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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

RAPHAEL GREENBERG, OREN TAL AND TAWFIQ DA'ADLI

This, the third and final volume of reports dedicated to the publication of the 1933–1986 excavations at Khirbat al-Karak (Kh. Kerak)/Tel Bet Yerah, describes the contiguous Hellenistic and Early Islamic remains excavated in the northern and southern parts of the site. These form an important component in the history of occupation on the mound and make a significant contribution to the archaeology of both periods. Their identification at the site in fact predates that of the Bronze Age remains: Eleazar Sukenik, who was asked to visit the road cut through ‘the Kerak’ in 1921, was the first to note their existence (Sukenik 1922), and the first to posit the identification of the site with Philoteria (see Chapter 2).<sup>1</sup>

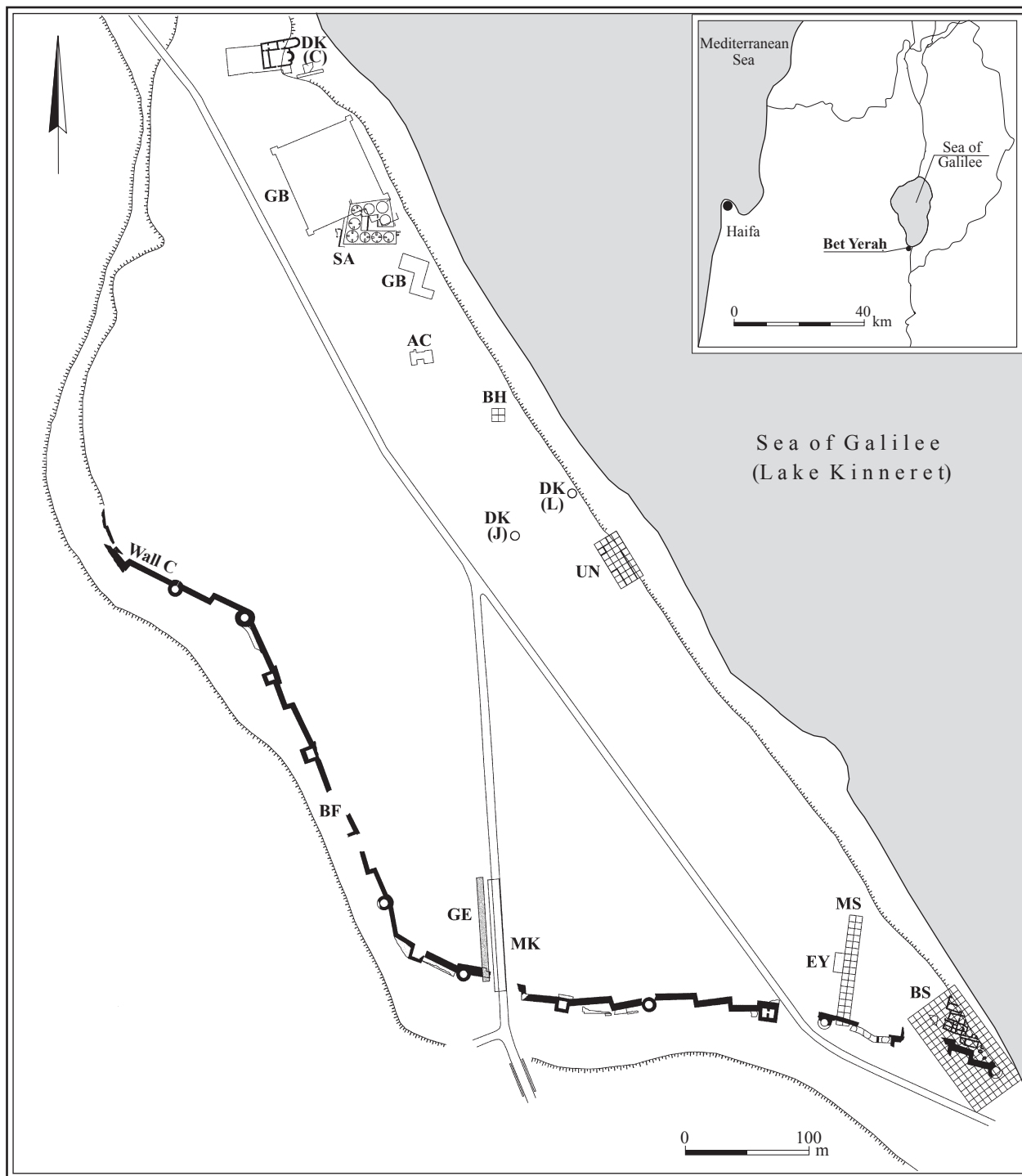
Substantial Hellenistic remains have been found, by several excavators, in virtually every part of the mound (Plan 1.1; Tables 1.1, 1.2): in all the areas excavated along its southern side (Areas BS, MS/EY, MK, GE), along considerable parts of the last Early Bronze Age fortification line (Wall C, principally in Towers 5, 8, 11 and 14 and near the ‘sortie tunnel’ [C10]) and in the various excavations of the northern sector (Areas GB, DK). In the central part of the mound, evidence is spotty, with the more substantial remains in Areas AC and BH, pits only in Areas UN and RV, and few finds reported in soundings undertaken by Delougaz and Haines in the western part of the mound.<sup>2</sup> This distribution might indicate a bimodal concentration of houses on the two higher portions of the mound in the north and south, with the intervening saddle being, perhaps, only sporadically occupied (Table 1.2).

