spices and perfumes in Song of Songs—Barkay enumerates about 10 different types—most of them originating in distant locations, requiring facilitation by long-distance trade (something befitting the biblical descriptions of Solomon's navy). Barkay draws special attention also to the visit of the Queen of Sheba, with an apparent nod to her visit in Song of Songs 3:6: "Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness, Like pillars of smoke, Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, With all powders of the merchant?" This imagery brings to mind the arrival of the Queen of Sheba and her retinue from the southern desert trading routes. 1 Kings 10:10 notes that "there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon." Barkay

highlights the 2012 discovery of the Ophel Pithos Inscription by Dr. Eilat Mazar, dating to the 10th century B.C.E., and Dr. Daniel Vainstub's 2023 analysis identifying its script as Ancient South Arabian (from the territory of Sheba), with reference to a well-known Sabean "spice" commodity named on the vessel as *ladan* (ladanum; see Vainstub, "Incense From Sheba for the Jerusalem Temple").

Dating

Barkay concludes his 160-page publication with a discussion on dating the text as a whole, reassessing key points that ground the text in the Iron Age generally and the 10th century B.C.E. specifically. "[T]he conclusion to which the discussion leads is that the Song of Songs originated in the days of Solomon, somewhere in the 10th century B.C.E." Points highlighted by Barkay as summary evidence to this end include:

- ***A sub-layer of Canaanite culture***—e.g. reference to Baal Hamon (Song of Songs 8:11); possible allusion to a Canaanite site atop Mount Carmel (Song of Songs 7:6; verse 5 in other translations); word pairings familiar from late second-millennium B.C.E. Canaanite-Ugaritic literature.
- ***The love-poetry genre***—something common in the ancient Near East, with parallels in Mesopotamian and Egyptian literature. Knowledge of such literature gradually became lost during the later classical periods.
- ***Literary dependence***—Isaiah and Jeremiah contain select passages "undoubtedly influenced by the Song of Songs," thus the text predates their own.
- ***Textual unity***—a picture that fits only with the time of the united monarchy. "Song of Songs does not mention places, figures, or other details that are later than the days of the united kingdom."

"The main, and perhaps the only, argument for the late dating of the text is linguistic," concludes Barkay. Yet "[w]hen this argument is placed against the other considerations mentioned in this text, it seems to have little relative weight."

Such late, piecemeal linguistic features are hardly problematic in Barkay's view. "[I]t is certainly possible that late syntactic formations, Aramaisms (influences of the Aramaic language on the text) and late foreign words penetrated the text before the final version was formed." Still, "[t]he text does not contain any late geographical name or distinct word in Greek that would help date the text to the times of the second temple. … Likewise, the text does not mention material cultural data characteristic of the late Iron Age. The descriptions in the Song of Songs do not include any anachronism that might betray the hand of a late author"—instead, perhaps merely the hand of an editor or redactor, perhaps of the likes of Ezra on the scene during the Persian period.

"We have no doubt that even if the Song of Songs contains later linguistic features, it has an ancient and solid foundation that allows it to be dated to the days of Solomon," Barkay concludes.

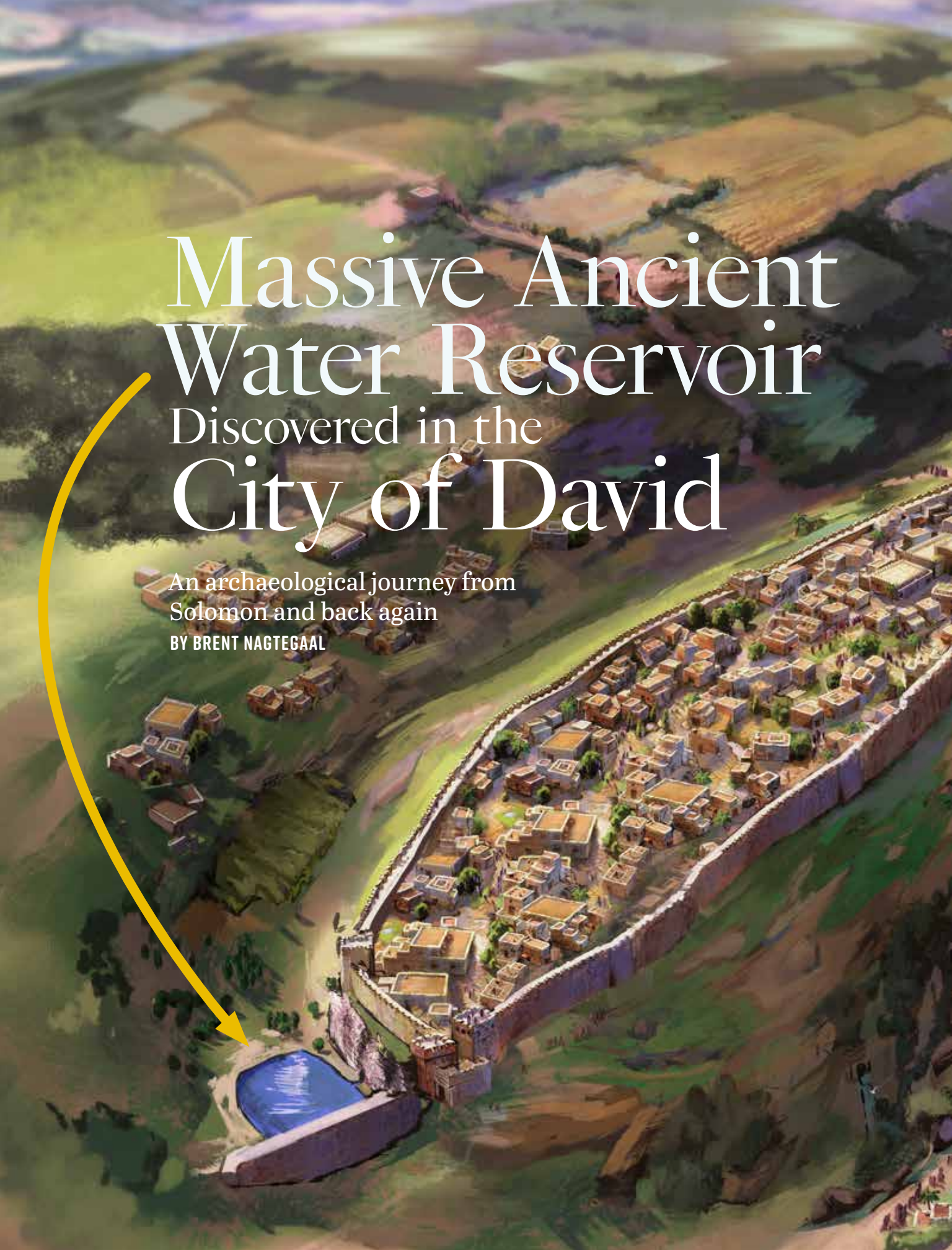
The Song of Songs, Which Is Gabriel's

This new book from Gabriel Barkay is more than just another publication. In a real sense, it's a swan song of his own career, looking back across his more than half-century in the field of biblical archaeology. It's a field that has witnessed many changes—not all of them for the better. "Since the 1970s, biblical studies on the one hand and archaeology on the other have drifted apart to the point of an almost complete disconnect," Barkay laments. "The disconnect is so stark that many have questioned the very name 'biblical archaeology,' or the very existence of such a discipline. There were others who disdained this field and saw it as a fundamentalist pursuit ….

"There is a tendency among scholars of biblical language, literature and history to treat material culture with contempt or to ignore it …. The Song of Songs is a book in which material culture occupies an extremely important place."

Professor Barkay's book is an attempt to rectify the situation, not only in relation to analysis of the Song of Songs but toward the field of biblical archaeology as a whole. "The purpose of the discussion here is also to restore the lost respect for the connection between the biblical text and material culture," he writes. "This connection was largely lost after the death of William Foxwell Albright and the decline in the importance of the school he founded—something which resulted in the premature death of biblical archaeology. Some of the reasons for the disconnect are related to modern political circumstances and the formation of extreme minimalist postmodern schools that deny any ancient background to the books of the Bible, including the Song of Songs." Yet biblical studies and archaeology are not mutually exclusive, he argues. "The realia explain the text, and sometimes the text explains the material remains, and the two disciplines complement each other."

In Professor Barkay's book, then, we have a resource that—as appropriately summarized by the publisher—"reveals the world of material culture described in the biblical text, and for the first time, gives the Song of Songs its rightful place as a valuable historical source." ■



Massive Ancient Water Reservoir Discovered in the City of David

An archaeological journey from Solomon and back again

BY BRENT NAGTEGAAL

JULIA GODDARD/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

When the City of David Foundation announced in December 2022 that it was going to excavate the entire Siloam Pool, the news was received by many archaeologists, including myself, with some indifference and a ho-hum attitude. We already understood the archaeology of this pool at the southern tip of the City of David and didn't think there was much more to be learned, even if the entire pool was excavated.

Or so we thought.

Much of our understanding had come two decades earlier, when archaeologists Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron discovered the northern portion of the pool with its beautiful ashlar stone steps descending toward the south. Shortly thereafter, Reich and Shukron published a report identifying their discovery as the Siloam Pool mentioned in the book of John.

Before this grand claim, the name "Siloam Pool" was attached to a smaller pool further north, at the exit point of the water tunnel known today as "Hezekiah's Tunnel." The discovery by Reich and Shukron challenged this identification. The colossal nature of the finely cut stones and the dating of the steps to the late Second Temple Period made it reasonable to accept that this new pool was the handiwork of Herodian Period Jerusalem and the pool where the blind man was healed, recorded in John 9:1-11.

So when the City of David announced that it intended to excavate the rest of the pool, it didn't seem too important an endeavor—at least in terms of furthering our understanding of ancient Jerusalem. It would be a huge task; roughly two Olympic-sized swimming pools of material would be removed. But it wasn't especially exciting, since all of the potential occupation layers uncovered inside the pool would no doubt date to the Herodian Period and later. For

this reason, several scientists considered the excavation more an earthmoving enterprise than an actual archaeological excavation.

In early 2023, and with very little fanfare, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), the City of David Foundation and head archaeologist Dr. Nahshon Szanton launched into the Herculean effort to fully excavate the Siloam Pool.

Fast-forward two years, and I'm glad the excavators had more vision than me to push forward with the dig!

On July 15, after wrapping up work on our dig on the Ophel, I trekked a few hundred yards to the bottom of the City of David along with the Ophel excavation team to meet Dr. Szanton and fellow archaeologist, Itamar Berko. This was one of our weekly organized tours to learn about the digs taking place in the area. Standing with Dr. Szanton on the plastered floor at the bottom of the pool, I was dumbfounded.

A colossal dam wall towered above us!

But it wasn't merely the height and size of the wall that was astonishing. There was also the revelation, as Dr. Szanton explained, that the wall wasn't from King Herod's time, nor even from the time of King Hezekiah, but was even older—from 2,800 years ago!

Dr. Szanton and his team had uncovered the largest water reservoir in Israel, dated to the time of Jerusalem's early biblical kings.

Here's how the excavators reported their discovery, as revealed in an August 30 press release: "This is the largest dam ever discovered in Israel and the earliest one ever found in Jerusalem. Its dimensions are remarkable: about 12 meters high, over 8 meters wide, and the uncovered length reaches 21 meters." (Note, this is not the total length of the wall, as it extends farther south out of the excavation area.)

It is true that the presence of this wall and the pool (known as *Birkat el-Hamra* in Arabic) were identified *before* these excavations, and even before Reich and Shukron discovered the beautiful stepped northern side. In fact, drawings of this area from the mid-19th century reveal the presence of a dam wall. But until this recent excavation, the entire inside of the dam area was filled with earth and had fruit trees growing in it. We had no idea about the actual size and dating of this water reservoir.

This new information was arresting, not least because it questioned my prior thinking of the *entire interpretation* that this was the Siloam Pool.

When the Herodian Period steps were discovered 20 years ago, it seemed logical that they were further evidence that the Birkat el-Hamra was the Pool of Siloam mentioned in the Gospels. Without deeply investigating the question, many archaeologists and tour guides alike, including myself, agreed with the conclusion that this was the Siloam Pool.

