

The Renewed Excavations of Tel Gezer, 2006-2008
Steven M. Ortiz and Samuel R. Wolff

2008 Field Report

(License No. G57/2008)

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Tel Gezer Excavation project is a long-term joint American-Israeli project addressing chronological reevaluations, ethnic and social boundaries, and state formation in the southern Levant. To date, the project has conducted three summer field season. The third season of the renewed excavations of Tel Gezer took place between 23 June and 25 July, 2008. The excavations were directed by Dr. Steven M. Ortiz of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dr. Sam Wolff of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The excavations were sponsored by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The project also receives financial support by a consortium of institutions: Ashland Theological Seminary, Marian Eakins Archaeological Museum, Lancaster Bible College, Lycoming College, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The excavations were carried out within the Tel Gezer National Park and benefit from the cooperation of the National Parks Authority. The excavation project also received support from Kibbutz Gezer,

Pinat Shorashim, and the Karmeit Yosef Community Association. The project is affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research.



Figure 1: 2008 Participants

Seventy staff members and volunteers from the United States, Denmark, Canada, Korea, India, and Israel participated in the 2008 season. Senior staff members included Gary Arbino (field archaeologist), E. Braun (field archaeologist); area supervisors: R. DeWitt-Knauth, L. Loyd, M. Pruitt, J. Strong, D. Warner, and J. Zan; assistant area supervisors: M. Barbosa, Alison Davis, Lesley Haines, Bonnie Johnston, Ken Miller, and P. Warner. Educational coordinator and administration: D. Cole; Project administrator: T. Hofecker; zooarchaeology: L. Horwitz; architect/draftsman: J. Rosenberg; registrar and conservator: H. Reichstadt, Pottery registrar: J.

Harrison. In addition, the regional survey project, under the direction of Dr. Eric Mitchell, continued to work from the previous season.

