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Ayelet Gilboa, Ilan Sharon, Jeffrey R. Zorn and Sveta Matskevich

EXCAVATIONS AT DOR, FINAL REPORT

VOLUME IIA

AREA G, THE LATE BRONZE AND IRON AGES: SYNTHESIS, ARCHITECTURE AND STRATIGRAPHY

DIRECTED BY
EPHRAIM STERN 1986–2000
ILAN SHARON AND AYELET GILBOA 2002–2004

with contributions by:
John E. Berg, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, Allen Estes
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In memory of
Professor Ephraim Stern (1934–2018), Director of the Tel Dor Excavations
1980–2000
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CHAPTER 12

THE “CULT ROOM”: AJ/34—PHASES 6–10

Jeffrey R. Zorn

Excavated by: Dennis Stanfill (1987)
Directed by: Andrew Stewart on behalf of UC Berkeley (1987–1994)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the remains in AJ/34, north of and including W9211. This long-lived wall forms a barrier to any direct correlation of architectural phases north and south of it and hence, of the local stages in this space with the general phases for the area. Below the Roman walls, no clear material of Phase 5 could be isolated, it is only with Phase 6b (stage v) that we reach extensive, coherent architectural remains and obtain stratigraphically certain and clean loci and assemblages. However, even here there is a degree of uncertainty, as it cannot be determined stratigraphically if stage v represents Phase 6a, 6b or even (less likely) 7, which affects the understanding of the phasing of the cult deposit in stage vii. Is it Phase 7, 8, or even 9? Because in other parts of Area G, Phase 6b was usually the best and often, the only stage preserved in Phase 6, it was decided to begin the numbering of the Iron Age sequence in AJ/34 with 6b as well. If one began the sequence with Phase 6a, then all other deposits would move up as well; e.g., the “cult deposit” discussed below would move from Phase 8 to Phase 7.

In addition, no clear evidence of the Phase 9 destruction was found in this unit, so this convenient benchmark for the correlation of the local stages to area-wide phases is of no use here. This is particularly unfortunate, as this unit is the only one in Area G where three primary assemblages were found in direct superposition: L9179 > L9548 > L9903 and related loci, phased here to 6b, 7 and 8 respectively. Admittedly, typological considerations, especially as regards the types of bowls—which were prevalent in all three assemblages—were part of the consideration for phasing the local stages as we did; see further discussions in Chapters 2 and 20.

In effect, this unit consists of parts of two different rooms, separated by a sequence of north-south partition walls: W9180 > W9408a > W9408b. However, because the western space thus formed was only minimally exposed, we describe both rooms here together.

WALL AND FLOOR STAGES

Table 12.1 Walls and floors per stage and phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Phase and Horizon</th>
<th>Walls and Floors</th>
<th>Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>Phase 6b—Ir1/2</td>
<td>W9180=W9212</td>
<td>Thumbnail plan: Fig. 12.1; details: Plans 8–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=W9216=F9179=?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>W9211=? W9904</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi</td>
<td>Phase 7—Ir1b—Ir12</td>
<td>W9408a=W18010a</td>
<td>Thumbnail plan: Fig. 12.4; details: Plan 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=W9216=W9211=F18004=(F9276=F9191&gt;F9548)=? W9904</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii</td>
<td>Phase 8—Ir1ab</td>
<td>W9408b=W18010b</td>
<td>Thumbnail plan: Fig. 12.12; details: Plan 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=W9211=W9904=F9903=? F18004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii</td>
<td>Phase 9—Ir1a late</td>
<td>W9211=W9408b=F9904=W18010b=F18065=F18089”=F18041”=F18085</td>
<td>Thumbnail plan: Fig. 12.19; details: Plan 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ix</td>
<td>Phase 10?—Ir1a early?</td>
<td>F18088</td>
<td>Details: Plan 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pottery assemblages: * Plates 20.38–20.39; ** Plate 20.33; *** Plate 20.3

DESCRIPTION OF WALLS

W9216 (top #15.08, base #14.01) forms the northern edge of the eastern room in the unit, between W9180 and W9904. It is a mudbrick wall, at least 30 cm wide; its total width is unknown because it extends into the northern balk below W9085. Bricks were ca. 40 cm long by at least 20 cm wide. It was not possible to determine the total number of courses in the wall. Note that unlike its counterpart in the western room—W9212, described below—this wall floats and no earlier walls were found below it. It is not known if the plan of the eastern room was substantially different in the phases preceding W9216 or if earlier walls were just inside the balk.

