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ASTROLOGY
IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
THE RIVER JORDAN



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IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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THE RIVER JORDAN



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Forty-Second International Conference



RELIGIOUS OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES
IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The Oriental Institute
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ASTROLOGY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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THE RIVER JORDAN

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THE JORDAN RIVER RAVINE NORTH OF THE SEA OF GALILEE: THE SITES AND NEW INSIGHTS

YOSEF STEPANSKY
(Israel Antiquities Authority)

Abstract

The recent publication of the Archaeological Survey of the Rosh Pinna Map under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Stepansky 2012), which includes on its eastern side the Jordan River ravine, gives us an opportunity for a fresh and updated review of the ravine and its main archaeological sites, along with a new appraisal of the traditions and history pertaining to the unique 'Banat Yaqub' sites on its northern edge. Although a little north of the ravine, we shall also take this opportunity for suggesting an identification for the biblical city of refuge 'Golan Babashan' (Deut. 4:43).

PREFACE

"Ten miles of Torrent... How great the descent of the Jordan is we can see pretty plainly here by a glance...while the loud noise of the river foaming at our feet tells also to the ear how fast the Jordan flows" (Macgregor 1904, p. 277). Since Macgregor's 1869 pioneering canoe-cruise account of this roughest section of the Jordan River between the Hula Lake and the Lake of Galilee, much water has flowed down the river-bed and some significant changes have taken place in its landscape. In the 1950's the riverbed south of the Hula Lake was lowered by a number of meters, and the Lake itself was mostly dried out, while a new bridge ('Gesher Benot Ya'aqov') today crosses the Jordan, replacing the old historic Banat Yaqub one. However, south of the bridge, the riverbed and scenic landscape on both of its sides haven't changed much, and it is still a sight of natural beauty and gushing waters. As yet without paved roads on its banks or slopes, this ten k"m long section of the Jordan River, a scenic ravine known today by many as 'The Mountainous Jordan', is still a somewhat 'sterile' and undeveloped enclave that hopefully will stay that way for years to come (figs.1 and 2).

