

LET THE

ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The magazine of the

STONES SPEAK



MAY-JUNE 2026



Is This the
QUEEN OF
SHEBA?

LET THE STONES SPEAK

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AREA E



FROM THE EDITOR | GERALD FLURRY

Another Ophel Excavation: A Unique Opportunity to Uncover Biblical Jerusalem

The Ophel has more to reveal.

THE LATE DR. EILAT MAZAR WAS ONE OF Jerusalem's most visionary archaeologists. This was evident nearly 30 years ago when she boldly proclaimed in the January-February 1997 *Biblical Archaeology Review* that she knew the location of King David's palace—and believed she could prove it.

Part of what made her so successful was the fact that she used the Bible as her guide. In her 1997 article, she said she came to this conclusion through “careful examination of the biblical text” and the study of “modern archaeological excavations in Jerusalem.”

Eilat had her skeptics. But she was unfazed. “If some regard as too speculative the hypothesis I shall put forth in this article, my reply is simply this: Let us put it to the test in the way archaeologists always try to test their theories—by excavation,” she wrote. It took almost 10 years before Roger Hertog came along and gave Eilat the funds to test her hypothesis. When she finally did, she was proved right!

Before her death in 2021, Dr. Mazar made a bold prediction about another prominent Jerusalem site.

I would like to share with you what she said and announce some exciting news about our archaeological work in Jerusalem.

Looking Ahead

The 2018 Ophel season was the last opportunity we had to excavate with Dr. Mazar. That year, we sent students and volunteers to assist her in two areas of excavation: Area D, which we have continued to excavate for four more seasons, and Area M, the Ophel cave. At the end-of-season dinner in 2018, Dr. Mazar delivered a speech to the crew, thanking them for their work, reviewing what they had accomplished, and looking ahead to future excavations.

That excavation, as with every excavation since (2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025), dealt mostly with Byzantine and Second Temple Period remains. “[A]lthough we are thrilled about the Second Temple Period ... and the Byzantine Period as well, we do want more of First Temple Period,” she said. “We want King David and King Solomon!” That is a statement we agree with 100 percent! She was eager to uncover more archaeology pointing to David and Solomon, the kings over Israel’s monumental united kingdom. And she knew just where to find it.

Eilat applied several times for a license to excavate what she named Area E. This was an area she told our crew she was “so anxious to excavate.” Area E is situated on the far northeastern side of the Ophel. It is large, deep and potentially rich with Iron Age (First Temple Period) material and architecture. We often refer to this period—from King Solomon in the mid-10th century through to Jerusalem’s destruction in 586 B.C.E.—as the period of royal biblical Jerusalem. This is when Judah’s kings, prophets and priests led Judah from the Ophel. For us, it’s the most exciting period of Jerusalem archaeology!

Dr. Mazar believed Area E was key to gaining a deeper, more detailed understanding of what she called the “royal Solomonic complex.”

“What would be inside the line of fortifications on the inner side that is from the time of King Solomon?” she asked. “The palace complex. This is the only place which they didn’t destroy because of garden works. I don’t think that even the Second Temple Period destroyed what was established there on the bedrock during the First Temple Period.”

Eilat explained the enormous potential of Area E. “I do have high expectations—and usually I’m right. We are not promising anybody anything. But we know the area; we can sense the area. We know the bedrock falls there very rapidly, at least 10 meters. If it falls at minimum 10 meters, we have 5 meters preservation—at minimum. So, to have 5 meters preservation of Solomonic past—let’s find this. It’s there. It’s there. That is why I’m working hard and not giving up on that. We must go on. We must continue and



excavate there—that’s it. That’s where we are going to continue—right?”

I am happy to announce, 12 years after Dr. Mazar first tried for a license, that we will be excavating Area E this summer!

The excavation will be led by Prof. Yosef Garfinkel from Hebrew University, sponsored by the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology and other generous donors, with the work carried out by students from Herbert W. Armstrong College.

There is a lot of material to remove, and most of it will be sifted, as it could be rich with finds. All totaled, we expect about 10 months of excavation, though we’ll do this in phases spread out over 12 to 18 months. As always, you will be able to follow the excavation of Area E at ArmstrongInstitute.org.

The opportunity to excavate this area arose suddenly and unexpectedly. Over just a few weeks in March, it virtually fell into our laps!

This reminds me of something Dr. Mazar once said: “There may be times where it will take 10 years for people to readjust to support or even accept the idea. But I’m not going to wait for them.” I like that. She was a lady in a hurry. She just kept moving ahead in spite of the critics, and there were plenty of those. Dr. Mazar had that spirit of David in many ways. And she was not waiting on anybody. She knew she had to move fast to get this work done. And she really helped to bring King David alive. If Dr. Mazar is right, then Area E will also highlight the



Eilat Mazar stands above Area E.

“We know the bedrock falls there very rapidly, at least 10 meters. If it falls at minimum 10 meters, we have 5 meters preservation—at minimum. So to have 5 meters preservation of Solomonic past—let’s find this. It’s there. It’s there. That is why I’m working hard and not giving up on that. We must go on.” —*Eilat Mazar*

the Lord, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem ...” (1 Kings 3:1; 9:15). After the construction of the first temple and Solomon’s royal complex, the Ophel became the seat of political and military power for the nation of Israel—and it continued that way for 400 years.

Area E will give us further insight into this period. Excavating Area E to reveal Iron Age infrastructure and materials would represent a significant expansion in the total area of First Temple Period archaeology featured on the Ophel. When it is finished, Iron Age Area E will connect via the “Solomonic wall” to the Iron Age gatehouse complex in the southern part of the Ophel. It will be a crescent of monumental, royal, First Temple Period architecture along the eastern border of the Ophel! (You can read more archaeological details of this location in Brent Nagtegaal’s article on page 4.)

The Ophel mound is rich with history! Think about what has already been discovered there from the First Temple Period: the bullae of King Hezekiah and the Prophet Isaiah; the Ophel Pithos Inscription, pointing to a relationship between Israel and the kingdom of Sheba; the golden earring pendant, pointing to a relationship between Israel and Phoenicia; and the monumental gatehouse from the time of Judah’s biblical kings. What a treasure trove. And we believe there is much more to be found!

Like Dr. Mazar, we are keen to begin excavating Area E. We don’t know what we will uncover. Perhaps it won’t be as interesting or remarkable as we think. Or maybe we will find something totally unexpected. All we know now is that *both* science and the biblical text suggest Area E will furnish a big piece of the puzzle that is the Iron Age Ophel.

The only way to know, as our good friend Eilat Mazar famously wrote, is to “put it to the test in the way archaeologists always try to test their theories—by excavation.” ■

monumental kingdom that began with King David’s reign.

The way this opportunity happened brings to mind Psalm 102:13-16: “Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory” (King James Version). For nearly 60 years, we have taken pleasure in Jerusalem’s stones and favored its dust. (You can read more about the importance of this passage in Psalm 102 and the hope it contains at ArmstrongInstitute.org/1043.)

Archaeology can inspire hope because of what it reveals about the Bible and how God worked with the nation of Israel. And so much of that history is displayed on the Ophel.

Why the Ophel?

The focus of Area E will be on uncovering the Iron Age architecture and material, which is so important to gaining an understanding of biblical Jerusalem.

The book of Kings records, “And Solomon became allied to Pharaoh king of Egypt by marriage, and took Pharaoh’s daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about. ... And this is the account of the levy which king Solomon raised; to build the house of



Why Excavate AREA E on Jerusalem's Ophel?

The next opportunity to reveal
Jerusalem's royal quarter

BRENT NAGTEGAAL

MONUMENTAL ROYAL CRESCENT

THE OPHEL RIDGE IS ONE OF ISRAEL'S MOST important plots of land. Visitors to the archaeological park can observe, and even touch, remains from history's most important periods: Umayyad, Byzantine, Roman, Hellenistic, Persian and, most importantly, Iron Age/First Temple Period—the time of Israel's and Judah's biblical kings.

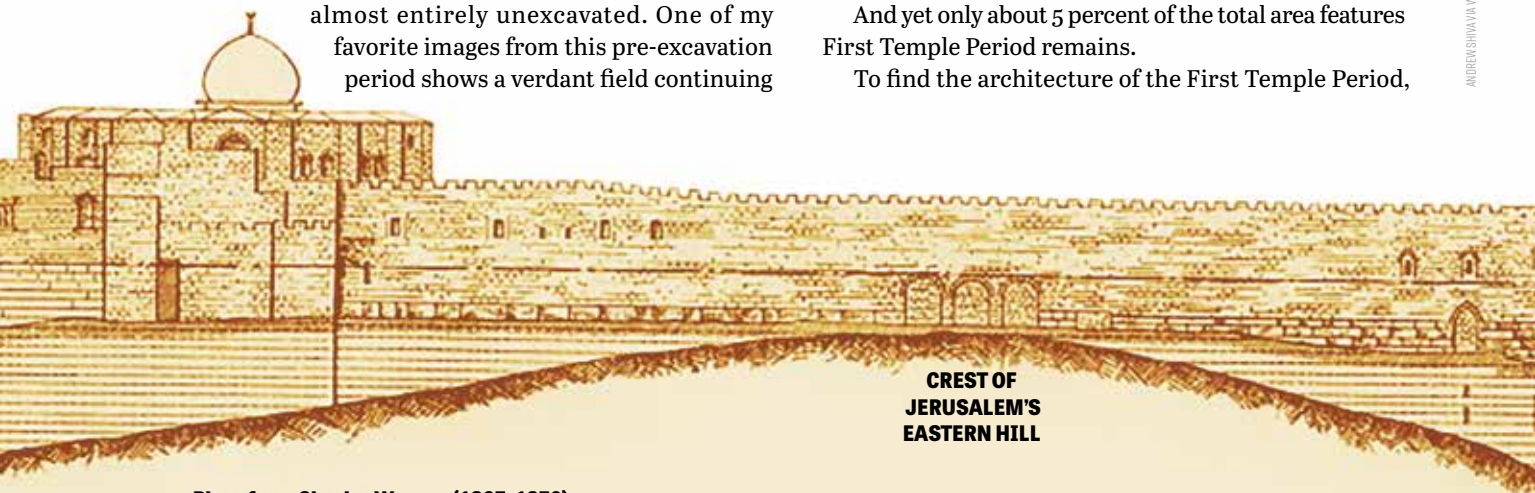
Looking at the site today, however, it's hard to believe that until the late 1960s, the whole ridge remained almost entirely unexcavated. One of my favorite images from this pre-excavation period shows a verdant field continuing

all the way up to the southern wall of the Temple Mount. In other photographs, local farmers can be seen traversing the area with livestock or working over the land with a plow, recalling the Prophet Micah's words "Zion [will] be plowed as a field" (Micah 3:12).

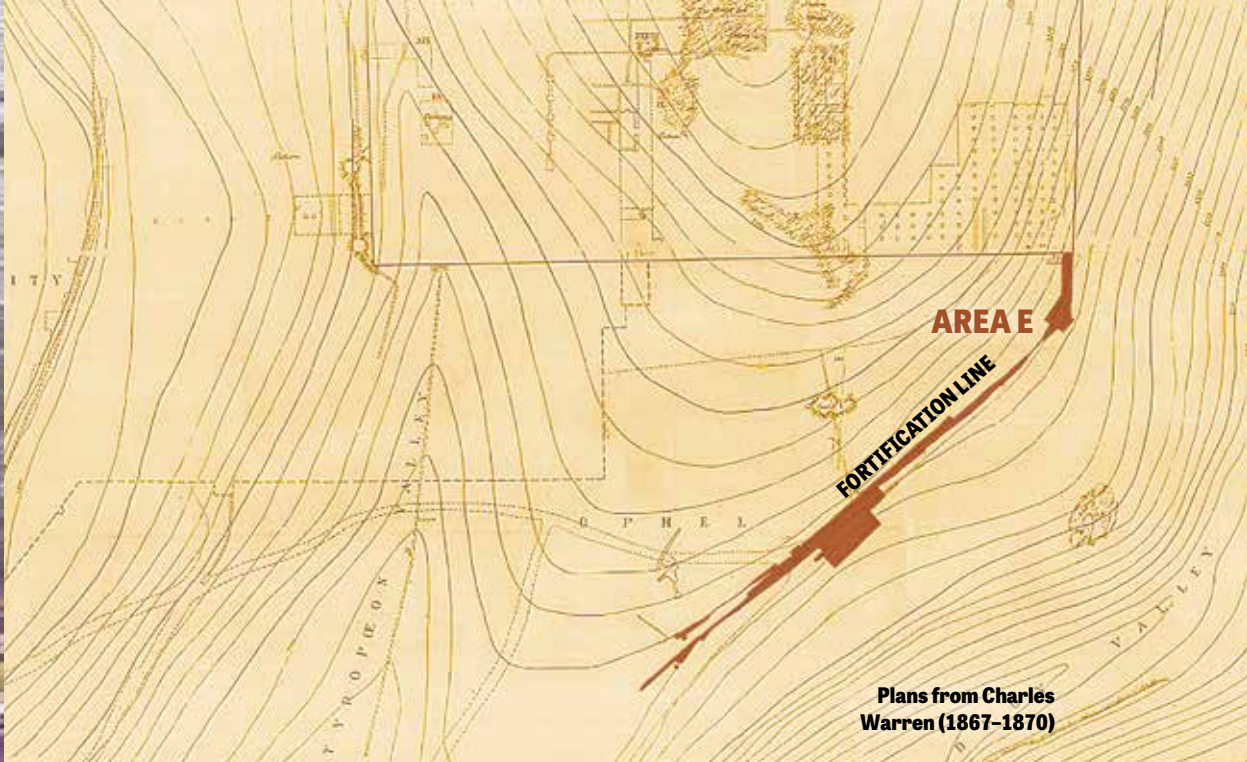
It's a very different picture today. The once barren field is now a vast labyrinth of archaeological remains: ancient walls, cisterns, pillars and ritual baths hewn into bedrock. Seven acres of ancient remains give witness to 3,000 years of almost continuous habitation.

And yet only about 5 percent of the total area features First Temple Period remains.

To find the architecture of the First Temple Period,



Plans from Charles Warren (1867-1870)



a visitor has to travel to the far eastern side of the Ophel. There—as the bedrock of the long, skinny ridge of Jerusalem begins to fall away into the Kidron Valley—monumental remains from biblical times emerge.

And it is here at the eastern Ophel, just 20 meters (66 feet) from the southeast corner of the Temple Mount, that an incredible opportunity for excavation has opened up—an opportunity that those of us at the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology are excited to take advantage of this summer under the direction of Hebrew University professor Yosef Garfinkel.

Why are we so excited for the opening of this new area, and what do we expect from the upcoming excavation?

Finding the First Temple Period

Following the 1967 Six-Day War, Israeli excavations, led by the late Prof. Benjamin Mazar of Hebrew University, began in haste. Over the next decade, the team excavated year-round, starting at the southwest corner of the Temple Mount and proceeding east along almost the entirety of the 279 meters (915 feet) of the southern wall.

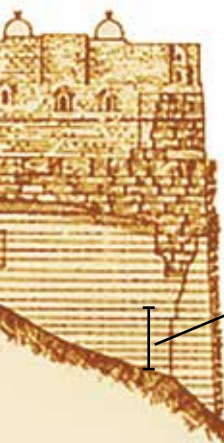
Unfortunately for the team, only the final years of excavation produced Iron Age remains at the southeastern side of the allotted area. The fact that the earliest remains were found in this area is

unsurprising for a site that underwent massive reconstructions through history. Often in archaeological digs, the most ancient remains are best preserved on the edges of the mound. Following the cycle of settlement, destruction and resettlement, the builders often have to clear away the debris and rubble from the top of the mound for their new city. This means pushing unwanted debris to the side of the hill, which then covers and preserves the more ancient remains.

This is certainly the case for Jerusalem's eastern hill (the original ridgeline), where almost nothing is preserved from the First Temple Period on the crest of the ridge. On the easternmost slope, however, there is some absolutely massive architecture with impressive heights of preservation. This is logical considering the topography of the eastern hill.

When considering which areas of the Ophel are the most likely to have First Temple Period remains, it's important to understand where the crest of the ridge is. Based on a visual reconstruction, it would be assumed that the crest was somewhere around the center of the southern wall of the Temple Mount. That is not the case. Instead, the crest of the ridge is under the Triple Gate, two thirds of the way across the southern wall to the east and only 86 meters (282 feet) from the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount (see drawing from Charles Warren across the page). Thus, it makes sense that, prior to the construction of the southern wall, most of the earliest First Temple Period construction was likely concentrated on the eastern edge of the Ophel.

This was confirmed materially when explorer



Area E contains approximately 10 meters of ancient material.

