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A Cairn Field on the Northern Periphery of Jerusalem

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In 1994, in preparation for residential construction in the Ramat Shelomo neighborhood of northeastern Jerusalem, an archaeological investigation was conducted in a cairn field, bordering the Ramot Forest (map ref. NIG 22043–63/63580–95; OIG 17043–63/13580–95; Fig. 1).[1] The investigation was an extension of the survey and excavations carried out in 1991 (Onn and Rapuano 1995; Onn, Weksler-Bdolah and Rapuano, forthcoming) at Khirbat er-Ras on the Shuʻfaṭ Ridge. In the 1991 survey, some 100 cairns grouped into 52 areas were identified.

The cairn field is situated on the Jerusalem regional syncline of the Judean hills anti-clinorium, between the Mount Hebron

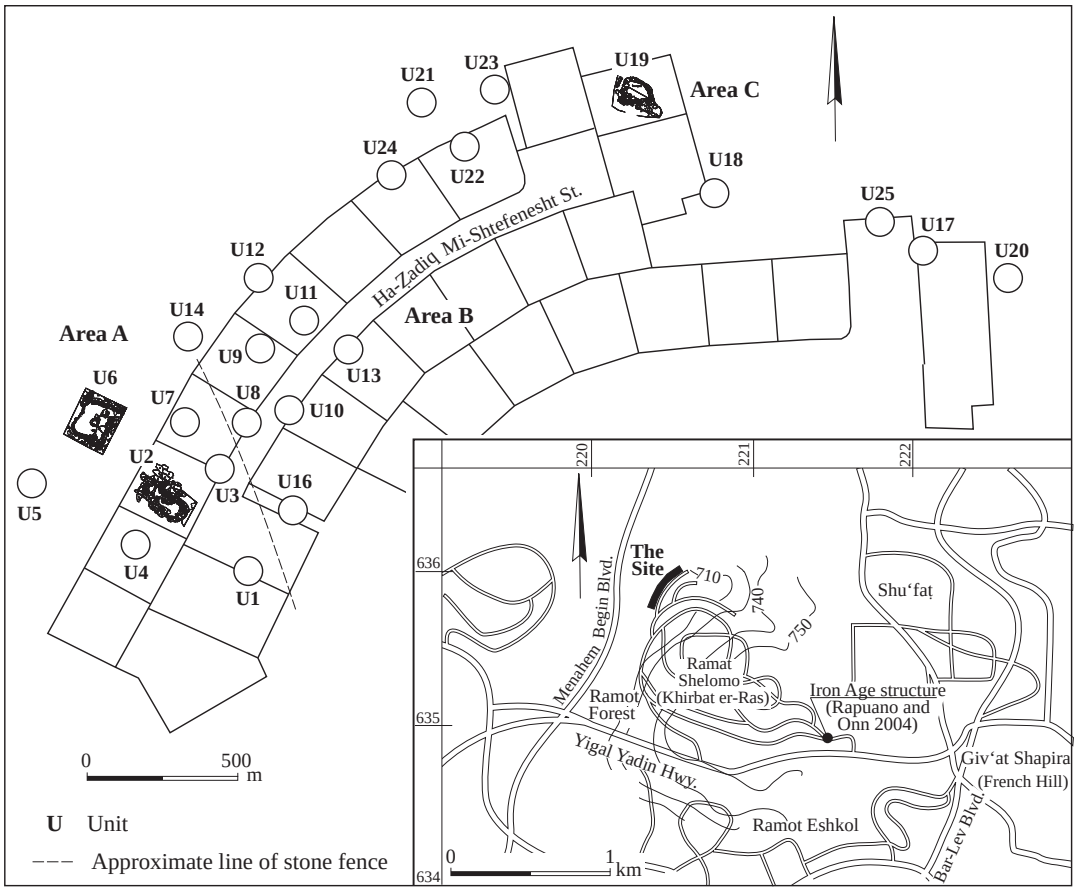


Fig. 1. Location map and site map.

anticline to the south and the Judean anticline to the north. The northern hillocks of Jerusalem comprise hard limestone of the Mount Scopus formation. Continuous erosion by westward-flowing rivulets created the ravines and ridges upon which the cairn field was situated. The investigated area consisted of about 1.75 hectares on the middle of the northwestern slope of the Shu'faṭ Ridge (Fig. 1). The archaeological strata lay upon *terra rossa* soil. There are no natural springs in the area.

THE SITE

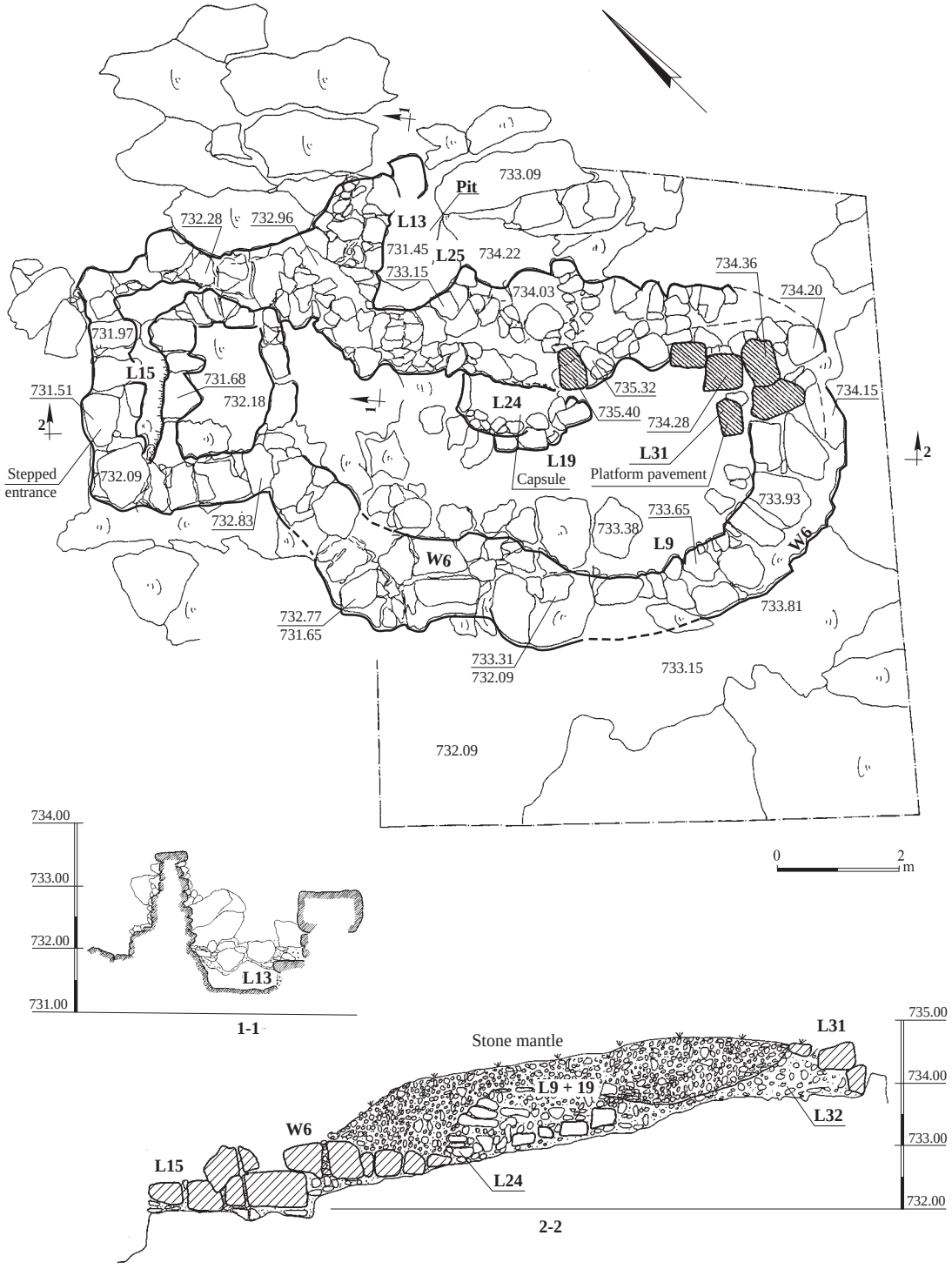
The investigated portion of the field contained some 30 cairns of various sizes. When building activity disturbed some of them, it was decided to excavate other intact cairns while still possible, before permitting construction to continue. The tract was divided into three areas: A in the west, B in the middle and C in the east (Fig. 1). A north–south stone fence, approximately 1 m wide and 25–30 m long, separated Area A from Area B (Figs. 1, 2).

