The “Large Stone Structure” in Jerusalem
Reality versus Yearning

By Israel Finkelstein

Two opposing interpretations of recent finds in E. Mazar’s excavations in the City of David have now been presented to the scholarly community. The first was published by the excavator herself1 and is fully supported by A. Mazar2. Much of the E. Mazar/A. Mazar analysis is now backed by A. Faust3. The second interpretation of the finds, based on the results of the first season of excavation at the site in 2005, was presented by Z. Herzog, L. Singer-Avitz, D. Ussishkin and the present author4.

The E. Mazar/A. Mazar/ Faust interpretation of the finds is based on three pillars:

1. Massive walls built of large boulders uncovered by E. Mazar belong to one large building, labeled the Large Stone Structure (hereafter LSS)5.
2. The LSS and the Stepped Stone Structure (hereafter SSS, referring to the stone mantle over the terraces on the slope)6 form one architectural complex7.
3. The construction of this complex should be dated to the Iron Age I or the Iron Age IIA, and in any event no later than the 10th century B.C.E.8.

According to the second analysis of the finds9:

a. The remains interpreted by E. Mazar as belonging to a LSS do not form a single building. Some of the walls may date to the late Iron Age IIA (in radiocarbon terms, the mid- to second-half of the 9th century B.C.E.)10, while other walls probably belong to the Hellenistic period.
b. The SSS cannot be considered a monolithic construction. There was an on-going need to support the slope here, as this is the narrowest point on the ridge of the City of David.

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1 E. Mazar 2007; 2009.
2 A. Mazar 2010, 34 – 45.
3 Faust 2010.
5 See also A. Mazar 2010, 40; Faust 2010, 118.
7 E. Mazar 2007 and 2009 throughout; e.g. A. Mazar 2010, 45; Faust 2010, 117.
8 The main difference in the E. Mazar/A. Mazar/Faust interpretation is that E. Mazar ascribes the construction of the LSS to King David, while A. Mazar 2010, 45 and Faust 2010, 127 identify it with the Jebusite fort conquered by King David.
9 Finkelstein/Herzog/Singer-Avitz/Ussishkin 2007; see also Finkelstein/Fantalkin/Piasetzky 2008.
10 Herzog, Singer-Avitz and Ussishkin suggested dating all elements to the Hellenistic period while I accept the possibility that some of the remains may date to the Iron Age IIA (Finkelstein/Fantalkin/Piasetzky 2008).
Therefore, the terraces on the slope and the stone mantle (the SSS) had to be renovated time and again. In all probability, the lower part of the SSS dates to the Iron Age IIA, while the upper part seems to date to the Hellenistic period; the latter was most likely built as support for the late Hellenistic First Wall (the Hasmonaean fortification).

c. There seems to be a connection between the upper (Hellenistic) part of the SSS and the Hellenistic city wall. Theoretically, there could have been a similar connection between the original, Iron Age SSS and supposed Iron Age IIA structures that were erected on the crest of the ridge (the so-called LSS), though such a connection does not exist today.

FAUST\textsuperscript{11} argues that the second season of excavations at the site rendered much of the second interpretation\textsuperscript{12} obsolete. This is not so. In what follows I wish to examine the results of the second season in the City of David (2006–2007) and take issue with the E. MAZAR/A. MAZAR/FAUST analysis of the finds.

1. General Comments on the Area of Excavations and the Remains

As a starting point to this rejoinder I wish to emphasize the problematic nature of the excavation area under discussion – as a caution of what can and what cannot be deduced from the remains unearthed there.

