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A FORTIFIED MIDDLE BRONZE AGE IIA SITE AT 'AIN ZUREKIYEH IN THE POLEG BASIN

Ram Gophna and Etan Ayalon

The site, located in the eastern basin of Nahal Poleg, lies on a *kurkar* (calcareous sandstone) hill southeast of Tel Poleg. The hill is part of the eastern (and third) *kurkar* ridge of the Sharon, exposed in this spot by the erosion of the stream (Karmon 1961:44). The site itself is nameless, but 300 m. to its north was a small Arab settlement called Kh. Zurekiyeh, and up until very recently a spring ('Ain Zurekiyeh) flowed in the vicinity (*SWP II*:141). Here, where the stream is at its narrowest, it was possible to bypass and cross the marshes that extended in the past to its east and west (Fig. 1).

The site was discovered and surveyed in the 1960s and was found to contain Middle Bronze Age IIA pottery (*Had. Arch.* 21:10). In the summer of 1978, it was reexamined in the course of the Survey of the Sharon Coastal Plain (Gophna and Ayalon 1980:147), and when it was discovered that recent quarrying activities had destroyed several of its structures, a salvage excavation was begun.

Excavations¹

The area covered by the site is approximately four dunams (one acre), and the average thickness of the debris is about 60 cm. Two areas (A and B), totalling about 350 m.², were opened and additional probes were made at several points. The excavation areas were selected where the quarrying operations had already damaged and exposed various architectural elements (Fig. 2).

Area A

This area lies at the top of the northern slope of the hill where the vertical "balk" left by the quarry bulldozers had revealed part of a stone wall, two courses high, built directly on bedrock. We exposed this wall for a length of 18 m., its outline curving to conform to the topography of the hill here (Fig. 3). It turned out to be the foundation of a 3.20-m.-wide wall built in two phases. The inner and outer faces of the first wall (W1012) are built of large sandstone blocks, while the space between them is filled with medium-sized and small stones, above which some meagre remains of the mudbrick superstructures were still discernible. The eastern half of the excavated segment was damaged by the quarry, but in

1 The salvage excavation was carried out on behalf of the Department of Antiquities and Museums and the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University under the direction of the authors. The site was excavated during three one-week seasons (December 1978, April and October 1979). The maps and plans were prepared by Shmuel Moshkovitz and Ora Paran; the finds were drawn by Yoseph Kopelian and photographed by Moshe Weinberg, all from the Institute of Archaeology. The authors wish to express their thanks to all of them.

The levels taken during the excavation are relative to the highest point of the site (zero level). This point is about 20 m. above sea-level.

