'Atiqot 79, 2014

New Archaeological Finds from Kursi-Gergesa

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Introduction

Exactly 30 years after the last season of excavations at the ancient monastery site of Kursi-Gergesa (Tzaferis 1983:1–2), the dig was renewed in September 2001 (map ref. NIG 261160–308/747930–8055; OIG 211160–308/247930–8055; Figs. 1, 2). This report covers three short seasons in 2001–2003.[1]

One of the reasons for returning to Kursi was to re-examine the stepped tunnel in Area C (see Fig. 3), discovered in 1970–1971, but not fully investigated, due to the termination of the excavation (Tzaferis 1983:22). The steps obviously led to an underground structure of some importance.

Another aim in re-opening the dig was to check the underground hollow spaces found to the east of the church, abutting the rear wall of the apse. These were accidentally discovered in 1999 when the National Parks Authority drilled several sockets in the ground to hold metal posts supporting a protective covering over the church.

Two areas were therefore opened: Area C, an extension of the original Area C in the excavations of 1970–1971, and Area D, located next to the eastern enclosure wall of the central church (Fig. 2).

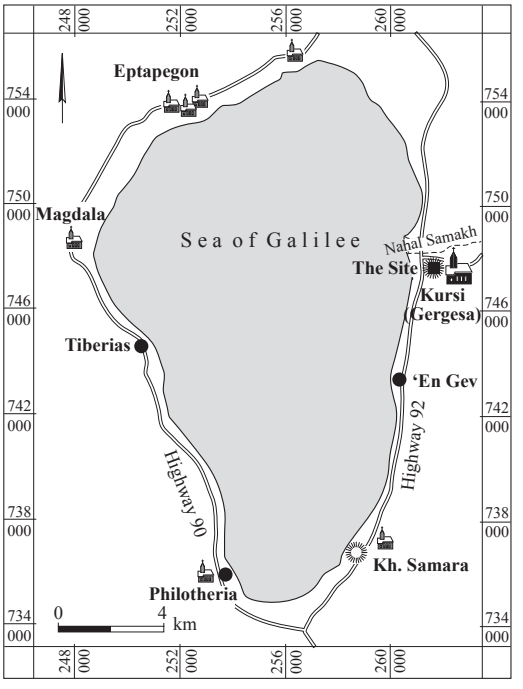


Fig. 1. Location map of the site and of other Christian holy places around the Sea of Galilee.

Area C

The Stepped Tunnel (Plan 1)

The tunnel, as it was left in 1971, included more than 18 (erroneously estimated as 30 in our first report) narrow stone-steps and a roof made of elongated stone slabs. The steps were built on an inclination of 45 degrees in relation to the roof. Three more steps were now uncovered, bringing the total number to 21 (Fig. 3). The tunnel ended in a narrow leveled space, above which was a vaulted entrance leading to a spacious underground room. The barrel-shaped roof of the room had collapsed, but the side walls stood to about a meter from the floor. As continuation of the dig within the room through the vaulted entrance was risky, indeed quite impossible, it was decided to approach from above. However, our effort to explore

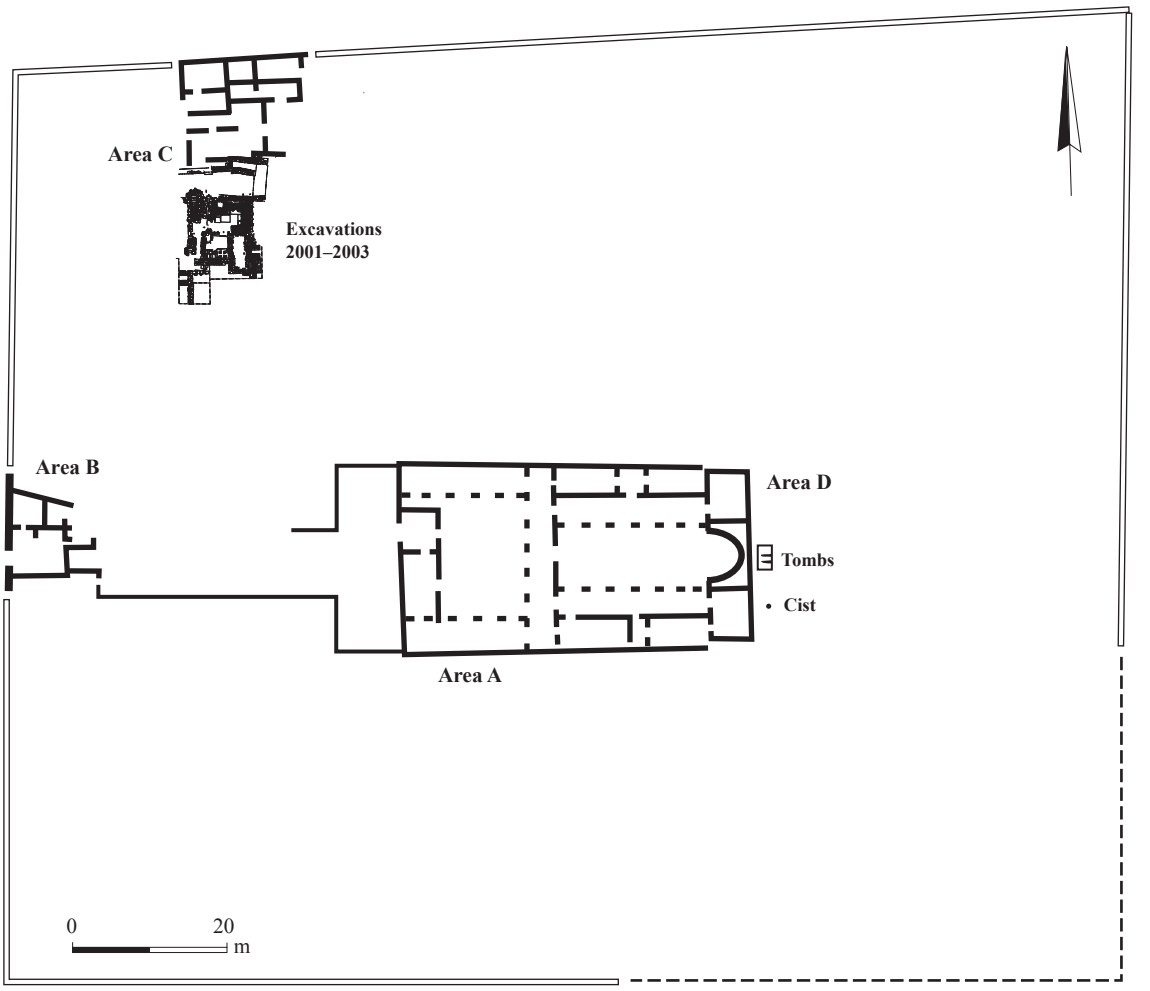


Fig. 2. The areas of excavation within the monastery.

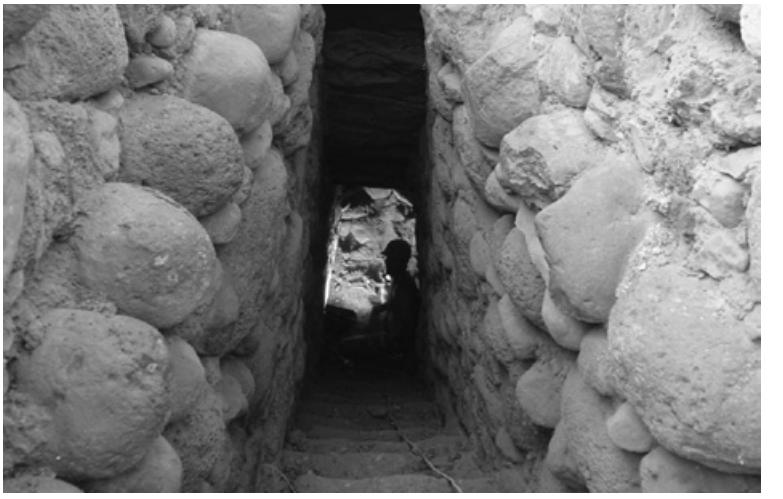


Fig. 3. The underground stepped corridor.

the subterranean complex was obstructed by the existence of walls belonging to a solid and well-preserved building lying close to and partly above it. The only element connected to the complex we sought was a chimney-like opening rooted deep in the soil just above the underground room. This opening very likely served both as a skylight and for ventilation (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. The chimney-like opening above the subterranean complex.

