

## REMAINS OF AN EARLY CHALCOLITHIC SETTLEMENT ON THE FRINGES OF ḤORBAT USHA

MARTIN PEILSTÖCKER

A salvage excavation conducted at the foot of the western slopes of Ḥorbat Usha (NIG 21637/7442; OIG 1637/2442) yielded the remains of a Chalcolithic settlement.<sup>1</sup> The site is situated c. 4 km east of Qiryat Ata and 2 km north of Naḥal Zippori in the hilly region of Geva'ot Alonim at an elevation of c. 90 m above sea level (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The ruins of the Arab village of Usha (Olami and Gal 2003: Site No. 74) are visible to the east of the site and on the upper part of the slope, suggesting that the ancient site of Usha, which was of importance during the Roman period as the temporary location of the Sanhedrin (for references see Tsafrir, di Segni and Green 1994:255–256), should be located there. To the west, the site is bordered by the modern road (Road 70) leading from Yagur Junction to Somekh Junction. Since the road probably covers parts of the early settlement, it is impossible to estimate its original size.

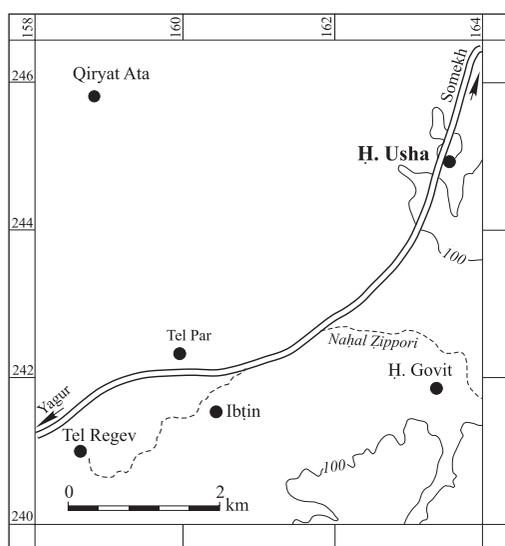


Fig. 1. Location map of the site.

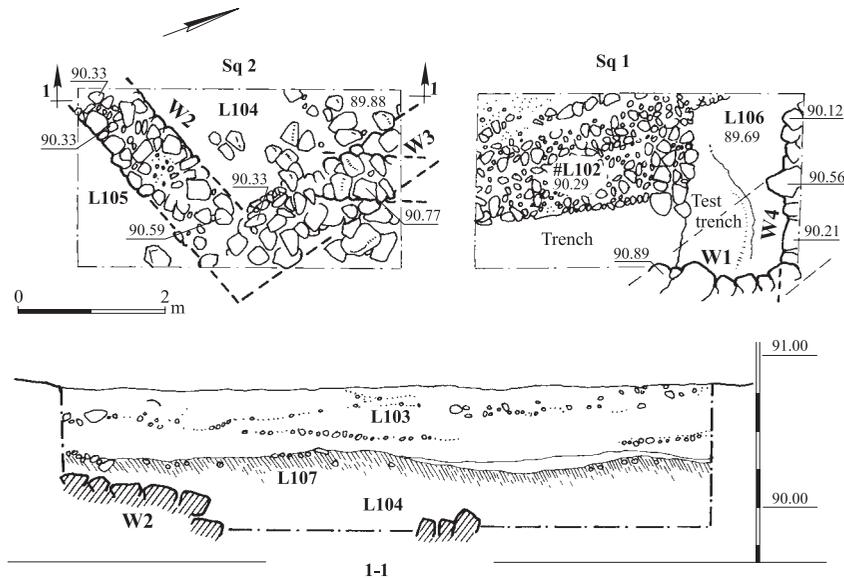
Water was apparently readily available to the ancient inhabitants. In addition to an annual precipitation rate of between 600–800 mm, a well found in the deserted village of Usha might have been in use in antiquity. The gray rendzina soils of the nearby valleys are suitable for agricultural activities. It seems that the site belongs to a complex of small sites in the area settled during the fifth millennium BCE. Such sites were found and excavated in recent years: Ḥorbat Govit (van den Brink 2000; Olami and Gal 2003: Site No. 112); Ḥorbat Ivtan (Ibtin; Peilstöcker 2000; Masarwa forthcoming); and an additional site found during the survey of Map 20 (Site 41).<sup>3</sup>

