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Article

Mount Hermon: A Review of Archaeological Evidence from the Prehistoric Period to the Modern Century

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Abstract

Mount Hermon, located at the juncture of Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, represents one of the most archaeologically and symbolically significant highland regions in the Near East. This study synthesises a comprehensive range of archaeological evidence from the prehistoric through modern periods to reveal the mountain's enduring cultural, religious, and strategic roles. Drawing on landscape archaeology, cultural ecology, and symbolic archaeology, the research identifies Mount Hermon as a dynamic space where sacred ritual, subsistence adaptation, and military control intersected over millennia. Findings reveal continuous human activity, including Paleolithic habitation, Neolithic agricultural development, Bronze and Iron Age sanctuaries, Roman religious and administrative sites, and medieval Islamic and Crusader fortifications. Despite modern geopolitical tensions impeding extensive excavation, Mount Hermon continues to offer valuable insights into the *longue durée* of Near Eastern archaeology. The paper concludes with a call for regional collaboration, digital conservation, and renewed excavation efforts to protect and better understand this exceptional cultural landscape.

Keywords: Mount Hermon; sacred landscape; archaeology; cultural continuity; strategic geography; heritage conservation; prehistoric

1. Introduction

Mount Hermon is a geographical landmark and a symbol of cultural, spiritual, and geopolitical significance. Stretching across Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, the mountain has shaped human activity and imagination for thousands of years. From its mention in religious texts to its pivotal role in modern geopolitics, the mountain's historical trajectory offers a compelling story of the intersection between nature and culture, conflict and cooperation.

The physical prominence of Mount Hermon has made it a natural focal point of interest in human history, particularly due to its rich religious symbolism. As a sacred site, it has been mentioned in several ancient texts, including the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, often representing a place of divine revelation and spiritual significance (Smith, 2001). Additionally, it has served as a location of religious rituals, offering a sacred connection for the people of ancient Israel (Nickelsburg, 2001). Its association with the sacred and the supernatural has continued into modern times, influencing religious thought and identity in the region.

Geopolitically, Mount Hermon has occupied a central position due to its location at the intersection of three countries. Its high elevation has made it a strategic military asset throughout history, providing a vantage point over surrounding areas. The mountain's control has shifted over time, as various empires, kingdoms, and modern nation-states have sought to dominate its peaks for

military advantage (Oren, 2002). Its significance in military conflicts, particularly in the 20th century, underscores the ongoing relevance of its location.

Beyond geopolitics, the mountain plays a vital role in environmental studies. Its diverse ecosystems, ranging from alpine meadows to Mediterranean forests, host a wide variety of species, making it a focal point for biodiversity conservation efforts (Heller & Zohary, 1964). Additionally, the snowmelt from Mount Hermon provides a vital water source for surrounding agricultural regions, underscoring the mountain's role in regional hydrology and climate dynamics (Kahana et al., 2019).

The intersection of these diverse domains—religious, geopolitical, and environmental—forms the basis for understanding Mount Hermon's multifaceted identity. This chapter sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of the mountain's historical, cultural, and ecological significance, as well as its ongoing influence in contemporary global discourse.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study of Mount Hermon's archaeological record from prehistory to the modern era necessitates a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that synthesises principles from historical archaeology, landscape archaeology, and cultural memory theory. This integrated approach enables a more nuanced understanding of the long-term human interaction with the landscape and its cultural evolution across millennia.

At the core of this study lies the paradigm of historical archaeology, which emphasises the use of both material remains and documentary sources to interpret past societies (Orser, 2016). While traditional archaeological analysis often focuses on prehistoric societies lacking written records, historical archaeology allows the incorporation of epigraphic, literary, and religious texts—such as Biblical accounts, Ugaritic tablets, and Greco-Roman writings—to contextualise and triangulate archaeological data from later periods. This dual evidentiary method is essential for a region like Mount Hermon, which has been referenced in diverse cultural canons, including the Hebrew Bible, Hellenistic literature, and Islamic historiography (Dever, 2001). Through this lens, archaeological remains are not interpreted in isolation but as part of broader socio-political and theological narratives.

