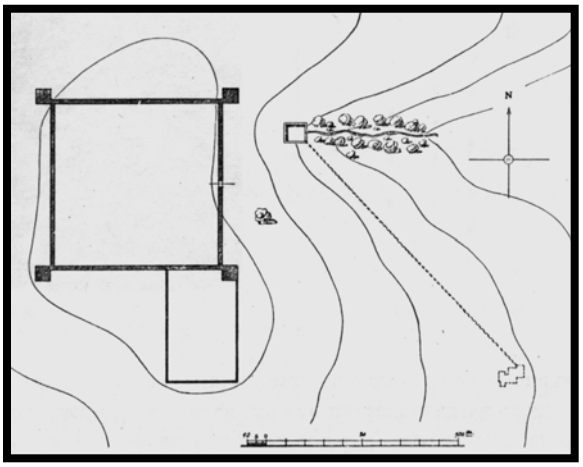
Biblical Tamar (aka Ein Hazeva): Renewed Excavations 2005-2009

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Tamar is located on a main junction at the northern border of the Arabah Valley, approximately 30 miles southwest of the Dead Sea. In addition to several strata of ruins, a prominent feature of the site is the spring of Ein Hazeva (the strong spring) at the base of a huge jujube tree (*ziziphus spina-christi*) adjacent to the gate complex of the 9th/8th century BC fortress. Ancient and modern highways meet at this junction: the Aqrabbim trail, the Zin river route, the Arabah road, the Nahal Amaztiah trail, and the road to Ein Yahav and Petra. Well established trade and travel routes across the Arabah and northern Negev Highlands converged at Tamar.

The earliest archaeological survey results regarding Tamar date to 1902 and the efforts of the Czech Alois Musil who often traveled in Arab dress, and under the name of Sheikh Musa er-Rweili. The site plan from Musil suggests that the Roman era fortress at the top of the tel was exposed, revealing its corner tower foundations. Even today contemporary guidebooks often direct visitors to the site with a description of the 2nd century CE Roman fortress without mentioning the previous thousand years of occupation and the ruins that attest to it.

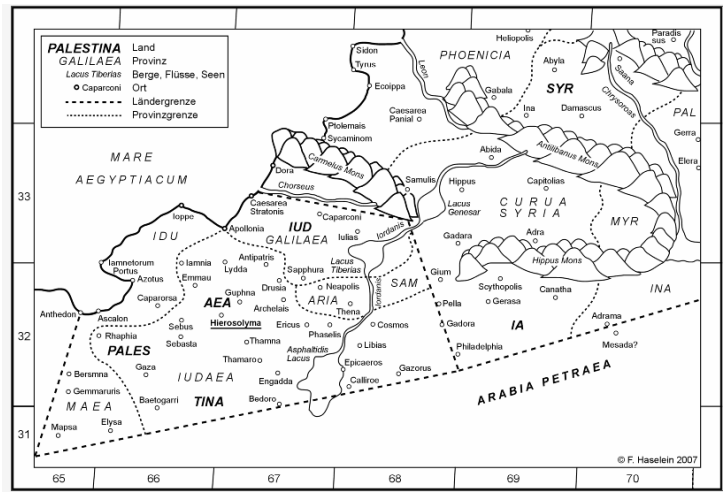


Musil topographic plan, 1902

Woolley and Lawrence (*The Wilderness of Zin*, 1936) and Gluek (*Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev*, 1959) refer to Tamar/Hazeva as Ain Hosb, assessing the site as the central gateway from Edom and Arabia enroute to Beersheba and Ashkelon for incense and copper trade.