### THE EXCAVATIONS

The excavations were initiated after building remains and ancient pottery were observed during trenching undertaken by a mechanical excavator. During the excavations two half-squares of 2.5 × 4.0 m, separated by a balk (1 m wide), were opened in a north–south direction along this trench (Plan 1).

In both squares, a topsoil layer of 70–90 cm covers the earlier remains (L101 in Sq 1; L103 in Sq 2). This layer contained a small amount of mostly non-diagnostic pottery sherds dating to the Chalcolithic, Roman and Byzantine periods. Some huge stones that appeared in the eastern section, as well as stones removed by the backhoe, might have once belonged to a terrace wall (W1).

The remains of a building consisting of two walls (W2 and W3) were uncovered under the surface layer in Sq 2. The walls, meeting at a 90 degree angle, were made of small to medium-



Plan 1. Plan and section of the excavation.

sized fieldstones. Both walls were preserved to a height of 0.5 m, or 3–4 courses. No floor could be identified within the building. In L104 stone debris was found, most probably representing collapse from the upper parts of the building. In L105, located outside the building, no floor was found, but it should be mentioned that this area was damaged by the mechanical excavator. In Sq 1 the continuation of the building was not found, but a stone pavement (L102), constructed of small stones and pebbles and based on a layer of stamped soil leveling the sloping bedrock, may relate to W3. To the east this pavement was bordered by another wall (W4) that appears only in section. In a small probe that reached bedrock, the foundation layer (L106) of the pavement was investigated.

#### THE FINDS

A small number of finds were found during the excavations. Due to the limited excavated area and the problematic conditions under which the excavation took place,<sup>4</sup> no statistical analyses of the finds were undertaken. The fact that pottery (and flint) was found on Pavement 102,

as well as below the pavement, indicates at least two phases. The pottery from these phases was chronologically indistinguishable.

#### *Pottery*<sup>5</sup>

A total of 234 pottery sherds were found in the excavation, including the topsoil material. Nineteen sherds belong to the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman occupation of the nearby classical site; the remainder dates to the Chalcolithic period. A sample of Chalcolithic pottery is illustrated in Fig. 2. Although the assemblage is limited in size, almost all the sherds are made of the same coarse ware, indicating the homogeneous character of the pottery. Despite the care devoted to the cleaning of the pottery with a dry brush only, many sherds crumbled. Two vessels could be partly restored.

*Bowls.*— The main bowl type is a deep bowl with a sharpened rim (Fig. 2:1–4). The bowls, varying in size, have straight or slightly rounded walls and show traces of burnishing. Some of them might have been slipped, but since the pottery was in a very poor state of preservation this is impossible to distinguish. One bowl (Fig. 2:1) had been repaired in antiquity.

A second bowl type is illustrated in Fig. 2:5. This shallow bowl has a carination in the upper part of the vessel, which is prominent on the outside, but less pronounced on the inside. This

bowl resembles the carinated shallow bowls of the Late Neolithic period known from sites, such as Tel Kabri (Kempinski 2002: Fig. 5.1:3) and Tell Ḥalaf (von Oppenheim 1943: Fig.

