

SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS AT
YESODOT (KHIRBET UMM EL-KALKHA):
THE MIDDLE AND LATE BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENT

Final Report

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE SALVAGE EXCAVATION AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Yehuda Govrin and Nathan Ben-Ari

Background

Yehuda Govrin

As part of the widening of Route 3 on the west side of the Judean Hills, the Israel National Roads Company (INRC) was required by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) to perform an archaeological survey and test excavations in the area of the agricultural village of Yesodot (Arabic: Khirbet Umm el-Kalkha).

The IAA survey was conducted by Y. Dagan, L. Barda and S. Golan (2009). This was followed

by a test excavation, initially with mechanical equipment and later by hand, under the direction of IAA archaeologist H. Torga.

As a result of these investigations, which indicated significant archaeological activity, the INRC was required to commission a large-scale salvage excavation. The company divided the site into two sections, with separate excavation tenders for each. Y.G. Archaeology Ltd won the tender for the western section, Area B (with academic sponsorship from the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, Hebrew Union College), and

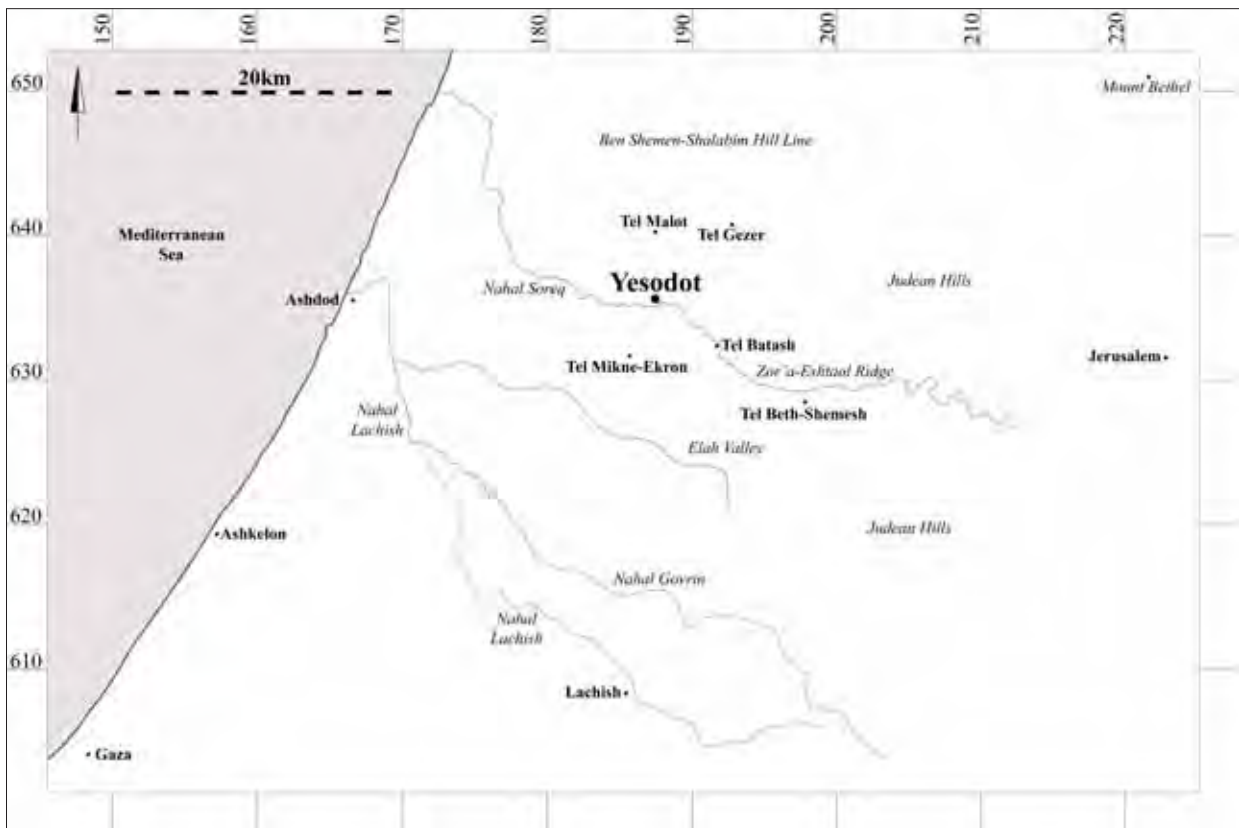


Fig. 1.1. The regional setting of the Yesodot excavation site (New Israel Grid: 187032–635295).

the Israeli Institute of Archaeology (sponsored by the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University) won the Area A tender.

Area B covered ca. 2000m² (or eighty 5.0 x 5.0m squares; Fig. 1.2). The excavation commenced in July 2006 and was completed in October, under the direction of Y. Govrin with area supervisors G. Hillel-Habasus and A. Clonimus-Cohen.

The Natural Environment of Yesodot

Nathan Ben-Ari

General background

The site of Yesodot (Khirbet Umm el-Kalkha) is situated on a wide alluvial terrace (ca. 86.0–88.0m ASL), in the western Judean Shephelah, between the eastern coastal plain and the upper Shephelah (see Fig. 1.1). Within this region Nahal Soreq forms

something of a natural border between two sectors, as follows:

The area north of Nahal Soreq and south of the Shalabim-Ben Shemen hill line. To the west of this area lies the central coastal plain, while to the east rises Mount Bethel, part of the Judean Hills. This zone is characterized by rounded hills descending from higher land to the east (such as the Yalo hills, which reach 380.0m above sea level (ASL) and then extend down to low elongated western spurs.

