ARIEL UNIVERSITY PRESS

IN THE HIGHLAND'S DEPTH

HALF-YEARLY JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY
OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY
OF THE HIGHLAND'S REGION AND UNDERGROUND CAVITIES

Volume 10/ Issue 1/ Spring 2020

Editorial Board

The volume has been published with aid of The Department of Jewish Culture, Ministry of Education

In the Highland's Depth
An Academic Peer-reviewed Journal, Published Semiannually Every Year

The Department of the Land of Israel and Archaeology
Ariel University, Israel
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ISBN 978-965-91808-0-6
ISSN 2521-9456 (print), 2706-7572 (online)

Cover Picture: View of Alon Road and the Samarian Desert,
from a cave near Kokhav Hashahar (photograph: D. Raviv)

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In the Highland's Depth
Volume 10, Issue 1, Spring 2020, pp. 11*-35*
DOI: https://doi.org/10.26351/IHD/10-1/6
ISSN: 2521-9456 (print); 2706-7572 (online)

ARIEL UNIVERSITY PRESS

New Excavations at Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa and the Iron Age II Settlement

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

Abstract

The article describes the results of the first season of excavations at Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa. The site, which was surveyed intensively by Adam Zertal about 15 years ago and identified by him as biblical ʿAtaroth, is located on a hilltop controlling the large spring of ʿAujah, 11 km northwest of Jericho. This area is not yet well known from archaeological excavations. The main occupation phase of the 1.5-hectare site is represented by a fortified Iron Age II town with a well-built casemate wall including a destruction layer and rich finds. An upper layer of well-preserved smaller structures probably dates from the Mamluk or Ottoman period, and remains of a pre-fortification phase were also identified. The date, location, and function of the site during the Iron Age II are also discussed; only further excavations in the coming years will clarify its character and layout in more detail.

Keywords: Iron Age, ʿAin ʿAujah, Jordan Valley, casemate wall, fortified town

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Introduction and History of Research

The Iron Age II is relatively unknown in the southern Jordan Valley (from Wadi Farʿah in the north to the Dead Sea in the south) since few substantial archaeological excavations of Iron Age sites have been conducted there. The main source of information so far is the Manasseh Hill Country Survey headed by Adam Zertal (Bar & Zertal 2016; 2019; Zertal & Bar 2017; 2019). This paper describes a new excavation project at Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa, a large, well-preserved Iron Age II site identified by the survey approximately 11 km northwest of Jericho (site 143; Zertal 2012, 494–524; Zertal & Bar 2019, 394–403).

Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa (Arabic for "Upper ʿAujah"), apparently a small, fortified town, is located on the summit of a hill south of and above Nahal Yitav (Wadi ʿAujah), 2 km west of Moshav Yitav (ITM 237908/650482; fig. 1). The site is on a high, stony hill isolated by steep slopes and is almost circular (110 m north–south and 85 m east–west), with a

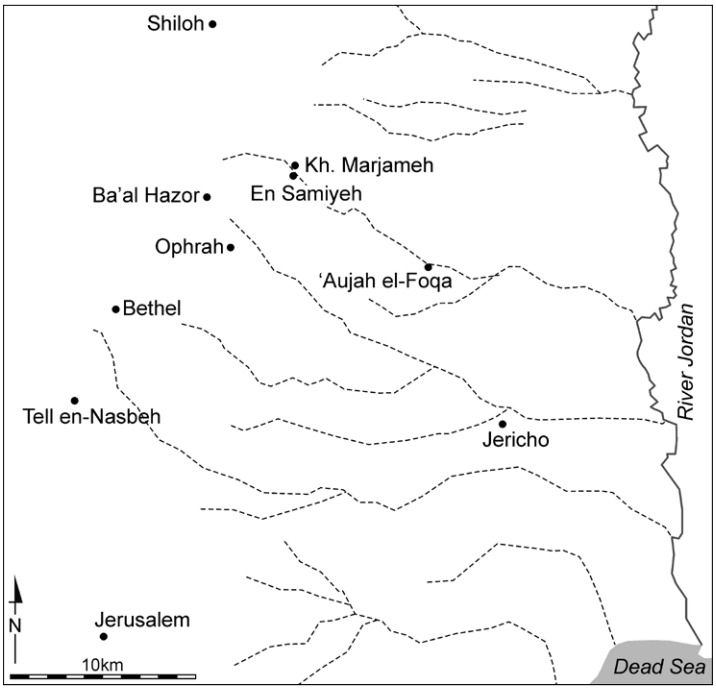


Figure 1: Location map with sites mentioned in text

projection on its southeastern edge. It rises about 100 m above its surroundings, with an elevation of up to 27 m above sea level.[1] The total area of the ancient hilltop site, including the parts outside and around the Iron Age walls, is 1.5 ha (15 dunams). The site is 1.5 km southeast of a large spring at Nahal Yitav (ʿAin ʿAujah). The hill is not easily accessible due to a difficult climb from most directions. The southern and eastern slopes are very steep and covered by hard flint rocks, while the northern slopes are slightly more moderate, with soft limestone outcrops exposed; thus access is easier from the north. The hilltop strategically controls the area of Nahal Yitav and this entire part of the Jordan Valley, including the Jericho plateau (figs. 2–3).

