

Solomon, Scripture, and Science: The Rise of the Judahite State in the 10th Century BCE

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Abstract

This paper compares evidence from stratified sites that are well dated by radio-carbon analyses, ceramic typology, and a critical reading of the pertinent texts of the Hebrew Bible. The results show that by the 10th century BCE in Judah we have a polity that represents a centralized state or kingdom. It was likely ruled by Solomon, even if the “larger-than-life” portrait of the Bible is exaggerated.

KEYWORDS: Kingdom of Judah, 10th century BCE, King Solomon, Gezer

1. Introduction

My paper will revolve around four principal assertions. First, archaeologists are historians or nothing. What else would they be? They paint a portrait of past cultures and of cultural changes over long timespans, but one based on material culture remains rather than textual remains. Their focus is essentially not on pots or archaeological periods but on people, on past events, and on larger historical configurations.

As historians, we must develop self-conscious, appropriate methods for history-writing – something few of us have done. In writing my recent *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah*, I devoted a long initial chapter to historiography. There I advocated a model based on jurisprudence – “trying” our two sources, the archaeological record and the textual record,

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as though to establish independently whether they are “innocent” or “guilty,” i.e., true or false evidence for history-writing.¹ The fundamental principles of jurisprudence are: (a) “Presumed (not “proven”) innocent unless or until found guilty”; (b) “The deciding factor being the preponderance of the evidence” (51%); and (c) “A judgment that stands beyond a reasonable doubt” (some will remain, but are unreasonable, and so cannot prevail). The judgment is not perfect, but it is the best we can do. That is why all histories are provisional; we do not possess the whole truth, only the “balance of probability.”

In “trying” text and artifact in the court of history, neither defendant can be a final witness on their own behalf. In particular, the biblical text cannot stand alone, as though it were self-evidently “true.” An external witness is required to corroborate it, and until recently that could only have been the archaeological data, considered separately and critically; but now we can add science.

The archaeological data are now the “primary” evidence for writing any new histories of ancient Israel. Compared with the biblical narratives, the archaeological information is more contemporary with the events in question; far more diverse, less biased, more dynamic and ever-expanding. But most biblical scholars in Israel, Europe, and North America have given up on history-writing; the current fad is “cultural memory.” Their skepticism means that we archaeologists must take up the challenge, or ancient Israel’s history will never be adequately illuminated.

2. A Test-Case in History-Writing: The Gezer Gate

It is appropriate in this issue on the 10th century BCE in ancient Judah to go back to events that raised the issue nearly thirty years ago. A series of articles in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* in 1990 debated the Gezer Field III city gate as evidence for a “Solomonic Kingdom,” with Ussishkin fielding a 9th-century BCE date (along with Wightman and following Jamieson-Drake; where are they now?).²

Then, in the mid-1990s, Finkelstein began tirelessly promoting his “low chronology,” which moves the origins of the Judahite (or “Israelite”) state all the

1. For an extensive application of the jurisprudence model, see W.G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2017).

2. See articles by Dever, Finkelstein, Holladay, and Ussishkin in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 277/278 (1990). Jamieson-Drake and Wightman, protagonists in this issue, dropped out of the discipline early on. For further developments, see Finkelstein 1996; 1998; Mazar 1997; and many chapters on C14 dates in Levy and Highman 2005.

way down to the 8th century BCE. Thus the notion of a 10th-century BCE “United Monarchy” was written out of history. In my judgment, there never was any empirical evidence for the idiosyncratic “low chronology”; and as several papers here will show, the vaunted C14 dates that were promised have actually dealt the “low chronology” a death blow.³ We can move on from excessive skepticism to a modest optimism, from fascination with novelty to serious, responsible work as historians.

As is well known, a brief passage in the Deuteronomistic history in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs 9:15–17) claims that Solomon “built” (Heb. *Bānāh*, “to build”, or often “to build up,” or fortify) four sites, first Jerusalem, the capital, and then Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. Literary critics, who now rule the day, may dispute among themselves when the text was written, by whom, for what purposes, and how it came to be transmitted to the 7th century BCE, into the form in which we now have it. Biblical theologians (if there are any left) and clerics may exercise themselves to find some metaphysical meaning (ethical or moral?) as though Solomon were God’s anointed. But we historians should only ask *One* question: did the purported events actually happen? Most biblical historians have given up on answering that question, only inquiring about “cultural meaning.” We archaeological historians must take up the challenge.⁴

For an example of a “history of events,” the 1967–1971 HUC–JIR/Harvard Semitic Museum excavations at Gezer completed the clearance of Macalister’s “Maccabean Castle” (Fig. 1), which, as Yadin had brilliantly guessed (never having seen the long-buried structure), was actually one half of an Iron Age four-entryway city gate (Fig. 2). Yadin saw the gate as almost identical in plan to the Str. X gate at Hazor that he had excavated and the Str. VA/IVB gate at Megiddo that he had recently re-investigated. Yadin confidently asserted that the Gezer gate was in fact the very gate referred to in 1 Kgs 9:15–17 – evidence of the design of a “royal

3. On the origins of the “low chronology” and the “Early Iron Age Dating Project,” hopefully incorporating hundreds of C14 dates, see Sharon et al. 2005. So far, however, relatively few dates have been published, and virtually none correlating C14 dates with secure stratigraphic sequences. For refutations, see Frese and Levy 2010, with references; Mazar 1997; Zarzecki-Peleg 1997; Ben-Tor 2000; Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Dever 2001; Kletter 2004. Mazar 2005 clinches the case. See now Finkelstein 2011, raising dates as much as 50 years.

