

Hazor at the End of the Late Bronze Age: Back to Basics

AMNON BEN-TOR

Institute of Archaeology
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel
bentor@mscc.huji.ac.il

SHARON ZUCKERMAN

Institute of Archaeology
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel
mssharon@mscc.huji.ac.il

The interpretation of the Late Bronze Age strata of Hazor is of crucial importance for understanding the sequence of events leading to the final destruction of this mighty Canaanite kingdom. In this article we take issue with a new interpretation of the Late Bronze Age Hazor data published recently by I. Finkelstein, and suggest that this interpretation does not tally either with the data as uncovered and presented by Yadin following his excavations, or with that uncovered by the presently ongoing excavations at Hazor. In the following, the relevant finds of both Yadin's published excavation results and a description of the remains uncovered in the renewed excavations of the site are presented and reassessed, leading to a scheme that conforms, with certain modifications, with that espoused previously by Yadin.

BACKGROUND

In a recently published article (Finkelstein 2005), the author proposes a different interpretation of the sequence of events ending in Hazor's destruction than the one suggested by Yadin, the site's excavator in the 1950s and 1960s. In essence, Finkelstein suggests that Canaanite Hazor was destroyed only once, in the end of Stratum 1B, and that Stratum 1A represents a short-lived ephemeral occupation restricted to the central and southern parts of the lower city. Finkelstein reviews the remains published by Yadin and Ben-Tor and rearranges them into two "horizons" to fit his new interpretation of Hazor's last phases (Finkelstein 2005: 345). While arguing for a different interpretation, however, the writer seems to be "shooting in all directions," by bringing up a series of issues that have little or nothing to do with his main subject. These include:

1. Is the monumental building located in the center of Hazor's acropolis (Area A), which was uncovered by the renewed excavations, a palace or a temple?
2. Who destroyed Canaanite Hazor?
3. When was Hazor destroyed?
4. Were those who settled Hazor after its destruction (Yadin's Strata XII–XI) Canaanites or Israelites?

In our response, we choose to comment briefly on those issues first, before dealing with Finkelstein's new interpretation of the last strata of Late Bronze Age Hazor (namely 1A and 1B in the lower city, and XIII on the Upper Tell).

(1) Finkelstein states with no hesitation that the building on Hazor's acropolis that "Ben-Tor identified as a palace . . . is *rightly* (italics mine, A.B-T.) identified by others as a temple" (Finkelstein 2005: 344). The truth of the matter is that opinions with regard to the function of this structure are divided, and while Zuckerman (2006) identifies it as a temple, others, among them members of the expedition's staff, identify it as a palace (Ben-Tor 2006a; Bonfil and Zarzecki-Peleg 2007). Finkelstein also draws support for his identification of the building's function from the views expressed by the "Ebla excavation team in the 3 ICAANE conference in Paris in 2002" (Finkelstein 2005: 341) but for some reason "forgets" to mention opposite views expressed by members of the Hazor excavation team in the same conference. Thus, for the time being and until further relevant data are revealed by the excavations, there is no right or wrong identification of the function of the building located in the center of Hazor's acropolis.

(2) Finkelstein correctly quotes Yadin's view that the "destruction [of Hazor] is doubtless to be ascribed to the Israelite tribes as related in the book of Joshua"

(Finkelstein 2005: 342). Where he is wrong, and not for the first time, is when he claims that “Ben-Tor adopted Yadin’s Israelite conquest theory” (Finkelstein 2005: 342, where he refers to Ben-Tor 1998). In that particular publication, as well as in others (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999: 38–39; Ben-Tor 2002: 307–8), all those who could possibly have been responsible for Hazor’s downfall were listed: Egyptians, Sea People, Canaanites, and (Proto) Israelites. So far, archaeology does not point toward any of the above as having been the “culprit.” This being the situation, all this writer (A.B.-T.) claims is that we keep our minds open and give *everyone* of all those mentioned above a “fair chance” and not exclude the (Proto) Israelites just because they are mentioned in the Bible as being the ones who did it. Let it be said once and for all that *nowhere* did this writer ever unequivocally identify the Israelites as having been responsible for Hazor’s destruction, nor mention that Joshua was the leader of the destroyers.

