

## ETIC AND EMIC EXPRESSIONS OF POWER IN ANCIENT ISRAEL: RECALIBRATING A DISCUSSION

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### *Abstract*

This article details the way that sociopolitical power was expressed in ancient Israel and how modern scholars have distorted this expression through the application of post-Enlightenment concepts and terminology. As such, ancient Israel's early first millennium BCE polities are studied and articulated in anachronistic terms and concepts (e.g., the "state", "empire", what a "king" is) that find no home in the Bronze or Iron Age Near East (ca. 2000–500 BCE). This discord between indigenous concepts of power, terminology related to political structure and leadership roles, and modern discussion of these features has important repercussions for how the biblical text is interpreted, how the archaeological remains from the 11<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE are interpreted, and how text and realia are collocated. This article traces the divergence between modern approaches to ancient Near Eastern sociopolitical structures and indigenous expressions of those same structures to establish a starting point for recalibrating the fierce debate about the historicity of the early Israelite monarchy in the days of Saul, David, and Solomon.

### *Keywords*

Anthropological Archaeology, Patrimonialism, Ancient Israel, Methodology, Political Power and Structure, State Formation

### **Introduction**

For the past forty years, scholarship on the early Israelite monarchy—typically referred to as the "United Monarchy" (ca. 1040–930 BCE)—has characterized this polity along neo-evolutionary terms. Debate rages over whether this monarchy should be classified as a "chiefdom", a "state," or even an "empire." Similarly debated is how to refer to Israel's earliest leaders—Saul, David, and Solomon according to the biblical text; are they "chieftains," "kings," or something else? The choice of terms carries with it modern baggage not the least of which is connected to how one interprets the archaeology of Israel from the 11<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE (the Iron Age I-IIA), how one views the historicity of the biblical text that records the sociopolitical situation of that time, and what those texts are actually describing. Interpretations of the archaeology and the texts are mutually reinforcing—even as precedence is given to one or the other—and are conceptualized along the lines of the terms listed above. Thus, the choice of terms employed says much about whether one is assumed to accept or deny the popular idea that the Hebrew Bible paints a picture of a flourishing and far-reaching

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monarchy under kings David and Solomon,<sup>2</sup> both of whom exerted complete political and military control within the clearly delineated boundaries of this polity. The problem, however, is that this entire framework is anachronistic and based on a popular but entirely problematic interpretation of the early Israelite monarchy. This paper is an attempt to turn from post-Enlightenment concepts, terms, and ideals to emic expressions of power and to re-interpret the popular view of Israel's early kings. When we do this it becomes clear that the dominant functionalist framework for interpreting the archaeological remains and their collocation to political organization is troublesome, historically accurate details about the early Israelite monarchy in the biblical text can be evaluated more properly, and that the adoption of neo-evolutionary terms to describe Israel's sociopolitical structure and leadership is entirely anachronistic and hinders instead of elucidates how we discuss and conceptualize what ancient Israel's expressions of power actually were.

While the main thrust of this article is differentiating the ancient Israelite concepts of "king" and "kingdom" from the way that modern scholars identify them, we must begin our discussion considering ancient Israelite sociopolitical structure. Only when we understand this structure through ancient textual attestation coupled with an appropriate theoretical framework can we hope to articulate it through emic terms as opposed to neo-evolutionary terms, which, as we will show, are entirely inapplicable. After this, it becomes possible to discuss the way(s) in which this structure would appear archaeologically.

## Methods

The nature of political power in the ancient Near East and how that power is related to social structures and correlated archaeologically is something that has been discussed extensively (Frick 1985; Flanagan 1981 and 1988; Gottwald 1979 and 2001; Dever 1982 and 1994; Jamieson-Drake 1991; McNutt 1999; Casana 2009 and 2013; Faust 2003; Finkelstein 1989 and 2010; Glatz 2009; Khatchadourian 2016; Master 2001 and 2003; Morris 2005; Osborne 2013; Parker 1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, and 2013; Porter 2004; Routledge 2004 and 2014; Smith 2003 and 2011; Zimansky 1985). In some contexts, there are visible and extensive material correlates to increased political power and social complexity; in others, this material element is more problematic to identify. Anthropological archaeologists, along with sociologists and political theorists continue to show how universalizing and linearizing models of socio-political evolution are generally fraught with exceptional cases. Context is important; any understanding and/or establishing of both symbols and material expressions of identity, power, and structure are specific to individual cultures and times (VanValkenburgh and Osborne 2013; Colburn and Hughes 2010; Johansen and Bauer 2011; Lulewicz 2019; Smith 2003 and 2011; Yoffee 2005; Dillehay 2014; Hendon 1991; Quilter and Castillo 2010).

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<sup>2</sup> Generally dated to ca. 1010–970 and 970–930 BCE, respectively. We do not know the specific dates of either of these kings' reigns as the biblical text portrays the length of each as "40 years", a typological number that may be literal or figurative. Biblical scholars often accept the length of reign at face-value and arrive at the actual calendrical years for their reigns using subsequent chronological markers in the biblical texts juxtaposed with extra-biblical texts that provide exact dates. Yet there are no contemporary external documents presently known for the days of David, Solomon, or Israel's first king, Saul, that can help establish their actual dates and/or lengths of reign.

One size does not fit all when it comes to articulating power structures and processes, particularly in the ancient Near East, where vastly different scenarios resulted in varying levels of social hierarchy and political expressions of authority and power. What can be shown for most ancient Near Eastern cultures, including Assyria, Babylonia, Ugarit, Canaan, Israel, Egypt, and the Hittites, is that they were patrimonial—relationships were personal and idealized, and reified as the dyadic relationship of father to son—as opposed to bureaucratic—where relationships are impersonal and based on ability and qualification. Unfortunately, however, in the scholarship on ancient Israel, this fundamental social reality is still largely ignored in favor of perpetuating inappropriate neo-evolutionary modes and means of describing social complexity and political structure. Terms such as “tribe,” “chiefdom,” and “state” still appear frequently despite rarely, if ever, being defined, and the fact that there are no ancient words for the latter two terms. Moreover, trait lists meant to help articulate levels of social complexity have been established within functional and sometimes structural frameworks that assume a shared worldview for conceptualizing relationships, identity, and experience. Such a shared worldview, however, simply does not exist. As a result, modern terminology for structuring ancient Near Eastern, and in particular, ancient Israelite social structure, political complexity, and geospatial correlates of dominion are anachronistic and in need of a more emic framework of expression. This article seeks to establish this framework.

Without such a framework, we run the risk of articulating the manifestation of political power in 11<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century BCE Israel from an etic perspective, ignoring emic considerations for how and when political authority operated, which in turn impacts what is preserved archaeologically, and how we interpret the archaeological remains. The result of such a perspective has led to expectations that early Iron Age Israel should possess particular archaeological features that mark “statehood,” including a large capital, urbanization, monumental inscriptions or art, and administrative scribalism (Wightman 1990; Jamieson-Drake 1991; Niemann 1997; Finkelstein 1999). As we will argue, in the context of a patrimonial agrarian society such as Israel, these features are either limiting or false. In fact, such features are not markers of the formative stage of the Israelite monarchy but are developments that arise only after the monarchy (or the “state”) was initiated and well ensconced in the social fabric.

