



THE MEGALITHIC MANIFESTATION OF THE URBAN PROCESS AT THE GOLAN DURING THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

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ABSTRACT

The Golan is one of the most unfamiliar landscapes in terms of archaeological research of the Early Bronze Age in the land of Israel. So is most of the area that is known as the 'Bashan' and 'Horan', located east and south-east to the Golan. This article deals with one of the most outstanding manifestations of the urbanization process that took place in the Golan: megalithic monuments that appear in various shapes. Huge fortified settlements, that were known as 'enclosures' were another characteristic of this urbanization process. The analysis of the excavation's results at Leviah, one of these 'enclosures', and the unique complex at Rogem Hiri, as well as survey results comprise the data-base of the present endeavor.

The urbanization process that took place at the southern-central Golan had many common cultural affinities with similar processes in other southern Levantine regions, like the Jordan valley, but was best connected to the area east of the Golan, that is till today *Terra Incognita*.

The megalithic manifestation of the urbanization process during the EBA is an integrated research that examined the data accumulated to date from archaeological fieldwork in the Golan, along with theoretical issues concerning megalithic monuments as reflected in the Post Processual Approach in archaeology. This way we tried to understand the meaning and the significance of those monuments in human societies that lived in the Golan during the third millennium BC.

KEY WORDS: Golan Ht., Levant, 'enclosures', megaliths, urbanization, EBA

THE URBANIZATION PROCESS OF THE SOUTHERN-CENTRAL GOLAN

The data that was accumulated to date from sites in the Golan allow us to reconstruct a settlement process that shared many traits of material culture with other regions, like the Jordan valley, Samaria, the Jezreel valley and the northern coastal plain (see Getzov, Paz and Gophna 2001). A similarity in material culture is also seen with the regions that border the Israelite Golan from east (the Bashan and Horan) and south-east (the Gilead). At these regions, complex settlement processes took place. A focal point of these processes were urban centers that emerged, flourished and finally ceased to exist. The urbanization processes that took place in most of the southern Levant resulted in more or less the same cultural phenomena. Yet, at the Golan, a different kind of urbanization process took place.

The Golan's settlement pattern resembles settlement phenomena over the world. Isolated sites that were located on hilly and rocky terrain are known as 'Hill-Forts'. They are very common in Western Europe, especially in Britain (Cunliffe 1974; Forde-Johnston 1976; Bradley 1991). The location on promontories, the massive fortifications and other material culture traits show, sometimes, striking similarity to the Golan 'enclosures'. But, more important, is the impact of this specific settlement form on the socio-political situation. Hill forts were the centers of a specific kind of socio-political order, that was named 'hill fort chiefdoms' (Earle 1997, 155-157). Hill fort chiefdoms are characterized, among other things, with the concentration of the population in few fortified centers instead of in many unfortified settlements. The fortifications tend to be extremely massive and warfare is common between rival centers. When looking on the Golan sites, fortified and unfortified, a very interesting picture emerges: first, the fortified settlements have very massive fortifications, sometimes with more than one defense line. The fortifications seem to be, in many cases, a social expression of separation between the 'inner' and the 'outer' spaces for the 'enclosures' people/inhabitants. The people who resided within the fortified sites seem to over-emphasize this separation by extra-massive barriers. The monumental enclosing fortifications thus created a 'landscape of oppositions; a term used by Oosterbick (1997, 125), who considered them as a political tool used by rulers who wished to maintain a social order which increased the dependence of the population on the ruling class (Oosterbick 1997, 124-126).

Another view concerning the role monuments fulfilled by being positioned between various oppositions, such as open-close, in-out, was recently expressed by Cummings and Whittle (2004, 87). In

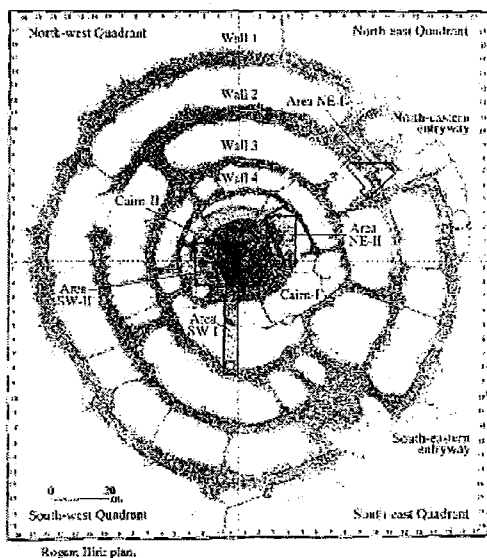


Fig. 1: the Golan during the EBA
(based on Zohar 1989)

discussing various aspects of the Neolithic Megalithic burial monuments at Wales, the authors emphasize the contrasts that were demonstrated by monuments, but here this 'landscape of oppositions' served people in a different way (see discussion below).