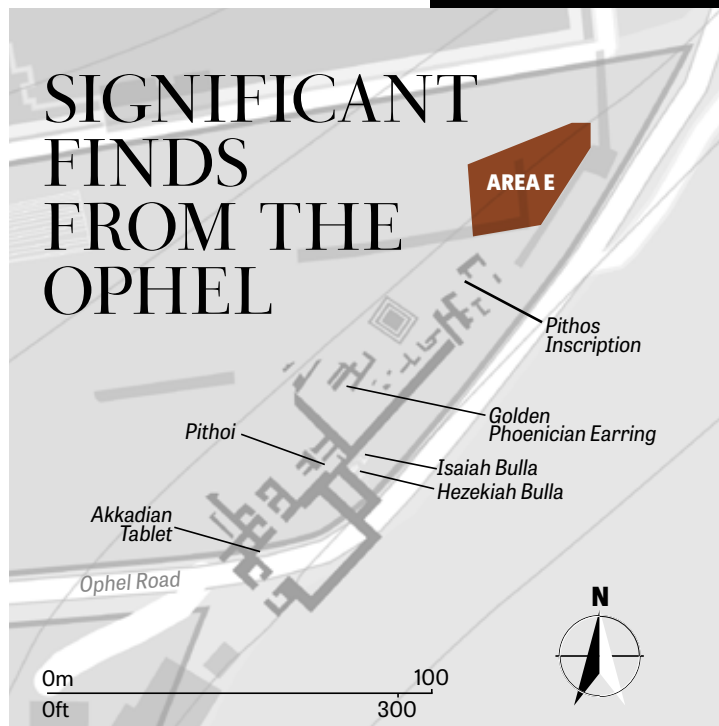
Charles Warren first documented the area in 1867 at the behest of the nascent Palestine Exploration Fund.

Starting at the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount, Warren dug shafts along the edge of the ridge, allowing him to patch together an eastern fortification line of the city, which was later dated to the Byzantine Period (mid-fifth century C.E.). Twenty-eight meters (92 feet) from the southern wall, he found a large rectangular tower incorporated into the city wall. The city wall then turned about 45 degrees to the west. About 95 meters from the first tower, Warren documented a second Byzantine tower, which was sitting on top of another earlier and more massive structure, itself built directly on top of bedrock. Archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon excavated this area and dated this monumental tower to the First Temple Period. To this day, it is partially visible from the Ophel Road, a busy thoroughfare that skirts the Ophel ridge.

In the final years of Benjamin Mazar's excavation, the team excavated inside this fortification line and began to finally discover First Temple Period walls and floors. This area was subsequently excavated in 1986 by Dr. Eilat Mazar (Benjamin Mazar's granddaughter), providing a clearer understanding of the layout of the rooms. Dr. Mazar's excavations revealed smashed *in situ* vessels and charred remains on top of the limestone floor; these remains provided evidence of the 586 B.C.E. destruction of Jerusalem that closed the First Temple Period.

Following that excavation, Eilat put together numerous lines of evidence and determined the area to be a gatehouse complex from the Iron IIA, most likely associated with the construction efforts of King Solomon. Archaeologists have since questioned the interpretation,

SIGNIFICANT FINDS FROM THE OPHEL



but no one discounts that these are huge walls from the time of Judah's biblical kings.

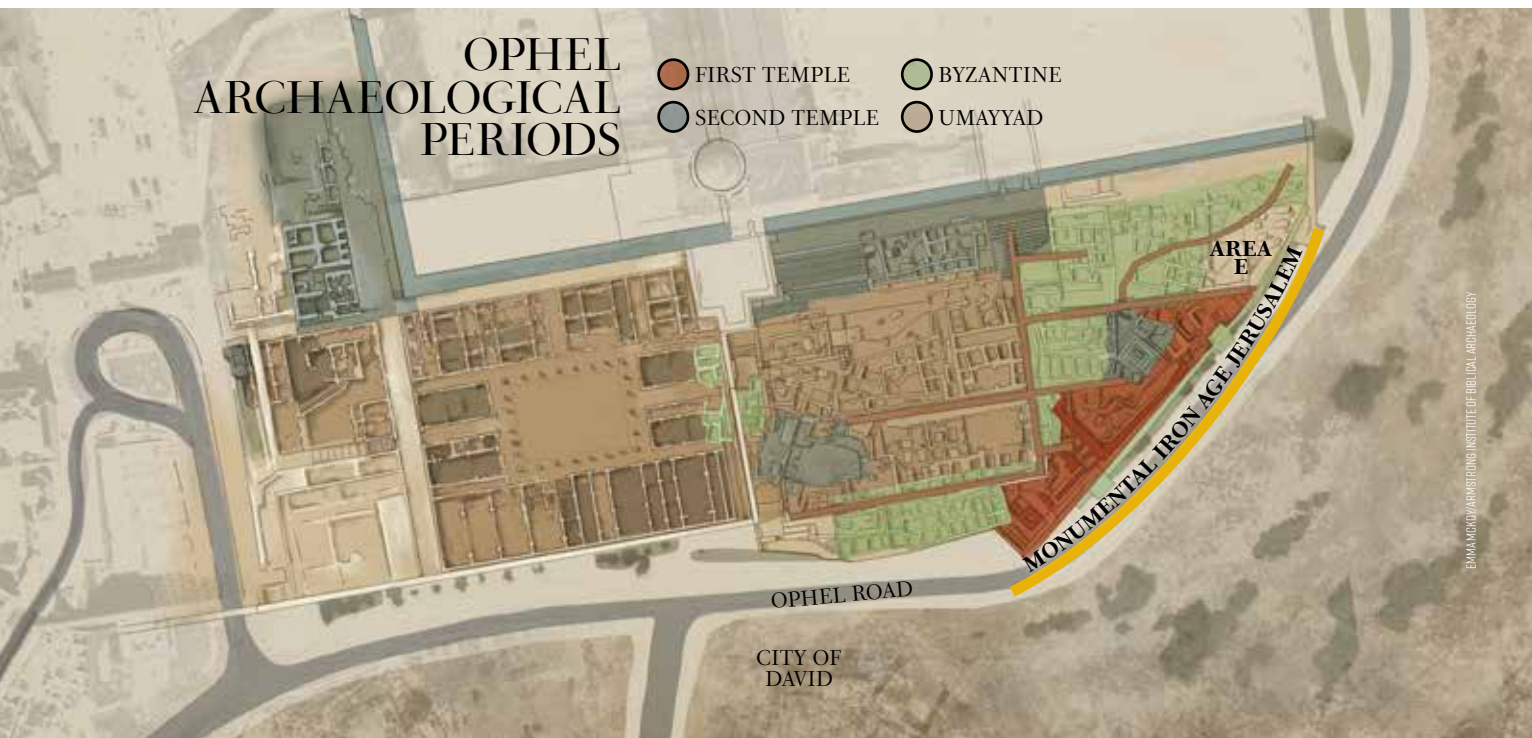
Thus, after two phases and years of excavation, it was possible to begin to discern the layout of the royal quarter of biblical Jerusalem—and it was found only in the eastern Ophel, deep down and adjacent to the Byzantine city wall.

Moving North

Between the end of Benjamin Mazar's excavation in 1978 and Eilat's excavation in 1986, most of the

OPHEL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERIODS

- FIRST TEMPLE
- SECOND TEMPLE
- BYZANTINE
- Umayyad





Eilat Mazar places her hand into the impression created by a large pithos pottery vessel in 1986.



Eilat Mazar stands beside the massive stones of the Extra Tower in 2010



Hezekiah Bulla (found 2009)



Isaiah Bulla (found 2009)

Ophel underwent massive reconstruction works in preparation for opening the area for tourists. These “gardening works,” as they have come to be known, succeeded in giving visitors to the Ophel a general picture of parts of the ancient site. However, in other instances, in particular the area between the gatehouse complex and the southeast corner of the Temple Mount, more than just reconstruction was completed. Further excavation was conducted down to bedrock, and yet absolutely no archaeological documentation was produced.

Eilat Mazar attempted to rectify this by reexamining the gatehouse area (2009) and opening up three areas to the north for further investigation (areas A, B and C in 2012–13).

In 2009, the excavations were extremely fruitful in solidifying the layout of the gatehouse and provided more datable material for a long straight section of a First Temple Period wall running parallel with the Byzantine city wall. Dr. Mazar dated the wall to King Solomon’s time (1 Kings 3:1).

The excavation also produced a wealth of small finds of great importance, especially two seal impressions bearing the names of biblical figures. The first read, “Belonging to Hezekiah, [son of] Ahaz, King of Judah.” To this day, it is the only seal impression belonging to an Israelite or Judean king ever found in controlled scientific investigations. A few meters

away, the team discovered a second seal impression that reads in ancient Hebrew: “Yesha’yah[u] Nvy[?]” interpreted as “Isaiah the Prophet.” The discovery of both seal impressions next to each other is another indication of the prominence of the Ophel as the royal quarter of Jerusalem.

In 2012 and 2013, the team moved further northeast within the fortification line. I supervised work in Area B, directly adjacent to the 2009 excavation. Under Eilat’s guidance, we were able to peel back much of the 1980s restoration works and produce, for the first time, solid architectural plans and dating for the Byzantine and Roman periods. Preserved under some of these later remains were, just as at the gatehouse, more First Temple Period walls and floors.

All of the buckets of material from the First Temple Period remains were wet sifted, leading to the discovery of a wealth of small finds dating primarily to the 10th to ninth century B.C.E. (the time of Solomon and early Judean kings). Among the seals, seal impressions and the wealth of pottery in Area B, we also uncovered a beautiful gold earring piece, a type known as a basket pendant. Similar discoveries of this type of jewelry were found exclusively from Phoenician sites around the Mediterranean, leading previous scholars to identify it as a cultural marker of the Phoenicians. The Ophel Basket Pendant was dated by the archaeological context to the early Iron IIA (10th century B.C.E.). As we have

previously published, the presence of such an earring on the Ophel from this time speaks to a Phoenician presence in the construction phase of this area, which can be linked to the Phoenician King Hiram's or Tyre's assistance in the construction of the royal quarter during the time of Solomon (1 Kings 7:13-14; see ArmstrongInstitute.org/1124).

Moving from Area B further northeast, Eilat Mazar's Area A yielded more First Temple Period wall and floors. This Area A structure apparently included another exceptionally large tower structure in the line of the First Temple Period fortification, albeit only partially revealed. Dr. Mazar concluded that this tower dated to at least the same period as the fortification wall running through Area B. Not much of this tower was able to be dated, as it is obscured by a later Byzantine Period tower. Dr. Mazar named it the "Great Projecting Tower" based on Nehemiah 3:27, which describes this as the next identifiable feature along the wall after the Water Gate, Projecting Tower and fortification wall of verses 25-26.

Inside this complex, the team discovered an inscription on the rim of a large, broken vessel known as a pithos. Dating to the 11th to 10th century B.C.E., it is the oldest alphabetic writing ever discovered in Jerusalem. For years, exactly what the inscription read—and even the exact language it was written in—remained elusive. However, a 2023 analysis, conducted by expert epigrapher Dr. Daniel Vainstub, brought together a remarkable convergence of biblical information.

According to Dr. Vainstub, the script isn't ancient Hebrew or Canaanite but actually Sabean—otherwise known as Ancient South Arabian (ASA). Furthermore, the inscription refers to a trade of incense known as *ladanum* (*Cistus ladaniferus*), known especially from the southern Arabian Peninsula. This discovery provides evidence of the extensive trade that occurred between King Solomon's Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Sheba.

The practice of archaeology, then, has proved that the areas along the fortification line of the Ophel produce some remarkable First Temple Period material.

And Now, Area E

Beginning in 2014, Eilat Mazar desired to continue excavating along the fortification of ancient Jerusalem. She was given permission to excavate Area D, which is adjacent to areas A and B, but are further up toward the crest of the ridge. As expected, with the rising bedrock in those areas, while certain impressive Byzantine and Roman Period discoveries were found, almost no First Temple Period remains were discovered. Her real dream was to continue following the fortification line toward

the Temple Mount, which she dubbed her future Area E.

Area E is in the same line and relative position on the eastern side of the ridge as the previously discovered First Temple Period architecture from 2009 onward. Even more important is the fact that very little "garden works" had been done in this area in the 1980s. The chances of finding undisturbed layers from royal Jerusalem, then, are extremely high.

Added to that, there was another enticing clue. One part of Area E had already been partially excavated decades earlier, but not all the way to bedrock. The excavation stopped at a certain depth to reveal the top of a wall that followed a completely different orientation from the later Byzantine Period structures above.

As we learned through the excavations in 2012 and 2013, the Byzantine Period architecture inside the fortification line follows the orientation of the southern wall of the Temple Mount. Excavating beneath, we discovered that all the buildings built before the 70 C.E. destruction of Jerusalem were oriented with the fortification line alongside the top of the Kidron Valley (45 degrees perpendicular to the southern wall). Thus in this probe of Area E, even though the top of a wall was only appearing, Dr. Mazar knew that it had to be from the Early Roman Period or earlier.

Further still, we could gather from the bedrock heights in Area A to the south of Area E that this wall was likely going to be preserved to a height of around 5 meters (16 feet). Such high preservation from the First or Second Temple Period, less than 30 meters (100 feet) from the southern wall of the Temple Mount, is astounding. That is what excited Dr. Mazar.

Another interesting detail is that the area between the Temple Mount wall and Area E was already partly excavated. Dr. Ronny Reich and Dr. Yuval Baruch excavated two areas adjacent to the Temple Mount in 1999–2000 on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Their team excavated to bedrock just north of Area E and found architecture matching the First Temple Period orientation, as well as scant remains of a floor from the late First Temple Period.

Thus, both sides of Area E have been excavated, and both sides have reached Iron Age material. In both areas, they reached down to a level of around 705 meters above sea level. But in Area E, the very top of the earliest remains stands at 711 meters above sea level. Then in



Area E in the foreground with the Mount of Olives in the background, looking east.



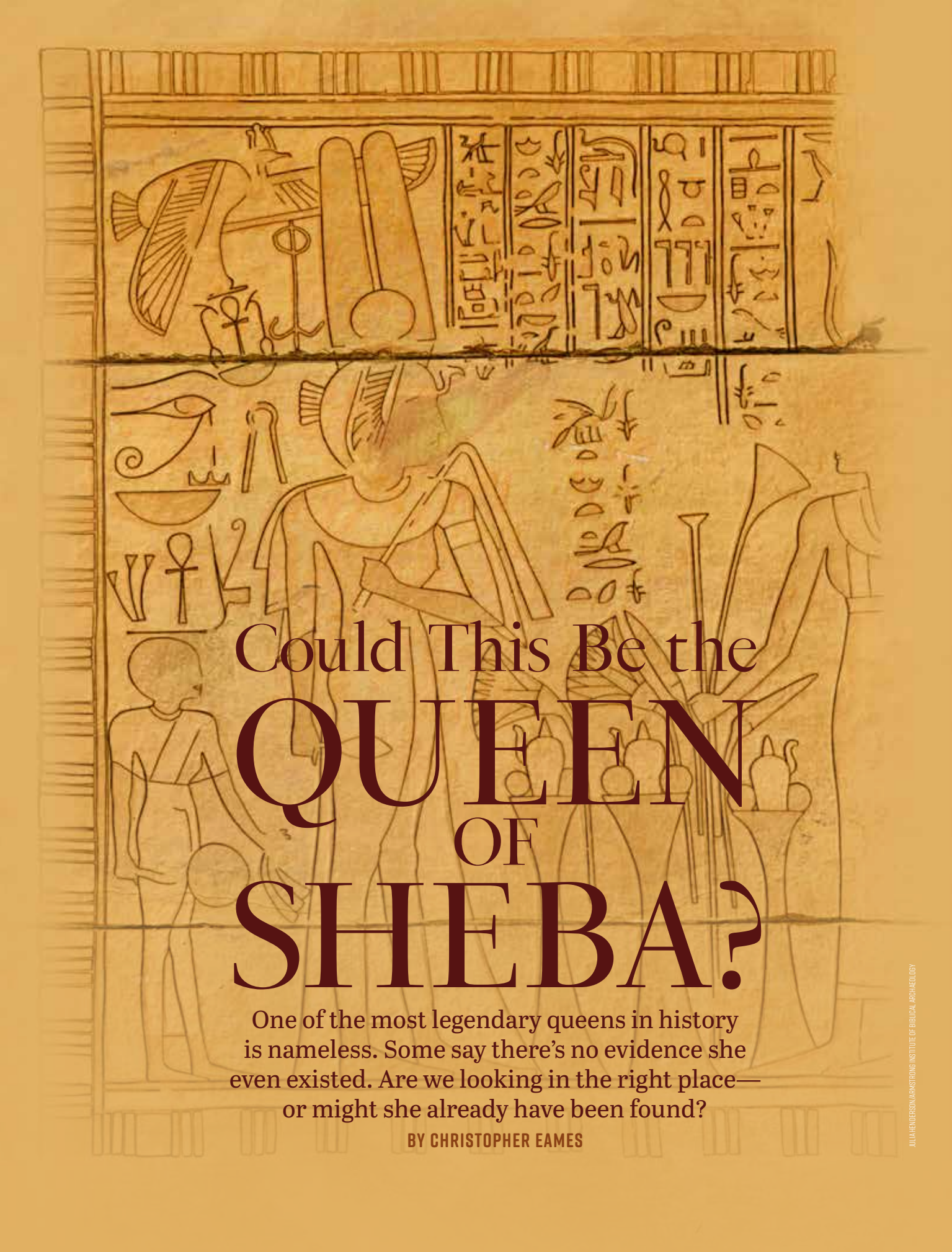
2023, a small test area was opened in Area E by Prof. Uzi Leibner and Dr. Orit Peleg-Barkat, which quickly exposed Hellenistic Period remains, and though this probe was not continued further, it had started to reveal some Iron Age material as well.

