

## **Tel Gezer, 2007 Excavation Summary Report**

**[UNEDITED DRAFT-INTERNAL USE ONLY]**

**Steven M. Ortiz and Samuel R. Wolff**

### **Introduction**

The second season of the renewed excavations of Tel Gezer took place between 18 June and 20 July, 2007. 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: 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 Karnei Yosef Community Association.

Over 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 Excavation Project is directed by Steven M. Ortiz (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Samuel R. Wolff (Israel Antiquities Authority). The Tel Gezer expedition included: Gary Arbino (field archaeologist), E. Braun (field archaeologist); area supervisors: S. Andrews, R. DeWitt-Knauth, E. Mitchell, M. Pruitt, and S. Rives and D. Warner; assistant area supervisors: J. Cathey, M. Loyd, J. Strong, and J. Zan. Educational

coordinator/administration: D. Cole; zooarchaeology: L. Horowitz and J. Lev-Tov;  
architect/draftsman: J. Rosenburg; registrar and conservationist: A. Appelbaum.

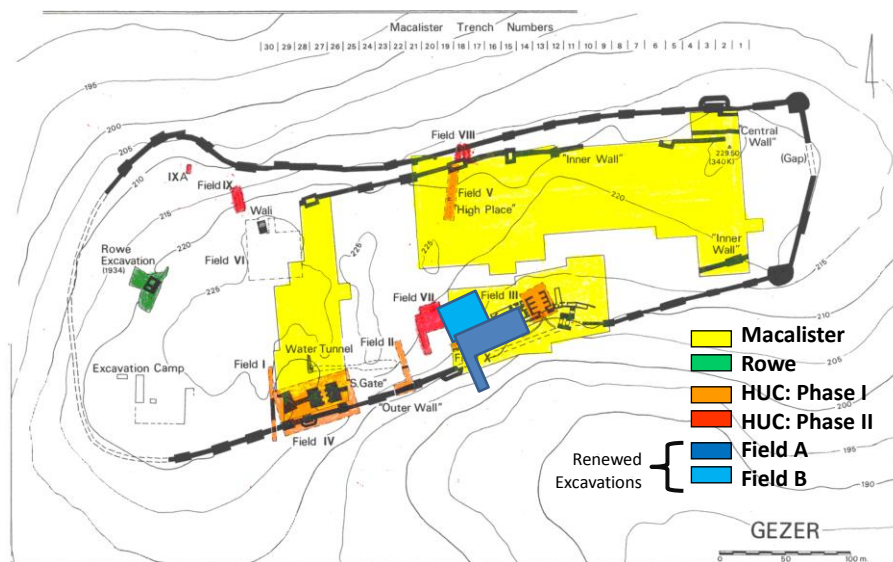


The excavations also coordinated work with the Nature and National Parks Protection Authority. A survey project, under the direction of Dr. Eric Mitchell was also initiated [License No. G-43/2007]. Dr. Yehuda Dagan of the Archaeological Survey of Israel approached the excavation project with the request to contribute to the regional survey. The scope of the survey is to locate and publish all archaeological features within a 2 km radius of the tel.

## **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).

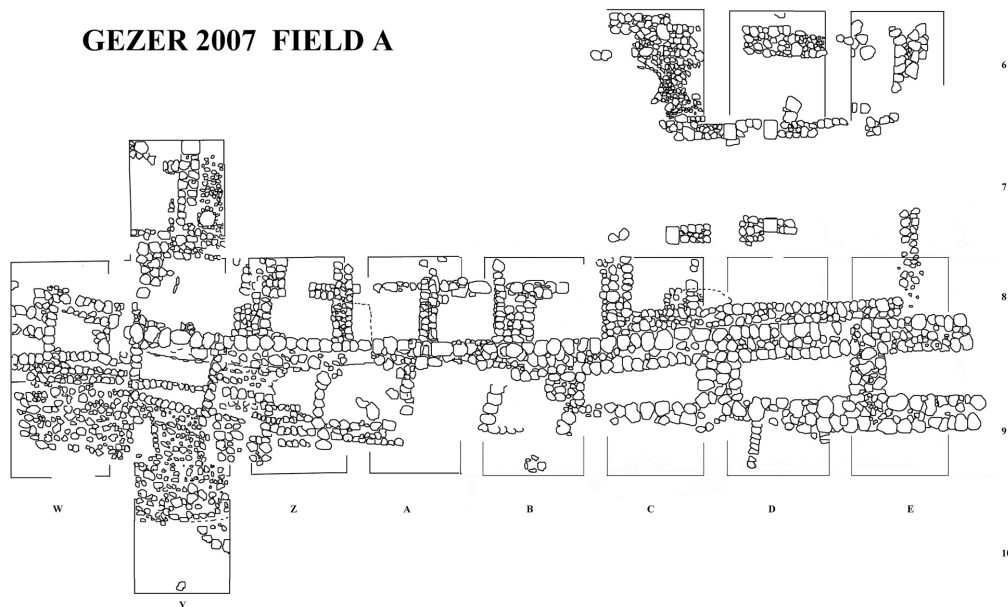


The main goal of our project is to excavate a large horizontal exposure on the south-central part of the tel and obtain a sequence of well-stratified cultural horizons of the Iron Age in order to establish a ceramic database. An additional goal is to unite various Iron Age components of the ancient city in order to better understand the relationship of the various fortifications and buildings (e.g. domestic buildings in 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.

## Field Excavations

### Field A

Field A is under the direction of Gary Arbino. Field A 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, 3) an area north of the fortification wall where previous excavations have proposed an area of large public buildings.



