

A Survey of the Site and Caves at Tell el-Hawy by the Confluence of the Rukkad and Yarmuk Rivers

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Abstract

The site of Tell el-Hawy is located above the confluence of the Rukkad and Yarmuk Rivers, near Israel's present-day borders with Syria and Jordan. A survey revealed ancient remains on the hilltop and slopes dating mainly from the Iron Age, Late Hellenistic, and Roman periods. Twenty caves were found, including a large burial cave with loculi. The finds from the survey, as well as the caves, are described. The location of the site and its function are also discussed.

Keywords: Golan; Tell el-Hawy; Rukkad River; Yarmuk River Hellenistic; Roman; survey

1. Site Geography and Geology

The site of Tell el-Hawy is located above the confluence of the Rukkad and Yarmuk Rivers, near Israel's present-day borders with Syria and Jordan (Figure 1). The Rukkad, the main tributary of the Yarmuk, flows from the north along the western side of the site, while the Yarmuk flows along the southern and southeastern sides. The site, about 4.5 ha in size, is on the edge of a spur (Râs Arkûb er Rahwah) that descends from the northeast. The hill stands 9 m above sea level and about 60 m above its surroundings. The western part of the site is comprised of basalt of the Rukkad Formation (Segev, Reznik, and Schattner 2022). The basalt irregularly covers Eocene chalk, which crops out on the slopes of Tell el-Hawy, comprising most of the hill. The chalk contains some chert concretions.

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Fig. 1. Tell el-Hawy looking north (photo: Mechael Osband).

The contact between the basalt and the chalk represents the Middle Pleistocene topography of the entrenched Rukkad. During the latter part of the Middle Pleistocene (or possibly early Late Pleistocene), the Rukkad Lava erupted in the northeastern Golan and flowed along the bottom of the paleo-Rukkad canyon. During the late Quaternary, the Rukkad and Yarmuk canyons trenched further, leaving high terraces of residual lava. Such a lava terrace protected the top of Tell el-Hawy from erosion, leaving it as a high hill. The Rukkad and Yarmuk rivers continued down-cutting the softer chalk on all sides of Tell el-Hawy, leaving it connected to the northeastern spur by a saddle, lower than the tell and the spur but higher than the flowing rivers.

The area below and surrounding the site is partly covered with basalt stones representing the eroded basalt caprock of the site. The ascent to the top of the site seems to have been through the northeastern saddle. The site contains about 20 caves, most of which appear to have been hewn in the chalk. A few small caves show signs of natural widening by karst dissolution along fractures.

In the current survey, the site was accessed from the south, where the Rukkad River crossing was easy. The only local road to the site seems to be from the spur that rises to the northeast into modern-day Syria.

2. Name and Previous Descriptions

The site was first surveyed and described by Gottlieb Schumacher in the late 19th century, who suggested that it defended the entrances to the Rukkad and Yarmuk river valleys. He described the site both in *Across the Jordan* (Schumacher 1886) and *The Jaulân* (Schumacher 1888).

Schumacher provided the following description in *Across the Jordan* (1886: 99–100):

Tell el Hawy. A small hill close to the junction of the Shari'at el Menadireh and the Rukkad. It forms the extreme western projection of the Ras 'Arkub er Rahwah. The hill is also known among the 'Arab el Menadireh by the name of Tell el Ferdawy. On the southern and western slopes of the hill are traces of an ancient wall of considerable strength, and on the hill itself, scattered about, were to be seen many well-squared building-stones. These show that the spot was in old times covered by habitations and possibly was fortified.

In *The Jaulân*, he provides a similar description (Schumacher 1888: 255):

Tell el-Haweh — Also called Tell el-Ferdaweh an isolated hill on the debouch of the Rukkad into the Yarmuk. It is covered with ruins. Walls of unhewn stones without mortar crown the summit; consequently, the Tell was well fortified, and defended the entrance to both of the large river valleys.

Apparently, the two names suggested for the site by the local Bedouin, Tell el-Hawy and Tell el-Ferdaweh, do not preserve an ancient name: Tell el-Hawy means *the ruins of the wind* and Tell Ferdaweh means *the isolated ruin*. It seems that the site was not settled in modern times and was mainly used by local shepherds. The deep gorge of the Rukkad River to the north, the accessibility mainly from the east, and the lack of notable remains on the surface seem to have contributed to its relative anonymity. No local roads pass the site, and the closest main route connecting the Golan with Batanea passes about 10 km north via Jisr er-Rukkad.

3. Description of the Site and Caves

The crest of Tell el-Hawy is its only significant flat area. The summit has limestone on the eastern end; the higher western half is basalt. Steep drops on the summit's western and northern sides offered the best natural protection.

No clear evidence of a large fortified structure was recorded. Some building stones are scattered around the summit, and several wall segments have been observed near the basalt and limestone line of contact. However, excavation is needed to clarify the nature of the settlement on the summit. On the western side are remains of basalt walls with some hewn stones that appear to form an enclosure

measuring about 27×40 m (Fig. 2:30). Roughly cut building stones on the site's eastern side may have also constituted an enclosure, although the evidence here is less clear. On the summit's northern part, a large round and perforated limestone slab (1.3 m in diameter) was recorded (Fig. 2:34), possibly an olive-press crushing stone, perhaps near its original location (Fig. 3). Near the summit (Fig. 2:29), a large, 5.3 m-diameter plastered installation, possibly a cistern, was discerned.

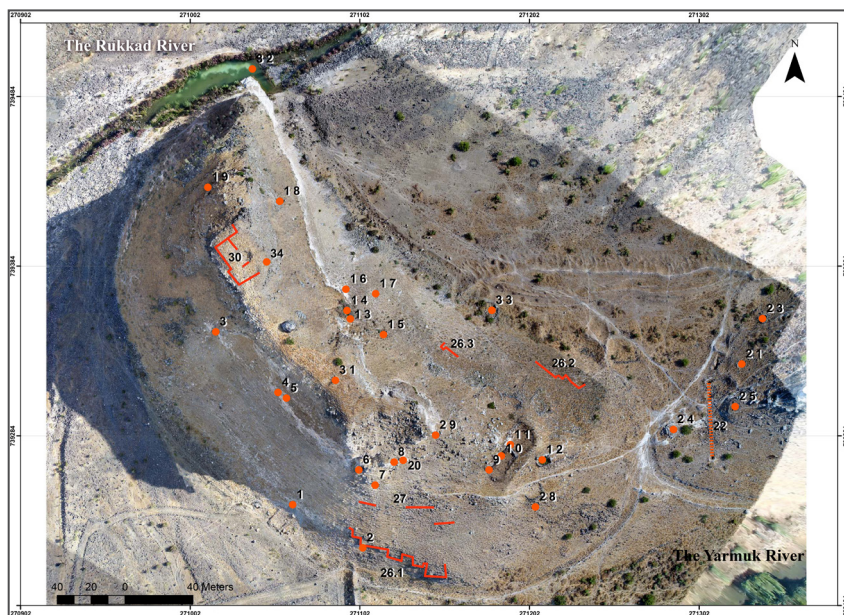


Fig. 2. Photogrammetry of Tell el-Hawy specifying the location of caves (1–20) and other points of interest: (21) a limestone vat, (22) a tunnel, (23) a structure, (24) a quarry, (25) a depression of a collapsed structure, (26–28) wall segments, (29) a plastered installation, (30) wall segments, (31) wall remains, (32) pools by the Rukkad River, (33) a modern stone fenced-in area, (34) a perforated round stone (Anya Kleiner).



