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Between Safad and Damascus: Excavations at the Village of Naʿarān and Mamluk and Early Ottoman Rural Settlements in the Golan

Introduction

The preservation of both the landscape and archaeological sites make the Golan a unique case study for examining rural life in the Mamluk and early Ottoman periods.[1] A map of the Golan's spatial settlement in the Mamluk period was first made after a detailed archaeological survey was conducted by Moshe Hartal and Yigal Ben Ephraim, who identified 191 sites (Map 1).[2] Their work clearly shows that the Mamluk period was the third most densely settled period in the Golan Heights, after the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.[3]

Although the number of sites is of prime importance, it is not sufficient for determining the degree of prosperity, as some archaeologists have suggested, or a general decline, as some historians have described.[4] This paper presents our preliminary historical research regarding rural settlement in the Golan and the results of our archaeological excavation at Naʿarān, a village located in the central Golan (Map 1, no 47) on the road that connected Safad and Damascus, approximately 7 km from the Mamluk *khān* and bridge of Banāt Yaʿqūb.[5]

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for their advice. We are currently working on a detailed monograph that will bring together all the material from the excavation, and there we will incorporate and address the reviewer's helpful remarks. This research was funded by the Israel Science Foundation grant number 255/21.

[1] The Golan in this paper refers to the area that stretches from Mount Hermon in the north to the Yarmuk River in the south, bounded by the Rift Valley in the west and the Ruqad River and volcanic mounds in the east. When examining the early Ottoman *defters,* the region includes the eastern *nahiye* of Jadūr, which stretches about 25 km further east of the volcanic mounds.

[2] Mamluk map of the Golan (map 18) produced by M. Hartal and Y. Ben Ephraim, published only at the Israel Antiquities Authority Survey website: https://survey.antiquities.org.il/#/Golan.

[3] Moshe Hartal, "Archaeological Survey as a Source for the History of the Golan," *Qadmoniot* 148 (2014): 80–89; Moshe Hartal and Yigal Ben Ephraim, The IAA Archaeological Survey of Israel Givat Orcha map 36/3 (http://survey.antiquities.org.il/#/MapSurvey/28), 2012.

[4] See section "Crisis in the Late Mamluk Period?" below.

[5] The project is funded by the Israel Science Foundation (Grant number 255/21) and is conducted by the authors, Tel Hai Academic College, Upper Galilee, Israel.

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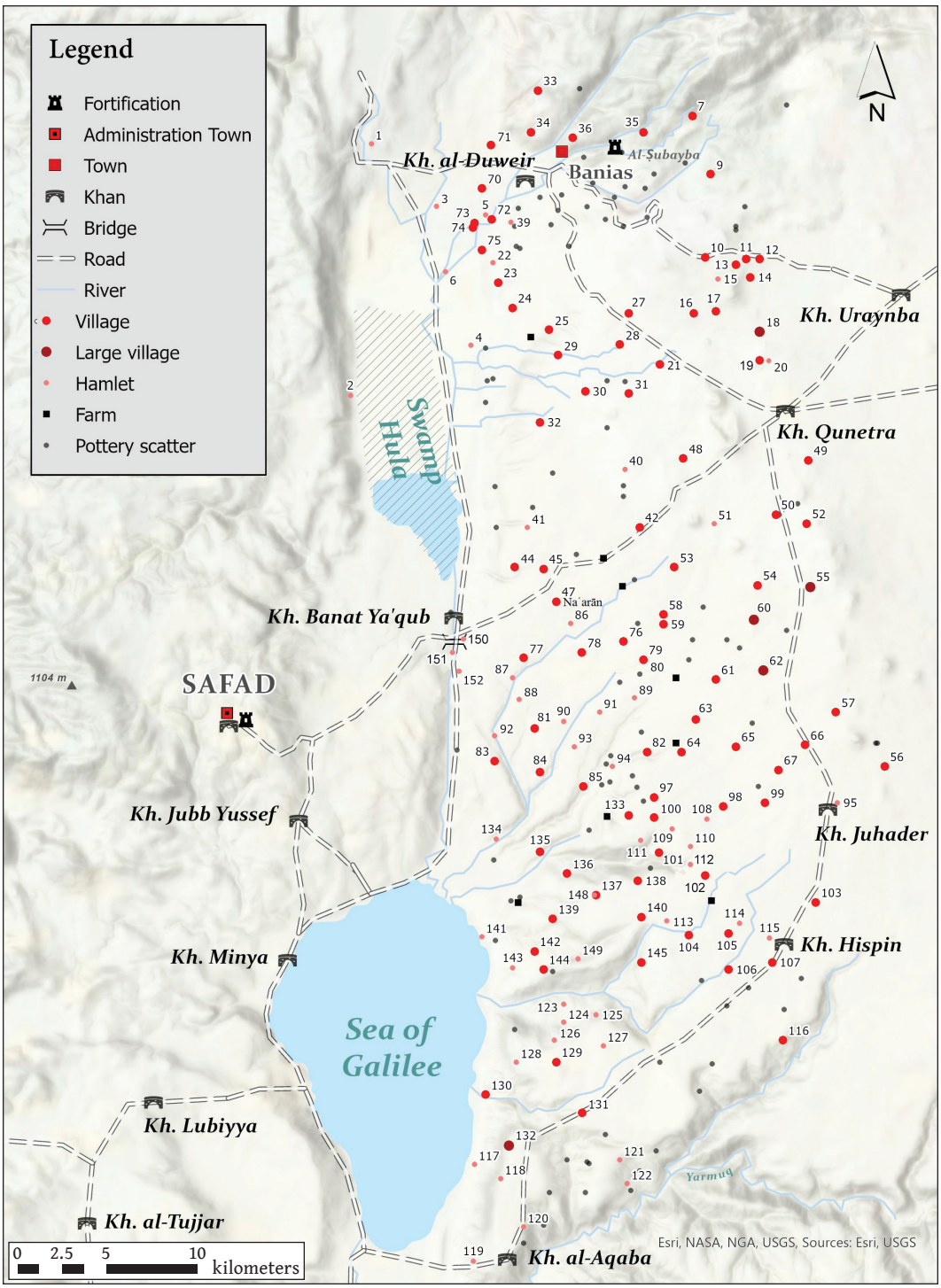

