

PUBLICATION METHODOLOGY

Yuval Gadot and Oded Lipschits

The site of Ramat Raḥel was settled almost continuously for nearly two millennia. The transition from one period to another was gradual in most cases, and the archaeological record shows only rare cases of wholesale destruction or abandonment. Aharoni recognized eight different strata and sub-strata (VB, VA, IVB, IVA, III, IIB, IIA, I), which he dated to five historical eras: the Iron Age and the Persian-Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. He published yearly reports, each presenting the stratigraphy of the area that had been excavated during that season. Pottery was presented selectively and not contextually in most cases, and only two loci were published in their entirety: Locus 477 (Aharoni 1964: Figs. 16–19) and Locus 484 (*ibid.*: Figs. 12–15). This method of publication made it difficult to correlate between the stratigraphic and the chronological sequence. Furthermore the site was not divided into areas/trenches, nor was the stratigraphy evaluated separately for each distinct area. This turned out to be a major flaw when doing the site analysis, since the settlement history of Ramat Raḥel varies considerably from one part of the site to the next, resulting in what should have been presented as several localized stratigraphic sequences. Furthermore, by ignoring local stratigraphic and architectural developments, Aharoni forced his overall historical paradigm on the entire site.

Our attempt to present a comprehensive stratigraphic report includes dividing the site into what we recognize as significant stratigraphic sectors, ignoring the year in which each area was excavated by Aharoni. Retrospective analysis makes it easier to define the sectors in a meaningful way.

The following factors impeded our ability to interpret the stratigraphic sequence of Ramat Raḥel:

First, as mentioned above, settlements at the site tended to endure for long periods, and transitions from layer to layer were in most cases gradual. This type of site formation process is characterized by repeated reuse of floors and walls. Deserted structures would be dismantled in order for building materials to be recycled for the next stage of occupation. As a result of this process, despite the long-time occupation of the site, the accumulation of remains above the bedrock was no thicker than 2 m—unlike the situation on the tells of the Shephelah and Coastal Plain (e.g., Megiddo, Lachish), which displayed as much as 10–20 m of accumulated material culture.

Second, Ramat Raḥel was founded in a mountainous landscape (Kedem 2009, 2011), offering little flat terrain suitable for settlement. Natural or artificial terraces served as the base for the earliest settlement. Later building operations hid the natural topography and made it difficult for the excavator to recognize as he dug from the surface down to bedrock. Only after bedrock elevations were recorded at different locations were these natural terraces fully recognized.

Because of the terraced construction on the tell, the absolute height of different architectural elements is often irrelevant when assigning them to a certain stratum. Floors of the same stratum may be found at significantly different elevations. In addition, floors and walls of an early stratum may be



Fig. 4.1: Walls of Stratum V, IV and II built directly on the rock surface (photo by Skyview).

at a higher elevation than those of a neighboring feature belonging to a later stratum, but located on a lower terrace step (Fig. 4.1).

The third obstacle is the nature of Aharoni's documentation, described at length in Chapter 3. Much of the data regarding the relationship between different features was either lost or not recorded. When possible, we returned to the field to re-excavate in order to fill in gaps in our records. Where no field documentation was recovered that could support or disprove Aharoni's interpretation, we present his arguments noting that the documentation is missing.

In analyzing the site we identified four distinct sectors that we then further divided into 12 sub-sectors, each with its unique stratigraphic sequence (Fig. 4.2). We defined the borders of the sectors based on stratigraphic and architectural considerations, rather than adhering to Aharoni's grid system. The following chapters present the stratigraphy in each of the sectors and sub-sectors and the pottery assemblages yielded from each of them.

AHARONI'S EASTERN SECTOR (AES)

This sector encompasses the eastern part of the area excavated by Aharoni (Figs. 4.3, 4.4). We divided Sector AES into three sub-sectors as presented in Table 4.1.

To the east, this sector is bordered by a modern road and by the westernmost houses of Kibbutz Ramat Raḥel. During Aharoni's excavations there were only a small number of buildings in this area, but the natural slope of the hill seemed to be an indication that this was the eastern border of the site.

