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ABBREVIATIONS

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ADAJ	Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament[3], ed. J.B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1969
BA	The Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BT	Babylonian Talmud
CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
CIS	Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries
EI	Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies
ESI	Excavations and Surveys in Israel
IAA Reports	Israel Antiquities Authority Reports
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
KAI	W. Donner and W. Röllig: *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* 1–3, Wiesbaden, 1962–1964; 1[5], 2002
NEAEHL	The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (English Edition), Jerusalem, 1993
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PT	Palestinian Talmud
QDAP	Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine
RA	Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale
RB	Revue Biblique
RE	Pauly-Wissowa's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
RQ	Revue de Qumran
VT	Vetus Testamentum
ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZDPV	Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins

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The 2006 and 2007 Excavation Seasons at Ramat Raḥel: Preliminary Report

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INTRODUCTION

This preliminary report presents the results of three seasons of excavation conducted at Ramat Raḥel between May 2006 and September 2007 (for the 2005 season, see Lipschits *et al*. 2006a; 2006b). The first of the three seasons (May 2006) was funded by the Israel Ministry of Tourism, the Israel National Fund, Tel Aviv University and Kibbutz Ramat Raḥel, and was dedicated to excavating the south-eastern corner of the site (area D2).[1] This short preliminary season was quickly followed by a 4-week season (July–August 2006), in which an average of 60 team members from Germany, the U.S., Israel and other countries participated.

Four areas were excavated (fig. 1): D1 and D3, C1 and C2 (all, except D3, excavated previously in 2005). The third season was in July–August 2007, when we continued excavating areas D1, C1 and C2, and began excavations in area D4.[2]

1 Ten hired workmen worked for three weeks, under the supervision of O. Lipschits and Y. Gadot. Area supervisor: G. Cinamon. Also participating: B. Arubas (stratigraphical analysis and surveying), N. Kedem, V. Zlatkovski, L. Marom, B. Babaiev, S. Zach, A. Achiman and O. Sergi (assistants) and S. Pavel (photography).

2 From 2006, O. Lipschits and M. Oeming have been the expedition directors. The staff includes: Y. Gadot (field director); B. Arubas (stratigraphical analysis and surveying); G. Cinamon (assistant field director, 2006); L. Freud (registration); N. Kedem, V. Zlatkovski, L. Marom and S. Zach (area supervisors); O. Sergi (assistant area supervisor and team coordinator); L. Yehoda and R. Avner (area supervisors, 2007); B. Babaiev (assistant area supervisor); S. Rubin and and P. Grandieri (assistant area supervisors, 2006); D. Katz, D. Dunn, B. Gross, S. Einhorn, S. Emanuelov, J. Boss, I. Koch, K. Raz, S. Amit, D. Frisbi and K. Sonka (assistant area supervisors, 2007); A. Achiman and C. Kettering (administration); P. van der Veen (academic programme, 2006); Y. Farhi (coins); I. Taxel (pottery analysis); and P. Shrago (photography).

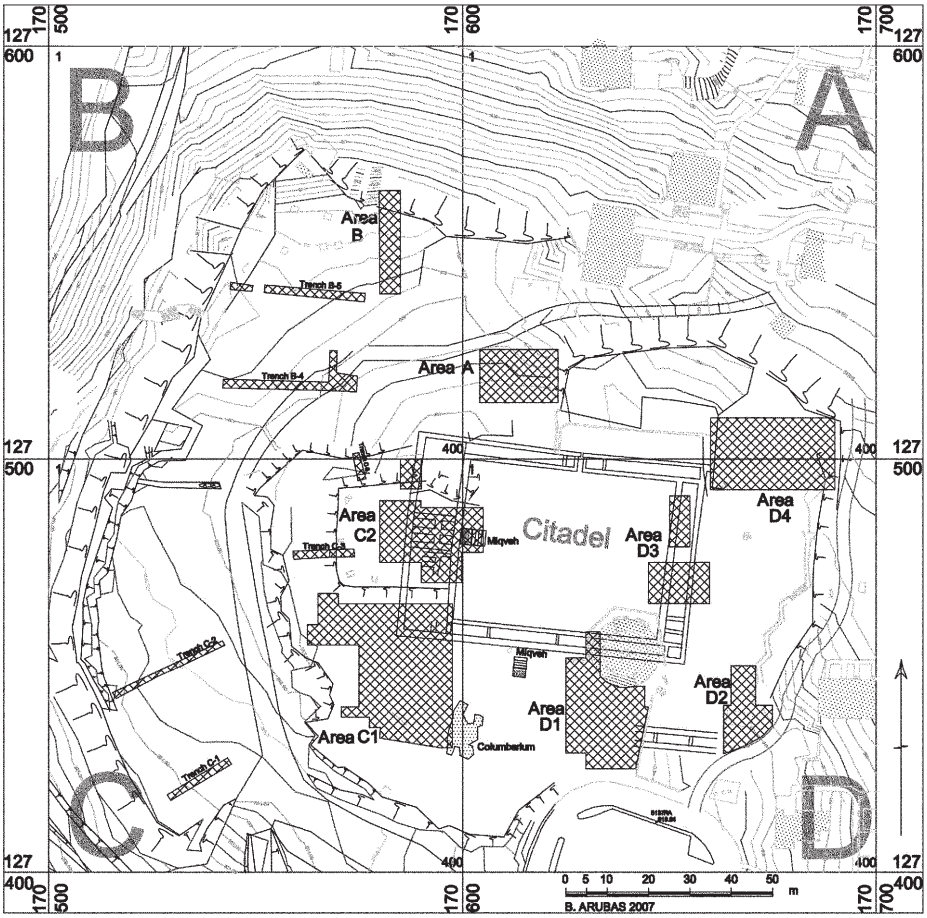

Fig. 1. Ramat Raḥel: general plan, indicating excavation areas

AREA D1

Located in the south-eastern part of the site, area D1 was excavated for the first time in 2005, during which architectural elements dating from the Byzantine and early Islamic periods were revealed. The small size of the area excavated in 2005 (four 5×5 m. squares) limited our ability to understand the layout and stratigraphic relationships of the architecture uncovered. We therefore devoted the 2006 and 2007 seasons to expanding area D1 to all directions and to removing the inner baulks. The total area excavated was 350 sq.m. (fig. 2).

The earliest features in area D1 are two Iron Age walls (phase D1-6). As the exposure is very limited at present, it is impossible to evaluate the overall plan or the exact date of these features.

