

Fundamental Issues in the Study of *Tanakh*
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Shiur #6i: *Tanakh* and Archaeology (continued)

H. The Unified Kingdom

We shall now address the argument concerning the absence of findings attesting to royal construction in Jerusalem and Yehuda. On this issue there have been significant developments in recent years. Between 2007 and 2012, excavations were undertaken at Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Ela Valley, by a team under the direction of Yosef Garfinkel, Sa'ar Ganor, and Michael Hasel.^[1] Upon a strategic hill at a height of 325 meters, these archaeologists discovered the ruins of a fortified city occupying an area of 23 dunams, surrounded by an impressive casemate wall.^[2] Burned pits of olives discovered on-site and sent for carbon 14-testing led to the dating of the city to the early 10th century B.C.E. – the period of David. In addition, further discoveries have shown that the city was unquestionably an Israelite – not Philistine – habitation:

- a. No pig bones were found among the thousands of animal bones found in the city, just as in the settlement villages, and in contrast to Canaanite or Philistine towns.
- b. Three rooms for religious ritual were discovered in the city, containing gravestones, a basalt altar and libation vessels, but no figurines depicting humans or animals were found. This contrasts with Canaanite and Philistine ritual sites, where human and animal figurines are usually found in abundance.
- c. The city is surrounded by a casemate wall – a double-wall with the space in between partitioned into long, narrow rooms. The houses adjacent to the wall include these rooms within themselves. This sort of planning is familiar to us from other sites – all within the boundaries of the kingdom of Judea, while in the Canaanite and Philistine cultures, a double-wall was not common.
- d. The ceramic style is unique and characteristic of the Iron Age in Judea; it is different from the ceramic usually found at Philistine sites.
- e. Finally, one of the fascinating discoveries at the site was an ostrakon (an inscribed pottery shard) with five lines of proto-Canaanite script. These lines include words that were almost certainly written in Hebrew (there are verbs that are unique to the Hebrew language),^[3] representing the earliest evidence of an inscription with content and meaning in this language.^[4]

The existence of a Judean city of this size attests to the fact that the wave of urbanization characterizing the transition to the Iron Age II did in fact occur at the beginning of the unified kingdom, and that at the time of David's monarchy, fortified cities already existed in Judea. There is room to assume that the location of this city – at a walking distance from each of the two central cities of David's kingdom, Jerusalem and Chevron – arose from its position on the main road from the

coastal plain to those cities, and from its position on the western border of the Israelite kingdom, facing the Philistines.

These new findings have had a significant impact, and the supporters of the "low chronology" have been hard-pressed to explain them.^[5] Efraim Stern, one of the most senior archaeologist in Israel, summarizes as follows:

"Over the course of my lengthy involvement in the archaeology of the Land of Israel, I have seen a great many 'fashions' that arrived from different places; most survived for short periods of time and then disappeared without a trace. It seems to me that the approach of the 'minimalist chronology', with its harsh historical conclusions, represents one such 'fashion'. I believe that the sooner it disappears, the better, and the results of the excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa are indeed aiding in this."^[6]

The findings at Khirbet Qeiyafa join other discoveries of recent years which indicate the power and significance of the unified kingdom specifically through its manifestations on its outer borders. In excavations undertaken at Tel Beit Shemesh, it became clear that during the Iron Age II the city underwent significant changes, including construction, fortification, a water reservoir, and a workshop for iron processing:

"Thus, a 'view from the border' serves to establish that over the course of the 10-9th centuries B.C.E. a central political entity was consolidated in Jerusalem. Even if the archaeological evidence of its existence at its seat of power is not yet sufficiently clear, the traces of its activity in the periphery of the area of its reign can tell us much about it."^[7]

In fact, the situation is changing even in Jerusalem itself. In 2005, Eilat Mazar, who heads the excavations in the City of David on behalf of the Hebrew University's Institute for Archaeology, discovered a large and impressive stone structure at the top of the mound of the City of David, apparently the result of a unique construction project of giant proportions.^[8] Vessels discovered beneath this structure are from the Iron Age I period, while the later additions to the structure have been dated, on the basis of the ceramics, to the Iron Age II period. The ceramic finding in conjunction with carbon dating led to the conclusion that the time best suited to the construction of a large stone building would have been around the year 1000 B.C.E. Mazar argues, on the basis of similar data, that the famous stepped stone structure located in area G served as part of the supporting wall for this great stone structure. All of this leads her to argue that this is none other than the palace of King David, whose construction by Phoenician merchants is recorded in the *Tanakh*,

