



BETHSAIDA EXCAVATIONS PROJECT THE SEASON OF 2004 FIELD REPORT

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The expedition

The 2004 excavation season at Bethsaida extended over a period of 6 weeks from May to July and an additional week in October 2004. The director of the dig is Rami Arav (University of Nebraska at Omaha, UNO) with the participation of Elizabeth McNamer and her students (Rocky Mountain College Billings MT), Carl Savage (Drew University) assistant to the director, Steve Collins and his students (Trinity Southwest University), Stephen Reynolds – archivist (UNO), Christine Delante photographer (Hartford University), Nicolae Roddy coordinator (Creighton University).

The Excavations

The excavations this season concentrated in two main areas, the gate – Area A and the Hellenistic Roman residential section, area C. A total of 23 loci were excavated in Area A and 3 in area C. Since the first excavations season, the excavation system of Bethsaida suggests replacing locus numbers as soon as changes in the terrain are noticed this in order to reduce the possibility of getting pottery mixed from more than one deposit. Some of the loci will consolidate in the process of the final report.

Area A

The main purpose of excavations in this area was twofold,

- A) To discover more architectural and small finds remains from Stratum 6 in order to retrieve the shape and pattern of the gate in this Stratum and to facilitate solid dating for it.
- B) To reveal more of the Hellenistic and Roman occupation in this area.

Sounding in Chamber 4

In order to obtain a better understanding of Stratum 6 city gate we continued the probe in chamber 4, we started in 2003. Two packed dirt floors were reached before bed rock. The floors were cut by foundation trenches of the walls of Chamber 4. This fact indicates that unlike the Outer city gate, the Four Chamber city gate, which is also the inner gate of the Stratum 5 complex, does not continue Stratum 6 structures in this area and clearly implies that Stratum 6 looked different under the Inner City Gate.

Bed rock was reached at the level of -170.80 about 2 meters under the floor of Stratum 5. (168.82). It is noteworthy that the floor of Stratum 6 in the courtyard is another 2 meters lower (-172.77). It means that in a short distance of 10 meters, the floor of the gate of Stratum 6, raises more than 2 meters. In comparison, the difference between the outer gate and the inner gate floor of Stratum 5 is only one meter. It means that the destruction layer of Stratum 6 at the area of the outer gate was thicker and apparently this area suffered heavier damage than the inner city gate. However, it is also possible that the inner city gate of Stratum 5 (the Four Chamber city gate) represents a new concept and was installed after leveling the debris

of Stratum 6. The architecture of this section is still unknown and in the next seasons we will attempt to make it clear.

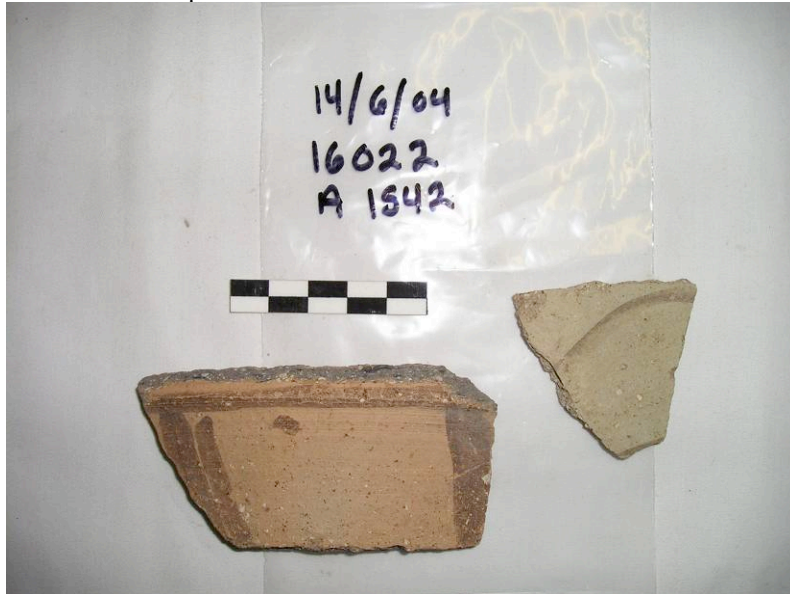
Lists of loci in this probe: 1540, 1542, 1543, 1546, 1549, 1550

Locus 1540

Thirteen baskets of finds were collected from this locus. The main activity of this locus was removing debris of red brick material and rocks until reaching a floor. Pottery shards include IA IIA bowls, craters, recycled pottery in stopper shape, jars, red slip pottery, cooking pots, two clay beads, bones and basalt grinding stones,

Locus 1542

A hard packed dirt floor was removed and the finds include monochrome decorated ware in addition to red slip and burnish ware. These shards are dated to late 11th or early 10th century BCE.



