

The Biblical Archaeology Society (BAS) ( <http://bib-arch.org/> ) annually holds a conference for top scholars in various fields relating to biblical studies to meet and discuss their research and (in the case of archaeologists) recent excavations in the Levant relating to biblical history. They often schedule their conference in the same city and during the same week simultaneously with the annual ASOR (American Schools of Oriental Research) and SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) conferences so that they can share the visiting lecturers with those other conferences.

Attending the 2010 conference in Atlanta at the end of November was my first time to attend and it was totally awesome! I really enjoyed the location and especially the interaction with the scholars in Q&A sessions and after the lectures. The Westin Peachtree Hotel where the conference was held (and where I stayed) was quite nice. Apparently it is the tallest hotel in the Western Hemisphere - 74 floors!

I listened to lectures by David Ussishkin, Yosef Garfinkel, Mark Wilson, Ben Withernington III, and Amihai Mazar and got to speak with a few of them afterward. I also saw William Dever briefly (when I snuck into the last 5 minutes of his lecture on the next day) and met Hershel Shanks (the president of BAS and editor of Biblical Archaeology Review/BAR magazine) while I was there. He introduced Amihai Mazar's lecture on Beth Shean, apparently the two are good friends.

By far though, on the topics of archaeology, Yosef Garfinkel's lecture was hands down the most exciting and fascinating . He, and others, see the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa as nothing short of a ground breaking site showing early 10th century fortifications, and (as he is known for saying) he thinks it counteracts Finkelstein's theory of the low chronology because it cannot account for such an early fortified site in Judah. On a personal note though, I found Ben Withernington's lecture on verbal biblical inspiration in an oral Israelite/ANE culture the most profound and impacting lecture on me. I really want to get the video recording of his lecture when it comes out. I may talk more about that later.

Garfinkel was very friendly and quite animated. He's a fairly humorous speaker as well - something I didn't expect. He elicited a few chuckles throughout the lecture, especially when he tongue-in-cheek suggested his critics would sooner call Khirbet Qeiyafa a **Japanese** site than a Judean one. I also got to walk right up to him afterward among a few others gathered around, and he took turns talking to each of us individually and answering additional questions not asked in the Q&A session. Garfinkel also personally invited me to come dig with him at Qeiyafa.

I told him I'd love to but I'm not sure if I have the time or money! Anyway that was pretty cool.

The lecture I took the most notes on was Yosef Garfinkel's and I typed it up in a 4 page Word document. I have pasted its contents below:

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**November 19, 2010**

**Atlanta, Georgia**

**Speaker: Yosef Garfinkel**

**Notes:**

Background on King David:

- Lived approximately 1000-965 B.C.
- Avraham Biran discovered the Tel Dan Stele during his excavations at Tel Dan in 1992-1993.
- The Stele's inscription is an account by the Aramean King Hazael bragging that he had killed 70 kings. In the inscription the title 'House of David' is found.
- This shows, from the typical use of the word 'house', that David was the founder of a ruling dynasty in Jerusalem.

Paradigms put forth as alternate history:

1. The Mythological Paradigm (1980s)
2. The Low Chronology Paradigm (1996)
3. "Ethnographic" Paradigm (2008)

The discovery of the Tel Dan Stele has destroyed the mythological paradigm which claimed that David was a fictional person with no historical counterpart. We know there was a David and that he was a King in Judah.

The Low Chronology Paradigm (held by Finkelstein) is being seriously challenged by the recent finds at Khirbet Qeiyafa.

**Information about Khirbet Qeiyafa:**

The site was found in 2008 (although its tell/mound had been noted/eyed as a possible site for excavation previously – noted as early as 1883 by *C.R. Conder & H.H. Kitchener* during a British survey of Palestine) and it is located slightly north of Sochoh and Azekah (which are toward opposite ends of the Valley of Elah on either side of Khirbet Qeiyafa – within seeing distance).