Workers clean the plastered wall of the dam.

EMIL ALJAJEH, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

But this new dating challenges this conclusion. And after studying it further, so too does much of the prior research.

Dating the Colossal Dam

Prior to this summer's visit, I was somewhat aware of Dr. Szanton's theory that the Birkat el-Hamra pool was *not* the Siloam Pool, as Reich and Shukron suggested. Not having studied the subject in-depth myself, I was skeptical. It's not unusual for new excavators to have new interpretations of an area previously excavated and to seek to reinterpret or overturn the conclusions of previous archaeologists. I wondered if Dr. Szanton might be seeking to overturn the conclusions of Reich and Shukron.

As it turns out, and as I later discovered researching this myself, Dr. Szanton was actually *restoring* the initial line of research—one I believe fits much better with the science, the historical record and the biblical text.

For me, the catalyst for reconsidering the pool's identification was the dating of the dam wall. I assumed, like most, that the wall dated to the time period of King Hezekiah (late eighth century B.C.E.). It was logical to believe the pool was originally built by King Hezekiah when he built a conduit to carry water from the Gihon

Researchers Johanna Regev, Nahshon Szanton, Itamar Berko, Elisabetta Boaretto sit atop the dam wall.

Straw found in the mortar of the dam wall

Spring to a pool in the southwest part of the city (2 Kings 20:20)—close to where this pool is located.

And although the end of Hezekiah's Tunnel is some distance away, it was still likely in my mind that his conduit fed this large pool.

However, during the summer tour, the archaeologists were emphatic: This massive dam predated Hezekiah by a century. If it wasn't Hezekiah's, then whose was it?

The new dating was published in late August in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (PNAS), in an article titled "Radiocarbon Dating of Jerusalem's Siloam Dam Links Climate Data and Major Waterworks." The lead author was Johanna Regev of the Dangoor Research Accelerator Mass Spectrometer Radiocarbon Laboratory of the Weizmann Institute of Science.

The paper documents how the team from the Weizmann Institute visited the site and extracted four organic samples from the mortar of the dam wall for carbon-14 radiometric dating. Three samples (uncharred straw and twigs) were taken from between the stones of the upper vertical portion of the wall and another sample of uncharred straw was taken from the core of the upper portion of the slanting reinforcement. The samples were taken to the lab in Rehovot for testing. What did testing reveal? "All four dates were very similar and could be averaged, giving a calibrated R_combined date of 805–795 B.C.E. (68.3 percent) and 809–792 B.C.E. (95.4 percent)," wrote Regev, et al.

Put simply, all four samples dated to around 800 B.C.E.!

In their press release, Regev and laboratory head Elisabetta Boaretto noted how unique it is to have four distinct carbon samples fall within such a narrow time frame: "Short-lived twigs and branches embedded in the dam's construction mortar provided a clear date at the end of the ninth century B.C.E., with extraordinary resolution of only about 10 years, a rare achievement when dating ancient finds."

The confirmed early dating for the massive dam wall, and therefore the earliest phase of the entire pool, was shocking to many scientists and scholars. Many scholars believe that Jerusalem's population didn't expand across the Tyropoeon Valley until the late eighth century B.C.E. at the time of Hezekiah. But this massive construction, bridging the Tyropoeon Valley, was built at least 100 years earlier.

In comments to *Haaretz,* renowned biblical minimalist Prof. Israel Finkelstein conceded that this discovery likely speaks to a larger Jerusalem than previously thought: "I see no logic in investing in this project had it not been for the need to bring water to the new quarter. The question remains open, but it is possible that the

SEE **DAM** PAGE 20

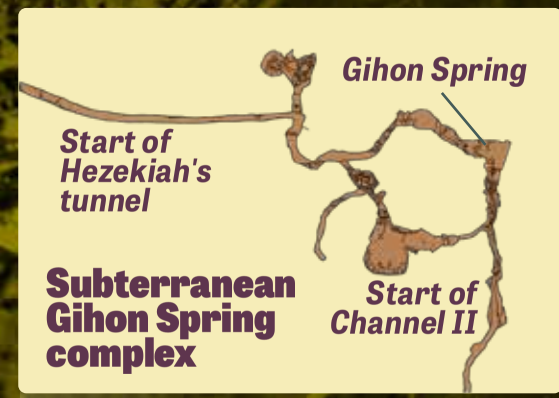
REUT YALE, CITY OF DAVID SPOKESPERSON'S OFFICE. DR. JOHANNA REGEV / SCIENTIFIC ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT, WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

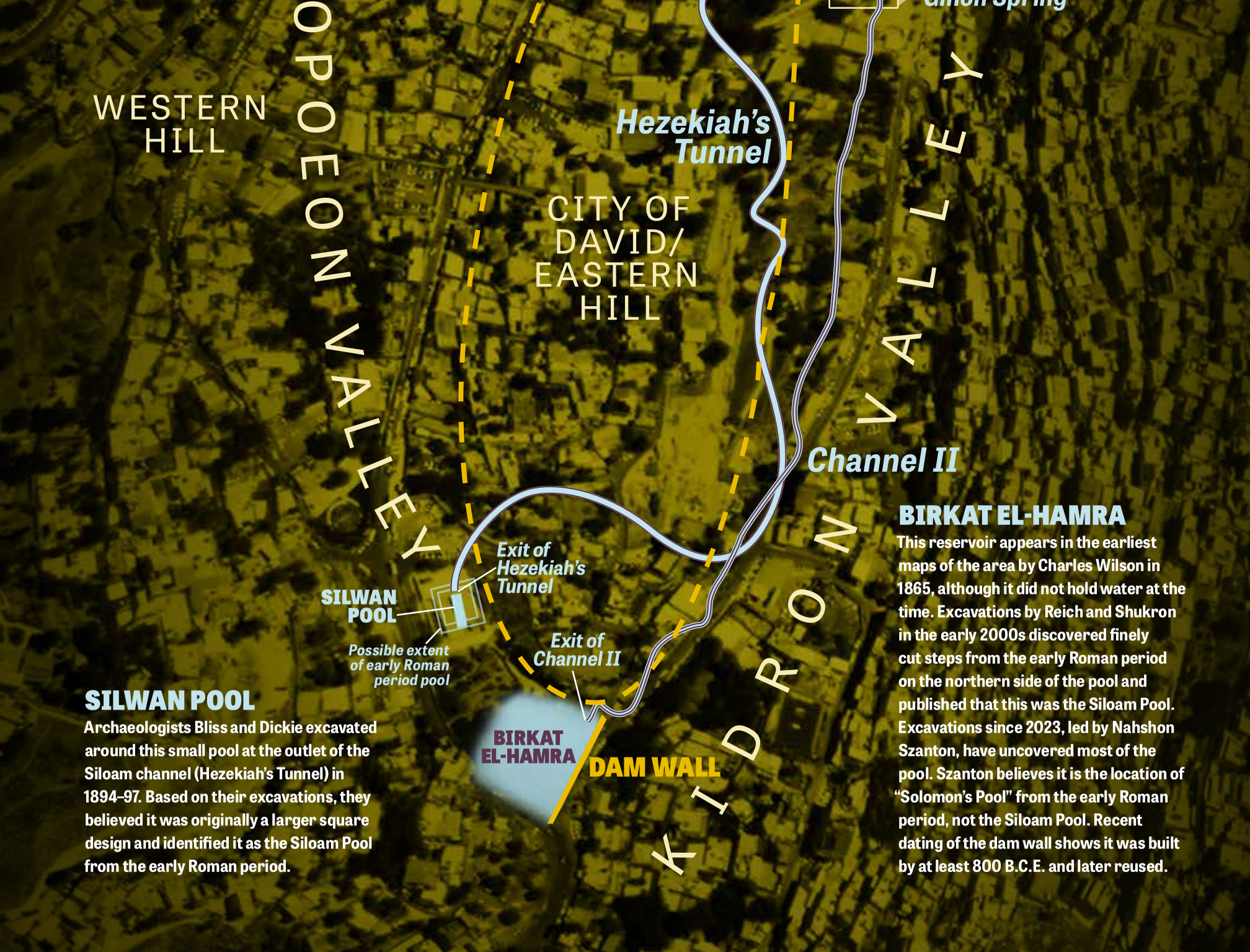
THE POOLS of Royal Jerusalem

The water system of ancient Jerusalem is a fascinating labyrinth of underground tunnels, pools and shafts. The origin of this watery maze is the Gihon Spring, Jerusalem's perennial water source situated inside the Kidron Valley, halfway up the eastern slope of the ancient City of David. From the spring chamber, where water shoots out between a crack in the bedrock, several tunnels branch off in different directions.

One tunnel (known as the Siloam Tunnel, or "Hezekiah's Tunnel") still flows with water, as it has for the last 2,700 years. This tunnel takes water on a 530-meter journey from the Gihon Spring, under the City of David ridge to the Silwan Pool in the city's southwest.

Another earlier tunnel (known as Channel II) leaves the spring area and travels more directly along the edge of the eastern slope of the City of David. Before Hezekiah's tunnel was built, water would travel down Channel II and fill the massive reservoir where the Tyropoeon Valley meets the Kidron Valley. This reservoir (known in Arabic as Birkat el-Hamra) has recently been dated to 2800 years ago.





SILWAN POOL

Archaeologists Bliss and Dickie excavated around this small pool at the outlet of the Siloam channel (Hezekiah's Tunnel) in 1894–97. Based on their excavations, they believed it was originally a larger square design and identified it as the Siloam Pool from the early Roman period.

BIRKAT EL-HAMRA

This reservoir appears in the earliest maps of the area by Charles Wilson in 1865, although it did not hold water at the time. Excavations by Reich and Shukron in the early 2000s discovered finely cut steps from the early Roman period on the northern side of the pool and published that this was the Siloam Pool. Excavations since 2023, led by Nahshon Szanton, have uncovered most of the pool. Szanton believes it is the location of "Solomon's Pool" from the early Roman period, not the Siloam Pool. Recent dating of the dam wall shows it was built by at least 800 B.C.E. and later reused.

DAM
FROM PAGE 17

city's expansion toward the Western Hill ... was already starting by 800 B.C.E. ... and the pool and dam were meant to serve this new neighborhood."

Redating the dam wall a century earlier suggests a stronger royal authority in Jerusalem earlier than many had assumed. "The exposure of the largest dam ever found in Israel, in the heart of ancient Jerusalem, is tangible evidence of the strength of the kingdom of Judah and the creativity of its kings in dealing with natural and environmental challenges," explained Heritage Minister Rabbi Amichai Eliyahu.

In the world of archaeology, nothing speaks more visibly to the power of a king than massive building projects. To stand at the bottom of this dam and marvel at the colossal wall and then conclude that Jerusalem's kings were unsophisticated is to betray the eyes. The administration in charge of Jerusalem in the ninth century B.C.E. obviously had the brains and brawn to construct this massive pool!

The IAA and the City of David Foundation deserve credit and praise for this discovery, especially considering most of us never anticipated such a momentous and important find from so early a time.

For historians and archaeologists, the dating of the pool *before* Hezekiah's time raises some major questions.

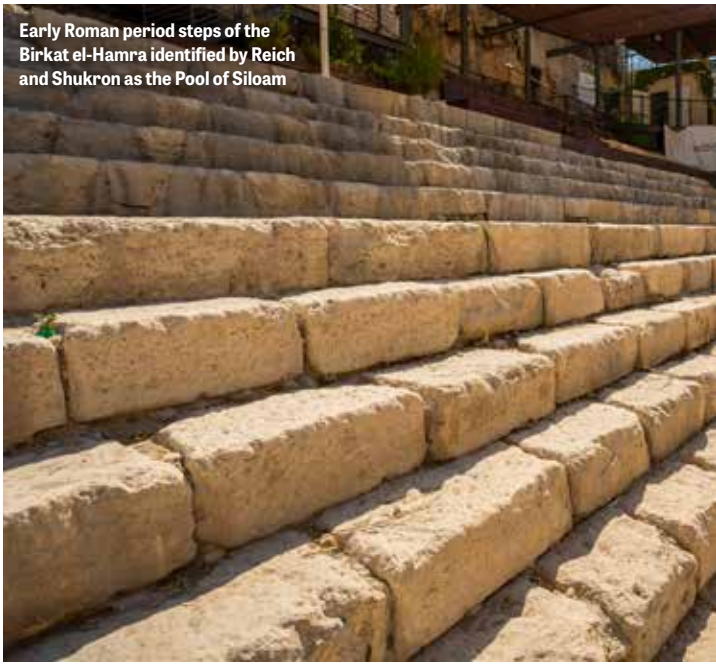
Earlier Than 800 B.C.E.?

