

The Fortifications of Areas CC and BC at Tel Lachish

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Abstract

During the Fourth Expedition to Tel Lachish in the years 2014 to 2017 a series of fortifications was uncovered in Area CC, in the center of the northern edge of the mound. In addition to the previously known city walls of Levels I–IV, the expedition discovered a new city wall, built in Level V and dated to the late 10th and the first half of the 9th centuries BCE.

KEYWORDS: Lachish, fortification, 10th century BCE, Rehoboam's fortified cities

1. Introduction

Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) is located in the southern Shephelah, approximately 60 km southwest of Jerusalem. It was a major Canaanite city in the second millennium BCE, the second most important city in Judah during the first half of the first millennium BCE, and a major city in the Persian and Early Hellenistic eras. The city guards one of the routes leading from the coastal plain to Hebron and Jerusalem in the central hill country (Fig. 1). It is situated on the south bank of the Lachish river at a point where the river bends, encircling the site on the east and north. The top of the large mound covers an area of ca. 7.5 hectares. It has been excavated in the past by three different expeditions (Tufnell 1953; Aharoni 1975; Ussishkin 2004). However, the nature of Level V, the earliest Iron Age II

Hoo-Goo Kang and Yosef Garfinkel: The Fortifications of Areas CC and BC at Tel Lachish, in A. Faust, Y. Garfinkel and M. Mumcuoglu (eds.) *State Formation Processes in the 10th Century BCE Levant (Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology 1)*: 352–374

ISSN: 2788-8819; <https://doi.org/10.52486/01.00001.13>; <https://openscholar.huji.ac.il/jjar>



settlement, remained unclear: it was not clear when it was built and if it was a village or a fortified city.

The Fourth Expedition to Tel Lachish was active in 2013–2017 on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Southern Adventist University under the direction of Prof. Y. Garfinkel, Prof. M.G. Hasel, and Prof. M.G. Klingbeil. One of the main expedition's goals was to clarify the date and nature of Level V (Garfinkel, Hasel, and Klingbeil 2013), an objective that was achieved thanks to the excavations in Area CC and Area BC.

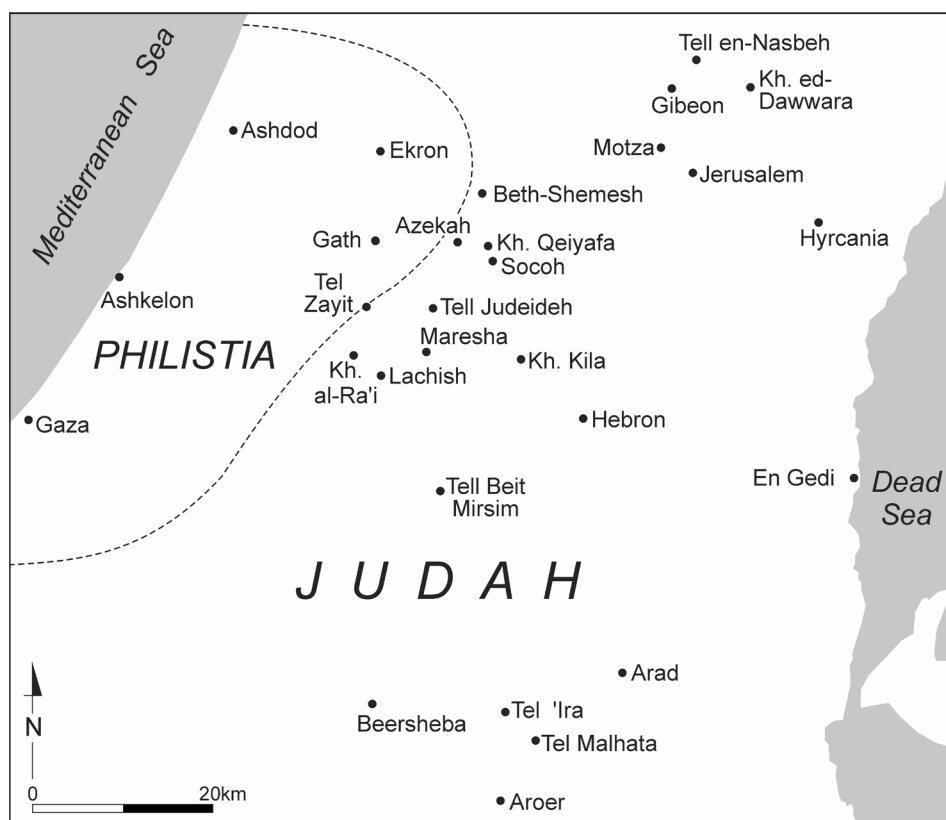


Fig. 1. The Kingdom of Judah and the location of Tel Lachish.

