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# New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and its Region

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and Doron Ben-Ami

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## CONTENTS

- 7     **Editorial Introduction**  
David Amit, Guy D. Stiebel, Orit Peleg-Barkat and Doron Ben-Ami
- 9     **Excavations in Jerusalem and its Region, 2011–2012**  
Doron Ben-Ami
- 25    **Preservation and Development Works Conducted during 2012 in the  
City of David, the Ophel and along the Tyropoeon Valley**  
Shahar Puni

## JERUSALEM AND THE JUDAEAN FOOTHILLS: THE EARLY PERIODS

- 35    **A Settlement and a Cemetery from the Intermediate Bronze  
Age in Ramat Bet Shemesh**  
Yitzhak Paz
- 7\*    **A Settlement from the Intermediate Bronze Age –  
Middle Bronze II in Newe Shalom**  
Dan Benjamin Storchan
- 50    **Cult in Khirbet Qeiyafa from the Iron Age IIa –  
Cult Rooms and Shrine Models**  
Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor
- 66    **Remarks on the Archaeology of Jerusalem in the Persian Period**  
Hillel Geva

## NEW STUDIES IN EPIGRAPHY AND GLYPTICS

- 83    **Assur in Jerusalem – New Glyptic Evidence of the Assyrian  
Influence on Jerusalem**  
Ariel Winderbaum
- 105   **The Seal Found near the Western Wall – A Suggestion  
for Its Meaning and Use**  
Shlomo Naeh
- 110   **A Graffito Bearing the Name of Trajan in a Cave at Kh. ʿArâk Hâla  
North of Bet Guvrin**  
Boaz Zissu, Boaz Langford, Avner Ecker and Esther Eshel

## **JERUSALEM AFTER THE ISLAMIC CONQUEST: NEW DISCOVERIES**

- 125 **Manufacture of Bone Items from the Early Islamic Period in Givati Parking  
Lot Excavations**  
Ariel Shatil
- 136 **New Discoveries in the Via Dolorosa – Excavations and  
a Survey in the Austrian Hospice and at the Vicinity of the "Ecce Homo" Arch**  
Shua Kisilevitz and Roie Greenwald
- 149 **The Market Street of Crusader Jerusalem in Light of  
a Recent Archaeological Excavation**  
Yecheil Zelinger and Michael Ehrlich
- 161 **Antique Maps of Jerusalem as Sources for its History:  
Methodological Lessons**  
Rehav (Buni) Rubin

