

The Diachronic Archaeological Record of Ancient Yehud: From the Late Chalcolithic to Modern Times

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Abstract

Substantial archaeological exposure of the ancient city of Yehud was achieved through as many as forty-four trial and salvage excavations conducted since 1993. The accumulated data has now reached a critical mass where a broad synthesis is made possible, concerning a site for which investigation has been slow due to the challenges of excavating within a densely populated and rapidly developing modern city. Excavations in the city, located in Israel's central coastal plain, revealed a patchy history of human settlement, ranging in date between the Late Chalcolithic and Ottoman periods, with lengthy periods of sparse residential use, when the site was variably utilized for funerary, industrial, agricultural, or other types of yet unidentified activities. This comprehensive synthesis unravels the archaeology and history of this little-known site, located at the heart of a region that has undergone major social transformations and historical upheavals during the period in question. The information on Yehud is contextualized with up-to-date knowledge of the archaeology of the central coastal plain, especially concerning Yehud's hinterland within the Ayalon valley.

Keywords: Yehud; settlement history; burial grounds; installations; ancient mound; Ayalon Valley

Gilad Itach. 2023. The Diachronic Archaeological Record of Ancient Yehud: From the Late Chalcolithic to Modern Times. *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* 4: 1–41. ISSN: 2788-8819; <https://doi.org/10.52486/01.00004.1>; <https://jjar.huji.ac.il>



1. Introduction

Archaeological research of Levantine settlements with long histories of occupation often advances through piecemeal exposure that contends with existing legacies of still-standing, mostly medieval-period buildings, modern construction, and the requirements of rapid development. Much of the exploration of these ancient sites relies on small-scale trial and salvage excavations that unfold at an irregular, unplanned pace rather than through long-term systematic work of organized expeditions (e.g., Avni and Gutfeld 2008; Golani 2003; Yannai 2008). Salvage excavations in such modern urban settings have the major limitation of providing archaeologists with limited spatial windows into the deposits of what may have been an extensive sprawling settlement in antiquity. The strict time constraints involved in salvage excavations further restrict the archaeologist's ability to thoroughly investigate issues of stratification and characterization of the occupation during different periods (Faust and Katz 2019: 43). Furthermore, decisions about where to excavate and the extent and depth of the exposure are tightly constrained in each case by the considerations of development. This reality is made even more difficult by the fact that the integrity of archaeological deposits underlying modern cities is often greatly compromised. Thus, such excavations tend to prohibit realistic reconstruction of key aspects like settlement size and plan, not to mention how temporal changes in social, economic, and political organization unfolded.

The central coastal plain of Israel has been a densely populated region both in antiquity and the modern era. Ongoing population growth and aggregation in recent decades have produced an ever-increasing number of challenges and opportunities to archaeological investigation at cities such as Ramla (Avni and Gutfeld 2008; Tal and Taxel 2008), Lod (Avisar 2008; Yannai 2008; van den Brink et al. 2015; Gorzelzany et al. 2016), Jaffa (Herzog 2008; Peilstöcker and Burke 2011), Azor (Golani and van den Brink 1999), and Bet Dagan (Yannai and Nagar 2014) (Fig. 1). However, compared to other ancient settlements in the region, intensive archaeological research at the site of Yehud had a relatively late beginning, as archaeological interest has only been sporadic until the early 1990s (see Gophna and Beck 1981: 74, Site No. 31). Subsequently, between 1993 and 2021, a total of 44 trial and salvage excavations were conducted within the city and its vicinity (Table 1), revealing remains spanning the Late Chalcolithic and the Ottoman periods. The finds manifest a patchy settlement history, shifting between residential occupation, at one time, and mortuary or industrial activity, at another.

As of today, no attempt has been made to systematically analyze the archaeological remains of Yehud. Therefore and as an archaeologist who has directed a number of the excavations in and near Yehud in recent years (Itach 2016;

2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; Itach, Golan, and Zwiebel 2017; Itach et al. 2019; Itach, Golan, and Ben Dor Evian 2022; Itach, Elisha, and Marcus, forthcoming), it is my goal to review the archaeology of this city and consider questions about its settlement history and position in the regional settlement systems of different periods. Thus, the present paper aims to: (a) present a summary of all available archaeological data from excavations conducted in Yehud, (b) trace changes in the nature of the occupation of the city through time, and (c) contextualize the data from both the synchronic and diachronic perspectives by comparing the findings from Yehud to those from neighboring sites.

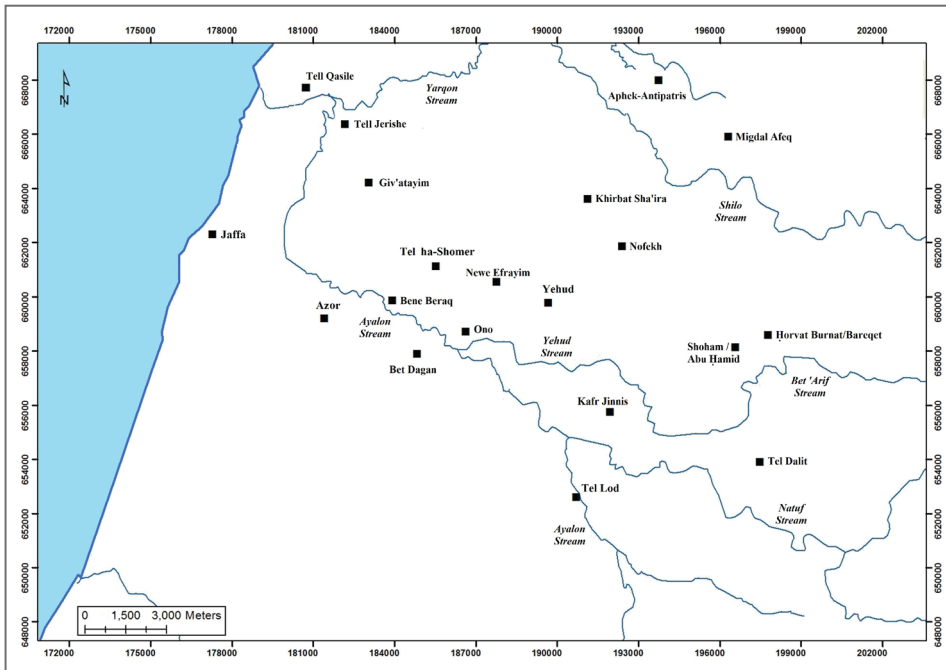


Fig. 1. The main archaeological sites in the Ayalon Valley and its vicinity mentioned in the text.

2. The Ancient Site of Yehud

2.1. Geography and Geology

Most of the ancient site of Yehud (formerly the Arab village of el-Yehûdiyeh; Gophna, Ayalon, and Ben Melech 2015a: Site No. 86) is located within the boundaries of the modern city, covering an area of at least 50 hectares. The site

is situated in the eastern part of the Israeli central coastal plain, 12 km east of the Mediterranean Sea. Topographically, the area is nearly flat, part of the floodplain basin of the Ayalon and Yehud Streams (van den Brink et al. 2014: 131; Govrin and Ben-Ari 2015). The area is bordered by calcareous aeolianite sandstone (*kurkar*) ridges in the west and the calcareous limestone of the Samaria Mountains in the east. Three major soil groups are found here. From the bottom up (Fig. 2), they consist of soft yellow sand, red sandy soil of medium hardness (locally known as *hamra*), and dark hard clay soil (*grumusol*; for a detailed description of a typical sedimentary section in this region, see Milevski 2008: Fig. 5; Itach et al. 2019: 191, and references therein).

2.2. Historical Background

Ancient Yehud was located slightly west of the main road that connected Syria-Mesopotamia with Egypt in ancient times (Dorsey 1991: 71, Map 2; for a slightly different course of this road, see Aharoni et al. 2011: 17, Map 10). However, the name Yehud is not included in Egyptian city lists of the Middle or New Kingdom periods, nor in any Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, although nearby biblical-period sites, such as Azor, Bet Dagon, and Bene-Berak, are mentioned in the description of Sennacherib's campaign to Judah in 701 BCE (Cogan 2008: 114). The only biblical-period historical source mentioning the place name Yehud is the Bible, wherein the settlement is assigned to the tribal allotment of Dan (Josh 19:45), listed together with the cities of Bene-Berak and Gath-Rimmon (the latter site possibly identified with Tell Jerishe; see Herzog 1993).

It was suggested that the place name Yehud (Greek: *Iouδαία*) is mentioned in the book of Maccabees I (4:15; see Avi-Yonah 1976: 68) of the classical period. However, this suggestion was disputed by other scholars arguing that Yehud is not mentioned in Hellenistic and Roman sources (Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green 1994). Moreover, even in Eusebius' systematic Onomasticon, Yehud is absent, and the author only provides a reference to its mentioning in the Bible (Notely and Safrai 2005: 106).

An Arab village, variably named el-Yehûdiyeh, Yahûdiyya, or el-Abbâsiyya, appears in sources spanning the Islamic period and the British mandate era (Conder and Kitchener 1882: 278; Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977: 155; Guérin 1982: 214–215) and later, a Jewish village named Yehud was founded over and adjacent to the ruins of the former Arab village after the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948.

