

Biblical History and Archaeology of the Old Testament City of Megiddo

Paul Okoro Ashiegbu¹

¹(Ph.D, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe)

ABSTRACT : This article explored the assertion that King Solomon built the cities of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer as is recorded in 1 Kings 9:15. Solomon reigned as king in Israel in the 10th Century B.C.E. However, the finds of archaeology in the city of Megiddo point to a later date for the structures there. While previous dates orientated one to a high chronology, that is, the time of Solomon, current views push to a low chronology, that is, in the 9th century B.C.E, the time Omri or Ahab his son was king in Samaria. This shift in date may be shocking but not surprising, because archaeological excavations help to make the written text clearer in the search for truth. However, it is not always the case. Considering the fact that incessant wars took place at Megiddo in the past, this made the city become notorious as a battle ground. This notion grew to apocalyptic level, making Armageddon or Megiddo the place for final combat for all the forces of evil as recorded in Revelation 16:16. Using the inductive method, this paper argued that an understanding of Megiddo is an understanding of Israel. It went further to show that Megiddo is used as a symbol in Revelation. Not to see it as such is a misnomer. The conclusion is that, as symbol, it cautions against the thirst for violence and war. Key words

KEYWORDS - Biblical History, Apocalypse, Archaeology, Armageddon, Megiddo, War, Peace

I. INTRODUCTION

Israel is a Middle-eastern territory that has passed through a long period of evolution. Many ancient kingdoms exercised a strong impact of rulership over it. The aim of this paper is to conduct an archaeological study of one the cities of ancient Israel, Megiddo. The purpose is to use archaeological investigation to come to an understanding of the ancient city of Megiddo. The thesis to be defended in this study is that an understanding of Megiddo is an understanding of Israel.

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The key term that needs to be clarified is the word 'archaeology.' According to Stein (1967), archaeology is "the scientific study of the historic or prehistoric peoples and their cultures by analysis of their artifacts, inscriptions, monuments and other such remains, especially those that have been excavated" (p. 77). It has kindred relationship with anthropology, geography and history. It is intimately related to anthropology. By virtue of this relationship, Sills (1968) saw archaeology as "the anthropology of extinct cultures" (p. 378). Relating it with geography, archaeology treats humans as beings who live and move in space. Finally, considering its relationship with history, "it deals with human behavior viewed through time and supplements written resources with the documentation provided by artifactual evidence from the past" (Sills, 1968, p. 378). The focus of this paper is not on archaeology in general but on biblical archaeology. This simply refers to the study of ancient cities of the Bible, and the use of excavated materials from the extinct cities mentioned in the Bible for better understanding of biblical texts that have those cities as their setting. In reality, sometimes the excavated materials corroborate texts from the Bible, and other times they do not. So, one of the criticisms levelled against Biblical Archaeology is that it is too narrow and exclusive. The accusation is that, even though it is preoccupied with human beings, it is very selective in discussing human beings and their environment along the ages. This concern, as Dever (1992) observed, makes scholars talk of "New Archaeology," or a "multidisciplinary approach to archaeology" (p. 355). As opposed to Biblical Archaeology, this new approach to doing archaeology grew out of the attempt to retrieve more than simply architectural and ceramic phases, which had been the conventional thrust. As Dever remarked, the new approach is more extensive, more exhaustive and more inclusive because "it now includes geographers, geomorphologists, climatologists, paleobotanists and paleomorphologists, physical and cultural anthropologists, historians of technology, computer programmers, and still other specialists in fields formerly thought quite remote from archaeology" (p. 355). Based on this reality, Levy

(1995) refers the development as “a contextual archaeology.” The reason is that this approach to doing archaeology focuses on “the human ecosystem and emphasizes the interdependence of cultural and environmental variables” (p. xii). The human environment as Levy remarked, is made up of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, and biosphere. These ecological realities interrelate with each other and they are variable in the sense that age, weather and climate can affect them. Scholars who entertain the view in favour of contextual or processual archaeology, as it is variously called also hold the opinion that ancient cities did not exist each on its own. No, they existed in regions. This means that what characterized the ecosystem of one city could as well characterize the ecosystem of another city within the same region. Flowing from this, a fair study of ancient cities, and the people who lived in them, will take into consideration the regions, rather than studying a particular city in isolation considering its relatedness to other cities of the region at that time. The result has become that, rather than talking of the archaeology of the Holy Land, or of Israel, or of Palestine (even if it is not simply to avoid modern political problems in those regions, many scholars prefer to use regional names such as Syro-Palestine (part of present day northern Israel, precisely Golan Heights was part of Syria), Ancient Canaan (present day Israel and Palestine occupy what was formerly ancient Canaan but which is again today, politically called West Bank, both being on the West Bank of River Jordan), or South Levant. As it has been indicated earlier this research is not going to focus on archaeology in general but on biblical archaeology. In that case, what King (1990) said is apt about the subject matter. Just as he observed that “biblical archaeology is concerned mainly with ancient Syria Palestine, including modern Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria” (p. 467 – 472). This stated area is the geographical setting for this research.

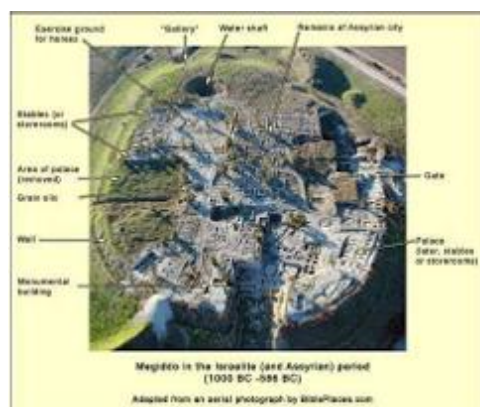
Notwithstanding the new insights brought by the “new archaeology,” biblical archaeology can be said to be proud of its identity and of its domain. The reason is that even though sometimes it corroborates biblical texts, it is not there just to prove the Bible right or wrong. The Bible, even though historical, does not claim to be scientific history. All the same, in this paper, where the need arises, I will combine the contributions of both biblical archaeology and the new archaeology, in so far as that will help give a good understanding of Megiddo, and so a good understanding of Israel. Without any political bias, in order to be particularistic of the geographical setting of this research, the names Israel and Palestine will be used interchangeably to refer to each other and to one and the same place which today occupy the place that was formerly called Land of Canaan.