Area A

Two relatively well-preserved cairns were systematically excavated in Area A: Units 2 and 6.

Unit 2 (c. 7 × 12 m; Plan 1; Figs. 3–7).— This unit was built on an incline, with the short sides in the higher southeast and lower northwest. The cairn, in a good state of preservation, was enclosed by W6, about 1.5 m wide (Fig. 3). There were two primary elements in the structure: a large, main compartment (L9; internal dimensions c. 7.4 × 3.0 m), round on the southeast with right angles on the northwest, and a smaller auxiliary component (L15; 4.5 × 3.5 m) that was apparently an entrance with

Fig. 2. Stone fence between Areas A and B, looking north.



Plan 1. Unit 2: plan and sections.

Fig. 3. Unit 2: general view of excavation in progress, looking northeast.

Fig. 4. Unit 2: stepped entrance (L15) on northwestern side of cairn, looking southeast.

three ascending steps (Fig. 4). In the middle of its long northeastern side, W6 curved inward to accommodate a circular pit (L13) filled with dark organic soil that may have held a post or pole (Plan 1: Section 1–1; Fig. 5). The main compartment was filled with nut- to fist-sized stones, forming a 1.5 m high stone mantle (L9 and L19; Plan 1: Section 2–2). This mantle rose up to a platform that extended inward from the round southeastern end of W6 at the top of the cairn. The platform, composed of an earthen fill (L32) paved with large undressed fieldstones (L31), was about 3.5 × 1.5 m (Fig. 6). In the center of the main chamber, beneath the stone mantle, was an oblong capsule (L24; 2.6 × 2.0 m, c. 1 m high) constructed of fist- to head-sized fieldstones, resting on a thin layer of *terra rossa* soil above bedrock (Fig. 7). It was oriented southeast to northwest, like the cairn itself, and contained only soil.

The sherds from Unit 2 date exclusively to the end of Iron II. Three bowls (Fig. 19:2, 7, 8) and a flask (Fig. 19:20) were found in the stone mantle (L9 and L19), while the cooking pot (Fig. 19:14) was recovered from L25 over stones surrounding Pit 13.

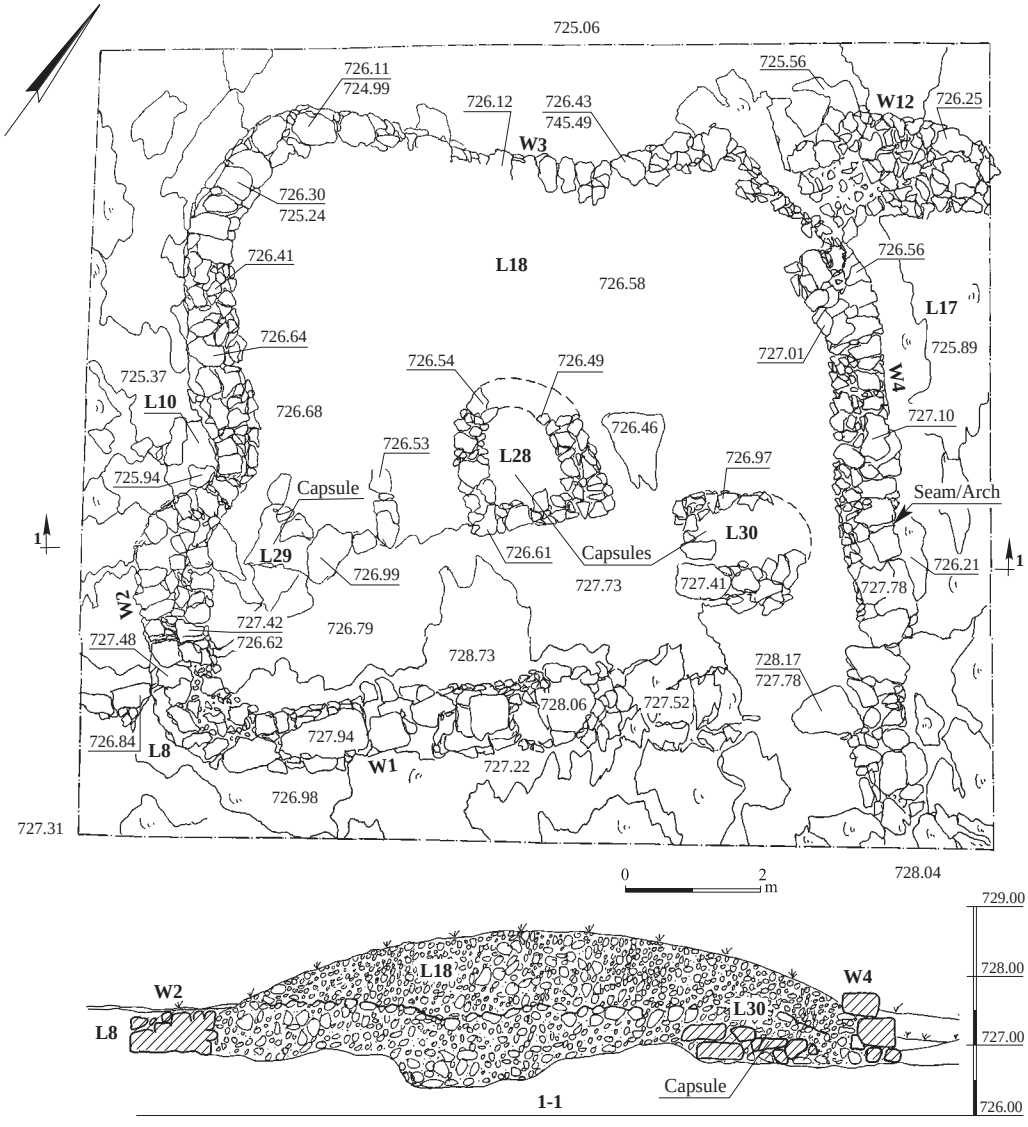
Fig. 5. Unit 2: Pit 13, abutting the outside of W6, looking northwest.

