

DIGSIGHT

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY LYNN H. WOOD ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

SOUTHERN TO EXCAVATE “FORTRESS OF ELAH”

ANCIENT BATTLEGROUND, POSTMODERN CONFLICT

The story of the valiant shepherd boy who challenges the ironclad giant with nothing but sling and stones is one of the most memorable in the Bible. 1 Samuel 17 recounts that the setting for this encounter was the Valley of Elah, the ancient borderland of Philistia and Judah. Here, about three thousand years ago, the armies of the Philistines and the Israelites gathered to wage war to decide who would have supremacy in the region. Today the valley where David slew Goliath has once again become a battleground this time for a new controversy involving biblical chronology and Israel’s United Monarchy.

Resting atop a hill overlooking the Elah Valley lie the ruins of an ancient city dating to the time of David. Last summer excavations at the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa uncovered the remains of a massive double wall, a chambered gate, and two small buildings. Chief archaeologist Dr. Yossi Garfinkel of the Hebrew University estimates that “200,000 tons of stone were required for the construction of these fortifications.” Pottery analysis and radiocarbon testing date these structures to the period archaeologists call Iron Age IIa, more specifically to “the very beginning of the Iron IIa period,” roughly 1000–970 BC. This was a single-period city, meaning it was occupied only during this short time.



Dr. Yossi Garfinkel examines the fortifications at Khirbet Qeiyafa

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SOUTHERN
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Power for Mind & Soul

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Traditional biblical chronology places David and Solomon’s reign in this period, the tenth century BC. Archaeological discoveries of the last century at biblical Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer revealed massive fortifications and chambered gates similar to the one found at Qeiyafa last summer. Archaeologists at the time linked these finds to the fortification projects of King Solomon (1 Kings 9:15), and the pottery confirmed the dating of these structures to the tenth century BC.

However, the traditional chronology and the connection to David and Solomon have recently been challenged by a new generation of archaeologists who contend that David and Solomon could not have built these great structures. For them Iron Age IIa began not



Casemate (double) wall of Khirbet Qeiyafa

around 1000 BC, but a hundred years later, redating the once-believed Solomonic buildings to the ninth century BC. This means there would be no monumental architecture associated with the United Monarchy.

According to archaeologist Israel

Finkelstein of Tel Aviv University, “many of the famous episodes in the biblical story of David and Solomon are fictions, historically questionable, or highly exaggerated.” Moreover, the archaeological record shows that Judah in the tenth century BC was nothing more than a “marginal and isolated chiefdom,” lacking an organized state capable of building elaborate fortifications. “From the archaeological information,” concludes Finkelstein, “we must come to a conclusion that undermines the historical credibility of this specific biblical narrative” (Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible’s Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* [New York: Free Press, 2006]).

The recent discoveries at Khirbet Qeiyafa seriously undermine Finkelstein’s conclusions. Qeiyafa’s monumental city wall—2,200 feet



Four-chambered gate with buildings to the left

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long and 13 feet wide—speaks volumes about the kind of centralized authority necessary to execute a building enterprise of this scale. Moreover, the four-chambered gate built of ashlar stones is typical of royal gates of this period. Archaeologists who have examined the pottery unanimously agree that the site should be dated to David’s time. The carbon-dating results corroborate their assessment. In Garfinkel’s own words, “the new excavations clearly indicate that already in the time of King David, urban cities were constructed in Judah.”

EVIDENCE IN WRITING

But if all this was not enough to turn the “low chronology” on its head, Garfinkel and his team have found even more evidence that challenges the critical view.

One of the key arguments used by scholars like Finkelstein for distrusting the Biblical text is the lack of evidence of literacy in Israel until the late eighth century BC. This leads them to believe that the account of David and Solomon’s court was not written during their reigns, but much later, three or four centuries later.

In a small building adjacent to the western gate at Qeiyafa, excavators found a piece of pottery with writing on it. This type of potsherd inscription is called an ostrakon. The 6- by 6-inch ostrakon contains five lines of text, each about ten letters in length, one of the longest inscriptions ever found in this part of the Near East. The inscription was written in proto-Canaanite script, and Garfinkel believes the language is Hebrew. Hebrew words for “don’t do,” “judge,” “king,” and “slave”



Dr. Garfinkel with ostrakon

have been tentatively identified. If Garfinkel is correct, this would be the **oldest Hebrew inscription** ever found. It predates the next oldest inscription (the Gezer Calendar) by about one hundred years.

The ostrakon, together with the absence of any Philistine pottery, points toward the identification of Khirbet Qeiyafa as a Judahite site. But more importantly, the discovery of such an early inscription challenges the assumption that the Israelites of David and Solomon’s time did not use writing for recordkeeping. If some inhabitants of a small border town like Qeiyafa could write, it is not unreasonable to assume there were royal scribes who recorded historical events. Thus, the Bible’s historical accounts need not have been concocted by writers centuries after the fact.