Putting all the facts together, the archaeological opportunity of Area E to yield findings from Jerusalem's royal quarter of biblical lore is unmatched. Area E is a potential archaeological gold mine—a gem, largely untouched and undisturbed. Yet while the expectation is to find high preservation from the First Temple Period, there are always archaeological surprises along the way, and all periods will be treated with equal archaeological care.

The chance to excavate Area E is not an opportunity that comes along very often. This is a location just inside the fortification line of Jerusalem's royal quarter, where kings of the Bible once roamed, along with priests and prophets. As we have learned over the past 60 years of on-and-off excavation, the Ophel, the First Temple Period remains further up the hill—near the crest—did not endure the throes of Jerusalem's cycle of destruction and rebuilding. It is only here, in the very eastern Ophel, that the royal quarter from King Solomon and every king thereafter can be viewed. No wonder Eilat Mazar was excited to excavate there.

“I’m so anxious to excavate there,” she told our team in 2018. “In previous phases, we have found that we have a city gate, we have a line of fortifications, we have buildings that attach to the city gate, and continuation of a fortress that is part of these fortifications. But the fortifications are continuing encircling the Temple Mount compound, and this area is inside this line. What would be inside the line of fortifications on the inner side that is from the time of King Solomon? The palace complex. This is the only place which they didn’t destroy because of garden works. I don’t think that even the Second Temple Period destroyed what was established there on the bedrock during the First Temple Period. So I do have high expectations—and usually I’m right. We are not promising anybody anything. But we know the area; we can sense the area. We know the bedrock falls there very rapidly, at least 10 meters. If it falls at minimum 10 meters, we have 5 meters preservation—at minimum. So, to have 5 meters preservation of Solomonic past—let’s find this. It’s there. It’s there. That is why I’m working hard and not giving up on that. We must go on. We must continue and excavate there—that’s it. That’s where we are going to continue—right?”

Eilat Mazar couldn’t continue there, but we are just as eager and excited to work toward fulfilling her dream—revealing royal Jerusalem in Area E. ■

The background is a sepia-toned image of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs and a central figure of a queen. The queen is depicted in profile, wearing a crown and a long dress, holding a staff. To her left is another smaller figure. The hieroglyphs are arranged in vertical columns, some of which are partially obscured by the text. The overall style is that of an archaeological discovery or a historical document.

Could This Be the QUEEN OF SHEBA?

One of the most legendary queens in history is nameless. Some say there's no evidence she even existed. Are we looking in the right place—or might she already have been found?

BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

“NOW WHEN THE QUEEN OF SHEBA heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue ...” (1 Kings 10:1-2; New King James Version). So begins the famous biblical account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem with her great convoy of treasures, including “one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great quantity, and precious stones” (verse 10; NKJV).

Yet who exactly was the Queen of Sheba? She is one of the most legendary queens in history, yet she’s not named in the two accounts of her contained in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kings 10; 2 Chronicles 9). Nor is she named in the New Testament, where she is referred to more generally as a “queen of the south” (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31). Nor is she named in the Qur’an, where her visit is described (An-Naml 27).

The identity of this female ruler of Sheba is a total mystery. Even among the most conservative, Bible-maximalist scholars and archaeologists—those who *do* emphasize parts of her story as having an air of genuine historicity—her actual identity is admitted as being completely elusive. In his classic 2003 book *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Egyptologist Prof. Kenneth Kitchen highlighted more general evidence showing that the Queen of Sheba indeed does “belong to genuine historical tradition”—although as to particulars, “we simply have no data yet, one way or the other.”

The key to solving this conundrum is the correct identification of her territory, the land of Sheba. This is popularly identified in scholarship with the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Yet even this identification is a minefield of numerous differing views and interpretations.

One particular attempt to identify the Queen of Sheba comes from the Velikovskian community—adherents to the chronology of Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky formulated in the 1940s. Velikovsky down-dated most of Egyptian history by up to six centuries. Drawing from Josephus’s mention of this woman as a “queen of Egypt,” Velikovsky identified her as the 15th-century B.C.E. female pharaoh Hatshepsut—down-dated, in his scheme, to the 10th century B.C.E., the time of Solomon.

As we have explained, Velikovsky’s highly controversial chronology only unraveled in light of new research and discoveries over the course of the 20th century (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1216*). Yet some continue to maintain his conclusions, chief among them his identification of Hatshepsut as the Queen of Sheba.

Hatshepsut is a biblically significant figure, as we have argued elsewhere (*ArmstrongInstitute.org/882*)—and she *does* in fact provide a link in the chain for identifying the Queen of Sheba—but perhaps not in the manner you might have thought (see sidebar, page 14).

But what about on the conventional chronology of Near East events, for the early-mid 10th century B.C.E.? Is there anyone who could be the Queen of Sheba? Or is the identity of the famous biblical queen really a total blank?

I believe there *is* a good candidate who emerges from the thick fog of this period. But to find her requires walking through the lines of evidence in a particular way.

First, the all-important question of *territory*.

Part I—A Tale of Two Shebas

The identification of Sheba with southwestern Arabia is common. “Hebrew *Sheba* is universally admitted to be the same name as the place-name commonly transcribed ‘Saba’ that denotes a community and kingdom in ancient Yemen in southwest Arabia,” Kitchen wrote. “It cannot be located in northwest Arabia for multiple reasons.”

Kitchen explained that trade routes from this region of Arabia were well established by the first half of the first millennium B.C.E. “In the late eighth and early seventh centuries we have Assyrian mentions of Itamru and Karibilu as kings of Saba, who belong to the line of Yemenite ‘paramount rulers’ (*mukarribs*) in southwest Arabian Saba. Before that, Assyrian sources record Sabeian trade caravans explicitly for the later eighth and implicitly for the early ninth centuries As they traveled freely north, so could she have done.” Kitchen called the biblical queen “Solomon’s *South Arabian* visitor” (*ibid*; emphasis added throughout).

Yet this southwestern identification is not quite as “universal” as Kitchen makes out. In a 2004 publication, Arabian history expert and early Islamic scholar Prof. Patricia Crone wrote that the Queen of Sheba is “most plausibly seen as a *north* Arabian ruler. ... [Q]ueens are well attested for north Arabian tribes in the Assyrian records, whereas *none* are attested for South Arabia at *any* time; indeed, there is no independent evidence for monarchic institutions at all in South Arabia as early as 900 B.C.” (*Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*).

The first-century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus provides an altogether different assertion. He explicitly identifies the Queen of Sheba as ruler on another *continent*—and not just over Egypt. His account begins with, “there was then a woman queen of Egypt and Ethiopia” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.6.5). He elaborates on many of the same details contained in the biblical account,

before concluding: “So when this *queen of Ethiopia* had obtained what we have already given an account of ... she returned to her own kingdom” (8.6.6).

Josephus, then, identifies her *primarily* with the territory of *Ethiopia*, as well as linked somehow with neighboring Egypt. (Note that the early Greek term *Aethiopia* was used more broadly than it is today: This name, a reference to those of dark complexion, applied to territory directly south of the border of Egypt, including modern-day Sudan.)

William Whiston, esteemed 18th-century translator of Josephus’s work, rebuffed Josephus’s account in a footnote to this section of text as one of a number of “mistakes made by Josephus.” “That this queen of Sheba was a queen of Sabea in South Arabia, and not of Egypt and Ethiopia, as Josephus here asserts, is, I suppose, now generally agreed. ... [T]here is little occasion for doubting in this matter.”

Yet these differing identifications—Arabian Peninsula vs. northeastern Africa—are not quite as contradictory as they might first appear. That’s because at various points in history, *these territories have been united as part of the same kingdom*—a polity bridging both sides of the southern Red Sea and the narrow Bab-el-Mandeb strait.

Sheba in Arabia—and Africa

This twin-territory entity is best known in the form of the Abyssinian kingdom of Aksum, ruled from Axum in northern Ethiopia—a two-part kingdom that flourished throughout the first millennium C.E. Of course, this is still much too late to be relevant to our Queen of Sheba.

Prior to this was an elusive entity centered in north-east Africa known as *D’mt*, described generally as an Ethio-Sabaeen kingdom spanning roughly from the eighth century B.C.E. to the fourth century B.C.E. We don’t know much about this kingdom, although it bears marked evidence of Sabaeen culture and influence, including architecture, art, burials and linguistic links shared across both sides of the Red Sea. Early scholarship posited a late “colonization theory” to explain this—that such elements were brought into Africa from Arabia. Newer research has, if anything, shown the opposite—a much earlier “indigenous origin” theory.

Yet if precious little is known about *this* early kingdom, even less is known about the prior centuries (see sidebar, page 14, for an exception). Nevertheless, it is at least notable that it is from the Sabaic script—formulated somewhere around the turn of the millennium, circa 1000 B.C.E.—that the later Ethiopian Ge’ez script derives.

We have before us, then, a truly strange and confusing twin-territory conundrum. Yet it is one that the biblical account sheds some light on.

Semitic vs. Hamitic

Genesis 10 lays out the descendants and territories of Noah’s sons Shem, Ham and Japheth. Among the dozens of names contained in this passage, one appears *twice*, for two clearly different groups—*Sheba*.

Spelled the same way as that of the territory of the Queen of Sheba (שבא), this name is associated with the family of *Cush*, son of Ham, in verse 7 (Cush, whose name means “black,” is the progenitor of the Kushites, or Nubians, south of Egypt); the same name Sheba is

NOT A QUEEN—A KINGDOM?

ONE INTERPRETATION OF THE Queen of Sheba episode in Judaism identifies her not as a *queen* at all, but rather a *kingdom*. This is rooted in a Talmudic passage, Bava Batra 15: “Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani says that Rabbi Yonatan says: Anyone who says that the queen of Sheba (*malkat Sheva*) who came to visit King Solomon was a woman is nothing other than mistaken. What is the meaning of *malkat* Sheba? The kingdom (*malkhuta*) of Sheba.” This is based on a variant possible spelling theoretically rendering equally

Queen of Sheba and *Kingdom of Sheba*.

What makes this *kingdom* interpretation especially problematic is playing it out in full throughout the passage. Take, for example, 1 Kings 10:1, “*she* came to prove him with hard questions,” or verse 13, “Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all *her* desire So *she* turned, and went to *her* own land, *she* and *her* servants.” *Kingdom* is indeed a feminine word and would receive the singular feminine pronoun—but a *kingdom* coming to prove Solomon with hard questions? Solomon

giving the *kingdom* all its desire? The *kingdom* turning, and going to *its* own land—*it* and *its* servants (which would surely be included in reference to the *kingdom*)? Not to mention the dubious variant spelling of the word *kingdom* to make this interpretation work (generally מלכה/ממלכה—*including in this same chapter*, verse 20—as opposed to *queen*, מלכה).

Indeed, the earliest Jewish writers are unanimous on reading this passage as referring to a *queen* of Sheba, rather than *Kingdom* of Sheba—and this is

also identified with the family of *Shem* in verse 28—more specifically through the lineage of Joktan, who is generally associated with southern Arabia.

Note that certain of these entities in Genesis 10 do not necessarily refer to a descendant literally called by the supplied name. In many cases—some more obvious than others—these names refer to territories within which respective descendants lived. So in the case of Sheba, we would not necessarily have a descendant of Shem and a descendant of Ham coincidentally called precisely the same name שְׁבָא; rather, a broader territory of Sheba occupied by descendants of each (compare 1 Chronicles 1:9, 32).

Coincidentally(?), that is exactly what we find with this kingdom of Sheba/Saba at various points in its history: two sides of a coin, with *Semitic* south Arabians on the one side and *Hamitic* Kushites on the other.

But there's more from the biblical account that may help us determine the "correct" Sheba for our story.

Cushite Brethren

Psalm 72, "A Psalm of Solomon," contains a similar reference to a train of gifts coming from Sheba to Jerusalem, including gold (verses 10, 15). In introducing Sheba in Psalm 72, it pairs it together with another entity: "Sheba [שְׁבָא] and *Seba* [סְבָא] shall offer gifts."

Seba is mentioned just three other times in the biblical account: twice as a member of the family of Cush *right alongside Sheba* (Genesis 10:7; 1 Chronicles 1:9); and once in Isaiah 43:3 alongside Egypt and Ethiopia/Cush. The implicit association in Psalm 72:10, then, appears to be a reference to *Cushite* Sheba delivering goods to Solomon—alongside brother *Seba*.

an interpretation carried through later Jewish texts (as well as Christian, Islamic and other). Why, then, this contrary opinion? Semitic language scholar Edward Ullendorff believes it was to counter circulating stories portraying the queen and Solomon in a less-than-favorable light: "[T]he Talmudic insistence that it was not a woman but a kingdom of Sheba (based on varying interpretations of Hebrew *mlkt*) that came to Jerusalem makes sense only on the assumption that a highly discreditable version of the Solomon-Sheba story was known to the rabbis" ("The Queen of Sheba," 1963). ■

Ezekiel 27:22 records the "merchants of Sheba" bearing exactly the same products described in the visit of the Queen of Sheba—that is, *spices, precious stones and gold*. It mentions this entity as *distinct* from Arabian merchants (verse 21). Instead, Sheba is paired with another entity: "merchants of Sheba and *Raamah*." Once again, this "Raamah" is found in only two other verses—in *exactly the same two passages of Cushite ancestry*—Genesis 10:7 and 1 Chronicles 1:9—right alongside Sheba and *Seba*.

In Book 1 of *Antiquities*, Josephus credits the line of Ham as founding the Sabeian entity (1.6.2). Further, in Book 2, he explains how the core city of this African "Sheba" lost its name—"Saba, which was a royal city of Ethiopia, which Cambyses [II, sixth century B.C.E.] afterwards named *Mero*" (2.10.2). This central Kushite city of Meroe is located on the banks of the Nile River in modern-day Sudan, and indeed a "Meroitic" kingdom emerged from here in the sixth century B.C.E. onward.

On this, the classical scholar William Bodham Donne wrote in *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography, Vol. II*: "Josephus affirms that the Queen of Sheba or Saba came from this region, and that it bore the name of Saba before it was known by that of Meroe. There seems also some affinity between the word *Saba* and the name or title of the kings of the Aethiopians, *Saba-co*"—the Kushite pharaohs Shabaqo and Shebitqo (late eighth century B.C.E.).

The land of "Sheba" can thus be identified with both Arabia and northeastern Africa. The question is, *which land did our famous queen come from?* The testimony of the earliest writers—from the biblical authors to Josephus—certainly trends in a certain direction. But would an Israelite connection with the lands of ancient Sudan-Ethiopia have even been possible?

In the words of archaeologist Prof. Aren Maeir, "connections between Judah and Sheba (Yemen? Ethiopia?) in the Iron Age, once thought to be completely mythical are now seen as distinctly possible in light of recent finds" ("The Early 'Maritime Silk Road'"). Case in point: A September 2025 article titled "Study Finds Levantine Ivory Came From Ethiopia, Not Egypt" presented new analysis of Iron Age ivories, upending the assumption that Israel's ivory was imported from neighboring Egypt, rather coming from sub-Saharan Africa (Phys.org).

Finally, of these two "Sheba-ite" territories—the Arabian and the African—if we are to look at continuing cultural association, there is no competition: The most stubbornly held attachment and loyalty to the Queen of Sheba comes *not* from southwest Arabia—whose late, fantastical and conflicting accounts even speculate her to have descended from shape-shifting *jinn*. Instead, her greatest institutionalized devotion comes from *Ethiopia*.

