LET THE STONES SPEAK

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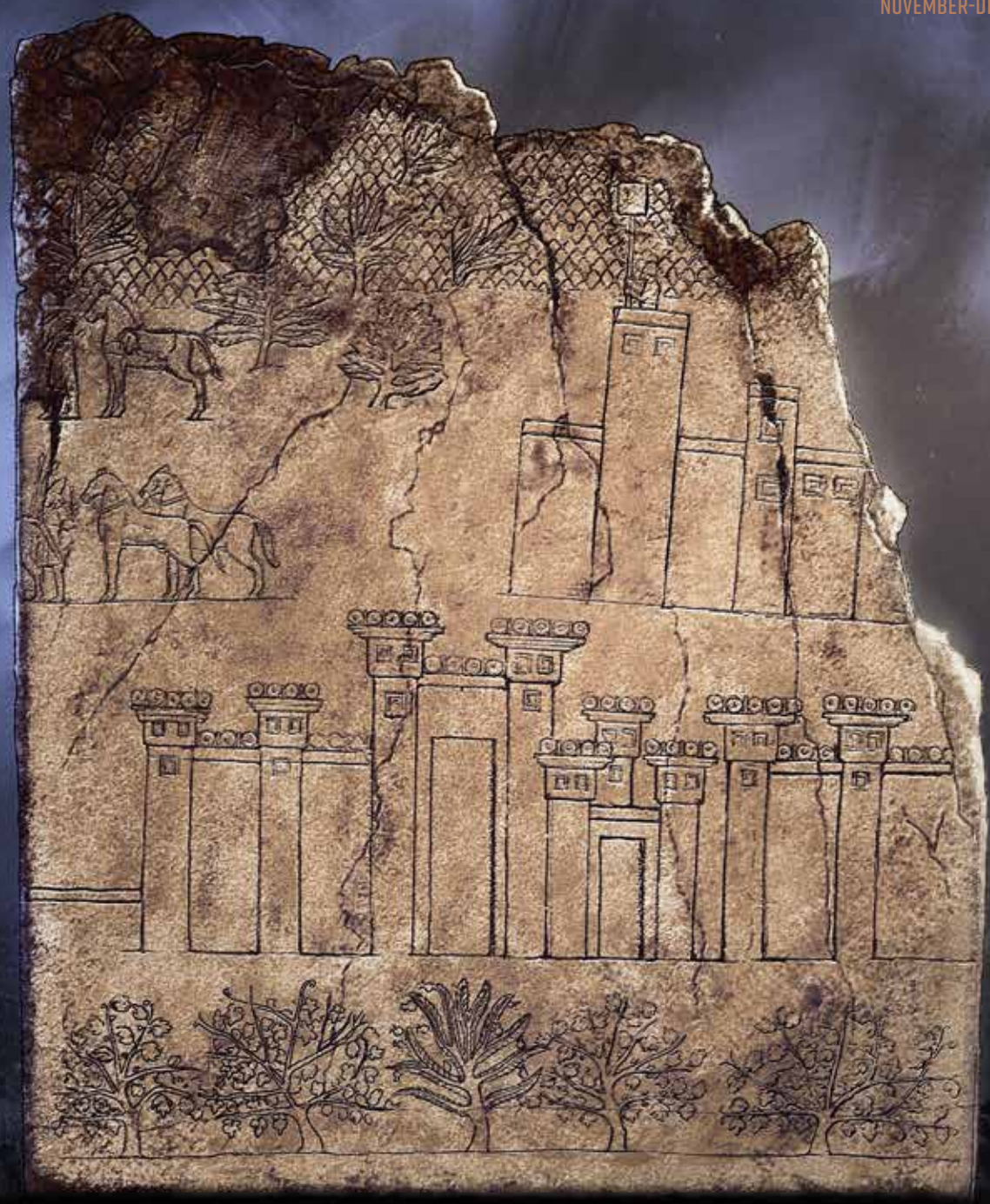
ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025



Earliest Picture of Jerusalem?

FROM THE EDITOR | GERALD FLURRY

A VOICE FROM THE DUST

LET THE STONES SPEAK

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025 | VOL. 4, NO. 6 | CIRC. 11,795

An Armstrong volunteer collects earth during the summer 2025 Ophel excavation.

COVER **Slab 28 of Sennacherib's throne room in Nineveh**

Biblical archaeology connects the past with the present—and the future.

Archaeology connects us with the past. The dust and stones and artifacts tell us stories of ancient times.

In *biblical* archaeology, the stones often speak in ways that amplify the unique and sacred voice of the Bible! A number of scriptures refer to *stones speaking.* That is why this magazine is called *Let the Stones Speak.*

The prophecy of Isaiah 29 contains a chilling picture of Jerusalem and a message that I believe relates to today's biblical archaeology.

Verses 3 and 4 say, "And I will encamp against thee round about, And will lay siege against thee with a mound, And I will raise siege works against thee. And brought down thou shalt speak out of the ground, And thy speech shall be low out of the dust; And thy voice shall be as of a ghost out of the ground, And *thy speech shall chirp out of the dust."*

Verse 4 in the English Standard Version reads, "And you will be brought low; from the earth you shall speak, and from the dust your speech will be bowed down; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and *from the dust your speech shall whisper."*

It's as though Jerusalem itself is speaking! A voice is emerging from the ground of the city, whispering from its dust. That sounds like biblical archaeology.

Commentaries say this a prophecy about either the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. or the time of Sennacherib's besiegement of Jerusalem in the late eighth century B.C.E. But perhaps, like never before, this "voice" is speaking today through biblical archaeology!

This is a powerful passage and an inspiring vision. It's almost like *God Himself* is giving us a message right out of the ground! Not a deafening one, as at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:15-16). This message is a "whisper"—a "still small voice," one might say, in the language of 1 Kings 19:12.

Note the similarity of this passage in Isaiah 29 with verses 14-15 of Psalm 102: "Thou wilt arise, and have compassion upon Zion; For it is time to be gracious unto her, for the appointed time is come. *For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, And love her dust."* We at the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology are pleased to contribute to the important work of excavating the stones and dust of Jerusalem. We love letting those stones speak!

The context of Isaiah 29 shows real distress. Verses 1 and 2 say, "Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add ye year to year, Let the feasts come round! Then will I distress Ariel, And there shall be mourning and moaning; and she shall be unto Me as a hearth of God." *Ariel* (אריאל), meaning "lion of God," is another name for Jerusalem, the city where David lived. More specifically, it can be associated with the location of the altar of God: The near-identical Hebrew word *ari'el* (אראיל), which some have associated by transposition with the *Ariel* of Isaiah 29, is used in Ezekiel 43:15-16 to refer to the altar or altar hearth.

Isaiah 29:7-11 show many nations coming against Jerusalem and putting the city in real danger. Throughout history, no city on Earth has suffered like Jerusalem. In many ways, we see this city coming under increased scrutiny and pressure in world events today. Sadly, even in recent years, Israel has suffered conditions very much like some of the worst chapters of its history, making this language of the Prophet Isaiah very relevant to our day. The "voice" speaking from the ruins of Jerusalem of old is issuing a warning to our people today!

In this context, God continues in verse 14: "Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvellous work among this people, Even a marvellous work and a wonder; And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the prudence of their prudent men shall be hid." The ESV reads, "Therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder ...." That is a spectacular promise!

We really believe the work being accomplished through biblical archaeology is an important part of a *wondrous* work—one that God Himself is behind. It's not just a work; it's also a WONDER— "wonder upon wonder." That is something we cherish.

Notice, in that verse, God says the wisdom and discernment of the wise of this world will fail. But when you look into the Bible, you find a world of *wonder*—one being substantiated and illustrated continually by the stones and treasures coming up out of the ground. It is uplifting because it is filled with vision and light—and *it is true.*

Psalm 102 links this project with the prophecy that so many Bible believers look forward to: "When the Lord shall build up Zion, *he shall appear in his glory"* (verse 16; King James Version). Earlier in this passage, it says "the appointed time is come," and this verse speaks of the coming of the Messiah! The surge of biblical archaeology in recent years leads me to believe that we are getting very close to that event.

That is quite a message being whispered from the dust of Jerusalem! ■

Revealing Royal Jerusalem!

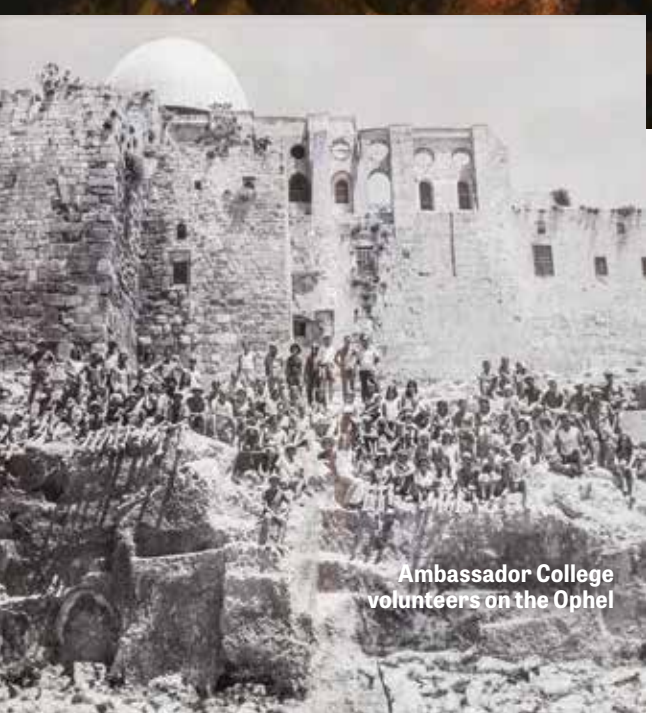
The multi-phase project to resurrect the history of the Ophel is now underway—and you can support this most-important enterprise!

The Ophel was the core of biblical Jerusalem for roughly 400 years. Starting with the reign of King Solomon, the Ophel was the seat of Judah's royal government and home to many of the Bible's greatest kings, priests and prophets.

Today, the Ophel is a mystery!

Every year, millions of people from across Israel and around the world visit the Holy Land and its many revered sites. But only a handful of these tourists ever visit the Ophel. In fact, most people have never heard of the Ophel and know nothing about its illustrious history—even though the Ophel borders two of Jerusalem's most popular destinations: the Temple Mount and the City of David.

"Revealing Royal Jerusalem" will unlock the Ophel mystery!



Ambassador College volunteers on the Ophel

The Archaeology of the Ophel

The Ophel was first excavated in the 19th and 20th centuries by legendary archaeologists Sir Charles Warren and Dame Kathleen Kenyon. These excavations revealed a site with a rich history and intriguing potential. More concerted efforts to excavate the wider Ophel began in the 1970s under the leadership of Hebrew University archaeologist Prof. Benjamin Mazar and later by his granddaughter Dr. Eilat Mazar. Today, the Ophel continues to be excavated by Prof. Uzi Leibner, Dr. Orit Peleg-Barkat and Prof. Yosef Garfinkel of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The Ophel is one of the most important archaeological and historical sites on Earth! It contains history that is central to the identity of Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Ophel has furnished some truly sensational discoveries—the time has come to tell their story!

What Is the Ophel?

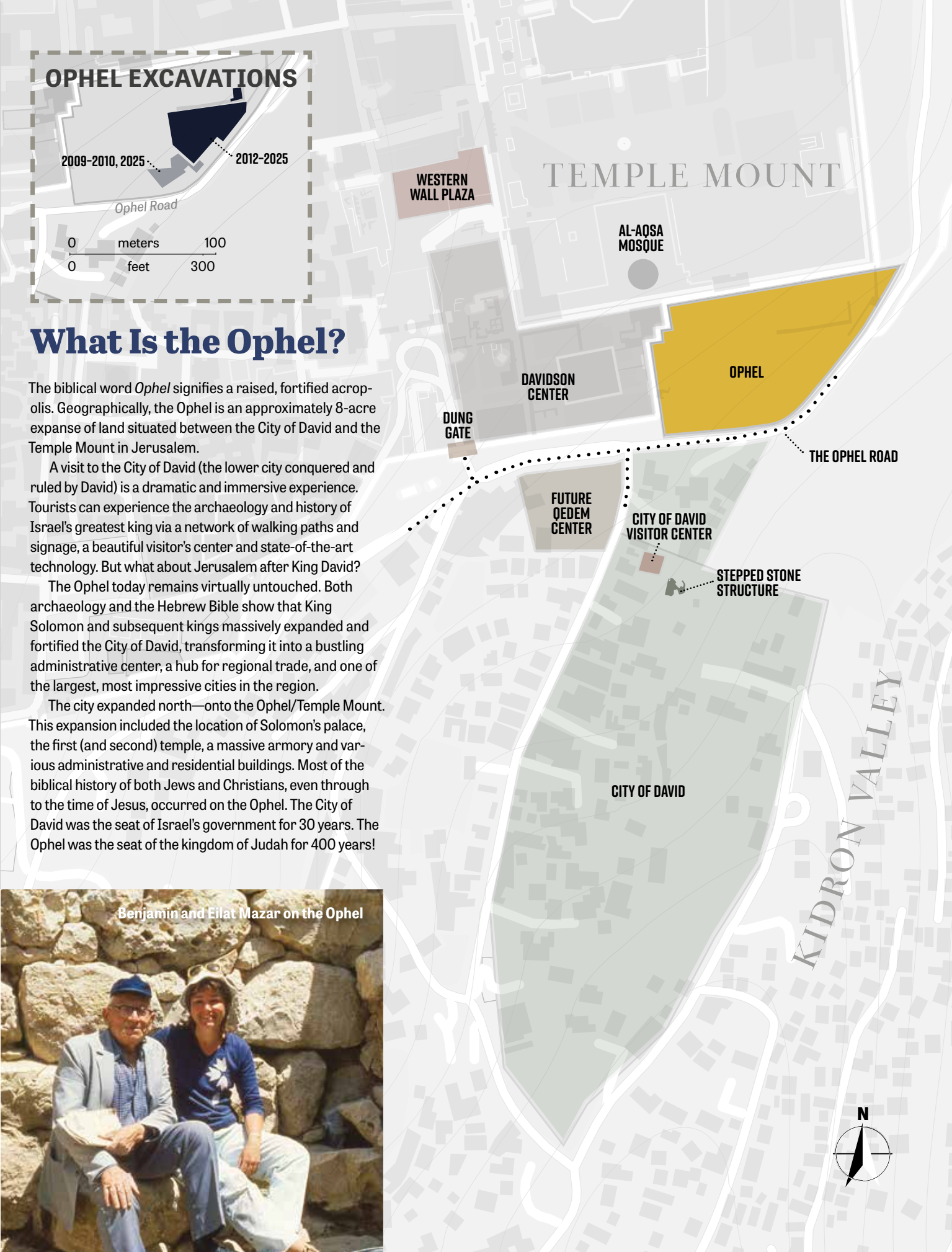
The biblical word *Ophel* signifies a raised, fortified acropolis. Geographically, the Ophel is an approximately 8-acre expanse of land situated between the City of David and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

A visit to the City of David (the lower city conquered and ruled by David) is a dramatic and immersive experience. Tourists can experience the archaeology and history of Israel's greatest king via a network of walking paths and signage, a beautiful visitor's center and state-of-the-art technology. But what about Jerusalem after King David?

The Ophel today remains virtually untouched. Both archaeology and the Hebrew Bible show that King Solomon and subsequent kings massively expanded and fortified the City of David, transforming it into a bustling administrative center, a hub for regional trade, and one of the largest, most impressive cities in the region.

The city expanded north—onto the Ophel/Temple Mount. This expansion included the location of Solomon's palace, the first (and second) temple, a massive armory and various administrative and residential buildings. Most of the biblical history of both Jews and Christians, even through to the time of Jesus, occurred on the Ophel. The City of David was the seat of Israel's government for 30 years. The Ophel was the seat of the kingdom of Judah for 400 years!

Benjamin and Eilat Mazar on the Ophel



Phase I: Restoring Iron Age Jerusalem

The Iron Age includes the time period from King David through to Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.E. This time period is also commonly referred to as the First Temple Period.

Of the approximately 8 acres that encompass the Ophel, less than 1 acre has been excavated down to Iron Age remains. These remains are situated in the southwest section of the Ophel, adjacent to the Ophel Road.

Phase I of "Revealing Royal Jerusalem" will restore the archaeological remains of this area, prepare the site for further excavation, and give visitors the opportunity to experience the world of King Solomon and successive kings, priests and prophets!

The Ophel Road Map

The Ophel can be divided into several areas according to archaeological time periods. Upon completion, the site will feature the history of four significant periods: the First Temple (1000–586 B.C.E.), the Second Temple (535 B.C.E.–70 C.E.), the Byzantine Period (300–650 C.E.) and the Umayyad Period (650–750 C.E.).

"Revealing Royal Jerusalem" will develop the site in several phases. Phase I, which includes the restoration and development of Iron Age Jerusalem, is now underway and is expected to open to the public in summer 2026.

Upon completion, visitors will be able to access the Ophel from multiple entrance points. A network of paths will allow visitors to explore the site. A visitor's center will provide bathroom facilities, refreshments and a gift shop, and will be the staging point for guided tours.

Want to support "Revealing Royal Jerusalem"?

"Revealing Royal Jerusalem" is a collaborative project between several key organizations, including the Israel Antiquities Authority, Daniel Mintz and Meredith Berkman, the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the East Jerusalem Development Ltd. and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority.

To learn more about the project, including how to donate, e-mail ***letters@ArmstrongInstitute.org***

Sensational Neo-Assyrian Artifact Found—in Jerusalem!

