

A Round Table-Top of a Single-Pedestalled '*Delphica*' from Ḥorvat Tabaq

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ḤORVAT TABAQ is located on the south-eastern slopes of Tel Goded, approximately 2 km. north-east of Beth Guvrin (map ref. 1418/1152; Fig. 1).¹ On the eastern side of the ancient roads and of the modern road there is a ruin called Ḥorvat Resek (Kh. Umm Raziq), which also gave its name to the ancient well at the site.

Only a few remnants of poorly preserved walls can be seen on the site, as well as dressed stones and other architectural remains dispersed throughout the area. The surface, however, hides an elaborate underground labyrinth of hewn rooms and passageways. Six such underground systems were studied on this site. These systems were hewn in the soft chalk of the Maresha detail, Zor'ah formation, Middle Eocene era.² A large system was discovered in the autumn of 1986, after having been broken into by grave robbers. On our first visits to the system soon after its discovery, we noticed a round stone with fluted edges (Fig. 2). It was lying in tunnel q, leading to Room 1 (Fig. 3). Shortly afterwards the stone disappeared, and was rediscovered in 1995 — broken into three parts — inside the grand burial system of Ḥorvat Midras.³ The round stone was transferred to the Israel Antiquities Authority, where it was repaired and registered as No. 1996-1394.⁴

1 The ancient name of the site is unknown. Victor Guérin, who visited the area in the 1860s, called the site 'Kh. Djedeideh', see V. Guérin: *Description Géographique, Historique et Archeologique de la Palestine*, II, *Judée*, Paris, 1879, p. 317. In the British Survey map (PEF Map, Sheet XX), published in 1879, the site is called 'Kh. el Judeiyideh'. In a map from the British Mandate, dated April 1945 (Beit Jibrin), Sheet 14/11, 1:20,000 Palestine, a ruin on the site is identified as Kh. Abu Tabaq. Kh. el Judeida is marked as being 900 m. to the south-west. In more recent maps the site is not marked at all, and only some caves are marked on the spot. We have renamed the site 'Ḥorvat Tabaq'.

2 Y. Miron: *Hiding Complex near Be'er Resek, Niqrot Zurim* 11-12 (1985), pp. 64-66 (Hebrew; English summary on p. 135); A. Kloner and Y. Tepper: *The Hiding Complexes in the Judean Shephelah*, Tel Aviv, 1987, pp. 237-238 (Hebrew); N. Sagiv and B. Zissu: *Ḥorvat Tabaq at Tel Goded — A Jewish Site from the Second Temple Period in the Judean Foothills*, in Y. Eshel (ed.): *Judea & Samaria Research Studies, Proceedings of the 7th Annual Meeting — 1997*, Kedumim-Ariel, 1998, pp. 115-139 (Hebrew with English summary).

3 A. Kloner: *Ḥ. Midras (Kh. Durusiya)*, *IEJ* 27 (1977), pp. 251-252; *idem*, *Ḥorvat Midras, Qadmoniot* 44 (1978), pp. 115-119 (Hebrew).

4 Our thanks are extended to Oded Raviv for the restoration; to Haim Moyal for the drawings; to Sherry Whetstone, Nili Graicer, N. Sidi and Rivka Birger-Calderon for their

