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## **Salvage Excavation at Tsrifin (S.I.R Shlomo Company compound) - 2008**

Final Report

Excavation Permit: B - 329/2008

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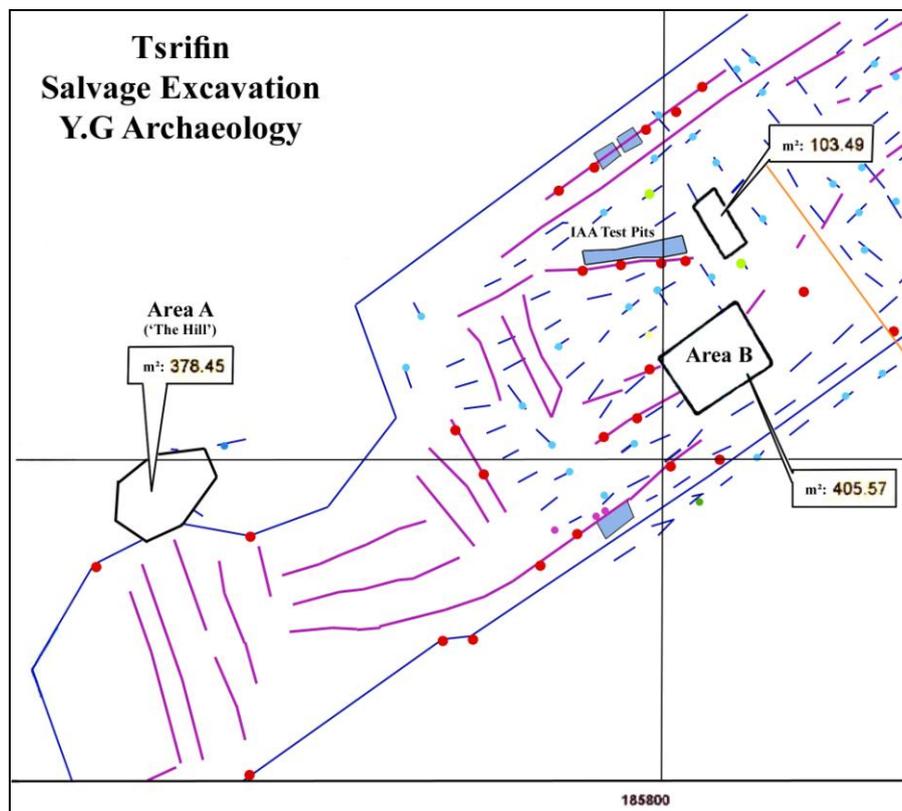


Figure 1: Location and site maps (the latter showing areas and test dig sections;  
31°57'29.02''N / 34°50'47.24''E).

## Introduction

During August and September 2008, a salvage excavation was carried out by Y.G. Archaeology at a known central coastal plain archaeological site in Tsrifin, in preparation for the development of a SIR Shlomo Real Estate logistics compound. The first stage of the excavation was conducted in Area A, situated in the southwestern section of the site. During phase two, Area B was opened at the centre of the compound.

### Area A – Introduction

Here machine-dug test excavations had been conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), with the result that an area of 378m<sup>2</sup> was identified as of significant archaeological potential. This would need to be excavated before the area could be released for construction work.



Figure 2: General view of the building (Area A).

Y.G. Archaeology opened sixteen excavation squares on this site, exposing the remains of part of an Early Islamic Period (Abbasid: 750 – ca.900 CE) building and compound. This building was located at the western fringe of the contemporary settlement, on top of a low *hamra* soil hill close to a river bank. The squares were marked according to the four points of the compass. The excavation started from the centre of the hill and was widened in order to investigate the ancient building's extent. The project was directed by Yehuda Govrin, supported by area supervisors Tamar Shavi and Ariel Wenderboim. Site planning and section drawing was conducted by a team headed by Dov Porotsky.