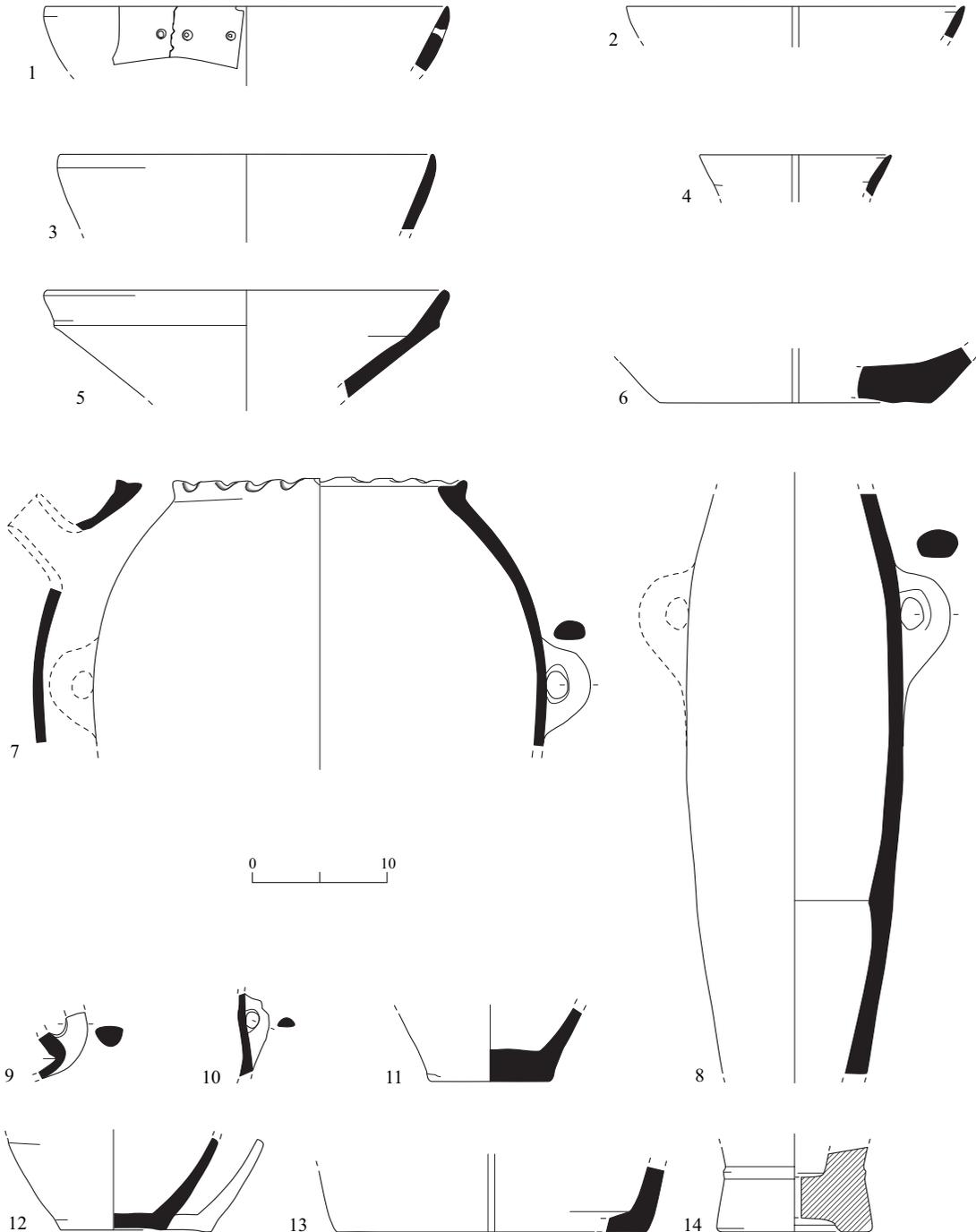


Fig. 2. Pottery (1–13) and basalt (14) finds.

