

The Renewed Excavations of Tel Gezer, 2006-2009

Steven M. Ortiz and Samuel R. Wolff

2009 Field Report

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Figure 1: Aerial (north at top)

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 four summer field seasons. The fourth season of the renewed excavation of Tel Gezer took place between 15 June and 16 July, 2009. 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 with the support of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The project also receives financial support by a consortium of institutions: Ashland Theological Seminary, Clear Creek Bible College, 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 2: 2009 Participants

Nearly 80 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 expedition included: T. Hofecker (project administrator), Gary Arbino (field archaeologist); area supervisors: M. Barbosa, A. Davis, L. Haines, R. DeWitt-Knauth, K. Miller, M. Pruitt, J. Strong, and D. Warner; assistant area supervisors: C. Coyle, A. Dodd, J. Jewell, G. Nagagreh, and P. Warner; educational coordinator/administration: D. Cole; zooarchaeology: L. Horowitz; architect/draftsman: J. Rosenberg; computer database designer: D. Pride; pottery registrar, J. Harrison; material culture registrar and conservator: H. Reichstadt.

The research goal 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.

Our goals for the 2009 season were: 1) to expand the exposure of Field A to the north, 2) continue the sondage, 3) remove the western portion of the late Iron Age fortification system in order to better understand its construction and expose the Late Bronze Age pillared building below 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 completion of our fourth season of excavation has produced the following results: 1) excavation of two building complexes dating to the Hellenistic Period; 2) Iron Age fortification systems; 3) an 8th century BCE Assyrian destruction of a large Israelite four-room house; 4) three major architectural strata of the Iron Age, 5) partial excavation of an LB pillared building; and 6) exposure of the Middle Bronze Age glacis. Work continues in three major fields: Field A—an administrative district with buildings abutting the north face of the Iron Age casemate fortification system; Field B—consists of the domestic quarter with a large four-room house, with auxiliary cobbled surfaces, that corresponds with the domestic buildings of HUC Field VII;

and the third field—Field A-Sondage, which consists of the remains of Hellenistic buildings, Iron Age city wall, glacis, and public buildings, as well as strata dated to the second millennium BCE (Late Bronze Age strata with pillared building and MB glacis and building remains.

OVERVIEW

1. Areas

In 2009, the two fields of excavation (A and B) were excavated as one large field with four subdivisions: Field A: East, Field B, upper sondage, and the lower sondage. with 28 total excavated squares. The entire operation was under the direct supervision of Dr. Gary Arbino.