Part II—Glory of the Kings

The *Kebra Nagast*, meaning the “Glory of the Kings,” is the national epic of Ethiopia. Compiled in its current form in the 14th century C.E., this epic, written in the Ge’ez script, purports to document Ethiopia’s royal dynasty all the way back to the Queen of Sheba, whom it names as *Makeda*, Queen of Ethiopia.

The *Kebra Nagast* is, in the words of the late Ethiopian history scholar and Semitic languages expert Prof. Edward Ullendorff, “not merely a literary work, but—as the Old Testament to the Hebrews or the Koran to the Arabs—it is the repository of Ethiopian national and religious feelings.” This “foremost creation of Ethiopic literature ... is woven into Ethiopian life in the most intimate manner. It has as its *pièce de résistance* the legend of the Queen of Sheba

“[T]he main story must have a very long period of gestation in Ethiopia and elsewhere Its author, the *neburā ed Yeshaq* of Aksum, was thus mainly redactor and interpreter of material which had long been known,” Ullendorff wrote. This Queen of Sheba connection has “very deep roots in Ethiopia and must be one of the most powerful and influential national sagas anywhere in the world. ... The veneration of the Queen of Sheba and her appropriation as the national ancestress of the Ethiopian people are of considerable antiquity and certainly precede the medieval *Kebra Nagast*” (*Ethiopia and the Bible*, 1968).

It is from this Queen of Sheba lineage, cemented in the *Kebra Nagast* tradition, that the rulers of Ethiopia claimed direct and unbroken descent—on up to the

final emperor Haile Selassie I (reigned 1930–1974), whose royal lineage tied to the queen was even embedded in Article 2 of Ethiopia’s constitution (see article, page 23).

The most interesting observation about the *Kebra Nagast* is that while it represents a multilayered and much-extrapolated account, it bears marked differences to the other rather colorful medieval accounts of the visit of the Queen of Sheba. Later Jewish and Islamic texts—e.g. the Targum Sheni and Qur’an—include weird and wonderful details relating to demons in Solomon’s court, his lengthy dialogues with animals including a hoopoe bird who brings the queen to him, and architectural trickery to get the queen to expose herself. Yet the *Kebra Nagast* has a “totally different atmosphere,” wrote Ullendorff. The tale of the hoopoe bird is “replaced by the realistic story of Tamrin, the head of Sheba’s caravans, who is engaged in large-scale trading operations with Solomon,” who “reports to the queen in such enthusiastic terms that she decides to go and see for herself.” Such details in the *Kebra Nagast* “do not deviate substantially from the biblical account but simply supply many details on which the concise story in the Old Testament is silent” (“The Queen of Sheba,” 1963).

We have noted how striking it is that the earliest Jewish, Christian and Islamic accounts are *all* totally devoid of a name for the queen. It is not until much later (centuries post-Qur’an) that Arabic commentators begin applying the name *Bilqis* to the queen. Yet even here, Ullendorff pointed out that this is “almost certainly” derived from the biblical *Piligiš*/Greek *Palakis*—a

CASE STUDY: THE ‘LAND OF PUNT’

IF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES from eastern Africa around the turn of the first millennium B.C.E. are comparatively sparing, we do get a glimpse of this general region from much earlier Egyptian texts of the second millennium B.C.E. Egyptian trade records and art of this period refer to an almost fantastical “Land of Punt,” a mecca of export in gold, expensive woods, aromatics, wild animals and animal products. While debate surrounds this entity, it is widely believed to have comprised territory of Africa southeast of Egypt, especially around the Horn of Africa—likely including

part of southwest Arabia as well. In the words of Prof. Patricia Crone, this “Land of Punt” appears to have referred to “the name of not only the African, but also the Arabian side of the Red Sea” (op cit).

It is from the reign of Hatshepsut (mid-second millennium B.C.E.) that we get our most striking picture of seafaring expeditions down to this Land of Punt, as well as a remarkable, almost Queen of Sheba-like processional depiction of a (rather girthy) Puntite Queen Ati with her husband and people delivering goods.

Prof. Francisco del Rio Sanchez wrote in a 2021 *National Geographic* article: “New scholarship about

the queen and her origins are still emerging. Wendy Laura Belcher, professor of African literature at Princeton University, proposed that the queen might be from ... the pre-Aksumite Ethiopian culture of Punt. Mentioned in Egyptian sources as early as the 15th century B.C., Punt provided Egypt with incense, spices and gold—all commodities associated with the queen and her visit with Solomon” (“Where Did the Queen of Sheba Rule—Arabia or Africa?”).

The biblical account describes the Queen of Sheba bringing Solomon “spices and gold very much, and precious stones” (1 Kings 10:2).

generic word meaning “concubine.” Conversely, right from the outset in this Ethiopian tradition, we have an entirely different name applied to her: *Makeda* (ማከዲ), a word “which has no obvious explanation” (ibid).

Makeda = Kandake?

Regarding the unique name *Makeda*, Ullendorff believes it has an ancient origin—although nowhere near as ancient as that of the Queen of Sheba. Instead, he hypothesizes it is a corrupted graft from the New Testament account of the first-century C.E. ruler “Candace queen of the Ethiopians” (Acts 8:27).

The “Candace” of the New Testament is a reference to a *kandake*, a Meroitic term for the female regent of Kush. A number of *kandakes* are known from this time period—the one in the book of Acts probably refers to the mid-first century C.E. Kandake Amanitore.

The presence of such influential female rulers in this Kushite territory is another interesting link to the Queen of Sheba. In his authoritative book *The Kingdom of Kush: Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization* (1997), Prof. László Török highlighted this consistent theme of the importance of female regents in this region across the first millennium B.C.E.: The “most significant feature of Kushite queenship is the strong accent laid on the ruler’s legitimacy through his mother and the mothers of his mother,” with the importance of a “female succession line.”

Yet there is an added quirk to both biblical accounts of the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9. In both texts, precisely within the middle of the account, there appears an inset describing Solomon’s navy bringing gold, precious wood especially for musical instruments, and precious stones (1 Kings 10:11-12; 2 Chronicles 9:10-11). This is often seen as a disconnected, unrelated addition—yet its presence within the Queen of Sheba account, right in the middle of the train of thought, may imply some relation to her visit. According to Ullendorff, “verses which relate to the Ophir fleet which fetched gold, precious stones and

Nevertheless, the *kandake* of the book of Acts is obviously no match for the Queen of Sheba, and drawing this connection relies on a rather convoluted explanation of how “Kandake” could become “Makeda.” Not only does Ullendorff *not* provide a phonetic explanation—he warned against even trying to find one: “This name has hitherto defied all attempts at an explanation, but I do not consider it impossible that Makeda is, in fact, a corruption of Candace (Kandake). One must not try to discover any phonetic reasons behind this corruption. If my conjecture is correct, then we have in the mixture of the names ... [a] conflation of the stories.” Ullendorff dismissed the *Kebra Nagast*’s own etymology, which breaks down the words into two parts as *Ma kada*, “ما كذا, must, of course, be rejected.”

It would be one thing for the much later *Kebra Nagast* to confuse the first-century New Testament account of an Ethiopian *kandake* with the Queen of Sheba. It would be quite another for the first-century Josephus, on the scene at the time as this *kandake*, to do so. A much later conflation in name, *perhaps*—but not in territory, which, again, is firmly equated with *Ethiopia*.



Delivery of goods from Punt, led by King Parahu and Queen Ati

wood which was particularly suitable for the manufacture of musical instruments” “might well be part of the story referring to additional gifts which the queen had delivered by the Red Sea fleet” (“The Queen of Sheba,” 1963).

If these goods *do* represent a connection to the Queen of Sheba’s visit, they would favor the African origin—the Land of Punt, for example, as a known exporter of rare woods including African blackwood,

a highly sought-after material for the construction of musical instruments. (This resonates with me, as an oboist—my own instrument is made from the highly sought after, extremely dense African blackwood known as *grenadilla*.)

Whatever the case, del Rio Sanchez concluded with the words of Professor Belcher: “[I]f any queen was going to travel north to Israel in the 10th century, it would have been an African queen.” ■

Taking Stock

Let's assess where we are. Despite the ambiguity surrounding the definition of the territory of Sheba during various periods, we do have Josephus's assurance of the Queen of Sheba's primary association with "Ethiopia"—more specifically, an identification "probably intended to cover Nubia-Meroe [further north] rather than Abyssinia proper, [yet] it does show a concentration on an African, instead of Arabian, origin," wrote Ullendorff (ibid).

We also have a delivery of treasure that matches well with this territory, including known examples of the processional delivery of goods (sidebar, page 14). We have continuous tradition of prominent female regents within this territory—from the New Testament period *kandakes*, back through the first millennium B.C.E. Kushite regents, right back as far as the 19th century B.C.E., with a 12th Dynasty Egyptian execration figurine mentioning a sole female monarch over Nubia—a queenly tradition that cannot be said for southwest Arabia. And we have a fiercely held tradition among the Ethiopian community—with a number of unique, specific and, in some respects, comparatively more realistic elements—identifying the Queen of Sheba as coming from northeastern Africa.

Yet we have a problem. Archaeological data from this part of the world is comparatively lacking—most especially for the time period in which we are interested, during the first part of the Third Intermediate Period, during which Egypt shrunk north, largely evacuating the region. "The centuries between the end of Egyptian domination in the Middle Nile Region around 1069 B.C., the death of the last ruler of the Egyptian 20th Dynasty, and the reign of Kashta [eighth century B.C.E.] ... represent the poorest-documented period of Kushite history," wrote Török (op cit). "The evidence is entirely silent on the region south of the Egyptian border until the eighth century B.C."—with one exception.

Part III—True Queen of the South

Engraved on an old Egyptian temple at Semna—a chief Nubian/Kushite city north of Meroe, in modern-day Sudan—is a later relief from the period of the 21st Dynasty (1077–948 B.C.E.). It contains an inscription and depiction of a great royal queen by the name of *Katimala* (variously *Kadimalo* or *Karimala*). The dating of her relief is not concrete but is generally placed within the early 10th century B.C.E., based on paleographic and historical considerations.

Little is known about this mysterious female monarch. All we have is this somewhat confounding inscription. Various theories have identified *Katimala* as perhaps the daughter of Pharaoh Osorkon the Elder (991–985 B.C.E.), the queen of Pharaoh Siamun (985–966 B.C.E.), or queen of Pharaoh Psusennes II (966–943 B.C.E.). Such Egypt-centric models posit her serving as viceroy of Kush, governing Kushite territory on behalf of the pharaoh.

Egyptologist Prof. John Coleman Darnell begs to differ. In his landmark 2006 study *The Inscription of Queen Katimala at Semna: Textual Evidence for the Origins of the Napatan State*, he sees in *Katimala* a decidedly Nubian queen ruling an emerging Napatan (pre-Meroitic) kingdom south of Egypt. "The origins of the Napatan Kingdom, later to become, if but for a short time, the Napatan Empire of Kush and Egypt, remain mysterious," writes Darnell. "Perhaps the only known epigraphic document that might shed light on the birth of this Nubian state is the inscription of a Queen *Katimala* at Semna."

The inscription is contained on the right side of the relief; on the left side is a "svelte" *Katimala*, "not dissimilar to the figure of Queen Abalo, the mother of Taharqa" (a late eighth-century B.C.E. Kushite pharaoh). *Katimala* "wears the vulture crown atop what appears to be her natural hair, worn close-cropped. This is not typical Egyptian regal fashion, in which the vulture crown is

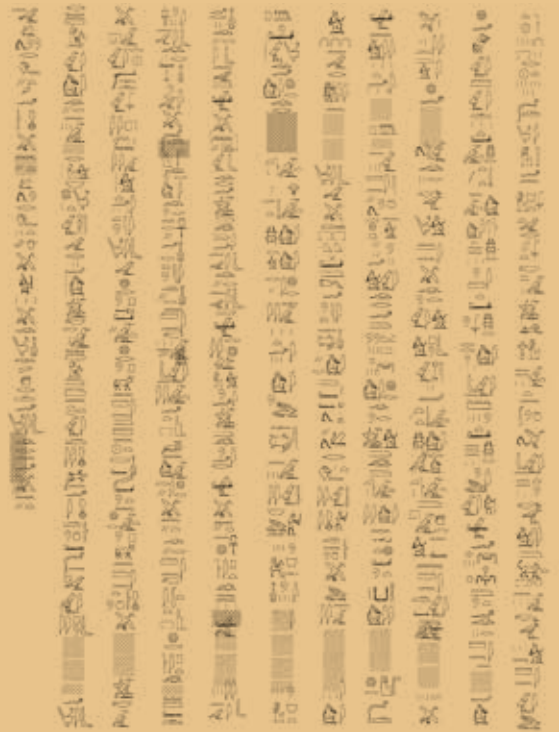
SEE
SHEBA
PAGE 20



The Semna Temple



Katimala's relief on the Semna temple



Hieroglyphic text of Katimala's inscription

KATIMALA'S SEMNA INSCRIPTION

Part 1: Introduction—

Complaint of a Ruler to Katimala

Year 14, month 2 of the Peret Season, day 9

Speech by his majesty to the king's great wife and the daughter of the king, Katimala, vindicated:

"Whither are we to turn if we do not serve among the servants of Amun?

When there is an opponent; otherwise will occur the annual thing that occurs to us; otherwise it will go badly for them (the servants of Amun); otherwise it will happen to us;

When there is a chieftain who has robbed gold and silver, and always treated Amun as accursed—who exalted me.

The enemy escaped."

Part 2: The Queen Responds

"What I did was to act as a servant of Amun. for I did not remember the event which happened to me this year, since I have trusted in Amun, who attacks him who robbed gold and silver.

He whom my fathers—to whom I have succeeded—appointed hastened to me, after he had failed/become physically disabled; and I did it in the mountains of gold;

For it was that year I achieved the understanding—then powerful is the magic of god."

Part 3: The Queen Addresses a Council of Chiefs

"And I said to 30 of the chiefs of ...

Bad is the pharaoh who is stripped of his strength.

Is it good to fear, and to show the back before the enemy, as did my fathers to whom I succeeded?

Since it was because of the event that occurred to me that ... did ... in that year.

Now as for my fathers who were wont to frighten all the enemies, they dwelled happily with their wives.

It is good to do evil to this one whom he (Amun) does not know; it is bad to do evil to people whom he (Amun) knows.

He shall appoint the one who is alive. See here—we have heard these evil ones, while they were yet alive—

'It is bad to do good; that which god said is false.'

Do what makes life—do good.

Is it not good to make other lands for Amun, where there is not his place?

For as for the one who makes for Amun another place—look, he will ... down to today, he (?) belonging to the annals of my fathers.

Is it bad to control this cattle of Amun daily? Is it good to sacrifice from the herd of Amun, like that which Makaresh did? Since daily all the city people cursed Makaresh, while there afflicted him likewise destruction, ... not having done ...

Is it evil to flee before him, like the one who flees before the army of the one who does good for the entire land? Evil is doing for him that which ...