On the face of it, the question of who built the massive pool seems obvious. Four carbon samples conclusively date its construction to around 800 B.C.E. Which biblical king ruled at this time? The general consensus is King Jehoash of Judah, who reigned from 835–796 B.C.E.

But this might be too simple.

Given that the carbon samples were taken from the very top of the 12-meter-high dam wall, it's possible that the top portion was renovated by Jehoash in the late ninth century and the main construction of the wall took place earlier. This is routine in long-lived sites across Israel, especially in Jerusalem. For example, according to the Bible, the oft-debated location in Jerusalem called the Millo (still identified by most as the Stepped Stone Structure) was originally built by King David, reinforced by Solomon, and later renovated by King Hezekiah (2 Samuel 5:9; 1 Kings 9:15; 2 Chronicles 32:5). By excavating through the top portion of the Stepped Stone Structure, an archaeologist could arrive at a date from Hezekiah's time, but it would be unwise to conclude that the entire structure dates entirely to Hezekiah's time.

What does this mean for the dam dating? It means that the date furnished by carbon testing (circa 800 B.C.E.) is the *latest* possible date for the construction of the massive water reservoir and dam wall. Sure, King Jehoash's men likely built the latest phase of the Iron Age dam, *but it could have initially been built even earlier.*



Early Roman period steps of the Birkat el-Hamra identified by Reich and Shukron as the Pool of Siloam

As we reconsider our understanding of this dam in light of this new dating, it's important to place this new information alongside prior research. Let's now consider the dam wall and reservoir in the context of the larger water system of ancient Jerusalem.

Jerusalem's Ancient Water Systems

The water system of ancient Jerusalem is a fascinating labyrinth of underground tunnels, pools and shafts. The origin of this watery maze is the Gihon Spring, Jerusalem's perennial water source, situated inside the Kidron Valley, halfway up the eastern slope of the ancient City of David. From the spring chamber, where water shoots out between a crack in the bedrock, several tunnels branch off in different directions.

One tunnel (known as the Siloam tunnel, or "Hezekiah's Tunnel") still flows with water, as it has for the last 2,700 years. This tunnel takes water on a 530-meter journey from the Gihon Spring, southwest under the City of David ridge, all the way to the bottom of the Tyropoeon Valley on the city's southwest. Here the water pools in what was universally recognized as the location of the Siloam Pool (until Reich and Shukron's theory). Sloshing through this ankle-deep watery tunnel is still one of my favorite things to do every summer in Jerusalem. Although there have been attempts to redate this Siloam tunnel to an earlier or later king of Judah, the weight of evidence still points to Hezekiah.

CITY OF DAVID

But what about Jerusalem's water system before Hezekiah? Standing beside the Gihon Spring, one can see several rock-cut channels, some of which are big enough for tourists to enter. One of these tunnels, known as Channel II, takes a more direct route along the eastern ridge of the City of David to the southern tip of the ancient city. Unlike Hezekiah's Tunnel, Channel II is not completely enclosed by bedrock; instead, the water would have been mostly unhidden as it makes a relatively direct journey from the spring to the massive reservoir recently uncovered, the Birkat el-Hamra pool.

The location of this reservoir is logical for a few reasons. First, damming the Tyropoeon Valley would make sense in the larger vision to eventually incorporate the Western Hill into Jerusalem. And functionally, this valley is narrower than the Kidron, which would make the construction of a wall easier (though still a major project).

In short, we have two tunnels and two pools, with one tunnel (Channel II) and pool (Birkat el-Hamra) predating the other. The construction of Hezekiah's Tunnel made Channel II inoperative. Instead of the water moving along the eastern ridge outside the city, Hezekiah's Tunnel took water beneath the city, emptying it into a pool further up the Tyropoeon Valley—to what had been originally identified as the Siloam Pool.

This change in Jerusalem's water tunnel system is also described in the Bible.

As the Bible relates, Hezekiah built his tunnel during a time of impending siege from Sennacherib's Assyrian army. It describes Hezekiah building a new water conduit to bring the water into the western side of the city (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:2-4). It also talks of him blocking "the upper watercourse of Gihon" (2 Chronicles 32:30; King James Version). Most likely, this is a reference to Channel II being retired when the new channel began operating.

The Prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of Hezekiah, confirms this change in Jerusalem's water systems in a number of passages. Prior to Hezekiah, Isaiah mentions that the people were rejecting "[t]he waters of Shiloah that go softly" (Isaiah 8:6), a passage that has been linked by many scholars to the flow of water through Channel II (see *Jerusalem and the Old Testament,* by Dr. J. Simons). In chapter 22, Isaiah records that during Hezekiah's time a new pool was constructed (verse 11).

So who built Channel II and the massive Birkat el-Hamra reservoir?

Whichever administration it was, it had to rule Jerusalem at least 100 years before Hezekiah.

Was It Solomon?

In 2023, not long after he began excavating the dam, Dr. Szanton published a summary paper in *'Atiqot* about the pools at the bottom of the City of David. In "Ritual Purification and Bathing in the Second Temple Period," Dr. Szanton provided "archaeological data that supports the identification of Birkat el-Hamra with Solomon's Pool." The paper also identified the smaller pool by the exit of Hezekiah's Tunnel as the location of the Siloam Pool.

The term "Solomon's Pool" is a reference to a pool identified by first-century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus. Josephus was referring to a pool in use during the early Roman period, not necessarily a pool that was actually built by King Solomon.

Dr. Szanton's paper presents the archaeological and historical arguments for rejecting the claim by Reich and Shukron that the Birkat el-Hamra pool is the Pool of Siloam.

His paper isn't the first to do this, as Dr. Szanton acknowledged. In 2008, historian Dr. Yoel Elitzur wrote "The Siloam Pool—'Solomon's Pool'—Was a Swimming Pool" for *Palestine Exploration Quarterly.* Elitzer's position drew insight from the first English translation of Josephus by Whiston in 1737, which describes the location of the First Wall of Jerusalem in this very area of the large dam: "Where (above the fountain Siloam) it also bends again toward the east at Solomon's Pool and reaches as far as a certain place which they called 'Ophlas,' where it was joined to the eastern cloister of the temple," Josephus wrote (*Wars of the Jews*; 5.145).

Using different translations of this passage of Josephus, other scholars put this "pool of Solomon" further toward the north. Elitzer disagreed, stating, "According to this interpretation, 'Solomon's Pool' was not in the middle of the eastern flank, *but rather at a low place on the edge of the southern flank, near the southeastern corner of the wall."*

Later in the article, Elitzer further clarified his position. He wrote, "Reich and Shukron's pool is the most outstanding feature in the area of Jerusalem's southeastern corner, *and it was to this pool [of Solomon] that Josephus was probably referring"* (emphasis added throughout).

Back to the Beginning

Here we have both Elitzer and Szanton (among others) making the case that this gigantic pool was "Solomon's Pool" from the time of Jesus, and not the Pool of Siloam of the same period. However, neither researcher spends much time considering *why* the pool mentioned by Josephus was named after the 10th-century king and Jerusalem's greatest builder.

This is somewhat understandable, given there was no hard archaeological data dating the pool to a much earlier period. There is also the frequent use of biblical names being appropriated at later times without any true relation to the individual. (Absalom's Tomb in the Kidron Valley, which likely dates to the Hellenistic Period, comes to mind.)

But science has now confirmed that this pool was built in 800 B.C.E. or earlier, removing King Hezekiah as a potential candidate for its construction. Logically, doesn't this suggest King Solomon should at least be considered as a candidate for its original construction?

There was a time when this was not only a logical possibility but the view of respected scholars. Armed with less science than we have today, these scholars believed that the channel that led to the Birkat el-Hamra, and likely the pool itself, was built by King Solomon.

Notice what historian Dr. J. Simons wrote in 1952, summarizing some of the conclusions of archaeologists Raymond Weill and Louis-Hugues Vincent, who excavated the City of David in 1913–1914 and 1923–1924: "The date of the tunnel of Siloam [Hezekiah's Tunnel] and the fact that it … was the latest of the great waterworks from the spring of Gihon, also provides a *terminus ante quem* for all other [tunnels]. Vincent's analysis of the artificial alterations in the spring-cave and also some plausible historical considerations have resulted in attributing canals I and II [that lead to the Birkat el-Hamra] to the INITIAL PHASE OF THE UNITED MONARCHY …. The character of canal II as a visible, unprotected water conduit, several hundred meters long, outside the circumvallation may be taken as indicative of a PEACE-TIME ENTERPRISE, TO BE THOUGHT OF ONLY IN A PERIOD OF GREAT POLITICAL TRANQUILITY. This fact, coupled with its GENERAL DATE IN THE EARLY MONARCHY, makes it PRACTICALLY CERTAIN, as Weill observes, THAT IT WAS CONSTRUCTED DURING THE REIGN OF SOLOMON. An allusion to the installation of an abundantly irrigated pleasure-garden by this king at Jerusalem may perhaps be seen in Ecclesiastes 2:5-6" (*Jerusalem in the Old Testament*).

Ecclesiastes is a book traditionally associated with King Solomon: "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; *I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit;* I MADE ME POOLS OF WATER, *to water therefrom the wood springing up with trees;* I acquired men-servants and maid-servants, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in Jerusalem" (Ecclesiastes 2:4-7). If we take the traditional attribution of Ecclesiastes to Solomon's time at face value, this is the earliest reference to pools relating to Jerusalem and specifically connects them to gardens with trees.

Another book attributed to King Solomon is the Song of Songs. Last year, Prof. Gabriel Barkay published a Hebrew-language book providing evidence that the Song of Songs could only have been written in the 10th century B.C.E., the time of King Solomon (see "Putting Solomon Back Into the Song of Songs," page 8).

The Song of Songs does not explicitly mention a pool, but it does make *repeated* references to King Solomon's personal garden. For example, "My beloved is gone down into his garden …" (Song of Songs 6:2). It makes sense that this well-irrigated garden was the product of water channels and large pools and was situated in a lower elevation. Verse 11 explicitly states that the garden was in the valley: "I went down into the garden of nuts, To look at the green plants of the valley, To see whether the vine budded, And the pomegranates were in flower." Whether this valley is the Tyropoeon Valley or the Kidron Valley, it is somewhere close to where the massive pool is located, as this is where the water is delivered from Channel II. Even later biblical authors reference the "king's garden" which is located in the southern part of the City of David (see 2 Kings 25:4; Nehemiah 3:15).

