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Late Roman–Byzantine-Period Ritual Baths at Ḥorbat Susya in *Daroma*

Yuval Baruch and Ronny Reich[1]

In the Byzantine period, and especially in the fifth–seventh centuries CE, a unique rural Jewish settlement developed at Susya, in *Daroma* (southern Hebron Hills). This uniqueness is expressed in various aspects of its material culture, including many ritual baths, which were found in almost every residence, in connection with agricultural production and even beneath the synagogue. This article presents data concerning the ritual baths, with special emphasis on ritual baths located near installations to produce oil and wine, and a ritual bath located in a subterranean space beneath the synagogue, offering a reexamination of the connection between purification and synagogues. The many ritual baths found at the site, long after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, seem to represent the aspiration of the members of the Jewish community at Susya to segregate themselves from the threatening Christian environment.

Keywords: purity, ritual bath, miqweh, Daroma, synagogue, Jewish village, Late Roman period, Byzantine period, priest, oil press, winepress

Introduction

Ḥorbat Susya, one of the largest sites in *Daroma*,[2] in the southern Hebron Hills, extends over an area of two hills, eastern and western, in the shape of a horseshoe, in accordance with the local topography. The site is located near an important longitudinal road that connects the northeastern Negev northward through Ma'ale Deragot. In its heyday, the site was a large, well-planned village, indicating a well-established community. Excavations at the

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[2] The southern Hebron Hills are a separate topographical unit located in the southern part of the Central Hill range. In rabbinic literature, and in the Onomasticon of Eusebius, this area is referred to as 'the South' or *'Daroma'*. The Onomasticon of Eusebius is the most important source concerning the settlement in *Daroma* at the beginning of the Byzantine period, mentioning the Greek form (Δαρωμά) of the Aramaic name for the first time (Klosterman 1904).

site were renewed in 1997,[3] in the course of which some of the remains uncovered in the past were redocumented, including the ritual baths (singular: *miqweh*; plural: *miqwa'ot*) that are the focus of this article. The ritual baths exposed at the site attest to the intensity of the purification phenomenon in the period after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, shedding light on various aspects of purity observation in this region in this period.

The Ritual Baths

The corpus of ritual baths uncovered in Israel (see Adler 2011; Reich 2013) totals about 850.[4] These installations are located in Jewish and Samaritan settlements, c. 85% of which date to the Second Temple period and the rest, dating to after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. About 25% of the later ritual baths were discovered at Ḥorbat Susya, establishing this village as a unique site in the study of the phenomenon of purification in post-Temple times.

A total of 29 ritual baths were recorded at the site (Table 1; Fig. 1),[5] most of which were installed in the walls of stepped corridors (*dromi*) that led to subterranean systems beneath the settlement's residences and open courtyards (except for ritual bath Nos. 5, 6 and 19, which were installed inside caves, and No. 2; see below). We consider that many more ritual baths existed within caves in the precincts of the village, a hypothesis supported by the survey conducted on behalf of the Israel Cave Research Center (Moran and Frumkin 1992:37), in which about 80 cave openings were recorded. Only some of the ritual baths at Susya were properly excavated, and those previously excavated have been redocumented. Most of the ritual baths that could be dated based on archaeological data were in use from the fourth to the first quarter of the seventh century CE, aligning with the main period of the settlement at the site.[6] One ritual bath (No. 1; Figs. 2–4), which was excavated on the northwestern margins of the ancient settlement, near the main longitudinal road, was dated to the Second Temple period.[7]

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[3] The excavations at Ḥorbat Susya were initiated and encouraged by Amir Drori, Director of the Israel Antiquities Authority at the time. They were conducted between 1997 and 1998 under the direction of Yuval Baruch (Permit Nos. L-820, L-832) and assisted by Slava Dabrowski (area supervisor), Genadi Kotovski (assistant area supervisor), Abdallah abu Gharbiyye (administration), Mark Kunin and Yuval Baruch (surveying and drafting), Clara Amit and Yuval Baruch (photography), Leticia Barda (GIS maps), Miriam Avissar (pottery) and Danny Syon (numismatics). The archaeological research was advised and guided by the late Yoram Tzafrir, Yizhar Hirschfeld, Ze'ev Yeivin and David Amit. Recently, while preparing the article for publication, ritual bath No. 2 (Fig. 27) was documented photogrammetrically by Alexander Wiegman and Or Zakaim of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

[4] Since the publication of these two studies, the number of ritual baths has been updated.

[5] During the mapping of the subterranean systems at Ḥorbat Susya on behalf of the Israel Cave Research Center, 29 installations were identified as ritual baths (Moran and Frumkin 1992); some of them were excavated by Yeivin (1993a) and Negev (1985), and the rest were excavated and redocumented by the authors.

[6] For a brief discussion of the chronology of the settlement at Ḥorbat Susya, see Baruch 2005.

[7] For the settlement at Ḥorbat Susya in the Second Temple period, see Baruch 2007.

Table 1. The Ritual Baths from Ḥorbat Susya

No.	Location	Measurements	Entrance	Additional Elements and Notes	Architectural Context	Figure
1	Northwest of the synagogue	c. 7.5 sq m, c. 1.3 m deep	Stepped corridor (c. 1.9 m long) ending in two steps descending to the immersion pool	Reused as a cistern	Near a road?	2–4
2	Beneath the synagogue	c. 5 sq m, c. 1 m deep	At the end of a stepped corridor	Immersion pool divided into two by a rock-cut partition wall	Connected to the synagogue	26–28, 31
3	Within an inner courtyard of a built complex south of the synagogue	c. 2.8 sq m, max. 1.2 m deep	Sunken entrance at the end of an L-shaped corridor comprising seven steps; a threshold with a posthole for a door	Three steps lead to the immersion pool on the north; a bench is hewn on the south; a stone-built niche for placing belongings in the pool's wall; a rock-cut channel conveys water to the *miqweh* through a round perforation to the left of the entrance; a cistern is found nearby	Residential	8
4	Within a built complex south of the synagogue	c. 3.2 sq m, max. 1.3 m deep	Within a stone-built wall at the end of a corridor comprising eight steps	Two relatively high steps lead to the immersion pool; high surfaces along its walls	Residential	16, 17
5, 6	Within a built complex southeast of the synagogue; excavated by Negev (‘winery cave’; 1985:244–246)		Within the walls of a stepped corridor leading to a cave	Holes in the doorposts of the entrance to accomodate a door	Residential	
7	In the south of the site; excavated by Negev	c. 2.1 sq m, max. 1 m deep	L-shaped corridor comprising three steps		Residential	5–7
8	Within a cave at the south of the site	c. 6.2 sq m, max. 1.1 m deep	At the end of a stepped corridor	A rounded immersion pool; a large irregular niche in its eastern wall; built threshold	Residential	
9	Eastern hill	c. 5.2 sq m, max. 1.55 m deep	At the end of an L-shaped corridor comprising eight steps, some rock-cut and some built of coarsely dressed ashlars	Arched niche west of the entrance for placing belongings	Residential	11–13

Table 1. (cont.)

No.	Location	Measurements	Entrance	Additional Elements and Notes	Architectural Context	Figure
10	Eastern hill	c. 5 sq m, c. 1 m deep	At the end of a corridor comprising eight poorly preserved steps		Residential	
11	Eastern hill	c. 4.25 sq m, max. 1.35 m deep	At the end of a corridor comprising four steps, some rock-cut and some stone-built	Square niche in the corner for placing belongings; below it are two ashlars, one atop the other, probably a bench	Residential	18–20
12	Eastern hill	c. 3.8 sq m, max. 1.6 m deep	At the end of a stepped corridor, partly destroyed	A small niche for an oil lamp in the wall south of the entrance	Residential	21, 22
13	Northeastern part of the site	c. 2.55 sq m, max. 1.55 m deep	At the center of the southern wall of a corridor comprising six steps	A small arched niche (0.3 m high, c. 0.15 m deep) in the western wall	Residential	14, 15
14	Eastern hill	c. 3.95 sq m, max. 2.3 m deep	At the end of a corridor comprising three hewn steps	A small square niche (0.25 × 0.35 m, c. 0.15 m deep) in the eastern wall of the installation, near the entrance	Residential	
15	Eastern hill	c. 4.6 sq m, max. 1.6 m deep	At the end of a corridor comprising five steps, partly built and partly hewn	A shallow decorative rectangular concavity at the meeting point between the walls and ceiling	Residential	9, 10
16	On the hill north of the synagogue	c. 3.75 sq m, max. 1.55 m deep	At the end of a corridor comprising four hewn steps		Residential	
17	East of the north–south street	c. 1.9 sq m	At the end of a corridor comprising nine steps		Residential	
18	In the built complex south of the synagogue	c. 4 sq m, max. 1.3 m deep	At the end of a corridor comprising nine hewn steps	A posthole hewn in the threshold	Residential	
19	Building 19	c. 3.9 sq m, max. 1.8 m deep	Within a large and complex subterranean system; at the end of a corridor comprising five steps	A monolithic threshold, with postholes for a door; an elevated surface (c. 10 cm high) to the north, probably for standing; a rounded vat is hewn in its corner	Production	24

Table 1. (cont.)

No.	Location	Measurements	Entrance	Additional Elements and Notes	Architectural Context	Figure
20	Building 19	c. 4.4 sq m, max. 1.4 m deep	In the wall of a corridor comprising nine steps	Sunken entrance, probably to accommodate a door; hewn benches along the last three steps descending into the immersion pool; a small niche in the southern wall, with soot marks, used to place an oil lamp	Production	24
21	Building 19	c. 4.05 sq m, max. 1.75 m deep	At the center of the northern wall of a corridor comprising thirteen hewn steps	Hewn installations flank the corridor; a cistern south of the corridor; one installation was sealed by W1401, in which a crushing stone was reused	Production	24
22	Building 19	c. 4 sq m, max. 1.6 m deep	A rectangular opening in the northern wall of a corridor comprising seven hewn steps; a cistern is hewn in its eastern wall	West of the entrance is a square opening leading to a small, rock-cut room (not excavated)	Production	24
23	North of the synagogue		In the wall of a corridor comprising seven steps	The walls are rounded and the ceiling is flat; three wide steps descend into the immersion pool; a rounded pit is hewn in its northwestern corner	Production	
24	North of the synagogue				Residential	
25, 26	Eastern hill		Two ritual baths, one opposite the other flanking a corridor		Residential	
27	West of the synagogue; south of and near an oil press				Production	
28	West of the synagogue; south of and near an oil press				Production	
29	West of the synagogue; south of and near an oil press				Production	

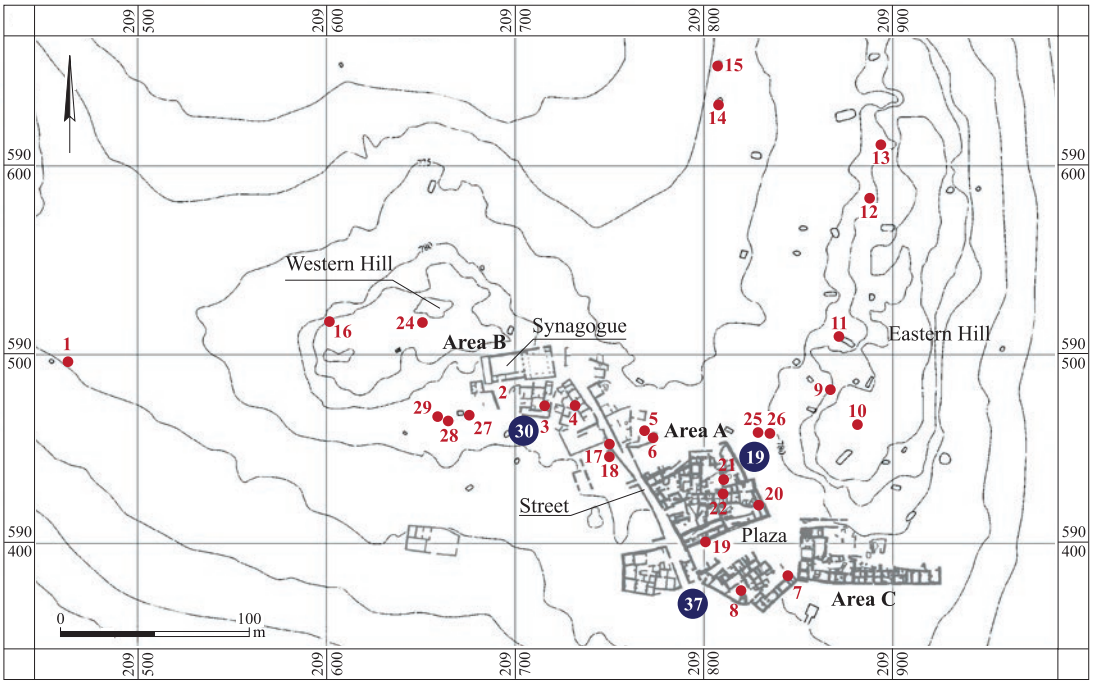

Fig. 1. Location of the ritual baths at Ḥorbat Susya (drafting: L. Barda).