The Bathhouse (Plan 1; Figs. 5–12)

In the two short seasons of 2001 and 2002, the entire building above the tunnel complex was cleaned and uncovered. To our great astonishment, it turned out to be a compact bathhouse, containing all the necessary components of a standard Roman–Byzantine bathhouse.

The building was composed of five distinct units: the water-supply unit, the heating installation (*praefurnium*), the heated-water pools, the hot room (*caldarium*) and the cool room (*frigidarium*) (Figs. 5, 6).

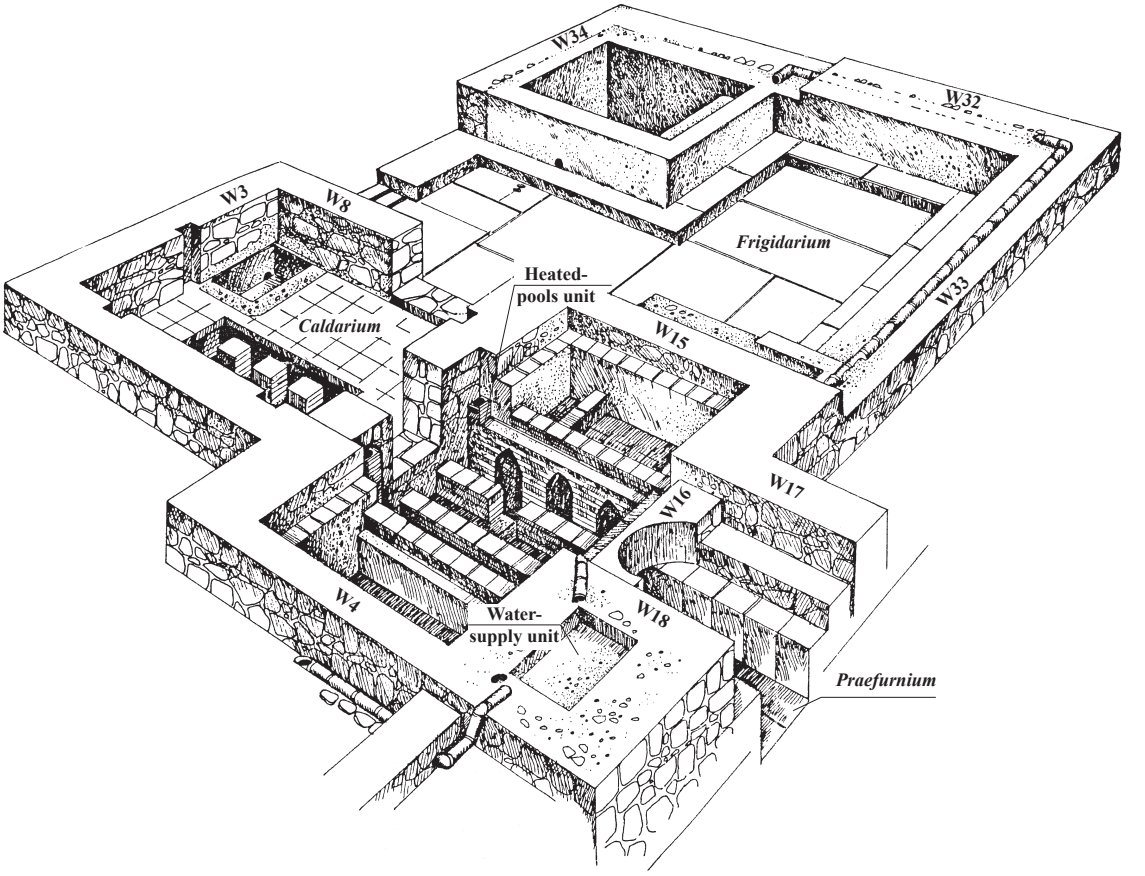
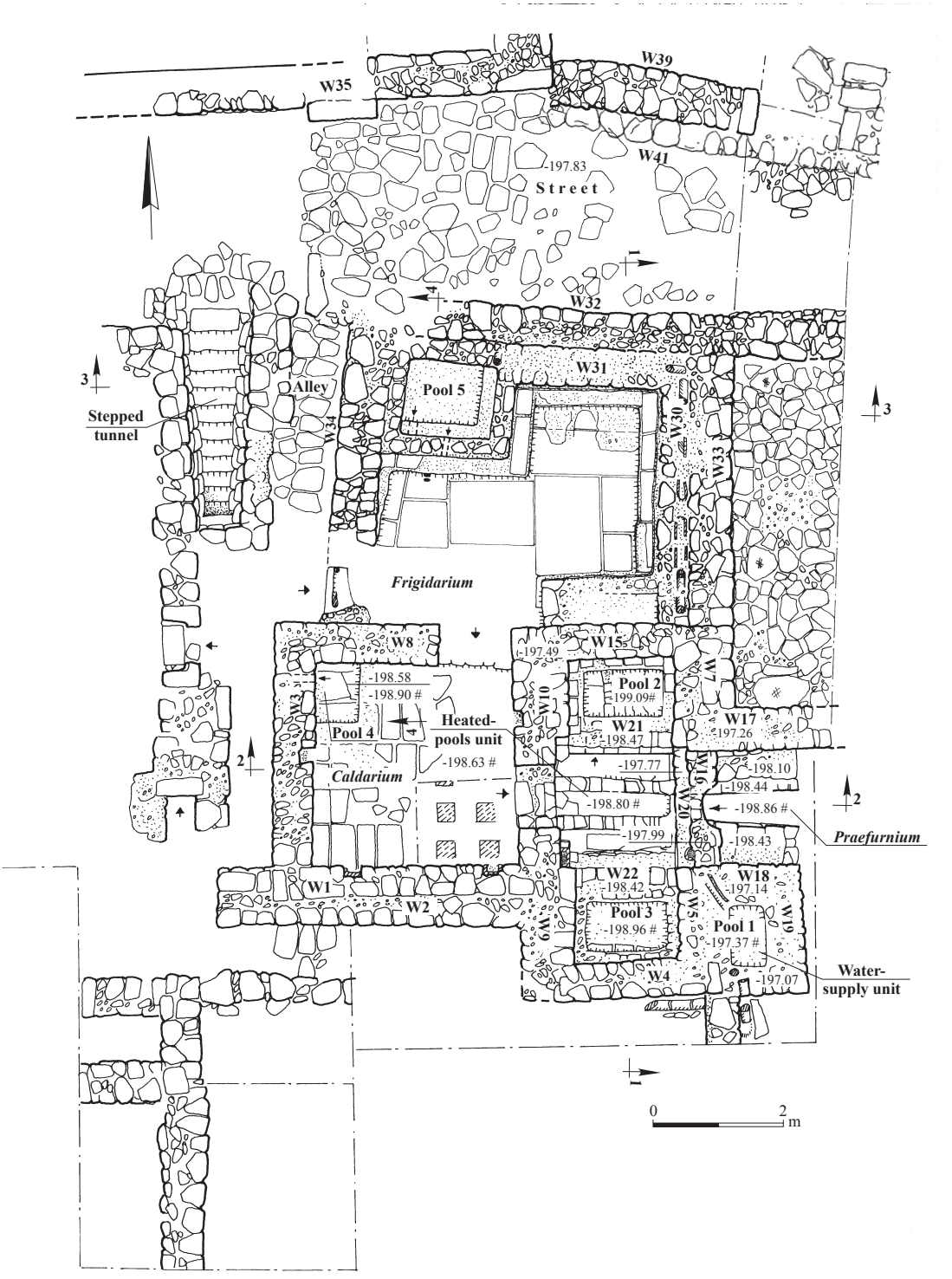
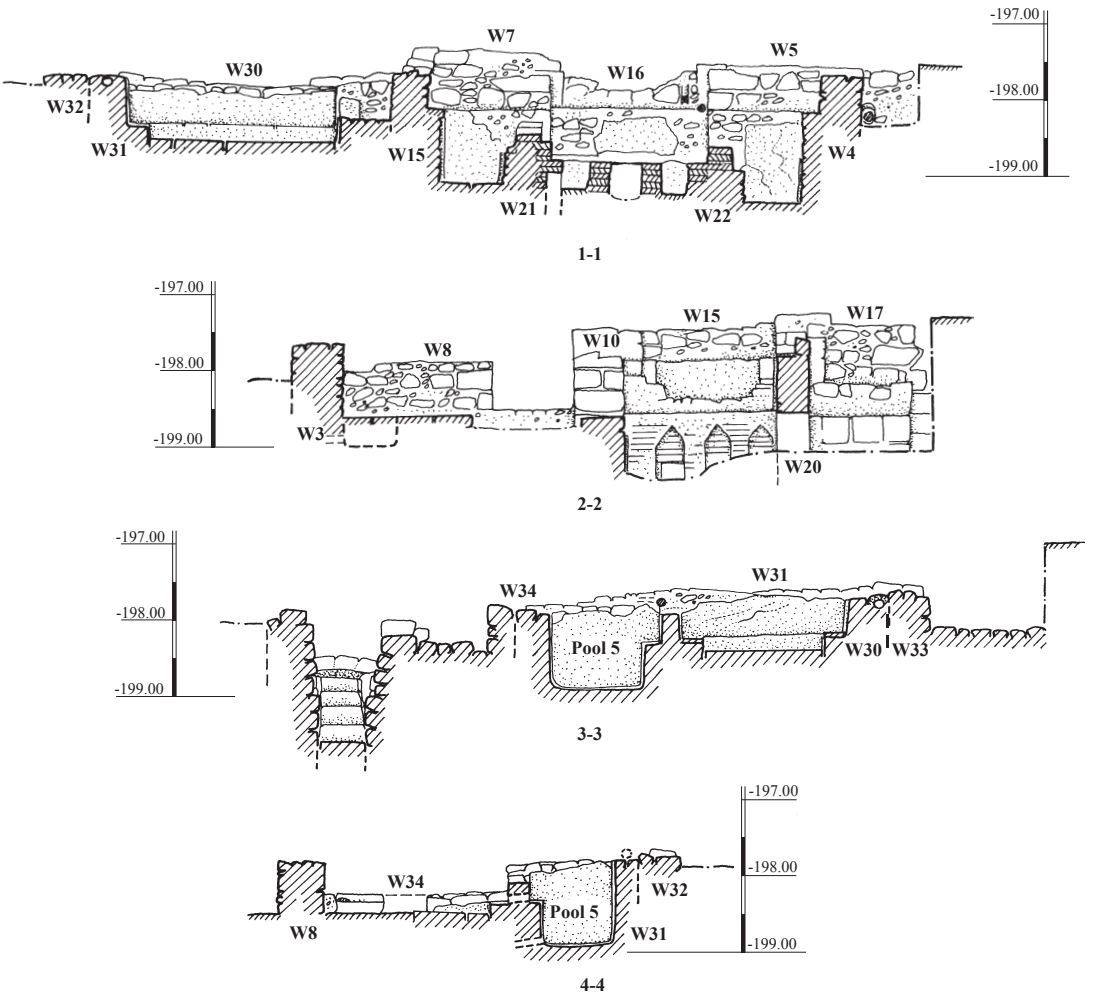


