

New Evidence for the 10th Century BCE at Tel Gezer

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Abstract

Recent excavations at Tel Gezer under the auspices of the Tandy Institute for Archaeology have systematically revealed a broad exposure west of the Iron Age gate complex (popularly referred to as the “Solomonic Gate”). This report focuses on the occupation layers of the 10th century BCE (our Strata 8 and 7, dated by ¹⁴C and ceramic analyses). Stratum 8 represents a unique period of Gezer’s history when the city experienced a major shift in urban planning, as evidenced by a monumental administrative building and casemate fortifications that are associated with the Iron Age gate. This city was intensely destroyed, probably as a result of Sheshonq’s campaign. Stratum 7, which was also destroyed, exhibits a major shift to domestic quarters.

KEYWORDS: Gezer, Iron Age IIA, monumental building, casemate fortifications, Solomon

1. Introduction

The Tel Gezer Excavation Project is a long-term joint project addressing chronological reevaluations, ethnic and social boundaries, and state formation in the southern Levant. The excavations were directed by Steven M. Ortiz and Samuel R. Wolff.¹ The purpose of the project is to investigate state formation and regional

1. The excavations were previously sponsored by New Orleans Baptist Seminary and the Tandy



boundaries in the northern Shephelah by investigating the Iron Age cultural horizon at Tel Gezer. These broad research trends in Iron Age archaeology are being addressed by current research projects in the Shephelah and the southern coastal plain.

A very tight stratigraphic sequence of occupation stretching from the end of the Late Bronze Age through the 10th century BCE was excavated (for an overall view of the excavations see Fig. 1). The strata were dated by preliminary ceramic analysis, Egyptian glyptics, and radiocarbon analysis. The radiocarbon analysis has been presented in a recent dissertation (Webster 2021). A summary of the results for the Iron Age strata is provided in Fig. 2 (for a complete analysis of the radiocarbon evidence see Webster et al forthcoming). This article focuses on the 10th-century occupation,² which is shown by the archaeological record to represent a dramatic change in the history of the site. First, however, we will briefly discuss the earlier Iron Age I and the later Iron Age II strata to demonstrate this change.

2. The Iron Age I (Strata 11 and 10)

The 10th-century strata (Strata 9–7) are built directly on top of the Iron Age I strata (Strata 11 and 10A/B). The Iron Age I strata consist of a possible perimeter wall, perhaps an earlier rendition of the later Iron Age casemate wall system, and a series of single-room storage buildings built up against the north face of the wall. These rooms do not have entrances to other units to their north. The storage units built up against the wall remained unchanged through both Iron Age I strata.

2.1. Stratum 11

Stratum 11 was built directly on the remnants of a Late Bronze Age building, as some of the founding levels of Iron Age I walls sat on Late Bronze Age floors and destruction levels (Fig. 3a). The builders were evidently aware of the earlier building, but nevertheless the settlement was built on a completely new plan.

The Stratum 11 settlement consists of a central building with several units

Institute for Archaeology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; the publication project is sponsored by Lipscomb University. The excavations were carried out within the Tel Gezer National Park and benefited from the cooperation of the National Parks Authority. The project is affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research. We thank the organizers of the conference for inviting us to participate and the editor of the article for her excellent work.

2. While some of the results for our 10th-century stratum (Stratum 8) have been previously published (Ortiz and Wolff 2017), we are now able to provide updated chronological data and discuss our results in a regional context.



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the Tandy excavations at Tel Gezer, with the six-chambered gate (HUC Field III) on the right.