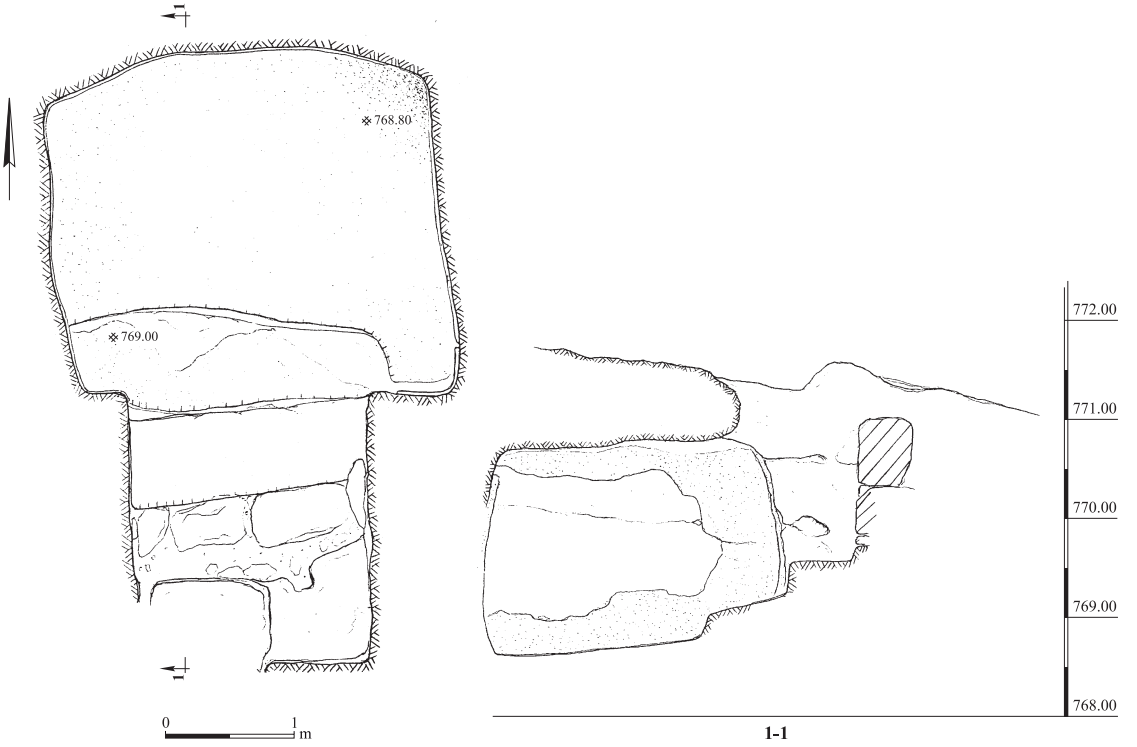

Fig. 2. Ritual bath No. 1, plan and section.

Fig. 3. Ritual bath No. 1, looking north.

Fig. 4. Ritual bath No. 1, interior, looking northeast.

Due to the great variety in the details of the ritual baths and the lack of uniformity in their plans, their characteristics will be discussed without offering a typology. Most of the ritual baths have an irregular plan, with only a few exhibiting a square outline with rounded corners (e.g., No. 7; Figs. 5–7). For the most part, the ceiling of the installations is flat. Also the descent into the immersion pool is not uniform: some were accessed via a straight flight of stairs, while others were entered through a rounded or L-shaped staircase. The number of steps and their dimensions also varies.

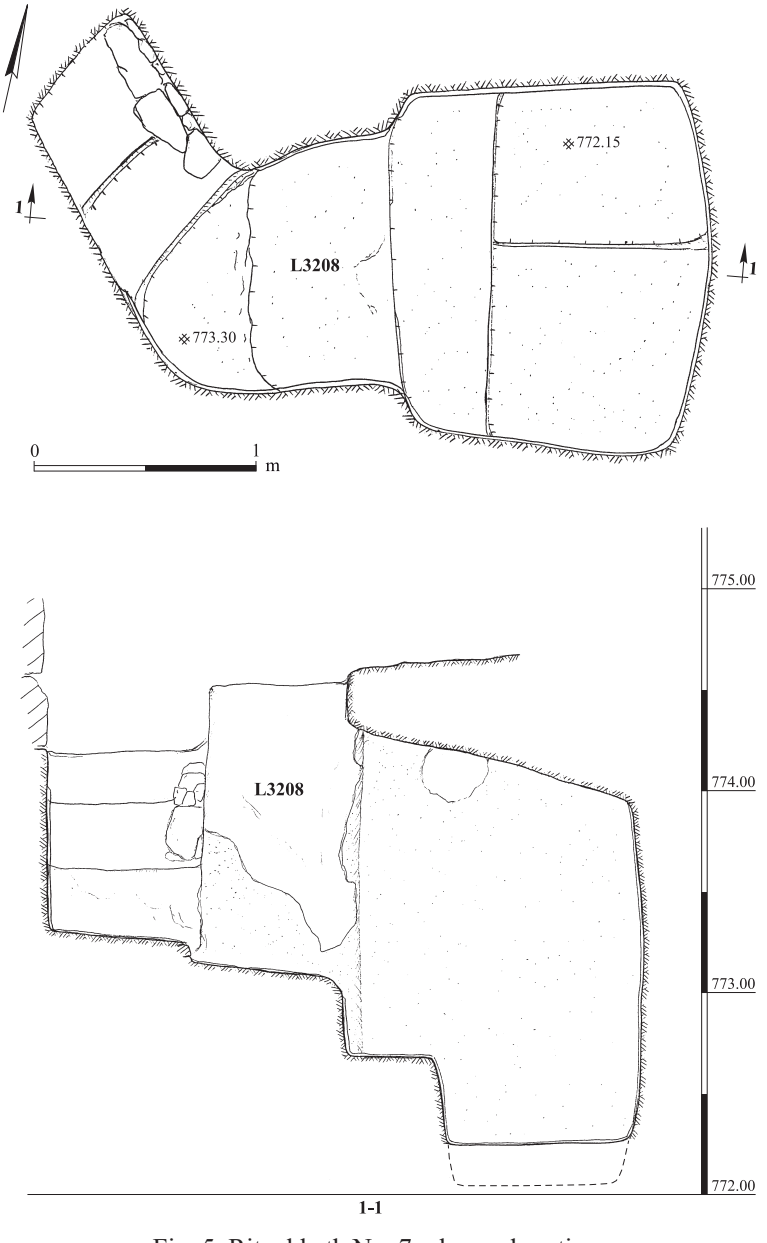

Fig. 5. Ritual bath No. 7, plan and section.

Fig. 6. Ritual bath No. 7, interior, looking west.

Fig. 7. Ritual bath No. 7, looking southwest.

Most of the openings leading into the immersion pools were low, so that an adult had to bend over to enter it. In some of the installations, the openings of the immersion pools were slightly sunken, and in others, there were holes in the doorposts, or postholes, to fix a wooden door (e.g., Nos. 3, 5, 18, 19; Fig. 8); some installations had a built threshold (e.g., Nos. 8, 14, 15, 19; Figs. 9, 10). The walls and ceilings of the ritual baths were coated

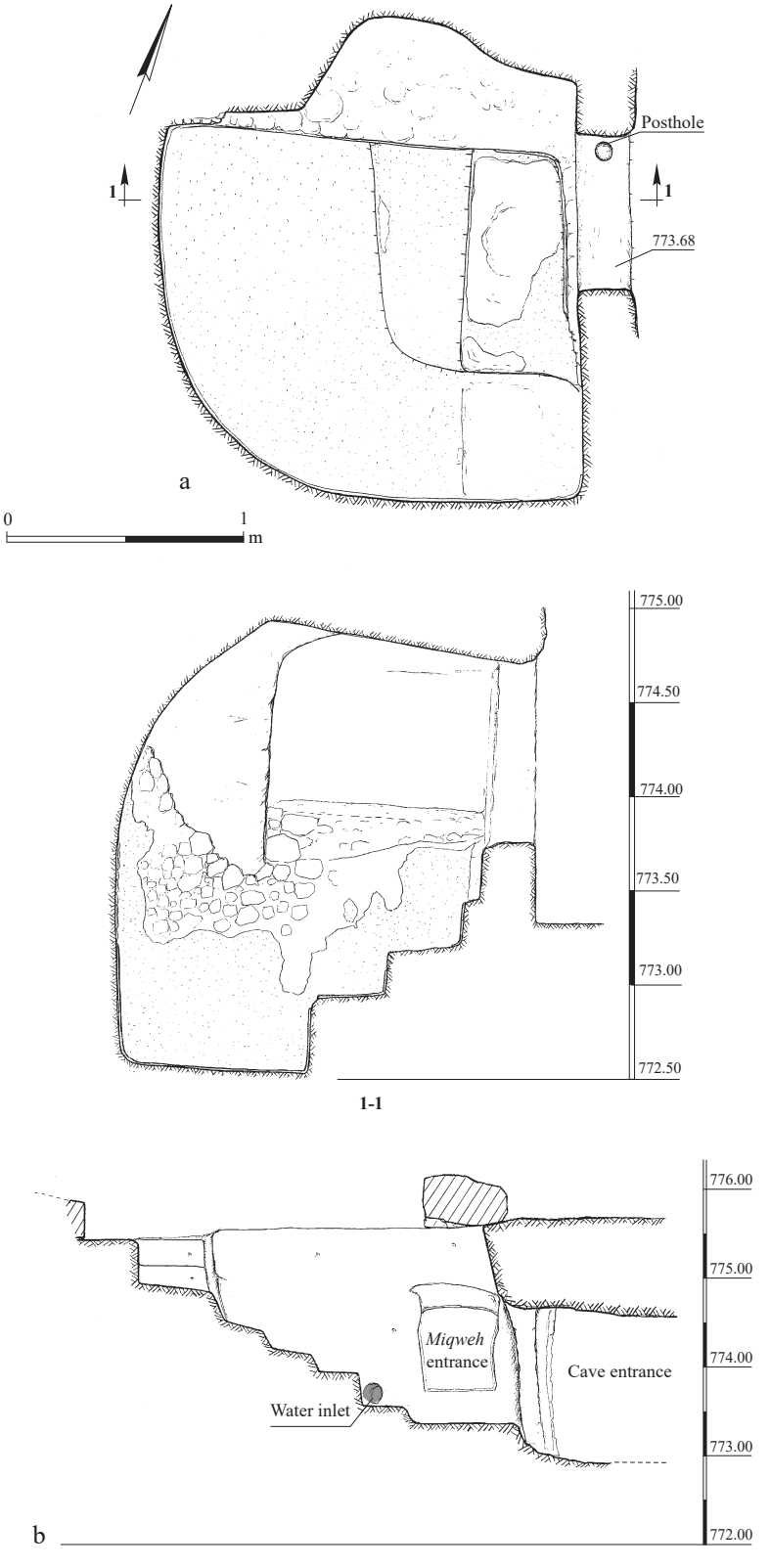

Fig. 8. Ritual bath No. 3: (a) plan and section; (b) section along the stepped corridor, looking east.

