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Farewell, King Arawna : The Threshing Floor of the Ark (2 Sam. 24)

Kletter, Raz

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Material, Method, and Meaning

Papers in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology
in Honor of Ilan Sharon

Edited by Uri Davidovich,
Naama Yahalom-Mack,
and Sveta Matskevich

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ÄGYPTEN UND ALTES TESTAMENT

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Band 110

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Illustration on the cover: Tel Dor and the southern lagoon, looking northwest.
Photograph by Howard Karesh, courtesy of the Tel Dor Project.

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Material, Method, and Meaning: Papers in Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology
in Honor of Ilan Sharon

Edited by Uri Davidovich, Naama Yahalom-Mack, and Sveta Matskevich

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Ilan Sharon

Contents

List of Contributors	xi
Preface	xvii
Uri Davidovich, Naama Yahalom-Mack and Sveta Matskevich	
List of Publications - Ilan Sharon	xix
Professor Ilan Sharon, A Comprehensively Biased Introduction	1
Ayelet Gilboa	
Part I: Archaeological Methods and Epistemologies	
Archaeological Cultures, Fabricated Ethnicities and DNA Research: “Minoans” and “Mycenaeans” as Case Examples	7
Joseph Maran	
Redundancy, Plurality, and the Digital Archaeological Record	27
Raphael Greenberg	
Archaeological Predictive Modeling for the Mountainous Upper Galilee	39
Ido Wachtel	
Disentangling a Confusion of Tongues—On Chronological Schemes, Terminologies, and Radiocarbon Dating in the Eastern Mediterranean	55
Katharina Streit	
Applications of Drone Photogrammetry at Tel Dor, Israel	67
Anthony T. Tamberino and Thomas E. Levy	
The Archaeological Documentation System DANA (Digital Archaeology and National Archives): A View from the Field	85
Stefan Münger and Liat Weinblum	
Part II: Dor	
The Reoccupation of Southern Phoenicia in the Persian Period: Rethinking the Evidence	101
S. Rebecca Martin and Yiftah Shalev	

Animal Rituals from the Persian Period at Tel Dor	117
Lidar Sapir-Hen and Yiftah Shalev	
In Search of “Ptolemaic” Dor	131
Barak Monnickendam-Givon	
A Hellenistic Glass Pendant of a Child Deity (Harpokrates) from Tel Dor	147
Jessica L. Nitschke	
A Late Bronze Age Gold Bull Head Pendant from Tel Dor	161
Pnina Torn Broers	
The Date of the Tel Dor Well and Its Contribution to the Study of Sea-Level Changes	177
Assaf Yasur-Landau and Ehud Arkin Shalev	
Part III: Phoenician Connections	
Between Philistia, Phoenicia, and Beyond: A View from Tell es-Safi/Gath	185
Aren M. Maeir	
On the Relations between Phoenicia and the Beth-Shean Valley in the Iron Age	195
Amihai Mazar	
Phoenician Presence in the Upper Galilee during Iron Age II	213
Hayah Katz	
An Iron Age IIA Phoenician Bichrome Jar from Tel Abel Beth Maacah	223
Nava Panitz-Cohen	
A Clay Pendant with an Impression of a Phoenician Seagoing Ship from Tel Abel Beth Maacah	241
Baruch Brandl and Naama Yahalom-Mack	
Part IV: Iron Age History and Archaeology	
The Last Four-Room House in Israel: Stratum 10 at Tel Shiqmona in Context	251
Golan Shalvi and Ayelet Gilboa	
“The iron which the king, my lord, gave to the smiths for work”: Aspects of Authority and Prestige in the City Plan of Hazor Stratum VIII	313
Ruhama Bonfil and Anabel Zarzecki-Peleg	

Standing on Hole-y Ground: The Storage Pits at Tell en-Naşbeh and the Role of the State.	337
Jeffrey R. Zorn	
Farewell, King Arawna: The Threshing Floor of the Ark (2 Sam. 24).	375
Raz Kletter	
The Border of Gezer and the Border of Gath: Elite Control of Land in Ancient Near Eastern Cities.	387
Yosef Garfinkel	
Epilogue	
“When in doubt, open a new locus; when not so in doubt, Twilight-Zone it”: The Educational Legacy of Ilan Sharon—An Associative-Multidisciplinary Archaeologist	397
Nati Kranot and Talia Neuman	
Color Plates	403

Farewell, King Arawna: The Threshing Floor of the Ark (2 Sam. 24)