Four areas were opened by the Fourth Expedition to Lachish, all of them in the northeast corner of the site (Figs. 2–3). Area AA was located within the tell, close to the “Solar Shrine” uncovered by Aharoni’s expedition, and yielded a stratigraphic sequence from Level I to Level VI. In Area BB, located in the mound’s northeast corner, a rich sequence of levels from the Middle Bronze Age to the Persian era was uncovered. Notable remains here were Middle Bronze Age

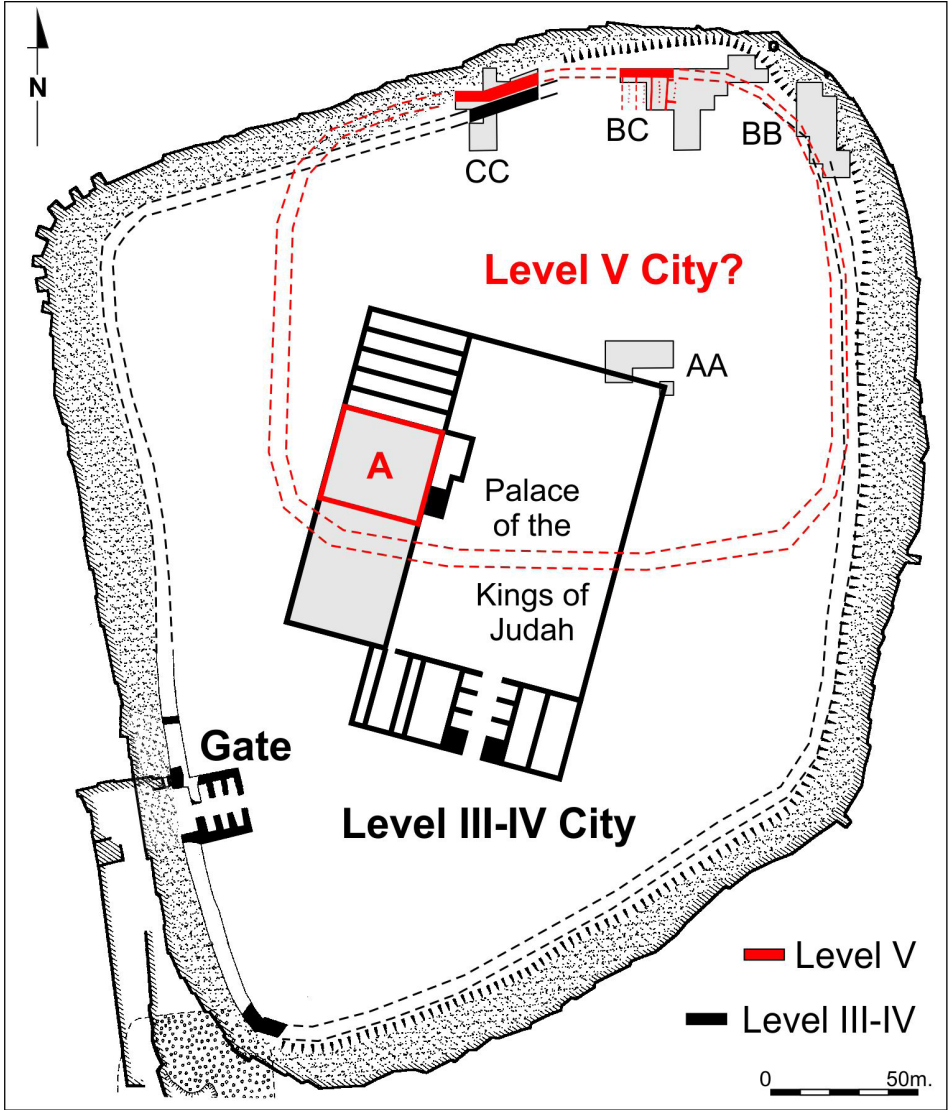


Fig. 2. The site of Lachish with the excavation areas of the Fourth Expedition to Lachish. The estimated size of the Level V city is marked in red.

fortifications, a Late Bronze Age fortress, a Late Bronze Age temple and various Iron Age structures (Garfinkel 2019; Weissbein et al. 2020). The excavations clearly indicated that the so-called “revetment,” which was previously believed to date from the Iron Age, was actually built in the Middle Bronze Age (Garfinkel 2019). The later fortifications of Levels V–I in this area, however, were severely damaged, either by human activities or by natural erosional processes. Area CC, in the central part of the northern slope, revealed a tight sequence of fortifications

from the Middle Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and the Persian period, including a previously unknown city wall built in Level V. Area BC is a small area located adjacent to Area BB, toward Area CC; here the city wall and houses of Level V were uncovered.

