

A BYZANTINE-PERIOD MONASTERY AT HAR ḤOMA, BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND BETHLEHEM

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2012 and June–August 2013, two seasons of salvage excavations were conducted on the northern slope of a high hill southeast of the Har Ḥoma neighborhood in south Jerusalem, prior to construction (Fig. 1; map ref. 221995/625300). Pine trees planted after the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 impeded recognition of the site prior to the excavation, although a development survey had been conducted in the area.¹

A single-phase, sixth–seventh-century CE Byzantine coenobium monastery was uncovered at the site, and several quarries and agricultural installations were documented nearby. Despite the monastery's poor state of preservation, its plan can be identified as comprising a central courtyard surrounded by rooms, a chapel and a winepress. The complex resembles other monasteries from this period between Jerusalem and Bethlehem (Aharoni 1964; Avner 2003; Eirikh-Rose 2007; Seligman 2015).

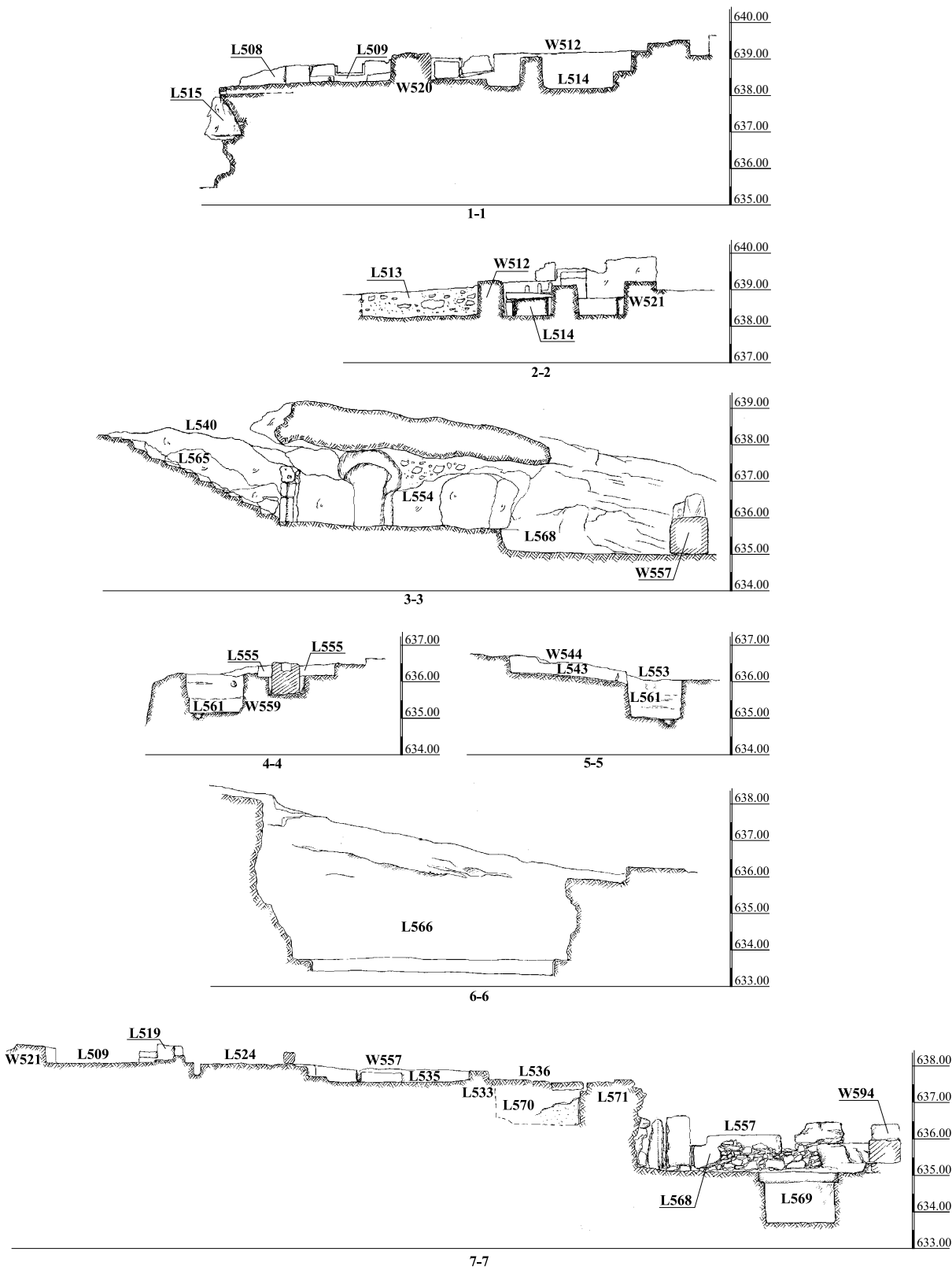
ARCHITECTURAL REMAINS AND STRATIGRAPHY

The monastery's rectangular structure (26 × 16 m; 416 sq m) is built on the northern slope of a high hill. Oriented on a precise north–south axis (Plan 1; Fig. 2), it is composed of three wings flanking a central courtyard. The site was found in a poor state of preservation due

¹ The excavations at Har Ḥoma C (Permit Nos. A-6520, A-6847), on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and financed by the Ministry of Housing and Construction, were directed by the author with the assistance of Nissan Nehama (administration), N. Shohami (area supervision, 2013 season), Avraham Hajian and Mark Kunin (surveying and drafting), Asaf Peretz (field photography), S. Al-‘Amlah (metal detection), Yossi Nagar (physical anthropology), Tamar Winter (glass), Gabriela Bijovsky (numismatics), Danit Levi (GPS), T. Gonen (pottery restoration), Irina Lidsky (pottery drawing), Clara Amit (studio photography), Avi Ganor (glass restoration), Carmen Hersch (glass drawing), Lena Kupersmidt and Victoria Nosikovsky (metal laboratory), Dov Porotsky (final plans) and Sky View Company Ltd. (aerial photography).



Plan 1. The monastery complex, plan and sections.



Plan 1. (cont.).



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the monastery, looking north.



Fig. 3. The threshold fragment in W562, looking north.

one with no hewn foundation, and therefore, it was identified solely by the few surviving stones placed directly on bedrock. The threshold fragment ($0.4\text{--}0.6 \times 1.8$ m), probably representing half of the original entrance, was found standing on its long side, and it seems to have been raised at some point (Fig. 3). The threshold may have been turned over during the robbing in an attempt to reuse it, but it was left in place.

The Western Wing

The western wing, excavated during the 2012 season, comprises two rectangular rooms, of which only hewn wall foundations and collapsed stones remained. The entrance to the northern room (L509; 2.2×2.3 m; Fig. 4), in W519, was through the northern wing's foyer (L524) to its east. The doorway (0.85 m wide, 0.75 m long) is situated 0.16 m higher than the leveled floor and is hewn into the bedrock. Adjacent to the northern doorjamb is a small square hole (0.10×0.14 m) that served as a door hinge, indicating that this room could be opened or closed as needed.

Round holes were carved into the wall foundation on either side of the entrance, which were probably hidden by the built wall (Fig. 5); their function is unclear. The northern one (diam. 0.28 m, depth 0.25 m) opened into the room on its southwestern side, making it impossible to hold any liquids. Beneath it was a square-shaped flat platform (0.50×0.54 m), perhaps connected to it. The southern hole (diam. 0.25 m, depth 0.25 m) yielded three *in situ* gold coins dating from the sixth century CE (see Bijovsky, this volume). According to Bijovsky, this sum could support a monastery of fifteen people for about two months! The high value of these coins suggests that the well-hidden hole served as the monastery's safe. The wall built on top of the rock-cut foundations would have created a narrow and hidden opening in the wall, allowing for an easy deposit of the coins, but making withdrawal difficult.