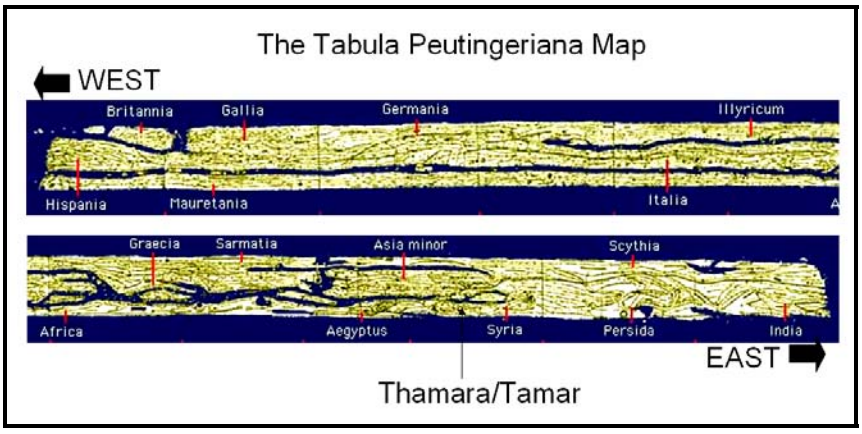
In 1987 members of the philanthropic Christian organization Blossoming Rose encouraged and financed a large-scale excavation of the site that continued through 1996. Led by IAA (Israel Antiquity Authority) archaeologists Rudolph Cohen and Yigal Israel, the ten-year excavation and restoration activity revealed eight significant strata ranging in date from the Solomonic 10th century BC to the Islamic and British periods of the 7th and 20th centuries CE. The ruins and surrounding property, known as Biblical Tamar Park, are still managed by Blossoming Rose, which maintains lodging and staffs a kitchen to house and feed the volunteers who come to excavate and earn certificates in restoration methods from the IAA. Teaming with Blossoming Rose, Rochester College (Michigan) and Austin Graduate School of Theology sponsored the renewed excavation seasons starting in 2005. During the last 4 years the focus of the excavation and restoration has been exclusively the 10th century BC fortress thought to date to the time of King Solomon, who according to 1 Kings 9:18, built “Tamar in the wilderness.”

The identification of Tamar with this particular site is based on Biblical, Roman, and Byzantine sources. Tamar is mentioned in the description of the southern border of the Promised Land between the Dead Sea and the Scorpion’s Ascent (Aqrabbim Pass) [Numbers 34:4, Joshua 15:3, and Judges 1:36]. The later sources start with Ptolemaeus’ list (Ptolemy; CE 90-168).

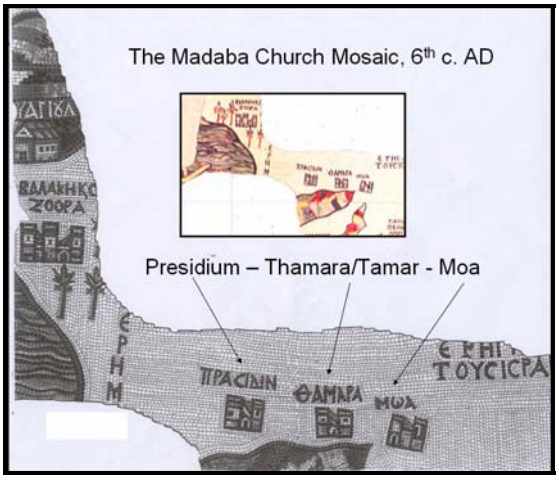


Ptolemaeus' list (Ptolemy; CE 90-168)

The Peutinger map, *Tabula Peutingeriana*, (4th or 5th century CE) shows Tamar on the road south of the Dead Sea between two main roads leading from Haluztah and Philadelphia to Eilat.



The Byzantine sources include the Madeba mosaic map (6th century CE) which situates Tamar between Presidium and Moa.

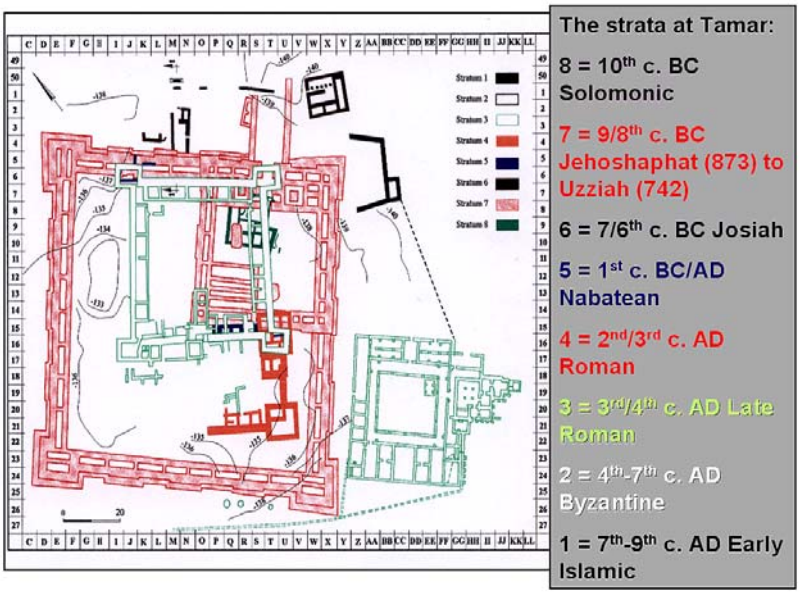


Eusebius (*Onomanistcon* 14:8; 4th century CE) also mentions Roman Thamara as the site of a military garrison and the Aqrabbim Ascent, recording that Thamara was one day's journey from Mamshit. The 4th century *Notitia Dignitarum* also mentions Thamara as a town in the eastern Roman Empire.

