

# INITIAL RESULTS OF THE STRATIGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY OF THE TEL KABRI MIDDLE BRONZE AGE PALACE

By Assaf Yasur-Landau, Eric H. Cline and Nurith Goshen

Tel Kabri is a 34-hectare site located in the western Galilee of modern-day Israel, five kilometers east of Nahariya. At its peak, during the MBII period (ca. 1720–1550/1500 BCE; BIETAK 2002), the site – with its vast palace and massive fortifications – was the center of a vast polity that dominated most of the western Galilee and the Akko plain (YASUR-LANDAU, CLINE and PIERCE 2008, 78) (Figs. 1, 2).

The site has been the focus of two large-scale explorations: the first led by Aaron Kempinski and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier from 1986 to 1993 (KEMPINSKI 2002) and the second led by Eric H. Cline and Assaf Yasur-Landau from 2005 to the present (YASUR-LANDAU *et al.* 2012). The aim of the current set of excavations is to study the formation of the Canaanite palatial economy and society as well as

to understand its interactions with the Aegean world. Indeed, previous publications stemming from our renewed excavations have dealt with the Kabri wall paintings and interactions with the Aegean world, as well as with social aspects of palatial consumption (CLINE and YASUR-LANDAU 2007; CLINE, YASUR-LANDAU and GOSHEN 2009; YASUR-LANDAU *et al.* 2012; YASUR-LANDAU and CLINE 2014; MAROM *et al.* 2014).

In this paper, however, we would like to present our current views on the stratigraphy and relative chronology of the Kabri palace, based on the preliminary synthesis of the results of the 2005–2011 seasons of excavation at Tel Kabri and of the accompanying regional survey in the western Galilee. We will follow here the palace's development throughout the later MBI and the entire MBII. As

