

## LACHISH

### Renewed Archaeological Excavations

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#### LACHISH AND THE PREVIOUS EXCAVATIONS

Lachish was one of the most important cities of the Biblical era in the Holy Land. Situated southwest of Jerusalem, it is represented today by a huge, impressive mound, named Tel Lachish or Tell ed-Duweir.

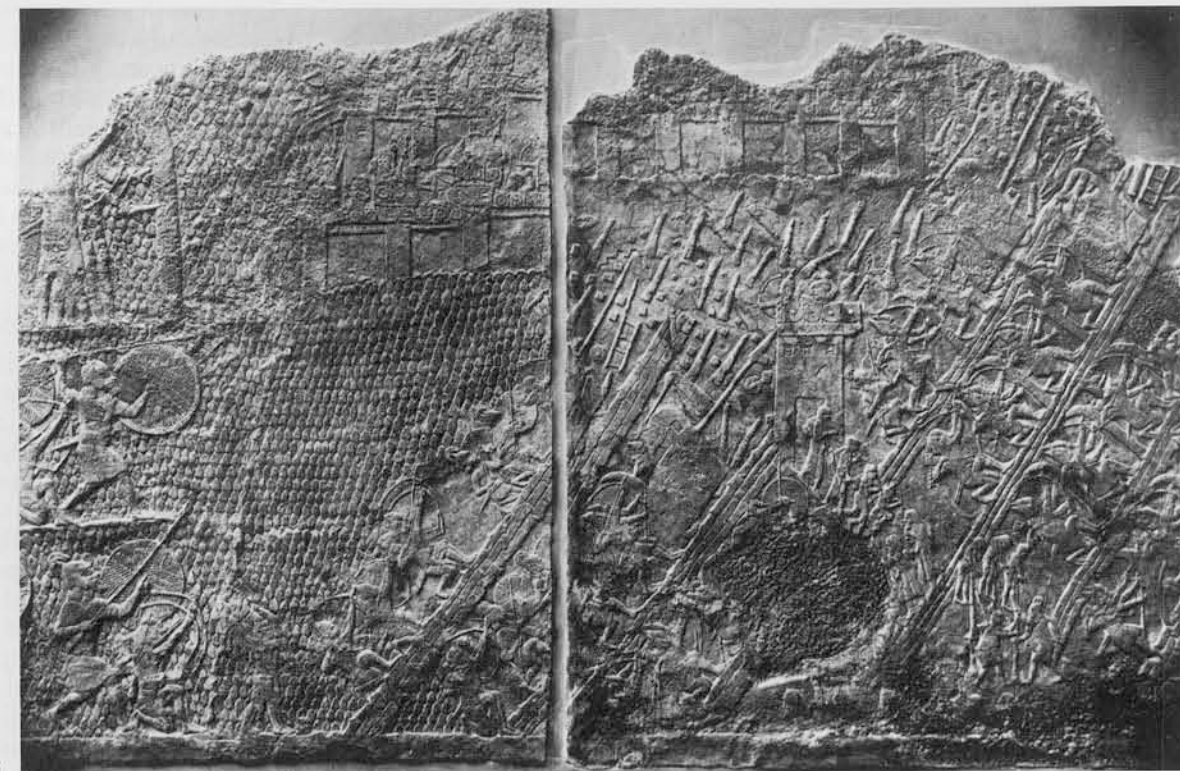
Lachish was already a large city during the third millennium B.C. During the Middle Bronze Age, in the first half of the second millennium B.C. Lachish was heavily fortified by a glacis and a fosse, which gave the mound its present conspicuous shape. During the Late Bronze Age it was a large Canaanite city-state, and a few letters from Lachish were found in the fourteenth century royal Egyptian archives at El-Amarna. Lachish played a major role in the story of the Israelite conquest of Canaan as related in Joshua 10. Joshua and the Israelites fought against Japhia, king of Lachish, destroyed the city and killed its inhabitants. Following the final destruction of the Canaanite city, Lachish was nearly abandoned for about two hundred years, till the tenth century B.C.

During the first half of the first millennium B.C., at the period of the Kingdom of Judah, Lachish was again a fortified city, and in fact it was the most important Judean city after Jerusalem. It played a special role in 701 B.C., when Sennacherib king of Assyria invaded Judah, and conquered all the fortified cities except Jerusalem. His royal camp—as we learn from the Old Testament—was situated near Lachish, which he stormed and conquered. A unique set of stone-reliefs portraying in detail the conquest of Lachish

was placed by Sennacherib in a special centrally situated room in his royal palace at Nineveh. These reliefs are now exhibited in the British Museum in London. The detailed reliefs and their position in the royal palace show that the conquest of Lachish was of singular importance. This was, perhaps, the most important military achievement of Sennacherib—undoubtedly the most powerful ruler of this part of the world—during the earlier part of his reign. In 588/6 B.C., Lachish was stormed and burnt again, this time by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. After that, when the country was under Persian domination in the fifth-fourth centuries B.C., Lachish served as a district capital, and then finally was deserted.

