Iron Age Jerusalem: Temple-Palace, Capital City

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INTRODUCTION

The debate over the status of Jerusalem of the United Monarchy has been of major interest to many scholars.1 Many of these studies focus on the presence or absence of archaeological finds. According to some, during the tenth–nineteenth centuries B.C.E., the city was only a small settlement.2 Others read the finds, limited as they are, as indicative of the presence of a large capital.3 A third opinion explains the lack of finds in Jerusalem through anthropological or ethno-archaeological justification, claiming that a site that is designated as a capital may be unsettled,4 while a fourth opinion claims that there was only a rural settlement in Jeru-
salem during that period.5 There is a general assumption that the portrayal of Jerusalem in the Biblical record is an attempt by a late editor to assign early importance to the capital city that arose only later.6

In this paper we will suggest another reconstruction of the city’s history during the tenth–nineteenth centuries B.C.E. We will propose that Jerusalem indeed served as the capital city of the United Monarchy and later of Judah, without necessarily leaving impressive archaeological remains. It will be shown that this explanation is in complete accordance with the Biblical record. Some scholars have already referred to Jerusalem in the early stages as an

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2. E.g., Ussishkin, “Solomon’s Jerusalem.”
3. E.g., A. Mazar, “Half Full.”
4. E.g., Faust, “United Monarchy and Anthropology.”

ideological/royal center, only later becoming the true capital of a state in the eighth century B.C.E. (see references above in n. 1). We suggest that already in the days of the United Monarchy, Jerusalem served as the capital of the state. As a capital, its sole function was as a royal-cultic center, purposely separated from a large population of residents, with the specific intention of strengthening the status of the monarchy. The need to view capital cities as solely large (residential) cities is a reflection of modern thought and not of the Biblical record, which makes no mention of residential and related construction for non-royal populations in the capital.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Few architectural remains in Jerusalem have been unequivocally dated to the period of the United Monarchy. It is widely agreed that the stepped stone structure, discovered by Kenyon and Shiloh,7 served as the base for a larger superstructure, and is of monumental proportions. The dating of this structure has been debated, with various portions of the structure being dated to different periods by various scholars.8 Other than the stepped stone structure, several other meager architectural elements have been found in the City of David,9 including traces of a larger building recently discovered by E. Mazar, which she interprets as a palace dating to the tenth century.10 In addition to architecture, small finds—particularly pottery—dating to the tenth century (according to the high chronology) have been found scattered in various areas of the excavations.11 While the pottery is useful in determining the presence of human activity at the site, it cannot attest to the size or importance of the city during this time.12

THE DEBATE OVER THE STATUS OF JERUSALEM

Based on the textual evidence, along with the limited archaeological finds mentioned above, and in conjunction with the fact that the site is one of the most heavily excavated in the world, scholars have suggested multiple interpretations of Jerusalem’s status from the time of the United Monarchy until the days of Hezekiah. The “half-full” approach proposed by A. Mazar contends that Jerusalem served as the center of the United Monarchy, even though it was not necessarily a large city. According to this view, in David’s time the city

8. The dating of the stepped stone structure is of little relevance to this paper, and therefore will not be discussed. For a recent survey on the subject, and references therein, see A. Mazar, “Half Full”; A. Maier, “Jerusalem before King David: An Archaeological Survey from Protohistoric Times to the End of the Iron Age,” in The History of Jerusalem: The Biblical Period, ed. S. Ahiyau and A. Mazar (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2000), 33–65 (Hebrew).
was located on the hill above the Gihon spring, and only later, during the Solomonic era, did it expand northward to include the Temple mount.\textsuperscript{13} The “half-empty” approach stresses the lack of archaeological remains and bureaucratic finds related to administrative/bureaucratic activity, while questioning the historicity of the Biblical narrative, claiming that Jerusalem was at best a very small site but certainly not an administrative center.\textsuperscript{14} The “minimalist” approach takes this one step further, claiming that the United Monarchy and the Judean state until the eighth century (and to a certain extent even beyond) was a figment of the late Biblical composer’s imagination.\textsuperscript{15}