Before we examine the newly discovered remains of fortifications in Areas CC and BC, we will briefly review the fortification systems of Lachish throughout the periods, as uncovered by the earlier excavations and published by Tufnell and Ussishkin.

Level I: A fortification system comprising a city wall and a city gate built over the ruined fortifications of Level II was uncovered on the western and southern sides of the mound (Tufnell 1953: 98–99, Pls. 108, 112; Ussishkin 2004: 97, 460–463, Figs. 9.39, 9.40, 12.47). The city wall, 2.5 m thick, was built from stones. Level I is subdivided into phases, whose exact dating is a matter of controversy (see below). Basically, the earlier two phases date from the Persian era and the later one from the Hellenistic era.

Level II: Immediately below Level I's city wall, the city wall of Level II was found. It is 3.5 m thick and built from stones. This city was destroyed by fire by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, at the end of the First Temple period. It has an outer and an inner city gate, with a large gate piazza between them. The famous Lachish Letters were found in a small room in this piazza; one of them mentions the names of the cities of Lachish and Azeqa (Torczyner et al. 1938: 75–87).

Levels IV–III: A massive fortification system was used continuously during these two levels; it was built in Level IV and went out of use at the end of Level III, when the city was destroyed by the Assyrians in 701 BCE. The fortifications included an outer and an inner city gate, with six chambers in the inner gate. The wall, 6 m thick, was constructed from mudbricks laid on one to three courses of stones. Such a solid mudbrick wall is unparalleled in any other Judahite site during the Iron Age. The city wall was uncovered by the previous expeditions on the western and southern sides of the mound. A major contribution of the excavations of Ussishkin (2004: 424–432) was to establish the stratigraphic connection of the mudbrick city wall with the large Iron Age palace located at the top of the site. The construction of the mudbrick wall is dated to the mid- or late 9th century BCE. Up to now it has been a common practice to relate this mudbrick wall to a massive stone wall located downslope around the entire site (Tufnell 1953: 55, 87–92, Pls. 11–12, 109;

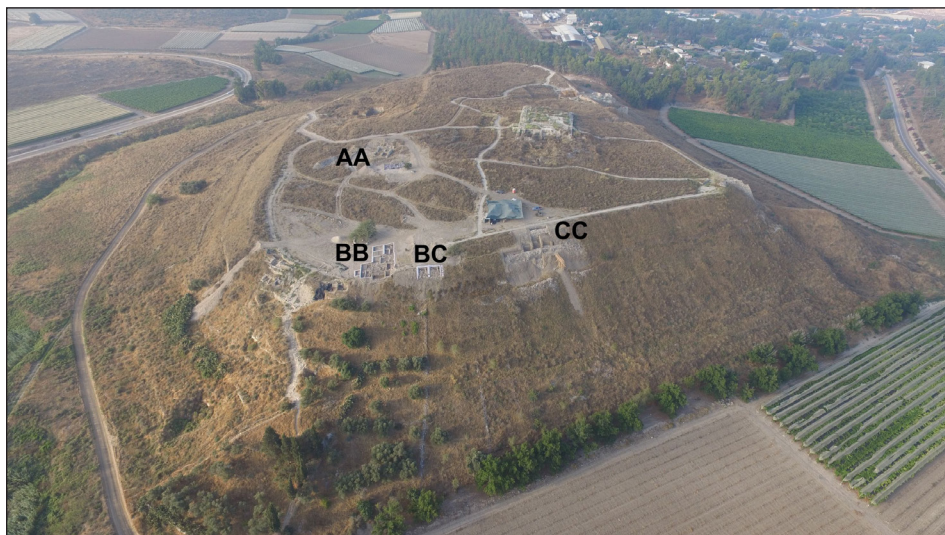


Fig. 3. Aerial view of the northeast corner of Tel Lachish during the 2016 excavation season (view to southwest).

