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ABBREVIATIONS

AASOR Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ADAJ Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
AJA American Journal of Archaeology
AfO Archiv für Orientforschung
BA The Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BT Babylonian Talmud
CAD Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
CIS Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum
DD Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DSD Dead Sea Discoveries
EI Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies
ESI Excavations and Surveys in Israel
IAA Reports Israel Antiquities Authority Reports
IEJ Israel Exploration Journal
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JCS Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JEJ Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies
PEQ Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PT Palestinian Talmud
QDAP Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine
RA Revue d’Assyriologie et d’Archéologie Orientale
RB Revue Biblique
RE Pauly-Wissowa’s Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
RQ Revue de Qumran
VT Vetus Testamentum
ZA Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZDPV Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins

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Excavations near Nahmanides Cave in Jerusalem and the Question of the Identification of Biblical Nob

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Bar-Ilan University
Ramat Gan

ABSTRACT: This article presents a salvage excavation undertaken in 2001 near Nahmanides Cave, in the upper section of Kidron Valley, Jerusalem.Segments of open limestone quarries from the second–first centuries BCE were uncovered. The quarries were covered in antiquity by an earth fill, containing large quantities of pottery from the end of the Iron Age (seventh–sixth centuries BCE). The fill may have been brought here from a nearby settlement, the stones of which were dismantled and reused. The article discusses the possibility of the identification of this settlement — which no longer exists — as biblical Nob, located north of Jerusalem.

In June 2001, a salvage excavation was conducted in the upper section of Kidron Valley (known in Arabic as Wadi al-Joz and in Hebrew as Nahal Ha-Egoz), some 50 m. north of Nahmanides Cave (grid ref. 17200/13320–17218/13330), before the construction of a new drainage system (fig. 1). Among the ancient features scattered on both banks of the valley are open limestone quarries and burial caves, including the Cave of Simeon the Just and the Minor Sanhedrin Cave from the Second Temple period, both of which have been investigated in the past (Kloner 2001: 83*-84*, 87*-88*; Kloner and Zissu 2002: 136–139).

Nahmanides Cave, mentioned in the past by Dalman (1930: 180) and Pierotti, who published a drawing of it (1864: pl. 57), derives its name from a medieval Jewish tradition that Nahmanides used to pray in it after moving to Jerusalem c. 1267 (Vilnay 2004: 177–178). It is a huge underground limestone quarry (c.

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1 The excavation, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (permit A-3444/2001) was funded by the Company for the Development of East Jerusalem. The excavation was directed by the author, with the participation of Haled Abu Ta'a and Naser Sanduka and with the assistance of Gideon Solimany, Jon Seligman and Avi Ganon. The plans of the site were prepared by Avi Hagian and Slava Pirsky. Assistance was provided by Prof. Hanan Eshel, Prof. Amos Kloner, Dr. David Amit, Dr. Gabriel Barkay and Avraham and Nili Graicer. The preparation of this article was supported by Krauthammer Cathedra at the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology. I am grateful to all of the above. An early version of this article was published in Hebrew (Zissu 2006).
The cave is partially unroofed (c. 15×30 m.) and partially roofed. The ceiling is supported in the middle by two square pillars. In the innermost part along the southern wall, a rock-cut shelf is located 3.5–4 m. above the floor. At various heights in the walls signs of quarrying activity to remove rectangular blocks of hewn stone are visible.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Such marks are known from other quarries from various periods in Jerusalem and its environs (e.g., the Chapel of St. Vartan beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the quarries have been dated to the Iron Age; Zedekiah’s Cave [Safrai and Sasson 2001: 77–80]; and the quarry from the late Second Temple period uncovered by Amit, Seligman and Zilberbod on the eastern slope of Mt. Scopus [2008]).
Fig. 2. Excavation areas: general plan

Fig. 3. Nahmanides Cave (view from outside to the south)
In the centre of the cave’s western wall, a series of four rock-cut troughs linked by a conduit were observed (fig. 5). A diagonal channel fed these troughs with water, perhaps from a small spring at the top of the cliff above the cave. Travertine deposits on the rock surface suggest that a small spring originally existed here. The water was apparently trapped in a small square room cut out of the rock,
visible today above the façade of the Nahmanides Cave. The cave has been surveyed but not excavated.

