

# Fortifications of Tel Hebron During the Bronze and Iron Ages, Once Again

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## Abstract

Recently, a scholarly debate took place about the date of construction and use of "cyclopean" city walls at Tel Hebron, as well as at other sites in the hill country of the southern Levant. Although these fortifications are traditionally dated to the Middle Bronze Age II, David Ussishkin suggested a much later date in the Iron Age IIB. A somewhat related debate, similar both methodologically and chronologically, is associated with the revetment fortification wall at Tel Lachish. The aim of this article, rather than presenting any new evidence, is to summarize the debate and examine the feasibility of dating the Hebron fortifications at this stage, partly against the backdrop of Middle Bronze Age fortifications at other sites in the central hills and in the southern Levant in general. Apparently, both dating suggestions are based more on historical considerations and resemblance to other sites than on solid stratigraphic considerations or absolute datable material.

**Keywords:** Tel Hebron, fortifications, cyclopean walls, central hills, Lachish revetment, Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age II

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## Introduction

Although fortifications are among the most visible, impressive, and important elements in the material culture of ancient cities in the southern Levant, their construction date is often the most difficult to determine. This is primarily because these massive structures were built directly on the bedrock and tended to be used in later periods as well, so their final use and destruction may be much later than their original construction date. Settlement in the Middle Bronze Age II (henceforth MB II, ca. 2000–1550 BCE) in the central hills of the southern Levant reflects a significant high point in comparison with previous and later periods (in particular the Late Bronze Age). This period is generally seen as the zenith of urban development; in particular, the investment (in quantity and quality) in large-scale fortification of cities in the southern Levant (walls, ramparts, and glacis) exceeded that at any other time in the Bronze and Iron Ages (e.g., Yadin 1978; Broshi and Gophna 1986; Dever 1987; Gophna and Portugali 1988; Bunimovitz 1992; Herzog 1997; Uziel 2010 and more references therein). It is usually suggested that this phenomenon started during the MB IIA (ca. 2000–1750 BCE) in the Shephelah region and northern Israel, possibly under the influence of earlier, larger urban centers in Syria, and subsequently expanded into the central hills and the Jordan Valley during the MB IIB–C (ca. 1750–1550 BCE; e.g., Yadin 1978; Herzog 1997; Burke 2004; 2008). In particular, several key sites from this period in Judea and Samaria illustrate substantial fortifications, including Shechem (Tell Balatah), Tel Shiloh, the City of David in Jerusalem, and Hebron (Fig. 1; see, e.g., Burke 2008). The fortifications include "cyclopean" walls (built of large, polygonal rubble stones), glacis, and ramparts; the cyclopean walls are the focus of this article. Recently, it was suggested that the date of construction of these fortifications, or at least some of them (in particular at the City of David and Hebron), was later, probably in the Iron Age II or even the reign of King Hezekiah (Ussishkin 2016; 2021). This article will present the Bronze and Iron Age fortifications discovered so far at Hebron (Tel Hebron) and discuss the dating of MB II fortifications (especially cyclopean walls) in the southern Levant. Although it does not present new evidence, this article provides an updated summary of the debate and examines the feasibility of dating the

Hebron fortifications at this stage, partly against the backdrop of Middle Bronze Age fortifications at other sites in the central hills and in the southern Levant in general.