(3) To date, no archaeological find or text enables us to determine the date of Hazor’s destruction with any accuracy. All indications seem to point toward a date in the 13th century B.C.E., most probably sometime in the middle of that century, as also suggested by Finkelstein (2005: 346–48). As far as written documents are concerned, the Ugarit document RS.20.225 allegedly mentioning Hazor, which Finkelstein rightly doubts (Finkelstein 2005: 347–48), probably does not refer to Hazor at all (Durand 2006). Thus, it is irrelevant to the issue of Hazor’s end. Finkelstein has unfortunately overlooked two items that do have a bearing on the chronological issue. A fragment of an Egyptian offering table was discovered in the destruction layer of the monumental building in Area M (Ben-Tor 1999: 273). The object was studied by J. Allen, who dated it “as late as the third decade of Ramesses II’s reign” (2001: 15), and by K. Kitchen, dating it to “some time in the decade following c. 1240–35 B.C.E.” (2003: 25). The object thus indicates that Hazor was still a viable city in the middle to the second half of the 13th century B.C.E., the time when even Finkelstein agrees that the Late Bronze city existed.

(4) The gap between the destruction of Late Bronze Age Hazor and the subsequent Iron Age settlement, as well as the observation that Yadin’s Strata XII–XI represent in fact one stratum only (Finkelstein 2005: 342), was already noted by the renewed Hazor excavation team members (Ben-Ami 2001: 166–67). With regard to who were the inhabitants of this rather poor settlement—Israelites or Canaanites—we do not pos-

sess any archaeological or textual indication, so we simply do not know. Finkelstein now claims they were Canaanites (Finkelstein 2005: 342). He may be right, but he may just as well be wrong. In this context, it is worth mentioning that in his book *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Finkelstein 1988), the most comprehensive study to date of that obscure period in the country’s history, Finkelstein repeatedly treats Hazor as an integral part of the process of Israelite settlement and even claims that, on the basis of the pottery found at Hazor XII, “there is no real difficulty in attributing these sites to Israelite groups” (Finkelstein 1988: 108). There is nothing wrong in changing one’s mind, provided such a change is based on new evidence. Such evidence has so far not been presented, so until new convincing evidence for the ethnicity of Hazor’s Iron I occupants is presented, their ethnic attribution should be treated with due caution.

Not only do the issues discussed above have no bearing on Finkelstein’s main thesis, they have another common denominator: *we do not know the answer* to any of these questions. In such cases, all we can do is speculate and propose answers based on the limited amount of data we possess, as long as such speculations do not conflict with information *we do* have and are not at odds with common sense.

THE “EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD”: A REASSESSMENT

Finkelstein’s interpretation of Canaanite Hazor’s last phases is based on the published results of Yadin’s excavations and on the preliminary publications of the renewed excavations at Hazor. The “evidence from the field” should, undoubtedly, form the basis for any reconstruction of the sequence of events culminating in the destruction of Canaanite Hazor. There are, however, several issues that should be addressed concerning Finkelstein’s use of these data, and we would like to briefly review these.

Finkelstein refutes the reconstruction of “two destruction layers,” claiming that this idea was espoused by Yadin in order to fit into his historical interpretation (Finkelstein 2005: 345). According to Finkelstein, Yadin’s contention that Canaanite Hazor was put to the torch by Joshua and never recovered caused a bias in his interpretation of the finds in the relevant strata. Finkelstein thus argues for what he terms a “much simpler situation,” according to which the

entire city was indeed destroyed by conflagration (his “horizon B”), and after a short hiatus occupation was resumed on a limited scale in a few areas in the southern part of the lower city (his “horizon A”).

The Lower City

Areas K and P: The two city gates excavated by Yadin were the only structures where a clear destruction at the end of Stratum 1B was identified (Ben-Tor 1989: 286–97; Mazar 1997: 382). Stratum 1A in these areas represents a phase of decline (which is characteristic of 1A throughout Hazor), and it follows that the city was probably not fortified during this last phase. It is important to note that Yadin raised this possibility already after the second season of excavations (Yadin et al. 1960: 113) and later on tended to accept it (Ben-Tor 1989: 297).

Area C: Finkelstein accepts Yadin’s reconstruction of a destruction (allegedly partial) of Stratum 1B. It should be emphasized, however, that this destruction is not attested throughout the area, and no signs of conflagration were clearly identified. Stratum 1A was much poorer and fragmentary, and no evidence of destruction by fire was noted (Yadin et al. 1960: 113). Finkelstein ignores, however, the most vivid sign of (human-inflicted) destruction in the temple of Stratum 1A, namely, the decapitated statue of a deity found in this last phase (Yadin et al. 1958: 87–88; Ben-Tor 2006b: 7). The conspicuous decline of the whole area, the destruction of the last temple, and the final abandonment of other buildings characterize Stratum 1A (and not Stratum 1B) in Area C.

Area F: The existence of a destruction of Stratum 1B in this area is suggested by Finkelstein, despite the fact that the excavator of the area, J. Perrot, states clearly that “no traces of destruction were observed at the end of stratum 1B, although this does not exclude the possibility of a short abandonment” (Yadin et al. 1960: 129 note). Stratum 1A represents a short-lived reoccupation, characterized by apparent deterioration and change of function of earlier structures in the area, some of which were reused. There is indeed no clear indication that Stratum 1A was destroyed. Area F seems to represent a sequence of continued activities, without destructions, throughout the Late Bronze Age until its final abandonment.

