

Khirbet Birzeit Research and Excavation 2000

Fourth Season Excavation

*Omar Abd Rabu,
in Cooperation with Matthias Flender, Khaled Nashef †
and Wolfgang Zwickel*

Preliminary Remarks

The above report was scheduled to appear in *Journal of Palestinian Archaeology* N^o II/2 (July 2001), published by the Palestinian Institute of Archaeology (PIA) at Birzeit University. However, the publication of this issue could not be completed, after Khaled Nashef, *Journal of Palestinian Archaeology* (JPA) editor, was denied in September 2002 re-entry to Palestine by the Israeli border authorities. With this action not only JPA was terminated, but also the Institute of Archaeology, which was closed shortly afterwards. For more details see <https://listhost.uchicago.edu/pipermail/anc/2004-November/015821.html>.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to retrieve some of material from Birzeit, which included pottery drawings. Photos of some architectural features were provided by Matthias Flender and Prof. Wolfgang Zwickel, the Co-Director the 4th season excavation at Khirbet Birzeit. These photographs were taken during the excavation and now stored at the Department of Old Testament Studies and Biblical Archaeology of the University Mainz. Accordingly cross-references to new illustrations were integrated in the revised report.

The publication of the report, coupled with the circumstances that led to the termination of JPA, should be a reminder of a policy deliberately practiced to silence Palestinian voices aspiring to recover and build up their cultural identity.

Khaled Nashef, May 12, 2008.

Introduction

In a joint project¹ with the Department of Old Testament Studies and Biblical

¹ The project was sponsored by Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz. Some additional money for the work was given by the Ministerpräsident Beck of the Federal State Rhineland-Palatinate and the Protestant Church of Palatinate. The German team was headed by Matthias Flender (field director), the Palestinian by Omar Abd Rabu (field director), assisted by Sigrun Welke-Holtmann, Christoph Kiworr and Christian Albers. The overall

Archaeology of Mainz University, the Palestinian Institute of Archaeology of Birzeit University has conducted its fourth season of excavation from July 17 to August 7, 2000. Excavations were carried out southwest of Area D, to the east of the freestanding Original Building (Areas A and B; see fig. 1). It was planned in the fourth season to reveal further related structures, especially assumed remains from the Iron Age and Greek/Hellenistic periods. Five squares (4×4 m) were opened, whereas only the southern halves of the first and third squares, and the northern halves of the second and fourth square, were excavated (fig. 2). Wall 603 in Square 5 was partially exposed (fig. 3). The bedrock was reached only in Square 4. Four occupation levels were determined, including the topsoil.



Fig. 1

project was directed by Wolfgang Zwickel and Khaled Nashef. Ibrahim Iqteit of PIA was draftsman. Omar Abd Rabu, who read the pottery, provided the present preliminary report.

The project was designed as an introductory work to a larger project between both institutions in Burj Beitin, which was projected for the year of 2001. Both sites display similar characteristics. During the excavation methods of both institutions were shared in order to develop a common excavation policy for the future project. The events of the Second Intifada halted excavation plans in Burj Beitin.

The teams wish to thank Dr. Hamdan Taha, Director of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities (Ramallah) for permission to conduct excavations at the site. Furthermore, the authors wish to thank the editors of *Ugarit-Forschungen* for their kindness to allow publication of this excavation report in its present condition.

