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The Iron Age Inner City Gate and Gate Shrine at Tel Lakhish (Lachish)

Saar Ganor and Igor Kreimerman[1]

An excavation carried out on the southern side of the six-chambered inner gatehouse at Lakhish exposed the gate passage, four piers and three chambers. The eastern chamber comprised two rooms, with a cultic niche in one of the room's back wall and an altar in front of it. The chamber probably served as a gate shrine, and was desecrated during Hezekiah's cult reform, when a toilet seat was placed next to the altar and the altar horns were trimmed. Evidence of Sennacherib's destruction in 701 BCE was manifest by the presence of arrowheads, slingstones and collapsed burned mud bricks. The pottery assemblage aligns with previous finds from Lakhish Level III, with all vessel forms known from Iron IIB strata in Judah.

Keywords: city gate, cult, Sennacherib, Hezekiah, arrowheads, slingstones

Introduction

The city of Lakhish, second in importance in Iron Age Judah after Jerusalem, is located on the banks of Naḥal Lakhish in the Judean Shephelah, dominating the road from the coastal plain to the mountainous region around Hebron and Jerusalem.

The site has been previously excavated by four archaeological expeditions. In the 1930s, the British Wellcome-Marston Archaeological Research Expedition, directed by James L. Starkey, uncovered extensive areas of the mound (Torczyner et al. 1938; Tufnell, Inge and Harding 1940; Tufnell 1953; 1958). A small-scale excavation, directed by Yohanan Aharoni of Tel Aviv University in the 1960s, focused on the area of the Solar Shrine (Aharoni 1975). Between 1973 and 1987, David Ussishkin of Tel Aviv University conducted a large-scale excavation in several areas of the tell (Ussishkin 2004e). The fourth excavation was carried out on behalf of the Hebrew University, under the direction of Yosef Garfinkel, Michael G. Hasel and Martin G. Klingbeil, focusing on the fortifications and the dating of Iron Age

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Table 1. Tel Lakhish Stratigraphy

Level	Period	Date (BCE)
I	Persian–Hellenistic	Fifth to second centuries
I	Iron Age IIC	Seventh–early sixth centuries (destroyed 587/586)
III	Iron Age IIB	Eighth century (destroyed 701)
IV	Iron Age IIA	Ninth century
V	Iron Age IIA	Tenth century
Occupation gap	Iron Age IB	
VI	Iron Age IA	Twelfth century

Lakhish (Garfinkel, Hasel and Klingbeil 2013; Garfinkel 2019; Garfinkel et al. 2019; 2021; Klingbeil et al. 2019).

The general stratigraphy of the site was established by the Wellcome-Marston Expedition (Tufnell 1953; 1958) and refined by the later expeditions (Aharoni 1975; Ussishkin 2004e; Garfinkel et al. 2019). Notwithstanding some changes in the attribution of specific structures to different levels, and in the absolute dating, the overall stratigraphic scheme remains valid (Table 1).

The gate area was first excavated in the 1930s, exposing the gate plaza, the northern part of two of the southern piers of the Level II gatehouse, and one of its northern piers (Tufnell 1953:94–98). Between 1973 and 1987, the northern side of the Levels IV–III six-chambered inner gatehouse was fully exposed, and part of the passage running through the gate was uncovered, in the course of which it became evident that this gate was constructed in Level IV, probably in the ninth century BCE, and was destroyed by Sennacherib in the course of the 701 BCE Assyrian campaign against Judah (Ussishkin 2004a).

In December 2015–February 2016, an excavation was carried out in the partially excavated southern side of the six-chambered inner gatehouse, and in the unexcavated part of the gate passage (Fig. 1), prior to developing the site for visitors.[2] The excavation results are presented here from the latest to the earliest levels.[3]

[2] The excavation (Permit No. A-7590; map ref. 185579/608090), conducted on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and underwritten by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and the Landmarks Project of the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage, was directed by Saar Ganor and Igor Kreimerman (field photography), with the assistance of Yaser Al-ʿAmor (logistics), Mendel Kahan and Dov Porotsky (surveying and drafting), Guy Fitoussi and Emil Aladjem (aerial photography), Yosef Bukengolts and Tamar Gonen (pottery restoration), Sharon Gal (isometric drawing), Irina Lidsky-Reznikov (drawing of arrowheads), Lena Kupershmidt (metallurgical laboratory), Argita Gyrman-Levanon (artifact drawings, courtesy of the National Laboratory for Digital Documentation and Research), Clara Amit (artifact photography), Raanan Kislev and Ram Shoef (conservation), Yossi Garfinkel, David Ussishkin, Lily Singer-Avitz, Alon De Groot, Yael Abadi-Reiss, Hamoudi Khalaily, Gideon Avni, Jon Seligman and Zvi Greenhut (consultation), Zeev Margalit, Tzvika Tzuk, Tami Holtz (Israel Nature and Parks Authority) and Project 500 laborers. Volunteers, students from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and staff members of the Israel Antiquities Authority Southern Regional Office also took part in the excavation.

[3] Some of the excavation results have already been presented, specifically regarding the gate shrine and the interpretation of the finds in context of Hezekiah's cult reform (Ganor and Kreimerman 2017a; 2017b; 2018a).

Fig. 1. The city gate at the end of the excavation, looking southwest.

Excavation of the Southern Side of the Inner Gate (Plan 1)

Some modern rubbish, including rusty cans, probably left by the 1930s' expedition, was found on the eastern side of the gate area. No architectural remains were attributed to Level I, and only sporadic sherds from the Persian–Hellenistic periods were found in topsoil loci.

Level II

Three elements were attributed to Level II: (1) A semicircular installation composed of a few small stones (L105), built on the southern wall of the Level III gatehouse (Fig. 2), contained sherds of 'En Gedi-type cooking pots with everted grooved rims (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012: 68, Type CP8; Yezerski 2007: 92, Type CP 3); (2) a row of four large stones (L170; c. 0.7 m long) abutting the Level II inner gatehouse (Fig. 3),[4] may have

[4] These stones, exposed in a previous excavation, do not appear in Tufnell's plans. They do appear in Ussishkin's Level II plan (Ussishkin 2004a: Fig. 12.41) but they are not described in the reports.

Fig. 2. Level II Installation 105, looking west.

Fig. 3. A row of four large stones (L170), attributed to Level II, looking south.

functioned as a retaining wall; (3) a foundation trench of the Level II city wall (L133; width 1.5 m) was observed in the western chamber of the Level III gatehouse, cutting through the white-plastered, southern mud-brick wall (W103) and destroying most of the western pier (Plan 1; Fig. 4). Foundation Trench 133 contained variously orientated burned mud bricks, and pottery sherds dating to Iron Age IIB, overlain by horizontally laid mud bricks that may have been extracted from Level III when the Level II foundation trench was dug. No corresponding foundation trench was observed in the northern side of the gatehouse, where the Level II wall was directly built on the lower courses of the Level III pier (Ussishkin 2004a:637–644).

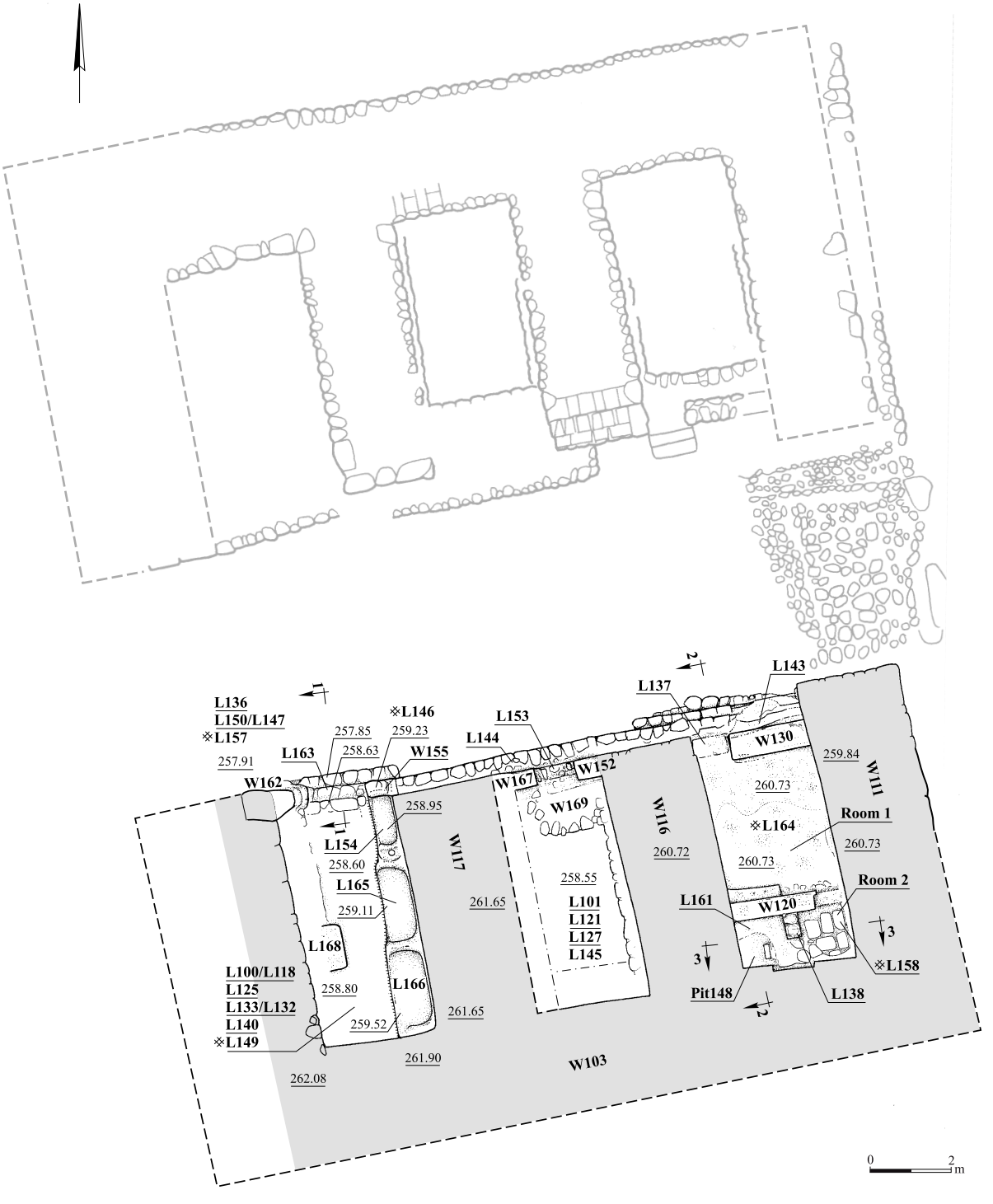
Fig. 4. Level II Foundation Trench 133, cutting plastered W103, looking south.

Post-Level III

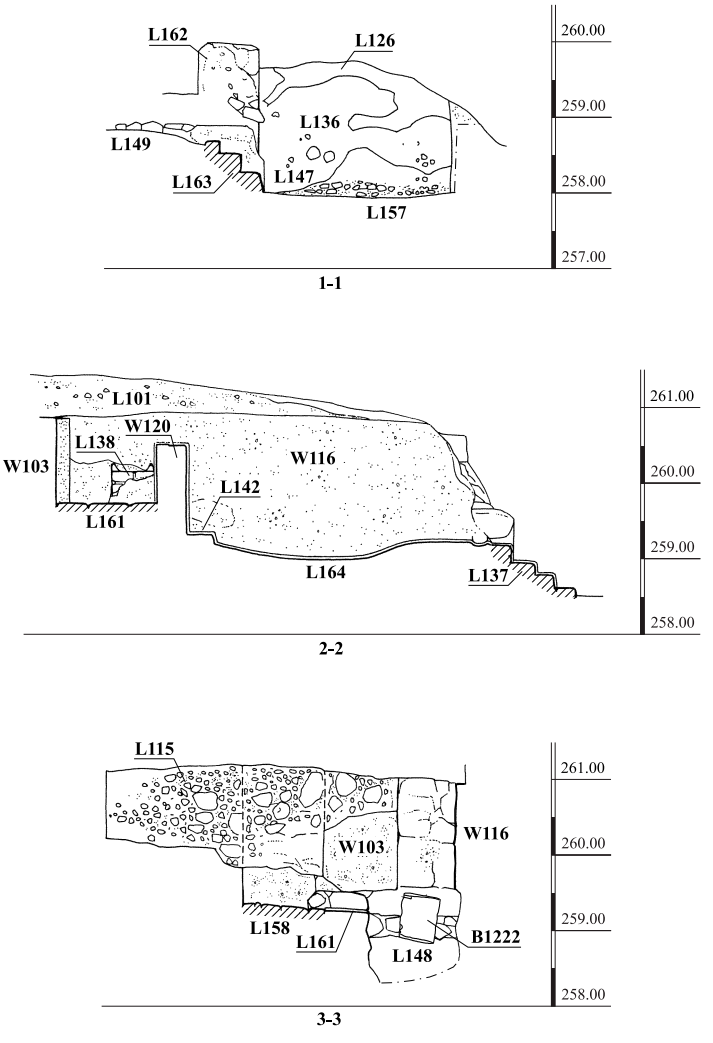
Ussishkin identified an interim phase of squatter activity between Levels III and II, when the western chamber of the northern side of the gatehouse was reused (Ussishkin 2004a:652, Figs. 12.39, 12.40). Another piece of evidence may now be added. The central chamber of the southern side of the Level III gatehouse was destroyed by a pit in antiquity, and no floor was extant, but only a grayish fill/accumulation layer containing pottery sherds from various periods (L121, L127; Plan 1; see below). Whilst the sherds retrieved from the upper layer (L121) could date to Levels II and I, the lower layer (L127) did not contain these later sherds, suggesting that the central chamber may have been destroyed shortly after the destruction of Level III.

Levels IV–III

The Level IV–III gatehouse (overall dimensions 24.5 × 24.5 m) comprised eight piers delimiting six chambers (Plan 1; see Fig. 1). The present excavation exposed the gate passage, and the four piers and three chambers of the southern side of the gatehouse. The



Plan 1. The excavated southern side of the inner gate, plan and sections.