## **NEW FINDS AT HERODIUM**

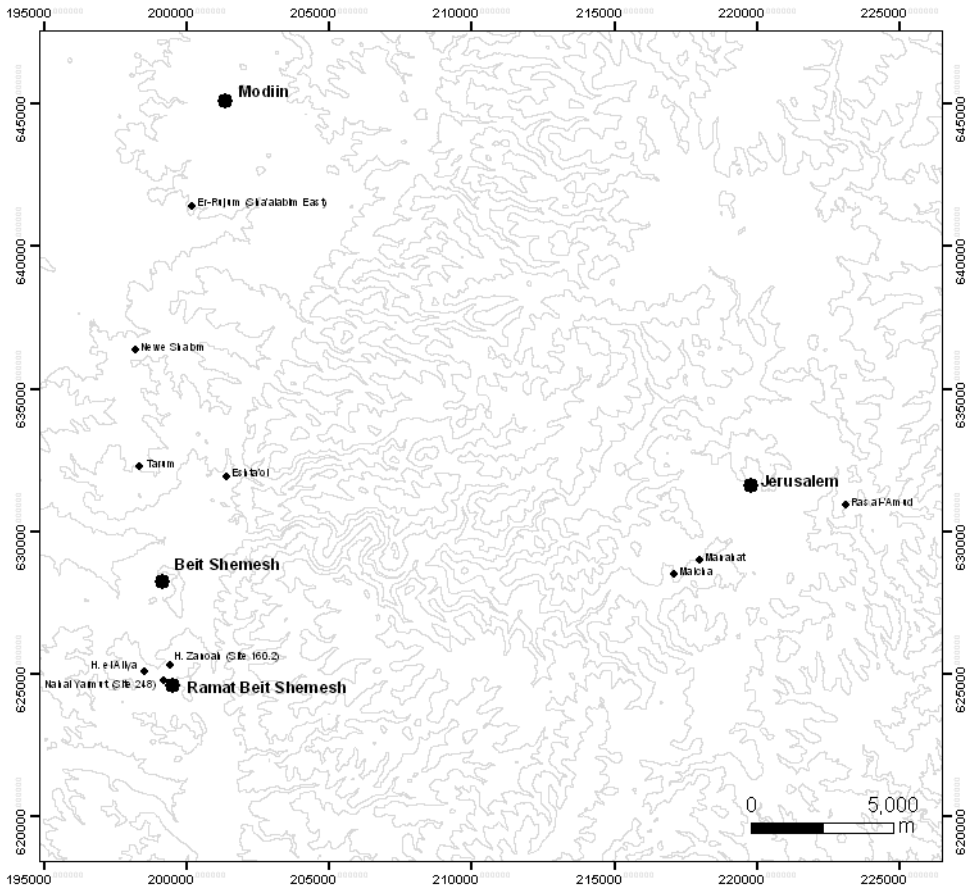
- 181 **New Findings at Herodium by the Ehud Netzer's Expedition**  
Yakov Kalman, Rachel Chachy, Oren Gutfeld and Roi Porat
- 194 **Herod's Workers: The Graffiti Evidence from the Area of the Theater  
at Herodium – The Greek and Latin Inscriptions**  
Avner Ecker
- 199 **Herod's Workers: The Graffiti Evidence from the Area of the Theater  
at Herodium – The Aramaic Inscription**  
Esther Eshel

# An Intermediate Bronze Age Farmhouse at Neve Shalom

Dan Benjamin Storchan  
 Israel Antiquities Authorities

Until recently, nearly all information about the Intermediate Bronze Age period (IBA), c. 2300-2000 BCE, in Israel has been based on

surveys and excavations conducted at large tells and burial sites. The noticeable abandonment of many of the previously inhabited city



1 Map of the excavation area

centers was traditionally interpreted to be a decline and decay of the newly achieved urban lifestyle (Herzog 1997). New studies in the IBA period have revealed numerous domestic sites typified by largely spread clustered buildings found on the slopes of moderate hills in areas above streambeds (Dagan 2006). The sites were largely hidden in agricultural lands covered by alluvial soils. Recently, due to increasing modern construction and urban sprawl into undeveloped land, a number of previously unknown IBA settlement sites were discovered during archaeological inspection and mechanical trenching in the area of Bet Shemesh. At Moshav Neve Shalom, located south of the Latrun junction, archaeological mechanical trenching, prior to the expansion of the neighborhood, uncovered the remains of a large multi-roomed structure (Fig. 1). A limited salvage excavation was undertaken that revealed a farmhouse dated to the Intermediate Bronze Age period (IB) with a continuous however, less intensive occupation during the Middle Bronze II period (MBII).<sup>1</sup> Upon excavation, the partially exposed tops of the structure's walls enabled immediate identification of a generally rectangular building plan (15x13 m) and differentiation of the building's southern most rooms. The tops of the stones bared shallow groove marks resulting from modern agricultural tilling in the area. The shallow topsoil cover, modern agricultural activity, and the natural erosion processes in the area allowed for only a moderate preservation of the structure's packed earth floors. The building was preserved (in most cases) to a height of one single stone course but

