Background

A survey was conducted at Tel Abel Beth Maacah (Grid reference: 254508/795860; Avel Bet Maakha; Tell Abil el-Qamh) between May 21-May 24, 2012, under the direction of Nava Panitz-Cohen, Ruhama Bonfil (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and Robert Mullins (Azusa Pacific University). The IAA License No. is G-26/2012. A total of 23 volunteers participated, including students from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem University College, and the University of the Holy Land, as well as volunteers from the kibbutzim and moshavim in the vicinity. Ruhama Bonfil, aided by Maya Oron (GIS Total Station), was the surveyor.
The goals of the survey were to obtain a chronological profile of the site and to clarify potential excavation areas, in preparation for an excavation season planned for 2013. The survey methodology included two parts: excavation to a depth of up to 20 cm (‘scratch survey’) in chosen areas and systematic walking surveys. Both activities were mainly conducted in areas of the tell that are not occupied by remains of the village Abil al-Qamh in the central part of the site, as identified based on British-mandate period aerial photos and maps (Fig. 1), as well as on ruins on the site.

![Fig. 1. Aerial photo, 1945, showing limits of the village Abil al-Qamh on the tell](image)

In order to allow for a comprehensive examination and survey of the site and its immediate vicinity, the area designated for research was set between the northwestern map coordinate 254000/796500 and the southeastern coordinate 255000/795500 of the New Israel Grid. This area was divided into squares of 100 x 100 m, lettered from west to east and numbered from north to south (Figs. 2–3).
Fig. 2. Location of 100 x 100 sq m grid on the tell
Fig. 3. Topographic map of Tel Abel Beth Maachah and its immediate environs, with the location of the 100 x 100 sq m grid and the excavation areas marked; boundaries agricultural fields of Abil al-Qamh marked by light blue lines.
The ‘Scratch Survey’

Seven areas (A–G) were chosen for the shallow probes of the ‘scratch survey’ (Figs. 3–4): Areas B–E in Squares 305–306 on the upper mound in the north, Area A in Squares 506–507 in the center, and Areas F–G in Squares 905 and 1005 at the southern edge of the lower mound. They were chosen based on two main factors: location in an area of strategic interest on the tell and prominence of elements visible on the surface (Figs. 3–4).

Fig. 4. Aerial photo of Tel Abel Beth Maacah; excavation areas marked in yellow (seen in relation to ruins Abil al-Qamh); borders of agricultural plots from the Mandatory period marked green.
Fig. 5. Topographic map of the tell and its environs, 1942

Fig. 6. Location of 2012 scratch survey excavation area on modern aerial photo, with borders of agricultural plots from the Mandatory period marked (see Fig. 5)
**Area A (Squares 506 and 507)**

Area A is located on the eastern slope of the tell, along the margins of the modern eastern access road to the tell (Figs. 3–4, 8). This route is more or less follows one of the roads leading to the Arab village, as the 1945 aerial photos show (see Figs. 1, 4, 7). It was chosen due to prominent elements that were visible, mainly walls composed of large stones on both sides of the road at its bend to the west (Areas A1 and A2), and a section devoid of vegetation with stone walls in the eastern slope just before this point (Area A3). This erosion caused by the cut of the modern access road to the summit here exposed much of the visible remains. It was thus chosen to examine the possible relationship between modern agricultural terrace walls and ancient walls and building material, as well as to obtain a chronological profile from the associated sherds.

Fig. 7. Location of Area A (A1, A2, A3) marked on topographic map and on 1945 aerial photo
Area A1 (Square 506)

Fig. 8. Area A, showing the location of the sub-areas on the grid map (left) and on the 1945 aerial photo (right)

A wall, built of both small and large mostly unhewn stones, was visible in the southwestern section of the eastern slope (Fig. 9), just where the road leading to the tell’s summit turned to the west.

Fig. 9. Area A1, looking southwest at Wall A1/14, before cleaning
Cleaning the northern face of Wall A1/13 and trimming the slope below it revealed that it was only a short (c. 1.1 m) segment standing c. 80 cm high. Very little pottery, an amorphous iron fragment and bits of glass were associated with this cleaning, with the few indicative sherds apparently dating to the Ottoman period. One large stone was incorporated in the top of the eastern end of this wall. Several stones to the west of Wall A1/13 (the top one very large) that appear stacked might represent
a north-south wall (unnumbered), although this was not clear. Excavation of a small area on the slope below the floating level of Wall A1/13 to a depth of c. 25 cm reached a layer with reddish burnt brick debris interspersed with small dark ash patches (Locus A1/9; Fig. 11) that contained pottery dating to the Iron Age I, including a collared-rim pithos rim and a complete lamp. It thus seems that Wall A1/13 can be defined as a modern terrace wall, perhaps incorporating several large worked ancient stones in secondary use. Indeed, the GIS analysis which plotted a layer showing the agricultural plots on the 1945 aerial photo together with our results, has shown that this wall fits the line of the wall bordering the approach road (see Figs 1, 7–8).

