

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE KHIRBAT AŞ-ŞAFRĀ SURVEY 2017¹

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Khirbat aş-Şafrā² is located about 17km southwest of Mādabā and occupies an area of 1.05 hectares. It sits on a natural hill (Fig. 1) near the road that connects Mādabā with Mā‘īn Hot Springs and, further, the Dead Sea (Fig. 2). The site occupies a flat plateau on the western side of Wādī ar-Rīshah, which is a northern tributary to Wādī Zarqā’ Mā‘īn. Since the site is located at the source of Wādī ar-Rīshah it is likely that a natural spring once existed there.

The entire region is composed of hills with steep slopes with very little cultivable land. There are plots of arable land mainly located at the bottom of various *wadis*. Even today these plots are used for cultivation of wheat and barley. Most of the area around Khirbat aş-Şafrā is used for grazing sheep and goats.

Ruins of buildings are scattered throughout the site and traces of remaining walls are still visible on its surface. The site is rectangular in



1. Khirbat aş-Şafrā, facing east.

1. We wish to thank Dr. Monther Jamhawi, Director General, and his staff at the Department of Antiquities of Jordan for their support of the project during this season. Also, we would like to express our appreciation to Basem al-Mahamid, Director of Madaba Antiquities Directorate, Department of Antiquities of Jordan. We would also like to thank Barbara Porter and Jack Green of the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) for their usual assistance. The professional surveyor was Ehab al-Jariri, appointed by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. Finally, we appreciate the help of Mr. Issa Siriani and Abdullah

al-Bawareed who served as representatives for the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.

The director of the 2017 survey project was Paul Gregor, with Jacob Moody, Trisha Broy, Dorian Alexander and Hala Ajilat (all of Andrews University) as participants in the survey process. Jacob Moody created digitalized bird’s-eye-view photos, and scanned diagnostic sherds. Pottery plates were created by Jacob Moody and Paul Ray.

2. In Arabic, *Şafrā* means ‘yellow’. The description fits well with the environment around the site.

shape (Fig. 3), and encompassed by a double (casemate) wall. At some places, the outer casemate is still standing up to 1m in height. The space between the casemate walls is approximately 1.5m wide. The highest point of the site is located on its southwestern section and is 761.5m above sea level. The lowest section is found on its northeastern side, at 756.5m above sea level (Fig. 4). From these elevations it is obvious that the entire settlement was placed on a relatively flat platform on top of the hill.

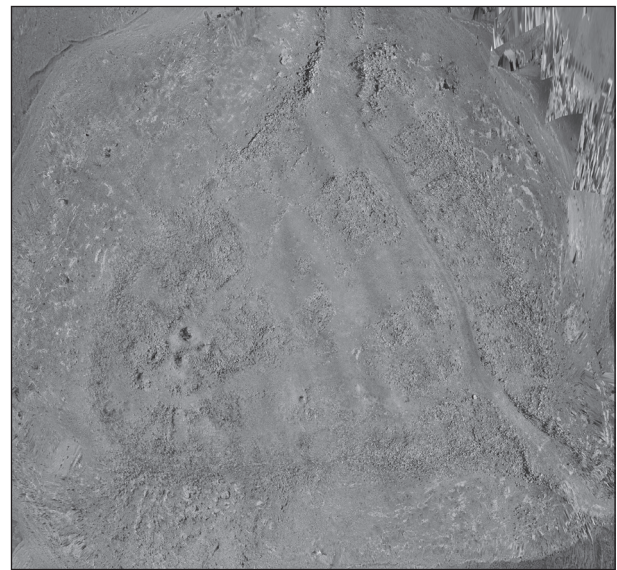
The acropolis of the settlement was most likely located on its southwestern side and it is here that the highest concentration of ruined buildings is found. There has been some illegal digging by local people in this area and some of the holes revealed the presence of caverns. These caverns seem to be filled with debris almost to the tops of their openings. There are no visible chisel marks, suggesting that they are natural openings in bedrock. There is no evidence of plaster to suggest that they served as

cisterns for collecting rain from the roof tops of adjacent buildings. However, further excavation should reveal if they were used as cisterns during the occupational periods of the site.