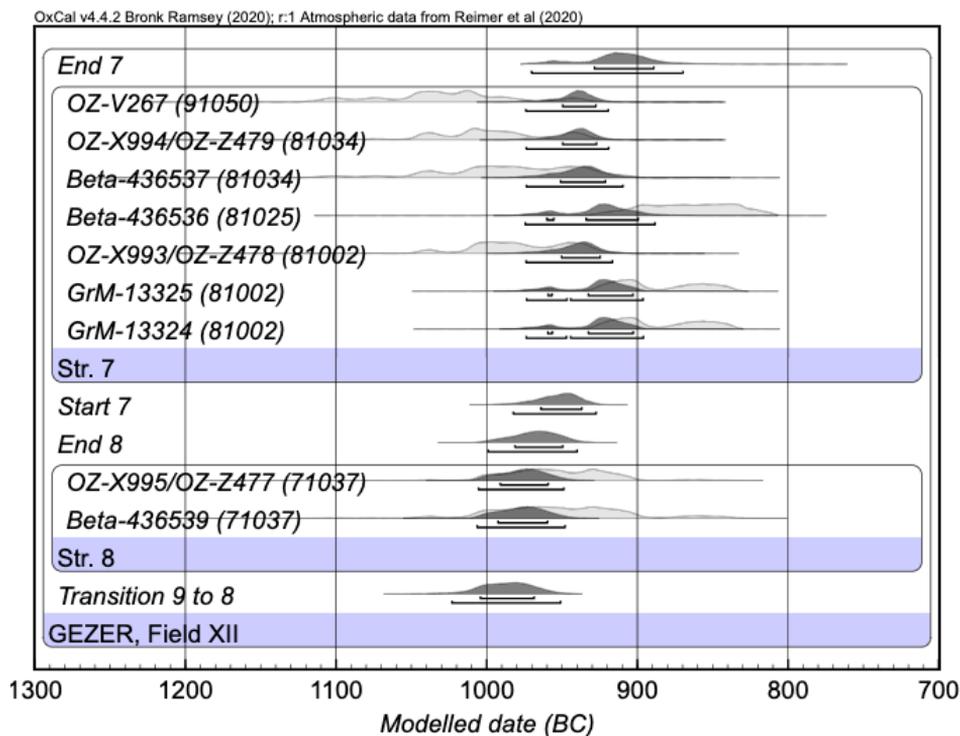


Fig. 2. Plot summarizing the ^{14}C determinations from Tel Gezer (courtesy L. Webster).

between it and the series of storage units forming the perimeter wall. The building itself is partially excavated, as the excavations uncovered only its southeast corner. It is constructed from large boulders. South and west of this building were several units that contained installations, sunken storage jars, and a tabun, and featured various surfaces such as cobbles, plaster, and beaten earth. Three foundation deposits consisted of variations of the typical land-and-bowl deposit of this period. Of the three, one featured three bowls and a lamp between the bowls; another had two “Gezer bowls” with a lamp between them; and the third comprised a chalice, a bowl, and two unfired bowls³ with a lamp between them. Another interesting element of this phase was the seemingly intentional burial of juglets by walls, of which we found a total of three.

2.2. Stratum 10

The Stratum 11 plan went out of use without leaving any evidence of destruction, except for the stone debris uncovered in the main building (Unit A). The Stratum 10 city continued to use the series of rooms along the perimeter wall, but the rest of its plan was very different, although a few of the same wall lines were used in the construction of the new walls. This plan was modified in the stratum’s last phase (Stratum 10A; Fig. 3b), to a pillared building with three pillars. The finds included a spearhead, a miniature rattle, the six-toed foot of a ceramic figurine, and three storage jars that were found partially sunken beneath the floor level in the west of the building. Almost every room yielded at least one restorable storage jar. Unit 3, the largest of the storerooms built against the wall, had nearly half a meter of ash and destruction. This room contained two storage jars and a multi-handled krater, along with seven mushroom-shaped clay sealing plugs. One of these sealing plugs was stamped with a pre-Early Iron Age mass-produced seal (Münger, Ortiz, and Wolff forthcoming).

The series of buildings in this area are public, unlike the typical Iron Age I courtyard houses that were excavated on the acropolis (Field VI of HUC). All the surfaces were either made of beaten earth or plastered. The pottery is typical Iron Age I with minimal Philistine Bichrome pottery (more common in Stratum 11). Most of the complete vessels were storage jars, lamps, bowls, and juglets (mostly foundation deposits), with the occasional chalice and multi-handled krater (Fig. 4). While the analysis is in a preliminary stage, currently the closest parallels to this assemblage seem to be from Timnah (Panitz-Cohen 2006), Beth-Shemesh

