

The Hazor Tablet: Foreword

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HAZOR was excavated during the years 1955–1958 and 1968–1970 by a team under the direction of the late Prof. Y. Yadin of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, on behalf of the Hebrew University, the Rothschild Foundation and the Israel Exploration Society.¹ Directly following the final publication of Yadin's excavations in the 1950s it was decided to resume excavations at this important site.² After an exploratory season in 1987, large-scale excavations were begun in 1990 and named 'Hazor Excavations in Memory of Yigael Yadin'.³ Seven to ten annual excavation seasons are planned.

Three major goals were set for the renewed excavations:

1. To check the stratigraphic sequence suggested by Yadin's expedition. Verification of the stratigraphy is crucial in view of the importance of Hazor and the fact that the previously obtained results serve as a reference point.
2. To enlarge the excavated area in order to obtain additional data pertaining to the various periods represented at the site. This will permit re-evaluation of the problems that have not been successfully resolved by Yadin's excavations. Of particular importance in this context is our intention to completely expose the imposing structure which is probably the palace of the Canaanite kings of Hazor, the north-eastern corner of which was exposed by Yadin in the 1950s in Area A in the centre of the site's acropolis. In addition to the architectural significance of such a building *per se* there is every hope that it may contain the city's royal archive.⁴
3. To restore some of the most noteworthy architectural elements at Hazor, such as the wall and gate attributed to King Solomon, other public structures and dwellings attributed to the period of the divided monarchy, as well as the Canaanite structure mentioned above, after it has been completely unearthed. Not only will this endeavour preserve these important buildings — some of which might otherwise

1 Y. Yadin *et al.*: *Hazor I*, Jerusalem, 1958; *Hazor II*, Jerusalem, 1960; *Hazor III–IV* (Plates), Jerusalem, 1961.

2 Y. Yadin *et al.*: *Hazor III–IV* (Text), A. Ben Tor (ed.), Jerusalem, 1989. The final report of the excavations conducted by Yadin in the late 1960s and early 1970s — *Hazor V* — is in preparation.

3 The renewed excavations are a joint project of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Complutense University, Madrid, in cooperation with Ambassador College, Big Sandy, Texas, Israel Exploration Society and Yad HaNadiv (Rothschild Foundation).