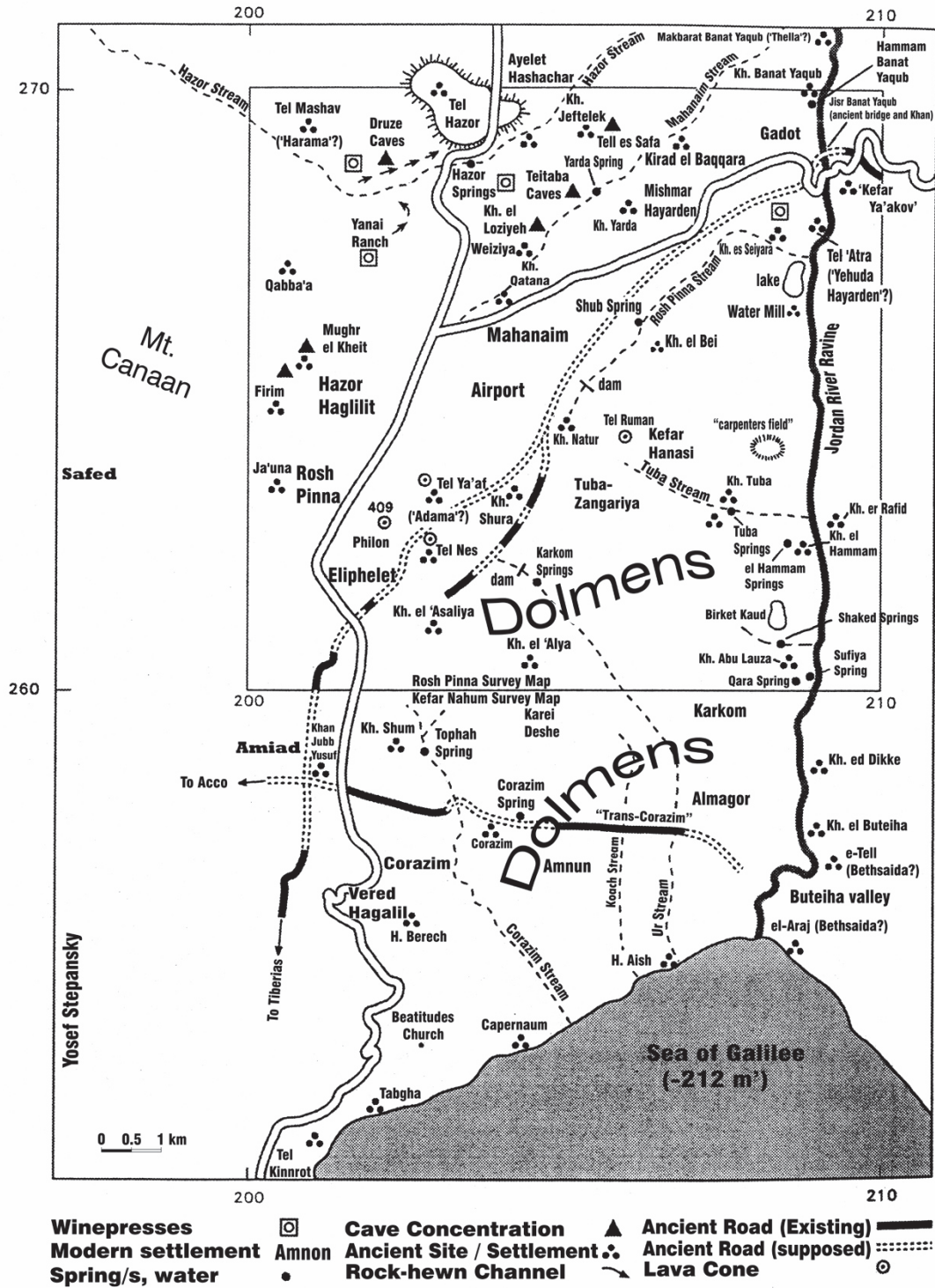


Fig. 1 The Mountainous Jordan River
(Jordan River Ravine), facing south.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1990).



Fig. 2 The Mountainous Jordan River
(Jordan River Ravine), facing east.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1991).

The Corazim Plateau: Ancient Sites, Ancient Roads and Modern Settlements



Map of the Corazim Plateau: Ancient Sites, Ancient Roads and Modern Settlements
(Y. Stepansky; Graphics – E. Froilich).

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND (fig.3)

The Jordan River Ravine separates the Golan Heights in the east from The Corazim Plateau in the west. Since both sides are covered by deep layers of basalt, the landscape is quite similar; this is so even though the basalt covering most of the Corazim Plateau (south of Tel Ruman - Kefar Hanasi) is quite older (3.5 – 5 million YBP [=Years Before Present]) than the basalt on the surface of the Golan, its counterpart to the east (1 – 2.2 million YBP). The river flows south from an elevation of 60 meters asl [= above sea level] to 150 meters bsl [= below sea level] before entering the Buteiha valley and eventually emptying into the Lake of Galilee whose present elevation is 212 meters bsl. This drop in elevation of more than 200 m' along its ten k'm route gives a gradient in excess of 2%, forming a V-shaped canyon with a depth of 150-200 m' below the surface of the plateaus above. This is also the only section of the river with white-water rapids, although their level and volume fluctuate seasonally (fig.4).



Fig. 4 Jordan Riverbed Rapids, facing south.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1991).



Fig. 5 Landslide, facing north-west
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1991).

Signs of frequent landslides can be detected on the relatively steep slopes above the river bed, especially on its western side (Stepansky 2002; fig. 5).

Until recently there was a lively debate whether this portion of the river is mainly erosive while the main fault line of the Dead Sea Transform (DST, the term used for this section of the Syro-African Rift) in this area should be placed along the Sheikh Ali fracture further east, or should the main fault line be placed along the course of the river itself. Remains surprisingly discovered in the excavations of the Crusader fortress of Vadum Jacob on Tel 'Atra in the 1990's is evidence in support of the latter view: sections of the Crusader wall that were exposed on the southern and northern edges of the fortress were found shifted more than two meters on either side of the fault line – on the eastern side towards the north and on the western side toward the south - a micro-demonstration of the tectonic movement of the Dead Sea Transform itself. This rare archaeo-geological find clearly indicates that this fault line has been active in historical periods since sections of the Crusader wall were shifted apart only after the wall was no longer in use (i.e., after 1179 C.E.). Researchers believe that the earthquakes of 1202, 1759 and 1837 CE were probably the cause for the movements of the wall (Ellenblum et al. 1998).

On the northern edge of the ravine the riverbed has exposed layers of lacustrine and river deposits of the Middle Pleistocene Benot Ya'aqov Formation, dating to 730,000-240,000 YBP, underlying the basalt layer above it. As a result of this rare exposure, the most ancient of all prehistoric sites in the area (second only in antiquity in the entire region to Ubeidiya in the Jordan valley 3 k'm south of the Sea of Galilee) - the extensive Lower Paleolithic Acheulian site of Gesher Benot Ya'aqov - was discovered in the 1930's and has been intensely investigated since (Goren-Inbar 1993, 2008).