3. Unfired bowls were described by Macalister (1912: 436) and seem to be unique to Gezer.

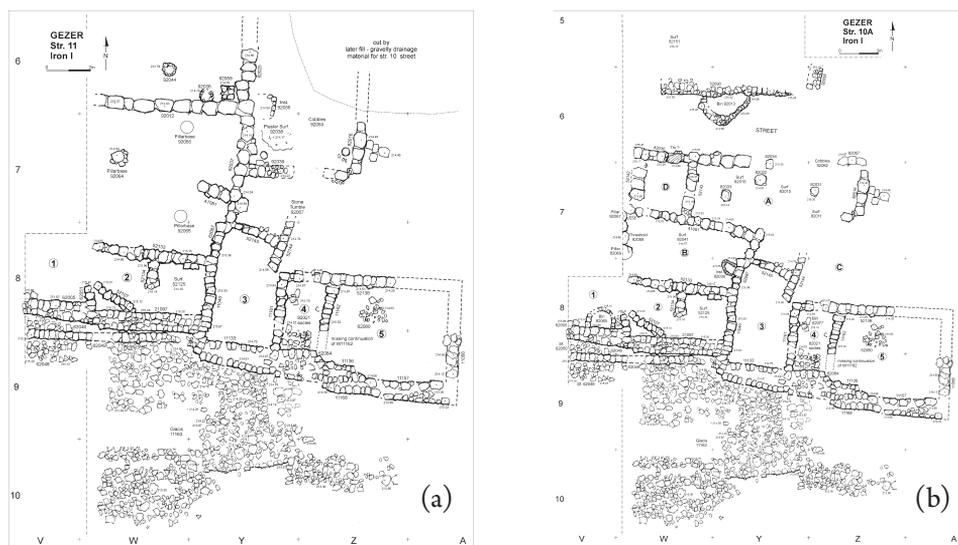


Fig. 3. Plan of Stratum 11 (a) and Stratum 10A (b) (prepared by J. Rosenberg).

(Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016), and Khirbet Qeiyafa (Kang and Garfinkel 2018). The last phase of Stratum 10 was violently destroyed; almost every unit and room contained evidence of this destruction. The HUC excavations attributed this to

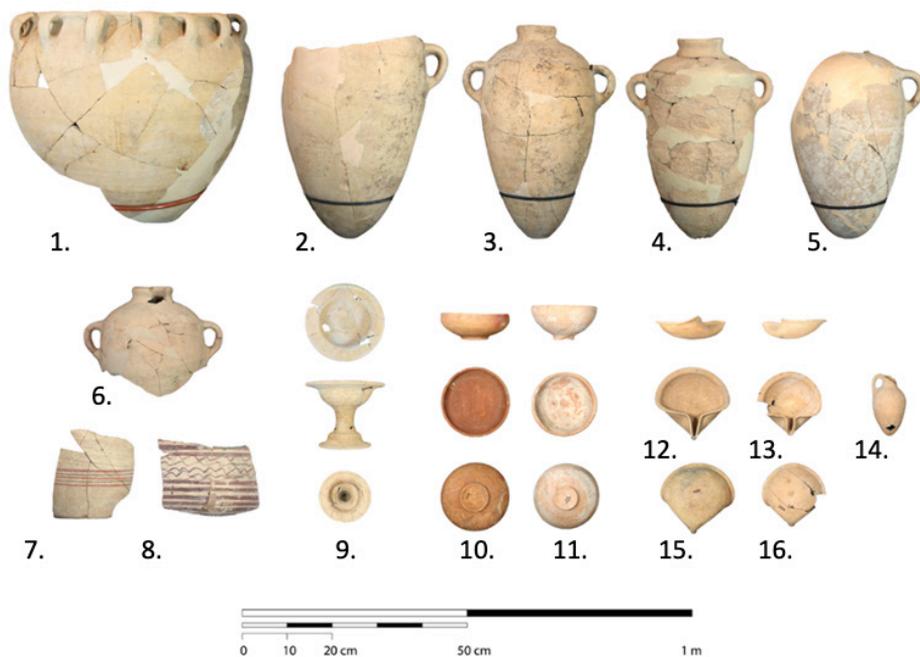


Fig. 4. Representative assemblage of pottery from Stratum 10A.

the Egyptian Pharaoh who gave the city to Solomon as a dowry (Dever, Lance, and Wright 1970: 61; Dever et al. 1974: 59).⁴ Since the HUC excavations, however, evidence for Egyptian 21st Dynasty activity has accumulated (Münger 2003). This includes our excavation's ceramic, glyptic and radiocarbon evidence on which a tentative date is based for the foundation of the last phase of the mid-11th century, with its destruction possibly falling within the 11th/early 10th century horizon.

3. The Iron Age IIA (Strata 9, 8, and 7)

3.1. Stratum 9

Stratum 9 is an ephemeral phase built directly on Stratum 10 (Fig. 5). It comprises a single rectangular building (8 × 5 m), oriented north-south and divided into two rooms by a wall line containing an entrance between the two rooms. The eastern room contained a tabun with a plaster surface in the north and a cobble surface in the south. The western room has a remnant of a cobble surface with a circular stone installation. To the west of this structure were remnants of a possible courtyard. Abutting the outside of the building was another tabun with a sunken storage jar. About 25% of the building is missing due to later occupation. This phase was not found anywhere else in the Tandy excavations, and therefore it may have been a short-lived squatter phase between Strata 10 and 8.