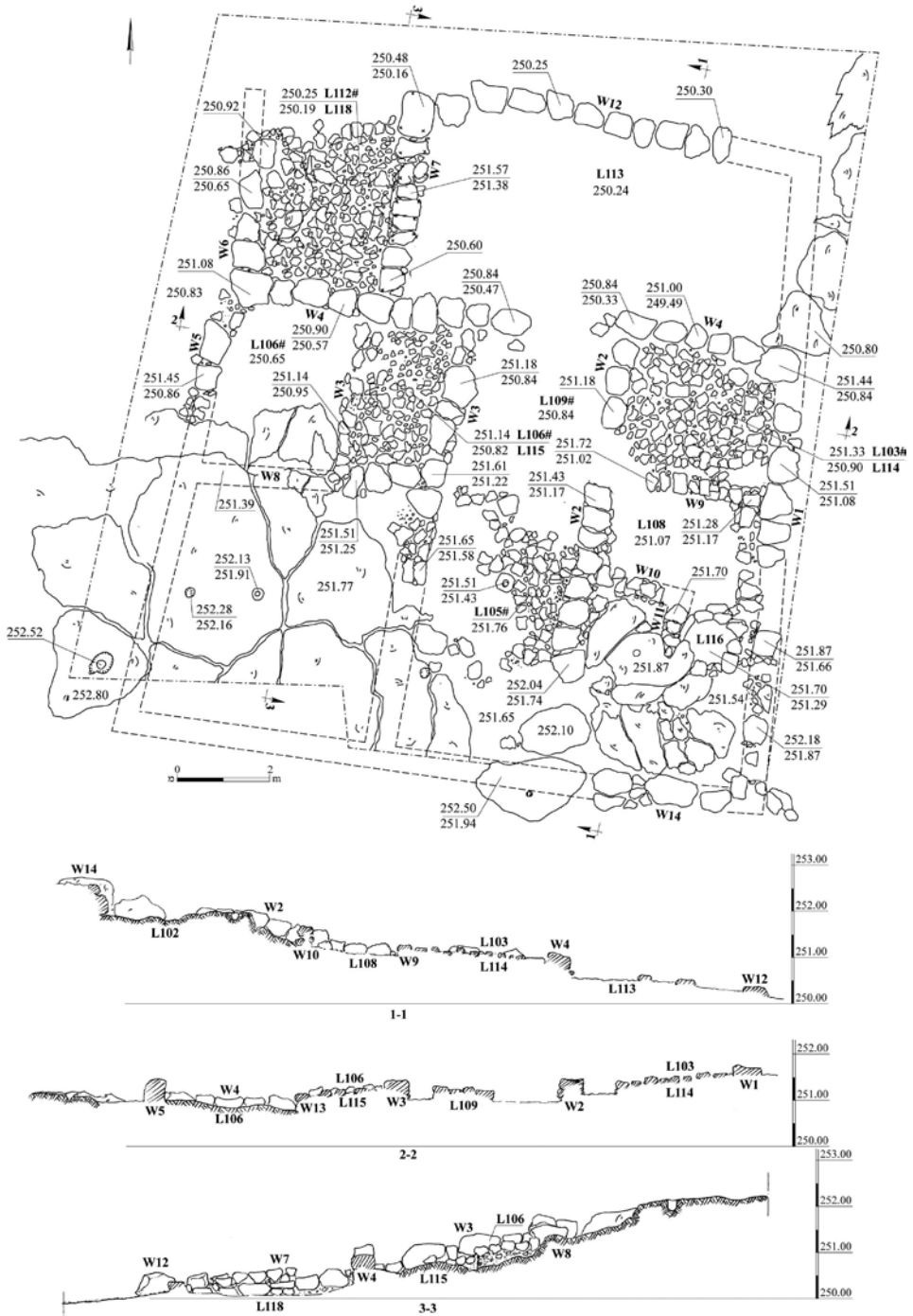
was however sufficient to enable a complete reconstruction of the building plan. The building consists of an entrance corridor (Room 112), a rectangular open courtyard (Room 113), and three rectangular side rooms (Room 106, Room 108, and Room 109) (Figs. 2-3).