1. The architectural remains are fragmentary; almost no wall has been fully preserved.
   a. An examination of what was actually found\textsuperscript{13} versus the reconstructions\textsuperscript{14} is revealing. In his plan, FAUST makes an attempt to distinguish between finds and reconstruction. Yet, his drawing of the actual remains goes far beyond what was found, including some crucial points: the full eastern line of Wall 20 in his plan does not exist in E. MAZAR’s plan (this includes the critical point of connection between the SSS and Wall 20); Wall 107, which has an angle in its northern face (an angle which makes it difficult to accept its full length as belonging to a single wall), appears in FAUST’s plan as a straight-line wall; FAUST’s drawing of the northwestern corner of the area also shows more than what was actually found.

b. The main contribution of the second season was the uncovering of “Rooms” D and E in the eastern sector of the area. E. MAZAR and FAUST reconstruct a line of four rooms here, while A. MAZAR draws two rooms. Yet, Room D is reconstructed according to two stones, each in a different wall\textsuperscript{15}! So in reality, only one half of a room (Room E) can be safely reconstructed here.

2. Secure dating of a building in archaeology can be done mainly according to assemblages of finds retrieved from its floors. No such assemblage has been found in this excavation. With the possible exception of Room E (but see below), not a single floor with finds exists in the entire area.

\textsuperscript{11} FAUST 2010, 121.
\textsuperscript{12} FINKELSTEIN/HERZOG/SINGER-AVITZ/USSISHKIN 2007.
\textsuperscript{13} Stone by stone drawing in E. MAZAR 2009, 64; Fig. 1 in this article.
\textsuperscript{14} E. MAZAR 2009, 65; A. MAZAR 2010, 36; FAUST 2010, 117.
\textsuperscript{15} E. MAZAR 2009, 59, plan.
3. Structures from the Hellenistic, Roman and later periods penetrated deep, sometimes down to bedrock, and destroyed earlier remains\(^\text{16}\). Some of these walls were oriented with earlier walls and used them as their foundations; in fact “in many cases it was difficult to distinguish by sight the Herodian walls from the Iron Age ones”\(^\text{17}\).

4. In many places Late Hellenistic and early Roman pottery was found as deep as the massive walls interpreted as belonging to the LSS\(^\text{18}\). In one spot a complete Herodian cooking pot was found among the large boulders\(^\text{19}\); in another place a late Iron II bulla was found between the stones\(^\text{20}\).

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16 E. MAZAR 2009, 86.
17 E. MAZAR 2009, 84.
18 Details in FINKELSTEIN/HERZOG/SINGER-AVITZ/USSISHKIN 2007, 150. Here and below I use this term (LSS) even though I do not think that evidence for such a structure exists.
19 E. MAZAR 2009, 86.
5. The entire area under discussion had been excavated in the early 20th century and then backfilled\textsuperscript{21}. In several places this excavation reached bedrock\textsuperscript{22}. As a result of this operation, many of the finds collected by E. Mazar cannot be considered as retrieved \textit{in situ}. Another result of this old excavation, as well as disturbances in antiquity, is that centuries in the history of the City of David may be missing from the accumulation.

6. Modern restoration work was carried out in the upper part of the SSS and the Hasmonaean city-wall. A. Mazar diminishes the importance of this point, saying that these works were done to the south of the current dig area, but adds an illuminating sentence: “except for some reinforcement with cement of several existing stone courses”\textsuperscript{23}. The latter includes the crucial sector of connection between the SSS and Wall 20 of the LSS; as I will show below, significant restoration work was carried out here.

Under these circumstances, stratigraphic and chronological observations are based on very little solid evidence and every reconstruction is highly hypothetical. Declaring that we are now “in possession of significant finds from what appears to be good archaeological contexts”\textsuperscript{24} demonstrates over-confidence, to say the least.

Having pointed out the severe problems facing those who wish to deal with the architecture, stratigraphy and dating of the remains in the area excavated by E. Mazar, I can now turn to the three foundations of the E. Mazar/A. Mazar/Faust interpretation: one LSS, connected to the SSS, and dating to the Iron Age I or the Iron Age IIA.