W9212 (top #14.66, base #14.35) is a fieldstone wall, preserved two courses high, of stones ca. 30 cm across, which continues the course of W9216, east of W9180, although it is slightly offset. It was built on the same line as W18010 below.

W18010 has two phases, denoted a-b. W18010a (top
#14.12, base #13.70) is a mud-construction wall, ca. 70 cm wide; no individual mudbricks could be traced. W18010a was built on top, but was slightly wider than W18010b below, and is partially built on debris layers on either side of W18010b. Thus, it is not likely that W18010b is merely a foundation for W18010a. W18010b (top #13.70, base #12.50 when excavation ceased) was a stone wall of small boulders (50–65 cm across, chinking stones 10–20 cm), preserved three courses high.

On the south, W9211 (top #14.41–14.21, base #12.72 on the northern face of the wall) is a fieldstone wall preserved 10–11 courses high. It is a long wall, spanning AJ–AI–AH/34. In some of these units, several construction stages were noted in this wall and, in one case, the lower phase had been given a separate number (W18516 in AI/34), although no such distinctions were made in the present unit. In AJ/34, this wall is 80 cm wide, constructed of stones 20–35 cm in diameter (in AI/34 it widens slightly and is constructed of somewhat larger stones). West of its corner with W9408, W9211 is only two to three courses high (base #13.70; see Fig. 12.14, lower right), suggesting a doorway in that area. In the corner where W9211 and W9904 meet, W9211 begins to float at ca. #12.90. Just west of this corner, there is a straight vertical seam in W9211, roughly on line with the eastern face of W9140(N)/W9915 in AJ/33. The seam runs from the point at which the wall floats here to the preserved top of the wall, indicating the existence of a doorway from this room to the south (Fig. 12.14). There is no way to know when the final blocking of the door took place. The most likely possibility is that the threshold of the doorway was gradually raised over the lifetime of the building, until its final destruction or abandonment.

On the east, W9904 (top #14.11, base #12.83 when excavation ceased) is a fieldstone wall, preserved four courses high and ca. 70 cm wide; the largest stones were ca. 25 x 40 cm, with smaller stones ca. 10 cm across. W9904 abuts W9211.

On the west, dividing the two rooms in the unit is north–south W9180 (top #14.85, base #14.32), a fieldstone wall ca. 50 cm wide, preserved one to two courses high, with stones ca. 25 x 35 cm in size. W9180 was built on top of W9408a. Because parts of W9408a were preserved higher in the northern balk, it seems that parts of this wall were removed south of W9216 to permit the construction of W9180.

W9408 had two phases, denoted a–b. W9408a (top #14.69–14.78, base #13.25 on the east, #13.17 on the west) is a mudbrick wall, ca. 1.1 m wide, preserved seven courses high, of bricks 25 x 40 cm (brick height could not be determined). Traces of plaster were found on the eastern face, which leaned out slightly, as if damaged during an earthquake or by subsidence or buckling of the wall. In part, it is a mudbrick “coating” over and around W9408b, ca. 30–60 cm high on both the eastern and western faces of the fieldstone core of the latter, depending on the height of the core. This indicates that, at some point, it was decided to widen W9408b by encasing it inside a wider mudbrick wall (Figs. 12.6–12.7). W9408b itself (top #14.05–13.57; base #12.90–12.68) is a fieldstone wall, ca. 50 cm wide, of small boulders, some 100 x 50 x 40 cm, others 50 x 40 x 30 cm. When excavation ceased, three courses were visible. W9408b dovetails with W18010b and abuts W9211.

Putting all walls and relations between them together, we obtain the following scheme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stage v</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Stage vi</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Stage vii + viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W9211</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9212</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9180</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9216</td>
<td>⊕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9180</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9216</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9211</td>
<td>⊕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W18010a</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W18010b</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9408a</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9408b</td>
<td>⊕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W18010b</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9408b</td>
<td>⊕</td>
<td>W9904</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third set of walls has two superimposed floors related to it and hence, two stages. In addition, there is another stage (ix) comprising a single floor below all extant walls. For the tentative correlation of these local stages to the general phases for Area G, see above.