Plan 1. (cont.).

outer western and eastern piers were c. 0.5 m longer than the two inner ones. The gatehouse was constructed of a foundation layer of large stones (max. 0.5 × 1.0 m), overlain by courses of unfired mud bricks (c. 0.50 × 0.50 × 0.15 m). The walls of the western chamber were the best-preserved, standing to a height of 4.2 m above the passage floor, and coated with plaster (2–4 cm thick), sometimes comprising two layers: a lower layer, probably made of crushed limestone (2–3 cm thick), and an upper, fine smooth plaster layer, probably of pyrogenic origin (c. 0.5 cm thick). In some places, there may not have been an upper layer, as for example, on the back wall (W103), where the crushed limestone layer was covered by soot from exposure to fire in the destruction (Fig. 4).

The Gate Passage

The gate passage ascended through the gatehouse into the city, where it became a street (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 15:2; Ussishkin 2004a: Fig. 12.18). The 6.2 m wide passage narrowed at both ends (5.2 m) due to the longer outer piers. Narrow benches, made of one row of stones, aligned the front of the gatehouse's southern side (Figs. 5, 6). The beaten earth floors (L146, L157) in the passage were covered by a destruction layer composed of a blackish layer of burned debris containing restorable pottery and charcoal (L150), overlain by an accumulation layer of orange burned bricks (L136, L147; c. 1.2 m thick; Plan 1: Section 1–1). This layer was dated by pottery to the 701 BCE destruction of the Level III gate.

The Western Chamber

The western chamber (2.8 × 5.8 m) was delimited on the south by W103 and on the east, by Pier 117; the western wall of the gate was not excavated as it was built over by the Level II city wall. The entrance into the chamber (L163; 0.9 m wide) lay between two short mud-brick walls coated with gray plaster (W155, W162; c. 0. 9 × 0.7 m; Fig. 7). Three stone steps led up to the chamber (Fig. 8).

Three benches were uncovered along on the eastern side of the chamber. Bench 154 (0.55 × 1.40 m) was the most elaborate, with two armrests and two wide shallow depressions marking two seats; three flat stones in front of the bench were probably footrests (Fig. 9). The bench was built of medium-sized, roughly cut stones (c. 0.3 × 0.5 m) attached with mud-mortar, and it was covered with a fine plaster layer (0.5–1.0 cm thick) that continued up over W117; its cracked and crumbly state exposed the underlying masonry (Fig. 10).

Fig. 5. The gate passage and the entrances to the southern chambers, looking east.

Fig. 6. The gate passage, with Bench 144 on the left, looking west; the Level II drainage channel is visible on the right, delimiting the excavation area.

Fig. 7. Entrance into western chamber, showing Bench 144, Pier 117 and W155, partly coated with plaster, looking south.

Fig. 8. The entrance into the western chamber, looking south.

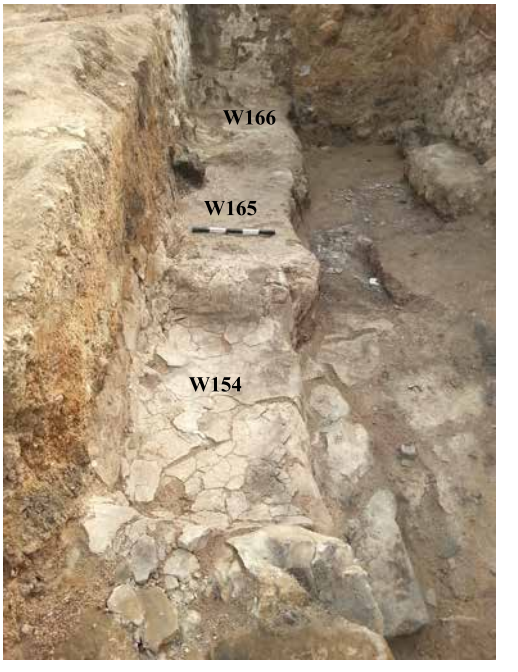


Fig. 9. The plastered benches in the western chamber, looking south.

Fig. 10. Bench 154, the plaster covering the bench and continuing up Wall 117, looking east.

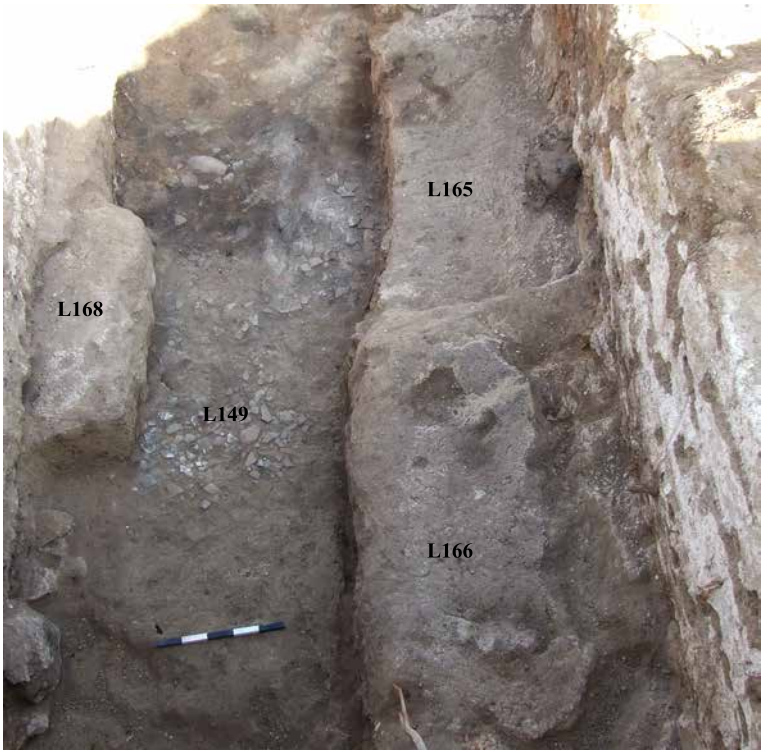


Fig. 11. Plastered benches 165, 166 and 168 in the western chamber, looking north.

The other two benches (L165, L166; 0.7 × 2.1–2.3 m) were built of mud bricks and covered with a thicker plaster layer (1–3 cm), the upward-sloping plaster extant on the bench sides suggesting that they originally also had armrests that were not preserved, but they had no footrests (Fig. 11). On the western side of the chamber, the remains of a single, poorly preserved bench (L168; visible dimensions 0.4 × 1.2 m) were exposed. It is not known whether there were additional benches here, as safety considerations precluded excavating the western side of the chamber.

The compact-earth floor in the chamber (L149) was covered by a thick destruction layer composed of burned mud bricks and a charred matrix (L140; depth up to 1.1 m) containing jars, asymmetric bowls/scoops and other pottery vessels (Fig. 29). Additional evidence for the Assyrian destruction of 701 BCE included three jar handles stamped with *lmlk* seal impressions (Fig. 34:1–3), and one jar handle bearing a personal seal impression, *lnḥm ʿbdi* (Fig. 34:4). The thick destruction layer was overlain by a debris layer of burned and unburned bricks, containing large pottery sherds (L132), in turn overlain by a layer of mostly unburned mud bricks (L125); both these layers were cut by Level II Foundation Trench 133 (see Fig. 4).

The Central Chamber

The central chamber (2.80 × 5.25 m) was delimited by W103 and Piers 116 and 117. Two stone-built steps (width 0.9 m) led up from the passage into the chamber, and two thin-plastered mud-brick walls (W152, W167) narrowed the entrance (Figs. 12, 13). The chamber walls were covered with fragments of coarse-grained white plaster, made of crushed chalk, and the chamber contained a layer of plaster fragments, mud bricks and pottery sherds

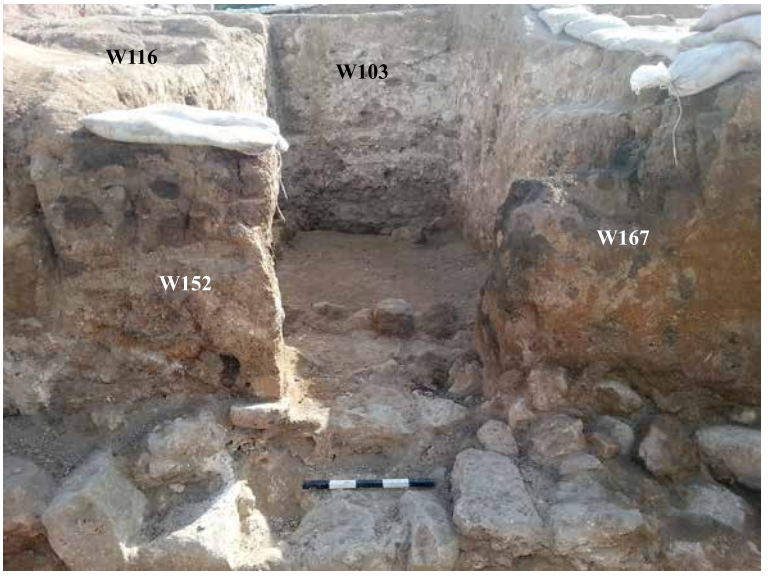


Fig. 12. The entrance into the central chamber, looking south.

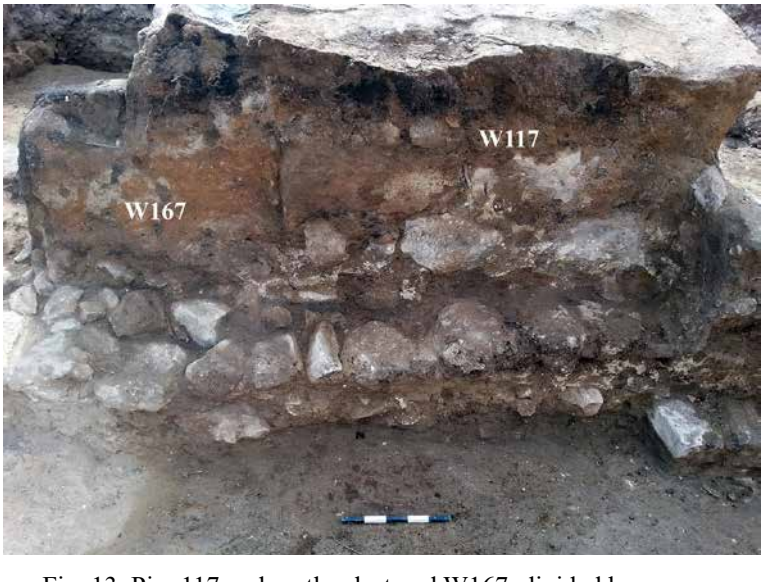


Fig. 13. Pier 117 and partly plastered W167, divided by a seam, looking south; Bench 144 and passage floor (L146) in foreground.

(L127), probably from the pit attributed to the post-Level III phase (see above). As no clear floor was extant, the excavation continued down to the upper courses of the gate foundations constructed in Level IV, exposing an east–west oriented sleeper wall (W169) that connected Piers 116 and 117 (Fig. 14). Similar sleeper walls were previously identified in the northern side of the gatehouse (Ussishkin 2004a:633).

The Eastern Chamber

The eastern chamber (2.80 × 5.65 m) was delimited by W103 and Piers 116 and 111 (Plans 1: Sections 2–2, 3–3; 2). Four well-dressed stone steps led up from the passage into the chamber, whose entrance was narrowed (from 0.9 m to 0.55 m) by a plastered mud-brick partition wall (W130; Figs. 15, 16). The chamber was divided into two rooms by a partition wall (W120; 2.1 m long, 0.45 m wide) with an entrance on its eastern side (0.7 m wide; Fig. 17).

Room 1 (3.4 × 2.8 m) had plastered walls and floor. At the southern end of the room, next to W120, the floor had slightly sunken (Fig. 18), and there was a narrow ledge (L142; length 1.2 m), on and around which many broken pottery vessels were found. A slight depression in the floor next to W120 indicated the former existence of a door, probably made of wood (Fig. 19). Plaster traces—mostly found in the debris covering the entrance, but in one spot

