

7 EASTERN STUDY AREA

7.1 Introduction

The eastern study area is located in the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin. The basin is in the center of the area and is mainly flat (Figure 7.1). The slopes of the southern

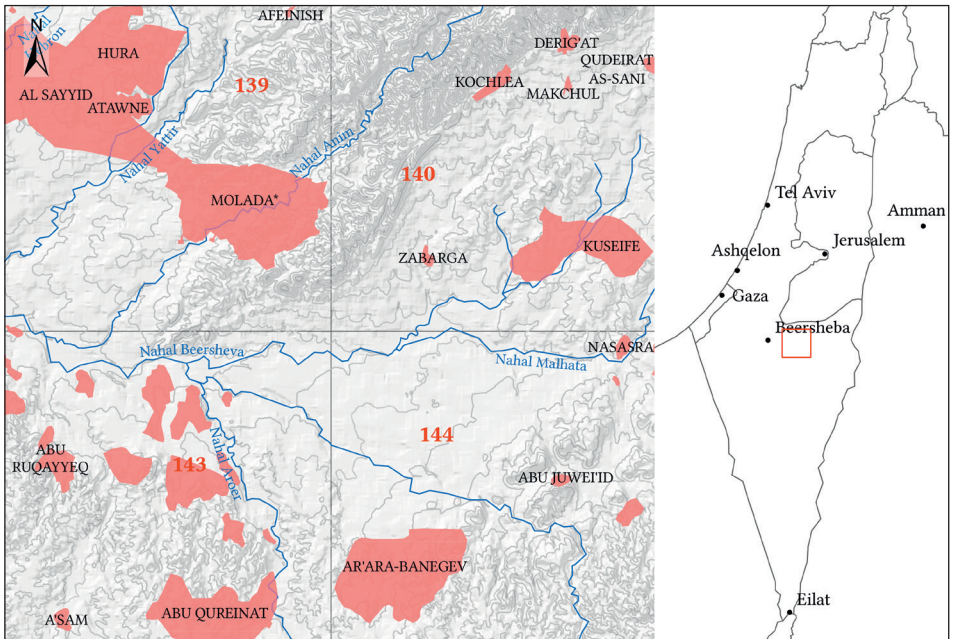


Figure 7.1 Eastern study area depicting modern settlements.

Survey map division (maps 139, 140, 143, and 144) according to the Archaeological Survey of Israel. This includes the main wadis in the area.

Hebron hills are located to the north, and the Northern ridges of the Negev Highlands are located to the south of the area. The altitude of the area is between 300 and 720 m above sea level.

Approximately 75 square km of the study area is developed. The developed area consists of Bedouin towns, a large army base, and paved roads. In addition to these towns and military installations, there are many unrecognized Bedouin villages in the area. Much of the free land is used by Bedouins during the winter months for agriculture and grazing, mainly along the wadis and in the northern region, where runoff agriculture is possible. The wadis in this area are dry riverbeds that only carry water after heavy winter rains. In the center of the study area, a large military base (Nevatim Air Force Base) covers a plot of land approximately 50 square km in size. However, large parts of the land on the base is not developed (Figure 7.2). Within the area of the military base the large settlement of Tel Malhata as well as the Roman-Byzantine town southeast of the tell are located. Access to the site is limited. However, the site was excavated in the 1960s and 1970s, 1990s, 2000s, and—in two recent excavations in 2016 and 2017—a large part of the Roman-Byzantine cemetery was excavated, located to the south of the Tel.

The eastern study area consists of four survey maps. In total, 371 Classical sites have been recorded in this study area (Table 7.1). All surveys were conducted by the ASI within the framework of the Negev Emergency Survey, starting in the late 1970s and continuing until the 2000s, although the main activities were conducted in the early 1980s. Many modern towns and settlements have built in the area since then, and the large military base, which covers a large area close to Tel

Table 7.1 Survey maps, sites, density, and survey methods for the eastern study area.

The numbers include only the Classical sites registered during systematic surveys, and not the sites added, based on development surveys, inspections and trial trenching, or excavations.

| Map No. | Dates Surveyed | Area (sq km) | Number of Total Sites | Density of Sites | Number of Classical Sites | Density of Sites | Survey Method | Reference |
|---------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 139 | 1983–1984 | 100 | 359 | 3.59 | 138 | 1.38 | Field-walking | Govrin, 1991 |
| 140 | 1984–1985 | 100 | 273 | 2.73 | 121 | 1.21 | Field-walking | Govrin, 2016 |
| 143 | 1981 | 100 | 48 | 0.48 | 32 | 0.32 | Field-walking | Eldar-Nir, 2015 |
| 144 | 1979–2000 | 100 | 159 | 1.59 | 80 | 0.80 | Field-walking | Beit-Arieh, 2003 |

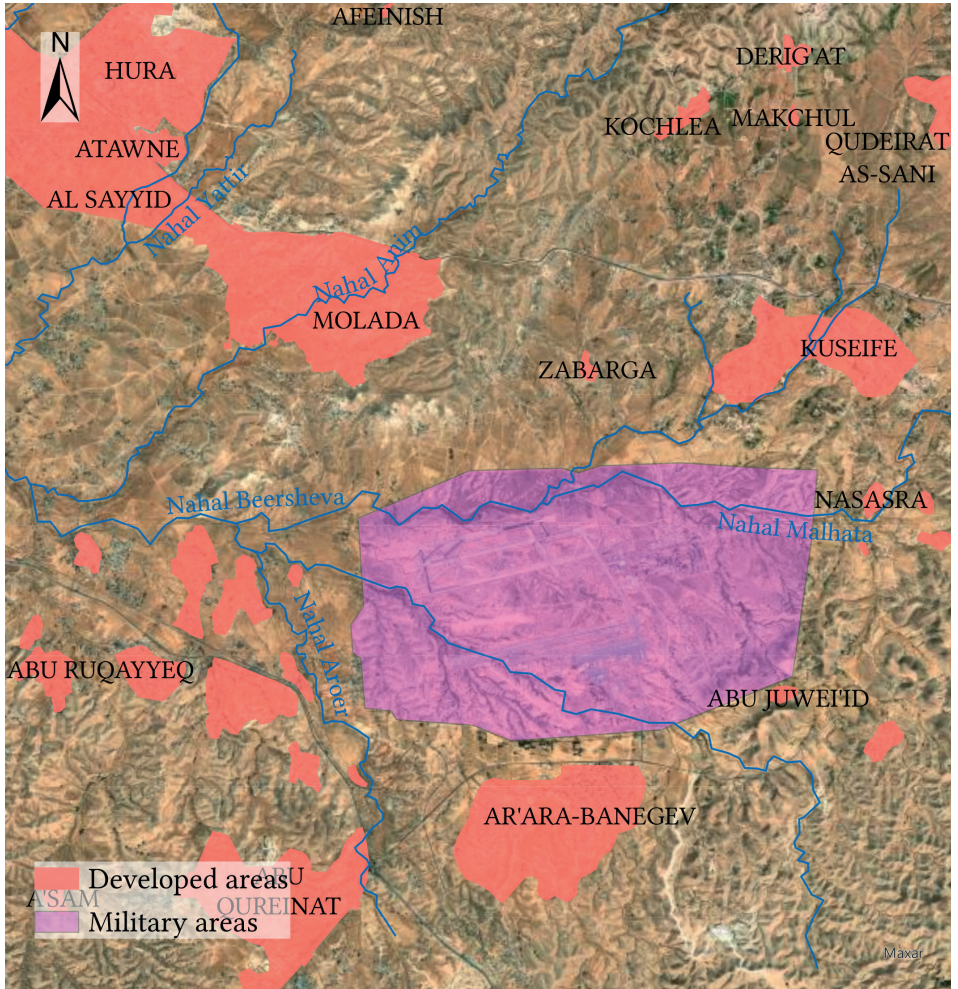


Figure 7.2 Modern land use of the eastern study area.

The Nevatim Air Force Base comprises the largest section of the study area, surrounded by mainly Bedouin towns and villages. Background: Satellite Imagery: ESRI—DigitalGlobe).

Malhata, opened in 1983. The majority of archaeological sites were discovered in the northern part of the study area, with a total of 259 sites. The surveys for the northern maps were conducted by Govrin during the years 1983–1985 (Govrin, 1991; 2016). The surveys in the southern part of the study area were conducted by Eldar-Nir (2015) and Beit-Arieh (2003), and in total, 112 Classical period sites were discovered. The surveys were conducted in 1981 (map 143) and in the course of several seasons during the years 1979–2000 (map 144).

The density of sites in the eastern study area ranges between 0.32 and 1.38, averaging 0.93 sites per square km (see Database-Appendix). The average site densities of the Besor study area and the eastern study area are identical ($n = 0.93$), while the average for the central study area is higher ($n = 1.60$). The higher density of Classical sites in the central study area can be explained by the location of the large ancient city of Be'er Sheva in the center of that area. As stated in the previous chapter, the average density of archaeological sites is higher in the northern maps of the eastern study area (maps 139 and 140). This is also visible in the eastern study area, where the area south of Nahal Beersheba-Nahal Malhata is less densely settled. The reason for this may be due to the fact that the slopes of the southern Hebron hills, which allow dry farming in the winter months, are better suited for agricultural purposes. Furthermore, it might be connected to a network of fortresses, which could have been installed for the defense of the northern settlements from desert tribes. A line of fortresses runs from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, beginning during the Hellenistic period, with fortresses in Tel Sheva, Tel Malhata, Tel Arad, and Horvat Uza. These fortresses also existed in the time of Diocletian (third century CE; limes fortification), with fortresses in Be'er Shema (Besor study area), Tel Sheva in the central study area, Tel Malhata in the eastern study area, and Horvat Uza, located outside the survey area (Avi-Yonah, 1959; Tsafir, 1982; Gichon, 1979; 2002; Kochavi, 1993; 936; Beit-Arieh, 1998; 1999). The line of fortresses runs through the middle of the study area and might be one of the reasons why there are fewer archaeological sites south of this line.

