

Yarmouk Culture Incredible Figurines





Introduction

Prehistoric sites always offer surprises and Schaar Ha-Golan named after the modern village next to it is such a site. Situated on the northern banks of the Yarmouk River just two kilometers south of the shores of the Sea of Galilee it was an ideal choice of site for early neolithic settlers.

Today the site lies in politically difficult territory right in the triangle of the borders of Jordan, Syria and Israel.

Interesting Discoveries

First discoveries of ancient cultural objects were made by new settlers in 1931. First excavations started 1949 and a small museum was built 1952. At first silex tools, pottery sherds and art objects were found on the surface.

Based on the unique finds it was given at that time already a name and called the Yarmouk Culture. It is contemporary to the Lodian or Jericho IX period and further south to the Nizanim Culture.

Similar objects were also found at 20 other sites in the region. To these belong: Hazorea, Munhata, Hamadiya, Habashan, Megiddo, Tel Qishion, Nahal Betzet, Nahal Zippon, Nahal Zehora, Tell Kabri all situated in Israel.

But also, Tel Farah, Wadi Murabbat and Wadi Qanah the latter two are caves in the West Bank area. And in Lebanon only Byblos, plus in Jordan Jebel Abu Thawwab, Ain Ghazel, Ain

Rahub and Wadi Shueib. But most sites offer few neolithic settlement traces.

Yarmouk Dating

Experts dated the discovered artefacts at Schaar Ha-Golan at an age of between 8,400 and 7,800 years. This represents a settlement period of 600 years or about 150 generations.

With this dating Yarmouk certainly is the first pottery culture belonging to the PNA period meaning pottery neolithic A period.

Major Excavations

After the first initial digs in 1949 more extensive excavations started 1989 covering an area of 2,200 sqm and later another 1,500 sqm. It was established that the settlement extended over 20 hectares and housed around 3,000 inhabitants. Therefore, it can be regarded as the biggest settlement at the time in the Near East.

Typical Buildings

At first round semi dug out huts with low stone walls like near al-Beidha in Jordan were erected. Wooden poles carried a roof covered with mud and leaves against rain. The semi subterranean structure gave coolness in hot summer climate as did the fully open portion below the roof with maximum ventilation.

In a second phase three large rectangular buildings and two streets formed the new layout of this early neolithic city.

Let's look at these buildings to understand the

already far developed culture and modern building techniques.

First Building

With an extension of 250 sqm it was smaller than the second building. Its entrance opened directly into a triangular court yard. Interestingly the single floor house had round, square and even rectangular rooms. The reasons for that layout is yet unknown.

Archaeologists unearthed various artefacts here such as silex tools, obsidian, pottery, animal bones, mussels and figure fragments as well as an interesting statue.

Second Building

This complex extended over 750 sqm and excavators found a surprising number of over 70 female figurines and similar artefacts as in the first building.

A third building has not yet been fully excavated. Was the size of a house dependent on the fortunes of the trading clan who owned it? Possibly so, because similarities were found at other sites.

Ancient City Layout

We have already mentioned the two main streets or better said passages. The first running between the first and second building was three meters wide and excavated up to a length of 50 meters.

The second only measured one meter in

width and was running between the other two buildings. It was excavated up to a length of 150 meters.

After the first two excavation projects covering a total of 3,700 sqm a new project was started on an area of 550 sqm. And this might not be the end of it.

Yarmouk Culture

Experts established that it was a very innovative culture and the first in the region to use systematic pottery production techniques. They produced both rude and very fine ware and used decorations, engravings and even painted their pottery.

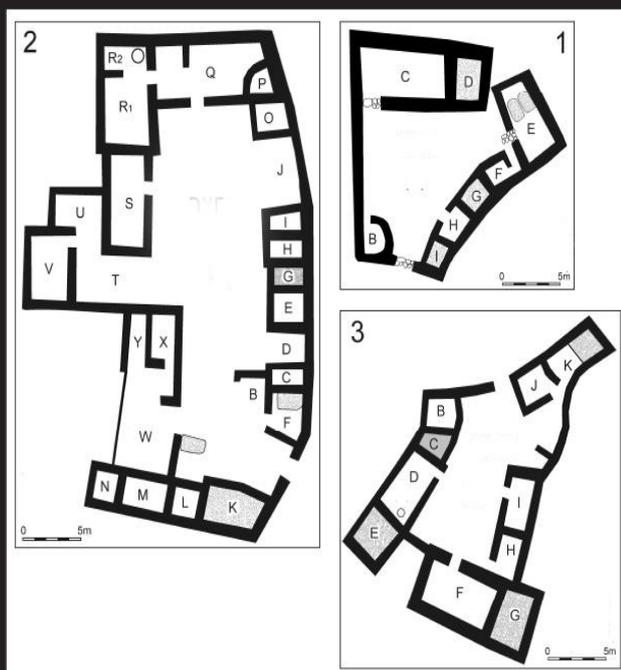
Most pieces were engraved with horizontal lines, zigzack and darted flash lines or fish bone motives. Pottery was skillfully made and were produced from rather small to very big in size. This included various skills.