Fig. 5. Isometric plan of the bathhouse.



Plan 1. Area C: the bathhouse, plan and sections (on opposite page).



The Water-Supply Unit. The unit, defined by W4, W5, W18 and W19, was a solid structure located in the southeastern corner of the building (Fig. 7). At its center stood a small rectangular plastered pool (Pool 1; 0.45 × 0.88 m), from which water was distributed to various parts of the bathhouse. Water flowed into the pool through a ceramic pipe running from the central part of the monastery compound, very probably from a reservoir or from a spring. Two more ceramic pipes, fixed in the northern side of the pool, distributed the water to the inner parts of the bathhouse; one was directed to the cool room (*frigidarium*) and the other, to the area of the heating room (*praefurnium*). A fourth ceramic pipe, fixed to the bottom of the pool, provided drainage.

The Praefurnium. The *praefurnium*, or hot room furnace, stood to the north of the water-supply unit and immediately adjacent to it. Planned as a wedge-shaped trench, it is defined by W16, W17 and W18 (Plan 1: Section 2–2; Fig. 8). Two narrow benches (width 0.5 m) stretched along the side walls (W17, W18); the space between them, where the fire burned, was paved with large basalt slabs. The eastern, broad end of the trench was left open while the opposite, narrower, western end led to a rectangular opening that passed under W16

Fig. 6. Overall view of the bathhouse, looking north.

Fig. 7. Water-supply unit.

and W20. This opening conducted the heat produced by the furnace in the ditch into the bathhouse (Fig. 9). A plastered, curved niche in the eastern face of W16 doubtless held a bronze cauldron (not found) for the heating of water by the fire in the *praefurnium*. Such cauldrons

were normally used in Roman–Byzantine bathhouses to provide the steam conveyed to the heated rooms through ceramic pipes.

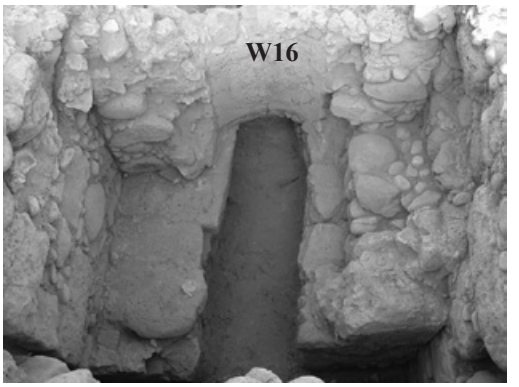


Fig. 8. The *praefurnium*.

The Heated-Pools Unit. This narrow space (2.5 × 6.0 m), west of the water-supply unit and the *praefurnium*, was enclosed by W4, W5/W20/W7, W9/W10 and W15. It was divided into three parts (Plan 1: Sections 1–1, 2–2; Fig. 9): the central section, under which ran the hypocaust carrying heat from the *praefurnium*; and two side spaces, containing rectangular pools, each measuring 0.65 × 1.20 m. Pool 2 to the north and Pool 3 to the south are separated from the central space by thin walls (W21, W22; width 0.3 m) and coated with hydraulic plaster. On the upper part of the walls surrounding each pool, at an elevation of -198.2 m, was a ledge (c. 0.3 m wide), probably to support some sort of lid.

All the inner walls of the unit, as well as the partition walls between the pools, were made of

Fig. 9. The heated-pools unit (left) and caldarium (right), looking south.

bricks. In the central section of the unit several fragments of marble slabs were found, very probably part of the original pavement above the hypocaust. The pools took the heated water directly from the cauldron, keeping it warm by means of the underlying hypocaust. Because of their close proximity to the *praefurnium*, they were probably not used as bathtubs but rather as reservoirs of heated water for bathing.

The Caldarium. The *caldarium* (hot room), west of the heated-pools unit (Plan 1: Section 2–2; Fig. 9) was a well-constructed, square hall measuring 3.10 × 3.05 m. It was enclosed on the south by a double wall (W1/W2), 1 m wide, on the west by W3, 0.5 m wide, on the north by W8 of a similar width, and on the east by W9 and W10. The unit was entered from the east and from the north.

The walls were constructed of roughly dressed basalt boulders except at the entrances, where well-cut stones were used. The boulders were held together by smaller stones set between them and by a whitish plaster. *Tubuli*—perpendicular rectangular ceramic pipes—were embedded in the inner face of Walls 1, 3 and 10 and connected to the hypocaust below. The eastern pipe in W1 was preserved almost intact (Fig. 10).

The *suspensura* or floor of the *caldarium*, made of large rectangular ceramic tiles (0.2 × 0.4 m), rested on short pillars composed of square ceramic tiles (0.2 × 0.2 m). The floor of the hypocaust was paved by similar square tiles.

A pool (Pool 4; 0.7 × 0.9 m), coated with hydraulic whitish plaster, was sunk into the floor in the northwestern corner of the room (Fig. 11). A narrow ceramic pipe, 10 cm above the bottom on the western side of Pool 4, passed under W3 to drain water out of the building. This little pool was presumably used as a tub for a single bather, though it is rather small for this purpose.

The Frigidarium. The *frigidarium* (cool room) occupied the northern part of the bathhouse, adjacent to the *caldarium* and the heated pools (Plan 1: Sections 3–3, 4–4; Fig. 12). It was enclosed on the south by W8 and W15, on the east by W30, on the north by W31 and on the west by W34, The *frigidarium* could be entered directly from outside the building through W34. The entrance was damaged, but the southern doorjamb and the monolithic threshold stood intact and *in situ*. Another large entranceway (width 1 m), at the eastern end of W8, connected the *frigidarium* with the *caldarium* to its south.

The *frigidarium* consisted of a rectangular space (3.8 × 4.0 m inner measurements) paved with large marble slabs of about 1.4 × 1.0 m. Smooth hydraulic plaster coated all the inner faces of the walls.

Fig. 10. *Tubuli* at the eastern end of the southern wall (W1) of the *caldarium*.

