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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2026.012>

19 (2026) 2: 235–273

ISSN (print) 1689-5150

ISSN (online) 2450-7059

Was Solomon Truly a Great Builder? And Did He Exist at All?

Czy Salomon wielkim budowniczym był? Czy w ogóle był?

Abstract. The article presents archaeological evidence from Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor. New data obtained using the ^{14}C method suggest that the formation of strata Hazor X–IX, Gezer VIII/8, and Megiddo VB–IVA/Q-4, H-5, along with their fortifications and six-chambered gates, should be dated to the mid-tenth century BC. The possibility that they were built by independent Canaanite or decentralized Hebrew communities must be rejected, as this is contradicted by the uniform pattern and very similar timing of the construction. The most likely builder during this period is the Hebrew United Monarchy, with the biblical tradition pointing to Solomon. The convergence of the archaeological data with the account of 1 Kings 9:15 suggests that this verse preserved older material and was incorporated by the Deuteronomist into his history of Israel.

Streszczenie. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia dane archeologiczne pochodzące z Megiddo, Gezer i Hazor. Dzięki nowym danym uzyskanym metodą C14 powstanie warstw Hazor X–IX, Gezer VIII/8, Megiddo VB–IVA/Q-4, H-5 wraz z ich obwarowaniami i bramami sześciokomorowymi, należy datować na połowę wieku X przed Chr. Należy przy tym odrzucić możliwość ich budowy przez niezależne ośrodki kananejskie lub zdecentralizowane ośrodki hebrajskie, czemu przeczy jednolity wzorzec budowy oraz bardzo zbliżony czas powstania. Najbardziej prawdopodobnym ich budowniczym w tym okresie jest Zjednoczona Monarchia hebrajska. Tradycja biblijna wskazuje tu na Salomona. Zbieżność danych archeologicznych z 1 Krl 9,15 każe przypuszczać, że wiersz ten zachował dawny materiał i został włączony przez redaktora deuteronomistycznego do jego dziejów Izraela.

Keywords: Megiddo, Hazor, Gezer, Solomon, United Monarchy, 1 Kings 9:15.

Słowa kluczowe: Megiddo, Hazor, Gezer, Salomon, Zjednoczona Monarchia, 1 Krl 9,15.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, there has been an ongoing debate among scholars about the historicity of the Hebrew United Monarchy. Much of this debate has centered on the available archaeological evidence—variously invoked to either support or challenge the existence of such a monarchy. Among the most frequently cited examples are fortifications, including the massive six-chambered gates built in three cities: Megiddo (Stratum VA–IVB), Gezer (Stratum VIII), and Hazor (Stratum X). Due to their monumental character, the gates were originally dated by their discoverers or by mid-twentieth-century archaeologists to the reign of King Solomon (tenth century BC). With further developments in history and archaeology in the late twentieth century, however, the structures were redated to the ninth century BC, and their construction was accordingly attributed to the kings of Israel (Northern Kingdom) from the Omride dynasty. Finally, in the last three years, the available evidence has been expanded to include new findings based primarily on radiocarbon (^{14}C) dating.

This article brings together the above findings, which have so far only been presented separately for each excavation site, in order to enable broader conclusions to be drawn from the revised dating. Naturally, the insights gained from three typologically similar excavation sites will be far greater than those based on a single site, allowing us to finally answer the question of *when* and, consequently, *by whom*, the six-chambered gates were built. This answer will help us determine whether the biblical portrayal of Solomon as a great builder contains factual elements or is entirely fictional. Furthermore, it will also affect the dating of the biblical texts that describe Solomon as the builder of fortifications in the three cities mentioned above (1 Kings 9:15). If the archaeological excavations indicate that the structures were built in the tenth century BC, it will be reasonable to conclude that the biblical account originated at that time or relatively soon thereafter. If, however, the gates are dated to the ninth century BC, the biblical texts attributing their construction to Solomon must have been composed later, which means that they do not contain historically reliable information. Needless to say, resolving this issue—present in scholarship since the time of Yadin and subsequently taken up by, for instance, Finkelstein and Mazar—is extremely important for archaeology, history, and biblical studies alike.

Given the nature of the subject matter, the article primarily employs methods proper to archaeology. The first three sections discuss the results of the

excavations carried out at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor, focusing mainly on the latest data published in the 2020s. This data are used for a critical reading of the biblical text and applied within the framework of the historical-critical method to ultimately answer the article's central questions—that is, when the gates (and, more broadly, urban fortifications) were built, and by what political entity.

1. Megiddo

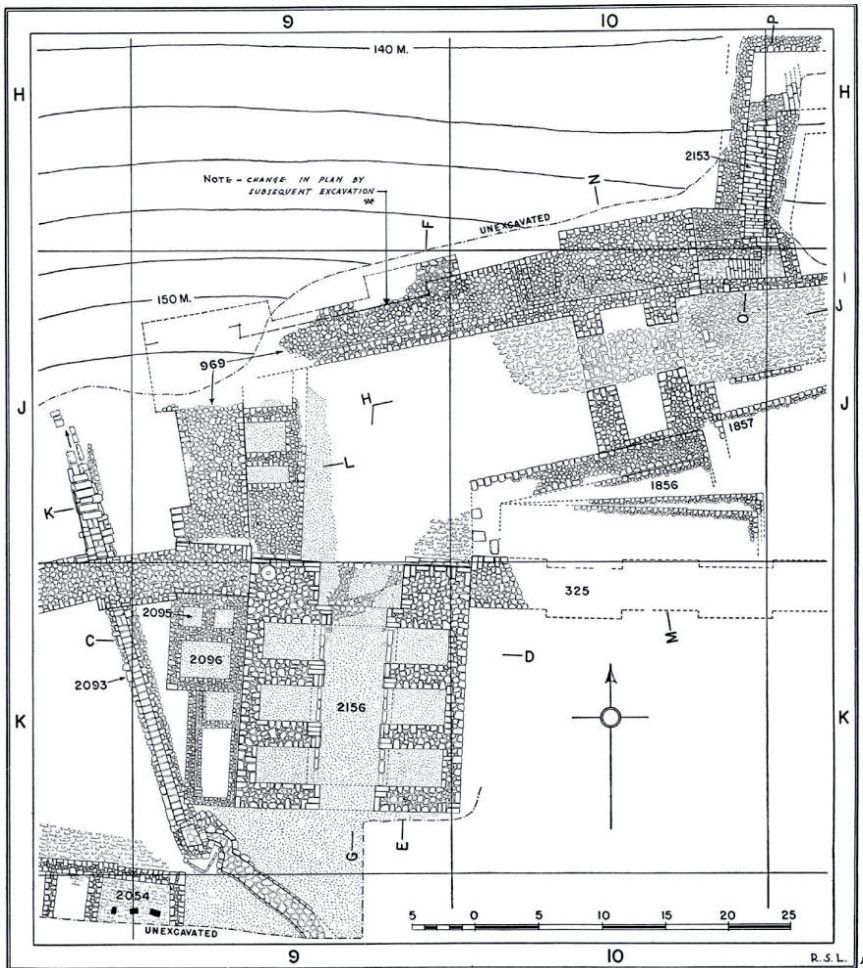


Figure 1. Plan of the excavation site at Gate 2156 in Megiddo. Note that the outer gate was added at a later time (Lamon 1948, 48, Fig. 105)

1.1. History of the Excavations

The excavations at Megiddo were first undertaken between 1903 and 1905 by Gottlieb Schumacher of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft. Schumacher's background as an architect rather than an archaeologist influenced the manner in which the project was carried out. First, a massive trial trench was dug through the center of the site, 20 to 25 meters deep, reaching bedrock in places. Since Schumacher was primarily searching for architectural remains, he overlooked a relatively small fragment of the stela of Pharaoh Shoshenq I, which would eventually be discovered in his spoil heap in 1925.¹ Had it been found *in situ*, it would have provided a precise chronological anchor for the corresponding stratum.

Further methodical excavations were undertaken by a team from the Oriental Institute (OI) of the University of Chicago under the direction of Clarence S. Fisher, Philip L. O. Guy, and Gordon Loud, who conducted their work between 1925 and 1939. While the OI team originally aimed to excavate the entire tell layer by layer, they were ultimately able to fully investigate the four upper strata (down to the ninth century BC, or IA II) before realizing the enormity of the task. Consequently, they chose to focus their efforts on selected areas (gate, temple, and palace), designating them as Areas A through D. In these locations, they reached Stratum XIII at the gate (MB IIA), bedrock in the temple (Stratum XX), and Stratum VI in the palace (IA I). The gate complex, located in Area A, was mainly exposed in 1935–36.

Further excavations were conducted at Megiddo in the 1960s and early 70s (1960–61, 1966–67, and 1971) under the direction of Yigael Yadin of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Yadin re-examined Strata VIA through III (IA II), focusing in particular on the northern stables, the gate, and the sewage system. He also conducted excavations in new areas, but on a much smaller scale.

Finally, since 1993, the excavations have been carried out by a team of researchers from Tel Aviv University led by Israel Finkelstein, David Ussishkin, and Baruch Halpern. The team has investigated various parts of the site, designating them as Areas F through Z. In 2018, the team excavated the vicinity of the gate (Area Z), collecting—among other things—samples for radiocarbon analysis.

¹ Ben-Dor Evian and Finkelstein (2023) have recently suggested that the fragment is not part of a stela but rather of an official inscription once placed on a building. This hypothesis, however, cannot be verified.