Fig. 3. Olive-press crushing stone, looking north (photo: Chaim Ben David).

Ancient remains are scattered throughout the site, many of which seem to have washed down the slope, possibly deriving from the summit.¹ Remains of structures were observed, especially on the western, southeastern, and eastern slopes. These remains include at least 43 m-long wall segments on the southeastern slope (Figs. 2:27, 4). Further down the slope, walls or terraces built of large basalt fieldstones and standing 4–7 courses high were recorded (Fig. 2:26.1). They seem to have continued on the northern slope (Fig. 2:26.2, 26.3). Interestingly, the eastern section of Wall Segment 26.1 may have comprised a structure, perhaps a gate, measuring 10 × 13 m. The northern area (26.3) is higher on the slope.



Fig. 4. Tell el-Hawy's south slope, looking north; note walls built of large basalt boulders (photo: Michael Osband)

The site's southern slope is crisscrossed by goat and sheep trails. The hill's eastern slope was probably the main pathway to the summit, and it is dotted with caves and remains of some basalt structures (Fig. 5). These include remains of thresholds, doorposts, a few large stones with drafted margins and rough, protruding bosses (Fig. 2:28). An Olynthus-type millstone (Fig. 6) was found just outside the caves (near Cave 11).

¹ A coin of Tyrian mint dating to ca. mid second century BCE was found on the summit. We thank Dr. Danny Syon, who also participated in the survey, for identifying the coin.



Fig. 5. Wall 27, looking north (photo: Oren Zingboym).



Fig. 6. Olynthus millstone near Caves 9–11 on the eastern slope (photo: Michael Osband).

At the base of the eastern slope near the saddle, stones are arranged in patterns typical of Bedouin burials. In this area, enclosures consisting of fieldstones and roughly cut stones in secondary use were found, apparently dating from recent times. At least one seems to have been a livestock enclosure, ca. 10 m in diameter. Note that many of the caves were used as shelters for livestock in modern times (see below).

The Rukkad River forms some natural pools directly northwest of the site (Fig. 2:32) and is likely to have provided water in antiquity.

3.1. The Artificial Caves

A notable feature of the site is caves hewn into the chalk. We found 20 caves (Table 1), 12 of which we visited and documented in the survey (Fig. 2:1–12). Additional caves were found in the past in the chalk of the nearby southern Rukkad Valley. No pottery, other datable material, or plaster was found in any of the surveyed caves. No caves were observed on the summit.

Table 1. Measurements of the caves of Tell el-Hawy (height was measured from ground level to the cave's roof).

No.	Cave Opening			Cave Measurements		
	Shape	Width (m)	Height (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Height (m)
1	Irregular	3.5	2.4	4.2	12	
5	Irregular	2	1	32.66	1.2	1.05
3	Oval	6.6	2.3	6.4	8	2.2
4	Rectangular	1.5	0.4	6.8	6	2
5	Oval	3.5	1.5	3.6	6	0.7
6	Oval	5.5	1.5	2.6	2.4	1
7	Oval	2	0.45	3.9	4.8	2.2
8	Rectangular	3.6	2	3.4	3.7	1.5
9	Irregular	3.6	1.7	6.8	5.8	1.7
10 (double entrance)	Arched	0.82	1.05	3.6	3.9	0.87
	Rectangular	1.19	1.05			
11	Collapsed	7	1.2	7.6	2.5	1.3
12	Arched	4.5	2.2	6.6	7.4	2.5
13	Irregular	4.8	1.3			
14	Arched	3	0.6			
15	Arched	1	0.7			
16 (double entrance)	Arched	4.4	1.8			
	Arched	1.9	0.8			
17	Arched	1.1	0.6			
18	Rectangular	1	0.7			
19	Arched	1.6	1.4			
20	Rectangular	3.6	1.1			

Caves 1 and 2 are located on the hill's southern side near the base of the slope. Cave 1 (Figs. 7, 8) has a low stone wall in front of the entrance, apparently tracing a hewn opening that weathered away into its present irregular shape. The cave has 24 loculi, all of which were found open and with no signs of sealing. There are nine loculi in the eastern and western walls and six in the northern wall. An additional niche was carved in the chamber's northeastern corner above the loculi. All the loculi are single-chambered except for the second and third from the entrance in both the western and eastern walls, which are interconnected. The entrance to the fourth loculus from the west in the back wall is slightly higher than the others. The loculi in the corners are wider than the others. No pottery was found inside the cave; it was never intensely used or had been thoroughly looted since it served its original purpose.

