

Iotapata, Josephus, and the siege of 67: preliminary report on the 1992-94 seasons

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Iotapata (Yodefata) is well known from the full description of the siege of A.D. 67 and its aftermath given by Josephus (*BJ* 3.141-288, 316-408, 432-42), who commanded the defense of the town.¹ The site (map ref. 1763/2486), located on a hill SE of the modern moshav of Yodefata, about 22 km SE of Akko–Ptolemais and 9 km north of Sepphoris (fig. 1), was first identified as ancient Yodefata by E. G. Schultz in 1847.² This identification is consistent with Josephus' description: a distance of 40 stades from Gabara (*Vit.* 233-34), its strategic location (fig. 2, colour), surrounded on three sides by steep ravines with only the N side accessible, and hidden from view by surrounding mountains (*BJ* 3.158-160), and its lack of a natural water source (*BJ* 3.181, 186), as well as the phonetic similarity of the modern name of the adjacent ruin, Khirbet Shifat (Jifat), to Yodefata.

Previous archaeological investigation had been limited to several surveys and to Aviam's excavation (1989) of an olive press in a cave.³ Based on his numismatic survey, A. Berman concluded that the town on the hill of Yodefata was destroyed in the year 67, after which the site was never re-occupied, while the adjacent ruin of Kh. Shifat (see below) was inhabited from the late 3rd c. through the early Arab period (7th c.). Based on their 1976 ceramic survey, E. M. Meyers, J. F. Strange and D. E. Groh suggested a possible late Hellenistic population on the hill of Yodefata and continuous occupation of the site from the early Roman to the early Byzantine period, and that Kh. Shifat was occupied continuously from the early Roman to the late Byzantine period. Y. Tepper and Y. Schacher proposed, based on their interpretation of Josephus' account, that the N wall of Yodefata was located in the northern part of Kh. Shifat, and that before that wall the battle for Yodefata was waged. Finally, Z. Gal concluded, based on the lack of evidence for occupation at Yodefata prior to the Hellenistic period, that Iron Age Jotbah should be identified with another site.⁴

Several pre-excavation surveys were conducted by the present authors. Aviam found remains of fortifications on the N, E and W perimeters of the hill, many cisterns, and apparent domestic structures. The pottery collected during the surveys and examined by Adan-Bayewitz suggested Hellenistic and early Roman occupation and an apparent lack of habitation after the middle decades of the 1st c. A.D. At Kh. Shifat, an apparently distinct site at the foot of Yodefata's N slope (fig. 3), remains of a large public building, with columns, and of other structures often over 1 m high, were found. Ceramic evidence from Kh. Shifat suggested occupation from the early Roman until the Byzantine period and in the mediaeval period.

Excavations have been conducted at seven areas at Yodefata (fig. 3): the NW perimeter of the hill (1), the NW slope (2), the E part of the summit (3), the NE slope (4), the SE slope (5),

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1 It has also been suggested that Yodefata is to be identified with [Ia]-aṭ-bi-te, mentioned in the annals of Tiglath-Pileser III, and Jotbah of II Kings 21:19. See M. Broshi, s.v. Jotbah, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 3 (Jerusalem 1958) 672, and bibliography cited.

2 E. G. Schultz, "Mittheilungen über eine Reise durch Samarien und Galilaea," *ZDMG* 3 (1849) 46-52.

3 M. Avi'am, "Tel Yodefata, olive press," *ESI* 9 (1991) 106.

4 A. Berman, "Seker Numismati be-Yodefata," *Yediot Numismatit be-Yisrael* 2 (1962) 42-43; E. M. Meyers, J. F. Strange and D. E. Groh, "The Meiron Excavation Project: archeological survey in Galilee and Golan, 1976," *BASOR* 230 (1978) 1-24; Y. Tepper and Y. Schacher, *Yodefata, Mivtzaro shel Yosef ben Mattityahu - Diyun Archaeologi Histori* (Tel Aviv 1982); id., *Yishuvim Yehudiyim ba-Galil u-Ma'arachot ha-Mistor she-Bahem* (Tel-Aviv 1984) 8-32; Z. Gal, *Lower Galilee during the Iron Age* (Winona Lake 1992) 108 (Gal suggests identifying Iron Age Jotbah with Karem el-Ras).