Seven new squares were opened up this season and another two squares from the 2006 season were excavated as well as balks between the new squares of 2007 and squares from the 2006 season. A majority of the squares in the field encountered the Field



VII excavation dump of the Hebrew Union College excavations of the 1970s, which covered most of the squares of the sondage. In addition two of the squares (W8 and Y7) had dumps from the Macalister excavations. What was postulated to be a large platform constructed before the Iron Age city wall uncovered in square Y9 of the 2006 season is now known to be a large stepped sloping revetment construction (glacis) built up against



the Iron Age city wall. 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 8 m in width (squares W8/9, Y8/9/10, and Z9).

Just north of this sloping revetment structure remnants of a structure tentatively defined as part of a tower. Parts of this building were excavated in squares W8 and Y7 this summer field season and parts were excavated in the 2006 season in squares Y8. This structure would have been built just west of the series of rooms next to the administrative building (Palace 8000). If this identification proves to be correct, then the project has

defined part of the Iron Age city planning. It appears that a series of public buildings was constructed just west of the 6-chambered gate. These buildings were built up against the north face of the casemate wall. From the gate we have what Dever (1984) called soldiers's barracks, next was a large pillared square-shaped administrative building (Palace 8000 in Dever's terminology), a series of rooms, and then the tower structure. Only the south parts of these buildings have been excavated. Most of the occupation and floors associated with these buildings has been destroyed or disturbed by Hellenistic rebuilding or Macalister's excavations. A cobbled floor surface (L21071) with stone lined rim bin L21072 sunk into the floor was excavated inside the building identified as a tower. 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 against the face of W21017. This provides the dating of these buildings to Iron Age II (8<sup>th</sup> century), a similar conclusion reached by the 1984 excavators.

Square Y10 served as a probe to investigate the depth of occupational levels and the extent of fortifications. The stone revetment ended in this square but it is not clear if it eroded away or if we reached the southern extent of the structure. A deep probe was conducted in the eastern half of the square to determine the depth of occupation. It became apparent that there is a steep drop in the slope of the southern part of the tel as this probe continued to contain later (e.g. Hellenistic) and mixed material.

In addition to the continued investigation of the fortification system, three squares (C6, D6, and E6) were excavated to determine the nature of the administrative buildings west of the gate. Most of this has been previously excavated by Macalister and several probes by Dever in the 1984 excavations. Most of the features in these squares were still

exposed on the surface and the excavations merely allowed us to define the foundations of the walls and assist in redrawing the plan. The north wall and the corners of the pillared administrative building were defined as well as the eastern and western corners. This allowed us to determine the frame of the building. This administrative building (Palace 8000) is a square shaped building ca. 11 m x 13 m with two rows of pillars in the center. Entrance into this building had to be somewhere in the east or west wall of the structure (only the north and south walls were excavated).



## Field B

A new field (Field B) was opened under the direction of Eliot Braun. This field is located northwest of Field A and will ultimately unite with the sondage of Field A providing a north-south stratigraphic section from the outside slope to Field VII of the second phase of the HUC excavations in the early 1970s. The goal of this new field is to 1) investigate the several Iron Age occupation horizons of the tel, 2) study the



urbanization process of the Iron Age City, 3) provide data from Iron Age domestic quarters to compare and contrast with the public buildings to the southeast in Field A. During the 2007 season, remnants of the Hellenistic occupation as well as an 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE destruction were found.

Fragments of buildings from our Hellenistic stratum were excavated in squares W5, Y5, and Y4. A north-south wall W22003/22043 with bonded east-west walls 22004 and 22014. An auxiliary building to the west of this structure contained some installations (L22012, L22100). 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. Most of these could only be tentatively dated from Persian pits (W22056/L22059, and L22120) to several modern pits and intrusions.

One of the observations made this season was the large amount of Persian pottery found in the field. 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 stratum beneath the Hellenistic structures. In addition to the ceramic data, a dog burial (L22070) was found in square Y2.

In all squares of excavation a destruction debris was found. Several whole vessels were found indicative of pottery of general Stratum VI (mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BCE). This destruction debris was found throughout the site in Fields II, III, VI, and VII of the HUC excavations. Previous excavators attributed this destruction to the Assyrian King Tiglath Pileser III. Burnt mudbrick collapse was found up to a half meter in preservation, particularly in squares Y2, Y3, and Z3. Excavations were stopped at the top of this

mudbrick detritus and several balks were removed in anticipation that next season's excavations will concentrate on this destruction phase.

### **Conservation/Site preservation**

The project continues to work in conjunction with the National Parks Authority in conservation and site preservation. Representatives from the Israel Antiquities Authority and the National Parks Authority met with the project directors to determine the best method to conserve the excavated casemate wall. A conservator from the IAA supervised and trained a group of student volunteers, working with a supervisor. In addition, the project conservator, Avigail Applebaum also oversaw the conservation of the site as well as small finds. Nearly 30 meters of the Iron Age city wall (casemate wall as well as the later Iron Age rebuild) were conserved this season.



### **Goals for the 2008 Season**

Goals for the 2008 season will be to continue excavations and expand the horizontal exposure in Fields A and B. At the end of the 2007 season, a bulldozer was brought in to remove the dumps of the 1970s. About 3 m of dump was removed to allow the project to safely excavate a sondage down the slope of the tel. We plan to open three-five squares down the slope in the 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 will be excavated to get an accurate plan of these structures as well as the excavation of the Assyrian 8<sup>th</sup> century destruction in Field B.