Figure 2: General view of the site from the air before the excavations, looking north (photo: B. Ben-Moshe)

1 Another part of the site may have extended to the north (Zertal & Bar 2019, 404, site 143(1)). About 400 m to the northeast (ITM 238851/650082), below Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa, on the bank of the wadi (today inside a modern Bedouin settlement, Ras ʿAin el-ʿAujah), lies a smaller archaeological site known as the ʿAujah Fortress (Zertal 2012, 380–385, site 140; Zertal & 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 & 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 ʿAujah el-Foqa (Zertal & Bar 2019, 389).

Figure 3: View from the site, looking southeast towards the Jericho Valley

The site was first visited and reported by the British Survey in 1874, who described it as "a ruined village on a mound, apparently modern" (Conder & Kitchener 1882, 391). This description, deduced from its good state of preservation, especially with respect to the remains of the later phase, dissuaded other scholars from studying or even visiting the place. It was first surveyed intensively during the winter of 2003/2004 by Zertal and the Manasseh Hill Country Survey team (Zertal et al. 2005; 2009). Zertal's intensive survey demonstrated that the main occupation at the site dates from the Iron Age II (see below).

Although the results of Zertal's survey were published, the site was never excavated until now. Several parts of the site were looted, mostly during a short period after the intensive survey, as several robbery pits and earth piles can testify.

The visible remains at the site consist of several dozen stone structures observable on the surface; some are even preserved up to 1.5–2.0 m high. Zertal and his team made a plan of the site that includes all the architectural elements visible on the surface (fig. 4). The settlement was surrounded by a casemate wall, and there is a tall tower at the center of the site; both of these are visible on the ground. According to the description in the survey, the visible remains include the central tower measuring 7.5×7.5 m in area (fig. 4: 1), standing inside a square court, and a section of the casemate wall on the west, 90 m long and 5 m wide, with more than 20 casemate rooms inside it (Zertal et al. 2009, 105). In the northwest, six structures can be identified in two clusters. Another section of the casemate wall, 45 m long, lies in the northeast; a section in the south is about 65 m long. According to Zertal, this

last section consists of two chains of casemates (as opposed to one in other areas) with walls preserved up to 1.5 m high (Zertal et al. 2009, 107). A larger tower (12×15 m; fig. 4: 9) is located west of the wall; Zertal suggested it may have been part of an entrance/gate complex (Zertal et al. 2009, 106). An outer tower (fig. 4: 62) is located about 50 m north of the site on a steep slope. It consists of two large rooms or units built of enormous boulders. This tower is attached to the site by two long walls on the slope, with several wide connecting walls in between, built for support or as a path foundation. Zertal and his team described additional groups of structures and suggested two phases of construction, both dated to the Iron Age II (Zertal et al. 2009, 107–109). As will be shown below, the remains represent at least two stratigraphic phases and different periods and do not all belong to the same settlement.

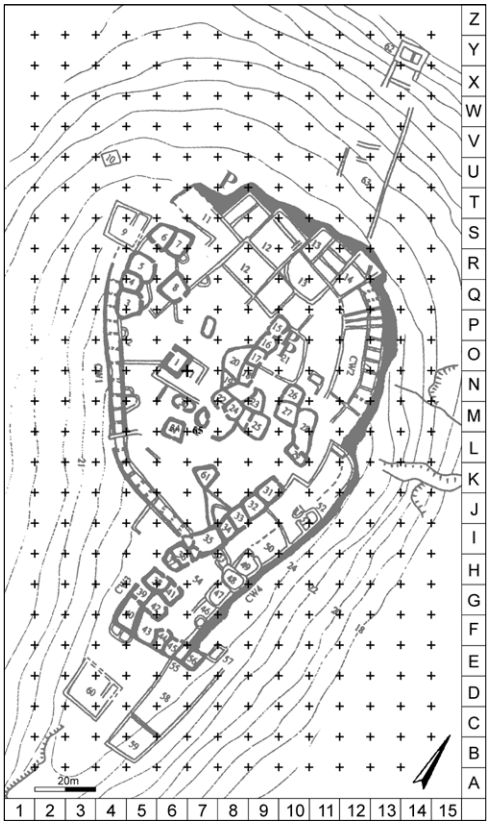


Figure 4: Plan of the structures at the site from Zertal's survey with current grid (after Zertal et al. 2009, fig. 2)

In the survey, about 400 randomly picked sherds were collected over the course of seven visits to the site. Of these, 90% belong to the Iron Age II (see Zertal et al. 2009, 110–116). The remainder were attributed to the Roman, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. The survey team suggested that the small number of sherds attributed to these other periods may indicate that, except for the Iron Age, there was only sporadic activity at the site. The conclusions of the survey, based on the remains and the collected pottery, are that the site was founded as a small, unfortified village during the Iron Age I, and that it was later expanded and fortified during the Iron Age IIB into a fortified town, with its main phase dating from the Iron Age IIB, or the eighth century BCE (ibid., 116–117). All the visible architecture was assumed by the surveyors to represent different phases in the Iron Age II (ibid., 110). According to the survey team, the pottery collected in the survey was associated with Judahite ceramic traditions, and an absence of Iron Age IIC (seventh century BCE) pottery was noted. It was suggested that the site may have been abandoned during Sennacherib's campaign in Judah in 701 BCE (Zertal et al. 2009, 117).