2. Do the Remains Belong to a Single “Large Stone Structure”?

Faust says that the “highlight of the excavations is a large and massive stone structure, which covered the entire excavation area and seems to have extended even far beyond its limits”\textsuperscript{25}. As I have already mentioned above, the remains of the LSS are fragmentary, with the reconstructions of both E. Mazar and Faust going far beyond the evidence on the ground\textsuperscript{26}. Moreover, much of Wall 20 – the eastern and best preserved wall of the reconstructed building – is the late Hellenistic (Hasmonaean) city wall\textsuperscript{27}.

No less important, nowhere does a floor connect to half Room E on one side and to massive walls that can theoretically be associated with the LSS on the other side\textsuperscript{28}. E. Mazar describes a chalk floor which ostensibly makes this connection\textsuperscript{29}. Yet, in the west the picture (\textit{ibidem}) seems to show that the floor goes under Wall 214\textsuperscript{30}, while in the east the floor ends

\textsuperscript{21} Field 5 in Macalister/Duncan 1926, 2, Fig. 1; see picture in 1926, 8, Fig. 2. See also detailed map in the pocket at the end of the volume.

\textsuperscript{22} Macalister/Duncan 1926, PI. I.

\textsuperscript{23} A. Mazar 2010, 38.

\textsuperscript{24} Faust 2010, 121.

\textsuperscript{25} Faust 2010, 117.

\textsuperscript{26} Compare E. Mazar 2009, 65; Faust 2010, 117, Fig. 1 to Fig. 1 in this article.

\textsuperscript{27} Even according to E. Mazar 2009, 77, upper drawing; see also Shiloh 1984, Pl. 27.1, Fig. 27.

\textsuperscript{28} See plan in E. Mazar 2009, 64.

\textsuperscript{29} E. Mazar 2009, 62.

\textsuperscript{30} Incidentally, note that the questionable “connection” is in an area of two stones!
before half Room E. In other words, there is no way to safely associate "Rooms" D and E and their finds with the massive walls that ostensibly belong to the LSS.

To this one should add two more observations: 1. The main "wall" of the reconstructed LSS – Wall 107 – does not form a straight line and most of it lacks the southern face. The "wall" is made of two sections, with different orientation and quality of construction. 2. According to the plan the foundations of the walls that ostensibly belong to the LSS drop dramatically from west to east – from 698.78 at the western end of Wall 107 to 696.25 in Wall 20. In fact, the foundation level of the western end of Wall 107 is ca. 1.3 m higher than the chalk floor (which supposedly belongs to the building) ca. 9 m to the east (level 697.45); moreover, it is half a meter higher than the patch of floor located only ca. 1.5 m from this point (level 698.24); these patchy floors, which appear in the first published plan as "pre-Iron Age", are taken as belonging to the LSS in the second publication. Monumental edifices were not built like this. Had the builders wanted to construct a "Large Stone Structure" on the edge of the slope, they would have had to either level the bedrock or lay a proper fill.

To sum-up this point, the possibility that the remains form parts of one large structure is slim. The remains (Fig. 1) probably belong to different structures, built in at least two periods of activity (below).

3. The Connection between the "Large Stone Structure" and the Stepped Stone Structure

Following E. MAZAR, A. MAZAR says that the "'Stepped Structure' in Shiloh's Area G and the 'Large Stone Structure' [...] to its west, should be defined as part of one and the same architectural complex". FAUST adds that "in the recent season the connection between the LSS and the Stepped Stone Structure in area G seems to have been substantiated beyond reasonable doubt". Whether these statements are to be trusted depends on the connection between the uppermost part of the SSS and the north-south wall that runs along the crest of the ridge (E. MAZAR's Wall 20). Following are five comments that shed light on this issue:

1. It is agreed by all authorities that the south and north towers exposed by MACALISTER date to the late Hellenistic period and are part of the First Wall of Hasmonaean Jerusalem. Regarding the wall that runs between the two towers, it is quite clear that its side sections, that is, the parts that connect to the towers, belong to the same fortification system as the towers. We are left, then, with the few meters of the wall in the center of the section between the towers – the spot which is related to the uppermost part of the SSS.