To the next phase we attribute a plastered vat and a screw-press installation (phase D1-4; fig. 3). The floor of the vat is mostly flat and made of plaster, except for a small rounded depression covered by a mosaic floor in the eastern end. The installation was attached to a well-built wall (WD6) to its north. This wall must

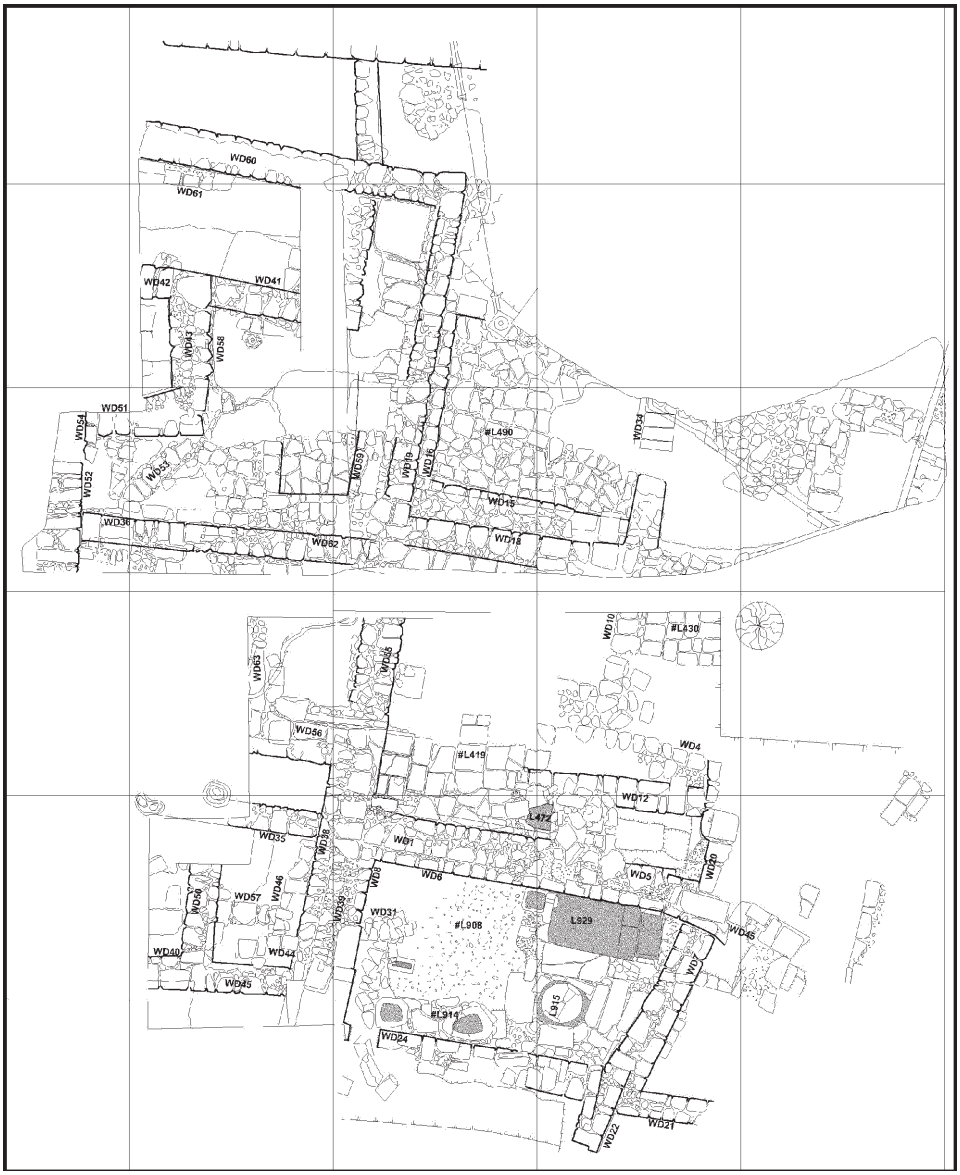

Fig. 2. Area D1: plan

have served as a terrace wall and was built at an earlier stage — as yet undetermined by additional finds — and preserved in the subsequent stage (see below). Similar installations were found by Aharoni in the area to the west of our area D2 (see, e.g., Aharoni 1964: 16) and under the floor of the church (see area D4 below). The installations date from the Byzantine period.

For the construction of the next phase (D1-2), the vat was filled with massive

stones and earth debris, and the screw press was cut, in order to fit the desired new floor level. The main architectural feature belonging to this later phase is a large courtyard building, dating from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods (eighth–eleventh centuries CE). The building includes a central courtyard paved with massive flat stones (locus 419; fig. 2). An opening, located in the south-east corner of the court, leads into a stone-built space beneath the courtyard (locus 472). The space was most likely used for dry storage, although it could perhaps have been a cistern.

Two halls were found, north (locus 490) and south (locus 908) of the courtyard. Both were roofed by a vault, and their floor was at least 1 m. lower than that of the courtyard. The north hall was stone-paved, while the floor of the southern hall (fig. 4) was made of