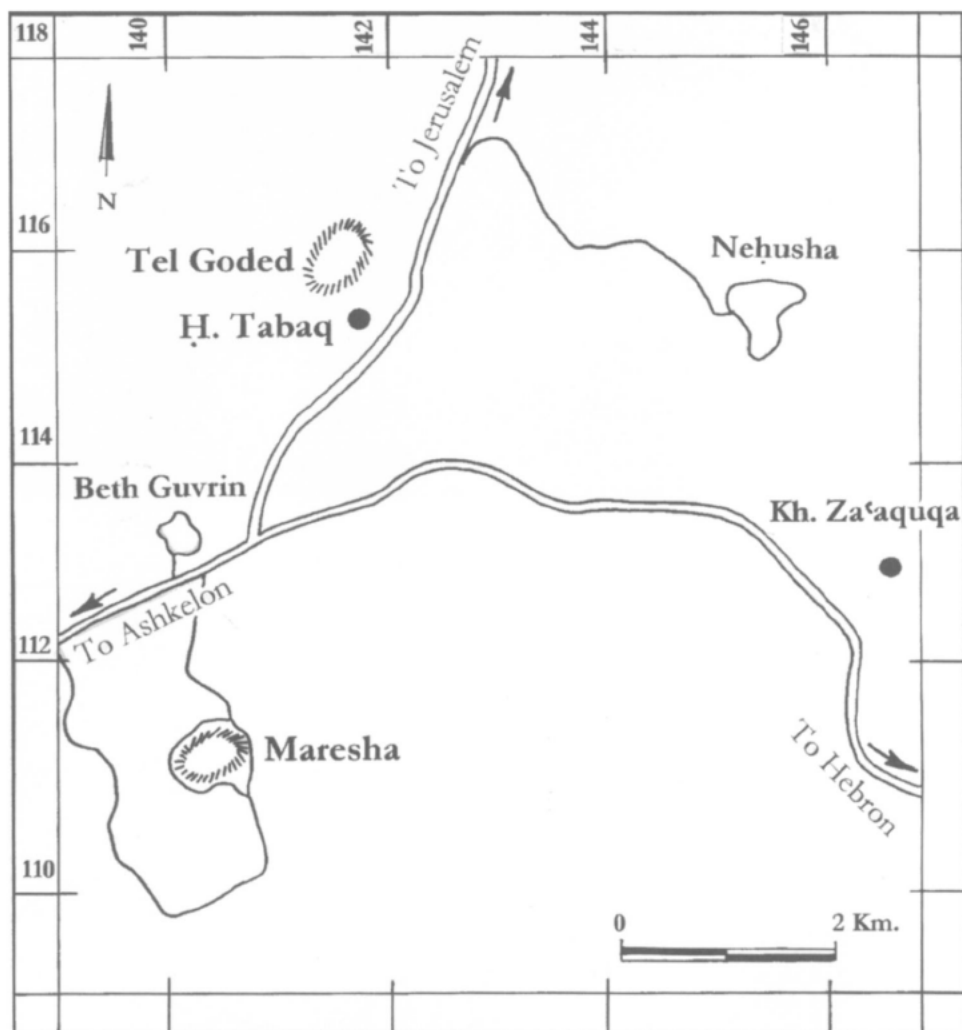


Fig. 1. Horvat Tabaq: location map.

Description (Figs. 4-5)

The round stone (diameter: 60 cm.; overall width: 9.5 cm.) was hand-made from a chalky block stone, without the use of a lathe. It is slightly elliptical, rather than a perfect circle. The upper side of the stone is flat and smooth. In the very centre of the underside there is a square indentation (c. 23×23 cm.; 0.4 cm. deep). Notches

assistance; to M Salzberger for photographs, Fig. 4; and to Yair Zoran for the on-site photographs. Thanks are also extended to an anonymous reader of this article for some remarks. The opinions expressed here are the authors' alone.

