Evaluating the "United Monarchy" of Israel: Unity and Identity in Text and Archaeology

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Abstract

This article argues that many interpretations of the so-called "United Monarchy" of Saul, David, and Solomon are built upon false assumptions and problematic hermeneutics, not to mention that they draw upon anachronistic terminology. This is significant because such issues impact how the history of the early Israelite monarchy is reconstructed, how archaeological materials are related to political organization, and how text and archaeology are integrated. What is needed is a framework for reading the text that is methodologically informed and which draws upon relevant theories. As such this article provides a brief overview of the use of the terms "United Monarchy" and "Davidic/Solomonic Empire" in modern scholarship before turning to recent attempts to theorize and model ancient monarchies, including the ways in which ancient kingdoms controlled territory and how leaders legitimized their power and expressed their authority in a manner that unified their constituencies. From there it re-evaluates the biblical portrayal of the monarchies of Saul, David, and Solomon, considering in particular the nature of early Israel's political and social unity and identity, before turning to the potential archaeological correlates of political power during the reigns of these kings.

1. Introduction

United Monarchy, Davidic Empire, Solomonic Empire – these terms are so ingrained in scholarship today that they seem to be almost self-evident. Yet, despite their ubiquity they are entirely modern constructs. The term "United Monarchy" does not appear in the biblical texts, nor is there a term for "empire" in biblical Hebrew, or any other ancient Near Eastern language for that matter. Nevertheless, not only have these two terms become ingrained in both biblical and archaeological scholarship, but also they have come to imply specific archaeological manifestations. For each socio-political "stage" in Israel's history, there is a corresponding archaeological footprint according to strictly materialist and/or functionalist interpretations. And while there have been attempts to sever the tie between the archaeological remains and such interpretations in order to better understand Israelite socio-political development (e.g., Stager 1985; 2003; Master 2001; Schloen 2001; Routledge 2004; Barako 2009; Fleming 2012a), many scholars still cling to old culture history and social evolutionary approaches that prohibit such a severing, while at the same time ignoring advances in sociological, anthropological, and geopolitical theory that would allow for a more nuanced interpretation of both the textual sources and the archaeological correlates of the recorded ancient socio-political structures.

In the case of ancient Israel, many interpretations of the so-called "United Monarchy" are built upon false assumptions and problematic hermeneutics, not to mention that they draw upon anachronistic terminology. This is significant because such issues impact how we reconstruct the history of the early Israelite monarchy, how we relate archaeological materials to political organization, and how we integrate text and archaeology. What is needed is a framework for reading the text that is methodologically informed and which draws upon relevant theories. As such I provide a brief overview of the use of the terms "United Monarchy" and "Davidic/Solomonic Empire" in modern scholarship before jumping quickly to recent attempts to theorize and model ancient monarchies, including the ways in which ancient kingdoms controlled territory and how leaders legitimized their power and expressed their authority in a manner that unified their constituencies. From there I re-evaluate the biblical portrayal of the monarchies of Saul, David, and Solomon, considering in particular the nature of early Israel's political and social unity and identity, before turning to the potential archaeological correlates of political power during the reigns of these kings.

The matter of unity is intimately tied to the idea of identity. Unity, in the sense

that I will be using it, pertains to unified territory and/or social norms. It carries with it a specific geographical component in addition to a social expression. Identity, on the other hand, pertains to a self-expressed sense of belonging to a specific group, house, nation, or leader. Such an expression can result in multiple identities at the same time, and it can result in different identities over time; that is, identity is fluid and contextual.[1]

2. Modeling Ancient Monarchies

The term "United Monarchy" dates back at least to the late 19th century (Kent 1892: 33), though it is not pervasive in discussions of Israel's early monarchy. In fact, even in the early 20th century, the term "United Monarchy" was but one of the monikers for Israel's monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon. Other terms include "united Israel" (Albright 1949: 229) and more generally the "Davidic monarchy" or the "kingdom of Solomon." Yet in no instance is it articulated in what way exactly the kingdoms of Saul, David, and Solomon were united. Presumably it is because all the tribes of Israel reckoned themselves subservient to each of these three kings.

The concept of a "United Monarchy" was tied exclusively to the interpretations of the biblical text in the 19th and 20th centuries. But following WWII the concept itself would be recast. In 1950 Albrecht Alt published an article entitled *Das Großreich Davids*, and with this article came a conceptual turn that has plagued scholarship ever since. Now the "United Monarchy" was branded the "Davidic/Solomonic Empire," a term that gained traction in Israeli and, in particular, American scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s (Bright 1959: 181; Malamat 1963: 16, 17).[2]

Yet, despite the entrenching of these terms, there was a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between traditional power structures, i.e., tribes and kings, that persisted in much of the scholarship of the day (e.g., Alt himself 1950; B. Mazar 1963). At the same time, however, it appears that the introduction of the

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1. I recognize that identity can also be imposed externally. As most of the textual data that will be utilized in this study is from the group at hand, i.e., "Israel" – as defined in the broadest possible terms – I will focus on the internal aspect of identity expression and formation. But, see below.
2. The translation of *Großreich* as "empire" carries with it a specific semantic range in English that is not identical to that of the German term. Moreover, in light of evolutionary models, the term has come to embody a specific political and social organization that appears to be counter to what Alt was describing.

New Archaeology in the 1960s along with evolutionary models of social development (Service 1962) influenced the conceptualization of the Israelite monarchy and social system, ultimately subsuming the multiplicity of power structures under one more coherent generalized and linearized model (Flanagan 1981; 1988; Frick 1985). The result was the preservation of the terms "United Monarchy" and "Davidic/Solomonic Empire" with these terms becoming even more problematic than they had been before, because they now carried with them an assumption of specific archaeological traits and manifestations of political power (e.g., Frick 1977; Jamieson-Drake 1991). Add to this the introduction of the term "state" and the issue of "state formation," and the shift away from a native expression of political power and hierarchy was complete.

Next, the terms "United Monarchy" and "Davidic/Solomonic Empire" became pariah terms that were used to denigrate the historicity of certain biblical texts when juxtaposed with archaeological discoveries, which were assumed to carry a more direct and clear meaning than did "ideological" texts. Thus, from the 1980s, models of state formation processes led the specific expectation of material expressions of political power, including the centralization of that power (Flanagan 1988: 19); the lack of sought-after archaeological traits that were understood to mark a state or an empire meant that the *Biblical* claims about the great "United Monarchy" and/or the "Davidic/Solomonic Empire" were later ideological fabrications (Lemche and Thompson 1994: 18–20). The straw man was now set up and knocked down.

Today, the problems with evolutionary models and the materialist expectation of non-material expressions are well known (Kletter 2004; Yoffee 2005). Recent studies in materiality, political geography, identity and ethnicity, and the social reification of power and authority, now provide us with the tools by which we can theorize and re-evaluate the early monarchy of ancient Israel. With this in mind, I turn now to a brief discussion of more salient theoretical and methodological developments – informed by archaeological and textual data from across the Near East – in order to establish what political power looked like in the ancient Near East and to assess whether or not what we expect the early Israelite monarchy to look like in the archaeological record is appropriate.