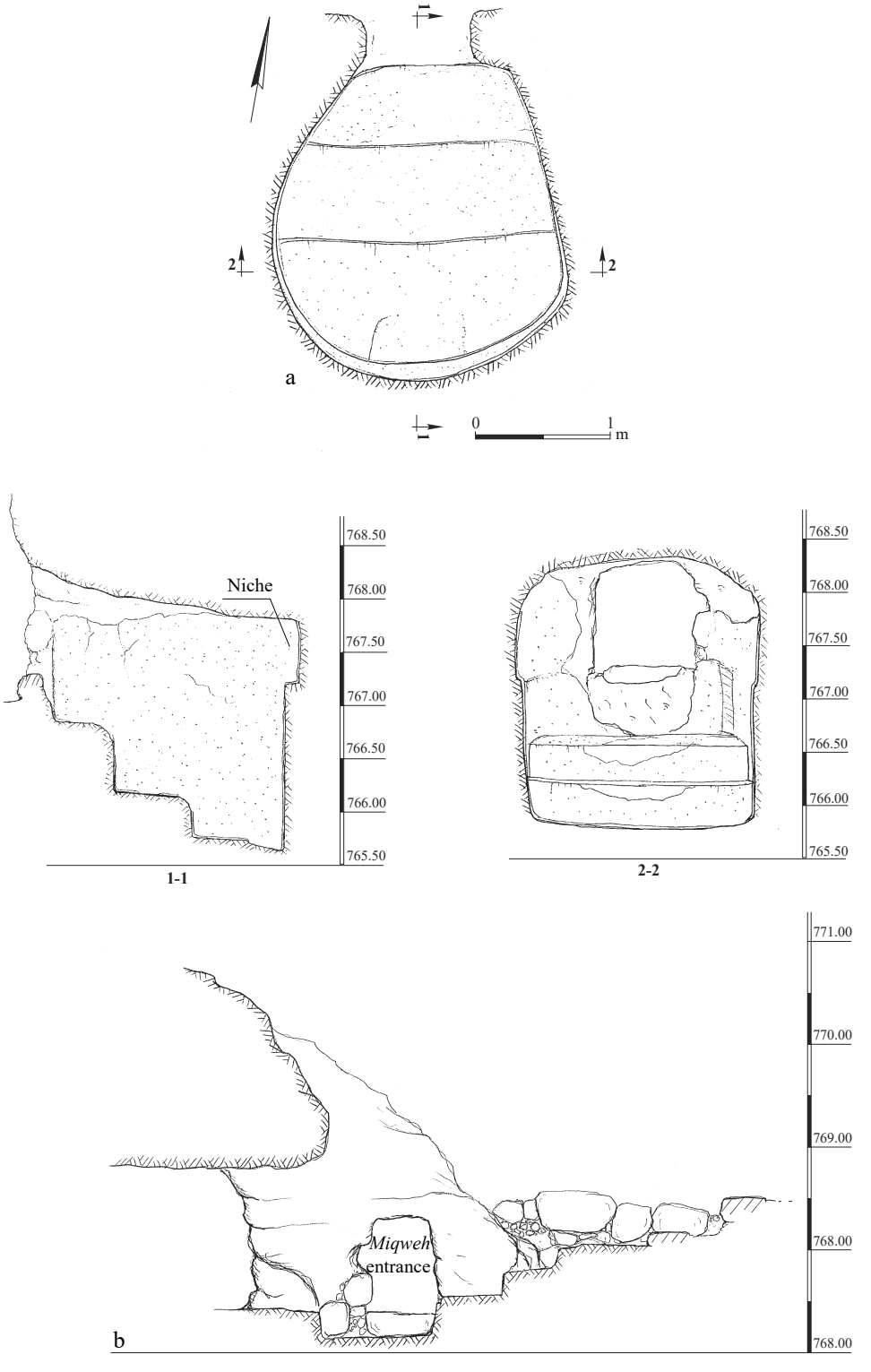

Fig. 9. Ritual bath No. 15: (a) plan and sections; (b) section along the stepped corridor, looking southeast (see Fig. 10).

Fig. 10. Ritual bath No. 15, the entrance, looking southeast; note the built threshold.

with several layers of hydraulic plaster, the inner layer comprising a mixture of cement and potsherds or crushed pottery. Some of the ritual baths had niches carved in their walls: large ones, probably used to place personal belongings, and small ones, used to place oil lamps for illumination (e.g., Nos. 9, 13; Figs. 11–15); some ritual baths preserved evidence of safety measures, such as low benches (e.g., Nos. 3, 4, 11, 19; Figs. 16, 17), or sockets for holding on (e.g., No. 15). All the ritual baths, except for the one discovered beneath the synagogue (see below), were filled with runoff rainwater. Some of the ritual baths were fed through shallow, rock-cut channels, while others were fed through a designated perforation cut into the wall near their opening (e.g., Nos. 3, 11, 12, 14; Figs. 18–22).

It is probable that the ritual baths were used daily by the inhabitants of ancient Susya. Some of them were used by the workers engaged in the production of agricultural produce, especially olive oil and perhaps even wine, which took place within the settlement or nearby (see below). One unique ritual bath was discovered beneath the synagogue (see below; see Baruch and Reich 2018). These two phenomena—ritual baths connected with agricultural production and ritual baths located below a synagogue—are elaborated on below.

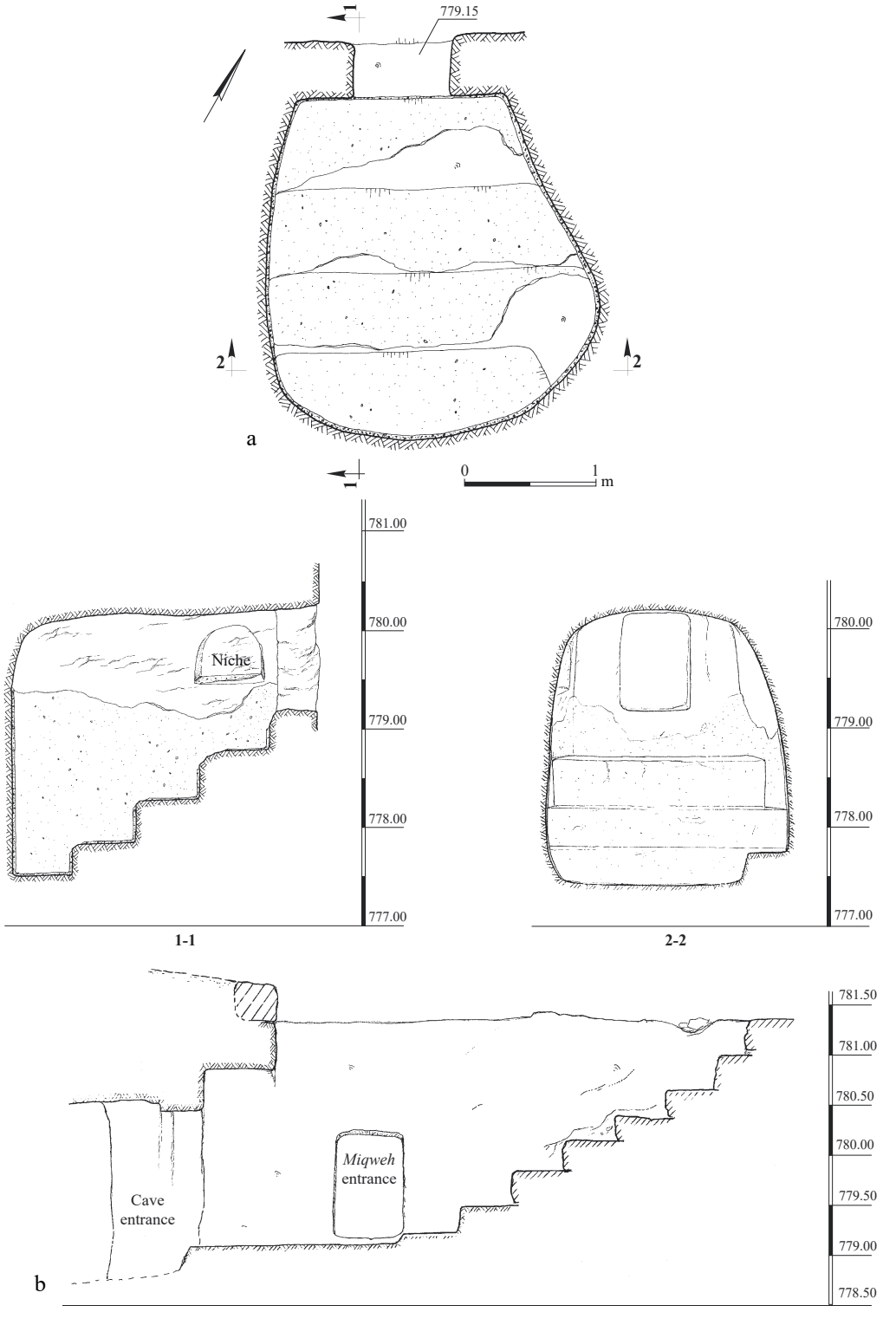

Fig. 11. Ritual bath No. 9: (a) plan and sections; (b) section along the stepped corridor, looking south (see Fig. 13).

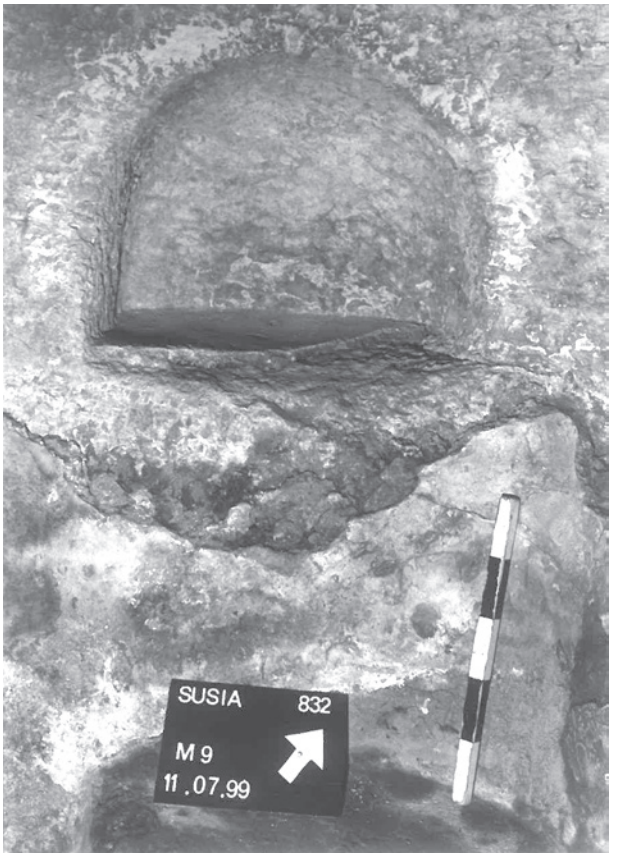

Fig. 12. Ritual bath No. 9, niche, looking northwest.

Fig. 13. Ritual bath No. 9, looking south; note rectangular entrance into *miqweh*.

