

**First announcement concerning the results
of the 2005 exploratory season at Tel Kabri**

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The 2005 preliminary and exploratory season of excavations at the site of Tel Kabri in Israel met with success beyond our expectations. Most importantly, we were able to establish that enough remains of the palace are still extant to merit a multi-year renewal of the excavations at the site. The most important accomplishments during the season included the following :

- The Middle Bronze (MB) IIB palace was found to be considerably larger than originally estimated by the previous excavators (3000-4000 sq. m. rather than 2000 sq. m.), extending further to the north, east and west. It may extend further to the south as well, but we did not excavate in that direction this season.
- Destruction deposits, including restorable local pottery, burnt organic material, and imported Cypriot pottery, were discovered which may provide further chronological data for the date of the violent destruction of the palace in the final phase of its existence.
- New evidence was found for an earlier MB IIA public structure or palace lying immediately below the MB IIB palace. This is one of the very few examples of palatial remains from this period in Israel and is of great potential interest.
- Interesting finds included the first gold object ever discovered at the site as well as a possible libation installation with numerous intact and restorable vessels.
- Conservation and protective measures were begun in an effort to prevent further damage to the remains uncovered more than a decade ago by the previous excavators.



**Fig. 1a. Middle Bronze Age Palace in Area D -West:
Hall 611 (foreground) and Room 740 (left background)**

Introduction

The site of Tel Kabri (Fig. 1a-b) provides a unique opportunity to retrieve critical data concerning both the role of Bronze Age Minoan artisans and Iron Age Greek mercenaries in the political and cultural systems of the Levant. Rescue excavations conducted between 1986-1993, led by the late Prof. Aharon Kempinski and Prof. Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, partially uncovered the remains of both a Middle Bronze Age palace with Minoan-style fresco paintings and an Iron Age fortress in which Greek mercenaries were stationed (see now the final publication in Kempinski 2002).

The 2005 exploratory season at the site of Tel Kabri in Israel was directed by Assaf Yasur-Landau of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, and Eric H. Cline of The George Washington University (Washington, D.C.). Area Supervisors were Aaron Burke of UCLA, Celia Bergoffen of the Fashion Institute of Technology (NY), Michal Bieniada of Pultusk High School of Humanities (Warsaw, Poland), and Nurith Goshen of Tel Aviv University. Team members included ca. 40 archaeologists and students of archaeology from the USA, Israel, Poland, the UK, France, Australia, and Croatia. The team excavated a total of 12 squares in three separate areas, working for 21 excavation days (4 weeks) from July 3rd-28th, 2005.



Fig. 1b. Extent of the MB IIB palace, with excavation areas marked

Initial objectives

Four general objectives were defined at the outset of the season:

1. Further establish the extent of the Middle Bronze Age palace (Fig. 1a, b) and locate its residential and service units.
2. Locate additional areas within the palace with intact plaster floors and plastered walls that may hint at the origin of the Minoan-style frescoes found by previous excavators, including miniature scenes.

3. Collect data for dating the frescoes and the destruction of the palace. These data (radiocarbon samples and date-bearing artifacts) have the potential to assist in establishing a clear correlation between the Aegean and the Levant during the critical period of transition between the Middle and Late Bronze Ages.
4. Prevent further damage to the site and initiate long-term conservation of the remains of the palace, particularly its frescoes.

Excavation areas and results of excavation

Area D-South (Fig. 2a) is located a few meters to the north of the earlier Area F excavated by A. Kempinski and W.-D. Niemeier (identified as the southern part of area D in the final publication of the 1986-1993 excavations). The area was defined by Kempinski and Niemeier as possibly being cultic in nature. Along the southern balk in this area we uncovered a great collapse of mudbricks covering a corner of a large wall (Wall 16008). This corner may be a continuation of wall 1510 and the entrance to unit 1550 which was excavated by Kempinski and Niemeier (Oren 2002: 61, 66-67). If correct, the fact that this wall ends with a corner (the entrance to a room?) disqualifies it from being the northeastern closing wall of the palace, as previously suggested by Kempinski and Niemeier (Oren 2002: 69 fig. 4.73), and suggests instead that the palace complex continues further to the northeast. The collapse both above and by this wall included burnt mudbricks -- possible evidence for the fiery end of the palace -- as well as some fragments of burnt organic material. There is also some evidence for metalworking in the area, including a fragment of a crucible, as well as some slag, small pieces of bronze sheet, and a small gold lunette (Fig. 2b). Pottery recovered from this area consisted primarily of fragmentary storage jars.



Figs. 2a-b. Area D-South (left) and Gold Lunette (right)

To the east of this collapse (and running into the eastern balk in this area), an open space was bordered by the corner of a massively-built stone structure (Wall 17006), constructed of field boulders with a possible mudbrick superstructure (Fig. 2a). Its construction technique differs from the walls of the palace, yet it resembles a segment of a 4.5 m. thick wall excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) ca. 20 m. to its north during a salvage operation several years ago (Shalem 2001). In our opinion, both structures may both belong to the same feature -- either a wall-and-tower complex guarding the entrance to the palace, or (as suggested by E. Oren, pers. com.) parts of a prominent monumental building located adjacent to the entrance to the palace. Further excavation will reveal more of this massive stone structure and clarify its nature.