RAZ KLETTER

ABSTRACT

The “threshing floor of Arawna” (or Araunah, Orna, Ornan) appears in the story about the altar built by King David to stop the plague (2 Sam. 24: 16b–25) caused by his census (2 Sam. 24: 1–16a). It forms part of the so-called appendix to the book of Samuel (2 Sam. 21–24). There are many original interpretations of 2 Sam. 24, and the related 1 Chron. 21 and 4QSAMa. Studies treat the textual and literary aspects in detail and attempt to interpret the possible implications for the history of early Jerusalem, the Jebusites, the origins of the Jerusalem Temple, the figure of King David, and more. In this article, an alternative interpretation of the story about the “threshing floor of Arawna” is offered, which avoids plagiarism – at the price of losing the hero.

KEYWORDS: Jerusalem, Iron Age, threshing floor, book of Samuel, King David, Arawna, Emar

INTRODUCTION

The “threshing floor of Arawna” (or Araunah, Orna, Ornan) appears in the story about the altar built by King David in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24), often defined as part of an appendix to the book of Samuel (2 Sam. 21–24).¹ There are many interpretations of 2 Sam. 24 and the related 1 Chron. 21 and 4QSAMa, attempting to decipher the possible implications for early Jerusalem, the Jebusites, the origins of the Jerusalem Temple, the figure of King David, and more (Auld 2002; 2010; 2012; Aejmelaeus 2007; Himbaza 2010; Rofé 2010; 2014; Amit 2011; Cohen 2013: 77–110; Park 2013; Russel 2016; Edenburg 2017).²

¹ It is a special honour to be one of the contributors to this book. I have known Ilan Sharon for many years now, and I highly appreciate his numerous and varied contributions to the archaeological research of Tel Dor and Phoenicia, Iron Age chronology, and field methodology.

² Russel (2016: Chapter 2) focuses on the census, and on why David had to buy the threshing floor. Auld (2002: 80; 2010: 129; 2012: 616) sees 2 Sam. 24 not as an appendix, but as the oldest source of Samuel, the “Book of Two Houses”. For Deuteronomistic revisions in 2 Sam. 21–24, see Veijola 1975: 106, note 2; McCarter 1984.

KING, TITLE OR DEITY?

Most of the scholars who discussed 2 Sam. 24 interpreted the word “Arawna” (and its variations) as a private name (McCarter 1984: 512, with references). This follows the story, which describes Arawna as a Jebusite (vv. 16, 18) who sold his threshing floor to King David (vv. 20–24). Following this interpretation, a common assumption is that Arawna was a former king of Jerusalem, based mainly on v. 23, which says: “all this Arawna the king gives to the king” (Ahlström 1961: 115–118; Cross 1973: 210; Ishida 1977: 129–130; Wyatt 1985; Cohen 2001: 35–36; Na’aman 2014: 488; Noegel 2015: 234; see also Hertzberg 1964: 408–415; Anderson 1989: 286; Elledge 2015: 77, note 161). True, v. 23 can be read as a vocative that refers to David: “all this, O king, Arawna gives to the king”. One can also claim that “king” should be omitted as an error. McCarter (1984: 508) amends Arawna here to *adony* – “my lord”, reading: “I give it all to my lord the king”. However, the supposed change from *’dny* (my lord) to *’rwnh* lacks explanation. If such readings involve illeism (Arawna referring to himself in third person), they are difficult, unless one reads “King Arawna” (Elledge 2015: 80).

However, there are good arguments against the identification of Arawna as a king. First, we have no

other evidence for such a former king in Jerusalem.³ Second, scholars did not address the fact that royals do not perform manual work in threshing floors like farmers do (the detail that Arawna was threshing wheat appears in Josephus, I Chron. 21:21, and 4QSAM^a). To repudiate the view that the threshing floor was a sacred site of King Arwana, Cross (1973: 210) observed that “evidently the king of Jerusalem was not threshing in his sanctuary”; but do kings thresh in threshing floors with family members? The attribution of ownership of a threshing floor to a king is already quite strange. Imagine a millionaire who, we are told, owns a cheap bicycle, not as a curiosity, but as if it is a self-evident matter.