It is close to Philistine territory, and the story of David and Goliath battling in the Valley of Elah would have taken place just below at the foot of the hill Khirbet Qeiyafa is on.

The site is surrounded by a 700 meter long fortified stone wall. Notable features include casemate walls near the gates, and the rare find of two gates at the site. It is the latter feature which is significant in properly identifying the site with an ancient city name (more on that later).

The feature of the casemate walls, Garfinkel says, shows urban planning for living quarters inside the casemate walls and is a **distinctively Judean idea**, not Canaanite. There were private quarters in the casemate walls, even an inner room at the outermost reinforcement of the wall where there was a several foot gap enough to sleep in. This is a rare feature. A few other Judean cities have casemate walls including Beersheba, Tell en Nasbeh, Beit Misrim, and (Megiddo? – didn't hear clearly). Khirbet Qeiyafa is the 5th such site to be discovered.

There was no fire destruction of this site. It simply fell out of use.

330 jar handles/finger loopholes were found with finger/thumbprint impressions on top. Garfinkel says this type of marking is an early predecessor to later LMLK seals which indicated that a jar was *from* or *to* **a king**. The fingerprint distinguished this type of pottery from regular pottery.

The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostrakon: an immensely important find. Garfinkel did not talk much about it. He says maybe in 10 years we will have an agreed upon proper translation of the Ostrakon (how encouraging...). He says lots of smart people are working on it. He made the note that the words/names Ba'al and elim (gods) appear in the inscription. Other words like shophet/shaphat cannot easily be determined to be either a noun (judge), a verb (to judge/decreed/dispense justice), or even if it is possibly a personal name.

One thing that this inscription does show is the "existence of sophisticated writing at the time of King David". This may lend additional credence to some of the Bible's accounts being penned at an early stage.

Returning to the site, only 1 Iron Age phase at Khirbet Qeiyafa was found, meaning it is a one phase site

**only**

, occupied for a relatively short period of time. Radiometric readings indicate the site dates from approximately

**1050-971 B.C**

. Garfinkel says that this would overlap with kings Saul and David

**but is too early for Solomon**

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Garfinkel returning to analysis of suggested alternate paradigms. Garfinkel claims:

1. The Mythological Paradigm (1980s) - destroyed
2. The Low Chronology Paradigm (1996) – severely challenged/destroyed
3. "Ethnographic" Paradigm (2008) – now a new tactic that is being used

With the challenge of an early 10th century (and possibly late 11th century) fortified site in

existence Garfinkel says the Low Chronology is inadequate to explain the emergence of Judah's kingdom (Garfinkel clarifies that he is talking about Judah in particular, as one cannot infer an united Israelite monarchy with north Israel from this site – but Khirbet Qeiyafa is relevant for the existence of a kingdom in Judah at that time).

Garfinkel says the Low Chronology argument has been set aside in trying to explain the existence of the site in favor of a new "Ethnographic" Paradigm argument/question about Qeiyafa: "Is it a Judean, or a Philistine, (or a Canaanite, or a....) city?". Garfinkel animatedly and humorously (tongue in cheek – to elicit a few chuckles) remarked that the critics of his interpretation of it being a Judean site will always say that it is "either a Philistine, or a Canaanite, or a Phoenician, ... or a *Japanese* site, but never Judean!"

His evidence for it being being a Judean site is based on the following observations:

1. Presence of urban planning (casemate walls)
2. Cooking habits
  - A) No pig bones were found (unlike Philistine sites)
  - B) Pita bread was eaten there – not a Philistine food
3. The Hebrew Ostrakon (unlike the Indo-European inscription from Tell es-Safi)
4. New Judean cultic sanctuary discovered in the summer 2010 (more details a little below)

Garfinkel says the site can also be likely linked, and is probable, to the Biblical city of Sha'arayim. The site is unique in that it have two gates, and the Hebrew form for dual is **-ayim**, hence "two gates" would be Sha'arayim in Hebrew. This matches the Biblical Shaarayim which is located near Sochoh and Azekah. See Joshua 15:35-36. Also see Joshua 19:6 (scribal error?) and 1 Chr. 4:31 = Joshua 15:32 (Shilihim). Notably 1 Chr. 4:31 lists Shaarayim among town that existed "until the time of David", which is consistent with a one period site (Khirbet Qeiyafa).

