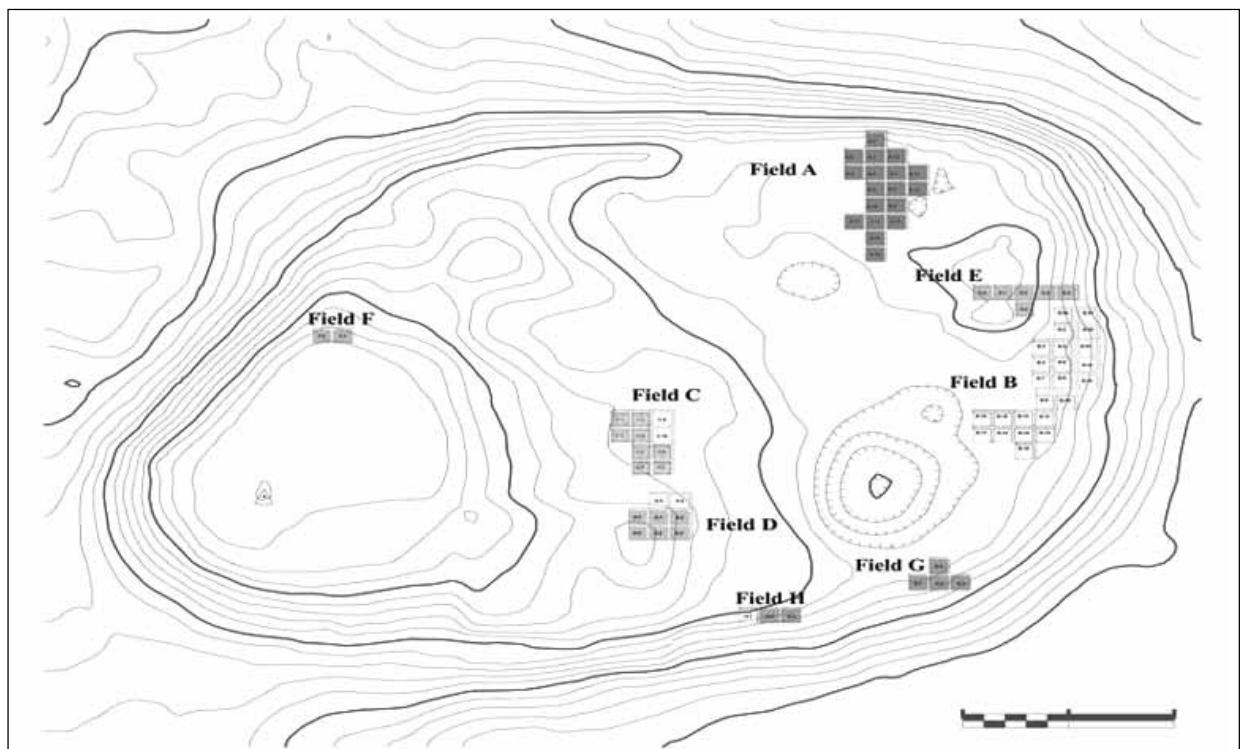


## A TRIPARTITE PILLARED BUILDING IN TRANSJORDAN

*Paul Z. Gregor*

During the first, 1992, season of excavation at Tall Jalūl, located approximately 5km north-east of Mādabā in Jordan (Younker *et al.* 1993, 1996, 1997, 2000 and 2007), a wall was revealed in Field A, Square 2, which was dated to the 8th century BC. Since this Field is located on the north-eastern ridge of the tall (see **Fig. 1**), this wall was expected to be a part of the city's defense system. However, after the first season, its thickness, length and exact function were still uncertain, since only the northern face of the wall had been exposed, with the rest left unexcavated in the southern balk. During the following season, in 1994, new squares were laid

out on the other (south) side of the wall in order to reveal its true nature and function. Soon after the second season, it was evident that there was another wall dating to the 7th century BC, which was built just inside the 8th century BC wall found during the previous season. During the course of excavation, upper portions of rectangular pillars emerged. The pillars were in parallel lines and appeared in two squares. It was immediately obvious that they represented the architectural form of a pillared building. During the following season, in 1996, the entire building was excavated, exposing all of its structural features. It was evident that it was actually a



1. Topographical map of Tall Jalul.

typical tripartite pillared building with two parallel rows of pillars located inside the structure. These are well-known in Cisjordan.

