




## Project Gallery

# New excavations at Tel Erani: the Early Bronze Age I fortification walls and early urbanisation in the Southern Levant

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Fortification walls and other buildings discovered during renewed excavations at Tel Erani (Tell esh-Sheikh el-Areyni) shed new light on the beginnings of urbanisation in the Southern Levant during the second half of the fourth millennium BC.

Keywords: Southern Levant, Early Bronze Age, fortification walls, urbanisation

## Introduction

Most research regarding the early urbanisation of the Southern Levant has focused on the construction of defensive walls and public buildings. Tel Erani (Tell esh-Sheikh el-Areyni) is located on the border between the Mediterranean coastal plain and the Judean foothills, in present-day Israel (Figure 1). Excavations began there in the 1960s under the first director of the Department of Antiquities (Yeivin 1977) and have continued since, with the most recent fieldwork undertaken in 2019. These expeditions include archaeologists from Tel Aviv University, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU), the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (JUK) and the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) (Kempinski & Gilead 1991; Ciałowicz *et al.* 2015), with the support of a team from the University of Buenos Aires.

The tell comprises three main areas: the acropolis in the north, the upper terrace and the lower terrace (Figure 2). Occupying approximately 25ha, the site includes Early (thirty-fifth to thirty-first century BC) and Late Bronze (fourteenth century BC) Age, and Iron Age phases (twelfth to eighth century BC), with some remains from the Byzantine (fourth to eighth century AD) and Ottoman (sixteenth to twentieth century AD) periods.

Yeivin's (1977) excavations in Area N—one of several areas he excavated (Figure 2)—revealed the remains of defensive mud-brick walls in the north-western part of the lower terrace. These were re-excavated by a BGU/JUK team (Ciałowicz *et al.* 2015). A salvage excavation during 2015–2016 (Milevski *et al.* 2016) revealed a new portion of the site's fortification walls. Both complexes in areas N and P-Q date to the Early Bronze (EB) IB1

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*Figure 1. Location map with sites mentioned in the text (inset) (produced by A. Fadida, based on ArcGIS, Esri), with general view of Tel Erani, looking north (2015–2016 season) (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).*

(c. 3300–3100 BC), referred to as the ‘Erani C horizon’ (Yekutieli 2006) following the nomenclature of the excavation conducted by Kempinski and Gilead (1991).

Building complexes found in Area D, excavated by Yeivin (1977) and later Kempinski and Gilead (1991) (Figure 3), provide some evidence for public buildings or proto palaces. These complexes were also dated to the EB IB1 based on associated pottery.

## **The defensive walls and the buildings in Area P-Q**

The excavations in 2015–2016 revealed two defensive walls built one on top of the other; these are numbered W200 and W204 (Figures 4 & 5:1). Excavations reveal several phases of the site that pre-date the fortifications, all of which belonged to the Erani C horizon.

In 2018–2019, a collaborative excavation between the BGU, JUK and the IAA, along with the team from Buenos Aires University, investigated the inner part of the town in Area P-Q, within the defensive walls (Figure 5:2). Several buildings were found near or attached to the defensive walls. Two main levels were found: one early, probably attached to the inner face of the defensive walls, and with several phases; and one late, which seems to post-date the collapse of the walls. The early level belongs to the Erani C horizon—probably its late phase, according to the associated pottery (Figure 6) and a radiocarbon date from