Garfinkel suggests that we can infer for Judah at this time under the reign of King David (from evidence at Khirbet Qeiyafa):

- Real central authority & city planning (not villages)
- Fortified, defined borders
- Administration (jar handles, etc.)
- Writing from the 10th century

Garfinkel later said, a bit tongue-in-cheek, "This is a one period site only, you cannot play with the dates. You will just have to accept the Biblical tradition, unfortunately..." said with a slight grin and shrug when he said 'unfortunately'.

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And now, new information (not yet published) from this past summer's 2010 dig season and some recent significant findings relating to cultic activities.

This past dig season 3 stone pillars, or *matzevah* were found at distinct locations which almost certainly functioned as cultic monuments. Jacob is said to have erected a pillar at Bethel after a theofany/dream/vision of God to commemorate the event.

The first stone was found standing in the first recess to the left in the 1st city gate, at the entrance to the city. Two others were found, one of them laying over inside an adjacent casemate wall (perhaps was moved).

The biggest find was a private cultic sanctuary in one of the casemate wall "rooms" where a private residence usually was. The "building/room" had a stone sitting bench on the left side of the wall (the only such bench found at the site) and had a basin in the floor with a bowl (possibly for libation). Someone later during the Q&A session asked why it was in a room, or if it wasn't in fact a private residence itself, and Garfinkel responded that it very well could have been a private home used for cultic purposes, and he mentioned the example of how the Ark of the Covenant had been placed in a personal residence for a long time before it was moved to Jerusalem.

Also found was a small basalt alter with curious diagonal lines going in opposite directions (symmetrical across the middle) and he compared it to an alter found at Tell Rehov where a tree was depicted in a similar manner with the branches angling up diagonally from the trunk. However the Tell Rehov alter had two goddesses/women standing on either side of the tree, whereas the alter at Khirbet qeiyafa had no iconography on it (other than the lines/semblance of tree branches). Garfinkel proposed from the lack of any other iconographic finds at the site that this could be an early indication of an Israelite observance of the ban on graven images, since the observance of abstinence from pork was also apparently observed that early as well – indicating adherence to the Law of Moses. Either way, Garfinkel labels the cult at Khirbet Qeiyafa an "aniconic cult".

Garfinkel also made a fascinating observation (which followed on the heels of David Ussishkin's earlier lecture on the Assyrian attack of Lachish) that in all the items shown in the Lachish relief which show detailed drawings of items being taken away from Lachish (like similar Egyptian reliefs) that even with Israelite 'cultic' items, like the two 4-5 foot chalices shown being carried away by Assyrian soldiers, had no markings or icons shown drawn on them (a detail that some other Assyrian reliefs contained on such items). From this he adduces general evidence that Jews had aniconic religious observance (which is perfectly in line with what the Bible tells us). He says sites that Israelite sites that are aniconic include Lachish (Building 49), Arad, and now Khirbet Qeiyafa.

One note on the basalt alter found is that it had no burn marks, so it probably was used for laying bread or other foods as offerings on it.

A "dual bulbed" (my words) drinking vessel (two spherical cups 'joined at the hip' so-to-speak, with a small hole where their sides met - allowing the drink to flow from one vessel to the other)

was found, and is comparable to a similar cup found at Tel Qiri (which however also had an extended bottom – like a wine glass). It is not known what such drinking vessels were used for (at either site), and may possibly be cultic, or Garfinkel non-committally suggested maybe a bride and groom sip from both sides of it at a wedding(?). Who knows.

**[End of notes on the lecture]**