

## Excavations at Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa: Results from the 2020–2021 Seasons

David Ben-Shlomo, Michael Freikman, and Ralph K. Hawkins

### **Abstract**

This article will describe and discuss the results of the 2020–2021 seasons of the excavations at Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa, a site in the southern Jordan Valley, north of Jericho. During these seasons, a section of the northern side of the site was excavated, including one complete structure. This structure, as well as the units around it, also contained a hasty abandonment or destruction layer from the Iron Age IIB similar to the one excavated in the southern part of the site. The article will illustrate reconstructed pottery from Area A, along with other finds. A large complex containing rooms and open areas appears to have been located in this area, although its function is still unclear. Finally, the reconstruction of the architecture will be discussed, along with the possible significance and function of the site.

**Keywords:** 'Aujah el-Foqa, Iron Age II, southern Jordan Valley, fortified sites, Manasseh Hill Country Survey

Prof. David Ben-Shlomo – Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology,  
Ariel University; [davben187@yahoo.com](mailto:davben187@yahoo.com)

Dr. Michael Freikman – Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology,  
Ariel University; [indy424@gmail.com](mailto:indy424@gmail.com)

Prof. Ralph K. Hawkins – Department of Religion, Averett University;  
[rhawkins@averett.edu](mailto:rhawkins@averett.edu)

## Introduction

Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa is a well-preserved 15-dunam Iron Age II site identified by the Manasseh Hill Country Survey, under the direction of Adam Zertal. It is located approximately 11 km northwest of Jericho (ITM 237908/650482; Zertal et al. 2005; 2009; Zertal and Bar 2019: 394–403; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a; 2020b). The excavations at the site of Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa were initiated as a part of the larger Jordan Valley Excavation Project (JVEP; [www.jvep.org](http://www.jvep.org)) and are directed by David Ben-Shlomo from Ariel University and Ralph Hawkins from Averrett University.

So far, three excavation seasons have been conducted at the site from 2019–2021 (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a; 2020b; Ben-Shlomo and Hawkins 2021).<sup>1</sup> Two excavation areas were opened: Area A (2019) in the southwestern part of the site (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a) and Area B (2020–2021) on the northern side of the site (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020b). While prior published articles have discussed the results in Area A, alongside previous research (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a; 2020b; Ben-Shlomo and Hawkins 2021), this article will deal only with the 2020–2021 results in Area B. The two main phases, Phase 1 (Mamluk-Ottoman), comprised of several dozen rounded small structures, and Phase 2 (main phase, Iron Age II), with larger rectilinear structures identified in Area A, were also defined in Area B (see below and Table 4). A large complex containing rooms and ovens was located in Area B, although its function is still unclear. The reconstruction of the architecture will also be discussed, as will the possible significance and function of the site. Some of the finds, including recently reconstructed pottery, will be presented, as will the reconstruction of portions of the site.

---

1 Permit Nos. 9-1-2019 (May–June 2019, 4 weeks), 3-1-20 (February 2020, 2 weeks), and 5-1-21 (February 2021, 2 weeks). The team included dozens of volunteers from Israel, the United States, and other countries. During the 2020–2021 seasons, an average of 15 volunteers participated on a daily basis. Assistance in the excavation was provided by Jay Rosenberg (surveying, plans, and graphics), Tal Rogovski (photographs of finds), and Olga Dubovsky (drawings). Field photographs were taken by the authors unless otherwise noted.

## Excavations in Area B, 2020–2021

Area B was opened in 2020 on the northern side of the site. This area is located in an important part of the site (Figs. 4–18), as the northern slope is less steep than the others. The northern slope is also characterized by softer limestone exposures (see Fig. 1, rear, whitish exposures), while the others are steeper and characterized by hard flint stone exposures. Therefore, it is likely that this area included the pathway up to the site and the town gate (see Fig. 2, showing the current dirt road to the site). Below this area, on the northern slopes, a series of "support" walls or structures can be seen on the surface (Fig. 2: center front; Figs. 3–4; Zertal et al. 2009: 109, Structures 62–63). Lower on the northern slope, Structure 62 (Fig. 3) may have been an outer tower guarding this pathway, delimited by a straight wall along the slope (Fig. 2: center). On the eastern side, a straight wall can be seen running down the slope (Fig. 4: right), while a transverse support wall was cleaned above the wall (Fig. 4: left; this was cleaned in 2020).



**Figure 1:** The site of 'Aujah el-Foqa before excavations, viewed from the south (photograph: courtesy of Boaz Ben-Moshe)



**Figure 2:** The northern area of the side climbed by a dirt road, facing south



**Figure 3:** Structure 62 below Area B



**Figure 4:** Area B (end of 2020 season), facing southwest, with support walls in the front

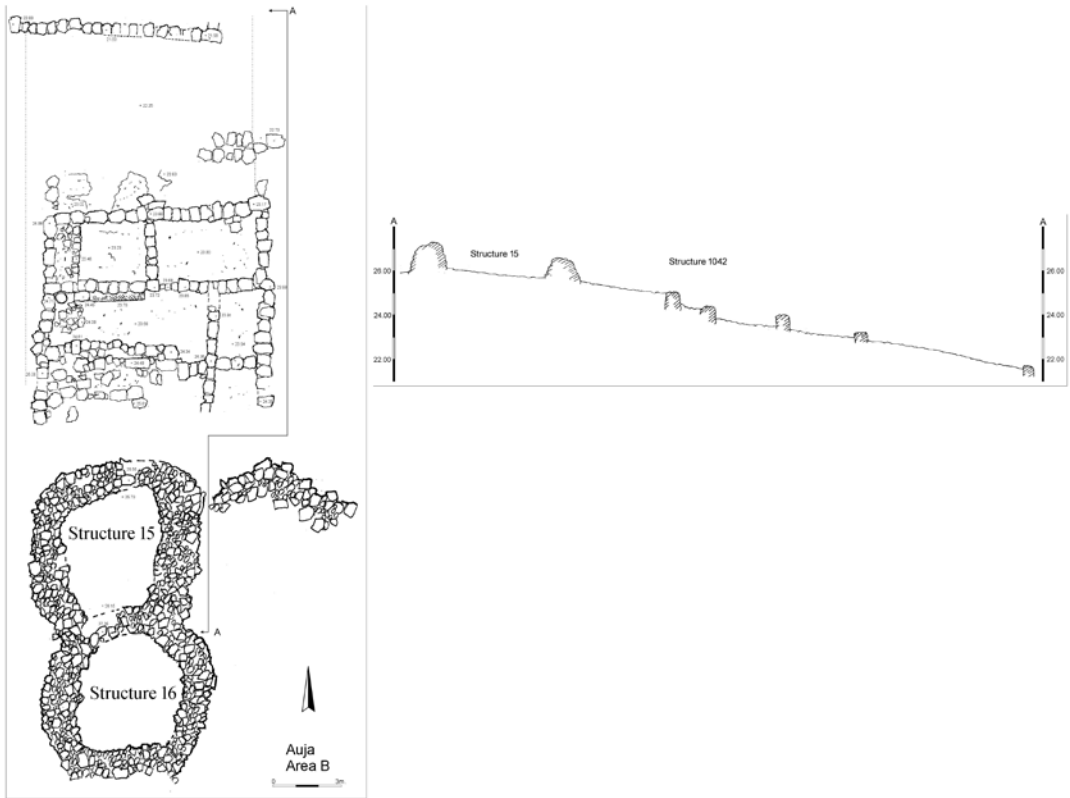
In 2020, an area relatively clear of late rounded structures and containing the visible straight walls of a structure was chosen for excavation. Here, the area to the southern, inner side of the casemate wall was excavated, and at least one structure was found. So far, about 10 excavation squares have been excavated. About 20–30 m to the north, the fortifications are covered with debris (Fig. 5: above), and will be cleared and excavated in the future in an attempt to identify the line of fortification and possibly the town gate (see below). This excavation will also clarify whether the casemate wall was generally freestanding, as in the case of the section excavated in Area A, or whether additional structures were connected to or combined with it.