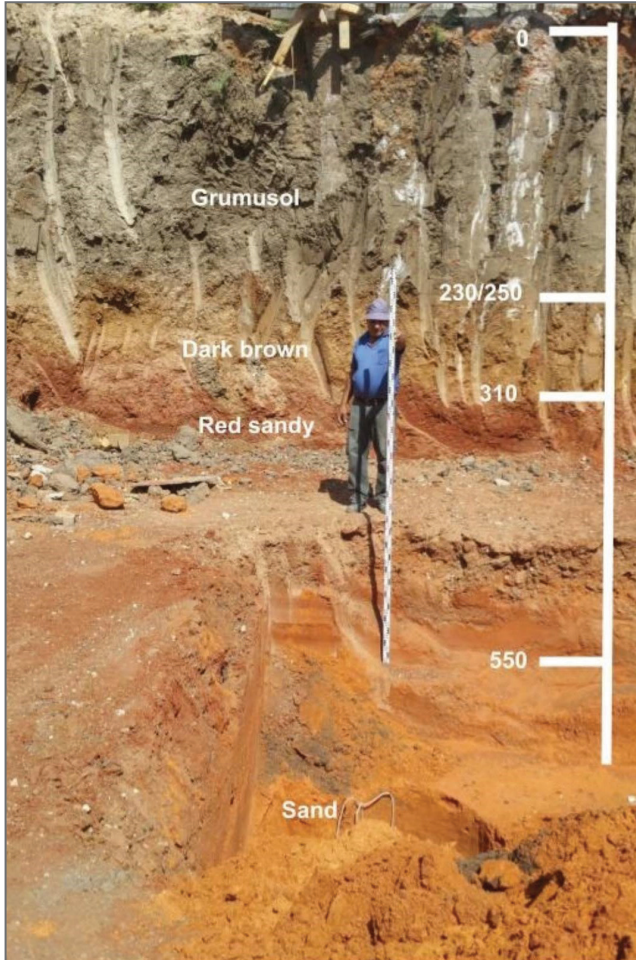


Fig. 2. A typical geological section of the central Ayalon Valley (after Itach et al. 2019: Fig. 3; Photo: Oren Ackermann and Gilad Itach).

2.3. Archaeological Remains

Table 1 summarizes the archaeological finds of 44 excavations in Yehud in chronological order (Fig. 3). Three functional categories are used: (a) architectural remains, including agricultural and industrial facilities; (b) human burials; (c) living surfaces and scattered pottery sherds without associated architecture. Site distribution maps are provided for each period, allowing an appreciation of the site's extent and diachronic shifts in scale and location.¹

¹ It should be borne in mind that some discrepancies may be expected in the description, amounts, and sometimes even the date of finds between preliminary and final publications.

Table 1. Excavations conducted at Yehud between 1993 and 2021. (a) Architecture and/or installation; (b) burial; (c) living surface and/or pottery sherds. S=Small: 1–9 squares; M=Medium: 10–29 squares; L=Large: $30 \leq$ squares (standard square 5×5 m). LC=Late Chalcolithic; EB=Early Bronze; IB=Intermediate Bronze; MB=Middle Bronze; LB=Late Bronze; IA=Iron Age; PER=Persian; HELL=Hellenistic; ROM=Roman; BYZ=Byzantine; EI=Early Islamic; CRU=Crusader; MAM=Mamluk; OTT=Ottoman.

No	License	Year	Size	References	LC	EB	IB	MB	LB	IA1	IA2	PER	HELL	ROM	BYZ	EI	CRU	MAM	OTT
1	A-2026	1993	S	Shemueli 1995	c										c	a	c		a
2	A-2099	1994	M	van den Brink et al. 2014	c		c	a	c		c	a			a				
3	A-2119	1994	S	Shemueli 1998	c									a		a c			b
4	A-2233	1995	S	Gudovich 1999a														a	a
5	A-2412	1996	S	Gudovich 1999b	c	c		c							c	c	a c	a c	a c
6	A-2634	1997	S	van den Brink, Golan, and Shemueli 2001	c														
7	A-2846	1998	S	Yannai 2004			b	b							c				
8*	A-3006	1999	S	Gudovich 2000															
9	B-70	1999	S	Shor 2000									c		c	a		a	a
10	A-3734	2002	S	Velednizki 2006											c				b
11	A-4533	2005	S	Milevski 2008	c		c							c	b				c
12**	A-5371	2008	M	Korenfeld and Bar-Nathan 2014											a	a b			
13**	A-5555	2008	M	Korenfeld and Bar-Nathan 2014											a	a b			

No	License	Year	Size	References	LC	EB	IB	MB	LB	IA1	IA2	PER	HELL	ROM	BYZ	EI	CRU	MAM	OTT
14	B-327	2008	L	Govrin 2015	a c			b											
15	B-337	2009	L	Govrin 2015	a c		b								a b	b			
16**	A-5646	2009	M	Korenfeld and Bar-Nathan 2014											a	a b			
17	A-5966	2010	S	Eshed 2011												b			
18	A-5996	2010	S	Segal 2014	c			c				c			a	a			a
19	A-6108	2011	S	Segal and Eshed 2011	c			b											a
20	A-6118	2011	L	Jakoel 2012; 2014a; 2021	a				c		c	c	c	a	a	c			a
21	A-6294	2011	S	Elisha 2013											a c				
22	A-6412	2012	S	Arbel 2013				b c						c	a	c		c	c
23	A-6526	2012	L	Jakoel and van den Brink 2014	a			b					c	a	a	c	c	c	c
24***	B-381	2012	L	Y. Govrin, pers. comm.	a c		b	b											a
25	A-6788	2013	S	Jakoel 2014b	a														a
26	A-6854	2013	M	Jakoel 2015a; 2020	a		b					b		b		b			a c
27***	B-397	2013	L	Y. Govrin, pers. comm.	a c		b	b											a
28	A-6892	2013	S	Jakoel 2015b	a			b							a				
29	A-7166	2014	L	Jakoel and Be'eri 2016	a			b	b			c	c	b	a				

No	License	Year	Size	References	LC	EB	IB	MB	LB	IA1	IA2	PER	HELL	ROM	BYZ	EI	CRU	MAM	OTT
30	A-7464	2015	S	Itach 2016	a														
31	A-7734	2016	S	Danziger 2021	c		c												
32	A-7796	2016	M	D. Abu Salach, pers. comm.	a			b										c	c
33	A-7804	2016	L	Itach, Golan and Zwiebel 2017; Itach et al. 2019; Itach, Golan and Ben Dor Evian 2022	a			b							a				
34	A-7885	2017	S	Jonish 2020	a c														
35	A-7975	2017	S	Jakoel, Ackermann, and Elisha 2018	c				b										
36	A-8013	2017	M	Jakoel and Elisha 2019	a c		b		b										
37	A-8111	2017	L	Jakoel 2019	a										a	a			a
38	A-8114	2017	S	Zwiebel 2019	c									c	c	b c			
39	A-8222	2018	M	Agmon et al. 2019	a			b	b					a	a	a			
40	A-8283	2018	L	Jakoel, forthcoming	a c		b	b	c										
41	B-460	2018	M	M. 'Iron and Y. Govrin, pers. comm.	a c				b		c	c		a	a				a
42	A-8383	2018	S	Itach 2019				b			a				c	c			a c
43	A-8391	2018	S	Itach 2020	c														
44	A-8422	2019	M	Agmon, Nagar, and Jakoel, forthcoming	c			c	c					c	c	b		c	c

No	License	Year	Size	References	LC	EB	IB	MB	LB	IA1	IA2	PER	HELL	ROM	BYZ	EI	CRU	MAM	OTT
45	A-8455	2019	S	Omanski 2020															a
46	A-8504	2019	M	Elisha, forthcoming											c	b		b c	b c
47	A-8721	2020	S	Marcus, forthcoming				c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c				
48	A-8785	2020	S	Golan, forthcoming	c			c	c				c	a	c				
Total****					32	1	9	19	11	1	5	7	6	13	26	18	3	8	22

* This excavation did not produce archaeological remains and, therefore, does not appear in the periodic maps below.

** While formally separate excavations that received separate licenses (A-5371, A-5555, A-5646), the first under Korenfeld and the latter two under Korenfeld and Bar-Nathan, they were subsequently combined and, therefore, counted as one here.

*** Although awarded separate licenses (B-381, B-397), Y. Govrin's two excavations at Yehud were combined into one and counted as such here.

**** Note that some excavations, although listed separately, are counted as one. For the sake of clarity, they are marked with italics.

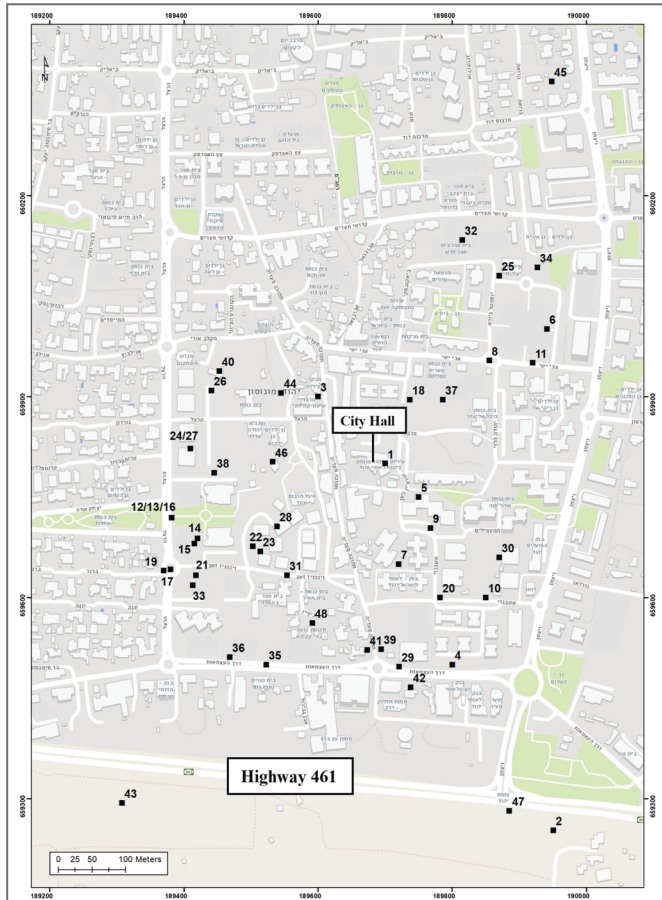


Fig. 3. Map of the excavations conducted at Yehud between 1993 and 2021.