4. On “cultural memory” as an overarching theory in biblical studies, see generally Davies 2008; Hendel 2010; Assmann 2011; Moore and Kelle 2011: 72–75. This trend is part of the well-known “literary turn” – i.e., a turn in scholarship away from history and history-writing. Thus no new mainstream English histories of ancient Israel have appeared in the last thirty years and more.

corps of engineers” in Solomon’s Jerusalem. That was in 1958, and for years Yadin regarded it as among his finest achievements.⁵

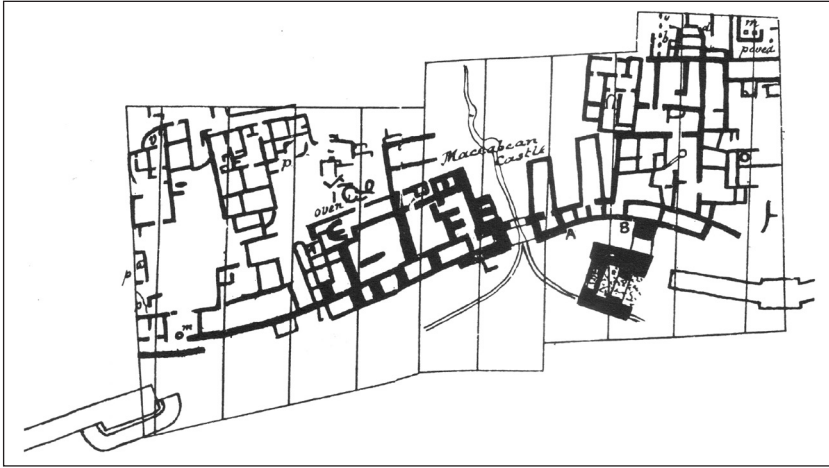


Fig. 1. Gezer: Macalister’s “Maccabean Castle” and unidentified building to the left (Dever 1985: Fig.1).

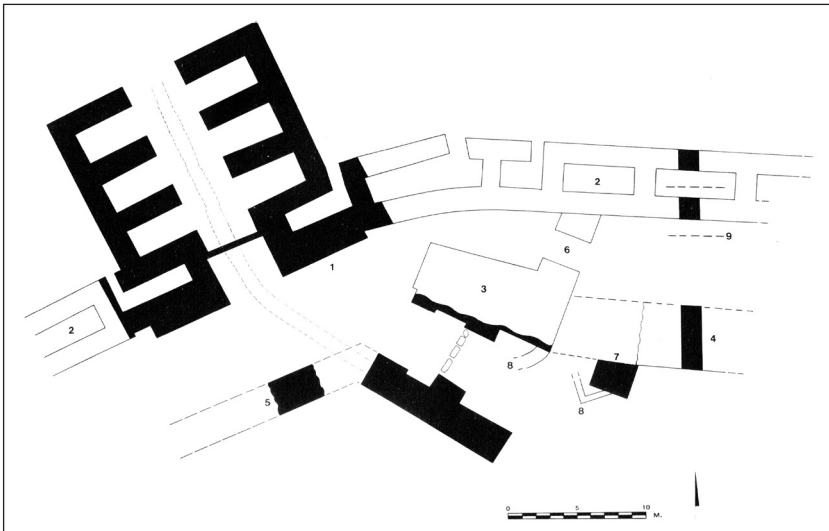


Fig. 2. Gezer: corrected plan of Solomonic gate complex in Field III after the 1984 season. 1. upper gateway; 2. casemate city wall; 3. outer “gatehouse”; 4. “outer wall,” Iron Age phase; 5. connector wall to west; 6. postern gate; 7. Solomonic ashlar tower; 8. LB II tower and revetment (partly exposed); 9. line of MB II inner wall (Dever 1985: Fig. 2).

5. See Yadin 1958. Toward the end of his life in 1984, he called this one of his greatest achievements.

Beginning in the 1980s, Yadin's use of archaeology to buttress the biblical narrative had come under increasing attack as old-fashioned "biblical archaeology," with its obvious biases and naïve misuse of archaeological data. By 1990, Finkelstein and Ussishkin had confronted the Gezer excavators, Dever and Holladay, arguing that our designation of "Solomonic" (i.e., 10th century BCE) for the gate was unwarranted.⁶

Somewhat later, Finkelstein charged that I had gone to Gezer, Bible in one hand and trowel in the other, to "prove the Bible." He ignored the fact that for nearly twenty years I had been challenging the older-style "biblical archaeology" in a series of publications.⁷ I am a very secular humanist, not a theist, and I have no interest whatsoever in "saving" either Solomon or the Bible. As the controversy became more heated in 1998, Finkelstein caricatured Ami Mazar, as well as me by implication, as "Bible archaeologists."⁸ In retrospect, it is clear that this was largely generational: an Oedipal reaction of younger archaeologists against Yadin and his disciples, by now nearly all of them at Tel Aviv University's rival, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Beginning in 1993, Finkelstein had begun to elaborate his idiosyncratic "low chronology" – a *Cause Célèbre* that he has pushed relentlessly for 25 years, reworking the stratigraphy of nearly every site in Israel, and even several in Jordan, to suit his scheme. I simply point out here that there never was any empirical evidence for such a radical reduction of dates. It was theatre rather than scholarship, and it made Finkelstein a celebrity. But the "low chronology" never became mainstream, and it has been rebutted too many times to be documented here.⁹

The only possible support for the "low chronology" came from the C₁₄ dates as these gradually became available after about 2000. Finkelstein repeated the claim that there were "dozens" of C₁₄ dates from Megiddo and elsewhere. But in his two papers at the Oxford C₁₄ symposium in 2004, he presented none. By contrast, Mazar published full details on 88 Rehov C₁₄ dates, coordinated with ceramic phases. In *Megiddo II* (2000), *Megiddo IV* (2006), and *Megiddo V* (2013),¹⁰

6. Cf. Dever 1985; 1986; 1993. For the Siamun and Shoshenq correlations, see Shortland 2005; Dever 2018 (both with extensive references). For recent radiocarbon dates, see Ortiz and Wolff in this volume.