**Area A2 (Square 506)**

Area A2 (see Fig. 8 for location) entailed the cleaning of the southeastern face of a wall (Wall A2/14; Fig. 12) that hugged the southern section above the access road, opposite and slightly further to the east of the remains in Area A1 described above.

![Fig. 12. Area A2. Terrace wall A2/14, looking north.](image)

Very little pottery was found associated with the stones of Wall A2/14 and the area below it to its south (Locus A2/2), apparently to be dated to the Medieval and Ottoman periods, based on the few sherds associated with it. The nature of the construction of this wall, which includes large and small unworked stones, suggests that it is an agricultural terrace wall. This is supported by our GIS analyses, where the location of Wall A2/14 fits the wall which borders the main eastern road to the Arab village (see Figs. 1, 7–8); this wall faces the wall (A1/13) exposed in Area A1, described above.
Area A3 (Square 507, sub-squares B/13–14)

Fig. 13. Location and plan of Area A3
The activity in Area A3 entailed the trimming of a section that was exposed in the activity in Area A3 entailed eastern section of the slope above the access road, showing mainly a segment of a north–south wall and a stone slab (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14. Area A/3, section in eastern slope, before cleaning and trimming

After cleaning and trimming the section, it was seen that three levels are apparently represented here (Fig. 16):

1) A north–south wall (Wall A3/11) that is composed mainly of small and medium-sized unworked stones and continues to the north; it is abutted on the north (corner?) by an east–west wall (Wall A3/5). Wall A3/5 was built of one row of slightly worked stones, the uppermost quite large; a layer with dark ash that might be a floor,
containing pottery apparently to be dated to Iron IIA (Locus A3/4), ran up to the southern face of Wall A3/5.

2) A concentration of somewhat disorderly stones below the foundation of Wall A3/5 apparently represents an earlier phase of these walls. A layer that seems to be a floor (Locus A3/10), sloping slightly down to the south, abutted these stones on their south; this layer contained a large amount of sherds, including a smashed storage jar (left in the field) with inside of which was white powdery material and a painted carinated krater (partially restorable), apparently to be dated to Iron I.

3) A flat stone slab sealed by the layer described in (2); an intact ring flask (A3/19) was found on the stone, in a debris layer (Locus A3/12) (Figs. 17–19). The relationship between this debris and Locus A3/10 remains unclear. The possibility was considered that the stone slab might be an entrance to a tomb that lies to the west; alternatively, it is a threshold into a room whose walls might be slightly inside (i.e., to the west) the presently exposed section.

Above the walls is a c. 40 cm deep layer of dark sterile agricultural soil (Locus A3/6) (Fig. 15). This area above the section of Area A/3 and to its west, north and south, was not occupied by building remains of the modern village (Fig. 8) and is potential for excavation of Iron Age I and IIA levels in the future.

Fig. 15. Area A/3, looking west at section above the access road, after initial cleaning and trimming; note top level of tell with layer of agricultural soil above walls
Fig. 16. Area A/3, looking west at the section; Walls A3/5 and A3/11 and elements below. Note layer with pottery (Locus A3/10) running under the upper phase of Wall A3/5 and possibly abutting its early phase; the stone slab is below this layer.

Fig. 17. Detail of stone slab with ring flask exposed above it (Locus A3/12), looking west.
Area B (Square 306; sub-squares E–F/19–20)

Area B (Fig. 20) was chosen for excavation due to the well-built wall (Wall B/1) comprised of large stones visible at the top of the southern end of the eastern slope of the upper mound (Fig. 21). Work entailed the cleaning and exposure of the top and the eastern face of this wall (Locus B/2), which was uncovered over a length of c. 4.4 m. The stones of this wall were all large and roughly worked (Figs. 22–23). On one hand, they do not appear to be typical of a modern agricultural terrace wall and they might be in secondary use. On the other hand, they are quite well fitted together. It may be questioned whether this was an ancient wall, or part of it, that could have been used in modern times as a terrace wall. Excavation to its west may provide an answer. At the termination of the survey, it was not yet clear whether Wall B/1 was floating; it seems that it does continue down. The slightly sloping area to the east of this wall was
Fig. 20. Location of Area B and plan; note location of enclosure wall of upper mound in relation to wall in Area B
cleaned and excavated (Loci B/1, B/3). Two nicely worked flattened basalt slabs were found in this debris (Fig. 22). The pottery appears to date to the Medieval and Ottoman periods.

