

Yoram Tsafir

(Jan. 30, 1938 – Nov. 22, 2015)

based on obituaries written in Hebrew by **Y. Patrich** and **R. Talgam** (translated by Y. Goel) and in English by **C. Dauphin** (see *IEJ* 66 [2016] 120-22, *SCI* 35 [2016] 163-66, and *PEQ* 148 [2016] 5-7

Yoram Tsafir combined archaeology and history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, receiving his B.A. in 1964 and his Ph.D. in 1976. His mentor was Michael Avi-Yonah (1904-74). For many years (1968-94) he served on the editorial board of *Qadmoniot*, published by the Israel Exploration Society, and (1978-86) on that of *Cathedra*, published by the Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute. He headed the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Research of Eretz Israel from 1976 to 1983. He was long a member of the Council of the Israel Exploration Society and a regular participant in its conferences in Israel and abroad, both as a lecturer and a guide on archaeological tours. For 21 years (1989-2010) he was a member of the Archaeological Council and its Licensing Committee. Elected to membership of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities in 2001, he was appointed to prepare a report on the state of archaeology in the country, which was presented early in 2015 and made public. Not only was he closely involved in all aspects of archaeology in Israel, including archaeological surveys, excavations, policy-making and interaction with the non-academic community, but he greatly influenced them in many ways. He was actively involved in the preservation of archaeological sites and in making them accessible to the public. He was opposed to what he believed to be the penetration of political interests into archaeological undertakings. He did much to enhance the prestige of Israeli archaeology both at home and abroad.



His research reflects the diverse ethnic, religious and cultural composition of the local population from the Hellenistic through the Umayyad periods. He made outstanding achievements in four major areas of research on the Roman and Byzantine periods:

1. Jerusalem

His Ph.D. dissertation (*Zion: the southwestern hill of Jerusalem and its place in the urban development of the city in the Byzantine period*) was written in the years immediately following the Six-Day War. It is a model of synthesis between analysis of the findings of many archaeological expeditions conducted since the 19th c. and the numerous literary sources. It served as a new point of departure for understanding the urban development of Jerusalem in the period and a basis for evaluating findings by the more recent excavations, including those of B. Mazar and N. Avigad. After 1974 he served as academic adviser to Avi-Yonah's model of Jerusalem in Second Temple times, which was transferred from the grounds of the Holyland Hotel to the Israel Museum in 2006. The three chapters written by him (the third with L. Di Segni) in *The history of Jerusalem: the Roman and Byzantine period* are essential. Other important studies dealt with the walls erected by Nehemiah and the Seleucid Akra.

2. Churches

Noteworthy excavations were conducted at Rehovot-in-the-Negev/Kh. Ruheibe (churches, dwellings, a caravansarai and cemeteries), at Horvat Berachot (a pilgrim church) on the edge of the Judaeian Desert, with the late Y. Hirschfeld, and at Horvat Beit Loya (a church, olive oil and wine presses, and burial complex), with J. Patrich. He published detailed reports on the excavations, but also studies dealing with archaeological and historical issues related to a specific church, such as Jerusalem's Nea Church. He was commissioned to write an article for the *Cambridge world history of religious architecture*, which is now in press.

3. Historical geography in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods

Tsafir completed Avi-Yonah's *Gazetteer of Roman Palestine* in 1976. An exhaustive project undertaken with L. Di Segni for the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities developed an *Onomasticon of Iudaea Palaestina and Arabia in the Greek and Latin sources*, comprising the geographical names and terms mentioned in all the written Greek and Latin sources relevant to the period from the conquest by Alexander of Macedon until the Islamic conquest. This is not merely a listing: each entry includes the full text of the sources in the original language and in translation; the information is then complemented by a summation and topographical identification. The first volume, including introductory essays, selected texts that mention many sites, and an annotated list of the sources, was published a few days before Tsafir's final hospitalization. Volume II.1-2 contains all sites beginning with the letter A (much more numerous than for any other letter and including "Arabia, Arabs, and Nabataeans", which by itself accounts for c.350 pp.); vol. II is in the final stages of indexing. The first fruits of these efforts, co-authored with L. Di Segni and J. Green, appeared as the *Tabula Imperii Romani: Iudaea • Palaestina: Eretz Israel in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods — maps and gazetteer* (1994).

