

In Memory of Ofer Bar-Yosef: A Personal Reflection

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In the middle of March 2020, Ofer Bar-Yosef had passed away at his home in Israel – a great man, my teacher and mentor, a highly accomplished archaeologist, a human being. I had parted from him as you would a person you love, with great pain.

I had been asked a few weeks back to write something in his memory for the journal of *Neo-Lithics*. Although I had consented, I found it very difficult to write – it was at the onset of the worldwide spread of the COVID crisis, which had affected us all. Facing fears, concerns, and uncertainty that had taken over our lives and despite the fact that we had been home bound with time seemingly available for pondering and contemplation, I struggled to put words to paper. Ofer was my mentor and teacher and had greatly inspired my disposition as an archaeologist, but beyond that, he had influenced my disposition as a human being.

What I lay down in writing here signifies a relationship lasting over 40 years, starting at the end of 1975 and ending only now. I found myself recalling my student years under his guidance, working at the field, or conducting discussions at the lab, during travel, sometimes even over the phone, and attempting to consider those issues from my perspective of here and now. Beyond the multitude of stories, some quite amusing, which I recalled, I found myself pondering over life in general and my personal history as well as my long, and good-standing relationship with Ofer, my formative years of schooling in Jerusalem, my scientific work, and the decisions I had come to take over the years. Little by little, I became ever more cognizant of the ways by which Ofer had influenced my own way, primarily during the earlier stages of my (professional) life, and the influence he exerted on me through his kindness, wisdom, and mostly – his acceptance of me for who I was (not an easy client) sometime during the second half of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. It seems to me that each of us, his students, and certainly his many collaborators and friends in Israel and abroad, carries with him a bundle of memories comprising both stories known to all as well as stories and episodes privy to no other, the content and significance of which depends on one's perspective, a word, and perhaps even a silence. I write here of both, with awe and reverence, delving at time into personal points, which, from my perspective, are occasionally perhaps too personal. In many ways, then, the first part of this text unfolds my stories, to the extent to which they were intertwined with Ofer. The goal, however, is for these selected short tales to help expose some of Ofer's multifaceted and captivating personality as I assume the role of the narrator.

Neo-Lithics is the journal that transpired from the first meeting, in Berlin, of the group known also



Fig. 1 Ofer at PPNA Netiv Hagdud, Locus 21 (c. 1984), in search for mudbricks. (Photo: Archives of the Prehistory Department, Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

by the name *Neo-Lithics* (following which also came the series of PPN conferences from PPN1 to PPN9 to date), in which I participated in 1993. As both Ofer and I had participated in many meetings of this group, and as this journal centers on the Neolithic period and its different aspects, emphasizing lithic assemblages, it is but natural to refer to this chapter of Ofer's scientific work – a long, intensive period of research – its essentials and outcomes. This narrative is not meant to be a learned synthesis of Ofer's work but rather a view through my own experience and understanding gained through my own perspective of observation and select memories.

I first met Ofer when I had arrived at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem at the end 1975. I was his student consecutively, never doubting or straying, until 1985. I had written my doctoral dissertation under his guidance, concentrating on the Neolithic period,

the period which had caught my attention throughout the course of my studies and ever since then. The relationship with Ofer was highly intensive, on a daily basis, in both the classroom, the laboratory, and the field. Ofer spent a sabbatical year at Ann-Arbor in the US while I was writing my dissertation in Israel, and at the era of ordinary postal services, I received his edifying comments over the pages of the text that had been shipped from the US in his handsome, decisive handwriting. The nature of the relationship changed as Ofer moved to teach steadily at Harvard University starting 1988. I had not frequently travelled to the US, and I had met him in his new university settings in Cambridge, MA only one time for just a couple of days during which I had also stayed at his home.

I had arrived a few days late at my first year at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and following a few minutes of searching in the disarray of the construction site later to become the Har Hatsofim (Mt. Scopus) campus, I had found the back side of the old archaeology building (among the first buildings built between the two world wars, in the Mt. Scopus campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem). There, I encountered a short man wearing some thick glasses arranging equipment in a vehicle parked by the entrance (it was later established he was a professor at the Hebrew University). I asked where they were headed, and he said: Southern Sinai; I asked whether I could join (southern Sinai was an enchanted place in my eyes, where I had travelled for weeks on end). He replied with a question: Who are you? he asked, and I responded that I was a student of archaeology. When have you started? he asked, and I responded: Today, although I have not yet attended my first class. He said he was sorry as this survey-tour was designated for advanced students only, but he suggested that I could help load the equipment – and so I had.

Very simple, natural, with a smile and in high-spirits – I immediately felt good. I believe he did not join that excursion but I can no longer recall. A few days later, I had arrived at the prehistory introductory class that he had taught, and I noted a wise man, enthusiastic and enthusiastically stimulating, who was characterized by a broad view, sharp speech, and kindness as he discoursed with students following him at the end of class, asking their questions. I was immediately drawn to the subject, and the early review (the opening classes) of the course spanned from the earliest of early (Paleolithic) and up to the Agricultural Revolution that had won a place of honor (of which I had heard prior to my studies and which held a great interest within me). I was greatly impressed, and this introductory class turned out to be one of the most fabulous I had ever attended. The desire immediately sprung within me to become a partner. Back then, I did not understand what archaeological laboratory work entailed or what was transpiring in the prehistory lab that was located at the basement floor of the building. Neither did I know that the field work in northern Sinai had just concluded and the field work at southern Sinai had not yet begun.

During the rest of my school years, my second and third years of undergraduate studies and later during my graduate and post-graduate studies, my university life had sprouted in several concurrent avenues – all heavily intertwined with Ofer. I cannot tell much, and I am certain I had forgot some, but I recall stories attesting to Ofer's personality, his attitude towards students and people in general, his scientific work, and his perception of the university as well as the academic world at large.

