

A Reply to R. Arav's Review of *Khirbet Qeiyafa Vol. 1*

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Abstract

The *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* recently published a book review by Dr. R. Arav on our final excavation report for the 2007–2008 seasons at Khirbet Qeiyafa (*BASOR* 364:93–97). This review falsely attributes many absurd claims to the site's excavators—for example, that the Iron Age city of Khirbet Qeiyafa was destroyed by rain. We reply here to 18 erroneous points in Dr. Arav's review.

We respond here to 18 erroneous points in R. Arav's recent review (*BASOR* 364:93–97) of *Khirbet Qeiyafa Vol. 1* (hereafter, *Qeiyafa I*), our final report on the 2007–2008 excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa (Garfinkel and Ganor 2009). Each comment is preceded by a direct citation from the review, in order of appearance, with page numbers indicating the page of appearance in the review.

1. *“It is only regrettable that scales were not placed next to all pottery pictures and that the locus numbers and a north arrow are missing from most of the site photographs”* (p. 93).

Photography is not merely a technical apparatus but also a reflection of aesthetic values. Most of the pottery drawings in *Qeiyafa I* are at a scale of 1:5; large storage jars are drawn at a scale of 1:10. These drawings provide accurate dimensions for each item. Photographs, on the other hand, create distortions and a scale does not accurately reflect the dimensions of a given vessel. Scales were therefore not presented for photographs of pottery in the publication to avoid redundancy and permit enlarged presentation of the vessels. Likewise, N-S orientation of walls and installations are clearly indicated on maps and plans. Addition of north arrows and boards with technical information in many cases results in crowded and unaesthetic photos. Once more, toward the end of his review, Dr. Arav complains that *“No north arrow is drawn on the sections...”* (p. 97). This is a preposterous criticism: since when are north arrows placed on section drawings?

2. *“The title of this book refers to it as Volume 1. However it is not clear whether this is the final or a preliminary report of the areas discussed”* (p. 93).

The book's cover and title page clearly indicate "*Khirbet Qeiyafa Vol. 1. Excavation Report 2007–2008.*" It is common knowledge that the titles of most major final excavation reports, for example Gezer I–VIII, Hazor I–V, Jericho I–V, Megiddo I–III, Shechem I–III follow this format. However, Dr. Arav prefers to ignore this, provocatively concluding that "*...it should rather be viewed as a preliminary report on the areas discussed... Since it seems that there are still many questions unresolved...*" (p. 93). *Qeiyafa I* has 304 pages comprising 16 chapters by 18 authors with 53 tables and 336 figures. It reports on all the findings of a two-week probe (in 2007) and a small-scale season (in 2008). Unresolved questions remain in the aftermath of most archaeological excavations. The reviewer's motive in refusing to recognize this as a final excavation report is unclear.

3. "*...the authors assert that in the wake of the discoveries at Khirbet Qeiyafa, the 'minimalist' approach should be labeled as one stemming from 'Paradigm Collapse Trauma' "*" (p. 93).

We used the term "paradigm-collapse trauma" in referring to a number of articles published in 1994–1995, immediately after the discovery of the Tel Dan stele with its reference to the "House of David." This inscription indicates that there was a historical person called David and that he was the founder of a royal dynasty. The panic that this inscription generated among members of the minimalist camp is reflected in their article titles such as: "House of David Built on Sand," "Did Biran Kill King David?" or "Eponymic Referent to Yahweh as Godfather." Khirbet Qeiyafa has nothing to do with that episode and these articles were published 12 years before the Khirbet Qeiyafa excavation began and pertain to Tel Dan, a site located nearly 200 km north of Khirbet Qeiyafa.

4. *“However, for reasons unknown, the authors purport that their [radiometric] dates are unique...”* (p. 93).

In Chapter 3 we present the radiometric datings of Khirbet Qeiyafa. Nowhere in the chapter is the word “unique” used. The importance of the 14C dating is discussed in the report. The reason is not “unknown,” but clearly explained: these are the first 14C determinations for early Iron IIA layers in Judah. Could Dr. Arav be unaware that no radiometric datings for the 10th or 9th centuries BC are available from Jerusalem, Arad, Beersheba, Tell en-Nasbeh, Gibeon, Tell Beth Mirsim, Beth Shemesh or any other major Judean site? The one and only 14C dating, now known from Lachish V, had not yet been published in 2009 (Garfinkel and Kang 2011). Even today, in January 2012, we know of no new radiometric datings published from Judah, an area extending from Tell en-Nasbeh in the north to Beersheba in the south.