Several scholars suggested that Arawna was not a private name, but rather, a title. Maisler (Mazar) (1947: 219) and Yeivin (1973: 398) suggested an origin from Hurrian *ewerina*, meaning king/ruler/head man. Adding “Jebusite” would provide us with “the Jebusite king/ruler/head man”, maintaining the identification of Arawna as a former leader of Jerusalem (cf. Montgomery 1935: 94; Gray 1952: 212). A Hittite origin of Arawna from *arawanis*, “nobleman”, was suggested by Sayce (1921). According to Rosén (1955), Arawna derives from Hittite *arawanni* – “free”; so “the *arawna*” in 2 Sam. 24:16 means “the free (person)” and, together with Jebusite, “the free Jebusite”. Wyatt interpreted *arawna* as the title “king”, and the added king in v. 23 as a gloss “translating the foreign term into Hebrew for the reader’s benefit” (Wyatt 1985: 40; see also 1990: 355–356). However, a translator rarely keeps the translated term in such a way that would be confusing to readers. Moreover, it is unlikely that biblical scribes translated from Hittite. There is no evidence supporting the once-common assumption about the presence of Hittites in early Iron Age Jerusalem (Singer 2006; Gilan 2013). Such title suggestions return us to where we started, only with losing the name Arawna in favor of an anonymous person. Since the bearer of the title must still be interpreted as a leading figure, it implies that Arawna is a “prominent Jebusite” (Ben-Zvi 2014: 419), likely a king. A story about a king called Arawna is more logical than a story about an anonymous king or leader that is mentioned only by title (cf. Revell 1996: 351, note 1).

Stolz (1970: 10) suggested that Arawna was not a person, but a deity, whose name derives from the Indo-European sky deity Varuna (Uranos). Therefore, the “threshing floor of Arawna” was the

Jebusite cult place where this deity was worshipped. Gerhards similarly related Arawna to the Indo-Arian deity *Waruna/*Ārōna/Varuna. Unlike Stolz, however, Gerhards suggested that David was the first to use this threshing floor for cult. He claimed that an original “Arawna episode” (2 Sam. 24:18–25) was secondarily attached to the census story by way of vv. 16–17, and that it has to be pre-exilic, the proof coming from the Indo-Arian name Arawna, which supposedly could not be invented by a much later, Persian period author (Gerhards 2008; 2009: 168, note 118). Although theoretically possible, this is a difficult suggestion. It creates a deity for which we have no other evidence from Judah/Israel. A threshing floor could be used for religious and cultic acts. Yet, once cult becomes the main activity, the place would be called, fittingly, a *temenos*, *bamah*, temple, and so on. It would no longer be called a threshing floor. Gerhards based his entire theory on the name, and the early date of vv. 18–25 on the interpretation of the name, resulting in circular reasoning. There is no certainty that Arawna was a Hittite/Hurrite/Indo-Arian name. Moreover, if Arawna/*Ārōna/Varuna was the name of an Indo-Arian deity worshipped in Jerusalem, how was it transferred to a mortal Jebusite in 2 Sam. 24:20–24 (which forms, according to Gerhards, part of the original story)?

In early studies, Arawna was identified by some scholars (Mowinckel, Bentzen) with Zadok (Wyatt 1985: 40, with references). More recently, Wyatt (1985) identified Arawna with Uriah the Hittite. Apart from the vocal similarity, there is little to support this idea, which necessitates identifying Uriah as a pre-Davidic king of Jerusalem and his wife, Bathsheba, as a queen. To this argument we may add that Arawna is called “Jebusite”, not “Hittite”, while Uriah is not a Hittite name (Singer 2006: 744–745; Gilan 2013: 40).

The inconsistency in the spelling of Arawna in 2 Sam. 24 is troubling. Are these really “slight differences” that often occur with personal names (thus Waters 2013: 78–79)? The MT in vv. 16 and 18 has in the Ketiv *’wrnh* and *’rnyh*, but they are not active agents. The assumed person (a male Arawna and not the threshing floor, which is feminine in Hebrew) is further specified by the term “Jebusite”. However, in vv. 20–24, the word is consistently rendered as *’rwnh* – the same as the Qere in vv. 16 and 18. In vv. 20–24, Arawna is an active figure, but without the term “Jebusite”. Chronicles renders the word nine times as Ornan (*’rnn*); the ending of this form is perhaps a Hebraization (thus, Gerhards 2008: 358).⁴ 4QSAM^a gives the name as *’rn* (Himbaza

³ Mathys (2007: 243–244) observed that Arawna “pops up” from nowhere and disappears into oblivion, having only one role to play: to give David legitimacy as a cultic leader.

