Tel Abel Beth Maacah – 2015 Excavation Report-Area A

General
The third season of excavation in Area A was carried out from June 21 to July 17, 2015, under the supervision of Ido Wachtel, assisted by Kenton Williams. Fredrika Loew was the registrar. Twelve to fourteen volunteers participated during the first three weeks, and eight to ten during the last week.

Area A is located at the eastern edge of the tell in the center of the saddle linking the upper and lower mounds. Six squares were opened in the 2013-2014 excavation season, positioned within the topographic grid of Squares 506 and 507 (see 2013 report, Fig. 1, left); the squares from south to north are: A/14, A/13, A/12 on the east and T/13, T/12 and S/12 on the west. In 2015 season, work was continued in parts of those six squares, and was extended to the half square of B/13, east of A/13 on the tell slope (this is the area of the walls identified in the slope during the 2012 survey). In the first two seasons, a total of four main stratigraphic phases were identified – Strata A1 to A-4 (see 2014 report, Table 1). In the 2015 season, we uncovered two earlier phases, A-5 and A-6. The uppermost phase (A1) contained several late (Ottoman?) terrace walls, which were built directly on top of the A2 walls. Strata A2 to A5 are attributed to the Iron Age I; only the top of Stratum A6 was reached in the 2015 season and thus its nature and date are not yet known.

The main goals of the 2015 season were 1) to clarify the nature, date and plan of Stratum A4 by extending exposure in the western parts of Squares A/14, A/13 and T/13; 2) to better understand the nature and plan of Stratum A3; 3) to better understand the relationship between A2 and A3 (in the upper step left in the western part of Squares A\13 and A\14; 3) to better understand and expose more of the continuation to west (S\12) of the large Stratum A2 building complex; 4) to examine the stratigraphic sequence below the destruction level of Stratum A4.

Table 1. Summary of the depth of excavation and the strata per square

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strata</th>
<th>A/14 west</th>
<th>A/14 east</th>
<th>A/13 west</th>
<th>A/13 east</th>
<th>B/13 west</th>
<th>T/13 east</th>
<th>S-T/12</th>
<th>A/12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total depth</td>
<td>0.70 m</td>
<td>1.70 m</td>
<td>1.0 m</td>
<td>0.2 m</td>
<td>0.74 m</td>
<td>0.65 m</td>
<td>0.55 m</td>
<td>1.02 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strata</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>A4</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>A4</td>
<td>A5</td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>A4</td>
<td>A2</td>
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General Summary of Results

Strata A5-A6: In Squares A/12 and A-B/13, we uncovered Stratum A5 floors and walls, and in Squares A/12 and (possibly) B/13, we exposed the top of A6 architecture and debris layers. It seems that several A5 walls were reused or rebuilt in A4.

Stratum A4: The continuation of the A4 building was found in Squares A/13-14 and T/13. The destruction debris in the eastern part of Square A/14 continued to the west and more restorable vessels and other finds were collected. We clarified more of the plan of the A4 building as well as its relationship to A5 below and A3 above. It seems that the northern ‘room’ in Squares A-B/12 is not part of the same building as the two rooms connected by an entranceway in Wall 2107.

Stratum A3: In Squares A/13-14 were floors of A3, with tabuns and a basin, and much pottery (not yet sure if some is restorable); only two walls were found and most of the area had apparently been a courtyard.

Stratum A2: Excavating below the lower floor in the western unit in Squares S/12 and T/13 exposed traces of metallurgical activity in the room in the form of a complete pot bellows, as well as what seems to be a cult corner in the passageway between the eastern and western units. Additional buttresses were exposed, showing this to have been a carefully built entranceway, leading from north to south.

Table 2. Summary of the main features, loci and walls of Strata A2 to A6, 2015 season

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Walls of a well-constructed building oriented NS-EW with related floor of hard-packed clay from Iron I (or early Iron IIA); two sub-phases containing floor raising and minor changes in the general plan; reuse of walls from A3 in Square S/12; entranceway between units lined with buttresses; metallurgical activity(?) or secondary use in western unit</td>
<td>377.60-376.78</td>
<td>Square S/12: 2124, 2125, 2149, 2156, 3146, 3147, 3168</td>
<td>Square S/12: 2126, 2128, 2138, 2144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In S/12 the floor is lower-376.69</td>
<td>Square T/12: 2109? (pit), 2119, 2114, 2133, 2139, 1123</td>
<td>Square T/12: 1114, 1120, 1136, 2118, 2136, [2137?], 2170, 2151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Square T/14: 2108, 2132</td>
<td>Square T/14: 2130, 2130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Open area with cooking activity, sealed A4 and sealed by A2; no continuity between the strata above or</td>
<td>376.75-376.42</td>
<td>Square T/12: 2135, 1164, 1174, 1165, 1166.</td>
<td>Square T/12: 3102\1158, 3123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Square A/13: 3101.</td>
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</tbody>
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below, aside from the reuse of the top of A4 Wall 2145 and the apparent secondary use of bellows pot in A2.

| A4 | Three rooms, possibly belonging to same unit, with unclear continuation to the west (T/13); destruction layer and floors in Squares A/13-14, part of A/12; one, possibly two walls re-used from A-5 | 376.40–375.15 | Square A/12: 2147, 2152, 2163, 2167
Square A/13: 1150, 2115, 2116, 2141, 2142, 2159, 2162, 2164, 3131, 3144, 3148, 3160
Square A/14: 2113, 2129, 2127, 1163, 3159, 3166, 3104, 3107, 3108, 3126, 3149
Square B/14: 3127?
Square T/13: 3138, 3139, 3152, 3153 | Square A-T/12: 2145
Square A\13: 2143
Squares A-B/13: 2107, 2173
Square A/14: 2169
Square T/13: 3154, 3157 |

| A5 | Two E-W walls, built of boulders, directly below A4 walls; possibly one N-S wall; stone collapse, some burn, much (unrestorable?) pottery | 375.14–374.86 | Square A/12: 3103, 3143, 3158
Square B/13: 3128, 3129, 3144, 3156
Square A/13: 3171, 3181 | Square B/13: 3120, 2107, 2173
Square A/12: 3150 |

| A6 | Massive N-S wall in probe at eastern edge of slope, Square A-B/12; fortification? | 374.62–374.39 | Square A/12: 3179
Square B/13: 3172? | Square A/12: 3180
Square B/13: 3183? |