2.3.1. Late Chalcolithic (4500–3800 BCE)

The earliest finds uncovered at Yehud date to the Late Chalcolithic period.² These were unearthed at 32 distinct locations, constituting the most widely represented period at the site (Fig. 4). However, it is devoid of architectural remains save two circular stone-built wells (Nos. 14, 30; Govrin 2015: 14–15; Itach 2016). Other than that, at least 130 vertical, deep, and narrow shafts and 17 pits were documented (Fig. 5; Itach et al. 2019: 193, Table 1). It was recently suggested that the shafts functioned as wells dug down to groundwater levels (Govrin 2015: 157–158; Itach et al. 2019: 267–269; van den Brink et al. 2019); it is also possible that they were

² Recently, R. Lupo (2021) suggested that some potsherds from excavation no. 20 (Jakobel 2021) may date to the Neolithic period. However, she acknowledges that the sherds were not stratified, and her description of their shape and fabric implies that they could also be of the Late Chalcolithic period. In the absence of further evidence for a Neolithic occupation at Yehud, Lupo's important suggestion is better set aside.

part of some kind of agricultural or industrial activity, the nature of which remains obscure. Notably, most shafts and pits were recorded in a relatively small number of the excavations clustered in the southwestern part of the site (Nos. 14, 15, 23, 24/27, 29, 33), whereas elsewhere, they are few and far between (Nos. 20, 25, 26, 28, 32, 34, 36, 37, 39–41). This pattern does not appear to correlate with the size of the excavations. Rather, the localities with concentrations of shafts and pits may represent areas designated for an indeterminate special-purpose activity. Excavations elsewhere in Yehud yielded remains of living surfaces and isolated potsherds (Nos. 1–3, 5, 6, 11, 18, 19, 31, 35, 38, 43, 44, 48). No intact burials from the Late Chalcolithic period were exposed at the site, and the only evidence of funerary activity comprised isolated ossuary sherds (Govrin 2015: 32; but see Jakael 2019).

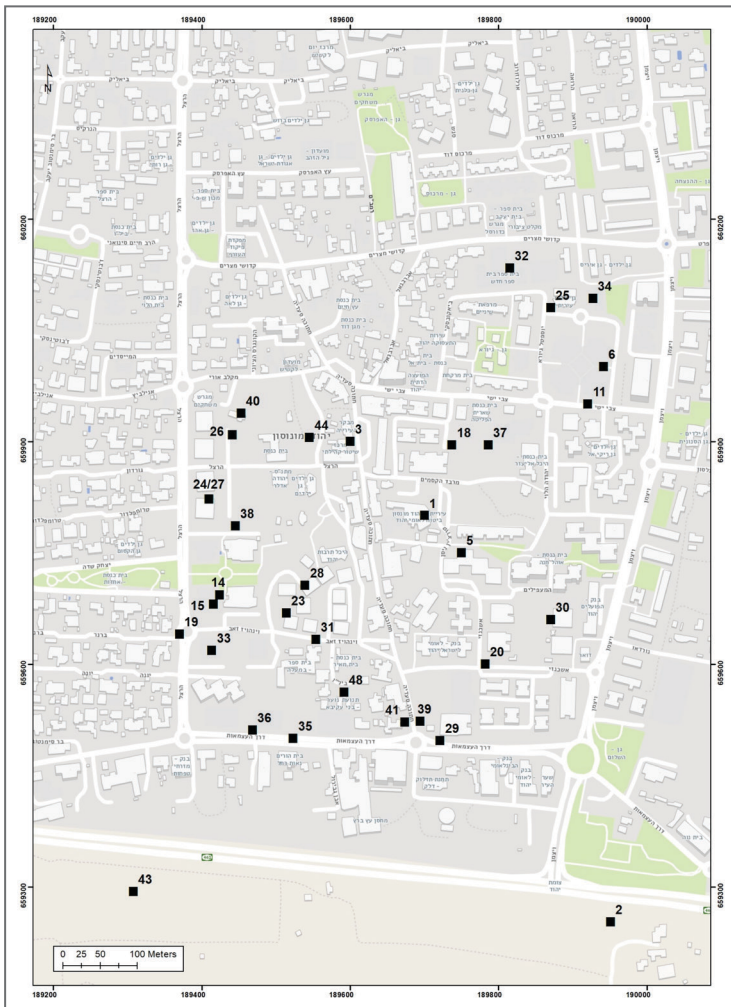


Fig. 4. Map of excavations with Late Chalcolithic remains.



Fig. 5. A Late Chalcolithic shaft, excavation No. 33
(Itach et al. 2019: Fig. 17; Photo: Maxim Dinshtein, Courtesy of the IAA).

2.3.2. Early Bronze Age (3800–2500 BCE)

Only a few potsherds of this period were recorded in Yehud, all deriving from one excavation (No. 5; Fig. 6). As no signs of architecture or burial remains were found, it seems that Yehud might have been abandoned after the Late Chalcolithic period for more than a thousand years.

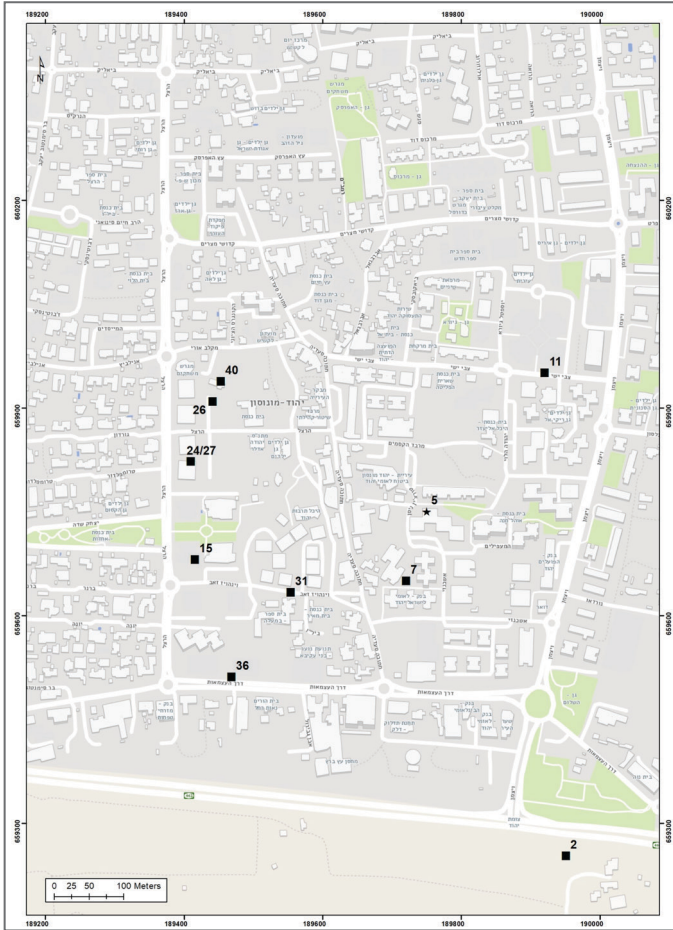


Fig. 6. Map of excavations with Early Bronze Age and Intermediate Bronze Age remains (the one Early Bronze Age locality is marked with a star).

2.3.3. Intermediate Bronze Age (2500–2000 BCE)

Remains from the Intermediate Bronze Age were found in as many as nine excavations (Fig. 6). Signs of occupation are noticeably lacking, however. At most, small pottery and flint assemblages were found in the southern part of the site, possibly indicating the existence of a small, intermittently occupied settlement (see more below; No. 2; van den Brink et al. 2014: 133). Conversely, most finds from this period derive from burials. The burials uncovered at the site were shaft burials typical of the period (Greenhut 1995), although they were dug into the hard soil rather than hewn in the rock, as is the case elsewhere (Yannai 2011; Itach, Elisha, and Marcus, forthcoming). E. Yannai was the first to report Intermediate

Bronze Age burials at Yehud, including some complete pottery vessels but no human remains (No. 7). Subsequently, Y. Govrin excavated a large part of a burial ground with more than 200 graves in the western part of the site (Nos. 15, 24/27; see also Jakoel 2020: 19). Additional burials were found in various locations (Nos. 26, 36, 40; see also Haddad 2000),³ and some Intermediate Bronze Age sherds found in the northeastern part of the site (No. 11) may have also originated from a nearby burial that was not exposed (Milevski 2008).

2.3.4. Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 BCE)

Remains from the Middle Bronze Age were uncovered in 19 excavations (Fig. 7), including meager remnants of what may have been a residential structure in the south and an extensive burial ground over most of the area. The presumed residential features include a wall fragment and some MB II potsherds (Nos. 2, 47), rendering the existence and location of a settlement that may have been associated with the Middle Bronze Age burial ground conjectural at this time (van den Brink et al. 2014: 140). Approximately 130 Middle Bronze Age burials have been unearthed so far (Fig. 8). Although little can be gleaned from the published information, it can be mentioned that, unlike the Intermediate Bronze Age shaft burials, those of the Middle Bronze Age were predominantly simple pit graves (Jakoel and Be'eri 2016). About 20 such graves were excavated in the eastern part of the site (No. 14) and more than 100 in its southern part (Nos. 29, 39, 42). One of them was an outstanding MB IIA warrior tomb containing a large number of metal objects and a unique anthropomorphic jug (No. 33; Itach, Golan, and Ben Dor Evian 2022). Additional MB II graves were found in different parts of the site (Nos. 7, 19, 23, 24/27, 28, 32, 40), while other excavations yielded only potsherds (Nos. 5, 18, 44, 48). Notably, one of these excavations retrieved several cooking-pot sherds with Middle Bronze Age burials (No. 22), indicating that the pots may have been part of rarely documented burial rituals (Ilan 1995; Garfinkel and Cohen 2007: 65–67).

³ Intermediate Bronze Age sherds were also reported in a preliminary report by O. Danziger (No. 31), although they were not included in the final publication of that excavation and, hence, may have been misidentified.

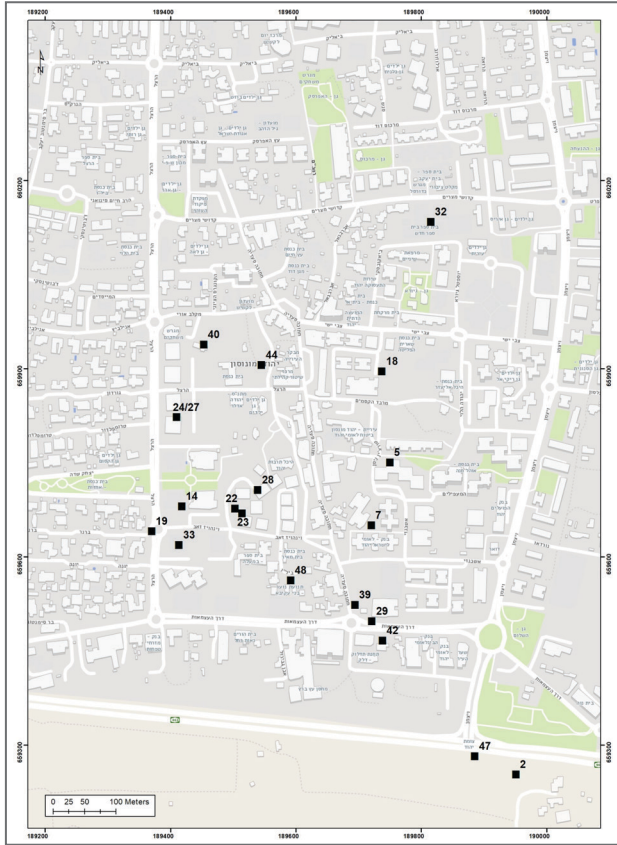


Fig. 7. Map of excavations with Middle Bronze Age remains.