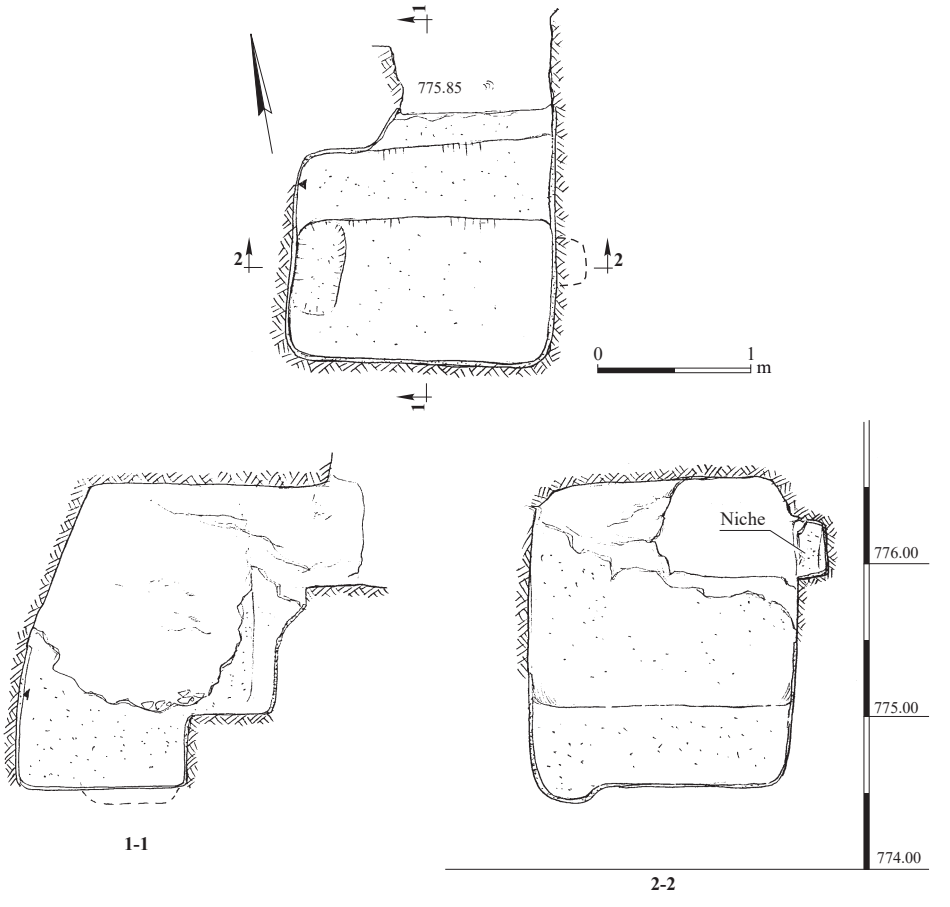

Fig. 14. Ritual bath No. 13, plan and sections.

Fig. 15. Ritual bath No. 13, looking southeast.

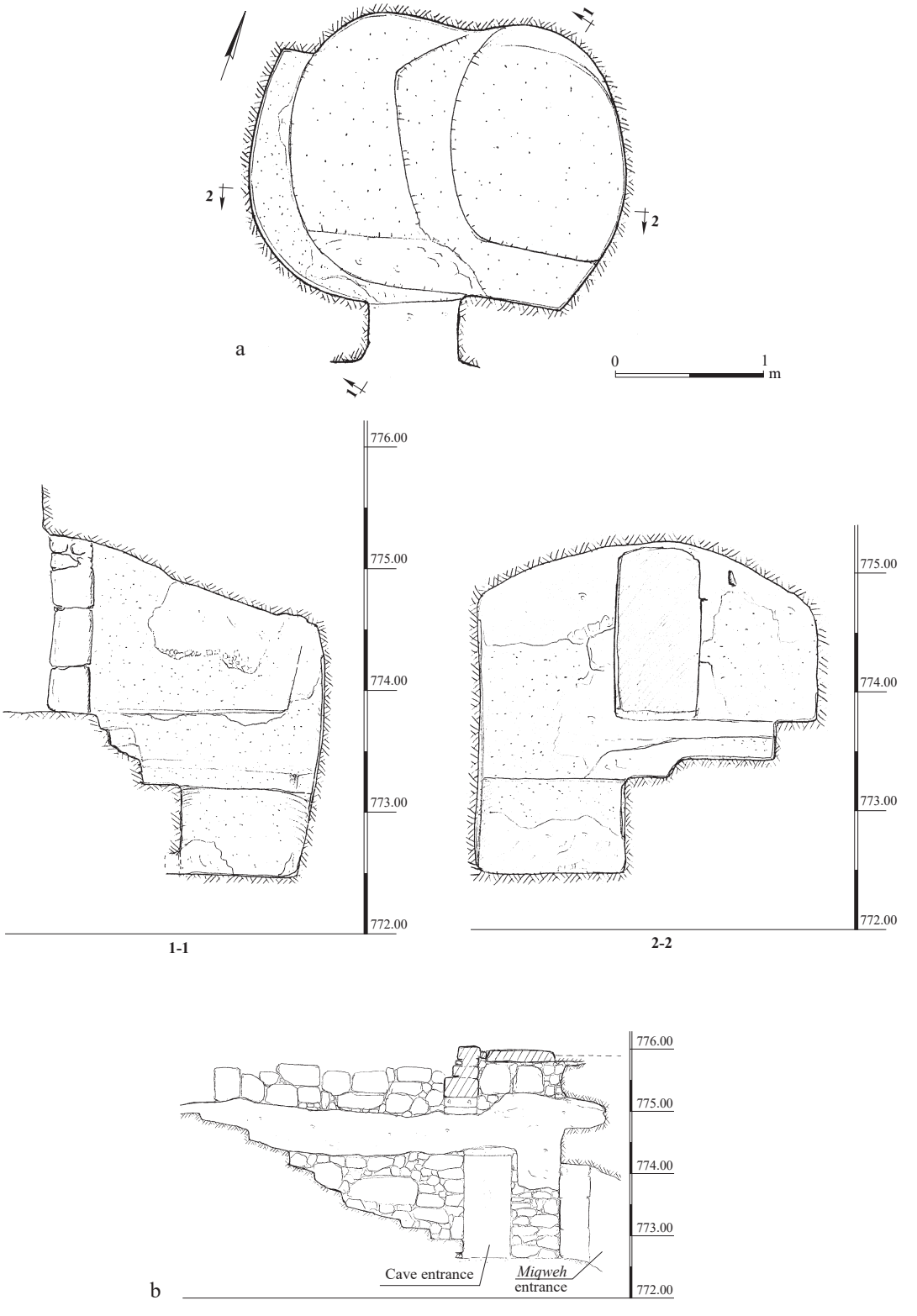

Fig. 16. Ritual bath No. 4: (a) plan and sections; (b) section along the stepped corridor, looking north.

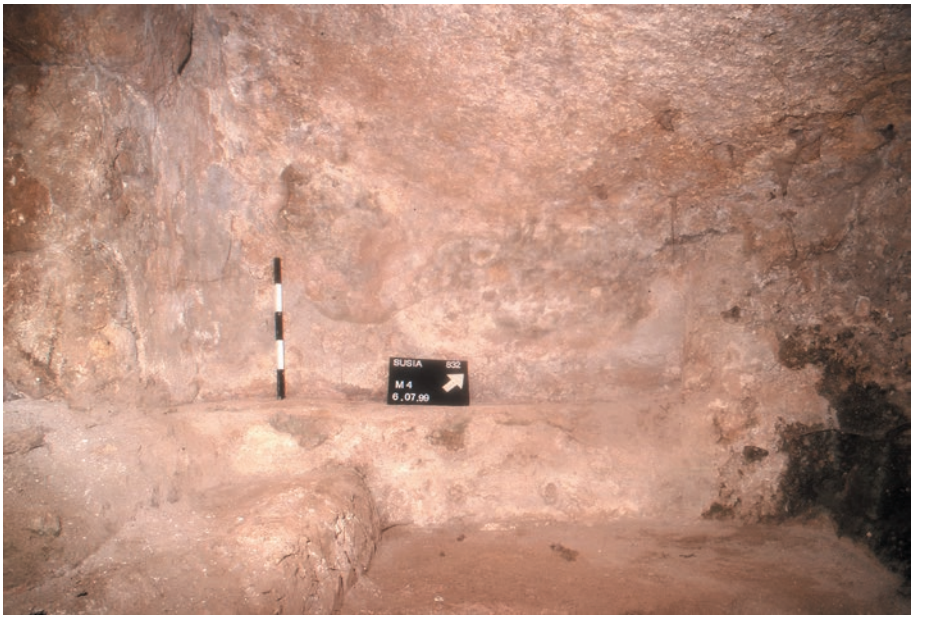

Fig. 17. Ritual bath No. 4, benches, looking northwest.

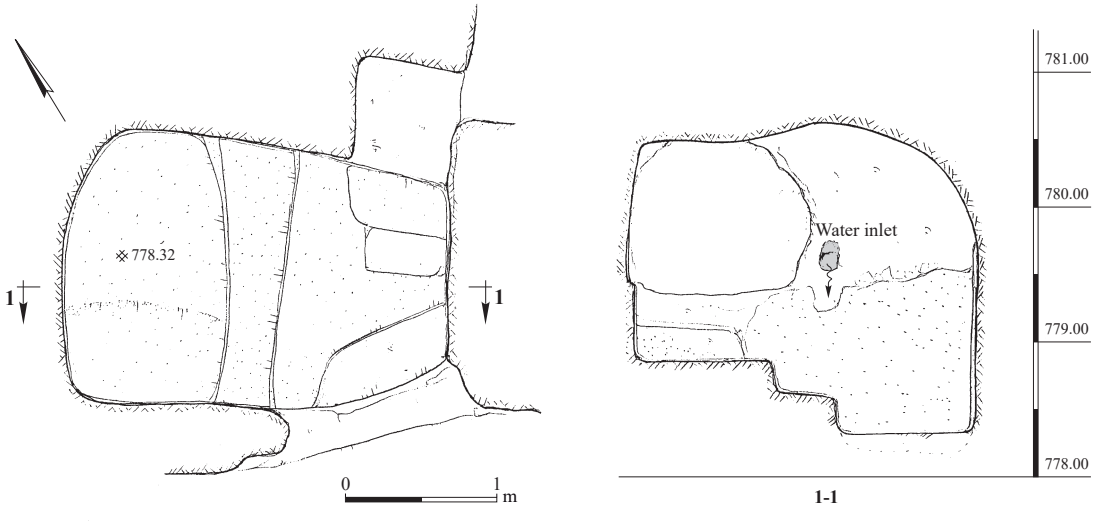

Fig. 18. Ritual bath No. 11, plan and section.

Fig. 19. Ritual bath No. 11, looking north;
note water perforation to left of entrance.

Fig. 20. Ritual bath No. 11, bench, looking north.

Fig. 21. Ritual bath No. 12, drainage channel, looking east.