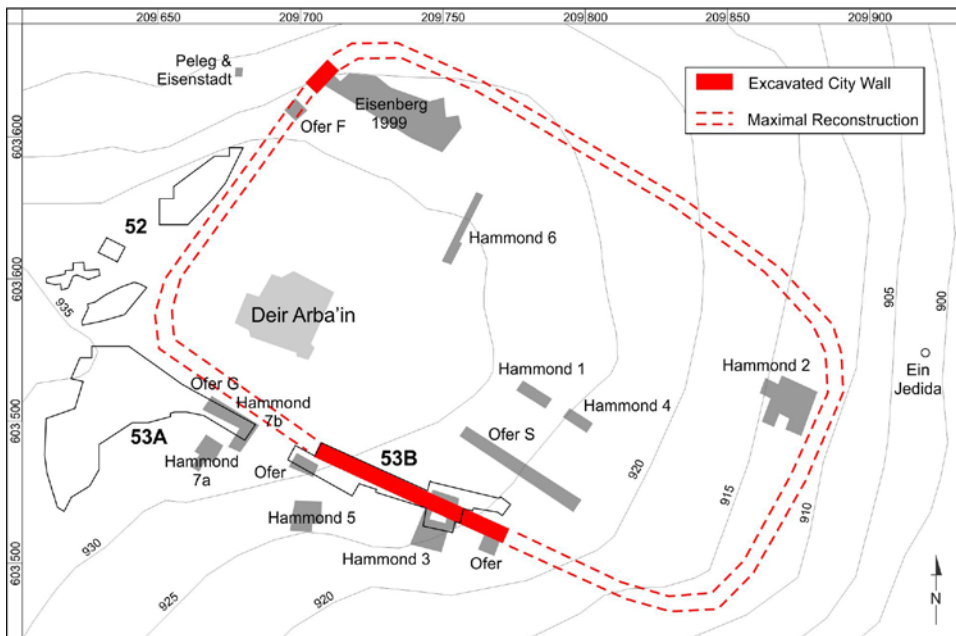
## The Fortifications at Tel Hebron

Tel Hebron (Tell Rumeida), about 30 km south of Jerusalem (Fig. 1), has been accepted as the location of biblical Hebron since the 1950s. Hebron was the leading city in Judah throughout the ages, and it was the seat of David's kingdom during the first seven years of his reign.



**Figure 1:** Map with sites mentioned in the text

The site was excavated by P. Hammond (1964–1966; Hammond 1968), A. Ofer (1984–1986; Ofer 1988; 1993), and E. Eisenberg (1999; Eisenberg 2011; forthcoming), but the results of these excavations have only been published very briefly so far. Hammond dated a tower and a section of cyclopean wall in the southern part of the site to the MB II (see Chadwick 2018). A city wall, uncovered in the 1999 excavations on the northern side of the tell, was also dated to this period based on pottery and scarabs (Eisenberg 2011: 26–30). Excavations were renewed in 2014 (Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017) in parts of the western and southwestern fringes of Tel Ḥevron (Fig. 2, Plots 52–53). The eastern part of the larger area (Fig. 2, Area 53B) is adjacent to Hammond's Area I.3 (Figs. 2, 4) where the city's ancient fortifications were exposed just south of the fortification line, and the cyclopean city wall was exposed from the outer side to a continuous length of nearly 70 m (Figs. 4–7; Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017: 67–87; Ben-Shlomo 2019).



**Figure 2:** Tel Ḥevron and locations of the various excavations

### **The Early Phase of the Cyclopean Wall (MB II?)**

The Bronze and Iron Age fortifications at Tel Hebron were visible on the surface in certain areas. The cyclopean fortification wall was first identified by Garstang in 1931 (Fig. 3; Eisenberg 2011: 20, Fig. 11), then by Hammond and Ofer, and was most recently described by Eisenberg (2011; for more detail, see also Chadwick 2005: 28; 2018). A cyclopean wall is defined as a wall primarily built of rubble (at least in its base), unworked polygonal stones substantially larger than 0.5 m each, with its stones not laid in horizontal courses, but rather with courses adapted to the polygonal lines of the individual stones. Hammond (1966: 19) dated the fortifications to the MB IIB–C (ca. 1750–1550 BCE) and suggested that this wall surrounded an area of only 2 hectares, whereas Ofer (1993) suggested that the MB IIB–C wall surrounded a city of 2.4 to 3 hectares (see Chadwick 2005: 27; Eisenberg 2011: 28, Fig. 16; Chadwick 2018). Eisenberg (2011: 28, Fig. 17) suggested an even larger area of 3.5 hectares (Fig. 2). Several segments of the wall are either connected or have a very similar construction technique and are thus assumed to be contemporaneous. However, fortification walls of a different character or building technique also appear, built with smaller hewn, rectilinear stones; these are probably of a later date (Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017: 78–87; Ben-Shlomo 2019; see below).

In the southern part of the site, the continuous exposure of the fortification wall is approximately 69.20 m long (Figs. 4–7, Area 53B), but it seems that at most 60.80 m of this length belongs to the earlier wall, while the rest consists of later additions (Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017: 67–87). The wall is identified by its large polygonal rubble stones. The building technique includes large stones and boulders set on the bedrock, which was leveled by a layer of small stones (Fig. 6; approx. 10–25×0–25×10–20 cm). The stones were laid with their straight side facing outward, creating a flat, smooth surface that would have prevented climbing on the wall. The lower part, overlying the bedrock, was seemingly reinforced by a layer of stones and yellowish marl soil. The wall itself was built of large, roughly cut rubble stones of polygonal shapes, with their size ranging from 140×85×45–65 or 115×100×45–65 cm to larger stones reaching 200×90×70 cm (Fig. 6). The cavities created between the large stones were filled by small stones measuring

10–25×10–20×10–20 cm. The wall's core was filled with medium-sized rubble stones measuring 15–30×15–30×10–25 cm. The core and the gaps between the large stones were filled with chunks of smaller stones and relatively small amounts of soil or marl (Fig. 7). It seems reasonable to assume that whereas larger stones were used in the lower courses, the top of the wall, not preserved, was built of smaller stones (like those found in the fallout layers to the south; see below). The line of exposure (Fig. 5, denoted Wall 2151, Wall B, or Wall 1 in its eastern part) was excavated from the outside, but in one location the full 3.4–3.6 m width of the wall was revealed (Fig. 7, left).