Map 1. Mamluk sites according to the IAA Golan Survey. (Map by Yoav Yoskovich)

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The Geopolitical Background

The territorial continuity extending from Egypt to Syria that was established by the Mamluks was a new configuration that lasted throughout the entire Mamluk period.[6] The geopolitical changes brought about by the Mamluks changed the Golan from a frontier region to a centrally-located peaceful region, as the Mamluk Sultanate's frontier shifted approximately 700 km east to the Euphrates.[7] The Golan was thus no longer on the fringe of two rival entities;[8] raids previously carried out by Ayyubid and Frankish forces[9] throughout the twelfth century, which may have slowed growth and development, belonged to the past.

A significant turning point in our understanding of the Golan came with the correction of a longstanding error regarding the history of al-Ṣubaybah fortress (Qalʿat Namrūd), situated at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Amitai and Ellenblum showed that the fortress was founded by the Ayyubids. After it was besieged and destroyed by the Mongols (1260), it was rebuilt on a grand and lavish scale by the Mamluks.[10] Hartal's excavations and the discovery of the monumental inscription in al-Ṣubaybah demonstrated the fortress's impact on settlement patterns, security, and economic development in the Golan. In 1260 al-Ṣubaybah, Banias, and the region's villages were granted by Sultan Baybars (r. 1260–77) to Badr al-Dīn Bilik al-Khaznadār, the sultan's viceroy. The potential profits to be gained made the Golan a valuable and generous gift. The local population were the first to benefit.[11] The region's security encouraged trade and the population's

[6] Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (New York, 1994), 35.

[7] Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War 1260–1281* (Cambridge, 2004), 202–7; Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages, The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (London, 1986).

[8] Meron Benvenisti, *The Crusaders in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1976), 147–52; Ronnie Ellenblum, *Crusader Castles and Modern Histories* (Cambridge, 2007), 146–64.

[9] Malcolm Barber, "Frontier Warfare in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: The Campaign of Jacob's Ford, 1178–79," in *The Crusades and their Sources: Essays Presented to Bernard Hamilton,* ed. J. France and W. G. Zajac (Singapore, 1989), 9–22; Nicholas Morton, *The Crusader States and their Neighbours* (Oxford, 2020), 20.

[10] Ronnie Ellenblum, "Who Built Qalʿat al-Ṣubayba?" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 103–12; Paul Deschamps, *Les Chateâux des Croisés en Terre Sainte II: La défense du royaume latin de Jérusalem,* vol. 2. (Paris, 1939); Moshe Hartal, *The al-Subayba (Nimrod) Fortress: Towers 11 and 9* (Jerusalem, 2001); Reuven Amitai, "An Arabic Inscription at al-Ṣubayba (Qalʿat Namrūd) from the Reign of Sultan Baybars," in ibid., 109–23; Kate Raphael, *Muslim Fortresses in the Levant, Between Crusaders and Mongols* (London, 2001).

[11] Hartal, *The al-Subayba;* Amitai, "An Arabic Inscription"; Barbé Hervé, "Le château de Safed et son territoire a l'époque des Croisades" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010); Kate Raphael and Mustafa Abbasi, "The Galilee Villages during the Mamluk and

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lives and property were better protected due to the fortress's garrison and the government's interests in protecting traffic along the *barīd* road that crossed the Golan. The Turkmens, who had settled in the region in the twelfth century, might have further reinforced the Mamluk garrison.[12]

Although Baybars built Jisr Banāt Yaʿqūb,[13] and four caravansaries were gradually erected in the Golan by the governors of Damascus and private entrepreneurs,[14] current research has shown that the central regime did not invest in local dams, mills, markets, or village mosques.

The social and legal status of the *fallāḥīn* (farmers) under the Mamluks is still under debate. While some were not the owners of the land but could lawfully enjoy their harvest after paying taxes, others were probably serfs tied to the land. Nevertheless, villagers were also organized, sharing grazing land and distant fields[15] and combating government bureaucracy.[16] In contrast to the *fallāḥīn,* the livelihood of the *ʿurbān* (nomads) was based on private ownership of livestock and cooperative ownership of pasture. Most of the meat in the city markets was supplied by nomads. As long as the two populations were governed by an able ruler, the region could thrive.[17]

Early Ottoman Periods (1260–1746): A Smooth Transition or a Full-Scale Crisis?" *Cathedra* 174 (2022): 39–62.

