Bethsaida Excavation

Report on the Season of 2022

Rami Arav, Carl Savage, Ann Haverkost

The Expedition

The excavation season of 2022 lasted 10 days, from May 17 to 27, 2022. Only a small number of staff members took part in it. The team included Dr. Carl Savage and his son Itai, Ann Haverkost, photographer Hanan Shafir and Prof. Rami Arav. Nic Birt, the architect of the expedition, received the field ground plans and incorporated them into AutoCAD, which is published in this report. Dr. Greg Jenks, the numismatic curator of the expedition and the website master, incorporated this report in the Bethsaida website (www.Bethsaidaarchaeology.org). The excavation was sponsored by the Hebrew Union College Jerusalem, headed by Dr. David Ilan. Pottery drawing was performed by DreAnna Hadash. Similar to previous years, the expedition resided in Kibbutz Gadot.

The excavation (fig. 1)

The excavation season of 2022 was dedicated to a probe researching the eastern edge of the plaza in front of the inner-city gate in Stratum VI (Squares M,N, 61). The city in Stratum VI featured an outer and inner-city gate. The outer city gate was excavated years earlier and was found to be located below Stratum V city-gate (N,O,P 52,53). A massive tower was built next to the eastern wing of the outer-city gate. A 6 m wide and 15 m long wall connected the tower to another tower and a thinner wall, 2 m wide, continued to the plaza of the inner-city gate and ends not in a 90 degrees corner, but with an angle (M,N, 57,58,59). This end of a wall is not recorded in any other place.

The inner-city gate of Stratum VI was approached by a long courtyard of 35 m, extending from the outer edge to the inner city-gate. Since it is covered by the Stratum V city wall, storage building and the inner city-gate, the western wall of the courtyard can only be presumed. However, a segment of it was discerned in Ground Penetrating Radar in square M 54 but has not been excavated. If indeed this line is correct, and reaches the northern tower of the inner city-gate, then at its northern end, the courtyard was 13 m wide and at the southern end it measured only 4 m.

Two towers flanked the Stratum VI inner-city gate (fig. 2). A high place was built at the façade of the southern tower (fig. 3). The high place contained two steps leading to a podium. Two aniconic stelae and one iconic stele were found on the high place. Two stages of construction were discerned at the inner city-gate. In both stages the courtyard was repaved. The earlier pavement was constructed together with the high place at the elevation of 173.31 MBSL. The upper pavement is about 42 cm higher and is associated with a drainage canal that led from the inner city to the ravine at the east of the mound. The southern half of the southern tower was renovated with a slight change in its angle. Most probably, this was done not to damage the high place. The northern façade of the southern tower was also changed and reinforced.

Since the cobblestone floor of the courtyard continues east, beyond the wall extending from the southern tower, it was necessary to find out if the southern part of the city was left undefended.

A probe was excavated in the season of 2019 and continued in the season of 2022. The probe skewed slightly from east-west direction, measured 2 X 6.5 m and was located at squares M, N, 60,61.

Eight loci were excavated in the 2022 season. One locus number 1281 was excavated already in 2019 and was continued in the early days of the season of 2022. A week through the excavation, a wall (W1200) running north-south was discovered. This was the wall whose existence had been anticipated The wall was found to be surprisingly thin, slightly short of 1 m wide, and was built on outer and inner face large stones with small stones

filling the space between the inner and outer faces. Since only 2 m of the length of the wall has been excavated, it is assumed that the wall reaches the tower in square O,P 57, 58. If this reconstruction of the wall is correct, then it must have created a space of 2.6 m between the parallel western wall that ends in the plaza in front of the inner city-gate. The southern extent of the wall is, at this point, unknown. There may be another outer city gate down at the slope of the mound towards the spring. However, the passageway to the spring at the bottom of the mound is naturally expected and further excavation will determine if there was another city-gate in the southeastern slope of the mound.

East of Wall 1200 a large heap of stones laying in disorder were discovered. Apparently, it is the debris of W1200. Their large number and size allude to the fact that the wall was built by field stones to substantial height. Bricks were built on top of the wall. The wall was most probably plastered. The debris primarily on the east of the wall may indicate that the reason for the collapse was an earthquake, perhaps the one that occurred in the first half of the fourth century CE.