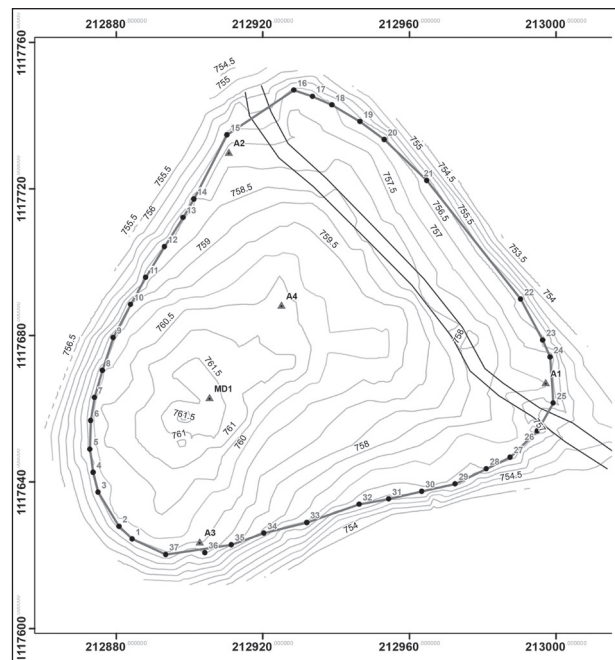
The settlement was easily accessible on its eastern side where the city gate was likely located. Unfortunately, the locals have bulldozed both this section and the northern corner of the fortification to create a road for pickup trucks to bring supplies to a nearby *bedouin* camp (Figs. 3 and 4). Apart from the acropolis area to the southwest, heaps of stones - representing ruined buildings - are visible around the perimeter



2. Regional map.



3. Aerial photo of Khirbat aş-Şafrā.



4. Topographic map of Khirbat aş-Şafrā.

of the city walls. A large part of the central area seems to lack ruins (**Fig. 3**). In some places, the earth layers have been washed away, leaving the bedrock exposed. It would appear that this section of the site served as a plaza or open space for public activities while the site was occupied. It is also possible that Khirbat aş-Şafrā was a military settlement with its center being used for horse and chariot maneuvers.

History of Early Research in the Region

The earliest recorded modern visit to this region was by Ulrich Seetzen during 1806. He visited the Mādabā area on March 22 of the same year. On his way south he mentioned Māʿīn, which he identified with Baal Meon, and also spoke of the Māʿīn Hot Springs (Seetzen 1810: 37). Since his visit was very brief, he did not mention Khirbat aş-Şafrā, but he was certainly in close proximity. He was followed by L. Burckhardt (1812), C. Irby and J. Mangles (1818) - with the same results. Their visits to the region were very brief and the omission of Khirbat aş-Şafrā is understandable. F. De Saulcy (1851) visited the southern section of Moabite territory and misplaced several sites on his map [He placed Mādabā south of Wādī al-Mūjib (River Arnon)].

Later, during 1872, H.B. Tristram did the first survey of what is traditionally believed to be Moabite territory. This survey of the Moabite plateau covered an area from the hill country of ʿAmmūn to Wādī al-Ḥasā (Brook Zered). At one point he found himself at the town of Māʿīn, which he identified as Baal Meon. He also visited Wādī Zarqāʾ Māʿīn but did not mention the Māʿīn Hot Springs. Evidently he was very close to Khirbat aş-Şafrā but did not pay a visit to the site (Tristram 1874: 302-4).

About the same time the American Palestine Exploration Society tried to create a map of eastern Palestine, with another attempt during 1875-77, but with limited results. During mid-April of 1876, S. Merrill found himself at Māʿīn and also the hot springs (Merrill 1881: 248; Moulton 1928: 55-69). A few years later, in 1881, C.R. Conder surveyed 500 miles of Transjordan covering the territory between the Wādī Zarqāʾ Māʿīn in the south and Wādī Nimrīn in the north. In his report he mentions the town of Māʿīn and Wādī Zarqāʾ Māʿīn, but

nothing is mentioned of Khirbat aş-Şafrā in spite of the fact that he had to be within close proximity (Conder 1989: 142-49). It seems that he was mainly concerned about dolmens rather than a systematic recording of all sites in this region. George A. Smith reflects very briefly on hot springs at Wādī Zarqāʾ Māʿīn also, but without further explanation of surrounding sites (Smith 1907: 571).