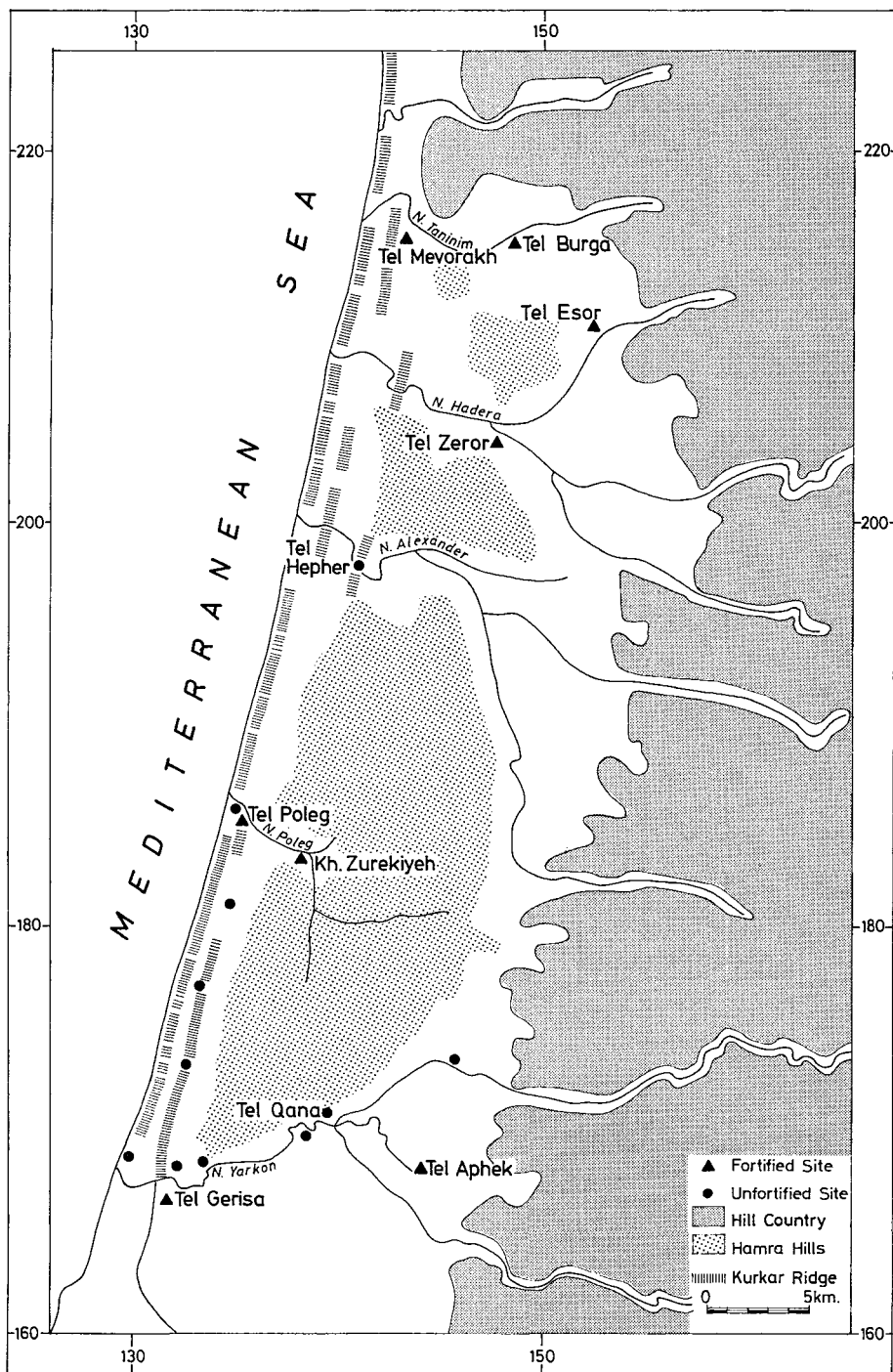


Fig. 1. MB-III sites in the Shephar Plain.