III. THESIS

The thesis to be developed in this article is that the understanding of the ancient city of Megiddo is important for understanding of Israel. The research type is qualitative. The methodology to be used is inductive. The inductive way of writing about things or phenomena or places uses the knowledge of particular things to come to an understanding of the whole. Having said earlier in this work that in the ancient Middle East, cities belonged to regions, hence the need to study cities according to the regions to which they belong. With the inductive approach, an understanding of the ancient city of Megiddo which is a part of the region will help to come to an understanding of Israel in general. The research will unfold by first identifying the ancient city of Megiddo in the Bible, then in history and finally, as a geographical locale. I will proceed to explore the archaeological finds on the mound of the ancient city. Next, the biblical texts situated in Megiddo will be interpreted in the light of the finds. Furthermore, the significance of Megiddo for Christians will be shown, especially, as the name appears in the Christian Apocalypse where it appears as the place for final battle between the people of God and the forces of darkness (Rev 16:16)

¹All biblical texts are quoted from *The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible (NAB)*.

IV. IDENTIFICATION OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF MEGIDDO



In the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, Megiddo is mentioned 12 times. It is shown as a city which is well located in the Canaanite territory and it was a battlefield in the ancient world because of its positioning. The first person who is said to have conquered Megiddo was Joshua (Jos 12:21). Other places that Megiddo is mentioned in the Bible are Jos 17:11, Jgs1:27, Jgs5:19, 1 Kgs 4:12, 1 Kgs 9:15, 2 Kgs 9:27, 2 Kgs 23:29, 2 Kgs 23:30 and 1 Chr 7:29. It is said to have been reconstructed by Solomon. One of the major things that make Megiddo historically important is that, first, it is the place where King Ahazia was killed by the soldiers of Jehu (1 Kgs 9:27). Second, King Josiah also died there, after confronting the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II (1 Chr 35:22). According to the Bible, King Solomon built “the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer” (1 Kgs 9:15b). This account is one of the oldest pieces of information in the Bible about Megiddo. Geographically, Megiddo is situated at the West Bank of River Jordan, the northcentral part of Israel, at a point where it is bounded on the north by the range of Mount Carmel, on the south by Taanach and the valley of Esdraelon or Jezreel, on the northeast by the coastal lines of the Mediterranean Sea, on the southeast by Beth -Shean, and on the southwest by Afula valley created by the range of low hills called Shaphela or Judean hills. Information from Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority indicated that “Gottlieb Schumacher was the earliest excavator who dug at the site, and he was the first person to associate the area that is called tell el- Mutesellim, which means the Tell of the Governors with the place called Megiddo today” (1997, p.10).

The same Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority stated that Esthori Haparchi's (sometimes written Estori Parhi) journey took place in 1322. However, a conflicting date by Davies (1986) revealed that the first person to have come closest to the identification of the 'tel'2 Megiddo is the Jewish scholar and traveler Esthori Haparchi, in 1313.3 Again, the Israeli authority for tourism stated that the location discovered by Esthori Haparchi was not exactly Megiddo but a neighboring place to Megiddo, called Lejun. The American scholar Edward Robinson in the 19th century C.E. identified the city of Megiddo with Lejun. Lejun was the name of the city where the Tenth Legion of the Roman Empire had its base, during the Roman period. In the Holy Land. It was rather Schumacher who between 1903 and 1905 dug the mound there at Megiddo and showed that the city of Megiddo was much older than Lejun. He made this conclusion from the finds that were dated to the Middle Bronze Age, the finds that were said to be from the time of King Solomon and a cartouche that must have been left by Sheshonk I when he invaded the city.

Finally, it was between 1960 and 1972 that Yigael Yadin went back to the mound. He unraveled facts and finds there, such as the gateway at Hazor which dates to the Iron Age, the gate at Megiddo and the other gate discovered at the Ayalon Valley of Gezer. Israel's tourism authority maintained that the identical nature of the gates seen in the three cities of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer made Yadin to identify them with King Solomon and the later Israelite kings (p.11).

²² A tel is the Hebrew word for the mound of an extinct or a deserted city. Sometimes the Arabic version 'tell' is also used to denote the mounds. About a mound, we understand it the way the Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority understands it, as “composed of layers formed over thousands of years by the construction of successive settlements in the

same location. With each civilization – destroyed in war, by natural disaster, or abandoned by its inhabitants – the tell grows a little more above the surface of the land” (1997, p. 9). 3For the sake of this paper, I accept the 1322 date, because here it is the Israeli authority for Tourism that is writing their own history, and not outsiders.

The ancient Middle East had two powerful kingdoms. On the north of the Mediterranean was Mesopotamia, and on the south was Egypt. In-between the two empires is Megiddo, located on the plain of Esdraelon, which according to Davies (1986) “corresponds to the land of Issachar in Genesis 49:15” (p. 10). He next remarked that the plain was conducive for agriculture and food. Of course, for human habitat, water was also needed for human beings. These are the reasons the place was favourable for human beings to settle.