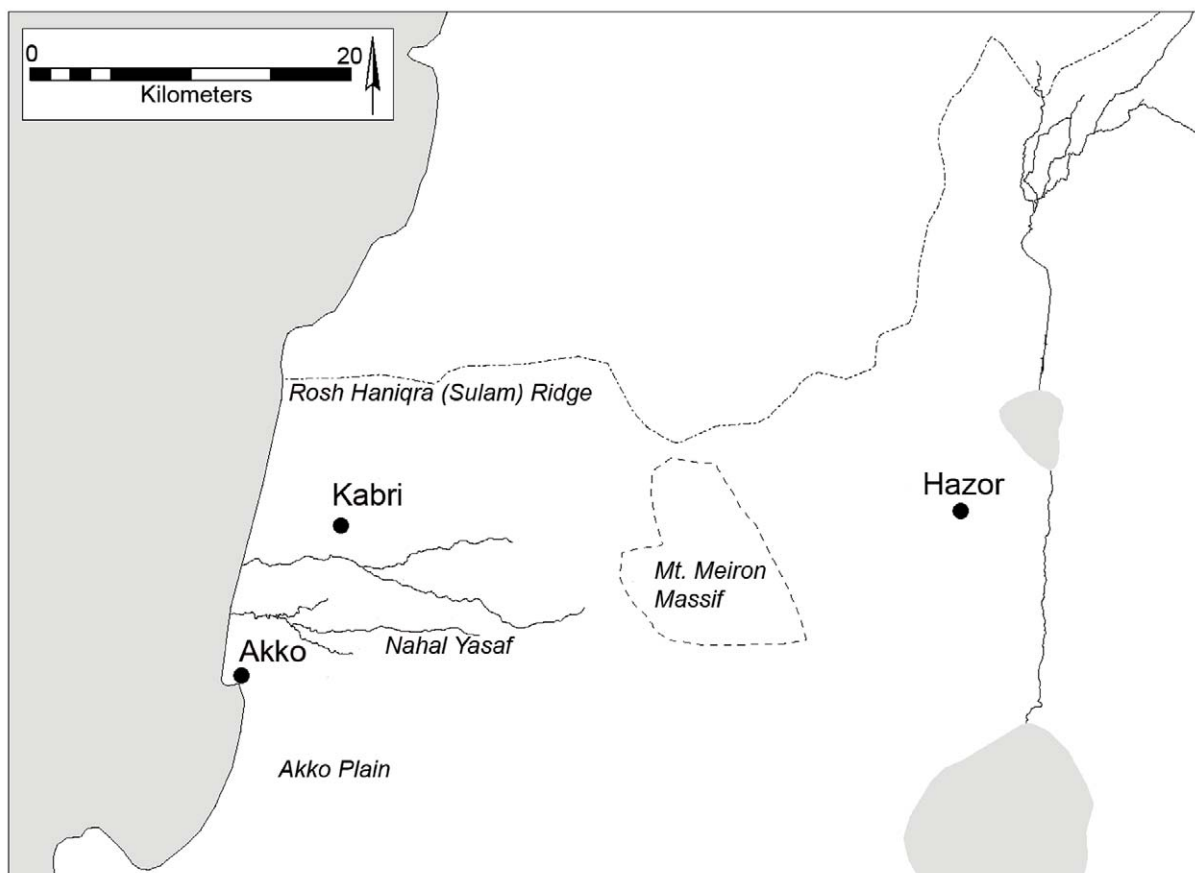


Fig. 1 Map of the western Galilee with Tel Kabri, Map by Assaf Yasur-Landau.

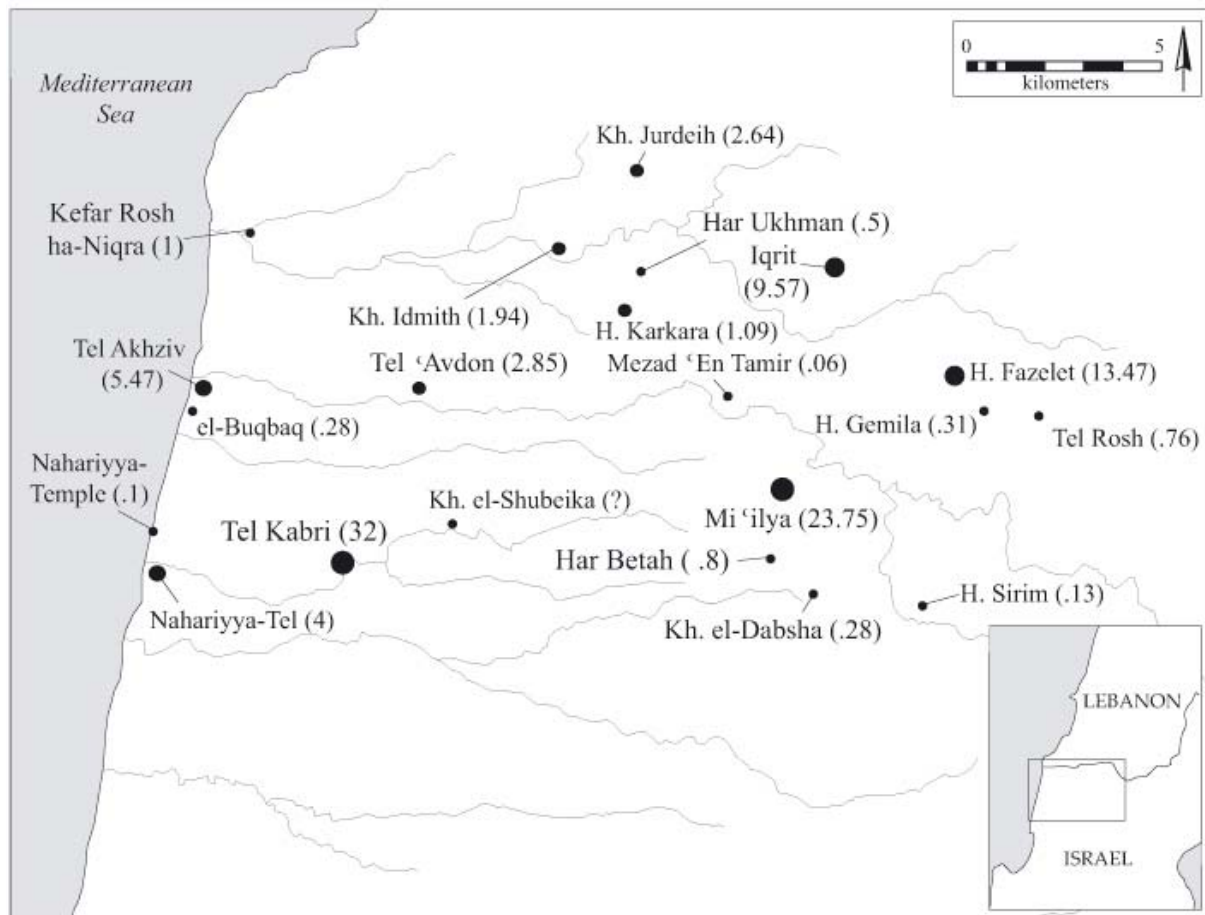


Fig. 2 Map of the surveyed MB II sites around Tel Kabri, Map by George E. Pierce.

much of our work has been dedicated to an examination of the stratification underneath and within rooms excavated by the previous expedition, we were able to add to the history of the palace presented by KEMPINSKI (2002, 450–451; OREN 2002, 55–70).<sup>1</sup> This article is accompanied by an initial analysis of the pottery assemblage from the palace by Samet (this volume).