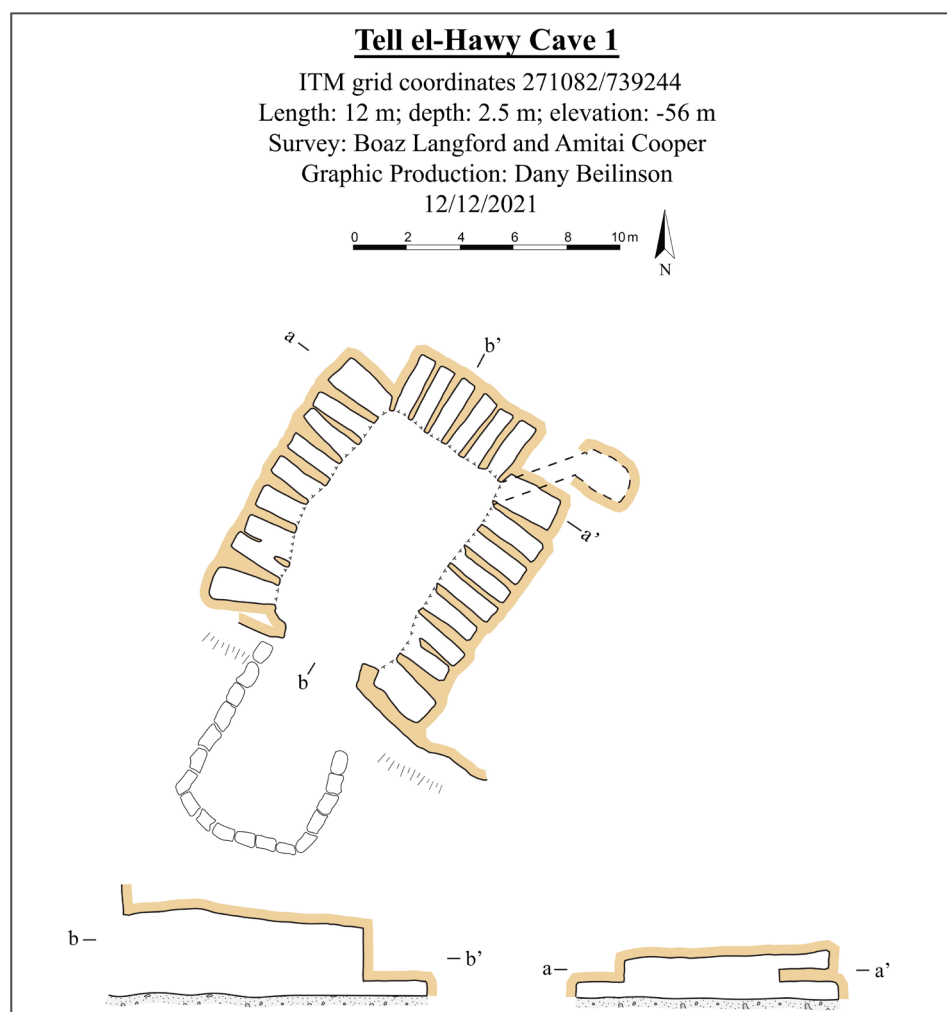


Fig. 7. Cave 1, plan and sections.



Fig. 8. Interior of Cave 1, looking northeast (photo: Michael Osband).

This burial cave cannot be definitively dated, but it may be assigned to the Hellenistic or Roman periods on typological grounds (Tal 2003). Hellenistic-period burials with more than ten loculi, possibly expanded family burials, have been found as early as the 3rd century BCE and primarily in Idumea (*ibid.*).² Currently, Cave 1 at Tell el-Hawy has more loculi than any other tomb in the southern Golan.

Five more caves (nos. 3–7) on the southern side are situated near the top of the slope below the summit. Caves 6 and 7 are adjacent; Cave 7 is slightly below Cave 6. A fieldstone fence, 1.6 m high, blocked the entrance to Cave 6. Caves 8 and 20 are east of Caves 6 and 7. Cave 20 was not surveyed due to time constraints.

Caves 9–11 (Fig. 9) are grouped together on the eastern side, not far from the edge of the summit. A basalt and limestone fence, 1 m high, 0.5 m wide, and topped with branches, stood at their entrances. It was probably built by modern shepherds to pen their livestock. Cave 9 is the southernmost of these caves. Inside this cave on the southern side are four crude arches of varying heights hewn into the rock

² The similarity of Cave 1 to burial caves in the Judean Shefela brings to mind the 3,000 Idumeans brought by Herod to help in subduing the robbers in Trachonitis (Josephus, *Ant.* 16.292). However, any connection between this event and Cave 1 in Tell el-Hawy is conjecture.

from the ceiling to the bottom. From east to west, they are 0.70, 0.40, 0.55, and 0.85 m high and 0.9, 1.2, 1, and 1 m wide, respectively. The height from the ground on the other side of the arches is 50 cm. A niche for an oil lamp seems to have been carved in the south wall near the pillars. This part of the cave contained a great deal of soil; it is not clear whether it was washed in or resulted from collapse. On the northern side of Cave 9, across from the entrance, is a niche. This cave may not have been finished. Cave 10 has a double entrance and a vertical shaft in the northwestern corner, 1.4 m long and 0.4 m wide, which rises to the surface. There is also a small niche, probably for an oil lamp. Cave 11 was relatively shallow, and its entrance had collapsed.



Fig. 9. Entrances to Caves 9–11, looking northwest (photo: Michael Osband).

Cave 12 is located below Caves 9–11. It has a 1.1 m-high and 0.5 m-wide basalt and limestone fence in front of its entrance, which was probably recently constructed by shepherds who kept their herds in the cave.

Photogrammetric modeling was used to identify and measure the entrances of additional caves on the site's northern and western sides, which were not fully surveyed. A cluster of five caves was found on a steep part of the northeastern slope below the middle of the summit (Fig. 2:13–17). Two more caves were found farther north, also on steep slopes (Fig. 2:18, 19). There may be more caves on the northern and western faces of the tell, which were not surveyed as intensively as the southern and eastern sides.

3.2. The Western Edge of the Râs Arkûb er-Rahwah Ascent

A saddle connects Tell el-Hawy to the spur of Râs Arkûb er-Rahwah. Several features were surveyed on the saddle's eastern ascent. An area of limestone blocks measuring 8.5×7.5 m was recorded near the saddle's base (Fig. 2:24). Perhaps it was an ancient quarry or the base of a structure that stood on top but had since been removed. One block bears an Arabic inscription bearing the name Muhammad (probably modern). Remains of two mancala games (Fig. 10) (and possibly a third) were also found on different stones. A depression (Fig. 2:25) nearby, measuring 2×3.5 m, may contain remains of a collapsed structure, a wall segment of which remains.



Fig. 10. A mancala game board near the base of the saddle east of Tell el-Hawy (photo: Michael Osband).

East of the quarry (Fig. 2:24) is a 42 m-long tunnel (Fig. 2:22), which is still accessible by crawling (Figs. 11, 12). Its northern end appears to have collapsed; the tunnel may have originally been 61 m long. Presently, it is unclear if the tunnel is ancient or modern, and we have no way of knowing when it was quarried or what it was used for. Near the quarry, a large limestone block, possibly a wine vat, was observed (Fig. 2:21). It measures 1.7×2.1 m and has a 1.20×1.45 m depression at its center. This depression is delimited on three sides by ca. 25 cm-wide margins and 40 cm-wide margins on the fourth side. It seems that attempts were made to remove it.



Fig. 11. Entrance to Tunnel 22 (photo: Oren Zingboym).

