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Cliff Settlements, Shelters and Refuge Caves in the Galilee¹

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The existence of intricate systems of interconnected refuge caves in the Judean Desert has been known for a long time, and has been the subject of many publications, including one in this volume.³ These systems were attributed by researchers to the period of the Bar Kokhba rebellion. One of the researchers suggested in his article that over 20 similar systems existed in the Galilee (Shahar 2003, 232-235). The purpose of this article is to show that the cave systems in the Galilee served not only as places of refuge, but also as escape routes for local villagers. The common denominator of these systems was their complexity, as compared with cliff-top caves, as they are currently accessible only by rappelling. It would appear that the inhabitants of many cliff-top Galilean villages prepared escape routes and refuge caves to serve in times of need. They descended into these natural caves by ropes, and enlarged and adapted them for survival in times of danger.

An inspection of these refuge caves indicates common methods and planning, raising the question of the existence of a central authority directing operations within a specific period, against the possibility of future wars; or perhaps it was simply a matter of one village learning and copying from another, thus providing a similar method throughout the region. Both



Figure 1. Two coins from Akhbarah.

the time-range and the simultaneity of preparations of the caves for refuge suggest that the methods of enlarging and preparing these caves may have been passed down through many generations. Pottery remains do not give a clear enough answer to these questions; they suggest a long time-span (from the Hellenistic to the late Muslim period). Numismatic evidence is generally regarded as a more reliable dating guide; however, the caves explored by the present author unfortunately failed to reveal coins, with the exception of two "Sepphoris" coins, 115-117 A.D., which were found in a cave in the Akhbarah cliff (fig. 1). These prove that this system was in use in the time of Trajan.

The similarity between the refuge-caves of the Galilee and those of the Judean Desert attributed to the time of Bar-Kokhba – whether the first stages of planning and preparation were at the time of Bar-Kokhba or a great deal earlier – does not help us in dating the Galilean caves; the work and building methods are characteristic

¹ I would like to express my indebtedness to Professor Hanan Eshel for his useful comments.

