It has been argued by several scholars that the defeat of Sisera by the Israelite tribes took place in the second half of the 12th century B.C., at about 1125 B.C. 1) This date was arrived at through an attempted correlation of archaeological and literary evidence. Thus, it was held that the words in Judg. v 19 “at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo”, imply that Megiddo itself was unoccupied at that time. Otherwise, one would have expected the battle to be located by reference to Megiddo rather than to the much less significant place Taanach. On the other hand, archaeological investigation was held to show that a decisive break in the occupation of Megiddo lay between strata VII and VI, i.e. between 1150 B.C. and 1075 B.C.; so the battle must have taken place sometime within these dates. Furthermore, it has also been argued that the subsequent settlement of the city was an Israelite one. 2)

However, quite apart from the fact that it is clearly a matter of dispute whether the break in occupation of Megiddo lies between strata VII and VI, or between strata VI and V 3), the general validity

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2) Albright, ibid.

3) It has been argued by J. J. Simons, “Caesurae in the History of Megiddo”, Oudtestamentische Studiën 1942, pp. 17-54, that “from the ceramic point of view stratum VI is a direct and immediate continuation of stratum VII”, and that it was after the city of stratum VI was destroyed in a great fire, perhaps accompanied by an earthquake, that the site was deserted and remained derelict for about fifty years (ibid., pp. 46 f.). Thus, it was with stratum V, belonging in the middle of the 11th century B.C., that there was a completely new settlement of Megiddo, “by a people with entirely new ideas” (ibid., p. 52), whom Simons conjectures to have been Philistine. The new settlement in stratum IV is taken by Simons to have been the first Israelite settlement there. With regard to the time of the gap
of the argument outlined above is highly suspect. It implies that Megiddo, through being unoccupied, had become so insignificant that an event taking place in its vicinity had to be located by reference to another place, Taanach, some five miles away to the south-east. But even if Megiddo lay derelict for over fifty years it is highly unlikely, in view especially of its important commanding position overlooking the plain of Esdraelon, that its fame would have so completely died out. And, anyway, it is to be noted that Taanach itself is located by reference to “the waters of Megiddo”. It appears far more likely that the words of the Song should be taken simply for what they say. The battle took place at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo, not at Megiddo itself, and the words neither imply nor preclude Megiddo being unoccupied at that time. It is impossible to conclude from the Song of Deborah that Megiddo was unoccupied at the time of the battle against Sisera, and therefore archaeology has no such direct bearing whatever on the date of this battle 1).

Apart perhaps from the observation that the Song probably presupposes a time when the tribe of Dan had migrated to its final in occupation of the city, Simons is followed by A. Alt, “Megiddo im Übergang vom kanaanäischen zum israelitischen Zeitalter”, Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel, vol. 1, München 1953, pp. 256 f. Megiddo V, however, is taken by Alt (ibid., pp. 269 ff.) as a Canaanite settlement. Albright retracted his original view for a time, but then later, in “The Biblical Period”, The Jews. Their History. Culture and Religion (edit. L. Finkelstein), New York 1949, pp. 20, 58 n. 2, dismissed the argument of Simons and returned to his original view that there was a “much more complete and more protracted” break between strata VII and VI than between strata VI and V. Here also Albright reaffirmed the dating of the Song of Deborah to c. 1125 B.C. on the basis of this archaeological study, cf. also, idem, “The Old Testament and the Archaeology of Palestine”, The Old Testament and Modern Study, p. 13. However, most recently, we find K. D. Schunck, Benjamin. Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Geschichte eines israelitischen Stammes, BZAW 86, 1963, p. 51, taking the gap in occupation as lying between strata VI and V; cf. also H. J. Franken and C. A. Franken-Battershill, A Primer of Old Testament Archaeology, Leiden 1963, p. 154. As for Albright’s view that Megiddo VI was an Israelite settlement, this is founded on the presence of Israelite pottery in Megiddo VI. However, similar pieces have also been found in Megiddo VII, and, anyway, their presence does not necessarily attest a change in government of the city, but rather simply outside influence, cf. Alt, “Megiddo im Übergang . . .”, pp. 264 f., who thinks of the tribe of Issachar in this connection. Furthermore, an Israelite settlement of Megiddo at this period contradicts the biblical tradition, cf. Judg. i 27 f., according to which the Canaanites continued to inhabit the city, although eventually they were subjected to forced labour.

1) This would also be the case even if Megiddo VI were an Israelite settlement; cf. also Alt, “Erwägungen über die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina”, Kleine Schriften, vol. 1, p. 161 n. 2; idem, “Megiddo im Übergang . . .”, p. 266 n. 2.