The area south of Nahal Soreq. This zone is located between Nahal Soreq to the north and Nahal Govrin to the south. To the west it is bordered by the central coastal plain and to the east by a series of fertile valleys on the margins of the Judean Hills (such as the Elah Valley). This zone is characterized by a chain of flat-topped limestone hills (part of



Fig. 1.2. Aerial photograph of the excavation area (looking east), with Route 3 on the left, the Y.G. Archaeology/Hebrew Union College excavation area (Area B) in the foreground, and the Israeli Institute of Archaeology/Tel Aviv University excavation area (Area A) in the background.

the Zor'a-Eshtaol ridge) with wide interspersing alluvial plains. The area is also characterized by high hills in the east (365.0–380.0m ASL) which descend to low hills in the west.

Locational and environmental data

The site of Yesodot is located ca. 200.0m from the northern bank of Nahal Soreq, which drains the plain and was probably an important water source for the site's inhabitants, at least seasonally (Fig. 1.1). Additional water was supplied by wells which probably were dug close to the riverbed (such wells are marked on modern maps, e.g. Be'er Yesodot). The area of Yesodot presently enjoys an average annual precipitation of ca. 400–600mm.

The northern part of the terrace plain is comprised of several soil types: Mediterranean brown forest soils with a presence of lime, Rendzina

mountain soils, and alluvial soils. The soils of the southern plain are slightly different from those of the north, being mostly brown alluvials with a presence of lime and brown-red sandy soils. The soils of both zones are highly fertile and well-suited for agriculture (Nir 1970: 187-189; Shavit 1992: 7-17; Dagan 2001: 12-22).

The site of Yesodot is located on a major route that links the central coastal plain with the hill country via Latrun, an important junction leading to Jerusalem and Hebron. During the Middle and Late Bronze Ages the Shephelah region was densely settled. This is evident from the number of sites in the vicinity of Yesodot (Fig. 1.1): Tel Gezer (ca. 8.0km to the north), Tel Mique-Ekron (ca. 3.5km to the southwest), Tel Batash (ca. 5.5km to the southeast) and Tel Beth Shemesh (ca. 13.0km to the southeast), to mention but a few.

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