Any disconnect between etic expectations and emic expressions has major ramifications for how we understand political entities in the ancient Near East, and ancient Israel in particular. It also has consequences for any study that would seek to integrate text into the archaeological picture, as false expectations or misguided interpretations of the archaeology reinforce specific readings of ancient textual materials and often leads to false expectations from the textual sources themselves (cf. Halpern 2005, 426). Likewise, when these textual sources are weighted down with etic assumptions about the socio-political world they reference, this can lead to false expectations of the archaeological record as a reflection of this world. In the end there is self-propagating reasoning that hinders emic representations of power in text and archaeology, and which leads to numerous circular and anachronistic arguments about the nature of ancient political control in Israel, the nature of its “United Monarchy,” and the historicity of the textual representation of this monarchy in the biblical books of 1-2 Samuel and 1 Kings.

Any review of the literature on the Israelite United Monarchy will show that views vary considerably about its historicity and specifics, whether they be from a textual or archaeological perspective (Dever 2005; Pioske 2015; Richelle 2016; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001;

Lemche and Thompson 1994). But most studies share at least some commonalities: a functionalist perspective that is tied to the idea that material correlates are the most meaningful way by which we can evaluate the historicity of the United Monarchy, and that these material correlates are present *throughout* the period of the United Monarchy. Also, still dominant is what Halpern (2005, 433) calls a “binary approach to the [biblical] text...[which] creates the wrong expectations for seeking archaeological reflexes.” A binary approach seeks to establish whether the text is “true” or “false.” But this simplified approach to the text leads many times to the creation of “straw-men” arguments. There is an interpretation of the biblical text, then a comparison with the archaeological record, and if the two do not match according to the scholar doing the evaluation, then the text is “wrong” in some nature, or in need of emendation. Such logic, unfortunately, dominates in biblical and archaeological studies but attests more to the expectations of the modern scholar than it does the nuanced attempt to interpret two separate corpora of data.

In this regard, Gottwald (1993, 204) correctly noted that, “we have not done our work until we can show how the fulcrum point of political economy is operative in the text and in the interpreter.” This gets to the main point of this methodological article, that we are viewing the biblical portrayal of the early ancient Israelite polities through an anachronistic and inappropriate political hermeneutic that does not accurately map onto the sociopolitical situation of ancient Israel as recorded in the biblical texts themselves, as well as the archaeological materials. With the latter, we are either left with a sense that the biblical texts are wrong, ideological, or misinformed because our interpretation of the archaeological record is “right,” or we need to fundamentally re-evaluate our epistemological assumptions when it comes to the interpretation of the archaeological record; functionalism is useful, but it is not the only, or necessarily the best lens through which to view ancient Israelite political structures. This is particularly true when, as we argue below, political structures in early patrimonial Israel were actually ever-evolving networks of relationships. Moreover, we must not forget that “correlating texts to objects is ticklish business” (Halpern 2005, 425).

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to admit our own expectations and/or biases. We assume that the biblical texts of Samuel and Kings preserve much useful historical material that properly reflects the 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. And while there are later additions and redactions to these texts, the mundane character of social aspects and political economy find their best, and in some cases only, parallels in these early periods, and do not reflect the later redactions, which variably date from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> (or later) centuries BCE. As a detailed text critical evaluation of ancient sources is beyond the scope of this article, it will have to suffice to say that there is much in 1 Sam 9–1 Kgs 11 that reflects early contexts, accurately recorded or remembered, as numerous scholars have shown (Halpern 2010; Fleming 2012a; Pioske 2015; Hutton 2009; Dietrich 2007; Hendel 2006; McCarter 1980a and 1980b; Kalimi 2019; Benz 2016; Schniedewind 2019; van Bekkum 2014 and 2017; Becking 2011).

What we will argue throughout is that when etic expectations of both text and artifact are subjected to sociological, anthropological, and archaeological theory and rethought as a result, a more refined and historically-contextualized portrait comes into focus and the perceived disaccord between what the Hebrew Bible claims for the United Monarchy and what the archaeology is for this same entity largely disappears; we can better approximate what the emic expression of political power and authority was.

### *Previous Modern Frameworks for Expressing Ancient Israelite Sociopolitical Structure*

In another context, one of us has shown that the concept of a “United Monarchy” was tied exclusively to the interpretations of the biblical text in the 19th and 20th centuries (Keimer 2021). The term “United Monarchy” is a modern invention. Nevertheless, it became ingrained in both biblical studies and early archaeological studies. Following Albrecht Alt’s article, *Das Großreich Davids* (1950), the “United Monarchy” was branded the “Davidic/Solomonic Empire,” a term that gained traction in Israeli and American scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s (Bright 1959, 181; Malamat 1963, 16–17).<sup>3</sup>

Yet, despite the entrenching of these terms, there was a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between traditional power structures, i.e., tribes and kings, that persisted in much of the scholarship of the day (e.g., Alt himself 1950; Mazar 1963). At the same time, however, it appears that the introduction of the New Archaeology in the 1960s along with evolutionary models of social development (Service 1962) influenced the conceptualization of the Israelite monarchy and social system, ultimately subsuming the multiplicity of power structures under one more coherent generalized and linearized model (Flanagan 1981 and 1988; Frick 1985). The result was the preservation of the terms “United Monarchy” and “Davidic/Solomonic Empire” with these terms becoming even more problematic than they had been before because they now carried with them an assumption of specific archaeological traits and manifestations of political power (e.g., Frick 1977; Jamieson-Drake 1991). Add to this the introduction of the term “state” and the issue of “state formation” and the shift away from a native expression of political power and hierarchy was complete.

Next, the terms “United Monarchy” and “Davidic/Solomonic Empire” became pariah terms that were used to denigrate the historicity of certain biblical texts when juxtaposed with archaeological discoveries, which were assumed to carry a more direct and clear meaning than did “ideological” texts. Thus, from the 1980s, models of state formation processes led the specific expectation of material expressions of political power, including the centralization of that power (Flanagan 1988, 19); the lack of sought-after archaeological traits that were understood to mark a state or an empire meant that the *biblical* claims about the great “United Monarchy” and/or the “Davidic/Solomonic Empire” were later ideological fabrications (Lemche and Thompson 1994, 18–20). The straw man was now set up and knocked down.

Today, the problems with evolutionary models and the materialist expectation of non-material expressions are well known (Schloen 2001; Master 2001 and 2003; Kletter 2004; Yoffee 2005; Thomas 2019b and 2021; Keimer 2021). Recent studies in materiality, political geography, identity and ethnicity, and the social reification of power and authority now provide us with the tools by which we can theorize and re-evaluate the early monarchy of ancient Israel, ultimately allowing us to define key sociopolitical concepts on their terms.