Classes were formidable, although for two of my undergraduate years during which I was studying under the auspices of the prehistory section, I was its only student (there was one other student – Dodi Ben Ami – an elder man, well-known and highly familiar with the field, having possessed knowledge of flint tool knapping and well-experienced in surveying different parts of the country, a family man who showed up inconsistently). Some of my classes with Ofer took place while driving, mostly through the Jordan Valley, namely, the area of Jericho, Netiv Hagdud, Gilgal, Wadi Fazaal, points of flint sources in these areas nearby Al Auja, and north of Wadi Fazaal, on the eastern slopes of Israel's mountain backbone. The conversations that took place during these travels were inciting and instructive, clearly attesting to the broad range of knowledge Ofer had of prehistory worldwide and his full involvement in the profession in the deepest and broadest sense of the words. An amusing anecdote occurred during my third year as I was about to complete my seminar essay



Fig. 2 Ofer at the PPN1 Workshop (1993) in Berlin, talking with Leslie Quintero (in front of them: Klaus Schmidt). (Photo: H.G. Gebel)

on the Acheuleo-Yabrudian cultural complex (later dubbed AYCC). I had requested to present my work in class as did all my colleagues from other sections in the department, and he agreed and came with me to the classroom. While I was presenting on the stage full of awe and reverence, he had soon dozed off only to awaken as I ceased talking. We had then returned to the laboratory for a cup of coffee accompanied with

a discussion of the AYCC, which had continued after he had read my paper. This paper left a warm spot in my heart for the AYCC and later, many years later, I became fortunate to dig, starting in 2001, a well-preserved AYCC site – Qesem Cave – which Ofer had visited on a few occasions as well. The discussion that had transpired back then, had now found its way into my daily reality decades after its occurrence.

Laboratory work involving the analysis of flint tool assemblages began during my second year, and Ofer, who introduced me to the work, said: “Pop into my office whenever you have a question and bring with you the tray containing the item in question, I shall respond, and you would be able to continue.” I thus found myself harassing him at his office at the end of the hallway quite often with a tray full of flint items and a mouthful of questions. Sometimes, I would even barge in during meetings he had held at his office. He never expressed unease nor did he reject me, rather – he looked, responded patiently, and continued his affairs as soon as I had left the room. During that year, I had already started working under Ofer’s guidance (as well as Nigel Goring-Morris’s guidance, in whose room I was initially situated) on flint (and stone) tool assemblages originating in the Neolithic sites of southern Sinai. This learning adventure was fascinating to me as I had participated in the excavation at these sites, one of which eventually became the subject of my graduate (MA) thesis, submitted to Ofer in 1981: Wadi Tbeik. At the laboratory, I had met a well formulated group of smart, knowledgeable, and highly motivated colleagues: few were undergraduate students, and most were Ofer’s graduate and postgraduate students, some whom also taught certain parts of the program’s curriculum. Among them were Naama Goren-Inbar, Anna Belfer-Cohen, Nigel Goring-Morris, Esti Mintz, Uri Baruch, and shortly after, also Steve Rosen, Dani Nadel, Yossi Garfinkel, and others as well as short-lived visitors to the lab. I was fully engaged and had spent many hours in the laboratory studying, and studying, and studying in between discussions that had taken place during many coffee breaks by the laboratory desk with Ofer and whoever else was there that day. It was schooling at its very best – open, free, and broad ranged. Retrospectively, it had turned out to comprise a formative phase (for me, for all of us, and I think even for Ofer), a phase that had given birth to the prehistorians of the future who had spread throughout the country.

An event I recall from these days: I arrived one morning at the laboratory to find that someone had been working at my desk, opening bags, and removing materials from them – in this case, faunal remains. I went to Ofer and said that despite my meagre stature, it was unacceptable to me that someone would rummage through my desk unbeknownst to me and would leave such disarray. It turned out to have been Professor Eitan Tchernov and one of his students who had come to prepare something on which they had been working at the time. I turned cheeky, and demanded

an apology and that my desk would be tidied as well. Ofer responded without a shred of hesitation: You are right, we shall fix this. And so it was. Despite my discomfort and feelings of uneasiness as the source of potential friction between Ofer and Eitan, who was his best friend and partner – his response made me feel as if I were in the seventh heaven – suddenly, I was confident about my place there. Retrospectively, as I write this text, I realize that many of our conversations and the events we had jointly experienced were time-withstanding lessons well-assimilated within me.

Field Work

Frequent excavation seasons in southern Sinai, summer excavation seasons at Hayonim Cave, and other field projects in which I partook alongside Ofer were fabulous, clever, precise, and superior, while also bringing the greatest joy. It is such a pity that the Neolithic project of southern Sinai was never fully published despite numerous discussions Ofer, Nigel, and I had about the possibility of publication. We were all too busy, and yet I am still hopeful that such a publication would materialize despite Ofer’s absence or the absence of his ideas, knowledge, and experience.