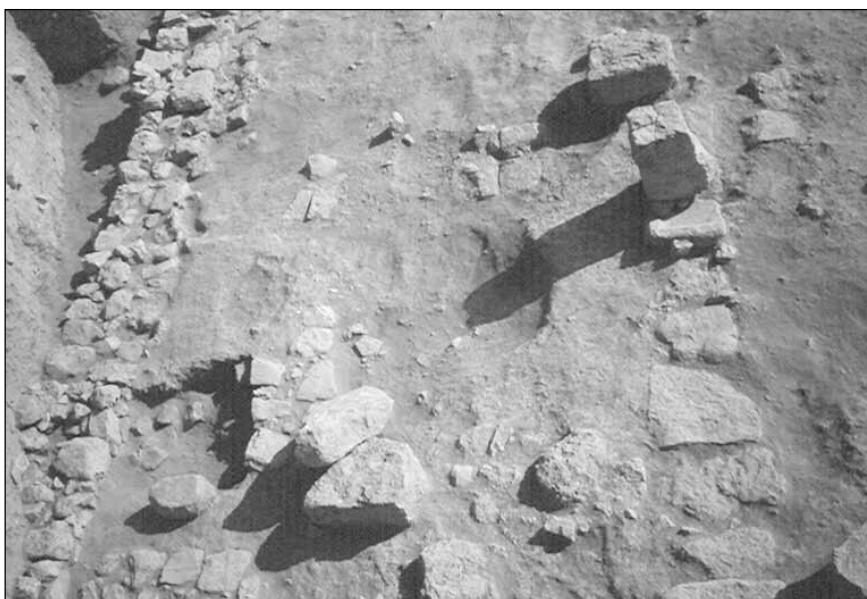
The building was 17m long and 10.2m wide, aligned just a few degrees off the north-south axis. Most of the upper portions of the walls were missing, owing to the fact that the floor of the building was just 1m below the ground surface. During the 19th century AD, this area was extensively used as a burial ground for slaves and servants of nearby villagers. In addition to the digging of the last couple of centuries, which greatly disrupted the ancient walls and floors of the building, some of the wall stones were undoubtedly robbed in antiquity and later times for other structures. The majority of the robbed stones were probably reused in constructing the Islamic village to the south of the tell. The western wall of the building, however, was well-preserved over its entire length and was visible above the floor level of the structure. Although most of the wall was preserved to a height of just 10 to 20cm above the floor, in some places it survived up to 1 meter. In addition to the western wall, only half of the northern wall survived at the north-western corner of the building. Apart from a few foundation stones, the eastern part of the northern wall and the entire southern and eastern walls were missing. Most of the pillars and pavement stones from the interior of the building were also missing.

From the remaining walls, however, it is ob-

vious that the building was well-constructed. Walls were 1m thick in most places. The lower courses of the walls consisted of larger, roughly hewn stones (50-70cm in diameter). Some of the stones were clearly reused from earlier structures. In one instance, the builders reused a large stone that once served as door socket, probably as part of a door of a larger building or even a city gate. In addition, a large stone basin which was 50cm in diameter was reused as a foundation stone in the southern wall. The majority of the stones used for the walls were roughly hewn and most were small (20-40cm) and medium (40-60cm) sized.

As noted above, from the remains of the structure it was evident that the roof of the building was supported by two parallel rows of pillars, of which a few were found *in situ* (see **Fig. 2**). The distance between the exterior walls and the pillars, and the distance between the two rows of pillars was 2.5m. Pillars in both rows were equidistant from each other, standing about 2m apart. Some of the pillars were buried in the ground, while others were standing on a supporting foundation, or stylobate. In some places only the foundation stones were found and some were missing altogether. Among those pillars still standing, the tallest one stood 1m above the floor.