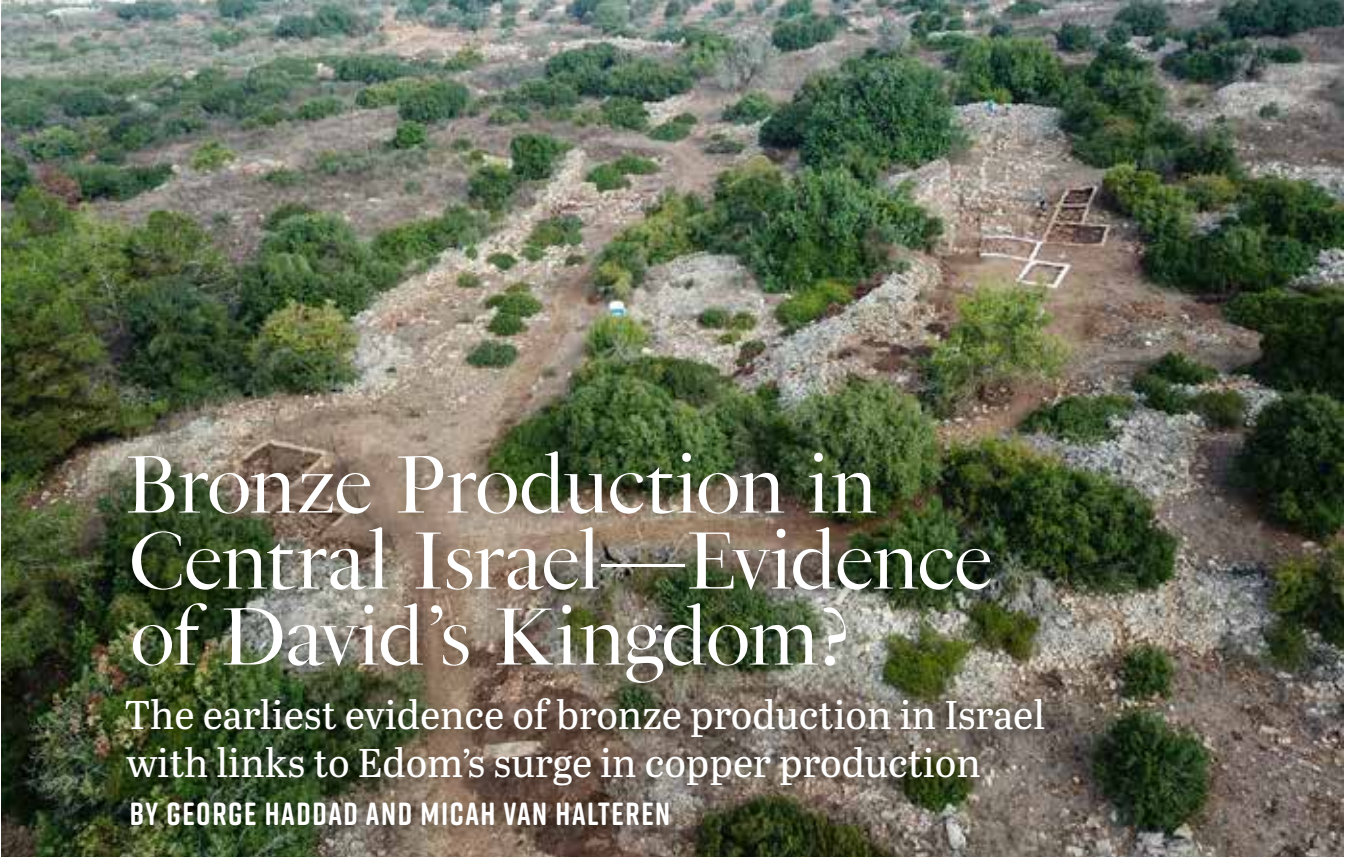
These biblical passages were not lost on the early archaeologists of Jerusalem. Indeed, they are also not lost on the archaeologists working in Jerusalem today. However, today there is a great reticence to relate discoveries to the biblical text if it is not 100 percent conclusive, which is extremely hard to achieve in any archaeological endeavor. And indeed, if archaeologists even speculate a logical connection to the biblical text before it is 100 percent confirmed, they could face ridicule by some of their colleagues.

And yet shouldn't we consider the weight of evidence, both archaeologically and textually?

Archaeologically, we have a truly massive reservoir in the southern part of the City of David. We know, too, that it was built at least by 800 B.C.E. or earlier. And we also know that this same pool was fed by a water channel that predates Hezekiah's Tunnel (700 B.C.E.).

Textually, we have several biblical allusions to King Solomon building pools and gardens in Jerusalem in the general vicinity of this reservoir. We also have Josephus referring to a large pool in this exact area as the "Pool of Solomon."

SEE **DAM** PAGE 36



Bronze Production in Central Israel—Evidence of David's Kingdom?

The earliest evidence of bronze production in Israel with links to Edom's surge in copper production.

BY GEORGE HADDAD AND MICAH VAN HALTEREN

A team of researchers from the University of Haifa has published evidence of bronze production at the northern edge of the Central Hill Country in Israel, at el-Ahwat, in a new study published in PLOS One. The scholars suggest that this site links to a complex network of Iron Age copper and bronze production sites throughout the Levant, specifically linked to the large mines at Timna and Faynan in the Arabah Valley.

It is important to first define the two metallurgical processes often discussed in relation to bronze production. "Bronzeworking" or "recycling" is simply melting preexisting bronze, whereas "bronzemaking" is alloying copper with tin, either in metallic or oxide form, on site.

At el-Ahwat, 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) southwest of Megiddo, researchers found the earliest example of bronzemaking in the land of Israel—dating to around 1000 B.C.E., the time of the biblical King David.

In previous excavations at el-Ahwat, Prof. Adam Zertal's team discovered numerous metal fragments and artifacts, but they were kept in his office for a long time without any outside knowledge of them. After his death in 2015, a box with 175 of these artifacts was found in his office by one of the authors.

The study examined seven copper and bronze spills as well as a slag fragment. "The analysis of the copper and bronze spills, along with the slag samples, indicates that bronze was produced at el-Ahwat during Iron Age I," the authors wrote. Thus, this is "the first site in the region to yield unequivocal evidence for the primary production of bronze through alloying copper with tin."

According to the report, "Lead isotope analysis, chemical composition and microstructure link some of the metal specifically to the Faynan ores, and other finds to the Timna ores, suggesting that both ores, possibly controlled by a joint polity, supplied copper to el-Ahwat.

"These findings challenge long-standing assumptions about the localization of bronzeworking in urban lowland centers, and open new perspectives on the inland trade routes and social organization of the early Iron Age southern Levant."

Bronzeworking in Iron Age I is often characterized as being decentralized and localized, consisting of households remelting scraps. El-Ahwat challenges this notion. It shows that bronze was produced from raw materials of copper and tin on location.

El-Ahwat now joins and contributes to a broader landscape of metallurgical activity. The fact that this site didn't just recycle bronze but alloyed copper with tin to produce bronze reveals a high level of expertise and a centralized system capable of securing and providing the raw materials needed for production.

"While el-Ahwat provides the only direct evidence of local bronze production to date, it was likely not unique. Other sites from the same period, such as Tel Rehov and Tel Masos, have yielded bronzeworking remains with high tin concentrations, though these materials have yet to be studied systematically," stated the report.

In other words, it's quite likely that there are other sites in the area where bronzemaking was taking place. The question then becomes: Who was the organizing

AARON LIPKIN

entity that was able to bring the copper from the Arabah and the south, and tin from afar (perhaps even as far as the British Isles)? Dr. Tzilla Eshel, one of the paper's authors, is asking these same questions. She told the *Times of Israel*, "Was there a polity organizing the network? And if so, who was the polity? One possibility is that it was the early Israelites" (August 26).

The Bible clearly describes a united, centralized monarchy in the region of ancient Israel producing and utilizing an enormous amount of bronze—so much so, that it was innumerable: "And Solomon did not weigh all the articles, because there were so many; the weight of the bronze was not determined" (1 Kings 7:47; New King James Version).

The research paper acknowledged the conflicting scholarly views on this topic. "A key debate concerns the control of copper production in the Arabah during Iron Age I (circa 1150–950 B.C.E.) after the end of Egyptian hegemony in the region. Central questions remain unresolved, namely who initiated and organized this large-scale enterprise, and where were its products headed?

"Bronzeworking has customarily been viewed as a lowland activity. As a result, the ongoing debate regarding the origin of the groups that eventually established the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah during the 10th or ninth century B.C.E. has been isolated from the political and economic context of copper production in the Arabah in the preceding centuries."

This is what makes el-Ahwat fascinating. Geographically, it directly connects the massive Arabah Valley mining operations with northern Israel.

Linking the copper found at el-Ahwat with the mines at Faynan and Timna is especially intriguing. Comparative studies between the mines have shown that around 1000 B.C.E. both locations experienced identical changes in copper production.

The Bible describes this as the time the united Israelite monarchy came to power and exerted control over Edom (2 Samuel 8:14).

According to Prof. Erez Ben-Yosef, director of the Central Timna Valley Project, a profound shift was evidenced in the fact that both copper mining/smelting sites, which are separated by over 100 kilometers, began to produce the exact same quality copper around this same time. "Data suggest that significant technological changes were associated with the reorganization of the instruction around the turn of the first millennium B.C.E. … Prior to these changes, the standardization of the production across the Wadi Araba was rather poor, reflecting a different practice for each smelting site" ("Ancient Technology and Punctuated Change: Detecting the Emergence of the Edomite Kingdom in the Southern Levant," PLOS One).

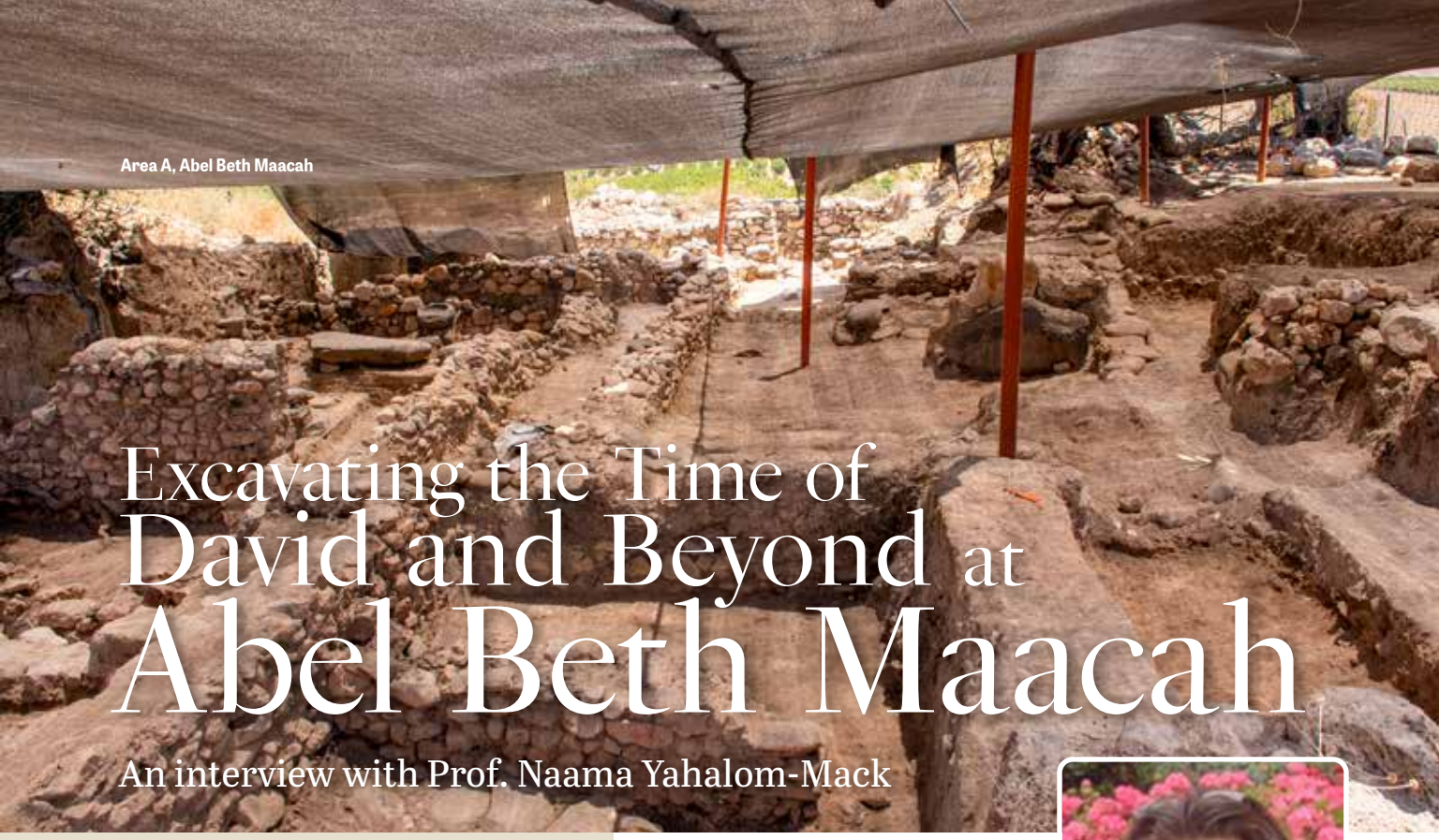
Thus, around 1000 B.C.E. both mines were operating on the same shared knowhow, indicating a single polity was controlling both. This material change runs concurrently with the relatively short window that bronze from Faynan and Timna appeared in el-Ahwat, toward Israel's north, for bronze production.