Closeup of the ostrakon’s inscription (notice the “A” looking character)

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TALE OF A TWO-GATE CITY

In November 2008, Garfinkel and his co-director, Saar Ganor, returned to the Qeiyafa for one week to excavate the eastern part of the city. Here a second gate was found. This gate was made up of two monumental stones, weighing as much as ten

tons each, much more than was needed to support the structure. This gate is the largest found at a biblical site and “was clearly intended as a statement of power and authority.”

More impressive still is the fact that Khirbet Qeiyafa is the only city in ancient Israel with two gates. Even much larger cities had only one gate. This fact has led Garfinkel and Ganor to identify Qeiyafa with biblical **Sha'arayim**. Sha'arayim (literally, “two gates,” in Hebrew) is mentioned three times in the Bible: (1) in the city list of the tribe of Judah (Josh 15:36); (2) in the narrative of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17:52); and (3) in the city list of the tribe of Simeon (1 Chr 4:31).

In the first reference, Sha'arayim is mentioned right after Azekah and Socoh, two towns also mentioned in the David and Goliath narrative that were in close proximity to the Valley of Elah. In the last reference, the Chronicler specifies that “these were their towns until the reign of David” (1 Ch 4:32).

This is perhaps an indication that some of

these cities were inhabited only during David's reign, as is the case with Qeiyafa. “Very important to us is the association of Sha'arayim with King David twice in the biblical tradition,” explain Garfinkel and Ganor. “This observation is consistent with the archaeological and radiometric data.”

SOUTHERN JOINS THE QEYAFA TEAM

The Institute of Archaeology at Southern has been invited to excavate Khirbet Qeiyafa as a partner. Southern's team will be excavating the central fortifications of the site (**Area A**) and subsequently publishing the results of their work, in consultation with Garfinkel and Ganor. This summer, in 2009, a small team of staff will be surveying and conducting preliminary probes. Dr. Michael G. Hasel, new associate director of the Khirbet Qeiyafa Archaeological Project, will present the results at the American Schools of Oriental Research professional meetings in New Orleans this coming November. A full-fledged excavation season is planned for 2010. If you are interested in participating (as a volunteer or a financial sponsor) in the exploration of one of the most important cities in the debate over the tenth century and United Monarchy, please contact Michael Hasel at <mhasel@southern.edu>.



THE TASK BEFORE US

In 1990 I dug in Israel for the first time at the site of Gezer, under the direction of William G. Dever of the University of Arizona. Here the senior generation of American archaeologists was trained. American digs in the Middle East today owe much to the Gezer method of excavation. I still remember the excitement of excavating the monumental gate and city wall that the Bible describes as being rebuilt by Solomon (1 Kings 9:15) and which Dever had dated earlier to the time of Solomon. I experienced firsthand the controversy over the dating of these buildings and remember my delight at finding the ceramic evidence that confirmed the Solomonic dating of those structures.

Since that time, I have had the privilege of working at impressive sites like Philistine Ashkelon with Harvard University, and at the famous Jewish fortress of Masada with the Hebrew University. At Philistine Ekron, where I dug for several seasons, a monumental stone inscription was found in 1996 naming the last five kings of this Philistine city. Yet, after excavating nine sites in three different countries, I find that nothing compares with that first season at Gezer! Perhaps it was

Nearly 20 years later, the debate over the United Monarchy continues. Much of the discussion and arguments revolve around what archaeology has *not* found (yet).

the initial thrill of discovery. Perhaps it was working with some of the giants of the archaeology of Israel. Perhaps it was the mystery surrounding the days of Solomon and the intrigue I felt in being involved, though in a minor way, in the ongoing revisionist debate.

Nearly 20 years later, the debate over the United Monarchy continues. Much of the discussion and arguments revolve around what archaeology has *not* found (yet). That changed last year with the discoveries at Khirbet Qeiyafa, which show there was a major fortified city near the Valley of Elah during David's reign. New data has emerged that directly contributes to the key questions at the heart of the debate: (1) How extensive was Judah in the early tenth century? (2) What was the extent of literacy during this time period? (3) In what way does a fortified city with over 200,000 tons of stone illuminate the question of centralized government and organization?

Though the questions are similar, the techniques and technologies that archaeologists use have changed. New high-resolution imaging techniques including ground penetrating radar and magnetometry, will enable us to secure images even before excavations begin. GPS/GIS technologies provide sophisticated mapping techniques that allow high precision data (see "**Excavations Go High Tech**"). Digital photography and 3-D imaging software allow us to reconstruct in 3-D the excavation process as significant artifacts and features are "reassembled" in their original contexts. Computer databases, designed for a complex matrix of information, keep track of material culture in relationship to stratigraphy.