Tel Lachish was excavated for six years, between 1933 and 1938, by a British expedition directed by J. L. Starkey. Starkey planned the work systematically and on a large scale for many years to come, and dedicated the first excavation seasons to digging areas beside the mound, and graveyards in its vicinity. Relatively little work was carried out on the mound proper. Special mention should be made of the latest Judean city gate, where the famous "Lachish Letters" were discovered in 1934. These are eighteen ostraca dating to the final period before the Babylonian conquest of Judah, letters sent to a military commander in Lachish, which reflect the mood of the period.

The excavations came to an end in 1938, shortly after Starkey was brutally murdered



1  
Tel Lachish: general view  
from the northwest.

2  
Storming the city of  
Lachish—a detail of the  
Lachish Reliefs.

by Arab marauders while on his way from Lachish to the opening ceremony of the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem. After Starkey's death, his assistant Olga Tufnell worked for twenty years on the data and finds of the excavations, and produced a meticulous excavation report.

The mound remained untouched till the present excavations, except for a small dig carried out by Professor Yohanan Aharoni of Tel Aviv University in the eastern part of the mound to investigate some of his theories concerning the Judean shrine at Arad.

#### THE PRESENT EXCAVATIONS

In 1973 the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University and the Israel Exploration Society resumed the excavations at the site under my direction. The work is sponsored by a few public bodies, primarily the Samuel H. Kress Foundation in New York, as well as The Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon, The University of South Africa in Pretoria, The Australian Institute of Archaeology and the Jewish National Fund.

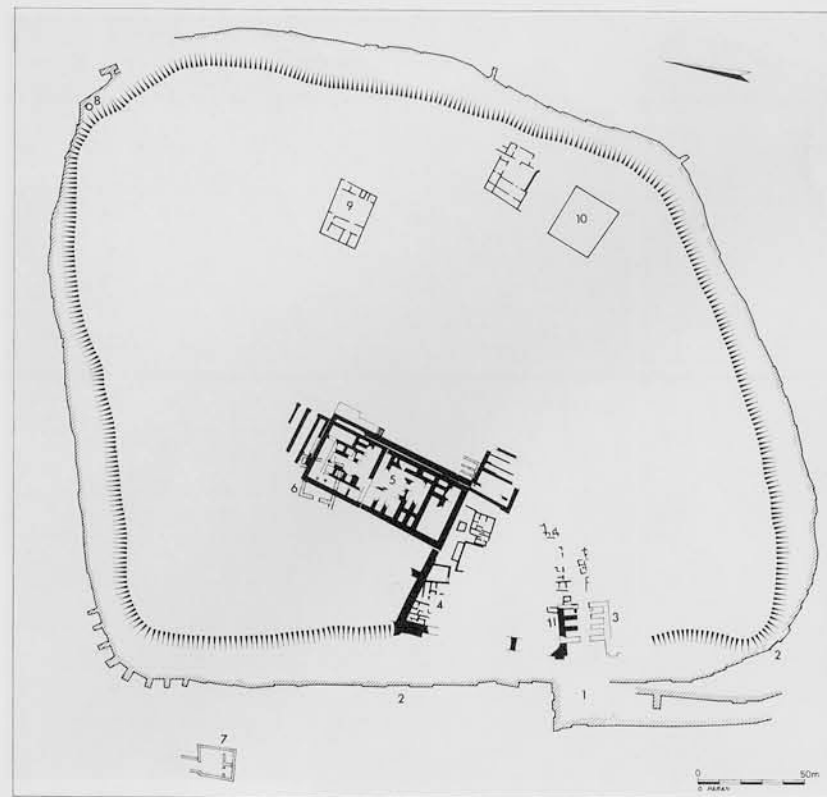
The excavations are planned on a long-term basis, and aim at systematically studying the history of Lachish and its material remains. So far, five excavation seasons have been carried out in 1973-1977, and the next one will take place in the summer of 1978. In the future, we plan to start an archaeological survey in the region of Lachish and to build an expedition camp nearby. Also, we hope to turn the mound into a national park, this way preserving the ancient remains and

opening them to the public.

When selecting our excavation areas on the huge mound, we had to take three factors into account: firstly, the difficulties of digging a large mound on a relatively small scale; secondly, the need to continue the work in the old excavation areas and follow the results of the previous excavations; and thirdly, the special importance of this Judean city. After many deliberations we decided to work in three areas (Fig. 3): the Judean palace-fort and the Canaanite buildings underneath (under the supervision of Mrs. Christa Clamer); the area of the Judean city gate (under the supervision of Mr. Y. Eshel); and a section area at the western part of the mound (under the supervision of Mr. G. Barkay). The areas of the palace-fort and the city gate were partly dug by Starkey and here we are continuing his work. The section area is a relatively narrow trench which cuts through the edge of the mound and will eventually extend to the lower slope. Here we plan to penetrate the lower levels of the mound, and get a sectional view of the various levels down to the natural rock, following the pattern set by Dame Kathleen Kenyon in her excavations at Jericho.

#### THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE PALACE

The Canaanite remains are being investigated by us in the high, central part of the mound, which almost certainly formed part of the acropolis of Lachish at that time. The earliest level so far penetrated dates from the end of the Middle Bronze Age, i.e. the



3 General plan of Tel Lachish:

- 1, Bastion and outer gate
- 2, Outer wall
- 3, Levels IV-III inner gate
- 4, Section area
- 5, Judean Palace-Fort
- 6, Late Bronze Age Temple
- 7, Fosse Temple
- 8, The well
- 9, The Solar Shrine
- 10, The great shaft

4 The Late Bronze Age temple: general view of the main complex from the west.



sixteenth century B.C. Here we unearthed small sections of a huge, monumental edifice, probably the contemporary royal palace. The walls of the building are massive, over two meters thick, constructed of brick on stone foundations and plastered over. Three architectural stages could be discerned in the building. It was destroyed by a terrible fire, the remains of which could be seen everywhere. One room evidently served as a storeroom; it contained large storage jars, and remains of peas, pomegranates and vetch indicate their use. Another larger room was of ceremonial character. Remains of charred wood recovered there were identified by Dr. Nili Lipshitz as Cedar of Lebanon.

This is rather an expensive wood, the trees having been imported to Lachish from Syria and Lebanon. It is mentioned many times in the Old Testament and other written sources, and in our sixteenth century burnt edifice we have the earliest samples of this tree so far identified in a Palestinian excavation. Parts of this edifice seem to have been reconstructed after its destruction, and various pits were dug from above into its ruins.

#### THE LATE BRONZE AGE TEMPLE

Superimposed on the burnt palace we found the remains of a Late Bronze Age monumental building, probably a temple. It should be stressed that our conclusion that the edifice was a temple is based solely on circumstantial evidence rather than direct proof, and theoretically it could have had some secular function. Considering its situation in the acropolis of Lachish, the temple may well have formed part of the contemporary royal palace complex. The temple was very poorly preserved. Apparently, the building had been robbed prior to its final destruction, and it was badly damaged when the later Judean palace-fort was constructed here. The temple was willfully destroyed by a strong fire—with the rest of the Canaanite city—at the end of the Late Bronze Age, i.e. at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the twelfth century B.C. This destruction can, perhaps, be assigned to the Israelite conquest as described in the Old Testament.

The main complex of the temple contained three units: antechamber, main hall and cella (Fig. 5). These units are arranged one behind the other on sloping ground, so that the cella is built at a higher level than the adjoining main hall which, in turn, is built at a higher level than the adjoining antechamber. The three main entrances to the antechamber, the main hall and the cella, are built along a straight west-east oriented axis. The ground-plan of the main complex of the temple can be compared to that of Canaanite temples in Alalach and Hazor. Significantly, this ground-plan is similar in principle to that of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem; thus it seems that our temple was built according to the ground-plan which later served as a prototype for Solomon's architects.

The antechamber and the cella which were very badly preserved, and the subsidiary units of the temple which were located to the northeast of the main complex, will not be discussed here. The main hall is approximately rectangular, measuring ca 16.50 x 13.20 m. Its walls were constructed of bricks on stone foundations and plastered over, and the floor was made of well laid bricks. Two large stone bases found in the center of the hall apparently carried round pillars which supported the roof. The latter was spanned with massive wooden beams; their

charred remains were dispersed all over the floor, and they were all identified as Cedar of Lebanon. The lavish use of such an expensive wood here also points to the richness of the building. A side entrance decorated with wooden beams leads to the subsidiary units from the northern side of the hall. A monumental staircase, built of beautifully-cut stone slabs, led from the floor of the hall to the raised cella. The staircase originally contained seven steps, and its axis has an exact east-west orientation. A stone slab placed in front of the lower step had a wide, incised circle, probably to mark the position of some object. The staircase was flanked by a stone parapet as well as by two columns which apparently supported a small roof or a canopy.

A large installation was constructed to the right of the staircase. It was plastered