The general idea of the Sinai project led by Ofer was to dig sites in various points of the cross-section of southern Sinai (from the Gulf of Eilat in the east to the Gulf of Suez in the west) in order to portray, from a broad perspective, the adaptation of PPNB societies to their barren, desert, environment and retrace their seasonal mobility. Indeed, PPNB sites were excavated at the climax of the southern Sinai mountains, nearby the famous Saint Catherine Monastery (the site of Ujrat el Mehed, aka Banana, due to the banana-shaped extension over which it is located); the site of Wadi Tbeik at Jabel Guna half way up the mountain to the north, and the sites of Wadi Jiba near the Gulf of Suez in the west. No site was found in the lower parts of the eastern side of the section. Following one of our discussions on the matter while at the field, Ofer said to me: “Go seek a site in the eastern slopes.” This was somewhat uncharacteristic as he was typically rather concerned, and it sounded out of line for him. Nevertheless, things were set in motion, the jeep had taken me to the area that we had marked on the map, and I set out on my solitary quest. I had repeated these adventures on several occasions but other than a few random flint artifacts scattered about, I was unable to identify a site. The feeling swept over me, yet again, that he trusted me, and perhaps even testing my experience through these solitary journeys. The southern Sinai Neolithic project was accompanied by a survey of Bedouin encampments in the area, a form of ethnoarchaeological study conducted by Naama Goren-Inbar and Israel Hershkovitz with the goal of promoting insights (*e.g.*, regarding seasonality) into the Neolithic period; this project added an interesting dimension to the work in the area. I can share that



Fig. 3 Ofer at the ppn6 Conference (2008) in Manchester, inspecting blade technologies). (Photo: H.G.K. Gebel)

the journey into the southern Sinai excavations, comprising some 15 excavation seasons of 2-3 weeks each, the drive down there, the adventures on the way, the amazing archaeology, the camps erected next to the sites and the friendships that had emerged there – all combined into a momentous, singular, fascinating experience, and it was my great fortune to have been a member in this journey alongside Ofer and many other wonderful persons that had partook in it. I believe that Ofer, too, was overjoyed with the project, and I had only ever seen him get upset once in all those years, when a troublesome student had caused damage to one of the stone walls at the site of Abu Madi I.

During one of these Sinai excavation seasons, I had witnessed the first steps of what would later become a firm life-long partnership, a family, between Ofer and Danny, his wife. During another, I had also met my own wife, Anat.

I remember my resolve to follow Ofer and observe as he wrote and sketched in his diary during the Sinai excavations. In my early days in the field, with hardly any experience whatsoever, I had requested this of him, he agreed, and said nothing. It was clear that he felt gratified in these moments of recording, observing, occasionally measuring a stone or an elevation using an unfolding wooden ruler, sketching, and writing, in his remarkable handwriting, in pencil. A few days later, I began asking questions, to which he responded unreservedly. Still a few days later, I began measuring

– at his request – and discussing with him the things he wrote and sketched. In a subsequent season, he suggested that I begin drawing stones – a wall. I started, and he helped me learn how to use a 1 x 1 m wooden frame with a string grid of 10 cm and respectively using millimeter pages to draw at a scale of 1:10. That summer at Hayonim Cave, it was my good fortune to sketch a great many stone piles and sections, and then later again during the southern Sinai excavations. I felt he was happy for me for having learned this basic recording method comprising accurate stone by stone and section drawing as well as diary sketches and schematic sections reflecting insights from the observations at the site. I had assumed the method, the graph diary, the pencil, and I felt really good about them. To this day, despite orderly, sophisticated recording methods, I still scribble in my graph diary in pencil.

Ofer had a rare talent for observation and the drawing of his observations, and he was additionally highly skilled in drawing tools of different matter (flint, stone, bone). I later found out he had additionally taken to water color painting and towards the end of his life had painted with color pencils – works at which we would occasionally sit and look at together at his home in Kfar Saba upon my visits there. The ease of movement as he worked, alongside his precision and the clear happiness emanating from him as he drew or painted, were one of the most wonderful things to watch throughout the excavations in which I participated. His sketches were beautifully, accurately, and swiftly executed, with characteristic pencil strokes – indeed, he was a talented man.

During the annual excavations at Hayonim Cave in the 1970s, we had lived in a school at the city of Carmiel, which was empty due to the summer break, we would eat a quick breakfast, and drive to work at the cave. I received some encouragement from Ofer when it turned out that I was a quick omelet flipper, which allowed for all team members to have an omelet for breakfast without it causing any delay in our departure to work. That was where I had first encountered disciplined work regarding the exposure of skeletons, conducted under the guidance of Professor Baruch Arensburg, Ofer's good old friend. I remember carrying up the slope the plastered block of the ornamented pelvis retrieved from Structure 5 of what we had considered to be a distinguished Natufian woman (although a debate ensued whether this was the remains of a woman or a man). I took it upon myself to carry the block as we had walked towards the cars, and Ofer walked by me. This was a simple portage job, but it was etched in my memory; Ofer was worried and said nothing until we had arrived safely, at which point he released a sigh of relief.

Another interesting, short field experience with Ofer took place in the Qafzeh Cave at an excavation that span over the course of two weeks or so. Ofer thought I should be exposed to the research potential of studying the Mousterian, while I preferred studying

Neolithic cultures. There I learned from Ofer about the need to follow weather forecasts and discuss the projected weather with colleagues – even when weather changes were inconsequential with the exception of the occasional hot, dry, and sandy Khamseein winds – because everyone likes talking about the weather, and discussing it leaves a good impression of politeness. There, Ofer had also taught me that according to accepted table mannerism, one should not leave the table until everyone had finished eating, unless two people facing each other were leaving the table together. He was concerned that I would not be able to upkeep the practice, so he suggested that we both sit facing each other as we were in the habit of eating at a much faster pace compared to our French colleagues. And so, we both left the dining table together during meal times. I found it amusing and had happily collaborated.

Following the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel and the transition of Israeli army forces to areas within the Green Line, particularly in the Negev area, a survey was conducted of areas that would potentially suffer damage during this transition. I was not a regular member of the surveying team, and chanced to visit on one occasion when Ofer was there, too, as he came to see some of the sites that had been found. One morning during that visit, we found our vehicle locked with its key inside, and Ofer was concerned that we would have to cause damage to it by forcing it open. I offered that I could open the car without incurring any damage to it provided that he and the others would step away. Following some short negotiations, he agreed and I had unlocked the car (using some “hardware” I had still carried with me back in the day). When everyone had returned to the vehicle, Ofer was busy seeking for any signs of damage, which he could not find. He never uttered a word about it. He had understood, and accepted it.

