A PRELIMINARY REPORT

AVRAHAM FAUST

Tel ‘Eton, commonly identified with biblical ‘Eglon, is a large site in the trough valley in the southeastern Shephelah. Since the summer of 2006, Bar-Ilan University has been carrying out a large-scale exploration project at the site and its surroundings. The excavations were preceded by a detailed mapping of the site, which was subsequently divided into 39 sub-units. This was followed by survey and shovel tests in each of those units, and by full-scale excavations in four excavation areas. It appears that the site was first settled in the Early Bronze Age, and again in the Middle Bronze Age to the late Iron Age (8th century BCE). Following a settlement gap in the 7th–5th centuries BCE, the site was resettled for a short period in the late Persian or early Hellenistic period. Among the major finds is a thick Assyrian destruction layer (8th century BCE), which sealed many houses with their content, including many pottery vessels, metal artifacts, and botanical material (some still within the vessels), and many additional finds. The present article summarizes the results of the explorations of the site in 2006–2009.

Keywords: Tel ‘Eton, Eglon, Shephelah, Iron Age

I. BACKGROUND

Tel ‘Eton is a large site (about 6 ha, or 15 acres) located in the trough valley, on the southeastern part of the Judean Shephelah, some 11 km east-southeast of Tel Lachish and about 4 km northeast of Tell Beit Mirsim (Fig. 1).1

The ancient city is situated near an important junction on the north-south road that meandered along the trough valley connecting the Beersheba valley and the Ayalon valley, and the east-west road that connected the coastal plain and the Shephelah with Hebron, and which passed along Wadi Adoraim. The site’s location near large valleys also secured its proximity to fertile soils, increasing its economic importance.

1.1 Identification of the Site

The site is identified by most scholars with Biblical ‘Eglon, which is mentioned in the Bible in Judah’s list of cities (Josh 15:39), and in the story of the Conquest. In the story (regardless of its historicity), the city is mentioned as the home of one of the kings of the south (Josh 10), and in the description of the war, ‘Eglon is placed between Lachish and Hebron. Consequently, most scholars identify it at Tel ‘Eton, which is located on the road between those cities. This identification was first suggested by Noth (1953, 95), and is accepted today by most scholars (e.g. Rainey 1980; Dagan 1996). The finds unearthed at the site do not contribute to its identification, but we hope that future finds will allow us to support or refute it.

1.2 Past Research

Surrounding the mound is a very large necropolis (some of the tombs are very nicely finished, and include gables, etc.), which has been robbed over the last several decades. The wide-scale robberies led, some 40 years ago, to a few salvage excavations that were carried...
Out at the cemetery by T. Dothan, D. Ussishkin, G. Edelstein, S. Aurant, V. Tzaferis, and O. Hass (Edelstein 1968; Edelstein and Aurant 1992; Edelstein et al. 1971; Kloner 1985; Tzaferis 1982a, 1982b; Tzaferis and Hess 1992; Ussishkin 1974; see also Arensburg and Belfer-Cohen 1992; Brewer 1992). The excavated tombs date from the Late Bronze Age to the Roman period. It is worth mentioning that a unique Iron Age I tomb was unearthed, which contained beautiful bichrome Philistine pottery (Edelstein and Aurant 1992) and an Iron II tomb whose walls contained lion-like engravings (Ussishkin 1974).

Small-scale salvage excavations were conducted at the site in 1977 by the Lachish Archaeological Expedition, headed by D. Ussishkin. The excavations in the field were directed by E. Ayalon and R. Bar-Natan. The excavations, which lasted only a short time, were conducted in four squares, not far from the top of the tell, where a robbery trench had been cut into the mound. Despite the shallowness and the limited extent of the excavations, two well-preserved Iron II levels were identified (Ayalon 1985; Zimhoni 1985).

2. THE BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY (BIU) EXPEDITION

In 2006, the BIU expedition initiated a large-scale excavation project at the tell and a survey of its surroundings. A meticulous survey on the mound preceded the excavations, and was followed by shovel tests. Subsequently, four excavation areas (A-D) were opened.

2.1 Preliminary Survey of the Mound

The first stage in the project was a detailed mapping of the mound and its slopes (carried out by a team from Wheaton College, headed by Prof. Daniel Master and George Pierce). The site was divided into 39 sub-units, following the topography of the mound (Fig. 2); the mound is divided today into many distinct terraces, which can be easily identified in aerial photographs and in the field. Each of these units was surveyed separately by a group of surveyors, who collected finds above the ground. The findings of the survey indicate that the site was occupied from Early Bronze Age through the Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age I and Iron Age II, to the Persian-Hellenistic (pre-Hasmonaean) period. Later finds...
Fig. 2. Map of the tell with the various survey units and the shovel tests.
were scarce, and probably do not indicate real occupation. The vast majority of the finds — about 72 per cent of the identifiable rims — are dated to the Iron II.

After completion of the survey, shovel testing was done in each unit (Fig. 2). The test included excavating a 1 x 1 m square, to the depth of 20 cm. The vast majority of the finds were, again, dated to the Iron Age II — about 62 per cent of the identifiable rims were dated to this period (see more below).

Our goal in the survey and shovel testing was not only to learn about the history of the site, but also to examine the reliability of those techniques. The survey, despite its advantages, suffers from many shortcomings, and it is accepted today by many that shovel testing is a much more reliable tool for predicting the findings within the ground (e.g. Portugali 1982; Leibner 2009, 68–82). Comparing the two methods should therefore be illuminating. Moreover, since we are carrying out also large-scale excavations at the mound, we will be able to compare the two methods not only to each other, but also to the results of the dig. This ‘triple’ examination will allow us to analyse the results of the survey and shovel tests, and to further improve our methods. The results of the various methods, and the advantages and disadvantages of each, will be discussed in detail elsewhere.