[12] David Ayalon, "The Wafidiya in the Mamluk Kingdom," *Islamic Culture* 25 (1951): 89–104; Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks;* Nakamachi Nobutaka, "The Rank and Status of Military Refugees in the Mamluk Army: A Reconsideration of the *Wāfidiyah,*" *Mamlūk Studies Review* 10, no.1 (2006): 55–81.

[13] In a recent lecture given by Katia Cytryn-Silverman a question has been raised regarding the construction of the Banāt Yaʿqūb bridge by Baybars.

[14] Yigal Tepper and Yotam Tepper, "The 'Horses' Barid' Dated to the Era of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars," *Jerusalem and Eretz Israel* 1 (2003): 123–52; Katia Cytryn-Silverman, *The Road Inns (Khāns) in Bilād al-Shām* (Oxford, 2010); Andrew Petersen, "Medieval Bridges of Palestine," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras* VI, ed. Urbain Vermeulen and Kristof D'hulster (Leuven, 2010), 291–306; Andrew Petersen, *Gazetteer of Buildings in Muslim Palestine, Part 1* (Oxford, 2001), 182–89.

[15] Yehoshua Frenkel, "Preliminary Remarks on the Agrarian History of Syria during the Early Mamluk Period," *Horizons in Geography* 44–45 (1996): 97–113.

[16] Yehoshua Frenkel, "Rural Society in Mamluk Palestine," *Cathedra* 77 (1995): 17–38; idem, "Villages, the Religious Establishment and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy: Notes on the History of Migration and Land Tenure in Mamlūk Bilād al-Shām," *Cathedra* 173 (2019): 37–59.

[17] Rudi Paul Linder, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia* (Bloomington, 1983); Anatoly M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World,* tr. J. Crookenden (Cambridge, 1984); Emanuel Marx, "Political Economy of Middle Eastern and North African Pastoral Nomads," in *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa, Entering the 21st Century,* ed. Dawn Chatty (Leiden, 2006), 78–97.

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Crisis in the Late Mamluk Period?

Some historians argue that the *iqṭāʿ* system, stagnation in farming technology, government monopoly over certain produce, heavy taxes, and the bubonic plague hindered development throughout the Mamluk Sultanate and led to a general decline in most agricultural areas during the mid-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[18] Damascus and the Hauran were struck by the plague five times (1348, 1372–73, 1362–64, 1375–76, and 1411). According to Dols, one third to one half of the population in the Middle East perished from plague.[19] The gradual decline that archaeologists identified at Banias, the Golan's administrative center in the fifteenth century, might have been caused by the reoccurrence of plague.[20]

Carl Petry is among the few historians who have raised doubts about the theory of the Mamluk Sultanate's decline in the fifteenth century: "So far, none has presented a definitive explanation for the alleged decline that sapped the energies of cultivators, artisans and merchants who yielded up the monies bolstering their regime's finances."[21] Bethany Walker's work on the late Mamluk period in Jordan demonstrates that although villages decreased in size and agricultural output was reduced, there is no evidence of a full-scale crisis. Some areas even show demographic and economic growth. The lack of uniformity, according to Walker, testifies to the importance and strong influence of local factors in determining the local situation.[22]

Naʿarān According to the Primary Sources

The village of Naʿarān is located in the central Golan (Map 1: no. 47). The site was occupied for 1500 years, with several long gaps. The Mamluk phase is just one level in the site that needs to be carefully identified and excavated to provide a view of the community members' personal lives. Our second objective was to

[18] Frenkel, "Villages, the Religious Establishment"; Elyahu Ashtor, *A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages* (London, 1976), 331; Zohar Amar, *Foodstuffs and Industrial Products Grown in the Land of Israel during the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem, 1996), 10–11; idem, *Agricultural Production in the Land of Israel during the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem, 2000), 346–55; Joseph Drory, "Eretz Israel in the Mamluk State (1260–1516)," in *The History of Eretz Israel under the Mamluk and Ottoman Rule (1260–1804),* ed. Amnon Cohen (Jerusalem, 1990), 24, 44.

[19] Michael Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, 1977); Stewart Borsch, *The Black Death in Egypt and England* (Austin, 2005).

[20] Vasilius Tzaferis and Rina Avner, "Excavations at Banyas," *Qadmoniot* 23 (1990): 110–14.

[21] Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians,* 103.

[22] Bethany J. Walker, "The Northern Jordan Survey 2003—Agriculture in Late Islamic Malka and Hubras Villages: A Preliminary Report of the First Season," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 339 (2005): 67–111.

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try to situate the village within the larger historical picture of regional and international events that occurred in the sultanate. Unlike most villages, Naʿarān is mentioned in the literary sources several times due to its geographic location on the main road to Damascus. William of Tyre (d. 1186) mentions a place called Nuara, where the Damascenes and the Franks met (1140) to combat Zengi, who had threatened Damascus. Prawer identified Nuara with Naʿarān.[23] The establishment of the branch of the *barīd* between the *mamlakah* (province) of Safad and Damascus turned this route into a busy highway.