The outer face of the wall was built relatively straight, and in several locations buttresses or towers were built (e.g., Tower 2403 and the larger tower excavated by Hammond in Area I.3; see Fig. 8 below; see also Eisenberg 2011: 26). In the eastern section, Hammond's Area I.3, a larger tower was outlined and the wall stands 5.6 m high (Fig. 5, Tower 1; Chadwick 2018: 172, Figs. 5–8). Although not completely excavated (due to a large olive tree within it), the rectangular tower excavated by Hammond in this area measures 15.5×9.2 m, with walls 3.25 m thick (Figs. 7, 9; see Hammond 1968; Chadwick 2005; Eisenberg 2011: 28; Chadwick 2018: 132, Fig. 7). It is integrated into the city wall, as is evident in the similar construction. The upper horizontal courses, however, indicate a later (Iron Age?) addition.

Chadwick, who studied the results from Hammond's Area I.3, presumed that the inner tower is the western tower of a gateway, which would have had a matching eastern tower (Fig. 5; Chadwick 2005: 28; 2018). About 10 m east of Hammond's Site I.3, Ofer (1988: 48) excavated a 5×5 m square in 1984 and reached the top of the city wall, and he claimed that the walled city continued further down in a straight line to lower terraces. In 2014, this area was cleaned and the soil between these two sections cleared, uncovering an additional 13.5 m portion of Wall D (Fig. 9; Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017: 96, Fig. 4.46; Ben-Shlomo 2019: Figs. 10–11). This wall is attached to the original cyclopean city wall, which, for an unknown reason, stopped at this point (possibly making an angle or turning north). Wall D is built of smaller, partly hewn, and more rectilinear stones (Fig. 9), as opposed to the polygonal stones of the earlier wall, which measure over 1 m.

Therefore, this wall is probably a later attachment, tentatively dated to the Iron Age II (see below).

Although Hammond suggested dating the fortifications in this area to the MB IIB–C (see e.g., Hammond 1966; Chadwick 2005; 2018), the area outside the city wall down to bedrock was covered by eroded accumulations from a later date and no MB floors were preserved. The dating is therefore determined only according to floor levels from the 1999 excavation in the northwestern part of the tell (Plot 67; Eisenberg and Nagorski 2002; Eisenberg 2011; forthcoming). Here, floors that abut the city wall were excavated on the inner face of the wall, and are dated, based on well-dated pottery and scarabs found on them, to the MB IIB–C, i.e., the final stages of the Middle Bronze Age (Eisenberg 2011: 19–20, 30, Strata IX–VIII, Wall B and Structure 141 abutting it; Eisenberg forthcoming: Figs. 3.80–3.93). In that area this wall also overlies the better-preserved Early Bronze Age (EB) city wall (Eisenberg 2011). In addition, in the northern part of the tell, just south of the 1999 excavation area, a segment of cyclopean-style wall is visible under a modern terrace (Fig. 3; see also Eisenberg 2011). Recently, Ussishkin (2016; 2021) suggested that the stratigraphic considerations linking the MB II finds (Strata IX–VIII) to the fortification wall in the northern part of the site are problematic. As noted above, the results of the 1999 excavations include a small and not very well-preserved portion of the cyclopean city wall overlying the EB III city wall. Another, better-preserved section of the cyclopean wall is visible in the same area of the tell under a modern terrace (Fig. 3; Eisenberg 2011). The area excavated is indeed small and forms an irregular space; moreover, Ussishkin (2021: 127–130) suggested that the fortification wall (overlying the EB III wall) may have cut through the MB II floor rather than adjoining it, and that a foundation trench of Wall B was built on the slope, thus possibly in close proximity to the cut strata below (House 141).

Nevertheless, the existence of a large MB II town at Tel Hebron is not disputed. A rare cuneiform document detailing a transfer of sheep, similar to palace economic documents, was found at Hebron (Anbar and Na'aman 1986–1987), indicating that it was probably an important center during the MB II (see, e.g., Na'aman 1992).