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31 E. MAZAR 2009, 64, plan. E. MAZAR’s suggestion that the floor was cut by a robbers trench there cannot be proven as the edge of the floor is patchy, see E. MAZAR 2009, 59, plan.
33 E. MAZAR 2007, 59.
34 E. MAZAR 2007, 59.
35 E. MAZAR 2007, 62, 64.
36 A. MAZAR 2010, 34.
37 FAUST 2010, 121.
38 MACALISTER/DUNCAN 1926.
40 E. SHILOH 1984, Pl. 77:1.
41 The area of the five large stones seen in the plan, in E. MAZAR 2009, 64.
2. While the lower part of the SSS must predate the late Iron Age II 42, the upper sector is built with different stones and at least part of it was set in a different orientation. The sections of the SSS under the Hellenistic part of the wall between the two towers 43 seem to fit in with the same construction effort and hence probably belong to a renovation of the SSS in the Hellenistic period 44. In this regard one should note the similarity in the style of the stones between the upper, northern part of the SSS and the eastern face of Wall 20, as well as the difference between these two sections and the lower part of the SSS 45.

3. The uppermost part of the SSS is a result of modern restoration work. This becomes clear when one compares the pictures published by MACALISTER/DUNCAN 46 to the pictures taken during SHILOH’s excavations or a short while thereafter 47. The latter has two or three more courses than the former (counting from a sort of a hole seen in both pictures in the upper, right-hand-side of the SSS, marked by a black line in both pictures published here). This is why today the uppermost part of the SSS seems to be “wrapped” around the city wall 48. A. MAZAR’s statement that the restoration involves no more than “reinforcement with cement of several existing stone courses” 49 is therefore inaccurate. This restoration is located in the only place where a connection between the SSS and a hypothetical Iron Age section of Wall 20 could have been theorized.

4. The excavator presents evidence showing that the layer of debris of Iron Age I metal industry in E. MAZAR’s excavation area (east of Room E) abuts the inner face of Wall 20 50. Yet, the foundation of the Hellenistic fortification could have been constructed over earlier walls. Indeed, according to E. MAZAR’s own testimony, boulders of the LSS were used as massive foundations for later walls, and “in many cases it was difficult to distinguish by sight the Herodian walls from the Iron Age ones” 51. The layer with remains of Iron Age I metal industry may abut such an early, pre-Hellenistic, pre-fortification wall.

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42 FINKELSTEIN/HERZOZ/SINGER-AVITZ/USSISHKIN 2007, 151–154. A. MAZAR states that the material with Iron Age IIA pottery below the late Iron Age II floor in the building over the SSS must be regarded as an early floor and not as a constructional fill because it does not show a mixture of pottery (A. MAZAR 2010, 38). No such floor exists and the content of a fill reflects the place (usually a dump) where it was taken from – no more and no less. Thus the Iron Age IIA pottery there only tells us that the floor of the building could not have been laid earlier than this period.

43 See picture in SHILOH 1984, Pl. 27.1, Fig. 27.

44 FINKELSTEIN/HERZOZ/SINGER-AVITZ/USSISHKIN 2007, 154. A. MAZAR 2010, 39 argues that the earth glacis with Hellenistic pottery found by both KENYON (e.g. STEINER 2001, 26 in the background of the picture, 84) and SHILOH (e.g. SHILOH 1984, Pl. 36) on top of the SSS negates the possibility that the latter was renovated in the Hellenistic period. The opposite is true: the Hellenistic builders had two goals: to prevent erosion on the slope and to prevent an easy approach to the fortification. Accordingly, the old, Iron Age SSS was renovated in order to serve, yet again, as a support on the deteriorating slope; the glacis was then thrown on top of it (and on top of the late Iron Age II structures constructed on its lower part), in order to create a steep slope and prevent an attacker from reaching the fortification by climbing the SSS.