7. See Dever 2017, with references to numerous other publications, going back as far as 1973.

8. Finkelstein 1998

9. See n. 3 above.

10. Cf. papers in Levy and Highman 2005: 15–30, 31–42, 193–309.

Finkelstein finally produced his Megiddo C14 dates. It is instructive to take a close look at all seven of them, as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Radiometric dates from Megiddo in years BCE.

Sample	Dates	Value
1	855–805 (1 σ); 980–950 (2 σ)	Good
2	1040–900 (2 σ).	Good
3	1000–830 (1 σ); 1130–790 (2 σ).	Too broad
4	900–805 (1 σ); 970–950 (2 σ).	Debatable
5	1005–935 (1 σ) 1050–900 (2 σ) >Averaging 895–805 (1 σ)	Good
6	895–805 (1 σ) 950–790 (2 σ) 980–950 (1.6%)	Low Too broad Good
7	1040–900 (2 σ)	Destruction, good ¹¹

It is noteworthy that only one of the Megiddo dates as published might support Finkelstein’s “low chronology” (at a 1 σ percentage of 68.2% accuracy). Several other dates are too broad for any chronology. And the other five all support our conventional chronology.

Let’s get back to the facts, to history rather than polemics. Our “Solomonic” date for the Field III gate at Gezer (Fig. 3) was not based on old-fashioned “prove the Bible” archaeology, as Finkelstein charged. It was based on careful stratigraphic observations:

1. Stratum VIII was situated above a “late Philistine Decorated Ware” stage and a massive destruction layer (Siamun, 978–959 BCE).
2. Furthermore, there was a predominance of hand burnish and a total absence of wheel burnish in Stratum VIII, which despite the opinion of some skeptics was and still is a reliable criterion.
3. Then there was a heavy destruction after the third street level of Stratum VIII that is best attributed to Pharaoh Sheshonq I, whose reign is closely dated to ca. 945–924 BCE and whose known battle itinerary in Canaan lists Gezer as No. 12 (see also Beth-Shean, No. 16; Rehov, No. 17; and Megiddo, No. 27).
4. There is a synchronism in both 1 Kgs 11:40–43 and 14:25 and 2 Chronicles 13:2 between the Shoshenq raid and the death of Solomon five years earlier.

11. Cf. Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern 2006: 555; Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Cline 2013: 1117–1123.

5. On top of the above-mentioned remains there were overlying administrative structures of the 9th–8th century BCE.¹²

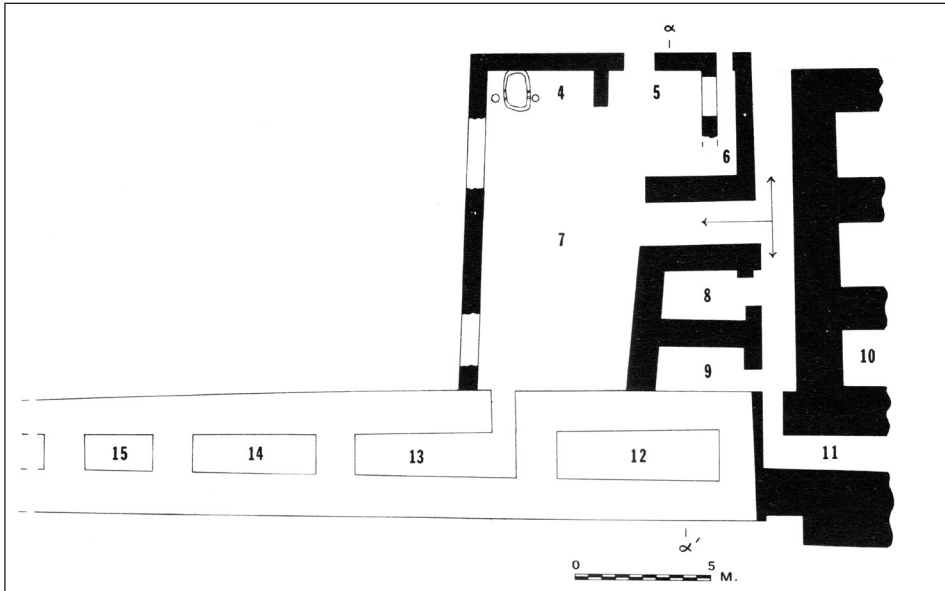


Fig. 3. “Palace 10,000,” adjoining Solomonite upper gateway (10) and western gate tower (11). Casemate outer and inner walls checked and replanned but not excavated in depth; crosswalls following Macalister (Dever 1985: Fig. 3).

Add to all this the fact that, despite the lack of Solomon’s name in extra-biblical texts thus far, we have the name of his father and the founder of a long-lived dynasty, David, on the 9th-century BCE Tel Dan stele (Fig. 4).¹³ It is not unreasonable, therefore, to see the reign of Solomon as ca. 970–930 BCE.

Oddly enough, Finkelstein has recently sought to bypass the dilemma posed by his own cynical “low chronology” scheme by positing a “Saulide confederation” with its “hub” at Gibeon (not Jerusalem), extending its control even as far north as the Jezreel Valley. So we have no “Solomon,” but we have David and Saul, his predecessors.¹⁴

When we excavated the Gezer gate nearly fifty years ago, no C14 dates were

12. See references in n. 6 above.

13. On the Tel Dan stele, see Atlas 2003, with extensive references. The possible reference on the Mesha stele to David (Lemaire 1994; Puech 1994) is disputed.

