

## AN EGYPTIAN “GOVERNOR’S RESIDENCY” AT GEZER?\*

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During the Late Bronze Age Gezer was probably the most important city-kingdom in southern Canaan, commanding a vital crossroad of the “Via Maris” and the main road leading up from the northern Shephelah to the hill country.<sup>1</sup> The conquest of Gezer plays an important role in Merneptah’s campaign to Canaan in the fifth year of his reign (1207 B.C.E.). It is mentioned not only in the Israel Stela (*ANET*:377) but also in the Amada inscription, where the Egyptian monarch has the epithet “subduer of Gezer” (Kitchen 1981:34). In another article (Singer, forthcoming), which deals with the annexation policy of the Ramesside kings, I have attempted to show that the takeover of Gezer by Merneptah served the double strategic purpose of fully “Egyptianizing” the coastal strip between Gaza and Jaffa and facilitating the Egyptian penetration into the central hill country. It stands to reason that — like in the case of Ashkelon, which after its conquest was turned into an Egyptian stronghold — a permanent Egyptian presence was also maintained at Gezer. It is inconceivable that Merneptah conquered and destroyed the city merely to abandon it shortly thereafter. This article attempts to find some clues for the Egyptian presence at Gezer in the results of the excavations carried out at the site.

The Hebrew Union College Expedition in the 1960s found evidence for a limited destruction of Stratum XV (Stratum 13 of Field II), which was attributed to Merneptah’s campaign (*Gezer 1974*:50; Dever 1976:439). The overlying stratum XIV (Stratum 12 in Field II and “Post-6” in Field VI) is described by the excavators as an ephemeral stage that “may mark a partial hiatus or a period of squatter occupation” (*Gezer 1974*:52). “The surviving inhabitants may have returned to the site and occupied it for about a generation before the Philistine incursions beginning in the early 12th century B.C.” (*ibid.*:50). The pottery of this stage is typical of the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age, and close parallels have been noted with Stratum B1 at Tell Beit Mirsim and Stratum XIII at Ashdod (*ibid.*:51). The Monochrome ware (Mycenaean IIIc1b), however, which appears at this stage at Ashdod, is missing at Gezer and Tell Beit Mirsim.<sup>2</sup> The Bichrome Philistine pottery makes its first appearance at Gezer in Stratum XIII (Stratum 11 in Field II; *ibid.*:54).

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1 For the kingdom of Gezer in the Amarna Age, see Ross 1966; Na’aman 1975:58–87.

2 For the geographical-historical significance of the distribution pattern of this early Philistine pottery, see Singer 1985.

If we accept the excavators' plausible interpretation, which connects the end of Stratum XV with Merneptah's campaign, it follows that the sparse occupation of Stratum XIV represents, in my opinion, the period in which the city was controlled by the Egyptians. *Prima facie* this appears incompatible with the rest of the evidence. However, in spite of the sparse occupation of Stratum XIV, Macalister found a wealth of Egyptian finds that are dated exactly to this period. Especially noteworthy is an Egyptian sundial with the cartouches of Merneptah (*Gezer II*:331; Fig. 456; Pilcher 1923). Objects inscribed with Merneptah's name are extremely rare in Canaan. So far, they have been found only at sites with close Egyptian associations: Beth-shan, Tell el-Far'ah (S) and Timna' (see Weinstein 1981:20–21).

Macalister also found two cartouches of Ramses III (*Gezer II*:236; Fig. 388; *Gezer III*: Pl. CXXI:20) and a cartouche of Ramses IX on a green-enamelled inlay (*Gezer II*:250; *Gezer III*: Pl. CXCv:74; Malamat 1971:299, n. 59). It is quite difficult to attribute these rare Egyptian finds, and probably many more that cannot be dated (see *Gezer III*: Pls. CCII–CCXI) to the squatter inhabitants of Stratum XIV.

A further important hint of a permanent Egyptian presence at Gezer is provided by a large stone block found by Macalister out of any architectural context in V 30B (*Gezer II*:307; Fig. 446). Half of the hieroglyphic sign *nb* ("gold") with a horizontal stroke above it is deeply incised on one end of the block. Prof. A. Schulman informs me that this was probably part of the support and the closing tie of a royal cartouche. Macalister himself ingeniously concluded (*Gezer II*:307): "The stone being too bulky to have been imported to the city, there is no admissible alternative to the view that it once formed part of a building covered with hieroglyphics, like the temples of the Nile. Nothing could be more impressive as an indication of the closeness of the Egyptian connexion with Gezer. The stone was the only part of the building that came to light."

Macalister correctly recognized the significance of this Egyptian building block decades before the discovery of similar architectural elements at Beth-shan, Jaffa, Ashdod and Gaza (see Weinstein 1981:19), all of which were Egyptian-dominated bases in the period under consideration. Is this block indeed the only part of the building that came to light? Or is it perhaps possible to identify other architectural remains with which this inscription could have been associated?