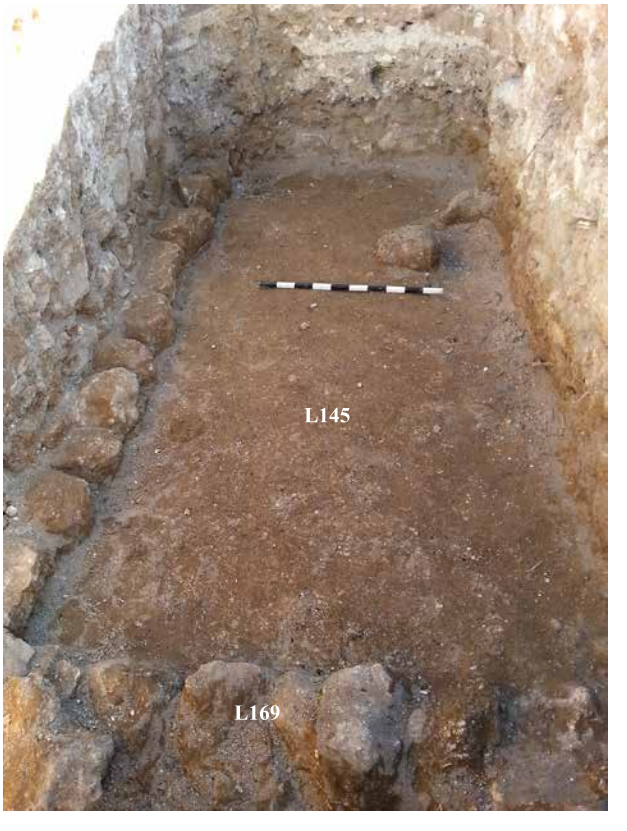
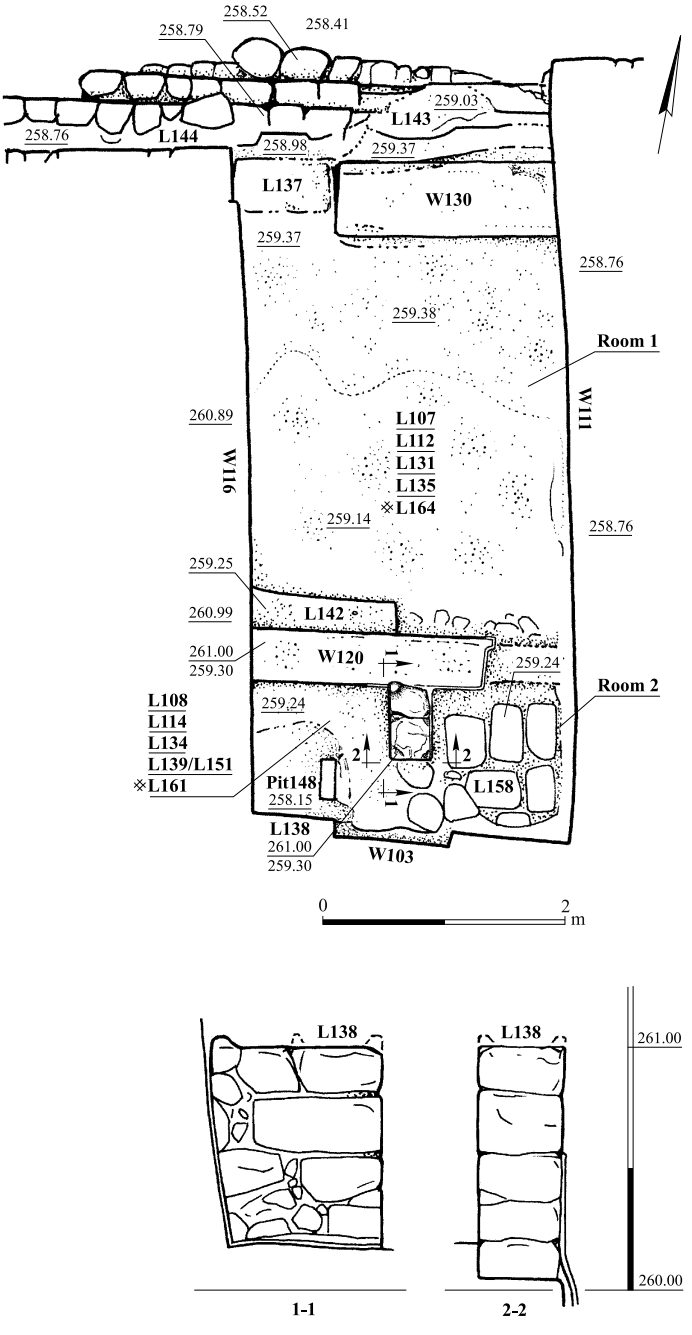


Fig. 14. The central chamber, with sleeper W169 in foreground, looking south.



Plan 2. The eastern chamber of the southern side of the Level IV–III gate, plan and sections.

Fig. 15. The entrance into the eastern chamber, with Bench 143 on the left, looking south.

Fig. 16. The entrance to the eastern chamber, after the 1938 excavations, looking south (after Tufnell 1953: Pl. 15:4).

Fig. 17. Overhead view of the eastern chamber, looking north.

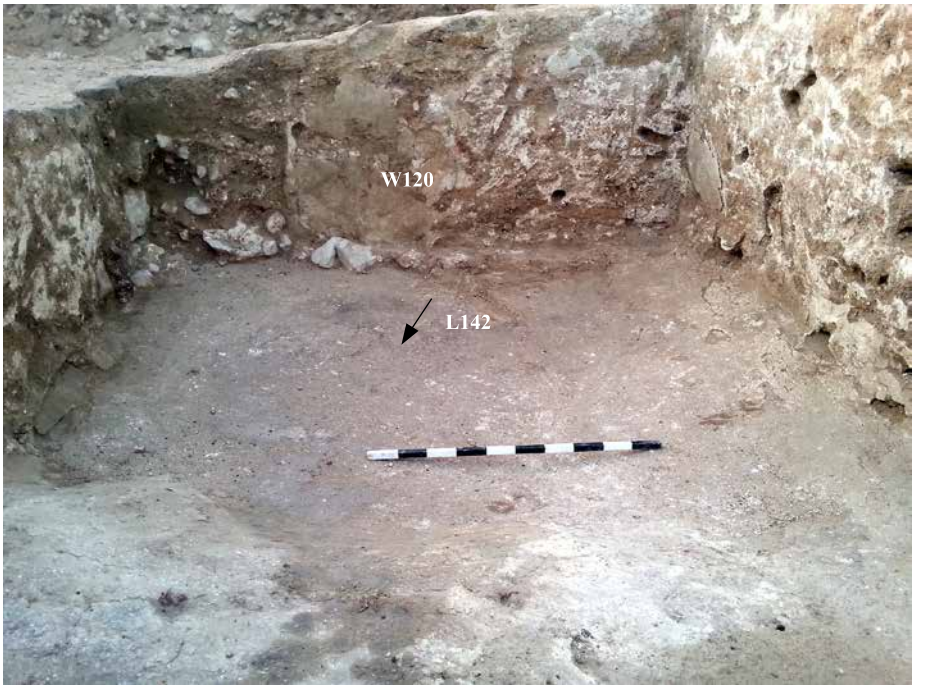


Fig. 18. Eastern chamber Room 1, with plastered walls and floor, showing the sunken floor (marked with an arrow), prior to the excavation of Room 2, looking south.

in situ where the door once stood—indicated that the door must have been plastered over and sealed up at some point, in which case, it could only have been opened by breaking the plaster (Figs. 20, 21). Four arrowheads (see Fig. 35) and a rounded stone, probably a

Fig. 19. The entrance into Room 2, showing the depression in the floor (marked with an arrow), looking south; remains of the original wall plaster that probably sealed the door are visible on the right.

Fig. 20. The entrance into Room 2, showing the gap between the original plaster on the opening, and the later applied plaster on the right, looking west.

a

b

Fig. 21. The entrance into Room 2, showing the original plaster (green) and the plaster that subsequently sealed the door (blue): (a) *in situ* plaster that fell off before the photograph was taken (purple), looking south; (b) the sediment marking the location of the door, looking west.

slingstone, were found just north of the opening, all facing southeast, indicating that they were shot from the gate passage into the chamber.

The floor of Room 1 (L164) was covered by a debris layer with a charred matrix, mud-brick fragments and pottery (L135; 0.2–0.8 m thick), overlain by a thin (0.2 m) brown accumulation layer containing pottery sherds (L131). This layer was covered by a brown accumulation layer mixed with plaster fragments and containing some restorable items (L112), in turn, overlain by the topsoil (L107).

Room 2 (1.25 × 2.80 m) was delimited by four walls, with a shallow niche (0.15 m deep) inset in W103 (Fig. 22); all the walls were plastered and covered with soot. The eastern part of the floor was paved with six flat stone slabs (L158), and the western part was plastered (L161; Fig. 23). A stone installation (L138), built integrally with W120 opposite the niche, was understood to be an altar (see below).

Plaster floor 161 was cut by a pit (L148; diam. c. 0.8 m), in which a large, rectangular stone object, identified as a toilet seat, was found lying on its side (Figs. 23–25). The understanding that Pit 148 was cut into Floor 161 rather than dating from an overlying later layer, is supported by several observations: (1) there was no trace of the pit in the homogeneous sediment layer above the floor (rechecked also in the photographs; see, for example, Fig. 24); (2) the regular, roughly rectangular contour of the top of the pit cut the floor without damaging the plaster on the adjacent walls; and (3) no later pottery or other finds indicate a later activity.

Fig. 22. Room 2, showing the niche in W103, before the floor was reached, looking west.

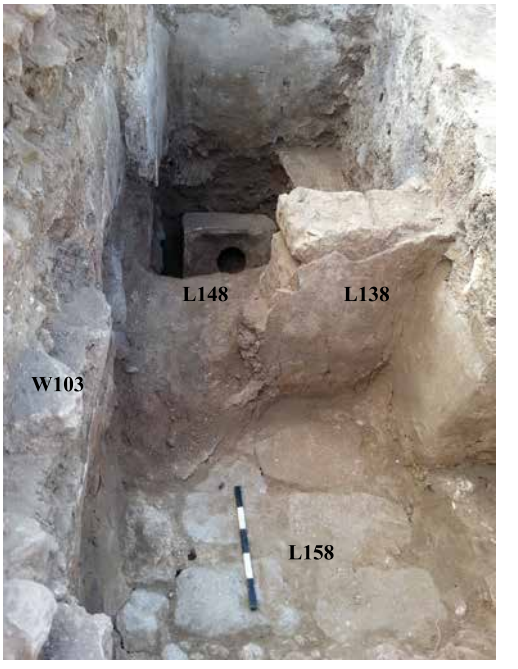


Fig. 23. Room 2, showing the stone pavement, the niche in W103, the altar, and the *in situ* toilet seat in the pit, looking west.

Fig. 24. Pit 148, showing the edge of the toilet seat, looking west.

Fig. 25. The toilet seat in Pit 148, looking west.

Room 2 contained many pottery vessels, mainly bowls and lamps. The floors (L158, L161) and Pit 148 were covered with debris layers (L151, L139; 0.5 m thick), containing many restorable vessels, some charred, overlain by another debris layer (L134; 0.8 m thick) with fewer, but also restorable, pottery vessels.

The Double Altar

The stone installation, built of partially hewn, soft limestones covered with plaster, was built integrally with W120 (Plan 2: Section 1–1; Fig. 26). The installation (L138; 0.65 × 0.37 m) stood to a height of 0.9 m. A high-quality plaster layer covered the altar together with the wall (see Fig. 23), and only careful examination revealed that it was not a monolith, but constructed of several stones. The upper stone was broken in two, probably in antiquity, and there was evidence of blows by a sharp object on the four corners of the southern half and on three corners of the northern half of the stone (Fig. 26:b, c). In the northwestern corner of the stone, the plaster continued higher forming a horn, and it probably originally continued higher in the other corners, forming seven additional horn-shaped corners on both stones. The entire installation was originally completely plastered; it is evident that at some point in time, the horns were broken off and a few blows were delivered to the installation, putting it out of use.

Based on the single preserved horn and the probable presence of other horns, it seems that the installation was an eight-horned double altar, or two adjoining altars. Whilst the double altar has no exact parallels, its features are not unique. Altars built adjoining walls are known from several sites (Gitin 1989; 2002). Pairs of altars adjacent to walls are known from Cult Corner 2081 in Megiddo Level VA (Loud 1948:45–46; Zevit 2001:220–225, Fig. 3.54) and at Tel Dan (Biran 1986:9). At Khirbat al-Mudayna in Jordan, three altars were found, two adjacent to the northwestern wall of the cult corner (Daviau and Steiner 2000:8, Figs. 2, 6).

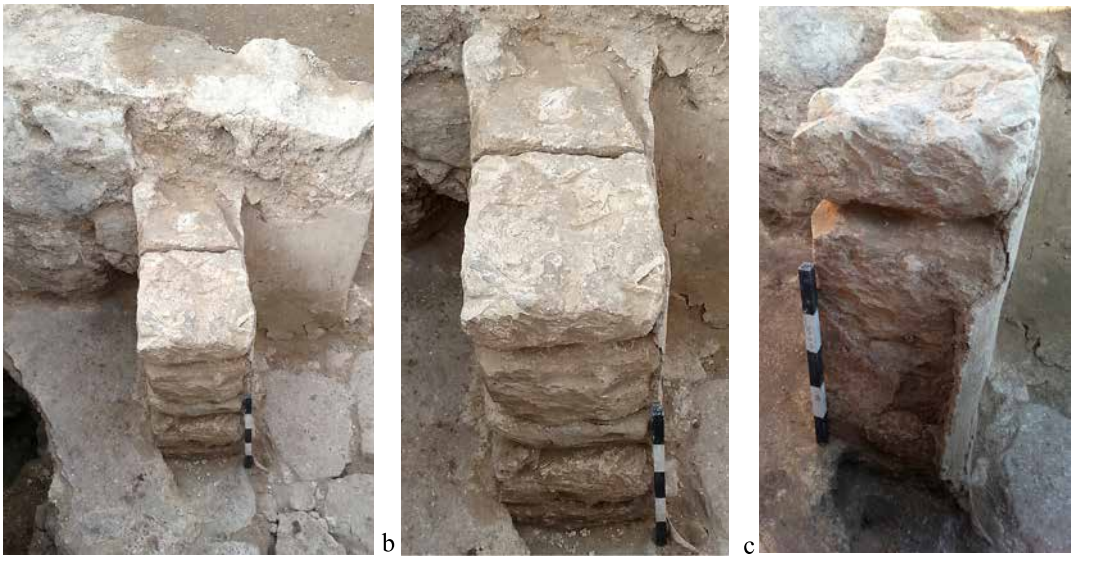


Fig. 26. The double altar (L138): (a) looking north; (b) close-up; (c) lines that resulted from a blow by a sharp object.

The twelfth-century BCE altar at Ashqelon was made of earth and covered with plaster and was integrated into the adjoining wall (Master and Aja 2011:136–140, Figs. 6–8).

There are examples of altars constructed from several stones, the best-known in Be'er Sheva' (Aharoni 1974). Possible horns of altars were found at Tel Dan and Megiddo (Biran 1982:24–25, Pl. 6:3; Lamon and Shipton 1939:29, Fig. 31b). Some altars were constructed of uncut or roughly cut stones, for example, the early phase of the main altar in the 'Arad temple *hekhal* (Herzog 2002:53–56, Fig. 23), and the altar in the temple courtyard at Tel Moẓa (Kisilevitz 2015:151, Fig. 3), with additional examples from Tel Dan and Khirbat 'Aṭārūs (Biran 1986:181–187, Fig. 11; Ji 2012). Plastered altars, such as the Ashqelon altar mentioned above, are also well-known. Remains of plaster, and possibly also of non-preserved plastered horns, were found in the late phase of the altar in the 'Arad temple *hekhal* (Herzog 2002:52–61; 2010:174–175). The small stone altars from 'Arad also exhibited the remains of plaster (Herzog 2010:174).