2.2. The Excavations

Over the course of the four excavation seasons, we have excavated four areas (Fig. 3). The first (Area A) is at the highest point of the tell (near its southern edge); the second (Area B) is also located in the upper part of the site (although it is lower topographically and more to the north) and is adjacent to the Lachish expedition excavation trench; the third (Area C) is on the north-eastern slope of the site, and the fourth (Area D) is on the western part of the upper mound.

2.3 Area A (Fig. 4)

This area is located on the highest point of the mound, from where large tracts of land can be seen. The area’s topographical prominence, along with the fact that many walls were visible prior to the excavations, was the reason for its selection for excavations.

So far, the excavations have exposed three strata (not including recent activities, such as military activity, on the surface, tentatively labelled Temporary Stratum A1; cf. Table 1), the lower of which is further sub-divided into at least two phases. The upper stratum (Temporary Stratum A2) includes the remains of a massive building; the tops of most of its walls were visible prior to the excavations. Following the first four seasons of excavations, we believe that the basic architectural elements of this building can be identified (Fig. 5). The structure is square and symmetrical (~ 20 x 20 m), although some rooms (or other spaces) about the building from the outside (e.g. F1013). The building appears to have had double walls (F1010, F1011, F1012, F1014, F1058, and probably also F1059, F1081, F1084, and F1085), which were probably filled with smaller stones, hence creating a thick outer wall (some 3–3.5 m wide). The structure was divided by inner walls (F1004, F1083, F1120 and probably F1082) into several internal spaces. The size of the building, its massiveness, and its location at the highest part of the mound — in a location that clearly enabled observation over large areas — seems to hint that the structure served for control or for military purposes, and was probably a type of fort. Unfortunately, the massive structure was only preserved to a height of one course, and only the foundations below the floors were excavated. Consequently, we cannot date the building with certainty. Yet, several factors lead us to cautiously date the structure to the Late Persian-Early Hellenistic period.
Fig. 3. Map of the tell with the excavation areas.
First, we should note the abundance of Late Persian-Early Hellenistic material throughout the site (especially on the lower terraces). This seems to have been the last period of significant settlement, and practically the only post-Iron Age large-scale occupation. Second, as we will see below, evidence exists that soil was removed from the upper part of the mound during the Byzantine period. This removal was probably responsible for the dismantling of most of the building. Finally, massive buildings, usually interpreted as forts, are prominent in many sites during the Persian period, including in the vicinity of Tel ‘Eton (e.g. at Tell Halif; Cole and Seger 2009). This strengthens the likelihood that the building dates to this period.

Below the fort we uncovered (during the 2008 and 2009 excavation seasons) limited evidence for a resettlement phase (Temporary Stratum A3) above the massive destruction layer, which we date to the late 8th century BCE (below). Only a few installations (Fig. 6) were built during this phase (F1107, F1099, F1187), and they abutted and reused some of the older walls (F1094, F1106, F1080 and F1116). The pottery that is associated with this activity seems to be identical to the pottery in the destruction layer below, and it appears that the resettlement took place soon after the destruction.

Below this phase of reoccupation, we unearthed well-preserved walls, some still standing to a height of more than 1.5 m (Temporary Stratum A4; Fig. 7). Between the walls we discovered a massive destruction layer and collapse that included stones, bricks, and many finds, including grinding stones, five bullae/sealings (or their fragments), loom-weights,
Table 1. Comparative table of the remains in the various areas (temporary strata numbers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period \ area</th>
<th>Area A</th>
<th>Area B</th>
<th>Area C</th>
<th>Area D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modern — military activity</td>
<td>A1 (foxholes)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byzantine Terrace construction</td>
<td>(soil removed)</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>C1 (pits)</td>
<td>D1 (scattered remains?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian-Hellenistic</td>
<td>A2 (fort?)</td>
<td>B2 (reuse of rooms)</td>
<td>C2 (disturbed remains — ?)</td>
<td>D2 (city wall — ? — time of erection is not clear yet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Age IIB — Reoccupation</td>
<td>A3 (a few installations)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Age IIB (8th Century BCE)</td>
<td>A4 (massive destruction layer)</td>
<td>B3 (destruction layer)</td>
<td>C3 (disturbed remains — ?)</td>
<td>D2 (city wall — ? — time of erection is not clear yet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Age IIA</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>B4 (reached in a very limited area)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Iron Age I (or the transition to the Iron Age IIA)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>B5</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Age I</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The end of the Late Bronze Age</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One should note that the finds in some areas are very limited due to the partiality of the dig, and the finds reported here do not necessarily reflect the nature of the remains, nor the state of preservation. Also, the lowest levels in each area (or even squares) were sometimes only ‘touched’ by us, and not really excavated, hence we are not always in a position to say much about the nature of those levels, and can only point to their existence.

metal artefacts, worked bones, and arrowheads (remains of the battle for the city). It seems that the buildings were destroyed in the late 8th century BCE by the Assyrian army.

Over the course of the excavations, we found that the discussed walls were part of a number of buildings. Most of the excavated area contained one large building (Building 101), whose corner stones were nicely curved, and whose area (ground floor only) can be roughly estimated as more than 250 sq. m (so far we have uncovered about half the building).

