

Excavations at Khirbat Hermas

Preliminary Report

Excavation Permit: B375/2011

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Academic Sponsor: Hebrew Union College

Introduction

This dig was carried out as part of a larger archaeological project in an area on the western outskirts of Rehovot. The area covered a linear strip of land, ca. 265m long and 20m wide. This concession was divided into two sub-areas. The larger of these was excavated by the Israeli Institute of Archaeology (henceforth IIA, under the auspices of Tel Aviv University). The other sub-area, where we – YG Archaeology Ltd., sponsored by the Hebrew Union College – excavated, was at the north end of the site, a strip of land measuring 80m long and 15m wide (Fig. 1).

Test excavations carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) had revealed the potential for urban remains at the site, most probably dating to Byzantine-Early Islamic times. Some Hellenistic, Roman and Mamluk artefacts had also been recovered. These findings were unsurprising, as other digs in the immediate environs of the site (e.g. Sion 2005) had uncovered a range of site types – domestic, industrial and mortuary – dating to these periods. Therefore we expected to find a multi-phase occupation site favouring the Byzantine-Early Islamic period.

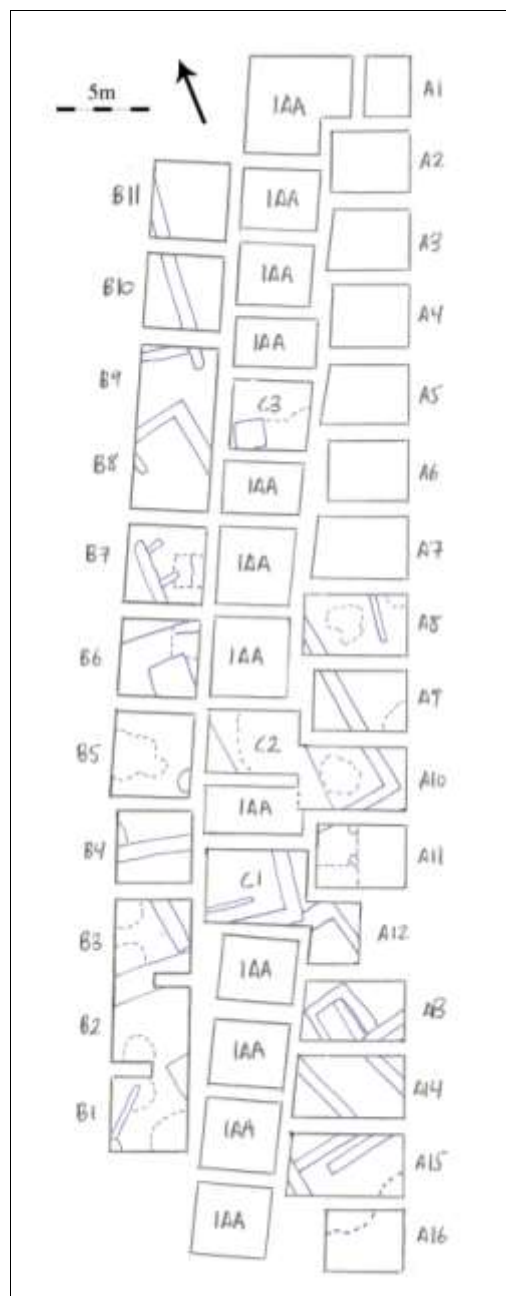


Figure 1. A schematic plan of our excavation area, with archaeological feature outlines marked.

The Site

This is indeed what we recovered – urban remains dating mostly to the Byzantine period, as well as some fairly sparse Early Islamic, Mamluk and Ottoman-period architecture. Most of the features were in a poor state of preservation, lacking specifiable function (Fig. 2). However, some structures appeared ‘public’ in nature – that is, substantial walls constructed of dressed stone façades, often plastered (Fig. 3). At other locations we found large deposits of ceramics, glass and glass slag, which we believe may mark ‘industrial’ activity of some sort – pottery and glass workshops, perhaps.



Figure 2. Non-specifiable walls in Sq. A14.

If we focus on the Byzantine-Early Islamic phases, which represent the only significant occupation of the site, we have a general impression of modest architectural remains, almost all oriented along the same north-south axis. Both these features and the artefacts found in their fills suggest that these were buildings suited to a domestic function and other general urban activities. This vague, orderly and uniform picture

is punctuated by a concentration of larger walls and substantial artefact deposits near the north end of the site. Further north, all architectural remains trail out and the northern 25-30m of the area see very few features.



Figure 3. Substantial walls and paved surface, Sq. A10.



Figure 4. Ceramics and glass deposit, associated with postulated industrial activity (L2051, Sq. B5).

‘Khirbat Hermas’

In this brief preliminary report little will be said about how our dig site fits into wider contexts – by

which I mean its relationship both to the IIA sub-area immediately adjacent, and to the surrounding archaeological landscape and history. Suffice it to say that between this 265m × 20m area and another site right beside it, excavated by the IAA some years ago (Sion 2005), we can see that a section of a Byzantine-Early Islamic village has been found. This has been identified as 'Khirbat Hermas', which prior to these archaeological works was known only from historical sources and knowledge of its location had been lost.

The sub-area which we dug incorporated what appears to have been part of the settlement's northern edge, while the southern edge of the IIA sub-area may have caught the village outskirts on that side. Thus, our combined IIA-YG Archaeology excavation site looks

to have uncovered a north-south strip of the Khirbat Hermas settlement. Our sub-area is distinctive in its more massive architecture and signs of industrial activity, while the IIA sub-area appears to have exposed a more central part of the ancient village, as well as some specialised activity areas. The IAA site (Sion 2005) to the east revealed more of the settlement, and at its eastern edge a cemetery. Together, these archaeological investigations have brought to light a significant portion of Khirbat Hermas, which will hopefully be published fully in the near future.

Bibliography

Sion, O. 2005. Khirbat Hermas. *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* 117. http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.asp?id=229&mag_id=110