Loci marked in red = excavated in 2015
Superposition of Strata A2-A6, end of 2015 season

Stratum A-6

The earliest remains in Area A were exposed in two of the eastern squares, A\12-13. In Square A/12, a small probe of 3.0 sq m (1.5x2 m) near the slope on the east was excavated below the A5 floor here (3143); 0.27 m. below it, we reached the top of Wall 3180 (374.66), which appears to be massive, 0.75 m wide and built with large stones, preserved for 2.6 m. Its location at the edge of the (present-day) slope suggests it might have been part of a tower or a city wall.
Square A/12, looking north; A6 Wall 3180 on right; A5 Wall 3150 on left

Stratum A6 Wall 3180, looking south
Square B/13, looking southeast; top of Wall 3183, possibly Stratum A6
Below the Stratum A5 stones 3156 and floor? 3144 in Square B/13, a probe of ca. 6.75 sq m (2-2.5x3 m) exposed a layer of debris with stone collapse (3172) abutting an east-west line of stones that appear on the south of this area, possibly a wall (3183); both are tentatively attributed to Stratum A6.

Stratum A5

Fig. 1. Schematic plan of Stratum A5 (gray walls)
General
Excavation of remains attributed to Stratum A5 was limited this season to probes in Squares A/12 (4x2.5-3 m) and A-B/13 (6x3 m). From this limited exposure, it seems that the layout of this occupation was generally similar to the Stratum A4 building above it, based on the fact that two of the major A4 walls were built right on top of A5 walls and/or were apparently a reuse of the earlier wall. It seems that a floor was not reached in Square A/13, and the level tentatively identified as a floor in Square B/13 (3144) is not entirely clear; its level is ca. 0.4 m below. The nature of the occupation is difficult to determine due to the limited exposure; a large amount of fallen stones and burnt debris, as well as much pottery, indicate a possible destruction that terminated the A5 occupation.

*It should be noted that the difference in elevation between what we identified as the A4 floor and the A5 debris in Square A/13 is not clear; the closing level of the A5 layer at the end of 2015 is the same as the floor (3108) in Room 2129 (Square A/14) to the south. The criteria for determining that we are in Stratum A5 in Square A/13 are: 1) the western part of Wall 2143, bordering this A5 debris, is floating and 2) we identified loci 3160, 2162 and 3119 as the A4 floor level, some 10 cm higher than the end-of-season assumed A5 level. However, it seems that Wall 2107 on the south is not yet floating, which would support the idea that we are not yet in A5. This needs to be further clarified in 2016.

Squares A-B/13
In Squares A-B/13, a relatively large space (6X3 m excavated) was attributed to A5, as it was below the floating level of A4 Installation 2165 and the associated floor (3160) and related, in part, to earlier architecture.
This space is most likely delineated by Wall 3120 on north (see below, Square A/12, for its description). However, since Wall 3120 is of very different construction than A4 Wall 2143 above it, with 3120 made of fine worked stones in a straight line, and A4 Wall 2143 built of haphazardly laid field stones in a herringbone pattern; the two walls were of slightly different orientation, explaining why the southern face of Wall 3120 was not visible under the southern face of A4 Wall 2132. Wall 3120 was traced for 4 meters; its western end continues below the unexcavated balk and its eastern end was cut by the slope. It is possible that there had been an entranceway here,
represented by a low flat stone, although this might be due to removal of higher stones when the A4 Wall 2143 was built.

The southern border of this space in Stratum A5 in the east (Square B/13) was apparently an earlier wall (3182) detected below the eastern end of A4 Wall 2107 (from the entrance in the A4 wall to the east); this wall was constructed of generally similar rectangular basalt stones as Wall 3120 (although more regularly worked) and was preserved two courses high (so far). Excavation this season proceeded down to 374.45 in front of (north) this wall, where the stones of possibly A6 Wall 3183 were revealed.

Square B/13, looking south at A5 Wall 3182 below A4 Wall 2143

Further to the west (west of the entrance in Wall 2107) it seems that Wall 2017 had existed in A5 and was reused in A4, as no earlier wall below it that would equate with Wall 3182 was as of yet detected.
Square A/13, looking south at Stratum A5 layer 3171 abutting the lower courses of Wall 2107, west of the entranceway in Wall 217

On the east, Wall 2173 apparently served as the border of the A5 space in Square B/13; this wall too continued to be used in A4, together with the newly added Wall 217. Only ca. 2 m of Wall 2173 was preserved on its southern end, while the rest was eroded down the slope. The eastern face of Wall 2173 was visible in the slope below Area A during the 2012 survey; then, this corner was marked as A3/5 (=2107) and A3/11 (=2173).

Section in eastern slope under Area A, looking west (in 2013); Wall A3/5=Wall 2107. Wall 13/11=Wall 2173 (in its Stratum A4 stage). Floor A3/4=Stratum A4 Floor 3108
Slope below Square B/13 (2015), looking west at eastern face of Wall 2173. Note stone where ring flask was found in the 2012 survey. Lowest courses of Wall 2173=Stratum A5
The western border of this space remains unclear, as excavation did not proceed below the stone walls attributed to Stratum A4 in Square T/13.

The contents of the space/room in Squares A-B/13, delineated by the above-described walls and sealed by the clay-plaster floor of A4 (3160; 375.25 m), was a layer of burnt debris (3171) (top: 375.18 m) with patches of ash, particularly in the western part, along with a large amount of collapsed stones and pottery that appears to be restorable, though it did not include complete vessels in situ. In the southwestern part of the space was a round stone installation or pavement patch (3181). This might be an indication that we are close the floor here.

