

# Khirbet Faṭṭir – 1997

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(Hebrew section: pp. 117–121)

During July and August 1997 the seventh season of excavation at Kh. Faṭṭir (Beit Jimal; see *ESI* 12) was conducted under the auspices of the Pontifical Salesian University of Rome. The excavation was directed by professors M. Piccirillo and A. Strus, with the assistance of F.M. Tommasi (archaeologist, Rome), R. Sandri and E. Puliafito (architects, Rome and Turin respectively), M. Mazzanti (objects registrar, Turin) and A. de Vincenz (ceramics specialist, Jerusalem). About 20 volunteers from Italy, Poland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Israel took part in the excavation.

This season's excavation had two goals: (1) to complete the excavation of the perimeter wall of the church complex in Area B; and (2) to extend the excavation in Area C, where Late Byzantine structures emerged previously, superimposed on earlier structures. Some workers were employed to preserve the work of a ruined house (Area D) situated near the 'Ein Faṭṭir spring, 230 m north of the excavated area.

## AREA B (Fig. 176)

An area of c. 156 sq m was investigated east of the church and oil press (II), along W1040, that could be the eastern fence wall of the church complex. W1040 is constructed of two rows of limestone blocks; the northern segment has only its interior face preserved, while its southern segment has its exterior face visible on the surface, but not explored. Trenches were opened southeast of the silo (III); no structures were found. The area is probably a large courtyard used for agricultural purposes within the complex. Most of the area is occupied by a rectangular building (V; 6 × 13 m), oriented north–south and having two entrances: one, still preserved, in the northern wall, and one, later destroyed, in the western wall.

The courtyard was accessible through two passages: one to the east of the church, of which jambs and a lintel were preserved, and another, south of the silo, which was subsequently blocked off. The courtyard excavated between the oil press and W1040 had a floor made of beaten earth and mortar. In the southern part of the courtyard two phases were discovered. The lower phase is a fill leveling the gradient of the bedrock; it contained a large quantity of ceramic and glass fragments dating to the 6th/7th century CE. The upper phase, a surface of sandy earth and mortar, was also rich in ceramics and glass material dating to the Late Byzantine and Early Umayyad periods. No architectural remains were found, only hearths

containing burnt ceramics and charred olive pits on the surface. The ceramic material, as well as a gold coin of 'Abd al-Malik (724–743 CE) found on the surface of this level, allows the courtyard to be dated between the second half of the 7th to the 8th centuries CE. The stratigraphy shows that the construction of Building V is contemporary with Phase 2. It seems that Building V was constructed simultaneously with the transformation of the oil press (II) into a flour mill; this was dated during the 1996 excavation season to the 7th century CE. The discontinuity between the western entrance of Building V and its inner Rooms 2, 3 and 4 indicates a later stage of construction, possibly connected to the removal of the divisions between Rooms 2 and 3 and Rooms 2 and 4, and the threshold in Room 1. Wall 1045 was probably built at this time. The reason for these later renovations is unknown and the function of the building in this phase is unclear. The function of the Phase 1 building can only be postulated: Room 1 may have served for dwelling; Room 4 for cereal storage; Rooms 2 and 3 as threshing floors and wheat storerooms.

## AREA C

*Late Byzantine/Early Islamic Period* (Fig. 177). This season the excavation of the building (Rooms I–IX) was extended to the west and to the south. The building exhibits two building phases: the first (W2061, W2058 and W2060; 6 × 24 m), whose function is unknown, dates to the early and/or middle Byzantine period; the second reused the older walls as foundations (outer walls?) and was used partly as an oil industry (Rooms III and IV) and partly for habitation (Rooms IX–XIII). The threshold in W2058, bordering Room XI, suggests that this is the entrance room of the building. Late Byzantine and Early Islamic pottery found on the floors of all the rooms date the later phase of the building to the Umayyad period.

A layer of ash in Room XIII, as well as collapsed stones from the walls of the rooms, seem to indicate that the building was destroyed by fire. Following a period of abandonment, the area was reoccupied, as shown by a later pavement. Rooms XI–XIII were rudimentarily rebuilt. Mamluk sherds found in Room XIII imply that this is the final occupation phase (not attested to in Area B).