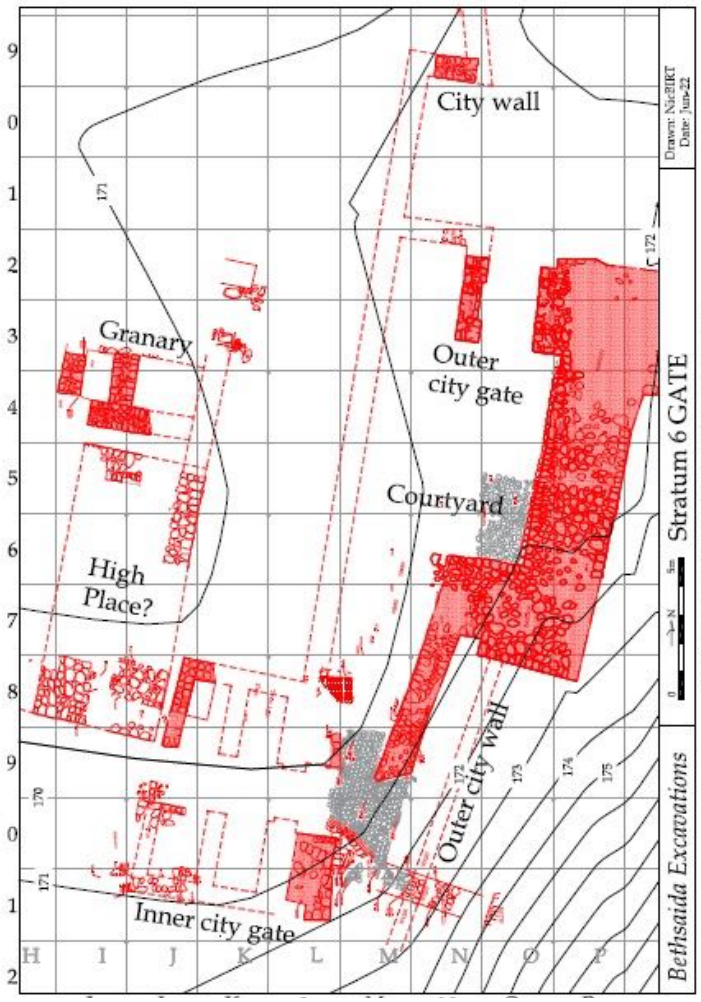


Figure 1. Stratum VI

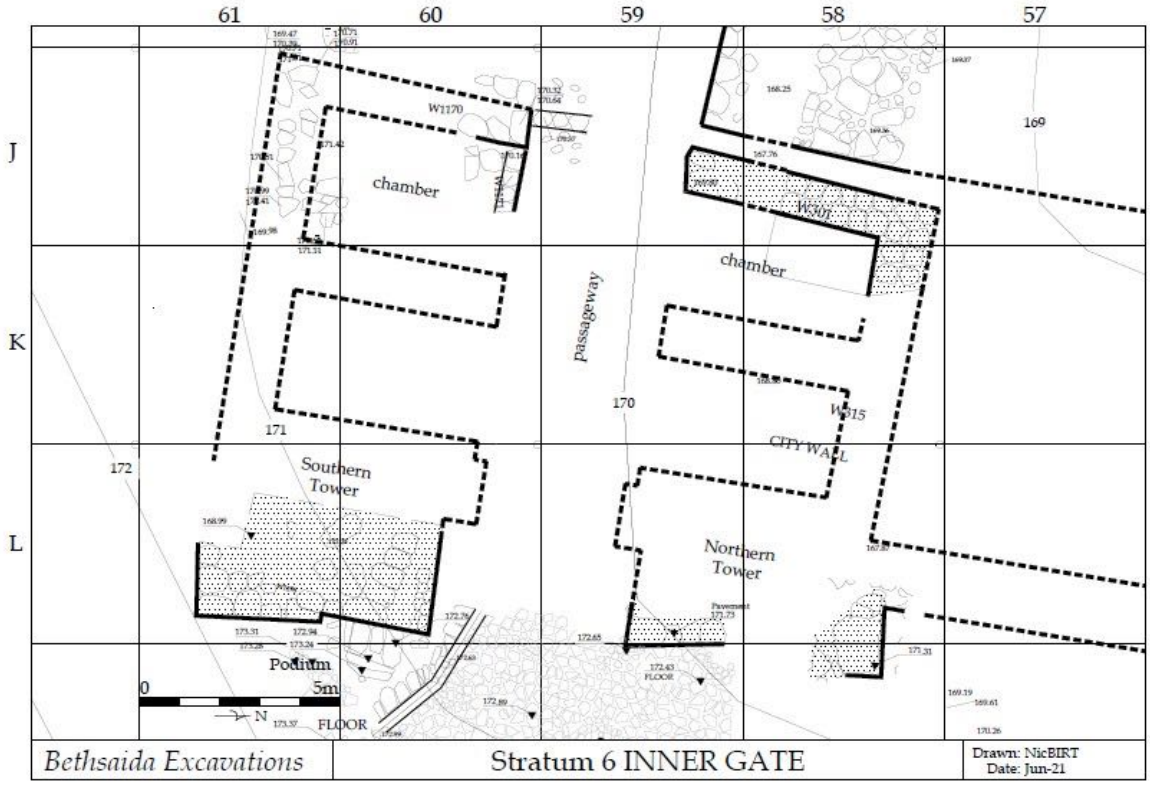


Figure 2, Section of the High Place at Stratum VI.

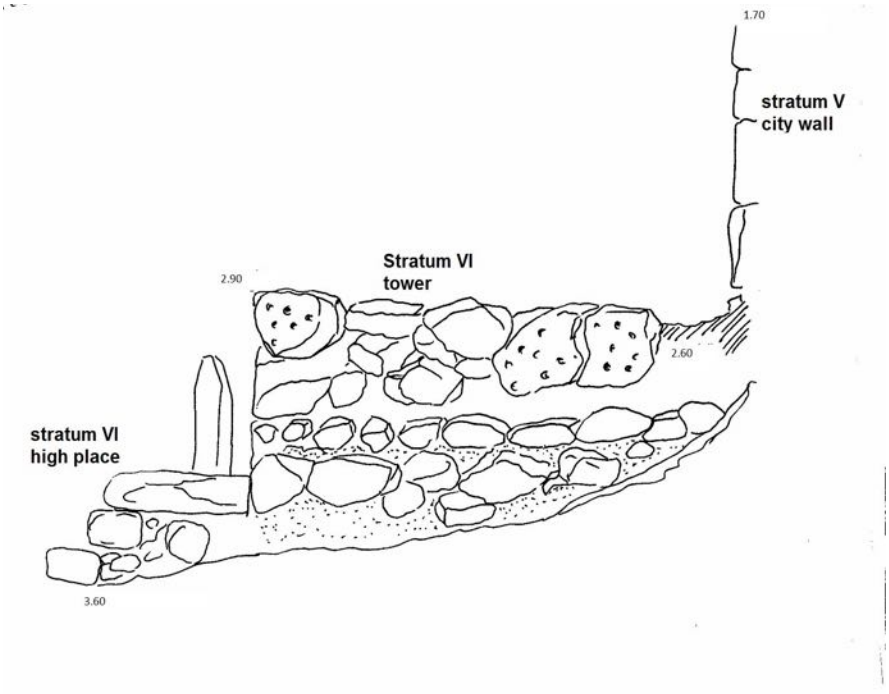


Figure 3. A section of the remains of Stratum VI southern tower and the high place

Small Finds:

A 2 m wide Roman city wall (Stratum II) runs on top of a 6 m wide Stratum V city wall, and on top of Stratum VI Inner city-gate. In addition to creating enormous difficulties in excavating the inner city-gate, it seems that the small finds discovered at the probe, east of the city walls and inner city-gate, can teach us something about refuse practices in ancient Bethsaida. Similar to the drainage canal that runs to the ravine, through the ages, the inhabitants of Bethsaida opted to discard refuse, pottery shards, animal bones and even broken architectural remains over the city walls down into the ravine. No single intact pottery vessel was discovered in the probe. The small finds collected in the probe included shards ranging from Iron Age II to Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Among the most interesting pieces that were discarded, was a large piece of limestone, perhaps a fragment of Corinthian capital. Another piece of limestone with a groove may have come from limestone vessels, a marker of Jewish presence.

Excavated Loci in 2022.

Locus 1281

Figure 4. Locus 1281, Stratum VI High Place in the background.

This locus was first excavated on January 19, 2019 as a probe to determine the eastern edge of the courtyard. The probe started at 173.23 MBSL and ended at 173.66 MBSL. Four baskets were recorded for this locus.

Figure 5. Locus 1281, Random collapse of W1200

Small Finds include small shards of pottery ranging from Iron Age (most of the shards), Hellenistic jars and small Hellenistic hemispherical bowl, Medieval pottery, and Turkish clay pipes.

Figure 6. Pottery shards from Locus 1281 basket 12803, notice the Everted Rim Casserole of the first century CE

After a few days of digging the inner face of W1200 appeared. The wall was constructed with large stones about 30 cm long.

Figu *ıre.*

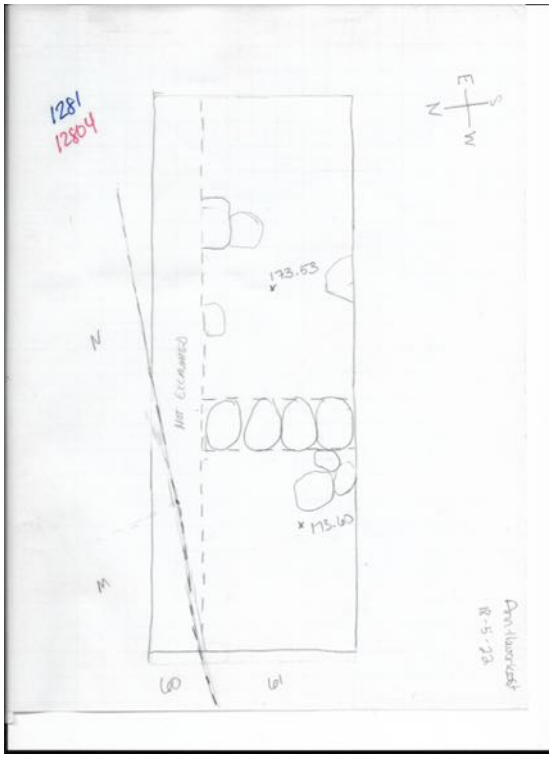


Figure 8. Locus 1281, W1200 was discovered.

Locus 1283

Once W1200 was discovered, the probe was divided into two loci. West of W1200 was a new locus numbered 1283. The upper elevation was recorded in 173.59 MBSL and the lower elevation was 173.63 MBSL. The main work in the locus included uncovering a pavement and compact dirt floor.

