



# NGSBA Excavation Reports

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## **Salvage Excavation at Yehud (HIGH compound north) - 2008 Preliminary Report**

Excavation Permit: B - 327/2008

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Figure 1: Location map of the Yehud excavation site (32°01'48.25''N / 34°53'12.32''E).

## Introduction

This HIGH Ltd construction site is situated at the southwestern fringes of Tel Yehud, and has yielded significant archaeological riches. During test excavations conducted by Israel Kornfeld and Rachel Bar Nathan of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), a complex of wine presses and structures from the Byzantine period were exposed. Further test pits were machine-dug and archaeologists monitored all building works. During the digging of a pit for the parking lot that was to serve the compound's two northern buildings, six additional archaeological features were found 3-4m below surface level. These were investigated by Y.G. Archaeology. In three of these feature locations a salvage excavation of 75m<sup>2</sup> was required by the IAA.

The features were located at the base of the parking lot's excavation, within a heavy black clayish layer. Stratigraphically, 3-4m-thick sediment lies above earlier archaeological features dating to the Chalcolithic Period (ca.4300-3300 BCE) and the Late Bronze Age (ca.1500-1200 BCE), and below finds from the Byzantine and Arab Periods which lay near the surface.

## Archaeological Feature 1 – Grave

As part of a parking lot excavation at the north end of the site, ca.2m of topsoil was removed by digging machines under IAA supervision. At the southwestern corner of the excavation, a bulldozer severely damaged a number of archaeological remains,

exposing potsherds, human and animal bones, small pieces of copper, a small three-legged basalt mortar and a basalt pestle. These artifacts were photographed by the IAA's inspector during their discovery, but were subsequently stolen from the site. A 1.5 x 2.3m rectangle was excavated at this feature, the entire eastern half of which had been truncated by the digging machine (Fig.2). A thin lime plaster layer of ca.1.5m diameter and ca.0.05m thickness sealed the top of the context. On the south side of the grave were located the remains of the interred body, and nearby lay the pieces of copper and the basalt mortar (L7). On the north side of the grave, directly under the plastered sealing were found the base of a conical jar lying on its side, a ceramic three-legged open bowl, and a large open bowl with a ring base (L6). In and under these bowls were remains of animal bones – especially ribs – that were probably ovine. At a depth of 0.4m below the plastered sealing, on the floor were three open bowls filled with remains of animal bones, found *in situ* (Figs.3, 4). The bones were scattered between and under the bowls.

The skeletal remains were those of a single individual, the lower part of an adult woman lying supine on her back (Fig.5). The remains of an arm and palm were discovered close to the pelvis which was partly preserved. The entire upper half of the skeleton was broken and damaged by the digging machine, this section of the body having been located in the truncated eastern half of the grave.

From the accompanying artifacts and based on anthropological analysis of the skeletal remains, it appears this grave was of an adult female buried in a general east-west orientation, with the head to the east and the legs to the west. Burial gifts – mainly ceramic bowls filled with meat from which the bones were preserved – were placed close to the north side of the body. It was possible to reconstruct the grave as follows: an underground chamber with a 2.5m diameter and a depth of ca.1m, covered with soil and sealed by a layer of plaster 0.05m thick. Based on the burial gift pottery, we can date this grave to the Late Bronze Age / Late Canaanite Period (1550-1150 BCE).



Figure 2: A general view of archaeological feature 1, facing west. Notice the plastered sealing the grave. The entire eastern half of the grave was destroyed by the digging machine, whose teeth marks can be seen in the section. In the north side

of the section we can see the imprint of a number of the pottery vessel grave goods.



Figure 3: Three bowls that were placed in the north side of the grave's floor. Notice the imprint of a fourth three-legged ceramic bowl.



Figure 4: A view of the grave's floor with the imprints of the bowls.





Figure 5: the pelvis and lower limbs of the interred woman (photographed from the north).

### **Archaeological Features 2 and 3 – Graves**

A 4 x 4m square (A) was excavated, within which were two archaeological features. These had been severely damaged by a bulldozer (Fig.6, 7), whose teeth cut into the clayey soil and exposed two *in situ* skeletons in situ and above them a concentration of potsherds. The fragmented sherds were collected and found to most likely date to the Late Bronze Age / Late Canaanite Period, and being so close to the burial remains these vessels probably were burial gifts.

After cleaning, feature 2 was seen to be comprised of a human skeleton placed on its right side in a foetal position. The body faced north and was oriented east-west (skull on the east side). Half of the skull was cut by the machine so that only its outline was extant.

Feature 3 was a concentration of human bones of which mainly the rib cage was preserved. Close to these bones were imprints of a number of pottery vessels, some of whose sherds had already been collected.

These graves were dug into a clayish layer, while their bases reached a lower *hamra* soil level. The graves' outlines were not preserved due to the severe damage caused by the bulldozer. All that survived were the grave floors, crumbled bones and pottery within the grave fills.



Figure 6: A general view of square A before excavation. Notice the bulldozer's teeth marks, which severely damaged the graves (archaeological features 2 and 3).



Figure 7: A general view of the graves' floors. Notice the sterile excavation section.