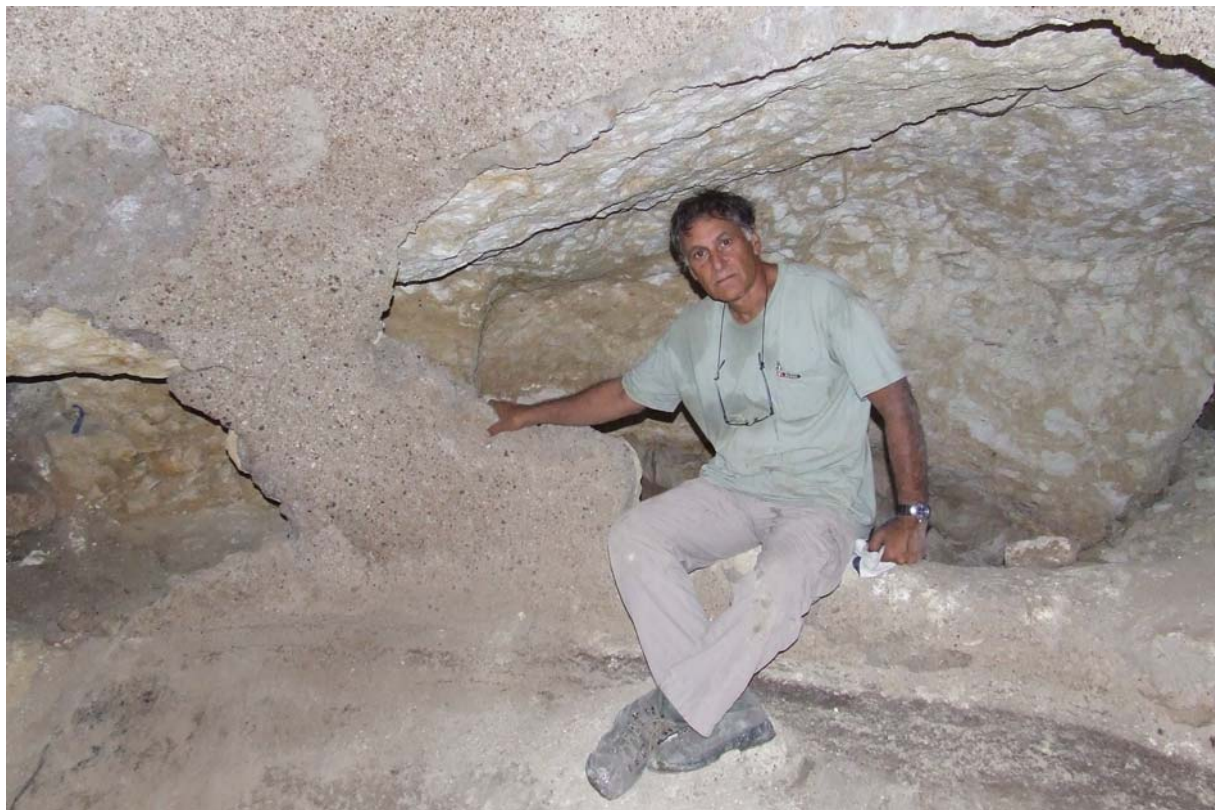
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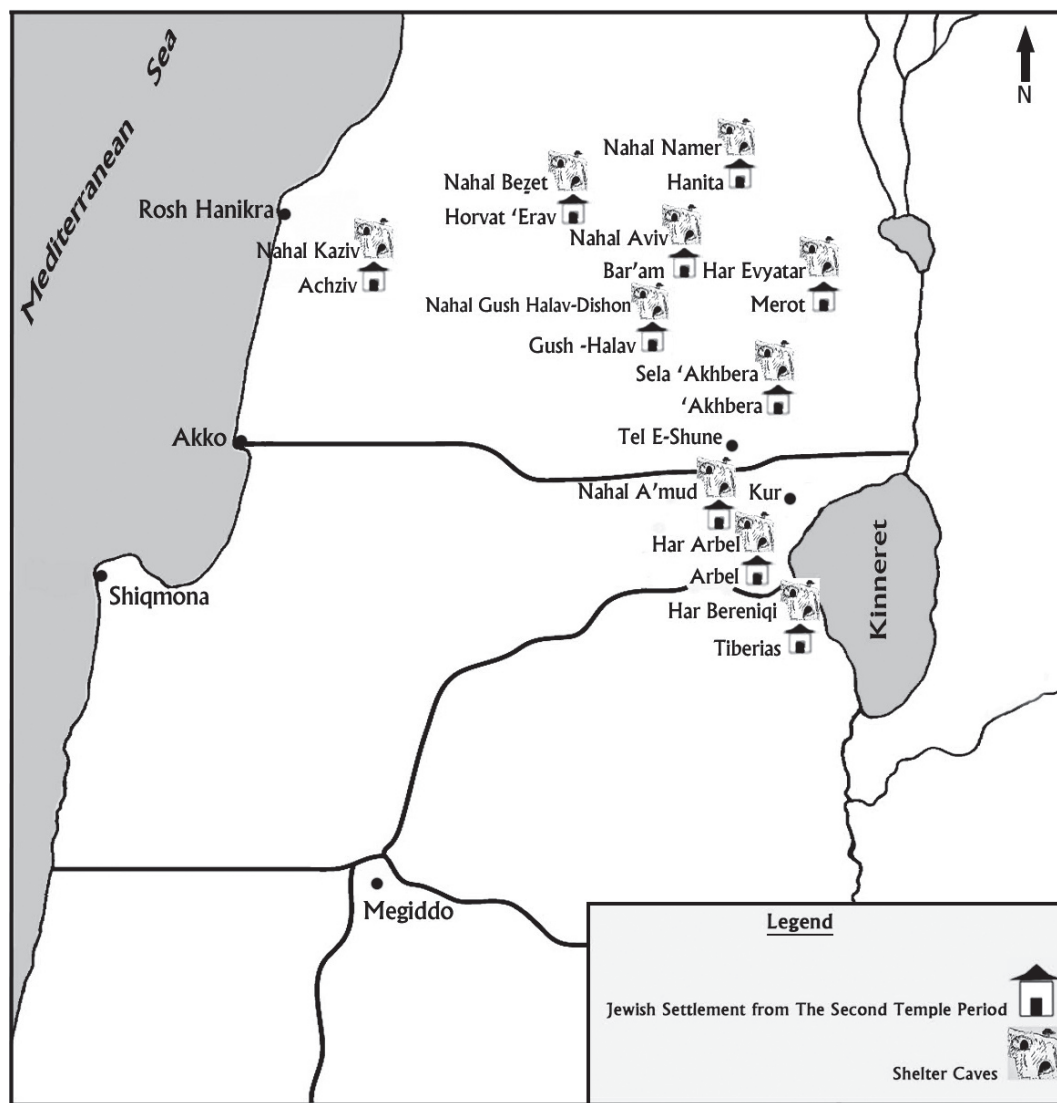
³ See the comprehensive books by Kloner and Tepper 1987; Eshel and Amit 1998.



Bilder von den Höhlenexpeditionen von Yinon Shvital, Ph.D.







Map 1. Refuge and concealed caves in Galilee.

of the entire region in ancient times.

For these reasons, we have neither a reliable key for the dating nor the background to the beginning of the preparation of the Galilean caves. To date, they can be equally attributed to the Herodian Period, the First Revolt, and the Bar Kokhba Rebellion, and references to the use of caves in these periods can be found in various sources.⁴ If they served this purpose

in one period, it is reasonable to assume that they served a similar purpose in later times, as is clearly evident even from the Muslim period. Therefore, we can only present the data as found: the location of the caves, their proximity to settlements, and the geological conditions. In specific places, the shape and dimensions of the natural cave can be drawn, as well as the man-made extension, supply routes, and evidence of daily life (especially purification rites), storage

⁴ Josephus Flavius, War I, 304, 307, 309-313; II, 573;

III, 27, 334, 341; Dio's Roman History VIII, 12, 69.

methods for food and water, means of harassing the enemy, means of preventing the conquest of the enemy, and means of camouflaging the site. All technical questions regarding the means for achieving these ends – access to the refugee community, its size, plans for living quarters, the question of whether the first caves were all started in one period, and above all the dating of the earliest preparation of the caves – all these questions must remain unanswered until a definitive find is made which settles the question one way or another.