5. *“...the author’s selection of Khirbet Qeiyafa for a dig arose from the result of a probe done in 2007 which revealed a site that had ‘...essentially a single stratum, Iron Age....’ However, the actual finds from the dig may indicate something conflicting with the initial probe: it is instead a multiple-occupation site that dates from the Middle Bronze Age to the Ottoman period”* (p. 93).

Dr. Arav uses a few short episodes in the history of Khirbet Qeiyafa to create the impression that it is a multiple-occupation site with major settlement over a period of 3,600 years, from ca. 1,800 BC (Middle Bronze Age) to the 19th century AD (Ottoman period). This is a blatant distortion of the true nature of the remains at the site.

In reality, however, one layer of occupation, which did not last more than one generation, is of utmost importance, that is the Iron Age layer at Khirbet Qeiyafa:

- a. It is the major settlement at the site, with prominent architecture still standing to a height of 2–3 m. The massive Iron Age constructions give the site its present outline.
- b. The artifacts uncovered in the destroyed city are today the best example of the material culture in Judah between ca. 1020 to 980 BC. No other site has provided such a rich assemblage of artifacts for this period.
- c. The dated ostrakon clearly indicates that the Canaanite script was still in use during the first half of the 10th century BC. As the only dated inscription between the 12–10 centuries BC, it is a landmark in the evolution of alphabetic script.
- d. The typical Judean urban planning of Khirbet Qeiyafa, dated to the late 11th century BC, has far reaching implications for understanding state formation processes in Judah. The time period of King David, which was not clearly known at any other site, including Jerusalem, became apparent for the first time.
- e. The connection to the biblical narrative cannot be ignored. Khirbet Qeiyafa clearly indicates that historical memories concerning the 10th century BC are preserved in the biblical text.

On the other hand, activity during all of the other periods was always confined to a small part of the site and did not contribute significantly to its sedimentation.

6. *“Another claim made, and often repeated in the book, is that Khirbet Qeiyafa is the ‘earliest known fortified city in Judah’ ... The justification for a pioneering claim for uniqueness is very demanding and certainly not a simple matter. It requires very*

thorough scrutiny. There is always room for error and misinterpretation, and therefore all doubts have to be removed, not by rhetoric, but by evidence” (p. 93).

Our early dating of Khirbet Qeiyafa is based on the radiometric dating (Chapter 3), the early typology of the local pottery (Chapter 6), the early typology of the imported Ashdod Ware pottery (Chapter 7) and the archaic shapes of the letters of the ostrakon (Chapter 14). Similar pottery assemblages in Judah and nearby areas all came from unfortified settlements: Arad XII, Beersheba VII, and Tel Batash IV. The Qeiyafa pottery assemblage is earlier than that of Lachish V.

An even earlier cultural affinity for the pottery of Khirbet Qeiyafa is suggested by Singer-Avitz (2010), who places it within the typological framework of the Iron Age Ib. This certainly puts the site in a very early context. Singer-Avitz is a well-known expert on the pottery of Judah in the Iron Age and was involved in analysis of pottery from Arad, Beersheba and Lachish. Dr. Arav’s comments reflect a lack of familiarity with the pottery of the Iron Age.

7. *“...the finds presented clearly point to Khirbet Qeiyafa being a severely eroded multiple-occupation site, not a single-stratum site. This means that the authors need to show clear, unequivocal, and compelling evidence that the construction of the ‘megalithic’ city wall and the city gate was in the Iron Age IIA, as they propose and does not date from the Middle Bronze Age with only renovation and reuse during the Iron Age. Thus far, the data presented in this volume are not sufficient to establish their claim” (p. 94).*

The language used here is quite dramatic: “clear,” “unequivocal,” and “compelling”; what Dr. Arav suggests here and in other parts of the review is that the city wall of Khirbet Qeiyafa was probably constructed in the Middle Bronze Age.

