

**Preliminary Report on the Results of the
December 2009/January 2010 Excavation Season at Tel Kabri**

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The December 2009/January 2010 supplementary excavations at Tel Kabri, the capital of a Middle Bronze Age (MB) Canaanite kingdom located in the western Galilee region of modern Israel, lasted from 20 December 2009 to 10 January 2010. The excavation, designed to investigate several intriguing features found in Corridor 694 towards the end of the regular 2009 season (June-July 2009), was co-directed by Assaf Yasur-Landau of the University of Haifa and Eric H. Cline of The George Washington University. It was undertaken courtesy of a Waitt grant from the National Geographic Society, with additional funding provided by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), the Biblical Archaeology Society of Northern Virginia (BASONOVA), Marc Cohen, Donald Kane, and Deborah Lehr and John Rogers, as well as anonymous donors, to all of whom we are most grateful. Equipment was provided by Dr. Alon Shavit, Director of the Israeli Institute of Archaeology, and assistance in conservation and storage was provided by the Leon Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies, directed by Dr. Yaacov Kahanov, both of whom we would also like to thank. Additional team members included Nurith Goshen of the University of Pennsylvania, Inbal Samet of the University of Haifa, and Sophia Macks of The George Washington University, as well as workmen led by Hussein Hassun of Buqata (Fig. 1a-c).



Fig. 1a-c. Staff and workmen at Tel Kabri, Dec/Jan 2009/10

Aims and Goals

During the 2009 summer excavation season at Tel Kabri, the corridor between Walls 679 and 706 (henceforth called simply “the corridor”) was dug, yielding a very rich deposit of restorable vessels, mostly jugs and storage jars, all dating to the transition between MBI-II, in the early second millennium BCE. This deposit was sealed beneath a plaster floor (L. 2135), used during the last phases of the palace in the MBII period. In the last days of the summer excavations, a lintel block was discerned among the stones of the southern face of Wall 679, approximately 2.5 m east of the corridor’s western end, and beneath it an opening blocked with earth. This opening in Wall 679, eventually labeled L. 2324 (and henceforth simply called “the opening” or “the passageway”) was covered by a row of five massive capstones, which in turn were covered by a layer of small stones similar to the rest of the uppermost course of Wall 679 (Fig. 2a-b). Restorable pottery that was found in the corridor clearly continued into this blocked opening, indicating that the two areas were related and in use at the same time.



Fig. 2a-b. Corridor between Walls 679 and 706; Opening 2324 in Wall 679

The aim of the 2009-2010 season was to determine the function of this opening – burial, passageway, or drain – and its date. Two possible additional openings in Wall 679, one to the east of this feature and one to the west, were not able to be excavated during this season, due to time constraints, and await exploration in future seasons.

Method of Investigation

During the season, the investigation of the opening was undertaken via the exploration of five separate yet related locations (Fig 3):

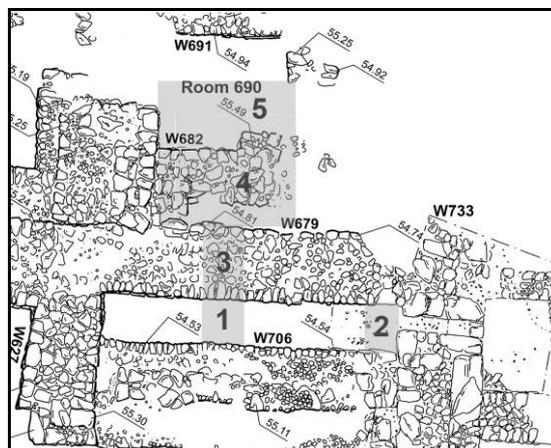


Fig. 3. Excavation area with investigated locations labeled

1) a probe was dug at the western end of the corridor, in order to determine the chronology of Wall 679 and the corridor in its entirety, by exploring the strata below the MBI-II pottery deposit, as well as to view the complete southern section of the opening;

2) a second probe was dug at the eastern end of the corridor, just west of Wall 733 (which marks the eastern edge of the corridor) and its opening, L. 2048. The aim of this probe was to determine if there is a similarity in elevation, construction technique, and accompanying corridor deposits between the two openings: L. 2324 and L. 2048;

3) the opening itself (L. 2324) was explored in depth, via the removal of the capstones and subsequent excavation of the deposits which were revealed;

4) a third probe was dug through the floor of Room 690, located immediately north of Wall 679, which aimed to determine the chronology of this room in its entirety, by exploring the strata below the MBII floor, as well as to view the complete northern section of the opening;

5) a robber trench located in the north of Room 690 was excavated in the hopes that it would supply a convenient window into the pre-MBII levels of Room 690 and perhaps shed additional light on the function of the opening in the corridor located to the south.