These new technologies are not inexpensive, but they allow us to focus on the data in a more comprehensive way than was possible even 20 years ago. We invite you to join us in this exciting new adventure at Khirbet Qeiyafa—a fortified city from the time of King David.



Dr. Michael G. Hasel

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael G. Hasel". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Director, Institute of Archaeology

EXCAVATIONS GO HIGH TECH



process data has truly brought us into the 21st century.

With scientific advancements in recent years archaeologists now utilize cutting-edge, high-tech tools that make processing large amounts of data more efficient and accurate. **Global Positioning Systems (GPS)** together with sophisticated software allows accurate positioning based on satellite readings within a centimeter. **Geographical Information Systems (GIS)** software applications allows that data to be

The image of an archaeologist has had some consistency over the years. A figure stooped over a pile of dirt with small instruments dusting the earth away one brush stroke at a time. In some ways excavation methods have not changed much over two centuries. We still dig by hand using the same tools Sir Flinders Petrie dug with at Tell el-Hesi in the 1890s. The reason for that is that objects and material culture are fragile even though they have withstood the test of time.

But in other ways archaeology has changed drastically. The questions we ask today are different and the ways we collect, store, and



processed so that 3-D imaging of objects can be placed in their original context in the ground and the “layering” of sites can be graphically uncovered one stratum at a time.

Today new computer databases allow realtime processing of complex data. Aerial photography and remote sensing allows us to see images from angles not normally seen on the ground. These technologies are becoming more accessible while making invaluable contributions in the field.

Archaeology, from its earliest beginnings, was a multidisciplinary



task involving geologists, artists, architects, mathematicians, photographers, linguists, and field archaeologists. But today staffing of excavations is even more complex as computer analysts, paleobotanists, zooarchaeologists, sedimentologists, chemists, and geographers are added to teams. This adds costs when transporting teams from the United States to the Middle East, but the dividends are most rewarding. They enable new questions and bring a more complete understanding of past cities and civilizations.

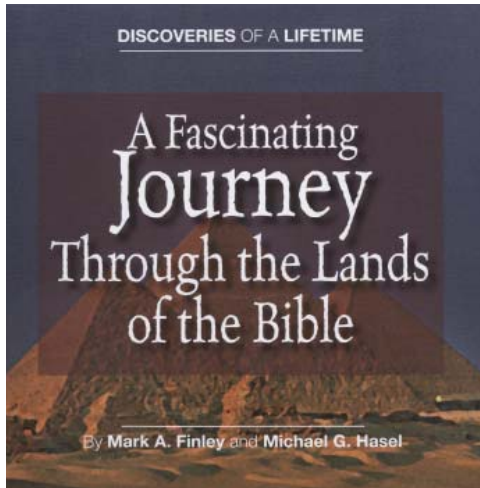
HELP US GO HIGH TECH!

The Institute of Archaeology is raising funds for the purchase of GPS/GIS equipment/software and the training of personnel.

Send your **tax-deductible** donation to:

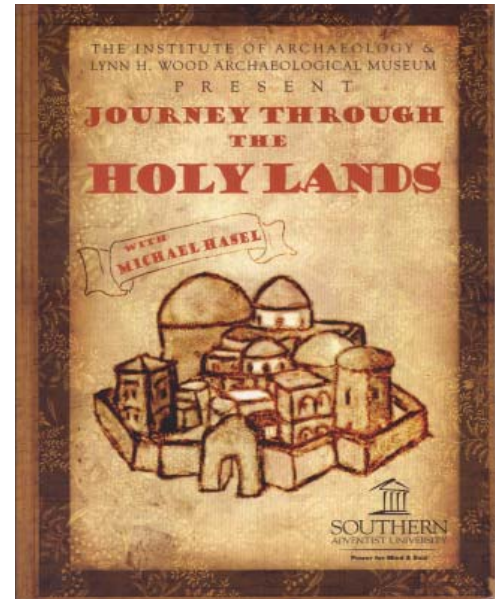
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INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY DVDs



Mark Finley and Michael Hasel invite you on a journey of a lifetime through the fascinating lands of the Bible. You will marvel at the incredible engineering feats of the Egyptians in building the pyramids. Your heart will race as we travel to ancient Babylon and unfold secrets centuries old. You will be amazed at how archaeological discoveries in the Middle East, especially Israel, can vividly illuminate the Biblical account. This is a ten-part DVD series of one-hour long programs. You will want to view these series again and again, so we invite you to come on a journey of discovery with us.

