‘En Esur (Asawir)

Preliminary Report

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In January–December 2017, extensive excavations were conducted at the site of ‘En Esur (‘Ein Asawir; License No. A-7888; map ref. 20199/70940; Fig. 1) prior to the construction of an interchange. The excavations, undertaken on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and financed by Netivei Israel (the National Transportation Infrastructure Company), were directed by I. Elad and Y. Paz, with the assistance of A. Gorzalczany, S. Emanuelov, S. Davidov, L. Brailovsky-*Rokser*, A. Massarwa, O. Segal, S. Elbaz, D. Shalem, G. Sovolev and E. Oren (area supervision), K. Sa’id and M. Massarwa (Haifa District), Y. Amrani and E. Bachar (administration), D. Pinhasov, *A*. Barkai, A. Rabin, N. Shaul, A. Ofir, A. Rosenthal, *A*. Akiva, *A*. Kostrov, E. Kashi and A. Kaf Kadosh (education and guidance), M. Kahan and R. Mishayev (surveying and drafting), A. Peretz (field photography), Y. Marmelstein and Griffin Company (drone photography), *Trilog* Company (magnometric surveying), L. Brailovsky-*Rokser* (flint tools), L. Perry (faunal remains), Y. Nagar (physical anthropology), E. Yannai (pottery) and P. Gendelman (scientific guidance). A. Massarwa, E. Oren and S. Davidov supervised the digging of trial trenches prior to the excavation.

‘En Esur is situated at the outlet of Nahal ‘Iron (Wadi ‘Ara) in the northern Sharon, near Tel Esur (Asawir; c. 28 dunams) and approximately 1 km east of Moshav ‘En ‘Iron. Two springs are located within the site: ‘En Esur (‘En Arubot), to the east of the tell, and an unnamed spring southwest of the tell. Another small tell lies nearby, to the south of ‘En Esur and Tel Esur. Excavations conducted at both tells in 2001–2003 (Zertal 2003) and 2010–2012 ([Bar 2016](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail.aspx?id=25034)) exposed occupation layers from Early Bronze Age I, Middle Bronze Age II, the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age II, and the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods. ‘En Esur is large proto-historic site extending over a level plain (c. 650 dunams) lying below and mainly to the south of Tel Esur. In the center of the site, approximately 220 m south of Tel Esur, is a small hillock. Previous excavations here exposed the remains of a settlement from the Pottery Neolithic, Early Chalcolithic, and Late Chalcolithic periods and from Early Bronze Age I and the Intermediate Bronze Age (Yannai 2006; 2016a; 2016b). Dozens of rock-hewn burial caves belonging to settlements at the site have been found in the hills to the east and south of ‘En Esur.

Sixteen areas (K1–K4, L1–L3, M1–M5, O1–O2, P1–P2; Fig. 2) were opened in the current excavation in which 200 squares were dug. Remains from the following periods were exposed: Pottery Neolithic, Early Chalcolithic, and Late Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age IA, Early Bronze Age IB, the Intermediate Bronze Age, and the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.

**The Pottery Neolithic Period.** A few potsherds and flint artifacts attest to the site’s occupation during this period.

**The Early Chalcolithic Period.** Fragments of pottery vessels from the Wadi Rabah culture were recovered from many of the excavation areas at the site. The remains of a settlement dating to the Wadi Rabah-culture period were also exposed in four of these excavation areas, including the walls of buildings (Areas L1 and O2), habitation levels and stone circles (Area M2), and the burial of a child in a jar (Area M5).

**The Late Chalcolithic Period.** Area O2 yielded two layers from this period. The earlier layer contained part of a building and habitation levels dating later than the Wadi Rabah culture, but probably predating the Ghassulian culture. A corner of a rectangular building and floors made of body fragments of pottery vessels and crushed chalk and dating to the Ghassulian culture were discovered in the later layer.