Zertal identified Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa as biblical ʿAtaroth (ibid., 120–121). ʿAtaroth is mentioned in the description of the Manasseh-Ephraim boundary, which lists a series of sites between Shechem and Jericho: "... down from Janohah to ʿAtaroth and to Naʿarath, and came to Jericho, and went out at Jordan" (Joshua 16, 6–7). Zertal's identification of Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa was based both on its location north of Jericho and on the meaning of the name – "a crown" – since the site crowns the local hilltop. Albrecht Alt (1926, 33) suggested locating ʿAtaroth at Khirbet ʿAujah et-Tahta, 6 km east of Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa (Zertal & Bar 2019, 408–411, site 146).

Recently, a seventh-century BCE papyrus that records a delivery of wine from Naʿarath to Jerusalem was published by Shmuel Ahituv and others (Ahituv et al. 2016). They suggested identifying this Naʿarath with the Naʿarath (נערתה) mentioned in Joshua 16, 7, and locating it at Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa. They made this association in part because Naʿarath was an important administrative center in the Jericho region (Ahituv et al. 2016, 242–245).[2] Unfortunately, however, the authenticity of this papyrus has been called into question (Rollston 2017).

2 While some substantial Iron Age II remains were mentioned at Jericho (Tel es-Sultan) (Marchetti et al. 2008, 587; Nigro 2020, 204–206), these had not yet been published.

The excavation project at the site was thus initiated on the basis of the impressive remains, the possibility that the site was an administrative center for the region during the Iron Age (a period for which little is known about the region from archaeological excavations), and its possible identification with biblical ʿAtaroth or Naʿarath.

Results of the 2019 Excavations

The first season of excavations at the site was conducted by the authors from May 26 to June 21, 2019, on behalf of Ariel and Averett universities.[3] Altogether 16 squares, or about 400 m^2, were excavated, in most places down to bedrock (fig. 5). At least three archaeological phases were defined.

Figure 5: Excavated area at the end of the 2019 season

3 The excavations were initiated as a part of the larger Jordan Valley Excavation Project (JVEP, www.jvep.org; see also Ben-Shlomo & Hawkins 2017), permit no. 9-1-2019. The team included over 50 volunteers from the US, Israel and other countries. Assistance in the excavation was provided by J. Rosenberg (surveying, plans and graphics), Tal Rogovski (photographs of finds) and Olga Dubovsky (drawings). We extend special thanks to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Education Department, which organized a group of pastors, teachers, and students from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to volunteer on the project for a full week. We also thank Ariel University for its financial support, as well as Shay Bar, Oren Ackerman and Omer Atavia for assistance and advice.

Phasing (see table 1)

Phase 1: The uppermost phase includes about 35–40 structures distributed all over the site. Many of these are well-preserved, built stone structures. The structures are rounded, square, or oval in shape, have one entrance and no apparent inner divisions, and are roughly 6–9 m in diameter. They were built of stones robbed from the walls of the main Iron Age II phase. Some of these are very well preserved, with the walls standing up to 2 m in height. These structures often have larger stones in the lower courses of the walls, likely using the base of an Iron Age wall. In some cases part or all of a structure follows the wall lines of the earlier phase, probably in order to stabilize the walls.

Phase 1 clearly overlies the main Iron Age phase. Given that it differs from it in width, shape, the orientation of the walls, and the size and shape of the structures, it is unlikely to date from the same period. The structures have some accumulation in them, seemingly rather poor in artifacts, that may be debris from the period when they were constructed and used, but also from occasional modern use. During the 2019 season, half of a structure from this phase was excavated to bedrock (Bldg. 64; figs. 6, 7: right; see also above, fig. 4: 64). The debris consisted mostly of Iron Age II sherds, but there was also later material (Roman-Byzantine, Mamluk, and Ottoman); the floor was made of crushed limestone. A nearly complete vessel that can be dated to the Ottoman period (see below) was found on the floor in a burnt patch (see below, fig. 16: 4).

Figure 6: Phase 1 structure (64)

Figure 7: Building 200 (left) and Structure 64 (right); north is at the bottom of the photo

This later phase of the site may date from the Ottoman period, since most of the post-Iron Age sherds date from this period (see below, fig. 16: 5). Identification of the later phase of the site as a small administrative center seems possible, since the site controls the spring but lacks easy access to its water and to agricultural areas because of its hilltop location. It was probably constructed here due in part to the abundance of good building material (rubble stone) available from the Iron Age walls that had stood at the site until then. Clearly, more excavation and research on this phase is needed.