The style of the cyclopean fortification wall is very similar to that of the various fortifications found in the City of David (e.g., Shiloh 1984: 12; Steiner 2001: 10–11), and particularly the fortifications leading to and surrounding the spring (Reich and Shukron 2003; 2010: 146; Reich 2011; Uziel and Szanton 2015). Similar city walls were built in other important MB IIB–C centers in the central hill country, such as Shechem (Campbell 2002: 105–109; Burke 2008: 648–657) possibly Shiloh (Finkelstein et al. 1993: 37, 47), Beitar (Batz 2017) and Beth Zur south of Jerusalem (Sellers 1933), and perhaps other sites in the hill country, including Kebera (Burke 2004: 604; 2008: 285) and Khirbet Keibar (Burke 2004: 605; 2008: 286) in northern Samaria, north of Shechem; for a general overview of such fortifications, see Seger 1975; Burke 2004: 658–662; 2008: 115–121; Eisenberg 2011: 28–30. The earliest wall at Gezer also seems similar (Dever et al. 1970: 41–43; Eisenberg 2011: 29), as does the MB IIC wall at Jericho (Fiaccavento and Montanari 2013). This similarity may strengthen the suggested MB II date for the construction of the Hebron wall, as well as suggesting a common cultural and architectural tradition for these hill sites during this period (see below).



**Figure 3:** A segment of cyclopean wall exposed today under a modern terrace in the northern part of the tell, looking south (photo: Noam Arnon)



**Figure 4:** Tel Ḥevron – Area 53B, looking north





**Figure 6:** The cyclopean wall in Area 53B, looking north



**Figure 7:** The cyclopean wall in Area 53B, top view looking east

### **The Later (Iron Age) Fortifications**

The excavations at Tel Hevron Area 53B indicate that the earlier cyclopean fortification wall was still in use, and furthermore, was refurbished, with various fortification elements added to it in a later period and used until the Iron Age IIB (Figs. 8–9; Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017: 78–92). The later, likely Iron Age II construction was in a different style, using smaller hewn, rectilinear stones. This style is also visible in other areas excavated during the early 1980s (Area G1, in a 5×5 m square; Ofer 1988: 48; 1993: 608). The upper courses of the wall were exposed on the surface before excavation. Ofer (1988: 48) already identified this wall as an Iron Age fortification element (denoted Wall 351). This area was expanded in 2014 and excavated down to bedrock, exposing the base of the wall. Along this section, exposed for a length of 7.3 m, the wall reaches a height of approximately 4 m and four to five courses, with the modern terrace wall built on top of it. A buttress or tower was apparently built here later (Fig. 4, W2403). This structure is 12.7 m long and approximately 1.7 m thick. Notably, the inner stones are combined within the earlier construction and were part of an earlier, smaller buttress, whereas the outer stones, which thicken and widen this protrusion, are not similarly combined (Fig. 6, center). Furthermore, the outer stones are of different sizes and shapes than the earlier city wall stones, being more rectilinear and forming an outer line of a slightly different orientation than the original wall. These observations indeed indicate a later date for the construction of this addition. The latest sherds from the fill abutting this structure are dated to the Iron Age IIB (see Ben-Shlomo 2019: Fig. 3.13). These would date its final use, although its construction may be earlier (the Iron Age IIA, for example). The tower also seems to have included larger stones, possibly reused after the original wall collapsed in this area.

Parallel to the fortification, on the outside, a reinforcement wall (Fig. 5, W2153; Fig. 8) was exposed for a total length of approximately 26.50 m (Fig. 8); it is located 1.5–3 m south of the city wall and clearly surrounds the tower (and therefore should be dated to the later phase). This wall was built to support a stone glacis abutting the city wall. It is cut in the east by a Late Roman–Byzantine (Phase 2) wall (Ofer 1993: 608). The wall was built against a sloping fill of earth and small stones with a

solid coating made of rubble stone, and larger stones used as foundations on bedrock (Fig. 8, rear right). The inner, northern face was not straight (as in terrace walls), and the area between the supporting wall and the city wall was filled with stones and dirt. The latest sherds from this fill are dated to the Iron Age IIB. The wall, over 2 m high and thinning towards the top, is slightly inclined to the north towards the city wall and was built directly on the bedrock. Due to the inward incline of the wall, the top of it probably abutted the city wall in antiquity. From the outer, southern face, layers of fill, stones, and fine dirt can be seen in the section (Fig. 8, rear right; Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017: Figs. 4.23–4.27, L.2158). Yellowish and brown layers, each about 1–15 cm thick, slope down to the south. The latest sherds from the excavation of these layers were also ascribed to the Iron Age IIB (Ben-Shlomo 2019: Fig. 3.13), dating its final use.

The supporting wall and the glacis are interpreted as reinforcements of the city wall, protecting the fortification against military attacks as well as weather and earthquake damage. The glacis also provided support to the base of the wall, preventing stones from being washed away due to erosion. A similar supporting wall dating to the Iron Age II was found at Tell en-Nasbeh (McCown 1947: 192–193, Pl. 69). Other possibly similar Iron Age II glacis or ramparts can be seen at Tell el-Fûl (Albright 1924: Fig. 17, Pl. XXIV) and Tell Beit Mirsim (Albright 1943: Pl. 40). Note that all these sites were in the territory of Judah in the late 8th and 7th centuries BCE.