Mt. Berenice is situated at the southwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, about 2 km. south of the modern Jewish settlement of Tiberias, above the antiquities of ancient Tiberias being excavated today. This imposing mountain, a steep-sloped limestone cliff with a precipitous eastern side, stands out from the surrounding countryside. Soaring to a height of 190 meters above the lake, its entire eastern side is dotted with caves. Of the thirty of these caves that have been explored, all were originally natural caves formed by karstic erosion. However, several had been dug from the centre to the end and prepared for human habitation (Schwager and Miron 1990, 61-76). Finds in the caves included shards from Late Roman period and other several periods (Cohen 1990, 86-88).

A Mishnaic source in the Palestinian Talmud relates how Rabbi Huna – of the fourth century CE – tells how he and his friends used to hide "for days and nights in the caves above the Great Beit Midrash". It is widely accepted that it refers to the Beit Midrash of R. Yohanan, in Tiberias.⁵

⁵ Apparently the reference was to the period of the Gallus Revolt, Palestinian Talmud, Pesahim, 1, 1; 27, 1 (Hirschfeld 2005, 24-26).

North of Tiberias, at the top of the descent leading down from the peak of Mt. Arbel to the dry riverbed of Wadi Hamam, excavations of an area of 100 dunam (25 acres) revealed the ruins of the Jewish settlement of Arbel, with its ancient synagogue overlooking a gorge that separates Mt. Arbel from Mt. Nitai. Both mountains have been associated with ancient Arbel since the discovery of a widespread system of refuge caves used by besieged Jews in the period preceding the Great Rebellion. Standing opposite these two imposing cliffs, one can clearly see the mouths of dozens of caves; reading Josephus Flavius' account of Herod's campaign against the Jewish settlers of the villages around the Sea of Galilee makes it abundantly clear that the reference is to Arbel. Josephus stated that Herod's conquest of Galilee was complete, except for Arbel, which was surrounded by caves. Josephus emphasizes the innovativeness and the tremendous demands made of Herod in the Arbel campaign, lowering his warriors to the cave-mouths by ropes inside wooden crates (Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities* XIV, 417-430), and mentions in particular "the length of time" (Josephus Flavius, *War* I, 309-313) that elapsed until the king finally settled on "this sophisticated and dangerous stratagem" (Josephus Flavius, *War* I, 309-313). All this is readily understood by anyone investigating these caves, and finding himself dangling at the end of a rope in front the cave-mouths.

An extensive survey of the Arbel caves carried out by the late Z. Ilan revealed the following data for the first time.⁶ A refuge cave

⁶ The research was headed by Dr. Z. Ilan, in which the author participated, surveyed the caves of Arbel and Mt. Nitai. The results of the survey appeared in an internal report published by the Cave Research Centre and the Nature Protection Society in December, 1992 (Hebrew). The earliest survey was made by Y. Tepper and Y. Shahar in 1982-1983. See Shahar and Tepper 1991, 24-53.

system was discovered and explored, and found to be most impressively developed and organized: from the fortress known as "Kalaat Abu- Ma'an" after a Druze revolutionary who entrenched himself there against a seventeenth century Turkish sultan (Vilnai 1977, 287), the explorer enters the central cave-system. The limestone sedimentary rocks (from the Eocene period) provided a base for the widespread karstic action, which hollowed out numerous natural caves. The cave entrances resemble a dovecote, and attracted many species of birds, especially pigeons and doves, to nest there. Thus the origin of the Arab name – Wadi Hamaam – the Dove Gorge. The nineteenth-century English researcher Henry Baker Tristram mentions the abundance of fauna in the gorge and the surrounding cliffs, particularly the Syrian bear. He relates how his team descended by rope to the Dove Caves, just as Herod's soldiers were described by Josephus in the first century A.D., being lowered in wooden crates, by rope (Josephus Flavius, *Antiquities* XIV, 417-427).⁷ Further down the slope, about 120 meters from the pass, there is a "cave-village" (the name given by Zvi Ilan to the site), the first of eight clusters to be found within the cliff. The caves, some of them natural, were enlarged and made suitable for human habitation, with different floor levels, and protected on one side by a rocky outcrop. In the centre of the complex there is a ritual purification bath (*miqveh*) in a two-room cave. On the western side of the cave-village remains of a water-cistern were found, fed by winter rains permeating through the cliff and perhaps used to fill the *miqveh*. On the eastern side of the cave-system there is a circular cistern, apparently fed via the ancient path. The discovery of coins, pottery shards and plaster indicate that the earliest use of the complex was in the Hellenistic

period. The path continues eastward at the foot of other cave-systems, which can be seen when one faces the cliff, until one reaches a manmade flight of steps leading to the "Ma'an" fortress. On the wall to the east of the steps, there are remains of caves, with an additional split-level *miqveh*, and a plaster-lined water-cistern. At the side, a quarried channel leads down to another well-developed complex of caves, built along the cleft running down from the cliff top.⁸ The caves are on six different levels and contain numerous spacious rooms with dressed-stone walls. Passages and installations make the entire cave system resemble a giant beehive. Remains are found from different periods, sometimes indicating re-use or recycling. Pottery shards and, more importantly, plaster from the water cisterns, are indicative of the Roman period (preparation for an uprising?), but the complex was used well into Byzantine and Ottoman times. The deliberate focalization of this cave-system, together with the excellent condition of preservation, would explain the purpose for which it was planned, designed and built, and perhaps also the way of life of its inhabitants.