Table 1: Initial phasing at Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa

Phase	Main remains	Date	Notes
1	Rounded and oval one-room houses	Mamluk/Ottoman	Well-preserved houses, modern usage?
2	Casemate wall, massive rectilinear structures	Iron Age II	Possibly two sub-phases
3	Poorly preserved walls	Iron Age I/II?	Empty floors

Phase 2: The main phase at the site dates from the Iron Age II. This phase includes massive structures, including a casemate wall surrounding the site, as well as many structures with wide, rectilinear walls, their tops mostly visible on the surface. The rounded structures from the upper phase clearly lie on top of the Iron Age remains in many locations (see fig. 7 above). The architectural remains discovered from this phase of the excavation are described in more detail below. This phase may have two sub-phases, since several floor levels and wall segments seem to be later additions. In addition, another late Iron Age IIB phase may be attested at the site, but this is not clear yet (this was also suggested by Zertal; see above).

Phase 3: There is evidence of a construction phase predating the main Iron Age phase and the fortification. This is attested by several walls and features in Squares L5c, K5a, K5b and K5d (see fig. 8: W162, W166, W144); these poorly preserved walls underlie the casemate

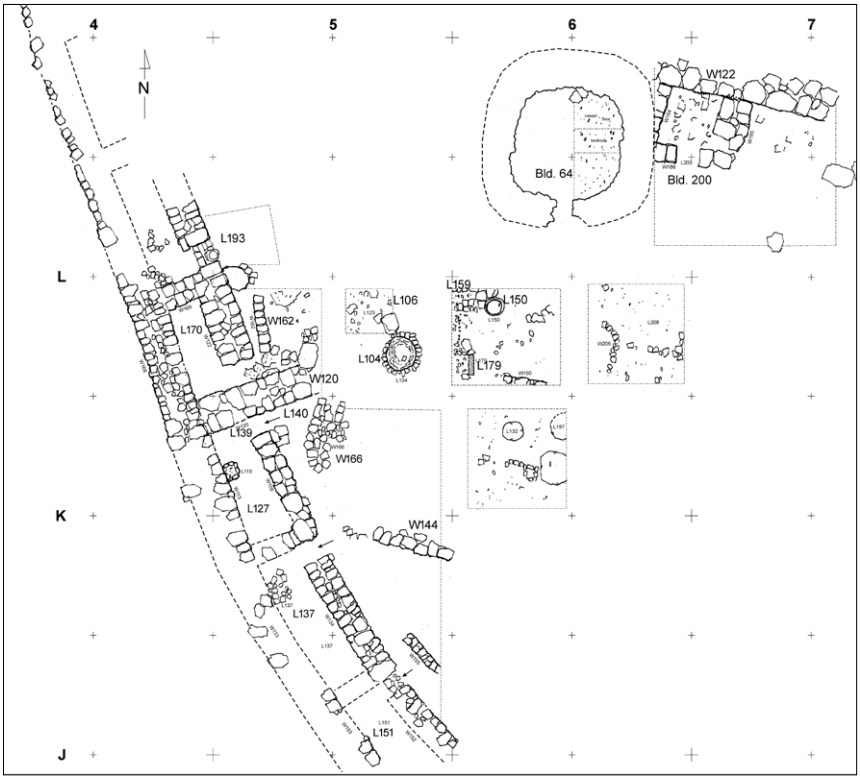


Figure 8: Schematic plan of excavated area, 2019

walls and run in a different orientation. Feature W166 may be either part of a wall or a patch of stone paving (fig. 9). A mud plaster floor layer relating to this phase was also unearthed in Square K5b, but it was practically devoid of artifacts. Therefore, this phase cannot yet be dated confidently. This phase, probably largely destroyed by the main Iron Age phase, could date from the Iron Age II, but may be earlier, perhaps the Iron Age I, since several sherds from this period have been found (post-deposition).

Figure 9: A casemate (L170), view from above; Note W166 on the upper left; north is at the bottom of the photo

The Wall of Phase 2 (Iron Age II)

Remains from Phase 2 were unearthed in most squares of the 2019 excavation. Construction was based on rubble or partly worked local limestone, dolomite, or flint. The main feature is the casemate wall; three or four of the casemates were excavated down to floor level or bedrock. The casemate wall was visible on the surface in many places before excavation, and a location where the area was relatively clear of later-phase structures was selected for initial excavation. The fortification walls are generally 1.2–1.5 m thick, and the casemates measure about 1.2–1.8×4.0–5.5 m (inner dimensions) where excavated. The entrances to the casemates south of Wall W120 are located at the same northern corner on the inner wall, whereas north of W120 they seem to be located on the opposite side (see fig. 8 above). This is somewhat similar to the early Iron Age IIA casemate wall at Khirbet Qeiyafa

(Garfinkel et al. 2016, 61–66), although there the directions were switched only near the gates. One of the future aims of the project is to identify the gate to the Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa site.

