46. THE TEMPLE MOUNT IN JERUSALEM DURING THE FIRST TEMPLE PERIOD: AN ARCHAEOLOGIST'S VIEW

by David Ussishkin

A DISCUSSION of the Temple Mount, the royal acropolis and religious center of biblical Jerusalem, is a most difficult task for the archaeologist because—apart from some initial surveys conducted in the nineteenth century—hardly any fieldwork could be carried out in the area of the Haram esh-Sherif. However, based on topographical data, circumstantial evidence, archaeological evidence retrieved in other parts of Jerusalem, comparable archaeological material, and finally the data contained in the biblical text, some suggestions concerning the character and history of the Temple Mount during the First Temple period can be crystallized. These suggestions are summarized in the present study, to be published in a book dedicated to Larry Stager, my esteemed colleague and personal friend of many years.

Jerusalem of the late eighth century B.C.E., that is, Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah and Sennacherib's campaign, is the starting point of our discussion (figure 1). It seems clear that by that time Jerusalem extended over the Southeast Hill, that is the "City of David" (figure 1:2), as well as over the Southwest Hill (figure 1:6), where the "Mishneh" quarter was built, thus becoming the largest city in Judah. The city was heavily fortified, and segments of its walls have been uncovered along the eastern slope of the "City of David" by Kenyon (Steiner 2001:89–92), Shiloh (1984:8–10, 28; figs. 30, 33), and Reich and Shukrun (2000; see also Shanks 1999), as well as further to the north in the area of the "Ophel" by Eilat Mazar (Mazar and Mazar 1989:1–48). On the Southwest Hill, segments of the fortifications were uncovered in the Jewish Quarter by Avigad (1983:46–60; Avigad and Geva 2000; Geva and Avigad 2000), possibly also in Hagai Street by Kloner (1984), and in the Ottoman citadel near Jaffa Gate (Geva 1979; 1983:56–58). It can be safely concluded that during this period the Temple Mount formed an integral part of the metropolis and served as the royal acropolis or compound of the kings of Judah. It can also be safely assumed that by that time the Temple Mount was surrounded by a wall that was incorporated into the city's fortifications. The acropolis was situated at the edge of the city, and therefore part of its surrounding wall formed a segment of the city wall, while another part separated the Temple Mount from the "City of David" and from the "Mishneh" quarter on the Southwest Hill.

In reconstructing the plan of the royal compound extending over the Temple Mount, all scholars agree that it was smaller than the later Herodian compound, the shape of which is preserved to the present day in the Haram esh-Sherif. Many graphic reconstructions depict the outlines of the rectangular Herodian compound, with the smaller Iron Age compound marked by curving lines inside (e.g., Avigad 1983:58, fig. 36). On the other hand, other scholars, among them Kenyon (1974:111–14, fig. 22) and Ritmeyer (1992), believe that the Herodian walls follow, at least in part, the lines of the Iron Age walls, and hence the walls of the earlier compound must have extended in straight rather than curved lines.

Wightman (1993:29–31) compared the Solomonic compound with that of Omride Samaria (figure 2), also reconstructing its walls in straight lines. Following this line of thought, we can assume that the royal compound of the kings of the House of David in Jerusalem was based in plan and character on the same model as the royal Omride compounds at Samaria (Crowfoot, Kenyon and Sukenik 1942) and Jezreel (Ussishkin and Woodhead 1997:11, fig. 4). These compounds have much in common, thus representing a crystallized model and concept. At both Samaria and Jezreel, the compound was founded on the summit of a hill, with bedrock constituting much of the surface. In both places, the compound is rectangular, surrounded by a casemate wall that was based on bedrock. The lower parts of the casemates served as foundations or revetments, which supported large amounts of soil and debris dumped as constructional fills. Due to the fills, the enclosed area was turned into a rectangular podium, its surface almost horizontal. At Samaria, several buildings were found inside the compound, which also had large open courtyards. The excavations barely touched the inner parts of the Jezreel compound, but it seems to have had similar open spaces.

The architectural concept of the compounds at Samaria and Jezreel must have been imported from the north. Similar compounds can be found in Urartian fortresses in eastern Anatolia. A good example is the compound of Lower Anzaf, built by Ishpuini king of Urartu in the ninth century B.C.E. (figure 3; Belli 1999). Rectangular in plan, it forms a horizontal podium based on constructional fills, situated on the summit of the hill.

