



LAG Ba-OMER.

GET THE POINT?

**commissioned for
The United Synagogue
of Conservative Judaism**
or distribution to the Jewish Community at Large



LAG Ba-OMER: GET THE POINT?

Foundation for Family Education

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COUNTING THE OMER

(Heb. ספירת העומר, *Sefirat ha-Omer*). The injunction to count the 49 days from the 16th of Nisan until Shavuot is considered to be of Pentateuchal authority as long as the *Omer* itself was offered; thus at present time it is of rabbinic authority only. The 49 days are commonly known as the *sefirah*.

The counting is preceded by a special benediction "concerning the counting of the *Omer*." Since the Bible states that "You shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete" and "You must count fifty days," the counting must mention both the number of days and the number of weeks (Men. 65b. 66a). Hence the standard formula runs as follows: on the first day, "Today is the first day of the *Omer*"; on the eighth day, "Today is the eighth day, making one week and one day of the *Omer*;" and so on. The time for the counting, which is to be done standing, is after the evening service, that is, when the new day begins (Sh. Ar., OH 489:1). One who forgets to count in the evening may count during the following day, without however reciting the blessing. He may then count again the same evening, using the blessing. But if he fails to count for one complete day, he is not permitted to resume the utterance of the blessing for the whole duration of the *Omer* (Sh. Ar., OH 489:7.8). And since the sole stipulation of the commandment is that the number of the particular day of the *Omer* is to be spoken aloud, one should avoid uttering it inadvertently once the time for counting has arrived; for example, if one has not yet counted and is asked what the number of the day is, one should reply by giving the number of the previous day (Sh. Ar., OH 489:4).

The kabbalists used the 49 days to form permutations of various *sefirot* denoting the ascent out of the 49 "gates" of impurity of the Egyptian bondage to the purity of the revelation at Sinai. In many prayer books these combinations are printed at the side of each day listed. Because the days counted "must be complete" it has become customary not to recite the evening service for Shavuot until after nightfall of the 49th day, whereas for other festivals it is permissible to start some time before nightfall (see *Day and Night).

In order not to forget the count of the day it was fairly common practice to have an "*Omer* calendar" in the home with movable numbers on it. These "calendars" even developed into an art form and several early specimens show intricate work and lettering.

A TIME OF MOURNING

From an unknown date during the talmudic period, the days of the *Omer* began to take on a character of semi-mourning; the solemnization of marriages was prohibited, then haircutting, and, later still, the use of musical instruments was banned. The mourning is normally associated with a plague said to have decimated the disciples of Rabbi kiva, who died "because they did not treat each other with respect" (Yev. 62b; cf. Sh. Ar., OH 493:1). But this reason for the mourning is among the many uncertainties connected with the *Omer* period and with *Lag ba-Omer, the minor festival celebrated on its 33rd day.



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The Talmud alludes to the plague, but makes no mention of any commemorative mourning. This is first recorded in the eighth century, when Neutrino Gone issued a responsum confirming both the practice of mourning and the accepted reason for it (Levin, Ozar, Yevamot, 141). Subsequent codes and compilations of custom up to and including the Shulchan Aruch (OH 493) cite this reference; and most, although not all (e.g., *Toledot Adam ve-Havvah*, 5, 4; *Abudraham ha-Shalem* (1959), 245), presume that the custom did in fact originate with the death of Akiva's disciples. On the other hand, Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and the Ashkenazi *Mahzor Vitry* appear unaware of its very existence.

LAG BA-OMER

NAME

Lag BaOmer is Hebrew shorthand for 33rd of Omer (Lag, or L"G (Hebrew: ל"ג) is the Hebrew numerals for 33). It falls on the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer, as counted from the second day of Passover until the holiday of Shavuot. This corresponds to the 18th day of the month of Iyar. Sephardi Jews have the custom of calling this holiday Lag LaOmer, which has been claimed to be more accurate according to the rules of Hebrew grammar. Lag La'Omer means the thirty-third day "of the Omer", as opposed to BaOmer - "in the Omer." In reality, Sephardim who follow the "Mechaber" or Rav Yosef Karo (Shulchan Aruch) celebrate "Lad BaOmer," or the 34th day of the omer.