"Chiram, king of Tyre, sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons, and they built David a house" ([Shmuel II 5:11](#))^[9]

Mazar's findings are contested, with the adherents of the "low chronology" being the first to reject the findings and argue that the ceramic found beneath the building are

from a later period, and that the building itself was also only built later, during the 9th century B.C.E. ^[10]

Of course, it is entirely possible that these findings are only the tip of the iceberg, and that many other discoveries in the future will provide further evidence of the unified kingdom. ^[11] At the same time, we must address the question of why more artifacts from the period of the unified kingdom have not been discovered to date in Jerusalem. It is reasonable to assume ^[12] that this phenomenon is the result of Jerusalem having undergone continuous construction from the Middle Bronze Age up until our own times, such that it is difficult to find artifacts from the Bronze and Iron Ages. It is relatively easy to find artifacts from destroyed layers of cities, and this explains why findings testifying to the destruction of the Second Temple have been discovered. By contrast, no buildings whatsoever have been found from the Persian or early Hellenistic periods, even though no-one questions the existence of the city during these times. Likewise, there are no findings from within the city itself attesting to its existence during the much earlier period – the 14th century B.C.E. Most of the artifacts that have been discovered in the City of David, from the Middle Bronze Age and Late Iron Age, were found on the eastern slope of the city – an area that was already abandoned by the Second Temple Period.

This applies not only to Jerusalem, but to the entire region of Judea. Unlike Dan and Chatzor, which were almost completely abandoned, and Megiddo, where construction during the Assyrian period was scarce, the Judean cities also had continuous Jewish settlement, in many cases lasting even through the Second Temple Period.

Two further points should be noted in conclusion:

1. Throughout *Sefer Shmuel*, we find many descriptions of wars, including their geographical and strategic aspects, attesting to a high level of proficiency in this material on the part of the author. It is very difficult to propose that an author during a later period could have provided these descriptions of events, field conditions, and roads which were sometimes far removed from the areas where these books are assumed to have been written (Jerusalem or Babylon). ^[13]
2. The fundamental argument of adherents of the "low chronology" is that the narratives about David were created at a later time, with a view to glorifying the founder of the dynasty. This approach utterly ignores the simple fact that there is no character who is criticized so closely and sharply in *Tanakh* as David. Why would anyone seeking to glorify the royal house of David and Shlomo want to describe all the difficult and complex episodes involving its first two kings? Who gains anything from the stories of Uriya and Bat-sheva, Amnon and Tamar, Avshalom and Adoniyah? Why would a later author describe Shlomo as taking foreign wives and building altars for idolatry? To date, no satisfactory explanation has been offered for this phenomenon.

J. Summary

We have briefly reviewed some of the central points pertaining to different periods concerning which there is controversy as to the integration of archaeological findings with the biblical account. The main impression arising from the discussion of these points would seem to be that the interpretation of the facts is highly dependent upon one's prior orientation. There are data which appear to point to a profound familiarity on the part of the authors of the biblical narratives with the historical and social background of the periods that they describe. Many archaeological artifacts accord with the biblical account, and these make it difficult to argue that the Books of *Tanakh* were written much later than the events which they record.

At the same time, there is an undeniable lack of artifacts that should be able to support the biblical account, and this phenomenon may be interpreted in different ways: some scholars, taking as their point of departure the assumption that the Books are later creations and that they are characterized by a certain bias, view the lack of artifacts as an expression of the lack of reliability of the biblical account. Those who proceed from a different point of departure may view the lack of artifacts as a situation that will be remedied with time – or, at most, as a phenomenon that has a logical explanation.

Our review has also revealed the transience of some central theories in the world of archaeology. The Merneptah Stele is a proof of utmost significance as to the existence at that time of an entity known as "Israel", and "had it not been discovered, quite coincidentally, the research on this subject would be in a completely different situation to what it is today."^[14]

Had the Dan Stele inscription not been discovered, some twenty years ago, many scholars today would probably still deny the existence of David and Shlomo, arguing that "no findings that confirm their existence have yet been discovered." The amount of material that has been excavated and studied is extremely small, relative to what remains, and we must also take into consideration the fact that in the most important regions, such as the City of David and the Temple Mount, excavations are highly problematic if not altogether impossible.

