

The Excavations at Mešad Hashavyahu

Preliminary Report

J. NAVEH

Department of Antiquities

The fortress¹ called today Mešad Hashavyahu (map ref.1207/1462) was discovered about 1.7 km. south of Yavneh-Yam (Minet Rubin), on one of the *karbar* hills along the sea-shore (see Fig. 1). During a surface-survey made on the site early in 1959, the author collected sherds dating from the end of Iron Age II and traced the general plan of the fortress. The plan was completed in two seasons of excavation (January and September 1960) on behalf of the Department of Antiquities and the Israel Exploration Society.²

The Hebrew ostraca which were among the finds have already been published.³ This paper describes the excavation and some of the objects found (complete vessels or representative fragments) including East Greek pottery. No attempt is made to list all the finds.

The L-shaped fortress covers an area of about 6 dunam (1½ acres) which can be divided into two rectangles. The larger rectangle (4 dunam) contains a

¹ The Department of Antiquities was first notified of the existence of this site by Mr. J. M. Weisenfreund of Tel Aviv, who had heard of it from Messrs. F. Burian and E. Friedmann of Givatayim. The site was also known to Mr. S. Lifshitz of Kibbutz Palmahim, who showed it to the author.

² The excavations were greatly assisted by Kibbutz Palmahim, where the members of the expedition were accommodated. The following took part in the excavations: Miss Pirhiya Beck (co-director in the second season), Messrs. S. Lifshitz, A. Kempinski (both seasons), R. Grafman, A. Eitan, D. Zvi Tov, Y. Dan, M. Busheri, J. Majjar (one season); Mr. S. Moshkovitz prepared the plans. The author wishes to thank Mr. I. Dunayevsky, architect, for his valuable advice concerning architectural problems. Mr. A. Eitan, Miss Ruth Sofer and Mrs. Ayala Sussmann assisted the author in registering and classifying the material. The pottery was drawn by Mrs. Irith Yarden, the photographs on the site were made by Mr. J. Sheffer and those of the pottery by Mr. J. Schweig and Mrs. H. Bieberkraut.

³ The author showed some of the East Greek sherds to Dr. P. P. Kahane of the Department of Antiquities, and to Sir John Beazley, Miss Eva Brann, and Dr. P. Dikaios during their short visits to Israel. Mr. B. B. Shefton visited the site and examined the material. Drawings and photographs of some of the sherds were sent to Dr. Chrysoula Kardara of Athens. The author takes this opportunity to thank all these scholars for their valuable advice. The opinions expressed in this paper, however, are the author's own responsibility.

⁴ See below, n. 4-5.

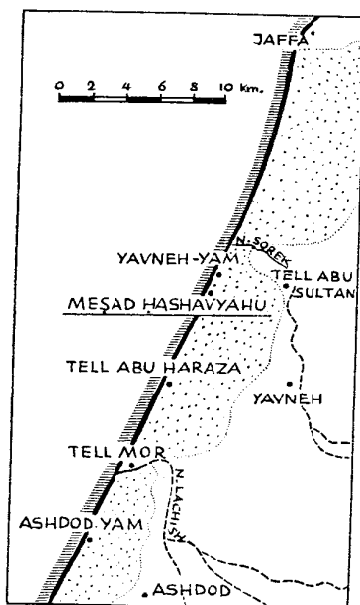


Fig. 1.

AREA A (Fig. 3 and Pl. 9)

The dressed building stones visible above the sand in the centre of the line of the west wall offered some hope of finding the gateway here. The hope proved well-founded: when the sand was removed, the southern part of the gate emerged, including the guard-room and the tower projecting from the wall. The dressed stones, laid directly on the rock, were preserved here to a considerable height. The gateway had been built up to at least half its height of *kurkar* stone probably locally quarried.

The guard-room (locus 10) is built into the thickness of the wall and measures c. 1.5×1.5 m. It was originally entered from the east through Room 4. The floor of the guard-room lies directly on the rubble filling of the wall; the threshold and the entrance were paved with pebbles. The five upper fragments of a Hebrew letter* were found in the north-eastern corner of the guard-room.

* J. Naveh: A Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C., *IEJ* 10 (1960), pp. 129-139, Pl. 17.

courtyard and rooms built against the fortress wall, while the smaller (2 dunam) consists of three rows of structures separated by streets. The fortress wall is 3.2 m. wide throughout, and is built of bricks on a stone foundation, with the exception of the gateway which seems partly to have been built of stone (see below). The outside of the fortress-wall is reinforced in some places by piers projecting about 70 cm. from the wall (Fig. 2).

