THE SHILOH EXCAVATIONS: SUMMARY OF THE 2025 FIELDWORK

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The 2025 excavations at Shiloh (Khirbet Seilun) took place in the northern area of the mound. We aimed to uncover Bronze Age and Iron Age architecture that had been known from previous seasons. Archaeological methods included dry sifting, wet sifting, metal detecting, and heavy fraction recovery. In this report, we recap the main developments from this year's fieldwork. The findings advanced our understanding of two large structures inside and outside the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall and the *favissa* near the northeastern bend of the wall. Discoveries date from MB IIb through the Islamic period (*ca.* 1750 BC–AD 1917).

Key Words: Shiloh, fortification wall, rampart, *favissa*, Bronze Age, Khirbet Seilun

INTRODUCTION

Excavation continued at ancient Shiloh in the Judean hills. The Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) collaborate with the staff officer of archaeology at the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria (permit no. 10-03-2025). This year, 150 participants excavated the northern slope in Areas D, H, and K (May 19–June 17). Previously, the staff officer excavated the western slope in Area J2 (Gat 2015), the southern slope in Areas N1 and N2 (Hizmi and Haber 2014), the eastern slope in Area G2, and the northern platform in Areas B1 and B2 (Livyatan Ben-Arie and Hizmi 2017; Livyatan Ben-Arie 2021).

This report summarizes the excavation progress in 2025. The excavation methods included dry sifting, wet sifting, metal detecting, and heavy fraction recovery. We distinguished nine strata from MB IIb through the Islamic period (*ca.* 1750 BC–AD 1917). The work further exposed two large structures inside and outside the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall and the *favissa* near the northeastern bend of the wall (Fig. 1).

AREAS H AND K: THE LARGE BUILDING

Remnants of the large building inside the fortification first came to light in 2017. The northern wall (Wall 10) was then linked to Wall U281 in Area K, excavated by Bar-Ilan University in the 1980s (Finkelstein 1993, 76). The perpendicular Wall 11 indicated that Wall 10 was probably not merely a retaining wall.

In 2019, excavation revealed the building's western wall (Wall 47) and northwest corner. After a hiatus in 2020–2021, the inner face of the southern wall (Wall 49) and the southwest corner became visible, showing that the western room formed a perfect square. More walls were uncovered in the following seasons, and we now have three rooms in the western area of the building, suggesting several phases following the original construction design. Some walls in the building's latest phase date to the Early Roman period. Nevertheless, earlier phases are discernable in some of the walls, suggesting a date in the Iron Age or even earlier.

This year, we worked in the three rooms. Excavations north of Wall 54 revealed several layers of fill, sloping south–north and covering a maximum height of 1.5 meters (Fig. 2). Under the fill was the original floor, made of compact beaten reddish soil. In past years, we have seen this fill in the other two rooms, suggesting that the entire area was intentionally covered. The floor exposed this year north of Wall 54 lacked pottery and objects, like the floors uncovered in previous seasons in the other two rooms. All floor elevations were the same (*ca.* 704.9 meters).

In the fill, excavation yielded trenches of darker soil along Walls 10 and 54. Work in previous

Figure 1: Architecture in Areas H and K. Drawing by Leen Ritmeyer; updated by Tim Lopez.

seasons showed that these trenches are present along all the walls within the western squared room, suggesting that foundation trenches accompanied the upper courses of the walls. The latest pottery in these trenches dates to the Iron IIa period.

Since ceramic sherds and dateable radiocarbon remains were rare, we tentatively based our relative chronology on stratigraphy; from Stratum 6a (LB IIb, *ca.* 1250 BC) for the floors to Stratum 4b (Iron IIa, *ca.* 980–750 BC) for the upper courses of the walls. Hopefully, future excavation will yield reliably dateable material.

To the east, five teams worked to identify the building's entrance, eastern wall, and southern wall. Although the southern wall is elusive, Emma Clodfelder's team may have found the northeast corner in Square AL30. Excavation there yielded similar sloping layers of fill as in the western rooms, along the southern side of Wall 10. Perpendicular to the wall on the eastern end sat a single line of large stones (elevation 704.6 m) that could have functioned as the threshold.