The floor between the pillars was made of beaten earth, but the floor between the walls and pillars was covered with flagstones of various



2. 7th century BC Pillar Building.

sizes. The entrance to the building was probably located on its southern side, which opens on to the inner city. Since the entire southern wall is missing, apart from few foundation stones, the precise shape and size of the entrance remains unknown.

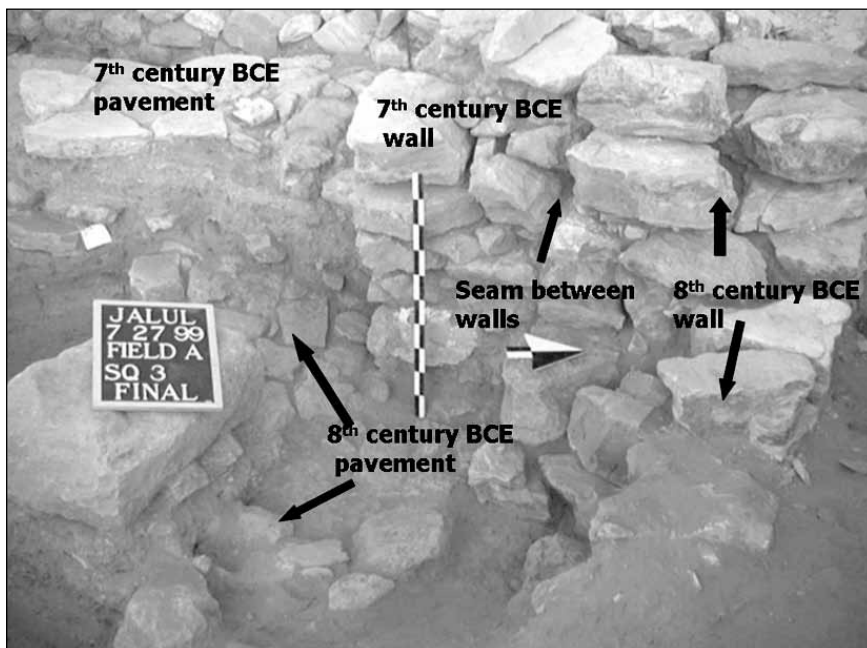
Owing to the fact that the structure was poorly preserved, a decision was reluctantly made to penetrate the floor of the building and to examine its possible foundation trenches in an attempt to determine its exact date. According to the pottery excavated under the sealed floor, it was evident that the structure was erected during the 7th century BC. After excavating the debris under the floor, the excavators were impressed to discover how the ancient architects had negotiated the uneven terrain by stabilizing the foundation of the building and ensuring that the structure was secure and safe.

The structure was erected on the remains of an earlier building dating to the 8th century BC (see **Fig. 3**). Ancient architects cleared most of the material deriving from this earlier structure. Apart from the remnants of the western wall found during the first season of excavation and sporadic flagstones, all other stones were recycled into the tripartite pillar building. In spite of the fact that northern wall of the earlier building (8th century BC) was in decent shape, for some reason the builders decided to construct a new

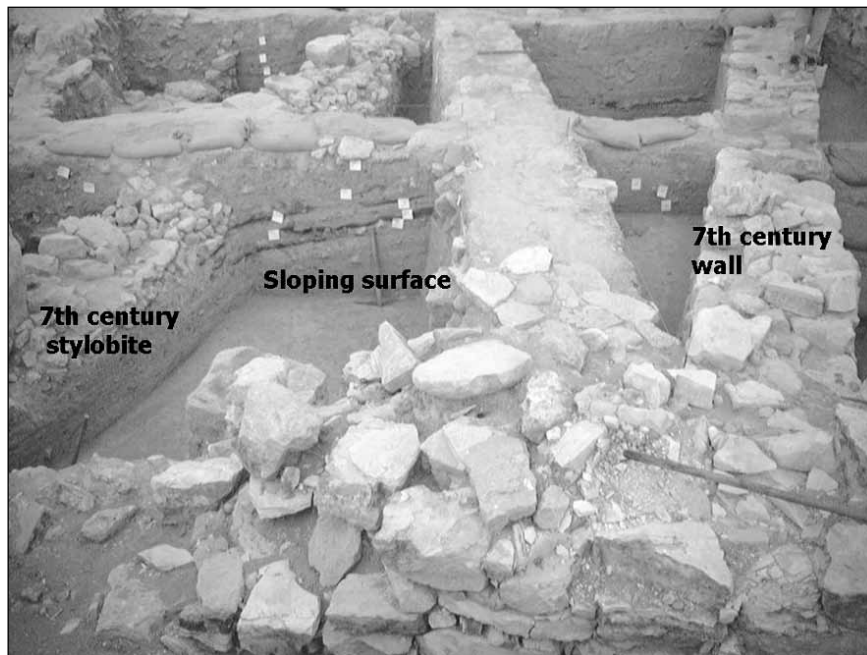
wall immediately next to it.