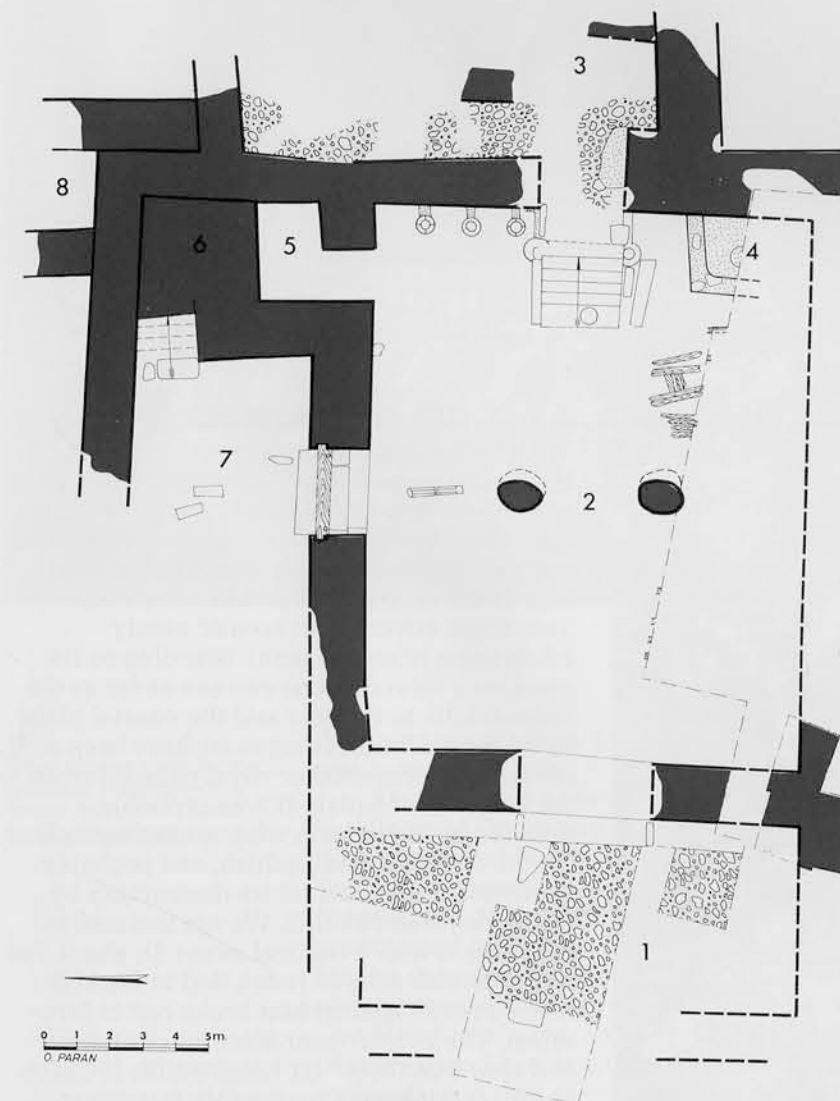


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5 Late Bronze Age Temple: the main complex:  
1, Antechamber  
2, Main hall  
3, The cella  
4, Installation

5, Storeroom  
6, Staircase(?)  
7, Stone slabs with graffiti  
8, Subsidiary units

6 The Late Bronze Age temple: the monumental staircase in the main hall.



5

over, and probably contained liquids. Many fragments of painted plaster were recovered in the area of the staircase and the installation. The fragments are painted with various colours, notably light blue, white, yellow, red and black; some show remains of patterns.

Three decorative columns stood along the eastern wall of the main hall, to the left of the staircase, and their round stone bases were found *in situ*. The columns were attached to the walls, each forming a kind of pilaster. The broken stone columns were discovered near the side entrance. They were tapering and octagonal and they were crowned by square capitals. Similar stone bases, columns and capitals were fashionable in Egypt; thus our columns form another indication of the Egyptian influence at Lachish during that period.

The rich equipment of the temple was robbed or smashed prior to the destruction of the building by fire. A small room which opened into the central hall served as a storeroom, and most of the finds were found there. They included pottery stands and bowls, fragments of imported Mycenaean vessels as well as Egyptian alabaster and faience vessels, beads and pendants, a decorated stone cover, a bronze chisel, many gold leaves and broken ivory plaques and, finally, pieces of oxidized iron—a metal which was still rare during that period.

A very interesting discovery was made in a small side room, near the side entrance to the central hall. In the 1975 season we found two well cut limestone slabs lying on the floor, and we left them there. Sometime between the 1975 and 1976 seasons, a visitor

to the site entered the excavation area and engraved his name on one of the slabs. During the winter the rain washed the face of the stones and revealed a complex of interwoven and mostly inexplicable graffiti. Tragically, the visitor's name damaged the clearest and most significant graffiti. It portrays a standing god (?) facing left; he brandishes a lance with both his hands. The god has large eyes and a long beard, and he wears a crown or a cap with a hanging streamer. His body is shown down to his waist and he wears a belt supported by two diagonal shoulder straps.

Finally, we should mention our prize find, a large decorated gold plaque. It was found crumpled and broken near the staircase (?) located behind the main hall and the small storeroom. The thin gold sheet, ca 19 x 11 cm., was apparently secured to a wooden plaque by small pins or sewn to a piece of leather or textile. The plaque portrays a naked goddess standing on a horse stepping to the right. The grooved lines covering the neck and back of the horse seem to signify a kind of cover, probably scale armour. The goddess is shown in frontal view except for her head which faces right. Her long hair ends in Hathor-style curls. Her headgear is composed of vertical leaves (?) resembling a flower, with two horns at the bottom; she is holding lotus flowers in each hand. Her genitalia and right eye, as well as the eye of the horse, were marked by insets, probably coloured stones, which are now missing.