Along the southern wall of the room (W520) is a flat, rectangular bench (0.65×1.40 m; height 0.2 m). On the western side of W520 is a small doorway (width 0.7 m, depth 0.7 m) leading into the southern room of the wing (L514).



Fig. 4. The abbot's room (L509), looking east.



Fig. 5. The entrance to L509, looking west.

The northern room's space is divided into two chambers—L509 on the south, and L508 on the north—by two bases of an arch or columns facing each other, both 0.3 m high (0.5×0.6 m on the east; 0.5×0.9 m on the west). The wall foundations of northern Chamber 508 (2.0×3.2 m) were preserved to a maximum height of 0.3 m. Its northern wall (W557) was built directly above a water cistern (see below) and collapsed into it. The northern room could have belonged to the monastery abbot, perhaps divided into his private chamber on the north (L508), which included a sleeping area, and a more public sector on the south (L509). This may explain the private entrance in the eastern wall (W519), the presence of a safe, and the doorway leading to the southern room (L514).

The southern room (L514) is a large rectangular hall (3.30×6.65 m). The measurements of this hall, equaling to 10×20 Byzantine feet, and the fact that all the foundations were hewn into bedrock, are evidence that the monastery's construction was carefully planned (Fig. 6). The room's main access was from the central courtyard to its east, through a large entrance in W512 (0.5×2.2 m). This entrance was blocked with large orderly-laid stone slabs after the monastery's desertion. The wall foundations were preserved to a maximum height of 1.2 m, and their width ranged from 0.7 m to 0.8 m. Along the room's central axis are two pilasters, one on the north and one on the south, and a hewn square-shaped column with a foundation in the center (Plan 1: Sections 1–1, 2–2). This row of columns supported the room's roof beams. Since no roof tiles were found, the roof was probably flat, and a second floor is not improbable. In the southeastern corner of the hall, between W512 and the southern pilaster, a niche was built of two standing stones topped with a large stone slab (Fig. 7). Its function is unclear.



Fig. 6. Hall 514, looking south.



Fig. 7. The installation in L514, looking south.

On the room's floor were two layers of collapsed building stones meant to be removed for reuse: mostly large stones in the upper layer (Plan 2:a; Fig. 8) and smaller ones in the lower one (Plan 2:b; Fig. 9). All the stones were measured and documented before their removal (Table 1). Although at first glance, the stones' rectangular shape seemed to indicate they were used for roofing, their dimensions confirm that they belonged to a wall. They are mostly much shorter than the space between the walls and the central beam, and are also too heavy to be supported by a central wooden beam. Unlike all the other rooms of the monastery, the nearby villagers did not rob the stones from this space; the reason for this is not clear.

There are at least two possible interpretations for the function of this main hall. One explanation is that it served as the refectory, where the monks' daily meals took place. So far, dining halls have been found in three Judean-desert coenobium monasteries: Martyrius, Khirbat ed-Deir and Theognius (Hirschfeld 2002:253–261); they are long and narrow, similar in shape to Hall 514. A second floor above the dining room may have served as



Plan 2. Collapsed building stones: (a) upper layer; (b) lower layer (see Table 1).



Fig. 8. The collapsed building stones, upper layer, looking north.



Fig. 9. The collapsed building stones, lower layer, looking northeast.

Table 1. Measurements of the Collapsed Building Stones

No.	Length	Width	Height	Comment ⁱ
<i>Upper Layer</i>				
1	0.75	0.67	0.26	Medium
2	1.45	0.68	0.20	Long, broken at the end
3	0.91	0.61	0.61	Medium
4	0.80	0.62	0.18	Medium
5	1.56	0.67	0.20	Long
6	0.91	65.5	0.26	Medium
7	1.88	0.78	0.29	Long
8	0.82	0.37	0.14	Medium
9	0.48	0.35	17.5	
10	0.68	0.70	0.62	Southern rock pedestal
11	0.60	0.47	0.60	
12	1.17	0.77	0.11	Long
13	0.38	0.38	0.30	
14	0.55	0.23	0.45	
15	1.38	0.63	0.20	Long
16	0.50	0.45	0.26	
17	0.59	0.55	0.25	
18	1.20	0.57	0.19	Long
19	0.70	0.55	0.22	
20	0.55	0.42	0.32	
21	0.62	0.40	0.13	
22	0.58	0.53	0.24	
23	0.85	0.63	0.23	+ No. 27 = Long (2.06 m)
24	0.48	0.40	0.28	
25	1.21	0.63	0.22	Long
26	0.40	0.35	0.64	
27	1.24	0.63	0.23	+ No. 23 = Long (2.06 m)
28	1.23	0.46	0.29	Long
29	0.45	0.40	0.14	
30	0.74	0.38	0.37	Medium
<i>Lower Layer</i>				
31	0.55	0.55	0.39	
32	0.40	0.40	0.13	
33	0.52	0.32	0.24	
34	0.50	0.43	0.30	
35	0.30	0.25	0.20	
36	0.50	0.45	0.22	
37	0.60	0.35–0.48	0.20	
38	0.55	0.30	0.30	
39	0.45	0.35	0.25	
40	0.60	0.35	0.43	
41	0.75	0.70	0.20	Medium
42	0.63	0.40	0.17	
43	0.52	0.45	0.35	
44	0.80	0.65	0.20	Medium
45	0.50	0.45	0.40	
46	0.60	0.45	0.30	
47	0.65	0.40	0.25	
48	0.72	0.43	0.20	
49	0.58	0.50	0.15	
50	1.00	0.50	0.30	Long
51	0.70	0.45	0.08	
52	0.50	0.35	0.15	
53	0.50	0.30	0.07	
54	0.50	0.32	0.11	
55	0.48	0.12	0.16	
56	0.56	0.48	0.14	
57	0.45	0.38	0.13	
58	0.73	0.36	0.37	Medium
59	0.67	0.53	0.32	
60	0.51	0.30	0.30	
61	0.45	0.40	0.25	
62	0.70	0.45	0.07	
63	0.40	0.35	0.13	

ⁱ Long = over 1 m; medium = 0.75–1.00 m.

a sleeping area for the monks. Another possibility is that the room served as the monks' communal dwellings, and the dining room was elsewhere, perhaps in L535 of the northern wing (see *Discussion*, below).

The Northern Wing

The northern wing comprises four rooms (Loci 524, 535, 536, 568) on a west–east axis (Plan 1: Section 7–7). The northern wall of this wing (W557) was not preserved due to natural erosion processes.

The western room (L524; 2.4×2.8 m) served as a foyer. Along its western wall (W519) ran a narrow drainage channel, carved into bedrock, partly covered by a stone slab. The channel drained rainwater into a large round cistern adjacent and north of the complex (L566). This room allowed the monastery's dwellers to access the water cistern without exiting the building.

On the eastern side of the room, the floor was covered by the collapsed stones of eastern W572. Only the two doorjambs and the doorway in the southeastern corner of the room survived; the latter had been carelessly blocked during the abandonment of the monastery.

A step (0.5 m high) in the doorway within W572 (see above) descended into a square-shaped room to its east (L535; 4.7×4.8 m; Fig. 10). Large rectangular stones from the collapsed walls covered the floor. The room had hewn and built benches (width 0.5 m) along its western, northern and southern walls. An extension was built at the end of the northern hewn bench. At the joining of this built extension and the floor, some gray plaster remains were visible, used to strengthen and smoothen it. The room's eastern side had no bench or opening, only a hewn wall foundation (W533; 0.5×5.3 , height 0.26 m). This room may have served as a gathering room, and a speaker may have stood in front of the eastern wall and addressed his listeners. Although no other such gathering rooms are known from Byzantine monasteries from the Land of Israel, it may be related to the teaching method known from Egypt, where the monks were given frontal instructions.