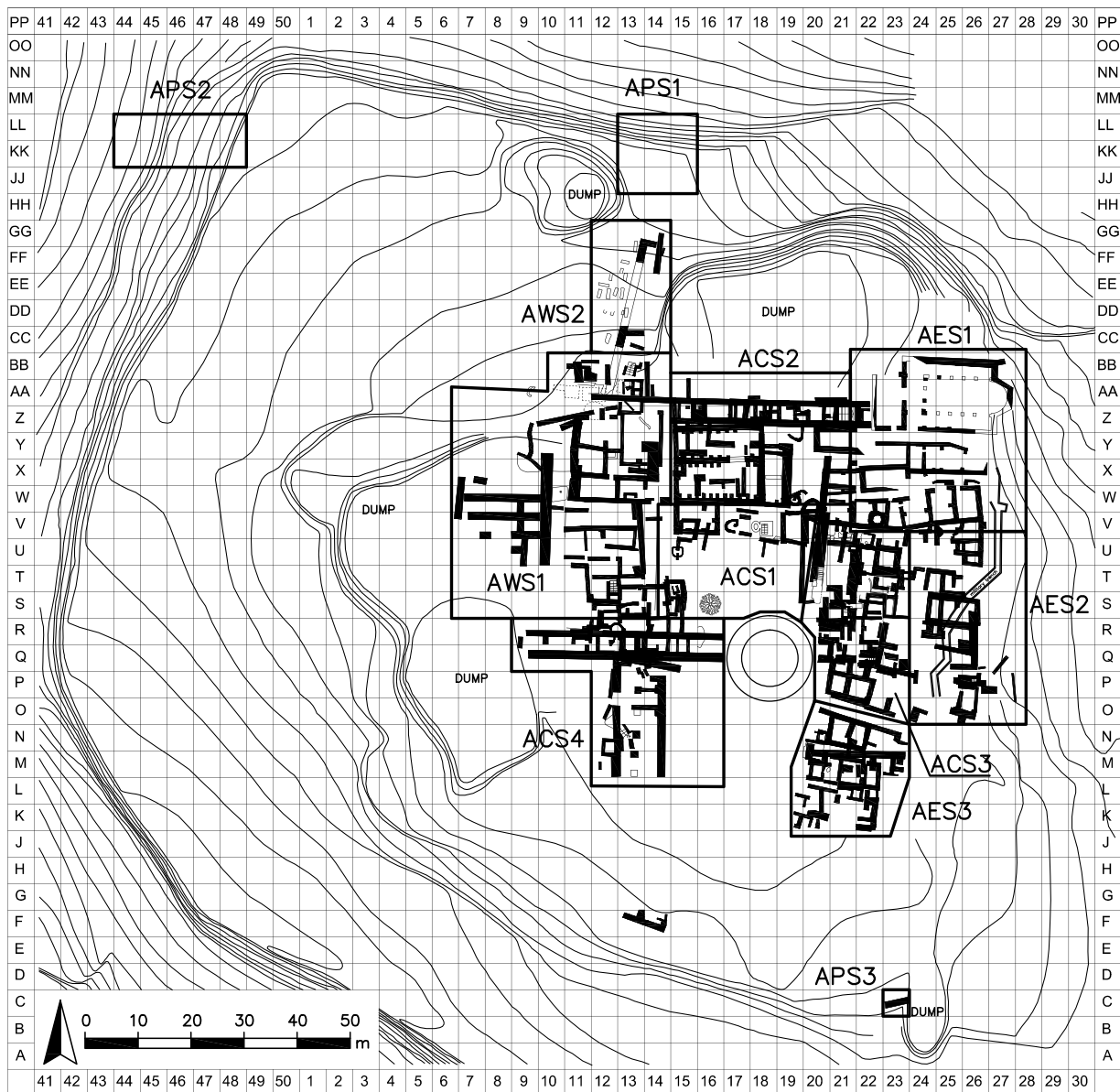


Fig. 4.2: Plan of site marking division into sectors and sub-sectors.

