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was the major thoroughfare leading from the east into Sepphoris’s civic centre. The discovery of a Roman temple indicates that the city, the Jewish capital of the Galilee in the Roman period, had a significant pagan population that built a temple in the heart of the city. The central location of the temple, positioned within a walled courtyard, and its architectural relationship to the surrounding buildings enhance our understanding of the urban plan of Sepphoris in the Roman era. The variety of buildings constructed along the *decumanus*, their proximity to each other, and their monumental character corroborate our assumption that this route was the major thoroughfare leading into the civic centre of Sepphoris from the east.

**Zeev Weiss**

In 2006, Bar-Ilan University initiated a large-scale excavation project at Tel 'Eton, c. 18 km. west of Hebron and 11 km. south-east of Lachish, and a survey of its surroundings.1 The excavations and the survey were directed by A. Faust. The expedition staff included: H. Katz (area B; ceramic analysis), D. Master (assistance in directing excavation and survey, 2006).

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1 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-Nathan, and the results were published as Ayalon 1985 and Zimhoni 1985.
The Persian period ostraca are being examined by E. Eshel. Students from Bar-Ilan University, Wheaton College IL and the Open University of Israel, as well as youth from the SPNI trailblazers, participated in the excavation.

The expedition was greatly assisted by the Lachish Regional Council. We would especially like to thank the mayor, D. Moravia, his assistant, M. Dahan, the council’s security officer, Y. Meshulam, and the director of the transportation department, A. Cohen. This help, along with the assistance we received from residents of the region (especially G. Eilon, E. Rosenblat and others from Moshav Shekef), was invaluable. Photographs and plans are courtesy of the Tel 'Eton Archaeological Expedition.

Preliminary Survey of the Tel

The first stage in the project was a detailed mapping of the tel and its slopes. The site was divided into 39 sub-units, following the topography of the tel; the latter is divided today into many distinct terraces, which could be easily identified in aerial photos and in the field. Each unit was surveyed separately by a group of surveyors, who collected all the surface finds. The survey indicated that the site was occupied almost continuously from the Early Bronze Age to the end of the eighth century BCE and then in the Persian-Hellenistic (pre-Hasmonaean) period, with the majority of the finds — some 73% of the identifiable rims — dating from the Iron Age II. Later finds were scarce, and probably do not indicate real occupation.

After the completion of the survey, shovel testing was conducted in each unit, including excavating a 1×1 m. square to the depth of 20 cm. Our goal was not only to learn the history of the site, but also to examine the reliability of those techniques. Today, it is generally accepted that shovel testing is a better predictive tool than surveys. The fact that we are also carrying out large-scale excavations enables us to evaluate the two methods in light of the results of the excavations, making it possible to improve future methods.

The Excavations

In the course of the two seasons conducted so far, we excavated in three areas (fig. 1): area A, at the summit, near its southern edge; area B, slightly lower and north of area A; and area C, on the northeastern slope of the site.

Area A (fig. 2)
The excavations here exposed two strata, the lower of which is further divided into at least two phases. The upper stratum included remains of a massive building. The tops of most of its walls were visible prior to excavation. The building’s basic architectural elements can now be identified. The structure is square (c. 20×20 m.), although some rooms (or other spaces) abutted the building from the outside (e.g., W1013). The building appears to have had double walls, which were probably filled with stones (W1010, W1011, W1012, W1014, W1058), creating a very thick outer wall (3–3.5 m. wide). The
Fig. 1. Tel 'Eton: map of the site, showing excavation areas
structure was divided by inner walls (e.g., W1004) into several spaces. The size of the building and its location at the highest part of the tel, affording a view over a wide area, suggests that it had a military purpose and was possibly a fort. Since only one course of its walls was preserved, we cannot date the building.

Below the fort we unearthed well-preserved walls, still standing to a height of more than 1.5 m. In between, we discovered a massive destruction layer and collapse, including stones, bricks, and many finds. Among the finds there were grinding stones, two fragments of bullae and many arrowheads. It seems that the building was destroyed in the late eighth century BCE, most likely by the Assyrian army.