Fig. 10. Room 535 and benches, looking north.

The entrance to the next room (L536; 4.0×4.4 ; Fig. 11) was from the central courtyard through a wide doorway (0.5×1.4 m). Two holes served to allocate the hinges of a double-wing door that opened onto the room and could be locked from the inside. Two shallow steps led from the threshold down to the room floor. Inside the room were a few stones from collapsed western W533. The room is bordered on the east by a shallow chiseled line in the bedrock marking the location of dismantled W571. A doorway in this wall probably led into the next room.

At the center of the room, a rectangular tomb (L570; 1.1×2.1 , depth 1.15 m) was carved on an east–west axis and covered by four square still-intact stone slabs (Fig. 12). The tomb’s walls were lined with thick white plaster. Inside the tomb lay the skeleton of an adult male, over 50 years old (see Nagar, this volume), most likely the monastery’s abbot. He was placed on his back, with his head facing west, resting on a raised headrest covered with white plaster (Fig. 13). The tomb yielded no datable artifacts. This tomb was added to the room in a later period in the monastery’s lifetime, and not at the time of its founding.

The easternmost room of the northern wing was not preserved. Its floor, which was also the ceiling of a hewn underground crypt (L568, see below), had collapsed into the crypt beneath it (Fig. 14). Nevertheless, it is possible to estimate its measurements (4.2×7.0 m) based on the crypt’s northern (W557) and eastern (W544) walls and the remains of W571 on the west. As this room was built directly above the crypt and adjacent to the hewn burial 570, it was most likely a chapel. Several quadrangular windowpane fragments found outside the room, at the northeastern corner of the courtyard, were probably intended for windows located within the church (see Winter, this volume: Fig. 1:5).



Fig. 11. Room 536, the monastery abbot’s tomb, aerial view to the north.



Fig. 12. The abbot-tomb stone-slab cover (L570), looking east.



Fig. 13. The plastered tomb (L570) with headrest, looking west.



Fig. 14. The northeastern corner of the complex collapsed onto the crypt, looking southwest.

The Eastern Wing

Only one room was revealed in this wing, south of the chapel and adjacent to it (L537; Fig. 15). The square room (2.2×2.4 m) was identified mainly by its well-preserved floor makeup; its walls were very poorly preserved due to stone robbing. Only the built foundation of western W526 (width 0.65 m) survived, plastered at the base of its outer (western) face to protect it from water damage (Fig. 16). A plastered draining channel (L560) ran alongside W526, continuing southeast and ending at the complex's eastern wall (W544). The water may have drained further, under the wall and out of the courtyard, but no archaeological



Fig. 15. Room 537, with its floor makeup, looking north.



Fig. 16. The plaster protecting the foundation of W526, looking south.

evidence was found to prove it. Only the hewn imprints of the southern wall's (W552; width 0.8 m) missing stones were preserved.

Although the floor surface was not preserved, the fill above the floor makeup contained many large white tesserae, indicating that the room may have been paved with a mosaic. Half of the floor makeup (L567) was excavated, but no diagnostic pottery sherds or coins were found within it.

This room was the only one in the complex where the leveled rock did not serve as the floor, and the wall foundations were not hewn but constructed. Therefore, the room apparently did not form part of the building's original plan and was probably added later. This room seems to have served as the *Diaconicon* for the church's holy artifacts and had an entrance in southern W522.

The Central Courtyard

The rectangular courtyard (10 × 20 m) was hewn into the bedrock but not leveled. It was used for the monastery's daily activities known from other monasteries to have taken place in the open space/courtyard, such as cooking. Although no remains of an oven or hearth were found, the cooking activities probably took place near the courtyard's southeastern corner, distanced from the entrance, the rooms and the chapel.

In the eastern part of the courtyard, a stairway of ten uneven steps (L565; depth 2.2 m, width 0.8–0.9 m) was carved into the soft limestone layer under the hard *nari* (Fig. 17), descending from the courtyard's surface to the entrance of a cave (L554, see below).

The Cave and the Crypt

The entrance to the cave (width 0.8 m, height 1.5 m) was through a doorway at the foot of the hewn staircase (Fig. 18). The doorjambs were built by placing a few large stones, one atop the other, of which only three remained on each side. A hinge socket for a door that opened into the cave and could be locked from the inside was visible on the eastern side (Fig. 19). The door had double locks: a drilled hole in the floor near the western doorjamb for a vertical post and another hole in the western doorjamb's top stone (height 1.2 m) for a horizontal bar. The entrance ceiling was extensively destroyed by the roots of a pine tree.

The cave (L554) was quarried into the soft limestone layer beneath the hard *nari* (Plan 1: Section 3–3); its estimated size was about 6 × 8 m. It was filled with alluvium, and only its western side was excavated (2 × 6 m). The function of a rounded chamber (1.5 × 2.0 m) carved into the western wall is unclear. The cave likely served as a storage space. The absence of storage vessels probably indicates that the monastery was not abandoned in haste but in a planned, orderly manner.

The cave connected on the north to a rectangular room (L568; 3.7 × 8.5 m) that served as the crypt of the chapel (Fig. 20); before its collapse, the chapel's floor was also the ceiling of the crypt (see Fig. 14). The crypt had two entrances: one from the cave on the south, by means of a shallow hewn step; and the other (width 0.85 m), with two doorjambs, through its northern wall (W557). The latter was carefully blocked with a large standing



Fig. 17. The staircase (L565) leading to the cave, looking south.



Fig. 18. The cave's entrance and doorjambs, looking south.



Fig. 19. The eastern doorjamb of the cave's entrance, looking east.



Fig. 20. The crypt, looking east.

monolithic stone during the complex's abandonment (Fig. 21). These are the only remains of the complex's northern enclosing wall, preserved to a maximum height of 1.05 m and built of two rows (0.5–0.8 m wide): an outer northern face of large monolithic stones, and an inner small-fieldstone fill southern face that would have been covered in plaster.

The eastern wall (W556; 0.9×4.0 m, 1.1 m high) was built of large rectangular stones. The central stone, partly rounded, formed part of the apse (Fig. 22), whose base was carved into the bedrock, its upper portion being built and forming part of the wall. Located near the northeastern corner of the complex, it was integrated within the complex's eastern closing wall (W544; length 16.5 m). The western wall of the crypt was carved into bedrock and was poorly preserved.

Facing the apse, a rectangular hewn tomb (L569; 1.1×2.1 m, depth 1.4 m) was found empty and without its covering slabs (Fig. 23). The tomb probably once contained the remains of the founder hermit, who originally lived in the cave and to whom the monastery was likely dedicated. This phenomenon is known from other Judean desert monasteries, such as Euthymius, Theodosius and Martyrius (Hirschfeld 2002:286–298).

Since the tomb and the apse in the crypt were on the same axis, it appears they were built together after the hermit passed away. The tomb was most likely a pilgrimage site during the monastery's lifetime, and the remains were removed from it when the monastery was abandoned.



Fig. 21. The blocked northern entrance to the crypt (W557), looking north.



Fig. 22. The apse at the eastern wall of the crypt (W556), looking north.