Preliminary Results

The probe dug at the western end of the corridor allowed us to view the opening in its entirety. We were also able to observe that the lower section of Wall 679 is wider than previously thought, i.e., wider than the portion previously excavated above, and that the lower section of Wall 706 appears to be of a different construction technique than the upper portion (Fig. 4a-b). It is unclear whether these lower sections represent a) earlier walls upon which 679 and 706 were built; b) an earlier phase for these walls; or c) simply the lower part of the walls, which were built wider and/or in a different style than the upper parts for some reason. However, the bottom of opening L. 2324 in Wall 679 is clearly the same as the uppermost level of this lower section; that is to say, the opening is entirely within the upper part of Wall 679 (Fig. 4b).



Fig. 4a-b. Lower section of Wall 706 (left) and opening L. 2324 in Wall 679 (right)

The strata below the MBI-II pottery deposit in the corridor had relatively few sherds in comparison to the previous levels seen during the Summer 2009 excavations and no floors or living surfaces could be clearly discerned anywhere in the probe. However, at a level of 52.86, the soil on the southern side of the probe (L. 2341) turned markedly darker than the soil on the northern side (L. 2342); in section it appears as a perfect rectangle (Fig. 5a-b), but

it does not appear to be a foundation trench for Wall 706 and its function remains unclear at the moment.



Fig. 5a-b. Loci 2341 and 2342 in western probe within corridor

Within the probe dug at the eastern end of the corridor, just west of Wall 733, we uncovered the lower sections of Walls 706, 679, and 733 (Fig. 6a-b). Here it can be clearly seen that the lower portion of both Walls 706 and 679 are wider than the upper portion of these walls, but again it is unclear whether these represent an earlier phase of these walls, a differentiation between the foundations and the walls themselves, or two separate sets of walls with the later walls built directly on top of the earlier ones. We also uncovered the threshold, i.e., the lowest level, of what had been identified in previous seasons as Drain 2048 but which now can be clearly seen to have functioned in some other manner; it is at almost exactly the same height (53.32) as the bottom of opening L. 2324 in Wall 679, which would argue that they were constructed at the same time and perhaps served similar or related purposes.



Fig. 6a-b. Eastern end of the corridor with Walls 733, 706, and 679 and “Drain” 2048

The opening seen in Wall 679 (L. 2324) was the principal target of our explorations during this winter season of excavations. Removal of the capstones sealing it from above revealed that the opening visible in Wall 679 was the southern end of a passageway, approximately a meter in height, which ran through the entire width of the wall, emerging at the northern end into a plastered area (Floor 2346), most likely an internal room or courtyard, underneath what would later become Room 690 (Fig. 7a).

The northernmost part of the passageway, immediately under the capstones, was initially seen to be blocked by large stones (Fig. 7b), but excavation eventually proved that

these stones were part of a deliberate fill added after the passageway went out of use, perhaps at the same time as the related plaster floor (L. 2346) at the north was also buried beneath 80 cm of deliberate fill.



Fig. 7a-b. Passageway through Wall 679 (left) and northern blocking stones (right)

Within the passageway was found a top layer of almost sterile soil, below which were layers containing much pottery intermixed with stones and soil. Some of the pottery obviously joins to, and belongs with, the vessels previously excavated and removed in the corridor during the Summer 2009 excavations. Other vessels were unique to this passageway and seem to have been deposited deliberately; most of these belong to restorable large storage vessels, but there were also several remarkable finds from near the bottom of the area: two juglets (possibly of Syrian origin) and an oil lamp, all found resting upright at similar levels and apparently placed intentionally in this spot, as well as a fragment of an Egyptian alabastron (Fig. 8a-c).



