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ARTIFICIAL CAVES CUT INTO CLIFF TOPS IN THE GALILEE AND THEIR HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract

During the research and documentation of subterranean caves in the Galilee region in Israel, a phenomenon was discovered which has shed light on the use of the Galilee cliff caves. Natural caves were further quarried and prepared by Galilee Jews as an organized enterprise to ensure their safety during times of distress during the Early Roman Period. Up until now, it has been accepted in research to distinguish between “hideout complexes” and “refuge caves”. Hideout complexes are subterranean spaces, artificially hewn deep underground, made up of winding narrow tunnels inclined at sharp angles and constructed at different levels. These were used as underground hiding places during emergency periods and even as home bases for guerrilla warfare. The hideout complexes had been quarried and were primarily discovered under the remains of Jewish settlements in Judea and in the Galilee. Refuge caves were distinguished from hideout complexes in that they were natural caves which were formed by karst dissolution processes at the peaks of high cliffs both in the Judean desert and in the Binyamin hills. Jews from various locations sought sanctuary in these refuge caves which were usually far from their homes. Findings discovered in Judea, both in refuge caves and in hideout complexes have usually indicated that they belonged to the Bar Kokhba revolt period (132 – 136 AD) although quite some time ago, discoveries in both types of caves testified to their use during the Great Revolt (66 – 70 AD). During a survey of caves discovered on the Galilee cliff-tops, another type of cave similar to refuge caves was found, but this type was clearly different in terms of the locations of the caves: while the refuge caves were far from every Jewish settlement, the Galilee caves were close to Jewish settlements and there was actually a straight geographical line between a settlement and the steep cave in its vicinity. In surveys I conducted in all of the caves, my colleges and I discovered findings connecting the caves to the Jewish settlement close to it. Due to this characteristic, which distinguished them from the refuge caves, I chose to call them “cliff shelters”. All of these cliff shelters had been quarried inside. We found plastered cisterns, ritual baths, potsherds, coins, storage jars, and other items in the caves. These helped to date the work done on the caves to the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. In this article, I will discuss a number of prominent Jewish settlements and their connection to the cliff shelters nearby, and present salient findings and the historical evidence of Josephus Flavius who hints at the use made by Galilee Jews of the cliff shelters during the Great Revolt.

Keywords: man-made caves, cliff shelters, The Great Jewish Revolt, Josephus Flavius.

Riassunto

Durante la ricerca di documentazione sulle cavità sotterranee della Galilea, in Israele, è stata fatta una scoperta che getta luce sull'uso delle grotte in parete nella regione. Le cavità naturali furono scavate e preparate dagli ebrei di Galilea secondo un progetto coordinato al fine di garantirsi la sicurezza nelle epoche difficili, durante i primi tempi del dominio romano. Fino ad oggi era consuetudine tra i ricercatori fare una distinzione tra “complesso di nascondigli” e “grotte-rifugio”. Un complesso di nascondigli è uno spazio sotterraneo artificiale scavato in profondità nel terreno, consistente in stretti tunnel serpeggianti, inclinati e a forte angolatura, che si sviluppa su più livelli. Questi complessi venivano usati come nascondigli sotterranei nei periodi di emergenza e anche come basi per azioni di guerriglia. Essi sono stati scavati e scoperti soprattutto sotto i resti di insediamenti ebraici nella Giudea e nella Galilea. Le grotte-rifugio si distinguono dai complessi di nascondigli in quanto cavità naturali formatesi con processi carsici sulle cime di alte pareti, sia nel deserto della Giudea sia nelle colline del Binyamin. Ebrei di varie località cercarono rifugio in queste cavità situate generalmente lontano dalle proprie abitazioni. I ritrovamenti effettuati sia nelle grotte-rifugio sia nei complessi di nascondigli indicano un'appartenenza al periodo della rivolta di Bar Kokhba (132-136 d.C.), anche se parecchio tempo fa alcune scoperte in entrambi i tipi di cavità suggerirono un loro possibile uso anche durante la Grande Rivolta (66-70 d.C.). Nel corso di una ricognizione nelle cavità scoperte sulle cime di alcune pareti in Galilea, è stato trovato un altro tipo di cavità simile alle grotte-rifugio, ma nettamente differente come posizione. Mentre le grotte-rifugio erano lontane dagli insediamenti, le cavità della Galilea erano loro vicine e vi era anzi uno stretto collegamento geografico tra un insediamento e le vicine cavità in parete. Durante le ricognizioni effettuate da me e dal mio Istituto sono stati trovati elementi che collegano le cavità ai vicini insediamenti ebraici. In base a questa caratteristica, che le distingue dalle grotte-rifugio, ho dato loro la denominazione di “rifugi in parete”. Tutti questi rifugi in parete presentano all'interno tracce di scavo. In essi sono state trovate cisterne intonacate, bagni rituali, alloggiamenti per bestiame, monete, vasi per conservare le derrate alimentari ed altri oggetti. Questi reperti hanno aiutato a ricondurre il lavoro eseguito nelle cavità al periodo ellenistico e agli inizi del periodo romano. Il presente lavoro presenta un certo numero di importanti insediamenti ebraici e la loro relazione con i rifugi in parete nelle vicinanze, presenta i ritrovamenti più significativi e analizza le informazioni storiche fornite da Giuseppe Flavio, che accenna all'uso di rifugi in parete fatto dagli ebrei della Galilea durante la Grande rivolta.