2.1. Territory and Territoriality

Territory has traditionally been viewed from a political perspective as a geographic region that falls under the domain of a given polity. The borders of such territory are defined and fixed, and the administration of the territory is largely monolithic.

This administration emanates from a central site whose realm of control is mirrored by its size; the larger the site, the larger the territory it controls. Recent studies in political geography show that this traditional view is particularly problematic for pre-Treaty of Westphalia methods and means of controlling a region (M. Smith 2005; Elden 2013; VanValkenburgh and Osborne 2013). Borders are not always defined or fixed, nor is control over a region necessarily monolithic. Theorists have instead turned to the concept of territoriality to explain the geopolitical expression of control attested in both text and inscriptions in the ancient Near East.

Territoriality is more properly the expression of control or attempted control over a given territory through the manipulation of people, phenomena, and/ or relationships (Sack 1986: 19; cf. VanValkenburgh and Osborne 2013: 3). Such control can appear materially, as in the case of fortifications or other structures built by the controlling entity, and be entirely functional, or it can be ideological and entirely psychological. There is a continuum of expression that requires a case-by-case analysis (Feinman 1998: 112–114, 131–132; Marcus and Feinman 1998: 10–11; Osborne 2013; VanValkenburgh and Osborne 2013; cf. A. Smith 2003: 22; Charrad and Adams 2011).

That there was no one expression of political control in the ancient Near East was articulated already by Liverani in his 1988 study on the growth of the Assyrian empire. He showed that the traditional view of Assyrian control as a spreading ink blot was not always appropriate. In fact, he argued that the Assyrians employed the use of strategic nodes of power to expand their domain even while those nodes left pockets of territory unconquered.

In a more recent study, James Osborne has articulated what he refers to as "malleable territoriality," a concept built upon textual and archaeological evidence from the northern Levant, illustrating that there was a "phenomenon of patchy, variegated political authority…[that] constituted a form of territoriality in which authority was not evenly distributed across the landscape, nor contained within a fixed border. Contiguity of land and settlements was not a necessary requirement for political control" (2013: 787). This reality, which was noted earlier by Casana (2009), matches evidence showing that Bronze Age rulers often controlled sites located quite distant from their capital city, sometimes in regions identified by modern scholars as belonging to other kingdoms. In this light, malleable territoriality undermines the idea that the size of capital cities necessarily implies the reach of their power. Just because a site was big does not mean that it had a broad power base or power potential, and just because a site was small does not mean that it lacked a power base or power potential. In fact, Osborne concludes that

"there is no reason to assume that the co-existence of ranked settlement hierarchies, dispersed trading centers, and the transfer of site ownership was problematic in ancient conceptions of territoriality."

The general conception that a "United Monarchy" ruled from Jerusalem could not exert political control over distant lands and/or that David and Solomon would need to, or did, exert uniform military and/or political control over all the territory from the Negev to the Euphrates are wholly problematic and anachronistic. Similarly, it is problematic to assume that such uniform control was expressed over *Any* size of territory we might wish to ascribe to Saul, David, or Solomon. In reality, control of territory and territorial expressions of presence/control are equally, if not largely, social issues in the ancient Near East. This brings us to a discussion of legitimization and power.

2.2. Legitimization and Power

There are two related questions with which a discussion of legitimization and power must begin: what does it mean to be legitimate and how is power legitimized?[3] In response to the first, political philosopher David Beetham (2013: xiv) notes:

> …legitimacy should be understood as a multidimensional concept, comprising rules, normative beliefs and appropriate actions. Power can be said to be legitimate where it does not breach established rules; where its acquisition and exercise are normatively validated in terms of socially accepted beliefs about rightful authorization and due performance;[4] and where it is confirmed through appropriate acts of recognition and acknowledgment. Together these give those in power moral as well as de facto authority, and those subject to them sufficient grounds for obedience and cooperation [see also Cohen 1988: 2, 16, and cf. Kelson 1961: 187–188].

Of key importance is that legitimacy does not get its efficacy only from belief (contra Weber 1956: 23, 157, 659) but also from conferring actions (Beetham 2013:

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3. See Cohen (1988) for a summary of various theoretical approaches to understanding the concept of legitimacy. He notes that the unifying thread across them all is that each seeks to understand how this concept, which carries with it "sanctioned inequality and acceptance of life-and-death powers," arose.

4. Routledge notes that, "kingship cannot be separated from the specific performative acts (warfare, building projects, temple dedications, etc.) by which kingliness was made manifest" (2004: 154).

12). The actions of dominant and subordinate are reciprocal in that the latter confer power that must be utilized by the former in socially acceptable ways. Further, while there must be a shared belief between dominant and subordinate in order to confer legitimacy, there must also be at least a minimum shared belief among the subordinates to garner enough support to make that belief normative – even though among subordinates this does not equate to all individuals having shared beliefs, but merely those who are representative of their constituency (Beetham 2013: 19; cf. Benz 2016 and Fleming 2012a for Bronze Age Canaan; Jursa 2017 for Neo-Babylonian period Mesopotamia).

These specific representatives and the constituencies they represent – what we can also call a ruler's "power base" – are actually evolving networks of relationships with individuals, households, clans, or communities linked by the exchange of goods, labor, or information, with information including political and/or religious ideology (Cohen 1988: 2–3; Billman 2010: 183). Specifically, kings in ancient Israel (and the ancient Near East in general) established asymmetric relationships with peoples/entities of various levels in order to maintain a broad power base. These kings interacted with other kings (2 Sam 5:11; 1 Kgs 5:15; 9:11–14), city/clan elders (2 Sam 5:3; 1 Kgs 12:1–20), individual craftsmen (Hiram), religious personnel (priests of Nob), and everyday commoners (Nabal) (cf. Billman 2010: 183).

Of note is how the constituent parties (or power base) who come to be ruled by kings in ancient Israel (and Judah), be they tribes, towns, or other entities, are often presented in the biblical texts as a collective (Fleming 2012a: 95). This collective has the power to select and depose kings, and its choice to support one king over another, or one king's decisions/policies, is relative to the specific situation and includes evaluating and negotiating specific "rights" or services. If these demands are met, then authority is consented to (see Blanton and Fargher 2008; Routledge 2014: 27–35).

As with what it means to be legitimate, how power is legitimized is bound to the internal content and rationale of people's beliefs rather than being based on any external criterion of validity. These beliefs vary from culture to culture and over the course of time. Moreover, articulating how power is legitimized requires considering not only the perspective of those legitimizing the power (i.e., those who will be ruled), but also of those expressing that legitimization (i.e., those who rule). Legitimization is not simply a one-way street; two parties are required in the process.

Regardless of from what a leader draws his legitimacy, this legitimacy must be constantly reified if the leader wishes to stay in power. The mechanism through

which this reification is brought to those being ruled, and by which a semblance of continuity is established, is through ideology. Ideology engenders the recognition of asymmetrical power relationships that allow certain individuals to rise to power and then to keep that power.