Past seasons yielded cultic paraphernalia in and near the building: two altar horns, a ceramic pomegranate (Lopez et al. 2019), a faience pomegranate pendant, and a murex shell. This season yielded a first-century AD limestone lamp mold just east of the building that was also found near coins, a chalkstone vessel, and fine Early Roman pottery.

AREA H: THE MONUMENTAL STRUCTURE

A century ago, Danish archaeologists exposed the city's Bronze Age fortification wall on the northern bank (Buhl 1969, 36–42). The ABR team resumed their work, moving west to east along the wall. Initially, we had no plans to excavate outside the city beyond exposing the wall face. That all changed in 2017 when we uncovered a megalithic

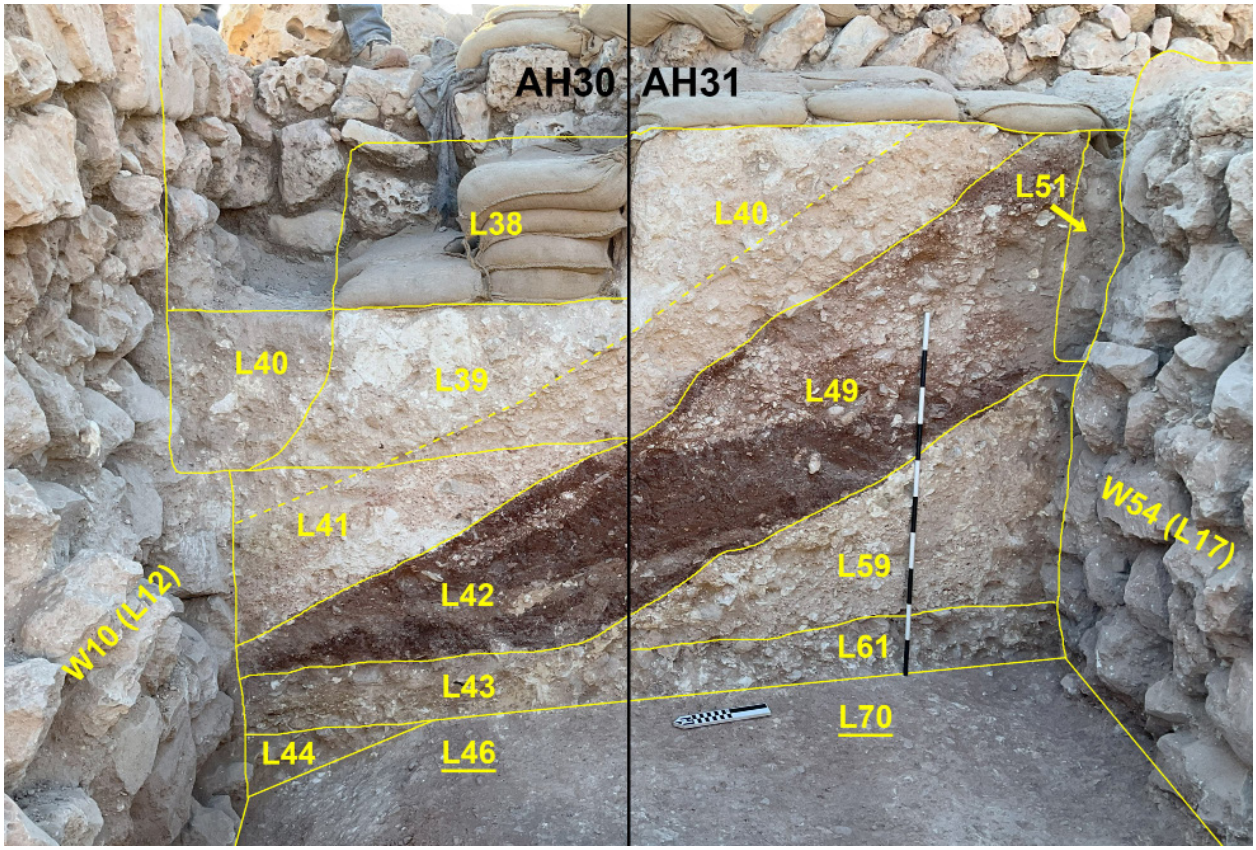

Figure 2: Sloping debris layers in the northwestern room of the large building. Photo by Tim Lopez.

wall abutting the city wall and retaining the rampart to the east. The rampart did not continue to the west in this section. Since then, we opened a dozen 5 × 5-meter squares outside the fortification wall to investigate the structure.