4 Y. Yadin: *Hazor, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1970*, London, 1972, pp. 124, 201.

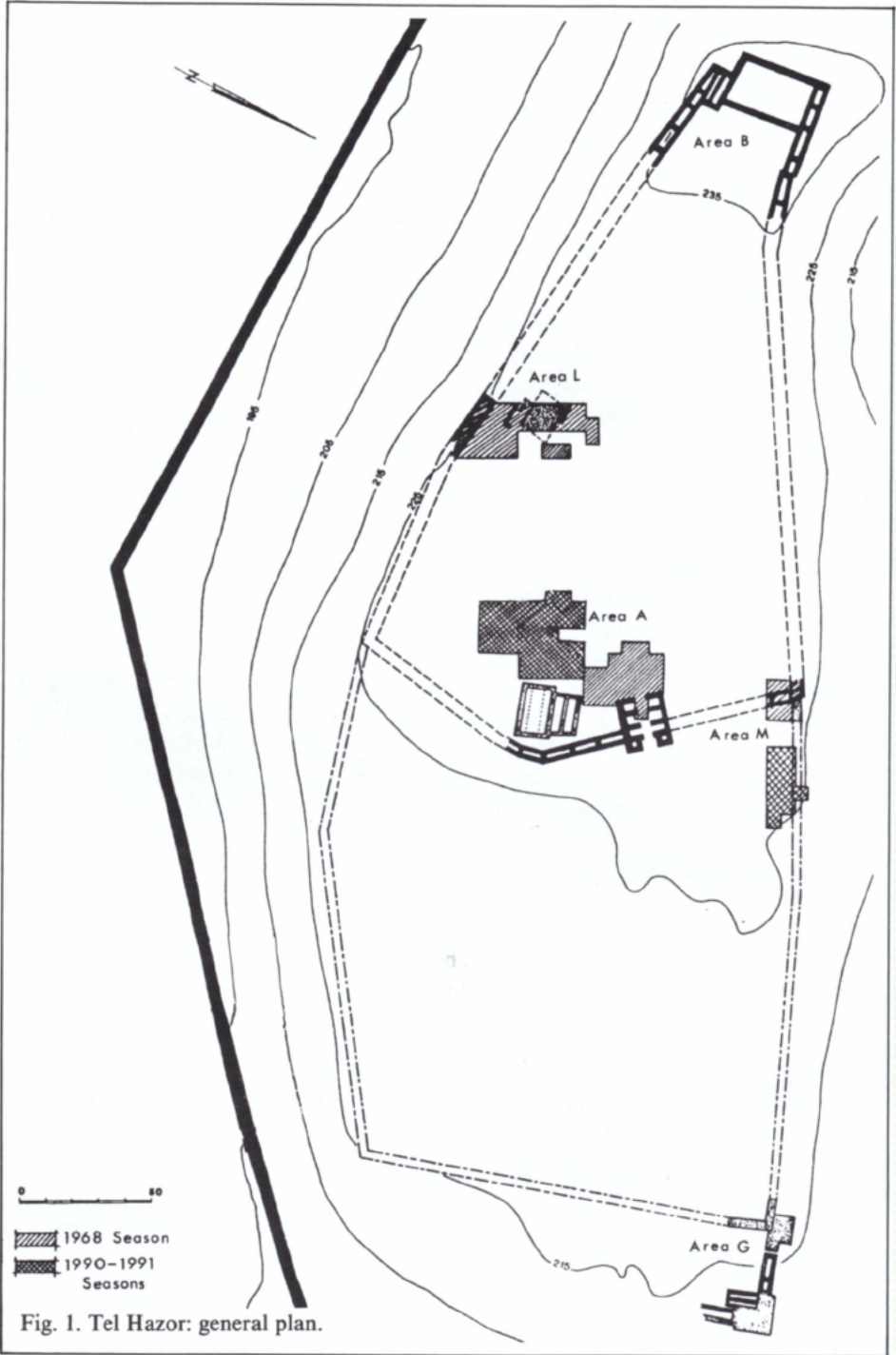


Fig. 1. Tel Hazor: general plan.

perish from exposure, but it will also provide the visitor with a vivid picture of some of the site's major architectural monuments. The site which 'beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms' (Josh. 11:10) deserves such focus and elucidation.

The excavations (Fig. 1) are centred in two areas on the acropolis (Yadin's 'upper city'). In Area A, located in the centre of the upper city, Yadin's team uncovered a sequence of strata covering almost the entire span of the site's occupation, from the Persian period down to the earliest settlement, founded on bedrock, dating to the Early Bronze II–III. The excavations here constitute a westward extension of the previously excavated area. The other area, Area M, is located on the northern edge of the upper city, where a small-scale excavation was carried out by Yadin's team in 1968.⁵ According to Yadin's conclusions, the city attributed to King Solomon is limited to the western half of the upper city, while the city attributed to Ahab extends over the entire area of the upper city. Area M is the location where the fortification systems of the two cities meet. Our goals here are two-fold: to enlarge the previously excavated area in order to check the stratigraphic sequence and to penetrate earlier strata, not reached in this area by Yadin's expedition. We also plan to excavate a section perpendicular to the slope of the acropolis in order to stratigraphically connect the upper city with Hazor's lower city, which lies to the north.

The subject of the paper, An Administrative Tablet from Hazor: A Preliminary Edition (pp. 21–33), is an isolated object discovered in Area M during the 1991 season: a partially preserved inscribed clay tablet. The artefact, No. 31050, was found in Square N/11 in Locus 5142, in the eastern part of Area M. It was found in a context of debris, consisting of collapsed mudbrick and ash, in a stratum centuries later than the date of the artefact under discussion. Such a find was completely unexpected in this location, and the archaeological context in which it was found was equally surprising. We are therefore grateful to the keen eyes of the area supervisors, G. Suleimani and D. Ben-Ami, whose diligence prevented it from being accidentally discarded in the course of the excavation.

The tablet dates from the first half of the second millennium B.C.E. The collapsed mudbricks, one of which contained the tablet, date, however, to the late Iron Age. The bricks could have fallen from any of Walls 3021, 3041, or 3090, all in the vicinity of Locus 5142 and all of which post-date the Israelite city wall, W. 3018, which was destroyed by the Assyrians in 732 B.C.E.⁶ Another possibility is that the bricks fell from the city wall itself. The stratigraphic situation of Locus 5142 is very ambiguous, due to a large pit (Locus 5139) dug during the Persian period, which caused severe damage to the previous strata, including the above-mentioned walls. The pottery recovered from the ash and mudbrick in Locus 5142 is mixed: it includes some sherds dating to the Persian period, most probably originating in the Persian pit, as well as sherds dating to Iron III, i.e. from the final days of Israelite Hazor. It is hoped that further excavation

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 140–142.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

in Area M planned for the 1992 season will help to clarify the stratigraphic situation of Locus 5142.

The inscribed clay tablet was probably included accidentally in the material out of which the Iron Age walls were eventually built. By this time the tablet was most probably already incomplete. The fact that it was part of a brick clearly contributed to its hard, well-baked state of preservation.



Israel President Chaim Herzog (second from left), holding the Hazor tablet. To his left, Prof. Maria Teresa Rubiato of Complutense University, Madrid; to his right, excavation director Prof. Amnon Ben-Tor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Joseph Aviram, Director of the Israel Exploration Society.