Gophna and Ayalon: MB IIA Site at 'Ain Zurekiyeh

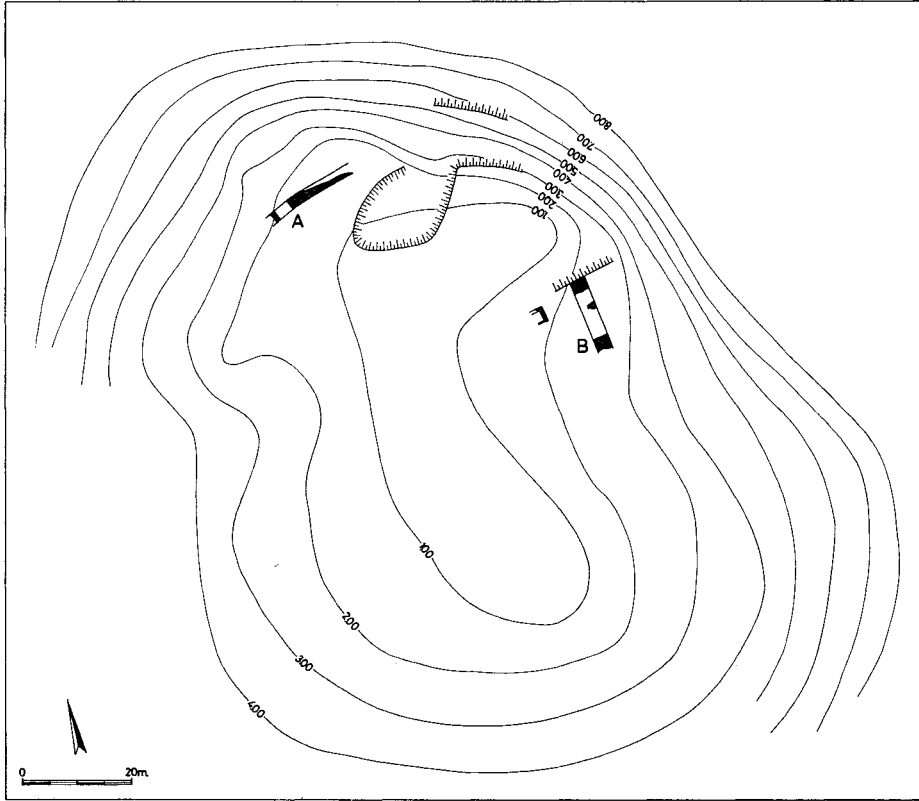


Fig. 2. Contour map of 'Ain Zurekiyeh and excavated areas.

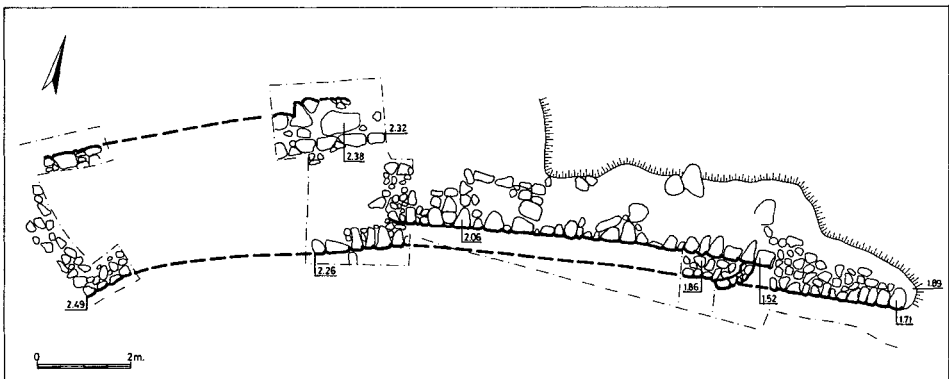


Fig. 3. Plan of Area A.

two places at the western end the wall was preserved to its full width. The western end of the excavated segment is cut by a gully. The later phase (W1011) was preserved for 8.5 m. only, and the quarrying damage prevented us from estimating its width. Only the foundation course, built in the same manner as that of the earlier phase, survived. The inner face of Wall W1011 was built parallel to the earlier one, but set back by about 50 cm. The remains were too close to the surface for any floor connected with either phase to have been preserved. Remains of some sort of semicircular installation built of small stones were found abutting onto the later phase of the wall.

Area B

The excavations in this area, lying on the eastern slope of the site, revealed a 16-m. stretch of a one-phase fortification wall and two habitational phases adjoining its inner side (Figs. 4, 5). This wall segment, which is closer to the edge of the marsh, is 2.5 m. lower than the level of the segment in Area A. Like the latter, it is 3.20 m. wide and similarly constructed on stone foundations, but here the brick superstructure was preserved to a height of 60 cm. Unlike the Area A segment, which was built directly on bedrock, the Area B wall was laid on a fill of *kurkar* and earth layers (Fig. 5). The bricks, made of the sandy red soil known as *hamra*, were laid without any mortar between them. A small area excavated from the wall inwards toward the centre of the hill revealed two habitational phases.