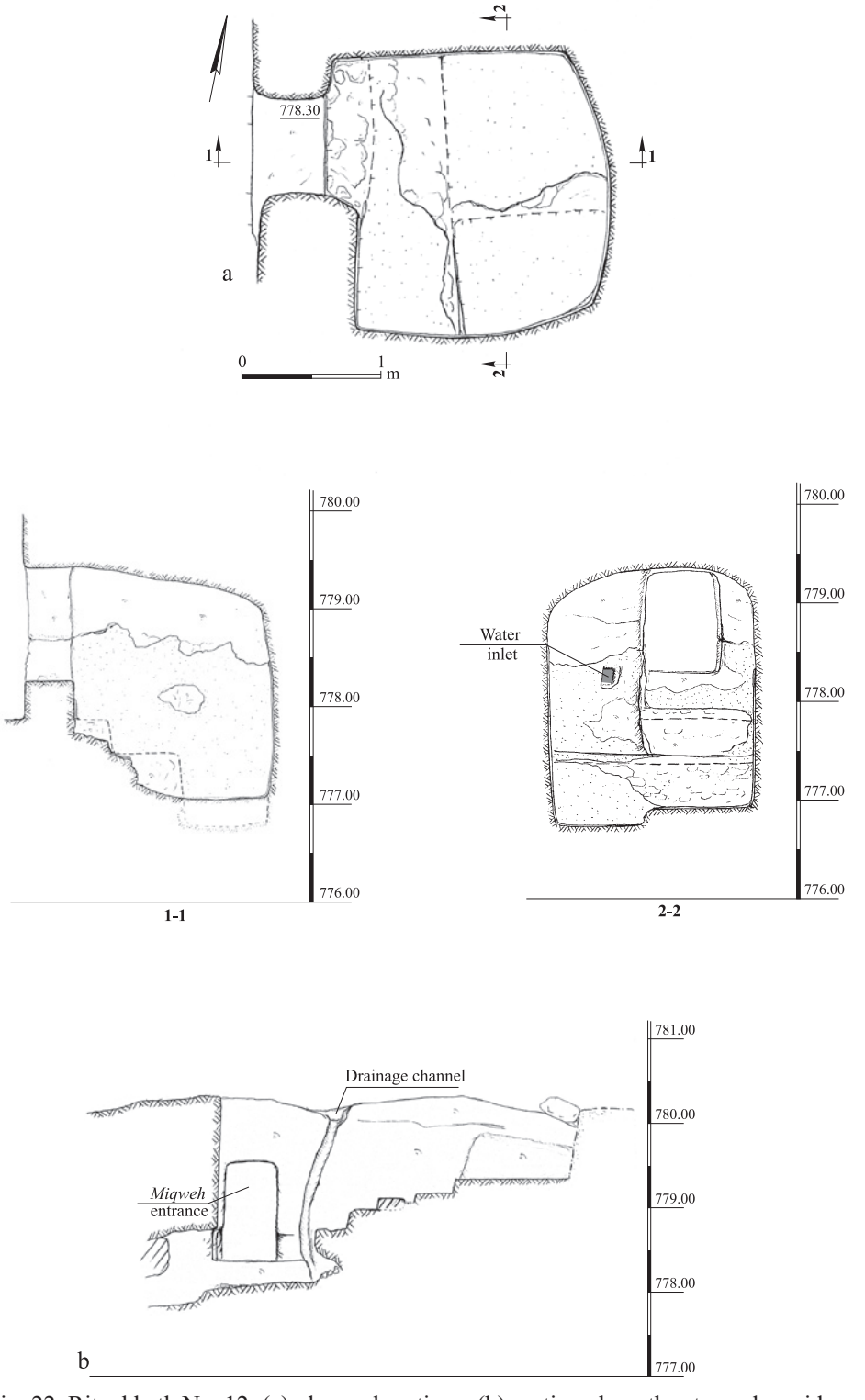

Fig. 22. Ritual bath No. 12: (a) plan and sections; (b) section along the stepped corridor, looking east (see Fig. 21).

Ritual Baths Connected with Agricultural Production

Eight ritual baths (Nos. 5, 6, 19–21, 27–29), and possibly one more (No. 22), were constructed near agricultural installations: two (Nos. 5, 6) were connected to a winery exposed by Negev (1985); three (Nos. 27–29) are thought to have been connected to an oil press based on a survey conducted in the framework of the 1990s excavations; and three (Nos. 19–21, and possibly also No. 22) were recorded in Area A (Building 19), serving hereby as a test case for understanding this phenomenon.

The excavations in Area A uncovered an architectural complex, built next to a north–south street (c. 250 m long, 5–10 m wide) that leads to the synagogue (Fig. 1). The street started in the south of the site, between two blocks of buildings. At this point, on the course of the street, a rectangular building was built, serving as a sort of entrance pavilion (Building 37).[8] From the street, narrow alleys branched off: three or four to the west and two to the east. The street was made of compacted earth above bedrock. At the contact point between the lower courses of the buildings and the street there was a thick layer of cement designed to prevent water seapage from the street. This finding attests to the regular maintenance of the street, which seems to have been an institutional operation.

The buildings and architectural complexes flanking the street opened onto it. One of these (Building 19; see below), probably the largest and most complex of them all, was built near the starting point of the street to its east. Four main archaeological phases were distinguished here: Phase 1, dating to the second half of the fourth century CE (the establishment of the settlement at Susya); Phase 2, dating to the fifth–first quarter of the seventh centuries CE; Phase 3, dating to the mid-seventh–beginning of the eighth centuries CE; and Phase 4, in the Middle Ages, dating from the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries CE.[9] In the nineteenth century, peasants from the nearby Arab villages of Yata (Yuta) and es-Samu‘ (Eshtemo‘a) settled at the site, especially in the subterranean systems, as indicated by the construction of walls, fences and sheep pens, while reusing ancient building stones. To the south of Building 19, was a trapezoidal plaza (c. 490 sq m), which opened onto the street, near Building 37 (see Fig. 1). The area to the northeast of Area A remained empty of buildings, whereas to the south, there was a sequence of buildings, some of them in direct connection with Building 19, at least in its early stages.

The detailed stratigraphic data is beyond the scope of this article. For the sake of the present discussion, 55 identified coins from Area A Building 19 are presented (Table 2; Fig. 23),[10] the

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[8] During the fieldwork, at least 46 buildings and compounds were documented and numbered. The building at the beginning of the street received the No. 37 and the one exposed in Area A received the No. 19.

[9] This division enables us to identify major changes in the nature of the settlement that are reflected *inter alia* in the settlement size and boundaries, and in the plan of the buildings.

[10] The coins from our excavation were identified by Danny Syon, who also prepared Table 2. The coins from Ze’ev Yeivin’s excavations at the synagogue (1993b) were identified by Donald T. Ariel and further processed by the authors.

Table 2. The Coins from Area A Building 19, arranged by Loci

No.	Locus	Basket	Ruler/Period	Year (CE)	Mint	Material	IAA No.
1			Constantius II	346–361	Alexandria		29427
2	1032	10120	Maurice Tiberius	582–602	Constantinople	Æ	29432
3	1038	10209	Late Roman?	late 4th c.		Æ	29436
4	1038	10675	Justin I	518–527	Constantinople	Æ	29404
5	1038	10676	Constantine I	337–341		Æ	29381
6	1043	10222	Qalawun	1279–1290	Damascus	Æ	29398
7	1052	10312	Late Roman	330–335		Æ	29438
8	1068	10140	Byzantine	498–538		Æ	29393
9	1071	10158	al-Naṣir Yusuf II	1237–1245	Damascus	ƦR	29437
10	1077	10580	Umayyad	c. AH 90 and later	Ramlah	Æ	29394
11	1086	10184	Constantius II	330–335	Antioch	Æ	29415
12	1095	10218	Umayyad	7th–8th c.		Æ	29412
13	1104	10326	Constantine II	330–335	Nicomedia	Æ	29396
14	1108	10285	Constantine I	319/20		Æ	29375
15	1108	10286	Constantius II	330–335	Antioch	Æ	29405
16	1113	10288	al-Naṣir Yusuf II	1237–1245	Damascus	ƦR	29433
17	1113	10292	Ottoman	15th–16th c.		Æ	29384
18	1113	10322	al-Saliḥ Isma‘il	1237–1245	Damascus	ƦR	29395
19	1113	10328	al-Naṣir Yusuf II	1237–1245	Damascus	ƦR	29399
20	1113	10336	al-Naṣir Yusuf II	1237–1245	Aleppo	ƦR	29429
21	1118	10413	Justin I	518–527	Constantinople	Æ	29408
22	1122	10334	al-Naṣir Naṣir al-Din Ḥasan	1347–1351	Damascus	Æ	29431
23	1155	10434	Constantine I	326–330	Alexandria	Æ	29376
24	1178	10428	al-Naṣir Yusuf II	AH655=1257/8			29397
25	1180	10435	Late Roman	5th c.?		Æ	29403
26	1180	10436	Late Roman	late 4th c.			29428
27	1196	11010	Justin II	570–578	Nicomedia	Æ	29387
28	1196	11063	Anastasius I	498–518	Constantinople	Æ	29407
29	1196	11065	Justinian I	527–538		Æ	29416
30	1196	11066	Anastasius I	498–518	Constantinople	Æ	29386
31	1196	11089	Late Roman	late 4th c.		Æ	29410
32	1196	11090	Umayyad			Æ	29419
33	1256	10472	Justin II	574/5	Constantinople	Æ	29414
34	1256	10472	Justin II	565–578	Constantinople	Æ	29413
35	1346	10668	Byzantine	6th c.	Constantinople	Æ	29420
36	1350	10995	Maurice or Heraclius			Æ	29409
37	1360	10672	Festus	59	Jerusalem	Æ	29402
38	1378	10841	Late Roman	late 4th–early 5th c.		Æ	29390
39	1425	10941	Late Roman	late 4th–early 5th c.		Æ	29389
40	1440	10813	Anastasius I	498–518	Constantinople	Æ	29385

Table 2. (cont.)

No.	Locus	Basket	Ruler/Period	Year (CE)	Mint	Material	IAA No.
41	1440	11013	Byzantine			Æ	29418
42	1443	10858	Late Roman?	4th c.?		Æ	29400
43	1456	10934	Late Roman	388–425		Æ	29383
44	1459	10961	Late Roman? (small)	5th c.?		Æ	29435
45	1476	10928	Umayyad	c. 120 AH (738)			29382
46	1491	11009	Phocas	602–610	Carthage	Æ	29379
48	1498	10997	Maurice or Heraclius	Late 6th–7th c.			29406
49	1508	11059	Baldwin III	1143–1163	Jerusalem	billon	29411
50	1526	11091	Late Roman	Late 4th c.		Æ	29440
51	1529	11095	Heraclius	612/3	Nicomedia	Æ	29378
52	1534	11096	Byzantine	498–538		Æ	29377
53	1548	1156	Justin II	570/1	Constantinople	Æ	29417
54	Dump	10586	al-Manṣur Muḥammad II	1244–1284	Hama	Æ	29430
55	Surface	10748	Late Roman	Late 4th c.			29391

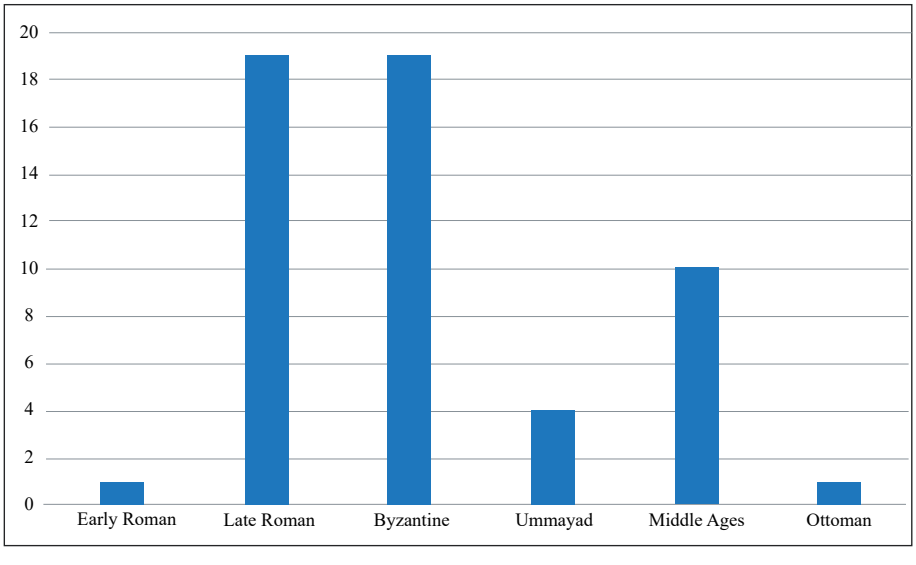

Fig. 23. Number of coins from Area A, according to periods.

dating of which corroborates that of the other findings at the site, such as pottery vessels, including oil lamps, and glass vessels. According to the numismatic evidence, the heyday of the settlement at Ḥorbat Susya lasted about 270 years, spanning the second quarter of the

fourth to the beginning of the seventh centuries CE.[11] It is noteworthy that the coins found in other areas at the site, as well as those discovered in Yeivin's excavations (see n. 10), including in the synagogue, date to the same chronological range.

Building 19: An Industrial Complex

In the center of Area A was exposed an L-shaped building (Building 19; Figs. 1, 24), built in the mid-fourth century CE[12] and comprising two wings: a western one (length c. 26 m) and a southern one (length c. 25.8 m). The walls of the building were constructed from dressed stones and their ceilings were made of long stone slabs that were placed on a system of arches across the width of the rooms. In most of the rooms, the floor was of beaten earth, while other rooms were paved with flat stones.