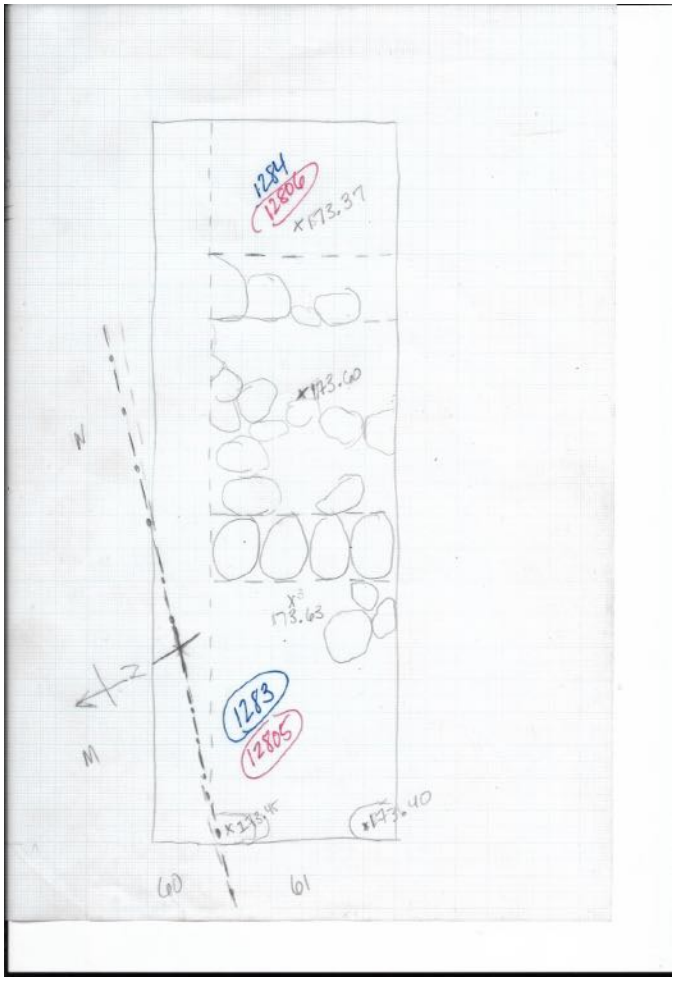


Figure 9. Locus 1283. The Probe was skewed from excavation grid.

The Small Finds include Iron Age II shards of pottery, fragments of basalt bowl, bones and Hellenistic shards of pottery.

The excavation probe was extended 0.5 m to the north and was now 2 m wide.

Figure 10. Shards from locus 1283, basket 12807. At right an Iron Age II rim of a bowl.

Locus 1284 (fig. 11, 12,13,14)

The locus extended from W1200 to the eastern edge of the mound. The distance from W1200 to the first step of the high place is 4.65m. This is the width of the plaza in front of the inner city-gate.

The locus consists of debris of W1200, that may have come down in the 4th century CE when a severe earthquake shocked the region. Apparently, most of the walls of Bethsaida were still visible above the ground to a substantial elevation before the earthquake took place.

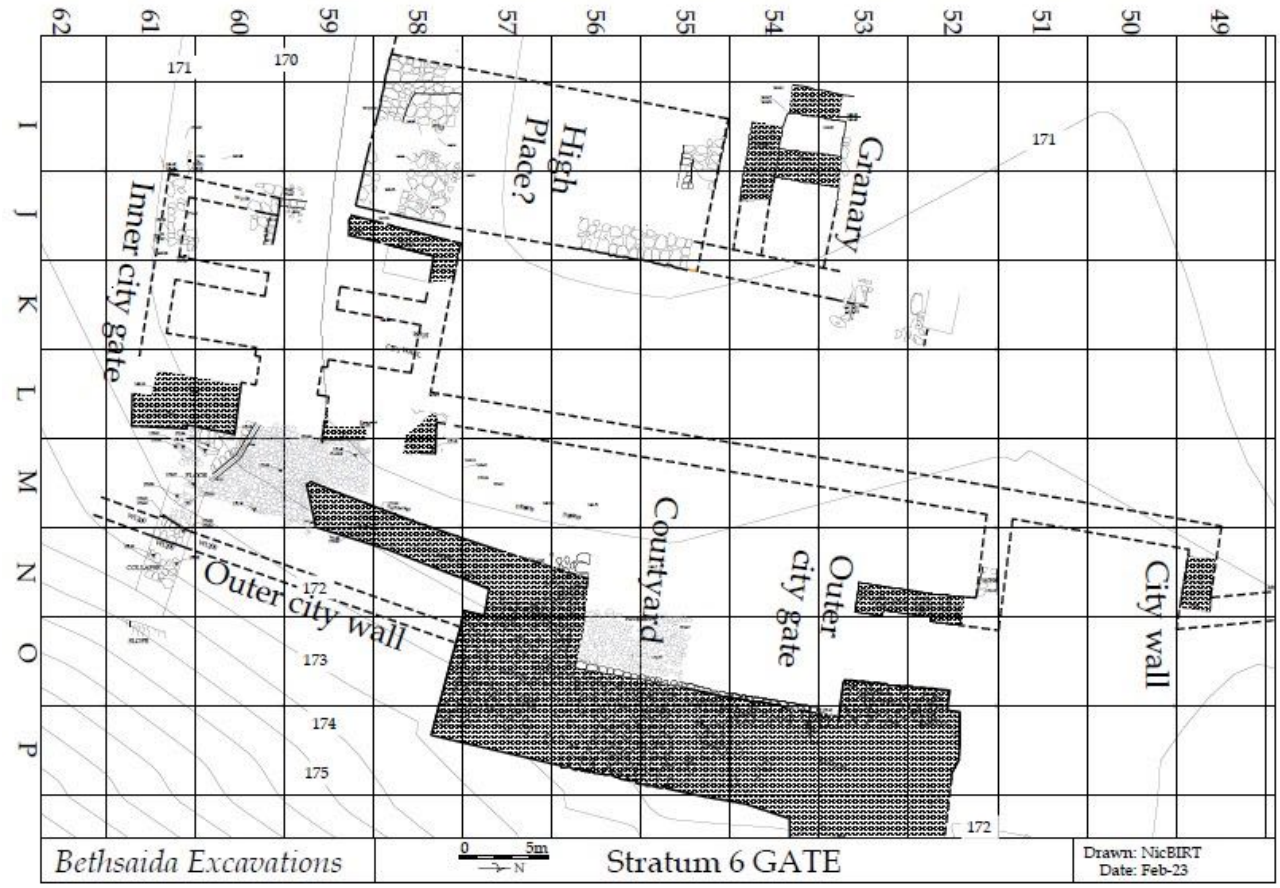


Figure 11. Stratum VI, The Outer City Wall is W1200.

Figure 12. Stratum VI probe, Locus 1284 at right, debris of W1200 between L. 1284 and L. 1286

Figure 13. The debris of W1200 in Locus 1284

Figure 14. The collapse of W1200 in Locus 1284

Small Finds

As in other find baskets of the probe, the shards of pottery range from Iron Age II to Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Exceptional finds were:

1. A Cypro-Phoenician, red slip and burnished pottery body shard of pottery.

Figure 15. A Cypro-Phoenician shard of pottery, red slip and burnished.

2. A basalt round stone, perhaps a large sling stone.
3. A piece of limestone was discovered among the debris of L.1284. Most probably it is a fragment of a Corinthian capital. The terrain of the Golan plateau, Bethsaida included, is basalt (except for Mount Hermon). Limestone is totally absent from the Geology of the Bethsaida area. Every piece of limestone found at the excavation of Bethsaida, was imported from outside the Golan. Therefore, the piece of limestone below is a mutilated fragment of an architectural element. During the excavation seasons, a few fragments of limestone architectural elements, and even one small piece of marble, were discovered in the vicinity of the temple. Thus, it seems very possible that this fragment originated from the temple.

Figure 16. A limestone fragment of a possible Corintian capital.

