



# NGSBA Excavation Reports

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## **Salvage Excavations at Or Yehuda (Ono) December 2009 Preliminary Report**

Excavation Permit: B - 342/2009  
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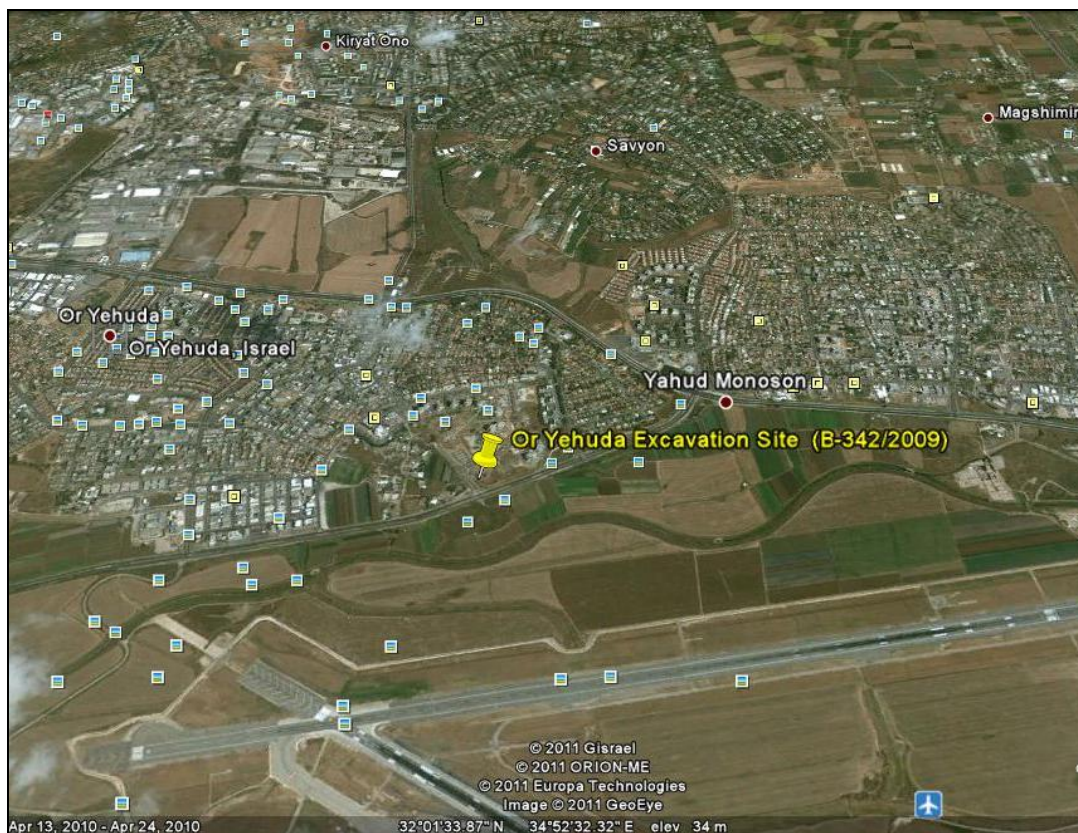


Figure 1: Location of excavation site (32° 1'24.17''N / 34°52'17.35''E).

## Introduction

This excavation at Or Yehuda began as a probe conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in an area designated for construction. After the discovery of several graves the IAA excavation was stopped and the area was covered.

Y.G. Archaeology began excavating on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2009, removing by machine the sand covering the site and constructing a shelter to protect the excavation from rain. The grave lining stones exposed by the IAA were revealed and the excavation was divided into two areas: Area A3 to the south and Area A2 to the north (Fig. 2).

In Area A3 the tops of stones belonging to two graves exposed in the IAA excavation were found. The graves were laid out along a general north-south axis and were lacking their capstones.

In Area A2 the tops of two large ashlar stones were uncovered that must have been capstones or gravestones. In this area the IAA excavators did not go very deep before their work was stopped following the discovery of the graves.

On 24<sup>th</sup> December the excavation was stopped by the client who acceded to the demands of Jewish ultra-orthodox protestors.

