

GEZER AND TAANACH.

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THE results of the excavations at Taanach conducted by Dr. Sellin have been published, so far, in a section of vol. 50 of *Denkschriften der Kaiserlich Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, forming a brochure of 124 pages, with a goodly supply of photographic illustrations and plates. It is upon this interesting and instructive publication that I draw for material in comparing the results as yet achieved in Gezer with those obtained by the Austrian professor.

In this case also, as in that of Megiddo, I must commence with a contrast unfavourable to ourselves. Dr. Sellin was able to employ a staff of 150 labourers, nearly double the possible maximum at Gezer. The supporters of Dr. Sellin placed about £2000 at his disposal at the beginning of his excavation, which freed him from the necessity of economising in various directions, a necessity that, at Gezer, was always a source of anxiety.

It cannot be too often repeated (1) that no mound should be abandoned till it is thoroughly dug from end to end; the Tell el-Amarna tablets were all contained within a few cubic feet of ground, and unless a mound be exhaustively searched, there is an even chance that some such deposit will be left behind; (2) that few undertakings are more expensive than scientific excavating, and if they are not properly supported it is better for the mound, for science, and for a more generous posterity that they should not be attempted at all; (3) that the *minimum* funds required for the proper excavation of such a mound as Gezer, within the time-limits of an Ottoman firman, is £350 *per mensem* (three and a half times the total sum which the Fund was enabled to place at my disposal). Some mounds would be yet more expensive. I examined one important and promising mound in Northern Palestine which would require at the very least £500, and the true figure is probably nearer £700 a month.

The advantages for the excavator of the mound of Taanach are much the same as at Gezer. The hill is now unoccupied; no reasonable doubt can be thrown on the identification with the

Biblical city ; and a good deal is known from literary sources of the history of Taanach, so that interesting parallels between documentary and archæological evidence may fairly be expected.

As we study Dr. Sellin's letterpress and illustrations, the essential unity of the Taanach civilisation with that of Gezer impresses us, precisely as we found in examining the results from Megiddo. There are occasional points of contrast which may be accidental, and which might disappear with a more complete examination of both mounds ; but the buildings and antiquities of the two sites might be interchanged bodily without any serious confusing of the archæological history of Palestine.

Dr. Sellin records his discoveries in a series of chapters, each devoted to an independent section of the mound. We may take these in order, noting on the way points of contrast and similarity with the Gezer excavations.

I. *Trench from the North Side to the Central Plateau.*—Here was found the ruin of a tower, resembling in general style the masonry of the Gezer fortifications, though without such an excessive use of small stone fillings as the Gezer walls show. Sling stones indicated that it had at some time been stormed. Some of these were perforated for the thong of the sling ; of the many sling-stones from Gezer none showed this detail. The group of stone objects illustrated by Dr. Sellin (fig. 7), consisting of mortars, pestles, and rubbing stones, is exactly like a collection of such objects that might be found in a contemporary structure at Gezer. The pottery from this tower indicates a date somewhere about 1000 B.C. ; one (fig. 8 *b*) is evidently of Cypriote origin. The most peculiar vessel from this building, as illustrated by Dr. Sellin, is fig. 8 *f* ; I do not recall a flat bottomed jug like this found anywhere at Gezer of the date suggested ; it looks rather later. The discovery of iron objects shows the given date to be the major limit of the age of the tower. A bone needle case with one needle remaining can be compared with a similar object found in Gezer.

Two parallel rows of standing columns, beside, but older than the tower, raise the same difficulty as was suggested by the similar discovery made by Dr. Schumacher at Megiddo. And here again I confess to a doubt as to whether these *dressed* pillars can legitimately be connected directly with religious worship. At least I hardly think this can be assumed till every other possibility has been considered and exhausted.