In 2020, the northern part of a structure was excavated, as was an open area to the north (Fig. 5). This latter area was an open area or a courtyard on bedrock, delimited by an east-west wall, possibly already part of a large structure to the north. Further excavations will determine whether this wall may already have been part of the fortification and/or tower or gate complex; in particular, an area measuring 8×11 m, seen from the air in Fig. 5, upper part; see below Fig. 19: "tower?".

During the 2020 season, a structure (Building 1042) was only partially excavated, since its southern section was covered in part by a late, Phase 1 structure (Structure 15; Fig. 6). This late, roughly rounded structure (probably Mamluk-Ottoman in date) was built using medium-sized stones, mostly robbed from earlier structures. It is 7.5 m in diameter, with an inner floor area of 4–5 m wide. Its entrance was on its northern side, while its southern side was attached to another rounded late structure (Structure 16; Fig. 6). The finds on the floor level of the structure were mixed with those from modern squatters. Structure 15 was dismantled during the 2021 season, enabling the excavation of Building 1042 to be completed (Figs. 7–8; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020b, "Structure 1042"). However, this structure seems to be part of a larger complex (see below, Fig. 26: "Complex I").



**Figure 5:** Area B at the end of the 2020 season



**Figure 6:** Plans of Structures 15 and 16 (Phase 1) and section in Area B



**Figure 7:** Aerial photograph of Area B at the end of the 2021 season

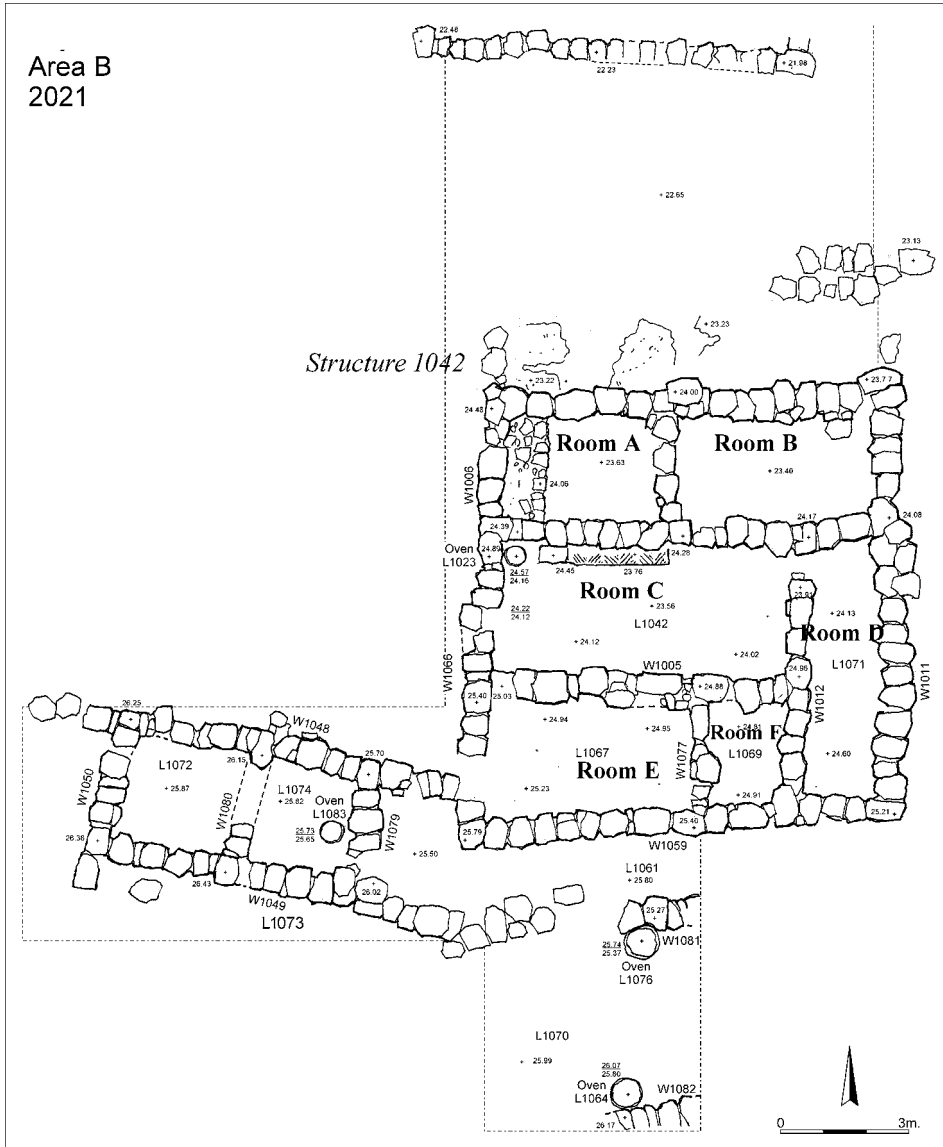


Figure 8: Plan of Area B at the end of the 2021 season



Building 1042 contains six rooms (Figs. 8–15). The building's entrance may have been in its southwestern corner (Fig. 8, Room E; see also Fig. 13, lower left), although this is not yet clear. A possible additional entrance was from the north, where an open area was excavated; however, the wall found there was poorly preserved. The building measures about 10×9.5 m (95 m<sup>2</sup>). The rooms are of different sizes (A–F), and their floors, usually on bedrock, slope from south to north (thus, the floor of Room E at 25.20 m is 1.6 m higher than that of Room A at 23.60 m; see Fig. 6, section), and were usually either on bedrock or a mud plaster layer that leveled the bedrock in some areas (Fig. 13, Room E, center). Five of the rooms are rectangular, four are oriented east-west, and one (Room D) north-south.

A clear and rich layer that contained reconstructable and intact vessels was excavated on the floors of two of the rooms (A and C; Figs. 9–10, 12; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020b: Figs. 17–18), and is evidence of a destruction or hasty abandonment. The finds include mostly storage jars and cooking pots (see below), although chalices, jugs (Fig. 12) and juglets were also found, along with other types, as well as stone tools (see Fig. 9, rounded stones), mud weights/stoppers, and metal objects. These vessels have been restored. This phase is similar in date and nature to the destruction layer recorded in Area A (see above; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a); according to the pottery found, it is dated to the 8th century BCE (see below). The other rooms contained fewer finds (Rooms B, D, and E), with a floor on top of the bedrock. The units to the southwest, outside Building 1042 (see below Figs. 17–18), also contained complete vessels, but have only partially been excavated. In Rooms A and D, several iron tools were also found on the floor (see below Fig. 14; Fig. 22: 2–4). A small room (Room F) contained several mud loom weights, which are probably the remains of an *in situ* loom on the floor (Fig. 15).



