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**YOSEF GARFINKEL AND SAAR GANOR, KHIRBET  
QEIYafa: SHA'ARAYIM**

## KHIRBET QEYAF A: SHA' ARAYIM

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### 1. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Khirbet Qeiyafa is a 2.3 hectare site, surrounded by massive fortifications of megalithic stones that remain standing to a height of 2–3 meters. The site is located in the western part of the high Shephelah (Israel map grid 14603 12267), atop a hill that border the Elah Valley on the north. This is a key strategic location in the biblical kingdom of Judah, on the main road from Philistia and the Coastal Plain to Jerusalem and Hebron in the hill country. Two kilometers to the west lies Tell Zakariyeh, commonly identified as biblical Azekah and two and a half kilometers to the southeast is Khirbet Shuwayka, commonly identified with biblical Socoh.

A number of European explorers visited Khirbet Qeiyafa during the 19th century: V. Guerin, C.R. Conder and H.H. Kitchener. During the 20th century, the site was neglected; it is not referred to in the works of the leading scholars in the field of biblical historical geography, such as W.F. Albright, B. Mazar, Y. Aharoni and Z. Kallai. In the last 20 years, archaeological surveys of the Shephelah region, conducted by Y. Dagan and Z. Greenhut, revisited the site (for further information and references see Garfinkel and Ganor 2008).

The site aroused interest in 2005 when Saar Ganor noted impressive Iron Age structures under later remains. The authors examined the site in 2007 and in 2008 conducted a six-week excavation season on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. During these two seasons nearly 600 sq. m of an Iron Age IIA city were unearthed in the western part of the site, in Area B where a four chamber gate, casemate city wall and two buildings were found (Fig. 1). A unique find here was an ostrakon, a five-line inscription written in ink on a pottery sherd. The Iron Age IIA remains were founded on bedrock and covered by a thin Hellenistic layer. No superimposed Iron Age living floors or walls were found at the site, indicating a single phase of Iron Age settlement lasting for a short period of time, probably not more than 20 years.

The expedition undertook additional field work during the first week of November 2008. A second gate has been identified in the eastern part of the city (Area C). The front side of the gate is composed of two monumen-

tal blocks of stone, one on each side (Fig. 2). Each stone has an estimated weight of 10 tons. This is the most massive gate ever found in any biblical city to date. The enormous efforts invested in the gate's construction far exceed technical requirements and was clearly intended as a statement of power and authority. The eastern gate, facing Jerusalem, was the main entrance to the city.

Khirbet Qeyafa is the only site in the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel with two gates. Even cities three or four times its size, such as Lachish and Megiddo, have only a single gate. This unique feature provides a clear indication of the site's identity as biblical Sha'arayim, a place name that means "two gates" in Hebrew.

There has been broad speculation over the years regarding the biblical name of Khirbet Qeyafa, none based upon solid evidence. The name Sha'arayim has been proposed twice: once during the 2008 excavation season by David Adams of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis; and in mid-September by Anson Rainey of Tel Aviv University. On those occasions, the existence of a second gate was not yet known.

The dating of the Iron IIA city of Khirbet Qeyafa is based on relative and absolute chronology. The relative chronology is early Iron IIA, as indicated by the pottery. The characteristic bell-shaped Philistine bowls, known in large quantities from Tell Qasile Stratum X (Mazar 1985, Fig. 34:1–10) and Tell Miqne Stratum IV (Ortiz 2000) are entirely absent. Thus, the site cannot be dated to the late Iron Age I. Currently there is a debate over whether Iron Age I ended ca. 1000 BC or 920/900 BC (Mazar and Bronk Ramsey 2008; Finkelstein 1996; Sharon et al. 2007). On the basis of our current knowledge, Khirbet Qeyafa cannot be dated to the 11th century BC.

Absolute dating at Khirbet Qeyafa is based on four burnt olive pits, measured at Oxford University. The results of the first two samples were sent to us on 6 October 2008 and the other two samples on 7 November 2008:

- OxA-19425      Qeyafa 5      2851±31
- OxA-19426      Qeyafa 6      2837±29
- OxA-19588      Qeyafa 7      2799±31
- OxA-19589      Qeyafa 1      2883±29

The average of these four measurements, as provided by Christopher Bronk Ramsey of Oxford University is: 2844±15 (Fig. 3). After calibration the dating is 1026–975 BCE (59.6%) or 1051–969 BCE (77.8%). As Khirbet Qeyafa is an Iron Age IIA site, we are left with a dating post-1000 BCE, that is, 1000–975 BCE (59.6%) or 1000–969 BCE (77.8%). These dates fit the time of King David (ca. 1000–965 BCE) and are too early for King Solomon (ca. 965–930 BCE).