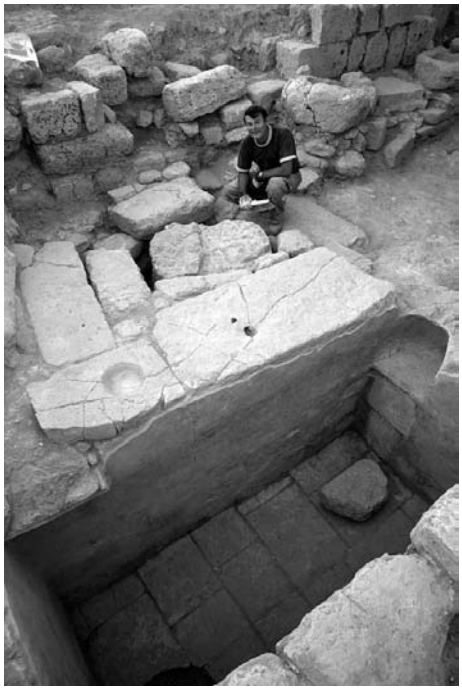

Fig. 3. Plastered vat (locus 929) and screw-press installation

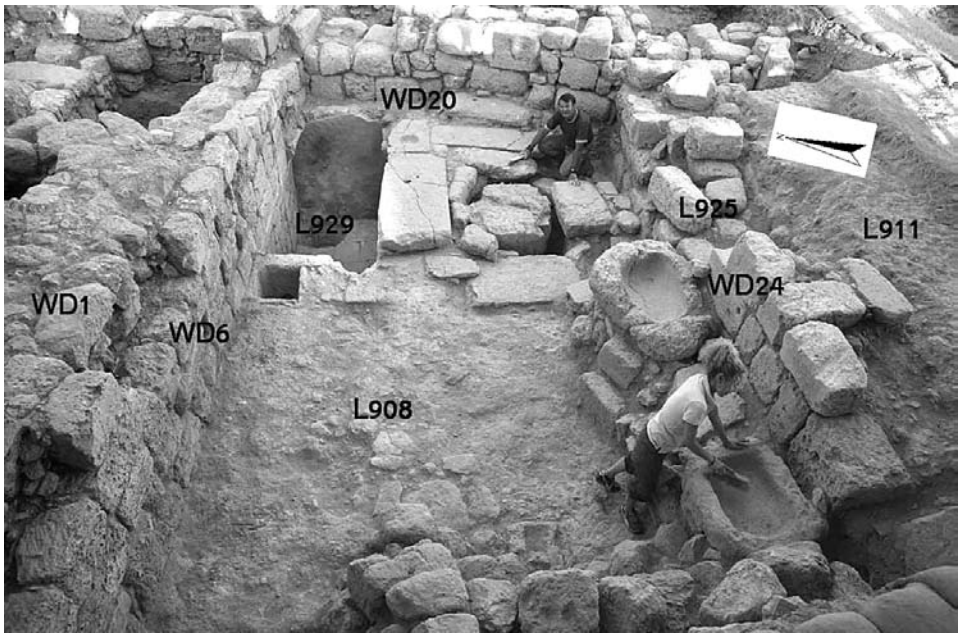

Fig. 4. Area D1, phase D1-2: hall 908 (view to the east)

packed earth. Smaller rooms were found to the east and to the south-west of the court. A line of stone installations was found next to the southern and western walls of the southern hall and next to the walls of the south-western room (fig. 4). The installations included two stone troughs and three stone shelves.

A massive stone collapse covered the floors of the various architectural units. The many broken pottery vessels date the collapse of the building either to the Abbasid period or to the beginning of the Fatimid period (tenth–eleventh centuries CE).

AREA D2

Area D2, located at the south-eastern corner of the site, was not excavated by Aharoni, because a hot-water tank within a cement structure belonging to Kibbutz Ramat Raḥel occupied the spot. In 2005, the structure was removed and the area was designated as a memorial garden.[3] Before the garden was laid, we conducted three weeks of salvage excavation, knowing that the main features revealed would be incorporated into the garden.

The earliest finding in this area is an Iron Age defense wall (WD107, fig. 5;

Fig. 5. Wall WD107 and floor locus 513, built on top of the wall (view to the south)

3 The garden was to commemorate five people killed in a 1956 shooting incident from the Jordanian side of the border. The victims were visiting the archaeological site, which had been discovered by Aharoni and excavated for the first time in 1954. See Lipschits 2006.

phase D2-5), the eastward continuation of Aharoni's casemate wall of Stratum VB (Aharoni 1964: fig. 6, squares M/L–20/23). The wall is built directly on the natural rock (a combination of flint and chalk), which slopes from north-east to south-west. We were able to trace the foundation trench (locus 531) which follows the north face of the wall and cuts into the rock. Above the trench, a floor, distinguished only as a thin layer of white crushed chalk in the section, approached the wall and sealed the earth fill of the trench. The few indicative pottery sherds found in the foundation trench can all be dated to the Iron Age II, although a more precise dating was not possible. The wall is built of large dressed stones. We were able to follow the wall eastward for a distance of 8.5 m., until it disappeared below a modern paved road. Aharoni reconstructed a second, outer wall, which runs parallel to our wall, and three inner partition walls. We cannot confirm these observations, because if the parallel wall indeed continued eastward, it would be located below the modern road. It should be noted that in our excavation we found no partition walls.

A thick, well-made floor consisting of crushed white, local, soft chalk (locus 513) was found above the Iron Age wall and was attributed to level D2-3 (fig. 5). The floor was exposed throughout almost the entire area of excavation. Its thickness varies between 20 and 40 cm. and is therefore very distinctive. Consequently, the floor was designated a stratigraphic base point, differentiating between features covered by the floor, features co-existing with it, and features that cut through it.

While the floor's relative chronology was easy to determine, its absolute date is debatable. In most cases, the soil beneath the floor did not produce any datable finds. The only well-dated feature found sealed below the floor is the wall with the foundation trench described above; both were dated to the Iron Age. Byzantine pottery was found lying on the floor, but it is clear that by then, the floor was in secondary use. A few Second Temple findings, concentrated in one spot on the floor, provide, for the moment, a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the floor, but an earlier date in the Hellenistic, Persian or late Iron Age is nevertheless possible.

The two upper layers accordingly belong to the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. The fragmentary walls found should be associated with the domestic quarters found by Aharoni west of the area excavated by us (Aharoni 1964: fig. 1).

AREA D3

Area D3 is located in the eastern quarter of the Iron Age palace, in and around the area interpreted by Aharoni as the inner gate of the palace (1964: 25 and his fig. 6). Four squares, lined north to south, were excavated inside the inner courtyard and close to the gate. We were hoping to re-expose the courtyard floor in order to

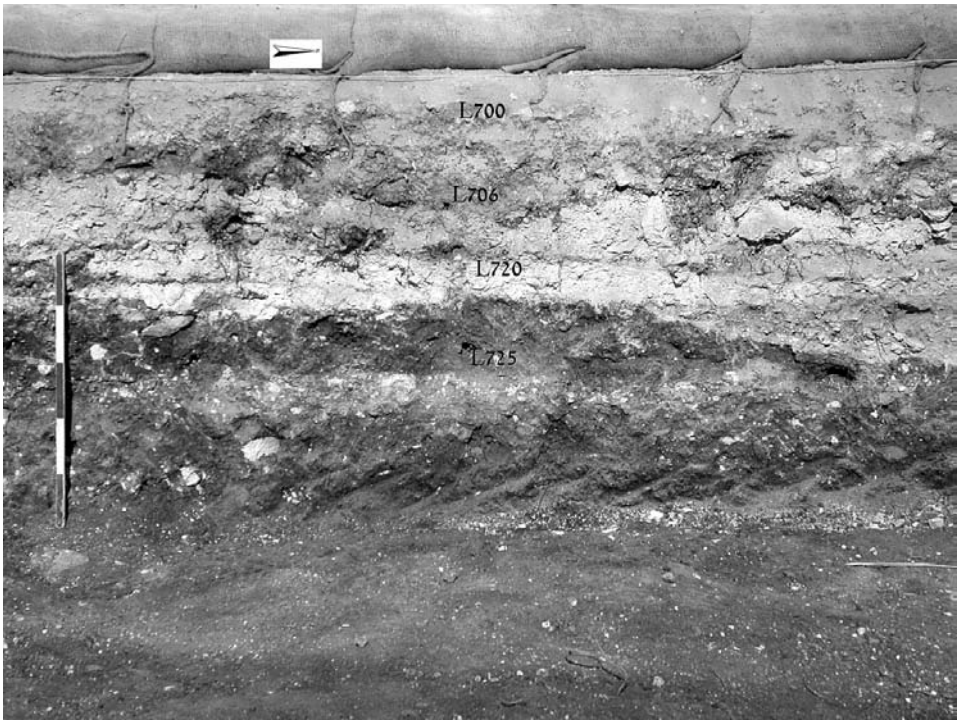

Fig. 6. Section through floor 720, the Iron Age courtyard

reevaluate Aharoni's dating of the palace courtyard. For this purpose, two additional squares were dug south of the inner gate.

