

Who Destroyed Megiddo VIA?

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It was not before the early years of the 3rd millennium CE that an «Universal Bureau for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity» (UBI) became conceivable. By necessity, the UBI faces an enormous backlog of cases hundreds, if not thousands of years old. Although investigations become increasingly difficult with the amount of time passed since the act, and although verdicts can only be brought in postumously, we nevertheless maintain that justice has to be handed out also in past cases in order to hope for a more human and enlightened future.

Megiddo VIA was a flourishing town of the late Iron I period in Canaan/Palestine, which ended in men-inflicted destruction (a clear case of murder and/or manslaughter, trespassing, burglary, pillaging, rape and arson). The massive conflagration which terminated Megiddo VIA burned the mudbricks and their debris brick-red. We also have the usual suspects, viz. the Gang Leaders of their times, *aka* kings and rulers. Investigations are difficult, because the evidence of the witnesses, most of them anonymous and sometimes even supposedly pseudonymous, has been heavily doctored by those who collected it. This part of the evidence is accessible to the public under the title of «Books of Samuel» and «First Book of Kings». Statements, in general, remain fairly vague and in some cases, seem to be heavily biased approximating blatant slander. At a first glance, they reflect much more hearsay than eye-witness-accounts. None of the witnesses or their editors try to give a complete and comprehensive record of what may, or must, have happened. Thus, deeds or misdeeds reported may or may not have actually been committed, whereas other violent acts might have gone unnoticed. The few scientific experts available make very slow progress. Since new evidence on the case of Megiddo VIA has recently turned up¹, it seems appropriate to render an interim review. The case cannot yet go to court, but deserves our incessant attention.

The time frame

The time frame has only recently been established². The flourishing town of Megiddo VIA (flourishing as compared to contemporary sites, if rather poor vis-à-vis Megiddo IX, VIII, or

¹ I. Finkelstein – D. Ussishkin – B. Halpern ed., *Megiddo III* (TAUIA MS 18/1&2; 2000); archaeology is now as competent to distinguish between violent destruction due to human activity on the one hand and destruction caused by natural catastrophes on the other, very much the same as a pathologist is able to tell whether a person died of cardiac arrest or from a bullet through the head. Bible-induced «destructions» like the notorious case of Dan VII in the interpretation of A. Biran, *Biblical Dan* (Jerusalem 1994) 126 (a thin layer of ash is no «destruction level» at all) can no longer go unnoticed.

² For A. Ben-Tor, Hazor and the Chronology of Northern Israel: A Reply to Israel Finkelstein: *BASOR* 317 (2000) 9-15, cf. the present author's replique: *The Low Chronology and How Not to Deal with It*: BN 101 (2000) 56-63; for N. Na'aman, *BASOR* 317, 1-7, see *infra*, n. 15. Accumulated C14-evidence for the Iron I period in the Feinān area leads to 1045-967 with 95% probability; the data are published by T.E. Levy et al., *The Jabal*

even VIIA and VA/IVB) was founded at the beginning of the 10th century³. As the spatial organization or rather disorganization of the settlement suggests, the town was not established by central planning, but developed gradually over an expanded period of some 50 years. For its destruction, any date beyond 950-920 BCE is highly unlikely, though a general assumption about the average duration of strata, especially if terminated by human activity, is not possible. Megiddo H 2, a stratum missed by the Chicago expedition, did not exist for more than 18 years; it follows the Assyrian destruction of 733, and is terminated by the Assyrian reconstruction which commenced in 716 BCE⁴. A duration of more than 75 years would be extremely long and rather improbable.

Let us now turn to our usual suspects.

Saul

The first king of Israel, represented by the witnesses more as a warlord than as a king, is not directly indicted by any source. It is said that Saul was prone to violent moods and violent actions, and that he found his death operating in the near vicinity of Megiddo. What if the military action which brought him down was the response of the regional power in the Jezreel to a previous raid on Megiddo VIA? Of course, Saul is beyond prosecution as long as his fingerprints have not been identified and do not turn up at the scene (which might still happen). On the other hand, it is not precisely known when this Gang Leader was active: around 1000 BCE? 980? 960? According to present expertise, the last date is the least likely. For chronological reasons, Saul is a rather poor suspect.

Eshbaal

Here, we have a much better case, for it is reported that his general Abner went to the Jezreel, among other regions, and made Eshbaal its king (1 Sam 2,9)⁵. The fact of a general introducing a king to an area where this ruler did not previously govern gives raise to the suspicion that military violence was involved. It is, however, not explicitly stated that he destroyed Megiddo. In addition, the time frame for Eshbaal is as uncertain as it is in the case of Saul. Megiddo VIA may not yet have been established when Eshbaal ruled. Eshbaal/Abner make better suspects than Saul just by a trifle.