A5 Debris 3171 and Installation 3181, looking north; western part of Wall 2107 not exposed
In the center, just west of A4 Bench 2165, was another roughly circular concentration of stones (unnumbered). A rounded burnt area (pit? unnumbered) was found against the southern face of Wall 2143 at 375.04 m.

Square A/13, looking east. Stone patch in A5 debris, just west of A4 Bench 2165 which is just at floating level (seen on its eastern face)
Debris 3171 in Square A/13 abuts the lowest exposed courses of Wall 2107 on the south, as seen in the photo above. On the north, it is assumed that this layer abuts Wall 3120, but, as noted above, the stones of A4 Wall 2143 (above 3120) obscure this connection as of now; these stones are collapsed downwards at this point due to the nearby slope. A built concentration of stones ca. 50 cm long and 35 cm wide (unnumbered in 2015), standing two courses high, adjoins the southern face of 2143 (see photo below). It remains to be seen whether they penetrate under A4 Wall 2143 and join with A5 Wall 3120 on the north. This area needs further clarification.

Square B/13, looking north at A4 Wall 2143 (left) and possibly A5 wall under it on the east; note built stone concentration against Wall 2143, assigned to A5 (not numbered). Note also floating level of A4 Bench 2165 in center left.
It should be noted that an area of 2 x 1.3 m was left unexcavated against the southern face of Wall 2143 on the west due to the later burial (3177) here. Based on the elevation of the floor attributed to Stratum A5 in Square A/12 (3143, see below), as well as the possible A5 floor surface (3144 in Square B/13 on the east, at 374.80 m), it seems that the floor below debris 3171 should be reached at ca. 374.86 m, leaving another 25-35 cm of the A5 layer to excavate.

Squares A-B/13, looking north; unexcavated ‘shelf’ against the western part of A4 Wall 2143 (with late burial 3177); foreground: A4 Room 2129.

Square B/13
In the narrow area to the east of A4 Bench 2165 (Square B/13), excavation proceeded to a lower level than in the western part of this space (A/13).
Square A/13, looking west; lower step in foreground (B/13) excavated to A5 under A4 2165

Square B/13, looking west from lower excavated step at section created under A4 Bench 2165 (detail of previous photo)

Below the A4 floor (3119), a layer similar to that of 3171 was reached, with burnt debris and collapsed stones (3128, 3129, 3144; top 375.18-375.13 m). At the bottom of this debris and collapse layer, in the southeastern corner of this space (in the corner between Walls 3182 and 2173), was a concentration of stones that appears to have been an installation, composed of stones surrounding a round area (pit?): upper layer-
3128, lower layer-3156: between them was a concentration of flat-lying sherds and a complete pyxis.

Square A/13, looking southeast; stones 3128

Square B/13, looking south; after removal of stones 3128 and revelation of A5 stones 3156 and pottery to their north; A5 Wall 3182 on the south (below A4 Wall 2107) not visible due to stones of 3156 abutting it

Pyxis from stones 3156
Square A/12
Wall 3120, directly under the lowest course of A4 Wall 2143, was entirely different in nature, composed of finely worked large basalt stones (75X45X45 cm), preserved only course high. The western part of the wall contains one extremely finely cut basalt block, which the stones to its east are large, but not worked as well; the eastern end is composed of smaller stones and is cut due to erosion on the slope. As noted above, the southern face of this wall has not yet been exposed due to its different orientation from Wall 2143 above it and the concentration of stones against the southern face that needs to be further explored.

Square A/12, looking south at A5 Wall 3120 under A4 Wall 2143

In the space to the north of Wall 3120 in Square A/12, the sequence was similar to that of the space to the south just described, although only a limited area was available for excavation due to the proximity of the slope. Below the A4 debris and floor (2147) that abutted Wall 2143 was a black burnt layer resting on an earthen floor at 374.82 m (3103) that abutted the northern face of A5 Wall 3120. This area contained several very large stones, including one very large worked one, that were apparently fallen from Wall 3120, as well as a concentration of eight hammer stones.
One meter to the north of Wall 3120 was a north-south line of stones (3150; top level 375.50 m) that looked more like a pile of haphazard basalt and limestone fieldstones than a wall, although it did not seem to be merely collapse. It was ca. 65 cm wide and extended to the north under A4 Wall 2145. To the west and east of ‘Wall’ 3150 was the same burnt matrix as 3103, designated 3158 on the west and 3143 on the east (until the slope); these were covered by the stone makeup of A4 Floors 3118 and 3140 respectively. On the southern end of Locus 3158, between the southern end of Wall 3150 and the subsidiary balk on the west, was a patch of stone pavement (374.90 m), looking like a threshold leading into the space to the north. Two large flat-topped limestones covered Wall 3150 (top level 375.73 m) and one more such stone was placed on top of the debris above this pavement, so that the three stones formed an L-shape; they apparently were laid in Stratum A4 and were incorporated in that floor; their function remains unknown.
Square A/12, looking north; foreground excavated to A5 level; center-A4 stone floor makeup with large limestones; the two north-south stones cover A5 ‘Wall’ 3150

Square A/12, looking down/east; right: A5 Locus 3103 against Wall 3120; left: three limestones in A4 stone floor bedding; the eastern limestones top A5 Wall 3150
Square A/12, looking north; A5 ‘Wall’ 3150, topped by 2 limestones (A4). Note stone pavement at southern end of Locus 3158 and animal hole above

Square A/12, looking west; A5 Wall 3150 (floating) topped by A4 limestones

The Stratum A5 burnt layer in Square A/13 contained significantly less pottery and finds than the space in A-B/13. This area was disturbed both due to its proximity to the slope and to a large animal hole that cut through much of the northwestern part (Loci 3103, 3158).
Remains of Stratum A4 were uncovered this season in the three eastern squares (A12-14) and the eastern part of Square T/1, extending 15 m from north to south and ca. 6-7 m from east to west. Three rooms or spaces were excavated; they had been violently destroyed, leaving a distinct burnt orange brick debris, with ash, charcoal, brick and stone collapse, in which were large amounts of pottery and bones, as well as a few other finds. The southernmost room (2129) was the richest in finds and the northernmost room contained two articulated skeletons in the debris (although it is possible that one or both are intrusive). The nature of the destruction in the middle room (2162) was different, as it did not contain complete vessels, but did have a standing-stone installation with a bench (2165), which could be interpreted as a cultic niche. Supporting this is a pit with many animal bones (2112).