The next major survey was conducted by Nelson Glueck in 1933. He found himself on the eve of May 30 at a place he identified as Ubaiyeh (Site 80) where he camped for the night. On May 31 he visited several sites (Ḥajar al-Mansūb = Site 81; al-Mughayrāt = Site 82) before he came to town of Māʿīn (Site 83) (Glueck 1934: 33). Based on his estimates, al-Mughayrāt is located about 4km southwest of Māʿīn. If he had traveled a few kilometers southwest from al-Mughayrāt he would have come to Khirbat aş-Şafrā, but did not do so.

Although Khirbat aş-Şafrā was unnoticed and not mentioned in early surveys, it appears for the first time on the map of Palestine compiled by G. Armstrong after several surveys for the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund. The map was published in 1890 (Armstrong 1980) (**Fig. 5**). The site is listed as ʿel Safrāhʾ and marked as a ruin. Obviously, some of the early explorers did come across Khirbat aş-Şafrā, but for unknown reason it was never mentioned in any of the early reports.

The 2017 Surface Survey at Khirbat aş-Şafrā

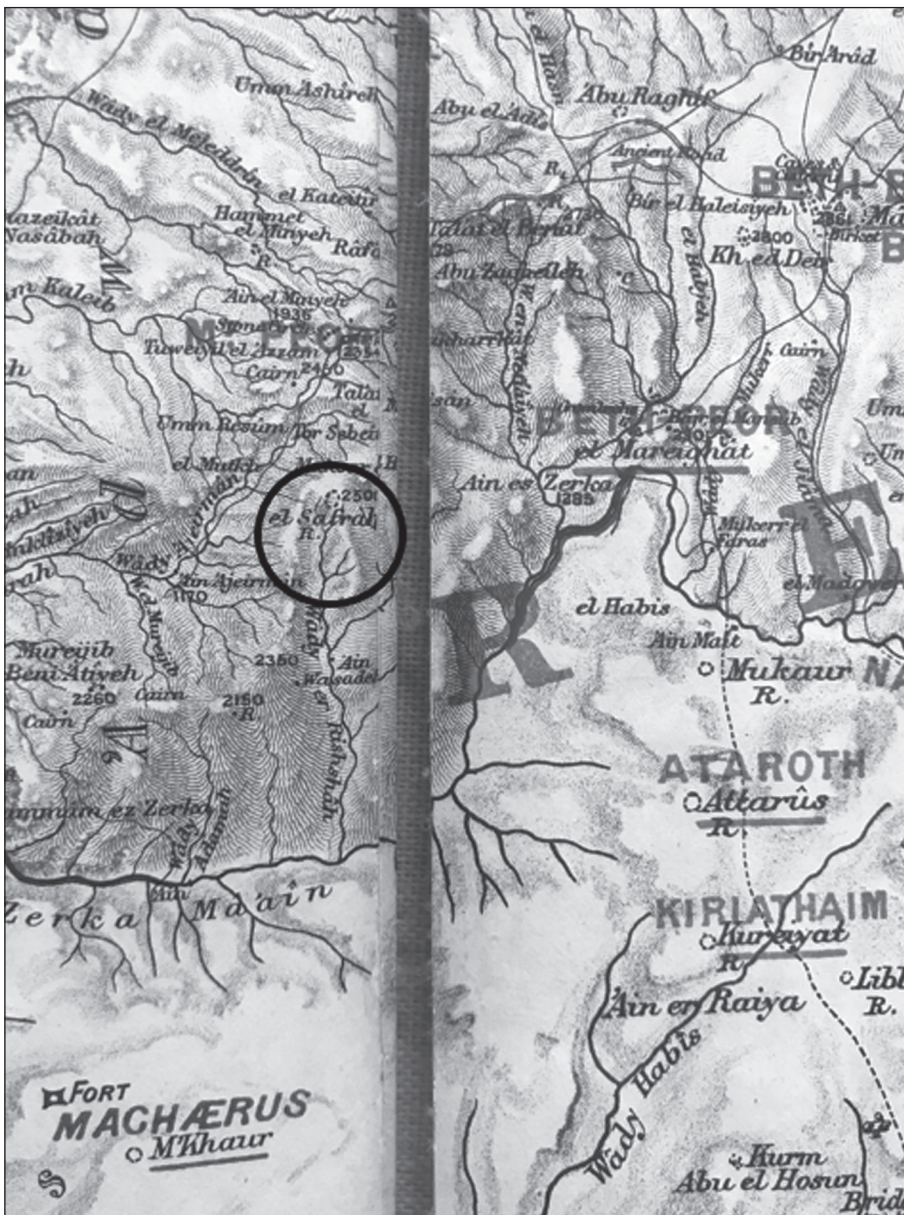
During June 2017, Andrews University conducted a surface survey of Khirbat aş-Şafrā. The site was divided in three sections. The first section was located outside the city walls, covering an area of 10m. The second section covered a 10m-wide strip inside the wall perimeter, and the third section was located in central part of the site. In addition to collecting ceramics from the surface we excavated two probes to gain a better understanding about the stratigraphic sequence of deposited layers. One probe (Probe 1) was located in the central section of the site and another (Probe 2) between the casemate walls. Probe 2 was completed by reaching the bedrock, while Probe 1 was only partially finished. It appears that the debris which accumulated during and after the abandonment of the settlement is

