

**Investigating our Past with a Smile:
Remembering Avraham Ronen (1935-2018)**
*Unsere Vergangenheit mit einem Lächeln erforschen:
Erinnerungen an Avraham Ronen (1935-2018)*

Ron Shimelmitz¹ and Andrew W. Kandel²

¹Zinman Institute of Archaeology
University of Haifa, Mount Carmel
3498838, Haifa, Israel
ronishim@gmail.com

²Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities
Research Center
“The Role of Culture in Early Expansions of Humans”
University of Tübingen
Rümelinstr. 23
72070 Tübingen, Germany
a.kandel@uni-tuebingen.de

“The control of fire and the awareness of death are the two poles of human cognition: while fire made humans the mightiest creatures on earth, the awareness of death revealed their inherent weakness. Simultaneously almighty and weak, there lies the human paradox and therein may lie the threshold of religious thought.” (Ronen 2012, 559)

Avraham Ronen’s passion was investigating the evolution of human culture (Fig. 1). He pursued this goal in the landscape of the Levant, which holds so many archaeological treasures. His research spanned the first Out-of-Africa dispersals of early *Homo*, through the development of modern human behavior in the Upper Paleolithic, and into the Neolithic Revolution. Through his many excavation projects, surveys and synthetic papers, Avraham Ronen played a central role in building up our knowledge about the characteristics and processes of human evolution that are revealed by these diverse periods.

His early studies began in Israel, where he completed his Bachelor of Arts in Archaeology and Geography at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1959. However, he gained his forward-thinking archaeological perspectives through his doctoral dissertation, accomplished in 1963 under the supervision of François Bordes at the Université de Bordeaux. He taught and researched at the University of Tel Aviv until 1975 and later moved to the University of Haifa, where he was a significant force in developing its Archaeological Department and establishing the Zinman Institute of Archaeology.

One of his main influences on the archaeology of the Near East is that he enriched our view of the regional and temporal variability of the Lower Paleolithic through his projects at sites such as Evron, Tabun, Eyal, Ruhama and Kissufim, stretching from



Fig. 1: Avraham Ronen on the Mount Carmel Survey in 1964. Photo: Ronen Family Archive.

Abb. 1: Avraham Ronen bei Untersuchungen im Karmel-Gebirge im Jahre 1964. Foto: Familienarchiv Ronen.

northern to southern Israel (Fig. 2). Our own personal bond with Avraham relates to his work on the Middle and Upper Paleolithic, which is echoed in his seminal monograph (Ronen 1984) covering his research at Sefunim Cave and Terrace during the 1960s. The monograph represents one of the first efforts at multidisciplinary research in the region, connecting environmental aspects with detailed discussion about material culture set within a stratigraphic framework. Even today these volumes constitute one of the most comprehensive works about an Upper Paleolithic site in the southern Levant. His interest in the evolution of human culture extended well into the early Holocene, as exemplified by his work at the unique Natufian and Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) site of Hatula.



Fig. 2: Avraham Ronen in the field, no date. Photo: Ronen Family Archive.

Abb. 2: Avraham Ronen bei Geländearbeiten im Karmel-Gebirge, ohne Jahresangabe. Foto: Familienarchiv Ronen.

Even after he stopped teaching in 2005, he continued researching the prehistory of Israel, primarily bringing to light more publications about his work at Tabun Cave, and especially addressing the lower part of the sequence of which we previously knew little (Fig. 3). Throughout his career Avraham Ronen recognized the importance of maintaining discussions with scholars abroad and thus acquired many partners and interacted with colleagues from all over the world.



Fig. 3: Avraham Ronen on a visit to Tabun Cave in 2011. In this photo he stands at the heart of his investigation of the cave – at the transition between the Acheulean and the Acheulo-Yabrudian of the Lower Paleolithic. Photo: Ron Shimelmitz.

Abb. 3: Avraham Ronen bei einem Besuch in Tabun im Jahre 2011. Auf diesem Bild steht er im Zentrum seiner Untersuchungen in der Höhle – dem Übergang zwischen dem Acheuléen und dem Acheulo-Jabrudien des Altpaläolithikums. Foto: Ron Shimelmitz.

We all hope that our scholarly work will leave a mark on future generations. The contributions made by Avraham Ronen, including the sites, the data collected from them, and especially his syntheses, all represent significant landmarks that will continue to echo well into the future. From a personal viewpoint, we note that every discussion with Avraham, whether archaeological or general, was marked by his deep sense of humor and curiosity. This makes us remember his remark that investigating the past is a privilege in which we should all take pride – and recall with humbleness the extent of our own interpretations.

References

- Ronen, A. 1984: Sefunim Prehistoric Sites, Mount Carmel, Israel. 2 volumes. BAR International Series 230. Oxford: BAR.
- Ronen, A. 2012: The oldest burials and their significance. In: S. C. Reynolds and A. Gallagher (eds.), African Genesis. Perspectives on Hominid Evolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 554–570.