This is corroborated by Josephus' description of the building of walls in caves near Lake Ginnosar (Sea of Galilee), until recently not fully appreciated, but now taking on a new and important dimension. The description of the building of walls above the Arbel Caves fits well with the theory of Y. Tepper and Y. Shahar that the cliff caves on the northern side of Wadi Hamaam, opposite the cliff today known as Arbel, are the Mt. Nitai caves, and that these are the "Arbel caves" referred to by Josephus (Shahar and Tepper 1991, 42). The distance as the crow flies between Mt. Nitai and Mt. Arbel is not more than 100 meters. The wall built to shield the caves is 322 meters in length and

⁷ The plunder of the eagles' nests was described in Tristram 1865, 446-447.

⁸ See Ilan 1992, p. 14.

traverses Mt. Nitai. Nine towers are spread out along its length; the access to the area guarded by them stretched from the north – between the cliff top and the ninth tower; from the southwest – from the cliff top to the wall section south of the first tower. Between the towers, the height of the wall varies: the northern side, whose base abutted the rugged slope, rose to "only" 4.5 meters, whereas on the southern side the height topped 8 meters. The upper level of the wall, 2.20 meters thick, was designed as a guard and patrol route. This impressive wall demanded many stages of preparation: the stones had to be quarried, dressed, fitted and raised to the height of the cliff; building materials had to be transported, and manpower had to be found for all these activities. All these resulted from the conception and overall planning of a complex whose possible purpose might have been providing a long-term refuge settlement for the local villagers. Such a towering wall would have provided a first line of defense. The cave-system of Mt. Nitai spreads beyond the wall, and its remains are still conspicuous on Mt. Nitai. The observer is provided with a clear and characteristic preparation of a settlement for defense in a possible war.

The settlement of Arbel was a Jewish settlement situated at a height of 100 meters on both sides of Wadi Hamam. The Hamam springs produce about 80 cubic meters of water per hour (correct as of December 1992) – an excellent source of water used by the Bedouin to this day.

About 1.5 kilometers northwest of Kibbutz Hukok many remains of a settlement were found: burial caves, pottery shards dated from the Second Temple period, a complete underground refuge complex (Tepper and Shachar, in Kloner and Tepper 1987, 311), a natural spring

water source, and even remains of an ancient Roman road connecting the Hukok hills with the main Amiad-Acre highway. Attempts were made to identify this settlement as Kfar Icho (Damati 1986, 37-43), which appears on the list of fortified settlements catalogued by Josephus;⁹ it is possible that there is greater foundation for this theory than would first appear, other than the erroneous transcription of the name. The Jewish settlement is situated at the Hukok ruins on a high hill, from which we can observe Arbel in its entirety. The craggiest part of Nahal Amud is found only 2.5 km. north of the settlement. This is characterized by extremely steep walls forming the gorge, which can be seen from the plain above. From this vantage point one can see a series of refuge caves; from one of these a simple vessel was extricated by means of a rope descent.¹⁰ The entire region has long since been classified as a Nature Reserve, and consequently, further research into the 75 caves has been made impossible at this stage. With the aid of binoculars, the caves appear to be identical to those of Mt. Arbel-Nitai. The methods and planning of this cave-system seem to be similar to those of the two aforementioned complexes, i.e., a compound made suitable for habitation and refuge within the settlement, and especially in caves within the steep cliff face, inaccessible by foot or military vehicles. The line of settlements with similar topology continues northwards. North of Hukok, one can see the cliff of Akhbarah, at whose foothills appear the remains of the Jewish settlement of Akhbarah (Αχαράβη).

⁹ On Josephus' list of fortifications in the Galilee, see Aviam 2004, 92-105 ; About Hukok area see Tepper, Dureen and Tepper 2000, 23-67.; About findings in Nachal Amud see Libner 2004, 289-291.

¹⁰ The vessel was seen both by Y. Moshe, the Antiquities Authority representative, and by the author on July 10th 1996. It was extricated from the cave under the supervision of Dr. M. Aviam.