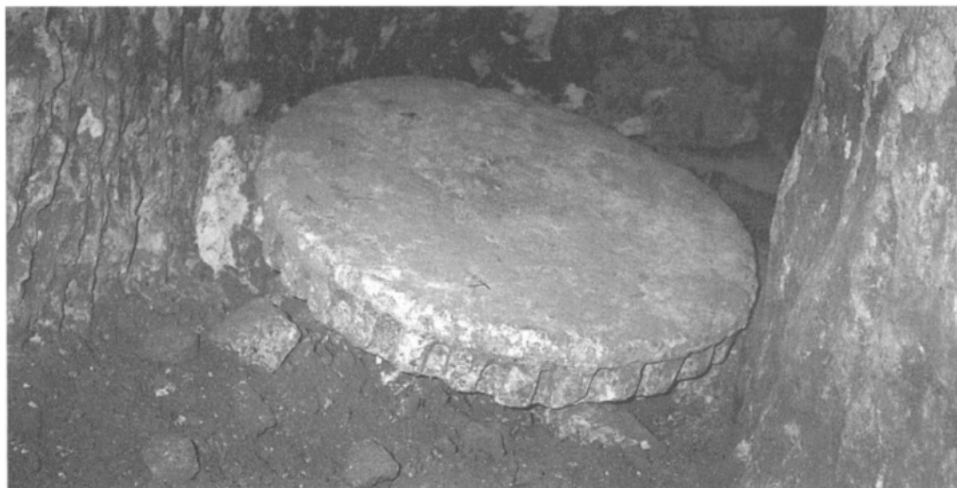


Fig. 2. Table-top *in situ*.

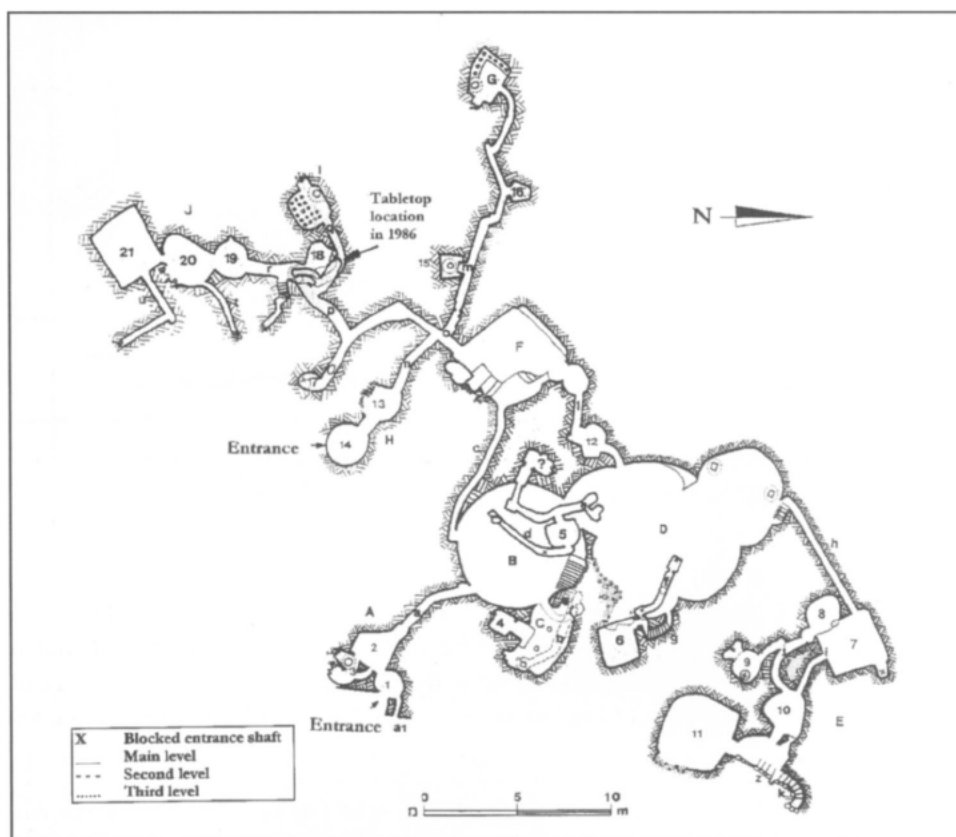


Fig. 3. Plan of cave system.