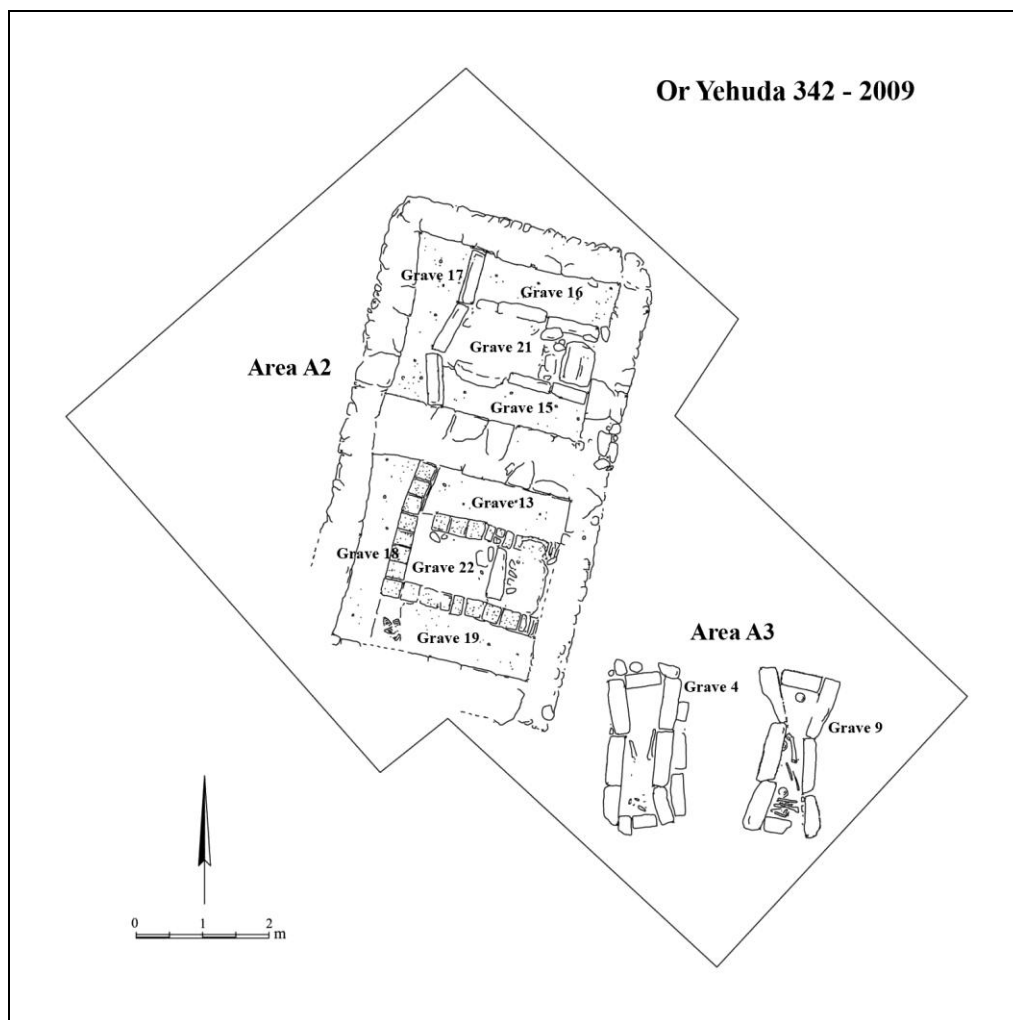


Figure 2: Site plan.

### Area A3

Two ashlar-built cist graves with a north-south orientation were discovered approximately 1.5m apart in this area. The graves were dug into a black, heavy clay soil. Very few sherds were found in this area and it appears that we reached the virgin soil into which these two graves were dug. The two graves had been opened in antiquity and were found without their capstones (Fig. 3). The irregularity of the ashlar construction suggests secondary use.

Grave 9 (Fig. 4): The eastern grave was built of hard slabs of limestone placed in two parallel rows, three stones along each side. Its approximate size is  $2.2 \times 1.2$ m. The grave interior was excavated to the depth of ca. 0.5m, at which level the bones were revealed. The grave fill contained only a few pottery sherds, probably from the grave backfill. In

the grave itself, three concentrations of bones in secondary burial were found, each concentration including a skull. One concentration was found in the center of the grave and two others on either side. The grave walls were partly collapsed into its center.



Figure 3: General view of Area A3 graves, Grave 4 in the background and Grave 9 in the foreground (from east).



Figure 4: Grave 9 (from southeast).

Grave 4 (Fig. 5): This, the western of the two Area A3 graves was also excavated to a depth of about 0.5m, whereupon the bones were revealed. It too was built from ashlar stones in secondary use. The size and manner of construction were the same as Grave 9.

Additional building stones supported the grave's eastern side and prevented its collapse. The grave fill also contained a few non-indicative pottery sherds. Two secondary burials of skulls together with concentrations of bones were found in the middle of the grave. The secondary nature of these interments indicates that – as in the case of Grave 9 – this grave was disturbed after its capstones were removed.



Figure 5: Grave 4 (from south).