Parole chiave: cavità artificiali, rifugi in parete, Grande rivolta ebraica, Giuseppe Flavio.

Foreword

Josephus Flavius is considered the most important historian to document the entire history of the Great Jewish Revolt against the Romans in real time (the first century AD). The revolt culminated in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the most important Jewish ritual site. It should be noted that this was about 35 years after the Galilee activity and the Jerusalem crucifixion of Jesus, who is mentioned with great respect in one of Josephus's books (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV, 416- 430). Many researchers have expressed their opinions about the reliability or lack of reliability of Josephus's descriptions. This article has been expedited by the recently developed scientific ability to read his writings carefully and learn about the geopolitical environment he describes, while relating it to occasional archeological findings in Israel and the ability to date these findings. This research method has lately become the nexus where historians and archeologists meet, leading to the development of a common track which was unknown in the past. As a researcher who combines a historical approach and an archeological pursuit, I would like to add an additional aspect to this meeting, the speleological aspect, that is, the study of caves. During the discovery and research of man-made caves which began during the 1970s, it became clear that, in the areas known as the Judean plain and the Judean desert, many dozens of caves, both man-made and natural, had been used as hideout complexes for Jews during their revolts against Rome (KLONER & TEPPER, 1987; KLONER & ZISSU, 2006; SHIVTIEL, 2009, 2011a). Research has distinguished between hideout complexes and refuge caves. Hideout complexes are subterranean spaces, hewn deep into the ground, consisting of narrow winding tunnels inclined at sharp angles and constructed at different levels. These were used as underground hiding places during emergency periods and even as home bases for guerrilla warfare (GIHON, 1983, 30-42). The underground tunnels were quarried primarily under the remains of Jewish settlements in Judea and the Galilee, where other scholars and I have recently identified seventy hideout complexes (SHIVTIEL, 2011a, 8–26). These are differentiated from caves termed “refuge caves”, which are natural caves formed at the peaks of high cliffs, found for the most part in the Judean desert. Jews from various locations fled to these caves which were sometimes far from their homes. The findings from both of these cave types usually testify that they belonged to the period of the Bar Kokhva revolt, the second revolt against the Romans which took place from 132-136 AD (ESHTEL & AMIT, 1998; ESHTEL & PORAT, 2009).

I would like here to discuss another unique phenomenon in the Galilee which I investigated when I and Vladimir Boslov (Israeli Cave Research Center) found hundreds of natural caves, the insides of which had been hewn and prepared for Jewish refugees, especially in preparation for the Roman invasion to crush the Great Jewish Revolt. These caves are located in very steep cliffs, very close to Jewish settlements. For this reason,



Fig.1: mount Arbel. Cliff shelters.

Fig.1: monte Arbel. Rifugi in parete.

they have been termed “cliff shelters”.

Back to Josephus: In two of the sources written by Josephus – *The Jewish War* and the *Life of Flavius Josephus*, Josephus noted that, when he arrived in the Galilee as its chief commander just prior to the outbreak of the Great Revolt, he fortified 18 of its settlements while the 19th was fortified by John son of Levi (Yohanan Ben Levi). Five of the settlements which he apparently fortified have been surveyed or excavated by various archeologists. He mentioned Tiberias, Arbel, Capharecho, (in *The Life of Josephus*, Kfar Ata), Akhbaron Rock (in *The Life of Josephus*, Akhbari), and Meroth. One site - Kfar Ata or Caphercikho remains unidentified. In this article I will reinforce those who maintain that this site fits a description of Huquk, a Jewish settlement which has recently been excavated. In the two sources mentioning the five fortified settlements, Josephus uses expressions describing the fortifications of villages as “very rocky”, and mentions the fortifications of the “Arbel caves”, fortification of “Akhbara Rock” (with emphasis on the “rock”), and he even notes that “he built walls about the caves near the lake of Gennessar” (*The War of the Jews B*, 572-574; *The Life of Josephus*, 187-188). I would like to suggest that in the five sites containing the same type of cliff shelters, these served as one of the defense methods of the Galilee Jews during the Second Temple period and particularly, we may assume that these provided one of the defensive means that Josephus was referring to when he came to “fortify the Galilee”. Their identification with what Josephus described has become clear. As these settlements were simultaneously reported as being fortified by Josephus, this paper will deal with the locations of the fortifications about which information in the field is meager. It should be emphasized that an assumption of the research investigating the fortifications takes into account both the lack of military experience of the person taking credit for the fortifications and the short time available to Josephus from the time of his arrival in the Galilee to the time he was taken prisoner by the Romans – only seven months. It becomes clear that a considerable number of settlements mentioned