This has been disputed with the argument that in Hebrew, the prefix used when counting is "B" or "Ba", as in Tu B'Av, Tisha B'av, etc. The "Ba" prefix in Hebrew can mean "relating to", as opposed to "la", which denotes "belonging to".

ORIGINS

The 33rd day of the counting of the Omer is Lag BaOmer. The origins of the Omer count are found in the Torah itself, in Leviticus 23:15-16, which states that it is a commandment to count seven complete weeks from the day after Passover night ending with the festival of Shavuot on the fiftieth day. The 49 days of the Omer correspond both to the time between physical emancipation from Egypt and the spiritual liberation of the giving of the Torah at the foot of Mount Sinai on Shavuot, as well as the time between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest in ancient Israel. There are a number of explanations for why the 33rd day is treated as a special holiday.

The Talmud (*Yevamot 62b*) states that during the time of Rabbi Akiva 24,000 of his students died from a divine-sent plague during the counting of the Omer. The Talmud then goes on to say that this was because they did not show proper respect to one another, befitting their level; they begrudged each other the spiritual levels attained by their comrades. Jews celebrate Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the count, as the traditional day that this plague ended. This is the view recorded in the legal code of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 120:1-10.

Another possible interpretation of this legend is that the students died as part of the Roman attempt to wipe out Judaism after the Bar Kokhba revolt. After the death of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students, he



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taught just five students, among them Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The latter went on to become the greatest teacher of Torah in his generation. The day of Lag BaOmer is also celebrated as the Hillula or Yahrzeit, the anniversary of the death, of bar Yohai,[2] who is believed to have authored the Zohar, a landmark text of Jewish mysticism. According to tradition, on the day of his death, he revealed the deepest secrets of the Kabbalah. Indeed this day is seen as a celebration of the giving of the hidden, mystical Torah through Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, as a parallel to Shavuot, which celebrates the giving of the revealed Torah through Moses. Indeed there is a source in the Kabbalah that Moses was reincarnated as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai to give this mystical element of the Torah to the Jewish people. The origin of Lag ba-Omer is likewise shrouded in mystery.

It is not explicitly mentioned any earlier than the 13th century, when Meiri in his commentary to *Yevamot* (*Beit ha-Behirah*, Yev. 62b) described it as the day when, "according to a tradition of the *geonim*," the "plague" surceased. Moreover there are differences of opinion as to how the date of Lag ba-Omer is to be calculated. Fundamentally, there are two approaches to the question, which in turn account for the different periods of time (according to various rites) when the mourning restrictions are held to be in force. One school of thought sees the 33rd day of the *Omer* as the anniversary of the termination of the plague. The authority for this view derives from a Midrash, no longer extant, which was handed down by Joshua ibn Shu'aib in the 14th century, or possibly based on an unknown "Spanish manuscript" cited by Zerahiah b. Isaac ha-Levi of the 12th century (see Tur, OH 493). In place of reading "they died from Passover to Shavuot," this Midrash adds the word "*pros*," i.e., "they died from Passover until before (*ad pros*) Shavuot." *Pros*" is taken to mean 15 days before; and thus implies that the plague terminated a fortnight before Shavuot, and Lag ba-Omer is the anniversary of that day.

Strictly speaking, however, 15 days before Shavuot would be the 34th day of the *Omer*, as indeed the Shulhan Arukh concedes. The present custom, then, must be attributed to a different calculation which is given by Isserles in his gloss to the Shulhan Arukh. The explanation stems from a *tosafot*, also no longer extant, cited by Ibn Shu'aib and most fully elaborated on by Jacob b. Moses Moellin in the 15th century in his *Sefer Maharil* (1873), 21b. In this work, Lag ba-Omer appears not as an anniversary at all but as a symbol of the 33 weekdays that occur during the course of the 49 days of the *Omer*. After subtracting the days of Passover, and those of the Sabbath and of Rosh Hodesh, only 33 are left from the 49 in which mourning is permissible; this fact is symbolically observed by constituting the 33rd day as a minor festival.