Earlier considerations of Hellenistic Philoteria, based for the most part on the sketchy preliminary publications of the excavation and on chance finds such as a cache of silver *tetradrachms* attributed to the site (Baramki 1944) and the later Tyche presumably found in the road cut (Sukenik 1922), had asserted the existence of a fortified town occupying the entire mound (Negev 1976; Hestrin 1993). The attribution of the fortifications (EB III Wall C, described in

*BY I*: Chapter 6) to the Hellenistic period rested both on Hellenistic finds made by Bar-Adon within several towers and the assumption that round towers should be ascribed, by default, a Hellenistic date. However, the most recent considerations of the latest stone fortifications, by Getzov (2006) and by Greenberg et al. (*BY I*), supply evidence for an original Early Bronze Age date for Wall C, as well as for the presence of Hellenistic burials in or near the fortifications that imply that at least parts of the wall were considered to be separate from the settlement. The recent work of the Tel Aviv University team (Greenberg and Paz 2010) has allowed us to observe site formation processes in various parts of the mound. These observations suggest that when Hellenistic settlers first arrived at the site, most of which had been abandoned for two millennia, they found not the gently undulating surface of the modern mound, but an uneven surface pockmarked with ruins and with prominent stone foundations of fortifications and of monumental structures. The main concentrations of houses were built away from the massive earlier remains, which were used for refuse disposal and possibly for crafts such as potting (a large pit with kiln fragments was excavated in the Early Bronze Age Circles Building in 2009).

Post-Hellenistic presence on Tel Bet Yerah was quite limited in extent and did not produce massive deposits. Early excavators reported Roman remains, but virtually nothing of this period can be identified in the remaining collections. Byzantine occupation appears to be limited to the church excavated and published by Delougaz and Haines (1960). The same excavators also identified substantial Early Islamic construction above the church; this was associated with the historical Umayyad palatial site of al-Šinnabra, although it was generally thought that the palace itself was located north of the mound.

A large fortified enclosure excavated just south of the church by Guy and Bar-Adon in 1950 and 1953 (adjoined by a bathhouse excavated by Stekelis in



Plan 1.1. Excavation areas at Tel Bet Yerah (see Table 1.1 for area codes).

**Table 1.1. Conspectus of Excavations at Tel Bet Yerah**

No.	Excavator(s)	Year	Area Code	Location	Principal Finds
1*	Makhoully	1933	MK	Ẓemaḥ–Tiberias roadbed	Stone drain; paved EBA street; Hellenistic houses
2*	Mazar and Stekelis	1944–1945	MS	7 × 100 m section at south of mound	Fortifications, EBA and Hellenistic houses
3*	Stekelis and Avi-Yonah	1945–1946	SA	Northern acropolis	Circles Building; Early Islamic bathhouse and fortification
4	Bar-Adon	1949	GB	Ohalo College	Badly disturbed EBA remains
5*	Guy and Bar-Adon	1950	GB	North of Circles Building	Hellenistic houses; Early Islamic fortified enclosure
6*	Bar-Adon	1951	BS	Southeastern tip of mound	10 × 10 m sounding to virgin soil; EB I to Late Islamic remains
7*	Bar-Adon	1952–1953	BS	Southeastern tip of mound	Extensive Hellenistic and EBA remains abutting fortification
8*	Bar-Adon	1953–1955	BF	Southern and western edges of mound	Extensive clearance of late EBA fortifications; early EBA wall and gate
9	Delougaz and Haines	1953	DK	Northern tip of mound	Byzantine church; Early Islamic <i>dār</i>
10	Delougaz and Kantor	1963–1964	DK	Various soundings in northern half of mound	EBA “olive oil factory”
11	Ussishkin and Netzer	1967	UN	Middle of east scarp	Alley, houses
12	Amiran and Cohen	1976	AC	Ohalo College	
13	Bahat	1976	BH	Ohalo College	EB I round structures
14*	Eisenberg	1981–1982	EY	Bet Yerah school	EBA domestic structures rich in finds
15*	Yogev	1985–1986	EY	Bet Yerah school (expansion of Eisenberg)	EBA domestic structures rich in finds
16	Getzov	1994–1995	GE	Ẓemaḥ–Tiberias highway	EB I–III fortifications; Hellenistic houses
17	Greenberg	2003–2015	SA, GB	Environs of Circles Building and Islamic palace	