14. For Finkelstein’s “Saulide confederacy,” see Finkelstein 2013; and cf. the critical review in Dever 2014.

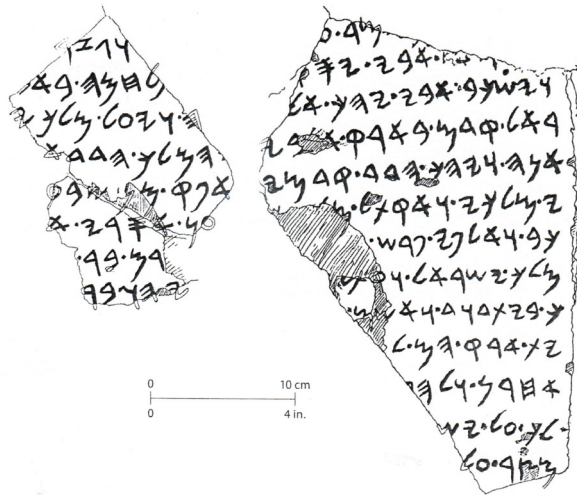


Fig. 4. The Tel Dan “House of David” inscription (drawn by Ada Yardeni).

available. But the recent excavations produced C14 dates that fall precisely in the mid-10th century BCE.¹⁵

3. A New Class of Ceramic Data

As the controversy over the city gates of Gezer and other sites continued, I resolved to return to Gezer in 1984 and again in 1990. In 1984 we excavated part of “Palace 10,000,” a large multi-roomed and courtyard complex immediately adjoining the Field III gate on the west side and clearly in contemporary use (Fig. 3). Partially cleared by Macalister, it was evidently an administrative complex, well-constructed of large masonry blocks. It had been partially destroyed and abandoned. Overlying the floors of the rooms was up to one meter of destruction debris.

From the floor of Courtyard I and in Rooms 4 and 5 of Palace 10,000, we recovered a small corpus of partially restorable pottery (Fig. 5), mostly small open bowls and kraters. These vessels are decorated not with the typical dark red slip and hand burnish but rather with a light red, streaky “wash,” almost never burnished (Fig. 6). It is evenly applied on the interior and often over the rim, as though wiped on with a rag.¹⁶ In publishing this pottery in 1986, I called attention to these distinctive red-washed wares, noting that in *Gezer I* (1970) and *Gezer II*

15. For 10th century C14 dates, see Ortiz and Wolff in this volume.

16. Dever 1985; 1986. The pertinent pottery from “Palace 10,000” is seen in Dever 1986: Fig. 17. Cf. n. 17 below.

(1974) I had already observed similar wares at other putative 10th-century BCE sites, such as Tell Qasile XI–X and Beth-Shemesh 4–3. And I recalled that in publishing the original Beth-Shemesh Stratum IIA pottery in 1938, Ernest Wright had already noticed such distinctive diagnostic wares.¹⁷

Unfortunately, in the 1986 preliminary report I did not give detailed pottery descriptions, so one could not make the distinction between “slip” and “wash.” The distinction is essential, but without Munsell soil color charts, or better color photographs, precise characterization of the relevant wares is nearly impossible.¹⁸

More recently, I have searched the literature for possible comparisons to the Gezer red-washed wares. The publication of pottery is often woefully inadequate, rarely including any input from experts in ceramic technology. Nevertheless, we can now provisionally distinguish some of these wares at a number of southern sites, among them Gezer IX–VIII, Beth Shemesh 4–3, Khirbet Qeiyafa IV, Tel Batash IV, and Tell Qasile XI–X (Fig. 6). There are other southern states where “red wash” might be recognized in transitional contexts of the late 11th–10th century BCE: ‘Izbet Sartah II–I, Tel Masos II–I, Beersheba VIII–VI, Nahal Boker, Ekron IV, Ashkelon 17, Ashdod X, and Tel Mor III (the latter four sites late Philistine).¹⁹ Most of these sites have “Late Philistine Decorated Wares” with a similar light red slip or possible “wash” in technical terms, some exhibiting a “transitional” cultural character that would match the ceramic features.

All of these southern sites are stratigraphically well dated to the late 11th–10th century BCE, and they are Israelite (i.e., “Judahite”), Philistine, or possibly transitional Philistine/Israelite sites. A few possibly contemporary northern sites might include Beth-Shean Lower V, Tel Rehov VI, and Megiddo VI. Yet the evidence has remained scant, due to inadequate publication.

17. Cf. Dever, Lance, and Wright 1970: 61; Dever et al. 1974: 58; Dever et al. 1986: 122, 123. For Wright’s precocious description of the very similar pottery of Beth-Shemesh IIA (now Stratum 3), see Wright 1938: 135 (cited in Dever et al. 1986: 123).

18. In 2019 I re-examined the published pottery from “Palace 10,000” (Fig. 5 here) and reconfirmed the nature of the thin, streaky red wash. Thus I can now give Munsell Color Chart designations. The krater shown on Fig. 5:3 here is Munsell “2.5YR red 5/8” to “2.5YR light red 6/8.” Most of these red-washed vessels are not truly “burnished,” but may be wet-smoothed. At this symposium, I showed some of the Gezer “Palace 10,000” sherds to Mazar, Panitz-Cohen, and Kang, who agreed on close similarities to Tell Qasile and Khirbet Qeiyafa wares. Ortiz and Wolff, who completed the excavation of “Palace 10,000,” have large quantities of these wares and also think them typical of the mid-10th century BCE.