The main goals of the 2015 season were 1) to reach the floor level and to clarify the extent of the southern room 2129 (Square A/14), 2) to clarify the general plan of this building by finding the closing walls of those rooms to west, 3) to clarify...
the relation and extent of continuation between this phase with A-5 below and A-3 above.

In order to find the western continuation of the rooms of this unit, the two upper subsidiary steps in Squares A/14 and A/13 that had been left excavated only to the floor level of Stratum A2 were excavated. In addition, excavation proceeded in Square T/13, including the removal of the balk between T/13 and A/13. In Square A/12, the A4 floor was reached and the floating levels of the A-4 walls were defined.

**Room 2129 (Square A/13)**

The southern room in Square A/14, 2129, is bounded on the north by Wall 2107 and on the south by Wall 2169, measuring 4 m from north to south (its east-west size is still unknown). The western part of Wall 2107, beyond the entranceway in it, was revealed this year; no closing wall has yet been found and the room continues west into the subsidiary balk under A3 Wall 3123. Wall 2169 on the south was found to have had a brick superstructure, which explains the many fallen bricks in the destruction debris in the room. This superstructure is visible in the subsidiary balk in the west, although no individual bricks can be discerned in it (see photo below).

![Room 2129, aerial view](image-url)
On the east, the room was cut by Walls 1162 and 2146. Wall 2146 was floating and removed. Wall 1162 was floating on its northern end at 375.62 m and center 375.41 (0.3-0.5 m above the floor level of Room 2129). However, Wall 1162 is still going down on its south, thus cutting into the destruction debris and floor (3108) of the room, as well as cutting the eastern end of Wall 2169. It is possible that this lower southern part of Wall 1162 is, in fact, a different wall on top of which Wall 1162 was built. Since it seems to cut A4 Wall 2169, it, too, should be later than Stratum A4. This needs to be further excavated to understand. The northern floating end of Wall 1162 was removed this season. Walls 1162 and 2146 remain undated, other than their being post-Stratum A4 and probably also post-Stratum A-3.

On the west, A3 Wall 3123 has not been removed and the subsidiary balk created underneath it is the western border of excavation in this room in 2015.

Square A/14, looking southeast; southern end of Wall 1162 (going down) cutting eastern end of A4 Wall 2169; A4 Floor 3108 in foreground
Wall 1162 floating above A4 floor 3108 in Room 2129, looking east

Room 2129, looking west at unexcavated destruction debris in west of room, sealed by A3 Wall 3123 and plaster layer 3145 below it; note brick superstructure above Wall 2169
The layer of burnt destruction debris excavated this season (3149; 3173 is the northern end of this layer, against Wall 2107) was the same as that found in the east of the room (2113, 2129). It included a layer of hard burnt brick debris and charcoal (3149), above a layer of very burnt fallen bricks and charcoal, ash, broken pottery. Ca. 25 cm above the floor (3108) was a layer of black ashy soil (3166). 30% of the soil was sifted in the upper part of the destruction and 100% in Locus 3166. Large amounts of restorable pottery collected, and soil samples for flotation and microfauna were taken.

The floor was found to contain several elements that are interrelated: stone pavement 3104, platform 2127, stone semi-circle 3107, and standing stone 3126. Note also the skeleton of a dog in the entranceway in Wall 2107. It seems that this room may be understood as having had a cultic nature, in light of these installations.
1. **Stone pavement 3104** in the northwestern part of the excavated area, between the entrance in Wall 2107 and the subsidiary balk under A3 Wall 3123. This pavement was composed of nicely and closely laid basalt stones (top: 375.15 m); it measures ca. 1.3 m from north to south and 1.1 m from east to west (though its western side is not entirely exposed). It seems that this pavement has a slightly rounded contour, visible mainly on its western side, although this might be the result of insufficient exposure to date. On the south, the pavement...
25

abuts Platform 2172; the semi-circle of stones 3107 is just to its east and the cut stone west of the entrance abuts its northeastern corner. Curiously, the lowest course of Wall 2107 where it abuts the pavement seems missing, though the stones in this course are seen to the east and this course is visible on its northern face. This needs to be further clarified. The debris above the pavement was very burnt and contained restorable pottery, as well as olive pits, two beads and an intact pyxis.

2. **Platform 2172** is a roughly square concentration of unworked stones, preserved 1-2 courses high; it is not clear whether several stones extending from the northwestern corner of the platform are part of it or not. The platform borders stone pavement 3104 on its south. The platform, roughly 90 sq cm, is located to the north of Wall 2169. The semi-circle of stones 3107 abuts the eastern end of the platform. At this point, there is a rounded gap in the stones of the platform in which the base of a pithos was found. A carinated krater with
two handles was found above the western part of the platform (see photos, 2014 Field Report).

View of Platform 2172, looking east; note also stone semi-circle 3017, pavement 3104, and cut stone near entrance in Wall 2107

3. Stone semi-circle 3107 abuts the eastern ends of the stone pavement and platform (see photos above). It is composed of medium-to large sized unworked field stones arranged to stand in a semi-circle whose open end faces north towards a very large limestone block that is worked on top (see below). The length of 3107 is 1.2 m and its external width is 1.0 m. Between it and the large worked stone is a gap of ca. 60 cm. The orientation of the semi-circle of stones towards the large worked stone implies that they were interrelated.