Area H: The temple of Area H poses the greatest challenge for Finkelstein’s interpretation. The stratigraphic sequence of the Area H temple is rather clear and served as the basis for Yadin’s reconstruction of the development of the lower city in general and the end of the Late Bronze Age in particular (Yadin et al. 1960: 113). The temple of Stratum 1B is an impressive monumental tripartite structure, and cannot be interpreted as “meagre” or “poorer” (Finkelstein 2005: 343). The finds attributed to it are indeed scarce, but this is due to the fact that most of them were reused in the Stratum 1A temple (Yadin 1993: 598; Beck 1989). The latest temple, that of Stratum 1A, witnesses several changes that are more profound than the mere raising of floors and replacing of the column bases (Zuckerman 2007). One of the features that should probably be attributed to this phase is the lion pit (Ussishkin 1970; Yadin 1972: 91; Ben-Tor 2006b: 4–5; Zuckerman 2007: 16–17). Its interpretation as the sole post-destruction feature in the area necessitates more accurate stratigraphic evidence, which is currently lacking. Temple 1A was destroyed in a fierce conflagration. Fallen stones, ashes, and mudbrick material reaching more than a meter high, as well as broken vessels and cultic paraphernalia, were found mainly in the inner hall (Ben-Tor 1989: 258–62). It is noteworthy that the statue of a seated figure found in this destruction layer was decapitated, and its head was found lying nearby, exactly like the one found in Stratum 1A of the Area C temple (Beck 1989: 324–27; Yadin et al. 1958: 87–88). The Late Bronze Age sequence of the Area H temple parallels that of the Area C temple, on the one hand, and the monumental structures of the Ceremonial Precinct on the Upper Tell, on the other.

The Upper Tell

Areas A and M: The Late Bronze Age Ceremonial Precinct in Area A was probably built in the 14th century B.C.E., as part of a major rebuilding activity identified also in the lower city (Stratum 1B). Two phases were discerned in the monumental structures on the Acropolis, the later one representing a period of decline and degeneration (Ben-Tor 1998). During this phase, basalt orthostats were removed and placed haphazardly in the once monumental buildings, flimsy walls and makeshift installations were erected (fig. 1), and architectural features were thrown into hastily dug pits in the “Podium Complex” in Area M, in the “Ceremonial Palace,” and in



Fig. 1. Stratum 1A features in the "Podium Complex" in Area M (from the west).

its northern courtyard (Ben-Tor 1996: 264; 2000: 248–49; Zuckerman 2007). In all cases, these remains were found *totally covered and sealed* by the thick destruction debris (fig. 2) representing the final destruction of the Ceremonial Precinct. It is thus clear that the immense conflagration, reaching a temperature of over 1300 degrees centigrade, put an end to the last phase of these structures, and the whole area was subsequently abandoned for a certain period of time (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999). This sequence is identical in nature to that identified in the Area H temple and the Area C temple. The last deteriorated and finally destroyed phase of all the above-mentioned public buildings should be attributed to the same "horizon," representing the last days of Canaanite Hazor (Zuckerman 2007).

BACK TO (A MODIFIED) TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

Reconstruction of a life-cycle of a city necessitates a correlation of the phases of the various areas, in such a way that will highlight the processes wit-

nessed by the city as a whole. In our opinion, the two horizons suggested by Finkelstein are in places arbitrary, and his scheme fails to take into account the general developments that can be discerned on the basis of the archaeological finds. Contrary to Yadin's view, we also argue in favor of one destruction level, but maintain that it should be placed at the end of Stratum 1A and terminated the Canaanite occupation at Hazor (table 1).

Against Finkelstein, we would thus like to suggest another interpretation, one that we believe is more in accord with the excavation results discussed above (table 2). This sequence is more in line with Yadin's original interpretation, with several minor updates following the results of the renewed excavations. Our interpretation allows for the possibility of differential destruction at the end of Stratum 1B (limited to the city gates). In our scheme, there is only one fierce destruction campaign, directed mainly at the public and religious buildings throughout the city, in the end of Stratum 1A. We (A.B.-T. and S.Z.) differ in our opinions as to the possible identity of the agents of this destruction, but this is of no immediate relevance to the reconstruction of the sequence of



Fig. 2. The same, covered with the destruction level (from the north).