Several anthropological and ethnoarchaeological approaches have been used in order to better understand the status of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah from its establishment through the eighth century B.C.E. One approach sees Jerusalem as the seat of a chiefdom (Judah), making Jerusalem a small provincial town that served as its center.\textsuperscript{16} Jamieson-Drake proposed that the absence of larger settlements in the area, along with the lack of settlement hierarchy and script and bureaucratic evidence, all point to a system of state-level politics. Faust compared Jerusalem to other empires, such as those of the Mongols and the Zulu, in which a capital city was either not established at all or only a small capital existed, the empire being comprised mostly of empty space.\textsuperscript{17} A different point of view emphasizes the formation of the Judean state from its border towns inward. While the evidence from Jerusalem is limited, the appearance of various cities along the western frontier indicates that a central Judean government did exist, with its capital in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{18}

Finally, a more historically oriented approach was taken by Na‘aman, who compared Jerusalem of the tenth century to that of the fourteenth century B.C.E.\textsuperscript{19} In the fourteenth century Jerusalem was a highland stronghold which dominated a pastoral population in the hill country and Shephelah. Yet in Jerusalem, there is almost no archaeological evidence dating to the fourteenth century. This is to be explained by the destruction or obliteration of the earlier remains by later building activity and by the fact that the city of this period is located in areas that have not yet been excavated. This led Na‘aman to conclude that Jerusalem of the tenth century was originally the center of a kingdom made up of pastoral settlements in the Hill Country and only later expanded to the Shephelah, just as fourteenth-century Jerusalem had been the center of a state in the same region.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT

Given the lack of archaeological evidence and extra-Biblical records, the Hebrew Bible serves as the major source for the reconstruction of the history of the United Monarchy, despite its religious agenda. In order to use such a source, caution must be exercised, yet we believe that this source should not be dismissed as unreliable.\textsuperscript{20} There is little doubt

\textsuperscript{13} A. Mazar, “Half Full,” 18–19.
\textsuperscript{14} Ussishkin, “Solomon’s Jerusalem.”
\textsuperscript{17} Faust, “United Monarchy and Anthropology,” 27–29.
\textsuperscript{18} Bunimovitz and Lederman, “Jerusalem and Beth-Shemesh,” 43–45.
\textsuperscript{19} Na‘aman, “Contribution of the Amarna Letters.”
that the Hebrew Bible was edited at a later stage, with the purpose of serving a religious agenda, but as others have pointed out, the Hebrew Bible includes earlier traditions and allusions to historical events that took place well before the text was composed and edited.  

Several examples can be mentioned: Shishak's campaign in the late tenth century B.C.E., the narratives relating to the role of the city of Gath as a major Philistine center, and the destruction of Gath by Haza'el king of Aram in the late ninth/early eighth century B.C.E., a fact mentioned by the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 12:17) and supported by the archaeological excavations at the site. Na'aman argues that administrative writing was used during the tenth century in Jerusalem, yet he views reports of Solomon's feats of building as unrealistic, being rather an attempt of the Deuteronomistic editor to compare Solomon to the great kings of his own time, although possibly based on ancient sources. Yet even if the Biblical accounts of David's conquests or Solomon's building activities are exaggerated, there is no evidence that they were completely fabricated. Furthermore, from the examples given above, there is good reason to assume that a historical core (some of which dates to the tenth century) underlies certain passages in the Biblical account. Below we undertake a review of the Biblical sources dealing with Jerusalem. As shall be seen, none of these references present Jerusalem as a large residential capital city.

CHOOSING JERUSALEM

According to Judges 1:8, the tribe of Judah conquered Jerusalem, yet this contradicts other passages, like verse 21, where it is suggested that the city fell within the territory allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, even though its members did not conquer Jebusite Jerusalem. That the city was not captured by the Israelite tribes is further stressed by the account in Joshua 15:63, where this is once again noted. Similar testimony appears in the tale of the concubine at Gibeah, where Jerusalem is termed a "city of foreigners" (Judges 19:12). This is followed by the conquest of the city at the hands of David, as attested in 2 Samuel 5:6–10. It is interesting to note that David had already been acting as king of Judah for seven years prior to his taking of Jerusalem, having ruled earlier from Hebron (2 Samuel 5:3). According to 2 Samuel 5:5, his rule over all of Israel was only established upon his move to Jerusalem, thereby stressing the importance of Jerusalem's neutrality in its establishment as a cornerstone of the United Monarchy.