7.2 Methodology and site size

The eastern study area contains 438 Classical period sites, as shown in Figure 7.3. This number differs from the site numbers collected during the survey conducted by the ASI (Table 7.1), as several additional sites were added to the database that had been discovered during development surveys, excavations, inspections, and trial trenching. During the Hellenistic period, the number of sites was relatively low ($n = 15$), but similar to the other two study areas ($n = 18$ and $n = 16$). During the

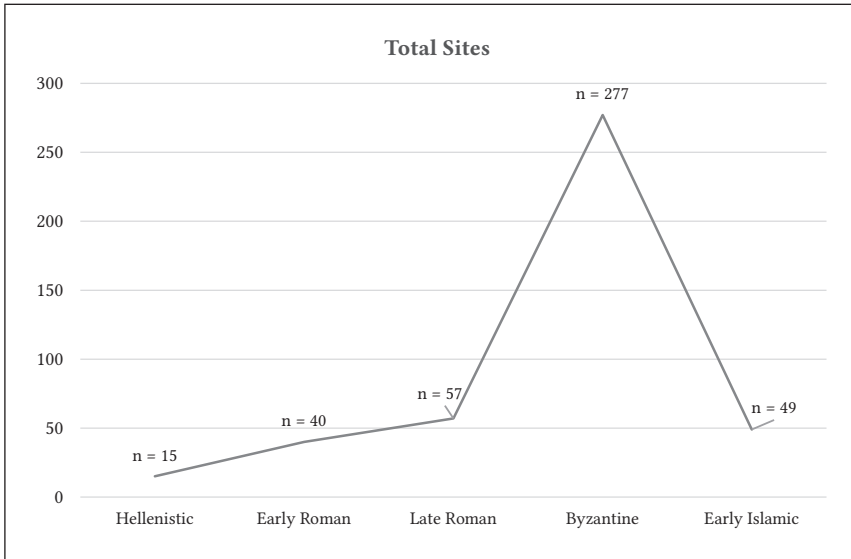


Figure 7.3 Eastern study area, total sites according to archaeological period.

Site percentage according to period: Hellenistic 3.4%, Early Roman 9.1%, Late Roman 13.1%, Byzantine 63.2% and Early Islamic 11.2%.

Hellenistic period, the sites consisted mainly of a large settlement at Tel Ira and several small fortresses. In the Early Roman period, 40 sites could be attributed, which is higher than in the western ($n = 29$) and in the central ($n = 12$) study areas. However, 17 of the Early Roman sites are findspots or other non-permanent settlements consisting of a few pottery sherds or coins. Therefore, by considering only permanent sites, the number is similar to the western study area ($n = 23$).

In this region, 57 sites have been dated to the Late Roman period, which is similar to the other two study areas (western $n = 60$ and central $n = 47$). As in the western and central study area, during the Byzantine period the number rises substantially. In the western study area, the number is almost identical ($n = 274$) and in the central study area is slightly higher ($n = 321$ without the sites within the Byzantine city of Be'er Sheva). During the Islamic period, the number of sites drops to 49. Magness has analyzed the survey of Nahal Yattir (map 139) to re-date the published and unpublished pottery. To the 13 sites Govrin (1991) dates to the Early Islamic period, Magness (2003: 9–74) dates an additional 15 sites to the Early Islamic period. Taking this number into account for the other maps, the total number of Early Islamic sites in the eastern study area should be about 53% higher. This means the number of Early Islamic sites would hypothetically

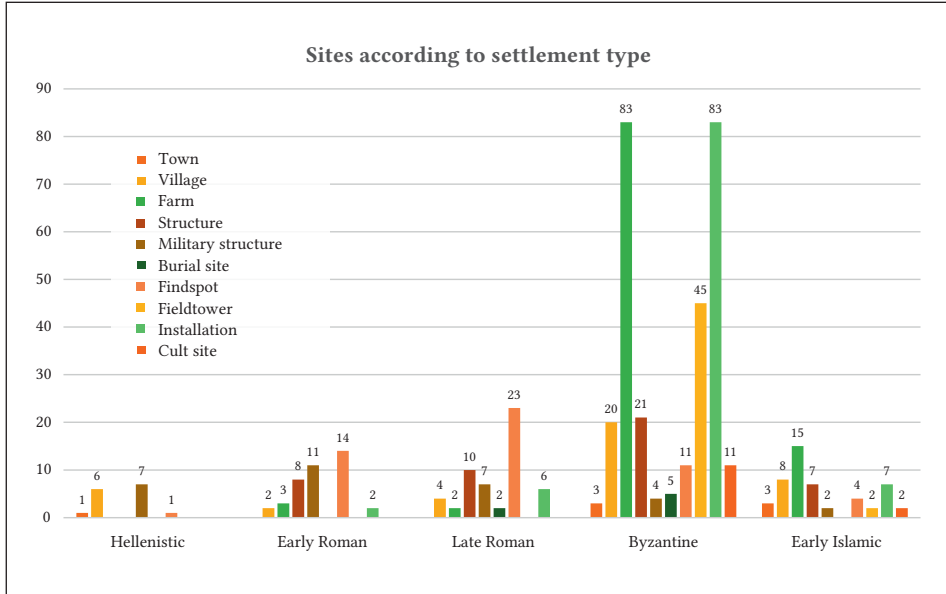


Figure 7.4 Sites according to settlement type in the eastern study area.

number around 109. As in the other study maps (140, 143, and 144), not much pottery has been published. Therefore, it is not possible to check this number, though clearly many Byzantine sites continued without interruption into the Umayyad period. Furthermore, the number 109 is similar to the central study area ($n = 101$), where many more excavations have been conducted, and therefore the dating of sites is more precise in that study area.

The numbers of all of the different settlement types rise sharply during the Byzantine period. Of course, these sites were not built during the same time period, but somewhere between the fourth and seventh century CE. According to excavations and the re-dating of pottery finds, the majority of Byzantine sites date to the fifth/sixth, and seventh century CE. During the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, a relatively high number of military sites (fortresses, towers, strongholds) is visible.

Wherever possible, the size of the settlements was calculated. In some cases, the size was given by the surveyor or excavator, however, this information was not available in all cases. If no size was available, it was estimated based on the described finds or, for larger sites left undisturbed by modern development, the size was calculated by the approximate radius of significant field scatters surrounding it (see 4.6—Calculation of site size). The majority of the sites belong to the

Table 7.2 Settlement size according to archaeological period in the eastern study area.

| | Settlement size (ha) | | | | Tot. |
|--|----------------------|---------|--------|------|------------|
| | 0.0–1.0 | 1.1–3.0 | 3.1–10 | < 10 | |
| Hellenistic settlements (332–37 BCE) | 13 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| Early Hellenistic | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Late Hellenistic | 8 | (1) | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Roman settlements (37 BCE–324 CE) | 90 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 97 |
| Early Roman (37 BCE–132 CE) | 37 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 40 |
| Late Roman (132–324 CE) | 53 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 57 |
| Byzantine settlements (324–640 CE) | 259 | 11 | 4 | 3 | 277 |
| Early Islamic settlements (640–750 CE) | 35 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 49 |

size category 0.01 to 1.0 ha ($n = 90.6\%$), which includes small sites such as farms, installations, and cisterns. The category of 1.1–3.0 ha includes larger sites, such as hamlets or large farmsteads ($n = 6.2\%$). The category of 3.1–10 ha includes larger villages ($n = 1.8\%$), and the category of > 10 ha includes small to large towns ($n = 1.4\%$) as shown in Table 7.2.

There are several large settlements in the study area, all dating to the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. Large villages include Horbat Hur, Tel Ira, and Horbat So'a; towns include Tel Malhata and Khirbat Qasif, which were larger than 10 ha.

7.3 Previous field work

Several excavations have been conducted in the study area, and most are clustered around specific areas (Figure 7.5). Many salvage excavations were surrounding the modern Bedouin towns of Hura (Horvat Hur) and Kuseifa (Khirbat Qasif) in re-

cent years: Hura and Nahal Yattir (Ein-Gedy, 2001; Zelin, 2001; Varga, 2003; 2014; 2015; Paran, 2007; Haiman, 2008; Peretz, 2012; 2017), Khirbat Qasif (Govrin, 1986; Figueras, 1995; Israel and Shuster, 2000; Shmueli, 2012; Lifshits and Fraiberg, 2013; Abadi-Reiss and Fraiberg, 2014; Fraiberg and Tepper, 2017), Abu Qrinat (Kobrin, 2020), Nevatim (Kobrin, 2016b), and Nahal Nevatim (Nikolsky, 2011a; 2011b). The large number of salvage excavations is due to modern construction as these towns which have grown rapidly since the early 1990s. All salvage excavations in these areas were conducted by the IAA. Four larger sites have been excavated by universities, including Tel Aroer, excavated by Biran and Cohen, Hebrew Union College, and IDAM (Thareani 2011). Tel Malhata has been excavated by Kochavi from

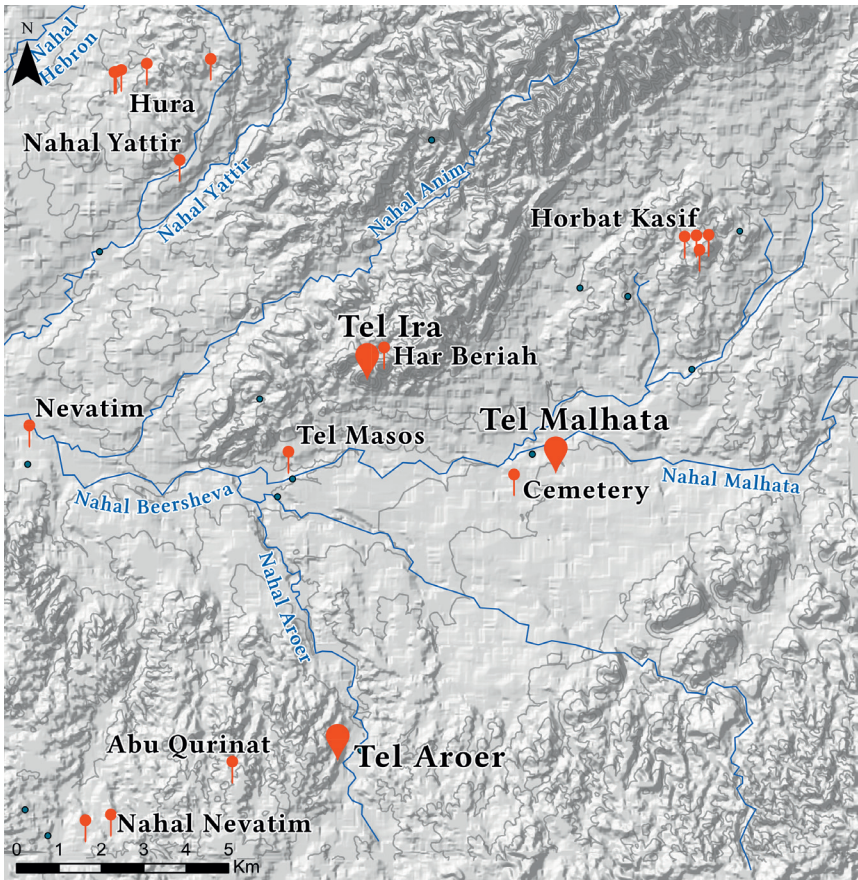


Figure 7.5 Previous field work in the eastern study area.