Ussishkin 2004: 432–436, Figs. 9.19–9.24). This stone wall, however, dates from the Middle Bronze Age (Garfinkel 2019).

In sum, no clear fortification dated to a level earlier than Level IV has been known up to the present. This includes gates, city walls, and other elements such as fortresses. The only relevant component mentioned is the Middle Bronze glacis that gave the site its geometric shape. Ussishkin (2004:55) assumed that the Bronze Age city gates were located, like the Iron Age gates, in the southwest corner of the site.

2. The Excavations in Area CC

Area CC is located in the middle of the northern edge of the mound, at the highest point of the northern side (Fig. 3). The area was chosen for excavation for several reasons:

1. It is located at the edge of the site, where one would expect the city wall to be located.
2. Downslope from this location a line of stones was observed, which seemed to be part of another city wall that had not been previously reported.
3. We noticed that the topography of the eastern side of the northern slope was different from that of its western side. In the east was a terrace-like formation not represented in the west, which could conceal a city wall.

4. As no Level V city wall was discerned on the western or southern sides of the mound, which were examined by the previous expeditions, it seemed possible that the Level V city occupied a limited area of the site (Fig. 2), like the Stratum X city at Hazor (Ben-Tor 2016: 132–146; Fig. 90). If so, the first Iron Age city of Level V was a small one and a large city was built only in the succeeding Level IV.

On this point, one of the authors [H.K.] has a different opinion: that Lachish was a large city occupying the entire mound already in Level V. According to this approach, Ussishkin expedition failed to find the city wall of Level V in Area S not because it did not exist, but because either it was eroded (as occurred in the west of Area CC) or the stones of the wall were robbed to build the massive new gate complex in Level IV, which included a bastion and a ramp leading to the city.

Area CC was excavated in three seasons, between 2014 and 2016. About 15 squares measuring 5×5 m were opened, with a total area of ca. 375 m² (Fig. 4). The following sequence was been observed, as summarized in Table 1 (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4. Area CC: a series of fortifications uncovered one on top of the other in the center of the northern slope of Tel Lachish (view to south).

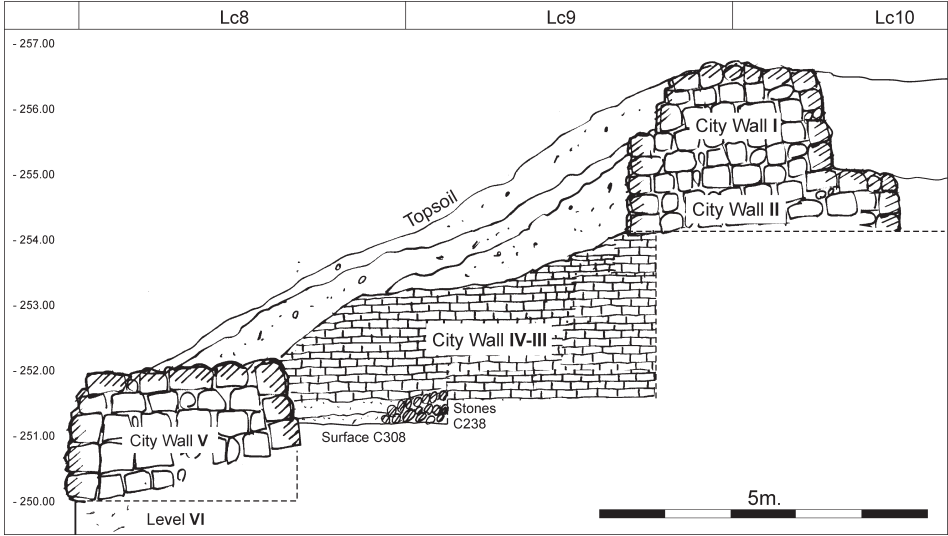


Fig. 5. Area CC: the eastern section of the northern slope of Tel Lachish.