According to Josephus, this settlement was also fortified; but he refers to data overlooked by other researchers. Klein, for instance, mentions briefly that Akhbarah is situated "east of Kfar Hananya" (Klein 1954, 129). While the location of Akhbarah 2 km. south of Safed, within Nahal Akhbarah, does in fact match Klein's description, in our opinion it is illogical that Josephus would describe as a "fortified settlement" a low-lying village with easy access both from the direction of Safed and from the Roman road traversing Nahal Amud and reaching the Amiad junction. Josephus hints at this when he emphasizes the fortification of Akhbarah Crag, and not Akhbarah. However, while inspecting this area, one sees a 135 meter high vertical-walled cliff towering above the foothills of the Akhbarah settlement. The cliff contains dozens of caves, some natural, and others enlarged or manmade. Access to these caves is solely by rope-descent or climbing. The caves are hidden in the rock-crannies of the Akhbarah cliffs. The cave-system resembles those of Mt. Arbel and Nahal Amud. The survey covered twenty quarried-out or enlarged split-level caves with connecting passages. About ten were plaster-lined, their size ranging from 1.5 X 2 meters to 2 X 5 meters. From these plaster-lined caves, hollowed-out water channels followed the lines of the vertical walls, and appeared to have served as gutters for collecting and distributing rain-water. Most of the caves were covered in layers of bird-droppings, making the search for pottery shards very difficult. However, certain finds were dated as early Roman. Here, too, there are clear signs of hammer and chisel work and square openings, which in some instances served as passages between rooms. The distance of Akhbarah Crag from the settlement identified as Akhbarah is no more than 150 meters; we therefore attach great importance to the following description by Victor Guérin, who iden-

tified Akhbarah and visited the site in 1870.

East of Wadi Akhbarah, and above it, lies the village of the same name, comprising a mere twenty humble dwellings. Above the village lies a plain, where we can see the baseline of walls defining a rectangular compound called to this day "Al-Knisa" [...] but perhaps before this building a synagogue stood there.¹¹

On the southern side the wadi is bounded by a huge wall of quarried cliffs. This is the site referred to by Josephus as "Akhbarah Crag" fortified by him in the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans (Guérin 1969, 351).

Guérin goes on to quote from the "Life of Josephus," Chapter 37:

I have likewise fortified the villages within the rocky areas of Upper Galilee – Yavneh, Meron and Akhbari. (My italics – Y.S.)

Guérin noted in particular the phrase "rocky areas" although in the original Greek the wording reads "the villages abound in rocks" (Josephus Flavius, Life, 187).

Moreover, I, in like manner, walled several villages of Upper Galilee, though they were very rocky of themselves. Their names are Jamnia, and Meroth, and Achabare.

Terminology appropriate to the concept of refuge caves in the Akhbarah cliff for the use of the besieged Jewish population at various times, appears in the diary of a Turkish traveler by the name of Tshelebi, who visited Galilee in 1648. He visited Akhbarah ("the Ruins of Ukebeh"),

¹¹ A synagogue was discovered in 1988 at Khirbet Akhbara by A. Damati (Ilan 1991, 51).

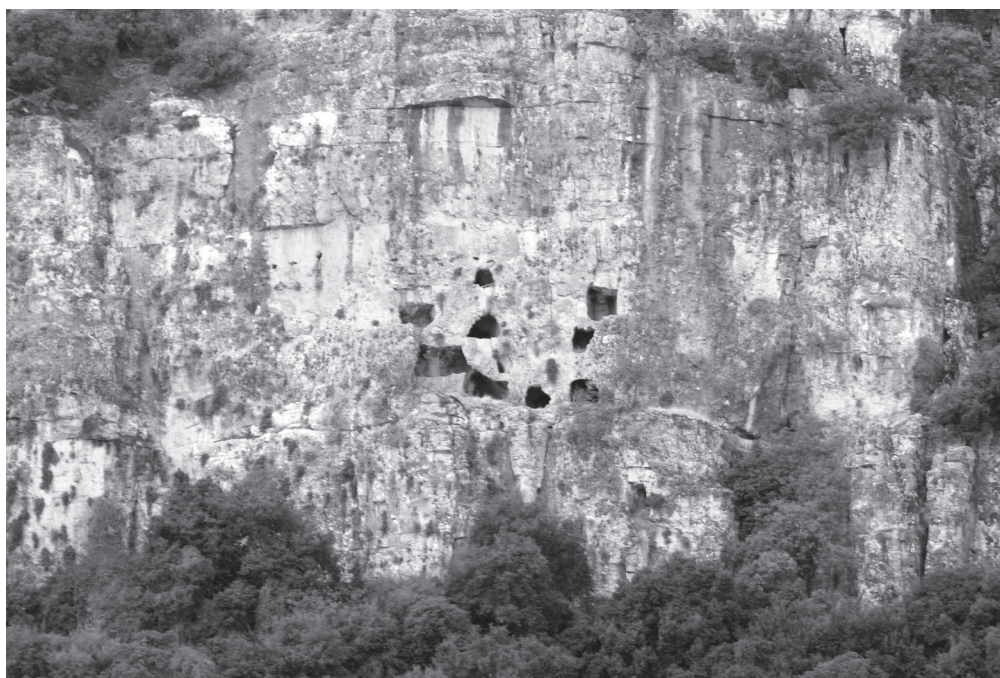


Figure 2. Mt. Eviatar caves.

saw the cliffs towering above him and wrote in his journal:

"The children of Israel escaped the plague and hid in these caves. Then Allah sent them a bad spirit which caused them to perish within the caves. Their skeletons, heaped together, can be seen there to this day" (Tshelebi 1980, 28).