Excavated sites are mainly clustered around the two modern towns: Hura and Kuseifa (Khirbat Qasif).

the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and later TAU. In the 1990s, the site was again excavated by a team from TAU and Baylor University by Beit-Arieh and Cresson (Beit-Arieh, 1998, Kochavi, 1993; Beit-Arieh and Freud, 2015). Tel Ira and Har Beriah was excavated in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly by Beit-Arieh from TAU (Beit-Arieh, 1999). Tel Masos was excavated in the 1970s by Aharoni, Fritz, and Kempinski (Kempinski, 1972; Fritz and Kempinski, 1983; Kempinski, 1993; Givon et al., 1996). These sites have been published in extensive volumes, which are important resources for the analysis of this study area. In these excavations remains from all periods, Hellenistic through Early Islamic, were excavated, whereas the majority of excavated Classical period remains date to the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. The excavated remains from the IAA excavations were mostly smaller sites, such as: farmsteads, field towers, burials, and agricultural installations. Some of these excavations were used to compare the survey results for this study.

7.4 Hellenistic period

During the Hellenistic period, 15 sites were recorded in the study area (Figure 7.6). The site density is relatively low ($n = 0.04$ sites per square km), but comparable to the other two study areas. Several tells are located within the study area, including Tel Ira, Tel Malhata, Tel Aroer, Tel Shoqet, Horvat Hur, and Horvat Yittan. Three tells are located in the plain of the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin (Tel Ira, Tel Malhata, and Tel Aroer), and these are close to the important roads crossing the area. In contrast, the smaller tells of Tel Shoqet, Horvat Hur, and Horvat Yittan are located on the southern fringes of the southern Hebron hills, usually along the banks of the dry riverbeds that mainly carry water during the winter months. Settlements were connected through a system of roads. Two main roads crossed the area during the Hellenistic period: a lateral road connecting Gaza with En Boqeq (the Dead Sea) connected the sites of Tel Sheva and Tel Malhata, which are located in the study areas. Near Tel Malhata, a north–south road intersected the lateral road, going north toward Jerusalem and south to Mampsis (Taxel, 2011: 400), the north–south road passed close to Tel Aroer, which overlooked it.

During Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule, the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin represented the southern border of Idumeae with the Nabateans (Avi-Yonah, 2002: 50; Taxel, 2011: 399). A few sites in the study area date to this Early Hellenistic period: Tel Ira (Beit-Arieh, 1999: 173), Tel Malhata (Tal, 2015: 17), and possibly Tel Aroer (Taxel, 2011: 399), Tel Shoqet, Horvat Hur, and Horvat Yittan. Several sites date to the Hasmonean period (late second to first century BCE), including the four fortresses

and strongholds Giv'at Metar, Horvat Bikhra, Dawasiya (Spot Height 500), and the Mar'it fortress. It is possible that the settlements at Tel Ira and Tel Malhata also existed during the Late Hellenistic period.

The largest site during the Hellenistic period was Tel Ira, which is located on the southernmost spur of the Hebron hills, on a table-top hill (514 m above sea level). The summit of the hill is about 70 to 100 meters above the valley, which overlooks the valley and the roads. The site is about two to three ha large (Beit-Arieh, 1999: 9–15). According to Beit-Arieh, Tel Ira was a large, fortified city during the Hellenistic period (Beit-Arieh, 1999: 178). The exact size of the Hellenistic settlement is unknown but, based on the published plan of the excavations at Tel Ira (Beit-Arieh, 1999: 10), it can be estimated that the settlement was around two to three hectares. However, the settlement at Tel Ira might have been bigger or smaller, as the site has only been partly excavated. Tel Ira was occupied during the Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods and possibly during Hasmonean rule, from the fourth to second centuries BCE.

Another important site was Tel Malhata, which is located in the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin, on the eastern bank of Nahal Malhata, close to where Nahal Beersheva comes together with Nahal Malhata. The tell is located on a flat natural terrace. It is elliptical in shape and extends over several hectares (Beit-Arieh, 2015: 11). The site was settled during the Bronze Age and Iron Age. After its destruction in the sixth century BCE, it was only resettled in the Persian and Early Hellenistic periods. According to Tal (2015: 17), it is possible that there was an Early Hellenistic period settlement that existed during the late fourth–early third centuries BCE. The main Hellenistic settlement, probably a fortress, existed at Tel Malhata during the second to early first centuries BCE under Seleucid rule. Tal (2015: 17) records that two Seleucid coins were found at the site, one of Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE) and a second one of Antiochus VII (138–139 BCE). Furthermore, there is a possibility that the site was settled during the Hasmonaean period based on pottery finds (ESA) and two coins of John Hyrcanus (129–104 BCE). However, the site lacks Jewish characteristics (Tal, 2015: 17). It may be that the settlement was abandoned in the late first century BCE. There is no evidence of destruction, and the abandonment might have been related to the new political reality, as the Seleucid left the region (Tal, 2015: 18).

Four fortresses were discovered during the survey in the study area: Giv'at Metar, Horvat Bikhra, Dawasiya (Spot Height 500), and the Mar'it fortress. All fortresses are located in the southern Hebron hills, north of the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin. According to Govrin, most of these military structures are related to the Hasmonean defense system that was set up against the Nabatean kingdom when Judah's southern border passed through the Be'er Sheva–Arad valley (Govrin, 1991; 2016).

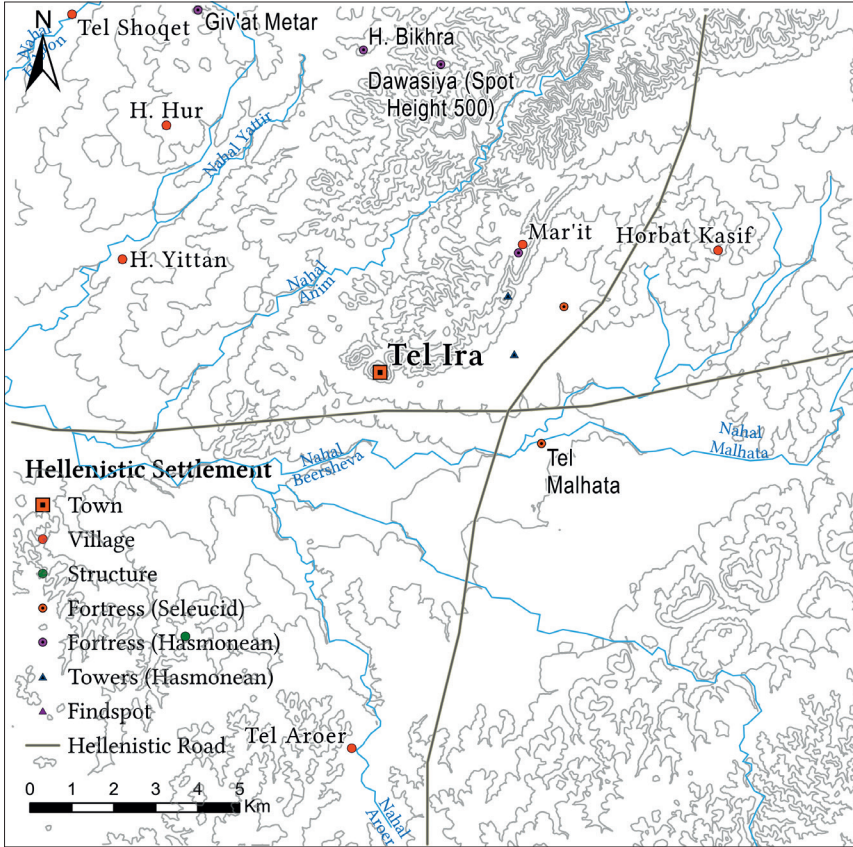


Figure 7.6 Hellenistic settlements of the eastern study area.

At Giv'at Metar, located on a hilltop, the remains of a rectangular structure (11 × 13 meters) with thick walls were found. To the east of the fort, an animal pen was found, possibly connected to the fort (Govrin, 1991: 30). Horvat Bikhra, like Giv'at Metar, was located on a hill, built as a square fort (9.5 × 10 meters) with thick walls. To the east and west, animal pens (Govrin, 1991: 37) were built. Several pottery sherds have been published: no. 1 to 5 are titled Hellenistic-Roman. Magness has reanalyzed the pottery, and none dates, according to her, to the Hellenistic period, but to the Early Roman to the Late Roman period, first to fourth centuries CE, including the unillustrated pottery (Magness, 2003: 14). Therefore, it is possible that this fortress rather dates to the Roman period. At Dawasiya (Spot Height 500), a large square structure (30 × 30 meters) was found with a structure consisting of several rooms and a courtyard with a cave located within. Outside

the structure, an animal pen was found (Govrin, 2016). The Mar'it Fortress, a Hellenistic period fortress (27 × 34 meters), is located on top of a narrow spur. The site was excavated in the past by D. Alon. A large amount of Hellenistic pottery was found scattered in the area (Govrin, 2016).

