

# City Planning of Tell el 'Ajjul

## Reconstructed Plan (Fig 1)

by

Khair N. Yassine

In order to analyze the city planning and social concepts of the ancient Palestinian cities, it is necessary to involve ourselves with the following aspects:

- a - The significance of town planning (which involves analysis of the location of its administrative and commercial centers.
- b - The location of the market place:
  - 1 - its sociological functions.
  - 2 - its relation to the shrine or palace.
- c - The streets and their position in relation to the residential units.
- d - The groups of these units (grouped themselves inwards or quarters):
  - 1 - the front entrance of the compounds facing the roads and the back abutting either on land not yet built up, or the city wall.
  - 2 - the backs of the compounds which might be linked by foot-paths which often formed the boundaries between quarters.
- e - The contrast between what might be called, the "radial and chess-

---

(1) The sequence of events at 'Ajjul was very different from that of the northern cities. Situated not far from the Sinai desert and only a mile or two from the Mediterranean coast, its position was doubly important. It lay at the junction of vital land routes and was well placed for maritime trade. The city

board pattern", or insular vs blocks pattern such analysis should indicate the extent to which we can speak of Palestine's city planning as opposed to haphazard accretion.

Before proceeding in our investigation, we must, curiously enough, remark that each of the towns of ancient Palestine sprang from contemporary conditions, economical, political (historical events), stratigraphical, typographical and technological achievement, each one almost having its own conditions.

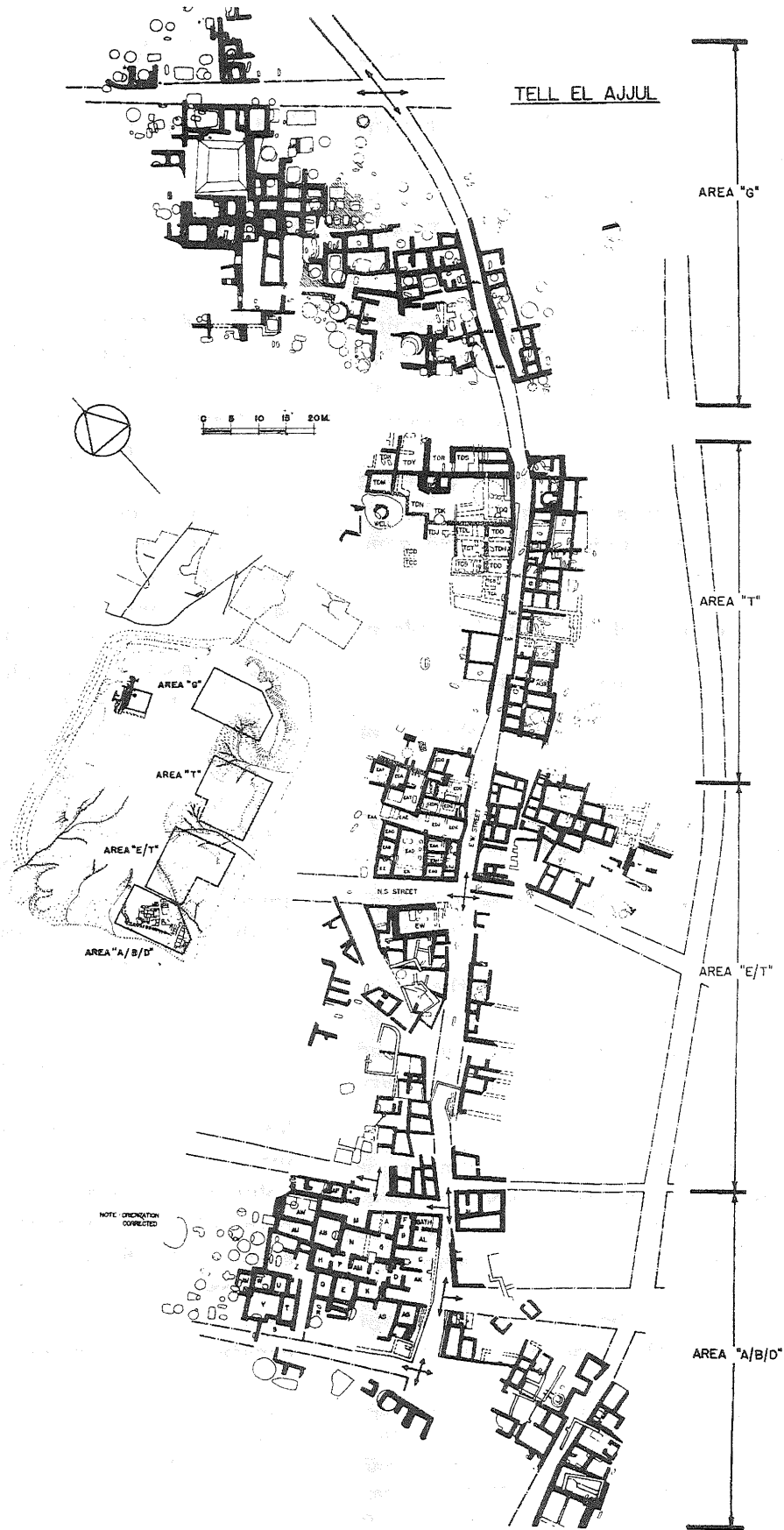
When we speak of the Palestinian cities and those of her neighbors, we must interject that Palestine was not involved in stylistic form and rigid tradition. This always fluctuated, but generally kept the formation of the architectural principle of organic order.