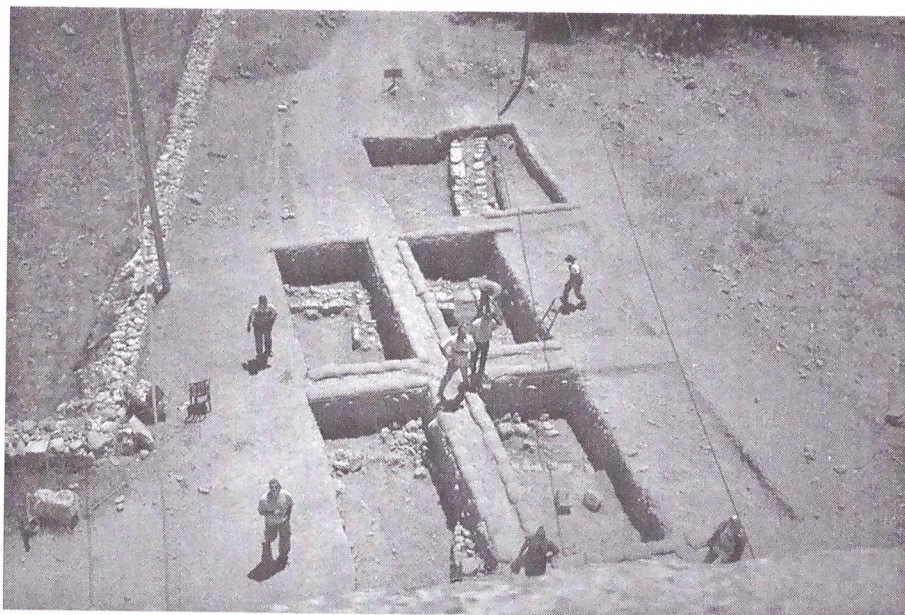


Fig. 2

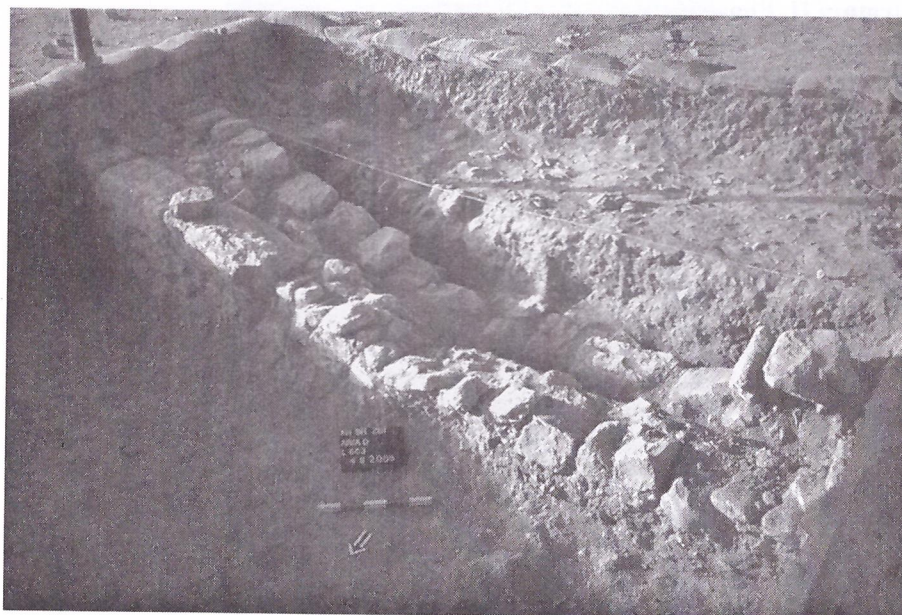


Fig. 3

Stratigraphy

The topsoil in Square 1 was covered by a layer of asphalt paving (thickness: 15 cm), beneath which there was a brown soil mixed with small pebbles, covering the western part of the square. The layer represents part of the modern track leading to the water tank and refuse of the construction work when the tank was built. The layer contained modern and Ottoman pottery sherds and glass fragments. After removal of this layer, the topsoil level was equal in all five squares.

Stratum I (Topsoil)

The topsoil (thickness: 10 cm) consisted of a brown fill mixed with small and middle-sized stones. This fill contained pottery sherds from various periods, glass fragments and plastic pieces.

Stratum II, Phase I (Collapse)

After removal of the topsoil, a level consisting of large and medium-sized stones (20 × 30, 30 × 40 cm) (Loci 101, 202) in a brown to grey fill was exposed. This level covered the Square 1 and the northern half of the Square 2 (Locus 103), where it bordered a grey fill free of stones in the southern half of Square 4 (Locus 503).

Stratum II, Phase II (Mamluk/Ottoman)

The Stratum consists of grey soil mixed with small stones and pottery sherds from the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (Locus 102) covering the excavation area. A hard, light brown fill (thickness: 10–15 cm; Locus 105; see fig. 4) appeared beneath the grey fill in Square 1. It contained stones from Wall 104 and small slabs presumably from a paved floor (Locus 106). A nearly complete juglet, body fragments of handmade vessels of the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods, animal bones, few iron and bronze pieces were found in this fill. The floor (Locus 106) was built of small and medium-sized stones (20 × 20, 10 × 20, 5 × 5, 10 × 5 cm), concentrated in the western part of the square.