◀ Fig. 2

No.	Vessel	Locus	Reg. No.	Description
1	Bowl	106	1012/2	Buff ware with tiny white and gray inclusions, burnished
2	Bowl	105	1011/2	Light colored ware, tiny white inclusions, burnished
3	Bowl	105	1011/3	Burnished
4	Bowl	105	1011/3	
5	Bowl	103	1005/4	Gray ware, small to tiny white and gray inclusions
6	Bowl?	103	1005/3	Gray ware, small to tiny white and gray inclusions
7	Krater	101	1001/1	Buff ware
8	Jar	106	1012/1	Buff ware with white inclusions
9	Churn	101	1002/1	Light ware with small white inclusions
10	Handle	104	1006/1	Buff ware with tiny white and gray inclusions
11	Jar	106	1012/3	Light colored ware with small white inclusions
12	Jar	105	1011/1	Gray ware with many small white inclusions
13	Jar	104	1006/3	Light colored ware with small white and gray inclusions
14	Stone vessel	106	1012/10	Basalt stone

21:4), although the carination on these vessels is much more pronounced. A base (Fig. 2:6) may belong to a shallow bowl or platter.

It should be mentioned that no paint ('lipstick') or plastic decoration was discerned.

*Kraters.*— One spouted krater with two loop handles and a flattened holemouth rim could be partly restored (Fig. 2:7). The rim is decorated by thumb indentations and the (missing) spout was situated between handles and rim. Holemouth vessels with similar rims are known from Ḥorbat 'Uza (Stratum 17; Getzov 1995: Fig. 16) and Kefar Gil'adi (Garfinkel 1999: Fig. 105:12). These latter vessels have additional small handles attached to the rim and lack a spout.

*Jars.*— Although numerous body sherds were found, most probably belonging to jars, no jar rims were recognized. One rim (Fig. 2:4) might belong to a jar, but the burnishing on the vessel indicates that it most probably belongs to a bowl, as described above. A portion of a 'Gilat jar' (Fig. 2:8) was partially restored. The particular vessel had two loop handles with a wide attachment, similar to handles of other jar types found in the excavation.

*Churns.*— One churn fragment was identified (Fig. 2:9). Churns are the *fossile directeur* of the (late) Chalcolithic period, but their appearance in earlier contexts has been previously recognized (Sadeh and Gophna 1991: Fig. 2:10).

*Handles.*— Several loop and lug handles (Fig. 2:10) were found. The loop handles have a wide attachment to the vessel's body.

*Bases.*— All bases were flat; some are thick (Fig. 2:11), while others are thinner (Fig. 2:12, 13), but all meet the vessel's body at a sharp angle.

*Decoration.*— Except for the rim of the vessel illustrated in Fig. 2:7, no plastic decoration appeared on the vessels. The only decoration recognized on the sherds was burnishing and in some cases a red slip. This red slip appears on open (inside only or both inside and outside) and closed vessels (outside only).

#### *Roof Plaster*

Numerous fragments of plaster were found during the excavations (Fig. 3). The largest piece was part of the roof construction of the

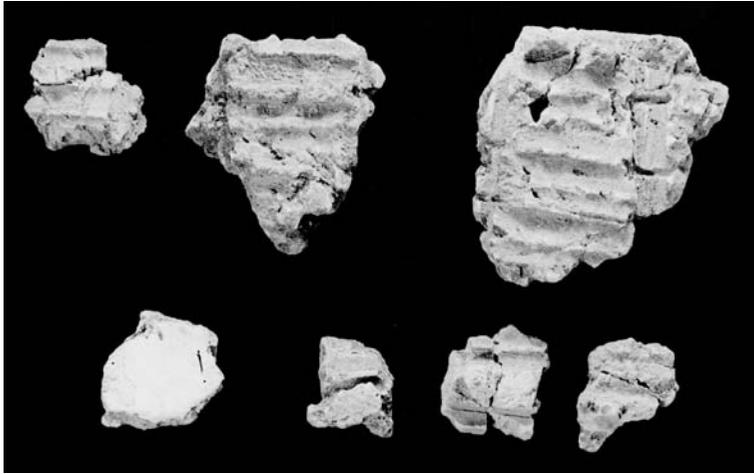


Fig. 3. Pieces of roof plaster.

excavated building. It shows traces of reeds, which were probably laid out on the roof as mats. This is indicated by the signs of strings or ropes holding the branches together.