I have been very careful in utilizing the Tell el 'Ajjul<sup>1</sup> architectural complex because of the sketchy and often inaccurate plans published in the five volumes of Gaza. No comprehensive plan of the excavations is produced, even in the fifth volume which followed topographical grid. As a result, it is hard to get a clear idea of the excavation as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

formed part of a province which was closely allied to Egypt during the Hyksos period. W.C. Hayes, *CHA* 2, fasc. 6, p. 21.

(2) The excavated loci are distributed into arbitrarily selected regions marked by the letters of the alphabet A-T, leaving U-Z for regions not yet touched.

Fig. 1



Petrie mistakenly indicated the north direction toward the west in Gaza I (Pl. LIV), and compared it with the detailed plans, particularly in Vol. III, Pl. LI. The carelessness with which orientations are used, adds considerably to the difficulty of understanding just what is referred to.<sup>3</sup>

The excavation report did not mention when the excavations were resumed in the successive campaign of 1938 and it is questioned whether they had, in fact, started from the point at which the previous one stopped, or if they had left an area untouched and separated between the two.

The divergence between Petrie's chronology of Palestinian pottery and what is known, is very great. Albright examined Petrie's four volumes and arrived at the conclusion that the "Copper Age" <sup>4</sup> described by Petrie is MBI <sup>5</sup> (or EB-MB, Kenyon). <sup>6</sup>

Petrie attributed the two strata to the twelfth and fifteenth dynasties, respectively. Albright's examinations indicated nothing of an occupation, after ca. 1450 B.C.,<sup>7</sup> and not a single characteristic painted sherd of developed LB type is recorded by Petrie as coming from the houses of the Hyksos level (equivalent to Tell Beit Mirsim D) <sup>8</sup> and belongs mainly to the late 17th and 16th centuries B.C.

(3) It is only indicated by saying, "the dig was resumed to the east of the previous campaign".

(4) Gaza I, p. 3; Gaza V. p. 10.

(5) W.F. Albright: "The Chronology of a South Palestinian City, Tell el 'Ajjul," *The American Journal of Semitic Language and Literatures* 55 (1938), pp. 145.

(6) K. Kenyon: *AHL* (1970) p. 145.

(7) Gaza I, pp. 2, 4. The Gaza upper level equals

So the Middle Bronze Age town probably dates only from the end of this period, and continued to the early part of L.B.

In the course of the second and third seasons, a series of superimposed buildings were excavated which Petrie considered to be palaces, between the earliest and second of which was a considerable layer of ash.<sup>9</sup> Professor Albright demonstrated that the occupation level which lay beneath the burnt layer (that is, Palace I) and city III were contemporary,<sup>10</sup> it seems clear that the destruction of both occurred at the same time, either during or shortly after the final defeat of the Hyksos, when the city of Ajjul was razed to the ground and houses and public buildings alike were covered by a thick layer of debris.

Fig. 1 illustrates the result of our attempt to reconstruct and correlate the areas dug (these areas were plotted on the map published in Gaza III (Pl. LI).<sup>11</sup> From the practical and hypothetical extension to the unexcavated portion (very badly denuded, between areas E,T, and G) of our reconstructed plan, there is a coherent city layout from which we draw conclusions.

To the west/south corner (drawn in open line) is the first phase of the lower level, the second phase probably

Megiddo, Stratum IX; Tuthmoses III equals TBM, Stratum C.

(8) W.F. Albright: *AJSL* 55, p. 345.

(9) *Gaza II*, pp. 4, 17.

(10) W.F. Albright: *AJSL* 55, p. 348-49. The date given for the construction of Palace I is in the late 17th century B.C.

(11) F. Petrie: *Ancient Gaza I* (1931) *II* (1932) *III* (1933) *IV* (1934) F. Petrie et al: *Ancient Gaza V* (1952).

is denuded because of the steep slope. In Area "A", the top big complex of the second phase was uncovered,<sup>12</sup> and described by Petrie as a main house of square blocks A, AB, H, J, which will hereafter be referred to as the civic complex. The whole complex seems to form a unified unit, containing many rooms, bathrooms, shrine and many silos to the west of the building. This unit might served as a civic building, housing officials. The shrine (AF) is of an Egyptian style, where it has three rooms at the rear.<sup>13</sup> Egyptian alabaster vases were found in Rooms F.C. W and N. the pottery registered comes from this complex, and was probably used as a living quarter of the (officer) in charge of the whole civic building.