⁴ This does not prove that the original name is foreign. One could give a common form to a name that was rare or

2010), while the LXX renders it *'Opva* (Wyatt 1985: 39).

THRESHING FLOORS

Threshing floors are perhaps tied to religious and mythical aspects in the bible (Park 2013; Waters 2013; 2015; Landy 2014), but it is risky to read this as an accurately historical picture and to interpret them in terms of a chthonic or fertility cult (Park 2013; Noegel 2015).⁵

Threshing floors in traditional Palestinian villages were located close to the village, in places exposed to wind (often, but not always, east of the village, yet not at the top of hills; Figs. 1–2). They had a smooth, hard ground or bedrock as their surface, which was

cleaned before and after use, sometimes resurfaced with earth/clay, and surrounded by a low fence. Poor families could thresh on a small scale by beating the crop by hand (cf. Ruth 2:17), but more often, animals and threshing sledges were used. Each farmer had a designated place for threshing, at night sleeping next to the crop to guard it. Assuming an average crop of 60 kg wheat per dunam,⁶ a team of two bulls operating a threshing sledge can thresh the crop of a field of 1.5–2 dunam in one day (Dalman 1933: 67–76; Avitsur 1984; Greenhut 2006: 16–17). A rabbinic rule demanded that threshing floors would be at least 50 cubit (ca. 25 m) away from the city. They could be private or public (Felix 1990: 217–222) and could be located near city gates (Smith 1946; Ziffer 2009: 6; Landy 2014: note 1).

Threshing floors are sometimes identified in excavations, although this is fraught with problems (for the southern Levant, see Avner et al. 2003; Anderson, Chabot and Van Gijn 2004; Shahack-Gross, Gafni and Finkestein 2009; Frumin 2017; Nagorsky 2017: Fig. 7; elsewhere, see Hillman 1984: 121–125; Littauer, Couwel and Steinkeller 1990;

corrupted, and not necessarily foreign.

⁵ Park (2013: 39–41) finds in biblical threshing floors all the following symbolic aspects: fertility, sexuality, creation, violence, punishment, death, and even connection between heaven and earth. They are “a place associated with ritual, creation, destruction, death, numinality and power”, a “universal ritual-theatre stage”. It seems that the main reference used by Park concerning real threshing floors is one page from a general, introductory level work (King and Stager 2001: 89).

⁶ One dunam (1000 square meters) = 0.1 hectare = ca. 0.25 acre.



Figure 1. The threshing floors of the village of Halhul, May 18, 1940, with Nebi Yunis in the background. Photo: Eric Matson, Courtesy of The Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-M33- 11447.



Figure 2. Winnowing at the threshing floors of Halhul in 1940, Photo: Eric Matson, Courtesy of The Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-M33-11447-A.

Isager and Skydsgaard 1995: 25, 53–55; Whittaker 2000; Waters 2015: 7–11).

Early Mesopotamian threshing floors (*adru*) were often owned and operated by temples or cities, and the farmer-tenants paid fees for their use (Van den Mierop 1997: 149–150; Veenhof and Eidem 2008: 220, 241; Johnson 2017: 163–167). Threshing floors could also be private property and were sold, usually as part of a complete ‘unit’ (such as an estate). The threshing period was also the time when taxes in kind were taken, since this was the first time that the crops were gathered. Some large threshing floors were shared by communities (Fales 1990: 97, 115, 122, 129–130).

Threshing floors are mentioned ca. 30 times in the bible, but, except for the one in 2 Sam. 24, none are described as belonging to a private individual. Farmers did not sell their threshing floors since they needed them, unless they sold an entire ‘unit’ that included a threshing floor. This suggests that if Arawna was a person, he was not a ‘common’ farmer. There is also an issue of size; for a ‘common’ farmer, an area of 10–12 meters in diameter is sufficient for a threshing floor. However, if the story of 2 Sam. 24 relates to the place of the future Temple, as many think, a much larger area is implied. This, too, points to Arawna, if a mortal being, as being a person of high status. A ‘common’ farmer would have neither

the means nor the need to own a much larger-than-usual threshing floor.

TWO ARANA/ARAWNA KINGS?

Another obstacle to interpreting Arawna as a former king of Jerusalem is that this makes him an unlikely figure of plagiarism. This possibility could not be noticed before 1993, when Masimichi Yamada published a few texts from thirteenth century BCE Emar. These are ordinary economic documents, recording the sale of relatively modest plots of real estate by the city (“Ninurta and the elders”) to private individuals. For reasons that elude us, four documents include in their midst an added section, which Yamada (1993: 142) translated as follows:⁷

“When Ara[na, the king], asked the city for 30,000 (shekels) of silver (and) 700 (shekels) of gold, KI.ersetus and houses were given (to the city) and the silver and gold were given to Arana, the kin[g].”

