



***Where did the early Israelites come from? Was there ever a united monarchy under King David and Solomon as the Bible tells us? These questions and more can potentially be answered from excavating the archaeological site of Khiret el Rai.***

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Macquarie University, and the Israel Antiquities Authority will jointly excavate the site of Khiret el Rai located in the Shephelah region of Israel, about 2 km west of Tel Lachish and approximately 60 kms SW of Jerusalem. It is a small site ca. 1.8 ha, but of critical importance.

**Why it is important**

Trial excavations were conducted by Professor Yossi Garfinkel (Hebrew University) and Saar Ganor (Israel Antiquities Authority) for 5 days in 2015 and 9 days in 2016. Yossi's interest was piqued by the presence of pottery on the surface similar to nearby Khiret Qeiyafa which he excavated and identified (somewhat controversially) with 'King David's Palace'. They were delighted to uncover levels transitioning from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age – the vital period in understanding whether the area was settled by Judeans, Philistines, or Canaanites. The site includes a destruction layer (great for archaeologists!) and substantial buildings such as a massive citadel at the top of the mound from the Iron Age IIb (c.800 BCE). Crucially, it includes an Iron Age Ib level (c.1150-980 BCE), which is missing from Lachish. This is very strange - if Lachish, the major Canaanite city in the region was destroyed and abandoned, how did the smaller nearby site of Khiret el Rai remain settled? Who was occupying it? Good dating from this site will fill the gaps in our knowledge and should enable a chronology of early Judah to be established.

**What we will do**

The excavation will run for three weeks in Jan/Feb each year commencing in 2018. It will be co-directed by Professor Yossi Garfinkel, Dr Kyle Keimer (Macquarie University) and Saar Ganor. Kyle has worked with Yossi previously at Khiret Qeiyafa and lectures in the archaeology of Ancient Israel. Students will be drawn from Macquarie and other Australian and New Zealand universities, and high school teachers. Dr Gil Davis (Macquarie) and Professor Wayne Horowitz (Hebrew University) will co-organise the logistics, and piggy-back the excavation directly onto the intensive summer course held at Hebrew University on Biblical Archaeology (run by Wayne and Gil). Last year this course was amazingly successful and bigger and better things are planned for 2018. It will be a training dig for all students using the latest scientific archaeological equipment, including recording the dig for viewing with VR.

## **Benefits**

You will gain competency in archaeological fieldwork techniques while working on a potentially very important site. You will return enriched with knowledge and understanding of Israel and its Biblical past! And it's lots of fun...

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Preliminary excavation at the site of Khiret el Rai



Excavating below the Iron Age IIA floor