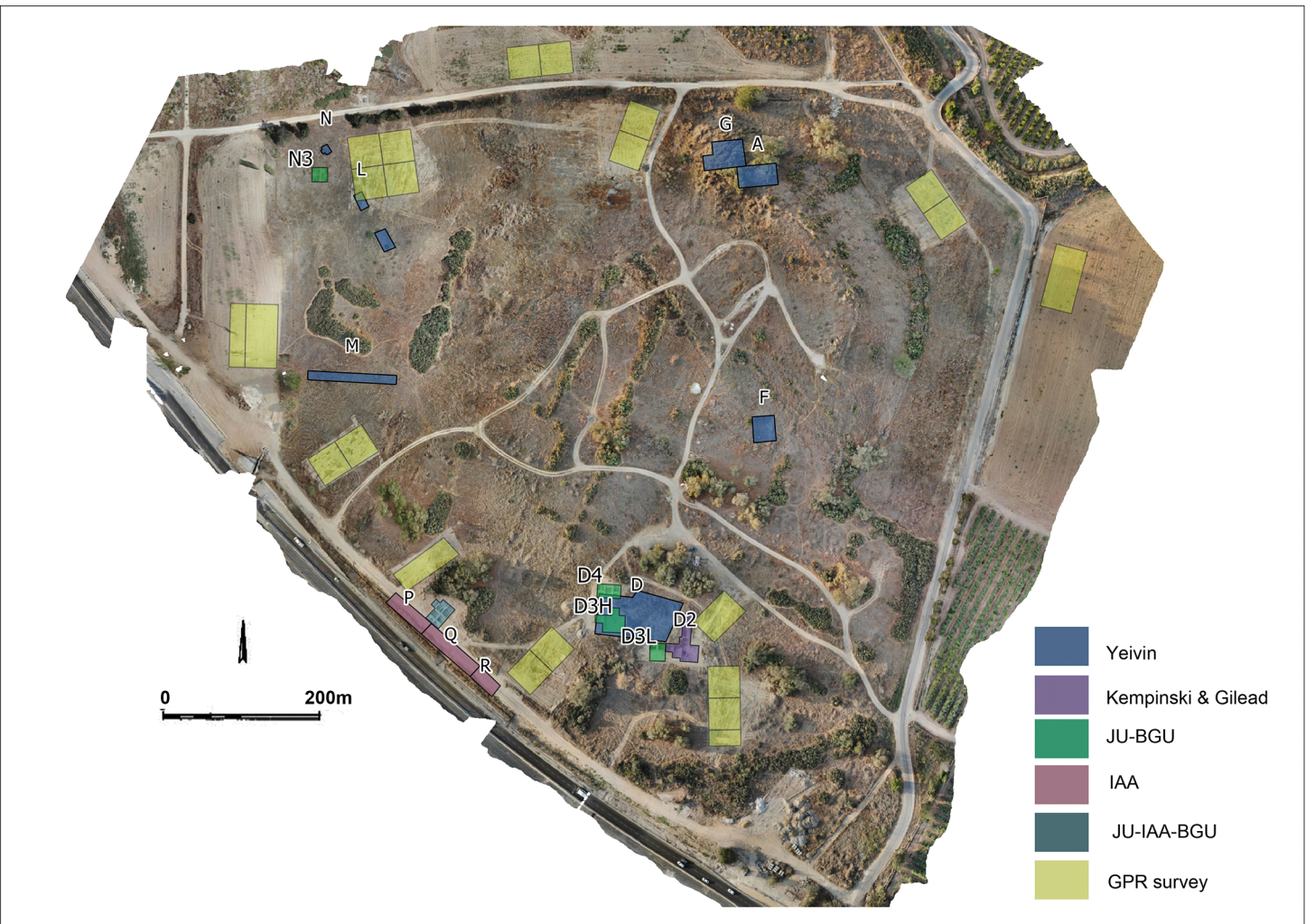


Figure 2. Location of excavated areas. JU = Jagiellonian University; BGU = Ben-Gurion University; IAA = Israel Antiquities Authority; GPR = ground-penetrating radar (aerial image by M. Czarnowicz).

one of the floors (4491±27 BP; GrM-22786: 3348–3092 BC at 95.4%; date modelled in OxCal v4.2, using the IntCal13 calibration curve; Bronk Ramsey 2009; Reimer *et al.* 2013).

Immediately below wall W200 was a destruction layer containing floors with *in situ* pottery vessels belonging to the Erani C horizon. The pottery was the same type as that found in floors of the structures inside the town (in Area P-Q) that are attached to the fortification walls.

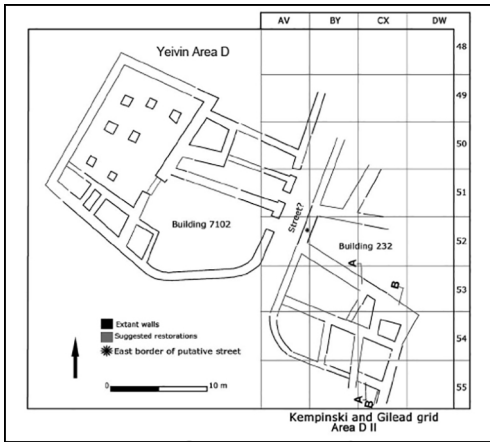


Figure 3. Public building(s) in Area D (adapted from Kempinski & Gilead 1991; Czarnowicz & Braun 2019).