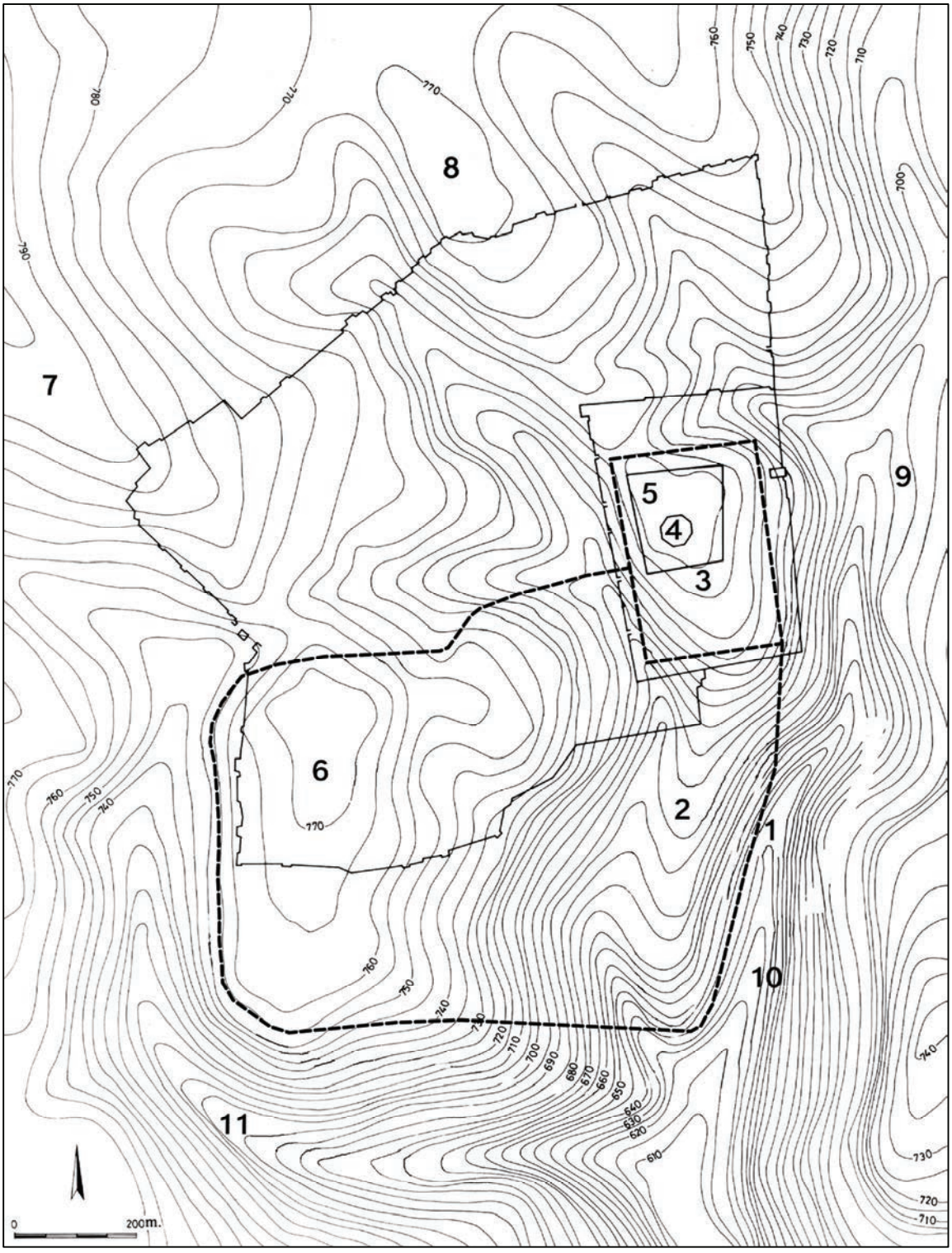


Figure 1. Jerusalem during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E.—a schematic reconstruction

1 Gihon Spring **2** "City of David" **3** Temple Mount **4** the temple **5** the royal palace **6** Southwest Hill
7 Northwest Hill **8** Northeast Hill **9** Mount of Olives **10** Kidron Valley **11** Hinnom Valley