... trampling ... I know, while I act ... against me, entirely. It is my reputation that has made ... It is your reputation that has made"

TURKEY

IRAN

SEARCHING FOR SHEBA

Mediterranean Sea

SYRIA

Solomonic Israel

● Jerusalem

ISRAEL

● Tamsis

21st Dynasty Egypt

● Thebes

EGYPT

JORDAN

KUWAIT

Persian Gulf

SAUDI ARABIA

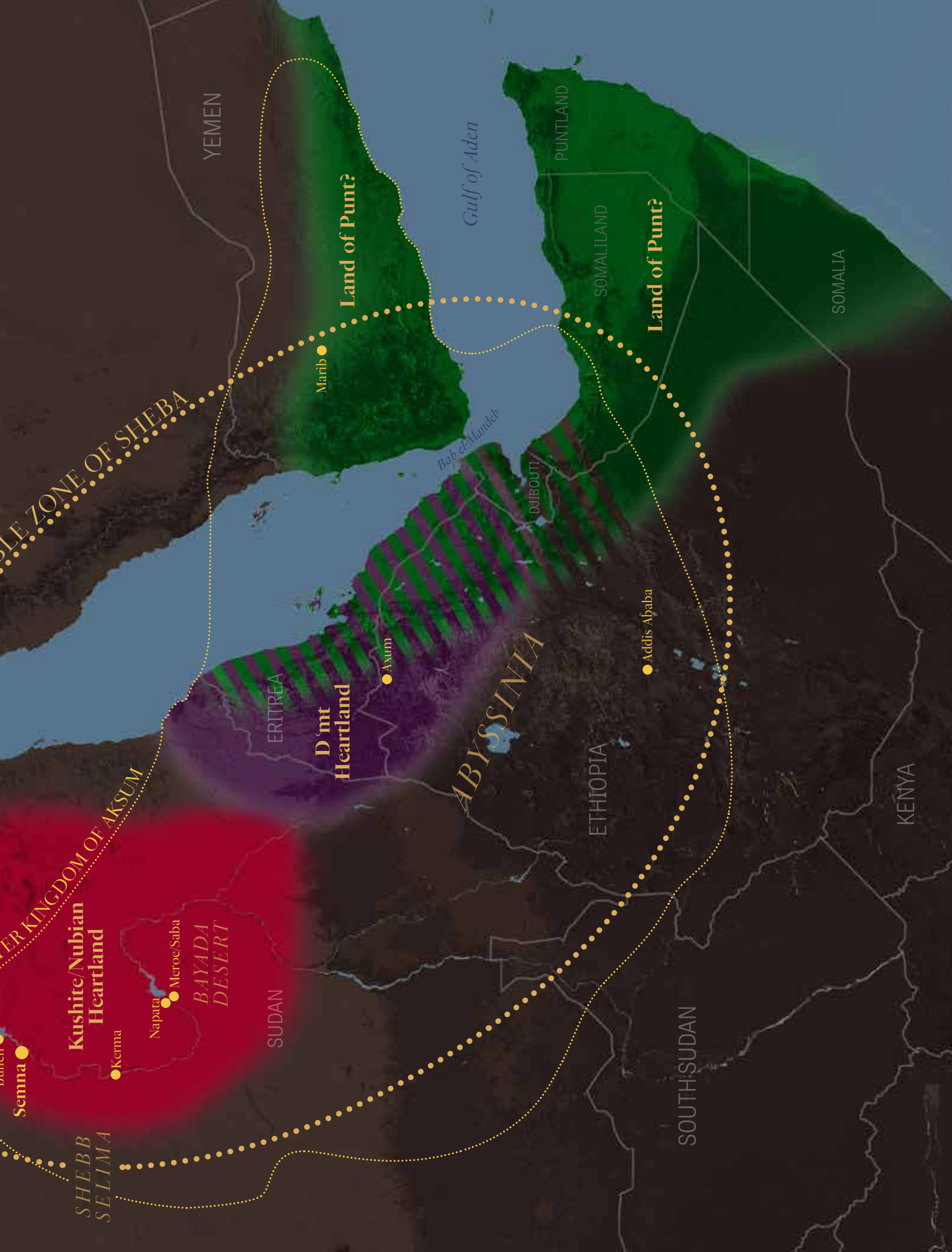
Red Sea

POSSIBLE

LAF

● Ruben

A key to identifying the Queen of Sheba is identifying her territory. In this there have been two great territorial contenders: southwest Arabia and northeast Africa. At various points in history, these territories on both sides of the Red Sea have been combined within the same kingdoms—and speculation remains about this territorial delineation throughout the region within the 10th century B.C.E. The following infographic depicts a number of territorial entities on the scene at various points in antiquity as described in the main article, including a number of individual locations addressed in the text (page 10 onward). The highlighted areas illustrate the primary zones of contention for the location of the land of Sheba.



ZONE OF SHEBA

ER KINGDOM OF AKSUM

Kushite/Nubian Heartland

SHEBB SELIMA

BAYADA DESERT

Land of Punt?

D'mt Heartland

ABYSSINIA

Land of Punt?

YEMEN

Gulf of Aden

PUNTLAND

SOMALILAND

SOMALIA

ERITREA

Marib

Axum

Bab el-Mandeb

DJIBOUTI

Addis Ababa

ETHIOPIA

KENYA

SOUTH SUDAN

Semna

Kerma

Napatra

Meroe/Saba

worn atop a long wig; there are, however, a number of Napatan and Meroitic parallels to this style.”

Paleographically and grammatically, Darnell affirms that the inscription is a good fit “sometime around the middle of the 11th to the middle to latter portion of the 10th centuries B.C.E.” Yet Darnell challenges the “almost total uncertainty that reigns in the Egyptological literature regarding the specific nature and import of the text,” especially in the “perceived impossibility of understanding the inscription”—not so much from unreadability, but rather from interpretation. (For the full text, see sidebar, page 17.)

In brief overview, Darnell’s reanalysis reveals Katimala “was apparently a more remarkable woman than any may have thought. A proper reading of the text reveals that Katimala assumed sole rule of the Napatan realm from a male ruler, perhaps her own husband, after what may have been the former ruler’s defeat at the hands of a rapacious enemy. The text relates that the male ruler became physically disabled, possibly after some skirmish with the inimical forces assailing the nascent Napatan realm. Although he may in fact have been victorious in the encounter, the text appears to emphasize that the enemy has brought repeated misery to the realm, and escaped again from the latest encounter. Katimala avers that she, with the help of Amun, then triumphed.”

Katimala’s inscription can be divided into three main parts: 1) a preamble of the demise of a faithless male ruler following battle (“disabled and perhaps ultimately deceased”); 2) a response from the ascendant Queen Katimala of her faithfulness in Amun and courage in battle (especially in relation to a feat in the “mountains of gold”); and 3) a speech before her chieftains encouraging bravery and faith.

Kingdom of Gold

A key element in the text is the queen’s valor “in the mountains of gold”—Nubian gold-mining territory—likely in connection to engaging this enemy force. This, together with the placement of the inscription, allows us to infer some territorial conclusions.

“The location of Katimala’s inscription at the southern end of the Second Cataract, and her reference to fighting an enemy in the mountains of gold together suggest that Katimala was interested in securing control of both Nilotic and Eastern Desert routes, and she may also have desired to control the middle portion of the Western Desert routes passing through the small oases of Bir Nakhlai, Shebb and Selima. The location of many Napatan sites at land and river trade route termini show trade, specifically in gold to the north and iron to the south, to have been integral to the Napatan state. ...

“The extension of Napatan control to the region of Semna would also secure the ‘Gold of Kush’ near the Nile between Kerma and Buhen. As the mining of gold in the Egyptian Eastern Desert appears to have ceased at the end of the Ramesside Period [early 11th century B.C.E.], not to be resumed until the Ptolemaic Period [late fourth century B.C.E.], securing and reopening or even continuing unabated the mining of gold in Nubia would provide a powerful advantage to the nascent Napatan State,” Darnell writes. He points to tombs at Hillat el-Arab showing signs of increased wealth at this time—the “probable source of this wealth, the mountains of gold of the Nubian Eastern Desert,” he states.

With this significant emphasis on *gold* and *trade*, one cannot help but see another parallel with the account of the Queen of Sheba, who delivered to Solomon “very much gold” (1 Kings 10:2; KJV) and whose merchants take on a legendary status in both the biblical and later texts.

Territorially, “one may reasonably suggest that the queen may allude to the extension of a proto-Napatan state across the Bayuda Desert and the incorporation of *Meroe* into the nascent polity”—the very location of Josephus’s *Saba!*

Warrior Queen, Poetess

Katimala’s relief stands at the “head of a tradition of important female administrators of the Third Intermediate Period,” writes Darnell. “The importance of Katimala at the dawn of Napatan royal power supports the significance of female influence on the later Napatan royal succession.

“Katimala was not only effective in dealing with the enemy menace; she was also eloquent In this Katimala appears to stand near the beginning of a Third Intermediate Period tradition of eloquent women, a tradition that could well correspond to an apparent general rise in the status of women during the Third Intermediate Period”—once again, a picture that fits strikingly well with the biblical Queen of Sheba, yet one that finds *zero* parallel in southwest Arabia.





similarity is certainly much closer than *Kandake*.

Overall, Katimala’s inscription “is a remarkable and thus far unique glimpse at the birth of the Napatan state,” Darnell concludes. “Although all elements of the iconography and language of Katimala’s tableau are Egyptian, nothing in the tableau supports an identification of Katimala as a daughter of any Egyptian ruler” (op cit). The associated iconography depicts Katimala in Nubian style together with an attendant, faced by the goddess Isis with solar deity symbolism above. If anything, even this religious symbolism is interesting in connection with the Queen of Sheba—later accounts label her a sun-worshiper at the start of her reign.

“Katimala’s inscription makes of her reign the introduction to a type of golden age,” with the regent “emerg[ing] as a remarkable person, a worthy ancestor—though we may not perceive clearly the lines of connection—for her often equally remarkable successors of the 25th Dynasty,” a Kushite dynasty that eventually rose up to rule Egypt during the eighth century B.C.E. (ibid).

Coming Full Circle

Could this foundational Kushite matriarchal progenitor—the eloquent, courageous and devout warrior queen and gold magnate, Katimala—be our Queen of Sheba? The dating, while still somewhat unclear, is a good general fit—and though comparatively little can be determined from a single relief, there is enough detail to infer a burgeoning kingdom including Meroe—the *very city of Saba identified by Josephus*. We can only speculate as to how much farther the kingdom may have expanded.

We have in Katimala a queen, then, primarily of *Ethiopia* (at least per Josephus’s use of the term)—secondarily of *Egypt*, insofar as her territory comprised that of former Egyptian dominion, and continued to reflect a “Theban spiritual hegemony over surviving priesthoods in Nubia”—Katimala’s tableau “strongly impl[y]ing that ... Nubian rulers were continuing and even developing an Egypt-Nubian state centered on the worship of the god Amun” (ibid). In a sense, Ethiopian in *state*—Egyptian in *spirit*, in religion.

In this particular light, it is interesting that Josephus describes the arriving ruler as a “queen of *Egypt* and *Ethiopia*”—and following her spiritual transformation at Jerusalem, leaving as simply “queen of *Ethiopia*.”

“And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built ... *there was no more spirit in her*. And she said to the king: ‘It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not ... *Blessed be the Lord thy God ...*’ (1 Kings 10:4-7, 9). ■

Queenship aside, even the point about *eloquence*—the “poetic nature and psychological depth” of Katimala’s text—is uncanny. Recall that the very reason the Queen of Sheba came was to “prove him with *hard questions*”—the Hebrew literally referring to “riddles.” The eloquence of Katimala’s inscription is not appreciated in translation, but it is embedded with symbolism, allusions and motifs—part of which makes it such a riddle to decipher.

What about her name? The late Argentine Egyptologist Ricardo Caminos believed it corresponded to the Meroitic *Kdi-mel(ye)*, drawing special attention to the initial element as the Meroitic *kādi* (“Notes on Queen Katimala’s Inscribed Panel in the Temple of Semna,” 1994).

Could it be, perchance, that we might have here some linguistic link to the great name of Ethiopian tradition, *Makeda*—broken down as *Ma-Kada*—here in this Nubian queen’s name, *Kadi-Mala*? The phonetic



I Visit the Man Who Might Have Changed the Course of World History

BY HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG

The following is an excerpt from a December 1973 *Plain Truth* Personal by our namesake, Herbert W. Armstrong, following his personal invitation to meet Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie.

WHAT IF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS HAD HEEDED Haile Selassie's plea and warning in 1935? Might it not have prevented WORLD WAR II? And would that not have changed the whole course of world history?

THINK what might have happened!

No World War II! No Korean War! No Vietnam War! No disintegration of the British Empire!

THINK how that might have changed the whole course of your life!

The fascist Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935. He was saying, "The time has come to make the fascist voice heard!" Hitler was to follow on his heels in organizing the fascist-Nazi armies in Germany.

Emperor Haile Selassie went before the League of Nations in Geneva in person. He pleaded with them to STOP this fast-mounting fascist threat to world peace at Ethiopia before it invaded France and Britain and started the greatest conflagration of world war in history.

Did not this man, who claims to be a direct descendant of the ancient Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Judah, prophesy that if they did not stop the fascist armies before they invaded Ethiopia, that all Western

Europe would be invaded?—that the British empire would cease to be an Empire—that nothing but TROUBLE would come upon the democracies of Western Europe and the United States?—war troubles, economic troubles—political troubles?

But the League of Nations had NO POWER! And the democracies didn't think any such big war would come. So they left helpless Ethiopia to her fate.

Yes, *WHAT IF!* How different might things have been, had Britain and America gone to Ethiopia's aid in 1935?

The Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was forced into exile. He went to England and did not return to his capital, Addis Ababa, until May 5, 1941, at the head of his resistance forces and with British troops. They had fought their way into Ethiopia from Sudan.

From the time of his personal appearance before the League of Nations in 1936, Emperor Haile Selassie became one of the best-known heads of state in the world. He was crowned the 225th ruler in 1930, and has had the longest reign, or tenure in office, as head of state or head of government of any man in the world.

All my life, from age 19, I have had more or less close contact with many of "the great and the near-great" of the world—heads of large corporations, presidents and

chairmen of major banks, publishers, educators—and in recent years government heads and world leaders. But none had seemed a more outstanding personality than Emperor Haile Selassie. So when, last March, the invitation came unexpectedly to visit him, it was an intriguing anticipation. Ethiopia is rich in biblical history, and I was looking forward with great interest to this meeting with the emperor.

It was in New Delhi, where I was a luncheon guest at the residence of Dr. Nagendra Singh, one of the world's leading exponents for world peace through international law. Among other guests was his Excellency Ato Getachew Mekasha, the ambassador from Ethiopia, and wife. During the course of the luncheon, the ambassador extended an invitation to visit his country and leader.

I had flown to our Ambassador College campus in England to officiate at graduation, and then on to Jerusalem. Eighty-five of our students—from all three campuses—flew on the same day to Jerusalem to spend two months working in our archaeological project there. As most of our readers know, Ambassador College is in joint participation with Hebrew University and the Israel Archaeological Society in the very large project adjacent to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (see *Time*, Sept. 3, 1973). Meanwhile a second invitation had come by telex to visit the emperor in Addis Ababa.

At a luncheon in Jerusalem, attended by several high-ranking university and government officials, it was mentioned that Emperor Selassie had spent over two years in Mandatory Palestine during his exile, and our Israeli friends at the luncheon knew him well.

It so happened that in our archaeological project, a very ancient seal, used by kings of Judah more than 2,500 years ago, had been discovered. A lion was engraved on the seal, representing “The Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” Emperor Selassie claims to be the direct descendant of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, and is often called “The Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” Our Israeli friends thought it would be nice to enlarge a photograph of the seal, frame it, and have me present it to the emperor.

We arrived Sunday, June 17, about 1:30 p.m. at Addis Ababa airport. His imperial majesty the emperor had sent to the airport one of his Mercedes limousines and driver, which was put at my personal service for the duration of our stay.

The meeting had been set for 4:30 Tuesday afternoon. At that time, we arrived at the Jubilee Palace of the emperor. There were, of course, at the gates, and at the entrance of the palace, the usual battery of armed and colorfully uniformed guards. We were met at the entrance by aides in military attire, with the Dr. Aklilu Habte, president of the Haile Selassie University, and the minister of education.

We were escorted up a long grand stairway with heavy red carpet. Arriving on the upper level, we turned into an ornate and very long room. There was a wide strip of red carpet down the center, the length of the room, and at the far end, seated behind a table with flowers, was the lone figure of his imperial majesty, the world-famous Emperor Haile Selassie. I led the way down the length of the room and was warmly greeted, as was the entire party on being introduced one at a time.

I then presented the emperor with a gift of Steuben crystal and also with the framed picture of the 2,500-year-old seal, with the engraving of the lion,

“The Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”

This seemed to please him very much, as I explained about our archaeological project and our mutual Israeli friends.

The university president acted as interpreter. I then began to mention some of the things the emperor and I have in common. We are virtually the same age—he is just eight days older than I. We both enjoyed long marriages, and both are now widowers. The empress died in 1962: my wife, in 1967, after almost 50 years of

marriage. Then I mentioned that I have the genealogy of my ancestry and that, I too, am a descendant of King Solomon of ancient Israel.

“Well WHY NOT?” blurted out the emperor spontaneously, without waiting for the interpreter to tell him what I had said.

At that responsive quip we all burst out in laughter. From that point the interpreter had very little to do.

During the first 15 or 20 minutes of our meeting, his majesty tended to answer whatever I said with a philosophical observation, apparently inspired by Solomon's Proverbs, which I rather deduced he has studied continuously and religiously.

The general sum and substance of our conversation revolved around the basic fundamental principles of world conditions, evils and problems,



Haile Selassie speaks before the League of Nations in Geneva on June 30, 1936.

and how in our work we are putting solutions and true values to actual practice, setting a living example of THE WAY to peace and happiness in our college campuses and in our communities throughout the world. “Philosophy, and moral philosophy,” he commented, “is commendable, but it is far more commendable to put into actual practice the principles upon which the philosophy is based.”

While we were talking, servants brought tea and cakes. The emperor began breaking off pieces of cake, which his pet dog, a tiny Chihuahua presented to him by Mao Tse-Tung, picked up promptly.

