

Sanctuaries and Sanctity #6

The Golan: A Laboratory for Synagogues:

Themes of Today

Jewish history on the Golan

Ancient synagogues discovered here

Inscriptions and what they tell us about the community

What were/are synagogues used for?

The story of Gamla

Golan today

Timeline

4500 – 3300 BCE Chalcolithic : villages, “Golan” culture

3300-1550 Early to Middle Bronze: Canaanite cities, dolmen formations

1550-1200 Late Bronze: Rujm al Hiri (?), kingdoms of Geshur and Aram

1200-732 Israelite settlement, exiled by Assyrians

332-140 Hellenistic: Hippos, Banias

140 Hasmonean conquest, more Jewish communities

67 CE Fall of Gamla

135-638 Roman and Byzantine: many Jewish communities, alongside pagan and Christian ones

749 Earthquake

1260-1517 Mameluke: Nimrod’s fortress, inns and roads

1517-1880 Ottoman: abandonment of much of the Golan

1880-1918 late Ottoman: attempts at resettlement

1918-1946 French Mandate, then independent Syria

1948-67 Syrian control

1967 Six-Day War, Israeli settlement and development

1973 Yom Kippur War

1981 Israel annexes Golan Heights

The Golan in Tanakh

Devarim 4: Then Moses set aside three cities on the east side of the Jordan to which a manslayer could escape, one who unwittingly slew a fellow man without having been hostile to him in the past; he could flee to one of these cities and live: Bezer, in the wilderness in the Tableland, belonging to the Reubenites; Ramoth, in Gilead, belonging to the Gadites; and **Golan, in Bashan**, belonging to the Manassites. (Devarim 4:41-43)

Gamla. . .insomuch that it is like a camel in figure, from whence it is so named (Josephus, The Jewish War 4:1:1)

Streets with Halachic Passageways

תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת מכות פרק ביז עד שלא הפרישו קדש בגליל לא היתה קולטת הפריש גמלה תחתיה עד שכיבשו את קדש

And these are the houses of walled cities: Any city in which there are at least three courtyards, each containing two houses, and which is surrounded by a wall from the era of [Joshua, son of Nun](#), e.g., the ancient fort [*katzra*] of Tzippori, and the fortress [*hakra*] of Gush Halav, and ancient Yodfat, and Gamla, and Gedod, and Hadid, and Ono, and Jerusalem, and likewise other similar cities. (Mishnah Arachin 9:6)

תוספתא מסכת עירובין (ליברמן) פרק א הלכה ב מבוי שיש לו צורת פתח אף על פי שרחב מעשר אמות הרי זה אין צריך למעט ר' ליעזר אומ' הכשר מבוי בלחיים

What Were Synagogues Used for?

Theodotus son of Vettenu, priest and synagogue leader, son of a synagogue leader, grandson of a synagogue leader, rebuilt this synagogue for the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments, and the hostelry, rooms and baths, for the lodging of those who have need from abroad. It was established by his forefathers, the elders and Simonides (Theodotus inscription, Jerusalem First Century C.E.)

תלמוד ירושלמי (ונציה) מסכת מגילה פרק ג דף עד טור א/ה"א תני בתי כניסיות ובתי מדרשו' אין נוהגין בהן קלות ראש לא אוכלין ולא שותין בהן ולא מטיילין בהן ולא ישיני' בהן ולא נכנסין בהן לא בחמה בימות החמה ולא בגשמים בימות הגשמי' אבל שוין ודורשין בהן ר' יהושע בן לוי אמר בתי כניסיות ובתי מדרשו' לחכמי' ולתלמידיה

Gamla Battle

Whereupon the people turned about, and fell upon their enemies, who had attacked them, and thrust them down to the lower parts, and as they were distressed by the narrowness and difficulty of the place, slew them; and as these Romans could neither beat those back that were above them, nor escape the force of their own men that were forcing their way forward, they were compelled to fly into their enemies houses, which were low; but these houses, being thus full of soldiers, whose weight they could not bear, fell down suddenly; and when one house fell, it shook down a great many of those that were under it, as did those do to such as were under them. By this means a vast number of the Romans perished, for they were so terribly distressed, that although they saw the houses subsiding, they were compelled to leap upon the tops of them; so that a great many were ground to powder by these ruins, and a great many of those that got from under them lost some of their limbs, but still a greater number were suffocated by the dust that arose from those ruins. The people of Gamala supposed this to be an assistance afforded them by God, and without regarding what damage they suffered themselves, they pressed forward, and thrust the enemy upon the tops of their houses, and when they stumbled in the sharp and narrow streets, and were perpetually falling down, they threw their stones or darts at them, and slew them. (Josephus The Jewish War 4:1:4)

What Can Inscriptions Tell Us?

Who is donating and how is the person described?

Kfar Nachum inscription: חלפו בר זבידה בר יוחנן:

Sussy inscription: זכור לטובה קדושת מרי רבי איסי הכהן המכובד ברבי. . רבי יוחנן הכהן הסופר ברבי. . .

Hamat Tverya inscription (from Greek):

Severos **disciple of**

Profuturos the **elder**

Naaran inscription: חליפו ברת רבי ספרה

What are the community's values?

Rehov inscription:

Shalom. These fruits are forbidden in Beit She'an during the Seventh Year, but during other years of the seven-year cycle they are tithed as *demai*-produce: cucumbers, watermelons, muskmelons, parsnip (carrots). . .

Sussyia inscription:

שהחזיקו ועשו את ה . . . הזה בשנה לחרבן הבית הש[נ]ה שלשבוּע [הב] ארבעת אלפ . .
מאות ו . . . שנה . . . שנברה העולם

Ein Gedi inscription:

10 generations from Adam to Noah

Zodiac signs and months

Patriarchs, Hananya, Mishael, Azarya

Donors

Anyone who causes strife among his fellow men or informs on them to non Jews or steals his friend's possessions or tells the secret of the city to non Jews, He whose eyes roam the whole land and see everything hidden will smite that man and his children and destroy him from the earth and everyone say Amen.

Jericho inscription:

זכורים לטובה כל אנשי הקהילה הקדושה גדולים וקטנים שעזר להם מלך העולם והתחזקו
ועשו פסיפס. היודע שמותם ושמות בניהם ואנשי ביתם יכתוב אותם עם כל הצדיקים בספר
החיים. . .