In a later phase, probably in the fifth century CE, Building 19 was surrounded by a stone wall, creating a closed, spacious square complex (c. 2180 sq m).[13] In the center of the western wall was a wide entrance (c. 4.5 m wide) that opened onto the street. On the southern side of the complex, long and narrow rooms were built, arranged in two separate systems, eastern and western, probably serving as storerooms. In the northwestern area of the complex (c. 404 sq m), smaller rooms and a spacious courtyard were built, as well as an installation identified as the crushing basin of an oil press. In the northeastern area of the complex (c. 358 sq m) were a courtyard, several poorly preserved rooms and rock-cut installations. Beneath the area of the complex were eight subterranean systems, which were accessed through stepped corridors (*dromi*). Four large water cisterns were recorded in this area.

Several installations within this complex are worthy of mention. A rock-cut installation (No. 1.1) was found, comprising two parts, upper and lower. The upper part was a narrow and long rectangular basin (L1592; c. 2.1 × 0.6 m) and the other, a larger and deeper rectangular basin (L1591; c. 4.1 × 2.0 m, c. 0.9 m deep). The eastern rock-cut wall of Installation 1.1 was breached toward the cave below it. Two perforations in the rock wall that separated the upper and lower basins (see Fig. 25) were used to drain liquids from one basin to the other. Several stones found on the northern wall of the installation may attest that it was originally partly built.[14]

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[11] Based on the ceramic finds, settlement at the site continued in the seventh and at least until the beginning of the eighth century CE; however, we consider that the settlement at the site had significantly declined in this phase. Regarding the later periods, it is noteworthy that four of the six Ayyubid silver *dirhams* found in L1113 may be considered a small hoard.

[12] Prior to our excavation, the building was partially excavated by Yehuda Govrin, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (see Govrin 1993).

[13] The complex underwent several architectural changes, some of them substantial, but this cannot be elaborated on here.

[14] A similar installation was recorded in the survey in the northeastern part of the site.

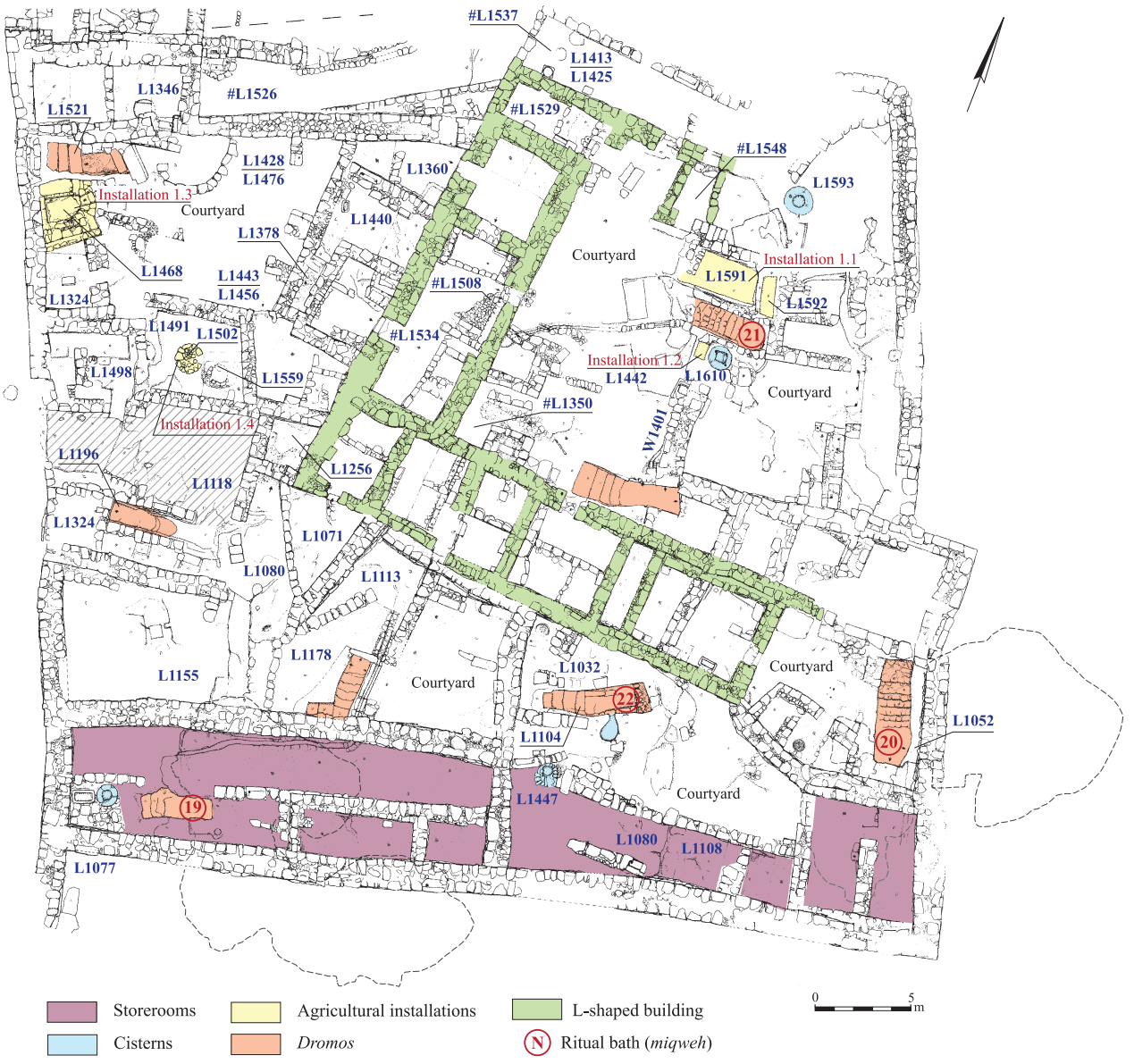

Fig. 24. Area A, Building 19, plan.

Another rock cut installation (No. 1.2; L1442; Fig. 25) included a small square basin (0.9 × 0.5 m) that drained through a perforation in its western wall to a lower hewn surface, which had only partially survived (at least 2 m wide). Adjacent to it on the south was a hewn shaft (L1697, L1698), with a square cross-section and straight walls (c. 3 m deep), in which small climbing niches were cut: four in the north, three in the west, one in the east and four in the south.

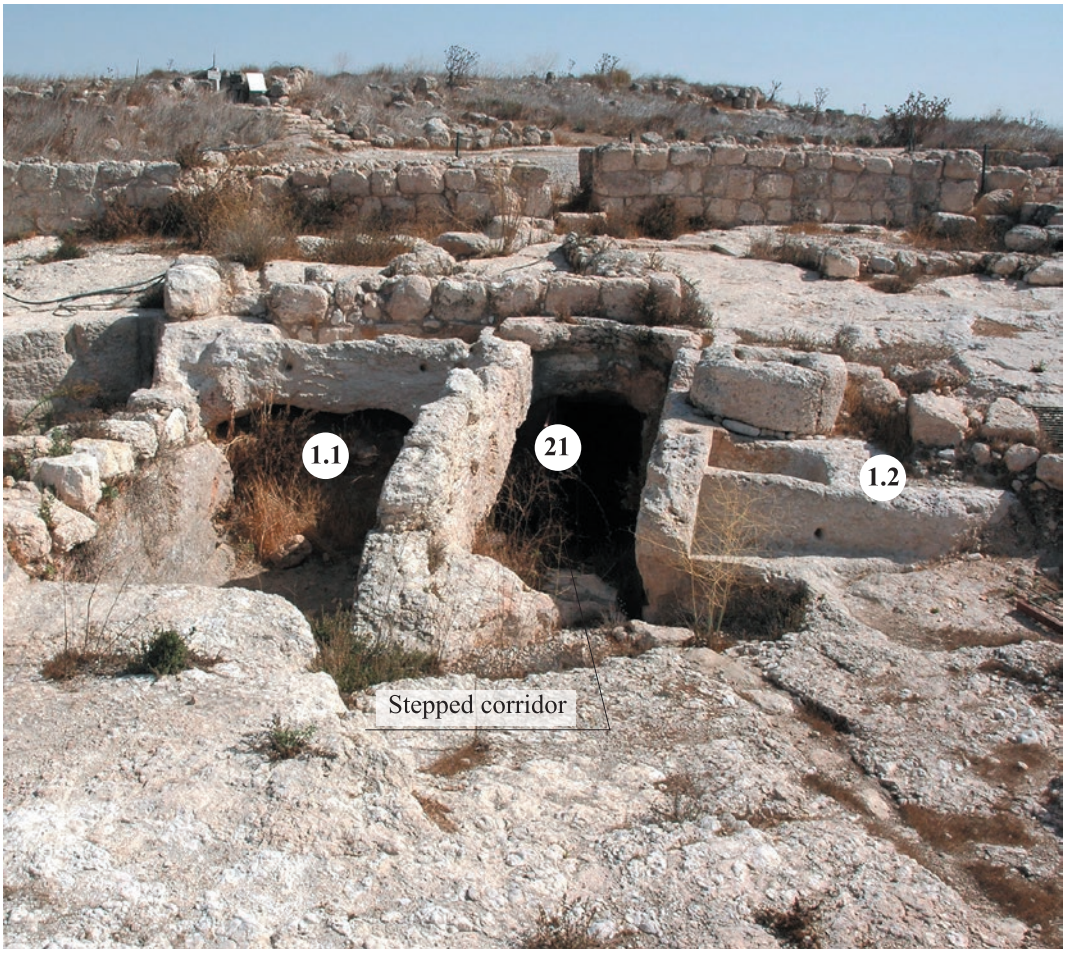

Fig. 25. Two square rock-cut and partly built installations (Nos. 1.1, 1.2) on both sides of the stepped corridor with *miqweh* 21, looking east.

A square, partly rock-cut and partly built installation (No. 1.3; L1468; 1.9 × 1.6 m) was found adjacent to the south wall of a stepped corridor that descended to a subterranean system (L1521). South of this installation was a small room (L1324) that opened onto the courtyard to its east. The installation is coated with several layers of grayish plaster, indicating maintenance.

In the northwestern area of the complex was built round installation (No. 1.4; diam. 1.5 m) within a square room (L1502; c. 20 sq m) that seems to have opened onto the courtyard to its north. The installation was built of fieldstones bonded with clay-based mortar, which seems to have served as a base for an oil-press crushing basin. Next to it was a rounded pit, dug in the ground and lined with fieldstones (L1559). Another indication that an oil press operated here was a fragment of a rounded stone, probably for crushing olives (diam.

c. 1.5 m, c. 0.35 m thick), which was found in secondary use in a wall in the northeastern courtyard of the complex (W1401). Another stone, identified as an oil-press stone weight, was discovered in one of the storerooms in the southwestern area of the complex.

The architectural characteristics of Building 19, as well as its location at the beginning of the street that crossed the ancient settlement, the trapezoidal plaza to its south, the concentration of installations and courtyards within it, and the subterranean systems beneath it—as well as many stone crushing and grinding tools, ovens and cooking vessels found within it—point to its industrial nature. Thus, it seems that this building complex served as a production center, including the storage and marketing of goods.

The Ritual Baths within Building 19 (Figs. 1, 24)

Four ritual baths were excavated and recorded in the complex of Building 19; the identification of No. 22 as a *miqweh* remains unclear. Ritual bath Nos. 20, 21 and 22(?) were installed on the sides of stepped corridors, while ritual bath No. 19 was installed within one of the subterranean systems documented in this area. The ritual baths in this area were fed with runoff rainwater, mainly from the courtyards and the roofs, which was conveyed through rock-cut channels, sometimes plastered.[15]

Ritual bath No. 21 (L1461) was installed in the northern corridor of the subterranean system beneath Building 19. It was flanked by two rock-cut installations (Fig. 25), each sharing a common wall with the corridor. Next to these installations were two large cisterns (L1593, L1610), topped by rounded monolithic stones, and additional poorly preserved rock cuttings. There is no doubt that the two rock-cut installations were used to process liquids, apparently through extraction and fermentation.

Ḥorbat Susya is the first site where the phenomenon of ritual baths located next to agricultural installations was identified. Negev (1985:243–246) suggested that these installations, located near winepresses and wineries, were used by the workers for bathing, not necessarily for ritual immersion.[16] Reich (2013:253–256) considered that in the Second Temple period, Jewish ritual baths were commonly found alongside wine- and oil presses to cater to the needs of the priests who would come to the production site to receive their share of priestly dues and tithes (Mishnah, *Hagigah* 3:4). Adler (2007) also related to this phenomenon, emphasizing the practical and economic considerations of supply and demand. The strict observance of purity laws connected to the production of wine and oil continued long after the destruction of the Temple.