4. Large worked stone with grinding stone
Large worked stone west of entranceway in Wall 2107, looking northwest

A stone ca. 60 cm wide and ca. 1 m cm high was deliberately placed against the southern face of Wall 2107 just west of the entranceway in that wall. Its top was cut at a sharp angle, almost 90 degrees, facing east. In the cut was a large part of an upper grinding stone. As noted above, the stone was abutted on the west by stone pavement 3104 and was north of the opening of the semi-circle of stones 3107 (in which the dog skeleton was found).

5. Dog skeleton in Wall 2107 entranceway (3106, 375.24-375.14). In the entranceway in Wall 2107 was the articulated skeleton of a dog; however, this was not a burial, but rather an old dog who died a natural death at this spot.
6. **Standing stone 3126** adjoins the southern face of Wall 2107, just east of the entranceway in it. In this sense, it counterbalanced the large cut stone to the west of the entrance, described above. The stone measured ## and was ## high. It was supported by a stone row that continued to the east, where it is eroded. The stone was set on a northeast-southwest axis, while the similar stone masseba (3265) in the room just to the north was set on an east-west axis and adjoined a stone bench. This massebah is smaller than the one in 2165.
Room 2162, to the north of Room 2129, is accessed through the entranceway in Wall 2107. Its northern wall is 2143 and its eastern wall, 2173 (whose northern part is eroded). The western border of this space was apparently uncovered in Square T/13 and is described below. The floor level of Room 2162 was determined mainly based on the floating level of bench/standing stone 2165, as the earthen floor was difficult to detect. Room 2162 contained a pit with animal bones (2112) and a standing stone with an adjoining bench (2165) that was online with the entranceway in Wall 2107. It is possible that this space was an open courtyard; it contained significantly less pottery and burnt debris than in the rooms to the south and the floor was more difficult to detect.

Square A/13

In the western part of the room, Stratum A3 Floor 3110 seals Loci 3131 (soft debris), 3134 (stone collapse) and 3148 (debris below stones and above floor, equivalent to 1150 and 2116 excavated in the 2013-2014 seasons to the east). The stone collapse (3134) in this square was also reached in T/13 to west (3139), though there it is higher, so that there is a downslope from west to east (top of stones in T/13 is at 376.22 and at 375.77 in A/13). The A4 floor under this debris and collapse is 3160, reached at 375.27 m, the same as Floor 2162 to the east. Like 2116 and 2162, a
limited amount of pottery was found in this area, along with a fair amount of bones and flint.

A4 Floor 3160 was laid above the burnt debris and stones of A5 3171, though 3160 was not easy to detect in most places; the floating level of Bench 2165.

**Square B/13**
The room/open space continued to the east into Square B/13, beyond Bench and standing stone 2165. This area was disturbed by erosion, it being on the eastern slope; in fact, no A3 layer was identified here and excavation more or less began in the A4 level.

A layer similar to 2162 to the west was excavated here (3119), representing debris on a possible earthen floor that was hard to define; it was mostly determined due to the elevation of Floor 3160 to the west and the floating level of Bench 2165. Some pottery and bones were found here. This layer was directly above the debris (3129) and stones (3128) attributed to Stratum A5 (described above).

**Remains in Square T/13**
In order to examine the western border of the Stratum A4 Room 2161, the balk between T-A/13 was removed and excavation proceeded down in the narrow area between the floating level of A2 Wall 1114 on the west and the balk under A2 Wall 1126 on the east (the center of which was removed later on). The southern border of this probe was under the floating level of A3 Wall 1158/3102 and the northern border was under the floating level of Wall 1168.

The layer below the A3 debris here (1141) was mostly composed of many fallen stones, some very large. This debris was numbered 3138 and the stone collapse was numbered 3139; an almost complete smashed storage jar was found in the higher debris layer.
At the level of 376.13 m, tops of two walls could be identified within this collapse – northeast-southwest Wall 3154, 0.5 m width, running along 2.75 m, and continuing into the northern balk (below A2 Wall 1118). On the south, Wall 3154 abuts/corners with a small segment of a west-east wall, 3157, that runs to the west under A2 Wall 1114 and to the east into the stone pile 3139. Wall 3154 is built of one line of large basalt stone (50X40X20 cm) of which only one course has so far been exposed. The stratigraphic affiliation here is clear: the top of this wall was found below the floating level of A3 wall (1158) and layer (1141), and was covered by stone collapse which is attributed to A4. It is possible that Wall 3154 is the western closing wall of Room 2162 and most likely cornered with Wall 2143 (corner presently below Stratum A2 Wall 1118. To south, it should close this room together with wall 2107 below the southern bulk of T/13. It would then be expected that Wall 3154 would corner on the south with Wall 2107; however, the location of Wall 3157 seems to preclude this. An explanation for this might be that Wall 3157 is no more than a collapse. Alternatively,
there had possibly been an entrance at its eastern end (below stone collapse 3139) that would lead into the southern part of this building on the west. Further excavation is necessary. West of Wall 3154 is debris 3152 and south of Wall 3157 is debris 3153. Both were hardly excavated in 2015.

The line of east-west stones in the north of Square T/13, designated Wall 1168, has proved to floating above Stratum A4; it may possibly be an A3 element, but the northern end of the balk between Squares T/13-12 obscures its relationship to the A3 level under A2 Wall 1118.
Square T/13, looking northeast; A4 Wall 3154 in left foreground with part of stone collapse 3139 to its east; note higher step on left with later grave 3177, higher step on right under A2 Wall 1126, and excavation down to A5(?) in center (east)

Square A/12, Room 2147

It seems clear that this space, originally considered a third room to the north of joined Rooms 2129 and 2162(3160), is not related to those room. No entrance joins them and its northern border, Wall 2145, is of a different orientation. It might be that this is an open space between the building on the south with Rooms 2129 and 2162, and some building bounded by Wall 2145 on the north (presently beyond the border of the excavation).