*The Roman Period.* Caves and installations dating to the Roman period were uncovered in this area:

1. Cave 2213 is situated under Room XI and was entered through a natural crack in the bedrock, enlarged artificially and later blocked by W2058. The pottery finds which infiltrated through this crack date to the early/middle Byzantine period (not later than the 6th century CE); thus, one can deduce that the walling up of the crack dates back to the 6th century CE. The original entrance to the cave was through a vertical shaft (0.6 × 0.7 m, depth 2 m) which was cut into the bedrock. Small arches were carved in the bottom walls of the shaft, on the east, south and west. The cave floor is 1.6 m below the bottom of the shaft; a ladder probably bridged the gap. The grooves around the opening of the shaft indicate that it was covered with a stone slab. The material found in the cave is mixed: a coin of Alexander Janneus (103–76 BCE), a Roman-period juglet, a fragment of a multi-colored Byzantine mosaic, several tesserae and bone fragments, as well as potsherds from the Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. The cave can be dated according to its function to the Roman period; its unusual entrance, which requires the use of a ladder, indicates its defensive character. It can probably be attributed to the Jewish War or to the Bar Kokhba Revolt. The construction of W2058 in the Byzantine period was intended to close the natural crack, as well as the shaft. The sherds found in the shaft date to the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods; it seems that it was subsequently reopened, probably before the reconstruction of the building in the second phase.

2. Cave 2214 (Fig. 178) is a subterranean structure located under the eastern part of Room XII; its entrance shaft is just to the west of W2061. The cave, hewn in two phases, consists of three loci—Locus A, the earliest, carved at a higher level, and Loci B and C at a lower level. Locus A was originally accessible through Passage 6. In the second phase, this passage was blocked by stones and a new, stepped entrance (1–3) was cut into the

middle of Locus A. Under the blocked passage (6) a lower passage was hewn leading to Loci B and C. The finds in Locus A include a coin of Alexander Janneus, remains of women's clothing, Roman-period potsherds and six partially broken wine jars dating to the 1st century BCE–the 1st century CE. In Loci B and C were a few small fragments of Roman-period potsherds, as well as a well-preserved metal lock of a door discovered in the entrance to Locus B. This could suggest that Loci B and C served as subterranean storerooms. The cave was sealed in the Roman period. However, in the upper part of the shaft several Byzantine and Early Islamic ceramics were found. It is possible that the shaft was partially used for storage up to the Umayyad period.

3. Cave/Cistern 2216 is oval in shape (diam. 5.4 m, height at least 3 m). It was entered via a rectangular shaft (0.8 × 1.0 m, depth c. 2 m) with footholds in the sides. Originally it probably served as a storage unit or shelter as did Caves 2213 and 2214. During the Byzantine period the cave was converted into a cistern, as shown by the 0.1 cm thick plaster on the walls and ceiling. The shaft was covered with a stone slab (0.5 m thick) having a round opening in its center. South of the slab is W2074, constructed of stones and mortar and covered on the interior with plaster. No ceramics were found inside the cistern. A layer of earth containing Umayyad ceramics extended over the opening of the cistern; it was covered with a layer of lime, probably in a period when the cistern was no longer in use.

4. *Miqveh* 2217 (Fig. 179) is located 4 m northeast of Cistern 2216; its walls are of uneven height (1–2, 2.3 and 2.8 m) due to the inclination of the bedrock. The steps leading to the *miqveh* are cut in the rock inside a rectangular shaft (2.0 × 2.3 m): three steps descend from west to east and four additional steps turn south to meet the entrance (height 2 m, width 2.1 m). West of the entrance is a 1.5 m high rock bench. A threshold (width 0.6 m) hewn exactly above the first step belongs to the original work of the *miqveh*. Two holes cut on each side of the entrance were probably intended for the placement of jambs, suggesting the existence of a door. A large niche (width 0.2 m, depth 0.15 m) cut into the rock south of the *miqveh* probably held a pole used to support an additional structure.

The bath itself (2.4 × 3.0 m) has four steps of the same height as the steps leading to the entrance (height 0.2 m). The last step ends in a basin

(width 1.2 m, depth 1 m). A semicircular step (height 0.8 m) to its west facilitated the entrance to the basin.

There is no evidence indicating the date of the *miqueb*'s construction. It seems that the entrance shaft was used up to the Early Islamic period. During this period the *miqueb* was filled about two-thirds high with small stones and earth containing large quantities of Late Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic pottery, including a calcareous lamp mold dating to the 3rd–4th centuries CE. The opening of the *miqueb* was then sealed with large blocks (height *c.* 1.5 m). Since the blocking of the *miqueb* was not intended against water infiltration, one can infer that it was done to transform the entrance shaft into a storeroom for dry products. Somewhat later, but still in the Umayyad period, the shaft was

filled with soft, sandy earth, which partially penetrated the *miqueb*. The fill of the shaft contained many potsherds from the Late Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods; a coin of Alexander Janneus found in the fill must be clearly out of context. The walls of the entrance shaft and the steps had been coated with gray plaster containing Late Byzantine and Early Islamic potsherds. The blocking of the *miqueb* might be connected to the closing of Cistern 2216 and the covering of the whole area with a layer of lime.

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*Figure captions:*

176. Kh. Faṭṭir. Area B, plan.

177. Kh. Faṭṭir. Area C, plan.

178. Kh. Faṭṭir. Area C, Cave 2214, plan and section.

179. Kh. Faṭṭir. Area C, *Miqueb* 2217, plan and section.