[15] During the excavation, we documented in several buildings a system of drainage channels along the walls, from the ceiling to the courtyard.

[16] Many pottery drawings, sorted into three periods—Late Roman, Byzantine and Mamluk—were included in Negev's records that were given to the authors.

The Ritual Bath beneath the Synagogue

The synagogue at Ḥorbat Susya was surrounded on the east, south and west by buildings, some abutting its walls. These structures were excavated by Yeivin (1993b) and Negev (1985); however, their dating is estimated as these excavations still await final publication.[17] Based on architectural considerations, and an analysis of the urban topography of the ancient settlement, we consider that these were public buildings of the Jewish community that lived in Susya from the mid-fourth to the first quarter of the seventh century CE. In the building south of the synagogue (Building 30, see Fig. 1), two ritual baths (Nos. 3, 4) were installed.

Area B

Southwest of the synagogue was exposed a courtyard (c. 70 sq m; Figs. 26, 27), which was connected to the synagogue through a narrow opening (c. 0.7 m wide, c. 1.3 m deep) in its thick southern wall. A stylized, crescent-shaped step led to the opening. It is possible that this opening replaced an ancient opening that formed part of the synagogue's original plan.[18]

In the center of the courtyard, a stepped corridor was hewn, descending to a subterranean hall divided into two spaces (Fig. 27). The stepped corridor narrowed moderately toward the opening at its end. Above the opening was a hewn, shallow channel that seems to have caught rainwater, preventing its seepage into the underground system. Above the rock-cut walls of the corridor were remains of fieldstone walls, apparently of a later construction, perhaps dating from the Ottoman period, when the cave was reused by peasants. Above the opening was a rock-cut, rectangular niche for the placement of a stone lintel, similar to other such stone lintels found in caves throughout the site.

The subterranean hall comprised two sections: an irregularly shaped front hall (A) and a small rear hall (B), interconnected by a rock-cut corridor. Our excavation focused on the front hall, while the other elements of the subterranean complex were merely documented. The data retrieved from the excavation allowed us to establish three chronological phases (Table 3). Front Hall A, of irregular plan (c. 9 × 11 m, height c. 2.6 m) served in three phases. Based on the marks that remained on its walls, hewing was accomplished with a wide chisel. Considering the quality of the bedrock, the level of quarrying was good; the walls were rounded at the contact between the eastern and western walls and the ceiling. The walls were coated with several layers of grayish hydraulic plaster of excellent quality, the outer surface of which was smoothed. Niches of varying sizes and in disorder were installed

[17] For a concise summary of all the excavations in and around the synagogue, see Baruch 2009:235–278 and references therein; Werlin 2015:139–140).

[18] Yeivin considered that the opening in the southern wall of the synagogue was installed to allow direct access to the staircase leading to the second floor, where a 'woman's gallery' overlooking the prayer hall was built, without a need to pass through the 'study classroom' in the southern hall of the synagogue (Yeivin 1993a:15). His interpretation of the gallery as a 'women's section' is uncertain and disputed.

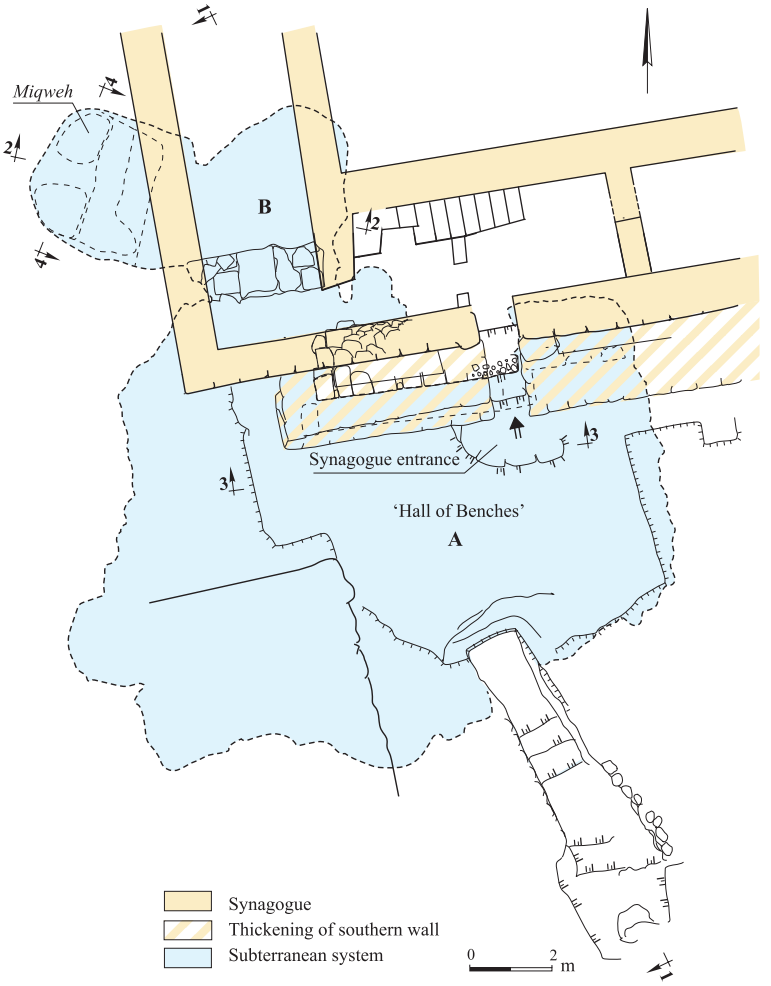

Fig. 26. Area B, subterranean space beneath the southern wall of the synagogue, plan.

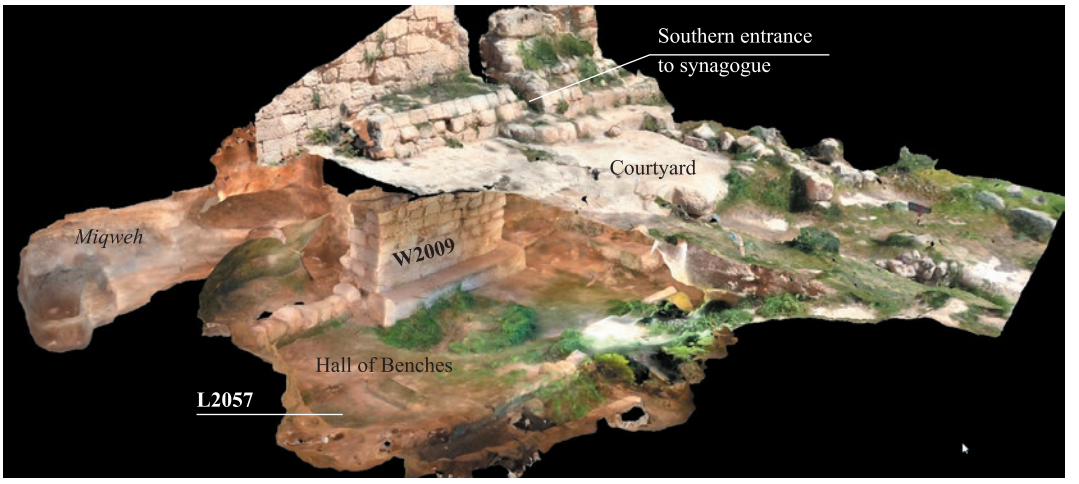

Fig. 27. Photogrametric model of the subterranean system below the synagogue, looking north.

Table 3. Phases of Use of the Subterranean Complex

Phase	Description	Date (CE)	Function
1	The hall's walls were coated with hydraulic plaster and the floor was made of packed limestone; niches and arcosolia were hewn in the walls; two square installations (L2057) coated with hydraulic plaster	Second half of 4th–beginning of 5th c.	In connection with water
2	The hall was divided into two spaces: in the front space (A), benches were built along the northern and eastern walls, and a new limestone floor was laid (L2005) abutting the benches; Floor 2005 canceled the Phase 1 square installations (L2057); ritual bath No. 2 was built; a vertical shaft was hewn in the hall's ceiling, connecting to the synagogue above it	First half of 5th–end of 6th c.	Gathering hall, used for eating liturgic meals or for studying, which required a state of purity
3	Wall 2009 was constructed behind the northern bench, and additional walls (e.g., W2010) were built on the limestone floor	Until the first quarter of the 7th c.	

in the walls. On the western side of the space were the remains of a pair of square basins, adjacent to one another (L2057; Figs. 26, 28, 29). The basins were contemporary with the lower floor (L2056); their walls were built of stones of different sizes and coated with grayish plaster on the interior. Due to their poor state of preservation, it was not possible to determine their function; however, it seems that they formed part of the subterranean space during the first phase of use.

In the second phase, ashlar stone-built benches with triangular armrests at their ends were installed along the northern and eastern walls of the subterranean space ('Hall of Benches'; Fig. 30).

Rear Hall B (c. 5.3 × 1.7 m, height c. 1.9 m), which extended below the synagogue, was accessed through a short corridor (1.0 × 0.7 m) that was cut into the northern wall of Hall A. At the end of this corridor was a stepped pool, plastered with grayish hydraulic plaster, identified as a ritual bath (No. 2; L2006, L2008; max. depth c. 1.5 m; Fig. 27). Two wide steps led down to a rounded immersion pool, with a rock-cut partition dividing its lower part into two (Fig. 31). Before the descent to the *miqweh*, on the right (northern) side, was a large, rock-cut niche (L2012). In the northeastern part of Hall B was a vertical hewn shaft (Fig. 28: Section 3–3), the upper end of which was located beneath the floor of the southwestern wing of the synagogue; it seems that when the walls of the synagogue were thickened, the shaft was blocked.[19]

[19] It is possible that the rear space of the subterranean complex was originally used as a water cistern.

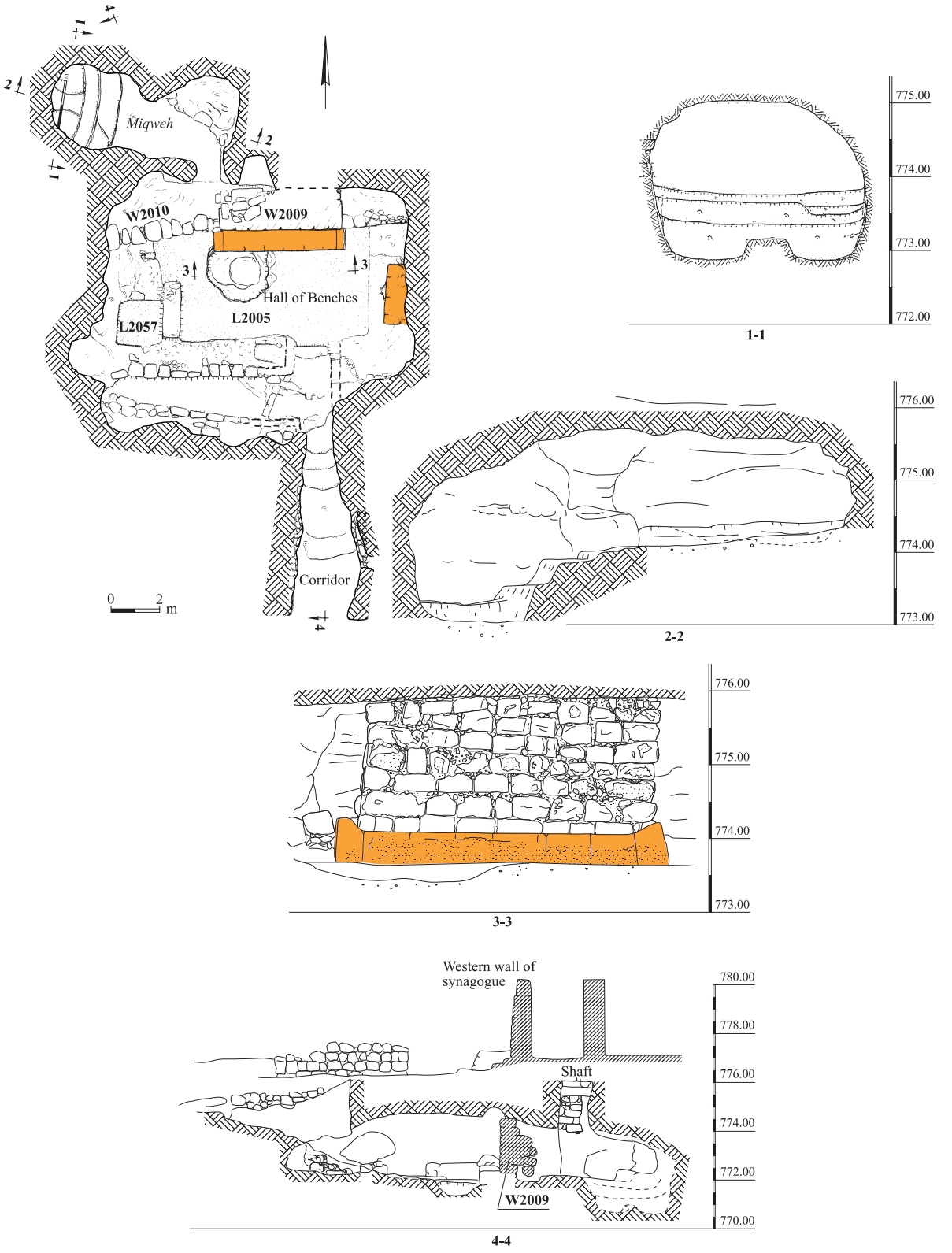

Fig. 28. The subterranean space beneath the synagogue, plan and sections.