### **Archaeological Feature 6 – Chalcolithic Well**

In a section of the building site's excavation pit, a large concentration of potsherds from the Chalcolithic Period (4300-3300 BCE) was discovered. The IAA directed that this feature be investigated. A 4 x 4m square was excavated adjacent to the ash and pottery concentration. The location and direction of this square were determined not

only by the archaeological remains but also by the construction site's form and access ramp. Prior to the excavation large amounts of rough pottery were collected from the surface of the square, all from the Chalcolithic period. Most of the pottery was broken, weathered and not *in situ*.

After excavating ca.0.3m below the current surface (ca.34m OD) the outline of a circular cut feature of 4m diameter was discovered (L4), cut into the red *hamra* soil which underlay the dark clayish area topsoil. At the center of L4 was a circular bifacial wall, creating an interior space filled with earth (L5). Both the outer and inner circles were excavated (Fig.8, 9). The former went down ca.1.5m into the *hamra*, and was rich in potsherds, ash, dark clayish soil and *hamra*. The bifacial built feature, L5, was constructed symmetrically and with high precision. Its interior maintained a 1m diameter, while its external form was more irregular with frequent protruding stones. The fill of the feature was mixed with ash and sherds, but less densely than L4.

These features were identified as a well (L5) and its construction pit (L4). The well was excavated to a depth of ca.3m below the current surface (Fig.10). At the base of excavation were found many large stones, which presumably fell in and blocked or filled the bottom of the well. These may have been from a section of the northern quadrant of the well, which had collapsed from a height of ca.0.7m at a certain point in its history. The excavation was discontinued due to the danger of further collapse in narrowing internal diameter of the descending well.



Figure 8: General view of the well (L5), and its foundation pit dug into the *hamra* soil (L4) (from north).





Figure 9: On the right the L4 foundation pit's cut in the *hamra*, at the center the pit fill, densely mixed with broken potsherds, and on the left the wall of the L5 well.



Figure 10: Excavation in the well's fill (L5).

### **Archaeological Features 7 and 8**

These features were detected during test excavations (section 15) conducted using a tractor. This machine located but damaged two pottery concentrations, which the IAA decided should be investigated.

At Feature 7, the western of the two, a 2.8 x 2m square was excavated (B) to a depth of 0.35m below the current surface (33.73m OD). At the centre of the excavated area were two ceramic vessels (both damaged by the machine): the fragments of a



storage jar facing upwards, and within this an inverted juglet. The vessels had been placed in a hole dug into the clayish soil to a depth of about 0.7m from the excavated square's surface. During the cleaning and removal of the jar's fragments crumbled bones were found in it. From a preliminary analysis it appears that this was a baby burial jar from the Late Canaanite Period.



Figure 11: A general view of Feature 7 before excavation.



Figure 12: A general view of Feature 7 after excavation. In the background are machine marks from the discovery and damaging of the feature.

At Feature 8 a 2 x 2m square was excavated (C) to a depth of about 0.4m below the current surface (33.8m OD). At the centre of the square was found a pit, dug into the clayish soil and the fill of which contained a concentration of potsherds and bones (Fig.13). The pit's diameter was about 0.8m and extended 0.6m deeper

than the excavated square. The sherds dated to the Chalcolithic Period and most were in a poor state of preservation. The pit was excavated down to the *hamra* and sand (Fig.14). It appears that this feature was a small rubbish pit of the Chalcolithic Period.



Figure 13: A general view of Feature 8 before excavation.



Figure 14: Feature 8 after excavation.

## Summary

Archaeological Feature 1 was a grave from the Late Bronze Age / Late Canaanite Period, the same period as were from Features 2, 3 and 7 (as well an additional grave from which the only remains was a copper dagger that was recovered by IAA inspectors). All of these features were most likely graves. It was unfortunate that

Feature 1's eastern half was completely destroyed, but despite this the very interesting remains of an adult (female) burial with burial gifts was recovered. It should be mentioned that after being recorded, the skeletal remains were removed by officials of the Ministry of Religion.

Feature 6 was a Chalcolithic well. This unique find expands our knowledge of Chalcolithic settlement in the area. The character and quantity of the associated pottery vessels indicate a large sedentary population whose economy was based mainly on pastoralism. It appears that this well, which was not associated with other constructions or features that we could discover, was built in this location due to the high local water table. The large concentration of sherds in the well's foundation pit was probably intended for stabilizing the well's wall and isolating it from the *hamra* and clayish soils, which could crack in dry conditions and swell with moisture. It is possible that the mixture of pottery, soil and ash also drained away surface water that might spill and create mud while one drew from the well. Certainly, the excavation in this area contributed considerably to our information corpus regarding Chalcolithic well construction techniques. The well probably fell into disuse when its northern section collapsed into the shaft, from which point it seems to have been used as a rubbish pit (still in the Chalcolithic Period). It is worth mentioning here that after being recorded, the well was covered and protected *in situ* for the benefit of future generations.

Archaeological Feature 8, the small Chalcolithic rubbish pit, may have been part of a broad activity assemblage contemporaneous and associated with the well.

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