This second mode of interpretation gave rise to three divergent customs regarding the mourning period. Some communities observed it for the 33 days from Passover to Shavuot omitting the special days, others for the 33 between Passover and Lag ba-Omer, and others for the 33 from after Rosh Hodesh Iyyar to Shavuot excluding Lag ba-Omer itself. The kabbalists took an entirely different approach to the matter. As to *sefirah* days, they stressed the idea of spiritual preparation for Shavuot, the anniversary of the revelation on Mt. Sinai (*Hemdut Yamim*, 3, 41d). Lag ba-Omer itself marked the *hillula . the *yahrzeit* of *Simeon. b. Yohai, by tradition the author of the Zohar. It was either the day



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on which he was ordained by Rabbi Akiva, or when he emerged from the cave in Meron where he had been hiding from the Romans (Shab. 33b), or the day on which he died; and it is observed as a *hillula*, a festivity or a "wedding between heaven and earth." Hence the grand celebrations which take place at Meron (*Zohar Idra Zutra*, end of *Ha'azinu*). However, although the Zohar does speak of Simeon's death as a *hillula*, there is no recorded reference to its date earlier than that in *Peri Ez Hayyim* by ayyim b. Joseph Vital (16/17th century; *Sha'ar Sefirat ha-Omer*, ch. 7).

While the celebrations at Meron excited enthusiasm among all sections of Jewish society and particularly from the kabbalists, they also provoked severe criticism. R. Moses *Sofer of Pressburg (d. 1839), after opposing the popular observance of lighting bonfires and questioning all of the reasons given above for the observance of Lag ba-Omer, offered his own explanation for the holiday. Lag ba-Omer is the day when manna began to fall in the wilderness (*Resp. Hatam Sofer*, YD 236). Since, however, the Talmud (Shab. 87b) and the *Sefer Olam* calculate that this happened two days earlier, there is, in the last resort, no unassailable determination of what actually took place on Lag ba-Omer; the only definite tradition is that the day is a holiday. It has for a long time been considered. Nachman Krochmal (d. 1840) being the most notable to express this view. that the cryptic reference in the Talmud to the disciples of R. Akiva and their mysterious death is in fact a veiled report of the defeat of "Akiva's soldiers" in the war with Rome (cf. Maimonides, *Yad Melakhim* 11:3; probably based on TJ, Ta'an. 4:5).

As a result, a variety of new theories have arisen among modern writers as to the origin of Lag ba-Omer. R. Isaac Nissenbaum of Warsaw, author of several books on religious Zionism, suggested that Lag ba-Omer is the anniversary of some great but brief triumph by the Judeans in their forlorn war with the Romans. possibly the recapture of Jerusalem, for which special coins were struck (*Hagut Lev* (1911), 181). Y.T. Levinsky, in *Sefer ha-Mo'adim* (1955), 340.2, pursues this line further; he cites Josephus (Wars 2:402ff.) as authority for the fact that a Judean uprising commenced in 66 C.E. in the days of the procurator Florus. At the same time he concurs with the tradition associating the victory on Lag ba-Omer with Bar Kokhba 70 years later, as well as with the story that Julius Severus' campaign against the insurrectionist Judeans was most severe during the period between Passover and Shavuot.

Eliezer Levi (*Yesodot ha-Tefillah* (1952), 232) advanced a hypothesis endeavoring to resolve another problem sensed by earlier writers; namely why we should mourn for the disciples of Rabbi Akiva, since they died as a punishment for their unseemly conduct? In view of the veiled references to the war with the Romans, he suggests, the judgment of the Talmud is to be understood not as condemning Akiva's disciples and their lack of respect for one another, but on the contrary as praising their dedication and teamwork. On the other hand, it may be that the phrases in the Talmud are to be understood in their literal sense: "Akiva's soldiers" were defeated due to a lack of coordination and unified command (see *Panim el Panim*, no. 574, May 22, 1970). The earlier traditions surrounding Bar Yohai's connection with Lag ba-Omer are entirely in accord with these theories, and one might then draw up a summary or composite theory in the following vein: Bar Kokhba's (i.e., Akiva's) men suffered an overwhelming defeat during the weeks between Passover and Shavuot; on the 33rd day of the *Omer* they enjoyed an



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important, though brief, change of fortune; and on this day Bar Yohai, one of the leading fighters in the uprising, either emerged from hiding in Meron, or lost his life in securing the victory.

