**Giv'at Zeev Excavations: Results from the 2021 Season**

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**Abstract**

In this article we present a preliminary report of the 2021 season at the site of Hill of 16 near Giv'at Ze'ev conducted by the author of this paper on behalf of the institute of archeology of Ariel university. This season was continuation of the ongoing study of this site since 2013. The excavation revealed a large fortified compound with service buildings and massive megalithic buildings located nearby. The ceramic and glyptic data collected the site suggests it should be dated to the earlier stages of the Middle Bronze period.

**Keywords:** Middle Bronze, Giv'at Ze'ev, Hill of 16, fortified compound, megalithic

**Introduction**

The site "Hill of 16" is located north of modern Jerusalem and in the immediate vicinity of the Give'on and the modern town of Giveat Ze’ev (Fig 1). It was surveyed by the author of this paper during 2013, and is excavated since then, nowadays on behalf of the Institute of archaeology of Ariel University (Permit number 08-01-2021). After four seasons of excavations conducted between the years 2015-2018 (Freikman et al. 2017, Freikman et al. 2019a, Freikman et al. 2020), we have established the existence of a small fortified site dated to the Middle Bronze II period (ca. 1,900-1,650 BCE). It was interpreted as a possible fortified caravanserai related to or directly managed by the authority of the Middle Bronze Give'on. The absolute chronology of the Middle Bronze period in the Southern Levant is still an issue for discussion (e.g., Hôfflemeyer 2017; Regev et al. 2021) and will not be elaborated here. The excavation is continued in order to answer unresolved issues, such as more precise dating of the site within the chronological sequence of the Middle Bronze period, as well as function of various architectural units found in the context of the compound and in its immediate vicinity. Although no reliable carbon samples were collected at the site so far, the ceramic assemblage may add valuable information to the discussion on appearance of the first fortifications in the hillside in our region. Results from Areas B and C will be described (Fig. 1)

**Area B**

Excavation in the Area B (denoted here B2) was the continuation of the previous season conducted during 2016 (Freikman *et al.* 2017). The main goal of season 2021 was to collect additional material in order to reinforce the dating of the walls of the fortified compound to the Middle Bronze II period and accomplish the excavation of the remains of the structure B1013 partially excavated in 2016. Area B2 was expanded both inside the walls W3 and W2, and outside them, in order to enlarge the area abutting the fortifications and archeological material, and reinforce the evidence of dating the whole complex to the Middle Bronze period.

In the course of the 2021 season we have continued the excavation of the area in the South-Eastern corner of the fortified compound expanding the area around the walls W1011 and W1019 revealed in 2016 (Figs. 2–3). During the last season we have found fragmentarily preserved remains of walls W1047 and W1048, both built along the west-east axis. They are built of two rows of fieldstones of small/medium size, although the one of the rows of the wall W1048 was mostly robbed. Wall W1048 abuts W1019 creating a roughly straight corner. Taking to account the results of both seasons, we may now propose that walls W1008, W1011, W1019, W1047 and W1048 are severely damaged remains of a single roughly rectangular structure (hereafter, building B1013, Fig. 4). Moreover, remains of the wall W1047 show no evidence of connection to the wall W1008, and may be interpreted as part of a passageway created by the two walls, leading into this building (Fig. 5). All these features belong to the earlier phase 1B of the compound in area B2 and may alter our interpretation of the remains of a burial found: severely disturbed human remains mixed with large fragments of a secondary used pithos were found in this corner earlier enclosed by the walls W1011 and W1008 (Freikman et al. 2017)Based on the results of the last season of excavation, we may cautiously assume that the original location of the burial was inside the building B1013, and was later moved to the recent location as it was robbed by the inhabitants of stratum 1A. This conclusion may be reinforced by the finds such as the scarab described below.