7 Southwest corner of the foundations of the Judean palace-fort.

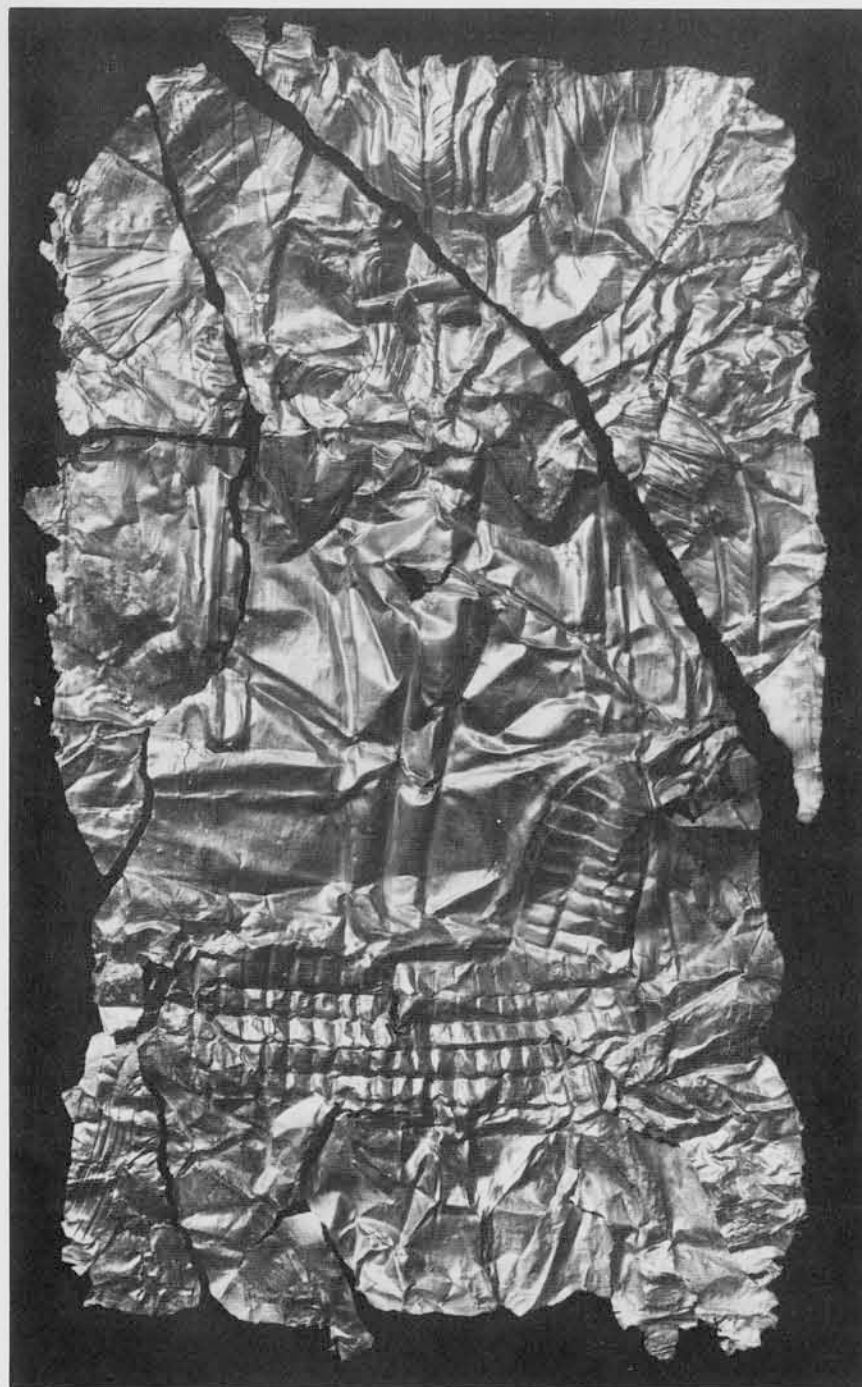
8 An octagonal column crowned by a square capital in the Late Bronze Age temple.

9 Stone slab with graffiti of a god (?) brandishing a lance, from the Late Bronze Age temple.



#### THE JUDEAN PALACE-FORT

The Judean palace-fort is the largest, most massive and most impressive building of the Iron Age yet known in the Holy Land, even though its superstructure is completely destroyed. Presently, it crowns the central part of the mound and dominates its surroundings, covering an area of nearly 2.5 dunams (about 1/2 acre). Standing on its ruins on a clear day one can see as far as the Hebron hills to the east and the coastal plain to the west. The building must have been a central governmental or royal palace-fort in the kingdom of Judah. It was probably founded by Rehoboam who, according to II Chron, 11,9, fortified Lachish, and probably continued to be used till its destruction by Sennacherib in 701 B.C. We are inclined to associate it with a Biblical event. In about 769 B.C. Amaziah king of Judah fled to Lachish when a revolt against him broke out in Jerusalem. The rebels "sent after him to Lachish and slew him there" (II Kings 14,19; II Chron. 25,27), and it seems reasonable to assume



10 Gold plaque depicting a goddess standing on a horse, from the Late Bronze Age temple.

that he took refuge in this palace-fort and was murdered there.

Starkey traced the character of the building and its history, and our investigations confirmed his conclusions in the main. The present remains are mostly the raised foundations of the structure. The builders constructed high stone foundation walls—for the outer as well as the inner walls—which reached the floor level of the building. The high foundation walls—reaching a height of more than 12 m. at one point—were filled with soil, and thus the substructure of the

edifice resembles a big box with the outer foundation walls encasing the fill. The box-like structure was labelled "podium" by Starkey. The building was constructed in three stages, labelled A, B, C, which can be well discerned in the preserved substructure. Now nothing but sections of plastered floors remains of the superstructure which was probably built of bricks. All the remains of the superstructure were completely removed when a small palace was built here in the Persian Period.

The area surrounding the palace-fort was no less impressive when the building reached its prime in stages B-C. On its western and southern sides a constructional fill was thrown in stage B against the outer foundation walls of the palace-fort, creating an artificial ramp, partly plastered, which sloped down towards the city walls. In stage C many poor houses were built in different levels on the artificial slope, adjacent to the huge palace-fort. On the eastern side extended a large, lime-plastered courtyard, and a monumental staircase led the way to the entrance on a level with the raised floor of the building. Incidentally, on the last day of the British dig, Tufnell discerned a short inscription in ancient Hebrew incised on one of the steps; it contained the first five letters of the Hebrew alphabet and, until the discoveries at Ugarit, this inscription was the earliest known abecedarium.