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<sup>3</sup> The translation of *Großreich* as “empire” carries with it a specific semantic range in English that is not identical to that of the German term. Moreover, in light of evolutionary models, the term has come to embody a specific political and social organization that appears to be counter to what Alt was describing.

### *Methodological Considerations—the Legitimization of Power and Authority*

To understand ancient Israelite concepts of leadership and territory behind the Hebrew terms for “king” and “kingdom” we must begin by considering what “power” is. We adopt the definition given by Quilter and Castillo (2010, xii) that “power” is “energy potential—the energy itself, whether as inherent in surplus labor or access to materials necessary to sustain life or create luxury items—and the ability to have access to or direct such energy to one end or another.”<sup>4</sup> “Authority,” on the other hand, is “the ability to channel the behavior of others in the absence of the threat or use of sanctions” (Fried 1967, 13; cf. Smith’s [2003, 108] definition). The two do not always need to appear together, though power, or better the expression of power is typically a key source of authority.

How is power legitimated? As Beetham (2013, xi) notes, the answer to this question is bound to the internal content and rationale of people’s beliefs, rather than being based on any external criterion of validity. These beliefs vary from culture to culture and over the course of time, meaning that the legitimization of power/authority is contextual—bound to specific instantiations of culture. While every culture that falls within the “ancient Near East” has specific articulations of various beliefs, there are some beliefs and rationalizations that appear to be generally constant across many of these cultures. And while our goal is to detail the sociopolitical beliefs of ancient Israel in order to articulate their specific expression of legitimate political power and the ways that power would have manifested in the archaeological record, comparison with surrounding cultures with a *longue durée* perspective not only helps clarify certain shared beliefs—patrimonialism, agriculturalism, patriarchalism—but also helps to define disparate beliefs—theologies and ideologies.

Moreover, articulating how power is legitimated requires considering not only the perspective of those legitimating the power (i.e., those who will be ruled), but also of those expressing that legitimization (i.e., those who rule). The relationship between these two categories of people requires a careful evaluation of numerous variables if we are to articulate an ancient political power relationship. Haas (1982; cf. Beetham 2013, xi) defines nine such variables for articulating such a relationship: means (charisma, military action, affiliation, treaty), scope (on a continuum of power communication from sovereign rule to hegemonic rule to partial rule), amount (qualitatively), extension (how far does one’s power reach; geographically and qualitatively), power costs, compliance costs, refusal costs, gains, and power bases (tribes, elders, elites, families, mercenaries, etc.).

Inherent in Haas’ variables is social structure. Social structure is one of the key factors that must be weighed in articulating power and legitimacy. The way in which power is manifest or the way in which a leader is legitimized and continues to remain legitimate, vary depending on the social structure. As such we must say something about social structure in ancient Israel (and by extension, the broader ancient Near East).

Strong evidence and arguments that Weber’s concept of patrimonialism is an appropriate and accurate framework for understanding ancient Israel’s sociopolitical structuration have already been presented several times (Stager 1985 and 2003; Master 2001; Barako 2009;

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<sup>4</sup> Surplus labour is equated to mercenary forces who assist and are directed by early charismatic leaders in Israel: Saul and David. These two kings, along with Solomon also engender the ability to direct military and the resultant economic resources.

Lemche 1996; Thomas 2019b and 2021).<sup>5</sup> This means that power was held by a “father” over his “household” (Hebrew *bêt ’ab*). But “father” and “household” are dyadic components that can refer to a literal father over his household, a king over his kingdom, or a god over his subjects/worshippers. The “household” as a flexible structuring idea over multiple levels of social organization is one aspect of ancient patrimonial systems, but the true heart of patrimonialism, particularly as it was articulated by Weber (1997, 347-351), is that it is “a tool that made it possible to explore political systems in which a ruler exerts power on the basis of kin ties, patron-client relations, personal allegiances, and combinations thereof, with few formal rules and regulations” (Charrad and Adams 2011, 7).<sup>6</sup> Similar patrimonial forms of administration with kinship-based (tribal) social and political structures in which kings needed to navigate how they established and exercised their power are present in the Ur III period (Garfinkle 2008 and 2013), Middle Babylonian Mari (Bodi 2013), Late Bronze Emar (Fleming 1992), the Neo-Babylonian kingdom (Jursa 2017), Late Bronze Age Ugarit (Schloen 2001); Late Bronze Age Canaan (Benz 2016), the Hittite kingdom (Bilgin 2018), and New Kingdom Egypt (Lehner 2000).

According to Charrad and Adams (2011, 8), “patrimonialism can characterize a relationship as limited and stylized as the classical Weberian triad of ruler-staff-ruled, or as rich and complex as the system of power characterizing a national state.”

Authority and power within patrimonial systems are based in traditional authority—i.e., authority that is understood to have always been there even if the inception of the authority is within living memory. Traditional authority itself is tied to both real and symbolic manifestations that serve to reify that authority. Schloen (2001) has the most comprehensive study on the symbolic aspect of patrimonial authority in the ancient Near East; and it would not be wrong to say that,

“holders of patrimonial power justify it through an extension of the ‘natural’ rights of patriarchs and cast it in terms of authenticity, tradition, loyalty, patriotism, duty, reciprocal obligations, care, and independence. It can be a basis for group solidarity...and a state ideology...it is an embodiment of traditional culture...an ideological foundation for national conscription...and for oppositional politics...it is in part the symbolic dimension and set of powerful meanings that the patrimonial carries that make it a pervasive possibility with an enduring presence despite moments of retreat” (Charrad and Adams 2011, 10).

In sum, power in a patrimonial society such as ancient Israel was expressed symbolically before it was expressed materially; it was first and foremost a social construction before there were any architectural constructions.

As with the semantic range of the term “king” (see below), the structure of political power and how that structure is defined in the ancient Near East is not only different than how it is defined in later periods, but it is also manifold in its expression. So, while Weber’s classification

<sup>5</sup> It should be recognized that to call ancient Israel “patriarchal” is not to deny that women held considerable power at various times and in various sociopolitical settings. As with many terms, “patriarchalism” is a generalized term for heuristic purposes that encompasses a vast majority of specific instantiations, though it is not absolute in its definition or monolithic in its expression, cf. Meyers (2006 and 2012) and Chapman (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Weber stated that, “the object of obedience is the personal authority of the individual which he enjoys by virtue of his traditional status. The organized group exercising authority is, in the simplest case, primarily based on relations of personal loyalty, cultivated through a common process of education” (1997, 341). This quote by Weber certainly holds true for Israel and Judah once the monarchy was entrenched, but additional clarification is needed for the period of the transition from rule by “judge” to rule by monarch.

offers the potential to draw us closer to an emic view of how ancient leaders led their constituents, we must remember that he articulated ideal types that seldom actually appear in history. Instead, the specific nature of political power and its operation are culturally, historically, and socially specific.