**Figure 9:** Building 1042, Room A (L1031), vessels on floor



**Figure 10:** Building 1042, Room C (L1042), vessels on floor with Tabun 1023 in rear



**Figure 11:** Section through Tabun 1023



**Figure 12:** Intact vessels from Building 1042



**Figure 13:** Building 1042, Rooms D, E, and F



**Figure 14:** An iron pick found in Room A



**Figure 15:** Room F with mud loom weights on floor

The southern part of the building may have contained two sub-phases, with a later sub-phase comprised of a bench, as well as installation and/or thickening of the southern wall of the house (Fig. 6, just north of the late rounded structure; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020b: 150; Fig. 15, lower part).

Several tabun ovens were discovered in this area, both in and outside Building 1042. One rather oval tabun oven was found in Room C (Oven 1023, Figs. 10–11). This feature, half of which was excavated, was also sectioned, revealing its inner structure and buildup (Fig. 11): its walls were made of mud and sherds, and its foundation was lined with small and larger stones, which also supported it from the sides. Another oven was located in a small room in the structure to the west (Fig. 8: Oven 1083), while two others (Fig. 8: Ovens 1064 and 1076) were located in a unit or room to the south of Structure 1042 (L1070; Fig. 16, center). This unit is still unclear, as its outer walls have not yet been excavated. The area was covered by the later Structure 15, and the fills here are still mixed in terms of their finds.

The function and nature of Building 1042 is yet to be determined. It is unclear whether it is a domestic structure, part of a storage-related administrative complex, or some combination of the two. The general outline of the house plan may resemble that of a "four-room house," common during the Iron Age in the southern Levant.

Yet it is not clear whether the central area (Room C) is an open area or a columned courtyard, as in many houses of this kind. The finds from the structure thus far may suggest storage (numerous jars) and cooking (several tabun ovens and cooking pots); this combination could fit a large house or some sort of military barracks where food was stored and cooked for groups of people. This may be surmised from the multiplicity of tabuns in this area (three altogether).

As noted, to the southwest of Area A, Building 1042 is connected to or combined with another structure in which only two units have been partially excavated thus far (Fig. 17, delimited by W1049 from the south). The two units are small and square, and one contains a tabun. The floor levels have not yet been reached. Just to the south of Wall 1049, several vessels were found, including a complete amphoriskos and a grinding stone (Figs. 18, 21: 6, L. 1073). This area will be further excavated and expanded in future seasons.



**Figure 16:** Area south of Building 1042, L1070



**Figure 17:** Rooms to the west of Building 1042



**Figure 18:** Pottery vessels excavated south of W1049 (L1073)

## **Reconstruction of Additional Remains in Area B**

Several walls in the northern part of the site can be identified in part or in full according to drone photographs (Fig. 19). We have marked only those that have been more securely identified. A large, nearly square structure measuring 11×8 m (Fig. 19: "Tower/gate?"), located to the north of Structure 1042 and combined with the casemate wall, may be part of a large tower or gate complex. To the east, several small rectangular rooms seem to be incorporated into or attached to the fortification (Fig. 19: top right). Four or five rooms are clearly visible in this area; each has a different size and orientation than "casemates" in other locations on the site (either excavated or visible; see lower part of Fig. 19).

In Area B, to the west of Structure 1042 and possibly attached to the structure, there is a large complex that includes a partly open(?) square area, about 14×15 m. Some internal divisions in this complex have been identified, which may divide it into at least six units (Fig. 19: Complex I). It appears that this complex continues to the west, possibly all the way to the fortification line (see Fig. 19: Complex II). The size of this complex would be about 22×14 m, over 300 m<sup>2</sup> (Complex I). This complex of structures may have continued to the southwest as well, with another "empty" area defined by a thick wall (Fig. 19: Complex III).





**Figure 19:** Aerial photo of the site with additional Phase 2 walls marked

Some of these walls were noted on the survey plan (see below Fig. 23: Structures 12–14; Zertal et al. 2009: 106), which states: "The general nature of the northern part is not yet clear. It seems to contain public buildings including fortified towers." Zertal divided the area into three or four units (Nos. 12–14), and suggested that Structure 13 may have been a typical four-room house (Zertal et al. 2009: 106). Some of the walls noted there are shown in the current reconstruction, while others are not.

As suggested here, the northwestern part of this complex may represent a gate and tower structure (Fig. 23: 14), while many of the structures to the west and south may represent a large, possibly administrative structure containing clusters of storerooms. The arrangement of large square areas, subdivided into smaller units and with no visible entrance, could indicate structures that were also used for storage. Similar structures, also interpreted as storerooms or administrative structures, have been excavated in various Iron Age II sites such as Megiddo (see e.g., Stratum III, Lamon and Shipton 1939: Figs. 71–72; Herzog 1997: Fig. 5.35) and Hazor (see e.g., Stratum VIIA, Ben-Ami 2012: 230–235, Plan 3.34). Nevertheless, only further excavations in the area may clarify the functions of these structures.

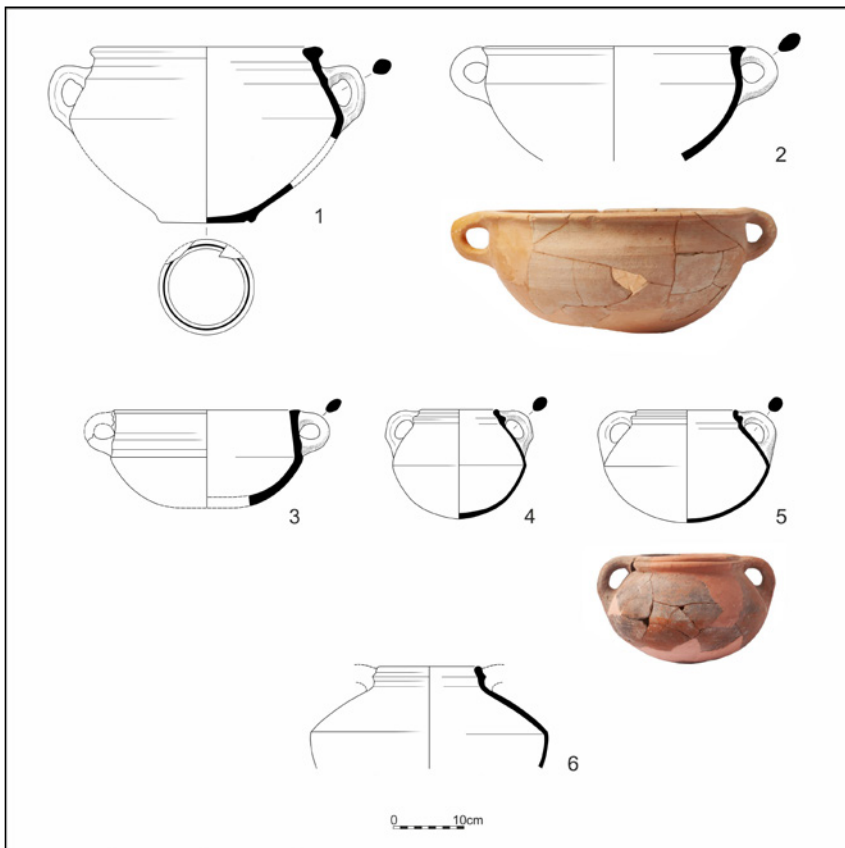
## **Finds**

Several of the finds from Areas A and B will be presented and briefly discussed here.