Area D-North is located to the north of the earlier Area D excavated by Kempinski and Niemeier, in an area which they thought contained the northern closing wall of the palace and in which a geophysical survey had suggested the presence of walls following the same orientation of

the MB IIB palace walls. Excavating between avocado trees in this area, we uncovered conclusive evidence that the palace continues further to the northeast than the previous excavators had suspected. Thick plastered floors were discovered in both Squares 41 and 51, the latter (51008) in a very good state of preservation (Fig. 3a). Square 42 yielded the remains of a possible massive wall (Wall 42009) with a rubble core, damaged when it was robbed in antiquity. A single finely-cut stone orthostat, on which can be seen the remains of a white plaster coating, was found *in situ* next to this stone structure (Fig. 3b). Twelve olive pits found here may provide C¹⁴ dates for the destruction of the palace in its final phase. The surfaces of both Squares 41 and 51 yielded pottery located immediately below (and sealed by) mudbrick destruction deposits. This pottery consisted mainly of storage jars, some of which are possibly restorable, but also included imported (and diagnostic) Cypriot ware, both handmade and wheelmade.



Figs. 3a-b. Squares 51 (left) and 42 (right) in Area D-North

The excavation in this area provided further support for Kempinski and Niemeier's notion of a very large MB IIA public structure or palace preceding the palace of the MB IIB period (Oren 2002: 68). Excavation below the floors of the MB IIB palace in Squares 41 and 42 uncovered a well-laid stone wall (Wall 41013) accompanied by a thick plaster floor (41012) (Fig. 4a). Both the building technique of the wall and its elevation are similar to walls surrounding Units 1569, 1586, and 1705 belonging to Stratum 4 of the previous excavations, which dates to the MB IIA period (Oren 2002: 55-56). In addition, a large deposit of restorable pottery was discovered within a large storage jar with a perforated base (possibly a libation installation) in Square 42, including a small holemouth pithos, a dipper juglet, and the lower part of a Tell el-Yahudiya juglet (Fig. 4b). It is unclear whether this deposit should be dated to the MB IIA or MB IIB period.



Figs. 4a-b. Stone wall and plaster floor in Square 41 (left) and storage jar with restorable pottery in Square 42 (right), all within Area D-North

Area D-West is located at the eastern edge of the Palace, just to the northwest of the large Ceremonial Hall 611 exposed during Kempinski and Niemeier's earlier excavations. The main objective of our excavation in this area was to fully uncover Room 740, hypothesized to be a throne room by Kempinski and Niemeier, who left the excavation of the room uncompleted. We also hoped to see whether we could locate the northwestern closing wall of the palace here.

Room 740, with direct access from the ceremonial hall 611 and therefore one of the most important rooms so far uncovered within the palace, was found to have massive intact walls and a thick plaster floor (Fig. 5a). Our excavations revealed the southwestern wall of Room 740 (Wall 80004) in Square 81, complete with intact mud bricks placed on a stone socle and still covered with an *in situ* thin layer of wall plaster. This was left for immediate conservation and thus the face of the wall plaster has not yet been examined for possible paint or other decorative features. This wall is extraordinarily wide -- at least 4 m. -- and can be seen running through Square 80 to the northwest as well, yet it may well be an interior wall of the palace, serving as an entrance to a very large unit, just as the monumental wall 677 found nearby by Kempinski and Niemeier forms an inner wall around Ceremonial Hall 611. The northwest wall of Room 740 was also uncovered during our excavations (Wall 673=91012) and was found to be another wide wall, measuring 3.5 m across (Fig. 5b). A few stones of this same wall appear as wall 673 in the preliminary report for 1992-1993.¹ However, even this wall is unlikely to be the northwestern closing wall of the palace, as thick mud brick debris found to the north may hint at an additional large room waiting to be excavated.



Figs. 5a-b. Room 740 (left) and surrounding walls (right) in Area D-West

Conservation of remains uncovered by the previous excavation

The remains uncovered by the previous excavations have suffered tremendously over the past decade. For instance, the geotextile which has covered the floor of Ceremonial Hall 611 (with its famous Minoan fresco painting) for the last 13 years has become adhered to the plaster surface in several places. In order to prevent further damage to these uniquely-important remains, we removed the dense vegetation growing over the northern and western parts of the area excavated by Kempinski and Niemeier, including many bushes that had planted their roots firmly into the plaster floors (Fig. 6a). The area was then re-fenced. Photographs were taken in order to document the damage to the walls and floors during the period of more than ten years between the end of the previous excavation and today, as well as to aid in devising a conservation plan for the future. The site was visited by an IAA conservation team who advised us regarding further immediate measures needed for the prevention of additional damage.

¹ Wall 691, suggested to be the closing wall of the palace in Kempinski's final report (2002), is likely to be a later agricultural terrace.



Figs. 6a-b. Dense vegetation covering the MB II B Palace (left) and placement of clean sand in Room 607(right)

Before ending the season, we also provided first aid to the better-preserved plaster floors uncovered during the previous excavations, which had not been previously protected. Therefore, the floors of Rooms 740 and 607 were first covered with clean sand (to prevent adhesion), then with a coat of isolating geotextile, and finally with a layer of earth (Fig. 6b). These measures will protect the floors throughout the next winter, after which time additional measures will be needed. In addition, we have arranged for the entire excavated area to be sprayed for weeds throughout the upcoming year.