From the settlement of Akhbarah (following the order of the settlements as described by Josephus), we must examine the settlement of Merot, considered to be the northernmost settlement of Jewish Galilee (Josephus Flavius, *War* III, 40). The identification of Merot with "the Jewish" settlement of Mero – as it appears in *War*, or Amerot in "Life of Josephus" – is accepted without question today. The village of Merot is situated at Khurbet Maros, 3.5 km. west of Tel Hazor (coordinates 1998-2708), and overlooks the Huleh Valley. Mt. Eviatar

rises above the western bank of the stream, at a distance of 2 km. from the settlement. On the northern face of Mt. Eviatar, there are about 30 caves, some manmade and some natural caves enlarged by man. The caves are situated at different levels and can only be accessed by rope and alpine climbing equipment (fig. 2).

In 1988, during the excavations at Merot, Zvi Ilan posited that these caves may have been designed for refuge for the inhabitants of Merot in times of war.¹² On June 30th, 1988 the writer rappelled from the summit of Mt. Eviatar¹³ down to the caves, and carried out a survey revealing the following data: a total of 35 caves were excavated from the cliff, on three levels. The height of the caves was about 100 meters above the river bed. The first cave was excavated about

¹² Related to the author during the 1988 season of the Merot excavations. Preliminary survey made by ICRC (Israel Cave Research), 1984, see Ilan 1990, 13.

¹³ Coordinates 1980-2705, about 2 km. southwest of Merot.

25 meters below the ledge at the top of the steep cliff. The caves were excavated or broadened with the use of simple mechanical tools, and clear signs of chiseling were found in most of the rooms. The dimensions of the rooms varied from 1.5 x 2 meters to 5 x 5 meters; the different levels were connected by passageways. (From here we understand why the Arabs gave it the name Wadi Shbabik [Window Gorge]). In three of the rooms there are signs of plastering, and many small drinking vessels were found. Most of the caves contained pottery shards from various periods, especially Hellenistic and Early Roman; also was found a strip of processed leather, dating from the Early Roman period.¹⁴ Some of the caves were dug in ancient times in a manner completely different from anything we had seen previously. They resembled elongated car parks. The appearance of the caves, the style of excavation, and their adaptation for human habitation certainly add credence to the theory that these cave systems were meant to provide refuge to the settlers of nearby Merot at one time or another. We must also point out that the three conditions for the decision to fortify a settlement existing in Merot: elevated location; proximity to the important highways from Damascus to Egypt (via the Bnot-Yaakov Bridge) and to the Syria-Lebanon Valley, via the western Huleh valley near Jib-Yussuf (Amiad Junction); and a bubbling spring 1 km. south of the settlement, which provides a convenient nearby water source. The Palestine Exploration Foundation reports the existence of this well and its strong flow of water (Conder and Kitchner 1881, 242). Large cisterns, built in Merot, provide an additional source of water. One situated near the synagogue in Merot measures 16.75 x 4 meters by 5 meters deep (Ilan and Damati 1987, 21).

¹⁴ As related to the author by Dr. Z. Ilan. Unfortunately, the fate of this strip remain unknown.

The village of Bar'am to the north is next in the line of refuge cave systems. A Jewish settlement of this name was not known until the twelfth century, but all the remains from its two ancient synagogues indicate the existence of a Jewish settlement from the first century. The gorge of Nahal Aviv is found a mere 3 km. away, its steep walls dotted with refuge caves. The possibility of some of them having been used by hermit monks in the Byzantine period is suggested by the vast number of pottery shards of that period (Aviam and Ahall 1980, 247-249). However, on the two occasions when surveys were carried out in these cave systems,¹⁵ finds were also made from periods when those working on the enlargement of the natural caves would have considered them suitable as refuge caves in times of rebellion. Some of the pottery shards discovered in the caves overhanging the gorge were found to be from the Early Roman period. It goes without saying that the only access to the caves was by rappelling.

Because of their proximity to the settlements of Bar'am and Gush Halav, the caves at Nahal Aviv may very well have been part of the chain of refuge caves for the Jewish settlements (prepared and fitted out for any contingency of an attempt by a foreign power to conquer Galilee).