#### THE JUDEAN FORTIFICATIONS

Judean Lachish was a heavily fortified city, and many efforts are being invested in studying its fortification system. An outer, massive revetment wall surrounded the entire site half-way down the slope. An inner city wall extended along the edge of the mound. Both city walls adjoined the city-gate complex. The outer city wall was bonded to the outer city gate, built in the form of a formidable bastion, while the inner city wall adjoined the inner gate-house. There are in fact three superimposed inner city walls and city gates. The latest fortification system, labelled Level I, dates to the Persian Period. Beneath it stretches the latest Judean city wall and city gate (Level II), which was destroyed by fire in 588/6 by Nebuchadnezzar, and in the destruction debris of which the "Lachish Letters" were discovered. Beneath extend the city wall and city gate of Levels IV-III, which were probably built in the 9th century B.C. and destroyed by a conflagration during the Assyrian conquest of 701 B.C. The outer city wall and the outer city gate or bastion seem at present to have been constructed as part of the same architectural scheme and concurrently with inner wall and inner city gate of Levels IV-III.

So far, we have concentrated our efforts



11 The section area: general view with the Judean palace-fort in the background.

12 The section area: houses built against the inner city wall. A ladder is leaning against the brick city wall of Levels IV-III, over which is the stone city wall of Level II.



12

which extended to the two sides of the gatehouse along the edge of the mound. The city wall was more than 4 m. in width, and had protruding towers which were more than 6 m. in width. Both the inner city gate and the city wall were constructed of bricks on stone foundations.

#### SENNACHERIB'S DESTRUCTION OF LACHISH

A problem of prime importance is the identification of the archaeological level representing the city which was destroyed by Sennacherib in 701 B.C. The historical evidence clearly indicates that Lachish must have been a formidable fortress which was stormed by the Assyrian army and then razed to the ground. The following strata were discerned in the British excavation (counting down from the top of the mound): Level I—Persian-Hellenistic Periods, 5th-3rd centuries B.C.; Level II—Judean city destroyed by fire in 588/6 B.C.; Level III—an earlier Judean city destroyed by fire; Level IV and Level V—earlier Judean cities which were hardly investigated; Level VI—the last Canaanite city which was also destroyed by fire in 1200 B.C. approximately. Starkey believed at the time that the city of Level III was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar during an earlier campaign, in 597 B.C., thus leaving a range of about only eleven years for Level II. Starkey, who was followed by Albright, Dame Kathleen Kenyon and other prominent scholars, believed that the remains of the ruined city representing the calamity of 701 B.C. lay underneath and had not yet been properly unearthed. On the other hand, Olga Tufnell, when preparing the final excavation report, reached the conclusion that Level III represents the city destroyed in 701 B.C. Tufnell's opinion was supported by a few scholars, mainly by Aharoni. Both opinions regarding the destruction date of Level III are based on evidence of rather indirect nature, mainly typology of pottery and general considerations concerning the dating of the royal Judean storage jars, to be discussed below.

It seems needless to add that one of our principal aims is to try to find some conclusive evidence which will help in solving the above problem one way or another, and to identify the destruction remains of 701 B.C. After deliberating on all aspects of the problem for four excavation seasons, we reached a conclusion which is based on direct stratigraphical evidence. After the previous excavations as well as ours, we now have seven different places where the stratigraphy has been checked down to Level VI, the latest Canaanite level, and thus the stratigraphy of the Judean city seems by now to be fairly clearly established. Between the earlier Level VI and the later Level II there is only



13 General view of the inner city gate of Levels IV-III.

one level—Level III—representing a large fortified city destroyed by fire, which could be dated to the eighth century B.C. Level IV was apparently not destroyed by fire and its fortifications—the inner city gate and city wall—continued to function in Level III. The earlier Level V is characterized by tenth century pottery, and its date can hardly be lowered down to the eighth century B.C. Of special importance are the data from the area of the city gate, which is portrayed as being under attack by Assyrian battering-rams in the Lachish Reliefs. The inner city gate (as well as the adjoining city wall) was constructed at Level IV and was destroyed once at the end of Level III. The outer city gate and the outer city wall have not yet been sufficiently investigated and fully understood, but it seems hardly possible that they could radically change the above conclusions.