Table 1. Fortification features uncovered in Area CC.

| Level | Period | Width (m) | Construction material | Remarks |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Level I | Persian–Hellenistic | 2.6 | Stone | Three phases |
| Level II | Iron Age IIC | 3.5 | Stone | Inset |
| Level III | Iron Age IIB | 6.0 | Mudbrick | Plastered outside |
| Level IV | Iron Age IIA late | 6.0 | Mudbrick | Stone foundation |
| Level V | Iron Age IIA early | 3.5 | Stone | Drainage |
| Level IX | Middle Bronze | Unknown | Stone | Inset |

Level I: A few of the stones of the city wall of Level I were already exposed on the surface before excavation. After removal of 10–20 cm of topsoil, the line of the wall was fully uncovered. It was built from medium-sized stones placed carefully on both the outer and the inner sides, the space in between filled by other stones. The city wall runs east-west, built directly on top of the city wall of Level II but narrower (2.6 m). The northern (outer) face is exactly on the line of the city wall of Level II, while the southern (inner) face is inset from the earlier wall by almost one meter. There is a gap of ca. 40 cm between the two city walls, an indication of an occupational gap, probably after the Babylonian destruction of Level II.

Three occupational phases (Ia–Ic) were noticed in the level, all representing domestic activity. In the earliest phase (Ic), a silo (C 38) that cut the city wall of Level II was built against the city wall (Figs. 6–7), while a narrow wall (W₃) was built abutting it. A tabun was uncovered on the floor right next to the wall. In the second phase (Ib), an additional wall (W₂) was constructed to make two rooms, in one of which a plastered floor and a sunken installation in the plaster were uncovered. In the latest phase (Ia), an additional wall (W₁) was built on top of the plastered floor, making three different rooms. In short, in all three phases of Level I Lachish was a fortified city, and no destruction was observed in any of them.



Fig. 6. Area CC: aerial view of the city wall of Level I and three domestic walls abutting it from inside the city. Note the city wall of Level II under domestic walls of Level I (view to north).

Level II: The city wall of Level II is 3.5 m thick, almost one meter thicker than the city wall of Level I (Figs. 7–8). Like the city wall of Level I, it was constructed with large/medium-sized stones forming the faces and the space in between filled by small stones. The city wall has an inset in the excavation area.

One or two domestic walls, one in mudbrick (W₄) and the other in stone (W₅?), were built abutting the city wall. Although a very limited area was excavated inside the city, a massive layer of fire destruction debris was removed to reach to the floor, on which several restorable vessels as well as some metal objects



Fig. 7. Silo C38 of the early phase of Level I, leaning against the Level I city wall and cutting the Level II city wall (view to north).

were found. Since Area CC is very far from the city gate, it could be said that the Babylonians destroyed the entire city by fire.

From outside the city diagonally deposited debris was noticed, the sediment consisting of silty soil with many whitish chunks. A short, flimsy stone installation was observed.

Levels IV–III: The city wall of Levels IV–III, built from mudbricks, was encountered immediately below the debris of Level II. The outer face of the city wall was found further to the north, beyond the area covered by the city wall of Level II. The inner face, in the south, is buried under the city wall of Level II. The exposed width of this city wall is 5.5 m. As the known width of this city wall is 6 m, about half a meter is buried under Level II.

The city wall was built on a foundation of small and medium-sized stones, one course high. In contrast to the well-constructed foundation level found in Area S (Ussishkin 2004: Fig. 9.8), they were laid in a rather careless manner, and sometimes did not reach the entire width of the wall.

The maximum height of preservation of the wall, about 2 m, can be seen in the south inside the slope. Only ca. 60 cm were preserved in the north, the outside of the slope. The outer face of the mudbrick city wall was coated with white plaster



Fig. 8. Area CC: the city walls of Levels I and II (view to east). Wall I and a silo about the city wall of Level I. Wall 4, and possibly Wall 5, about the city wall of Level II.

(Figs. 9–10). Some of the plaster had fallen and was found lying horizontally. The fill under the plaster includes pottery of the Iron Age IIA, while above the plaster Iron Age IIB pottery was found. Such plaster was found in other parts of the site (Ussishkin 2004: 701–704, Figs. 9.6, 13:14 behind the standing man). It seems that before Sennacherib’s campaign of 701 BCE the fortifications were strengthened and plastered, which would have given the city a shimmering appearance.

In the eastern side of the excavation area the mudbrick city wall of Levels IV–III abuts the wall of Level V and runs parallel to it. Toward the western side of the area the Level V city wall changes its orientation and turns to the north, and hence the two city walls are no longer parallel to one another (Fig. 2).



Fig. 9. Area CC: the city wall of Levels IV–III (view to south).
Note the individual bricks of the superstructure.



Fig. 10. Area CC: the city wall of Levels IV–III on the right, with the brick superstructure and the outer face covered with white plaster.
The stone city wall of Level V is seen on the left (view to east).