Al-ʿUmarī (1301–49) was the first Mamluk author to mention Naʿarān: "Regarding the [roads] that branched out from the center of Damascus, to Burayj al-Falūṣ, to Uraynbah, to Naʿarān, to Safad."[24]

Al-Qalaqshandī (1355–1418) repeats al-ʿUmarī but calls this branch the Safad Road *(ṭarīq Ṣafad).*[25]

Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī (1410–68), who was born and educated in Jerusalem, served al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 1422–38) in Egypt, but spent most of his career in Syria, where he held the position of deputy *(nāʾib)* in Karak, Malaṭya, and Jerusalem. For three consecutive years he served as leader of the pilgrim caravans. Although he retired from the Mamluk administration in 1453, he continued to consult with the sultan and participated in diplomatic missions.[26] Due to his active service in the provinces of Syria, he might have been better acquainted than others with the geography and the administrative layout of the region. Al-Ẓāhirī provides important additional details:

> As for the province of Naʿarān, it is exceptional, with many arduous roads. The region's largest town is Naʿarān. It is said that it has more than 160 villages. It is also a county of Damascus.[27]
>
> As for what lay between Damascus and Safad, from it to al-Burayj, then to al-Qalūs (al-fulūṣ?), then to al-Uraynbah, then to Naʿarān, then to Jubb Yusūf, then to Safad.[28]

[23] William of Tyre, *The Deeds Beyond the Sea,* tr. E. A. Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York, 1943), 2:106; Joshua Prawer, *A History of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1971), 1:243.

[24] Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Al-Taʿrīf fi al-muṣṭalaḥ al-sharīf,* ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1988), 250.

[25] Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ* (Cairo, 1915–22), 14:382.

[26] Julien Loiseau, "Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 3rd ed., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_32237; Ghent University Mamluk Prosopography Project entry for Khalīl b. Shāhīn al-Shaykhī, https://ihodp.ugent.be/mpp/actor-khalīl-b.-shāhīn-al-shaykhī.

[27] Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓahirī, *Kitāb Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik* (Cairo, 1988), 41.

[28] Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓahirī, *Kitāb Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik* (Paris, 1894), 120.

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Ibn al-Jīʿān (d. 1480), whose book focuses on the voyage of the Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Qāytbāy (r. 1468–96) to the fortresses on the Euphrates River, writes:

> And [the noble retinue] stopped at [Jisr Yaʿqūb], by the river bank which links to Birkat Qadas. The amir Bard Bek held a great banquet there. Between this station *(maḥaṭṭah)* and Damascus there are six relay stations *(burud):* al-Murayj, Saʿsaʿ, al-Uraynbah, al-Qunaytrah, Naʿarān, and Jisr Yaʿqūb.[29]

Ibn al-Jīʿān is the only source that states that Naʿarān had a relay station *(maḥaṭṭah).*[30] Finding this relay station became one of the excavation's primary goals; it turned out to be considerably more difficult than we expected.

Thus, according to the most detailed account, by the first half of the fifteenth century Naʿarān had developed into an administrative town with 160 villages under its jurisdiction; i.e., 45% of the total number of villages in the Golan. According to al-Ẓāhirī, the remaining 55% of the villages (200) were under the jurisdiction of the city of Banias.[31]

The Correlation between the Archaeological Evidence and the Written Sources

As mentioned earlier, Hartal and Ben Ephraim published a survey of 191 Mamluk sites. Mechael Osband and Haim Ben-David reexamined the pottery from the Golan survey and concluded that the number of Mamluk sites was 303.[32] While the archaeologists found it difficult to define the Mamluk sites (hamlets, farmsteads, or villages), al-Ẓāhirī clearly states there were 360 villages (قرية). This supports the survey results and confirms Hartal and Ben Ephraim's conclusion that the region was densely settled during the Mamluk period.

Since al-Ẓāhirī provides a picture that dates to the first half of the fifteenth century, it is possible that the waves of plague did not reduce the number of vil-

[29] Ibn al-Jīʿān, *Al-Qawl al-mustaẓraf fī safar mawlānā al-Malik al-Ashraf,* ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Tripoli, 1984), 91.

[30] For an analysis of this text, see Cytryn-Silverman, *Road Inns,* 106.

[31] Al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik* (1894), 54.

[32] Hartal, "Archaeological Survey," 88. Following the excavation of the Mamluk level at Majdulīyah, Dr. Mechael Osband and Professor Chaim Ben-David from Kinneret Academic College reviewed data from the IAA Golan survey and the unpublished data (the material was provided by Hartal and Ben-Ephraim). A reexamination of the pottery from the survey showed Mamluk sites numbered 303. We would like to thank both for forwarding this information to us. Chaim Ben-David and Mechael Osband, "Mamluk-Period Settlement in the aʿamāl (Regions) of Bānyās, ěs-Saara and Nawā," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 139 (2023): 113–38.

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lages but may have reduced the population in each village. This is, however, a crude supposition that has no further support.

In 1535, eighteen years after the Ottoman conquest, Naʿarān is registered in the *Mufassal Tahrīr Defteri* (detailed survey registers) carried out in the provinces of al-Shām al-Sharīf (Damascus) by Suleiman I (r. 1520–66). Under the Ottomans, the Golan was divided into three *nahiye*s: Shaʿarah, Hulah, and Jadūr. Naʿarān belonged to the first *nahiye*. The village was defined as a *timar* (small military fief) and belonged to ʿAlāʾ-Sayyid Şhihābü'd-dīn bin Sayyid Tācü'd-Dīn al-Ḥüsaynī er-Rufāʿī.[33] According to the document, it grew 5 *gharārah* of wheat (8,000 kg) and 5 *gharārah* of barley (8,000 kg). Its summer crops were valued at 300 *akçe* (the main silver coin in the Ottoman empire). Its income from goats and honey was 100 *akçe*. The *fallāḥīn* who cultivated the land paid 1300 akçe to the owner. In addition, they also paid the owner of the land a tithe of 500 *akçe*.[34] The village had 15 households and its own imam. For the sake of comparison, the two largest villages in the Golan had 64 and 54 families respectively. The total number of villages in the Golan had plummeted to 77.[35]