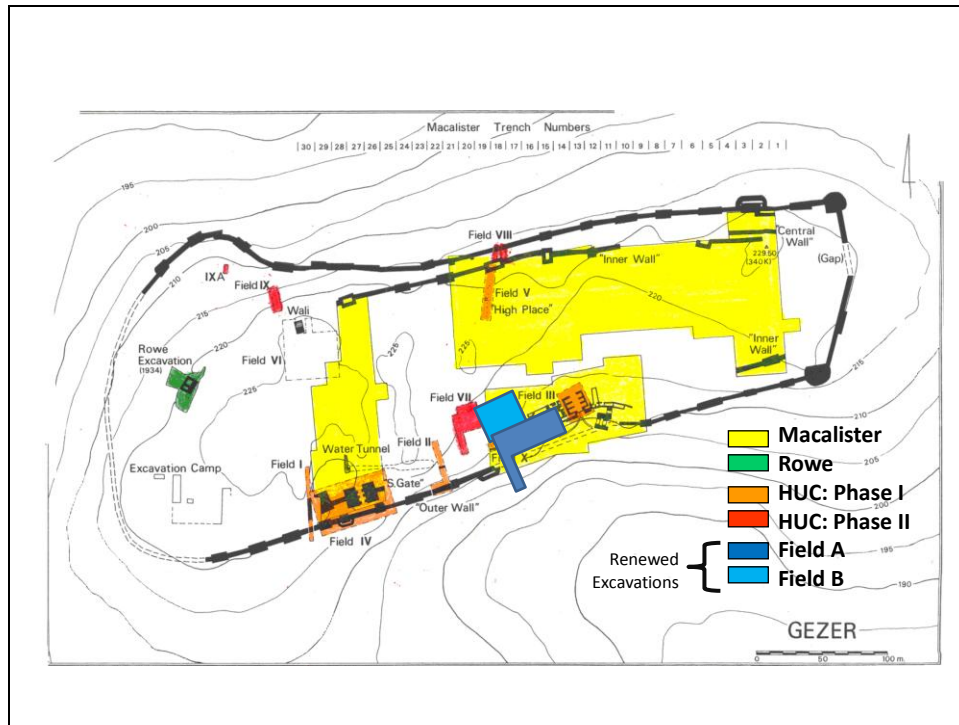


Figure 2: New Fields with Previous Excavations

Research Goals/Objectives

The purpose of the project is to investigate state formation and regional boundaries in the northern Shephelah by investigating the Iron Age cultural horizon at Tel Gezer. These broad research trends in Iron Age archaeology are being addressed by current research projects in the Shephelah and Southern Coastal Plain; specifically ethnic and political boundaries in the Judean Hills and the Philistine coastal plain. Tel Gezer is an ideal site to address the regional geo-political dynamic between Judah and Philistia during the Iron Age.

The following are our main objectives:

- 1) To expose, define and date those fortification systems preserved in our area of excavation.
- 2) Link domestic structures in Field VII with the fortification systems in Field III.
- 3) Provide a broad exposure of Iron Age strata, whether they yield domestic architecture, like Field VII, or public architecture, like Field III and Palace 10000.
- 4) Excavate inside (north of) the “Solomonic Gate” in order to ipso facto provide more information on the date of the gate.
- 5) Investigate the feasibility of Zeev Herzog’s reconstruction of a 10th century fortress (*Archaeology of the City*, p. 217).

Research Design

The main field goal of our project is to excavate a large horizontal exposure on the tell and obtain a sequence of well-stratified cultural horizons of the Iron Age. There are three major factors that influenced our decision to choose where to dig to address our research questions and design: 1) topography and modern settlement history (19th century structures and cemetery, HUC dig house), 2) previous excavations (Macalister and HUC), and the 3) NPA Cultural Heritage Plan. Based on these factors, our excavations concentrated on the eastern slope of the western hill, and the southern end of the western hill and central valley. This area has the potential to address our research design and field objectives. The area will unite two fields with Iron Age strata (HUC Field VII and III), with limited overburden of either Macalister’s excavations or modern buildings.

Goals for the 2008 Season

Goals for the 2008 season were to continue excavations and expand the horizontal exposure in Fields A and B. At the end of the 2007 season, a JCB was brought in to remove the dumps of the 1970s.

About 3 meters of dump was removed to allow the project to safely excavate a sondage down the slope of the tel. We opened one square and two half-squares down the slope in an attempt to 1) see if the outer wall extends in this area, and 2) to establish a stratigraphic relationship with the fortifications excavated.

In addition to the sondage, the foundations of administrative buildings north of the city wall were excavated to get an accurate plan of these structures as well as the excavation of the Assyrian 8th century destruction in Field B.

OVERVIEW

1. Areas

The excavations are designed to unite the Iron Age architectural elements and cultural horizons of Field VII and Field III of the HUC excavations with our renewed excavations, thus allowing for optimal reconstruction of the growth and expansion of the Iron Age city as well as artifact distributional patterns.

Field A was supervised by Gary Arbino. It encompasses an area west of the Iron Age Gate Complex (Field III of the HUC excavations). The goals of this area are to investigate Iron Age fortifications and a series of Iron Age administrative buildings. This field includes 1) an east-west section of squares from the Iron Age gate to the west exposing the city fortification system, 2) a north-south sondage to investigate the relationship between the Iron Age wall and the “outer” wall, and 3) an area north of the fortification wall where a series of large public buildings are located.



Figure 3: Aerial of Fields A and B

Field B, under the direction of Eliot Braun, was opened in the 2007 season. It is located northwest of Field A, and will ultimately unite with the sondage of Field A providing a north-south stratigraphic section from Field VII of the HUC excavations to the outside southern slope. The goal of this field is to 1) investigate the several Iron Age occupation horizons of the tel, 2) study the urbanization process of the Iron Age City, and 3) provide data from Iron Age domestic quarters to compare with the public buildings to the southeast in Field A.

