

Salvage Excavation Reports

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NEW SERIES

GIV'AT HA-ORANIM

A CHALCOLITHIC SITE

Na'ama Scheftelowitz and Ronit Oren

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The site of Giv'at ha-Oranim is located in the limestone foothills of the Judean Hills. Its discovery and identification as a Chalcolithic village with attendant industrial installations is an important addition to the settlement history of the region during this period. The inhabitants adapted the natural karstic caves which honeycombed the area for living, storage and burials. The pottery and basalt assemblages are linked to the Beersheba-Ghassul culture. The metal objects bear a striking similarity to those from Nahal Mishmar. Its geographic position in the settlement pattern of the region highlights the significance of the Giv'at ha-Oranim site in the Chalcolithic settlement system, its mortuary customs and local culture.

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A CHALCOLITHIC SITE NEAR NAHAL BEIT ARIF

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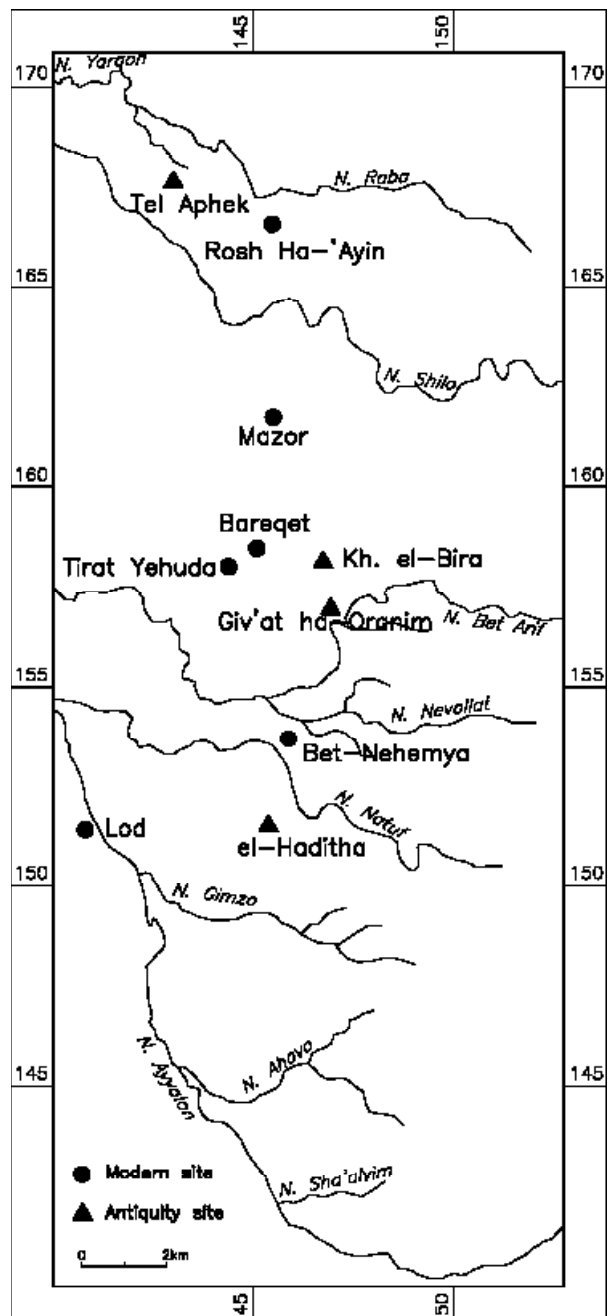
INTRODUCTION

Naama Scheftelowitz

The site of Giv'at ha-Oranim (map ref. 1468-1588) was first recorded by Gophna and Beit-Arieh (1997: 26-32: Site 70). It is located near Khirbet el-Bira which takes its name from a small Byzantine/Early Islamic village excavated in the vicinity (Safrai 1997). The site sits on a rocky hilltop (130 m asl at its highest point) whose southern side slopes steeply down to the course of Nahal Beit Arif. It lies 15 km north-east of Ben Gurion International Airport and 3 km east of the town of Shoham (Fig. 1.1). The ancient site extends over an area of 8,250 m². Most of the occupation remains are concentrated on the south and east of the hill which slopes moderately on the northern, eastern and western sides. Recent settlement and agricultural activity, added to the fact that the hilltop was once used for field manoeuvres by the Israel Defence Forces, have severely damaged the archaeological remains especially in the southern part of the site.

In 1994 the proposed route of a highway which would traverse the country from north to south was surveyed by teams from the Israel Antiquities Authority (Shavit 1994). The site later to be called Giv'at ha-Oranim was described as comprising the remains of small quarries, two basins, a rock-cut wine press and agricultural terraces from the Byzantine period. There was no mention of Chalcolithic remains.

Subsequently, prior to construction of the road, an area of 2500 x 100 m was allocated to the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University for investigation. During the pre-excavation survey of this area the pottery sherds gathered from the surface confirmed the Byzantine date of the installations. The only indication of an earlier presence at the site was a single body sherd of possibly Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age date. Unfortunately no other material was found to support this isolated clue, and the dig began under the assumption that this was a Byzantine



site. Its importance was recognised after the first excavation season and the name Giv'at ha-Oranim, after a small copse of pine trees nearby, was officially registered (Oren and Scheftelowitz 1996).