If it was a saint's tomb, then the crypt may have served as a pilgrimage site for Christians traveling between the two holy cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem on the main road which passes about 2.7 km west of the site. They likely entered the crypt through the northern entrance, paid their respects, and left through the cave and the southern staircase. The short distance between the stairway's highest step and the assumed line of the southern monastery



Fig. 23. The empty hermit tomb (L569)
in the crypt, looking east.

wall (W562) suggests there was an exit wicket at its end leading out of the complex. If so, the monks' privacy would not have been disturbed, at the same time allowing many pilgrims to visit the founder's holy tomb.

The Water System

Like all Byzantine desert sites, this monastery had a simple drainage system for collecting every drop of rainwater, from the roofs and the courtyard, into a large cistern.

Two water channels were found in the northwestern corner of the courtyard: one, from the east (0.1×4.7 m, depth 0.5 m), running alongside W522 of the northern wing, and the other connecting with the latter from the south (0.2×1.0 m, depth 0.3), combining into one larger channel (0.2×5.0 m, depth 0.2–0.3; Fig. 24). As mentioned above, the combined channel was hewn into the bedrock floor of the northern wing's entrance room (L524) and was found covered by thin stone slabs.

The water drained from the main channel north into a round plastered settling pool (L515; diam. 1 m, depth 1.1 m). It was damaged at a later period, and only its southern part survived (Fig. 25; Plan 1: Section 1–1). The floodwater would drain into the settling pool, where the dirt and the dust would sink to the bottom, and the clean water would then spill into the large cistern.

The elliptic cistern (L566; 8.5×9.0 m) was preserved 2.6 m deep and could hold about 155 cu m of water (Fig. 26; Plan 1: Section 6–6). It was coated with white hydraulic plaster, very well-preserved on the floor but poorly on the walls, a difference explained by the



Fig. 24. The main water channel (L524), looking north.



Fig. 25. The ruined plastered settling pool (L515); note the mouth of the water channel at the top, looking south.



Fig. 26. The water cistern (L566), looking southwest.

fact that the floor was always covered in water and sediment that kept the plaster wet and at a relatively constant humidity level. In contrast, the plaster on the wall, affected by the cistern's water-level changes, would alternate between dry and wet states. A 0.5 m high "bench" of unclear function surrounds the floor of the cistern.

On the southern side of the cistern, a rounded niche, located just below the northern wing's entrance room (L524), may have facilitated drawing water from the cistern in the entrance room, as mentioned above.

The Winepress

Outside the monastery and adjacent to its eastern wall was a hewn winepress complex composed of three parts: a square treading floor, a square collecting vat, and a pressing device (Fig. 27; Plan 1: Sections 4–4, 5–5).

The treading floor (L543; 3.05×3.05 m, depth 0.2 m), paved with a white mosaic, was well-preserved. In its northeastern corner, a small channel led the grape juice into a deep hewn collecting vat (L561; 1.45×1.45 m, depth 0.87–1.22 m; max. 2.3 cu m). The collecting vat had a partly preserved white mosaic floor, and its walls were covered in a gray plaster preserved to a maximum height of 0.43 m. In the northeastern corner of the vat, a typical Byzantine ceramic basin was embedded in the floor for collecting residual liquids (Fig. 28; diam. 0.42 m, depth 0.2 m). Although the basin definitely dates from the Byzantine period, the engraved decorative lines on its exterior are characteristic of Late Roman wares. No parallel was found for this basin, but it is probably dated to the sixth–seventh centuries CE, within the monastery's lifetime.



Fig. 27. Aerial view of the winepress.



Fig. 28. The Byzantine basin embedded in the floor of the winepress.

It is interesting to note that both the treading floor and the collecting vat fit the standard Byzantine measurements—the floor measures 9.5×9.5 Byzantine feet and the vat, 4.5×4.5 .²

South of the collecting vat and east of the treading floor, an irregularly-shaped hewn surface ($1.8\text{--}2.6 \times 2.25\text{--}2.30$ m) formed part of a secondary pressing installation of the “lever and screw” type, the most common oil-press type in the country during the Byzantine period (Frankel 2009:10; 2010:95). At the center of the surface, a rounded stone weight (L573) of the “Samaria Screw Weight” type (Frankel 1999:111–113) lay in a hewn rounded hole (diam. 1 m, depth 0.5 m). The weight (diam. 0.78 m, 0.85 m high) weighed about 1100 kg.³ A socket cut into its top and two square mortises on its sides served to fasten the screw in place. The beam would have been attached to the socket through the screw on one end and anchored in a niche in the monastery’s eastern wall (W544) on the other, passing over the southern side of the treading floor. The crushed grapes were gathered into baskets and stacked on the treading floor, under the beam, for secondary pressing.

Given this pressing device’s specific type, a question arises as to whether it formed part of the winepress or whether it had been converted into an oil press. The absence of both the typical press-bed on the treading floor and an olive crushing mill at the site indicates that it was not. While secondary pressing of grapes in the Byzantine period is known from other sites (Amit 2009; Ayalon 2009; Zelinger 2009), it was usually achieved by placing the

² The standard foot length in Byzantium seems to have been 0.3123 m, but in practice, the length fluctuated between 0.308 and 0.320 m (Kazhdan 1991:1708).

³ The weight calculation is based on the estimated weight of hard limestone, i.e., 2.7 g/cc (Shadmon 1972:60).

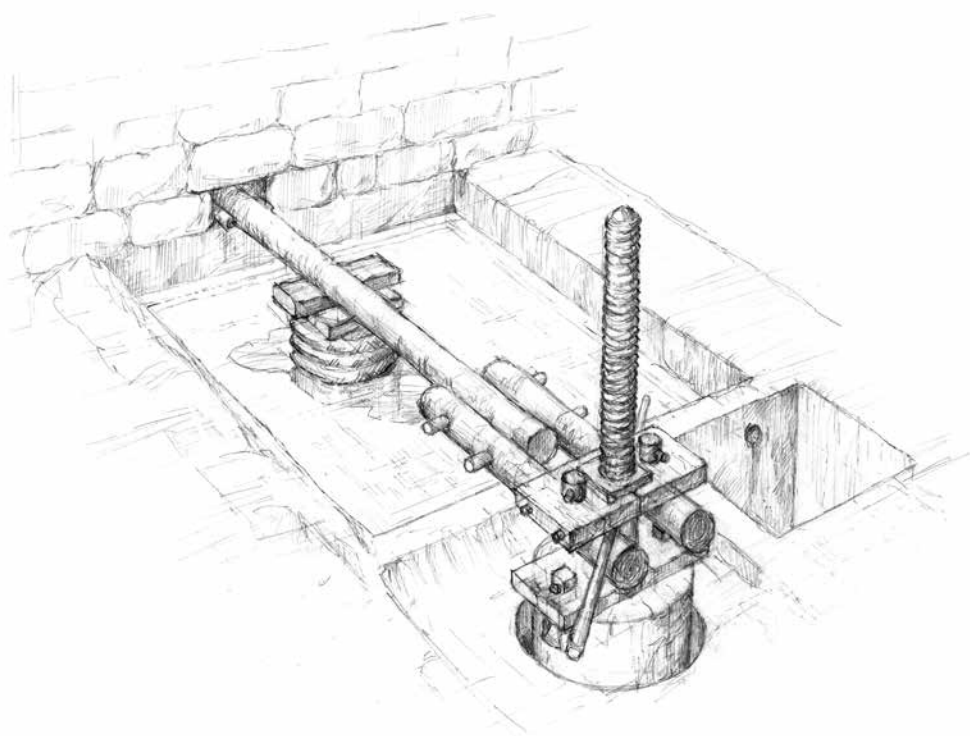


Fig. 29. Proposed reconstruction of the winepress.

crushed grapes on a screw fixed in the middle of the treading floor. In this case, however, the baskets were placed directly on the treading floor and were squeezed by means of a beam (Fig. 29). This technique is very unusual in wine pressing. The only known winepress using the same technique is at a Byzantine-period rural settlement excavated near the Nesher cement-factory limestone quarry, close to Ramla (Avrutis 2015:21–24).⁴ The first half of the fifth century CE is the *terminus post quem* for that installation, a date which was determined based on three coins found during the dismantling of the treading floor and winepress walls.