Emar and Jerusalem are some 700 km away from each other (as the crow flies), and we know of no direct contacts between them.⁸ Some 250 years separate the

⁷ We will not discuss minor differences between these texts, treated by Yamada (1993; 2017); the determinative “King” before arana appears – perhaps – in only one text.

⁸ Those who believe that Arawna is Hittite should notice

Emar documents from the (estimated) time of King David, although 2 Sam. 24 was probably written much later. More crucial than the time gap is the question of genre. There is no ancient Near Eastern literary *topos* of kings selling threshing floors. The Samuel story is a “high” literary narrative, loaded with religious significance, as opposed to the Emar documents, which are ‘dry’ economic records.⁹ The unusual Arana section was not added in the Emar texts for religious reasons, but perhaps as a precedent to legitimize the sale.¹⁰

If we follow Yamada’s reading, the similarity between those Emar documents and 2 Sam. 24 becomes uncanny. In both cities, there was a mysterious former king named Arana/Arawna, unknown from any other source, who was involved in the sale of real estate. As Yamada (2017: 124–129; cf. Viano 2012: 142–154) clarified in his more recent study, King Arana was selling mainly cheaper property, uninhabited land (threshing floors, waste plots) in peripheral areas and/or outside the city walls. History does not repeat itself in this way. Imagine finding the words “Merlin” and “Excalibur” in a contract from a Byzantine period city in Spain.

THE THRESHING FLOOR OF THE TREASURY?

The problem of “plagiarism” is dispelled if we follow other, more popular readings of the Emar documents than Yamada’s (2017: 124, note 12). Fleming (2000: 25; see also Pentti 2001: 27) suggested a relation to Akkadian *arnu* “offense, punishment” and *arānum* “to give offense”, reading: “for the offense of the king” – so the foreign powers demanded restitution from Emar for this offense. Skaist (1998) suggested that *arana* was a Hurrian term for “gift” or “tribute” (reading *ana arana* in Arnaud 1991: text 14 as “for tribute”):

“When 30,000 (shekels) of silver and 2,000 (shekels) of gold for tribute [of the king?] they demanded of the city of Emar, [parcels of real property] were sold for silver and gold, and the silver

and gold were given as tribute to the king” (Skaist 1998: 171).

Arnaud (1991) read *arana* as “treasury”, based on the Akkadian *arānu* (or *arannu*, *arranu*), which is a feminine noun that means “chest, cashbox, coffin” (Black, George and Postgate 2000: 22). In a short note, Beckman (1996) followed Arnaud, reading *arana* as “treasury” or “royal treasury”.

Following these scholars, it is proposed that there was no king named Arana at Emar. But was there a king named Arawna in Jerusalem? The Akkadian *arannu* has a biblical cognate – *’aron* (Tawil 2009: 31–32).¹¹ Could *arawna* in 2 Sam. 24 be an economic term, related to Akkadian *arannu*, with an approximated meaning of “treasury”? If so, the “threshing floor of *arawna*” means “the threshing floor of the treasury”. One need not assume direct borrowing from Late Bronze Age Emar, for this term exists also in Neo-Assyrian/Neo-Babylonian inscriptions. For example, between ca. 530–480 BCE, the expression “income of the treasury” (*erbu ša aranni*) denoted a certain type of silver guaranteed by the royal treasury (Jursa 2018: 117; CAD 1/II: 231).

Following the reading “treasury”, there was no private owner named Arawna selling the threshing floor to David. In fact, whether the threshing floor belonged to a king or to the city, by conquering Jerusalem, David inherited it and would have no need to buy it. This proposal refutes the appearance of Arawna as an active human who sells the threshing floor to David, as related in 2 Sam. 24:20–24. However, as noted above, various scholars identified vv. 20–24 as a secondary addition (Fuss 1962: note 87, with literature; McCarter 1984: 516). In 2 Sam. 24, Fuss (1962) defined an original, factual Israelite “altar etiology” (vv. 2, 4b, 8–9, 15, 17–19, 25), which he dated to the time of David or Solomon, relating how David erected an altar to Yahweh at the threshing floor of Arawna, a Jebusite person. A second, also early “Jebusite etiology” described a Jebusite holy place at the same place. Much later, priestly editors added vv. 16 and 20–24, combining and reworking the two etiologies. They obscured the existence of a former Jebusite cult place, and invented Arawna as a contemporary person who converses with and sells the threshing floor to David. They also added the appearance of the angel of Yahweh. Thus, Fuss accepted the existence of a Jebusite person named Arawna and a very early date for the original story as historically reliable.

that these Emar documents belong to the Syrian, not Syro-Hittite scribal tradition (Yamada 2017: 123).