1.2. Stratigraphy and Chronology

<i>University of Chicago Stratum</i>	<i>Period</i>
XX?	EB I
Phase in XIX; not identified as a separate level	EB IB
XIX	EB IB
XVIII	EB IB
Not detected	EB IB
XVII	EB III
XVI	EB III
XV	EB III
XIII?	MB I
XII	MB II
XI?	MB II
X	MB III/ LB I
IX	LB I
VIII?	LB II
VIIB?	LB II
VIIA?	LB II
VIIA or slightly later	LB II/IA I
VIB	Iron I
VIA	Iron I/II
VB	Iron II
VA–IVB	Iron II
IVA	Iron II
Not detected	Iron II
III	Iron II
II	Iron II
	Late Roman
	20th century CE

Figure 2. Stratigraphy of Megiddo according to the OI team (Finkelstein et al. 2008, 1945)

For the purposes of our discussion, the crucial strata are those from VIA to IVB. The first of these, Stratum VIA, which is commonly described as Canaanite or Canaanite-Philistine, was destroyed in a violent attack—as evidenced by traces of fire. According to the OI team, the next stratum is VB, which is believed to have been very short-lived and contain no remains of major structures. The researchers were only able to identify traces of this stratum in some parts of the area under study, and its dating remains problematic. By contrast, Stratum VA–IVB contains large storage and palatial structures, as well as the monumental six-chambered gate. In this context, it is important to note that the division into two separate strata (VA and IVB) was clearly a mistake on the part of the Chicago team, as originally indicated by Albright, who argued that these in fact represent a single stratum—a conclusion later confirmed by Yadin. While all scholars agree in identifying this stratum as Hebrew/Israelite, its dating remains problematic, with proposals ranging from the tenth to the seventh century BC.

The destruction of Stratum VIA has been dated in various ways. The Chicago team proposed a timespan of 1150 to 1100 BC, whereas Yadin argued that the stratum was destroyed around 1050–1000 BC and attributed the attack to David. A major shift in relation to earlier studies was introduced by Finkelstein, who initially maintained that the destruction of Stratum VIA had resulted from Shoshenq's campaign of 925 BC: "The total destruction of this stratum can then be related to Shoshenq's campaign" (1996, 183).² This event paved the way for the subsequent construction of the "Omride" Megiddo in Stratum VA–IVB: "When Shoshenq withdrew from the Jezreel Valley, the arena was open for the rulers of the northern Samaria polity—the Northern Kingdom" (Finkelstein 2002, 121). Consequently, the small Stratum VB was assumed to have existed for a short time around 900 BC, while Stratum VA–IVB was dated to the ninth century and the reign of the Omrides. Thus, Yadin's earlier proposal to date Stratum VA–IVB (that is, the remains of a large city whose Hebrew/Israelite character is universally accepted by scholars) to the tenth century BC was largely rejected, and the dating was shifted to the ninth century BC. The reason behind this chronological shift was the late dating of the destruction of the Canaanite city in Stratum VIA.

² This view has been maintained by other scholars as well. See, for example, Ronowska 2020, 20, although the same author had argued a year earlier that Stratum VIA was destroyed by Hebrew tribes around 950 BC (Ronowska 2019, 34–35).

Subsequent excavations and the resulting radiocarbon (^{14}C) data finally convinced Finkelstein to acknowledge that Megiddo VIA may have been destroyed prior to Shoshenq's campaign. While he initially proposed a broad range of dates between 1005 and 925 BC (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2006), he then pushed the date of destruction further back after subsequent excavation seasons (2010–14). Even as late as 2019, Finkelstein still argued that Stratum VIA existed in the “late 11th and much of 10th century,” dating its destruction broadly to 985–935 BC (Finkelstein et al. 2019, 182; cf. Toffolo et al. 2014, 241³). Four years later, however, in light of new radiocarbon results, he was compelled to move the destruction even further back to 999–974 BC (Ben-Dor Evian and Finkelstein 2023, 105; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2023, 109).⁴ As a result, he no longer associated the destruction of Stratum VIA with Shoshenq's campaign but with “the expansion of the highlanders into the valley, a development that soon brought about the emergence of the Israelite Northern Kingdom” (Kleiman et al. 2024, 90). Identical or similar views concerning the dating of the destruction of Stratum VIA are now expressed by other scholars as well. For example, Bruins (2023, 824–825) states an average of 1003–974 BC for eight radiocarbon samples originating from the stratum bearing traces of destruction, excluding five even earlier samples (twelfth to eleventh century BC) as belonging to the same stratum but predating the destruction. This is similar to Mazar's earlier proposal (1010–943 BC), even though it was based on older radiocarbon data (Mazar and Ramsey 2008, 166; cf. Mazar 2005, 25, where he broadly suggested ca. 1000 BC). Most recently, using the latest radiocarbon results, Gil Orduña (2024, 151) has proposed nearly identical dates, stating an average of 986–983 BC.

1.3. Finkelstein's Proposals Concerning the Dating of the “Solomonic” Stratum VB–IVA

In light of the above findings, it is safe to assume that there is now a scholarly consensus that the Canaanite city of Stratum VIA was destroyed in the first quarter of the tenth century BC and that its destruction was related to the expansion of Hebrew tribes from the central highlands rather than to Shoshenq's

³ This article, with certain modifications, was reprinted in the third volume of the excavation report for the 2010–2014 seasons, *Megiddo VI*. See Toffolo et al. 2022, 1434.

⁴ In his 2025 article, he refers more generally to the “early tenth century BCE” (Finkelstein 2025b, 208).

campaign. Shifting the destruction of Stratum VIA some 50 to 75 years back should logically have led Finkelstein to also push back the dating of the subsequent strata, including the stratum central to our discussion, VA–IVB, which is where the fortifications, gate, and palace were found. And yet, he continues to maintain that this stratum was not constructed until the ninth century BC. Interestingly, he argues that the six-chambered gate was a free-standing structure that served a ceremonial rather than defensive function, since he believes that the city walls did not exist at that time.⁵ Nonetheless, he concedes that “this is a peculiar situation in the Northern Kingdom of Iron IIA Israel” (Finkelstein et al. 2019, 185; see also Finkelstein 2025b, 206–209; Adams, Finkelstein, and Levy 2025, 32). In order to be able to date the construction of the gate to the ninth century BC, however, Finkelstein needed to fill the gap of roughly one hundred years between the destruction of Stratum VIA and the rise of the city found in Stratum VA–IVB. This is why he implicitly suggests that the site was abandoned for several decades,⁶ stating that Stratum VIA was destroyed in the “early tenth century,” whereas the next stratum (VB) originates from the “late tenth century” (Finkelstein 2025b, 208). This implies that the city lay in ruins during this period, with no attempts at rebuilding. Only toward the end of the tenth century would Stratum VB have emerged, followed by the construction of the city in Stratum VA–IVB in the ninth century. Considering the fact that Omri’s reign began around 885 BC, the monumental structures of Stratum VA–IVB could not have been built earlier than the late 880s BC—in fact, they may have been built even later, since it is Ahab (reigning ca. 874–853 BC) who is generally regarded as the most significant ruler of the Omride dynasty. If the construction of the walls (contrary to Finkelstein’s claims), the gate, and the palaces is attributed to Ahab, these structures should then be dated to the second quarter of the ninth century BC, which is more than a hundred years after the fall of the Canaanite city of Stratum VIA.

⁵ This contradicts both Yadin’s earlier conclusions and the views of Finkelstein’s colleague at Tel Aviv University, David Ussishkin (see Ussishkin 2020).

⁶ Recently, Finkelstein has suggested that there was “a short gap” between the destruction of Stratum VIA (999–974 BC) and the beginnings of Stratum VB, although he dates the latter extremely broadly to 962/882 BC (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2023, 110).

1.4. Weak Points in Finkelstein's Proposal

Finkelstein's suggestion is not supported by either stratigraphy or radiocarbon dating. First, according to earlier excavations, Stratum VB is extremely thin, and its presence has not been attested across the entire site. Finkelstein himself notes that no remains of Stratum VB were found underneath the structure known as the Solomonic six-chambered gate and that "the gate is built right on the top of the ruins of Stratum VIA's gate" (Finkelstein et al. 2019, 184). Therefore, accepting Finkelstein's assumptions would also require concluding that this area shows no trace of settlement for one hundred years or more. It seems rather implausible that the city's main entrance could be abandoned for such an extended period, and no archaeologist has expressly made such a claim—even though Finkelstein's suggestions logically lead to this conclusion.

One would also have to accept that during his campaign in Canaan, Pharaoh Shoshenq erected his stele on the ruins of the city found in Stratum VIA or, at best, in the desolate village of Stratum VB (Finkelstein et al. 2019, 182, describe Stratum VB as a "gateless village") and that he later deemed the capture of this meager settlement worthy of mention in the great triumphal inscription at Karnak. This scenario appears unrealistic, a point which Finkelstein indirectly acknowledges when he argues that the erection of the inscription was a manifestation of the pharaoh's authority toward the local population (Ben-Dor Evian and Finkelstein 2023, 107). If the pharaoh had intended to display his power, placing the inscription or stele at a major local site would have served that purpose. Hence, the logical assumption is that when Shoshenq reached Megiddo, it was a place of importance. Stratum VB certainly was not such a place, whereas the remains in Stratum VA–IVB, with their walls, monumental gate, and palaces, meet the criterion. This implies that the monumental structures of Stratum VA–IVB, which attest to the city's high status, must have existed *before* 925 BC.