In addition to the four fortresses, strongholds were discovered, which are towers of 3 × 3 meters. Small settlements were found at Tel Shoqet, Horvat Hur, Horvat Yittan, and Mar'it (Govrin, 1991; 2016). At Tel Aroer, it is unclear what kind of settlement existed as there are only scant remains. Taxel (2011: 316) suggests a very small settlement. Four coins dating to the Hellenistic period have been found: three Seleucid coins dating between 222–187 BCE and one Hasmonean coin (Alexander Jannaeus). Pottery finds date from the late fourth or early third to the second century BCE and from the Late Hellenistic (Hasmonean) period to the Early Roman period, the late second and first century BCE to the first century CE (Taxel and Hershkovitz, 2011: 343–63).

During the Hellenistic period, almost no settlements were located in the southern part of the study area, as in the central study area. The exact reason for this is unknown (Beit-Arieh, 2003, Eldar-Nir, 2015), but most likely the Idumeae border, forced against the Nabatean Kingdom by the Hasmonean defense network of fortresses, was responsible for the lack of Hellenistic settlements south of the Nahal Beersheva-Nahal Malhata line. Most of the Hellenistic sites are rather small, with the exception of Tel Ira, which was a fortified city. Based on excavation and survey results, it seems that during the Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule, the tells were settled, mainly Tel Ira and Tel Malhata, possibly also Tel Aroer, Tel Shoqet, Horvat Hur, and Horvat Yittan. It is unclear if all these sites were also settled by the Hasmonians, especially Tel Ira and Tel Malhata. However, there are some indications that they were, such as pottery and coin finds that date to the Late Hellenistic period. To the Late Hellenistic period, several fortress and strongholds can also be attributed, mainly located in the southern Heron hills. It is unclear if all of them date to the Late Hellenistic period or if a few only date to the Early Roman period, as is the case for the published pottery from Horvat Bikhra.

7.5 Roman period

During the Roman period, 40 sites date to the Early Roman period and 56 to the Late Roman period. In total, 96 sites date to the Roman period. Most sites that date to the Roman period were found in the northern part of the study area, similar to the Hellenistic period. Most sites could be dated to one of the two subperiods (Early Roman or Late Roman) based on the survey and excavation de-

scription. Furthermore, a few sites have been dated to both the Early and Late Roman periods (these sites were counted twice). In map 140 (Govrin, 2016), some sites were classified as Roman-Byzantine. Based on the fact that Govrin delineates between Roman, Late Roman, Roman-Byzantine, and Byzantine, one can assume that it was unclear whether the Roman-Byzantine sites dated either to the Late Roman, Byzantine, or both periods. Based on the fact that Early Roman pottery is easily differentiated from Late Roman pottery, it is assumed that if these sites actually date to the Roman period, they belong to the Late Roman period and not to the Early Roman period. Therefore, the sites were counted twice as Late Roman and Byzantine period sites, and as there are no published pottery sherds or other means to redate the sites, it is not possible to conclusively attribute them to one or both periods.

7.5.1 Early Roman period

There are 40 sites that date to the Early Roman period. This is the highest number of Early Roman sites in the three study areas; however, 17 sites are non-permanent sites (findspots and parts of roads). In many cases, only pottery sherds, coins, or other small finds dating to the Early Roman period were found, meaning there are 23 Early Roman settlements in the study area, which is similar to the other two study areas.

At Tel Malhata, a Roman fortress (70 × 50 meters) was discovered during surveys and excavations. The open courtyard-type fortress had casemate walls, and it seems that the structure had two phases of occupation: Early to Middle Roman (first to early third centuries CE) and Late Roman to Early Byzantine (fourth and fifth centuries CE). The fortress was abandoned in the early third century and later on reoccupied (Tal, 2015: 18). According to Applebaum (1967: 285), the fortress at Tel Malhata served as an agricultural mansion defended by a tower rather than a military fortification. Based on the material found in the 2016/2017 excavations, a settlement existed below the tell, probably at least from the late Early/Middle Roman period onwards. It is possible that after the fortress was abandoned in the early third century CE, around the mid-third century a settlement at the base of the tell was established. It is unclear if there was a break between the abandonment of the fortress and the establishment of the settlement at the base of the tell. The Early Roman pottery from the Tel included Eastern Terra Sigillata (ETS) A bowls, which date no later than 180 CE, although the majority of the material found dates to the third (after 250 CE) and fourth century CE (Tal, 2015: 671–82).

The settlement at Tel Aroer consisted of a massive tower and a courtyard, as well as a civilian residential area located outside the fortified structure. The for-

tified complex overlooked the major north–south road and probably served as a road station or trading post (Taxel, 2011: 401). The settlement and the tower existed probably from the mid to late first century BCE (possibly later) to the first century CE (until ca. 70 CE). The fortified tower was probably destroyed during the First Jewish Revolt (Taxel, 2011: 316–35). Most likely, the site was inhabited by Jews. After the destruction of the tower and living quarters at Tel Arorer, the site was probably deserted, and only toward the end of the first century CE and the beginning of the second century CE was it resettled. The fortified structure was not rebuilt, and it is likely that only some living quarters were present at Tel Arorer. The settlement existed until the end of the Second Jewish Revolt in 135 CE (Taxel, 2011: 335). Eleven coins were found at Tel Arorer, dating to the Early Roman period, which is between the mid-first century BCE until the First Jewish Revolt, including three coins from the second year of the First Jewish Revolt (67/68 CE). The majority of the coins clearly date to the first century CE, and there were no coins found dating after 67/68 CE (Barkay, 2011: 390–94). Barkay (2011: 394) attributes that fact, as well as the small number of coins in general, to the excavation methods.

Tel Ira was abandoned during the Hellenistic period. It seems that a small Early Roman period settlement was established at the site. According to Hershkovitz (1999: 297) small Jewish settlement was established at the end of the Second Temple period, between the destruction of the Temple (70 CE) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (Hershkovitz, 1999: 299). Among the pottery finds, was a multi-nozzled ring lamp and local y produced vessels, the comes from Areas M and L, however no structural remains were identified dating to this period (Biran, 1999: 115–29).

The site of Nahal Yattir, located on a hilltop on the eastern bank of Nahal, consists of a well-preserved fortified structure from the Early Roman period. It comprises a fortified structure surrounding a central courtyard and an underground tunnel system, as well as living quarters on the hillside. The site was excavated by Alon in the early 1980s and is dated from the late Herodian period (first century CE) to the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 CE). To the northeast of the structure, a Persian period fortress was found. It seems that the building material for the later fortress was taken from the Persian structure (Vainstub and Fabian, 2015). Several of the Late Hellenistic (Hasmonean) fortresses were reused, for example, Givat Metar, Horvat Bikhra (which seemed to only date to the Roman and not to the Hellenistic period, see above), Mar'it Fortress, and Dawasiya (Spot Height 500), which were resettled probably in the Herodian period. According to Applebaum (1962) and Gichon (1967; 2002: 192), in 31/32 BCE Herod constructed a fortification system against the Nabateans along the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin, where the southern border passed. These fortresses might have been part of such a fortification system.

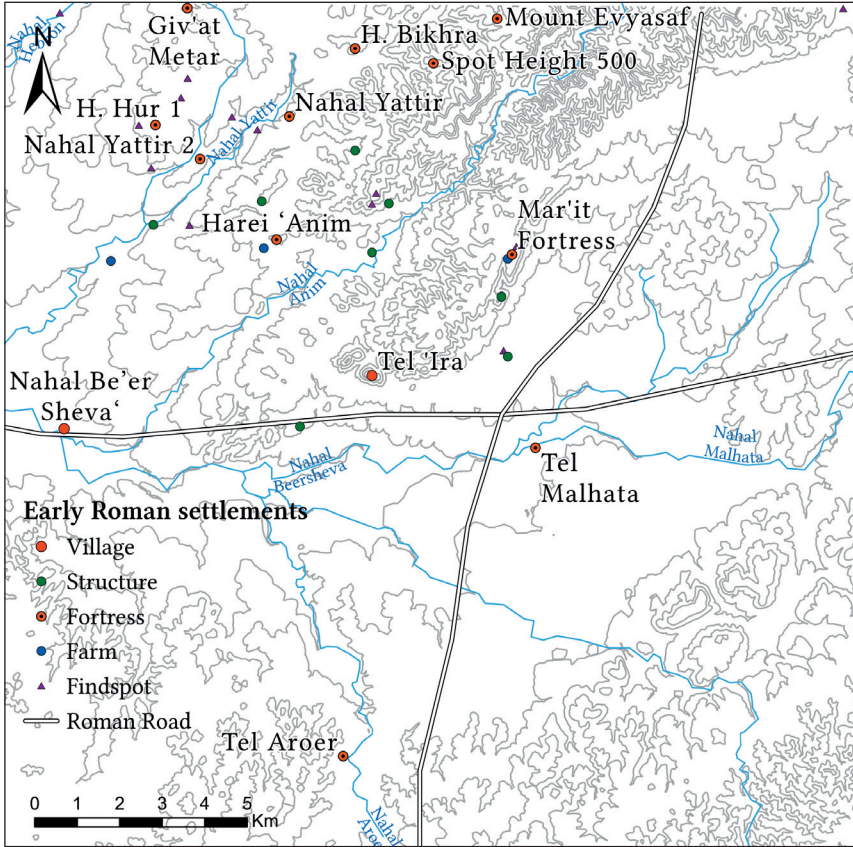


Figure 7.7 Early Roman sites in the eastern study area.

During the Roman period, two major roads crossed the study area: a longitudinal road, running east to west from En Boqeq (Dead Sea) via Tel Malhata-Be'er Sheva to Gaza, and a north-south road that connected Mampsis with Tel Malhata and continued northwards to Jerusalem (Ma'aleh Deragot). The intersection of these two roads was near Tel Malhata (Roll, 1994; Taxel, 2011: 400). According to Govrin (2016), following the Bar Kokhba revolt, the Roman army adopted these roads for the use of their military forces and equipment.

The majority of sites are located in the northwestern part of the study area, near the southern Hebron hills. The majority of the sites were rather small. Most can be grouped in the category of 0.01–1.0 ha, as there were many single structures or small fortresses and villages throughout this time. South of the Nahal Beersheva-Nahal Malhata line, only Tel Aroer was located, which served as a

lookout and later a waystation. Several of the fortresses also had a civil part, mostly a small rural settlement, as for example, at Tel Aroer or Nahal Yattir. Based on the dating and nature of the settlements, it seems that most of the Early Roman sites were small Jewish settlements and fortresses, or strongholds that existed during the first to early second centuries CE until the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 CE), and were then abandoned. An exception is Tel Malhata, which was occupied until the early third century CE. It seems that after the Bar Kokhba revolt until the late third century CE, almost no settlements existed in the eastern study area.

