GALILEE PREHISTORY PROJECT

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Update on the Marj Rabba Publication Project

Six seasons of excavation and survey produced tens of thousands of chipped and ground stone pieces, fragmentary ceramic vessels, animal remains, soil samples, plants and seeds, coins, walls, hearths, and much, much more. Along with the artifacts and samples are the daily notes, digital records, maps, photographs, and plans, which together comprise a comprehensive record of the Chalcolithic (4500–3600 BCE) at Marj Rabba (2009–2014). Over the past year Senior Research Associate Yorke Rowan, with Research Associates Morag Kersel and Austin "Chad" Hill, concentrated their efforts on bringing together all of the evidence of the daily life at Marj Rabba.

Marj Rabba is a Chalcolithic site approximately 8 ha in size located in the hills of the Lower Galilee of modern-day Israel. Based on the results of six seasons of excavation, a geophysical survey, and a pedestrian survey, Marj Rabba may be one of the largest Chalcolithic villages in the Galilee known to date. Analyses suggest at least three distinct phases of occupation characterized by fragments of mudbrick and stone walls, well-constructed, multiple course rectilinear buildings, stone circles (perhaps silo bases) and other, smaller features. Large quantities of ceramic, lithic, faunal, and paleobotanical remains, in tandem with the architectural evidence, argue for an occupation by sedentary farmers carrying out mixed agriculture with an emphasis on the production of grain (Price et al. 2013; Rowan and Kersel 2014). Foregoing the traditional excavation/survey field season, the summer of 2016 was dedicated to analysis, processing, documenting, and preparing the results of the excavations and survey at Marj Rabba for publication. Rowan and Kersel spent long summer days in Jerusalem at the W. F. Albright Institute for Archaeological Research with the excavated materials and records (fig. 1).

Figure 1. Marj Rabba flint analysis at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (photo: M. Kersel)

With former NELC/Anthropology undergraduate Max Price, now a lecturer at MIT, Yorke and Research Associates Hill and Kersel published an article examining the possible ritual roles gazelles played during the Chalcolithic, a period which witnessed a decrease in hunting and a greater reliance on agriculture and domesticated animals. "Gazelles, Liminality, and Chalcolithic Ritual: A Case Study from Marj Rabba, Israel" in the *Bulletin*

of the American Schools of Oriental Research 376 (2016): 7–27 addresses the unusual discovery of burned gazelle feet in the well-constructed building (Building 1, on the cover of that issue of *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*) at Marj Rabba, which may have been used for ritual purposes. This paper adds to discussions around the importance of gazelles during the Chalcolithic period. During 2016–2017 Hill, Rowan, and Kersel presented the results of this analysis season at the Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research.

Future Directions for the Galilee Prehistory Project

With an eye to the future, and to the overarching goals of the Galilee Prehistory Project (GPP) — an examination of the dramatic changes in the relationship of villages, ritual sites, and mortuary practices during the Chalcolithic in the Galilee, a virtually unexamined region for this period — summer 2016 was also used to identify the next potential site for investigation. A goal of the GPP is to investigate a series of sites in the Galilee in order to set a base line and establish the variability for the region during the Chalcolithic. This, in turn, will contextualize why this period witnessed dramatic changes such as rapid agricultural expansion, mounting evidence for ritual practices, and intensification in craft production. Gathering data from this region will allow comparisons with the Chalcolithic assemblages excavated at sites in the Negev, the Golan, the Jordan Valley, and other lands bordering the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. As a result further interpretations of subsistence economies during the Chalcolithic period will be better understood. To meet these goals another comparative site was needed. But would a site be identified?

In "How Do You Find a Site?" (*News & Notes* #228 Winter 2016) Rowan, Kersel, and Hill discussed the criteria used to decide where to excavate/survey more ephemeral prehistoric sites, like those focused on by the Galilee Prehistory Project. Archival and historic map evidence, oral interviews, previous pedestrian surveys, aerial images, and survey all provide potential clues and insights on finding "the next big site." Sometimes single-period Chalcolithic sites are discernible on the surface, with visible walls, but more often these sites are invisible from the surface, obscured by orchards, agriculture, and soil overburden as a result of repeated flooding and deposits of sedimentation.