19. References cannot be supplied, since the precise pottery descriptions that would be required are not given.

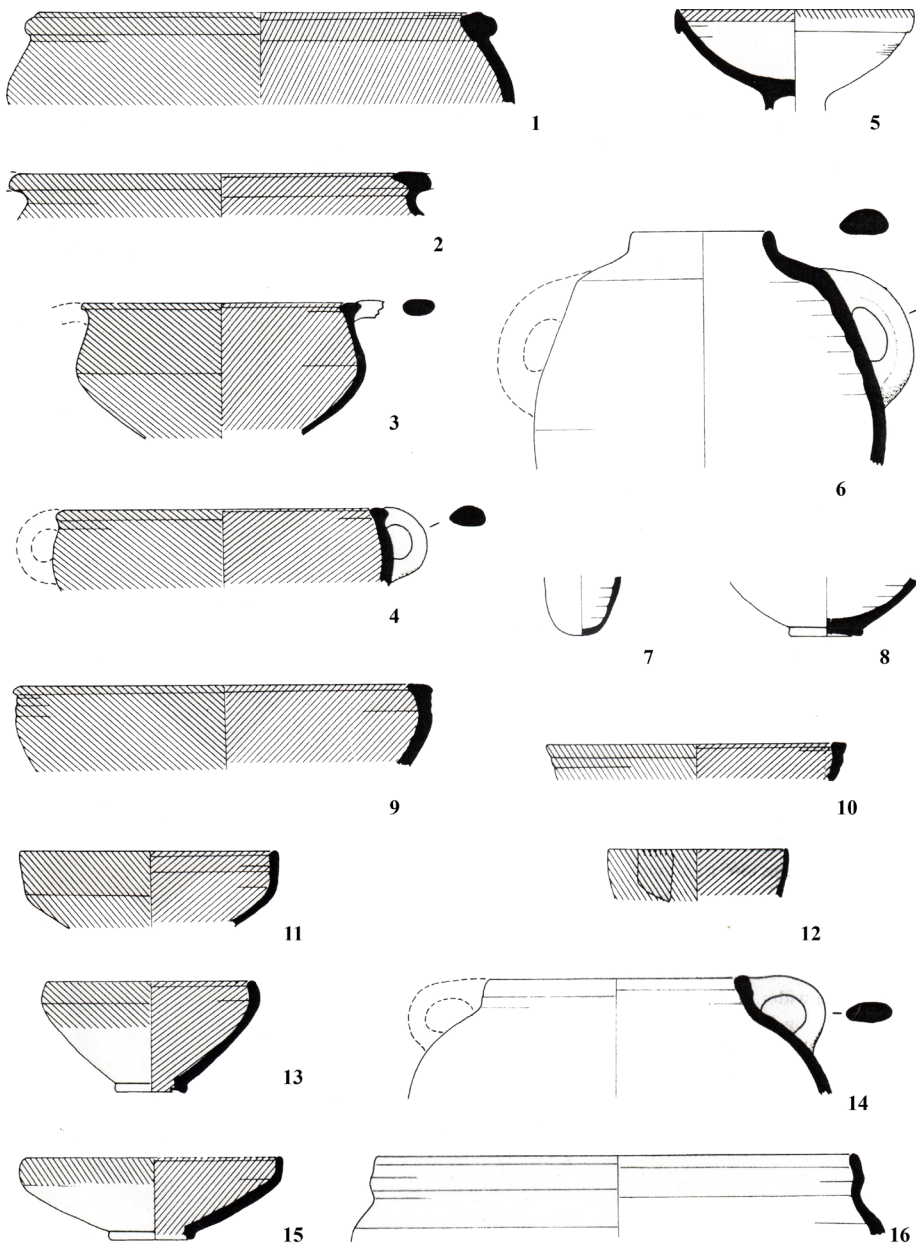


Fig. 5. Pottery from the destruction levels of the 10th-century BCE “Palace 10,000” (Dever 1993: Fig. 7).

The recently published pottery from Khirbet Qeiyafa provides the smoking gun, partly because of the rare color photographs.²⁰ The ceramic corpus of this