**DISCUSSION OF PHASES AND STAGES**

**Phase 6b (Stage v)**

W9180 ≡ W9212 ≡ W9216 ≡ F9179 ≡? W9211 ≡? W9904

Stage v contains the first clear and coherent architectural remains since stage i and, even here, the walls are preserved primarily only one course above the associated floor. Only those loci and walls north of W9211, the main east–west wall in AJ/34 at this elevation, will be treated here; features to the south of W9211 are treated either in Chapter 10 (AI/33) or Chapter 13 (AJ/33).

In stage v, W9180 (founded on W9408a) abuts mudbrick W9216 and is, in turn, abutted by W9212 (founded on W18010a). W9211 is preserved below the level of F9179, having been robbed out to a great depth, but since W9211 marks the southern boundary for the same space in stages vi and vii (Phases 7–8), it is probable that it also did in stage v. Similarly, W9904, robbed out by late pit L9680, probably marks the eastern boundary of this space in stage v.

L9202 and L9395 (stage iv) may mark a robber trench of W9211.

Fig. 12.1. Thumbnail plan of Phase 6, AJ/34. For details, see Plans 8–9. (d09Z3-1254)
Comments on the Nature and Integrity of the Stage v Deposits

Although the debris of L9179 was contaminated by a stage ii disturbance above it, some pottery was found in situ on F9179, which may date the floor’s last use. F9179 (#14.42; Figs. 12.2–12.3) is the only floor which is at an elevation which could reach any of these walls; however, it was not possible to establish a direct connection to any of them. The only other material possibly related to stage v is L9214, although this small mudbrick-debris locus might also belong with stage vi below.

Phase 7 (Stage vi)

W9408a ≡ W18010a ≡ W9216 ≡ W9211 ≡ F18004 ≡ { F9276 = F9191 > F9548 } ≡? W9904

Mudbrick W9408a abuts both mudbrick W9216 (founded in this stage) and stone W9211 (Figs. 12.5–12.7); in turn, W9408a is abutted by mudbrick W18010a (below W9212 of stage v; Fig. 12.7). As noted above, W9904 was probably in use in this stage, but was robbed out by pit L9680.

Stage vi has one floor with three resurfacings. The earliest surface was F9548, which contained in situ pottery (#14.13; Figs. 12.8–12.9). It was not always possible to differentiate this lowest surface from a very close resurfacing (#14.07–14.00) and so, they were numbered together. F9548 reaches W9408a and W9216 and is at a level where it could have reached W9211 and W9904. The slightly later resurfacing is F9276 = F9191 (#14.24), which also reaches W9216 and W9408a and could have reached W9211 and W9904.

F18004 (#13.73–13.65; Fig. 12.10), a dirt floor exposed in a small area west of W9408, reaches W9211 and W18010a and most likely also the mudbricks of W9408a, although it seems like it reaches the stones of W9408b (Figs. 12.10–12.11). The latter relationship poses a problem because W9408a is abutted by W18010a, both of which are mudbrick, while W18010b dovetails with W9408b, both stone. Since F18004 reaches W18010a, which dovetails with W9408a, this supports the relation to W9408a and not W9408b.

Note that there is a difference of ca. 30 cm in elevation between stage vi floors east and west of W9408a. F9548 on the east is at ca. #14.13, while F18004 on the west is at ca. #13.73, although both reach W9211.
CHAPTER 12

Fig. 12.5. General view of Phase 7 in AJ/34, looking northwest. Mudbrick W9408a and W9216 form the western and northern walls of Room 9191, while stone W9211 marks its southern limit (photograph courtesy of Andrew Stewart). (p10Z3-0079)

Fig. 12.6. Juncture of Phase 7 stone W9211 with mudbrick W9048a, looking southwest. The section cut into W9048a shows the stones of W9048b beginning to appear behind the mudbrick “coating” encasing the stone core. (p05Z3-0648)

