

The Gates of Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo: Their Origin and Distribution

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"This is the account of the forced labor which King Solomon levied to build the house of the Lord, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer."

1 Kings 9:15

The trending titles of recent publications and the captivating labels placed upon the idea of a "vanishing king" the disappearance of a United Monarchy, is scattered across archaeological literature.¹ Despite extensive efforts and archaeological excavations, still primary evidence pertaining to who King Solomon was, continues to challenge archaeologists. Although, it should be noted that evidence pertaining to individuals referring to the Kings, such as Hezekiah, and Jeroboam II, have been uncovered, including a mention of King David's family line. Biblical historians and archaeologists are still wrestling with King Solomon's silent record, continually searching for that one piece of evidence that might contain his name. While the importance of minor artifacts should not be overlooked, evidence pertaining to King Solomon and his United Monarchy is not found etched in the seals and pottery of the day. Instead, it can be found in much larger, more durable features, such as in the architectural structures of three ancient cities.²

The incredible construction projects that took place at Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo run parallel to each other in terms of similarity. They are connected through the idea of scripture, clearly attributing them to King Solomon. The identification and interpretation of a singular archaeological site is an exceptionally complicated endeavor. The identification and interpretation of three separate sites with connective ties is an even more complex undertaking. Through the examination of archaeological evidence pertaining to the gates of Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo, paying close attention to their origin and significance, and by analyzing arguments

¹ Gary N. Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from Recent Histories of Ancient Israel." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997), 19.

² Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon", 22.

associated with construction and chronology, data will be looked at and uncovered to connect these three sites to each other and the reign of King Solomon.³

The Low Chronology

The concept of the low chronology was primarily re-developed and taken a step further in terms of its ideals by a highly influential archaeologist by the name of Israel Finkelstein.

Finkelstein's primary goal in creating this new argument was to look at the archaeological evidence and material culture from King David and Solomon's reign and suggest that what we think about this period is exceptionally over-exaggerated compared to its actuality. In 1996, Finkelstein developed his main argument in this newly re-developed concept, indicating that none of the architectural features pertaining to the gate systems found at the sites of Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo date to the time period of Solomon. Instead, they all date much later in time. Eventually concluding that the idea of a low chronological system should be put in place to interpret the beginning of the United Monarchy.⁴ This newly developed paradigm consisted of several main arguments.⁵ Arguments that were put in place to re-evaluate and re-determine data that previous archaeologists had initially examined. Finkelstein's low chronology is essentially based upon two main ideas. The first of these ideas is the concept of the absence of Philistine pottery in Stratum VI, and the second has to do with the dating of ceramics at Tell Jezreel. Looking at the first of these two arguments, it is the idea of shifting the timeline to better accommodate for the arrival of the Philistine people. This is due to the fact that he could not find

³ Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon", 23.

⁴ Herzog, Ze'ev, "State Formation and the Iron Age I-Iron Age IIA Transition: Remarks on the Faust-Finkelstein Debate." *Near Eastern Archaeology* 70/1 (2007), 21.

⁵ Amnon Ben-Tor and Doron Ben-Ami, "Hazor and the Archaeology of the Tenth Century BCE" *Israel Exploration Journal* 48, no. 1/2 (1998), 30.

any Philistine bichrome pottery within the specified Strata VI.⁶ This is the beginning of the change in time, shifting all Israelite history 100 years later than it originally happened.

When looking at the pottery from Jezreel and Samaria, period I was compared with Strata VA-IVB found at Megiddo.⁷ Finkelstein used this as a way of suggesting that since Jezreel and Samaria's pottery dated to the 9th century, the dates also need to be shifted to allow for congruent times.⁸ Therefore, Megiddo's Solomonic gate was redated 100 years later. With this shift in time, and to keep with the low chronological paradigm, this suggests that Gezer's strata IX destruction connects to Pharaoh Shishak. Conclusively removing the connection of Solomon from Gezer and its building achievements. In connection with the site of Megiddo, Finkelstein states, "Put aside 1 Kings 9:15, and the Shoshenq stele which came from a dump, the only clue for dating the Megiddo strata is furnished by the Philistine pottery." Implying that the only objective evidence that came from the site comes from Philistine pottery, time needs to be interpreted on a later date; therefore, the gate is not Solomonic.⁹ Another central argument that is presented has to do with the interpretation of the date of pottery. Due to the fact that there is not much difference in Iron IIA pottery from the 9th and 10th centuries; pottery found at sites such as Hazor cannot be conclusively identified due to its similarity in comparison.¹⁰ The low chronological belief of Solomon's building projects can be defined by a former professor/archaeologist at Tel Aviv University, David Ussishkin, who stated in his article published by the American Schools of Oriental Research.