Fig. 6. Unit 2: the platform (L31, L32), looking northwest.

Fig. 7. Unit 2: cairn-capsule (L24) after excavation, looking northwest; Unit 6 is in the background.

Fig. 8. Unit 6 before excavation, looking northwest.

Unit 6 (Plan 2; Figs. 8–13).— This unit was found to be in an excellent state of preservation, with no signs of disturbance. Unlike Unit 2, it was situated on relatively level ground. The cairn was roughly square (11.50 × 9.45 m), the longer sides running northeast to southwest. It had round corners and was 2 m high, including the stone mantle. The thickness of the periphery walls (W1, W2, W3 and W4) was approximately one meter (Fig. 9). The middle portion of W2



Plan 2. Unit 6: plan and section.

Fig. 9. Unit 6: round corner joining Walls 2 and 3, looking north.

curved inward to accommodate a pit (L10) on the exterior face of the wall (Fig. 10). Similar to L13 in Unit 2, Pit 10 may have held a post or pole. In the center of its northeastern side, a seam was found in the peripheral W4 (Fig. 11). The stones on the inner face of the wall, opposite the seam, were arranged in an arch of sorts (see Fig. 14). Perhaps this is the point at which construction of the wall encompassing the cairn began and ended—the joint between the first and last stones placed in the wall. The interior of Unit 6 was entirely filled by a stone mantle (L18; Fig. 12; Plan 2: Section 1–1) beneath which, on a thin layer of soil above bedrock, were three case-like capsules (L28, L29 and L30), constructed of head-sized and larger fieldstones. The capsules were approximately 2 sq m, round at one end and square at the other. Like L24 in Unit 2, each capsule was totally devoid of finds (Fig. 13).

Fig. 10. Unit 6: Pit 10, abutting the outside of W2, looking southeast.

Fig. 11. Unit 6: seam in W4 (marked by an arrow), looking southwest.

Wall 12 (1.45 m wide), which extended northward from the juncture of Walls 3 and 4, was apparently the northwestern side of an enclosure or courtyard (L17), of which the rest of the walls had disappeared or become too scanty to trace.

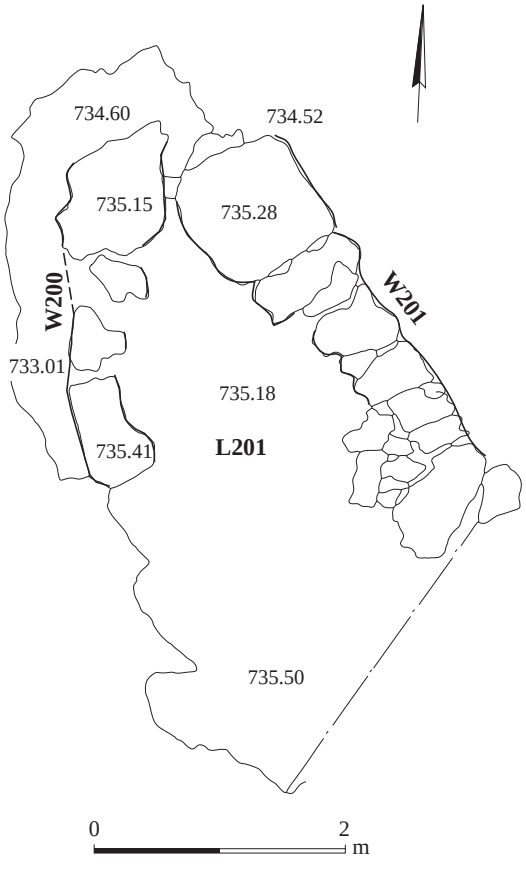
The only diagnostic pottery sherds found in Unit 6 date to Iron II, including a bowl (Fig. 19:1) and a juglet base (Fig. 19:19), both recovered from L8 at the southern exterior corner of the cairn.

A number of other stone heaps in Area A were investigated (see Fig. 1). Under the mantle of Unit 3 was a double channel leading to a sort of vat. Unit 5 (Fig. 14), damaged by a bulldozer prior to our investigation, seems to have originally been about the same size as Unit 2. It was sectioned north to south and a number of Iron II pottery sherds were recovered (L31), the most significant of which was a large folded-rim bowl (Fig. 19:10). In addition, the locations of other cairns, such as Unit 7, were recorded.

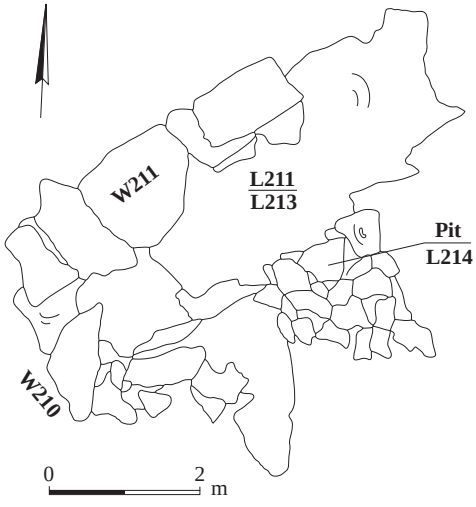
Fig. 12. Unit 6: stone mantle L18, looking northwest.

Fig. 13. Unit 6: Capsule 30 after excavation, looking northeast.

Fig. 14. Unit 5 (L31): excavated section in northeastern side, looking west.



Plan 3. Unit 23.



Plan 4. Unit 24.

Area B

Several small cairns in varying states of preservation were excavated in Area B.

Unit 24 (4.68 × 2.95 m; Plan 3).— Little remained of this unit, other than the northeastern end of its semi-oval peripheral wall. The only diagnostic sherd is of an Iron II bowl found in L201 (see Fig. 21:4).

Unit 23 (extant 2.49 × 2.33 m; Fig. 15).— Of this smaller unit only the southwestern end, enclosed by its peripheral wall, remained. It was apparently oriented toward the southwest (Plan 4). A pit (L214) against the exterior face of the southeastern side of the wall may have been a pit or a post hole similar to L13 in Unit 2 and L10 in Unit 6. As in the case of the other cairns, an earthen fill (L213) was covered with a stone mantle (L211).

Unit 21 (Fig. 16).— This unit was a round cairn of large boulders, about 3 m in diameter, surrounded by a rough periphery wall 0.26–0.82 m wide. An open courtyard (L202; extant 5.75 × 6.70 m) may have extended north of the

Fig. 15. Unit 23 before excavation, looking north.