OTHER EXPLANATIONS

Extra-rabbinic sources do not help to clarify the matter. Some students of folklore trace the mournful nature of the days of the *sefirah* to the Roman superstition against marriages in May. The fullest statement of this theory was made in the 19th century by Julius Landsberger of Darmstadt (see bibl.). The author cites Ovid (Fast 5: 419ff.), who explains that the Romans did not solemnize marriages in May due to the fact that this was the month of the *Lemuria* when the souls of the departed returned to wander over the earth and disturb the peace of the living. According to Landsberger, the Roman superstition was adopted by the Jews, who subsequently lost all recollection of its origin and found a new rationale for it in the tragedy of Akiva's disciples. Landsberger's theory leaves many questions unanswered. It does not explain why there is a ban on haircutting during the *Omer* as well as on marriage, or why the custom prevailed in geonic countries. But it does, however, offer an ingenious explanation of the origin of Lag ba-Omer. Among the Romans, the period of superstitious fear lasted for 32 days starting from Walpurgis Night (the last night of April) and continuing throughout the 31 days of May. In commemoration of this period of 32 days, its conclusion on the 33rd day was celebrated as a festival.

Theodor H. Gaster (*Festivals of the Jewish Year* (1953), 52) suggests that Lag ba-Omer, especially with its custom of children going forth with bows and arrows, is a Jewish version of the English and German custom of shooting arrows at demons on May day, i.e., the day after Walpurgis Night. In the view of Joseph Naphtali Derenbourg (in REJ, 29 (1894), 149), Lag ba-Omer is a day in the middle of the *sefirah* period when mourning is to be relaxed, comparable to *mi-carême* observed midway during Lent. There were 34 (twice 17) bad days during the *sefirah*; a respite was needed and the first day of the second half was chosen. J. Morgenstern (in: HUCA, 39 (1968), 81.90) points out that the date of Lag ba-Omer is the approximate midpoint of the 49-day period for those dissidents who begin their *Omer* offering the day after Passover. L.H. Silberman (see bibl.) following H. Grimme, regards the day as commemorating an anniversary celebrated in honor of Marduk; and Gustav Dalman conjectured that it may have marked the first day of summer between the 13th and 25th of May, which was distinguished by the early rising of the Pleiades (cf. RH 11b).

BONFIRES

The most well-known custom of Lag BaOmer is the lighting of bonfires. Some say that as bar Yohai gave spiritual light to the world with the revelation of the Zohar, bonfires are lit to symbolize the impact of his teachings. It is also Jewish custom to light a candle in honour of the deceased on the day of the Yahrzeit. As his passing left such a 'light' behind, many candles and/or bonfires are lit. The Bnei Yissoschor cites another reason for the lighting of bonfires. On the day of his death Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said "Now, it's my desire to reveal secrets...The day will not go to its place like any other, for



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Early Bronze Age also brought about the development of more sophisticated weapons, and the first metal weapons appear at this time. Several types of bows (Heb. קשׁת, *keshet* (*geshet*)) are known in this period: the simple double-convex Egyptian bow; the early Mesopotamian bow, shaped like a simple curve; and the composite bow, developed by the Akkadians in the second half of the third millennium. Arrows (Heb. חֵז, *hez*) were hollow reed shafts, their bases usually feathered. Arrowheads were at first made of flint and later of metal.

THE LATE BRONZE AGE (1550–1200 B.C.E.)

The composite bow, made of wood from birch trees (?), tendons of wild bulls, horns of wild goats, and sinews from the hocks of bulls (Aqhat A, tablet 6, lines 20.23; Pritchard, Texts, 151), was the only type of bow used by archers in this period. The highly technical skill required for its manufacture made it the weapon of the armies of the empires and of the wealthy ruling class of the city-states.

THE IRON AGE (THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM; 1200–900 B.C.E.)