Another problem with dating the emergence of Stratum VA–IVB to the ninth century BC lies in the radiocarbon (^{14}C) evidence. A detailed study by Bruins,⁷ who calibrated earlier data using the latest IntCal20 curve, shows, above

⁷ The study is based on publications by researchers from Tel Aviv: Boaretto 2006, 2022; Sharon et al. 2007; Gilboa et al. 2013; Toffolo et al. 2014; 2022; Fantalkin et al. 2015; and Kleiman et al. 2019. One might also add Martin et al. 2020 and Gil Orduña 2024.

all, that VB was in fact not an independent stratum but merely a phase in the development of the city in VA–IVB. The four tested samples from Stratum VB are dated (with the results averaged) to 961, 928, 869, and 858 BC (Bruins 2023, 828). These dates cover the *entire* lifespan of the Iron Age IIA city—from its construction around the mid-tenth century BC to its demise around the mid-ninth century BC. Consequently, it is impossible to date this stratum to a short period around 900 BC, as Finkelstein suggested. The above dating demonstrates that Stratum VB is, in fact, part of the same occupational horizon as Stratum VA–IVB. Accordingly, Bruins (2023, 831) argues that “the archaeological criteria to call a certain layer Stratum VB, usually on the basis of ceramics, seem not well established. It seems better to base the archaeological stratigraphy on radiocarbon dating.” Even before that, Norma Franklin described the entire Stratum V as follows: “The Stratum V city was a long-lived, multi-phased city with two monumental palaces. It was continuously maintained and rebuilt, and not destroyed” (Franklin 2006, 109). The dating of the four Stratum VB samples—two to the tenth century (one likely to its first half) and two to the ninth century BC (one closer to the midpoint of the century)—shows that this stratum cannot be confined to a narrow period at the end of the tenth century BC, since the samples span more than a hundred years.

By far the most important examples are those associated with Stratum VA–IVB. Of the nine tested samples from this stratum, the averaged results of one sample point to the very end of the eleventh century (1008 BC; RTK-6403), a further three fall within the tenth century (959, 936, and 925 BC; RTK-6405, 6286, and 6404), and the remaining five date to the ninth century (865, 861, 858 $\times$ 2, and 857 BC; RTK-6408, 6406, 6760, and 6429, and RTT-3948) (Bruins 2023, 828). An earlier sample⁸ should be added to the above, also dated to the tenth century BC (Gilboa et al. 2013, 1120, as discussed further below). In this case, too, the radiocarbon dates for Stratum VA–IVB span the *entire* Iron Age IIA, making it impossible to assign the finds from this stratum exclusively to the ninth century BC.

⁸ RTT-3949 (Level H-5): 1005–930 BC at a probability of 63.2%.

Stratum area level, locus and archaeo context	¹⁴ C date (year BP) Lab #	Calibrated age 1σ (68.3% probability) Cal BCE	Calibrated age 2σ (95.4% probability) Cal BCE	Calibrated median (cal BCE)
Stratum VB Level H-7, 06/H/78 Floor	2808 ± 27 (2) RTT-5498	998–925 (68.3%)	1048–898 (95.4%)	961
Stratum VB Level Q-6a, 12/Q/94 Olive pit	2780 ± 45 RTK-6755	991–897 (54.4%) 871–841 (13.9%)	1046–1030 (2.0%) 1020–820 (93.4%)	928
Stratum VB Level Q-6a, 14/Q/50 Olive pit	2740 ± 22 RTD-8045	905–891 (14.2%) 881–834 (54.1%)	927–822 (95.4%)	869
Stratum VB Level Q-6b, 12/Q/120 Olive pit	2700 ± 45 RTK-6753	898–864 (29.8%) 850–809 (38.4%)	967–960 (0.7%) 931–794 (94.7%)	858
Level Q-5 10/Q/73 Olive pits	2848 ± 28 (4) RTK-6403	1051–973 (55.4%) 955–933 (12.8%)	1111–925 (95.4%)	1008
Level Q-5 10/Q/95 Wheat	2779 ± 29 (4) RTK-6404	983–946 (24.3%) 941–898 (35.6%) 866–849 (8.3%)	1006–891 (75.7%) 882–835 (19.8%)	925
Level Q-5 10/Q/95 Wheat	2806 ± 32 (3) RTK-6405	1002–921 (68.3%)	1048–896 (91.4%) 873–843 (4.0%)	959
Level Q-5 10/Q/96 Olive pits	2716 ± 28 (4) RTK-6406	898–864 (35.4%) 853–822 (32.8%)	911–809 BC (95.4%)	861
Stratum VA-IVB Level Q-4, 10/Q/163 wheat	2786 ± 29 (4) RTK-6286	986–901 (68.3%)	1011–891 (81.6%) 881–836 (13.8%)	936
Stratum VA-IVB Level Q-4, 10/Q/112 Olive pits	2706 ± 52 RTK-6408	898–811 (68.3%)	981–947 (5.0%) 940–793 (90.4%)	865
Stratum VA-IVB Level Q-4, 12/Q/22 Wheat	2700 ± 45 RTK-6760	898–864 (29.8%) 850–809 (38.4%)	967–960 (0.7%) 931–794 (94.7%)	858
Stratum VA-IVB Level H-5, 98/H/79 Destruction debris	2695 ± 50 RTT-3948	898–862 (29.2%) 853–808 (39.1%)	971–956 (1.7%) 932–791 (93.7%)	857
Stratum VA-IVB Level H-5, 98/H/62 Destruction debris	2708 ± 32 (3) RTK-6429	898–867 (32.2%) 848–814 (36.1%)	914–806 (95.4%)	858

Figure 3. Radiocarbon data for Megiddo, Strata VB and VA–IVB (Bruins 2023, 828)⁹

⁹ In accordance with Boaretto's suggestion (2022, 1441), Bruins omitted sample RTD-8048 from Level Q-4 (dated to 815–800 BC). Boaretto describes it as follows: "Locus not good for dating; possibly a pit." The proposed dating and description indicate that this sample is an intrusion from a later stratum.

If we combine the radiocarbon results for Strata VB and VA–IVB, which in reality appear to form a single stratum, we obtain seven dates in the tenth century BC (including one at the transition between the eleventh and tenth centuries) and seven in the ninth century. It is also important to keep in mind that when a stratum is destroyed as a result of an attack, the majority of the preserved material typically originates from its final phase. Since Stratum (VB)–VA–IVB was destroyed, as evidenced by the radiocarbon results, in the second half of the ninth century BC, most likely in the course of Hazael’s invasion around 835 BC,¹⁰ one may assume that samples from the second half of the ninth century should be the most numerous. Yet, the tenth and ninth centuries are represented by exactly the same number of samples, which makes it untenable to maintain that this stratum did not originate until the ninth century.

In this context, it is not surprising that in his most recent publications, Finkelstein urges caution in the use of radiocarbon data. He notes, quite correctly, that it is best to rely on short-lived samples (olive pits, cereal grains) to avoid the “old wood effect,” a term referring to objects such as beams that may have been reused for centuries. Thus, samples should be taken from a stratigraphically secure locus with an accumulation of artifacts, and ideally several samples should be obtained from the same locus (Finkelstein 2025a, 91). The problem, however, is that all the samples from Megiddo presented above were collected by the Tel Aviv team, and most of them are indeed olive pits or cereal grains. Moreover, somewhat unexpectedly, Finkelstein states that “the Megiddo dates offered good coverage for the Late Bronze and the Iron I, while the Iron IIA layers at the site did not supply sufficient radiocarbon evidence” (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2023, 105). Meanwhile, in the same article, one can see that Megiddo provides ten samples for LB II, eight for LB III, twenty-four for IA I, and fifteen for IA IIA.¹¹ Consequently, the differences in sample counts do not support the claim that the radiocarbon evidence for IA IIA at Megiddo is insufficient.

In his latest publications, Finkelstein—in direct contrast to Franklin and Bruins, who viewed the entire Stratum V as a gradually evolving whole—

¹⁰ It should be emphasized that this was, from the outset, a correct claim on the part of Finkelstein, in contrast to Yadin, who maintained that Stratum VA–IVB was destroyed in the course of Shoshenq’s campaign—a view that is clearly contradicted by the ¹⁴C results. See Finkelstein et al. 2019, 187, where the destruction of Stratum VA–IVB is dated “in the early second half of the 9th century BCE.”

¹¹ Bruins 2023 provides data for thirteen IA IIA samples.

proposes dividing the IA IIA period (i.e., the former Stratum V) into three smaller subperiods whose naming is not entirely established. In some cases, they are referred to as Early Iron Age IIA, an unnamed transitional phase, and Late Iron Age IIA (Finkelstein et al. 2022, 16; Finkelstein 2025a, 92), and in other cases, as Early, Middle, and Late Iron Age IIA (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2023, 106; Adams, Cradic, and Finkelstein 2025, 6). Traces of the Early Iron Age IIA (corresponding to the stratum designated as VB by the Chicago team) are said to occur in Levels H-8, H-7, and Q-6, *together* with the Middle Iron Age IIA in Levels K-3 and L-4, and even *together* with the Late Iron Age IIA in Levels M-3, M-2, and M-1. Thus, according to Finkelstein's team, the Early Iron Age IIA can be distinguished from later subperiods only in Areas H and Q. Going further, traces of the Middle Iron Age IIA (which has no counterpart in the previously established strata) are found in Levels H-6 and Q-5, *together* with the Early Iron Age IIA in Levels K-3 and L-4, and *together* with both the Early and Late Iron Age IIA in Levels M-3, M-2, and M-1. Again, the Middle Iron Age IIA can be distinguished from other subperiods only in Areas H and Q. Finally, remains of the Late Iron Age IIA (the former Stratum VA–IVB) appear in Levels H-5, K-2, L-3, and Q-4, and—together with all other subperiods—in Levels M-3, M-2, and M-1 (Finkelstein 2025a, 92; Adams, Cradic, and Finkelstein 2025, 6). Thus, Finkelstein and his collaborators propose a far-reaching subdivision of the former Stratum V and date the Early Iron Age IIA between 999/974 and 962/882 BC, the Middle Iron Age IIA between 962/882 and 886/842 BC, and the Late Iron Age IIA between 886/842 BC and an unspecified end date (Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2023, 109). On that basis, Finkelstein (2025b) maintains that the fortified city with palaces (Stratum VA–IVB / Late Iron Age IIA) was not established until the ninth century BC, attributing it unequivocally to the Omride dynasty.