The roof construction of buildings in the early periods has been discussed elsewhere (Porath 1992:45), but there is little evidence from excavations. The use of plaster for covering seems unlikely, since the surface is uneven and carelessly prepared.

#### *Basalt Vessel*

Only one fragment of a basalt stone vessel was unearthed during the excavation (Fig. 2:14).

#### *The Flints*

Hamoudi Khalaily

One hundred and ninety-three flint artifacts were collected during the excavation at Ḥorbat Usha. Most of them were manufactured of coarse light brown flint with white inclusions of Turonian origin (Meshash formation). Such flints are present in the vicinity of the site (Rot 1977). Only three artifacts were fashioned from high quality, dark brown flint of Eocenian origin.

The majority of the artifacts are waste and debris. The cores ( $n = 5$ ) are amorphous in shape (Fig. 4:1) and were used mainly for the production of flakes.

The majority of the tools ( $n = 11$ ) are retouched flakes. Three tools are described here. The first is a transverse arrowhead (Fig. 4:2). It was manufactured on a small segment of an elongated flake. Both lateral sides were fashioned by abrupt retouch, while the working edge displayed fine retouch. Such arrowheads are present in Late Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age assemblages (Gopher 1994:221; Rosen 1997:44)

The second tool is a sickle blade that was modified from a short blade blank with a trapezoidal section (Fig. 4:3). The back of the blade was shaped by semi-abrupt retouch and was then truncated. The working edge displays irregular retouch, which appeared mainly on its ventral surface; the dorsal surface displays continuous nibbling. Sickle gloss, however, covers both sides.

The third tool is bifacial, most probably an adze (Fig. 4:4). It was fashioned from a thick and elongated flake with a plano-convex section. The bifacial flaking is restricted to the sides, leaving the major portion of the dorsal and the ventral surfaces unretouched. The working edge is heavily polished; part of it, however, was damaged by post-polishing activities. Such adzes appear in Late Neolithic assemblages, but become more dominant during the Chalcolithic period (Barkai 2000:347).