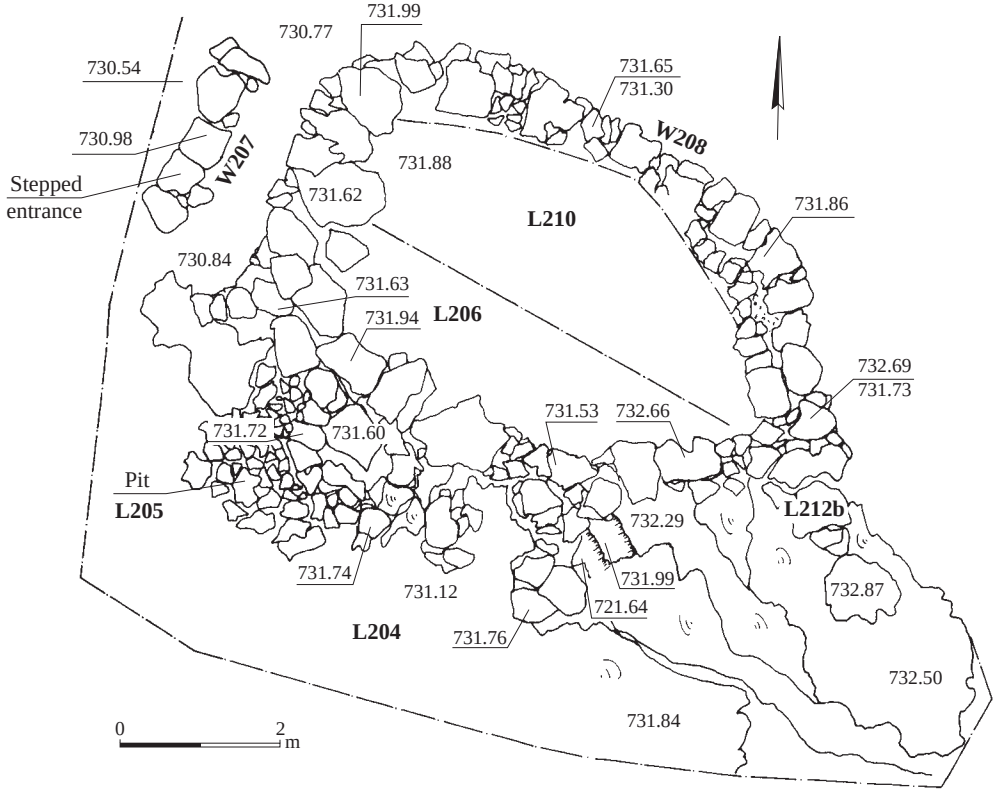
Fig. 16. Unit 21 before excavation, looking north.

cairn. Only the walls of the eastern side of this possible courtyard were found; they were built of fieldstones and averaged 0.5 m in width. A ring of fieldstones on the eastern side of the cairn (L208; diam. c. 0.75 m) yielded the upper part of an Early Roman storage jar (Fig. 20:7). Another storage-jar rim (Fig. 20:10) of the same period was found in L202. Many body sherds, apparently from these two jars, were gathered; however, the poor preservation of the material did not enable the restoration of either vessel.

Unit 22 (L200; 2 × 4 m).— This small cairn yielded an Iron Age krater fragment (Fig. 19:11).

Area C

Unit 19 (Plan 5; Figs. 17, 18).— This unit is the principal cairn excavated in Area C. Especially well preserved, this elliptical cairn (12.6 × 6.9 m) was oriented northwest to southeast, and was about 2 m high, similarly to Unit 2. We decided to make a section through the stone mantle of the cairn by excavating only its southwestern half. It had a periphery wall (W208), about 1.05 m wide. The center was filled with a stone mantle (L210). To the northwest, a rock-built shelf (W207; 2.50 × 0.85 m, 0.44 m high) was apparently the single preserved stair of a stepped entrance, similar to L15 in Unit 2. A shallow pit (L205; diam. 3 m) on the outer face of the peripheral wall may have served a function similar to L13 in Unit 2, L10 in Unit 6 and L214 in Unit 23. At the higher (southeastern) end of the structure, the mantle extended to the adjacent bedrock surface covered with a pavement of rough flagstones (L212b). This may have been a platform (4.6 × 3.0 m) similar to L31 in Unit 2. No capsules were found in this cairn; however, it is possible that there was one on the northeastern side at a level lower than the excavation reached.



Plan 5. Unit 19.

Fig. 17. Unit 19 before excavation, looking northeast.

Fig. 18. Unit 19: excavation in progress, looking southwest.

Unit 19 yielded pottery dating to the end of Iron II. Especially significant is the black juglet (Fig. 19:18) that was found deep inside the stone mantle (L210). Also from Unit 19 are jars (Figs. 19:15, 16) from higher up in the mantle (L204, L206) and a krater (Fig. 19:13) from Pit 205. Sherds from later periods were found in and around the cairn, mainly on its southwestern side, possibly indicating a later disturbance, although none were recognized during the excavation. Sherds from later periods found in the cairn itself include Hellenistic jars (Figs. 20:5, 6) and an Early Roman lid and jug base (Fig. 20:11, 13) in L204, and an Early Roman jar (Fig. 20:9) in L205. Iron Age (Fig. 19:9, 12), Persian (Fig. 20:4) and Early Roman (Fig. 20:8) sherds were surface finds recovered south of Unit 19.

CERAMIC FINDS

Ceramic finds were extremely scanty and fragmentary. In addition to pottery from within the excavated cairns, sherds were collected on and around the unexcavated cairns. In consideration of how little ceramic material was available, we have presented below all the diagnostic sherds recovered in the survey and excavation of the site. Selected parallels for each vessel are presented in the tables accompanying the pottery plates (Figs. 19 and 20).

Iron Age II

Open Vessels.— Two small bowls were found. Figure 19:1 has a plain rim and straight walls, and Fig. 19:2 is the disc base of another such bowl. In Fig. 19:3, 4 are medium-sized bowls

