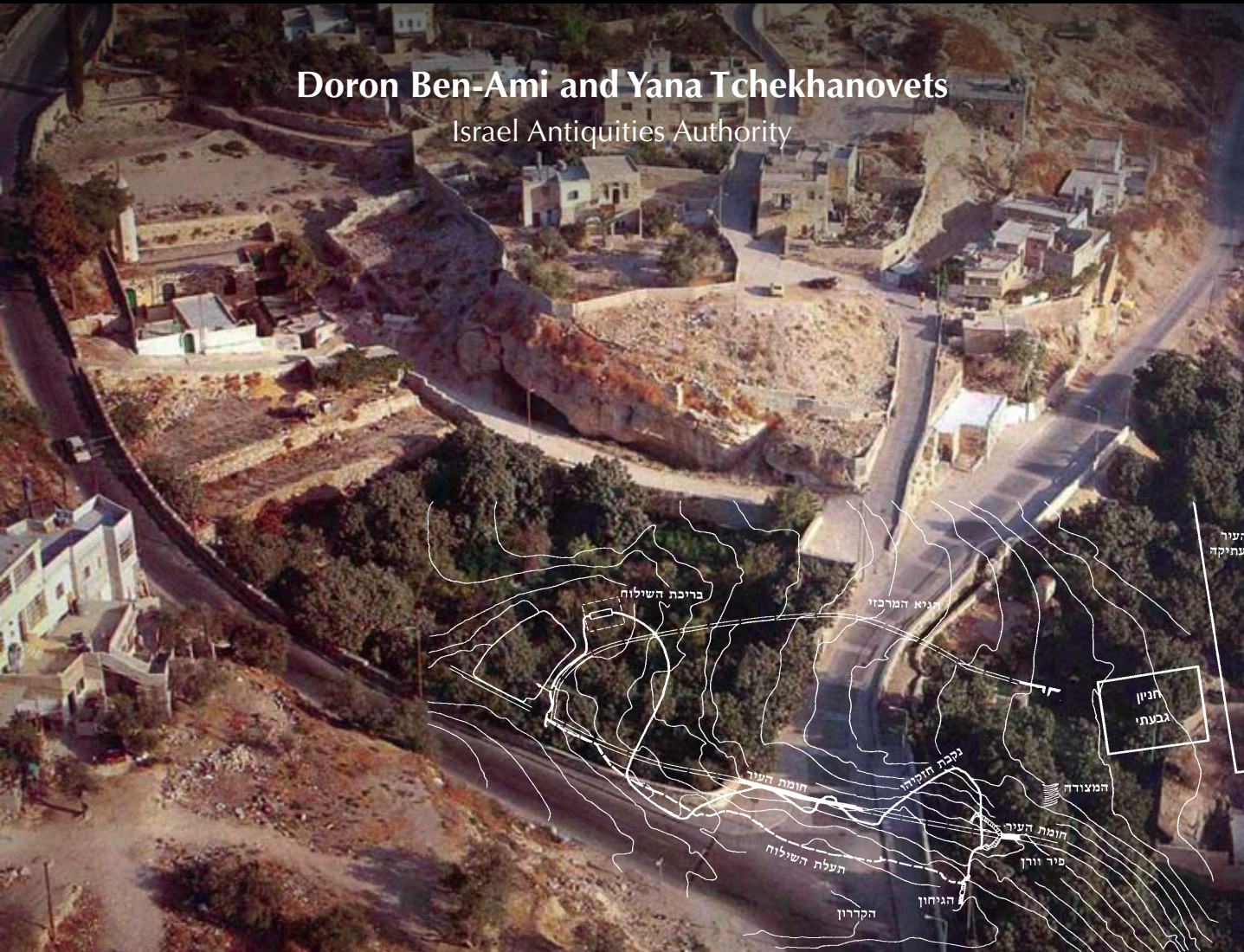




Was the City of David Walled in the Iron Age IIA?

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Introduction

Some of the most extensive excavations in the City of David have been underway since March 2007 in the area of the Givati Car Park in the City of David (Fig. 1)¹, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). The Iron Age is represented in the Givati dig by a number of clearly defined phases of settlement covering most of the period. The earliest of these phases has been dated to the Iron Age IIA, with remains found directly on bedrock at an average depth of approximately 10 m below the surface. These remains include meager, carelessly constructed buildings, whose walls, usually the width of one row of stones, encompassed various household installations. This dwelling quarter kept its character throughout the Iron Age (Ben-Ami and Tchekhanovets 2010).



Fig. 1. The City of David and the location of the Givati excavation area.

The excavation revealed that the builders of the early settlement frequently used bedrock as a foundation for the walls of dwellings; sometimes even incorporating bedrock into the buildings themselves. For example, floors were found bounded by built walls on one side

¹ The excavation is directed by the authors on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and on the initiative of the Elad association. It is conducted with the assistance of a team of archaeologists including H. Ben-Dov, D. Gutreich, S. Hirschberg, A. Zilberstein, S. Cohen, P. Korbin and A. Shatil.

and by bedrock outcrops on the other, and some bedrock surfaces were smoothed so they could serve as flooring in rooms. This picture is very reminiscent of the use builders made of bedrock outcrops on the eastern slopes of the City of David hill (see, e.g., Kenyon 1974: 136, Fig. 54).