Fig. 11. The pool in the *caldarium*.

Fig. 12. The *frigidarium*, looking west.

Pool 5 (inner measurements 1 × 1 m) was found in the northwestern corner of the room with the plaster completely intact. A ceramic pipe in the eastern wall (W30) conducted fresh water to Pool 5. The pool had three openings: one in the northern wall for fresh water to pour in; a second at the bottom of the southern wall for water to drain out; and a third, just below the top of the southern wall, undoubtedly for preventing overflow. Plastered benches, c. 0.5 m high, lined the southern, eastern and northern walls of the *frigidarium*, as well as the eastern and southern sides of the pool. Bathers could sit on these benches and enjoy the fresh, cool water drawn from the nearby pool. In addition to the benches, a wide platform (0.8 × 2.0 m), constructed along W15, was most likely used as a reclining couch.

The northern W31 and eastern W30 were widened by two outer walls, W32 and W33, built in quite a different manner, in that they were not plastered. It is not clear whether these outer walls belonged to other structures abutting the bathhouse or whether they were later additions and repairs to the bathhouse. The second suggestion seems much more likely, considering that the northern outer wall (W32), which runs along the street, could not have belonged to any structure except the bathhouse.

Location of the Bathhouse

It is evident that the bathhouse was connected to the hostel building that was excavated in 1970–1971 (Tzaferis 1983:21–22). Between the hostel in the north and the bathhouse runs a street paved with stone slabs. The entrance of the hostel opens onto that street, while access to the bathhouse is through a narrow alleyway (width 1 m), and the alleyway is located exactly opposite the entrance of the hostel. Since the stepped tunnel, found only a meter west of the bathhouse, is accessed from the same street, it became quite apparent that the hostel, the street, the stepped tunnel and the bathhouse were all built at the same time and

were functionally interconnected. The relation between the stepped tunnel and the other structures bordering the street will be fully understood only after the entire complex of the steps and the subterranean room is completely uncovered.

The Pottery from the Bathhouse (Fig. 13)
The repertoire of pottery found in the bathhouse was similar to that of the adjacent hostel building, although more limited in quantity and types. The assemblage included fragments of bowls and cooking pots, and whole and fragmentary oil lamps.

Bowls (Fig. 13:1–3).— Several rims of Late Roman C Ware bowls were found. Most can be dated to the late sixth–seventh centuries CE, i.e., Phase II of the hostelry assemblage (Tzaferis 1983:31–32, Fig. 4:1–17).

Cooking Pots (Fig. 13:4, 5).— Two types of cooking pots were found in the bathhouse: the open bowl form (No. 4) and a closed, vertical-necked form (No. 5). They are identical to those found in the hostelry (Tzaferis 1983:33, Fig. 6:7–8, 9–11).

Oil Lamps (Fig. 13:6–8).— The three oil lamps of the slipper type can be generally dated to the late Byzantine period, the late sixth–early seventh centuries CE (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978:108–110). Lamp No. 6 was found on the floor (*suspensura*) of the caldarium and the two others (Nos. 7, 8) on the floor of the *praefurnium*.

Discussion

Dating of the Bathhouse
Based on the stratigraphic and ceramic evidence, it may be concluded that the bathhouse and the hostel were clearly constructed and in use at the same time, i.e., in the second quarter of the seventh century—certainly after the expulsion of the Persian army and brief restoration of Byzantine control in 628 CE, and quite soon after the Arab conquest in 630 CE. Strangely enough, no coins were discovered in any of the rooms of the bathhouse, but the numismatic finds from the 1970–1971 excavations also date the hostelry to the late sixth and seventh centuries CE (Tzaferis 1983:22).

The Significance of the Bathhouse in the Monastery at Kursi-Gergesa
The surprising discovery of the bathhouse offers interesting information on the subject of the secular functions of the monastery at Kursi-Gergesa in addition to its monastic attributes.

It is quite evident that the hostelry and the small but compact bathhouse were built within the monastery compound in order to provide the best possible hospitality to the multitude of Christian pilgrims visiting not only the site of the ‘miracle of the swine’ (see Tzaferis 1983:43–48), but the many other Christian holy places located around the Sea of Galilee (see Fig. 1), as well.

Archaeological excavations and discoveries of recent years have shown beyond a doubt, that many of the early monasteries in the Holy Land, especially those built on sacred sites, included comfortable hostelries and well-organized stables to serve the numerous pilgrims (Tzaferis 1991:49–50; Hirschfeld 1992:196–200). The monastery at Kursi was built not only on a significant holy site, but also on the main route circumnavigating the lake. As early Christian pilgrimage in the Holy Land was mainly pedestrian, a hostelry within the monastery might provide a most convenient and welcome sojourn for the pilgrim, as well as a considerable source of income for the monastery. If the hostelry were also equipped with a standard bathhouse, it could offer the pilgrims an opportunity to wash away the dust and sweat of their journey and enjoy real repose.

However, not all monasteries with hostelries could receive guests and pilgrims with a bathhouse. Based on the archaeological evidence so far discovered, it seems that apart from Kursi only a few others—all located on the cardinal pilgrimage roads—were equipped

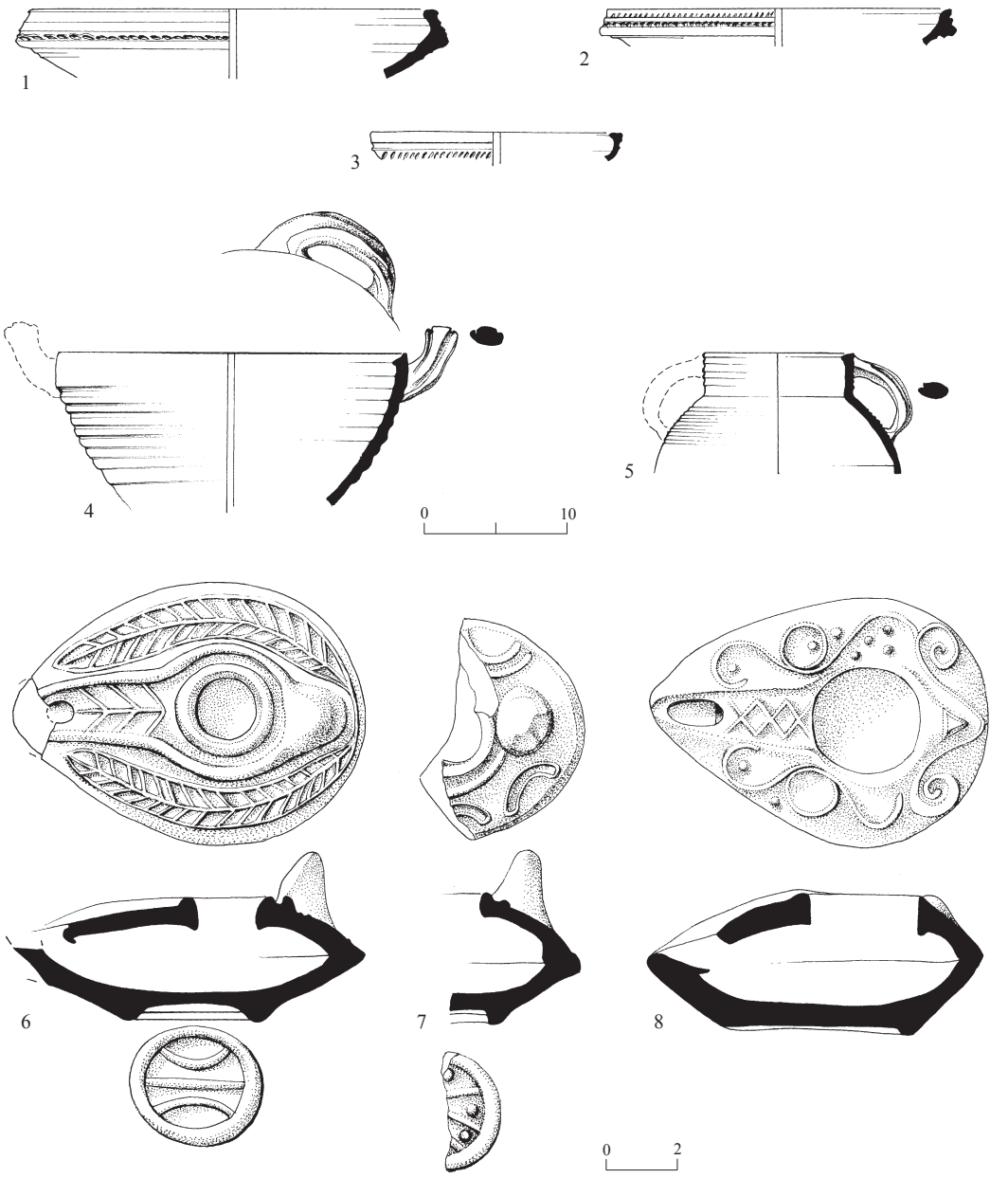


Fig. 13. Selected ceramic finds from the bathhouse.