In the eastern part of Area CC a stone tower was uncovered. It was built on top of the earlier Level V city wall, and its foundation trench cut into the earlier wall.

Level V: The main discovery in Area CC was a previously unknown fortification of Level V. Some of its stones (with white plaster) could be seen even before the

excavation started. This city wall was found north of (downslope from) the city wall of Level IV–III (Figs. 11–12).



Fig. 11. Area CC: aerial view of the city wall of Level V (view to south).



Fig. 12. Area CC: aerial view of the city wall of Level V (view to west).

The city wall is 3.5 m wide and was constructed, like the city walls of Levels I and II, from large stones forming the two faces and small stones filling the space between them. It was preserved to a height of 1–2 m. Since the top of the wall is flat, it seems likely that the superstructure was made of bricks, which have

eroded away. We exposed about 30 m of the wall, with better preservation in the east and poor preservation in the west. In the west, large parts of the outer face had eroded downslope and only the inner face of the wall was found. An opening of a drainage system was observed in the outer face of the city wall. It was constructed like a low and narrow window, with a massive stone at the top (Fig. 13–14).



Fig. 13. Area CC: the city wall of Level V with its drainage outlet (view to south).



Fig. 14. Area CC: close-up of the drainage outlet in the city wall of Level V (view to south).

Inside the city we uncovered a floor running up to the city wall, bearing typical Level V pottery decorated with red slip and irregular hand burnish. While excavating under the floors to reach Level VI, we encountered the inner part of the drainage system (Fig. 15). Olive pits from this floor yielded radiometric dates in the last part of the 10th century and the first half of the 9th century BCE (Fig. 16; Garfinkel et al. 2019).



Fig. 15. Area CC: a close-up of the inlet of a drainage in the city wall of Level V (view to north).

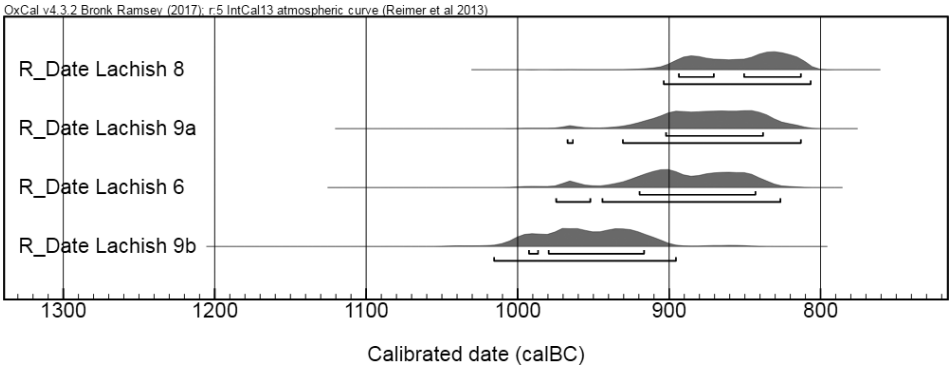


Fig. 16. Area CC: radiometric datings from the floor uncovered under the mudbrick city wall of Levels IV–III and abutting the stone city wall of Level V.

Level VI: When the city wall of Level V was “floating,” a destruction layer of Level VI began to appear. No fortification was encountered in this level.

Level IX: Further downslope, we uncovered part of the massive wall, the so-called “revetment,” that encircled the entire site at the mid-slope level. This wall had already been uncovered by the members of the first expedition to Lachish, who dated it to the Iron Age and understood it as part of the Level IV–III fortifications (Tufnell 1953). When the massive revetment wall was excavated from inside the city, it became clear that it had been constructed in the MB IIB. Above it were found remains dated to the MB IIC and the Late Bronze Age.

3. Area BC

After a segment of the new city wall of Level V was found in Area CC, it was decided to open Area BC in the eastern side of the slope, adjacent to the western part of Area BB (see Figs. 2–3). Here the following stratigraphic sequence was found:

1. Topsoil: a thin level of 10–20 cm.
2. The city wall of Levels IV–III. First the brick superstructure was excavated, standing to a height of up to one meter. The bricks were built on top of stone foundations that incorporated walls and stones of Level V buildings (Figs. 17–18).
3. The remains of Level V were found under the city wall of Level IV–III; they include a long segment of a stone city wall as well as several pillared buildings abutting the stone wall from inside the city.
4. When we excavated deeper we uncovered rich destruction debris of Level VI, with typical Canaanite pottery and a few bronze objects.