The next three Jewish settlements (or at least those with a Jewish majority – but more on that later) in the chain are Achziv (Kziv, Gziv), Hanot (Hanita) and Rosh Maya. These actually extend over the border of the Kingdom of Tyre, and each one shows signs of having been outside the known borders of the Jewish settlement of the Second Temple Period. Undoubtedly, the

¹⁵ A preliminary survey was carried out in these caves in 1979 by teams from the Akhziv and Mt. Meron Field Schools. An additional survey was carried out in 2000 by a team from the Cave Research Centre headed by the author.

important Halachic discussion regarding "the forbidden towns in the Domain of Tyre" and the appearance of the names of the permitted and forbidden towns in the Rehov inscription serve as proof that these settlements, which appear in both sources, were "forbidden" (Sussman 1974, 125-127). In other words, they were Jewish settlements liable for tithe and septennial taxes.¹⁶ These settlements also appear frequently in Talmudic literature in these and other contexts.¹⁷ In any case, for our purposes, the settlement of Achziv is situated at the mouth of Nahal Achziv, in the center of which, on the steep southern cliff-face, are dozens of hanging refuge caves. In the survey of the 1980's (Be'er 1990, 35), 35 caves were explored which did not require rappelling. Some 50 caves which do require rappelling still await exploration. Pottery shards from different periods were found in the caves, including the early Roman period. However, the most impressive find was discovered on the northern bank of Nahal Kziv: exactly opposite the cluster of refuge caves the life-size figure of a man, dressed in the familiar style of the Roman army – skirt, belt and sword – was found carved into the rock (fig. 3). Recently, a helmet was also noticed. It is difficult to imagine who could have carved such a bas-relief, other than a soldier belonging to an army unit carrying out surveillance or siege on the caves. Frankel (1986, 51-52) suggested that this is a divine figure, but admitted that there is no evidence for this suggestion.

The Jewish settlement of Hanot – or Hanita –

¹⁶ Tosefta, Shevi'it 4.2 (Zuckermann edition); Palestinian Talmud, Shevi'it 6.1; 36, 2; Sifrei Deuteronomy, P. Ekev. See also the discussion about the possibility of the existence of Jewish settlement in the Western Galilee in Frankel et al 2001, 110-112.

¹⁷ Klein 1939, 90, 160, 186; Tosefta Damai 1.1 (Zuckermann edition); Palestinian Talmud, Damai, 2, 1; 22, 4 and other places.

lies to the west of a branch of the stream within the boundaries of Kibbutz Hanita. Southwest of the settlement a graveyard was discovered with graves from the Roman and Byzantine periods. Again, not surprisingly, we find 1.5 km. to the east of Hanita the flowing stream of Nahal Namer, and the refuge cave system surveyed in the 1980's by Frankel and Getzov. Now, as then, in the dozens of caves dotting the steep cliffs, evidence of human habitation can be found, including manmade plastered cisterns, gutters and channels for water collection, dug out along the cliff and reaching the cave entrance. Many pottery shards were also found, and vessels apparently dating from the time of the settlement in Hanita. (The museum in Hanita is graced with a lintel resembling those of the synagogues of the Galilee).

The last settlement on the list is Rosh Maya; it has not yet been identified (Frankel and Getzov 1997, 22), but since the remains of a settlement known to us today as Khirbet Erav – Irbin are the closest to the chain of refuge caves scattered along the cliffs of Nahal Betzet, it can be assumed that, just as every other Jewish settlement made use of the refuge caves during the frequent emergencies of the Roman Period, the Jewish inhabitants of Rosh Maya would have regarded the caves of Nahal Betzet as their own local refuge.¹⁸ Perhaps the refuge caves of Nahal Betzet should have been attributed to the Jewish inhabitants of Betzet, which also appears in the list of "forbidden settlements"; yet the distance of the caves from the settlement is too great and does not comport with previous evidence indicating close proximity between settlements and refuge caves (Frankel and Getzov 1997, 91).¹⁹

¹⁸ A dipper juglet was recently found by the author in a cave in the cliff below Khirbet Erav – Irbin; it is dated to Mamluk Period.

¹⁹ The site is located close to the Shlomi Industrial Zone.

Conclusion

This article gives a glimpse into the continuing research into besieged settlements and their fortified defenses from the time of the rebellion against Herod, or as preparation for the First Rebellion or from the Bar Kokhba Period. Many questions remain to be answered, but today we can present certain facts which have come to light:

Preparations were made for various rebellions, at a strategic level, in accordance with the specific conditions of the Galilean region (similarly to the Judean Desert) and in consideration of the simple fact that the inhabitants of the Galilee never thought in tactical offensive terms against the Roman invaders, but always planned for fortification and defense. The evidence shows that three criteria formed the basis of the plans:

1. Fortification of the settlements with walls, as in Mt. Nitai (Arbel): A solid wall, well-planned and designed, a reliable obstacle against those attempting to destroy it. And in the words of John son of Levi from Gischala, such walls brought about the attrition of those well-practiced in the art of destruction.
2. Another method of defense and survival was the digging of tunnels and burrows for the inhabitants to hide in. This method was chosen in settlements with a suitable geological rock structure. The burrows were complicated and tortuous, with few entrances and escape exits. Their purpose was for underground concealment for a limited period, with the possibility of escape. The distinctly defensive character of these concealment caves decreed the use of camouflage for entrances and exits. Therefore, sometimes we come across burrows whose entrance is via water wells or is shaped like a bottle, well camouflaged with bushes or trees. (The burrows of Khurbet Roma in the Galilee are typical of many others in the region, and are remarkably similar to those of the Judea).
3. The method discussed in this article refers to ten early Galilean settlements (the enclosed map 1 shows eleven) that have refuge cave systems within a distance of 2 km., with a natural defense of steep-walled cliffs overhanging a riverbed. The cliffs are formed of hard limestone, characteristically from the Middle Eocene Period (except for Mt. Eviatar). An annual rainfall of 600-700 mm caused the slow but steady erosion of the rocks, resulting in natural hollows, which in



Figure 3. An image of a Roman warrior carved on the rock face.

time became karstic caves. The steepness of the vertical cliffs meant that human access was possible only by rappelling (assuming that there have been no dramatic geological changes in the limestone rock since that time).