THE POTTERY

The pottery assemblage retrieved from the southern side of the gatehouse (Figs. 27–33) is characteristic of Lakhish Level III. The pottery includes bowls and kraters, asymmetric bowls (scoops), a cooking pot, storage jars, jugs, a juglet, stands and lamps. The pottery is presented typologically, with comparisons to similar vessels from the previous excavations at Lakhish, and from recently published sites in Judah. The pottery figures (Figs. 27–33) are arranged according to the different contexts: the gate passage (Figs. 27, 28), the western chamber (Fig. 29) and the two rooms of the eastern chamber (Figs. 30–33).

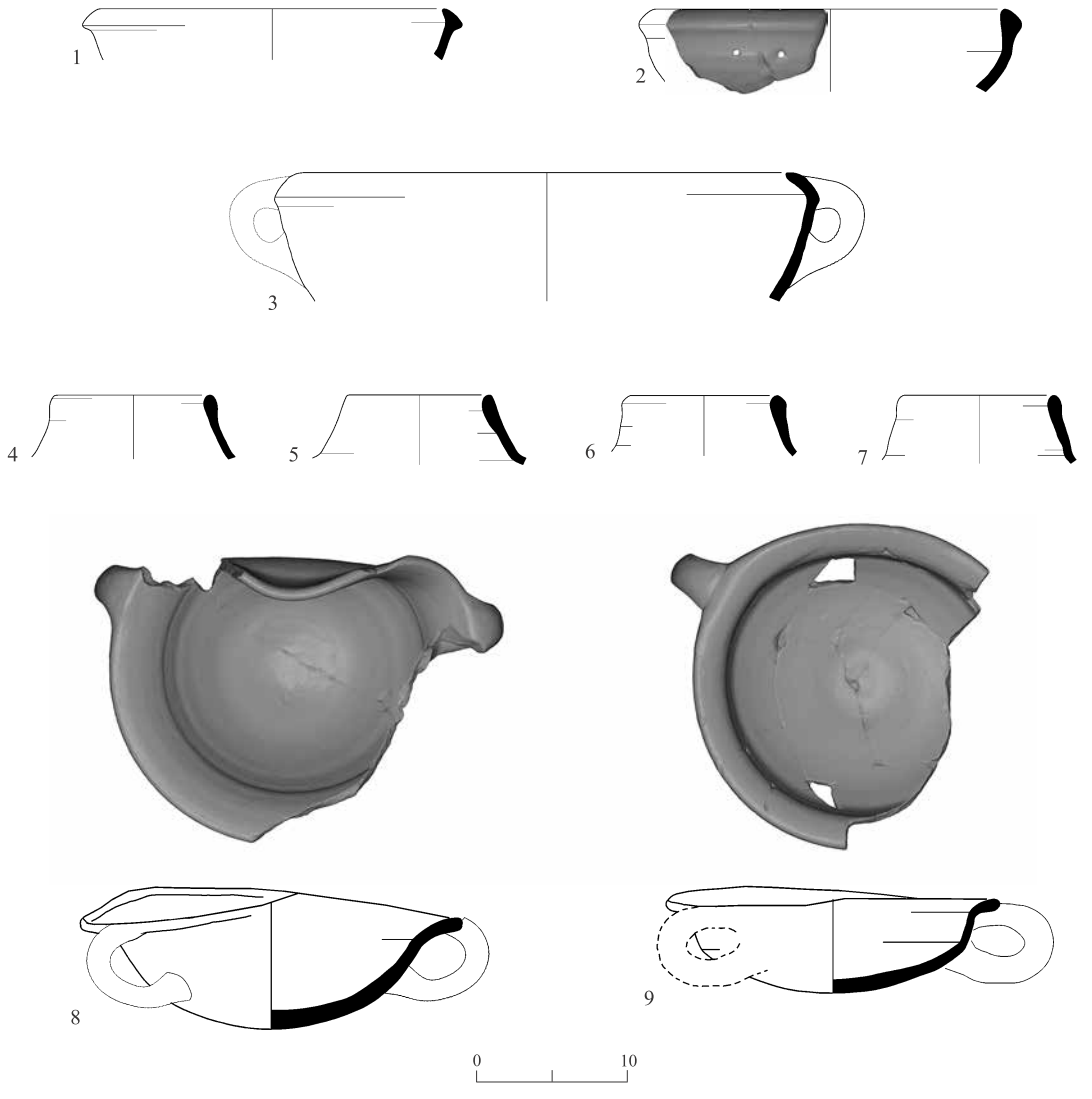


Fig. 27. Pottery from the gate passage.

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description
1	Bowl	157	1244/11	Brown, gray core, few white grits
2	Bowl	157	1244/03	Brown, gray core, few white grits, mending holes
3	Bowl	157	1251	Brown, gray core, many white middium and large grits
4	Jar	150	1213	Brown, gray core, many white grits
5	Jar	150	1213/02	Brown, gray core, white grits
6	Jar	157	1244/12	Brown, gray core, many white grits
7	Jar	146	1249/01	Brown, gray core, many white grits
8	Scoop	157	1241	Brown, gray core, few white grits
9	Scoop	146	1249	Light gray-green, gray core with few large white grits

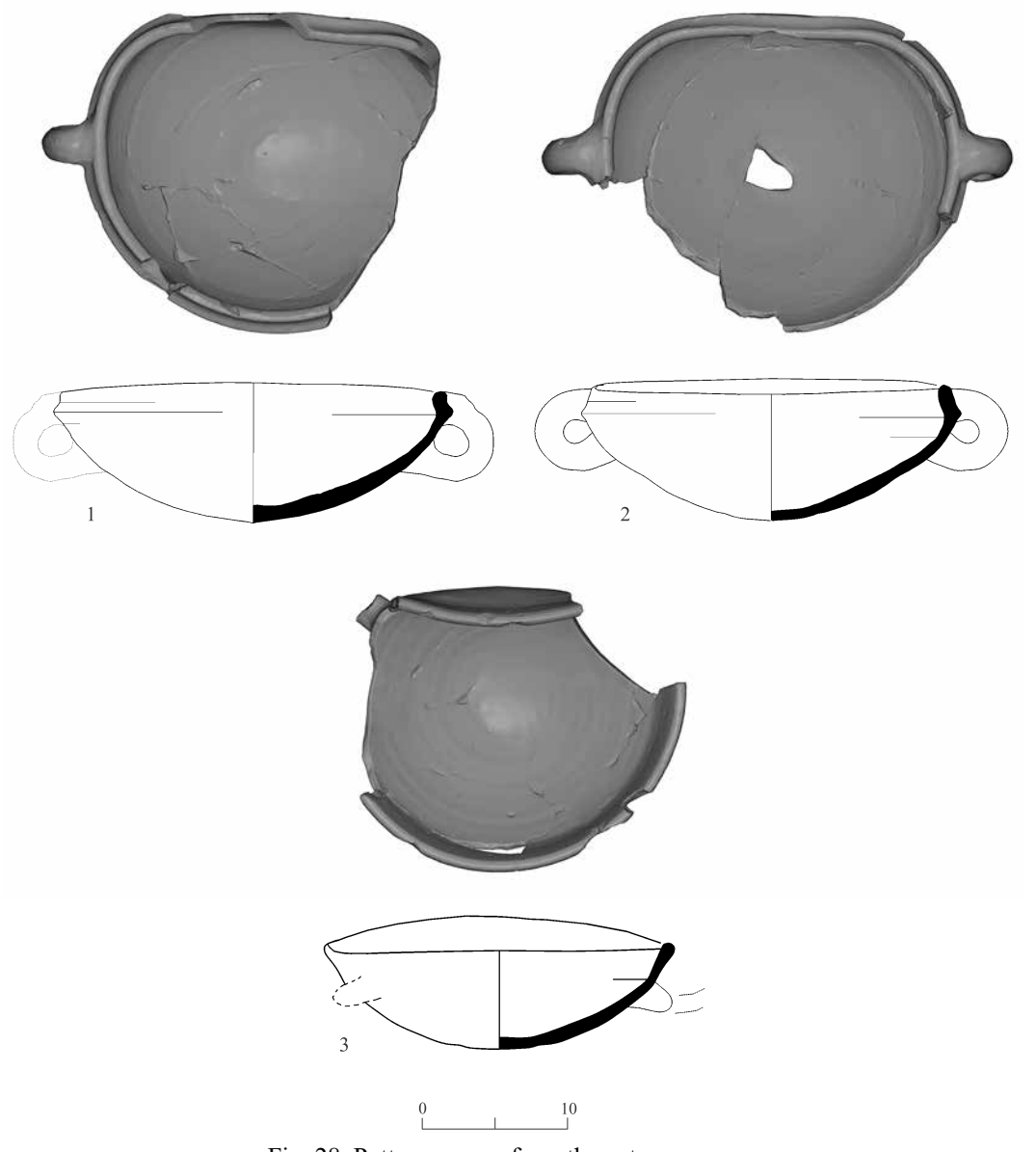


Fig. 28. Pottery scoops from the gate passage.

No.	Locus	Basket	Description
1	146	1247	Brown, gray core, few white grits
2	157	1244	Light brown, lighter brown core, few white grits
3	146	1239	Gray-brown, gray core, few medium and large white grits

Bowls

Most of the bowls classify as three main types. The first type are flat or shallow bowls with straight walls, a disc or flat base and a rounded or cut rim (Figs. 30:1–7; 31:1; 32:1–5). They appear in small quantities at Lakhish Level V and continue in Levels III and II (Zimhoni 2004a:1657–1658, Group V-IV: B-1; 2004b:1793, Group III: B-1). Parallels are

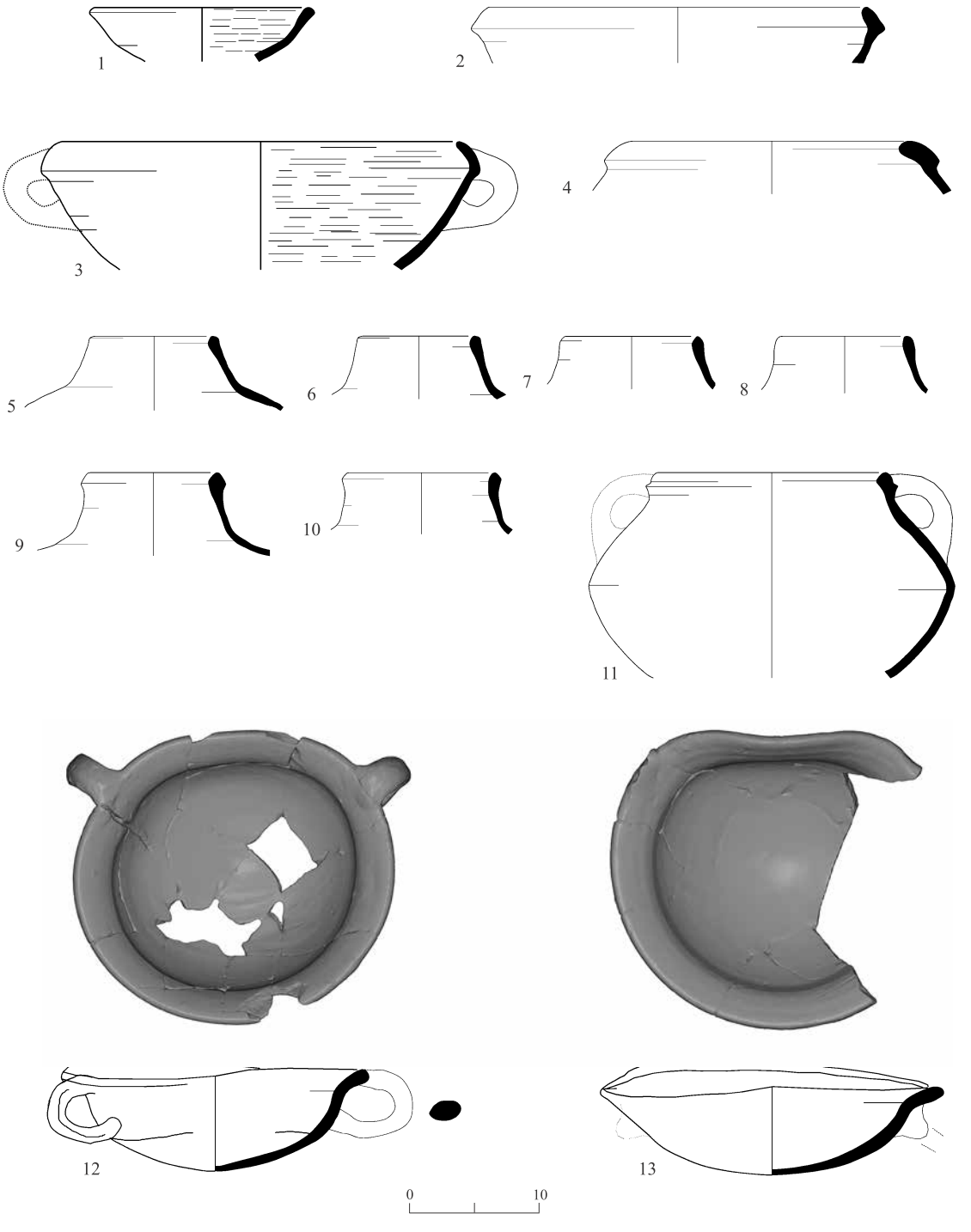


Fig. 29. Pottery from the western chamber.

