



Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception

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Genocide - Hamutal

Volume 10

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Gezer

Steven M. Ortiz, Sam Wolff

Gezer (MT *Gezer*), located in the Aijalon Valley at the intersection of the Via Maris and the road leading to Jerusalem, is a 33-acre (12.1 ha) mound located 8 km south-southeast of the modern city of Ramlah. It is mentioned in Egyptian sources (*qdr*) and in Assyrian sources (*Gazri*): the annals of Thutmose III (ca. 1468 BCE), Amarna Letters (14th cent. BCE), and Merneptah's Victory Stela, and in an inscription and relief of Tiglath-pileser III (8th cent. BCE).

1. Archaeology

The site is well known due to several archaeological expeditions. Two major excavations were carried out from 1902–1909 by R.A.S. Macalister and from 1964–1973 by Hebrew Union College (HUC) directed by William G. Dever and Joe D. Seger. Several smaller excavations were conducted by Raymond Weill (1913, 1923), Alan Rowe (1934), and Dever (1984, 1990). Renewed excavations are currently being conducted by a team of the Tandy Institute for Archaeology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary under the direction of Steven Ortiz and Samuel Wolff.

Gezer played a prominent role in biblical archaeology with the publication of an article by Yadin (1958) arguing for a connection between the “Maccabean castle” excavated by Macalister, the six chambered gates from Hazor and Megiddo, and 1 Kgs 9:15. This became a classic paradigm for biblical archaeology of the 1970s and 1980s. The HUC excavations of Gezer also played an important role in New Archaeology which emphasized the separation of archaeological research from biblical research. The HUC excavations defined twenty-one major strata. While there is evidence of occupation in the Chalcolithic period and Early Bronze Age, these were meager occupations; probably local villages around the spring. There is no evidence of major occupation from Early Bronze Age III to the beginning of Middle Bronze Age II.

Gezer was a significant Canaanite city-state throughout the 2nd millennium BCE. The mound was initially occupied around 3500 BCE and the settlement continued to grow until it became a fortified city during the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2000–1500 BCE) when large-scale fortifications (gate, tower, glacis) were built and the “High Place” was founded. The city was destroyed (ca. 1500 BCE) and rebuilt during the Late Bronze Age when it came under Egyptian hegemony as evidenced by several palaces and residences. The city was again destroyed in the 14th century BCE when Egypt was weak, as illustrated in the Amarna letters. An Iron Age I (ca. 1200–1000 BCE) fortified city was exposed by the recent Tandy excavations. A Solomonic phase is evidenced by the construction of a six chambered monumental city gate, a so-called palace, and a casemate wall. The famous Gezer Calendar, associated with this period, is usually regarded as the earliest Hebrew inscription, though the script and the language there may just as easily be called Phoenician. This city was destroyed by Shishak (ca. 950–925), then rebuilt but later destroyed by Tiglath-pileser III (733 BCE). Subsequently, occupation of the site diminished until the 2nd century BCE when it became a Seleucid and Maccabean stronghold.

Several textual traditions have informed the discussion of the archaeology and geography of Gezer. According to the Bible, Joshua defeated the king of Gezer who was part of a Canaanite coalition (Josh 10:33). Gezer remained in Canaanite hands throughout the period of the Judges (Josh 16:10; Judg 1:29) even though it formed the boundary for Ephraim's tribal allotment (Josh 16:3) and was assigned as a Levitical city (Josh 21:21). David fought against the Philistines near Gezer (2 Sam 5:25; 1 Chr 20:4). Gezer was conquered by Egypt and given as a dowry to Solomon. Solomon fortified Gezer along with Jerusalem, Hazor, and Megiddo (1 Kgs 9:15–17).

2. Gezer and Joshua's Southern Campaign

Joshua 10 consists of three literary units coalesced into a single narrative: the anti-Gibeonite coalition (vv. 1–15), the execution of the kings of this coalition at the cave of Makkadah (vv. 16–27), and a southern campaign of the hill country and the Shephelah (vv. 28–42). Several scholars are persuaded that the

southern campaign preserves the memory of an older tradition (Wright) based on the topography and logic of the itinerary. Yet the question is whether the tradition is ancient (e.g., Iron Age I), or based on a later battle (e.g., Sennacherib in 701 [2 Kgs 18:13]; Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE [Jer 34:7]).