My first independent excavation of a Neolithic site occurred as a result of the relationship that had formed between us over the course of my undergraduate studies. One morning in the laboratory, during my third and final undergraduate year, Ofer asked me: Would you like to excavate a Neolithic site by yourself? I didn't need even a split of a second to respond: Of course! (despite not knowing to what site he was referring). Ofer explained that he would not be able to participate in the educational excavation of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Be'er Sheva conducted by Isaac Gilead and is requesting that I excavate the Neolithic site of Qadesh Barne'a 3. Following some preparations, transfer of records from his earlier test excavation at the site, and plentiful good advice, I set off to the excavation on my own for the very first time. I had made nearly every mistake possible – made it, and corrected. Reporting and correcting meetings with Ofer ensued, and eventually, after numerous years, so did a publication. Again I had felt that Ofer trusted me, and that was very important to me. Ofer's trust in me had assumed another form, starting when I had just begun my graduate studies as he suggested that I read papers

he was writing and act as the devil's advocate prior to their submission for publication. These were papers on the Neolithic period, in which I was interested (such as the 1981 paper mentioned below). And this was another great lesson impressed upon me – not only with respect to the scientific conduct, but also and mainly regarding his approach, his way of thinking, trust, and respect embodied in his act – traits of Ofer that I had not encountered in many others.

Ofer was meticulous in his work both in the field and later in the laboratory. Even when he was in a hurry and was pushing for faster results, he never once deviated from the resolution and sifting guidelines determined for the site. He was uncompromising with regards to methodology and resolution. He was also meticulous in his investigation, focusing not only on his own work but seeking to understand what others were doing within their own frame of reference. This diligence of his was not entirely in line with the passion he expressed when discussing any archaeological issue, which did not always transfer to his writing. Yet, these were two facets of the very same person.

While his patience abounded with any student and excavator, it was occasionally shortened vis-à-vis persons outside the system, even visiting professionals. One time, he had called me to his office to explain that I should go and describe to some visiting experts what a burin was and help them analyze some findings which they had found in some survey because they were unfamiliar with these. I was surprised because I was just an undergraduate student and these were expert archaeologists ranking highly within the academia, and did as he beckoned. At the end of the day, he explained that he did not like so-called experts who came to work as professionals without preparing themselves and familiarizing themselves with knowledge that was pertinent to the task at hand – another of his valuable lessons assimilated deep within me.

As I concluded my undergraduate studies, Ofer had suggested a partnership excavating the PPNA site of Netiv Hagdud. This made me very happy, and following a few days of work that I had conducted with some labor men in the early 1980s, we had several blissful and successful excavation seasons climaxing in the publication of the book that had summed the project. Upon our initial agreement, we had also agreed to prepare a grant proposal for the procurement of excavation funds. We had indeed prepared it, and as in those days, we had to photocopy many copies and send them off by post. As I had not yet made a living from archaeology at that time, and had worked off campus throughout my undergraduate and graduate programs, I had to leave for my workplace. Ofer said he would prepare the copies and that the following day we would send them all out. The following day, however, when I arrived, no copies had been prepared and Ofer asked that I do it. For some reason, given my mood that morning and following a sleepless night, I had confronted him immediately, saying that if the partnership meant for me to be a bellboy who photocopies and goes to the

post office, then this was no real partnership. Ofer had looked at me, thought for a brief moment, smiled his familiar smile, and said: You are right, I shall photocopy and send, as I promised. I never asked, and I have no idea what had transpired the previous day and why things were amiss, but I do remember his face, his brief moment of thought, and then his response. This was another lesson, one that I am not certain I had learned well, but I had done my best to apply it since I began teaching and working with students.

Excavating seasons at Netiv Hagdud were interesting and informative, involving many partners and visitors studying the biology and genetics of cereals, once we had realized that botanical matter had been preserved in large quantities. We had additionally surveyed the area, including Jericho, while Ofer had conceived of and prepared the paper about the walls of Jericho. Other surveys included the area of Fazel, Gilgal, and the Salibiya Basin. Things progressed quite smoothly with a few eccentric exceptions involving volunteers (mostly girl volunteers) who had insisted to hitch rides to the kibbutz Yeitav in which we were staying, standing a crossroad in a small local settlement that had not regarded the practice favorably, gave reason for concern to Ofer and occasionally also resulted in some complex rescue acts. Additionally, one young volunteer from a country east of the Iron Curtain almost caused herself medical damage due a passion she developed towards bananas – a fruit that she had not encountered previously in her life. Some awkward yet amusing discussions took place between Ofer and myself on how we might help her accept the fact that the bananas, grown by the kibbutz, were a common commodity that would always be available in the dining hall so that there was no need to hoard them, or overconsume them.

During that time, as a graduate student, I had written my first research proposal on my own to facilitate work in the Neolithic site of Mujahiya in the Golan Heights. When I went to submit it to the University's Research Authority, I was asked to have Ofer sign it as my partner, as he had been my supervisor. I responded that Ofer had nothing to do with it, he was aware of my proposal, and was not interested in taking part in the project, and further erupted into severe criticism and other exclamations directed at the amazed professor to whom I was submitting the proposal. The proposal was thrown to the bin under his desk, not without my (nearly violent) response. A day or two later, Ofer had approached me and asked what had transpired at the Research Authority. Undoubtedly hearing the version of the professor, he had asked why I felt forced to slam his desk. So, I explained, and he said: You are right, I don't know what I would have done in your place – yet another lesson assimilated within me.