The emperor gave no indication or move toward terminating our visit, but after some 45 minutes, I felt it proper to do so, and rose to my feet, expressing what an honor and delight the meeting had been. Then Haile Selassie presented me with an already autographed full color photograph of himself, with a sterling silver frame, bearing his Imperial insignia centered over the top of the frame.

Then I received a real surprise. Out of a beautiful leather case, handed him by an aide, the emperor took an extremely beautiful gold bracelet which he presented to me as his personal gift to my daughter Beverly. In the center of the bracelet was a solid gold coin (24 karat), made 43 years ago in celebration of his coronation. The coin had the emperor’s face engraved on it. The rest of the bracelet was 22 karat gold, with beautiful garlands engraved with exquisite craftsmanship. Jewelers have since evaluated it as the finest gold bracelet they had ever seen. It is naturally quite a conversation piece, and so far as value is concerned, priceless. The very exquisite work was all done in Ethiopia, where they mine gold in limited quantities and produce some of the world’s finest jewelry.

That evening, I hosted a reception and dinner in a private room off the lobby of our hotel in honor of the minister of Education, the president of the University, the dean of faculties, the head of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, the vice president for Academic Affairs, the vice president for Planning, and other distinguished guests, and their wives.

On Wednesday, June 20, I paid a morning visit for two or three hours to the university. There my host and guide was the president of the university. That same day, June 20, I was guest of honor at a very important luncheon hosted by his excellency the ambassador to India. He had invited other ambassadors. In attendance were the ambassadors from 19 different nations, and their wives.

I was called upon to make a brief address before this distinguished gathering. After making a toast to his imperial majesty, the emperor of Ethiopia, I stated that

we were gathered in a world PEACE-conference, proving that so many people from so many nations could gather together in friendship. I spoke briefly, some seven or eight minutes, on THE WAY TO WORLD PEACE—the way of God’s law, briefly proclaiming the coming world of peace—the WORLD TO COME.

The following day, Thursday, was the day of our departure. But that morning we were the very special guests of his imperial majesty at the graduation ceremonies of the university, held in the Grand Palace. We were seated on the large front platform, immediately to the left of the dais on which was the ornate gold throne where the emperor was to sit, personally handing the diplomas to each graduate.

A large band was playing at the rear. The graduates marched in, completely filling the large auditorium—close to 3,000 of them. It was a very colorful ceremony.

Following this, we were driven directly from the palace to the airport, where our crew had our plane ready for boarding. And there, to personally bid us goodbye were the ambassador to India and his wife.

It was, we felt, a most profitable, as well as enjoyable four days in Ethiopia.

Herbert Armstrong went on to visit Haile Selassie once more in 1974, with future plans for another visit to the country. Later that year, however, news came of the Derg coup and the emperor’s imprisonment. In September 1975, Mr. Armstrong wrote the following memo in his article “Another Government Overthrown”:

Major news headlines this morning read: Another government overthrown—this time in Peru, and a new premier and government in riot-torn Portugal. Governments are being overthrown at the rate of one or more a month.

The former Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia died a few days ago. He was just eight days older than I. His government was overthrown by a military coup approximately a year ago. One of the last things he did before the military took him was to send me a letter of congratulation on my 82nd birthday. Many asked me after his imprisonment what had happened to the noted emperor. But I didn’t know—nobody except a few military officers in Ethiopia did. President Kenyatta of Kenya told me that he and Haile Selassie were very close friends—closer than brothers. But at that time, he had no knowledge as to the emperor’s fate.

It is significant that some mysterious invisible force seems to be stirring up strife within nations all over the world, as well as strife BETWEEN nations.

It will take a greater POWER than human to bring PERMANENT PEACE to the world. Yet that PERMANENT PEACE will come shortly—you can read of it in the book of Zechariah chapter 14. ■



King Taita of Palistin is depicted on a black basalt slab at the Aleppo temple.

Toi of Hamath: David's Northern 'Philistine' Ally?

And has his kingdom been identified through archaeology?

BY MICAH VAN HALTEREN

THROUGHOUT THE REIGNS OF DAVID AND SOLOMON several foreign kingdoms were allies of the united monarchy. King Hiram of Tyre, for example, helped David build his palace and helped Solomon build the temple. The Queen of Sheba gave Solomon a great store of wealth for his wisdom.

There is, however, one king who supported David who often gets overlooked because of his brief mention in the Bible. “And when *Toi king of Hamath* heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer, then Toi sent Joram his son unto king David, to salute him, and to bless him—because he had fought against Hadadezer and smitten him; for Hadadezer had wars with Toi—and

he brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass” (2 Samuel 8:9-10).

Who was this “Toi king of Hamath”—and is there any archaeological evidence for his existence and his kingdom?

Taita Inscriptions

In 2003, German archaeologist Prof. Kay Kohlmeyer discovered a hieroglyphic Luwian inscription at the temple of the storm-god of Aleppo (northern Syria). Known as Aleppo 6, the inscription reads: “I am Taita the Hero, king of Palistin.” “Hero” was one of the honorific titles used in the Hittite empire period.

Scholars eventually connected this inscription to two others discovered in Sheizar and Meharde (just north of ancient Hamath)—both of which mention the name Taita. Later, Prof. David Hawkins revealed the discovery of another temple inscription (Aleppo 7) from Aleppo that bore the same name.

In 2010, Charles Steitler of the Academy of Science and Literature in Mainz, Germany, was the first to identify the “Taita” from these inscriptions with the Toi king of Hamath of 2 Samuel 8.

Although the names look similar, there are obvious differences in spelling. This is not unusual. Epigraphic studies are often able to explain these differences. The full Luwian name, Taitas, is most likely of Hurrian origin. According to Steitler, the name was probably derived from the root *tahhe*, meaning “man”—with examples of names using this root present at other sites. Not much is known about the second “ta” element and the final “s” is likely a nominative ending in the Luwian script (similar in Greek).

Concerning the vowel difference between “a” and “o,” Steitler writes: “Given the frequent shift of the long vowel *ā* to *ō* in Canaanite, as well as the presence of the vowel *a* in the first syllable of Toi’s name in Josephus and in some manuscripts of the Septuagint, it seems likely that the initial syllable of T’Y was originally pronounced with a vowel *a*. The final *yod* of the name is supported by the readings of Josephus, *thainos*, and of *Codex Vaticanus*, *thaei*.”

The biblical Toi/Tai/Tou, as Steitler asserts, could be construed as a Hebrew abbreviation of “Taita.”

What about Taita’s kingdom? Does it fit with the biblical description of the king of Hamath?

Different Kingdoms, Different Kings?

Although the name of the king on the Aleppo, Sheizar and Mehard inscriptions is the same, the name of his kingdom is not. The main difference is that the kingdom of the Taita from the Aleppo temple inscriptions was called *Palistin*; the Taita of the Sheizar and Meharde inscriptions ruled a kingdom with the name *Walistin*.

This has led scholars to suggest the likelihood of two kings with the name Taita ruling over the same kingdom but at different times. Based on the epigraphic differences, the Taita from Aleppo was dated to the 11th century B.C.E. and the Taita from Sheizar and Meharde to the 10th century B.C.E.

“As to the alternation of initial *pa-* and *wa-*, we could suppose that it reflects a hesitation in rendering an initial *f*, where Egyptian, Hebrew and Akkadian all opted for *p*,” wrote Prof. David Hawkins. “We may also note that if we are to think in terms of two Taitas, the form *Palistin* would be the older by a clear margin.”

Professor Hawkins suggested that the gap between the two Taitas might be no more than one generation. Epigrapher Gershon Galil concurs, writing, “If Taita I ruled Palistin in the first half of the 11th century B.C.E., Taita II, his grandson, may be dated to the late 11th–early 10th century B.C.E.” (“A Concise History of Palistin/Patin/Unqi/mq in the 11th–9th Centuries B.C.”).

According to the biblical timeline, the proposed time frame for Taita II lines up perfectly with the reign of King David and Toi, king of Hamath.

Taita’s Palistin

After the Hittite empire collapsed around 1200 B.C.E.—during a region-wide cataclysm known as the Bronze Age collapse—several smaller Neo-Hittite states emerged out of its ruins in the area of western Syria, southeastern Turkey and Lebanon. The Bible hints at this situation in 1 Kings 10:29, speaking of the plural “kings of the Hittites.”

As these inscriptions show, one of these kingdoms was *Palistin*. The heart of *Palistin* was located in the Amuq Valley (also known as the Plain of Antioch) in northwest Syria. One of the biggest changes in the Amuq Valley in the early 12th century B.C.E. was the move of its chief city from Tell Atchana (Alalakh) to Tell Tayinat (later known as Kanuluah; Calneh in the Bible—Amos 6:2). This is based on archaeological excavations at the site uncovering evidence of increased settlement and large construction later in the early Iron Age, as well as another inscription Tell Tayanit 1—with the name *Palistin*.

As to the extent of the kingdom, Prof. Lynn Welton from the University of Toronto and her colleagues write in their paper “Shifting Networks and Community Identity at Tell Tayinat in the Iron I (ca. 12th to Mid 10th Century B.C.E.):” “Together, these inscriptions imply the existence of an early Iron Age kingdom known as *Walastin/Palastin*, centered in the Amuq Plain, encompassing an area that included Aleppo to the east, and extending southward in the Orontes Valley [Amuq Valley] as far as Hama [Hamath], with its capital located at Tell Tayinat.”

Two more inscriptions discovered at the coastal site of Arsuz (southern Turkey) mention the kingdom of *Walastin*, further revealing the extent of the kingdom at the time of Taita II.

But if this was the extent of the kingdom, then why is Toi/Taita called the king only of *Hamath* in the Bible—not king of *Palistin*?

Hamath was evidently under Taita’s control, and the battle David fought against Hadadezer was “by Hamath”—right at its border (1 Chronicles 18:3). As Dr. Mark Weeden wrote, “It might just be the case that

the Judeans did not know about or found it irrelevant to mention the parts of Toi's kingdom further to the north" ("After the Hittites: The Kingdoms of Karkamish and Palistin in Northern Syria").

Evidence of control as far south as Hamath is dated only to the 10th century B.C.E., in connection with Taita II. "The modification of the picture demanded by the recognition of two Taitas would be: a kingdom of perhaps three generations, 11th to early 10th century B.C.E., ruled from the Amuq by Taita I controlling Aleppo and Karkamiš(?); and by Taita II controlling (additionally?) as far south as Meharde-Sheizar," Hawkins explained.

Pottery from Cyprus and Mycenae was found at Alalakh, the previous capital in the Amuq plain, "demonstrating the involvement of this key site in the Eastern Mediterranean trade network of this period," according to Jeffrey Emanuel, a specialist in Aegean archaeology from Harvard.

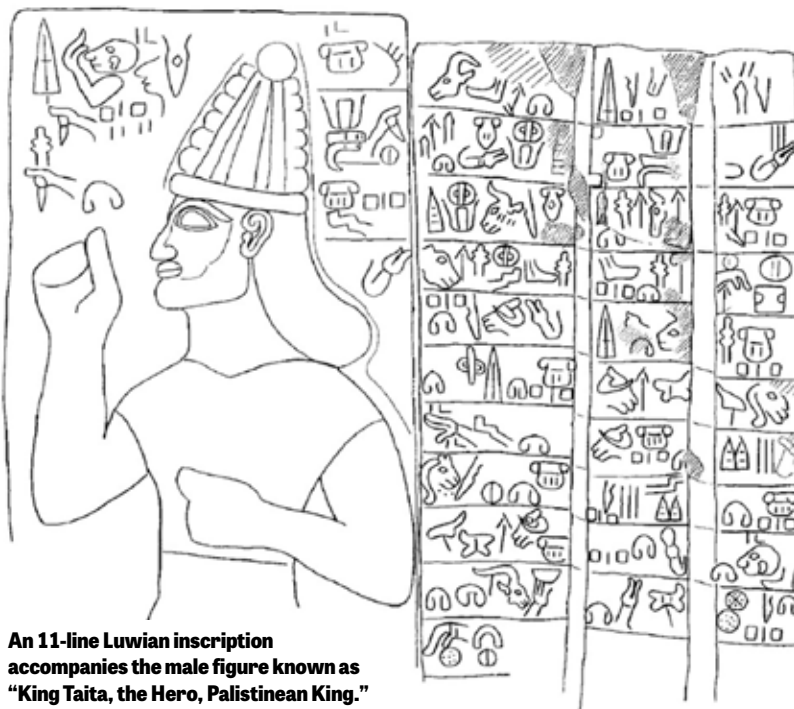
As Tell Tayinat became the main site of the Amuq Valley in the Iron Age I, it took over this role. "The role of the main site in the 'Amuq as a gateway for imports continued in the Iron II, as well, with Ta'yinat serving as a hub of exchange between Cyprus, the Aegean and the Levant." This position as a trade hub could explain why the Bible says King Toi was so wealthy—able to send "vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass" along with his son.

Palistin—Northern Philistines?

The name *Palistin* looks similar to the infamous Philistines of the Bible. This similarity has led scholars to suggest a connection between the two peoples—suggesting that at least part of the Palistineans were "northern Philistines." Pottery styles also support this conclusion.

The Late Helladic IIIc style pottery, an influence from the Aegean, entered *Palistin* in the 12th century B.C.E., resulting in "widespread distribution in the north Orontes Valley," the Amuq Valley Regional Project Survey recorded. Aegean influences are often considered evidence of Sea People/Philistine influence in the Levant based on the ceramics found at the Philistine sites of Ekron, Ashdod and Ashkelon.

However, the locally produced Aegean-style wares were rare in the Iron Age I phase, when the Philistine



An 11-line Luwian inscription accompanies the male figure known as "King Taita, the Hero, Palistinean King."

Sea Peoples, as recorded on Ramesses III's Medinet Habu reliefs, were supposed to have appeared. Only in the late 12th to early 11th century B.C.E. does the style increase, though it declines again after about a century.

Pointing to this late introduction, independent researcher Michael Banyai believes that the Aegean wares should not be dogmatically connected with the Philistines. "It is possible that whoever introduced LH IIIc 1b ceramics to Palestine did not necessarily identify as a Philistine," he wrote. Instead, he proposed that these should be identified with another ethnic group.

In contrast to the Aegean influence, the excavated pottery also revealed a strong and continuing local Hittite tradition. This Hittite tradition stays the most predominant throughout the whole period until both the local pottery and Aegean-style pottery were replaced by Red Slip Burnished Wares in the Iron Age II.

The pottery and the use of hieroglyphic Luwian script "suggest close cultural connections with the former Hittite world and the continuation of earlier ceramic industries," according to Professor Welton. In addition, two basalt stele uncovered in the city of Arsuz on the Mediterranean coast make mention of Supiluliuma, king of Walistin. The last ruler of the Hittite empire before its collapse was also called Supiluliuma. This has led some to suggest that he was a descendant in the continuing line of the Hittite royal house, ruling over one of its successor kingdoms. Altogether it seems that the main culture was

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, THERE IS AN abundance of evidence for the historicity of Israel's biblical united monarchy. This was a topic we explored in detail in the Exhibit Edition of *Let the Stones Speak*. Inscriptions, architecture, cities, garrisons, copper mines, evidence of trade—all of these demonstrate the historical reality of David and Solomon's kingdom as described in the Bible.

As is the case with archaeology, new evidence is emerging all the time. That's true of the material we published in our Exhibit Edition. Last year, Prof. Avraham Faust from Bar-Ilan University and Zev Farber from the Shalom Hartman Institute published a new book, *The Bible's First Kings: Uncovering the Story of Saul, David and Solomon*. In Chapter 8, they discuss evidence of the kingdom of David and Solomon coming from an unexpected place—the Sharon Plain.

Let's see how the settlement of the Sharon Plain is yet another piece of evidence for a strong united monarchy centered in Jerusalem.

The Sharon

The Sharon is a fertile plain along the Mediterranean coast located between the Tanninim River in the north and the Yarkon River in the south. Today about a third of its agricultural land is used for citrus farming. This wasn't always the case, however; for much of its history, the Sharon Plain was a swampland caused by drainage problems due to the kurkar (calcareous sandstone) ridges.

Regardless of its terrain, the Sharon had its fair share of settlements throughout the Bronze Age (3300–1200 B.C.E.). Joshua 12:18 reveals that the Israelites conquered the Sharon but left much of the local population to their own devices. Many of the sites remained Canaanite/Philistine throughout the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I (1200–1000 B.C.E.).

During the Iron Age I, settlement around the Yarkon River began to increase while the rest of the plain experienced a gradual decline. After the Iron Age I, however, something changed.