### **Pottery**

A large amount of pottery has been recovered, especially from some of the casemate spaces in Area A (Figs. 20–21) and Structure 1042 in Area B. Rooms A and C in Structure 1042 contained over 20 complete vessels, some currently still in reconstruction. These include storage jars of the typical "hippo" type, cooking pots, a chalice, and a jug and juglets (see above). So far, only the pottery from Area A has been fully reconstructed (Figs. 20–21), including kraters (Fig. 20: 1–3), cooking pots (Fig. 20: 4–6), storage jars (Fig. 21: 1–2), a spouted jar/amphora (Fig. 21: 3), amphoriskoi (Fig. 21: 4–6), and jugs and juglets (Fig. 21: 7). Because the pottery has not yet been fully restored and analyzed, a more detailed discussion of the pottery will be published separately. So far, however, representative vessels, mainly from the casemate area, indicate forms that appear mostly during the late Iron Age IIA and early Iron Age IIB (the 9th and early 8th centuries BCE), with most parallels probably coming from northern sites (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: \*25–\*27,

Figs. 14–15; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020b: 153–157). Note that the spouted jar or amphora from 'Aujah (Fig. 21: 3) has three handles and a short flaring neck, while most examples in the southern Levant have a tall cylindrical neck. Several amphoriskoi should also be noted, with at least four complete examples so far (Fig. 21: 4–6; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: Fig. 15: 8). These have pointed, rounded to flat bases, and are occasionally decorated with red slip and burnish and/or black horizontal bands.



**Figure 20:** Pottery from casemates in Area A (open forms)

**Table 1: Description of pottery in Figure 20**

No.	Description	Locus	Basket	Parallels
1	Krater	140	225	Hazor, Stratum VII, Ben-Tor and Zarzecki-Peleg 2015: 139, Pl. 2.2.4: 6–7, 11
2	Krater	140	230/1	Rehov, Stratum IV, Ben-Tor and Zarzecki-Peleg 2015: 139, Pl. 2.2.4: 12
3	Krater	140	230	Hazor, Stratum VI, Sandhaus 2012: Fig. 4.1: 5
4	Cooking pot	110	127/2	Rehov, Stratum IV, Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2020: Fig. 13.86: 1–2
5	Cooking pot	110	127/1	Same as 4
6	Cooking pot	140	282	Rehov, Stratum IV, Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2020: Fig. 13.131: 9

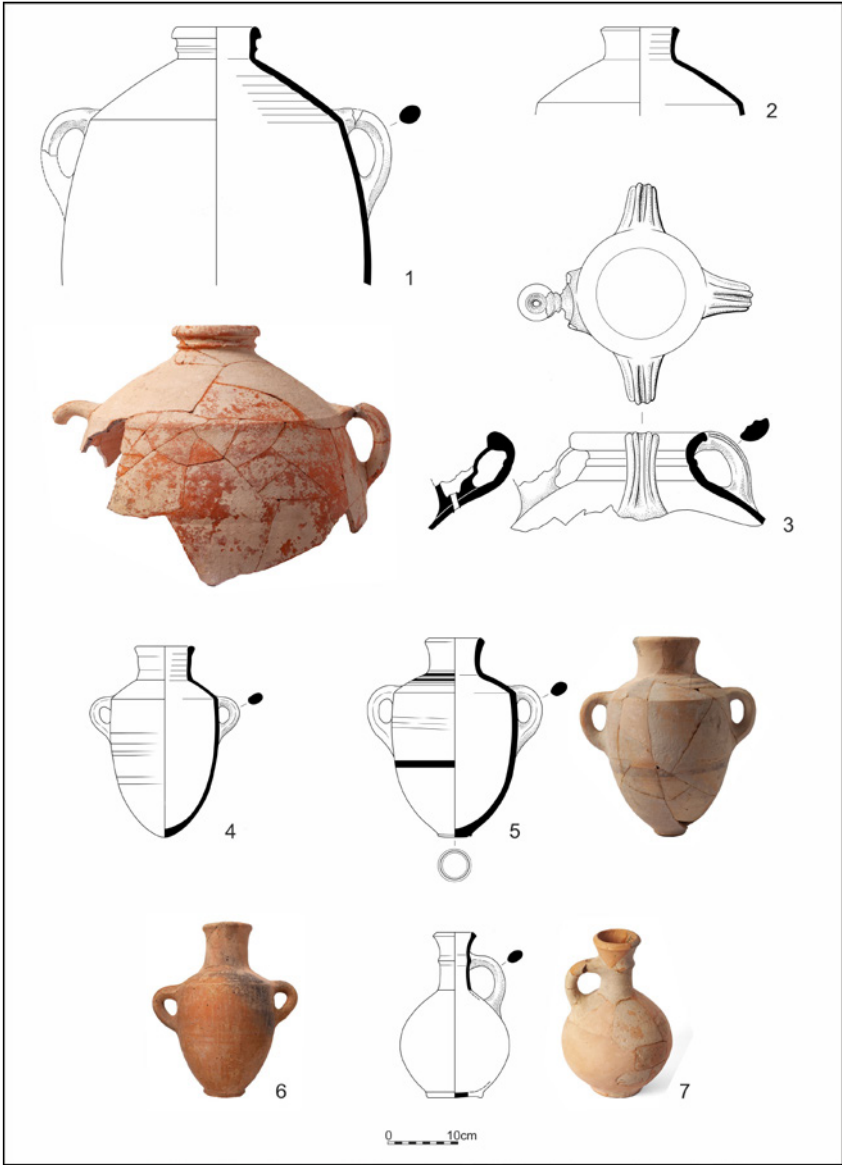


Figure 21: Pottery from Areas A and B (closed forms)

**Table 2: Description of pottery in Figure 21**

No.	Description	Locus	Basket	Notes	Parallels
1	Storage jar	184	357	Area A	Rehov, Stratum V, Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2020: Fig. 13.55: 14–15
2	Storage jar	175	345	Area A	Megiddo, Stratum VA-IVB, Zarzecki-Peleg 2016: Fig. 25: 5–6
3	Spouted jar/ amphora	192	398	Area A	Beth Shean, Stratum P-7, Ben-Tor and Zarzecki-Peleg 2015: Pl. 2.2.15: 6
4	Amphoriskos	140	252	Area A	Rehov, Stratum IV, Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2020: Fig. 13.104: 10
5	Amphoriskos	134	232	Area A	Rehov, Stratum IV, Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2020: Fig. 13.151: 3
6	Amphoriskos	1073	2213	Area B	Rehov, Stratum IV, Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2020: Fig. 13.88: 9
7	Jug	140	222	Area B	Megiddo, Stratum III, Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 4: 96

In the area south of Structure 1042, an unusual and interesting vessel was uncovered: a large krater with an applied decoration depicting a snake or snakes (Fig. 22: 1). It has a wide rim and at least four large incised handles. Snakes applied on pottery vessels appear very rarely in Bronze and Iron Age iconography, and are known mostly from cultic stands such as those found in the Level VI (11th c. BCE) southern temple of Beth Shean (see, e.g., Mullins 2012: 145, Fig. 17).