Over and above the outstanding features that enhance the thriving of people, as have been mentioned above, Megiddo was situated at a place very strategic for having direct commercial contact with Egyptian and Mesopotamian traders. In fact, the popular trade route through the sea called the Via Maris was controlled by Megiddo in this epoch. Again, from the point of view of commerce and economy, Megiddo was at great advantage. It served as a link with other cities like Haifa, Akko and Beth -Shean. Davies interpreted this strategic positioning of Megiddo as something positive, because it fostered commerce and battle. However, on the negative side, “the same position made it vulnerable to enemies, if not a fertile ground for battles” (p. 10). Reflecting on the natural location and the commercial power of Megiddo, one can agree with Kenyon’s (1971) observation that “there is no biblical record of the capture of Megiddo. It slides unannounced into the sphere of the Israelite kingdom” (p. 53) However, there are some indicators that the place was a fertile ground for battle. Despite the fact that there is no biblical record to show that Megiddo was captured by enemies, Davies (1986) agreed with many scholars on the authenticity of “a number of Egyptian inscriptions found at the site itself, some letters sent by the king of Megiddo to the Egyptian court, and most vivid of all, the account in the annals of “Tuthmosis III.”⁴ Of his siege of Megiddo c. 1468 BCE, which as Davies (1986) agreed, is sometimes referred to as “the first recorded battle in history”(p. 37). That battle took place in 1479 B.C.E. in the Late Bronze Age period. The Pharaoh of Egypt Tuthmosis III then captured the city of Megiddo from the Canaanites who lived there, after many months of military campaign.

Another incident that proves that Megiddo was a fertile ground for battles is that after the battle with the Canaanites, it was at Megiddo that the Philistines unleashed constant menace to the Israelites. Often one hears of the Israelites forming a United Kingdom, and even of the fortifications built by King Solomon. At that time kings used to fortify their cities as a proactive measure against enemies. The region was prone to enemy attack right from the time of King Saul. As Cornfield (1976) stated “the constant Philistine menace was the great challenge that forced the Israelites to face up the problem of their survival as a distinctive religious community and a cohesive national entity” (p. 93-94). It was with King Saul that the Israelites moved from a tribal society to becoming a kingdom. Still, it was “the struggle between the Philistines and Israel that led to a final battle in which the Philistines from their bases in Megiddo and Beth-Shean along the Via Maris in the plain of Jezreel, inflicted on Israel a crushing defeat at Mount Gilboa.” (Cornfeld, 1976, p.95). That battle claimed the life of Saul, and his head was hung at the gate of Beth-Shean. With all of these indications of battles that happened in that area, one can with confidence, say with Davies (1986) that the location was a fertile ground for battles.

⁴ *Tuthmosis or Tuthmose III was a Pharaoh of Egypt, in the New Kingdom or the XVIII Dynasty which dates about 1567 – 1085 B.C.E. He ruled just after the female Pharaoh Hatshepsut, between 1504 – 1450 B.C.E. He made invasions in Syria, expanded the Temple of the god Amun in Karnak which is still located in the Northern city of Egypt called Luxor.*

An important contribution of archaeologists in the tel Megiddo has been to discover structures supposed to be Solomonic. For people who read the Bible, to say that King Solomon made the city popular is incontrovertible, especially when one considers what is said that Solomon built Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer (1 Kgs 9:15b). Nonetheless, in the last 30 years, that assertion has been strongly reassessed by scholars. As far back as 1990, King (1990) started to question the old belief. Ussishkin (1997) is the leading voice among those that have questioned the Solomonic dating of the finds at Megiddo. Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority stated that in reality, some of the structures that were hitherto attributed to Solomon are either older or later than Solomon's era. For instance, the Authority stated that the earliest fortifications built at Megiddo were done during the Early Bronze Age (3300-2200 B.C.E). Some other fortifications were later constructed during the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1800 B.C.E). The fortifications continued to serve the city up to the time when the Egyptian Pharaoh, Thutmose III launched a siege at the city. Other indicators that prove that most of what was earlier considered to have been built by Solomon at Megiddo include a massive gateway that is typical of the Bronze Age technology, the gate's walls were small and were made up of dressed stones (called ashlar), and moreover, the unearthing of the remains of an earlier gateway that is dated to 1700s B.C.E, discovered in 1992 during an expedition carried out by the Tel Aviv University, Megiddo.

However, Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority, through its archaeological overture help Christians to do a rereading of what a mere face value reading of the biblical text shows to be the development done by Solomon. The Authority clarified that the Iron Age gate said to have been unearthed by Yigael Yadin between 1960 and 1972 at tel Megiddo can be attributed to have been built by King Solomon solely because of "the striking similarity of gates unearthed at Hazor and Gezer, being two other cities which according to Bible records were constructed by Solomon" (Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority, 1997, p.15). This had been the traditional belief. However, new archaeological data have made scholars to push finds formerly dated to the time of the United Kingdom of Israel, that is, the time of Solomon in the 10th c. B.C.E to the time of Omri or at most during the Omride dynasty, that is, in the 9th c. B.C.E., which means either the time of Omri as king of Samaria or at the time of his son Ahab, as the king of Samaria. This means a fact-finding revolution, from high chronology to low chronology.

What one can retain from the Israeli Authority reconstruction of biblical history through archaeology is that, even before Solomon became king, Megiddo was a rich city. The Authority confirms this assertion with the point it gives about the making of cities in ancient times: "The construction of fortifications around a city highlights two important facts: that the population has possessions to protect and that they have the cultural, political, and organizational skills to put a large labor force to work for the public weal" (p. 14). The concern for fortifications indicates that Megiddo was situated at a place that made it vulnerable to enemies' invasion.

In the 8th c, B.C.E, precisely in 732 B.C.E, the Assyrians under King Tiglath-Pileser III launched a military offensive and destroyed the city. With that it became a vassal state of Assyria, and above all the capital city where the governor resided, hence the name Tell el-Mutesellim (Tell of the governor). After, the Babylonians attacked and dominated it. After the Babylonians, the Romans with their Tenth Legion, dominated it, being stationed at Lejun. Finally, it was at Megiddo that the Germans under Napoleon beat the Turks in the 18th c. B.C.E.