Such complexity in political power has been clear to anthropological archaeologists who have noted how political organizations, that is, organizations that can hold, wield, and bestow power, are “dynamic, complex networks of individuals and households, who have divergent motivations, life histories, and resources” (Billman 2010, 182; cf. Goldstone and Haldon 2009; Yoffee 2005). The nature of political rule and political power is, as Routledge (2004 and 2014) touts it, fluid in its specific manifestations, but concrete in that the king is the nexus of that power.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of how a leader draws his legitimacy, this legitimacy must be constantly reified through social means if the leader wishes to stay in power. The mechanism through which this reification is brought to those being ruled, and by which a semblance of continuity is established is through ideology. Ideology engenders the recognition of asymmetrical power relationships that allow certain individuals to rise to power and then to keep that power. At the same time, if taken in a Gramscian sense, ideology is culture. Kings are beholden to the culturally accepted norms of their constituency while at the same time this constituency relies on the king to fulfill their socially derived expectations. Kings can attempt to manipulate these expectations via ideology, but only in so far as is, or becomes, socially acceptable. Ideology is then both an outcome of the underlying nature of the sociopolitical structure and is something that creates such structure.

Special note is necessary to draw the distinction between the purpose and presence of ideology, and the level of centralization expressed/manifested by those using an ideology to create a sense of unity and hierarchy. Great political power is not always necessitated on the centralization of *all* political power, or even economic resources (LaBianca 2009; Thomas 2019a). These correlations are, again, anachronistic to the ancient Near East and ancient Israel. In reality, it is the social structure of a society that has the greatest influence on centralization, and the degree that it was critical or not in the maintenance of political relationships.

Recent studies are starting to articulate the nature of centralized power and the various degrees to which a political entity can operate within a continuum of greater and lesser centralization. In particular, Kiser and Sacks (2011, 130) note that patrimonial societies are typically characterized by “extreme forms of decentralization (local notables, feudalism, and prebendalism).” Charrad (2011, 65) even illustrates how centralized and de-centralized power structures co-exist. More specifically for the Near East, Benz (2016) and Fleming (2012a) highlight the role of collective governance even within a realm of particularizing political power. Russell highlights the ways in which kings attempted to navigate decentralized power

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<sup>7</sup> Routledge applies the Gramscian definition of hegemony to his discussion of ancient “states.” The state, for Routledge, is both fluid and concrete; what is actually the manifest power is not a continually redefined “collective fiction” though, but kingship (Cf. Khatchadourian’s [2016, xiv] idea of the imperial “condition,” a term that denotes the “perpetual aspirational and incomplete” nature of imperial sovereignty). Kingship, and the materials that represent kingship embody authority. In this way there is no “state” as classically defined, but there is a political entity ensconced around a political figure, the king. The king is the mediator in a dual dyadic system that links god to king and king to people. As such, the king’s ability to establish hegemonic control is tied to traditional understandings of kingship in the ancient Near East, even though the biblical portrayal of the creation of the monarchy is unique in its rationale for that creation.



structures in order to express their authority (2017). From an archaeological perspective, Maeir and Shai (2016) have started to articulate the reality of de-centralized political power in ancient Israel. This decentralization is also clear in the biblical texts. In 1 Kgs 21:8-14 king Ahab is unable to claim Naboth's land until the elders who lived in Jezreel had convicted Naboth of heresy and treason.<sup>8</sup> The Israelite monarchy had to integrate local control because local authority was ingrained in the society (Sharon and Zarzecki-Peleg 2006, 164). Without the support of this local authority, the monarch risked losing control over the people.

It is the support of the local authorities and even one's own tribe—i.e., elders and tribal/family leaders—that made monarchy possible; indeed, it was necessary, given the kinship-segmentary character of ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. And it was tribal elders in particular that needed to be won over and appeased. King Saul's early military power came from members of his own tribe (1 Sam 22:7): he appointed his cousin, Abiner, as chief over the soldiers (1 Sam 14:50); then, he distributed fields and vineyards to his soldiers (1 Sam 22:7). The same is true of David. His early power base was comprised of members of his father's house (*bêt 'ab*) along with disaffected men (1 Sam 22:1-2). David's chief was his nephew, Joab (2 Sam 2:13), and the head of his mercenaries, Benaiah, who later led the soldiers in support of Solomon (1 Kgs 1:33-38), was the son of a loyal follower (2 Sam 8:18).

The challenge for the monarch was how to handle the traditional tribal structure and power of the tribal/clan elders. As modern ethnographic examples show, patriarchal patrimonial power structures can be subverted or integrated into a monarchic or state system (Charrad 2011). In fact, the relationship between a monarch and the tribes that legitimize him, varies over the course of the early Israelite monarchy. Tribal leaders cry for a monarch in the days of the prophet Samuel and are given Saul. They again support David later. But when the monarch over-extends and/or abuses his power at the expense of the tribal authorities, there is pushback, as is highlighted by Absalom, David's son, and his revolt (Russell 2017, 68-83; Halpern 1981, 80). This pushback is even more extreme following Solomon's death with the subsequent withdrawal of support for Solomon's heir by the northern tribes when he refused to lessen their obligations of service to the crown.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, kings rule through personal union, as Alt (1989) put it. This personal union, as Hendel (2006, 224; cf. Lemche 1996) rightly notes, is connected to the idea of patron-client relationships within a patrimonial kingdom. The king is not the center of a centralized political system that envelopes all levels of society, but he is the head of a de-centralized system built upon traditional social structures. So, while the king may establish hegemonic control that is ever evolving, his hegemony requires the buy-in of numerous people who, in effect, create and/or display their own hegemony. This is the heart of the patrimonial system (Stager 2003, 70; Keimer 2021, 74).

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<sup>8</sup> Along similar lines, bureaucratic governments that utilize tribal and local administrative structures to rule effectively, appear in the modern Middle East. In fact, the hierarchy of authority shows that individual members of local patrimonial networks dealt with their sheikhs, who in turn, would/could deal with the central government (Charrad 2011, 60). Power was centralized on the one hand in the main government but decentralized on the other hand in that all lower echelons of the society adhered to more traditional modes of authority, operated at a local level.

<sup>9</sup> Though interestingly, the northern tribes do not abandon the idea of monarchy altogether, but instead opt for a monarch of their own choosing.

