

Excavation at Ramla (Bialik Interchange) - 2010

Early Islamic Graves

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This excavation (excavation license B-356/2010) was carried out by Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd. in early November 2010, under the academic auspices of the Hebrew Union College. Nissim Golding-Meir directed the project, working with a team including archaeology students. Physical anthropologist Vered Eshed took part in the entire process of exposure and extraction of the skeletons (Eshed, this volume, p.123). Dr. Eshed also took the excavation photographs. Yehuda Govrin provided oversight.

INTRODUCTION

During development work on the Bialik interchange at the Mazliah-Ramla junction, human bones were discovered. The work in the area was stopped. A test excavation using a backhoe was conducted by Tzach

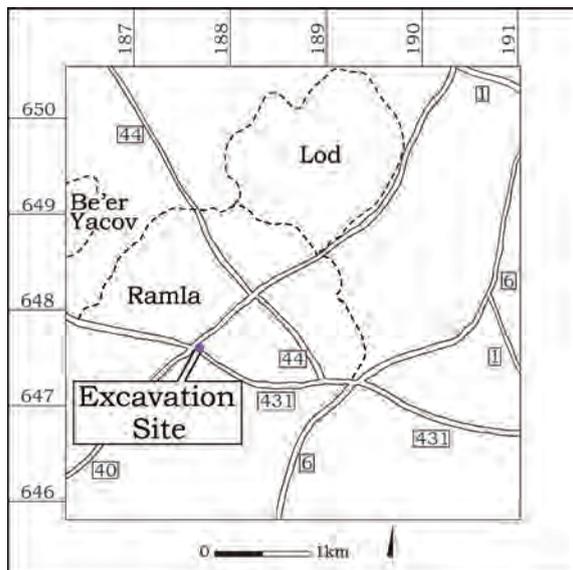


Figure 1. The location of the site (New Israel Grid: 187326-647170; 80m asl).



Figure 2. A general view of the area before excavation (facing south).

Kanias of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). The tests were carried out adjacent to Route 40 on its east side and north of Route 431, in an area 20.0m long and 5.0m wide. During these tests four simple pit graves were found without associated structures. The finds included badly preserved bones. Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd. was subsequently contracted to conduct a rescue excavation.

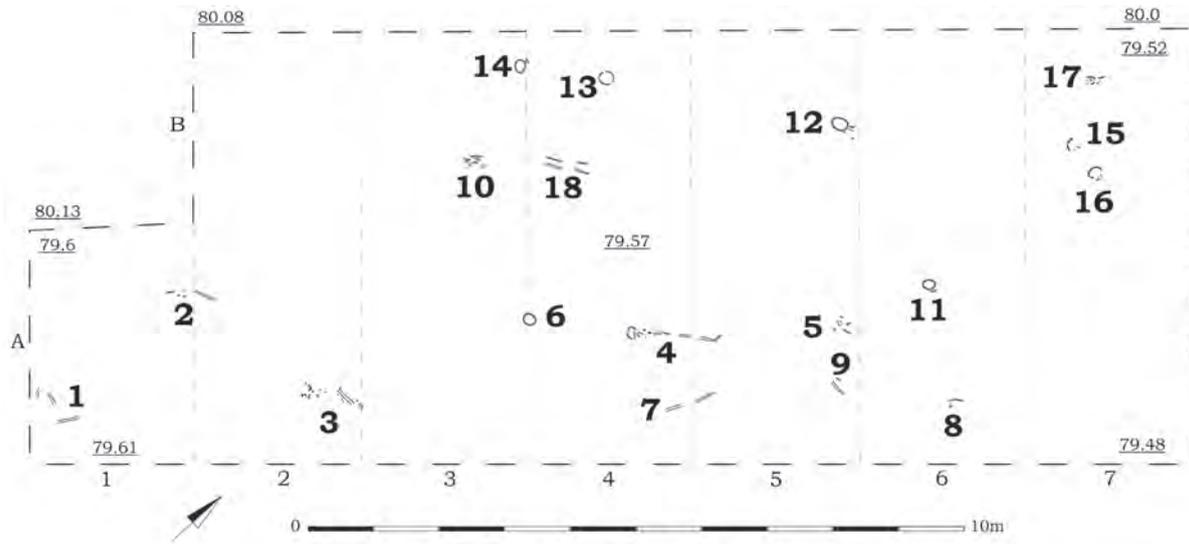


Figure 3. Site plan.

THE EXCAVATION

Prior to our arrival at the site the present-day surface had been removed by backhoe, as part of the IAA test excavations. Our 20.0m x 6.2m excavation area was thus from the outset 0.5m lower than its surroundings. East of this area was a deep trench excavated as part of the road construction. The excavated area itself was cut by two IAA test trenches. The first was longitudinal, dividing the area from north to south. The second trench cut the first diagonally.

The area was divided into two rows of squares (A and B), each square measuring ca. 3.0 x 2.5m and each truncated by the IAA test trenches.

The surface was cleaned and brushed in order to trace the remains of the burials exposed during the test excavations. In the full-resolution rescue excavation we exposed the remains of about 18 individuals buried in the *hamra* soil. Most of the graves contained clusters of bones or skulls in a bad state of preservation. From some of the individuals only the skull was preserved while in other cases only the postcranial



Figure 4. Left: Grave 14 (skull remains). Right: Grave 18 (postcranial bones only).

bones were extant (Fig. 4). A number of the interments had been damaged during the test excavation.

Where such was discernible, we found the burial orientation to be northeast/southwest, with the head to the southwest. All adequately-preserved remains indicated an eastward facial orientation. 13 of the 18 interments were adults (i.e. older than 15 years of age). However, except for two cases where the age was determined by dental information (30-40 years) it was generally not possible to calculate the age. Five of the graves were for children (nos. 6, 11, 15-17), three of whom were interred close to one another in the northeastern-most dig square (nos. 15-17, Square B7). Apart from Grave 17, in which only the postcranial bones were found, the child burials yielded only skulls. It was not possible to identify the sex of any of the individuals buried at this site, except for Grave 12 which was determined as male.

CONCLUSIONS

This excavation exposed the remains of some 18 interments, buried in simple graves dug into the



Figure 5. General view of Grave 4.

virgin *hamra* soil of the area. Judging by the surviving evidence, it is likely that all bodies were oriented northeast/southwest, with heads to the southwest and facing east.

The few pottery sherds we found were not diagnostic but their ware seems to date to the Early Islamic period. This was, in all likelihood, one of ancient Ramla's several burial grounds (Avni 2008: 4, general map).

During the excavation the human remains were exposed and documented, and the remains were collected and removed from the area before it was released for road construction works.

REFERENCES

- Avni. G. 2008. "The Most Beautiful of Cities." Ramla during the Early Islamic Period: An Archaeological Survey. *Qadmoniot* 135: 2-11.