Fig. 8a-c. Juglet (above left and right) and alabastron fragment (below)

The passageway was clearly deliberately built to run through Wall 679, linking the corridor at the south to an area with a plaster floor at the north (immediately below and earlier than Room 690). Its bottom consists of the top layer of stones from the lower, and wider, part of the wall, while the capstones at the top were covered by a single course of smaller stones, and possibly by additional mudbricks above those in turn. The passageway went out of use only when the level of the area immediately to the north of Wall 679 was raised considerably, due to a deliberate fill 80 cm in height which lies between Floors 2346 and 2327 (see below). That the two areas were filled at the same time is clearly indicated by finds of painted plaster from an unidentified object, pieces of which were found on both sides of the blocking stones – some in the fill within the passageway and some in the fill above Floor 2346.

The third probe was dug through the floor of Room 690, located immediately north of Wall 679, and was meant to determine the chronology of this room in its entirety. Below Iron Age Wall 682, of which the easternmost 2.2 m were dismantled, lay plaster floor 2306 (Fig. 9a). Between the wall and the floor was fill that contained MB pottery, possibly restorable. Portions of this floor had been previously seen by Kempinski during his excavations and are shown on his plans as L. 690; hence our reference to this area as Room 690. Immediately above this floor, in one section of the room, a small patch of plaster ca. 50 cm in diameter was observed. This may be the remains of the collapse of a second storey, but no further evidence was found anywhere else in the room. In addition, several terracotta loom weights and an ivory spindle whorl (Fig. 9b) were found in Middle Bronze Age contexts during the removal of the Iron Age wall; these match well with other loom weights and spindle whorls found in the same general area by Kempinski during his excavations.



Fig. 9a-b. Floor 2306 (=690) and an ivory spindle whorl found on or near the floor

During the articulation of Floor 2306, a north-south wall (L. 2308) was uncovered, forming the eastern border of the room. This appears to be the rest of Kempinski's Wall 704, which appears on his plans. Directly below Floor 2306, which was approximately 5 cm thick, lay a second floor (L. 2307), the thickness of which varied between 2 and 4 cm. Below this floor and a 5-20 cm layer of fill/accumulation of mud-brick debris, a third plaster floor (L. 2326) appeared, which is 4 cm thick and slopes down sharply to the north. Beneath this floor is an additional ca. 10 cm layer of fill/accumulation of mud-brick debris and then a fourth floor (L. 2327). This floor was executed in an irregular fashion, sloping in many directions and thus varying drastically in elevation and thickness (ca. 7 cm at the southern end, close to Wall 679, but thinning out to almost nothing at the northern end). This series of floors was cut by several pits at different stages, the function and nature of which could not be readily determined (Fig. 10a-b).



Fig. 10a-b. Floors in Room 690 (left); pit 2330 in the same room

Floor 2327 was not the earliest floor in the area, however. It was deliberately laid upon a very thick fill (L. 2338), approximately 80 cm in height, which may consist of mud-brick debris from the destruction of the walls of the earlier phase or may have been brought in from elsewhere (Fig 11a). This deep fill seals a thin layer of occupation debris (L. 2344) containing many sherds (a number of which date to the EB), *tabun* (oven) material and bones, below which lies a fifth plaster floor (L. 2346), at a much lower level than all of the others. A small probe dug through the southeastern part of the exposed area of this floor revealed that it is almost 30 cm thick and of outstanding quality and execution (Fig. 11b); it is unclear at this time whether this area is simply a room or is part of a larger area, such as a courtyard. The soil beneath this floor is sterile and has no inclusions in it apart from some small stones.



Fig. 11a-b. Floor 2346 beneath deep fill 2338 (left) and detail of floor 2346 (right)

Finally, a robber trench located to the north of Room 690, possibly dating to the Byzantine period, was excavated. This feature cut through the four floors of Room 690 (Fig. 12a) and may have removed the northern closing wall of the room. At the southwestern corner of the excavations in this area, in a section just missed by the robber trench, was a large globular storage jar (L. 2347), sunk up to its neck into Floor 2326 and cutting Floors 2326 and 2327 (Fig. 12b). Excavation of this area was arbitrarily discontinued due to time constraints and may be resumed at a future date.