Generating the buy-in of local tribal leaders—tapping into the pre-existing traditional power structures—can be done in various ways: David sent booty to the elders of Judah to win their support; Solomon held feasts; Saul and David gave land grants. And along with each of these, kings operating in a de-centralized power setting also created and exploited one or more ideologies that supplemented and supplanted other beliefs about power and where it lay.<sup>10</sup>

Ideologies can have a material, aural, and/or psychological/emotional, correlate. In all instances, though, ideologies are based on symbolism and the encoding of specific messages for consumption by the ruler's power base. If, as we articulated above, one aspect of legitimacy is a coercive capacity, which is manifest not only in actual military actions, but even more poignantly in literary and/or aural commemoration, then, as Cohen notes, “odes, songs, legends, and myths do much more than glorify coercive capacity. In their own form they are a fundamental condition for legitimizing state power. They describe characters and events whose supernatural actions, powers, and relationships initiated a particular early state. The extraordinary accomplishments of those founders transforms them and their exploits into a rationale for inequity” (1988, 6). Smith (2000, 157) summarizes it this way: “legitimacy allows the furtherance of political goals in other domains,” and thus it is possible to see royal ideology in both its corporeal and incorporeal expressions as embedded within legitimacy and motivated social action, while at the same time it is engineered by them (cf. Schloen 2001, 88-89, 92). The psychological response to visual or aural stimuli either drives one to acceptance of the ideology and a confirmation of authority for the leader, or it leads to rejection of the ideology and potential destabilization of the leader's authority.

Of great importance is the fact that ideology and personal relationships that allow the king to gain and maintain power do not necessarily leave behind an archaeological correlate. Instead, as Campagno (2013, 214) notes, there is a “new logic of social organization” that permeates the leader's power base, and logic does not necessarily have a material expression. In the case of the early Israelite monarchy, this political entity is best expressed as a new logic that only adds a substantial archaeologically visible component in the days of Solomon, if the text of Samuel and Kings contains accurate historical memories in this regard and if the traditional dating of archaeological layers is retained in favor of Finkelstein's “Low Chronology” (1996).<sup>11</sup>

Any attempt to reconstruct ancient historical events and institutions needs to keep these points in mind as they navigate ancient written sources. All too often modern portrayals of David and Solomon highlight biblical ideology in a way that denudes the text of Samuel and Kings of much historical veracity. Yet, the ideological nature of a text does not necessarily

<sup>10</sup> The idea of centralization may have been an aspect of specific ideologies, but it was not always inherent. This both made way for and necessitated the creation of royal ideologies.

<sup>11</sup> There is a chronological debate within the archaeology of ancient Israel over the dates of the early Iron Age and which archaeological strata correlate to which historical event/figure. While these issues are not central to most of our arguments, we will note that the evidence evinced for what is termed the “Modified Conventional Chronology” appears to deal with the relative and absolute dating most judiciously (see Mazar 2005). This chronology allows for a ceramic horizon that runs from ca. 980–830 BCE with an early (10<sup>th</sup>–early 9<sup>th</sup> c.) and late phase (mid-late 9<sup>th</sup> c.). Radiocarbon dates from several sites across Israel appear to indicate the same—the Iron Age IIA, as defined archaeologically, begins in the early 10<sup>th</sup> c. and continues to the last third of the 9<sup>th</sup> c. The result is that strata traditionally dated to the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Hazor X, Gezer VIII, Megiddo VA–IVB)—the period of Solomon—remain in that horizon and should not be lowered in date to the late 10<sup>th</sup> or even early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries as adherents of the so-called “Low Chronology” argue; See also Finkelstein (2011).

relate to its historicity. We must first understand the society with which we are dealing—how it works, how it is structured, what motivates people, etc. Then, once we are sociologically informed, we move to identify any ideology, establish its purpose, articulate its form, and then compare it with contemporary texts of a similar genre/nature, before seeking to draw in other corpora of data, such as the archaeological remains, which themselves need to undergo their own interpretation. In other words, we need to attempt to understand ancient Israel from an emic view.

Further, with an explicit defining of terms—such as “king” and “kingdom”—we make clearer what our own preconceived notions and interpretational biases are, and we can establish a check on whether our understanding of a specific term/institution/ideology is comparable to what it was in antiquity. Only with proper expectations and interpretations can we move forward and hopefully diminish the proliferation of anachronistic or ill-informed interpretations of ancient Israelite society. When we do this for the Israelite United Monarchy, as various studies have done (Alt 1989; Younger 1990; Hays 2015), and as we will articulate further below, then we see that from a textual perspective the biblical portrayal of the kings of the United Monarchy is comparable to other ancient Near Eastern depictions of various monarchs.

### Articulating Terms for Rulers

Having detailed the way in which power was understood in the Ancient Near East and how ancient Israel was structured sociopolitically, we can now address who was ruling; what was this person called and how was their role defined? Answering these questions is made difficult by the nature of the biblical texts and the fact that they have undergone various redactions. Still, the nuance between terms of leadership in the days of the early Israelite monarchy is important to parcel out as these terms do not have the same semantic range as their English translations suggest.

There are two terms for the early leader of the Israelite monarchy: *nagid* (1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 13:14; 25:30; 2 Sam 5:2; 6:21; 7:8; 1 Kgs 1:35; 14:7) and *melek* (1 Sam 15:1). The Hebrew root from which the term *nagid* is derived is debated. Presumably it is related to the idea of “being informed,” “announcing,” “rising above,” “being in front of.” *Melek* derives from the root *mlk*, which means “to reign, rule, be king.” Any attempt to arrive at meaningful, semantically nuanced translations of either of these terms requires a detailed linguistic, historical, and theological discussion that is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>12</sup> What is more pertinent for us is how the terms *nagid* and *melek*, generally translated as “prince” and “king” respectively, are conceptualized today.

What is a *nagid*? A *melek*? There is nothing inherent in either term that indicates the scope of office or domain. Yet via a filter of subsequent manifestations of what a “king” is, modern scholars have imposed anachronistic expectations for the terms. But neither biblical nor Ancient Near Eastern “kings” are coequal to later “kings” in the oft-taken medieval sense.

<sup>12</sup> Modern sociologically focused attempts to differentiate these terms miss the point of the ancient authors’ intents. For the author(s) of the books of 1-2 Samuel, the Israelite god YHWH is the only legitimate *melek*; His representatives (i.e., earthly kings) are simply *nagids*. This is a theological distinction as opposed to a sociological one.

For instance, Schniedewind (1999, 25) notes that the Edomite Chronicle (Gen 36:31-39; 1 Chr 1:43-50) mentioning “kings” actually reflects a situation more akin to the biblical Judges—charismatic individuals who rise up to lead Israel in battle and then return to their normal status following any conflict—as each “king” is unrelated and ruled from a different locale.<sup>13</sup> Fleming (2012b, 103) notes that “those who called themselves ‘kings’ at Emar appear to have been leaders of prominent families that were accustomed to sharing political decision-making with their peers.”

The sometimes-tacit sometimes-explicit assumption that “kings” always rule over large populations is mitigated by the textual evidence. In reality, a *melek* is someone who has authority to rule over others and to make decisions on their behalf. Such authority can extend over anything from a few people to many thousands. The scope of authority enjoyed by an individual king, along with how this rule was implemented must be evaluated case by case as the specific manifestation of kingship, and the specific semantic range of what is meant by the term “king” is contingent upon numerous contextually derived variables: social structure, economic aspirations, geographical setting, population density, etc. For instance, Bodi (2014, 211) points out that even weaker rulers, such as Zimri-Lim—in comparison to Hammurabi—refer to themselves as *šarrum dannum*, “mighty king”. In short, a *melek* is as a *melek* does, and if people (whether many or few) follow and acknowledge the *melek*-ness of an individual, then that individual is a *melek*.