2.3.1 Building 101 (the governor’s residency)

The northern part of the building was probably excavated in its entirety, but the southern part of the building is still covered by the later fort, and most of it has not yet been excavated (Figs. 4, 7 and 8). The northern wall (composed of F1057, F1046, F1150 and F1080) extends for almost 20 m. Although the northwestern corner has not yet been exposed, we estimate that we have reached one of the corner stones, therefore exposing almost the full length of this wall. Five rooms were excavated, partially or completely, along this side of the building (Rooms 101c, 101d, 101e, 101f and 101g). To the south of those rooms sat a large, open courtyard with a plaster floor. At a later stage, a flimsy wall (F1041) was built over the plaster floor, subdividing it into two unequal parts (Spaces 101a and 101b).

On the basis of the excavated rooms, and in light of the similarity of the plan to other houses, e.g. the Western Tower at Tell Beit Mirsim (Albright 1943), we reconstruct the structure as a large four-room house (Fig. 8). This was a long house, whose entrance was probably east, in the unexcavated Square L23. From the entrance, one entered a large
Fig. 5. Plan of Area A, temporary stratum A2.
courtyard (101a\b) (perhaps through a small room in Square L23), and from the courtyard one could enter a system of rooms to the north (101g, 101f, 101e and 101d, as one enters the building), and probably a similar system to the south (only one such room, opposite room 101d, was partially excavated). From the western part of the yard, two doorways led to the
excavations at tel ‘eton (2006–2009)

Fig. 7. Plan of Area A, temporary stratum A4.

broad space of the building. Only a small part of this space was excavated (part of Room 101c, in Square O24).

The walls of the building were mostly built of stones (F1019, F1026, F1028, F1046, F1047, F1057, F1150, F1080, F1116 and F1104) or of bricks on top of a stone-wall (F1020, F1029, F1162 and F1173), and were preserved to a height of up to 1.5 m (it is likely that some more walls were built with bricks on top of stones, but the bricks were not always preserved). The inner wall F1048 was built only of bricks and was preserved to the same height.

It appears that the courtyard was not roofed — this is indicated by the nature of finds within the courtyard, when compared with the other rooms, by the fact that the collapse of
Fig. 8. The governor’s residency reconstructed.

stones and bricks was far less massive than in the other rooms, by its size, which made building a roof over it very difficult (its original width approaches 7 m), and by the lack of any evidence for roofing (see below).

Dozens of loom weights seem to indicate that a large loom was originally standing in the northeastern part of the courtyard, near the estimated location of the doorway. In the western part of the courtyard, near the entrance to the western space\room, the lower part of a jar was discovered, sunk into the plastered floor.

Evidence supports that the rest of the building had a roof, and that a second floor was built above it. This is indicated by the nature of the finds, the wealth of the remains, and especially from the discovery of large patches of hard chalky material in the middle of the wall fall in a number of places, and (especially in Room 101d). The finds above this chalky layer include many vessels, but the sherds were usually widely dispersed. Many of the finds below the chalky material were unearthed in-situ. We assume that the chalky material is part of the second story floor.
Four of the rooms (101d, 101e, 101f and 101g) were excavated almost in their entirety. The finds from room 101d included some 11 storage vessels, 9 bowls, 11 jugs and juglets, as well as 3 cooking pots, 2 oil lamps, and additional items. Especially worth mentioning are four bullae/sealings (or parts of bullae) that were unearthed just above the chalky material, and they indicate that the second storey room was used for administrative purposes (a fifth bulla/sealing was found on the topsoil of Square M24, during the sifting of the material from Room 101d. It most likely originated from this room and fell during the sifting.). One of the bullae was composed of three registers, the upper one depicting a grazing doe and the lower two containing an inscription ‘to Shebanayahu (son of) Samak’ (Faust and Eshel, in press; see Fig. 9). The other bullae/sealings were un-epigraphic. The finds below the chalky material included many smashed storage jars, unearthed in-situ. Between the jars were additional finds, including a few juglets, animal horns (the bones), and more (Fig. 10). On the floor at the entrance to the room, we uncovered a grinding stone, a juglet, and an oil lamp, and behind them another storage jar. It is important to mention the finds that were unearthed inside the vessels; many of the jars were uncovered with the remains of their

Fig. 9. A bulla from Area A (photographed by Zeev Radovan).

Fig. 10. Photograph of the destruction in Room 101d.
contents, including various botanical finds (excavated and identified by E. Weiss, with the assistance of A. Hartman, Y. Mahler-Slasky, and C. Auman) — olive pits, grape stones, lentils, and more. Also discovered were two concentrations of garlic, which were probably hanging on the walls and fell when the structure collapsed.

The finds in Room 101g included mainly storage jars (about ten have been partly or completely restored at present), and a few additional vessels that indicate the room was used almost solely for storage. We must note that most of the storage jars were found with their heads down, as if they fell from above. Within the soil on the floor, many seeds (wheat) were found, and it is possible that grains were stored in sacks on the floor, and the jars were kept either on shelves or on the second floor.

The restoration of the finds from Rooms 101e and 101f is only in the initial stages. However, on the basis of the finds on the floor, it appears that the finds in Room 101e also include a number of storage jars and other vessels. The finds in Room 101f (a small room, more accurately termed a ‘cell’) were more limited in number.

Although only a small part of Room 101c was exposed, it is noteworthy to mention that complete storage jars were unearthed there, one intact, along with two large basins. Smashed vessels were also discovered in other parts of the building, but their frequency was less.

All in all, the location of Structure 101, its size, floor plan, and quality of construction, along with the many finds unearthed (especially the large number of storage jars) including the small assemblage of bullae/sealings, indicate that this was a building of importance. We cautiously interpret the structure to be the residency of the town’s governor (we hope that additional finds will, in the future, either support or refute this suggestion).