◂ Fig. 29

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description
1	Bowl	140	1174/01	Wheel burnished
2	Bowl	132	1100/01	Brown, gray core, white grits
3	Bowl	140	1197/01	Brown, gray core, black and white grits
4	Jar	140	1174/02	Grayish brown, gray core, black and white grits
5	Jar	140	1185/01	Brown, brown core, black and white grits
6	Jar	140	1185/02	Brown, brown core, black and white grits
7	Jar	140	1204	Brown, gray core, white grits
8	Jar	140	1206	Grayish brown, gray core, white grits
9	Jar	140	1193/02	Grayish brown, gray core, large white grits
10	Jar	140	1189/01	Brown, gray core, white grits
11	Cooking Pot	125	1083	Reddish brown, reddish core, black and white medium grits
12	Scoop	149	1225	Orange brown, gray core, black grits
13	Scoop	140	1193	Light brown, light brown core, few large grits

Fig. 30 ▸

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description
1	Bowl	135	1132/05	Grayish brown, grayish brown core, few small white grits
2	Bowl	135	1159/02	Reddish brown, gray core, small and medium white grits
3	Bowl	135	1132/04	Reddish brown, gray core, small and medium white grits
4	Bowl	135	1132/02	Light brown, grayish brown core, few black grits
5	Bowl	135	1159	Reddish brown color, light brown core, medium gray grits
6	Bowl	135	1146/04	Brown, dark gray core, white grits
7	Bowl	135	1146/05	Orange, light brown core, few white grits
8	Bowl	135	1146	Reddish brown, gray core, white grits
9	Bowl	135	1151/04	Brown, grayish brown core, gray and brown grits
10	Bowl	135	1146/02	Light brown, grayish brown core, white grits
11	Bowl	135	1149	Gray, medium and small gray and white grits
12	Bowl	135	1151	Brown, light brown core, gray grits
13	Jar	135	1132	Light brown, light brown core, black grits
14	Jar	135	1146/01	Brown, coarse gray clay, gray-and-white grits
15	Lamp	135	1150	Brown, gray core
16	Lamp	112	1091	Yellow-green, light brown core, few grits
17	Stand	135	1151/01	Red slip, light brown core, many medium gray grits

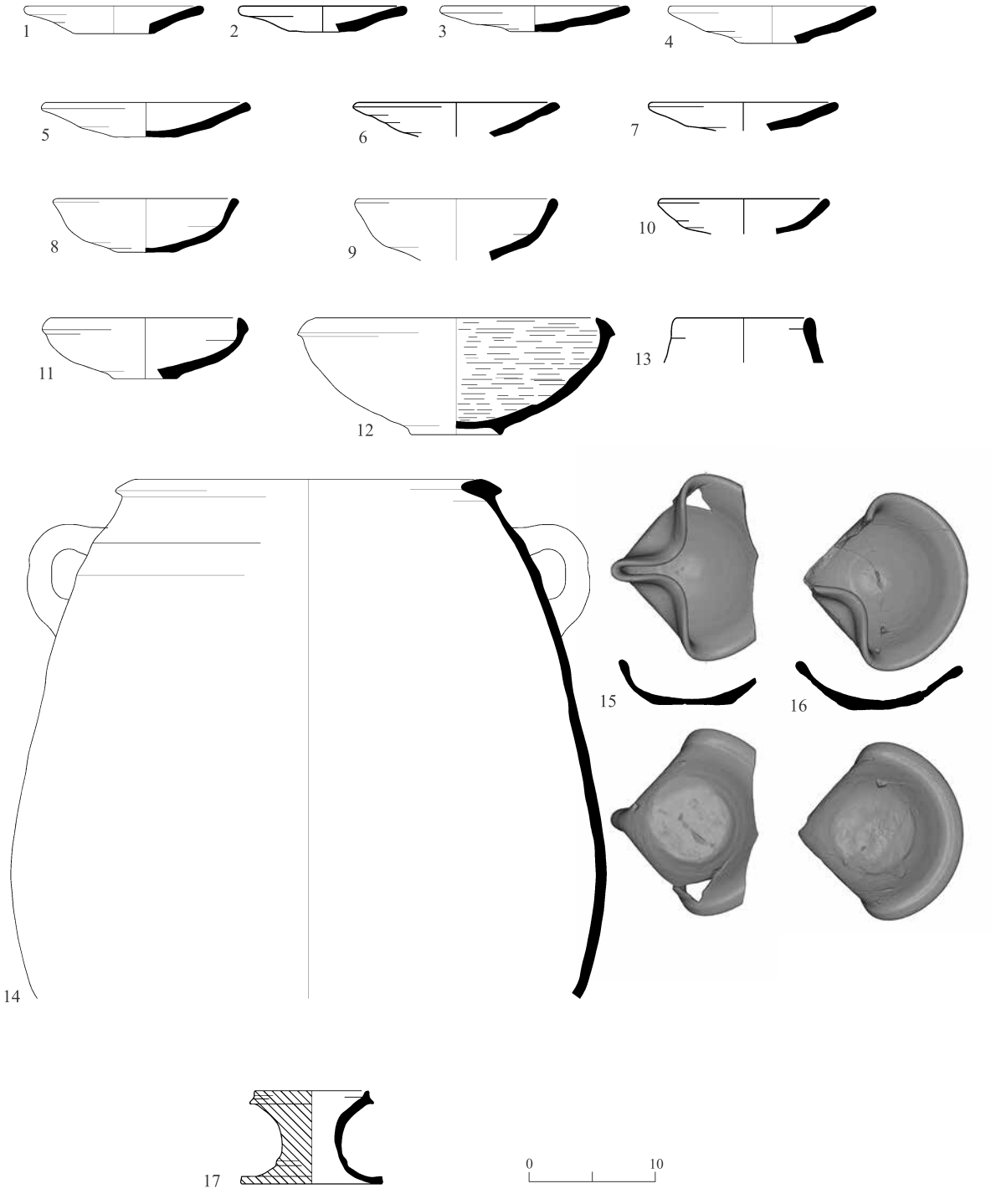


Fig. 30. Pottery from Room 1 in the eastern chamber.

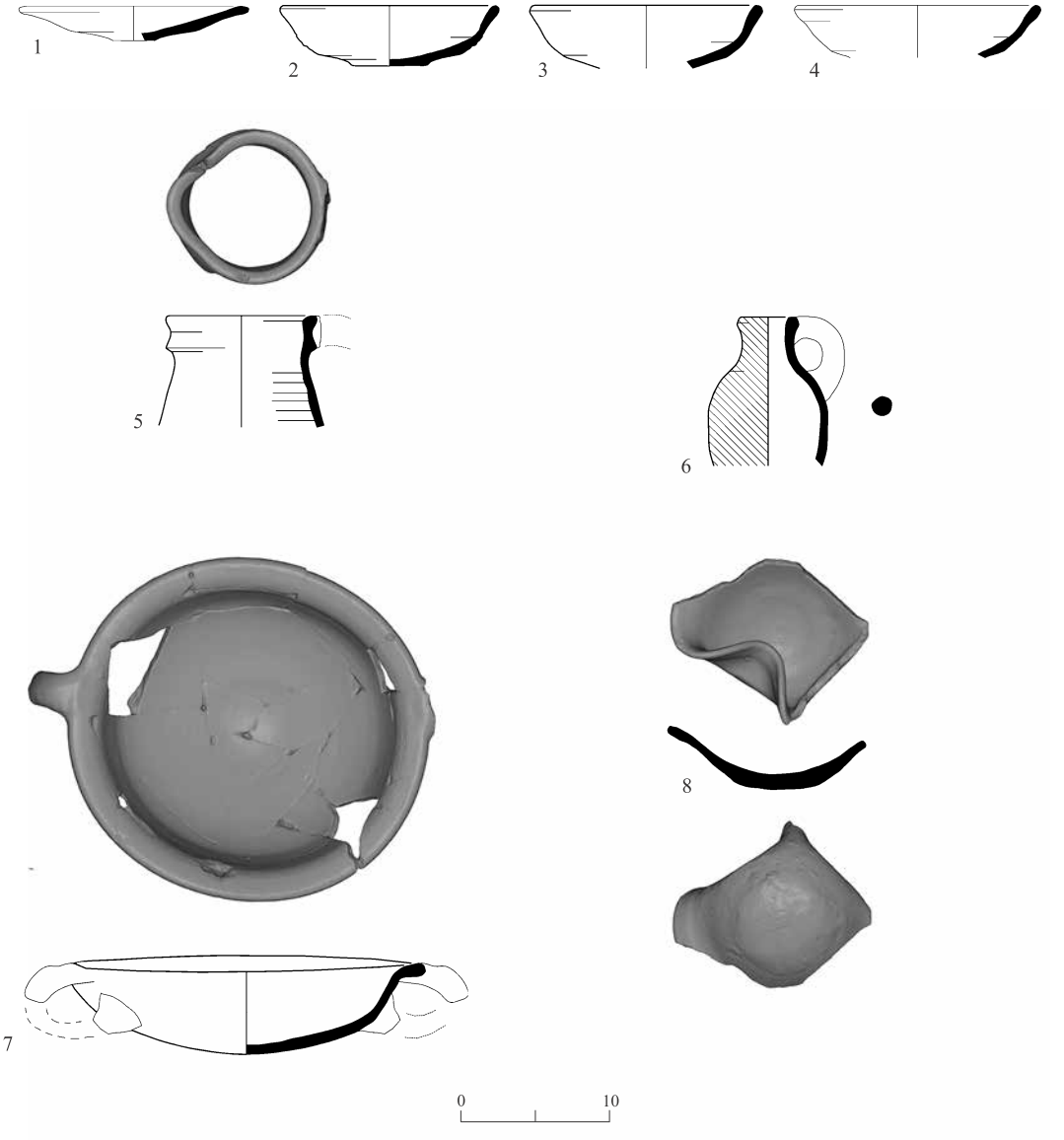


Fig. 31. Pottery from the upper collapse layer (L134) in Room 2 in the eastern chamber.

No.	Type	Basket	Description
1	Bowl	1167/02	Brown, gray core, many white grits
2	Bowl	1164/01	Brown, gray core, few white grits
3	Bowl	1164	Brown, brown section, black grits
4	Bowl	1167/06	Gray, gray core, few white grits
5	Jug	1167/01	Light brown, orange clay, white grits
6	Juglet	1290	Red slip, light brown core, many medium gray grits
7	Scoop	1167	Light brown, few large white grits; parts of the vessel were found in L135 (Room 1)
8	Lamp	1131	Orange brown, orange brown core, few black grits

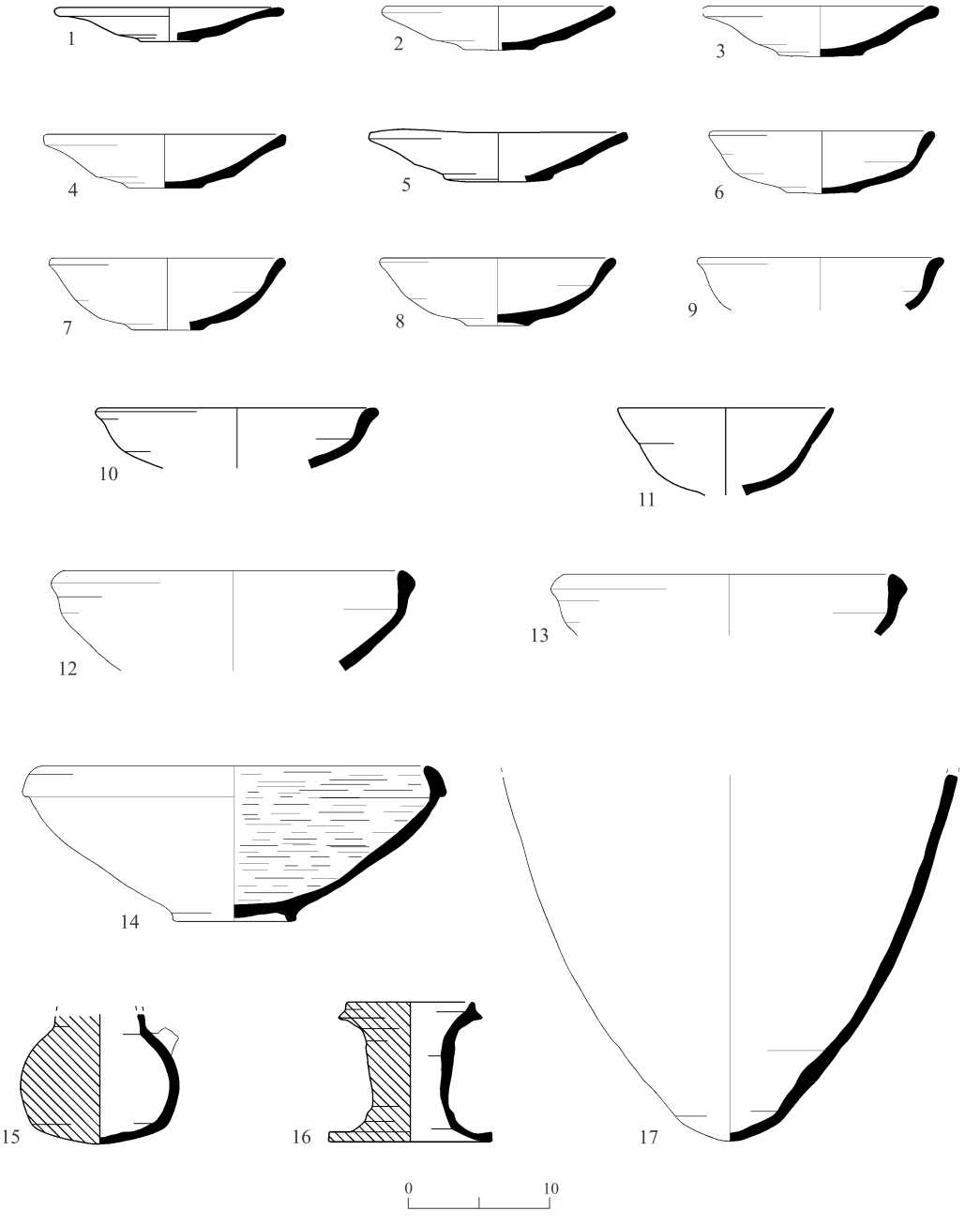


Fig. 32. Pottery on the floor (L139, L151) of Room 2 in the eastern chamber.