In our view, Finkelstein's argument has a number of weaknesses. First, it should be noted that in *Megiddo V*, and even in some articles included in *Megiddo VI*, the division of the Iron Age IIA into three subperiods was never employed. Instead, a simpler scheme was presented: Early Iron Age IIA (Stratum VB, late tenth century BC) and Late Iron Age IIA (Stratum VA–IVB, ninth century BC), corresponding to earlier stratigraphic conventions (see Finkelstein et al. 2013, 17; Toffolo et al. 2022, 1422). As the end date of Stratum VIA was being pushed back, it became necessary to introduce a gap in settlement at Megiddo and/or to extend the duration of Stratum VB (Early Iron Age IIA), or even to add a new period (Middle Iron Age IIA). Indeed,

Finkelstein’s team itself acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing these subperiods accurately, noting that in practice, the differentiation is only visible in Areas H and Q, whereas in Areas M, L, and K, the division into subperiods is not clearly defined.

Area							U of C Strata	Period
F	H	J	K	L	M	Q		
F-6	H-10		K-5		M-5	Q-8	VIB	Early IA I
F-5	H-9		K-4	L-5	M-4	Q-7	VIA	Late IA I
	H-8		K-3	L-4	M-3 M-2 M-1	Q-6	VB	Early IA IIA
	H-7							
	H-6					Q-5	Not detected	Middle IA IIA
	H-5		K-2	L-3		Q-4	VA–IVB	Late IA IIA
F-4b	H-4		K-1	L-2		Q-3	IVA	IA IIB
	H-3					Q-2		
	H-2						Not detected	IA IIB
F-4a	H-1			L-1		Q-1	III	IA IIB
F-3							II	IA IIC
F-2								
F-1								

Figure 4. Iron Age stratigraphy for Megiddo according to Finkelstein’s team (Adams, Cradic, and Finkelstein 2025, 6)

Second, the chronology—especially for the Middle Iron Age IIA—is unclear. Since Stratum VB (Early Iron Age IIA) is dated by Finkelstein (2025b, 208) to the late tenth century BC, and Stratum VA–IVB (Late Iron Age IIA) corresponds to the rule of the Omride dynasty (not earlier than the 880s BC¹²), the Middle Iron Age IIA must be dated to the beginning of the ninth century BC (ca. 900–880 BC). According to Finkelstein, this period is represented in Levels Q-5, M-2, L-4, K-3, and H-6 of the new excavation (Finkelstein 2025a, 92), as well as in Level H-7 (Finkelstein and Piasezky 2023, 106).¹³

¹² While Finkelstein (2025b, 208) describes it as “early ninth century,” in light of the title of the article and his repeated emphasis that Stratum VA–IVB represents “Omride Megiddo,” it cannot be dated earlier than the reign of Omri—that is, the late 880s and early 870s BC. Here, we leave aside the earlier suggestion that when speaking of the Omride dynasty, the construction should rather be attributed to Ahab, and that, accordingly, the emergence of Stratum VA–IVB ought to be situated closer to the mid-ninth century BC.

¹³ Other publications assign Level H-7 to the Early Iron Age IIA subperiod (Finkelstein 2025a, 92) or even introduce an additional, unnamed subperiod (!) between the Early and

In view of the above, it is necessary to examine the dating of the samples from the relevant levels in order to verify Finkelstein's proposal. He specifies the following samples for the different levels Q-5 level, all with probabilities at 68.3 percent (Bruins 2023, 828; very similarly: Boaretto 2022, 1441; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2023, 106):

- RTK-6403 (Level Q-5): 1051–933 BC, calibrated average: 1008 BC (four olive pits);
- RTK-6405 (Level Q-5): 1002–921 BC, calibrated average: 959 BC (three wheat grains);
- RTK-6404 (Level Q-5): 983–898 BC (59.9%), calibrated average: 925 BC (four wheat grains); and
- RTK-6406 (Level Q-5): 898–822 BC, calibrated average: 861 BC (four olive pits).

For Level H-7:

- RTT-5498 (Level H-7): 998–925 BC, calibrated average: 961 BC.

As it turns out, of the five samples that, according to Finkelstein's claim, should date from the early ninth century, only one can be assigned to that period. Three clearly point to the tenth century, and one even to the late eleventh or early tenth century BC. All these samples derive from several (three to four) grains or pits, therefore they cannot be dismissed as accidental, isolated cases. Sample RTD-8051 from Level Q-5 was omitted, since it points to the end of the ninth or even to the beginning of the eighth century BC (820–800 BC) and therefore appears to be a later intrusion in this stratum (most likely introduced after Hazael's attack around 835 BC.¹⁴

The radiocarbon analysis shows clearly that the areas dated by Finkelstein to the Middle Iron Age IIA (i.e., the early ninth century BC) contain samples originating predominantly from the tenth century (largely from the first half of that century). This means that the dating of the Middle Iron Age IIA proposed by Finkelstein is not supported by the ¹⁴C evidence.

Even more significant is the fact that among the six samples from Levels Q-4 and H-5, corresponding to Stratum VA–IVB (Late Iron Age IIA) which Finkelstein explicitly labelled as “Omridic,” alongside four examples dated to

Middle Iron Age IIA (Adams, Cradic, and Finkelstein 2025, 6). This shows a certain arbitrariness in the attribution of Level H-7 to successive subperiods.

¹⁴ Boaretto (2022, 1441) describes it as follows: “A locus not good for dating.”

the ninth century BC, there are also two samples that clearly point to the tenth century BC:

- RTK-6286 (Level Q-4): 986–901 BC (68.2%; Bruins 2023, 828; calibrated average 936 BC, very similarly: Boaretto 2022, 1441; Finkelstein and Piasezky 2023, 106)¹⁵; and
- RTT-3949 (Level H-5): 1005–930 BC (68.2%; Gilboa et al. 2013, 1120).¹⁶

The above findings indicate that the stratum began in the tenth century BC and came to an end in the ninth century BC, which is also an argument against dividing the Iron Age IIA into too many small subperiods. The evidence from Megiddo suggests a pattern of gradual development throughout the tenth and ninth centuries BC, which is why assigning individual levels exclusively to narrow subperiods may lead to erroneous conclusions.

To some extent, Finkelstein and Piasezky also arrive at a similar conclusion. For Megiddo and Tel Rehov, or for the northern region more broadly, they ultimately state that “in the North, we divide the three phases of the Iron IIA into two phases (middle and late Iron IIA as a single unit = late Iron IIA)” (Finkelstein and Piasezky 2023, 114). Thus, the authors themselves effectively merge the two subperiods into a single horizon. At the same time, it cannot be maintained that this combined Late Iron Age IIA began only under the Omride dynasty, since such a claim contradicts the ¹⁴C sample dating.

Considering the above evidence, it seems untenable to argue that the monumental structures found at Megiddo in Stratum VA–IVB (which, in reality, as Bruins has argued, forms a broader continuum with Stratum VB) were built during the reign of the Omride dynasty. Rather, after the destruction of Stratum VIA in the early tenth century BC, a new city gradually emerged. Its

¹⁵ The sample in fact consists of four wheat grains (Boaretto 2022, 1441).

¹⁶ Earlier publication: Boaretto 2006, 555. The sample is not cited in later studies, even though the “neighboring” sample RTT-3948 (dated to 895–805 BC) is regularly mentioned. The authors summarized the situation by saying that “this level should be attributed to a late horizon within the Iron IIA (chapter 13), which should place it . . . in the last third of the 9th century BCE. The excavators correlate it with Stratum Va-IVb of the University of Chicago excavations . . . the two dates from this phase (Samples 3948, 3949) hardly overlap, the former encompassing mostly the 9th century and the latter the 10th. *This is problematic* [emphasis added] for a level that cannot have been of very long duration (it is one of four Iron IIA layers in area H)” (Gilboa et al. 2013, 1120). The considerable spread of the data is also noted by Mazar 2010, 33; Mazar 2011, 107; and Dever 2017, 385.

gate and palaces were constructed around the mid-tenth century BC, and the city continued to function throughout the ninth century until its destruction in Hazael's campaign around 835 BC.

2. Gezer

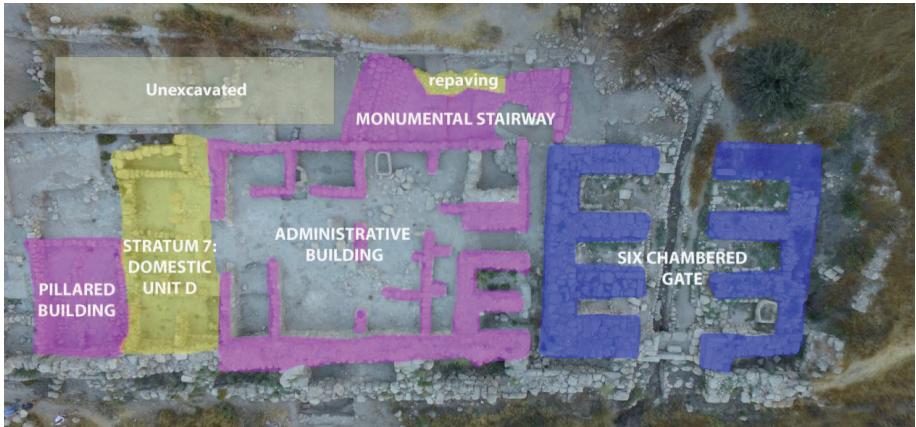


Figure 5. Photograph showing the excavations of the gate, casemate walls, and adjacent buildings at Gezer, Stratum 8 (Ortiz 2023, 736, Fig. 6)

2.1. History of the Excavations

The first excavations at Gezer were conducted by R. A. S. Macalister of the Palestine Exploration Fund between 1902 and 1909. Macalister began his work by cutting several trial trenches in the eastern part of the mound, which reached bedrock and were in some cases as deep as 13 meters. Ultimately, Macalister identified nine strata, even though the archaeological methods that he employed were rather rudimentary by modern standards. Among other things, he uncovered the area of the six-chambered gate, but he misidentified it as a Maccabean fortress. In 1934, Alan Rowe—also working for the Palestine Exploration Fund—carried out a short excavation project, but it failed to produce the expected outcomes, and the site was abandoned after six weeks.

