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Khirbat Safra

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Fig. 1. Khirbat Safra, looking east. (Photo by Paul Gregor.)

The first and second seasons of excavations at Khirbat Safra were conducted in June and July of 2018 and 2019. They were directed by Paul Z. Gregor, Paul Ray, and Constance Gane of Andrews University.

Khirbat Safra is a 2.6-acre, triangular-shaped site, located southwest of Madaba, overlooking the Dead Sea (Figs. 1, 2). The casemate wall system surrounding it has been exposed in every field (A–D). Its walls are freestanding, built directly upon uneven bedrock, and its crevices are filled with a densely packed, sterile, red-brick-like material that lacks material culture. On bedrock, a two-row outer wall, a one-row inner wall, and cross walls were built. Several doorways in the inner wall connect rooms on either side. The initial construction of the casemate wall system dates to Iron Age I.

Field A is on the western edge of the site. Two squares were excavated in 2018. Early Iron Age I ceramics were found directly upon the bedrock in two rooms along the outer casemate wall, upon which there was a beaten-earth surface. Above it was a mixture of Iron Age I and Iron Age II ceramics within a superstructural collapse, suggesting a destruction. In the other square, bedrock was covered by a plastered floor, with early Iron Age I ceramics imbedded in it, above which is a ca. 50 cm ashy lens. Post-destruction debris suggests a period of abandonment, above which was

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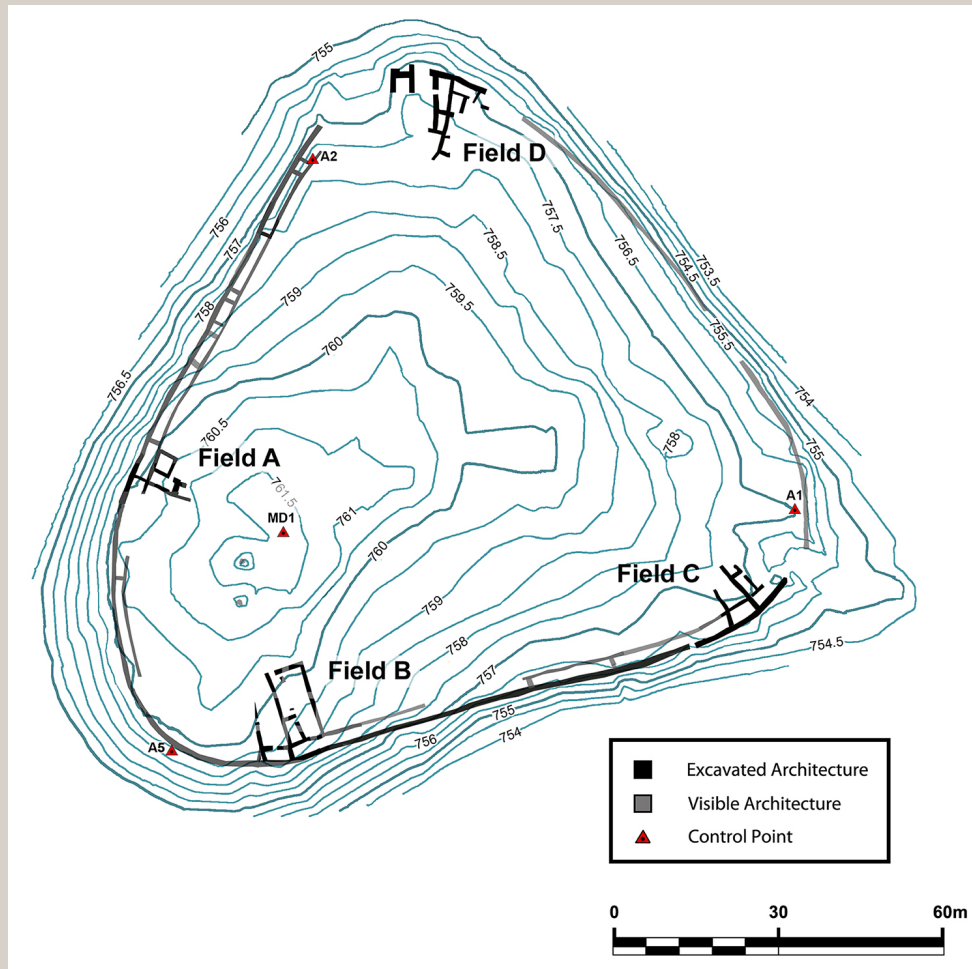


Fig. 2. Khirbat Safra topographic map. (Map by Bob Bates; modified from the Department of Antiquities survey, 2017.)

a beaten-earth surface and substantial Byzantine-period walls, in some cases, built upon those of Iron Age I date. A second beaten-earth surface also dates to this time. These surfaces and walls indicate a Byzantine-period occupation on this part of the site.

Field B, excavated in both seasons, consists of seven squares (B1-7) on the southwestern edge of the site. Work here concentrated on two buildings, consisting of long rooms, connected with the broad-room casemates.

Building 2, the more completely excavated, shares its western wall with building 1. This wall has been traced over 12 m to the northwest from the broad-room casemate to the south. The entrance to the building is in the northwest corner of the north wall. The building is subdivided on its western side by a small room, a pillar, and another section of wall.

Building 1, the westernmost structure, was also traced from its casemate, but most of its western wall, beyond a postern entrance, is, as yet, unexcavated. Iron Age I beaten-earth surfaces were discovered in both buildings, followed by a destruction event, probably an earthquake, sometime in early Iron Age II.

Field C is located on the southeastern corner of the site. It was excavated only in 2018 and consists of two squares (C1 and C2). Early Iron Age I pottery was found on a surface immediately above bedrock that was sealed below a destruction layer, ca. 0.10 m thick, with Iron Age I sherds.

A second occupational level consisted of a beaten-earth floor, with flat-lying pottery, above which was a series of ash layers, suggesting another conflagration. Above the ash is an abandonment layer, with some post-depositional Iron Age II ceramics.

Field D is located on the northernmost edge of the site. Six squares (D1–6) have been excavated in two seasons. This area has stones larger than anything elsewhere on the site, with a rather shallow earth matrix, only 0.10 m deep, above the bedrock in places.

Here, a casemate room and parts of several other rooms have been uncovered, along with part of the city gate complex, including its threshold. The roadway, inside the gate, is lined by large walls, with benches against them. Long rooms parallel the gate and road on either side.