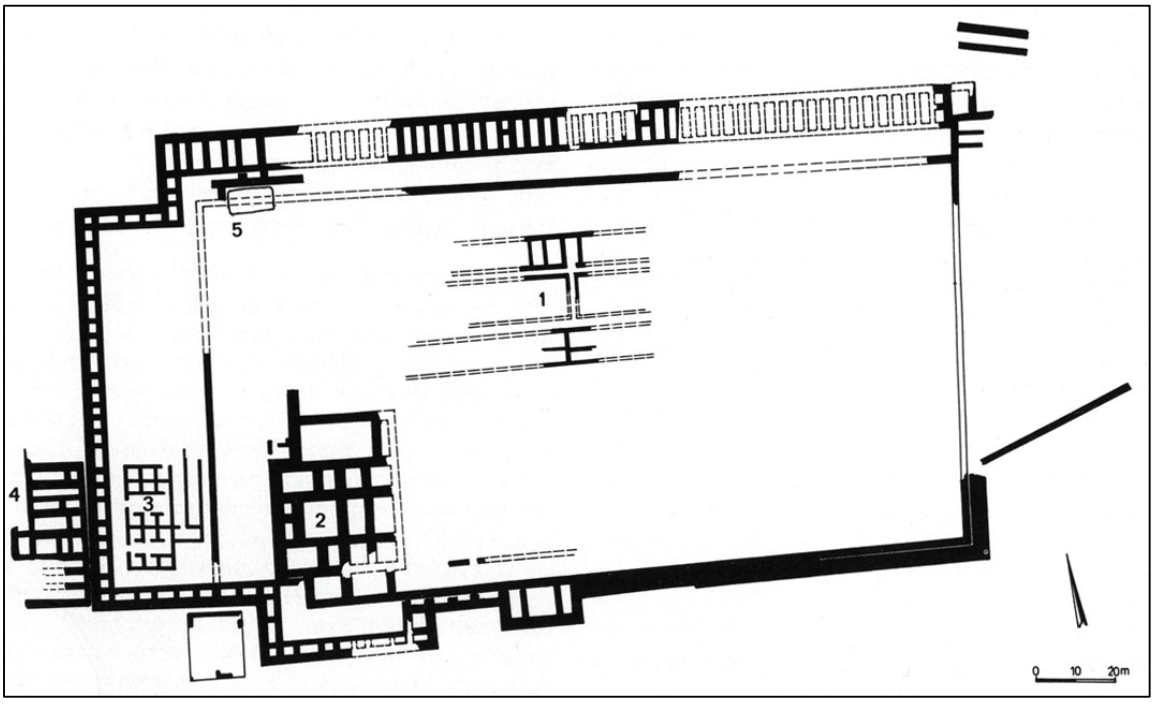


Figure 2. A plan of the Omride acropolis in Samaria (after Herzog 1997:230, fig. 5.22)
1 the "Ivory House" **2** the palace **3** the "Ostraca House"

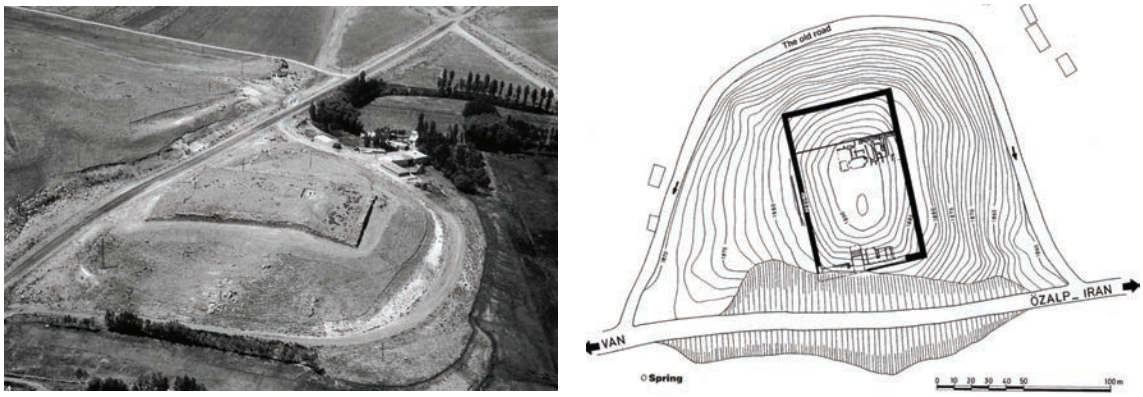


Figure 3. Aerial view and plan of the Urartian fortress of Lower Anzaf in eastern Anatolia (after Belli 1999:fig. 1 and pl. 1:4)

In Jerusalem, the Temple Mount was surrounded on three sides by a steep slope, but on the northwestern side it was connected by a topographical saddle to the hill running farther to the northwest, known as the Northeast Hill (figure 1:8). This saddle constituted the topographical weak point in the defense of the Temple Mount. Wilson and Warren surveyed the exposed rock surface in this area in 1864, and concluded that a deep ditch was cut at this point into the rock. In their own words: "Between the corner and the platform the ridge of Moriah must have been in one place very narrow; and here . . . the rock gives place to turf, and there are other indications which would lead us to believe that there was at one time a ditch cut in the solid rock" (Wilson and Warren 1871: 13). Ottosson (1989) and Oredsson (2000:92–95) have also recently suggested that a moat was cut in the rock across the saddle in the First Temple period.