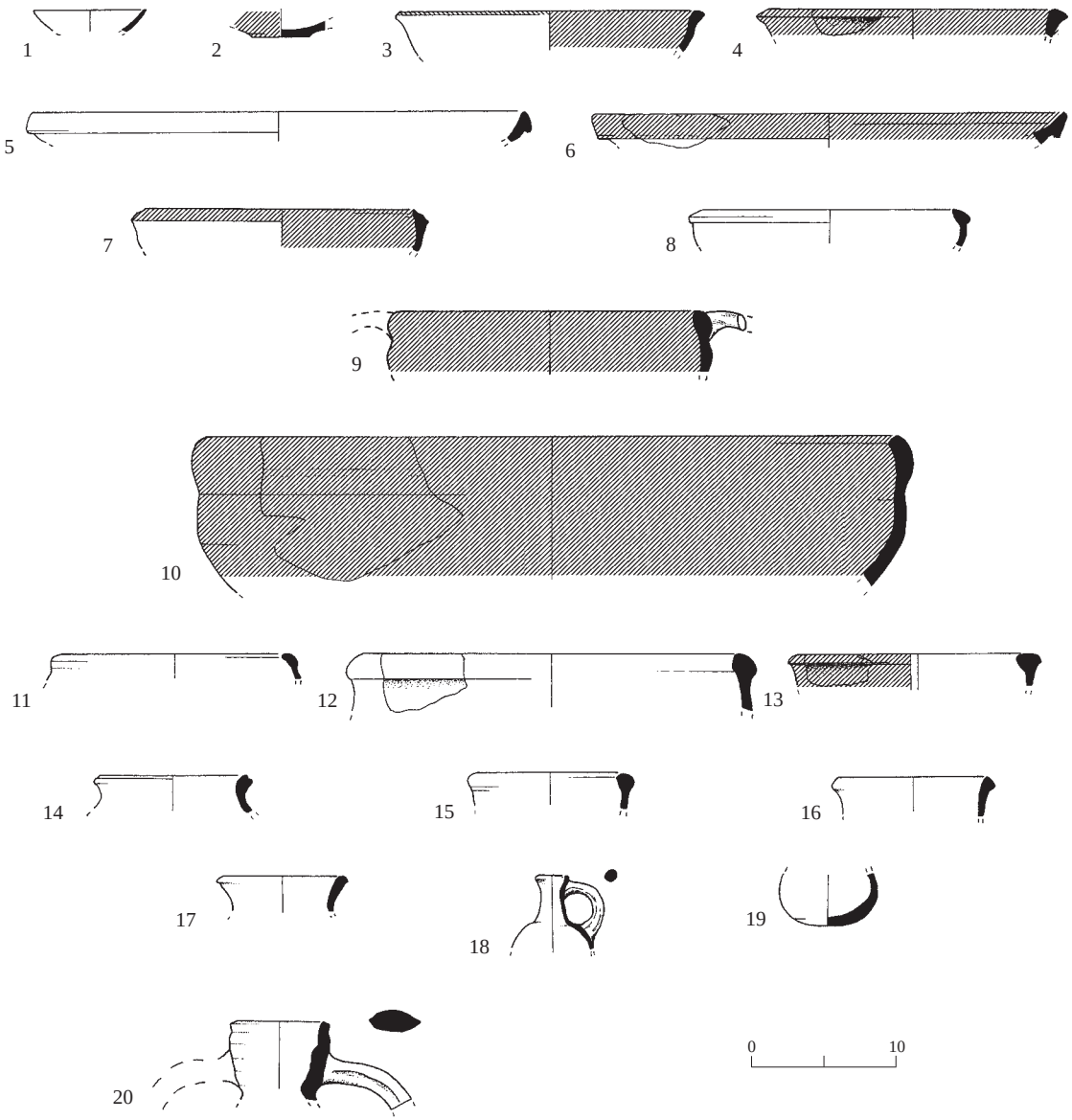


Fig. 19. Iron Age II pottery.

◂ Fig. 19

No.	Form	Basket	Locus	Unit	Description	Selected Parallels
1	Bowl	28	8	6	Light red (2.5YR 5/6) ware; dark gray core; tiny-to-small white, red and sand inclusions	Albright 1932: Fig. 65:13 (Tell Beit Mirsim, Str. A, end of 8th c. BCE) Aharoni 1976: Fig. 4:1 (Be'er Sheva', Str. 2, end of 8th c. BCE) Eshel 1995: Fig. 2:36 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
2	Bowl	52	19	2	Grayish brown (10YR 5/2) ware; reddish yellow (5YR 7/6) slip on ext.; few tiny white and sand inclusions	Aharoni 1975: Pl. 47:10 (Lakhish, Str. II, 7th–6th c. BCE)
3	Bowl			Surface	Light reddish brown (2.5YR 6/4) ware; red (10YR 5/6) slip on ext. rim and int.; few tiny-to-medium white inclusions; wheel burnishing on int.	Tufnell 1953: Pl. 98:570 (Lakhish, Levels III–II, 8th–6th c. BCE) Tushingham 1985: Fig. 4:23 (Jerusalem, Iron Age to late pre-exilic period)
4	Bowl		201	24	Brown (7.5YR 5/2) ware; light red (2.5YR 5/6) slip int. and ext.; few tiny-to-large white and sand inclusions	Mazar and Mazar 1989: Pl. 14:14 (Jerusalem, Iron II)
5	Bowl/ baking tray			Surface	Light brown (7.5YR 6/4) ware; thick, light gray core; reddish yellow (5YR 6/8) slip; few tiny-to-medium white and sand inclusions	Tufnell 1953: Pl. 104:682 (Lakhish, Level III, 8th c. BCE) Eshel 1995: Fig. 17:7 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
6	Bowl/ baking tray			Surface	Red (2.5YR 5/8) ware; thick gray core; few tiny-to-medium white and black inclusions	Tushingham 1985: Fig. 1:36 (Jerusalem, Iron Age to late pre-exilic period) Mazar and Mazar 1989: Pl. 10:3 (Jerusalem, Iron Age II)
7	Bowl		9	2	Red (2.5YR 5/6) ware; weak red (10R 4/3) slip on int. and ext. rim; many tiny-to-medium white and sand inclusions	Zimhoni 1990: Fig. 3:16 (Lakhish, Level III, end of 8th c. BCE)
8	Bowl		9	2	Light brown (7.5YR 6/4) ware; few tiny white inclusions	Tufnell 1953: Pl. 102:647 (Lakhish, probably post-exilic) Eshel 1995: Fig. 14:11 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
9	Bowl			Surface, south of 19	Grayish brown (10YR 5/2) ware; reddish yellow (5YR 6/6) slip on int. and ext.; some tiny-to-medium white inclusions; wheel burnishing on int.	Albright 1943: Pl. 20:16 (Tell Beit Mirsim, Str. A, end of 8th c. BCE) Gitin 1990: Pl. 27:27 (Gezer, 7th–6th c. BCE)
10	Bowl	68	31	5	Dark gray (10YR 4/1) ware; light red (10R 6/8) to reddish brown (2.5YR 4/4) slip on int. and ext.; some tiny-to-medium white and gray inclusions; wheel burnishing on int.	Mazar, Dothan and Dunayevsky 1966: Fig. 16:4 ('En Gedi, Str. V, 7th–6th c. BCE) Aharoni 1973: Pl. 64:8 (Be'er Sheva', Str. 2, end of 8th c. BCE)
11	Krater	2000	200	22	Reddish yellow (5YR 6/8) ware; some tiny-to-large white and red inclusions	Aharoni 1975: Pl. 46:10 (Lakhish, Str. III, end of 8th c. BCE) Eshel 1995: Fig. 16:6 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
12	Krater			Surface, south of 19	Reddish brown (2.5YR 5/4) ware; some tiny-to-large white and sand inclusions	Dever et al. 1974: Pl. 34:21 (Gezer, Str. 5B–A, 8th c. BCE)

◂ **Fig. 19** (cont.)