No.	Type	Locus	Reg. No.	Description
1	Bowl	45	59/1	Orange and red slip, incised decoration
2	Bowl	45	59/2	Orange, red-brown slip, incised decoration
3	Bowl	45	59/3	Light red, brown slip, incised decoration
4	Cooking pot	8	76/1	Red-brown, blackened surface, ribbed
5	Cooking pot	8	76/2	Brown-red, ribbed
6	Oil lamp	10	68	Buff clay, relief decoration of herringbone pattern and palm frond
7	Oil lamp	9	51	Buff clay, relief decoration of double half-circles
8	Oil lamp	23	124	Buff clay, relief decoration of vine and rhombs

with this amenity: the Monastery of Martyrius and the Monastery of Theodorus and Cyriacus, both established east of Jerusalem on the main Jerusalem–Jericho road; the monastery at Ḥorbat Zikhrin on the main road connecting Caesarea with Jerusalem; and the Monastery of St. Hilarion at Tell Umm el-'Amer in the Gaza Strip.

The bathhouse in the Martyrius Monastery was situated within the walls and next to a rectangular building that the excavators identified as a farmhouse. The excavators date the baths to the Byzantine period and the farmhouse to the Umayyad period. Built on a limited scale, the baths could only have served the monastic community who lived within the compound (Magen and Talgam 1990:106).

The bathhouse in the Monastery of Theodorus and Cyriacus, on the other hand, was built outside the main entrance, on the southern side of the complex. The excavators date the bathhouse to the Umayyad period and argue that it constituted a later addition to the monastery (Amit, Seligman and Zilberbod 2003:144–145).

In the excavations at Ḥorbat Zikhrin, from 1982 to 1985, two bathhouses were discovered. The first was part of a large building that was only partially excavated. The ruins of this bathhouse were very close to another well-constructed building referred to by the excavator as a monastery, although no remains of any sort of church were found within the compound. The second bathhouse was uncovered at a distance of c. 150 m to the south of the first one; it stood amid several habitation units adjacent to a church (Fisher 1985).

The monastic compound of Hilarion in the Gaza Strip, dated by the excavators to the sixth century CE, contained a church with a crypt, an annexed chapel and a baptistery, a well, a bath complex, a refectory and a hostelry (Elter and Hassoune 2005).

The bathing installations associated with these monastic compounds accommodated both the host monks and their guest pilgrims. Whether they were located within the walls of the monastery or outside, their presence clarifies two points: (a) bodily cleanliness was not taboo in the early Christian monasticism in the Holy Land; (b) early Christian pilgrims enjoyed comfortable hospitality in the monasteries they visited.

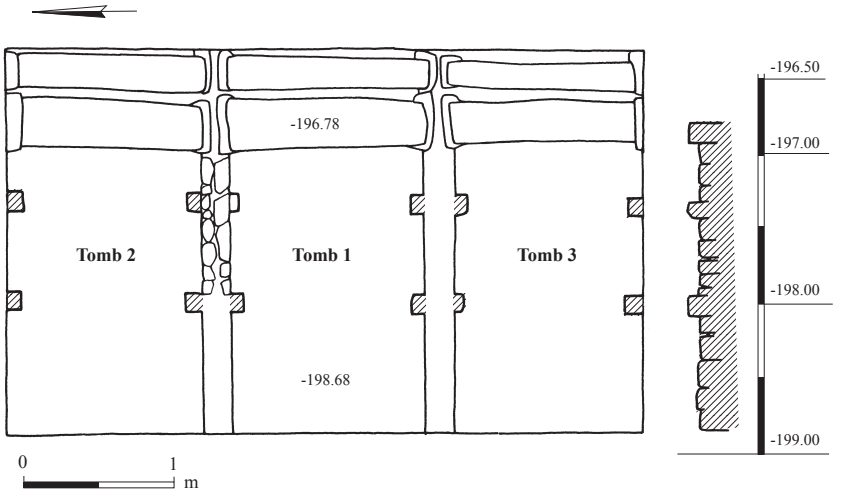
Although the bathhouses at Kursi and the other monasteries mentioned contained almost all the basic components (*praefurnium*, heated pools, *caldarium* and *frigidarium*) typical of normal Roman/Byzantine *balnea*, they differed in many other supplementary spaces, such as: the *tepidarium* (tepid room) and *apodyterium* (dressing room). They also lacked *palaestrae*, swimming pools and all the ancillary equipment for luxurious recreation and enjoyment usually found in large public bathhouses. These deficiencies can be understood by their context: the bathhouses were intended to provide a measure of hospitality to a small, specific group of people, namely Christian pilgrims. Being within or adjacent to a monastic compound required modesty both in plan and function. Thus, they were restricted to serving the hygienic needs of the bathers and not given to the pleasures of the flesh.

AREA D (Plan 2; Figs. 14, 15)

The Tombs

The soundings opened in Area D, located to the east of the church just behind the wall of the apse, yielded a well-preserved complex of subterranean rooms used for burial. So far, only three small rectangular chambers have been uncovered; however, the underground complex undoubtedly contained more than these three similar tombs. An additional tomb, of the cist type, was uncovered south of the burial complex (see below).

The plan, size and general layout of all three tombs were exactly the same. They were arranged in a straight line sharing common inner walls. The ground plan of each tomb was the same: a rectangular space measuring 1.20 × 2.35 m (inner dimensions). The height



Plan 2. Area D: Tombs 1–3, plan and section.

from floor to ceiling was 1.75 m. The walls were constructed of roughly dressed basalt masonry, similar to the walls of the church (Fig. 14). The joints were filled with a whitish plaster mixed with small stones. Stone ledges were left along both interior walls of each chamber—two in each wall, projecting about 0.3 m inward. Since no entrances were provided, these ledges undoubtedly served as footholds for those entering from above to entomb the deceased (Fig. 14). Once burial was completed, stone beams (1.6 m long, 0.35 m wide, 0.2 m thick) were placed over each tomb (Fig. 15).

The tombs contained the disarticulated bones of several dozen humans. From a cursory check of the skeletal remains, Nagar (this volume) concluded that they represented individuals of a wide age-range, from children to the elderly, and both sexes. Considering the large quantity of human skeletal remains found in the three tombs, the burial goods, such as usually accompanied the dead in the Roman and Byzantine times, were relatively scant.

The cist tomb, south of the burial complex, was constructed of rectangular stones. It contained fragmentary, mostly disarticulated remains of at least 13 burials.

Fig. 14. Interior of Tomb 1.

Finds from the Tombs

Mixed with the skeletal remains in the tombs were ceramic-bowl and lamp fragments; glass vessels and beads (see Katsnelson, this volume); iron and bronze jewelry; buckles, bells, chain fragments and other appurtenances; assorted iron weapons and tools; and incised bone plaques. Four coins were found, three of them perforated (see Bijovsky, below).

Fig. 15. Stone beams covering the tombs.

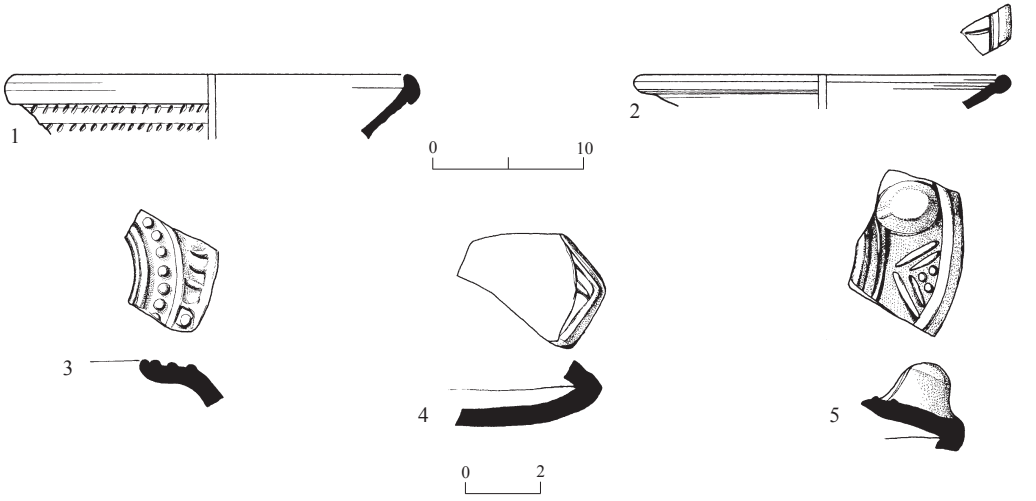


Fig. 16. Ceramic finds from Tomb 2.