Fig. 29. A pair of installations on the western side of the 'Hall of Benches,' looking west.

Fig. 30. The northern bench built along W2009, looking northeast.

Fig. 31. Ritual bath No. 2 with partition in the lower part of the immersion pool, looking west.

The Dating of the Subterranean System

Following the excavation of the 'Hall of Benches' it became clear that there were three main phases of use (Table 3), dating to the fourth–first quarter of the seventh centuries CE. We consider that the synagogue above was also used in this timeframe.[20] The finds retrieved in the excavation of the 'Hall of Benches' were few, including potsherds,[21] glassware, stoneware, coins (Table 4),[22] nails and stucco fragments, which probably decorated parts of the subterranean system. The dating of the floor levels to the period spanning the fourth–first half of the seventh centuries CE is supported by two samples of charcoal found beneath the floors of the 'Hall of Benches,' which were tested by Carbon-14 analysis, yielding two dates: between 470–480 CE, and between 530–640 CE.[23]

[20] The dating of the stages of the synagogue at Ḥorbat Susya was summarized by Werlin (2015:175–180). Once abandoned, a mosque was built in the courtyard of the synagogue, possibly following the conversion of the Jewish residents to Islam, or the immigration of Muslim residents. At this time, there was no need for a ritual bath.

[21] Noteworthy is the relatively high number of bowls and cooking pots in the assemblages associated with the second phase (about 80%), compared to only a few storage vessels and jugs. This attests that the cave was used for activities related to food and not as a storage or industrial facility.

[22] Seventeen bronze coins were discovered in this area, six of which were identifiable and dated to the mid–end fourth century CE. Four coins retrieved from L2023 (earth fills under the chalk floor of the second phase, L2005) were stuck together (a hoard?). Coin Nos. 5, 6 were found in a hole in the rock (L2053).

[23] The analysis was conducted by Elisabetta Boaretto (see Baruch 2005).

Table 4. Identified Coins from Area B

No.	IAA No.	Locus	Basket	Period	Year (CE)	Mint
1	29359	2023	20044	Late Roman	337–341	Antioch
2	29358	2023	20045	Late Roman	late 4th c.	
3	29360	2023	20046	Late Roman	225–341	
4	29361	2023	20047	Constantius II	341–346	Antioch
5	29365	2053	20148	Late Roman?		
6	29362	2053	20150	Late Roman	late 4th c.	

The Function of the Subterranean System beneath the Synagogue

The subterranean system beneath the synagogue was unique, as it comprised a 'Hall of Benches' in its front space and a ritual bath in its rear space. The connection between the subterranean system and the synagogue above it is clear: they were connected by an opening in the southern wall of the synagogue and the underground system extended under the area of the synagogue.

The subterranean system was related to a religious activity connected with the synagogue. As almost every house in Susya has a stepped ritual bath, it can be assumed that the residents of Susya arrived at the synagogue after having immersed at home. Therefore, it seems that the 'Hall of Benches' was a study hall (*bet midrash*), which required a state of purity (see, e.g., Sussman 1968:310–313); alternatively, the immersion in the *miqweh* beneath the synangogue was required by participants of liturgic meals (*se'udot mitzva*), which were held in this hall and required some level of purity (Reich 1987). Recently, Adler rejected the possibility that ritual baths installed near synagogues were intended to enable participation in liturgic meals, arguing that there is a chronological gap between the archaeological findings of the Second Temple period and the halakhic text concerning liturgic meals, which is not earlier than the third century CE (Adler 2008a:62–63). Adler cites a Tannaite source, which mentions an explicit Halakha that forbids eating within the confines of a synagogue: "Synagogues... no one eats or drinks in them..." (Tosefta, *Megillah* 2, 18 [Lieberman edition, p. 353]).[24] It seems, then, that the archaeological finds from Susya refute the two claims put foward by Adler: (1) the finds in question date from the fourth century CE, that is, post-Talmudic; (2) the 'Hall of Benches' constitutes a separate wing beneath the synagogue. Therefore, we consider that the subterranean system beneath the synagogue housed activities that required a certain degree of purity.

[24] The issue of eating in synagogues was recently addressed by Aviam and Safrai (2021) in their theoretical study concerning private synagogues. They do not rule out the possibility; however, they suggest that it was more likely to have occurred in rooms connected to the synagogue and in relation to other activities, such as learning (Aviam and Safrai 2021:126–127).

Ritual Baths in Synagogues

Synagogues dating from the Second Temple period, such as at Masada, Herodium, Gamla, Jericho, Khirbat el-ʻUmdan, Qiryat Sefer, Ḥorbat ʻEtri and the City of David in Jerusalem, incorporated water installations identified as ritual baths, while only a few of the dozens of Roman- and Byzantine-period synagogues (Reich 2013: 241–245) excavated in Israel and in the Diaspora comprised ritual baths, and their connection to the synagogues is controversial. The paucity of ritual baths in connection with synagogues dating to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods led some researchers to suggest that Jewish communities did not continue to observe the laws of purity after the destruction of the Temple (see, e.g., Levine 1991:39; Adler 2011:66–68). Some scholars considered that the Jewish communities observed purity in connection to the synagogue in different ways, either by using a nearby public bathhouse (Reich 1988; 2013:245–251; Grosberg 2001) or a natural water source, such as at Caesarea and Gaza, and even in the Diaspora, e.g., in the Island of Delos and in Ostia Antica.[25] This, however, did not annul the need of worshipers to purify themselves, and therefore, alternative facilities were established, such as the *gurna* mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Megillah* 3:3), which was a sink for washing hands and feet, also mentioned in a medieval text from the Cairo Genizah (Margaliyot 1974:132).

Discussion and Conclusions

The literary sources testify that after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the strict adherence to the laws of purity continued, attesting to a hope of rebuilding the Temple. This is explicitly evident in the Talmudic sources which include extensive discussions of topics related to purity and impurity. The sources indicate that purity was strictly maintained not only within the confines of the synagogue and the *bet midrash* but also practiced daily, as in the production of oil and wine (Adler 2008; Reich 2013:253–256). In contrast to the many Talmudic references to the laws of purification, and the multitude of archaeological findings dating to the Second Temple period, the archaeological evidence connected to the observance of purity in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, both in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora, is scarce, with most ritual baths found within settlements and only a few, next to synagogues (Adler 2008; Reich 2013:245).[26]

[25] We are aware of the fact that an installation identified by the excavator, Maria Floriani Squarciapino, as a ritual bath was unearthed in the synagogue of Ostia Antica, Italy (for a discussion and architectural analysis of the synagogue, see Runesson 2001:71–72).

[26] It is noteworthy that in the Early Islamic period and in the Middle Ages, ritual baths were found mainly in connection with synagogues and considered community property, and almost never in private houses; this connection was discussed by Pinkerfeld (1946:51). It is possible to consider the ritual bath from Ḥorbat Susya as a prototype of this later development. The earliest example of this phenomenon is the Ben Ezra synagogue in Fustat (Cairo), where a pair of ritual baths was recorded within the synagogue complex, dating from the eighth century CE (Ben-Dov 1982:33; 1989:149–162).

In light of the above, the finding of many ritual baths at Ḥorbat Susya in the *Daroma* (southern Hebron Hills) region is noteworthy, testifying to the uniqueness of this Jewish settlement. This uniqueness is reflected in several material aspects, such as the appearance of many menorah decorations; the location of the entrance to the synagogue in the east; the widespread use of the Hebrew script in addition to the Aramaic script;[27] the use of a calendar based on years counted from the biblical date of the creation of the world; and two inscriptions mentioning the names of people who boast of their affiliation with priestly families.[28] These archaeological data led some scholars to believe that the religious status of the priestly families, and perhaps even their economic status, was high in the region of *Daroma*, and particularly in the Jewish settlement of Susya (Amit 2004; Miller 2006:144).[29]

The main reasons for the unique material culture of Susya lies, *inter alia*, in the historical and cultural reality of the time. In the Byzantine period, especially in the fifth–seventh centuries CE, Christianity reached its peak, gaining significant hold of the rural and seminomadic populations that lived on the margins of the cultivated land area. The Hebron Hills and the southern Judean desert ('the South' or '*Daroma*')—the scenes of many of the biblical stories, especially those related to the figures of Abraham and King David, such as Alone Mamre, Hebron, Ziff, Carmel and Ma'on—were the major locations of Christian activity. The economic prosperity and the secure system of roads, bustling with traffic, led to a flourishing of settlements in the southern regions, where even tribes of shepherds living on the fringes of society adapted to the new Byzantine society and the new religion.

In the new settlements established in the area, one or more churches were built. It is likely that in the fifth century CE, there were no more pagans in this area, while the Jewish inhabitants resided in several, closely located large villages in a very limited area, such as the one exposed at Ḥorbat Susya. We consider that these Jews wished to separate themselves from their Christian neighbors, as is indicated in the material culture remains within their settlements in the region, and especially at Susya. Therefore, the unique phenomenon of the many ritual baths at Susya must be understood and interpreted as follows: (1) purification in the ritual baths within the residences was not associated with the Temple, as was customary in the Second Temple period and following its the destruction, but to the desire to separate oneself from the surrounding Christian environment, leading to a development new purity issues, especially those related to the purity of the family, e.g., after a woman's menstruation

[27] For a discussion of the Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions from Susya, see, e.g., Yeivin 1974; Naveh 1978:114–125; Laub 2014:75–89.

[28] The first is the Aramaic inscription "Remembered for good Lazar Kahana…." found in the narthex of the synagogue, and the second is a Hebrew, "Remembered for good, the sanctity of my master Rabbi Isai (or Isi) the Priest, …. which was donated at a feast [of] Rabbi Johanan the Priest.. which was found in the southern corner of the synagogue's courtyard" (see Naveh 1978: Inscription Nos. 74, 75; Rosenfeld 2005; Laub 2014:91–92).

[29] On the status of the priesthood and its power during the Talmudic period, see, for example, Kimelman 1983; Amit 2004; Irshai 2004; for a different opinion, see Fine 2004.

(נידה); (2) ritual baths installed near agricultural installations seem to point to a continuation of the ancient custom of producing wine and oil in purity, indicating the centrality of Susya as an economic and commercial center in *'Daroma,'* for Jewish, and perhaps even non-Jewish farmers; and (3) the ritual bath discovered in the subterranean hall beneath the synagogue, and in direct connection to it, calls for a reconsideration of the connection between ritual baths and synagogues.

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