Fig. 8. An MB IIB burial, excavation No. 42
(Itach 2019: Fig 4; Photo: Yaniv Agmon, Courtesy of the IAA).

2.3.5. Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BCE)

Late Bronze Age remains were uncovered in 11 excavations (Fig. 9). Domestic pottery, including cooking-pot sherds, were found in two, which also yielded putative settlement remains of the Intermediate and Middle Bronze Ages (Nos. 2, 47), perhaps an indication of settlement continuity. Most of the finds of this period, however, are associated with burials, mostly pit graves, as in the Middle Bronze Age. Shaft tombs were tentatively identified in one excavation (No. 35). Altogether, fourteen burials were excavated in the southern part of the site (No. 29), ten slightly further west (Nos. 39, 41), and eight somewhat further west still (Nos. 35, 36). The Late Bronze Age burials seem to concentrate in the southern part of the site, overlapping with the main cluster of Middle Bronze Age burials in the east and extending west. In the remaining excavations, only pottery sherds were found (Nos. 20, 40, 44, 48).

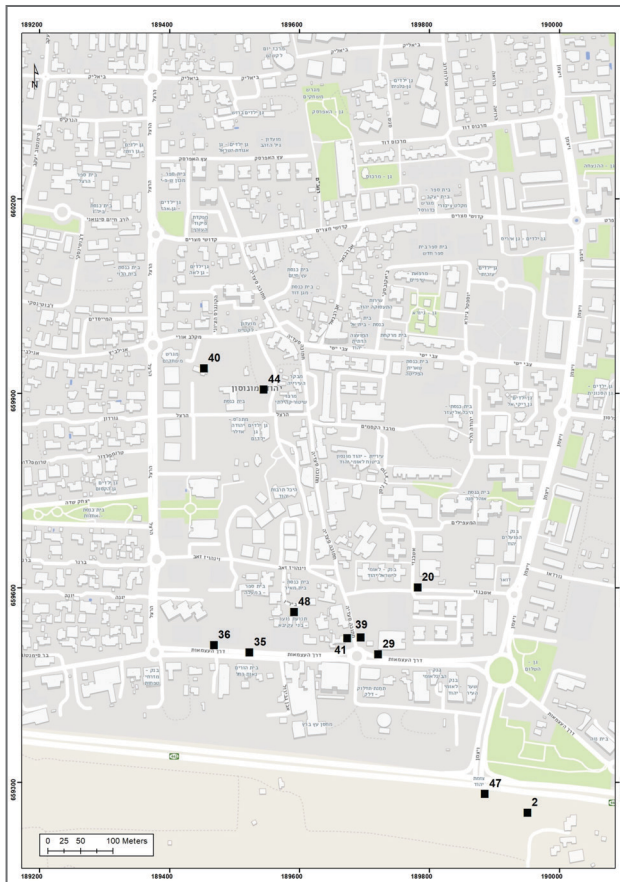


Fig. 9. Map of excavations with Late Bronze Age remains.

2.3.6. Iron Age I–II (1200–539 BCE)

Meager Iron Age remains were uncovered in five excavations (Fig. 10), all in the southeastern part of the site. No architectural remains indicative of a permanent settlement were found, nor was any evidence of burials recorded. The only constructed Iron Age feature was uncovered in excavation No. 42. It comprised an installation built of small stones, perhaps a bath, coated with 2–3 cm-thick gray plaster. The installation's dark soil fill contained a few Iron Age II potsherds (Itach 2019: Fig. 6:6–8). Only one excavation produced Iron Age I potsherds (No. 47), whereas Iron Age II potsherds were found in three excavations (Nos. 2, 20, 47); an Iron Age II weight was found nearby (No. 41).

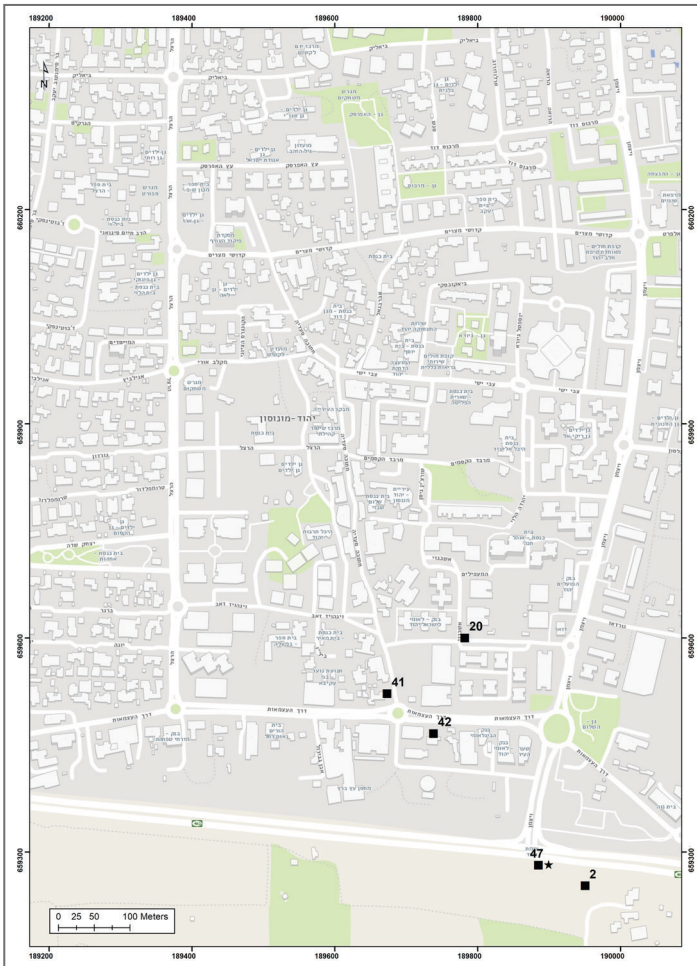


Fig. 10. Map of excavations with Iron Age I–II remains (the excavation with Iron Age I potsherds is marked with a star).

2.3.7. Persian Period (539–332 BCE)

As in the Iron Age, only a few remains that could be ascribed to the Persian period were found at Yehud, although they were much more widely spread across the site, recorded in seven different excavations (Fig. 11). The remains of a floor were discovered in the southern part of the site (No. 2; van den Brink et al. 2014: 133), and seven burials were unearthed in its northwest (No. 26). In addition, some *ex situ* potsherds were found in five other excavations (Nos. 18, 20, 29, 41, 47).

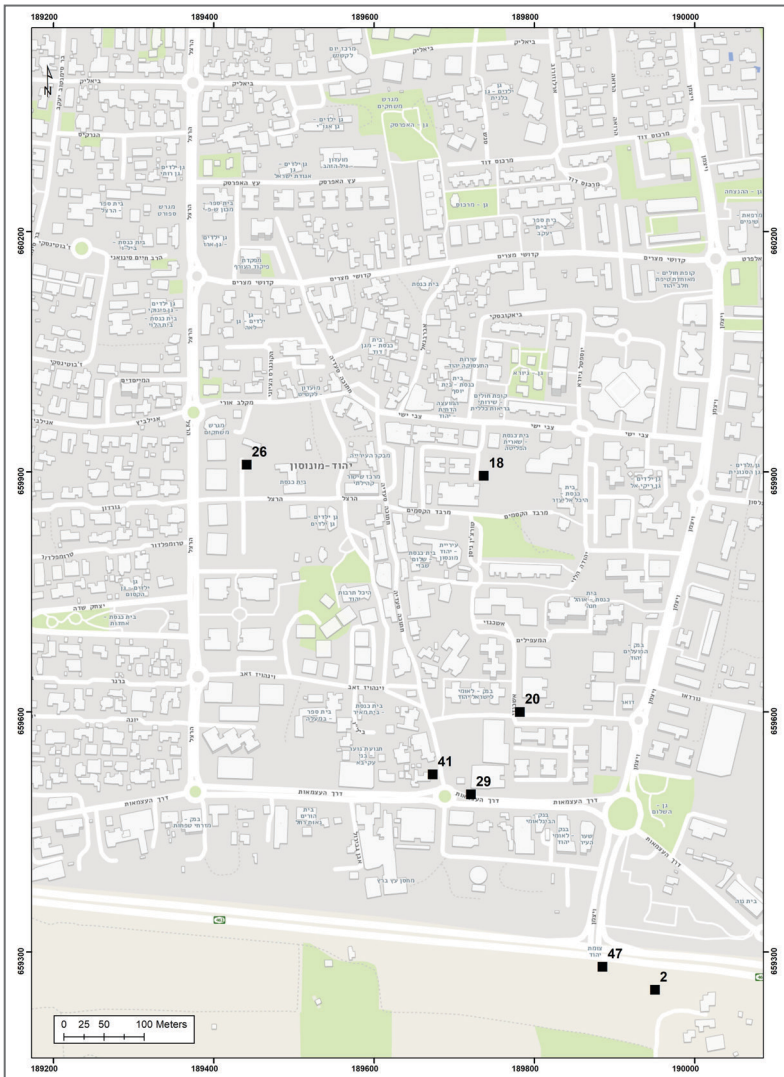


Fig. 11. Map of excavations with Persian-period remains.

2.3.8. Hellenistic Period (332–63 BCE)

Potsherds dating to the Hellenistic period were recorded in six excavations (Fig. 12). As no architectural remains or burials were found, some form of short-lived activity at the southern part of the site may be suggested for this period.

