

Tall el-Hammam

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From January to March 2020, on Tall el-Hammam's upper city acropolis (fields UA and UB), the fifteenth season of excavations exposed and clarified Iron Age Ila-b, Late Bronze Age II, and Middle Bronze Age II architecture in twelve excavation squares.

Iron Age II (Strata VII-X)

On the upper tall's southwest extremity (field UA), in square 2BB, the well-preserved (and plastered) mud-brick superstructure (12–20 courses high, 2 m thick) of a monumental tower (with interior “empty space” dimensions of 4.10 m x 7.3 m) was discovered sitting on 3 m-thick dry-laid stone foundations about 3 m deep. The interior faces of all the stone foundations were also heavily plastered, forming a “basement” space below grade. It was built in association with the “governor's residence,” which abuts a substantial twelve-room warehouse to the northeast (which has an identically constructed stone foundation and mud-brick superstructure)—all enclosed by the final version of the Iron Age Ila city wall. The large stone foundations and associated engineered fill created a high-profile platform for both multistoried monumental buildings. Beneath the Iron Age Ila tower foundations, three additional Iron Age architectural phases were identified, the earliest being a large Iron Age Ila stone-lined silo. Additional early Iron Age Ila (stratum X) stone-lined silos and stone wall foundations were found across fields UA and UB, including 10 m-long W503, which served as an exterior boundary for a series of rooms. Short-life (barley) samples found in the destruction level of the “governor's residence,” warehouse, other administrative and domestic structures, and the city wall and gate complex of stratum VIII date the site's final Iron Age II destruction to the last third of the 9th century BCE. The authors attribute this destruction to Aramaean military action.

Late Bronze Age II (Stratum XI)

Additional architectural elements of a single, short-lived, freestanding, multiroom, one-story, 10 m x 10 m structure dating to the 14th century BCE (based on date ranges and ceramics)—built after three centuries of abandonment—were excavated. Presumption of a “customs house” controlling and taxing traffic on roads intersecting at the site is based on previously found objects, including pieces of carbonized furniture, a set of bronze balance-scale pans, weights, amulets, numerous painted pottery vessels, and sherds typical of the Late Bronze II ceramic repertoire. Large timbers and heavier-than-domestic construction suggest an “official” government function, presumably during Egypt's domination of the southern Levant (late 15th–14th



centuries BCE) and destroyed by fire in the late 14th century BCE. This season, fragmentary walls and a main double-doored entry to this building were found directly on remains of the northeast exterior wall of the Middle Bronze II palace complex.

Middle Bronze Age (Strata XIIA, XIIB, XIIIC [MB2]; XIII [MB1])

In square UB.5II, a section of the upper city's brick-on-stone wall foundation (W559) emerged with an exterior-offset defensive tower (with interior stairway) that had likely been added later—all atop an underlying defensive rampart constructed almost entirely of mud bricks, its glacis forming field UB's northwest-facing slope (Fig. 1). Immediately inside this wall/tower, a ring road separated the upper city defenses from parallel 2.2 m-thick stone-and-mudbrick W522. W522 forms a corner with W493, both having mud bricks with the same dimensions (averaging 40 x 40 x 12 cm). W493 represents the palace's northeast exterior wall, and W522 its northwest wall. In square UA.6HH, W522 ended, creating a possible 2.2 m-wide entryway. Opposite the southwest end of W522, W527 formed the other side of a passageway from the ring road into the palace—with evidence of an earlier mud-plaster and later lime-plaster floor a few centimeters above. In square UA.2BB on the upper tall's southwest edge, the southwest (exterior) face of a wide brick-on-stone-foundation wall was found with the same orientation and on the same level as W493 (the palace's northeast exterior wall). With the mud bricks of both being the same size (and having dimensions larger than those of the interior mud-brick walls), this wall is almost certainly the palace's southwest exterior wall, given its proximity to the southwest slope of the upper tall.

Project website: tallelhammam.com

Fig. 1. Middle Bronze Age II upper city wall and tower. (Photo courtesy of the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project.)