THE EXCAVATIONS

The 2001 excavation focused on two areas: area A in the west (figs. 2, 6–8) and area B in the east (fig. 2). In both, open limestone quarries and scattered pottery were observed. The total excavated area encompasses c. 130 sq.m. (a section c. 25×4 m. in area A and a section c. 10×3 m. on average in area B). After the
Fig. 7b. Area A: view to the north-east (loci 201 and 202)
Fig. 8. Area A: rock-cut channel (loci 206, 208 and 210; view to the north-east)
archaeological documentation was concluded, the area was released for further development.

The quarry was used as a source of meleke stone, a hard Turonian limestone of the Bina formation. The extensive quarries are believed to have fallen into disuse in the first century BCE (see below).

In both areas, masons exposed the natural rock to a depth of 1.5–4.5 m. below the present-day surface. In many places there are signs of the cessation of quarrying — scars or ‘negatives’ left on the rock walls and floor after the removal of the block of stone. Some blocks of stone were never separated, due to fissures or defects in the bedrock. The separation channels — the shallow channels left in the bedrock after separation of the block — offer an estimate of the typical size of building stones extracted: up to 0.5 m. in length, and c. 0.25–0.4 m. in width and height.

In area A, near the western edge of the excavation area, a channel segment (c. 5×0.6 m.), stretching in a general north–south direction, was uncovered (figs. 6, 8). Its upper portion was dug out of the valley earth to a depth of c. 3.5 m.; its lower part was cut into the bedrock. The upper end of the rock-cut portion is approximately 1.7 m. high; it is covered with stone slabs, stones and soil. A small probe in the silt covering the floor of the channel (L.208) uncovered large fragments of a spherical cooking pot (fig. 9:2) and jar fragments (fig. 9:5), both dated to the Hellenistic period (second–first centuries BCE).

The continuation of the channel in both directions could not be examined for safety reasons. This channel is similar to water tunnels in the springs of the Judean Hills (Ron 1992). It is possible that it exploited a water source that dried up over the years.

The channel is cut by the quarry, indicating that it was no longer serving its original purpose during the quarrying enterprise. After the quarries fell into disuse, they were systematically covered with dirt and quarrying chips and debris (e.g., L.207 and L.204). This homogeneous fill contained large amounts of potsherds typical of the end of the Iron Age II, such as jugs, holemouth jars, kraters, a zoomorphic figurine and oil-lamps from the seventh and sixth centuries BCE (figs. 10–11).

The same phenomenon was observed in area B. Large amounts of Iron II pottery, mixed with stone debris and chips, were found on the bedrock (figs.

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3 Meleke is found in the vicinity of the American Colony, on the southern bank of Nahal Ha-Egoz; on the northern bank of Nahal Ha-Egoz, in contrast, a brittle chalk of the mizzi hila type was uncovered (Picard 1956: maps 5–6; Arkin 1973: map 1:3, ‘Geology’). Toward the end of the Second Temple period, preference was given to those parts of the quarries where meleke rock was fairly accessible (Kloner and Zissu 2007: 12–15); such quarries are well known from various places in northern Jerusalem, such as Sanhedriya (Jotham-Rothschild 1952).
10–11). A few Hellenistic pottery sherds were also found on the bedrock (fig. 9:3). A natural karstic niche damaged by the quarry was revealed, containing a complete Hellenistic cooking pot (fig. 9:1), dated to the second or first century BCE (Bar-Nathan 2002: 68–70, pl. 11:123, type J-CP1). This vessel apparently belongs to the quarrying enterprise; thus, the end of the quarrying activities can apparently be dated to this period.

It is impossible to determine conclusively from where the Iron II potsherds in the fill came. However, on the basis of the vessel types represented, as well as the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Provenience and Reg. No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Parallels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cooking pot</td>
<td>L.212, B.523</td>
<td>Brown-red clay, smoothed</td>
<td>Hellenistic–Early Roman</td>
<td>Bar-Nathan 2002: 68–70, pl. 11:123, type J-CP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cooking pot</td>
<td>L.208, B.512</td>
<td>Reddish clay, coarse white grits</td>
<td>Hellenistic–Early Roman</td>
<td>Bar-Nathan 2002: 68–70, pl. 11:123, type J-CP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Storage jar</td>
<td>L.211, B.517/36</td>
<td>Buff clay, white grits</td>
<td>Hellenistic</td>
<td>Geva and Hershkovitz 2006: 103, pl. 4.3:1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Storage jar</td>
<td>L.200, B.504/2</td>
<td>Red-grey clay, white grits</td>
<td>Hellenistic</td>
<td>Geva and Hershkovitz 2006: 104, pl. 4.3:7,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Storage jar</td>
<td>L.209, B.514/1</td>
<td>Grey clay, black grits</td>
<td>Hellenistic</td>
<td>Geva 2006: pl. 5.4:17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
state of preservation of the pottery (large fragments unimpaired by use) and their large quantities, we can assume that they originated from a nearby settlement, located at the top of the slope either north or south of the quarry: around the American Colony or in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood (fig. 1; see also relief map of Jerusalem, Hecker 1956: map 1, showing the higher topography of these locations).