'Excitement on a level I can't remember ever experiencing'

BY ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE STAFF

In October, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) announced the discovery of the first-ever First Temple Period Assyrian inscription found in Jerusalem.

The miniature 2.5-centimeter inscription, which dates to between the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E., bears the iconic cuneiform (wedge-impressed) script in the Akkadian language of the Assyrian Empire. The fragment was discovered by Moriah Cohen while she was wet-sifting earth from the ongoing IAA excavations along the western edge of Jerusalem's Ophel, under the direction of Dr. Ayala Zilberstein.

The text was analyzed by Dr. Filip Vukosavović and Dr. Anat Cohen-Weinberger of the IAA, along with Dr. Peter Zilberg of Bar-Ilan University. The royal Assyrian inscription bears a demand to an unnamed king of Judah for payment of tribute "by the first of [the month of] Av"—or else.

Contextually, the late eighth to seventh century B.C.E. was a period of Assyrian dominance in the region. The empire had just conquered the northern kingdom of Israel; the southern kingdom of Judah and neighboring entities had become tributary states. Judean kings Hezekiah and Manasseh, whose reigns spanned most of this period, are both described in the Bible as being under the yoke of Assyria (e.g. 2 Kings 18:7; 2 Chronicles 33:11). In the case of Hezekiah, the Bible describes his refusal to pay tribute to the king of Assyria: "[A]nd he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not" (2 Kings 18:7). This led to what has become known as one of the most heavily represented biblical events in archaeology: Sennacherib's fateful invasion of Judah.

The account of Hezekiah's rebellion is especially interesting in relation to this latest discovery, which, according to the press release, "addresses a delay in payment from the kingdom of Judah to the Assyrian Empire," perhaps indicating a "deliberate tax revolt, such as the Bible describes regarding King Hezekiah rebelling against Sennacherib."

A video release of the artifact by the City of David states: "Here we actually have a direct letter, signed with the seal of the king of Assyria, addressed to the king of Judah, saying to him, 'Dear king of Judah, send the tribute quickly by the first of Av—and if not, the consequences will be severe.'"

Assyriologists Vukosavović and Zilberg believe this inscription was part of a type of Assyrian royal seal—one bearing an abbreviated text summarizing the contents of a longer official document sealed by it.

Excavation director Dr. Ayala Zilberstein holds the inscription.

"Bullae or sealings of this type bore an impression that was sometimes accompanied by a short inscription in Assyrian cuneiform script noting the dispatch's contents or its destination," they wrote. The inscription also "explicitly mentions a chariot officer, the 'one who holds the reins,' in Assyrian terms"—a title "indicat[ing] a high-ranking personality, responsible for conveying official messages on behalf of the royal house. Such a figure is indeed well-known from Assyrian administration archives."

Of further interest is the petrographic analysis of the item—analysis of its material composition. "[T]he fragment's composition revealed that the material from which it was made is entirely different from the local raw materials typically used to produce pottery, bullae and clay documents in Jerusalem and the southern Levant," noted Dr. Cohen-Weinberger. Instead, the "mineral composition generally corresponds to the geology of the Tigris Basin region, where the central cities of the Assyrian kingdom were located, such as Nineveh, Ashur or Nimrud/Kalhu." Research is ongoing to determine exactly which area the inscription derives from.

While this is not the first, nor earliest, Akkadian cuneiform inscription found in Jerusalem—two other such Canaanite inscriptions were found in our own excavations on the eastern side of the Ophel, under the direction of the late Dr. Eilat Mazar—this is the first such Assyrian inscription from the First Temple Period. And suffice it to say, this remarkable discovery is causing quite a stir.

Dr. Vukosavović described the discovery as "excitement on a level I can't remember ever experiencing in my life, really." Cohen, who found the fragment, stated: "Even though so many fascinating finds have been discovered here [at the Emek Tzurim wet-sifting facility] over the years, we've never, ever found anything like this. … This is a once-in-a-lifetime find."

Israel's minister of heritage, Rabbi Amichai Eliyahu, said: "The discovery of the Assyrian inscription from the First Temple Period in the very heart of Jerusalem is impressive evidence of the city's status as the capital of the kingdom of Judah some 2,700 years ago, and of the depth of its ties with the Assyrian Empire just as described in the Bible."

The artifact has also sparked quite a lot of chatter in academic circles on social media. Achaemenid expert and noted minimalist Dr. Gad Barnea initially declared the item "almost certainly fake," before eventually rescinding his claim following dialogue with other academics (X, October 23). Assyrian history expert Dr. Christopher Jones has his own differing views on the nature of the item: "After working with it, I am 100 percent certain that it isn't a letter or a bulla" (X, October 25). His own interpretation will be published in the December issue of *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires.*

Such a small, fragmentary inscription is bound to result in numerous differing conclusions. Yet whatever the case, in the words of Vukosavović, Cohen-Weinberger and Zilberg, "[t]his is a small fragment of great significance."

"The find opens a window into understanding the political and administrative ties between Judah and Assyria," they wrote. "It is the very first evidence of its kind of the official, and perhaps even tense, communication that took place between Jerusalem and the world's most powerful superpower." ■

EMIL ALADJEM/ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY (2)

Ancient Assyrian Grave Discovered in Israel

A recent excavation at Horvat Tevet has uncovered evidence of Assyrian dominance in seventh-century B.C.E. Jezreel Valley.

BY SPENCER FALK

Brand new archaeological evidence has recently emerged that supports the biblical account of an Assyrian takeover of the northern territory of Israel in the late eighth century B.C.E. A recent excavation at Horvat Tevet, directed by Tel Aviv University's Prof. Omer Sergi, uncovered an Assyrian cremation burial assemblage from the seventh century B.C.E.

Horvat Tevet is located in the Jezreel Valley—15 kilometers (9 miles) northeast of Tel Megiddo and 120 kilometers (75 miles) northeast of Jerusalem.

Horvat Tevet consists of nine occupation levels that have been systematically excavated. The top two levels are dated to the Islamic Period and the Roman-Byzantine Period. The next six levels are dated to the Iron Age, and the bottom level is dated to the Middle-Late Bronze Age.

In a recent article for *Haaretz,* archaeology correspondent Ariel David wrote, "[D]uring the Israelite monarchy, especially under the Omride dynasty, Tevet had been the hub of an important royal estate, which stored and distributed produce from the surrounding fields." That all changed, however, between 721 and 718 B.C.E. when the northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 17).

"Tevet was no exception" to Assyria's invasion, David wrote. "There are barely any signs of human habitation there during Assyrian times." So why, then, is there an Assyrian burial at the site? "[S]omeone had deliberately brought these remains from somewhere else and staged this lavish burial" (ibid).

BURIAL PITS. LOOKING SOUTHEAST (PHOTO BY JORDAN WEITZEL, COURTESY OF KAREN COVELLO-PARAN AND OMER SERGI, THE HORVAT TEVET EXPEDITION)

Cremation burial at Horvat Tevet

Based off the biblical text, Assyrian domination is exactly what we'd expect to find in this region.

In the excavation report published in *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University,* Omer Peleg et al. wrote: "The opulence of the burial contrasts sharply with meager findings in the site's Iron IIC occupational level" ("A Unique Assemblage of Cremation Burial From Horvat Tevet and Assyrian Imperial Rule in the Jezreel Valley"). During Assyrian occupation, Horvat Tevet was primarily an agricultural community. Due to its agricultural nature, Horvat Tevet and the surrounding area were sparsely populated.

The Assyrian cremation burial was found in occupation level three, which dates to the seventh century B.C.E. The burial "consisted of two adjacent burial pits, containing a cremation burial and an inhumation articulated burial," or in other words, a skeleton with bones fully intact (ibid).

Within the burial, the archaeologists discovered three urns, which contained many small juglets and juglet sherds.

Four items in the assemblage are particularly important as they prove Assyrian occupation of Horvat Tevet during the seventh century B.C.E.

The first two are a glazed Assyrian bottle and an alabastrum. "The term 'glazed Assyrian bottle' has become commonly used for this type because of its widespread presence in Assyrian burial sites and centers of power. Parallels from the Assyrian heartland indicate that these bottles were often discovered within specific burial settings, alongside other valuable offerings vessels. … Notably, these glazed Assyrian bottles were found within both residential and public structures that correlate with Assyrian dominance over the region" (ibid).

The alabastrum, a vessel commonly used for perfumes or valuable oils, has many parallels throughout the Mediterranean coast—most of which date to the Iron IIC. This is the first such example, however, to be discovered in the Levant.

The other two important items discovered are a stone weight and a Neo-Assyrian cylindrical seal. "The stone weight held particular importance, as precise weighing systems were essential for the organized flow of goods in such societies," wrote Peleg et al. "The cylinder seal, on the other hand, was used to imprint markings on vessels, baskets, sacks and various records. … The presence of both the stone weight and the Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal … reflects, on the one hand, access to long-distance trade and, on the other hand, the Assyrian colonial network and sphere of influence." These finds indicate that there was a strong central Assyrian government ruling over this territory.

The finds from Horvat Tevet indicate a large expanse of the Assyrian Empire. "During the Iron IIC, Tel Megiddo III served as a thriving administrative Assyrian city, which maintained strong economic ties with the eastern Mediterranean," wrote Peleg et al. "The cremation burial at Horvat Tevet mirrors the level of complexity seen in urban centers like Tel Megiddo III. … The high social status of the deceased points to the probable connection with the nearby Assyrian provincial center at Tel Megiddo."

This site is located near many ancient trade outposts that were positioned to overlook the major trade routes out of Megiddo. Assyria's expansive trade network is strong proof of their dominance in the area.

Based off the biblical text, Assyrian domination is exactly what we'd expect to find in this region. 2 Kings 17 states that, after defeating Israel, Sennacherib "brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Avva, and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and PLACED THEM IN THE CITIES OF SAMARIA INSTEAD OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof" (verse 24). This practice of taking conquered peoples and transplanting them into newly acquired territory has been called Assyria's "deportation policy." (Read *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1137* for more information.) The archaeological evidence found at Horvat Tevet is further evidence of Assyria's transplantation policy and dominance over these "cities of Samaria." ■

Revealed: A 2,700-Year-Old Depiction of Jerusalem and Hezekiah?

Remarkably, the relief may picture not only Jerusalem but also King Hezekiah himself. BY BRENT NAGTEGAAL

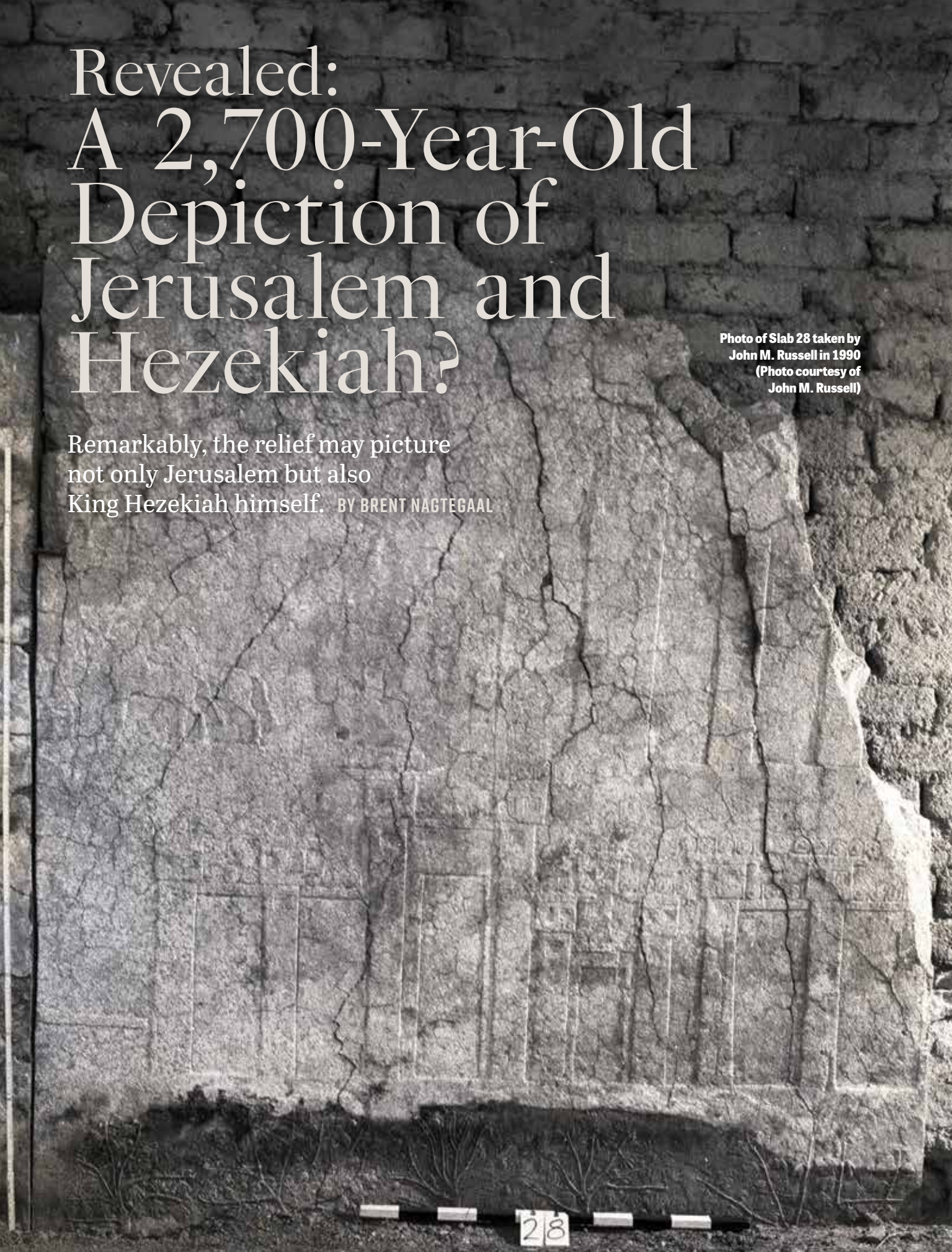


Photo of Slab 28 taken by John M. Russell in 1990 (Photo courtesy of John M. Russell)

When researcher Stephen Compton shared with me an image of Slab 28 of Sennacherib's throne room in Nineveh, I was awestruck. Surveying the scene on the relief, the identity of the city portrayed grew increasingly obvious: This was Jerusalem!

We were in Boston attending the 2024 American Schools of Overseas Research (ASOR) conference, where Compton was presenting his interpretation of Slab 28. Listening to him lay out his research, and discussing all the archaeological and historical connections, it was clear he was onto something. *He might be right!* I thought. *This is the oldest work of art depicting Jerusalem ever found!*

The evidence began to accrue immediately. There were the three species of fruit trees—grapes, figs and pomegranates—all native to Israel and Judah. It was noteworthy too that, unlike some depictions of trees on other reliefs, these were not hewn down, suggesting this city remained unconquered. Above the fruit trees, there was a massive city wall, defensive towers and two gates. Depicted on the defensive towers were twice-corbeled battlements. Although I didn't know it at the time, these were almost identical to those on the Lachish wall reliefs, suggesting this was a Judean city. On top of the corbeled battlements was a series of shields, recalling scenes described in several biblical passages from the time of King David onward.

Higher up the slab, there was a *second* series of walls and towers. This was interesting. Did this indicate this city occupied two hills or ridges, just like Jerusalem?

Finally, standing alone in the tallest tower was a single figure. He's the only individual in the entire city. And he's holding a standard, suggesting royal status. If Slab 28 depicts a scene from King Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, and if the city depicted was Jerusalem, then this lone royal figure had to be King Hezekiah!

Is this really a 2,700-year-old representation of biblical King Hezekiah? Was this whole scene the earliest graphic representation of Jerusalem ever discovered?

I left ASOR eager to read Compton's paper, where all his research would be presented for study and consideration by scholars and scientists around the world. More than a year later, after studying his detailed and thorough analysis, I am convinced: Slab 28 portrays Jerusalem!

The article, titled "Sennacherib's Throne-Room Reliefs: On Jerusalem and the Misplaced City of Ushu," was published in the October 2025 issue of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, a prestigious journal published by the University of Chicago.

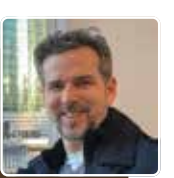
In this article, we will review Compton's spellbinding discovery—representing not just the earliest portrayal of Jerusalem ever found but the depiction of one of biblical Judah's greatest kings.

The Throne Room

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was a wealthy, highly militarized Mesopotamian superpower that dominated the Near East for roughly 300 years between 911 and 612 B.C.E. Assyria's formidable army invaded Israel and Judah in the late eighth century, starting in 745 B.C.E. and ending with King Sennacherib's failed campaign to destroy Jerusalem near the end of the eighth century B.C.E.

This history is well documented, both archaeologically and in ancient texts, including the Bible. Even before this discovery, perhaps no event in biblical history was more corroborated than Assyrian King Sennacherib's military campaign into Judah.

There are archaeological remains from the late eighth century B.C.E. of the massive destruction layers at Judean sites like Lachish and Azekah. There is evidence of the siege preparations in Jerusalem enacted by King Hezekiah of Judah, most notably, a 550-meter (1,800 feet) water tunnel running underneath the city, which is still accessible today and mentioned in three places in the Bible. There is the seal impression, a royal signature, of King Hezekiah of Judah, discovered in the royal quarter of Jerusalem in 2009 and on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



When developing a new research paper, I usually present it at an academic conference to get feedback from colleagues before submitting it to a journal. I first presented this paper at ASOR 2024 in Boston. Afterward, I had a great conversation with Brent Nagtegaal. He brings substantial knowledge and experience from his extensive work on archaeological excavations in Jerusalem and asked about how the image I was proposing to identify as Jerusalem corresponded with that city's Iron Age II archaeological record. Researching and exploring that relationship during the subsequent rewrite improved the paper. I am grateful for that input from Brent and happy to see this paper—after undergoing peer review and publication in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*—also being shared with a wider audience here in *Let the Stones Speak*. —Stephen Compton

Then there are the prized Lachish wall reliefs, lifted from ancient Nineveh and housed in the British Museum in London, pictorially documenting the siege, capture and destruction of Judah's second-most important city.