No.	Form	Basket	Locus	Unit	Description	Selected Parallels
13	Krater	2010	205	19	Brown (7.5YR 5/2) ware; red (2.5YR 5/8) slip; some tiny-to-large white and sand inclusions	Eshel 1995: Fig. 15:13, 14 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
14	Cooking pot	62	25	2	Red (2.5YR 5/6) ware; many tiny-to-medium white and sand inclusions	Aharoni 1975: Pl. 50:132 (Lakhish, Str. II, 6th c. BCE) Aharoni 1976: Fig. 8:3 (Tell Masos, 7th–6th c. BCE)
15	Jar	2006	206	19	Reddish yellow (5YR 6/6) ware; many tiny-to-large white and sand inclusions	Eshel 1995: Fig. 28:3 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
16	Jar	2014	204	19	Pink (7.5YR 7/4) ware; light brown (7.5YR 6/3) thick core; few tiny-to-small white and sand inclusions	Mazar, Dothan and Dunayevsky 1966: Fig. 22:4 (‘En Gedi, Str. V, 7th–6th c. BCE)
17	Jug			Surface, east of 5	Unavailable	Rast 1978: Fig. 75:8 (Ta‘anakh, Period V, first half of 7th c. BCE)
18	Juglet	218	210	19	Dark gray (7.5YR N4) ware; very dark gray (7.5YR N3) slip on ext.; some tiny-to-medium white inclusions	Aharoni 1976: Fig. 3:14 (‘Arad, Str. VIII, end of 8th c. BCE) Eshel 1995: Fig. 24:19 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
19	Juglet	8	1	6	Reddish brown (5YR 5/4) ware; light brown (7.5YR 6/4) to dark gray core; few tiny-to-medium sand inclusions	Mazar, Dothan and Dunayevsky 1966: Fig. 19:2 (‘En Gedi, Str. V, 7th–6th c. BCE) Aharoni 1976: Fig. 16 (‘Arad, Str. VII, end 8th c. BCE) Eshel 1995: Fig. 24:19 (Jerusalem, first half to mid-7th c. BCE)
20	Flask	52	19	2	Red (10YR 5/6) ware; thick, light brown (7.5YR 6/4) core; many tiny-to-large inclusions	Tufnell 1953: Pl. 92:437 (Lakhish, Level III, 8th c. BCE) Aharoni 1975: Pl. 55: Type FL 80 (Lakhish, Str. II, 7th–6th c. BCE)

with everted rims. Not enough remains of the vessels with folded triangular rims illustrated in Fig. 19:5, 6 to determine whether they are indeed wide shallow bowls or baking trays. Medium-sized, inverted folded-rim bowls, such as Fig. 19:7, 8, are especially typical of this region at the end of Iron II. Likewise, the large folded-rim bowls in Fig. 19:9, 10 are quite well-known in the Jerusalem area of this time; several were excavated by Ruth Amiran in the 1950s (Amiran 1958: Figs. 3:3–10; 14:15; 15:11). Figure 19:11–13 are kraters with folded or thickened inverted rims.

Closed Vessels.— The morphology of the rim of the globular cooking pot in Fig. 19:14 clearly dates it to the seventh or sixth century BCE. Two jar fragments were found: Fig. 19:15 has a thickened rim and Fig. 19:16 has a folded rim; both have cylindrical necks. Figure 19:17 is the only Iron Age jug found; it has a folded rim and a flaring neck. Figure 19:18 is a ‘black juglet’, and Fig. 19:19 is the lower portion of a globular juglet with a flattened base. Figure 19:20 is the only flask found on site (identified by Alon De Groot of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

Typologically, the Iron II sherds can be assigned to the end of that period (eighth to sixth centuries BCE), although nothing in the repertoire requires a date any earlier than seventh century BCE.

The Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods

The sherds illustrated in Fig. 20, ranging from the Persian period (fifth–fourth centuries BCE) to the Early Roman period (end of the first–second centuries CE), are presented typologically and then chronologically. Figure 20:1 is a small Late Hellenistic bowl with a folded everted rim, and Fig. 20:2 is the concave base of a small bowl from the same period. Figure 20:3 is apparently a lid with a small shelf on its inner lip, probably dating to the Late Hellenistic or Early Roman period. Figure 20:4 is a holemouth jar of the Persian period; its shoulder is decorated with an incised row of grooves that probably continued around the vessel, beneath which is the spring of a handle. Two folded-rim storage jars (Figs. 20:5, 6) date to the Hellenistic period. Of the two Early Roman storage jars with long necks, Fig. 20:7 has an internally-thickened rim and Fig. 20:8, a small, everted rim. The short, grooved shelf-rim of Fig. 20:9 belongs to a bag-shaped storage jar found in Judea in the first–second centuries CE. Figure 20:10 is the shelf rim and cylindrical neck of a bell-shaped jar, a type that appeared in the first century CE and continued into the second. Figure 20:11 is the concave ring base of a jug dating to the Early Roman period.

Analysis of the Ceramic Finds

The earliest pottery in the cairn field dated to the end of Iron II, apparently the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. This pottery was found in all three areas and in all the excavated cairns, except Unit 21, where its absence was not surprising considering the general paucity of finds from that unit. All the Iron II pottery recovered from the excavated cairns was found within the stone mantles or on the periphery of the cairns. Thus, it seems that this was the period in which the cairns were constructed and used. As Amiran (1958:221) noted with regard to the cairns she excavated in west Jerusalem, "It should... be clearly borne in mind that pottery or other finds uncovered here have a different dating value from those found on floor levels of a settlement. Whereas in the latter all the finds belong to the

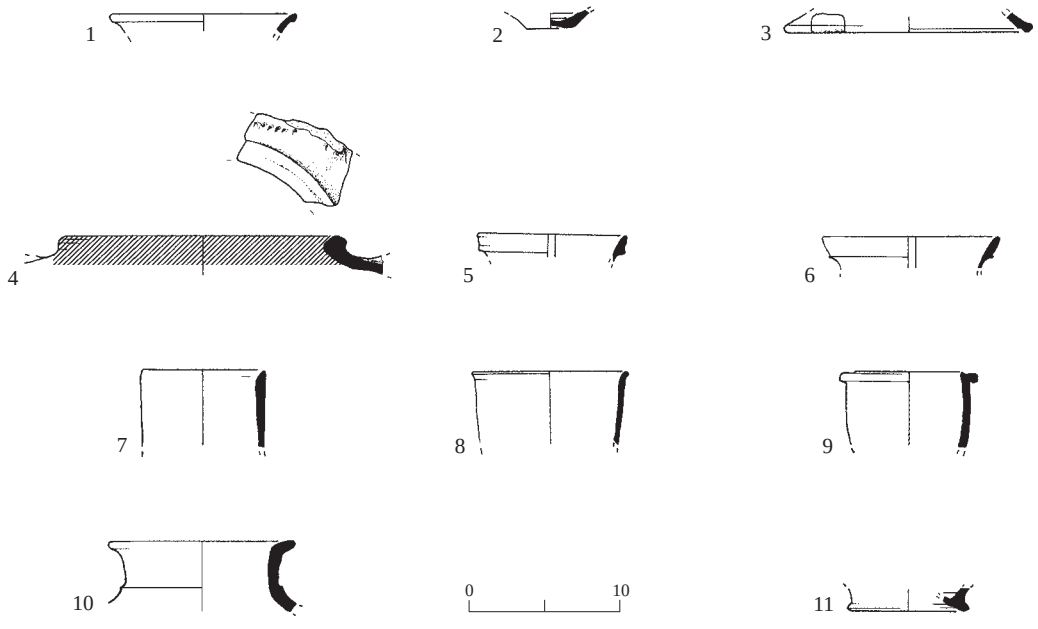


Fig. 20. Persian, Hellenistic, and Early Roman pottery.