⁹ Probably one scribe wrote three documents and another scribe, the fourth. For this type of document at Emar, see Beckman 1997; Viano 2012.

¹⁰ Russell (2016: 29, after van Soldt 2002: 102–103) mentions another “former” king who sells a threshing floor (confiscated from a criminal) – King Yaqaru of Ugarit. However, the term there (É.KISLAḤ) can mean an empty lot and not necessarily a threshing floor (Yamada 2017). “Orna” in the Xanthos trilingual inscription is the city name, not a king (Lemaire 1995; Adiego 2012; Megrelis 2013; Melchert 2019).

¹¹ Compare other scripts, e.g., Babylonian Aramaic *’arnā* and Syriac *’arūnā* (Pentti 2001: 27).

Regardless of Fuss' conclusions, one can read *arawna* as "treasury", and the earlier story as follows:¹²

^{16b}And the angel of Yahweh was with the Jebusite threshing floor of the treasury. And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of Yahweh standing between the earth and the heavens, and his sword drawn in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem, and the elders fell on their faces covered in sackcloth. ¹⁷And David said to Yahweh when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, thus he said: "It is I who sinned, I the shepherd who did wrong. And these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand be against me and my father's house." ¹⁸And Gad came to David on that day and said to him: "Go up, raise to Yahweh an altar on the Jebusite threshing floor of the treasury." ¹⁹And David went up according to the word of Gad, as Yahweh had charged. ²⁵David built there an altar to Yahweh and presented burnt offerings and peace, and Yahweh listened to the land, and the destruction was stopped from upon Israel.

Verses 18–19 and 25 may hint at, but do not mention explicitly, the Jerusalem Temple (cf. Auld 2012: 619). As noted above, later scribe/s misunderstood the word "treasury"/*arawna* as a proper name and invented a story (vv. 20–24) that explained who this Arawna was (a former king of Jerusalem), and how his property became David's. They portrayed David as an ideal figure – a pious king who repents, sacrifices to God, listens to a prophet, is just in his dealings with "foreigners" like Arawna, and respected by them (Fokkelman 1990: 327). This later story gives legitimacy to the Jerusalem Temple (similar to the story about the Machpelah Cave in Gen. 23; cf. McCarter 1984: 512; Amit 2011). The process is completed in 1 Chron. 21, when the "threshing floor of Ornan" is explicitly identified with the Jerusalem Temple.

However, reading *arawna* as "treasury" in 2 Sam. 24:16, 18 involves serious difficulties. First, there is no clarification how an economic term became a private name. Since the term *arranu* existed not just in the Late Bronze Age, but much later, and as *'aron* in the bible, why would the scribes of 2 Sam. 24 misunderstand it? Second, would a scribe mention a "threshing floor of the treasury" without explaining what treasury is concerned – to whom did it belong? Third, while *arannu* means roughly "treasury" in Akkadian, in biblical Hebrew, treasury is conveyed by a different word (*'oṣar* – Hosea 13:15; Josh. 6:19; 1 Kings 14:26). The word *'aron* appears in the bible

for the Ark of God – a special furniture that holds religious, not economic treasures. The only *'aron* that can be interpreted as a financial "treasury" is the one used in the fixing of the Temple (2 Kings 13). It was a regular piece of furniture, which was secondarily fitted by drilling a hole in its door (1 Kings 12:10). To sum up the discussion so far, there is no convincing evidence to support the reading of *arawna* as "treasury" in 2 Sam. 24.

THE THRESHING FLOOR OF THE ARK

A more plausible interpretation of *arawna* in 2 Sam. 24 is not as a treasury, but as the famous Ark (*'aron*) of Yahweh:

^{16b}And the angel of Yahweh was with the threshing floor of the Ark [...] [The following, until v. 18, as cited above] ¹⁸And Gad came to David on that day and said to him: "Go up, raise to Yahweh an altar on the threshing floor of the Ark of Yah." ¹⁹And David went up according to the word of Gad, as Yahweh had charged. ²⁵David built there an altar to Yahweh and presented burnt offerings and peace, and Yahweh listened to the land, and the destruction was stopped from upon Israel.