In 1957, Yigael Yadin proposed that the gate at Gezer originated from the time of Solomon, causing renewed interest in the site. Between 1964 and 1974 and again between 1984 and 1990, regular excavations were conducted by

Hebrew Union College and Harvard University, with the University of Arizona replacing the latter in the final two seasons. The field directors were, in succession, G. Ernest Wright, William G. Dever, and Joe D. Seeger. The excavations were conducted using modern methods, although still without radiocarbon dating. Areas previously uncovered by Macalister (including the six-chambered gate) were re-excavated, and new areas were explored—including the casemate city walls. More than twenty strata were identified, ranging from the thirtieth to the first century BC.

The most recent excavations, funded by the Tandy Institute for Archaeology, were carried out between 2006 and 2017 under the direction of Steven Ortiz and Samuel Wolff. The project focused on Iron Age levels and exposed, among other things, the buildings immediately adjacent to the six-chambered gate on its western side. As part of the work, radiocarbon analyses were conducted, making absolute dating possible.

2.2. Stratigraphy and Chronology

In the case of Gezer, the key issue is the dating of Stratum 8 (new Tandy excavations) or VIII (HUC excavations), which contains, among other features, a large administrative building, the casemate city walls, and the six-chambered city gate. As noted above, from the time of Yadin's research onward, the gate and the walls were dated to the tenth century BC and commonly described as "Solomonic," but with the emergence of the Low Chronology, the dating of all strata was shifted. Finkelstein proposed attributing the destruction of Stratum IX to Shoshenq (1996, 183), or even to rulers of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2002, 283); he also suggested dating the crucial Stratum VIII to the ninth century BC and assigning its construction—as in Megiddo—to the Omrides (2002, 284).

Strata	Dates	Description	HUC excavations
1	Modern	HUC dump: excavation trenches, dumps, rock piles	
2	Modern (ca. 1800–1950)	Bergheim Estate, Abu Shusheh, Macalister ackfill and trenches	
3	Hellenistic	Domestic buildings, walls (some reused IA), kilns, silo, several pits above Four Room House; HUC : reused gate	Strata IIA-C, III
4	Persian	Ceramic, Retaining wall (A4/5), Dog burials, pits	IV
5	Late Iron Age IIc	Small building, Silos, wall stubs, pits	V
Destruction: 734 Assyrian Destruction (Tiglath Pileser III)			
6A	IA IIB 9th–8th	This phase represents minor building/construction modifications Enlarging south wall of 4 Room House, Rebuild of Industrial Building C	VI
6B		Public: Administrative Buildings A-B, Industrial Building C (Oil Production?); Rebuilt fortification walls, 4 room house, courtyard, street; HUC : domestic buildings (Field VII)	
Destruction			
7	IA IIA (10th/early 9th)	Domestic: Units A-E [Unit E =rebuild of Building 52136, enlarged and strengthened], Dog burials. HUC : 4-chambered gate	VII
Destruction: Sheshonq I			
8	IA IIA Mid-10th	Public: Central Administrative Courtyard Building, Fortifications: Casemate city-wall, monumental flagstone pavement, HUC : 6 chambered Gate (Field III), Buildings 52136, 52057: larger walls plus cobble floor and tabun, Fortifications: Single-line City-wall and rebuild glacis. HUC : 6-chambered gate	VIII
9	IA Ic (10th)	Rectangular Building with Tabun 62067, courtyard with Tabun 82007	
Destruction: Siamun			
10A	IA Ib 11th/10th	Isolated walls beneath casemate, Complex of Building Units, City wall, Glacis and curb	IX
10B		Complex of building units, city wall	XI
11	IA Ia/b (12th)	Complex of building units, city wall	XIII–XII
12A	LB IIB (LB III/IAIA)	Repair, rebuild of 12B buildings	XIV
Destruction-Merenptah			
12B	LB IIB	Patrician House, various wall stubs	XV
13	LBIIA	W94123, 94127 (massive building)	XVI
14	MB IIC	Walls and Glacis	XVIII

Figure 6. Stratigraphy of Gezer according to the Ortiz/Wolff team (Ortiz 2023, 731)

The destruction of Stratum VIII was, in his view, caused either by Hazael of Damascus in the second half of the ninth century or by minor clashes between Israel and Judah or the Philistine cities (Finkelstein 2002, 285). The proposal to adopt the Low Chronology sparked intense debate (see, e.g., Finkelstein and Mazar 2007), and it seems that only new excavations providing radiocarbon samples can finally resolve the issue.

The excavations conducted by the Tandy Institute confirmed the earlier observations that Stratum 10A (formerly IX), which yielded pottery characteristic of the Iron Age IB, had been destroyed in an attack and the resulting fire. The seal-amulet impression found in this stratum dates to the Twenty-First Dynasty, most likely to the reign of Pharaoh Siamun (985–967 BC; see Münger 2003; 2005). Archeologists from the Tandy team (Webster et al. 2023, 11) suggest that this find—together with the evidence of destruction—corroborates the theory proposed by the HUC team, which attributed the destruction of Stratum 10A to this ruler or another pharaoh of the Twenty-First Dynasty (cf. 1 Kings 9:16).

Stratum 9 was short-lived and represents a transitional phase between the Late Iron Age I and Iron Age IIA. In the stratum crucial to our discussion, namely Stratum 8 (Iron Age IIA), the team uncovered 27 meters of casemate walls with a stone-covered glacis (beyond which there is a single-line city wall), as well as a series of buildings adjoining the six-chambered gate, including a large administrative building measuring 19×12 meters, with three entrances and fifteen rooms. This building, partially uncovered by the HUC team and designated as Palace 10000, shows notable similarities to Palace 6000 at Megiddo (Ortiz and Wolff 2021, 232). While the stratum was destroyed, it appears that the inhabitants were able to evacuate, as the buildings were found empty (Webster et al. 2023, 11–12).

A pivotal question that remains at this point concerns the absolute dating of the individual strata, including Stratum 8. Ortiz and Wolff's team presented the following findings (all samples are olive pits):

	Model B with 19±5 yr offset	
	Calibrated age range (BC)	
	68.3% hpd	95.4% hpd
Beta-436536 (81025)	924–887 (68.3%)	937–845 (95.4%)
GrM-13324 (81002)	925–893 (68.3%)	931–850 (95.4%)
GrM-13325 (81002)	925–894 (68.3%)	931–850 (95.4%)
OZ-X993/OZ-Z478 (81002)	949–918 (68.3%)	963–905 (95.4%)
Beta-436537 (81034)	946–912 (68.3%)	967–898 (95.4%)
OZ-X994/OZ-Z479 (81034)	950–923 (68.3%)	963–907 (95.4%)
OZ-V267 (91050)	951–926 (68.3%)	963–907 (95.4%)
7 (VII)		
OZ-X995/OZ-Z477 (71037)	976–950 (68.3%)	991–922 (95.4%)
Beta-436539 (71037)	977–949 (68.3%)	992–923 (95.4%)
Beta-436538 (71042)	1195–1173 (12.1%) 1161–1143 (10.7%) 1130–1052 (45.5%)	1216–1040 (89.4%) 1039–1016 (6%)
Beta-436540 (81011)	1253–1252 (0.8%) 1223–1123 (67.5%)	1267–1053 (95.4%)
8 (VIII)		
Beta-436533 (82023)	1042–1036 (6.6%) 1017–983 (61.6%)	1052–966 (95.4%)
9 (IX–VIII)		
Beta-436535 (82026)	1066–1041 (32.2%) 1039–1015 (36%)	1094–1008 (95.4%)
Beta-436534 (82040)	1070–1043 (34%) 1037–1015 (34.3%)	1094–1009 (95.4%)
OZ-X996/OZ-Z480 (82040)	1071–1046 (36.5%) 1034–1016 (31.8%)	1092–1012 (95.4%)
10A (X–IX)		

Figure 7. Radiocarbon (^{14}C) dating for Strata 10A, 9, 8, and 7 according to the preferred Model B with an offset of 19 ± 5 years (after Webster et al. 2023, S2 Table: Bayesian output, all models)

On the basis of the above samples, the Tandy Institute team proposed the following chronology for the period of interest in the history of Gezer:

Cultural transitions	Stratum or transition	Model B with 19±5 yr offset	
		Calibrated age range (BC)	
		68.3% hpd	95.4% hpd
Iron IIA to IIB	End 7	915–868 (68.3%)	925–827 (95.4%)
	Stratum 7	946–898 (68.3%)	965–861 (95.4%)
	Transition 8 to 7	968–939 (68.3%)	980–918 (95.4%)
	Stratum 8	978–948 (68.3%)	995–923 (95.4%)
	Start 8	988–955 (68.3%)	1009–927 (95.4%)
Iron I to II	End 9	1011–969 (68.3%)	1045–952 (95.4%)
	Stratum 9	1032–985 (68.3%)	1062–967 (95.4%)
	Transition 10A to 9	1053–1036 (19.4%)	1083–985 (95.4%)
		1034–1003 (48.9%)	
	Stratum 10A	1066–1016 (68.3%)	1095–1005 (95.4%)
	Transition 10B to 10A	1090–1053 (47.1%)	1104–1019 (95.4%)
		1042–1025 (21.1%)	