20. See Garfinkel and Ganor 2009; Kang and Garfinkel 2018. There are color photographs, but no Munsell designations.

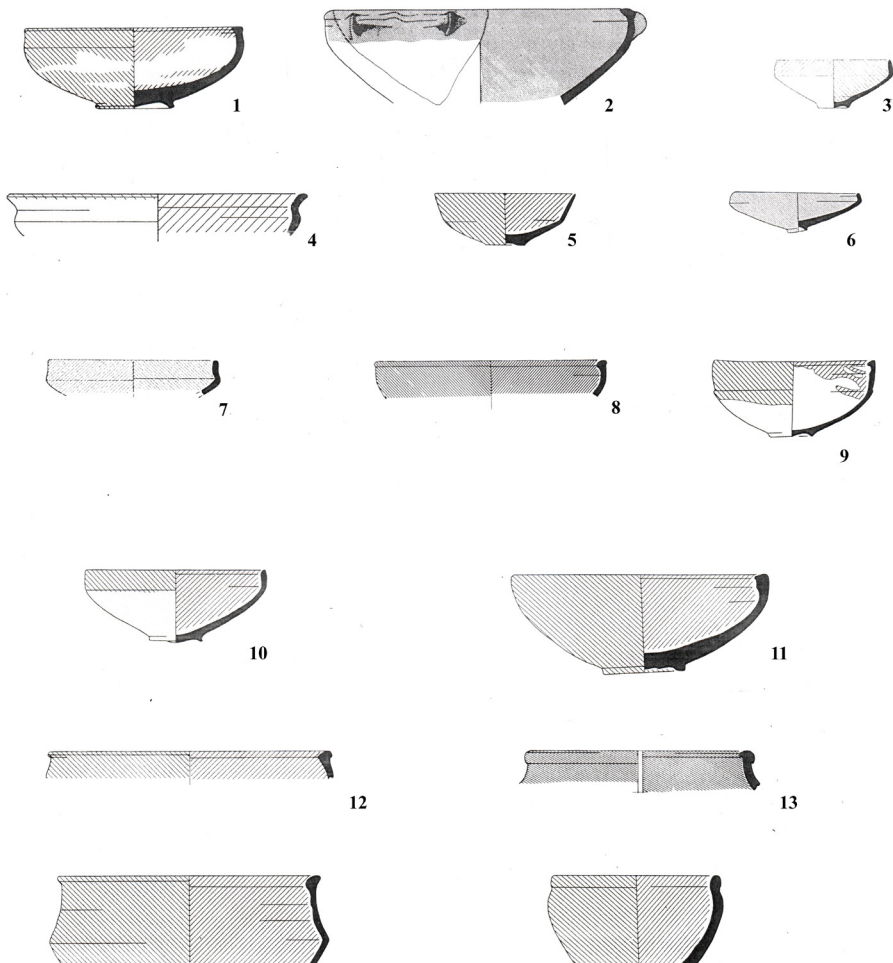


Fig. 6. Examples of red-washed pottery, late 11th–10th century BCE: 1. Gezer VIII (Gitin 1990: Pl. 7:13); 2. Beersheba VII (Herzog 1984: Fig. 26:8); 3. Qeiyafa IV (Kang and Garfinkel 2018: Pl. 46:3); 4. Lahav VID (Cole 2017: Pl. 9:6); 5. Beth-Shemesh 3 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 9.81:13); 6. Beth-Shemesh 3 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 6.73:1); 7. Qeiyafa IV (Garfinkel and Ganor 2009: Fig. 6.3:17); 8. Batash IV (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2011: Pl. 9:3); 9. Ashdod Xa (Dothan et al. 1982, Fig. 45:13); 10. Megiddo VI (Loud 1948: Pl. 78:15); 11. Tel Amal IV (Levy and Edelstein 1972: Fig. 14:6); 12. Gezer VIII (Gitin 1990: Pl. 8:17); 13. Beersheba II (Herzog 1985: Fig. 21:13); 14. Ekron IVB (Gitin 2016: Fig. 5.92:3); 15. Megiddo VA/IVB (Loud 1948: Pl. 89:12).

essentially one-period site is universally dated to the late 11th or better early 10th century BCE by experts – even low chronology advocates. Furthermore, despite early skepticism, the C14 dates now fully corroborate the ceramic dates. These red-washed wares at Qeiyafa may begin in the late 11th century BCE, but they clearly define the early 10th century. It is noteworthy that at Qeiyafa (and elsewhere) these

wares overlap with the “Ashdod” or “Late Philistine Decorated Wares” – also red washed (not “slipped”) and then overpainted with black geometric designs.²¹

Even though we are at an early stage in characterizing these red-washed wares, I would suggest the following relative 11th–9th-century BCE stages of the ceramic evolutions (all overlapping, of course, to some extent) and argue that they correlate with cultural phases (Table 2).

Table 2. Main stages of the ceramic evolution during the late 11th–9th century BCE.

Pottery	Date	Cultural Phase
Late Philistine Decorated Ware	Late 11th century	Philistine decline
Thin red wash, no burnish	Late 11th–early 10th century	“Transitional” era
Medium slip, hand burnished	Mid-late 10th century	Early Israelite state
Darker, heavier slip, wheel burnish	9th century	Consolidation of state

I would argue that it is not so much the presence of certain wares that distinguishes the 10th-century pottery from that of the 9th century BCE, but rather the absence of certain other wares (i.e., “red wash”, hand-burnish, flat-rimmed cooking pots, etc.).

This is, of course, the typical relative ceramic sequence, although increasingly supported by more precise stratigraphy. But Qeiyafa nails the sequence down with satisfyingly precise absolute C14 dates. And now, as we shall see, the new Gezer C14 dates also fix the floruit of these wares in the 10th century BCE. I do not see much evidence that they extend into the 9th century BCE, when, as is well known, it is the heavily slipped hand- and wheel-burnished wares that predominate.

My isolation of a distinctive late 11th–10th-century BCE red-washed ceramic family was developed independently as early as 1970, but it coincides almost exactly with the “Middle Philistine Decorated Wares” distinguished by Kang and Garfinkel.²² Their description, date, and distribution of these wares is almost identical, the only difference being that most such wares have black painted decoration over what they call “debased . . . red slip.” But some Qeiyafa vessels have only their “debased slip,” which I think is equal to my “streaky red wash.” Happily, they publish color photographs (although no Munsell colors). And I am confident that their “Middle Philistine Decorated Ware” overlaps closely with my red-washed wares.

21. For the Ashdod Ware, recently redefined as Late Philistine Decorated Ware, see Ben-Shlomo 2006.

22. Kang and Garfinkel 2009: 156–158. Cf. Kang and Garfinkel 2018: 61–65.

It is noteworthy that their chart giving three ceramic phases from the late 11th to the 9th century BCE closely matches my four phases here, again developed independently.²³

Kang and Garfinkel seem to explain the shift from Philistine bichrome paint to “debased” slip (wash?) as due to the influence of Phoenician bichrome and red-slipped wares, as a “hybrid” and “transitional” ceramic phase. I also regard the contemporary red-washed wares as transitional, but a more southern derivation, with native “Proto-Israelite” implications, seems likely.²⁴

In the light of the preceding, I would argue that thanks to a bit of detective work – plus new and better C14 dates – we now have at our disposal a securely dated ceramic corpus of the late 11th–10th century BCE that will enable us at last to define the 10th century BCE in stratigraphic, ceramic, and truly historical terms.

On balance, these are relatively new observations on ceramic typology. However, in a pioneering study of slipped and burnished wares in 1993, Ami Mazar’s instincts were sound. He noted that red slip and burnish developed gradually throughout the Iron Age I with what he called “unburnished drab red slip” on some wares as early as the 12th century BCE at Beth-Shean. He said that, as far as he knew, such wares were “unparalleled at other sites.” But if Mazar’s “drab” color is really the same as my “streaky red wash,” then we do now have Iron Age I (and early Iron Age IIA) parallels. In any case, Mazar’s early theoretical ceramic sequence of slip and burnish anticipates the more nuanced sequence charted above.²⁵

In their renewed excavations at Beth-Shemesh, Bunimovitz and Lederman have endorsed the observations of Wright and myself on a distinct red-washed ceramic family. They date these wares initially to their Stratum 4, equivalent to Qeiyafa IV in the early to mid-10th century BCE, a date supported by C14 determinations, with Stratum 4 ending ca. 950–940 BCE. However, these wares continue into Stratum 3, of the mid to late 10th century BCE.²⁶

23. Garfinkel and Ganor 2009: 158. Cf. Kang and Garfinkel 2018: 115.

24. Kang and Garfinkel 2009: 156–158. Phoenician red-slipped wares, while somewhat closer, are however not well attested before the 9th century BCE.