A number of intermittent streams empty out into the river, the longest of them being the Rosh Pinna Stream, which was probably perennial in yesteryear. Along the western bank of the river are a number of springs, some of them grouped together forming small green oasis's (the Tuba, el Hammam and Shaked spring-clusters); it is adjacent to them that we find remains of settlement ruins. About half way down

the ravine, on a rocky slope above the west bank, is a unique rock-strewn precipice of naturally-split basalt fragments, weathered over the centuries. The slope has been termed by the locals of the area – ‘Carpenters Field’.

STATE OF RESEARCH

Since John Macgregor’s innovative adventure in 1869 (Macgregor 1904), and until the early 1990’s, the Jordan River Ravine area was only sporadically surveyed in the context of larger, more general surveys (e.g. Gue’rin 1880; Conder and Kitchener 1881-1883, I; Karge 1917, pp.306-320; Turville-Petre 1927, pp. 309-310; Ilan 1991). However, a number of full-fledge and extensive excavations have been ongoing for decades at three sites along the river: On the northern fringe at the aforementioned prehistoric site of Gesher Benot Ya’aqov; at the mound and Crusader castle of Tel ‘Atra (Vadum Jacob [Latin]; known also as Le Chastellet [French], Meẓad ‘Ateret [Hebrew] and Qasr ‘Atra [Arabic]); and slightly south of the ravine, overlooking the Buteiha valley - at the large mound of e-Tell, identified by its excavators with biblical Bethsaida.

In the early 1990’s the Israel Antiquities Authority was established, and in its wake, along with the systematic survey of the larger Golan Heights east of the Jordan, began the full survey of the Corazim Plateau, headed by the author, including the Jordan Ravine and the slopes on both its sides¹. Fig.3 displays some of the major sites and phenomena within the survey area. Until the present time (2016) some 500 sites have been recorded, all within the framework of the survey maps of Rosh Pinna (18) (fully completed; Stepansky 2012) and of Kefar Nahum (36) to its south (Preliminary reports: Stepansky 1991, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010; Stepansky, Zingboym and Shapiro 2011). Of these, several dozen are in the vicinity of the Jordan River.

THE SITES RELATING TO YAQUB (JACOB) AND HIS DAUGHTERS

At the northern end of the ravine, along the western bank of the river, are a number of ancient sites with names that display traditions pertaining to the biblical Jacob and his daughters (fig.3). From north to south, they are:

Kh. Maqbarat Banat Yaqub (map coordinates 2091 2708): an unexcavated ancient mound and settlement site, covered by a Muslim cemetery, identified with 1st century C.E. ‘Thella, a village near to Jordan’ (Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 3.40; Shaked and Avshalom-Gorni 2004). This is probably the mound referred to by Macgregor as ‘Beit Jacob’ (House of Jacob; Macgregor 1904, pp. 272-273).

Kh. Banat Yaqub (map coordinates 2088 2700, termed also Kh. el-Hammam): An unexcavated ruin on a low hill; at the bottom of the hill, between the site and the Jordan, is a sulfur spring termed ‘Hammam Banat Yaqub’ (Stepansky 2012, site 44; fig.6).

¹ The Survey was conducted with the help of the following permanent volunteers: Tommy Amit, Zeev Nizan and Joe Sina (of blessed memory) from Kibbutz Kefar Hanasi, Yosef Arbel from Kibbutz Gadot and Uzi Efrat from Kibbutz Beit Zera. As of 2016, the survey has yet to be completed entirely, with some 20 k”m² left to be done on the eastern side of the Kefar Nahum survey map. For archaeological and historical diachronic summaries of the survey area in Hebrew, see: Stepansky 2008 and 2014, in English – Stepansky (forthcoming).



Fig. 6 The sulfur spring of 'Hammam Banat Yaqub', facing east.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1990).

Jisr Banat Yaqub (map coordinates 2091 2688): The site of the historic Mamluk-Ottoman bridge, some 300 meters north of the present bridge. Parts of one arch have survived (the easternmost arch?) and can still be seen insitu (Stepansky 2012, site 109; figs.7-8).



Fig. 7 Remains of the eastern arch of Jisr Banat Yaqub,
Left – facing north, Right – facing east
(Photographs – Y. Stepansky, 1990).



Fig. 8 Jisr Banat Yaqub – ca. 1910, facing North-East.

Photograph by Gustav Dalman, Director of the ‘German-Evangelical Institute for the Study of Palestine’s Antiquity in Jerusalem’, courtesy of Dalman Institute, Theological Faculty, University of Greifswald, Germany. I wish to thank Prof. Haim Goren of the Tel Hai College for bringing this photograph to our attention.

Khan Banat Yaqub (map coordinates 2092 2688): A Mamluk-period caravansary seventy meters east of the ancient bridge (Stepansky 2012, site 112).