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Description
1	Bowl	45/1	Red-brown clay, red slip on int. and ext.; incised decoration
2	Platter	45/2	Brown clay, red slip on int. and ext.
3	Oil lamp	45/4	Buff clay; relief decoration
4	Oil lamp	55	Buff clay; relief decoration

Pottery (Figs. 16, 17)

Bowls (Fig. 16:1, 2).— Several rims of bowls, of the Late Roman C Type, Form 10, dating to the sixth–seventh centuries CE (Hayes 1972:343–346, Fig. 71), were found in Tomb 2.

Lamps (Figs. 16:3, 4; 17).— Two small sherds of oil lamps of the slipper type (Fig. 16:3, 4), also discovered in Tomb 2, date to the late Byzantine period (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978:112–116). Of great interest is the fragmented *polilychnos* (multi-wick lamp) found in Tomb 1 (Fig. 17). The *polilychnos* is of brittle buff clay covered in a brownish slip. The base is flat and a loop handle is attached on the rear. The large central filling-hole is surrounded by two raised ridges. The space on either side of the filling-hole is symmetrically decorated in relief, with a vine scroll springing from an amphora set at the center of the nozzle. Within the loops of each vine are depicted a human figure, a bird and a flower or fruit. The *polilychnos* is generally dated to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, third–fifth centuries CE (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978:108–109).

Small Finds

Iron Rings (Fig. 18).— Among the small finds, the most interesting is a group of engraved iron rings, five legible (to a greater or lesser degree) and several additional pieces in poor or fragmentary condition. Each ring is composed of a circle framing a concave disc that was skillfully engraved in intaglio. On two of the rings (Figs. 18:1, 2), distinct human portraits were engraved. Another ring (Fig. 18:3) portrayed an indistinct, perhaps human image, accompanied by a cross made of five round cavities. A fourth ring (Fig. 18:4) displayed a winged human-like figure, and a fifth ring (Fig. 18:5), a more-or-less geometrical composition in the style of a scrolled lotus.

In order to present the clearest possible images, the drawings and photographs in Fig. 18 are taken from modern impressions made from the signets. However, the descriptions below relate to the mirror-image intaglio-cut engravings on the actual discs, so that left and right are reversed and what is described as a cavity appears as a protrusion.

The two rings bearing human busts are obviously the most important. Ring No. 1 depicts a rather rotund, beardless person, with a garment draped across the chest. The head is surrounded by circles of different sizes, probably representing curly hair. Around the head is a halo, marked by three ovoid cavities, two at the sides and one on top. To the left of the figure is a cross, composed of a vertical arm intersected by two horizontal ones.

Ring No. 2 shows a bearded human head similarly enclosed in a halo with three marked points. The beard is long and forked, while the coiffure forms a triangle over the brows. Two trefoil symbols are engraved to the left and right of the head.

In early Christian iconography, as was the case in medieval and later iconography, the halo over the head was the accepted distinguishing mark of saints or other greatly venerated persons such as the Byzantine Christian emperors. However, the engravings on these two rings cannot represent the portrait of a Byzantine emperor for the simple reason that the crossed nimbus (as indicated by the three connecting points on the halo) was reserved exclusively for Christ. If this is correct, the two engraved rings found in the burials at Kursi may be added to the list of early Christian metal works and jewelry depicting the image of Christ.

Engraved rings made of various metals (such as gold, silver, bronze or iron), depicting religious symbols or busts of saints, the Virgin Mary and Christ, were common among the early Christians. Their popularity increased from the sixth century onward (Ross 1965:52–62). Apart from their importance for the history of Christian iconography, the engraved rings from Kursi, depicting Christ both bearded and beardless, may provide good evidence for the date of the burials. The sixth century and especially the Justinianic era, 548–565 CE, constitutes a decisive turning point in Christian

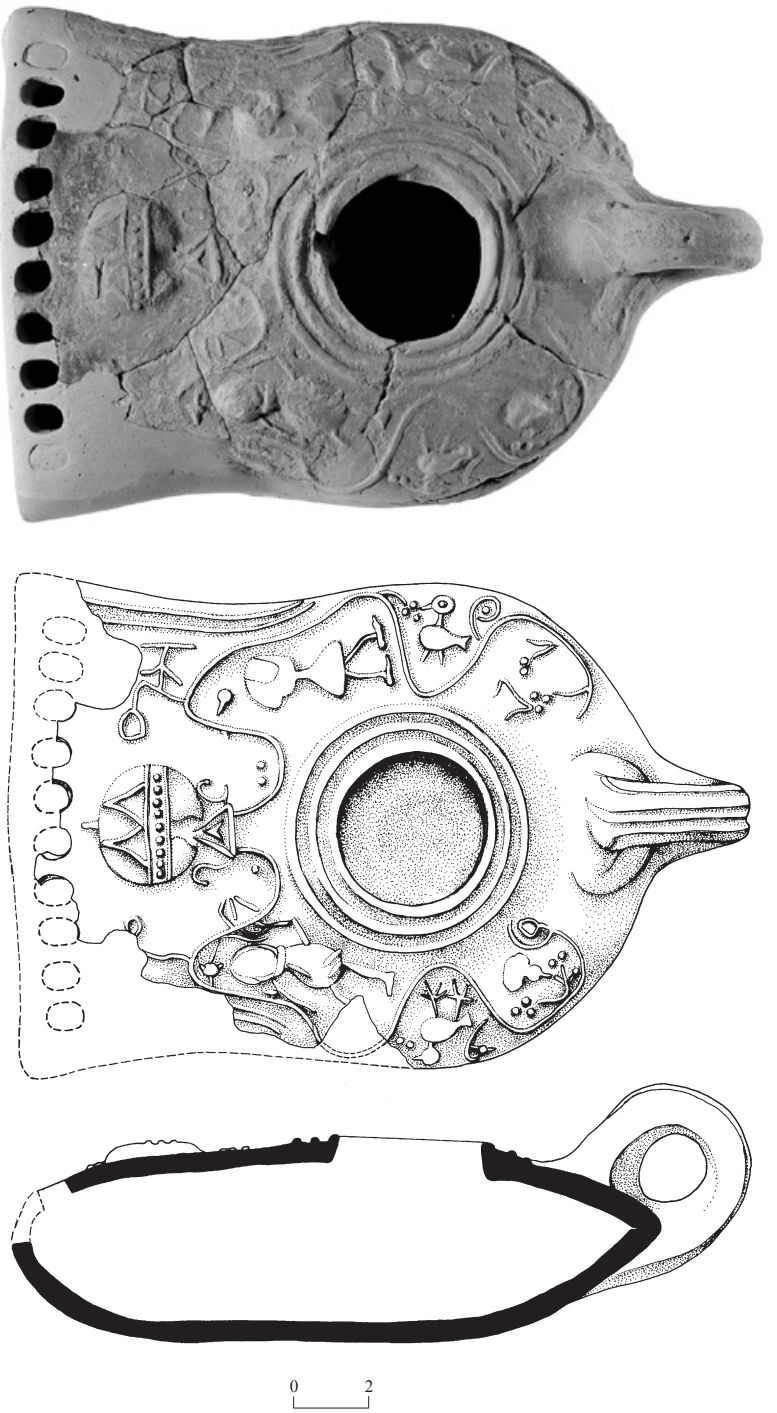


Fig. 17. A multi-wick (*polilychnos*) lamp from Tomb 1.

Fig. 18. Engraved iron rings from the tombs.

iconography. At about that time, there was a tendency to disengage from Greco-Roman artistic tradition and to adopt the manner of oriental spiritual representation (Kitzinger 1977:99–112). A long-bearded face and large eyes are among the most typical features of the new style for the depiction of Christ and the saints, and the bearded bust of Christ portrayed in Fig. 18:2 is a convincing illustration of these new stylistic tendencies. A very similar style characterizes many other depictions of Christ on ivory diptychs (Grabar 1966: Pls. 338–340, 363), pilgrim flasks from Palestine (Grabar 1958: Pl. XVI:10) and golden medallions (Kitzinger 1977: Pl. 218), all of which are dated to the sixth–seventh centuries CE.

