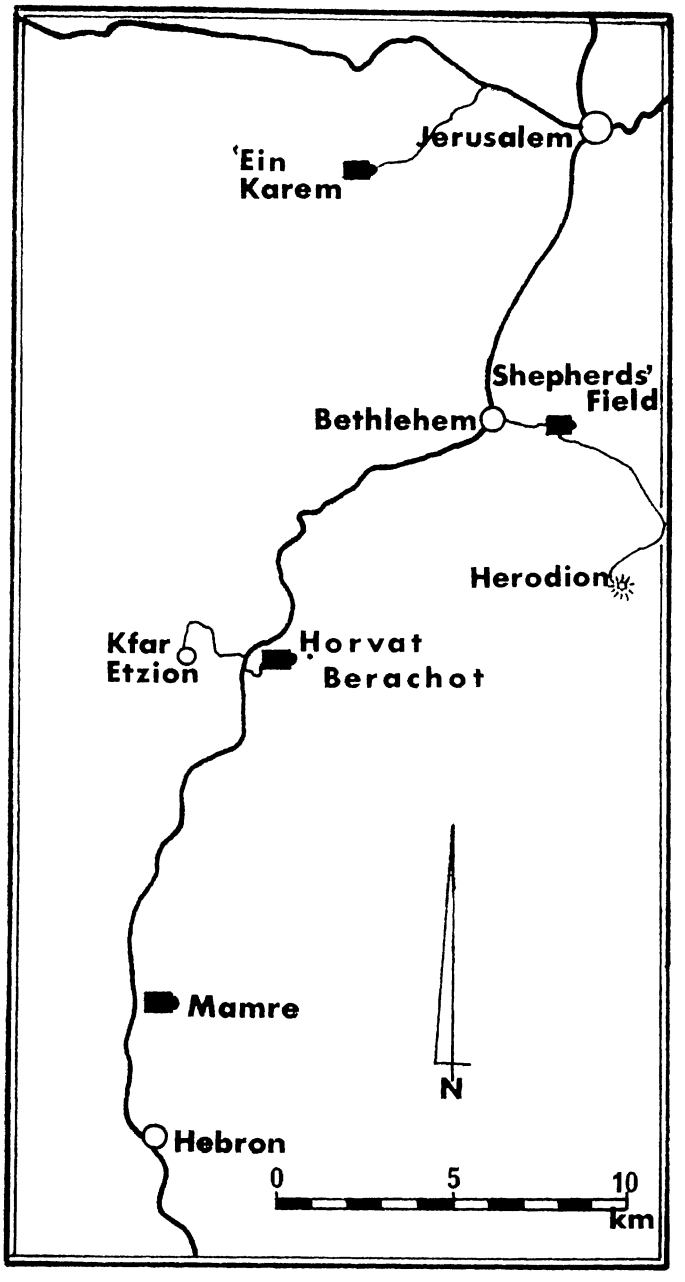


A. Israel, Ḥorvat Berachot, Location Map

Introduction

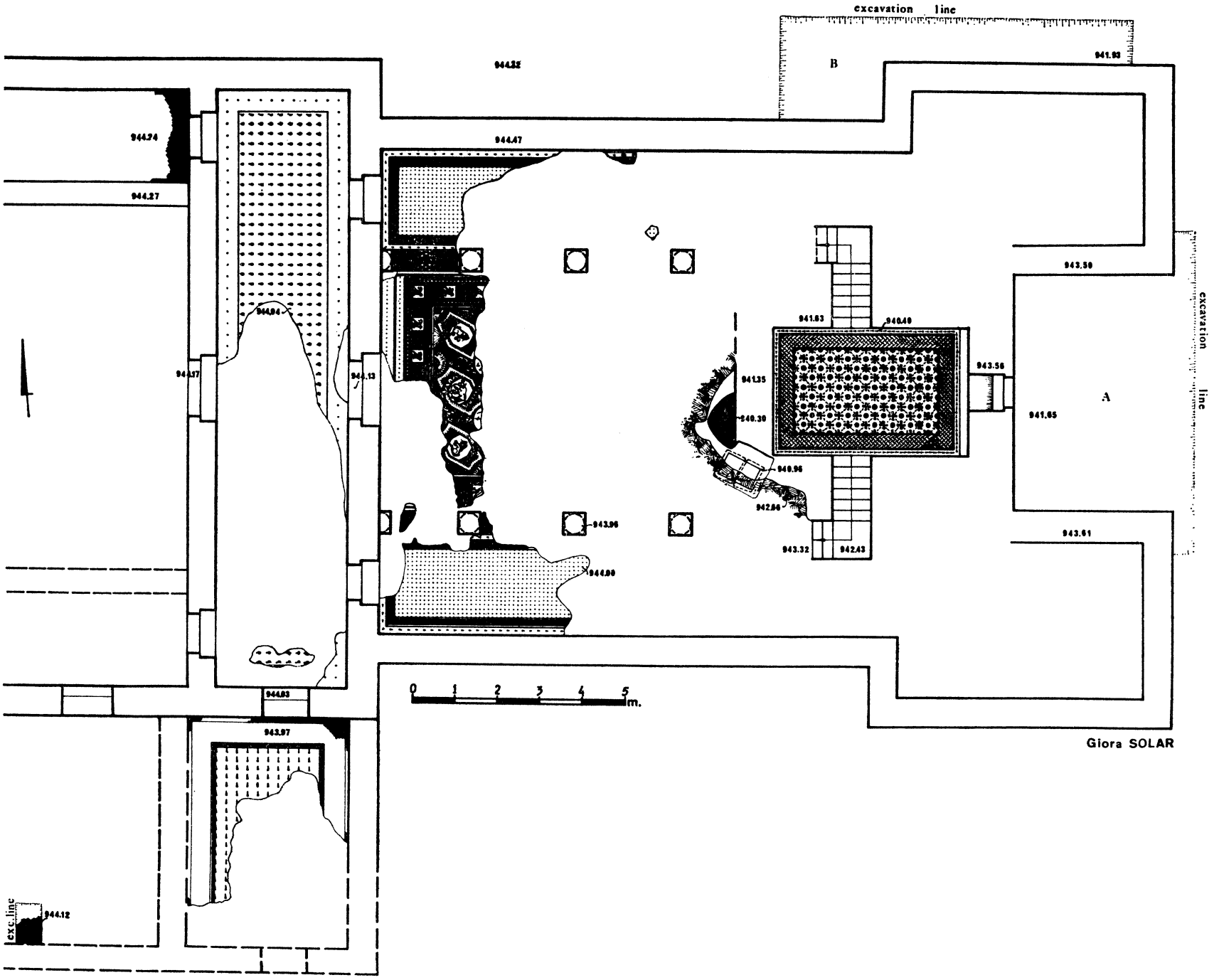
Ḥorvat Berachot (in Arabic: Khirbet Bureikut) is located near the main road Jerusalem-Hebron, *ca.* nine kilometers southwest of Bethlehem (Map ref. 1638.1138) (fig. A). The site consists of many ruins of houses, vaulted cellars, rock-cut cisterns, and caves scattered along the top of a wide hill and on its northern, southern, and especially eastern slopes (fig. 1). Pottery collected in the area shows clearly that the settlement belongs to the Byzantine and Early Arab period, but without an excavation of other parts of the site no further information on it is available. The site suffered from the robbing of antiquities; a massive rectangular ashlar building located on the southern slope of the hill was the part most seriously affected. A salvage dig was therefore carried out in this building in July 1976.[1] In the course of the excavations it became clear that this edifice was a Byzantine basilical church of the fifth to seventh centuries which was deserted after the Arab conquest and then occupied by Moslems, who used it as a dwelling place or storeroom; it was at that time that secondary provisional walls were built in some parts of the church. More recently, most of the ashlars and roof tiles were taken away by Arab villagers. Only on the east side were walls preserved to a level above the foundations and up to a height of two meters. Cultivation of the area severely damaged the mosaic floors of the church. The church complex consists of the main basilical hall, a crypt which was discovered under the ruined chancel, a narthex, and an atrium flanked by rooms—perhaps a monastery.