Locus 1542, monochrome ware, late 11th century BCE to early 10th century BCE

Locus 1543

This locus number was designated to removal of a floor, the last one before reaching bed rock. The shards of pottery in this locus included early forms of IAIIa pottery, red slip and burnished ring based bowls and even a handle with “palm tree” decoration typically to the last phases of the Late Bronze Age. The date of the locus and the stratum is determined by the latest find and will be late 11th, early 10th centuries BCE.



Locus 1543, Red slip and burnished ware, decorated handle.

Locus 1546

This locus was designated for the level immediately below the floor level. Shards of pottery that were retrieved from this locus include early forms of IA Ila pottery

Locus 1549

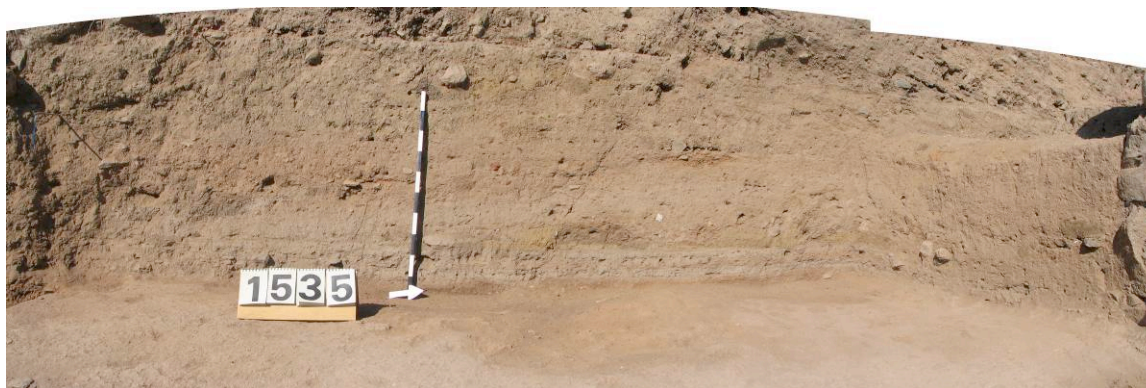
This locus was designated for cleaning what seems to be a cobble stone pavement.

Locus 1550

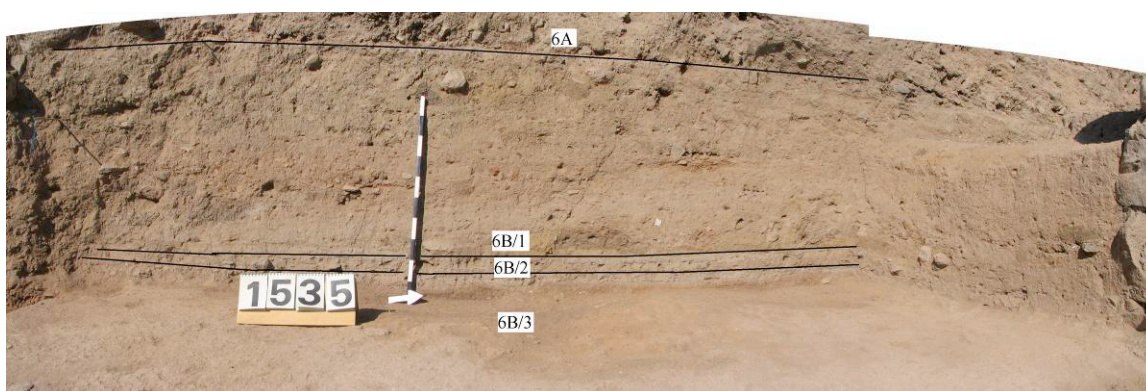
This is the deepest locus where bed rock was reached. Few shards of pottery were found among small gravel and compact dirt and it seems that this layer served as an infrastructure of the floor above. The small finds include bones and shards of pottery that seem to be early forms of IAIIa and a nice flint blade.

Sounding in the Courtyard

The courtyard contained a very thick accumulation of dirt consisted of floor levels destructions, fills and infrastructure indicative of a very long use of this place as a courtyard. The floors were made of compact dirt with very few stones and not much pottery. Three floors (6B/3, 6B/2 and 6B/1) were found accumulated one on top of each other in a difference of about 10 centimeters. The next floor (6A) was found on top of a thick layer of debris (about one meter) above the 6B1, and signifies a different level. While the floors 6B/1/2/3, represent natural accumulation, 6A represents a new level built on top of collapse.



