

A BYZANTINE CHURCH AT QIRYAT ATA

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Following the discovery of a mosaic floor in the course of erecting a telephone pole, a limited rescue excavation was conducted on Bet Lehem Street, north of today's Municipal Museum in Qiryat Ata (map ref. NIG 21028/74565; OIG 16028/24565; Fig. 1). The excavation revealed part of a church from the Byzantine period (see also Vitto 1973; Ovadiah 1976:10–11; Ovadiah and Gomez de Silva 1981:228, No. 32 [213]; Schick 1995:364; Dauphin 1998:669; Olami and Gal 2003:33*, No. 53).¹

THE EXCAVATION

Only the northern third of the building was exposed, the remaining part being located on private property, beneath a house built in the 1950s. The owner of the house recalled that mosaic floors had been found during its construction.

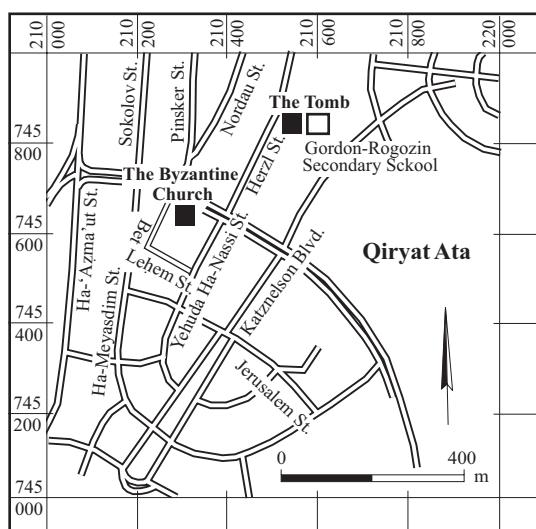


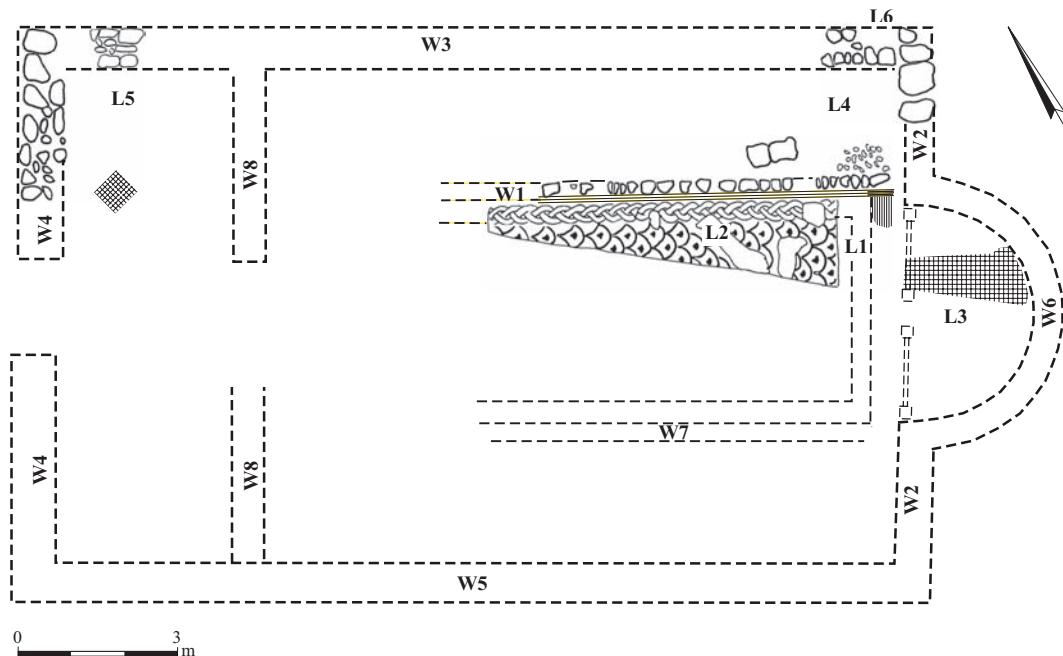
Fig. 1. Location map of the church and the tomb (see Vitto, this volume).

An area of c. 100 sq m was excavated. The remains, located at c. 33.7 m above sea level, were covered by a 0.1–0.2 m thick layer of earth. The walls were very poorly preserved, with most of their stones missing. The extant segments consisted of no more than one course (0.6–0.7 m thick) built directly on bedrock, made of roughly dressed limestones with rubble in between.