in Josephus's writings and those not mentioned, were located in close proximity to steep cliffs in which there were natural caves created in the rock by karst dissolution processes. What was unique about them was that most could only be reached by rappelling or by climbing up to them with the aid of ropes or high ladders. For this reason we called these caves adjacent to Jewish settlements, "cliff shelters" in order to distinguish them from "refuge caves". All of the cliff shelters which have been investigated by me and my colleague were prepared for habitation and have visible signs of excavation and expansion. In many of the cliff shelters, pitchers, pottery shards, water cisterns, and even ritual baths (*mikvas*) were found as well as various additional findings which testified to their use during the Second Temple period. As these cliff shelters were located at points so steep and difficult to access, to the point of being life threatening, I would like to propose that anyone who was capable of preparing these sites had to have been in great distress and in a life threatening situation; this would have especially suited the era of the Great Revolt. From the impression received from the descriptions of Josephus, it may be assumed that the threat of death hovered over the Galilee Jews from the moment Vespasian's and Titus's Roman forces invaded the Galilee at the beginning of the Great Revolt (RAPAPORT, 1984).

The richest documentation of the findings was found in the cliff shelters of three central locations: Mount Arbel-Nitai, Nahal Amud and Sela Akhbara, sites adjacent to settlements which Josephus claimed that he fortified on the eve of the Great Revolt. In the cliff shelters of these sites, only equipment and articles necessary for existence and survival were found. The findings provide a source of comparison with other cliff shelters (Nahal Hazor, Nahal Dishon, Nahal Aviv, Nahal Betzet, Nahal Namer and Nahal Kziv) in which similar articles were found (SHIVTIEL, 2004, 2008).

Cliff Shelters on Mount Arbel-Nitai

Mount Arbel and Mount Nitai are separated by the Arbel gorge, but from a geographical-geological standpoint they are considered one cliff, connected in earlier geological periods. The cliff shelters on Mount Arbel (Fig. 1) and on Mount Nitai (Fig. 2) are, for the most part, arranged at the surface of the cliffs in complexes of four to seven caves which have been cleared for use. Each of these complexes is located between two steep rocky surfaces, and access to them from the side is difficult and often impossible except by rappelling or by a difficult climb with the aid of technical means. Over 300 of the caves served as cliff shelters. These were natural caves which had shown clear signs of having been prepared and in which there were findings testifying to human activity, in particular during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods (LEIBNER, 2004). For about 150 of the cliff shelters at these two sites, access was possible only by rope or by using ladders or other means which will be detailed below. On both sides of the mountains, the cliff shelters are spread over a wide area: 1.5 km in the case of Mount Nitai,

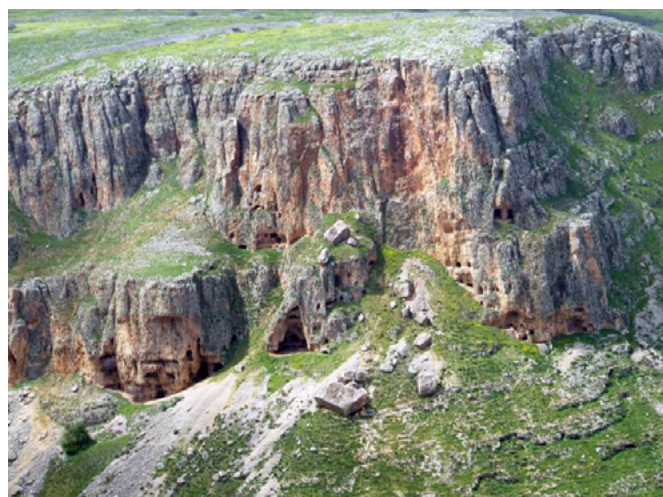


Fig. 2: mount Nitai. Cliff shelters and the wall above them.