Special note is necessary to draw the distinction between the purpose and presence of ideology and the level of centralization expressed/manifested by those using an ideology to create a sense of unity and hierarchy. Great political power is not always dependent on the centralization of all political power, or even economic resources (cf. Osborne 2013; Benz 2016). These correlations are, again, anachronistic in the ancient Near East and ancient Israel. In reality, it is the social structure of a society that has the greatest impact upon the level of centralized political power.

In sum, kings rule through personal union, as Alt put it (1989). This personal union as Hendel (2006: 224) rightly notes, is connected to the idea of patron-client relationships within a patrimonial kingdom (cf. Lemche 1996), where such relationships are conceptualized in terms of the household (Schloen 2001). The king is not the center of a centralized political system that envelops all levels of society, but he is the head of a de-centralized system built upon traditional social structures. So, while the king may establish hegemonic control that is ever evolving, his hegemony requires the buy-in of numerous people who, in effect, create and/or display their own hegemony. This is the heart of the patrimonial system (cf. Stager 2003: 70).

Generating the buy-in of local tribal leaders – tapping into the pre-existing traditional power structures – may not always be successful. Not every person/group within a given geopolitical realm will always express perfect allegiance. This is clearly seen in the fact that threats often have to be made to get groups to contribute men and/or join in a battle (cf. 1 Sam 11). Yet threats are not the only way to secure allegiance. This can be done in various ways, as I will mention below. In every instance, kings operating in a de-centralized power setting created and exploited one or more ideologies that supplemented and supplanted other beliefs about power, where that power lay, and group identity.[5]

2.3. Identity

The issues of identity and even "ethnicity" are fraught with difficulty and appeals

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5. The idea of centralization may have been an aspect of specific ideologies, but it was not always inherent. This both made way for, and necessitated, the creation of royal ideologies.

to anachronism. Identities are understood to be multifaceted, changing from time to time and from context to context, with multiple identities being possible at the same time (Hodos 2010; Davis and Keimer 2018). The full valence of this multivariability has slowly been making its way into the archaeology of the southern Levant, even though it has been established in related fields for years (cf. Weingart 2014; 2019; Monroe and Fleming 2019). As Routledge (2004: 152) notes, there can be overlapping concepts that are activated in the expression of polity, which can be read as identity in general: the house as a metaphor, genealogies that establish commonality, and segmentation that highlights differentiation. These three are "interrelated cultural resources differentially deployed in specific cultural and historical contexts."

Regardless of any problems in our own heuristics, we cannot negate the fact that people – in our case ancient Israelites and/or Judahites – created identities and drew boundaries between "us" and "them." They used material objects and metaphors to generate symbols and meaning. A person or group's identity is thus the totality of the material and the symbolic.[6] In discussions of the Israelite "United Monarchy" it has often been tacitly assumed that there needs to be a tangible identity marker, or perhaps tangible identity markers, that correspond to a shared allegiance to a political leader or entity.

On the one hand, this stands to reason, as political bodies often engender a common or shared identity amongst their constituencies. Such an identity may or may not be the same as an "ethnic" affiliation. On the other hand, there is no a priori reason that shared political allegiance necessitates a shared material expression of group identity. Delimiting when an object, or assemblage, or architectural feature is a meaningful expression of an ancient person or group's identity must weigh any textual data and seek to identify purposeful patterns of material production (i.e., iconographic, architectural, ceramic, etc.) if the meaningfulness

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6. Ilan (2019: 297) raises germane questions when he asks, "All human societies organize in identity groups and identify other, contradistinctive groups. It has been suggested that such identification, and the social boundaries that accompany it, are a survival mechanism and a means of gaining access to resources…But how is group identification expressed in material culture? To what degree is archaeology able to discern group identification by means of material culture remains? How is ethnicity manipulated in political relations between groups?" Groups developed and dissolved, and there were numerous groups in flux at any given moment. Killebrew (2005) refers to the "mixed multitude." Biblically speaking, there are references to various Canaanite enclaves – Hivites, Jebusites, etc. – none of whom has been identified in an archaeologically distinct manner. How does this bode for Israelite tribes? Pottery can be similar or regional, but in neither instance does it necessitate a specific political position.

of the said item is to be collocated to identity (Shennan 1994; Stein 1999; Diaz-Andreu et al. 2005; Insoll 2007).

In the past scholars have focused on material remains as the means by which we can discuss ancient Israelite identity/ethnicity and/or the formation of Israelite political structures. I do not wish to re-hash debates about whether or not changes in settlement patterns from the Iron Age I to IIA, or the presence/absence of pillared houses, collared-rim store jars, or pig bones, are meaningful identity markers of either "Israel" or the "United Monarchy" (for such discussions see Sparks 1998; Faust 2017). Suffice it to say that studies on materiality highlight the fact that ancient materials can have any number of "identities" that are meaningful, not all of which imply the "ethnic" identification of those using them (Colburn and Hughes 2010; Johansen and Bauer 2011; Dillehay 2014).

Instead, I wish to direct attention to political aesthetics as a means of expressing shared identity and/or political affiliation. Adam Smith (2000) already took such a tack with the Urartian kingdom and rightly noted at the time that anthropological approaches to legitimacy had tended to focus on self-interested calculation, even though these are limited in that they do not account for affective reasons – emotion and imagination – behind the creation and maintenance of legitimate status. The situation has started to change, but there is much room in studies of the early Israelite monarchy for more comprehensive considerations of such approaches.

Political aesthetics, or as I will equate them, political ideologies, play major roles in the creation, navigation, and maintenance of various types of identity. Ideologies can have a material, aural, and/or psychological/emotional correlate. In all instances, though, ideologies are based on symbolism and the encoding of specific messages for consumption by the ruler's power base. For instance, royal ideology is often ensconced materially in artistic representations, and it is manifested aurally in poetry and ballads that contextualize and re-tell exploits of the king and his mighty men (cf. 2 Sam 22:2–51; 23:8–39). The psychological response to visual or aural stimuli either drives one to acceptance of the ideology and a confirmation of authority for the leader, or leads to rejection of the ideology and potential destabilization of the leader's authority.

Factors such as the manipulation of genealogies, the expression of cult, the cult of personality, the use of symbolic names like "Israel," the use of poetry and songs, and the ascription to kings of artistic and mental capacities are all non-material ways that identity form and are presented in the biblical texts for the early Israelite monarchy. A comprehensive consideration of such aesthetic means of propagating

power provides fertile ground for drawing together text and archaeology in novel ways in order to view the whole matter of identity with fresh eyes.

3. An Interpretation of the Biblical Portrayal of the "United Monarchy"

3.1. Issues in the use of the text

We now turn to the biblical texts and reading the accounts of the "United Monarchy" in light of the theoretical discussions just presented. Only once a more sociologically contextualized reading is arrived at can we articulate some of the expected archaeological expressions of early Israelite political control. Of course, mining the biblical text for historical details is not easy or straightforward. Often these texts have been redacted by later authors, were written well after events they purport to describe, and/or present details in what is a wholly appropriate ancient Near Eastern manner that actually obfuscates the types of details that modern archaeologists and historians desire.