A reconstruction of the building is proposed (Plan 1). The church was basilical in plan, measuring 11 × 17 m (external dimensions; W2, W3, W4, W5), oriented roughly eastward. It consisted of a prayer hall measuring c. 9.0 × 11.5 m (internal dimensions), with a rounded apse (W6; c. 2 m radius) protruding from the eastern wall (W2), and a narthex (W3, W4, W5, W8) in front of the hall. The prayer hall was divided into a central nave (c. 4.2 m wide) and two side-aisles (each 2.2 m wide). No columns were found, but one course of stones (W1), exposed between the nave and the northern aisle, may have been the remains of a stylobate or a partition wall. The floor level of the apse was 10 cm higher than that of the nave. The apse was probably separated from the nave by a chancel screen.

THE MOSAIC FLOORS

The nave was paved with a polychrome mosaic (see below) and the apse with a mosaic floor made of white tesserae (each 1.5 × 1.5 cm). No mosaic floor was found in the northern aisle, but the rock surface had been leveled with small stones and covered with a layer of plaster, which may have served as a bedding for a mosaic floor, not preserved. The narthex was



Plan 1. Proposed reconstruction of the church.

paved with a mosaic floor made of large white tesserae (3×3 cm), laid diagonally in relation to the walls. Remains of this floor were found near the western wall of the building (W4).

The surface of all the mosaic floors was uneven. Their grayish color and the friable tesserae are evidence of a major conflagration.

The nave mosaic (Fig. 2) was made of tesserae (1.5×1.5 cm) in three colors: white, black and red (density 36–43 per sq dm), laid on bedrock, which had been leveled with small stones and covered with a layer of plaster. The decoration is geometric, consisting (from the outside in) of a white band (*DGMR I*: Pl. 1y), 0.2 m wide; a 0.32 m wide border made of a single black fillet (*DGMR I*: Pl. 1a); a three-strand guilloche (*DGMR I*: Pl. 72d) made of white, red and black tesserae, 0.25 m wide; a single black fillet (*DGMR I*: Pl. 1a); a triple white fillet (*DGMR I*: Pl. 1t); a single black fillet (*DGMR I*: Pl. 1a); and a field decorated with a trichrome orthogonal pattern of outlined adjacent scales (*DGMR I*: Pl. 219b). Each scale

is outlined by one row of black tesserae and two rows of red tesserae, and contains, in the center, a small scale made of eight red tesserae on a white background.

An orthogonal pattern of adjacent scales often occurs on Near Eastern mosaic floors dating to the Byzantine period, especially on church floors. There are two main variants. The most common variant consists of a pattern of adjacent scales made entirely of white tesserae, without a colored outline of the scales (*DGMR I*: 219c); each scale contains a colored floret in the center. This composition gives the impression of a white carpet seeded with florets, the dominant element being the floret and not the scale pattern. It is found in many Syro-Palestinian churches, e.g., at Nebi Yunes north of Sidon (Donceel-Voûte 1988:407–410, Fig. 400), Hanita (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Pl. 99:2), Kh. el-Ghureiyib (Aviam 2002: Fig. 85), Nahariyya (Dauphin and Edelstein 1984: Pls. 7, 9, 11), H. Medav (Aviam 2002: Figs. 101, 103), H. Hesheq (Aviam 2002: Fig.



Fig. 2. Detail of the mosaic floor.

20), Shiqmona (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Pls. 157, 166, 167), Kursi, in the baptistery (Donceel-Voûte 1988:171, Figs. 141, 142), Bet Yerah (Delougaz and Haines 1960: Pls. 24, 25), and Soueida/Suweida, 90 km east of Kursi (Donceel-Voûte 1988:309–310, Fig. 303). The second, rarer variant, is an evolution of the first. It also consists of a composition of adjacent scales containing florets, but each scale has a colored outline so that both florets and scales are prominent. The mosaic found at Qiryat Ata belongs to this variant, which also appears e.g., in the church on Mount Zion, Jerusalem (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Pl. 95). Both variants may occur alongside each other, e.g., at Shave Ziyyon (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Pl. 144: white scales, and Pl. 148:1: scales with a red and black outline) and Kh. Samra (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Pl. 102:1, white scales; and Pl. 103:2, scales with a colored outline).