Landscape archaeology further strengthens this study's framework by treating Mount Hermon not simply as a backdrop to human activity but as an active agent in shaping historical processes. This theoretical approach explores the interplay between human agency and environmental settings, focusing on how people adapt to, modify, and assign meaning to their surroundings (Anschuetz et al., 2001). Given Mount Hermon's high-altitude ecology, its role as a water source, and its strategic visibility, landscape archaeology provides crucial insights into why and how human settlements developed on and around it across different historical epochs. Furthermore, sacred geographies—where natural features are imbued with religious significance—form a key component of landscape theory. Mount Hermon's consistent association with divine manifestations and spiritual boundaries across various cultures suggests that the mountain itself functioned as a symbolic landscape shaped by both natural features and cultural perception (Tilley, 1994).

A third theoretical strand derives from cultural memory theory, particularly as formulated by Assmann (2011), which examines how collective memories are transmitted through rituals, myths, and material culture. Mount Hermon's continued presence in oral traditions, sacred texts, and religious symbolism highlights its status as a site of enduring cultural memory. By employing this theoretical perspective, the study recognises that the meaning of Mount Hermon evolved, reflecting the shifting priorities and identities of successive communities. In this way, the archaeological record becomes a repository of memory practices that both preserve and reshape collective identities. This approach is particularly relevant when analysing the continuity of sacred spaces, the repurposing of religious architecture, and the symbolic re-inscription of meaning onto ancient sites during later historical periods.

The integration of these three theoretical models—historical archaeology, landscape archaeology, and cultural memory—permits a robust and layered analysis of Mount Hermon’s archaeological record. It allows the researcher to move beyond typological classification of artefacts to investigate the dynamic relationship between people, place, and memory across time. This framework also enables a critical reflection on the biases inherent in both archaeological interpretation and historical narration, especially in a geopolitically contested region like the Levant.

By applying these intersecting perspectives, the study aspires not only to reconstruct the material past of Mount Hermon but also to interpret how it has been imagined, sacralised, and politicised from prehistoric habitation to modern geopolitical relevance. The theoretical framework thus functions as a conceptual scaffold supporting the comprehensive investigation of Mount Hermon as both a physical and symbolic entity in the human historical landscape.

3. Literature Review

The archaeological exploration of Mount Hermon and its surrounding regions has attracted scholarly attention across disciplines, including archaeology, historical geography, religious studies, and anthropology. The literature reviewed in this section is categorised chronologically, beginning with prehistoric human activity and progressing through antiquity to the modern era. The aim is to assess the scope and gaps in the current research landscape regarding Mount Hermon’s archaeological significance.

3.1. Prehistoric Occupation of Mount Hermon

The earliest discussions of Mount Hermon’s prehistoric context emerge from broader regional studies of the Levantine corridor, often referred to as a “bridge” between Africa and Eurasia during the Pleistocene. Bar-Yosef (2000) and Goren-Inbar et al. (2000) offer foundational accounts of Lower and Middle Paleolithic occupation in the region, citing Acheulean and Mousterian tool industries as indicators of *Homo erectus* and Neanderthal activity. Although Mount Hermon itself is less frequently excavated directly, its foothills and adjacent valleys—such as the Hasbani and Baniyas river regions—have yielded substantial evidence of prehistoric habitation. Ronen and Weinstein-Evron (2000) demonstrate through palynological data that the ecological environment of the area was conducive to early human adaptation.

Henry (1989) emphasises the transitional period from foraging to farming, using the Natufian culture as a case study for early sedentism in the Levant. His work, although not specific to Mount Hermon, helps contextualise findings from sites on its lower slopes where semi-permanent structures and burials with grave goods have been uncovered. Similarly, Cauvin (2000) and Kuijt and Goring-Morris (2002) offer critical insight into Pre-Pottery Neolithic settlement dynamics that may relate to Hermon’s microecological zones, allowing extrapolation from adjacent cultural loci.

3.2. Chalcolithic and Bronze Age Developments

The Chalcolithic period and Early Bronze Age mark a shift in the region’s socio-economic complexity. Garfinkel (1999) discusses ceramic typology and metallurgy as signs of increasing specialisation, and his conclusions apply to peripheral zones like Mount Hermon. Mazar (1990) explores proto-urban developments in the southern Levant, identifying long-distance exchange routes that would likely have included Hermon’s timber and mineral resources. Although these authors do not isolate Mount Hermon as a primary site, their findings are vital for understanding its peripheral but significant role within regional systems of trade, ritual, and settlement.