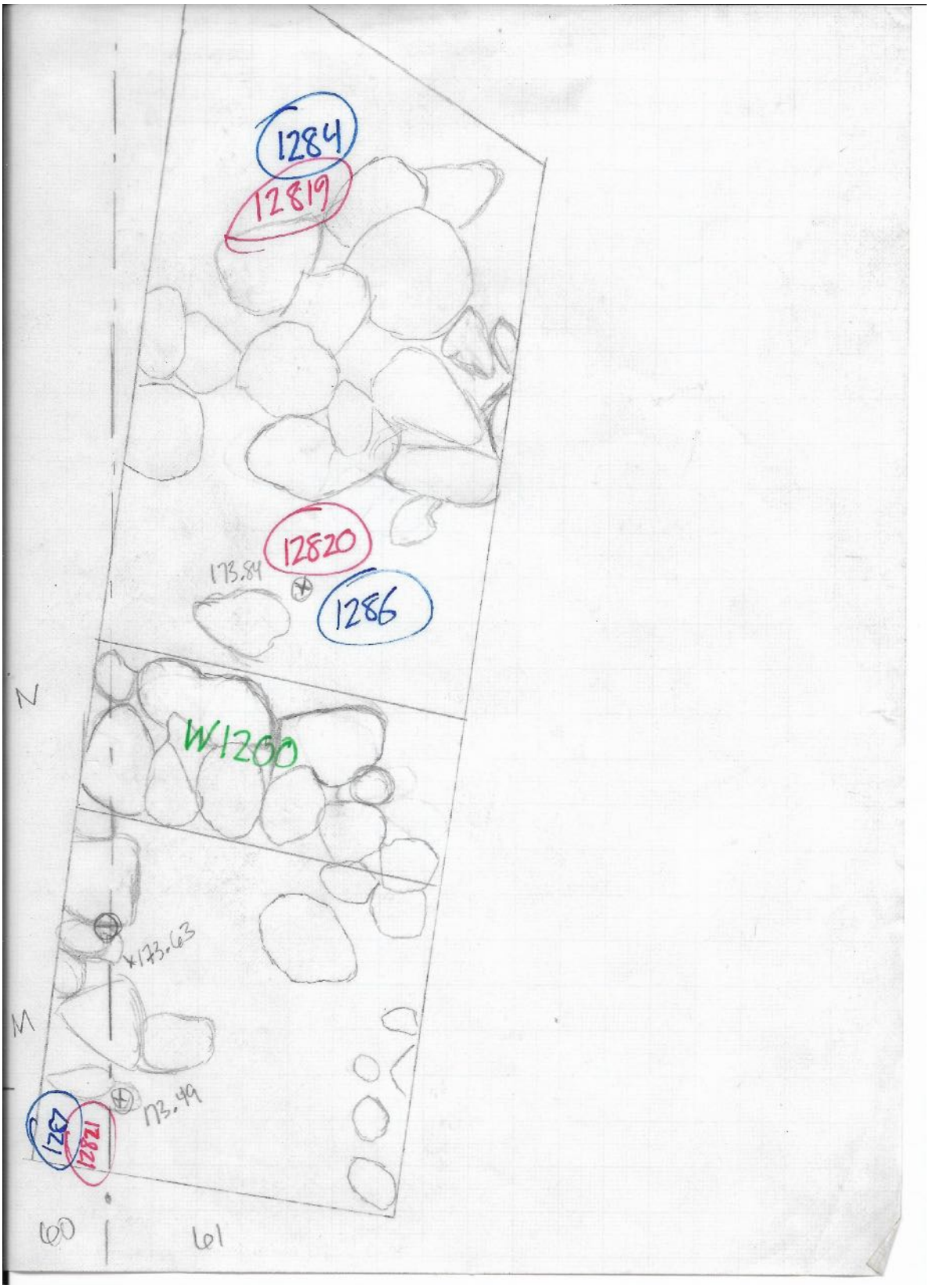


Figure 17. Daily graph of the probe. Notice the debris between L.1284 and L.1286

Locus 1285

The extension of the probe to the north was marked as Locus 1285 and it stretched from W1200 to the courtyard pavement at the west of the locus.

The upper elevation of Locus 1285 was 173.07 MBSL. During the excavation, a layer of 0.5 m, containing fragments of burnt mud bricks and small stones, was found above a pavement that connects to the cobblestone of the courtyard. The elevation of this pavement was 173.57 MBSL, 0.30 m lower than the earlier pavement of the courtyard near the high place. Already in 2019 it has been found that the courtyard in front of the inner city-gate, was paved twice. The earliest and the lower pavement was below the first step of the high place. (The elevation of the lower step of the high place was 173.24 MBSL, and the elevation of the low pavement was between 173.28 and 173.31MBSL, meaning about 10 cm was the low pavement lower than the first step). But the upper pavement was higher than the first step of the high place (172.89 MBSL), which created a strange situation in which the steps of the high place were lower than the courtyard pavement. Yet, the lower pavement formed a moderate slope further to W1200.

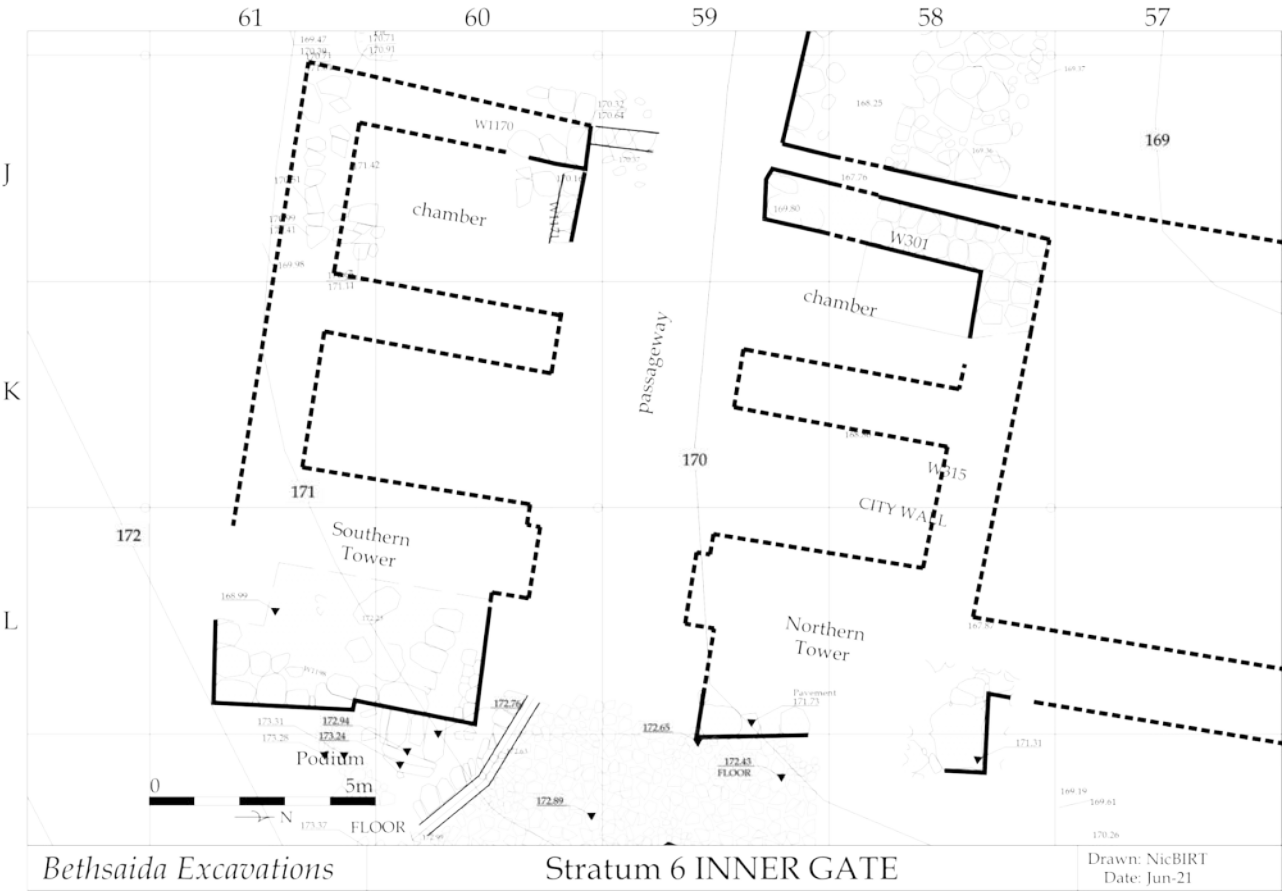


Figure 18. Stratum VI Inner City Gate, notice the different elevation of the lower floor south of the high place and the upper floor north of the high place.