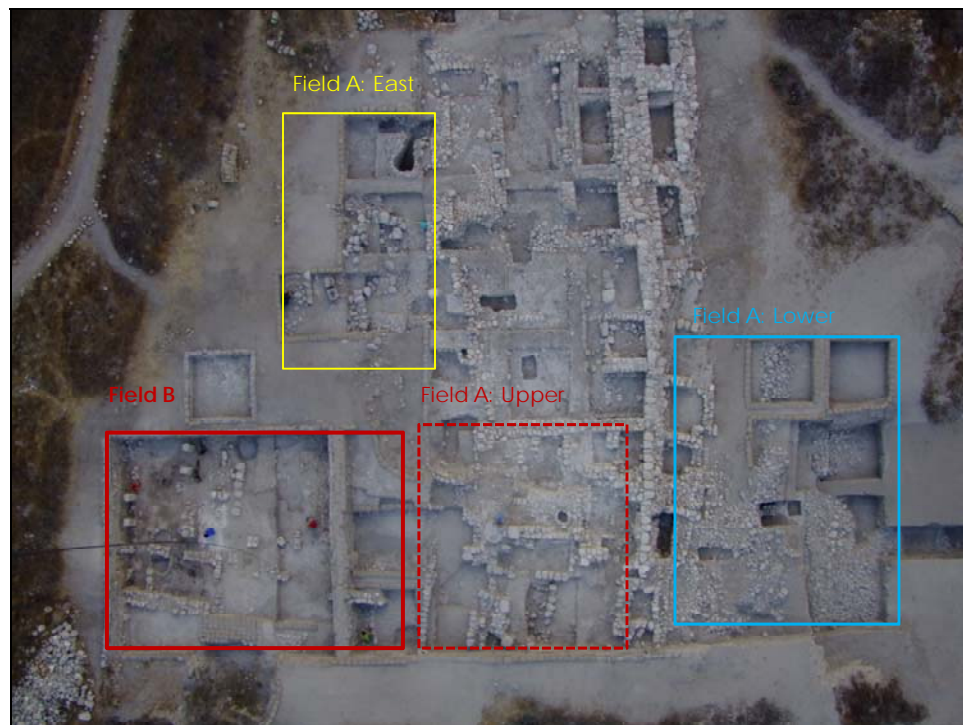


Figure 3: Plan of 2009 Areas

the goals of field B were to complete the excavation of the domestic structures and the associated 8th century destruction. The goals for field A were to continue excavations to the north, and

excavate expediently to the Late Bronze Age strata (Upper Sondage), and continue exploring the fortification systems in the sondage and the continued search for the wall line of the outer wall.

The field strategy was to remove balks from the 2008 season in Field A and the upper sondage as well as any remaining strata associated with Macalister fills and Hellenistic occupation. In the lower sondage we expanded to the west in order to get a robust plan of the fortification systems but also to enlarge the sondage for safety concerns.

In addition, principles from the *Reconstructing Ancient (Biblical) Israel: The Exact and Life Sciences Perspective Project* (Tel Aviv University, Israel Finkelstein principal investigator) visited the site to investigate the viability of the 8th century destruction and the distribution of vessels in the domestic structures of Field B. We initiated a joint project as Tel Gezer contributed sediment samples of our four-room house to the geoarchaeology component.

2. Summary of Results

Major results of the 2009 season were the clarification of the architectural layout of the Hellenistic stratum, the domestic quarter and Administrative Building C of the public quarter, and a series of fortification systems from the Iron Age to the Middle Bronze Age.

Previous excavations had revealed Hellenistic Building A (called a 'tower' in 2008 report) and Building B. The 2009 season revealed another building (Building C) between these two as well as additional rooms to Building B. Adding our buildings to the plans of HUC Field VII and Macalister shows that there was an extensive Hellenistic town on the eastern slope of the western hill possibly down to the area of the Iron Age six-chambered gate (see figure 6).

Our Iron Age domestic walls and surfaces which were interpreted last season as a series of small rooms became clarified as we removed the balks and found pillars providing the plan for a large four-room house (see figure 7). The Iron Age city-plan of three administrative buildings (typical tripartite storage buildings) was clarified with the addition of an installation (Iron Age

winepress) associated with a cobble surface in Administrative Building C and the re-excavation of a pottery kiln outside and north of Administrative Building A (see figure 8). Dever originally associated these buildings west of the gate as a large palace, we had tentatively reinterpreted them as administrative buildings, now it appears that they might more accurately be associated with industry and storage. Unfortunately Macalister had previously excavated these buildings and removed almost all of the material culture leaving only the walls.