3.2. Stratum 8

The Stratum 8 city experienced a radical change, with a new city plan that included a casemate wall system and a large administrative building (Fig. 6). These features were previously revealed by the HUC excavations, but the Tandy project has expanded our knowledge by defining the nature of the public building as well as providing a robust stratigraphic analysis of a series of overlying settlement plans and destructions, as well as radiocarbon dates.⁵

Remains of the Tandy Institute's Stratum 8 (10th century) are primarily concentrated in the eastern portion of our excavation, adjacent to the city's Iron Age gate. The features that characterize Stratum 8 are, for the most part, large

4. Scholars have subsequently identified this pharaoh as Siamun (Malamat 2001).

5. Gezer's well-known six-chambered gate and adjoining casemate wall were revealed by previous excavations in the area, and our goal was therefore to enhance our understanding of the Solomonic city by expanding the area west of the gate. Some smaller explorations were conducted by Dever in 1984; he noted that there was a large building here, which he labeled "Palace 10,000" (Dever 1985: 219).

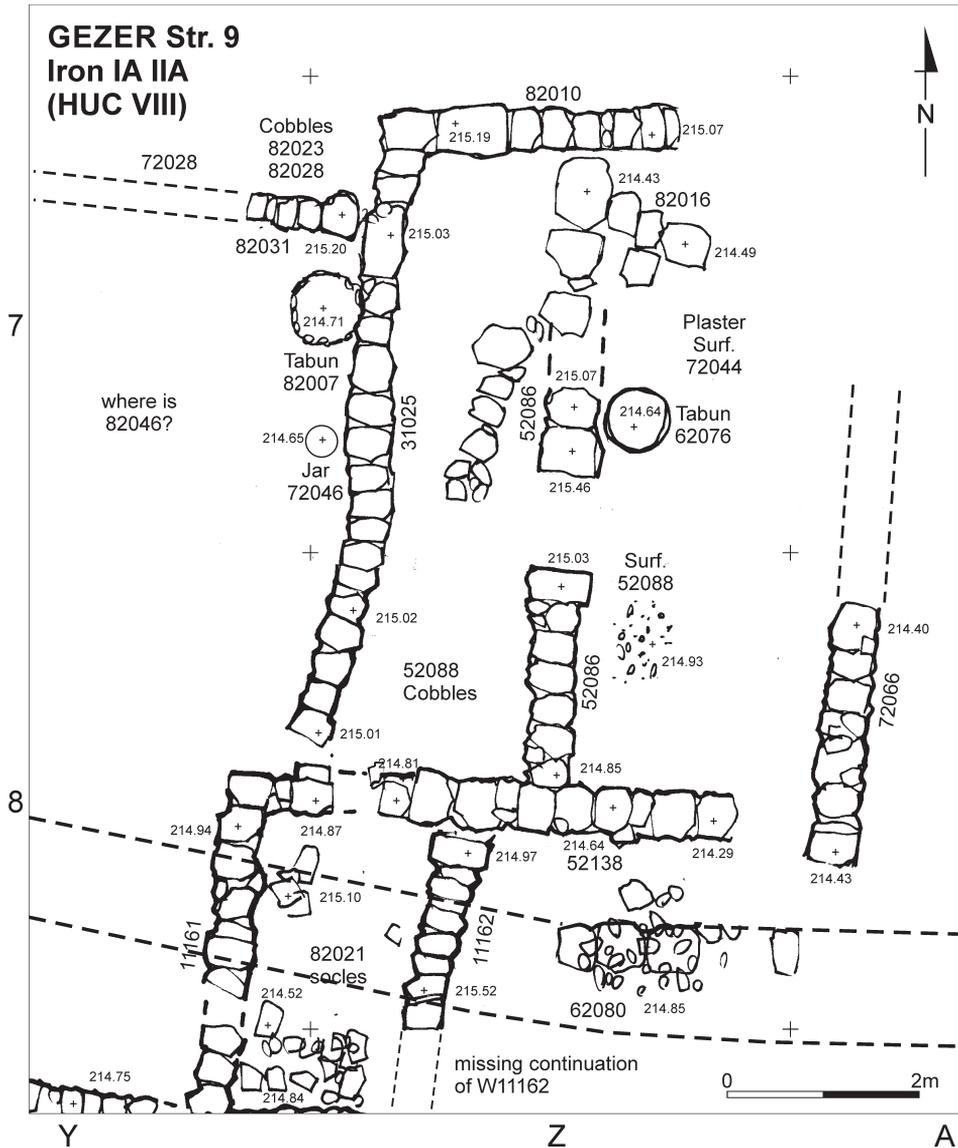


Fig. 5. Stratum 9: Plan of single domestic structure (prepared by J. Rosenberg).

constructions, indicating that this area constituted public space during this phase. The Tandy project's work in this field uncovered the previously revealed (by Macalister) and then reburied length of the casemate wall towards the west, a stone-paved stairway adjoining the gate, and a large administrative structure previously exposed in part by the HUC team.