The original term survived nearly intact in v. 18: "the Ark of Yah" (*'rn yh*). A small mistake of writing the two words together lead to a later interpretation of *'rnyh* as a private name. The original word in verse 16 was probably "the ark": *h'rn*, explaining the particle that survived.¹³ Once the word was understood as a personal name, the forms were harmonized further (a process that is seen in the Qere). Later scribes or redactors assumed that Arawna was a former resident of Jerusalem, identifying him as a "Jebusite", and (in v. 23) as former king of Jerusalem. The midrash on the "name" *arawna* used a consistent spelling in vv. 20–24, and inadvertently created the only named Jebusite person in the entire bible. Otherwise, Jebusite pertains to a gentilic form of a group of people and only secondarily (and rarely) to a place name (Hübner 2007: 17; cf. Na'aman 2014: 481;

¹³ Later this was fitted to the reading of a private name by adding the ending h and the w. In both vv. 16 and 18 the Keri further fixed the word, to fit the personal name as implied by vv. 20–24. The Greek "Orna" can be transliteration for "Ornan" of 1 Chron. 21:16 (Auld 2010: 126). Rofé (2014) sees v. 16 as a later interpolation; if so, the only original word left is in v. 18. See also McCarter 1984: 511, 515, although he thought that the verses about Gad are secondary (vv. 10–14, 16a, and 17–19; McCarter 1984: 516). Thus, the original story is vv. 1–9, 15, 16b, 20–25— "an early and reliable story which was favorable to King David" (McCarter 1984: 518).

¹² Following, in part, 4Q and 1 Chron. Some scholars see vv. 16–17 too as later additions; see more below.

Wazana 2017). I agree with Hübner (2007) that Jebusites are a fictitious creation; there never was a Jebusite ethnic group living in a city called Jebus. Now we may add that there never was a Jebusite king of Jerusalem called Arawna.

Indeed, the Ark of God always appears with the full name Elohim/Yahweh, and not Yah. However, it has quite many variations and appears also in a shortened form as “the Ark”. Hence, one more variation is not unconceivable.

Many years ago (and nearly forgotten now), Tur-Sinai (Torczyner) (1945) suggested an interesting theory. Based on 2 Sam. 5:8, 1 Chr 11:6, and Ps. 42:8, Tur-Sinai assumed that Jebus was the name of the deity (and not of the city) of Jerusalem, a storm-god whose weapon, the *zinor/sinor* (presumably an Indo-European word) meant thunder and lightning. As part of this theory, Tur-Sinai commented very briefly that if Jebus was a deity, the “threshing floor of Arawna the Jebusite” was “the threshing floor of the deity Jebus”, so that “One should review the entire issue, whether the matter here does not concern the ark of the god, and maybe we will return to this issue on another occasion” (Tur-Sinai 1945: 105, emphasis in the original).

Unfortunately, Tur-Sinai never expanded on his comment (for brief mentions without elaboration, see also Tur-Sinai 1951: 285, note 1; 1955: 548–549). His suggestion implied (although not explicitly) that 2 Sam. 24 spoke originally about an Ark of the deity Jebus, different from the Ark of Yahweh. Only later did this ark come to be understood as a private name. Tur-Sinai did not explain these changes, and, like other scholars at the time, saw the story as an early, reliable source. Yet, the theory that Jebus is a deity and *zinor* his weapon (thunder and lightning) is very far-fetched.

There is no reason to think that the older story was particularly early (cf. Cohen 2013: 161–162). It builds upon 2 Sam. 6, which describes the bringing of the Ark to the City of David (without mentioning a specific location where it was placed).¹⁴ From its earliest version, the story in 2 Sam. 24 connected the threshing floor not with a former Jebusite property, least of all a Jebusite cult site, but with the Ark of Yahweh and hence, with Yahweh and the future Temple of Jerusalem. According to the logic of this story, the Ark of Yahweh, which David brought to Jerusalem, was placed in an open area outside the city – the “threshing floor of the Ark”. Since there

was not yet a Temple, the Ark was presumably placed in a tent.¹⁵ There was no Jebusite cult place there, and no issue of property (the word “Jebusite” is a later addition fitting the picture of a former king of Jerusalem).