Figure 8. Absolute chronology of Strata 10A to 7 at Gezer (after Webster et al. 2023, S1 Table: Bayesian output, all models)

It should be noted that the Tandy Institute team considered two samples from Stratum 8 with dates pointing to the period between the thirteenth and eleventh centuries BC (Beta 436538 and Beta 436540) as intrusions originating from earlier strata and excluded them when determining the chronology of that stratum. Accepting these outliers would have pushed Stratum 8 even further back in time. Nonetheless, even when they are excluded, there are still six radiocarbon samples from Strata 10A, 9, and 8 that produce a coherent chronological sequence. It would therefore be incorrect to claim that the dating relies on a single example from an uncertain context or that it is compromised by the “old wood effect.” Ultimately, it has to be concluded that Stratum 10A existed between 1090 and 1003 BC (68.3%) or between 1104 and 985 BC (95.4%), and its destruction most likely occurred in the first quarter of the tenth century BC. The short-lived Stratum 9 existed between 1053 and 969 BC (68.3%) or between 1083 and 953 BC (95.4%), meaning that it came to an end in the late first half of the tenth century BC. Stratum 8, in turn, existed between 988 and 939 BC (68.3%) or between 1009 and 918 BC, placing its destruction in the third or

fourth quarter of the tenth century BC. The excavators attribute the stratum's demise to Pharaoh Shoshenq (Ortiz and Wolff 2021, 235). Significantly, the subsequent Stratum 7 clearly began before the end of the tenth century BC: of the seven samples recovered, as many as four date to the tenth century, and three come from the transition between the tenth and ninth centuries BC, which rules out any attempts to push forward the dating of Stratum 8.

The above data clearly show that Stratum 8—with its casemate walls and six-chambered gate—existed between the end of the first half and the final quarter of the tenth century BC. This means that Finkelstein's proposals to attribute the destruction of Stratum 10A/IX to Shoshenq or to rulers of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and to date Stratum 8/VIII to the ninth century are incorrect. By contrast, Yadin's earlier proposal and Dever's (2017, 283) more recent suggestion to place Stratum 8/VIII in the mid-tenth century BC are well supported, as is the interpretation offered by the Tandy Institute team (Ortiz and Wolff 2021, 238).

3. Hazor

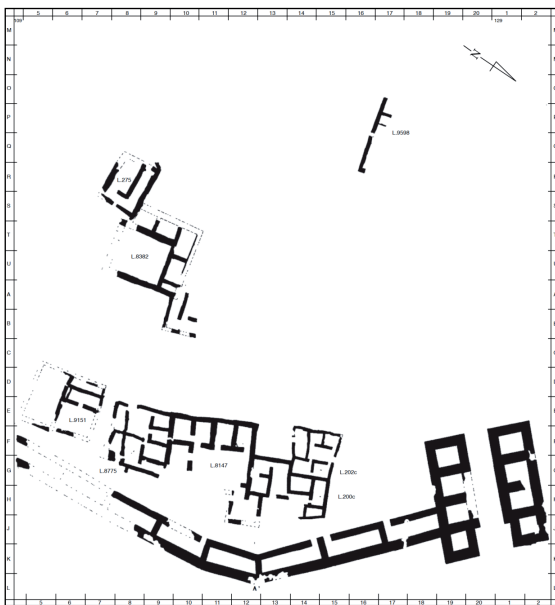


Figure 9. Casemate walls and six-chambered gate in Stratum Xa at Hazor (Ben-Tor et al. 2012, Plan 2–8)

3.1. History of the Excavations

The excavations at Hazor began with several trial trenches dug by John Garstang in 1928, but it was not until the mid-twentieth century that full-scale work at the site was started by Yigael Yadin, who directed the excavation seasons in 1955–58 and again in 1968. While the excavations covered more than ten areas in both the Upper and Lower City, significant portions of the site remained unexcavated, and Yadin planned additional seasons. Stratigraphic sequences were established for both parts of the site with the provision that since the two parts were not physically connected, the strata in each of them were numbered separately. The results of the first five seasons were published in five volumes titled *Hazor I* through *V*.

Since 1990, new excavations have been underway, conducted by a team from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in cooperation with various partners. Until 2023, the project was directed by Amnon Ben-Tor, and now it is led by Igor Kreimerman. Two volumes of reports have been published for the renewed excavations: *Hazor VI* (Ben-Tor et al. 2012) and *Hazor VII* (Ben-Tor et al. 2017), the former devoted to Iron Age finds and the latter to Bronze Age material.

The strata in the Upper City span the period from the Early Bronze Age to the Hellenistic era, whereas the finds from the Lower City are more limited chronologically as this area was inhabited only during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. In total, twenty-one strata have been identified in the Upper City and four in the Lower City.

3.2. Stratigraphy and Chronology

Stratum: Upper Tell	Stratum: Lower City	Archaeological Period	Absolute Dates (Cen- turies B.C.E.)	Archaeological Remains	Historical References
XXI	—	Early Bronze Age II–III	28th	residential units	
XX–XIX	—	Early Bronze Age III	27th–24th	residential units and monumen- tal structure on acropolis (?)	
XVIII	—	Intermediate Bronze Age	22nd–21st	residential units on acropolis	
pre-XVII	—	Middle Bronze Age IIA–B	18th	burials and structures on the upper tell	Egyptian Execration Texts
XVII	4	Middle Bronze Age IIB	18th–17th	erection of the earthen ram- part of the Lower City (?)	Mari archive
XVI	3	Middle Bronze Age IIB	17th–16th	both Upper and Lower Cities are inhabited, public struc- tures and domestic quarters	
XV	2	Late Bronze Age I	15th		Annals of New Kingdom pharaohs
XIV	1B	Late Bronze Age II	14th		Amarna archive
XIII	1A	Late Bronze Age II	13th		Papyrus Anastasi I
XII/XI	—	Iron Age I	11th	pits and meager architecture	
Xb–Xa IXb–IXa	—	Iron Age IIA	mid-10th– early 9th	six-chambered gate, casemate wall, domestic structures	united monarchy (Solomon?)
VIIIb–VIIIa VIIb–VIIa	—	Iron Age IIA–B	9th	casemate wall still used, administrative structures and domestic units	kingdom of Israel (Omride dynasty)
VIc–VIa Vc–Va	—	Iron Age IIC	8th	casemate wall still used, administrative structures and domestic units	kingdom of Israel: Jeroboam II–Pekah Assyrian destruction by Tiglath-pileser III
IV	—	Iron Age IIC	8th	sporadic settlement	post-Assyrian destruc- tion; Israelite (?) settle- ment
III	—	“Assyrian”	7th	governmental structures on and around the tell	
II	—	Persian period	5th–4th	citadel, tombs	
I	—	Hellenistic period	3rd–1st	citadel	

Figure 10. Stratigraphy of Hazor according to Ben-Tor’s team (Zuckerman 2013, 69)

The city flourished in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, reaching its peak in the fourteenth century BC—that is, in the Amarna period. Both the Lower City (Stratum 1A) and the Upper City (Stratum XIII) were destroyed in the

second half of the thirteenth century BC, as indicated by a fragmentary Egyptian inscription mentioning one of the commanders from the final years of the reign of Ramesses II (Kitchen 2003, 24; Ben-Tor 2023, 117). The site was virtually abandoned until the mid-eleventh century BC, the only traces of human presence consisting of hearth remains, pits, and fragments of low walls within the former citadel. Hence, it has even been suggested that the inhabitants of Strata XII through XI lived a semi-nomadic—or at least very modest—existence (Ben-Tor 2023, 127).

Further clarity came with the uncovering of Stratum X. Although this stratum covers only the western part of the Upper City, and the settlement was significantly smaller during that time than at the peak of its development in the Bronze Age, a number of notable structures were found, including casemate city walls and a six-chambered gate. All archaeologists agree that this stratum belongs to the Iron Age IIA. What remains unclear, however, is whether it comes from the beginning or the end of this subperiod and, consequently, how it should be dated in absolute terms. Both Yadin and Ben-Tor considered Stratum X to contain remains dating from the tenth century BC, which they described as “Solomonic.” Finkelstein, however, pushed this dating forward, linking it to the excavations at Megiddo: “Stratum X at Hazor should be dated to the time of Megiddo VA-IVB, or slightly earlier. In absolute dating this means late tenth or early ninth century B.C.E.” (Finkelstein 1999, 60). Yet in the same article, the proposed dating to the late tenth or early ninth century BC shifts unambiguously to the ninth century, since Stratum X at Hazor is attributed to the Omrides, and in subsequent publications, the reference to the tenth century no longer appears: “the date of Hazor X in the early 9th century is established” (Finkelstein 2000, 240). This prompted a response from Ben-Tor (2000; 2001), the director of the Hazor excavations, who strongly opposed shifting the date forward. His argument mainly relied on pottery, including vessels found in the lower courses of the casemate city wall during the new excavations and beneath the ninth-century “pillar building,” which was completely relocated during the later seasons. According to Ben-Tor (2013; 2023, 132–137), the pottery itself and the location in which it was found (the earliest deposits of Stratum X) point unequivocally to the mid-tenth century BC. Unfortunately, there is no radiocarbon data for Stratum X, and Ben-Tor was in fact skeptical about the accuracy of the method (2004, 46). As a result, the debate relies on relative chronology, which can be anchored in absolute dating only through comparison with other sites.