The site was inhabited early in the Middle Bronze Age I, as is evident from tombs excavated

by Kempinski (tombs 1045 and 1050; KEMPINSKI, GERSHUNI and SCHEFTELOWITZ 2002, Fig. 5.22). It seems, however, that for most of the MBI, there was no palatial structure at the site (see Table 1). The area upon which the palace was built was occupied in the middle part of the MBI – our phase DW VII<sup>2</sup> – by domestic structures, the remains of which were found under wall 673, the northern wall of the palace, as well as east of wall 733 in the eastern part of Area DW (Fig. 3). This

<sup>1</sup> The Tel Kabri archaeological project's interdisciplinary research is funded primarily by the ISF (grant 848/10) and INSTAP, as well as the University of Haifa, The Leon Recanati Institute for Maritime Studies, The George Washington University, and private donors; we are grateful to all of the above for their support. Area supervisors in the project are Nurith Goshen from the University of Pennsylvania, Inbal Samet from the University of Haifa, and Alexandra Ratzlaff from Boston University. Scientific collaborators in the project include: Andrew Koh from Brandeis University (Residue Analysis); David Ben Shlomo from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Petrography); Guy Bar-Oz and Nimrod Marom from the University

of Haifa (Zooarchaeology); Felix Höflmayer from the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin (Radiocarbon); Ruth Shahack-Gross from the Weizmann Institute (Geomorphology); and Sarel Shalev from the University of Haifa (XRF analysis). A detailed account of the stratigraphy of the renewed excavations at Tel Kabri will appear in the forthcoming *Kabri II* volume (Brill), with the following chapters: Area D West (Nurith Goshen and Alexandra Ratzlaff) Area D South 1 (Inbal Samet) Area D South 2 (Alexandra Ratzlaff) and Area D North (Nurith Goshen and Alexandra Ratzlaff).

<sup>2</sup> The phasing used in the paper refers to local phases related to excavation areas; thus phase DW VII relates to D-West.



Fig. 3 Tel Kabri, Area D-West, level DW VII wall under wall 673.

picture completes that compiled by our regional survey, which suggests that at this time Kabri was but one of a series of unfortified settlements in the western Galilee (YASUR-LANDAU, CLINE and PIERCE 2008).

The earliest MB monumental structure at the site may be attributed to the middle-late MBI, our phase DW VI, perhaps parallel to Apeh phases

2–3 (Fig. 4 plan of DW VI;) (see SAMET, this volume). The private houses were flattened and covered by a thick constructional fill of earth and rubble, which contained much Early Bronze Age pottery, probably an indication of the origin of the fill. Two massive stone walls creating a long space, named “the corridor” by us, are the major component of this structure. They are preserved to a height of at least 2 meters. The corridor had two narrow openings: to the east, a 0.50 m wide opening, and to the north, a 0.50 m wide opening that led to another space, covered with a very thick white plaster floor. Although very little of the structure has yet been excavated, it seems that the first palatial structure at Tel Kabri had a fort-like appearance. This brings to mind other fortified structures of the MBI period connected with the rise of complexity in a region which is still pre-urban, such as the fort at Qiriat Shmona (south) (YASUR-LANDAU 2012) or the Tel el-Burak fortified palatial structure (KAMLAH and SADER 2010, Fig. 3).

Not much later, during the transitional MBI-II period (our phase DW V, roughly equivalent to



Area D-West Level VI

Fig. 4 Tel Kabri, Area D-West, plan of phase DW VI.





Fig. 5 Tel Kabri, Area D-West, plan of phase DW V.



Fig. 6 Area D-West, Phase DW V fill into DW VI architecture.