26. The subject of the reliability of the Biblical accounts is very complicated and has been dealt with extensively by other scholars. A recounting of the debate in this paper would be superfluous. We will simply state that in any case, the Hebrew Bible's description of Jerusalem does not depict a large residential capital and therefore should not be used as a defense of the minimalist approach.
It has already been noted that David chose Jerusalem for its location on the border between Judah and the northern tribes. It is commonly attested that when two separate entities are involved in a merger (such as ritual or administrative unification), the location of such activity is a neutral zone, on the border between the two entities. For example, the site of Ancient Olympia, the location of the Olympic Games and a cultic center for the worship of Zeus, is located in a remote area. In choosing its capital city, the United States determined that it should be in a territory between, yet not belonging to, two states, i.e., a border region. The choice of Jerusalem can also be seen as an attempt to choose a new site, unconnected to past traditions, in order to underline the unique and divine appointment of the Davidic dynasty.

This is evident from the fact that prior to its establishment as the capital, Jerusalem is not mentioned among the ritual places of the tribes (such as Shiloh, Beth El, Dan, Elon Moreh, Shechem), or as a center of political action (Hebron, Gibeah, Shiloh). Among David’s attempts to unify the two entities and strengthen his dynastic claim, one can point to the bringing of the ark into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). Traditionally, the ark was holy to all the tribes and kept in Shiloh. Its move to Jerusalem indicates an attempt to establish the city as holy for all. Additionally, with Jerusalem situated in a distant and high location, this further contributed to the site’s importance and holiness. The separation of temple and palace from the population further contributed to the holy status of the site. Such a separation of the temple for the purpose of joint worship is seen in the southern Levant in the second millennium B.C.E. (e.g., Nahariyah, the Bull Site, Mount Gerizim, Amman) as well as elsewhere (e.g., Late Bronze Age Alalakh), where temples were set apart from the broader community. Furthermore, it has been noted that placing a temple in a remote location, topographically difficult to reach (e.g., a mountaintop) adds to its perception as holy, since

32. Zorn’s suggestion, “Burials of the Judean Kings,” that David chose the site of Jerusalem as his capital seems erroneous. First there is no evidence of a “royal Canaanite center” at Jerusalem after the fourteenth century, well prior to the birth of David. Furthermore, there is nothing to suggest that David made any effort to include “Canaanite” elements within the Israelite or Judean population. While there is little doubt that the tribes included numerous people whose ancestors may have once called themselves Canaanites, these people had already been assimilated into the Israelites, so that there would have been no need to appease them.
it represents the holier status as a high-place. A good example of the isolation and elevation of a religious site is found at Tepe Nišš-I Jān, Iran, where the religious site was built on an isolated artificial mound.39 Thus, by creating an inhospitable environment for the Israelite capital, a heightened sense of importance was instilled in the eyes of the people, whereby the king could bolster his prominence.40

JERUSALEM’S DEVELOPMENT

The evidence for David’s building activities is solely based on the Hebrew Bible.41 According to it, David settled within the “Stronghold of Zion” (2 Samuel 5:9), a building which existed already prior to his arrival. David named the city after himself: “The City of David” (2 Samuel 5:9) a practice that was common in ancient times.42 For example, Sargon II named the city of Kār-Sharrukin after himself.43 The use of this new name for Jerusalem is attested in the accounts of the burials of the kings of Judah, where the expression “and was buried with his fathers in the City of David, his father” was utilized until the days of Hezekiah, after which it is no longer found. The use of this expression is not insignificant, but suggests that Jerusalem was exclusively a dynastic city.

Soon thereafter, David had a house built for him by Phoenicians (2 Samuel 5:11). Since such a use of group labor in building monumental architecture is often used in establishing social hierarchy,44 it would seem that this was David’s intention in building his palace with a Phoenician workforce. Although David hoped to build God’s house and even made plans for it, he never succeeded in so doing (2 Samuel 7:6–7; 1 Kings 5:17).