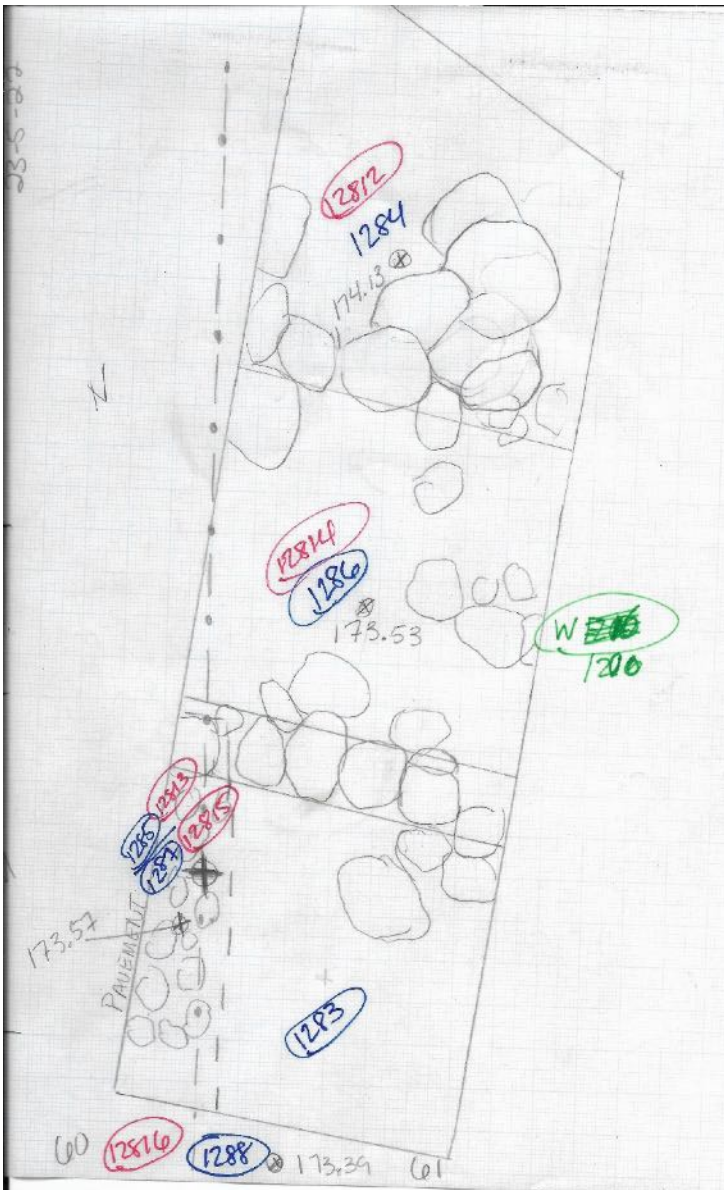


Figure 19. Daily graph of May 25, 2022.

Figure 20. Locus 1285. Topsoil has been removed and below are the original deposits. Locus 1283 shows the pavement of the 11 century BCE floor.

Small Finds

Pottery shards discovered at this locus are similar to the other finds in the probe and vary from Iron Age II to the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Among the exceptional finds was a piece of limestone with a groove along its flat side. It seems that this was a part of limestone vessel. A typical Jewish marker.

Figure 21. Limestone fragment with a groove, perhaps a fragment of vessel.

Locus 1286

This locus is located between W1200 and the debris of the wall on the east side of the wall.

The excavation revealed the outer face of W1200 which was one course lower than the western face, perhaps an indicator of an east-west shock wave of the earthquake. Three courses of basalt field stones made this face of the wall. As stated earlier, the width of W1200 is slightly less than 1 m. The wall was most probably not built to the top by basalt field stones, but the upper part was constructed with mud bricks and plastered to disclose the stone part from the brick part of the wall.

Figure 22. Locus 1286 east of W1200

Small Finds

Five baskets were collected at this locus, they contained Iron Age II pottery shards, and shards of Hellenistic small deep hemispherical bowl, shards of juglets, bottles and vases, Shards of Rhodian wine amphora, early Roman cups, and jugs and small pieces of limestone.

Figure 23, Diagnostic shards from Locus 1286.

Figure 24. Diagnostic shards from Locus 1286, at the upper left side an Iron Age II bowl, lower right side a Hellenistic/Roman cooking pot.

Locus 1287

Locus above is 1285. The upper elevation was 173.61 MBSL and lower elevation was 173.74 MBSL. Work on this locus included removing an upper pavement and a baulk under the pavement.

Scattered stones were found at the transition between L.1283, L.1287 and L. 1288.

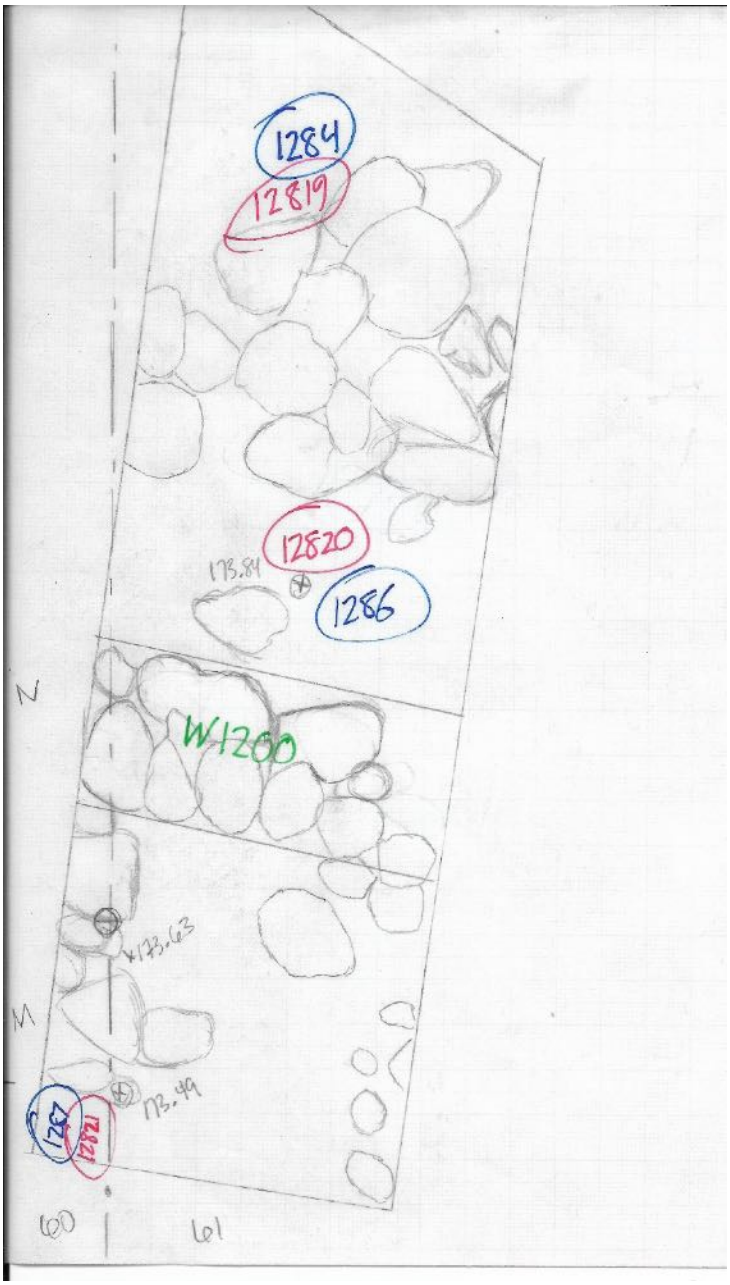


Figure 25. Daily graph of the probe. L. 1287 is at the bottom left side of the picture.