Fig. 2: monte Nitai. Rifugi in parete e rupe soprastante.

and 2.5 km at Mount Arbel. The openings of the caves on both sides of the cliff face the gorge. In various places it was found that there were passages to caves at different levels (Fig. 3), through chimneys. In the Arbel shelters, about 35 small plastered cisterns were found to collect water. These were fed from hewn gutters which drained rainwater from the peak of the cliff or from the stalactites which dripped straight into small cisterns intentionally dug below them. In five of the caves, *mikvas* had been hewn (REICH, 2010; SHIVTIEL, 2009, 2012; Fig. 5). On the entrance posts of 17 steep caves, tabs were cut to enable ropes to be tied and used for rappelling and climbing. About 90 of the caves had niches for oil lamps, and 17 pits had been quarried for storage. Vessels for stockpiling and storage had been brought to most of the refuge caves, along with cooking pots whose broken shards were found scattered in the caves. Alongside 16 cliff shelters facing spatial observation areas, open rock ledges had been quarried as vantage points. Within those cliff shelters which were accessible only by rappelling, many pottery shards from the early Roman period were found, while in caves on the mountain slope, which were accessible by a difficult climb (but without the need for ropes), ceramics from the early Roman and Byzantine periods were found as well as those of later periods (LEIBNER, 2004). At the mouths of two of the cliff shelters, two Bodkin arrowheads, largely in use by the Roman army, were found (STIBEL, 2007; Fig. 6). In the caves on the slope of the cliff, a Hellenistic coin was found issued in Tyre during the rule of Antiochus VII (138-129 BCE), and a coin issued during the reign of Antiochus IX (115-96 BCE). In addition, eight coins were found dating from the rule of Alexander Yannai (c.103-76 BCE; LEIBNER, 2004) and a coin from the reign of Anastasius Caesar (dated 495 AD). In a survey of the extremely steep cliff shelters which required the use of climbing and rappelling equipment, in three of the cliff shelters, five coins were discovered near water cisterns: one from the days of Yohanan Hyrcanus (129-104 BCE), two coins dated 80 BCE during the reign of Alexander Yannai, and one from Tyre, dating from the first century BCE. On a stony plateau of Mount Nitai,



Fig 3: mount Arbel. Cliff shelters at different levels.
Fig. 3: monte Arbel. Rifugi in parete a varie altezze.

researchers working at different times discovered a wall with nine guard towers along its length. The wall was documented during the 1980s by YUVAL SHACHAR and YIGAL TEPPER, and by the Author in 2007. The wall is 286 meters long and remains of the wall's nine towers are clearly visible on the ground. Seen from the top of the Arbel cliff, the wall appears in the form of a bow (TEPPER & SHACHAR, 1992; SHIVTIEL, 2009). Three sections of the wall were excavated in 2010 by UZI LEIBNER who identified a number of stages, of which the most prominent dated from the early and mid-Roman periods (LEIBNER, pers. comm.). Two clear characteristics support the possibility that the wall was built to defend those to the east of it, that is, to protect those who were fleeing to the cliff shelters: the first is that all nine guard towers of the wall were built equidistant from one another and all face west, which was the only direction from which advancing military forces could be expected. The second characteristic is the early Roman material which was found both around the wall, and after its partial excavation. It seems clear, in my opinion, that the Mount Nitai wall, its location and the findings match the written description of Josephus that "he built a wall to defend the caves around the Lake of Genessar".

The Second Temple Period Jewish Settlements in the Region of Mount Arbel

In the Arbel region, two early Jewish settlements have been discovered, the centers of which were synagogues

of imposing appearance. The first was found during the 1980s at the top of the Arbel heights (north of Moshav Arbel), by ZVI ILAN and AVRAHAM IZDARECHET and was excavated during two seasons in 2012-2013 by BENNY AROBAS (ILAN & IZDARECHET, 1988). The second synagogue was excavated for a number of seasons beginning in 2006 by UZI LEIBNER and it is at the foot of Mount Nitai, on the southern side of the Arab village, Wadi Hamam. In the opinion of the archeologist who led the excavation, the Jewish settlement at Wadi Hamam was at its peak at the beginning of the early Roman period. It appears that there is a clear connection between the Jews who fled from the settlements of Arbel and the cliff shelters of Mount Arbel, as well as between those escaping from Wadi Hamam and the cliff shelters of Mount Nitai. The large number of cliff shelters at these two sites (about 400) may also have served the inhabitants of Migdal which is well known to have taken an active part in the Great Revolt. Thus, it is possible that the inhabitants of the Jewish settlement of Arbel prepared the caves at Mount Arbel and the residents of the Jewish settlement located at the opening section of Wadi Hamam prepared the cliff shelters of Mount Nitai as well as the protective wall which defended these shelters from Roman attack.