**Figure 22:** Various finds from Areas A and B

**Table 3: Description of pottery in Figure 22**

No.	Description	Locus	Basket	Notes	Parallels
1	Krater with applications	1070	2198	Area B	
2	Iron axe/pick	1018	2025	Area B, Room D	Rosh Zayit, Gal and Alexandre 2000: Fig. III.118: 11–12
3	Iron arrow/tool	1031	2049	Area A, Room A	
4	Iron arrowhead	1070	2200		
5	Slingshot	1078	2215	Area B	
6	Clay weight/stopper	139	196	Area A	Rosh Zayit, Gal and Alexandre 2000: Fig. III.99
7	Clay stopper	1031	2088	Area B, Room A	Rosh Zayit, Gal and Alexandre 2000: 125–126, Fig. III.81: 12

### Other Finds

The small finds assemblage from 'Aujah el-Foqa is not yet rich and diversified. Most small finds fall into the categories of ground stone tools, iron and other metal tools, and weapons and loom weights (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: Fig. 16: 1–3). Notable finds are several complete "doughnut-shaped" loom weights or stoppers (Fig. 22: 6–7) as well as several iron arrowheads, spearheads (Fig. 22: 3–4; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: Fig. 16: 2–3), and iron tools, such as picks and an axe, found in Area B (Fig. 22: 2). A large number of spherical flint or chert objects, 4–5 cm in diameter (not illustrated), may be tools – perhaps rubbers or slingstones. The arrowheads and possible slingstones fit in well with the interpretation of Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa as a military site. One clay object is of particular interest (Fig. 22: 5). Its elongated shape is reminiscent of slingshots occasionally found, although rarely published, in Bronze and Iron Age Near Eastern and Aegean sites (e.g., Childe 1951; Vutiropoulos 1991; Dohrenwend 2002). However, while such projectiles made of clay are found



in the protohistoric periods (e.g., Arsebük and Korfmann 1976), Iron Age specimens found in our region are often made of lead, and no clay examples from this period are known to us (e.g., Åström and Nikolaou 1983). Some of these artifacts may be remnants of the battle that produced the destruction level. In addition, several of the lower pieces of the basalt grinding stones were found, two of them at the entrances to the casemates near the side wall in Area A. Ground stone tools were also published in the survey (Eitam 2007, which chronicled 35 stone items).

## Reconstructing the Architecture of the Site: The Late Phase

Three phases have been identified at the site so far (see Table 4), with Phase 2 denoting the main Iron Age II architectural phase and the fortified town; this phase possibly had two sub-phases. These remains were robbed and overlain by a much later settlement, which clearly overlies the main Iron Age phase and is comprised of small rounded structures (Phase 1, Figs. 24–25; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: \*18–\*19). The late, rounded structures have some accumulation and are seemingly poor in artifacts, which may be debris from the period of their construction and use, as well as from occasional modern use. As noted, the description and reconstruction shown on the survey map (Fig. 23) is problematic, because the remains represent at least two stratigraphic phases and different periods and do not all belong to the same settlement. In fact, most units on this plan are Phase 1 late structures (see Fig. 24).

**Table 4: Initial phasing at Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa**

Phase	Main remains	Areas excavated	Date	Notes
1	Rounded and oval one-room houses	A, B	Mamluk/ Ottoman	Well-preserved houses, modern usage (Fig. 25)
2	Casemate wall, massive rectilinear structures	A, B	Iron Age II	Possibly two sub-phases (Figs. 11–12; Fig. 26)
3	Poorly preserved walls	A	Iron Age I/II?	Empty floors

According to the drone photos, which were combined with the survey plan (Figs. 23–25), a preliminary plan of the upper phase was reconstructed (Fig. 25). The uppermost phase includes at least 43 structures distributed all over the site. Many of these are well-preserved, built stone structures, with the walls standing up to 2 m in height. The structures are rounded, square, or oval in shape, have one entrance and almost no apparent inner divisions, and are roughly 6–9 m in diameter (Fig. 24). The structures are usually built in clusters, where the outer walls are attached to each other; at least three such clusters can be identified. Most of the structures are concentrated along the eastern part of the site, and are not close to the steep slopes, in contrast to the Iron Age fortification wall. The structures often have larger stones in the lower courses of the walls, and were probably built on the remaining lower courses of Iron Age walls. In some cases, part or all of a structure follows or utilizes the wall lines of the earlier phase, possibly in order to stabilize the walls. In this way, the square structure at the top of the site (Fig. 23: 1) may have been used in both phases of the site as a tower.<sup>2</sup>

---

2 Zertal suggested two phases of the Iron Age remains: one with the casemate wall, and a later one that included uniformly constructed barracks (Zertal et al. 2009: 117). The so-called later "barracks" noted by Zertal are in fact Phase 1 rounded structures (e.g. Fig. 23: Structures 15–22) and are not related to the Iron Age; different, localized, sub-phases of the main building remains were noted in the excavation (see above).