Courtyard section



Wall section of the courtyard; the black lines emphasize the different levels. The outer gate is at the right of the picture. The view is to the west. The compact floor of stratum 6B/3 is the earliest floor of the gate. About 10 cm. above this floor there is another compact floor, Stratum 6B/2, which is perhaps repair and renovations. At an elevation of about 10 cm. above this there is another compact floor, Stratum 6B/1, with presumably a similar history. This floor is covered with a meter high level of debris consisting of broken bricks small stones and plaster. Above it there is a very obvious floor, designated as 6A. A level of one meter of debris separates this floor and the stone pavement of Stratum 5.

The lowest floor, built on top of rough cobbles was made of compact dirt. A few oak tree posts were found near the outer city gate and formed a canopy for an unknown device. It was dubbed here as “the Falafel stand”.

The following loci constitute the probe in the courtyard: 1538, 1539, 1541, 1544, 1545, 1547, 1551, 1552, 1553

Locus 1538

This locus constitutes a large number of baskets and represents a sounding of 110 cm. in the courtyard. The dirt excavated was debris of bricks and small rocks. Finds were small fragments of animal bones and about 1,300 shards of pottery. This fact clearly indicates that when the structures collapsed there were no intact vessels on the floors. The relatively small amount of shards of pottery may indicate that the shards were originally incorporated in the brick work. Noteworthy is a shard of pottery with three ink marks probably belonging to an ostrakon. In addition to it we discovered a clay bead and a shard of a perforated cup. A single iron arrow head found in this debris may indicate that the collapse of the structures were a result of a military action. This locus belongs to Stratum 6B/1.



Locus 1538, ink marks on a shard.



Locus 1538, Iron arrow head



Locus 1538, clay bead

Locus 1539

This locus continues the removal of the Roman wall collapse and contains mainly Roman and Hellenistic period finds. Among the finds there are Galilean bowls, ETS shards and glass.



Locus 1539, Glass pieces from the Roman period.



Locus 1539, Iron bracelet



Locus 1539, a fragment of limestone vessel

Locus 1541

This small locus was confined to a part of the courtyard and is combined with 1538. Pottery finds include red slip and burnished IAlIa shards of pottery from the early stages of the 10th century BCE.

Locus 1544

This locus was a small pit excavated into the floor. Few bones and not too many shards of pottery were found there. The shards include deep grooved jar neck and ring base bowls.

Locus 1545

This locus continues Locus 1539. Hellenistic and Roman finds are still mixed with growing number of IAlIa finds.



Locus 1545, indicative shards and bones from basket 17029, among Hellenistic and Roman there are IAlIa shards.

Locus 1547

This locus represents the levels under the remains of the Roman debris. The floor of the courtyard was reached at the bottom of this area and the finds were all dating from IAlIa. Among the pottery finds there are red slip and burnished pottery shards together with Cypro-Phoenician shards.

Locus 1551

This is a pit with shards from the top mixed with locus 1544. Very few shards and small pieces of flint were discovered in the pit.

Locus 1552

This is a smaller pit which contained 5 shards of IAI pottery.

Locus 1553

This locus constitutes the finds from the floor of the courtyard. This is the first floor of the courtyard. Very few pottery shards were discovered on this floor and it means that when the structures were destroyed there was no single intact vessel on the floor. This fact may indicate an accidental discovery or well expected destruction in which the inhabitants removed all worthy objects away.

The floor was made of compact dirt and leveled nicely. Next to the corner of the outer city gate three carbonated oak tree posts were discovered. They measured 5 by 5 cm. In addition to it, a post hole was discovered in front the oak posts. This discovery indicates a booth or a canopy near the entrance. It was dubbed by us as the “falafel stand”. The carbonated wood was taken to C¹⁴ analysis. The few diagnostic shards collected from this locus indicate early IAI shards of pottery. It includes red slip and burnished bowl shards.

Sounding Chamber 2

A probe (3.45 by 2.5 m.) was excavated at Chamber 2 in order to retrieve more information on the architecture and the date of Stratum 6. On the last days of the excavations, a level of stones was discovered at the probe. It is not yet clear whether this level is the top of a remaining architecture or it is a layer of debris. The pottery shards indicate clearly an IAIIa dating and include red slip and burnished bowl shards as well as flints, bones and plaster fragments.

The loci in this area were: 1554, 1704.