The ring in Fig. 18:1, showing Christ beardless and with curly hair, can also be dated to the sixth century CE, as both types, bearded and beardless, were represented during this transitional period. The curly hair over the brows is also a characteristic element in Christian iconography of the sixth century CE (Grabar 1966:186, Pl. 201).

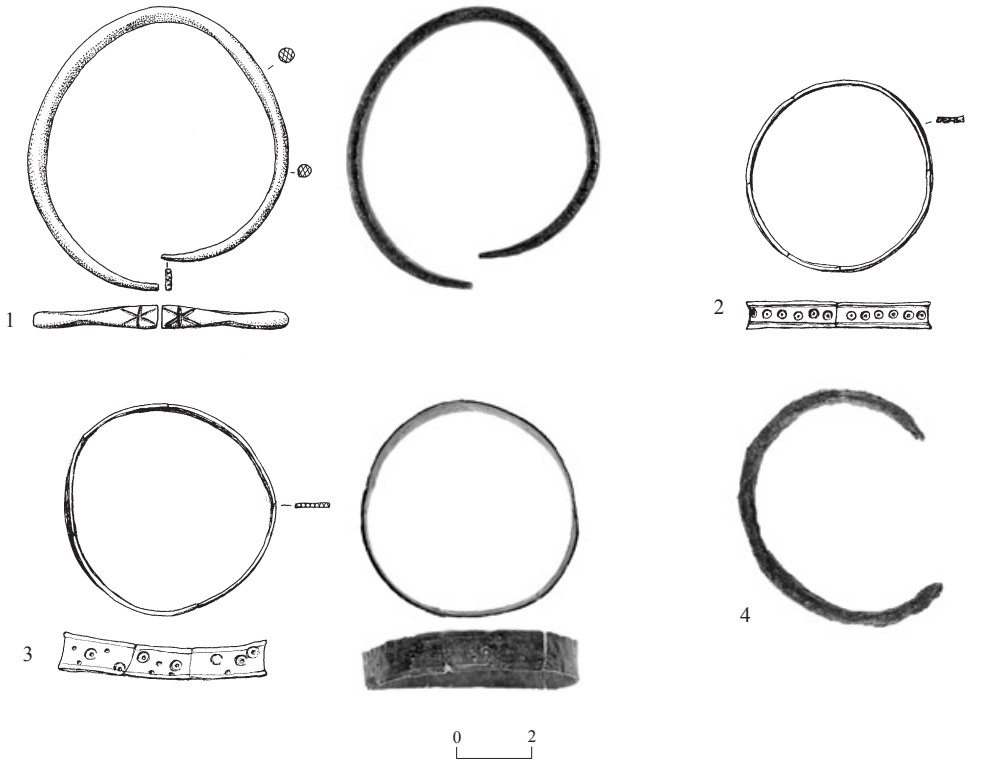


Fig. 19. Bronze bracelets from the tombs.

Bronze Bracelets (Fig. 19).— The bracelets are of three different types, all of which are well-known and common in the Roman to Early Islamic periods. One bracelet (Fig. 19:1) is made of a thick, round band, its square ends decorated with incised lines (Patrich and Rafael 2008:422, No. 27). Two others (Fig. 19:2, 3) are thin flat bands of bronze decorated with small circles and dots at their center (Stern 1997: Fig. 12:47; Sion 2007:23, Fig. 4:6, 7). There are at least four examples (some fragmentary) of the simplest type of bracelet (Fig. 19:4), made of a thin, undecorated band with a round section (Tzaferis 1982: Pl. VII:4; Stern 1997:123, Fig. 12:48–53).

Bronze Buckles (Fig. 20:1, 2).— Two buckles were found. Buckle No. 1 has a rectangular plate perforated with twelve holes, arranged in rows of three: two sets of six holes each, for attachment to the belt. In Buckle No. 2, the shape of the plate attached to the rear is shorter and has only three holes. In both cases, the clasp mechanism follows the same principle as in belts today. Quite a large collection of Roman–Byzantine buckles was found in the excavations of Caesarea Maritima (Rafael 2008:447–448, Nos. 208–220).

Bells (Fig. 20:3).— Several bells, most fragmentary, were found in the tombs. Small bells made of bronze are fairly common among burial goods in the Roman and Byzantine periods (Stern 1997: Fig. 13:59, 60; Tzaferis 1982: Pl. VII:4; Haddad 2007: Fig. 8:4, 5). The practical application of small bells is quite uncertain, but it is widely believed that they were used as charms against evil eye, as musical instruments, or in religious ceremonies attached to the ceremonial priestly clothes (Gorali 1971).

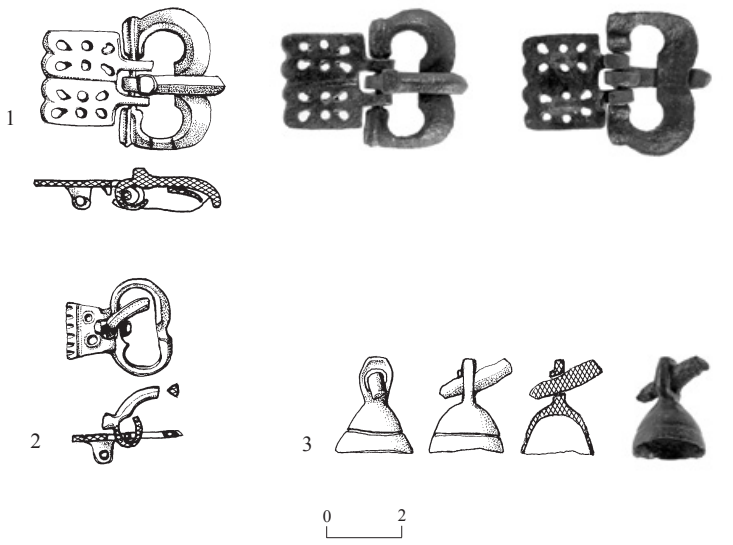


Fig. 20. Bronze buckles and a bell from the tombs.

Weapons/Tools (Fig. 21).— Of great interest are the iron weapons and agricultural implements found in the tombs. Such finds are usually rare in ordinary Byzantine tombs, especially when they come from a monastic environment. The collection included: three spearheads (Figs. 21:1–3), a curved knife (Fig. 21:4), an axe (Fig. 21:5), and miniscule fragments of two arrowheads (not illustrated). Two of the spearheads (Fig. 21:1, 2) were fitted to the handle by a solid, long pointed tang. The third (Fig. 21:3) was fitted by a deep socket. A similar spearhead with a socket handle was found in Area C in Kursi, erroneously described in the final publication of the dig as a dagger (Tzaferis 1983:65, Pl. XVI:10). The curved knife (Fig. 21:4), badly corroded, was fitted to the handle by a pointed tang, as were similar knives found elsewhere (Rafael 2008:449, Nos. 241, 242). The axe (Fig. 21:5) has an unusual shape, with no parallels from other excavated sites in Israel. Measuring 2 × 8 cm, it is quite thin, with three holes in its rear for attachment to the handle. Both sides of the blade are decorated with circles and dots.

Decorated Bone Objects (Fig. 22)
Two rectangular pieces (Fig. 22:1, 2) were very probably parts of different handles—of knives or of some other domestic tool. Both are incised with circles and dots, a motif commonly used on such objects during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. Number 1 is smoothly finished and decorated on both sides. Number 2 is finished and decorated on only one face, with an elaborate pattern, consisting of interlaced circles, a motif also used in mosaic pavements (Tzaferis 1983: Pl. XI:3).

The square plaque (Fig. 22:3) was undoubtedly part of a cosmetics box with inlaid decoration. Its back is plain, while the front is decorated with a quatrefoil design or rosette set around a circle. The spaces left between the four leaves form the arms of an isosceles cross stemming from the central circle.