‘Kefar Ya‘aqov’ (map coordinates 2095 2685): an unexcavated Roman-Byzantine ruin with remains of a public building (synagogue? fig.9; The site is presently within the confines of a minefield). The ruin is unnamed on the old maps, the present name being given by the surveyors. However, it is possible that some of the references to ‘the house of Jacob’ in the numerous sources from medieval times and on relate to this ruin (Stepansky 2012, site 114).



Fig. 9 ‘Kefar Ya‘aqov’:
Remains of a public building, facing North-East.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1990).



Fig. 10 Tel ‘Atra before excavation.
aerial photo facing North-West.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1990).

Tel 'Atra (map coordinates 2089 2678): the most conspicuous of the ancient sites along this part of the Jordan River, with seemingly successive settlement from Neolithic to Ottoman times (Stepansky 2012, site 143; fig.10). Its prominence in the Iron Age (witnessed by a fine survey-collection of Iron Age shards) on the border between Israel and Aram leads us to suggest the identification of the site with 'Jehuda Hayarden' ('Judah upon the Jordan') of Joshua 19:34, and linking it with the cluster of Iron Age settlements Rosh Pinna, Tel Ya'af and fortified Tel Nes near the ancient road junction to the west (Stepansky 2012, sites 187, 189 and 241). The site was probably also prominent in the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods: it (and possibly the whole course of this mountainous section of the river?) could be identified with the 'Ravine of Antiochus' which, according to Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.394; *Wars of the Jews*, 1.105, was conquered by Jannaeus Flavius in 83-80 BCE (Hartal 2015, 10.3.2). On the northern part of the ancient mound, the crusaders in October 1178 began building a large castle whose remains have been partly uncovered in excavation - only to be destroyed by Saladin on the 30th of August less than a year later (Ellenblum 2007. pps.258-274). As stated above, the excavations have also uncovered evidence that the fault-line of the Syrian-African Rift in this area should be placed along the course of the Jordan River. On the limestone spur to the west of the castle are remains of small quarries, rock-hewn installations, tethering-loops and basins (fig.11) that we interpret as feeding troughs for animals, probably for the horses of the Crusader Knights or for the mules of the quarrymen preparing stones for the castle; a unique find are four iron quarrying stakes (fig.12) that were discovered in 1993 on the ground near a quarry on the spur (Stepansky 2012, site 140).



Fig. 11 Feeding trough with tethering loops.
Found west of Tel 'Atra
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1990).

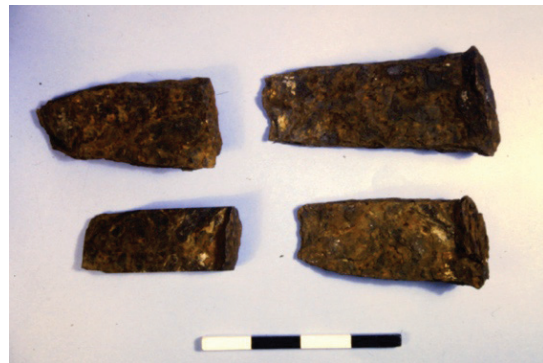


Fig. 12 Crusader iron quarrying stakes.
Found west of Tel 'Atra
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1993).

The excavations of the castle uncovered similar iron stakes, and additional tools and weapons related to both the Crusader and Muslim forces. The Crusaders termed the castle 'Vadum Jacob' – Latin for 'Ford of Jacob', referring to the ancient crossing point over the Jordan that was in proximity to the Tel for centuries before the building of the bridge ca. one k"m to the north. The site is also mentioned in Muslim sources from the Middle Ages as 'el-Mashad Yaqub' (Jacob's residence) or by the name 'Beit el-Hazan' (the House of Sorrow, referring to Jacob's mourning over the supposed death of his son Joseph). In any case, the great antiquity of the site indicates that this crossing and the route traversing it were in constant use for centuries before the construction of the bridge (fig.3)².

To this list of sites and place-names along the river relating to Jacob, his sons and daughters, we can add quite a few more sites to the west, on the Corazim plateau and within Safed itself. For lack of space we shall deal with just two of them: the cistern of 'Jubb Yusuf' adjacent to the Khan of that name, where local tradition shows the pit where Joseph was detained (a tradition already mentioned in pre-crusader times); and Kh. Shura, a Roman-Byzantine ruin with remains of a monumental synagogue whose stone benches surrounding the inner perimeter of the prayer hall have been exposed in a 1983 excavation

² We should note, however, that no Roman milestones, pavements or other evidence of a Roman road system have been found anywhere in our survey area west of the Jordan – contra to some earlier erroneous reports mentioned in various publications.