## Area A2

In this area was uncovered a complex structure containing eight graves. On the surface of this area were found large amounts of pottery sherds together with many bone fragments. The IAA excavation also exposed two capstones or grave stones in the area's northern part. The dislodged capstones as well as the quantities of finds and bone fragments make it clear that the graves in this complex were robbed in antiquity. The graves were surrounded by stone walls of about 0.5m thickness, preserved to a height of about 0.7m, and constructed of medium-sized fieldstones. The rectangular grave complex, measuring approximately 7 × 4m, was divided into two sections by a wall approximately 0.8m wide. At the center of each section of the complex were found a large grave surrounded by three smaller graves (Figs. 6, 7). The complex's surface was covered by pottery sherds, bone fragments and special finds including a complete oil lamp, an arrowhead, a copper cymbal, a number of bracelets and a key.

The northern section of the complex (Fig. 6) included at its center a large grave (Grave 21) built of dressed stones. One of its capstones was found *in situ* (during the IAA excavation). Three additional and smaller graves abutted Grave 21, from the south (Grave 15), north (Grave 16) and west (Grave 17). These graves were excavated to their bases

which were paved with stones. The graves were severely disturbed: inside and above them were found many pottery sherds and bone fragments. We also recovered jewelry, including iron bracelets and a number of kohl bottles (one of which contained a bronze cosmetic applicator) (Fig. 8). These appear to indicate the burial of women. In addition, two ceramic palettes with depressions in them – probably used for make-up – and a number of ceramic vessels were found *in situ* and sent for restoration.

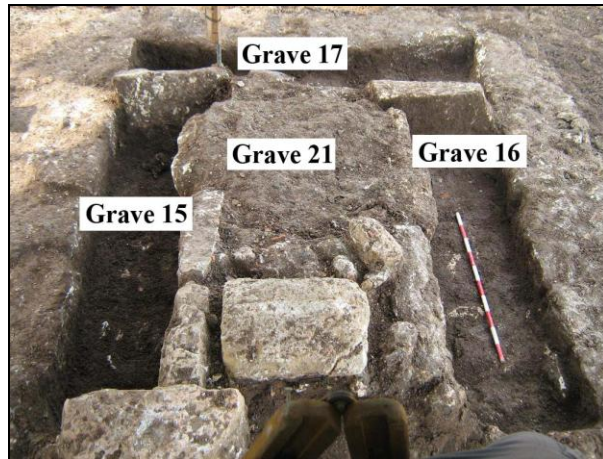


Figure 6: General view of the northern section of the Area A2 burial complex (from east).

The southern section of the burial complex (Fig. 7) was similar in design to the northern part, but in this section the central grave (Grave 22) was built not from stone but rather ceramic tiles bonded with cementing material. Grave 22 was not opened since the excavation was stopped abruptly. In this section three additional smaller graves were also found, appended to the larger grave from the south (Grave 19), north (Grave 13) and west (Grave 18). The graves were excavated to their bases, which were paved with stones. These graves were also severely disturbed, although artifacts and bone fragments were recovered. Several *in situ* ceramic vessels were sent for restoration.



Figure 7: General view of the southern section of the Area 2 burial complex (from east).



Figure 8: Glass kohl bottle from Grave 17, *in situ*.



Figure 9: Cooking pot from Grave 17, *in situ*.

## Summary

A total area of 86m<sup>2</sup> was excavated at this site (the northern section of Area A2 extending beyond the original IAA test excavation area). Examination of the finds suggests that the cemetery was used in two phases – Byzantine and Early Islamic.

The earlier phase was concentrated mainly in Area A2 and included an impressive burial complex containing eight graves. Most of the bones from these burials were not preserved and it appears that the compound was severely disturbed in antiquity, making it impossible to define the gender or age of the interred. The finds included eight glass kohl bottles (one of which contained a cosmetic applicator), two bowls that were probably used for cosmetics, thirteen bracelets and additional jewelry including beads, pins, a bronze crucifix, a seal, bells and other artifacts. These finds indicate strongly that the individuals buried around the two central graves were women. It is possible that the two central interments were of patriarchs of a family or families, but these graves were not excavated. The quantity of finds and the graves' fine construction suggest that the interred were of high status. The ceramic finds (including a complete oil lamp) indicate that the graves date to the end of the Byzantine and beginning of the Early Islamic period. The bronze crucifix is evidence for the interred being Christians.

The second site phase consisted of two simple cist graves, oriented north-south. Very few pottery sherds were found in association with these graves, probably from their backfill. The graves' dressed stone linings were possibly taken from the burial complex adjacent to them in Area A2. The graves' orientation may indicate that they belonged to Muslims. The graves were opened in antiquity and additional secondary burials were added.

The excavation was terminated due to pressure by ultra-orthodox Jews before it was possible to determine the gender or age of the interred. The IAA backfilled the site.

## Further Reading

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