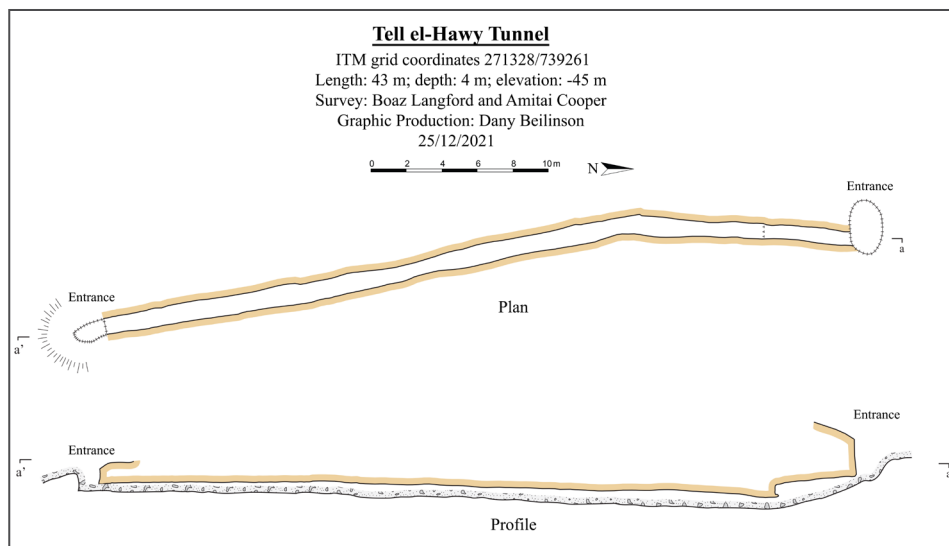


Fig. 12. Tunnel 22, plan and section.

A little further north, limestone-built walls of a structure measuring 4.6×2 m with a possible entrance from the east were found (Fig. 2:23). Its function is unclear; perhaps, it was a mausoleum as it is clearly separated from the main site to the west.

4. The Pottery

In total, more than 100 diagnostic pottery sherds (including 94 rims) were collected, encompassing the Bronze and Iron Ages (22.3%), late Hellenistic period (37.2%), Early Roman period (10.6%), and Middle Roman period (17%). Ten rims could not be assigned to a specific period but are broadly attributed to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and several diagnostic bases and body sherds were also collected.

The Bronze Age pottery was mainly comprised of bowls found near the Tunnel (Fig. 2:22). The Iron Age pottery consists of cooking and storage vessels (Fig.13), mainly found near the large walls in the southeastern part of the site (Fig. 2:26).

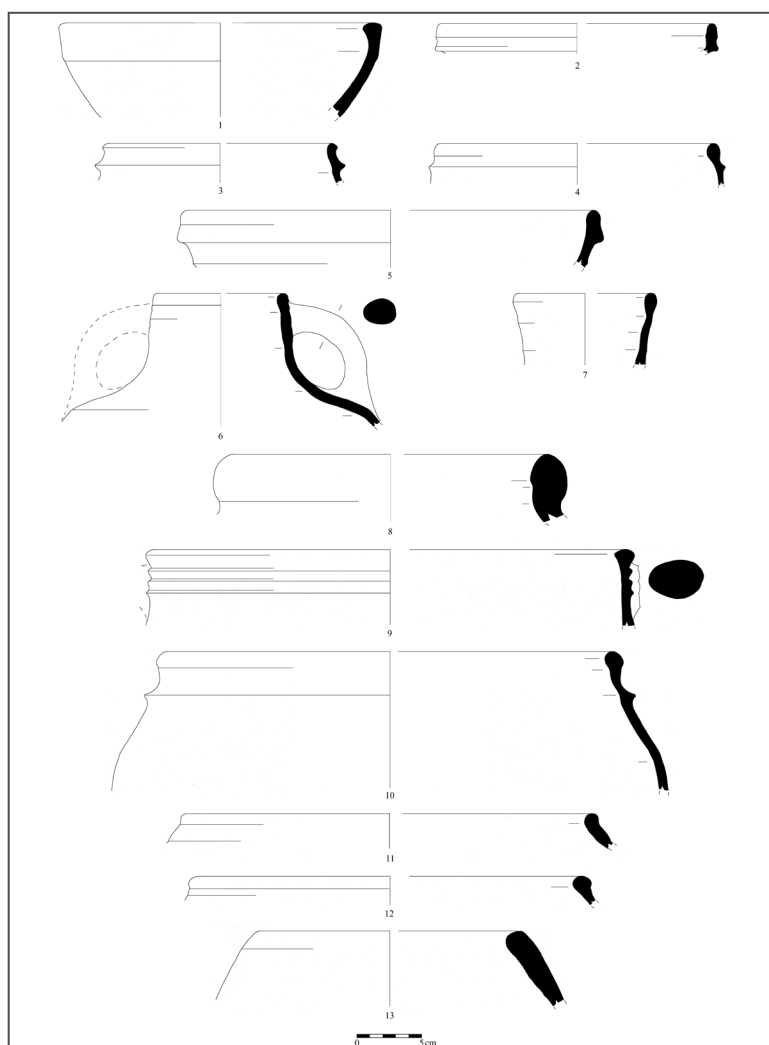


Fig. 13. Iron Age pottery from Tell el-Hawy (Alexander Iermolin).

The most substantial amount of pottery collected is dated to the late Hellenistic period, including cooking and storage vessels and many Eastern Sigillata A fragments (Fig. 14; 16 rims, six bases, and 18 body sherds). The most common form is a broad dish with a low ring foot (Tel Anafa Type 13; Slane 1997: 285–287). Some late Hellenistic storage jars and cooking pots are similar to common pottery types reported from Gamla: round-rim storage jars, splayed-neck cooking pots, and short ledge-rim casseroles (Berlin 2006: 32, 41, 48). While most of the pottery was found on the slopes, especially the southern slope, the pottery on the site's summit should be given priority because it was not washed down. This pottery is mainly Hellenistic, suggesting that it was settled at that time.