◂ **Fig. 32**

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description
1	Bowl	139	1184/03	Gray, medium and small gray and white grits
2	Bowl	139	1190	Reddish brown, light brown core, medium gray grits
3	Bowl	139	1198/07	Gray, small and medium white grits
4	Bowl	139	1196	Brown gray core, large white grits
5	Bowl	139	1184/04-2	Brown, gray core, white grits
6	Bowl	139	1173	Brown, gray core, black grits
7	Bowl	139	1169/06	Gray, small white grits
8	Bowl	139	1192	Light gray, white grits
9	Bowl	139	1169/04	Brown, gray core, few white grits
10	Bowl	139	1184	Brown, grayish brown core, few white and gray grits
11	Bowl	139	1184/07	Gray, gray grits
12	Bowl	139	1169	Brown, grayish core
13	Bowl	139	1184/02	Brown, gray core, large gray and some white grits
14	Bowl	139	1182	Brown, gray core, white grits
15	Juglet	139	1188	Red slip, light brown core, many medium gray grits
16	Stand	151	1219	Red slip, light brown core, many medium gray grits
17	Jar	139	1198	Light brown, light brown core, black grits

found at Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016:12.34, Type BL flt, 12.36); Tel Baṭash Strata III–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:49–50, Pls. 14:2, 60:5, Type BL 15); City of David Strata 12–10 (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:60–61, Types B6a, B6b); Ramat Raḥel (Freud 2016: Table 16.1, Types B2.1, B2.2); ‘Arad Strata X–VI (Singer-Avitz 2002: Table 2: Types B 1, B 3, B 4); Be’er Sheva‘ Stratum II, but not Stratum III (Singer-Avitz 2016:586, Graph 12.2, Type B–3); and Tel Malḥata Strata IV–III (Freud 2015:164, Type B1).

The second type are fairly shallow bowls, with a mid-wall carination, a disc or ring base and a plain or slightly thickened rim (Figs. 29:1; 30:8–10; 31:2–4; 32:6–10). These bowls first appear in Lakhish Level IV and continue in Level III (Zimhoni 2004a:1666, Group V-IV: B-15; 2004b:1793, Figs. 26.3:8, 9, Group III: B-4). Parallels come from Tel Baṭash Strata IV–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:44–45, Type BL 24); ‘Arad Strata X–VII (Singer-Avitz 2002: Table 2: Type B11); Be’er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:589, Type B–11); and Tel Malḥata (Freud 2015: Fig. 4.62:1).

The third type are bowls with folded rims, thick walls and ring bases (Figs. 27:1, 2; 29:2; 30:11, 12; 32:12–14), the large, nearly complete bowls being rounded without a carination and wheel-burnished (Figs. 30:12; 32:14). Similar bowls are known from Lakhish Levels

III–II (Zimhoni 2004b:1793–1794, Figs. 26.3:16–21, Group III:B-2, B-3). Parallels for this bowl-type include Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 12.34, Type BL thick-rim); Tel Baṭash Strata IV–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:39–40, Type BL 13); City of David Area E, Strata 13–10 (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:62–65, Type B8b); ʻArad Strata X–VII (Singer-Avitz 2002: Table 2:Type B 24); and Be'er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:590, Graph 12.2, Type B–15).

There were a couple of large kraters with folded rims (Figs. 27:3; 29:3); the complete kraters usually have four handles and a ring base. Such kraters are known from Lakhish (Zimhoni 2004b: Figs. 26.20:10; 26.24:2; 26.29:23; 26.31:4). Similar vessels come from the City of David, Area E (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012b:62–64, Type B8a) and Be'er Sheva‘ III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:597–599, Type B–36).

A thin delicate, small deep bowl with a low carination was found (Fig. 32:11), similar bowls coming from Lakhish Level III (Zimhoni 2004b: Fig. 26.3:1, 3). This vessel has parallels in Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 12.34, Type BL thn-evrt); Tel Baṭash Strata III–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:47–48, Type BL 46); City of David, Area E, Strata 12–11 (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:61–62, Type B7); and Be'er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:591, Type B–17).

Asymmetrical Bowls or Scoops

These large bowl-like vessels have rounded or flattened bases, and two loop handles extending from the rim to the base; one wall is pushed inward, creating an asymmetrical form, and the handles are attached on either side of the indention (Figs. 27:8, 9; 28:1–3; 29:12, 13; 31:7). Nine complete vessels and 36 fragments were found. Zimhoni (2004b) and Ussishkin (2004d) identified three subtypes, all of which were found in the excavation. Type B-7a has an extended or sharply everted rim (Figs. 27:8, 9; 29:12, 13; 31:7), Type B-7b has a ridged rim (Fig. 29:1, 2), and Type B-7c is characterized by a simple rim and straightish walls (Fig. 29:3).

These scoops are well-known from Iron IIB layers at other sites, such as Tel Baṭash Strata III–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:50–51, Type BL 18) and Be'er Sheva‘ Stratum II (Singer-Avitz 2016: Type B–35), where they were usually found in administrative contexts (Gitin 1993). During the Late Bronze Age, scoops were commonly found in portal areas, where it has been proposed that they were used for libation (Zuckerman 2007).

Cooking Pot

A single cooking pot (Fig. 29:11) was found in the debris of the western chamber. It has a carinated body, almost no neck and a wide mouth with a thickened rim and a shallow groove below the rim. This cooking pot type is known from Lakhish Level III (Zimhoni 2004b: Figs. 26.21:9; 26.30:1; 26.38:3, Group III: CP-2). Similar cooking pots were found at Tel Baṭash Strata IV and III (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:83–84, Type CP 7), City of David Area E, Stratum 12 (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:67, Type CP6) and Be'er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:606–608, Type CP–3).

Storage Jars

Four restorable storage jars and several sherds of the *lmlk*-type jars were found (Figs. 27:4–7; 29:7–10). The jars are characterized by a thickened rim, a straight or inward-leaning neck, a rounded shoulder and an oval body, and a rounded base; four handles are attached beneath the shoulder. The fabric is brown, sometimes described as reddish brown, with a gray core and many white grits. Dozens of similar jars were found in previous excavations at the site (Tufnell 1953:315–316; Zimhoni 2004b:1794–1795, Group III: SJ-1). These jars are characteristic of destruction layers of the late eighth century BCE, and they are known from other sites, e.g., Tel Baṭash Strata III–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:93–96, Type SJ 8), Gezer (Gitin 1990:122–124) and Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 12.34, Type SJ lmlk). However, at several sites, including Be'er Sheva' Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:612–614, Type SJ–3), no, or only a few jars of this group were stamped with *lmlk* seal impressions.

Several rims of "*lmlk*-like" storage jars (Figs. 29:5, 6; 30:13), and possibly a storage jar base (Fig. 32:17), were found. The jars, having an inward-sloping neck, a plain slightly thickened rim and a light brown fabric with gray grits, are not classified as royal *lmlk* jars (Zimhoni's Group III: SJ-1), but seem best to correspond to Zimhoni's "*lmlk*-like" storage jars (Group III: SJ-2; Zimhoni 2004b:1794–1796). These jars were identified in Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 12.34, Type SJ *lmlk*-like); Tel Baṭash Strata III–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:93–96, Type SJ 8); 'Arad Strata X–VIII (Singer-Avitz 2002: Table 2: Type SJ 11); and Be'er Sheva' Stratum II (Singer-Avitz 2016: 614, Type SJ–4).

One nearly complete holemouth storage jar (Fig. 30:14) and another fragment (Fig. 29:4) were found. This vessel has a thickened rounded rim, a wide body, four handles and two ridges near the handles. Similar vessels were published from Lakhish Level III (Zimhoni 2004b:1797, Group III:SJ-4), and they were also found at Tel 'Eṭon (Katz and Faust 2012: Fig. 10:2) and Be'er Sheva' (Singer-Avitz 2016:619, Type SJ–12).

In addition, a single sherd of a neck-less storage jar was found (not illustrated). This type was discussed by Zimhoni (2004b:1797–1799; Group III: SJ-5).

Jug

The upper part of a jug had a wide neck with a ridge, a trefoil rim and a handle attached from the rim (Fig. 31:5). Similar jugs are known from Iron IIB–C contexts, with examples in the City of David Area E, where they appear infrequently in Stratum 11 and become common in Stratum 10 (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:78–79, Fig. 4.23:1, Type J3b), in 'Arad Strata X–VII (Singer-Avitz 2002: Table 2: Type J 2) and Be'er Sheva' Stratum II (Singer-Avitz 2016:625, Figs. 12.16:10; 12.65:12, Type J–3). The lower part of a red-slipped jug with a rounded base was also found (Fig. 32:15). Similar jugs are very common in Iron IIB contexts, for example at Lakhish (Zimhoni 2004b: Figs. 26.4:10; 13:1; 23:4); Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 12.34, Type JG rnd); City of David Area

E, Strata 12B–11 (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:79–80, Fig. 4.4:14, Type J4); ‘Arad Strata X–VIII (Singer-Avitz 2002: Table 2: Type J 1); and Be’er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:630–632, Type J-17).

Juglet

A single dipper juglet with a cylindrical body and a handle from the rim to the shoulder was found (Fig. 31:6). Such juglets continue the Iron IIA tradition, and are found at Lakhish Level III (Zimhoni 2004b: Fig. 26.21:5); Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 12.34, Type JT clndr); Tel Baṭash Strata IV–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:124–127, Type JT 7); City of David Area E, Stratum 13 (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:71, Type Jt1a); and Be’er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016: 633–634, Type JD-1).

Stands

Two small stands feature thin walls and rims with a triangular section and an outer ridge (Figs. 30:17; 32:16). Similar stands were uncovered in Lakhish Levels III–II (Tufnell 1953:108, 123, 220, Pls. 77:31, 90:396, 397; Zimhoni 2004b: Figs. 26.20:11; 26.43:10) and Tell Beit Mirsim (Albright 1932: Pl. 71:9). Fairly similar stands were found at ‘Arad in Strata IX and VI (Singer-Avitz 2002: Figs. 33:6; 47:13).

Lamps

All the lamps are shallow with broad rims, and they have two different bases. Some lamps have a thickened base (Figs. 31:8; 33:1–5), characteristic of the eighth century BCE. Similar lamps are well-known from Lakhish (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 83:151; Zimhoni 2004b:1794, Fig. 26.5:6–8); Bet Shemesh Level 2 (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2016: Fig. 12.34, Type LP I-dsk); Tel Baṭash Strata III–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:134, Type LP 3a); City of David Area E (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012: 92, Type L2); ‘Arad Strata X–VIII (Singer-Avitz 2002: Table 2: Type L 1); and Be’er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:642, Type L–2).

The other lamps have a flat (Figs. 30:15, 16; 33:6) or rounded (Fig. 33:7, 8) base. This lamp type appears in Iron IIA and has parallels in Iron IIB contexts in Lakhish Level III (Zimhoni 2004b: Figs. 26.21:12, 13; 27:15; 34:8; 34: 6, 8); Tel ‘Eṭon (Katz and Faust 2012:38, Fig. 12:9, Type Lamp 2); Tel Baṭash Strata III–II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001:134–135, Type LP 4); City of David Area E, Stratum 12B, but not in the later phases (Ariel and De Groot 2000: Fig. 19:18; De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:90–92, Fig. 4.9:1, Type L1); Be’er Sheva‘ Strata III–II (Singer-Avitz 2016:642, Pl. 12.20, Type L–1); and Tel Malḥata Strata IV–IIIB, but not in Stratum IIIA (Freud 2015:228–229, Types L1, L4).

Most of the vessels in this assemblage have parallels in Lakhish Level III, and all the vessel forms are known from Iron IIB strata in Judah. Thus, a date toward the end of the eighth century BCE seems probable, also fitting the stratigraphic context of the finds.

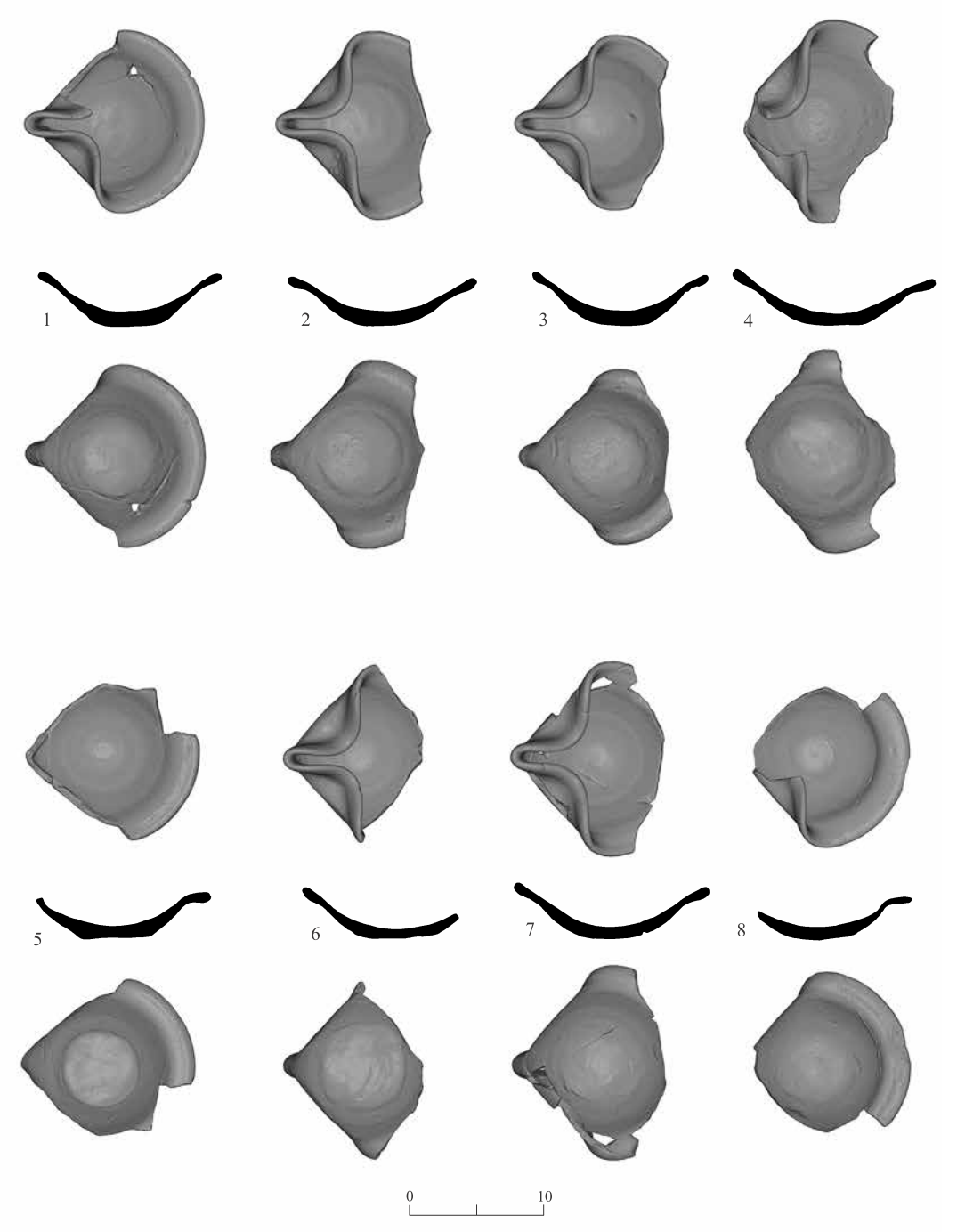


Fig. 33. Lamps on the floor (L139) of Room 2 in the eastern chamber.

