

Chapter Title: Introduction

Chapter Author(s): David Ben-Shlomo

Book Title: The Azor Cemetery

Book Subtitle: Moshe Dothan's excavations, 1958 and 1960

Book Author(s): David Ben-Shlomo, Ariel Berman, Amir Golani, Christian Herrmann, Natalya Katsnelson, Othmar Keel, Edward F. Maher, Henk K. Mienis, Yossi Nagar and Moshe Sharon

Published by: Israel Antiquities Authority / תוקיִתעה תוֹשר. (2012)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1fzfh7d.5>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.



Israel Antiquities Authority / תוקיִתעה תוֹשר is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Azor Cemetery*

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

DAVID BEN-SHLOMO

Tel Azor is located approximately 6 km southeast of Tel Aviv–Jaffa (Fig. 1.1), on the road to Jerusalem (map ref. OIG 13158/15926; NIG 18158/65926), in the midst of a densely populated region. The site of Azor lies about 6 km east of the Mediterranean coast and is located on *hamra* soil; 2–3 km to the north and west are the inner *kurkar* ridges. ‘Pararendzina’ soil is available to the west and north of the site (Dan et al. 1972:35). The climate and vegetation of this region are typical of the lowland Mediterranean zone, the coastal dune area and the coastal plain.

Archaeological remains at the site are dispersed over a relatively large area, underlying the modern towns of Azor and Holon (particularly the latter’s industrial area). The city is a typical example of the conflict between modern urbanism and the preservation of ancient remains, where no systematic large-scale, long-term excavations have been undertaken, yet several salvage excavations have revealed a continuous sequence of occupation from the Chalcolithic to the Ottoman periods (Plan 1.1; Table 1.1; see Golani and van den Brink 1999: Appendix 1). The lack of systematic

investigation makes it very difficult to reconstruct the ancient settlement at any given period. Moreover, most of the remains uncovered thus far relate to funerary activities. The tell itself is quite small; however, the ancient site appears to have spread beyond its confines, as indicated by several large cemeteries dating from the Chalcolithic period through to modern times. These seem to indicate the presence of a larger settlement than that located on the relatively small tell; yet, it is still not possible to estimate the size of the site in the various periods. However, the site’s location on the main coastal routes may hint at the use of the area as a regional cemetery in certain periods, catering not only to the site itself. It should be noted that natural caves are common along the *kurkar* ridges of the region, which can easily be cut for shaft graves.

The identification of the Bronze and Iron Age settlement with the ancient site of Azor is supported by the preservation of the name in the modern Arab village of Yazor. Azor is mentioned in LXX Joshua 19:45, where it appears among the cities of Danin, in place of the town of Yehud, which appears in the Masoretic text. The site is also mentioned in Sennacherib’s annals, where the conquest of the ‘Ashqelonite’ towns of Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Bene-Berak and Azor are mentioned in relation to the subjugation of the rebellious Sidqa of Ashqelon (Frahm 1997:53–55; Na’aman 1998:222–223). Moshe Dothan (1989) linked the biblical references to the Danite city of Azor and the Iron Age I burials excavated there, particularly noting evidence for cremation. The inscription (pre-firing) on an Iron IIB–C storage jar, reading *LSHLMI*, led to Dothan’s suggestion (1961c) that the site was settled by Judeans in the sixth century BCE. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the archaeological and historical evidence of the site of Azor is still very limited.

This volume presents the findings of one of the largest and most important excavations at Azor, conducted by Moshe Dothan during 1958 and 1960, on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums

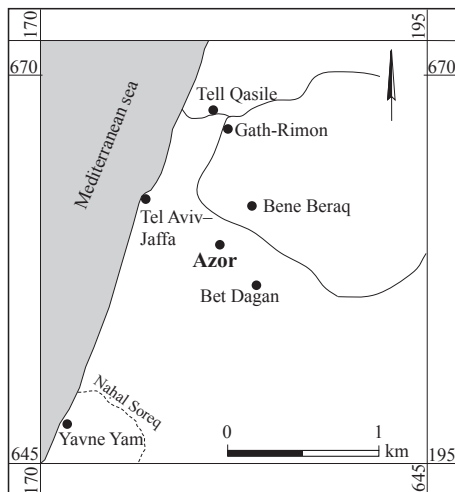


Fig. 1.1. Location map.