2. Phases/Stratigraphy

Ten major strata have been defined in Fields A and B.

| Tel Gezer Master Stratigraphic Chart 2006-08 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|----------------------------|--|--|
| Preliminary Strata | | Field A | Field B | HUC Excavations | |
| 1 | Topsoil, Modern Excavation Dumps | HUC dump | Trenches, rock piles | | |
| 2 | Macalister | | | | |
| 3 | Hellenistic | Retaining walls, silo | Domestic bldg, Dog burials | Strata IIA-C, III | |
| 4 | Persian | ceramic | ceramic | Strata IV | |
| 5 | Late Iron Age II | | silo | V | |
| 6 | IA II (8 th) Assyrian Destruction | Rebuilt walls | | VIA | |
| 7 | 9 th | walls | ----- | VIB | |
| 8 | 10 th | Casemate fortification | ----- | VIIA | |
| | | Earlier cross walls connected to casemate | | VIIB (mid 10 th) | |
| 9 | | Destruction Layer, Pillared Building? | | VIII (late 11 th /early 10 th Siaman Des.) | |
| | | Pillared Building? | | XI-IXA (Phil) | |
| | | | | XII (early 12 th) | |
| 10 | LB Destruction | Small probe | | XII | |

EXCAVATION RESULTS

1. Latter/Intrusions

Both fields contained evidence of Macalister’s excavations and backfill. All squares along the Iron Age fortifications were previously excavated by Macalister as well as Hellenistic buildings in Fields A and B. The northern half of Field A sits in a depression, evidence that this is an area where Macalister excavated. It is apparent that Macalister stopped when he encountered large architectural features such as the Hellenistic buildings in Field B and the Iron Age buildings in Field A.

In addition, several small earlier trenches north of the Iron Age city wall were revealed that should be attributed to the Dever excavations of 1984 and/or 1990, as well as the HUC dump. In Field B, some of these trenches might be attributed to modern Israeli military trenches during the period between 1948 and 1967 (personal communication with Kibbutz Gezer residents). A large bulldozer cut extends the length of most of the southern side of the Iron Age casemate wall. The origin or purpose of this activity is not known.

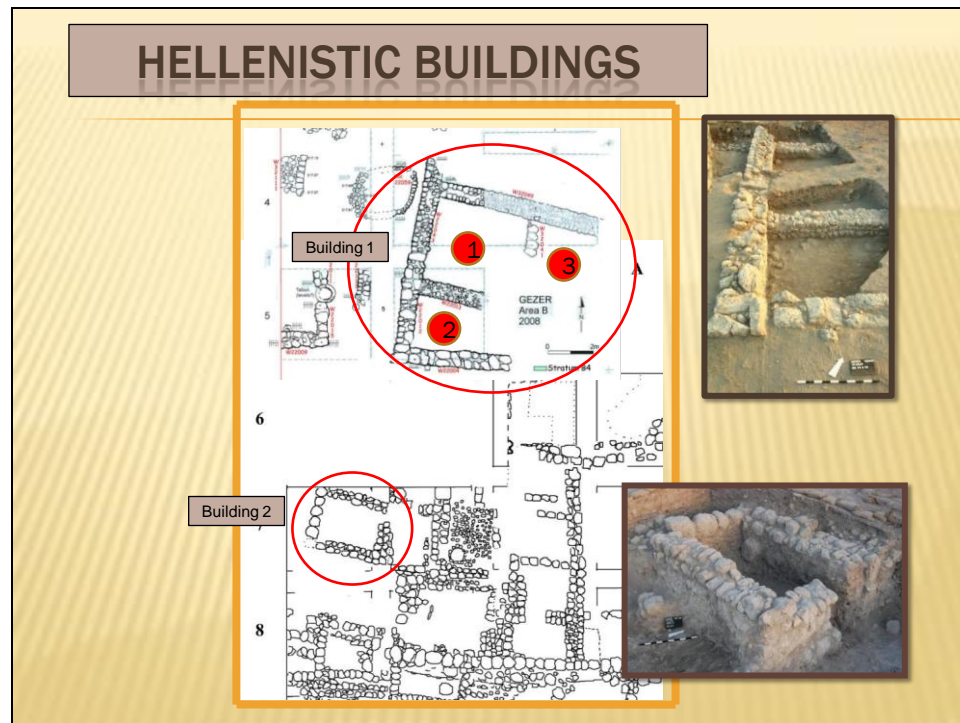


Figure 4: Hellenistic Buildings

2. Persian/Hellenistic Strata

Parts of two buildings/complexes were excavated in Field B and the western end of Field A (see Figure 3). These two buildings are probably contemporary with the Hellenistic