In addition, an area of 100 m² adjacent to the wall W3 was excavated down to the bedrock outside of the compound. It is 0.7 m higher than the area inside it due to a steep difference of the bedrock level. The living surface B1044 abutting the compound wall from outside is placed directly on top of the bedrock or pockets of sediments located in the shallow depressions. Similar to the other parts of area B2, no *in situ* material, walls or other architectural features later than Middle Bronze II period were found here, and almost all the material is dated to this period.

**Area C**

The main goal of excavation at area C was to expand our knowledge of the ridge located east of the main area (B1-B4) of the site. The survey conducted at 2013 revealed a number of stone structures of megalithic nature built along the ridge. One of these structures was fully excavated down to the bedrock in the course of 2021 season (Figs. 6). The upper part of the walls of structure denoted C1 was visible prior to the excavation, showing the roughly rectangular building aligned with the axis NNW-SSE (walls C1-C4). The excavated structure was built of large stones many of them reaching more than 500 kg each. More than half of the stones are Quartzolite not found in the immediate vicinity. These stones are not present on the hill and were probably quarried and brought from the distance of some 400 m away east from the valley near the construction site. This fact is especially conspicuous in comparison with the buildings found in area B where only few of the stones used are Quartzolite. In Area B the vast majority (more than 95 %) of the stones are represented by the regular limestone found in this area in abundance. It is possible that this shiny stone was chosen for the construction of this megalithic structure because of the special visual properties.

Building C1 was built directly on the levelled bedrock also used as the floor (W5). It measures 5.5 X 3.5 m, and the remaining course of stones is standing to the height of some 0.5m. The SSE wall (W4) is constructed of the double row of the stones. It is not clear what was the original height of the structure. As the amount of collapsed stones around it is negligible, and no other structures were found in the immediate vicinity, it is possible that the original height was only a little higher than the surviving part. We suggest that the lacking stones in the Southern part of the building indicate the existence of the entrance. One of the Quartzolite stones is of special interest. It is placed uprights in the middle of the short wall (W2) faced NNW. It is possible that it was used as a stele incorporated into the building (Fig. 7: Upper part of the photograph). In the end of the excavation the missing stones on the preserved course of the structure were reconstructed, the floor/bedrock inside the building (W5) was covered with the geotextile and covered with a thick layer of the local sediment for the sake of the future preservation of the archaeological remains (Fig. 7).

All the material, with the exception of few roman/byzantine ribbed shards found in the upper debris, is similar to the material found in area B and should be dated to the Middle Bronze II period. In general, it is similar to the pottery found in areas B1-B4 (Freikman et al. 2017: 17\*-24\*; 2021: 72\*: 84\*). It is mostly made of dark-red/brown or greenish clay, in most cases in bad state of preservation due to the local microclimate conditions. The total number of 365 shards were found inside the building C1 or outside its entrance. No complete vessels or large restorable parts were found, probably due to the later disturbance by robbers. A number of spheroid flint tools and a kauri shell were also found on the floor of this structure

From the point of view of architectural setting building C1 can be cautiously compared to several megalithic structures found in the surroundings in this area (Stekelis 1956). We should also point out the megalithic chambers known as "Kubbur Bini Israil” located about 10 km to east of the site (Ables 1997).

**Finds: Pottery**

The ceramic assemblage collected in both strata of Area B2 is homogenous and the types are similar.

**Bowls (Fig. 8)**

Shallow bowls (Fig. 8: 1-2). These bowls are featured by a shallow profile and the inverted or folded towards inside rim. Similar bowls were also found in the previous seasons at the site as well as other sites in this area, such as the burials of Gibeon (Pritchard 1963: Fig. 20: 1–15; Fig. 28: 1; Fig. 40: 1–7), Hebron (Ben-Shlomo 2017: Fig. 7.2: 1–3), Jerusalem (Eisenberg 2012: Fig. 7.1: 9–13; Fig. 7.17: 3–5; Fig. 7.20: 7–8, 12), Lachish (Singer-Avitz 2004: Fig. 16.4: 7, 9; 16.13: 1; Fig. 16.22: 1), Aphek (Beck 2000a: Fig. 10.10: 10–11; Yadin 2009: Fig. 7.2: 4, 6), Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1983: Fig. 22: 4; Fig. 72: 5; Fig. 106: 1, 8, 16–17) and Tell Beit Mirsim (Ben-Arieh 2004: Fig. 2.7). However, the bowls with folded rim are more characteristic for the latter parts of the Middle Bronze period II. One of the shallow bowls was found inside the megalithic structure in area C (Fig. 1: 2).