\* Finds included in this volume

**Table 1.2. Distribution of Hellenistic and Later Occupation Phases on Mound**

<i>Area</i> <i>Bet Yerah</i> <i>Period<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>DK</i> <i>(Church)</i>	<i>GB</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>AC +</i> <i>BH</i>	<i>UN</i>	<i>MS/EY</i>	<i>BS</i>	<i>MK/GE</i>	<i>BF</i>
H (Hellenistic)	?	2–3	2	2–3	Pits	2	2	1	Re-use of Wall C
J (Byzantine)	1					Coins			
K (Early Islamic)	2	2	2			1 (?)	Burials?		

<sup>1</sup> See *BY I*: Table 1.2, *BY II*: Table 2 for Bet Yerah periodization

1946) was identified by them as a synagogue of Roman or Byzantine date (Guy 1951; Bar-Adon 1956). Later reviews of the evidence refuted the identification, but did not tackle the dating (Applebaum 1988; Reich 1993). In 2002, a new study of the structure (Whitcomb 2002) suggested that it should be identified as the Umayyad palace of al-Şinnabra—an identification largely corroborated by the results of the renewed excavations at the site. As will be seen below, further study indicates the presence of additional structures of this date on and near the mound. Salvage work in 2012/2013 conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority to the west of the site, on the far side of the Jordan River bed, uncovered remains that can be associated with the Umayyad water supply and with a bridge that crossed the river at the northern end of the mound (for the location of these excavations, see Chapters 10 and 12, Figs. 10.1 and 12.1).

Like the Early Bronze Age remains described in *BY I* and *BY II*, the excavation of the Hellenistic and Early Islamic remains—often in the course of salvage work—suffered from a lack of continuity and focus. This was compounded by the relative indifference of some earlier excavators to classical and post-classical material culture, by the summary methods used to excavate large architectural complexes, and by the severe erosion that affected the upper layers of the mound. As a result, enormous quantities of Hellenistic pottery collected during the excavations and currently in the IAA storerooms could be ascribed only the most general provenance, while the Islamic periods are scarcely represented in the material culture assemblage.

In view of this state of affairs, and after consideration of the main issues that we hoped could be resolved by the present publication (bearing in mind that earlier publications—Delougaz and Haines 1964 and Getzov 2006—cover important ground for the periods in question), the method adopted was to work with the strengths of the documentation in hand: to produce as complete a record as possible of the architectural remains and to associate the principal diagnostic (mostly pottery) finds with specific locations in the excavation (rather than produce a ‘catalogue’ of unprovenanced finds for the sake of their typological repertoire). Our presentation is therefore selective; only the stamped amphora handles and coins are presented in full, given their chronological value. As for the later, post-classical periods, not only did we have to retrieve every extant fragment, but—after

these proved to be inadequate to the basic tasks of publication—we were impelled to return to the mound itself, in order to establish basic stratigraphic relations, to document unpublished mosaic floors and to obtain datable materials from secure contexts. The results of the recent soundings are incorporated in the general description of the Islamic-period remains.

## PHILOTERIA AND AL-ŞINNABRA—A BRIEF HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The written sources on the site in Hellenistic times are relatively scant and refer principally to its foundation and destruction. The place carrying the possibly pre-classical toponym ‘Beth Yerah’ (see Chapter 2) was renamed Philoteria in the mid-third century BCE, apparently after Ptolemy II’s sister. Although the earliest reference to Philoteria is that of Polybius (*Histories* V, 70, 3–5), in the context of Antiochus III’s invasion of Coele Syria during the Fourth Syrian War (218 BCE), where Scythopolis is mentioned as well (see in this respect the discussion of Cohen 2006:273–274, 290–299), the evidence recovered from our analysis of the Rhodian stamped handles allows us to assume that the site was formally founded in the context of the Second Syrian War (260–253 BCE), together with Ptolemaïs, Scythopolis and possibly Rabat-Ammon (renamed Philadelphia), as suggested by Fuks (1983:47–51). Other foundations/re-foundations that are related to this event were Joppa/*ypy*—which was renamed Ioppé—and Gaza/*zh* (given the coin evidence, with their first issues dated to Ptolemy II’s 25th regnal year, that is 261/260 BCE; cf. Tal 2011:243–244, nn. 9, 10).

