



Tell es-Safi/Gath III

The Early Bronze Age, Part 1

Edited by Itzhaq Shai,
Haskel J. Greenfield
and Aren M. Maeir

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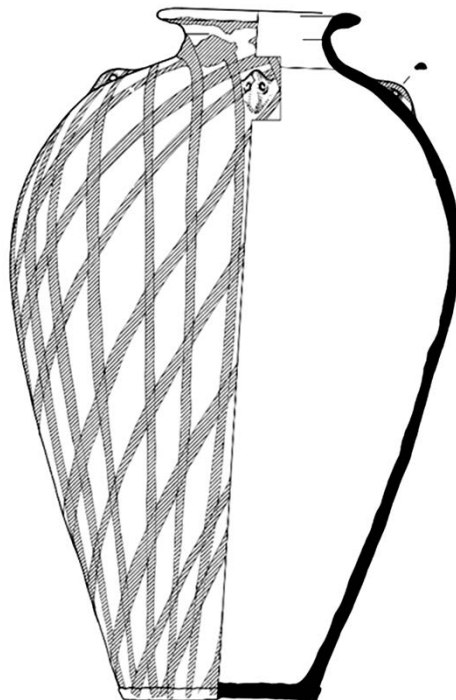
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With Contributions by

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Illustration on the cover: View of Tell es-Safi/Gath (looking west) & Early Bronze Age jar from Tell es-Safi/Gath.

Illustration on p. III: Drawing (by Y. Rudman) of an Early Bronze Age III decorated jar, from Area E, Tell es-Safi/Gath.

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CHAPTER 1

PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION

AREN M. MAEIR, HASKEL J. GREENFIELD AND ITZHAQ SHAI

The Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath Archaeological Project, directed by AMM, commenced in 1996 and continued until the summer season of July 2021, which constituted the last large-scale season of the project. Over the course of 25 years, as excavations, field surveys and various research on the archaeology, history and environment of this site was conducted, numerous publications relating to the project have appeared, including articles, chapters and volumes. Two previous volumes of the final reports have already appeared, dealing with various aspects relating to the site (Maeir [ed.] 2012; Maeir and Uziel [eds.] 2020; see as well Maeir [ed.] 2017/2018). The present, third volume of the Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath final reports, is the first part of a sub-series of the final reports (*Studies on the Early Bronze Age at Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath*, edited by H. J. Greenfield and A. M. Maeir) dedicated to the Early Bronze Age remains on the site.

The Early Bronze Age (=EB; ca. 3500–2500 BCE), the first urban period in the Southern Levant (Fig. 1.1), represents a time frame in which key socio-economic developments took place (e.g., Greenberg 2019: 24–135). At many sites in the Southern Levant, including Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath, this period represents a major archaeological phase, with impressive remains of the earliest urban culture. At Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath, significant and substantial remains from the EB III (ca. 2800–2500 BCE) were found in various parts of the “Upper City” (Fig. 1.2). These include fortifications (found in Areas F, J and P, see Shai et al. 2016; Chadwick et al. 2017), a domestic quarter (Area E) and various other features (Areas A, E, F, J and P).

The excavations in Area E, on the eastern side of the upper city of Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath (Fig. 1.2), revealed the most extensive *in situ* stratigraphic remains of the EB on the site. Seven strata (E5a, E5b, E5c, E6, E7, E8 and E9) were exposed, spanning the late EB II through the late EB III (see Fig. 1.3). These remains appear to represent a non-elite domestic quarter in the fortified EB city of Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath.

The current volume is the first of a series of reports dedicated to the Early Bronze Age remains at the site. In this volume, the three upper levels (E5a, E5b, E5c), which were extensively investigated from 2004 until 2014, are described in detail. While initially it was suggested (e.g., Shai et al. 2014) that these three strata (E5a, E5b, E5c) represent only phases within one stratum (due to the similarity in architectural planning), we currently relate to them as three separate strata, which display continuity between them. During these initial years of excavations in Area E, IS served as the area supervisor and spearheaded the publication of the finds from this area.