The result of our section into the courtyard floor (locus 720) confirms Aharoni's observations (fig. 6). The floor itself was made of crushed lime of varying thickness, reaching 30 cm. in places. Beneath the floor we found a fill of soil lying above the natural rock. Apparently, the natural rock slopes here from southwest to north-east. The fill, coupled with the varying thickness of the floor, created a horizontal surface. Similar types of pottery, dating from a later part of the Iron Age, were found in and below the floor. In this area of the Iron Age palace, we found no evidence of an earlier, eighth-century BCE stratum (Aharoni's Stratum VB).

A second section was cut south of the 'inner gate' and just by the stone pavement interpreted by Aharoni as the pavement of the inner gate. Here we found a line of white chalky floor, similar to that of the courtyard described above. The floor is most certainly under the stone pavement of the 'inner gate'. Due to the very limited exposure here it is not yet possible to determine whether the chalk floor is indeed the same as the one in the courtyard. If further excavations here confirm this, the stone pavement will have to be to be assigned to a later stratigraphic stage and the idea of an 'inner gate' reevaluated.

AREA D4 (THE CHURCH)

Area D4, in the north-eastern sector of the site, is where Aharoni uncovered the remains of a Byzantine church in 1954. The church was reexamined by Aharoni and a team from the University of Rome during the 1962 season, and a detailed report was subsequently published (Testini 1964). Some minor efforts were made to preserve the remains of the church, which was identified as the Kathisma church. It is noteworthy that Aharoni and his team did not excavate below the church floor. In 1984, Barkay, then at Tel Aviv University, conducted a trial excavation at the site, cutting two sections below the floor of the church, probably in order to expose earlier Iron Age remains. The results of his excavation have not yet been published.

Following the discovery of the Kathisma church on the slope of the site during a rescue excavation conducted by R. Avner for the Israel Antiquities Authority (Avner 2006–07), it became evident that the church under discussion here is not the Kathisma and that a re-evaluation of the church was therefore necessary, The 2007 season was therefore devoted mainly to demarcating the plan of the church and evaluating its structural phases and date, in order to determine its historical and cultural context.

Clearing the church ground plan of accumulated modern debris (phase D4-2, fig. 7) confirmed the plan published by Aharoni and Testini (1964: fig. 39). We re-exposed the walls of the apse and of 'room 3' in the front of the church (Testini

Fig. 7. Area D4: view at the end of the 2007 season (view to the north-east)

Fig. 8. The mortar floor of the church (at bottom) and earlier remains of phase D4-4 (at top)

1964: 103 and fig. 39). Two small sections were made in places where only the mortar of the mosaic floor was preserved, in order to gather coins and other datable material from the foundation of the church. This material is still being processed and will be reported in future publications.

We noticed some indications of an earlier architectural phase (D4-3) of the church or some other public building in the sections left in Barkay's square. The most notable of these are the remains of a floor line (locus 595), sealed by the church's floor. This earlier floor approaches a large column base, which seems to be incorporated into the floor of the church. To a still earlier phase (D4-4) we assigned two large press installations, consisting of at least three plastered vats (loci 255, 274 and 375), and an extended pressing floor (locus 577). The vats and the floors were sealed by the mortar of the mosaic floor of the church and therefore date from an earlier period (fig. 8). Walls found under the church floor indicate that the press installations were located inside a built insula, but the exact plan of this building is as yet unknown.

AREA C1

The unexpected discovery of the plastered pools, drains and stone-built channel in 2005 made us realise that an exceptional effort would be necessary in order to understand the water installation found at this area. Prior to the excavation we had to remove over 1,150 cu.m. of earth, dumped there either by Aharoni or by the military before and after the 1948 war. The removal of this modern earth dump enabled us to expand the area of excavation to the south, west and north. The findings of the 2006 and 2007 seasons made this exceptional effort worthwhile.

Three distinctive phases and several sub-phases were defined (figs. 9–10).

The earliest phases (C1-6 and C1-5) include a major alteration of the natural form of the hill and the creation of an artificially-lowered enclosure. The enclosure is flanked by a steep escarpment on three sides. The southern escarpment measures at least 19 m. and runs from south-east to west-north-west. The eastern

