

# **Tel Gezer, 2006 2006 Season Excavation Summary Report**

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## **Introduction**

The inaugural season of the renewed excavations of Tel Gezer took place between 4 June and 18 July, 2006. The excavations were sponsored by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The project also receives financial support by a consortium of institutions: Grace Seminary, Marian Eakins Archaeological Museum, Lancaster Bible College, Lycoming College, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern 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.

Fourteen excavation squares encompassing an area of 10 x 35 m (Field A) were excavated delineating 8 phases from the present to the Late Bronze Age. The main results were the investigation of the Iron Age II casemate fortifications along with a second major rebuilding dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. These two strata are built directly on top of a destruction level tentatively dated to Stratum IX of the HUC excavation project and an earlier strata dating to the Late Bronze Age.

Over 60 participants from the consortium schools as well as other students and volunteers from the U.S. and Israel took part in the inaugural season. The Tel Gezer Excavation Project is directed by Steven M. Ortiz (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) and Samuel R. Wolff (Israel Antiquities Authority). The Tel Gezer expedition included: E. Braun (senior advisor), Gary Arbino (field archaeologist); area supervisors: S. Andrews, R. DeWitt-Kanuath, E. Mitchell, and D. Warner; assistant area supervisors: J. Cathey, M. Pruitt, and S. Rives. Project Administrator: T. Hofecker; Educational coordinator/administration: D. Cole; zooarchaeology: L. Horowitz and J. Lev-Tov; architect/draftsman: J. Rosenburg; registrar: D. Hofecker.

The first season of excavations also coordinated work with the Nature and National Parks Protection Authority for the commencement and preparation for the presentation of the site as a national monument. Excavations were limited to the southern perimeter of the proposed excavation area (e.g. along the Iron Age fortifications) to preserve the northern part of the area to be excavated for pedestrian traffic during the inauguration ceremonies of the site as a national park. This ceremony took place on 10 July 2006. The Tel Gezer excavation team cleaned both the “Solomonic” and Middle Bronze Gate complexes from vegetal overgrowth and assisted with trail construction and restoration, and filling in test pits and trenches from previous excavations.

## **Research Design**

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. The regional geo-political dynamic between Judah and Philistia during the Iron Age is currently being investigated by the Tel Beth Shemesh Archaeological Project of Tel Aviv University and the Tel es-Safi Archaeological Project of Bar Ilan University.

The research design focused on three major domains of inquiry: 1) publication and analysis of the western expansion of Field III from the 1984 and 1990 excavations (Palaces 8000 and 10,000), 2) excavation of a new field, which is an expansion and broad exposure of the area between Field VII and Field III, and 3) to investigate specific problems concerning the relationship of Iron Age fortifications (e.g. the relationship between the “Outer Wall” and the Field III six-chambered gate complex and casemate fortifications).

The main goal of our project is to excavate a large horizontal exposure on the south-central part of the tel and obtain a sequence of well-stratified cultural horizons of the Iron Age in order to establish a ceramic database. An additional goal is to unite various Iron Age components of the ancient city in order to better understand the relationship of the various fortifications and buildings (e.g. wall systems to Field VII and Palaces 8000 and 10,000). This database will aid in our attempt to clarify current issues concerning the history of Gezer and contribute to a ceramic production and distribution model of the greater Aijalon Valley region. The results of the renewed excavations will also be coalesced with Iron Age research in the region.

#### Specific 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) Check if Zeev Herzog’s reconstruction of a 10<sup>th</sup> century fortress (*Archaeology of the City*, p. 217) stands up.

### Summary of Prior Investigations

Nearly half of Tel Gezer was excavated by the British team led by R.A.S. Macalister during 1902-1909. A brief season was conducted by A. Rowe in 1934. Subsequently, excavations were conducted by Hebrew Union College (HUC) excavations from 1964-1973: Phase I, directed by W.G. Dever, and Phase II by J. Seger. Finally, small problem-solving excavations were conducted in 1984 and 1990 by the University of Arizona under the direction of W.G. Dever.

The Iron Age horizon at Gezer has been excavated in many areas (e.g. Fields I, II, III, VI, VII, and X). While the results have revealed that there are over ten strata dating to the Iron Age period, only two of the three areas yielded broad exposures. These two areas date to the early Iron Age I (Field VI) and the late Iron Age (Field VII). None of these excavations have provided an appropriate amount of ceramic data for a complete reconstruction of the site during the Iron Age cultural horizon.

During the summer of 2005, the project co-directors met with Dr. Dever and examined the excavation notes and material culture remains located in the storerooms of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem. This initial research of the 1984 and 1990 excavation results provided the framework for the development of the research design.

## **The 2006 Excavations**

### Methodology

One of the issues was setting up a master grid that would incorporate previous excavations. One of the specific goals of the project is to link the Iron Age domestic structures of Field VII with the fortification system of Field III. The HUC excavations had individual grid systems for each field that were surveyed based on the individual topography of each area, therefore Field III and Field VII did not have a unified grid plan. The decision was made to create a master grid plan for the site based on the grid system of Field III of the HUC excavations. The tel was divided into sixteen 100 x 100 meter squares. These are subdivided into individual 5 x 5 meter squares.

In addition, major architectural features of the tel were surveyed by a representative of the Survey Department of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Leticia ). It was determined that previous surveys and site plans are very accurate and the new project will not have any problems coordinating previous stratigraphic results of the HUC expedition with the new excavations.

### Field Strategy

Due to the restrictions placed on the excavation project by the National Parks Authority, the plan to excavate southeast of Field VII was not possible. The directors decided to focus the first season's investigations on the fortification system. A single excavation field (Field A) consisted of fourteen 5 x 5 meter squares in an east-west line from the Iron Age Field III gate to the west was initiated. This resulted in the excavation of over 40 meters of the city-wall during the Iron Age II period.