The destruction debris in this room (2147) rested on a floor composed of burnt earth on the south and a patch of small stones set on a thick white plaster layer, concentrated in the northwest of this room and designated 3118. This ‘patch’ was bordered on the east by two large white limestones with flattened tops; yet another such stone joined them at a right angle, partly bordering 3118 on its south. The two eastern stones were set directly on top of A5 Wall 3150, as described above. This entire corner was disturbed by a large animal hole.

The floor level of this room is higher by some 20 cm compared to that of the room to its south (2162) and some 35 cm compared to the southernmost room (2129).
Square A/12, A4 Room 2147, looking north; stone bedding of floor, with three smooth limestones; Wall 2145 in back; foreground: probe below floor down to A5; note animal hole in northwest of the floor

**Stratum A-3**

![Plan of Stratum A-3](image)

**Fig. 3. Plan of Stratum A-3**
**General**

Following the destruction of the Stratum A4 rooms in Squares A-B/12-14, the area underwent a fundamental change. The destruction debris of Stratum A4 was leveled or filled in slightly and new floors were laid, either earthen or plaster. Most of this occupation was in an open area (at least in Squares T-A/12), with a large amount of ovens and installations, but only two walls. None of the A4 walls were reused, aside from Wall 2145, whose top was used as a ‘sleeper’ wall-work surface between an oven and an installation in Square T/12 (see 2013-2014 reports). The three ovens and one installation that were exposed in the eastern part of the area are on the same north-south line.

The nature of this occupation is understood to be domestic. However, with the exposure of the pot bellows in Square A/12, and the level with ovens below it, presently attributed to Stratum A3, it might be postulated whether the nature should be understood as industrial.

The elevations of the A3 floors were quite consistent in the eastern part of the area, ranging from ca. 376.40 to 376.30. The floor has not yet been reached in Square S/12; the top of what we think is the A3 debris and ovens there is at ca. 376.40 m, which would suit the levels in the east.

Excavation in 2015 showed that walls previously considered to have been used in A3 were, in fact, built first in A2; these include Walls 1118, 1126, and 1142, all floating above A3 debris, floors and walls. For example, Wall 1126 was built above the top of A4 Wall 3102 and the related debris layers and floor (Square A/13). In Square A/12, the lowest courses of two Stratum A2 walls appear to be abutted by the Stratum A3 debris; this would be the only case where A3 walls continued to be used in Stratum A2. However, more exposure is necessary to understand this situation.

**Square A/14**

Excavation proceed this season below the level of A2 Walls 1125 and 1130 (which were removed) and Floor 1111. A3 elements that were exposed right below them include: a flimsy L-shaped stone feature (3115, level 376.69), and a poorly preserved oven (3116, level 376.68-376.41) that seems to have been cut on its north by A2 Wall 1130. The layer of debris associated with these features was 3109, which was found to cover two rather enigmatic features: Wall 3123 and stones 3141 (376.45).
Square A/13, Oven 3116 cut by A2 Wall 1130 on its north; looking east. Large stone – in A2 Floor 1111.

Square A/14, A3 Wall 3123 and stones 3141, looking south; row of higher stones (3121) on right (west)

Wall 3123 was a northeast-southwest line of small closely packed small and medium stones, preserved three courses high (the two upper courses were removed) and very wide (80 cm). Above its westernmost row of stones was a row of stones 3121 (preserved slightly higher than the rest of the wall. The L-shaped stones of 3115 were set directly on its top. The northern end of Wall 3123 seems to have been cut by A2
Wall 1130, although it terminates somewhat to the south of that wall. Its southern end runs into the southern balk.

Stones 3141 adjoined the lowest course of Wall 3123 on the northern part of its eastern face; the nature of these stones is unclear. On one hand, they are built similar to Wall 3123, but are clearly a separate feature as a clear seam is visible between the two. These stones were preserved one course high and were set (like Wall 3123) on top of a white plaster layer (3145- see below). One explanation of 3141 is that this is a stone pavement, representing the A3 floor surface here. Alternatively, this might have been a reinforcement of Wall 3123 or a localized work surface. Stones 3141 were removed in order to excavate the

To the east of Wall 3123 and stones 3141 was debris 3122; no clear floor level was found, although this debris rested on top of a thick (7 cm) white plaster layer (3145), similar to the makeup of the A3 floor excavated in previous seasons to the east (1131) and more or less on the same level. The enigmatic feature is that plaster layer 3145 penetrates underneath stones 3141 and (with their removal) clearly also under Wall 3123. It is thus not clear whether it is a post-Stratum A4 element, perhaps laid to level off the uneven burnt debris of the latter in preparation for the construction of Wall 3123, stones 3141 and the laying of the A3 floor in this space. In favor of this idea is a thick (10 cm) layer of orange brick material laid directly under the plaster of 3145 that seems to be a kind of deliberate leveling fill. On the other hand, what seems to be the eastern continuation of this plaster ‘surface’, 1167, was quite clearly a living surface with installations and activity on it. It seems that only with the removal of Wall 3123 and excavation to the west can this question be resolved.

A curious feature was revealed to the west of Wall 3123: in the very narrow strip between Wall 3123 and the western balk (designated 3122 but hardly excavated), was a matrix of orangey burnt brick debris and black charcoal chunks with some ash; this matrix was also noted in the balk itself at a higher level, sealed by the typical brown-and-white-chalky material typical of Stratum A2 (this matrix is not numbered as it is inside the balk and was not excavated yet, but it is identical to that of A2 floor 1111 and the debris above in this square). This burnt orange and black debris is, in fact, identical to the A4 material sealed by Wall 3123 and the white plaster layer below it (3145). It is difficult to explain this phenomenon. Such burnt debris is not found anywhere else in A3 contexts and is, as noted, identical to the A4 destruction layer below. One explanation is that the A4 building was terraced, so that its western room
(west of Room 2129, described above) was on a higher level and the A3 people cut into it. Another explanation is that possibly Wall 3123 and stones 3141 were much later intrusive elements, although this would not explain the higher level of the burnt debris. Further excavation is necessary.