Consequently, both datings appear in the literature: the tenth century (e.g., Lee et al. 2013, 736) and the ninth century (e.g., Sergi 2023, 168).

4. Proposed Absolute Dating of Megiddo VA–IVB/H-5, Q-4; Gezer VIII/8; and Hazor X

The above findings indicate that absolute dating using radiocarbon methods is not possible with regard to Hazor. Moreover, pottery alone cannot be used as a decisive criterion for distinguishing between the Early Iron Age IIA (from the mid-tenth century BC onward) and Late Iron Age IIA (from the first half of the ninth century BC onward): “A more serious objection, made by many researchers, is that the pottery of the Iron Age IIA is basically the same for much of the 10th and 9th centuries” (Frese and Levy 2016, 190). Indeed, in the case of Hazor, scholars ultimately rely on parallel strata from other sites when proposing absolute dates. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that the dispute over the dating of Hazor X cannot be resolved solely on the basis of evidence from the site itself; rather, it is necessary to reference the dating of the strata cited as parallel, or contemporary: Megiddo VA–IVB and Gezer VIII/8.

In the case of Gezer, the situation is clear. The latest ^{14}C data published at the end of 2023 unequivocally indicate that Stratum VIII/8 should be dated to the tenth century BC. Specifically, its beginning should be placed in the first half of the tenth century BC, whereas its destruction most likely occurred toward the end of the third or at the beginning of the fourth quarter of the century (possibly during Shoshenq’s campaign). There is no sample from this stratum that points to the ninth century BC. Moreover, the sequence is consistent with the data from the adjacent strata: samples in the preceding Stratum 10A/X–IX date from the eleventh century BC, while in Stratum 9/IX–VIII, there is a single sample dating from the transition between the eleventh and tenth centuries BC. In the subsequent Stratum 7/VII, four samples still belong to the tenth century, and three more to the transition between the tenth and ninth centuries BC. In this case, the data point to an obvious conclusion: the fortifications at Gezer (i.e., the casemate walls and six-chambered gate) must originate from the tenth century BC. Moreover, since Hazor X is correlated on the basis of ceramics with Gezer VIII/8, this provides the first chronological “anchor” tying this stratum to the tenth century BC.

In the case of Megiddo, the difficulty lies in distinguishing the individual strata, since Finkelstein has recently proposed an increasingly elaborate subdivision into Early Iron Age IIA, Middle Iron Age IIA, and Late Iron Age IIA. In doing so, he constrains the dating of structures such as the casemate walls and the six-chambered gate exclusively to the Late Iron Age IIA, identifying this phase with Levels H-5 and Q-4 from the new excavations, which are meant to correspond to the former Stratum VA–IVB. As demonstrated above, such fragmentation of the Iron Age IIA is not supported by radiocarbon evidence. In reality, all strata assigned to the Early/Middle/Late Iron Age IIA periods contain samples from both the tenth and ninth centuries BC. The most important thing, however, is that even if one were to accept Finkelstein's proposal and assume that only Levels H-5 and Q-4 correspond to the strata with the casemate walls and the six-chamber gate, two of the six samples from these levels clearly point to the tenth century BC, while the remaining four point to the ninth century BC. This makes it impossible to date the construction of these fortifications to the reign of the Omrides. Rather, the conclusion is that this stratum originated around the mid-tenth century BC and continued into the third quarter of the ninth century. In this way, we obtain a second chronological “anchor,” which likewise requires us to date the parallel stratum, Hazor X, to the tenth century.

The above findings, based on radiocarbon dating, compel us to conclude that two strata (i.e., Gezer VIII/8 and Megiddo VA–IVB/H-5, Q-4) were established no later than the mid-tenth century BC. The first of these was destroyed still in the tenth century (ca. 925 BC?), while the second survived into the second half of the ninth century (ca. 835 BC?). On this basis, the parallel stratum at Hazor—with its casemate walls, six-chambered gate, and corresponding ceramic assemblage—must also be dated to the tenth century BC. In fact, assigning the construction of these strata to the tenth century is by no means an isolated position (see, e.g., Dever 2017, 273–274, 283; Faust and Farber 2025, 83).

5. Who Built the Six-Chambered Gates?

Having established when the defensive walls and six-chambered gates were built at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor, we can now ask the inevitable question, that is: who built them? Clearly, no inscription has survived that would resolve this issue for us, which means that we must infer the answer from the context. From the time of Yadin, who based his interpretation on the biblical reference in

1 Kings 9:15, scholars consistently identified Solomon as the builder of all three fortification systems. However, as noted in the introduction, this view began to be challenged in the 1990s, primarily by the Tel Aviv school of archaeology. Professor Finkelstein's central claim has been that the fortifications at all three sites should be attributed to the Omrides. Yet, as we have demonstrated, dating the structures to the 880s BC (the beginning of Omri's reign), and even more so to the mid-ninth century BC (the reign of Ahab), cannot be considered viable in light of the radiocarbon results, which (at least in the cases of Gezer and Megiddo) show that construction took place as early as the tenth century BC.

In view of the above, what are the options? Who could have built entire cities and their fortifications according to a similar architectural model? One possibility would be the earlier inhabitants of the cities: the Canaanites. All the cities in question had previously been inhabited by people conventionally referred to as Canaanites, but they suffered violent destruction as a result of an attack. Hazor (Stratum XIII in the Upper City and Stratum 1A in the Lower City) fell first, as early as the thirteenth century BC. Gezer (Stratum IX/10A) was destroyed in the early tenth century BC, and so was Megiddo (Stratum VIA). In the case of Hazor, the destruction of the city was followed by a settlement gap and then by a short-lived, sparsely built stratum (Hazor XII/XI, eleventh century BC). A similar pattern can be seen at Gezer (Stratum 9, first half of the tenth century BC) and at Megiddo (Stratum VB, mid-tenth century BC). These strata were not reconstructions of the earlier cities; rather, they were architecturally very limited, lacking fortifications or even larger buildings. In each case, and in particular at Megiddo, these strata transition without any traces of destruction into subsequent horizons that exhibit a completely different urban plan, with administrative buildings (palaces, storehouses), a redesigned entrance in the form of a six-chambered gate, and—in the cases of Gezer and Hazor—casemate city walls (Hazor X–IX, Gezer VIII/8, Megiddo VB–IVA/Q-4, H-5). Subsequent strata at each site follow this urban layout, even if the city was later destroyed in an attack (Hazor VIII through VII, Gezer VII/7 through VI/6, and Megiddo IVA). Moreover, in each of the cases, archaeologists have no reservations about identifying these later strata as Israelite. Thus, the archaeological evidence clearly indicates that a break in settlement continuity occurred between the cities identified as Canaanite and those with six-chambered gates dated to the tenth century BC. This is demonstrated by changes in city planning, the abandonment of earlier temples, and the adoption of a different type of fortification. These new patterns are repeated in subsequent strata that are unquestionably Israelite.

In summary, the archaeological data point to a connection between the tenth-century BC cities and their successors rather than their predecessors.

It is also worth noting that there is no trace in the written records of a hypothetical Canaanite “renaissance” in which Canaanites would have built new cities in the tenth century BC. In other words, no written account exists, whether biblical or extra-biblical, that would link these cities in the tenth century to any Canaanite rulers. By contrast, the biblical tradition explicitly associates their construction with Solomon. Even if this tradition were to be dated to a later period (as discussed below), it nevertheless exists—unlike the hypothetical “Canaanite option,” which is not supported by any written sources.

Further evidence against attributing the construction of fortified cities in the tenth century BC to local Canaanite rulers comes from the history of Khirbet Qeiyafa. Despite attempts to attribute the construction of this city to the Philistines or Canaanites (see, e.g., Na’aman 2008, 2–3; 2010; Finkelstein 2010, 17–19), it is evident that the city was inhabited by a Hebrew population, regardless of the debate as to whether it belonged to the territory of Benjamin (Finkelstein and Fantalkin 2012, 51–55; Finkelstein 2013, 56–58; Münnich 2014, 76–81; Faust and Farber 2025, 156–160, 312–313) or to that of Judah (all publications by the excavation director Yosef Garfinkel). Importantly, Khirbet Qeiyafa was established in the late eleventh or in the very early tenth century BC on previously unsettled land, which means that the Canaanites could not have built the city, because they simply had not been present in the area beforehand. Clearly, founding a new city from the ground up requires mobilizing a substantial labor force and considerable material resources—something that only a political entity is capable of accomplishing. Since neither the Philistines nor the Canaanites were responsible, the only remaining option is the Hebrews, who must already have been sufficiently organized to undertake the construction of a new city. Considering the fact that Khirbet Qeiyafa predates the six-chambered gates at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor, there can be no doubt that by the mid-tenth century, the Hebrews had established political structures advanced enough to build fortified cities with monumental gates.