Subsequent volumes will report on the research results from 2014 until the final season of excavation in Area E in 2018. They will present the earlier strata and more recent information from the E5 Strata. The E5 Strata are the most spatially investigated and provide the greatest insight into EB III household behavior. The earlier strata (E6–9) were reached in progressively smaller areas as excavation continued deeper. The results of the later seasons add to the interpretations of the earlier seasons (for interim reports on these earlier levels, see Albaz 2020; Ross 2020; Maeir 2020: 972).

It should be noted that these three later strata (E5a, E5B and E5c) represent the three final phases of this domestic quarter, which ended ca. 2500 BCE. Based on radiometric dating (Shai et al. 2014 and unpublished data), the uppermost EB III level was abandoned ca. 2500 BCE. This fits well with the “high chronology” for the end of the Early Bronze Age (e.g., Regev et al. 2012). The earlier levels represent earlier stages of the EB III and perhaps the latter part of the EB II.

Following the abandonment of Stratum E5a, this part of the site (Area E) was not reoccupied until the Late Bronze Age (LB), more than 1000 years later (e.g., Shai, Uziel and Maeir 2020). Despite this long period with no settlement in this part of the site,¹ the LB remains were built just above the final EB remains.

¹ In other parts of site and its surroundings, there is

evidence of activities between the end of the EB and

A major impetus for the intensive study of the EB remains at the site was the long-term collaboration between AMM and HJG. The collaboration was funded by grants from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (2009–2011, Grant No. IG 410-2009-1303, awarded to HJG; and an eight-year series of grants: 2011, LOI PG 895-2011-63; 2012–2017, Grant No. PG 895-2011-1005, awarded to both HJG and AMM). These grants enabled our team to conduct extensive and intensive excavations in the EB III neighborhood of Area E and carry out research on a broad range of related topics (e.g., various studies presented in Maeir 2017/2018).

While initial reports on the results of this research have appeared (e.g., Shai et al. 2014; Greenfield et al. 2016; Greenfield, Shai and Maeir 2017; 2020), the present volume represents the first volume dedicated solely to the EB remains. This volume, which as mentioned above, covers, for the most part, finds excavated up to and including the 2014 season of excavations, deals with the following topics:

- Stratigraphy of Strata E5a, E5b and E5c (Chapter 2, by Shai, Greenfield, Albaz, Ross and Maeir);
- EB fortifications and finds in Area F (Chapter 3, by Chadwick, Welch and Maeir)
- The EB III pottery assemblage (Chapter 4, by Albaz);
- Petrographic analyses of EB III pottery from Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath (Chapter 5, by Ben-Shlomo);
- EB vessel shaping at Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath: a scanning method for differentiating chaînes opératoires and new perspectives on early urban economies (Chapter 6, by Ross, Fowler, Greenfield, Shai and Maeir);
- An EB ritual domestic donkey burial from Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath, Israel (Chapter 7, by H. Greenfield, T. Greenfield, Brown, Ross, Albaz, Shai and Maeir);
- Isotope Analyses of domestic animals at Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath (Area E): evidence for economic and cultural ties between the

EB city of Tell eṣ-Şâfi (Gath) and the Nile Valley (Chapter 8, by Arnold, Hartman, Greenfield, Babcock and Maeir);

- The EB lithic chipped-stone assemblage from Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath (Chapter 9, by Manclossi and Rosen);
- A reconstruction of the life history of EB III basalt ground stone objects (Chapter 10, by Beller);
- The EB ground stone assemblage from Area E (Chapter 11, by Beller, Greenfield, Shai, Albaz and Maeir);
- First results for the phytolith analysis in the EB levels of Area E, Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath (Chapter 12, by Cabanes)
- Copper objects and their provenance (Chapter 13, by Eliyahu-Behar and Yahalom-Mack);
- Micro-archaeology and archaeological science at Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath (Chapter 14, by Eliyahu-Behar);
- Ground Penetrating Radar Survey in Area E (Chapter 15, by Pincus).

Several more volumes of the EB subseries of the final reports on Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath are scheduled to appear in the future. These volumes will cover the final seasons of excavations in the EB levels (2015–2018) and various, more specialized topics.