4. Urbanization

Here Tsafir's most important contribution lies in the large-scale excavations he conducted at Beth She'an/Scythopolis in 1980-81 and especially 1986-2003 in conjunction with G. Foerster, B. Arubas and many others. These excavations were part of the most extensive archaeological project ever conducted in the country. Scythopolis was the capital of *Palaestina Secunda* during the Byzantine period; Tsafir's team excavated the civic center and amphitheatre, both of cardinal importance for understanding its urban development in the Roman, Byzantine and early Muslim periods. Architectural and other finds support a dynamic picture of urban development, including destruction and restoration, over several centuries. The findings are also relevant for understanding the cities of the Decapolis east of the Jordan River. Through his published articles, lectures and guided tours at Scythopolis, Tsafir gained international renown as an expert on the urbanisation of these periods. To date, two volumes of final reports have appeared: the lamps and glass vessels. Three further volumes, devoted to the architecture and stratigraphy of the "Street of the Monuments", including the Nymphaeum, accepted by Qedem Reports as vols. IIIA-IIIIC, are in the final stages of editorial work. The first of these includes Tsafir's long introductory chapter on Scythopolis and its excavations.

Tsafir also carried out surveys and excavations in the Judean Desert and the south: the churches of Pharan in the Sinai, the Hasmonean-Herodian fortress at Alexandrion/Sartaba (with Y. Magen), the caves at 'Ayn 'Arrub, a survey of the road from Avdat to Sha'ar Ramon (with Z. Meshel), and others. He also worked on the monasticism of Sinai and on the Monastery of St. Catherine. Prior to the ceding of the Sinai to Egypt in 1980, he assisted the Archaeological Survey of Israel in protecting sites.

His published works include a basic textbook, *Eretz Israel from the destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim conquest: archeology and art* (in Hebrew) which, despite having been published in 1985, remains a basic textbook; an updated English version of c.600 pages is in the editing stage. He published 10 books and edited another 10, some jointly with colleagues. He published some 175 scholarly articles, many in English in *IEJ* and in Hebrew in *Qadmoniot*, and contributed many entries to the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* and the *NEAEHL*. His research was marked by a broad perspective and great erudition. Renowned as a book-lover, he authored a few volumes of *belles lettres* under the pseudonym Yoram Avi-Tamar. In 1976 he was awarded the Yitzhak Sadeh Prize for Literature for his book *Injury* (in Hebrew), in which he recorded his being heavily wounded in the Six-Day War and how he contended with his injuries in its aftermath. He continued as an education officer in the Reserve right up to the moment of having heart surgery. Despite walking on crutches since 1967, undeterred he visited an enormous number of sites throughout the Roman and Byzantine worlds.

Tsafir was an inspiring and esteemed teacher, much beloved by his students. Unassuming and soft-spoken, he was naturally disposed towards collaboration and dialogue. He co-founded the School for Field Studies of the Midreshet Ben-Gurion at Sede Boqer in the early 1960s. From 1969 until his retirement in 2005 he taught at the Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology, serving as its Director from 1989 to 1992 and as Professor of Classical and of Christian Archaeology. He inspired a whole generation of students to work on Byzantine sites across the country and especially in the Judean Desert. His work on monasticism generated further work by his disciples (the late Y. Hirschfeld, J. Patrich on monasteries of the Judean Desert, U. Dahari on those of the Sinai peninsula)

and others; the great surge of interest in monasticism starting in the 1980s was mostly due to his teaching. Other leading archaeologists in the Israel Antiquities Authority and at Israeli universities (e.g., R. Birger, R. Rubin, H. Goldfus, R. Talgam, B. Arubas) are among those whose Ph.D. theses he supervised or who have worked to continue his legacy. His wide range of interests, extending firmly into the Early Islamic period, was reflected in the Festschrift (see below) presented to him in 2009. He never reneged on his moral convictions, which include his public protest against destructive methods employed by archaeologists in the Arab Old City of Jerusalem. It was his fundamental belief that a political agenda should never dictate an archaeologist's emotions or a frantic pace of work.

A complete list of publications up to 2009 appeared in L. Di Segni, Y. Hirschfeld, J. Patrich and R. Talgam (edd.), *Man near a Roman arch. Studies presented to Prof. Yoram Tsafrir* (Jerusalem 2009) 1-8. The following is a selection:

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