Previous Archaeological Research

Schumacher, who produced the first modern map of the Golan, visited the site of Naʿarān in 1897 and 1913, documenting Greek inscriptions, crosses carved in stone, and the Bedouin community who lived on the ruins.[36] Shmariya Gutman and Dan Urman surveyed the site in 1967–69. Urman suggested that the large complex next to the village was a medieval *khān*.[37] Dauphin, Gibson, and Schonfield, who studied Byzantine settlements in the Golan in the late 1970s, suggested that the complex was a Byzantine monastery that later served as a *khān*.[38] Hartal and Ben Ephraim surveyed the site in 1983 and 1995. Their methodical

[33] We have no further information about the owner of the village.

[34] Yayına Hazırlayanlar, Ahmet Özkılınç Ali Coşkun, and Abdullah Sivridağ, *401 numaralı Şam livâsı mufassal tahrîr defteri (942/1535),* Series T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı yayın nu. 118, 119, Defter-i Hâkânî dizisi 17 (Ankara, 2011), 1:26, 346.

[35] Ibid., 338–69.

[36] Gutlive Schumacher "Notes from Jadur," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* 29, no. 3 (1897): 195–96.

[37] Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras* (Atlanta, 1996), 10–12.

[38] Simon Gibson and Claudine Dauphin, "Exploring Ancient Settlements and Landscapes in the Golan," *Cathedra* 73 (1984): 10–12; Claudine M. Dauphin and Jeremy J. Schonfield, "Settlements of the Roman and Byzantine Periods on the Golan Heights: Preliminary Report on Three Seasons of Survey (1979–1981)," *Israel Exploration Journal* 33 (1983): 197–205.

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collection and analysis of pottery showed that the site was settled during the Mamluk period.[39]

The 2022 Excavation at Naʿarān

The village covers circa 30 dunams. At the northwestern edge there is a cemetery with a few Byzantine and modern Muslim tombstones. A walk through the village alleys reveals a mix of ancient and modern building materials (iron and cement) with no apparent order. Column drums, capitals, and stone blocks decorated with crosses, rosettes, and other symbols are found in some of the courtyard houses, as well as animal pens, and the traditional Hauranian-style houses.[40] Some of the houses still stand to their full height. A spring shaded by large fig trees flows at the southeastern edge of the village. Remnants of steps lead to a building that may have served as a bathhouse in the Byzantine period. The Mamluk phase in the site is not easily recognizable, due to the recycling of building materials and the ongoing use of the same building methods in the subsequent period.

In the summer of 2021, a spark that accidently blew from a beekeeper's smoke gun set fire to the site. The fire, however, provided a unique opportunity to survey and photograph the village with a drone unhindered by the vegetation that is normally waist high.

Whereas Byzantine pottery was found almost throughout the entire site, Mamluk pottery could only be found on the crown of the hill and its eastern slopes (Fig. 1). Although the quantity of Mamluk pottery collected in this area was impressive, the only way of gauging the length of the Mamluk settlement and receiving answers as to who founded the houses and lived in them was to excavate a house all the way down to its foundations. We were also determined to try to answer a question regarding the large complex outside the village: was this a *khān* or just a station along the *barīd*?

The Hauran-Style House on the Hill (Area C)

During the survey, we identified at the top of the hill a Hauranian-style house with an entrance, three pillars, and a capital decorated with a crude tree of life

[39] Hartal and Ben Ephraim, Naaran site number 53 Ashmura Map (15) (2014), https://survey.antiquities.org.il/#/MapSurvey/1113.

[40] Moshe Hartal, "The Hauran Style Architecture," in *Rafid on the Golan: A Profile of a Late Roman and Byzantine Village,* ed. Shimon Dar, Moshe Hartal, and Eitan Ayalon (Oxford, 2006), 7–11; Howard C. Butler, *Ancient Architecture in Syria: The Southern Hauran,* Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria, part IIA2 (Leiden, 1909); idem, *Ancient Architecture in Syria: Umm idj-Djimal,* PPUAES IIA3 (Leiden, 1913).

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Fig. 1. Aerial view of Naʿarān (summer 2022). (Photo by Dan Malkinson)

and a cross. The entire structure was buried under a massive pile of long basalt beams. The scale of the collapse suggests that the building originally had two floors. Once the site was cleared, the plan could be seen. It consisted of a hall (12 m x 11 m) with a long narrow room (8 m x 12 m) at its side (Fig. 2). Similar designs can be found in other houses throughout the Golan.