The idea of cutting a deep moat in the rock also originates in the north. In Jezreel, three sides of the rectangular compound were protected by a deep, rock-cut moat (Ussishkin and Woodhead 1997:11, fig. 4). There was no need for such a moat on the fourth side, which faced a steep slope. Good comparisons to the assumed moat at the northwestern edge of the Temple Mount can be found in eastern Anatolia. In Van, in the central fortress of the kings of Urartu (figure 4), as well as in the fortress of Çavuştepe dated to the seventh century B.C.E. (figure 5), the sausage-shaped fortress was protected by a deep rock-cut moat on both of its ends, separating the fortress from the continuation of the hill.

According to the biblical text, the royal acropolis in Jerusalem contained two major buildings, the royal palace and the temple. At the time of its construction, the royal palace was almost certainly the main edifice of the compound, being much larger in size than the temple. In later periods, however, the temple gained in importance, while the royal palace was nearly forgotten. The best comparison to a contemporary temple *vis-à-vis* the royal palace is the eighth-century B.C.E. temple of Tell Taʿyinat in northern Syria, built adjacent to the larger *bīt ḫilāni* palace in the royal acropolis of the kings of Kunulua (Haines 1971:pl. 103).

Assuming that the temple stood on the summit of the hill, exactly at the spot where the Dome of the Rock is presently situated (figure 1:4), all scholars reconstruct the royal palace to the south of the temple, where the ground is lower (e.g., Galling 1937: 411; Simons 1952:436; Vincent and Stève 1954:pl. 129; Wightman 1993:31, fig. 9). This reconstruction is based on several indications in the biblical text that one had to ascend from the palace to the temple (e.g., 2 Kings 22:3–4; Jer. 26:10; 36:10–12), and, more importantly, on the references to the royal palace in the descriptions of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city walls in Nehemiah 3:25–29 and 12:37. The descriptions of Nehemiah's wall and its relationship to the palace, however, can be interpreted in different ways.

In my view, it is reasonable to assume that the palace stood on the lower ground to the north of the temple, an area spacious enough to accommodate such a large complex (figure 1:5). If located to the north of the temple, the royal palace of Jerusalem would have been ideally situated: the royal acropolis of Jerusalem was at the northeastern edge of the city and the palace was at the northern end of the acropolis, adjacent to the edge of the fortified city. This way, the palace would have been more secure and isolated, while if located to the south of the temple, everybody approaching the temple from the direction of the "City of David" would have had to pass near it.

This suggestion is based on the location of many palaces of rulers during the Bronze and Iron Ages. In many cities, we find the acropolis built at the edge of the city and the ruler's palace built at the edge of the acropolis, for example, at Hittite Hattusha (figure 6), Late Bronze Ugarit and Megiddo, as well as Assyrian Calah, Nineveh, Dur-Sharrukin, Til-Barsib, and Megiddo. There are, of course, other cases, notably Israelite Samaria and Neo-Hittite Zincirli-Samʾal, in which the acropolis was located in the middle of the city, but in both these cities also, the royal palace was located at the edge of the acropolis.

The temple and its suggested reconstruction, analyzed in innumerable studies, will not be discussed here, but the palace warrants a brief description. The magnificent royal palace in Jerusalem, ascribed in the biblical text to King Solomon, is briefly described in 1 Kings 7:1–12 and can be partly reconstructed on the basis of archaeological comparisons (see Ussishkin 1973; King and Stager 2001:202–4). The edifice contained a ceremonial wing, residential quarters, and "the house of the Forest of Lebanon"—a separate unit as big as the temple, which probably functioned as the royal treasury. The palace complex was enclosed within its own large courtyard.

The large, magnificent ceremonial wing is of special interest. The biblical text informs us that it contained "the hall of columns, fifty cubits long and thirty cubits broad, and a hall and columns with a cornice in front of them" as well as "the hall for the throne," that is, "the hall of judgment"—the largest and most luxurious unit in the edifice.

The description of the ceremonial wing fits the model of the contemporary Syrian palace type known as *bīt ḫilāni*. A good example can be seen in Tell Halaf, in the ruler's palace of Aramean Gozan, dated to the tenth–ninth centuries B.C.E. (figure 7; see Langenegger et al. 1950). An impressive entrance with a portico led to an entrance hall, that is "the hall of columns"—the "columns" apparently being the columns of the entrance portico. The entrance hall opened to the throne room, the main hall of the edifice, where the throne of the king was placed on a dais built adjacent to one of the side walls.