Under the level of the tower pottery of 1200 or 1500 B.C. made its appearance; fine bowls with wishbone handles and the "ladder" decoration, and the more definitely Palestinian geometrical patterns, so common in all Palestinian mounds. With them was a rattle, a curious class of object that has not, I think, received the attention they merit. They can hardly be mere toys.

Proceeding further along the trench, Dr. Sellin found two jar-buried infants (? foundation sacrifices), an anticipation of the great cemetery he was destined to discover later; and "a monolith 1.30 metres high, 0.40 metre broad, with a round hole in the side; . . . five stone steps led up to it." Dr. Sellin does not illustrate this object, which seems from a description to be part of an olive press. A house with a well-beaten mud floor may also be referred to as a comparative rarity, both at Gezer and at Taanach.

2. *The North-Eastern Fortress.*—The occurrence of bossed masonry, to be compared with some of the towers of the outer city wall at Gezer, is the most interesting feature of this structure; and it is a pity that very definite indications of date seem to be lacking. It can scarcely be as old as the very interesting seal cylinder, with old Babylonian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics side by side upon it, which Dr. Sellin had the good fortune to find within its precincts. The pottery cylinder (fig. 24 in Dr. Sellin's work) has many parallels throughout all the excavations that have been undertaken in Palestine. It is probably a stand for a round bottomed jar. The bottle filler (fig. 25) is a distinctly rarer type of object.

3. *The North-East Bastion.*—A solid tower of masonry, with drafted stones, resembling the supposed Solomonic towers in the city walls of Gezer, and probably of about the same period.

4. *The North-East Trench.*—Here Dr. Sellin made some of his most important discoveries. A very early cemetery of jar-buried infants, some of them evidently, judging from the shape of the jars, antedating those in the similar cemetery in the High Place at Gezer, rewarded his investigation in this part of the mound. Several points of interest are presented by this cemetery—notably their association with a rock-cut altar, much resembling the famous "Zorah" altar—and the find is of the first importance for a study of the rites attending infant sacrifice in Palestine. Noteworthy is the small jar with yellow powder deposited with one of the interments. This may possibly have been incense. A large jar of incense, which had reduced to a yellow sand-like powder (in fact I thought at first that

it was sand), was found at Gezer, not however in the High Place. An important difference is to be noticed between the age of the Gezer and the Taanach infants. All the Gezerite child-sacrifices were new-born infants, save two (not buried in jars) who had attained the age of five or six. The Taanach children included some (jar-buried) who might be about two years. Two of the Gezer infants had been burnt, as had also the older children; the Taanach examples however showed no trace of fire.

A very important distinction between the Gezer and the Taanach cemeteries lies in the association of the Gezer jar-burials with the row of monoliths which is absent in the case of Taanach. Of course we must always remember the possibility of a Puritanic destruction of the Taanach stones, though this does not seem so probable an event in the northern kingdom as in the southern. I must in any case express my own indebtedness to Dr. Sellin for having acted on a hint I ventured upon in one of my reports, and taken the trouble definitely to prove the absence of the monoliths in the Taanach mound.

5. *The Castle of Istar-Waşur*.—Here again fortune smiled upon Dr. Sellin; not only did he find a singularly interesting building, but in that building was the first Palestine library yet discovered. The building is specially instructive, as it illustrates the contemporaneous use of masonry structures with rock-cut cellarage; and the combed sherds found within it give us a useful date-level in the history of pottery. The library is instructive and encouraging; it shows that there was communication not only between the Palestine cities and Egypt at the Tell el-Amarna period, but between the individual Palestinian cities themselves; and it carries us a few steps further into that as yet very little known chamber of history which the Tell el-Hesi tablet first unlocked for us. Once more this discovery impresses upon us the necessity for leaving no mound till every inch of it has been turned over to the rock. A single cubic foot of earth may contain a prize worth a three years' search; and it may be the foot left untouched!