Very interesting is the spatial distribution of the settlements throughout the southern-central Golan. More than 80% of the small unfortified settlements that existed during the EBA were situated west of the Golan steep cliffs above which the 'enclosures' were built. These small settlements could have been connected politically to the 'enclosures', but could also be autonomous. Still, they must have had economic relations with the 'enclosures'. It seems that the Golanite populations preferred the large fortified centers over the small un-defended settlements.

THE MEGALITHIC SINGULARITY OF THE GOLAN

The megalithic nature of the archaeological record is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the urbanization process that took place in the Golan during the Early Bronze Age. I believe that the Golan's singularity in this matter demands an effort to understand the meaning of this phenomenon.

Worldwide literature yielded thousands of issues concerning every aspect of the megalithic phenomena. Recent endeavours using a Post Processual approach seems to be the best tool to explain the megalithic phenomenon of the Golan.

One of the most popular topics in recent researches is the location of monuments within natural landscapes. Researches dealing with Neolithic Europe refer to megaliths as elements that were imposed on the landscape, instead of being integrated within it, a kind of contradiction that is part of a whole new ideological and cultural system (Bradley 1993, 17-20). Monuments are being understood as

components that reflect the enforcement of human logic on landscape and thus 'altering' it (ibid; Scarre 2001, 9).

A more complex approach considers Neolithic monuments found in Britain as a different kind of human 'declaration', meant not to reflect an imposition on nature, but rather a new understanding of the world and an effort to adjust landscape to a new ideological framework. Thus, monuments are being interpreted as means to re-shape landscape as a move towards creation of a new relationship between humans and their natural surroundings.

At south-western and south-eastern Wales, Neolithic monuments were examined in relation to various landscape features. It turned out that megalithic architecture varies a lot in south-western coastal areas of Wales. Nevertheless, on the whole, their relation to topography and landscape is very clear: despite their proximity to coast-line, they were situated in a way that the coast-line will not be seen from their location. Also, emphasis was put in relative obscurity and limited access to specific directions only (Tilley 1994, 93-94). Tilley figured out that the monuments had symbolic and ritual significance, as meeting points in the causeways used by traveling people. At regions like the "black mountains, monuments emphasized natural elements of the landscape, as rivers, crossings, promontories (Tilley 1994, 142). Like Tilley, Scarre tried to go beyond topographic setting of the monuments and signified their location within regional contexts (Scarre 2001, 9), in the scope of 'spiritual magnetism, a focal point that unites human notions and historical, social and geographic values' (ibid, 12). This spiritual magnetism may derive from the mere topographic location of the sacred area. A setting on mountain top or isolated sea-shore that dictate sacred journey or pilgrimage may add to the spiritual magnetism of the sacred area.

THE LOCATION OF MEGALITHS IN THE GOLAN LANDSCAPE AND ITS SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The megalithic cemetery of Leviah is located on the southern slope of the spur. It was discovered during a survey, and contains at least 60 burial structures, and many more cist tombs. Two monumental burial structures were excavated in 1997. The more impressively built structure was an oval/round tumulus within which one large burial cist was found, containing two articulated skeletons, with no burial offerings. The second excavated structure comprised three small chambers containing human bones in secondary use. Two of the chambers contained at least a dozen complete pottery vessels, typical to EBIB (ca. 3300-3050 BC, see table 1). It seems that the cemetery covered the entire southern slope of Leviah and was used as the main burial ground of the settlement at least in this period

EBIA	EBIB	EBII	EBIII
3500-3300	3300-3100/3050	3100/3050-2700	2700-2300/2200

Table 1: chronological phases of EBA at the land of Israel (years BC)



Fig. 2: Megalithic burial structure at Leviah

The cemetery can be seen from two directions only: south and west. It means, that most 'enclosures', being located east and north from Leviah, were not able to view this



Fig. 3: Megalithic burial structure at Leviah

cemetery. On the other hand, whoever walked from the sea of Galilee and climbed towards the Golan height could not miss the megalithic cemetery of Leviah, and the immense fortifications of the town that dominated it from above.