Deep bowls (Fig. 8: 3-4). These bowls are featured by inverted profile with a rounded rim, or semiglobular profile with an inverted rim. Similar bowls are also attested at the settlement of Gibeon (Pritchard 1963: Fig. 20: 1-15: Fig. 40: 1-7), Jerusalem (Eisenberg 2012: Fig. 7.1: 9-13; Fig. 7.17: 3-5; Fig. 7.20: 7-8), Lachish (Singer-Avitz 2004: Fig. 16.4: 7, 9; 16.13: 1), Hebron (Ben-Shlomo 2017: Fig. 7.2: 1-3), Tell Beth Mirsim (Ben Arieh 2004: Fig. 2.7), and elsewhere. Vessels similar to the bowl found inside the megalithic structure in area C (Fig. 8: 4) were also attested at the MBIIa context at Aphek (Beck 2000: 175, Fig. 10.4:8).

Carinated bowls (Fig. 8: 5-6). These bowls are featured by a double carinated body, everted rim and usually ring or trumpeted base. In general, the bowls found at the site have relatively robust and thick walls and relatively short rim consistent with the initial stages of the Middle Age period. Similar bowls were found in the burials of Gibeon (Pritchard 1963: Fig. 20:17–26; Fig. 32:15–16), Jerusalem (de Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012: Fig. 7.9:3, 9), Lachish (Singer- Avitz 2004: Fig. 16.2:5; Fig. 16.11:2–6), Shiloh (Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: 86–87, Fig. 6.5:10–14), and Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1983: Fig. 175:8; Fig. 177:4, 20; Fig. 191:1). One should mention that open carinated bowls with flaring rim and relatively tall upper part or delicate 'egg-shell' bowls of the Late part of this period were not attested so far at the site (Bonfil 2019: 81).

**Kraters (Fig. 9: 1-2)**

Two fragments of different types were attested in area B2. One is with everted rim. Similar krater was found in Jerusalem (Eisenberg 2012: 257, Fig. 7.2.: 23-24) Afek (Yadin 2009: Fig. 10.14: 6). and another one is a globular krater with a folded rim. Similar kraters were also attested in Jerusalem (Eisenberg 2012: 257, Fig. 7.3: 3) and Lachish (Singer-Avitz 2004: 914, Fig. 16.9: 12).

**Cooking pots (Fig. 9: 3-6)**

Cooking pots are represented by two main types attested in the Middle Bronze period. Most of them belong to the straight walled handmade type with rope pattern decoration and series of holes along the rim. Fully pierced as well partially pierced holes appear. Gibeon (Pritchard 1963: Fig. 41:2), Jerusalem (de Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012: Fig. 7.13:6; Fig. 7.16:4), Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1983: Fig. 106:10; Fig. 163:8, 6–7; Fig. 164:4–6), Lachish (Singer-Avitz 2004: Fig. 16.5:12), and Ramla (Yasur-Landau and Samet 2008: Fig. 2.6:3). Some have inverted rim, similar to cooking pots appearing at Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1983: Fig. 184: 23-26) or Yesodot (Paz and Nativ 2022: 130, 3.41: 19).

One example illustrated is a globular wheel-made cooking pot. It was found inside the megalithic structure in area C (Fig. 9: 6). Similar vessels with inverted or guttered rim were attested at several sites such as Aphek (Yadin 2009: Fig. 7.1: 4–5; Fig. 7.3: 7–9), Efrata (Gonen 2001: Fig. 46: 2), Yesodot (Paz and Nativ 2022: 128, Fig. 3.40: 4), Ramla (Yasur-Landau 2008: Fig. 2.5), and Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1982: Fig. 120: 11).