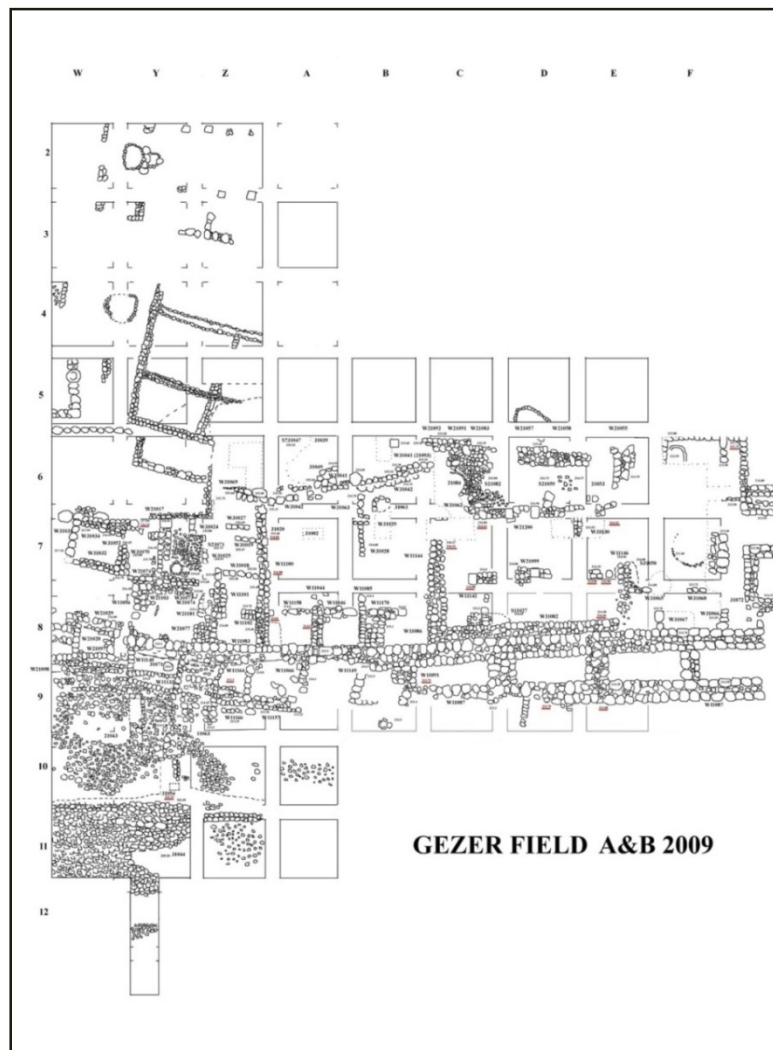


Figure 4: Plan of 2009 Excavation Squares

Due to the Hellenistic buildings and new architectural features of Administrative Building C, our goal to get to the Late Bronze Age level in the upper sondage was not obtained. While the nature of the architectural context of the large monolithic pillarbase tentatively dated to the Late Bronze

remains was not determined this season, the plan to systematically excavated by architectural stratum remains a major goal for the project.

The area of the lower sondage was expanded to reveal a series of fortification systems of Tel Gezer. Clarification of the Iron Age glacis and retaining system made of crib and retaining walls was accomplished as well as the line of the Middle Bronze Age glacis with associated walls.

3. Phasing

There were ten phases that were defined in the 2009 season, most of these phases were already excavated in previous seasons. New phases discerned were two or three phases stratigraphically between the Late Iron Age II and Hellenistic strata—most probably Late Iron Age II strata after the 8th century destruction. These were only found under the Hellenistic Strata preserved from Macalister’s excavations. Several walls that predate the 8th century stratum were also discerned this season. Most of these walls were found beneath the floor levels of Administration Building C in Field A. these earlier phases were also noted in the 2008 excavation season.

While one of our goals was to reach the Late Bronze Age strata, this goal was not accomplished as we encountered additional architectural features of the Hellenistic buildings and of Administrative Building C. A Middle Bronze Age phase, MB glacis and wall, were found this season. For a complete correlation with the previous seasons phases see the 2009 Fields A and B Report.

Phasing Chart: 2009 Season		
Tentative Dating	Field Phase	2009 Squares
Topsoil	Phase 0	W6, Y6, B4, B5, C5, D5, W10, W11, Y10, Y11, Y12, Y13, Z10, Z11, A10, A11
Modern	Phase 1a	W6, Y6, B4, B5, C5, D5, W10, W11, Y10, Y11, Y12, Y13, Z10, Z11, A10, A11
Pebble fill (Macalister)	Phase 1b	W5, W6, W7, Y5, Y6, Z5, [W10, W11, Y10, Y11, Y12, Y13, Z10, Z11]
Post-Hellenistic?		
Hellenistic	Phase 2a	Y6, W7 (2 phases), C5(?), D5, [W10, Y10, W11, Y11, Y12, Z11 (Ceramic only)], Y5, Z5 (2 phases?)
Late Persian/ Early Hellenistic	Phase 2b	Y6(?); Pitting: W4, Y4, Z2, Z4