The buildings to the north of Building 101 were too partially excavated to enable a detailed discussion of their plan, but it must be noted that they appear to have been somewhat smaller. Interestingly, although they were built adjacent to Building 101, they did not share common walls, and each building had its own outer walls (hence, creating double systems of walls in Squares O24 and N24; see F10694, F1046, F1057 and F1060). Such a practice is common in the Iron Age II, and is usually indicative of high class structures (cf. Faust 1999, in press). The finds in these houses were, generally speaking, similar to those in Building 101, and included much smashed late 8th century BCE pottery.

In summary, the excellent preservation in Area A presents us with a clear stratigraphical picture of the remains. In addition, the excellent condition of the buildings below the massive destruction layer shows the use of space within them. We hope that in future seasons we will be able to expose the large building in its entirety.

2.4 Area B

This large area was opened next to the small (four squares) trench that was excavated by the Lachish expedition in 1977. In this short season, two relatively well preserved Iron Age II levels (dated to the mid-9th-mid-8th centuries BCE) were unearthed. Our excavations in Area B had two objectives, which led to the expansion of the area in two directions (Fig. 11).

1) We aimed to open a new line of squares in order to continue the original line, excavated by the Lachish expedition in the upper terrace, in the lower terrace to the west. The aim of this line was to make a section in the tell.

2) We aimed to expand the area opened by the Lachish expedition on the upper terrace, to the north and south, in order to gain a large exposure of the Iron Age II architecture. This would expose whole buildings, which would allow us to discuss the use of space within the buildings, and perhaps even some aspects of town planning.
2.4.1 Area B-Lower

We will begin the discussion by describing the finds on the lower terrace (Squares V-AA46; Fig. 12). In most of the squares that were opened on this terrace (only square AA46 down the slope, and to some extent also Square Z46, are different), the upper layer of soil (i.e. the topsoil and just below it) was found to be ‘sterile’, i.e. without large or medium size stones, and with only small sherds. The latter included pottery that dates to various periods (mainly Iron Age II), including Byzantine sherds (mainly body sherds) that were uncovered in a depth of 50 cm and more, at the bottom of the ‘sterile’ soil layer (and sometimes within the stones). In most of the squares (AA46 and V46 are excepted) we uncovered, below the ‘sterile’ layer, a dense layer of large and medium size stones, which did not create a built system (Fig. 13), and below it we found walls (some of the tops of the walls were already
observed within the stones layer). It seems that the upper layer of ‘sterile’ soil is part of a Byzantine agricultural terrace, and that large parts of the mound were used for agricultural purposes at the time. The cutting of the original buildings, and the creation of agricultural terraces involved a significant amount of work, including the massive removal of the material from the upper part of the mound (on which no agricultural terraces were built, see more below). As we will see below, it is clear that during the Iron Age II, the city was also built on several (architectural) terraces, but in the Byzantine period, agricultural terracing activity cut through the original form of the mound, giving it a new shape (to a large extent, this activity is responsible for its present form). This can be seen in the upper part of Area B, where buildings and floors were simply cut when the agricultural terrace was built. Fig. 14 shows how we reconstructed the original Iron Age II architectural terraces, and how they were cut and changed during the Byzantine period (this is probably similar to the current form of the mound). The Byzantine terracing phase and its significance will be discussed in more detail below, but we should note that the massive stone layer that was unearthed below the sterile soil was probably laid as part of the earth-moving work. That is, the stones from the dismantled structures were laid before the soil was added (so as to create ‘clean’ soil for agricultural purposes). We hope to examine this conclusion in future seasons.

The findings below the stone layer are not homogenous: In the eastern part of the excavation area (Square V46, where the stone layer was not unearthed), we found a layer below the sterile soil layer that contained Iron I pottery, including a few sherds of Philistine bichrome pottery. Some Iron I material (both from the end of this period and from its main
excavations at tel ‘eton (2006–2009)

Fig. 14. A schematic section of Area B, showing the current shape of the mound (probably shaped by agricultural terracing in the Byzantine period) along with the Iron Age architectural remains and the reconstruction of the Iron Age architectural terraces.

phase) was also found in the adjacent square (W46), just below the stone layer. It appears that, in those squares, the Byzantine earth works removed the entire Iron Age II levels (see Fig. 14), and we were therefore able to find the Iron I levels immediately below the terrace. Due to the limited exposure, no clear architectural elements were dated to this period, and the finds include pottery, bones, and flints that were unearthed in stratified accumulations and in a few pits. In the 2009 season, we were able to dig below the thick Iron I accumulation in Square V46 and to reach a massive layer composed of disintegrated bricks, which might be part of a destruction layer. The pottery from this phase dates to the latter part of the Late Bronze Age. This is the earliest phase we reached during the excavations.

In most other squares in this area, when we penetrated the stone layer, we found Iron Age remains, including a system of rooms created by two long, east-west walls, and inner walls connecting them at intervals (from east to west, F2143, F2049, F2047, F2005, and probably also F2112 down the slope; while in some cases we exposed only the foundation, the contour of the rooms was clear). The northern wall was practically in the baulk, and its exposure was therefore limited (F2050, in Square Y46). The southern wall (F2007, F2055, F2083, F2056, F2017 and F2021), ran through the entire width of the lower terrace. However, although its overall orientation was roughly the same throughout, it appears to have been composed of several separate walls, belonging to different structures. Those buildings were constructed on different architectural terraces, and hence they differ greatly. Thus, one can see that F2055 (and F2007, which is part of the same wall) is quite shallow, while the adjacent F2083 is much deeper. The reason for this is that F2081 (perpendicular to the
The abovementioned walls) is an original architectural terrace wall, and the building to its east (incorporating F2055 and F2007) was higher than the one built to its west (incorporating F2083) (see also Figs. 12 and 14). We hope to gain a better understanding of this system (and its date) in the coming seasons.