Finally, there is the Roman tax edict from Beer Sheba that mentions Tamar as a soldiers' outpost. Today, Kibbutz Ir Ovot exists near the site, while Blossoming Rose manages the Biblical Tamar Park hosting visitors and excavation/restoration groups.

Excavations at Tamar have exposed eight strata:

Stratum 8	10th century BCE	likely Solomonic in origin and use
Stratum 7a	9th-8th century BCE	Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham
Stratum 7b	8th century BCE	Ahaz / Hezekiah
Stratum 6	7th century BCE	Josiah
Stratum 5	1st centuries BCE/CE	Nabataean
Stratum 4	2nd century CE	Early Roman
Stratum 3	3rd-4th century CE	Late Roman
Stratum 2	4th-7th century CE	Byzantine
Stratum 1a	7th-9th century CE	Islamic
Stratum 1b	20th century CE	British Mandate Period



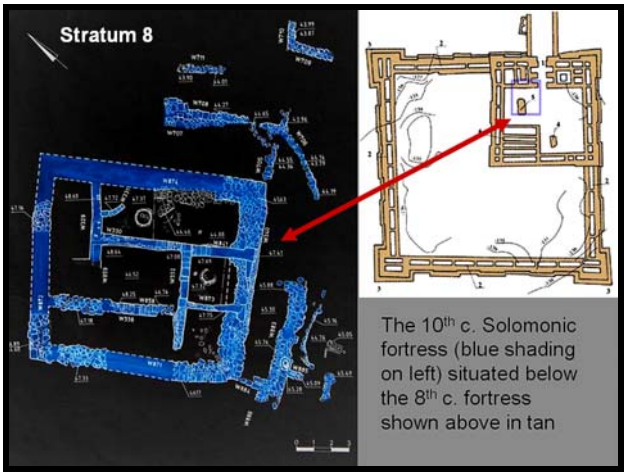


Aerial View of Tamar

Stratum 8 10th century BCE Solomon

The earliest fortress of the United Monarch at Tamar dates to the 10th century BCE, most likely during the reign of King Solomon (I Kings 9:18; "Tamar in the Wilderness"). These are the earliest known remains at Tamar having been uncovered about 10 feet below the surface, underneath the 9/8th century gate complex from the much larger fortress built over it. The fortress that we are suggesting was built by Solomon is roughly square/rectangular in plan, with a series of rooms around a central space (below in blue). As verified during our excavations, there was also a sloping retaining/defensive wall surrounding the main structure. This early fort was located just inside the gate of the later 9/8th century fortress, underneath the citadel (upper right schematic). The early fort is similar to a type of square fort was common in the 10th century Negev highlands, as evidenced by the topographic plans from other sites, such as Horvat Ritma.

The central space of the fortress measures 40 x 35 feet. It seems reasonable to assume that this fortress met the same fate as the network of towers and fortresses in the Negev highlands: either abandoned or destroyed during the campaign of Pharaoh Shishak (Shoshenq I) in 925 BCE.





Main Wall of 10th c. Fortress with Rampart, adjacent to the 9/8th c. Gate Complex

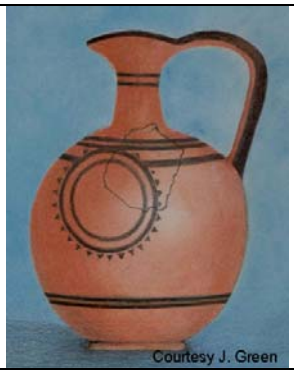
The renewed excavations at Tamar during 2005 to the present have focused on sections of this eighth stratum. Our primary objectives were to excavate the outlying installations, auxiliary walls, and recover a viable ceramic assemblage associated with this particular stratum. As of yet no definitive destruction layer has been detected, but the pottery has been exciting. The assemblage includes Qurayya painted ware (Midianite), Cypro-Phoenician Black on Red ware, a Judean cooking pot, and unique Hazeva ware, most of which dates to the 10th century BCE. Additional small finds include several ground stone implements, Red Sea shells, and a spindle whorl suggesting a possible industrial use for the auxiliary walls outside the fortress.