The stones from the walls were robbed from all but the lowest courses. The floor remains are either on the surface, a few centimeters below it, or even, in several cases, completely eroded away. The southern casemates in particular are badly eroded (see above, fig. 8: L151). The walls (probably foundations) of Casemate L170 were completely preserved but its floor was eroded. Nevertheless, in several locations (L127, L140, L193), a destruction layer rich in broken pottery was discovered, especially at the entrances to the middle casemates excavated (see above, fig. 8: L127, L137), on the inner (city) side (figs. 10–11). The destruction was evidenced by the intact vessels and ashy layers in several locations and by several iron arrowheads and a spearhead also discovered there (see below, fig. 16: 2, 3). In Casemate L127, the entire burnt floor level was excavated, and several

Figure 10: In situ pottery in the entrance to casemate (L140), looking west

Figure 11: Stairs in wall and sunken jar in the northern part of excavated fortification wall (L193), looking north

intact vessels were found there, including Iron Age II cooking pots (see below, fig. 14: 5, 6) and an arrowhead. A rounded installation was located adjacent to the western wall. Basalt grinding stones were found in two of the entrances (one in each). In the northern area of the wall (L193), a stepped entrance to a casemate, or a small passageway, was excavated. The passage, approximately 1 m long, consisted of three stone steps descending to the outside. An upside-down spouted jar was placed at the bottom of the stairs (see fig. 11 above).

Apparently, no interior walls were found abutting the fortification (except the partly preserved W120). Either all such architecture was looted, or there were no structures abutting the casemate wall from the inside, at least in this section of the site (unlike at Khirbet Qeiyafa, for example).

Remains Adjacent to the Wall

The squares excavated adjacent to the fortification wall on the inside yielded remains including floors, debris, pits, and various installations. Apparently, this was an open area in the main Iron Age phase. A circular installation (L104) about 2 m in diameter is probably a silo (fig. 12). It is a pit, 1.1 m deep and lined with stones throughout its depth; the lower part is narrower than the top. Similar silos are well known in the hill country of Israel, especially from the Iron Age II (e.g. Khirbet Marjameh – Mazar 1995, 96, fig. 14; Tel Moza – Greenhut 2009, 26–33, figs. 2.25–2.33), though most of them are larger and better built. Around Silo L104, a layer with large pottery sherds and other finds was probably the floor level of an open area (see above, fig. 8: L106). Several pits, possibly dug from the same floor level, were excavated in the adjacent square (K6a); one contained large amounts of restorable pottery, as well as some charcoal (pit L171).

Figure 12: Silo L104

A floor layer with various installations was unearthed in Square L6c. It was covered by a higher layer with possible fragmentary stone walls and contained mixed pottery. This level may represent a later local context of this phase or the remains of an open area of Phase 1. The best-preserved installation in this area is a rounded tabun, with patches of burnt sediment around it (L150). Adjacent to the tabun to the west, a rectangular installation lined with stones was uncovered (L159). At the southeastern corner is another rectangular installation or "bin" lined with a thin brick/mud wall (L197).

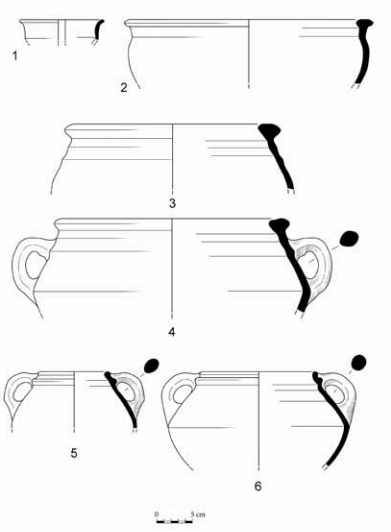
Building 200

A fragment of a structure was excavated in the northeastern part of the excavated area (see above, fig. 8: Bldg. 200). Although most of the walls have been dismantled and the stones robbed, and only a partial lower course was found on the bedrock, it is clear from what remains that this was a massive structure. It is clearly overlaid by Structure 64 of Phase 1, which reused some of its stones in the later walls (fig. 13), and it is tentatively attributed to Phase 2. W177 is an east-west wall built of large stones, with a thickness of about 2 m (see fig. 7 above). Wall W164 forms a corner at a right angle with it and underlies the wall of Structure 64. A room measuring approximately 4.5×4.5 m was created there, with an earthen floor lying on top of the bedrock (L200). There is no evidence that the structure was violently destroyed. Sherds on the floor date from the Iron Age IIA. This was very likely part of a large structure, maybe a fortress or a tower.