Finds

A few shards of pottery were found in this locus. As similar to finds in this probe, they include shards of Iron Age II jars and a few undiagnostic Hellenistic Roman pottery shards.

Locus 1288

The locus is located west of L. 1283 and east of the drainage canal that runs near the high place. The elevation of this locus is 173.38 MBSL, about 0.4 m higher than the pavement at 1287. It consists of cleaning the pavement excavated in 2019. No finds were found in this locus.

Locus 1289

The locus above 1289 is L.1287. Work in this locus consisted of removing dirt from the cobblestone pavement of the courtyard.

The cobblestone pavement was covered by hard packed dirt floor. The elevation of this floor was recorded at 173.54 MBSL. about 10 cm above the cobblestone pavement. Near W1200 the cobblestone pavement was recorded at 173.64 MBSL.

Finds from this locus were similar to the rest of the probe, Iron Age II mixed with Hellenistic Roman shards. That means that W1200 was still standing at a considerable level and collapsed in the strong earthquake of the early 4th century CE.

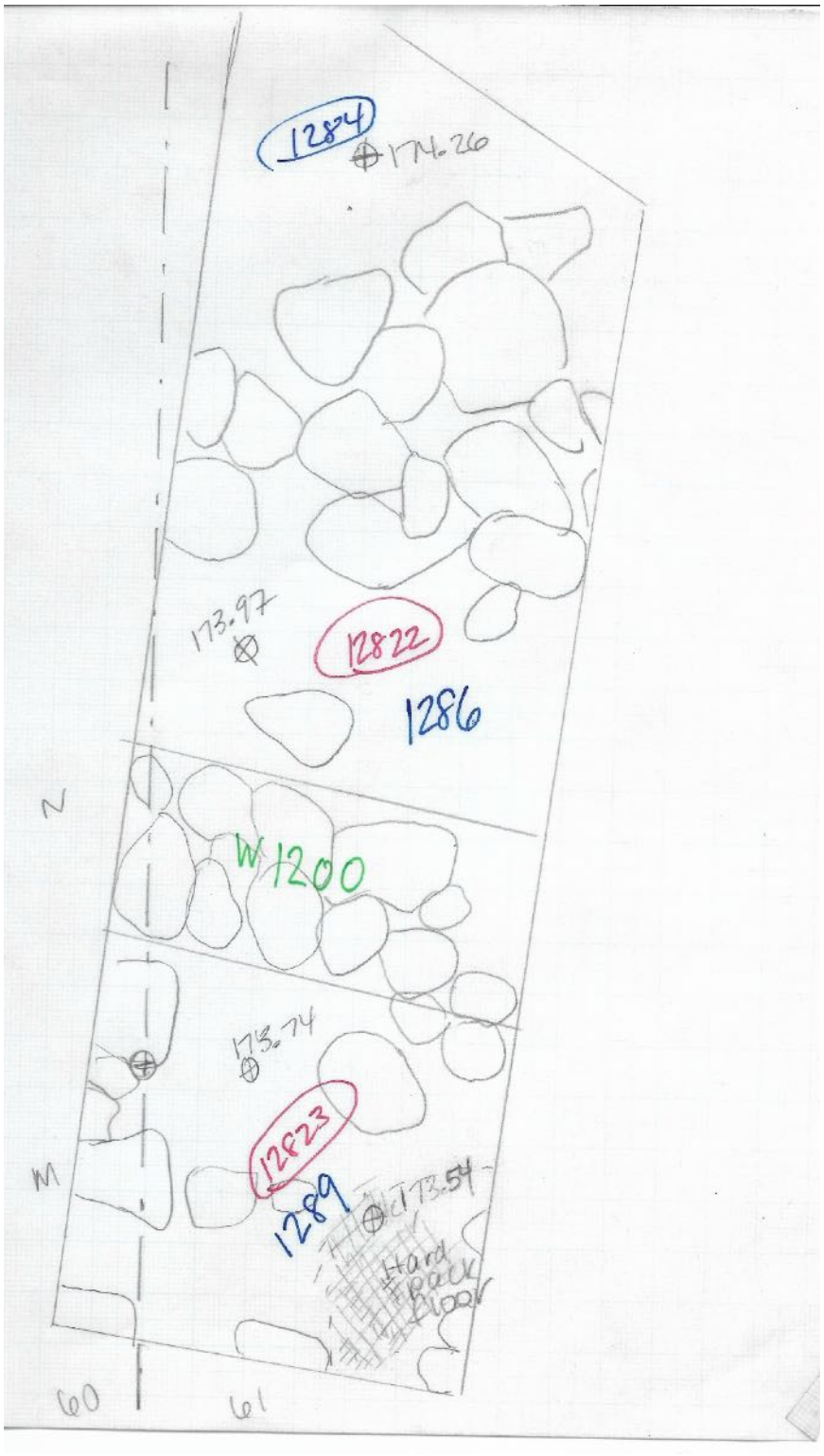


Figure 26. Daily graph of the probe. Notice the remains of a hard pack floor and the remains of cobblestone floor below it near W1200

Figure 27. Locus 1289 at the right side of the photo. Notice the cobblestone pavement near W1200 and the debris of that wall between L. 1286 and L. 1284