Apart from the incidents of war that occurred in that area, the reality which goes a long way to support the assertion that Megiddo was a fertile ground for battles, the positioning of Megiddo could be said to be responsible for this, which resulted to its weakness and strength. The weakness manifested in the way the location exposed the city to constant conflicts between contending powers as at the time. However, the source of strength showed itself in the sense that the city by being located at the eastern extreme of the Mediterranean Sea, it was a confluence town which brought together three continents by land, namely, Africa, Asia and Europe. As a strategic, meeting point of peoples, it was known for intercultural and cross-cultural relationships. This reality of the place enhanced commerce and collection of taxes from people leaving and entering the city. This means that economically, Megiddo was a power hub for Israel at the time. The significance of Megiddo as controlling

one of the only two trade routes throughout the Mount Carmel range popularly called the Via Maris, the great caravan route, cannot be overemphasized.

The Hebrew Bible never mentions Megiddo as the place of final battle. However, the Christian Bible mentions Armageddon, which is the Greek corrupted form or the Hebrew Har Megiddo as the place where the forces of evil will be gathered before their defeat in a final battle (Rev 16:16). Now that the city of Megiddo has been identified, the next task is to show the major excavations on the mound.

V. EXCAVATIONS ON THE TEL MEGIDDO

Notwithstanding that mention has been made of the gates dated both the Bronze Age (not Solomon's) and the Iron Age (possibly Solomon's), at this point of the research, I want to give a synopsis of the major archaeological finds in the ancient city of Megiddo. To talk about the synopsis means to see how archaeological finds relate with each other, as things that happened in a common locale. The goal is that by understanding Megiddo we will understand Israel. In doing this I intend to use the outline given by Levy and Holl (1995) for studying social change to analyze and evaluate the finds. The outline asks question about "innovations and technology," and "how social groups acquire, maintain, and lose power" (p. 7). Given the reason that this investigation is about a city that is extinct, it involves asking question about the people who lived in that city. About the people, the major question that will be asked here is about their belief system. For this reason, the context question here is, what was "the role of cult and /or religion in the society (that is, in Megiddo) and question concerning "the scale of investment in cult or religious facilities" at Megiddo? Finally, concerning the "process of change" in Megiddo, to reason with Levy (1995), the question will be" why major transitions occurred" (p. 7).

The study done by Davies (1986) concerning the excavations at Megiddo reveals that different groups of people have excavated at this site. From 1903 to 1905 the Germans were there, led by Gottlieb Shumacher. In 1927, the Americans, represented by the University of Chicago and led by Clarence Fisher dug on the site. The last group to dig there was the team made up P. L. O. Guy, R. S. Lamon and Gordon Loud. This was before the tel came under the jurisdiction of the Israeli Hebrew University in Jerusalem from 1960 to 1972. Yigael Yadin opened the door for the Israeli group. Sometime in 1965, I. Dunayevsky, and in 1974 A. Eitan excavated on Megiddo. The result has been that every new discovery or insight has contributed to a fresh understanding of the ancient city. About twenty-five layers of cities have been reached since excavation started in Megiddo.

Credit must be given to the Germans for introducing the methodology of drawing maps, plotting scales, and classifying the excavated areas into sections called "strata."⁵ The German Professor Carl Watzinger came after Schumacher. Special difference between the methods used by both of them is that why Schumacher's approach was so exclusive in that he only quested for structures built by Solomon, Watzinger is credited from the point of view that although he also launched the search for Solomon structures, he extended it to everything that could be attributed to Solomon, whether they are masonry, stables or gates. P. L. O. Guy, the American who came after Fisher has to be acknowledged "for introducing 'locus numbers' to designate rooms or other small areas in a stratum, which is now a universal practice, and the taking of aerial photographs of major structures by means of a camera attached to a captive balloon" (Davies, 1986, p. 20). Levy and Holl (1995) remarked that the archaeology of the Holy Land has been divided into 22 traditionally accepted general chronological periods spanning from the Lower Paleolithic to modern nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (p.6), and I will add in the twenty-first century. Periodically, I will make reference to some of the chronological periods.

⁵*The singular is stratum.*

As King (1990) remarked, after World War 11, the approach to the archaeology of the Syro Palestinian region changed. Three people were instrumental to this development, namely, the British Kathleen Kenyon, the Israeli Yigael Yadin and the American G. Ernest Wright. Unfortunately, King did not give any information on whether those three archaeologists dug at Megiddo in particular or whether they focused on other parts of Israel. Another important information from King is that the interdisciplinary turn saw that the quest for remains of ancient cities Syro-Palestine started since 1970. It gave rise to the involvement of paleobotanists, zoo archaeologists, geologists, ecologists, physical and cultural anthropologists. Other developments seen in the practice of archaeology is the use of new scientific and technological devices,⁶ and in the age of AI, robotics and drone technology, it is most probable that they will also be incorporated. The purpose of this comprehensive approach, as King (1990) remarked, is to achieve exactitude in reconstructing the daily life of the people of the Bible.