The excavations uncovered the southern part of the gateway and the adjoining rooms (area A). In addition six trial soundings (areas B-G) were made in various parts of the fortress.

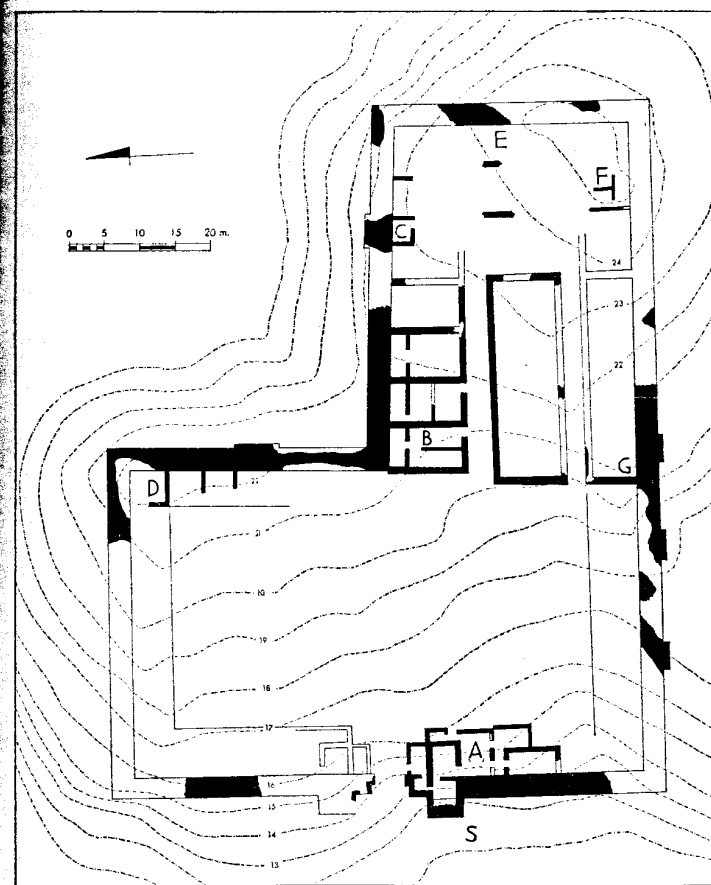


Fig. 2. Sketch plan of the fortress.

In the south-western corner of this room the base of a burnished bowl with an incised mark was found (Fig. 4:20). The pottery finds include fragments of a bowl with thickened rim (Fig. 4:12), the handle and shoulder of a jar, the base of a local lamp, a small fragment of an Ionian cup (Fig. 7:7), the handle

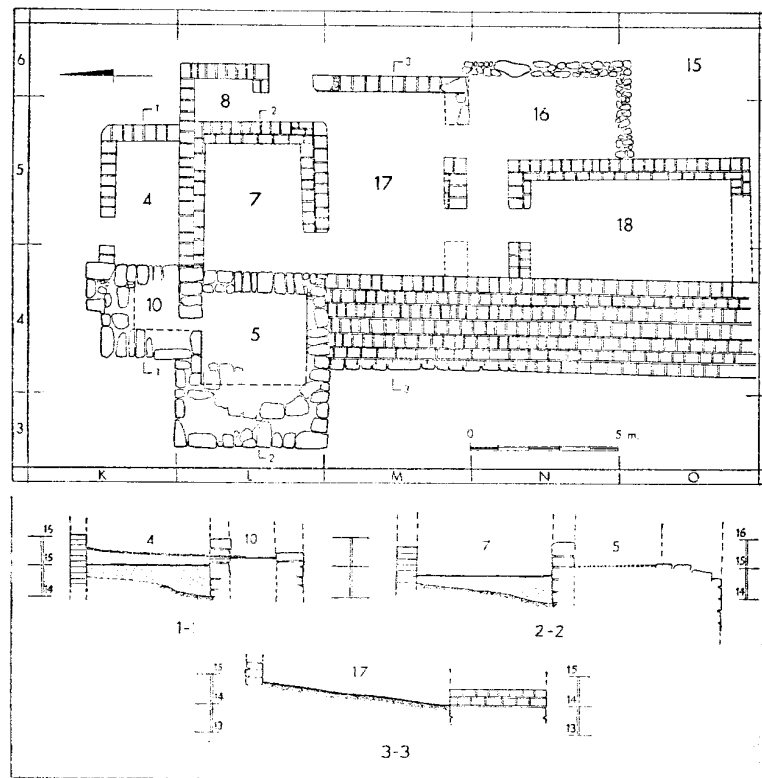


Fig. 3. Area A. Plan and sections.

of an oinochoe, and the rim of a krater. The level of the floor is 15.35 m. above sea-level; the depth of the deposit is so shallow that only in the corners does it reach 15.4 m. (the burnished bowl) and 15.46 m. (the letter).