No.	Basket	Description
1	1177	Brown color and clay, many white grits
2	1187	Brown color, gray clay
3	1170	Brown color, light brown clay
4	1171	Yellowish-brown color, gray grits
5	1179/02	
6	1188	Brown color, gray core, many medium gray-and-white grits
7	1191	Orange color and clay, gray grits
8	1184/01	Orange color, yellowish core, gray grits

Other Finds

Stamped Jar Handles (Fig. 34)

Four stamped jar handles were found, three of them with *lmlk* seal impressions. Two of the *lmlk* stamps bear a two-winged impression with the *lmlk* icon at the top, and the name *ḥbrn* (undivided) at the bottom (Fig. 34:1, 2). These impressions classify as Type H IIa (Lemaire 1981). One stamp is of the four-winged type, but the city name was not preserved (Fig. 34:3). Based on the carefully executed letters of the *lmlk* icon, the seal should probably be attributed to Type H Ib (Lemaire 1981). It should be noted that since both H IIa and H Ib impressions (particularly H Ib and S Ib) were found sealed under the Level III destruction debris in previous excavations at Lakhish (Barkay and Vaugh 1996), our findings have no bearing on the recent debate on the chronology of the *lmlk* royal storage jars (Lipschits, Sergi and Koch 2010; Ussishkin 2011).

In addition, we uncovered a private square seal impression with a border, two registers and a line divider, bearing the inscription *lnḥm/ʿbdi* (לנחם/עבדי), "belonging to Naḥum (son of) ʿAbdi" (Fig. 34:4). A total of 13 such stamps were previously found at Lakhish (Tufnell 1953:341, Pl. 47A:10,11; Barkay and Vaughn 1996:69). Two similar impressions are known from Tel Goded (Bliss 1900:220, Pl. VII:3) and Naḥal ʿArugot cave, near ʿEn Gedi (Hadas 1983).

Arrowheads (Fig. 35)

Nine iron arrowheads were retrieved: five in the gate passage near the entrance into the western chamber (L150) and four in Room 1, in the eastern chamber (L135); the seven better preserved ones are illustrated. Following the extensive discussion and typology of

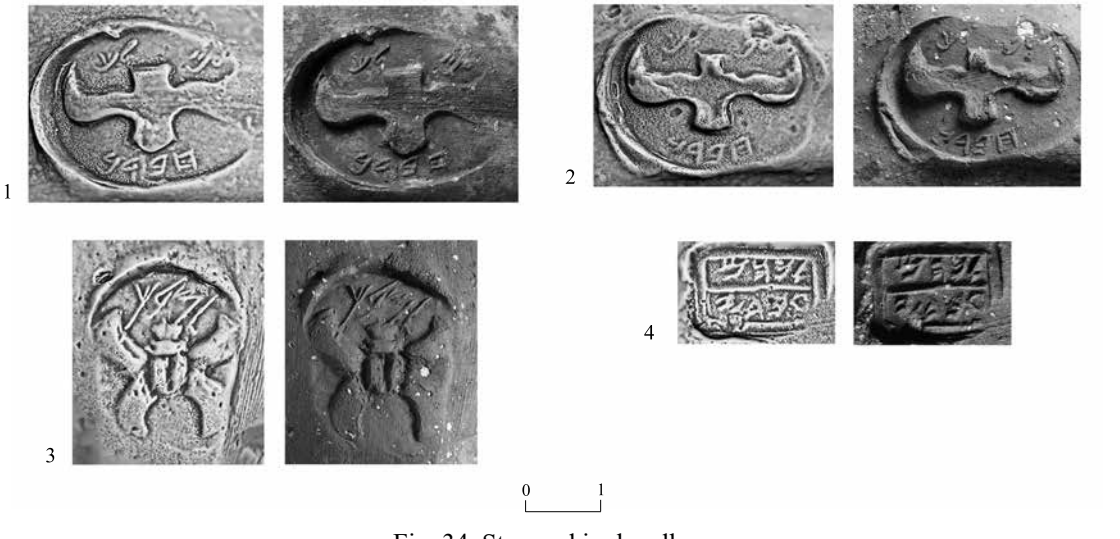


Fig. 34. Stamped jar handles.

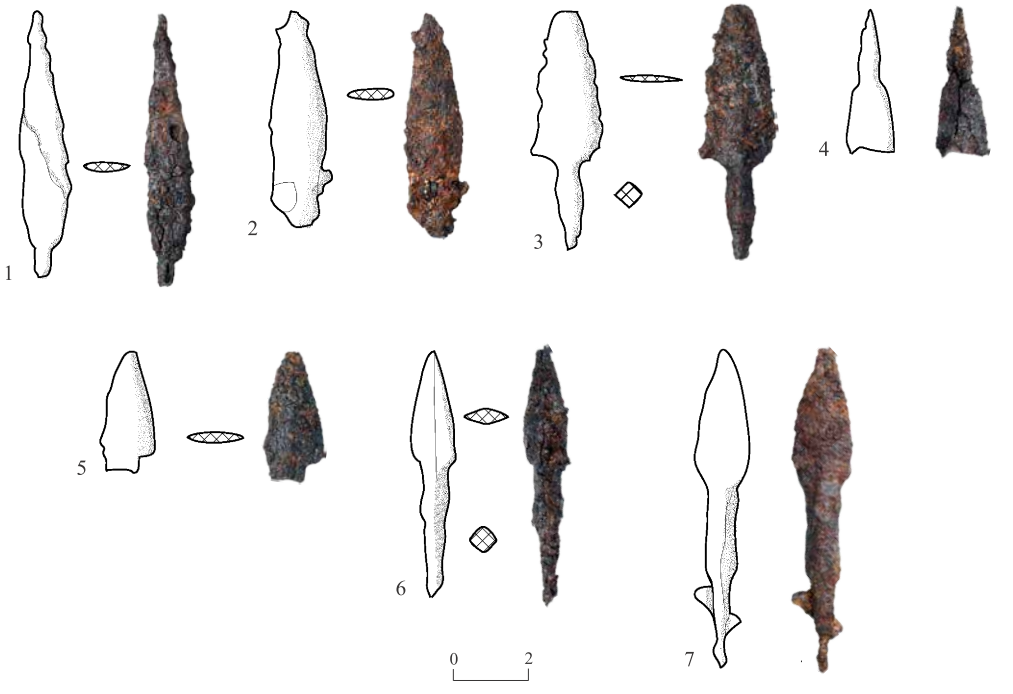


Fig. 35. Arrowheads.

all the arrowheads from Starkey's and Ussishkin's excavations (Gottlieb 2004), some are plain leaf-shaped arrowheads (Fig. 35:1–5; Gottlieb's Type I), while others have a central rib (Fig. 35:6, 7; Gottlieb's Type III).

Toilet Seat (Figs. 36, 37)

A cuboid-shaped stone was found lying on its side in Pit 148 in Room 2 in the eastern chamber (Plan 1: Section 3–3; see Figs. 23–25). The finely carved stone (B1222; 0.50 × 0.56 m, 0.39 m high) has a raised border (1 cm wide) around three margins of its upper face, and a depression in the center with a keyhole-shaped opening (circle diam. 18 cm, channel 7 × 19 cm). The upper part of the stone was clearly better worked than the lower part. On one side of the lower part, there were diagonal incisions, possibly to apply plaster, indicating that the bottom of the stone may have been plastered and attached to the floor.

The perforated cuboid stone has good parallels as Iron Age toilet seats or latrines, dating from the eighth to early sixth centuries BCE, for example in the City of David in Jerusalem (De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012:347–352, Fig. 10.3; see also Ganor and Kreimerman 2019:220–221).

It is probable that the toilet seat collapsed into the 0.5 m deep pit when the floor collapsed. Below the toilet seat, there was an 0.7 m deep layer of accumulated sediment, overlying some stones, suggesting that the pit may possibly have been a cesspit. A few

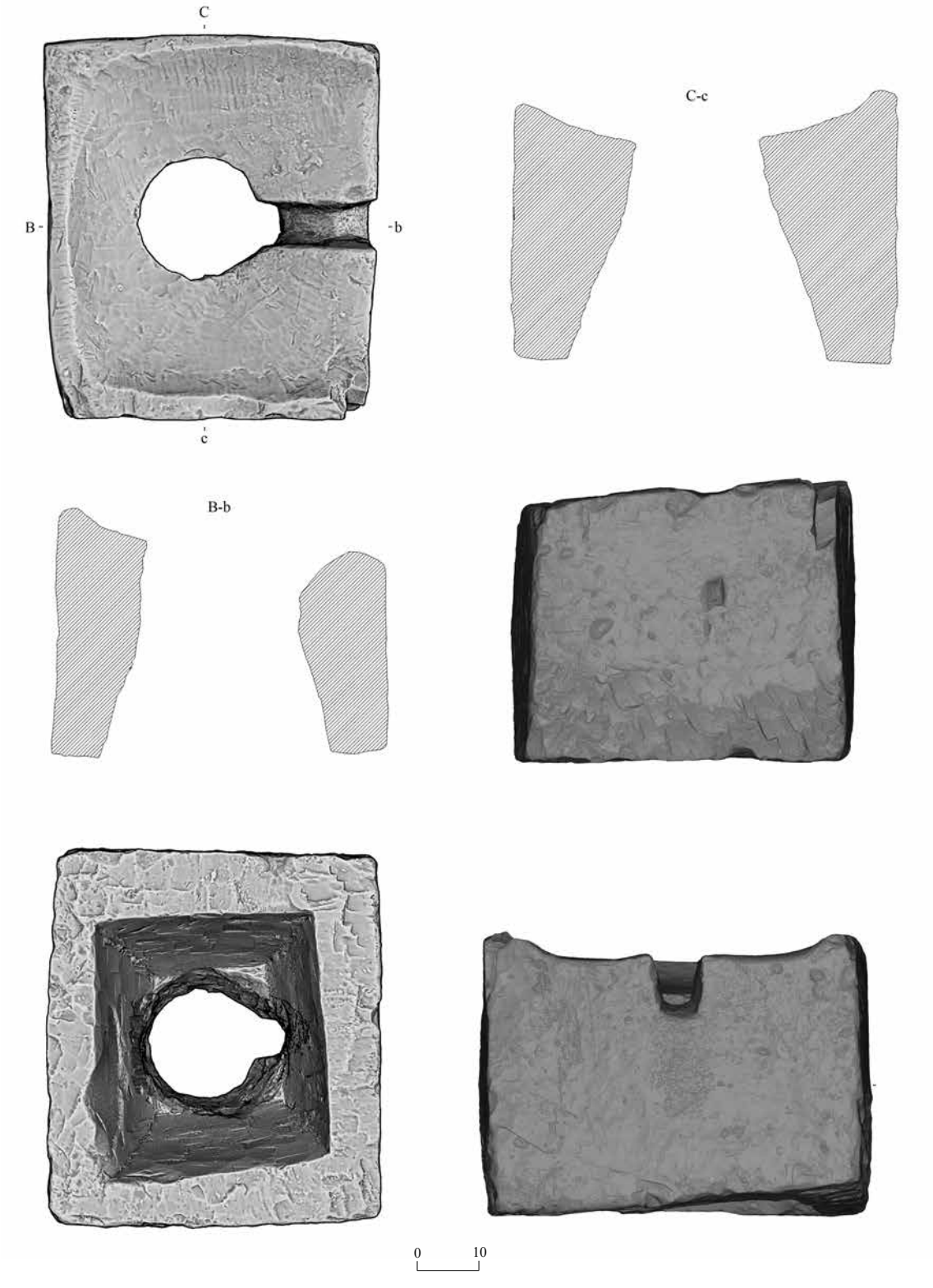


Fig. 36. Toilet seat (B1222).

0 10

Fig. 37. Toilet seat (B1222).

sediment samples were collected from various depths below the toilet seat, and comparative samples were collected from below the plastered floor (L161) outside the pit. Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) tests, conducted in the Laboratory for Sedimentary Archaeology at the University of Haifa (headed by Ruth Shahack-Gross), showed that the sediment directly below the toilet seat, and the reference sediment outside the installation, were composed of calcite, clay and quartz. Notably, the infrared spectrum of the sediment on which the stone object lay did not indicate the presence of mineral phosphate compounds (see detailed discussion in Ganor and Kreimerman 2019:223). Since fecal matter is known to be rich in phosphates (Langgut et al. 2016:380–382), and no phosphate was found in any of the samples, it seems that the sediment below the stone object did not contain fecal remains (see *Discussion*, below).

Large Perforated Stone

A large, perforated stone (B1044; not illustrated) was found in a debris layer in the western chamber (L118). Since this layer was relatively close to topsoil, and it included mixed pottery, it seems that the stone was in a secondary context. The stone (0.55 × 0.40 × 0.18 m) had a flat top and straightish sides, and it was perforated with a round hole (diam. c. 0.1 m). The stone was cut in half vertically, thus the original stone was about twice as thick. Similar stones were found in previous excavations in the gate area and at the foot of the city walls (Ussishkin 2004b; 2004c:734–736). Ussishkin suggested that these stones were lowered from the top of the walls using ropes, probably to damage the Assyrian siege machinery.