In Square Y46, in the western part of the area, we found many Persian period remains, including large parts of vessels and two ostraca from the 4th century BCE. Although final conclusions regarding the exact nature of the Persian period occupation are pending further excavations, it currently seems that the walls themselves were built in the Iron Age, and the area was re-used in the Persian period.

One of the aims in opening the line of the squares in the lower part of Area B was to find the city wall, which we estimated, on the basis of the current topography, to be located in Square Z46. We have found a north-south wall in this square (F2005), but it is quite clear that it is not the city-wall. First of all, the wall is too thin and cannot provide sufficient protection. In addition, it is incorporated with the long east-west wall mentioned above (F2021, F2017 in this area), but does not continue southward from this wall. Hence, it could not have formed a city wall, and it did not ‘close’ the city. Also, we must note that F2021 continued westward (past F2055) down the slope, indicating that the building continued in this direction, and F2055 was an inner wall within a larger structure (in the 2009 season we therefore opened a new square — AA46 — down the slope, in an attempt to find the city wall). The fact that F2021 eroded in the slope, and was simply cut there (within Square Z46), shows that the original building continued in this direction, and it was the present form of the mound that made the western part of the building disappear. Similar to the higher part of Area B (see below), we believe that Byzantine agricultural activity was responsible for the present shape of the site, and that the original city wall was situated further west (for the city wall, see Area D).

The westernmost square (AA46) was opened in the 2009 season in an attempt to locate the city wall. We uncovered parts of a building that was eroded or cut, similar to the situation in Square Z46 up the slope. This can be seen not only in wall F2121, which disappears toward the western part of the square, but also in the well-preserved Iron Age IIB (8th century BCE) floors that were unearthed in the eastern (and higher) part of the square, but which were not preserved in the western part (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15. In-situ pottery in Square AA46.
In summary, although the stratigraphy is not always clear, the lower part of Area B presents us with the deepest excavations conducted at Tel ‘Eton. Schematically, the latest period of use of this part of the site was in the Byzantine period (Temporary Stratum B1; cf. Table 1). During that time, it was used for agricultural purposes and its form changed. In the Persian period, some buildings were used (most likely re-used) in the western part of the area (Temporary Stratum B2). Most of the finds in this area seem to date to the Iron Age II, although floors were unearthed only in the western slope, in Square AA46 (Temporary Stratum B3). In Area B-lower, we reached the late Iron Age I level (Temporary Stratum B5) in a limited part of Square W46 (no remains of Temporary Stratum B4 were unearthed in this part of Area B, see more below). The main Iron Age I level was unearthed in Squares W46 and, mainly, V46 (Temporary Stratum B6), and the end of the Late Bronze Age was exposed in Square V46 (Temporary Stratum B7).

### 2.4.2 Area B-Upper

In the upper part of Area B, we aimed at expanding the area excavated by the Lachish expedition in 1977. Over the course of four seasons, we cleaned part of the area exposed by the Lachish expedition, and opened five squares to the north of this area and one to its south (Fig. 16). All in all, ten squares were excavated, eight on the upper terrace (five in our excavations and three by the Lachish expedition) and two on the slope between the upper and lower terraces (one by the Lachish expedition and one by us). We will first address the upper eight squares.

In this part of the site, our excavations concentrated on understanding the architecture, and therefore did not usually excavate below the upper phase (Iron Age IIB; 8th century BCE). Notably, the floors of this phase are found within the topsoil or immediately below it (probably as a result of the Byzantine agricultural terracing activity that removed most of the buildings of this period). Additionally, the preservation of the finds varies greatly, from excellent to poor (see also Katz and Faust, forthcoming). It appears as if parts of three architectural units were exposed in this area.

The southeastern unit (Fig. 17 is a very schematic possible reconstruction of those buildings) seems to be the most complete (the part that was excavated includes Squares S45 and S47 in our excavations, and the two eastern squares of the Lachish expedition). Only the northern (F2038) and the western (F2025, F2043 and F2145) boundary walls of the house were (partially) excavated (it is possible that the eastern wall of the building is visible in a robbery pit that was dug in the eastern edge of the Lachish expedition excavations). Interestingly, it appears that to the west, the outer wall of the house was not used by other dwellings, and another wall (F2093), apparently of a different building, was built nearby (hence creating a double wall). The northern wall of this building, on the other hand, seems to have been used by an additional building (see below). Although this is not certain, we tend to reconstruct the building as a four-room house, in the following way: The entrance was probably from the south, in an unexcavated square. The broad room at the back of the house was bounded by the northern wall F2038 to the north, F2055 to the west, and F2039 and F2109 to the south. F2108 is a later blocking in the doorway between F2039 and F2109, and this doorway was the original entrance to the broad room (it was not identified by the Lachish expedition, although it was within their excavation area, since it was located within their wide baulk). The southern part of the building seems to be divided by two inner walls into three long spaces. The western wall, composed of F2044 and F2144, separated the central room from the western one, and the eastern wall (F2117, originally excavated by the Lachish expedition) separated the central room from the eastern one. Only future excavations will allow us to examine this reconstruction.
The southwestern unit was excavated to a limited extent, and we are unable to offer a reconstruction of the building (remains were exposed in one square by the Lachish expedition, and in half a square — T47 — by our expedition; in addition, a wall is still visible on the surface to the west, and it might have been the western wall of the building). Furthermore, the structure was probably cut when the Byzantine terraces were constructed, and its preservation is therefore very limited.