Room 4 is a vestibule to the guard-room. Near its north wall, of which only about 20 cm. remain standing, we found the upper part of a jar placed upside down and used as an oven (Pl. 12 A). The traces of ashes around this jar showed the floor level distinctly at 14.95 m. On this floor were found a Greek cooking pot (Fig. 6:3; Pl. 12 F:2) and nearby the base of a local lamp, the rim of a coarse bowl of the type shown in Fig. 4:16,17 and Pl. 12 E, a fragment of a

Greek lamp (Fig. 8:4), two Ionian cups (Fig. 7:6,11; Pl. 12 H), and a painted sherd (Pl. 10 H) showing a human head (?). The deposit on the floor reaches a level of 15.1 m. and is sealed off by the debris of a collapsed brick wall.

This collapse must have occurred when the fortress was still occupied, because at a level of 15.3—15.35 m. we found the pebble-pavement leading to the entrance of the guard-room (see Fig. 3, section 1—1). This pavement also overlies the north wall of Room 4 which by that time had gone out of use. The finds made here include an iron arrow-head (Pl. 12 D:3), the sixth and lowest fragment of the letter, and another ostrakon, which was found on the ruined north wall.⁵ Evidently, Room 4 was pulled down in order to enlarge the open place in front of the gate. This was the only part of the fortress in which we could distinguish two phases, and it should be noted that the ostraca were found in the later phase.

Room 8 is a narrow chamber adjoining the east wall of Room 7. In its northeast corner we found a clay furnace which had been plastered over, and which stood on a few stones. The bottom of the furnace and the floor of the room were full of ashes (Pl. 12 B, C). Here a large piece of iron ore⁶ was found and an iron arrow-head and spatula (Pl. 12 D:1,4). It may be assumed that the furnace served for the manufacture of iron tools and implements.

Among the local pottery found in Room 8 were bowls (Fig. 4:5,13), fragments of a burnished jug, coarse bowls of the type shown in Fig. 4:16,17, and a jar (Fig. 5:10). Together with these were fragments of an oinochoe (Fig. 8:6), an Ionian cup, a Greek cooking pot, and a bowl painted with concentric circles and bars on the lip (Fig. 7:15, Pl. 12I:1; compare with the kraters in Fig. 7:14, 16, Pl. 12I:2).

Room 7 (3.25×4.25 m.) is entered from locus 17, through an opening between the fortress-wall and the south wall of Room 7. From Room 7 an opening leads into the tower (locus 5) through the stone wall of the tower, which is also the west wall of Room 7. The other three walls are built of mud-

⁵ J. Naveh: More Hebrew Inscriptions from Mešad Hašavyahu, above, pp. 27-32, Fig. 1, Nos. 1b, 3; for ostrakon No. 3 cf. pp. 28-29, Pl. 5B, C. On the plan (Fig. 1), Room 4 has not been shown, since it had ceased to exist at the time to which the ostraca belong.

⁶ The pieces of iron ore found in loci 8 and 5 and in area B were defined as hematite by Mr. I. Zak of the Geological Survey of Israel, to whom these pieces were sent for analysis together with the iron implement and samples of clay and plaster from the furnace. The arrow-head illustrated in Pl. 12D:2 was found in the gate-entrance.

brick; a light-coloured plaster covers walls and floor. The floor (height 14.75 m.) is laid on the sand used to fill out and level the uneven and sloping bed-rock (see Fig. 3, section 2—2). Bricks from collapsed walls covered this floor to a depth of one metre.

Here pieces of coarse bowls were found (as Fig. 4:16,17), fragments of a jar, a decanter (as Fig. 5:16), and an oinochoe. Pottery was also found in the sand filling below the plastered floor; it included fragments of local bowls (Fig. 4:3) and a juglet, as well as fragments of an Ionian cup. The sherds which were found below the plastered floor of this room must belong to the period when it was built, and we may assume with some measure of certainty that the floor of Room 7 was plastered at the time when the building of the fortress was being completed.