During the course of excavation, no foundation trenches for any of the existing walls were found. Obviously ancient architects had come to the conclusion that the ground was stable enough to support the weight of the structure, so they laid the first course of walls right on the existing surface. This was also true for one row of pillars running along the western side of the building. However, the east row of pillars was constructed in entirely different way. For some reason the architects thought that the surface upon which this row of pillars was to be placed would not support their weight, and that as result the building would not be stable. This was probably due to the fact that the terrain where the eastern column of pillars was to be placed was sloping slightly down to the east, meaning that this surface was more that 50cm lower than its western side. In addition, the excavation revealed that the texture of the soil on that side of the building consisted of soft, ashy material unsuitable for any kind of structural support. To avoid digging deep trenches, the engineers constructed a stylobate (1m wide and 60cm high) consisting of small stones (10-30cm in diameter) in order to provide a solid foundation for the eastern row of pillars (see **Fig. 4**).

Later, when the stylobate for the eastern row of pillars was in place and walls were construct-



3. 7th and 8th century BC structures.



4. 7th century BC stylobite.

ed, the builders leveled the surface of the building floor. They filled the entire building with debris consisting of a thick layer (40-60cm) of soil mixed with small stones in order to stabilize the structure. The new surface between the walls and columns of pillars was evenly paved with flagstones of various sizes. Some of the floor stones were 50cm across, while others were much smaller; most were about 20 to 30cm thick. The floor was leveled by placing lime mortar into the space between flagstones, which provided a firm and smooth surface. The area between the columns of pillars, however, was not paved but rather covered with a layer of beaten earth, 4 to 5cm thick.

Many of the flagstones on the floor and stones from the walls were removed in later periods. However, enough sealed floor surfaces remained to establish the date when this structure was originally erected. Pottery excavated from these sealed loci indicated that the building was constructed sometime early in the 7th century BC. Pottery found on the floor suggests that the building went out of use sometimes near the end of the 7th century BC. The angle of some of the surviving pillars indicates that the building collapsed toward its northern end, but this probably did not occur until after the building survived its second phase of use.

Owing to the heavy activities of stone robbers

and grave diggers during the past few centuries, the second phase of the building was evident only in one place. It seems that the floor of the building was resurfaced once again, and at that time, the building was redesigned by placing an additional wall within the building. The wall was built on the previous floor and only a few stones remained intact. The wall was located on the western side of the building and ran perpendicular from the existing wall towards the inside of the structure. One of the stones served as a door socket, with its socket of 25-30cm in diameter indicating a presence of a larger door. Apart from this, nothing else remained that would shed light on this final phase of use.

It seems that the second phase of the building ended towards the end of 7th century BC. Careful removal of the debris above the floor indicates that the building was not destroyed by natural disasters (e.g. earthquake), human activity or an accidental fire. There was no burnt material of any kind present among the debris found on floor of the building. Also, the floor was devoid of any pots, whole or otherwise, indicating that the structure collapsed as a result of abandonment.