Still, in many instances the text does preserve social, political, and/or cultural realities that are tangential to the broader or even main concerns of the authors (at least as modern scholars have reconstructed the interests of ancient authors). From a sociological perspective, the elements that are most important for the current paper are the elements that were least significant for biblical authors. The biblical authors were unconcerned with the mundane aspects of social structure and the way that they interacted to produce political situations. These elements are descriptive aspects of a prescriptive text that seeks to explain why a specific political structure, i.e., the monarchy, was unsuccessful and how this pertains to the presence and leadership of YHWH.

Thus, despite later redactions and/or compositional dates for the text of 1–2 Sam and 1 Kgs 1–11, there is no a priori reason to discount the historicity of large portions of this material. In fact, numerous studies over the past couple of decades have reaffirmed the antiquity and, in numerous instances, the likely historicity of many of the traditions about the early Israelite monarchy (Vermeylen 2000: 471–624; Dietrich 2007: 227–316; 2012; Hutton 2009; Fleming 2012a; Benz 2016; Richelle 2016). Fleming (2012a: 99ff.), in particular, notes that the sociological situation portrayed in parts of Samuel cannot fit a late Iron Age setting.[7] I therefore

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7. Fleming challenges Römer's (2005; Römer and de Pury 2000) reading of much of the David and Solomon material through the lens of later events (i.e., those in the 7th century in

proceed under the assumption that, within reason and appropriate expectation, the biblical account of the early Israelite monarchy reflects in broad strokes the general historical sequence of actual events and developments, and in particular social elements that are germane to the present study's focus.[8]

3.2. Saul's Kingdom

If we consider power, legitimacy, and legitimization in the Israelite "United Monarchy" in light of the preceding theoretical discussion, we see that the textual concords with the theoretical. For Saul, David, and Solomon we will see essentially the same three-step process of legitimization. For Saul, the process unfolds as follows: 1) the people request a king, who then adheres to culturally appropriate rules, which are detailed by Samuel serving as an intermediary (1 Sam 10:20–21, 25); 2) normative validity is established by the elders of Israel, or was established already in 1 Sam 8:4 when they requested a king, and then Saul proves his worth by leading Israel in victorious battle against the Ammonites at Jabesh Gilead; 3) following this victory, the people publicly crown Saul at Gilgal (11:14–15). With

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particular), noting in particular that "these seventh-century and later dates do not account for the portrayal of collective Israel as a political actor in the revolts launched by Absalom and Sheba in 2 Samuel 15–20" (Fleming 2012: 100; cf. also Hutton 2009 and Vermeylan 2010). It is important to note that a great many biblical scholars turn to Finkelstein's interpretation of the archaeological record, considering his interpretation to be, apparently, less biased than that of all other archaeologists (cf. Hjelm 2016: 9; see the critique of such a scenario in Halpern 2005: 423–424). And because Finkelstein interprets the archaeology to say that there was no far-reaching "United Monarchy," then it becomes clear that suspicion of the historicity of the biblical text is all the more warranted. Hjelm (2016: 13–14) goes on to say that archaeology has "challenged the historicity of a biblical Israel and the united monarchy." But "archaeology" has done no such thing; scholars interpreting the archaeology in a specific manner have raised the challenge. The archaeological remains are unbiased data that receive meaning when interpreted by archaeologists (cf. Rainey 2001: 144).

8. Establishing the actual chronological sequence of events in the reigns of David and Solomon is greatly hampered by the fact that large portions of the so-called History of David's Rise (ca. 1 Sam 15–2 Sam 5) and Solomon's Succession Narrative (ca. 2 Sam 2–1 Kgs 2) appear to be royal apologia (McCarter 1980a; Knapp 2015: 161–248; Kalimi 2019: 127–164). As such, these texts *May* hedge, conceal, avoid, or dismiss the truth of what actually happened. Still, even if a strict order of events cannot be established, the presence of such apologetic works provides great insight on the sociological setting from which such texts derive (Hutton 2009: 165). Royal apologies function in settings where they are needed. They are not created after the fact (Ishida 1982; Hutton 2009: 157–168). In fact, Hutton makes a strong case that the Davidic apology dates from the early to mid-10th century and the Solomonic apology to the late 10th century (2009: 177–288, in particular 273; 364; cf. also McCarter 1980a; Kalimi 2019: 127–164).

the legitimization of the king, we can turn to evaluating how unity and identity were expressed, or at least remembered, in the biblical text.

The text of 1 Samuel does not articulate the boundaries of Saul's kingdom, but based on the locations mentioned in the text and the enemies against whom Saul struggled, it can be argued that it reached north to the Jezreel Valley, east into Gilead, south to the furthest extent of the Hill Country of Judah, and west to the Chalk Moat that separates the hills of Judah from the Shephelah (Fig. 1).[9] In the Elah Valley, it is likely that Saul exerted control as far as Khirbet Qeiyafa for at least a period of time.

Unfortunately, the most descriptive passage we have for Saul's kingdom-building is 1 Sam 14: 47–48, which merely records that Saul "fought against" (יִלָּחֶם) Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines, and that he "routed" (יַרְשִׁיעַ) them. He also delivered Israel from "plundering" (*Šśh*) at the hands of the Amalekites. That the Amalekites were entering "Israelite" territory to plunder implies a defensive attitude to territorial gain, something that is further corroborated by the conflicts with the Philistines.

In fact, in no instance does the text say that Saul expanded his territory into that of any of his foes after defeating them. Rather, regions and towns that can be said to fall within Saul's realm do so through social processes, not military expansion. A town/region is part of Saul's kingdom because the leaders of that town or representatives of those who live in that region align themselves with Saul (e.g., Jabesh Gilead). Unfortunately, the biblical text does not generally provide details about the process of Saul's alliance-making (but see 1 Sam 14:52), but the fact that there may have been groups within Saul's territorial domain that did not give allegiance to him is hinted at in 1 Sam 13–14, where there is a Philistine contingent in the heart of Benjamin and where a group referred to as the "Hebrews" appear juxtaposed with "Israel." "Israel," whose territorial extent is not stated, appears to be the collective identifier for the group over which Saul has authority (cf. Monroe and Fleming 2019: 22), whereas these "Hebrews" may be understood as a separate entity aligned not with Saul but with the Philistines, who have also stationed an outpost in Saulide territory (1 Sam 14:21).

If the term "Israel" is reflective of an early unifying identity, it is significant

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9. The men of Keilah appear to be loyal to Saul (1 Sam 23:1–14). Bethlehem also appears to be loyal to Saul based on the fear of the elders there when Samuel approaches (1 Sam 16:4). In fact, Levin (2003) makes the case that the southern extent of Saul's kingdom covered the entirety of the Judean Hills, down to modern-day Kh. Tatrit and Tel Kiriot (Kh. el-Qaryatēn), sites he equates with the Goshen and Gibeon of Josh 10:41.