3. Gezer and Its Boundaries

The biblical text is ambiguous as regards Gezer and its allotment. Gezer is a city of Ephraim (Josh 16:3, 10; Judg 1:29) and given to the Levites, specifically the non-priestly Kohathites (Josh 21:21; 1 Chr 6:67). Based on the geographical data, the biblical text also places Gezer within the boundaries of Judah (Josh 15:12) and in the tribal allotment of Dan (Josh 19:40–46). Nevertheless Gezer remained in Canaanite control (Josh 16:10; Judg 1:29). An account of a battle between David and the Philistines mentions that he struck the Philistines all the way “from Gibeon to Gezer,” implying that Gezer was in Philistine territory (2 Sam 5:25).

4. Gezer and Solomon

Most exegetical and historical reconstruction has focused on the mention of Gezer in 1 Kgs 9 as a city that Solomon fortified and that was given to Solomon in a marriage alliance with Pharaoh's daughter. The text associates the building of Gezer with Hazor and Megiddo, and notes that the king of Egypt captured Gezer, burned the city, killed the Canaanites, and gave it as dowry to his daughter who was to marry Solomon. Emphasis has been placed on the archaeology of these three cities, which has distorted the literary analysis of the text. Most scholars have noted that this account is part of a section of various fragments of text associated with Solomon's statecraft, construction projects, and conscripted labor (vv. 15–28). It has been interpreted as a sort of summary statement of Solomon's activities that follows a description of Solomon's building of the temple and palace (1 Kgs 9:1–9). This is similar to other accounts of kings where a Deuteronomistic redactor provides a summary statement at the end of their reign. Most scholars note that v. 16 is parenthetical and separates an original archival list of building projects throughout the kingdom, listing projects from Hazor in the north to Tamar in the wilderness. These earlier approaches emphasized a historical-critical approach that emphasized reconstructing Solomon's building projects and corvée labor.

Some scholars (Knauf; Neimann) have used a source critical approach influenced by Finkelstein's Low Chronology theory, and have associated v. 15 with an insertion of northern cities into archival texts about Solomon, which reflects a theological idealism uniting north and south traditions. Hence the text reflects a later idealized Deuteronomistic creation and is not necessarily based on archival texts.

A recent approach by Schniedewind posits that the original list was a long archival description that included vv. 15 and 17–18. A later Deuteronomistic literary shaping provides the overarching themes of Solomon's failure to uphold the Deuteronomistic law of the prohibitions in the law of the king (e.g., gold, horse, and foreign wives) that dates to the Josianic period.

5. Hellenistic and Maccabean Gezer

The last occupation at Gezer was during the Hellenistic period. Various references in 1 Maccabees note that Gazara was a Syrian outpost of the Seleucid dynasty (1 Macc 9:52). Jonathan's brother and successor won national independence from Demetrius II. He besieged the fortress of Gezer and won. He expelled the inhabitants with loyal “keepers of the law” and placed John (Hyrcanus) in charge of the new Jewish garrison (1 Macc 13:41).

All major excavations have exposed a well-developed town plan of Gezer during the Hellenistic period. Most of the occupation appears to be on the east slope of the western hill to the eastern hill. There is also evidence of a Jewish household where a possible mikveh was found.

During this period, several Gezer boundary stones have been found. These are bilingual inscriptions with Alkios (private name) written in Greek, and “the boundary of Gezer” written facing the inscription in Hebrew. To date there are twelve inscriptions, the most recent one was found by the Gezer survey project. These inscriptions illustrate (1) the multi-ethnic population, (2) the impact of Hellenization, and (3) the division between public and private fields. It is also possible that they reflect the influence of the Maccabees and their concern for Jewish fields observing Torah principles of agriculture found in the Pentateuch.

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