⁶*Modern scientific and technological devices include carbon-14 which is used for dating , thermoluminescence is used for dating pottery, magnetometry is used for detecting the presence of metal objects, potassium argon is used for dating geological samples, neutron activation analysis is used for tracing the origin of clay (King, 1990, 469-470).*

VI. THE GATE AREA

On arriving at the site, one enters through the north according to the preservations made by the Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority, one sees a staircase and an outer gate which was believed by earlier archaeologists to have been built during the time of King Solomon (961 – 922 B.C.E.), that is, in the Iron Age. This gate is right opposite of the palace. The gate and the palace divide the tell into north, south, east and west. Both on the northwest and on the southwest of the gate, one sees what is most probably a Late Bronze Age gate and a Middle Bronze Age (2,200 – 1,200 B.C.E.) gate respectively. This shows that the gates are older than the time of Solomon. Kathleen Kenyon, the British archaeologist dug the mound in the 1950s, and drew the conclusion that there are two important elements that give evidence that Solomon built royal cities. One of the elements is “that the gate through the main wall had outside it an outer gate” (Kenyon, 1971, p. 59). However, all her inferences have been vigorously reassessed. Ussishkin (1997) pointed a finger in the opposite direction and expressed that the date of the construction of the gate is uncertain. He argued that it can only be ascribed to Solomon because of its similarity with the ones found at Hazor and Gezer (p. 467). His remark agrees with what King (1990) said about ten years earlier concerning the archaeological remains of fortresses and towers found at Megiddo that “it is safe to say that defense was a concern during this period” (p. 47). Above all, King contested that what gives insight to the life of the Israelites in the Iron Age II are the finds at Samaria.⁷ According to him, at that time, the developments there can be attributed to Omri⁸ and his son Ahab, and not to Solomon. The palace excavated was built by them. King argued that the fact that the palace was embellished with ivories found by excavators at the mound suggests the reason the 8th century prophets, especially Amos criticized the riches of Samaria (p. 47). This point is plausible for the archaeological investigation being done in this paper, especially for inciting persuasion in favour of the low chronology.

⁷*Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel otherwise called Ephraim.*

⁸*Omri was a later king of the Northern Kingdom, succeeded to the throne by his son, Ahab.*

VII. THE PALACE AREA

The palace was found directly opposite the gate, on the south of the mound. On the west there is a palace with rooms that serve as a casemate (a double wall) to the city wall, to make it more solid for defense against enemies. This is also found on Stratum IV. This stratum also designated as Stratum VA-IVB has been considered the most critical stratum, because that has attracted the attention of scholars in the quest for “the Solomonic city.” Stratum IV has often been considered as belonging to the time of Solomon, but the dating of the potteries found there by excavators challenges the assertion, thereby suggesting a later date after Solomon. Megiddo Expedition⁹ revealed that Israel Finkelstien in his dating of Iron Age finds coined the expression “Low

Chronology,” came up with strong arguments that in the tell Megiddo “there is not a single chronological anchor (that is, a find carrying an absolute date, such as an inscription mentioning an Egyptian Pharaoh), between the end of the Egyptian 20th Dynasty rule in Canaan in the late twelfth century B.C.E and the Assyrian campaigns in the late eight B.C.E” (Megiddo Expedition, p.1). This view rules out attempt to situate the finds at the mound to a time in the past, that can help to authenticate any find as “Solomonic city” or “Solomonic Megiddo.” The new development upheld by scholars about tel Megiddo have four points that compel one to make a change from the conventional belief to the latest consensus. What will be mentioned here, for the sake of the scope of this paper is the fourth point. It states that “historians and biblical scholars have become more and more skeptical about the biblical materials which describe the days of the United Monarchy. Many scholars argue that the stories of King Solomon draw a picture of an idyllic “Golden Age” and that the description of his time is filled with theological and ideological goals, as well as historical realities of the time of the authors” (Megiddo Expedition, p. 2). This opinion points to an important biblical fact about the theologians of the books of the Bible. The text of 1Kings 9:15 which states that Solomon built the cities of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, was a way of idealizing and even idolizing Solomon as a great builder, just as his father David was idealized as a lover of songs and praised Yahweh, even though David did not compose all the Psalms.¹⁰ It is more plausible to think this way, in the absence of any archaeological and chronological data to show that Solomon built Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer as is stated in 1 Kings 9:15.

⁹ *The Megiddo Expedition is an association of archaeologists that operates under the auspices of Tel Aviv University. This University belongs to a consortium of institutions that are interested in the archaeology of Syro Palestine, namely, George Washington University, Loyola Marymount University Southern California University and Vanderbilt University (all in USA) and Bern (in Switzerland). The leaders of the Expedition are Israel Finkelstein, and David Ussishkin (both of Tel Aviv University) and Eric Cline (of George Washington University, USA) who is the Associate Director.*

VIII. THE SACRED AREA

A huge Temple called ‘Templeburg’ in German was excavated here. This early Bronze Age (3000 B.C.E.) sacred precinct was dug up on the tell, in area BB.461. This is said to be the earliest Temple. It means that people lived and worshipped at Megiddo even before the Canaanites settled there in the Middle Bronze Age, that is about 1900 B.C.E. The information from Ussishkin (1997) indicates that the Temple was made up of “circular altars surrounded by rectangular houses.” The sacred area also features a rectangular stone that stands upright known as the “Massebot” in Hebrew language which means “sacred stone.” The sacred stone marked the holiest place in the sanctuary, although in the Israelite period its use became questionable for fear of yielding to idolatry. One of the major places it was prohibited is in Exodus 34:13, where the Lord through Moses prohibited the Israelites to not have anything in common with the inhabitants of the land they were about to take possession of, the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. He commanded them to tear down their altars, their sacred pillars and cut down their sacred poles.¹¹ This injunction inspired caution for the use of the sacred stone.