In the eastern part of the Square 1, remains of a taboun (Locus 103) with an adjacent burned clay floor (Locus 108) were uncovered. Black traces of the taboun walls were impressed on the floor, enabling the measurement of the wall thickness, that is 2.50 cm. The taboun has a semi-circular plan, its inner part was covered with an ash fill, 2 cm thick. Fragments of cooking pots dated to the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods were found in this fill. The clay floor (Locus 108), which extended under the eastern balk, presumably represents part of the collapsed taboun walls.

A wall (W104) was partly uncovered in the southwestern corner of the southern half of Square 1. This wall continues beneath the balk between Square 1 and Square 2. Only the northern row of the wall was exposed, which was constructed of roughly dressed large and medium-sized stones. It is to be noted that the center of the wall was slightly curved.

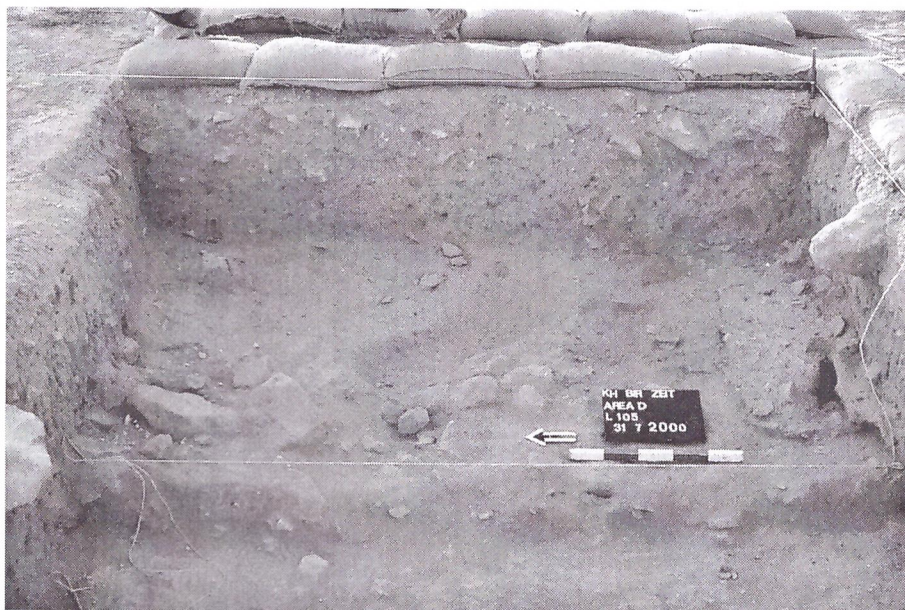


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Wall 212 (fig. 5) and a small segment of a soil floor were revealed in the northern half of Square 2 after removal of a grey fill with fallen stones (Loci 210, 211). The fill contained large sherds of cooking pots, an almost completely preserved oil lamp and a metal spatula. Wall 212 (exposed length: 2 m) consisted of two rows, the outer was built of larger stones, whereas the inner was not preserved. The wall has a north-south orientation. A fragmentary hearth (inner diameter: 1.20 m) was exposed to the east of the wall.

A heap of stones with grey fill (Loci 395, 507; see fig. 6) was uncovered in Squares 3 and 4. In Square 3, it covered the top of Walls 307 and 309, in Square 4 the top of Wall 511. It contained Iron Age I, II, and Late Greek / Early Hellenistic pottery sherds. Wall 603 was uncovered in Square 5, however, its base was not reached in this season. A gate was observed in the southern face of the wall, which was blocked by large stones. Lower courses of Wall 603 were similar to Walls 11, 15, 19, 23 of the Umayyad structure uncovered during the third season. Thus, the higher courses of Wall 603, including the blocked gate, could be considered as a late addition or restoration of the original wall of the Umayyad period.

Wall 603 (see fig. 3) was oriented east-west and built of reused stones derived also from earlier Umayyad foundations. The wall was 1 to 1.10 m thick (exposed length: 5 m) and constructed of partly dressed stones. The process of rebuilding consisted in opening an entrance in the southeastern part of the northern face of the wall, where a large stone was reworked to form a step, while an adjacent entrance was closed. Pottery sherds of the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods were collected from the higher courses and from the blocked gate in the inner face. The construction methods of Walls 603 and 202 in the eastern part of the northern half of Square 2 were similar: Both were slightly curved at the center. Furthermore, both fills covering Wall 603 and 212 were identical, i. e., consisting of grey soil and small and medium-sized stones. It also contained the above-mentioned oil lamp. Therefore, the restoration work in Wall 603 could be dated in the last part of Mamluk and beginning of the Ottoman periods.