7.5.2 Late Roman period

During the Late Roman period, 57 sites were settled, though it is unclear if they actually date to the Late Roman or rather to the Byzantine period. In some instances, published pottery or coin finds could help to determine the dating. It seems that most Early Roman period sites were abandoned at some point in the mid-second century CE. In the Late Roman period, during the late third–early fourth centuries CE, a rise in settlement activity in the area is evident. According to Govrin (1991: 19*; 2016), this should be attributed to the reorganization by Emperor Diocletian. Several “fortresses” were discovered in the northern part of the study area, mainly in the southern Hebron hills. These courtyard and tower structures do not necessarily indicate military presence, or the use of the structure as a fort (Magness, 2003: 128). It is possible that these were fortified farmhouses, because of their remote location. In the overview map they are indicated as forts, but should be understood as fortified structures, and it is unclear whether they had a military or civil purpose.

During the Late Roman period, Tel Malhata was, according to Eusebius’s *Onomasticon*, “a central settlement and an administrative capital” (Tal, 2015: 18). The fortress on the tell was reoccupied in the late third–early fourth centuries CE (Tal, 2015: 19). This suggestion is also supported by the coin finds from Tel Malhata: 12 coins date to the late third century and 28 to the fourth century CE (Kindler, 2015: 685). It is unclear when the civil settlement (Moleatha) south and east of the tell started, but excavations revealed domestic and public buildings and a large necropolis, with close to 300 tombs. The site had been excavated in the past by archaeologists of IDAM, and subsequently the IAA. Only preliminary reports or summaries of the excavations were partially published (Gichon, 1979; Eldar and Baumgarten, 1993; Talis et al., 2017; Nahliely and Fabian, 1992, unpublished). Eldar and Baumgarten (1993: 937) date the remains to the Late Roman-Byzantine period. A large graveyard with close to some 160 tombs, approximately 750 meters south of Tel Malhata, was excavated during July 2016 and April–May and August 2017.

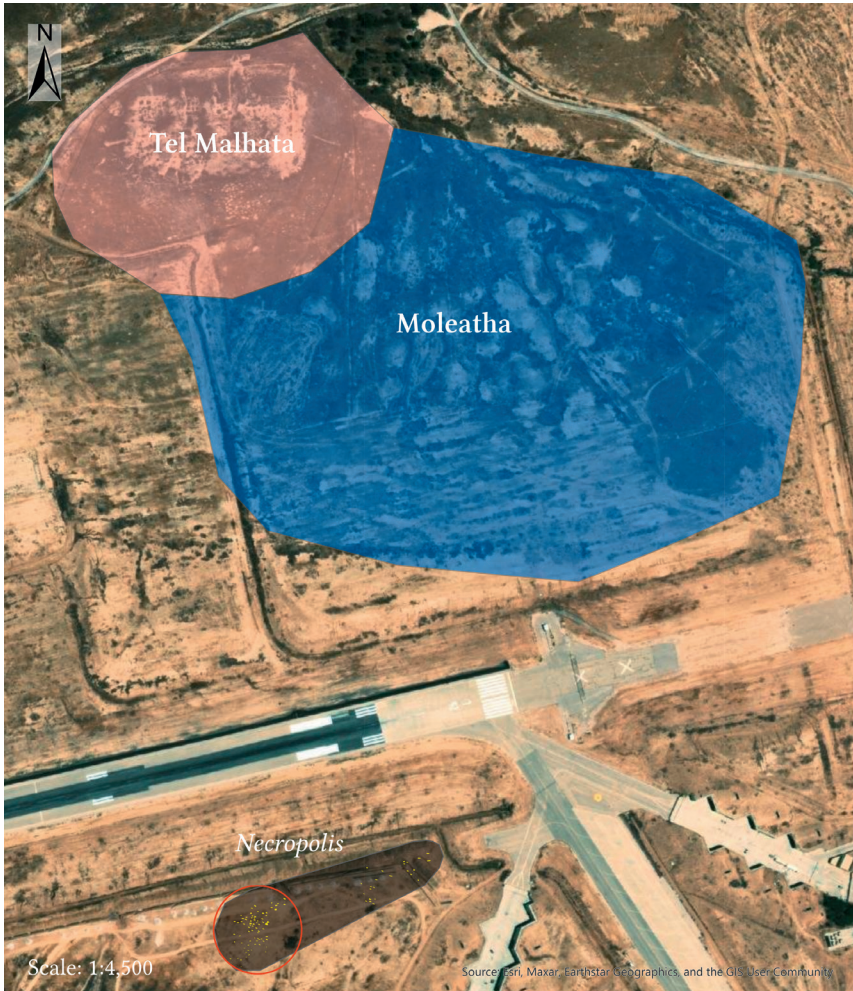


Figure 7.8 Tel Malhata, the lower settlement and the Necropolis.

The area of the necropolis was excavated in 2016 and 2017. The red circle indicates the tombs from the first season in 2016, where most of the pottery finds date to the third and fourth century CE. Background: Satellite imagery: ESRI—DigitalGlobe.

The excavated burials date, according to the excavator, from the Late Roman to Early Islamic period (Talis et al., 2017).

Most of the discovered pottery was found in the northwestern part of the cemetery in incineration pits. The pits were dug next to each other, separated by earthen partitions. Next to human bones, pottery and other small finds were also

discovered. The pits were burned and then covered with soil (Talis et al., 2017). Several Nabatean carinated bowls were found, which date most likely to the third century, probably after 250 CE as the bowls are not decorated. Besides the carinated bowls, cooking ware, juglets, beakers and strainer jars were found. All pottery dates to the third and fourth century CE, with the exception of the ETS bowls, which date to the late second century CE (see above), although these might be heirlooms.

Next to the pottery finds several alabaster vessels (n=5) were discovered in different tombs in the necropolis. These alabaster vessels probably originated from present-day Yemen. Several similar vessels were found in burials along Arabian trade routes (Hassell, 1997), which might point to the importance of the location of Malhata along the trade routes. Additionally, two figurines made from ebony hardwood were found; they probably originate in North-Africa, possibly Egypt. All these imported vessels and small finds show the importance of the settlement by Tel Malhata during the Early/Middle Roman and later periods. The richness of the burial finds, shows also that the settlement at Tel Malhata must have been of considerable size already during the Middle Roman period.

During the first century CE a small Jewish settlement was established at Tel Ira. This settlement was abandoned towards the end of the first century CE, and it seems that during the second to third centuries CE, the site was unoccupied. Only toward the end of the Late Roman period was the site reoccupied (Beit-Arieh, 1999: 174).

During the Roman period, two major roads crossed the study area: a longitudinal road, running east to west from En Boqeq (Dead Sea) via Tel Malhata-Be'er Sheva to Gaza, and a north-south road that connected Mamphis with Tel Malhata

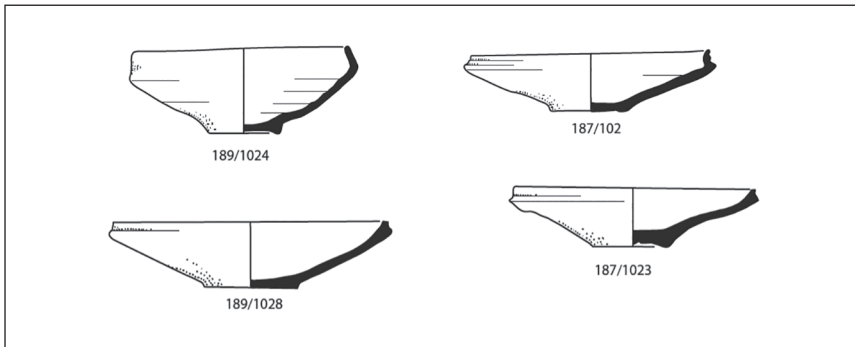


Figure 7.9 Nabatean carinated bowls from burials 187 and 189.

Excavation Tel Malhata (South), Permit No. A-7768/2016. Drawing: Hersch, Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.



Figure 7.10 Roman period figurine made from black hardwood (ebony).

Excavation Tel Malhata (South), Permit No. A-7768/2016. IAA archive: B-948111;

Photo: Amid, Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

and continued northwards to Jerusalem (Ma'aleh Deragot). The intersection of these two roads occurred near Tel Malhata. According to Govrin, following the Bar Kokhba revolt, the Roman army adopted these roads for the use of their military forces and equipment (Govrin, 2016).

It seems that after the abandonment of most sites in the early second century, there was a phase of some 100 to 150 years with little activity in the area. Toward the end of the Late Roman period, the settlement activity started to rise again, which might be connected to the reforms by Diocletian and more stable political circumstances. Many sites were reoccupied, including Tel Ira and Tel Malhata. However, it seems that many settlements were only settled later in the Byzantine period, as was the case of the small village of Nahal Malhata (Beit-Arieh, 2003: 29–30), where the published pottery all seems Byzantine. As in previous periods, south of the Nahal Beersheva–Nahal Malhata line, few sites were dated to the Late Roman period.