Aharoni, therefore, never attempted to dig further to the east. It should be noted that while new houses were built by the kibbutz in 1956, few architectural remains were exposed and reported by inspectors of the Department of Antiquities (Fig. 4.5a and b),¹ and those that were reported were not dated. The Renewed Excavations has exposed some ancient walls that seem to continue below the kibbutz's more recent developments (Sergi forthcoming; Areas D4–D5). It seems, therefore, that the site extended further to the east. The northern edge of the sector is delineated by the northern wall of a church (Squares BB/23–BB/27 and see Chapter 5), where the terrain slopes rather sharply to the north and to the east. Farther to the north the natural slope was covered by the earth dump of Aharoni's excavations.

¹ We wish to thank the IAA archive and ArieH Rochman-Halperin for allowing us to publish these items found at the archive.

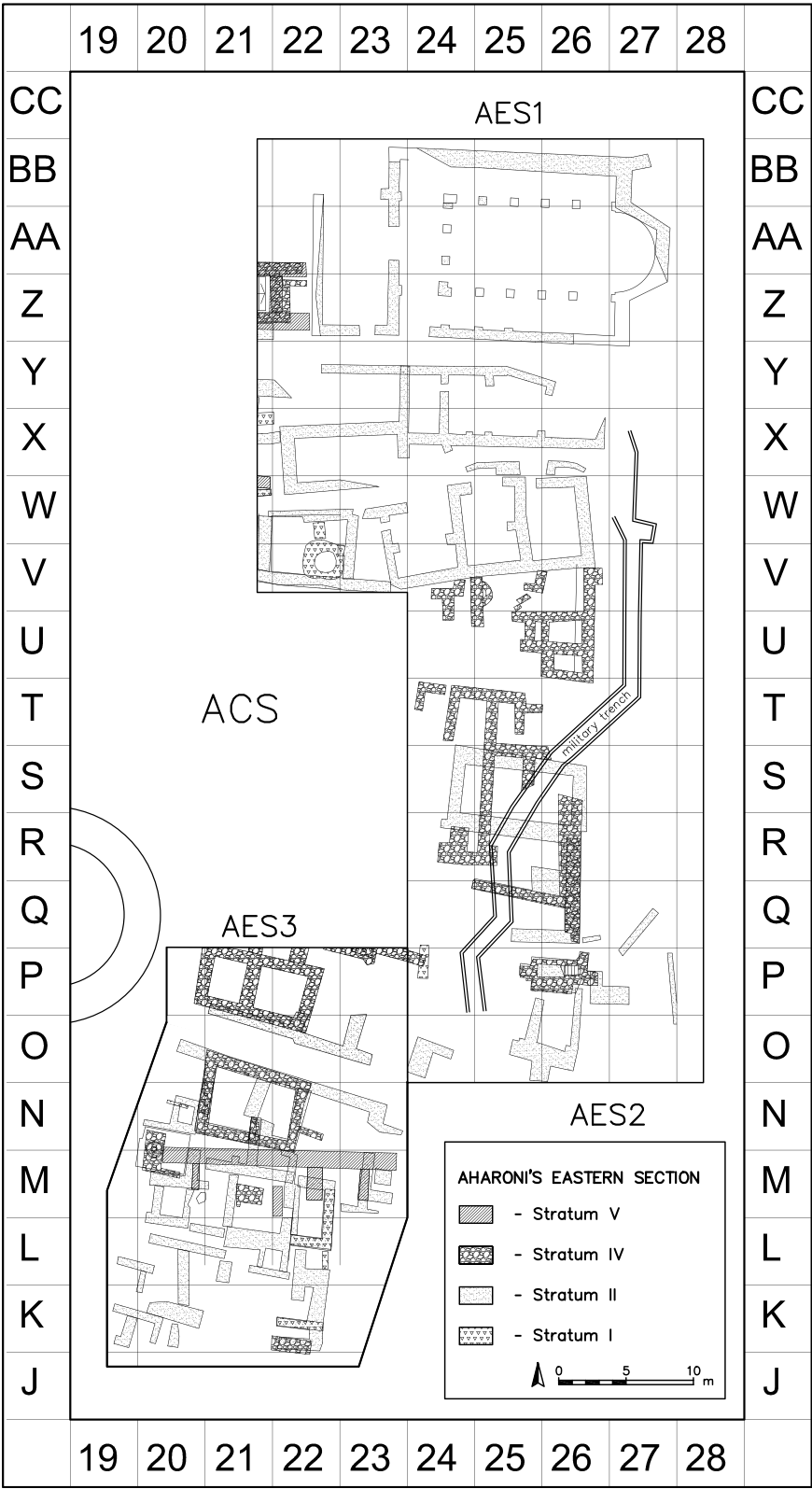


Fig. 4.3: Sector AES – architectural remains from all strata.

TABLE 4.1: SUB-SECTORS IN SECTOR AES

<i>Sub-Sector</i>	<i>Squares According to Aharoni's Grid</i>	<i>Main Architectural Features</i>
AES1	V–BB/22–28	Church and annexed building
AES2	O–V/24–27	Private dwellings, Courtyard 470
AES3	K–P/18–23	Private dwellings, agricultural installations



Fig. 4.4: Aerial view of the southern part of Sector AES as seen today (photo by Skyview).

The southwestern limit of this sector is a line that roughly follows the border between Aharoni's grid Columns 23 and 24. This line was chosen since the stratigraphy to the west of the line is significantly different. In the northern part (Sub-sector AES1) the sector expands westward into Aharoni's Squares V–BB in grid Columns 22 and 23, in order to include the dominant architectural buildings such as the church and Building 5 (see Chapter 5) in their entirety. Much like the eastern border of the sector, its southern limit is defined by modern buildings that prevented Aharoni from excavating further to the south.²

² The kibbutz's steam room stood south of Sector AES. After it was torn down, the Renewed Excavations investigated this as Area D2. For excavation results, see Lipschits *et al.* 2009).