Stratum III, Phase I (Byzantine/Umayyad?)

After the removal of the fill of grey soil with small- and medium-sized stones (L 305; see fig. 7), the tops of Walls 307, 309 were exposed, but not their horizontal and vertical extension. The walls could form part of a room, which was not exposed completely in this season. Furthermore, Wall 514, which was exposed in the northern half of Square 4, represents an extension to Wall 307. The fill covering this wall (Locus 504) is the same as Locus 305 in Square 3. The walls were built of two rows of dressed stones (thickness: 0.90–1.00 m), while the space between them was filled with small stones. The walls were constructed in a similar manner to Walls 11, 15, 19, 23 of the Umayyad structure from the previous season.²

² Nashef/Abd Rabu, 2001, 9, and fig. 10.



Fig. 6

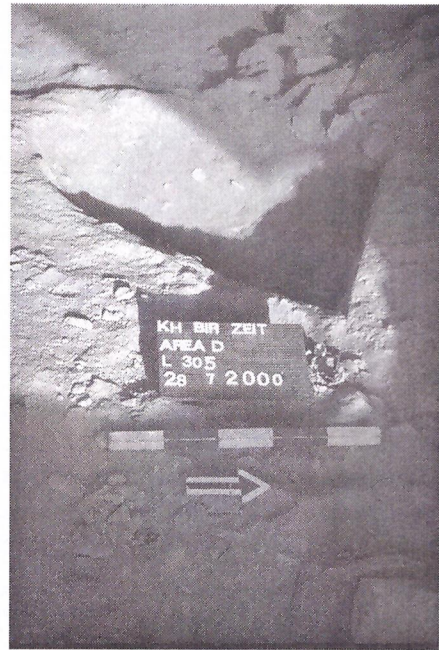


Fig. 7

The walls predate the Mamluk period according to Late Byzantine / Early Umayyad pottery sherds found within the light brown fill covering the inner area between Walls 307 and 309. It should also be noted that the collapse of the latter walls seems to be represented in the southwestern corner of Square 3 and the northwestern corner of Square 4 (Locus 507; see fig. 6), which contained Late Byzantine / Early Umayyad pottery sherds. This collapse is identified as the abandonment of the Byzantine / Umayyad site, already established in the previous season as a separate phase (Stratum III, Phase II). The data for this phase, as well as for Stratum III, Phase III (Roman / Byzantine), remains in this season incomplete. Future excavations in this area should help in consolidating the picture, in order to reach a precise stratification, as in to the previous season.

Stratum IV (Bedrock)

Beneath the collapse layer in the northern half of Square 4, there was a layer of red brown soil, covering the bedrock and the top of Wall 511. The fill contained pottery sherds of the Early Iron II and Late Greek / Early Hellenistic periods. It is not possible at present to relate Wall 511 to any of these periods. On the bedrock there was also burned soil mixed with red soil, which could have resulted from an oven, no longer existing.

Wall 511 was built on bedrock and has an east-west orientation. The wall (exposed length: 5 m) was built in two rows of large stones. The wall may date to the beginning of the Iron Age II, or, perhaps, to the end of Iron Age I (10th or 9th century BC).

Pottery

The following description includes pottery types collected from Stratum II and IV, excluding Stratum III, which did not exhibit clear architectural remains.