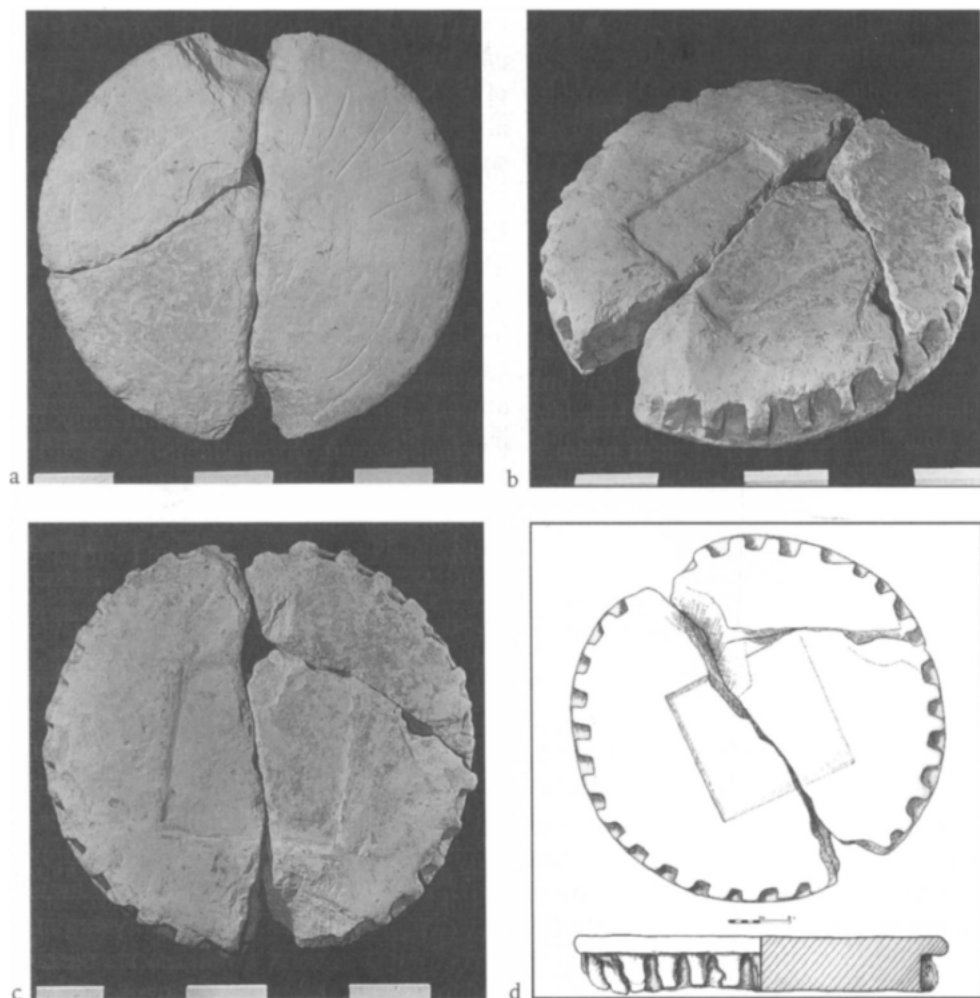


Fig. 4. a) Upper side of table-top (graffito is modern); b) oblique view of underside, with notches around it; c) underside, with indentation in centre; d) underside and section.

are carved around the entire circumference of the stone. The average width of the notches is 3 cm. and their average depth is 2.6 cm. They are 6 cm. in length from the bottom of the round stone, thus leaving an intact ring of stone, 3.5 cm. in height, around the upper edge. The distance between the notches is 3 cm., creating a fluted pattern.

