

## The Meaning of ἐπὶ λόφου in Polybius' Writing and its Effect on the Location of the Town Tabor\*

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In two of the places the name *Tabor* is mentioned in the Bible (*Jos.* 19.12,<sup>1</sup>, *Chron.* 6.62), the reference is not to the well-known mountain in the southern Galilee but rather to a town of that name in the same district. In Josephus' time, this town was already in ruins;<sup>2</sup> its destruction probably predates the Hasmonean period.<sup>3</sup> A settlement of this name is nowhere alluded to in later sources.

The last source to mention the *town* of Tabor is Polybius. In his description of the conquest of the Galilee by Antiochus III in the year 218 BCE (5.70). Polybius mentions *Atabyrion* (=Tabor), a fortified town, which was captured by Antiochus, and describes the special tactic employed by Antiochus in taking the town. By staging a retreat on the part of his men, downhill away

\* The subject referred to in this note is discussed in detail in my article דבוריה הר תבור ודבורה לרגלי הר תבור ('Daburiyah and Dabura at the foot of Mt. Tabor'), recently submitted for publication in *Cathedra* of Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Jerusalem (Hebrew). I would like to thank Mrs. Erna Kobus, Mrs. Lisa Ullmann and Dr. Doron Mendels who supported me in analyzing the Greek Text.

1 The structure of the verse — ופגע הגבול בתבור ובשהצימה ובית שמש — “and the border meets Tabor and Šahašima and Beth Šemeš,” as well as the concluding number — ערים שש עשרה — “sixteen towns,” both indicate that Tabor here is the name of a *town*.

2 Josephus mentions Ἰταβύριον (=Tabor) ten times in his books, and in all instances he is speaking of Ἰταβύριον ὄρος — “*the mount* of Itabyrion” (See Niese Index p. 45b).

3 In *Ant.* 13.396–97, a summing-up of the Hasmonean conquests is stated. The name Ἰταβύριον ὄρος is written there as the name of a *district*, together with Samaria and the Carmel, while it is absent from the list of the conquered *towns*.

from the town, Antiochus succeeded in luring the bolder defenders of the town out into an ambush. He then reattacked with his main force and captured the town. In light of the aforementioned historical sources it is reasonable to assume that as a result of Antiochus' conquest the town fell into perpetual ruin.

The location of the town of Atabyrion is described by Polybius as follows: ...καὶ παρῆν ἐπ' Ἀταβύριον δὲ κεῖται μὲν ἐπὶ λόφου μαστοειδοῦς τὴν δὲ πρόσβασιν ἔχει πλεῖον ἢ πεντεκαίδεκα σταδίων.

This sentence was translated by Paton:

"... and reached Atabyrium which lies *on a conical hill*, the ascent of which is more than fifteen stades."<sup>4</sup>

This conception that "ἐπὶ λόφου" here means "on a hill" or "upon a mountain" is commonly accepted.<sup>5</sup> However, a comparison of this description with the archaeological data, as well as with what we can learn from the Bible, presents a difficulty.

Archaeological explorations carried out on Mt. Tabor indicate that the upper region of the mountain (a surface of about 0.4 sq. km.) contains only remnants of fortresses and monasteries, dating not earlier than the Roman period. Neither pre-Roman pottery nor remains of any town have been found upon the mountain.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the deeply wooded slopes of the mountain would not have been a suitable site for a town.

Biblical sources also preclude the existence of a town on the top of the mountain. According to the Scriptures, the town Tabor had been given first to the tribe of Issachar and later transferred to Zebulun. Near Tabor there existed the town of *Daberath* which had always belonged to Issachar. The location of Daberath (today Dabūryeh), on the western foothills of Mt. Tabor, indicates that the mountain itself and its southern and eastern slopes and lowlands had always been a part of the territory of Issachar. Therefore they could not have served as the location of the town Tabor. On the other hand, the northern area adjacent to the mountain could have been transferred from one tribe to another. The original eastern border of Zebulun ran north from Daberath. A small move of the border to the east, over generations, is quite reasonable; therefore we can assume that the location of the town was

4 Polybius, *The Histories* II, transl. by W.R. Paton, Vol. 2 (Harvard 1954) *loc. cit.*

5 See F.W. Walbank. *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* (Oxford 1957) Vol 1, 596, *RE* I 4 (1888).

6 Y. Aharoni, "תבור", *אנציקלופדיה מקראית* ח, (Enc. Biblica 8, 407. Hebrew); M. Piccirillo, M. Ben-Dov, E. Shiller, I. Zaharoni, *פסגת הר תבור*, (The Summit of Mt. Tabor) *Qardom* 20 (1982) 52–78 (Hebrew).

just north of Mt. Tabor. Consistent with this is the existence of a large ruin on a terrace slightly north of the mountain. The majority of the pottery found there is from the Hellenistic period, and there are no findings from a later period.<sup>7</sup> This site can be identified as the site of Tabor—Atabyrion.