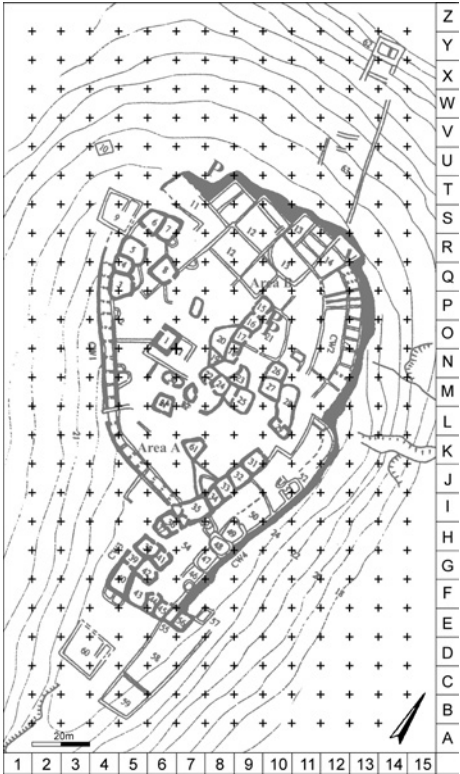
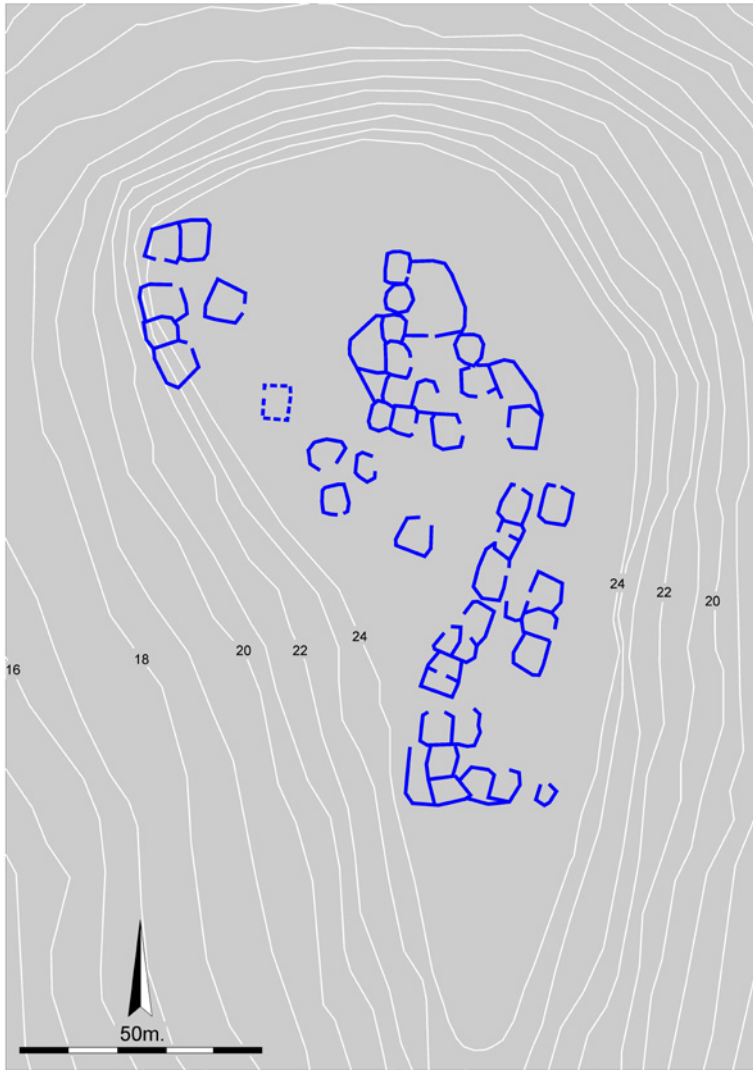


Figure 23: Survey map (after Zertal et al. 2009: Fig. 2)



Figure 24: Aerial photo of 'Aujah el-Foqa after the 2021 season



**Figure 25:** Plan of Phase 1



**Figure 26:** Plan of Phase 2

During the 2019 season, half of such a structure from this phase was excavated to bedrock (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: \*18–\*19, Bld. 64, Figs. 6, 7, right; see also Fig. 23: Structure 64). The debris consisted mostly of Iron Age II sherds, but there was also later material (Roman-Byzantine, Mamluk, and Ottoman), not yet studied. A nearly complete vessel that can be dated to the Ottoman period was found in

a burnt patch on the floor (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: Fig. 14: 4). Therefore, the late phase of the site may date from the Mamluk or Ottoman period; however, as noted, these late structures may occasionally have been used by squatters during the modern period as well. While the later phase of the site reflects a small and poorly built site, maybe a hamlet, its location on the steep hilltop is not convenient for agriculture or raising flocks. This raises a question about the function of the site, and may suggest that it could have been a small administrative or military post guarding the road that passed through the wadi. However, this is merely speculative, and the topic clearly requires further research. The structure was probably constructed here at least in part because of the abundance of good building material (rubble stone) that remained from the Iron Age walls.

## **Discussion: Significance and Function of the Site**

The multifaceted importance of the site of 'Aujah el-Foqa has already been noted: its control over the nearby 'Aujah spring, its regional location as a border site, and the more general significance of its location, which faced the Ammonite Kingdom and allowed for control of the Jordan Valley road (Zertal et al. 2009: 118–119).<sup>3</sup> From a regional perspective, the primary significance of Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa was control of nearby 'En 'Aujah, a major water source for the region from Jericho to Wadi Far'ah. Similarly, Khirbet Marjameh, 8 km to the northwest, near the upper section of Nahal Yitav, was another fortified town that controlled another important spring, 'En Samiyeh (e.g., Mazar 1995; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2018; Bar and Zertal 2019: 227–233); note that it is located in a less arid region than 'Aujah.

---

3 While the biblical identification of the site is not the aim of this article, it should be noted that Zertal identified Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa as the biblical 'Ataroth (Zertal et al. 2009: 120–121) mentioned in the description of the Manasseh-Ephraim boundary (Joshua 16:6–7). It has also been suggested that the site may be identified with Na'arath (נַעֲרָתָה), mentioned in the same list (Ahituv et al. 2016). Na'arath seems more likely, as it is the closest of the sites listed to Jericho (Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020b: 139). Thus, 'Ataroth would be identified with the next Israelite town, Khirbet Marjameh, to the west.

Indeed, the original purpose of the construction and maintenance of this fortified site is open to debate. Its aim may have been to protect the main water sources of the region from external enemies, such as the Ammonites or the Assyrians, or internal enemies, such as the Judahites; to aid in territorial disputes; or to control the water sources and protect them from local semi-nomadic populations that may have been subdued or partly subdued by a central political power.<sup>4</sup> Faust discussed the function of fortified sites and fortified structures outside the main towns in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (Faust 2012: 178–189). He suggested that personnel may have executed military, administrative, and agricultural functions at these sites simultaneously (Faust 2012: 188). That is to say, a small group of residents might have been considered a military unit while also serving in administrative or other roles. Note, however, that since the site is located on the top of a steep hill, access to agricultural fields would have been difficult. It would have been much easier to engage in agricultural activity below the site, on the plains and along the riverbanks.<sup>5</sup>

Zertal suggested that the site had already been founded in the Iron Age I, that its main activity was during the Iron IIB, and that it was deserted by the end of the Iron IIB, possibly as a result of Sennacherib's campaign in Judah in 701 BCE (Zertal et al. 2009: 116–117). The excavations so far have shown no evidence from the Iron Age I. The date of construction of the fortification will only become clear after the phase predating it is more securely established (Phase 3, which probably did not include a casemate wall; see Ben-Shlomo et al. 2020a: \*20–\*21). The pottery of the main phase dates to the Iron Age IIA and IIB. The construction of the main building remains, including the casemate, can therefore be placed during the Iron Age IIA,

---

4 Note Zertal's suggestion that several "tower sites" along the Jordan Valley may reflect an "Ammonite penetration" in this region (Zertal 1995; Zertal et al. 2009: 119).

5 Below the site, on the bank of the wadi, lies a smaller archaeological site known as the "Aujah Fortress" (Zertal 2012: 380–385, Site 140; Zertal and Bar 2019: 384–389, Site 140). An archaeological excavation was conducted here in 2012 by the Archaeology Staff Officer of the Civil Administration (Hizmi, pers. comm.; Zertal and Bar 2019: 387). The primary remains here belong to a Byzantine-period monastery, but this may have been built on top of an Iron Age fortress linked with Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa (Zertal and Bar 2019: 389).

possibly the 9th century BCE. The excavations indicate that the site was eventually destroyed, probably violently in battle, and not deserted as Zertal suggested. This destruction appears to have occurred during a later stage of this period, somewhere in the 8th century BCE.