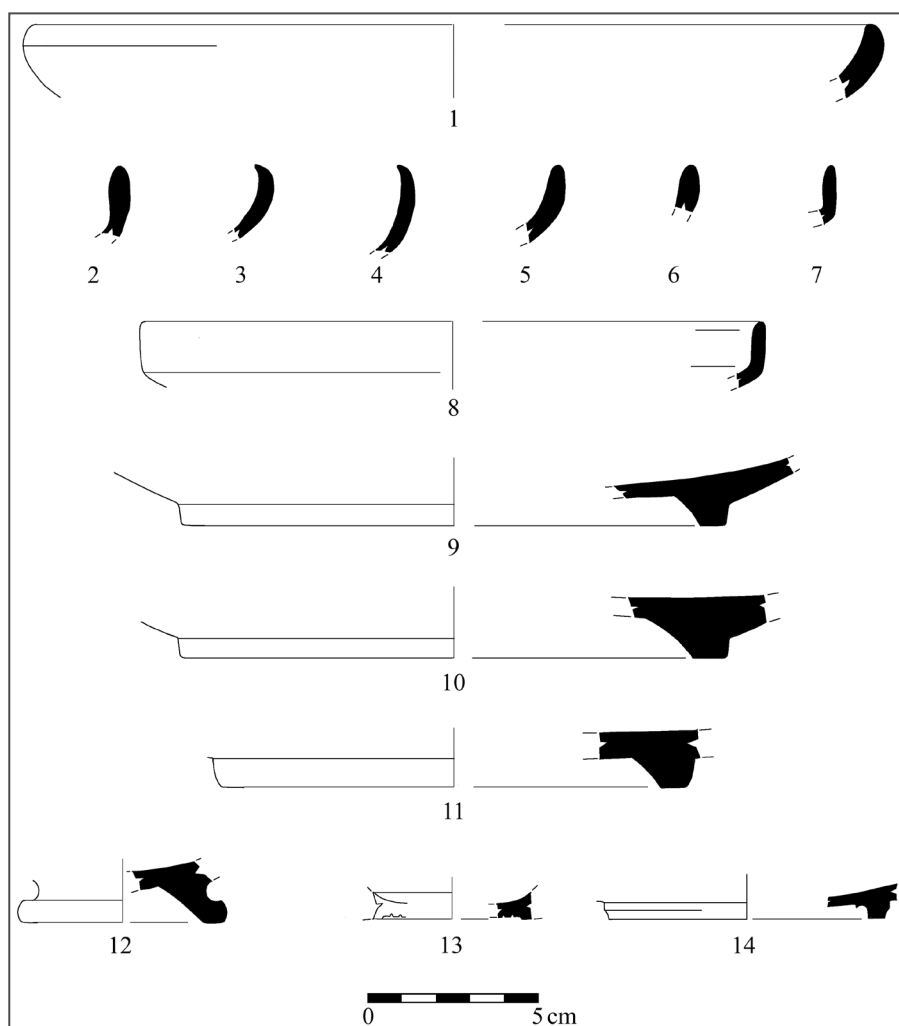


Fig. 14. Eastern Sigillata A from Tell el-Hawy (Alexander Iermolin).

It is unclear whether the site was continuously settled from the late Hellenistic to the Middle Roman period or whether its occupation was intermittent. Some forms attributed to the Early Roman period could be earlier or later. For example, the beveled-rim cooking pot could be dated to the Early Roman period (which would suggest continuous settlement) but has also been observed in late Hellenistic contexts in the Golan (e.g., Hippos, Majduliyya; personal observation, MO). If the latter is the case, there may be a gap at Tell el-Hawy between the Hellenistic and Middle Roman periods.

The late Hellenistic and Roman-period cooking ware forms found at Tell el-Hawy (Fig. 15) are widespread throughout the central and southern Golan (Adan-Bayewitz 1993; 2003; Ben David 2014) as well as in the Gadara region (e.g., Tell Zira'a; Kenkel and Hoss 2020). These forms include Kefar Hannaya cooking ware Types 1A, 3B, 1B, and 4C (the numbers here refer to the form and not necessarily the production site). These forms continued into the Late Roman period. However, the absence of other pottery types characteristic of the late 3rd and 4th centuries CE suggests that at Tell el-Hawy, these forms should be limited to the 2nd or early 3rd century CE at the latest (Fig. 16). Two Byzantine-period rims—one of Phocaeen Red Slip Form 3 (Hayes 2008: 87–88) and one of a black Byzantine storage jar—suggest only a low-key presence at the site at this time. The pottery also suggests that the site was not settled during the battle of Yarmuk in 636 CE.

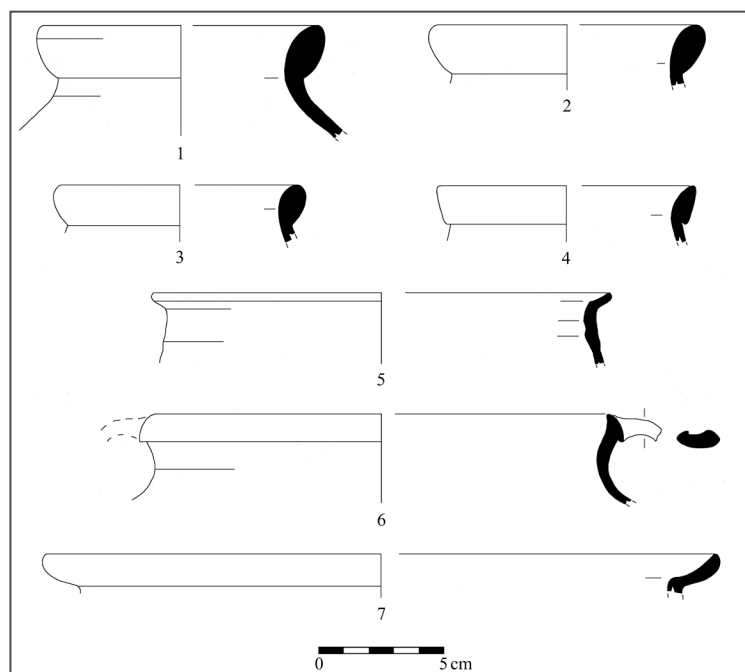


Fig. 15. Late Hellenistic and Early Roman-period pottery from Tell el-Hawy (Alexander Iermolin).