Although the technique of rope descent from cliff tops is considered to be modern and daring, it was certainly performed in ancient times, albeit in a more primitive fashion. This was proved by Herod's soldiers in Mt. Arbel, by the rebels of the Bar-Kokhba rebellion, and by Tristram who descended Mt. Arbel by rope in order to collect eagles' eggs. In fact, this is a simple technique, particularly for anybody trying to save his life from the invading Roman army. The cliff caves near the settlements gave shelter and refuge to the besieged Jews who had the foresight to prepare them in good time.

These preparations included the equipment needed for rappelling – means of tying the ropes, rope ladders and crates harnessed to the ropes. Thus the defenders were able to glide down to the mouths of the natural caves. With the use of hammer and chisel, the cave mouths were broadened or additional entrances were made, and connecting passages opened between the different levels and cave systems. The hollowed out spaces were made fit for human habitation; certain caves were prepared and plastered to serve as cisterns and channels dug out of the rock to bring the dripping rainwater to them. Ritual purification baths were also built, thus

demonstrating the deep spiritual need of the besieged defenders to abide by their religious purification laws, even in difficult times. Food supplies were lowered into the caves, and all supplies needed for surviving a long drawn-out siege.

When the enemy approached these settlements, the inhabitants packed up their most important belongings, descended into the caves by rope, detached the ropes from their anchorage, hauled in the ropes, and prepared themselves for life in the safe environment of the refuge.

The absolutely defensive nature of this method strengthens the theory that from the very start the Galileans made preparations whose primary purpose was to avoid a clash with the enemy, but to maneuver him into a situation where he would be forced to confront the besieged defenders in the complex refuge cave systems.

Knowing or assuming that the Roman army would not leave an unliquidated enclave behind them, the Galileans could presume that their chosen method of defense would delay the Roman invaders, whose progress would be blocked until they had eliminated the last of the defenders in the refuge-caves. Perhaps the purpose of the besieged was only to put obstacles in the way of the invading army, and to delay him as long as possible from advancing on further targets – the main one being Jerusalem.

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Yinon Shivtiel, Ph.D.

For more than 30 years, Yinon Shivtiel has researched the caves of Israel, and today serves as a representative of the Academic Center for Cave Research (CRC) in the Galilee. He encountered cave research when studying speleology, a field that developed in Israel from a 1982 survey carried out in the Sodom area under professor Amos Fromkin. There a dripstone cave was discovered, the biggest of its type in the world, which contained a unique natural phenomenon: stalactites and stalagmites made of pure salt (NACL). The discovery of the cave involved a hair-raising adventure, deep in the earth, in which, over an eight hour period, Dr. Shivtiel and four of his friends lost their way in a labyrinth of tunnels over five kilometers long. This became a turning point in Dr. Shivtiel's life. The drama was captured live on camera, and retelling it became his signature lecture; ever since, he has retold the events on countless podiums throughout Israel.

Over the years, Dr. Shivtiel has participated in the detection and study of dozens of dripstone caves throughout Israel: along the length of the Green Line, throughout Judea and Samaria, in the Judean desert, and in recent decades, throughout the Galilee. In his study of Galilee caves, Dr. Shivtiel found dozens of systems of cave shelters deep in the earth and cliff shelters at the head of steep cliffs. All the underground spaces were found to have been hewn by hand by the Jews of Galilee in preparation for the Roman rebellion. These discoveries became the subject of both Dr. Shivtiel's doctoral research and of thrilling tours given to a wide audience of lovers of the history and archeology of the Second Temple period in the Galilee. Some of his discoveries won complimentary headlines in the local written and televised media.

Dr. Shivtiel is a graduate of the department of biblical studies and history of the land of Israel of Bar Ilan University, and also of Haifa University where he did his graduate studies in the departments of history of the land of Israel, and literature of the sages. His M.A. thesis was on the fortifications of Josephus in the Galilee in the time of the Roman rebellion. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the subject of the cliff shelters and hiding complexes systems that he found in the Galilee over a period of many years. His dissertation integrated three disciplines: speleology, archeology and history, and was entitled " Rock Shelters and Hiding Complexes in the Galilee: The History of the Jewish Settlement in the Galilee during the Early Roman Period, Based on a Study of Rock-Cut Caves".

His doctoral studies were done in the department of the land of Israel studies of Bar Ilan University under the supervision of the Late Prof. Hanan Eshel and Dr. Boaz Zisso. Dr. Shivtiel has publicized dozens of articles and presented at many conferences. He lectures at Zefat Academic College and Ohalo College in Katzrin and coordinates the local CRC, all of which institutes lie in the Galilee.