Fig. 1. Map indicating the extent of Saul's power base (highlighted)
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that David refers to Saul's seeking him within the "borders of Israel" in 1 Sam 27:1, as the preceding chapters indicate that Saul was pursuing David exclusively in the territory of Judah, particularly that of the Maon–Carmel–Ziph triangle and the southwestern Shephelah, where Calebites and Ziphites reside. In fact, 1 Sam 23–27 highlights the segmentation at play in the southern Hill Country of Judah (Routledge 2004: 121).

By segmentation I mean that there is a hierarchical structure wherein social units at the same level reckon their identification – their identities – differently, but are subsumed under the same social unit at a higher level. For instance, the Ziphites (1 Sam 23:19) and Calebites (25:3) are separate entities that are both

subsumed by the biblical author under the moniker "Israel" in 27:1. It would appear that we can conceive of "Israel" in a segmentary manner akin to Routledge's reconstruction of Iron Age Moab (2004).

To summarize the reign and power of Saul: he is legitimized and conducts his appropriate duties. He exerts control over an undefined region through the establishment and navigation of power relationships. His power is not expressed uniformly across a contiguous landscape, nor is there anything expressly material or tangible in the way his power is manifested. Nevertheless, through his actions a unifying identity, i.e., "Israel," is established, even though this is only one of the identities that those showing allegiance to Saul can actuate. Similarly to the term "Israel," devotion to YHWH appears to be a tacit identifying, and even unifying, feature in Saul's kingdom according to the text, though it may be argued that only with the rise of David to power did YHWH serve as a more active unifying emblem.

3.3. David's Kingdom

As we chart David's rise to power we find that more relevant details for assessing matters of unity and identity in his kingdom are preserved than are for Saul's kingdom. The specific types of details, however, are most useful when we remember that ancient Israel was patrimonial and largely patriarchal (Stager 1985; 2003; Lemche 1996; Master 2001; Schloen 2001; Barako 2009).[10] At its heart, patrimonialism is "a tool that made it possible to explore political systems in which a ruler exerts power on the basis of kin ties, patron-client relations, personal allegiances, and combinations thereof, with few formal rules and regulations" (Charrad and Adams 2011: 7). If we accept this broad definition of patrimonialism, then we allow for an articulation of both vertical and horizontal power relationships, while at the same time allowing for the fact that rulers and ruled are constantly reifying what it means to be ruled and what it means to rule.

David's rise to power began with him leading a rabble of discontents (1 Sam 22:2), who ultimately gained the support of Judahite clan leaders by giving them spoils from military victories (30:26).[11] This is already step two in David's

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10. It should be recognized that to call ancient Israel "patriarchal" is not to deny that women held considerable power at various times and in various sociopolitical settings. As with many terms, "patriarchalism" is a generalized term for heuristic purposes that encompasses a vast majority of specific instantiations, though it is not absolute in its definition or monolithic in its expression (cf. Meyers 2006; 2012; Chapman 2016).

11. The mentions of the people "loving" David and finding his actions "good" in 1 Sam 18: 5,

legitimization; the first step was established with Saul, and in light of the apparent Philistine threat the request for a king remained active. Then, David moved from his base at Ziklag to the region of Hebron, where the "men of Judah" came and anointed him king (2 Sam 2:4) – step three. In David's case the last step is replicated when the elders of Israel make a covenant with David and anoint him king over Israel in 2 Sam 5:3.[12] This is after Abner had conferred with them to essentially delegitimize Ish-bosheth (2 Sam 3:17) after he himself had taken offense at Ish-bosheth's rule (3:7–11).[13]

Once properly legitimate, David "strikes" (נכה) and/or "subdues" (כבש) the Philistines, Moab, Zobah, Edom, Ammon, and Amalek. He then collects tribute from Moab and Aram (2 Sam 8:2, 6) and places *Neṣibim* (governors/garrisons/sentries) in Aram Damascus and Edom (8:14).

What is most striking, however, is that no clear borders for David's kingdom are delineated in the account of his military activities in 2 Sam 8 and 10. In fact, all the terminology in these chapters is fairly ambiguous when it comes to ascertaining what David accomplished – neither נכה or נגף are particularly illuminating – and what the nature of his control over his enemies was. To be sure, the text does relay that he established *Neṣibim* in Aram Damascus and in Edom. But even this term is debated; is the text referring to "garrisons" or "governors"? "Garrisons" suggests that David stationed a group or groups of troops in these territories, while "governors" indicates single individuals. Regardless, David is traditionally understood to have imposed military rule over these regions. But regardless of how we translate *Neṣibim* – and I will merely raise the possibility that this term is more a reflection of a type of site than it is a reference to a person/group – there is no clear idea that they are meant to show David's military control over the entire

13–16, though tied to David's military leadership, carry with them heavier ideological tones and may not represent early traditions (see McCarter 1980: 305–314).

12. The role of the house of Benjamin is an interesting point, as they are mentioned as a separate entity with whom Abner confers in 2 Sam 3:19.

13. Scholarship has moved from discussing the "United Monarchy" to the "kingdoms of Israel and Judah." The latter, while never explicitly articulated from a methodological perspective, is the better. It more faithfully captures the political situation in which there was an existing kingdom of Israel under the house of Saul and an upstart kingdom of Judah under the house of David. Thus, references in the books of Samuel to "Israel and Judah" are not actually indications of later composition or redaction, as most biblical scholars would have us believe, but are accurate portrayals of the political reality in the Iron Age I to IIA transitional period. David, after all, needed to call the kingdom over which he ruled from Hebron something (see Monroe and Fleming 2019 for more on this matter, as well as a slightly different take).

region of Aram Damascus or Edom. Instead, these sites are nodes of power that for all intents and purposes are for the control of economic resources rather than the subjugation of people groups (I will treat this in detail in another venue).
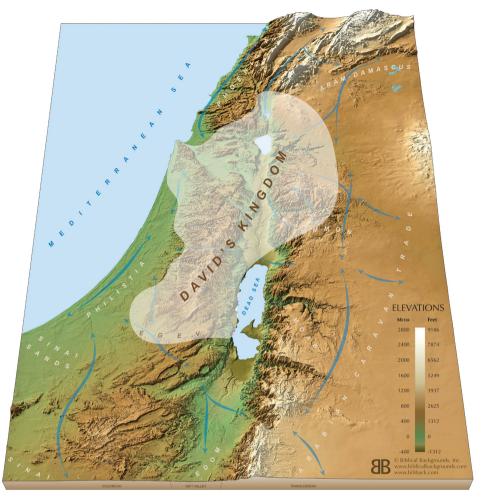
The best articulation of the borders of David's kingdom would appear to be 2 Sam 24, which recounts the lands in which David conducted his census. If this document, which is understood to be built around an old source, does reflect David's political reach, then the clearest claim is that that reach extended from the region of Dan to the region of Beersheba (Fig. 2). "Israel" has grown to include the Galilee and perhaps portions of the coastal plain. But there are two important considerations based on the places and peoples mentioned in this census list. First, the presence of Canaanites and Hivites in territory that is presented as "Israel" suggests malleable territoriality.[14] David did not actually control a clearly defined and contiguous region from the site of Dan to the site of Beersheba. Second, the preservation of these same groups indicates segmentation. They are "Hivites" and "Canaanites," but they are presented as part of broader "Israel." Taken together, these considerations indicate that the census, while it may have been conducted to determine available manpower and/or a tax base, was at the same time an attempt to determine who was loyal to David.[15] That is, who considered David to be the legitimate king.