Oil Lamp (Table 1)

The complete lamp is made of pale yellow clay, fired under medium temperature. In size, its upper part equals its lower. The lamp has a handle, folded towards the oil channel. The relatively small oil opening is round and located at the center of the upper part of the lamp, thus, cutting the rectangular channel, which begins from the handle and ends at the round wick opening. The channel is decorated with two interwoven wavy lines. On both sides of the channel there are panels with chevron decorations and geometric designs. The lamp was found within a grey fill (Locus 210) on an earthen floor of Stratum II, Phase II. This lamp type is dated to the 14th century to reach the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman period. Similar lamps were found in Khirbet Siyar el-Ghanam at Beit Sa-hour³ and in the Armenian Garden excavation in Jerusalem.⁴

N ^o	Object	Reg. N ^o	Locus	Type of Locus	Stratum
1	lamp	1556	210	Grey fill on floor	Stratum II, Phase II

Table 1. Lamp

Handmade Cooking Pots and Bowl (Table 2)

In this season, two types of cooking pots (qidr, qudur) were found: Open (table 2,1–3) and closed (table 2,4) forms. The handmade pots are made of red clay containing large amount of temper, fired to a light brown color. Three forms of the open form cooking pots are attested:

1. Pots with a short and thick neck. The rim is everted and simple (table 2,1). Similar pots were uncovered at Khirbet Birzeit.⁵
2. Open form pots with a simple rim, a short neck and geometric decoration on the rim and on the round body (table 2,2). No parallels are attested.
3. Open form pots without any neck. They have thick, triangular everted rim and round body (table 2,3). Similar pots were found at Tell Qaymun.⁶

Only one sample of closed form pots was found in this season (table 2,4). This type is characterized by an everted neck, simple rim, and round body. Apparently the type has no parallels.

Few fragments of handmade bowls with simple rim and thick body were

³ Tzaferis, 1975, pl. 20,7.

⁴ Tushingham, 1985, 151, Type 2, fig. 45,1–3.

⁵ Abd Rabu, 2000, 16, fig. 4,1.

⁶ Avissar, 1996, fig. XIII 98, Type 11,6.

found (table 2,5). The bowls are poorly fired and are characterized of brown clay containing white inclusions and straw. Parallels for these bowls were recovered at Khirbet Birzeit in the third season.⁷

N ^o	Object	Reg. N ^o	Locus	Type of Locus	Stratum
1	Pot	1591	210	grey fill on floor	Stratum II, Phase II
2	Pot	1062	108	burned clay area (presumably from taboun walls)	Stratum II, Phase II
3	Pot	2526	503	grey fill	Stratum II, Phase I
4	Pot	3040	603	wall	Stratum II, Phase II
5	Bowl	1043	106	floor	Stratum II, Phase II

Table 2. Pots (1–4), bowl (5)

Jars and Juglet (Closed Forms) (Table 3)

The jar table 3,1 with long neck and everted rim. Table 3,2 is a jar with a long neck and simple rim, beneath which there is a ledge. These jars are made of brown clay, well-fired to take an orange color. There are no exact parallels for these jars, the first of which was found beneath a floor from the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods. The second was found above this floor.

A handmade juglet of light brown clay (table 3,3) was fired to take a green color. A globular body and long neck characterize the juglet. It has probably an everted rim and a handle stretching from rim to the shoulder. The juglet was found in situ with other sherds on a floor from the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods.

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Locus	Type of Locus	Stratum
1	Jar	1068	110	fill beneath floor 106	Stratum II, Phase II
2	Jar	1033	105	fill above floor 106	Stratum II, Phase II
3	Juglet	1043	106	Floor	Stratum II, Phase II

Table 3. Jars and juglet

Glazed Bowls (Table 4)

Fragments of glazed bowls were found within a fill of the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods. Table 4,1 represents a plate with a dark green glaze with a horizontal protruding rim, curved slightly. It has a decoration of black slanted parallel lines, incised with a fine instrument (sgraffito).

Table 4,2 represents a bowl with yellow glaze, incised in green with a fine instrument (sgraffito). Table 4,3–5 bowls with green glaze covering the interior,

⁷ Abd Rabu, 2000, 9, fig. 3.

and yellow glaze covering partly the exterior (table 4,5). These fragments belong to Stratum II, Phase II, dated to the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods. Parallels to these bowls were attested in Mamluk levels of sites, such as the Armenian Garden in Jerusalem, Emmaus, and Tell Qaymun.