Several archaeological comparisons can be found for details of the biblical descriptions of the throne room. This magnificent hall "was paneled in cedar from one side of the floor to the other" (1 Kings 7:7). Similar paneling can be seen in the walls of the entrance hall and the throne room of Barrakib's *bīt ḫilāni* palace at Zincirli-Samʾal, dated to the third quarter of the eighth century B.C.E. (figure 8; von Luschan and Jacoby 1911:299). The magnificent throne, ascribed to Solomon, is described in detail in

the biblical text (1 Kings 10:18–20). Almost certainly made of wood, it was lavishly decorated with ivory and gold, and flanked by lions. Similar thrones are portrayed on Canaanite ivories, Assyrian reliefs, and the sarcophagus of Ahiram, king of Byblos (figure 9). Finally, Jeremiah 36:22 informs us that Jehoiakim, king of Judah, "sat in the winter house in the ninth month, and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him." The ninth month, that is Kislev, falls about December, in mid-winter, and it is not surprising that a fire was lit in the hearth. Remains of a hearth were found in front of the throne dais in Zincirli, in the palaces of Kilamuwa and Barrakib, kings of Sam'al (von Luschan and Jacoby 1911:278–79, 296–98, pl. 49), and a metal brazier, shaped like a cart with wheels, was uncovered in the throne room in the Tell Halaf palace (figure 10; Langenegger et al. 1950:45–48, taf. 12).

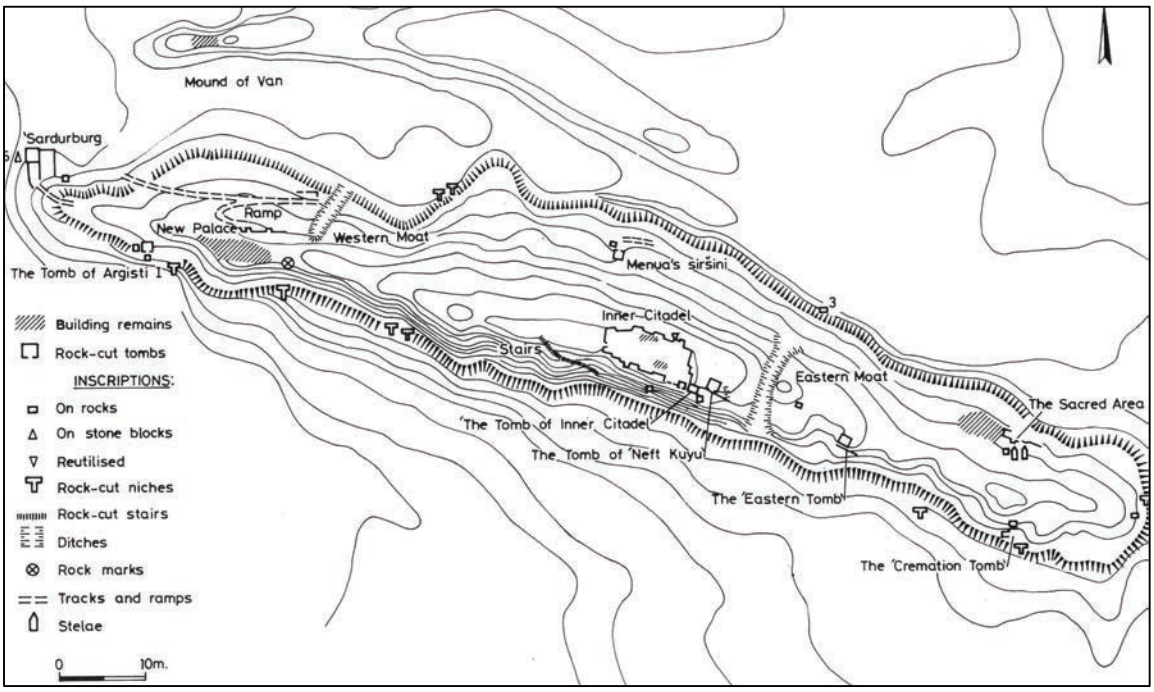


Figure 4. The Urartian fortress at Van (after Tarhan 1994:fig. 3)

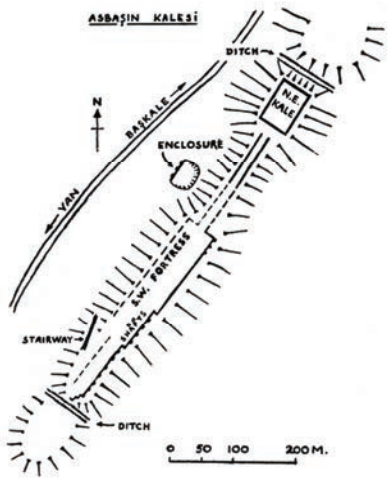


Figure 5. The Urartian fortress at Çavuştepe (after Erzen 1988:3, fig. 3)
Each rock-cut moat is marked as "ditch."