There is thus no clear claim in the text of Samuel that David controlled all the territory from the Negev to the Euphrates in a political or even military manner. Instead, a close reading of the text shows that David's reach was more constricted, based on navigating social relationships, and in conformity with what we see elsewhere in the Levant over the course of the Iron Age. Moreover, the description of David's kingdom is written in a way that conforms to ancient Near Eastern standards (Younger 1990). While it may be an aggrandizing way of writing, it preserves, in this instance, tell-tale signs of the true nature of legitimization and power and the social struggles to establish and maintain them.

What then do we do with claims that David's Jerusalem was too small to control far-reaching lands? Charismatic and powerful leaders could expand their domain by winning the support of local leaders through military/martial threats, economic jockeying, and/or ideological claims to legitimacy, superiority, and/or connectivity. The result could be a vast realm in which all the key power players

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14. Of course, the complex redactional history of the biblical text precludes knowing this for certain, as there may be other factors influencing the specific wording.
15. I thank George Pierce for this suggestion.

Fig. 2. Map indicating the extent of David's power base (highlighted)
(©Biblical Backgrounds, Inc.; used with permission).

paid allegiance to one leader due to that leader's charisma, legitimacy, and/or physical ability to levy punishment, not because they lived in a big city.[16]

But controlling any territory through military might requires a sizeable exertion of time, resources, and manpower. The practicality of such an endeavor was likely far less realized than is generally assumed. In fact, it is clear that more aesthetic means of expressing power and engendering submission – art, ideology, feasting, and poetry – were regularly used in the Near East. The benefit of visual and, in

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16. For the recognition that Jerusalem's physical size did not implicate its importance see Stager (1985: 25), who notes Fox's (1977: 39–43) idea of the disembedded capital and identifies Jerusalem as a regal-ritual center.

particular, aural forms of expressing power, is that they reach a far wider audience far more easily than do material expressions of power. From the beginning of the Israelite monarchy, these more aesthetic means of propagating and securing legitimacy appear.

The heroics of Saul and David are sung about (1 Sam 18). In fact, as Mark Smith (2015: 4) notes, early hero poetry that serves to establish the aura of the king runs through the reigns of Saul to Solomon. The difference is that while Saul and David are presented as warriors, the poetry about Solomon portrays him as wise. Of related importance is the fact that David is said to have had at least one scribe (2 Sam 8:17; cf. 20:25). As Burke (2020) has recently argued, there is a continuation of Egyptian scribes/scribal tradition in Canaan after the withdrawal of New Kingdom Egypt. Scribes, he notes, were far more versatile than mere writers; they were rememberers and composers.[17] They helped craft identity or helped perpetuate an identity to be crafted. Their skills as purveyors of knowledge were sought out. That scribes would have continued to function for generations in Jerusalem, the capital city of an old Egyptian vassal, stands to reason. It can be presumed that this is where David recruited his scribe(s). At the same time, the fact that Saul is not mentioned as having any scribes likely reflects the fact that his power base did not bring him into contact with scribes left over in Canaan.[18]

In Israel the creation of specific "narratives" and identities were the purview of the scribe. These narratives need not have been written, but were likely royal apologia and/or psalms for recitation that included the idea of David as a psalmist/musician and even the earliest form of the promise to David in 2 Sam 7, which spread and inculcated royal ideology while at the same time crafting an identity around David and his legitimacy and even potentially constructing or reconstructing an early national identity (cf. Schniedewind 1999: 18; Hutton 2009: 168–175).[19] This latter possibility, as Weingart has recently articulated, is indicated

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17. This raises the question of what is the distinction between a *Sopher* and a *Mazkir*.

18. Incidentally, this also attests to the fact of malleable territoriality in Saul's kingdom. Jerusalem is its own enclave in a territory otherwise allegiant to Saul. On a separate point, the continuation of Egyptian scribal traditions may even account for the transferral of Akkadian terms into Hebrew at an early stage. Not all Akkadian loanwords would need to be understood as loaned in the Neo-Assyrian period. For comparable reconstructions of scribalism and the role of scribes in the Iron Age I to early Iron Age IIA, albeit with some differing conclusions, see Sanders 2004; 2008; Carr 2005: 20–30; Byrne 2007; Hutton 2009: 168–175.

19. There are two laments attributed to David: 2 Sam 1:17–27 and 2 Sam 3:33–34. In both instances these are recorded as public events that, at least in the latter case (vv. 32–37), endeared David to the people. Weitzman (1997: 133–140) has argued that these laments are part of a

in the establishment (no later than the time of David) of a twelve-tribe concept, which essentially closed the canon on major genealogical alterations and varying kinship relationships at a grand level (Weingart 2014; 2019: 30).[20]

David's kingdom in many ways mirrors Saul's. His power is based on navigating social relationships in order to reify his legitimate rule over a constituency. Their support enables him to wage military actions, thereby bringing him into contact with other groups, regions, and leaders with whom a status quo needs to be instituted. If the biblical claims are accurate, David won his military encounters and established himself as the dominant partner in these relationships, enabling him to dictate the nature of the relationships. And *if* the census in 2 Sam 24 reflects the realm over which David's ideological/propaganda machine was able to convince the power players that they shared an identity (without necessarily negating any other self-identification that they held), then it would appear that David was able to win the support of those players in the Galilee.

But, as in Saul's kingdom, David's reach was not so tight that it created a blanket of political and military control from the Negev to Hamath. In fact, it apparently did not create a uniform political expression even from Dan to Beersheba. So, while claims of David's influence up to Hamath are entirely feasible based on sociological considerations, the view that David exerted unilateral political or even military control over such a broad swath of land is an entirely modern construction.

3.4. Solomon's Kingdom

Solomon's legitimization is a bit trickier to articulate, as most Biblicists would argue that the ready hand of the Deuteronomistic Historian, or perhaps another editor/redactor, has shaped the narrative at a later time. As a result, there is likely

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larger type-scene structure that permeates 2 Samuel and which serves to highlight a decline in the personality and public image of David over the course of his reign. Despite any literary devices, the portrayal of David as one who composes music/laments is accepted as something that David does, and which he is known for. In fact, "David's lament [in 2 Sam 1] involved a use of language that helped to establish the king's positive public image; David's inarticulate and socially isolating response to the death of Absalom signals the collapse of that image and the political/rhetorical skills which had helped David construct it" (Weitzman 1997: 140).