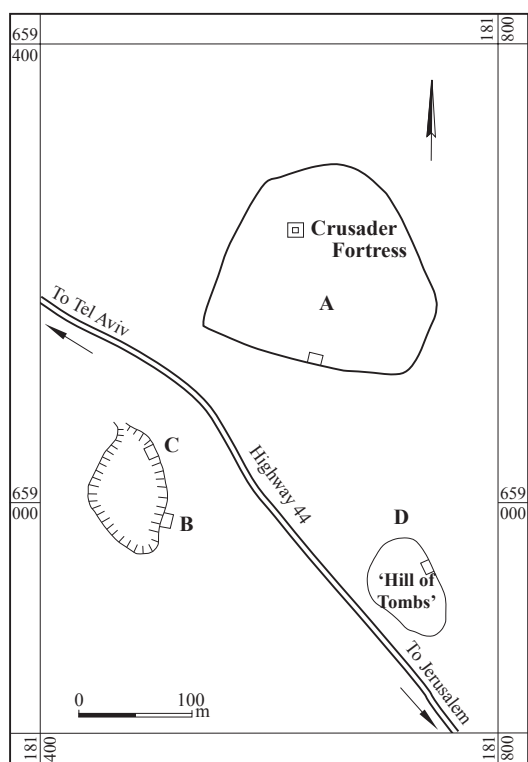
Plan 1.1. Location of excavations at Azor, 1940–2005.

**Table 1.1. Stratigraphic Sequence**

<i>Period</i>	<i>Area B Phase</i>	<i>Area C Phase</i>	<i>Area D Phase</i>
Chalcolithic	III	VI	
Early Bronze Age I	II, I		VII
Middle Bronze Age IIC	I	V, IV	
Late Bronze Age		IV, III	VI
Iron Age IB		II	V–IV
Iron Age IIA		I	III
Iron Age IIB		I	II
Roman–Byzantine	I		
Early Islamic			IC
Late Islamic (Mamluk, Ottoman)		I	IA and B

(IDAM). The excavations were undertaken in four areas, labeled A–D (Plan 1.2; Table 1.1). Area D, the primary excavation area, is located on the so-called ‘hill of tombs’ of Azor, just east of the modern highway, and where the modern cemetery and mosque are located. This hill was excavated on several occasions. The earliest work was carried out by M. Dothan in 1958 and 1960. This was followed by Shlomo Pipano (1984), who reported tenth-century BCE and Byzantine remains. The most recent excavations were conducted by Aviva Buchennino, who excavated adjacent to Dothan’s Area D, and reported very similar results, i.e., a dense burial ground of the thirteenth–eleventh centuries BCE showing diverse burial customs (Buchennino 2006; Buchennino and Yannai 2010). In Area D, Dothan’s excavations uncovered a large group of late Iron I (c. 1100–1000 BCE) graves, representing diverse burial customs, as well as a group of Iron Age IIA graves and limited evidence of Late Bronze Age II and Iron IIB–C tombs. The uppermost layer of Area D yielded various Islamic-period tombs.

Dothan’s Area A lies near the area of Tel Azor on which stands the Crusader fortress, *Chateau des Plains*. It was only probed by M. Dothan in 1958,



Plan 1.2. Location of M. Dothan’s excavation areas at Azor.

with no archaeological remains found or recorded. The area is therefore not discussed in this report, although excavations in 1966 by Ram Gophna and Menashe Busheri yielded Early Bronze Age I, Late Bronze Age, Iron I (including a rampart) and Early Islamic-period strata. Further excavations were conducted by Hagit Torge (2005), who found mostly later remains. It seems that there are Iron Age remains, particularly on the eastern slope of the tell, which faces the ‘hill of tombs’. In Area B, southwest of the tell, remains of a Chalcolithic–EB IA structure were found in a modern quarry. This area is in the vicinity of Jean Perrot’s excavations of Chalcolithic ossuaries (Perrot 1961). In Area C, a Middle Bronze Age IIC shaft grave and a burial cave used in MB IIC, the Late Bronze Age and Iron I were excavated.