It should be noted that a full list of loci will appear in a forthcoming volume, when the report on the EB levels is completed.

The method of numbering loci and baskets used in the first years of the project (Maeir and Zukerman 2012) was changed after the 2011 season.

In the 2012 season, the registration method that was used was as following: for loci, e.g. E15as01, where E is the excavation area, 15 is the season, “as” is a code for the square and 01 is the locus number (up to 99 loci, per season, in each square); for baskets, e.g. E15as010, where E is the excavation area, 15 is the season, “as” is a code for the square and 010 is the basket number (up to 909 baskets, per season, in each square).

the LB. While stratified remains from the EB IV/Intermediate Bronze Age were not found in any of the excavation areas on the tell itself, evidence of a tomb from this period was found in Area C6, to the east of the tell (Maeir 2012: 13; Gur-Arieh and Maeir 2020:

129; Maeir 2020). Extensive stratified evidence, including fortifications and domestic contexts, dating to the Middle Bronze Age were found in Area F, northwest of the summit of the Upper City (e.g., Chadwick et al. 2017; 2020).

CHAPTER 1: PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION

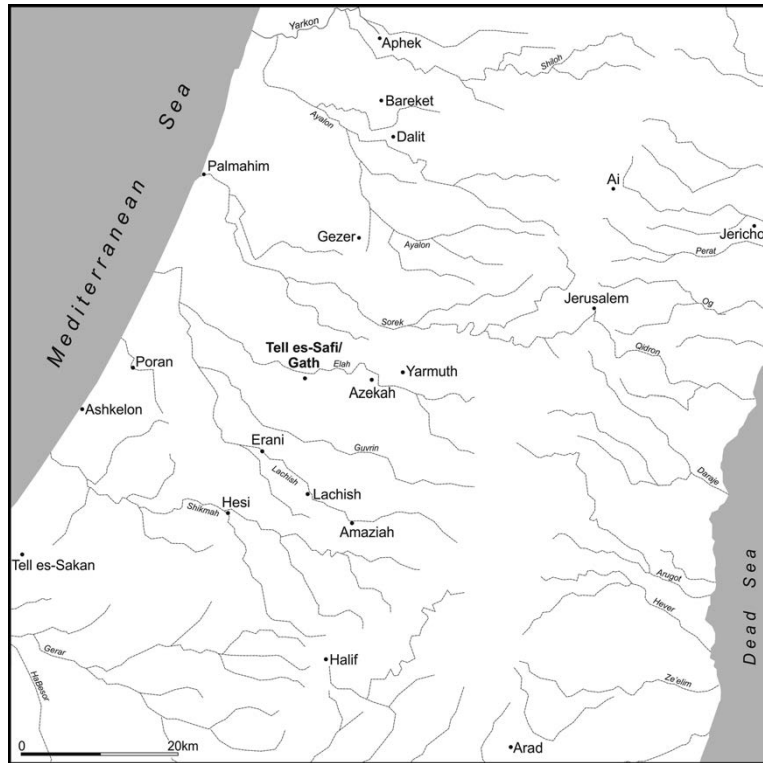


Fig. 1.1: Map of Southern Canaan with major EB sites (prepared by J. Rosenberg).