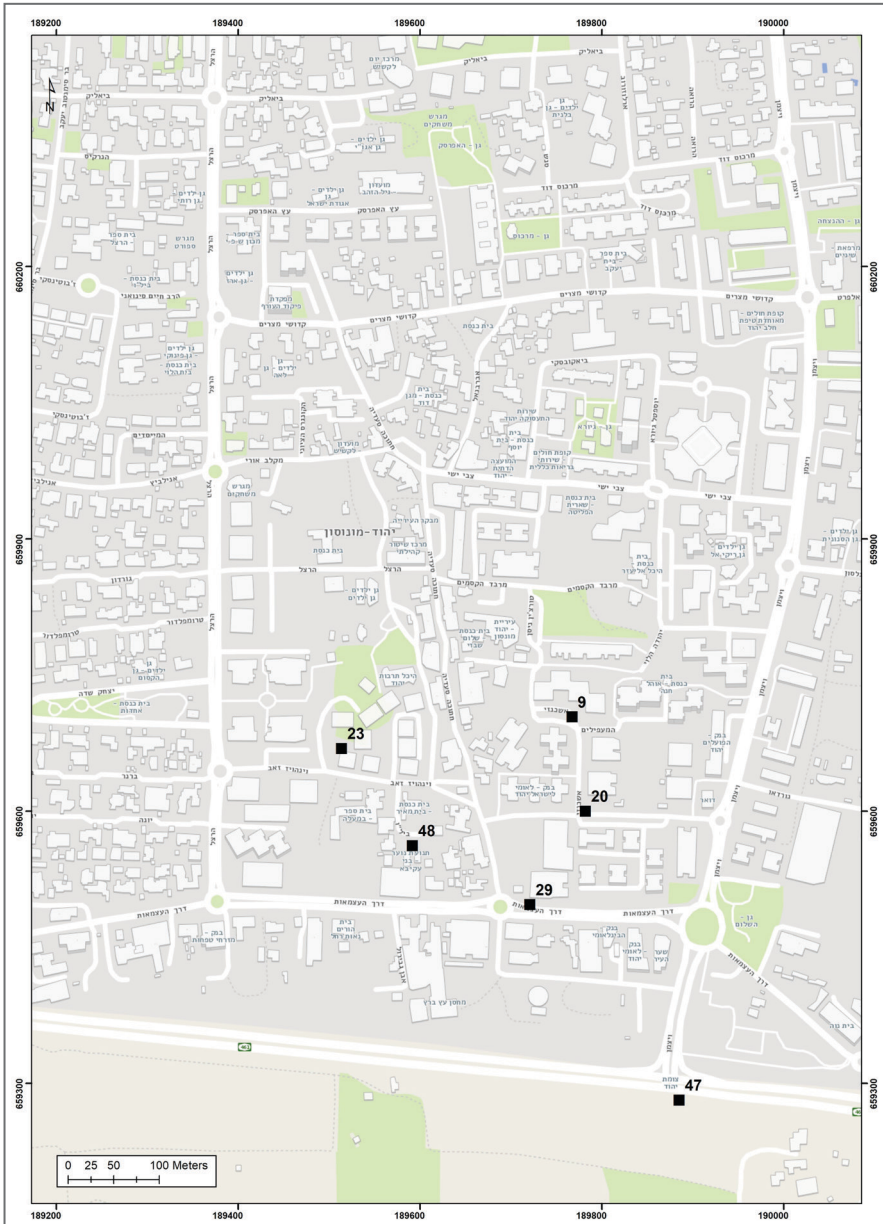


Fig. 12. Map of excavations with Hellenistic-period remains.

2.3.9. Roman Period (63 BCE–324 CE)

Roman-period archaeological remains were found in 13 excavations but with no definite signs of permanent settlement (Fig. 13). However, unlike the Hellenistic period, five excavations produced remains of installations (Nos. 3, 20, 23, 39, 41; possibly also No. 48). In excavation No. 20, five pottery kilns, one metal-smelting kiln, and wall remains were uncovered (Fig. 14); another pottery kiln was found further west (No. 23), and two oval-shaped pits containing an assortment of domestic pottery were recorded in the southern part of the site (No. 39). Burial remains were found in two excavations, comprising at least 25 graves in the southern part of the site (No. 29) and one Late Roman grave in its northwestern part (No. 26). Other excavations produced only potsherds (Nos. 11, 22, 38, 44, 47). It seems that activity at this time was primarily industrial, alongside some funerary operations.

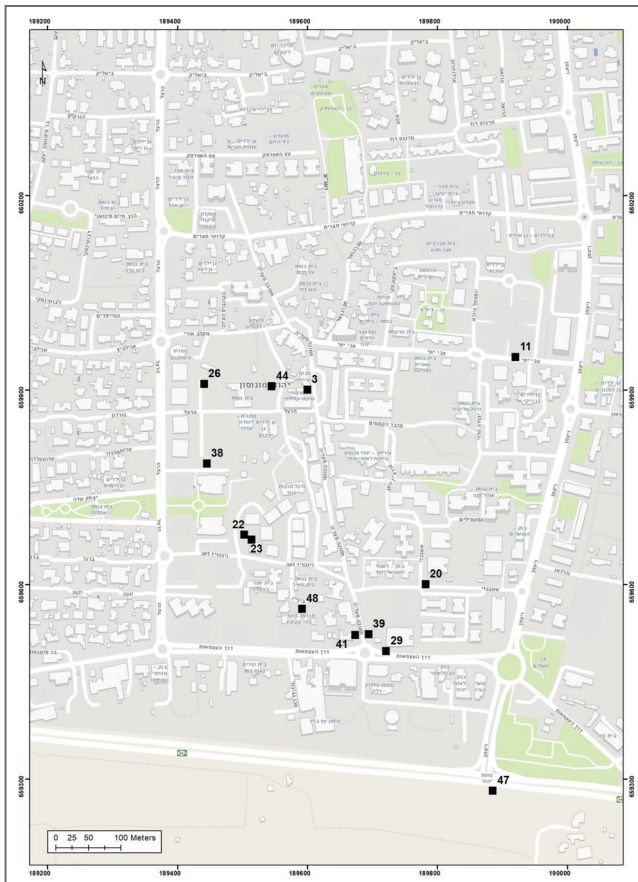


Fig. 13. Map of excavations with Roman-period remains.



Fig. 14. A Roman pottery kiln, excavation No. 20
(Jakoel 2014a: Fig. 7; Photo: Assaf Peretz, Courtesy of the IAA).

2.3.10. Byzantine Period (324–638 CE)

Evidence of substantial Byzantine-period occupation was found in 26 different excavations (Fig. 15), including architectural remains, living surfaces, burials, and installations, rendering this the second-most densely represented period at the site after the Late Chalcolithic. This is also the first time that definite signs of permanent settlement are found in Yehud, consisting of residential buildings. A large residential building, one of its rooms lavishly adorned with a colorful mosaic, and a winepress were uncovered in the eastern part of the site (No. 12/13/16; Fig. 16). Another residential building featuring a colorful mosaic was exposed in the southern part of the site (No. 39), a large winepress and some small dwelling structures were excavated nearby (No. 29), and a living surface was exposed further north (No. 7). Large-scale architectural remains were also uncovered in excavation Nos. 18, 20–23, and 28, and several excavations produced pottery kilns (Nos. 2, 15, 33, 37, 41). Two graves containing the remains of at least nine individuals were found in the northeastern part of the site (No. 11), and some graves dated to the Late Byzantine–Early Islamic transition were found in the site’s western part (No. 15). Other excavations yielded only potsherds (Nos. 1, 5, 9, 10, 38, 42, 44, 46–48).

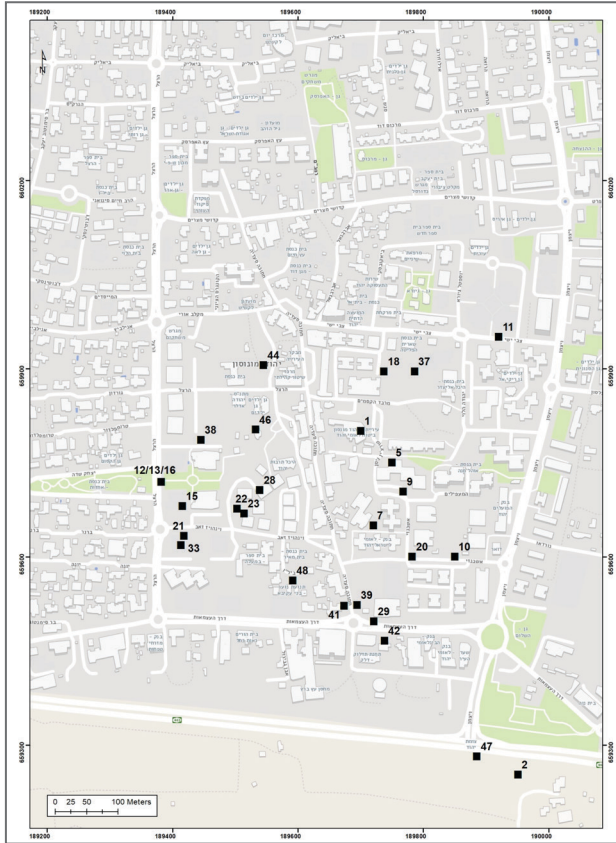


Fig. 15. Map of excavations with Byzantine-period remains.



Fig. 16. The remains of a Byzantine winepress, excavation No. 12/13/16 (Korenfeld and Bar-Nathan 2014: Fig. 9; Photo: Assaf Peretz, Courtesy of the IAA).

2.3.11. Early Islamic Period (638–1099 CE)

Architectural remains, living surfaces, and burials dated to the Early Islamic period were found in 18 excavations (Fig. 17). While the remains of this period are widely spread across the site, the architectural remains were scarce or constituted continued use of Byzantine-period structures (Nos. 1, 3, 9, 12/13/16, 18, 37, 39). Burials found in a number of the excavations lacked burial goods (Nos. 15, 17, 26, 38, 44, 46), and their attribution to the Early Islamic period remains tentative. Occasionally, isolated living surfaces and concentrations of pottery sherds were also found (Nos. 5, 20, 22, 23, 42). Apparently, the occupation of Yehud declined in the Early Islamic period after an episode of prosperity during the Byzantine period.