◂ Fig. 20

No.	Form	Basket	Locus	Unit	Description	Selected Parallels
1	Bowl			Surface	Reddish brown (2.5YR 5/4) ware; few tiny, white inclusions	Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl. 16:260 (Jericho Winter Palaces, Type J-Pl1A3, 85/75–31 BCE)
2	Bowl	2006	206	19	Red (10R 5/8) ware; thick, dark gray core; few tiny-to-medium white inclusions	Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl. 15:223, 224 (Jericho Winter Palaces, Type J-Bl3A3, 85/75–31 BCE)
3	Lid	2019	204	19	Light red (2.5YR 5/6) ware; few tiny-to-small white and gray inclusions	Tushingham 1985: Fig. 20:53 (Jerusalem, 40–70 CE) Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl. 16:255 (Jericho Winter Palaces, Type J-Pl1A3, 100–95/85 BCE)
4	Jar			Surface, south of 19	Grayish brown (10YR 5/2) ware; pinkish white (5YR 8/2) on ext. and light reddish brown (5YR 6/4) slip on int.; some tiny-to-large sand and shell inclusions; row of incised gashes on shoulder	Tushingham 1985: Figs. 15:19, 20 (Jerusalem, Persian) Gitin 1990: Pl. 28:18, 29 (Gezer, Persian, 5th–4th c. BCE)
5	Jar	2004	204	19	Pink (7.5YR 7/4) ware; few tiny-to-small white and sand inclusions	Gitin 1990: Fig. 48:1 (Gezer, Late Hellenistic) Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl. 3:18 (Jericho Winter Palaces, Type J-SJ41A, 85/75–31 BCE)
6	Jar	2004	204	19	Light reddish brown (5YR 6/4) ware; light red (2.5YR 5/6) surface ext.; few tiny-to-large white and brown inclusions	de Vaux 1954: Fig. 1:2 (Qumran, Period Ib, 135–131 BCE) Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl.3:18 (Jericho Winter Palaces, Type J-SJ41A, 85/75–31 BCE)
7	Jar	2012	208	21	Pink (7.5YR 7/4) ware; thick gray core; few tiny-to-medium white and sand inclusions	Bar-Adon 1977: Figs. 4, 5 (‘Ein el-Ghuweir, 175 BCE–68 CE)
8	Jar			Surface, south of 19	Reddish yellow (5YR 7/6) ware; thick, light gray core; few tiny-to-large white inclusions	de Vaux 1953: Fig. 2:2 (Qumran, Period II, 4 BCE–68 CE) Ben-Arieh and Netzer 1974 (Jerusalem, Third Wall, Herodian) Bar-Nathan 1981: Pls. 1:4; 3:22 (Herodium, 48–70 CE)
9	Jar	2009	205	19	Light red (2.5YR 6/6) ware; pink (7.5YR 8/4) surface int. and ext.; few tiny-to-small white and red inclusions	Lapp and Nickelsburg 1974: Pl. 27:2 (Wadi ed-Daliyeh, Second Revolt, 132–135 CE) Bar-Nathan 1981: Pl. 3:17–20 (Herodium, 48–70 CE)
10	Jar	2002	202	21	Gray (2.5YR N5/) ware; reddish yellow (7.5YR 8/6) surface int. and ext.; tiny-to-medium white and black inclusions	Bar-Nathan 1981: Pl. 2:2 (Herodium, 48 CE)
11	Jug	2005	204	19	Light red (2.5YR 5/6) to light brown (7.5YR 6/3) ware; few tiny-to-large white and sand inclusions	de Vaux 1954: Fig. 4:12 (Qumran, Period II, 4 BC–68 CE) Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl. 8:57 (Jericho Winter Palaces, Type J-JG1B, 31–15 BCE)

end of the period in question, in our case they reflect the actual period when this installation was in use."

The pottery dating to the Persian, Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods was found in limited areas of the site and apparently postdates the original use of the cairns. Such pottery may have been disposed of or dropped by inhabitants of settlements elsewhere on the ridge during these later periods (Onn, Weksler-Bdolah and Rapuano, forthcoming).

Discussion

From the surveys and excavations that were undertaken in 1991 and 1994 on Shu'faṭ Ridge, at least four types of cairns can be distinguished: (1) a stone mantle covering a structure, as in Building 2017 (see Fig. 1; Rapuano and Onn 2004); (2) roughly square units (c. 10 × 10 m), such as Unit 6; (3) oval-shaped units (c. 12 × 7 m), such as Units 2 and 19; and (4) stone mantles covering small installations, such as the small double channel leading to the receptacle in Unit 3.

In the case of Building 2017 (Type 1), it seems the cairn mantle was intended to cover an abandoned structure (Rapuano and Onn 2004). Instances have also been noted of cultic structures that were covered by a stone mantle after going out of use (Zertal 1986–1987:156).

The investigated square and oval cairns (Types 2 and 3) were simple constructions consisting of some or all of the following elements: (a) a stepped entrance; (b) a peripheral revetment wall; (c) one or more capsules; (d) a pit or installation attached to the exterior of the peripheral wall; (e) a cap or stone mantle; and (f) a platform of undressed bedrock or natural earth, paved with rough stone slabs.

Recently, Sion et al. (2007:153) excavated stone heaps in the Samarian Shephelah, some of which were approximately the same size and dimensions as ours. They concluded that the peripheral wall enclosing some of the cairns served no other purpose than to retain the stones that were gathered to clear the surrounding vicinity for agricultural exploitation (see also Edelstein and Milevski 1994:8; Edelstein, Milevski and Aurant 1998:8–10). Such an explanation does not seem to apply to the Shu'faṭ cairn field: considering how little room was left between the units on our site, it seems unlikely that they were created by clearing land for agricultural use. Moreover, no agricultural installations were noted at the site, with the possible exception of Unit 3.

Nor do the cairns on Shu'faṭ Ridge appear to have served as tombs, for careful excavation of several of them revealed no human remains whatsoever within or around them. In this respect, they resemble a number of stone heaps excavated by Amiran in western Jerusalem (Amiran 1958). She dated her tumuli to Iron II, revising Albright's date (Albright 1923), and demonstrated that they were produced by native Judahites, correcting Albright's notion that they were of foreign origin (Amiran 1958:226). A comparison of the tumuli that Amiran examined with those that we investigated proves interesting, considering their proximity to our cairns, their dating, and their similarity in a number of features.