Figure 13: Building 200 from the east, showing the later Structure 64 overlying it (on the left)

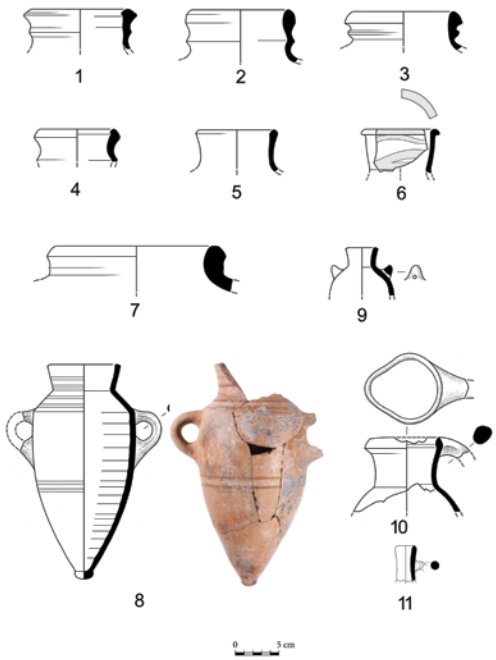
Pottery and Other Finds

A large amount of pottery was recovered, especially from some of the casemate spaces. Several selected vessels are illustrated. Because the pottery has not yet been restored or analyzed, a more detailed discussion of it will be published separately. So far, however, representative vessels, mainly from the casemate area, indicate forms appearing during the late Iron Age IIA and early Iron Age IIB (ninth and eighth centuries BCE), with most parallels probably coming from northern sites (figs. 14–15). Several sherds of imported Black on Red juglets were found, as were two fragments of strainer-spouted jugs. Southern "Judahite" Iron II types, such as folded rim bowls and holemouth jars, are rare, as are red-slipped and burnished ware.



No.	Description	Basket	Locus	Selected parallels
1	Bowl	157/1	123	Rosh Zayit, Area B (Gal & Alexandre 2000, fig. VI.11: 14); Yoqneam, Stratum XIV (Zarzecki-Peleg et al. 2005, fig. I53: 5)
2	Krater	230/1	140	Yoqneam, Stratum XIV (Zarzecki-Peleg et al. 2005: figs. I40: 21, I.68: 21)
3	Krater-jar	227/1	140	Beth-Shean, Stratum P-7 (Mazar 2006, fig. 12.2: type KR56); Megiddo, Stratum VA–IVB (Arie 2013, 688, fig. 13.6: type K35)
4	Krater-jar	225/1	140	Same as no. 3
5	Cooking pot	127/2	110	Marjameh (Mazar 1995, fig. 17: 2); Rosh Zayit, Stratum IIa (Gal & Alexandre 2000, fig. III.79: 25); Yoqneam, Stratum XV (Zarzecki-Peleg et al. 2005, figs. I57: 32, type CP VA, I.68: 31); Megiddo, Level H-7 (Arie 2013, fig. 13.35: 14, type CP31b)
6	Cooking pot	127/1	110	Same as no. 5

Figure 14: Iron Age pottery from Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa, open forms



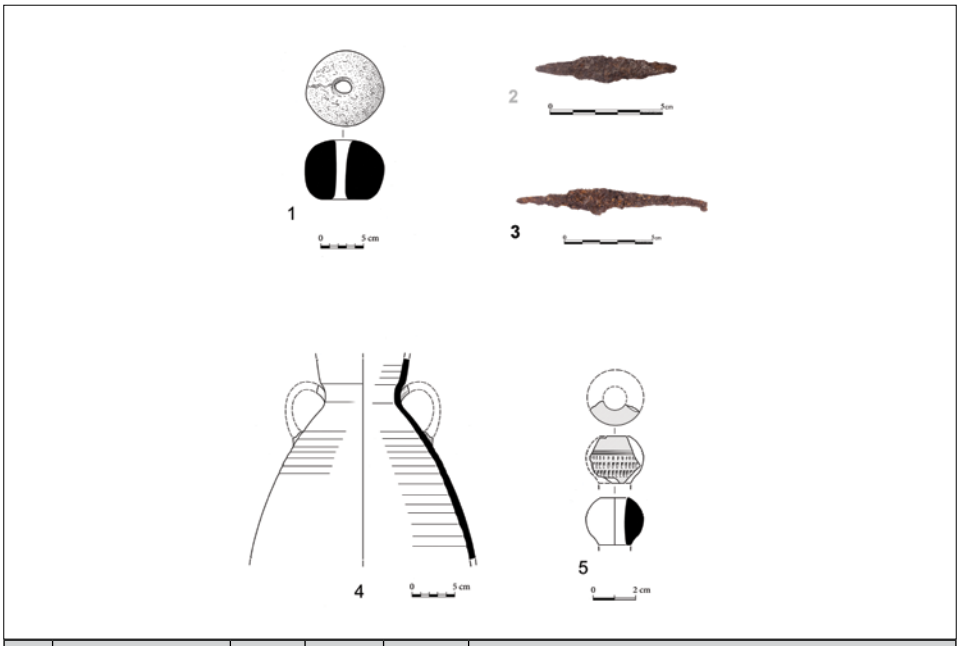
No.	Description	Basket	Locus	Notes	Selected parallels
1	Storage jar	157/3	123		Marjameh (Mazar 1995, fig. 20: 16, 18); Megiddo, Stratum VA–IVB (Arie 2013, 714, fig. 13.22: type SJ35a)
2	Storage jar	226/1	140		Same as no. 1
3	Storage jar	173/1	112		Megiddo, Stratum VA-IVB (Arie 2013, 715, fig. 13.22: type SJ35b)
4	Storage jar	173/4	112		Yoqneam, Stratum XIV (Zarzecki-Peleg et al. 2005, fig. I48: 1)
5	Jar	173/3	112		Yoqneam, Stratum XIV (Zarzecki-Peleg et al. 2005, fig. I41: 2)
6	Jar/jug	157/2	123	Red decoration	
7	Pithos	173/2	112		Yoqneam, Stratum XVI (Zarzecki-Peleg et al. 2005, fig. I38: 18)
8	Amphoriskos	223	140	Red slip, burnish, white and red decoration	Megiddo, Stratum V (Lamon & Shipton 1939, pl. 22: 131); Beersheba, Stratum II (Aharoni 1973, pls. 67: 1, 72: 17, 74: 16)
9	Pyxis	221/1	140	Black burnish	Megiddo, Stratum V (Lamon & Shipton 1939, pl. 19: 96); Tel Rehov, Stratum IV (Mazar et al. 2005, fig. 13.36: 13)
10	Jug	225/2	140		Yoqneam, Stratum XIV (Zarzecki-Peleg et al. 2005, fig. I53: 30)
11	Juglet ("black juglet")	157/5	123	Black burnish	Khirbet Qeiyafa and other sites (Cohen-Weinberger & Panitz-Cohen 2014); Megiddo, Stratum VA–IVB (Arie 2013, 705–706, fig. 13.14: type JT32)