Persian	Phase 3	Ceramic only (?)
Late Iron II (7 th ?) - Early Persian (Poss. multiple phases)	Phase 4	Y6 (?), W5, Y2: Silo 42015/32089
Debris of Phase 5b	Phase 5a	Y6, W7, B5, W2, W3, W4, Y2, Y4, Y5, Z5
Destruction: Assyrian?		
Iron IIB: Rebuild (8 th)	Phase 5b	B4, B5, C5, W6, W7, Y6, W5 (?), Y5, W4 (?), Y4, Z4, W2, W3, Y2, Z2
Debris	Phase 6a	W5, W6
Destruction?		
Iron IIB Rebuild (9 th)	Phase 6	W5, W6, W7, Y5, Y6, B4(?), B5(?), C5(?)
Destruction:: Shishak?		
Iron IIA: Casemate Phase	Phase 7a	W7, W10, Y10, Z10
Iron IIA: Retaining Walls & Casemate Construction	Phase 7b	W10, Y10, Z10, A9
LB/Iron I Debris Destruction: "Siamun"? "Merneptah"?	Phase 8a	A9, W10
	Phase 8b	Y10
LB	Phase 9	Y10
MBII	Phase 10a	W10, W11, Y10, Y11, Z11, Y12
MBII	Phase 10b	W10, Y10, [Y11, Z11?]

EXCAVATION RESULTS

1. Later Intrusions

As with previous seasons, all new squares contained elements of the previous excavations of Macalister. It is apparent that Macalister backfilled areas with a rocky matrix leaving only the architectural features. This is particularly evident in the Hellenistic buildings.

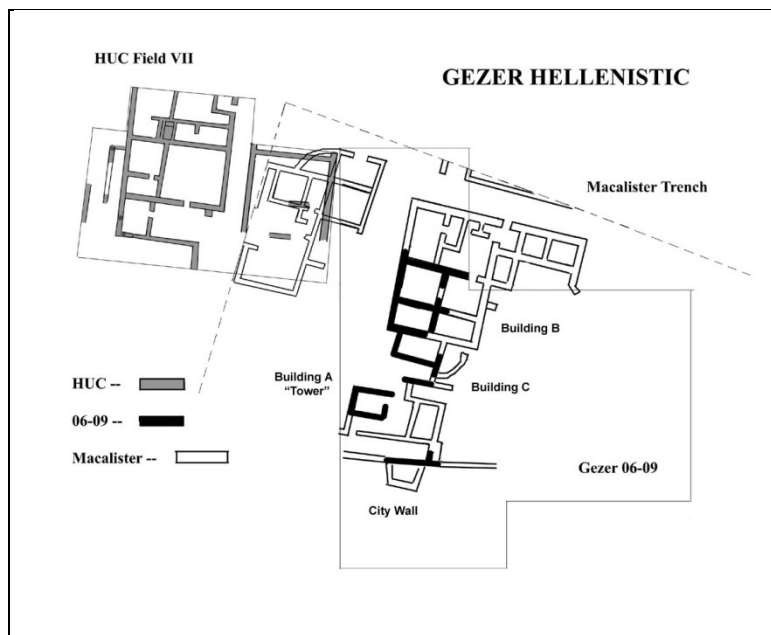


Figure 5: Hellenistic Plan with previous excavations

2. Hellenistic Building

The Hellenistic stratum yielded an architectural plan of domestic structures. When combined with the plans exposed in Field VII (HUC) and by Macalister, a significant exposure is achieved (see Figure 5). No floors or fill layers were preserved from this stratum; Macalister removed them all, leaving behind only the walls. The Hellenistic pottery recovered from Macalister fills found throughout our excavation has not yet been studied in detail. One additional room (Hellenistic Building C) to the south of Hellenistic Building B was found in the 2009 season, as well as walls between Building C and Building A (see Figure 6). In the post-season analysis, it became clear that our Hellenistic buildings are part of a larger housing complex that was found earlier by Macalister.