The northern unit was excavated to a large extent (Squares T48, S48, and half of Squares T47 and S47), but, its form and size are still not clear. The western part of the
building was also probably cut during the Byzantine terracing activity. The fact that the building originally extended westward is exemplified by the cutting of the plaster floors, e.g. F2078. The central part of the excavated area is composed of a large room, bounded by F2038 (south), F2064, F2095 (west), and F2123 (north). The floor of the room was plastered and, although it was very near the surface, many complete vessels were found on the floors, as well as two installations (Fig. 18). The building and the pottery are dated to the Iron Age IIB (8th century BCE).

The southern part of Square T47 (within the southwestern unit), which bordered the Lachish expedition trench, was cleared and further excavated by our team. In the lowest part, we exposed (in a very limited area) remains which seem to date to the Iron Age IIA (Temporary Stratum B4).

---

**Fig. 17.** Aerial photograph of the upper part of Area B (photographed by Sky View), with schematically reconstructed structures.

**Fig. 18.** *In-situ* pottery in Square S48.
An additional square (U47) was opened on the slope connecting the upper and lower parts of Area B. Parts of a number of walls were unearthed in the square, belonging to a few phases. Much of the area was covered with a pavement (F2128). Although the evidence is not yet clear and further analysis is pending, it seems that most of the pottery from this phase dates to the end of the Iron I, or to the transition to the early Iron Age IIA at the latest (Temporary Stratum B5). The pottery seems similar (or slightly later) to the upper thin layer exposed in square W46 (despite the possible difference, we label both Temporary Stratum B5). It therefore presents us with the intermediate situation between most of Area B-upper, where the remains are dated mostly to the later phases of the Iron Age II (Temporary Stratum B3, and to limited extent also Temporary Stratum B4), and the eastern part of Area B–lower, where most of the pottery below the Byzantine terrace (with the exception of the above mentioned layer in W46, and in a few more places) were dated to the Iron Age I (Temporary Stratum B6) (Fig. 14, above). As noted, it appears that the Byzantine terracing activity in this square (U47) removed the Iron Age IIB remains (and probably most remains from the Iron Age IIA), leaving the remains of the late Iron Age I or the transition from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II (Temporary Stratum B5).

In summary, Area B-upper presents a glimpse into a residential neighbourhood of the Iron Age IIB. We hope to expand the excavations in future seasons and to learn about the plan of the houses and the entire neighbourhood.

2.5 Area C

This area is located in the northeastern slope of the mound, in a relatively low area. It was randomly chosen as an excavation area in order for us to examine the settlement history of the lower city. This area is likely to differ from the upper part of the mound where the other excavation areas were concentrated. Comparing the history of Area C with the others might allow us to learn about the expansion and contraction of the city during the various periods, as well as rich and poor housing, etc.

Only two squares have been opened in this area to date (Fig. 19), and our information is therefore limited. We have uncovered many pits, dating to the late Persian or early Hellenistic period (Temporary Stratum C1), which were dug into the Iron Age stratum (Temporary Stratum C2). Although most of the pits have already been identified in the topsoil, articulating and excavating them was difficult. We succeeded in extracting a ‘clean’ assemblage from two of the pits. The finds do not have many comparisons, and we tend to date them to the 4th century BCE. Although the finds in this area include many imported (Attic) sherds, no such pottery was unearthed within the clean assemblages, and hence we cannot use this pottery for dating the pits. Work on the Persian period material from this area (and from other parts of the mound) is currently underway.

The pits appear to have been dug into the Iron Age II level, and a few parallel walls (e.g. F3007, F3013, F3014 and F3028) seem to have belonged to this phase (some of the pits even cut into the walls). The limited area of the excavations (and to some extent the partial state of preservation) does not allow for a reconstruction of the Iron Age structures.

2.6 Area D

In the course of the surveys conducted on the site, we noticed that the mound was built of many parallel terraces (we used these terraces to divide the mound into its separate survey units). However, one of the terraces slopes significantly, connecting a lower terrace with the main part of the tell, just south of Area B. We believed that the edge of the higher terrace, into which the sloping terrace enters, was the city-wall, and that it is possible that the sloping terrace was a ramp leading to a city gate.
In the final week of the 2009 excavation season, we opened two squares in this area (labeled Area D). Due to the limited excavation time, the results were limited (Fig. 20) and conclusions tentative. Nevertheless, in the western part of the area, we uncovered what looked like the city wall (F4010, F4011 and F4012). The wall was massive, reaching a considerable height (we have not yet reached the lower courses of the wall, and they still extend downward). To the east of the city wall, we uncovered a few smaller walls, perhaps forming a structure. Their date is still undetermined. A surface which might abut the wall was also uncovered (just below the topsoil), but its date is also uncertain. The finds on the topsoil included mainly Iron Age II and Persian period remains.

In summary, it is clear that we have uncovered the city wall, but it is not certain whether this is indeed a ramp leading to the city gate.

2.7 Survey in the Vicinity of the Site

In addition to the excavations at the mound, we carried out a survey in the site’s vicinity, in order to learn on the nature of the usage of the environment, in the various periods, on ‘daughter’ sites and various installations, agricultural and others. The most conspicuous finds were the tombs in the large cemetery that covered the entire area around the site. The tombs were robbed systematically over the years. We are already familiar with a few hundred tombs (dating from the late 3rd millennium BCE onwards), and the number appears to reach the thousands. The survey is currently underway and the results will be published separately.
3. HISTORY OF THE SITE: A SUMMARY

Based on the available evidence from the survey and the excavations, we can try to reconstruct the history of settlement at Tel 'Eion.