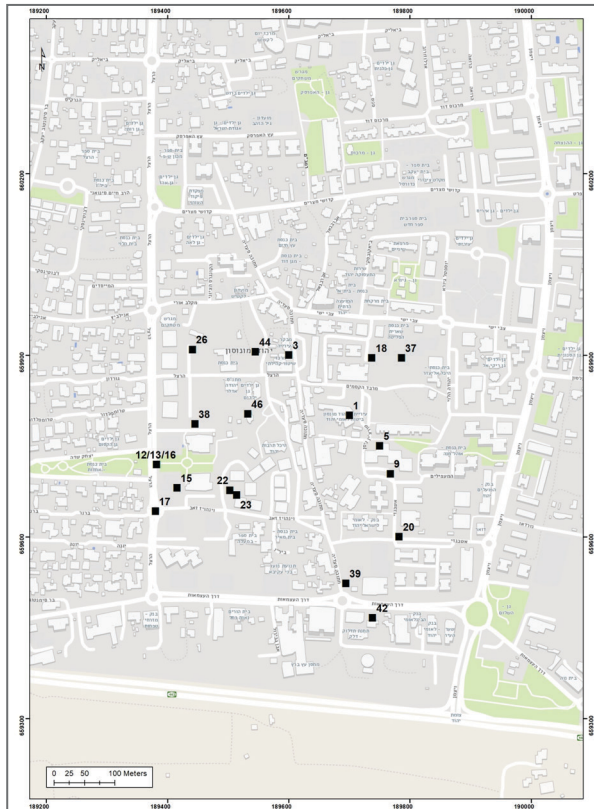


Fig. 17. Map of excavations with Early Islamic-period remains.

2.3.12. Crusader Period (1099 – 1260 CE)

Only three excavations produced archaeological remains dating to the Crusader period (Fig. 18). They included a massive wall, perhaps part of a large building,

in the eastern part of the site (No. 5) and concentrations of Crusader potsherds (No. 1, and perhaps also No. 23). It seems that the Early Islamic village was abandoned at the beginning of the Crusader period, and a large building, perhaps a fort, was established in its center.

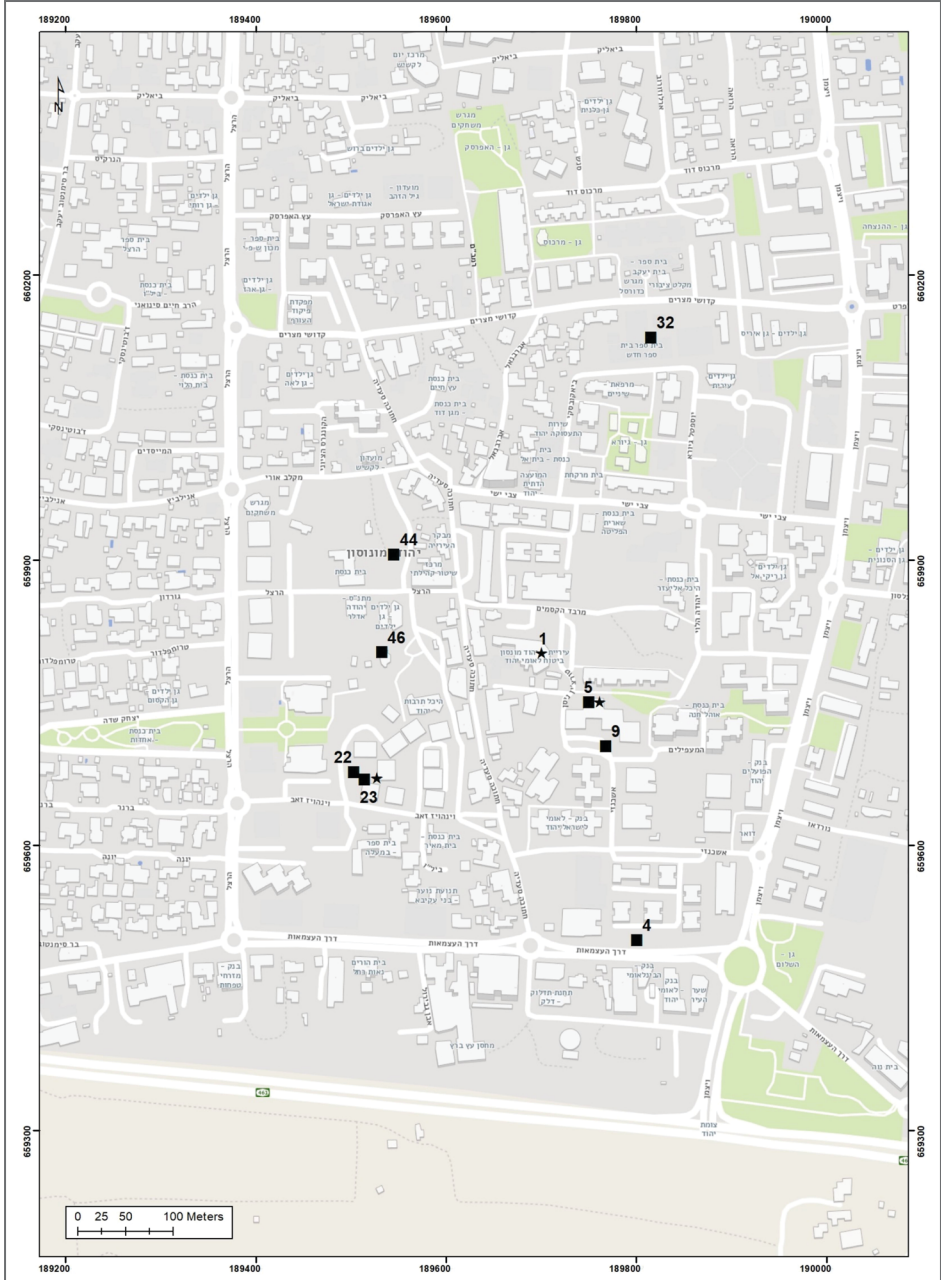


Fig. 18. Map of excavations with Crusader (marked with a star) and Mamluk-period remains.

2.3.13. Mamluk Period (1260–1517 CE)

Eight excavations uncovered archaeological remains dated to the Mamluk period (Fig. 18); three yielded architectural remains (Nos. 4, 5, 9). Several burials and an adjacent sheik's tomb appear to belong to this period (No. 46; Fig. 19). Other excavations yielded only potsherds (Nos. 22, 32, 44, and perhaps also no. 23). The Mamluk-period remains seem rather poor, and it may be suggested that the village occupied the eastern part of the site, while the cemetery was in the west, near the sheik's tomb.



Fig. 19. The sheik's tomb near excavation No. 46 (Photo: Gilad Itach).

2.3.14. Ottoman Period (1517–1917 CE)

Ottoman-period remains were found in 22 excavations (Fig. 20), rendering this the third best-represented period at the site. Architectural remains were found in many excavations, although they were usually rather poor (Nos. 1, 4, 5, 9, 18–20, 24/27, 25, 26, 41, 42, 45). Notwithstanding, fairly substantial remains with evidence of two distinct phases were exposed in excavation No. 37 in the eastern part of the site. The early phase comprised dwelling remains, and the late phase consisted of ash pits, perhaps representing the center of the Ottoman village. A Mosque with a minaret still standing today is found nearby. Burials, mostly without goods, were found in three excavations (Nos. 3, 10, 46; see also Jakoel 2020: 11). Other excavations yielded only meager remains, mostly potsherds (Nos. 11, 22, 23, 32, 44).

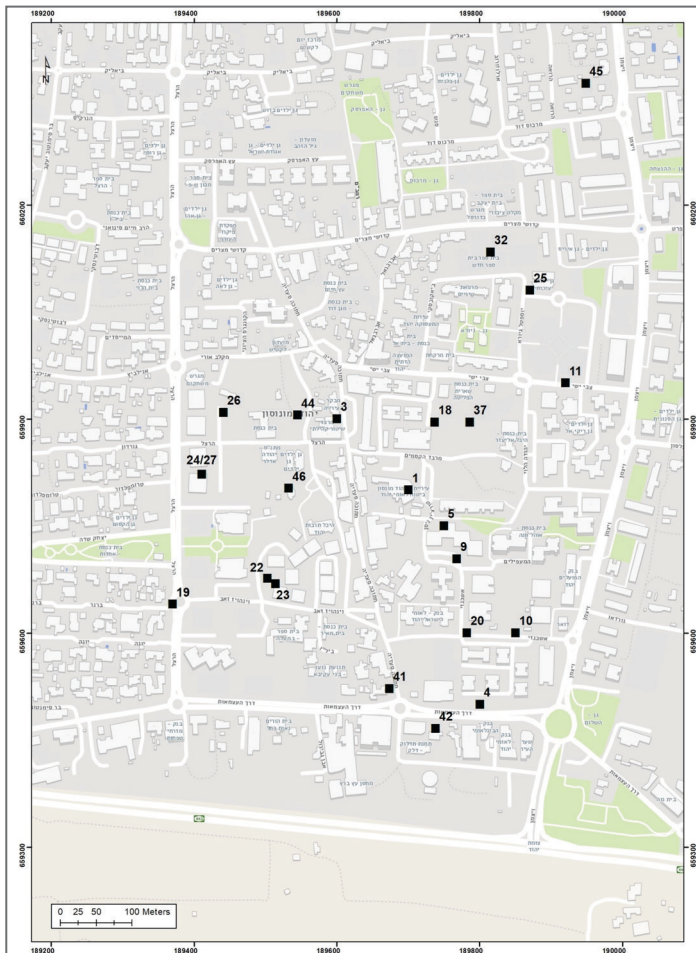


Fig. 20. Map of excavations with Ottoman-period remains.