Square A/14, looking west at A3 Wall 3123 (after removal of stones 3141) above white plaster layer 3145, capping the A4 destruction. Note burnt material in lower part of western balk in background

Detail of previous photo: Square A/14, looking west at A4 destruction debris under A3 Wall 3123 with white plaster 3145; note brick superstructure of A4 Wall 2169 on the left; note also the burnt material in balk west of Wall 3123 (with meter stick).

At the northern end of Locus 3122 (northwest of the northern cut end of Wall 3123) a large broken smoothed basalt slab was found, leaning against the northern balk. It is not clear to which phase it should be ascribed.

Square A/13
Bordering the activity described above in Square A/14 was Wall 3102 (inside the balk between A/13-14), a short segment of an east-west stone wall, covered by Stratum A2 Wall 1142. This wall is the eastern continuation of Wall 1158, found in Square T/13 just to the west. Together, they run some 3.5 m; the eastern end of Wall 3102 terminates just about on the line of Wall 3123 (in Square A/14 to the south), while Wall 1158 (the western end) continues into the western balk. It seems reasonable to assume that Walls 3102 and 3123 had cornered, a corner damaged when A2 Wall 1130 was built here.

Square A/13, A3 Wall 3102, looking southwest. A2 Wall 1126 above, A4 Wall 2107 below; right: A4 stone collapse 3139 – Square T/13. Bottom: A5 debris 3171
Square T/13, A3 Wall 1158 (western continuation of Wall 3102), looking south; A2 Wall 1147 above on right; A4 stone collapse 3139 on bottom, below 1158

To the north of Wall 3102 in the western end of Square A/14, the higher step left in 2014 was excavated. Wall 1126 was found to clearly run above Wall 3102 and is thus understood to not be related to A3. This context, abutting Wall 3102, contained debris (3101) with much pottery, possibly restorable (though not complete smashed vessels), burnt charcoal, ash, stones and an oven in its center (3114), on the same line as Oven 3116 to the south and at the same elevation. This debris rested on an earthen floor (3110 in the south and 3111 in the north) that was the same level as the floor identified in the 2013 season in the eastern part of this square and attributed to A3 (Floor 1140). The same can be said about the layer to the west in Square T/13 (1141) that was attributed to A3; although no clear floor was found, it is on the same level as 3110/3111.

Loci 3110 and 3111 were separated because of a short row of rectangular (in the west) and round (in the east) stones (3112) identified in the northern part of the higher step east of A2 Wall 1126. These were thought to be part of a stone pavement incorporated in the A3 floor, so 3110 is south of the stones and 3111 to the north. However, 3112 proved to be capstones of an intrusive grave (3177) so in fact, 3110 and 3111 are one and the same. On the northern end of 3111 was a fine stone basin, whose top was on level with the bottom of A2 Wall 1118. This basin was related to the A3 activity here.
Square A/13, looking north on A3 floor 3110; oven 3114 on right and later grave 3112/3177 on north; stone basin on floor 3111 to north

No wall was found to the north of Wall 3102 and, in fact, the A3 activity excavated in Square A/13 continues in Square A/12 in the form of the previously uncovered oven.
(1166) and pithos installation (1165) that flank the top of A4 Wall 2145 (see 2014 report). This oven and installation were on more or less the same line as ovens 3114 and 3116 to the south (described above), as was the basin. Thus, the open area bounded on the south by Wall 3102 continues at least 7.5 m to the north.

All the A3 floors in Square A/13 (and in T/13 to the west) were laid on top of the A4 debris layers in this area, which related to A4 walls (see description above) below.

**Square S/12**

The remains attributed to Stratum A3 in Square A/12 were reached in the last days of excavation in 2015 and thus, the following is a tentative understanding.

At the level where pot bellows 3147 was floating (Locus 3155), the matrix began to change to more burnt orangey and charcoal material and just about on this level, an oven (3178) was revealed to the north of where the pot bellows had stood. The layer associated with it is 3175 (though in fact the same as 3155, just a technical change when the oven appeared). To the east of where the pot bellows had been set, under the stones of A2 Wall 2138 and the threshold/blockage to its north, an additional oven was revealed (3176). A row of stones extends from this oven to the west; they are not sufficiently exposed as of yet to understand if they are built or collapse. It does not seem as though we are yet on a floor and, judging by the elevations in comparison to those of A3 elements in the east, we are ca. 25 cm above that level. It is not clear at this point if there is any relationship between the pot bellows and this activity (debris, ovens, stones). The pot was found in secondary use, sunken into the floor of the early phase of Stratum A2 (see below). The question is whether it was in use in this earlier A3(?) phase as well; perhaps this was the original phase of this pot. This needs further excavation to get more data.

An interesting feature in this level in Square S/12 is the fact that Walls 2126 and 2128 bound this space, as they do in the two phases of A2 above. This is the only case in which A3 walls continued in use in A2. Moreover, the construction of these walls is far superior to those securely attributed to A3 in the eastern part of the area. Alternatively, what we are seeing here are deep foundations of A2 walls.
Square S/12; layer 3175 and top of oven 3178, looking east. Pot bellows floating.

Square S/12, looking east, after removal of pot bellows 3147.

Square S/12, closeup of oven 3176 under threshold into room (early phase)
Stratum A-2

Fig. 4. Plan of Stratum A2
Schematic plan of eastern and western units

Squares S-T/12
The focus of work in Stratum A2 in 2015 was in the passageway between the eastern and western units; dismantling the balk between Squares S/12 and T/12 contributed to our understanding of the situation here. It became clear that there are square stone buttresses at the ends of the east-west walls in both the eastern and the western units in this square. The buttress (2118) on the eastern end of Wall 1136 is the best preserved and of fine construction; buttress 3167 on the western end of Wall 2128 is damaged on its north by pit 2149/3142. The southern part of buttress 3167 contains a large worked basalt stone, near the threshold in Wall 2138 (see below). Buttresses 2118 and 3167 are opposite each other, ca. 2 m between them, and both measure ca. 0.95x 0.95 cm.
Looking down at passageway lines with buttresses.