**Storage jars (Figs. 10–11)**

Fragments of at least five different storage jars were attested inside or around the building B1013, and few more fragments were found outside the compound wall. Two of these jars were found between the walls W1008 and W1047 in the possible entryway into the building B1013.

Storage jars featured by flaring neck and various variations of the folded rim without a ridge. Storage jars with simple everted neck (Fig. 10). In addition to the similar vessels found at the site in the previous seasons (Freikman et la. 2017: \*19, Fig. 23:1-2). Vessels with the thickened variation of this kind of rim were also attested at Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1983: 427, Fig. 181: 12). Remains of two different storage jars with a simple or rounded everted rim were found in area C (Fig. 10:2-4).

Storage jars featured by flaring neck, folded rim, and a ridge, created by the rim folding (Fig. 11). Such type are also attested at Lachish (Singer-Avitz 2004: Fig. 16.31:5; Fig. 16.22:15), Yesodot (Paz and Nativ 2022: Fig. 3.40: 5), Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1983: Fig. 71:2; Fig. 106:5; Fig. 167:11–12), and Shiloh (Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: Fig. 6.7:8–9; Fig. 6.9:9–12).

**Jugs and juglets (Fig. 12: 1-2)**

Jugs typical for the Middle Bronze period. In addition, two pointed bases must have belonged to similar vessels. Such bases were found on some jars and jugs at sites such as Lachish (Singer-Avitz 2004: Fig. 16.14: 5; Singer-Avitz 2004: Fig. 17.10: 4), Shiloh (Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: Fig. 6.23: 11), Jerusalem (Eisenberg 2012: Fig. 7.5: 1–2), Shechem (Cole 1984: Pl. 40: e–h), and Nahal Refa'im (Gershuny 2017: Fig. 8: 6).

**Bases (Fig. 12: 3-6)**

Bases include four main types:

1. Disc bases. Similar bases belong to various types of vessels, mostly bowls, and are attested at different sites across the region (Fig. 12:3).

2. Ring bases. This type of base is mostly typical for the earlier stages of the Middle Bronze II period. They are attested at and elsewhere (Fig. 12:4).

3. Trumpet base. This type of base becomes more common into the later stages of the Middle Bronze II period, mostly found on carinated bowls similar to (Fig. 12:5).

4. Conical base. This type of base is characteristic for the jars or juglets. (Fig. 12:6).

Handles. Handles attested during the 2021 season are mostly represented by large stripe handles that belong to the storage jars.

**Pottery from Area C**

The pottery assemblage of area C is represented by only a handful of pottery fragments:

1. Fragments of two bowls. One with the rim folded inside (for parallels see above), and the other is a rounded deep bowl.

2. Vessels similar to the latter were also attested at the MBIIa context at Aphek (Beck 2000: 175, Fig. 10.4:8).

**Other Finds**

One fragment of a small basalt bowl with an inverted rim (Fig. 13) and three stone hammerstones were found on the living surfaces in the area B2 (Fig. 14: 1-3). In addition, three stone tools including two hammerstones and a basalt polisher were found inside the structure C1 (Fig. 14: 4-6). One should also mention a single kauri shell found on the floor (Fig. 17).

The most interesting object found inside the building B1013 is a scarab seal (Fig. 15), made of a bone. Both the upper part depicting the scarab and the lower part representing the seal image are made with a skillful hand, creating straight and clear lines. The seal lower face image depicts two addorsed cobra snakes with interweaving tails with their faces pointing outwards. Both heads are topped by the *maat* feathers. Similar motives appear in various sites in Israel, probably imitating the Middle Kingdom scarabs from Egypt (Tuffnell 1984; Ben Tor 2000: 128, Pls. 52-53, Type 3B1). Although these scarabs usually appear in the context of later phases of Middle Bronze II, a roughly contemporary scarab was attested at nearby Give'on adorned with representations of addorsed cobras (Pritchard 1963: Fig. 71: 11).