### **Entrance corridor (Room 112) and Courtyard (Room 113)**

The structure's main entrance (3 m width), located in the northwest corner of the excavation area between walls W6 and W7, was gained from the north into a square corridor (3x3 m) (Fig. 4). Within the corridor, a layer of earth and 2-3 densely packed medium sized fieldstone courses were revealed. The stones seem to have been intentionally dumped to level the natural slope of the bedrock. The stone fill would have served as a strong foundation for upon which a beaten earth floor would be set. At the southern join of walls W7 and W4, two lower set stones within the line of W7 delineate an entranceway leading into a courtyard (Room 113) to the east. The rectangular courtyard (8x3.5 m) was built along the northern façade of the structure (Fig. 5). The walls outlining the northeastern corner were not preserved and could be assumed to have continued the delineation of walls W1 and W12 to form a corner. A 2 m wide gap in W4 in the central part of the courtyard's northern wall (W4) served as an entrance leading north to a central room (Room 109).

### **Room 109 – Central Room**

Nearly all of the walls of the central room, forming a generally rectangular plan (9x3 m),



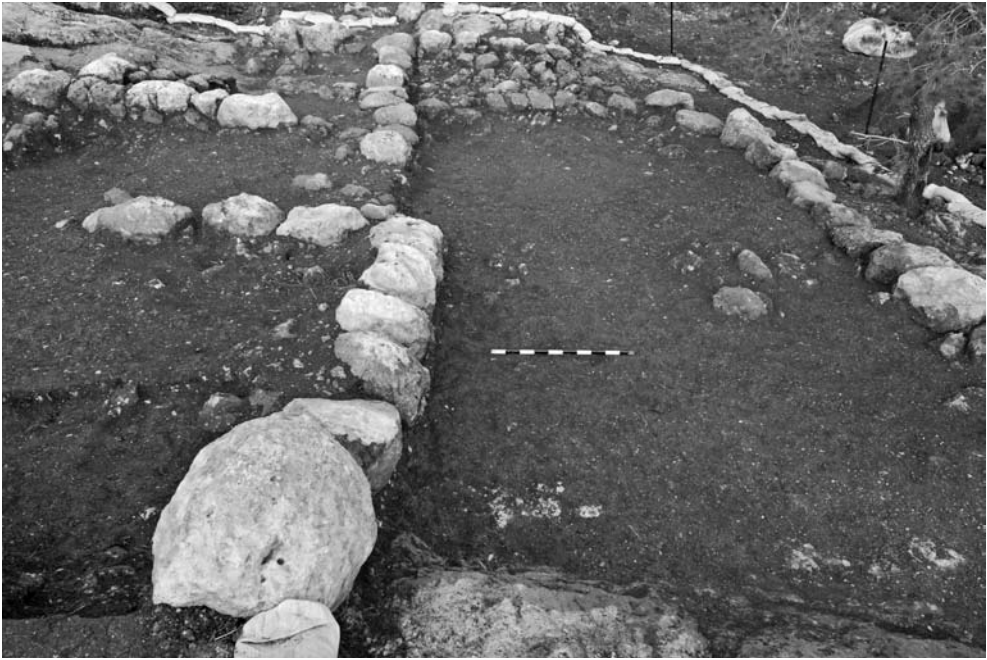
2 Plan and sections of the excavation



3 General view of the structure, looking north



4 The entrance corridor (Room 112), looking south



5 General view of the courtyard, looking southwest

were apparent upon excavation. The room can be divided into an upper (southern) and lower (northern) sections. In the southern part of the room, a partial stone pavement was uncovered. Among the stone pavement, a stone bearing a small shallow cupmark, presumably used as a mortar, was found. The southern and a large part of the western walls of the room were not preserved. In the center of the room, a large flat topped stone was uncovered and sunk into a packed earthen floor it served as a pillar base. This northern sloping floor covered the entire northern part of the room. Along the western part of the room, a 1 m wide entranceway, built between walls W3 and W4, enables passage into Room 106.