The apparent existence of an ancient spring, which must have dried up over the years, supports the possibility that an ancient (Iron Age) site existed in close proximity. The building stones of that settlement would, in our opinion, have been taken for secondary use elsewhere, thus disappearing from the landscape before quarrying in the valley ceased. Later, the area was covered with a dirt fill, originating from the nearby location of that former settlement, which naturally contained some remnants of building material and many potsherds. This fill was meant to restore the landscape of the valley and enable the resumption of agricultural activity there. The fill seems to date from the first century BCE, after the cessation of quarrying activities, as suggested by a few Hellenistic period sherds, found in the upper layers of this fill (fig. 9:4).

Agricultural settlements existed in this region in the Iron Age, as shown by a survey of Jerusalem (Kloner 2003: 20–24, maps 2, 15). An idea of what these settlements looked like may be gleaned from the farm uncovered in Nahal Zimri, north of Jerusalem (Yoge 1985; Meitlis 1991) and the fortress at Giv’at Shapira (Barkay, Fantalkin and Tal 2002).

IDENTIFICATION OF THE BIBLICAL VILLAGE OF NOB

It is difficult to identify the name of a village of which no trace remains. Its conjectured location north of Jerusalem lends credence to the possibility that it may be the biblical town of Nob (1 Sam. 22:19; Isa. 10:28–32; Neh. 11:32), because of the proximity of this place to the walls of the capital.

The first biblical reference to the town of Nob is in 1 Sam. 22:19, when Saul orders the killing of the priests and their families. Notwithstanding Saul’s punishment, the town was inhabited during the subsequent centuries. Isaiah mentions it in his description of the 701 BCE Assyrian campaign against Jerusalem, as the last place through which the Assyrian army passed, as it approached the capital from

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4 We know from the descriptions of Josephus, for instance, in the context of the siege of the city by Titus during the Jewish War (War, 5.2:2 [54]; 5.3:2 [106]), that the areas north of the city were used intensively for agriculture in the late Second Temple period.

5 The Iron Age burial cave excavated by Kloner in the Ma’alot Dafna neighbourhood of Jerusalem (Charles Netter Street near Shimon Hazaddik Street; grid ref. 17135/13355) may have been used by the residents of this village (Kloner 1992: 241–243).
Fig. 10. Iron II pottery
north to south. Jerusalem was in sight from Nob: ‘This very day shall he halt at Nob, waving his hand at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem’ (Isa. 10:28–32). Gallim, Laisha, Madmenah and Gebim are other unidentified toponyms mentioned in the same passage, but apparently located further north (Faust 2008 and references therein).

In the days of the Restoration Period, Nob is mentioned as one of the localities in the region of Benjamin (Neh. 11:32), situated south of Gibªeah (Tell el-Ful), near ªAnatot (identified as modern ªAnata) and ªAnaniah (identified with the village of el-ªAzzariyeh).