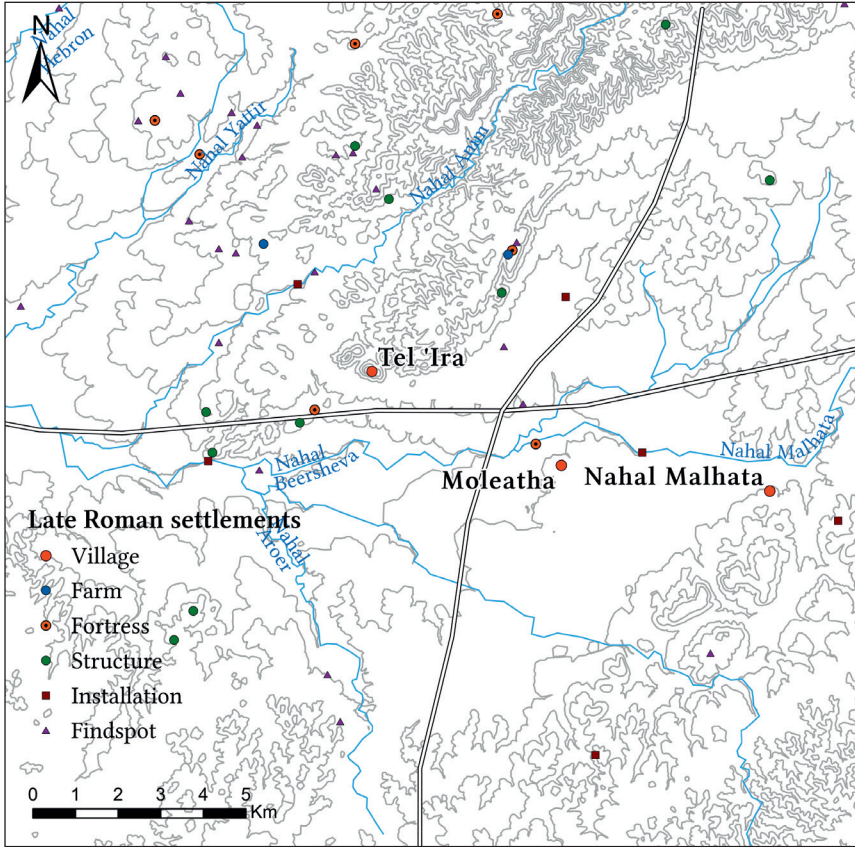


Figure 7.11 Late Roman sites of the eastern study area.

7.6 Byzantine period

During the Byzantine period, a large expansion in settlement patterns is evident in the eastern region, similar to the patterns observed in the western and central study areas. Specifically, there was a substantial increase in archaeological sites, which were larger in comparison to previous periods. The northern part of the study area is still more densely populated compared to the southern part; however, the southern part also saw a large increase in settlements during this period. It was found that 277 sites date to the Byzantine period, and the site density was 0.7 sites per square km. Additionally, the number of towns and villages is significantly higher than in previous periods. Large settlements existed at Moleatha, Tel Ira, Horvat Hur, Horvat So'a, and Horvat Qasif.

Tel Ira was resettled in the Byzantine period, and a large and dense settlement existed on the tell. According to Beit-Arieh (1999: 178), Tel Ira was an impressive city, which might have been the administrative center of the region. During the Early Byzantine period, Tel Ira served as a kind of fortress and later as a civil settlement and a monastic station (Ovadia, 1999: 436). Several public buildings were located in the eastern part, including a large monastery with a church. Pottery finds show that the settlement flourished during the fourth to seventh centuries CE, especially during the sixth and seventh centuries CE (Fischer and Tal, 1999: 319). The monastery covered an area of about 800 square m and was located in the eastern side of the settlement. The rectangular structure consisted of 12 rooms, and a chapel was located at the east of the complex. Floors were paved with mosaics (Cresson, 1999: 88–96).

Despite the large settlement and monastic building, there were only two coins found dating to the Byzantine period, one fifth century CE coin and one early sixth century CE coin (Kindler, 1999: 440). About 300 meters north of Tel Ira, Har Bariya is located, and is slightly higher than Tel Ira. Har Bariya provided a good view of the surrounding area: Tel Ira, Tel Malhata, and Tel Masos were easily visible. The structure excavated on top of the mountain revealed the remains of a manor house from the Byzantine period. The farmhouse was probably occupied during the sixth to seventh century CE, and the structure was abandoned in the mid-seventh century CE (Cresson, 1999: 102). The large manor farmhouse was clearly somehow connected with the main site at Tel Ira.

Moleatha, the Byzantine settlement located at the foot of the Iron Age tell of Tel Malhata, was a large settlement. The area of Tel Malhata was occupied during the Chalcolithic, Bronze, Iron, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. Based on excavation and survey data, the size of the Roman-Byzantine period settlement of Tel Malhata was approximately 20 to 25 ha. On top of the tell, a fortress stood, overlooking the surroundings and the roads. The fortress was probably settled during the late third and fourth century, mainly during the Early Byzantine period. The large settlement southeast of the tell most likely also had a church, however, only indirect proof of this has been found (Di Segni 2015: 702–703). Several large domestic and public buildings, some with mosaic floors, as well as a necropolis with some 300 tombs, have been discovered in previous excavations (Gichon, 1979; Eldar and Baumgarten, 1993; Taliset et al., 2017; Nahliely and Fabian, unpublished). According to Eldar and Baumgarten (1993: 937), the settlement was a religious and agricultural center.

About 300 meters south of Moleatha, some 160 tombs were excavated in 2016 and 2017 which date from the Middle Roman to Early Islamic period (preliminary publication: Talis et al., 2017). Tombs were found in three locations. It can be assumed that there are also tombs located in-between these locations. However, no

inspections have taken place or trial trenching was necessary in those areas because there was no construction planned, or development had already occurred. In total, the area of the burials covers some 1.2 ha. This is only a small strip that has been excavated. It is assumed that further cemeteries are located surrounding the ancient town. Most of the burials were cist tombs, but several pit graves that date to the Middle/Late Roman period (see above) were also found. The cist tombs were made out of dressed limestone blocks, lined in the loess soil, covered with three to four limestone slabs. Tombs were lined in rows with a general east-west and northwest-southeast direction. Some of the burials had a floor of limestone slabs and others were without, but the burials were well preserved. In several tombs, grave goods ($n = 26$) were found, including jewelry, glass and pottery, clothing, weapons, and food. Some of the cist tombs had the remains of wooden coffins. Many of the skeletons had their head placed to the west and the feet to the east, which was common in Byzantine burial practices. The Byzantine Negev burial tradition continued into the Early Islamic period (Nagar and Sonntag, 2008). However, the burial posture did change: the faces of the dead were turned to face south toward Mecca (Nagar and Sonntag, 2008). Several of the excavated tombs had skeletons with their heads facing south, which might be an indication that part of the cemetery dates to Early Islamic burials.

Another large settlement from the Byzantine period was Khirbat Qasif, which was probably a town of ca. 20 to 25 ha. Several ancient remains were discovered during surveys and excavations. Musil (1907: 18) and Mader (1918: 225) reported the presence of three churches. They were discovered in the early 20th century during surveys, but at the time of writing, none of the churches have been excavated. Ovadiah (1970: 121) suggests that the northern church served as a monastery. According to Govrin (2016), residential buildings, cave dwellings, and cisterns were found during surveys. During excavations, a large winepress, an alley, residential complexes, cisterns, and a cemetery were excavated (Govrin, 1986; Israel and Shuster, 2000; Shmueli, 2012; Lifshits and Fraiberg, 2013; Fraiberg and Tepper, 2017).

A large village existed at Horvat Hur, which was about four ha in size (Govrin, 1991: 20*). The settlement was located in the southern Hebron hills, overlooking the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin, and included at least two large churches, a monastery, defense towers, buildings, and cisterns (Govrin, 1991: 20*; Figueras, 1995: 415). Several excavations have been conducted in and around Horvat Hur, revealing the remains of a monastery, farmhouses, watchtowers, agricultural installations, and cisterns. In 2014, Varga excavated the remains of the monastery measuring 28×20 meters and consisting of several halls, including a dining and prayer hall. The dining and prayer hall were paved with mosaic floors. Four inscriptions were found that date the monastery to the mid-sixth century CE (Varga, 2015). In

Horvat So'a, a village of ca. one to two hectares, a large Byzantine church and an adjoined rectangular structure were found—the building is possibly a monastery (Govrin, 1991: 97–99; Figueras, 1995: 417). The complex includes several rooms and a defense tower (8 × 8 meters). In addition to this complex, several buildings were found to the north of the site (Govrin, 1991: 100).

At Tel Masos, a monastery was built, dating between the Late Byzantine and the Umayyad periods. According to inscriptions, the monastery was built in the seventh and early eighth centuries CE. The building had a rectangular plan and a crypt for burials. The living quarters of the monks were built around a rectangular courtyard. The church had a rectangular apsis, which is typical for Syrian churches (Kempinsky, 1993: 989).

As visible per the distribution map, the Byzantine sites are clustered around a few centers in the eastern northern Negev. These are Tel Shoqet/Hura, Tel Ira, Tel Malhata, Tel Yeshua/Horvat So'a, and Khirbat Qasif. The majority of these settlements are located at important strategic locations close to the major roads, either the lateral road (from the Dead Sea to Gaza) or the north–south road (Mampsis to Jerusalem). Furthermore, clustered around each center are numerous small sites, hamlets, farms, and installations. Magness has analyzed the pottery of the sites located in map 139 and, according to her, most pottery dates from the fifth or sixth to the seventh century CE. Only a small part of all sites, about one-third, dates to the Early Byzantine or the whole Byzantine period. This is most likely also true for the other three survey maps (Figure 7.12).

At least 13 Christian cult sites have been found in several locations that date to the Byzantine period. All larger settlements had churches, and/or some also contained monasteries. There were a couple of isolated monasteries. Cult sites have been discovered at Horvat Hur, Tel Ira, Tel Masos, Horvat So'a, Khirbat Qasif, and Tel Yeshua. The Christian cult sites in the eastern study area were built in the fifth to sixth centuries CE (see Appendix 5—Cult sites in the study areas: Christian Cult sites—Churches). All the cult sites are located in the northern part of the study area. This is similar to findings in the Be'er Sheva area. No synagogues have been found so far in the eastern study area. However, to the north of the study area, several synagogues have been discovered that date to the Byzantine period, particularly on the slopes of the Hebron mountains (cf. Horbat Rimmon (Kobrin, 2019), Horbat 'Anim (Amit, 2003), Khirbet Susiya (Yeivin, 1974), and Eshtamoa (Yeivin, 2004)).