only about 1m deep. The outer city wall appears to be about 1m thick while the inside wall was a bit thinner. The stones that are part of the still-standing wall seem to be roughly hewn and medium sized. Most of them are limestone with a few chert stones.

During the survey, 1,061 pottery sherds were collected from the surface. From the 10m strip outside the city perimeter we found 555 sherds, of which 35 were diagnostic. From the strip covering 10m inside the city wall perimeter we found 228 sherds, of which 25 were diagnostic, and from the strip within the central area of the city we collected 278 sherds, of which 39 were diagnostic (*cf.* Table 1).

During the course of the excavation of Probe 1, we collected 24 sherds with only one diagnostic sherd, belonging to a jar. In Probe 2 we found 35 pottery sherds, again with only one diagnostic sherd, this time coming from a juglet. It seems that majority of the pottery assemblage consists of bowls (43) and jars (32). We also collected cooking-pot fragments (16) and storage-jar (5), juglet (2) and jug (1) sherds.

Most of the diagnostic sherds are very fragmentary, with only a few centimeters of the neck or body existing below the rim. We also found three fragments belonging to a collar-rim jar. The collar is clearly visible, as is a small section of jar's neck. The trajectory of the neck part



5. Palestine Exploration Fund map.

seems to go upright suggesting that the jar was produced during the earlier part of Iron Age IIA. Based on preliminary readings, most of the diagnostic sherds belong to Iron Age IIA or IIB (Figs. 6-9; cf. Table 2), with the exception of a

few sherds belonging to the Roman period. None of the sherds had slip or burnishing of any kind.