The Philistines brought with them weapons that had been developed in the Aegean. In the wall reliefs of Ramses III at Medinet Habu, each group of Sea Peoples wore slightly different helmets and armor, perhaps as a tribal distinction. The Philistines wore feather-crested helmets, while the other groups wore horned helmets or helmets with disks and horns. The body was protected by a coat of armor made of numerous metal strips laid at angles to each other, thus forming inverted V's or V's, depending upon the tribe. The Philistine army fought in groups of four, each soldier armed with either a long sword or a pair of spears. In hand-to-hand combat, the duelist, like Goliath, was protected by a man-sized shield carried by a special shield bearer (I Sam. 17:7). The bow and the battle-ax were not included in the Philistine arsenal.

While the Egyptian army continued to use the same type of chariot as was used in the Late Bronze Age, the Philistines employed a heavy chariot with six-spoked wheels and a crew of three, armed with hurling javelins like the Hittite charioteers. The Israelite tribes, when settling in the hill country, "drove out the inhabitants of the hill country, for he [Judah] was unable to drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron" (Judg. 1:19). The tribal army of Deborah and Barak was victorious over the chariots of Sisera in a battle in the Jezreel Valley (Judg. 4:13.15). David and Solomon were the first to form chariot squadrons in the Israelite army, and Solomon built special cities for chariots (I Kings 10:26; II Chron. 1:14). At the same time, Solomon was the main trader in horses and chariots between Egypt and the Hittites (I Kings 10:28.29).

RAINBOW

"Bow" (Heb. קשׁת), "in the cloud" (Gen. 9:13.14, 16; Ezek. 1:28). In the sequel to the Flood Story (Gen. 9:8.17) God sets His bow in the clouds as a sign to the people and as a reminder to Himself that no deluge shall again destroy the earth. According to the rabbis this rainbow was created during the eve of the Sabbath of Creation at twilight (Pes. 54a). Nahmanides similarly explained that the rainbow had



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existed previously but was now designated to serve as this symbol (to Gen. 9:12). However, Ibn Ezra held that the bow was first created by God after the Flood (to Gen. 9:13). The bow symbolized that God's wrath had ceased since the end of the bow pointed downward just as the warrior lowers his bow on declaring peace (Nahmanides to Gen. 9:12).

The rabbis held that the rainbow need not appear in the lifetime of a saint whose merit alone is sufficient to save the world from destruction (Ket. 77b and Rashi ad. loc.). Since the rainbow was the reflection of "the glory of the Lord" (Ezek. 1:28), it was considered injurious to gaze directly at it (Hag. 16a). It was reported that R. Joshua b. Levi declared that upon seeing the rainbow one should fall on his face as did Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:28). Nevertheless, in Erez Israel, the rabbis disapproved of such action since it appeared as if the person was bowing down to the rainbow. They, however, approved of reciting a blessing upon the rainbow's appearance. The text of this blessing as it is today recited is "Blessed are Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who remembers the Covenant, is faithful to His Covenant, and keeps His promise" (Ber. 59a; Sh. Ar. OH 229:1). The blessing is to be recited even if a rainbow is seen twice within 30 days *Mishnah Berurah* to Sh. Ar., loc. cit.).

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ARROWHEAD

An **arrowhead** is point of an arrow, or a shape resembling such a point; as archaeological artifacts arrowheads are a subclass of .[1] Arrowheads are found all over the world. Archaeologically they are usually made of stone: primarily being flint, obsidian, or cherts; however in many excavations bone, wooden and metal arrowheads have been found. Arrowheads are attached to arrow shafts and may be "thrown", with by means of such as an Atlatl (similar to a spear thrower), or fired from a bow.

In archaeology, a **projectile point** is an object that was hafted and used either as knife or projectile tip or both, commonly called an arrowhead. Occasionally, projectile points made of worked bone or ivory are found at archaeological sites, but generally the term is reserved for a refined chipped-stone biface. Projectile points fall into two general types: dart points and arrow points. Dart points are defined as those bifaces which were used to tip spears and atlatl darts. Arrow points are smaller and lighter than dart points, and were used to tip arrows. In North American archaeology dart and arrow points come in an amazing variety of shapes and styles, which vary according to time and geographic area. The question of how to distinguish an arrowpoint from a point used on a larger weapon is non-trivial; the best indication is the width of the hafting area, which will correlate to the width of the shaft (Wyckoff 1964).



