The southern hill country of Palestine, known as the Judean Hills, is divided into three ranges running north to south: the Bethel Hills, the Jerusalem Hills, and the Hebron Hills. The Hebron Hills rise higher than the Jerusalem Hills to the north and drop steeply to the east and west. Unlike the Lower Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea Region, the area to the south of the city of Hebron comprised a fairly dense settlement zone during the Roman and Byzantine periods, mostly consisting of small villages. It is this area that the historical sources typically identify as the “Darom.”

The Jewish settlements of the southern Hebron Hills served as the topic for David Amit’s 2003 doctoral dissertation. His work at the sites of Ma’on (in Judea) and Ḥ. ‘Anim was the core of the study, while the synagogues at Kh. Susiya and Eshtemoa as well as finds from sites elsewhere in the southern Hebron Hills provided the materials for comparative discussions, specifically regarding the architectural orientation of the buildings and the symbolic use of the menorah among the synagogues’ artistic repertoire. Amit’s study includes the most comprehensive discussions of the four synagogues—Kh. Susiya, Eshtemoa, Ma’on (in Judea), and Ḥ. ‘Anim—available to date. His chapters on Ma’on and Ḥ. ‘Anim present the finds of the excavation and therefore serve as an unpublished final report for the fieldwork. The sections on the sites not excavated by the author—Kh. Susiya and Eshtemoa—provide a comprehensive analysis of the relevant studies and preliminary reports. Since it would be redundant to reiterate all of Amit’s work here, we will limit our discussion and descriptions to the most relevant features of the synagogues and sites, as well as those details not included by Amit.

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1 Orni and Efrat, Geography, pp. 58–60.
2 See Schwartz, Jewish Settlement, passim; Amit, “The Synagogues.”
4 Amit, “The Synagogues.”
Khirbet Susiya\(^5\)

Kh. Susiya (henceforth Susiya) is one of the most important sites for the study of Jewish village life in late ancient Palestine.\(^6\) The extensive remains include some of the Second Temple period, although the majority of the structures preserved are Byzantine in date.\(^7\) The communal religious structure at Susiya is among the best preserved and most enigmatic of the Palestinian synagogues.

**Location and Identification**

The ruins of Susiya comprise about 20 acres (80 dunams) on a horseshoe-shaped ridge among the southern Hebron Hills (fig. 55), about 13.5 km south of the city of Hebron and 6.0 km north of the Green Line which marks the West Bank (\(\text{NIG 209800/590500; 31°24′23″N 35°06′06″E}\)).\(^8\) The site sits at 750 m asl, a stark contrast from En-Gedi (see above), which is reflected in the cooler and wetter climate.\(^9\)

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9 On the climate, see Orni and Efrat, *Geography*, pp. 58–60, 135–38, 144–46. The annual precipitation is somewhat lower than the Shephelah and coastal plain to the west. On the