buildings excavated by the HUC excavations in Field VII. It appears that Macalister excavated all surfaces associated with these buildings and all that is left are the walls and foundations.

Fragments of a northern building (Building 1) were excavated in Field B. This building is 9 x 8 m and continued north where only a small wall stub was preserved and continued east where it was not excavated. This building consists of a north-south wall with three bonded east-west walls. A small divider wall is bonded to the south face of the north wall. Three units can be discerned in this building. Immediately to the south is a second, smaller rectangular single-room building, ca. 4 x 2 m. The preserved height of these walls is nearly one meter.

Lower down the slope to the southeast are other fragments of architectural features that probably date to the Hellenistic occupation phase. These include an east-west wall built on top of the Iron Age fortification wall, and a circular installation, perhaps to be identified as a silo or a pottery kiln (previously dated by Dever to the Iron Age Palace 8000), and several wall fragments that are rebuilds of walls of the Iron Age administrative buildings.

It is clear, as was known from Macalister's "Maccabean Castle," and evidence of Hellenistic reuse of the "Solomonic" gate system, that the ruins of the Iron Age fortifications and public buildings were known to the Hellenistic inhabitants and were reused and/or incorporated into Hellenistic buildings and terrace walls.

Hellenistic Finds

All artifacts associated with our Hellenistic occupation were found within the pits and dumps of Macalister. Of note are two Hellenistic lead weights of the Tanit series, two coins, one

dated to Ptolomy VI (shown below), several Rhodian stamped jar handles, and naturally ceramics. The weight and coins have been published or mentioned in recent publications.¹



Figure 5: Hellenistic Finds—Lead weight and Coin

Pre-Hellenistic/Post Iron Age

Field B also contained many later disturbances cut into the Iron Age II Strata. Most of



these pits contained a mixture of pottery from the Hellenistic to the Iron Age Periods. These could only be tentatively dated from Persian pits to several modern pits and intrusions. One of the observations made this season was the large amount of Persian pottery found in Field B. While this is only anecdotal evidence from field pottery reading, there is a substantial amount from this field versus Field A to suggest a possible Persian occupation

Figure 6: Persian Pottery

¹S. Wolff and G. Finkelsztein, "Two New Hellenistic Lead Weights of the Tanit Series." In *Exploring the Longue Duree: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager*, ed. D. Schloen. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009 and Catharine C. Lorber, "The Ptolemaic Era Coins Revisited," Catharine C. Lorber; *The Numismatic Chronicle* 167:106-117 (2007).

stratum beneath the Hellenistic structures. In addition to the ceramic data, three dog burials, one articulated and two ephemeral (two of the burials are shown in this slide. All dog burials were found in Field B north of Hellenistic Building 1.

3. Iron Age: Field A (Fortifications and Administrative Buildings)

Most of the Iron Age in Field A has been disturbed or excavated by previous excavators. Nevertheless, an aggressive plan to obtain a complete picture of the various public buildings



Figure 7: Field A looking south

and fortifications was implemented. After three seasons, a large area 45 x 20 m has been excavated along with a 15 m long sondage (see Figure 7). The material above the walls and features was 20th century backfill and topsoil.