South of this building, an E/W street runs all the way to the east end of mound in radial form, running parallel to the city wall and follows the configuration of the mound. There is another street south of this one running parallel to it, but not traceable beyond area B/D's lower level. Dwelling complexes bordering the E/W street on both sides, were found.

In Area E, complex EW,<sup>14</sup> stands a very noticeable building, situated overlooking three streets. The distinction of this building in having thick walls forming a big hall (8.50 x 4. m.) and its location on an intersection are indicative of a special function. Palestinian temples found in Shechem of MB and Megiddo (Stratum VIII) are almost the same as this one, with only

(12) Gaza, I, Plate LIV.

(13) Like the mortuary chapel of Sunkh-Khare Mentuhutep at Qurna and the Middle Kingdom temple at Medinet Madi, etc.

(14) Gaza IV, p. 15, Plate LXII.

(15) Gaza IV, Plate LXIII.

minor differences. Unfortunately, the material remains found in it were not abundant and of no help for identification of special use. East of the (temple) and at the north side of the E/W street, a big house is found, house "EAD". East of it is an alley with two houses. Area T at the north side of the E/W street has a big unified complex partially built of rough stones, (T.D.N. complexes).<sup>15</sup>

This big stone building is built on a rigid plan with a straight wall and mostly unified in thickness. Two large sized wells were found to the west of Room TDM and one north of TDQ. Rooms TCS, TCT, TDL, TDD, TDH and TDO are long and narrow, all built of stones and possibly used as storage rooms. The special material and spaciousness of the west hall (TDK/TDN) and the wells, all show a distinction of function different from most of the other complexes thus far described.<sup>16</sup> All indicate the complex to have been a public function. On the southern side of the E/W street, a group of houses appear on a contiguous uniform plan, set on the southern side of the street, smaller than those on the north side. All built side to side, no pathways were left between them. They all seem to be uniform in plan, with minor differences in size and shape.

The excavation in Area G revealed two levels of occupation, the same as those dug in the previous seasons.<sup>17</sup> The E/W street (GAW/GAM/GAL) continued, turning north. The complexes uncovered in Area G were less elabo-

(16) The arrangement of the different parts are also different from the civic building described before. We may assume this from the civic building used to store government provisions.

(17) Gaza V, Plates XXXIII and XXXI.

rate, but all were in alignment with the main E/W street.

To summarize the Tell el 'Ajjul town planning, we see that the layout seems to have a regular planning based on the pattern of the street layout, directed E/W, and meeting other ones running N/S. The city was divided into big sections, unlike Tell Beit Mirsim and Megiddo, where blocks were smaller. Each section seems to have consisted of many houses attached side and then, back to back.

The N/S street of Tell el 'Ajjul, linking the center city with its outer configurations are wide and straight, providing an easy to the center city, and probably makes a straight ravine between the temple (EW) and the Palace, located at the north edge of the city.<sup>18</sup>

This phenomenon is unique in Tell el 'Ajjul, unlike the Palestinian cities, where transverse ravines are narrow and winding.

The zoning seems to be also a little different, with the inner area of the city grouping of official buildings, temple, administrative units and civic center, as well as huge mansions forming blocks arranged according to a loss scheme all along the north side of the E/N street. The small dwellings are arranged on the southern side of the street and are themselves an indication of an adequate organization.

---

(18) Very little is found apart from the stone substructure of the walls. The upper wall courses were undoubtedly built of mud brick. "It has been suggested that this complex was intended as a stronghold, the ranges of rather

## Conclusions

The street system divided the city into slightly irregular blocks, each having its own individuality. In some cases (such as Megiddo, Tell el 'Ajjul, Tell Abu Hawam and Ta'annek) each row consists of buildings belonging to a certain type, (they are grouped according to types, into quarters, conforming to a system of zoning). A house of different plan and larger size set in a part of a quarter could have been intended for the governor or official in charge, or could possibly have been the mansion of a wealthy owner. The public building, civic building, and temple are generally located inside the city, along the inner periphery of the second main street.

It is clear that city planning and zonal patterns represent responses to a number of different kinds of factors that influence them in different ways and degrees on different levels; i.e., ecology, warfare, religion. These are general factors, but seem to have affected the layout of Megiddo, Tell el 'Ajjul and Ta'annek in the different phases.

The excavated area, however, has not been large enough to permit valid generalizations. Our attempt to reconstruct a total town plan of Tell el 'Ajjul, must rely very largely upon the hypothetical extension to the unexcavated portions of the site.

Khair N. Yassine  
Jordan University.

small-sized rooms surrounding a large open courtyard conforming more to the requirements of a fort than those of the residence of a governor," Claire Epstein: *Palestinian Bichrome Ware* (1966) p. 175.