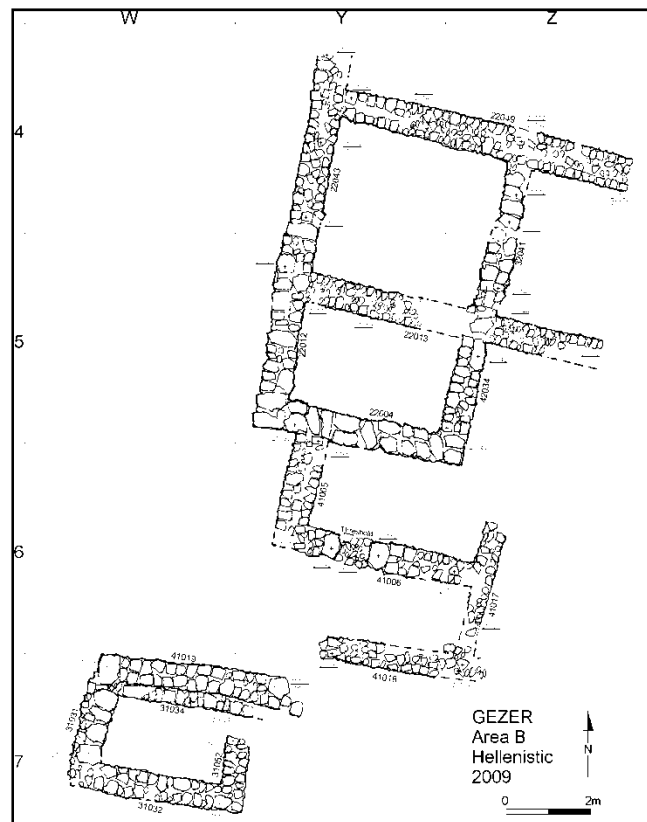


Figure 6: Hellenistic Stratum

3. Persian Period

Below the Hellenistic stratum were two ephemeral phases, The first is marked by extensive pitting and at least three dog burials excavated in previous seasons in Field B. These burials should probably be associated with the dog burials discovered in Field VII. Elements of this phase were discerned in Field B (squares W\$, Y\$, Z2, and Z4). Throughout the fills and dumps of later periods, pottery dating to the Persian period was found, unfortunately no architectural features were found of this period.

4. Late Iron Age II

Various surfaces and walls were discovered that were stratigraphically below the Hellenistic horizon and above our 8th century destruction. Just below this are scattered architectural remains, including a surface remnant with a stump-base lamp sitting upon it, and a silo. The silo (Square Y2) continued to be excavated and had a preserved height of c. 2.00 m, contained a complete Phoenician amphora, other pottery vessels and a zoomorphic figurine dating to the late eighth/seventh centuries BCE. This silo cut into the most impressive feature in Area B, the four-room house.



Figure 9: Destruction

house as a whole is estimated at 135 m², considerably larger than typical four-room houses found in urban centers. The building and its contents were sealed by burnt mudbrick destruction debris, testimony to a considerable conflagration (Fig 9). The portable finds from the building included basalt grinding stones, loomweights and a sizeable ceramic assemblage, consisting primarily of restorable storage jars with lesser numbers of bowls and kraters (no cooking pots or jugs). The juxtaposition in the

same room (southern broadroom) of *lammelek* storage jars (without the typical stamps), typical of Judean sites, and Phoenician torpedo-shaped storage jars, characteristic of coastal