DAVID AND GOLIATH: The Biblical Story of Artillery

The account of the battle between David and Goliath is reported in 1 Samuel, chapter 17:[1] Saul and the Israelites are facing the Philistines at Socoh in Judah. Twice a day for forty days Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, comes out between the lines and challenges the Israelites to send out a champion of their own to decide the outcome of the battle in single combat, but Saul and all the Israelites are afraid. David is present, bringing food for his elder brothers. When told that Saul has promised to reward any man who will defeat the Philistine champion, David declares he is not afraid. Saul reluctantly agrees and offers his armour, which David declines in favour of his sling and five stones he takes from a brook.

David and Goliath confront each other, Goliath with his armour and shield-bearer, David with his staff and sling. "And the Philistine cursed David by his gods." But David replies: "This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down, and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that Yahweh saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is Yahweh's, and he will give you into our hand."
2]

David then strikes Goliath in the head with a stone from his sling; the Philistine falls on his face to the ground. David seizes Goliath's sword and kills him, then cutting off his head. The shocked Philistines flee and are pursued by the Israelites "as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron". David puts the armour of Goliath in his own tent, and takes the head to Jerusalem. Saul sends Abner to inquire whose son this is who has routed the Philistines and killed their champion. Abner brings David before Saul, who asks him whose son he is. "And David answered, 'I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite'."

GOLIATH'S HEIGHT

There are significant differences between the Masoretic (Hebrew), Septuagint (Greek), and Dead Sea Scrolls versions of 1 Samuel 17.[3] One of the most interesting of these relates to Goliath's height: 4QSam(a), the Dead Sea Scrolls text of Samuel, gives the height of Goliath as "four cubits and a span," (approximately 200 cm or about six feet seven inches), and this is what the 4th century AD Septuagint manuscripts and the 1st century AD historian Josephus also record. Later Septuagint manuscripts and the oldest Masoretic texts (Aleppo Codex, 10th century AD) read "six cubits and a span," which would make him about 290 cm or nine feet six inches tall.[4]

DAVID'S AGE

Early biblical manuscripts such as the 4th century AD Codex Vaticanus do not contain the verses describing David coming each day with food for his brothers, nor 1 Samuel 17:55-58 in which Saul seems unaware of David's identity, referring to him as "this youth" and asking Abner to find out the name of his father. The narrative therefore reads that Goliath is challenging the Israelites to combat, the



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Israelites are afraid, and David, already with Saul, accepts the challenge.[5] The shorter Septuagint version removes a number of ambiguities which have puzzled commentators: it removes 1 Samuel 17:55-58 in which Saul seems not to know David, despite having taken him as one of his shield-bearers and harpist; it removes 1 Samuel 17:50, the presence of which makes it seem as if David kills Goliath twice, once with his sling and then again with a sword;[6] and it gives David a clear reason, as Saul's personal shield-bearer, for accepting Goliath's challenge. Scholars drawing on studies of oral transmission and folklore have concluded that the non-Septuagint material "is a folktale grafted onto the initial text of ... 1 Samuel." [7]

ELHANAN AND GOLIATH

2 Samuel 21:19[8] tells how Goliath was killed by "Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite." The 4th century 1 Chronicles 20[9] explains the second Goliath by saying that Elhanan "slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath," apparently constructing the name Lahmi from the last portion of the word "Bethlehemite" ("*beit-ha'lahmi*"). [10] The King James Bible translators adopted this into their translation of 2 Samuel 21:18-19, although the Hebrew text makes no mention of the word "brother".