The Masonry

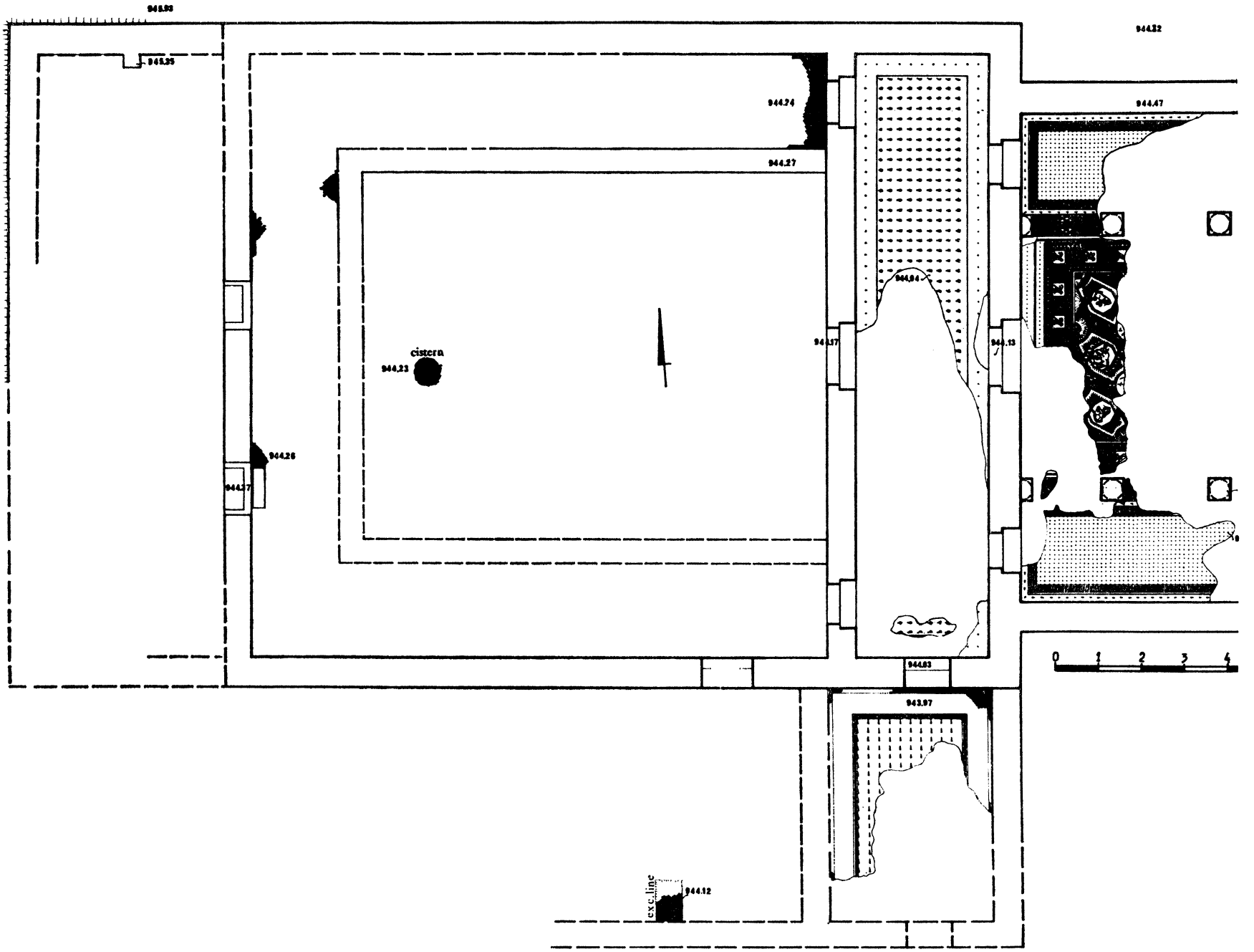
The church was built on bedrock on the eastern side of the southern slope of the hill. This slope necessitated heavy construction work and filling on the eastern side, so as to bring the eastern part of the building to the same level as the western part. This topographical setting enabled the architects to include in the church a vaulted crypt beneath the chancel, in a natural cave which had been used as a shrine before the church was built (fig. B).