When I decided to pursue my doctoral studies, I had approached Ofer and come to an agreement with him regarding the subject of my study: Neolithic arrowheads, an exercise in relative chronology to be verified by absolute chronology available back then.

Ofer had not intervened with methodological issues concerning the computerized analysis I was conducting or with the software which I was using. Many interesting discussions nonetheless took place on other aspects of the work over the years. Despite his travels abroad, we had long, productive discussions regarding my work, and I feel that we had a reciprocal understanding that the study was well-conducted and within the spirit of what he considered fine scientific work. His input concerning the contents of my study was both fascinating and contributing. As I approached the end of my program, Ofer offered to help me find a place where I would be able to continue my work. Among others, he suggested that I work at the Israel's Authority of Antiquities thinking I might exert some influence there, that I teach at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Be'er Sheva (where Dr. Isaac Gilad resided as a single prehistory staff member), or that I turn to Tel-Aviv University, where there was no active prehistory staff member at the time. I chose the latter and found a favorable audience following Ofer's conversations with the heads of the department. This remains my professional home to date.

I published only occasionally with Ofer, focusing on Netiv Hagdud, including our joint book on the site, and the Gilgal sites (with Nigel Goring-Morris). I went my own separate way, and our relationship never evolved in that direction, so that joint publications were never our common denominator. Notwithstanding, we had many encounters and held many discussions when we met or over the phone, as well as when he visited Israel; we met at conferences and we exchanged visits at excavation sites. I had always felt that Ofer was keeping me current with his new endeavors and the realms of scholarly prehistory from which I was distant. I never felt this was a reciprocal avenue of exchange. Even when I had shared with him the developments that had taken place during his years of absence, certainly others did so more elaborately. Ofer had visited every excavation I had ever conducted, often with Danny. He had visited the northern Israeli PN site I was excavating at Naḥal Zehora, my excavation at Naḥal Ḥadera V which he had tested in the early 1970s, Kumran Cave 24 in the Judean Desert, the Qesem Cave at different points of excavation, and finally the Neolithic site of Naḥal Yarmuth 38 in the year 2017-2018. When he had finally returned to Israel, we had met on several occasions in Tel Aviv University, in Jerusalem (to where I had travelled to meet him), and finally in his house in Kfar Saba where we had talked a little about archaeological concerns, daily matters, and family until he had stopped talking, after which remained the exchange of looks and his familiar smile. I feel the need and duty to mention the dedication, dignity, integrity, and great matter-of-factness of Danny throughout this struggle, who conducted herself without surrendering all that was possible for her and Ofer, including travels and visitations, and without feeling sorry for herself. I offer her my greatest appreciation for this.

Ofer's Scientific Work on the Neolithic

Ofer was exceptionally observant in the field. When I had first started working with him, it was challenging for me as a youngster, to settle this fact with his thick glasses – but I was greatly mistaken. Ofer had an outstanding propensity to see and understand the sites and their environment as well as a deep understanding of the overarching framework of archaeology, as one who lived it fully and meaningfully.

Ofer was a giant, a man of extensive knowledge and deep, astute familiarity with the entirety of prehistory – from the Lower Paleolithic, through the Middle Paleolithic, the Upper Paleolithic, the Epipaleolithic (which was the subject of his seminal dissertation, including widespread fieldwork throughout the country), the Natufian (which was his central soft spot, perhaps since his excavation of Naḥal Oren and certainly since his excavations of Hayonim Cave, and recently also of Naḥal Ein Gev II). He had some insights into the Chalcolithic world and even the Bronze Age concerning certain subjects and areas. Many central themes repeatedly emerged in his work regarding the studied period: fundamental issues of archaeological methodology (at all levels), relative and absolute dating, defining ancient archaeological entities (cultures), dynamics of transition between periods and cultures, environment, climate, spatial distribution and the spread of people and ideas, and many others. Particularly interesting, and in my view, illuminating with respect of not only his pure scientific work but also his personality, was his work about central persons pioneering the study of Levantine prehistory such as Dorothy Garrod and Francis Turville-Petre.

He was a tenacious reader with superb memory – at least that is how I perceived him to be. He was deeply acquainted with diverse subjects of interests and activities, and was always curious to hear more and stay current with professional literature to further expand his knowledge, in the event anything unfamiliar crossed his path. He was thus never a stranger to any novelty of archaeological thought or conceptualization, starting with the New Archaeology, which I had first encountered when I met him in the 1970s when it was still at its peak or perhaps slightly beyond. Indeed, following his recommendation, one of the first books I had read during my school years, almost as soon as it was published, was *The Early Mesoamerican Village* by Kent Flannery who was at leading edge of the New Archaeology. Undoubtedly it was a fascinating, amusing, and highly informative book.

Ofer had gained his experience with Neolithic sites as a student, and even earlier, as a volunteer (for example, his work at Naḥal Oren alongside his teacher, Moshe Stekelis) as early as the end of the 1950s, and later, during the 1970s, he had worked throughout the little Neolithic presence found in northern Sinai sites. He was fully dedicated to his work on the Palaeolithic periods and yet taught and engaged significantly in the subject of the Agricultural Revolution and the Neolithic

period. His class known as “The Origins of Civilization” is favourably remembered, as is its hidden-in-plain-sight premise that the origins of Western society and its central social institutions are in the Levant.