The Tandy excavations retraced the wall running west from the gate for a length of ca. 27 m; the wall does not appear to have originally extended much further than

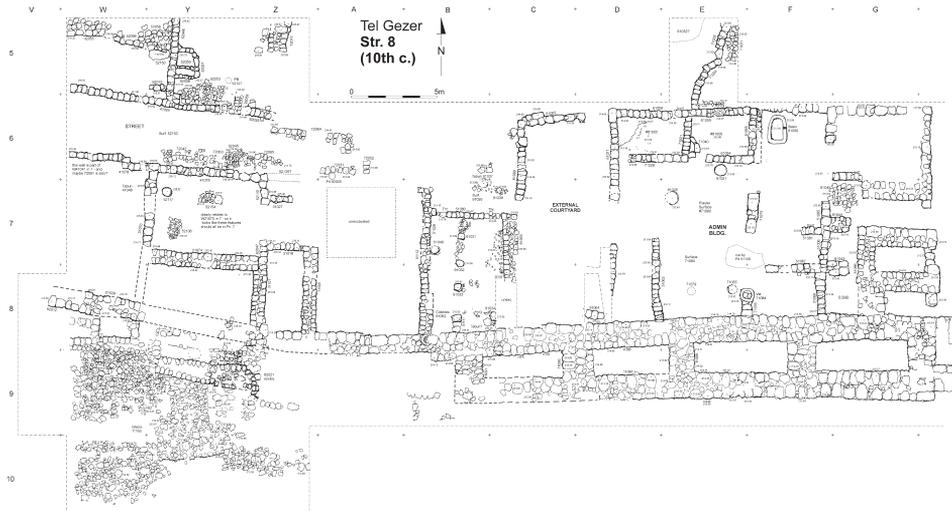


Fig. 6. Plan of Stratum 8 (prepared by J. Rosenberg).

this, although no corner or end of any kind was revealed. The individual casemates of this wall are enclosed on all sides, with only the initial casemate adjoining the gate featuring an opening. An additional doorway was reconstructed in Casemate 13 by the HUC team, but our own work in this area did not reveal any conclusive evidence for an opening at this point in the wall. Unlike Casemate 12, which when excavated by the HUC team in 1990 yielded “small quantities of tenth century BCE pottery, including one intact lamp” above the casemate’s “original earth and cobble surface” (Dever 1993: 37), the casemates excavated by the Tandy project did not produce any surfaces or other finds contemporary with their construction, leaving us to conclude that they were previously excavated by Macalister..

Abutting the interior of the casemate wall and separated from the gate structure only by a narrow alley is a large administrative building (Fig. 7) originating in the same phase as the gate and casemate system. Portions of the eastern extent of this building were previously excavated by the HUC project, which designated it Palace 10,000. Our full exposure of the administrative building has revealed a structure twice the size of HUC’s Palace 10,000, with an overall plan of ca. 19 × 12 m. At least 15 distinct rooms and areas (called units below) can be delineated within this building.

The administrative building appears to have featured three entrances. Unit 13 seems to have been an entry corridor providing access to the building from the alley separating the structure from the city gate. This same alley gave access to the initial casemate and to Units 14 and 15, none of which could be entered from



Fig. 7. Stratum 8: the administrative building.

within the administrative structure itself. The walls in this area of the building are notably different in construction from the rest of the structure: they were constructed two to three rows wide, with roughly dressed field stones that are somewhat smaller than those utilized in the rest of the building. As is the case elsewhere in the administrative building, these walls incorporate the occasional ashlar block. While the southeastern corner of the structure does appear to be part of the construction of a larger structure, the thickness of its walls and the seemingly exterior entry to its rooms suggest a different use for this portion of the building. This area was perhaps part of a defensive tower associated with the gate but incorporated into a larger support structure; that is, the administrative building may have been utilized as a living or working space used by soldiers or personnel associated with the defensive tower built against the gate.

