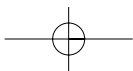
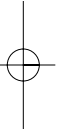
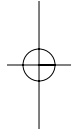


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Tel Shimron

Question: What is the connection between
Tel Shimron, Britain, Holland, and outer space?
Answer: Orde Wingate, Moshe Dayan, and Ilan Ramon.

by Yossi Buchman

Photography: Ya'acov Shkolnik



When Joshua led the Israelites into the Land of Israel, it did not have a significant central government. Each city's ruler was a "king" and all of the cities together formed a social and governmental system of "kingdom-cities." Each one attempted to resist Joshua, but after the fall of Jericho they succumbed, one after another.

The kings of the north realized that they had to form an alliance against Israel. The initiative came from Jabin, king of Hazor, the largest city. He first turned to "Jobab, king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph" (Josh. 11:1), apparently because of their kingdoms' strategic positions alongside the international route that crossed the valleys of the Galilee: Achshaph on the Acre Plain, in the passageway to the Jezreel Valley; Shimron, in the Jezreel Valley, in the passageway to the Beit Netufa Valley; and Madon, in the passageway from the Lower Galilee to the Sea of Galilee.

The identification of Shimron on the hill adjacent to the Nahalal Junction is based on apocryphal sources and the writings of the Jewish sages. The tell is called Khirbet Semunia in Arabic, a name explained in the Jerusalem Talmud as deriving from Shimron: "...and Nahalal – Mahlul...and Shimron – Semunia...and Bethlehem – Beit Lechem Daraya." The mention of Shimron together with Nahalal and Bethlehem strengthens its identification.

Further evidence of Shimron's connection to the main road linking the valleys is found in the Egyptian Tel el-Amarna letters (fourteenth century BCE). In one letter, Burnaburiash, king of Babylonia, complains to the Egyptian king Amenhotep IV that two local kings in Canaan attacked and robbed a caravan of Babylonian merchants, which also included his ambassador, in the Beit Netufa Valley. In other letters it emerged that one of the kings ruled the city of Shamkhuna – Shimonia or Semunia.

How did we get from Shimron to Shimonia and Semunia, names that also appear in the Septuagint and Josephus Flavius's autobiography? Prof. Samuel Klein and A. Alt suggest that the name Shimron may have been changed to Shimon in the Hasmonean period, in honor of Simon (Shimon) the Maccabee on the occasion of his victories in the Lower Galilee.

Shimron is mentioned in the Bible as a son of Issachar (Gen. 46:13) and as a settlement in the territory of Zebulun (Josh. 19:10-16). The list of settlements in which Shimron is included has no geographical order, perhaps because Zebulun had difficulty overcoming the Canaanites and creating territorial continuity in the tribe's allotted area; reality dictated areas and boundaries that were different from the theoretical ones. Issachar apparently had the same difficulty and thus Shimron, which bore the name of the head of a household from that tribe, became part of Zebulun's territory.

There have been no excavations at Tel Shimron. Knowledge of the site has been gathered solely from surveys. In July 1875, the French scholar Victor Guerin visited Semunia. He wrote: "This village, which today is inhabited only by a few poor families, was built on the site of an ancient town that had been totally destroyed.... I saw among the ruins...the remains of a building of hewn stones that had been destroyed...and had been adorned with pillars inside, as attested by two damaged pillars situated there."

Guerin based his identification on a geographical analysis and on historical sources, but in the summer of 1933, Prof. Samuel Klein and his student Benjamin Maisler, later to be known as Prof. Binyamin Mazar, discovered potsherds attesting that the site, about 37 acres in size and surrounded by defensive ramparts, had been inhabited in all of the Canaanite periods.

They saw the remains of the building Guerin described. "We came across four rows of pillars, sprouting up from the ground, and beside them we found a lintel of an entrance and a basin," they reported. "These remains belong to a large building, and perhaps they are the remains of an ancient synagogue." Shmuel Dayan, in his book *Nahalalim*, relates that several members of Nahalal went to the spot with Maisler and exposed a mosaic floor beside the pillars.

Four years later, in 1937, two khaki-clad men came to Tel Shimron. One consulted a tattered Bible and from time to time looked up and observed the area. He was British intelligence officer Capt. Charles Orde Wingate. The other was Moshe Dayan, who had recently joined the new settlement in Shimron. A year after Wingate's death (1944) in a plane crash, dis-



charged Jewish soldiers from the British army settled on Ramat Naftali and called the settlement Yemin Orde. When the settlement was besieged during Israel's War of Independence, Wingate's widow had his Bible parachuted down to them to raise their morale.

A Torah scroll connected to Shimron also ended its way in flight. It had belonged to Simon Dasberg, who had been chief rabbi of Holland and had held onto the scroll when he and his community were taken to Bergen-Belsen. When he heard that one of the inmates in his hut, Joachim Joseph, was nearing the age of 13, he prepared him for his bar mitzvah. After secretly holding the ceremony before dawn, he presented the scroll to the child, saying, "Take this – you have more of a chance of getting out of here." Dasberg was murdered two months later.

Joseph survived the Holocaust, immigrated to Israel, and became a professor of planetary and atmospheric physics. He was an initiator of the experiment for which NASA sent Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon on the space shuttle *Columbia*. When Ramon visited his home, he heard the story of the scroll and asked if he could take it with him into outer space as a symbol of the Jewish people's ability to survive. When the *Columbia* disintegrated on its way back to Earth, the scroll vanished. Ramon, at the request of his widow, Rona, was buried next to Moshe Dayan in the Nahalal cemetery, beside Tel Shimron. ■

Above: Jewish burial cave in Beit She'arim. According to the Talmud, Rabbi Judah HaNasi, president of the Sanhedrin, "passing by Semunia," was asked by that community to select a rabbi for them. This account probably alludes to the route he took when he would travel from his private residence in Beit She'arim in the Jezreel Valley to his presidential residence in Zippori, on the periphery of the Beit Netufa Valley – another indication that Semunia (Shimron) was located between the two valleys.

Facing page: Observation tower built by Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael - Jewish National Fund at the top of Tel Shimron.