Fig. 12a-b. Section of robber trench (left) and detail of storage jar in situ (right)

Conclusions

The MBI palace

The search for the function and chronology of L. 2324, the opening first seen in Wall 679 of the corridor during the Summer 2009 excavations at Tel Kabri and which was debated as the entrance to a tomb, passageway or drain, has now led to an unexpected and exciting discovery -- the earliest phase of the Canaanite palace at Kabri. It is now apparent that the palace was built in the middle part of the MBI period, dating to the 19th century BCE, some 150 years earlier than previously thought.

Remains of this phase include the three massive walls of the corridor, built of boulders and large fieldstones – Wall 679 in the north, Wall 706 in the south, and Wall 733 in the east. The preservation of Wall 679 in particular is impressive – over 2.00 meters from its top down to below floor 2346 – as is the preservation of Wall 706 as well. It is possible that the MBI walls were built in two distinct phases, as there are differences in the style of masonry between the lower and the upper courses in both Wall 706 and Wall 679.

The only floor which can be safely assigned to this phase is the very thick plaster floor L. 2346, the lowest plaster floor found in the area beneath Room 690 to the north of Wall 679.

The corridor itself remains a mystery – a narrow and long space, surrounded by three very thick walls. It could have been a well-protected storage place situated in the midst of the earlier palace. The two openings, L. 2324 in Wall 679 near the western end of the corridor and L. 2048 in Wall 733 at the eastern end of the corridor, were the only entry points to the corridor. While their exact function remains unknown, it is possible that the narrower opening (L. 2048) in Wall 733 served as a window for fresh air and light, while the larger passageway (L. 2324) in Wall 679 may have served as a postern, or secondary access to the corridor. The lack of other entrances may indicate that the corridor was also accessible from above.

The early palace at Kabri may be envisioned as a very robust, fort-like structure. Together with the palace at Aphek, it is the earliest Middle Bronze Age palace found in Israel to date, predating the palaces found at Megiddo, Lachish, and Shechem. At that time, the Kabri MBI palace was quite possibly the most spectacular building in northern Israel, controlling a site three and a half times as large as Megiddo. This structure eventually developed into the palace of Kabri that we have been excavating since 2005, which then continued to exist through several additional phases of modifications, until ca. 1550 BCE when it was finally destroyed and/or abandoned. With a now-lengthy history of 300 or more years of continuous use for the palace, the results of this season have indicated that Kabri may hold another record, for being the palace used for the longest continuous time in Israel.

Changes during the MBI-MBII transition

During the later part of MBI or the MBI-II transition, the palace went through a series of architectural modification, and its area seems to grow. Two walls were built against the eastern part of Wall 733: Wall 2032 and Wall 731 (this corrects our 2008 preliminary report, where we argued that Wall 733 was built at the same time as Wall 731 and Wall 2032). A similar phenomenon is observed north of Wall 679, when north-south Wall 2308 was built against east-west Wall 679, creating the eastern boundary of Room 690 of the later palace. A series of four floors in this room, (2306, 2307, 2326, 2327) attest to its continuous use all the way into the later MBII period.

These modifications were preceded by a series of deliberate fills. For instance, east of Wall 733, the fill was composed of dark compact soil with many stones (L. 2044, L. 2054, and L. 2064, for which see our 2008 preliminary report). These fills had a more dramatic nature in the area of the corridor and to its north. Here, the occupation debris above floor 2346, beneath Room 690, was covered by a dark brown deliberate fill, L. 2338, which in some places was almost 80 cm thick. The same fill was also found blocking the passageway 2324. At the same time, the corridor was also deliberately filled.

This deliberate filling culminated in the deposition of pottery vessels on top of the fill in both the corridor and in the passageway through Wall 679. Large pottery vessels, such as jug and storage jars were found in the corridor, as well as at the southern mouth of passageway 2324 (the original opening first seen in Summer 2009). The limited space within the actual passageway, between the fill and the capstones, dictated that only small vessels could be squeezed inside – two juglets and an oil lamp.

The deliberate deposition of such a large number of vessels both in the corridor and in the passageway is hardly coincidental. It may represent the remains of a feast, or ritual, which marked the termination of the use of the corridor, the opening/passageway (L. 2324), and the room north of Wall 679, and which was conducted just before the laying of new plaster floors high above the original surfaces of the corridor and Room 690.