The most impressive monument found in the Golan is Rogem Hiri (from Arabic – stone heap of the wild cat). The site is unique in every aspect. No equivalent of this complex was ever found in the southern Levant or elsewhere in the Near East. The only known monument that share some resemblance may be Stonehenge, being erected more or less at

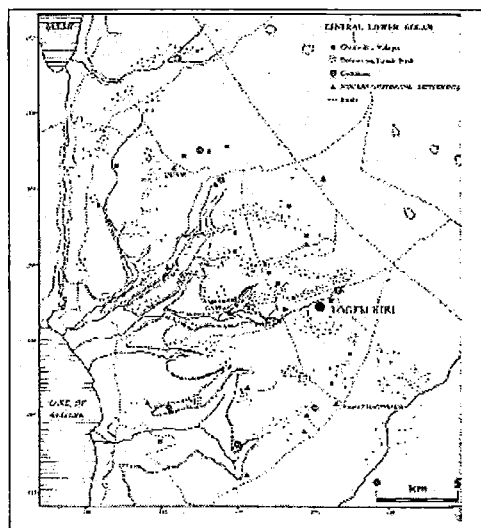


Fig. 4. Rogem Hiri, photo and general plan (after Mizrahi et al. 1996)

the same time that Rogem Hiri existed (the third millennium BC).

Rogem Hiri was initially detected through flight over the Golan height in 1968, and was excavated for few seasons since 1988 (Mizrachi 1992; 1996). The site is comprised of a central tumulus, surrounded by four concentric walls linked by radial walls. The central tumulus appeared to be a cairn covering a megalithic tomb. The diameter of the outer circle is 155m., the concentric walls were very massive, ca. 3m. wide. The whole complex had two entrances: a north-eastern and a south-eastern one.

The exact nature and meaning of the unique impressive megalithic site is not yet known. Some scholars try to interpret it as an observatory, or a cultic center (Mizrachi 1992; Zohar 1992). Both theories may find support in the location of the entrances: the north-eastern one points exactly to the direction of the dawn on the 21st of June, while some large stones found at the east of the site mark the shining direction during equinox. Other scholars tend to interpret it as a burial complex of one of the rulers that dominated one or more of the fortified towns that flourished in the southern-central Golan during the EBA (Kochavi 1993). See above concerning terminology (=EBA)

Rogem Hiri is located within a plain, which is by itself devoid of unusual topographic characteristics. This is exactly what makes spiritual magnetism more remarkable, as defined by Scarre (2001, 12). The remarkable attraction of Rogem Hiri may derive not only from the architectural features of it, but also from its location in the Golan landscape. In spite of being situated rather low in relation to the immediate surroundings, the visibility from the site to every direction is superb: towards north-east, the volcanic cones, towards north - Mount Hermon is well seen (50km. away), towards south-west - Mount Tavor (100km. far) is seen, as well as

the Galilee mountains and the Huleh valley (Mizrachi 1992, 28-29).

It is important to note also the adjacent ridge of el-Arba'in, above which a Chalcolithic site existed. Rogem Hiri is also surrounded by hundreds of tumuli and dolmens. It seems quite plausible, that Rogem Hiri was built by dwellers of either one or more of the large fortified towns that flourished in the Golan during the third millennium BC. It was, no doubt, a powerful 'spiritual magnet'.

In a recent research, dealing with the monumental cultic enclosure of the Neolithic period at Avebury, southern England, Watson (2001) discussed many theoretical aspects that derive from the shape and the location of the site within the landscape. It seems, that Avebury was intentionally situated next to an earlier cultic site, and the road that led to the new complex passed through the ancient one, contributing to the illustration of time and history to the pilgrims.

At Avebury, special emphasis was put on the relation between the human-made compound to the natural hilly terrain surrounding it, in a way that sometimes confused natural and artificial, and as a result, it could have been considered as an integral part of nature. Its shape and architectural uniqueness (mainly the recurrent stone circles) created the illusion of a center of the world (Watson 2001: 304). The complex was a man-made micro-cosmos that encapsulated the landscape within which it was situated. People who entered it, were in a space that altered their involvement with external surrounding. The monument, by virtue, was a means that transferred visions, voices and smells from a broader surrounding to another dimension, more restricted, where a 'new world' existed instead (*ibid*, 309). Nevertheless, the experience created by the monument was not available to everyone. The inner division of the complex is evident to a restriction of access. Watson believes that

Avebury presents difference within social order, according to the maximal access points. The number of people permitted to stay within the compound decreased in every inner circle, till the holliest space.