A glimpse at the plan of the "Third Semitic Period" in Macalister's excavation report (*Gezer III*: Pl. IV) reveals a massive public structure at the northern end of trenches 14–16 (Fig. 1). A brief description, a plan and a photograph of this imposing building, designated by Macalister "the Canaanite Castle," is given in the 14th preliminary report (Macalister 1907:192–195).<sup>3</sup> This information was more or less repeated in *Gezer I*:206–208. On the basis of the few objects found in and about this Castle (see below),

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3 See also the photograph in Macalister 1907:187 (looking northwest), which shows in the background the foundations of the entrance halls of the Castle erected over a "Troglodyte Cave" (*ibid.*192).

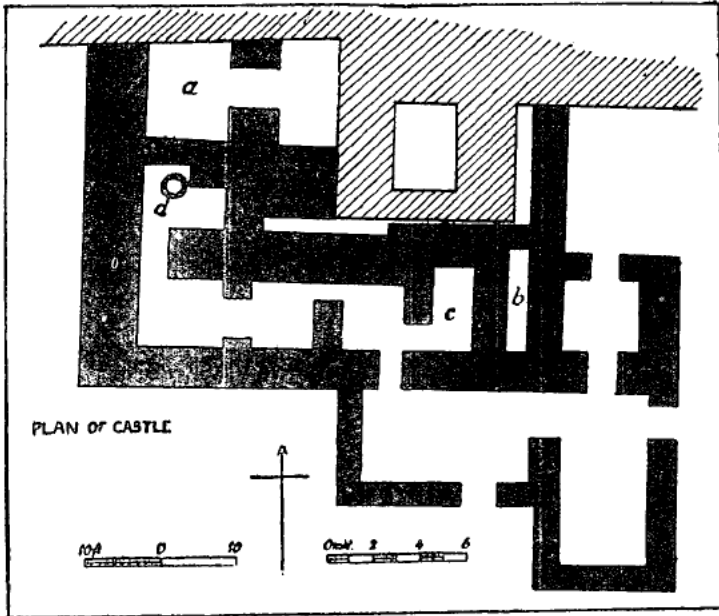


Fig. 1. Plan of large building in IV 14-16 (*Gezer I*:207, Fig. 97).

Macalister (1907: 192) dated it to the 13th century B.C.E. and concluded that it was no doubt the main public structure of the period at Gezer (see also Garstang 1931:377). According to Macalister, it may have served as "the residence of the governor" (*Gezer I*:206), or perhaps as the castle of Horam, king of Gezer, mentioned in Josh. 10:33 (*ibid.*:208; Macalister 1907:194). This building is one of the few left intact by Macalister because it was considered to be too valuable to destroy (*Gezer I*:48). Accordingly, the underlying deposits (an accumulation of two to three feet on bedrock) were not examined (Macalister 1907:192).

All that has been preserved of this building are the foundations below the level of the door threshold. The massive walls, which range in thickness from about 1.0 to 3.0 m., were laid out carefully at right angles. According to Macalister's description, the building butts onto the Inner Wall, which it exploited as its rear wall. One of the towers of the Inner Wall, which differs conspicuously from the other towers of this wall, apparently "penetrates" into the structure. However, since it is much earlier, it has evidently been incorporated into the structure.

The southern wall (not including the entrance halls) is about 20.5 m. long according to the plan (*Gezer I*:107). (Note, however, that in the general plan in *Gezer III*: Pl.IV, the length of this wall is barely 18.5 m., making the building appear exactly square.) The western wall is about 14.5 m. long, and if we add to it the width of the Inner Wall, which serves as the rear wall of the structure, we get a more-or less squarish plan.

Three halls lead to the entrance at the southeastern corner. (It should be noted, however, that in the general plan in *Gezer III*, a further wall connects with these halls at the

east.) The entrance leads to a long, narrow hall that communicates by doorways with the other rooms. The narrow apartment *b* was identified by Macalister as a storeroom, but it is more likely a staircase, like the narrow compartment adjacent to the corner of the tower. The little circular structure in room *d*, a hearth according to Macalister, is the only architectural feature remaining.

East of the building there was a large open courtyard (see *Gezer III*: Pl. IV). After its destruction, the building probably remained unused. During the following periods only a shallow layer of earth accumulated on top of it (*Gezer II*:342).

The Castle was almost devoid of artifacts. Only room *a* (excavated in 1902; Macalister 1907:193) yielded any objects at all (*Gezer I*:208). Among these were two fine bronze axes, a bronze spearhead, a three-legged stone vessel, an alabaster vessel, some pottery (not described) and a fragment of a polished green stone ornament with an incised chevron design (*ibid.*:208; Fig. 98). It is extremely difficult to identify these objects with certainty in Macalister's report.<sup>4</sup>

So much for Macalister's brief description of the Castle. Obviously many vital details remain unknown. It is not even specified whether the foundations were made of stone or brick, although examination of the photograph in *Gezer I*:209, Fig. 99 and Macalister 1907:187 favours the latter possibility. Moreover, the plans are not very accurate. A simple comparison between the general plan in *Gezer III* and the enlarged plan in *Gezer I* reveals considerable differences both in size and layout.