On their outer faces, the walls were mainly built of large ashlars of an average length of 50–90 cm. (sometimes more than 1 m.) and a height of

[1] See preliminary report by Y. Tsafrir and Y. Hirschfeld, "Khirbet Bureikut, Notes and News," *IEJ*, 26 (1976), 206–7, pl. 36d–e; and also in Hebrew, "A Church of the Byzantine Period at Ḥorvat Berachot," *Qadmoniot*, 44 (1978), 120–28. The excavation was carried out on behalf of the Staff Officer, Archaeology, for Judea and Samaria, the Kfar Etzion Educational Center, and the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The excavators were assisted by Mr. D. Amit. The plans and architectural reconstructions were drawn by the architect G. Solar; the pottery was drawn by Mrs. E. Huber; and the photographs were taken by Mr. Z. Radovan. We owe thanks to Mr. A. Eitan, director of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museum, for permission to use the archive of the Department. The final text was prepared by Y. Tsafrir while he was a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks; the authors owe many thanks to the staff and librarians of this Institute for their generous assistance. We especially thank Dr. Sabine MacCormack for her useful help and advice.



B 1. General Plan of Excavated Church, East End

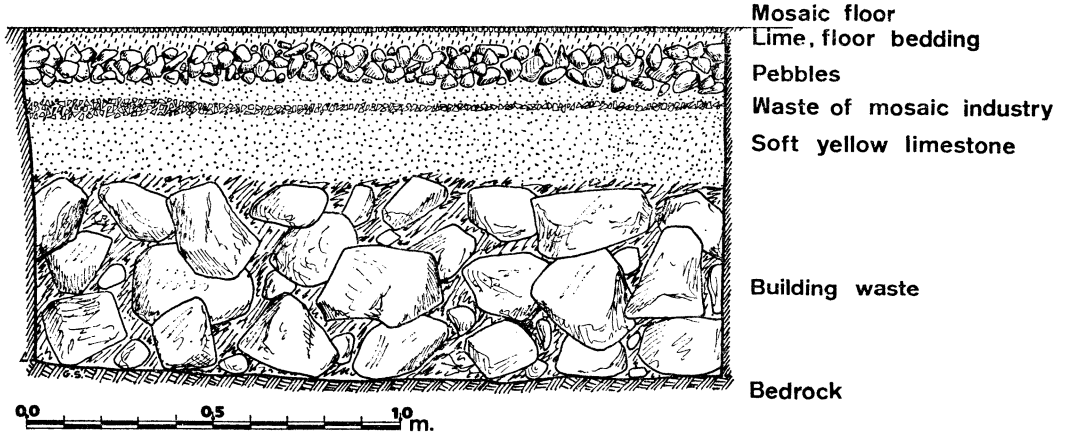


B. 2. General Plan of Excavated Church, West End

0.65 m. Most stones were dressed rather crudely on the inner, hidden faces, but quite carefully on the outer faces. The majority of the stones had smooth marginal drafts and a prominent rough boss in the center, but some had no boss or only a very low central one (figs. 2, 3). Stone dressing with marginal drafts was very common in the Second Temple Period in Judea, but it also appears in many Early Byzantine sites.[2] However, as a whole, the masonry of the church is different from that of the typical Second Temple Period and it is therefore clear that the stones were specifically prepared for this church and not brought to the site for secondary use.[3]

The average thickness of the walls was about 0.70 m. Their exterior faces were most probably uncoated, but at the lower courses a revetment of cement and gravel was applied (cf. figs. 2, 3) in order to protect the foundations and collect rain falling from the roof and walls into a shallow cemented channel leading to a neighboring cistern (which we have not discovered). This cement revetment was *ca.* 50 cm. high and *ca.* 15–20 cm. thick at its base, but these dimensions varied according to the topographical conditions; in one spot at the east side it was *ca.* 1.1 m. high and 0.45 m. thick. In the interior of the building the walls were coated with white plaster. Although no remains of colored plaster were discovered, it is not at all impossible that some parts of the walls were decorated with frescoes.