During the summer of 2016, through a series of conversations with various archaeologists, Rowan and Kersel identified a series of sites on the eastern side of the Upper Galilee region with potential for a future field investigation. A focus on a different Galilean environmental zone would provide an excellent comparison of roughly contemporaneous sites in the region. Often identified in advance of development (housing, road construction, industrial expansion, etc.), these sites were recognized in previous pedestrian surveys carried out by archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). Short reports and publications were consulted, in addition to meetings with archaeologists, like Yosef Stepansky. Rowan and Kersel visited Stepansky in his home to discuss the "best candidates" for future exploration. After consulting with Stepansky, Rowan and Kersel visited eight sites over three days (Ahihud, Ein Aka, Horvat Duvshan, Horvat Utza, Khirbet Eli, Site 61, Tel Nes/Tell es-Sanjak, and Zippori) on the eastern side of the Upper and Lower Galilee. Many of the sites are located on part of the Via Maris (Latin: "way of the sea") the ancient trade route between Egypt and the northern areas of Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Syria. Of the eight sites visited, two were assessed as more promising, while other sites were unappealing due to their close proximity to roads, disturbed nature, and lack of landscape integrity.

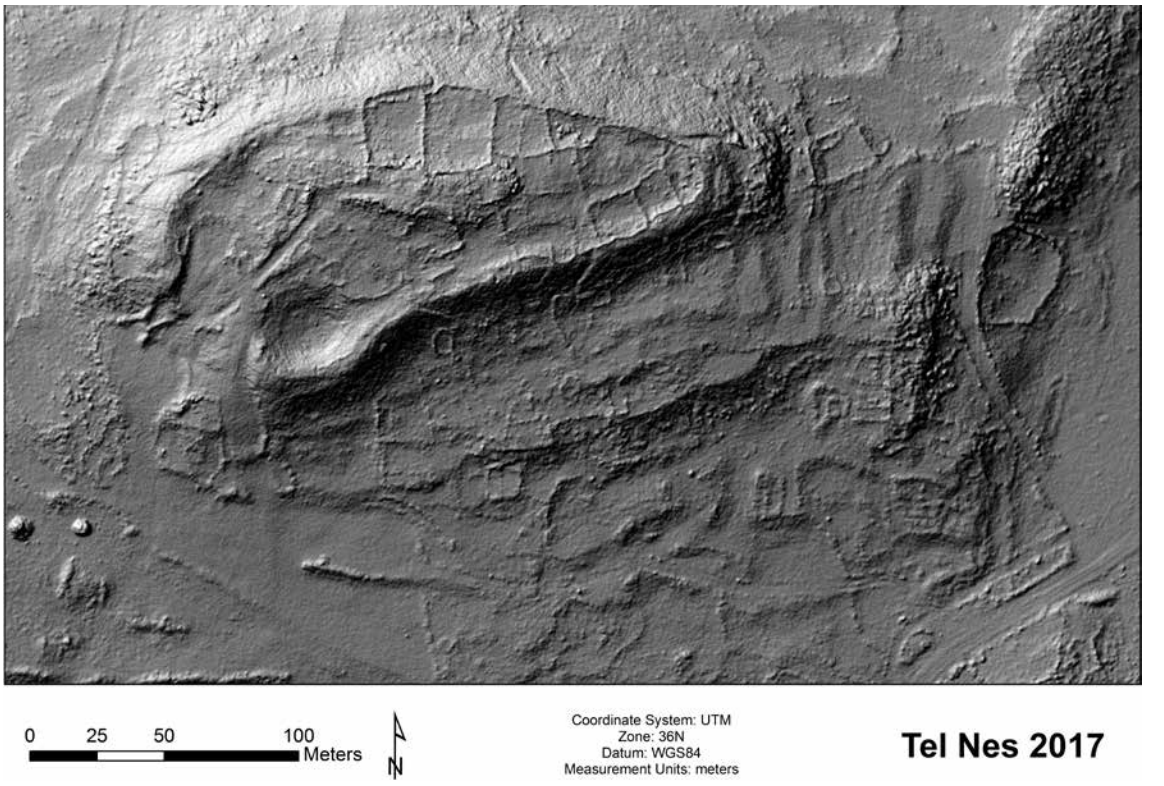

Figure 2. Orthophotograph of Tel Nes (Tell es-Sanjak)