### **Room 106**

The southern half of Room 106 (3.5x9 m) was not preserved however, its original size can be completely reconstructed based on an assumingly symmetrical building plan. Both walls W5 and W14 would have extended to form the buildings' southwestern corner. The room is bisected and halved by a natural dip in the bedrock and an inner division wall, W8. To the north of W8 a small stone pavement was uncovered. The western extent of the pavement abuts a wall, W13, built of medium fieldstones. The partially stone-paved room and internal dividing wall indicate an obvious spatial and possibly functional differentiation within the room. In the western half of the room a layer



of mudbrick chunks and debris was uncovered. Below the layer of disintegrated mudbricks, a packed earth floor set directly upon the bedrock was uncovered.

### **Room 108**

A 1 m wide gap within W2 provides access from the central room to Room 103. At the entrance a wall, W9, built of a single row of medium sized fieldstones in an east/west orientation, divides the long room into smaller cells. In the north, Room 108A (2.5x3 m), a layer of medium sized fieldstones, similar to that found in the entrance corridor, was uncovered. The removal of the stone pavement uncovered a layer of brown alluvial soil with many pebble and cobble inclusions. To the south of W9, the partial remains of a low cut bench, built alongside W1, was uncovered. Excavation within this room uncovered numerous mudbrick fragments and a stone-lined circular installation. The installation was built partially upon the bedrock of a single row of fieldstones.

The Neue Shalom structure seems to have been pre-planned in conjunction to the natural topography. The location, nestled within a large natural dip in the bedrock, provided a sturdy bedrock foundation for the southern, eastern, and western walls of the structure. The structure's external walls were all built of a single row of large stone boulders set directly upon a layer of alluvial soil or in some cases directly upon the limestone bedrock. The stones would most likely have served as a foundation course for an assumingly mudbrick superstructure. During excavation mudbrick fragments and debris were found within a few

rooms of the structure. With exception of the courtyard, it is likely that the other rooms would have been roofed as well, however a pillar base was only found in the central room.

Mechanical trenching, conducted before and during the excavation, around the excavation was not successful in identifying any other structures in the immediate area. With the exception of numerous scattered and badly preserved terrace walls, the building seems to be the only architectural element in the area. The lack of other structures in the area suggests the building to have been isolated and functioned as a farmhouse. Farmhouses would have served as work and storage areas to the nearby agricultural plots presumably on the periphery of larger settlement sites. The sporadic or seasonal temporal usage of the site would explain the lack of accumulated occupational debris at the site. The usage of the structure as a farmhouse could also be indicated by the limited material remains found within. The material assemblage is comprised of ceramics (mostly body fragments), a few flint implements (including flint hammerstones) and large fragments of a plaster basin. The construction of the building can be dated to the IB period as all dateable sherds from loci under clear floor contexts were in fact from this period. A non-intensive occupation of the structure continued on into the Middle Bronze Age II period as suggested by the few indicative store jar and cooking pot vessel fragments found on the surface. The nature of the plaster basin, circular installation, and hammer/grinding stones indicates agricultural activity at the site. In addition to the agricultural function of

the building, the location, with a commanding overlooking view above the Ayyalon Valley, would have made the site useful as a strategic watch point.