Entrance to the administrative building via the corridor of Unit 13 was by means of a bent axis. The small area forming the corner of this bent axis (Unit 10) was paved with a cobbled surface. Several other areas in the public structure featured plastered surfaces, but only this surface and the entryway in Unit 4 were cobbled. This may be due to the increased amount of foot traffic in these areas, as cobbles would have been more resistant to erosion in the entryway. Alternatively, the placement of the cobbles in Unit 10 may have been due to factors related to the runoff of rainwater from the plastered courtyard in Unit 6. In the absence of any drainage system in the courtyard, it is possible that water may have drained

to the area of the entry, and that the cobbles were intended to ease movement through the entryway under wet conditions.

To the south of Unit 10 are two small rooms separated by a small partition wall that created two nearly identical rooms, each measuring ca. 1.5 × 1.5 m. The ceramic material recovered from these rooms is represented primarily by storage jars, strengthening the suggestion that these small rooms were utilized as storage spaces.

Entering through the bent axis of Unit 10 leads to a large central courtyard that was subdivided into various spaces (Units 6–9). Unit 6 provides the clearest evidence that this space was an open courtyard. A well-preserved plastered surface was revealed here, extending from the casemate wall in the south to the entrance of Room 2 in the north, a length of ca. 9 m. Associated with this surface were three tabuns, as well as a small concave stone feature set into the plaster and surrounded by a ring of small cobbles. This stone feature may have been a grinding installation, or perhaps a post-hole for some sort of temporary covering.

Separating Unit 6 from Unit 7 is an ashlar wall that runs for 2.5 m in a north-south orientation. This ashlar wall is in line with walls to its north and south but does not connect with either. Two courses of ashlar are preserved. A number of other ashlar and large rough stones were found tumbled to the west of the wall, having clearly been part of the wall prior to its destruction. It appears that this wall functioned as a partition between Units 6 and 7, although its size may suggest an additional structural purpose of some kind. Units 7 and 8 are separated from one another only by a short protrusion from the north/south wall along their eastern end; this may be the sole remaining evidence of an originally more substantial divider wall.

Just to the west of the plastered courtyard is a broad room in the far western end of the building (Unit 5). This room is partitioned off from Unit 6, although the two are open to one another via a wide passageway at their northern end. A second entrance to the administrative structure was in Unit 5, where a 3 m wide entranceway leads to an area that probably served as an exterior courtyard to the west. A series of similarly sized rooms were constructed along the northern wall of the administrative building. Units 1 and 2 are nearly identical in size, and both featured a plastered surface that was especially well-preserved in Unit 1. Unit 3, which lacks a southern enclosure wall, features a unique large basin originally excavated by the HUC team that is mostly likely part of an olive-oil installation. While Dever reconstructed two entrances to the building in our Unit 4, our own examination of the wall line here suggests only one, located in the far northeastern

corner of the structure and giving direct access to the stone-paved plaza to the north. The metalled subfloor of the latter extends beneath the cobbles that form the threshold of this northeastern entrance, connecting the two features.

This northeastern entry led from the administrative building to a large stone-paved monumental stairway that was revealed from the area of the gate westward for a distance of ca. 12 m (Fig. 8). The stairway was over 5 m in width. Farther to the west was a street, 3 m wide, paved with small pebbles and pottery. It is clear that these two pathways were connected. This stairway was heavily pitted out by later activity but was originally paved with stones ranging in size from large cobbles to small boulders. The stairway was bounded on the western side by a north-south wall that abutted the northern wall of the administrative building. On the western side of this wall was a small cobbled courtyard containing a tabun, which may have belonged to an unexcavated building to the north. Moving from the gate to this latter courtyard, the Stratum 8 surfaces north of the administrative building rise incrementally by about half a meter, while the contemporary surfaces within the building remain level as one moves westward, suggesting that the western end of the administrative building may have been cut into the slope of the tell when it was constructed.



Fig. 8. Aerial photograph of Stratum 8 (purple) and Stratum 7 (yellow). Note the six-chambered gate (blue), which was in use in both Stratum 8 and Stratum 7.