Square S/12, looking southwest at Buttress 3167

The two southern buttresses in Square T/12 (at the eastern end of Wall 1120 and the western end of Wall 2126, both unnumbered as of yet) are partly inside the southern balk and need to be fully excavated to better understand. The southeastern buttress (at the end of Wall 1120) seems to be floating but this needs to be further clarified.

Floor 3168 (376.70) in the passageway, covered by debris 3165, was well made of plaster and pebbles. This floor abuts Wall 1114, Buttress 3167, Buttress 2118, and Wall 2170 of the cultic niche (see below). It is not clear whether it abuts Wall 2151 (see description below), which seems to be lower (possibly A3?). Floor 3168 is attributed to the early phase of Stratum A2, equaling Floor 2161 inside the room to the west. This is based mainly on elevations, since no later floor was found, mostly
due to damage caused by later pits. This floor was quite empty of finds, other than some pottery sherds, bones and flints.

In the southeastern part of the exposed passageway is what seems to be a cultic niche, with a slightly northwest-southeast screen wall (2170), ca. 2.1 m long, that encloses a small area between it and the western face of Wall 1114. Against this face, just north of the southeastern buttress (at the end of Wall 1120) is a feature that might be a bamah—two large rounded smooth basalt stones stacked on top of each other. The floor between Wall 2170 and bamah 3170 is 3169—it is identical in makeup and elevation to that of 3168 in the passageway and might be the same floor, with Wall 2170 built on top of it.

![Cultic niche in southeastern corner of Squares T-S/12, looking southeast. Note buttresses along walls and floor 3168 in passageway](image)

*Room 2153/2161 (the Western Unit)*

The floor of the early phase in the western room (2161) was reached in the 2014 season. Excavating into the floor makeup revealed a complete pot bellows sunken into the floor, its rim surrounded by small stones and apparently in secondary use as a pit. Inside this pot were ash, charcoal bits, bones burnt green, bits of bronze, a tuyere fragment and iron fragment (detected with a magnet).
Squares S-T/12; western room with pot bellows 3147 in A2 Floor 2161.

Wall 2138, the closing wall on the east of the western room (2153=late A2, 2161=early A2), has a threshold leading into the room from the passageway on the east. It seems that there had been two levels of threshold, to match the two floors in this room. Both were made of flattened basalt stones.
Square S/12, looking west at Wall 2138 and thresholds to its north. Note pot bellows 3147 exposed down to floating level.

The upper threshold was found at the level of 377.28 and the lower level is 376.69, only a few cm higher than the floor level inside and just on the level of the floor (3168) in the passageway. Between the two there is a soil fill, part of the floor rising. However, the Wall 2138 appears to relate only to the upper threshold. If so, then in the early phase of A2, one would enter the western space from the passageway through a wide entrance, partly paved with a basalt stone, while in the later phase of A2, a short wall (2138) was built on the south (cornering with Wall 2126), narrowing the entrance into the room. However, this reconstruction needs to be further examined.

Just below the lower threshold was oven 3176, attributed to Stratum A3 (see description and photos above).

Wall 2151

Wall 2151 is a short segment of a stone wall that continues into the northern balk. It extends from the northwestern corner of Buttress 2118 and it is not yet clear whether it is earlier than the buttress (as presently thought, and thus it is attributed to Stratum A3. Wall 2151 is opposite Wall 2144 that extends to the north from Wall 2128 of the western room. This would support the attribution of Wall 2151 to Stratum A2 and not A3. However, further work is necessary to understand the stratigraphy of this wall.
Square T/12, looking east; Wall 2151 and Buttress 2118

*Square A/14*

Excavation in the western part of the square showed that Walls 1125 and 1130 formed a corner that was apparently partially disturbed by a pit. Wall 1125 was removed, and the eastern part of Wall 1130 as well. Wall 1130 was found to cover Stratum A3 Wall 3102.
Area A, end of 2015 season; north on the right
Aerial view, eastern part of Area A, end of 2015 season; north to the left

Aerial view, western and southeastern part of Area A, end of 2015 season; north to the right
Appendix: Burial 3177

In the northwestern part of Square A/13, a human burial was found dug into the matrix of A3 debris 3101 and Floor 3111 and penetrated down to just above the debris (3134, 3148) on the A4 floor (2162) below. Its western end cut the northern end of A2 Wall 1126. The burial was covered by two rectangular stones on the west and several rounded stones on the east (3112) (top at 376.42-38). Under these stones were a row of irregular sized stones lining the grave on the north, some standing; one of them was broken stone basin, found near the skull, standing on its narrow edge.

The skeleton was found lying on its right side, with both arms in front, hands in front of the pelvis, in a good state of preservation, facing south. Upon discovery, the remains were excavated carefully using dental tools and a wooden skewer. After photos and drawings, some of the semi-circular grave stones were removed in order to continue. Working photos were taken throughout the process. We excavated with latex gloves and a surgical mask in order preserve its integrity for later DNA analysis by the physical anthropologist, to whom the bones were being sent. When removed, the bones were separated into corresponding bags (left arm, right arm, left foot, etc.). Carbon 14 dating of the skeleton by the Weizmann Institute of Science showed that it is an intrusive feature, most likely to be dated to the early Islamic period.

Skeletons in Square A/12

The intrusion of this grave to such a low level is interesting, indicating that the inhabitants of the site at the time when the grave was dug, were aware of the early remains. In light of the late date of this skeleton, it is possible that the two skeletons in Square A/12 found in the Stratum A4 destruction might also be intrusive. The southern skeleton was facing south, laid against Wall 2143, but not in a built grave like burial 3177. The northern skeleton in that square was very poorly preserved but also seems to have been facing south. This may support the idea that they were indeed later, Islamic burials.
Capstones 3112 of grave 3177, looking north; A3 stone basin in background. Note cut in A2 Wall 1126 where westernmost rectangular stone is.

Skeleton in grave 3177, looking northwest, after removal of basin by skull (exposed at a lower level)

Broken basin near skull