Locus 1704 in Chamber 2, a level of stones appears under the floor of Chamber 2 Stratum 5. Further excavations will determine whether this level is part of a structure or debris.



Locus 1704, Iron Age IIA shards of pottery, notice the cooking pots, jars, and red slip and burnished bowls.



Locus 1704, Iron Age IIA shards of pottery, notice the red slip and burnished shards, cooking pots and bowls and a double handle red slip and burnish Phoenician shard.

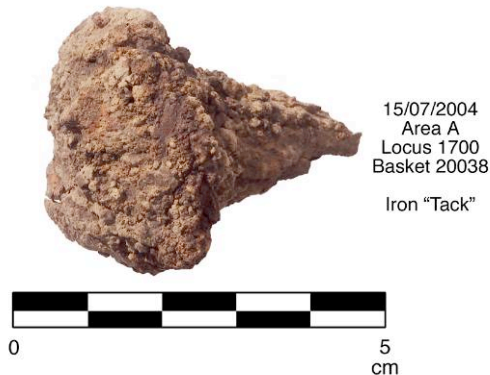
Area A West

This area, supervised by Dr. Carl Savage, is located at the south of the Roman temple in squares H, 53, 54. The main purpose for excavating this area was to retrieve more information about the temple's area and to see how it looked like during the Roman period.

The loci excavated in this area are: 1700, 1701, 1702, 1703.

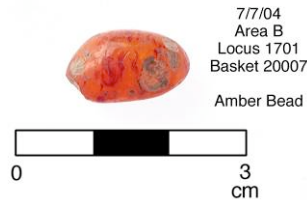
Locus 1700

This locus is immediately south of the southern wall of the temple. The floor of this area was composed of small field stones situated loosely on a dirt floor. Finds included shards of cooking pots in the types of long neck, and a triple ridge on rim, as well as Roman jars, jugs and Galilean bowls. Additionally to these there were very few Eastern Terra Sigillata (ETS) shards including a Hellenistic "fish bowl" and black Athenian shards obviously out of their original context. A nice shard of a type known as Apulian ware and Roman first century glass shards were also found. The most impressive find was a decoration iron nail used to decorate doors. It is very plausible that originally it decorated the door of the temple.



Locus 1701

A distance of about 2 meter south of the southern temple wall there is a wall running somewhat parallel to the temple's wall but built of inferior quality. The top of this wall is designated as locus 1701. Work on this locus began with removal of scattered remains of a tomb, perhaps Bedouin. Finds in this area include Roman glass, clay pyramidal loom weight. Pottery shards clearly indicate a mix area in which Hellenistic and Roman shards were found mixed together. Hellenistic shards include ungentaria, decorated jars, Spattered Wash Ware, Megarian and ETS shards, Roman pottery shards include Herodian and Roman oil lamps, glass and Galilean bowls. A nice carnelian bead was also discovered.



A first century glass shard of a decorated plate.

Locus 1702

South of Locus 1701 is Locus 1702. It contains finds from debris resting on remnants of a hard packed floor (– 167.85). Pottery shards include Hellenistic Roman cooking pots, ETS and a fragment of a Megarian bowl, fragments of Rhodian wine amphora, Spatter Washed Ware, Galilean bowl and a coin which has not yet been deciphered. The date of this floor would be determined by the latest finds and that would be first century CE.



Locus 1703

This locus number continues Locus 1536 from season 2003 and constitutes cleaning large stones, perhaps the top of an Iron Age structure.

Area C

Area C consists of a residential houses dating from the Hellenistic to the Roman periods. This season it was determined that a pavement found next to a wall is a part of a cobble paved street, 1.65 m. wide, that runs east-west and intersects with the segment of a north-south cobble paved street that was discovered in 1994. Three loci were excavated in this area this season. One locus (locus 562) contains the area prior to the discovery of the segment of a house. Once the walls of the house were discerned this locus

was divided into two different loci, one designated to the indoor area of the house (Locus 563) and one for the outdoor area (Locus 564). Few pottery shards were found and mostly are 2nd to the 1st centuries BCE.

Locus 562

This locus signifies the entire excavated area in this section before the walls forming a segment of a building were discovered. Among the finds there was a bronze fibula decorated with small projections on a square section shape handles.



Locus 563

The walls that form the structure were preserved to an altitude of two courses. They are about 70 cm. wide and built of field stones. The lintel of the entrance to the structure was found lying next to the entrance.

Locus 564

This locus constitutes the open area outside of the structures. Scattered stones were found all over the locus which originated from the collapse of the walls of the structures.

2084