While the first variant has a long lifespan, from the fifth to the early seventh centuries CE, the second variant does not appear before

the sixth century CE, probably no earlier than the second half of that century. Moreover, the rendering of the floret in the scales shows evolution. In the earlier examples, the floret is a rather naturalistic flower (usually red) with a dark (usually black) stem, while in the later examples the floret is stylized, reduced to a small red scale (a petal?) without a stem (Levi 1947:436–450, Fig. 167; Dulière 1974:46–50). At Qiryat Ata, the floret is of the later, stylized type. Therefore, this mosaic floor can be dated on stylistic grounds to the sixth century CE, probably the second half of that century.

THE CHANCEL SCREEN

Small limestone fragments decorated with geometric motifs in low relief (straight and curved bands) were found on the mosaic floor in the eastern part of the nave (L1; Fig. 3). They probably belonged to a chancel screen of a type similar to the one found in the churches at Nahariyya (Dauphin and Edelstein 1984: Figs.



Fig. 3. Carved limestone fragments (chancel screen?).

17, 18) and Pella (Smith and Day 1989:122–124, Fig. 34): a geometric décor consisting of interlooped bands and circles. The screen would have stood between the slightly raised apse and the nave. The shattering of the chancel screen into small pieces and the grayish color of the limestone are obviously due to the conflagration that had left traces also on the mosaic floor.

THE FINDS

Finds were scarce due to the limited excavation and the thin layer of earth covering the remains. Except for a few very small pottery sherds (mostly of bag-shaped jars) found inside the church (L2, L3, L4), most of the finds came from the area located at the corner of W3 and W4 (L5). They include a pottery oil lamp, as well as pottery and glass vessels attributed to the Byzantine period. In addition, a Mamluk coin and an Ottoman smoking pipe were collected on the surface.

Pottery Vessels

The pottery vessels include Late Roman Fine Ware bowls, cooking vessels, jars, a jug, a basin and an oil lamp.

Late Roman Fine Ware (Fig. 4:1, 2).—Six rims were discovered, all belonging to Phocaean Red Slip Ware (formerly Late Roman C) Type 10A, which Hayes (1972; 1980) suggests dating to the late sixth–early seventh centuries CE.

Cooking Vessels (Fig. 4:3–6).—Four bevelled-rim casseroles or cooking bowls (Fig. 4:3, 4) with heavy horizontal handles are of a type frequently found at Byzantine sites, e.g., at Caesarea (Magness 1992: Figs. 60:1–3; 64:6–8) and Yoqne‘am (Avissar 1996b: Fig. XII.6:11, 12). A casserole lid fragment (Fig. 4:5) with a wide knob handle, pierced by a steam-hole and a ribbed body, has many parallels throughout the country from the Late Roman to the Early Islamic periods. A cooking pot with a short concave rim and a large strap handle (Fig. 4:6) has parallels at Meron in Cistern 3 (Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981:99, 174, Pl. 6.5:12), Caesarea (Adan-Bayewitz 1986:108, 126–127, Fig. 4:3, 4) and Jalame (Johnson 1988:197, Fig. 7–41:608, 198). A similar cooking pot, but with smaller and more angular handles, was found at Kellia in Egypt (Egloff 1977:103, Types 138–140, Pls. 18:1, 2; 51:6; 52:1–3; 93:4, 5). Johnson assigns this vessel to “Period 3 (351–383 CE) and later.” At Meron, the writers date