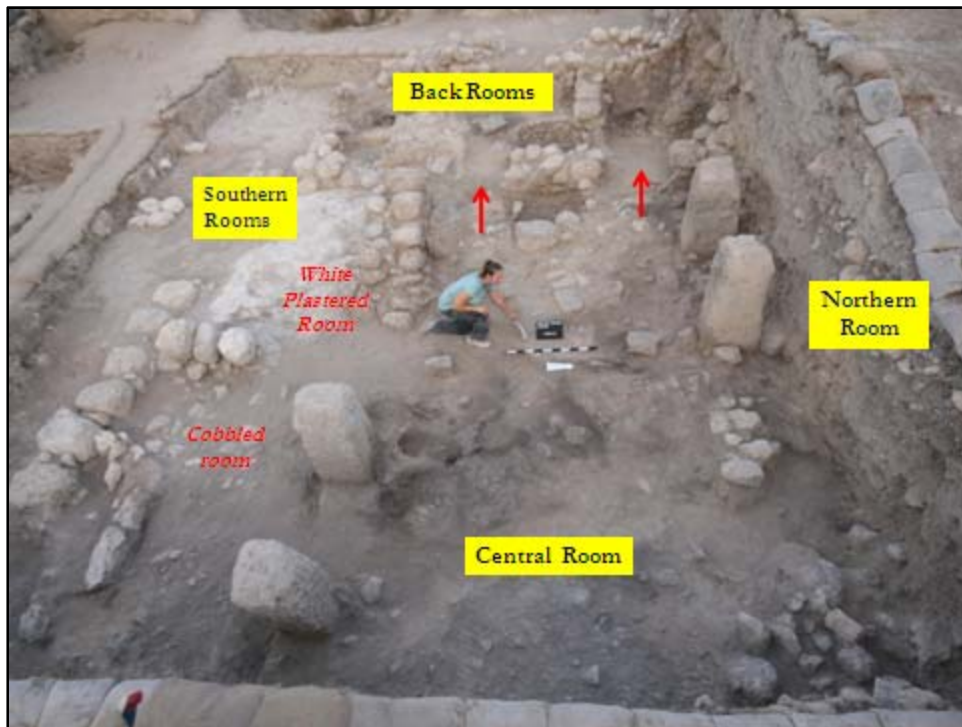


Figure 10: Four Room House looking west



Figure 11: Destruction in Four Room House
 exposed), perhaps representing a portion of a street leading uphill from the Iron Age gateway towards the west. One weight from an olive press installation, as was found in nearby Field VII, was found on this surface.

assemblages, clearly illustrates that Gezer straddled the geopolitical boundaries between these two zones. The ceramic assemblage and small glyptic finds date to the eighth century BCE and is tentatively associated with the destruction of the site by Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 BCE. Evidence a similarly-dated destruction was found in the excavations in nearby Field VII. To the south of the four-room house remains of a cobbled

surface (c. 6.5 m length and 3 m width



Figure 12: Destruction, store jar

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

Administrative Buildings

The excavations have defined part of the Iron Age city planning during the 8th century BCE. It appears that a series of three tripartite public buildings were 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