Kempinski's stratum 4 in the palace area), the palace went through an extensive enlargement and elaboration program (Fig. 5). This constructional phase was accompanied by thick deliberate fills that packed the corridor as well as the room to its north (Fig. 6). The corridor deposit (to be discussed by Samet in this volume) included vast amounts of restorable pottery belonging to the transitional MBI-MBII, their types suggesting some resemblance to a tomb assemblage.

During the construction, three small rooms were also built to the east of the corridor. It is possible that an early hall, the predecessor of Ceremonial Hall 611, was built to the west of the corridor, as indicated by a floor predating the Stratum 3 MBII floors found by Kempinski (OREN 2002, Fig. 4.55). Similarly, Hall 740 was first constructed during this phase, to the west of Ceremonial Hall 611.

This was the period during which Tel Kabri was first surrounded by a massive earthen rampart, 25 meters thick in some places (KEMPINSKI 2002, 39). This act consolidated the power of the governing rulership on the one hand and improved



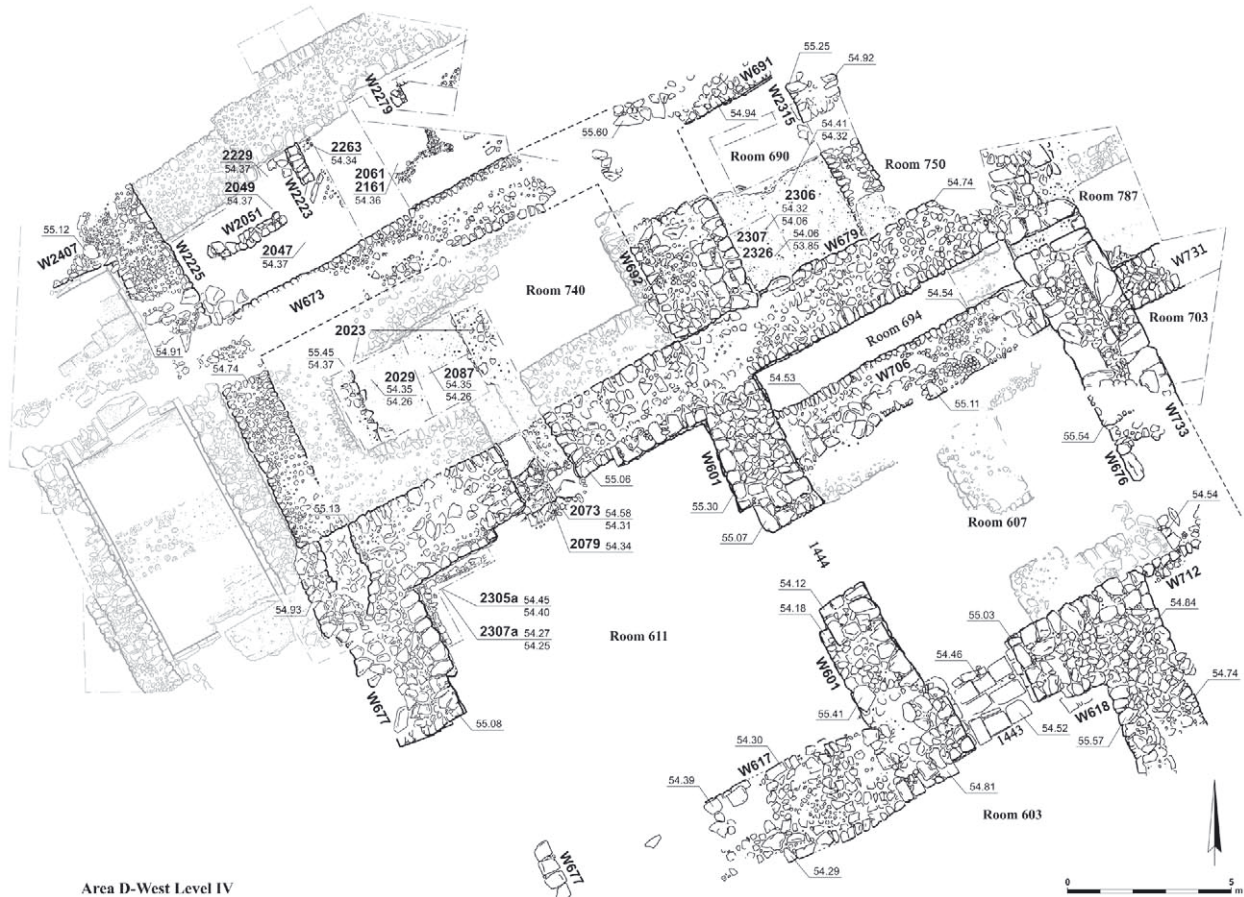


Fig. 7 Tel Kabri, Area D-West, plan of phase DW IV.

the security of the entire community on the other hand. It may well have been a response to the processes of the inter-polity rivalry occurring in the western Galilee between Acco and Kabri, which resulted also in the disappearance of small MBI rural sites, and the fortification of secondary settlements such as Achziv and perhaps Avdon (YASUR-LANDAU, CLINE and PIERCE 2008).