Nevertheless, despite the lack of sufficient data, it is possible, I believe, to point out several resemblances between this imposing building — the only one of its kind at Gezer — and the buildings that have come to be known as Egyptian "governors' residencies" in Canaan (see Oren 1985). These include the squarish plan, the solid walls that carried an upper storey, the corner entrance typical of Egyptian architecture of this period and the long narrow corridor at the entrance, which has a close parallel in the Tell el-Far'ah residency (Oren 1985:40; Fig. 2:6). Obviously, there are also architectural features that depart from the "standard plan," for example, the location of the largest room in one of the corners (see below) rather than in the centre of the building. However, as pointed out by Oren (*ibid.*:52), the "governors' residencies" adapted Egyptian architecture to local building traditions and therefore exhibit considerable variability in layout and size.

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4 Among the Egyptian objects found in trenches 14 and 17 in the Third and Fourth Semitic periods are a number that may have come from the "residency," although their connection with it cannot be positively established: in IV 17 there was a small axe (*Gezer III*: Pl. CXCI:5; *Gezer II*:243); in IV 16 was a narrow, flat strip of bronze (*Gezer II*:267; *Gezer III*: Pl. CXCVII:4); two alabaster vessels are reported to have come from V 17 and V 16 respectively (*Gezer III*: Pls. CCXII:6; CCXIII:10); a large limestone stopper was "found in the shallow earth covering the large building at the N. end of IV 15–17; this earth contained a mixture of objects from Third Semitic to Hellenistic..." (*Gezer III*: Pl. CCXII:21; *Gezer II*:342).

The main problem that arises in any tentative reconstruction of the plan of the Gezer "Residency" is the relationship between the structure and the Inner Wall and tower.<sup>5</sup> By the time it was constructed, the Inner Wall already lay in ruins. The builders incorporated part of its strong foundations and one of its towers into their new construction. Indeed, the plan of the "Residency" leaves little doubt that its builders were familiar with the line of the Inner Wall and made good use of it. Regarding the tower, if, as is very likely, only its foundations were preserved when the "Residency" was built, we should perhaps reconstruct in its place one large room, or more probably two adjacent rooms, a small and a large one (Fig. 2). The size of the larger room at the northeastern corner would have been, according to our reconstruction, approximately 6 x 8 m. This was probably the main room of the "Residency".

This tentative reconstruction remains conjectural, of course, unless corroborated by a small-scale trial excavation. This challenge should not be too difficult to meet, since the "Residency" probably lies close to the surface just as it was left by Macalister some eighty years ago.

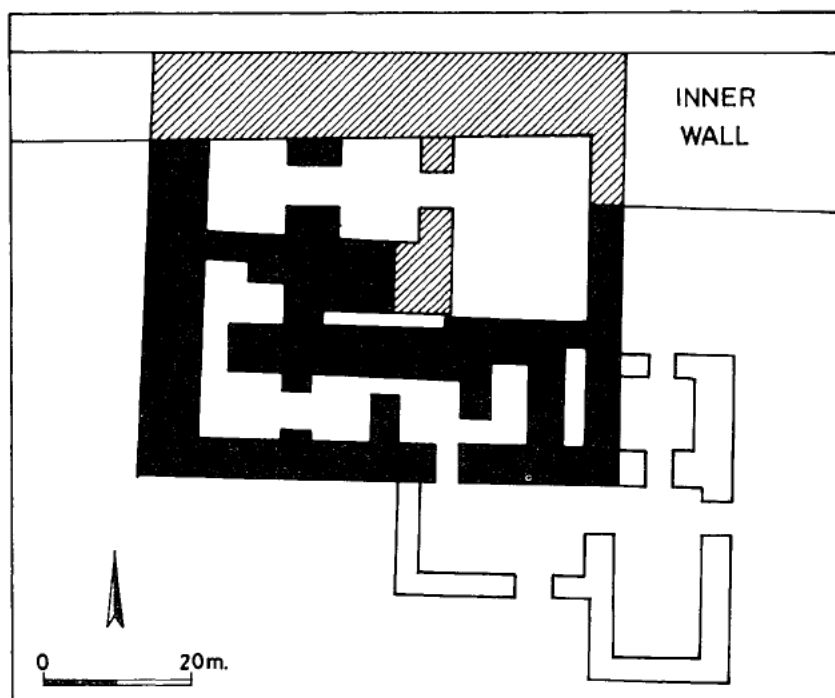


Fig. 2. Suggested reconstruction of "Governor's Residency."

5 For the problem of the final date of the "Inner Wall," see Dever 1982:21-23; cf. also Bunimowitz 1983:69.

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