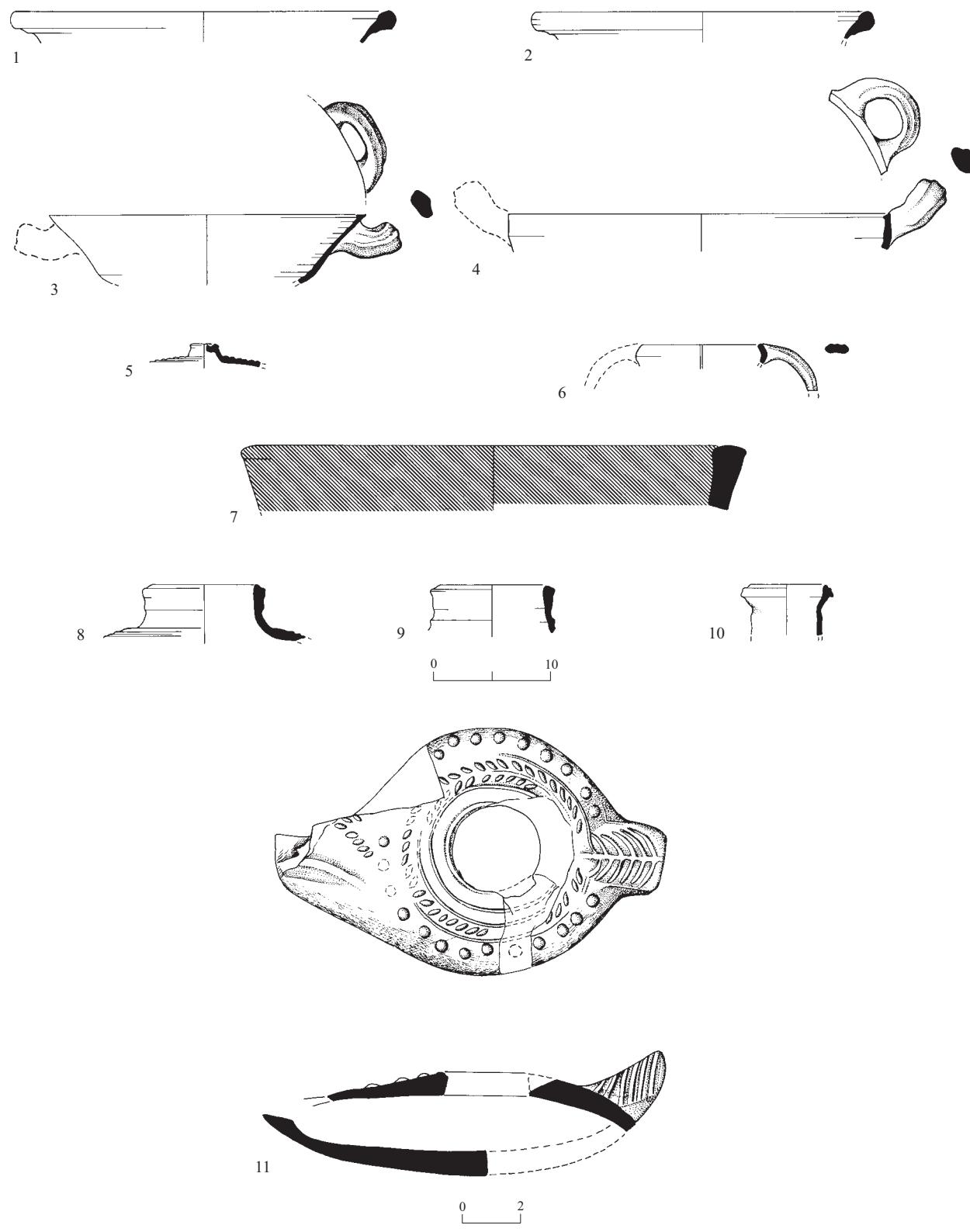


Fig. 4. Pottery vessels.

◀ Fig. 4

No.	Reg. No.	Locus	Type	Description	Dimensions (cm)
1	4-2	5	Bowl PRS 10A	Light red fabric 10R 6/8	D rim 42
2	5-3	5	Bowl PRS 10A	Light red fabric 10R 6/8	D rim 28
3	6-1	5	Casserole/ cooking bowl	Brown-red fabric 10R 5/4, very small red and gray grits	D rim 25
4	5-4	5	Casserole/ cooking bowl	Brown-red fabric 10R 5/4	D 30
5	6-4	5	Casserole lid	Red fabric 7.5 R 5/6, very small red grits	
6	3-4	5	Cooking pot	Red fabric 10R 5/8, small white grits	
7	6-9	5	Basin	Very pale brown fabric 10YR 8/3, white grits, gray core, red slip	D rim 69
8	4-1	5	Jar	Red fabric 10R 5/4 (ext.), 10R 5/6 (int.), small white grits	D rim 10
9	4-4	5	Jar	Dark gray fabric 10R 4/1, small white grits	D rim 10
10	2-5	5	Jug	Reddish yellow fabric 7.5YR 7/6, white and gray grits	D rim 6.2
11	8	5	Oil lamp	Very pale brown fabric 10YR 8/3, red slip 2.5YR 4/8	L 13, W 7.5, H 3

it to the fourth century CE, based on the Jalame dating and on the other finds from Cistern 3. However, the discovery of two of these cooking pots in the Late Byzantine building at Caesarea (L359, Stratum 4), the late sixth–early seventh centuries CE dating at Kellia (based on coins and ^{14}C), and the presence of this example at Qiryat Ata indicate that this type of cooking pot was in use in the sixth–seventh centuries CE.