There are now three different proposals, dating the Khirbet Qeiyafa city wall to: the Hellenistic period (Dagan 2009), the Iron Age IIA (Garfinkel and Ganor 2009), and now, to the Middle Bronze Age. As far as we know, no other city wall in the entire southern Levant has been dated so diversely, with up to 1,500 years' difference between the proposed dates: ca. 1,800 BC, ca. 1,000 BC, or ca. 300 BC.

The methodology of dating archaeological layers and buildings was discussed by the founding father and mother of stratigraphic excavations, Sir Mortimer Wheeler (1954:72) and Dame Kathleen Kenyon (1961:75). In *Beginning in Archaeology*, Kenyon specifically states: "The two main principles of excavation are the observation of the different layers of soil, including any disturbances affecting them, and the interpretation of their relationship to any structure. Each layer of soil can be dated only by the objects in it" (Kenyon 1961:75). In Wheeler's classical book *Archaeology from the Earth*, one reads: "Unless a structure is dated by a contemporary inscription... our knowledge of its date or cultural context must be derived from the stratigraphic association of objects of recognizable types" (1954:72). Kochavi, Beck and Gophna write specifically on the dating of fortifications: "...the primary consideration, in our opinion, should be the pottery-bearing floors abutting onto the wall itself. Such floors date the period of the usage of the wall" (1979: 125).

Our own conclusions conform to these strict methodological guidelines. The lower peripheral wall at Khirbet Qeiyafa is part of a coherent architectural plan, including two city gates, a monumental threshold, a casemate city wall, and buildings. Dozens of restorable pottery vessels were found on the floors abutting the city wall and they have been presented in Chapters 6 and 7. This assemblage is the only legitimate pottery for dating the fortifications at Khirbet Qeiyafa (Garfinkel and Ganor 2010).

The Middle Bronze Age sherds, less than 0.1% of the pottery uncovered at Khirbet Qeiyafa, are always heavily eroded small items, usually 2–4 cm in size. They were never found in a clean Middle Bronze context, upon a floor, and were always found mixed with either Hellenistic or Iron Age debris. While Dr. Arav demands “*clear, unequivocal, and compelling evidence [for] the construction of the ‘megalithic’ city wall and the city gate*” he finds no difficulty dating them to the Middle Bronze Age in the absence of any stratigraphic data.

The nature of the Middle Bronze Age fortifications should not be overlooked. The great stone revetments seem basically to be parts of the substructure of the fortifications as well as supporting walls for the constructional fills that characterize the MB II enclosures, rather than to be city walls proper (Ussishkin 1989). These megalithic walls were not free-standing, but covered with huge earth ramparts on their outer face. At Khirbet Qeiyafa, on the other hand, the wall is free standing; no earthen rampart abuts it from the outside nor constructional fills from the inside. The typology of the gates should also be taken into account. Similar four-chamber gates with deep chambers have never been found in Middle Bronze Age settlements. This is typical Iron Age construction, known from many other cities including Lachish and Beersheba (Herzog 1997).

8. The reviewer complains that of the six radiometric dates from Locus B214 only five are discussed in the book (p. 94).

The radiometric datings are presented in Table 3.2 on p. 36 of *Qeiyafa I*. The first row of this table clearly indicates that sample Qeiyafa 1a, from Locus B214, was not processed as it failed in the Oxford laboratory.

9. “...the Middle Bronze Age [radiometric] samples would date the construction, and the Hellenistic sample would date the destruction of this unit” (p. 94).

Once again Dr. Arav indicates that construction of the Khirbet Qeiyafa city wall should be dated to the Middle Bronze Age (see point 7 above). He further indicates that the casemate city wall was in use for one and half millennia, from ca. 1,800 BC to the 3rd century BC. He bases this on several radiometric datings from one poor context, Locus B214. As we explained in *Qeiyafa I*, this is a problematic locus, inside a casemate that was freestanding for thousands of years. Given the large gaps between the megalithic stones, sediment could have washed out, animals could have dug holes into the casemate, and roots could have penetrated it. Before we fully understood the problematic nature of Locus B214, we sent four olive pits from this location for dating. Two of the olive pits were tested twice by the laboratory, producing six processed samples. One sample failed, leaving a total of five dates: one olive pit provided two datings within the Middle Bronze Age; two olive pits provided Iron Age dates; one olive pit produced a Hellenistic date. By ignoring our observations on the problematic context of Locus B214, Dr. Arav has fabricated a settlement history of 1,500 years for the city wall of Khirbet Qeiyafa, based upon one Middle Bronze Age olive pit for its construction and one Hellenistic olive pit for its destruction.