### Articulating Terms for What Rulers Ruled

The political entities over which Saul, David, and particularly Solomon ruled have been referred to as, among other terms, “states,” “chiefdoms,” “empires,” “tribal states”, and “patrimonial kingdoms,” with the first three the most common appellations (Jamieson-Drake 1991; Holladay 1995; Mazar 2007; Finkelstein 2007). So, which is it? Or perhaps the better question is what do these modern terms mean, and what do they imply? Do they equate to ancient Hebrew terms of geospatial control?

The problem with defining what we call ancient political structures—states, empires, chiefdoms, etc.—is made clear in many recent studies (Sinopoli 1995; Smith 2003; Smith 2009; Scheidel 2013; Yoffee 2005)—though it was Kletter (2004) who focused on ancient Israel and the quagmire of terminology and methodology pertaining to the United Monarchy and its study. Unfortunately, it does not appear that his well-articulated and methodologically informed study has gained the traction that it deserves. As such, we offer a review of relevant and related points.

When it comes to the “state,” note that “no agreement has ever been reached on a universally acceptable general definition that has any real analytic value, partly because historians and anthropologists tend to define ‘the state’ in terms of the different questions they wish to ask.” States can encompass everything from “tribal or clan communities united under a warlord or chieftain who is endowed with both symbolic and military authority—in anthropological terms, a ‘Big-man’ confederacy” to “territorially unified political entities, with an

<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Schniedewind draws the connection between dynastic succession and the use of the term *melek* in Ammon: Nahash to Hanun (1 Sam 11:1-2; 12:12; 2 Sam 10:1; 1 Chr 19:1-2).

organizational ‘center’ (which may be peripatetic) from which a ruler or ruling group exercises political authority” (Goldstone and Haldon 2009, 4-5). The former can be short-lived and the latter multi-generational, though this is not always a given.

The same problem of definition holds true for “chiefdoms;” anthropologists have never settled on a stable definition (Kletter 2004, 19). Moreover, as Yoffee (1993, 64) noted years ago, “typological efforts to identify a chiefdom was and is useless.” This sentiment is carried by numerous other anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians in a volume that Yoffee edited along with Andrew Sherratt (1993). This is but one of many works among many scholars who illustrate time and again the problems with evolutionary social theory that uses the categories of “chiefdom” and “state.” Yet, these warnings have not been heeded by many archaeologists who study ancient Israel; instead, debates surround the social complexity of ancient Israel and are correlated to matters of political development. This false correlation needs to be put to rest once and for all. This is especially so considering theoretical models and empirical evidence that shows that modern terms such as “chiefdom” and “state” are not only anachronistic, but also that they have no agreed upon definition, resulting in a lack of any real explanatory power.

Instead of the old evolutionary model, scholars agree that political structures and their strategies for expressing and garnering authoritative control, the archaeological correlates of those structures, and the social framework of ancient societies is highly variable and needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis (VanValkenburgh and Osborne 2013; Osborne 2013; Feinman 1998, 112-114, 131-132; Marcus and Feinman 1998, 10-11; cf. Charrad and Adams 2011; Smith 2003, 22).

The critiques and the current direction in dealing with “empires” mirrors that of the “state.” Sinopoli initially notes that “though differing somewhat in their emphases, virtually all published definitions of empire share a view of empires as territorially expansive and incorporative kinds of states, involving relationships in which one state exercises control over other sociopolitical entities” (1995, 5). She also notes that “most authors also share a conception of various kinds of empires distinguished by differing degrees of political and/or economic control, viewed either as discrete types or as variations along a continuum from weakly integrated to more highly centralized polities” (1994, 160). Ultimately, however, she acknowledges that one major problem for studying ‘empires’ is the “internal variability or diversity in strategies for incorporation, economic processes, ideology and belief systems, natural and cultural environments, and relations to the political center” (1995). So “empire” seems to become such a broad term it almost (or perhaps actually) loses any real descriptive efficacy. Specifically in the ancient Near East, saying that David and Solomon had an empire as the Assyrians had an empire becomes totally hollow and void because it misses the great complexity inherent in the terminology.

Ergo, one can choose to designate what David and Solomon had as an “empire” only if acknowledging that this does not really describe anything specific; what is important is the particular contexts and nuances of the specific “empire.” Archaeologically we need to identify markers of imperial control for the specific empire. Textually, we need to evaluate the historicity of the texts that describe the ancient empire, mining them for useful references that clarify how power was expressed and propagated by those in power, and how those under the imperial authority responded. Thus, we can ask what claims the texts make about the actual permanence and extent of Saulide, Davidic, and/or Solomonic control in any one place.

Part of evaluating the textual sources includes establishing ancient conventions in written sources. Comparative materials from elsewhere in the Near East provide illustrations of how contemporary texts rationalize, aggrandize, and conceptualize the power of the kingdom, which is tantamount to the power of the king himself. In addition to identifying conventions, we must also seek to establish the contemporaneity of textual sources to the events they record, and the possible ideologies inherent in how texts are written and/or historic events are remembered and portrayed. As mentioned above, there are several studies that have made compelling cases for dating large portions of the books of Samuel and 1 Kgs 1-11 to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It is because of the apologetic nature of these passages that they find their best and only social context in the days when the Davidic dynasty was attempting to legitimize itself; it makes no sense to have such apologetic texts composed later in the Iron Age when the Davidic dynasty was already well ensconced (in Judah) or replaced some time ago (in Israel).

If we want to discuss the political entity under Saul, David, and Solomon, we need to recognize that the terms “state,” “empire,” and “chiefdom” are anachronistic (Thomas 2021). In fact, there is no word for “state” or “empire” in biblical Hebrew, or any other ancient Near Eastern language for that matter (until the Persian period). To be sure, even the phrase “United Monarchy” is anachronistic and must be defined as it is a modern scholarly construct (see Keimer 2021); it is not a native term ever used for the kingdom of Saul, David, or Solomon. To what degree were the people of this kingdom under the rule of these three kings “united”? What were the uniting aspects of this political regime? Was there a specific territory that was united by this kingdom? Should the term “United Monarchy” be dismissed?<sup>14</sup>

While space does not allow a full treatment of each of these questions, we will begin by saying that to our minds the term “United Monarchy” is a useful and common heuristic phrase that should continue to be used. However, there must be greater clarification about the nature of this monarchy, its specific instantiations under Saul, David, and Solomon, and the expression of power of each king and his royal machine. With greater clarification it is hoped that fewer straw-men arguments will appear.<sup>15</sup>

As for the use of the term “empire” when referring to the United Monarchy, it seems that term is typically used very loosely and with no clear definition. It may presumably refer to the assumed size of territory under Israelite political control or influence, Israelite political control over neighboring polities, or even the control or taxation of a variety of goods and services. Instead of offering a definition for an Israelite “empire” under the first three kings of Israel, we prefer to articulate political control using native terms (cf. Kletter 2004, 28; Na’aman 1996, 21).