It seems clear that the six-chambered gate type was popular throughout the country during the 10th-9th centuries BC, rather than

⁶ Amiha Mazar, "Iron Age Chronology: A Reply to I. Finkelstein." *Levant* 29 (1997): 158.

⁷ Ben-Tor, "Hazor and the Archaeology of the Tenth Century BCE", 31.

⁸ Mazar, "Iron Age Chronology", 161.

⁹ Deborah O. Cantrell, and Israel Finkelstein, "A Kingdom for a Horse: The Megiddo Stables and Eighth Century Israel." *Finkelstein, Ussishkin, and Halpern* (2006), 643.

¹⁰ Ben-Tor, "Hazor and the Archaeology of the Tenth Century BCE", 33.

being an exclusive type of gate constructed only in Solomon's Royal cities. All gates were constructed in a similar fashion, though they differ in size and style. Of special interest is the similarity of measurements between the gates at Megiddo, and Hazor, which were constructed at different times.¹¹

The High Chronology: Traditional View, the Chronology Presented in Scripture

The high chronological system, also known as the traditional view of chronology, is the timeline that explicitly resembles the events in scripture. With this viewpoint, the chronology begins at the Philistine's arrival in 1185/1175 BC as documented by Ramses III on the Medinet Habu Temple in Egypt.¹² While it is not known for sure when Saul specifically began his reign as King, it is estimated that it was around 1041 BC. David can be seen as reigning from 1011-970 BC and because the Bible mentions that Solomon began building the temple in his fourth year, and with Biblical passages to verify that timeframe, "in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord." (1 Kgs 6:1). That would secure his reign as beginning in 970/971 BC.

As mentioned before, Israel Finkelstein had a paradigm put in place to secure his specific sequencing of the low chronology. Looking specifically at the site of Megiddo, there was an extraordinary piece of evidence found cataloging a significant Egyptian campaign that took place.¹³ Finkelstein explicitly said to "Put aside" this evidence as it was found out of context, out of stratigraphy. However, the Biblical record tells us something important.¹⁴ "And it came about in King Rehoboam's fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the Lord, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem." (2 Chr. 12:22). Following the high chronological timeline

¹¹ David Ussishkin, "Was the Solomonic City Gate at Megiddo Built by King Solomon?" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239 (1980), 17.

¹² Mazar, "Iron Age Chronology", 158.

¹³ Ben-Tor, "Hazor and the Archaeology of the Tenth Century BCE", 34.

¹⁴ Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon", 25.

and with Solomons reign lasting from 971-931 BC, there is a record of this campaign at 926/25 BC.¹⁵ Which securely places Solomon as United ruler, and places validity on his building projects, as seen at Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo.

Identifying Archaeological Features of the Solomonic City

The first archaeologist to sufficiently excavate these three sites and specifically note parallels between each city was Yigael Yadin.¹⁶ He excavated between the years of 1957-1970. When Yadin was excavating at each site, he noticed that several features seemed to be extremely familiar. The design, dimension, construction, and artistic features remained consistent. There was a casemate wall system at each site, a specific architectural feature prevalent during the 10th century in Israel. Yadin remarked on the fact that each site had a city gate that contained six chambers, three chambers on each side. The gates' dimensions were impressively consistent, and each guardhouse measures precisely 48 feet in width. Yadin concluded that the gates of Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo were designed in such a way as to have been apart of a massive, unified building project in ancient Israel.¹⁷ Looking at each site's specific stratigraphy it reveals that within a short period of time, these three cities grow from being relatively small fortifications into huge, fortified cities. All with specific construction pertaining to particular wall systems, and well built six-chambered city gates, all following a similar construction pattern.

¹⁵ Anabel Zarzecki-Peleg, "Yadin's Expedition to Megiddo." *Final Report of the Archaeological Excavations* Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 2016. 3.

¹⁶ Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon", 22.

¹⁷ Yigael Yadin, "Was the "Solomonic" City Gate at Megiddo Built by King Solomon? A Rejoinder" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239, no. 1 (1980): 19.