Most of the area was previously exposed by 1) Macalister's excavations; 2) 1984 excavations; and 3) a modern bulldozer cut parallel to the south face of the casemate. These earlier investigations presented some obstacles to the interpretation of excavation results as many stratigraphic relationships were cut and most fills and debris layers contained material culture from various cultural horizons. Nevertheless, the results of the 2006 were noteworthy and the productivity of the staff and volunteers made a major contribution to the history of the ancient city of Gezer.

### **Summary of Results Field A-Iron Age Casemate Wall**

Field A was under the direction of Field Archaeologist Gary Arbino. Fourteen 5 x 5 meter squares were excavated along the line of the casemate. The fortification system created a natural terrace with seven squares to the north of the field forming the upper terrace and seven squares south of the casemate down the slope forming a lower terrace. Thirteen Phases were defined, from Modern trenches to the Late Bronze Age in Field A.

The main cultural stratum is the Iron Age Casemate Fortification System. This can be dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE (conventional dating) based on the results of Field III and the stratigraphy developed by the HUC excavations in the 1960s and 70s.

### Modern Period

Evidence of recent activity was found throughout the area. In the northeast section of the field (Squares C8, D8, and E8) previous excavation trenches of the 1984 season were excavated. In addition, the dump of the HUC 1970s excavations was excavated in the western most part of the field (Square Y9). A recent bulldozer cut (after the 1990 season) cut through the southern half of the squares on the lower terrace.

In addition, several disturbances and refills were discerned and are attributed to Macalister's excavations. A comparison of architectural features exposed during the 2006 season and Macalister's reports illustrate that while most of the architecture excavated this season was already exposed by him, there are some variations between the actual architectural features and Macalister's drawings. The most notable example is the absence of a casemate room-divider wall and the size of a wall that extends north of the casemate.

### Hellenistic Period

Remains dating to the Hellenistic Period were found in the northwest of the field (Squares Y8 and Z8). A single east-west wall (W11058) was built on top of the northern line of the casemate. In addition several other remnants of wall stubs and rebuilding were evidenced in several excavation squares (Y8, Z8, A8, B8). It appears that this is the

southern extent of the Hellenistic domestic structure excavated in Field VII of the HUC excavations. It is also evident that the casemate wall was exposed during the Hellenistic Period as various later walls were built against the casemate post-dating the Iron Age II period. While only one surface was found associated with one of these features (Surface 11137), most of the other architectural features post-date fills and debris of the Iron Age II phases. Noting that the results are still very tentative, it is probable that the casemate system served as a retaining wall for agricultural activity south of the Hellenistic settlement further up the slope (Field VII). Further excavations to the southeast of Field VII will hopefully yield further Hellenistic strata that will present a broader horizontal plan of the Hellenistic cultural horizon.

### Iron Age II

The HUC excavations in Field III and the 1984 excavations have already provided the Iron Age stratigraphy of this part of the site. The new excavations found architectural remains that can be attributed to the two major phases of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century. Dever (1985) noted two structures west of the Iron Age Gate complex, Palaces 8000 and 10000 dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE respectively. Architectural features associated with these two horizons were found in the 2006 season (on the general plan, features in dark blue are 8<sup>th</sup> century and features in red are 10<sup>th</sup> century).

The Casemate Wall system consists of two parallel wall lines that extend from the gate to Square B9. The double casemate wall system appears to be destroyed. The northern line (W11081) continues as W11083 while there is no evidence of the continuation of the southern wall line (W11087). It is unclear whether this was part of the

original design of the city-wall (i.e. a double parallel wall (casemate) from the gate that becomes a single wall line), or if it represents a later rebuild that only reconstructed the northern line. This part of the city-wall was disturbed by later excavations. The line of the city-wall will need to be investigated in future seasons to determine if the phenomenon of the single wall continues or if we have a later rebuild of a break in the casemate wall system.

Palace 8000 of the 1984 excavations was also partially excavated as well as other parts. Our excavations clarified some of the 1984 season's conclusions. The Palace is best defined as administrative units. There are two units, one to the immediate west of the gate guardrooms (Unit I: a Pillared Building Room A) and a second unit (Unit II) that contains a series of rooms (Rooms B, C, D, and E).

### Iron Age I/Late Bronze Age

One of the unexpected results of the season was the excavation of two destructions tentatively dated to the Iron Age I/II and the Late Bronze Age. These horizons were already defined by the HUC excavations (Strata IX and XV). This is the first time these strata were excavated with the fortification system. The stratum IX destruction was found beneath the casemate wall in squares Z9, A9, and B9. Unfortunately most of these squares were cut by a bulldozer, leaving only a small section of undisturbed in situ remains. In spite of this phenomenon, there is clear evidence of this destruction. In addition, an ash layer (Square Y9) contained several mushroom-shaped storage jar stoppers—one containing a seal of Siamun.

A second destruction horizon was found in Square Z9 and D9. The pottery found in the burnt mudbrick detritus was Late Bronze Age. While the exposure was minimal, we can tentatively associate this phase (Phase 13) with Stratum XV of the HUC excavations.

### **Goals for the 2007 Season**

Goals for the 2007 season will focus on the continuation of the project's research design. Two fields will be opened. One will be the continuation of Field A. A line of squares will be opened to the north (squares Y7-E7) and to the southwest of the 2006 excavations. This southwest expansion will investigate: the large structure L11163 in Square Y9, two destruction horizons, and open up squares down the slope to connect the fortifications of the line of casemates with the "outer wall."

A second field will be opened to the southeast of Field VII. This is an area with the potential to have undisturbed Iron Age stratigraphy. In addition, this field will unite Iron Age domestic features with the public buildings and fortifications excavated in the 2006 season.