After a week-long excavation of the site, we uncovered a dirt floor with a military blanket, two enameled bowls, and a mess tin that dated to the 1960s. The amount of modern glass, tin cans, and ammunition indicated the house was used by both Syrian and Israeli armies. Forty centimeters below this modern floor we abruptly shifted from the late twentieth century to the Mamluk period. At the base of the pillar lay a complete Mamluk oil lamp (Fig. 3). The Mamluk floor had burnt patches and fragments of plaster. A dark green sgrafitto glazed bowl (Fig. 4) and a Mamluk coin dated to 1300–99 were found on this floor. The floor foundation was made of field stones and a recycled Byzantine tombstone. The adjacent large hall had four arches built from well-dressed stones. The arches supported basalt roof beams. Stone and cement benches lined the walls,

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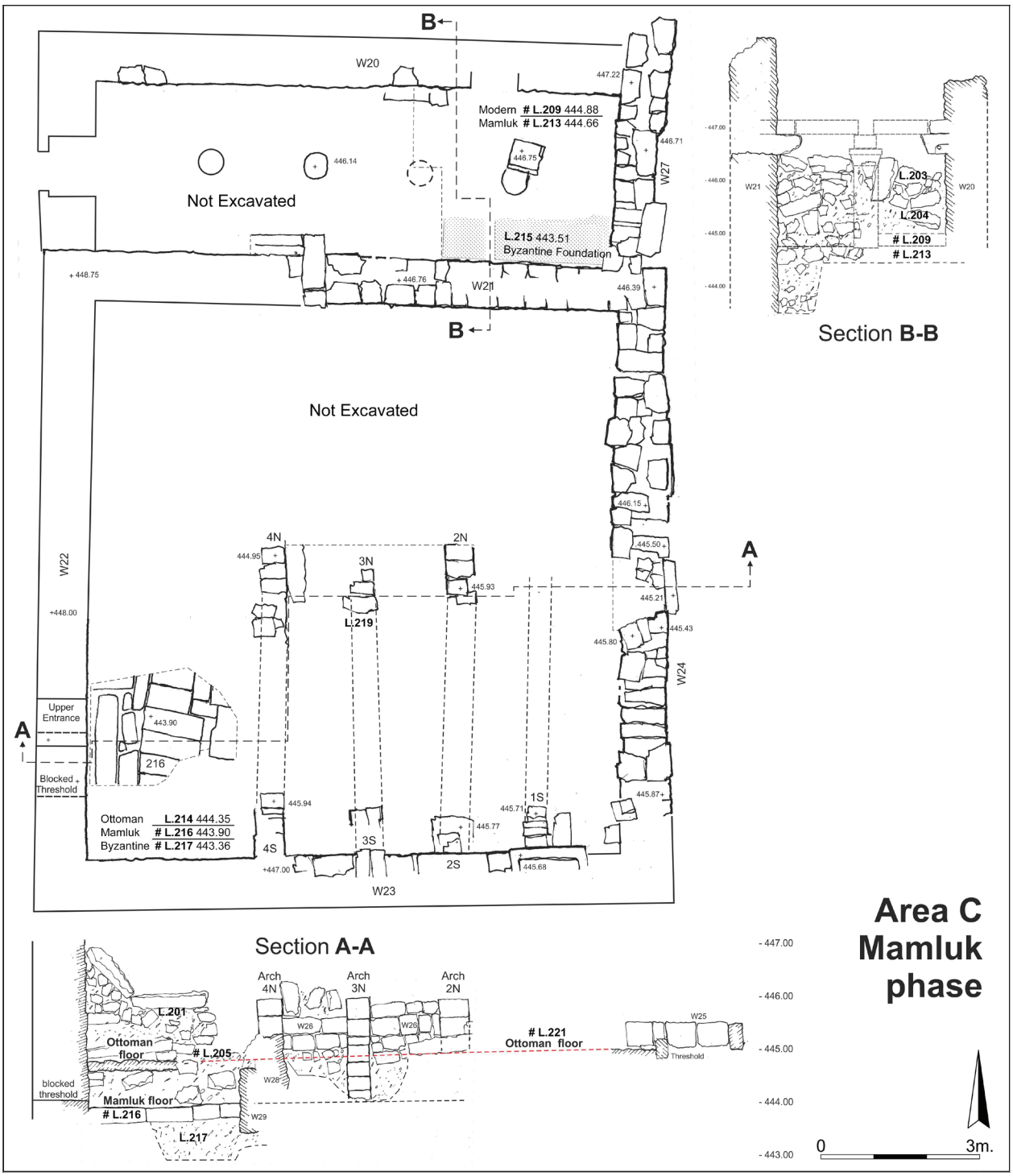

Fig. 2. Plan of the Hauranian house. (Jay Rosenberg)

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Fig. 3. Mamluk oil lamp. (Photo by Shai Scharfberg)

a common feature in rural architecture.[41] Fragments of clay tobacco pipes indicated that the hall, as we found it, dated to the late Ottoman period (eighteenth

[41] Bethany J. Walker, "Early Ottoman/Late Islamic/Post-Mamluk: What are the Archaeological Traces of the 16th Century in Syria?" in *The Mamlūk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām in the Sixteenth Century,* ed. Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (Bonn, 2017), 355; idem, "The Phenomenon of the "Disappearing" Villages of Late Medieval Jordan, as Reflected in Archaeological and Economic Sources," *Bulletin d'études Orientales* (2012): 161–76; idem, "The Northern Jordan Project and the 'Liquid Landscapes' of Late Islamic Bilad al-Sham," in *Landscapes of the Islamic World: Archaeology, History, and Ethnography,* ed. Stephen McPhillips and Paul D. Wordsworth (Pennsylvania, 2016), 184–99; idem, *Jordan in the Late Middle Ages: Transformation of the Mamluk Frontier* (Chicago, 2011).