Excavations at Hazor

Hazor has one of the most strategic positions in the geographical area.¹⁸ Due to its significant position, archaeologists expected the construction methods reflect its strength, and the architecture and material culture should reflect the fact that it was a stop in the social and economic world of the Near East.¹⁹ Excavations that were carried out in the 50's confirmed this initial hypothesis, and a system of fortifications, and the six-chambered gate were uncovered. Yadin's excavation yielded four distinct stratigraphical architectural phases. These four phases were Xb, Xa, IXb, and IXa, all of which dated to the middle of the tenth/early ninth century.²⁰ This is a fundamentally important concept to understand as the earliest of these stratum is associated with the architectural design of the casemate wall system, directly connected to the six-chamber Solomonite gate.

Parallels found at Megiddo

At Megiddo, the stratigraphic sequence found at the gate system is precisely the same as mentioned at Hazor.²¹ Here there can be seen a Phoenician connection with the presence of specific architectural, artistic features known as Proto-Aeolic capitals. A majority of these capitals have been found at the site of Megiddo; however, there have also been some that have been uncovered in Gezer and in Hazor. In the archaeological community there has been a debate on whether these capitals were used as decorative features or if they had a more functional purpose in construction. Whatever the case, there is still a very strong connection, as these capitals found at Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo are the same as their Phoenician counterparts.

¹⁸ Daniel M. Master, "State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, (2001), 119.

¹⁹ Piotr Bienkowski, "The Role of Hazor in the Late Bronze Age." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 119, no. 1 (1987), 50.

²⁰ Amnon Ben-Tor and Doron Ben-Ami, "Hazor and the Archaeology of the Tenth Century BCE" *Israel Exploration Journal* 48, no. 1/2 (1998), 11.

²¹ Master, "State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel.", 120.

Looking closer at the Phoenician connection, all three gate systems used a specific type of masonry, called ashlar masonry. This was a type of block that can be found throughout ancient Israel and its specific characteristics reflects the building characteristics of Phoenician sites. Yadin theorized that these stylistic features were introduced by Phoenician workers. Once again, this concept not only draws comparisons between the three different cities, but it also very clearly connects with historical events recorded in the Bible. Passages show us that King Solomon's substantial building ventures were led by a workforce from Tyre, as the supplies were given to him from King Hiram of Tyre.

I received your message and will give you all the cedar and pine logs you need. My workers will carry them down from Lebanon to the Mediterranean Sea. They will tie the logs together and float them along the coast to wherever you want them. Then they will untie the logs, and your workers can take them from there... Solomon's and Hiram's men worked with men from the city of Gebal, and together they got the stones and logs ready. (1 Kgs 5: 8, 18)

In 1925 another key piece of evidence was uncovered at the site of Megiddo. A fragment of stela, later discovered to be Sheshonq I's victory stela. It was discovered at Megiddo during preparations for an excavation by the University of Chicago.²² Dr. Clarence Fisher's account of the discovery of the stela provides insight into a problem that was uncovered.

The fragment of the Shishak stela came from one of the old surface dump heaps near the eastern edge. The original stela had been broken up and its fragments used for building stones for a building subsequent to 930 B.C. If it had been found in a wall it would have determined one possible limit of date for the building. Thus while interesting as proving the presence of Shishak at Megiddo, it does not have any stratigraphical value.²³

²² Rupert L Chapman III, "Putting Sheshonq I In His Place." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 141, no. 1 (2009): 4.

²³ Chapman III, "Putting Sheshonq I In His Place." 4.

Unfortunately, this piece of Shishak's stela was found out of context. Meaning that it cannot accurately be determined as to which stratigraphical layer it belongs to. However, the Bible produces evidence that is able to fill in some of the time gaps and answer many questions that support the placement of this stela in time. In 1 Kings 14:25 it reads, "In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt marched against Jerusalem." Egyptian records produced a king by the name of Sheshonq, who ruled Egypt during the 22nd dynasty. This pharaoh is believed to be the Shishak who marched against Jerusalem. Looking further still at Egyptian records, the Bubastite Portal, located in Karnak, is a relief showcasing Pharaoh Shisak's campaigns. In row three of the relief in a section dedicated to the Coastal plain, Shephelah, and Jezreel valley, 'mkdi' or Megiddo was revealed.²⁴ While this stela found at Megiddo was unfortunately unable to be used as it was found out of context, it does still provide evidence for the sequence of Solomon and Rehoboam. Leading to a positive connection to Solomon's cities and building activity.