In the course of the excavations, we realized that these well-preserved walls belonged to a large building, with nicely-curved corner stones and an area (ground floor only) of roughly 150–200 sq.m. The walls were mostly built of stones (W1019, W1026, W1028, W1046, W1047 and W1057), or of bricks on a stone foundation (W1020 and W1029). One of the in-
ner walls was built only of bricks, and was preserved to the same height (W1048). So far, we have uncovered much of the central courtyard, bounded in the north by W1020, in the west by W1019, and in the south by W1026, and with a plastered floor. Also uncovered were parts of the rooms surrounding it to the north, west and south. The eastern boundary of the courtyard has not yet been unearthed; we suspect that the building’s entrance is located here. The finds indicate that the courtyard was not roofed (and the collapse was less massive than in the other rooms). A large loom originally stood 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. During the last phase of the occupation of the building, the courtyard was divided into two by a flimsy wall (W1031, W1032, W1041). It seems that the rest of the building was roofed, and a second storey 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 — which we assume to be part of a floor — in the middle of the wall fall. The findings above this material included many vessels, but the sherds were usually widely dispersed.

One of the rooms (bounded by W1020, W1046, W1047 and W1048) was excavated almost in its entirety. The findings from what we assume to be the second storey include many jars, as well as cooking pots and additional finds. The finds below the chalky material included many smashed storage jars, unearthed in situ (fig. 3), and additional finds, including a few juglets and animal horns. On a floor in the entrance to the room, we uncovered a grinding stone, a juglet and an oil lamp.

Fig. 3. Area A: eighth-century BCE destruction layer
and behind them another storage jar. Noteworthy are the finds unearthed inside the vessels. Many of the jars were uncovered with remains of their contents, including various botanical finds: olive pits, grape stones, lentils and cereals. Also discovered were two concentrations of garlic, which had probably fallen from the walls when the structure collapsed.

Smashed vessels were also discovered in other parts of the building, as well as in an adjacent building to the north. Interestingly, although the two buildings were built next to each other, each had its own outer walls (W1044, W1046, W1057, W1060), and they did not have a common wall. This is usually indicative of high-class structures.

Area B
This area was opened next to a small trench of four squares excavated by the Lachish expedition in the 1970s (Ayalon 1985); the new line of squares continues the original line, although in a lower terrace (fig. 4). The aim was to make a section in the tel.

In the upper part of the excavations — in the topsoil and just below it — we found mainly ‘sterile’ soil, i.e., without large or medium-sized stones and with only small sherds. The latter included pottery dating from various periods (mainly Iron Age II), including Byzantine sherds uncovered at a depth of 50 cm. and more. Below the ‘sterile’ layer, we uncovered, in most of the squares, a layer of large and medium-sized stones, which did not form part of buildings or of any built system, and below it walls (some already visible within the stone layer).

We believe that the upper layer of ‘sterile’ soil is part of a Byzantine terrace, and that large parts of the tel were used for agricultural purposes at the time. The stone layer was probably laid there as part

Fig. 4. Area B: aerial view (photo: Sky View)
of the earth-moving work, but further excavation will be necessary in order to substantiate this.

The findings below the stone layer are not homogeneous. In the eastern part of area B (where the stone layer was not clearly unearthed), we found a layer containing Iron I pottery, including Philistine bichrome. In the rest of the area, we found Iron Age remains, including a system of rooms, formed by two long east–west walls and inner walls connecting them at various intervals. In the western part of the area, close to the wall enclosing it to the west (whose nature is not yet clear), we found many Persian period remains, including two ostraca from the fourth century BCE, most probably the result of reoccupation in the Iron Age building.

In addition, we opened another square in the upper part of area B, near one of the Lachish expedition’s squares and to its north. We have uncovered a dense system of walls, from two phases, both from the eighth century BCE. Many vessels were unearthed in this square too — mainly in a destruction layer, similar to the one uncovered in area A.

**Area C**

This area was chosen randomly, in the hope of uncovering different types of remains, and thus, to learn about the situation in other, peripheral, parts of the tel.

We uncovered many pits, dated to the Persian or the early Hellenistic period, probably from the fourth century BCE, dug into the Iron Age stratum (fig. 5). The finds included many imported Attic sherds.

**Survey in the Vicinity of the Site**

In addition to the excavations at the tel, we conducted a survey in the site’s vicinity. The most conspicuous find is, of course, the large cemetery that covers the entire area around the site. We are already familiar with a few hundred tombs (dating...
from the late third millennium BCE onward), and there may well be several thousand. The tombs were systematically robbed over the years.

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