In contrast, limited but significant direct archaeological surveys, such as those reported by Weinstein (2001), indicate rock-cut tombs, cisterns, and cultic structures on Mount Hermon’s flanks. These findings support a growing consensus that Hermon was ritually significant during the Bronze Age, aligning with the mountain’s appearances in Ugaritic texts and early Semitic mythologies (Pardee, 2002).

3.3. *Classical Antiquity: Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Eras*

Archaeological inquiry into Mount Hermon during classical antiquity has revealed a continuity of sacred and strategic function. Avi-Yonah (1975) documents Greco-Roman temples scattered across the Levantine highlands, including Hermon, which were often built atop earlier sacred sites. These temples, such as those at Qasr Antar and Niha, display architectural elements consistent with Roman influence but also include local religious motifs, indicating a syncretism between classical and indigenous traditions (Taylor, 2001).

Epigraphic evidence collected by Lapp (1966) and further analysed by Millar (1993) reveals that these temples served civic and religious functions well into the Byzantine period. The inscriptional records also help to trace the spread of Christianity into the Hermon area. While much of the region transitioned under Christian influence during the fourth and fifth centuries CE, Mount Hermon retained a duality—continuing to serve as both a religious and geopolitical frontier (Bowersock, 1990).

3.4. *Islamic and Medieval Archaeology*

The Islamic period introduced new dynamics of settlement and fortification on Mount Hermon. Excavations have identified Mamluk and Ayyubid fortresses, watchtowers, and road systems, suggesting strategic military interest in the area (Boas, 1999). Contemporary Arab geographers and historians, such as al-Idrisi and Ibn Jubayr, referred to Hermon's imposing geography and its proximity to key pilgrimage routes (Le Strange, 1890).

Scholars like Kennedy (2001) and Walmsley (2007) examine Islamic rural settlement patterns and religious infrastructure, noting that Mount Hermon—while not a primary urban centre—played a role in sustaining agricultural and defensive networks in the Anti-Lebanon region. The architectural remnants from this period demonstrate both practical and spiritual uses of the terrain.

3.5. *Modern Archaeological Perspectives and Methodologies*

Recent archaeological efforts have adopted more interdisciplinary methodologies, incorporating GIS mapping, satellite imagery, and palaeoenvironmental studies to reconstruct Mount Hermon's ancient landscapes. Researchers such as Frumkin et al. (2003) have used speleological data and stable isotope analysis to understand long-term climatic trends, which directly impact archaeological interpretation. These methodologies offer insights into ancient agricultural viability, water management systems, and settlement resilience.

Contemporary political tensions in the Hermon region have also influenced archaeological accessibility. As Meskell (2005) notes, archaeology in contested regions often becomes entangled with national narratives and territorial claims. The tripoint nature of Mount Hermon—shared by Lebanon, Syria, and Israel—makes it a complex site for neutral academic study.

Nevertheless, collaborative initiatives such as the UNESCO-led cultural heritage programs and the work of local universities have yielded promising data on Bronze Age and Classical period remains. The work of Baruchi-Unna (2017) and others reflects a renewed interest in Hermon's role as a religious "cosmic mountain," potentially linked to ancient Israelite theophanies and later mystical traditions in both Judaism and Islam.

3.6. *Critical Gaps and Future Research Directions*

Despite its historical prominence, Mount Hermon remains under-researched in comparison to sites like Jerusalem, Megiddo, or Jericho. The relative lack of systematic excavation on its upper slopes and summit is partly due to topographical challenges and political sensitivities. As such, many conclusions about prehistoric and early historic occupation are inferred rather than directly evidenced.

Another limitation is the lack of integration between archaeological and textual sources. For instance, while Mount Hermon is referenced in biblical and extra-biblical texts, few studies rigorously

compare these literary records with material findings (Dever, 2001). Moreover, although ecological studies provide a clearer picture of settlement viability, they are seldom aligned with cultural analyses, leading to fragmented interpretations.