In the earlier phase the bedrock was levelled and used as a floor. Depressions in the rock and the space between the rock and the wall were filled with stones and soil and covered with a layer of crushed *kurkar*. The architectural remains of this phase included (on the south) a thin wall (W1161) perpendicular to the fortification wall, of which only the stone foundation has survived, and (on the north) three large, round stones that most likely served as pillar bases. The stones stood in a row, perpendicular to the fortification wall, spaced approximately 2.5 m. apart, with the easternmost stone standing very close to the

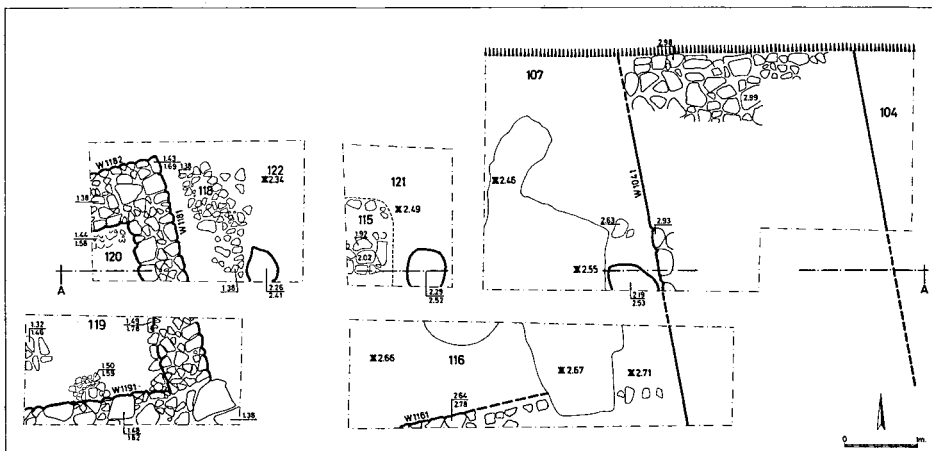


Fig. 4. Plan of Area B.

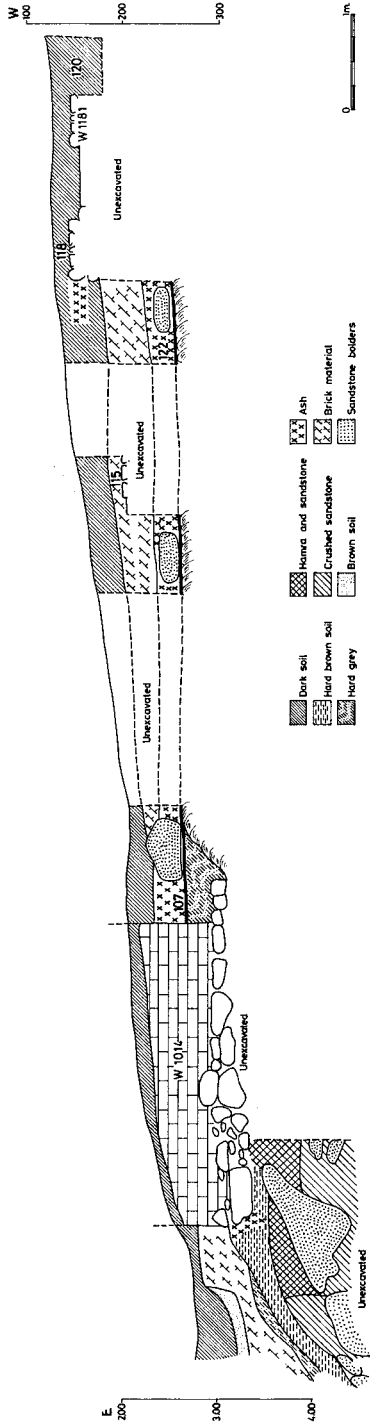


Fig. 5. Section of Area B.

wall. On the floors there were many sherds, including one complete gutter-rimmed storage jar (Fig. 6:5) from Floor 122, as well as pig and sheep bones; two stone mallets and a small worked limestone slab were found on Floor 116. This phase of the settlement ended in destruction, and the floor was covered with a rather thick layer of ashes and burnt wooden beams, identified by Lipschitz and Waisel (1980) as Calliprinos oak (*Quercus calliprinos* Webb.), on top of which was a 60-cm.-thick layer of brick debris. The fallen brick layer was mixed with soil eroded from the top of the hill, which seems to show that the site was abandoned for a short period of time between the two phases.