The church was furnished with mosaic pavements. A probe was dug under the pavement when it was removed for restoration, in order to investigate the



C. Church, Section of Probe near Central Door of Hall, looking East

[2] See examples in the close vicinity: the walls of the fourth-century church at Bethany, S. J. Saller, *Excavations at Bethany, 1949–1953* (Jerusalem, 1957), 9–13, fig. 4, pls. 11b, 13b; the sixth-century church at Siyar el Ghanam (Shepherds' Field), V. Corbo, *Gli scavi di Kh. Siyar el Ghanam (Campo dei Pastori) e i monasteri dei dintorni* (Jerusalem, 1955), 19–21, photos 11, 14, 15.

[3] In the Second Temple period the ashlars of monumental buildings were carefully cut on all sides to prepare the stones for "dry" masonry. On our site only the visible faces (i.e., the outer and inner faces of the walls) were thus dressed since the core of the wall was filled with small rough stones, rubble, and cement.

method of construction and the possible existence of earlier floors or buildings. This excavation took place on the western part of the nave, near the central door connecting it with the narthex. It measured 1×1.80 m. Figure C shows the section of this excavation, looking east.

The bedrock proved to be at 943.10 m. above sea level, some 0.95 m. under the surface of the pavement. The space between bedrock and pavement was filled artificially; there was no evidence of an earlier wall or floor. The lower layer of the fill consisted of rough stones, waste of the building stones which were dressed on the spot. The average dimension of these stones was 20 to 25 cm. This lower layer was some 55 cm. thick; above it a soft yellow limestone was laid, in order to level the foundation. Its thickness varied between 15 and 20 cm. This material is not found in the neighboring area and was brought to the site for use in the foundation of the pavement.

Above the yellow limestone a thin layer (3 to 6 cm. thick) of stone chips, some 0.5×1.5 cm. big, was found. The chips are of hard white limestone, and were waste of the white tesserae, which were made of local stone on the site. Above this there is another layer of soft yellow limestone, 6 cm. thick. There follows a layer 12 cm. thick of small pebbles (averaging 3×4 cm.) and above this is the mortar bedding for the mosaics. The mass of lime and chalk containing ashes and finely pounded pottery was pressed over and into the pebbles, the upper surface being coated with soft and smooth light-colored lime into which the tesserae were laid.

On the other, western side of this probe, the foundations of the threshold of the nave door were discovered (fig. 4). Here a solid, thicker layer (*ca.* 0.80 m.) of building waste was installed which was to carry the much heavier weight of the walls. Only 5 cm. of the soft limestone layer was laid above the rough foundation in order to level this substructure and prepare it for carrying the wall.

A few Byzantine sherds of types common in the fifth to sixth centuries and one fragment of a typical roof tile were collected in the course of the excavation below the level of the pavement. Figure H is a fragment of a rim of a bag-shaped amphora with a slight crest on its shoulder and two handles (not found), of a type known since the mid-fifth century.[4] The fragment, of brown reddish clay, was discovered at 943.45 m., i.e., in the layer of building waste, *ca.* 55 cm. below the floor. Figure I is a fragment of a bowl with a dropping rim, of fine reddish clay with a light brown slip. Pottery of this type also occurs in the Byzantine levels at Capernaum.[5] The fragment was found in the soft yellow limestone layer at 943.65 m., *ca.* 35 cm. below the floor.