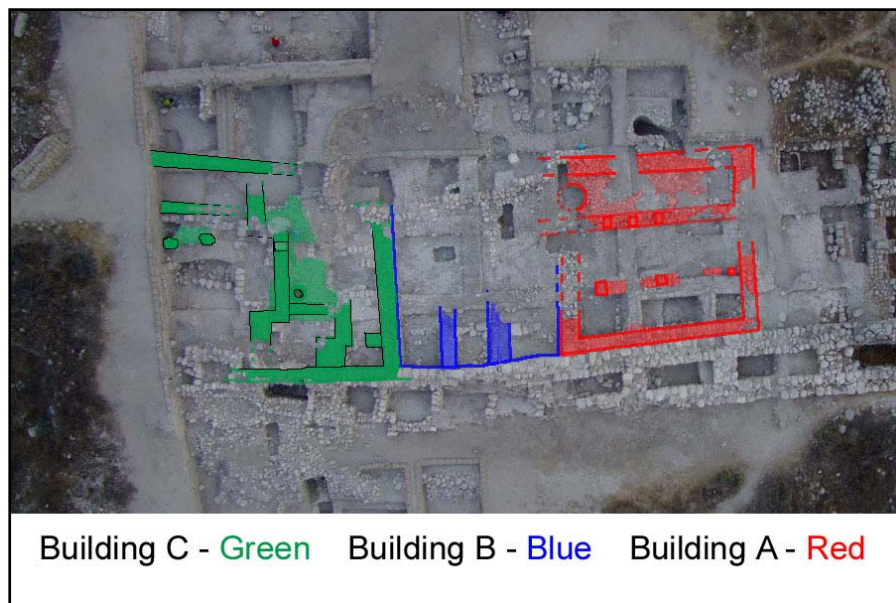


Figure 13: Administrative Buildings (Field A)

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. Our excavations have clarified Dever's Palace 8000,

which needs to be updated. The majority of the building is our Administration Building A. The western part of Palace 8000 is a second public building.

These buildings were known from previous seasons. This season we clarified the architectural plan of Building C. It was assumed that it was also a tripartite building but now it is clear that it consists of two parts. The eastern half contains an olive-press. This press is surrounded by cobbled surfaces. A cobbled floor surface with stone-lined bin sunk into the floor. While a majority of the surfaces were 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). The western half of the building was disturbed by either Macalister's excavations or the Hellenistic buildings.

Fortifications: Casemate and Stone Revetment

The 2009 season was instrumental in clarifying the series of fortification systems. One of the goals was to continue to expose the stone revetment system highlighted in the 2008 season. One of the accomplishments was finding the line of the Middle Bronze Age outer wall.

Iron IIA Glacis and Retaining Walls

The Iron Age stone glacis was founded on a rampart composed of dike and fill layers of alternating plaster and soil. Only the uppermost two layers in this sequence have been excavated. This type of rampart has been already found elsewhere at Gezer and throughout the ancient Levant. The top plaster layer in the sequence comes up to the stones of the glacis at its southern edge, and is 15-20 cm thick. It extends east-west at least 15 m (although more patchy toward the east) and continues northward from the glacis for at least 3 meters. Laying directly atop Late Bronze/Early Iron I destruction debris a second stone glacis was uncovered (Fig. 14). It extends from the western edge of excavations eastward almost 15 m and southward c. 10 m with a 1.3 m drop in slope. At the southern edge of this glacis the stones ended in an uneven and erratic edge, which dropped off vertically 1.6 m to the level of the MB II glacis below, indicating

it was robbed out either in antiquity or by modern excavations (Macalister). The stones of this glacis were smaller than those of the MB II glacis.