Tools and Weapons

The discovered silex arrow heads were rather small but perfect. They measured from two to three centimeters. The half-moon shaped cutting tools were three to six centimeters long. Axes were produced from basalt and other tools made from limestone. In addition, some wooden tools and baskets were unearthed.

Long Distance Trade

We know that at the time long distance trade flourished and inhabitants traded obsidian and nephrite as well as mussels from the Medi-





terranean about 60 kilometers away. Obsidian was sourced from Anatolia or Armenia over a distance of 700 kilometers.

Important Figurines

Now we come to the real surprise discoveries which made the site so important. Over 200 figurines have been found all across the site. That indicates they were used in every household. These measured between six to fourteen centimeters.

Some large female figurines measured even up to 40 centimeters which is rather large for neolithic times. Still today these figurines raise many questions. What was their purpose? Were they symbols? Did they represent gods?

The huge numbers surprises archaeologists. Possibly they were produced here, because of the unique pottery production knowhow and therefore also exported in numbers. Most figurines were also painted with red lines others were totally covered by red paint.

Experts assume they were fertility symbols, because they were mostly female figurines formed with huge hips. Three types were produced. Most figurines are of the sitting type, some standing and smaller were round in shape.

The body parts were separately formed and joined. Some detailed part such as eyes, ears

and nose were added later. Over 24 styled parts were used on the various figurines.

A prolonged head is typical for all figurines. Possibly they indicate the wearing of a hat. Might this be a symbol of the presumed fertility goddess? Possibly so.

Unique for neolithic figurines and statues are also the clearly visible earrings. Special are also the caftan like cloth and scarf. This might indicate a ceremonial dress and not every day clothing. This kind of dress also point to a fertility goddess.

In total five complete sitting figurines have been found on site plus 70 figurines with parts missing. Also, four standing figurines were excavated where only the head was formed. They look rather like a phallus symbol. But see for yourself.

In addition, over 100 simple oval limestone figures resulted in the various digs. They are humble works with engraved faces and body parts. Few of these types were also found at other Yarmouk sites. They range from 30 grams to over 6 kilograms. On average they weigh 50 grams. These were painted too and the stones





were shaped into oval form before.

Let me express one theory based on similar objects found at other sites. Why were they made of stone and were so well polished? The other objects I am talking about were talisman protecting trading travelers from evil and danger. They were made of stone not to break and polished in pockets or saddle packs over time.

But these talisman stones could also represent an ancestor cult. With the help of the deceased, you find your way when you get lost. Hopefully one day new research will tell us.

Unique Statue

This was found in the court yard of the first building. It was especially fine polished to a white ceramic look as no other object found on site. But it had not the typical Yarmouk Culture eyes and only simple face outlines.

Statues during neolithic times had either an



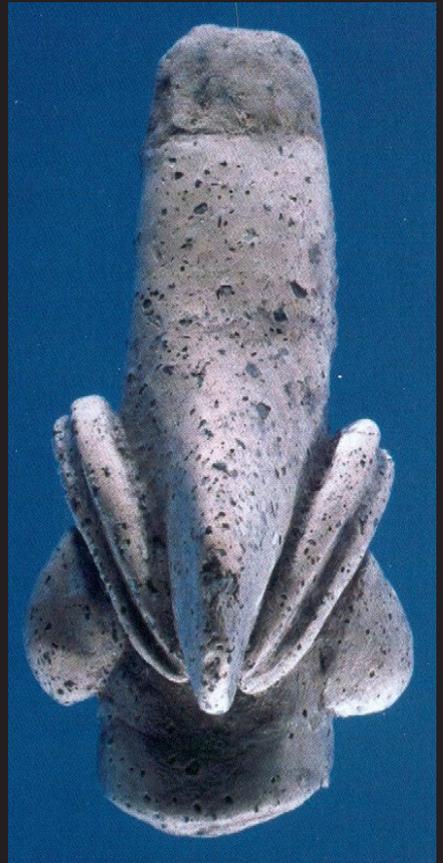
ancestral purpose or symbolized a cherished god for adoration and prayers plus sacrifices. In this regard the simple face indication plus polishing is very similar to the small stone figurines.

Summery

We know that this region was inhabited by humans emigrating in waves from Africa already about two million years ago. And we have proof that homo sapiens started to spread about 300,000 years ago. Homo neanderthalensis died out about 30,000 years ago.

So, all human activity in paleolithic and neolithic times was initiated by our ancestors. Regularly new research results show us that our ancestors were far more developed to skills and knowhow as we previously believed. No wonder that they were able to produce refined pottery art and had distinctive religious beliefs and practiced complex rituals. This interesting site is just a good example of that.





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We thank the excavators and archaeologists for using some of their pictures and graphs.