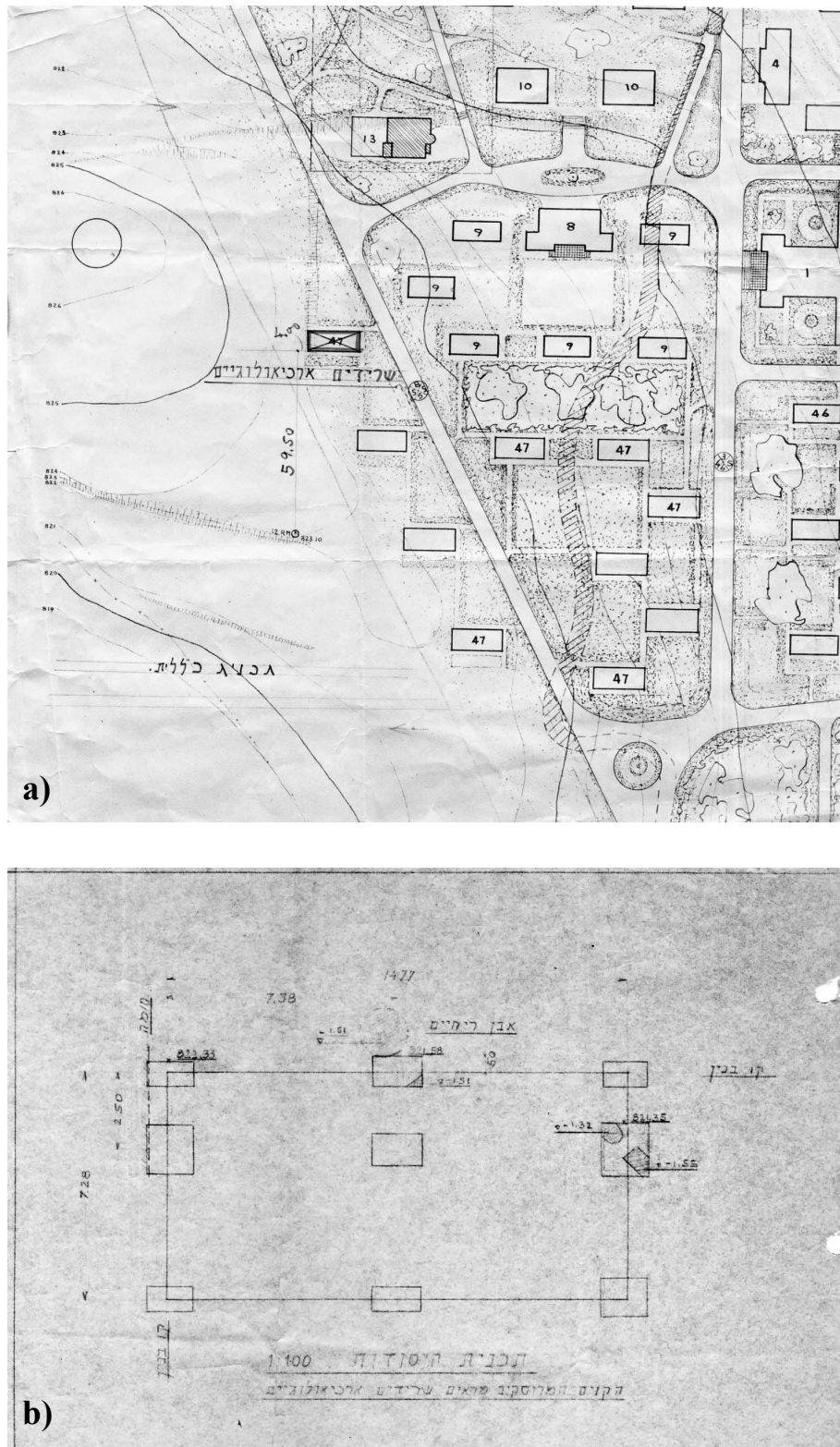


Fig. 4.5: A scan of a report by an IAA inspector on the finds under the kibbutz houses: (a) location map; (b) architectural plan (courtesy of the IAA archives).

In 1954, just prior to Aharoni's salvage excavations at the site, a meandering military trench was dug in the eastern part of the sector (Bocher 2011: 7; Figs. 4.3 and 4.6). Two bunkers were hollowed out along with a trench, expanding the destruction caused to earlier archaeological strata (Fig. 4.7). The construction of these modern fortifications compromised our understanding of the eastern sections of Building 5 and the church (though the apse itself was not damaged; see Chapter 5).



Fig. 4.6: The apse damaged by the military trench. The sides of the trench are highlighted.



Fig. 4.7: The military bunker built above the church. Note the date marked in the concrete.

AHARONI'S CENTRAL SECTOR (ACS)

At the heart of the central sector of the site stands the well-defined inner courtyard of the palatial compound (Courtyard 380) with architecture units built north, west and south of it (Figs. 4.8 and 4.9). The natural rock surface, mostly red flint of the Meshash formation, slopes sharply from southwest (817.20 m) to northeast (815.50 m). As a result, in the southern part of this sector (Sub-sector ACS4) the architectural remains from all periods lie directly on the bedrock, while in the north of the sector the anthropogenic accumulation was more than 2 m deep. Due to this difference, the sector was divided into four sub-sectors, shown in Table 4.2.

The sector was excavated in every season from 1954 to 1962, and underwent reconstruction work that was only partially documented. This activity included dismantling of architectural elements from