This process was accompanied during the period by an increase in the impact of Kabri and its rulers on the surrounding countryside, with the construction of the large fort at En Tamir (GETZOV 2000), built over Nahal Kheziv, which overlooked a land route running from the foothills of the Meiron massif to the west, ending at Achziv on the coast. This large fort centered around a courtyard has not yet been fully excavated, but has already yielded sherds of the transitional MBI-II and early MBII period.

The rising power of the Kabri rulership and its abilities to use the existing workforce for public projects also allowed for the enlargement of the palace. At the same time, its stronger grip on a



Fig. 8 Aerial photo of Area D-West.

larger populace required a place in which the rulership could meet with other decision-making groups in the community, which explains the construction of a large hall to the west of the corridor. This place would become a focal point of power for the rest of the palace's history.





Fig. 9 Area D-South 2 (= DS-2), with steps, drain and terrace wall.

During the next phase, DW IV (Fig. 7; Fig. 8), roughly equivalent to Kempinski Strata 3a and 3b, and MBII (Table 1), the palace is further extended to the north-east, reaching our Area D-North. The entire western wing of the palace is repaved with a new set of plaster floors.

Furthermore, Kempinski's excavations in Area F, and our adjacent excavations in Area DS-1 and DS-2 indicate that the palace was extended to the south as well, reaching this area too during the MBII, and covering the remains of transitional MBI-II private houses with a series of monumental structures (OREN 2002, 55, 61–63). We have expanded Kempinski's Area F considerably, adding to it our Areas DS-1 and DS-2. The remains in Area DS-2 include a well-built terrace wall with a drain and a flight of steps (Fig. 9). These led to Area F, which contained a courtyard with a thick plaster floor and platforms paved with drafted stones. A massive brick collapse that covers the entire area suggests that there is a large structure still buried to the east, which was possibly built during this phase.

Sometime during this period, perhaps during the later part, the palace was decorated with at least two sets of Aegean-style wall paintings and two sets of Aegean-style floors. These include the miniature wall fresco and the frescoed floor previously discovered by Kempinski and Niemeier, found in a secondary deposition in Area DW (NIE-MEIER and NIEMEIER 2002) and the Aegean-style wall painting with a blue background, as well as possibly another painted floor, found in a second-

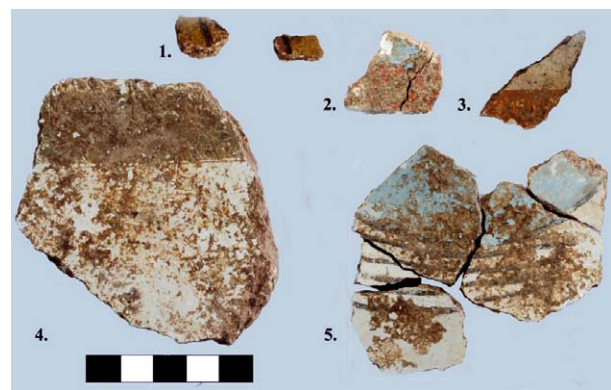


Fig. 10 Frescoes found in Tel Kabri from Area D-South.





Fig. 11 Tel Kabri, Area D-West, plan of phase DW III.

ary deposition in Area DS during our recent excavations (CLINE, YASUR-LANDAU and GOSHEN 2011) (Fig. 10).

While the palace of phase DW V was vast, the palace of phase DW IV was even larger and was also more developed, as indicated by the first use at the site of architectural refinements such as entrances with inner recesses, ashlar paving stones and perhaps orthostats, and, above all, Aegean-style painting. In earlier articles (CLINE and YASUR-LANDAU 2007; CLINE, YASUR-LANDAU and GOSHEN 2011), we have argued that the repeated choice by the Kabri rulership of Aegean art rather than Syrian-inspired art, reflected in up to four different wall and floor paintings, was deliberate and calculated. It was, on the one hand, a manifestation of the rulers' will to demonstrate their connections with faraway areas which other polities did not possess and, on the other hand, an aspiration to belong to a more "cosmopolitan" Mediterranean narrative. It seems, therefore, that while the robust, fort-like palace of phase DW V was an expression of the newly-acquired dominance of Kabri in the Acco valley, the very large and more elegantly-



Fig. 12 Area D-South 1 (= DS-1).

refined palace of DW IV was an expression of the will of the rulers of Kabri to take part in interregional trade and perhaps politics.