A magnetometry survey conducted in 2019 on the edge of the lower terrace, close to areas N and P-Q, suggests that other structures existed on the north-western and southern border of the lower terrace. These are most evident in the south-east of the terrace, where the wall appears to turn northwards following the topography of the lower terrace (Figure 2).

## Discussion

The excavations at Tel Erani have revealed a walled town of the early phase of the EB IB on the Mediterranean coastal plain. The town was probably connected via inter-regional exchange between the coast and the highlands of the Southern

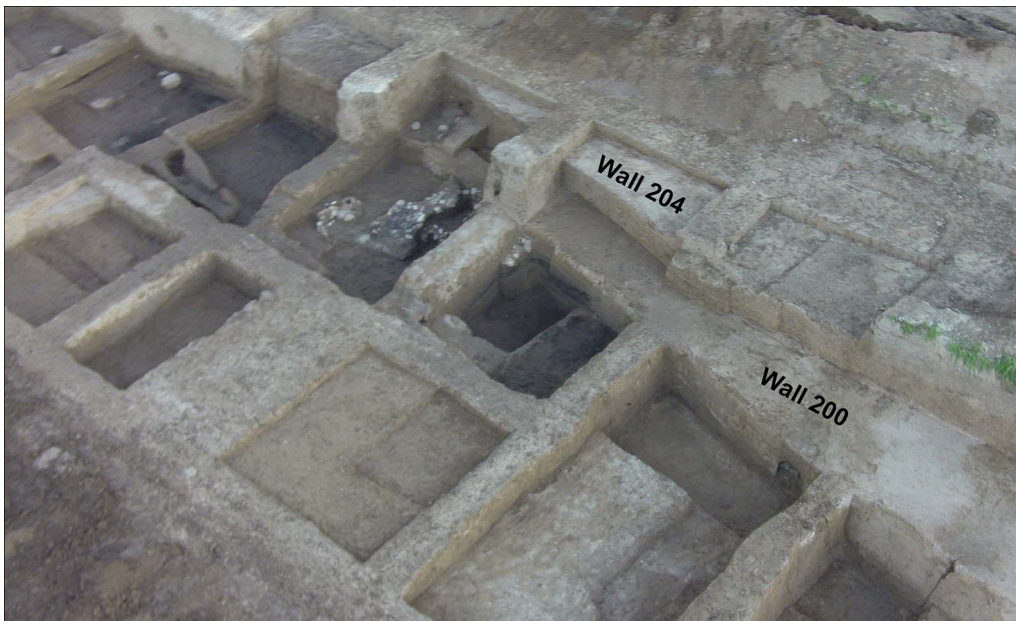


Figure 4. Fortification walls in Area P-Q (2015–2016 season; courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

Levant (Yekutieli 2006; Milevski 2011). The gradually increasing occupation density and the presence of public buildings and defensive town walls suggest an early period of urbanisation and fortification in the central-southern part of the Southern Levant. This surely reflects a type of social organisation led by elite groups (see Shalev 2018).

Tel Erani clearly has some features associated with urbanism: public architecture, evidence for

economic specialisation and trade, and dense occupation. Other criteria, such as population density, however, cannot be asserted. Early sites in the Southern Levant have some, but not all, of the attributes associated with urbanism (see Childe 1950; Gaydarska 2016; Smith 2016; Woolf 2020). Tel Erani appears to be at a relatively early stage of the urbanisation process in the Near East.