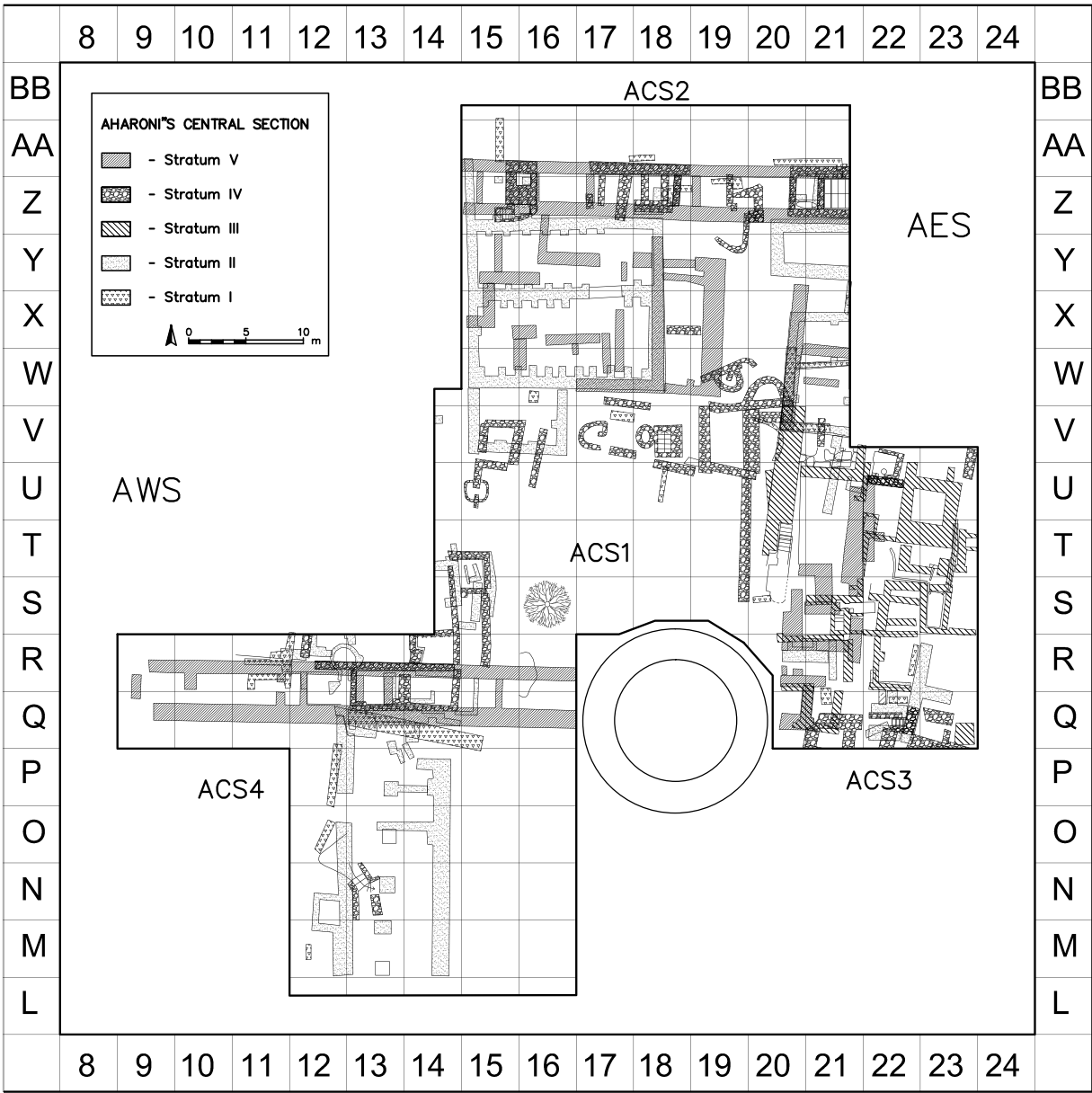


Fig. 4.8: Sector ACS—architectural remains from all strata.



Fig. 4.9: Sector ACS—aerial photograph taken in 2007. Note that all the architectural remains that were found cutting into or built above the central courtyard were either removed or covered (photo by Skyview).

TABLE 4.2: SUB-SECTORS IN AHARONI'S CENTRAL SECTOR (ACS)

<i>Sub-sector</i>	<i>Squares According to Aharoni's Grid</i>	<i>Main Architectural Features</i>
ACS1	Q–W/15–20	Courtyard 380 and southern casemate
ACS2	W–AA/15–22	Halls 260 and 257, Building 468 and the northern casemate system
ACS3	Q–V/20–23	Bathhouse 339, Gate 375
ACS4	M–R/9–16	Building 201

the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods, which had been built above Courtyard 380 and Building 468 to the north of the courtyard. Most architectural documentation was lost, and we were left with schematic plans of only some of the features that had been removed.