Finally, there are the written annals of King Sennacherib's exploits that each bear record of Judah's King Hezekiah being trapped in his royal city Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage" (see sidebar, page 14).

This "new" piece of evidence takes us to the capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire itself.

Archaeological excavations at ancient Nineveh, the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire during the time of Sennacherib, first began in the 1840s with British archaeologist Sir Austen Henry Layard on behalf of the British Museum. His large-scale digs and those of subsequent British archaeologists uncovered massive palatial structures on Kuyunjik, one of two tells at the city.

Following the death of his father, Sargon II, Sennacherib developed the site in 703–692 B.C.E. for his royal citadel and constructed in the southwest of the tell what he called a "palace without rival." Sennacherib's palace compound is immense; it takes up just over 30 acres, or around 23 football fields.

The rooms and hallways of King Sennacherib's palace are adorned with wall reliefs, carvings that document the exploits of the ancient Assyrian king. The individual reliefs are gigantic, rising almost 3 meters above the ground on many of the walls. All totaled, Layard uncovered just over 70 rooms in the palace, many of them adorned by roughly 3 kilometers (nearly 2 miles) of wall carvings.

Room 36 (by Layard's numbering) contains one of the most famous scenes. The reliefs in this room depict the account of Sennacherib's devastating destruction of the Judahite city of Lachish. This scene is on display at the British Museum in London. As incredible as the relief is, Room 36 is actually pretty ordinary (only 12 meters long, or 39 feet), and the scene does not occupy a position of prominence within the palace.

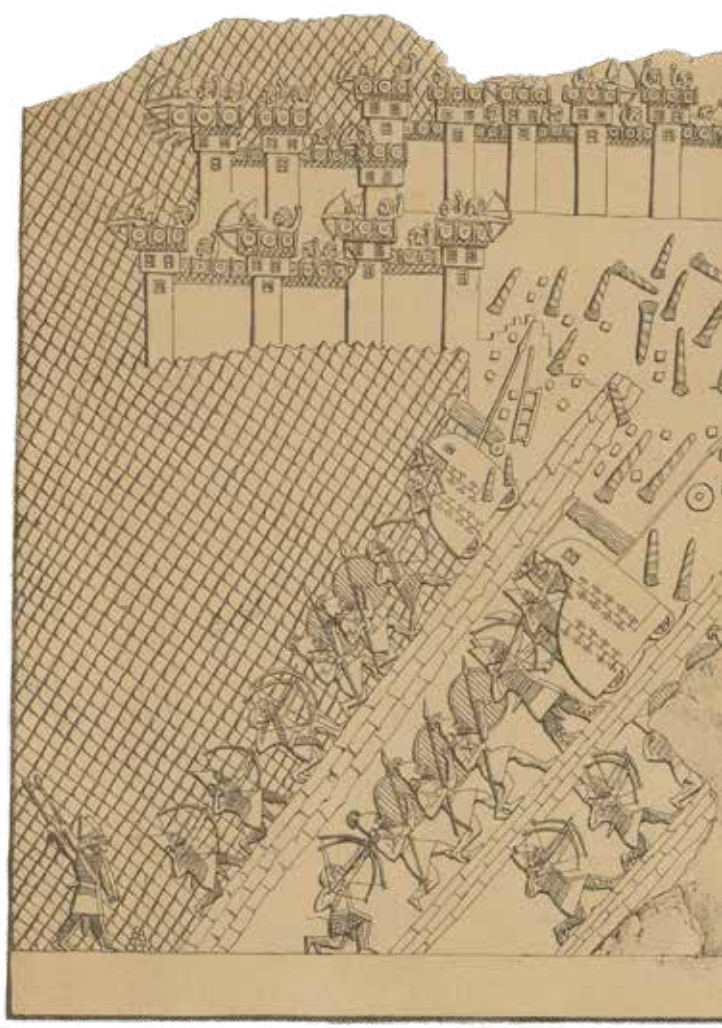
The most impressive room in the palace is Sennacherib's throne room. This room is 51 meters long and 20 meters wide (167 feet by 66 feet). The walls were originally lined with around 35 carved stone panels, with scenes unfolding across multiple panels to tell narratives. The throne room is "the largest room ever found in ancient Assyria," Compton explained in an interview in November. When it comes to the wall carvings, it is "prime real estate in the palace."

Slab 28 is in the throne room, the epicenter of Sennacherib's prestige.

Unfortunately, Sennacherib's throne room, along with its over 100 meters (330 feet) of reliefs, was destroyed in 2015–2016 by the Islamic State. The obliteration of archaeological sites across Syria and Iraq is one of the great intellectual tragedies of our time. Since 2021, the University of Heidelberg has led a valiant effort to salvage and restore whatever is left of Sennacherib's palace. Sadly, only the lowest stubs of the wall foundations remain of the throne room.

Fortunately, Layard and his team documented Sennacherib's throne room (and much of Nineveh) in detailed reports, including several drawings and illustrations. Without the actual reliefs to study, Compton relied on these detailed drawings and descriptions.

It is important to note: Compton isn't the first to propose that a Jerusalem scene was captured on the inside of Sennacherib's throne room. Assyriologist Christoph Uehlinger suggested some 20 years ago that the section of wall in question (Slab 28) *could* be a scene of Jerusalem. Uehlinger, whom Compton credits for his foundational insights, had been on a



quest to find Jerusalem on a wall somewhere on the 3 kilometers (2 miles) of reliefs. In the end, he settled that Jerusalem *might* be depicted in three different scenes (Slab 28 being one of them). After presenting the research, Uehlinger concluded in 2003 that "present pictorial evidence can neither prove nor exclude the possibility that the siege of Jerusalem was depicted on one of Sennacherib's palace reliefs" ("Clio in a World of Pictures").

Unlike Uehlinger, Compton wasn't on a quest to find Jerusalem. He was searching for the city of Ushu, a dominant Phoenician city mentioned as being conquered in Sennacherib's annals and yet never found in the palace wall reliefs. "I worked on the wall because Ushu was the main mystery that hadn't been solved from a Neo-Assyrian perspective," Compton recalled in our interview. "I'm a history nerd, and this is my particular field."

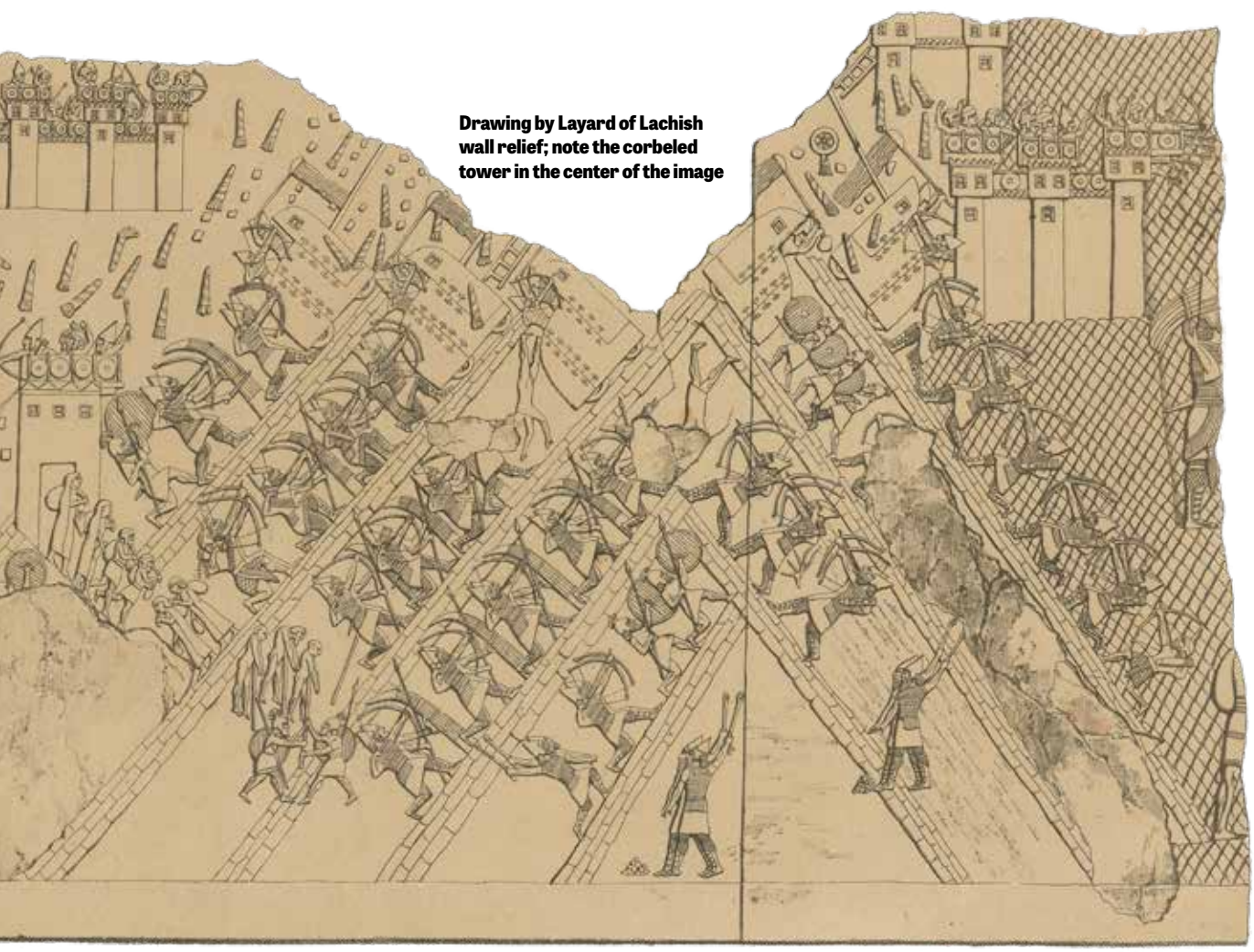
In order to provide stronger evidence for Jerusalem on Slab 28, it is important to solve the mystery of Ushu.

The Mystery of Ushu and Eltekeh

It is generally accepted that the reliefs covering the throne room's eastern wall document major battles in Sennacherib's third military campaign. Based on his own annals, such as the Oriental Prism (now at the University of Chicago), this campaign impacted three nations of "Hatti Land," or the eastern Mediterranean. These were Phoenicia, Philistia and Judah. Unfortunately, not all the wall reliefs in the throne room were drawn by Layard. Others were too degraded to draw, or perhaps even left blank in antiquity. So we don't have illustrations of every relief.

Nevertheless, three segments of the engravings were drawn well enough for scholars to debate what exactly is depicted on each one.

In his report, Compton took the description of Sennacherib's third campaign as it was recorded in Sennacherib's annals and considered it alongside the geographic and architectural markers on the reliefs



Drawing by Layard of Lachish wall relief; note the corbeled tower in the center of the image

and documented by Layard. He also considered all this evidence in the context of regional geography. Putting all these pieces of information together, Compton concluded that the scenes on the eastern wall of the throne room are recorded in chronological order.

According to the annals, Sennacherib conquered the Levant by moving from north to south. First, he destroyed eight strong-walled cities of Phoenicia, then conquered the cities of the Philistines, including engaging in a major open-field battle near Eltekeh against the Egyptian-Cushite army. Finally, the annals record Sennacherib's subjugation of 46 strong-walled unnamed cities of Judah under the leadership of "Hezekiah of the land of Judah."

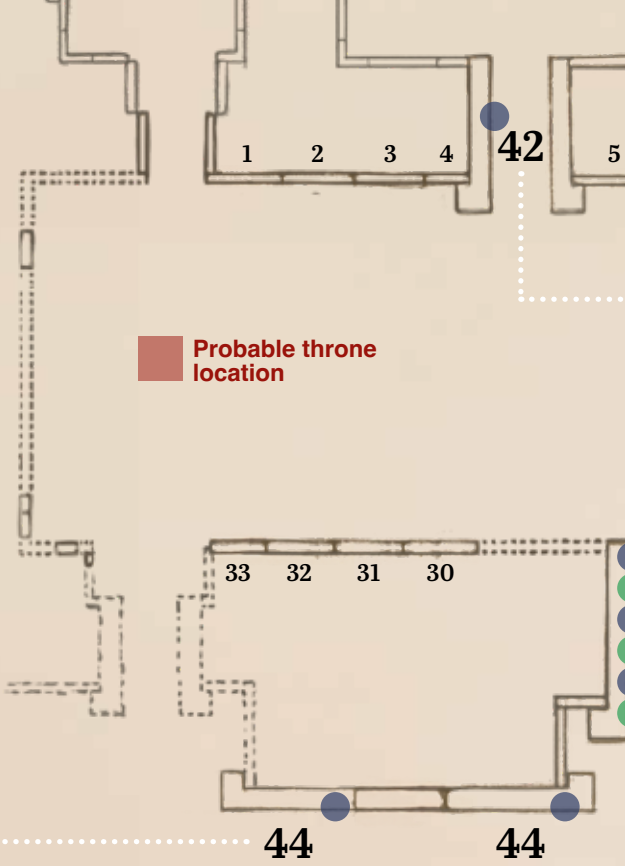
The first scene on the reliefs (panels 20a and 20b), according to Compton and others, portrays Phoenician ships fleeing from a coastal city. But no inscription on the relief identifies the city.

According to the textual evidence, during the third campaign, Phoenician King Luli escaped by ship. Most scholars agree this is the scene depicted on panels 20a and 20b. But *what city* is this exactly? Prior theories posit that it was Phoenicia's Tyre, or perhaps even the southern city of Jaffa. Compton disagrees and made a compelling case that this is Ushu, a city which, until his paper, had never been located on the Phoenician coast.

According to Layard's personal notes of the nearby scenes, this city "stands amongst mountains which rise from the seashore." He also recorded that the area close to the city was forested. While Tyre and Jaffa were coastal cities, both were built on flat terrain and neither was forested.

Compton argued that the city described is Ushu, one of the eight Phoenician cities mentioned in the annals, and the only one mentioned twice. Compton then went one step further and equated ancient Ushu with the ruins of Alexandroschene, named after Alexander the Great, located halfway between Tyre in Lebanon and the modern border of the State of Israel. Alexandroschene exists on a promontory, which also happens to be the only place on the southern Phoenician coast where mountains descend to the edge of the Mediterranean Sea.

Indeed, as noted in the paper, Compton added that all eight other Phoenician cities retain their names throughout ancient times. Ushu, however, falls out of use in antiquity, and the name Alexandroschene, the staging ground from which Alexander the Great assaulted the island fortress of Tyre, begins to be used.



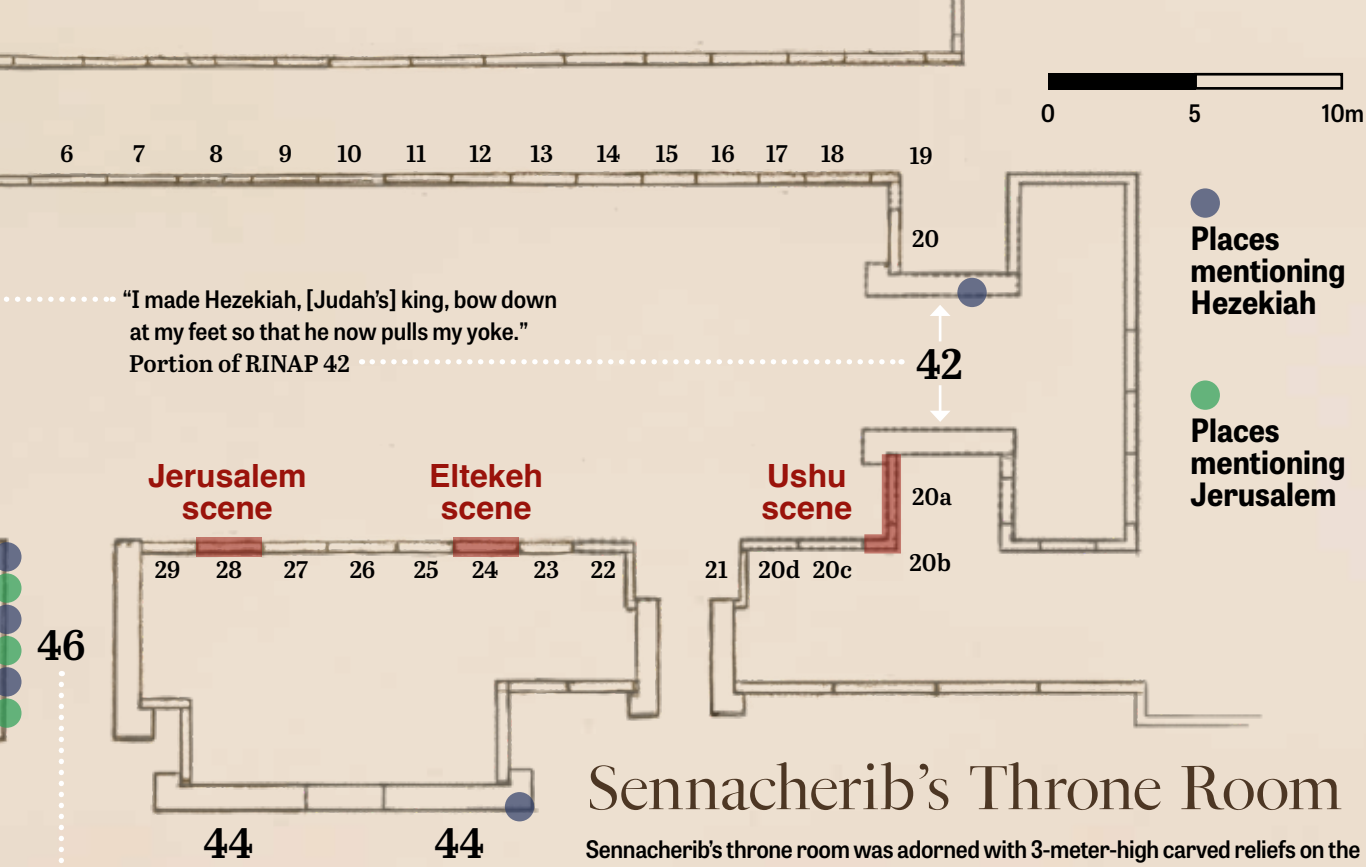
"I ruined the wide district of the recalcitrant and strong land of Judah, and I made Hezekiah its king to bow down at my feet." Portion of RINAP 44

SENNACHERIB'S 17 HEZEKIAH INSCRIPTIONS

In order to place a biblical story in its wider historical context, connections to foreign powers are essential, especially if those foreign powers kept detailed records.