Directly above the remains of the earliest phase of construction from the Iron Age are the foundations of the next stratum, also from the Iron Age. The pottery discovered in that stratum dates it to the 8th century BCE. The remains there are oriented somewhat differently in relation to those of the previous stratum. They seal off the previous stratum entirely and sometimes cut right down into its architectural remains. The latest phase of the Iron Age in this area is dated to the 7th–6th centuries BCE.

Remains from the Iron Age I and all phases of the Bronze Age are conspicuously absent in this area. This is true not only of architectural remains but also in the almost complete lack of pottery from these periods. Other than a few fragments belonging to the Late Bronze Age, even fewer than the remains from the Middle Bronze Age, so far the Bronze Age in general is not really represented in this excavation. This negative evidence is particularly striking considering the finds from the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age to the west and south of Givati excavation area: the settlement's Middle Bronze Age fortification line was found on the eastern slopes of the hill in the excavations of K. Kenyon (1974: 81–83) and of Y. Shiloh (1984: 26). In recent years remains of huge, impressive fortifications have been unearthed near the Gihon Spring (Reich and Shukron 2000; 2009). The boundaries of this settlement (fortress?) have not yet been sufficiently clarified; the conspicuous lack of remains from this period in Givati may indicate that this area was outside (north of) the fortified walls of the City of David (see E. Mazar 2006; 2009: 22–23; and in contrast, Reich and Shukron 2007; 2008). The absence of remains from the Late Bronze Age also raises a question with regard to the settlement's fortification in the Late Bronze Age (Na'aman 1996; Knauf 2000). That absence is particularly marked in light of E. Mazar's findings, albeit meager, in her excavations at the top of the hill (E. Mazar 2009; 29–32).

The Givati excavations have not yet revealed any evidence of fortifications from the Iron Age (or fortifications from any other period) on the western edge of the City of David hill. Although it cannot be ruled out that a wall from the Iron Age might be found in the future beneath remains from later periods, in light of the findings we have so far, this possibility seems slim. First of all, the topography makes it rather unlikely that an Iron Age wall was built on the lower part of the slope, near the Tyropoeon Valley bed. It would be more reasonable to reconstruct the course of such a wall, if indeed existed, farther to the east (near the eastern boundary of our excavation area), above the point where the bedrock drops sharply westward.

In fact, in Kenyon's Area M, which fell within the Givati excavations area, she created a ca. 25-m-long cross-section beginning at the road in the east and proceeding westward. In the eastern part of this cross-section, Kenyon reached bedrock and found no remnant of an Iron Age fortification (Kenyon 1964:13). Among Kenyon's main considerations for excavating this area had been the discovery in 1927 of the remains of massive walls just to the south, which had been interpreted as a gate house incorporated into a fortification line (Fig. 2; Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929: 12–26). During our excavations in Givati, which is north of and adjacent to Crowfoot and Fitzgerald's dig, remains were unearthed that fully continue the picture of the latter's findings. In light of the findings in Givati, we can say with a great degree of certainty that the impressive walls discovered to the south were apparently part of monumental construction, which should be dated to the Early Roman period and should not be ascribed to any fortification system (Ben-Ami and Tchekhanovets 2011:80).

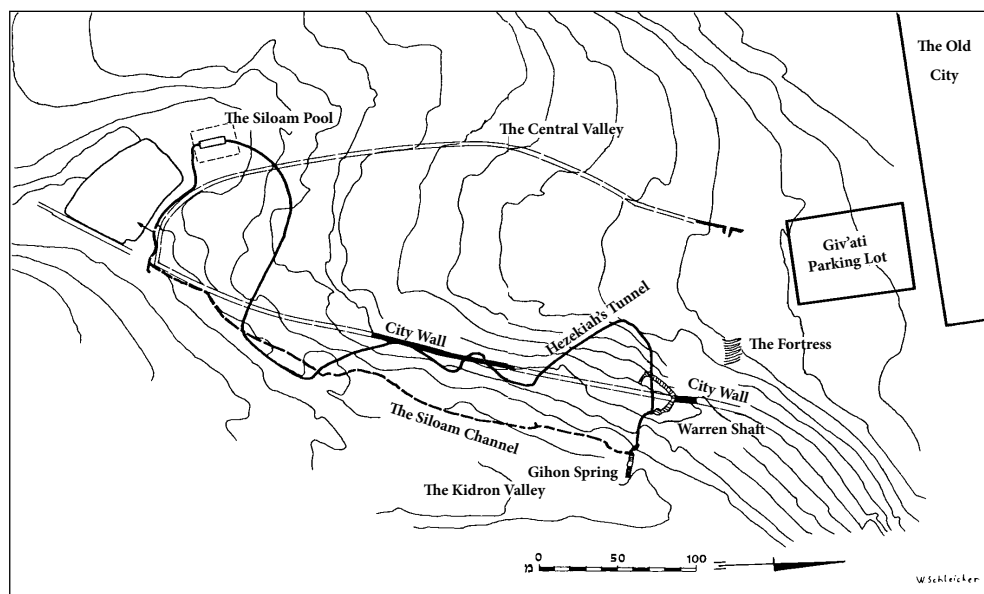


Fig. 2. The location of the Givati excavation area in relation to the “gate house” discovered during the Crowfoot and Fitzgerald’s excavations.

