

New Findings from the Acrabat Toparchy and the Northern Border of Judea before and after the Great Revolt

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Abstract

The toparchy of Acrabat occupied the border between Judea and Samaria during much of the Roman and Byzantine periods. During the late Second Temple period, it was the northernmost administrative district of Judea. The decades of 70–136 CE, which encompass the interbellum period and the Bar Kokhba Revolt, remain opaque. Until recently, the region's ethnic composition, in general, and the existence of Jewish communities, in particular, was obscure. This study presents and analyzes new data from recent excavations and surveys in the toparchy's territory. We draw two conclusions: (1) A Jewish population resided in the region during the interbellum period and participated in the Bar Kokhba Revolt, and (2) the northern border of the Bar Kokhba administration was roughly the same as the northern border of Judea in the late Second Temple period. These conclusions indicate that the Jewish territory during the Second Jewish Revolt extended further north than was previously thought.

Keywords: the Bar Kokhba Revolt; the *interbellum* period; hiding complexes; refuge caves; Bar Kokhba coins.



1. Introduction

During the Roman and Byzantine periods, the borders of the Acrabat toparchy were fluid. In the Early Roman period (ca. 40 BCE–136 CE), it was part of Judea and bordered in the north with Samaria, whereas in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, it was incorporated into Samaria and bordered with Judea in the south. Based on Eusebius' Onomasticon, geographic considerations, and archaeological evidence, the toparchy's borders are defined by the Shiloh Valley (Sahl Kafr Istuna) in the south, Bet Dajan Valley (Sahl Bet Dajan) in the north, the Neapolis-Jerusalem Road in the west, and the Samaritan desert in the east, all within the region designated today as the West Bank (Fig. 1; Raviv 2018a: 60–67, 108). Its capital—Acrabat—was located in today's Palestinian village of 'Aqrabah, about 10 km southeast of Nablus (Tsafrir, Di Desgni, and Green 1994: 56–57; Di Segni and Tsafrir 2017: 70–81). During the First century CE, Acrabat was the northernmost of Judea's 11 toparchies (Josephus, *J.W.* 3.55; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 5.70),¹ and Josephus is the most important source of information about its history (*Ant.* 12.328; *J.W.* 2.235, 2.568, 2.652, 3.48), including his account of the events during the First Revolt (*J.W.* 4.504, 4.511, 4.551).

There is abundant evidence that a Jewish population resided in Acrabat during the late Second Temple period (Zissu 2001: 26–29; Klein 2007; 2009; Klein and Zissu 2010; Raviv 2018a: 75–80). However, their fate in the period between the Great Jewish Revolt against Rome (henceforth, the *interbellum* period) and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (BKR) (70–136 CE) is uncertain. As a result, many questions remain unanswered: What was the impact of the First Revolt on the Jewish settlements in this region? What was Acrabat's administrative status during the *interbellum* and BKR periods? How did the Bar Kokhba administration engage the toparchy, and what were its geographical borders?

While scholarly efforts to trace Jewish involvement in the BKR have focused on hiding complexes, Menachem Mor (2016: 237–238) claims that the mere existence of these systems offers little information regarding the revolt's territorial breadth. In this paper, we review recent findings from the southern part of the toparchy that shed light on the extent of Jewish habitation in Acrabat during the *interbellum* period and the BKR. First, we will summarize the information gathered by the first author and other researchers. Next, we will present relevant results from our excavations and surveys. Finally, we will discuss the historical implications of these findings.

1 By *Judea* we mean the territory between Idumea in the south and Samaria in the north, not the more extensive Roman Provincia Iudaea.

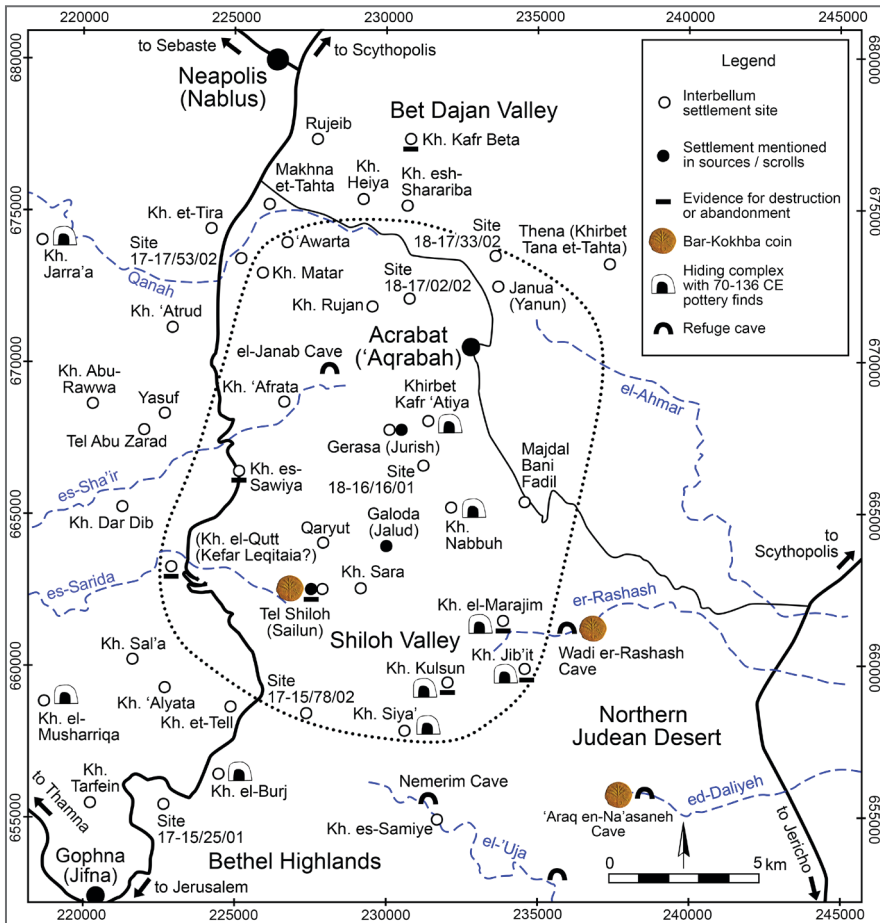


Fig. 1: Map of the Acrabat toparchy showing the main sites mentioned in the article.

2. History of Research

The first evidence of Jewish settlements in the toparchy of Acrabat during the *interbellum* period was published in the 1960s. It consisted of BKR-period documents discovered in Wadi Murabba'at, referring to Acrabat, Galoda, and possibly Shiloh (e.g., Benoit 1961: 243–254; Milik 1961: 127). The most relevant document for our concerns is Mur 115. It dates from 124 CE and refers to “Eleaios (son) of Simon” from the village of “Galoda in the area of Acrabatta” (Γαλωδών τῆς περὶ Ἀκραβαττῶν), identified with the modern village of Jalud (Benoit 1961: 243–254; Di Segni and Tsafrir 2017: 75). Since, several decades earlier, Josephus (J.W. 3.55) cited Acrabat and other villages mentioned in Mur 115—Gophna and Herodium—in the list of Judea's toparchies, we may postulate some degree of administrative continuity in the northern Judean Hills from the late Second Temple period into the *interbellum*

period (see also Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 5.70; Isaac 1992; 1998: 165–169, 176–179; Shahar 1996: 177–187; Cotton 2007). In the 1980s, Zeev Safrai (1984: 206) identified Kafr Leqitaia, one of the three posts established by Hadrian during the BKR, with Khirbet el-Qutt, ca. 4.5 km west of Shiloh (*Lam. Rab.* 1:45; cf. Mor 2016: 156–158).