The tower (locus 5) projects about 5 m. from the line of the wall and its front measures 5.25 m. in length. The threshold leading to Room 7 shows that the space within the tower had been utilized. Although we could not find a clearly marked floor in the tower, there must have been one on the same level as the threshold, which is 35 cm. higher than the floor of Room 7. The architectural remains are sufficient to show that the length of the north-south axis of the tower-room was 3.5 m; the length of the east-west axis, however, cannot be determined, since the west side of the tower has been eroded and the courses do not reach the postulated height of the floor (see Pl. 9 C). The room may have been divided into two by a partition, but in view of the obvious necessity of making the west wall of the tower as thick and strong as possible, it is more likely that there was space only for one chamber about 3 m. wide. The scant remains also do not show whether there had been an opening from the guard-room (10) to the tower (5). Since there is no opening between Rooms 4 and 7, we assume that originally there had been such an opening between 10 and 5.

The objects found while clearing the stones of the tower include a coarse bowl (Fig. 4:17, Pl. 12E:2) and juglet (Fig. 6:11), a pointed base of a jug, rims of local bowls, part of an oinochoe, a Hebrew ostrakon¹ and a piece of hematite.

South of Rooms 7 and 8 is locus 17, whose size (6.25 × 4 m.) indicates that it had served as a courtyard. This supposition is further confirmed by the absence of a leveled floor. Locus 17, which is partly paved with shells, gradually slopes towards the west from a level of 14.7 m. to 14 m (see Fig. 3, section 3—3).

¹ *Op. cit.* (above, n. 5), ostrakon No. 6, pp. 30-32, Pl. 6A, C.

Here a small fragment of an ostrakon was found, which probably belongs to the missing part of the letter,² local bowls (Fig. 4:1, 8, 11), a 'cup and saucer' (Fig. 4:19), a local jar (Fig. 5:9), a hole-mouth jar (Fig. 5:12), local lamps (Fig. 5:18), a local cooking pot (Fig. 5:4) as well as a Greek cooking pot (as Fig. 6:7,8), and an amphora (Fig. 6:5).

A brick foundation-wall measuring 1.75 × 0.75 m. was uncovered in the southern part of courtyard 17. It is reasonable to assume that there had been another such foundation wall west of it (Fig. 3); both may have served as supports for a light roof over the entrance to Room 18.

At the end of the second season the line of the walls of 16 and 18 could be traced, but the rooms have not yet been excavated.

South of Room 16 is an open area (locus 15), which we have begun clearing. The great concentration of sherds in this locus indicates that it had probably served as a rubbish dump. Greek sherds are especially numerous, and most of the painted fragments come from here.

Outside the fortress-wall, in the neighbourhood of the gate, there is, in our opinion, another rubbish dump. The sherds collected there are marked S.

Since we found only one floor in all the rooms with the exception of Room 4, we conclude that the fortress remained in use for a short period only. We have therefore thought it reasonable to include in the pottery discussed in this paper sherds from the rubbish dumps and sherds picked up on the surface (marked SF), and to assume that this material too reflects the history of the fortress.

TRIAL SOUNDINGS (Fig. 2)

In *Area B* we cleared the floor of one room in a house situated in the north-western part of the smaller rectangle. Part of the pottery found here is shown in Figs. 4:15 (large bowl), 5:2 (local cooking pot), 6:3 (amphora), 6:9 (large pot, Pl. 12G), 7:9,10 (bases of Ionian cups). The rest of the finds consisted of fragments of local jars and bowls, oinochoai, a Greek cooking pot, and a lump of hematite.

In *Area C* a room adjoining the north wall of the smaller rectangle was investigated. There three local bowls were found (Fig. 4:7), three coarse bowls (Fig. 4:16, Pl. 12E:1), a local cooking pot, two decanters (Fig. 5:17), four local lamps (Fig. 5:21), an amphora (Fig. 6:4.) and some fragments of two

² *Op. cit.* (above, n. 5), ostrakon No. 1c, pp. 27-28, Pl. 5A.

additional amphorae, a fragment of a local jar (as Fig. 6:15), two Greek cooking pots (Fig. 6:7; Pl. 12F: 1,3), a basket-handled jar (Fig. 6:13), an Ionian cup (Fig. 7:3) and a krater (Fig. 7:17; Pl. 12 K), an iron needle (Pl. 12 D:6), and an elongated iron tool (Pl. 12 D:5).