⁴ The author wishes to thank Eitan Ayalon, from the Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv, for this information. The winepress was excavated by Shlomo Kol Ya'akov and Vladimir Avrutis of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology, University of Haifa.

THE FINDS

The Byzantine-period pottery assemblage of Jerusalem and its surroundings is well-known, mostly because of the intensive explorations in the Old City, but also from finds excavated in monasteries on the outskirts of the city. The primary publication for studying Byzantine assemblages is Magness 1993, which established the Byzantine pottery’s framework, typology and chronology for the Jerusalem area. Excavation reports of a few, well-dated monasteries from the area around the Holy City and the Judean desert published in the previous decade, such as Kh. ed-Deir (Hirschfeld 1999), Deir Ghazali (Avner 2000) and Khirbat Umm Leisun (Seligman and Abu Raya 2002; Seligman 2015), reinforce our knowledge on the material culture of the Byzantine monasteries.

The pottery vessels’ illustrations, presented by location, are followed by a typological discussion. The entire assemblage derived from stratified fills since, as mentioned above, the bedrock served as floor throughout the complex.

Archaeological Contexts

The Courtyard (L539, L540; Fig. 30).— Although found in non-sealed contexts, the pottery sherds from the courtyard are representative of assemblages found in Byzantine monasteries.

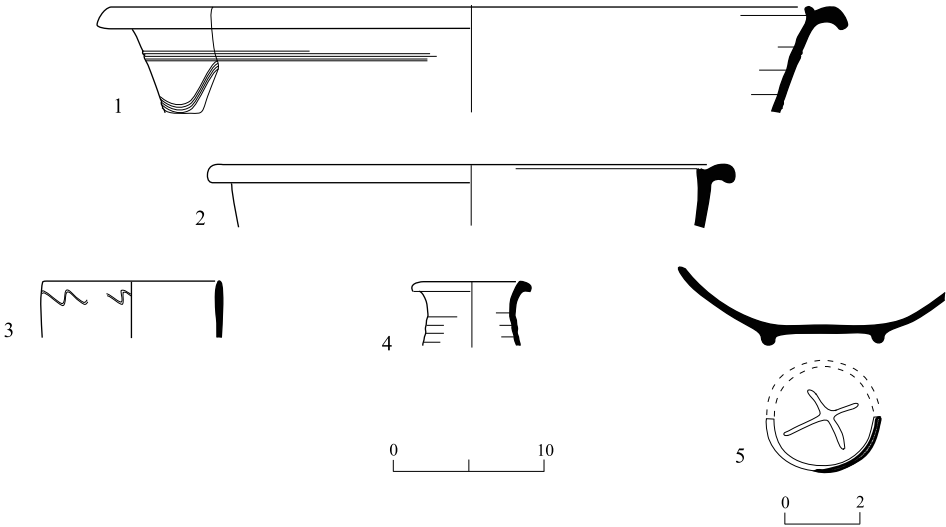


Fig. 30. Pottery from the courtyard (L539, L540).

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Basin	539	5091	Light brown; white and black small grits	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.1:22
2	Bowl	539	5090	Orange-light brown; well-fired	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.1:19
3	Bowl	540	5094	FBW; orange-light brown; well-fired	Magness 1993:194, FBW Bowls 1A: 2
4	Jug	539	5086	Dark orange; high neck	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.2:30
5	Oil lamp	539	5093	Base of an oil lamp; dark brown; well-fired	

The Rubbish Pit (L501; Fig. 31). — A rubbish pit was found in a shallow quarry about 5 m west of the monastery's western W521, from which ashlar stones were hewn for the monastery's construction. This pit was uncovered during the quarry's excavation before the identification of the adjacent monastery complex. The massive amount of pottery discovered in the pit led us to seek its origin. The pottery assemblage from the pit presented here reflects the period of activity at the site.

The Cave (L554, L565; Fig. 32).— The pottery found in the cave was washed in by the water running down from the courtyard to the complex's lower area. Although the pottery was not found in its original context, it is representative of the monastery's daily life.

L514, Below the Collapsed Walls (Fig. 33:1–8).— The pottery from L514 was found among and below the massive stone collapse, thus dating the monastery's last occupation phase.

Fig. 31 ►

No.	Type	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Bowl	5000	Square rim, dark brown; reddish brown slip on int. and ext.	Hayes 1972:345, Fig. 71:4 (LRC Form 10)
2	Bowl	5000	Floor of a dark red bowl with stamped decoration	As No. 1
3	Basin	5000	Arched rim; light orange with incised wavy lines on ext.	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.1:22
4	Basin	5000	Orange-brown; hand-folded decoration	
5	Basin	5000	Rilled rim; light brown; incised wavy lines on ext.	
6	Bowl	5000	Yellow-white; flat rim; vertical incised decoration on ext.	
7	Cooking pot	5000	Dark orange; short neck; out-folded rim	Avner 2000: Fig. 20:6
8	Storage jar	5000	Light orange; high straight rim with ridge at its base	Calderon 1999: Pl. 1: 6
9	Storage jar	5002	Light orange-brown; folded rim	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.2:20
10	Jug	5000	FBW; wide neck; triangular rim	Magness 1993:238
11	Jug	5000	FBW; swollen neck	Vincenz 2007: Pl. 25:1
12	Jug	5000	FBW; wide neck; straight rim	Vincenz 2007: Pl. 25:33
13	Jug	5000	FBW; narrow neck; folded rim	
14	Oil lamp	5001	Large candlestick lamp with ring base	Calderon 1999: Pl. 5:3