Ofer's interest in the emergence of agriculture was expressed during these years, the late 1970s, in both writings concerning the Natufian and many discussions in which he repeatedly noted that good Natufian sites representing its late phases must be found in order to clarify the events that transpired at the time (Naḥal Ein Gev II was one such site, and he had indeed returned to excavate it in his last years along with Leore Grosman and Anna Belfer-Cohen). This was also the reason for which he was interested in the Khiamian culture, which, in his view, had preceded only by a little the appearance of the PPNA as it was then known from famous sites such as Jericho, Naḥal Oren with which he was familiar, and the Middle Euphrates sites in Syria.

I remember clearly the publication of the first review paper on the Neolithic period in 1977, published in a Hebrew outlet aimed for both the professional and general communities. Despite its lax style, it was inclusive and current. It was the first orderly and comprehensive – and admirably so – portrayal of the period in which were already expressed the issues and perceptions that will later be echoed in his research

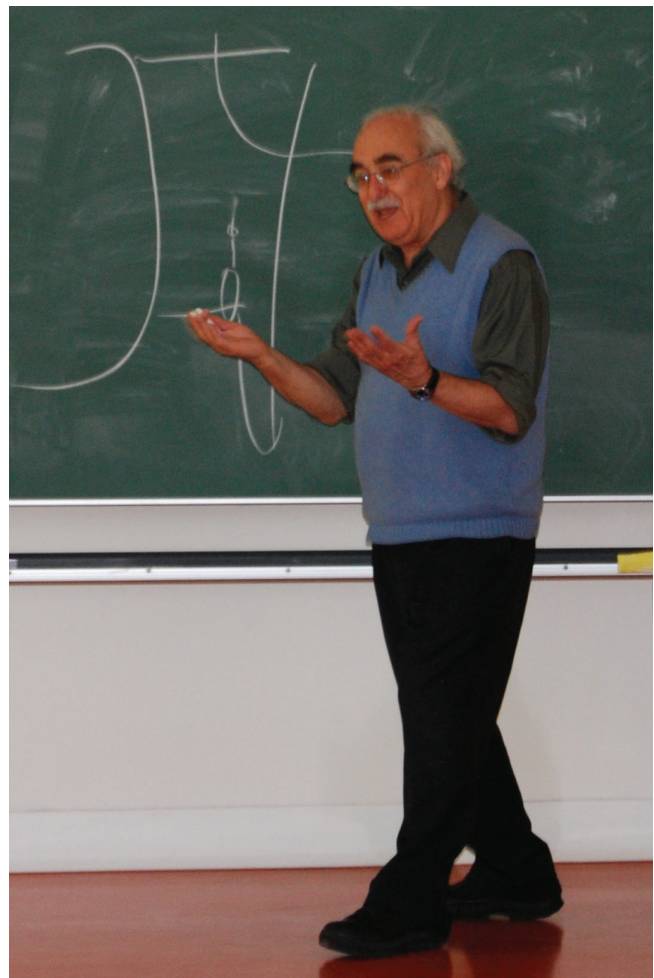


Fig. 4 Ofer at the Basta Final Symposium (2010) in Berlin, heading the final session. (Photo: H.G.K. Gebel)

into the Neolithic. In his introduction sections, he clarified methodological issues, distinguished between Paleolithic and Neolithic sites and the significance of the divide to the archaeologist, and generally stated – addressing both himself and to a new generation of archaeologists to follow – that a new frame of reference was required for the understanding of the Neolithic. Next in the article, he had reviewed chronology, the nature of sites, and settlement patterns; he had reviewed Neolithic archaeology and presented the basis for the new economy and society; he had not neglected a discussion on the environment, the climate, and their dynamics during that time; he included discussions of material cultural assemblages, namely flint and stone tools as well as architecture; and he had additionally discussed burials and rituals related to the dead, and finally – Neolithic art. His concluding section depicts Neolithic lifeways and their different components.

The paper was published while the PPNB excavation project in southern Sinai was underway and despite the clear Neolithic assignment of the excavated sites in Sinai based on their lithic assemblages (blade and arrowhead manufacturing alongside the absence of sickle blades and bifacial tools), they highlighted an aspect of Neolithic hunter-gatherer societies in the desert area rather than agricultural populations. Shortly after, the project of Netiv Hagdud had begun, a large and deep Neolithic tell site, and with it, Ofer's Neolithic research had transposed to one of the prominent residential centers in the Jordan Valley, nearby the site of Jericho that was excavated in the 1950s and the site of Gilgal that was excavated during those years by Tamar Noy from The Israel Museum.

Since then, Ofer had written many papers on the Neolithic period, both alone and with colleagues, in which the Agricultural Revolution in the Levant was placed into a broad context beginning with the Early Epipaleolithic, continuing through the Natufian, and unto its realization in the Neolithic. I shall note but a few of these publications to elucidate Ofer's contribution to the study of the Agricultural Revolution in our region. One paper I recall very clearly, was his 1981 paper that saw light in the *Préhistoire du Levant I*, in which was summarized the first conference by that name that had taken place at Lyon, France during 1980. In this paper Ofer had presented his view concerning the PPN period and its cultures. His methodological statement included notions regarding problematic slope-sites that generated many misunderstandings and errors, regarding a systematic definition of past cultures based on material evidence (alongside the presentation of quantitative data on the central tool types of the period), regarding relative and absolute and chronology, and regarding many other issues. He then presented the cultural bodies of the PPN (PPNA and PPNB). As early as this publication, his assessment was clear regarding the existence of the Khiamian entity (culture) that preceded the Sultanian culture and the presence of an Early PPNB phase at the southern Levant. This publication was sharp and direct, free of

naïveté, making it clear that Ofer believed chronology will emerge from carbon 14 dating and Neolithic material culture (flint tool typology for example), that he subscribed to the school of archaeological thought known as Culture History, and that in order to promote a deeper understanding of the findings, more field work was required including detailed reports of archaeozoological and archaeobotanical records.