20. Weingart (2019: 29) notes that there are two different types of lineages: vertical, which serve to establish and maintain hierarchical structures, and horizontal, which are more about establishing and maintaining a group's boundaries. "Boundary markers in turn become especially relevant if the outside boundaries have to be established – be it that a community takes shape, be it that its delimitations become unstable and subject to change."

greater literarization of Solomon's reign. In fact, the process by which Solomon is legitimized is actually presented in reverse order in 1 Kgs; that is, it starts with the public expression of his legitimization (1 Kgs 1:38–40), then the text relays his performative act of building the temple of YHWH, and finally 1 Kgs 8 goes to great lengths to show that Solomon's kingship was in fact the desired plan of YHWH and was the express manifestation of the original agreement between Israel and YHWH for the creation of kingship to begin with. Literarily, what we have for Solomon is a description of his delegitimization even as the typical markers of the actual process of legitimization are present.

Solomon's kingdom is presumed to be the largest of the "United Monarchy" based on 1 Kgs 5:1 [4:21], which states that "Solomon ruled (*Mošel*) over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates (*Hannahar*) to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt."[21] In 5:5, however, the text specifies that "Judah and Israel dwelt in safety, every man under his own vine and under his own fig tree, from Dan to Beersheba" (5:5 [4:25]).[22] The specific choice of the verbs √משל and √רדה, which appear in the parallel description of Solomon's domain in 1 Kgs 5:4, do not, as Christopher Hays (2015) has noted, imply that Solomon controlled the territory from the Euphrates to Egypt politically or militarily. Instead, they convey the idea that Solomon was the dominant partner in various political partnerships/relationships (cf. the Sefire Treaty).[23] As the dominant partner, he could claim authority and allegiance from the submissive partner and push for the status quo that he desired – as long as that partner continued to view him as a legitimate ruler.

Solomon's kingdom, it appears, did not actually change much from that of his father David (Fig. 3). First, the effective realm wherein the majority of the people

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21. The parallel statement in 1 Kgs 5:4 [4:24] says, "For he had dominion (*Rodeh*) over all of *Eber Hanahar*, from Tiphsah to Gaza, over all the kings of the region west of the Euphrates (*Eber Hannahar*). And he had peace all around him." It is likely that this verse, which merely restates 5:1 in different terms, is a later gloss based on the term *Eber Hannahar*, which first appears in Assyrian inscriptions in the days of Sargon II.

22. Within the idea of malleable territoriality we must consider that vast stretches of the terrain being discussed are simply uninhabited. To claim authority over them requires saying so; no material culture is necessary and no peoples have to be subdued.

23. In fact, the threefold recounting of Solomon's territory has parallels with Egyptian territorial descriptions in the New Kingdom (Hogarth 1914; Hays 2015) – something that is partially mirrored in the Assyrian concept of the "Land of Assur" and the "Yoke of Assur" as well (Postgate 1992). There is an internal, an external, and an idealized realm as Hays calls them. The internal realm, over which Solomon presumably exerted political and military control, was from Dan to Beersheba.

were loyal to him was from Dan to Beersheba. But still, there were apparently pockets of ambivalence, as indicated in 1 Kgs 9:20 by the reference to "all the people who were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel." While the text does not specify, we may envision that this phrase implies that these groups did not recognize Solomon's legitimacy, and this is perhaps why they were forced into labor. Incidentally, if we consider this verse in light of what has been said above about segmentation and identity, it may offer one potential explanation for the seemingly contradictory statement in 1 Kgs 5:27 [5:13] that Solomon drafted labor from "Israel." In one instance the "higher-order" identity, "Israel" is cited, in the other, "lower-level" identities are listed.

Fig. 3. Map indicating the extent of Solomon's power base (highlighted) (©Biblical Backgrounds, Inc.; used with permission).

Second, the economic structure that David envisioned for his kingdom and which he put into play through the placement of *Neṣibim* in the region of Aram Damascus and Edom is apparently still operating under Solomon. The fact that 1 Kgs 11:14–25 notes adversaries to Solomon in these two regions makes sense, as they are the two regions with the greatest potential to control the main arteries of trade. If we consider the sites that Solomon "builds" in 1 Kgs 9:15–19, their geographic locations suggest that Solomon was attempting to tighten his grip on trade through the region.

Whether his wealth was as opulent as the text indicates, or regardless of whether all the details of the Solomonic narrative reflect specific historical developments, the underlying socio-political concerns are not out of place in relation to what we see earlier for Saul and David, or even for the early first-millennium Aramean and Neo-Hittite kingdoms in the northern Levant (cf. Kitchen 2002; Bryce 2012; Younger 2016), even though the specifics of the socio-political players have shifted.

Like David before him, Solomon uses dedication to YHWH as a unifying element for his kingdom (1 Kgs 6–8). The erection of a temple for YHWH in Jerusalem makes that clear.[24] Moreover, traditions about Solomon's wisdom can likely be traced back to his reign, as they serve a royal agenda. Politically, Solomon's legitimacy is bolstered through a perceived terminological unity (i.e., the "Kingdom of Israel") as well as a conceptual unity (the "People of Yahweh"; cf. Benz 2016: Ch. 11; Monroe and Fleming 2019).

4. Unity, Identity, and the Archaeological Footprint of Israelite Monarchic Power

To this point I have discussed the textual representation of the "United Monarchy," albeit in light of various theoretical considerations and parallels from the ancient Near East that help articulate the socio-political and geopolitical underpinnings that run through the text. Again, as Fleming has noted, such underpinnings are mundane details (for the most part) that change over time. The situation in the late Iron Age is different from that in the early Iron Age; the portrait we get from the books of Samuel and 1 Kings indicates an early setting.

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24. 1 Kgs 8 goes to great lengths to refer to "Israel" as well as unity amongst this entity – unity not only as a collective, but also unity with their king and their god. Most of this chapter is understood to be a later DtrH composition.

What, then, does this mean archaeologically? We have been discussing political and cultural unity and identity. We have seen that Saul, David, and Solomon had to adapt to an ever-changing set of circumstances in order to stay in power. Their legitimacy was not static or enduring, and nor were the identity and unity of their constituencies. These kings had to navigate traditional tribal power structures, most of which would leave a dubious archaeological footprint. Thus, we must question how fair a judge of socio-political developments and geopolitical reality the archaeological record truly is.

The fact that the "United Monarchy" consists of three specific instantiations of a political system that is based on how the legitimate ruler navigated different levels of power and authority shows us that there will not be one specific manner in which this political entity appears in the archaeological record. In fact, based on what the biblical text claims, the only items Saul reputedly builds or erects are a monument (*Yad*) in Carmel (1 Sam 15:12) and an altar (1 Sam 14:35).[25] David is slightly more concerned with leaving an archaeological footprint, as he supposedly erects two monuments/stelae, builds an altar (2 Sam 24:25//1 Chr 21:26), and builds "the millo and inward" in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:9//1 Chr 11:8). It is only for Solomon that a more extensive and tangible archaeological footprint is articulated from a textual perspective. Constructions of one sort or another are built at Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Lower Beth Horon, Baalath, and Tamar/Tadmor, as are store cities, chariot cities, cities for his horsemen, and whatever he desired to build in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and in all the land under his dominion (1 Kgs 9:15–19; cf. 2 Chr 8:1–11). In Jerusalem particularly, Solomon is said to have built his house, the Temple, the wall of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 3:2; 9:15), the House of the Forest of Lebanon (1 Kgs 7:2), the "millo" (1 Kgs 9:15, 24), and a house for Pharaoh's daughter.

