

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE 2013 SEASON OF THE SHIKHIN EXCAVATION PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

by  
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### Introduction

In July and August of 2013 the team excavated in thirteen squares in two archaeological fields: Field I on the northern and uppermost terrace of Shikhin (AI in the 2011 survey) and Field III on the western slope of Jebel Qat to the east (D in the survey). We did not excavate further in Field II but do plan to continue our work there in future seasons.

In Field I we began by concentrating our work in the two buildings discovered in 2012: a western building with plaster floors and walls built of single rows of stones—some of them spoils—founded on a thin layer of earth above bedrock, probably associated with pottery manufacturing; and an eastern building, probably a house that may well have been abandoned by the time the western building was built. We re-opened three squares that we did not finish digging in the 2012 season (I.4, 5, and 6), and we opened four more to expand north (I.8, 9, 10, and 14). I.12 expanded our excavations south; it lay outside the building and uncovered cut bedrock, including a wall foundation trench that does not line up with other architecture in the field. Although we found no evidence of it, the northern wall of architect's hypothetical projection of the synagogue runs E–W through I.12.

We opened a small probe (I.13) around a large ashlar that protruded from the ground south of our Field I squares. When the team discovered that it was a fragment of a heart-shaped column, we opened three more squares (I.15, 16, and 17) in hopes of locating more of the building that we are confident is a Roman Period synagogue.

In Field III we excavated one square to expose three sarcophagi that lie close to one another on the western slope of Jebel Qat.

### Field I: Pottery Manufacture

The majority of soil loci in these squares continue to be fill that dates to the LR period, sometimes with much older pottery and coins. We have found pottery as early as the Iron II and Persian periods. The greatest number of sherds date to the ER period.

At the end of the 2012 season we back filled Squares I.4, 5, and 6 to protect the cattle of Moshav Zippori that graze on the hill and to protect plaster floors. The teams in these squares began by removing last year's fill and then continuing their excavations. This year we did not back fill squares but built a fence to keep both cattle and people out of our trenches.

We cleared Square I.4 (Claire Oldfather, AS) to bedrock everywhere except for L4020 in the west (2.4 m x 1.4 m), in which stones sitting in earth level the space. The remaining fill continued to date to the LR period, except for a few buckets of pottery taken from soil directly over bedrock in the southeast corner (no *terra rosa* was found), which dated to the MR period. The relationship of I.4 to the rest of the building remains unclear. We intend to complete excavations in future seasons and to remove balks to reveal its relationship to I.3 to the west, I.5 to the east, I.6 to the north, and I.12 to the south.

Square I.6 (Aaron Carr, AS; Maddi Stauble, AS) north of I.4 and east of I.7 was also cleared of back fill from last season. The team removed the badly damaged sections of plaster floor and discovered below them the edge of a plastered pool whose height had been raised by means of a wall laid up to the edge of the vertical face of the bedrock and similarly plastered. The northeast section of the pool lies in the southwest corner of the square and likely emerges in the northern part of I.4, where it is filled in and covered with plaster, probably the same floor that was in I.6. We will need to remove the northern balk of I.4 and the northern 2x4 m section of I.6 in order to get a clearer picture of this pool. All loci from I.6 date to the LR period, suggesting

that the pool was filled and the plaster floors were laid, and then the building with which they were associated was destroyed, between 250 and 363 CE.

The architect's projection of the main building of Field I suggests that Squares I.5, I.8, I.9, and I.10 lie over the remains of a single building, perhaps the house of a potter.

The team of Square I.5 (Randy O'Neill, AS; Lewis Collins, AS) to the east of I.4 removed last year's fill to bedrock in the east (interior to the putative house—perhaps courtyard) and the south. Soil immediately west of W5004 and soil inside the intersection of W5004 and W5005 remains unexcavated, as does the bulk of the pottery waste lying under floor L5002 in the northwest of the square.