In 1989, another summative paper was published, co-authored with Anna Belfer-Cohen, in the *Journal of World Prehistory*. This extensive summary reflected the growing significance Ofer had assigned to the discussion on climate and the environment in which the Agricultural Revolution took place, the evolutionary (pre-adaptive) basis for change and the systematic assessment of cultural change which was based on the ethnography of both hunters-gatherers and other pre-industrial societies as well as an anthropological theory of cultural change. Following a thorough review of the region and the environment, came reviews of Epipaleolithic cultures, including the Natufian culture, and a review of the PPN world. The part of the discussion involving the change that had transpired during the Neolithic period is, in fact, an anthropology of sorts of the past – a description of how the transition occurred from hunter-gatherer bands to larger, sedentary and industrious, settlements. The place of the Natufian culture became central to the understanding of this transition, in which the PPNA was the realization of pre-adaptations that had transpired during the Natufian. The emphasis placed on the influence of the environment and its resources as a central factor in the transition emerged in this paper and remained prominent later on as well. In that same year, a second paper coauthored by Ofer and Anna Belfer-Cohen was published, which had made me very happy. This was a paper discussing the interaction sphere of the Levant (Jacques Cauvin's *koiné*), which was well-aligned with my view and the results of my doctoral study and consequently my early publications in which I had referred to the Levant as a single plane of human interconnectivity. Nevertheless, I had not devoted time to write elaborately or systematically on this subject and I had not developed this idea to the breadth and depth that Ofer and Anna had. I shall not further detail the many publications by Ofer on his own or co-authored with Anna and others. The foundations of his perception in these regards and the ways by which he explained the Agricultural Revolution had not considerably changed over the years, although they benefitted from his growing knowledge and experience, which allowed for greater nuancing and distinction in certain aspects. Archaeology played a central role in them, alongside the vast archaeological knowledge he estimated was required to be amassed for this purpose, issues of field and laboratory methodology, the necessity of defining cultural bodies in a systematic, orderly manner (essentially following Gordon Childe's good old principles), and the necessity of backtracing their natural resources. The answer to the question Why this

transition had taken place was also present throughout these publications, although it assumed different facets reflecting changes that had occurred in Ofer's train of thought. As early as 1991 (in a publication with Anna Belfer-Cohen), he had adopted an evolutionary, slightly restricted yet clear, view of cultural change and offered a series of criteria that he thought should be investigated in order to better assess the Neolithic transition as it was reflected, first and foremost, in the archaeological record. He was and remained forever true to the archaeologist in him.

Answers to questions of When and Where had the Agricultural Revolution and plant and animal domestication occur ran deeper over the years, and were eventually synthesized in 1995 in a book edited by Thomas Levy. Here were expressed his notions regarding the crucial role of climate and the environment and the relationship between these factors and the emergence of agriculture (these ideas were reiterated in a paper he published in 2002 with Anna Belfer-Cohen titled "Facing environmental crisis: societal and cultural changes at the transition from the Younger Dryas to the Holocene in the Levant"). The paper also presented a discussion regarding the pace of domestication (that is, How the transition had occurred); however, despite keeping current with his time, he did not present a conclusive position, at least with respect to plant domestication. Here, too, the Natufian culture was allocated a central role on the way to the revolution, the PPNA also played a key role, and the suggestion was raised that the emergence of agriculture took place in the lower Jordan Valley. Other issues laid out in this paper that depict Ofer's interest in aspects beyond Culture History namely: shifting cultivation, anthropology-based socioeconomic change mechanisms, social organization, and specifically, the change in gender relationships and the status of women in the new emergent Neolithic society. Only a dozen years later, in a book co-authored with Yosef Garfinkel published in 2008 on the prehistory of Israel (Hebrew), had Ofer presented, very briefly, a well-formulated opinion regarding the emergence of agriculture. This time, it was clear that he perceived domestication processes to have been prolonged and that the change was interlaced with a demographic expansion, the movement of matter, animals and plants (seeds), ideas, and perhaps even people throughout the Levant, who were responsible for spreading the revolution. Over the years and ever since 1977, in all the papers in which he had discussed the Agricultural Revolution, an important chapter was dedicated to animals and their domestication (an interest that possibly related to and was influenced by his long-lasting friendship and collaboration with Professor Eitan Tchernov). This had eventually led to a discussion on the emergence of pastoralism as extensively expressed in the edited book with Anatoly Khazanov, published in 1992, focusing on the emergence of pastoralism in the Levant.

In 2011, a volume of *Current Anthropology* following a Wenner Gen workshop was published

focusing on the emergence of agriculture worldwide. Moving away from the historical particularism that had placed the Levant – the region that he was studying – at the center of change, Ofer coauthored with Douglas Price the opening paper of this volume, this time assessing the issue from a broad global perspective rather than the Levantine one (which he represented throughout the 1980s, 1990s and later in both conferences and book chapters). Both the historical review of the study as well as the conceptual and theoretical backgrounds are extensive in this short manuscript. Here, Ofer's thoughts conjoined the general discussion on evolutionary ecology as he emphasized the Darwinist foundation of the Optimal Foraging Theory and assessed whether change occurs in times of stress or times of plenty. Possibly, his work in China (that has started as early as the late 1990s) was a trigger in this expansion of his view. Extending the discussion to the global arena and accepting the notion that the Agricultural Revolution and plant domestication had emerged more or less universally worldwide further supported his view that climate played a central role as the trigger of change; this time, however, it was viewed as a central driver at a much greater scope, tying the world together. The 2011 publication reflected a "shifting of gears" related to ideas he had expressed all along, as he shifted his emphasis from the key role he had previously assigned to the Levant in these changes to assigning the central role to the influence of global climatic and environmental forces instead.