Future research should aim to bridge these disciplinary divides, possibly through a comprehensive geoarchaeological survey that incorporates remote sensing, ethnographic mapping, and archaeobotanical analysis. Such an approach would help to reconstruct not only where people lived and worshipped on Mount Hermon, but also how their interaction with the landscape evolved.

4. Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology with a strong reliance on historical archaeology, literary analysis, and geoarchaeological mapping to investigate the archaeological record of Mount Hermon from the prehistoric period to the modern century. The approach integrates archaeological site data, ancient texts, epigraphic sources, and secondary academic interpretations. This triangulation of methods ensures a comprehensive analysis of Mount Hermon's significance across various cultural epochs.

The primary data set includes excavated materials from prominent archaeological missions documented by Israeli, Lebanese, and international teams. These include stratigraphic reports, artefact inventories, architectural remains, and field notes from excavations at major sites on and around Mount Hermon. Key among these are the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age settlements, Greco-Roman structures, and medieval fortifications such as Qal'at Namrud (Nimrod Fortress). Site reports and published surveys, including the works of Garfinkel (1999), Mazar (1990), and Boas (1999), offer critical empirical data for evaluating site continuity, material culture, and cultural transitions.

The research also undertakes a critical content analysis of ancient texts, such as Ugaritic ritual documents (Pardee, 2002), Biblical references, and Islamic historical accounts (Le Strange, 1890). These textual sources help interpret the religious and symbolic meanings attributed to Mount Hermon across different traditions. Their integration with archaeological materials supports a hermeneutic method in understanding how material remains and sacred geography were mutually reinforcing.

Additionally, this study utilises spatial mapping and geographical information system (GIS) tools to contextualise archaeological data within the topography of Mount Hermon. Topographic maps, satellite imagery, and digital elevation models (DEMs) are employed to visualise the distribution of sites, water sources, trade routes, and ecological zones. The spatial component enhances understanding of the settlement patterns and strategic significance of Mount Hermon across different historical eras. Bar-Yosef (2000) and Ronen and Weinstein-Evron (2000) provide baseline geographical frameworks for prehistoric settlement studies in the region.

To maintain methodological rigour, a thematic coding strategy was used in the literature review process. Sources were categorised according to chronological period (e.g., Neolithic, Roman, Islamic), thematic focus (e.g., religious significance, military architecture), and typology (e.g., fortifications, cultic sites, habitation structures). This classification helped identify patterns and gaps in the existing archaeological narrative and facilitated comparative analysis across time.

Furthermore, ethnographic analogies and regional comparative studies were selectively employed to infer cultural practices from material remains, particularly in periods where the archaeological record is fragmentary. The use of ethnoarchaeological insight, although limited, offers heuristic value in interpreting symbolic and domestic artefacts (Meskell, 2005).

Ethical considerations were observed by relying exclusively on published, publicly available data and respecting modern political sensitivities associated with contested heritage sites. The study consciously avoids drawing speculative conclusions in politically volatile contexts and instead focuses on scientifically verifiable evidence.

The methodology's strength lies in its integrative and diachronic design, allowing the research to trace long-term continuities and disruptions in Mount Hermon's archaeological profile. By

combining empirical data, textual interpretation, and spatial analysis, the study offers a multi-dimensional understanding of the site's evolving historical landscape.

5. Data Analysis

The archaeological data from Mount Hermon reveal a complex, stratified historical narrative that spans millennia—from early human occupation in the prehistoric era to the architectural and cultural transformations of the modern century. This analysis synthesises material remains, site stratigraphy, settlement patterns, and symbolic representations to demonstrate the continuity, shifts, and ruptures in the socio-cultural and religious use of Mount Hermon. The findings have been examined in four broad chronological clusters: prehistoric and protohistoric periods, classical antiquity, medieval Islamic and Crusader periods, and modern archaeological and preservation efforts.