Discussing the integration within the landscape of Neolithic monuments in Orkney (Britain), Bradley (1998, 116-127) sees the erection of monuments as an action of encapsulation of all the characteristics of landscapes within the monument (*ibid*, 122). Bradley thinks that the way monuments were built, the raw material used and the way the stones were situated, all reflect the surrounding landscape. He stresses upon the difference between the experience shared by those who are found inside the monument, being completely cut-off from the natural surroundings, and those not allowed to enter the sacred monument, but remain 'attached' to the natural landscape. The movement from the area outside the monument to the area inside it is a shift to a completely different experience (*ibid*, 127).

It is important to note that many scholars that accept the post-processual approach in archaeology share the same notions as Bradley concerning the relations between Neolithic megaliths and their landscape, wherever they were found.

At Sweden, Tilley considered megaliths as camera lenses, focusing attention to natural landscapes, that played a critical role in human social order (Tilley 1998, 25-27).

Cummings and Whittle considered landscape as the medium through which social life exist. Neolithic monuments at Wales were actually negotiation loci where people could comprehend their place in the world. The achievement of erecting such monuments had a mythical meaning concerning the creation of the universe and the ancestors who originated from the earth and water.

Monuments were deliberately placed within landscapes that reflected the diversity between higher and lower places, beginning

and ending (riverine systems that begins in mountains and end in the sea), thus symbolizing oppositions such as 'life and death' (Cummings and Whittle 2004, 77-87).

It seems to me, that the method of construction of Rogem Hiri reflects the same principles. First of all, its location inside a plain from which impressive landscape features were clearly seen, had spiritual meaning. Second, the proximity to the Chalcolithic sacred place of el-Arbain was meant to illustrate the connection to the past and the historic continuation. Those who entered the circles of the monument were cut off from the outer world and thus shared an experience in which different senses took part. It is quite clear, that the ideology that stressed upon the sharp contrast between in-out the enclosed fortified town, (in socio-political aspects), was attested also to the sacred complex of Rogem Hiri.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION - THE SYRIAN-AFRICAN RIFT AS A 'MEGALITHIC LANDSCAPE'

It appears, that many of the megalithic cemeteries, dolmen fields and other monuments that are found in the southern Levant are located along the Syrian-African rift, from the Dead Sea to northern Syria, a phenomenon well illustrated by Zohar (1989, fig. 1).

In addition to the megalithic phenomena that characterize the Golan, (close to the northern edge of the megalithic landscape) one should note, for example, the various megalithic features that were found during the Moab and Ard el-Kerak survey (close to the southern edge of the megalithic landscape), recently discussed by Worschech (2002). At this region, many megalithic elements, like cromlechs, dolmens, menhirs and other burial structures were found, some of them could be dated to the Early Bronze Age (Worschech 2002, 57-58).