In our opinion, this round stone was used as a table-top, which originally rested on a single pedestal (not discovered, but presumably massive in order to bear the weight of the stone table-top). The square head of the pedestal would have fit into the socket created by the square indentation in the underside of the table-top (see

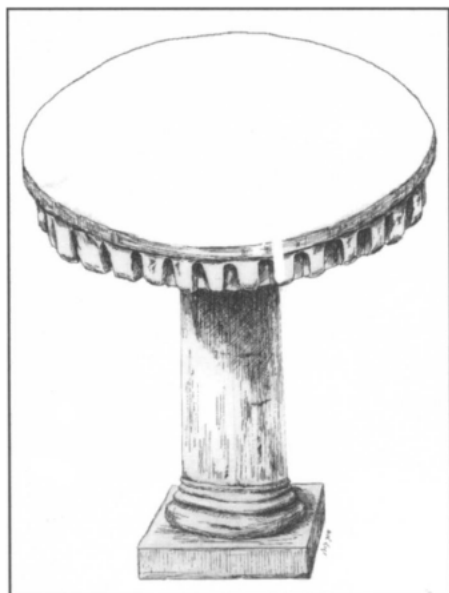


Fig. 5. Proposed reconstruction of table (leg and base are conjecture).

reconstruction, Fig. 5). On the basis of parallels (see below), we believe the body of the pedestal was probably rounded, although it is also possible that it was square.⁵

Discussion

The table-tops of the Roman period are divided into two main categories on the basis of their shape: A) square or rectangular table-tops; and B) round table-tops. They are made of a variety of materials, although those found in Israel are almost all made of stone.

Type A1. This type is a square table (*Monopodium* or *Cartibulum*) which stood upon a single support.⁶ These tables were generally immobile, and their pedestal was massive. Made of wood, stone, or metal, these tables seldom stood

freely in the centre of a room, but were usually placed against a wall or in a corner; therefore, only the edges on the sides visible to the room were decorated. These tables were for general use and various purposes, and the space below the table-top was sometimes utilised for the storage of large vessels. A single-pedestal table of this type is mentioned in the Tosefta (Kelim, Baba Bathra, 3,4).⁷ Stone tables are known in archaeological finds of the Second Temple period in Jerusalem.⁸ A stone

5 An unpublished example of the lower part of a square leg was found by Prof. N. Avigad in the excavations of the Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem. The table-top belonging to this leg is exhibited at the Reuben and Edith Hecht Museum, University of Haifa. Thanks are due to Hillel Geva (Jerusalem) and Ofra Rimmon, Chief Curator of the museum, for this information.

6 G. Richter: *Ancient Furniture*, Oxford, 1926, pp. 140–141; *idem*, *The Furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans*, London, 1966, pp. 112–113. See discussion in L.Y. Rahmani: Table-Top of the Late Second Temple Period, *Atiqot* (Hebrew Series) 7 (1974), p. 66, English summary on pp. 9*–10*; *idem*, Table-Top of the Late Second Temple Period, *Sefunim* 5 (1976), pp. 67–71 (Hebrew).

7 M.S. Zuckerman: *Tosephta*, Leipzig, 1881, p. 592.

8 N. Avigad: *Discovering Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 1983, p. 174–182; J. Wilkinson: Stone Tables in Herodian Jerusalem, *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 13 (1993–1994), pp. 7–21.

table-top with two decorated edges, dated to the second century B.C.E., was found at Maresha, located 4 km. south of Ḥorvat Tabāq.⁹

Type A2. This is a rectangular table-top, standing upon two parallel perpendicular solid supports, which are mainly rectangular in shape, but often carved decoratively.¹⁰ Examples are found in Pompei, as well as in Herculaneum and other sites.¹¹

Type A3. This is a rectangular table-top with four legs.¹² Such tables have been found in various locations in the Roman world, but not in the Levant. Richter suggests, albeit without providing evidence, that there may have been rectangular table-tops with three legs.¹³

Type B1. This is a round table (*Delphica*) which stood upon three legs, usually made of wood. Indentations for the insertion of the legs were cut into the underside of the table-top. These tables were used for serving food and drinks. Round tables with three legs terminating in lions' paws or in grooves were common in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.¹⁴ Two types of *Delphicae* are known. One is elegant and relatively tall, and seems to be the earlier of the two, although it appears in later periods as well. The other type, with shorter legs and a more massive appearance, is dated mainly to the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, and was common in Italy and other sites in the Mediterranean region, from the second century B.C.E. onwards.¹⁵