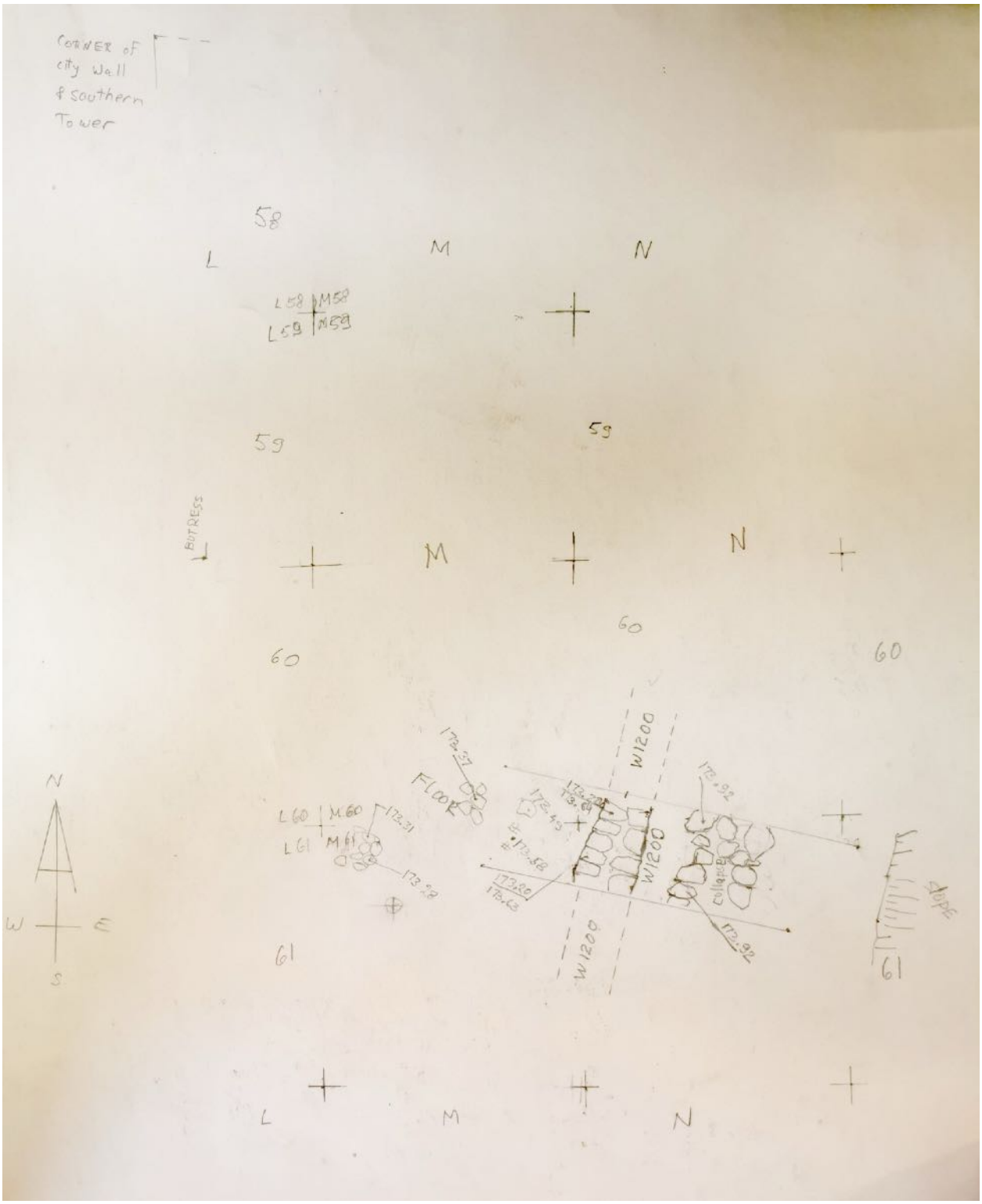


Figure 28. Land surveying of the probe.

Figure 29. Small finds from L. 1289. Iron Age II mixed with Hellenistic Roman. Typical for a discard of household.

Figure 30. Family day at the end of the season

Qela Valley (Josephus' Camp)

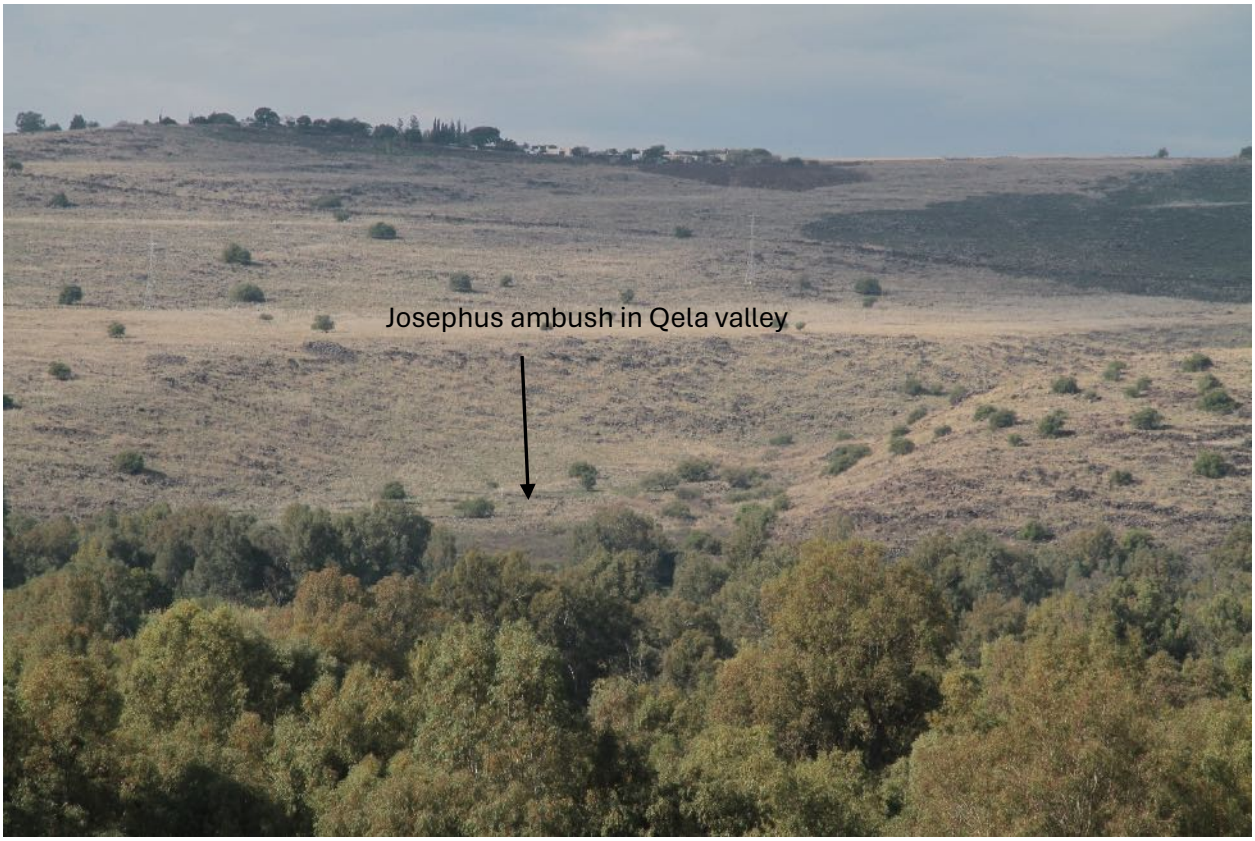


Figure 31. Qela Valley with the enclosure walls. A view from Bethsaida.

On 21 May 2022, the small team of the Bethsaida Excavation Project surveyed the bottom of Qela Valley, opposite the mound of Bethsaida, on the Galilean bank of the Jordan River (fig. 30). The team included Dr. Carl Savage, Itai his son, Ann Haverkost, the expedition photographer Hanan Shafir, and Prof. Rami Arav.

Qela valley is the only valley that descends from the Chorazin plateau to the Jordan River (fig. 31). The bottom of the valley always intrigued us, as the potential place for Josephus' camp during the Jewish Roman War. Josephus narrates in his autobiographical book, (*Life* chapters 71-73), that at the onset of the Jewish Roman war, when it still looked like a local uprising, two cities, Seleucia and Gamala in the Golan heights, revolted against Agrippa II, the last Herodian king. The king deployed a mercenary unit under a Roman named Sulla. The mission of Sulla was not to engage in frontal confrontation with the rebels, but to subdue them by cutting off their connection with the Jewish Galilean settlements. Since the cities were about 20 km apart from each other, Sulla pitched a camp on the junction leading to these two places. Josephus wrote that it was five stadia away from Julias/Bethsaida (about 1 km).

Josephus heard about the blockade and deployed to the plain of Bethsaida. Jeremiah, his comrade—with 2,000 men—pitched his camp 1 stadium away from Julias/Bethsaida (about 200 m). Sometime later Josephus arrived with 3,000 men and pitched an ambush in a valley descending to the Jordan Valley. In the clash that ensued, Josephus was injured and evacuated to Capernaum (not Julias/Bethsaida) and later to Tarichea (Magdala). A counterattack of Sulla failed to defeat the rebels after seeing boats coming from Tiberias towards Julias/Bethsaida.