A range of excavations and surveys in the region produced finds that facilitate the identification of additional *interbellum* sites with Jewish occupations (Fig. 1).² These include diagnostic pottery and glass vessel fragments from Tel Shiloh (Andersen 1985: Pl. 13:235; 14:262A; Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1993: Fig. 6.69:8,15; Zissu 2001: 28; Hizmi and Haber 2014: 104; Gat 2016: 202, Pl. 2:5,6),³ diagnostic ceramics from Khirbet Kulsun and Khirbet el-Qutt (Klein and Zissu 2010: 107–108; Raviv, Har-Even, and Tavger 2016), and hiding complexes and artifacts from Khirbet Kafr ‘Atiya, Khirbet Kulsun, Khirbet Siya’, and Khirbet el-Marajim (Klein 2009: 190; Klein and Zissu 2010: 97–108; Tavger and Raviv 2013; Raviv et al. 2015: 124–126).⁴ Presently, only the finds from the hiding complexes at Khirbet Kulsun and Khirbet el-Marajim are published, presenting small ceramic assemblages. While there is no evidence of non-Jewish sites in the toparchy during the *interbellum* period, at least three Late Roman-period sites of non-Jewish populations were recorded (Klein 2011: 111–113, 172–173). This implies a demographic shift also observed in other parts of Judea.

Notwithstanding these insights, we still lack evidence from the time of the BKR proper, such as coins, weights, layers of destruction or abandonment, refuge caves, and inscriptions. Moreover, while some finds derive from excavations (e.g., Shiloh), much data from stratigraphic contexts remains unpublished. Consequently, it is impossible to determine the extent of the Jewish settlement in the region during the BKR, whether the Bar Kokhba administration controlled the Acrabat area, and whether its residents participated in the revolt and subsequently evacuated.

- 2 As a rule, Jewish habitations are identified on the grounds of specific types of Early Roman-period (40 BCE–136 CE) artifacts and features, such as stone vessels, ossuaries, hiding complexes, and coins of the Jewish revolts against Rome (Zissu 2001: 14–16, 29–76; Berlin 2005: 417–470; Zelinger 2009; Adler 2011; Raviv 2018a). Having said that, we should note that ritual baths and oil lamps (Herodian knife-pressed and molded Judean lamps) are problematic indicators of a Jewish population because the Samaritans made use of similar features and artifacts during the *interbellum* period and maybe even earlier.
- 3 Although the differentiation of *interbellum* ceramic and glass assemblages from those of the late Second Temple period can be challenging, there are several distinguishing features to draw on (see Rapuano 2013: 57–102; Adan-Bayewitz et al. 2016: 9–12; Terem 2016; Raviv 2018c; Zissu 2018: 39–47).
- 4 Dating hiding complexes is a highly delicate matter (see Melamed 2022; Raviv 2023). We attribute the complexes mentioned here to 70–136 CE based on small artifacts recovered inside the systems and not only on the architectural plan.

3. Recent Excavations and Surveys

Recently, we conducted three projects within the region of Acrabat, producing a range of new archaeological evidence of the *interbellum* and BKR periods. These projects include (a) the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) excavations at Tel Shiloh, (b) the New Southern Samaria Survey (NSSS), and (c) the Wadi er-Rashash Basin Survey (WRBS). Of a total of 60 Roman-period sites in the Acrabat toparchy, 26 are dated to the *interbellum* and BKR periods (Fig. 1; Raviv 2018a: 330–332). They comprise the villages of Jalud and ‘Aqrabah and 24 additional sites that produced diagnostic ceramic finds. Of these sites, nine yielded archaeological remains indicative of a Jewish population, five of which have been published: Khirbet Kulsun (Klein 2009: 190; Klein and Zissu 2010: 97–108), Khirbet el-Marajim (Raviv et al. 2015: 124–126), Khirbet el-Qutt (Klein and Zissu 2010: 107–108; Raviv, Har-Even, and Tavger 2016), Tel Shiloh (Zissu 2001: 28; Hizmi and Haber 2014: 104; Gat 2016: 202, Pl. 2:5,6 and bibliography therein), and Khirbet Siya’ (Tavger and Raviv 2013). Below, we present new findings from six sites. Four pertain to yet unpublished sites, and two concern sites that until now have produced only sparse *interbellum* and BKR-period finds (Khirbet el-Marajim and Tel Shiloh).

3.1. Tel Shiloh (New Israel Grid 22751/66250)

Tel Shiloh is a large multi-period rural site in southern Samaria, 3 km east of the Jerusalem-Nablus Road. As of 2017, excavations at the site have been conducted by ABR and the Staff Officer of Archaeology in Judea and Samaria (hereafter Staff Officer). In the course of these excavations, hitherto unknown *interbellum*-period remains were found across most of the mound: Areas G, H1, J1, J2, O, N1, N2, P1, and P2 (Fig. 2).

Judean oil lamps, typically dated to 70–136 CE (see Sussman 1972: Nos. 52, 190), were uncovered in Areas N2 and J2, and the NSSS documented a Judean oil lamp fragment in one of the tombs in the northern necropolis (Raviv 2018b: 136). In Area P2, a large assemblage of *interbellum*-period potsherds was found above late Second Temple-period walls (Raviv 2018c: 25–63). The excavators reported buildings of the *interbellum* period in Areas G2 and N1 and floors with *in situ* pottery vessels and evidence of a hasty BKR-period abandonment in Areas G2, J2, and H1. In Area J2, sealed entrances were found, perhaps in preparation for the BKR.