According to our GIS analyses, the location of Wall B/4 falls on the line of a wall which enclosed the tell summit during the occupation of the Arab village (Fig. 20). It should emphasized that the summit of the tell was not settled or cultivated during the period of the last Arab village (Fig. 24).

Fig. 21. Area B, Wall B/1 before cleaning and exposure, looking northwest

Fig. 22. Wall B/1, looking west, after cleaning. Note basalt slabs in debris in front of wall
Fig. 24. Location of Areas B, C, D and E on upper mound, marked on 1945 aerial photo showing houses of village.
Area C (Square 305; sub-squares N/19–20)

Area C is located on the eastern margin of the access road just before its final climb to the summit of the upper tell (Fig. 25). It was chosen due to prominent large stones visible on the eastern margin of the road and to the fact that it is believed to be beyond the northern border of the village Abil al-Qamh, as seen in the aerial photos from 1945. Work entailed delineating the tops of the stones visible in the road and c. 1 m to their east. What appears to be a north-south wall (Wall C/1) composed of two rows of slightly worked field stones abuts a large flat-topped worked stone on its south, which must have been a threshold (Figs. 26–27). Two stones of a wall (Wall C/2) continuing to the east abut this stone. A concentration of small closely packed stones along the eastern face of Wall C/1 might represent remains of a floor. The small amount of pottery associated with these walls appears to date to the Medieval period. It is possible that this represents a building dating to the pre-village occupation, or to an early phase of the village itself, that was no longer visible in the aerial photos at our disposal (see Fig. 24).
Fig. 25. Location and plan of Area C
Fig. 26. Area C, looking north; meter stick in front of possible threshold

Fig. 27. Area C, Wall C/1, looking south; possible threshold stone in upper center

**The ‘Enclosure’ Wall**

The walking survey to southwest of this area (west of the approach road to the summit) identified a well-built wall running east–west, found in sub-squares K–L/6 of Square 405 (Fig. 28). This wall has an apparent entranceway near its western end, with a finely worked door jamb stone (Fig. 29). Our GIS analyses showed that this wall falls right on the line of the wall which encloses the tell summit during the occupation of the Arab village (Fig. 25); see also above, Area B (although the nature
of the construction of the wall in Area B is entirely different from the ‘enclosure’ wall in the southwest of Area C).

Fig. 28. Top of ‘enclosure’ wall southwest of Area C, looking northwest

Fig. 29. Possible entrance in ‘enclosure’ wall, with standing door jamb
Area D (Square 305; sub-squares N–O/15–16)

Area D is located on the western end of the southern slope of the upper mound (see Figs. 24, 30).

Fig. 30. Location of Area D and plan
It extends from the access road to the western end of the tell at this point, although only its eastern half was excavated down past topsoil. A concentration of amorphic field stones was uncovered just under topsoil (Locus D/1) (Figs. 31–32). Very little pottery was associated with these stones, all of it unindicative and apparently Medieval and later. Although the squares of Area D are south of the military bunker on the summit (see below, Area E), it is possible that the debris and stones here represent a dump down the slope when the bunker was built.

Fig. 31. The two squares of Area D, looking west; stones in northeast part of the area

Fig. 32. Area D, looking southeast; stones of Locus D/1. People down the slope are standing in Area C
Area E (Square 305; sub-squares P–Q/10–11)

Area E is located on the summit of the tell (see Figs. 24, 33), in an area exposed between the lines of a military bunker that was dug into this northernmost part of the site, providing a panoramic view (Fig. 34). This area serves as a parking lot for visitors who drive up to the summit, as well as for army vehicles on patrol, and thus

Fig. 33. Location and plan of Area E
was not covered with the thick vegetation and weeds that characterized the rest of the site.

Just under the hard-packed topsoil were concentrations of field stones, one of which with an oval shape (ca. 1.2 m long), while the other to its southeast, was less well defined. The orientation of the oval was more or less southwest to northeast. Among the stones were a few worked basalt stones that apparently were grinding stones or pounders. The contour of the stones suggest these are remains of post-antiquity graves. V. Guerrin, who visited the site in 1880, mentioned that the northwestern part of the mound was occupied by such a cemetery, belonging to the villagers of Abil al-Qamh. A map dating to 1942 shows that a cemetery occupied the northern and eastern slopes of the upper mound. Only a small section of this area was exposed and was re-covered immediately at the end of the survey. It is thus unknown to what extent these graves continue to the south; obviously, the construction of the military bunker destroyed a number of them along the perimeter of the highest summit of the site.
Fig. 34. Area E; area between sides of army bunker, looking southwest

Fig. 35. Area E, looking northwest. Concentrations of stones, apparently representing graves of the Medieval cemetery of Abil Al-Qamh
**Area F (Square 905, sub-squares R/5–6)**

Area F is located at the southern edge of the lower mound, in its eastern part (Figs. 36–37).