Fortifications: Casemate and Stone Revetment

During our first season, excavations concentrated on the Iron Age Casemate wall west of the six-chambered Iron Age Gate. In the 1984 Dever excavations, evidence of three Iron Age strata and remains of an 8th century destruction debris were found. We anticipated that the casemate west of the gate had undisturbed Iron Age strata. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

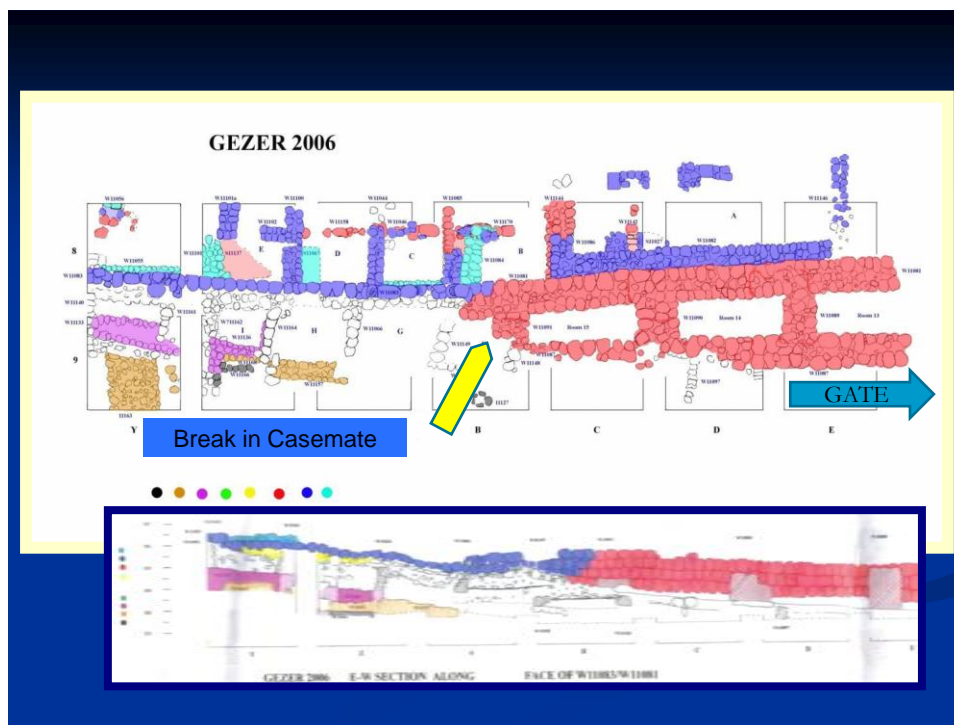


Figure 8: Fortification Plan

The Casemate Wall system consists of two parallel wall lines that extend from the gate to Square B9, about 30 m in length (Figure 2). The casemate is constructed of two rows of large unhewn stones with a central row of smaller chinking/fill stones. The northern line continues as a single wall for over 17 m, while there is no evidence of the continuation of the southern wall

line.² The northern wall line is a latter 8th century BCE rebuild that consists of a single row of unhewn boulder size stones.³ It contains a reused vat. After the first field season, it was clear that Macalister had previously excavated this area and freely altered the plans. Our excavations in 2006 also made it clear that there were no entrances to the casemates, contra Dever's reconstruction and casemate wall systems from other sites.

Retention System

A series of seven single row walls abut the south face of the fortification wall. Since these retention walls were built on top of an earlier destruction and a possible earlier pillared building (see below), it seems most plausible that this retaining wall system is contemporary with the main casemate system. The narrowness of the socle system indicates that the large, three row, double wall casemate system did not continue west beyond Field B.