The main feature of the later phase is Structure 120, built parallel to the fortification wall (from which it may be assumed that it was still in use at this time) at a distance of 6.30 m. (Fig. 4). The excavation exposed the eastern part of the building, of which only the *kurkar* foundation course has survived. The inner space of the structure is 2.30 m. wide, and parts of a floor (or under-floor bedding), built of small stones, have been preserved. A surface of small stones about 1.00 m. wide was found at the eastern side of this structure (Surface 118). In this part of the area the stratigraphic sequence, wherein the stone paving of Surface 118 was laid on top of a 1-m.-thick fallen brick layer covering the earlier phase (Floor 122), is quite clear (Fig. 5). At a distance of 2.5 m. east of the structure we exposed a round stone-built installation (Locus 115) with a flat stone at its centre — perhaps a stand for a large pottery vessel. This installation was also built on the layer of debris separating the two phases.

Pottery

The amount of pottery discovered during our brief excavations at 'Ain Zurekiyeh is small, but its characteristic features enable us to fix its date fairly well within the Middle Bronze Age IIA. Both building phases may be attributed to this period, although it is not possible to make typological distinctions between the pottery of the earlier and later phases.

All the MB IIA diagnostic features discernible in our small pottery assemblage (Figs. 6-7) are comparable to those of the rich material excavated at the major fortified MB IIA settlements in the Sharon Plain, i.e., Tel Aphek, Tel Poleg, Tel Zeror and Tel Burga (Beck 1975; Kochavi, Beck and Gophna 1979). Noteworthy among these pottery types are: bowls with flat ledge rims (Fig. 6:2), rounded bowls (Fig. 6:1), red-slipped and burnished carinated bowls (Fig. 7:1, 2), holemouth kraters (Fig. 7:3), gutter-rimmed storage jars (Fig. 6:5), rounded, thickened-rim storage jars (Figs. 6:7; 7:6), squarish-rimmed storage jars (Figs. 6:6, 8), and storage jars with elongated rims and a ridge at the bottom (Figs. 6:9; 7:4, 5).

Comparison of the pottery with the other MB IIA assemblages from the Sharon shows that the closest parallels are with the material of the "Pre-palace phase" at Tel Aphek and with the assemblages of Tel Zeror and Tel Burga, rather than with nearby Tel Poleg.

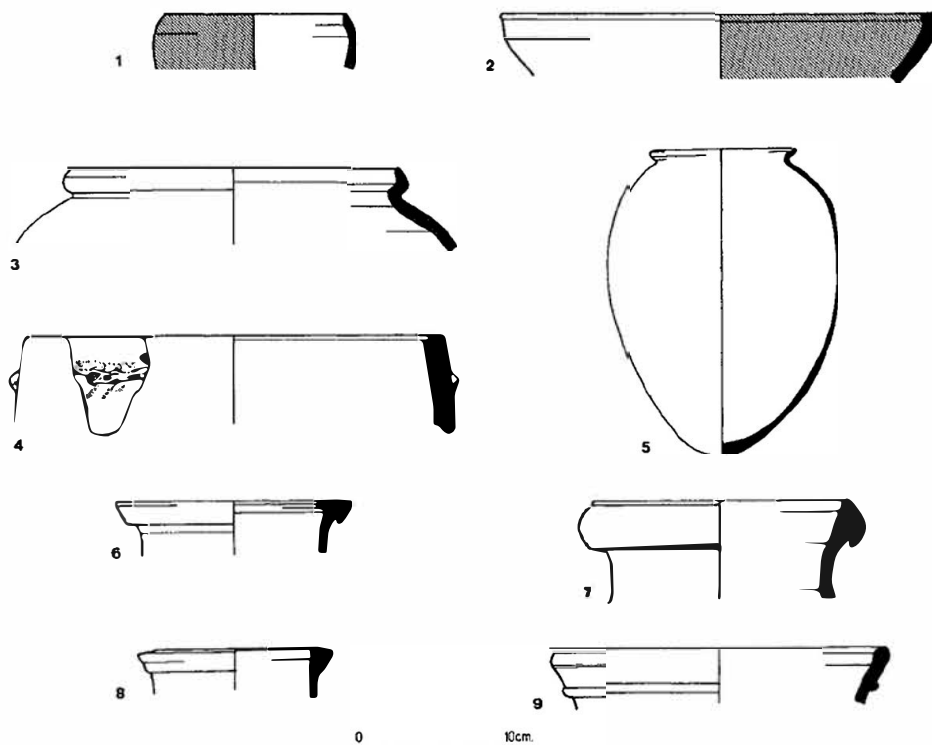


Fig. 6

FIGURE 6. STRATIFIED POTTERY: LOWER FLOOR (1-7); UPPER FLOOR (8-9).