However, archaeology has contributed, and will continue to contribute greatly to our understanding of and appreciation of *Tanakh*. A walk through the sites where the stories of the *Tanakh* took place, or standing before archeological findings from that period, is a powerful and moving experience. Archaeological research also influences and deepens our understanding of different parts of *Tanakh*. Without the discoveries on the ground, it is doubtful whether we would make the proper differentiation, for instance, between the descriptions of settlement in *Sefer Yehoshua* and those in *Sefer Shoftim*. In addition, archaeological findings have shed light on the events described in the text, such as the campaign of Shishak and the war against Mesha, king of Moav. It seems reasonable to assume that further discoveries with ramifications for this sphere of research still await us, and will continue to interest all those who hold the *Tanakh* dear.

[1] On the findings, see: H. Misgav, Y. Garfinkel and S. Ganor, "Ha-Ostrakon mi-Khirbet Kiafa", *Chiddushim be-Archeologia shel Yerushalayim u-Sevivata* 3, 5770, pp. 111-123; Y. Garfinkel, S. Ganor and M. Hasel, "Arba Onot Chafira Rishonot be-Churvat Kiyafa, Ir Mevutzeret bi-Shefelat Yehud me-Reshit ha-Me'ah ha-10 Lifnei ha-Sefira", *Kadmoniyot* 141, 2011, pp. 2-12; Y. Garfinkel, "Hitpatchut ha-Ma'arakh ha-Yishuvi be-Mamlekhet Yehuda me-Reshit ve-ad Churban ha-Bayit ha-Rishon", *Katedra* 143, 5772, pp. 7-44; Y. Garfinkel, S. Ganor and M. Hasel, *Ikevot David ha-Melekh be-Emek ha-Ela*, Tel Aviv 2012.

[2] The wall displays an interesting phenomenon – the presence of two gates. This led Garfinkel and his associates to conclude that the city that they uncovered was the biblical Sha'arayim. As proof of this they cite the appearance of this city in the description of the battle between David and Goliath, which took place precisely in this region ([Shmuel I 17:52](#)). Some have questioned this identification – see, for example, Y. Ziv, "Khirbat Kiyafa Enena 'Sha'arayim!'", *Kadmoniot* 142, 2011, pp. 109-110. G. Galil, "He-Asor ha-Rishon le-Malkhuto shel David bi-Yerushalayim ve-Yechasav im ha-Pelishtim le-Or ha-Mimtzaim ha-Archeologiim ve-ha-Epigrafiim mi-Khirbet Kiyafa Hi Neta'im", in: A. Eyal, A. Levi-Reifer and A. Faust (eds.), *Chiddushim be-Chekker Yerushalayim – ha-Kovetz ha-16*, Ramat Gan 5771, pp. 21-71.

[3] The inscription is not clearly legible and is difficult to understand. One suggestion as to the original text is proposed by G. Galil (n. 2 above); a more cautious proposal is offered by H. Misgav, "Ostrakon mi-Churvat Keyafa", *Kadmoniot* 141, pp. 13-16. For more on the inscription see A. Yardeni, "Ha-Ketovet mi-Churvat Keyafa", *Chiddushim be-Archeologia shel Yerushalayim u-Sevivata* 3, 5770, pp. 124-125; A. Demsky, "Ha-Ketovet ha-Enigmatit mi-Churvat Keyafa: Tzuratah ve-Sugatah", *ibid.*, pp. 126-129; S. Achituv, "Ha-Ketovet mi-Churvat Keyafa", *ibid.*, pp. 130-132; *Ikevot David ha-Melekh be-Emek ha-Ela*, pp. 123-132.

[4] The Izbet Sartah ostrakon, discovered in the region of Rosh ha-Ayin, is dated even earlier, to the period of the Judges, but its proto-Canaanite inscription consists only of the letters of the alphabet, apparently as a reading exercise. For more on the ostrakon see Y. Finkelstein, *Chafiroi Izbet Sartah ve-ha-Hatnahalut ha-Yisraelit ba-Har*, Tel Aviv, 5743. This inscription, too, is of great importance, since it proves the existence of an ancient scribal tradition, countering the claims of Naaman and others whose argument that biblical historiographic literature was written hundreds of years after the events described is based, *inter alia*, on the assumption that literacy in the earlier period was extremely rare. On this argument see A. Demsky, *Yedi'at Sefer be-Yisrael be-Et ha-Atika*, Jerusalem 5772, pp. 28-33.