Hamrat Fidan Project: Excavations at the Wadi Fidan 40 Cemetery, Jordan (1997): *Levant* 31 (1999) 293-308, 303 and 305.

³ In addition to the not quite conclusive C-14-evidence as presented by I. Carmi – D. Segal: *Megiddo III*, 502f, more and more precise data exist and will be published in *Megiddo IV* (J. Finkelstein, pers. com.). The remaining unpublished evidence cited in BN 101, 56 fn. 2 has been made accessible, in the meantime, by A. Mazar, *IEJ* 49 (1999) 40f (Tel Rehov) and by oral communication at the Copenhagen conference on Near Eastern Archaeology, summer 2000 (Tel Dor).

⁴ J. Peersmann: *Megiddo III*, 532f.

⁵ The preposition 'l after the H stem of MLK is due to the ellipsis of a verb of motion; cf. W. Gesenius – E. Kautzsch, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Leipzig 28¹⁹⁰⁹ = Hildesheim 1977) 395 § 119g.

David

David, too, is widely described to have indulged in acts of homicide and genocide over an extensive region and during a protracted time. The core area of his realm seems to have been constituted by Judah and Southern Samaria: his family owned property between Hebron and Baal-Hazor⁶. Reported military actions led David's troops as far east as Rabbat Ammon, and as far north as Maacah. A raid on Megiddo would have been quite in character according to David's portrait in 1 Sam 25; 27-30; 2 Sam 8; 10-12. On the other hand, nearly no actions like these are reported to have been carried out in the Philisto-Canaanite West, which may not be accidental: David probably knew where the trade capital was concentrated on which his tribal kingdom depended. David, we have to state, is probably not the culprit who destroyed Megiddo VIA.

In addition, Judges 1,27-28 indicate that Megiddo and Taanach came under Israelite rule rather in a peaceful manner. The reliability of this source is controversial, but it cannot be ignored.

Sheba

The case of Sheba, for some time the head of the Israel Liberation Organisation (ILO) during the reign of David, i.e. a terrorist according to some and a freedom fighter in the eyes of others, is under scrutiny by fellow-investigator B. Halpern, as confided to the present author over a cup of English Tea (*šāy inglīsī*) in the UBI's canteen.

Solomon

At a first glance, a rather unlikely suspect, being represented by our sources as the «king of peace» *sans pareil*. This perception has, however, turned out to be an ideological construct of later generations. Turning to the primary evidence, the iconographic record represents the Iron I-IIA period (ca. 1150-875 BCE) as an age of violence, the iconography related to peace, stability and economic prosperity not being attested before the Iron IIB period, i.e. the reign of the Omride dynasty⁷.

There are, however, two specific references to Solomon interfering with Megiddo. According to 1 Kings 9,15 he even built Megiddo. But this need not exclude that he had previously destroyed the town. The archaeological record does, however, indicate that the destruction of Megiddo VIA was followed by a period of abandonment. In addition, the reference to Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer in 1 Kings 9,15 is not a reliable source for the 10th century, the specific grouping of the three sites being due to structures and constellations created or operative under Jeroboam II or the Assyrians.

According to 1 Kings 4,12, Solomon had a «representative» at Taanach for Megiddo and the adjacent area⁸. Although the reliability of the lists of Solomon's officials is also

⁶ 2 Sam 13,23; 15,7-12. This is also the area from which David's military élite was recruited, cf. B. Mazar, *The Early Biblical Period* (Jerusalem 1986) 84.

⁷ O. Keel – Ch. Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole* (QD 134; ⁴1997) 129-138; 145 Fig. 155a and b; 146-148; 152-165; 199-230/237-301.

⁸ These «representatives» are neither *gouverneurs*, nor does the list constitute any «provincial system»; cf. H.M. Niemann, *Herrschaft, Königtum und Staat* (FAT 6; 1993) 33-40; they were sort of «delegates» serving as interface between the king and tribes or towns within his sphere of interests.

controversial, 1 Kings 4,8-16* has recently gained in authenticity⁹. It is remarkable that Solomon's delegate to the Jezreel did not reside at Megiddo, but obviously at Taanach, which is mentioned first. Megiddo at the time of Solomon, then, must have been settled, because it is mentioned as a site, but should have carried less importance than Taanach. This observation helps to identify Megiddo VB with Solomon's Megiddo, and directs the search for the perpetrator in the case of Megiddo VIA to quite another social context than that of kings or rulers.

First, however, we have to conclude our revision of the list of usual suspects. We may state that on this list, Solomon does not figure very prominently.

Shoshenq

Shoshenq has been blamed by I. Finkelstein (at least, Shoshenq claims to have conquered Megiddo in his Karnak Inscription) and is exculpated by D. Ussishkin (who would set up a magnificent stela on a heap of ruins)¹⁰.