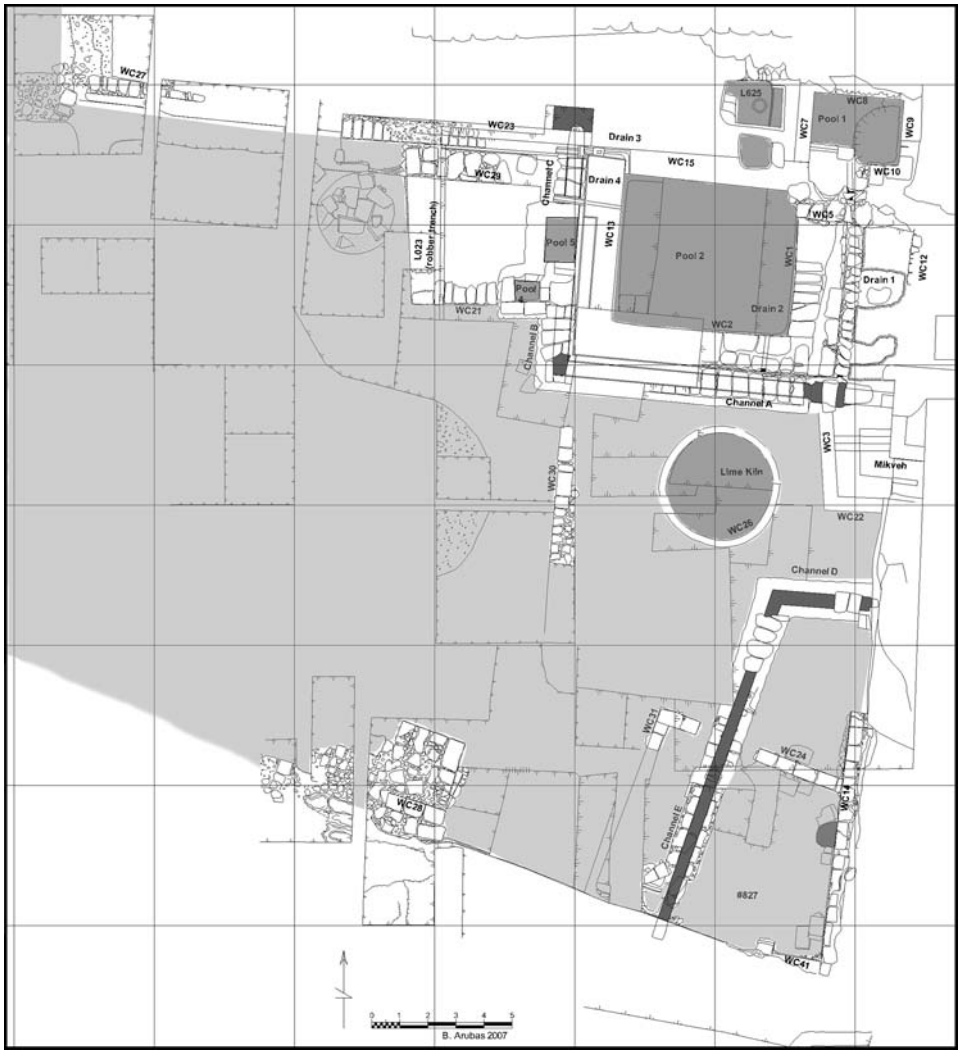

Fig. 9. Area C1: plan

escarpment continues for 33 m. in a north–south direction (fig. 11). It creates a steep rise of almost 3 m. Carving out the natural rock, the mason had to cut through natural outcrops of flint. The northern escarpment is more difficult to distinguish and follow, not being as well preserved as the other two. It continues for at least 25 m. in an east–west direction. Here too, the rise created by the escarpment reaches over 3 m. at several points. On the west we did not find a defining line marking the end of the enclosure. Since the flattened bedrock continued westward to the edge of the excavated area, it may very well be that the enclosure was deliberately left open on the west and that the hillside was

Fig. 10. Aerial view of area C1 at the end of the 2007 season

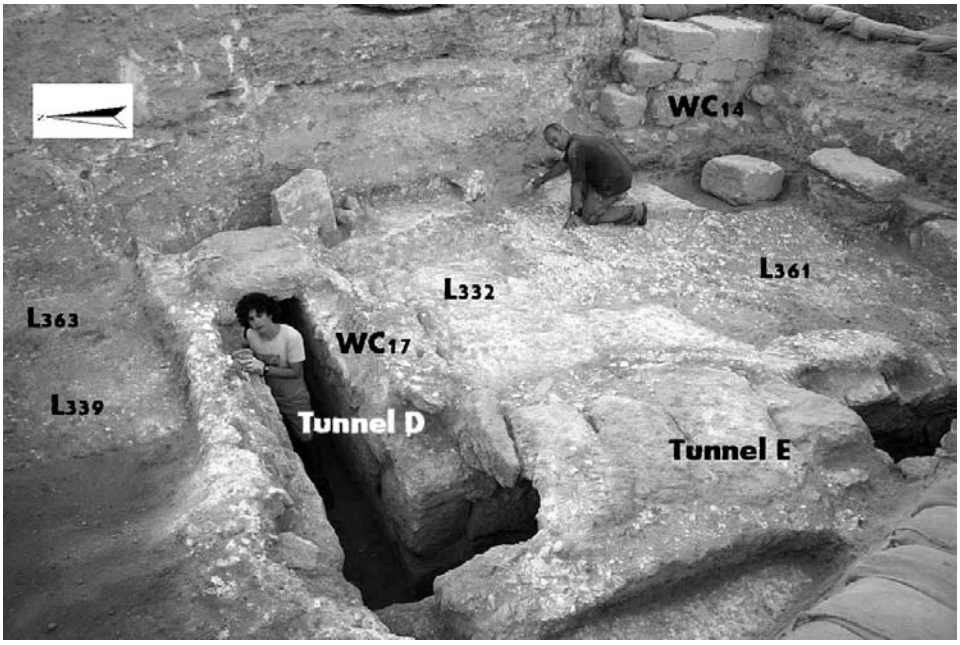

Fig. 11. The eastern escarpment, area C1 and channel D–E (view to the east)

terraced. The overall area carved out of the rock and artificially flattened reached 1,000 sq.m.

As noted above, most of the lowered enclosed area was flattened in order to create a levelled horizontal surface of the soft limestone rock (fig. 12). On this surface was laid a layer of chocolate-coloured earth, interpreted by us as 'garden soil'. This is not the natural soil of the site and must have been brought in from elsewhere — probably the valley of Rephaʿim to the west of Ramat Raḥel. Wherever the dark garden soil was exposed it was always some 40 cm. thick and lying on the flattened bedrock.

It should be noted that in 2005, we had come across a similar flattened bedrock surface covered by 'garden soil' in our areas A and B, both located in the northwestern court (fig. 1). Apparently, the entire western face of the hill of Ramat Raḥel, around the palace built on its summit, was transformed from a rocky mound into an artificially flattened area for the purpose of planting a garden.

Other features are related to water. In our report on the 2005 season (Lipschits *et al.* 2006a), we described three plastered pools and one rock-cut channel. In the two subsequent seasons we exposed additional installations associated with water and we gained a better understanding of the one already exposed.

Rock-cut Channels

In 2006 we found the continuation of channel A, cleaned in 2005 (fig. 9). The channel was first cut into the flattened bedrock, and then its sides were lined with

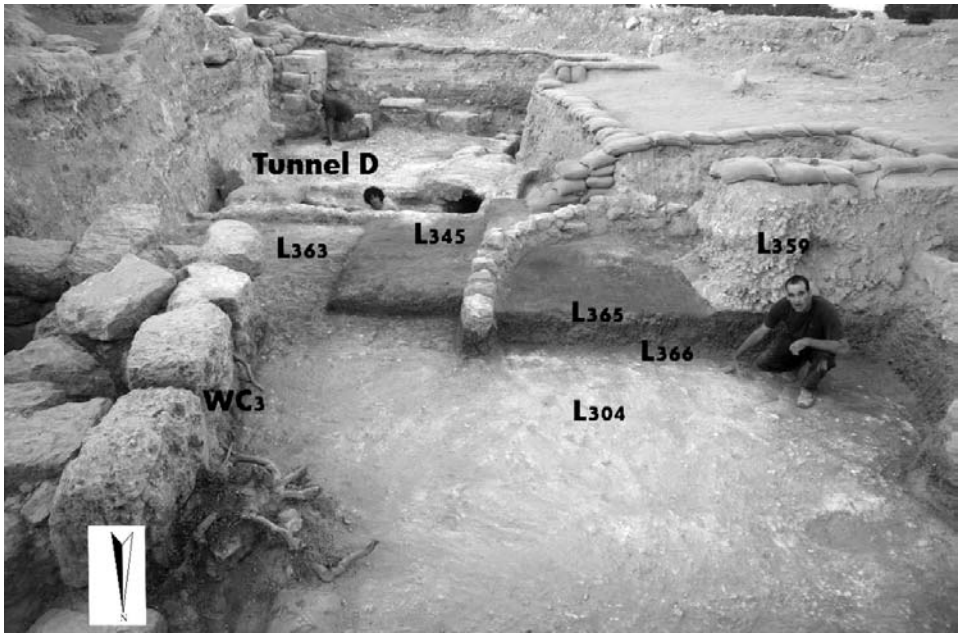

Fig. 12. Lime kiln built above the chocolate-coloured earth and the flattened bedrock