A major renovation project separated phase DW IV from DW III. It is possible that the one-hall monumental structure in Area DS-1 was built during this period (Fig. 11; Fig. 12). The function of this structure is still undetermined, yet the material used for the mending of the floor (and

possibly in the mud-bricks) included pieces of Aegean-style wall paintings belonging to the previous phase.

In Area DW at this time, the walls of room 740 were thickened considerably and the Aegean-style miniature fresco was removed and used as packing material in a newly created threshold (CLINE, YASUR-LANDAU and GOSHEN 2011). A hall to the east of Ceremonial Hall 611 was divided into two smaller rooms, 667 and 607. It has been suggested by Kempinski that Ceremonial Hall 611 itself had orthostats that were removed during this phase, leaving a gap between the painted floor and the walls of the hall (KEMPINSKI 1990: 44; KEMPINSKI 1992: 15; OREN 2002: n. 5).

To the north and west of the external wall of the palace, two large features now appear. The first is wall 2129, a 1.8 meter thick wall, built north of wall 673. It is constructed as a series of zig-zag segments, each stepping out slightly further to the south from the previous. It may be the foundations of a curtain wall, although its precise function remains to be determined.

The second new feature was found during the 2011 excavation season, when we uncovered the so-called “Orthostat Building” (Fig. 13) (YASUR-LANDAU *et al.* 2012). It is located immediately to the west of the ceremonial area of the palace at Kabri and is connected to wall 2129 just mentioned. This is a small building, with an outer size of approximately 6 m × 14 m, which has two rooms positioned one behind the other. The inner faces of the stone wall foundations in both rooms are lined with beach rock orthostats c. 25 cm thick, 60 cm high, and between 40 cm and 1.5 m long. These orthostat slabs were covered with white plaster; square dowel holes were chiseled into their top surface. The back room of the structure was paved with large drafted and plastered stones, and contained at least three restorable storage jars.

The reasons for this renovation program are still not understood. The end of Aegean art in the palace of Kabri may be due to a sudden lack of resources or a cessation of connections to Aegean artisans. However, the expansion of the palace on the one hand, and the Cypriot pottery found in its latest destruction deposits on the other hand (KEMPINSKI, GERSHUNI and SHEFTELOWITZ 2002, 117–120), suggest that there was no lack of resources nor a severance of international ties at this time. Thus, we need to look elsewhere for an explanation of the change in the artistic program of the palace, although it may be as simple as a

new political-cultural agenda on the part of the Kabri rulership.

The latest, post-renovation, palace was destroyed during the late MBII, before the beginning of the LBI period (CLINE, YASUR-LANDAU and GOSHEN 2011). This dating is indicated by the presence of White Painted Middle Cypriot wares and a Chocolate on White amphora in combination with the absence of final MBII wares such as early Bichrome Wheelmade, canonical Chocolate on White bowls, Cypriot Proto White Painted, and perhaps even early Cypriot White Slip I. In terms of absolute chronology, it is entirely plausible that the palace went out of use within the first half of the sixteenth century BCE.

While the excavations at the site continue, our understanding of the palace of Kabri is an ongoing process. The tentative development scheme of the palace presented here shows development over at least two and a half centuries – from the late MBI to the late MBII. In all stages, the palace seems to grow at the expense of domestic structures. In the earliest phase, DW VI, the proto-palace appears to be a fort-like structure. It grows in size and more closely resembles a proper palace in the succeeding phase DW V, during the transitional MBI-MBII, at the same time that the Kabri rampart is built. The further growth and elaboration of the phase DW IV palace reflects the dominant status of Kabri in the Acco valley, and its overseas connections. Finally, the last phase of the palace, DW III, does not seem to show overseas contact in the form of wall paintings/architectural decoration, yet its growth continues until the demise of the palace, and the site, during late MBII or the beginning of MBIII.