Various factors particular to this site influenced our work. The *hamra* topsoil had been very compacted by heavy mechanical equipment. Also, adjacent to the ancient building was found a large modern garbage pit that had truncated much of the structure's north end. Finally, the archaeological remains had been disturbed in places by the modern Arab village of Sarafand, debris from which had to be cleared.

## Early Islamic Period Building

This structure was built directly on natural *hamra* soil, as mentioned, on a small undulating hill close to a stream. Only the southeastern wing of the building survived, as well as several extant wall sections outside it which seem to have been part of the building's yards and associated installations. This building was constructed in several phases. The bases of the walls were preserved to different heights (having presumably been robbed out at some point), and several of the walls abutted one another. The walls were built of dressed stones, especially on their external faces, often on a foundation of small limestone chips (Fig.4).

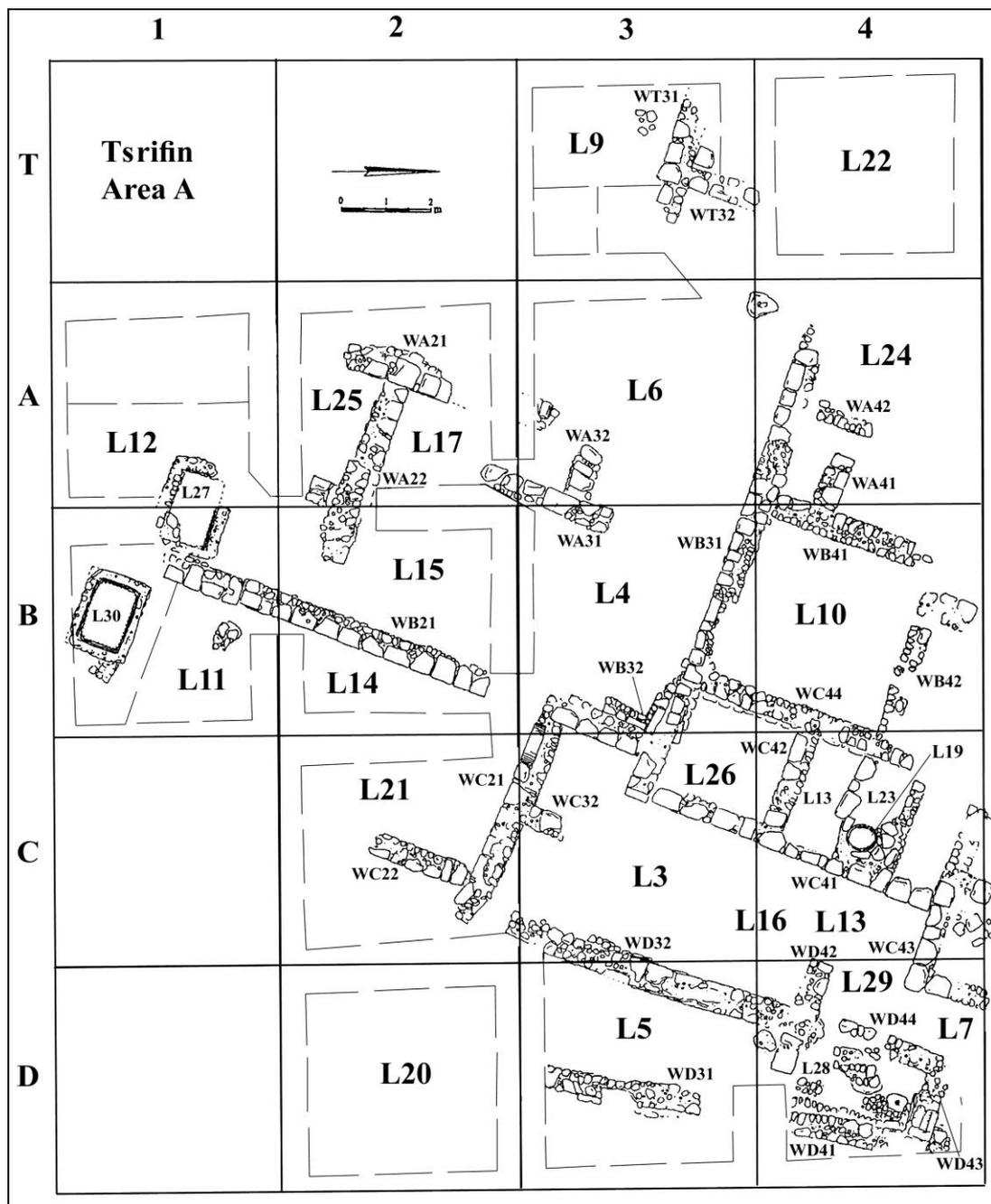


Figure 3: General plan of the building remains.