The Biblical account of David’s building activity includes the palace and the intended temple (as evidenced by his bringing the ark to the site). There is no reason to assume that the “City of David” had to have been a large residential capital. It seems that only building activities linked directly to the establishment of David’s power as monarch were undertaken there, since the city was the location of the central governing body for the area and of the royal ritual site. Such a phenomenon is well documented during the rise of political forces, as economic or political elites try to appropriate religious authority in order to strengthen their claim to privilege.45

The accounts of David’s son Solomon deal quite extensively with his building activities in Jerusalem and elsewhere. In Jerusalem, Solomon built a royal complex that included the temple, his palace, and other royal buildings (1 Kings 6–7).46 It is important to note that

41. But see E. Mazar, “Did I Find King David’s Palace?”
44. Wason, Archaeology of Rank, 146.
all of the building activities in Jerusalem were of royal and ritual character. There is no mention of residential or related construction for a non-royal population. This is in contrast to Solomon’s building activities at other sites, where it is mentioned that he built “cities” (Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Lower Beth Horon, Ba’alath, Tamar) and “store-cities and cities for his chariots” (1 Kings 9:14–20), and not specific royal buildings. It therefore seems that building activity in Jerusalem in the days of the United Monarchy was exclusively for king and cult.

Furthermore, the description of the Jerusalem temple distinguishes it from other known Iron Age cultic sites. For example, the temple in Arad seems to have had a completely different function, directed more towards the popular cult, while the Jerusalem temple reflected a more elite, royal function. The plan of the temple in Jerusalem paralleled temples in Syria, where they were an expression of the local elite’s high status. The incorporation of the central cultic site within the palace is a major step in the attempt to strengthen the hold of the royal family, since it underscores the divine right of the king to rule, and portrays the king as God’s chosen ruler.

Among many cultures chiefs’ houses are closely connected with the main religious structure. In situations where the temple and palace are not physically linked, the ruling class has found other ways of connecting themselves with the cultic center in order to prove their link to the gods. At Amarna, the relationship between temple and palace was stressed through ritual procession. The pharaonic state used the shrine-centered settlement for its own interests by placing governmental stelae at the door of the temple. The Hebrew Bible stresses Jeroboam’s need to link himself to cultic ritual by adopting and annexing existing sacred sites with traditional Israelite roots (2 Kings 12:26–29). Therefore, it would seem that both David and Solomon deliberately kept Jerusalem uniquely royal and ritually elitist, holding the temple and themselves at a distance from the population by intentionally not incorporating existing or developing residential areas, thereby strengthening their right to kingship.

THE CHANGING OUTLOOK ON JERUSALEM

In the eighth century B.C.E., Jerusalem expanded to the Western Hill, becoming not only a royal-ritual site but a residential site as well. This is attested in both the archaeological record and in the Biblical sources. The account of Hezekiah’s building activity includes

48. W. Wason, Archaeology of Rank, 145.
the construction of a city wall and a water system (2 Kings 20:20) and the annexation of private houses (indicating that such houses were located in Jerusalem) in order to build the wall (Isaiah 22:8–11). Furthermore, the burial expression used prior to Hezekiah’s day, “and was buried with his fathers in the City of David, his father” (e.g., 1 Kings 15:24), is replaced by “slept with his fathers” (2 Kings 20:21) and later by “buried in the garden of Uzza” (2 Kings 21:18). This suggests a change in the city’s status—from an exclusively royal estate (including the governmental bureaucratic institutions and officers) to a city with both governmental and residential functions. Similarly, the latest Biblical reference to Jerusalem as the “City of David” appears in Isaiah 22:9, reflecting the situation in the late eighth century. Based on this literary evidence, it seems that Jerusalem did not continue to be exclusively the seat of the royal dynasty, as implied in the Biblical expression “the City of David” that was used earlier.

**DISCUSSION**

As seen above, the presumption that Jerusalem must have been a large city in the tenth century in order to function as a capital is more a result of modern conceptions of capital cities than a conclusion to be drawn from the Biblical account. The building activities of David and Solomon in Jerusalem revolved solely around royal and elite ritual undertakings. That there is no mention of non-royal residential buildings is not a result of their insignificance to the Biblical editor, especially since he mentions them in connection with other cities (2 Kings 9:15–19). Jerusalem of the tenth–ninth centuries served as the political and ritual center of the kingdom.

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52. While Zorn, “Burials of the Judean Kings,” distinguishes between the locations of the burials, claiming that from the time of Hezekiah the Judean kings adopted the Assyrian custom of burying within the royal complex, we believe that the terms should not be taken literally, but rather suggest a change in attitude towards Jerusalem. However, even if the location of the burials did change, it still reflects the altered attitude of the Judean monarch, who saw less need to assert himself as the rightful ruler, and more cause to link himself with rising powers.