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bowl</td>
<td>L.212, B.523/1</td>
<td>Orange clay, wheel-burnished interior</td>
<td>Lachish: Level III (Zimhoni 2004: fig. 26.20:2.7); Jerusalem: Area A, Stratum 7 (De Groot, Geva and Yezerski 2003: pl. 1.9:5,7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bowl</td>
<td>L.211, B.517/6</td>
<td>Reddish clay, white grits</td>
<td>lachish: Level III (Zimhoni 2004: fig. 26.24:2; fig. 26.25:3); Jerusalem: Area A, Stratum 7 (De Groot, Geva and Yezerski 2003: pl. 1.9:22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Holemouth jar</td>
<td>L.203, B.505/1</td>
<td>Orange clay, white grits</td>
<td>Jerusalem: Area E (Yezerski 2006: pl. 3.2:16,17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Holemouth jar</td>
<td>L.207, B.511</td>
<td>Buff clay, white grits</td>
<td>Jerusalem: Area A, Stratum 7 (De Groot, Geva and Yezerski 2003: pl. 1.10:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>L.203, B.502/10</td>
<td>Red-brown clay</td>
<td>En Gedi: Stratum V (Yezerski 2007: pl. 6.30); Jerusalem: Area E (Yezerski 2006: pl. 3.2:12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Oil lamp</td>
<td>L.211, B.519</td>
<td>Brown-red clay, white and grey grits</td>
<td><strong>Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem</strong>: Area A, Stratum 9, lamp type B (De Groot, Geva and Yezerski 2003: 13, pls. 1.5:14, 1.10:16); <strong>En Gedi</strong>: Stratum V, lamp type L2 (Yezerski 2007: 104–105, pl. 11.6–9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Oil lamp</td>
<td>L.211, B.521/44</td>
<td>Orange clay, white and grey grits</td>
<td><strong>Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem</strong>: Area A, Stratum 9, lamp type B (De Groot, Geva and Yezerski 2003: 13, pls. 1.5:14, 1.10:16); <strong>En Gedi</strong>: Stratum V, lamp type L2 (Yezerski 2007: 104–105, pl. 11.6–9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Oil lamp</td>
<td>L.203, B.502/1</td>
<td>Brown-red clay, white grits</td>
<td><strong>Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem</strong>: Area A, Stratum 9, lamp types B–C (De Groot, Geva and Yezerski 2003: 13, pls. 1.6:8, 1.14:21, 1.15:10,18); <strong>En Gedi</strong>: Stratum V, lamp type L2 (Yezerski 2007: 104–105, pl. 11:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Incised potsherd</td>
<td>L.211, B.520</td>
<td>Red clay, grey core; 'chiseled' design; part of kof or tet (?) and schematic drawing</td>
<td>See discussion, Barkay 2003: 52–55, n. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Zoomorphic figurine</td>
<td>L.211, B.522</td>
<td>Body only, legs, head and tail broken; grey clay, coarse white grits</td>
<td>Yezerski and Geva 2003: 66–67, pls. 3.5, 3.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No ancient site known in the area north of Jerusalem has provided evidence enabling an unequivocal identification. Robinson believed that Nob should be located upon the ridge of the Mount of Olives, north-east of the city, but his investigations ended ‘without the slightest success’ (Robinson 1970: 463–464). Albright looked for Nob at Ras el-Mesarif (Mount Scopus) or at at-Tur (atop of the Mount of Olives) (Albright 1931–32: 413). Many scholars, including Abel (1938: 399–400), Rainey and Notley (2006: 235) and Kallai, accepted this view (for a summary of the scholarly views on the identification of Nob, see Kallai 1968 and references therein).6

Aharoni identified Nob at ‘Isawiyeh (1968: 340, 356), while Eshel located it at Shu‘afat (1987). These identifications are, however, unlikely, since no archaeological finds have been uncovered to support them and, moreover, they do not overlook Jerusalem.

Barkay, Fantalkin and Tal suggested locating Nob at Giv‘at Shapira (2002: 65–66). The difficulty here lies in the fact that this site consists of a compact fortified structure, whereas we should expect a more considerable site.

The two possible locations suggested here — the area of the American Colony or the Sheikh Jarraḥ neighbourhood — are both topographically high, thus providing a view of Jerusalem, as described in Isaiah.

CONCLUSIONS

The article presents new archaeological data recorded in a salvage excavation conducted at Nahmanides Cave in the upper part of Kidron Valley. Segments of open limestone quarries from the second–first centuries BCE were uncovered, cutting through an earlier water system. There are further indications that a small spring issued nearby.

The open limestone quarries were covered in antiquity by an earth fill, containing numerous pottery sherds from the end of the Iron Age (seventh–sixth centuries BCE). This fill may have been transported here from a nearby settlement, the stones of which were dismantled and reused.

The article discusses the possibility of the identification of this conjectured settlement with biblical Nob and locating it nearby, in the higher areas of the American Colony or of the Sheikh Jarraḥ neighbourhood. To date, however, the

6 As stated by Kallai (1968): ‘[Nob] overlooks Jerusalem and is south of Giv‘at Shaul, near ‘Anatot and ‘Ananiah (el-‘Azzariyeh, near the Mount of Olives). … The main difficulty in identifying Nob is that even though it is clear where it should be, there is no site in the area where proof identifying it has been found. … Therefore, unless a site is found in the northern portion of the Mt. Scopus ridge, the possibility of identifying Nob with a-Tur should be considered...’.
identification of the biblical toponym must remain tentative, in the absence of additional archaeological remains from the relevant periods.

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