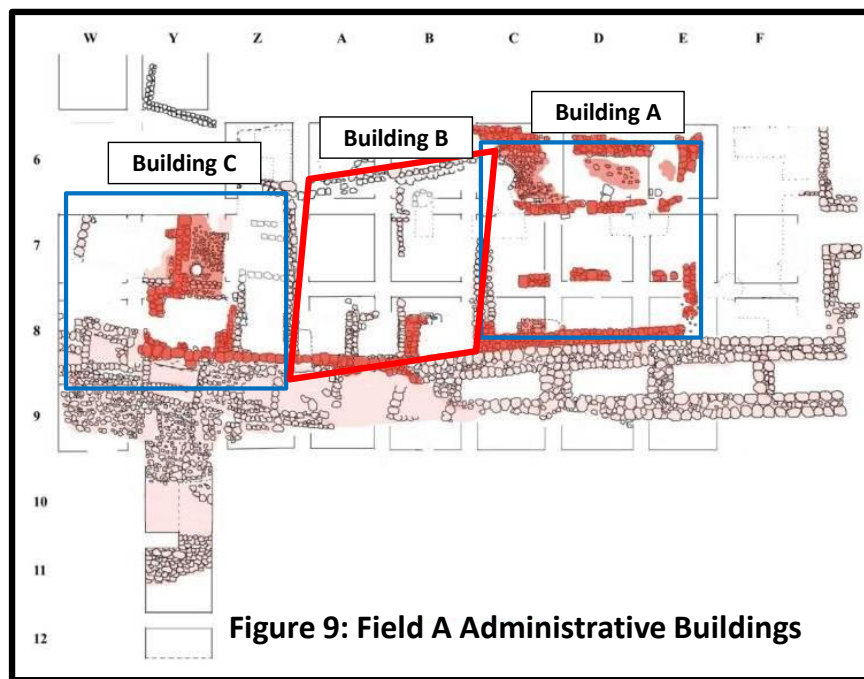
A large, stepped, sloping revetment construction (glacis) was built up against the Iron Age city wall and incorporated into the socle wall retention system. This structure is built of cobble to boulder size, unhewn stones in a series of layers or steps from the south up to the outside face of the city wall. It extends nearly 15 m from east to west and ca. 15 m in width. The extent of this stone revetment is unknown as it is only revealed in a probe in the sondage. There is a three meter gap due to erosion or later trenching. From the bottom of the revetment, excavated to date, to the top of the fortification wall is a height of nearly 7 meters.

² It is possible that the rebuild reflects the original design of the city-wall (i.e. a double parallel wall (casemate) from the gate that becomes a single wall line), excavations of earlier strata will determine the history of use.

³ According to Macalister's plan, he only found a single wall line.

There is a 2 ½ meter slope from the surface levels north of the fortification wall and revetment to the threshold of the Iron Age Gate.

The Iron Age fortification system constructed during the 10th/9th century was designed for optimal defense. The six-chambered gate was built in the saddle with the “built-up foundation technique”⁴ and the western fortification wall to the west followed the slope up the western hill. At the point of the western end of the saddle, an additional stone revetment was constructed. At a later period in the Iron Age an outer gatehouse was constructed along with an outer wall—typical of other Iron Age sites.



Administrative Buildings

⁴ David Ussishkin, “Was the “Solomonic” City Gate at Megiddo Built by King Solomon?” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239:1-18, 1980.

The excavations have defined part of the Iron Age city planning during the 8th century BCE. It appears that a series of public buildings was constructed just west of the six-chambered gate. These buildings were built up against the north face of the casemate wall. From the gate we have what Dever (1985) called soldiers' barracks, next was a large pillared square-shaped administrative building (Palace 8000 in Dever's terminology), a second tripartite building, and a third structure. Most of the features in these squares were exposed on the surface or disturbed by Macalister, and the excavations merely allowed us to define the foundations of the walls and assist in redrawing the plan.

Administration Building A

This building, measuring almost 15m x 15m, can be seen on both Macalister's plan and Dever's 1984/1990 plan. It is a square, tripartite building with two rows of pillars in the center.

Our excavations have clarified 8th century structures. Now with a complete horizontal exposure, Dever's Palace 8000 needs to be updated. The majority of the building is our Administration Building A. There is a possible courtyard between this building and the 'Soldiers' Barracks' to the east, which abuts the western edge of the six-chambered gate. The western part of Palace 8000 is a second public building.