AHARONI'S WESTERN SECTOR (AWS)

The western sector of the site encompasses Squares S–GG/7–14 of Aharoni's grid (Figs. 4.10 and 4.11), and was divided into two sub-sectors according to the elevation of the bedrock surface (see Table 4.3). AWS1 is characterized by a relatively high rock surface (819 m) while the rock surface at AWS2, located

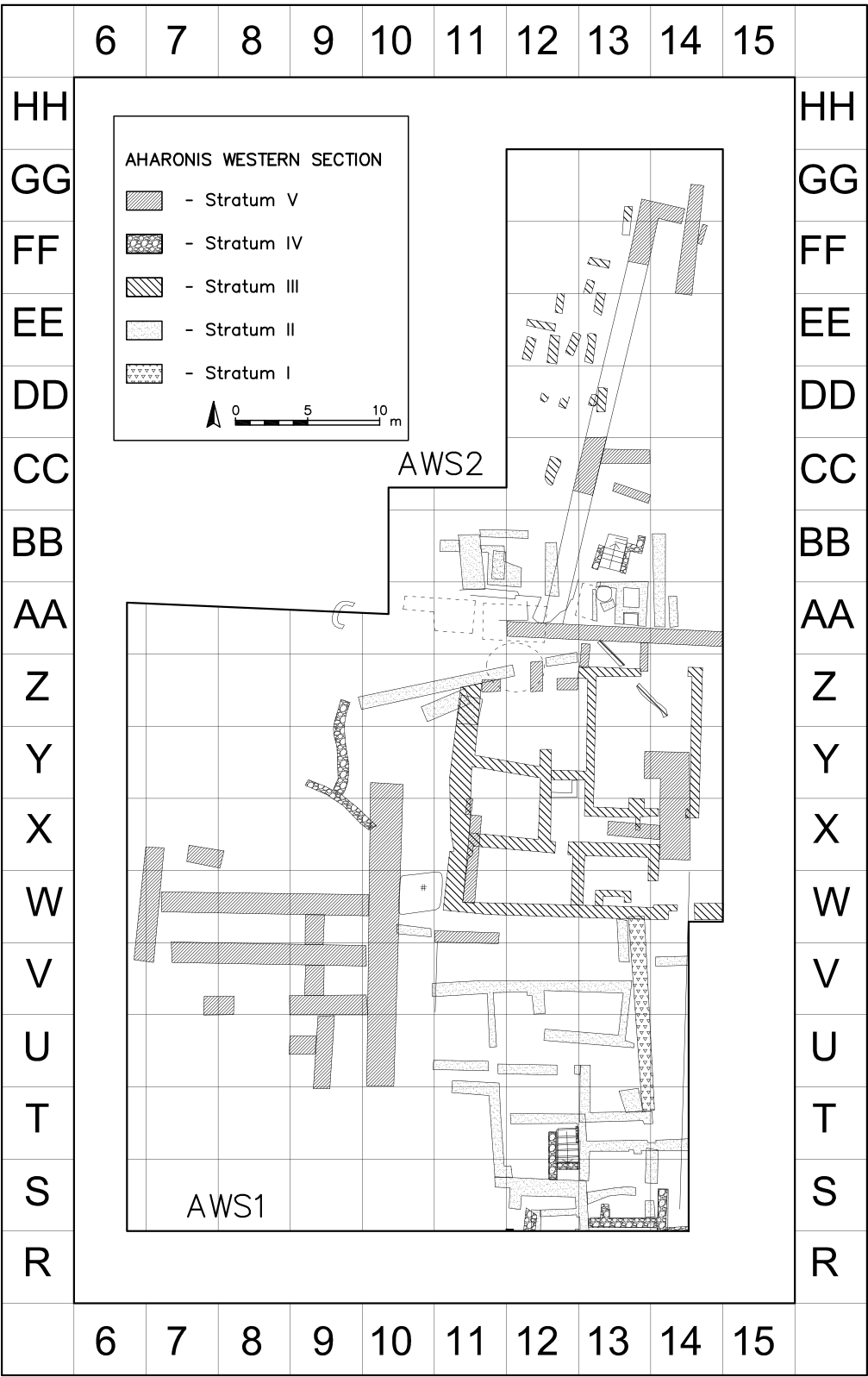


Fig. 4.10: Sector AWS—architectural remains from all strata.