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Fig. 4. Mamluk glazed sgraffito bowl. (Photo by Shai Scharfberg)

to nineteenth centuries). Its arches, however, were constructed in the second half of the fourteenth century. Two coins—one roughly dated to 1400–1600, the other to the reign of Shaʿbān II (1363–77)—and fragments of glazed bowls provided a good date.[42]

[42]Copper alloy Mamluk coins do not always provide an exact date. Their inscriptions and the coin surface are often worn and almost impossible to read. Thus, the second coin was roughly dated to 1400–1600. The coins were cleaned by Orna Cohen and identified by Dr. Robert Kool, who heads the numismatic department at the Israeli Antiquity Authority.

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Was the house built during the late Mamluk period? To answer this, we proceeded with the excavation down to the foundations of the external walls. Fragments of Golan pitoi, cooking bowls, and storage jars, as well as two coins from the fourth and fifth centuries, dated the foundations to the Byzantine period. The house was abandoned in the seventh century and gradually collapsed over the next seven hundred years. It was rebuilt in the late Mamluk period in the traditional Hauranian style but was abandoned shortly after 1535 and occupied again only in the late Ottoman period. The village continued to thrive under the modern Syrian state until 1967.[43] The ruins were later used by the IDF for a short interval.

Was there a Khān at Naʿarān?

The *barīd* route and its stations were used first and foremost for military and government correspondence.[44] The *khān*s along the Safad-Damascus road that catered to merchants and travelers were built by private entrepreneurs about a century after the establishment of the *barīd*.[45]

Although the site is described as a stop along the *barīd,* Ibn al-Jīʿān is the only author who defines Naʿarān as a relay station *(burud).*[46] Schumacher writes that according to local traditions, Naʿarān served as an important way station.[47] Maʿoz concluded that the villagers built the large complex sometime after 1913 from stones collected in the ancient village and its surroundings.[48] Moshe Hartal and Yigal Ben Ephraim sided with Maʿoz.[49] Urman, who based his conclusions on pottery and an architectural analysis, remarks that "Near the hill, southwest of the village, stands a khan dating at least from the medieval period."[50]

[43] Yigal Kipnis, "The Profile of Settlement of the Syrian Golan Heights Prior to the Six Day War," *Cathedra* 116 (2005): map on page 136.

[44] Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks,* 74.

[45] For details on the *khān*s of Jubb Yūsuf, Jisr Banāt Yaʿqūb, Khisfīn, and Jūkhadār, see Cytryn-Silverman, *Road Inns,* 104, 106, 121, 123.

[46] Regarding the development of the *khān*s, roads, and infrastructure, as well as the architectural plan, see ibid.

[47] Gregg and Urman, *Jews, Pagans and Christians,* n. 11.

[48] Zvi Maʿoz, "Comments on Jewish and Christian Communities in Byzantine Palestine," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 117 (1985): 60–61.

[49] Moshe Hartal and Yigal Ben Ephraim, 'Naaran' Map 15 Ashmura, site 53. The Golan Archaeological Survey (2014). https://survey.antiquities.org.il/#/MapSurvey/1113/site/16453

[50] Gregg and Urman, *Jews, Pagans and Christians,* 109. The Naʿarān was surveyed also as part of Dan Urman's Ph.D. research, where it is mentioned in his catalogue of sites in the appendix: Dan Urman, "The Golan during the Roman and Byzantine Periods: Topography, Settlements, Economy" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1979).

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Fig. 5. Aerial photograph of the *khān* (summer 2022). (Photo by Dan Malkinson)

Dauphin and Gibson concluded that the medieval *khān* was built on the remains of the Byzantine monastery.[51] In his book on roads and inns in Israel, Eliyahu Stern identifies this large complex as a Mamluk and Ottoman *khān*. According to Stern, the *khān* at Naʿarān was meant to replace an earlier *khān* at Qadariyah, approximately 4 km northeast of Naʿarān. Stern backed his conclusion with a description written in 1400 by the traveler Rabbi Yitzak Volfara.[52]

The large complex (46 m x 31.5 m) consists of an open rectangular courtyard surrounded by rooms on three sides and a long hall with stalls in the south (Fig. 5). The walls still stand to their full height. Its size and plan resemble a *khān*.[53]

[51] Gibson and Dauphin, "Exploring Ancient Settlements and Landscapes in the Golan," 7, 12; Dauphin and Schonfield, "Settlements of the Roman and Byzantine Periods," 204–5.

[52] Eliyahu Stern, *Caravansaries, Roads & Inns in Israel* ([Jerusalem], 1997), 136–37. Stern does not give the details of the source, and we never managed to locate it. Katia Cytrin-Silverman, who researched the Mamluk *khān*s in Israel, quotes and analyzes Ibn al-Jīʿān, but she does not include Naʿarān in her research: Cytryn-Silverman, *Road Inns,* 31; idem, "The Road Inns (Khans) in Eretz-Israel during the Mamluk Period," *Qadmoniot* 39 (2006): 66–77.

[53] Cytryn-Silverman, *Road Inns,* 184, plate 3.

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The foundations are built directly on the bedrock, that is ca. 50 cm from the surface. While it is close to the village, it is not a homogeneous part of it.

The northern half is a late nineteenth- to twentieth-century addition. The walls are built of roughly dressed basalt blocks, cement, Marseille tiles, plastered walls, iron bars, and rails. Soundings in the courtyard yielded pebbled and flagstone floors and a narrow water channel. The material from below the floors was predominantly modern with few Byzantine pieces and few glazed Mamluk sherds. The size of the modern compound and the octagonal cement fountain in the center suggest that it was the house of a prominent local figure. The earlier phases are difficult to distinguish.