Central Administration Building B

The walls of this building were extensively disturbed by the Hellenistic structures and Macalister. Between the eastern and western enclosure walls is a 20 m² area. This building shares its eastern wall with Building A. It is bonded with the rebuilt fortification wall as well as

the northern wall of the casemate wall. In addition, it is clear that this building, or at least several of its walls, belong to an earlier phase as the western and northern walls are bonded to walls of earlier phases. Buildings A and C might also be earlier. Within this area remnants of two north-south wall systems were defined. This building is also a tripartite building, except the long rooms run north-south.

Western Administration Building C

Just north of the revetment are remains of a third administrative building. Only the south part of this building complex has been excavated. Most of the occupation layers and floors associated with these buildings had been destroyed or disturbed by Hellenistic rebuilding or Macalister's excavations. A cobbled floor surface with stone-lined bin sunk into the floor was excavated inside Building C. While a majority of this surface was exposed by Macalister, a small section was undisturbed and contained a complete Iron Age II juglet laying on the floor. This provides the dating of these buildings to Iron Age II (8th century), a similar conclusion reached by the 1984 excavators.

Earlier Iron Age Phases (10th and 9th c.)

There is evidence of two earlier Iron Age strata beneath the 8th c. administrative buildings. This evidence comes from the area of Building B. At this location we have the deepest penetration of Macalister excavations which exposed earlier walls. These two phases were also revealed by the probes and excavation of a casemate room during the 1984 Dever excavations. With the excavation and removal of our Hellenistic stratum and the excavation north of these

administrative buildings, the excavation will systematically investigate these earlier Iron Age Strata.

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4. Iron Age: Field B (Domestic Buildings)

In most squares in Field B, evidence of an 8th century BCE destruction was found. Several whole vessels were found indicative of pottery of general Stratum VI (mid-8th century BCE). This stratum is contemporary with the domestic structures and destruction debris found in the adjacent Field VII of the HUC excavations. Unfortunately about ½ of the debris was disturbed by Hellenistic occupation, pits, and modern trenches. A later Iron Age silo cuts the earlier Iron Age phase; a complete storage jar was found in this silo.

5. Earlier Strata

Four features that predate the Iron Age fortification system were defined. They are found in small probes and hence their dating is difficult, the sole stratigraphic relationship being that they are earlier than the Iron Age fortification. These three features are located along the southern line of the fortification wall and their relationship to the Iron Age architecture north of the city wall is unknown.

The first is a sunken store jar at the base of the southern line of the casemate found in the 2006 season. The top (e.g. rim) of this storejar was removed (probably due to the bulldozer cut of unknown origin) based solely on its body can we tentatively date it to Iron I/early Iron Age II.

Beneath the Iron Age revetment walls, in several squares that penetrated beneath the fortifications is a ½ meter layer of ashy destruction debris. Most of the loci associated with this debris stratum contained pottery dated to the 11/10th century ceramic horizon (e.g. cyma-profiled bowls, red-slip, etc.). In one of these probes beneath the revetment system, in the midst of this ashy destruction debris, several mushroom-shaped clay stoppers were found. One of these stoppers featured a stamped seal near its rim which tentatively dates it to the early 10th century BCE.

At the bottom of this same probe, a large circular pillar base, .80 m was discovered, sealed by a layer dating to the Late Bronze II. While it is a single architectural feature, it is clear that there is a remnant of a large, presumably public pillared building sitting on the western slope of the tel. Fortunately this was found within the squares of our sondage—an area we were already planning to remove part of the Iron Age fortification system. Ironically the level of

this base (213.7) is at the same level of the threshold of the gate, supporting our conclusion that the Iron Age fortification system built up the area within the natural saddle of the tell.

An east-west wall/revetment was excavated south and down slope of the Iron Age fortification wall. It is stratigraphically earlier than the Casemate and Retaining systems. Pottery found in debris alongside the wall is dated to the LB/Iron Age I horizon. Probes made through the mantle (where the stones appeared to have already been removed) contain clean LB/Iron I material (further evidence that the retaining wall system and the mantle were all constructed as a unit).