On the basis of the survey (to be published separately), it appears that the first significant settlement at the site was during the Early Bronze Age. A few sherds from the Middle Bronze Age indicate some settlement during that time. The number of rims from the Late Bronze Age is higher and we assume that, during this period, the site was a significant centre in this part of the Shephelah, perhaps on the border between Lachish and Khirbet Rabud (Debir) or Hebron.

The earliest remains uncovered in the excavations were from the latter part of the Late Bronze Age. The evidence regarding the end of the Late Bronze Age hints that the settlement was destroyed, but we must wait for more data before any definite conclusion can be reached.

Remains from the Iron Age I were unearthed on top of the late Late Bronze Age layer. The assemblage exhibits continuities with Late Bronze Age forms in the region, but includes bichrome Philistine pottery. This suggests some connection with the coastal plain. However, these finds were uncovered in a limited area (two squares only, V46 and W46), and therefore any conclusions should await further excavations. Finds from the end of the Iron Age I (or the transition to the Iron Age IIA) were also unearthed only in a limited area.
Excavations at Tel ‘Eton (2006–2009) (U47 and W46), and those of the Iron Age IIA were found only in part of one square (T47).

Most of the remains in the excavations and in the survey are from the Iron Age IIB (8th century BCE). It is likely that during this time the site served as a major town in the Shephelah, near the Hebron hills (the trough valley). Most of our information on the city came from the destruction layer that was unearthed in most excavation squares. It appears that the violent destruction occurred when the town was conquered by the Assyrians in the late 8th century. The excellent preservation of the structures and their content, which includes dozens of complete and intact vessels along with many additional finds, opens many venues for research. First and foremost, it allows for a detailed chronological analysis. The exact dating within the late 8th century of the Assyrian destructions in the Shephelah is currently debated, with some scholars suggesting that the major destructions were earlier than Sennacherib’s campaign (Blakely and Hardin 2002). Others support the traditional date of 701 BCE (Finkelstein and Na’am 2004). The detailed evidence from Tel ‘Eton enables a thorough examination of this question (Fig. 21). This question is discussed at great length elsewhere (Katz and Faust, forthcoming), and it suffices here to state that although there are some features which suggest an earlier date for the destruction of Tel ‘Eton (e.g. the high percentage of hand burnish and the lack of the lmlk seal impressions), the amount of evidence still supports a date at the very end of the 8th century, i.e. Sennacherib’s campaign is still the most likely agent for the destruction.

We should also note that the finds will allow a detailed study of the use of space in Iron Age dwellings, but this is beyond the scope of the present article.

The importance of Tel ‘Eton at the time is also evidenced by the find of a small collection of bullae/sealings within the large building (governor’s residency) in Area A. Although bullae are common in the 7th century, they are, surprisingly, quite rare in the 8th century destruction levels in Judah. The finding of the small collection is therefore an indication that the site was a relatively important centre (see also Faust and Eshel, in press). The small collection from Tel ‘Eton is also important for understanding the development of administration in Judah, as it presents us with a relatively unknown phase within this developmental scale (Faust 2010).

Fig. 21. Photograph of the ceramic assemblage from the destruction layer.
After the massive Assyrian destruction of the city in the late 8th century, it was not rebuilt as a city. We do have limited evidence of reoccupation in some parts of the city, on top of the ruins; however this is not only limited in scope but also represents a short episode that occurred immediately after the destruction. We must note that no pottery dated to the 7th century (with any certainty) was uncovered at the site.

The gap in the occupation of the site continued through the 6th and perhaps the 5th century BCE.

Although settlement in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods was much more limited than that of the Iron Age II, it appears that it was extensive and covered large parts of the site, including some of the lower terraces, where many of the finds were found in-situ (see below). We tentatively date this settlement to the 4th century BCE (a few ostraca were dated to this century on the basis of paleography).

The findings in the topsoil also include a few later sherds, but those do not seem to indicate real settlement. We cannot rule out, of course, that there was a farmstead or something of the like on the mound, but it appears that there was no real settlement during those periods. It appears that during the Byzantine period much of the site was used for agriculture.


As already stated, we believe that much of the current form of the mound is a result of agricultural terracing activity conducted during the Byzantine period. The available evidence from the various parts of the tell suggests that the people who built the terraces changed the shape of the site, moving earth around to create their desired pattern. It appears that what today is the upper part of the mound (its central north-south ridge; cf. Fig. 2) was considerably higher until this activity. This part (the ridge) was used to supply the other parts (and probably also fields in the vicinity of the site) with the required soil, and the upper layers were dismantled and removed. If the finds in Area B (lower) are indicative, then (some of) the stones of the dismantled structures were laid first, and the soil was laid on top of them, as to create a sterile layer suitable for agricultural activity. We believe that this is the reason for the relative dearth of Persian period remains in the upper ridge of the mound, whereas such finds are relatively abundant in the lower terraces. After all, this was the last period of significant occupation, and hence it was removed almost completely from the upper ridge of the mound. Those remains are found in the lower terraces either because this is where they was dumped (in areas where the terraces were filled with material from other places) or because it was left unharmed (since, in at least some places in the lower terraces, no remains were systematically removed; rather they were simply covered). The massive fort in Area A, for example, was almost completely dismantled, and only parts of the foundation were preserved, attesting to a significant post-701 BCE occupation in this part of the site. In light of the above, it is likely that the fort should indeed be dated to the late Persian or early Hellenistic period.