45 E. MAZAR 2009, 58, picture.

46 MACALISTER/DUNCAN 1926, Fig. 47; also Taf. 1A in this article, taken from the Matson collection.

47 E. e. E. MAZAR 2009, 37; Taf. 1B in this article.

48 See e. e. picture in E. MAZAR 2007, 45.

49 A. MAZAR 2010, 38.

50 E. MAZAR 2009, 59, picture and plan.

51 E. MAZAR 2009, 84.
5. If the eastern face of the central part of Wall 20 dates to the Iron Age, where is the Hellenistic fortification?

To sum-up this point, the statement that “Wall 20, the eastern wall of the ‘Large Stone Structure’, is also the upper part of the ‘Stepped Stone Structure’” is erroneous. The only architectural connection that exists on the ground is between the upper part of the SSS – probably Hellenistic in date – and the Hellenistic city-wall. A connection between the original, Iron Age SSS and possible Iron Age IIA walls unearthed by E. MAZAR (some of the walls of her LSS) could have existed in antiquity, but cannot be proven today. Whoever claims that the “magnitude and uniqueness of the combined ‘Stepped Structure’ and the ‘Large Stone Structure’ are unparalleled anywhere in the Levant between the 12th and early 9th centuries BCE” or that “[t]he combined building was the main structure in Iron Age I Jerusalem [. . .] and is indeed the most impressive building from this period throughout the region” speaks about a structure that cannot be seen today and that may have never existed.

4. The Date of the Remains

The accumulation between bedrock and the stone pavement or installation in the southeast corner of “Room” D (in fact, between bedrock and “Rooms” D and E in general) is minimal – 10–20cm. This compact debris includes, from bottom up, the earth accumulation with Late Bronze and Iron Age I pottery, the metal industry of the Iron Age I; a layer with Iron Age I collared rim jars and several Iron Age IIA sherds under the pavement. A hand burnished bowl found with the latter is compared by E. MAZAR to the material in Locus 47; the latter dates to the late Iron Age IIA, as it includes a black-on-red vessel. The late Iron Age IIA should be placed in the mid- to second-half of the 9th century. All this shows that at least the pavement/installation in the southeast corner of “Room D” cannot predate the 9th century B.C.E. The fact that remains of metal industry were found under the pavement/installation as well as over it demonstrates the stratigraphic problems in this area.

In a previous work we raised the possibility that the latest pottery in the earth accumulation under the massive walls associated with the LSS dates to the beginning of the Iron Age IIA. E. MAZAR now accepts that this earth accumulation may include material from the early Iron Age IIA. It seems that A. MAZAR’s demand, that in order to date the LSS to a post-Iron Age I

52 A. MAZAR 2010, 40.
53 A. MAZAR 2010, 45.
54 Faust 2010, 128.
55 E. MAZAR 2009, 34, picture.
57 E. MAZAR 2009, 35.
58 E. MAZAR 2009, 61.
59 For its appearance in the Levant see Herzog/Singer-Avitz 2004, 215.
60 For the dates of the two phases of the Iron Age IIA see Finkelstein/Piasetzky 2010; Boaretto/Finkelstein/Shahack-Gross 2010.
61 E. MAZAR 2009, 61.
63 E. MAZAR 2009, 38 contra her own words later, that the latest sherds in this accumulation date to the Iron Age I see E. MAZAR 2009, 51.
date we should expect to find “at least a few post-Iron I sherds in these layers” has now been fulfilled. This means, again, that the massive walls can hardly antedate ca. 900 B.C.E.64.