Figure 4: Extant dressed stone wall courses.

A number of features worthy of note are here mentioned. Beyond the southern end of the building (probably in the yards), two built features were found (L27, 30, Squares A-B1). The western construction (L27) (Fig.5) measured 1 x 1.5m, and was preserved to a height of ca.0.5m. Its northwestern corner was missing (destroyed by a test section). The structure was built of small stones bonded by rough mortar. Inside, within a yellowish ash fill, a number of fragments of glass bottles, glazed pottery and bones were found.



Figure 5: L27.

About 1m southeast of this structure was found a second, of similar dimensions (L30) (Fig.6). This structure was also built of small undressed stones bonded with mortar, and its north side was also damaged by a test channel. However, unlike its neighbor, the interior walls of L30 were lined with a number of thin layers of plaster.

In the area's northeastern square (D4) was found part of a threshold into a small room (L28), the floor of which was cobbled and at least partially plastered. Adjacent to the north side of the threshold were unearthed the remains of a plastered gutter with a basalt slab at its base.

*In situ* within the room and close to the building's corner lay a *tabun* (ceramic oven, L19). Near the *tabun* was an ash-rich context.



Figure 6: L30.

## Finds

A large quantity of potsherds were recovered, most of which constitute waste thrown into the yards and the building's rooms. Notable was the large quantity of bowl fragments, jars and cooking pots. A number of decorated oil lamps from the Early Islamic Period were also found, as well as glazed pottery typical of this period. The *tabun* has been mentioned. Finally, in the yards a number of large animal bones, a fragment of a stone bowl and fragments of a basalt grinding stone were also retrieved.

## Area A Summary

In this area the remains of a residential building from the Early Islamic Period (Abbasid: 750 – ca.900 CE) were discovered. The majority of the architectural remains which survived constitute the lower wall courses, most dressed stones presumably having been robbed in antiquity or destroyed in recent centuries by the large rubbish pit which devastated most of the northern end of the building. This structure was probably a private residence, a farmhouse physically disconnected from the contemporary village adjacent to the site. It is probable that the Area A building's location on a low *hamra* hill at a distance from the village and close to a stream was a mark of its owner's relatively high status. During the building's history several changes and additions were made to its original plan. The structure probably went out of use during the tenth century CE, after which began the process of its near-total disassembly and the robbery of dressed stones from its walls.

The salvage excavation and archaeological recording of this building was completed. The area was subsequently released for development.

## Area B – Introduction and Excavation

The focus of the excavation's second phase, this area at the center of the compound (i.e. northwest of Area A) is close to the location of test excavations previously conducted by the IAA under Ahia Cohen-Tavor (see 'References' below). These test trenches defined the area requiring further excavation. Here we opened 275m<sup>2</sup>, divided between ten and a half squares inside the defined area, to which an extra half-square was added in order to expose the entirety of a feature at the north end of the area (Fig.7). The orientation of our square grid was decided by the archaeology, not the cardinal points of the compass.

This phase of the excavation was also directed by Yehuda Govrin, with area supervisors Amir Cohen-Klonimus, Tamar Shavi and Ariel Wenderboim. Site planning was conducted by Dov Porotsky and Slava Firski.