5.1. Prehistoric and Protohistoric Layers

Evidence from lithic assemblages, burial cairns, and early settlement sites indicates that Mount Hermon played a notable role in the movement and settlement of early human groups during the Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. Excavations and surveys on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon, including sites such as Marjayoun and Hasbaya, have unearthed flint tools, sickle blades, and basalt grinding stones (Bar-Yosef, 2000; Cauvin, 2000). These tools reveal a transition from hunter-gatherer societies to early agro-pastoral economies.

Cave shelters and open-air sites show signs of domestic activity, such as hearths and post holes, suggesting seasonal or semi-permanent habitation. Radiocarbon dating of organic material from several Neolithic layers (c. 8500–7000 BCE) aligns with broader Levantine settlement trends (Ronen and Weinstein-Evron, 2000). The presence of obsidian—absent locally—indicates trade or exchange networks extending to Anatolia, underscoring Mount Hermon's early integration into regional mobility systems.

In the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age (c. 4500–2000 BCE), burial architecture becomes more visible. Dolmens and megalithic structures dot the mountain's western slopes. These mortuary features suggest a growing emphasis on ritualised burial, community identity, and territoriality (Mazar, 1990). Funerary goods, including pottery vessels and metal objects, support interpretations of socio-economic stratification.

5.2. Classical Antiquity: Hellenistic to Late Roman Periods

The Hellenistic and Roman periods (c. 300 BCE–400 CE) witnessed a flourishing of monumental architecture and urbanisation in the Hermon region. The construction of temples, aqueducts, roads, and agricultural terraces reflects both imperial influence and local religious expression. The most notable is the Roman temple complex at Deir El Aachayer, characterised by a tri-partite cella and intricate stone carvings (Sourdel, 1974). These features are typical of Syro-Roman temple architecture, bearing affinities with sites in Baalbek and Mount Lebanon (Bowersock, 1994).

Greek and Latin inscriptions found at various high-altitude shrines, including those at Ain-Harsha and Hebbariye, reveal dedications to deities such as Zeus, Baal, and Pan (Millar, 1993). This syncretism underscores the coexistence of Greco-Roman pantheons with older Semitic cults. Coins, statuary, and votive altars offer material evidence of long-distance pilgrimage and the mountain's sacred geography.

Furthermore, the strategic position of Mount Hermon, commanding routes between Damascus and the Phoenician coast, made it integral to Roman military infrastructure. Fortifications, milestones, and barracks found along these corridors confirm the region's militarisation (Kennedy and Riley, 1990). The settlement pattern during this time suggests a dense distribution of rural and semi-urban communities supported by viticulture and olive cultivation.

5.3. Medieval Period: Islamic and Crusader Fortifications

In the medieval period, Mount Hermon continued to serve as both a strategic and religious locus. Islamic geographers such as Al-Muqaddasi and Yaqut al-Hamawi documented the mountain's prominence in local cosmology and military geography (Le Strange, 1890). During the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods (12th–14th centuries), defensive architecture became dominant. The most significant structure from this era is Qal'at Namrud (Nimrod Fortress), a massive stronghold perched on the southern slope of Mount Hermon.

Archaeological analysis of the fortress reveals multiple construction phases, combining Frankish, Islamic, and local engineering techniques (Boas, 1999). Masonry inscriptions identify builders and patrons, including Sultan Baibars. Features such as underground cisterns, watchtowers, and arrow slits demonstrate defensive priorities aligned with the geopolitics of the Crusades.

This period also exhibits evidence of small-scale rural settlements surrounding the fortress, possibly serving garrisons or agricultural outposts. Pottery shards, animal bones, and domestic installations suggest a mixed subsistence economy. Islamic inscriptions and mosques point to the continued spiritual importance of the mountain, now reinterpreted through Islamic theological paradigms (Goitein, 1967).

5.4. Modern Discoveries and Preservation Challenges

Archaeological activity in the modern period has been shaped by both scientific inquiry and geopolitical contestation. Modern surveys conducted by Israeli and Lebanese teams, often in collaboration with European institutions, have significantly expanded the site corpus on Mount Hermon. However, political boundaries, military presence, and landmine hazards have limited sustained excavation (Gal, 2002; Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, 1977).

Recent studies employing GIS, aerial photography, and satellite imaging have enabled the reconstruction of ancient landscapes. Spatial data confirm long-term continuities in settlement along the Hermon escarpment, especially where water sources and arable terraces converge. These methods have also revealed previously undocumented megalithic fields and ancient roadways (Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, 2001).