The City of Gezer

When R.A.S. Macalister excavated Gezer in the early 1900's; Biblical archaeology was still just beginning.²⁵ Though there were complications that arose out of the unconventional methods of early archaeology, Macalister's work was seen as a base model, and his dates were concluded with successive excavations which have revealed houses that were attached to the casemate wall system.²⁶ In later excavations new discoveries pertaining to stratigraphical sequencing and construction of 10th century houses within the city were looked at with great

²⁴ A. Massart, "The Bubastite Portal by The Epigraphic Survey." The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications (1955): 206.

²⁵ William G. Dever, "Further Evidence on the Date of the Outer Wall at Gezer." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 289, no. 1 (1993), 33.

²⁶ Yigael Yadin, "Solomon's City Wall and Gate at Gezer." *Israel Exploration Journal* 8 (1958), 82.

detail. Showing a connection between the three cities as well. While all previous excavations have provided evidence for Gezer being a Solomonic city, exciting new evidence has recently just been uncovered by archaeologist Dr. Steven Ortiz. During recent excavation, a clay stopper was uncovered in Field W, Room 3 which is located in Iron 1 Strata Xa. Found on this stopper was a seal impression, with the possible name of Siamun etched within.²⁷ Netjerkheperre-Setepenamun Siamun was the sixth pharaoh of Egypt during the 21st Dynasty.²⁸ Siamun was very much involved in his military, listing campaigns and victories over his many years as king. Most of the information that is found about Siamun comes from Egyptian sources, however, found in 1st Kings is a connection to Siamun and his military activity. 1st Kings mentions the city of Gezer being conquered and burned by an Egyptian pharaoh, most likely Siamun, during his military campaign in Israel.²⁹ This Egyptian pharaoh then gave it to King Solomon as the dowry for his daughter.

Pharaoh king of Egypt had attacked and captured Gezer. He
had set it on fire. He killed its Canaanite inhabitants and then
gave it as a wedding gift to his daughter, Solomon's wife.
(1 Kings 9:16)

Archaeologist Kenneth A. Kitchen believes that Siamun conquered Gezer and gave it to Solomon as a dowry. While others have maintained the position of uncertainty. This topic has been a source of frequent debate in the realm of Biblical archaeology, and with this new discovery of a clay stopper it has changed everything. Not only does this stopper have the name of Siamun on it, but it was also uncovered below the Solomonic gate system. The discovery of

²⁷ Panopto video. "Dr. Steven Ortiz: Renewed Excavations at Gezer." 1:08:14. April 1, 2021. <https://southern.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=fd30d83-33a7-4cdc-9858-acfd015b916d&start=undefined>

²⁸ Alberto R Green, "Solomon and Siamun: A Synchronism Between Early Dynastic Israel and the Twenty-First Dynasty of Egypt." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 3 (1978): 353

²⁹ Green, "Solomon and Siamun: A Synchronism Between Early Dynastic Israel and the Twenty-First Dynasty of Egypt." 354

this clay stopper in strata provides evidence for the fact that Gezer was occupied before its destruction. Siamun, during his military campaign destroyed the city, and after Solomon was given the city, he rebuilt on top of the destruction layer.³⁰ Thus, this discovery yields evidence as being part of a bigger building project, being one of the three Solomonic cities.

Conclusion

Discussions pertaining to a United Monarchy and the existence of Solomon entirely, is under constant examination. This is due simply to the fact that archaeological evidence has not yet provided subsequent material that places a name on building activity, and unified cities. Jane M. Cahill, Lawyer and Archaeologist states, “Theories based on negative evidence should never be preferred to theories based on positive evidence. Stated either way, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” The fact is there is substantial evidence connecting these three cities to each other. The parallels between architectural design, commonality in measurements, and specific features are consistent with Solomon’s other building projects. Examining all data presented and using the information provided, we can see that there was a rise of major fortified cities in the 10th century. Several elements, including pottery and specific components and stylistic features within the fortifications, show a strong connection to being collectively interwoven to one another. Successive archaeological evidence provides particular connections with distinct collective features, and with an examination of Biblical text, it broadens the picture. Through archaeological remains, historical contexts, and Biblical text, we can see this idea of a societal picture of uniformity. The Solomonic building period is established, and the gates of Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo confirm its validity.

³⁰ Panopto video. "Dr. Steven Ortiz: Renewed Excavations at Gezer." 1:08:14. April 1, 2021. <https://southern.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=fd30d83-33a7-4cdc-9858-acfd015b916d&start=undefined>

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