This process can perhaps also be observed at Tel Afek, north of Tel Aviv, at 'Ai, near Jerusalem, and also in the north, at Ein Zippori, Tel Bet Yerah and Tel Shalem (Callaway 1980; Eisenberg 1996; Kochavi et al. 2000; Getzov 2006; Milevski et al. 2014). The material culture—predominantly Erani C horizon

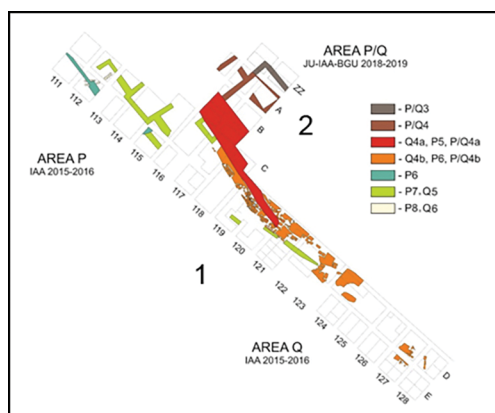


Figure 5. 1) Area P-Q, view of fortification walls (2015–2016); 2) inner buildings attached to the walls (2019). JU = Jagiellonian University; BGU = Ben-Gurion University; IAA = Israel Antiquities Authority (plan drawn by E. Aladjem and M. Czarnowicz).

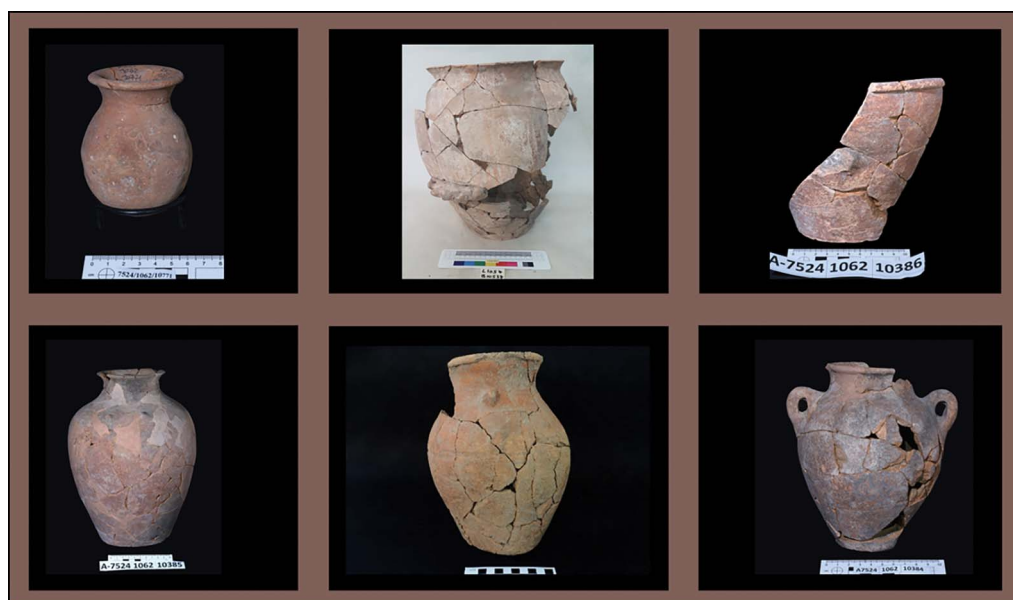


Figure 6. Pottery from the Erani C horizon found in Area P-Q (photographs by C. Amit, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

pottery—demonstrates how Tel Erani was widely connected, with links to other sites on the coastal plain (e.g. Azor, Lod, Afridar, Barnea); the foothills (e.g. Tel Gezer Hartuv, Eshtaol, Ramat Bet Shemesh, Horbat Ptora, Tel Lachish, Amazyia); the central hill country (e.g. Tel en-Nasbeh, Jerusalem); the Jordan Valley (e.g. Jericho); the Judean desert (e.g. Nahal Mishtar Cave); and the northern Negev (e.g. Lahav) (Yekutieli 2006; Milevski 2011). This pottery is also evident in Lower and Middle Egypt (Czarnowicz 2014) and represents one of the first phases of Levantine interaction with the Nile during the mid-fourth millennium BC.

The following phase of Tel Erani, EB IB2, probably reflects the presence of Egyptians at the site, as evidenced by a ubiquitous presence of Egyptian finds (Czarnowicz *et al.* 2014). The connection between phase EB IB2 and the earlier Erani C horizon remains unclear, as does the relationship between the Egyptian influence and the earlier fortification walls; this is an area of future research at the site.

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