Fig. 4.11: Sector AWS—aerial photograph taken in 2007 (photo by Skyview).

TABLE 4.3: SUB-SECTORS IN AHARONI'S WESTERN SECTOR (AWS)

<i>Sub-Sector</i>	<i>Squares According to Aharoni's Grid</i>	<i>Main Architectural Features</i>
AWS1	S-BB/6–14	Building 803, private dwellings
AWS2	CC-GG/12–14	Outer courtyard, burial ground

to the north of AWS1, is considerably lower, at ca. 815 m. The different man-made elevations in the rock influenced the development of the later human settlement.

A small rectangular area in the southeast of the sector (Squares S–T/11–14) was excavated in 1954, while exposing the southern casemate wall (see also ACS4). The main part of the area was excavated in the 1962 season, when new squares were opened and dug down to bedrock to the north and to west of the 1954 squares. At the same time, the 1954 excavation squares were restudied. This entire area is referred to here as Sub-sector AWS1. Also included here is a discussion of excavations conducted in 1962 in Squares CC–GG/11–14 (Aharoni 1964: 28), designated here as Sub-sector AWS2.

The natural bedrock in the western sector is very close to the modern surface, and the ancient debris was usually less than 1 m thick. The relatively thin earth accumulation across most parts of the sector allowed Aharoni to expand the excavation area, unearthing large architectural units. In most parts of the sector, only one course of all wall foundations survived. Floors were rarely found, but even when

recovered, they were usually devoid of any remains of material culture that could help to determine their period of use. Relatively good preservation is seen only in rock-cut features such as tombs (found mainly in Sub-sector AWS2) or ritual baths (found in Sub-sector AWS1).

A unique feature in Sub-sector AWS1 is an earth fill, ca. 2 m thick, found above a collapsed ceiling of a cave in Squares X–Y/9–10 (Loci 811, 812 and 814). Many finds were collected from this earth fill; all of them date to the Iron Age and to the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

EXCAVATIONS IN ADDITIONAL SECTORS (FIG. 4.2)

Three additional excavation areas were opened in different locations on the tell and are therefore discussed here separately:

APS1: Squares JJ–LL/13–15. This sub-sector of the site was excavated in 1962. In a short report of the results, published in 1964, Aharoni (1964: 53), claimed that all finds from these squares dated to the Iron Age. However, he never published the finds themselves. Since we could not locate the finds from the relevant loci, only a stratigraphic reevaluation of the sub-sector is presented here.

APS2: Squares KK–LL/44–48. This sub-sector is located on the western slope of the site. Aharoni considered it to be substantial for understanding the history of the entire Iron Age occupation at the site. He therefore published the results of these excavations in a relatively lengthy report (Aharoni 1964: 51–52). The field plans, however, are published in this volume for the first time. We could not locate the pottery in order to verify Aharoni's conclusions.

APS3: Squares B–C/23. Aharoni opened this single square as a trial excavation in order to understand the stratigraphy of the southeastern slope of the site. This sub-sector was mentioned briefly in the 1962 report (Aharoni 1962: 51) and was later incorporated into the overall plan of the Iron Age site (Aharoni 1964: Fig. 6), but Aharoni presented no finds in his publications to support a date in the Iron Age. Our discussion of this sub-sector is limited by the meager documentation.

THE PHASING SYSTEM

In this volume, each sub-sector is assigned a local phasing scheme independent of Aharoni's general stratigraphic division. This enables us to note the local developments in different sub-sectors across the site. Stratigraphically secured loci were identified for each of the phases, and only pottery deriving from these loci is presented. An exception to this rule is pottery vessels that have a unique value, regardless of their context. These are dealt with separately (see Chapters 16–18).

We were unable to relocate all the relevant pottery at the National Treasures or the Hebrew University storerooms. By publishing only clearly contextualized pottery and complete assemblages in connection with the stratigraphy we were able to incorporate the local phases into a single, comprehensive scheme that can be securely dated.

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