The site's significance may also derive from its possible status as a local border town between Israel and Judah. The northern or "Israelite" parallels for the pottery from the destruction level have been noted above (see also Ben-Shlomo 2020b: 153–157). The material culture of our site (especially pottery) seems to be of a more northern or "Israelite" nature, and its location was traditionally under the control of the northern kingdom, according to biblical descriptions in which Jericho was still on the Israelite side of the border (Joshua 16:7; 1 Kings 16:31). Therefore, it may tentatively be seen as an Israelite site, at least during the late Iron Age II. The nearby site of Khirbet Marjameh, which is quite similar, was also identified as Israelite by Mazar (1995).<sup>6</sup> Casemate walls from the Iron Age II are indeed a well-known feature in Judah. Perhaps the best-known example, and clearly the earliest, is Khirbet Qeiyafa (e.g., Garfinkel et al. 2016: 48–56, 68–72). There, the wall was built according to a plan similar to that of the wall at Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa, with similar casemate sizes and entrances. However, most instances of this plan in Judah attest to "radial" plans, in which some of the domestic houses are joined to the wall in a "belt," with the casemates serving as the rear rooms of the houses (the original city plan may have consisted of only the city wall). Other Iron Age IIB examples may be found at Tel Beer-Sheba, Tel Beit Mirsim, and Tel en-Nasbeh (e.g., Herzog 1997: 237–249; Garfinkel et al. 2016:

---

6 Zertal concluded that the site of 'Aujah el-Foqa was a Judean fortified center. This was according to the pottery types found in the survey, his reconstruction of the ancient Israel-Judah border, and the plan of the site and the casemate wall (Zertal et al. 2009: 118–120). The site was paralleled to Beer-Sheba Stratum II (Zertal et al. 2009: 118). Yet according to the recent finds, as will be shown, an Israelite affiliation is a more likely "political identity" for the site. Note also that Faust claimed that Judean fortified sites are larger and more numerous than Israelite fortified sites (Faust 2012: 180–183); however, this could be a bias resulting in the relatively large number of excavations conducted in Judah as opposed to Samaria and the Jordan Valley.



207).<sup>7</sup> A plan that involved initial construction with a casemate wall may have been a more universal functional design for military settlements throughout the southern Levant during the Iron Age; examples of this plan also appear in northern Israel (see, e.g., Zarzecki-Peleg 2005: 169–183, regarding Stratum XIV of the Iron Age IIA at Yoqneam). Thus, the phenomenon of towns that were fortified by casemate walls and that later assumed a radial structure may have been a more "Judahite" city plan, common during the 9th and 8th centuries BCE (see, e.g., Herzog 1997: 237–249; Garfinkel et al. 2016: 205–207). Note, however, that the radial plan also appears in northern sites in Samaria, such as Khirbet Beit Arieḥ (Riklin 1997: Fig. 2).

Whether the site was on the Israelite or Judahite side of the border – or occasionally flipped sides throughout the period in question (see, e.g., Sergi 2013) – the nature of the border between these political entities remains unclear, both generally and in this marginal area during the Iron Age II (regarding Judean borders and material culture, see e.g., Stern 1993; Kletter 1995; 1999). Was it an open, administrative border that mostly delineated land ownership? Was it a more supervised border due to political volatility, or was it a more closed and fortified border that reflected periods of conflict between the states? What would have been the roles and characteristics of a "border town"? The function and character of Iron Age "border towns" in this region, such as 'Aujah el-Foqa and Marjameh, require further clarification.

Zertal defined these sites as "military base and presence sites" (Zertal et al. 2009: 118), suggesting also that they may have played an important administrative role for the region. Zertal even suggested that 'Aujah may have been the administrative center for the entire Jordan Valley area south of Beth Shean. Notably, only meager Iron Age II remains have been found at the important site of Jericho (Tell es-Sultan),

---

7 Iron Age II sites in the Negev highlands with a plan consisting of a rounded compound with cells and a gate have also traditionally been interpreted as Judahite or early Israelite fortified strongholds (e.g., Cohen 1979; Zertal et al. 2009: 117, more references therein). Alternatively, this architectural plan may represent settlement compounds of semi-nomadic populations (e.g., Shachak-Gross et al. 2014), who probably lived in this area as well (see e.g., Ben-Shlomo and Hawkins 2017).

according to the published data.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa may have been a small regional administrative center for the Jericho area and the southern Jordan Valley during some of this period. These sites may have been part of an administrative and/or military system during the Iron Age, probably governing the local nomadic population. So far, the excavation has not uncovered much direct archaeological data, such as clearly identifiable administrative and storage structures or seals and sealings. However, since the units excavated and reconstructed from aerial photos in Area B could represent storage facilities (Fig. 26; see above), additional walls that have already been identified on the surface may be promising. Similar structures, which may also be identified as storage facilities, have been found in larger administrative centers in northern Israel (such as Hazor and Megiddo; see above) and elsewhere. The pottery assemblage at these sites is also dominated by storage vessels, although cooking pots and tabun ovens are also common. This issue may only be clarified when more information about the site is available.

Therefore, in the coming excavation seasons (now planned for 2022–2023), additional areas within the site will be excavated, especially in its northern section. The aim of this excavation is to determine the site's interior architecture, as well as the architecture of some large, possibly administrative structures. This excavation will be complemented by further analysis of aerial photographs of the un-excavated parts of the site. Hopefully, radiocarbon dates from well-stratified contexts will also be attained in the future. The need for further study of the site is evident both from the site's special location and from its well-preserved remains from the Iron Age and Late Antiquity in the southern Jordan Valley, a region that is relatively poorly understood in archaeological research, especially with respect to the Iron Age II.

---

8 While some substantial Iron Age II remains were noted at Jericho (Tell es-Sultan), including a four-cell gate, a "Hilani" palace, and other structures, mainly according to older excavations by Sellin and Garstang (Marchetti et al. 2008: 587; Nigro 2020: 204–206, Fig. 28), these have not yet been published or dated in any detail.

## Acknowledgements

The project is supported by the Hecht Foundation.