“The 10th century (the beginning of the Iron Age II), however, is outstanding,” wrote Faust in a 2007 *Israel Exploration Journal* article. “During this period there was a settlement peak in the Yarkon basin and the Sharon area, and the following sites were settled: Tel Qasile, Tel Gerisa, Tel Michal, Makhmis, Tel Aphid, Tel Hefer (with limited activity at best), Tel Mikhmoret, Tel Zeror, Tel Poleg and Tel Mevorakh” (“The Sharon and the Yarkon Basin in the 10th Century B.C.E.: Ecology, Settlement Patterns and Political Involvement”).

In their new book, Faust and Farber refer to the region as “an ecologically fringe swampland.” So why was there “a settlement peak” in the 10th century B.C.E.?

United Monarchy Takeover

One of the central sites Faust and Farber focus on is Tel Qasile.

Tel Qasile is situated within the center of modern-day Tel Aviv. It lies close to the bank of the Yarkon

THE SHARON AND THE UNITED MONARCHY

Does the Sharon Plain of the 10th century B.C.E. reveal the kingdom of David and Solomon?

BY MICAH VAN HALTEREN



River and is around 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) from the Mediterranean coast. It was first excavated by Prof. Benjamin Mazar in 1948—whose excavation of this site was the first license issued by the newly formed State of Israel. After his excavations concluded in 1950, archaeologist Jacob Kaplan continued to excavate between the 1950s and 1970s, followed by Amihai Mazar (nephew of Benjamin Mazar) in the 1970s and 1980s.

In addition to a residential area, archaeologists uncovered an extensive cultic center with a Philistine temple that was in continual use through three strata (Strata X-XII). The temple was expanded with each new stratum.

This changed, however, starting with the 10th century B.C.E., the period of the united monarchy. “Although the cultic compound, with its succession of temples, grew and developed in the course of Strata XII-X of the Iron Age I, after the massive destruction of Stratum X in the early 10th century B.C.E. the temples were not rebuilt,” Faust wrote (“The ‘United Monarchy’ on the Ground,” 2021). According to Faust, the Israelites were responsible for the destruction and transformation of Tel Qasile.

An absence of temples is a clear sign of Israelite society. In our Exhibit Edition, we wrote that these sites without temples, including Tel Qasile, “show that David’s territorial hold extended far beyond Jerusalem. He didn’t just rule over the southern highlands as a petty tribal chieftain; instead, his kingdom grew in size to engulf the Plain of Sharon and into the northern valleys, destroying foreign temples as he went” (see ArmstrongInstitute.org/1031 for more information).

Faust believed that the change in culture allows us to “see that the highland polity [united Israel, with its capital at Jerusalem] expanded into the Sharon and incorporated the region into its political and cultural sphere.”

Another clear sign of Israelite incursion into the area are the four-room houses present at Tel Mevorakh in the north of the Sharon. Archaeologists have identified these “longitudinal four-room houses” as a distinctly Israelite form of architecture. “These houses dominated the built landscape of Iron II Israelite settlements, where almost all houses—rich and poor, large and small, urban and rural—were built in this manner,” Faust and Farber write. “At the same time, they were very rare outside Israelite settlements.” (For more on these four-room houses, read ArmstrongInstitute.org/1072.)

Geographically, it makes sense that David and Solomon crossed into the Yarkon basin. According to Faust and Farber, this region “would have been especially important when the political center that wished to benefit from the maritime trade was located in a limited area encompassing southern Samaria, northern Judah or the northernmost part of the Shephelah,

somewhere between Ramallah, Bethlehem and Gezer.” As such, they conclude that the “only reasonable candidate is Jerusalem.”

Sharon in the Bible

The first biblical reference to this area at this time period is in 1 Chronicles 27:29, which speaks of one of David’s ministers named “Shirtai the Sharonite” who was “over the herds that fed in Sharon.” 1 Kings 4:10 says the region surrounding Tel Hefer (“land of Hephher”), which lies in the Sharon Plain, became a tributary of Solomon and delivered goods to the king for one month out of a year.

Slightly later in Solomon’s reign, the Bible reveals part of the reason there was an influx in activity in the area—especially around the Yarkon River. In 1 Kings 5, Solomon asked King Hiram of Tyre to provide him with cedar and cypress timbers for the construction of the first temple. “... I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of cypress,” Hiram said. “My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea; and I will make them into rafts to go by sea *unto the place that thou shalt appoint me*, and will cause them to be broken up there, and thou shalt receive them ...” (verses 22-23; verses 8-9 in other translations).

2 Chronicles 2:15 reveals that this appointed place was the port city of Jaffa, close to the mouth of the Yarkon River. Once the logs arrived in Jaffa, “the best route would be to bring the trees to the Yarkon, and from there by the river to Aphek, and only from there to carry them overland,” Faust explains.

Some of our readers live in or close to Tel Aviv and will be familiar with the Yarkon River. Three thousand years ago, that river may have been the very waterway Solomon used to move the timber from Phoenicia to Jerusalem for the construction of the temple.

Additionally, for Solomon’s “navy of Tarshish,” which operated in cooperation with the Phoenicians and whose voyages reached Spain and beyond (1 Kings 10:22), the Sharon Plain was the perfect outlet to the Mediterranean Sea.

Whole Sharon?

While the evidence shows increased prosperity in the whole Sharon, Faust and Farber admit that “most of the prosperity seems to have concentrated in a string of sites along the Yarkon basin, some of which might have been associated with Jaffa, located slightly to the south of the river, on the coast.”

Why, then, would the settlements in the rest of the Sharon flourish if the focus of the united monarchy was primarily on the Yarkon basin?

A lack of Canaanite temples and the prevalence of four-room houses testify of an Israelite takeover in the

early 10th century B.C.E. Second, the Bible's description of the construction of Solomon's temple speaks of trade along the coast of the whole region. While the prosperity in the rest of the region doesn't necessarily have to do with the movement of resources from Phoenicia to Jaffa, it does certainly fit with the expansion of a united Israel into that region and general trade along its coast.

"The main force pulling people to the region was most likely its ability to benefit from the maritime trade that passed along its coasts and channel some of it inland," Faust and Farber write. "Maritime trade grew significantly with the advent of the Iron Age II, and from this perspective, the Sharon settlement growth in the Iron IIA should not come as a surprise."

Movement to the Sharon Plain in general was a natural consequence of control and enlarged investment in the area by the highland polity. It demonstrates the consequences of a period of wealth and prosperity that fits with the united monarchy.

Short-Lived Glory

Just as the glory of the united monarchy was rather brief, so too was the interest and prosperity in the Sharon region. In his 2007 article, Faust said that the prosperity was "short-lived" and that "most of these sites—Tel Qasile, Tel Gerisa, Tel Michal, Makhmis, Tel Aphek, Tel Poleg and Tel Mevorakh—were abandoned by the end of the 10th century." Only Tel Zeror (another site excavated by students of our namesake in the 1970s), Tel Hefer and Tel Mikhmoret continued to be used throughout the Iron Age IIA-IIIb.

A decline and abandonment of most of these settlements in the Iron IIB strata means they must have been destroyed or abandoned sometime during the Iron IIA period. "Most excavators explicitly attributed the Iron IIA settlements in the Sharon to the 10th century only," write Faust and Farber. "In the ninth century [the second half of the Iron IIA], the population plummeted from one of the highest it had ever been to almost entirely uninhabited."

What was the reason for this abandonment? In the late 10th century B.C.E., after Solomon's reign concluded, Pharaoh Shishak (Shoshenq I—see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1149*) invaded the Levant and destroyed many cities and villages, as listed on the Karnak Inscription (see 1 Kings 14:25-26). It is possible some of the cities and villages he destroyed included the sites in the Sharon Plain, although only the easternmost part of the Sharon is listed among the 43 cities on the damaged and incomplete inscription at Karnak.

History shows that when the nation was unified and strong, the Sharon was a lucrative region, especially with Solomon's construction of the temple requiring

Phoenician goods be shipped by sea. After the nation divided, however, the inland polities lost interest in resettling and fortifying the swampy region.

"The entity that built the sites, namely the highland polity, no longer existed when Shishak visited the region and it could not therefore rebuild the sites, nor was there anyone who had an interest in sustaining the system as a whole," write Faust and Farber.

After the nation split, maritime interest decreased and the Bible describes no successive kings that possessed a significant fleet of ships after Solomon (e.g. 1 Kings 9:27; 10:22)—besides Jehoshaphat's and Ahaziah's failed attempt at shipbuilding (1 Kings 22:48-49; 2 Chronicles 20:35-37). Thus, there was no incentive to reinvigorate the Sharon for the kingdom of Judah in the ninth century B.C.E.

For the northern kingdom, there was also no appeal in the region since the city of Dor, just north of the Sharon Plain, was the most convenient port access to the Mediterranean. Only for a united nation under a government headquartered in Jerusalem—as the united monarchy was—would investment in the Sharon region be expedient. Therefore, Faust and Farber explain, "only the highland polity of the 10th century could account for the region's prosperity."

Additionally, the Sharon is not mentioned in the Bible after the division of the nation until the time of the Prophet Isaiah in the eighth century B.C.E. (Isaiah 33:9; 35:2; 65:10). The insignificance the region was relegated to following David and Solomon is shown by both the lack of textual references in the Hebrew Bible and the archaeological record.

United Monarchy— Historical Reality

Excavations show that settlement only picked up again in the late Iron Age and hit a new high during the Persian period. Therefore, there was only a short window of time—the 10th century B.C.E.—when settlement in the Sharon peaked. As it happens, that time frame lines up with the history of David and Solomon's great kingdom as described in the Bible. Coincidence? Judge for yourself.

As we combine the settlement history of the Sharon with the biblical narrative, the most logical explanation is the incorporation of the Sharon Plain into a strong united monarchy—a "highland polity" with its capital at Jerusalem. And when we read through those scriptures of the construction of the temple or Solomon's navy of Tarshish, it brings to mind the words of Prof. Benjamin Mazar (emphasis added): "Pore over the Bible again and again, for it contains within it descriptions of GENUINE HISTORICAL REALITY." ■



The Royal Steward Inscription: Is Shebna's Tomb Cursed?

An inscription with a unique connection
to a curse proclaimed in Isaiah 22

BY SPENCER FALK

THE PROPHET ISAIAH WARNED JUDAH DURING THE reigns of several kings, delivering a strong message of judgment against the nation. In a few instances, Isaiah also warned—and even cursed—specific *individuals*. A potent example is recorded in Isaiah 22.

“Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts: Go, get thee unto this steward, Even unto Shebna, who is over the house: What hast thou here, and whom hast thou here, That thou hast hewed thee out here a sepulchre, Thou that hewest thee out a sepulchre on high, And gravest a habitation for thyself in the rock? Behold, the Lord will hurl thee up and down with a man's throw; Yea, He will wind thee round and round; He will violently roll and toss thee like a ball into a large country; There shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, Thou shame of the lord's house. And I will thrust thee from thy post, And from thy station shalt thou be pulled down” (verses 15-19). Shebna was formerly the royal steward of King Hezekiah—the Hebrew title *asher 'al habayit*, על-הבית, literally “which is over the house”—a managerial position over the royal house and treasury. Because of Shebna's pride, vanity and unfaithfulness, he was demoted and replaced by Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah (verses 20-25).

An ancient tomb text, known as the Royal Steward Inscription—sometimes referred to more directly as the Shebna Inscription—has an intriguing connection to this passage, in name, title, date and location—as well as in *curse*.

The Discovery

While leading explorations around Jerusalem in 1870, French archaeologist Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau took note of one particular inscription above a tomb that sat on an especially high cliff on the edge of Silwan, overlooking the Kidron Valley. At the time, Clermont-Ganneau was unable to decipher its Hebrew inscription in full. He did postulate that part of the inscription contained the title “Royal Steward” and therefore put forward that it was the tomb of Shebna. Realizing the historical value of the inscription, he had it removed and sent to the British Museum, where it sat for more than 80 years before being translated.

In 1953, Israeli archaeologist Prof. Nahman Avigad finally translated the text. It reads: “This is [the tomb of] ... iah [or yahu], which is over the house. There is no silver or gold here, only ... [his bones] ... and the bones of his maidservant with him. Cursed be the man who opens this.” He dated the Hebrew text on the inscription to the seventh century B.C.E. and “confirmed Clermont-Ganneau’s reading *asher ‘al habayit*, or ‘Royal Steward,’ and adopted his suggestion that the tomb belonged to Shebna,” wrote Hershel Shanks, former editor in chief of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, in “The Tombs of Silwan” (May-June 1994).

As such, this inscription became known as the “Royal Steward Inscription,” or “Shebna Inscription.” Although there is no visible mention of the name “Shebna,” researchers generally agree that the tomb belonged to this cursed steward of King Hezekiah. This is based on a few clues.

The Textual Evidence

The majority—and most important part—of the name is missing, but let’s consider what we can gather. The part of the name that remains on the inscription is the ending “yahu.” This is known as a theophoric ending. As Shanks wrote, this was a “common suffix in Judah that refers to YHWH, the personal name of the Israelite God,” adding that the Isaiah 22 Shebna’s “full name is, presumably, Shebnayahu.”

In *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis From the Period of the Judean Kingdom*, Prof. David Ussishkin writes: “When the funerary inscription was deciphered, [Israeli archaeologist Yigael] Yadin and Avigad proposed completing the name as [Sheban]yahu, of which Shebna is the abbreviated form, and this was accepted by many scholars.” In his 1953 *Israel Exploration Journal* article “The Epitaph of a Royal Steward,” Avigad explained: “It is a well-known fact that certain Hebrew names, ending in *alef*”—as Shebna does—are abbreviated “hypocoristica” of longer names ending in *-iah* or *-yahu*. He provides a number of examples, including

אחא/אחיהו, עזרא/עזריהו, עבדא/עבדיהו. “A person could apparently be called both by his full name and by its abbreviation,” he wrote. While, as Avigad explained, this is a “conjectural suggestion,” it is the most likely conclusion considering all available evidence. Furthermore, two bullae (clay seal stamps) have been discovered bearing this longer name “Shebnayahu, Servant of the King”—one from Lachish and another from the antiquities market—which almost certainly belonged to one and the same biblical individual. (In the case of these bullae, the shorter three-letter Hebrew title “servant” makes logical sense for the tiny inscriptions, as compared to the nine-letter title for “royal steward.”)

More significant than the personal name is the exact parallel for the title used on this inscription. Notice Isaiah 22:15 again: “Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, Go, get thee unto this steward, Even unto Shebna, *who is over the house.*” Avigad continued: “This title, which may also be translated ‘Steward of the House’ or ‘Governor of the Palace,’ indicates that the deceased was an official of high rank, holding a position of great importance at the court of the king.” This title, or a form thereof, is found 14 times in the Bible—10 times in the exact form used both on this inscription and in relation to Shebna—and of these, 7 references are to the biblical Shebna/Eliakim episode. As such, there is a strong biblical connection to this name at this point in time—even without the personal name explicitly stated.

Another point is the dating: Paleographically, the inscription style is of the seventh century B.C.E. Chronologically, the biblical Shebna was on the scene at the end of the eighth and into the seventh centuries B.C.E., probably dying during the early to mid-seventh century B.C.E.

An additional note is the style of the engraving. In “Texts in the City: Monumental Inscriptions in Jerusalem’s Landscape,” Prof. Jeremy Smoak and Dr. Alice Mandell wrote, “Moreover, the engraved letters on this lintel are among the largest examples of writing in the corpus of inscriptions from the Iron Age southern Levant. Thus, the artistic design and scale of the letters compel audiences to wonder how much time and effort went into its production.” This rather flamboyant—might we say narcissistic?—textual style is emphasized in the spacing and size of the letters. Smoak and Mandell continue: “This arraignment produces an image that is dense with writing while the downwards vertical strokes



of certain letter forms pull the eye down to the lower lines of text, thus creating an image of continuous script. The shape, spacing and slanting of the letters blurs the line between art and writing. ... The prominent position of the inscription over the doorway combined with the width of the inscription conveyed messages about social hierarchies and boundaries.”

This tomb inscription wasn’t just words—it was a broadcast of pride, power and authority of the tomb’s owner. This is additionally attested in the tomb’s location.

Location, Location, Location

The Silwan necropolis contains around 60 tombs. These tombs are in rows that gradually increase in elevation on the cliff edge that runs above the Kidron Valley and across from the City of David.

In 1968, Professor Ussishkin, assisted by the late Prof. Gabriel Barkay, performed an in-depth survey of the necropolis and its tombs. “A careful study of the remains indicated the existence of a monumental necropolis,” he wrote in 1970, “where nobles and notables of the kingdom of Judah were undoubtedly interred.” The biblical text describes that the righteous kings of Judah were buried in the City of David. It would make sense, then, that Judah’s royal officials were buried in a different location but still nearby.