To date, we have uncovered the structure's eastern exterior wall (No. 27), two interior walls (Nos. 68 and 97), and a row of four pillars (Fig. 3). The walls and pillars stood on bedrock. The eastern wall interlocked with an interior wall (No. 68) and ran parallel to the four pillars. Two pillars were preserved to their original height, as confirmed by the presence of an architectural notch at that elevation in the fortification wall. The tallest pillar contained five blocks and stood 2.6 meters high.

Nearby, we located lower and upper socket stones (ex situ), each with socket diameters of 25 centimeters. In the structure, we discovered limestone flooring tiles in Strata 7–6 (MB III–LB IIb, *ca.* 1650–1177 BC). The in-situ flooring tiles sat on bedrock. Some of the 120 ex-situ flooring tiles were geometrically shaped into triangles, rectangles, diamonds, and a hexagon. Geometrically shaped flooring stones from the Bronze Age were unattested in the archaeological record until now.

The structure was built in MB III (Stratum 7, *ca.* 1650–1483 BC) based on the pottery, bedrock foundation, and big-block construction. An abundance of pottery in the structure dated from MB III to the Late Bronze Age (Strata 7–6). Ceramics from the Iron Age, Early Roman period,

Figure 3: Four pillars in the monumental structure. Photo by Gary D. Urie.