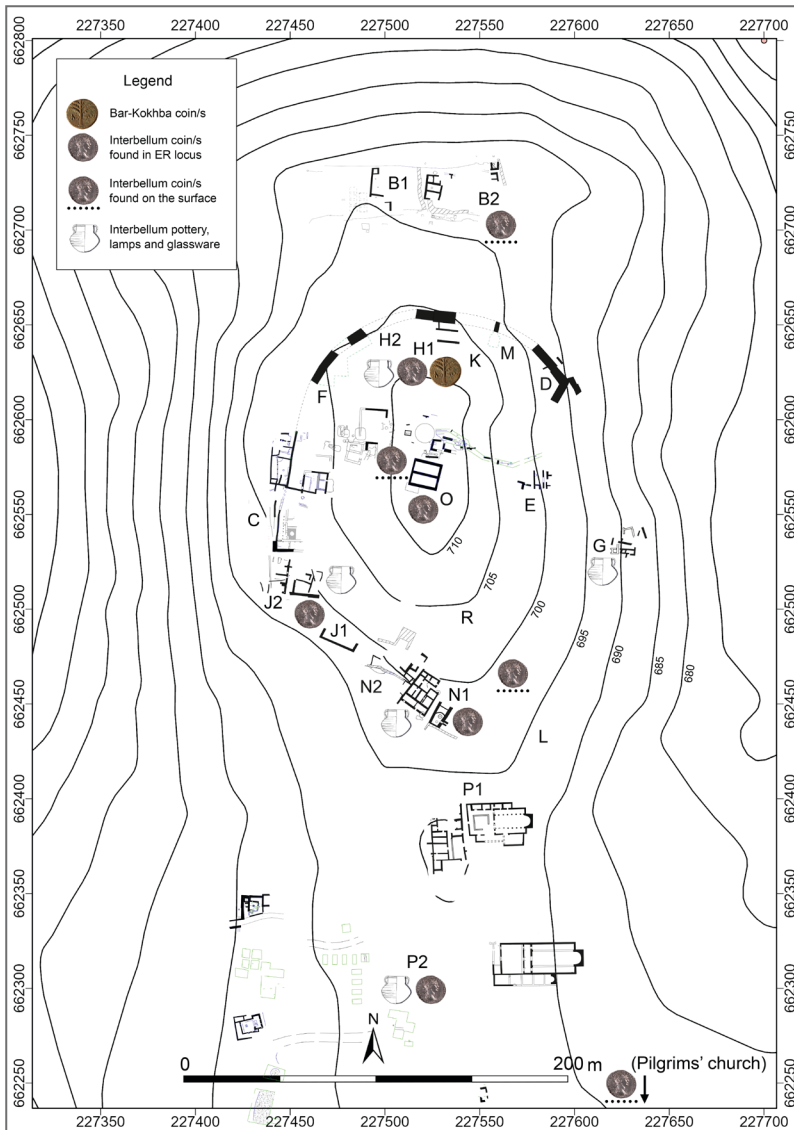


Fig. 2. A map of Tel Shiloh depicting the excavation areas and the principal finds dated to 70–136 CE.

However, the most compelling evidence of occupation during the BKR derives from Square AF31 in Area H1 (Fig. 3). Below topsoil (Locus 4), a stone debris layer was uncovered (Locus 5), superimposing a floor and presumably representing the last years of a building's operation and the first years of its abandonment. Notwithstanding some artifacts of earlier periods (Iron Age, late Hellenistic, and Early Roman), the stratum's assemblage primarily comprises *interbellum* and BKR-period pottery (Fig. 4), alongside glass artifacts and three silver coins (*denarii*).



Fig. 3. Plan of Area H1 (above; drawing: Leen Ritmeyer) and the eastern section of Square AF31, facing west (below; drawing: Tim Lopez).

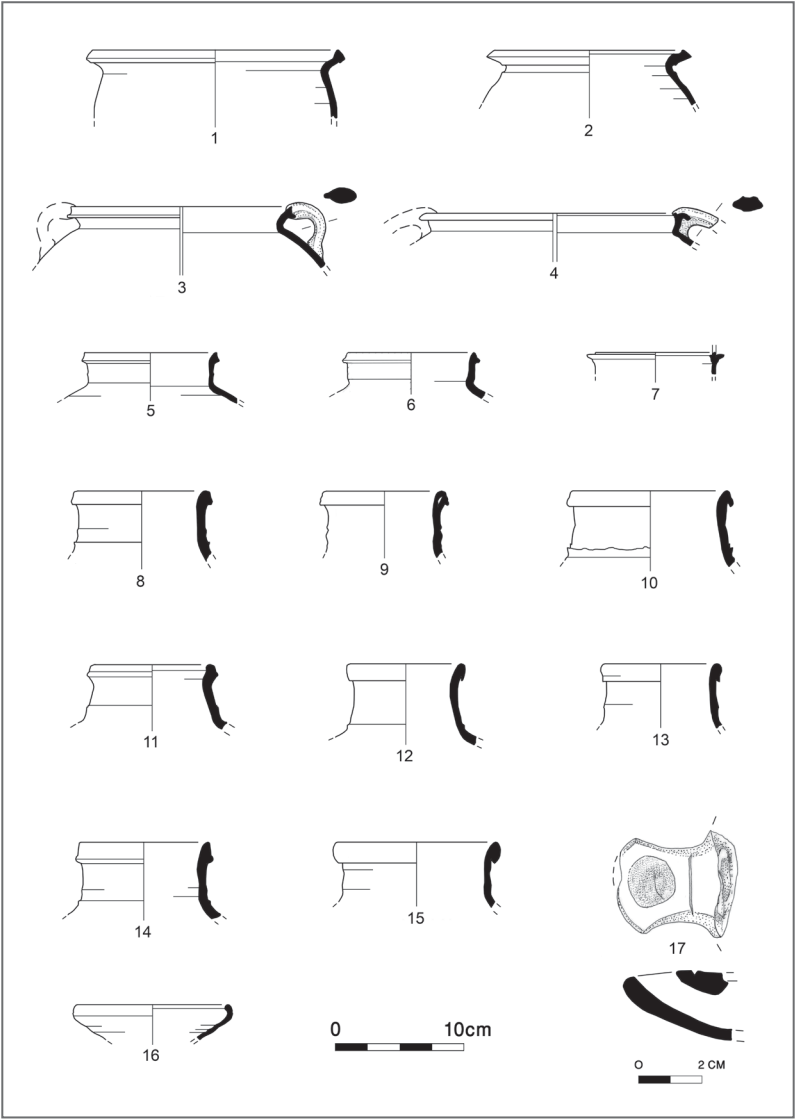


Fig. 4. *Interbellum* and BKR-period pottery from Area H1, Square AF31, Locus 5 at Tel Shiloh (drawing: Yulia Rodman).

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Description	Parallel
1	10.7	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white grits, gray core, dark cover on the outside	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 61, Pl. 1.6:627
2	8.11	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white grits, gray core	Amit and Eshel 1998: 191, Pl. 1:18; Terem 2016: Pl. 53:481

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Description	Parallel
3	2.30	Cooking pot	Brownish ware, white grits, gray core, black cover	Variant of no. 1
4	8.29	Cooking pot	Brownish orange sandy ware, black and white grits, reddish cover on the outside	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 63, Pl. 1.8:659
5	8.13	Cooking pot	Orange-brown ware, white grits, gray core, dark cover on the outside	Rapuano 2013: 69, Fig. 4:55
6	9.22	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white grits, gray core, black cover	Rapuano 2013: 69, Fig. 4:55
7	9.21	Cooking pot	Reddish ware, white girts, light brown cover on the outside	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 60, 70, Pls. 1.5:624, 1.15:738
8	10.11	Storage jar	Light orange ware, white grits	Bar-Nathan 2006: 75, 93, Pl. 16:98; Terem 2016: Pl. 21:284
9	7.13	Storage jar	Light orange ware, white and black girts, yellowish cover on the outside	Variant of no. 8
10	9.20	Storage jar	Greenish-yellowish ware, white and black girts	Raviv 2018c: 76, Pl. 13:34
11	9.32	Storage jar	Light orange ware, white grits	Bar-Nathan 2006: 75, 93, Pl. 16:97
12	8.17	Storage jar	Pinkish orange ware, white grits	Magen, Tzionit, and Sirkis 2004: 228, Pl. 7:14,15
13	9.2	Storage jar	Pinkish ware, white grits	Eshel 1988: 62, Pl. 1:12
14	7.11	Storage jar	Light yellowish brown ware, white and black grits	Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 27:12; Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 64, Pl. 1.9:676
15	8.23	Storage jar	Orange ware, white grits, gray core	Eshel 1988: 62, Pl. 1:11; Terem 2016: Pl. 23:291
16	8.22	Bowl	Gray-light brown ware, white grits	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 59, Pl. 1.4:599; Terem 2016: Pl. 46:427
17	12.20	Knife-pared (Herodian) lamp	Light yellowish ware, burnish marks around the firing-hole	Barag and Hershkovitz 1994: 43–47; Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 62, 63, Pls. 1.7:649, 1.8: 672