Areas D and E are small trial pits in the north-east corner of the larger rectangle and near the east wall of the smaller rectangle respectively. The relatively few sherds found here were of the types found in the other areas.

In *Area F*, the examination of a heap of stones on the top of the hill showed that it had been placed there at some time after the destruction of the fortress, because a layer of sand divided it from the brown earth containing brick debris below which lay the remains of rooms. On the floor of these rooms were uncovered two local jars (Fig. 6:14, 15), a bowl with a high ring-base (Fig. 6:12), a hole-mouth jar (Fig. 5:8), a decanter (Fig. 5:16), two local bowls (Fig. 4:4), an Ionian cup (Fig. 7:2), fragments of an oinochoe (Pl. 11 B), and a bronze fibula.

Area G is a sounding in a room adjoining the centre of the south wall. On the floor of this room we found local bowls with thickened rims, and one bowl with an everted rim (Fig. 4:6), coarse bowls of the type shown in Fig. 4:16, 17, a juglet (Fig. 5:5), a local lamp with a high base (as Fig. 5:18) and another with a flat base (Fig. 5:19), two amphorae (Fig. 6:1, 2), Ionian cups (Fig. 7:4, 8), local and Greek cooking pots, local jars, painted sherds of oinochoai (Fig. 9:2; Pl. 10 G), and an iron spearhead.

These soundings revealed everywhere one floor only, generally of beaten earth, with an abundance of Greek and local sherds filling in the picture obtained in area A. The floors were generally laid on bedrock, often covered with a thin layer of clean sand to even out the irregularities of the rock. Collapsed brick walls covered the remains on the floors and helped to preserve them.

THE POTTERY (Figs. 4-10, pp. 100-113)

Two main groups can be distinguished among the pottery found at Meşad Hashavyahu—locally manufactured pottery and foreign East Greek ware.

Local Pottery. Most of the locally manufactured pottery is a characteristic assemblage of the types dating to the eighth to seventh centuries B. C. usually found on tells in Judah and in the Shephelah. Some features, however, make a date in the seventh century preferable, e.g. the type of the cooking pots. Moreover, the presence of a certain ceramic element makes, in our opinion, an eighth

century date for the fortress improbable. This ceramic element is usually defined as Persian, and consists of coarse bowls (Fig. 4:16, 17 and Pl. 12 E) and jars with basket handles, one of which was found in area C (Fig. 6:13) and the other on the surface. The 'Persian' bowls were found in great numbers on every floor together with local and East Greek pottery. These coarse wares are characteristic of the sixth to fifth centuries B. C., and their presence excludes, in our opinion, the possibility of dating the ceramic assemblage any earlier than the second half of the seventh century B. C.⁹

East Greek pottery. In as much as the author was able to form an opinion on the East Greek wares found here for the first time in large quantities in Palestine,¹⁰ he believes that they confirm the above dating and even narrow down the existence of the fortress to the last third of the seventh century B. C. This conclusion follows from an analysis of the painted pottery which belongs to the Middle Wild Goat style, usually dated to 630-600 B. C.¹¹ In addition, most of the other East Greek wares also fit well into this context.

Although some of the local and East Greek pottery could well be dated later, historically the presence of the Hebrew ostraca in the last phase of locus 4 cannot be explained unless we date the fortress to the last third of the seventh century (see below).

HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS

The Greek pottery found at Meşad Hashavyahu in large quantities—including ordinary household ware—bears witness to a Greek settlement on the site. The first settlers appear to have been Greeks; this seems likely from the pieces of an Ionian cup found below the floor of Room 7 and the very numerous Greek painted sherds in the rubbish dumps (locus 15 and area S). The decorated East Greek sherds show that the Greeks settled here in c. 630-625 B. C. Since we

⁹ The excavators of Megiddo place these bowls—both the flat and ring base types—in strata III-I (i. e. eighth century and later); cf. M. G. Shipton: *Megiddo*, I, Chicago, 1939, p. 168, § 53, Pl. 23: 13-17 and Pl. 58:13-17. We find it difficult to accept this dating. For a bibliography, see O. Tufnell: *Lachish*, III, London, 1953, pp. 279-280. The bowls of Meşad Hashavyahu are of the flat base type only, and it seems that this is the early type.

