American Student Finds Cobra Seal at Gezer

Overseas tour reveals new artifact from storied site

Lauren K. McCormick November 13, 2026



Obverse and reverse of the cobra-bearing Late Bronze Age scarab from Gezer. *Courtey Israel Antiquities Authority, edited by author.*

A few days after arriving in Israel, while on a study tour of Tel Gezer, 17-year-old American high school student Shiloh Attoun saw an object on the side of the road. The small item turned out to be a 3,300-year-old scarab seal with an inscribed face depicting two upright cobras. Shiloh described how we happened upon the find during his group's first field excursion:

> As we were learning about Tel Gezer's history and archaeology, I noticed a small, interesting object on the ground. It looked ancient. I picked it up and consulted my guide. I couldn't believe it was happening to me—a moment ago we were talking about the slim chances of ever discovering such a find, and here was one right in my hand!



Shiloh Attoun with the scarab seal from Tel Gezer. *Courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority.*

The ancient city of Gezer is located in the Judean foothills, or Shephelah. Today a national park, Tel Gezer is one of the most thoroughly excavated and historically rich archaeological sites in Israel, with significant remains from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (2000–1200 BCE) and the Iron Age (1200–586 BCE).

In the second millennium, Gezer was an important Canaanite fortified city. This was a period of expanding Egyptian rule in the Levant. New Kingdom pharaohs were especially concerned to control the trade routes that ran through the area, which linked Egypt with Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia. The Middle Bronze Age occupants notably left a row of ten large standing stones, a large underground water system, and a cache of gold and silver jewelry showing the city's wealth and trade connections. Gezer first appears in Egyptian records in the 15th century BCE, when Thutmose III claims to have destroyed the city, although little archaeological evidence of such an event has been found. The Amarna Letters (c. 1350 BCE) include ten correspondences where rulers of Gezer swear fealty to Egypt and seek the pharaoh's support amid local conflicts.

Toward the end of the Late Bronze Age, Gezer was targeted during the Levantine campaign of Pharaoh Merneptah. The pharaoh claimed Gezer's conquest in his famous victory stela that lists Ashkelon, Yanoam, and Israel among the places or peoples that he destroyed (this stela is the earliest known extrabiblical source to mention Israel). Archaeological excavations have revealed a substantial destruction at Gezer, dated by radiocarbon

evidence to approximately 1218–1172 BCE, during the time in which Merneptah reigned in Egypt.

Despite its prominent Bronze Age history, the most famous artifact from Gezer hails from the Iron Age, probably the tenth century: the Gezer Calendar. Written in an early alphabetic script, this text lists the months of the year according to agricultural seasons.

Iron Age Gezer has a monumental six-chambered gate and casemate wall system, which is similar to fortifications discovered at Hazor and Megiddo. Some archaeologists attribute this resemblance to King Solomon's building campaigns in the tenth century BCE (1 Kings 9:15–19). The late Iron Age strata reveal evidence of destruction, including an Assyrian siege and eventual conquest by the Babylonians.

The Israel Antiquities Authority suggests that the student's scarab seal demonstrates ancient Egypt's cultural influence on Late Bronze Age Gezer. The artifact was examined by Ido Koch of Tel Aviv University, who noted the scarab's interesting features: "The cobra, identified with the biblical serpent and called in Egyptian and in Greek *uraeus*, was a very common protective and royal symbol in ancient Egypt. The semi-ellipse below the cobras represents the Egyptian hieroglyphic sign *nb*, which means 'lord.'" After initial analysis, the scarab was entrusted to Israel's National Treasures Department.

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