The issue with most of Solomon's construction projects is that there is no specificity as to what was built. The text merely says that Solomon "built" (בנה) specific sites. Does this mean that he fortified them? That he built administrative buildings there? That he built a densely inhabited settlement? The text does

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25. It is worth considering whether any anti-Saul literary structuring in 1 Samuel led to the removal of references to royal construction projects under Saul. To my mind, this seems unlikely, in that even as the text pits the house of Saul against the house of David, minimal construction projects are attributed to David. It would appear that royal construction projects are not of prime historical or narratological significance for contrasting the two rulers. The fact that the Temple in Jerusalem is clearly identified with Solomon in 1 Kgs further minimizes the role construction projects played for the biblical author(s) as they built their narrative. Significantly, such construction projects do become significant for the Chronicler, who regularly includes additional royal projects not recorded in Kings.

not say – archaeologists have always provided the specific nature of Solomon's building projects based on their interpretation and dating of the archaeological remains.

Thus, Yadin interpreted 1 Kgs 9:15 as referring to gates and fortification walls (1958). Syntactically, the text is ambiguous, clearly referring to a wall at Jerusalem but not necessarily at the subsequently listed sites of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. It may be that the large buildings known as "palaces" (Palace 10,000 at Gezer and Palace 6000 at Megiddo) are those implied by the text. What we can take away from this is that even if any of these structures at Hazor, Megiddo, or Gezer are what the biblical author had in mind – gates, fortification walls, palaces – those features that have been excavated, dated to the days of Solomon (i.e., the early Iron Age IIA), and interpreted as "Solomonic" are themselves not standardized. The gate of Hazor X is not exactly the same as the gate of Megiddo VA–IVB, which again is not the same as the gate of Gezer VIII.[26] They share functional similarities, but share what we might consider to be a master plan only in the very broadest of terms. When the specifics of each gate are considered, the differences are clear: the design of the external towers, the presence or absence of benches and other installations, an external gateway, or even the masonry style are not uniform. It is clear that these variations resulted from access to local resources, topographical considerations, and likely the specific interpretation of any "master plan" by a *Local Leader* or official overseeing their construction.

It is the growing recognition that centralized power in the ancient Near East does not preclude the presence of local or regional networks of power (cf. Charpin 2004; Fleming 2004; von Dassow 2012; Benz 2016) that makes the archaeological articulation of political power even more of a challenge, because we must consider what level of political power we are dealing with and what the possible material manifestations of that power are. For instance, Solomon could have commissioned the construction of the gates at Megiddo, Hazor, and/or Gezer, but the actual construction of those gates was carried out by locals loyal to him. Additionally, we must accept that the modern concepts of "public" and "private" were not so clearly delineated in the ancient Near East, a fact that calls into question facile interpretations of specific archaeological remains (i.e. "palaces") based only on their size. In systems where power is reified socially rather than territorially – i.e., patrimonial systems – the presence of palaces or other monumental buildings

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26. For the sake of this argument, the traditional ascription of these levels to the mid- to late 10th century BCE is followed here.

marking political power cannot be assumed. Moreover, it must be shown that a monumental building serves a political purpose. While it can be, or at least often is, assumed that monumental buildings indicate political control because the resources and manpower necessary to construct such edifices would only be possible with an organized political power, the underlying social network wherein power relationships are manifest do not implicitly require such buildings.

In fact, there is nothing in the texts or archaeology that indicates which monumental buildings should be considered palaces, which are large private houses, and whether the buildings themselves are what indicates the presence of a political entity. The Hebrew term *Hekal* comes directly from the Sumerian É .GAL (Akkadian *Ekallum*) and means "big house." Quantitatively, the term does not carry with it a specific idea of what constitutes "big" – it is relative. The same is true for the original Sumerian term; Bodi (2014: 211) notes that the term *Ekallum* "does not stand for any architecturally major building or construction but simply for the house in which the town's ruler lived."[27] Similarly, Otto (2012: 94) asks, "if the palace was only the residence of the local king and not the headquarter of a centralized administration with a complex body of functionaries, would it have been very different from a large house?" (cf. also McClellan 1997).

Not only are the sizes of ancient Near Eastern palaces relative, but so are their designs. Fleming rightly cautions against assuming what a palace should look like (2012b: 103); the "palace" of Emar, if it is Chantier A, is far more restricted in size and institutional scope than the palace at Ugarit. Comparably, Palace 6000 at Megiddo or Palace 10,000 at Gezer, which are contemporary regardless of the chronological scheme adopted, are not identical in construction quality, layout, or size, even though both are considered to be "palaces" that demarcate the presence of a royal administration.

Buildings are not the only gauge of political control. This is especially true in patrimonial systems, where power is often expressed more readily through social means. Yet, the presence of specific types of "monumental" or "public" buildings – palaces – has come to be expected in any reconstruction of political power. To be sure, palaces do represent the imposition of political control, but

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27. Bodi (2014) draws upon the Mari letters to interpret the period of Saul, David, and Solomon. While he appreciates that Finkelstein – who is one of the most outspoken scholars dealing with the early Israelite monarchy – uses the term "chiefdom" over "state" for early Israel, Bodi also argues that Finkelstein's understanding of the terms *Melek* (king), *Bêt* (temple), and *Hêkāl* (palace) does not conform to the ancient semantic range common among seminomadic groups already from the Middle Babylonian period.

such buildings are not the only way that a political entity can or does express its control in the ancient Near East.

5. Conclusions

The term "United Monarchy" is a scholarly construct. We really should be talking about "United Monarchies," as the kingdoms of Saul, David, and Solomon, while sharing certain aspects – such as how social power was legitimized and required continuous reification, and the fact that their territories were not entirely contiguous or even populated by people who identified with them and/or considered them legitimate – are separate political expressions derived from socially constructed and limiting circumstances. What began with Saul expanded under David and was fine-tuned under Solomon, who fortified strategic nodes on the landscape, creating a network of power expressed symbolically, materially, and politically.

When we consider the social structure of ancient Israel and the way power, political geography, and identity were constructed/reified, adapted, and evolved over time, then we can focus our archaeological expectations on more contextually certain expressions and move away from false expectations and straw men – i.e., that there was a Davidic/Solomonic Empire and that there *Should* be a unified "Israelite" material culture that reflects the presence of such a political entity – as we attempt to understand the relationship between sociopolitical structures and their archaeological manifestations.

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