The Level V remains include the stone city wall that is known from Area CC. As the terrain slopes to both the north and the east in Area BC, large parts of the city wall had eroded, and only part of the wall was preserved (Figs. 19–20). One complete building and segments of two others were excavated (Figs. 20–21). The floors abutting their walls revealed some pottery indicative of Level V. These buildings went out of use when the much wider mudbrick city wall of Level IV was built above them; sometimes the top of a domestic wall of Level V was embedded in the foundation of the city wall of Level IV.

No destruction level was noticed in this area, suggesting that Level V went out of use due to a new urban plan that expanded the Iron Age city across the entire



Fig. 17. Area BC: the city wall of Levels IV–III with mudbricks on top of stone foundations (view to west).



Fig. 18. Area BC: the stone foundations of Level IV, neatly incorporating a wall of a Level V building (view to south).

tel. The finds in Area BC clearly indicate that the city wall of Level V ran all the way to the northeast corner of the site.

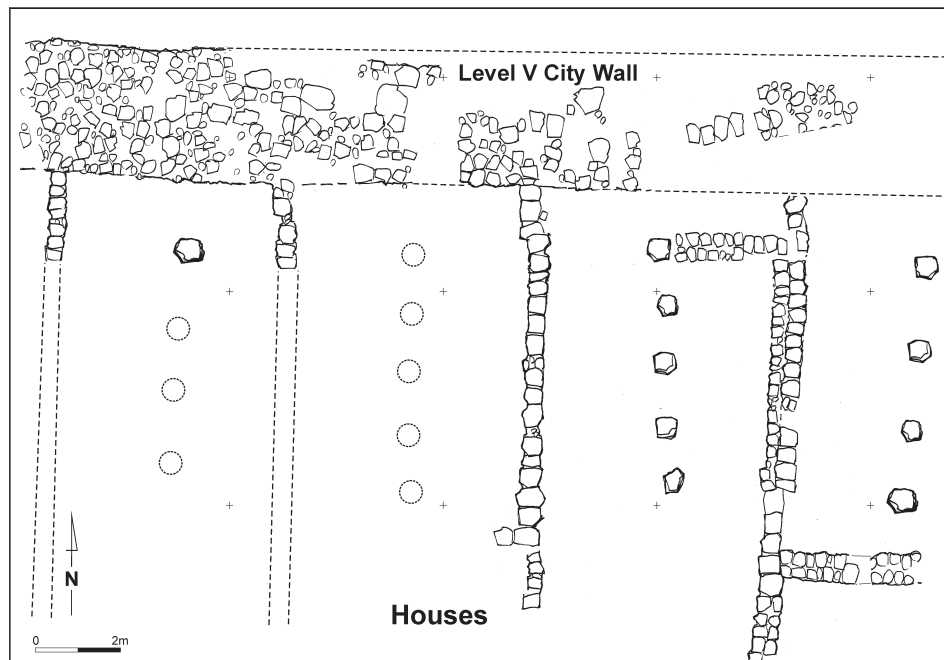


Fig. 19. Area BC: plan of the excavation of Level V.



Fig. 20. Area BC: aerial photograph of the stone wall at the end of the 2016 excavation season (view to north).



Fig. 21. Area BC: aerial view showing the house abutting the city wall of Level V.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1. The contribution of the new excavations

The archaeological results from Areas CC and BC lead to the following conclusions:

1. A series of fortification systems has been uncovered from Level I to Level IX (excluding Levels VI–VIII). The features and construction of the city walls differ between periods, but in all periods the city wall is a solid one built from either stone or mudbrick.
2. Although casemate city walls were built in a number of cities in Judah, no casemate city wall is known at Lachish. Other Judean sites, like Khirbet Qeiyafa, Tell Beit Mirsim, and the earlier city at Tell en-Nasbeh, were fortified by the hollow casemate wall, which requires less raw material for its construction and is consequently faster and cheaper to erect. The construction of a solid city wall at Lachish in the latter part of the 10th century BCE indicates its strategic importance to the kingdom as early as Level V.