This tripartite pillar building found at Tall Jalūl is very similar to those already discovered on both sides of the Jordan River. It is rectangular in shape and is divided into three long rooms

by two rows of pillars. Like most similar buildings, two side rooms were paved with flagstones while the center room was surfaced with beaten earth. The fact that the eastern row of pillars was supported by a stylobate is unique, apart from one pillar building excavated at 'Ein Gev where stylobates are also present as an additional support for the pillars (Kochavi and Tsukimoto 2008: 1924). Throughout the course of the excavation, neither mangers nor basins were found in or around the building to indicate its possible function as stable or industrial facility. Therefore, it is probable that this building most likely served as a store-room, market or perhaps both at different times.

### **A Short Note on the Discovery of Pillared Buildings**

The first recorded pillared building was discovered at Tall al-Hesi; its existence was reported in 1894 and 1898 by Frederick Bliss (1898: 90-98). The excavators discovered a complex of three pillared buildings, but the pillars were not parallel with the outer walls of the building. A decade later, Sellin unearthed few standing monoliths at Ta'anach, which he interpreted to be some kind of ritual pillared street (1904: 104). Not surprisingly, this structure was later recognized as a pillared building (Borowski 1987: 81).

A team from the University of Chicago excavated Megiddo from 1925 to 1939, which resulted in several preliminary reports and a two volume publication. In the second preliminary report, published in 1931, the excavators indicated the existence of several pillared buildings among the ruins of ancient Megiddo (Guy 1931: 37-48). The existence of tripartite pillared buildings was confirmed by two later reports (Lamon and Shipton 1939; Loud 1948). During several seasons of excavations the team discovered a complex of five pillared buildings. Later, in 1998, Tel Aviv University renewed excavations at Megiddo and continued until 2002. They discovered another complex of 12 pillared buildings clustered around an open cobbled courtyard (Finkelstein, Ussishkin and Halpern 2006a and 2006b).

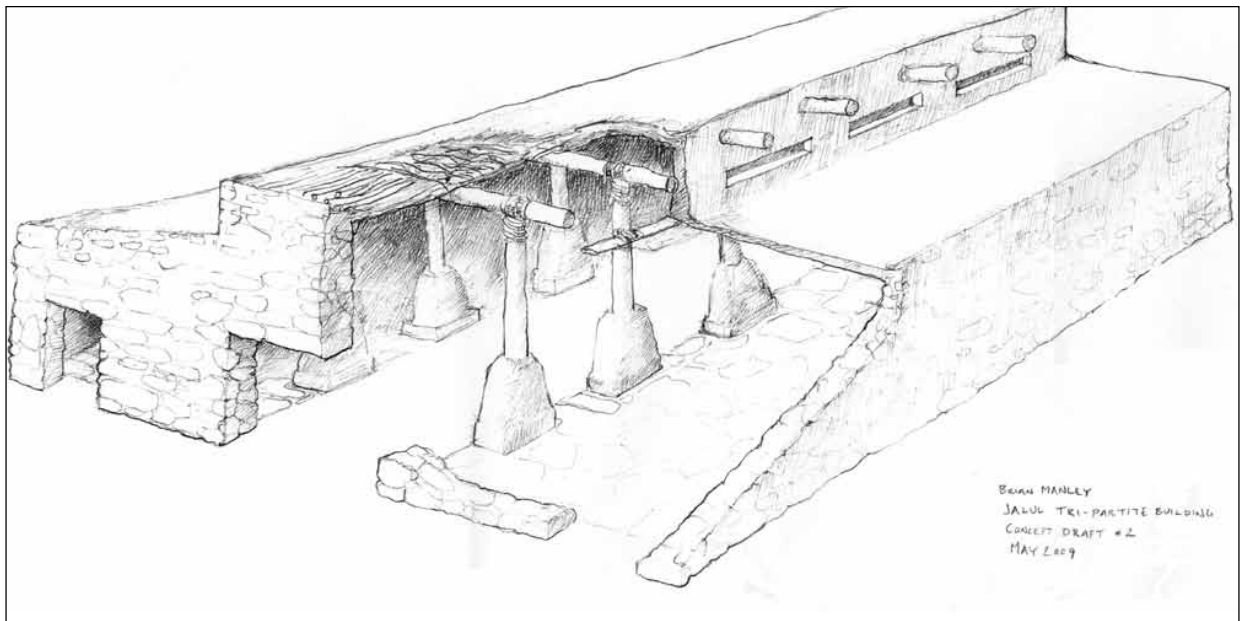
At about the same time as the University of Chicago excavations were underway at Megiddo, Grant started his excavations at Beth Shem-