Dever, who exposed only portions of the eastern part of this building, interpreted it as an open “parade ground” (Dever 1985: 221). He had expected to find a *bīt hilāni*-style palace comparable to Palace 6000 at Megiddo but concluded, based

on his understanding of the plan of the structure, that his Palace 10,000 was in fact not a *bit hilāni* like Palace 6000 (Dever 1985: 221). While it is no longer agreed that Palace 6000 at Megiddo should be identified as a *bit hilāni* (and nor, for that matter, should *any* structure in the southern Levant), we would suggest that our administrative structure at Gezer does belong to the same category as Megiddo's Palace 6000. Sharon and Zarzecki-Peleg (2006) proposed defining buildings in this tradition as Lateral-Access Podium (LAP) structures. Common features of LAP structures include lateral access as opposed to direct access through the main broad side, a square or elongated footprint, symmetry along both long and broad axes, construction on a raised podium, and ashlar masonry. Alternatively, Lehmann and Killebrew (2010) have proposed the term Central Hall Tetra-Partite Residencies. They downplay the raised podium as a required feature of the structures and stress what they believe to be conceptual ties between these structures and the common four-room house plan. The Gezer administrative building adds an important new exemplar to this discussion.

Auxiliary architecture. Looking beyond the public architecture of the administrative building and its immediate surroundings, the excavations revealed a small pillared building located ca. 5 m west of the administrative building (Fig. 8). This building abutted the casemate wall in the south and featured two long rooms separated by a row of pillars. Along the eastern wall of the structure was a preserved patch of the building's cobbled surface, while a courtyard located immediately to the north of the building contained a poorly preserved tabun placed on a metalled surface. Further west, a length of a street from this phase was traced and remnants of 10th-century buildings, most destroyed by later construction as well as disturbed by Macalister's excavation, came to light; only foundation outlines with some cobble surfaces with limited pottery were revealed. These architectural features suggest that this portion of the city was not conceived of as public space, indicating that the administrative building, along with the gate, casemate, and plaza, may have been the full extent of the public architecture in this part of the city.

Fortifications: the casemate city wall. Following HUC's work at Gezer and prior to the Tandy's excavations, Herzog (1997: 216–217) suggested that Gezer's casemate wall surrounded a compact fortress and was not part of a site-wide fortification. While our excavation did not find evidence for such a casemate fortress, we accept his basic premise that the casemate wall was never intended to extend very far from the gate. Instead, it was part of a localized construction

project, together with the gate, the plaza, and the administrative building, that served to imprint an administrative presence on the settlement. If we combine this observation with the biblical tradition regarding Gezer's incorporation into Israel during the reign of Solomon as recorded in 1 Kgs 9:15–17, we can speculate that these monumental constructions were an expression of Israelite dominance over newly acquired territory. This may help to explain why the occupants of the administrative building seem to have abandoned it prior to its destruction; one can easily imagine the officials sent to administer Israelite authority over this peripheral site retreating to the safety of the kingdom's core ahead of the Egyptian campaign. This possible reconstruction finds support in the subsequent Stratum 7 remains at the site, which exhibit a significant change in character.

The Stratum 8 administrative building was destroyed around the third quarter of the 10th century (Fig. 9), most likely by Pharaoh Shoshenq (biblical Shishak) as part of his military campaign in the region (ca. 925 BCE).⁶ Prior to this destruction, the building was emptied of its contents, either by its occupants, who likely abandoned it and fled, or by its conquerors, who may have looted the building during its final hours. Very little was discovered on the floors. The few ceramic finds available are consistent with a 10th-century date for the use and destruction of the building. Among the noteworthy finds is an exquisite ivory game board from Unit 1 (Wolff and Ortiz 2018). This delicately incised board is arranged for the Game of Twenty Squares and is decorated with five rosettes. While several game boards and board fragments were found at Gezer, both by Macalister and by the Tandy excavations, most are crudely executed limestone examples that do not approach the craftsmanship evident in this ivory board.

3.3. Stratum 7

The city was immediately rebuilt following the destruction of Stratum 8 (Fig. 10). The previous administrative quarter went out of use and the area became a domestic quarter, as attested by remnants of around five domestic units (Units A–E). The new builders were aware of the Stratum 8 architectural layout, now in ruins; they reused double-row walls constructed in the earlier stratum and added new courses or rows to these walls. The area lost its former monumentality, although the monumental street was repaved and continued in use. Most of the Stratum 7 remains were patchy due to Stratum 6 construction and trenching in the Macalister

6. See Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006 for a discussion of the dating of this event.



Fig. 9. Stratum 8: destruction in Unit 2 of the administrative building.



Fig. 10. Plan of Stratum 7 (prepared by J. Rosenberg).

excavations. Fortunately, there was one complete unit (Unit D) that provided a picture of the nature of these domestic structures (Fig. 11).