A group of round table-tops of this type was found during the excavations of the upper city of Jerusalem in the Second Temple period.¹⁶ A table of this type is drawn in the Painted ('Sidonian') Cave 1 at Maresha, which is dated to the third century B.C.E.¹⁷ In the Mishna (Kelim, 22, 1-2), three-legged דלפיקי are mentioned in the

9 F.J. Bliss and R.A.S. Macalister: *Excavations in Palestine 1898-1900*, London, 1902, p. 57, Pl. 18:9. It is assumed, on the basis of its decoration on only two sides, that it stood in a corner of a room. In the same plate, two stone legs, presumably belonging to tables of this type, are also drawn and described, see *ibid.*, p. 57, Pl. 18:7, 8.

10 Richter (above, n. 6, 1926), pp. 140-142; *idem* (above, n. 6, 1966), p. 113.

11 *Pompeii, Pitture e Mosaici* (no author), Vol. I, Regio I, Rome, 1990, p. 83, Fig. 1; p. 183, Figs. 2-5; p. 798, Fig. 1; *ibid.*, Vol. IV, Regio VI, Rome, 1993, p. 672, Figs. 29-31.

12 Richter (above, n. 6, 1926), pp. 138-139; *idem* (above, n. 6, 1966), p. 113.

13 Richter (above, n. 6, 1966), p. 110.

14 Richter (above, n. 6, 1926), pp. 87-88, 139-140; *idem* (above, n. 6, 1966), p. 70.

15 R. Merhav: A Bronze Leg from a Piece of Hellenistic Furniture — A Find from Seabed near 'Atlit, *EI* 25 (1996), pp. 428-429 (Hebrew), English summary on pp. 104*-105*.

16 Avigad (above, n. 8).

17 J.P. Peters and H. Thiersch: *Painted Tombs in the Necropolis of Marissa*, London, 1905: frontispiece, p. 21.

Halachot concerning the ritual cleanliness of food and utensils. The Mishna also differentiates between the דלפקי and an ordinary table, in reference to the entertainment of a Gentile by a Jew (Abodah Zarah, 5,5).

Type B2. On the basis of the table-top from Ḥorvat Tabaq, published here, we propose another sub-type: a round table-top with a single support (see below). Although, to the best of our knowledge, no example of this type has previously been found at archaeological sites, its existence is testified by Richter on the basis of literary and artistic descriptions.¹⁸

Conclusions

The design of the table-top from Ḥorvat Tabaq appears to be a hybrid combining the round table-top of the *Delphica* type with the single leg of the *Monopodium* type. Although we are aware of the fact that the *Delphica* is by definition a three-legged table, so called with reference to the three legs of the Delphic tripod, we suggest that our table-top is a variation on the *Delphica* type. It appears that the table was manufactured in a local workshop according to the tastes of the local population, and is unlike the common three-legged *Delphici* discovered at sites in Italy and Jerusalem and evident in the painted table of Maresha.

In our opinion, the table belonged to one of the families residing in the Jewish settlement of Ḥorvat Tabaq during the late Second Temple period, up to the eve of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Since the system was sealed by the end of the revolt, and had not been opened since, it would appear that we should date this table to the period preceding the '30s of the second century C.E., i.e. to the first century and the beginning of the second century C.E.

We can offer a number of hypotheses for the placement of the table in a passage of the hiding cave. 1) It may have been used by the fleeing population as a blocking stone to one of the passages. 2) It may have been taken down to the cave in order to serve in its original capacity, or because of its value to its owner. The size and unusual nature of the round table-top, compared to the usual finds in the hiding caves, suggest that the table was taken down on purpose. 3) The table may have surfed down into the cave system as part of the landslide and fill that accompanied the destruction of the settlement at the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt. This was also the end of the use of the settlement, the underground cave systems and the hiding caves, based on the finds found within them.

¹⁸ Richter (above, n. 6, 1966), pp. 112–113.