

Khirbat Sarah (Khirbat as-Sar), 2023

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The archaeological project at Khirbat Sarah (MEGA-Jordan no. 11304) started with two short field seasons (2018, 2019), sponsored by the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw. After the break due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was resumed in 2023 under the leadership of M. Burdajewicz and J. Młynarczyk on behalf of the Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw. The project is financed by the Polish National Science Centre (UMO-2021/43/B/HS3/00813).

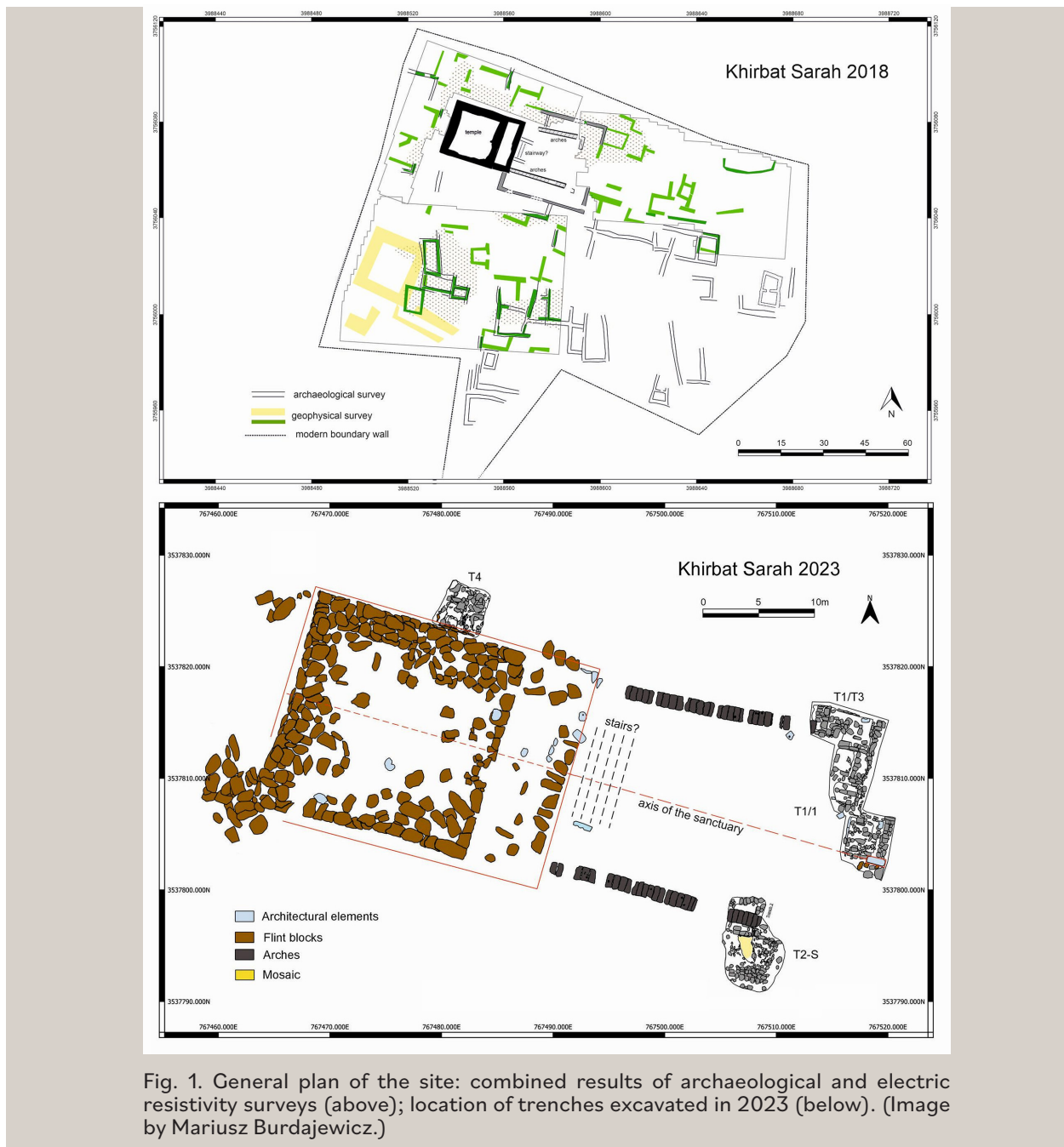
Khirbat Sarah (972 masl) is situated on the western outskirts of contemporary Amman, 12 km from the Qal'a, on the plateau's edge near the entrance to Wadi Sir. The location ensures a considerable strategic potential for the site through constant control of access to Amman both from the Jordan Valley and the land of Moab. The site's summit is occupied by well-preserved architectural relics consisting of a monumental "tower" (qasr) constructed from huge flint blocks and considered typical of the Ammonite period. During post-Ammonite times, in the 2nd century CE, the tower was adapted for a temple with a vestibule and adorned with the classical architectural order. An arcaded courtyard was added to it in the 3rd century. It created an architectural compound preliminarily identified as a sanctuary, an important religious center whose monumental character indicates prominence beyond just local. On the slopes around the tower and the courtyard are scattered remnants of poor-quality buildings/enclosures, probably the testimony of a semi-rural settlement accompanied by scores of Middle Islamic potsherds. The ancient name of the site remains still unknown.

In 2023, three trenches (T1/1, T1/T3, and T2-S) were opened in the eastern part of the sanctuary courtyard as extensions of the trenches made in 2019 (Fig. 1). The results of their exploration testify to a dense habitation of the site, especially in the Middle Islamic period, when the Roman structures were extensively reused. An interesting feature in trench T1/T3 is a "clerestory" wall with three openings associated with the Umayyad to Abbasid pottery. Moreover, during the 2023 season, levels of the late Roman/Byzantine periods were identified for the first time. A fragment of a monochrome mosaic floor of large white cubes, probably Abbasid, was found in T2-S. However, the chronological phasing of the site remains preliminary because it is rendered difficult by repeated reuse of walls and structures of all consecutive periods (Fig. 2).

The fourth trench (T4) was opened at the northern side of the "Ammonite tower" to determine the date of its foundation. Its exploration reached a significant depth of almost 4.5 m below the present-day ground level (Fig. 3) but did not reveal any stratigraphy because the trench



AIJ 4 Khirbat Sarah (Khirbat as-Sar), 2023



proved to contain the construction of a buttress. The latest pottery forms (specifically, Eastern Sigillata A ware) indicate that the buttress was built by the Romans around the mid-2nd century CE, suggesting that the “Ammonite tower” was transformed into the cella of the temple precisely during that time. Despite several Iron Age storage-jar fragments in the buttress fills, the exact date of the tower’s construction remains to be determined during future fieldwork.



Fig. 2. In the foreground: an accumulation of various structures from the Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods in trench T1/1; in the background: “clerestory wall” in trench T1/T3. Viewed from the south. (Photo by Mariusz Burdajewicz.)



Fig. 3. Trench 4 by the “Ammonite” tower. Viewed from the northeast. (Photo by Mariusz Burdajewicz.)

References

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