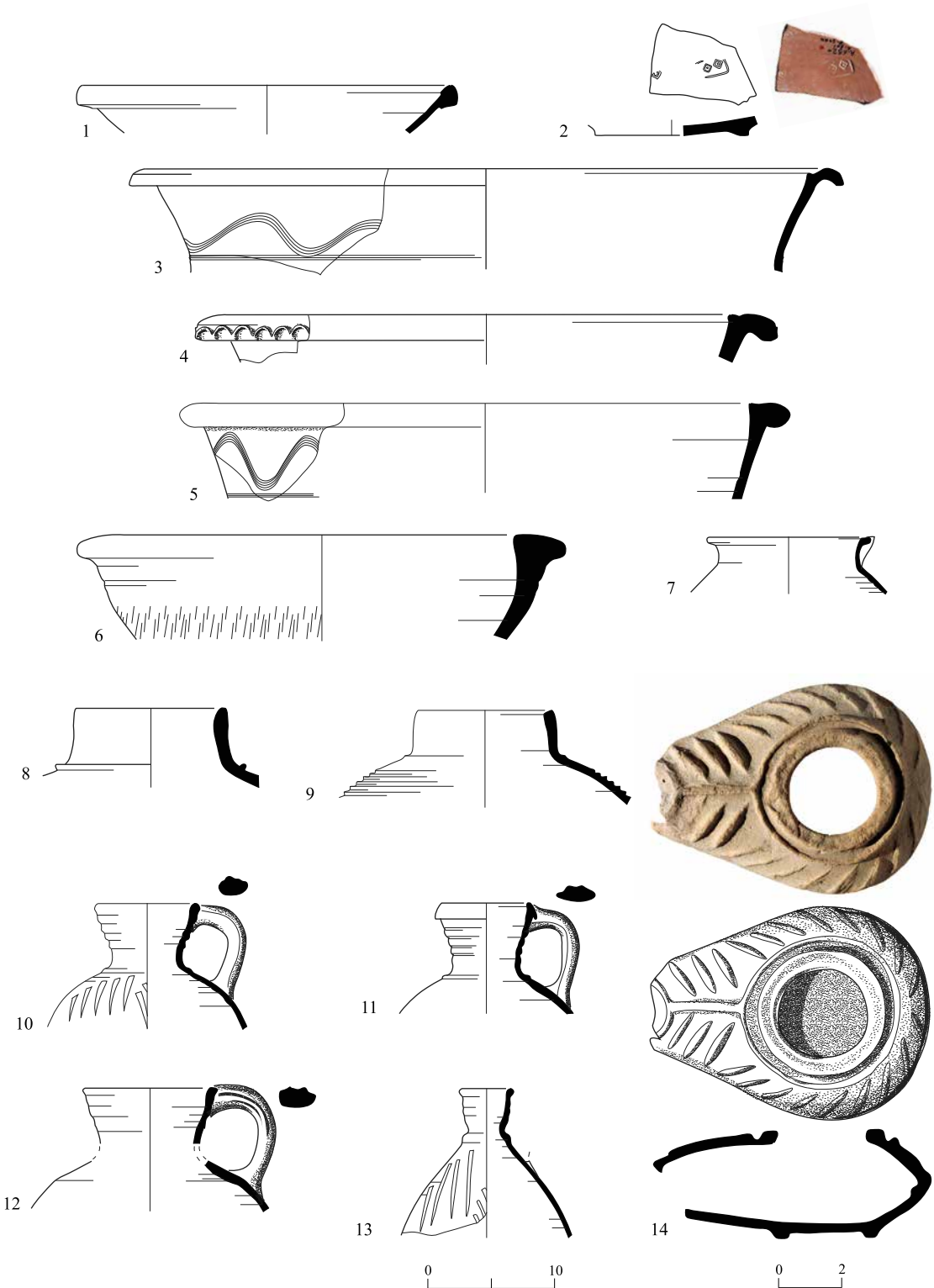


Fig. 31. Pottery from the rubbish pit (L501).

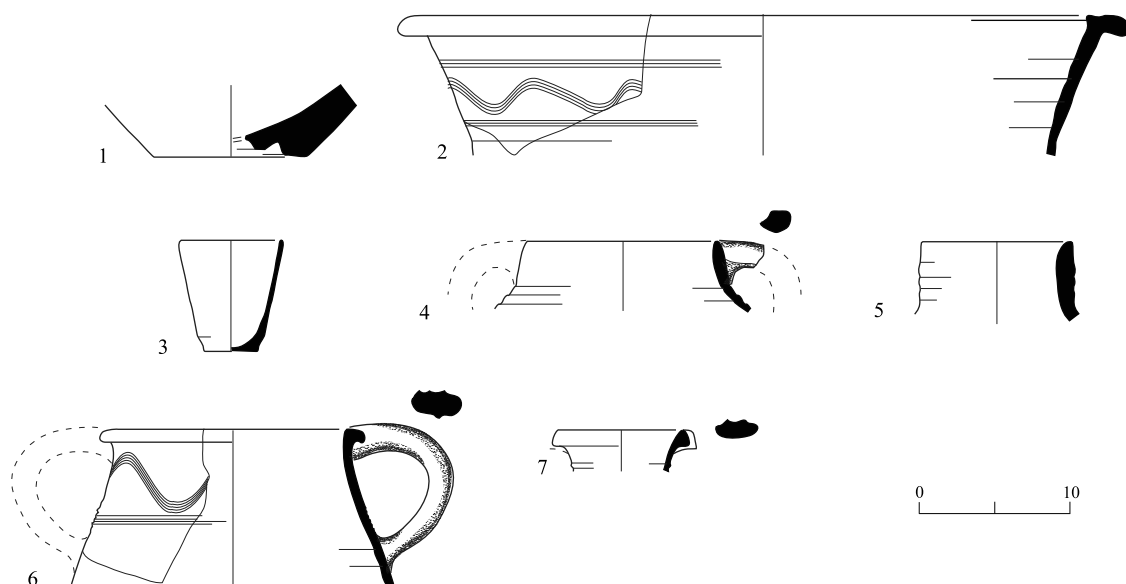


Fig. 32. Pottery from the cave (L554, 565).

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Bowl	554	5124	Base; dark orange	
2	Basin	565	5134	Light brown; incised wavy lines on ext.	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.1:22
3	Cup	554	5124	FBW, thin wall; light orange; hard-fired; flat base	
4	Cooking pot	554	5124	Brown-red clay; short; straight neck	Magness 1993:218 Form 3B:3
5	Storage jar	565	5134	Light brown clay; white grits	
6	Jug	565	5135	Dark orange clay; hard-fired; incised wavy lines on ext.	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.2:13
7	Jug	565	5135	FBW; light orange; triangular rim	Magness 2012: Pl. 9.4:22

Typology

Basins.— Two main basin subtypes known from the Byzantine period were found at the monastery: rilled-rim and arched-rim. Both types began to appear in the second century CE (Rapuano 2013:65–66), yet the latest forms continued up to the sixth century CE, with the arched-rim basin continuing even up to the late seventh century CE. Rilled-rim basins (Fig. 31:5), although dated up to the sixth century CE, are rare in the assemblage (Magness 1993:203).

On the other hand, the latest types of arched-rim basins (Figs. 31:3; 33:1), typically decorated with combed bands on the exterior walls, are very common and show a much wider distribution than the rilled-rim basins. They are one of the most popular wares found at Byzantine sites.