Additional excavations will hopefully shed more light on the scope and production area within the site and its broader connections. "There is a general problem of dating early Iron Age sites in the Central Hill Country," Dr. Eshel told the *Times of Israel.* "Many sites were excavated a long time ago, when carbon-14 dating did not exist or was much less common."

She noted that at el-Ahwat, "some olive pits were radiocarbon-dated to the late 11th/early 10th centuries B.C.E., but they were all found in the same pit, so they are not conclusive as one individual location is not enough to date the whole site. We hope to find more samples suitable for radiocarbon dating across el-Ahwat."

Regardless, the bronzemaking at el-Ahwat shows a unity in production and advanced metalworking knowledge, as well as a synchronized trade network of copper and tin—all evidence of a central administration, or put another way, a kingdom!

As Ben-Yosef summarized to the *Times of Israel*, "The study proves that copper and tin were alloyed to produce bronze locally in ancient Israel at this early date." He added that, in his view, "a well-established Israelite kingdom did exist in the 10th century, and in light of its geographical location, el-Ahwat belonged to it." ■



Area A, Abel Beth Maacah

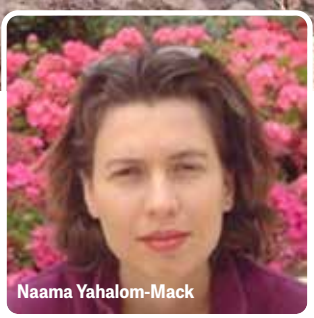
Excavating the Time of David and Beyond at Abel Beth Maacah

An interview with Prof. Naama Yahalom-Mack

Situated just inside Israel's border with Lebanon, Abel Beth Maacah is the northernmost archaeological site in Israel. The Bible also situates the site on the northern frontier of the ancient nation of Israel during the time of King David (c. 1000 B.C.E.). 2 Samuel 20 records that Sheba, the son of Bichri, took refuge in Abel Beth Maacah after raising an insurrection against David. When Joab, David's general, began to destroy the city in pursuit of Sheba, a wise woman asks him why is he attacking a city that is a "mother in Israel."

Biblical minimalists claim Israel's territory was much smaller than what is recorded in the biblical text. They believe Abel Beth Maacah did not belong to Israel in the 10th century B.C.E. and did not become part of the kingdom until 200 years later.

In July, *Let the Stones Speak* contributing editor Brent Nagtegaal visited the archaeological site to discuss Abel Beth Maacah with Prof. Naama Yahalom-Mack, codirector of the site. Here is a transcript of their discussion, edited for clarity.



Naama Yahalom-Mack

BRENT NAGTEGAAL (BN): Thank you for taking the time for this interview.

NAAMA YAHALOM-MACK (NYM): Thank you for visiting us up north.

BN: Let's begin with you telling us a little about this site.

NYM: The excavation was first initiated in 2012 by Nava Panitz-Cohen of Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Robert Mullins of Azusa Pacific. [Since 2017, Yahalom-Mack has been the codirector of the site.]

BN: Where is the tel situated in the larger geographic area?

NYM: We're at the very northern point of the Hula Valley. As you know, the borders of Israel kind of penetrate into Lebanon at this point. It's the finger of the Galilee. Only the town of Metula is north of us. And we are in the same valley as Hazor, which is in the southwestern corner of the Hula Valley. Tel Dan is 6 kilometers (4 miles) east and Hazor is 30 kilometers (19 miles) south. The Phoenician coast is 30 kilometers west and Damascus as the crow flies is about 70 kilometers (43 miles) to the northeast.

BN: Anciently this site was at the crossroads of Aram, Phoenicia and northern Israel. And this is what makes this site so fascinating.

BRENT NAGTEGAAL/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

NYM: Yes. This is a meeting point, a border. It's a junction during the Iron Age. It's between the expanding, strong Aramean kingdom of Aram-Damascus, that basically swallowed every other small Aramean entity in the region in the ninth century B.C.E.

In the 10th century B.C.E., we are still in a calmer world. With the Phoenicians, we've got the Tyre expansion in the ninth century B.C.E, but Tyre and Sidon are already strong cities in the 11th century B.C.E. as well. And we've got the Israelite kingdom, which is expanding from its core in the Jezreel Valley. And of course, the rate of this expansion is debated today in archaeological research.

BN: What happens at the site as we enter the Iron Age?

NYM: We know that the entire site is settled during the early Iron Age (11th century B.C.E.), and it begins with a pit settlement. This is a village settlement that is characterized by multiple quarrying pits. It's a known phenomenon for the beginning of the Iron I; we see it at Tel Dan and elsewhere. And then not much later, we see a rebuilding of the site and the construction of public buildings. Here in Area A, in the very center of the mound, we have one of the most complete sequences of Iron Age between 12th and ninth centuries B.C.E. of any site. It's a really good stratigraphical sequence.

BN: When we get to the Iron I period what would be some of the dates or related biblical personalities?

NYM: Good question. Although we don't know how much after the destruction of Hazor this happens, we do identify newcomers that are excavating these pits sometime in the Iron I. It is difficult to say exactly who they are.

BN: So we don't have an ethnic identity attached to this people, but we know they arrived here and quarried somewhere in the judges period?

NYM: The only thing that we could say is that during the second millennium B.C.E., Abel Beth Maacah is mentioned as Abel or Abilu in texts and sources, mainly Egyptian sources. And then when we come to the Bible, suddenly it's Abel Beth Maacah. So there is a suffix that suggests newcomers are in play here. But we do see some continuity of the Late Bronze Age material culture. It's not a strict change. We're not talking about ethnicities. We're talking about complex identities here.

BN: So the earliest mention of this town in the Bible would date from around what period?

NYM: From the time of David. But let's separate two things. There's the kingdom of Maacah with its sister kingdom, Geshur, and that's a story that we're not sure how to relate to what's going on here. Maacah is a name that we find in the Bible since the days of Genesis. But the kingdom of Maacah or Geshur are thought to have existed a little more to the east. Maacah should be located in Bashan or the Golan.

Some scholars see our site as the capital of the kingdom of Maacah. In any event, the earliest Abel Beth Maacah is mentioned in the Bible is from the time of David, with the story of the wise woman. We have the rebel, Sheba ben Bichri. He escapes from Jerusalem.

BN: Just after Absalom's revolt.

NYM: Exactly. And he travels as far as he can, almost to the very north. He escapes here, and then Joab pursues him. And there's a very interesting discussion with a woman that is defined as the wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah.

BN: And as far as the narrative goes, Sheba's head is lopped off.

NYM: He's beheaded, and the head is thrown over the wall.

BN: And Joab goes back to Jerusalem.

NYM: Exactly.

BN: Do you have habitation from around that time?

NYM: First of all, not even considering the historicity of this passage, the conversation that the wise woman has with Joab is very interesting to us because she tells him, "We are the faithful and the righteous. We believe in the

Plan of Area A

God of Israel. And why are you trying to kill a city and a mother in Israel?"

So what we learn from this text is that these people are situated at a very far away, distant location, and they need to prove that they belong. And this is very interesting for the question of the identity of the people living here. What is their material culture? How is it affected by the Arameans to the north, by the Phoenicians? How Israelite are they, if they are, or when they are? Maybe an easier question is to ask, who are the paying their taxes to? This is a very interesting question to us.

BN: So as far as the structures in this area, there are two main periods that we can see here: Iron I and then Iron II.

NYM: Yes.

BN: What does this area look like during the Iron I period?

NYM: In the Iron I we have a gradual development after the pit settlement. There are some very interesting public buildings. And these are a combination between cult and production. We've got multiple *matzevot,* standing stones and other cultic features that are together with a lot of production remains, such as grinding stones and ash installations and all kinds of things. So it's something different than what we have in the Bronze Age. There is development in cultic and religious practices. And then this is destroyed too, sometime in the middle of the 11th century B.C.E., based on radiocarbon dates.

Interestingly, we have a very similar destruction at Tel Dan. At Tel Dan at the time, there is a village and a lot of bronzeworking, but no public buildings. We are thinking that in the seesaw relationship between the sites, Abel is the major site and that Dan was secondary and Hazor practically nonexistent during the Iron I. The 11th century B.C.E. is the time for Abel Beth Maacah to shine. So after the destruction of those buildings, we have an elaborate, lavish building.

BN: Is it a palace?

NYM: I want to call it a palace. I don't want to excuse myself. I think it's a palace. It's built beautifully.

BN: Right, we saw some of the construction of the walls, the doorways. It's impressive.

NYM: The walls you can see are really nicely angled. And the door frames have nice flat stones. They're all in the corner of the rooms. They have nice frames with flat stones, and we have these alternating basalt floors. One room with stone floor and then one without and then one with and one without and one with.

When we started to appreciate this building, we understood we need to know the full plan of this building. And as much as we've expanded and removed a lot of the Iron IIA remains to get down to this building, we still do not know its full plan. It's going on and on and on. And there's a major destruction at the end of this period, which is a very similar destruction to what we know at Megiddo: the Megiddo VIIA destruction and the Yokneam destruction. This is the time when many sites are destroyed.

BN: Do we know who caused the destruction of those other sites?

NYM: Well, that's a major question in the archaeology of Israel. And also when were the following cities built? Were they built immediately on top of the destruction? Was there a gap? The minimalists like to expand this gap between the destruction of the Iron I and the building of the Iron II buildings and kind of push it down as far as the ninth century B.C.E. to the Omride dynasty.

BN: But you don't really see that in the material here.

NYM: We see the opposite. We see them building immediately on top of the destruction. We see them utilizing the earlier Iron I walls. The walls are built in the same orientation. It is a different construction; it's a different character, but we do see some continuity between the phases of the Iron I and Iron IIA. And this is, again, one of the questions that we're pursuing here.

BN: When is this transition from the destruction of the Iron I city to the construction of the new Iron IIA city? It wasn't in the 12th century B.C.E., and it wasn't in the eighth century B.C.E. So you've got a window that you're working in, correct?

COURTESY OF ABEL BETH MAACAH EXCAVATIONS

Head of an elite figure made of faience

NYM: My window is the 10th century B.C.E. This is when it happens. And the reason I know this is because we have excavated a huge citadel in the upper mound of this site, which we date again to the Iron IIA. Below the citadel, in the foundations of the citadel, we have dates from the late 10th century B.C.E.

So, it's a good question whether our dates are really the earliest dates of the citadel. And then when you look at the radiocarbon dates, there are two possible peaks: one in the first half of the 10th century, one in the second half of the 10th century. But we are saying that there's not a big gap between both dates. We need to, of course, prove this. But still, we think somewhere in the beginning of the second half of the 10th century would be a good date for the destruction and the rebuilding.

BN: Let's talk now about some major discoveries that you've made here over the past few years. Tell us about the beautiful faience head.

NYM: We found it in the latest phase of the citadel up in Area B, in a possible cultic room. We have a very massive entrance to this chamber. It's one of the casemates. There's a massive entrance and in front of the entrance is a circle of stones and ash beside it. And this guy was found on that floor in this room. He was lying facing up, as if he wanted people to find him!

When we brought him back to the lab, Mimi Lavi, our conservator, cleaned him up, and he was absolutely exquisite. It's workmanship that we don't see everywhere. He is a bearded male. He has a lot of hair and very black, which means something: He has black hair, black eyebrows, black pupils, black beard. Debbie Ben Ami, who worked with us on the interpretation of his iconography, says it's a very manly thing to do. If you want to be a man in the ancient Near East, you want to have a lot of black hair.

And he's wearing this bandanna on his head. This is a typical Semite type of headdress for a male. In the stripes we see yellow, and the yellow is probably indicating gold, so we're thinking that this guy is an elite.

BN: Can we date this find?