2 Samuel 21 appears to be an extremely corrupt passage: "Jaare-oregim," the name of Elhanan's father, means a nonsensical "forest of weaver's beams", and seems to have been copied from Goliath's weaponry (Goliath has a spear "with a shaft like a weaver's beam"). Dr. Baruch Halpern believes that David's opponent probably had no name originally, being referred to simply as "the Philistine" (the name Goliath is applied to him only twice in 1 Samuel 17): "Most likely, storytellers displaced the deed from the otherwise obscure Elhanan onto the more famous character, David." [11]

GOLIATH AND THE PHILISTINES

Potsherd inscribed with the two names "alwt" and "wlt", etymologically related to the name Goliath Tell es-Safi, the biblical Gath and traditional home of Goliath, has been the subject of extensive excavations by Israel's Bar-Ilan University. The archaeologists have established that this was one of the largest of the Philistine cities until destroyed in the 9th century BC, an event from which it never recovered. An important find relating to Goliath is the discovery of a potsherd, reliably dated to the 10th to mid 9th centuries BC, inscribed with the two names "alwt" and "wlt". While the names are not directly connected with the biblical Goliath, they are etymologically related and demonstrate that the name fits with the context of late-10th/early-9th century BC Philistine culture. The name "Goliath" itself is non-Semitic and has been linked with the Lydian name "Alyattes", which also fits the Philistine context of the biblical Goliath story. [12] Aren Maeir, director of the excavation, comments: "Here we have very nice evidence [that] the name Goliath appearing in the Bible in the context of the story of David and Goliath □c is not some later literary creation." [13]



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me and rejoice," and David replies, "Before you die, open your eyes and see your slayer;" Goliath sees an angel and tells David that it is not he who has killed him but the angel. Pseudo-Philo then goes on to say that the angel of the Lord changes David's appearance so that no one recognizes him, and thus Saul asks who he is.[19]

References

1. ^ 1sam 17.
2. ^ English translations give "The LORD" at this point for the Hebrew YHWH, which is not normally written in full.
3. ^ Outline of then textual history of Samuel.
4. ^ Variants of Bible Manuscripts.
5. ^ Compare texts of short and long versions of 1 Samuel 17.
6. ^ 1 Samuel 17:49 describes how David "took out a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead ... and he fell on his face to the ground;" 17:50 describes how "David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine, and killed him;" 1 Samuel 17:51 describes how David "took [Goliath's] sword and drew it out of its sheath, and killed him, and cut off his head with it."
7. ^ See end of section, "The Effects of Oral Tradition"
8. ^ 2 Samuel 21
9. ^ 1 Chronicles 20
10. ^ Ralph W. Klein, *Narrative Texts: Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah*, see section "Representative Changes in Chronicles of Texts Taken from Samuel-Kings". Compare 1 Samuel 16:1, "I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite (beit-ha'lahmi), for I have found among his sons a king for me."
11. ^ David's Secret Demons, Baruch Halpern, 2004.
12. ^ Tell es-Safi/Gath weblog. and Bar-Ilan University.; For the editio princeps and an in-depth discussion of the inscription, see now: Maeir, A.M., Wimmer, S.J., Zukerman, A., and Demsky, A. 2008 (In press). An Iron Age I/IIA Archaic Alphabetic Inscription from Tell es-Safi/Gath: Paleography, Dating, and Historical-Cultural Significance. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*.
13. <http://www.smh.com.au/news/science/tall-tale-of-a-philistine-researchers-uneearth-a-goliathcerealbowl/2005/11/14/1131951099130.html?oneclick=true>
14. ^ Azzan Yadin's 'Goliath's Armor and the Israelite Collective Memory,' appeared in *Vetus Testamentum* 54:373-95 (2004). See also Israel Finkelstein, "The Philistines in the Bible: A Late Monarchic Perspective", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 27:131:67. For a brief online overview, see Higgsaion, a blog by Christopher Heard, Associate Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University.
15. ^ Homer, *Iliad* Book 7 ll.132-160
16. ^ M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon. West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997 pp.370,376
17. ^ Yebamoth, 24b
18. ^ For a brief overview of Talmudic traditions on Goliath, see Jewish Encyclopedia, "Goliath"



LAG Ba-OMER: GET THE POINT? ל"ג בעומר

The hilltop location of the wooden forts would have given the defending slingers the advantage of range over the attackers and multiple concentric ramparts, each higher than the other, would allow a large number of men to create a hailstorm of stone. Consistent with this, it has been noted that, generally, where the natural slope is steep, the defences are narrow and where the slope is less steep, the defences are wider.