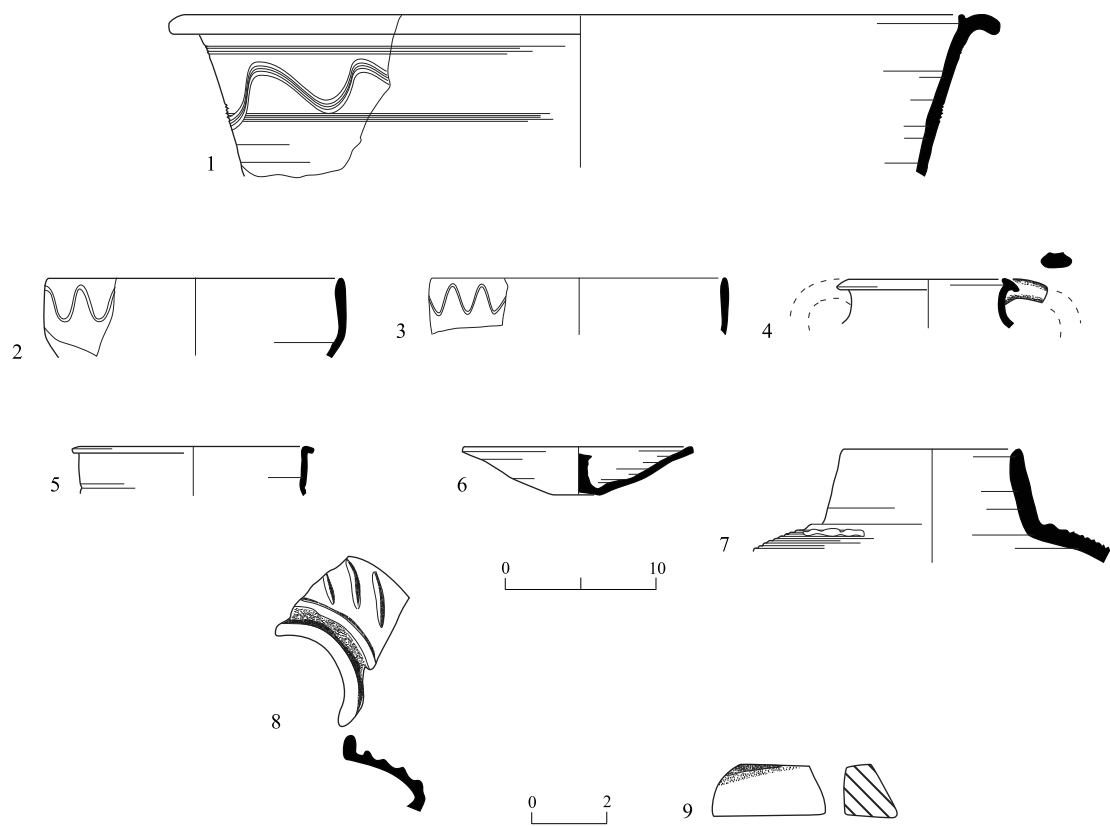


Fig. 33. Pottery and stone object from L514, below the collapsed walls.

No.	Type	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Basin	5020	Reddish brown; few small white grits; bands decoration	
2	Bowl	5031	FBW; gray ext. wall and orange int. wall; well-fired; metallic	Magness 1993:194, Form 4B:1
3	Bowl	5027	FBW; brown-orange walls; well-fired; metallic	Calderon 1999:143, Pl. 4:2
4	Cooking pot	5025	Dark brown; relatively short neck; projected hooked rim	Magness 1993:220, Form 4B:1
5	Cooking pot	5029	Dark brown; reddish core; short neck	Magness 1993:220, Form 4C:1
6	Lid	5031	Light reddish brown; metallic; no grits	Vincenz 2007:340, Pl. 21:5
7	Storage jar	5019	Yellowish light orange; straight high rim with a ridge at its base	
8	Oil lamp	5025	Brownish–dark orange; two ridges surround the filling hole, int. is higher.	Calderon 1999:144, Pl. 5:3
9	Weight/grinding stone(?)	5031	Irregular smooth basalt stone (3 × 7 cm)	

Bowls.— Two bowl groups are presented here, one imported and the second local. The only imported vessels found at the monastery are two fragments (Fig. 31:1, 2) of Subtype 10 Phocaean wares (also named Late Roman C), one of the most common bowl types imported into the country during the Byzantine period. They were dated by Hayes (1972:346) to the late sixth–early seventh century CE. The stamped decoration in the middle of the bowl's floor (Fig. 31:2) depicts two rhombuses encircled by a rectangle. This stamped motif is very common in early Late Roman C bowls but rare in the late Subtype 10 form, which is usually plain.

The second group is the well-known Fine Byzantine Ware, which includes various forms (bowls, jugs, juglets and cups) made of a characteristic light brown or light orange fabric, well-fired with a distinct finish. The vessels are thin-walled, and most have visible burnishing lines on the exterior. Based on findings from Jerusalem, Magness (1993) maintains that these vessels do not appear before the mid-sixth century CE, continuing into the Early Islamic period with minor changes.

Although these vessels are widespread both in the north and the south, they appear primarily in the Jerusalem region, apparently their main production center. The monastery's FBW bowls (Figs. 30:3; 33:2, 3) have thin, rounded walls and either incurved or plain rims. Their exterior wall is decorated with a single incised wavy line below the rim. Based on Magness's typology (1993:194), they belong to FBW Bowl Type 1A:1, 2, dating from the mid-sixth to the late seventh century and continuing until the early eighth century CE, and they originated in the Jerusalem area.

The lid (Fig. 33:6) is made of fine well-levigated clay, similar to that of the Fine Byzantine Ware. It seems that the potter added a small central knob-handle to a shallow bowl, changing its function to a lid. Remains of soot on its exterior edge are evidence that it was probably used as a cooking-pot lid, contradicting Vincenz's proposal (2007:249) that they were used for temporarily closing jars. These lids were found in the Byzantine village of 'En Gedi (Vincenz 2007: Pl. 21:5) and at the Khirbat ed-Deir Monastery (Calderon 1999: Pl. 4:9), both dated to the sixth century CE and later.

Storage Jars.— Relatively few jars were found in the complex, perhaps because of its organized abandonment. The storage jar found in L514 (Fig. 33:7) belongs to the bag-shaped jar type, well-known in the Jerusalem area. It was found at almost every Byzantine site, like the Deir Ghazali monastery (Avner 2000:40, Fig. 19:4), and is dated from the late sixth to the early eighth century CE.

Jugs.— A large number of vessels found in the rubbish pit (Fig. 31:10–13) and the cave (Fig. 32:6, 7) belonged to the FBW jugs type. The vessels are decorated with incised gashes or nicks on their shoulder. Unlike the FBW bowls, the jugs and juglets do not seem to continue beyond the first half of the eighth century CE (Magness 1993:236).

Lamps.— Two examples of the upper part of large candlestick lamps are presented. One (Fig. 31:14), from the rubbish pit, is well-preserved, while the other (Fig. 33:8), found below the collapsed walls in L514, is a small sherd. Both lamps are decorated with palm branches and show a radial design adorning the rim. A third sherd is the bottom part of a large candlestick lamp with a partial X mark on its base (Fig. 30:5), which may be either the producer's trademark or a series mark. These mold-made lamps were produced from two separate upper and lower molds that were joined together before firing, once leather hard.

This lamp type was widespread throughout the country, especially prominent around Jerusalem, which most probably was its production center. Rosenthal and Sivan (1978:116–118) suggested that such lamps were in use from the fifth to the eighth century CE. Magness (1993:251–254) proposed that they did not appear before the sixth century CE, continuing to be produced in the seventh century CE.

Stone Object.—An irregular trapezoid-shaped basalt stone was found below the collapsed walls in L514 (Fig. 33:9). It could be either a small grinding stone or a weight. Its weight totaled 130 g, but as the stone was found broken in two, its original weight was estimated at 130–140 g.

DISCUSSION

This monastery represents a homogeneous, single-period complex comprising all the elements present in Byzantine small *coenobium* monasteries. Based on its size (416 sq m), the monastery was attributed to Hirschfeld's small-sized group of Judean Desert monasteries (2002:144). Also, following Hirschfeld's estimation of Byzantine hermit populations (2002:187–189), the Har Ḥoma *coenobium* was inhabited by a community of about 20 monks.

Although not much of the building was preserved due to extensive stone robbing, its layout was reconstructed based on the hewn wall foundations. The rectangular shape, right angles, uniform wings, and hewn foundations—all suggest a well-thought-out, pre-planned edifice, which was constructed as a single unit. The compound included an open courtyard surrounded by rooms on three sides. Among the elements identified at the site are a large refectory (L514), a meeting room(?) (L535), a sacred burial room for the founding hermit (L536), a two leveled chapel and crypt (L568) with a hewn cave (L569), a water cistern (L566) and a winepress (L543).

Although we were able to recognize most of the monastery's elements, a few things remain unclear. First, we could not locate with certainty the dwellings of the monastery residents. One possibility is that it was located on the second floor of the western wing which did not survive. The hewn foundations' dimensions definitely provide the support required for a second floor, though no archaeological evidence, such as a built staircase, was found to support this hypothesis. However, it is highly unlikely that the dwellings were in the northern wing, above the sacred chapel or the burial room.