Most of Dothan’s excavations at the site focused on the above-mentioned Iron Age cemetery (Area D), with at least 58 tombs identified. The majority of the tombs date to Iron IB, with several dating to the end of the Late Bronze Age (thirteenth century BCE): plain pit burials, jar burials, brick-lined tombs, cremation burials (in jars) and collective burials in burial structures. Only several relatively short reports were published on the excavations. These primarily consist of notes and reports published from 1958 to 1961 (M. Dothan 1958; 1960; 1961a; 1961b; 1961c), an article describing Tomb D63 (one of the cremation burials—M. Dothan 1989); the entry in *NEAEHL* (M. Dothan 1993); and mention in synthetic works by Trude and Moshe Dothan (T. Dothan and M. Dothan 1992:101–117) and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (1992a:152–153, 156–158, 160–162, 178, 183). The findings were particularly emphasized by the Dothans in their studies on the Philistine material culture (T. Dothan 1982:54–57; T. Dothan and M. Dothan 1992:107–117). In addition, a group of elaborately decorated Philistine Bichrome vessels from various collections and attributed to Azor were published (T. Dothan 1982:114, 124–125, 166, 171, 183, 188). Much of this material was illicitly excavated during the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, material from Bronze and Iron Age tombs at Azor can be found in abundance on the antiquities market, as well as in local homes (some of this material was collected by Yariv Shapira and is stored in the local museum at Azor).

When preparing the material for publication, certain difficulties arose, as a result of the more than fifty years that had gone by since the excavations. The available written data included the field notebooks,

graphic diaries, tomb inventories, pottery cards and, of course, previous publications. Nevertheless no formal 'locus cards' or 'basket lists' were written, and in fact the term 'locus' was not yet used in excavations of the time. It is also possible that not all of the diagnostic pottery was collected systematically; animal bones were seldom collected, and occasionally noted. The material from the excavations, mostly pottery, was stored in the IAA facilities, yet a large number of complete vessels and other items were located in the Israel Museum and the Azor museum. Some of the items reported in the publications and notes were not found. The pottery was sorted and classified contextually according to the numbers written on the sherds, yet in some cases the ink had faded and thus it was not possible to ascertain the context of the find. While the artifacts were considered the most reliable data, further information on finds was obtained using the field notes and various publications.

The registration method varied between the 1958 and 1960 seasons. In 1958, basket numbers were assigned to the finds (e.g., C58/1, D58/1), and the tomb context was provided on the basket lists and finds cards. In the 1960 season, the burials were each given a different registration number according to tomb number (i.e., material from Tomb D40 would be labeled basket 40d/x). All finds recovered from outside the burials were assigned running baskets numbers, with most

contexts defined as the entire  $5 \times 5$  m square. Thus, it was not possible to contextually evaluate the finds found outside the burials.

As noted, one of the main problems faced when working on the publication of old excavation material is determining the information that should be included in the analysis and publication. While the main body of data presented in this report relies on the finds themselves, a more maximalistic approach was taken, using any known data on the excavations, such as field notes, cards, drawings, photographs or archive notes. It was felt that as the final report of the excavation, all information should be considered. A good example for these varying data sources is the human remains from the excavations. Apparently much of the skeletal material which was, in many cases, found in articulation, was not located during our analysis. The human remains that could be found were analyzed by Yossi Nagar of the IAA (see Chapter 11). Certain additional information about the skeletons, which was noted during and after the excavation, especially by Nicu Haas and Hillel Nathan, is presented here, in addition to the limited data published by Denise Ferembach (1961; see also T. Dothan and M. Dothan 1992:112–113). While these observations should be taken with reservation and cannot be critically examined, they are at times the only evidence at hand and therefore it was necessary to present them as well.