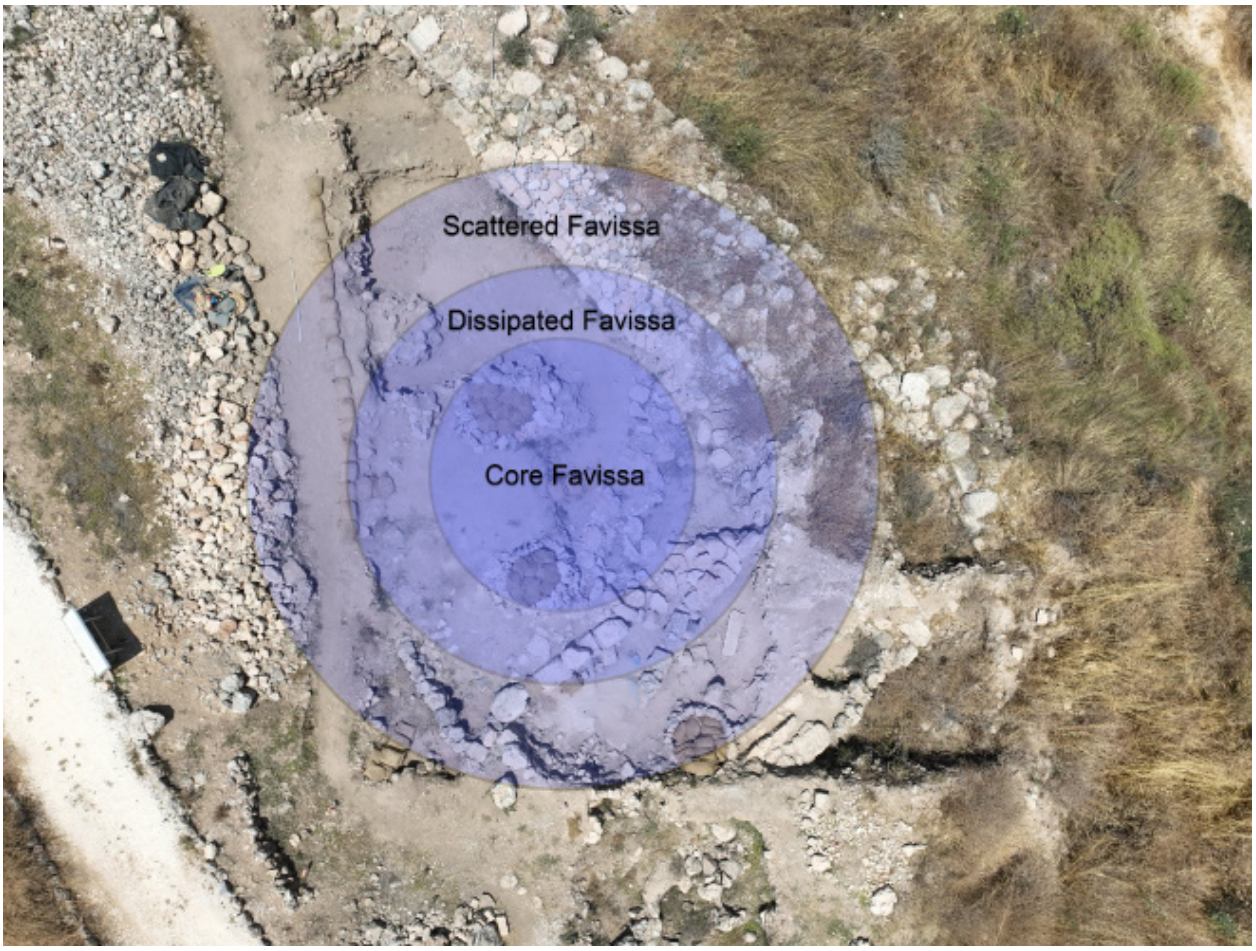

Figure 4: *Favissa* material dissipating outward from the core. Photo by Gary D. Urie.

and Byzantine period appeared in fills at higher elevations. Above the older architecture, four Byzantine terrace walls traversed the slope from east to west.

In 2025, the major find in this structure was a fourth pillar. An interior wall ran east–west between Pillars 3 and 4, indicating that the pillars supported different rooms. The fourth pillar verifies that the structure was indeed monumental. In the structure we unearthed a complete and restorable ceramic storage vessel from the Middle Bronze Age. The vessel sat upright against the vertical face of the bedrock next to a scarab. Other significant finds included a bulla, an anthropomorphic appliqué on a potsherd, and 42 ex-situ paving stones.

AREA D: THE FAVISSA

In the 1980s, Bar-Ilan University uncovered a Late Bronze Age *favissa* along the northeastern perimeter (Lederman and Finkelstein 1993, 43). Beginning in 2022, we excavated their residual balks to conduct independent research using advanced technology. Initially, we selected a central balk for excavation, which yielded over seven thousand faunal remains. Over the subsequent seasons, we determined that the central balk marked the core of the *favissa* deposit (Fig. 4). The sacrificial material appears to have been displaced radially outward from the core, likely because numerous grain silos were cut into the *favissa* in the Iron Age I–IIa horizon (Strata 5–4c, ca. 1050–900 BC), disrupting its original stratigraphy. In 2022, we uncovered numerous ornate Late Bronze Age ceramic vessels, charred bones, and three gold objects—two star-shaped pendants and one

bead or pendant loop. In the 2023–2024 seasons, we removed the remaining seven balks, which contained charred, kosher faunal remains, small finds, Late Bronze Age pottery, and three additional gold artifacts: a scoop-shaped pendant, a misshapen fragment, and a pendant depicting a man's bearded face (McClinton 2025, 16–17).

In 2025, we identified the *favissa*'s western boundary. We executed two 2 × 2-meter probes to investigate the boundary's stratigraphy. Eventually, we advanced the probes to trenches (Trenches 1 and 2), extending from the pits eastward toward the *favissa*'s core. This strategy allowed us to refine our understanding of the stratigraphy and delineate both the bottom elevation of the core *favissa* and the western boundary of its dispersal. Our investigation revealed a distinct conflagration layer sloping downward from west to east that clearly separates Stratum 6 (Late Bronze Age, ca. 1483–1177 BC) from Stratum 7 (MB III, ca. 1650–1483 BC). Our hypothesis that the *favissa* matrix dissipates away from the core finds support in the presence of Late Bronze Age pottery, charred deposits, and faunal remains in lower concentrations than those recovered from the core itself. Notable finds this season included a silver lunate earring, a mother-of-pearl pendant, and a ceramic zoomorphic figurine head. We saved floral and faunal samples for radiocarbon dating, and we performed petrographic analysis on Area D vessels.

In the future, we intend to establish the elevation of the underlying bedrock, investigate architectural features further, and advance our understanding of the Middle Bronze Age fortification wall. We want to understand the relationship between the *favissa* and the large building approximately 35 meters to the west.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 fieldwork clarified our knowledge of three areas at the site: the large building inside the fortification wall, the monumental structure outside the wall, and the *favissa* at the northeast of the mound. We plan to continue excavating the architectural structures and the *favissa* in upcoming seasons.

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