## 2. SHA'ARAYIM IN THE BIBLICAL TRADITION

Sha'arayim is mentioned three times in the Bible:

- 1) In the city list of the tribe of Judah it appears after Socoh and

Azekah (Josh 15:36). As mentioned above, Socoh is located 2.5 km to the southeast of Khirbet Qeiyafa and Azekah 2 km to the west of Khirbet Qeiyafa. Thus, the geographical location of Sha'arayim in the Elah Valley region suits its location in the biblical list.

- 2) After David killed Goliath, in the Elah Valley, between Socoh and Azekah, the Philistines escaped through the “road of Sha'arayim” (1 Sam 17:52). In this case, again, Sha'arayim is mentioned in closed proximity to the Elah Valley, Socoh and Azekah.
- 3) In the city list of the tribe of Simeon, Sha'arayim is mentioned as one of the cities “until the reign of David” (1 Ch 4:31–32).

One may claim that there were two cities called Sha'arayim, one near the Elah Valley and the other in the Negev. However, the appearance of Sha'arayim in this list is quite problematic. There are three parallel texts for the city list of the Negev and the tribe of Simeon: Joshua 15, Joshua 19 and 1 Chronicles 4. In the same location in each list a different name appears: Shilhim in Josh 15:32, Sharuhin in Josh 19:6, and Sha'arayim in 1 Chr 4:31. These changes are usually interpreted as scribe errors since all three names are begin with the letter shin. Sha'arayim does not appear in the two other lists, so there was, in fact, no second city with this name in the Negev.

Generally neglected by scholars is the association of the closing words: “until the reign of David” only with the Sha'arayim version and immediately adjacent to this name. Apparently, the text of 1 Chr 4:31–32: “Sha'arayim. These were their towns until the reign of David” is a remnant of a list, now lost, that included cities from the period before David's regency.

There has been speculation over the years regarding the location of biblical Sha'arayim (for a survey of views, see Rainey 1982), though lacking a solid base. Very important to us is the association of Sha'arayim with King David twice in the biblical tradition. Sha'arayim is not mentioned in conjunction with any other later First Temple period tradition. This observation is consistent with the archaeological and radiometric data that indicate a single-phase settlement in the early 10th century BCE at Khirbet Qeiyafa.

### 3. DISCUSSION

The excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa, and the site's clear identification with biblical Sha'arayim have opened new horizons for understanding certain aspects of the 10th century BCE in biblical Judah.

#### *3.1 CHRONOLOGY*

When did the transition from Iron Age I to Iron Age II occur? The traditional view, now designated the “high chronology,” dates this process to ca. 1000 BCE (Mazar and Bronk Ramsey 2008). Advocates of a “low chronology” place the end of Iron Age I at ca. 920 BCE (Finkelstein 1996), and an “ultra-low chronology” even descends to ca. 900 BCE (Sharon et al. 2007). The four new C14 results from Khirbet Qeiyafa clearly indicate that the

“low chronology” and the “ultra-low chronology” are unacceptable. They appear to be based upon samples taken from more advanced stages of Iron Age IIA, but not its very beginning. Indeed, at Megiddo the earliest Iron Age IIA phase, Stratum Vb, was never dated radiometrically.

Sha'arayim is associated twice with King David, in both cases before he became king. As the radiometric dates from Khirbet Qeiyafa are as early as 1026 BCE (59.6%) or 1051 BCE (77.8%), one is left to wonder if the city was not constructed in the late 11th century BCE. The combination of the biblical text and the radiometric dates supports an “ultra high” chronology for the transition from Iron I to Iron II, ca. 1015–1010 BCE.

### ***3.2 SETTLEMENT PATTERN.***

What was the settlement pattern of the early Iron Age IIA in Judah? Traditional scholarship related the building of fortified cities to the 10th century BCE (Yadin 1958; Mazar 1990). On the other hand, advocates of the low chronology date the same building activities to the 9th century BCE. Herzog and Singer-Avitz have suggested that Iron Age IIA should be subdivided into two phases in the south (2004). In the early Iron IIA they place the following settlements: Arad XII, Beersheba VII, Lachish V, Batash IV, and Masos II. These are not fortified cities; rather, enclosures with houses arranged on the site periphery. According to their analysis, only in late Iron Age IIA, around the mid-9th century BCE, were fortified sites constructed for the first time: Arad XI, Beersheba VI, Lachish IV.

However, Khirbet Qeiyafa is surrounded by a massive casemate city wall, 700 m long and 4 m wide. It is constructed of megalithic stones, quite often reaching a weight of 4–5 tons apiece, and in the eastern gate, even ca. 10 tons each. Our calculation suggests that 200,000 tons of stone were required for the construction of these fortifications. A four-chambered gate, its upper part constructed of ashlar, was located and excavated in the western part of the city. It is clearly a fortified town rather than a rural settlement.