Amiran's Tumulus 5 (diam. 32 m) was much larger than any of our cairns. It had a ring wall with 'angles' between each of the wall segments (Amiran 1958:215, Fig. 13). Each side of the polygonal wall projected from the adjacent wall by a width of one stone and thus was not a true angle. The 'seam' in W4 of our Unit 6 is reminiscent of one such 'angle'. Tumulus 5 had a 'platform' consisting of a paved fill supported by a revetment wall, similar to what we found in Unit 2. Two stepped entrances in the ring wall of Tumulus 5 were similar in size and construction to the single stepped entrances in our Units 2 and 19. A stone fill connecting the steps to the platform of Tumulus 5 may have served the same function as the stone mantle in our Units 2 and 19. Amiran was perplexed not to have found a burial in or beside a 'hexagonal pit' near the center of Tumulus 5 (Amiran 1958:214–215; 226). Her 'hexagonal pit' may in fact have been a capsule similar to those in Units 2 and 6.

Amiran's Tumulus 6 (7 × 12 m) was built on a slope at the top of a wadi bed, resembling our Units 2 and 19 in plan, orientation and size. Near the upper end of this tumulus, she found a wall of similar workmanship as the ring wall of Tumulus 5 that supported a platform paved with four roughly dressed slabs bordered with fieldstones. Although Amiran expected to find a burial beneath the pavement, she found only natural soil, as we did in Unit 2.

At the end of her 1953 excavation, Amiran interpreted Tumulus 5 as a high place (*bamah*). She concluded that "The place was ... prepared for ritual acts, the nature of which escapes us" (Amiran 1958:216). However, Amiran (1958:226–227, n. 23) subsequently amended her interpretation, conceding to Albright's theory that the *bamah* served two purposes at the same time—that of a burial spot and that of a cult place. Consequently, she concluded that the tumulus may have marked a tomb despite the absence of a burial within the tumulus itself, surmising that the actual burial might have been located outside it, somewhere in the vicinity. Barkay (1975; 2003) suggested that the west Jerusalem cairns may be associated with the burning ceremony performed in honor of the kings of Judah after their death and burial (Jeremiah 34:5; II Chronicles 16:14; 21:19).

In the context of cultic sites, it is worth comparing our site with the so-called "Bull Site" on the summit of a remote ridge in the northern part of the Samaria Hills (Mazar 1982). The "Bull Site" is not a cairn, but rather an elliptical area, approximately 21 m from east to west and 23 m from north to south, enclosed by a massive stone periphery wall and containing several installations. According to Mazar, the enclosure probably served as a central cultic site for a group of nearby settlements, its location having been carefully selected to view the important mountain ridges to the north. Based mainly on the ceramic finds, Mazar dated the site to Iron IA (the first half of the twelfth century BCE).

There are a number of similarities between the above examples and our Type 2 and Type 3 cairns. Each of the above examples was located in an open, uninhabited place, on a mountain ridge, a slope, the shoulder of a hill, or the top of a wadi bed. In each case, it appears that the location was chosen with foresight and the site was carefully laid out. The basic plans of these sites evidence a similarity in concept. They were all open-air sites and generally oval or elliptical. All had a stone enclosure wall surrounding various installations.

An intriguing question concerns the purpose of the capsules (c. 1 × 1 m) in the centers of Units 2 and 6, for it seems that the cairns were built around them. The hexagonal pit near the center of Amiran's Tumulus 5 was possibly a capsule similar to ours. Amiran's expectation to find a burial was reasonable, considering that burial cists in the centers of cairns had been used long before (Joshua 7:26; II Samuel 18:17; e.g., Greenberg 1992; Haiman 1992) and well into the Iron Age (e.g., Harding 1953:8). Yet, although capsules seem to have been a regular feature, none of those excavated by us or by Amiran contained burials.

Small installations somewhat similar to our capsules were discovered at an Israelite site on Mount Ebal dated to Iron I (Zertal 1986–1987). Some of the installations were empty, but some contained whole or fragmentary pottery vessels, including votive pieces. Zertal suggested that the site had a continuous cultic function throughout its earlier and later strata. He identified the installations as compartments of the earlier stratum where visitors left offerings. In the later stratum, these compartments were incorporated into what Zertal argued was an Israelite altar (Zertal 1986–1987:117–118). On the other hand, Kempinski (1986:45, 48) contended that the site was a watchtower and that the earlier installations were pits and silos.

Units 2, 6, 19 and 23 each contained an unexplained pit or installation on the external face of the peripheral revetment wall. If the function of the cairns was indeed cultic, the pits may have held sacred trees or poles. Similar cavities at other Iron Age sites in the Near East have been interpreted as pits for planting

sacred trees (e.g., Andrae 1938: Figs. 17–20; Soren and Sanders 1984:289–91; Gaber and Dever 1996:105). While Mazar suggested the possibility of there having been a sacred tree within the enclosure at the "Bull Site," he offered no actual evidence for it (Mazar 1982:35).

In a most interesting passage (Micah 3:12), the prophet warns that because of the sins of the rulers of Judah, "Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest." The parallelism in this verse equates high places of the forest (*bamot ya'ar*, במות יער) with heaps (*iyen*, עיין). The association of the high places of the forest with the Temple Mount (mountain of the house) may hint at their proximity to Jerusalem. The prophet's admonition would have been particularly poignant if these *bamot* or stone heaps were familiar landmarks in the wilderness seen by all who came to Jerusalem.

However, in discussing the meaning and function of these cairns, we must close with a cautionary note. In an ethnographic study of the Sinai Arabs and modern Bedouin, Frendo (1996) noted that most of the stone heaps in desert regions of the southern Levant are related to nomadic societies and may have a number of meanings. Considering the many interpretations attached to rock mounds, Frendo concluded that it is almost impossible for an archaeologist to make any but the most general statements on the basis of such stones.[2]

Summary and Conclusions

The ceramic finds indicate that the investigated cairns were constructed and used in late Iron II, when the Shu'faṭ Ridge was first settled (Onn and Rapuano 1995). A number of the cairns were simple, but carefully planned installations that may have served for ceremonial or cultic purposes. Products of the local inhabitants during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, they were quickly constructed, probably in a single building operation. Considering their dating and location on a ridge near Jerusalem, they might be examples of the *bamot* denounced by the prophets in the twilight years of the kingdom of Judah.

Notes

[1] The project (Permit No. A-2215) was directed on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority by Alexander Onn and Yehudah Rapuano, with the assistance of Eliyahu Shabo.

The excavation permit was issued for a broad area that included Er-Ras and a small Iron Age structure (see Fig. 1). This led to the publishing of an incorrect map reference (OIG 17210/13485) in the preliminary report (Rapuano and Shabo 2000:96*). The map reference listed here reflects the correct location on the Israel Grid Map.

[2] Stone heaps may mark routes, indicate places of assemblage, or commemorate events that took place on the spot (related, for instance, to warfare or tribal/family incidents). They may serve as altars for offerings or as stations along pilgrim routes—places of prayer, vows and/or curses. Some may have a "practical" purpose, such as defensive 'breast-works' or as grapevine supports (in the case of the small stone heaps that cover miles of hillsides and valleys in the Negev region of southern Israel).

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