25. Cf. Mazar 1993. Mazar argues (1993: 371; *Contra* Holladay 1990) that Munsell Soil Color Chart designations are not reliable or necessary. But they are, if the fine-grained distinctions advocated here are to be made.

26. Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: 213–231, 281–328, 375–382. The C14 date for the transition from Stratum 4 to Stratum 3 is ca. 940 BCE (68.2%), equivalent to Gezer VIII. Piasetzky accepts this date, although he prefers a 2σ deviation, which would be ca. 980–872 BCE (95.4%). Boaretto,

4. The Textual Data: The Hebrew Bible and History

We cannot simply dismiss the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, our other source for history-writing, as many revisionists (and even some archaeologists) do, often with contempt, just because these texts require cautious, critical evaluation. Even obviously propagandistic texts may contain some reliable historical information – a “core” of facts that can be isolated with proper methods, and with the external witness of archaeology in the court of history.

European biblical revisionists like Lemche, Thompson, and Davies have repeatedly asserted that the texts of the Hebrew Bible are “too late” to contain reliable historical sources for any “historical Israel” in the Iron Age – they are Persian, Hellenistic, or even later.²⁷ Yet these pundits know next to nothing about Hebrew linguistics, dating the biblical texts on the basis of the stages of literary Hebrew that the text reflects.

If there were any doubt about their incompetence, one need only look at the recent exhaustive analysis of two leading Hebrew linguists, Ronald Hendel of Berkeley and Jan Joosten, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford. Entitled *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible? a Linguistic, Textual, and History Study* (2018), their work proves beyond any doubt that the Deuteronomistic history (including Kings), and even the Pentateuch, are written in “Classical Hebrew” unique to the Iron Age, not the “Late Hebrew” of the books of Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. Although cautious and generally skeptical scholars, these authors suggest that many texts – even the “Song of Solomon” (*Shîr Hā-Shîrim*) – may actually be as early as 10th century BCE in date.²⁸

Previously, Hendel, as well as other leading Hebraists like Richard Eliot Freedman and William Schneidewind, had also “excavated” 1 Kgs 9:15–17. They, too, had pointed out evidence for an early date for this text, thus providing at least some reliable historical information.

For instance, if the writers were working in much later periods, how did they know of two Egyptian pharaohs whose reigns “box in” the reign of Solomon: Siamun of Dynasty XIX (978–959 BCE) and Shoshenq I of Dynasty XX

Sharon, and Gilboa think that is “unlikely.” For whom? Cf. Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: 684–686, 692–695.

27. For a summary of an extensive critique of biblical “revisionism,” see Dever 2001, connecting it specifically with the fallacies of postmodernism. Few Israeli archaeologists have taken much notice.

28. Hendel and Joosten 2018.

(945–924 BCE)?²⁹ They cannot have read the Egyptian king lists, whose absolute dates in any case would not have been available then. They must have been in possession of earlier sources, contemporary or near-contemporary with the King Solomon of whom they knew.

The persistent notion of the biblical (and archaeological) revisionists that the Hebrew Bible is a late “literary construct” – in effect a “tall tale” – is a curious conceit. It flies in the face of sound linguistic and historical scholarship. To be sure, the larger than life “Solomon of the Bible” is a fictitious character, one who ruled over a kingdom that stretched from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, who had 1000 wives, and for whom everything he touched turned to gold. But a more modest “King Solomon” did exist in the 10th century BCE; he ruled over at least a fledgling state and could command the men and material to design and construct monumental architecture like the superbly engineered Gezer Field III city gate. Absolute proof may be lacking, but a conclusion “beyond a reasonable doubt” may be reached and confidently defended.

The Gezer evidence for an early Judahite kingdom (if not the “United Monarchy” of the Hebrew Bible or modern scholarship) is not unique. Recent excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa, probably biblical “Sha‘arayim” (and now at Khirbet er-Ra‘i?), have revealed an exceptionally well planned, constructed, and provisioned garrison town on the Philistine border, dated by ceramics and C₁₄ determinations to the early 10th century BCE, as all authorities agree. It could only have been commissioned by a centralized government, almost certainly Judahite to judge from its typical Judahite town-plan. Qeiyafa can hardly be Philistine or Canaanite.

The recent publication of the renewed excavations at Beth-Shemesh by Bunomovitz and Lederman reveals in Stratum 3 the initial Israelite reoccupation of a previously late Canaanite village. Stratum 3 features a massive city wall, a large, pillared administrative building with a nearby massive water system and reservoir, a monumental “residency,” a large storehouse, a commercial area, a unique iron foundry, and domestic houses.

Among the ceramic groups at Beth-Shemesh are my red-washed wares. Several C₁₄ determinations fix the beginning of Stratum 3 to ca. 950 BCE. The excavators at Beth-Shemesh interpret Stratum 3 as a royal administrative center of an early Judahite state – obviously rejecting the “low chronology” and its attendant skepticism.³⁰

29. Cf. Friedman 2010; Schniedewind 2010.

30. Lederman (in his oral presentation in the conference), disputed that Beth-Shemesh 3

The evidence from Khirbet Qeiyafa, Gezer, and Beth-Shemesh for a 10th-century BCE date for the rise of a Judahite state does not stand alone. If we summarize our current mainstream understanding of the archaeological data, buttressed by the dates fixed by C14 determinations, as well as datable historical texts such as the Shoshenq itinerary list,³¹ we can group Iron Age IIA 10th-century BCE Judahite sites by region, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Classification of 10th-century BCE sites in Judah by region.