(Stepansky 2012, site 192). Both sites are in proximity to the prominent ancient road crossing the area from south-west to north-east, part of the Mamluk ‘Cairo – Damascus’ postal highway in medieval times (fig.3). In our opinion, this realia assisted in the promotion of the local traditions pertaining to the stories told in the Book of Genesis – notably the story of Joseph and his brothers that took place at ‘Dothan’ adjacent to the ancient route on which Ishmaelites and Midianites traveled with Joseph down to Egypt (Genesis 37: 25-29). A better understanding of how these traditions were nurtured with the aid of archaeological sites and relics was attained when the author heard first-hand from the Honorable Bedouin Mukhtar of Tuba on how the brothers of Joseph sat on the benches of the ancient synagogue of Kh. Shura (fig.13) – which were exposed only in 1983 (!) - and there had their communal deliberation on what to do with Joseph before throwing him into the pit, Jubb Yusuf, a few kilometers down the road.



Fig. 13 Kh. Shura Synagogue, facing South-East.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1983).

Although the landscape and road-system certainly facilitated the cultivation of these traditions, manifested in place-names and relics throughout the area (these also include ‘Mount Canaan’ and the identification in some medieval sources of ‘Bethel’ with Safed), it seems that they are part of a larger series of traditions popularly fostered by the common-folk residents of Galilee throughout the generations, who believed that this part of Galilee – their ‘home-front’ – encompasses ancient Canaan, scene of the biblical stories well known to them from the scriptures, especially Genesis³. A similar common-folk popular promotion of other Biblical and Post-Biblical traditions in the Eastern Lower Galilee / Sea of Galilee area has been discerned and well-defined by E. Reiner (1998).

³ Other biblical characters traditionally placed in this area are Shem and Ever the descendants of Noah (in Safed), Abraham (a spring named after him in the Rosh Pinna stream) and the sons of Jacob (a Sheikh tomb south of Ayelet Hashachar at Kh. Jefelek). The traditions of Safed are fantastically described in Evliya Tshelebi’s 1648-1650 C.E. account of the city (Tshelebi 1980, pp. 18-28). These traditions have nothing to do with the many ‘tombs of the righteous’ that dot the Upper Galilee landscape within Safed and its surrounding area. We shall also note that the antiquity of these traditions and their diffusion to numerous sites all over the area certainly preclude the possibility of ‘explaining’ the tradition of the ‘bridge of the daughters of Jacob’ as referring to a Crusader Nunnery of Sisters of St. James (= ‘Jacob’) in Safed which was supported by the tolls collected from travellers crossing the bridge. The confounding of the nuns of St. James with the daughters of Jacob the Patriarch, as suggested by B.Z. Freidman (1898) and still widely quoted today, is erroneous and has nothing to do with the formation of the Banat Yaqub traditions.

DOWN THE RIVER – WATER MILLS, SETTLEMENTS AND DOLMENS

In the northern part of the ravine, south of Tel ‘Atra, the waters of river powered in the past a number of flour mills, the best preserved one being Tahumat Qasr ‘Atra below the southern slope of the mound. One flour mill was completely unknown until its discovery in the course of our survey; it was found in a relatively fine state of preservation with several ornamented stones in secondary use, one of them a stone-lintel fragment most probably taken from Kh. Shura mentioned above (Stepansky 2012, site 168; fig. 14).



Fig. 14 Ancient water mill on the western bank of the Jordan, facing north-east.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1991).

Further down the river, a number of settlement sites were located on the western slopes overlooking the riverbed in proximity to fresh water springs (which shows that the springs were a more important settlement-factor than the theoretical convenience of being adjacent to the riverbed itself), the largest of them being Kh. Tuba (Stepansky 2012, site 230; fig.15) which includes the remains of an unexcavated public building (synagogue?; fig.16).



Fig. 15 Kh. Tuba, facing south.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1991).



Fig. 16 Ornamented lintel, Kh. Tuba.
(Photograph Y. Stepansky, 1991).

Further south, half-way down the ravine, a protruding hill some fifty meters higher than the riverbed itself overlooks it from its western side (fig.17) – this is Kh. el Hammam, a 10-20 dunam-large settlement site with some 6-7 springs below its western and northern slopes (fig.18). The pottery assembly shows that the site was settled in most time-periods between Early Bronze and Ottoman (Stepansky 2012, site 266). This projecting hill is most probably the ‘interesting point’ from where Macgregor described seeing both the Hula and Gennesareth (Sea of Galilee) Lakes, the high point on the vivid sketch he published in his classic ‘Rob Roy on the Jordan’ (1904, pp.275-277)⁴.