Basin (Fig. 4:7).—Flat rim of a basin made of a very coarse fabric with red slip similar to basins found, e.g., at Capernaum (Loffreda 1974:56, 59, Fig. 14:12–14) and Bet She'an (Avshalom-Gorni 2000:52*, Fig. 8:5). They appear from the Late Roman to the Early Islamic periods.

Bag-Shaped Jars (Fig. 4:8, 9).—Most of the pottery fragments discovered belong to bag-shaped jars made of red or blackish fabric, several with white painted geometric

decoration. They have a relatively short neck with a ridge in the middle and a thickened rim, flat and slightly grooved at the top. Widespread in the Byzantine–Early Islamic periods, they appear, e.g., at Keisan (see Landgraf 1980: 67–80, who published a detailed study of their manufacture).

Jug (Fig. 4:10).—A jug made of a fine pink-yellowish fabric, with a cylindrical neck and an everted, offset triangular rim with a slight depression on top resembles the Fine Byzantine Ware Jugs A (Magness 1993:236–237) found in Jerusalem, in a sealed context beneath the Nea Church, which was inaugurated in 543 CE.

Oil Lamp (Fig. 4:11).—Found in L5 (near W4), the lamp has a circular body flaring into a wide nozzle, a flat base, a large filling hole (diam. 2.7 cm) surrounded by four ridges, and a tongue-shaped handle decorated with a palm

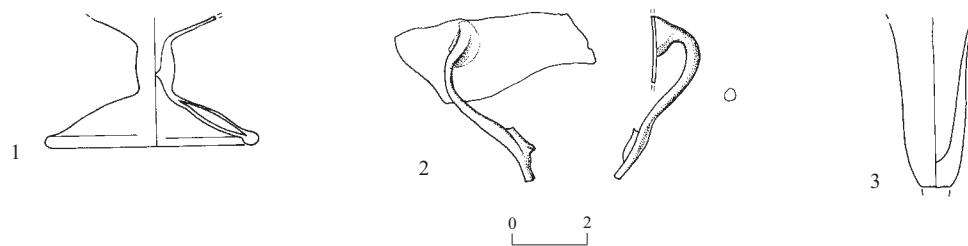


Fig. 5. Glass vessels.

No.	Reg. No.	Locus	Type	Color
1	7-7	5	Wineglass	Greenish
2	7-8	5	Oil lamp	Greenish
3	3-10	5	Oil lamp	Bluish-greenish

frond. The shoulder is decorated with a band of pellets and oblique strokes. Raised concave lines on the nozzle mimic a spatulate nozzle. It belongs to a type widespread in northern Israel and Transjordan, which Sussman (1988:95, 100, 113, No. 36) describes as a “northern Christian type” and Hadad (2002:56–61, Type 22, with further references), as the “last remnant of the Beit Nattif imitations.” Sussman dates this type of lamp from the mid-fourth to the fifth centuries CE; Smith (1973:218, Pl. 63:186), at Pella, gives a fourth–sixth centuries range and Hadad, on the basis of finds from Bet She’ān, suggests limiting the dating to the fifth–early sixth centuries CE.

Glass Vessels

Wineglass (Fig. 5:1).— Foot of a wineglass with a concave tubular base and a hollow stem, with parallels, e.g., at Shave Ziyyon (Barag 1967:67–68, Fig. 16:15) and Beirut (Foy 2000:275).

Oil Lamps.— Figure 5:2 is a body fragment with an asymmetrical, thin handle of a bowl-shaped oil lamp that recalls a vessel found in Tomb 231 on the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem (Bagatti and Milik 1958: Fig. 35:147). Figure 5:3 is a plain, hollow stem of an oil lamp which has parallels, e.g., at Shave Ziyyon (Barag

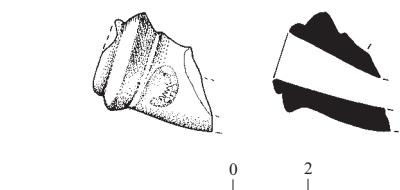


Fig. 6. Tobacco pipe (chibouk).