10. “As an example of what that violent destruction might have been, the excavators suggest that ‘the city was destroyed during winter rains’ (p. 85). Weather always plays a major role in the aftermath of destruction and may cause erosion and drift of layers from a mound, but certainly rain would not likely be the sole cause for abandonment” (p. 95).

Dr. Arav's twisting of our words "destroyed during winter rains" to mean "destroyed by winter rains" is, perhaps, the most absurd allegation in his review of *Qeiyafa I*. The Iron Age city of Khirbet Qeiyafa was clearly destroyed, as indicated by numerous broken pottery vessels, stone tools and metal objects left on the floors of the houses. This evidence is presented in numerous photographs in our report (*Qeiyafa I*, Figs, 5.51–5.58). We do not know how the city was destroyed: whether by earthquake or by enemies. The problem with the former is the absence of a pattern of wall collapse in a single direction, as might be expected in an earthquake. The problem with the latter is that we do not have a clear burnt layer.

For that reason, we are hesitant to explain the destruction of the Iron Age city of Khirbet Qeiyafa. Given its location on the border between Judah and Philistia, it seems most likely that it was conquered and then destroyed. If this event occurred during the winter rainy season, it is possible that no burnt layer would result. The reviewer's claim that the excavators have invoked rain as "*the sole cause for abandonment*" of the heavily fortified bordered city of Khirbet Qeiyafa is simply ridiculous and an utter falsification of what the report clearly states.

11. "*If we are to take the assumptions of the authors seriously—that Tell Qeiyafa is indeed the Judahite She`arayim, situated in 'Efes Damim,' the battlefield of David and Goliath, and was not deserted in a peaceful manner—then could it be that the match between David and Goliath was not as narrated in the Bible and that the Judahites actually lost this battle?*" (p. 95).

Dr. Arav presents here a mixture of factual inaccuracy and fantasy. Khirbet Qeiyafa suddenly appears with a new name: "Tell Qeiyafa," and is turned into the site of biblical Efes Damim (a claim never made in our report). The biblical account, of

disputed historical value, places the battle between David and Goliath in the Valley of Elah while Khirbet Qeiyafa is located on a hilltop above a valley. The biblical story describes the military force against the Philistines as “Saul and the men of Israel” (1 Sam 17:2, Revised Standard Version) while Dr. Arav turns these into “Judahites.” It is of little comfort that not only *Qeiyafa I* is subject to abuse in this review, but the Bible as well.

12. *“The first gate is fairly small, measuring only 13 by 10.5 m. It consists of four small chambers and, oddly, had no protruding towers to protect it”* (p. 95).

The gates at Khirbet Qeiyafa are in conformity with the standards of gate size in the Kingdom of Judah. Similar gates, in plan and size, have been reported at Beersheba and Lachish (Herzog 1997).

13. *“...piers are not incorporated into the walls but may have been added in a later phase or stratum”* (p. 95).

Dr. Arav emphasizes that the casemates abut the outer city wall and buildings abut the gate and the casemates. According to the reviewer, each construction phase may indicate another chronological phase or stratum. Indeed, at Khirbet Qeiyafa there are walls abutting other walls, but each room had only one floor level, and the floors connect the walls into one coherent architectural plan. Instead of looking at the general plan of the site’s architecture, the reviewer chooses to cut and fragment it into meaningless walls, as he does by suggesting that there was a gate without piers. These observations entirely ignore the most important aspect here: Khirbet Qeiyafa follows the classic plan of Judean cities, known from four other sites: Beersheba, Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell en-Nasbeh and Tel Beth-Shemesh (Shiloh 1978; Herzog 1997).

14. The reviewer interprets Building BI as perhaps having “*served as a small shrine,*” and concludes the same for Building BII: “*The authors did not identify the purpose of the building, but it seems that it had a function similar to that of Building BI*” (p. 95).

Dr. Arav nonchalantly identifies two Iron Age cult buildings without any “*clear, unequivocal, and compelling evidence*” for cultic activities *in situ*. One concealed standing stone found upside down in secondary use inside Building BI is sufficient to identify Building BII a cultic building.

