

2 HISTORY OF RESEARCH OF THE NORTHERN NEGEV

The northern Negev has been of interest since the early 19th century, the beginning of modern biblical archaeology, mainly because it is mentioned in the Bible as the Negeb of Judah. The early 19th century investigations of the Negev started with visits by early explorers and reconnaissance surveys, which were inspired by the desire to study the biblical geography of the country and were focused on identifying ancient sites by their names and linking them to the Bible. Therefore, the first phase of research conducted in the region can be called biblical explorations. One such early archaeological survey of Palestine was conducted by Robinson (1841), who engaged in a three-month journey from Suez to Beirut and, along the way, he identified ancient sites and names that he linked to the Bible.

The second phase of archaeological research in the northern Negev commenced in the middle of the 19th century. Surveys were no longer adventures, having become more systematic. This rise in systematic surveys was based on geographic coverage as opposed to the search for biblical sites. The first attempt at a geographical, historical, and archaeological survey was conducted by Guerin, a French researcher in the 1860s (Schloen, 2008: 148) who carried out several explorations of Judea. Guerin was the first to explore the region in such a systematic way, which was a significant contribution to the archaeology of the area. Guerin's surveys are considered part of the pre-archaeological phase of the exploration of Palestine, as many ancient remains were not destroyed yet by development. However, archaeological periodization based on ceramic sherds was not yet common practice and was, therefore, not applied.

Between 1868–1870, Palmer, working for the Palestine Exploration Fund, explored the Northern Sinai and the Negev, providing descriptions of archaeological sites including those in the northern Negev. After the British occupation of Egypt,

Palmer worked for the government until he was killed on a mission in Wadi Sudr in 1881 (Besant, 1883). In 1875, the *Survey of Western Palestine* was published, providing a more systematic and detailed survey than Guerin's earlier work. The Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) survey focused on the area north of the Gaza–Be'er Sheva line (Condor and Kitchener, 1883). The published work included the results of the survey and a detailed map of the area showing the surveyed ancient sites.

At the beginning of the 20th century, systematic ethnography began in the northern Negev. In 1902, the Czech orientalist and ethnographer Musil (1907) visited and described several archaeological sites, including Be'er Shema and Be'er Sheva. Although these surveys added new data, they mainly focused on large sites. However, some of the new data were important as they described sites that were fully or partially destroyed shortly afterward. Thus, Musil described the Byzantine ruins of Be'er Sheva, which were dismantled when the Ottomans started building the modern town. His work was published in four books called *Arabia Petraea* (Musil, 1907).

Prior to World War I, the British realized that they had no exact maps of some southern Palestine regions. Therefore, they had a military interest in creating a new, updated survey of the area, but to hide its true purpose, it was conducted by the PEF. To provide the survey with the seal of legitimacy and fulfill the PEF's survey goals, the archaeologists Woolley and Lawrence joined the project (Richter, 2008). Based on their surveys of the region, Woolley and Lawrence (1914) disputed Huntington's (1911) environmental determinist frameworks, which had proposed that the rise and fall of civilizations in the Near East were based on climatic change. For example, Huntington (1911: 129) argued that the climate during the Roman-Byzantine period was more favorable than in later eras, spreading settlements also to the desert areas and, as a result of desiccation, leading to the desertification and consequent abandonment of Palestine after the Arab conquest.

In 1914, the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, later known as the Israel Exploration Society (IES), was founded in Jerusalem to explore Jewish antiquities. The IES continues to influence archaeological research in the country significantly. The first excavation permit issued by the Israeli government was given in 1948 to the IES. Furthermore, the IES has published a large range of books concerning the archaeology of Israel.

Shortly after World War I, Albright surveyed the Negev and Dead Sea area (Albright, 1924). Albright practiced interdisciplinary research that included history, philology, Bible studies, historical geography, and archaeology (Running and Freedman, 1997: 61–62). Like the first researchers in the region, he searched specifically for archaeological sites described in the Bible and did not look for later sites. Albright furthermore excavated Tell Beit Mirsim, which is located a few kilometers north of the study area. As a result of this excavation, he estab-

lished a pottery chronology for western Palestine during the Bronze and Iron Age periods. Simultaneously, in the early 1920s, Petrie and the British School of Archaeology in Egypt were conducting excavations at Tel Jemmeh and Tell el-Far'ah south (Beth-Pelet¹, Tel Sharuhen) in the western northern Negev, which also revealed, among others, Classical period strata that included the Roman fortress on top of the tell (Petrie, 1930).