Square 5 reveals the earliest structure in this part of the field. As we are finding in most squares of Field I, the residents of Shikhin quarried bedrock, creating pool-like structures either deliberately or as an unintended consequence of quarrying. After the quarrying, people built a wall (W5029) perpendicular to a cut face of bedrock; a niche in this face may have been cut to serve something like a bond joint between the wall and the rock. People built what is probably a house, laying W5004 and W5005 on top and at the edge of the quarried bedrock. It is unclear whether the house and W5029 are contemporaries. In their original construction, W5004 and W5005 bonded. In a later construction—perhaps a repair—people built the upper courses of W5005 to abut W5004; the lowest course of this secondary reconstruction is all that remains. We found this practice in I.8 as well. At some point a cup around 33 cm in diameter with a slot around 11 cm wide was cut into the bedrock north of a pool-like structure in the bedrock interior to W5004 and W5005. This cup might have supported a superstructure for industrial activity. When the putative house was in use, people brought in soil to fill in the pool-like structure east of the joint of Walls 4 and 5, and they formed a surface, probably by foot traffic. After the house went out of use, people built W5018 flush with and parallel to W5005, extending it northwest into I.4 (W4013). They then dumped over 1.5 meters of pottery production waste—consisting mostly of sherds, clinkers, and wasters—west of W5004 and north of W5018, and then laid plaster floor L5002 on top, originally making it up to both walls. They laid the floor up to the surviving upper course of W5004, which suggests that the house was already out of use when they put in the floor.

The pottery under the surface interior to the house dated to the LR period, as did the pottery under the plaster floor and the pottery that eroded or was filled in around the walls when the most recent building went out of use. This means that two major construction and destruction phases happened in the third century and into the mid fourth century CE. We cannot determine the date of the quarrying. We will have to excavate a foundation trench for W5029 to learn its construction date.

Square I.8 (Rachel Stivers-Bender, AS) to the north of I.5 and east of I.6 was opened for the first time this season. The southern half of this square yielded an astonishing number of lamp fragments, hence earning the name the “lamp shop.” Wall 8003 runs northwest to southeast in the southwestern corner of the square and might meet W5004 at right angles in the northern balk of I.4. In the West, W8003 bonds with W8009, which extends southwest to northeast into I.8 (W800\_). W8003 and the southern extension of W8009 sat at the northwestern corner of a pool or other depression carved into bedrock, similar to the construction of W5004, and probably part of the same installation, which may also survive in the northeastern corner of I.4. The northern half of I.8 was partially excavated. The lamp fragments and pottery of I.8 consistently reveal LR soil loci, even at the lowest excavated levels in the southwest corner.

I.9 (Randy O'Neill, AS), 10 (Randy O'Neill, AS), and 14 (Rachel Stivers-Bender, AS) were opened only around one week before excavations were halted to concentrate on the public building and little progress was made, other than to reveal the upper courses of several walls close to the surface. In I.9, a stone that is probably a column drum was partially hollowed to form something like a mortar. In the northern half of I.10, the team uncovered what might be the remnants of a stone circle around two meters in diameter. Most of the putative circle lies in the balks.

I.12 (Alex Ramos, AS) was opened south of I.4 to extend Field I southward. The team began a northern probe, which they halted in order to open a square in the public building. The northern probe did not reveal any structure, but more cut bedrock. One edge of cut bedrock, however, clearly showed that it was carved to accommodate a wall foundation. The orientation of this wall matches no other building in the field. The soil loci were LR, but the crew did find Islamic (6<sup>th</sup> c.) lamp fragments and one complete and whole Islamic lamp. No Islamic pottery was found, leading us to hypothesize that people returned to the hill centuries after its abandonment, perhaps because they knew of the synagogue ruin. The northern exterior wall of the putative synagogue, running northwest to southeast, is projected to run through the northern probe. No signs of it were found.