Stratum 8 excavation area



Qurayya Painted Ware

		
10th c. BC Black on Red Cypro-Phoenician juglet		**10th c. BC Judean cooking pot**

Additional finds:		
		
Ground-stone implements	Red Sea shells	Spindle Whorl

Stratum 7A/B 9th-8th century BCE Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz

Above and covering Stratum 8 was build Stratum 7A, a structure 50m x 50m square, fortified by a casemate wall and supported by a large retaining wall. The structure was filled with earth dug from the surrounding area and then strengthened by connecting walls that raised the level of the living area above everything else. The fortress included an impressive and complicated four-chambered gate, silos, stables, and a warehouse, all typical of other administrative centers like Dor, Lachish, Be'ersheba, and Tel el-Kheleifeh (Eilat). The pottery finds and 14C sample results show that the fortress was built in the 9/8th c. BCE. Correlation with biblical sources suggests a number of historical events connected to this stratum. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, attempted to control Edom during this time and tried to open international trade through Eilat (although Solomon may have previously done these same things). Amaziah is also mentioned as a conqueror of Edom at this time.

Stratum 7B is the extension of 7A by a casemate wall to double the perimeter of the previous fortress to 100m x 100m, with the addition of three huge corner towers, each 15m x 15m. This new structure was filled with earth that was dug around it to create a moat with a glacis descending to its bottom. The remains that are left are the foundation of the structure built from stones brought from a quarry located 3 kilometers east of Tamar, where the streambeds of Hazevah and Idan meet.

The impressive dimensions of the expanded fortress – roughly four times larger than other Negev fortresses – along with the fact that the gate is northern facing, suggest the possibility that it was actually a Judean fortified administrative city rather than simply a fortress. The construction of the gate complex differs from the rest of the fortress. It is made of well-dressed stones and still stands over 3 meters high. The four gate chambers, each 2.5m wide, are also well preserved. The four-chambered gate was a common type for fortifications during the 9/8th centuries. Three parallel walls near the inner southwestern corner of the gate complex were probably part of a three room storehouse. Near this storehouse, two grain silos were uncovered with remnants of wheat and barley. These have been refilled for safety reasons.

Uzziah or Jotham are the likely candidates behind the expansion of the original 7A fortress. Stratum 7 was destroyed by a fire due to an enemy attack. The typical destruction layer of ash from the fire, including several iron arrowheads, was found in only a few rooms. This probably happened during the reign of Hezekiah when the Assyrian king Sennacharib destroyed several fortified towns enroute to Jerusalem.



9/8th c. Gate Complex



8th c. Destruction Layer

Stratum 6 7th century BCE Josiah

Outside the fortifications at Tamar, east and west of the ramp leading up to the gate complex, a sacred shrine and foundation for a so-called four-spaced or pillared house were discovered. Inside the fortress, pottery and a private seal were found in the fill of the later structures. Comparative research indicates that these finds belong to the late Iron Age, during the last days of the Kingdom of Judah, during the time of Josiah.

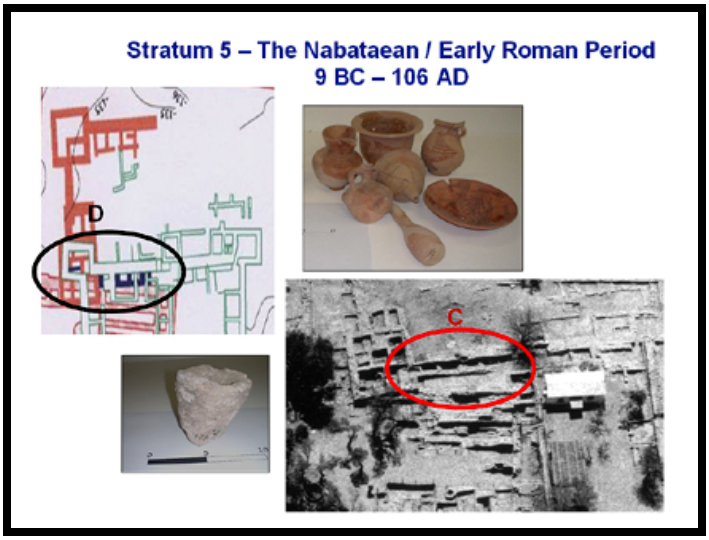
Excavation of the shrine complex revealed at least six phases belonging to three periods of use ranging from the Iron Age to the Nabataean Period. One of the phases is the intentional burial of smashed incense burners, cult objects, and part of the destroyed structure itself in a favissa. This destruction of the shrine may be connected to the religious reforms of King Josiah. The collection of incense burners and anthropomorphic cult stands from the Edomite shrine has been reconstructed and is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

	
Edomite Shrine	**Four Space House**

Stratum 5 1st centuries BCE/CE Nabataean

During the Babylonian Exile (post 587 BCE), Tamar was abandoned. It wasn't until the late Nabataean kingdom, during the days of King Aretas IV, that Tamar was rebuilt. The builder leveled and lowered the mound of the previous fortresses, putting in their place a fortress and possibly a temple. The fortress was located in Area D, nearby the stables of the Iron Age. The temple was located in Area C, where some

walls belonging to the Nabataean period were found. From this temple, it seems, there was the reuse of several stone architectural elements in later periods. All around the slopes of this area pottery and other material remains were exposed when the whole mound was lowered again during the late Roman period.