To address another possibility, one cannot simply assume that the cities represented by Hazor X–IX, Gezer VIII/8, and Megiddo VB–IVA/Q-4, H-5 were built independently of one another by some local tribal leaders (judges). Such an assumption is not supported by any sources, including the biblical tradition. More importantly, however, the archaeological evidence strongly contradicts this view. All of the cities mentioned above emerged at roughly the same time and

share a very similar gate design with similarly dressed stones. This was already emphasized by Milson (1986), who noted that *all three* gates have passageways of exactly the same width, that is, 4.2 meters (i.e., approximately 8 cubits of approx. 0.53 meters¹⁷), and that the thickness of their outer walls is identical in every case: 1.6 meters (3 cubits). Internal dimensions are also very similar: the internal widths of the gates are 14.6 meters (28 cubits) at Megiddo, 15.1 meters (29 cubits) at Hazor, and 13.5 meters (26 cubits) at Gezer. Moreover, the internal lengths of the gates are also closely matched: 12.8 meters (24½ cubits) at Megiddo, 12.6 meters (24 cubits) at Hazor, with only the Gezer gate being somewhat shorter at 10.4 meters (19½ cubits). Likewise, the external dimensions show significant similarity: 17.8 × 20.1 meters (34 × 38½ cubits) at Megiddo, 18.3 × 20.7 meters (35 × 39½ cubits) at Hazor, and 16.7 × 16.4 meters (32 × 31 cubits) at Gezer. Additionally, the distance between the towers flanking the entrance is nearly identical at Megiddo and Hazor at 6.3 to 6.4 meters (12 cubits), and the thickness of the casemate walls adjacent to the gates at Gezer and Hazor is also identical: 5 meters (9½ cubits).

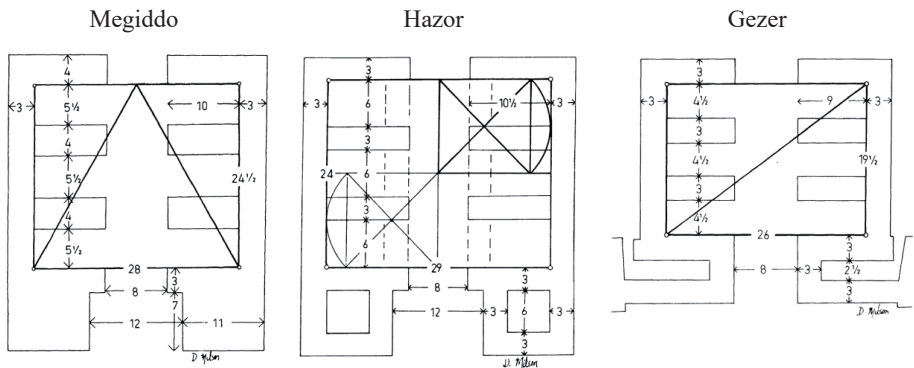


Figure 11. Plans of the six-chambered gates at Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer (Milson 1986, 89–91)

The assumption that structures so similar to one another could have been built independently within a relatively small geographic area at precisely the same time is rather unrealistic. Even if one were to argue that the six-chambered

¹⁷ All measurements are converted (with rounding) to cubits according to the system used by Milson (1986).

gate design was widespread at the time (which is not the case, since, for example, both gates at Khirbet Qeiyafa were four-chambered), the similarity in terms of dimensions is striking. This becomes particularly evident when the gates in question are compared with the six-chambered gate at Lachish. Built in the ninth century BC, the Lachish gate is significantly larger, measuring approximately 24.5×24.5 meters (47×47 cubits). The passageway also has a different width as the outer piers of the gate are slightly longer than the inner ones. The entrance and exit measure 5.2 meters (approx. 10 cubits) in width, while the internal distance between the piers is 6.2 meters ($11\frac{3}{4}$ cubits) (Ganor and Kreimerman 2023, 366). Apart from the dimensions, certain structural details (e.g., the length of the piers) are also different in comparison with the gates at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor. Finally, the Lachish gate contained a cultic installation with an altar (Ganor and Kreimerman 2019), which was not the case at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor. It is therefore evident that the slightly later gate at Lachish, despite also having six chambers, was built according to a different design and has noticeably different proportions.

The above findings strongly suggest that the gates at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor were built under the direction of a single center of political power that employed a unified architectural blueprint for defensive gateways. Since such a center could not have been established by the Philistines or Canaanites, the only remaining option is the Hebrews. Given the established dating of around the mid-tenth century BC, it could not have been the Omride dynasty of the Northern Kingdom. Likewise, it is not plausible to attribute the construction to the first ruler of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam, or to any of his short-lived successors before Omri, since there are no corresponding references in the biblical tradition (the only tradition that mentions Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, and Zimri at all). At the same time, it is difficult to overlook the fact that the biblical text, regardless of its date of composition, consistently attributes extensive building activity to Solomon, explicitly naming three cities: Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor.

Clearly, no definitive conclusion can be drawn until an extra-biblical source (e.g., an inscription) identifying the builder of the fortifications in these cities is discovered. Nonetheless, even with the current evidence, by far the most probable attribution for the construction of the fortifications at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor is to Solomon, and in light of the ^{14}C dating, attribution to the Omrides must be rejected.

6. Implications for the Dating of Biblical Texts

Archaeological evidence indicates that the strata Hazor X–IX, Gezer VIII/8, and Megiddo VB–IVA/Q-4, H-5, with their fortifications and six-chambered gates, should be dated to the mid-tenth century BC and that their only plausible builders in that period could be the rulers of the Hebrew monarchy.

When faced with the above conclusion, two approaches can be adopted. The first one is to assume that the biblical texts mentioning Solomon as the builder of Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor were composed late and are merely the product of (depending on the version adopted): (a) the Deuteronomist, (b) an author living in the Persian period, or (c) an author living in the Hellenistic period. According to this view, these texts reflect an attempt to project an image of ancient Israel's greatness for the political needs of the time. If that is the case, one must then accept the extraordinary coincidence that this hypothetical late author named three cities as having been built by Solomon and that it was in these very cities that fortifications from the mid-tenth century BC have now been discovered. In addition, one cannot argue that the late author simply listed cities with characteristic six-chambered gates, since there are two facts which contradict such an explanation.

First, within the area inhabited by the Hebrews, there was also a six-chambered gate in Lachish, and yet this city is not mentioned. In fact, the Lachish gate was larger than the gates at Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo, making it the more logical choice if the late author had merely wished to emphasize the grandeur of a semi-mythical monarch.

Second, even if one assumes that the biblical text was composed late, one must take into account the fact that the six-chambered gates and fortifications—or at least their visible ruins—were still visible at the time. After all, it is difficult to imagine that the biblical author would select three cities at random. Rather, he must have seen something in these cities that prompted him to associate them with his vision of a great Israel.

At Megiddo, the earlier six-chambered gate (Gate 2156) was replaced in the later Stratum IVA (likely between 835 and 732 BC) by a smaller four-chambered gate (Gate 500), and in Stratum III (the Assyrian period, 732 to ca. 650 BC)—by a two-chambered gate. Stratum II (late seventh century BC) and Stratum I (Persian period) represent a time of the city's decline and

disappearance, with no visible traces of the earlier monumental structures remaining on the surface afterwards.

The situation was similar at Gezer. In place of the six-chambered gate of Stratum VIII/8, a smaller four-chambered gate was built in Stratum VII/7 (ninth century BC) and remained in use in Stratum VI/6 (until the Assyrian invasion of 732 BC). In the poorly preserved Stratum V/5 (likely lasting until the Babylonian conquest of 587/6 BC), a two-chambered gate existed but was not rebuilt after its destruction. In the Persian period (Stratum IV/4), there are no significant architectural remains, and the site appears to have been virtually abandoned. Gezer was only rebuilt in the Hellenistic period, mainly under the Hasmoneans, and while the city gate was reused at that time, its width was reduced.

Finally, the fortifications of Hazor, together with the six-chambered gate, remained in constant use until the Assyrian conquest of 732 BC, which destroyed Stratum V. The subsequent Stratum IV contains only sparse traces of resettlement attempts made by those who survived the attack. In Stratum III (seventh century BC), an Assyrian fortress was constructed on the site of the former citadel, while most of the city remained abandoned, along with the ruins of its walls and gate. The same situation is visible in Stratum II (Persian period), in which burials begin to appear within the city. In Stratum I (Hellenistic period), only a fortress on the western edge of the Upper City was in use.

The above evidence indicates that the reference to the construction of the city fortifications at Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor in 1 Kings 9:15 could not have originated in the Persian period, since at that time, all three sites were either abandoned or reduced to impoverished villages. Few remains of their former grandeur were likely visible on the surface, with the exception of a small stronghold on the edge of the former city at Hazor. The Hellenistic period is an even less plausible option since Megiddo no longer existed at all. At Hazor, a small citadel continued to function, and only Gezer fared slightly better from the second century BC onward. This means that the text referring to the construction of fortifications in these cities could not have been composed later than before 732 BC, when all three sites were devastated during Tiglath-Pileser III's campaign. Thus, if one assumes that 1 Kings 9:15 was written as an attempt to create a legendary, imperial vision of Solomon's old kingdom, such an attempt cannot be dated later than 732 BC—and even then, one must take into account the fact that the gates at Megiddo and Gezer had already been rebuilt. Accepting this assumption would also require overlooking the fact that the author of the text—presumably writing in the Southern Kingdom as it is difficult to imagine

a scribe in Samaria glorifying Solomon of Jerusalem—lists three cities located in the Northern Kingdom while omitting any urban centers in the South, including Lachish. This in itself demands some reflection.

All the above considerations point toward a second, alternative proposal. It appears that 1 Kings 9:15 is not the work of a late author “inventing” Solomon’s greatness for his contemporary political purposes, but rather a text that preserves an older tradition reaching back to the tenth century BC. This would explain the striking convergence between the biblical text and the archaeological evidence, which indeed points to the construction of fortifications with characteristic six-chambered gates in the mid-tenth century BC. This implies that in shaping his account of Israel’s past, the Deuteronomist drew upon earlier records reaching back to the time of the United Monarchy, thus acting more as an editor than as an author. The above proposal significantly affects not only the dating but also the historical reliability of the text. It seems that 1 Kings 9:15 contains early material dating back to the tenth century BC, later incorporated into the Deuteronomistic History. Moreover, this material appears to be credible since it mentions the construction of fortifications in three cities (Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor), which is corroborated by the archaeological evidence.

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