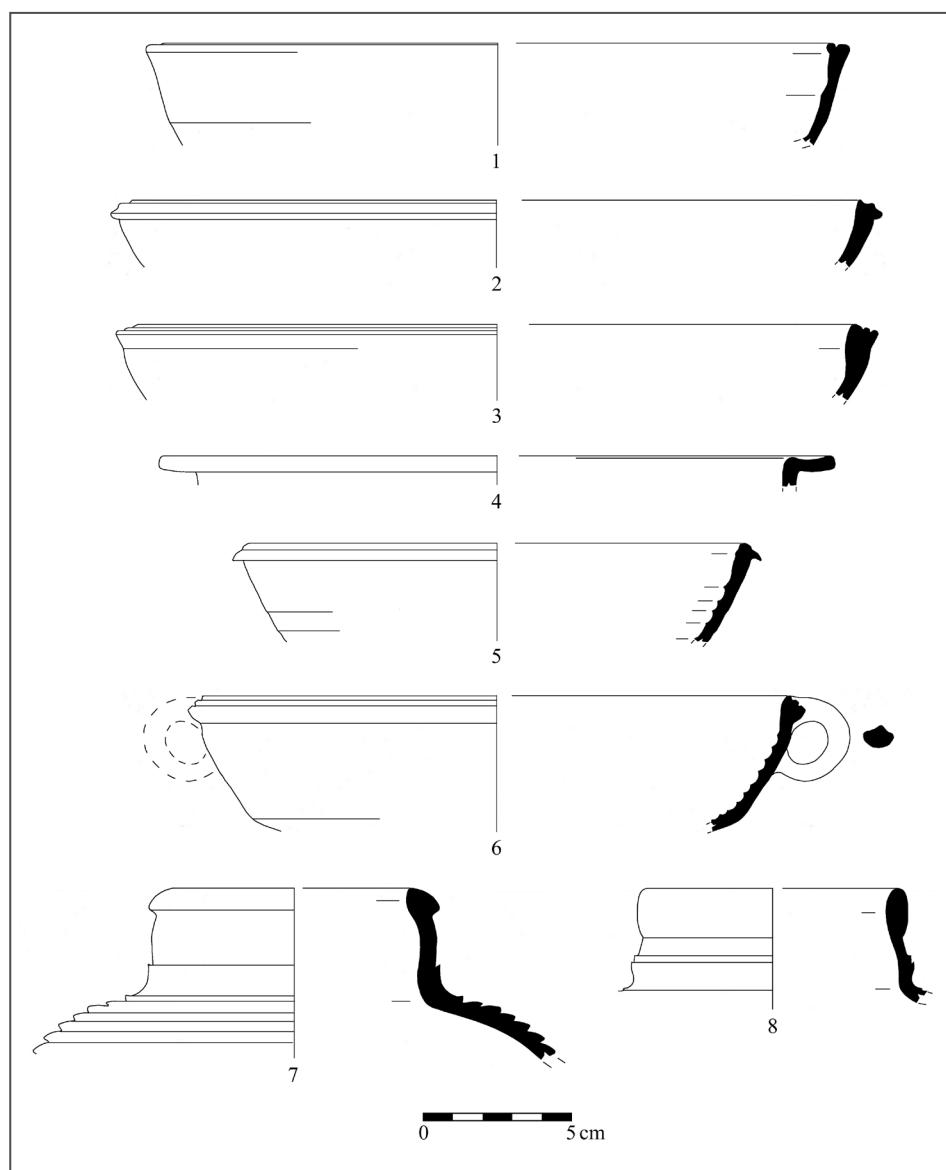


Fig. 16. Middle Roman (1–7) and Byzantine (8) pottery from Tell el-Hawy (Alexander Iermolin).

The pottery collected in the survey suggests that the site was settled in the Iron Age and Late Hellenistic periods and that it either continued or had a brief hiatus before settlement resumed in the Middle Roman period.³ The pottery forms from Tell el-Hawy are similar to those recovered in neighboring areas, including

³ The abandonment of sites in the Middle and Late Roman periods has been documented in the Eastern Galilee and throughout the Golan.

the Golan to the west and the northern Jordan to the south. It is unclear if these are also the common forms directly to the east as no published pottery reports are presently available from this area.⁴

5. Discussion

5.1. Site Identification

The site's ancient name is unknown as its current name does not preserve an earlier one. In the Iron Age, it may have been part of the region biblically referred to as “the ridge east of the sea of Kinnereth” (כַּתֵּף יַם כִּנְרֵת; Num 34:11, NEB; Elitzur 1999). Schumacher suggested that Râs Arkûb er-Rahwah, the spur of which Tell el-Hawy is the southwestern edge, and its ruins—Khirbet Arkûb er-Rahwah—might preserve the ancient name Argov (Schumacher 1886: 43, 44, Fig. 6). However, this seems unlikely, as the meaning in Arabic is *the broad ridge*, and it does not preserve an ancient name, as was pointed out by Condor (1886).

Josephus notes various places captured by Janneus in the Golan region (J.W. 1.104–105). The site of Pharanx Antiochus is yet to be definitively identified. Several identifications have been suggested (Hartal 2006b: 347–348, 388–399, and references therein), including the northern Hula Valley, Mezad ‘Ateret, the area of the Yarmuk, and Bethsaida by the Sea of Galilee. Some scholars have suggested that Josephus was presenting a geographical account of Janneus's campaign, driving north after the capture of Gaulane and Seleucia. They also point to a similarity between חוֹלַת אַנְטִיּוֹכִיָּה, which appears in rabbinical literature, with the Hula Lake (Press 1943: 78). However, *Hula* seems to be a term for *valley*. Following Fuchs, Ma'oz suggests that the Pharanx Antiochus “should be a fort named after Antiochus dominating a natural obstacle, such as a cleft, a chasm, a ravine, a gully, a topographical canyon, or a gorge” (Ma'oz 2013a: 79). Since the term *pharanx* refers to a deep, narrow ravine, the southern Rukkad is also a good candidate for Pharanx Antiochus. Notably, the name Antiochus is also known as part of the names of the nearby cities of Hippos and Gadara. If this is correct, then some of the finds at Tell el-Hawy could be connected to Janneus's campaign.

Although they do not refer to Tell el-Hawy, the best-known mentions of the area are provided by descriptions of the Battle of Yarmuk in 636 CE, when the Byzantine army fled the Muslim forces and got trapped at the confluence of the Rukkad and Yarmuk Rivers (Sharon 2002: 60).

⁴ Pottery from the Hauran has been published (Rohmer 2020) but not in the area directly to the east of Tell el-Hawy. A more detailed report of the pottery of Tell el-Hawy and other sites in the region by Osband and Zingboym is currently in preparation.

5.2. Function and Fortification in the Hellenistic Period

The pottery from the survey indicates that the site was mainly occupied in the Iron Age, late Hellenistic, possibly Early Roman, and Middle Roman periods. However, what sort of occupation it was remains unclear. While the site rises above its surroundings and includes building remains and a burial cave, no definitive remains of fortifications on the summit were observed. Perhaps, over time, the walls collapsed, and the building stones rolled down the slope (a few large dressed stones with drafted margins were found on the eastern slope).⁵ Whether or not it was used as a fortification in the Hellenistic or Roman periods, the questions remain: Who settled it and what was its function?

Ma'oz argued for the existence of Hellenistic fortress remains in the southern Golan. According to Ma'oz, these fortresses predated Janneaus and were part of 2nd-century BCE Seleucid fortifications that protected the Hippos Territorium from the western side (Ma'oz 2013b: 29–93), as the Hippos Territorium was “almost impregnable on the east and south, being naturally well fortified by the Rukkad and Yarmoukh gorges” (ibid., 82). In a recent study of the fortress sites in the southern Golan, including a revision of Ma'oz's dating, Pažout (2021) discusses three features of Hellenistic fortifications in the region: location, relation to the road system, and intervisibility. He found that many fortresses feature natural fortifications, and some are positioned near major routes or on local roads that ascend to the Golan. However, many are relatively isolated, suggesting that intervisibility was not a significant consideration.