## References

- Arsebük, G. and Korfmann, M. 1976. An Assemblage of Sling Pellets from Tulintepe 1972. In S. Pekman (ed.), *Keban Project 1972 Activities* (Keban Project Publications Series I, No. 5). Ankara: Middle East Technical University, pp. 163–172.
- Åström, P. and Nikolaou, I. 1983. Lead Sling Bullets from Hala Sultan Teke. *Opusculo Atheniensi* 13: 29–33.
- Bar, S. and Zertal, A. 2019. *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey*, Vol. 7: The Eastern Samaria Shoulder (from Wadi Rashash to Wadi 'Aujah). Haifa: University of Haifa [Hebrew].
- Ben-Ami, D. 2012. The Iron Age II (Strata VIII–VII). In A. Ben-Tor, D. Ben-Ami, and D. Sandhaus (eds.), *Ḥazor VI: The 1990–2009 Excavations – The Iron Age*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, pp. 154–285.
- Ben-Shlomo, D., Freikman, M., and Hawkins, R. K. 2020a. New Excavations at Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa and the Iron Age II Settlement. *In the Highland's Depth* 10(1): \*11–\*35.
- Ben-Shlomo, D., Freikman, M., and Hawkins, R. K. 2020b. New Excavations at Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa and the Iron Age II Settlement. *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 29(2): 133–166 [Hebrew].
- Ben-Shlomo, D. and Hawkins, R. K. 2021. 'Auja el-Foqa: A Desert Fortress on Ancient Israel's Eastern Frontier. *Biblical Archaeology Review* 47(1): 58–64.
- Ben-Shlomo, D., Tavger, A., and Har-Even, B. 2018. Back to Marjameh: The Iron II Pottery of Khirbet Marjameh – Typology and Provenance Study. *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 27: \*81–\*115.

- Ben-Tor, A. and Zarzecki-Peleg, A. 2015. Iron Age IIA–B: Northern Valleys and Upper Galilee. In S. Gitin (ed.), *The Ancient Pottery of Israel and Its Neighbours from the Iron Age Through the Hellenistic Period*, Vol. 1. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, pp. 135–188.
- Childe, V. G. 1951. The Significance of the Sling for Greek Prehistory. In G. Milonas (ed.), *Studies Presented to David Moore Robinson I*. St. Louis, MO: Washington University Press, pp. 1–5.
- Cohen, R. 1979. The Iron Age Fortresses in the Central Negev. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 236: 61–79.
- Dohrenwend, R. 2002. The Sling: Forgotten Firepower of Antiquity. *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 11(2): 28–49.
- Eitam, D. 2007. The Stone Tools from Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa. In S. Crawford, A. Ben-Tor, J. P. Dessel, W. G. Dever, A. Mazar, and J. Aviram (eds.), *"Up to the Gates of Ekron": Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gytin*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, pp. 93–106.
- Faust, A. 2012. *The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Gal, Z. and Alexandre, Y. 2000. *Horbat Rosh Zayit: An Iron Age Storage Fort and Village* (IAA Reports 8). Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Garfinkel, Y., Kreimerman, I., and Zilberg, P. 2016. *Debating Khirbet Qeiyafa: A Fortified City in Judah from the Time of King David*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society.
- Herzog, Z. 1997. *Archaeology of the City: Urban Planning in Ancient Israel and Its Social Implications* (Monograph Series of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology No. 13). Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University.
- Kletter, R. 1995. *Selected Material Remains of Late Iron Age Judah in Relation to Its Political Borders*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Tel Aviv University [Hebrew].

- Kletter, R. 1999. Pots and Politics: Material Remains of Late Iron Age Judah in Relation to Its Political Borders. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 314(1): 19–54.
- Lamon, R. S. and Shipton, G. M., 1939. *Megiddo I: Seasons of 1925–34 – Strata I–V*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Marchetti, N., Nigro, L., and Taha, H. 2008. Preliminary Report on the Third and Fourth Seasons of Excavations of the Italian-Palestinian Expedition at Tell es-Sultan/Jericho, 1999 and 2000. In I. Thuesen (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East* (Copenhagen, 2000). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, pp. 581–597.
- Mazar, A. 1995. Excavations at the Israelite Town at Khirbet Marjameh in the Hills of Ephraim. *Israel Exploration Journal* 45: 85–117.
- Mazar, A. and Panitz-Cohen, N. 2020. *Tel Rehov: A Bronze and Iron Age City in the Beth-Shean Valley*, Volume II: The Lower Mound – Area C and the Apiary (Qedem 60). Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- Mullins, R. 2012. The Late Bronze and Iron Age Temples at Beth-Shean. In J. Kamlah and H. Michelau (eds.), *Temple Building and Temple Cult: Architecture and Cultic Paraphernalia of Temples in the Levant (2.–1. Mill. B.C.E.) – Proceedings of a Conference on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Institute of Biblical Archaeology at the University of Tübingen, 28–30 May 2010* (ADPV 41). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, pp. 127–157.
- Nigro, L. 2020. The Italian-Palestinian Expedition to Tell es-Sultan, Ancient Jericho (1997–2015): Archaeology and Valorisation of Material and Immaterial Heritage. In R. T. Sparks, B. Finlayson, B. Wagemakers, and J. M. Briffa (eds.), *Digging Up Jericho: Past, Present and Future*. Oxford: Archaeopress, pp. 175–214.
- Riklin, S. 1997. Beit Arye. *'Atiqot* 32: 7–20 [Hebrew].
- Sandhaus, D. 2012. The Iron Age II (Strata VI–V). In A. Ben-Tor, D. Ben-Ami, and D. Sandhaus (eds.), *Hazor VI: The 1990–2009 Excavations – The Iron Age*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, pp. 286–399.

- Sergi, O. 2013. Judah's Expansion in Historical Context. *Tel Aviv* 40(2): 226–246.
- Shahack-Gross, R., Boaretto, E., Cabanes, D., Katz, O., and Finkelstein, I., 2014. Subsistence Economy in the Negev Highlands: The Iron Age and the Byzantine/Early Islamic Period. *Levant* 46: 98–117.
- Stern, E. 1993. The Jericho Region and the Eastern Border of the Judean Kingdom in Its Last Days. *Eretz Israel* 24: 192–197 [Hebrew]; \*238 [English summary].
- Vutiropulos, N. 1991. The Sling in the Aegean Bronze Age. *Antiquity* 65(247): 279–286.
- Zarzecki-Peleg, A. 2005. Stratigraphy and Architecture: The Iron Age IIA (Strata XVI–XIV). In A. Ben-Tor, A. Zarzecki-Peleg, and S. Cohen-Anidjar (eds.), *Yoqne'am II: The Iron Age and the Persian Period – Final Report of the Archaeological Excavations (1977–1988)*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, pp. 90–168.
- Zarzecki-Peleg, A. 2016. *Yadin's Expedition to Megiddo: Final Report on the Archaeological Excavations (Qedem 56)*. Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- Zertal, A. 1995. Three Iron Age Fortresses in the Jordan Valley and the Origin of the Ammonite Circular Towers. *Israel Exploration Journal* 45(4): 253–273.
- Zertal, A. 2012. *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey*, Vol. 5: The Middle Jordan Valley (from Wadi Fasaal to Wadi 'Auja). Haifa: University of Haifa [Hebrew].
- Zertal, A. and Bar, S. 2019. *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey*, Vol. 5: The Middle Jordan Valley, from Wadi Fasaal to Wadi 'Aujah. Leiden: Brill.
- Zertal, A., Ben-Yosef, D., and Cohen, O. 2005. Khirbet 'Aujah el-Foqa ('Ataroth): A Fortified Town from the Iron Age in the Southern Jordan Valley. *Judea and Samaria Research Studies* 14: 11–34 [Hebrew].
- Zertal, A., Ben-Yosef, D., Cohen, O., and Be'eri, R. 2009. Kh. 'Aujah el-Foqa (Ataroth): An Iron Age Fortified City in the Jordan Valley. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 141: 104–123.