The first excavation season took place in July/August 1996 under the auspices of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, with the financial backing of the Cross Israel Highway Ltd. At this time the primary goal was to clean the installations and uncover the bedrock in their vicinity in order to detect additional installations.

The method of excavating, recording and documenting adopted was that described by Aharoni *et al.* (1973:119-132) based on a grid of 5 x 5 m squares with 0.50 m baulks. The earth removed from clean loci was sifted. Most pottery sherds were collected, washed and restored in the field. In other cases indicative sherds were registered and kept. All non-ceramic finds (metal, stone, bone and ivory) were collected separately. Samples of the contents of vessels were taken and checked in the field for organic material. Charcoal remains were carefully collected but unfortunately the number of samples was small. Animal bones were collected separately from human skeletal remains. Processing of the material and preparation for publication of both excavation seasons was done in the laboratories of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University.

A grid of 20 squares by 20 squares was laid out and work started in Squares I-M/32-34. The results were totally unexpected. When the topsoil was cleared it became apparent that the bedrock was perforated with round holes that led to subterranean spaces (Fig. 1.2). The finds in these spaces were also surprising. They included a large amount of Chalcolithic pottery as well as fragments of basalt, flint and limestone vessels and tools and one piece of a copper object. The latter unmistakably resembled one of the elements that decorated the copper 'crowns' found in the hoard of prestige objects found in the Naḥal Mishmar cave (Fig. 1.3). Since the site of Giv'at ha-Oranim was condemned to total obliteration because of the planned road construction, a full and comprehensive excavation was obligatory.

The significant size and importance of the site was already apparent as the second season of

excavations began in May 1997. Consequently, the site was divided into three areas: Area G on the southwestern part of the site, Area J in the northern part and Area K on the eastern part (Fig. 1.4). This division into three areas was arbitrary and not dictated by any topographic considerations. In fact, as work progressed, it was found that sometimes a single architectural feature overlapped two areas. In such cases the entire feature was excavated as a complete unit and assigned to one of the two areas. While the site was divided into areas primarily for practical reasons, it is clear that it represents a single homogeneous cultural horizon. There are, however, geological features characteristic of each area, for example, cave complexes over 3 m deep were found only in Areas G and K, and caves unsuitable for habitation were found only in Area J. In this, the final excavation report, the division into areas are disregarded and the site dealt with as an entity.

All the architectural features of the Chalcolithic period were below the surface. This is a karstic area and in many cases the bedrock which had originally formed roofs and walls of underground cavities had collapsed into them. The disintegration and collapse of slabs of overlying rock seriously affected the state of preservation of the archaeological remains which were now uncovered and unprotected. In many cases small and medium-sized stones fell into the caves which gradually filled up with material swept into them, including soil, pottery sherds and other small objects. Consequently it was virtually impossible to distinguish between material that originally belonged to the feature and that which was added after it was abandoned. Furthermore, the internal plan of the caves and pits was damaged, in some cases severely, and passageways, entrances and partitions were destroyed. All this made for very difficult excavation conditions.

A 16 m long wall (W1402) built in the Byzantine period was uncovered along part of the southeastern border of the Chalcolithic site in Squares O-R/29-30 (Fig. 1.5). Built of five courses of roughly hewn stones, it is located on the edge of a natural steep step, suggesting that it had served as a retaining wall. Since the Chalcolithic site is located on a moderate slope, it is reasonable to assume that the material left behind by the inhabitants was

gradually washed down this slope resulting in an accumulation of more than two metres of debris against the northwestern side of the retaining wall. It is also probable that this mass of debris exerted heavy pressure on the wall, weakening it until its stone courses collapsed.

ARCHITECTURE

Naama Scheftelowitz and Ronit Oren

THE CAVES

Eight multi-chambered cave complexes were found at Giv'at ha-Oranim (Fig. 2.1 - see insert back cover). They may be divided into two main types: (a) caves which had more than one opening in the roof to provide air and were thus suitable for habitation, and (b) caves unsuitable for habitation. All but two of the caves belong to the first type.

TYPE A

These lie on the southern slope of a ridge which runs along the hilltop from northeast to southwest for about 200 m. The habitable caves do not all share the same structural plan. They differ from each other in general size and in the number of chambers and pits. Furthermore, the range and richness of material finds differed from cave to cave. On the other hand, there are many characteristic elements and features that testify to a common functional, cultural and chronological sphere, and thus they may be considered as a distinct category.

CAVE 1780

This is a complex of seven chambers (Loci 995, 967, 1002, 993, 977, 1038, 998) in Squares L-M/31-32 (Figs. 2.2-2.4). Its roof had almost completely collapsed except for the part covering Locus 993 where the ceiling with its round opening was still intact (Fig. 2.5). It was impossible to determine whether there were other entrances into the complex from outside. Despite these limitations, the general plan of the cave is comprehensible. The seven chambers of the cave were different from each other in their plan, size and the nature of finds.

Locus 995 is ca. 2.20 x 2.00m and ca. 0.90m high.

It is connected to the adjoining room (967) by an aperture (0.80m wide by 0.95m high) in its eastern wall. The higher floor level of 995 and the existence of the passageway can be interpreted in two ways: a) that Locus 995 was an unroofed step that led from the surface down into the first room (967) of the cave; b) that Locus 995 was a roofed niche in the wall