Fig. 17 The Jordan River facing south;
on the right Kh. el Hammam.
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1992).



Fig. 18 Kh. el-Hammam and springs, facing east
(Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1992).

Opposite Kh. el Hammam to the east, on the Golan plateau overlooking the riverbed but some 150 meters towering above it, are the extensive unexcavated Roman-Byzantine ruins of Kh. er Rafid, first surveyed by Schumacher in the 1880s and several times since (Stepansky 2012, site 268). Returning to the western side, further south is the small ruin of Kh. Abu Lauza (south of the Shaked spring cluster, fig.19), before the river comes out of the ravine on its way towards the Buteiha valley.



Fig. 19 Shaked springs, facing east (Photograph – Y. Stepansky, 1992).

⁴ In some publications the site is mentioned erroneously as having remains of an ancient synagogue. This stems from an error that occurred in a map showing the distribution of ancient synagogues in the Upper Galilee in a study by Z. Ilan (1991, p.21) where this site is confused with the aforementioned Kh. el Hammam (=Kh. Banat Yaqub), a site with a similar name located 8 km to the north of here.

On the eastern bank of the river, slightly outside the realms of the ravine (map coordinates 2088 2588), is the well-studied ruin of Kh. ed Dikke whose remains of a monumental synagogue excavated in 1905 can hardly be made out today (Ilan 1991, pp.84-85).

Although beyond the narrow scope of this study, mention should be made of the ongoing excavations at the large mound of e-Tell on the east bank of the Jordan, identified by its excavators with biblical Bethsaida. They have surprisingly revealed a large urban settlement from the Iron Age 2 identified by its excavators as the capital city of the early Aramean kingdom of Geshur (Arav and Freund 2004). Still yet to be shown is the extent of influence this important center had on the area to the west of the Jordan - if at all; nevertheless any future research of the Corazim Plateau and Sea of Galilee area in the Biblical era should take into account their proximity to this important site.

As for the Dolmens so numerous on the Golan Heights (thousands) and the Corazim Plateau (hundreds; fig.20): the banks of the river itself are devoid of them entirely.

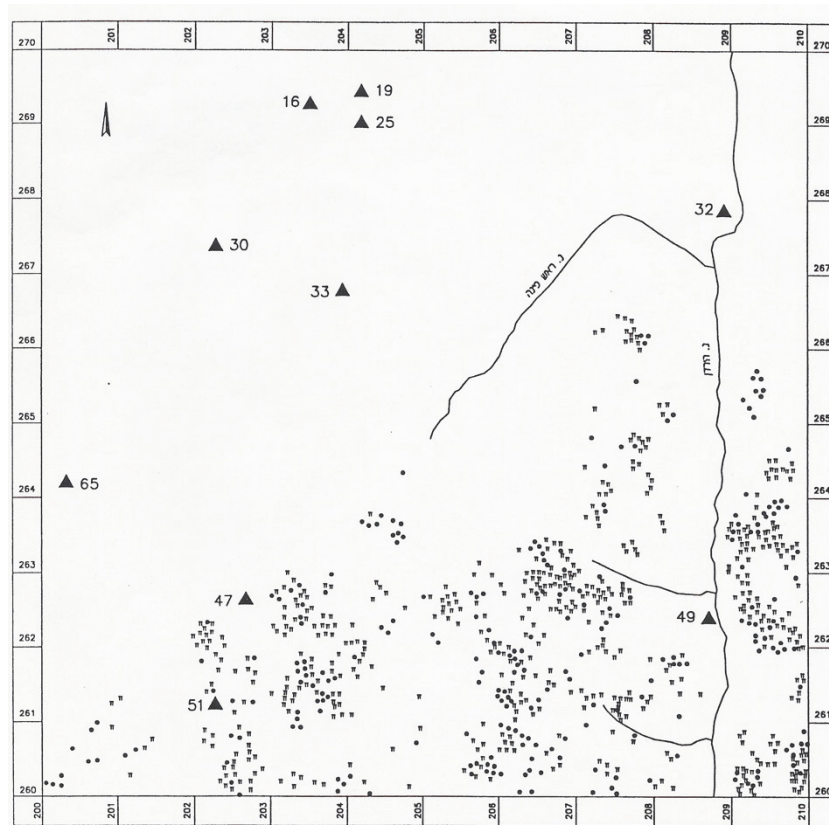


Fig. 20 Dolmen and Tumuli distribution, Rosh Pinna Survey Map (Y. Stepansky).