esh. The excavation lasted only four years, starting in 1928 and finishing in 1931 (Grant 1931; Grant and Wright 1939). The excavators reported the discovery of a large building and at first suggested that it was a temple. However, the building was never completely excavated and it lacked any evidence to indicate that it was used for cultic purposes. Finally, it was suggested that this building may have been some kind of governmental residency (Grant and Wright 1939: 69). It was later identified as a pillared building (Bunimowitz and Lederman 2008: 1646).

In 1935 Hamilton reported his findings from the excavation at Tall Abu Hawam. In spite of the fact that the stratigraphy of the building was not clear, he proposed several phases for its construction. Dimensions of the building were 10.7 by 7.5m, making it one of the smallest pillared buildings recorded (Hamilton 1935: 8-10). Two years later, another publication came out, indicating the presence of a pillared building at Lachish (Starkey 1937: 237). Later, this report was confirmed in the final publications on the Lachish excavations (Tufnell 1953a and 1953b). When Tel Aviv University recommenced excavations between 1973 and 1994, the existence of several pillared buildings was again confirmed (Ussishkin 2004).

During the mid twentieth century another possible pillared building was discovered at Tall Qasile, which was excavated between 1948 and 1950 by Benjamin Mazar (Mazar 1986: 70-71). A few years later Yadin excavated Hazor and reported the discovery of a pillared building. However, a row of ten pillars were excavated and reported by Garstang, who had excavated at the site a few decades earlier (in 1928), but never recognized them to be part of a pillared building. He indicated in his report that he found an enclosure "which he called the camp area" (Yadin 1993: 595). Yadin excavated a pillared building in 1955 and 1956, which continued in use through Strata VIII-VII. The building measured 14 by 24m; the central room was 3.6m wide while side rooms were about 2.5m wide (Yadin 1958: 11-14; 1960: 6-9; 1972: 167-169).

At Tall Migne (ancient Ekron), Naveh reported the existence of a building near the city gates (Naveh 1958: 87-94). Later, Yadin and Ussishkin indicated that rows of pillars with tethering holes closely resembling the tripartite buildings



5. Pillared building reconstruction.

at Megiddo and Beer Sheba had been found (Yadin 1975: 61, n. 23; 1976a: 22, n. 20; Ussishkin 2004: 831). Another possible pillared building was discovered at ancient Gibeon. The site was excavated in 1956 by Pritchard (1964: 35-37) and the building was extremely fragmentary, but later it was recognized as a possible pillared building (Herzog 1973: 26; Herr 1988: 50).

During three seasons of excavations conducted between 1967 and 1971, a tripartite pillared building measuring 7 by 18m was discovered at Tall Malhata (Kochavi 1993b: 935). Later, when the site was excavated again between 1990 and 2000, several other pillared buildings were discovered, which preceded and co-existed with the one discovered earlier (Beit-Arieh 2008b: 1917).

Another significant complex of pillared buildings was discovered and reported in 1973 by Aharoni, who excavated Beer-Sheba between 1969 and 1971 (Aharoni 1973: 13-18). Three pillar structures were found with similar features, in terms of construction and size. On average the buildings were 18m long and 15m wide. They closely resembled the tripartite pillared buildings found at Megiddo.

A few years later (between 1972 and 1975), Tel Aviv University carried out several seasons of excavations at Tall Masos under the directorship of Yohanan Aharoni. After three seasons

of excavations, the remains of a building were discovered that resembled a pillared building (Kempinski and Fritz 1977: 136-148). In spite of the fact that Fritz was certain that this was a tripartite pillared building, others challenged this conclusion (Herr 1988: 50; Kempinski and Fritz 1977: 140). Since the building is dated to Iron Age I, it may be plausible to suggest that it was some kind of prototype for a typical tripartite pillared building, which would become very common in later periods.