### ***3.3 POLITICAL ORGANIZATION.***

What was the political structure in the 10th century BCE? The traditional view points to a single powerful centralized authority in Jerusalem that controlled the entire country (Mazar 1990; Stager 2003). Others have proposed local autonomous organizations (Finkelstein 1996; Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004). The massive construction of the Khirbet Qeiyafa city wall, which required 200,000 tons of stone, and the massive eastern gate of the city with two stones of ca. 10 tons each, proclaim the power and authority of a centralized political organization, namely a state.

### ***3.4 THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE.***

What is the historical value of the biblical narrative concerning the period of the United Monarchy? In the early days of research it was accepted as an accurate historical account (see, e.g., B. Mazar 1986; Yadin 1958). Since the 1980s serious doubts have been raised regarding this tradition, suggesting

that it is merely a literary compilation dating from centuries later (see, e.g., Davies 1992; Thompson 1999). King David was, according to this view, a purely mythological figure. Although the inscription on the Tel Dan stele clearly indicates that he was indeed a historical figure (Biran and Naveh 1995), it is unclear if he was the ruler of a large empire or a small, dusty “cow town.”

The geopolitical circumstances in the Elah Valley during the late 11th–early 10th centuries are quite clear. The mighty Philistine city state of Gath, ca. 30 hectares in area, was located only 12 km downstream from Khirbet Qeiyafa. This was a hostile border area, where the Kingdoms of Gath and Jerusalem had constant millenary conflicts. The story of David and Goliath is just one of many such “warrior tales” listed in 2 Sam 21:15–22 and 1 Ch 11:11–27. Even if many of these traditions are folkloristic in character, their chronology and geography bear historical memories. As by the end of the 9th century BCE Gath disappeared as a political power, these traditions must have been created at an earlier time.

The biblical text, the single-phase city at Khirbet Qeiyafa, and the radiometric dates each stands alone as significant evidence clearly indicating that the biblical tradition does bear authentic geographical memories from the 10th century BCE Elah Valley. There is no ground for the assumption that these traditions were fabricated in the late 7th century BCE or in the Hellenistic period.

Furthermore, the five-line inscription uncovered at Khirbet Qeiyafa clearly indicates that writing was practiced in this region. Thus, historical memory could have been passed down for generations, until finally being summarized as the biblical text.

**FIGS. 1–3**

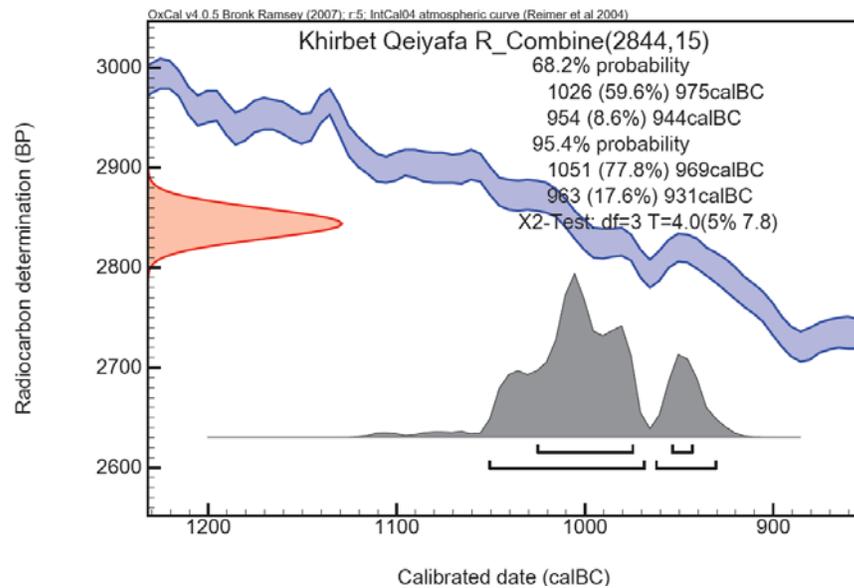
- 1) Aerial photo of the western gate of Khirbet Qeiyafa. Hellenistic walls block the gate opening and the southern chambers (photographed by Sky Balloon).



- 2) The eastern gate of Khirbet Qeiyafa, with two megalithic stones at each side. The center is blocked with the later Hellenistic wall (photographed by Y. Garfinkel).



- 3) Calibrated graph of the combined four radiometric datings from Khirbet Qeiyafa (courtesy of C. Bronk Ramsey).



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