Perhaps most illustrative of this concept is the push of the Neo-Assyrian Empire into the eastern Mediterranean in the eighth to seventh centuries B.C.E. Six consecutive Assyrian kings are mentioned in the biblical text, beginning with the powerful Tiglath-Pileser III in the middle of the eighth century. Following him are Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal—all of whom are mentioned to a greater or lesser extent.

In the Bible, these kings are mentioned only as they impact the nations of Israel and Judah. However, when studying the larger Assyrian corpus of inscriptions, we see a far more expansive view of their Assyrian



Sennacherib's Throne Room

Sennacherib's throne room was adorned with 3-meter-high carved reliefs on the walls. In this illustration, each slab is numbered according to Sir Henry Austen Layard's drawings. Each doorway featured bull statues with an inscription that largely parallels Sennacherib's written annals. These inscriptions were numbered and published in *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria, Vol. 1 and 2 (RINAP).* Hezekiah's name was found preserved eight times in these doorway reliefs.

dominion. Thus, what is truly portrayed as a big deal in the Bible for Israel or Judah was only a relatively minor escapade according to Assyrian documents.

In the case of King Sennacherib and King Hezekiah of Judah, however, both the Bible and Assyrian documents give the interaction great emphasis.

Some of these inscriptions are well-known—such as the Taylor Prism, the Oriental Prism and the Jerusalem Prism—all writings by Sennacherib's scribes that include the king's third campaign to the Hatti Land, which included the takeover of most of Judah.

But there are more—a LOT MORE! Those prisms are only three of 17 inscriptions that mention King Hezekiah by name.

In 2012 and 2014, Prof. A. Kirk Grayson and Dr. Jamie Novotny produced two massive volumes, titled *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria.* These volumes are part of a larger project—*The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period* (RINAP)—and detail all of the known Assyrian inscriptions belonging to King Sennacherib. The scholarly work is an extremely thorough synthesis of the context, translation and provenance of the surviving texts of King Sennacherib.

These volumes show that King Hezekiah's name was written not only on prisms but also on stand-alone tablets and the wall inscriptions in Sennacherib's palace.

Thus, if we read through all the ancient inscriptions of Sennacherib, we can find King Hezekiah's name virtually everywhere. In fact, his name is explicitly written over 100 times (101 by my count).

Most notably, King Hezekiah's name is featured highly in Sennacherib's inscriptions at the doorways to his massive throne room in Nineveh. On most of the doorways leading into the throne room, Sennacherib boasts about his exploits against Hezekiah. "I made Hezekiah, its king, bow down at my feet so that he now pulls my yoke," reads one such inscription (RINAP 42). "I ruined the wide district of the recalcitrant and strong and of Judah, and I made Hezekiah its king to bow down at my feet," reads another (RINAP 44).

At the main entrance of the throne room, Hezekiah is mentioned three times, largely paralleling the text from the Taylor Prism. One section of the inscription reads, "As for Hezekiah ... I confined him inside the city Jerusalem, his royal city." This inscription is less than 5 meters (16 feet) from Slab 28, which is most likely a scene portraying Hezekiah "trapped" in Jerusalem.

BRENT NAGTEGAAL

The location of Ushu just south of Tyre also matches with a probable reference to the city as *Hosah* in Joshua 19:29, being between Tyre and Achziv further to the south.

Following the ASOR presentation, Compton's colleague, John M. Russell, further solidified the Ushu option, reminding him that the inscription framing the entrance to the throne room only mentions one Phoenician city—Ushu, which underscores its importance and would "favor its depiction on the throne room reliefs as well."

Put together, wrote Compton, "[t]he above confirms that the wall reliefs to the right (east) of Sennacherib's throne, indeed, began with Phoenicia and Luli's escape, and thus begins with the same event as Sennacherib's annals of this third campaign. One can then hypothesize (and the rest of the evidence will support) that these reliefs followed the same chronological order as the annals."

Compton then confirmed the earlier research by Russell, identifying the second of the three documented throne room reliefs (Slab 24) with the Cushite-Egyptian forces in battle with the Assyrians at Eltekeh. This corresponds with the more descriptive written records in the annals that describe Sennacherib's army moving further south to take over Philistia.

According to the annals, the Philistines call for help from the Cushite-Egyptian army, which enters the fray in the battle at Eltekeh, a location on the coastal plain just to the west of modern-day Rehovot. Given Slab 24 is the only carving displaying an open battle, and its place within the Philistine section of the annals, it makes logical sense that Slab 24 is the Eltekeh battle. The city of Eltekeh is identified today with Tel Shalaf, which is an extremely small tel that Compton matched with the tiny city in the background of the open battle scene.

Here's what we know so far: The first scene in the throne room is identified with Ushu, representing the first nation to be conquered on Sennacherib's third campaign. The second scene is identified as Eltekeh, Sennacherib's major battle in Philistine territory and second step in Assyria's Levantine invasion.

Why is this important in our consideration of Jerusalem? "Since the first two scenes have been shown to depict scenes from the first two kingdoms invaded on Sennacherib's third campaign," Compton wrote, "SLAB

HEZEKIAH'S OCCUPATION OF GATH

WHAT WAS THE STATE OF Gath during the reign of King Hezekiah? Gath is most well known for being the Philistine capital during the 10th and ninth centuries B.C.E. But until recently, not much was known about this city during Hezekiah's reign. Recent excavations at Tell es-Safi give us more detail about Gath after the ninth century.

Tell es-Safi contains evidence of three destruction layers. It has remains from many different kingdoms, revealing turmoil and continuous upheaval of local government. Archaeological evidence indicates that Gath was a thriving Philistine city during the 10th and ninth centuries B.C.E. But toward the end of the ninth century, Gath was completely destroyed by Syrian King Hazael.

During the beginning of the eighth century, Gath was partially rebuilt. But about 10 years after Hazael's siege, a massive earthquake leveled the city once again. This earthquake is mentioned in Amos 1 and Zechariah 14.

This is where the kingdom of Judah enters the picture. In an article documenting recent discoveries found in Tell es-Safi, Dr. Jeffery R. Chadwick wrote, "It was … about 750 to 725 B.C.E. that the kingdom of Judah expanded its territorial control westward into Philistia and the coastal plain and occupied Tell es-Safi. … It is noted that King Hezekiah 'attacked the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory' (2 Kings 18:8), an event which may have occurred around 727 B.C.E., during the reign of Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, with Hezekiah acting as co-regent prince conducting the Judahite military push in Philistia."

What archaeological evidence is there of Judahite occupation at Tell es-Safi? And how much did Hezekiah build up this city? The first proof of Judahite occupation is multiple four-room houses that were found on the site, which date to the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. In a recent article about Gath, Prof. Yigal Levin wrote, "The eighth-century B.C.E. houses excavated in Area F, near the summit of the tell, seem to be of the type often referred to as 'four-room' or 'pillared' houses, which are typical of both Iron Age Israel and Judah" ("When Gath of the Philistines Became Gath of Judah: Dramatic Glimpse of Biblical Archaeology"). It is clear that Tell es-Safi was occupied and rebuilt by Judah. The Iron Age houses from this time are of Judahite design and hundreds of Judahite household items were

28 might be expected to feature Sennacherib's third and final target of this campaign—Judah" (emphasis added).

Jerusalem Revealed!

Given the progression of the throne room reliefs, and the fact that Jerusalem is the only Judahite city to be mentioned by name in Sennacherib's annals, logic suggests we can expect Hezekiah's royal city to appear next in the wall reliefs in Nineveh.

As noted in the introduction, the *visual evidence* identifying the city in Slab 28 as Jerusalem is compelling.

In his article, Compton drew attention to the striking architectural similarities between Slab 28 in the throne room and the Lachish wall reliefs from Room 36—the only other Judahite city that has been unquestionably identified in Sennacherib's palace (note the image on page 13). In particular, the masonry at the top of the defensive towers between Lachish and the city of Slab 28 is almost identical. "Both cities have tall narrow towers topped with sophisticated battlements that are corbeled (or otherwise extended beyond the width of the tower that supports them)," wrote Compton. While other cities in the southern Levant were shown with single-corbeled towers, only on these Judahite cities do the towers extend outward, wider than their base a second time, indicating that this is a unique defining element of Judean architecture.

Outside of Slab 28 and the Lachish reliefs, the only other time this architectural feature exists on Assyrian reliefs is in an unidentified city displayed in Room 12 of Sennacherib's palace. These reliefs show a moat wrapping partway around a city but ending where a river flows along the city's left side. Compton identified this Room 12 city with Tell es-Safi (the biblical city of Gath), where a massive trench had been carved through solid rock around three sides of the city, while a river flowed along the fourth side. Previously, researchers Alexander Zukerman and Itzhaq Shai showed that Tell es-Safi/biblical Gath was the unnamed city with a moat that Sennacherib described conquering in his famous Azekah inscription. In this inscription, Sennacherib called it a Philistine city that had been "captured and strengthened by Hezekiah." This is also supported by the archaeology of Tell es-Safi, which shows a Judahite

SEE **PICTURE** PAGE 20

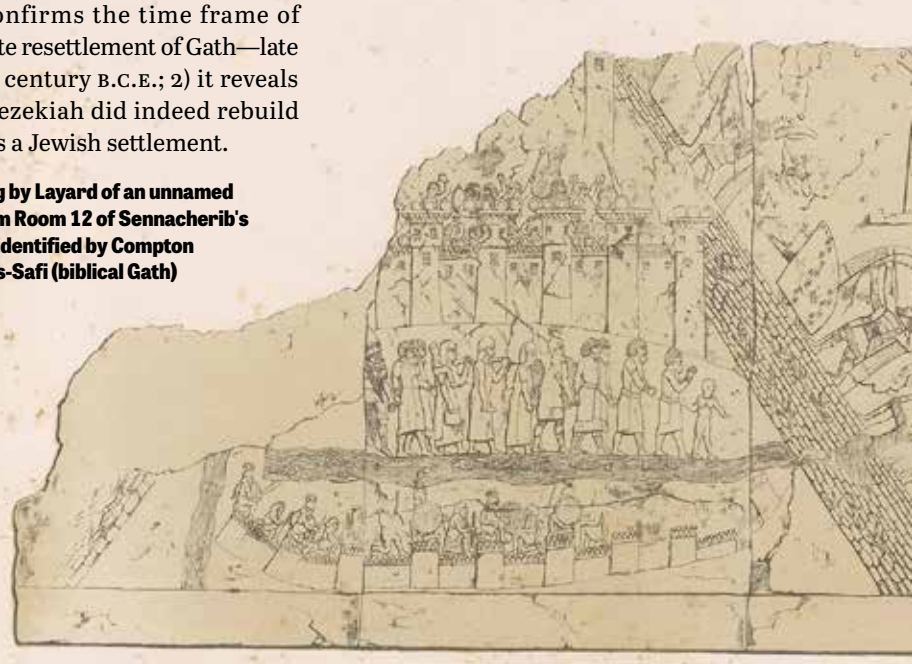
found within these structures. (For more on four-room houses, read *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1072*.)

One especially important item found within these houses were Judahite stamps. "Additionally, several *lmlk* ('belonging to the king') stamp impressions, typical of the kingdom of Judah in the late eighth and early seventh centuries B.C.E. were found in the destruction layer of the city," wrote Levin. "The eighth-century B.C.E. remains at Tell es-Safi clearly show that the former city of the Philistines was now part of the kingdom of Judah."

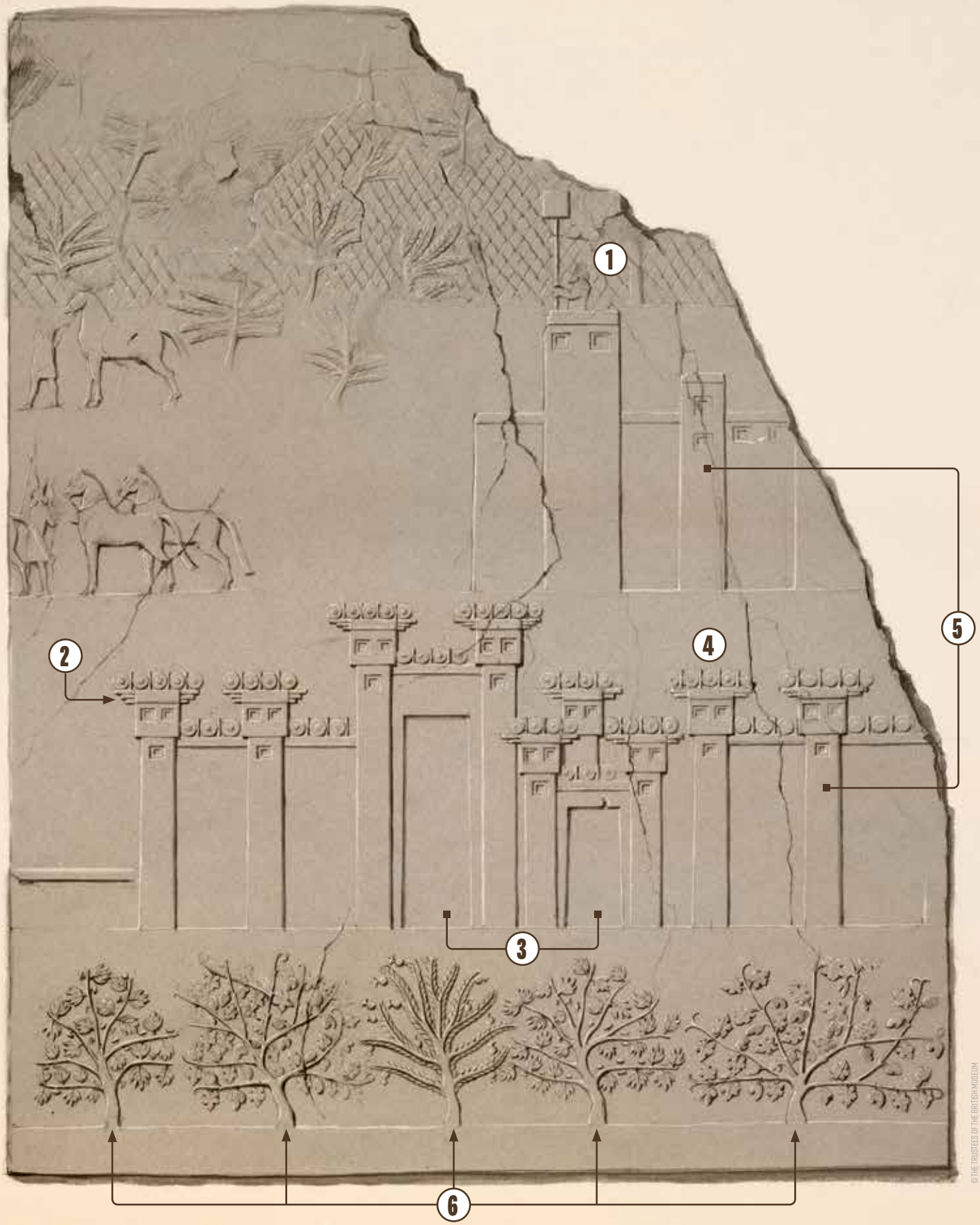
The great earthquake in the early eighth century leveled the walls of the structures on Tell es-Safi, but the foundations of those structures remained intact. When rebuilding Gath, the Judean builders built their new structures on the previous foundations. "In order to erect their own new structures, rather than remove the collapses, they [the Judean builders] built terrace walls around the collapses and covered the brick debris over with fill soil, ultimately flattening it even with the tops of the terrace walls to create new flat spaces upon which to build," Chadwick explained.

This reuse of pre-earthquake foundations shows two things: 1) It confirms the time frame of Judahite resettlement of Gath—late eighth century B.C.E.; 2) it reveals that Hezekiah did indeed rebuild Gath as a Jewish settlement.

Judah's occupation of Gath lasted only a brief time before it was captured and destroyed by the Assyrians at the end of the eighth century B.C.E. This brief occupation and later destruction of Tell es-Safi confirm the biblical account and help us better understand the history of Gath. **SPENCER FALK**



Drawing by Layard of an unnamed city from Room 12 of Sennacherib's palace; identified by Compton as Tell es-Safi (biblical Gath)



THE OLDEST PICTURE OF JERUSALEM?