According to Mazar (1997: 48) several factors influenced archaeological research in Israel after the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948: (1) for Israeli scholars, direct contact with colleagues in other parts of the Near East was not possible; (2) the archaeological investigation of Jewish heritage was encouraged by the state; (3) and the country was developing rapidly (Mazar, 1997: 48). The British Mandatory Department of Antiquities was replaced by the newly established Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM), which conducted salvage excavations at numerous sites (Mazar, 1997: 48). A key focus during the early history of the Israeli state was the area described as the Negev of Judah in the Bible, with Beersheba as its center, which inspired several research projects in the second half of the 20th century.

Among the scholars who surveyed the northern Negev during this time were such figures as Alon (1979), Aharoni (1958), Glueck (1961), and Gichon (1975). Aharoni was one of the most prominent archaeologists working in the northern Negev, his primary focus being the Iron Age. He conducted a regional study examining the Be'er Sheva–Arad Valley (Aharoni, 1958), but, as noted previously, he was not interested in Classical period sites. He also initiated the large-scale excavations at Arad (Aharoni, 1975), Tel Malhata (Beit Arie and Freud, 2015), Tel Masos (Kempinski et al., 1981), Tel Sheva (Aharoni, 1973), and Tel Ira (Beit Arie, 1999). Tel Sheva was actually known as Tell es-Seba, or Tell Sheva, and its name later changed to Tel Be'er Sheva to conform to a biblical interpretation. These excavations mainly uncovered remains dating to earlier (biblical) periods and several important Classical remains were also excavated (in most sites in the region, the upper layers date from the Hellenistic to the Early Islamic periods). A detailed stratigraphy and pottery chronology does not always exist for these sites, as not all researchers were interested in that material. In general, the reason the Classical (and non-Jewish) remains were researched less carefully can be attributed to the desire to build a national identity.

In the 1970s, following the 1967 war and the opening up of the Negev to research, archaeological interests expanded greatly, and many new studies focused on non-biblical periods, both Classical and prehistoric. Among others, Negev (e.g.,

1 Petrie identified the site as Beth-Pelet (Joshua, 15: 27; Berlin and Brettler, 2014: 473), the excavation report was therefore published under the name Beth-Pelet (Petrie, 1930).

1971; 1986) intensively researched the Nabateans. Based on his research, today, many Byzantine sites in the central Negev are still described as Nabatean, such as Elusa, Oboda, or Mamphis. Gichon (e.g., 1967; 1975; 1979) researched the Classical sites in the northern Negev associated with the *Limes Palestina*. As a military historian, Gichon was interested in its protection to the south and therefore studied fortresses and fortifications along the *Limes Palestina*.

A new phase of archaeological research in the Negev began with the Negev Emergency Survey (1978–1988), a branch of the ASI. The ASI operated under the auspices of the IDAM (the present-day IAA) and was founded in 1964 with several archaeological mapping surveys. Each map consisted of grid squares of 10 x 10 km (100 square km). Different teams conducted the surveys, and all archaeological sites and occurrences were mapped and described. Survey activities in the Negev were limited in the early phase of the ASI. A response to the peace treaty with Egypt and the planned redeployment of the Israel Defense Forces in the Negev, the Negev Emergency Surveys received more attention, and many areas in the Negev were systematically surveyed (Cohen, 1982). Archaeological research on the ancient city of Be'er Sheva, the core site of the entire region, began in the 1950s. The modern city was built at the beginning of the 20th century by the Turks on the remains of a Roman-Byzantine town (Gophna and Yisraeli, 1973: 115), and it underwent further development from the 1950s onwards. As a result, salvage excavations carried out by the IDAM and later the IAA took place. The excavations of Be'er Sheva revealed the remains of the Classical period city in several locations, mainly in today's Old City and its vicinity. Furthermore, with the help of aerial photos from World War I, the remains of a possible Late Roman army camp were discovered within the city limits of Be'er Sheva (Fabian, 1995a; 1995b) and, in recent years, parts of this site have been excavated. In addition to the excavations in Be'er Sheva, many rural settlements have also recently been excavated in a belt around the ancient city. The rural sites include mainly villages, farmhouses, watchtowers, installations, cisterns, and agricultural terraces. Since the 1990s, a growing number of construction projects have been conducted in the northern Negev, especially within and surrounding the city of Be'er Sheva. Due to the high volume of urban development projects, the IAA has conducted many development surveys, inspections, trial trenching, and salvage excavations. Therefore, in this period, the knowledge of sites and settlement patterns in the northern Negev has grown rapidly.