NYM: He can be dated to the abandonment of the citadel, which is the second half of the ninth century. The entire site was abandoned at the second half of the ninth century. He possibly represents someone—someone who placed him on his behalf in this cultic place to stand before the god permanently, even when he's busy. He represents some sort of elite person or governor. He doesn't necessarily depict one of the kings, as was hypothesized by many journalists.

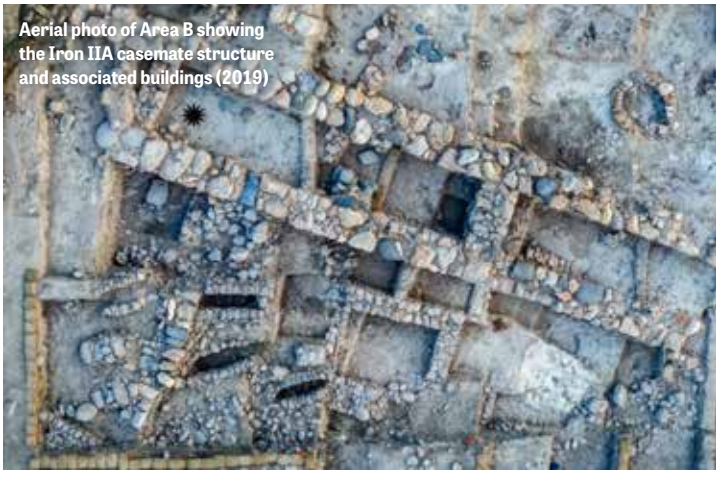
BN: Even without knowing who exactly he depicts, the artifact itself is so unique and beautiful.

NYM: It is beautiful. And it is made of faience, which is like an early form of glass. It was made in a mold. We've done some research about it. We did a head scan at the Weizmann Institute, and we could see the technique, the way that he was pressed into a mold and the way that things broke when they removed him from the mold. And the materials that were used, for example, the manganese that was used for the black features and the green that was used for the faience itself, which are probably copper minerals. It's still one of our most prized finds today. It's in the Israel Museum.

BN: And there was another major discovery, one that relates to who the people here were paying their taxes to? This was an inscription that was found on a storage vessel?

NYM: OK, we'll start from the beginning. We opened another area of excavation to the south of this area, in an area that is slightly depressed. We thought that this is a good place for an entrance to the city, maybe a gate. In excavating, we came to a really nicely built storage building, which seems to have one phase. It's defined by a long wall on the east and then walls going perpendicular, creating elongated halls. The halls were full of jars. So this was a storage building for sure.

We know these vessels were burnt, so they were part of some sort of a destruction. We have no dates from this building. We don't know when it was built. One radiocarbon date from below the building tells us that it was built during the ninth century. So it's not a 10th-century B.C.E.



Aerial photo of Area B showing the Iron IIA casemate structure and associated buildings (2019)

PHOTO: GABI LARON; CONSERVATION MIMI LAVI. ABEL: BETH MAAKAH EXPEDITION PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDER WEIDMANN AND VASILY SHMIDOV

Iron IIA storage jar with Hebrew inscription *l'Benayau*

building. We've already excavated more than 70 vessels. We've restored more than 60. One of them had an ink inscription below the handle, which read, *l'Benayau,* meaning belonging to a guy named Benayau. And Benayau is the shorter form of the name. If he was in Judah, he would have been Benayahu.

BN: In English, his name is *Benaiah*.

NYM: The name *Bana,* meaning "built"—Benayau, meaning "God has built"—is common. You find it everywhere, even in the Aramean sphere. But the ending "yau" or "yahu," of course, refers to the God of Israel. So if we're reading it correctly, it's a Hebrew name with a theophoric ending in an Israelite form. And our epigrapher Christopher Rollston identified the script as Hebrew.

Now it is important as well to date this building. One name on one vessel doesn't make this an Israelite building. But the building is something that is very planned and administrative. It's part of some kind of central administration. It's not one building. It's probably three buildings as we see it today. A second one, definitely. Maybe a third to the south. About a third of the jars are marked on their handles. The vessels were examined by Anat Cohen-Weinberger. She showed that they're local production. So they were producing jars probably to contain wine.

And maybe they were keeping this jar with the inscription for someone from the Israelite sphere. Or maybe it was built by a central administration that was Israel at the time.

PHOTO: GABI LARON, CONSERVATION MIMI LAW, ABEL BETH MAACAH EXPEDITION PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDER WEIDMANN AND YAKOV SHMOOV

I would say that maybe this is where the Omrides come in. So we've got building activity from the 10th century B.C.E. But then later, the Omrides would be responsible for some makeover during the middle of the ninth century B.C.E. I don't think this storehouse lived long. It was built and abandoned or destroyed not long after.

BN: I'm a big believer that the scientists who excavate a site should be the first to interpret the site, rather than other people interpreting for them. But this period is very debated in archaeological circles. How far did the kingdom of Israel come toward the north? People have different theories on when the northward expansion happened. Many of the minimalists would put that as far as the eighth century B.C.E. when Israelite domination came under Jeroboam II.

NYM: Right.

BN: But from what you're finding here, the eighth century B.C.E. is way too late?

NYM: If we want to be careful, we would say that our excavations first and foremost put Abel Beth Maacah on the map during the 10th century B.C.E. and the ninth century B.C.E. If you look at *The Forgotten Kingdom,* Prof. Israel Finkelstein's 2013 book, you'll see Abel Beth Maacah is not even on his map during the time of the 10th century B.C.E., nor in the time of the ninth century B.C.E.

BN: But that's when you have the biggest period of construction at Abel Beth Maacah?

NYM: Exactly. But in his book, Abel Beth Maacah along with Dan is placed on a map only at the time of Jeroboam II in the eighth century B.C.E. But we see a very different picture from our excavations.

We know that Abel Beth Maacah was thriving during the ninth century B.C.E., and even in the late 10th century B.C.E. Whether it was Israelite to begin with or whether it was annexed during the time of the Omrides still remains a question. Rather, it is the eighth century B.C.E. that is missing here. We do not have the Tiglath-Pileser destruction here. We have it at Dan. We have it at Hazor. But we do not have it here. It seems like we have lost ground and other sites regained. So it's a bit of a seesaw effect, maybe between us and Dan. I know that Dan is highly debated today. According to the Bible, it's a religious center from the time of Jeroboam I. And what we see here, if we can do the comparisons and relate our finds to Tel Dan, which we're trying to do that as we speak, there's no reason to suspect that Dan is not existing at this time. It could be a modest settlement. It doesn't mean that it's not a cultic center. The biblical narrative generally falls in place with our excavations here in Abel Beth Maacah in the region I would say.

BN: We talked briefly about the faience head, and we talked about the inscription. You also found a large vessel full of bones?

NYM: That's true. But you know, we're kind of focusing on the anomalies and not saying anything about the larger assemblage here. And I have to say that we have pottery here that includes the red burnished pottery that we know from the Israelite territory. Of course, it's also found in the north. So it could reach here that way. And we've got a hippo jar here.

BN: Why is the hippo jar significant?

NYM: You have multiple hippo jars in the Jezreel Valley. This is like *the* economic system of the Jezreel Valley. And this is one reason why some researchers would like to leave the Hula Valley out of the Israelite kingdom, assuming that the hippo jars kind of define the boundaries of Israel. Of course, it's not necessarily so. It's an economic system. And there are other economic systems to the north. We've got our K jars that form a different economic system. I don't think it means anything about geopolitics. Yet we still do find the hippo jars here.

We have material culture that is very diverse here. It could be recognized in sites to the south and in the north.

BN: By north you mean Phoenicia?

NYM: I mean Phoenicia. And the few sites in Lebanon where we know a little bit about their material culture. We have some elements that are koine. It doesn't mean you define them as Phoenician or Aramean or whatever. Then we do have things that correlate with the material culture of the kingdom of Israel. So we have both.

BN: How much do you have that would correlate with Aram-Damascus?

NYM: We don't know the material culture of Aram-Damascus. That's a big problem. And generally with the Arameans, it's not always easy to define what it is exactly. It's not the case of pots and people. The Arameans are dispersed. They come into existing settlements, and they kind of sink in there. And we really tried in the beginning of the excavation. It was a major theme that this excavation would shed light on the Aramean material culture. But it didn't, as far as we know.

So again, we've got elements that work well with the Israelite kingdom to the south. We also have elements that are a sort of koine, shared material culture.

Then we have a jar full of astragali bones found in a monumental Iron II building where there is a lot of industry. We've got a pottery kiln and many tabuns and a lot of giant walls that were very difficult to remove. Part of one of these giant buildings was a stone pavement. On top of the stone pavement was a jar. It was full of astragali bones. That's the knuckle bones of the hind leg of an animal. We had 406 smashed in one jar. These were analyzed by Dr. Matthew Susnow. He could show that it wasn't 200 animals slaughtered for this event. It was collected over time. And they were used. Some of them were perforated. And it seemed like someone collected them together at this time, which is the end of the occupation here, the very final phase.

BN: This is mid-ninth century B.C.E.?

NYM: That would be second half of the ninth century B.C.E. I can't really say exactly when. Whatever happened there, we don't know. We just know that in many cultures, these bones are used for divination. The other possibility is a game, but this is not a game. They left it there standing, full of astragali. So there could have been some kind of ceremony and the result was the abandonment of the site. That's a dramatic find, I think.

BN: So just finally, in terms of modern day geopolitics; when we were walking up the tel, we can see the demilitarized zone with Lebanon. But you said you actually felt a little bit safer right now, than before the war with Hezbollah.

NYM: Previously when we excavated here, there were Hezbollah outposts on top of the village to the west and on top of this demilitarized hill to the east. And they were watching us. Basically the last 10 years we were at gunpoint, and we knew that they were there, and we were excavating here and not knowing what the future entails and what they were thinking about. Once this threat was removed, I think we're safer here than we ever were to dig. The army is watching over us. We inform them every day that we're going up the tel. We let them know that we're leaving the tel, and they're watching over us. We know they're looking over our shoulders.

BN: Thank you very much for touring us around the site and bringing our viewers along with you. Thanks for your efforts over the past decade—10-year anniversary for you at least being up here on the site. How many more seasons do you think it'll tick on? Until you find the rest of this building here behind us?

NYM: Exactly.

BN: Thank you very much for your time.

NYM: Sure. ■

Touring the Bible at the Ashmolean Museum

Get to know the artifacts that call the University of Oxford home.

BY MIHAILO S. ZEKIC

Dominus illuminatio mea—the Lord is my light. This phrase, taken from the first verse of Psalm 27, serves as the motto for the University of Oxford. As the English-speaking world's oldest educational institution, its reputation as a center for learning and scholarship dates back to at least 1096. For centuries since then, the University of Oxford's educational programs have changed the course of Western civilization. Its alumni include kings Edward VII and VIII, 25 British prime ministers, at least 36 foreign heads of state or government and 56 Nobel laureates. The last seven prime ministers of the United Kingdom were all educated in Oxford. Its literary tradition includes such students and professors as Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Percy Bysshe Shelley and many others.

But Oxford is not just a prestigious place for an education in *secular* studies.

Although it does not intentionally promote biblical history, at Oxford's heart is an institution that has artifacts that illuminate the biblical story: the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology.

Founded in 1683, it is Britain's first public museum and one of the oldest museums in the world. Its original collection grew from the "cabinet of curiosities" of its inaugural donor and namesake Elias Ashmole. This original collection was mostly made up of specimens from the natural world. The collection later branched out to include archaeological finds. Its modern building was constructed between 1841 and 1845 to house the university's collection of classical statuary and fine arts. This institution merged with the Ashmolean's collection to form the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology in 1908.

Today, the Ashmolean Museum has become Oxford's premier archaeological institution. This includes displaying several important artifacts relating to *biblical* archaeology.

The Sumerian King List

"When kingship had come down from heaven, kingship was at Eridu. Alulim was king; he reigned 28,800 years; Alagar reigned 36,000 years; two kings reigned 64,800 years. Eridu was abandoned; its kingship was taken to Bad-tibira." So starts the Weld-Blundell Prism, better known as the Sumerian King List. This ancient document records how the Sumerians, the earliest major civilization of the Fertile Crescent, believed their earliest history transpired.