It thus seems clear that being the sole "candidate," Level III was destroyed in 701 B.C. This was a prosperous, densely populated city, and its destruction and devastation was complete. The inner city-gate, palace-fort (stage C) and all the private houses were burnt by fire and razed to the ground. The evidence of the conflagration can be seen all around. In some cases the accumulation of destruction debris reaches a height of nearly 2 m. We found sun-dried bricks which fell from the upper part of the walls and were hardened by the intense fire and, at least in one case, fragments of crushed pottery vessels were distorted due to the strong heat. In addition, hundreds of arrowheads were discovered in the British excavation and in ours in association with Level III. They were arrowheads shot at the attacked city by the Assyrian soldiers as well as arrowheads prepared for use by the

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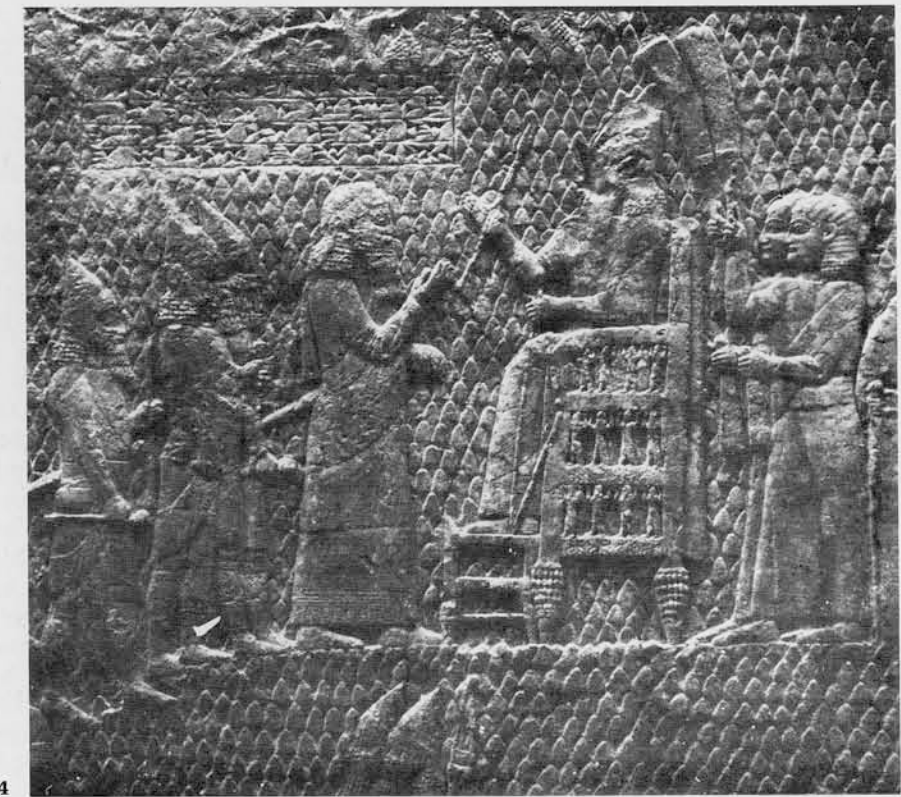
Judean defenders.

Following the calamity which befell the Level III city, Lachish seems to have been left in ruins, and nearly abandoned, for a long period. Many Lachishites were indeed killed by the Assyrians, and most of the surviving population was probably deported—as shown in the Lachish Reliefs—among the 200,150 Judean deportees mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions. The Judean towns conquered by Sennacherib were given by him to the Philistine cities in the coastal area, Ashdod, Ekron and Gaza, and Lachish was probably no exception. By the time king Josiah reigned in Judah during the later part of the seventh century B.C., the area of Lachish was probably returned to Judah, and we can safely assign to him the rebuilding and refortification of the city, as represented in Level II.

#### THE ROYAL JUDEAN STORAGE JARS

The destruction date of Level III is a problem the solution of which is most significant for the history and archaeology of the whole of Judah. Here we will deal with only one significant issue, the dating of the royal Judean storage jars.

Since the nineteenth century A.D. storage jar handles with royal Judean seal impressions have been discovered in various sites in Judah and by now more than one thousand such stamped handles are known. These seal impressions include a brief Hebrew inscription and an emblem. The inscription includes the word *lmlk*, which means "belonging to the king" and the name of one of the four towns, Hebron, Sochoh,



14 King Sennacherib sits on his throne facing Lachish—a detail of the Lachish Reliefs.



15

Ziph or *mmšt*. As to the emblem—three types can be distinguished: a four-winged scarab portrayed in naturalistic style; a four-winged scarab portrayed in schematic style; and a two-winged symbol, probably a winged sun-disc. We thus have twelve different variants of the royal seal impressions with “private” names which are certainly related to the “royal” ones.

Of prime importance is the problem of dating these storage jars. Who is the king, or who are the kings of Judah during whose reign these jars were produced? Although many stamped handles were discovered in different sites, the various suggestions about dating them are usually based on historical and epigraphical considerations. The various suggested datings are within the range of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. Some scholars believe—following D. Diringer—that the royal stamps with the emblem of a four-winged scarab in naturalistic style (labelled as Class I) are earlier in date than those portraying a four-winged scarab in schematic style (Class II), which in turn antedate those having a two-winged symbol (Class III). Diringer dated Classes I and II to the eighth century and Class III to the later part of the seventh century, to the reign of Josiah. Aharoni accepted the assumption that the different Classes are not contemporary, but ascribed Class III to Manasseh, who reigned during the earlier part of the seventh century. Other scholars, notably F. M. Cross Jr. and H. D. Lance, believe that the stamps of all classes were contemporaneously used during the reign of Josiah and that their use ceased after his reign. Recently, the French scholar A. Lemaire suggested that on the basis of the epigraphical data the royal stamps of all classes should be dated to the eighth century B.C.



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15 A Judean family going into exile following the Assyrian conquest of Lachish—a detail of the Lachish Reliefs.