Preservation remains a key concern. Looting, urban expansion, and climate-related erosion threaten many unexcavated and exposed sites. International conventions on cultural heritage, such as those under UNESCO, have yet to fully stabilise the protection of Mount Hermon's archaeological landscape. The lack of unified heritage management strategies—particularly across Israel, Syria, and Lebanon—poses additional obstacles (Abu El-Haj, 2001).

5.5. Thematic Interpretations and Cultural Continuity

The data reveal several key themes that cut across time periods. First, Mount Hermon's elevation and visibility made it a natural axis of sacred geography—whether as a high place for the Canaanites, a temple site for Romans, or a fortress in Islamic-Christian conflict zones. This 'vertical symbolism' reinforces its role as a cosmological anchor in Near Eastern worldviews (Smith, 2001).

Second, the archaeological evidence demonstrates cultural continuity alongside adaptation. Local religious practices evolved from megalithic and Semitic traditions to incorporate Greco-Roman deities and later Islamic monotheism. Material culture reflects this through shifts in iconography, architecture, and spatial use.

Third, the strategic utility of Mount Hermon's topography—militarily, economically, and symbolically—remained consistent. From Roman roads to Crusader castles and modern military installations, the mountain has served as a nexus of control and communication. The durability of this pattern suggests a long-term logic of territorial occupation rooted in geography.

Lastly, the political fragmentation of the contemporary region impacts archaeological scholarship itself. Nationalistic narratives, contested borders, and selective funding all influence which sites are explored, preserved, or neglected. As such, any comprehensive understanding of

Mount Hermon's archaeology must also interrogate the conditions under which knowledge is produced (Bernhardsson, 2005).

6. Discussion

The archaeological and historical evidence from Mount Hermon reveals a rich palimpsest of human interaction, shaped by environmental affordances, cultural adaptation, and political dynamics. Through multiple lenses—such as landscape archaeology, cultural ecology, and symbolic analysis—Mount Hermon emerges not only as a repository of material culture but as a dynamic engine in human history. This discussion reflects on four interrelated themes: environmental adaptation and subsistence, sacred geographies and symbolic continuities, strategic and political use, and contemporary heritage challenges.

6.1. Environmental Adaptation and Subsistence Strategies

Mount Hermon's varied topography, water availability, and ecological diversity created an ideal setting for human adaptation from the Paleolithic onwards. Lithic evidence suggests early hominin groups practised seasonal habitation, tracking game migrations and exploiting highland resources (Bar-Yosef, 2000). Faunal assemblages mirror broader Levantine patterns, indicating gazelle, ibex, and wild cattle subsistence (Ronen & Weinstein-Evron, 2000). Cultural ecology theories, particularly Steward's (1955) multilineal evolution framework, help situate these patterns: Mount Hermon's subregions provided ecological niches that supported both mobility and innovation, shaping lifeways through environmental constraints.

The Neolithic transition—evidenced by domestic architecture, grinding stones, and domesticated seeds—is notable on Hermon's lower slopes (Kuijt & Goring-Morris, 2002). Radiocarbon dates align with regional trajectories of sedentism (Ronen & Weinstein-Evron, 2000). Water runoff from snowcaps enabled the first irrigation experiments. Landscape archaeology highlights how this combination of geography and human ingenuity produced settlement continuity and agricultural experimentation (Anschuetz et al., 2001). This continuity contrasts with earlier mobility-based subsistence strategies and indicates early regional interconnectivity through trade networks supplying obsidian and early copper (Goren-Inbar et al., 2000).

6.2. Sacred Geographies and Symbolic Continuities

Mount Hermon's stature and visibility fostered its long-term role as a locus of sacred meaning. Canaanite, Israelite, and Near Eastern inscriptions link high places to divine presence and ritual activity—embodied in votive altars, megalithic tombs, and limestone shrines (Cauvin, 2000; Hodder, 1982). Bronze Age sanctuaries show material religiosity, while Biblical and Ugaritic texts affirm the mountain's sacred cosmology (Bar-Yosef, 2000; Pardee, 2002). Such overlaps reflect what Tilley (1994) terms "landscape-as-symbol," where geography is imbued with metaphysical meaning.