The regular clusters of Dolmens and Tumuli Cairns begin at a minimum distance of 300 meters on the upper slopes of the ravine on both sides of the Jordan. We are of the opinion, shared by others, that the construction of most of the Dolmens and Tumuli as tombs for the dead in this region should be dated to the Intermediate and early part of the Middle Bronze Age periods (late 3rd – early 2nd millennia B.C.E.), their constructors coming from the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes/communities who inhabited the area during those periods (Stepansky 2005; fig.21).



Dolmen types on the Corazim Plateau (Photographs – Y. Stepansky, 1990-1992).

Yet, more research on the megalithic culture so prominent in the rocky basalt expanses of northern Israel, Jordan and Syria is necessary to throw additional light on this extensive but still quite enigmatic phenomenon. One of the mysterious sites waiting to be excavated is located just south of the Jordan River Ravine, slightly north of e-Tell on the eastern bank of the river: Kh. el Buteiha – comprised of a ‘maze’ of three concentric circles built from basalt field-stones (fig.22; Tal and Haramati 1997, p.153). Although smaller in size (56 meters in diameter), it reminds one of Rujm el-Hiri (160 meters in diameter), the massive megalithic monument on the Golan Heights whose date and purpose of construction are still elusive despite its excavation and substantial ongoing research (see recently e.g. Freikman 2012).



Fig. 22 Kh. el Buteiha, facing North-West
(Photograph – D. Tal, with permission from Albatross Aerial Photography Company.
Source: Tal and Haramati 1997:153).

APPENDIX: A PROPOSED IDENTIFICATION FOR THE CITY OF REFUGE ‘GOLAN IN THE BASHAN’ (= SELEUCIA IN THE GOLAN?)

The name ‘Golan’ referring to the north-eastern of the six ‘cities of refuge’ appears in the Bible four times (Deut. 4:43; Joshua 20:8; Joshua 21: 27; 1 Chron. 6:56), all of them mentioning a city in the land of Bashan. Its identification is one of the most evasive issues pertaining to the historical-geography of the region. In the recent past Golan was proposed to be at Tel Seluqyye located near Qazrin (map coordinates 2190 2653), a site also identified with the Hellenistic and Early Roman city/village of Seleucia on the Golan at (Meitlis 1999, p.16; for summaries on Seleucia on the Golan see also Cohen 2006, pps.288-289; Aviam and Richardson 2003, p.193). However, with the completion and final publication of the archaeological survey of the Golan, Hartal writes:” After Jannaeus conquered Golan, it [the name Golan] disappears from the sources and the name Gaulanitis (Γαυλανίτιδας) was given to the administrative region of what is today the central Golan Heights... During the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud the settlement Golan was unknown. Its name may have been distorted and mentioned as Goblana (Jerusalem Talmud, Megilla, 3, 5, 73d), Gaulana (Jerusalem Talmud, Avoda Zara 2, 41c) and Gablan (Mishna Sota 9, 15). It seems that the sages no longer knew the location of biblical Golan and proposed identifying it with other places, such as Seleucia, Boşra and Dabura... During the Arab period, the name was given to the entire Golan and to quite a large area east of it, preserved in Arabic as Jaulan. But the name of the city of Golan has disappeared and its location is unknown.” (Hartal 2015, 10.3.1). Hartal also alludes to another anomaly: the fourth century c.e. mentioning by Eusebius of a “very large village called Gaulan in Bashan. And the district is called by the name of the village” (Eusebius, Onomastikon 64.1.6).

As for Seleucia, conquered by Jannaeus in 83-80 B.C.E. (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.393; *Wars of the Jews*, 1.105, and later described by Flavius Josephus as a well-defended village by nature (*Life of Josephus*, 187 near the Hula Lake; *Wars of the Jews*, 4.2), Hartal rejects the proposed identification with Tel Seluqyye located relatively far from the lake and prefers the site of Dardara near the lake on the western slopes of the Golan Height (Hartal and Ben-Ephraim 2014, site 24; fig.23).