One silver coin is associated with Trajan, dated 114–117 CE, and minted in Rome, while the other two were overstruck by the Bar Kokhba administration (Fig. 5). The Trajan coin (Fig. 5: 1; object no. 2122) measures 17 mm across, weighs 3.36 gr (axis 6) (RIC II: 268, no. 345). Its obverse depicts a laureate bust of Trajan, facing right, and surrounded by the Latin legend IMP CAES NER TRAIAN OPTIM AVG GER DAC PARTHICO, while the coin's reverse features the standing personification of Felicitas, facing left, holding a *caduceus* and *cornucopia*, and surrounded by the legend PM TR P COS VI P P SPQR. Of the two Bar Kokhba coins, one bears the name שמעון (Shim'on) in a wreath, while the opposite side features a flask with a handle and a palm branch (a *lulav*) to its right surrounded by the legend לחרות ירושלם (i.e., for the freedom of Jerusalem) (Fig. 5: 2; object no. 2014). This coin is 18 mm across, weighs 3.26 gr (axis 12) (cf. Mildenberg 1984: no. 72). The second Bar Kokhba coin depicts, on one side, the name שמעון (Shim'on) in a wreath and, on the other side, a palm branch (a *lulav*) surrounded by the paleo-Hebrew legend לחרות ירושלם (i.e., for the freedom of Jerusalem) (Fig. 5: 3; object no. 1898). It measures 17–18 mm across, weighs 2.42 gr (axis 12) (cf. *TJC*: 253, no. 279a). A fourth coin attributed to Bar Kokhba was found in a disturbed context in Square AC28. It is made of bronze and belongs to the undated series (Fig. 5: 4; object no. 958). On the one side, it features a palm tree and the name שמעון (Shim'on) and, on the other side, a grape cluster surrounded by the legend לחרות ירושלם (i.e., for the freedom of Jerusalem). It measures 16–18 mm across, weighs 4.64 gr (axis 12; *TJC*: 255, no. 302). Notably, the formula *for the freedom of Jerusalem* is characteristic of coins from the third and fourth years of the BKR (134/5–135/6 CE).



Fig. 5. BKR-period coins found at Tel Shiloh, Area H1 (photo: Shahar Cohen).

These coins join a series of at least 22 Roman imperial and provincial coins from the *interbellum* period found at Shiloh by previous expeditions. These include four coins recovered by the Danish team in the late 1920s and early 1930s and 18 coins recently excavated by the Staff Officer and ABR. These are attributed to Vespasian, Domitian, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the cities of Tyre, Ascalon, and Dora and comprise a date range spanning 69 and 138 CE (Andersen 1985: 103, 107, nos. 374, 376, 377; Haim Shkolnik, personal communication, 2022).

Regardless of their stratigraphic proveniences, these coins indicate that Shiloh was inhabited during the *interbellum* period and was later located within the Bar Kokhba administrative sphere. Thus, despite the damage inflicted on the settlement in the aftermath of the First Revolt (see Zissu 2001: 27–28; Livyatan-Ben Arie and Hizmi 2014: 124), the distribution of finds on the mound's northern and southern slopes indicates that except for Area B, Shiloh was continuously occupied until 136 CE (*contra* Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1993: 6). After this date, however, the settlement in most of the mound was abandoned and remained unsettled throughout the Late Roman period (Livyatan-Ben Arie and Hizmi 2014: 125).

3.2. Khirbet Kafr 'Atiya (New Israel Grid 23139/66800)

Khitbet Kafr 'Atiya is a rural site on two hills, 2.5 km southwest of the village of 'Aqrabah. Klein (2009: 190) documented a hiding complex in the site's southeastern part. This complex includes two chambers linked with a typical hiding burrow. The NSSS identified a second hiding complex with a few *interbellum* and BKR-period potsherds on the site's western side. Because this part of the site is under the civil jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (Area B), all finds were recorded and left in the field. The complex includes six bell-shaped pits linked with low, narrow passages and typical hiding burrows. Their walls have niches intended for oil lamps (Raviv 2018b: 142–143).

3.3. Khirbet Nabbuh (New Israel Grid 23223/66519)

Khirbet Nabbuh is a small rural site located 3 km south-southeast of Khirbet Kafr 'Atiya and just east of the region's primary watershed. *Interbellum*-period potsherds were found at Khirbet Nabbuh by the Ephraim Survey (Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997: 775–776; Raviv 2018b: 144). The NSSS documented an underground system on the western side of the site. Because this part of the site is under the civil jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (Area B), all finds were recorded and left in the field. The underground complex

comprises a series of rock-hewn chambers linked by low and winding passages (Raviv 2018b: 143–144). Many *interbellum* and BKR-period potsherds were observed on the system's floors, including storage jars, cooking pots, bowls, and an indicative fragment of a square Judean oil lamp ornamented with a rosette, similar to those reported by Sussman (1972: 56, no. 58–59; 2012: 424, no. 1002). While this system lacks the typical hiding burrows, it features narrow passages, blocked openings, and an Early Roman water facility repurposed as a hideout chamber. Together with the abovementioned potsherds, it is readily identified as a hiding complex of the BKR rebels.

3.4. Khirbet el-Marajim (New Israel Grid 23402/66151)

Khirbet el-Marajim is a small rural site located 6 km east of Tel Shiloh on the fringes of the Samarian desert. A small hiding complex was discovered and published by the NSSS (Raviv et al. 2015: 124–126). More recently, the WRBS discovered an extensive, 50 m-long hiding complex comprised of 13 chambers identified as storage installations and water facilities connected by low and narrow burrows (Fig. 6).

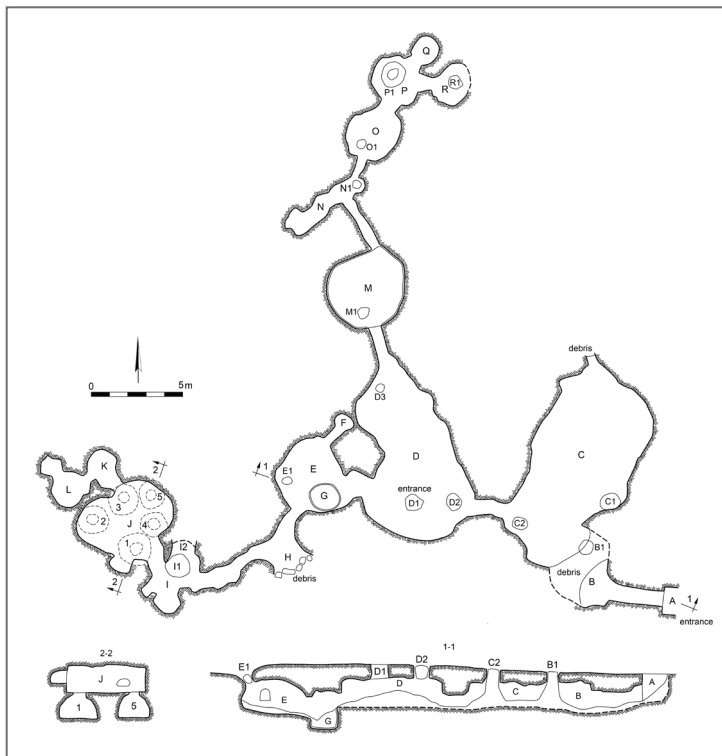


Fig. 6. The hiding complex at Khirbet el-Marajim, layout and cross-sections (drawing: Dvir Raviv).