Regarding Philoteria’s destruction, it has long been assumed that the site was taken by Alexander Jannaeus between 104 and 92 BCE (Sukenik 1922:103–107; Jones 1971:240–241, 255, 257; Schürer 1979:142–145; Stern 1981:39–40; see also Cohen 2006:273–274), most probably in the same campaign that led to the conquest of Gadara (after a ten-month siege) and Arethus in Transjordan (Josephus, *War* I, 87; *Antiquities* XIII, 356; Niese 1955). The only specific reference to this episode is that of the seventh–eighth-century chronicler (Georgius Syncellus I:559 [cf. Gelzer 1880:256 ff.]), where Philoteria is mentioned at the end of the list of towns across the Jordan (Ἰορδάνου Πόλεων) and in the regions of Amon and Moab (including Pella, Gadara, Abila, Hippos and

Dion). These are said to be Macedonian colonies (Μακεδόνων ἀποικίας) conquered by Alexander Jannaeus, together with Scythopolis, Mallea/Marisa in Samaria, Mount Tabor and Gaba. The list, which may be derived from the sources used by Josephus (above), is rather confused (from a geographical perspective) and probably suffers from repeated copying and inaccuracies. The stamped Rhodian amphora handles recovered from the larger residential areas could also, or alternatively, be construed as evidence of a destruction (or abandonment) in the context of Jonathan's military campaign in the Galilee (145/144–144/143 BCE).

Various authors have proposed a Jewish and Roman presence at the mound in the first centuries CE, based on the identification of the site with the toponyms 'Sinnabre' and 'Beth Yerah', the former mentioned by Josephus as a staging-ground for Vespasian's army and both mentioned in third–fourth-century Jewish sources as neighboring towns (see Chapter 2). Aside from stray finds, however, nothing on the mound can be attributed to this time-frame. Structures assigned to this phase by Mazar, Avi-Yonah and Bar-Adon have proven to be Early Islamic in date (see below) or cannot be dated at all (see Chapter 8: Plan 8.13). The earliest certain late antique remains are those of the fifth–sixth-century church excavated and published by Delougaz and Haines (1960) and a number of Byzantine tombs found by them on the ridge to the west of the mound (Delougaz and Haines 1960). The location of Roman Sinnabre, and even of late antique 'Beth Yerah'—if the later traditions are to be taken at face value—remains, therefore, a mystery.

In Early Islamic times, Sinnabre reappears as al-Şinnabra, the local seat of the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu'āwiya, and his successors. Al-Şinnabra figures prominently in the annals of Umayyad rule, appearing to have been used continuously until the end of the Umayyad period, in the mid-eighth century CE.

Later, it is mentioned as a village in the Faṭimid period, but this, i.e., its existence as a village, is not certain, as al-Şinnabra is mentioned later, from Crusader until Ottoman times, only in connection to the bridge crossing nearby.

The designation Khirbat al-Karak, 'Ruins of the Fortress', seems to be of late origin (Pococke 1745:70 appears to be the earliest mention in print). In late Ottoman times, the mound was crossed by the Samakh [Zemah]–Tiberias road, but there is no record of settlement at that time. The twentieth-century history of 'the Kerak' is described at length in *BYI*. The name Bet Yerah is a recent identification, possibly based on a Bronze Age toponym (see Chapter 2).

### STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report on Hellenistic Philoteria and Islamic al-Şinnabra is presented in two parts. Following this introduction and a brief consideration of the toponym *Beth Yerah*, Part I, Chapters 3–6, deals with the Hellenistic remains, beginning with a discussion of stratigraphy and assemblages (Chapter 3), a consideration of the ceramic typology, the figurines, a faience bowl and coins (Chapter 4), a brief discussion and catalogue of imported stamped amphora handles (Chapter 5) and an extended discussion of the architectural and historical contexts of Philoteria-Bet Yerah (Chapter 6). Part II, Chapters 7–12, includes an historical introduction to al-Şinnabra (Chapter 7), a detailed description of the architecture (Chapter 8), a discussion of the numismatic finds (Chapter 9) and reports on the inverted siphon and bridge discovered just west of the mound (Chapters 10–12). A concluding discussion (Chapter 13) recapitulates and contextualizes the principle contributions of the volume to the long-term history of Tel Bet Yerah.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For the history of excavation at the site, see *BY I*:1–16.

<sup>2</sup> According to fieldnotes studied by Esse (1991) and a log-book provided to us by Gabriella Bachi.

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