This domestic house was not a typical Israelite four-room house but was rather a segmented building with single-row fieldstone walls added to divide the living area into smaller spaces. A pillared segment (Rooms 1, 2, 10) contained several



Fig. 11. Stratum 7: domestic structure (Unit D) built directly over the Stratum 8 administrative building.

storage jars. The next segment (Rooms 4 and 5, and perhaps 6) was possibly an open courtyard; this segment too contained several storage jars, along with a tabun in a corner and sunken plaster-lined installations. This led to the third segment (Rooms 7 and 8), which could only be accessed through the central space (Room 5); an occupant would first have to enter Room 7 to gain access to the back room (Room 8). Room 7 contained a bench and Room 8 produced restorable pottery of various forms, including several juglets and two chalices. It appears that Room 8 was used as a storage room for items that were infrequently used, or perhaps were of some importance to the household and hence were kept out of primary activity areas.

This chapter of the city's history shows a major realignment. The casemate fortifications were rebuilt, and the gate apparently became a four-chambered gate. Instead of rebuilding the administrative center, a series of domestic buildings were constructed, some abutting the still-standing inner (northern) wall of the casemate fortification. The builders were aware of the plan of the earlier administrative building, reusing some of the walls and maintaining their orientation. A unique feature was two canine burials here, each located in front of a different unit.

This city was violently destroyed. We previously associated this destruction with Hazael's campaign (Ortiz and Wolff 2017:95), but based on radiocarbon dates (Fig. 2) and an initial reading of the pottery, we now date it to the late 10th/early 9th centuries BCE, which would predate Hazael's campaign.

4. Notes on 10th-Century Pottery

Although the ceramic assemblages have not yet been studied or quantified, a few preliminary observations can be made regarding the 10th-century pottery of Gezer. The pottery from Stratum 8 marks the first appearance of a surface treatment that can be described as a "red wash" (probably the same as Holladay's "thinner 'red' slips" (Holladay 1990: 41) on both bowls and kraters but also on closed vessels (Fig. 12). In addition, bowls and kraters whose surfaces were treated with red slip



Fig. 12. "Red wash" storage jar from Stratum 8 (photograph by S. Wolff).

and hand burnish (Fig. 13) make their first appearance, but in smaller quantities than red wash. Stratum 7 features more red slip and hand burnish and less red wash than Stratum 8. Thus, the key for distinguishing assemblages of the mid-10th century from those of the late 10th century at Gezer lies in the percentages of these two surface treatments. Further study may reveal additional differences. Some have characterized Solomon as the “red slip and hand burnish king” (cf. Holladay 1990: 50, 63). It would be more accurate to characterize Solomon as the “red wash and red slip and hand burnish king.”



Fig. 13. Red-slipped and hand-burnished bowls and kraters from Stratum 7 (photograph by S. Wolff).

5. Conclusions

Gezer's major buildings, fortifications, and city-planning naturally point to a centralized authority. Press releases and National Parks Authority signage have popularized our building by referring to it as "Solomon's Palace." We seriously doubt that any Judean king entered the building. Nevertheless, the shift to centralized planning and public architecture suggests state formation. We would suggest that our administrative structure belongs to the same category as Megiddo's Palace 6000, since both structures belong to a tradition that is still being defined (as either a Lateral-Access Podium or a Central Hall Tetra-Partite building).

The large administrative building is typical of the Iron Age. An oft-quoted account notes that Solomon fortified Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, with the added description that Gezer was given as a dowry to Solomon (1 Kgs 9:15–16). There has recently been an explosion of archaeological research centered on the Shephelah, and scholars have noted an expansion during the Iron Age IIA and proposed various models for this expansion. Bunimovitz and Lederman, based on their excavations at Beth-Shemesh, have proposed a westward expansion of 10th-century Judah. They note that this buffer zone "experienced shifts of alternating prosperity and decline" (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: 46). The discovery of Khirbet Qeiyafa, a fortress in the Elah Valley, also supports this pattern of a westward expansion at the beginning of the 10th century BCE. We can now add Gezer as part of this westward expansion from the hill-country toward the coast.

If one assumes, as we do, that the original casemate wall is contemporary with the six-chambered gate, then one must assign both to our Stratum 8. Stratum 7 remains, which abut the casemate wall at least a meter above its founding level, have yielded reliable radiocarbon dates that place it in the late 10th/early 9th centuries BCE. Stratum 8, then, must date from an earlier time; that is, more or less to Solomon's reign. These observations confirm previous scholars' claim that the six-chambered gate dates to the reign of Solomon (e.g. Yadin 1958; Ussishkin 1980:17; Holladay 1990), *contra* the proposal of Finkelstein (1996: 183).

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