The subterranean system has the shape of an inverted T. Chamber J's plan suggests that it initially served for storage. Chambers J and K contained dozens of Early Roman-period potsherds and glass fragments (Fig. 7), as well as fragments of four iron items—two knives, a sickle, and an elbow key—probably of the same period (Fig. 8). Significantly, most of these finds date exclusively from the *interbellum* period (Fig. 8:9–19, 21) and are presumably attributable to the events of the BKR. The typical hiding burrows and the pottery finds suggest that Chamber J and other installations were incorporated into the hiding complex during the BKR. Water Installation G is particularly notable. It is coated with typical Early Roman gray plaster and is located in Chamber E, a relatively inaccessible inner hall, which may indicate forethought in preparation for the BKR.

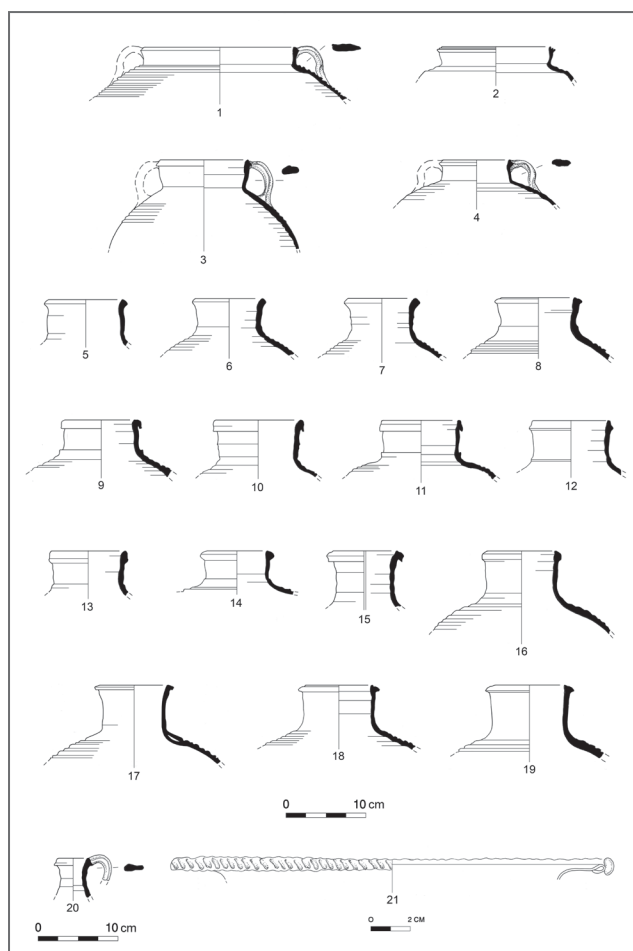


Fig. 7. Early Roman (including *interbellum* and BKR-period) pottery and glassware from the hiding complex at Khirbet el-Marajim (drawing: Yulia Rodman).

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Description	Parallel
1	J-03/18	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white grits, gray core	Eshel and Zissu 1998: 124, Pl. 2:4; Raviv 2018c: 53, Pl. 5:7
2	J-03/15	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white grits, gray core	Raviv 2018c: 53, Pl. 6:29
3	I-04/20	Cooking pot	Reddish ware, white grits, gray core	Raviv 2018c: 91, Pl. 17:18
4	I-04/21	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, black and white grits, gray core	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 63, Pl. 1.8:667
5	J-03/7	Storage Jar	Reddish orange ware, white grits	Bar-Nathan 2002: 151, 274, Pl. 24:398
6	J-03/13	Storage Jar	Light brown ware, white grits, gray core	Raviv 2018c: 78, Pl. 11:1
7	J-03/6	Storage Jar	Light brown-orange ware, yellowish exterior, white grits	Raviv 2018a: 264, Pl. 11:10; 2018c: 78, Pl. 11:4
8	J-03/3	Storage Jar	Light orange ware, yellowish exterior, black grits, light brown core	Amit and Eshel 1998: 194, Pl. 3:42
9	J-03/8	Storage Jar	Orange ware, yellowish exterior, white grits, brown core	Rapuano 2013: 77, Fig. 8:145
10	J-03/1	Storage Jar	Yellowish-greenish ware, black and white grits, gray core	Raviv 2018c: 42, Pl. 4:46
11	J-03/14	Storage Jar	Yellowish ware, black and white grits, light brown core	Bar-Nathan 2006: 93, Pl. 16:103
12	J-03/9	Storage Jar	Light yellowish brown ware, black and white grits	Zissu et al. 2009b: 418, Ol. 1:5
13	J-03/10	Storage Jar	Orange ware, yellowish exterior, white grits, gray core	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 56, Pl. 1.1:559
14	J-03/11	Storage Jar	Orange ware, yellowish exterior, white grits, gray core	Aharoni 1962: 166, Fig. 3:8

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Description	Parallel
15	J-03/16	Storage Jar	Light yellowish brown ware, black and white girts, gray core	Raviv 2018c: 81, Pl. 14:59
16	J-03/5	Storage Jar	Pinkish orange ware, white and black grits, light brown core	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 56, Pl. 1.1:564; Raviv 2018c: 81, Pl. 14:57
17	K-24	Storage Jar	Light yellowish brown ware, small white girts, gray core	Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 26:5
18	J-03/2	Storage Jar	Orange ware, light yellowish brown exterior, many black grits, brown core	Zissu et al. 2009a: 497, Pl. 2:9; Raviv 2018c: 78, Pl. 11:15
19	J-03/4	Storage Jar	Yellowish ware, black and white girts, light brown core	Variant of no. 17
20	J-03/19	Juglet	Reddish ware, dark gray exterior, white grits	Amit and Eshel 1998: 194, Pl. 3:28
21	E-26/2	Glass bowl with folded rim and crimped trail	Bluish green	Avigad 1962: 178, Fig. 6:5; Jackson-Tal et al. 2020: 76, Fig. 8:4

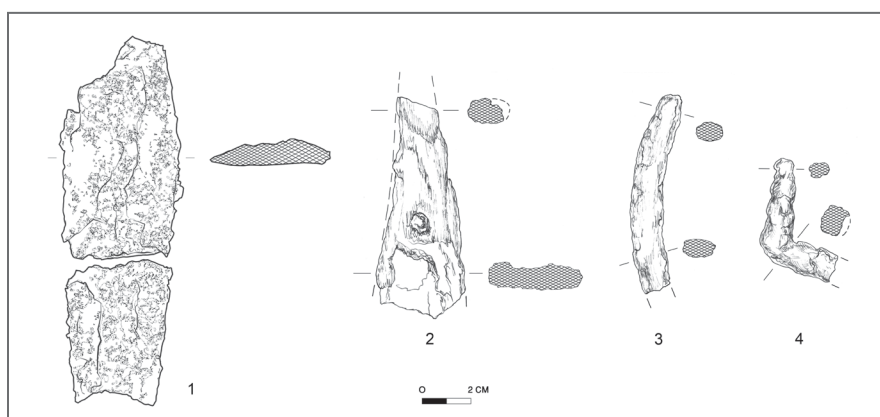


Fig. 8. Iron items from Chamber J in the hiding complex at Khirbet el-Marajim (drawing: Yulia Rodman).