Ancient Timnah (Tall Batash) was excavated between 1977 and 1989. After twelve seasons of excavations it was reported that Area E contained a cluster of four typical pillared buildings. Pillars that divided each building into three sections, or rooms, were described as “monolithic stone pillars” (Mazar and Kelm 1993: 155). All excavated pillars were square (0.4 by 0.4m) and ranged in height from 0.84 to 1.24m. Pillars were not uniformly distant from each other (1.84 to 2.45m) and it seems that the complex collapsed as a result of abandonment, as the floors were virtually empty of finds (Mazar 1997: 218-219).

Between 1982 and 1985, a German team led by Fritz excavated Tall Chinnereth and reported the existence of a pillared building (Fritz 1993: 300). Later, Fritz identified the building as a tripartite pillared building (1995: 85). Another complex of pillared buildings was discovered at

‘Ein-Gev by a Japanese team between 1990 and 1991. The buildings share exterior walls and are located on top of a hill near a massive casemate wall. The complex covers an area of about 20 by 36m. Stone pillars are present in every building and are supported by stylobates. The side rooms are paved with stones while the floors in the middle rooms are made of packed earth (Kochavi 1993a: 411-412; Kochavi and Tsukimoto 2008: 1724-1726).

Tall Hadar was excavated between 1987 and 1997 by Tel Aviv University under the directorship of Yadin and Kochavi. They found two tripartite pillared buildings dating to the end of the 11th century BC (Yadin and Kochavi 2008: 1756). Most of the pillars that divide the buildings into three parts were preserved up to 2m in height. This may be one of the earliest tripartite buildings in existence (Kochavi 1993c: 551).

Three pillared buildings were discovered at Tall Hadid between 1995 and 1997 during salvage excavations. The buildings were 8 to 9m long and were divided into three sections by two rows of pillars (Beit-Arieh 2008a: 1757-1758). Another discovery was made in Transjordan, where two pillared buildings were reported in 2006 (following the one found at Jalūl in 2004 — see below). They were discovered in Khirbat al-Mudayna. The buildings were divided into three rooms by standing pillars. Between each pair of pillars was a stone basin. The floor of the side rooms was bedrock, while the central room was also bedrock but was plastered with beaten earth (Daviau 2006: 14-30).

### **Different Functions of Pillared Buildings**

The tripartite pillared building discovered at Tall Jalūl during 1994 is, the best of our knowledge, the first one found in Transjordan. Apart from the one discovered at Khirbat al-Mudayna, all other tripartite pillared buildings found during the last 100 years have been located west of the River Jordan. All of them follow the same basic structural design: they are large, elongated rectangular buildings divided into three long rooms by two parallel rows of pillars that create one central room flanked by two long side rooms. Even though all are structurally rectangular in shape, they vary in length from 11 to 28m, while their width ranges between 7.5 and 10.7m. Side rooms are between 1.9 and 2.8m

wide (2.3m on average). The distance between pillars varies between 0.7 and 1.53m, with managers, rubble or platform fillings between them (Currid 1992a: 52-54).

Scholars have debated the function of these buildings for decades, suggesting different functions. Their arguments will not be repeated here, except to offer a brief summary of their ideas (Albright 1943: 22-24; Pritchard 1970; Yadin 1975, 1976a and 1976b; Conrad 1977; Volkmar 1977; Wightman 1984; Davies 1988; Herr 1988; Kroll 1989; Currid 1992a and 1992b; Herzog 1992; Holladay 1992; Kochavi 1998). Based on the shapes and forms of the pillars, the sizes of the rooms and the artifacts found on the floors of the tripartite pillared buildings, different interpretations regarding their function(s) were offered. It was first suggested by Bliss (1898: 95-96) that pillared buildings served as bazaars or market places. This same idea was supported by Herr (1988: 57-61) and Kochavi (1998: 475) who identified them as “shopping malls” or emporia (1999: 45). However, Bliss was not certain that the building he excavated was indeed a bazaar, and he also proposed that it might have served as barracks for soldiers (1989: 96). This idea was supported by Pritchard (1970: 274) and Fritz (1977: 42). However, one pillared building (at Beth Shemesh) was identified as a possible temple (Grant and Wright 1939: 69). Nevertheless, due to insufficient cultic artifacts found in and around the building, this idea did not receive much acceptance within the scholarly world.