#### Summary of Field I Pottery Manufacturing

The skeleton of the buildings of the pottery manufacturing industry in Field I are becoming clearer. The most important conclusions that we can draw from two seasons of digging in this field is that [1] Shikhin's potters were producing most of the familiar Galilean forms, not just storage jars; [2] they were also producing several unfamiliar forms; and [3] they were making oil lamps. These conclusions already challenge ideas that have been repeated often since important provenience studies of Galilean pottery began being published in the 1990s.

#### Field I: Public Building

The small probe that we opened around what turned out to be the heart-shaped column drum. This discovery led us to suspend, for the season, excavations in the northern buildings of Field I and concentrate all our efforts in squares around this find to allow us to uncover as much of the building as possible before the end of the season. The square with the heart shaped column was designated I.13, directly southwest of I.12. I.15 was opened west of I.13, I.16 south of I.15, and I.17 east of I.13. Excavation in I.16 was halted after only a day. By the end of the season I.17 had uncovered only rubble.

I.13 (Claire Oldfather, AS) began as a 2 x 2 m probe in the northeast corner of the 4 x 4 square, opened around what looked like a large, tipped ashlar protruding from the ground. After four days of digging it became clear that we had a heart-shaped column drum. Eventually all but the 2 x 2 meter in the southeast corner of the square was excavated. We also extended the original 2 x 2 m probe two meters to the north, removing two meters of the north balk and extending a meter into the square to the north. To maintain scientific control and avoid confusion, we will designate I.13 as a square larger than 5 x 5 meters. We will determine I.13's exact dimensions in the 2014 season.

By the end of the season we had fully exposed the heart-shaped column drum, part of a stylobate to the south and west, and to the north one battered piece of a very large threshold that was constructed from hard limestone in two sections. (The other section might be lying upside down a few centimeters to the west.) The threshold was clearly manufactured as one of two

pieces (both ends are carved, not broken), and is 1.45 meters/4.93 Roman ft in length. If it is  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a threshold, the two halves made a threshold 2.92 meters/9.86 Roman ft in length. The groove for the door jam measures 87 cm/2.94 Roman feet; hence, the double-leafed door would have measured almost 6 Roman feet wide.

1.88 meters of stylobate were uncovered running southwest to northeast. In the south the stylobate is made up to bedrock that might be cut to form the stylobate for the base of a heart-shaped column and indicating that the stylobate continued to the southeast. The stylobate measures .83 m wide. We were surprised to learn that the eastern faces of the stylobate stones are bossed in the Herodian style, suggesting that they are spoils from an earlier building, perhaps a synagogue (see the discussion of I.15 below).

All soil loci dated to the LR period, which suggests that the synagogue came down in the earthquake of 363 and was contemporary with the pottery industry to the north. We excavated no sealed loci. Next season we can lift one or two stones of the stylobate to establish the date they were set. Currently we hypothesize that we have uncovered around half of the southern extent of the western stylobate, and that the synagogue was oriented northwest to southeast, angled about 20 degrees south of east, with the main entrance in the east (see plan). The building is oriented in the same direction as the northern buildings of Field I.

The team of I.15 (Aaron Carr, AS) to the east of I.13 opened a northern probe and uncovered four stones of a wall (W15004) made of a single row of ashlar founded on bedrock, and running northwest to southeast, matching the orientation of the synagogue. The soil south of the wall lay above bedrock and contained no pottery or other object later than the ER period. This is the only such locus discovered in two seasons of digging. According to our hypothetical plan of the public building, this wall would have been built at right angles to and abutting the building's western exterior wall, perhaps as part of a small room built onto the building. If we are correct about the date of W15004 and the extent of the synagogue, the public building must also date to the ER period. We will need to continue in both I.15 and I.13 to confirm or revise these hypotheses.