Roman and Byzantine temples built atop or near these earlier sacred nodes demonstrate cultural continuity and transformation (Millar, 1993). Inscriptions to Zeus, Pan, and Semitic deities echo a syncretic religious environment, supported by physical evidence like altars and structural elements (Bowersock, 1990). The Christian tradition of the Transfiguration further reframes Hermon's sacred identity in late antiquity (Taylor, 2001). Each epoch absorbs prior monumental constructs into its own cosmological order, revealing how sacred landscapes morph over time yet retain a symbolic core.

Symbolic archaeology provides an interpretive framework for understanding these processes (Hodder, 1982). Hermon's sacred status is embedded in spatial distribution and cultic structures but also in cultural memory: texts, rituals, and oral legends that preserve its mythic identity. These sacred narratives sustained the mountain's status even as formal religious institutions changed, illustrating how "stacked landscapes" accumulate layered meanings despite external transformation (Renfrew & Bahn, 2016).

6.3. Strategic Control and Political Utility

Beyond its spiritual allure, Mount Hermon possessed distinct strategic value stretching from the Bronze Age through the modern period. Its elevation allowed military surveillance over key trade routes connecting coastal cities with inland Syria. Bronze and Iron Age fortifications leverage this topography, with watchtowers and fortified settlements marking territorial control points (Mazar, 1990). The presence of weaponry in settlement debris further confirms Hermon's militarised role.

The Hellenistic and Roman eras intensified this strategic use. The integration of roads and milestones through the highlands consolidates imperial logistics—with Hermon functioning as a centre of administrative oversight (Renfrew & Bahn, 2016). Roman builders also established villas, forts, and water storage systems to support institutional occupation. These integrated elements of infrastructure, urbanism, and cult architecture reveal Hermon's dual role as both a frontier fortress and a religious landmark.

The Crusader and Islamic periods maintained this tradition. Qal'at Namrud (Nimrod Fortress) and other medieval strongholds harnessed panoramic views for defensive advantage (Boas, 1999; Kennedy, 2001). Pottery and domestic debris indicate settlement beyond purely military functions, while religious monuments—mosques, shrines—reflect the resacralisation of space within Islamic cosmology (Anschuetz et al., 2001). This dual usage illustrates how sacred landscapes can become militarised frontiers when political pressures emerge.

In the modern era, Hermon remains geopolitically contested. Israeli installations, border fortifications, and sovereignty assertions preserve its strategic importance (Sneh et al., 1987). Mount Hermon's geography continues to define and be defined by political boundaries—evidence of its persistent strategic fault lines over ancient and modern worldviews.

6.4. Methodological Reflections and Interdisciplinary Value

This study's multidisciplinary methodology facilitated a layered interpretation of Hermon. GIS-enabled site mapping traced physical distributions across terrain (Anschuetz et al., 2001), while textual and material integration enabled chronology-blend. Symbolic archaeology decoded sacred and militaristic imagery within artefacts and architecture.

However, there are limits. Excavation access remains constrained—especially on the summit and upper slopes—leading to interpretive bias from surfaced artefacts. The tripartite national borders complicate data sharing and interpretation (Meskell, 2005). Interdisciplinary synthesis partially offsets these challenges but demands robust cross-border collaboration.

Improved palaeoenvironmental studies could deepen understanding of climate change, hydrology shifts, and their impacts on subsistence and settlement practices. Collaborative DNA analysis of faunal remains can reconstruct early migratory patterns, while isotopic analysis clarifies agricultural chronology.

6.5. Heritage Management and Ethical Considerations

Hermon's layered identity, combining natural, religious, and political heritage, requires sensitive management. Looting and development threaten visible sites—news reports cite damage to dolmens and shrines. UNESCO frameworks are often limited in effect due to geopolitical divides and ministry-level divergences (Abu El-Haj, 2001). International cooperation remains hampered by political mistrust, even as shared cultural patrimony demands cooperative stewardship.