About 8.5 m from the cyclopean city wall and parallel to it, an additional stone wall was built on bedrock (Fig. 7, right; Fig. 5, Wall 2517; Eisenberg and Ben-Shlomo 2017: 85, Fig. 4.35). This wall, exposed for a length of 22.5 m, was 1.6–1.7 m thick and preserved to a height of 2 m on the western side and is aligned with the glacis.

Another fortification element, probably an outset, supporting wall, or tower (Fig. 5, Wall 2) abutting the face of this inner tower, was unearthed by Hammond in 1964 (Figs. 10–11; see Eisenberg 2011: Fig. 15). This structure (covered and no longer visible today) extended 6.5 m outward from the line of the main wall, and its length was exposed for 12 m (Fig. 5, in blue). Hammond (1965: 268) dated this wall to the MB II, due to the abutting Wall 1, whereas Chadwick (2018) dated it earlier to the EB III, mostly due to EB material on the lowermost level of bedrock adjacent to

Wall 2 and its resemblance to the EB III wall excavated in 1999. Chadwick (2018: 175–179, Figs. 11–13) also identified EB III, MB II, LB II, and Iron II levels in this area based on stratification and pottery.

The difficulty of dating Wall 2 to the EB III, earlier than the cyclopean wall (Fig. 5, Wall 1), is the fact that it clearly abuts it perfectly (Figs. 10–11; see Chadwick 2018: Fig. 9). If Wall 1 had been built later, on top on the underlying bedrock, it seems unlikely that no stones of Wall 2 would have been dismantled or moved; the fact that Wall 2 is also built on bedrock does not indicate that it is earlier (as claimed in Chadwick 2018: 183). Thus, since Wall 2 is not cut or overridden by Wall 1, it seems clear that Wall 2 is (at least technically) later than Wall 1 (see also Ussishkin 2021). Based on the construction style, it seems more likely that Wall 2 belongs to the Iron Age II phase; it could have been built at a later period on the bedrock, which is not very deep here (probably because most of the soil on this slope is eroded). There is also no real floor level on the bedrock, with EB material reaching Wall 2, and although there may have been EB III architectural remains in this location, they were likely removed by the two later stages. Furthermore, because Wall 2 ends in the east, Chadwick (2018: 179–182) is "forced" to assume a gateway in this area. However, a simpler explanation is that Wall 2 was a rampart or supporting wall added later (probably during the Iron Age II). A possibly similar example comes from Tell en-Nasbeh (McCown 1947: Pl. 69:2, left, denoted a "retaining wall") and dated to the Iron Age II.

The area between the later supporting walls and the city wall was covered with stones probably representing the collapse of the fortification walls when they were destroyed and/or after they fell into disuse. The finds from this accumulation represent the final stage of use of the fortifications in the Iron Age, as indicated by the pottery found and a Hebrew seal of an official (see Vainstub and Ben-Shlomo 2016; Ben-Shlomo 2019: Fig. 3.14).



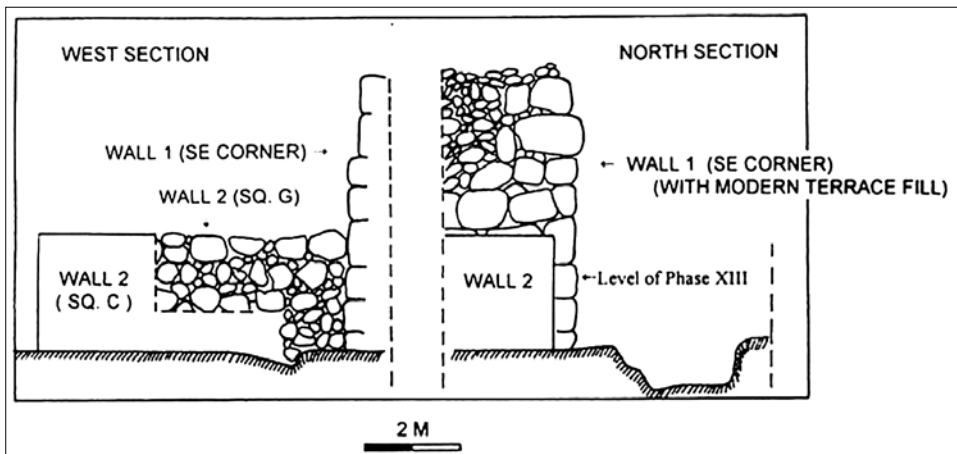
**Figure 8:** The supporting wall and glacis, looking east