Conclusion

Summary

To date, our major results are defining the architectural plans of the 8th century BCE city plan. It is apparent that there are three major areas: 1) domestic quarters, 2) public buildings (Administrative Buildings A, B, and C, Gate Complex, and 3) auxiliary guard rooms. We have also determined that there are multiple architectural phases associated with the gate complex. While these were known in the Hebrew Union College excavations, the renewed excavations should provide a more detailed analysis of the history of the Iron Age city. In addition, evidence has come to light of earlier occupation levels before the 10th century gate and fortification system, e.g. destruction strata and a potential pillared building.

The results of recent archaeological investigations and scholarly research have focused on the geopolitical development during the 8th century in Judah and the southern coastal plain.⁵ These projects are the Beth Shemesh project under the direction of Schlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman. The evaluation of the 8th century destruction at Tel Halif by James Hardin, and the excavations at Tel Gath under the direction of Aren Maeir of Bar Ilan University. These new excavations and scholarship have demonstrated that there was a political shift between Judah and Philistia during the 8th century. Judah started to expand westward as evidenced by the robust building activity at Beth Shemesh with an extensive water system and city expansion. The settlement and material culture changes demonstrate a geopolitical shift of Judah westward, perhaps associated with the activities of King Uzziah.

With this renewed emphasis on the later Iron Age Period, a relatively unknown part of the history of the site is coming to light. While the results are preliminary, there is enough information to coalesce with the excavation results of Tel Gezer with the Beth Shemesh and Tell es-Safi to postulate historical reconstructions and the nature of the 8th century BCE city. While the excavations are still in their initial stages and the results are tentative—some conclusions can be drawn from the data—particularly the unfolding Iron Age city plan. The 8th century city reused the city plan and buildings of the 10th century BCE. Tel Gezer's fortifications and city wall line define the city as an oval-shaped city plan. Although the text in 1 Kings 9:16 implies that Gezer, along with Hazor and Megiddo was an administrative city; it was probably a secondary administrative center during the 8th century BCE. Perhaps during the United Monarchy Gezer

⁵ I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman, "The Judahite Shephelah in the Late 8th and Early 7th Centuries BCE," *Tel Aviv* 31:69-79, 2004. Jeffrey A. Blakely and James W. Hardin, "Southwestern Judah in the Late Eight Century B.C.E.," in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 326:11-64, 2002.

was a major administrative city, but under a smaller Judean Kingdom, it contracted to a secondary administrative center with the city of Lachish to the south serving as the administrative center for the Shephelah.

Goals for 2009

Our goals for the 2009 season are: 1) expand the northern exposure of Field A, 2) continue the sondage, 3) remove a portion of the Iron Age fortification system in order to better understand it and to reveal the Late Bronze Age pillared building underneath it, 4) connect Field B with Field A to obtain a complete stratigraphic picture of Fields A, B and Field VII of the HUC excavations, 5) continue the excavation of the 8th century destruction in Field B.

The project will expand Field A (north of Administrative Buildings A, B, and C) by opening up two lines of squares (Squares Z4/5 to G4/5). This is a total of 18 squares. Most of these squares have been previously investigated by Macalister and we anticipate that we will find the same type of activity as the 2008 season. Hopefully, we will be able to continue to delineate the architectural plan of the 8th century occupation.

Work on the sondage will continue with the goal of determining the extent of the glacis (L31044) as well as discerning if the line of the outer wall continues. We plan to open up Squares W10 and W11 to the west to expand the exposure of the sondage as well as address issues of safety. In addition we will continue to excavate south down the slope (Squares W12 and Y12).

Squares W6 and Y6 served as a dump access for Field B and Field A. Ironically, these two squares are part of the master plan to have a north-south stratigraphic line from the Hellenistic

and Iron Age domestic structures in Field VII of the HUC excavations and the slope of the city fortification system. In addition, we plan to remove Hellenistic and Iron Age architecture in Squares W7, Y7, W8, and Y8 in order to investigate the structure and stratigraphy associated with the large pillar base found in Square Y9.

Excavations in Field B will be limited to continuation of squares opened in 2008. (squares W2, W3, and W4 as well as Y2, Y3, and Z2).