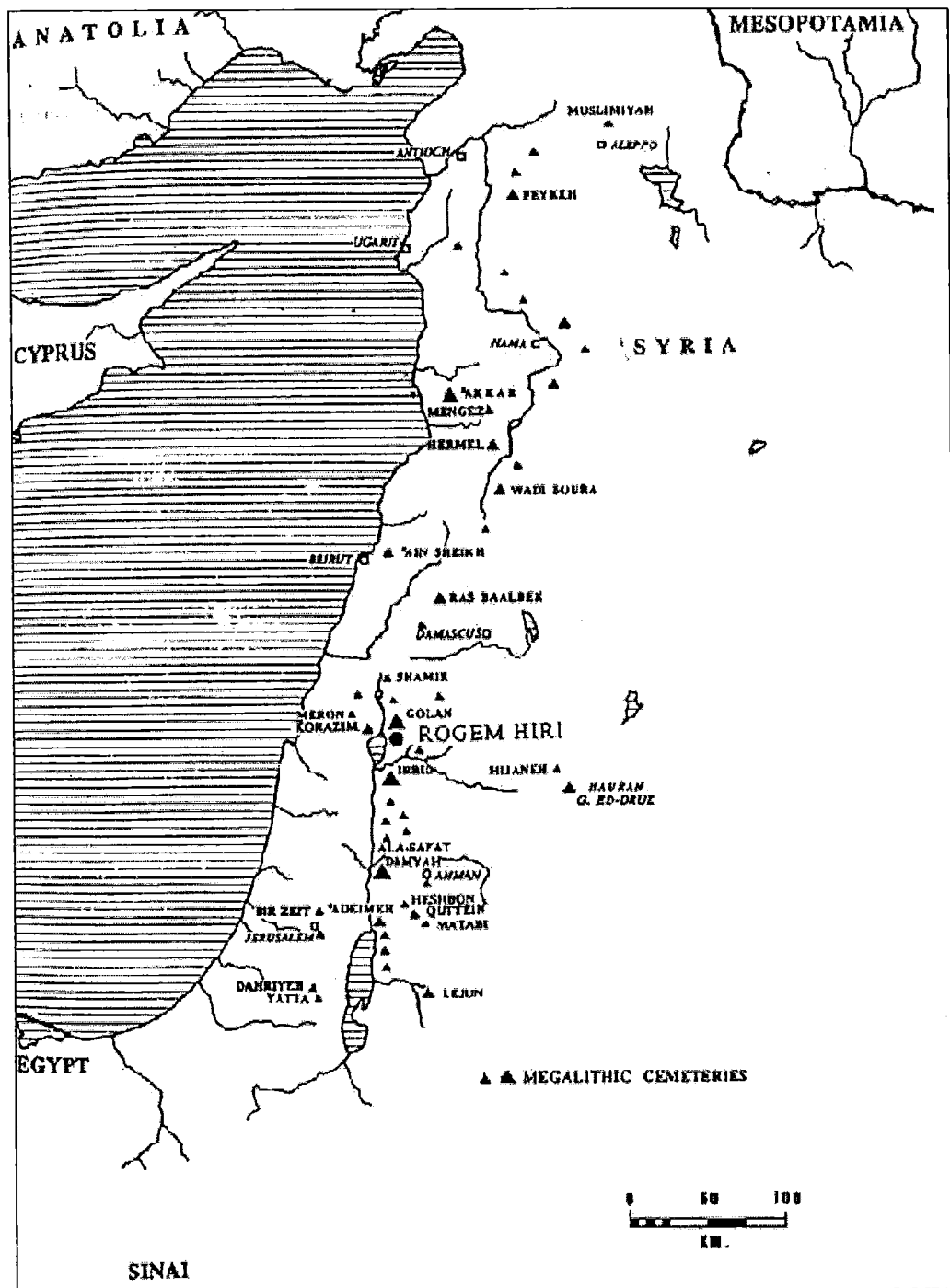


Fig. 5: Megalithic spatial distribution along the Syrian-African rift (after Zohar 1989, fig.1)

Zohar tends to explain the phenomenon in relation with two factors: cultural – the monuments were built by semi-nomads/pastoral societies in non-agricultural lands, and geological – megaliths were built in areas where raw material (e.g., basalt slabs) was available (Zohar 1992). Due to the complexity of this phenomenon, I believe it would be appropriate to raise yet another interpretation, based upon the Post-Proconsul approach. I suggest, that the tectonic and volcanic activities that created and shaped the rift, actually created a region which can be described as a 'megalithic landscape', in which a megalithic 'potential' existed. One may accept Bradley's opinion that monuments encapsulated their natural surroundings (Bradley 1998, 122). Thus, megalithic monuments reflected the megalithic landscapes.

Scarre (2002: 10-12) thought that in many cases, large un-hewn stones were used to create strong resonance between monuments and their natural surrounding to achieve a kind of integration between them. The will to create identity between the monument and the bed-rock from which it originated was reflected in choosing the raw material, and in the careful planning and building of the monument (Laporte *et al.* 2002, 82). The construction of monuments with a shape that was not natural (round cairns, dolmens, cromlechs and such) was not necessarily to oppose nature, but rather meant to express an ideology that understands the universe differently. Locations of monuments within landscape were seen as focal points of discussion of the universe and the human place within it. Thus, legitimacy was given to alteration of natural places to meet cognitive

human needs through what Thomas calls 'cosmologic engineering' (Thomas 1999, 46): taking natural materials and arranging them in a unique un-natural way. On the other hand, monuments were constructed in the most harmonic manner (Cummings 2002, 118-119). It may be suggested, then, that megalithic masonry will exist in a 'megalithic landscape', where traces of natural forces are well attested. The Syrian-African rift, and within it, the Golan Heights, presents exactly this kind of a landscape.

Hence, one may understand megalithic monuments that were constructed along the rift as a human effort to create new relationships with the surrounding, through alteration of impressive natural shapes to a new ideological system, that characterizes the urbanization of the Early Bronze Age in the southern Levant. There is no way to identify megalith builders with pastoral societies. The appearance of the megaliths along the Jordan Valley rift, side by side with the emergence of urban settlements (end of 4th - 3rd millennium BC) testifies for a connection between both phenomena. The clear connection between urban settlements of the Golan (e.g. Leviah) and megalithic monuments is an evidence for a new set of ideas that derived from urban culture and was carried out by well organized and stratified communities. Those urban communities, being led by powerful chiefs, rulers or 'agents', as defined by Flannery (1999), were the only entities that were able to carry out the complicated monumental enterprises that characterized the urbanization of the EBA at the Golan.

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