stones and plastered. Large rectangular stones were used to roof it. We previously reported that the channel was made of two sections. The first is 9.2 m. long in an east–west direction. At its western end, the channel makes a 90° turn to the north and continues for a further 4 m., ending in a built and plastered wall. In 2006, we also exposed the outer face of the end wall and realised that it was part of a small plastered installation (pool 5) that was built into the channel and must therefore belong to a later phase (see below). North of the installation we found the continuation of the channel (section C). This section, which was built of stones and then plastered, continues for an additional 2 m. until it ends at the northern escarpment.

It seems that the well-built, thickly-plastered channel (A–C) was meant to connect the eastern and northern escarpment, but at both sides it ends suddenly with no visible outlet for the water. It should be noted that the channel follows the outer contour of pool 2 (see below). The two features were therefore hewn and built together.

In 2007, a second channel (D–E) was found south of channel A–C. This newly-discovered channel shares many features with channel A–C, but was built to a much lower standard. Channel D–E cuts into the flattened bedrock, but its side walls are built of stones. Only a few stones were left of the many that once roofed the channel. Section D of the channel is oriented east–west and is 3.25 m. long, starting from the eastern escarpment. It turns southward and continues for nearly 15 m., until it reaches the southern escarpment (section E). Here, too, the channel does not lead into a reservoir or another obvious destination, and we still do not know the water source or understand the purpose of the rock-cut channels. This channel connects the eastern and the southern escarpments, and it seems that both channels were made to hold the water, rather than to carry it elsewhere.

Plastered Pools

In 2005, we reported finding three pools. Pool 1 was excavated by Aharoni (but not reported or published). The area interpreted as pool 3 (south of channel A) in the previous report turned out to be part of the flattened bedrock. If indeed there was a pool here, it was much smaller than previously thought, and served as a filtering pool for water running into channel A. Our main progress here was in our understanding of pool 2. We continued to clear the earth-fill from inside the pool. The findings from this fill are associated with the pool's later use and are discussed below (phase C1-3). We had now uncovered the four corners of the pool (including the relocation of a Ran Morin statue, which was in the south-western corner of the pool[4]). The interior of the pool is 7×7 m. The north escarpment of the

4 Sculptor Ran Morin had positioned four statues named 'hypothetical ruins' over the four supposed corners of the Iron Age fortress. As excavation of the site proceeded, it became apparent that the supposed south-western corner, located within area C1, was in fact the corner of pool 2; consequently, the statue was relocated.

enclosure serves as the northern wall of the pool. Although the natural rock could have served as the northern and eastern walls of the pool, stones were laid against the face of the rock to line it and create a retaining wall. The other two walls were also stone-built. Thick plaster layers were found on both the inner and outer faces of all the walls. We made a section into and below the pool's floor and found that the natural rock was hewn (like in the rest of the enclosure), and huge, thick flat stones neatly laid on the base rock as a floor foundation. A dark cement was used to fill the gaps between the stones, and a layer of a cement-like substance was then spread over the foundation stones. This layer (over 15 cm. thick) became the pool's floor. Interestingly, not a single sherd or any other kind of datable material was found beneath the cement floor.

In 2005, we found one blocked drain (drain 2) in the southern wall of the pool. It carried water from pool 2 either into small pool 3, or directly into channel A. In 2006, we found two more exceptionally well-built drains, which led water from pool 2 westward (fig. 13). Drain 3 begins as a small rock-cut gutter in the north-western corner of the pool, *c.* 15 cm. below its surface. The gutter curves west-ward, drops down a nicely-shaped step and continues on the built wall that rises on the northern escarpment (WC23). The later parts of the drain are built of thin worked stones in a very high-quality fashion. Drain 4 is built in the same manner, about 1 m. south of drain 3 and 50 cm. below the pool surface. It starts inside the western wall of pool 2 (WC13) and continues westward, passing above built

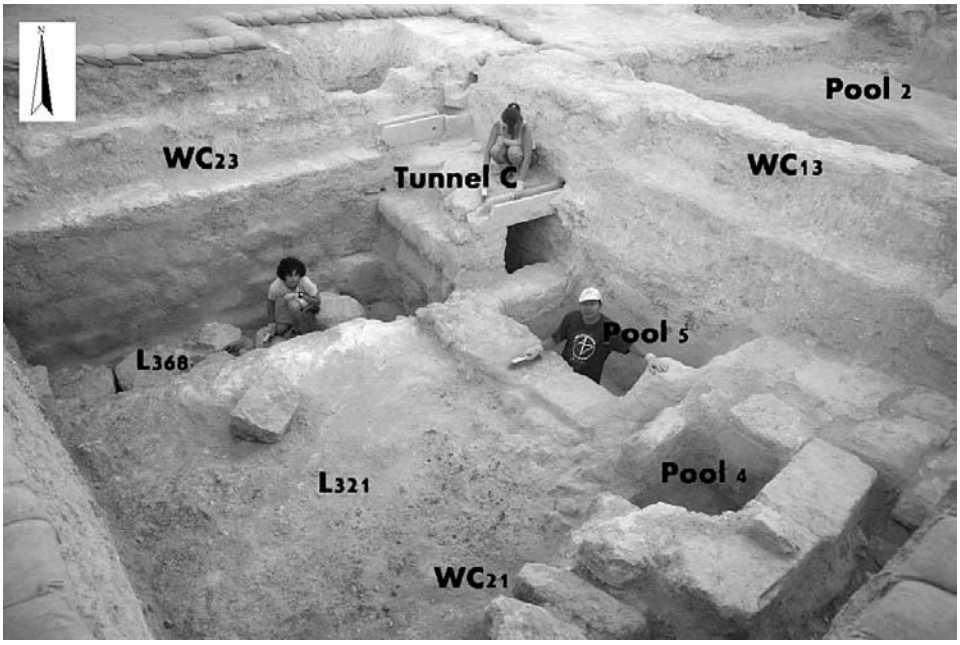

Fig. 13. Drains 3 and 4 built above channel A–C (view to the north)

channel C. It should be noted that both these drains were found blocked by layers of plaster, which means that they fell into disuse when the pool ceased to function as a pool and served to dissolve the burnt chalk stones from a kiln built nearby, by soaking them in water (phase C1-3 below).