3. The Stratification and Mound Formation of Yehud

Several scholars, the present author included, supported the existence of an archaeological mound (a Near Eastern *tell* or *tel*) in Yehud, presumably located in a ca. 2-hectare elevated area northeast of the city hall (Fig. 1; Jakoel and van den Brink 2014; Govrin 2015: 7–14, Fig. 1; Itach 2016). However, evidence of mound-formation processes consisting of long-term human occupation and substantial accumulation of stratified deposits (Aharoni et al. 2011: 24; Faust and Katz 2019: 37–41) is poor, calling this hypothesis into question (Itach et al. 2019: 193). Having reviewed the last three decades of intensive and extensive excavations in Yehud, we are now able to reconsider this question.

To begin, the data presented above, summarizing the results of 44 widely-dispersed excavations, clearly show that the site of Yehud was occupied intermittently between the Late Chalcolithic and the Ottoman period. However, most archaeological deposits at the site were found in single-stratum contexts, and numerous instances of late archaeological remains—Roman and even Byzantine—have been deposited on virgin soil. Moreover, the earliest unequivocal evidence of permanent settlement at Yehud is from the Byzantine period, while earlier remains consist of various kinds of installations and human burials. In addition, a recent excavation in the northernmost part of the putative Tel Yehud (No. 37) produced a deep section down to sterile soil. Notably, no Bronze and Iron Age remains that constitute the core of Near Eastern mounds were found. Instead, it comprised Byzantine-period and later deposits directly superimposing Late Chalcolithic remains.

The only evidence of a pre-Byzantine settlement was found in the southern part of the site, relatively far away from the area long suspected to form the mound of Tel Yehud. Remains dating to the Middle Bronze Age include meager architectural features and small finds, possibly indicating a small rural settlement. Other small finds, including cooking pot sherds, were dated to the Intermediate Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, and Iron Age (Nos. 2, 47). This area, near Yehud Stream, may have been inhabited at least during some of the biblical periods, and it is here that a small mound could have formed, provided that mound formation occurred at Yehud in the first place. For now, as long as there is no definite evidence of the existence of a *tell* at Yehud, this author is of the opinion that the use of the term *Tel Yehud* should cease. Instead, Yehud should be called a *site*, intimating a spatially horizontal spread of settlement remains across many different localities.

4. Settlement History at Yehud and Its Vicinity

4.1. The Late Chalcolithic Period

The site of Yehud was first settled during the Late Chalcolithic period, and although no definitive remains of a permanent settlement have been unearthed, the numerous shafts, pits, and living surfaces, together with the sizeable ceramic, stone, flint, and faunal assemblages, demonstrate extensive human presence at the site during this time (Itach et al. 2019; van den Brink et al. 2019). One may hypothesize a separate yet unexcavated residential area nearby; it is unlikely, however, given the abundance and richness of the finds already uncovered and the extensive probing of the site and its vicinity in recent decades.

Other Late Chalcolithic sites along the Ayalon Stream, such as Bene Beraq (Be'eri et al. 2019) and Ono (Gorzalczany 2000; van den Brink, Golan, and Shemueli 2001: Note 9; Kogan-Zehavi 2011; Arbel and Volynsky 2019: 211), also comprise pits, shafts, and some living surfaces but no architectural remains. A Late Chalcolithic site with somewhat more substantial evidence of permanent settlement in the western coastal plain is known only from the modern city of Tel Aviv (see van den Brink et al. 2016). Late Chalcolithic burial-cave sites, on the other hand, were found in many other locations along the Ayalon Stream, including Azor (Perrot and Ladiray 1980), Giv'atayim (Sussman and Ben-Arieh 1966; Korenfeld 2013), and Shoham (van den Brink and Gophna 2005; van den Brink 2009; for a detailed list of burial sites in this region, see van den Brink 2005). A unique burial context of this period consisting of an isolated constructed tomb was unearthed near Giv'at Dani, in an area of alluvial soil, 5 m below the surface (Itach 2018); the structure may have been part of a larger burial site, which remains to be exposed.

According to the surveys conducted in the region (Gophan and Beit-Arieh 2012; Kochavi and Beit-Arieh 2013; Gophna, Ayalon, and Ben-Melech 2015a; 2015b; Table 2), a total of 40 Late Chalcolithic sites have been recorded to date (see also Itach et al. 2019: 194). Yehud must have been one of the central sites among them and a major component in the regional settlement system of the Ayalon Valley occupied by a society that retained some level of seasonal nomadism, albeit far along in the process of becoming fully settled (Govrin 2015: 157–159; Itach et al. 2019: Fig. 1).

Table 2. Archaeological sites documented in four regional survey maps (RH= Rosh ha-Ayin; PT= Petah Tikva; TA= Tel Aviv)

Survey Map	LC	EB	IB	MB	LB	IA	PE	HE	RO	BY	EI	CR	MA	OT
Lod (80)	12	19	4	3	4	47	28	19	45*	106	28	15		21
RH (78)	8	4	-	7	2	32	37	26	17**	70	26	12		16
PT (71)	16	11	6	23	4	14	8	18	41	27	28	11	15	15
TA (70)***	4	8	3	7	1	4	3	8		8		3	4	3
Total	40	42	13	40	11	97	76	71	103	211	82	60		55

* Forty-three additional sites were indiscriminately dated to the Roman-Byzantine period and were not counted here.

** Thirty-five additional sites were indiscriminately dated to the Roman-Byzantine period and were not counted here.

*** Unlike the other three maps cited here, which cover an area of 100 km², this map covers an area of only ca. 25 km².

4.2. The Bronze and Iron Ages

The site of Yehud appears to have been uninhabited for more than a millennium after the Late Chalcolithic period. Throughout dozens of excavations conducted across the site, Early Bronze Age potsherds were nearly absent. Similarly, no Early Bronze Age remains were found at the nearby site of Bene Beraq (Finkelstein 1990; Be'eri et al. 2019; 2020), and only a few sherds of this period were found at Ono (Kogan-Zehavi 2011). Late Chalcolithic sites located somewhat farther away, such as Azor (Golani and Van den Brink 1999) and Tel Lod (Yannai 2008; van den Brink et al. 2015; Golani 2022), have yielded more substantial Early Bronze Age remains. Extensive Early Bronze Age occupations have been recorded farther east, at sites like Tel Aphek (Beck and Kochavi 1993; Kochavi, Beck and Yadin 2000; Gadot and Yadin 2009), Khirbat Abu Hamid (Paz, Segal, and Nadelman 2018), Tel Bareqet (Paz and Paz 2007), and Tel Dalit (Gophna 1996).

Altogether, surveys documented 42 Early Bronze Age sites in the region, about half east of Yehud and the other half west of it (Table 2). Some of them were fortified during the EB II, whereas during the EB III, only rural sites are known. Interestingly, the larger and more substantial sites were recorded east of Yehud, while the sites to its west were relatively small and rural (Herzog 1993). Thus, Faust and Ashkenazy's (2009) argument that large swaths of the coastal plain were uninhabited during the Early Bronze Age seems to hold for the central part of the Ayalon Valley.

The site of Yehud became a sizeable burial ground during the subsequent Intermediate Bronze Age (ca. 200 burials; for partial descriptions of the finds, see

Govrin 2015: 105–111; Jakoel 2020). Most graves were found in the northwestern part of the site. Interestingly, notwithstanding the millennium-long hiatus between the periods, much of the Intermediate Bronze Age cemetery spatially coincided with the part of the site where Late Chalcolithic activity also concentrated.

At least three large Intermediate Bronze Age cemeteries existed in the central Ayalon Valley: Bet Dagan (Yannai 2011; Yannai and Nagar 2014), Yehud (Govrin 2015), and Newe Efrayim (Itach, Elisha, and Marcus, forthcoming), yielding together hundreds of shaft tombs dug into the hard soil. Conversely, evidence of Intermediate Bronze Age occupation of the region's large mound sites —e.g., Bet Dagan (Peilstöcker and Kapitaikin 2000) and Azor (Yannai 2011: 251)—is conspicuously lacking, suggesting that the settlement pattern consisted primarily of small, rural, single-period occupations. Such sites are extremely difficult to expose due to humanly caused degradation or extensive alluviation that buries the remains deep in the ground. Nevertheless, a recent excavation at Newe Efrayim, less than 2 km west of Yehud, may have uncovered a settlement of this kind (Itach, Elisha, and Marcus, forthcoming), and additional sites await discovery (Yannai 2011: 251–252). Intermediate Bronze Age settlements appear to be entirely absent from western Samaria, where surveys revealed scant pottery shreds in only four sites. Nine Intermediate Bronze Age burial sites were found nearer to the coastline, along the north-south *kurkar* ridge. Here too, no clear signs of settlement were recorded (Table 2).

The Middle Bronze Age burial ground uncovered at Yehud comprised somewhat fewer graves than that of the Intermediate Bronze Age (ca. 130), although it also demonstrated an expansion to the south and east (Itach, Golan, and Ben Dor Evian 2022: Fig. 2). The Late Bronze Age cemetery, in contrast, concentrated in a relatively small area in the southern part of what was formerly the Middle Bronze Age burial ground where only ca. 28 graves were found. The transition from the Intermediate to the Middle and Late Bronze Ages also entailed a shift in burial types from shaft tombs to simple pit graves. Meager architectural remains and small quantities of domestic Middle Bronze Age pottery, mainly cooking pots, suggest that a small settlement existed at the site at that time, perhaps also during the preceding Intermediate Bronze Age and the subsequent Late Bronze Age.

Middle and Late Bronze Age pit graves are also known from other sites in the region. More than 80 such graves were unearthed at Bene Beraq (Be'eri et al. 2020), and it is estimated that there are at least one thousand more. The main urban center of the region at that time was Aphek (Beck and Kochavi 1993), located northeast of Yehud, while other important settlements included Tel Jerishe (Herzog 1993) and Jaffa (Herzog 2008), west of Yehud. Surveys of the region demonstrate that while western Samaria was sparsely settled at this time, with only ten sites documented,

the coastal plain was densely settled, with a total of 30 sites (Table 2). Many of the latter were rural, established near the meeting point of the Yarqon and the Ayalon Streams. However, only a handful of Middle Bronze Age sites are known closer to Yehud itself, including Bene Beraq (Finkelstein 1990; Be’ei et al. 2019), Khirbat Sha’ira (Peilstöcker 2004), and Tel ha-Shomer (Itach 2021). The entire region underwent a sharp demographic decline during the Late Bronze Age when only 11 sites were documented (Table 2).