**Figure 9:** Wall D, looking west



**Figure 10:** View of the top of the Wall 2 foundation structure in Squares I.3 and I.3A, 1964 (Chadwick 2018: Fig. 18)



**Figure 11:** Northern and western sections of Hammond's Wall 1 and Wall 2 (Chadwick 2018: Fig. 9)

## Discussion

Dating the construction of ancient fortification systems is not easy, since these elements, which require much labor to build, were often in use for very long periods of time, with renovations and modifications over the years. The finds, fills, and debris associated with these walls often represent their final period of use and/or their destruction date rather than their construction period, which may be many centuries earlier. In the hill country this becomes even more difficult as every new layer built on the rock surfaces erases the previous layers rather than overlying them (as at other tell sites). Therefore, the best method for dating the construction of fortification elements is probably to locate them in between datable stratigraphical elements. This is often quite difficult, because these massive walls were often built on bedrock and used in later periods, in some cases even being exposed on the surface in modern times.

In general, there are several methods of dating the original construction of a fortification wall or system in archaeology:

1. Obtaining a relative or absolute date range based on datable elements that sandwich it stratigraphically – antedating it from below and postdating it from above.
2. Obtaining a relative or absolute date from context, i.e., based on architectural elements connected with it in the excavation that can be dated directly (although this might also merely reflect use).
3. Dismantling a section of the wall, excavating within and/or under it, and retrieving datable material from the foundation trench (C-14, pottery, or other).
4. Relying on datable finds on the lowest floor level that reaches the wall from the inside or outside, although again, this does not preclude a lower floor phase dated to the original construction that did not survive, especially at hill country sites.
5. Using OSL (e.g., Davidovich et al. 2012) or archaeomagnetic analysis (see below, e.g., Vaknin et al. 2024); however, this could also be indicative of use rather than the construction date.
6. Relying on the "typology" or construction method of the wall and comparing it to other datable sites; here, however, one should beware of circular reasoning.

As will be shown in most cases discussed here, only methods 4–6 have been used and discussed; methods 1–3, which are the only methods that can clearly date the construction, have not.

As noted, Ussishkin (2016; 2021) recently suggested that the cyclopean fortification walls of the City of David near the Gihon Spring, as well as those at Tel Hebron, should not be dated to the MB IIB–C as previously suggested, but rather much later, to the Iron Age IIB–C. Ussishkin discusses the evidence for fortifications in the City of David unearthed in excavations by Kenyon (Wall NB / Wall 3; e.g., Shiloh 1984; Steiner 2001, Area E, Wall 285/219; De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012) and by Reich and Shukron (the Spring Tower and the Pool Tower; Reich and Shukron 2010). Ussishkin's main argument for rejecting the excavators' dating of these walls, in particular those from Area E and the area of the Gihon Spring (especially Walls 108 and 109 of the Pool Tower), is that floor material from houses reaching the wall from the inside (as in Area E, Strata 17–18, as well as various spots in the interior of the Pool Tower) cannot be used to date the wall and should be treated as early construction fills (Ussishkin 2016: 141–145). Moreover, recent C-14 analyses also give 9th-century BCE dates for its construction (Regev et al. 2017). According to Ussishkin's re-analysis of the finds, there is no proof that these fortification walls date to the MB II, since no MB II floor clearly reaches these walls (see above). Alternatively, he suggests an Iron Age IIB–C date, linking this construction with the substantial expansion of the city on the Western Hill.

Clearly, these massive walls stood and were used, whether as intact fortification walls for the city or otherwise for very long periods, especially during the Iron Age, when the city expanded. Recent excavations in the area of the Spring Tower and the Pool Tower (Uziel and Szanton 2015) unearthed domestic houses abutting or leaning on the cyclopean walls, with two earlier phases dated to the late Iron Age IIA (Stratum 9, 9th–early 8th centuries BCE; Uziel and Szanton 2015: 237–239, Fig. 3), and a later phase to the late Iron Age IIB (Stratum 8, late 7th century BCE, or Lachish III). Recent radiocarbon dating from the base of the Spring Tower seems to indicate that much of the construction in this area is dated to the Iron Age IIA or the 9th century BCE (Regev et al. 2017). Although these results do not indicate an MB II

construction date for the cyclopean elements in this area, they show that the massive walls were standing and used during the 9th century BCE and were thus constructed either then or, more likely, earlier. Therefore, the dating of all the cyclopean elements in the City of David to the late 8th century BCE (or later) as suggested by Ussishkin cannot be accepted (see Gadot and Uziel 2017: 131).