6. *The Western Tower*.—This building was unusually right-angled for a Palestinian structure. In this excavation were found a handsome specimen of the common form of Cypriote ointment pot, and also Astarte plaques of styles quite different from anything from Gezer. There is a very remarkable variety of these plaques, and it is an interesting question, to which no answer can yet be

given, how far different cities or places show a predilection for different types. A curious figure representing a man riding on a nondescript animal, also found in this part of the tell, is interesting, as it illustrates the antiquity of the Oriental fashion of riding over the haunches of a donkey rather than in the middle of the back. Among the stone objects from this part of the mound are good examples of the curious form of grindstone in which a conical projection in the upper stone fits into a conical depression in the lower.

The Arab Castle.—We may pass this part of the work over in silence, as it is concerned with an archæological level not found at all in the Gezer mound. Dr. Sellin's work here is a useful contribution to a little known chapter of the history of Palestinian civilisation.

The three Shafts under the Arab Castle.—Several points of similarity and of contrast with the Gezer work resulted from the excavations. A square oil press, figured by Dr. Sellin (fig. 71) is quite unlike the Gezer specimens, which are almost invariably round, though sometimes oblong. Here was found a bronze serpent figure, which Dr. Sellin himself compares with the bronze cobra found in the Gezer High Place.

It is interesting in studying Dr. Sellin's account of these shafts to observe how the development of pottery follows exactly the same course in Taanach as in Gezer, and so far as we can judge is the same at the same period in both places. Thanks to the work of systematic excavation which has been carried on within the last fifteen years not only in Palestine itself but also in the Mediterranean islands and the adjacent countries, we may now fairly claim that the chronology of pottery is on a sound basis, and the dating of the various strata of a city has become almost mechanical. It is to be observed that among the painted sherds animal forms (especially ibexes) seem to predominate over bird figures. The contrary is the case at Gezer.

We may pass more rapidly over Dr. Sellin's other discoveries. The curious upright cylinder, which he calls a *Räucherschale* (fig. 81), while not in every detail resembling anything from Gezer, has its analogies among the Gezer finds. The exact purpose of this class of object is still to seek. The footed bowl (*Libationsschale*, fig. 84) is very common at all periods.

In yet another trench Dr. Sellin found a pair of upright squared

monoliths of the kind to which we have already adverted. Here again one knows not what to think regarding their purpose. Dr. Sellin makes out a good case for their being objects of cult, yet their close association, relatively, with the stone of an olive press seems to suggest that they had some radical connection with it.

In an excavation to the east of the mound Dr. Sellin found, among other noteworthy objects, a small conical seal bearing two stags on the base and a tree (?) between them. An identical motive appeared among seals from Gezer, and it has more than once been alluded to in the reports. Indeed, so frequent is the stag (or some similar horned animal) found upon Gezerite seals, that I had begun to suspect that it was a totemistic device belonging essentially to some family or tribe of which Gezer was one of the headquarters. If this be so, it is very interesting to find the same device recurring at Taanach; indeed, it is interesting in any case.

We need not dwell here on the extraordinary altar, which has already been illustrated in the *Quarterly Statement*, and which is quite one of the most remarkable discoveries yet made in Palestine. In connection with it was found one of the Cypriote Astarte figures (the type with large earrings); one such was found at Tell el-Hesi, but nowhere else in Palestine had the type re-appeared till Dr. Sellin found his at Taanach.

On the whole, the Egyptian influence seems rather less at Taanach than it is at Gezer, which is not surprising, considering the more remote situation of the former town.

Dr. Sellin closes his interesting contribution to Palestinian Archæology with a series of chapters in which the total results are summarised. As we are not primarily reviewing his work in the present communication, we need not analyse these chapters here. But it is clear even to one who merely turns the pages, and still more to a careful student of his text, that the comparisons which he institutes between the result of the excavations at Taanach and Lachish, with their many points of similarity, and their few, if any, points of contrast, might be extended to Gezer. Civilisation over all Western Palestine is thus shown to have had the same course of development whether we study the North or the South.