¹⁰ Three sherds of this kind were found in Ashkelon, cf. W. J. Phythian-Adams: Report on the Stratification of Askalon, *PEFQS* (1923), Pl. IV: 1, 14, 17, description on p. 83. cf. also J. H. Iliffe: Pre-Hellenistic Greek Pottery in Palestine, *QDAP* 2 (1932), Pl. Va:1,5; R. M. Cook: *Ionia and Greece 800-600 B.C.*, *Journ. of Hellenic Studies* 66 (1946), p. 83, n. 143; Ch. Clairmont: *Greek Pottery from the Near East, Berytus* 11 (1954/5), pp. 85-139, especially pp. 103-108.

¹¹ R. M. Cook: *Greek Painted Pottery*, London, 1960, pp. 118-126.

found everywhere (with the exception of locus 4) one floor only and no architectural changes, we assume that the fortress existed for a period which may not have exceeded a few decades.

The Hebrew ostraca, which indicate clearly that the site was under the rule of Judah, must belong to Josiah's reign, since known historical data make it very unlikely that Josiah's successors controlled the Mediterranean coast. The fortress may have been conquered by Josiah a short time before it was abandoned. The king quartered military forces in the fortress with a governor at their head, who was also responsible for the administration of the region.¹² The occupation forces continued to use the living accommodation without making any architectural changes, the only exception being locus 4, which may have conflicted with the new inhabitants' preference for an open space near the gate.¹³ Room 4 was pulled down, and since apparently the brick debris turned easily into mud at the entrance to the guard-room, this area was paved with pebbles.¹⁴

Judah's control over the fortress seems to have ended with Josiah's defeat by Pharaoh Necho and death in 609 B. C. The ostraca were found in the guard-room and near its entrance under collapsed brick walls. Since only clean sand without any ancient remains was found above the brick debris, we assume that the fortress was abandoned in 609 B. C. and was never reoccupied.

One of the problems raised by the abundant East Greek ceramic material is what manner of Greeks settled here. The simplest solution would be to assume that at Meşad Hashavyahu we have the remains of a Greek trading colony. We cannot, however, disregard Herodotus (II, 152, 154), who records that Psamtik I (663—609 B. C.) employed Ionian and Carian mercenaries.¹⁵ This Pharaoh's activities on the Philistine coast are recorded in Herodotus II, 157, where we are

¹² *Op. cit.* (above, n. 4), p. 139.

¹³ See above, p. 31.

¹⁴ We found no traces of the takeover by the new masters in other loci. For the present, we can only note that finds in the guard-room belong to the second phase in the history of the fortress (only small fragments of Greek sherds were found here). In courtyard 17 most of the material is local. It seems that after taking over the fortress, the new masters cleared these loci by throwing out the pottery previously accumulated. This may explain the concentration of Greek sherds in the rubbish dumps in locus 15 and in area S. The fate of the Greek inhabitants after the conquest of the fortress is a question which needs clarification by further excavation.

¹⁵ Ashurbanipal records that Gyges king of Lydia sent soldiers to assist Psamtik, cf. D. D. Luckenbill: *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, II, Chicago, 1927, pp. 297-298, §§784-785. Lydian mercenaries in the Saitic Egyptian army are also mentioned in Jer. 46:9 and Ezek. 30:5.

told that Psamtik besieged Ashdod for 29 years. It may therefore be suggested that the Greeks who settled at Meşad Hashavyahu were mercenaries of Psamtik I. The military character of the settlement and the workshop for producing iron implements may be better understood in the light of this suggestion.¹⁶

It is too early to draw final conclusions concerning the history of the fortress. Further excavations on the site, as well as intensive study of the East Greek pottery, may well uncover important points which have escaped us at present.

Provisionally, the data yielded by the excavation may be summarized as follows:

- 1) The fortress existed for a period which may not have exceeded twenty years.
- 2) The East Greek pottery suggests that the site was inhabited by Greeks in the last third of the seventh century B. C.
- 3) The first settlers and perhaps even the builders of the fortress were Greeks.
- 4) The fortress was conquered by Josiah a few years before 609 B. C.
- 5) The fortress was abandoned when the Egyptian army advanced along the coast in 609 B. C., and the site was never resettled.

¹⁶ Although the author prefers this hypothesis to the theory that Meşad Hashavyahu was a Greek merchant colony, it should be noted that no remains whatsoever—neither pottery nor scarabs—have yet been found which could point to Egyptian control of the fortress.