E. MAZAR 65, A. MAZAR 66 and FAUST 67 all emphasize the importance of the Iron Age IIA material found in Locus 47 as indicating a second phase in the history of the LSS, insinuating that it was originally built earlier. Yet, in this locus Iron Age IIB pottery was found below the Iron Age IIA items 68. A. MAZAR tried to resolve this problem by saying that “the sherd might have come from an upper level of this locus.” 69 Yet, E. MAZAR now raises the possibility that these sherds “were introduced into the material of the lower part of the locus during the excavation” 70. There are two possibilities here: If there were, indeed, in situ Iron Age IIB sherds under the Iron Age IIA pottery, the entire deposit cannot be regarded as in situ material; and if the Iron Age IIB sherds were “introduced” into this spot during the excavation, the reliability of the entire dig is shattered. In any event — and at the very least — the Iron Age IIA pottery in this locus cannot be used to date the construction of E. MAZAR’s LSS.

This is as far as the evidence for dating goes. The only thing that can be said regarding the date of the supposed early walls in this area is that they were laid during or after the Iron Age IIA. Both E. MAZAR and FAUST 71 adhere to the old notion that the Iron Age IIA dates to 10th century B.C.E. Yet, as I have shown time and again 72, this dating is based on circular arguments which come from a literal reading of the biblical text. Radiocarbon investigations put the Iron Age IIA between the second half of the 10th century and ca. 800 B.C.E.73. FAUST’s statement that the results of the 2006–2007 excavation seasons “solve the issue of the date of the structure in an almost final manner” and that “[w]e are now in possession of significant finds from what appears to be good archaeological contexts” 74, which clearly indicate that the LSS should be dated to the Iron Age I” 75 may only be true for half Room E, which covers an area of ca. 4 x 3 meters. In fact, even this is far from being certain.

64 The latest radiocarbon date from the earth accumulation under the massive walls is 2780 ± 50 (E. MAZAR 2009, 39, n. 88), which translates to a calibrated date of 997–850 B.C.E. (68%). Contra to FAUST 2010, 122 this determination cannot help dating the construction of the walls; it only means that the walls were not built before ca. 1000 B.C.E.

66 A. MAZAR 2010, 43.
67 FAUST 2010, 122.
68 FINKELSTEIN/HERZOG/SINGER-AVITZ/ USSISHKIN 2007, 149.
69 A. MAZAR 2010, 43, n. 46.
70 E. MAZAR 2009, 53, n. 127.
71 FAUST 2010, 127.
72 For the latest see FINKELSTEIN 2010.
74 My understanding of “good archaeological context” is, e.g., a destruction layer with an assemblage of pottery such as Hirbet Selîn/Shiloh V, Megiddo VIA, Tell es-Sârem/Tel Rahôv IV, Tell es-Sâfi IV, Lachish III or the destruction layer recently investigated by FAUST at Tell ‘Étûn. The entire area of MAZAR’s excavation does not have a single “good archaeological context” — this, as indicated above, is not the fault of the excavator.
75 FAUST 2010, 121, 124 – “securely dated to the Iron Age I”.

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5. Summary

As things stand today:

1. There is no single LSS. There is no physical connection between half Room E, which may date to the Iron Age I or to the Iron Age IIA, and the massive walls associated by E. MAZAR, A. MAZAR and FAUST with the LSS.

2. There is no connection today between massive walls possibly dating to the Iron Age on the ridge (E. MAZAR’s LSS) and the Iron Age part of the SSS. The only physical connection is between the Hellenistic part of the SSS and the Late Hellenistic fortification.

3. Some of the massive wall stabs unearthed by E. MAZAR may date to the Iron Age IIA in the 9th century B.C.E.; others may date to the Hellenistic period.

4. Based on solid archaeological arguments alone, that is, without relying on the biblical text, no seasoned archaeologist would have associated the remains in question with monumental architecture of the 10th century B.C.E.

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B. The Stepped Stone Structure after restoration (E. MAZAR 2009, 37). Reader should count from black line up: two or three courses were added at the top.

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