A small stone object with the measurements of 7/6/4.5 cm (Fig. 16). It is made of greenish stone. The object is narrowing towards its upper side. The object is well polished from all sides. It has damage marks on both long ends. However, it is not clear whether these marks were represent intentional damage while using it as a knapping tool, or accidental damage. This object was found near the burial inside the building B1013 in the immediate vicinity of the scarab.

**Discussion**

In general, the excavation of the season 2021 in the area B achieved two main goals. First, the completion of excavation of the structure B1013 enabled us with better understanding of the burial found earlier in season 2016. Second, the expansion of this area both inside and outside of the closure wall of the compound W3 reinforced the conclusions of the previous seasons: the consistent finds dated to the same pottery found in the context of both phases and the scarab also dated to this period of time.

The ceramic assemblage presented above is consistent with the pottery found at the site in the previous seasons. This pottery generally shows certain similarities to the earlier strata at Tel Aphek and other contemporary sites, such as straight walled handmade cooking pots, carinated bowls, storage jar types, or incised combed decoration (Freikman et al. 2017: Fig. Fig. 26:2 ). On the other hand. Some shapes characteristic for the later stages of the Middle Bronze period, as carinated bowls with elongated rim, cooking pots with grooved rim or eggshell bowls are not found or very rare. Thus, the assemblage can be cautiously dated to the final stages of the MBIIa or initial MBIIb period (Beck 2000, Freikman et al. 2020). This dating is especially noteworthy in the light of general lack of fortified sites dated to the earlier stages of the Middle Bronze II period in the highland.

The megalithic structure C1 is so far unique in the archaeological horizon of the Middle Bronze period in this region. Although no bones were found inside the structure due to the severe preservation conditions, we may cautiously interpret it as a building of ritual significance, possibly a burial of one of an inhabitants of the compound in area B. Nowadays it is hard to find any similar megalithic burial (or other building) anywhere in the region, yet, megalithic structures were reported in the Samaria since the early days of the modern archaeological research. For instance, buildings called 'dolmens' were reported by Oliphant (1880: 149-150)., Vincent, noticeably mentioning a 'trilithon' near el-Djib (1901: 278-284), on the road from Jericho to Shechem (Oimstead 1972: 30), and In the vicinity of Jerusalem (Stekelis 1956).

The structure may also be compared to the so called " Qubbur Bani Israil " (‘tomb of the sons of Israel’), which includes five large rectangular megalithic buildings found about ten km to the east of the site. However, only one of these buildings was excavated so far, and no clear dating material was found in the context of this excavation. Therefore, this possibility remains to be reinforced or rejected. In addition, several structures megalithic in their nature were reported from this area by Stekelis (Stekelis 1956). However, these were also of uncertain dating, and the structural, similarity, is somewhat vague. Therefore, the structure in Area C, as well as the others located around it on the hill, remain so far unique in the archaeological horizon of the Middle Bronze period.

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**Captions**

Figure 1. 'Hill of 16", general map.

Figure 2. Area B2. Aerial view.

Figure 3. Plan of area B2.

Figure 4. Structure B1013.

Figure 5. Entrance to the structure B1013.

Figure 6. Megalithic structure in area C. Aerial view.

Figure 7. Megalithic structure in area C after conservation.

Figure 8. Pottery assemblage, bowls.

Figure 9. Pottery assemblage, kraters and cooking pots.

Figure 10. Pottery assemblage, jars.

Figure 11. Pottery assemblage, jars.

Figure 12. Pottery assemblage, kraters, juglets and bases.

Figure 13. Basalt bowl.

Figure 14. Basalt hammerstones and polishers.

Figure 15. Scarab.

Figure 16. Green stone object.

Figure 17. Kauri shell.