The Cliff Shelters of Nahal Amud (the Amud Gorge) and the Jewish Settlements of the Surrounding Area

A documentation survey of the cliff shelters at Nahal Amud was conducted from the central part of the Amud Gorge which starts at Highway 65 continuing to the lower part of Nahal Amud, crossing the Hukuk-Migdal road (Highway 8077). In this framework, 304 caves were surveyed, of which 250 were defined as cliff shelters. All of the caves are clearly spread out northwest of the rock pillar (Amud) which gives Nahal Amud its name. The beginning of the complex of cliff shelters at Nahal Amud is a group of caves cited on path marking maps as the *Shovach* caves, and from there, the refuges continue to the northwest until the wadi junction with highway 65. Along this path, three large complexes have been cleared and prepared exceptionally well: the first is the lower *Shovach* complex and, at a distance of about two kilometers, the upper *Shovach* complex, and a half kilometer further on, the *Shavshevet* (weathervane) complex. Among these three complexes, there are additional refuge caves, some of which were prepared as observation posts and rock shelters and these are characterized by walls constructed at their mouths. The distribution of the refuges and prominent complexes lend further support to the possibility that the population who prepared the cliff shelters resided in the Jewish settlements in this vicinity. A hideout complex, discovered by the Author in 2012-2013, leads to Huquq, whose synagogue has recently been uncovered. One of the tunnels leads under the synagogue. Other area settlements include the ancient villages known today as Tel Nashi, Shune, and Horvat Kur, where another synagogue has recently been uncovered. The village of Kur is located east of Moshav

Kahal, which is located above the Amud Gorge, and south of it; an ancient path descends at a point where the rock is especially steep. Between a small crevice a series of hewn stairs, straight to the central complex of the cliff shelters in the Amud Gorge.

The Lower Shovach Cliff Shelter Complex

The lower *Shovach* complex, in which the lowest caves do not require rappelling or rope climbing, was discovered in archeological excavations during the 1960s by a group from the University of Chicago. They identified this complex as a prehistoric site attributed to the Mousterian culture of the Middle Paleolithic period (BINFORD, 1966). In the upper caves of this cluster, which we reached by rappelling or by alpine climbing from the gorge bed, we also discovered findings from the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. The complex of about 30 upper caves appear to be hewn when viewed from the outside (Fig. 7). From within they all shared the characteristics previously cited for cliff shelters. On the southern rock wall of the complex, at a height of over 30 meters from the ground, a perpendicular wide swath of wall has been plastered in grey and this can clearly be seen by a viewer standing at the foot of the vertical wall. Only when climbing the stone wall towards the exposed plaster can one see four graded channels under it, cut into the rock in order to catch water streaming down from the top of the cliff. The water flowed from the top of the cliff, straight over the plastered swath and collected in the channels. These led to a hidden small cistern between two cracks in the rock. The cistern was oval and well covered with grey hydraulic plaster. At the center of the cistern, a kind of plastered seat was hewn. It is quite possible that this is a *mikve* although such a facility at this level would be unique. Above the exposed plastered section, on the face of the rock, a concealed cliff shelter was found which contained a large *pithos* (a large earthenware jar) measuring 1.3 x 0.50 meters with an inner diameter of 0.47 m. The *pithos* was identified by Motti Aviam as a GCW type (Galilean Coarse Ware) which characterized the Hellenistic period but was also known to have been in use at the beginning of the Roman period.

The Upper Shovach Cliff Shelter Complex

The second complex (upper *Shovach*) is located about two kilometers northwest of the lower *Shovach* complex and is similar to it in morphological form and style. It is the most complex cluster discovered up to now, both in the Amud Gorge and in other Galilee sites which have been investigated (Fig. 8). Reaching the caves also requires using alpine climbing methods and rappelling from the peak of the cliff. Entry to a few of the cliff shelters in these two complexes requires first rappelling from a height of 60 meters, finding a crag to anchor an additional rope and moving across the vertical wall horizontally towards the complex, located in the depths of a concealed rock groove protected by a rock roof of large dimensions standing out from the mouths of the caves which were prepared as refuges. Those who prepared the caves evidently reached them



Fig. 4: a water cistern filled via stalactites.

Fig. 4: cisterna ricoperta di stalattiti.

by climbing from the cliff bed, facing the incline. Climbing was done by inserting wooden pegs, some of which are still in situ. We think that the first climber tied ropes to the pegs and secured his body, then continued by climbing upwards while pulling his body up from below. When the first climber reached the cave complex at the middle level, tabs were hewn to enable ropes to be tied and the ropes were then dropped to the bottom



Fig. 5: mount Arbel. A ritual bath (purification pool).

Fig. 5: monte Arbel. Bagno rituale (vasca di purificazione).