Of the tombs in the necropolis, the Tomb of the Royal Steward is one of the highest in elevation, standing out along the cliff edge with an unrivaled view of the temple, palace and City of David.

Taken together—the manner of the lintel inscription and the location of the tomb, besides the title, dating and partial name—we have a remarkable fit with the words of Isaiah: “What hast thou here, and whom hast thou here, That thou hast hewed thee out here a sepulchre, Thou that *hewest thee out a sepulchre on high*, And gravest a habitation for thyself in the rock?” (Isaiah 22:16). The rock-cut tomb in Silwan was indeed carved out on high—30 meters (100 feet) above the floor of the Kidron Valley. In *The Necropolis From the Time of the Kingdom of Judah at Silwan, Jerusalem*, Ussishkin describes its location as “distinguished.”

Isaiah’s Condemnation

Shebna was corrected by the Prophet Isaiah for his pride and arrogance, all tied directly to that tomb he was carving out for himself. As we’ve seen, this is aptly illustrated by the Tomb of the Steward in the Silwan necropolis.

But there is a final element to consider. The last part of the tomb inscription invokes a curse upon whomever would disturb the contents: “Cursed be the man who opens this.” This is especially interesting in Isaiah’s turning of a curse upon Shebna himself. Additionally, as seen in 2 Kings 18 and 19, Isaiah 22, 36 and 37, Shebna’s title was stripped from him and given to Eliakim, leaving Shebna with a grand tomb embossed with a title that he no longer carried.

What, then, became of the once Royal Steward Shebna? The Bible doesn’t say—short of Isaiah’s prophecy: “Behold, the Lord will hurl thee up and down with a man’s throw; Yea, He will wind thee round and round; He will violently roll and toss thee like a ball into a large country; There shalt thou die ...” (Isaiah 22:17-18). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Royal Steward tomb was found empty—as were other tombs along the Silwan necropolis. Curiously, also missing was this name of the tomb owner—and not only scratched out, as in the relatively common practice of *damnatio memoriae*, but remarkably deeply gouged out, creating a ball-shaped indent in the stone. “Isaiah prophesied that the biblical Shebna would be tossed ‘like a ball into a large country,’” wrote *Let the Stones Speak* contributing editor Christopher Eames. “Perhaps the name of this individual was quite literally carved out of the inscription into a ball shape, and tossed away” (ArmstrongInstitute.org/157). While we can’t know for sure, one thing is clear: The owner’s name that was attached to this cave was intentionally and deliberately removed, leaving behind only the divine name element at the end, *-yahu*.

The Royal Steward Inscription stands as one of the most important artifacts in biblical archaeology, offering a unique insight into the drama of Isaiah 22 and bringing biblical history vividly to life. ■



The Lachish inscription

Joseph's Unusual Title Proved by New Lachish Inscription

As Joseph was 'šalit' in Bronze Age Egypt, Baal was 'šalit' at Bronze Age Lachish.

BY ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE STAFF

“AND THE SONS OF ISRAEL CAME TO BUY AMONG those that came; for the famine was in the land of Canaan. And Joseph was the governor [šalit] over the land ...” (Genesis 42:5-6).

While serving as regent in Egypt, Joseph was given an odd title: *šalit* (שליט/ליט). It's a word, or a form of a word, found generally in late texts, e.g. Esther, Nehemiah and chiefly in the book of Ecclesiastes—a book commonly seen by textual critics as a *very* late composition of the Hellenistic Period. Actually, this late dating has been challenged by a recent reanalysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls by the AI-program Enoch; a fragment of a copy

of Ecclesiastes was redated to much earlier within the third century B.C.E., challenging prevailing late-date compositional hypotheses (ArmstrongInstitute.org/1277).

Nevertheless, *šalit* has at least been generally recognized as a later Persian Period loan word, applied either during the editing or composition of these texts, perhaps as late as the second half of the first millennium B.C.E.

A brand new inscription from Lachish, discovered just last year and published in a recent *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* article, challenges that conclusion—revealing the use of this word in the Levant

as early as the second half of the second millennium B.C.E., the end of the Late Bronze Age.

Bronze Age Lachish—Writing Metropolis

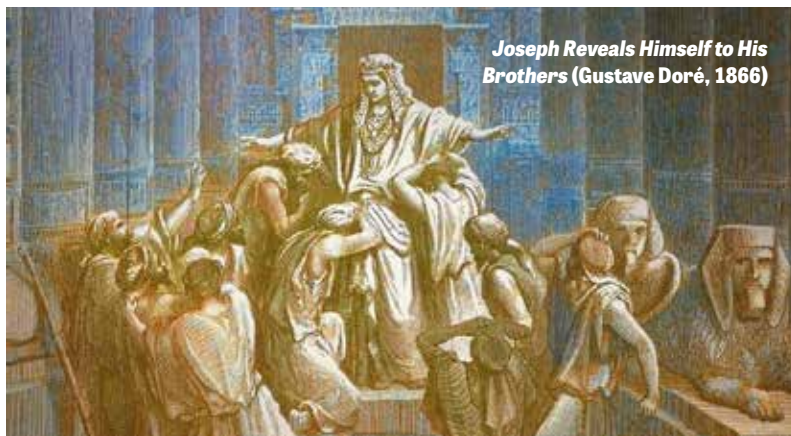
In the February 2026 article titled “A Late Bronze Age Canaanite Jar Inscription From the 2025 Excavation Season at Lachish,” authors Daniel Vainstub, Itamar Weissbein, Hoo-Goo Kang, Shai Halevi and Yosef Garfinkel revealed a “partially preserved inscription [that] was found in an unambiguous 12th-century B.C.E. archaeological context associated with the site’s last Late Bronze Age settlement.” Although the inscription is broken, enough of it has survived to “allow one to read the personal name *B’lšlt*. This name is built on the root *šlt*, which hitherto has been widely considered a much later (Persian Period) loan from Aramaic,” they wrote.

Lachish is a prominent archaeological tel located roughly 45 kilometers (28 miles) southwest of Jerusalem. It featured as Judah’s “second city” after Jerusalem during the Iron Age and was likewise a major site during the preceding Bronze Age. It is from this site that we have the “largest corpus of Bronze Age Canaanite inscriptions to date,” wrote Vainstub et al—inscriptions spanning from the later part of the Middle Bronze Age to the end of the Late Bronze Age, several of which have been revealed by the ongoing excavations directed primarily by Hebrew University professor Yosef Garfinkel. The recent discovery comes from the summer 2025 season of the Seventh Expedition to Tel Lachish.

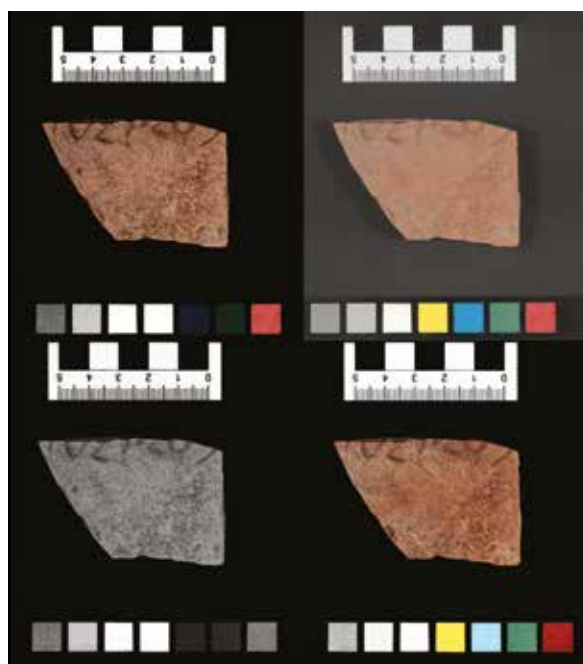
The inscription comes from a fill within Level VI at the administrative summit of the site—a level corresponding with the “last settlement horizon of Late Bronze Age Lachish, which was destroyed in the mid-12th century B.C.E.” in a “massive conflagration” (ibid). Chronologically, the find goes together with various structures unearthed belonging to this time period, including a large Late Bronze III temple.

‘Baal Rules’

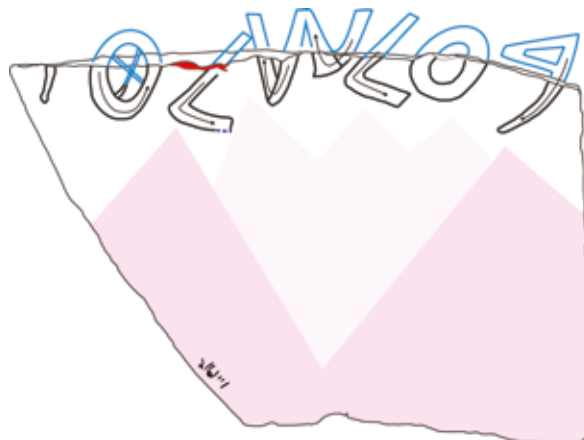
The inscription itself was written on the outside of a vessel in red ink. It was analyzed via multispectral photography in the Israel Antiquities Authority laboratories, which allowed optimal visualization of the inscription. All that remains of the inscription is the lower half of which Vainstub et al identify as a personal name—*ב'לשלט*/B’lšlt—the first component



Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers (Gustave Doré, 1866)



ABOVE Multispectral photos of the Lachish inscription
BELOW Paleographic interpretation (Vainstub notes: The red patch above the second lamed signifies a break in the sherd that in the photographs may otherwise appear to be writing.)



corresponding to the famous deity Baal, and the second to our word *šalit*, “ruler.” The authors do note some uncertainty with the interpretation of the first letter, ם. “Nevertheless,” they wrote, “the lower halves of the five remaining letters offer unequivocal readings.”

The name means something akin to “Baal rules”/“Baal ruled”—the initial element “appropriate for a Late Bronze Age Canaanite inscription, since Ba’al was the most venerated deity in the region.” The second component, however, is described as “surprising.”

Vainstub et al continued: “The root םל”ט (i.e. rule) in biblical Hebrew ... is widely considered an Aramaism that was introduced in the Persian Period under the

language’s extensive influence. This view relies on a) the root’s alleged absence from languages other than Aramaic before the eighth century B.C.E., and b) the fact that almost all the occurrences of the root in biblical Hebrew come in books produced in the Persian Period This last point has two thorny exceptions: Genesis 42:6, “and Joseph was the regent (השליט) on the land,” and Psalm 119:133, ‘let no wrongdoing rule (אל-תשלט) over me.’ [I]n the last two decades, minimalist voices have claimed that the Joseph stories were produced in the Persian or even the Hellenistic Period in the context of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt,” Vainstub et al wrote. Contrarily, they noted the conclusion of the late Hebrew Bible scholar Gordon Wenham, who “rejected the interpretation of השליט in

Genesis 42:6 as a late term, correctly arguing that since the root occurs in Old Assyrian, it is a common Semitic one.” Sadly, Wenham died just months prior to the discovery of this inscription validating his conclusion.

“Rather than a loan, it is an old pan-Semitic root,” wrote Vainstub et al. “Although in Classical Hebrew it was secondary to the standard מל”ש, and overwhelmed it only in the Persian Period, under the influence of Aramaic, it can no longer be considered a decisive mark of lateness.”

Script Development—Earlier Than Realized

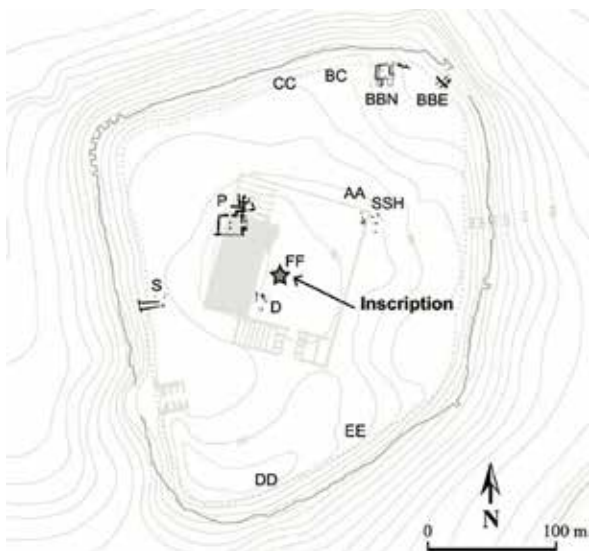
The *šalit* element of the inscription was far from the only notable feature.

The authors noted that close analysis of the text shows it to have been written in a rather more developed alphabetic text of the time: “Our inscription makes an important contribution to the understanding of this significant stage in the development of the script in the following ways: 1) It precedes by about a century what are considered the most ancient known instances of the script dated to the 11th century B.C.E.; 2) it was written in a pottery workshop in the Lachish area, far south of Phoenicia, considered by many the place where this script first developed; and 3) the strokes’ varying thicknesses, resulting from a smooth and confident wielding of the stylus, seems to mark the beginning of the ‘shading’ characteristic of Hebrew and Aramaic scripts.”

In this latest of Lachish inscriptions, then, we have a remarkable attestation to an even earlier development of the Canaanite/Hebrew/Phoenician script. Not only that, we have a remarkable precedent for the use of this term *šalit* applied to Joseph, chronologically on the scene during the second millennium B.C.E. Bronze Age. ■



Aerial view of Tel Lachish



Map of Lachish, highlighting remains from Level VI and inscription findspot

Neo-Hittite, a foreign Aegean element, which some would say is Philistine, cannot be denied. (For more on the Philistines and their connection to the Palistin, read *ArmstrongInstitute.org/663*; for more on the Hittites, read *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1954*.)

Later History

According to the Bible, after the reign of King David, the city of Hamath was brought under King Solomon's sphere of influence. 1 Kings 8:65 states that Solomon's kingdom extended "from the entrance of Hamath unto the Brook of Egypt." 2 Chronicles 8:4 reveals that he built storage cities at Hamath.

Professor Hawkins wrote that the kingdom of Palastin "extended as far south as the environs of Hama[th], at a latest date of the early 10th century B.C." This fits well with David's reign ending around 970 B.C.E. and Solomon's subsequent takeover of the area around Hamath. Some suggest that Toi's son, Joram/Hadoram, became one of Solomon's vassals.

After Solomon, Hamath must have fallen again to some other power, as 2 Kings 14:28 states that King Jeroboam II (790–750 B.C.E.) "recovered Damascus, and Hamath, for Judah in Israel." As for Palistin, a later kingdom named Patin (known as Unqi in Assyrian inscriptions) seems to have developed out of it. At this point, if Palistin was indeed influenced by the Philistines, the only evidence of that influence in these later stages would be the similarity in name.

Regardless of the origins of the kingdom of Palistin, the possibility of one of its kings being mentioned in the Bible is intriguing.

In their book *The Bible's First Kings: Uncovering the Story of Saul, David and Solomon*, Avraham Faust of Bar-Ilan University and Zev Farber, chief editor of *TheTorah.com*, suggest that these findings strengthen the case for the accuracy of David's story. If the identification is true, it reveals an author that "was familiar with the king's name, which would be very unlikely for, let's say, a seventh-century scribe looking to embellish David's story."

As the Bible has it in 2 Samuel 8, a king ruling over a Syro-Hittite state was on friendly terms with the united monarchy because of David's victory over Hadadezer—one of his enemies. So far, this lines up well with archaeological evidence from the northern Orontes Valley. "Corroboration of the existence of an ally in these early campaigns would not only shore up the biblical narrative at an important juncture, but also provide evidence for the international standing of the state of Judah in the 10th century B.C.," Weeden wrote.

"Taita" and his kingdom "Palistin" seem to be the closest match we can find of this northern ally of David described in the Bible. ■

FEEDBACK

I very much enjoy reading your publication and always learn something new. Your graphics relating to the archaeological digs are superb and very much enhance my understanding of the accompanying articles. Thank you; please keep up the good work.

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

Thank you very much for sending me the March-April 2026 issue. I was greatly blessed and enriched by its biblical insights and spiritual depth. I especially appreciate the way the teachings connect historical events, spiritual truths and practical applications for believers today. It has truly become a valuable source of learning and encouragement.

KARNATAKA, INDIA

I have just received a copy of *Let the Stones Speak*. Wow! What a wonderful, sumptuous magazine! I'm so delighted to have found your institute on YouTube. Based off your YouTube description, I thought the magazine was going to be good, but it's far better than I could have guessed! I am not a Jewish man, but as a British Christian, I fully accept and celebrate the heritage of the Jewish people and absolutely support their right to exist in peace. It saddens me knowing that elements within our society try to eliminate or diminish the true history of the Jewish nation in the land that we now call Israel. *Let the Stones Speak* testifies to the undoubtable history of the Jewish people in the land of Israel. My sincerest thanks to you and all of your contributors for their input to your fabulous biblical archaeology journal.

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