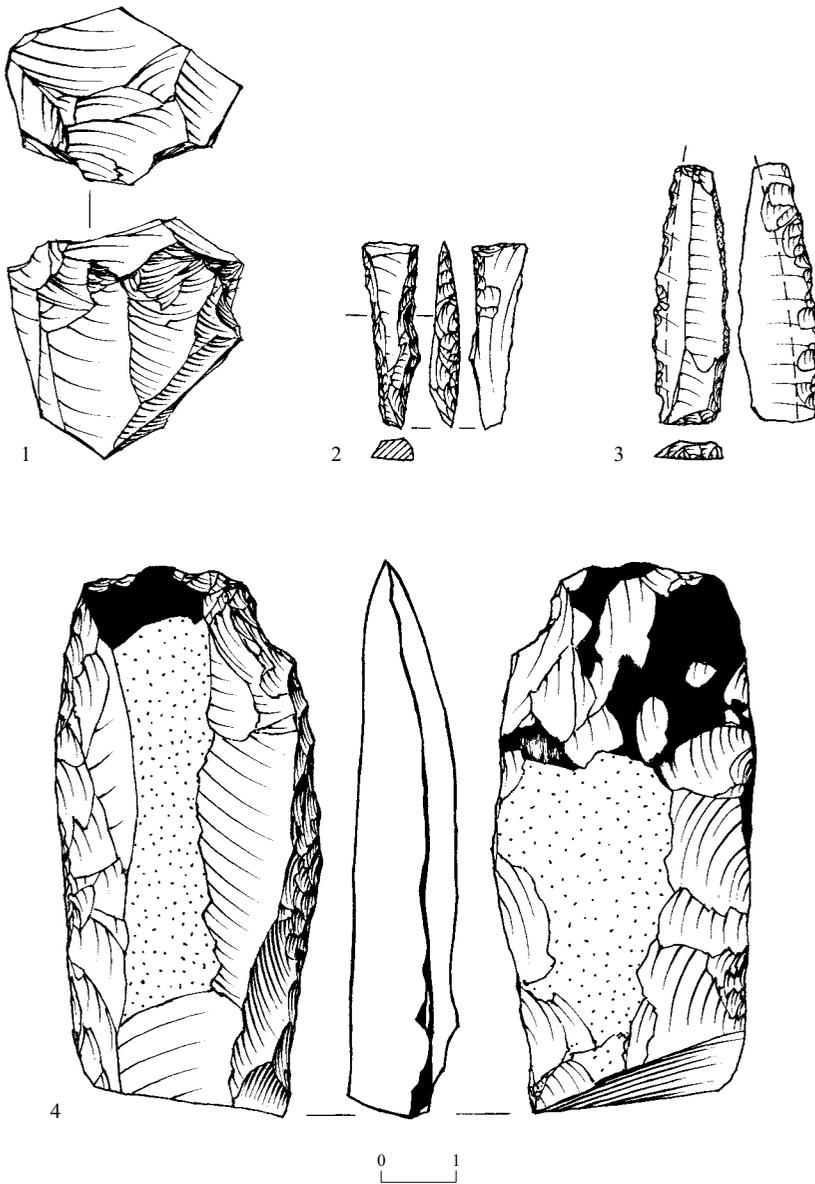


Fig. 4. Flint core (1) and tools (2-4).

The flint collection from Ḥorbat Usha is too small to draw major conclusions. However, the appearance of a transverse arrowhead together with a backed, truncated sickle blade and an adze indicates their chrono-cultural assignment. These tool types appear in late Wadi Rabah, as well as in Chalcolithic-period assemblages (late fifth and fourth millennia BCE). This

chrono-cultural assignment is corroborated by the ceramic analysis (see above).

#### SUMMARY

The small number of sherds found in the excavation does not allow us to reconstruct a complete assemblage since certain types, such

as cooking pots, are missing, while others (jars, closed vessels) appear in small numbers only. There is no reason to postulate anything other than a domestic assemblage here.

Parallels for the pottery of Ḥorbat Usha can be found in the assemblages of Tel Tsaf (Gophna and Sadeh 1989), Ḥorbat 'Uza (Getzov 1995), Tel Kabri (Scheftelowitz 2002), Ha-Yonim Terrace (Khalaily, Goren and Valla 1993), and Naṣur Stratum 4 (Eli Yannai, pers. comm.), all attributed to the fifth millennium BCE. All these sites have their chronological settings in the Early or Middle Chalcolithic Period, after the Wadi Rabah phase and before the Ghassulian phase. The pottery of nearby

Ḥorbat Govit, on the other hand, seems to belong to the later phase of the Chalcolithic period. The pottery from the excavations at nearby Qiryat Ata includes material dated to the Wadi Rabah phase but lacks a Chalcolithic phase (Khalaily 2003). In the case of Ḥorbat Usha, the churn fragment and the Gilat jar seem to indicate a relatively late date within the time span of the Early Chalcolithic period, lasting at least five hundred years (Garfinkel 1999:6, Table 3). Types characteristic of the 'classical' Late Chalcolithic period, such as cornets, are missing, but one has to take into consideration the fact that the pottery and flint assemblage is very limited.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The work was conducted in December 2000 by the author on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Permit No. A-3348). Vadim Essmann and Viacheslav Pirski (surveying) and Y. Yacobi (administrator) assisted, as well as Dror Barshad and Zach Horowitz from the Haifa office of the IAA. Financial support was provided by the Israel Electricity Corporation. Furthermore the author wishes to thank H. Cinamon (registration), Michal Ben-Gal (pottery restoration), Tsila Sagiv (photography), Marina Shuiskaya-Aranov (pottery drawing) and Michael Smilansky (flint drawings) for their contributions.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the region see Gal 1992:2.