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Parallel
1	33/20/1	Knife	Yadin 1963: Fig. 31:25,26; Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 32:4
2	33/20/2	Knife	
3	33/20/3	Sickle	Yadin 1963: Fig. 30:30
4	33/20/4	Elbow key	See Yadin 1963: 94–100; Tsafrir and Zissu 2002: 30, n. 131

3.5. Khirbet Jib'it (New Israel Grid 23460/65975)

Khirbet Jib'it is a large multi-period rural site, 1.5 km southeast of Khirbet el-Marajim, on the fringes of the Samaritan desert. In the 1980s, Zvi Ilan and Uri Dinur excavated a typical hiding complex, which produced Early Roman pottery and soft limestone vessels (Ilan and Dinur 1987: 120–123). The subsequent NSSS identified two Early Roman ritual baths that were put out of use by the hiding complex (Raviv, Har-Even, and Tavger 2016: 127–129), and the WRBS spotted *interbellum* and BKR-period potsherds inside the hiding complex (in Ilan and Dinur's Chamber 6) and on the surface (Fig. 9).

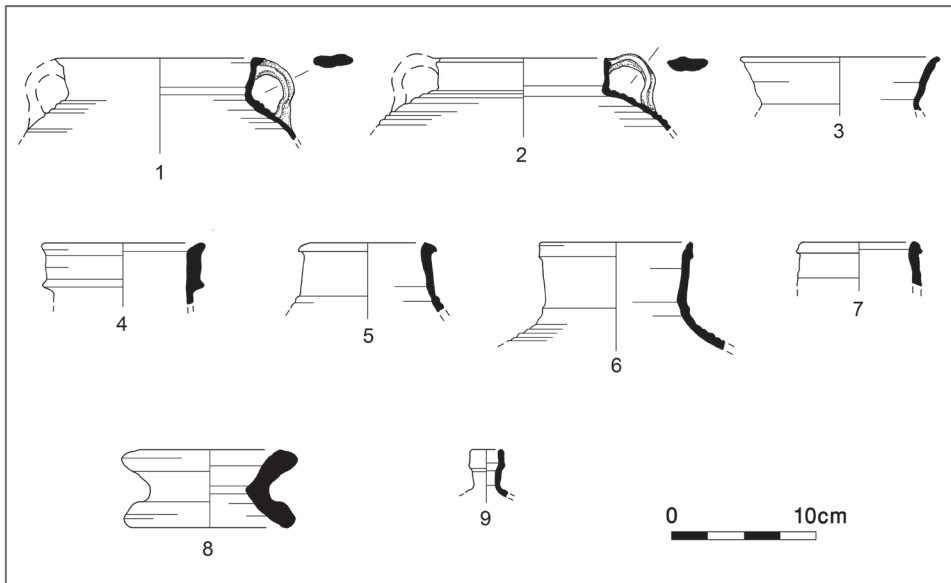


Fig. 9. The potsherds from the hiding complex at Khirbet Jib'it, Chamber 6 (drawing: Yulia Rodman).

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Description	Parallel	Date
1	01/5	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, dark exterior, white grits, dark gray core	Raviv 2018c: 52, Pl. 5:23	Late 1st–2nd century CE
2	01/3	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, dark gray core	Raviv 2018c: 452, Pl. 5:6	Mid-1st–2nd century CE
3	01/9	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, many white grits, gray interior	Bar-Nathan 2002: 261, Pl. 11:125,126	1st century BCE
4	01/8	Storage Jar	Yellowish ware, light orange-gray core	Bar-Nathan 2002: 253, Pl. 3:20,21	Late 2nd–mid 1st century BCE
5	01/7	Storage Jar	light gray ware, few white grits, Reddish core	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 66, Pl. 1.11:700	Mid-1st–2nd century CE
6	01/2	Storage Jar	Pinkish ware, black and white grits, gray core	Rapuano 2013: 79, Fig. 9:157	2nd century CE
7	01/6	Storage Jar	Light yellowish brown sandy ware, light gray core	Terem 2016: Pl. 29:323	Late 1st–2nd century CE
8	01/1	Stand	Light reddish brown ware, black and white grits, dark gray core	Geva 2003: Pl. 6.6:36,37	4th century BCE–2nd century CE
9	01/10	Juglet	Yellowish ware, light orange core	Bar-Nathan 2002: 260, Pl. 10:86	1st century BCE–1st century CE

3.6. Wadi er-Rashash caves (New Israel Grid 2356/6610)

The WRBS explored underground chambers at settlement sites and caves in the cliffs above the Wadi er-Rashash streambed (Fig. 10). Three natural caves in the ravine's north wall, east of the waterfall, yielded evidence of human activity in antiquity—the Waterfall Cave, the Hanging Caves, and the Wadi er-Rashash Cave—offering their dwellers the benefit of proximity to the settled district and the nearby springs of 'Ain er-Rashash and 'Ain ed-Duma, southwest and northwest of the streambed, respectively. Of these caves, only the Wadi er-Rashash Cave produced finds relevant to our present research.

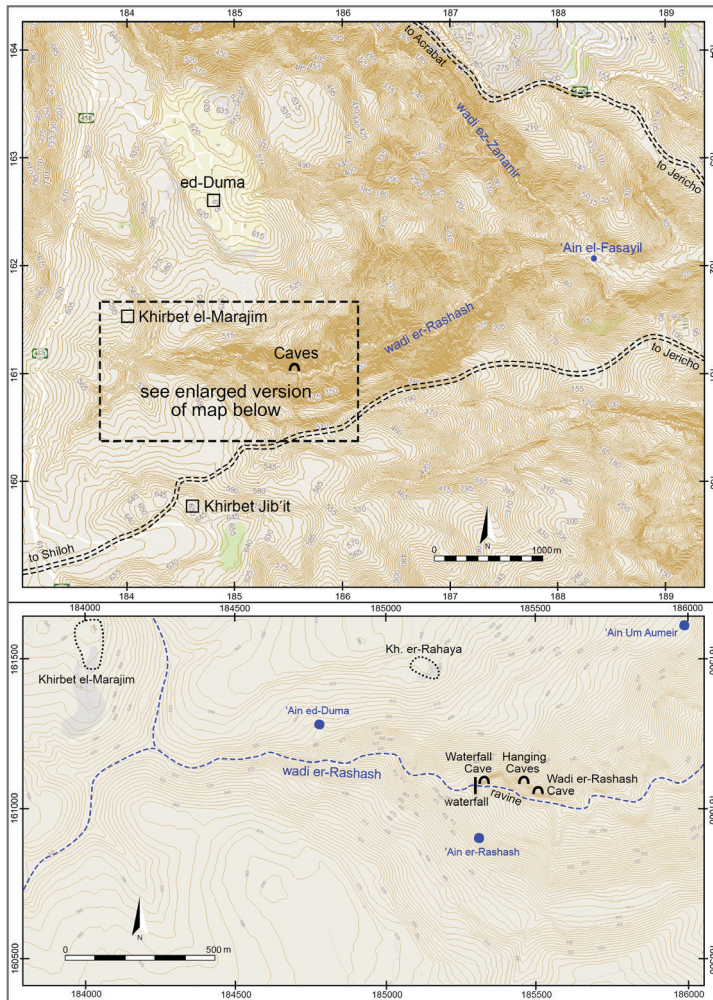


Fig. 10. Maps of the Wadi er-Rashash Basin Survey; the lower map is a detail of the upper.