Fig. 12.7. Juncture of W9216, W9408a and W18010a, looking northeast. Left: mudbricks of W9408a in section. Dark line of mudbrick above W9408 number plaque is part of the mudbrick “coating” of W9408a, encasing the upper stone course of W9408b. A single stone of W9408b is just appearing. (p05Z3-0649)

Fig. 12.8. Phase 7 F9548 reaching W9408a and W9216, looking south. Bottom center: juncture of W9408a and W9216. (p05Z3-0650)

Fig. 12.9. F9548 with in situ vessels, looking west. Center and upper right: corner of W9408a and W9216 (photograph courtesy of Andrew Stewart). (p10Z3-0080)
**Comments on the Nature and Integrity of the Stage vii Deposits**

For dating purposes, the most secure locus is L9500, sealed below F9179. L9191 and L9276 are probably also secure, but were not sealed by F9179. L9548, below all three of the loci, is also secure and contained a number of in situ vessels. Probably also secure are L9538, below W9212 of stage v, L9214, either of stage v or vi, and L18011, below L9538. Less certain is L9407 below L9277, which may be part of a Persian period disturbance, although it is below the level of F9179 and is adjacent to and at the same elevation as L9548.

**Phase 8 (Stage vii)**

\[ W9408b \equiv W18010b \equiv W9211 \equiv W9904 \equiv F9903 \equiv ? F18004 \]  
\( \text{(the "cult deposit")} \)

W9408b and W9904 abut W9211 (Figs. 12.13–12.14) and W9408b dovetails with W18010b. All of these walls are of stone construction. Mudbrick W9216 had not yet been constructed in stage vii, so the northern limit of the room enclosed by W9408b, W9211 and W9904 is unknown. However, given the area’s architectural continuity across Phases 6–9, there may well have been a northern Phases 8–9 wall just beyond the area excavated.

W9211 does not exist west of W9408b in stage vii, only to its east. Possibly a doorway existed here or, perhaps, the lower phase of the wall was narrower and is hidden in the balk under the higher phase, which was never removed.

In the corner where W9211 and W9904 meet, W9211 begins to float above the level of stage viii F18065 (ca. #12.90). Just west of this corner is a clear “seam” in the wall (Fig. 12.14), indicating a doorway into the room, which was blocked in stage vii and/or vii.

To the east of W9408, the floor situation in this stage is problematic. First is an issue surrounding a ceramic...
assemblage found in this room. L9903 and L18034 came down on a number of vessels in primary deposition, some of a possibly cultic nature; this is the deposit which gave the room its nickname. The vessels were found in the western third of the room, all at about the same elevation (ca. #13.00) and some leaning against W9408b (Figs. 12.15–12.17; cf., discussion of this assemblage under “Room 9903” in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 20, Plates 20.38–20.39). However, despite these vessels, no clear floor could be traced in any part of the area adjacent to W9408b, only a grey ashy layer 4–6 cm thick, containing bits of kurkar and charcoal. The matrix of L9903 was sandy orange-brown fill with many sherds, bone, plaster chunks, small fallen mudbrick chunks and disassociated reed-matting material.

A few other vessels were found towards the center of the room where, again, no typical floor was found. Instead, what appeared to be a mudbrick surface, or perhaps some installation, was found. This consisted of a fairly clear line of four mortared bricks along the border with L9985 (discussed
below). Other bricks and parts of bricks were found east of this, but their orientation was less regular. The top of these mudbricks constitutes F9903 (#13.05–12.98) and they were excavated as L18065 (see below). It should be noted, however, that the in situ pottery was by-and-large found west of this surface/installation. In fact, the semi-intact vessels seem to stop suspiciously on line with the single row of bricks (Fig. 12.17), with no indication of a floor surface beneath them.

L9974, two mudbricks found in the corner against W9211 and W9408b, were at first thought to be a low bench. However, they were found on top of the rock tumble in L18059 (Fig. 12.18) and so, seem more like wall collapse in stage vii.