In the late 8th century BCE, new fortifications were built that surrounded the City of David, the Temple Mount and Mount Zion (Fig. 3). The remains of the city’s fortification line from this period, which were unearthed by various excavators, all of whom dated them not earlier than the 8th century BCE, are the only remains of fortifications known today from the Iron Age in Jerusalem. The fact that in the east, these remains overlap the fortification line attributed to the Middle Bronze Age uncovered in Kenyon’s excavations and in those of the Shiloh expedition (but see, recently, Reich 2011: 251, 260) does not attest, as is commonly assumed,

that the earlier fortifications continued in use until they were replaced by new ones in the Iron Age. In the same way roads were constructed in antiquity, the wall from the 8th century BCE was built over the line of the Canaanite wall from the Middle Bronze Age, reflecting topographical-functional considerations similar to those of the 8th-century BCE builders.

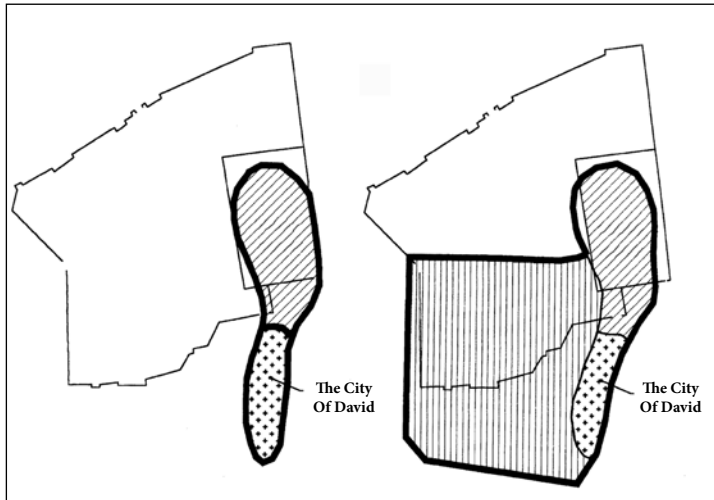


Fig. 3. Jerusalem during the Iron Age II (left) before it spread toward the western hill in the 8th century BCE (right).

It is noteworthy in this context that nowhere in the Land of Israel is there an example of an attempt by scholars to create continuity of this type of a fortification system built in the Middle Bronze Age that persisted in use continually in the Late Bronze Age, through the Iron Age I, the Iron Age IIA and until its replacement by new fortifications in the late 8th century BCE. Archaeological findings from recent years show that some components of Jerusalem's impressive fortifications in the Middle Bronze Age, especially those near the Gihon Spring, were indeed known to the inhabitants of the city in the subsequent periods, and that these inhabitants even made use of them. However, there is no evidence that these fortifications continued to be used for their original purpose in later periods.

If not for the biblical description attributing the construction of Jerusalem's walls to King Solomon's time (1 Kings 9:15) and the supposition that the city had special status in the early days of the monarchy, scholars would probably not have been drawn into discussion of the existence of a fortification system in Jerusalem during the Iron Age IIA (D. Ussishkin reached a similar conclusion as far back as 2006, and see, recently, Ussishkin 2012).

Needless to say, if a fortified settlement existed in the Iron Age IIA on the City of David hill, the western line of the walls would have to have gone through the Givati excavation area. This extensive area provides a full cross-section of the western side of the City of David hill from

its summit to the Tyropoeon Valley floor that bounds it on the west. Thus, until excavations reveal unambiguous evidence of the existence of a wall, it seems that conclusion must be rejected that a fortification line surrounded the hill during the Iron Age IIA, a line ostensibly based on earlier fortifications from the Middle Bronze Age.

The results of the Givati excavations have direct implications for understanding the settlement history of the city of David throughout the various periods, particularly the earlier ones. It seems that the preliminary data on the physical size of the settlement on the hill – as revealed by the Givati excavations on the one hand, and by the negative evidence so far for an earlier fortification line from the Iron Age in this part of the hill on the other hand – bring us one step closer to a better understanding of the nature and size of the settlement that existed there in the early days of the monarchy (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The City of David, looking north. Was the hill really fortified at the beginning of the monarchy?

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Illustration Credits

Fig. 1. Courtesy of SkyView Photography

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