<sup>3</sup> The site was settled during the Early Chalcolithic period, but not during the Early Bronze Age as

mistakenly indicated in the preliminary report of this survey (Lehmann and Peilstöcker 1995).

<sup>4</sup> The excavation took place under very difficult conditions. The week prior to the excavation had been very rainy and during the excavation itself work was interrupted due to heavy rains. The muddy soil made sifting impossible. The work of the mechanical excavator caused additional damage, particularly in Sq 1.

<sup>5</sup> I thank Eli Yannai, Nimrod Getzov, Eliot Braun and Edwin C.M. van den Brink for their help in analyzing the pottery and for providing me with information concerning unpublished excavations in the area.

#### REFERENCES

- Barkai R. 2000. *Flint and Stone Axes as Cultural Markers: Socio-Economic Changes as Reflected in the Holocene Flint Tool Industries of the Southern Levant*. Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University. Tel Aviv.
- Gal Z. 1992. *The Lower Galilee during the Iron Age*. Winona Lake, IN.
- Garfinkel Y. 1999. *Neolithic and Chalcolithic Pottery of the Southern Levant* (Qedem 39). Jerusalem.
- Getzov N. 1995. Ḥorvat 'Uza. *ESI* 13:19–21.
- Gopher A. 1994. *Arrowheads of the Neolithic Levant* (ASOR Diss. S. 10). Winona Lake, IN.
- Gophna R. and Sadeh S. 1989. Excavations at Tel Tsaf: An Early Chalcolithic Site in the Jordan Valley. *Tel Aviv* 15–16:3–36.
- Kempinski A. (Scheftelowitz N. and Oren R. eds.). 2002. *Tel Kabri: The 1986–1993 Excavation*

- Seasons* (Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology Monograph Series No. 20). Tel Aviv.
- Khalaily H., Goren Y. and Valla F.R. 1993. A Late Pottery Neolithic Assemblage from Hayonim Terrace, Western Galilee. *Mitekufat Haeven* 25:132–144.
- Lehmann G. and Peilstöcker M. 1995. Bericht über den Survey im Hinterland von Akko. *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Evangelischen Instituts für Altertumswissenschaften des Heiligen Landes* 4:31–40.
- Masarwa M. Forthcoming. Excavations at Ibtin. *'Atiqot*.
- Olami Y. and Gal Z. 2003. *Map of Shefar'am (24)* (Archaeological Survey of Israel). Jerusalem.
- Oppenheim M. von. 1943. *Tell Halaf I: Die prähistorischen Funde*. Berlin.
- Peilstöcker M. 2000. Ḥorbat Ivta. *HA-ESI* 112: 27\*–28\*.
- Porath Y. 1992. Domestic Architecture of the Chalcolithic Period. In A. Kempinski and R. Reich eds. *The Architecture of Ancient Israel*. Jerusalem. Pp. 40–48.
- Rosen S.A. 1997. *Lithics After the Stone Age: A Handbook of the Stone Tools from the Levant*. Walnut Creek, Ca.
- Rot Y. 1977. *Material Potentiality of Raw Materials for Construction in the Umm el-Fahem and the Menashe Hills* (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Israel Geological Survey). Jerusalem (Hebrew).
- Sadeh S. and Gophna R. 1991. Observations on the Chalcolithic Ceramic Sequence in the Middle Jordan Valley. *Mitekufat Haeven* 24:135–148.
- Scheftelowitz N. 2002. Pottery: Late Neolithic Period. In A. Kempinski (N. Scheftelowitz and R. Oren eds.). *Tel Kabri: The 1986–1993 Excavation Seasons* (Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology Monograph Series No. 20). Tel Aviv. Pp. 91–95.
- Tsafrir Y., Di Segni L. and Green J. 1994. *Tabula Imperii Romani. Iudaea–Palaestina: Eretz Israel in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods*. Jerusalem.
- van den Brink E.C.M. 2000. Ḥorbat Govit. *HA-ESI* 112:117\*.