

# Kh. Er-Ras – End of dig update

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Dear Friends

Four weeks of intensive rock-moving, bucket lines and dirt sweeping at Kh. Er-Ras are over. The aim of this season was mainly to get to know the site – its nature, its preservation level and its potential. Thanks to the hard work of everyone we have managed to achieve much more. Here is a short synopsis of this season's achievements and avenues open for further research in the field.

We are now able to recognize four main occupational levels in chronological terms: Middle Bronze IIB, IA IIC, Persian and Hellenistic. For each period we hold a number of clear contexts (Loci) that can be further analyzed.

1. Domestic architecture : Previously excavated building  
Previous excavations exposed three houses. These houses were only partly excavated. In area F (see plan below) we connected to the house excavated by N. Fieg from the east. We were able to locate the eastern closing wall of the house. One room was identified inside the house. Only part of the room was excavated, leaving a section along its southern edge for future research/sampling . The floor of the room was not reached by the end of the season. The pottery collected from within the collapse seems to date to the Iron Age – Persian periods. The material from the collapse was all sifted carefully for faunal remains, shells and flint debitage (waste product).
2. Domestic architecture: New building  
Parts of at least two new buildings were unearthed. In area G three spaces making out one building were partly exposed. The picture that emerges from the pottery collected from the floors seems to show a complex process of initial use and secondary use in later periods, including the addition of smaller rooms to the already existing structure. The floor of the main hall was exposed in a narrow section only and we have found on it a number of restorable jars (not yet studied for exact dates). The pottery was not washed and can serve for entail residue analysis (that is to check whether there is good preservation before considering a longer project). On top of the faunal remains and flint waste we also found organic material in a good state of preservation.  
A second house was found in area T – to the north-east of the site. Only one square was dug in a kind of trail pit. A floor and two walls were found right below the surface, dated by the pottery to the Iron Age. Future expansion of the area will allow a better understating of the building plan and nature.
3. Terrace dating  
Area E was designated mainly for understand terrace construction techniques and dating. The date of the terraces at er-Ras as well as at other sites in the Rephaim valley was and still is disputed. Until now the dating was done in standard archaeological procedures (mainly stratigraphy). The lower terrace in area E seemed to date to later then the Persian period as it is built directly above a floor dating to

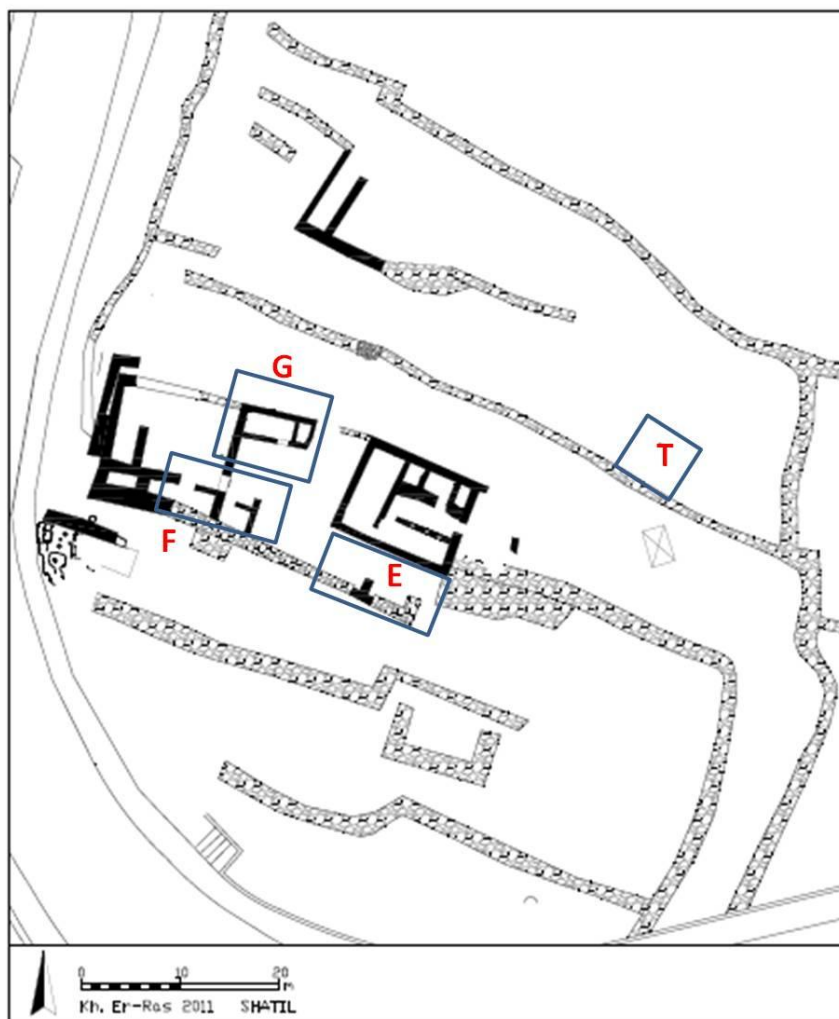
the Persian period. The section made at area E shows that a clear intentional fill was placed behind the terrace. Such fills were also found in areas F and G. In all areas the terrace seems to belong to the latest occupational level. We plan on dating the agricultural fill layers by OLS together with Naomi Porat and Gideon Avni.

#### 4. Special finds

Among the Special Finds collected, one rare coin deserve special attention – the coin, dated to the late six-early fifth centuries BCE, is a cut stator (didrachm) of Aegina, one of the Islands of Ionia. The obverse of the coin presents a sea turtle, while the reverse is a four part incuse square. The coin was identified by Yoav Farhi of the Hebrew university.

The coin was intentionally cut in antiquity and this points that it was circulated as bullion to be weighed in transactions. Probably during the transitional stage which pre-dates the beginning of the monetary economy in Judaea.

This rare coin is the first of this type to be discovered in a controlled excavation environment in Israel and one of the earliest coins ever found in Israel. The fact that the rare coin was found in a small rural site of all places, challenges our understanding of what a 'rural community' really was.



Future excavations at the site will on the one hand broaden the exposure in areas F, G and T in order to gain a better understanding of the architectural layout of buildings, and on the other hand on focus careful exposure of the context already exposed. A preliminary short season of sampling from sections may help direct future work.

I wish to thank the many people who contributed directly to the success of the season: Efrat Botser, Assaf Kleiman, Keren Ras and Yoav Tsur (area supervisors), Parker Diggory and Carolyn Patterson (assistance area supervisors), Liora Freud (Registration), Shatil Emmanuilov (surveying), Ofer Fatal (administration), Prof. Manfred Oeming (Heidelberg university), Lidar Sapir-Hen (Zooarchaeology), Omri Lernau (fishbones), Ron Schimelmits (Flint), Yoav Farhi (metal detector), Steve Weiner, Adi Eliyahu Behar, Dafna Langgut and Davis Friesm (sampling for the ERC program), Alon Shavit and Tzafi Alon (Israel Institute of Archaeology), Israel Finkelstein and Oded Lipschits (Tel-Aviv University) and last but not least – all of the wonderful team members who followed the biblical phrase: " will do and obey"

Yuval