The soil in this area is black and mixed with ash and potsherds down to a depth of 1-2m. The British Mandate Period layer reached to a depth of ca.0.4m, rich in Marseilles tiles and dressed stone. At ca.0.5-0.9m were layers of Mamluk-to-Ottoman organics-affected soil mixed with an occasional sherd. From 1-1.5m depth was a light brown soil containing small amounts of Early Islamic pottery (8-10<sup>th</sup> centuries). Beneath this lay *hamra* soil, sterile and devoid of finds.

It appears that this area encompassed the western outskirts of the ancient and modern Arab village of Sarafand, some of the remains of which were undoubtedly contemporaneous with the building found nearby in Area A. In the present area, the features that were uncovered include underground household constructions, installations with an industrial agricultural nature, and the debris of an ancient garbage dump close to the stream.

To begin with, all squares were excavated to a depth of ca.0.4m, through the Mandate occupation layer. Thereafter, in the squares where no architecture was found – a quarter of the site – excavation continued down to the sterile *hamra*. A number of squares on the western side of the area (A-C1, T1) were partially dug by machine, in order to confirm the apparent absence of architecture in them. Squares yielding architectural remains were excavated solely by hand, including baulks in order to obtain as complete as possible an architectural picture of the area.

Mentioned here are the archaeological features of Area B that are most worthy of note. All date to the Early Islamic Period.

### Structure (L52)

In square C3 a structure was exposed just below the surface (Figs.8-9). This was constructed of small mortared stones, and took the form of six chambers in two rows. The structure was built directly on the *hamra*. Its southern section survived to ca.0.5m below the surface, the north to ca.1.5m due to the existence of an ash-rich deposit in that area. The chambers were identical in length and width (ca.1 x 0.5m), but varied in height. The three eastern chambers were ca.0.3m high, the western ca.0.8m. No access between the chambers was apparent. In the three eastern chambers a collecting basin 0.1m deep and with a 0.2m diameter was found at the centre of each chamber. The chambers were all plastered with a high-quality thin hydraulic plaster, which indicates that the chambers were intended to hold fluids. Beyond that, and an implied agricultural-industrial association, the function or purpose of L52 is not clear.



Figure 7: General plan of Area B.



Figure 8: General view of the L52 installation (from south).



Figure 9: L52 (from north).

### **Cesspit 1 (L59)**

The remains of a cesspit dug into the sterile *hamra* were discovered in squares B3 and C3, under the topsoil layer of the black soil rich in organic material. The pit measured 1.3 x 2.4m, and was lined with small and medium-sized limestones, one course wide. The pit did not have a constructed floor. Over the natural *hamra* soil had been spread a 0.2m-deep layer of yellowish sand. The pit was in a good state of preservation, except for its southwestern corner which did not survive. At the bottom of the pit large amounts of sherds were found, presumably dumped after having broken or being deemed unusable (Fig.10). The sherds included large numbers of cooking pots, lids, jars, juglets, and other vessel types. These dated from the Early Islamic Period.



Figure 10: Buckets filled with potsherds from the floor of the L59 cesspit.

### Mosaic-Surfaced Pool (L60)

Located centrally amongst the area's architectural remains (C2), a small pool measuring 1 x 1.5m was exposed close to the surface (L60) (Fig.11). This pool was lined with a high-quality hydraulic plaster (ca.0.01m thick). Its floor was surfaced with a rough white mosaic. In the southeastern corner of the pool was a draining basin of 0.3m diameter. East of the pool, parts of the plastered walls of an additional, badly-preserved pool or channel were found. West of the pool were uncovered the scant remains of a plastered floor. These remains belong to the later phase of the area, with which the L52 structure is also associated. On the mosaic floor a few sherds of the Early Islamic Period were discovered.



Figure 11: The mosaic floor of the L60 plastered pool (from east).

### Cesspit 2 (L56)

West of the L60 pool, a second large cesspit was discovered (Fig.12). It measured 2.3 x 2.8m, and was built under the plastered floor of a building that did not survive (two of its dressed stones were re-used in a wall north of the cesspit). As with the L59 cesspit, the floor was simply yellowish sand directly overlying the *hamra*. However, unlike L59 whose walls were left unlined, all of the L56 walls were plastered. They were built from small stones bonded by rough mortar. It appears that this cesspit was roofed with a dome also constructed from small stones. These were discovered in the pit's black, organic and ceramics-scarce fill. The pit's eastern half was excavated down to the *hamra*.