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<sup>14</sup> Bodi (2014, 211) argues that the term “monarchy” should be abandoned altogether when talking of Saul, David, and Solomon as the term draws to mind European monarchies and seems inadequate to describe the ancient reality of ancient Near Eastern tribes. Instead, he believes the term “chiefdom” is more appropriate as these rulers function as “tribal chieftains” or “warlords.” While we do not entirely agree with Bodi, his point serves to highlight that all terms carry baggage with them and should not only be properly understood within their specific context, but also be defined if we wish to use them in alternate cultural, temporal, or spatial contexts. Such a contextual understanding of language was made famous by Bronislaw Malinowski (1923) and served as the foundation for the structuralist school of linguistics that still finds much favor today in linguistics and certain circles of biblical studies (for an overview see Davis and Keimer 2018).

<sup>15</sup> For an attempt to do this see Keimer 2021.

In Hebrew, the words for the existing political entity are: *malkut*, *melukah*, *mamlakah*, *mamlakut*, *malku*, all of which are generally translated as “domain, dominion” or “kingdom.” Literally, the name of the entity over which a king has authority is his “realm of rule.” The Hebrew, as with the case of *melek*, does not imply a specific scope of this realm either geographically or relationally, the nature of the population within that realm (pastoral-nomadic or sedentary, urban or rural), or the density of settlement (cf. Dever 2005, 76). The realms can be geographically large or small, and they can permeate some aspects of society without being absolute. Moreover, individual realms do not even need to be contiguous as is becoming clearer from newly discovered ancient texts and informed anthropological and political geographic studies (e.g., Osborne 2013; VanValkenburgh and Osborne 2013).

Osborne’s concept of “malleable territoriality,” which is built upon textual and archaeological evidence from the northern Levant, illustrates that there was a “phenomenon of patchy, variegated political authority...[that] constituted a form of territoriality in which authority was not evenly distributed across the landscape, nor contained within a fixed border. Contiguity of land and settlements was not a necessary requirement for political control” (2013, 787). This reality, which was noted earlier by Casana (2009), also conforms to evidence showing that Bronze Age rulers controlled sites often located quite distant from their capital city, sometimes in regions identified by modern scholars as belonging to other kingdoms.

## Discussion

Regardless of advancements in anthropological and sociological approaches to studying the ancient Near East, discussions about social and political structure in ancient Israel have been dominated by functionalist thinking that has sought to match specific material correlates with political form and social structure. Terms such as chiefdom, tribe, or state, are applied to ancient Israel when certain characteristics or traits of perceived sociopolitical order are identified by the archaeologist/historian. We must ask, however, whether the trait lists that define where on the sociopolitical spectrum our ancient query is located are the best for making such an evaluation. Ever since Fried and Service, and later Sahlins, articulated their classic model of social evolution, an ever-increasing number of studies has shown the inadequacies of this model for understanding ancient cultures in a meaningful way (e.g., Feinman 1998; Yoffee 1993; Rothman 1994; Miller 2005). Granted, the model was meant to provide a generic framework for understanding all societies, but unfortunately it often fell prey to etic expressions of cultural significance that better reflected the worldview of the sociologists and anthropologists studying the societies.

In anthropological archaeology, the recognition of these issues has led to a general reworking of how ancient cultures are understood. A phenomenological bent that is informed by more nuanced readings of ancient texts and the physical manifestation of specific sociopolitical structures—i.e., emic views of structures and their approximated physical expression—now dominates. Unfortunately, such informed studies have not made much headway in the study of ancient Israel even though they are more and more common for other areas of the ancient Near East.

Connected to the issue of *what* we call the ancient entity being ruled, we believe that there needs to be a focus on *how* the entities are ruled and what the dominant political will looks

like in the archaeological record at any given time.<sup>16</sup> With such a focus, we see that spaces of various scales—international systems to polities, settlements, and buildings—are constructed by that political will. Consistent and persistent archaeological manifestations of political power may or may not exist but it “is then the task of the archaeologist to describe ‘what polities actually do’ in landscapes—how they manufacture sovereignty, secure power and legitimacy, and order subjects through spatial practices and representations” (VanValkenburgh and Osborne 2013, 9, citing Smith 2003, 25). In the case of the Israelite United Monarchy, we need to ask what did Saul, David, and Solomon—all of whom are accepted as historical figures by the vast majority of biblical scholars and archaeologists—do, and did it leave any archaeologically attestable remains?

Before addressing this question, we must note that all reconstructions of Israelite power are based on what Ben-Yosef (2019) calls an “architectural bias.” Scholars identify the presence of people based on the buildings they leave behind. This approach does not consider the pastoral/nomadic element of society. That such an element was there even into the early Israelite monarchy is clear in the texts (e.g., 1 Kgs 12:16) and from recent work in southern Israel (Ben-Yosef 2016 and Forthcoming). Israel may well have had a far more substantial population from which to draw for political, military, and/or economic reasons than we currently allow for; in fact, this is most certainly the case.

So, if the measurable attributes of the archaeological record are not the sole index of political reality, we should come back to Kletter’s suggestion that “instead of the limiting neo-evolutionary model, we can use the rich historical sources about the Levant in the Iron Age period” to better understand this reality (2004, 28). Sources that reveal ideologies are important (Na’aman 1996; Liverani 1990), and in fact necessary for grasping the native social basis for exercising political authority and understanding the way this exercise was mediated, as well as understanding the terms used to refer to this authority and its realm of control.<sup>17</sup>

Above, we have established patrimonialism as this social basis for the United Monarchy and we have claimed that the Hebrew Bible is a viable primary source for the contextualized deployment of ideology by David and Solomon. Moreover, the archaeological and textual records of other patrimonial polities in the historical Near East provide appropriate comparanda for modelling how political power could and would have been enacted and maintained by David and Solomon in places the biblical text indicates they did so. Acknowledging that the United Monarchy would have been patrimonial has important implications for taking the archaeology of Iron Age I/IIA Israel as reflective of socio-political developments. If David and Solomon’s authority was fundamentally interpersonal, there is no need to assume that it was dependent on purely physical coercive symbols (e.g., monumental buildings such as temples or palaces). Rather, as has been shown elsewhere (Keimer 2021; Thomas 2021), the manifestations that have been the fixation of so much archaeological research on the United

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<sup>16</sup> If, nevertheless, modern terms are to be employed, then we must use caution in how we apply modern terms and models to past societies, and we must be aware of the bias that permeates the use of the terms “monarchy”, “state”, and “state formation” and the potential issues such bias, born out of anachronistic manifestations of the entities referred to by these terms, has for articulating exactly what we are dealing with in ancient Israel (cf. Meyers 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Pioske (2019) develops a hermeneutic that favors neither text nor archaeology in reconstructing/investigating the past. Both the texts and the archaeological remains require interpretation and, as such, neither is inherently less biased or more biased. With that said, several variables must be considered in weighing a source’s value and not all sources are equal or appropriate, but this depends on the questions being asked.