In the following years, Ofer had assumed the approach of the protracted autonomous model school of thought regarding the domestication of plants (and an equivalent approach on the domestication of animals). Accordingly, he had become a proponent of a slow, protracted domestication process, that transpired through necessary phases of experimentation and cultivation lasting thousands of years prior to domestication (e.g., a paper from 2017 that was published as a chapter in the book "On Human Nature"). My own understanding of this process developed as quite the opposite, namely, that domestication emerged in a quick, rapid event that transpired in a single core area in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria. This I had elaborately detailed in a coauthored book with Prof. Shahal Abbo published in Hebrew in 2016, a copy of which I presented to Ofer. We were in agreement regarding only few facets of the domestication model. In the few discussions that we had held on the issue, I felt I had won him over with respect to a few points of my argument while failing to do so with other points. Thus, Ofer and I never reached unity of mind in this regard, leaving us in a disagreement which I respected and valued. Interestingly, and relieving to me, in a very recent paper that has been published after his death in an edited volume on textile production, Ofer discussed the origins of fiber technology in which he mentioned a point we had not always agreed upon: the fact that the origins of agriculture in the Fertile Crescent took place in a core area in the Middle Euphrates Valley.

An important facet of Ofer's scientific work was his practical-applicative worldview on the responsibility of archaeologists. He often said that the most important facet of our work comprised the reports – full, detailed reports covering the long span of excavation projects and analysis work. He would say that the reports would last forever, while interpretations may come and go, return, or disappear as they may. Indeed, he worked hard to leave such a legacy, as he regarded it his duty and responsibility towards future generations of archaeologists, and his uncompromising approach regarding methodology and resolution that yielded massive amounts of findings made it a hard goal to achieve. Recent discussions emerging in the Neo-Lithics community attest to the importance of this key issue – how we ought to publish and present the results of our work and what kind of reaction it would stimulate among both the professional community and the general public. While Ofer truly thought he is obliged, as an archaeologist, to provide full, detailed, final reports on his field projects, it was nevertheless clear that he could not and would not have deprived himself of the joy of interpretation, speculation, and construction of the “big picture”. In my mind, as in his, I believe, these two spheres were never in conflict.

Ofer was, in essence, an advocate of historical particularism but first and foremost, he was an archaeologist of Cultural History: a man who believed in cultures and communities that lived and defined past histories – which he bore in great reverence. Central to the periods and cultures that he studied were stratigraphy, lithic techno-typology, and his deep understanding of the environment and its resources. This did not prevent him from holding a broad evolutionary point of view concerning human culture. Nor did it prevent him from being a “post-modernist” in day-to-day conversations as well as discussion of the historical (whether prehistoric or recent) past. It cannot be said that he had turned away from ideology or that he thought it had no effect on humans – although his approach towards this issue was not always explicitly reflected in his writing. To that effect, I would say that the statement made by the editors of a volume presented to Ofer as he turned 70, that he did not correspond with post-modernistic notions, is only partially true. While such a statement indeed characterized his daily, practical archaeological work that was based on field work and meticulous data recovery and analysis, in his discussions and thoughts, he had assigned great significance to the background, ideology, perception, and agenda of scholars studying prehistoric periods, thereby realizing at least one facet of post-modern (contextual) archaeology – the facet that relates to the context of present-day researchers in their work. Early on, he would often tell me that any “gossip” concerning the people involved is important for its contribution to a better understanding of those people and their work. This statement was well-aligned with his practical ways. He was always current and privy to many small and large deeds and stories involving different researchers, and from these he had derived

some of his regard towards their scientific approach. Whether this attitude extended towards Neolithic, or earlier prehistoric people and the possibility of elucidating their agendas that had led to the changes to which they had led – is difficult to say; such an attitude, much in the spirit of Gordon Childe's *Man Makes Himself* (which was ahead of its time when published) would not have surprised me although it was indeed not fully expressed in his writing.

Ofer was a modest man. While it was clear that he had acknowledged his own capabilities, he would often sarcastically declare “I am Levantine” in order to exempt himself of further justification (yet as if responding a concealed argument). As my relationship with Ofer deepened, I considered this statement to be an ironic self-attesting paraphrase. Whether it was indeed so, and whether or not there was any intentional deliberation on his part in this, I never knew but I could make an educated guess.

Ofer was a superb listener. I first began noticing this skill of his after spending some time in both the laboratory and the field (I myself am not generally that patient), and it required several incidents, some of which I shared above, until I had fully realized this. Once I did, his esteem in my eyes was increased. He was also highly studious, always concentrated, always writing notes in his little notepads – everywhere he was, at conferences, in classes, in lectures, and at any meeting – as if there was something urgently important in the discourses to which he was listening that must not be lost or forgotten. Yet at the same time, he could listen and doze off – but he had the ability to stay focused and practical once awoken, as if he had heard everything and missed nothing.

Kindness and passion were his hallmarks and two traits required in order to establish the laboratory in which he worked in Jerusalem during the 1970s and 1980s. I was and am happy to have been a part of it, and it is still testimony to date to his investment in his students and the influence he had exerted over them. It was Ofer who had left a deep mark on prehistoric research in our region and had fostered a whole generation of scholars and teachers who had spread to all corners of the country. It was Ofer who had left a deep mark on me as a new emergent scholar and teacher, as well as a human being.

Rarely do we meet in our lifetime people who are fascinating, interesting, kind, and highly influential – and Ofer was one of these. I am fortunate to have met him and to have him share some of his life with me. I was always proud for having been his student, and I still take pride in this fact. I always found it a source of joy to visit with him and be one of his colleagues and friends. I am greatly saddened by his departure as there was always, always a very personal element in all of it – simple love.

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