No.	Reg. No.	Locus	Description	Dimensions (cm)
1	6-3	5	Gray fabric, large white grits, red-brown slip, burnished	D opening of shank 1.3

1967:68–69, Fig. 16:25); Bet She’ān (Hadad 1998: Type 4); Beirut (Foy 2000:243–244); and Nir Gallim (Gorin-Rosen 2002: Fig. 2: 3, 4).

All the glass vessels are typical of the Byzantine–Early Islamic periods.

SURFACE FINDS

Ottoman Tobacco Pipe (Fig. 6)

A shank of a clay tobacco pipe (chibouk) was found on the surface. It is made of coarse gray fabric, burnished and red-brown slipped. It has a stepped-ring termination and a crescent-

shaped stamp (11 × 7 mm), enclosing raised dots, impressed on the right side of the shank.

This type of tobacco pipe was common in the eighteenth century, with parallels at Acre (Edelstein and Avissar 1997:133, 134, Fig. 2:3a–c; Stern 1997:68, Fig. 19:136), Yoqne‘am (Avissar 1996a: Nos. 7–9; 2005:83–86, Nos. 8–17, Type 2) and Belmont Castle (Simpson 2000: Fig. 13.3:43, Group IV).

Mamluk Coin

Ariel Berman

One coin was found on the surface, near W4. It has no connection with the church.

1. Reg. No. 9, Surface, IAA 10997.
Al-Ashraf Sha'bān II Nāṣir al-Dīn, Dimashq, AH 770/1368 CE.
Obv.: Central horizontal segment: الملك الاشرف
Rev.: Central horizontal segment: [---] وسبيعهانية [---]
Æ fals, 2.22 g, 16 mm.
Cf. Balog 1964:220, No. 454.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Except for the coin and the chibouk, all the finds are attributable to the Late Byzantine period. Although some of the pottery and glass vessels belong to types that have a long history, the best chronological indicators (the Late Roman Fine Wares and the oil lamp) suggest a date not later than the beginning of the seventh century CE.

The traces of fire on the mosaic floor and on the decorated limestone fragments (chancel screen?) indicate that the church was destroyed by a conflagration. There is no evidence that it was repaired or rebuilt.

Like many churches in Western Galilee, its destruction and abandonment may be connected with the Sassanid invasion of Palestine in 614 CE (Avi-Yonah 1976:259–268; Wilkinson 2002:14–16). This may have occurred either at the hands of the Sassanians themselves on their march to Jerusalem, or at the hands of Jews who are said by several historical sources to have joined the Sassanian army in

great numbers and taken part in the killing of Christians and the destruction of their churches (Sophronius, *Anacr.* 14:105, seventh century CE; Sebeos, *Hist.* 24:95, seventh century CE; Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 2:400 [trans.], 4:404 [Syriac text], twelfth century CE).² In the seventh-century Ethiopian work Sargs of Aberga (sections 90, p. 62; 91, p. 63; 109, p. 84), we read that the Sassanians assigned the Jews the responsibility of capturing some of the coastal cities. A Jewish force is said to have laid siege to Acre-Ptolemais and captured it with the help of the Jews living inside the city. They set fire to a church, killed people, tortured a deacon and burned the Christian books in possession of the bishop. According to the tenth-century Patriarch of Alexandria Eutychius (*Ann.* 1084–1085), the Jews did not succeed in capturing Tyre but they set fire to many churches outside the fortifications of the city. Each time the Jews destroyed a church, Eutychius says, the inhabitants of Tyre brought one hundred Jews out onto the walls of the city and cut off their heads, which they threw outside the walls. Caution is called for when using Christian sources—the only ones we have—which may contain polemic distortions and exaggeration in the figures, especially those written after the events. If the numbers given by Eutychius—two thousand Jews reportedly beheaded—were taken at face value, it would mean that twenty churches were destroyed. The source does not say how far beyond the walls of Tyre they went to destroy churches, but Schick (1995:28–29) considers it very plausible that they also set fire to churches in the area of Acre-Ptolemais, as archaeological evidence seems to show. In addition to the church at Qiryat Ata, several churches in northwestern Galilee have revealed evidence of destruction by fire or abandonment at the beginning of the seventh century CE. Churches at Nahariyya, Shave Ziyyon, ‘Evron and Shelomi (Dauphin and Edelstein 1984:109; Dauphin 1986:42–43, 49–50) bear traces of fire, while churches at H. Hesheq, Kh. el-Waziya, H. Medav and H. Gob appear to have been abandoned (Aviam 2002:184*–185*).