The meager remains of the Iron Age and the Persian period at Yehud—an installation of a tentative Iron Age II date (Itach 2019), the remains of a Persian-period living surface in the southern part of the site (van den Brink et al. 2014: 133), and a few Persian-period graves in its northern part (Jakoel 2020: 5–8)—are in agreement with the broader scarcity of settlements in the central Ayalon Valley at this time. Scant Iron Age I–II and Persian-period remains were found at Bene Beraq (Finkelstein 1990), and a few Iron Age II and Persian remains were found at Neve Efrayim (Marcus, forthcoming; Itach, Elisha, and Marcus, forthcoming).

In western Samaria, surveys and excavations indicated that numerous rural sites were established in the second half of the 8th century BCE, the latter part of Iron Age II, following the region’s annexation by the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Finkelstein 1981; Faust 2006; Shadman 2019). Located at the southwestern edge of the empire, this area had strategic military importance as a muster point before marching into the hostile southern territories (Aster and Faust 2015; Itach 2022). These rural sites, all located in the Samaria western foothills, were established to support the Assyrian effort, and most remained occupied during the subsequent Persian (76 sites) and Hellenistic (71 sites) periods as well (Table 2; see also Faust 2006).

4.3. Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods

Scattered Hellenistic-period potsherds found at Yehud probably represent short-duration activities at the site. Areas surrounding Yehud were likewise sparsely settled at the time, with scant remains from this period found at Bene Beraq (Be’eri et al. 2019). Farther away, a small urban settlement existed at Aphek (Beck and Kokhavi 1993), and a village was founded to its east, at Ḥorvat Burnat (Amit, Torgë, and Gendelman 2008). Regional surveys recorded 71 sites from this period. Most were located in western Samaria, east of Yehud (Table 2), representing ongoing rural occupation that had begun in preceding periods.

During the Roman period, an industrial zone primarily equipped with pottery kilns was established at Yehud and subsequently expanded during the Byzantine period. The latter period was the first to manifest extensive residential

construction at the site, including opulent structures featuring colorful mosaic floors (Korenfeld and Bar-Nathan 2014; Jakoel and Be'eri 2016; Agmon et al. 2019). The large-scale development of Yehud in the Roman and mainly the Byzantine periods was part of a wider regional trend of settlement intensification. Thus, surveys along the Ayalon Valley and the Samaria foothills documented more than 100 Roman-period sites and more than 200 Byzantine-period sites (Table 2). The Roman period also saw the establishment of Antipatris at Aphek (Avi-Yonah 1976: 29; Beck and Kochavi 1993) and Diospolis at Lod (Avi-Yonah 1976: 75; Gorzelzany et al. 2016), where a lavish residential quarter with colorful mosaic floors was uncovered (Avissar 2008).

At this time, Yehud was located near the main road heading north to Aphek (Tsafriir, Di Segni, and Green 1994). The settlement in the western part of the Ayalon Valley seems to have remained rural; no large urban sites were found there (Gophna, Ayalon, and Ben Melech 2015a). However, in the Byzantine period, the city of Jaffa developed considerably, and the road connecting it with Lod to the east passed near Yehud. Settlement and industrial activity of a modest scale during the Byzantine period were documented at Bene Beraq (Avi-Yona 1976: 36; Finkelstein 1990; Be'eri et al. 2019), Ono (Avi-Yonah 1976: 85; Gophna, Feldstein, and Taxel 2007) and Newe Efrayim (Birman 2007; Itach, Elisha, and Marcus, forthcoming), which may have developed as part of the rural hinterland of large nearby cities.

4.4. Early Islamic to Ottoman Periods

The Decrease in settlement activity observed at Yehud during the Early Islamic period was part of a broader regional trend in which the number of sites documented in the surveys dropped to as low as 82 (Table 2). No newly founded sites are known in the region from this period. Early Islamic remains were found at Bene Beraq (Be'eri et al. 2019) and Newe Efrayim (Birman 2007; Sion 2007), while a large site was excavated in Kafr Jinnis (Messika 2006). The most important urban centers at this time remained those of Aphek, Lod, and Jaffa.

Yehud of the Crusader period seems to have comprised only a single, large structure, perhaps a fort, located at its center (Gudovich 1999b). The archaeological data for this period in the Ayalon Valley is rather limited, and only 14 sites were reported in the surveys (Table 2). A textual Crusader-period source mentions a place named Rentiae in this area, probably present-day Nofekh, which was handed over to the Hospitaller Order in 1166 CE (Haddad 2011; see also Avi-Yonah 1976: 90). A fortress was established at this time in Azor (Golani and van den Brink 1999: 1), and important regional centers operated at Migdal Afeq (Taxel 2017), Jaffa, and Tell Qasile (Gophna, Ayalon, and Ben Melech 2015a).

The site of Yehud was resettled during the Mamluk period. A sheik's tomb that Jewish and Muslim traditions identify with Judah, son of Jacob (Gen 29:35), is attributed to this period. Archaeological finds indicate that the settlement continued to grow in the Ottoman period, and according to historical sources, it comprised 126 Muslim households in 1596 CE (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977: 155) and 2,437 inhabitants—presumably about 300 households—after World War I (Barron 1923: Table VII, P. 20). This development was part of a broader process of settlement growth in the Ayalon Valley during the Mamluk and especially the Ottoman periods. A total of 55 sites were recorded, most notably Kafr 'Ana (Ono), Kafarjun (Newe Efrayim), Kafr Jinnis (east of Ben-Gurion Airport), Ibn Ibraq (Bene Beraq), Yzur (Azor), Safuriyeh (Sapariya), Bet Dejun (Bet Dagan), Sakia (Or Yehuda), Rantieh (Nofekh), and et-Tireh (Barekqet). Most of these sites remained occupied into the British Mandate era and were abandoned in 1948. Today, except for the sheik's tomb and the Ottoman mosque and minaret, no ancient structures remain standing at Yehud.

5. Conclusions

Archaeological investigation of the ancient site of Yehud, lying beneath the modern city, has lagged considerably behind that of other present-day urban settlements in the Israeli coastal plain. The present paper offers the first systematic summary of a large amount of data amassed from dozens of trial and salvage excavations in the city since the early 1990s. It also places them in the context of the history of settlement development in the central Ayalon Valley between the Late Chalcolithic and the modern era.

Yehud has furnished ample evidence of human activity throughout most of this timespan, while its nature and intensity changed considerably from period to period (Table 3). During its first period of occupation, a large expanse of the site was devoted to what may have been industrial or agricultural activities, whereas residential use seems to have been intermittent rather than continuous. The site was desolate during the Early Bronze Age and became a burial ground during the Intermediate, Middle, and Late Bronze Ages. From the Iron Age to the Hellenistic period, habitation at the site was sporadic. The site became industrial again during the Roman period, and the first full-blown permanent settlement consisting of substantial architectural remains was established during the Byzantine period. The site was then settled much less intensively in the Early Islamic period, while only a fort seemed to have been manned during the Crusader period. Yehud was resettled again in the Mamluk period and continued to grow during the Ottoman period.

The discontinuous history of Yehud appears to correspond with a recent reevaluation of the site's stratification that concluded that mound formation processes did not take place. It is argued that during the Bronze and Iron Ages, the quintessential periods of mound formation in the Levant, a small, possibly ephemeral settlement existed in the southern part of Yehud. The absence of any substantial settlement, particularly during the Iron Age, and the scarcity of historical sources mentioning the site between the Iron Age to the Byzantine period call the site's identification with biblical Yehud (Josh 19:45) into question.

Table 3. Summary of the archaeological finds at Yehud.

Period	No. of excavations	Description
Late Chalcolithic (4500–3800 BCE)	32	Industrial area with at least 17 pits, 130 shafts, and isolated pockets with occupational debris.
Early Bronze Age (3800–2500 BCE)	1	Not settled, a few potsherds.
Intermediate Bronze Age (2500–2000 BCE)	9	A large-scale cemetery with more than 200 burials identified as shaft tombs.
Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 BCE)	19	More than 130 burials unearthed; the remains of a small settlement in the southern part of the site.
Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BCE)	11	At least 28 burials unearthed; some sherds of domestic pottery may indicate the existence of a small settlement in the southern part of the site.
Iron Age I–II (1200–539 BCE)	5	Mostly scattered pottery sherds.
Persian period (539–332 BCE)	7	Scant settlement remains in the southern part of the site; some burial remains in its northern part.
Hellenistic period (332–63 BCE)	6	Unstratified pottery sherds.
Roman period (63 BCE–324 CE)	13	Pottery kilns in several locations; a concentration of 25 burials.
Byzantine period (324–638 CE)	26	Settlement remains, including residential dwellings with colorful mosaics, a winepress, pottery kilns, and other installations.
Early Islamic period (638–1099 CE)	18	Architectural remains, living surfaces, and burials.
Crusade period (1099–1260 CE)	3	A massive wall and pottery sherds.
Mamluk period (1260–1517 CE)	8	Architectural remains and burials.
Ottoman period (1517–1917 CE)	22	Architectural remains, installations, and burials.

As many of the excavations conducted at Yehud have only been preliminarily published, it is hoped that the critical questions raised concerning its settlement history will be revisited in the future as additional data will come to light. Significant aspects of the site's archaeology that call for further consideration include (1) the distribution of different features, installations, and architectural remains, (2) the establishment of stratigraphic relationships between different parts of the site with the aid of absolute elevations and the sediments in which the remains of various periods were uncovered, and finally, (3) more fine-tuned dating.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Israel Antiquities Authority for supporting this research. My gratitude is extended to Y. Govrin, Y. Elisha, M. 'Iron, E. Jakoel, Y. Agmon, D. Golan, J. Marcus, and D. Abu-Salach for sharing information from their unpublished excavations with me. Special thanks are due to A. Dagot for her efforts in creating the maps used in this publication and Z. Greenhut for all his support. I would also like to thank Y. Tepper, E.C.M van den Brink, and S. Bar for reading early drafts of this manuscript and for their helpful comments and L. Weissbrod for carefully editing the manuscript. The responsibility for any errors is, of course, mine alone. The article was completed during my stay at the Oriental Institute, the University of Chicago, funded by a Fulbright postdoctoral fellowship.

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