Fig. 6: mount Arbel. An arrowhead.
Fig. 6: monte Arbel. Punta di freccia.

of the cliff. The others ascended by using the ropes to climb and supporting their feet on the pegs. From the middle level, quarried chimneys were hewn to connect the upper levels where most of the work was done to prepare the caves so that they would be impossible to capture. Most of the arrangement of the inner cliff shelter in this complex was entirely camouflaged from anyone who was looking up from the caves at the foot of the slope between the vertical cliff and the gorge. The viewer from the gorge sees only a network of natural cavities whose openings face the slope. The upper *Shovach* complex is composed of three levels connected by chimneys or narrow rock shelves. Passage from one cave to another requires adhering to the rock wall and supporting one's body with projections of natural rock in order to avoid falling into the chasm. The first level was used as a kind of "entrance" from which wooden pegs projected towards the cliff and downwards. Climbing on them was extremely dangerous. The entrance level was composed of four quarried hollow areas and a narrow chimney through which one could climb to the second level. The chimney climb was about eight meters, and pushing one's body up through the chimney was difficult and could only be done with one's arms stretched up, holding on to projections which were remains of rock left from quarrying the chimney. The climber pushed his body up by the tips of his toes. His body was pressed tightly within the walls of the chimney.

On the second level, a hollow area was quarried with a large granary storage pit at its center. On the northern side of the space, a square opening had been cut leading to an additional quarried room (8x8 m) whose inner side had been hewn into the shape of a bow. At the southern edge, a window with no threshold had been cut which provided a triangular observation post in the direction of the Huquq heights and the ridges of the Lower Galilee. We measured the height from this level down to the floor of the incline at 30 meters.

The third level hangs between the peak of the cliff and the vertical wall of rock to the foot of the incline. The height from this level to the bed of the gorge is about

40 meters. The hollowed caves on the third level are connected by hewn tunnels meticulously executed, very similar to the quarries of the subterranean hideout complexes discovered both in the Galilee and in the Benjamin region (SHIVTIEL, 2011b). The longest tunnel connects the innermost cave with the cave which looks out over the gorge, and is 17 meters in length. This tunnel reaches three observation windows which overlook the Huquq heights and the Amud Gorge. The thresholds of the three windows are connected to the rock ceiling. On the threshold of the middle window, adjacent to the passage tunnel, a triangular step was cut whose vertex is in the shape of a funnel leading to the gaping chasm. The ceiling of third cave at the end of the tunnel is covered with active stalactites. Some of the dripping water flows from a hewn channel into a small cistern whose side wall faces the chasm. On this side, a triangular step has been cut. It should be noted that except for pottery shards which have been identified with certainty as belonging to the early Roman period, there have been no other findings in this complex. This perhaps testifies that those being sheltered in the caves did not surrender and/or were not killed but left the caves alive and did not leave any equipment behind.

The Shavshevet (Weathervane) Cliff Shelter Complex

We called the third complex the *Shavshevet* complex because it is located exactly opposite Ein Shavshevet, the spring marked on the trail maps of the Amud Gorge region. The *Shavshevet* cave complex is bell-shaped and characterized by a network of 20 shelter caves which have been quarried above the vertical rock wall, and some which are 20 meters in height from the step formed in the gorge slope can be climbed without the assistance of special equipment. Even below the bottom of the vertical rock wall facing northwards, one can distinguish long deep hewn slits. These were cut horizontally on the face of the wall. They appear to be niches on which scaffolding was placed both to quarry



Fig. 7: Nahal Amud. Cliff shelters, lower Shovach.
Fig.7: Nahal Amud: Rifugi in parete, complesso inferiore di Shovach.

the refuges and to reach them (Fig. 9). On the inner side of the bell shape, a large cistern was quarried and lined in grey plaster and above it, a perpendicular channel seven meters long which opened alongside a cluster of stalactites formed in a karst crack hidden in the rock, from which water from the stalactites flowed into the cistern. Above the channel, there is a narrow rock shelf upon which a number of rooms were quarried which are visible only after climbing into the hewn channel. South of the *Shavshevet* complex at a distance of 15 meters, a quarried depression was discovered at the center of a large precipice, at a height of 20 meters. it appears to be a lookout point for only one person. Inside, a GCW (Galilee Coarse Ware) type water pitcher was found, estimated to date from the Hellenistic Roman periods. Below the *Shavshevet* cliff shelters, 38 flattened arrowheads were found of a type typically used by the Roman army (STIBEL, 2007). In the Amud gorge complexes, the following findings were discovered: in the steep rock walls leading to the cliff shelters, 20 climbing pegs; hewn depressions for scaffolding; metal digging tools; two storage jars; 37 hewn rock shelves as lookout points; 34 grain storage pits and benches, 25 cisterns, some of which were quarried out under active stalactites. Also found were rock sheltering, constructed defensive walls, fragments of cooking pots, storage vessels and receptacles, and a number of coins from the reign of Alexander Yannai. Those of the findings found in the cliff shelters and in their vicinity which were dated to the Hellenistic - early Roman periods reflect the period of activity of the Jewish settlements Huquq, Horvat Shuna, Tel Nashi and Horvat Kur. It should of course be noted that the preparation of the caves may have begun during the Hellenistic period, when the Jewish population was increasing in these areas of the Galilee (LEIBNER, 2012).