Figure 6. A plan of Hattusha during the period of the Hittite Empire (after Bittel 1970:26, fig. 3)

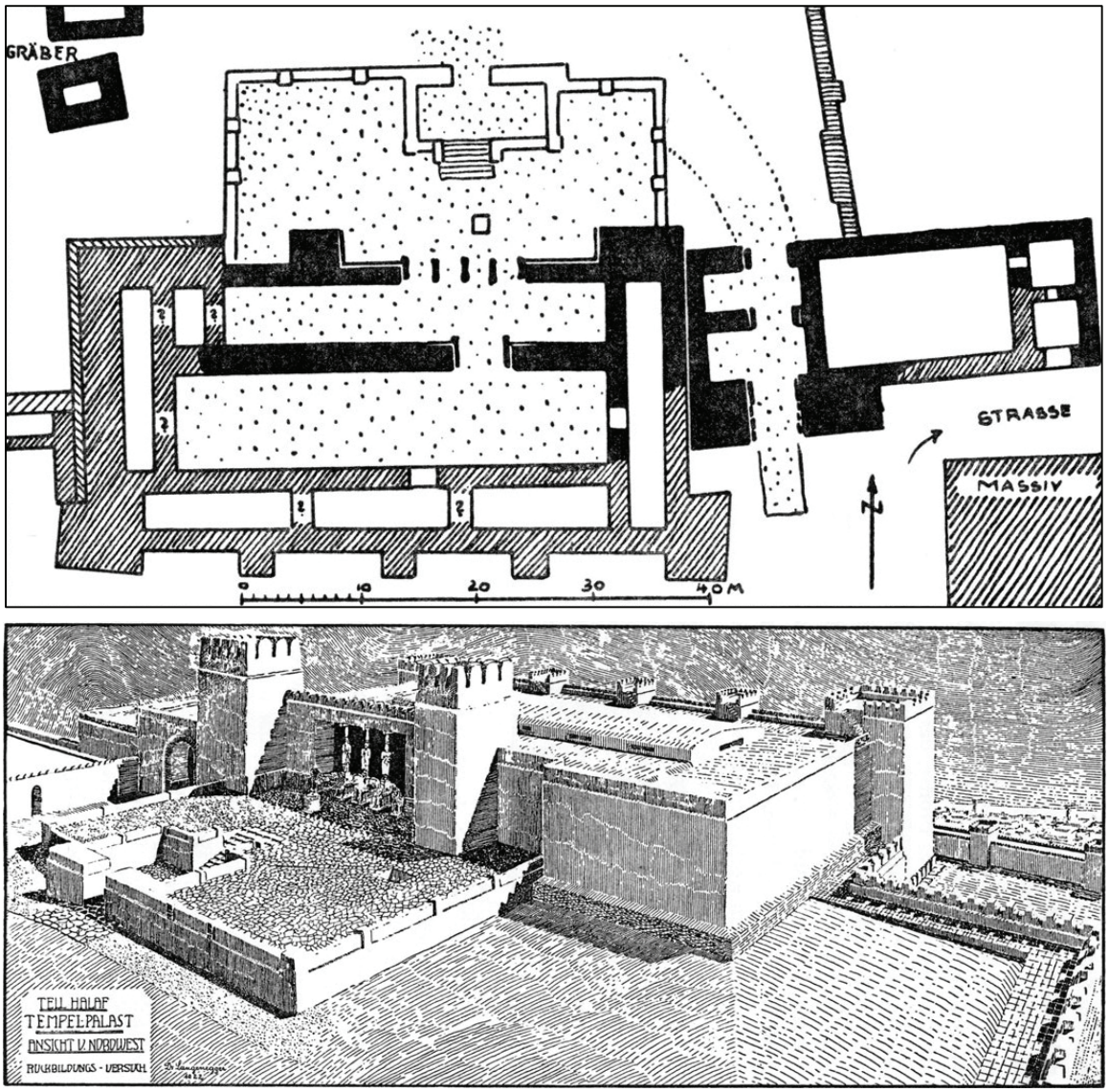
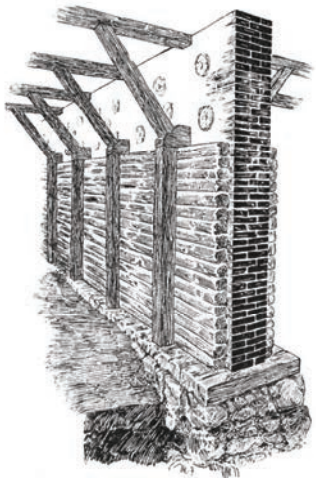