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Fig. 36. Location and plan of Area F
It was opened due to the exposure in topsoil of two large stones. Excavation down c. 10 cm revealed three large stones (Wall F/1) and a scattering of field stones to their west and southwest. Wall F/1 comprised two large roughly rounded/worked stones with a worked rectangular stone between them (Fig. 38). A fair amount of pottery was recovered from between and around the stones (Locus F/2), dating to Iron IIA and including restorable body sherds (Fig. 39). Wall F/1 continues to the north into the balk and descends slightly. These stones are understood as being part of a wall, although it is possible that they are capstones for a burial, although this is a less likely alternative.

Fig. 37. Location of Areas F and G in lower mound, marked on 1945 aerial photo
Area G (Square 1005, sub-squares O/3–4)

Area G was opened on the lower southern terrace of the tell (see Figs. 37, 40) in order to ascertain if this part of the tell was occupied in antiquity. Excavating 10 cm down did not reveal any architecture (Fig. 40) and only a small amount of unindicative sherds was found. It seems that the coverage of agricultural soil in this step of the mound is deeper than in the higher part of the lower mound, where ancient ruins are right under topsoil.
The Walking Survey (Figs. 41–49)
The systematic walking survey of the lower tell and its slopes, as well as the western slope of the upper tell, was conducted on Wednesday afternoon, May 23 and Thursday, May 24, with the participation of 18 volunteers, who were divided into three teams. Each team was given a topographic map of the tell and was designated a strip: east, center and west (Fig. 41). As the team walked the strip and picked up sherds on the ground, the bags into which they were put were marked on the plan. This method was used for the three main segments: the eastern slope, the top of the lower tell, the western slope (which included the slope of the upper mound as well). The segments that were surveyed avoided the identified ruins of the abandoned village, mostly represented by terrace walls in the northern part of the lower tell. In addition, an area proposed to be a possible Assyrian siege ramp adjoining the northwestern corner of the tell was surveyed.

Each bag of sherds was marked with the segment of the strip, i.e.: Eastern slope: eastern strip, northern segment; Lower tell: central strip, central section, etc. Following this, each strip was sub-divided into north and south and pottery collected accordingly. These were also marked on the relevant topographic map. Due to the heavy weed and thorn cover, it was difficult to recover the sherds in topsoil, although
it was clear that they were not very plentiful, other than the southwestern slope, where the most sherds

Fig. 41. Topographic map of the tel with survey strips and finds survey marked
were picked up. The overwhelming majority of the sherds were not indicative. Periods represented:

Early Bronze II: large amount on southwestern slope
Middle Bronze Age: middle and south of center of lower tell, southwestern slope, few
Late Bronze Age: sporadic sherds in lower tell
Iron Age I: sporadic sherds in lower tell
Iron Age II: relatively large amount, mostly in center and southern part of lower tell
Medieval and Ottoman: all segments, relatively less than in upper mound

Additional features identified in the walking survey included:

1) An exposed strip of bedrock running like a backbone through the central part of the lower mound, with several outcroppings in the eastern part (all were mapped by the surveyor). In these outcroppings were a number of subterranean caves or chasms, apparently natural but some altered by human activity (Figs. 46–47). Their interiors were not explored.

2) In the lower part of the eastern slope, central segment, were five rock-carved tombs, comprising a staircase leading down to an arched entranceway (Fig. 48). One tomb explored during the survey had a rounded burial chamber with arched arcosolia carved into the walls; the interior of the arcosolia appear to have been benches that were subsequently carved into troughs. One such trough contained human remains, and some wood, indicating that these might be an intrusive and relatively modern reuse of the cave. Clearly, there is a lower level to the tomb, indicated by an arched opening full of debris on the left (south) side of the tomb (Fig. 49). Another such opening appears also on the north side (below the burial bench), but it is almost entirely filled in.
Fig. 42. Method of conducting walking survey; lower tell, looking south.

Fig. 43. Surveying the possible Assyrian siege ramp on the northwestern side of the tell, looking northwest

Fig. 44. Surveying western slope, central segment, near saddle in slope that might indicate the existence of an ancient gate. Looking south
Fig. 45. Walking survey of western segment of lower tell; looking west.

Fig. 46. Natural outcropping of bedrock and cave in east-center of lower tell; looking southeast.

Fig. 47. Outcropping of bedrock with subterranean chasm (filled in); lower tell.
Fig. 48. Entrance to one of the rock-carved tombs in the central-eastern lower slope. Staircase descent not exposed in this tomb.

Fig. 49. Inside of tomb: carved entrance to lower level (on lower right); man’s right hand resting on modern wood on burial bench; left hand on a burial bench.