Tel Nes, Tell es Sanjak, Tell es Sanjaq (Coordinates Zone 36N, 739400E, 3649500N)

At Tel Nes (Tell es-Sanjak, Arabic) a volcanic cone prominently stands out in the surrounding landscape (fig. 2). The site is a natural hill rather than a typical anthropogenic tell, with sherds from the Chalcolithic and Iron Age periods scattered on the summit and its slopes. Portions of rectangular buildings, which Rowan and Kersel examined during site visits, are evident from aerial photographs. The volcanic cone provides a good overview of the surrounding area and there appear to be local sources of water. Fortification walls at the site have been ascribed to the Iron Age (Stepansky pers. comm. 2012). The original IAA pedestrian survey identified retaining walls, building foundations, terraces, courtyards, and the remains of rectangular buildings (fig. 3), some attributed to the Chalcolithic period based on the surface collection of

Figure 3. Tel Nes walls on site surface of slope (photo: M. Kersel)

Figure 4. Overview of walls visible on surface of Horbat Duvshan (photo: M. Kersel).

ceramics. The IAA survey recorded approximately ten buildings, whose walls survived to a height of 1–2 basalt stone courses (Stepansky 2014). The combination of a natural landscape conducive to inhabitation, a local water source, intensive survey results, Chalcolithic ceramic distribution, and visible walls/rooms all said "excavate here." Our next report for the Oriental Institute *Annual Report* will detail our exploratory field investigations at this site.

Horvat Duvshan (El-'Assaliyeh, Arabic) (Coordinates Zone 36N, 739000E, 3647900N)

The site lies in the center of the Korazim Plateau, along the Via Maris. In 1978 members of Kibbutz Kefar Ha-Nasi identified the remains of almost fifty structures, visible from the surface (fig. 4). A later survey carried out by Stepansky (2005) from 1990 to 1993 estimated the site of Horvat Duvshan (the name is a reference to honey or honey production) to be 250 dunams (ca. 25 ha) in size with predominantly Chalcolithic pottery recovered from the surface. These findings were supported by Smithline (2013), who conducted limited salvage excavations (three 5 × 5 meter squares) in the northern part of the site, and by a 2012 intensive pedestrian survey in advance of road development on behalf of the IAA (Zingboym 2013). The Smithline excavations at Horvat Duvshan revealed typical "Golan" ceramics, although petrographic analysis suggest that the vessels were manufactured in close proximity to the site (Smithline 2013, p. 33). Environmental conditions are not conducive to the preservation of organic materials, but the extant walls and Chalcolithic sherds visible on the surface (figs.

Figure 5. Yorke Rowan on wall at Horbat Duvshan (photo: M. Kersel)

Figure 6. Surface collection of Chalcolithic artifacts (photo: M. Kersel)

5, 6), previous excavation and survey results, and the presence of a nearby water source ('Ein Duvshan) make this site a promising candidate for future excavation.

CONCLUSION

The Galilee presents particular challenges when searching for Chalcolithic sites for comparative evidence to contemporaneous sites from other regions. As a region that receives greater rainfall, preservation of the archaeological record is less ideal than more arid zones to the south and east. This also results in greater movement of sediments, and encourages the bioturbation created by plant growth and burrowing animals that directly impacts preservation. In addition, some ideal locations for prehistoric villages and hamlets remained appealing to builders in later periods, such that Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic remains are frequently found in the basal layers of tell sites. As a consequence, the presence of material culture from these early prehistoric periods may lack its original context. Taking into consideration the various environmental and human factors affecting the landscape and recognizing a lacuna in our understanding of the Chalcolithic period from this region, the GPP is exploring a number of sites in the Galilee in order to build a greater corpus of knowledge on the transition from sparse, early agricultural hamlets and villages to the profusion of larger, more economically complex Chalcolithic villages.

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