No. Type	Reg. No. Locus	Description	Comparisons*
1 Bowl	29/1 116	5YR 5/6 yellowish-red clay, white grits, 2.5YR 4/6 red slip, well fired.	<i>Poleg</i> : Fig. 7:1.
2 Bowl	40/1 115	5YR 6/4 light reddish-brown clay, 2.5YR 4/2 red core, 10R 4/6 red slip, radial hand-burnish inside, well fired.	<i>Poleg</i> : Fig. 7:8; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 10-9.
3 Cooking-pot	27/1 116	5YR 5/6 yellowish-red clay, 10R 4/8 red core, white grits, medium fired.	<i>Poleg</i> : Figs. 7:13-14; 8:15-16; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 11:5; <i>Zeror</i> : Fig. 17:9.
4 Cooking-pot	27/2 116	2.5YR 6/6-5/6 red clay, 2.5YR N3/0 very dark grey core, poorly fired.	<i>Poleg</i> : Fig. 7:16; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 11:7-9; <i>Zeror</i> : Fig. 17:10.

* For full references to the abbreviations see:

Aphek: Beck 1975.*Poleg, Burga, Zeror*: Kochavi, Beck and Gophna 1979.

FIGURE 6 (cont.)

<i>No. Type</i>	<i>Reg. No.</i>	<i>Locus</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comparisons*</i>
5 Storage jar	45/1	122	2.5YR 5/4 reddish-brown clay, white grits, well fired.	<i>Aphek</i> : Fig. 1:4; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 11:6; <i>Zeror</i> : Figs. 17:9; 18:9.
6 Storage jar	27/3	116	2.5YR 6/8 light red clay, 2.5YR 4/8 red core, white and grey grits, well fired.	<i>Aphek</i> : Fig. 5:11.
7 Storage jar	27/4	116	2.5YR 6/6 light red clay, 2.5YR N5/0 grey core, white grits, well fired.	<i>Aphek</i> : Figs. 1:17; 7:12-13; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 12:6-7.
8 Storage jar	33/1	119	5YR 6/6-6/8 reddish-yellow clay, few small white grits, well fired.	<i>Aphek</i> : Fig. 7:19-21; <i>Poleg</i> : Fig. 8:6-8; 19-20; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 11:16, 18; <i>Zeror</i> : Fig. 18:6.
9 Storage jar	38/1	119	2.5YR 6/6-6/8 light red clay 10R 5/1 reddish-grey core, white grits, well fired.	<i>Aphek</i> : Fig. 5:9, 10; <i>Poleg</i> : Fig. 7:17-19; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 11:12-13, 15.

FIGURE 7. UNSTRATIFIED POTTERY.

<i>No. Type</i>	<i>Reg. No.</i>	<i>Locus</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comparison*</i>
1 Bowl	1/1		5YR 7/6 reddish-yellow clay, remnants of red slip, horizontal burnish, well fired.	<i>Poleg</i> : Figs. 7:4; 8:12-13.
2 Bowl	1/2		2.5YR 6/8 light red clay, 2.5YR 5/6 red core, small grey grits, 10R 4/6 red slip, well fired.	<i>Burga</i> : Fig. 10:2; <i>Zeror</i> : Fig. 18:10.
3 Krater	2/1	100	10R 5/8 red clay, 2.5YR N4/0 dark grey core, white grits, well fired.	<i>Aphek</i> : Fig. 2:8; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 4:2, 4; <i>Zeror</i> : Fig. 17:7, 8.
4 Storage jar	1/3		2.5YR 6/6 light red clay, 2.5YR 5/2 red core, small white grits, remnants of red slip outside, well fired.	<i>Poleg</i> : Fig. 7:17-19; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 11:12-13, 15.
5 Storage jar	1/4		10R 6/8 light red clay 10R 5/6 red core, numerous small white grits, remnants of red slip, well fired.	<i>Poleg</i> : Fig. 7:17-19; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 11:12-13, 15
6 Storage jar	1/5		2.5YR 5/6 red clay, well fired.	<i>Aphek</i> : Fig. 7:12; <i>Burga</i> : Fig. 12:6.