Another problematic issue is the nature of the area along the eastern face of W9408b, below the level at which the intact pottery was found and between the wall and mudbrick surface F9903. This was excavated as L9985 (bottom elevations #12.84–12.81) and related L18053 = L18054 = L18059. They all consist of a sandy brown fill with many sherds, bone, some shells and small stones, along with fragments of mudbrick and plaster. This is very similar to the description given for L9903, 9881 and 9861, all above the putative F9903 and below F9548. Moreover, some cross mends were possible between pottery found in L9903 and L9985. Excavation below the in situ vessels into L9985 and the other loci did not yield any observable floor when excavation ceased in L18054 (#12.77–12.64).

Three different explanations might be offered:
(a) The “cult deposit” was thrown into a pit or a trench (a favissa?). This would explain the haphazard appearance of the deposition of these vessels and their different elevations, as well as the fact that no clear floor was found under the assemblage and that loci bottoming out at different elevations seem to share the same matrix. Assuming that Loci 9861, 9881, 9903, at least part of 9985 (see further below) and, perhaps, L18053, L18054 and L18059, all form part of a large pit, begs the question of which is the surface that this pit was dug from. The key to phasing in this case is the fact that at least some of these loci are sealed by F9548 of stage vi and that the putative pit is dug into stage viii deposits.

(b) There was a floor, but it was missed. In this scenario, the mudbrick floor/installation (F9903) forms the floor in the eastern part of the unit and the above-mentioned ash layer in L9903 is the only candidate for a floor in the western part. In this case, L9985 is mixed. The restorable pottery in the highest baskets (including the pieces cross-mending with L9903) are intrusive from above the putative floor, while the bulk of the loci, as well as associated deposits (18053, 18054, 18059), actually belong to stage vii. This is the scenario followed in the plan (Plan 6) and in the ceramic discussion (Chapter 20; see Plates 20.38–20.39 vs. Plate 20.33).

(c) The mudbricks forming F9903 were a raised bench (with L9974 perhaps being a similar installation), while the floor in the rest of the room was at least 35 cm lower (i.e., L9985 et al. are still above the putative stage vii floor, which was never reached). This begs the question of why some of the intact vessels were found at least 35 cm above the floor, unless they fell down, with the rest of the collapse, from a higher story.

Irrespective of which scenario is chosen, there is an added uncertainty of the correlation of local stages in this unit to general phases of Area G, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter and in Chapter 3.

West of W9408b, no clear floor was found below stage vi F18004 (ca. #13.70) before F18041 = F18085 (ca. #12.50). This means that to the east of the wall, there are three stages (see further discussion below), while to the west, there are only two, or that the stage vii floor in this small space had been missed.

Comments on the Nature and Integrity of the Stage vii Deposits

To the east of W9408, the most secure remains are the in situ vessels in L9903. L9881 is material from below F9548 and L9407; this, too, is likely secure, since L9861 was opened above it to remove any final late contamination, either from pits or between-season erosion. L18014 was sealed below W9216. Below L18014 is L18034 = L9903, which also contained in situ vessels; however, L18034 is also just above L18053 of stage vii, with no clear floor between.
Phase 9 (Stage viii)

W9211 ≡ W9408b ≡ W18010b ≡ F18065 ≡ F18089 (east of W9408b) ≡ F18041 = F18085 (west of W9408b)

To the east of W9408b, it seems that there were three relatively closely superimposed floors between #13.00–12.80: F9903, F18065, and F18089. The makeup of mudbrick floor/installation F9903 was removed as L18065 and under it was a white ashy floor (F18065; #12.80–12.99); below this floor was a 5 cm thick sandy layer containing sherds, shells, flints and remains of one to five small fish on an ashy grey surface (F18089; #12.87–12.77).

As noted in the discussion of stage vii (Phase 8) above, L9985 = L18053 = L18054 = L18059 may belong to stage viii.

To the west of W9408b, F18041 = F18085 (#12.64–12.43; Fig. 12.11) reached W9408b and W18010b near the base of their lowest courses (Fig. 12.20).

Comments on the Nature and Integrity of the Stage viii Deposits

For dating purposes, L18041, sealed below F18004, and L18084 and L18085, sealed below W18010a, provide secure material west of W9408. Notably, there are no traces of the Phase 9 destruction in this unit, but there were very few in the unit(s) to the south as well.
Fig. 12.22. Locus genealogy for AJ/34. (d09Z3-1259)