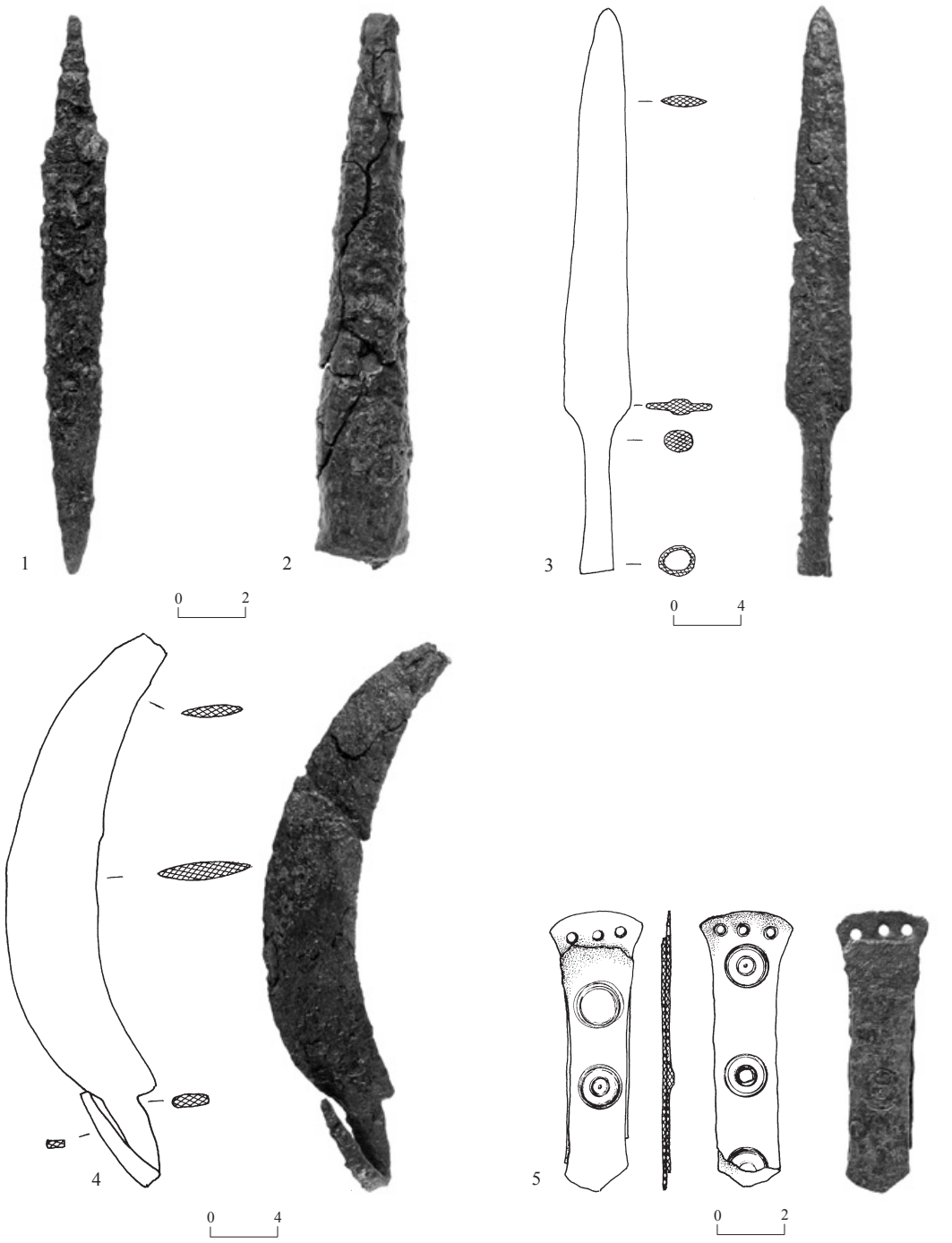


Fig. 21. Weapons/tools from the tombs.

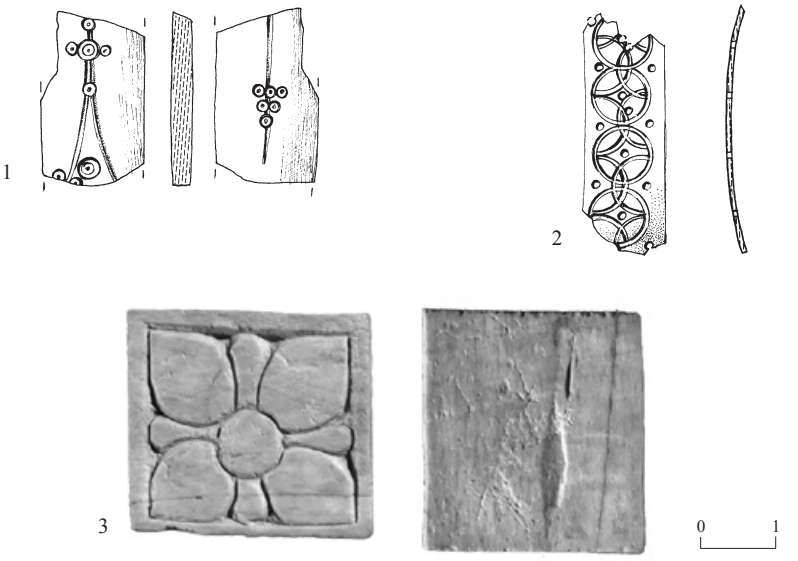


Fig. 22. Bone plaques from the tombs.

Coins
Gabriela Bijovsky

1. Reg. No. 18, Tomb 1, Area D, IAA 75891.
Julian II the Apostate, Antioch, 361–363 CE.
Obv.: [DN FL CL IVLIANVS NOB CAES] Bust r., pearl-diademed, cuirassed and draped.
Rev.: SECVRITAS REIPVB Bull stg. r. In exergue: ANTA flanked by palm branches.
Æ, ↖, 5.23 g, 26 mm.
LRBC 2:100, Nos. 2640–2641.

2. Reg. No. 22, Tomb 1, Area D, IAA 75897.
Byzantine, sixth century CE, Constantinople.
Obv.:]NV[Bust r., diademed, cuirassed and draped.
Rev.: **M** below E; in exergue: CON.
Æ *follis*, 5.22 g, 23 mm. Pierced and worn.

3. Reg. No. 20, Tomb 1, Area D, IAA 75898.
Byzantine, sixth century CE (Maurice Tiberius?).
Obv.: [---] Bust facing.
Rev.: Obliterated.
Æ, 6.05 g, 25 mm. Very worn, pierced with bronze loop, used as a medallion.

4. Reg. No. 92, Tomb 2, Area D, IAA 75892.
Byzantine, sixth century CE.
Obv.: [---] Bust r., diademed, cuirassed and draped.
Rev.: **M** all the details are illegible.
Æ *follis*, 13.17 g, 26 × 28 mm. Pierced.

Discussion

Dating of the Tombs
On the basis of the dating indicated by the coins, the glass (see Katsnelson, this volume), the ceramic vessels, the rings and the other small finds, the common burial took place during the

late Byzantine period, i.e., the late sixth to early seventh centuries CE.

The Historical Significance of the Burials

The general character of the tombs, the variety of the finds and, more specifically, the manner in which the skeletal remains were deposited, clearly indicate that the tombs were not used for normal interments or as a bone-deposit in continuous use. Once the bones were deposited, they were covered by heavy stone beams, never to be reopened for new burials. The act of burial was done once and for all, a fact also affirmed by the date of the coins.

The skeletal remains were very probably collected from provisional entombments and given a proper burial in a convenient and very secure place next to the eastern wall of the church. Such burial clearly reflects some tragic historical event that took place in the monastery toward the very end of the Byzantine period, such as a massacre or an epidemic.

The Persian invasion of 614 CE, the destructive and murderous march of the Persian army, which particularly endangered monks and monasteries in Byzantine Palestine, might have been that historical event.

If this was the case, we may assume that among the victims were not only monks but also many lay Christians, including women and children from the vicinity, who would have sought refuge within the walls of the monastery. Following the expulsion of the Persians in 628 CE, the relics and remains were deposited in a communal tomb built expressly for that purpose.

NOTE

[1] The excavations (Permit No. A-3462; License Nos. G-86/2002, G-46/2003), directed by the author and Dr. Charles Page, were conducted on behalf of the IAA and the Jerusalem Institute of Biblical Studies. The field work was done by volunteers coming mostly from the United States. Field supervisors were the late Pinhas Porat during the 2001 and 2002 seasons and Professor John Laughlin from Danville University Virginia in 2003. Assisting in the excavation and the preparation of this report were Vadim Essman, Tania Kornfeld and Israel Vatkin (surveying and drafting); Natalya Zak (finalization of maps and plans for publication); Tsila Sagiv and Clara Amit (photography); and Carmen Hersch and Noga Ze'evi (drawing of objects). The finds were studied by Gabriela Bijovsky (coins), Natalya Katsnelson (glass) and Yossi Nagar (skeletal remains).

In 2004, the author conducted an additional season of excavations (License No. G-70/2004), which is not included in this report.

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