It was also suggested that pillared buildings might have been used as ancient slave prisons (Tvedtnes 1992: 68), customs houses (Linsay 1992: 68), tax collection centers (Herzog 1973: 30; Wise 1999: 10), or simply as a place for shearing sheep (Bartels 1977: 48). Franklin suggested that the courtyard at Megiddo served as a fairground where people from the countryside brought different products to display and sell, while live animals were kept inside the pillared buildings (Shanks 2003: 53). In spite of the fact that these latter suggestions might sound appealing, they did not receive much scholarly support since they are not based on evidence revealed through the excavated material. Another suggestion came from Aharoni, who proposed that pillared houses might have been used for domestic purposes during times of distress as

refugee centers. He based this suggestion on the fact that at a pillared building in Beer Sheba, a sizeable assemblage of domestic pottery was discovered on the building's floor, which represents the final phase of occupation before its destruction (Aharoni 1973).

In addition to the above-mentioned possible functions of pillared buildings, Daviau offered a new interpretation, at least for those she excavated in ancient Moab. Based on artifacts found among fallen debris, she suggested that the two pillared buildings discovered at Khirbat al-Mudayna served as industrial facilities for weaving and dyeing textiles (Daviau 2006: 20).

During the first half of 20th century, Megiddo was excavated and a tripartite pillared building interpreted as a horse stable (Guy 1931: 37; Lamon and Shipton 1939: 32-47; Yadin 1975, 1976a and 1976b; Davis 1988: 32). Later, tripartite pillared buildings found at Lachish (Ussishkin 2004: 831) and Beer Sheba (Yadin 1976b; Holladay 1986) were also interpreted as stables. This interpretation of pillared buildings was challenged later, and it was suggested that they were nothing more than storehouses (Pritchard 1970: 268-276). Even at present, archaeologists are divided in their interpretations of the function(s) of these structures in general, and those at Megiddo in particular. Apart from the questionable pillared buildings found at Megiddo, scholars generally agree that they served mostly as storehouses or granaries. This is certainly true for Beer Sheba (Aharoni 1973: 14-15; Herzog 1973, 1992), Hazor (Yadin 1972), Beth Shemesh (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2008) and Lachish.

In spite of the fact that the function of tripartite pillared buildings is disputed, all archaeologists agree that they were some kind of public buildings. As such, it would be hard to accept that they served only one purpose. Some might have been specially constructed for one function, but it should not be ruled out that during their existence, they might have served different purposes at different times. This idea was first suggested by Yadin (1976b: 249), but was emphasized by Wright, who offered a wide range of possible usages for such buildings (1985: 307). He was followed by Mazar, who suggested that the same architectural features could have served different functions as dictated by

local and immediate needs (1990: 476-478).

The discovery of pillared buildings clearly demonstrates several things. First, this type of structure is not only common in the Iron Age II period; it is now evident that they were used in earlier periods, i.e. Iron Age I, as well. The first pillared buildings that may be recognized as possible prototypes were in existence even earlier, during the 12th century BC (Tall Masos) and 11th century BC (Tall Hadar). Second, tripartite pillared buildings were not restricted to the West Bank, but were also known and used in Transjordan (Tall Jalul and Khirbat al-Mudayna) as well. Third, tripartite pillared buildings were not popular within only one ethnic group (Israelites) but were also used by other ethnic groups such as the Philistines (Tall Qasile, and possibly Tall Abu Hawam), Ammonites (Tall Jalul) and Moabites (Khirbat al-Mudayna). Fourth, although similar in structure, tripartite pillared buildings were used for different purposes and served different needs such as stables, storehouses, industrial facilities and market places. Fifth, it is also possible that within as little as a year or as much as a decade, one building might have been used for variety of purposes to accommodate the immediate needs of different inhabitants.

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