The Wadi er-Rashash Cave is located about 200 m east of the waterfall in the lower section of the northern cliff, ca. 30 m above the streambed (Figs. 11, 12). It faces southeast, and although its opening is relatively large (3×5 m), it is somewhat concealed when standing in the streambed and by the springs. One must have accessed the cave through a path leading up from the streambed, albeit such a path is no longer identifiable. It occupies a wide crack in the Cenomanian dolostone and marl cliff and measures 6 m long, 2–3 m wide, and 3–5 m high. Given the brittle nature of the rock, the cave's ceiling might have collapsed, rendering its present scale smaller than it was in antiquity. Although modern looters emptied the cave of much of its contents, numerous interbellum and BKR-period artifacts were recovered from the dirt on the cave floor and the spoil heap outside (Fig. 13).



Fig. 11. The entrance to Wadi er-Rashash Cave (arrow), looking west (photo: Dvir Raviv)

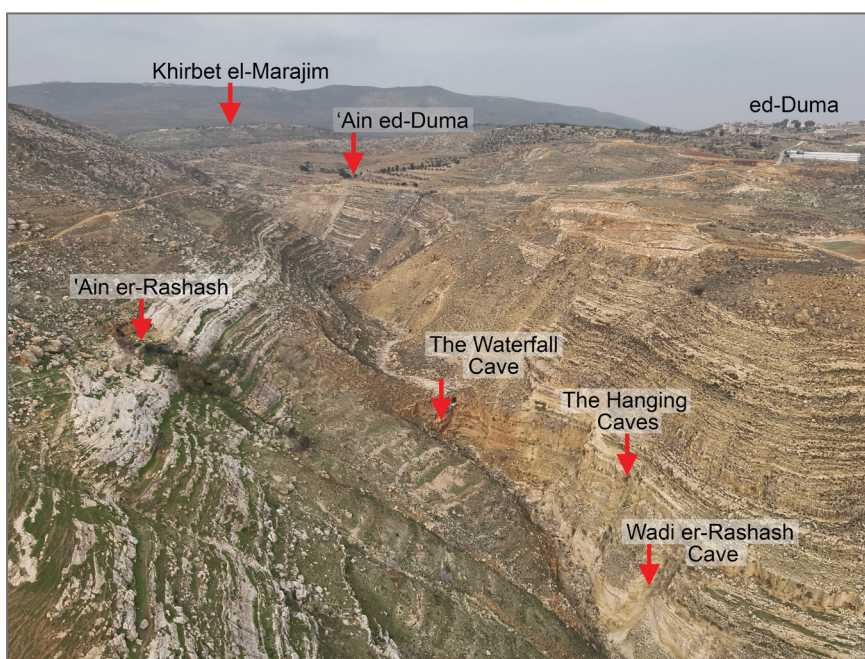


Fig. 12. Wadi er-Rashash, a bird's eye view, looking northwest (photo: Dvir Raviv)

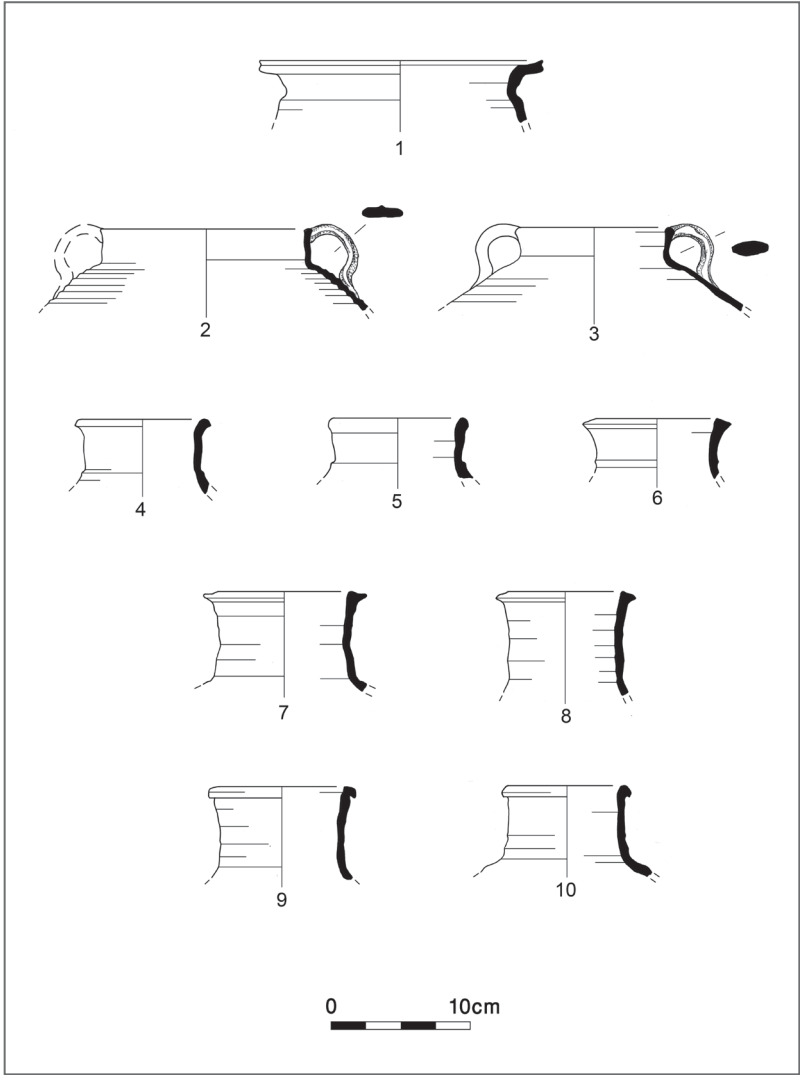


Fig. 13. *Interbellum* and BKR-period pottery from Wadi er-Rashash Cave (drawing: Yulia Rodman).

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Description	Parallel
1	01/7	Krater	Reddish orange ware, light exterior, white grits, gray core	Bar-Nathan 2006: 148, Pl. 24:22
2	01/8	Cooking pot	Reddish gray ware, white girts	Porat, Eshel, and Frumkin 2009: 275, Pl. 3:2
3	01/10	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white girts	Raviv 2018c: 90, Pl. 16:2

No.	Reg. No.	Type	Description	Parallel
4	01/9	Storage jar	Gray ware, many black and white grits	Raviv 2018c: 74, Pl. 11:3
5	01/5	Storage jar	Reddish ware, white grits	Raviv 2018a: 250, Pl. 1:5; 2018c: 78, Pl. 11:1
6	01/6	Storage jar	Reddish ware, yellowish exterior, black and white grits	Rapuano 2013: 75, Fig. 7:132
7	01/2	Storage jar	Light pinkish brown ware, few white grits, light gray core	Raviv 2018c: 78, Pl. 11:10
8	01/1	Storage jar	Pinkish ware, light yellowish brown exterior, white grits	Zissu et al. 2009a: 497, Pl. 2:13
9	01/4	Storage jar	Pinkish orange ware, light exterior, white grits	Raviv 2018c: 80, Pl. 13:38
10	01/3	Storage jar	Reddish ware, light cover, white grits	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 56, Pl. 1.1:563; Raviv 2018c: 80, Pl. 13:41

These artifacts include potsherds—mainly of jars and cooking pots—and a BKR bronze coin (Fig. 14). It belongs to the undated series, depicts a musical instrument, and bears the legend לחירות ירושלם (i.e., for the freedom of Jerusalem); it was struck during year three or four of the BKR (134/5–135/6 CE; for further details, see Raviv 2021).