* See note on previous page.

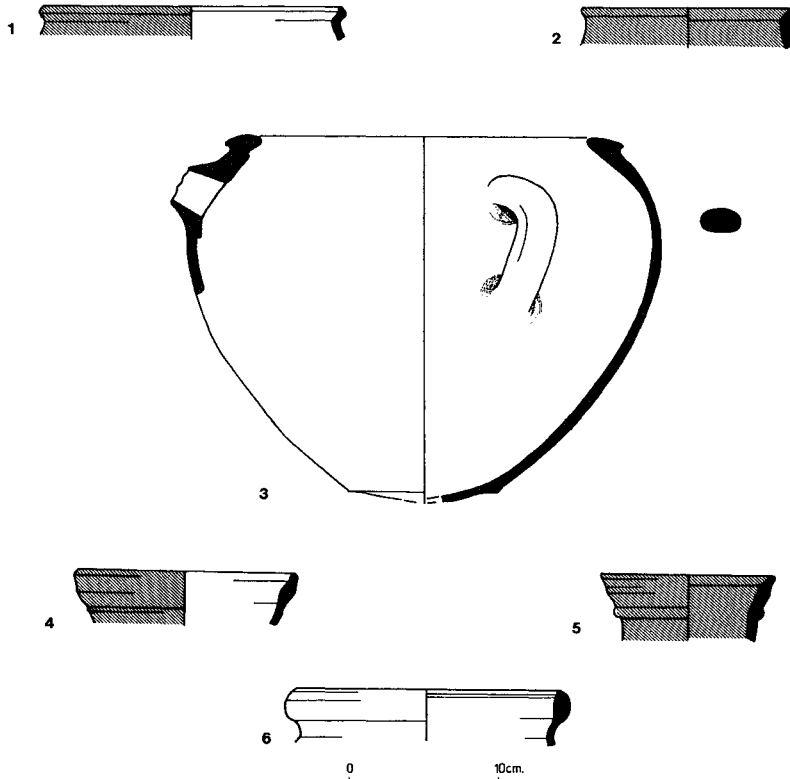


Fig. 7

Conclusions

From our detailed survey of the fortress area we arrived at the conclusion that the fortification wall had encircled the entire hill (an area of some four dunams), but that the structures within the circumference of the wall were sparsely scattered. Construction was denser on the western slope of the hill, which was not excavated. The remains of both phases do not exceed half a metre in thickness (except for a few pits), and the site seems to have been inhabited for a short time only. According to the ceramic analysis, both phases belong to the Middle Bronze Age IIA. Comparisons with the pottery of nearby Tel Poleg suggests that the fortified settlement at 'Ain Zurekiyeh preceded the building of the fortress there. If — as we suggest — the above-described finds correspond to the "Pre-palace phase" in the MB IIA sequence at Aphek, the site at 'Ain Zurekiyeh may have been part of the earliest fortification network of the city-state of Aphek (Gophna and Ayalon 1980; Gophna and Beck 1981:77). Our fort was apparently intended to guard 'Ain Zurekiyeh — a source of fresh water in the surrounding marshlands — and perhaps also the north-south coastal road crossing the marshlands at this point, as well as a transverse road that presumably connected the coast with the eastern Sharon via the Naḥal Poleg basin.

The fragment of a Late Bronze Age "milk bowl" found in the topsoil and some sherds dating to the Persian period seem to show that the site was sparsely settled during these two periods.

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