16 Ivory bottle stopper in the form of a male ibex. The stopper is perforated and the liquids, probably perfumes, were poured through the mouth of the ibex. Discovered in a Judean house of Level IV. Height about 7 cm.

With the excavations of the British expedition it became apparent that Tel Lachish was a key site concerning the problematical royal storage jars. No less than 310 handles bearing a royal stamp and 48 handles bearing a “private” seal impression were recovered in the excavation. Furthermore, a few storage jars of the type which carried these handles (defined as type 484 in Olga Tufnell’s division), one of them bearing royal stamps of Class II, were restored. The royal storage jars had been very popular in Level III and are limited to that level, as stated by Tufnell: “Nearly all the rooms attributed to city Level III contained at least one example of this vessel, and they were virtually confined to it.”

Here, then, was the first clear case in which the royal storage jars were found in a good stratigraphical context, sealed under the destruction debris of Level III. Nevertheless, the dating of the royal storage jars could not be decided conclusively, mainly due to two reasons. First, the destruction date of Level III is a controversial issue and, in fact, the datings of the royal storage jars reached through historical and epigraphical considerations were used as arguments for dating the destruction of Level III. Second, the majority of the royal stamps recovered in the excavation were of Class II and only a small number of handles bore impressions of Class III. The reason for that is not known, and it remained rather uncertain whether or not the small number of Class III handles were also discovered in the stratigraphic context of Level III. This meant, in other words, that it remained an open question whether the Class III royal storage jars were used concurrently with the jars of Class II in the city of Level III prior to its destruction,

17 A royal seal impression of Class I: a four-winged scarab in naturalistic style with the name of Hebron stamped on the storage jar, from the storeroom behind the gatehouse.

18 Royal seal impression of Class III: two-winged sun disc with the name of Sochoh.

19 Royal seal impression of Class II: a four-winged scarab in schematic style with the name of Hebron, from a storage jar found in the gatehouse.

20 A private seal with the name “Meshulam [son of] Ahimelech,” from a storage jar found in the city gate.



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or alternatively, whether the Class III storage jars are later in date. In this case they came into use in Lachish after the city of Level III met its tragic end, and here incidentally is the reason why relatively so few of them were recovered in Lachish. Tufnell remained ambiguous on the subject. H. D. Lance showed that the data presented in the excavation report indicate that the Class III handles originate in Level III contexts. On the other hand, Aharoni pointed out that here we are dealing not with whole vessels which could form reliable evidence but rather with handles which could easily be stray ones.

Our excavation added new data which seem to be conclusive. We pay much attention to pottery restoration. The fragments of every vessel which are lying in the ground undisturbed are methodically collected and later, if possible, restored. As a result, we

were able during the first three excavation seasons to uncover and later restore six storage jars with royal seal impressions as well as a similar number of storage jars which are not stamped. A few more storage jars—two or three of them stamped—were excavated in the fourth season but have not yet been restored. All these storage jars were recovered in the gate area and in the section area in clear loci of Level III and all of them were crushed under and sealed by the destruction debris of that level.

The main interest lies with two of the storage jars which bear Class III seal impressions. The first storage jar was discovered in a storeroom situated behind the gatehouse. The room was found full of crushed jars, and so far three of them have been restored and are presently exhibited in the Israel Museum. They include our storage jar bearing the Class



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**21**  
Broken storage jars as found crushed on the floor of the Level III storeroom behind the gatehouse.

**22**  
Three reconstructed royal Judean storage jars from the storeroom behind the gatehouse. From left to right: a jar with Class I stamps; a jar with Class III stamps; a jar without stamps.



III impressions, as well as a storage jar bearing a Class I impression and a similar storage jar which is not stamped. The second storage jar, whose lower part could not be restored, was discovered in one of the gate-chambers. Two of its handles bore seal impressions of Class III with the name of Sochoh; the other two handles carried a "private" stamp with the name "Meshulam (son of) Ahimelech," who probably was a government official associated with the "business" of the royal storage jars.

Summing up, we see that the discovery of complete storage jars bearing Class III stamps in Level III decides the above issue. It now seems clear that royal storage jars of all types—those without stamps as well as those bearing stamps of Classes I, II and III—were used concurrently in Level III prior to its destruction. This event, as shown above, occurred in 701 B.C., and we thus must conclude that the royal storage jars of all types were used concurrently in Judah during the reign of King Hezekiah. It is impossible to decide whether the royal storage jars of all kinds were produced exclusively during the reign of Hezekiah, or not. We have to consider the possibility that one or more kinds of the storage jars were produced prior to Hezekiah's ascent to the throne of Judah but continued to be used during his reign. On the other hand, as Tel Lachish was virtually deserted after 701 B.C., we do not know whether the royal storage jars were produced and used after that date, during the later part of Hezekiah's reign, and during the period following his death. In any case, by the time that Level II was destroyed in 588/6 B.C. these vessels were not used any more in Lachish, and probably not in the rest of Judah.

#### Credits

Figs. 1, 10, 16, 21 are from photographs by Avraham Hay; 4, 6, 8, 12, 13, by Michal Roche; 22 by Moshe Weinberg; 2, 14, 15 courtesy of the British Museum.

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