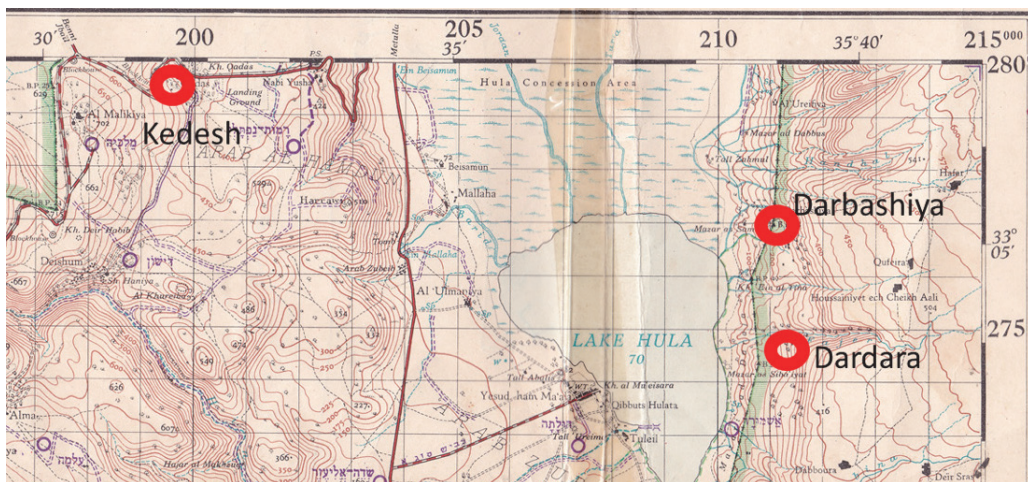


Fig. 23: Locations of Darbashiya, Dardara and Kedesh
(Palestine Map 1:100,000, Sheet 3 Safad, Printed by Survey of Palestine 1944,
Reprinted by the Israel Dept. of Surveys, 1958).

Seemingly, in looking for the Biblical city of Golan, we would expect that the site should be a large archaeological mound, with a considerable amount of Iron Age pottery. As Hartal has pointed out, the Jewish sages, some of them living in nearby Tiberias and its environs during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, suggested identifying Golan with one of the settlement sites familiar to them in

their days, while also attempting to describe the layout of the six cities of refuge according to (ancient?) traditions which were known to them. One of these traditions is brought down in the Babylonian Talmud: “[the 6 cities of refuge] were aligned like two rows in a vineyard: Hebron in Judah opposite Betzer in the desert, Shechem in the mountains of Efraim opposite Ramoth in the Gilead, Kedesh in the mountains of Naftali opposite Golan in the Bashan” (Tractate Makkoth, 9a). As mentioned above, another tradition related the ancient city of Golan to the site of Seleucia, which is identified by Hartal with the site of Dardara. However, at Dardara Iron Age pottery is seemingly absent entirely⁵ and as such it cannot be identified with long-lost Biblical Golan.

With all this in mind, we suggest identifying the Iron Age city of Golan, and possibly also Seleucia, with the imposing site of Darbashiye 2.5 k”m north of Dardara surveyed by Hartal and Ben-Ephraim (2014, site 14; figs.23-24).



Fig. 24 Darbashiya: Aerial View (2010). Source: Hartal and Ben-Ephraim 2014, fig. 2.

With a commanding view of the Hula lake, and a cluster of springs in its proximity, this multi-period Tel is partly covered by the remains of a modern Syrian village and military outpost (today still surrounded by a minefield), probably concealing much more than can be seen on the surface. Iron Age II pottery was collected at the site enabling the identification with Golan, while ‘several sherds dating to the Hellenistic period and possibly to the Early Roman period’ also suit the periods of settlement of Seleucia known from the historical record. Of special note are fourteen 2nd-1st centuries B.C.E. Hasmonaeen coins that were found in the past at the site (Aviam 2007, p.117 site 63; Syon 2015, p.112 site 50, 165 fig. 34, 169 table 15)⁶. It is also interesting to note that Josephus describes the site in his day as a village (*Life of Josephus*, 187), while in the past during Jannaeus’ time (1st half of the 1st century B.C.E.) it was seemingly a much larger settlement, as its imperial name also infers. Cohen (2006, p.288) suggests from this reading that the status of Seleucia on the Golan declined in the 1st century C.E. from its Hellenistic heyday – a situation that apparently parallels the results of the survey and coinage at Darbashiya.

In the past, Israel Antiquities Authority archaeologist E. Damati has indeed suggested identifying the site with Seleucia (E. Damati, pers.comm., 1995); here we repeat his suggestion, and further propose

⁵ In our opinion, the lone pottery shard identified as an Iron 1 jar (Hartal and Ben-Ephraim 2014, fig. 9:8) is most probably Middle Bronze Age.

⁶ The coins are from a private collection. According to D. Syon (pers.comm. 22 august 2016), eleven of the fourteen are from the reign of Jannaeus (who conquered Seleucia 83-80 B.C.E); one is from the reign of John Hyrcanus I (134 – 101 B.C.E.). I thank D. Syon for this unpublished information.

identifying the site with Iron Age Golan. This would also comply with the later tradition of Golan being 'opposite' Kedesh; for, in fact, Darbashiye is almost exactly due east of Tel Kedesh, the widely accepted identification of the city of refuge "Kedesh in Galilee in the mountain of Naphtali" (Joshua 20:7) eleven k"m away. In any case, only future excavations at Darbashiya will determine its identification for sure.

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