### Field III

III.1 (Aaron Carr, AS) constituted a square opened around three sarcophagi sitting on the western slope of Jebel Qat east of Shikhin, near T-3, the third tomb around Shikhin identified in the 2011 survey. All three sarcophagi are oriented east to west with the feet to the west, that is toward Shikhin. No sarcophagus was covered with a lid, but the lid of the southernmost sarcophagus was lying upside down immediately to its north.

The southern sarcophagus was nearly completely preserved in its length, but much of the upper part was badly damaged. The two sarcophagi to the north were missing about the western quarter. All sarcophagi were unadorned except for the southern face of the middle sarcophagus, which was carved in a non-representational style with garlands and raised circles, similar to another sarcophagus a few meters to the north. The Area Supervisor hypothesizes that these sarcophagi were placed on the hill in preparation for moving them into a tomb. The one finished face of the middle sarcophagus suggests to him that they were being decorated on the slope of the hill and that they were never used.

### The Small Finds, Coins, and Pottery

As of the date of this report, the coins from the 2013 season have not been cleaned and read. This season we uncovered more fragments of stone vessels (4). We are also finding a significant

number of unfamiliar pottery forms. The most significant small finds of the season are the great number of lamp fragments found in Field I, especially in I.8 (62!; 129 in Field I), and the surprising number of lamp molds (five; seven total in two seasons) recovered, all dating to the second and third century CE. Some of the lamp molds can be matched to lamp fragments recovered this season. This means that we can now prove that Shikhin produced lamps, a significant discovery with implications for the Galilean economy, village-city relations, and expression of Jewish cultural identity in the Roman period.

I.4	3 lamp fragments		Basalt grinder
I.5	13 lamp fragments		3 lamp fragments
I.6	16 lamp fragments	I.12	17 lamp fragments
	Lamp mold		Complete, whole Islamic lamp
	Stone vessel frag (grinding bowl?)		coin
	coin	I.13	7 lamp fragments
I.8	stone vessel fragment		2 basalt grinders
	Coin	I.14	lamp fragment
	Basalt grinder	I.15	basalt grinder
	3 Lamp molds	I.17	stone vessel fragment
	62 lamp fragments		Stone stopper
I.9	2 lamp fragments		5 lamp fragments
	stone vessel fragment		3 coins
I.10	Lamp mold	III.1	coin

#### List of Photos

I.4	Facing east, west ½ of square, Claire Oldfather
I.5	Facing south, Lewis Collins
I.6	Facing east, Maddi Stauble
I.8	Facing north, Maddi Stauble
I.9	Facing south, Maddi Stauble
I.10	Facing north, Claire Oldfather
I.12	Facing north, north ½ of square, Alex Ramos
I.13	Facing east, south portion of square, Claire Oldfather
	Facing northeast
	Facing north, detail of stylobate and heart-shaped column drum, with threshold at top of frame
	Facing west, northern portion of square, Claire Oldfather
	Facing west, detail of threshold
I.14	Facing north
I.15	Facing north, north ½ of square
I.17	Facing north, north ½ of square, Alex Ramos
III.1	Facing west, Aaron Carr

#### Publications

Mordechai Aviam and James Riley Strange are producing a preliminary report on Shikhin's oil lamp production for publication in 2014.

Conclusion

Shikhin was a village of at least modest wealth in the Roman periods, as indicated by evidence of as many as four industries on its hilltops and Jebel Qat to the east: wine, oil, pottery, and lamps. Its relative wealth is also indicated by burial practices: some of its residents could afford sarcophagi carved with some skill from local soft limestone. Finally, the construction of the synagogue also indicates the presence of some families with money. The number of unfamiliar pottery forms indicates that Shikhin's potters experimented. The number of wasters shows that Shikhin manufactured most of the familiar Galilean forms of pottery, and that they probably exported them. Similarly, the number of lamp fragments and molds proves that Shikhin produced lamps, and suggests that they exported them as well. Future seasons are planned to complete the recovery and conservation of the pottery and lamp industries and of the synagogue.

Respectfully Submitted,

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