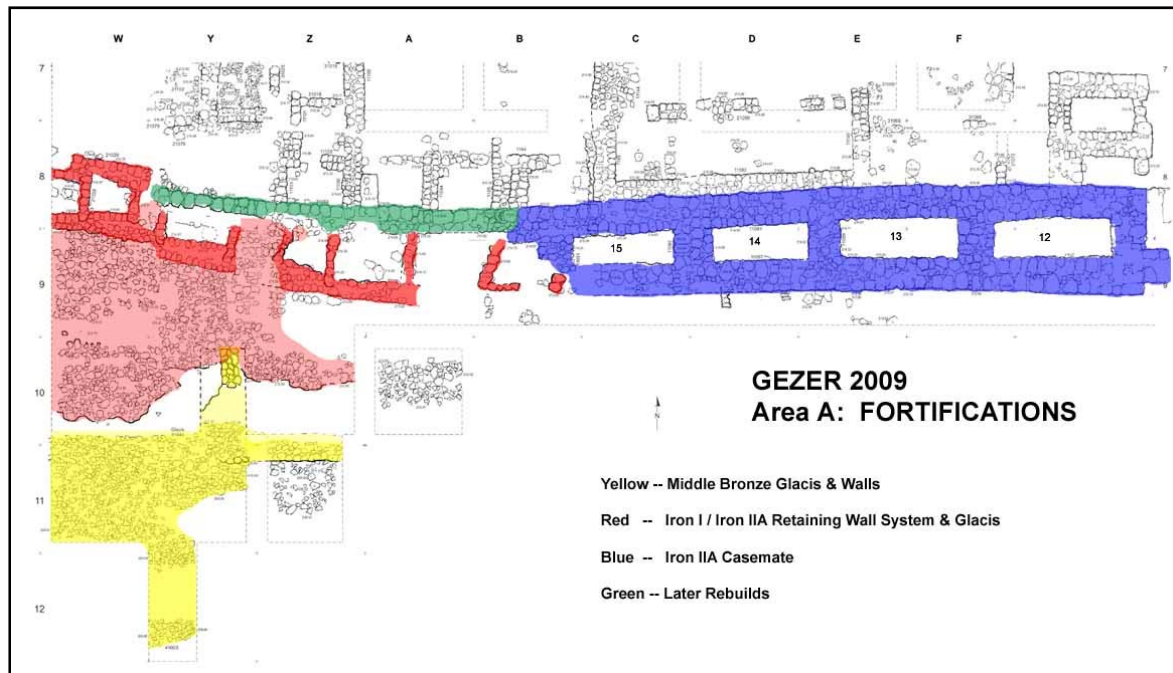


Figure 14: Area A Fortifications

At its northern reaches the stones of this glacis are integrated into a system of retaining and crib walls. This system of earth stabilization runs from the eastern edge of excavations some 25 m westward with nine crib walls, roughly evenly spaced. It angled upslope and served to support a wall at the top of the units. Similar walls in contemporary fills have been noted briefly in earlier Gezer excavations east of the gate (cf. *BASOR* 262). In one of the “chambers” created by this system, a deep contemporary backfill was excavated. In this destruction material several storage-jar stoppers were found, one of which bore a stamp which is more or less contemporary to those from the reign of Pharaoh Siamun. This clearly places the glacis and retaining system in the late Iron I or early Iron II.

MB II RAMPART AND GLACIS

Beneath the Iron Age glacis was a flat plaster “top.” On top of this plaster a short (1.3 m) section of wall, made of two courses and three rows of small unhewn boulders, was uncovered. Its

function remains enigmatic. In a small (1 x 1 m) probe into the sealed locus below the plastered top, only MB II pottery was excavated, thus dating the entire structure to that period. The structure of the Gezer rampart and glacis comports well with the construction of MB II fortifications discovered elsewhere.

At the lowest excavated levels down the slope of the tell a stone glacis was uncovered (Fig. 14). This stone mantle is made up of small boulder-sized stones set atop a soil and plaster rampart extending south from the line of the Iron II fortification walls. These stones were exposed over a distance of 10 m from east to west, and may continue to the east and west of our excavation area. The glacis extends over 9 m downslope from a plastered top to its lowest exposed levels. The general slope of this glacis is c. 15 degrees, but it is steeper towards the east. Near the highest level and integrated into the steepest part of the glacis, a 6+ m-long wall section runs eastward into the balk. This wall was constructed of three courses of boulder and cobble-sized stones; the number of rows remains unexcavated into the slope. The function of this wall remains uncertain; it may have served to stabilize the glacis, or may have been the base for a tower contemporary with the glacis.

VI. CONCLUSION

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.

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 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.

Based on the results, it was determined that the project will take a year break to allow for publications and pottery restoration of the 8th century destruction. Since the major architectural elements of Field A and B are in phase it became apparent that the project was at a good stopping point.

Goals for the 2011 season are 1) continue excavations north of Field A and east of Field B in order to define the relationship between the domestic quarter, public buildings and gate complex; 2) remove Administrative Building C in order to investigate earlier architectural strata (i.e. pillared building); 3) excavate beneath the street in Field B.