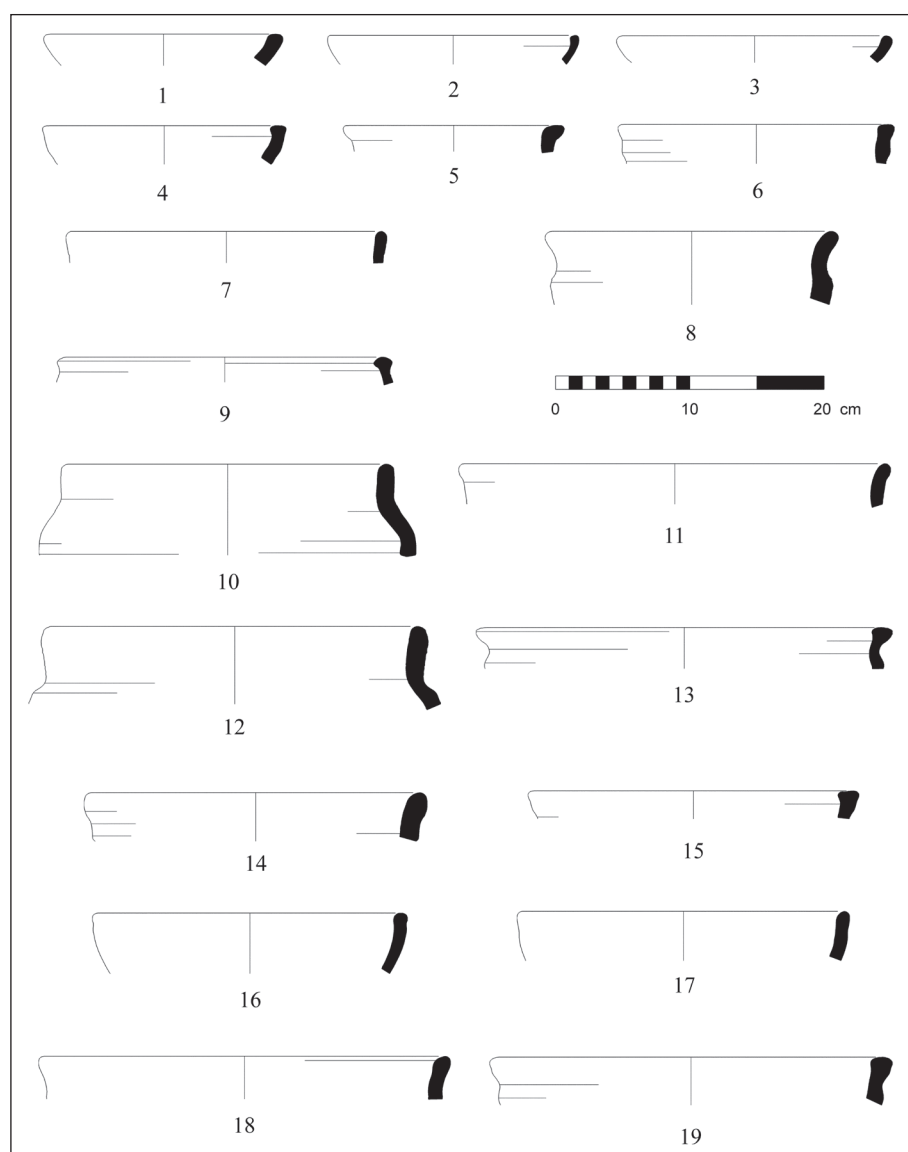
It would appear that the site was established during the early part of Iron Age II and continued to exist for couple of centuries. The ceramic

Table 1: Distribution of ceramic finds.

Location	Bowls	Jars	Cooking pots	Jugs	Juglets	Storage jars
10m outside strip	19	10	4	1	1	
10m inside strip	12	9	3			1
Center strip	12	13	9		1	4

Table 2. Distribution of ceramics illustrated at Figs. 6-9.

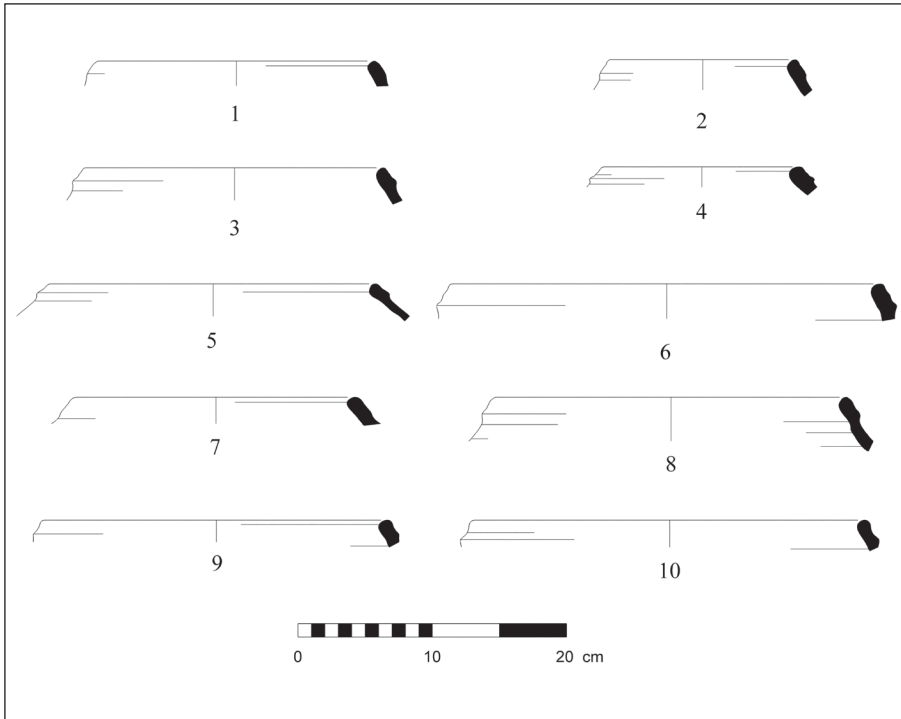
Location	Bowls	Cooking pots	Jars	Storage jars
10m outside strip	6.3, 10, 11, 14, 16	7.2, 3, 10	8.1, 2, 3, 4	--
10m inside strip	6.1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13, 15, 17	7.5	8.5	--
Center strip	6.6, 8, 9, 18, 19	7.1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9	8.6, 7, 8	9.1, 2, 3