Assyrian King Sennacherib constructed what ancient annals call a "palace without rival" in Nineveh in the early seventh century B.C.E. The most impressive room in the palace is his throne room, measuring 51 meters long and 20 meters wide. The throne room is flanked on both sides with massive wall reliefs—scenes of his military campaigns. The image pictured here is the scene on Slab 28 on the eastern throne room wall. Researcher Stephen Compton recently published compelling evidence that the city is Jerusalem, and its lone figure atop its tallest tower is Judah's King Hezekiah.

1 KING HEZEKIAH

Typically, Assyrian reliefs depict the enemy on city walls, brandishing weapons or throwing stones. In this case, only one individual is visible in the city, and he's holding up a standard, indicating his royal status. In the Bible, the Hebrew word *nes* is used to describe the standard (banner or flag) or a sail of a ship (see Isaiah 13:2; 33:23). In Ezekiel 27:7, *nes* describes the sail on a Phoenician ship, which is revealed from reliefs as a "square of cloth hung from a horizontal crossmember centered atop a vertical mast, much like the standard on Slab 28," Compton wrote. This is the only instance on Assyrian reliefs of a standard being held atop an enemy city wall. Assyrian texts closely associate standards with royalty. This image closely parallels Sennacherib's description of King Hezekiah as recorded in his ancient annals: "Hezekiah ... like a caged bird, I shut up in Jerusalem like a caged bird."

2 CORBELED BATTLEMENTS

The masonry at the top of the tall, narrow defensive towers features sophisticated battlements that are corbeled (extended beyond the width of the tower that supports them). The only other reliefs where multi-corbeled battlements are visible are the scene of the Judahite city of Lachish in Room 36 and a city depicted in Room 12, which some scholars identify as Judahite Gath. Thus, it makes sense that this city on Slab 28 is also Judahite and reveals that the multi-corbeled battlements are a unique defining element of Judean architecture.

3 GATES

Most cities in ancient Israel had only one main passageway or gate, as this is far more defensible. However, this image has two gates in close proximity to each other. Numerous biblical passages point to the many gates, perhaps up to 12, that Jerusalem had in order to offer greater access to the city (Nehemiah 3). The Prophet Isaiah, a contemporary of Hezekiah, wrote, "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people" (Isaiah 62:10; King James Version).

4 SHIELDS

The presence of shields atop the defensive towers is a known phenomenon among Phoenician and Judean towers from King David's time onward (Ezekiel 27:10). Song of Songs describes the tower of David as being adorned by shields (Song of Songs 4:4). The Bible notes that when Hezekiah prepared for the siege of Jerusalem, he too made shields to defend the towers: "And he took courage, and built up all the wall that was broken down, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and strengthened Millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance" (2 Chronicles 32:5). See also 2 Samuel 22:3; 1 Kings 10:17; Psalm 18:2; Isaiah 21:5.

5 A CITY ON TWO HILLS

There is a clear separation between the upper and lower defenses of the city. "This is the only time in known Assyrian reliefs that a city was split across two registers, or two ground levels," Compton wrote. Jerusalem itself is a city built on two main ridges. It's possible that this deliberate division of the city in the scene could represent the division between the City of David and Ophel along Jerusalem's eastern hill (with a moat recently discovered separating them). Alternatively, it could represent the presence of a defended city on the eastern and western hills of Jerusalem (archaeological evidence indicates that the western hill was fortified by Hezekiah's time).

6 NATIVE FLORA

Sennacherib's reliefs often depict native flora for a given city. In this case, figs, pomegranates and grapes are pictured. To this day, these three fruit trees are the most common in the land of Israel. It is also notable that these fruit trees remain standing. On many other reliefs of *conquered* cities, the vegetation is cut down. Perhaps these trees are indicative of Jerusalem's King's Garden, located in the southern region of the city (2 Kings 25:4).

PICTURE
FROM PAGE 17

phase during the time of Hezekiah when the city came under Judahite domination (for more information, see sidebar below). It was at this time that the Judahite-style upper battlements may have been placed on top of the defensive towers.

Put together, in all of the Assyrian wall reliefs, there are only three cities with multi-corbeled battlements atop their defensive towers. One of them is definitely Judahite Lachish. The other is all but certainly Judahite Gath. The last is the scene on Slab 28 of the throne room, which Compton views as Jerusalem.

Compton also drew attention to the lone figure of a man holding a flag (or "standard") atop the tallest tower of the city on Slab 28. He is the only human figure in the city. Studying this figure, one recalls Sennacherib's boast on the Taylor Prism, where he describes: "Hezekiah ... I shut up in Jerusalem like a caged bird."

To Compton, the fact that this individual is holding a flag or standard indicates his royal status. Normally, Assyrian reliefs depict the enemy on city walls brandishing weapons or throwing stones. But in this case, he's holding up a standard, which Assyrian texts closely associate with kings. In fact, Slab 28 is the only instance on Assyrian reliefs of a figure holding up a standard atop an enemy's city wall.

As Compton related, there are all kinds of standards in Assyrian reliefs. Some take the shape of a globe or other unusual shapes. But on Slab 28, the standard is in the shape of a square cloth.

In the Bible, the Hebrew word *nes* is used to describe the standard (banner or flag) or a sail of a ship (see Isaiah 13:2; 33:23). In his paper, Compton related this to a passage in Ezekiel 27:7, where the *nes,* or sail, on a Phoenician ship can be viewed as a "square of cloth hung from a horizontal crossmember centered atop a vertical mast, much like the standard on Slab 28."

As Compton summarized in our interview, "This is the only instance of somebody holding a standard, which I think means it is the king!" This would match perfectly with the description of Hezekiah in the annals and is another indication that Slab 28 is a scene of Jerusalem.

Bringing Jerusalem to Life

In his paper, Compton then works to establish the vantage point from where the city image was created. Through a lengthy comparison with the archaeology and geography of Jerusalem, he posited the image was drawn from north of the city. He then followed up that discussion by addressing some potential challenges to his designation of Slab 28 being Jerusalem, such as the question of direction in the throne room and the idea of a continuous narrative. These are dispatched with ease, citing similar examples of the same phenomena in other Assyrian reliefs (I encourage you to read the paper itself on this).

Congratulations to Stephen Compton for his formidable research and lucid explanation of the entire eastern wall of King Sennacherib's throne room. While it can be difficult to reach academic consensus on almost any subject these days, Compton's well-reasoned case for understanding the progression from Ushu to Eltekeh to Jerusalem in Sennacherib's "palace without equal" will be hard to overturn.

For us Jerusalem-philes, we are grateful to have another crucial resource to gain insight into Judean royal architecture and the layout of Jerusalem from the time of Judah's biblical kings. No doubt the debate will now begin, perhaps not over the actual designation of Slab 28 being Jerusalem but over the particulars of the scene itself. Surely, there is much more that can be learned about Jerusalem from this image.

I suspect that just as researchers have inspected every element of the Madaba map of Jerusalem from the Byzantine Period for clues of the city's layout, scholars will now pore over this image time and again. We finally have an image of royal Jerusalem from 1,000 years earlier for our reference material.

And from a perhaps more important standpoint, it is truly amazing how much archaeological and textual information is now available, highlighting this episode in biblical history.

Certainly, there is a major point of divergence between Sennacherib's annals and the biblical text found in Isaiah, Kings and Chronicles—most notably, the destruction of Sennacherib's army on the eve of its attack on Hezekiah's Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:36-37; 2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chronicles 32:21). Sennacherib fails to mention such a miraculous defeat of his own army. But then again, what Assyrian king (or almost any for that matter) is known for recording his failures on his palace walls or annals? This is certainly not something that would be recorded in his magnificent throne room.

This image—and the lack of destruction layer at Jerusalem—paint a clear picture and bring the Bible to life. "Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast a mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come unto this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for Mine own sake, and for My servant David's sake'" (2 Kings 19:32-34). ■

Did Isaiah Prophesy the Image of Hezekiah in Sennacherib's Throne Room?

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In sitting still and rest shall ye be saved, In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; And ye would not. But ye said: 'No, for we will flee upon horses'; Therefore shall ye flee; And: 'We will ride upon the swift'; Therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one, At the rebuke of five shall ye flee;

Till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain,
And as an ensign on a hill. —*Isaiah 30:15-17*

Isaiah was a long-lived prophet in Judah who served through the reigns of four kings from David's dynasty—the final being King Hezekiah. Chapters 36-39 of his book document the late eighth-century B.C.E. invasion of King Sennacherib of Assyria into the land of Judah.

Chapters 28-31 are delivered by Isaiah in the lead-up to the invasion—the period immediately following the fall of Samaria. These chapters have prophetic application to the coming of the Messiah, but they also have specific application for the time of Hezekiah, when Assyria would take almost all of Judah captive.

Chapter 30 begins as a warning to Judah, and perhaps to King Hezekiah himself, not to seek help in an alliance with Egypt against Sennacherib. Instead, Isaiah encourages Judah to rely on God for counsel and protection: "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, That take counsel, but not of Me; And that form projects, but not of My spirit, That they may add sin to sin; That walk to go down into Egypt, And have not asked at My mouth; To take refuge in the stronghold of Pharaoh, And to take shelter in the shadow of Egypt!" (verses 1-2).

Archaeological and historical evidence reveal that Hezekiah did choose to seek Egypt's help before seeking counsel of Isaiah (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1211*).

The result of this trust in Egypt instead of God was disastrous for Judah. Sennacherib's ferocious army moved swiftly into Judah, taking over 46 fenced cities and sending hundreds of thousands of people into slavery. His incursion resulted in the near total destruction of the nation and the almost complete subjugation of the Jews.

Only Jerusalem was left to conquer.

Isaiah then prophesies that the Assyrian onslaught would continue "Till you be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, And as an ensign on a hill." The Hebrew word for "ensign," *nes,* refers to the royal standard of Judah. After viewing the scene on Slab 28, one can't help but connect the image of a lone royal figure standing on the highest tower of Jerusalem's hill, bearing the *nes* of Judah, with this specific prophecy of Isaiah.

To this, we are compelled to ask a big question: Did Isaiah prophesy the exact scene that would play out in Jerusalem—one that Sennacherib would emblazon on the walls of his royal palace?

A few verses prior, Isaiah wrote, "Now go, write it before them on a tablet, And inscribe it in a book, That it may be for the time to come, For ever and ever" (verse 8). Here, in the same chapter, God tells the prophet to first inscribe these events on a tablet. This way the words can be a witness to the people of Isaiah's day when the events would take place a few years later; thus confirming Isaiah's place as a prophet of God and also the power of God to bring these events about. But the prophet was also to inscribe it in a book, so that it would be understood "for the time to come"; so that people far in the future would be able to read this same text.

Now, 2,700 years after the prophecy was given and the Jerusalem scene on Slab 28 identified, we too can understand the surety of the words of the prophet.

BRENT NAGTEGAAL

Overview of olive oil industrial zone, city wall and three-way entry gate at Tel Miqne

Uncovering the Bible's Buried Cities: EKRON

From the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age, this city has a long history that matches the meaning of its name.

BY MICAH VAN HALTEREN

Few sites have a more diverse archaeological repertoire than Ekron. Located on the Judean frontier, this Philistine city was subject to many cultural influences that shaped its history and people. Ekron was one of the five major Philistine capital cities often referred to as the Pentapolis.

Ekron's story is fascinating. In the Iron Age, it was the final of three Philistine cities that held the ark of the covenant. In the late eighth century B.C.E., Ekron was controlled by Judean King Hezekiah, and then later dominated the trade of olive oil under the Assyrian Empire. Ekron's significant archaeological remains show that the Philistines were a well-known people for much longer than initially believed and that culturally they had a talent for adapting to the people around them.

Ekron, or what is Tel Miqne today, is about 35 kilometers (22 miles) southwest of Jerusalem, near Kibbutz Revadim, in the Judean lowlands. It was excavated over 14 seasons between 1981 and 1996 by archaeologists Prof. Seymour Gitin of the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and the late Prof. Trude Dothan of Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Since 1996, the primary focus has been on publishing the many remarkable finds from this fascinating site.

Let's dig in.

Early Ekron—Migration of the Philistines

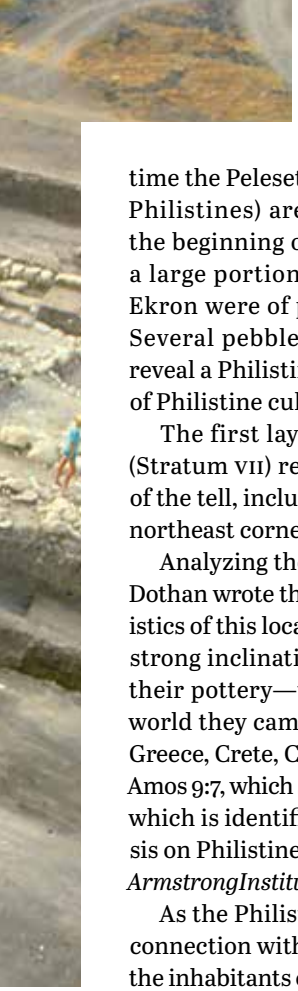
The biblical text records that during Israel's conquest of the Promised Land "Ekron, with its towns and its villages" was allotted to the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:12, 45) but later transferred to Dan (Joshua 19:40, 43).

In addition to the many later Iron Age discoveries, excavations revealed evidence of occupation from the Chalcolithic to Late Bronze Age, which was earlier than the excavators expected. Some of the earliest strata contain Canaanite remains with imported Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery, revealing far-reaching international trade before the 12th century B.C.E. (the Late Bronze Age). No fortifications surrounded the city at this time.

Then a stark change occurs: In the next layer, the pottery shifts from the imported pottery of the Late Bronze Age to locally produced Mycenaean pottery of Iron Age I. Local production of the pottery is evidenced by a number of kilns found in the city's southern industrial region.

This change marked the beginning of a foreign migration into the southern coastal region of the Levant at the start of the 12th century B.C.E. This change, and the destruction associated with the previous layer, reveal the main influx of the Philistines into the region. The transition takes place around the same

FROM SY GITIN. PHOTO TAKEN BY ILAN STULMAN, AUGUST 1986



time the Peleset Sea People (often associated with the Philistines) are first mentioned by Ramesses III in the beginning of the 12th century B.C.E. Incidentally, a large portion of the animal bones found at Iron I Ekron were of pigs—common to all Philistine sites. Several pebbled hearths in the domestic area also reveal a Philistine presence, as this is a typical feature of Philistine culture.

The first layer of the clear Philistine occupation (Stratum VII) reveals that they inhabited all 50 acres of the tell, including the upper 10-acre acropolis at the northeast corner of the mound.

Analyzing the pottery finds from the site, Professor Dothan wrote that "the distinctly Mycenaean characteristics of this locally made pottery show the Sea People's strong inclination to re-create in Canaan—at least in their pottery—the home environment of the Aegean world they came from." The Aegean includes parts of Greece, Crete, Cyprus, Syria and Turkey. This parallels Amos 9:7, which says the Philistines came from "Caphtor," which is identified with the island of Crete; DNA analysis on Philistine skeletons has also confirmed this (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/174*).

As the Philistines migrated, they did not lose their connection with their homeland. The Aegean origin of the inhabitants of Ekron is corroborated by many of the finds around Tel Miqne.

David's Destruction?

Following the period of the judges, Ekron and the other Philistine cities were subdued by the Israelites in the battle that resulted in the death of Goliath (1 Samuel 7:14). Although Israel successfully defeated the Philistines, the archaeological record suggests Israel didn't destroy or maintain a presence in the city. 1 Samuel 17 records that the Philistines came up against Israel during the reign of King Saul (late 11th century B.C.E.) but were defeated and driven back to Ekron and Shaaraim.

Like some of its neighboring cities, archaeological evidence shows that Ekron was completely destroyed between 1000 and 975 B.C.E., either by Pharaoh Siamun of Egypt or the Israelites under King David. Professor Gitin believes we can confidently identify Ekron's destroyer: "No doubt the decline in the fortunes of Ekron was related to the ascendancy of David and his son Solomon and to the fact that Israel was now able to dominate the Philistines."

After this destruction, Ekron became greatly diminished in size and power. It shrunk from a 50-acre city to a 10-acre acropolis at the northeastern corner. This event marked the end of the Iron I city. It remained a small, relatively inconsequential settlement for the next 270 years.

Because the monochrome and bichrome Philistine wares and hearths disappear in the post-1000 B.C.E. layers of strata III-II, scholars believed this was evidence that the Philistine occupation of the southern coast ended. Many believed, at this point, the Philistines became lost to history. Professor Gitin disagrees.

In "Excavating Ekron," Gitin wrote, "As the archaeological evidence piled up … *it became clear that the Philistines continued to exist, although they had adopted features of other cultures"* (emphasis added throughout). This is just another example of a pattern that Professor Gitin identified. The Philistine inhabitants of Ekron had a talent for what he calls acculturation and continuation: They adopted the characteristics of their subjugators.

"Between about 1000 B.C.E. and the late seventh century B.C.E., the Philistines survived and sometimes thrived, absorbing cultural characteristics of their neighbors—the *Israelites, the Phoenicians and, finally, the Assyrians,"* he wrote.

After roughly 270 years of relative obscurity, the city of Ekron flourished again under the Assyrians.

Ekron, Assyria and Hezekiah

To understand Ekron in the seventh century B.C.E., it is important to consider it in the context of Assyria. Several societies or cultures collide in Ekron under the Assyrian Empire.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire started to invade the land of Israel in the latter half of the eighth century B.C.E. It conquered Samaria between 721 and 718 B.C.E. before setting its sights on Judah.