In this case, the defense seems to have a slight edge over the prosecution. In addition, Shoshenq's campaign(s)¹¹ took place ca. 930-920 BCE; chronology makes him the last possible suspect, but not a likely one.

Jeroboam I.

If Shoshenq had indeed conquered Megiddo without destroying it, could Jeroboam have struck back after the Egyptian main army had left and taken Megiddo for himself? According to the most recent reconstruction of Shoshenq's campaign(s)¹², one comes to the conclusion that Shoshenq did not fight the nascent kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but rather a number of still independent towns and cities on the borders of the two highland states. In other words: Shoshenq, Jeroboam I. and Solomon/Rehabeam may more probably have been allies than enemies, and it is quite conceivable that Shoshenq handed over the territory he conquered to the two kings in fief. Thus, then, it may have come to be that Megiddo fell peacefully under Israelite rule. Jeroboam should not be kept on the list of suspects.

The Neighborhood

Most crimes are committed within the circle of relatives and acquaintances. Previous investigations were so preoccupied with the usual suspects that they forgot to investigate the victim's immediate social context – where one is always supposed to have the first look.

Megiddo's immediate neighbors were Jokneam and Taanach. According to a very ancient and widespread attitude, my neighbor is always my enemy. The settlement history of

⁹ Due to J. Böseneker, Text und Redaktion. Untersuchungen zum hebräischen und griechischen Text von 1 Könige 1-11 (Diss. theol. Rostock 2000). The argument will be presented in more detail elsewhere.

¹⁰ I. Finkelstein – D. Ussishkin: Megiddo III, 599 and n. 19.

¹¹ Cf. H.M. Niemann, The Socio-political Shadow of the Biblical Solomon: L.K. Handy ed., The Age of Solomon. Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium (SHCAN 11; 1997) 252-299, 296-299.

¹² N. Na'aman, בוסע שישק לארץ ישראל בראי התרבות המצרית והמנוצח הארכאולוגי, Zion 63 (1998) 247-276, 250-268, read in the light of Niemann, Shadow, 296f. The author's reconstruction of Shoshenq's campaign(s) and its/their consequences is comprised on the adjacent map (produced, most obligingly, by J. Müller-Clemm).

Jokneam in the 11th/10th centuries cannot yet be written. Jokneam will have to be investigated as a suspect in the Megiddo-VIA-case as soon as the data are published.

Taanach, on the other hand, is open to scrutiny. Taanach has four strata within the Iron I/IIA period (IA, IB; gap; IIA; IIB) which were equated with Megiddo VIIB through VA/IVB (Rast)¹³ or Megiddo VIIA/VIB through VA/IVB (Finkelstein)¹⁴. According to Finkelstein, Taanach IA covers the period between Megiddo VIIA and VIA; i.e., it corresponds at Megiddo to the gap after the destruction/abandonment of Megiddo VIIA and to Megiddo VIB. Contrary to Finkelstein, this synchronism is not hampered by the fact that there is no Philistine bichrome pottery at Taanach IA (and IB) which shows up in Megiddo VIB: Philistine imports in the North were few, and the pottery evidence at Taanach, especially for Taanach IB, is less¹⁵. Taanach IB developed out of IA without a break, as Megiddo VIA developed from VIB. Taanach IB ended in much the same kind of massive conflagration as did Megiddo VIA. For Finkelstein, Shoshenq is the culprit in both cases. Now, not every victim killed by the means of a Smith&Wesson 0.38 in New York City over the past 20 years was killed by the same person. The pottery assemblage of Taanach IB corresponds to Megiddo VIB and VIA¹⁶, i.e. the destruction of Taanach IB should slightly antedate the destruction of Megiddo VIA.

The scenario that suddenly emerges reminds us of the fact that not all victims of violent crime are always innocent. Taanach IA-B started to develop during the Iron I (11th century) – well before Megiddo; then Megiddo sets in, as a village (VIB) which became a prospering town (VIA). Might we suspect that the people of Megiddo VIA knocked out their competition in the immediate neighborhood, Taanach IB?

The prosperous second half of the existence of Megiddo VIA corresponds to the gap at Taanach after IB; but the people of Taanach, or the wider valley, might well have thought of revenge, and they may easily have gained Phoenician support (if the appearance of burnished red slip is an indicator of growing Phoenician influence). So it were most probably them who destroyed Megiddo VIA and founded Taanach IIA, to which corresponds the gap at Megiddo after VIA (the pottery of Taanach IIA falls between Megiddo VIA and VB)¹⁷. Taanach IIA developed into Taanach IIB, at the same time as a new village sprang up at Megiddo: VB¹⁸. Then Sheshong destroyed Taanach IIB, but he erected his victory stela at Megiddo VB, thus designating the village for development as a regional center – a plan which was duly implemented by (Jeroboam I and) the dynasty of Omri, who transposed the village of Megiddo VB into the regional center of Megiddo VA/IVB.