¹⁰ *The Psalms are subdivided into five books, as follows: First Book is from Psalms 1 to 41; Second Book is from Psalms 42 to 72; Third Book is from Psalms 73 to 89; Fourth Book is from Psalms 90 to 106 and Fifth Book is from Psalms 107 to 150. Many Psalms found in Book One though attributed to David may not be historically correct to say that David wrote them. Again, many Psalms in the Second and the Third Books (Pss 42 – 89) are ascribed to Korah and Asaph. These were the two great singing ministries of the temple at the time of the Second Temple (1 Chr 6:33ff; 25:1f).*

It is important to note that during the Canaanite the sacred area served for the worship of El (“god,” singular in Hebrew language). The plural of El, Elohim became associated with the Israelite God. Another Canaanite god that challenged El was Ba’al (goddess of the earth). El is a male god and has a female partner called Athirat (but called Asherah in the Bible). While El was the ruler of all the gods in Canaanite pantheon, Ba’al was responsible for rain and agriculture. Other deities known in the Canaanite world are Mot and Yam. While Mot was the deity

in charge of death and ruled the underworld, Yam was the god that ruled the sea. In Old Testament times, the worship of Asherah, the female consort of El was prohibited (2 Kings 23:4), because the Israelites had the tendency to have recourse to her. They possibly learnt this practice from the people among whom they lived. On its own part, Ba'al being a nature deity was believed to control rain and thunder. The land which was originally Canaan but later became Israel is in most part a desert area. This reality can help one conjecture how importantly Ba'al was considered at the time. With this also, one can understand the seriousness of the combat which the prophet Elijah had with the prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).

¹¹ Other texts that point to the prohibition of the sacred stone are Deut 16:22, Lev 26:1 and 1 Kings 14:23.

Despite all that has been said above, the Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority indicates that there are no archaeological finds that help to attest how the deities named were worshipped at Megiddo. It suffices to say that human beings offered sacrifices to the deities in form of food. Again, the fact that a lot of animal bones was found at the site suggests that animal sacrifices were done there.

The type of architecture and fortifications seen at the tel shows the settlement was urban at the period before the city was possibly abandoned, possibly for pastoral and nomadic. Reasons. Among the finds in the sacred precinct is a large building containing tombs. The period was also characterized by massive cemeteries, potteries wearing double – coloured paint or bichromes. Scholars agree that the sacred area was functional even up to the Middle Bronze Age. Therefore, the Middle Bronze Age also featured fortifications, temples and cultic materials. The Canaanite period continued even after the demise of the "Hyskos."¹² For this Megiddo is seen as a good representation of cultural continuity, seen in Stratum VI. The sacred area reflects in its material culture, casemate walls, capitals, and writings how much was committed to technology, architecture and religion even before Solomon, in the Middle Bronze Age.

IX. THE GRANARY

The granary is a deep underground construction meant for the storage of grains. This stone pit or silo can be found in Stratum IV A. The stored grains served the people in time of famine, drought, and especially in time of war. In the time of war, it was not only the inhabitants of the city that benefited from the stored materials, but also refugees from other cities. This shows how much the Palestinian city of Megiddo was associated with wealth and with greatness.

¹² The Hyskos were rulers of Egypt, of foreign origin who organized a revolution and took power from the indigenes thereby forming the Fifteenth Dynasty.

X. WATER SYSTEM

Food and water were very important elements for people. The time of famine, drought and war tells how much a king is committed to serving his people. The water system seen at Megiddo dates to the 9th century B.C.E., that is the time of Ahab son of Omri. It is located at the southeast corner of the tell. This is a technological wonder: an enormous shaft, laid down a hole dug out of a rock, as deep as 120ft. This shaft is from that depth connected to a tunnel of 215ft in length which culminates in a spring. When the city was on siege, the inhabitants could have access to water without falling prey to enemies. Special feature of the water system is that its exit is camouflaged to confuse an enemy who wants to launch an attack from the exit. But unfortunately, it seems the city was besieged from that angle. Skeletons are said to have been found there, which were perhaps skeletons of the guards who guarded the city then. Talking about social change, two things have to be remarked. First about development, the city of Megiddo saw more innovation and technological growth in the time of Ahab. Second, concerning religion and ideology, even though the focus was shifting to the worship of the God of Israel at the time of Ahab, contact with Canaanite religion made the Israelite religion syncretistic.

XI. TEXTS AND FINDS

One of the criticisms leveled on the archaeology of Megiddo, and so of the Holy Land is that it had been too much centered on King Solomon, with support from the text which indicates what the King did: “This is an account of the forced labour which King Solomon levied in order to build the temple of the Lord, his palace, Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer” (1 Kgs 9:15). In all his royal cities, including Megiddo, Solomon is said to have built “cities of chariots and for horses (1 Kgs 9:19). These biblical statements and others make up working hypotheses which biblical archaeologists have all along used to confirm their finds and vice versa.

Many scholars say it with certitude, that there is great difference between textual scholarship and archaeology. Halpern (1997) strongly contends that “the essential skills of textual scholarship differ altogether from those of archaeology” (p. 312). Harping on the difference, he said that “an archaeologist can truly test a hypothesis with fresh data ... a textual scholar can do no more than ground a hypothesis in existing data” (p.313). From this one gets the impression that archaeological finds often do not corroborate biblical texts. Or as Cornfeld (1976) puts it, “some biblical events did not occur in the way described, or that many happened in different historical order” (p. 1). Cornfeld remarked correctly that “the biblical archaeologist can illuminate the historical setting, the cultural background and the events with which the biblical text is concerned” (p.2). Here Cornfeld and Halpern share the same opinion, and so do I, that archaeology sheds light on history, and so on the written text. Making a step further, Halpern remarked that “history when done properly, gives voice to those who do not speak in our texts, who have not left ideologically charged records, who have not successfully manipulated the technologies of persuasion at a temporal remove” (p. 331).