15. “*In the first paragraph of Chapter 6, ‘The Early Iron Age IIA Pottery,’ the authors make a presumptuous statement: ‘Pottery of the early Iron Age IIA in southern Israel is poorly known. The three classic sites—Beersheba, Arad, and Lachish—are all problematic’ (p. 119). Therefore, they conclude, ‘previous work on the Iron Age IIA pottery in Judah was not founded on a satisfactory database’ (p. 119). Undoubtedly, some of the researchers of the sites listed above would not agree with this conclusion*” (p. 96).

A reviewer should present his or her own ideas; here the reviewer presumes to speak on behalf of other scholars. Early Iron Age IIA strata at sites in Judah include Arad XII, Beersheva VII, Tel Batash IV and Lachish V, all of which suffer from the same fundamental problems:

- a. The Iron IIA layers were excavated in limited areas.
- b. The architectural context of the pottery is not always clear as it is not associated with complete architectural units.
- c. The pottery yielded consisted mainly of small sherds. These sites did not provide large assemblages with dozens of complete vessels.

- d. None of these sites provided radiometric dates and consequently, their absolute dating is unclear.
- e. All these sites are characterized by a long sequence of Iron Age layers. As is well known, pottery sherds can move up and down in multilayer sites. Thus, it is possible that some of the pottery types from these sites are not part of the original early Iron IIA stratum.

Khirbet Qeiyafa, in marked contrast, is characterized by the following:

- a. At Khirbet Qeiyafa the Iron IIA layer was exposed over an area larger than at any of the other sites.
- b. Complete architectural units were excavated, and the pottery can be related to specific houses and rooms.
- c. Dozens of complete vessels were recovered in the various excavation seasons, making Khirbet Qeiyafa the main type site for the pottery of its period in southern Israel.
- d. Radiometric dating places Khirbet Qeiyafa in the late eleventh–early tenth centuries BCE.
- e. Since only one Iron Age phase is represented, all the Iron Age pottery uncovered from the architectural remains at Khirbet Qeiyafa belongs to this phase. Intrusive pottery sherds are clearly dated to either the Middle Bronze Age or the Hellenistic period.

16. *“The authors then proceed to suggest that ‘Khirbet Qeiyafa offers for the first time, an important resource for our understanding of the pottery development of Judah in the early Iron Age IIA’”(p. 119). However, some pottery cited in support of this claim appears to have Iron Age IIB parallels...”* (p. 96).

As we have shown in point 6 above, an expert on Iron Age pottery in Judah who is working on the assemblages of Arad and Beersheba has suggested an even

earlier horizon than the Iron Age IIA for the Qeiyafa assemblage, that is, the late Iron Age IB (Singer-Avitz 2010).

17. “Chapter 9, ‘Stone and Metal Artifacts,’ ...alleges to present another pioneering aspect of the excavation... The author reports on 40 stone tools... With but a few drawings and photos, and in only 19 pages, he proposes to set the new template for this type of report” (p. 96).

In this chapter all of the 40 stone artifacts recovered are summarized in a table, providing the location and specific geological composition (as identified by a geologist). All are presented in technical drawings. The major pioneering aspect here is the presentation of the entire assemblage, not a new typology for stone tools. Everyone who is familiar with the current situation of stone-tool research at historical sites knows that these artifacts are either completely ignored, or only a few “nice” items presented. How many excavation reports on sites dated to the Bronze or Iron Ages provide quantitative data for stone tools?

18. Relating to the standing stone, the reviewer comments that “no geological analysis follows” (p. 96). Table 9.1 in *Qeiyafa I* does provide a geologist’s description of this stone.

The 18 points raised above are but a selection of issues that reflect serious problems with Dr. Arav’s review. Since *Qeiyafa I* was published, three additional large-scale excavation seasons have been conducted in the years 2009–2011. The excavated area at the site is now nearly 10 times greater than it was at the end of 2008. Complete architectural units have been uncovered and a vivid picture is

emerging of how the city was built. Large quantities of finds from the destruction layer of the late 11th–early 10th century BC city provide data for the study of almost every aspect of daily life: pottery, stone tools, metal objects, cultic paraphernalia, Egyptian scarabs, animal bones and various other find categories. The publication of this data in subsequent volumes of the final report series is now the main concern of the Khirbet Qeiyafa expedition.

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