During the Byzantine period, a few large settlements existed in the eastern study area. The largest were clearly the towns of Tel Malhata/Moleatha, Kirbat Qasif, and Tel Ira, and large villages like Horvat Hur. The settlements at Moleatha and Khirbat Qasif started in the Late Roman period, and the site of Tel Ira was re-occupied at the same time. The highest number of Byzantine settlements and the

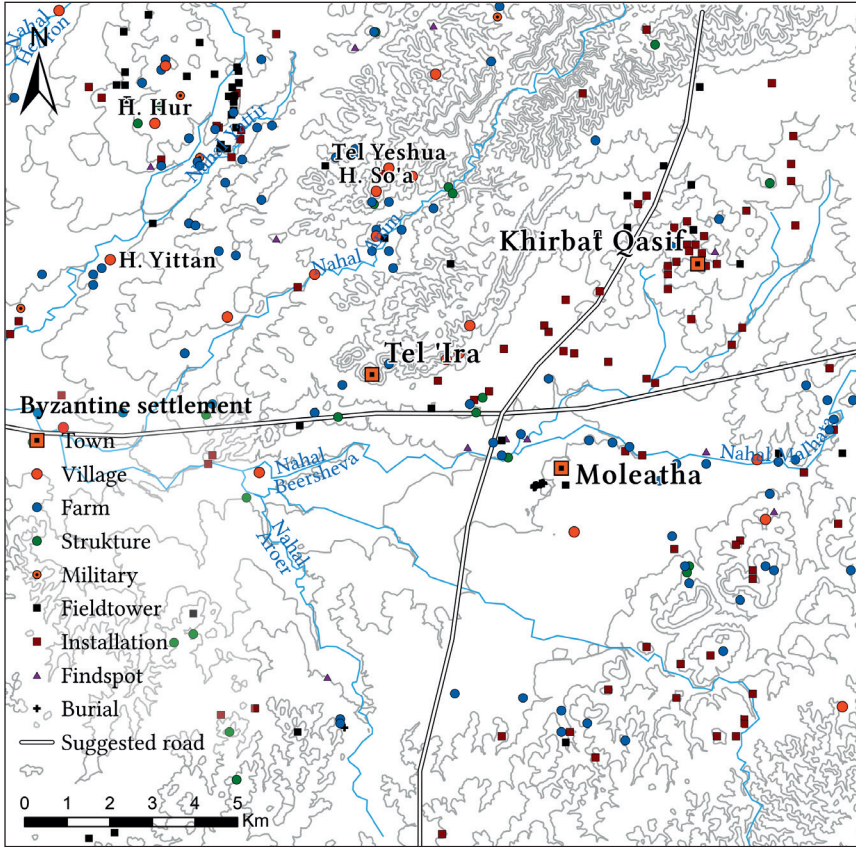


Figure 7.12 Byzantine period site distribution in the eastern study area.

largest extent of these sites was most likely from the late fifth and sixth to the seventh centuries CE. Surrounding the larger settlements, a high number of installations ($n = 83$) and field towers ($n = 45$) were found. Furthermore, several large rural monasteries were found in the study area. The large settlements were located close to important roads.

7.7 Early Islamic period

As evidenced from the survey data, the number of settlements dropped from 277 during the Byzantine period to 49 during the Early Islamic period. The settlement density was 0.12, which is comparable to the western study area. Govrin (1991: 20*) argues that most of the tells (Tel Shoqet, Horvat Hur, Horvat Yittan, and Tel Ira) continued to be densely occupied during this period. Furthermore, the Late Byzantine ceramic assemblage continued to be used at the beginning of the Early Islamic period (Govrin, 2016). Therefore, the differentiation between Late Byzantine and Early Islamic period sites is difficult to establish. Beit-Arieh (2003: 14*) states that it is possible that some of the Byzantine settlements continued into the Early Islamic period. During the Early Islamic period, large farms attest to a continued occupancy from the Byzantine period on. The decrease in settlements seems to have occurred only from the early eighth century onwards.

During the Early Islamic period, the settlement on Tel Ira continued, although restricted in size, concentrated at the eastern end of the site. The monastery at Tel Ira had, during the seventh–eighth century, no further ecclesiastical function (Cresson, 1999: 95). The pottery finds of Tel Ira show a continuation from the Byzantine period pottery in the seventh century to typical Early Islamic pottery dating from the eighth to the tenth century CE (Fischer and Tal, 1999: 319). The remains show no destruction layer, meaning the site was abandoned sometime in the Early Islamic period.

Tel Masos is located on the northern bank of Nahal Be'er Sheva, a few kilometers west of Tel Ira. The tell was occupied during the Chalcolithic period and the Iron Age. About 100 meters to the west of the main settlement, a smaller area was settled, including a Syrian Nestorian monastery (Kempinski, 1978). The rectangular monastery covered an area of some 300 square m and included living quarters, a Syrian church, and a burial crypt (Magness, 2003: 57). No coins or other small finds have been published, therefore, the structure has only been dated based on the pottery. The Nestorian monastery was probably established in the sixth to seventh century CE and was then abandoned around the late seventh or early eighth century CE (Magness, 2003: 57), which was the Umayyad period. Magness suggests that, based on the fact that no coins or other valuables were found but whole vessels were left behind, the monastery was abandoned hastily, however, there are no signs of destruction (Magness, 2003: 58).

At Khirbat Qasif, several recent excavations were conducted, have brought to light remains dating to the Early Islamic period. In 2009, Shmueli (2012) conducted an excavation discovering the remains of an industrial winepress that was in use between the fifth and ninth centuries CE. Furthermore, an alley and parts of two residential buildings were exposed on the western side of the winepress, and

ceramic finds from the alley date from the sixth to the tenth centuries CE. A structure with an open courtyard on top of the winepress was excavated, and parts of the winepress continued to be used, as the collection vat of the winepress was filled with ashlar and architectural elements (including a lintel decorated with a cross). Pottery sherds found within the fill of the collection vat indicated that the winepress went out of use somewhere in the eighth or ninth century and was afterward abandoned.

A high concentration of glass finds have been found during the excavation, and similar vessels have been found in Early Islamic urban centers such as Ramla, Bet She'an, Tiberias, and Caesarea (Gorin-Rosen, 2012). These finds point to the importance of Khirbat Qasif during the Early Islamic period. Fraiberg (Fraiberg and Tepper, 2017) excavated a large dovecote cave, which is interesting, as such caves are more commonly found further north in the Judean Foothills. Within the study area, only built dovecote towers, mainly from the Byzantine period, are known. The dovecote at Khirbat Qasif dates to the seventh–eighth centuries CE. Next to the dovecote, a cave with a staircase and two walls was found—the remains date from the ninth to the eleventh centuries CE. Furthermore, a burial cave was discovered, which remains unexcavated (Fraiberg and Tepper, 2017). In the vicinity of Khirbat Qasif, a small square farmhouse (ca. 8 × 8.5 meters) was discovered, which was part of the agricultural hinterland of Khirbat Qasif during the Abbasid period (Lifshits and Fraiberg, 2013). In 1997, Israel and Schuster (2000: 92*) excavated two buildings with large courtyards, dating ceramic finds mainly to the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. The findings show that Khirbat Qasif was also a large settlement during the Early Islamic period, though it seems that settlement activity ceased between the tenth and eleventh centuries CE.

At Tel Malhata, a fortification was discovered on top of the tell, dating to the Early Islamic period, similar to the fortifications at Tel Sheva (Avni, 2014: 259). At Tel Sheva, the fortress on top of the tell was built during the second century CE and abandoned somewhere during the fourth century, then reoccupied during the Early Islamic period. Similarly, at Tel Malhata, the fortress was abandoned in the fourth century and reoccupied in the Early Islamic period. The large settlement at the foot of the tell continued during the Early Islamic period. The pottery found during the excavations dates well into the Early Islamic period (Avni 2014: 259). Furthermore, in the recent salvage excavations (Talis et al., 2017) conducted by the IAA (directed by S. Talis), a cemetery was located some 300 meters south of Tel Malhata/Moleatha. Some 150 tombs were excavated, and several burials were found that adhered to Early Islamic burial traditions. The Byzantine burial traditions continued into the Early Islamic period, but the position of the head was different, as noted earlier—it was turned toward Mecca (south), or the body was placed to the south (Figure 7.13).

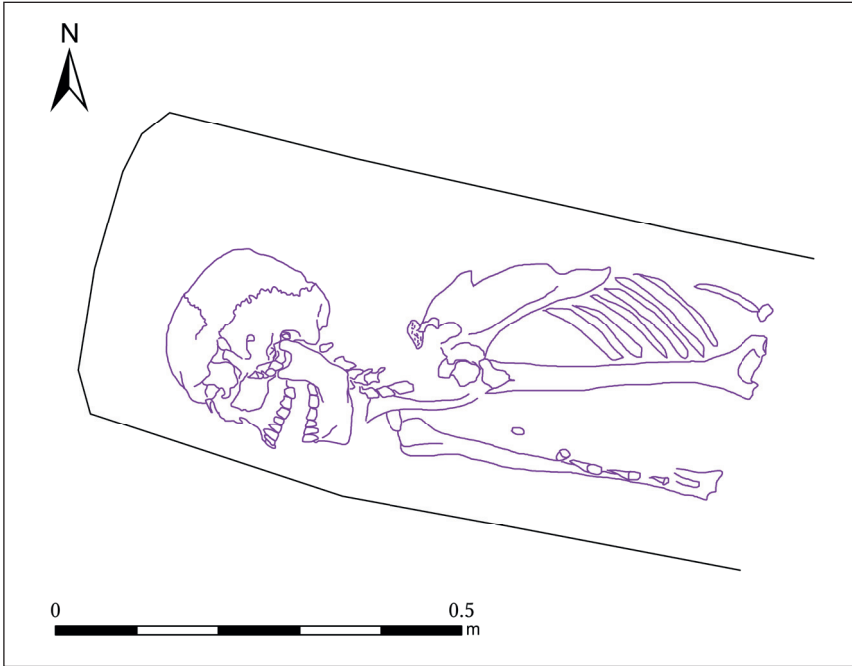


Figure 7.13 Possible Early Islamic (Muslim) burial.

Deceased placed on its side, head facing south. Burial excavated on March 14, 2017, at a cemetery south of Tel Malhata. Drawing: Alajdem, Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

As in the central study area, several large farmhouses were built during the Early Islamic period. At Hura, a large farmhouse, located on the southern fringe of the Yattir range, was excavated (1997 and 2009). The farmhouse consisted of a square structure with an inner courtyard surrounded by several rooms. Two construction phases are discernable. According to the excavator, the building dates from the seventh to the late eighth centuries CE (Peretz, 2012). The pottery finds include FBW and molded Buff ware. The FBW cups published (Peretz, 2012: Figs 14–16) seem to belong to Form 1 E, which generally dates to the eighth–ninth century CE (Magness, 1993: 196). The Buff (Mafjar) ware (Peretz, 2012: Figs. 29, 30, and 34) generally date to the late eighth–early ninth century CE (Cytryn-Silverman, 2010: 106–107). The glass finds date from the Umayyad to the Abbasid period (Peretz, 2012; Winter, forthcoming). Based on the findings, it is possible that the farmhouse was settled later than the end of the eighth century CE, possibly in the ninth or even the tenth century CE.