It appears Ekron was first sieged in 721 B.C.E. by Sargon II, as shown on his wall reliefs at Khorsabad. A wall relief mentions Ekron by its Assyrian name, *Amqarrûna,* and specifically speaks of the *Palaštu* (Philistines) who lived there. The fact that the Assyrians mention the Philistines and their cities by name "indicates that the Philistines were still recognized as a distinct group with their own land and cities as late as the seventh century," wrote Gitin.

Toward the end of the eighth century B.C.E., Ekron was sieged by another Assyrian king, Sennacherib. This too was documented. On his prism inscriptions, Sennacherib described the story of Padi, the Assyrian-installed ruler of Ekron who was put "into fetters of iron and given over to Hezekiah, the Jew" by the "officials, nobles and people of Ekron" when King Hezekiah conquered the city (2 Kings 18:8). Sennacherib then marched against Ekron on his campaign into Judah. "I drew near to Ekron and slew the governors and nobles who had rebelled," Sennacherib recorded.

Archaeology attests to this recorded history. A small occupation layer dated to around 700 B.C.E. shows that

the long-abandoned lower city was used for a short period before the Assyrian hegemony associated with the final stratum. This is interesting, as it lines up with Hezekiah's occupation of Ekron described by the Assyrians.

More evidence of this was found in three storage jars in the upper acropolis that contained *lmlk* inscriptions, which means "belonging to the king." Such inscriptions are typical of the late eighth-century reign of Hezekiah. (For more information, visit *ArmstrongInstitute.org/103*.) The presence of these jars provide additional proof that Hezekiah did, in fact, have some measure of control over Ekron.

Olive Oil Production

Assyria's rule of Ekron resulted in somewhat of a renaissance, marked by an increase in trade, size and prosperity. At the beginning of the seventh century, Ekron was rebuilt with new fortifications, including a massive three-way entry gate, and developed into a large, industrial, olive oil production center. According to Gitin, the city became "the largest olive-oil production center that we know of from antiquity." More than 100 olive oil installations were found at Ekron, more than at any other site in Israel.

Olive oil production happened in lever-and-weight presses by a three-step process of crushing, pressing and separation. The buildings where these were found were divided into a press and a storage room. These installations were discovered alongside the southern wall in the domestic area, as well as in the temple complex at the center of the tell. This shows that oil was produced throughout the site.

The Bible describes olive trees being present in large numbers in the lowland area surrounding Ekron: "And over the *olive-trees* and the sycomore-trees that were in the *Lowland* [Shephelah] was Baal-hanan the Gederite; and over the cellars of *oil* was Joash" (1 Chronicles 27:28).

As the archaeologists note, the sheer amount of oil produced (probably over 230 tons annually) by the Philistines at Ekron suggests it was exported. This surplus was most likely traded through the Assyrian-controlled Phoenician markets—the Phoenicians themselves being supreme maritime traders.

According to Prof. David Eitam, however, Ekron's oil factories would operate for only about six months in the year. What did the Ekronites do during the off season? This is where the other installations consisting of "vats and shallow basins" at Tel Miqne come into play.

Eitam pointed out that these could have been used for pressing wool and linen. Alongside the installations, they found a large amount of loom weights. Thus, "based on this data and in light of the large scale of the oil industry," Eitam wrote, "we suggest that an extensive textile manufacture took place in the city in between the olive harvest seasons."

Ekron it seems was a dual-use city, producing and exporting olive oil for half of the year and textiles the other half.

The Multicultural Temple

Immediately after the Assyrians conquered Ekron, making it a vassal city-state, the centerpiece of the site was constructed: Temple Complex 650.

The remains of this massive temple structure, which is 57 meters by 38 meters (187 feet by 124 feet), lie at the center of Ekron, in what is termed the "elite zone." This is where Professor Gitin's team made a special discovery: the majestic Royal Dedicatory Inscription. According to Professor Gitin, the inscription is "the most important object" found at the site and "one of the most significant finds excavated in Israel in the 20th century."

This large limestone block, weighing 150 kilograms (330 pounds), contains 5 lines of 72 letters. The inscription reads: "The temple which he built, *'kys* (Achish) son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron, for *Ptgyh* his lady. May she bless him, and protect him and prolong his days, and bless his land."

This inscription was a remarkable and unique find because it "allows us to declare with certainty that Tel Miqne is actually biblical Ekron," Gitin said. Among other things, it forms "the basis for tracing the continuity of Philistine occupation at Ekron and the process of acculturation."

For example, several of the names referenced on the stone tie the Philistines to their Aegean origins. The first name, *Achish,* has been taken to mean *Aegean,* or "the Greek," and is also the name of one of the earlier kings of Gath, Ekron's neighboring city (1 Samuel 21:11). This same king is also named in the prism of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, as "Ikausu, king of Ekron." The name is distinctly not of Semitic origin. Then there is the goddess to whom this temple and inscription were dedicated. Her name, *Ptgyh,* is connected to Pytho at Delphi—the shrine of the goddess Gaia of the Mycenaeans.

The language used at the temple as well as its construction reveal a strong connection to the Phoenicians, which, as suggested by Professor Gitin, most likely resulted from the strong commercial position of Ekron as an olive oil producer and exporter and the maritime prominence of the Phoenicians.

Olive oil installation—composed of a crushing basin flanked by two presses. Opposite each press are perforated stone weights.

Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription

One of the side rooms of the temple structure contained another oil press installation along with 253 storage jars. One storage jar was inscribed with *lb'l wlpdy,* meaning "for Baal and for Padi." This inscription confirms the worship of Baal at Ekron. The form of the inscription represents the common Assyrian usage of "for god and king," displaying the Assyrian influence at Ekron.

Several four-horned altars were located around the site, including at the temple. This type of altar was common in the neighboring Judean religion.

In Building 350, the archaeologists found three bronze wheels, each having eight spokes, along with the corner of a stand. These discoveries were part of a wheeled stand "reminiscent of the biblical description of the *mechonot,* the laver stands made for Solomon's temple in Jerusalem by Hiram king of Tyre," wrote Professor Dothan. 1 Kings 7:30 describes Solomon's lavers: "And every base had four brazen wheels, and axles of brass; and the four feet thereof had undersetters; beneath the laver were the undersetters molten, with wreaths at the side of each."

Thus, especially in the seventh century, we find Ekron in the middle of a diverse and connected world, somewhat maintaining its historic connection to the Aegean while still adapting (perhaps out of necessity) to other cultures. We see Baal and Asherah worship at the temple, examples of tithing and Judean-type altars and offerings, references to the Aegean written in Phoenician style on the Royal Dedicatory Inscription, and a temple with Assyrian and Phoenician features—these are all proof of maximum acculturation.

Ekron Uprooted

Assyrian rule of Ekron came to an end around 630 B.C.E. and transitioned to a short period of Egyptian control, dividing Strata IB and IC. This brief Egyptian period saw a slight decrease in olive oil production based on some of the installations at the site falling out of use.

Ekron was issued its final destruction by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B.C.E. In the Aramaic Saqqarah Papyrus, also known as the Adon Letters, Adon—possibly king of Ekron at the time—wrote to the Egyptian pharaoh for support against the Babylonian invasion—a request that history proves was left unanswered. According to Professor Gitin, this great destruction was proved by 3 feet of debris at the site covering the previous layer.

The name *Ekron,* which according to *Strong's Concordance* means "emigration" or "torn up by the roots," is a fitting description of the city that demonstrates the migration of the Philistine Sea People from the Aegean and their long-term settlement in the southern coast of the Levant.

About the end of this settlement, Zephaniah prophesied against the city, saying that "Ekron shall be rooted up" once more (Zephaniah 2:4). Only this time, the inhabitants of Ekron were permanently taken up by their roots and finally became lost to history—all "due to the long-term process of acculturation influenced by Ekron's contacts with Assyria in particular, as well as the Israelites and Phoenicians, a process that left them without a sufficiently strong core culture to sustain them in captivity," wrote Gitin.

Thus ended the story of the Philistine people at Ekron.

After the Philistines had gone into Babylonian captivity, the site was briefly settled at the start of the next century, but it quickly fell out of use until the Roman Period. Today, Kibbutz Revadim near Ekron has capitalized on its Philistine history. The story of this ancient people of Ekron is displayed in a reconstructed Philistine street and at the Ekron Museum of the History of Philistine Culture. ■

FROM SY GITIN. PHOTO TAKEN BY I. AN. STULMAN, AUGUST 1984. DREN ROZENVIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Abraham Makes the Enemies Flee Who Hold His Nephew, Antonio Tempesta (1613)

Genesis 14: Uncovering THE BIBLE'S WORLD WAR I

Eastern axis versus western entente: the striking evidence for the Bible's first world war

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

The battle of Megiddo, fought between Pharaoh Thutmose III and Canaanite city-states circa 1482 B.C.E., is often described as the "first battle in history." This isn't true, of course. This is simply the earliest battle for which details are widely accepted as reliable by scholars.

Yet there is another account of a battle centuries earlier—a battle for which we have comparatively detailed information, including the identities of multiple nations and the names of 13 different leaders. It is a battle for which we have detailed campaign maps, including routes of attack, escape and topographical challenges; particulars about guerrilla tactics and intervention; conflict resolution and distribution of spoils. There is even a description of familial relations and household organization. All of this information is contained in 340 words of ancient Semitic text—the translation of which equates to around 600 words in English. (By way of comparison, this text is nearly seven times the length of that preserved on the Tel Dan Stele and around a third longer than that of the Mesha Stele.)

For many scholars, there's just one "problem" with this account: It is found in the *Bible.* Not only that, but in the most historically "suspect" book of them all—*Genesis.*

Bible scholar Mary Jane Chaignot summarized this skepticism in the account contained in Genesis 14 as "almost monotonous in its detail of names and places, *none of which can be verified by outside biblical sources.* That makes scholars nervous. ... [I]t raises many unnerving questions about the historicity of the whole chapter. Like, maybe it really isn't true, after all" ("Genesis 14: Abraham and the Four Kings"; emphasis added throughout).

While some historical and archaeological particulars are lacking, this assessment could not be further from the truth. There *is* in fact a strong body of evidence, not only for the general geopolitical situation at the time of this conflict but also the identity of several of the antagonists themselves.

In this article, we'll review the "real" first world war—the epic "Battle of Nations" recorded in Genesis 14—and the extraordinary evidence for it.

Overview

The Genesis 14 account takes place within the lifetime of Abram, during the early part of his sojourn in Canaan. The chapter begins by describing a coalition of four powerful polities, led by the Elamite king Chedorlaomer. This king advances against a rebel alliance of five city-states located in the Jordan Valley-Dead Sea region.

The Bible describes the four-king eastern axis as handily defeating the five-king Transjordanian bloc and carving for themselves an even wider path of destruction throughout the Southern Levant. Among the spoils of war gleaned from the lavish city of Sodom was Abram's nephew Lot, including his family and possessions.

When Abram heard of Lot's capture, Genesis 14:14 says that he rallied "his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan," which was called Laish during Abram's time (Judges 18:29). From there, Abram's forces attacked the invaders in guerrilla fashion by night, routing the armies on their return journey up into Syria, and ultimately forcing the release of the captured booty and slaves. "And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people" (Genesis 14:16). The chapter concludes with a description of Abram's triumphant return and his exchanges in the "King's Vale" with Melchizedek (king-priest of Salem) and Bera (king of Sodom).

Situating the Conflict

In investigating the historicity of the account, we must first establish the time frame of these biblical patriarchs. This can often be the most controversial issue, but we shall see, based on the convergence of evidence, where the best fit lies.

In previous articles, we have dated the biblical patriarchs to the first half of the second millennium B.C.E., and the patriarch Abraham to the 20th to 18th century B.C.E. This dating is based on what is often referred to as an "early Exodus" and "short sojourn" model (see our articles at *ArmstrongInstitute.org/350* and */845*). Without wading into this debate here, others may derive the same general chronological conclusions from the relatively popular "late Exodus" and "long sojourn" model.

Chronologically, this befits the archaeological evidence for what is known as the Middle Bronze II period (circa 2000–1550 B.C.E.). For example, many of the cities mentioned in the Abrahamic narratives are known archaeologically to have come into existence during the early-to-middle part of this Middle Bronze II period (cities such as Jerusalem, Hebron, Dan/Laish, Shechem and Damascus).

Though others following differing chronological schemes have attempted alternative proposals (particularly proponents of an early Exodus-long sojourn model, thus putting events in the late *third* millennium B.C.E.), we will see that it is squarely within this Middle Bronze II period—around the 19th to 18th century B.C.E.—that we see a confluence of the full weight of historical data.

Now, let's take a look at the key antagonist: the Elamites.

Elam-Led Juggernaut

"And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, that they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela …" (Genesis 14:1-2). It is not immediately clear from these verses who led the coalition. One might assume it is the first-listed king, Amraphel. Actually, the names of the rulers (on both sides) are listed in alphabetical order in the Hebrew language. It is not until verses 4-5 that the leader of this axis is revealed: "Twelve years they [the Jordan Valley kings] served *Chedorlaomer,* and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year came *Chedorlaomer* and the kings that were with him …."

Chedorlaomer, king of Elam—a distant polity located on the eastern shores of the Persian Gulf in modern-day southern Iran—was clearly the key consolidating player in this account. While the other names are each listed twice, Chedorlaomer's is mentioned five times, and the second, non-alphabetical listing of names (verse 9) leads with Chedorlaomer. In two instances in this chapter, the three other kings are described as being "with him."

This scene in which a dominant Elam forms an axis with nearby powers is precisely recorded in history. Historians refer to it as the "Elamite Conquest" period.

Archaeological evidence shows that around 2000 B.C.E. Elam sacked Ur and effectively ended the dominance of the Sumerian kingdom. Elam was catapulted to new heights of power, primarily during the rich Sukkalmah ("Grand Vizier") dynasty (beginning circa 1900 B.C.E.). Elam's diplomatic, commercial and military interests at this time extended as far east as India and as far west as the Levant. Goods from both ends of the spectrum have been discovered at Elam's capital, Susa, aptly illustrating Genesis 14:4—the flow of Levantine goods to the other side of the Persian Gulf.

"Elam became one of the *largest and most powerful* of the western Asian kingdoms with extensive diplomatic, commercial and military interests both in Mesopotamia and Syria," writes historian Trevor Bryce. "Its territories extended north to the Caspian Sea, south to the Persian Gulf, eastwards to the desert regions of Kavir and Lut, and westwards into Mesopotamia" (*The Routledge Handbook of the Peoples and Places of Ancient Western Asia*).

Late Egyptologist Prof. Kenneth Kitchen summarized the Elamite-centric geopolitical reality behind Genesis 14 in his 2006 magnum opus *On the Reliability of the Old Testament:* "[I]t is *only* in this particular period (2000–1700 B.C.E.) that the eastern realm of Elam intervened extensively in the politics of Mesopotamia—with its armies—and sent its envoys far west into Syria to Qatna. *Never again did Elam follow such wide-reaching policies.* So in terms of geopolitics, the eastern alliance in Genesis 14 *must* be treated seriously as an archaic memory preserved in the existing book of Genesis." He adds that "from circa 2000 to 1750 (1650 at the extreme), we have the one and only period during which extensive power alliances were common in Mesopotamia and with its neighbors. Alliances of four or five kings were commonplace and modest then."

Under this early second-millennium B.C.E. Elamite umbrella, let's consider the names of the kings in question—starting with the ruler of Elam.

Chedorlaomer, King of Elam

Although the name *Chedorlaomer* is not (yet) known outside of the biblical account, it does bear the hallmark of an authentic Elamite ruler. The first part of the name, *Chedor-* (כדר-, the Hebrew of which might be more closely transliterated as *Kdur-*) corresponds to the well-known Elamite name-element *Kudur-*. This is a name-element born by several Elamite rulers, including of the Sukkalmah period.

The second part of the name, *-laomer,* is a perfect match with *Lagamar*—an underworld deity, whose name means "merciless." The Hebrew (לעמר-) is an even closer match to this name than the English reveals, bearing within it a Semitic guttural consonant sometimes transliterated as a *g,* thus alternatively rendering it *-lagomer.* The third-century B.C.E. Septuagint Greek translation of Chedorlaomer's name renders it: Χοδολλογομορ (*Khodollogomor*).

Therefore, Chedorlaomer is a perfect representation of the name *Kudur-Lagamar*—a strikingly apt name for an Elamite ruler, meaning "Servant of Lagamar."

As far as etymology goes, we have the mark of authenticity. But what about the lack of a known Elamite ruler by this name? To Assyriologist Dr. Stephanie Dalley, this lack is "not surprising, since there were several concurrent Elamite leaders in that period," who "are often referred to by their title, 'grand vizier,' rather than by name" (*The City of Babylon: A History, c. 2000 B.C.–A.D. 116,* 2021).

What, then, of the other named rulers? Can they be positively identified?

Arioch, King of Ellasar

The second-listed ruler in Genesis 14:1 is Arioch, king of Ellasar. There is debate regarding this king and his territory. Nevertheless, there *is* an identically named individual ruling over a similarly named polity that I believe to be the correct fit—an identification that, up until more recent decades, was taken for granted: *Eriaku, king of Larsa.*

Rim-Sin I foundation figurine

Elam's subjugation of Ur resulted in more than just the establishment of Elam as a regional superpower; it also allowed the development of the "Isin-Larsa" kingdom. This small kingdom initially began in the city of Isin but was later overthrown and established in the city of Larsa. The Larsa state, located in lower Mesopotamia (modern-day southeastern Iraq), existed for only 150 years, primarily during the 19th century B.C.E. The final ruler of the Larsa kingdom before its collapse was Rim-Sin I.