Similarly, as mentioned, Ussishkin suggests an Iron Age IIB date for the construction of the cyclopean fortifications at Tel Hebron (see above; Ussishkin 2016: 148–150; 2021). Ussishkin claims that there could not have been a long time between the construction of the earlier cyclopean wall and the rampart/glacis and later walls (see above; Ussishkin 2021: 132), but again, all his claims are relevant to the latest use of the early wall rather than its original construction. Indeed, repairs and renovations to the earlier wall were made throughout the Iron Age. Thus, Ussishkin's claims that the cyclopean walls were originally built in the Iron Age IIB are circumstantial and are no better than the typological dating to the MB II (see below).

The difficulties in dating large-scale excavations can be also well illustrated by the recent debate regarding the dating of the large revetment wall at Tel Lachish. In this case, too, Ussishkin advances an Iron Age IIB date, but here he is defending the longstanding, traditional dating by the excavators (himself included), rather than challenging it. This long, massive wall encircling the mound at midslope (2 km in total length) was dated to the Iron Age II by the excavators, Stacey and later Ussishkin. This dating was agreed on by most other scholars based on the historical record, the Assyrian Lachish reliefs, and subsequent evidence from the excavations (Ussishkin 2023; Garfinkel 2024 and references therein), and was recently supported by archaeomagnetic methods (Vaknin et al. 2024).

Recently, the fourth excavations at Lachish, conducted on behalf of the Hebrew University, redated this element to the early MB II based on new finds of an MB II fortress and LBA remains overlying it in the northeastern part of the tell (e.g., Garfinkel et al. 2021; Garfinkel 2024). The revetment is built of large stones like the cyclopean walls, but some sections have hewn stones rather than polygonal rubble (Garfinkel 2024: Fig. 7). The main archaeological evidence for the Iron Age date is

the physical connection of the revetment in the southwestern area to the Iron Age gate and the finds from Area R in the south. There the Assyrian siege ramp was built over the revetment and a brick tower dated to the Iron Age II (Ussishkin 2016; 2023). Nevertheless, this evidence relates to the use and destruction periods rather than to the date of construction. Garfinkel (2024) surveyed 21 points along the revetment that indicate an earlier date; the revetment was cut by the Iron Age gate. In particular, in the northeastern Area BB, an MB IIB–C built brick structure well dated to this period by finds and C-14 seems to overlie the revetment wall; in another spot the revetment is superimposed by an LBA structure (Garfinkel et al. 2021: 430, Fig. 9; Garfinkel 2024: 14, Fig. 14). On the other hand, recent archaeomagnetic analysis of the bricks of a tower built on top of the revetment in the southern area (Ussishkin Area RR) indicate that the bricks were put into an in situ configuration (probably caused by a fire set by the Assyrian attackers) in the late 8th century BCE (701 BCE; Vaknin et al. 2024). Since this is a mud brick structure, it was probably built not long before this date (Vaknin et al. 2024: 87). Therefore, in this area the revetment was clearly in use, and possibly built, during the Iron Age II; note that this study does not introduce any new claims, as Garfinkel (2024: 11) also states that the tower was built during the Iron II. Thus, there is seemingly contradictory evidence for dating the use and possibly construction in different (far apart) sections of the presumably same fortification element.

As mentioned, Ussishkin's re-analysis of the cyclopean fortifications in the City of David and Hebron also raises the question of whether we should change the date of construction of the other, similarly built city walls at other sites in the central hills such as Shechem/Tell Balatah (Campbell 2002) and Shiloh (Finkelstein et al. 1993: 37), as well as other sites such as Gezer (Dever et al. 1970: 41–43) and Jericho (Fiaccavento and Montanari 2013), from the traditional MB II to the Iron Age IIB–C; Ussishkin (2021: 133) does suggest that Gezer and Nasbeh also date to the Iron II (see above). Apparently, Ussishkin does not redate these other cyclopean city walls, probably for historical reasons. This unique construction technique is not known in the southern Levant from any other period in the Bronze and Iron Ages, except for the cyclopean walls at Khirbet Qeiyafa, constructed during the early Iron Age IIA

(e.g., Garfinkel et al. 2014: 12–15, 76, 342, although there is an MB II phase at this site as well). For Tel Hebron, indeed, our direct archaeological data for dating the cyclopean walls is so far limited. The results of the 1999 excavations, not yet fully published, include a small and not very well-preserved portion of the cyclopean city wall overlying the EB III city wall (Eisenberg 2011); yet another segment of a cyclopean wall is visible nearby (Fig. 3). Furthermore, the walls of the rooms dated according to finds on the floor and abutting the city wall are not at right angles to the city wall (as noted by Ussishkin 2016: 150). Construction of the cyclopean wall in Area 53B and in Hammond's excavations on the southeastern side of the tell was thus tentatively dated to the MB IIB–C, and the supporting wall and glacis described above, whose final use is dated to the Iron Age IIB–C, are clearly linked with later additions and modifications to the city wall (apparently still in use during this period), though built in a completely different style.