Antiquarian Herbert Weld-Blundell gifted it to the museum in 1923. It is unclear how Weld-Blundell first acquired the prism; he had sponsored an excavation at the Mesopotamian city-state of Larsa but may have acquired it from an antiquities dealer. The museum regards Larsa as its most likely provenance and dates it to circa 1800 B.C.E. Larsa was one of the last powerful Sumerian city-states before the Akkadian-speaking Babylonians conquered Sumer.

The king list starts tens of thousands of years into the legendary past. It lists dynasties ruling from particular city-states, jumping from city to city as their kingships gain prominence. Eventually, it lists kings who are independently verifiable in the historical record, including famous names such as Sargon of Akkad.

Several important details of the king list relate to the Bible:

- The earliest kings have astronomically long reigns. The king list states King Enmen-lu-ana of Bad-tibira reigned for 43,200 years. This parallels the long lifespans the Bible gives of the pre-Flood world in Genesis 5. (The lifespans in the Bible aren't nearly as long, but there is a way to synchronize the lifespans of the Bible and the king list. See *ArmstrongInstitute.org/269* for more information.)
- After the first eight kings, the king list records: "The

Flood swept over." Genesis lists 10 generations from Adam to Noah through the line of Seth before the biblical deluge (Genesis 5) and eight generations through the line of Cain (Genesis 4), paralleling the king list.

- After the Flood, lifespans shrank, similar to the Bible's account.
- The king list also mentions "Enmerkar, son of Meskiagkasher, the king of Uruk, the one who founded Uruk." Enmerkar may have corroboration with the biblical warrior Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10), who the Bible says founded Uruk/Erech (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1276*).

Jericho Skull

Uncovered in 1953 by Dame Kathleen Kenyon, this is one of several ritually decorated skulls found in Jericho. These skulls were part of an ancient burial practice in which the skull of a deceased individual was covered in plaster and shells were used to cover the eye sockets.

Jericho is famous as the city Joshua conquered (Joshua 6), but this skull dates to well before that time. Attributed by Kenyon to the Neolithic period, this represents one of the oldest known "portraits" ever discovered.

The Sinuhe Ostracon

This is the largest known limestone ostracon (a sherd of pottery or stone with writing) discovered from Egypt. It narrates a story known as "The Tale of Sinuhe," where a courtier named Sinuhe flees to the Levant after the death of Pharaoh Amenemhat I (c. 1938–1908 B.C.E.). On his journey, Sinuhe almost dies of thirst but is rescued by a local chieftain and revived. While abroad, he marries the daughter of another benefactor.

"The Tale of Sinuhe" has remarkable similarities with the story of Moses, who fled the wrath of a pharaoh after killing a man, stayed in exile with a Levantine chieftain, and married his daughter (Exodus 2:11-22; see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1041*).

The Sinuhe Ostracon was recorded sometime around 1292–1190 B.C.E., but the story itself dates to an earlier period and remained a literary classic in ancient Egypt for centuries.

Jasper Seal of 'Hannah'

The Ashmolean dates this stone seal to circa 750–700 B.C.E. It originally came from Lachish, one of Judah's major cities at this point in its history. Its Paleo-Hebrew text reads: "Belonging to Hannah." Seals for prominent individuals are relatively common finds in Iron Age Israel, but seals belonging to women are not. This would not have been the biblical matriarch Hannah (1 Samuel 1), who lived hundreds of years earlier. But it is still an extrabiblical example of her name.

Fertility Figurines

The fertility figurines housed in the Ashmolean Museum were discovered by Kenyon on Jerusalem's Ophel, a ridge first developed under King Solomon. The museum dates these fertility figurines to circa 750–650 B.C.E. These were most likely depictions of the Canaanite fertility goddess Ashtaroth, consort of the storm god Baal and counterpart to Mesopotamia's Ishtar (e.g. Judges 2:13; 1 Samuel 12:10). The Bible states such pagan worship is one of the main sins that sent Judah into captivity.

LMLK Handles

In the late eighth century B.C.E., Judah faced an invasion from the mighty Assyrian Empire under King Sennacherib, as recorded in 2 Kings 18-19, Isaiah 36-38 and 2 Chronicles 32. Judah's King Hezekiah prepared Jerusalem for the impending siege (e.g. 2 Chronicles 32:2-5).

Jar handles with the paleo-Hebrew inscription *lmlk* ("belonging to the king") dating to this time period have been discovered throughout Israel. It's believed they were part of Hezekiah's logistical reorganization in anticipation of the Assyrian invasion. The Ashmolean has several of these handles on display.

Of note is the winged sun symbol carved into some of the handles. This fits with the general iconography of the period. A Jerusalem seal impression belonging to Hezekiah shows a very similar symbol (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/169*). Taken together, this may suggest a winged sun was a personal symbol of Hezekiah.

The Shrine of Taharqa

The Shrine of Taharqa is the largest intact ancient Egyptian building in the United Kingdom. It was originally from the ruins of Kawa, between the Nile's third and fourth cataracts in what is today Sudan.

Taharqa, who reigned in the early seventh century B.C.E., was originally from Kush (an African kingdom based in northern Sudan). His family had conquered Egypt and established an empire stretching to the Mediterranean coast. He was a noted builder who commissioned new structures in Memphis and Thebes, Egypt's historic capitals. Taharqa was a contemporary of Hezekiah and is one of the few pharaohs named in the biblical account (e.g. 2 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9—both mention "Tirhakah king of Ethiopia" fighting against the Assyrians). You can learn more about the Kushites at *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1126*.

The shrine is dedicated to the Egyptian pantheon's chief god, Amun-Ra. While traveling north to Egypt, young Taharqa spotted a decaying temple at Kawa. Upon becoming pharaoh, he decided to rebuild it. Importing architects from Egypt, Taharqa's work took four years to complete.

The Ashmolean's shrine was discovered in 1930 during an Oxford-sponsored excavation. The Sudanese government gifted the shrine to the University of Oxford. Archaeologists disassembled the building, shipped the 236 sandstone blocks to England, and reassembled it in the Ashmolean.

Stone Shekels

The modern New Israeli Shekel currency takes its name from a biblical unit of measurement. The shekel originally was a weight used for trading silver and gold (Genesis 23:16; 24:22). The most common method of engaging in trade was through hacksilver—piles of silver pieces used as a makeshift "currency." Stones like these would have been weighed to confirm the measurements of the precious metals.

The Bible does not specify exactly how much one shekel weighed. But the Ashmolean's stones help answer the question. The red stone (pictured above), with a measured weight of 45.3 grams, has an inscription stating it weighs 4 shekels. The largest stone is inscribed as weighing 16 shekels.

The stones were found in Jerusalem. The Ashmolean dates them to between 650–587 B.C.E., just before the Babylonian destruction. By the time Persia conquered Babylon and Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to Judah, the Persian government had introduced coinage through the empire. The old system of weighing hacksilver was phased out.

Nebuchadnezzar's Brick

Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (r. 605–561 B.C.E.), mentioned prominently in the books of Jeremiah and Daniel, was one of the ancient Middle East's most powerful rulers. His empire extended from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Nebuchadnezzar was a noted builder, commissioning monuments like Babylon's famed Ishtar Gate.

Nebuchadnezzar's vision for Babylon can be summed up in what he said in Daniel 4: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for a royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" (verse 27).

Nebuchadnezzar had individual bricks of his buildings stamped with his insignia. This was one such brick. Its text, written in an archaic form of cuneiform in homage to Babylon's history, reads: "Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who provides for Esagila and Ezida [two religious sites], the eldest son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon am I."

The Passover Potsherd

During the Persian Empire (559–330 B.C.E.), a unique Jewish community flourished on the island of Elephantine in the Nile River, near Egypt's border with Nubia. Possibly the descendants of Jewish mercenaries recruited by a pharaoh to fight the Kushites, they

developed their own customs and even set up their own temple rivaling the one Zerubbabel built in Jerusalem (Zechariah 4:9). This ostracon was a letter between two households and is dated to 475 B.C.E., the time of Persia's King Xerxes (or Ahasuerus; Esther 1:1). It reads:

> To Hosea, greetings! Take care of the children until Autab gets there. Don't trust anyone else with them! If the flour for your bread has been ground, make a small portion of dough to last until their mother gets there. Let me know when you will be celebrating Passover. Tell me how the baby is doing!

The Passover Potsherd is one of the oldest known extrabiblical references to Passover.

Dead Sea Scroll Jar

Three Bedouin shepherds in 1947 were looking for a missing goat near the archaeological site of Qumran at the northern end of the Dead Sea. One of the shepherds discovered a cave sealed with boulders where, after entering, he found an antique jar holding pieces of parchment. News of the first discovery led to researchers scouring the caves of Qumran for more manuscripts. Between 1949 and 1956, hundreds of manuscripts and thousands of fragments surfaced from expeditions to Qumran. This included the oldest relatively intact biblical manuscripts thus far found. Some of the manuscripts have been dated to the fourth century B.C.E.—potentially less than a hundred years after the Hebrew Bible was completed.

In its Roman galleries, the Ashmolean has one of the jars from Qumran on display. It originally sat in Jerusalem's Palestine Archaeological Museum, today the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum. The Ashmolean purchased the jar in 1951 for £50.

In *The Jewish Journey,* Rebecca Abrams writes: "On 26 November 1951 a box containing an unspecified 'jar' was loaded onto an Air France flight from Jerusalem to London. The precious delivery arrived in Oxford on 6 December. The jar, however, was in pieces, as Donald Hardenm, then Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean, pointed out, somewhat grumpily, a few weeks later: 'The jar and its cover arrived some time ago. It was not too well packed and some of the recent mends had broken again ... As you know, I always felt the price was excessive, and now that we have it in our possession, I am afraid I feel it all the more, but I did it out of kindness.'

"Today, the price looks more like a bargain. The jar was finally put back together in 2013 and in 2017 went on display for the first time."

The Bible in the Heart of England

It is no exaggeration to state the work of the University of Oxford has changed Western civilization. England has had the prestigious reputation of being Europe's educational center for hundreds of years. Without Oxford, many of England's greatest scientific discoveries, literary works and political developments may have never happened. The politicians, explorers, archaeologists and chroniclers that helped build the largest empire known to man probably could not have accomplished what they did without the educational culture that institutions like Oxford cultivated.

It is fitting then that at Oxford's Ashmolean Museum are so many testimonies of the book that, in many ways, sits at the heart of Western civilization. The University of Oxford does not subscribe to the Bible as infallible truth, but it houses millenniums-old texts that point to the Bible—a book at the heart of Western civilization's foundation.

The artifact Abrams first addresses in *The Jewish Journey* is the Sumerian King List, an object written by a pagan people on the other side of the Middle East, hundreds of years before the people of Israel existed. Abrams explains why she began her book there, writing:

"All stories are journeys, and all journeys begin with a departure. From a biblical perspective, the Jewish journey begins 4,000 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia. ... [It] was from here that Abraham, the first great leader of the Jewish people and the founder of Jewish monotheism, set out for the land of Canaan. It was also here, at around the same time, that the Sumerian King List was made."

The civilization that started with Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees has shaped the world. The science and culture developed at Oxford through the centuries has also had a significant role in shaping Western civilization. It still does. But behind the university's current cutting-edge research and development taking place in modern buildings of glass and concrete sits an institution that points back to where it all began: a civilization from thousands of years ago, with stories of a flood, Passover, pharaohs and patriarchs—and the book that preserved them. ■

Benaya Rhein

A Tale of Two Benayas

3,000 Years Apart

The storage jar inscribed *l'Benayau*—"Belonging to Benayau"—in situ

A story of 'a place and a name' on Israel's northernmost border

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

"Yad Vashem" (יד ושם) is the name of Israel's Holocaust memorial center, located on the western edge of Jerusalem. The name is derived from Isaiah 56:5, where the Hebrew phrase is rendered as "a place and a name" (King James Version).

I want to share here a story of a "place and a name"—or more specifically, one place, one name, but two individuals, 3,000 years apart—on Israel's northernmost border.