3. Although the city walls at Lachish are solid, private houses were constructed abutting the city wall from the inside. This was observed even in Level I of the Persian period. This is interesting in view of the standard Judean town planning, in which casemate city walls were abutted by houses from inside the city (Faust 2002).
4. Tufnell (1953: 59) dated Level I to 450–150 BCE. It was later argued that Level I at Lachish was fortified only in its second sub-phase (Fantalkin and Tal 2004; 2006). We uncovered three phases in Level I and ascertained that the city was already fortified in the first phase (Kang 2016a).
5. Some scholars (e.g., Ussishkin 2004: 77–78) have assumed that Level V was a small rural village that had no fortifications or monumental buildings such as a city wall, gate, storehouse, or palace. Our new results, however, clearly indicate that the Level V city was fortified.

4.2. A City Wall, Not a Revetment

It has been argued that the new Level V city wall is not a city wall but a “revetment” for the Level IV–III city wall (Ussishkin 2019). This interpretation is mistaken, as it does not take into consideration the following aspects:

1. In Areas CC and BC, floors running up to the city wall from inside the city were excavated. The pottery from here is typical of the Iron Age IIA. Radiometric dating of olive pits from these floors, processed at the laboratory of the University of Oxford, yielded dates in the second half of the 10th and the early 9th century BC (Garfinkel et al. 2019).
2. In Area CC, a drainage channel ran under the city wall to drain rainwater from inside the city. The excavation uncovered its inlet within the wall, which was completely blocked by the construction of the Level IV city wall.
3. When the city wall of Level V became “floating,” a massive destruction layer, a mixture of burnt mudbricks and layers ash, appeared. The pottery collected here is indicative of Level VI, the last Canaanite city at Lachish, and there are no remains of Level V below this destruction layer.
4. In Area BC houses were found abutting the wall from inside the city, in such a way that the city wall was the rear wall of the houses. Ussishkin suggested that the “revetment” of Level IV was the external wall of the houses of Level V.
5. To the best of our knowledge, no such “revetment” is known from any other site in Israel or the entire Levant. What we actually have here are fortification systems of the Middle Bronze Age and of Level V, mistakenly attributed to Levels IV–III.

4.3. King Rehoboam and the Earliest Iron Age Fortifications of Lachish

The dating of the earliest Iron Age fortifications at Tel Lachish has been hotly debated. Five major proposals have been made for their date:

1. The early 10th century BCE, the time of David and Solomon (Tufnell 1953; Zukerman and Gitin 2016: 417).
2. The late 10th century BCE, the time of King Rehoboam (Aharoni 1975:12–14; Yadin 1980).
3. The early or mid-9th century BCE (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001; Ussishkin 2004; 2015; Na'aman 2013; Katz and Faust 2014).
4. The late 9th century BCE, following the destruction of the nearby large Philistine city of Gath (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2011: 42–43; Sergi 2013; Lehmann and Niemann 2014).
5. Some time during the 8th century BCE (Niemann 2011).

As we can see, nearly 250 years separate the earliest and the latest proposed dates. The new radiometric dating indicates that the second proposal, advocated by Aharoni and Yadin, is the correct one.

The question of when fortification systems began to appear in the Shephelah is significant for the discussion of state formation. Fortification systems in this region are known from Khirbet Qeiyafa, Gezer Stratum VIII, Beth-Shemesh Stratum 3, and now Lachish Level V. According to the pottery typology analysis and/or new radiocarbon data, Khirbet Qeiyafa dates from the early 10th century BCE (Garfinkel et al. 2016: 138–156); both Gezer VIII and Beth-Shemesh 3 are later than Khirbet Qeiyafa but date from some point in the same century (Kang 2012: 163–167, 200–201);¹ and finally Lachish V dates from the late 10th–early 9th century BCE (Kang 2016b; Garfinkel et al. 2019).

1. The Level V fortification recently found at Tel Lachish has implications for the debate over the historical reality of the biblical narrative in 2 Chr 11:5–12, which tells that King Rehoboam fortified fifteen cities in Judah in the last third of the 10th century BCE. The archaeological results of the previous expeditions have led scholars to argue that the biblical passages do not reflect the time of Rehoboam but rather those of Hezekiah (Na'aman 1986) or Josiah (Fritz 1981), or even the Hasmonean period (Finkelstein 2001). These speculations are now

1. Beth Shemesh 3 has been dated to 950–790 BCE (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2009). Our point here is that the date of construction of the fortification of Stratum 3 is within the 10th century BCE.

proven wrong, a conclusion that was already reached by pottery comparison between Lachish Level V and Khirbet Qeiyafa of the early 10th century BCE (Kang 2013; 2017) and is now confirmed by radiometric datings.

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