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Locus	Type of Locus	Stratum
1	Plate	1571	207	brown fill mixed with grey fill	Stratum II, Phase II
2	Bowl	1035	103	taboun	Stratum II, Phase II
3	Bowl	3034	606	brown fill mixed with grey fill	Stratum II, Phase I
4	Bowl	1591	210	grey fill on floor	Stratum II, Phase II
5	Bowl	3028	601	grey fill	Stratum II, Phase I

Table 4. Glazed bowls

Storage Jars and ziers/pithoi⁸ (Table 5)

Fragments of storage jars of the Late Greek / Early Hellenistic periods were found on bedrock (table 5,1). In a red brown fill on bedrock (Locus 509, see fig. 8), there were ziers/pithoi of Iron Age I (table 5,3) and jars of Iron Age II (table 5,4). There were also ziers/pithoi of the Iron Age I found in a stone fill dated to the Mamluk period (Locus 506, see fig. 9).

Table 5,1 represents a storage jar with everted rounded rim. The jar is made of red clay, well-fired. Similar jars were found in Sabastya,⁹ Beitin¹⁰ and Khirbet Birzeit.¹¹

Table 5,2–3 represent fragments of large jars (ziers/pithoi) from Iron Age I. The ziers/pithoi are made of brown clay, fired to take light brown color. It contains sand inclusions and characterized by thick rounded rim, slightly everted. These ziers/pithoi were found in most of Iron Age I sites in the hills of Jerusalem and Ramallah.¹²

Table 5,4 represents a jar from the Iron Age II. It is characterized by a thick rim, slightly curved, and has no neck. There are parallels for this jar recovered from Tell en-Nasbeh.¹³

⁸ *Zier* is a Palestinian term for amphora or pithos.

⁹ Zayadine, 1966, pl. 27,2–4.

¹⁰ Kelso, 1968, pl. 68,6.

¹¹ Abd Rabu, 2000, 17, fig. 14,7–8.

¹² Cf. samples from Tell en-Nasbeh (McCown/Wampler et al., 1947, pl. 3,39–40).

¹³ McCown/Wampler et al., 1947, pl. 25,4–5.



Fig. 8

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Locus	Type of Locus	Stratum
1	Storage jar	2570	213	fill on bedrock	Stratum IV
2	Zier/pithos	2547	506	stone fill	Stratum II, Phase II
3	Zier/pithos	2530	509	dark red soil on bedrock	Stratum IV
4	Storage jar	2560	509	dark red soil on bedrock	Stratum IV

Table 5. Storage jars and ziers/pithoi



Fig. 9

Conclusions

The expansion of the excavation areas yielded substantial evidence of Late Greek / Early Hellenistic settlement, which has its roots in the Iron Age (Stratum IV). The nature of this settlement as displayed by Wall 511 should be determined in future seasons. Evidence of the Roman/Byzantine settlement (Stratum III, Phase III), though major at the site, could not be ascertained in this season. Some walls pertaining to a Byzantine/Umayyad structure (Stratum III, Phase I) with their collapse (Stratum III, Phase II) were uncovered. The paved floor 106, wall remains, taboun, and a hearth, indicate clear settlement activities of the Late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (Stratum II, Phase II). The latter are probably associated functionally with the Original Building, the use of which goes back to the Mamluk period. It seems that the site, including the Original Building, was deserted during the sixteenth or seventeenth century (Stratum II, Phase I).

Bibliography

- Abd Rabu, O., 2000: Khirbet Birzeit Research and Excavation Project 1999: The Pottery. *Journal of Palestinian Archaeology* 1/2, 13–24.
- Avissar, M., 1996: The Medieval Pottery. In A. Ben Tor / M. Avissar / M. Portugali (eds.): *Yoqne'am I: The Later Periods*. Qedem Reports 3. Jerusalem: The Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University. Pp. 75–172.
- Kelso, J. L., 1968: *The Excavation of Bethel (1934–1969)*. AASOR 39. Cambridge: American School of Oriental Research.
- McCown, C. C. / Wampler, J. C., et al., 1947: *Tell en-Nasbeh*. Berkeley / New Haven: The Palestine Institute of Pacific School of Religion.
- Nashef, K. / Abd Rabu, O., 2000: Khirbet Birzeit Research and Excavation Project 1999: Third Season Excavation. *Journal of Palestinian Archaeology* 1/2, 4–12 (in Arabic).
- Tsaferis, 1975: The Archaeological Excavation at Shepherds' Field. *Liber Annus* 25, 5–52.
- Tushingham, A. D., 1985: *Excavation in the Jerusalem 1961–1967*, vol. 1. Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum.
- Zayadine, F., 1966: Early Hellenistic Pottery from the Theater Excavations at Samaria. *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 11, 53–64.