Last July, I joined my colleague Brent Nagtegaal on his trip to Abel Beth Maacah to interview site director Prof. Naama Yahalom-Mack (see page 25 for the transcript). Abel Beth Maacah is the closest archaeological site to Israel's border with Lebanon; it is barely more than 500 meters from the "Blue Line." We asked Naama if she and her team were nervous about excavating so close to the northern border, given the war situation. She explained that the excavation team had never felt safer. This is because the Hezbollah-occupied installations that once looked down on them had now been destroyed.

Just as it is today, Abel Beth Maacah was situated on the northern border in ancient biblical Israel. One of the key artifacts to come from the site made headlines in 2020: the discovery of a vessel sherd dating to the 10th to ninth century B.C.E. that bore the inscription, "Belonging to Benayau" (לבניו).

The name was evidently Israelite, a fact clearly demonstrated by the "Yahwist" theophoric ending. Further, it was spelled in a manner particular to the northern kingdom of Israel (it ends with -יו/-yau; rather than the more typical Judahite spelling -יהו/-yahu or -יה/ya—a convention that continues to this day). This personal name is found multiple times throughout the Bible and is typically transliterated as Benaiah. A common spelling used by modern individuals with this name is Benaya.

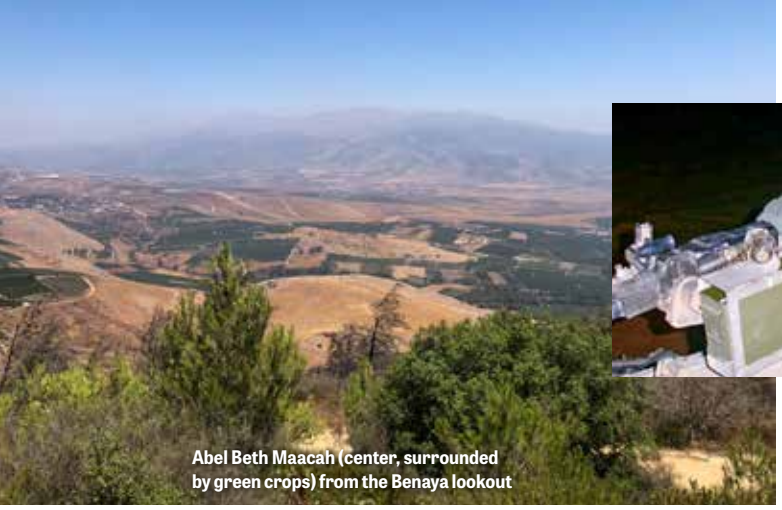
The find was extraordinary and helped identify the site as an Iron Age IIA Israelite settlement from nearly 3,000 years ago. This was a reality already attested to in the biblical account. During the reign of David, for example, "Abel of Beth-maachah" is described as a "city ... in Israel" (2 Samuel 20:15, 19). Yet *surely* the border of ancient Israel couldn't have extended *this* far north—so reasoned minimalist-leaning scholars. The Benayau Inscription demonstrated otherwise.

After visiting the site, Brent and I drove up from the Hula Valley (Tel Abel Beth Maacah is located within its northern mouth) and ascended Naftali Ridge, a hill 3 kilometers west, to get some shots overlooking the tel. While Abel Beth Maacah is adjacent to the Lebanon border to the east, Naftali Ridge borders Lebanon to the west (with the western side of the hill comprising the Lebanese town of Al-Aadaissah and the eastern side Israel's kibbutz Misgav Am). Just before the border, on the Israeli side, is a lookout where we stopped to take pictures of Abel Beth Maacah below.

I was stunned to see the name of the lookout: Mitzpe Benaya (Benaya Lookout).

Within the wooden structure, a small group of Israelis were commemorating the memory of a fallen soldier: Maj. Benaya Rhein.

ROBERT MULLINS



Abel Beth Maacah (center, surrounded by green crops) from the Benaya lookout

An audio guide at the lookout told the story. On July 12, 2006, two Israeli military vehicles were ambushed by Hezbollah militants in a cross-border raid into Israel. Three Israeli soldiers were killed and two more kidnapped. A failed rescue attempt resulted in the deaths of five more Israeli servicemen. When Israel refused to bow to Hezbollah's demands for a prisoner exchange, the Second Lebanon War unfurled, within which Benaya served—and was killed.

Maj. Gen. (Res.) Tamir Hayman recounted Benaya's involvement in the war: "The late Benaya Rhein was killed in the Second Lebanon War in a tank with a crew that reflects both Israeli-ness and the IDF as the people's army." The 27-year-old Benaya "was supposed to be on leave between assignments but couldn't stay home. He went up north and did not stop pressuring his commanders until they gave him a tank and a special crew. And this tank crew, without receiving an order, decided to do what was necessary. If food needed to be brought, they would bring combat rations to the fighters at the front. If maps were needed—no problem. Need to rescue the injured? They will go anywhere. Soon the rumor about the 'Benaya Force,' the tank crew that comes to help, spread among the reservists who fought on the eastern front in Lebanon ....

"Benaya, a religious soldier from the settlement of Karnei Shomron, commanded a crew whose special composition almost seems to have been put together by a playwright who wanted to illustrate why the IDF is still the people's army. Benaya's tank crew included Sgt. Alex Bonimovich, an immigrant from Russia; Sgt. Adam Goren, a secular kibbutznik; and Sgt. Uri Grossman, a sabra from Jerusalem, son of the acclaimed and sharply critical leftist writer David Grossman." The men left on a final mission on Aug. 12, 2006—just two days before the end of the conflict—when their tank was hit by a projectile, killing the crew. "I, on Memorial Day, will commemorate my friends and the soldiers under my command who did not return," concluded Hayman in his April 24, 2023, post ("Benaya's 'Israeli Tank'"), professing his love for "Benaya, my soldier" and wondering about the symbolism of his life.

I wondered about it too, visiting the Benaya Lookout. Here we were, familiar with the field of archaeology and the connection of this northern location to the name Benaya—interacting with a small Israeli group who knew nothing of the archaeology, yet who also connected this very same northern location with the name Benaya. They were stunned to hear about the connection with the site below us, Abel Beth Maacah.

This is one of the incredible and powerful realities of archaeology. Biblical archaeology can bridge a 3,000-year gap—and show us that in many ways, not much has changed for this name and this place.

Today Maj. Benaya Rhein is memorialized on a

DAM
FROM PAGE 22

Isn't that enough evidence to *at least consider the possibility* that this dam was built by King Solomon?

This wouldn't be unprecedented. After all, only a century ago, excavators in the City of David claimed that it was "practically certain" that King Solomon built the water system leading to the Birkat el-Hamra.

It's true that the dating of Channel II is still up for debate. Some archaeologists say it dates as early as Middle Bronze Age II (circa 1800 B.C.E.). Others date it as late as the ninth century B.C.E. Others argue the northern section closest to the spring dates to the Middle Bronze and the southern half to the eighth century B.C.E. The reason for the wide window is tunnels through bedrock are very hard to date given there is little datable material available. This means we are left to date it by its relationship to the other features it relates to—features where the dating is disagreed upon. Yet with all the debate, most scholars would agree that during the 10th century B.C.E. (the time of Solomon), water flowed through Channel II.

Today, it is an unfortunate and tragic fact that King Solomon has fallen into the realm of myth and fiction. Even in the city in which he dwelt and built, King Solomon has become an anathema to some. He is rejected, even when science and logic demand we at least consider the possibility Solomon might be responsible for some of Jerusalem's ancient ruins.

website (benaya.name), which contains an account of his life, personal letters, details about his family, and the lookout dedicated in his name soon after his death, near where he left on his final mission. One particularly memorable diary entry was written during his trip to Poland in 2000, where he visited the Treblinka concentration camp—a place in which the "stones spoke" to him. "When I traveled to Poland, I felt death. On the plane, there were Poles who were happy as they approached their country. When we landed, they applauded; they had arrived home.

"I also arrived home, to the cemetery of the Jewish people. To the cemetery of my grandfather's family, to the cemetery of my grandmother's family. Throughout my stay in Poland, death walks with me—Warsaw is a beautiful city, but for me it is dead. In Tykocin, in Treblinka, I feel that I am stepping on the dead, that I am stepping on fellow human beings. Death is everywhere. But I know that this death gave birth to life and this life is me, you, they, we. This life gave me the right to be a free Jew in the Land of Israel. This life gave me the right to be a soldier in the Land of Israel. This life gave me the right to represent, as a Jewish soldier from the Land of Israel, all those who were and are not and those who are. This life demands and demands, what exactly is difficult for me to define and about which I am still pondering.

"But it is clear to me that the demands are great and binding, and may I, Benaya, have the strength to meet them."

He did, and he too shares a name and a place, both figuratively and literally—one that is 3,000 years old.

And from death, new life emerges. For the same evening Benaya's family was informed of his death, his sister went into labor—and a son was born.

Named Benaya. ■

There is still a lot of investigation left to do in this gigantic dam. Perhaps, in the future, archaeologists will cut a temporary trench through the dam wall to allow samples to be taken from the base of the structure. And perhaps these samples too will date to 800 B.C.E., dismissing the possibility that it was built by King Solomon.

Until then, the possibility remains very much open that Jerusalem's greatest dam was originally built by Israel's greatest builder—King Solomon. ■

MAGAZINE FEEDBACK

Greatly appreciate the reporting of the archaeological evidence confirming the contents of the Bible.

It goes beyond saying that while the world continually denies the Jewish connection to the Land of Israel, Armstrong is in the forefront of ensuring that this is confronted by evidence of the stones.

IN RESPONSE TO:

VIDEO: OPHEL EXCAVATION BEGINS IN ANCIENT JERUSALEM

I'm going to copy and share the link to this page. You deserve to have way more than 42,000 subscribers! These excavations definitely support the history of the Jews and Israel.

Thank you for everything you're doing to keep us informed. I count on my copy of *Let the Stones Speak.* I've found your YouTube channel to be a welcome respite from the noise of the world. Thanks.

IN RESPONSE TO:

NEW EXCAVATIONS: KING REHOBOAM'S FORTIFICATIONS AT LACHISH

I love this; what an awesome video. The maps are very helpful for those of us who do not really know the terrain. Absolutely fascinating video. Thank you very much for this video and the bonus with Prof. Hoo-Goo Kang! Keep up the wonderful work!

IN RESPONSE TO:

VIDEO: MASSIVE 2,800-YEAR-OLD DAM DISCOVERED IN ANCIENT JERUSALEM

Thank you for always keeping us updated on the important discoveries in Israel. You do an amazing job. In fact, I just renewed my subscription to your magazine. I always enjoy having the printed copy and often share it with friends and family.

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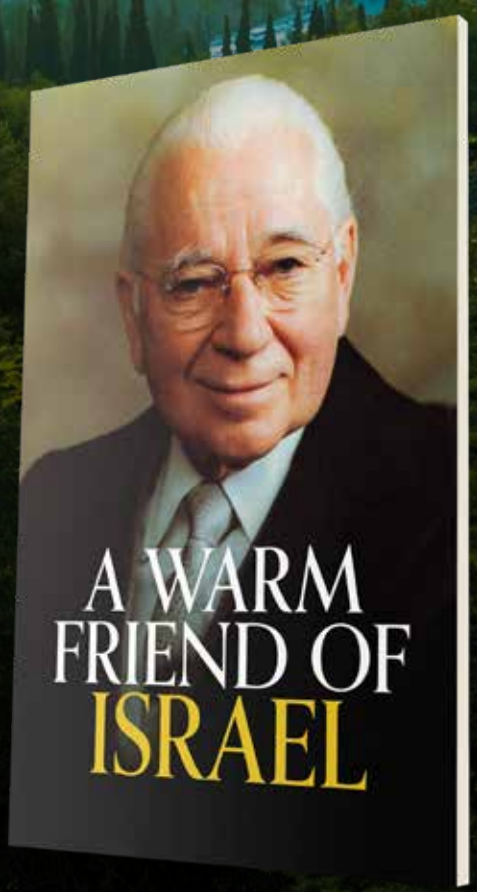

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