The excavations of the Kabri palace are an ongoing project, and several key questions of chronology are either under study now or will be addressed in the coming seasons. A major component that is currently being addressed is the question of absolute chronology, with an ongoing analysis of radiocarbon samples from past seasons by Felix Höflmayer. One of the goals for the next seasons is to collect additional samples, thereby allowing us to present a robust radiocarbon sequence from the various phases of the palace. Another important theme that needs addressing is the chronology for the end of the palace. To date, the assemblage of complete vessels published from the last phase of the palace (DW/DS III) is rather limited. The discovery of the palace’s storerooms in 2013, still filled with pottery *in situ*, began a





Fig. 13 Area D-West, Orthostat Building.

prolonged process of excavation and restoration. A single storeroom was excavated in 2013, while at least one more awaits further excavations. The data from these assemblages will no doubt yield

further insights on the date of the end of the palace, and perhaps will hint at the cause for its destruction.

## References

- BIETAK, M.  
2002 Relative and Absolute Chronology of the Middle Bronze Age: Comments on the Present State of Research. In M. BIETAK (ed.), *The Middle Bronze Age in the Levant. Proceedings of an International Conference on MB IIA Ceramic Material. Vienna 24th-26th of January 2001*, Wien: 29–42.
- CLINE, E. H. and YASUR-LANDAU, A.  
2007 Poetry in Motion: Canaanite Rulerships and Minoan Narrative Poetry at Tel Kabri. In: MORRIS, S. P. and LAFFINEUR, R., (eds.), *EPOS: Reconstructing Greek Epic and Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology. Proceedings of the 11th International Aegean Conference EPOS Reconsidering Greek Epic and Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology Los Angeles, UCLA, The J. Paul Getty Villa, 20–23 April 2006* (Aegaeum 28). Liège: 157–166.
- CLINE, E. H., YASUR-LANDAU, A. and GOSHEN, N.  
2011 New Fragments of Aegean-Style Painted Plaster from Tel Kabri, Israel. *AJA* 115.2, 245–261.
- GETZOV, N.  
2000 A Middle Bronze Age II Fort on the Naqar Ridge in Western Galilee. *Atiqot* 39, 75–106.
- KAMLAH, J. and SADER, H.  
2010 Deutsch-libanesische Ausgrabungen auf Tell el-Burak südlich von Sidon. Vorbericht nach Abschluss der siebten Kampagne 2010. *ZDPF* 2010, 93–115.
- KEMPINSKI, A.  
2002 *Tel Kabri. The 1986–1993 Excavations*. Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University.
- KEMPINSKI, A., GERSHUNY L. and SCHEFTELOWITZ N.  
2002 The Middle Bronze Age. In: KEMPINSKI, A. *Tel Kabri. The 1986–1993 Excavations*. Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University: 109–175.
- MAROM, N., YASUR-LANDAU, A., ZUCKERMAN, S., CLINE, E., BENTOR, A. AND BAR-OS, G.  
2014 Shepherd Kings? A Zooarchaeological Investigation of Elite Precincts in Middle Bronze Age Hazor and Tel Kabri. *BASOR* 371, 59–82.
- NIEMEIER, B. and NIEMEIER, W-D.  
2002 The Frescoes in the Middle Bronze Age Palace. In KEMPINSKI, A. *Tel Kabri. The 1986–1993 Excavations*: Tel Aviv, 254–285.
- OREN, R.  
2002 Area D. In KEMPINSKI, A. *Tel Kabri. The 1986–1993 Excavations*: Tel Aviv, 55–72.
- YASUR-LANDAU, A.  
2012 The Stratum VII Fortress in a Time of Competing Politics. In: GADOT, Y. and YASUR-LANDAU, A. *Qiryat Shemona (S). Fort and Village in the Hula Valley*. Tel Aviv, 212–220.
- YASUR-LANDAU, A., CLINE, E. H. and PIERCE, G. A.  
2008 Middle Bronze Age Settlement Patterns in the Western Galilee, Israel. *JFA* 33/1, 59–83.
- YASUR-LANDAU, A., CLINE, E. H., GOSHEN, N., MAROM, N. and SAMET, I.  
2012 An MB II Orthostat Building at Tel Kabri, Israel. *BASOR* 367, 1–29.
- YASUR-LANDAU, A. and CLINE, E. H.  
2014 The Middle Bronze Age Palace of Kabri Through Time. In: SOUVATZI, S. and HADJI, A., (eds.), *Space and Time in Mediterranean Prehistory*. New York, 231–245.