

Excavation at Khirbat Marmita (Hartuv Quarry) - 2008

Roman and Byzantine Remains

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This excavation was carried out in 2008 by Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd. (excavation license G-63/2008), under the direction of Tamar Shavi and the academic auspices of the Hebrew Union College.

INTRODUCTION

Khirbat Marmita is a well-known Roman-Byzantine site with habitation, industrial and mortuary aspects. It is located within the bounds of the present-day Hartuv quarry in the central Shephelah, at 310m asl. Previous rescue excavations at the site were conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) under the direction of Gershuny (2006; see also Billig 2011). These excavations—carried out mainly in the eastern part of Khirbat Marmita—exposed water cisterns, buildings, a *mikveh* (a Jewish ritual bathing installation), wine presses and other features. Our excavation



Figure 1. Ancient quarrying works (Platform E) in the excavation area (facing south).

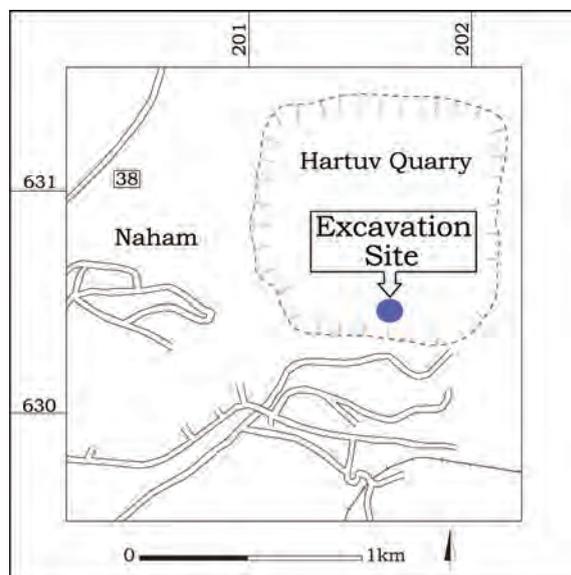


Figure 2. Hartuv location map (New Israel Grid: 201629-630408; 310m asl).

was located further west, just east of a line of fig trees which constituted the quarry limit.

Backhoe test probes at various locations did not reveal any archaeological remains. We could therefore focus on recording the details of those archaeological installations and features found carved into exposed bedrock outcroppings. These features included quarrying sites, wine presses and cup marks.

THE EXCAVATION

Quarrying platforms (Fig. 3)

In the upper part of the site were found a number of quarrying platforms cut for the production of building stones. These platforms extended along an east-west line of exposed bedrock. The eastern platform (A) measured 8.0 x 3.0m and was cut to a maximum depth of 0.8m. At some point the centre of the platform collapsed inward (Fig. 4), which probably brought quarrying here to an end. On the surface of the platform were found two cup marks (L15 and L16) each measuring 0.35m in diameter and cut to a depth of 0.3m.

The central platform (A-west) measured 2.25 x 1.9m. At its southwestern corner a karstic hole was opened and found to be filled with soil. In the upper levels of this fill we found (non-indicative) potsherds dating to the Roman period. At a depth of approximately 0.8m the soil became archaeologically sterile.

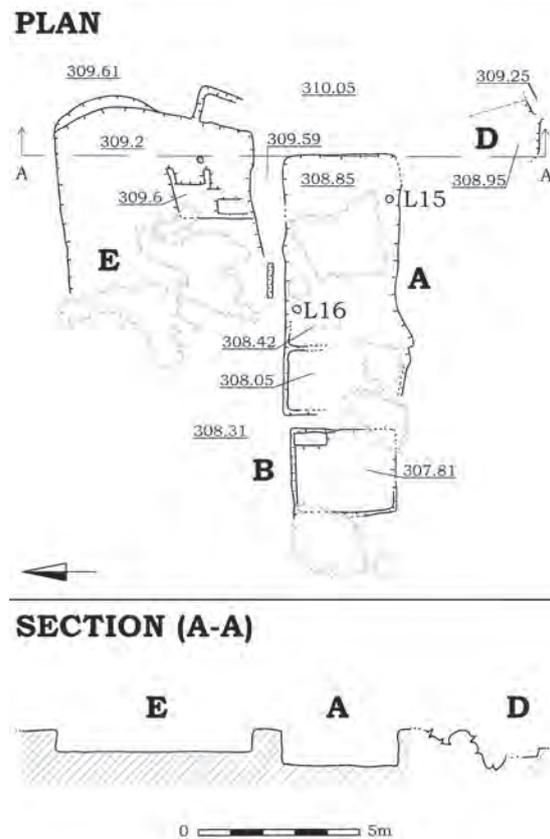


Figure 3. Plan and section of the quarrying platforms.

The western quarrying platform (B) measured 3.2 x 2.9m. At its northeastern corner a fragment of quarried stone was found. At the western end of the platform we excavated a karstic hole filled with rocks and soil, together with a large number of (non-indicative) Roman-period sherds. Inside the hole were also found a number of large stones which were probably discarded there. A tree grew close to the southwestern corner of the platform. Its roots took advantage of and penetrated the karstic cavities. There appeared to be a karstic passage between the hole that was excavated and the one in which the tree grew.