CONSTRUCTION

A classic sling is braided from non-elastic material. The classic materials are flax, hemp or wool; those of the Balearic islanders were said to be made from a type of rush. Flax and hemp resist rotting, but wool is softer and more comfortable. Braided cords are used in preference to twisted rope because a braid resists twisting when stretched. This improves accuracy. The overall length of a sling could vary significantly and a slinger may have slings of different lengths, the longer sling being used when greater range is required. A length of about 120 cm (4 ft) would be typical. At the centre of the sling, a cradle or pouch is constructed. This may be formed by making a wide braid from the same material as the cords or by inserting a piece of a different material such as leather. The cradle is typically diamond shaped and, in use, will fold around the projectile. Some cradles have a hole or slit that allows the material to wrap around the projectile slightly thereby holding it more securely; some cradles take the form of a net. At the end of one cord, a finger-loop is formed; this cord is called the retention cord. At the end of the other cord it is common practice to form a knot; this cord is called the release cord. The release cord will be held between finger and thumb to be released at just the right moment. The release cord may have a complex braid to add bulk to the end, this makes the knot easier to hold and the extra weight allows the loose end of a discharged sling to be recovered with a flick of the wrist. The simplest projectile was the humble stone, preferably well-rounded; suitable ammunition may frequently be found in a river. The size of the projectiles can vary dramatically in size from pebbles weighing no more than 50 g (2 oz) to fist-sized stones weighing 500 g (1 lb) or more. Projectiles could also be purpose-made from clay; this allowed a very high consistency of size and shape of the shot that would be an aid to range and accuracy. Many examples have been found in the archaeological record. The best ammunition was cast from lead. Leaden sling-bullets were widely used in the Greek and Roman world. For a given mass, lead, being very dense, offers the minimum size and therefore minimum air resistance. In addition, leaden sling-bullets are small and difficult to see in flight.

LAG BA-OMER RESOURCES ON-LINE

1. J TSA HOLIDAY IMAGE DATABANK

http://www.jtsa.edu/News/JTS_Holiday_Image_Databank.xml

2. THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM: HOLIDAY RESOURCES

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www.jewishfreeware.org Commissioned by The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
for distribution to the Jewish Community at Large.



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http://www.uscj.org/Lag_BOmer7445.html

3. JEWISH AGENCY FOR ISRAEL: DEPARTMENT FOR JEWISH ZIONIST EDUCATION

<http://www.jafi.org.il/education/festivals/shavuot/lagba.html>

4. THE HOMER OMER CALENDAR [for counting the Omer]

<http://homer.jvibe.com/>

5. THE NATIONAL JEWISH OUTREACH PROGRAM

<http://www.njop.org/html/lagbaomermain.html>

6. THE SEFORIM BLOG: Moadim le-Simcha, by R. Tuviah Freund

<http://seforim.blogspot.com/2008/05/lag-ba-omer-and-upsherins-in-recent.html>

7. CAJE CURRICULUM BANK

http://www.caje.org/learn/fs_pin.html

8. JACOB RICHMAN'S HOT SITES: LAG BA-OMER

<http://www.jr.co.il/hotsites/j-hdayla.htm>

9. Archery Equipment

Hall's Archery Sales, 291 Middle Tpke W., Manchester, CT 06040 (860) 646-0443
www.hallsarrow.com

ALTERNATIVES TO ACTUAL ARCHERY

1. Archery Range

In most communities, there is an indoor archery range which also has equipment for use, perhaps rental. In addition, increasingly they offer a video “virtual” shooting situation, for both target and field/hunting in which special arrows are used, shot against a screen and the score is recorded electronically. It is similar to a “virtual golf” course. Competition of various sorts can be created, but it is loads of fun.

2. WII

This electronic “game package” now offers a “virtual” archery package which enables you to set up an archery “range” or field in which to “shoot” indoors with a minimum of equipment, a maximum of fun and is easily a great way to conclude any of the learning experiences. [Watch for “slings” to become available.]