What do we know of the history of the site and its name in Byzantine times?

Several rock-cut chamber-tombs dating to the third–fourth centuries CE have been discovered in the area, but no settlement of this period has yet been found. Beside an uncertain mention in Josephus (*Life* 188; *Jewish War* 2:573), there is no written evidence of a settlement by the name of Capharath/Caparatha in the Roman or Byzantine periods (see Vitto, this volume: Conclusions).

Nevertheless, during the Byzantine period, archaeological evidence indicates that a rather prosperous settlement seems to have existed within the present limits of Qiryat Ata. In addition to the church discussed in this report, several other remains dating to the Byzantine period have been brought to light. In July 1941, Makhoul excavated a square room (4.4 × 4.4 m) paved with a mosaic floor decorated with a triple Solomon knot (*AIEMA* 1973: No. 59), at the “south-west corner of Kfar Atta settlement, in the area allotted to dwelling of the managers of the textile factory” (British Mandate Archives, Kh. Kufrita/Kafr Ata: unpubl. report dated 18.7.1941). In March 1954, two superimposed polychrome mosaic floors were found “near the Tseva factory” (unpubl. report dated 21.3.1954 in IAA Archives). In November 1986, an oil press dated to the late Byzantine period was excavated by Siegelmann (1987). In 1990, a rescue excavation was conducted by Badhi (2000) at map ref. NIG 2104/7455, which revealed remains from the Byzantine period including plastered channels and coins of Justin II (574/5 CE) and Mauricius (600/1 CE), Early Islamic-period walls and pottery, and Ottoman-period walls and pottery. According to Barag (1981:392), a site named Kafrata near Shefar‘am reappears in a truce treaty signed

in Acre between the Mamluk Sultan Qala'un and the Franks in June 1283. The coin dated 1368 CE, found near the surface during the excavation of the church, suggests at least some activity at the site in the fourteenth century. It is not known whether the place continued to be inhabited without interruption, but the name Kafra Atta appears in the Ottoman tax registers (*daftar-i mufaṣṣal*) of 1596/1597 CE (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977:193) as a village in which fifteen families lived. The next mention of the place refers to the year 1811 when Sulaiman Pasha was governor of Acre. ‘Ali Pasha, who represented the Ottoman sultan, is said to have settled in Kufrita, restored the village and reconstructed the mosque (Al-‘Awra 1936:191; Araf 1975:39–40; Grossman 1994:67). In the course of the nineteenth century, the village’s land changed hands a few times, eventually being purchased by the Sarsaq family, who possessed much land in the Haifa region. Nineteenth-century travelers mention a village consisting of fifty houses built of pisé, which is called Kufr Tai/Kafr Etteh by Robinson (1841; 1856), Kefr Et-Ta by Guérin (1880:409), Kefr Etta by Conder and Kitchener (1881:285), and Kufrita on the maps of the British Mandate. In 1886, Schumacher (1887:178) took a census of the Lîvâ of ‘Akka on behalf of the government in Constantinople and counted in Kefr Etta 285 inhabitants, all Muslims, of which 57 were male adults between the ages of 16 to 60. The Ottoman chibouk discovered during the dig may have belonged to an inhabitant of this village.

Thus, the name of the Byzantine settlement remains unknown and further excavations will be necessary to complete the picture we have of the history of the site.

NOTES

¹ In November 1972, a seven-day excavation (Permit No. A-385) was conducted under the direction of the author on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (now the Israel Antiquities Authority) with the help of six workers financed by the Ministry of Communication. The plan was drawn by the author and prepared for publication by Natalia Zak. The pottery vessels were restored by Moshe Hoffman and the metal finds cleaned by Nena Janeš. Irina Lidski drew the finds and Tsila Sagiv photographed them. Yehuda Ben-Yosef, regional inspector of antiquities, assisted in the organization of the dig and took the field photographs. Rachel

Bar-Nathan offered useful comments on some of the pottery and Yael Gorin-Rosen, on the glass vessels. The author wishes to express her gratitude to all.

² Many Christian sources mention the cruel acts of the Jews during the Sassanid invasion of Palestine and the ensuing burning of churches. Avi-Yonah (1976:259–268) suggests explaining this behavior as stemming from the hatred of the Jews for the Byzantines out of fear of forced conversion, their hope that the new rulers would allow them to attain freedom from Byzantine rule and, above all, the spirit prevailing in the seventh century, when such cruelties were practiced by all.

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