Considering Tell el-Hawy in this light can help determine the reason for its location and possibly its function. The site does not have good intervisibility with fortified sites to the west, but it is naturally protected, and Hellenistic fortifications are commonly found on hills of this nature (Tal 2006: 160–163). The region's topography demands that routes contend with the Rift Valley on the west and the deep Yarmuk Gorge on the south. Therefore, the main crossings were located about 10 km west of Tell el-Hawy, by the Sea of Galilee, or 25 km east, where the Yarmuk is no longer deep. The absence of Roman-period road remains from the site's vicinity suggests that Tell el-Hawy was not positioned on a main transit route. Narrow winding and difficult local paths have been noted in the area of Tell el-Hawy between the eastern and western Golan and by the Yarmuk (Fig. 17).

⁵ This may be similar to the situation at Hellenistic Gamla at the time of Janneaus's conquest. While Josephus described it as a fortress, no corresponding remains were found at the site (Tal 2006: 138).

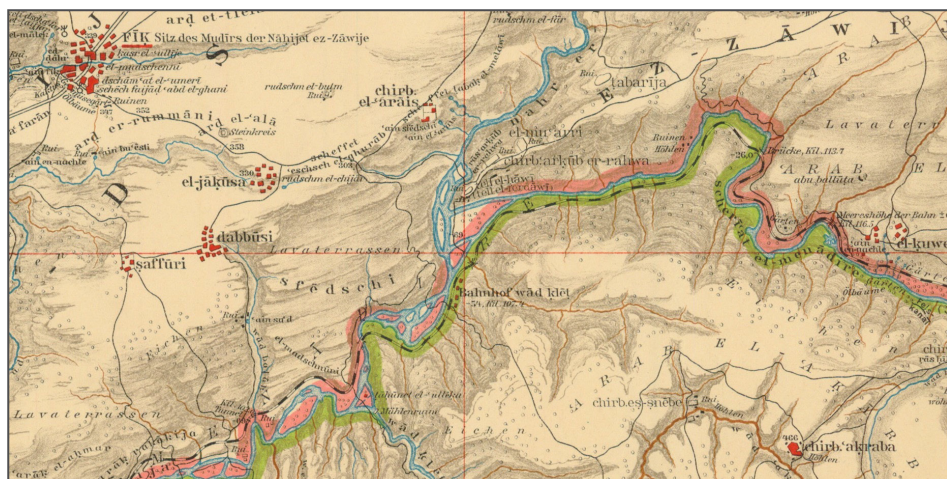


Fig. 17. Map of Tell el-Hawy and its surrounding (after Schumacher 1920); note the absence of main roads in the site's vicinity.

There are other fortified sites in the western Golan whose location has similar characteristics: Hippos on the gorge of Nahal 'En Gev, Khirbet el-Hutiyye on the gorge of Nahal Samakh (Hartal and Ben Efraim 2012a: Site 17), and Gamla on the gorge of Nahal Daliyyot. Excavations have shown that both Gamla and Hippos began as Hellenistic period sites. Thus, all these sites seem to have been established to control a local road while utilizing similar topographical conditions: a location above a deep gorge that was also an essential route of passage, even if a local one (Pažout 2021).

If Tell el-Hawy had been settled in the late Hellenistic period in order to control a local route, it could have also served a military function when necessary. This sort of circumstance may explain the site's abandonment. The area of Tell el-Hawy had strategic value only during the Hellenistic period when a territorial border passed nearby. This was no longer the case in the Roman period. Furthermore, the construction of the 2nd or 3rd-century Roman road across the Rukkad near Jisr er-Rukkad, north of Tell el-Hawy, rendered the arduous local route obsolete and advanced the site's eventual abandonment.

Tell el-Hawy may have been one of the fortifications set up by Jannaeus following military campaigns in 80–83 BCE into the region east of Tell el-Hawy, east of the Golan, and north of the Yarmuk (Kasher 1987). Fortifications dating from the first half of the 1st century BCE and attributed to Janneaus have also been identified in other regions, such as Horbat Tefen in the Galilee (Sabar 2022). While Tell el-Hawy has similar natural defenses, the absence of solid fortification walls suggests a different function, possibly an information-relay

position. It could have been either offensive or defensive, maybe having to do with the long siege of Gadara (Jansen 2021).⁶ Another possibility is that the site was a military position in defense of Jannaeus's impending expansion. Note that a large Hellenistic stronghold—Rukkad Fortress—was partially excavated on the Golan plateau north of Tell el-Hawy, overlooking the Rukkad River (Bron and Zingboym 2019). Height Spot 265 and 'Ein et-Taruq may have also been small fortified sites above the Rukkad River (Hartal and Ben Ephraim 2012b: Sites 32, 42). Further research is needed to determine if there is a military connection between these sites and Tell el-Hawy.

5.3. Administrative District in the Roman Period

Surveys near Tell el-Hawy have identified Hellenistic and Roman-period sites (Fig. 18). The area west of the Rukkad River (Hartal and Ben Ephraim 2012b) was more systematically surveyed than the area to the east; therefore, we have more information on the sites in that area.⁷ Ceramic forms similar to those discovered at Tell el-Hawy were manufactured at el-'Arais, a Middle Roman-period pottery workshop on the western slope of the Rukkad Gorge (Osband 2014: 44-46). However, further analysis is required to determine if the two sites are directly connected. On the slope and plateau east of the Rukkad River, one also finds evidence of Roman-period settlements, mainly comprising architectural elements and inscriptions (e.g., Sartre-Fauriat and Sartre 2016: 309–312).

⁶ Note that Hartal (2006a: 270) suggests that the eastern border of Jannaeus's kingdom was east of the Decapolis city of Dion, placing the site well within his kingdom.

⁷ Inscriptions in the area to the east of Tell el-Hawy have been published (Sartre-Fauriat and Sartre 2016), but the region was not systematically surveyed.