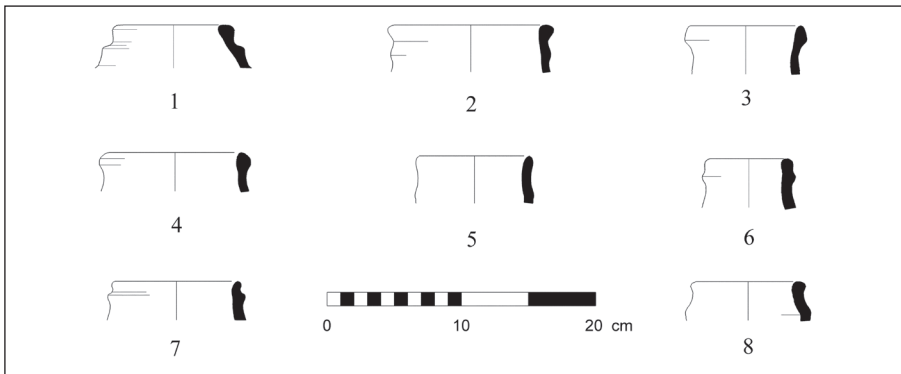
6. Bowls.

assemblage as found on the surface included no ethnic indications of any kind, so we cannot conclude with certainty who established the settlement. Future excavations will hopefully provide evidence to resolve this issue. In addition, since

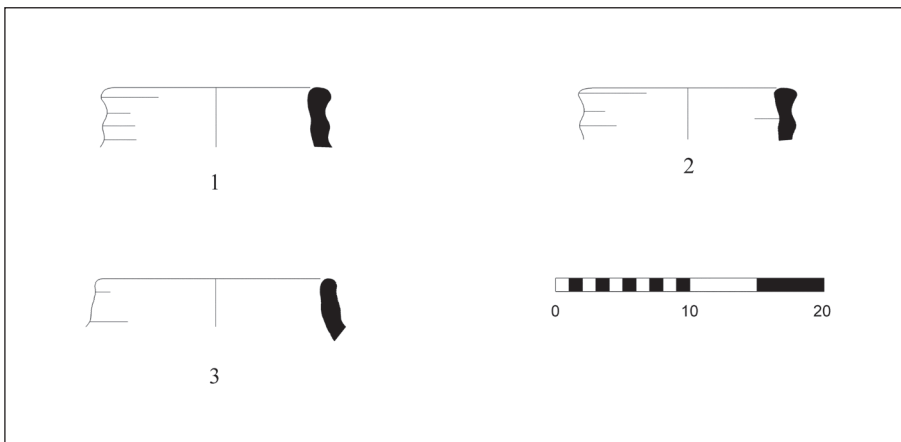
the ceramic assemblage consists of bowls, cooking pots, jars, jugs, juglets and storage jars, it would appear that the site was a typical small village settlement, although one cannot rule out the possibility that it served as military outpost.



7. *Cooking pots.*



8. *Jars.*



9. *Storage jars.*

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