Did you miss a **Museum Lecture**? You can now purchase a DVD of the following museum lecture series presentations: “*The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology*” by **Thomas Davis**; “*Gnosticism, the Gospel of Judas, and the Da Vinci Code*” by **Scott Carroll**; “*The Age of David and Solomon: Myth or Reality*” by **William Dever**; “*The Worlds of Abraham*” by **Alfred Hoerth**; “*The campaigns of Seti I into Western Asia*” by **Peter Brand**; and much more. Visit archaeology.southern.edu for a complete list of titles.



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RECENT SIGHTINGS

PRESS COVERAGE OF KHIRBET QEYAF/A/QEYAF/A OSTRACON

- [Find of Ancient City Could Alter Notions of Biblical David](#) (New York Times)
- [New Evidence Surfaces of David's kingdom](#) (San Francisco Chronicle)
- ["David and Goliath" City Found in Israel?](#) (National Geographic News)
- [Discovery of King David Era Fort Stirs Debate on Size of Kingdom](#) (Jewish Journal)
- [Have Israeli Archaeologists Found World's Oldest Hebrew Inscription?](#) (Haaretz)
- [Earliest Known Hebrew Text In Proto-Canaanite Script Discovered](#) (ScienceDaily)
- [Advanced Digital Imaging and the Qeiyafa Ostrakon](#) (Los Angeles Times)
- [Archaeologists Unearth Oldest Hebrew Text](#) (YouTube newsclip)

ANCIENT SEALS UNEARTHED IN JERUSALEM DIG (Jerusalem Post)

A routine archaeological excavation ahead of private construction in an Arab neighborhood on the outskirts of Jerusalem has uncovered a series of seal impressions from the reign of the biblical King Hezekiah 2,700 years ago, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced . . .



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COPPER RUINS IN JORDAN BOLSTER BIBLICAL RECORD OF KING SOLOMON (Los Angeles Times)

A massive copper smelting plant in the biblical land of Edom is at least three centuries older than researchers previously believed, placing it firmly in the biblical timeline of King Solomon, the first ruler of a united Israel 3,000 years ago . . .

[Click here to read more](#)

GIS IN ARCHAEOLOGY (Biblical Archaeology Review)

Archaeologists have always been concerned with where objects are found. For the archaeologist, it makes a huge difference whether something is found in an ancient kitchen, in the inner sanctum of a temple or in the burial niche of a warrior's tomb. It is these spatial insights that really tell the archaeologist how and in what way certain artifacts were used, and by whom . . .

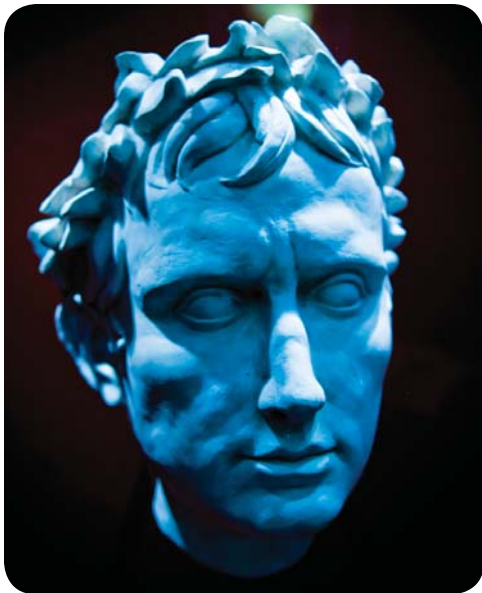
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UPCOMING EVENTS

VISIT “FACES OF POWER” TODAY!

The Lynn H. Wood Archaeological Museum is proud to feature: “**Faces of Power: Ancient Coins of the Biblical World.**” This special exhibition on coins of the Bible will be on display until **May 3, 2009**. Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see this stunning exhibition and learn about the coins of the first emperors of Rome.



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Sunday, 2 – 5 p.m.
Monday, closed
Tuesday – Thursday, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m and 1 – 5 p.m.
Friday, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
Saturday, 2 – 5 p.m.

To schedule a guided tour contact **Star Stevens** at 423.236.2988 or <sstevens@southern.edu>

SCHOLARLY MEETINGS

American Research Center in Egypt

Annual Meeting
April 24 – 26, 2009
Dallas, Texas

University of Haifa

International Conference
“Egypt, Canaan and Israel: History, Imperialism and Ideology”
May 3 – 9, 2009
Haifa, Israel

SUMMER EVENTS

Middle East Study Tour

June 1 – June 15, 2009
Turkey

Archaeological Fieldwork

June 24 – July 19, 2009
Khirbet Qeiyafa, Israel



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