The two rooms excavated on the southern side of the courtyard were built during the Byzantine period. Below their crude stone floors, we found a clean deposit of Byzantine pottery, four coins, and a seal dated to between the late third and seventh centuries. Modern pottery and glazed Mamluk and Ottoman bowls were found in the topsoil of both rooms.

The southern wing is an almost independent unit: a long hall (29 m x 6.2 m) supported by ten arches creating spacious individual stalls (6.2 m x 1.85 m). Narrow doorways (5.2 m x 1.62 m) are inserted in each arch. The roof is built with long basalt beams in the Hauranian style. The arches were packed with field stones in the twentieth century to strengthen the structure (Fig. 6). The excavation of two stalls yielded a mix of modern, Ottoman, and Mamluk unglazed coarse basins, glazed sgraffito, slip painted and monochrome bowls, a horizontal cooking pot handle, fragments of Rashayya ware, Marseille tiles, and porcelain bowls imported from Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The few indicative pieces from the foundations dated to the Mamluk and Byzantine periods. One Mamluk and one Late Roman coin were found, but neither was in clear archaeological context.

Using a great deal of caution, due to the fact that most loci were disturbed, we concluded that the southern wing divided into stalls and the rooms that open into the courtyard were founded in the Byzantine period and later resettled in the Mamluk period. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an entirely new wing was added in the north. This conclusion follows those of Urman, Dauphin, and Gibson.

The Mamluk way station mentioned in the sources was probably a relatively modest building. It consisted of the long rectangular arched hall that may have served for stabling horses.

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Fig. 6. The stalls along the southern wing of the *khān*. (Photo by Shai Scharfberg)

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Summary

According to the coins and the pottery, Naʿarān was founded in the Byzantine period. The Mamluk period settlement was built towards the end of the fourteenth century on the Byzantine ruins. While the written sources state that it developed into a small town, the excavations display its last phase, when it was reduced to a small village. Not all the Byzantine houses at the site were rebuilt during the Mamluk period and there is no evidence of Mamluk settlement along the southeastern edge. The Mamluk period's domestic architecture at the site follows the Hauranian local tradition that had existed in the region since the first century CE. The houses are well built and constructed from recycled Byzantine stones. The community used common local pottery, well known from numerous sites across the country. It is an assemblage one expects to find in a village rather than a town. There were no imported vessels or luxury items. The number of coins is surprisingly low, indicating the community did not trade with the nearby markets or the merchants who traveled on the international road that passed through Naʿarān. This gap between the description provided in the sources and the archaeological finds is harder to explain. If Naʿarān was indeed a town in the late fourteenth century, its population must have shrunk rapidly during the late fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth century. This conclusion is supported by the 1535 Ottoman tax book, eighteen years after the Ottoman conquest, which records only fifteen families living in the village.[54] Naʿarān does not appear in the tax books of the second half of the sixteenth century. Al-Khiyārī, who traveled through the region in 1672, describes a deserted village. Similar accounts are given by al-Nābulusī, who crossed the Golan in 1690, and Asʿad al-Luqaymī, who passed by Naʿarān in 1759. Though their accounts are very brief, al-Luqaymī does writes that the village was ruined by the plague.[55] The location of the village on a busy international road may have been a disadvantage in times of pestilence. The reoccurrence of the plague in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was apparently no less severe or frequent than when it first broke out.[56]

This argument is not convincing, however, since both the Galilee and Transjordan suffered similar disasters, but neither show dramatic changes. In both regions the number of villages remained fairly stable throughout the sixteenth

[54] Hazırlayanlar et al., *401 numaralı,* 1:346. Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khiyārī, *Riḥlat al-Khiyārī, Tuḥfat al-Udabāʾ wa-Salwat al-Ghurabāʾ* (Baghdad, 1980), 387; ʿAbd al-Ghanī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nābulusī, *Al-Ḥaḍrah al-unsīyah fī al-riḥlah al-Qudsīyah* (Beirut, 1991), 54.

[55] Muṣṭafá Asʿad al-Luqaymī, *Mawāniḥ al-uns bi-riḥlatī li-Wādī al-Quds* (Damascus, 2012), 265–66.

[56] In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Syria suffered eighteen outbreaks: Michael Dols, "The Second Plague Pandemic and its Recurrences in the Middle East 1347–1894," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 22 (1979), 169 n. 11, 176 n. 30.

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century.[57] Further analysis of the Ottoman tax books,[58] in fact, reveals the number of villages in the Golan remained low (between 66 and 78) and that the number of families in the villages had dropped by over 50% by 1565.[59] The reasons for this sharp decline are not at all clear. The excavations did not reveal signs of sudden human or natural destruction, and the sources do not point toward political turmoil or nomadic uprisings in the Golan or the larger region. At this point, we have no hard evidence or clue that explains this rather grim picture. Perhaps excavating one of the villages that existed throughout the sixteenth century and later and further examination of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tax books will provide new data that will help in understanding these rapid changes.

[57] Walker, "Northern Jordan Survey," 67–111; idem, "Northern Jordan Project," 184–99; idem, *Jordan in the Late Middle Ages;* Raphael and Abbasi, "Galilee Villages," 39–62.

[58] Archives of the Ottoman Prime Ministry Office, Istanbul, *Tapu tahrir defterleri,* defter no. 263/1548; defter no. 257/1550; defter no. 430/1565.

[59] Ibid., defter no. 423/1565.

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