The destination of the two drains is still obscure. Determining it depends upon an understanding of the most enigmatic part of the enclosure: the area west of pool 2 (fig. 9). Here we uncovered a plastered wall built on the northern escarpment (WC23). A ditch (*c.* 1 m. wide), to its south, was carved out of the rock. On its bottom we found large flat stones, similar in shape to the foundation stones of pool 2. South of the ditch, the flattened bedrock (which here is flint) and two small terrace walls were exposed, one to the south (WC21) and one to the west (here only a robber trench was found). The area defined by these two terrace walls and the ditch was the only one in which the 'garden soil' was missing. It seems that the two walls terraced the soil out of some 'space', the function of which cannot be ascertained. It is clear that this area underwent major changes in subsequent phases, damaging the remains of the earlier phases. One reconstruction, admittedly hypothetical, is that the ditch was part of a plastered pool, of which only the northern and eastern walls survived. The pool was built west of pool 2, on a lower level, and the two decorative drains (drains 2 and 3; see above) would have served for carrying water from the higher pool 2 into this hypothetical pool on its west.

There is no doubt that the effort needed to create the artificial garden and pools on the west of the site was exceptional. To date, we have no knowledge of similarly constructed gardens in ancient Israel. It should be understood in connection with the palatial building on top of the hill to the east and north of area C1.

The next three phases include activities that reused and damaged the enclosure and garden. To the earliest of these phases we assigned the construction of two plastered structures in channel A–C and the terrace wall to its west. The first of the two structures was noted in 2005 and numbered as 'pool 4' (fig. 9). Apparently the pool was small and plastered. The floor of the structure is mostly flat, except for a rounded depression in the south-eastern corner. The second structure, pool 5 (fig. 9), has two small steps leading down to a flat floor with a rounded depression in its south-west corner. The nature and function of these structures is not clear. Similar installations have been reported only by Aharoni and dated to between the Persian period and the Second Temple period (Aharoni 1962: 4–5, 27). The construction of the two installations evidently destroyed the underground channels, and they must therefore date from a later phase. To the same phase we assigned the building of an architectural unit in the south-eastern part of the enclosure. In constructing this unit, the eastern and southern escarpments were used as walls (WC24 and WC41 respectively; see fig. 9). Large ashlars were robbed from nearby structures and placed against the escarpment to prevent its collapse (fig. 14). The northern (WC24) and western (WC31) walls of the unit were built of similar ashlars, in

secondary use. The floor of the unit covered channel E. We noted that the floor of the architectural unit (locus 827) was laid after the cover stones of channel E had been robbed, and we concluded that the channel was out of use at the time this unit was constructed. It is also significant that the northern wall (WC24) cuts through the 'garden soil' and is therefore later. The architectural unit was violently destroyed, and a few pottery vessels, dated to the end of the Persian and the beginning of the Hellenistic period, were found on the floor. This pottery assemblage helped to date the construction of the architectural unit to the Persian period, and features such as the garden and the channels to an earlier chronological stage — probably the late Iron Age, the period to which Aharoni's palace and fort were assigned. This assumption is further supported by the high percentage of Iron Age pottery found in the earth layers above the garden.

Fig. 14. Floor 824 covered by stone and pottery debris (view to the east); note ashlar stones used for the walls built against the escarpment

A lime kiln was also found built into the enclosure (fig. 12). The kiln, found to the south of pool 2 and channel A, is rounded and built of small field stones. A very distinctive red burnt soil was found inside it. Outside, we found a layer of dark ash. These layers, like the kiln itself, were all lying on top of the 'garden soil'. A white layer of soft lime was found in the fill inside pool 2. Apparently, the plastered pool was used at this stage for dissolving the burnt chalk stones from the kiln by soaking them in water. This would explain why all the drains were found sealed by layers of plaster, preventing water from running out of the pool. The kiln was dated by associated pottery to the Hellenistic period.

The latest phase, which damaged the enclosure in this area, is a huge earth fill that covered the entire area. This fill, which appears to have been intentional, completely buried all the features described above. It was very homogeneous and contained a rich collection of pottery sherds, the latest dating from the second century BCE, arrowheads of the same chronological horizon and a large corpus of stamped handles, typical of the Iron Age and the Persian and Early Hellenistic periods.

The earth fill buried the enclosure and levelled it to the surface of the surrounding land to the east and north (the summit of the site). From that time on, the site was on the outskirts of the settlement. Most of the features found from these phases, dating from the Second Temple and the Roman and Byzantine periods, are agricultural installations cut into the natural bedrock surrounding the enclosure. A vat for a wine-press was found in the north-eastern corner of the enclosure (locus 625). Its pressing floor was probably built above pool 1.

Many sub-surface agricultural installations and some burial tombs were found carved into the rock to the east of the enclosure, among them a cave with columbaria (see below). Architectural remains from these phases include a well-constructed stone podium, built into the south-western corner of the enclosure (locus 846). Pottery and a number of tesserae collected from its foundation trench indicate that the podium, possibly the base of a small tower, was built during the Roman period or later. A wall (WC51) built of huge boulders lined along the northern escarpment marks the latest phase in the area. This boulder wall was built by the Israeli army between 1948 and 1967, in an attempt to support the defences built above and north of it.

AREA C2

Area C2 is located north of area C1 and above the lowered enclosure. In 2005 we reported on our attempt to retrace the plan of the Iron Age walls which had been exposed by Aharoni (1964: 49; cf. Reich 2003). In 2007, we returned to this area, hoping to be able to connect the palatial architecture dated by Aharoni to the Iron Age with the newly-discovered garden to the south and the west. Unfortunately, the poor state of preservation and the military trenches that cut through this area prevented any possible connection between the two architectural units. We did, however, manage to re-expose the main north–south wall of the Iron Age palace (wall west of locus 729 in Aharoni 1964: fig. 6). Having proven that the south-western corner of the Iron Age palace was not where Aharoni indicated, it seems that this wall should be viewed as the western closing wall of the palace, separating it from a projecting tower fort located to its west. A huge flat stone which constituted part of the wall may have served as a threshold leading from the palace to the west, into the projecting fort, composed of two towers.

In addition to cleaning the previously exposed Iron Age architecture, we excavated a huge subterranean space that was cut into the natural rock, just east of the wall described above (figs. 1, 15). The space had originally been cut for a *miqweh*. The rock-cut walls of the *miqweh* were plastered and decorated with a unique tree-like design. A series of steps led down into the bath. At a later stage, dated by abundant finds to the Byzantine period, the steps were carved out and the space was covered by a vaulted roof. Aharoni reported finding similar vaulted subterranean spaces in other parts of the site (see, e.g., Aharoni 1964: 14).