An additional quarrying platform (E) was found immediately north of Platform A (Fig. 5). The size of this platform was 6.2 x 5.4m and its depth 0.4m. At its eastern end were a number of deep detachment slots defining the slabs that were next to be quarried from the platform (see Fig. 1). At the western extremity of the platform we uncovered several natural depressions in the rock, again containing ceramic sherds of Roman date. It appears that quarrying here was discontinued in mid-operation, due to the relatively poor quality of the rock.

A final quarrying platform (D) was located southeast of Platform A. Only the western side was exposed due to a large crack in the rock which constituted a safety hazard. A 3.0 x 3.0m section was dug down to the base of the platform, about 0.8 m deep. Again, in the friable earth from this section we found a number of sherds dating to the Roman period.



Figure 4. The eastern quarrying platform (A), the floor of which collapsed (facing west).



Figure 5. The northern quarrying platform (E) (facing west).

Treading floors

Two small platforms were found carved into the rock very close to the edge of the site's southern limit:

- The first was a surface installation (L11, Fig. 6), which we exposed completely. This was probably a

treading floor which made up one stage in a wine production process. The floor was cracked and dangerous.

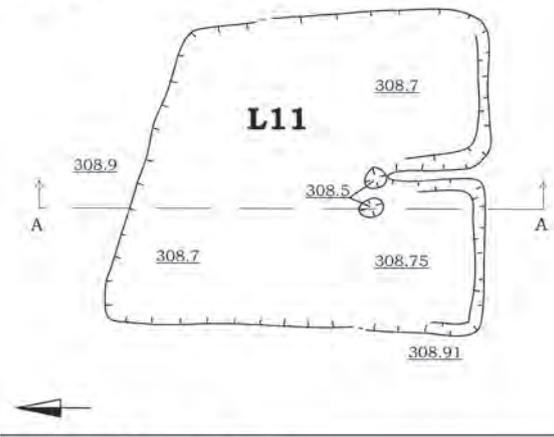
- An additional treading floor and associated vat (L12, Fig. 7) were found to the west of the first.

These wine presses follow the simplest design for such installations: Frankel's type T1 (Frankel 1999: 51-56).

Cup marks

A number of cup marks hewn into the exposed bedrock of the site were found close to the edge of the cliff at the site's southwestern edge. The eastern cup mark (L7) was 0.5m in diameter and 0.4m deep. Approximately 4.0m west of L7 we identified two adjacent cup marks (L8 and 9), L8 measuring 0.5m in diameter and 0.35m deep, and L9 0.6m in diameter and 0.45m deep. An additional cup mark (L10) was

PLAN



SECTION (A-A)

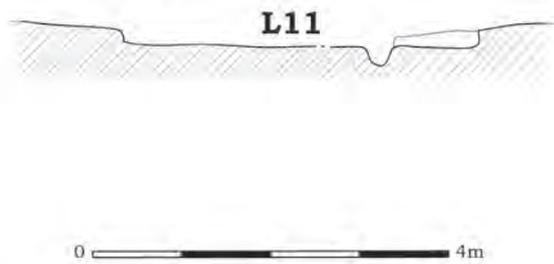
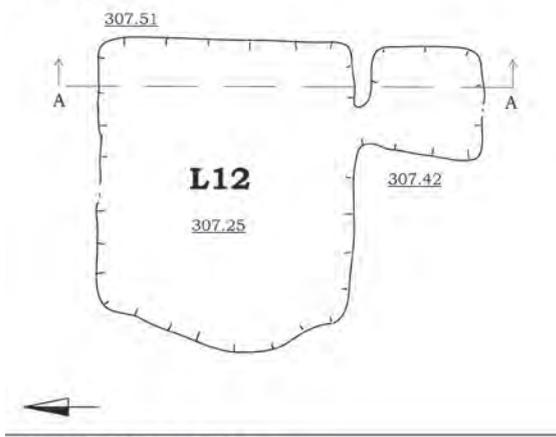


Figure 6. The L11 treading floor.

PLAN



SECTION (A-A)

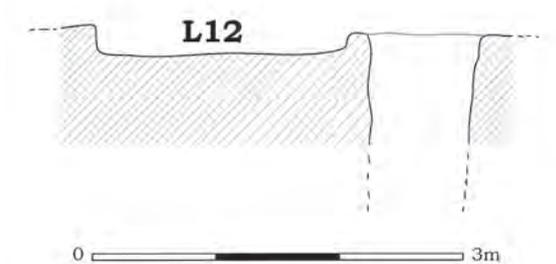


Figure 7. The L12 treading floor and vat.

found 6.0m west of L8 and L9; its diameter was 0.6m and its depth 0.5m. We noted that there was a carved socket surrounding mostly the southeastern edge of the cup (Fig. 8), and that the base of the cup had an even concave shape.

CONCLUSIONS

This site included part of an ancient quarry in the vicinity of the Roman and Byzantine settlement of Khirbat Marmita. In addition, wine presses were found which could either predate, post-date or coexist with the quarry. The finds indicate that the quarry was coeval with the settlement.



Figure 8. The western cup mark (L10). Note the carved socket around the cup.

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