This, after all, is the most likely scenario as it emerges at the time being. But the case is not closed yet; further investigations are imperative. At least we have an hypothesis to test. And of course, we keep our list of usual suspects to round them up again another time.

¹³ W. Rast, *Taanach I* (Cambridge MA 1978).

¹⁴ Cf. I. Finkelstein, *Notes on the Stratigraphy and Chronology of Iron Age Ta'anach*: TA 25 (1998) 208-218.

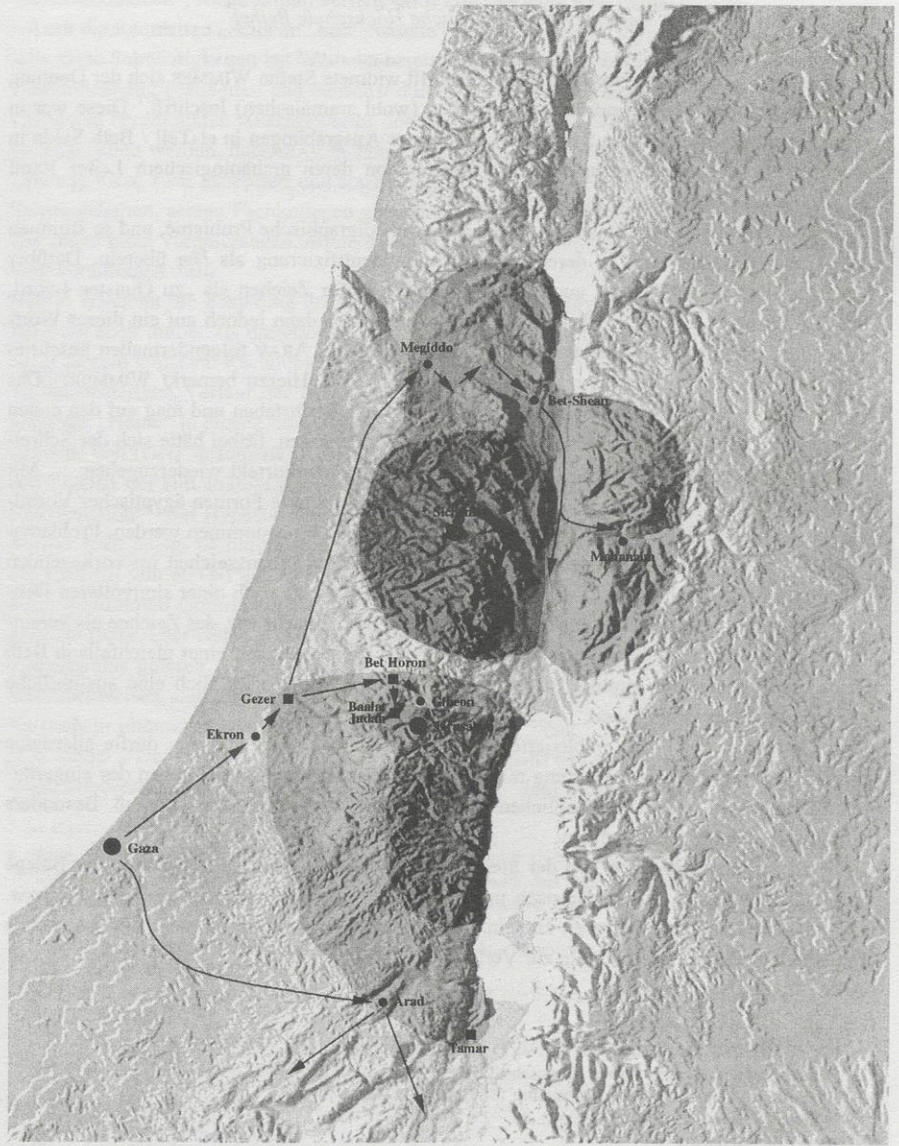
¹⁵ Cf. N. Naaman, *The Contribution of the Trojan Grey Ware from Lachish and Tel Mique-Ekron to the Chronology of the Philistine Monochrome Pottery*: BASOR 317 (2000) 1-7, 4f. Whether the *argumentum e silentio*, i.e. the absence of something in a context where this something is expected, is viable or not is always a question of statistics.




¹⁶ Finkelstein, TA 25, 213.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁸ The occurrence of one collared rim-jar at Taanach IIB and Megiddo VB (Finkelstein, TA 25,216) argues for the contemporaneity of these two strata, not of Taanach IIB and Megiddo VA/IVB.

Shoshenq and Solomon



-  Shoshenq's Campaigns
-  Core and Periphery of the Early States of Israel and Judah
-  Places Fortified by Solomon (1 Kings 9 : 17f.)