Fig. 15. Area C2: *miqweh* (view to the north)

SURVEY AND EXCAVATION OF UNDERGROUND SPACES

During the 2006 season, a team from the Cave Research Unit of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was invited to perform a survey to map the ancient subterranean spaces. The team, headed by R. Porat and U. Davidovich and assisted by two members of the unit, began with a general survey of the 'southern hill' of the site, bordered by Aharoni's excavation area to the north, by area D of the current expedition to the east, by the parking lot and modern road to the south and south-west, and by area C1 to the west (fig. 1). The purpose of the survey was to trace all the exposed openings to subterranean spaces, in order to shed light on subterranean activity in this area. Ten such spaces were found, all artificially hewn: two water cisterns, two *miqwaʾot*, a columbarium, two rock-cut tombs and three spaces that could not be defined. The cave with columbaria and the cave with the *miqwaʾot* were chosen for further excavations, which were carried out in 2006 and 2007.

The ritual bath excavated (fig. 1) is shaped as a stepped, subterranean rectangular cave (*c*. 3×2 m.), with three wide steps and a fourth, slightly wider, step at the bottom (fig. 16). The original hewn passage leading into the *miqweh* is sealed by later debris, into which a few steps were shaped, probably in order to use the space at a later period. While cleaning the accumulated rubbish inside, it became clear that the *miqweh* had been open in recent decades, since beer bottles and bags

were found at the bottom of the accumulation and below large fallen stones. It may have been cleaned by one of the former expeditions to the site or on some other unknown occasion. In any case, the ritual bath has now been cleared down to

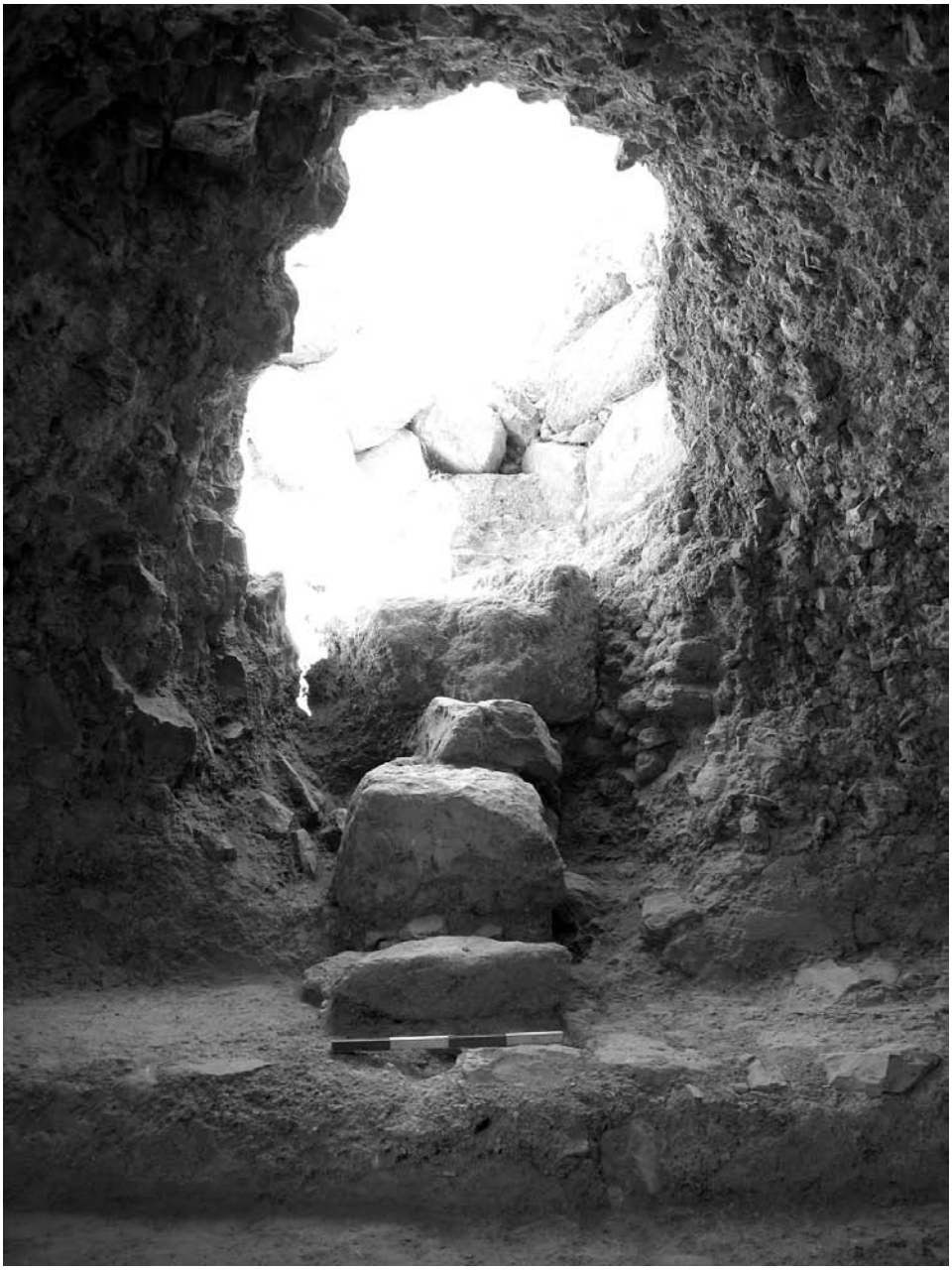

Fig. 16. *Miqweh* between areas C1 and D1

the bottom. It constitutes another nearly complete example — the seventh to be found at Ramat Raḥel — of this typical Second Temple period Jewish ritual bath. It thus helps to estimate the perimeter of the settlement in that period, a relatively under-represented time-span in the above-ground architecture of Ramat Raḥel.

The excavation in the columbarium area led to the realisation that the subterranean complex is much more elaborate than previously thought. At least two ancient entrances into the complex were found — one originally thought to be an opening into a different cave. Two additional chambers containing columbarium niches were found, as well as two further dividing walls within the subterranean zone. From the viewpoint of relative chronology, we may define at least five different phases. However, no definite conclusions can be drawn with regard to the absolute dating of the various elements and phases, except the accumulation inside chambers D and E after they fell into disuse. Though the pottery assemblages require further study, it seems safe to state that the columbarium complex functioned before the Late Roman period and possibly even before the end of the Second Temple period, since pottery, stone vessels and glass objects dating from these periods were found in the above-mentioned accumulations. The ancient hewing (chamber F) found below chamber A of the complex should be dated to the Hellenistic period, if not earlier.

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