Wadi er-Rashash Cave's location, only 1.5 kilometers from Khirbet Jib'it and Khirbet el-Marajim, which included BKR hiding complexes, suggests that the refugees likely originated from these sites. Indeed, the sizeable number of potsherds (ca. 40 vessels in total) supports the hypothesis that a large group of refugees sought shelter in the cave, despite its modest dimensions.



Fig. 14. A Bar Kokhba coin found in Wadi er-Rashash Cave (photo: Tal Rogovsky).

4. Discussion

Acrabat is one of the least-known toparchies of the Roman province of Judaea. Until recently, the available information provided little insight into the region and its population between the First Revolt and the end of the BKR. The findings presented in the current paper help fill this lacuna, substantiating three principal observations:

1. Ceramic, numismatic, and glass assemblages found in most excavation areas in Tel Shiloh and three Bar Kokhba coins retrieved from the northern part of the mound indicate that the site was settled throughout the *interbellum* period and abandoned in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba Revolt.
2. A BKR coin and a contemporary pottery assemblage in a natural cave in the cliff of Wadi er-Rashash suggest it was used for refuge.
3. The discovery of rock-hewn hiding complexes with *interbellum* and BKR-period finds in four sites—Khirbet Kafr 'Atiya, Khirbet Nabbuh, Khirbet el-Marajim, and Khirbet Jib'it—speaks for these settlements' participation in the BKR. This increases the total number of settlements in the region known to have been occupied during the revolt to eight.

The Bar Kokhba coins from Shiloh and Wadi er-Rashash are particularly important because they provide, for the first time, clear evidence that the Bar Kokhba administration controlled parts of the Acrabat region (see Raviv and Zissu, forthcoming). Furthermore, dating as late as 134/5 CE, these coins suggest that the local rebels were still fighting the Roman forces, or at least remained near their homes, in the third year of the war (134/5 CE).

The Wadi er-Rashash Cave is one of dozens of natural caves in Judea used by BKR rebels (see Raviv 2018a: 103–105, 242–257; Eshel and Zissu 2019: 62–77). It is, however, the northernmost of the Judean Desert caves of this category. Another cave in the region that BKR refugees might have used is el-Janab Cave, about 4 km west of 'Aqrabah (Raviv et al. 2022: 269–270).

The discovery of securely dated *interbellum* and BKR-period artifacts in four hiding complexes strongly suggests that Jewish rebels used them during the BKR. Given the paucity of elaborate and contemporaneous hiding complexes outside the Judean lowlands, the discovery of these complexes is of considerable significance, providing the rare opportunity to glimpse into BKR hiding complexes in the hill country of Judea.

Most of the sites discussed here are in the southern part of the Acrabat toparchy, which underscores the near absence of clear Jewish BKR-period finds north of 'Aqrabah. To understand this pattern, one should consider it

against the background of four factors: (a) Access to archaeological remains in the northern part of the area is limited due to comparatively dense buildup and rural activity; (b) intensive Late Roman and Byzantine Samaritan settlement in the region tends to obfuscate archaeological efforts to distinguish earlier Jewish occupations; (c) the city of Acrabat and nearby settlements were severely damaged during the First Revolt; and (d) the foundation of the Roman colony of Neapolis (Nablus) to the northwest in 72 CE probably involved the expropriation of lands from the neighboring rebel provinces (Safrai 1994; Gibson and Lewis 2023). On the grounds of the latter two, it is probable that following the First Revolt, the toparchy of Acrabat contracted southeast and was considerably smaller during the *interbellum* period.

However, it seems that most of the toparchy's territory remained in Judea after the First Revolt, and the present study reinforces the widely accepted premise that the Acrabat toparchy constituted the northernmost extent of the Bar Kokhba administration (e.g., Safrai 1980: 51–65; Zissu 2001: 234, 278–280; Kloner and Zissu 2005: 140; Horbury 2014: 347). Based on the distribution of BKR coins and other findings, we may draw the northern border of the Bar Kokhba administration as follows: from the village of 'Aqrabah, west to Wadi Qanah where it followed the north border of the nearby Thamna toparchy (Raviv 2018a: 109) and continued down the Samaritan hills' western slopes to the Coastal Plain (Amit and Bijovsky 2007; Raviv 2018a: 66, 109).

There is also evidence for settlement abandonment after the BKR, often followed by an occupational hiatus during the Late Roman period (mid-2nd–4th centuries CE). Concomitantly, other populations entered the region: Samaritans in the north (see Raviv 2018a: 168–170) and pagans in the south (Klein 2011: 318–319). The archaeological and literary evidence about the destruction of הר המלך (*Har ha-Melekh*; i.e., the King's Mountain) is pertinent. *Har ha-Melekh* is a Talmudic geographical term designating a Jewish district, apparently spanning the northern Judean hills and southern and western Samaria, whose residents were displaced by Samaritans during the BKR (see Shahar 2000; Safrai 2010; cf. Magen 2008).

As noted above, the Bar Kokhba coins from Wadi er-Rashash, Shiloh, and other sites in northern Judea (e.g., Eshel and Zissu 2019: 138; Raviv, Stripling, and Farhi 2020) indicate that the Jewish occupation persisted in the region at least until the third year of the BKR. However, contemporary documents found in Wadi Murabba'at in the central Judean Desert, mentioning places in Acrabat, may imply that some population

displacement occurred (e.g., Benoit 1961: 243–254; Milik 1961: 127). It is possible that during the fighting, residents of northern Judea fled to districts south of Jerusalem and, eventually, to the central Judean Desert caves. Such a scenario echoes Lamentations Rabbah 1:45, which mentions three Hadrian guard posts in Judea, set up to crack down on the rebellion; notably, at least one of them was placed in the northern Judean hills (see Mor 2016: 214–215).

Significantly, Ptolemy does not mention Acrabat in his mid-2nd century CE list of Judean toparchies, suggesting the town no longer existed, probably destroyed during the BKR (Safrai 1981: 281). Instead, he refers to Neapolis and Θηνα, likely Khirbet Tana et-Tahta, as important localities in Samaria (Stern 1980: 167). Located only about 5 km northeast of 'Aqrabah, Khirbet Tana et-Tahta's inclusion in Ptolemy's list implies that it took over the role of the toparchy's administrative center. Safrai (1984: 188) posited that this change reflects the increased power of the Samaritans in the Acrabat region after the BKR, a thesis buttressed by the abovementioned literary references to the King's Mountain and supported by the archaeological evidence of settlement continuity in the northern part of the district and the Shiloh region during the Late Roman period. However, while archaeological data from Khirbet Tana et-Tahta indicates a prosperous town during the 2nd–3rd centuries CE (Bar 2017; Raviv 2018b: 158–160), the data are insufficient for securely determining its inhabitant's ethnic composition.

To conclude, it is notable that the patterns traced in this paper for the toparchy of Acrabat during the *interbellum* and BKR periods are similar to those observed for other toparchies to the south and west: Gophna, Thamna, and Lydda (Zelinger 2009; Raviv 2018a: 98–125). Thus, the view that the BKR rebel territory was limited to the regions south of Jerusalem (Kloner and Tepper 1987: 366–372; Mor 1991: 98, 137; Magen 2004: 14, 23) is no longer tenable. On the contrary, the up-to-date data presented in our paper support the validity of Cassius Dio's account of the consequences of the BKR (*Roman History* 69.14; Raviv and Ben David 2021). The inclusion of the Acrabat toparchy (or most of it) in *interbellum* Judea means that the Jewish territory before and during the BKR extended further north than hitherto thought.

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