Another possibility would be for the large room in the western wing (L514) to not have served as a dining hall but rather as dwellings. The room's measurements allow about 12 adult men to sleep comfortably. The proximity of the suggested abbot's room (L509) to this hall supports this suggestion as he could supervise the monks from this location. If so, then the so-called meeting room (L535) with the benches around its inner perimeter may have served as the dining room.

Another question concerns the location of the kitchen/cooking area. In some of the known Byzantine *coenobium* monasteries in the Judean desert, a kitchen was found adjacent to the dining room, for example, at the monasteries of Martyrius and Khirbat ed-Deir. However, in the present monastery, no evidence for a kitchen was found, suggesting the use of a small hearth in the courtyard.

The majority of the finds from the site—pottery, glass (see Winter, this volume) and coins (see Bijovsky, this volume)—can be dated to the Byzantine–Early Islamic periods, up to the eighth century CE.

Byzantine Monasteries Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem

A number of scholars (Corbo 1955; Chitty 1966; Hirschfeld 1990; 1992; Patrich 1995) documented over a dozen sites between the two holy cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, identifying them as rural monasteries based on hagiographic, toponymic and archaeological data (Fig. 1). According to Seligman (2011:478–481), such monasteries and their monastic farms were the most common settlement form in Jerusalem's hinterland during the Byzantine period. Their livelihood was based on the cultivation of grapes, olives and grain, the daily dietary staples in the Roman and Byzantine periods in general, and Byzantine Palestine in particular (Seligman 2011:414–421).

In a five kilometer radius around our site, eight monasteries from the same period were located in the modern municipal area of Jerusalem, and three more in the municipal area of Bethlehem. The strategic location and the short distance between the two holy cities allowed these monasteries' development and flourishing during the Byzantine period. When considering this monastery's importance, one should view it as a kind of "prototype" reflecting the Byzantine period's settlement pattern in the Jerusalem area.

Most of the sites detailed below were described and documented by the Franciscan priest Vigilio Corbo, from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, who excavated the Byzantine monastery of "Syar el-Ghanam" (Sede Ha-Ro'im) near Beit Sahur in 1951–1952. His team surveyed the area surrounding their excavation, documenting and even excavating contemporary monasteries (Corbo 1955:110–165). Both Hirschfeld (1992) and Patrich's (1995) work expanded our knowledge of suburban Byzantine Jerusalem and the Judean desert. The Jerusalem survey, led by Kloner (2000), found a few additional sites, and other monasteries were revealed in salvage excavations conducted during development works in the Jerusalem area. Following is a brief summary of the findings at monasteries situated at a maximum distance of 2.5 km from our site, presented from north to south.

Kh. Umm Leisun (map ref. 22324/62736).— Seligman and Abu-Raya (2002) discovered the remains of a small monastery with a chapel and a mosaic floor. They suggested identifying it as the Eustathius Monastery, known from Byzantine literary sources. However, a hewn crypt with a Georgian inscription, found during excavations conducted on the site between 2002 and 2004, ruled out this identification (Seligman 2015). The monastery served as home to Georgian monks during the fifth and sixth centuries CE. The site was partly damaged by construction.

Kh. Zewaha–Ramat Raḥel (map ref. 22063/62747).— The site is located west of Kibbutz Ramat Raḥel and was excavated from 1954 to 1963 by Aharoni (1964). Most finds are from earlier periods, but above them were revealed the remains of a Byzantine basilica church with a mosaic floor depicting geometric features preserved only in the hall's southern and western parts. East of the church were monastery rooms, and to its west were a large water cistern and a bathhouse. Seligman suggested identifying the ruins as a monastery situated near the Byzantine village “Metopa” (Seligman 2011:446–447). Some remains were removed for continued excavation, while some were preserved to undergo future conservation.

Kathisma (map ref. 22023/62730).— A large octagonal church (each face 10.5 m long) with spectacular mosaic floors was built near the main Jerusalem–Bethlehem road. The church was established to commemorate the exact place where, according to tradition, the pregnant Virgin Mary rested on her way to Bethlehem. The rock on which she supposedly sat is at the center of the church. Avner excavated the site between 1992 and 1997 (2003:173–186; 2022); the church was restored.

Umm Ṭuba (map ref. 22180/67640).— In 2005, a small excavation was conducted at Umm Ṭuba, exposing some Byzantine structures. The dig revealed various architectural artifacts, such as a Corinthian capital fragment decorated with a cross, marble columns and chancel-screen fragments. The small finds, such as glass, colorful tesserae and a glass window fragment, also pointed to the existence of a Byzantine-period monastery (Eirikh-Rose 2007:142). The remains of the supposed church/monastery spread over a 100 m radius of the excavation site and include wall segments and two mosaic floors, one atop the other, one of them comprising colorful tesserae. Under the mosaic floors was a hewn cave with a northern entrance, which may have served as a crypt (Adawi 2010:115–117). The finds from the survey and the excavations, together with the toponymic comparison and remains mentioned by Guérin (1869:83–84), suggest that the site may be identified with the Byzantine village “Metopa” (Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green 1994:184–185). The site was partly destroyed after excavation for building purposes.

Giv‘at Ḥoma—Jebel Abu-Ghunneim (map ref. 22100/62590).— This is a small rectangular monastery (19 × 25 m) with a central courtyard and a water cistern. In the northern part is

an elongated chapel (5×16 m) paved with a mosaic showing a floral design and an inner apse. Corbo suggested that these are the remains of one of the monasteries founded in the fifth century CE by the brothers Marinus and Lucas, the disciples of St. Euthymius (Corbo 1955:144). The site was severely damaged.

Kh. Luqa (map ref. 22224/62550).— The site was surveyed by Guérin (1869:85), Conder and Kitchener (1881–1883, III: 110), and Corbo (1955:146–148). A small building (7×8 m), perhaps a tower, was distinguished, with a staircase leading to a second floor. The surveyors found early foundations of a monastery with a church, additional rooms and mosaic floors. Scattered tesserae and roof tiles were found around the structure. This site was identified as the second of the coupled monasteries established by the two monks mentioned above. The building may have also served as a mosque during the Early Islamic period, as indicated by a rounded niche in the southern wall. The site has not been excavated.

Kh. el-Qatt (map ref. 22110/62510).— The site holds the remains of a large monastery constructed in the sixth century CE (Corbo 1955:112–139). The almost square-shaped building (30×35 m) comprises a central courtyard surrounded by colonnades and paved with a mosaic floor featuring geometric patterns and a Georgian inscription. The five-line inscription contained dedications to individuals of the Georgian community who had settled in the Holy Land, dedicating the monastery to St. Theodore. South of the courtyard were two agricultural installations (wine and olive presses) and stables. North of the courtyard was the mono-apsidal elongated church and the monks' burial chamber. There were no living quarters on the ground floor, and it seems that the monks' dwellings were on an upper level.

Kh. Umm el-Asafir (map ref. 22125/62495).— Conder and Kitchener surveyed the site (1881–1883, III:127) and described the remains of a church (width 14 m, length unknown) and a wall built of large ashlar stones. In the Jerusalem survey (Kloner 2000:154), the surveyors found potsherds and roof tiles from the Byzantine period, many tesserae and plaster fragments. The site has not been excavated.

CONCLUSIONS

The group of monasteries mentioned above, to which this monastery also belongs, can be labeled “monasteries between the cities.” Situated between the two most holy cities of Christianity, Jerusalem in the north and Bethlehem in the south, their location suggests that their characteristics differ from those of the monasteries located within or very close to the city walls of Jerusalem and in the Judean desert. Their location near, or close to, the main road between the cities—unlike the Judean desert group—exposed them to massive pilgrimage transit, enabling the development of new sources of income, such as pilgrim hospitality, and new sacred centers.

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