Group	Region	Sites
I	The “Heartland”	Kh. Dawarra, Tell el-Fûl II, Tell en-Nasbeh IIC, Jerusalem 14, Lachish V, Kh. er-Ra’î, Tell Beit Mirsim B3, Tel Eton, Lahav VID
II	Sites on the “Canaanite” border	Gezer IX–VIII
III	Sites on the border with Philistia	Tell Qasile X–IX, ‘Izbet Sartah I, Tel Batash IVB–A, Beth-Shemesh 4–3
IV	Sites in the south	Beersheba VI–V, Arad XII, Tel Malhata C, the Negev forts

5. Discussion

What is significant here is that the sites in Groups I and II are previous 11th-century BCE sites that by the mid 10th century BCE are becoming Judahite (“Israelite”) sites, i.e., shifting to Group I “Heartland” or native Judahite sites. Group IV sites, however, on the natural border of Judah, develop further as Judahite sites in later stages.

There is, of course, rather fashionable criticism of “trait-lists.” But traits are merely characteristics that set off or define something, without which we could not even discuss or compare these entities. No one hesitates to define the Philistine culture by its traits; so why not early Israel (barring typical postmodernist nihilism about “ethnicity”)?

What now unites all these 10th century BCE sites as a Judahite state (or perhaps “kingdom”) are widespread traits of “statehood” such as:

1. Clashes that clarify borders that will remain relatively fixed (with Philistia).
2. The gradual absorption of previously non-Judahite ethnic groups (the end of the last “Canaanite” sites).

demonstrates “statehood,” having apparently changed his mind after the final report went to press.

31. On the Shoshenq raid, ca. 930 BCE, see above, n. 6.

3. The build-up of “central palace” sites and administrative centers (Gezer, Beth-Shemesh, Tel Masos, as well as Jerusalem).
4. Distinctive town plans (Tell en-Nasbeh (?), Khirbet Qeiyafa, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beersheba).
5. Monumental architecture such as city walls (Tell en-Nasbeh, Beth-Shemesh, Khirbet Qeiyafa; Tell Beit Mirsim; Beersheba; Malhata); palaces (Gezer; Beth-Shemesh); water systems (Beth-Shemesh)
6. Definitive domestic houses (“four-room”).
7. Characteristic socio-economic structure (“patrimonial”).
8. Standardized industries (red-washed and hand-burnished pottery).
9. A developing national language and script (“Hebrew”) at ‘Izbet Sartah, Gezer, Beth-Shemesh, Khirbet Qeiyafa, Tel Zayit.

By positing an early Judahite state, we do not assert that it originated abruptly or in a full-fledged form. Following several authorities on state-formation processes, we confront rather something like in “early inchoate state,” one that will not be fully consolidated until the 9th century BCE. The origins of the northern Israelite state in the 9th century BCE is another matter (below).³²

Does the scenario of a developing 10th-century BCE Judahite state or kingdom fit the biblical portrait? The chronology, now securely dated by C14 determinations (Gezer, Beth-Shemesh, Khirbet Qeiyafa, the Negev forts), certainly fits the reigns of the biblical Kings David and Solomon (the latter’s death dated ca. 930 BCE on the basis of the Shoshenq inscription).

We should, however, probably drop the term “United Monarchy,” since it does not occur in the Hebrew Bible; what we have is a “not-yet-divided” monarchy, i.e., before the secession after Solomon’s death. I also suggest that we cease debating about when the “Iron Age IIA” ends. It does not end (or begin) at all, nor is

32. On the Solomonic era generally, see the chapters in Handy et al. 1997. For a true Solomonic state or kingdom, see Na’aman 1997; Bunimovitz and Faust 2001; Stager 2003; Killebrew 2004; Paul 2008; Mazar 2010; Steiner 2004; Dever 2017: 259–282 and references there. For definitions of the state and “state formation processes,” see Carneiro 1970; Wright 1977; Claesson and Skalnick 1978; Feinman and Marcus 1998; Dever 1997; Master 2001; Joffe 2002; Yoffe 2005. The essays in Fritz and Davies (1996) are mostly postmodernist ideological manifestos, while the attempt at synthesis by Schäfer-Lichtenberger (2016) is amateurish, with scarcely any recourse to the primary archaeological data. Carneiro’s definition is a good summary of opinion. The “state is an autonomous political unit, encompassing many communities within its territories, and having a centralized government with the power to draft men for work and collect taxes, and decree and enforce laws” (1970: 733). For a good example of the confusion, even among archaeologists, let alone historians, see Kang and Garfinkel 2018: 113–117 and references there.

it a historical era, and certainly not a biblical concept. We invented it for our convenience. Whether we see an “Iron Age IIA” phase ending with widespread Shoshenq destructions ca. 930 BCE, or ca. 840 BCE on the “modified conventional chronology,” is irrelevant for our historical reconstruction here, or any other. We are trying to write a “history of events,” not of archaeological terminology.³³ Finally, the rise of the northern kingdom of “Israel” is a matter beyond our purview here, so I leave the other famous gates at Hazor and Megiddo to others. In any case, the biblical accounts place the origin of the north in the post-Solomonic era in the 9th century BCE. Nearly all scholars agree (Finkelstein’s views are hardly original).

6. Conclusion

The biblical and archaeological “revisionists” have had their way for thirty years. It is time to say “No” to radical skepticism, to reclaim an early Judahite or Israelite state, in the light of clear stratigraphic evidence, improved ceramic chronology, new C14 dating, and – yes – a critical reading of pertinent Biblical texts. The Hebrew Bible is indeed a collection of stories, some of them fanciful or late. But some of them – early and buttressed by our current archaeological data – have the ring of truth about them. Let’s do some real “revisionist history.”

On the basis of all the “witnesses” we have in this case, the claim that the kingdom of David and Solomon in Judah in the 10th century BCE did exist is true “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

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33. All authorities agree on the 9th century BCE for the rise of the northern state, as well as on the Judahite biases of the biblical narratives. As for the other city gates in 1 Kgs 9:15–17, Hazor can be dated with some confidence to the 10th century BCE (Stratum X; Zarzecki-Peleg 1997; Ben-Tor and Ben-Ami 1998), and soundings below the Megiddo Stratum VA/IVB gate were recently conducted (the results curiously unclear).

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