

S

SAFED

THE SITE

Ancient Safed is located on a chalky hill in the mountainous eastern area of Upper Galilee. On the summit of the hill, 834 m above sea level, is an elongated ancient mound, c. 10 a. in area, settled from the Middle Bronze Age onward. In the Crusader and Mameluke periods, towering citadels were built on the hill. A number of medieval and Ottoman quarters, still partly preserved, extended along the slopes of the hill surrounding the citadel. The site is first mentioned by Josephus (*War II*, 573) as Seph, a site he fortified between Achbara and Yamnit. It is thereafter referred to in numerous Jewish and Arab sources and became the main urban center in the Galilee in the second millennium CE.

HISTORY

Surveys and archaeological excavations of the mound and its slopes have revealed that Safed was first settled in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000 BCE) and has since been continuously inhabited into modern times. The site may have already been fortified in the second and first centuries BCE, possibly as one of the Hellenistic fortresses and later as one of the Hasmonean garrisons conquered by Herod during his campaign against the Jews of Galilee in 39 BCE (Josephus, *War I*, 238–239, 314–316; *Antiq. XIV*, 297–298). Josephus fortified the site in 67 CE in preparation for the anticipated Roman invasion. However, no definite architectural remains of these fortifications have been found. During the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, Safed was probably a medium-sized Jewish town, mentioned once in the Jerusalem Talmud. According to Jewish literary and epigraphic sources, a community of one of the 24 priestly families, Yakim-Pashchur (the twelfth priestly course), lived in Safed. In the Early Islamic period, a Jewish community in Safed is documented in the Cairo Geniza. In the eleventh century CE, just before the Frankish conquest, Arab sources mention the existence of a single tower, Burj el-Yatim. The earliest fortification of the site by the Franks is recorded as dating to 1101/02 CE; this fortress was handed over to the Templars in 1168. Safed was surrendered to Saladin by the Franks in 1188, and the fortress remained in Muslim hands until 1240. Safed was then returned to Frankish rule and a large citadel was built, described as the largest Crusader castle in the East; the details of its building are described in a Latin source, *De Constructione Castris Saphet*, dated to the year 1264 and attributed to the bishop of Marseille, Benoît of Alignan. In 1266, the Mamelukes, under the command of Baybars, besieged the fortress, which was surrendered after a six-week siege. According to the historical sources, the Mameluke Sultan undertook reconstruction work as early as 1266–1267, building an outer fortification wall, as well as a huge round tower, 120 cubits (60 m) high and 70 cubits (35 m) in diameter, and fitted with a spiral ramp. Safed, dominated by its castle, became a provincial capital and eventually one of the largest cities in the country. During the sixteenth century, it was a world-renowned center of Jewish thought and mysticism, with a prosperous Jewish quarter on its western slope that encompassed about half the city's total population (c. 20,000). In 1759 and 1837, earthquakes severely damaged the city, while further hardships in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, together with the development of the coastal cities, brought about an eventual decline in the city's population and importance, a situation relieved only after the 1948 War of Independence.

SURVEYS AND EXCAVATIONS

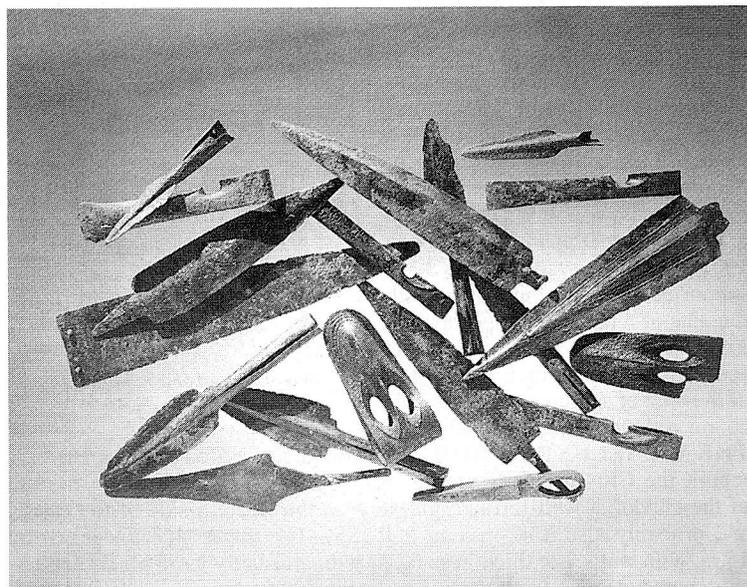
Although described by numerous travelers throughout the second millennium CE, Safed's archaeological remains and ancient buildings were first documented by European explorers and artists in the nineteenth century. A survey of the citadel conducted by the Palestine Exploration Fund produced its first detailed plan. Until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, however, no formal excavations were conducted within ancient Safed. The excavations described below were carried out mainly under the

auspices of the Israel Department of Antiquities (IDA) and, since 1990, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA).

The first excavations were undertaken in 1951 by M. Dothan and in 1962 by A. Druks within the confines of the citadel, below it, and to the south and southwest of the summit. In 1967 (D. Bahat), and again in 1987 (E. Damati and Y. Stepansky), Middle Bronze Age I–II and Late Bronze Age burial caves were excavated on the southern slope of Mount Canaan, 500 m east of the citadel. During the 1980s, a series of soundings was directed by Damati in different parts of the citadel, and pottery surveys of the mound and its environs were conducted on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of Israel (by R. Frankel et al.) and the IDA (archaeological survey by Y. Stepansky). In the early 1990s, an emergency survey and a salvage excavation of Middle Bronze Age cairns were carried out by Damati and Stepansky prior to the construction of the Ramat Razim and Menachem Begin quarters in the eastern part of Safed's municipal area. In 1996, a salvage excavation was directed by Damati at the site of Khan ha-Yehudim (Khan el-Pasha) on the southern fringes of the Jewish Quarter. A long-range project for the excavation, preservation, and reconstruction of the southern part of the citadel was initiated in 2001, directed at first by Damati and continued by H. Barbé. Preservation evaluations and architectural surveys of ancient buildings and monuments were also carried out in the Old City by the IAA Conservation Department. In 2002, a small-scale salvage excavation was conducted by Damati in the Artists' Quarter near the Rimonim Hotel, in front of the Zawiyet Banat Hamid Mameluke mausoleum. A salvage excavation was directed by M. Cohen on the southern fringes of the Mameluke-Ottoman Quarter of Harat el-Wata (a modern neighborhood in the southern section of Safed) and a limited sounding within the compound of Machon Alta on the northwestern slope of the citadel was conducted by Stepansky.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

THE MIDDLE-LATE BRONZE AGE CEMETERY. Excavations in 1969 and 1987 on the slopes of Mount Canaan exposed the remains of an ancient cemetery. In 1969, five caves were excavated, yielding pottery vessels, metal weapons, and a scarab from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages; the last cave contained imported vessels. In 1987, finds uncovered



Middle Bronze Age bronze weapons from a tomb on the slopes of Mount Canaan.