In addition to the site at Neve Shalom, in the immediate area remains from the IB period were uncovered at Moshav Tarum, the Esta'ol Junction, and Ramat Bet Shemesh (Fig. 1). At Moshav Tarum, a limited salvage excavation uncovered the remains of a single strata multi-roomed structure dating to the IB period. Due to the lack of the scope of the excavation the presence of other structures in the area is yet undetermined (Storchan forthcoming). Nearby to the north of Moshav Tarum, excavations conducted along Highway 44 uncovered cobble and rock layers with ceramic remains from the IB period. The rocky layers probably were deemed to have been intentionally dumped and related to unidentified agricultural activities. To the east of Neve Shalom, a series of excavations conducted at the Eshta'ol Junction (Areas A, C, E, and F) revealed a grouping of multiple structures from the IBA period built around large central courtyards (Golani and Storchan 2009). The structures were built of a row of large fieldstone boulders with adjoining packed earth floors. In addition, partial pavements of small and medium sized stone cobbles were uncovered at the site. At the northern extent of the excavations, a large rock pile was uncovered resembling the rocky layers found along highway 44. Excavations at the site of Er-Rujum uncovered the remains of an IBA rural settlement buried under a large stone heap (Milevski *et al.* 2012). The apparently rural settlement included both broadroom structures

and a central open space. Further to the south, another excavation conducted in Ramat Bet Shemesh (A-6354) uncovered the remains of a large settlement and numerous shaft tombs from the IB period (Yitzhak Paz, pers. comm.). Archaeological survey of the region documented many IBA sites in the region as indicated by large surface scatters of pottery (Dagan 2010). At Nahal Yarmut (Site 248), multiple structures and a courtyard dating to the IBA period were found (Dagan 1998). Around the structures numerous rock cut installations were found. Further to the east, in Jerusalem, sites from the IB period were excavated at Ras-al-'Amud and at Malcha in the Nahal Refaim valley (Fig. 6). The excavations both enjoyed a wide scope and thus revealed impressive building plans. At the site of Ras-al-'Amud revealed multi-roomed structures build around a central open courtyard. Similar to the Neve Shalom farmhouse evidence of non-extensive occupational remains dating to the MB II period were found directly above the IB stratum. A cluster of IB domestic structures were found at Malha. Unlike the other IBA sites, occupation at the site continued and became increasingly intensified well into the MB II period (Eisenberg 1993). A similar pattern of continuous occupation was noted during excavations at the nearby site of Manahat (Edelstein 1993). The farmhouse found at Neve Shalom shares many of the typical characteristics and elements of an IB period site. Nearly all sites from the IBA period can be noted by structural walls built of a single row of large fieldstones forming a building plan composed of a set of rooms built around a courtyard. Pillar bases used for roof support

and grinding stone installations set within floor makeup are also commonly found within the structures. The Newe Shalom farmhouse differs from the other clustered settlement sites as no other structures were found in the nearby area. A similarly isolated structure, dating to the IBA period, was detected by survey at H. Zanoach (Site 160.2) (Dagan 2010). The ceramic assemblage from Newe Shalom is extremely limited in quantity in comparison to the other excavations where sizeable amounts of ceramics and in many cases restorable vessels were found. Of interesting note, both at Newe Shalom, Eshta'ol, and Ras el-Amud very minimal faunal remains were uncovered. The lack of ceramic and faunal assemblages may attest to a seasonal or un-intensive occupation of the site. The recent discovery of multiple sites of close proximity infers a large regional system of an interlinked and sedentary or semi-sedentary lifestyle during the IB period. During the IBA period the Ramat Bet Shemesh region flourished with settlements. The region would have provided a wide range of economic

niches including ample grazing land and a climate suitable for year-round agriculture. All excavations at the settlement sites yielded material remains such as storage vessels, domestic wares, and agricultural tools indicating a highly sedentary and perhaps completely permanently settled population (Dagan 2006). The appearance of isolated farmhouse structures, such as at Newe Shalom, coupled with larger village sites attests for the region's predominantly sedentary agrarian way of life. The Newe Shalom farmhouse was probably only but one of many such structures that dotted the ancient landscape located on the periphery of the larger clustered settlement sites. No direct clear connection between the Newe Shalom farmhouse and an assumed nearby larger domestic site can currently be made. With the continuous increase in modern development in the region coupled with meticulous archaeological inspection additional sites of a similar nature are bound to be discovered enabling for a better picture of settlement patterns in the region during the IBA period.

#### Footnotes

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