This reconstruction of the formation of the current shape of the mound is also supported by an analysis of the finds within the shovel tests conducted throughout the site (Fig. 2). Most of the tests conducted in the upper ridge produced evidence of building remains within the upper 20 cm, whereas most tests on the lower terraces and slopes of the mound did not produce such finds. This indicates that the upper ridge was not used for agriculture, as large stones and bricks can be found in the upper part of the topsoil. The absence (or rarity) of such finds in the lower parts of the site strengthens the suggestion that those areas were, to a large extent, used for agricultural purposes.
EXCAVATIONS AT TEL ‘ETON (2006–2009)

NOTES

1 The analysis of the material from Tel ‘Eton within the larger settlement context (the southern trough valley) is supported by a research grant (#884/08) from the Israel Science Foundation.

2 The excavations (permit numbers G45/2006, G69/2007, G47/2008, G47/2009) and the survey (permit numbers G46/2006, G15/2007, S28/2008, S130/2009) were directed by Avraham Faust, and the expedition staff included Haya Katz (field director and ceramic analysis), Ortal Chalaf (assisting in supervising area B, 2007; surveying, 2008; supervising area D, 2009), Pirchia Eyal (registrar, 2007, 2009, and laboratory coordinator), Daniel Master (assistance in directing the dig and survey, 2006), Tehila Atkins (supervising area C), George Pierce (surveying, 2006), Josh Walton (supervising area A, 2006), Aharon Greener (supervising area A, 2007), Garth Gilmour (supervising area A, 2008), Yonatan Adler (supervising area A, 2006) Einat Ambar-Armon (assistance in supervising area A, 2006), Naveh Yogeve (assisting in supervising area A, 2007), Holly Aller (assisting in supervising area A, 2008), Philip Johnson (assisting in supervising area B, 2006), Masha Levin (assisting in supervising area B, 2008), Michael Azaband (supervising area C, 2007), Silvie Neuman (surveyor, 2007), Michal Demskey (assisting in supervising area B, 2006). Yair Sapir and Yonatan Shemla (surveyors, 2009), Rotem Shelef (registrar, 2006), and Uria Efrat (registrar, 2008). Restoration was done by Dina Castel, pottery drawing by Yulia Rodman and conservation by Yishaiau Ben-Yaakov. Epigraphic finds were analysed by Eti Eshel. The archeobotanical analysis in the field was carried out by Ehud Weiss, with the assistance of Anat Hartman, Yael Maher-Slaski, and Chen Auman. Administration was conducted by Samy Maman (2006–2008), Avi Shiri (2008), and Liran Ben-Shusan (2009). In the identification of the ceramic unearthed during the survey, we were assisted by Shlomo Bunimovitz, Aner Maier, David Adan-Bayewitz, Joe Uziel, Lily Singer-Avitz, Alon de Groot, Boaz Zissu, Oren Tal, Debi Sandhaus and Esti Yadun. The excavations were carried out with the help of students from Bar-Ilan University, Wheaton College, and the Open University of Israel, as well as by youth from the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel Trailblazers. The expedition was greatly assisted by the Lachish Regional Council. We would especially like to thank Mr. Danni Moravia, the mayor; Mr. Meir Dahan, the mayor’s assistant; Yaron Meshulam, the council’s security officer; and Mr. Avi Cohen, the director of the transportation department. This help, along with the assistance we received from the people living in the region (and especially those in Moshav Shekel, notably Gadi Elon and Eitan Rosenblat), was invaluable and aided the expedition in achieving its goals.

3 F2027 seems to be a continuation of F2044 (which is supposed to be an inner wall of the house) on the one hand, but to cut F2039, and then continues into the broad room, partially blocking it on the other hand. This is a problematic reconstruction, but we must note that it is based on the way we re-exposed F2027 that was originally excavated by the Lachish expedition. The fact that it cuts F2039 is based on our observation of the present situation. However, since the wall was exposed for about 30 years, we should treat this stratigraphical relationship cautiously before using it as evidence. In the meantime, despite this problem, we follow the above reconstruction.

4 Theoretically, it is possible that the northern unit should be divided into two buildings, separated by F2044 and F2005. This, however, does not seem to be the case, as the wall is too flimsy to be an outer wall, especially given the high quality of the floors. One should also take into account the similarity in the construction of the floors on both sides of the wall, as evidence against their being parts of two different buildings. Final conclusions should await more data.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albright, W. F., 1943. The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim, III: The Iron Age (AASOR 21–22), New Haven, CT.


Faust, A., 2010. ‘An assemblage of bullae from Tel ‘Eton and the development of administration in Judah’, paper presented in the 36th Annual Meeting of the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology (and the J. M. Alkow Department of Archaeology and Near Eastern Cultures, Tel Aviv University), ‘And They Went Up and Toured the Land’, in honor of Professor Anson F. Rainey on the occasion of his 80th birthday (held at Bar-Ilan University on May 6, 2010).

Faust, A., and Eshel, E., in press. ‘An Inscribed Bulla with Grazing Doe from Tel ‘Eton’, MAARAV.
Ussishkin, D., 1974. ‘Tombs from the Israelite period at Tel ‘Eton’, Tel Aviv 1, 109–127; pls. 21–24.
Zimhoni, O., 1985. ‘The Iron Age pottery of Tel ‘Eton and its relations to the Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim and Arad assemblages’, Tel Aviv 12, 63–90.