Figure 15: Iron Age pottery from Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa, closed forms

So far the quantity of bowls and other tableware at the site is relatively small. Although large kraters appear (fig. 14: 3, 4), the most common forms are closed vessels, such as storage jars and jugs (fig. 15). Most jar necks are similar to those of "hippo jars" (fig. 15: 1–4). Cooking pots appear in several locations, including complete specimens in Casemate L127 (fig. 14: 5, 6). Especially interesting are an amphoriskos (fig. 15: 8) and a pyxis (fig. 15: 9), rare forms in this region. The amphoriskos found in the L140 destruction level is complete and is decorated with light red slip, vertical burnish, and red and white horizontal bands. This decoration pattern and the form may link the vessel to "Late Philistine Decorated Ware". Very similar vessels from the Iron Age IIA–B have been found at sites such as Tel es-Safi/Gath, Beersheba, and Arad (see Ben-Shlomo et al. 2004; Ben-Shlomo 2006, 63, fig. 1.30: 12–15, and more references therein).

Many of the published forms from the survey are more similar to Judahite types, such as folded rim bowls and kraters (Zertal et al. 2009, 110–113, fig. 5: 1–7); they also have a later eighth-century BCE date. However, these types are very rare in the excavation so far. Perhaps they represent a later phase evident in other parts of the site. Thus far, the cooking pots and jars found in the excavation are quite similar to those published in the survey (ibid., 115–116, figs. 6–7).

Other notable finds are a complete "doughnut-shaped" loom weight or stopper (fig. 16: 1) discovered at the entrance to Casemate L127 (L139), and several iron arrowheads and spearheads (fig. 16: 2–3), including one in this location (Casemate 127; fig. 16: 3). 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 ʿAujah el-Foqa as a military site. Some of these artifacts may be remnants of the battle that produced the destruction level. In addition, several of the lower pieces of basalt grinding stones were found, two of them at the entrances to the casemates near the side wall (L193). These may represent various activities that took place after the casemate had fallen out of use. Alternatively, these large, flat pieces may have been in secondary use in the entrances and may have already functioned as part of the thresholds during the main period of occupation of the site.



No.	Description	Basket	Locus	Notes	Selected parallels
1	Loom weight/stopper	196	139	Clay	Rosh Zayit, Stratum IIa (Gal & Alexandre 2000, fig. III.81: 13–18)
2	Arrowhead	151	118	Iron	Tel Jemmeh (Ben-Shlomo & Gardiner 2014, 881–882, fig. 21.2: i,j)
3	Spearhead	254	139	Iron	Tel Jemmeh (Ben-Shlomo & Gardiner 2014, 881–882, fig. 21.2: e)
4	Storage jar	202/1	142	Ottoman	Taʿanach (Ziadeh-Seely 1995, fig. 10: 6, 7)
5	Tobacco pipe	100	Surface	Ottoman	Taʿanach (Ziadeh-Seely 1995, fig. 1: 1.296)

Figure 16: Small Iron Age and Mamluk/Ottoman finds from Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa

Discussion

The initial results from Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa highlight its main feature found so far: the well-built Iron Age casemate wall encircling the site. This element, like the location of the site, is indicative of its strategic and military function. Only a few Iron Age architectural remains within the settlement were excavated, and so far no structures have been seen to abut or join with the city wall. Nevertheless, visible remains of rather massive structures are evidenced in other locations, either as fragmentary walls or as lines of thick walls visible on the surface (fig. 17; see also structures 11 and 12 in fig. 4 above).