Some scholars presumed that the πόλις Polybius speaks of was actually a fortress, built on the hilltop to defend the district against Antiochus.<sup>8</sup> Yet this assumption is problematic linguistically and ultimately fits neither the archaeological findings nor the Biblical data.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that the key to the problem is in the explanation of the expression ἐπὶ λόφου.

Generally ἐπὶ + *gen.* could also be explained as “near”, “not far from”, or “in”.<sup>10</sup> Upon examining the expression ἐπὶ λόφου in Polybius’ writing, I have found that it occurs a few times, and in no case does the context indicate “upon a hill”. The two occurrences of ἐπὶ λόφου in sentences the style of which is very similar to that of our passage are most logically translated as “at”,

- 7 N. Zuri נחלת יששכר (The Land of Issachar) (Jerusalem 1977) 105–108 (Hebrew). The name of the ruin is “Khirbet Dabūra” and from linguistic and historical data it seems to me that there is a possibility that this form was transferred from the Aramaic form תבורא, which was considered in later generations, by popular etymology, as a mate-form of Dabūryeh (<Dabūrīta\* < Dabarīta < Daberat) located near Mt. Tabor, on the west.
- 8 M. Avi-Yona גיאוגרפיה היסטורית של ארץ ישראל (Historical Geography of Palestine) (Jerusalem 1949) 28 (Hebrew). M. Stern מ. ישראל של ארץ ישראל (The History of the Holy Land) 3 (Jerusalem 1981) 58 (Hebrew). Ch. Moller & G. Schmitt, *Siedlungen Palästinas nach Flavius Josephus*, (Wiesbaden 1976) 111–12.
- 9 There is a widespread tendency to deny the existence of the Biblical town Tabor, not necessarily in connection with the interpretation of Plb. 5,70. Some scholars have emended the Biblical text; others explained “תבור” as an abbreviated form of כסלות־תבור or אונות־תבור. For bibliography see E.L. Curtis & A.A. Madsen, *The Book of Chronicles*, ICC (Edinburgh 1910) 143, F. Brown & S.R. Driver & C.A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon for the O.T.* (Oxford 1906) 1061, S. Klein, ערי הכהנים והלוויים (The Cities of Priests and Levites) (Jerusalem — Tel Aviv 1934) 12 (Hebrew), Y. Aharoni, “תבור”, אנציקלופדיה מקראית ח, (Encyclopaedia Biblica) 8, 407 (Hebrew). Of course, the school of Wellhausen considers all genealogical and geographical lists of the book of Chronicles to be not more than imaginary fiction (J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, (Berlin 1878) 153–8; 206–17). However, our research is based on the Biblical text as it is.
- 10 LSJ ἐπὶ A.I.1. (“sts. also at or near,”), J. Schweighauser, *Lexicon Polybium* (Lipsiae 1759) 238b, A. Mauersberger, *Polybius-Lexikon*, Vol. 1/2 (Berlin 1961) 876–80.

“near”, “on the slope of”, “in the district of” a mountain, rather than “on the top of a mountain”:

ἡ τῶν Αἰγυριατῶν ... κεῖται δ' ἐπὶ λόφων ἐρυμνῶν καὶ δυσβάτων.

=Aigeria...is located *in a district of* lofty and impassable mountains (4.57.5).

ἡ κεῖται (Ἀλίφειρα) μὲν ἐπὶ λόφου κρημνώδους πανταχόθεν ἔχοντος πλεῖον ἢ δεκασταδίων πρόσβασιν, ἔχει δ' ἄκραν ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ κορυφῇ τοῦ σύμπαντος λόφου...

(Aliphera) which lies *on the slope of* a mountain, precipitous on all sides, which has an ascent of more than ten stades and it (=the town) has a fortress on the very top of the whole ridge (4.78.3).

The last sentence is particularly important, since it demonstrates the terminology used by Polybius to express “*on the top of the hill*”. Here, we have the preposition ἐν - ἐν τῇ κορυφῇ τοῦ λόφου. Similarly, we find in other places in Polybius’ writing a shorter combination — ἐν τῷ λόφῳ, meaning — “*upon the hill*.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus Polybius clearly distinguishes between “upon a hill” and “near” or “at a hill”. For the former he uses ἐν+*dat.*, the latter is expressed by ἐπί+*gen.*<sup>12</sup> The town of Atabyrion “ἐπὶ λόφου μαστοειδοῦς” is, therefore, to be located at the foot of that breast-like mountain and not upon its summit. This conclusion, based on a linguistic distinction in the Greek source, is consistent, as shown above, with the Biblical and archaeological data.

I hope the linguistic distinction suggested here can help toward a better understanding of the Greek historical sources.

Ofra

11 E.g. II 28,2; III 105,2.

12 See now also *Herodotus Historiae* I, ed. H.B. Rosén (Teubner, Leipzig 1987) p. XVII (ad Hdt. 2. 124. 4).