Figure 7. The *bīt ḫilāni* palace at Tell Halaf, plan and reconstruction (after Langenegger et al. 1950:fig. 6 and plan 5)



◄ *Figure 8.* Reconstructed wooden paneling of the walls in Barrakib's Palace K at Zincirli (after von Luschan and Jacoby 1911:299, fig. 209)



Figure 9. ► King Ahiram of Byblos seated on his throne; a relief carved on the king's sarcophagus (after Montet 1928:pl. 131)

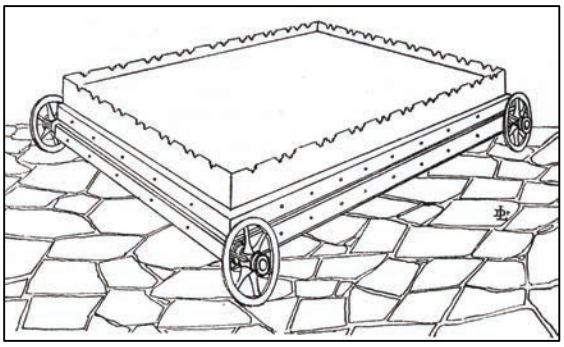


Figure 10. A cart-shaped metal brazier found in the throne room of the palace at Tell Halaf (after Langenegger et al. 1950:Abb. 15)

There is another matter which should be emphasized. In his descriptions of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., Flavius Josephus twice mentions a place known as the "Camp of the Assyrians." The data brought by Josephus is sufficient to identify the site of the "Camp of the Assyrians" on the Northeast Hill, to the northwest of the Temple Mount (figure 1:8; Ussishkin 1979; 1995:290–92). We can safely assume that this place marks the very place where the Assyrian task force sent by Sennacherib to Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. pitched its camp. A schematic view of such a camp is portrayed in the Lachish reliefs (see Ussishkin 1982:92–93, fig. 73). Apparently, the appearance of the Assyrian army at the gates of Jerusalem left a strong impact on the population of the city, and hence the site of the camp retained its name for nearly 800 years.

From the Assyrian point of view, the Northeast Hill was the optimal place for pitching the camp. Camping on the spacious summit of the hill, the Assyrian task force faced the Temple Mount extending on lower ground. The presence of the Assyrian army at this place directly threatened the center of the Judean government—the royal compound and, in particular, the royal palace, if it were located, as assumed above, on its northern side. The saddle and the area of the assumed moat was the most suitable place for conducting negotiations with Hezekiah, negotiations which eventually resulted in Hezekiah's *de facto* surrender to the king of Assyria.

Once we move backwards from the latter part of the eighth century to the tenth and ninth centuries B.C.E., the archaeological picture becomes problematic and obscure, in particular with regard to the Temple Mount, and the meager archaeological evidence has been interpreted in different ways.

Many scholars, for example recently Cahill (2003; 2004), believe that the archaeological evidence allows a reconstruction of the Solomonic city as described in the biblical text. On that basis, as can be seen in various reconstructions, such as those published by Shanks (1995:74–75) and Cahill (2004: 22), Jerusalem is shown as sausage-shaped. The city includes the "City of David" and the Temple Mount, the latter crowned by the prominent building of the temple. Based on 1 Kings 9:15, the city is shown surrounded by a massive city wall.

It seems, however, that the archaeological evidence presents a different picture of the Solomonic city (Ussishkin 2003a; 2003b). Intensive and systematic archaeological investigations have been carried out in different parts of biblical Jerusalem for more than 150 years, and sufficient data were recovered to give us some idea of the extent and character of the



Figure 11. Jerusalem during the tenth century B.C.E.: a schematic reconstruction
1 Gihon Spring **2** "City of David" **3** Temple Mount

city during the tenth and ninth centuries B.C.E. The picture is unlikely to change drastically in the future. It appears that the settlement of this period extended solely along the central parts of the "City of David" (figure 11) and it was not protected by a city wall. The fortifications uncovered near the southeast corner of the Haram esh-Sherif (Mazar and Mazar 1989: 1–48) date to the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. city and not earlier, as recently suggested by Eilat Mazar (2006b) on the basis of the biblical text. In my view, the theory advocated by Kenyon (1974:81–83, 89–91) and Cahill (2003:21–23) that the city wall of the Middle Bronze Age settlement continued to be in use at that time cannot be accepted.