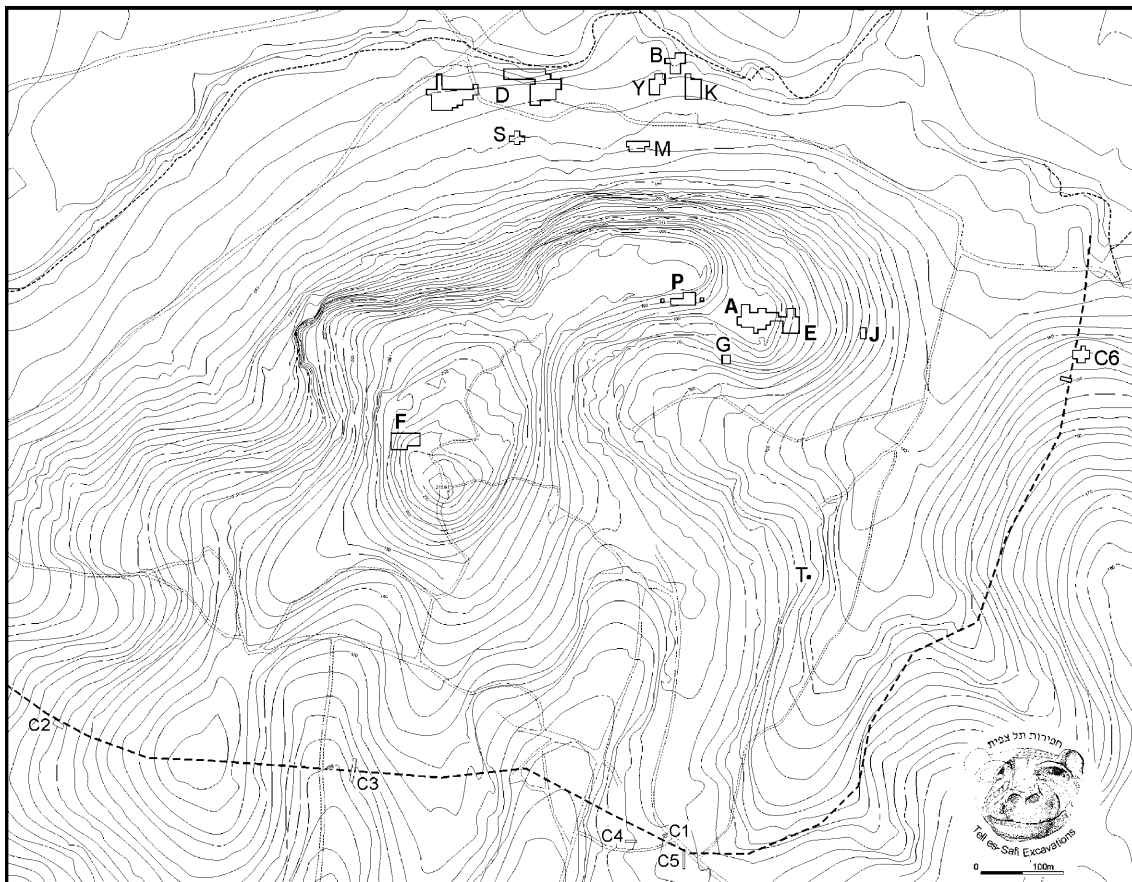


Fig. 1.2: General plan of Tell es-Şâfi/Gath with the location of excavation areas. Areas with EB remains are noted in bold (prepared by J. Rosenberg).