In 2011 at Nahal Anim, Fraiberg (2017b) excavated a large farming estate. The settlement was located on a small hill. Three residential units were excavated, and probably the settlement represents a small farming estate. The site dates from the Late Byzantine to the mid-ninth century CE. As in other similar large farmhouses, the remains indicate two construction phases, the second one, probably dating to the mid-eight century CE (Fraiberg, 2017b). The glass finds date to the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, the majority to the eighth and ninth century CE (Winter, forthcoming).

Two possible mosques were found during surveys and excavations. At Nahal Amin, a large farmstead (30 × 70 meters) was found during the survey. The large structure was built in the Early Islamic period, and no Byzantine period remains were found. The farmhouse was divided into two units: the southern unit comprising 20 rooms arranged around a courtyard; the northern part connected through

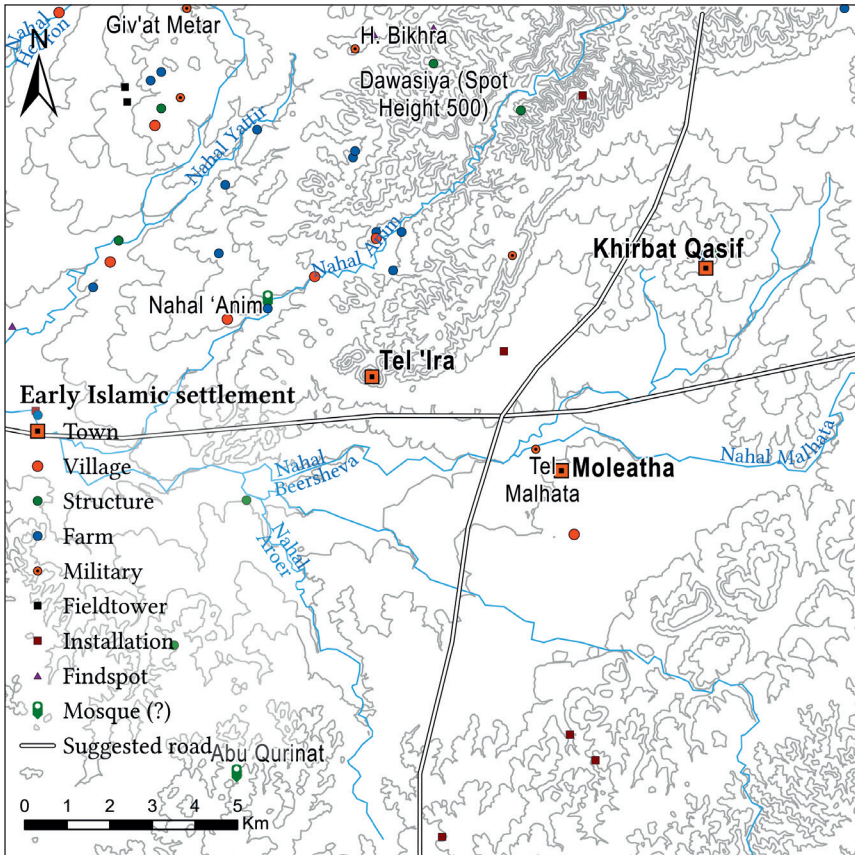


Figure 7.14 Early Islamic period settlements in the eastern study area.

a 15-meter corridor consisting of several adjoining courtyards and rectangular rooms (Govrin, 1991: 135–36). At the southern wall, a rectangular room with a niche toward the south was discovered. Pottery finds include Buff ware, and according to Magness, the illustrated as well as the unillustrated pottery dates to the eighth to ninth centuries CE, though some could date later (Magness, 2003: 52).

During excavations at Abu Qurinat, several remains, including animal pens, installations, buildings, and dwelling caves, as well as a possible open mosque, were excavated. The oval structure with a prayer niche to its south (*mihrab*) was located on a hilltop (Kobrin, 2020). Similar structures have been found in the Negev Highlands (Avni, 1994: 86). Magness (2003: 65) suggests a third possible mosque at the monastery in Horvat Hur, where at the southern wall a possible *mihrab* was added. However, the site was excavated in 2014, and no such transformation of the monastery has been reported (Varga, 2015; Varga and Rasiuk, 2017). The dating of the other two structures is difficult. The structure at the farmhouse at Nahal Amin, where the mosque is incorporated, dates to the eighth to ninth centuries CE, possibly later. The mosque could have been added at any time to the existing structure; only an excavation would reveal a more exact date. The building at Abu Qurinat is even more difficult to date as there were almost no pottery sherds, or other small finds, found during excavations. Therefore, a more exact date of construction is impossible to establish.

Based on the survey and excavation data, many sites continued from the Byzantine into the Early Islamic period. New sites were settled, mainly large farmsteads. Several sites were occupied until the eighth–ninth century CE or later (see Magness, 2003). Furthermore, the larger settlements continued to be occupied, and some underwent changes in the Early Islamic period—for example, Tel Ira, where the settlement concentrated only in the eastern part. It seems that the monasteries went out of use at some point in the late seventh or early eighth centuries CE: Hura (Varga, 2015), Tel Ira (Beit-Arieh, 1999; Magness, 2003), Tel Masos (Fritz and Keminski, 1983; Magness, 2003), and Tel Yeshua (Govrin, 1991; Magness, 2003). However, none of the structures showed destruction layers. Two possible mosques were discovered in the study area, but it is unclear when they were constructed.

7.8 Coin finds from the eastern study area

The coin-finds from the eastern study area comprise 126 coins, and 92% are from only three sites: Tel Aroer, Tel Ira, and Tel Malhata. Tel Aroer was only settled until the Early Roman period and then abandoned; Tel Ira had a dense settlement

during the Byzantine period, but almost no coins date to this period ($n = 4$); and the main settlement on top of Tel Malhata ended sometime in the fourth century CE. These facts influence the statistical probability of coin-finds from the eastern study area. During Ptolemaic and Seleucid rule, the southern boundary of the toparchy of Idumaea passed through the Be'er Sheva–Arad basin. Many of these coins appeared during the third to the mid-first century BCE, especially during Seleucid rule in the second century CE, when a peak is shown. A relatively high number of coins have been found from the Hasmonean period. Additionally, there are many sites that were only built during the Hasmonean period, including the fortresses and manor houses with towers in the southern Hebron hills.

Many coins date from the third century to the first century BCE. No coins were found dating to the years 50 CE to 250 CE, while many coins have been found from the middle of the third century CE. Although in this study area, the coins are only from a few sites, the strong rise in the late third–early fourth centuries CE is mostly connected to a general trend in the eastern study area. This means that settlement activity grew substantially, which is also visible in the site numbers. The complete lack of sixth- and seventh-century coins is connected to the fact that a too-small sample of data was available and, furthermore, that although at Tel Ira, a large settlement existed during this period, as shown by the pottery finds, not many coins were found. Pottery finds of surveyed sites showed that many of the sites date to the late fifth and sixth to the seventh century CE. Therefore, Figure 7.15 only gives a limited picture of the settlement occupation in the eastern study area.

As evident in Figure 7.15, although only 3.4% of all sites date to the Hellenistic period, almost 40% of the coin finds date to this period. Over 63% of all sites date to the Byzantine period, however only 33% of all coins date to this period. This imbalance in the number of coins and sites dating to a specific area is connected to the fact that the coin finds in this graph are from only a few sites. In the central study area, the coin finds are from several sites ($n > 40$) so, the number of coins correlates with the number of sites.

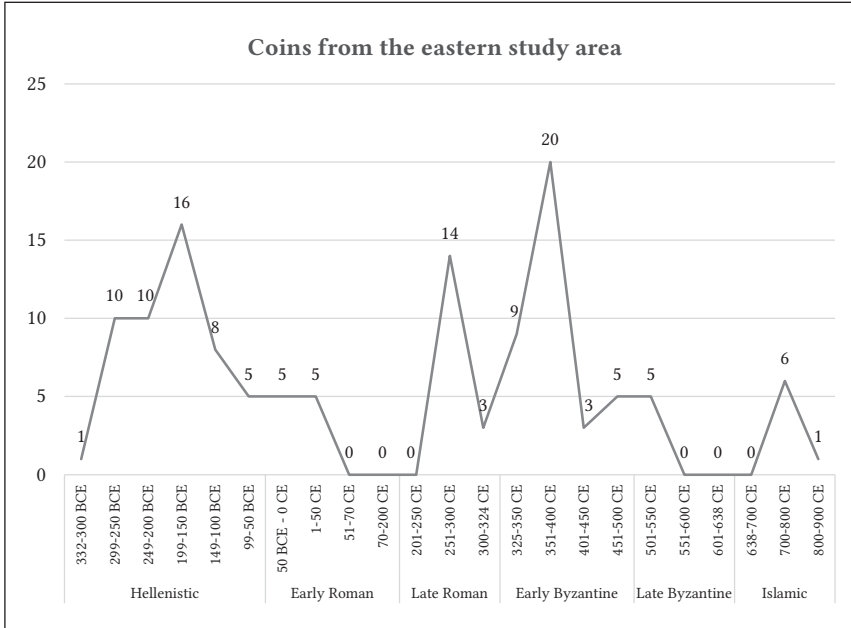


Figure 7.15 Coin finds from the eastern study area.

Coins from Tel Ira, Tel Malhata, Tel Aroer, Horbat Qasif, and Hura (Kindler 1999; 2015; Nikolsky, 2008; Barkay, 2011; Shmueli, 2012). Coins according to percentage: Hellenistic 39.7%, Early Roman 7.9%, Late Roman 13.5%, Early Byzantine 29.4%, Late Byzantine 4% and Early Islamic 5.6%. Roughly 33.3% of the coins date between 300 and 638. Coin data from the IAA internal database (*Menorah*).