

GEZER

In the early 1870s, a French archaeologist by the name of Charles Clermont-Ganneau first made the discovery of a boundary stone at a mound called Tel el Jezer by the local Arabs. It has been dated to the first century A.D. The inscription on the stone was written in two languages: in Hebrew, "Boundary of Gezer," and in Greek, "[Belonging to] Alkios." This boundary stone has confirmed the identification of the site. Later, in 1902, the Palestine Exploration Fund finally decided to excavate the area under the direction of R. A. S. Macalister. He discovered several more boundary stones with similar inscriptions. Another of these stones was found in more recent times, bringing the total number to thirteen.



Stone Reading "Boundary of Gezer" / "[Belonging to] Alkios"
(Museum of the Ancient Orient, Istanbul)

During his work, Macalister also discovered a row of eight standing stones (*masseboth*). The shortest was five feet high, and the tallest was over ten feet. Being representative of deity, standing stones were often set up by the Canaanites at their high places. A high place, located on a mountain or hill, was a site used for worship rites. High elevations were preferred in order to bring worshipers closer to the heavens and their gods. High places usually had shade trees, raised platforms, altars, standing stones, and rooms for priests to make special offerings. These were associated with pagan cults, and they became symbols of false worship. The Israelites worshiped the Baals at these places. Sometimes they attempted to worship the Lord at high places, mixing false pagan elements with divine truth (syncretism).



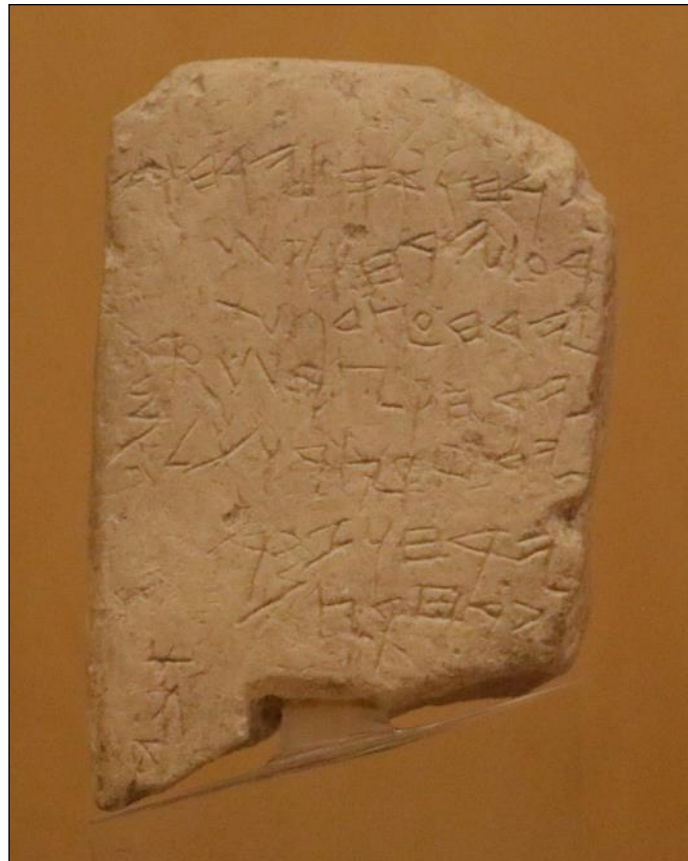
Standing Stones (*Masseboth*) Found at Gezer



In 1908, Macalister also found the famous Gezer Calendar, a small piece of soft limestone measuring 4.25 inches long and 3.125 inches wide with Paleo-Hebrew writing. The inscription is a list of the annual agricultural seasons. It is generally interpreted as either a school boy's exercise or a farmer's almanac. The text reads:

The two months of [olive] harvest;	[mid-September to mid-November]
The two months of planting [grain];	[mid-November to mid-January]
The two months of late planting;	[mid-January to mid-March]
The month of hoeing up flax;	[mid-March to mid-April]
The month of harvesting barley;	[mid-April to mid-May]
The month of harvesting [wheat] and storing;	[mid-May to mid-June]
The two months of vine-tending;	[mid-June to mid-August]
The month of summer-fruit [figs, grapes, etc.].	[mid-August to mid-September]

The calendar gives us an authentic description of the agricultural year as it was practiced in ancient Israel about the time of Solomon's reign (10th century B.C.).



Gezer Calendar
(Museum of the Ancient Orient, Istanbul)

While excavating Gezer, Macalister also discovered a water tunnel similar to those found in other parts of Israel (Hazor, Megiddo, and Gibeon). A vertical shaft led to a sloped tunnel, which in turn led to a cavern with spring water. Over the past hundred years, part of the tunnel has filled back up with dirt and debris. Archaeologists have been working to remove this fill, to fully investigate the water system, and to determine the date of its construction.

Overlooking the Valley of Aijalon, Gezer once guarded the Via Maris (“Way to the Sea”) running from Mesopotamia to Egypt as well as the road heading east to Jerusalem. At various times, Gezer was controlled by Canaanites, Philistines, and Egyptians. (In addition to the Old Testament, the city is also mentioned on the Merneptah Stela and in the Amarna Letters; *ANET*, 378, 486-90.) While Joshua defeated the king of Gezer and his army during the conquest (Josh. 10:33; 12:12), the Israelites did not dislodge the Canaanites from the city (Josh. 16:10; Judg. 1:29). It was not until the reign of Solomon that it became an Israelite city. The Bible explains that Pharaoh had attacked Gezer, capturing the city and setting it on fire. After killing its Canaanite inhabitants, he gave the city as a wedding present to his daughter, whom Solomon had married. Then Solomon rebuilt the city (1 Kings 9:16-17). A six-chambered gate dating from the time of Solomon has been discovered at Gezer. It is similar to the gates found at Hazor and Megiddo. This is to be expected, since Solomon rebuilt these three strategic cities during the same period using forced labor (1 Kings 9:15).

Artifacts and models from excavations at Tel Gezer (and Tel Dan) are on display at the Skirball Museum of Biblical Archaeology in Jerusalem.