**Early Bronze Age IA**. Remains of this period were only exposed in Area O2, at the heart of the site. At least four settlement layers were uncovered, containing about ten densely built round or elliptical structures (wall width 0.4–0.6 m; Fig. 3). Installations, a drainage channel and work surfaces were found in some of the buildings. An installation constructed of *tabun* material was exposed in one building. A rectangular building (Fig. 4) was discovered in the later layer. Based on its plan and the ceramic finds recovered from its floor it appears to date to the transition phase between Early Bronze Age IA and Early Bronze Age IB.

**Early Bronze Age IB**. Dozens of buildings attributed to two main layers were discovered in all the excavation areas at the site (Figs. 5–7). Two phases of construction were discerned in the later layer in many of the excavation areas. In the two layers belonging to the period, several types of basic architectural units were found to have existed alongside each other: Capsule-like structures (rectangular structures with rounded corners) and rectangular structures with square corners. Some of the buildings are joined together in blocks and quarters and separated by streets and alleys. Some are located within a walled complex and some are free-standing buildings. Only the stone-built foundations of their walls were preserved whereas nothing was preserved of the upper courses, which were probably made of mud bricks. Most of the buildings were constructed on a north–south or east–west alignment. The entrances were generally set in one of the longer walls. Large stone bases on which wooden pillars were probably placed to support the ceiling were discovered along the central axis of the buildings. Silos, one or two circles of stones of which were preserved, were found near and sometimes even attached to some of the buildings. A magnometric survey conducted in the unexcavated area between Areas M1–M3 shows that the sections of streets exposed in the current excavation are part of an intricate network of connecting streets running between the various quarters and complexes at the site (Fig. 8). The survey also revealed that the site was crowded with buildings, with hardly any open spaces. The excavation yielded numerous local potsherds, a few fragments of Egyptian pottery vessels including a bottle and a cylindrical vessel, and a fragment of a jar made of local clay containing a cylinder-seal impression depicting a ritual scene (Fig. 9).

**Intermediate Bronze Age**. Fragments of pottery vessels were discovered in some of the excavation areas, without building remains.

**Late Roman and Byzantine Periods**. Potsherds from these periods were recovered from the surface in many of the areas; most were small and worn. A refuse pit (2.2 × 2.3 m, depth 0.4 m) dating to the Late Roman period (third–fourth centuries CE) was exposed in Area K3. A well-plastered water channel found in Area P1 may be connected to the diversion of water from nearby Nahal ‘Iron that probably dates to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.

The preliminary results from the trial excavation at the ‘En Esur site indicate that it was first settled in the Pottery Neolithic period. During the Early Chalcolithic period (Wadi Rabah culture) the site covered a large area, but at this early stage of the excavations it is not yet possible to determine the precise extent of the settlement. During the Late Chalcolithic period the settlement was concentrated in the center of the site, near the springs. This area remained the hub of the settlement in the Early Bronze Age. In Early Bronze Age IB, the site covered a relatively limited area of a few dozen dunams. Early in Early Bronze Age IB, the settlement expanded to a size of several hundred dunams and toward the end of the period it reached its maximum size (c. 650 dunams). In Early Bronze Age IB it was densely built and shows the characteristic planning and organization of proto-urban settlements. The site was abandoned late in Early Bronze Age IB, like other sites of this period such as Tel Bet She’an and Tel Megiddo.

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1. Location map.

2. Map of excavation areas.

3. Densely-built structures dating from Early Bronze Age IA, looking northwest.

4. Building from the transition phase between Early Bronze Age IA and Early Bronze Age IB, looking northwest.

5. Area M1, Early Bronze Age IB street and buildings, looking northwest.

6. Area M2, Early Bronze Age IB buildings and streets, looking southeast.

7. Area M4, Early Bronze Age IB building, looking southeast.

8. Results of the magnometric survey conducted between Areas M1–M3.

9. Early Bronze Age IB cylinder-seal impression.