Figure 12: Eastern section of the L56 cesspit, showing the domed roof remains.

## The Northern Pool (L57)

In square T2, approximately 10m north of L56 and the area's architectural remains concentration, an additional structure was discovered (Fig.13). This consisted chiefly of a plaster-lined pool (1.5 x 0.8 x 0.5m). The plaster – covering the walls and floor – was here also a high-quality hydraulic type, 0.02m thick. The pool's edges were formed by large dressed stones, preserved mainly on the southern and eastern sides of the feature. In the southeastern corner of the plastered floor a basin for draining fluids was found. In the pool fill varied sherds and Marseilles tiles were found. The impression is that this installation was fundamentally very similar to the L60 mosaic-surfaced pool design, and is presumably the sole surviving remnant of a larger structure.



Figure 13: General view of the L57 northern pool.

## Finds

In Area B a vast amount of pottery was found, most of which was in the form of sherds thrown into the cesspits. Regarding these ceramic finds, particularly worthy of note are the large quantities of bowls, jars and cooking pots represented. One complete jar was found, probably from the Early Ottoman Period (16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries). This was probably used in order to draw water from the Antillya well (Ottoman type). The jar was found amongst the black topsoil debris, with no architectonic context.



Figure 14: A complete jar found in a section of the site's debris.

## Summary

In Area B the remains of a residential structure and associated built features from the Early Islamic Period were unearthed. The archaeological features preserved were of two main types: cut features, mostly in the form of cesspits; and built features and structures, including mainly plaster-lined installations that stored or processed certain fluids. Of the actual architecture only a number of badly preserved walls were extant, which unfortunately is insufficient for the purposes of reconstructive models. However, we can confidently affirm that the area's main structure (squares B-C, 1-3) was built from large dressed stones set on a stone and mortar foundation in the natural *hamra*. These structures fell into disuse in the tenth century CE. Most of the dressed stones of the buildings were robbed in antiquity for secondary use.

Like the Area A compound, this building was probably a farmhouse in the western outskirts of the Early Islamic village of Sarafand. It appears that the location close to a stream on the periphery of the settlement led to this area later becoming a dumping ground, especially of organic waste, which created a deep layer of black soil over the *hamra*.

The salvage excavation in Area B was completed, and the area was released for development.

## Further Reading

Links to abstracts of Ahia Cohen-Tavor's excavations at Tsrifin:

[http://www.antiquities.org.il/Dig\\_Item\\_eng.asp?id=347](http://www.antiquities.org.il/Dig_Item_eng.asp?id=347)

[http://www.antiquities.org.il/Dig\\_Item\\_eng.asp?id=480](http://www.antiquities.org.il/Dig_Item_eng.asp?id=480)

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Baram, U. 2009. 'Above and Beyond Ancient Mounds: The Archaeology of the Modern Periods in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean.' *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology* 2: 647-662.

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Gorzalczany, A., Barkan, D. and Iechie, L. 2010. 'A site from the Persian, Hellenistic and early Islamic periods at Holot Yavne.' *Atiqot* 62: 171-172.

Hirschfeld, Y. 1995. *The Palestinian Dwelling in the Roman-Byzantine Period*. Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press.

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Katsnelson, N. 2010. 'The glass finds from Arab Kefar Sava.' *Atiqot* 61: 127-130.

Kennedy, H.N. 2006. *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East*. London: Ashgate.

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- Schaefer, J. 1989. 'Archaeological Remains from the Medieval Islamic Occupation of the Northwest Negev Desert.' *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 274: 33-60.
- Sussman, V. 2010. 'The ceramic oil lamps from Horbat Rozez.' *Atiqot* 62: 139-144.
- Yannai, E. 2010. 'A salvage excavation at Horbat Rozez.' *Atiqot* 62: 107-137.