So, having said all this, I will advance to doing a rereading of the biblical texts that concern Megiddo. Texts set on Megiddo can be found in the Book of Joshua, Judges, Second Book of Samuel, the Books of Kings, and the First Book of Chronicles. Considering the location of Megiddo, the Bible account situates it in the land of Issachar and Asher – which became the lot of the tribe of Manasseh the first born of Joseph – where it shares neighborhood with Beth-Shean, Dor and Taanach (Jos 17:11). This location agrees with Esthori Haparchi’s identification of Megiddo with Tell el-Mutesselim in 1322, following the account given by the Israel Nature and National Parks Protection Authority (1997). It was a Canaanite city (Jgs 1:27). This was the portion of land that fell to the descendants of Joseph (1 Chr 7:28-29). At the time of Joshua, the descendants of Joseph who got that portion of land were already complaining to Joshua that the Canaanites who lived “in the valley region have iron chariots, in particular those in Beth-Shean and its towns, and those in the valley of Jezreel” (Jos 17:16).

Since archaeology makes Iron Age start with the time of Solomon, one would say that what is regarded as “iron chariots” in the text may have in reality been bronze chariots. Megiddo was among the cities whose kings were conquered by Joshua (Jos 12:21). The waters of Megiddo are mentioned in the Song of Deborah (Jgs 5:19) as where the Israelite kings fought and defeated the Canaanite kings. The tribes that fought the battle are Ephraim (Jgs 5:14), Benjamin (5:14), Machir (which represented Manasseh in v.14), Barak represented Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali (5:15). The four tribes that did not join in that battle were Reuben (v.15-16), Gad or Gilead (v.17), Dan (v.17), and Asher (v.17). It is very striking to note that the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom Simeon and Judah are completely absent in the Song. This makes me agree with Cornfeld (1976) that “it may be more accurate to see the period of the united monarchy as an interlude when two separate political entities were welded together by the personal power of David” (p. 115). Many scholars even believe that maybe there was never a united kingdom called Israel. At any rate, the separation of the kingdoms after the death of Solomon only reflects the original state when there was no united nation of Israel.

The First Book of Kings mentions that King Solomon had twelve governors who provided food for the palace in turns, each once a year. Baana, son of Ahilud was the governor of the city of Megiddo who had that responsibility (1 kgs 4:12). And as Cornfeld (1976) observed, archaeologists were able to dig up the small palace of Baana ben Ahilud, whom Solomon appointed as governor of Megiddo. However, following the Low chronology reassessment of the establishments at Megiddo by The Megiddo Expedition, the fortifications, the wall, the gates and the water system have all be reassigned to the time of Ahab. This also includes the

development of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, contrary to the opinion held previously, especially as the reading of 1 Kings 9:15 had earlier occasioned. What is often called “the stables of Solomon” are most probably to be ascribed to the time of Omri (1 Kgs 16:23) or to his son Ahab (1 Kgs 16:29). The analysis so far shows that whereas the texts give voice to Solomon (1 Kgs 9:15), archaeological finds rather give voice to Omri or Ahab who would have been technologically silent. This view agrees with Halpern’s (1997) opinion that “history gives voice to those who do not speak in our texts” (p. 331).

Finally, it is important to note that Josiah King of Judah died in Megiddo, slain by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (1 Kgs 23:29). Saul had earlier died there, slain by the Philistines, precisely on Mount Gilboa (1 Sam 31:8), and his body hung at Bet-Shean (v. 10). From what has been said so far, one sees that the ancient city of Megiddo was a favourable ground for battle and conquest. This fact must have informed the symbolism of the name, as the place for the final battle, in the Book of Revelation. For this reason, in the last section of this paper, I want to examine the Christian contextualization of Megiddo or “Armageddon.”

XII. ARMAGEDDON (HAR MEGIDDO), PLACE OF FINAL BATTLE: REVELATION 16:16

The book of Revelation in Chapter 16, describes the seven plagues executed by the seven angels on the persecutors of God’s people on earth. “The sixth angel emptied his bowl on the river Euphrates. Its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East” (Rev 16:12). Demonic spirits “went to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God the almighty” (Rev 16:14). Verse 16 says: “They then assembled the kings in the place that is named Armageddon in Hebrews.” This name comes from the real Hebrew expression *har Megiddo* which means “Mount of Megiddo.” The question is, why must the kings of the earth be assembled at Armageddon?

The First Century C.E. Christians most probably availed themselves of the Old Testament books. They knew that the Israelites fought against the Canaanites at Megiddo (Jgs 5:19-20). Ahaziah, son of Jehoram and king of Judah was slain by Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat and king of Israel (Northern Kingdom) at Megiddo (2 Kgs 9:27-29). Neco, Pharaoh of Egypt slew Josiah king of Judah at Megiddo (2 Chr 35:23-24; 1 Kgs 23:29). King Saul opened the gate for royal deaths at Megiddo (1 Sam 31:8). An Apocalypse as a style of writing expresses the idea that the day of the Lord will be a day of judgment, and on that day the enemies of God’s people and the enemies of God will be judged and destroyed while the elect will be saved. When Christians thought of where such a definitive battle would possibly take place, and going through the Old Testament (Jgs 5:19-20; 2 Kgs 9:27 and 2 Chr 35:20-24), they saw there was no city characterized by war like Megiddo. So, Megiddo or Armageddon as it is written in Revelation 16:16 graduated to a symbol of the place where the agents of evil will be defeated forever and the people of God saved.