Figure 17: Aerial photo showing remains of structures at Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa

Since the site is located on the top of a steep hill, access to agricultural fields would have been difficult, as would transporting water to the site from the spring about 1 km away. If no water reservoir was constructed at the site (none has been identified yet), then the water must have been stored in jars and/or pithoi, as well as in skins. This situation, like the fortifications, seems to point to a military function for the site, a function that raises questions about the number of inhabitants and their identity: whether entire families or only soldiers and administrative personnel lived there. Moreover, if the site was also an administrative center of some sort, one would expect to find large storage structures. The excavation of several additional structures at the site in the future may resolve these issues.

As for the date of the foundation of the site, further research is needed. The date of construction of the fortification will only become clear after the phase predating it (Phase 3) is more securely established. The results thus far indicate that the primary phase of use of the Iron Age settlement was during the Iron Age II, in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE

(Phase 2), with a possible destruction in this period. Although nearby Khirbet Marjameh was probably destroyed by the Assyrians (Mazar 1995, 101), Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa may have been destroyed earlier. This raises the question of the historical background of its destruction. One possibility would be a conflict with the Ammonites, who ruled the region surrounding Jordan's present-day capital city, Amman. The "tribal kingdom" of Ammon had emerged in part to counter the mounting threat posed by the Israelites (LaBianca & Younker 1995, 399), and the Bible recounts perpetual conflict between them (Tyson 2014, 107–145). Naturally, the southern Jordan Valley would have featured in some of the battles, since both parties would have crossed the Jordan River there to engage each other (e.g. 2 Samuel 10). Another possible culprit could be the Arameans, whom the Bible claims conducted intermittent campaigns against Israel and Judah throughout the period of their national existence (Younger 2016).

Casemate walls from the Iron Age II are a well-known feature in Judah. The best-known and earliest example is Khirbet Qeiyafa (Garfinkel et al. 2016, 48–56, 68–72), where the wall was built according to a similar plan as at Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa, with similar casemate sizes and entrances. In most cases some of the domestic houses are joined with the wall in a "belt", with the casemates serving as the rear rooms of the houses, but the original city plan may have consisted of only the city wall (ibid., 61–66). Other later examples are Tel Beersheba, Tel Beit Mirsim, and Tel en-Nasbeh (e.g. Herzog 1997, 237–249; Garfinkel et al. 2016, 207). 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; Cohen & Cohen-Amin 2004). 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 (e.g. Ben-Yosef 2015; Ben-Shlomo & Hawkins 2017).

The phenomenon of towns fortified by casemate walls and later assuming a radial structure is often linked with the "Judahite" city plan in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE (see e.g. Herzog 1997, 237–249; Garfinkel et al. 2016, 205–207). However, this plan involving construction at the outset with a casemate wall may be a more universal functional design for military settlements throughout the southern Levant during the Iron Age; it appears in northern Israel as well (see e.g. Zarzecki-Peleg 2005, 169–183, regarding Stratum XIV of the Iron Age IIA at Yoqneam). Since the material culture of

our site (especially pottery) seems to be of a more northern or "Israelite" nature, and the location was traditionally under the control of the northern kingdom (as the border lay south of Jericho), it may be tentatively seen as an Israelite site, at least during the late Iron Age II. Nevertheless, this issue may only be clarified when more information about the site is available.[4]

From a regional perspective, the main importance of Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa was control of nearby ʿAin ʿAujah, a major water source for the region from Jericho to Wadi Farʿah. A nearby site in a possibly similar position is Khirbet Marjameh, 8 km to the northwest, near the upper section of Nahal Yitav. Khirbet Marjameh controlled another important spring, ʿAin Samiyeh (Mazar 1992; 1995; Ben-Shlomo et al. 2018), but it is located in a less arid region. These sites may have been part of an administrative or military system during the Iron Age, probably governing the local nomadic population, although it is not clear whether they belonged to the kingdom of Israel or Judah. Notably, the Iron Age II remains at Jericho (Tel es-Sultan) are meager, according to the published data, so Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa may have been a small regional administrative center during some of this period.[5] On the other hand, if Khirbet ʿAujah el-Foqa is the ʿAtaroth mentioned in the border list in Joshua, its significance may have been as a border town. It is not clear for what purpose these fortified sites were built and maintained in the first place: whether to protect the main water sources of the region from external enemies (the Ammonites? the Assyrians?), to aid in territorial disputes between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, 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.

In the coming excavation seasons, therefore, additional areas within the site will be excavated in order to determine the interior architecture, as well as the architecture of some large, possibly administrative structures. In addition, the fortification will be further studied and the main gate to the site will be sought. Hopefully, in the future radiocarbon dates from well-stratified contexts will be attained as well. The upper, later phase with the rounded

4 The topic of fortified sites in this region of the Jordan Valley and along the border between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be discussed elsewhere.

5 One may speculate about a similar role for the site during the Mamluk/Ottoman period, based on the location at least.

structures will be studied further in order to date it and clarify its historical background. The initial results have not provided any more evidence for identification of the site. Nevertheless, the need for further excavation is clear 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 very poorly understood in archaeological research, especially with respect to the Iron Age II.

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