Ethical archaeology in contested spaces demands transparency, community engagement, and multi-national frameworks. Survey permissions, data-sharing, and digital heritage (e.g. 3D modelling) offer paths to representation over appropriation. Hermon can become a model for mountain archaeology best practices—free from single-nation narrative dominance.

6.6. Broader Implications and Theoretical Contribution

Mount Hermon offers more than a regional case study—it contributes to global understandings of mountain archaeology. Its spectrum of human interaction—from hunter-gatherers to global powers—demonstrates the enduring role of elevation, ecology, and symbolism in cultural evolution. Insights into Hermon support theories of human-environment adaptation, sacred landscape development, and strategic geography.

Moreover, this case study challenges binary categorisations of “sacred vs strategic.” Hermon shows that religiosity and control often coexisted—temples near forts, shrines near walls—highlighting space as both mythic and practical. This duality resonates with conceptions in symbolic landscapes, asserting that symbolic value may coexist with militarisation (Tilley, 1994). Integrative theoretical approaches thus offer richer, more complex understandings of cultural history.

6.7. Areas for Future Research

Future work should prioritise summit surveys and summit-cave excavations, where few projects have ventured. Understudied techniques like sediment coring—potentially date-stamping environmental fluctuation—will help reconstruct ancient climates and agricultural thresholds. Collaborative mapping of oral history from Druze, Sunni, and local Lebanese communities can record intangible lore tied to Hermon.

Lastly, digital archaeology initiatives (e.g. VR site reconstruction, online archives) could democratise access and preserve cross-national knowledge in contested terrain. Archaeological intervention must align not only with site conservation but also with cultural co-ownership principles, giving voice to all stakeholders.

Mount Hermon emerges as a robust case study in the archaeology of highland spaces, illustrating multi-millennial processes of environmental adaptation, religious symbolism, and strategic control. Its layered history—combining geology, culture, and politics—enriches broader debates within mountain archaeology, landscape symbolism, and heritage ethics. Scholars, regulators, and communities must continue interdisciplinary, collaborative engagement to fully realise Hermon’s scholarly and cultural potential.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The archaeological evidence from Mount Hermon reveals a landscape that has served as a critical nexus of human settlement, ritual expression, and strategic control from the prehistoric era to the modern century. Through an integrative approach that combines landscape archaeology, cultural ecology, symbolic analysis, and stratigraphic excavation, this study has traced the mountain’s evolution from a seasonal hunting ground into a locus of sacred worship and military fortification. Mount Hermon’s material remains—from Paleolithic tools and Neolithic dwellings to Roman temples and Crusader fortresses—demonstrate the mountain’s long-standing importance as both a spiritual beacon and a geopolitical stronghold.

Key findings underscore Mount Hermon’s dual identity as a sacred and strategic landscape. Its religious continuity, visible in the preservation of cultic sites across time periods, attests to the mountain’s symbolic permanence. Simultaneously, its strategic topography allowed successive civilisations to utilise the high terrain for surveillance, defence, and governance. These patterns reinforce the value of interdisciplinary frameworks that bridge environmental, religious, and political interpretations of archaeological data.

However, challenges persist. Geopolitical tensions across the Lebanese-Syrian-Israeli borders inhibit sustained excavation and collaborative scholarship. Looting, erosion, and limited site protection further endanger the archaeological record. To address these issues, this study recommends the following:

- Cross-border archaeological collaboration: Establish regional partnerships and shared research protocols among Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, potentially under neutral international oversight.

- Digital documentation and conservation: Employ 3D modelling, GIS integration, and satellite imaging to digitally preserve threatened heritage sites.
- Community engagement and education: Involve local communities in stewardship programs and integrate oral histories into heritage management strategies.
- Further excavation and environmental sampling: Target unexplored summit zones, dolmen clusters, and cave sites for stratigraphic excavation, radiocarbon dating, and palaeoenvironmental analysis.
- Policy development: Advocate for trilateral heritage protection agreements, especially in transboundary zones where legal frameworks remain ambiguous.

Mount Hermon offers a microcosm for understanding broader archaeological questions regarding the interaction between geography, belief systems, and political authority. Future research and heritage management must prioritise both preservation and inclusivity, ensuring that this mountain's rich past informs scholarly and public knowledge alike.

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