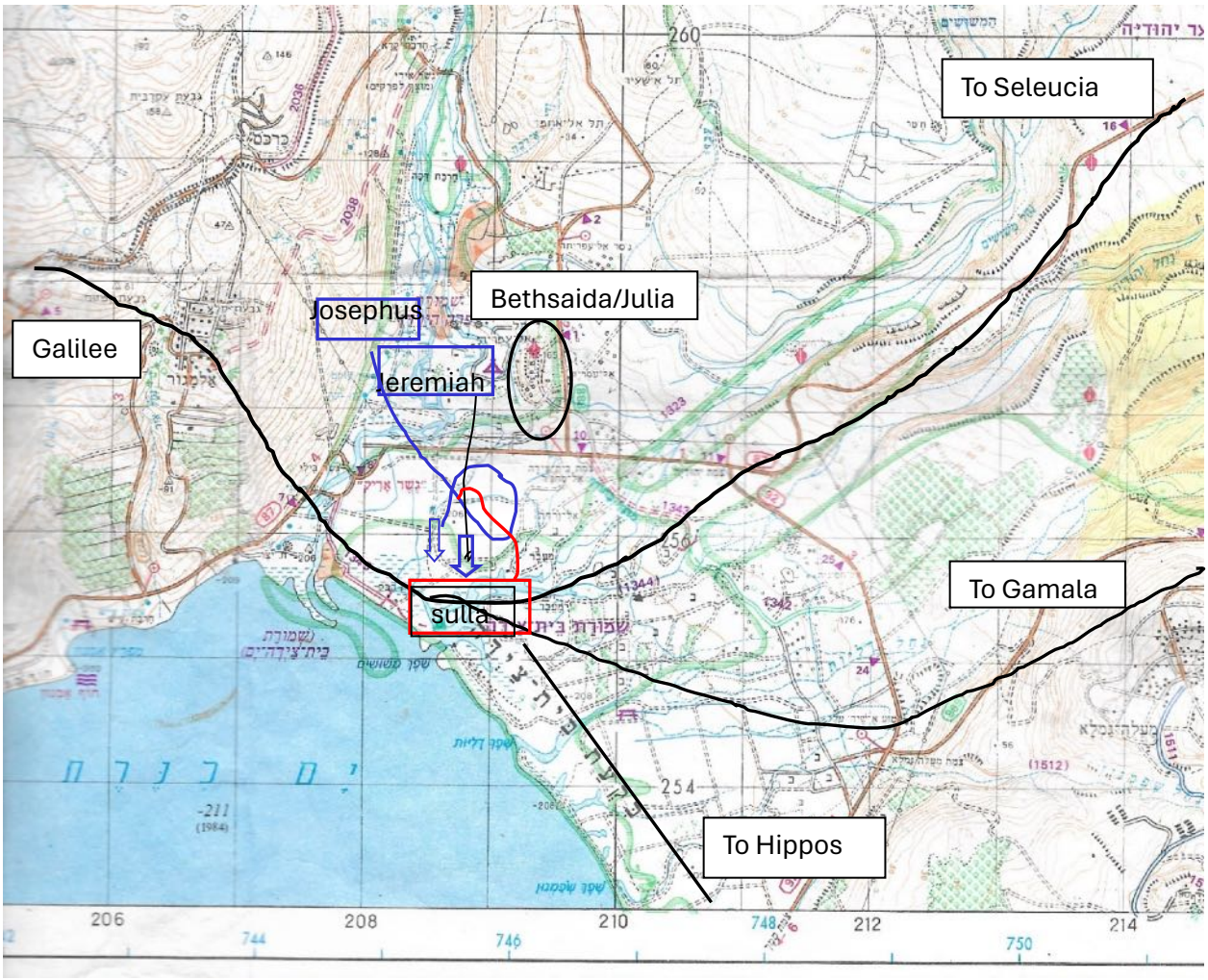


Figure 32. Josephus maneuvers at Bethsaida plain. Red-Sulla, blue Josephus and Jeremiah

The survey discovered a scattered rural settlement at the estuary of the Qela valley to the Jordan River. A watermill was observed in this site. This appears to be from the Ottoman period, but is most likely constructed on the remains of an earlier water mill from the Roman period. Adjacent to the settlement and slightly above it, there are enclosures surrounded by fences and on the southern bank of the valley there are a few heaps of stones, perhaps remains of lookout towers.

The enclosure in the valley cannot be seen from El-Araj, a site near the estuary of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee (fig. 33). This could have been an ideal place for ambushing the mercenary camp, most probably situated at El-Araj.

Figure 33. The Bethsaida plain. In the foreground is the mound of Bethsaida. in the trees a short distance from the lake is El-Araj, the site of Sulla's camp

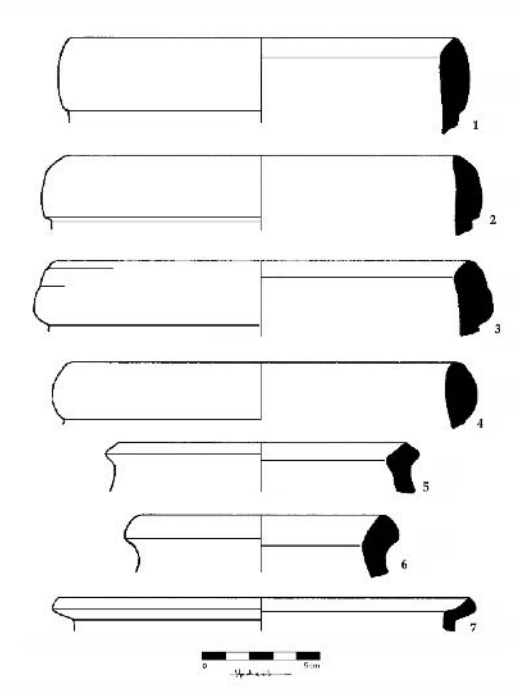
Figure 34. Watermill at Qela valley.

Figure 35. The enclosure wall at Qela valley.

Figure 36. Qela valley

Figure 37. Shards of pottery from Qela valley

Pottery shards collected at this survey demonstrate similarity to the settlement pattern of Bethsaida, and include Iron Age II, Hellenistic and Roman pottery.



2021 Wadi Kella, Josephus Camp, Artifacts Drawings
DreAnna Hadash

Drawing #	Survey	Date	Exterior/Interior: Munsell Color	Core: Munsell Color	Description	
#1	L2 B2	21.5.22	7.5YR 5/8 strong brown 7.5YR 5/8 strong brown	7.5YR 6/3 light brown	Medium fired, small voids, white and black grits	Jar rim
#2	L2 B2	21.5.22	7.5YR 5/8 strong brown 7.5YR 5/8 strong brown	7.5YR 6/3 light brown	Low to medium fire with white and black grits	Jar rim
#3	L2 B2	21.5.22	7.5YR 5/8 strong brown 7.5YR 5/8 strong brown	7.5YR 6/3 light brown	Low to medium fire with voids, white and black grits	Jar rim
#4	L2 B2	21.5.22	7.5YR 5/8 strong brown 7.5YR 5/8 strong brown	7.5YR 5/8 strong brown	Low to medium fire with voids, white grits, black grits	Jar rim
#5	L2 B2	21.5.22	7.5YR 7/2 pinkish grey 7.5YR 7/2 pinkish grey	7.5YR 7/2 pinkish grey	Low to medium fire	Jar rim
#6	L2 B2	21.5.22	7.5YR 7/2 pinkish grey 7.5YR 7/2 pinkish grey	7.5YR 7/2 pinkish grey	Low to medium fire	Jar rim
#7	L2 B2	21.5.22	2YR 5/8 red 2YR 5/8 red	2YR 5/2 weak red	High fired fine clay body	Cooking pot rim
#8	L2 B2	21.5.22	2YR 5/6 red 2YR 5/6 red	2YR 5/3 reddish brown	.7 thick shed, high fired throwing ridges inside and outside, high fired	*****Body sherd *****No drawing
#9	L2 B2	21.5.22	2YR 5/6 red 2YR 5/6 red	2YR 5/6 red	.4 cm very thin sherd, high fired	*****Body sherd *****No drawing