Slingstones

Two rounded stones were found during the excavations (not illustrated). One is a standard limestone spheroid without marks of wear (L122, B1036/1; diam. c. 5.5 cm), found in a secondary context. The other one, also made of limestone, is slightly elongated (L135, B1156/1; c. 9 cm long, 8 cm wide, 8 cm thick), and it was found at the entrance to Room 2 in the eastern chamber next to the four arrowheads. The absence of wear marks indicates that it was not a tool, and the rather rounded shape indicates that it was not a masonry stone; although too large to be used in a sling, it could have been used for throwing at the enemy.

Slingstones were retrieved in previous excavations at the site; their identification, however, is difficult, as pounding stones and other stone objects were often reused as sling bullets (Sass and Ussishkin 2004:1974–1981).

Discussion

Architectural Observations

The excavation contributed to our understanding of the gatehouse area at Lakhish and of Iron Age gates in general. Whilst the overall plan of the gate—six chambers delimited by four pairs of piers—was known from Starkey's and Ussishkin's excavations, new details came to light in the current excavation. Thanks to the better preservation of the southern side of the gate, it is now clear that the lower foundation courses were built of stones and the upper superstructure was of mud bricks, and that the walls were plastered by fine, white lime plaster. It is probable that the northern side of the gate was coated with similar plaster.

The southern chambers, as the northern chambers, were c. 2.5 m wide. The entrances into the southern chambers were 0.8–0.9 m wide, as they were bordered on both sides by small walls. In the northern side of the gate, a thin wall was only identified at the entrance to the eastern chamber (Ussishkin 2004a:640). Similar walls are known from Tel Kinrot Stratum II (Fritz 1993: Fig. 6; Münger, Zangenberg and Pakkala 2011: Fig. 7), Tel Dan (Biran 1994:236, Fig. 194) and the 'Ofel in Jerusalem (Mazar and Mazar 1989:37, Pl. 26).[5] This feature is common at sites in Jordan (Frese 2020:32), for example at Khirbat al-Mudayna (Chadwick, Daviau and Steiner 2000:258–260, Fig. 2), Tell Jawa (Daviau 2003: Fig. 9.2) and Khirbat en-Naḥas (Levy et al. 2014: Figs. 2.6, 2.7).

Benches, similar to those found in the western chamber, were also found at Gezer, where they were arranged along the walls of all the chambers (Holladay 1990), at Tell en-Nasbeh (Mizpa; Zorn 1993:493, P 952), where there were probably benches in the eastern chamber of the outer gate, and at Be'er Sheva', where thin benches were found in some of the chambers (Herzog 2016:206–229).[6] Benches alongside the gate passage, as found at

[5] If the structure is a gate (see Sharon and Zarzecki-Peleg 2006:158–159 for reservations).

[6] For other sites, see Frese 2020:31, n. 28.

Lakhish, are less common, and are known from Khirbat al-Mudayna (Chadwick et al. 2000; Daviau et al. 2012:271–274) and Khirbat en-Naḥas (Levy et al. 2014:111–112).

The Function of the Gate Chambers

The function of the western chamber may be deduced from the presence of the wide plastered benches with armrests. While the narrow, small-fieldstone benches along the gate passage were probably intended for all passing through the gate, the benches in the chamber were reserved for privileged individuals. The function of the city gate as a place where the elders sat and where judicial procedures took place, is well-known from biblical and other sources (Deuteronomy 16:18; 17:8; 21:19–21; 25:7; Joshua 20:4; Amos 5:15; Zechariah 8:16; Bovati 1994; Blomquist 1999; Frese 2020:141–159; May 2014). The Bible moreover records a meeting between the kings of Israel and Judah at the gates of Samaria (1 Kings 22:10). The western chamber could well suit these functions. The presence of several *lmlk* storage jars and scoops, traditionally associated with administrative functions, could theoretically support a function related to the collection of taxes. However, as is proposed below, the pottery assemblage may mainly reflect the activities that took place at the gate during the course of the city siege.

The eastern chamber, whose piers and entrance were first excavated by the British expedition (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 15:4), is unique in several aspects. Firstly, the plan and the location of the entrances reflect the creation of an intentional hierarchy between the gate passage, accessible to all, and the increasingly segregated areas of Rooms 1 and 2. The entrance from the gate passage into Room 1 was located on the western side of the room and was closed by a door, isolating it from the passage. The entrance from Room 1 into Room 2 was on the eastern side, possibly enabling a person in Room 1 to have a glimpse of Room 2, but not a view of the altar. The best architectural parallels to the eastern chamber are the Iron Age Temple at ʻArad and Building 2161 at Megiddo (Herzog 1986:96; Loud 1948:45, Figs. 96, 388). Based on the presence of the niche in the rear southern wall and the altar in front of it, we suggest that the eastern chamber served as a gate shrine (for a detailed discussion, see Ganor and Kreimerman 2019).

The understanding that the shrine ceased to function prior to Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BCE is supported by the blocked door of Room 2 and by the arrowheads and slingstone found next to, but outside Room 2. It thus aspires that the shrine had ceased to function when Sennacherib conquered the city. The broken horns of the altar, and the toilet seat or latrine inside the Holy of Holies reflect the intentional desecration of the shrine. This could also explain the absence of specific cultic objects such as scepters, prestige items, and perhaps standing stones (*maẓẓevot*), which were probably broken and discarded as part of the desecration ritual; metal artifacts could have been smelted down, a practice known from textual and archaeological contexts (Garfinkel 2009). One should note that in the ʻArad temple as well, hardly any cultic objects were found, apart from the two altars and the *maẓẓevot* (Herzog 2002:58–72).

The act of desecrating a temple by converting it into a latrine is known from the story of Jehu, who, on ascending the throne, destroyed the cult of Baal: "And they brought out the pillars of the Temple of Baal and burned them. They destroyed the pillar of Baal, and tore down the temple of Baal, and turned it into a latrine, as is still the case. Thus, Jehu eradicated Baal from Israel" (2 Kings 10:26–28). Although the reality of the events described in these verses remains unknown, it is clear that a practice of desecrating a shrine by converting it to a latrine was known to the biblical author (for a detailed discussion, see Ganor and Kreimerman 2019:228–230). In the light of the attribution of the shrine to Level III, it is probable that the desecration was part of Hezekiah's cult reform (2 Kings 18:4).

The historical reality of Hezekiah's cult reform has been debated on both textual and archaeological grounds (Ganor and Kreimerman 2019:230–231, with references to earlier works). The main criticism focused on two arguments: (1) the termination of the cult at 'Arad and Be'er Sheba' may not have been related to a religious reform but to other circumstances (Edelman 2008:417–418; Fried 2002:447; Handy 1988; Uehlinger 2005:290); (2) The desecration of the cult-places at these two sites could have occurred earlier or later than the proposed date of Hezekiah's cult reform (Edelman 2008; Knauf 2002; Na'aman 2002). These two objections regarding 'Arad and Be'er Sheba' were refuted by Herzog (2010).

We consider these arguments not convincing also in the case of Lakhish. Firstly, the placing of a toilet in the shrine is a clear act of desecration. Secondly, it aspires that Room 2 was sealed off prior to the destruction of Level III in 701 BCE, supporting a dating consistent with Hezekiah's cult reform (see Ganor and Kreimerman 2019:230–231).

Liraz (2018) recently proposed a similarity between the southeastern and the northeastern chambers of the Lakhish gatehouse. The northeastern chamber was approached by two stone steps, and it was suggested that two additional steps were removed from their original place; one of the stone blocks bore an incised Egyptian senet game. According to Ussishkin, an installation (L4018) with an inner partition wall was built against the rear wall of the chamber and was approached by two steps, and on the western side of the installation, a roughly square stone block with a deep depression in its center was found (Ussishkin 2004a:640–641, Figs. 12.23–12.26). The associated pottery assemblage comprised three bowls, a jug and a large pithos (Zimhoni 2004b: Fig. 26.1:4–8). Ussishkin identified this installation as associated with water activities (Ussishkin 2004a:641, 669). Liraz (2018) proposed that the installation was actually a small room accessed from the east, similar to Room 2 in the southeastern chamber, and that its entrance was blocked by the addition of thin plastered blocks. He considered that the northern part of the partition wall in the installation was in fact, stone collapse, and that one could pass from east to west in this rear room. He further suggested that the southern part of the partition wall that was composed of relatively large stone blocks was actually an altar with trimmed horns. Finally, he argued that the block with the deep depression was another toilet seat. If all these suggestions are accepted, then the northeastern chamber was also composed of two rooms, was furnished with an altar, and was desecrated by placing a latrine in the rear room and sealing it. According to Liraz, the

fact that a large pottery container was found in both the northeastern and the southeastern chambers, supports the similarity of these two rooms, and their identity as cultic rooms.

In our opinion, the proposed similarity between the two chambers is not convincing, as there is no evidence that Installation 4018 was ever accessed from the east, and no threshold or depression for placing a door was reported below the limestone blocks at the east of the installation. While it is possible that the northern part of the partition wall in L4018 was composed of fallen stones, the supposed 'altar' built of square blocks south of this partition was preserved very low above the floor, and even if it was an altar, its upper courses were missing, and one cannot therefore expect to find any remains of horns on the lower courses. The stone with the depression did not have an opening or a hole and was probably some kind of container rather than a toilet seat. There are also several major differences between the two chambers. In the southeastern chamber, the floor was completely plastered, Rooms 1 and 2 were separated by a wall (W120), there was a niche in the back wall, and many bowls and lamps were retrieved; none of these features were found in the northeastern chamber. The architecture of the northeastern chamber thus differs significantly from that of the southeastern chamber, and there is too little data to determine whether the former had a cultic or a different function.

The previous excavations uncovered the western and central chambers of the northern side of the gate, but no installations or architectural features disclosed their function. The pottery assemblages—five bowls, three scoops, two jugs, two lamps, two nearly complete jars and fragments of two additional jars in the central chamber (Zimhoni 2004b: Figs. 26.12:6–13, 26.13), and four bowls, a jug, a juglet, a stand, seven scoops and a storage jar in the western chamber (Zimhoni 2004b: Figs. 26.14, 26.15)—do not contribute to an understanding of the function of these chambers.

Evidence of the Battle and Destruction

The gate was destroyed by fire, as is evident in the concentrations of ash, charred material and burned mud bricks. The thickest and most intensively burned debris was observed in the gate passage and in the southwestern chamber. The central chamber on the southern side was disturbed, and it is thus not surprising that no destruction debris was extant. In the southeastern chamber, a much thinner layer of burned debris was found. The visual examination of the gate walls show that they were not burned to the same degree. The mud bricks of the piers facing the passage appear orange in color and look burned, while toward the southern rear wall of the gate their color changed to brown and they seem not to be burned. The southern rear wall was not burned, apart from the western part in the southwestern chamber, where the wall shows a distinctive color pattern—the western side is orange, followed by black and then the original grayish brown color of the bricks (see Fig. 5). A similar pattern was observed in experimental studies (Kreimerman and Shahack-Gross 2019), and it is characteristic of the application of heat from one side of the wall. In the northern side of the gate, *in situ* mud bricks were only found at two points—at the second pier from the west they were orange in color and burned, while at another point in

the northern wall of the gate they retained their grayish brown color and seemed unburned (Ussishkin 2004a:637–651, Fig. 12.18).

Evidence for the battle against Sennacherib's army in 701 BCE includes the arrowheads, two slingstones and the large, perforated stone, albeit found in secondary context. Similar evidence was found by the previous expeditions (Gottlieb 2004; Ussishkin 1982; 2004a:637–651). No skeletons were found by any of the expeditions, suggesting that the gate area was cleared of bodies before it was set ablaze, a common practice in warfare (Kreimerman 2017). The casualties may have been removed from the city to caves near the site (Risdon 1939), although the association of the skeletons found here with Sennacherib's conquest was contested (Eph'al 2013:32–33; Zimhoni 1997:160–164).

The pottery assemblage is characteristic of the late eighth century BCE. Parallels for most of the vessels are found in the previous Lakhish expeditions and in contemporary sites in Judah. If our understanding of the desecration of the southeastern chamber at the time of Hezekiah's cult reform is correct, the assemblage here probably reflects the cultic activities abandoned after the reform. The few arrowheads found in the chamber show that it was opened during the battle.

The southwestern chamber contained some storage jars, bowl fragments and asymmetrical bowls/scoops. It is not clear whether this assemblage reflects the activity in the chamber prior to, or during the battle. The latter possibility seems more probable, also in light of the abundance of asymmetrical bowls across the entire gate structure (Ussishkin 2004d).[7] It was proposed that these bowls were used either for scooping grain or for libation in cultic context (Gitin 1993; Zuckerman 2007), but it is unlikely that these activities were so widespread in the gate. An alternative explanation for the presence of these vessels is that they were used either to spill hot oil over the enemy, or water over the gate area to prevent the enemy from setting it on fire, this latter suggestion also explaining why many were found tilted rather than lying flat, as they may have fallen from above.

Conclusions

The excavation of the southern side of the inner six-chamber gate of Lakhish revealed three chambers delimited by four piers. The good state of preservation showed that the entrances into the chambers were narrowed by small mud-brick walls and that the walls were white-plastered. The western chamber was lined with benches on both sides and was probably the location where the city elders or other privileged individuals sat when they performed public duties, including jurisdiction. The central chamber was destroyed in antiquity, so its function remains unknown. The eastern chamber, composed of two rooms, had a cultic niche in the center of its back wall and an altar in front of the niche. The chamber probably

[7] Note that in a previous publication we preferred the former option (Ganor and Kreimerman 2019:212).

served as a gate shrine, and was probably desecrated during Hezekiah's cult reform, when a toilet seat above a cesspit was placed next to the altar and the altar horns were trimmed.

Evidence of Sennacherib's destruction in 701 BCE was manifest in the southern side of the gate by the presence of arrowheads and collapsed burned bricks, the pottery assemblage aligning with the previous finds from Lakhish Level III destruction layer.

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