Rim-Sin was his Akkadian name. His Sumerian name has long been identified as *Eriaku.* Thus in name, period and place, Eriaku of Larsa would be a striking match for Arioch of Ellasar. So striking, in fact, that in early scholarship it was common to equate Rim-Sin I with the biblical Arioch. Examples include Prof. Ira Maurice Price's 1904 tome *Some Literary Remains of Rim Sin (Arioch), King of Larsa* and Assyriologist Dr. William Muss-Arnolt's assessment of this king "whom science is wont to identify

Genesis 14 Belligerents

with the Arioch (Eri-Aku), king of Ellasar, mentioned in Genesis chapter 14" ("Recent Archaeological Documents," 1906).

Tidal, King of Goiim

What of Tidal, king of Goiim? *Goiim* is a Hebrew word simply meaning "nations" or "peoples" (as in many English translations). This individual has long been posited as Hittite, or "proto-Hittite," due to the linguistic parallel of his name with that of several later Hittite rulers, beginning with the 15th-century B.C.E. Tudhaliya I.

Actually, Tudhaliya I is not the first Anatolian ruler to bear this name. *Peake's Commentary* notes, "Certain is the name of Tidal (Hebrew, *Tidh'al*), which appears in Ugarit as *tdghl,* [corresponding to the] Hittite *Tudkhaliya* and *Tudkhul'a* in the Spartoli texts .... This name is common in the Cappadocian texts of the 19th century B.C.E. and appears frequently among the names of Hittite kings and nobles in later centuries."

Dalley adds in her 2021 publication: "New evidence for identifying Tidal, long recognized as an abbreviation for the Hittite royal name *Tudhaliya,* is found on a clay tablet from the pre-Hittite Assyrian merchant colony at Kanesh. He was a 'chief cupbearer,' which is a title for a military leader. At that time, Kanesh was conquered by Pithana, king of the unidentified city Kuššara, home to the ancestors of the earliest Hittite kings" (op cit).

Even the rather more obscure territorial title for this biblical Tidal/Tudhaliya is appropriate. The general reference to "peoples," or "nations," is befitting of the "fractured nature of political power in Anatolia in the 19th and 18th centuries B.C.E., according to archives of Assyrian merchants in Cappadocia" (Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History," 1995). Kitchen further noted that the name Tidal/Tudhaliya "is a fair equivalent of the 'paramount chiefs,' *ruba'um rabium,* known in Anatolia in the 20th–19th centuries, or as chief of warrior groups" (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament*).

We come now to the final ruler of our four-nation axis—the one mentioned first in Genesis 14:1, but whom I have intentionally reserved for last. For it is this individual, I believe, who brings it all together—the key that unlocks the historical picture behind the Genesis 14 account—a king whose identity, in the words of Professor Price, has been "quite definitely determined."

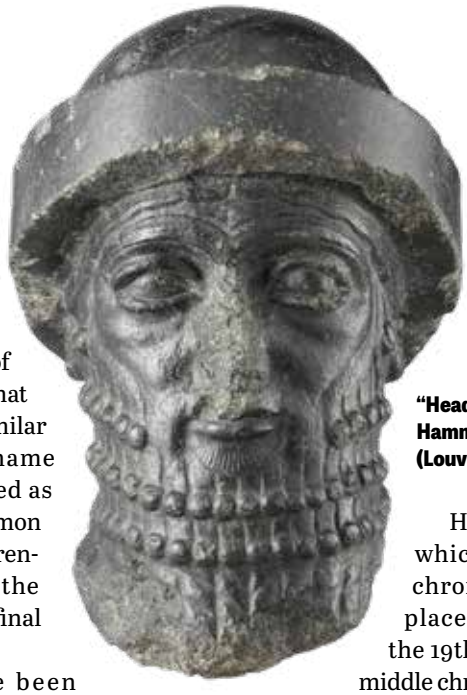
Amraphel, King of Shinar

The 1906 *Jewish Encyclopedia* entry for "Amraphel" states: "The identity of the name has long been a subject of controversy among Assyriologists .... [Eberhard] Schrader was the first to suggest that Amraphel was *Hammurabi, king of Babylon,* the sixth king in the first dynasty of Babylon. *This is now the prevailing view among both Assyriologists and Old Testament scholars."* Muss-Arnolt refers to him outright as "Hammurabi, the Amraphel of the Old Testament" (op cit).

Suffice it to say, this is not the case in modern scholarship—academics are much more reticent to directly equivocate historical individuals with their

biblical counterparts. Still, the identification of Hammurabi as Amraphel is relatively common and not without reason.

Shinar is well known as cognate with Sumer—the ancient name for Babylon, located northwest of Larsa. And as for the name of this king—despite looking somewhat more different in English, it is a similar approximation to the Hebrew name אמרפל, more closely transliterated as *'Amrapil.* Note further that the common spelling *Hammurabi* is alternately rendered *Ammurapi*—consonantly, the names are a match, except for the final Hebrew consonant "l."



"Head of Hammurabi" (Louvre)

Various explanations have been offered for the presence of this final consonant. I believe the following from Assyriologist Marc Van De Mieroop may provide the best answer to this question (though he is not here referring to the subject of Amraphel's identity): "Hammurabi ... was praised in ways that were unusual for kings of his dynasty. Perhaps the highest esteem awarded him was his inclusion among the gods during his lifetime. He is called *the god Hammurabi,* the good shepherd, in one song .... At the same time people named their children after Hammurabi. The name *Hammurabi-ili,* meaning 'Hammurabi is my god,' appeared, something unparalleled in his dynasty. The references to Hammurabi as a god were probably inspired by a southern tradition, where regularly kings were deified during their lifetime" (*King Hammurabi of Babylon: A Biography*).

The above-mentioned song comes from "the former kingdom of Larsa where the scribes still had the habit to write the name of the king with the divine determinative," writes Rients de Boer. "Hammurabi himself declares in a royal inscription that he put *his name in the mouths of the people so that they would proclaim it daily 'as that of a god'"* ("'Hammurabi-Is-My-God!': Basilophoric Personal Names and Royal Ideology During the Old Babylonian Period").

The name Amraph*el,* then—i.e. Hammurabi-*il* or Ammurapi-*il*—may therefore be reflective of the variant "deified" name of this ruler.

The Majesty of Hammurabi

Of all the early kings of Babylon, Hammurabi is arguably the most well-known and consequential. The primary copy of his legal text, the "Code of Hammurabi," is housed at the Louvre; a replica of it is housed at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. Hammurabi's portrait adorns the U.S. Capitol building's House Chamber, right next to that of Moses—one of 23 marble reliefs of prominent law-administrators in history. Hammurabi is known for leading Babylon out of relative obscurity as a minor kingdom to significant heights of power.

He is also the central figure around which early chronology moves. High chronology, which I generally prefer, places Hammurabi's 42-year reign in the 19th century B.C.E. The more popular middle chronology places his reign in the early 18th century B.C.E. For those keeping track, high chronology is a better fit with the Masoretic chronology of the Hebrew Bible (namely, with respect to the 480 years between the Exodus and building of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6:1); alternatively, the middle chronology is a closer fit to the Septuagint variant (which gives 440 years in 1 Kings 6:1—see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1133* for more detail).

Without bogging down into different schemes, we have different plausible chronological scenarios (i.e. 19th or 18th century B.C.E.) but the same triangulation of three out of our four antagonist kings:

- Amraphel of Shinar as Hammurabi of Sumer/Babylon
- Arioch of Ellasar as Eriaku/Rim-Sin I of Larsa (contemporary with the first half of Hammurabi's reign)
- Tidal of Goiim/Peoples as Tudhaliya of Kanesh (also contemporary with Hammurabi)

This leaves Chedorlaomer (Kudur-Lagamar) of Elam as the sole unidentified exception; nevertheless, again, this name-type and polity fits neatly within the same time period, during Elam's Sukkalmah dynasty.

What of the Defendants?

Can anything be said for the other side—Bera of Sodom, Birsha of Gomorrah, Shinab of Admah, Shemeber of Zeboiim and the king of Bela?

Not really. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is far less material evidence for the Jordan Valley-Dead Sea region rulers during the second millennium B.C.E. Archaeologically, we *do* know of the existence of multiple Jordan Valley cities on the scene during this time; however, we know almost nothing about *any* of these

rulers. To this end, it is telling that even the biblical account itself, while naming each of the kings several times in the account, never identifies the king of Bela by name.

Additionally, when it comes to the names of the leaders of Sodom and Gomorrah—Bera and Birsha—these names seem to exhibit wordplay, something common in the Bible for unsavory characters. Prof. Ronald Hendel wrote: "The personal names of King Bera (בֶּרַע; *bera*) of Sodom and King Birsha (בִּרְשַׁע; *birsha*) of Gomorrah are symbolic—they mean 'with evil' (בְּרַע; *bera*) and 'with wickedness' (בְּרֶשַׁע; *beresha*), revealing their bad moral character" ("Abraham Defeats Chedorlaomer, the Proto-Persian King").

It is impossible to know whether these names are entirely symbolic or a wordplay on a similar-sounding original name, something apparent with respect to several other biblical figures, such as Nimrod, Cushan-rishathaim, Ishbosheth, Mephibosheth and Jerubbesheth (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/296, /851* and */1276*).

The less-than-flattering naming of these kings is unsurprising, given the following account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19). As an aside, in our broader chronological scheme, this fits well with the destruction of Tell el-Hammam—a key candidate for Sodom, whose demise is dated by the excavators (on a low chronological system) to somewhere between the 18th and 17th centuries B.C.E. (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1178*).

Reconstructing the Historical Landscape

Setting the Jordan Valley kings aside and focusing strictly on the antagonists, and in light of the above information, I would concur with Dalley that the Genesis 14 account best "links with foreign rulers early in the reign of Hammurabi." This is based on Arioch/Eriaku's reign overlapping the first part of Hammurabi's reign and the fact that Amraphel/Hammurabi is a junior partner in the Genesis 14 account (led by Elam).

The early years of Hammurabi's reign have been described as internally "peaceful" and concentrated on the development of his relatively minor state during a time of Elamite dominance. "Elam was strong and rich, however, and it seems to have been respected and feared by all," writes Van De Mieroop. "The ruler could intervene in local Babylonian matters, impose his wishes and adjudicate disagreements … the kings [of lower Mesopotamia] seem to have acknowledged the *Sukkalmah* as a very important ruler whose authority superseded their own. When they quarreled, they hoped for the latter's support to enforce their claims," even going so far as to address the Elamite ruler as "father" (op cit).

Rather strikingly, in light of the Genesis 14 account, the Elamite ruler also has the armies of Babylon and Larsa at his beck and call. One order from the Elamite king written to Hammurabi reads: "I have decided to start a campaign …. Mobilize your elite troops." To which Hammurabi replies: "As you have written to me, my army is ready and available for your attack. The moment you attack, my army will leave to assist you" (ARM XXVI/2 no. 362). Similar correspondence exists with Rim-Sin I, ruler of Larsa—these texts remarkably parallel the Genesis 14 account of the Elamite ruler's access to the neighboring armies of Shinar and Ellasar.

Some 25 years into Hammurabi's reign, however, a dramatically different picture to the former time of cooperation "suddenly" emerged. Elam turned on certain of the Mesopotamian city-states, with a plot to pit Rim-Sin's and Hammurabi's armies against one another. These kings, instead, united to defeat Elam, an

IS THIS ABRAM'S FATHER, TERAH?

ABRAM IS WELL-KNOWN FOR HIS MIGRATION from "Ur of the Chaldees" (Hebrew, "Ur-Kasdim") to Canaan. Less well-known is the fact that his father, Terah, initially led his family on this journey (Genesis 11:31), before stopping partway to settle in Haran (Syria). It seems evident that Terah's family had met with violence in Ur, which claimed the life of one of his sons (verse 28)—something expounded upon in Jewish tradition.

A candidate for this origin city of Ur-Kasdim is Urkeš, along Syria's northeastern border with Turkey. A number of inscriptions have been found dating to the 19th century B.C.E., relating to a prominent official in this city named *Terru.* This "man of Urkeš" had fallen out of favor with the general population. His plight is relayed in a series of letters to King Zimri-Lim of Mari—*another contemporary with the early part of Hammurabi's reign.* "A couple of times I have had to save myself, escaping death," Terru wrote to Zimri-Lim, lamenting the public hatred for himself (ARM 28 44bis).

Could the beleaguered Terru of Urkeš be one and the same Terah of Ur-Kasdim? For more on the striking parallels, see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/349* and */1131*. ■

effort that was successful; Hammurabi was frustrated, however, with a lack of contribution from Rim-Sin's forces and subsequently turned on Larsa, conquering the kingdom and ending Rim-Sin's dynasty.

What could have caused such a "sudden" collapse of alliances—this turning on one another and complete upheaval of the status quo? *Could* it have been sparked by reversals of fortune during joint campaigns elsewhere—perhaps of the sort recorded in Genesis 14?

In all this, there is a final coalition in Genesis 14 that we have not yet considered.

Abram and the Amorites

You'd be forgiven for thinking that nothing relating to the patriarch Abram/Abraham has ever been discovered. This common assumption has been popularly spread on social media and even across large mainstream media platforms. The *New Yorker,* for example, wrote in 2020: "In the long war over how to reconcile the Bible with historical fact, the story of David stands at ground zero. There is no archaeological record of Abraham or Isaac or Jacob. There is no Noah's ark, nothing from Moses. Joshua did not bring down the walls of Jericho …" (Ruth Margalit, "Built on Sand: In Search of King David's Lost Empire"—see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/652* for a response to this particularly jarring article).

Something *can* be said for Abram, though. The 10th-century B.C.E. Karnak inscription of Pharaoh Sheshonq I/Shishak mentions a series of locations in the southern Levant, one of which is named "The Field of Abram." Though it is impossible to determine from the inscription exactly where this "field" is located, it nevertheless would be a logical fit with the only "field" mentioned multiple times in relation to Abram—that of Mamre, where Abram is stationed at the time of the Genesis 14 account (verse 13).

There's more: The name Abram has also been found on no less than five separate Babylonian documents dated to the 19th century B.C.E., unearthed in Dilbat (just south of Babylon proper) and first published in 1909. These documents reference a certain individual named *Abarama* (variously spelled *Abamrama* or *Abamram*). "With the loss of mimmation, this would be represented in a consonantal text as אברם," wrote Prof. John van Seters—precisely the Hebrew spelling of *Abram* (*Abraham in History and Tradition,* 1975). While this name apparently belongs to a different individual (based on the different name of his father), at a minimum it backs up the biblical use of this name during the period in question.

Of Abram, Genesis 14:13 supplies a key piece of information: "And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of *Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram"* (King James Version). The New English Translation describes these Amorites as "allied by treaty with Abram." (Other verses at least allude to Abram's association with the Amorites—e.g. Genesis 15:16; Ezekiel 16:3, 45; see also *ArmstrongInstitute.org/806* and */818* for more detail.)

The continuing verses of Genesis 14 describe Abram rallying his expansive workforce of 318 men to pursue the withdrawing armies. An oft-overlooked aspect to this is that Abram was joined in his pursuit by his Amorite "confederates." This is not only inferred by the particular biblical attention drawn to this alliance but is highlighted explicitly at the end of the chapter (verse 24).

What is interesting in light of all this is the fact that *Hammurabi himself was an Amorite*—part of what is known as the Amorite First Dynasty of Babylon.

One can't help but wonder: Is it more than just coincidence that at the end of it all, the only eastern polity that would go on to not only survive but also thrive would be the *Amorites*—while Elam's realm crashed and burned? Could it be that in the "defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him" (verse 17; New King James Version), Chedorlaomer's drafted Amorite forces were left comparatively spared by Abram's own Amorite alliance—returning home to assert themselves as the dominant power in Mesopotamia?

The Rest Is History

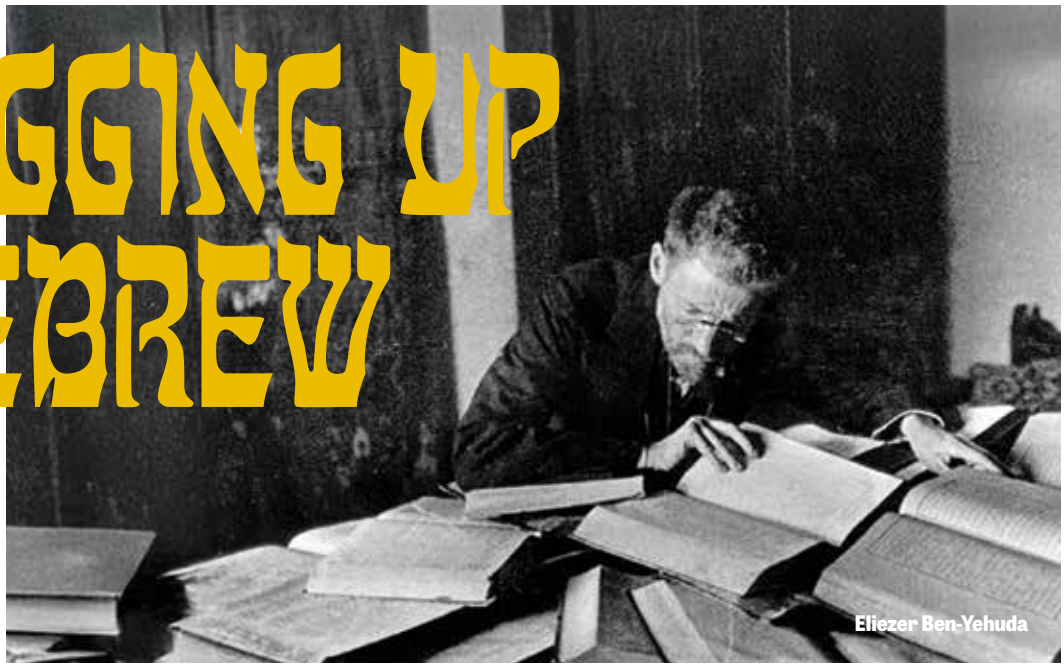
Some may consider this to be overtly speculative. Despite the missing details, the level of data that converges around the early part of Hammurabi's reign has led some scholars to take seriously the notion of a historical backdrop to the Genesis 14 account at this time.