Monarchy can actually be understood as embedded within the statecraft and ideology of patrimonial kingship instead of as tangible remains.

Considering the textual evidence, there are few claims that the first two Israelite monarchs (Saul and David) did much that would result in archaeologically visible manifestations of their political power or its extent. Saul reputedly builds or erects a monument (*yad*) in Carmel (1 Sam 15:12) and an altar (1 Sam 14:35). David supposedly erects two monuments/stelae, builds an altar (2 Sam 24:25//1 Chr 21:26), and builds “the millo and inward” in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:9//1 Chr 11:8). It is only for Solomon that a more extensive and tangible archaeological footprint is articulated from a textual perspective. Constructions of one sort or another are built at Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Lower Beth Horon, Baalath, and Tamar/Tadmor, as are store cities, chariot cities, cities for his horsemen, and whatever he desired to build in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and in all the land under his dominion (1 Kgs 9:15–19; cf. 2 Chr 8:1–11). In Jerusalem particularly, Solomon is said to have built his house, the Temple, the wall of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 3:2; 9:15), the House of the Forest of Lebanon (1 Kgs 7:2), the “millo” (1 Kgs 9:15, 24), and a house for Pharaoh’s daughter. Of course, what Solomon actually built is nowhere articulated. Modern archaeologists have provided the nature of these projects based on their interpretation and dating of the archaeological remains.

It appears that the biblical author(s) assumed or knew that political power was not always or even typically reified in tangible structures but was instead a social matter. It was only with Solomon’s reign that any substantial construction projects are recorded. So, if *nagids/meleks* did not necessarily mark their rule through constructions that delineated their kingdoms (*mamlekahs*), then how did they control their realms?

The answer lies in the specific context of the political power being evaluated. For example, the Egyptian New Kingdom, the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the Persian Empire each used networks of fortresses to control the entirety of Canaan/Israel/Judea (Morris 2005; Ben-Shlomo 2014; Thareani 2016; Keimer 2013; Stern 2001; Khatchadourian 2016). In each instance, there was a constrained architecture of domination, both in the size of the individual sites and in the number of such sites. Real power was not represented in the physical architecture but in the ideology and threat of what that architecture represented. At the same time, power was expressed at key nodes to accomplish the specific goals of each political entity. In general, these goals were typically economic; control of trade routes was paramount, control over every patch of land around those routes was less so (cf. Liverani 1988).

Regardless of what Solomon actually built according to 1 Kgs 9:15–19, the underlying rationale for the mention of those specific sites—regardless of the historicity of the passage—shows that Solomon (or a biblical author/editor) understood that rule over those sites allowed for control of the main trade hubs and all east-west and north-south traffic, along with access to Jerusalem (Keimer 2013).

Importantly, no one doubts the extent of Egyptian, Assyrian, or Persian political control over Canaan/Judea even though there is a limited archaeological footprint of that control, but many scholars do doubt that a united Israelite monarchy controlled the same territory for a brief period in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE despite similar levels of archaeological evidence. Part of this may be the result of an anachronistic reading of biblical claims about the extent, degree, and nature of Israel’s political control under David and Solomon. Scholars are looking for neo-evolutionary traits marking “chiefdoms,” “states,” or “empires” without considering how Israel conceptualized power/authority and geospatial dominion.

## Conclusions

An emic definition of ancient Israelite leadership and geospatial control is tied to the culture's social structure. We have argued that not only modern terminology, but also modern conceptualizations of power and politics are problematically applied to the early Israelite monarchy under kings Saul, David, and Solomon. Instead, we find deeper satisfaction in asking—as VanValkenburgh and Osborne (2013, 10) do—“how and why they [i.e., social entities, spheres of authority, and/or behaviors] take on their particular spatial, temporal, and institutional configurations. This is against focusing on an older and monolithic view of territory that sees political/territorial entities as bound, uniform in geographic continuity, fixed to a specific physical landscape, monolithic in their control of territory, and expressed through a uniform presentation and praxis of political power.”

Ancient Israelite “kings” were individuals who had authority over others, and the geospatial domain over which they had authority was their “kingdom.” What kingship and this domain looked like at any given time was tied to how well the king navigated social relationships with those near and far. In the early monarchy of ancient Israel, political relationships were all done face-to-face. When control was desired over a specific area or resource, a relationship with local authorities was established and potentially someone who was trusted by the leader was placed in control. This relationship and/or representative of the leader was an embodiment of the leader's power/authority and the authority of the “state”. They did not bring with them necessarily anything more than the clout of the leader. Even so, gifts are indicated in the biblical texts. When David sought to win support, he gave gifts to the tribal elders. Such a practice would no doubt have been extended to any situation in which Saul, David, or Solomon sought to have influence. Direct control was not necessary, nor even claimed by the biblical text outside of the bounds of biblically defined Israel, that is, from the sites of Dan to Beersheba (2 Sam 24; 1 Kgs 5).

Considering this, it makes Solomon's appointment of sons-in-law and a likely friend of his father's over key districts significant (1 Kgs 4). These confidants were selected to be the face of the monarchy in far-reaching districts that were also on the border with neighboring Tyre and Damascus. Such Solomonic hegemony makes perfect sense because direct military control of the Galilee may not have been possible, but there was enough social semblance between Judah and those regions to keep them semi-connected. At the same time, this semblance with Judah was mirrored by a dissemblance with the neighboring Phoenicians and Arameans. Local populations (or tribal leaders) could more easily align themselves with Judah.

Little in the way of infrastructure would be needed to implement the system just noted. Small, single building settlements, which could have been as elaborate as fortresses, or small settlements at sites strategic for the control of communication and trade were all that were needed. No major archaeological footprint of political control is necessary. The idea of negative evidence may be less of actual negative evidence and more of exactly the nature of evidence that we should be expecting when we consider the sociopolitical context.

Was the Israelite United Monarchy a real entity? What form did it take? Does the biblical portrayal of this entity during the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon reflect this entity's actual historical expression? These questions should cause us to pause and reflect if we have been using fruitful interpretive frameworks, or whether our current approach(es) to studying the Israelite United Monarchy are masquerading as objective statements about the nature of

ancient Israelite society and political structure while being blind to the fluidity and variability that characterizes political power, which in turn diversifies the archaeological correlate of that power.

We have discussed several theoretical and methodological points essential to approximating an emic understanding of ancient Israelite political power and authority, how that power and authority operated and were expressed conceptually, how they may appear archaeologically, and how they were recorded in the Bible, which is our only textual resource detailing the early Israelite monarchy. We see that the standard approach to understanding the Israelite United Monarchy in which political complexity is juxtaposed with architectural forms is problematic at best unless the underlying social reality is articulated, key native terms are defined, and fluidity in expressions of political power over the span of Saul, David, and Solomon's reigns, is allowed for.

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