Most significant for our discussion are the results of the large-scale excavations carried out by Benjamin Mazar, and later by Eilat Mazar, to the south of the Temple Mount. Only a few pottery pieces earlier than the eighth century B.C.E. were recovered here, out of stratigraphical context (Mazar and Mazar 1989; E. Mazar 2006b:784 and fig. 3), and it seems that the entire area was not settled at that time. A similar, complementary picture is gained from the sifting of earthen fills originating in the southern parts of the Haram esh-Sherif: while later Iron Age pottery is well represented, very few Iron Age hand-burnished pottery pieces dated to before the eighth century B.C.E., as well as sherds dating to earlier periods, have been recovered here (Barkay and Zweig 2006:219–20). It thus appears that the settlement of the United Monarchy period did not reach the Temple Mount.

A few words must be added at this point on the enigmatic and unique "Stepped Stone Structure," a kind of retaining wall supporting the steep rocky slope above the Gihon Spring and on the underlying terraces. The structure, the underlying terraces, their function and their date, have been extensively studied in recent years (see Shiloh 1984:16–18, 29, figs. 16–19; Steiner 2001:36–39, 43–52; 2003; Cahill 2003: 33–54; Finkelstein 2003:84–86; A. Mazar 2006). Used and rebuilt for many generations, it seems that this structure or parts of it originates at the end of the Bronze Age and was in use, at least partly, until the Second Temple period.

It is usually assumed that the "Stepped Stone Structure" supported a public building or fort on the summit of the ridge. Recent excavations at this spot by Eilat Mazar revealed substantial structural remains, which she dated to this general period and—on the basis of the biblical text—identified as parts of King David's royal palace (E. Mazar 2006a; see also A. Mazar 2006:269–70). Different stratigraphical and chronological conclusions have recently been reached by I. Finkelstein, Z. Herzog, L. Singer-Avitz, and D. Ussishkin (2007).

Turning back to the problems of the Temple Mount, the above topographical and archaeological data leave us with four options for reconstructing the Temple Mount during the tenth century B.C.E.

First option: Based on the proposal of Knauf (2000), the Temple Mount formed the cultic and secular center of the city already during the Late Bronze Age and the earlier part of the Iron Age. However, there are no textual or archaeological indications to support this theory.

Second option: Based on the biblical tradition, Solomon built a small, modest temple on the Temple Mount, which formed the basis for later reconstruction and extension of the buildings here. In that case, the large compound and the monumental royal palace were added, and the temple was enlarged or rebuilt, in the eighth century B.C.E., when the Temple Mount was incorporated into the extended city. This is the view of Naʾaman, who argued that Solomon built a temple on the Temple Mount, "though on a much smaller scale than the one built in the late monarchical period" (Naʾaman 1996:23).

Third option: The royal acropolis was built as a separate entity by Solomon, as described in the biblical text, and it was incorporated in the expanding city during the late eighth century B.C.E.

Fourth option: The royal acropolis was built as described in the biblical text, but in the late eighth century B.C.E., when the modest tenth-century settlement became a large, fortified city and the Temple Mount was incorporated in it.

There is one strong argument in support of the first and second options. One would expect the planners of the city to have built the royal compound at the highest and most strategically located place in the city. The northern part of the Southwest Hill (figure 1:6), at an elevation of ca. 773 meters above sea level, is clearly the optimal place for the location of the acropolis, rather than the Temple Mount at ca. 743 meters (figure 1:4). And indeed, during the Second Temple period, the Hasmonean kings, and later Herod, shifted their royal palaces to the Southwest Hill. This is a clear indication that the Temple Mount had already been a significant cultic place before the extension of the city in the eighth century B.C.E., so that the royal acropolis was built at this spot.

A similar case can be observed in Hattusha, the Hittite capital (figure 6; see, e.g., Bittel 1970; Neve 1992). Settlement started here in the Early Bronze Age on the hill known as Büyükkale. During the Middle Bronze Age, the "Lower City" was added to the west and northwest, and in this way the Büyük-

kale became the acropolis. Later, during the period of the Hittite kingdom, the city was further extended, and the "Upper City" was added to the south of the Büyükkale and the "Lower City." The Büyükkale remained the acropolis of the extended city, and here was built the central palace of the Hittite kings, although the southern part of the "Upper City" was much higher than the Büyükkale.

The Temple Mount was the religious and political center of the kings of the House of David during the First Temple period. It is a great pity that it cannot be properly investigated archaeologically, although since the Temple Mount was built or destroyed extensively in later periods, it is doubtful whether archaeological investigations could retrieve significant data related to the First Temple period. However, as shown above, it is still possible to reconstruct in part its character and history during this important period.

N.B.: This article is an expanded version of a paper presented in the annual conference of the Society of Biblical Literature in Washington, D.C., in November 2006.

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