53. There are three exceptions: Nehemiah 3:15; 12:37; and 2 Chronicles 33:14. The two references in Nehemiah clearly point to an area in the city that was called “the City of David” (probably where the royal Judean administrative center was located during the late Iron Age), and not to the city of Jerusalem in and of itself. Furthermore, since Nehemiah and Chronicles were written during the Persian period, it can be explained that during this period of return to Zion, emphasis was placed on the link between the city’s rebuilding and that of the United Monarchy.


center first of the United Monarchy, then of the Judean Kingdom. Jerusalem functioned as the capital not only for the rural and pastoral population, but also for cities in Judah, such as Beth-Shean Stratum 3, Arad Strata XII–XI, Lachish Levels V–IV, and Beersheba Stratum VII–V. As well as for Gezer, Megiddo, and Hazor in Israel. It underwent a change of status during the eighth century, when it continued to function as the center for the above-mentioned activities, while also expanding greatly with the addition of large residential areas. Whether this was a result of the fall of Samaria, the Assyrian threat, or the stability established by the dynast is difficult to determine unequivocally, although it is likely that all of these factors contributed in one way or another. Such a development is easily accounted for. First of all, the importance of Jerusalem (or any other site) is determined not merely by its size. There is no reason to assume that in order for Jerusalem to have been the most important site it must have been the largest. Site stratification is determined by a number of factors which do not coincide only with size, but with the scope of building activities, site location, etc. The seat of centralized power is not always located in the largest settlement of its domain. In fact, in many cases the reason for the large size of royal cities is not the total number of their ordinary residents, but the large number of people in the service of, and related to, the king (e.g., craftsmen, priests, family). There are many cases where the temple, and in turn the palace, serve not only as the center, but as a catalyst for a city’s transformation into an urban center. Although it is more of a rural example, the Middle Bronze Age temple at Tell el-Hayyat preceded all other construction at the site, followed only later by the addition of residential houses. It is an example of a case where the village is a direct derivative of the temple at a site. This is also true of other regions as well. For example, it has been noted that the earliest “nucleus” of settlements in Egypt was the temple, which then served as the catalyst for further settlement and development. Thus, many Egyptian cities were the result of residential growth around valley temples. The importance of such towns has been noted as of significant value to the New Kingdom, where the “Temple-Town” was the ideal embodiment of a city. Others have noted that the earliest sites of urbanization in the Indus Valley, in the North China Plain, and in Mesoamerica, began as tribal shrines that dealt with ritual as well as administration, before growing into temples and eventually cities. Further examples come from Mesopotamia, where temples functioned as stand-alone centers in which public

60. Wasen, The Archaeology of Rank, 129, 137.
functions were carried out. In time, however, palaces were added to such sites, a first step in evolving into fully developed cities.  

It is interesting to note how the distinguishing of Jerusalem first as a ritual site and then as a central temple served the monarchy beyond its religious purposes. First and foremost, the investment in religion in and of itself boosted the king’s position in the eyes of the faithful. Furthermore, a temple and its rituals have often been used in creating a sense of community (important when considering the formation of a new entity) and in governing aspects of the social structure. Linking the palace with the temple reflected the importance of the monarch as the chosen ruler, while creating a platform of unity between the tribes.

CONCLUSIONS

Jerusalem under the United Monarchy was not a large capital city. David and Solomon’s activities were intended to establish the city as the royal estate, the seat of the king, the royal cult center, and the location of administrative activity directly connected to the functioning of the monarchy. Therefore, the lack of finds in Jerusalem dating to the tenth–ninth centuries B.C.E. should not be explained by the “full” or “empty” glass. It is solely a result of the city’s function until the eighth century, a function deliberately determined by the monarchs in order to exalt themselves. During the tenth–ninth and early eighth centuries it was called “the City of David,” hinting that it was the city of the royal family.

During the eighth century this purpose changed as the city grew and began to function as a capital city in a manner more comparable to that of modern capitals, and similar to that of Samaria in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This may have occurred as a result of the conquest of the Northern Kingdom and the migration of its elite population to Judah, where they served in key positions in the royal administration. Yet it is also probably related to the fact that the Davidic dynasty had already become the rightful, established, and divinely chosen line in the eyes of the Judean people. The ruin of the competitor kingdom was surely a catalyst for Jerusalem’s development and a formative factor for a new way of thinking about the Judean monarchy.