One such scholar is the octogenarian Dr. Dalley, who speaks from rare firsthand experience about the shifting academic perspectives on this biblical account. "Over half a century ago many scholars thought that there were references to Babylonian history in the Hebrew book of Genesis 14:1-16, including the garbled names of kings known from cuneiform texts in the time of Hammurabi," she writes. "A reaction then arose, dominating the subject and solving the problems by simply rejecting them.

"However, as many more texts became available, particularly those excavated at Mari, a return to the earlier view was suggested by Jean-Marie Durand …. Finds of cuneiform texts at Hazor, Megiddo and Hebron indicate knowledge of Babylonian there" (op cit).

The end result? "The apparent identification of names found in cuneiform texts of Hammurabi's time, and the episode in Genesis, as already suggested by Durand in 2005, *has been strengthened by subsequent research."* ■

DIGGING UP HEBREW



Eliezer Ben-Yehuda

The revival of Hebrew as a spoken language has been given supernatural terms like 'resurrection' and 'miracle,' but how 'scientific' was it? **BY RYAN MALONE**

An Israeli friend and musical colleague of mine made international headlines this summer.

Acclaimed cellist Amit Peled was kicked out of a café in Austria. What grievous offense warranted the owner's refusal to serve him and the two other musicians in his party? They were speaking Hebrew.

"Welcome to Europe 2025," Peled was quoted by the *Times of Israel* as saying (July 27).

This resonated with me, having just been in Austria two months earlier—and even having carried on a rudimentary Hebrew conversation with an Israeli family at a tourist site near Salzburg (no one around us seemed to mind).

The current global political climate is ripe with animosity not just toward the Jewish nation and its people but even their language. Of course, the man credited with singlehandedly reviving Hebrew as a spoken language would agree that the language itself was intertwined with the very existence of a Jewish state.

Now 144 years on from when this man first arrived in Jerusalem, his work is maligned by some as not true to the original tongue of his forefathers. After all, as an argument goes, how close could a Yiddish-speaking Russian Jew get to reviving Hebrew as it was once spoken?

A 1952 English book by Robert St. John, now out of print, offers incredible detail on this process and the man called Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. In *Tongue of the Prophets,* St. John conveyed what he learned from a biography written in Hebrew by Eliezer's widow.

Ben-Yehuda's work not only benefited the establishment of "Israel," it also served as a mighty support to the archaeological work that would come in the years to follow. Biblical archaeology without a nation of Hebrew speakers seems impossible to imagine.

Additionally, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda was himself an archaeologist—of a linguistic sort. The kind of rigorous work he did, the scientific standards to which he adhered, are relatable to anyone leading an excavation. And they make the product of his life's devotion all the more worthy of the highest esteem.

Miraculous?

Maybe it's the same for most students of Hebrew, but it wasn't long into my studies that a tutor provided me with homework about the work of Ben-Yehuda. The worksheet

I was given had the Hebrew title "The Miracle of Hebrew" and explained in briefest form the work of Ben-Yehuda.

There is so much depth to what this man did, however, to me it was worth branching out from a two-paragraph, simple-Hebrew account to Robert St. John's 340-page work.

But can a modern Hebrew speaker really trust that his spoken language is similar to what it was before it went dormant some 2,000 years ago? Setting aside the fact that any language morphs over centuries, is Hebrew's long hiatus from everyday life an argument against modern Hebrew's legitimacy?

Ben-Yehuda's *resurrection* of Hebrew certainly is "miraculous" in itself—as the word "resurrection" would imply. But scientists and archaeologists don't like to operate in the realm of "miracles." They look at what can be perceived with the senses—from what has been VERIFIABLY RECORDED and PRESERVED.

So we will set aside what many would perceive as miraculous. We will set aside what some would insist were the fingerprints of God throughout the process. We will set aside the inexplicable triumph the man achieved—not just over naysayers (from the very people who would actually benefit from his success), but over the terminal illness that was supposed to prevent him from barely reaching adulthood. Instead, we will look squarely at the scientific procedure Ben-Yehuda undertook to present his people with the language they speak today.

Unsurprisingly, the Hebrew Bible appears as a key "artifact" in this whole process. He wasn't a spiritual or religious man, but he knew Scripture could not be ignored as a central historical source for his mission. Its function was scientific.

Never mind that his naysayers insisted Hebrew was "holy" and *only* to be used in prayer or religious contexts. Eliezer rejected this. For when Israel's prophets roamed the streets millenniums ago, did they not use the same language both to relay divine pronouncements and to facilitate commerce in the marketplace? Did not King David use the same language to pen his most heartfelt prayers as well as to govern affairs of state?

The Journey Begins

For those unfamiliar with Ben-Yehuda's life, here is a brief look at his background, which can scarcely be severed from his passion to resurrect Hebrew.

Born as Eliezer Pearlman in 1858 in modern-day Belarus, he took a different surname and moved in with an uncle to avoid mandatory military service to the czar. This uncle sent him to a nearby rabbinical school where he met an influential rabbi named Joseph Blucker, whose massive library intrigued the young

"... IN ORDER TO HAVE OUR OWN LAND AND POLITICAL LIFE IT IS ALSO NECESSARY THAT WE HAVE A LANGUAGE TO HOLD US TOGETHER. THAT LANGUAGE IS HEBREW .... FOR ALL THESE REASONS, I AM WORKING LIKE A MAN WITH BUT A FEW HOURS TO LIVE."

PUBLIC DOMAIN

teenager. Blucker drew Eliezer's attention to one book in particular: a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*—in HEBREW.

"It was Rabbi Blucker who kindled a spark which grew into a scorching flame that only death would someday extinguish," St. John wrote. "This spark was a love of the Hebrew language, not only as a vehicle for preserving the words of great Jewish religious leaders and the conveyance of them from generation to generation, but also as a secular language."

Eliezer's uncle, however, was horrified by the boy reading a secular book in a holy language, and he kicked his nephew out of his house.

Afraid to go back to his mother, the 14-year-old went to another nearby city and slept in the synagogue which, by custom, remained unlocked through the night. The next morning, a man, surnamed Yonas, found Eliezer and brought him home to his wife, four daughters and two sons.

Eliezer and the Yonas's oldest, an 18-year-old named Deborah, became fast friends as she taught him French, German and Russian over the next two years. The youngest, an infant named Pola, also grew to have a fascination with the new boy, but more on that later.

Deborah fanned his love for Hebrew. "It is a language of beauty," she told Eliezer. "It has a melody of its own."

He eventually went to Paris, where he finished high

Ben-Yehuda in his study

school and where the idea of a Jewish homeland—a Hebrew nation—became the aim of his life. Eliezer decided to remain there to continue studying medicine, since it was "a profession which could give him a certain social standing ... and place him in contact with people in a position to help in the realization of his dream," St. John wrote.

Around this time, he contracted tuberculosis. The illness that was supposed to be his undoing inspired him to be more productive than he might have ever been. He wrote article after article, with awareness that any of them might stand as his last words.

Working on borrowed time, he wrote to Deborah: "I have the feeling of a person condemned to death, and I so much wish to find a way to utter my last words. For this reason, I work now without sleep to put onto paper the reasons why it is so important for the Jewish world to become inflamed with the idea of returning to the land of our forefathers and working for the freedom to which we are entitled. I have decided that in order to have our own land and political life it is also necessary that we have a language to hold us together. That language is Hebrew [and, as he explained, a modern version for everyday life] .... For all these reasons, I am working like a man with but a few hours to live."

In the following letter, he signed it with a newly chosen surname: BEN-YEHUDA ("son of Judah"). He explained this was a Hebrew translation of his father's Yiddish name. Deborah eventually became his wife.

Archaeologist of Words

The myriad struggles Ben-Yehuda faced in the political and linguistic sphere are too many to detail here. We will look squarely at the process with which he revived Hebrew.

Before he got started in these linguistic efforts, he met an influential friend who told him his effort to modernize Hebrew would be "like building a modern 19th-century structure on a solid foundation thousands of years old."

Eliezer replied: "One will have to spend years searching through Hebrew literature and in libraries all over the world for words which once were in the language and disappeared."

His friend astutely observed: "You will have to be detective, scholar, magician and midwife all combined."

He also had to be somewhat of a persuader. He arrived in Jerusalem in what was then known as southern Ottoman Syria in 1881 (what he preferred calling "Israel") on what religious Jews would have been observing as *Simchat Torah* (the eighth day of the *Sukkot* festival).

His effort included convincing the approximately 24,000 Jews then in the land (speaking a variety of languages) to adopt ONE. One Yiddish man told Deborah and Eliezer that the couple was speaking a dead language. To which Eliezer replied: "You are wrong, my friend. I am alive. My wife is alive. We speak Hebrew. Therefore, Hebrew is alive."

Though not religious, they adopted many Jewish customs in order to be taken seriously by their new neighbors.

He began a magazine with a name that was a Hebrew play on words: *Hatzvi* means deer or gazelle, but the word came explicitly from Daniel 11:16, 41, which used "eretz hatzvi" to describe "the glorious land"—as the word for gazelle could also mean glorious or beautiful.

The magazine itself introduced and popularized recently discovered or "created" Hebrew words to its readership little by little.

He also began teaching Hebrew—IN Hebrew—"a method which generations later would be used by one of the most successful language schools in the world," St. John wrote.

And of course, only Hebrew was spoken among Eliezer, Deborah and their children. (In terms of pronunciation, he preferred the Sephardic over the Ashkenazic, since he believed Sephardic was closer to ancient Hebrew.)

Ten years after their arrival in the Holy Land, Deborah died of the very illness that was supposed to claim Eliezer's life. About a year later, he married her now 19-year-old sister, Pola, who renamed herself a more Hebrew-sounding "Hemda."

A motto hanging over his desk read: "The day is short; the work to be done so great!" Eliezer continued to work urgently.

This urgency was partly credited to "Israel" having its own anthem and flag but no single language to bind everyone together. To Eliezer, this meant a Hebrew dictionary needed to be published as soon as possible to establish proper standards for pronunciation and teaching.

Hemda had some catching up to do to keep up with a Hebrew-speaking household. It began in earnest when her new husband sat her down and opened the Bible—pointing at the first word, explaining the Hebrew phrase "in the beginning," and then the next word, and then the next. "Day after day she took lessons from him," St. John writes. "He taught her first to read the entire book of Genesis, but each day he gave her a sprinkling of purely household words to learn."

Meanwhile, he would often pull 17-to-18-hour days working on a Hebrew dictionary. One did not then exist (nor even a Hebrew word for "dictionary").

His office was littered with paper fragments. But for anyone cleaning his room, no scrap was to be considered trash. It may have contained a word, notes about a word or its etymology. Each might have represented weeks spent in a distant library.

Early in the process, a scrap of a "lost" word became literally lost in the hubbub of daily activity, which caused no end of grief in the Ben-Yehuda household (and later was found in the cuff of Eliezer's pants). Shortly after this, Eliezer instituted a filing system and hired two theology students to help document his work.

The "science" of this process was clearly seen in how well he researched each word.

He would end up scouring thousands of books over decades—"the works of many forgotten poets and writers of little fame," St. John wrote. "He had even perused countless private manuscripts. He had had to become master not only of written English, French, German, Russian and Hebrew itself, but also of the 'sister languages' of Arabic, Coptic, Assyrian, Aramaic and Ethiopian."

Part of this included a two-month stint in London—working tirelessly in the British Museum. St. John, aptly leaning on the archaeology analogy, wrote regarding any time he found a "lost" word: "On that occasion, he was as excited as, years later, the archaeologists would be when they suddenly uncovered the ancient wealth of King Tutankhamen."

A Pure Language

"Ben-Yehuda wanted to keep Hebrew PURE," St. John wrote (emphasis added throughout). "He wanted to help make modern Hebrew a consistent and beautiful language, without harsh sounds; without words which grated on the ear because they were inconsistent with the ancient music of the language. That was the basic theory on which he worked."

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's task was not just to resurrect dead words, nor even to find words that had nearly disappeared; it was to generate words for the countless number of new items and ideas that had developed in society for the past 2,000 years.

Part of Hebrew's revival being kept PURE meant properly handling the formulation of these new, modern words. Rather than arbitrarily making up words, or leaning on "loan" words (which he called the "bastardization" of the language), he looked to see if there was a root, concept or idea in history that could be used as a resource, a starting point (the word for "bicycle" was a blend of "wheel" and "two"). If not, he would go to the Semitic sister languages (e.g. Arabic) to see what he could "graft" into Hebrew. Because of these languages' similarity to Hebrew, he did not view this as any "bastardization."

This included some uphill efforts against people borrowing words themselves. For example, since the French called "fashion" *mode,* most Hebrew speakers then preferred to say *modah,* but Eliezer, with Hemda's help, created *ofnah,* based on the ancient Hebrew *ofen,* meaning style or manner.

Some questioned what gave him the authority or power to decide such things. "The answer he always gave," St. John wrote, "was that he was MERELY THE EXCAVATOR. He *dug out a word* and put it on display; if they were pleased with it and felt a need for it, the word was there for them to use. If they rejected it, the word died aborning." For instance, some words gained usage in his home but never outside, so the word in fact died. The word he preferred in his house for "tomato" was closer to a colloquial Arabic word, but the word commonly in use (*agvania*—from a root meaning "to love sensuously") was the one that stuck among the populace.

The Witnesses

Ben-Yehuda's dictionary was a "Herculean task"—as Prof. Samuel Krauss, a language scholar from Budapest, described it. Krauss highly complimented Eliezer's scientific methods and said that "no one but a man with tremendous enterprise and boundless energy" could undertake such a feat.

"He said that if Ben-Yehuda's work had no other results, it had been worthwhile because of the new

light it threw on many obscure passages in the Bible," St. John wrote.

Not only was this to be the first Hebrew dictionary in modern history (and probably ever), it would be more than just a list of words, definitions and standards of pronunciation. It would be a multilingual dictionary (with French, German and English translations). It would include origins, comparisons with sister words in other Semitic languages.

But each word would also include a WITNESS, as Eliezer called it—EXAMPLES OF USAGE in history, where applicable. "This had given him one of his greatest problems of research; to find in ancient, medieval and modern literature as many different 'witnesses' or uses of each word as possible."

He excavated 335 different ways to use *lo* (no/not), and 210 "witnesses" for *ken* (yes).

"Many of his 'witnesses' were quotations from the Bible and other religious books," St. John wrote, "but there were often long passages from secular literature, from the works of little-known poets, or from manuscripts he had found somewhere in a distant library."

And so some words took up multiple pages—starting with the first one (*av:* father). The word for "because" (*ki*) would have 24 columns.

The Bible Speaks

Eventually, Eliezer replaced the motto over his desk to read: "My day is long; my work is blessed."

Though Eliezer Ben-Yehuda outlived anyone's expectations for his lifespan, his 64-year life was not long enough for what became a 17-volume dictionary, each volume averaging 600 pages each. He completed only five of them before his death in 1922, and fittingly the last word he was working on was *nefesh*—the word for soul. Nevertheless, he left much of the material required for the remaining volumes, which his widow, one of his sons and other devotees helped finish.

His approach was wholly scientific and sound. Truly, as Professor Krauss had suggested, Eliezer's work would be "worthwhile because of the new light it threw on many obscure passages in the Bible." At the very least, it opened a unique and broader access to the Hebrew Bible—at least for some of its literary virtues. (For more, read "The Powerful Poetry of the Hebrews" at *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1042*.)

The world into which Eliezer was born was one where his mother "knew the Hebrew words of the Bible, but she had never really understood what the words meant," St. John wrote. Decades later, the ability to think, speak, hear and dream in the language of the Bible has given millions the ability to see, in an unfiltered way, the beauty of the biblical text itself. ■

FEEDBACK

I came across your website and have begun receiving your magazine. I want to let you know how much I enjoy it. I like the fact that you use the Bible in your archaeological research, unlike other groups. Thank you for making this publication available freely for those of us who are retired and are no longer traveling.

UNITED STATES

OPHEL SITE TOUR

I wanted to thank you again for the tour. I really enjoyed it. Your deep knowledge shines through in the way you explain things, making everything clear and engaging. It's also obvious that your work in the excavations has given you a level of understanding most people never get to see, which made the experience especially meaningful.

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

EXHIBIT EDITION

I want to thank you for sending me the Exhibit Edition of *Let the Stones Speak*. I really enjoyed it, and I learned so much. I love it and keep rereading it! I love listening to your videos and reading your articles. Such a fantastic organization.

UNITED STATES

PUTTING SOLOMON BACK INTO THE SONG OF SONGS

Having studied the Song of Solomon for nearly a decade, these were fresh angles of observation I had never heard discussed before. It caused me to see passages with more clarity and appreciation than before. Please produce more Song of Solomon-related articles if the opportunities present themselves in the future. Keep up the great work; it's much appreciated.

NORTHERN IRELAND

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