Thus, summarizing the evidence so far from the southern fortifications at Tel Hebron, there are clearly at least two different fortification elements, one at least technically earlier (the cyclopean wall) and the other later (other elements). Therefore, the following possibilities may be suggested in principle for dating these elements:

1. According to Chadwick (2018) there were in fact three periods of fortifications: the earliest, including Wall 2 (and possibly other elements), from the EB III; the cyclopean wall (Wall 1) from the MB II; and later elements from the Iron Age II. As shown above, this seems unlikely since Wall 2 is evidently a later addition to Wall 1.
2. The earlier and later elements are from the same period (MB II), but were also used during the Iron Age II. This is less likely because the Iron II sherds come from the supporting wall fill, and due to the difference in the construction style of the later elements.
3. The excavators (Hammond, Ofer, Eisenberg, and Ben-Shlomo) suggest that the earlier element was constructed during the MB II and the later one during the Iron Age II; some of the later elements may have been constructed during the Iron Age IIA prior to the last use and destruction during the Iron IIB–C.

4. Similar to Option 3 but with the earlier element dated to the Iron Age IIA.
5. The earlier and later elements are from the same period (Iron IIB; Ussishkin's suggestion). As noted, this suggestion is problematic due to differences in construction style. Ussishkin does not argue that the cyclopean wall cannot date, for example, to the Iron Age IIA (here Option 4), as may be evidenced at the City of David based on C-14 dating (see above; Gadot and Uziel 2017); note the similar cyclopean wall at Khirbet Qeiyafa dated to the early Iron Age IIA (Garfinkel et al. 2014: 342).

In fact, I believe, it is not yet possible to definitively prove any of these dating possibilities for the construction of the cyclopean wall at this location at Hebron. In order to achieve a final, definite dating of the original construction of the cyclopean wall at Tel Hebron, it will be necessary to excavate more and larger floors and houses abutting the city wall, as well as to excavate a section of the wall itself and date its foundation trench. Therefore, we are still highly dependent on the typological and historical reasoning of parallels to other occurrences of the cyclopean construction technique in the central hills.

As noted, typological and historical considerations suggest that the cyclopean fortifications in the southern Levant date to the MB II. The biblical text in the story of Caleb and the spies may also hint at this: "They went up to the Negev and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, descendants of Anaq, were there. Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt" (Numbers 13:22). This passage suggests that the city wall of Hebron was visible, well known, and built long before the text was written; the reference to "giants" (Anaq) also alludes to its cyclopean nature. Thus, even if the text was written during the 6th century BCE or later, reflecting Judean traditions of the 8th–7th centuries BCE, it indicates a tradition that these cyclopean walls at Hebron were much older than the late Judean Kingdom period. Note that such a tradition would fit an Iron Age IIA construction of the wall as well.

The dating of the massive fortifications is related to large MB II urban centers or city-states throughout the Levant, as well as in Syria during the early part of the period (see above; Burke 2008). Initially, archaeologists attributed MB II fortifications in the

Levant to the Hyksos Dynasty in Egypt and Canaan (e.g., Petrie 1906; Yadin 1978; Bunimovitz 1992); in particular, these scholars emphasized the large ramparts associated with fortified camps and chariot armies. Later, this historical link was questioned (see, e.g., Dever 1985; Bunimovitz 1992: 221–224). The phenomenon was seen to be more complex, related to earlier phases of the MB II, and subject to Syrian influences (from sites such as Ebla and Qatna). The ramparts, probably more typical of the MB IIA (ca. 2000–1750 BCE), attracted more attention. They often encompassed enormous areas in and near tell sites and were interpreted as being related to population movements or power symbols in addition to their fortification function (e.g., Kaplan 1975; Bunimovitz 1992; Finkelstein 1992; Uziel 2010 and references therein). However, these ramparts do not appear in the central hills. The fortification walls and smaller glacis are less unusual; in fact they are a rather common element although they still serve as landmarks due to their massiveness, "cyclopean" technique, distribution, and long-term use. They were also common in the hill country during the MB IIB–C (Burke 2008). They could be accounted for by functional explanations (e.g., expansion and protection of cities, the settlement of new populations), symbolic ones (competition and status symbols of city rulers, or monumentality in relation to new social, political, and economic orders; Kaplan 1975; Renfrew 1986; Bunimovitz 1992), or a combination of these. An alternative historical and social-based dating of the fortifications to the late Judean Kingdom period is in fact strongly based on biblical and Neo-Assyrian texts and iconography (as is the case for the dating of the Tel Lachish revetment). Therefore, as we must also rely on these considerations for now, I believe that an MB II date for the cyclopean wall of Tel Hebron is still preferable.

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