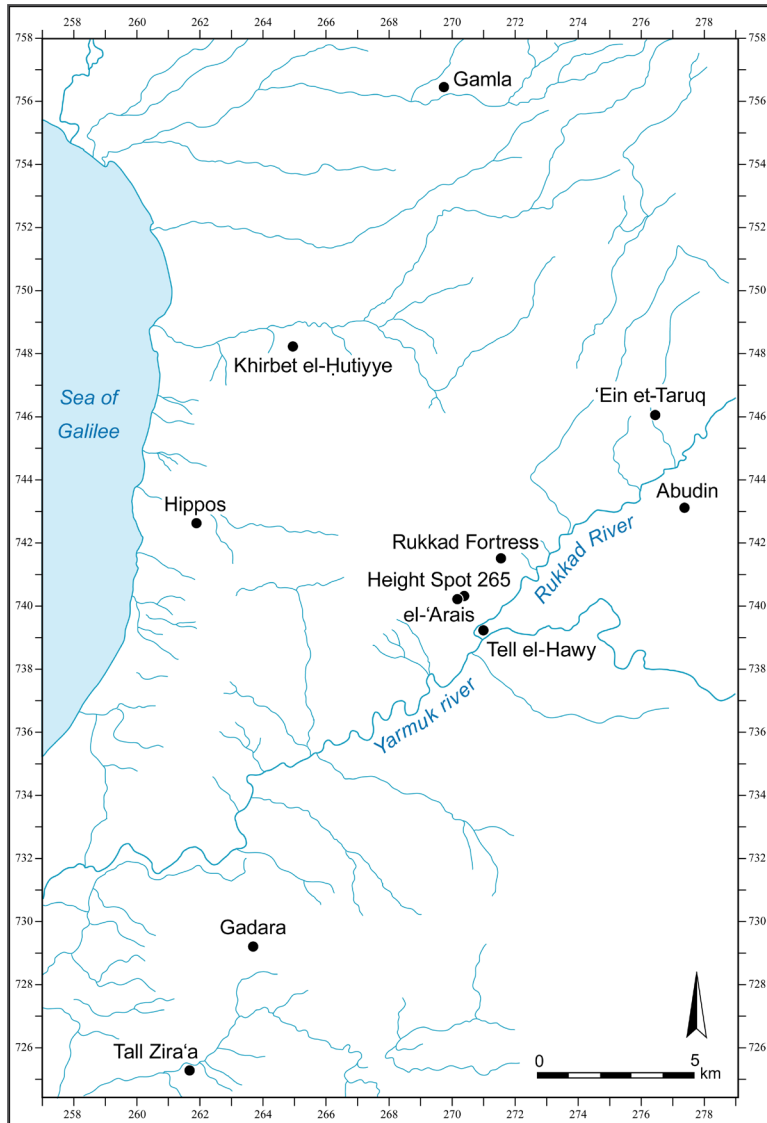


Fig. 18. A map of the southern Golan, indicating Tell el-Hawy and other sites mentioned in the paper (Sapir Haad).

Tell el-Hawy's contemporary position on the border between Israel, Syria, and Jordan is not exceptional. In ancient times, this location was near the district borders of the Hippos, Gadara, and Batanea regions. These regional borders, however, need not have corresponded to natural barriers in the landscape. This is best demonstrated by Ḥamat Gader. While located north of the Yarmuk River, it belonged to the Decapolis city of Gadara to the south rather than to Hippos to

the north. Thus, notwithstanding its depth, the southern Rukkad Gorge did not necessarily constitute a border.

According to Hartal (2006a: 272, Map 5), in the Early Roman period, the area of Tell el-Hawy was within the territory of the Herodian kingdom, which continued further east. Hartal places the area of the Rukkad and Yarmuk confluence within the Herodian kingdom, on the border of the Batanea and Hippos districts, both of which fall within the kingdom. Hartal also suggests that in the 2nd century CE, Tell el-Hawy was part of the province of Judaea/Palaestina and continued to be part of this region in the Byzantine period as part of Palaestina Secunda. Hartal places the southern Rukkad within the Hippos district, which would put Tell el-Hawy in that district. However, with the founding of the province of Arabia, it is unclear whether the border between Palaestina and Arabia was by the Rukkad or the Allan River to the east (Hartal 2006a: 278, Map 6). According to Hartal, the eastern border is placed by the Allan River to the east.

Ma'oz (1986) suggests that the southern part of the Rukkad River was a border between administrative districts. In the Roman period, it was the border between Batanea and Naveh districts, on the one side, and Hippos, on the other (Ben David 2019). More recently, in the late 19th century, it was considered the border between the eastern and western Jaulan, which were both parts of a more comprehensive district distinguished from the western Hauran by the Allan River (Schumacher 1886: 2–3).

Defining these districts' borders is difficult. One reason is that they shifted over time. Historical and archaeological sources such as border stones, coins, inscriptions, and district village lists have been used to define the borders of the Decapolis cities (e.g., Moors 2002). On these grounds, Tell el-Hawy may have belonged to the Hippos District to the west, the Gadara, Dion, or Abila District to the south, or the Naveh District to the east. Moreover, given its border location, it could have changed hands and moved between districts. The famous Rehob Inscription, which is also found with some differences in rabbinic sources (Sussmann 1974; 1975), mentions two administrative regions near Tell el-Hawy: Hippos and Naveh. While the Rehob Inscription dates to the Byzantine period, the text is presumed to express a Roman-period tradition. Since Tell el-Hawy seems to be on the border of these two regions, the question of whether it can be identified with a specific site mentioned in the Rehob Inscription is worth exploring.

Nine Jewish settlements are named in the Hippos region, of which five or six have been identified (Ben David 2011). Stone vessels have been noted at sites in the Hippos district, evidence of Jewish ethnicity in the Roman period (Fridman 2021). While Tell el-Hawy contains Roman-period pottery, it produced no evidence of Jewish ethnicity and, therefore, is unlikely to be one of the remaining

unidentified Jewish sites. Additionally, the pottery forms at the site are widespread throughout the region, including Hippos, Gadara, and Gaulanitis.

The site's topography is conducive to an eastbound affiliation, suggesting it is more likely to have been part of the Naveh District than the Hippos District. Eight Jewish settlements in the Naveh district are mentioned in the Rehob Inscription, of which four have been identified.⁸ The list, with some differences, also appears in the Jerusalem Talmud and the Tosefta. One important difference pertains to the preambles of these lists. In the Rehob Inscription, the preamble reads “העיירות שהן ספיק בתחום נוה” (t. *Demai* 2:1), while the Tosefta begins with “העיירות המותרות בתחום ניי ונאסרו” (t. *Šeb.* 4:10). According to Sussmann (1974), the latter should also be the reading in the Jerusalem Talmud. Notably, the phrase שהן ספיק does not occur with other districts in the Rehob Inscription. While this has typically been interpreted as expressing doubt as to whether the towns themselves are forbidden or permitted in connection with Jewish agricultural laws, it is also possible that the doubt refers to whether they were part of the Naveh district. This would put Tell el-Hawy in a good location for the rabbinical source to consider as an unclear area, as it is on the border of the Gadara, Hippos, and Naveh regions.

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⁸ The source as it appears in the Rehob Inscription (Naveh 1978: 81) is as follows: “העיירות שהן ספיק בתחום נוה” (t. *Demai* 2:1). Sussmann compared the different versions of the various names. He found, based on a comparison with other sources, that the two sites of וריב and וריב in the Rehob Inscription should probably be read as one site called וריב (Sussmann 1974: 124–125).

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