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Salvage Excavation at Eshtaol - 2006 Final Report

Excavation Permit: B – 311/2006

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Academic Sponsor: Hebrew Union College



Figure 1: General view of the Early Bronze Age structure.

Introduction



Figure 2: Location of the YG Archaeology excavation at Eshtaol (31°46'43''N / 35°00'43''E).

A salvage excavation was carried out at this site in 2006, following a 2005 test excavation by Gideon Solimany of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). The salvage excavation was commissioned by MATZ (tender: 28/06), and was carried out by Y.G. Contract Archaeology, with the academic sponsorship of the Hebrew Union College. Scientific guidance for the excavation was given by Professor Yosef Garfinkel of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, accompanied by geomorphologic guidance by Dr. Oren Ackerman.

The excavation (87.5m²; August, October 2006) included the completion of the test excavation in two half-squares and the digging of two additional squares (5 × 5m) in an area to the south where the remains of a wall had been found in an IAA test pit. The squares were numbered with Roman numerals from I to IV from north to south (towards Eshtaol intersection). In accordance with IAA requirements, an additional half-square (2.5 × 5m) was excavated following the discovery of architecture in square III. The additional square was marked with the number V and is located between squares III and IV.

The Excavation

The topsoil in the area is heavy and clayish, and in all of our squares this overlay a pebble-dense layer, which in turn overlay the archaeologically-sterile subsoil. It was possible to distinguish between the topsoil and overburden sediment reflecting recent

anthropogenic accumulation. The site lies on a natural slope, down from north to south (except in square III, where the slope is reversed – as is seen at the base of the structure's longitudinal walls W213 and W229).

The excavation and initial analysis of the finds from squares I and II showed similarities to square IV. These did not yield much in the way of archaeological finds. In all three squares, the relatively-undisturbed archaeological layer is found 35-45cm below the surface. No stratification was visible within what is a homogeneous archaeological layer, the soil type and inclusion sorting of which are uniform. Mixed ceramic finds from the Early Bronze Age (EBA) and the Neolithic period were found from the top of the layer to its bottom. One architectural feature was uncovered (wall W223).

The most informative discoveries were made in squares III and V. The heavy clayish sediment topsoil in these squares reached to over a meter in depth in this area (it is understood that this depth was due to the ancient walls we found here (see below) acting against erosion and soil creep). In this area it was possible to distinguish between three archaeological phases. The upper/latest phase included a layer of pebbles (L205) that was well preserved in square III but not in square V, as well as a section of a wall built of flat stones (W203) which was preserved to only one course, and a rough structure built of large fieldstones (L202). The L205 pebble layer abuts both this installation and wall W203. Most of the pottery that was found between the stones and fill of the L202 structure date to the EBA.

Under this phase was found a rectangular building constructed of fieldstones (walls W213, W229 and W249) (Fig.1). This structure's fourth wall (south) was not exposed, having been located in the baulk between squares IV and V. The above-mentioned L202 installation was found above this structure's walls and fill, making clear their relative dating. The walls of this structure were built from fieldstones of different sizes. These were laid two rows wide. The external façade was built mainly with larger stones, while smaller stones were selected for the internal façade. Most of the external façade of the northwest corner of the structure was missing, while the inner face of this corner was almost completely preserved. In the northern part of wall W229 there is a 60cm-wide gap. It is not clear whether this was the location of an opening or whether the section was later removed or collapsed. In one of the stones found in W229 there is a small depression. This was most probably a hollow stone – either functioning as a hinge socket while forming part of the wall, or having lost its initial use. West of the building a rough L-shaped wall (W252) made of small fieldstones was uncovered, which formed in plan what appears to have been an entrance room or antechamber to the W213/229/249 building.

Underneath the structure's walls (especially W213 and W249), potsherds dating to the EBA were also found. The building rested on a non-occupation context, beneath which was another layer of pebbles (L247, 249). This was 30-40cm deep, of varying pebble density, and directly overlying the area's virgin subsoil. L247/249 was investigated at three locations. A 4m² section was excavated in the northern interior of the W213/229/249 structure, down to the subsoil. An additional section was excavated to the north of W249, also down to subsoil. And finally, a third 4m² section was excavated through the floor level of installation L250 (discussed further on p.4 of stratigraphic report), again down to subsoil. Between these investigations of the L247/249 pebble-

dense stratum, we found Neolithic flint tools and two pottery sherds belonging to the Yarmukian culture.

Close to the end of the excavation, walls 213, 229, 249 were removed.

Summary

This excavation uncovered a prehistoric structure, as well as other walls and a variety of objects. These assorted Early Bronze Age and Neolithic structural and artifactual remains form part of the matrix of archaeology in the area. For a more detailed discussion, see the below-cited excavation report of a nearby contemporaneous site.

Further Reading

Fall, P.L., Lines, L., and Falconer, S.E. 1998. 'Seeds of civilization: Bronze Age rural economy and ecology in the southern Levant.' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88: 107-125.

Garfinkel, Y. 1993. 'The Yarmukian culture in Israel.' *Paléorient* 19: 115-134.

Golani, A. 2008. 'Khirbet Hamada (Eshtaol Junction)'. Israel Antiquities Authority Abstract: http://www.antiquities.org.il/Dig_Item_eng.asp?id=1066

Greenberg, R. 2002. *Early Urbanizations in the Levant: a regional narrative*. Leiceister: Leicester University Press.

Twiss, K.C. 2007. 'The Neolithic of the southern Levant.' *Evolutionary Anthropology* 16: 24-35.