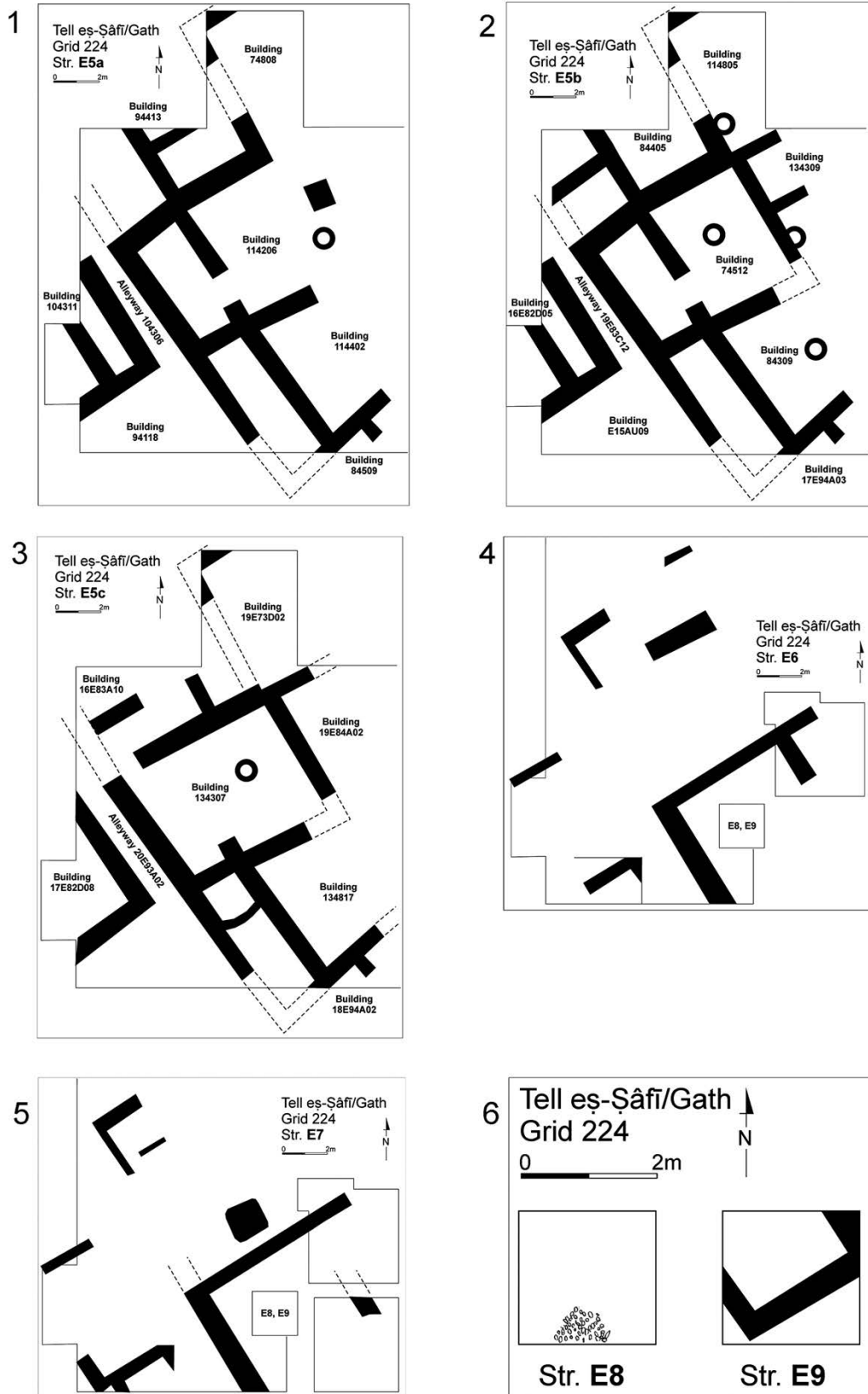


Fig. 1.3: Schematic plan of the seven EB strata in Area E, Tell es-Şâfi/Gath (prepared by J. Rosenberg).

From the 2013 season and all subsequent seasons, the following method was implemented: for loci, e.g. 16E83A10, where 16 is the season number, E is the excavation area, 83A is the square number and 10 is the locus number (up to 99 loci, per season, in each square); for baskets, e.g. 16E83A010, where 16 is the season number, E is the excavation area, 83A is the square number and 010 is the basket number (up to 999 baskets, per season, in each square).

Partial funding for the publication of this volume was provided through the SSHRC grants awarded to HJG and AMM (noted above) and a book publication grant from the Israel Science Foundation to AMM and IS (Grant # 18/21). We gratefully acknowledge the dedicated staff and team members of the Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath Archaeo-

logical Project for their crucial roles in uncovering and studying the relevant finds and we thank the authors of the chapters in this volume for their contributions. In particular, we would like to thank Shira Albaz, director of the project lab, for her dedicated and untiring work on all things connected to the project in general and to the research on the EB in particular. Photographs appearing in the volume were taken by S. Drücke, M. Eniukhina, H. Greenfield, A. Maeir, V. Naikhin and R. Wis-kin; Objects drawings were crafted by D. Levine, Y. Rudman and B. Soibelman; Maps and plans were drawn by J. Rosenberg; Aerial photographs were by A.M. Maeir, Skyview and Griffin Aerial Imaging. Finally, we would like to thank Chris McKinny and Joe Uziel for their hard work on preparing and editing this manuscript.

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