Following this, we realize that the story of 2 Sam. 24 continues the so-called Ark Narrative of 1 Sam. 4–6 and 2 Sam. 6.¹⁶ The Ark had ups and downs in its history. When the Philistines took it, it suffered a temporary, evil diversion, which is expressed by the verbs “to take”, “to bring” (Hebrew *lkh*, *bw'* – 1 Sam. 4:11; 5:1, 10, etc.). Positive movements that advanced the ark to its final destination place in the Jerusalem Temple are rendered by the verb “to go up” (*lh*) (1 Sam. 6:9, 21; 7:1; 2 Sam. 6:2, 12). The use of the same verb, and also the term “with” (in v. 16), connects 2 Sam. 24 to the story of the Ark. The “threshing floor of the Ark of Yah” is another stop in the wanderings of the Ark. From his dwelling in Jerusalem, David “went up” to the threshing floor of the Ark and built an altar there (2 Sam. 24:18–19, 25; cf. Fokkelman 1990: 326–327). Benayahu later “went up” to this place to kill Joab, who sought refuge in the tent (1 Kings 2:34). Solomon and the people “brought up” (*wy'lw*) the Ark from the city to the new Temple (1 Kings 8:1–5).

The later midrash about King Arawna and the purchase of his threshing floor by David was not meant to portray continuity in cult, but to show that the roots of the Temple of Solomon were already laid by David, the just and devout king (cf. Na’aman 2012: 32; Ben-Zvi 2014: 433). Arawna as a mortal figure was created by mistake from the “Ark of Yah”. Once the “Ark of Yah” was read as one word, it was mistakenly interpreted as a private name, and the figure of a Jebusite king/noble named Arawna (or the like) was born. An added section (2 Sam. 24:20–24) came to explain who was Arawna and how his threshing floor later became the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁷

¹⁵ The Philistines took only the Ark, not the tabernacle tent. The tent is not mentioned in 1 Sam. 4–6. In 2 Sam. 6:17, David placed the Ark “in its place” inside an unspecified (tabernacle?) tent. The tabernacle reappears in 1 Kings 8:4, but has no place there, as it is no longer needed (as one could not place the tent inside the Temple).

¹⁶ The connection to the Ark narrative was noticed long ago (Budde 1902; McCarter 1984: 517; Edenburg 2017: notes 60, 95–99). It does not follow that the Ark narrative was an independent source or that 2 Sam. 24:16–19, 25 was detached from it. Edenburg (2017) suggested that the connection reflects not a shared reduction, but rather, a common social milieu, and that 2 Sam. 24 interacts with 1 Kings 16:24 (the purchase of Samaria) and not with Gen. 23.

¹⁷ Greenberg (2010) suggested that David’s sin, which caused the plague, was his premature planning to build the Temple. Yet, the plague was stopped, and David fully re-

¹⁴ On the route of the Ark, 1 Sam. 6 mentioned “the threshing floor [of] Nachon” (in Chronicles, “Kidon”), where a person that touched it was killed. The form “with the Ark” is repeated in 2 Sam. 6 (“with the threshing floor”). The Ark could be conceived as resting in a tent outside the city.



Figure 3. The threshold of Aruna in Tallinn, 2018. Photo: Raz Kletter. (Color Plate 15.2, p. 418)

The account of the threshing floor of the Ark was not an independent story, but part of the stories about the census and pestilence in 2 Sam. 24. Its growth should be attributed to piecemeal changes and interpretive additions, and not to a join of separated, independent sources (Auld 2010: 130; Greenwood 2010; Rofé 2014: 318; Russel 2016: 19; Edenburg 2017). Many scholars argue for a late date of this story (Levine 1993; Mathys 2007: 230, 243; Na’aman 2012: 32; Edenburg 2017). If one accepts

pented. The Chronicler’s portrayal of David preparing everything for the Temple is part of his idealization of David (Russel 2016: 16–17).

this view, hardly anything can be deduced from this story about the early history of Jerusalem. Yet, we can conclude that the biblical authors did not relate Solomon’s Temple with a former cult place and that there never was a king of Jerusalem called Arawna.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

LXX	the Septuagint
MT	the Masoretic Text
4QSAM ^a	The Samuel Scroll, Qumran
v., vv.	verse, verses

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Plate 14.1. Brandl and Yahalom-Mack: Figure 1.



Plate 14.2. Brandl and Yahalom-Mack: Figure 2.



Plate 15.1. Shalvi and Gilboa: Figure 2.



Plate 15.2. Kletter: Figure 3.