TABLE 1: Suggested Scheme of Hazor's Late Bronze Final Phases

<i>Area C</i>	<i>Area F</i>	<i>Area H</i>	<i>Area K</i>	<i>Area P</i>	<i>Upper Tell: Areas A and M</i>
1A (end: temple destroyed, domestic area abandoned?)	1A (end: abandonment, no destruction)	1A (end: temple destroyed)	1A (gate out of use? No destruction)	1A (gate out of use? No destruction)	XIII (end: monumental buildings destroyed)
1B (no destruction)	1B (no destruction)	1B (partial destruction?)	1B (destruction)	1B (destruction)	XIV (no destruction)

TABLE 2: Comparative Table

	<i>Finkelstein 2005</i>	<i>Ben-Tor and Zuckerman</i>
"Horizon A"	Areas C, F (1A): no destruction Area H (lion pit): no destruction Areas K and P (1A): no destruction Upper Tell (XIII): no occupation	Areas C, H, F (1A), and Upper Tell (XIII): destruction; Areas K and P (1A): no destruction
"Horizon B"	Areas C, F, K and P, H (1B), and Upper Tell (XIII): destruction	Areas C, F (1B) and Upper Tell (XIV): no destruction; Areas K and P (1B): destruction; Area H (1B): partial destruction?

events which should be based solely on the archaeological data. The final destruction of the Late Bronze Age city is followed by a total abandonment of the lower city. The upper tell was left unoccupied for an

unspecified period of time, with no clear evidence of post-destruction activity anywhere at the city prior to its reoccupation in the Iron I period.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. P.
2001 A Hieroglyphic Fragment from Hazor. *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 15: 13–15.
- Beck, P.
1989 Stone Ritual Artifacts and Statues from Areas A and H. Pp. 322–38 in *Hazor III–IV: An Account of the Third and Fourth Seasons of Excavation, 1957–1958: Text*, ed. A. Ben-Tor. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Ben-Ami, D.
2001 The Iron Age I at Tel Hazor in Light of the Renewed Excavations. *Israel Exploration Journal* 51: 148–70.
- Ben-Tor, A.
1996 Tel Hazor, 1996. *Israel Exploration Journal* 46: 262–68.
1998 The Fall of Canaanite Hazor—The “Who” and “When” Questions. Pp. 456–67 in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE: In Honor of Trude Dothan*, eds. S. Gittin, A. Mazar, and E. Stern. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
1999 Tel Hazor, 1999. *Israel Exploration Journal* 49: 269–74.
2000 Tel Hazor, 2000. *Israel Exploration Journal* 50: 243–49.
2002 Hazor—A City State between the Major Powers: A Rejoinder. *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 16: 303–8.
2006a Ceremonial Palace, Not a Temple. *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32/5: 8, 78–79.
2006b The Sad Fate of Statues and the Mutilated Statues of Hazor. Pp. 3–16 in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, eds. S. Gitin, J. E. Wright, and J. P. Dessel. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Ben-Tor, A., ed.
1989 *Hazor III–IV: An Account of the Third and Fourth Seasons of Excavation, 1957–1958: Text*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Ben-Tor, A., and Rubiato, M.-T.
1999 Did the Israelites Destroy the Canaanite City? *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25/3: 22–39.
- Bonfil, R., and Zarzecki-Peleg, A.
2007 The Palace in the Upper City of Hazor as an Expression of a Syrian Architectural Paradigm. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 348: 25–47.
- Durand, J. M.
2006 *Hazor à l’époque d’Ugarit. Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 3: 74.
- Finkelstein, I.
1988 *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
2005 Hazor at the End of the Late Bronze Age: A Re-assessment. *Ugarit-Forschungen* 37: 341–49.
- Kitchen, K. A.
2003 An Egyptian Inscribed Fragment from Late Bronze Hazor. *Israel Exploration Journal* 53: 20–28.
- Mazar, A.
1997 Area P. Pp. 353–84 in *Hazor V: An Account of the Fifth Season of Excavation, 1968*, eds. A. Ben-Tor and R. Bonfil. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Ussishkin, D.
1970 The Syro-Hittite Ritual Burial of Monuments. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29: 124–28.
- Yadin, Y.
1972 *Hazor: The Head of All Those Kingdoms*. London: Oxford University.
1993 Hazor. Pp. 594–603 in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. 2, ed. E. Stern. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Yadin, Y.; Aharoni, Y.; Amiran, R.; Dothan, T.; Dunayevsky, I.; and Perrot, J.
1958 *Hazor I: An Account of the First Season of Excavations, 1955*. Jerusalem: Magnes.
1960 *Hazor II: An Account of the Second Season of Excavations, 1956*. Jerusalem: Magnes.
- Zuckerman, S.
2006 Where is the Hazor Archive Buried? *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32/2: 28–37.
2007 Anatomy of a Destruction: Crisis Architecture, Termination Rituals and the Fall of Canaanite Hazor. *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 20: 1–32.