As an image, it has flaws, and so would be incorrect if not preposterous to identify the present site of Megiddo as truly the place of final battle, if ever there will be any battle. This holds true when one remembers that the Book of Revelation uses a lot of imageries, symbols and symbolic acts. The reader finds the symbolic act of the eating of the scroll (10:8-11) and another symbolic act (11:1-2). There are equally symbolic visions (12:1-15). The woman and the dragon (12:1-17) are symbols. The first beast with power from the dragon (12:18 – 13:3), the second beast working on behalf of the first (13:11-12) and the number 666 inscribed on the forehead or on the right hand (13:16-18) are all symbols. Considering all of this, it becomes dangerous to read all of the cited examples as symbols while reading Armageddon (Megiddo) literally. To do this shows absolute lack of comprehension of the literature that is apocalyptic in nature. In contrast, anyone who understands that the enormous role of symbols in Revelation will understand that Armageddon is nothing more than a symbolic name. When for instance, Babylon is used to refer to Rome, and it is called “the great harlot” (Rev 17:1-6), it is a figurative and symbolic expression. In real life Rome was never and is never Babylon. The expression “the great harlot” is not to be understood as meaning promiscuity. But for abandoning of God, Rome is said to be Babylon. Having understood the place of symbols in the Book of Revelation, it is not surprising to see that war is a common theme in the book. Ashiegbu (2017) has argued that in this world, “battle goes on among spirit beings no less than it goes on among human beings” (p.31). It is true the Book of Revelation mentions the

celestial war that took place between the camp of Michael and his angels and the camp of the dragon and his angels (12:7-9). The author contended that the cause of the war was not stated. In the absence of any known reason for the war, he saw it as the symbolic crafting style of the author of the book of Revelation to introduce a simple truth for the persecuted people of God, that their enemy had been defeated by God before and would be defeated always. This means the cause of the war is to be traced to “divine vengeance for the persecuted people of God” (Ashiegbu, 2017, p. 31). However, the mention of war, and especially, of Megiddo or Armageddon in Revelation has been so much misconstrued, misinterpreted and overexaggerated. Cory (2008) is among those who say that this way of reading Revelation is troubling. She invites readers to look beyond “the suffering and bloodshed” motif in Revelation as this amounts to making people limit themselves to looking “at the back of the world” and above all, to be looking at the “back view of God” as if God were a lover of violence, suffering and blood shedding. Cory is aware, just as many of us are, that world powers and religious extremists tend to misread Revelation and take undue advantage of what seems right to them to incite wars. To this Cory invites the world “to behold God’s face in the new Jerusalem,” to embrace “the new world order characterized by the radical inversion of power.” This means that Jerusalem pictured as the city “descending from heaven” is another symbol of what should preoccupy the minds of world powers. If Megiddo or Armageddon symbolizes war, Jerusalem symbolizes peace. Peace is ultimately what Megiddo and Israel stand for in relation to the world at large.

Another person that has drummed caution about the better way to understanding Megiddo with regard to Revelation 16:16 is Patella (2008). He recounts the prevalence of Christian fundamentalists who often pray at the site of Megiddo, with Bible in hand, being influenced by on-the-surface reading of the text of Revelation. Patella reminds the reader that the name Megiddo is a metaphor in the book of Revelation, just as the number 666 (13:18) is a code name for a Roman Emperor who ruled at the peak of the persecution of Christians who were the first readers of the Book of Revelation. Many individuals, groups, Christian fundamentalists and world leaders who have constituted themselves into “apocalyptic roosters” announcing hours for the cosmic war to start from this region of the world have failed to take into consideration the presence of symbols, imageries and metaphors in the book of Revelation. They might be waiting for ever, for a war that will never come. Even if there happens to be a world war tomorrow, it should not be alluded to Revelation 16:16. As the harbinger. The visionary in the book saw a final vision of the holy city of Jerusalem coming down from heaven (21:10-14).

In his commentary on the text, Kizhakkeyil (2007) points out that from the mountain top where he was standing John sees the holy city of Jerusalem coming down from heaven. The author wants readers to see it as “a contrast to John’s journey to the desert to see the great prostitute” (p. 170). The expression, “heavenly Jerusalem” is a symbolic expression. Kizhakkeyil understands the city seen by John as the Messianic Jerusalem or the city of Jerusalem coming down from heaven which is yet to unfold or evolve. It is the vision of a new world that will be free from wars, injustices, pestilences and other evils, just as Cory (2008) echoed in her own way. The meaning of this is that, just as wars of enormous degrees have been associated with Megiddo, and by extension with Israel, so also eternal peace will break into the world through that region. The expression “heavenly Jerusalem” is a metaphor for the place of eternal peace.

XIII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I tried to do two major things. The first was to use archaeological finds in Megiddo to evaluate the biblical text that says that King Solomon built cities such as Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer, as is recorded in 1 Kings 9:15. The second task was to point out a new way for understanding the biblical text which says that the kings of the earth will be assembled at Armageddon for the final battle, as recorded in Revelation 16:16.

Considering the first task, I tried to flow with the current reassessment of the “Solomonic Megiddo” of the 10th century B.C.E. which has changed the narrative resulting to the option for low chronology as is championed by the Megiddo Expedition. Surely, this is a shocking news to a reader who does on-the-surface reading of 1 Kings 9:15. However, it should not be surprising because archaeology does not always corroborate the written text. As a place, Megiddo is significant not only because Solomon was king there, but also, because it was a fertile ground for battles in the past. This is a reality that befell it because, geographically it is positioned at the

meeting point of three continents, namely, Africa, Asia and Europe. The spate of wars that intervened there made the name and the place Megiddo to become a saying, a place of reference and a symbol of war in the Christian apocalyptic book of Revelation. Symbols do not always explain reality. Again, symbols can easily be misunderstood and misinterpreted. In the world, Megiddo is one of such symbolic names that are fraught with misconception. Many still think Revelation 16:16 is a prophecy about war awaiting its fulfilment sometime and someday. The reason is that they find it hard to understand Armageddon is a symbol. Equally, they find it difficult to comprehend that the holy city of Jerusalem coming down from heaven is also a symbol. Such people continue to expect wars start from Israel. The inductive method was used in writing this research. In the search of truth, the inductive method goes from specifics to the general. This means that what is said of Megiddo can be used to understand Israel. So, instead of suggesting war, Armageddon calls for caution: Remember Megiddo and shun violence and war. Jerusalem is highlighted as a dream city for all, where peace will reign in eternity.

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