[5] N. Naaman, "Khirbet Keyafa ve-ha-Maavak bein Pelishtim le-Kena'ananim bi-Tekufat ha-Barzel ha-Keduma bi-Derom ha-Aretz", *Katedra* 143, 5772, pp. 65-92, argues that the inhabitants of Khirbet Qeiyafa were Canaanites and not Israelites. He proposes that they refrained from eating pork as a way of distinguishing themselves from the Philistines, and that the ostrakon discovered on site was inscribed in an as-yet

unidentified dialect of proto-Canaanite. For a discussion of the attempts by adherents of the school of "low chronology" to deal with the findings at Khirbet Qeiyafa, see A. Shtull-Trauring, "The Keys to the Kingdom", Haaretz, April 21, 2012 <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/the-keys-to-the-kingdom-1.360222>.

The article also provides an interesting description of the internal power struggles within archaeological circles, and principally between the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (with which Garfinkel is associated) and Tel Aviv University (the academic home of Naaman and Finkelstein). This description illustrates the extent to which issues with no bearing whatsoever on science and objective truth become involved in the discussion. Garfinkel, Ganor and Hasel (*Ikevot David ha-Melekh be-Emek ha-Ela*), pp. 49-50, describe the criticism with the following words:

"All of the writers are from Tel Aviv University, which is today a hothouse for flourishing minimalism. Why have no critical articles been penned to date by scholars based in London, Paris, or New York?... The original minimalist approach was a consolidated world-view, which argued that the ancient history of the Jewish People must be written only on the basis of extra-biblical data. All the approaches that came later... are simply patchwork additions that try desperately to solve difficulties which the earlier paradigm is incapable of addressing. These patchwork solutions are not the fruit of real research, in which data are gathered and examined with a view to reaching well-founded conclusions, but rather weak alternatives that run counter to logic, and whose strength lies in the absence of data and the negation of the value of the biblical tradition as a source of information about the period in question."

It should be noted that it is specifically the minimalists, who do not necessarily declare the *Tanakhto* to be unreliable, but rather build their archaeological picture on the basis of actual findings (or lack thereof), who should have the easiest time changing their position once new findings appear. Surprisingly, however, they treat them with a suspicion that goes beyond the accepted archaeological norm – all of which calls their motives into question.

[6] Editorial in *Kadmoniot* 141, p. 1

[7] S. Bonimowitz and Z. Lederman, "Yerushalayim u-Beit Shemesh: Bein Birah u-Gevulah", in: A. Barukh and A. Faust (eds.), *Chiddushim be-Chekker Yerushalayim – ha-Kovetz ha-Asiri*, Ramat Gan 5765, p. 45.

[8] See E. Mazar, *Armon ha-Melekh David – ha-Chafiroi be-Rosh Giv'at Ir David*, Jerusalem 2009, pp. 39-58.

[9] Prior to the discovery of the large stone structure, A. Mazar had argued (p. 108 of the work cited above) that the structure with the steps was a supporting wall of the citadel which David captured (rather than of his palace). To this view, too, the finding from the City of David accords with the biblical account of the conquest of Jerusalem.

[10] Finkelstein and Silverman, p. 248.

[11] For more findings supporting Jerusalem's status as a significant city during the period of the unified kingdom, see G. Kahil, "Tekufat ha-Mamlakha ha-Meuchedet: ha-Edut ha-Archeologit", in: A. Faust and A. Barukh (eds.), *Chiddushim be-Chekker Yerushalayim – ha-Kovetz ha-Shevi'i*, Ramat Gan 5762, pp. 21-27; A. de Garotte, "Ha-Ir ha-Ne'elama' shel ha-Mea ha-Asirit Lifnei ha-Sefira, *ibid.*, pp. 29-34.

^[12] See Meitlis, pp. 206-214; M. Garsiel, "Shelavei Chibburo shel Sefer Shmuel", *Beit Mikra* 54, 2, esp. pp. 46-48.

^[13] See Garsiel, pp. 34-35, and his notes ad loc.

^[14] J. Hoffman, *Historia, Mythos v'Politika*, in Y.L. Levine and A. Mazar, 'HaPulmus al HaEmet v'Historia B'Mikra', Jerusalem 5761 pp31-32.