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Ancient Landscapes of the Ghor es-Sāfī: Surveys and Excavations 1997–2009

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The Ghor es-Sāfī is located at the southeastern end of the Dead Sea. At 400 m below sea level, it is the lowest place on the earth's surface. The ancient site is known from the Old Testament (Genesis 19) as *Zoar*, one of the 'cities of the plain' which was not destroyed by fire and brimstone. The area has good archaeological evidence for a substantial settlement of the Early Bronze Age, more limited Middle Bronze Age sites, and an extensive Iron Age occupation. It is attested in Roman documents, for example the Babatha Archive and the *Notitia Dignitatum*, as *Zoara*, an agriculturally rich district and the station of a cavalry unit. On the Byzantine mosaic map at Madaba, it is depicted as the walled city of *Zoora* surrounded by date palms and it is also known to have been the seat of a bishop who attended the Nicaean Councils. During Crusader and medieval Islamic periods, historical sources such as Yakut, Al-Maqdisi, and Foulcher of Chartres name it as *Segor* and/or *Zughar* and mention that it was a major center for sugar and indigo production as well as the most important market for these products.

Aerial view of Wadi al-Hasa in the Ghor es-Sāfī from the west; photo by Jane Taylor