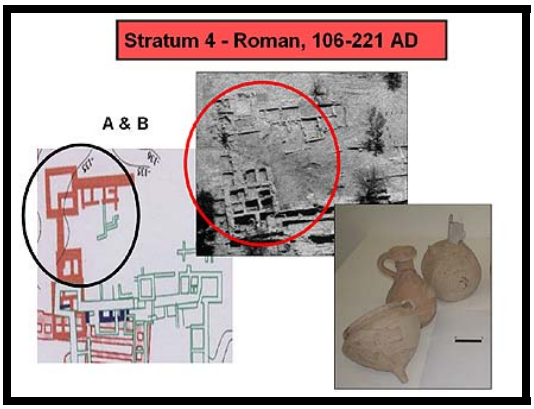
Stratum 4	**2nd century CE**	**Early Roman**
Stratum 3	**3rd-4th century CE**	**Late Roman**

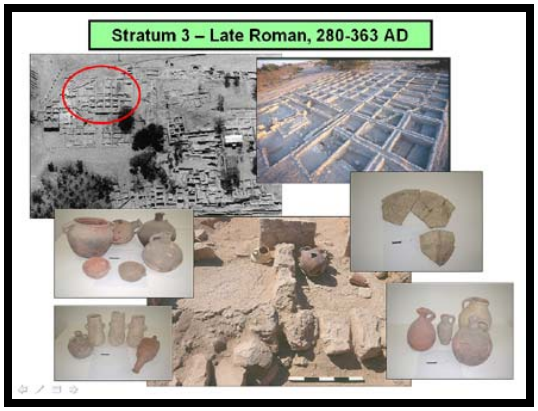
In the year 106 CE, during the time of King Rabbel II, the final Nabataean king, the Roman Empire annexed the Nabataean kingdom. At Tamar a new structure was rebuilt mainly in Areas A and B, creating a two-tower fortress. The cultural material belonging to this period was uncovered on a few floor levels, on the slopes of the site, and in the Iron Age stone walls were robbing took place. The Early Roman occupation of Tamar ended in 221 CE, in the days of Elagabalus Caesar (203-222 CE). At that time, all the southern sites of the Negev were abandoned, including those of the Incense Trade Route and Negev trade stations like Memphis, Metzad Yeroham.

After fifty years of instability in the Empire, the Romans once again took control of the eastern provinces. During this time the Roman military built the southern road across the Scorpion Pass (aka The Aqrabbim Ascent) along with strategically placed tax stations. It was also at this time that the Romans chose Tamar to be one of the main establishments along this road. Two large structures were built at the site using the stones from the earlier periods. Using the remains of the previous Roman fortress as a foundation they constructed another tower fortress. Below, to the east of the fortress, they built a large military bath complex attached to military palaestra. This Roman military occupation ended with the achievement of peace in 361 CE. The structures were destroyed by an earthquake in 363 CE.



Aqrabbim Roman Road







Roman Bath Complex

Stratum 2	**4th-7th century CE**	**Byzantine**
Stratum 1a	**7th-9th century CE**	**Islamic**
Stratum 1b	**20th century CE**	**British Mandate Period**

During the Byzantine period Tamar was a small soldiers' outpost. With the establishment of the Umayyad Empire in the 7th c. CE, the Aravah became a haven for farms and villages situated near the abundant water sources like Ein Hazeva at Tamar. The material remains from this time period at Tamar suggest that the site was an agricultural farm with at least two places of occupation, a water supply system with a

well, water pools, and an aqueduct. That era ended during the Abbasid Dynasty at the beginning of the 9th c. CE.

From that point up to the beginning of the 20th century, the site has been visited by passersby using the water of the spring and the jujube tree as a landmark on the horizon. At the beginning of the British Mandate period, a police station was built along with five houses, a well with a pump, and a watering trough for horses and camels. It was one of several “Camel Police Stations” on the road from Be’ersheba to Eilat. The station was taken over and used by the Israel Defense Forces when Israel was declared a state in 1948. In the 1960s the military camp was moved south and a wandering-settler family was brought in from a place that they tried to occupy near Moa. At Tamar they established a cooperative community that they named Ir Ovot, which now exists to the east of the ruins and is currently the mailstop for Biblical Tamar.



British Police Station