Cliff Shelters in Akhbara Rock

Akhbara Rock is located at the center of the Akhbara gorge, spilling out into the Amud gorge, and it is adjacent to the Jewish settlement of Akhbara whose ruins and synagogue have already been surveyed by researchers and archeologists (SHIVTIEL, 2009). The Akhbara Rock cliff is the highest vertical cliff in the Galilee, reaching height of 132 meters (Fig. 10). Over the surface of the cliff, 127 shepherds caves and cliff shelters are scattered. Most of the caves which were prepared as cliff shelters are in the northern, steeper part of the cliff, and access is possible only by rappelling from the peak of the cliff. In this part of the cliff, we found a cluster of cliff shelters quarried on three levels connected by chimneys. In every cluster, observation point windows face northwest and some look southwards towards the Akhbara gorge (spilling into the Amud gorge). On the top level of the complex, a room was quarried measuring 5.6 in depth x 5 m in width, with height ranging from 4 m at the entrance to 1 m at its eastern edge. A water cistern plastered in grey has a diameter of 0.7 m at its opening, and 1.8 m within, with a depth of 2.0 m. The cistern was quarried under a group of stalactites which still drip water into it. On the floor of the room are an abundance of pottery



Fig. 8: Nahal Amud. Cliff shelters, upper Shovach.

Fig. 8: Nahal Amud. Rifugi in parete, complesso superiore di Shovach.

shards indicative of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. In the same room, on the eastern rock wall is a charcoal inscription which has not yet been deciphered. In the northern part of the cliff, a square-shaped, grey plastered *mikve* was also discovered which has three steps leading down into the purification pool, three meters deep (SHIVTIEL, 2009). In this cluster and below it, coins have been found dating from the Hasmonean period and up to the reign of Trajan (SHIVTIEL and ZISSU, 2007 - 2008). Five plastered cisterns were found at Akhbara Rock, along with one Bodkin arrowhead and a small glass bottle from the early Roman period. In sum, there were also channels to transmit water from the peak of the cliff to the cisterns, a *mikve*, chimney passages from level to level, a charcoal inscription which cannot be read, niches for oil lamps, storage pits, rock shelters, benches, pottery shards of receptacles and other vessels, table ware and cooking pots.

Galilee Fortifications Prepared by Josephus Flavius and their Connection to Cliff Shelters

The central issue arising from the extent of the findings and their locations, and from the effort required to reach the caves to prepare them and to hide in them, makes it necessary to assume that both those preparing the shelters and those hiding out in them were in deep distress. It would be impossible to view the cliff shelters as places where people would settle in times of calm. Apparently, two main chronological points in the Second Temple period would fit these possibilities: the



Fig. 9: Nahal Amud. Shavshevet cliff shelters.

Fig. 9: Nahal Amud. Rifugi in parete del complesso di Shavshevet.

first is the final days of the Hasmonean kingdom in the Galilee and the second, the time of the Great Revolt against Rome. Josephus provides information in his writings about the Hasmonean struggles as he describes those loyal to Antigonus finding refuge in the caves of Arbel in the Galilee (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV, 313-430). But the really detailed descriptions in Josephus's writings of cave fortifications and the construction of the defensive wall refer to the Great Revolt. This period is known as one of general distress in Jewish settlements which would likely have caused the general population to search for means of defense and security in the steep caves adjacent to their settlements. But it appears that Josephus's description of the method used by the Jews of Arbel to defend themselves in the days of Herod the Great provided the idea itself for using the cliff shelters, an idea which was, in fact, adopted by him. Both in *The Antiquities of the Jews* and in *The War of the Jews* Josephus describes what Herod had to do to conquer the Jews who opposed him and who had fled into the "caves of Arbel" when their lives were actually in danger (about 100 years before Josephus's time). The following is Josephus's description:

"But as for Herod, he went in haste against the robbers that were in the caves, ... while he marched against them. These caves were in mountains that were exceeding abrupt, and in their middle were no other than precipices, with certain entrances into the caves, and those caves were encompassed with sharp rocks, and in these did the robbers lie concealed, with all their families about them; but the king caused certain chests

to be made, in order to destroy them, and to be hung down, bound about with iron chains, by an engine, from the top of the mountain, it being not possible to get up to them, by reason of the sharp ascent of the mountains, nor to creep down to them from above. Now these chests were filled with armed men, who had long hooks in their hands, by which they might pull out such as resisted them, and then tumble them down, and kill them by so doing; but the letting the chests down proved to be a matter of great danger, because of the vast depth they were to be let down, although they had their provisions in the chests themselves. But when the chests were let down, and not one of those in the mouths of the caves durst come near them, but lay still out of fear, some of the armed men girt on their armor, and by both their hands took hold of the chain by which the chests were let down, and went into the mouths of the caves, because they fretted that such delay was made by the robbers not daring to come out of the caves; and when they were at any of those mouths, they first killed many of those that were in the mouths with their darts, and afterwards pulled those to them that resisted them with their hooks, and tumbled them down the precipices, and afterwards went into the caves, and killed many more, and then went into their chests again, and lay still there; but, upon this, terror seized the rest, when they heard the lamentations that were made, and they despaired of escaping. ... The same method of assault was made use of the next day; and they went further, and got out in baskets to fight them, and fought them at their doors, and sent fire among them, and set their caves on fire, for there was a great deal of combustible matter within them.(Fig. 11). Now there was one old man who was caught within one of these caves, with seven children and a wife; these prayed him to give them leave to go out, and yield themselves up to the enemy; but he stood at the cave's mouth, and always slew that child of his who went out, till he had destroyed them every one, and after that he slew his wife, and cast their dead bodies down the precipice, and himself after them, and so underwent death rather than slavery..." (*Antiquities*, XIV, 413-430 and with small changes, *The War of the Jews*, A, 304-313, Translated by W. Whiston).

This method actually enabled those who prepared the shelters to be hung down to the openings of the caves in order to make the preparations; it also clarifies how both men and women of different ages were able to reach the steep caves. Thus, it appears that the technique and the knowledge necessary for preparing the cliff shelters and for reaching them was already known before the time of Josephus.

Discussion of the Findings

The phenomenon of preparing cliff shelters and the findings discovered in them, especially the complexes which have been discussed here, indicate that they were meant for survival and in a collective organization around the need to defend and safeguard the living in a situation of deep distress. This was true during the Hellenistic period and, even more, during

the period of the Great Jewish Revolt against Rome. Preparation of the cliff shelters in the Galilee entailed creating refuge sites in places where nature made this possible. The difficulties of access faced by a potential enemy made such an attempt, life threatening, and contributed to a certain sense of security. For those who prepared and organized the refuges, their distress and the distress of those dear to them outweighed the fear for their lives. They were Jews who were living in constant danger of being invaded by the Roman enemy. When the danger grew near and threatened their lives and those of their families, they were lowered in crates or rappelled down to the cliff shelters on ropes. They ascended to the upper levels on ladders, supported themselves with scaffolding and climbed up using pegs. They brought with them only the basic means of existence. They quarried small cisterns in places where they found active stalactites and accumulated runoff water from the vertical walls of rock. They brought very few personal possessions and those too, if there were any, have been covered through the years by a thick layer of bird droppings. The exception to the rule here was the preparation of *mikvas* on Arbel and Akhbara Rock. These indicate that the need for purification for those who were fleeing to Arbel and Akhbara Rock, the only places *mikvas* were found, was a real existential need, similar to the need for food and water. Perhaps we may attribute the preparation of *mikvas* to groups of *cohanim* (priests) who were living in the Galilee before the Great Revolt, or to a group for whom questions of defilement and purification were an inseparable part of their lives (SHIVTIEL, 2012).

Conclusions

Even if the cliff shelters were not prepared during the days of Josephus Flavius and even if he did not personally orchestrate the organization and entry of the settlement inhabitants into the steep cliff shelters on Mount Arbel-Nitai, the Amud Gorge and Akhbara Rock, there is reason to assume that the cliff shelters were an inseparable part of the defense system of these inhabitants in times of distress, which were known to have occurred throughout the Second Temple period. The need for them naturally increased during the Great Revolt. It appears that cliff shelters could have been viewed as the only chance to save lives at a time when the Roman enemy army, known for its strength and its power, would invade the Galilee on its way to suppress the Jewish Revolt. If those refuges actually saved lives, perhaps their use from time to time enables us to make the assumption that these steep refuges actually did supply the defense which was expected from them. This conclusion has two factors to support it: the first is that the refuges in the upper *Shovach*, those which were the most fortified and the steepest discovered up to now, were found to be almost empty of any archeological finding, and it appears that those who fled there, left them when the danger had passed, taking whatever they had needed at the times. The second factor is the remains of the imposing synagogues discovered in the ruins



Fig. 10: Akhbara Rock Cliff Shelters.

Fig. 10: il rifugio in parete della rocca di Akhbara.

of the Arbel settlement, and more recently, in the settlements of Wadi Hamam, Horvat Kur and Huquq. These indicate that there was a recovery in the Jewish settlement after the Great Revolt.

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