The arrangement of the layers in the foundation of the church, which contained building and dressing waste as well as waste of the tesserae and the broken tile, shows that the process of building the church and preparing the

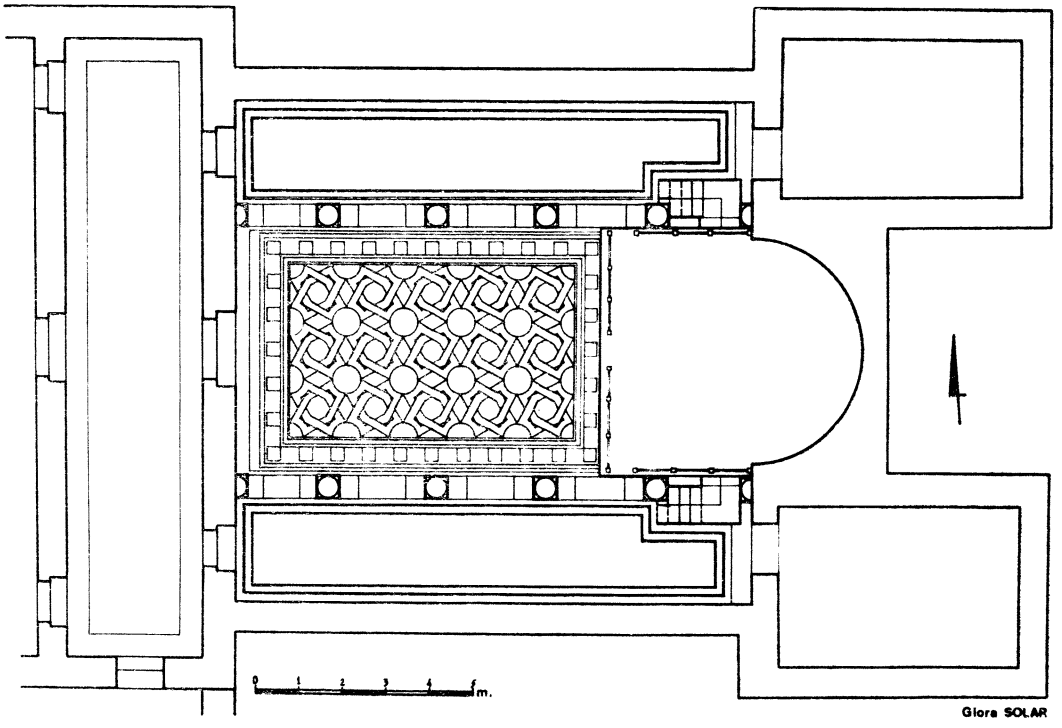
[4] J. A. Riley, "The Pottery from the First Session of Excavation at Cesarea Hippodrome," *BASOR*, 218 (1975), 26, fig. 28:3.

[5] S. Loffreda, *Cafarnao. II. La ceramica* (Jerusalem, 1974), 160, fig. 49:5.

stones, tesserae, and tiles was all done within a short period. At the south-western corner of the south aisle a depression in the mosaic led to the discovery of an opening to an underground clay drain which channeled waste water from the church (fig. 5).

Plan and Structure of the Main Hall and Sanctuary

The main hall of the church had a basilical plan and was divided into nave and side aisles by two rows of columns (figs. B, D). At the east end the chancel and apse were built above a vaulted crypt. Because the vault of the crypt collapsed, the whole eastern portion of the church was destroyed. The process of ruin was completed by later robbing of the stones. Therefore, only little information about the sanctuary could be collected from findings which consisted mainly of some marble fragments, probably parts of the screen and altar (see *infra*, pp. 318, 320, and fig. 6) and of a few scattered stones which may have come from the apse and the pavement. Judging by the provenance of some black slabs in the shape of isosceles right-angled triangles (of 15 cm. on each side and 3 cm. thick) (fig. 7), we assume that the chancel was paved with opus sectile. Remains of cement of the setting bed were discovered on the rough back face of these slabs.



D. Church, Suggested Reconstruction of Ground Plan

The exterior width of the church was *ca.* 12.50 m.; the interior width, 11.10 m. The exterior length, without the narthex and the towers, was 15.50 m.; the interior length, up to the end of the apse (according to our reconstruction

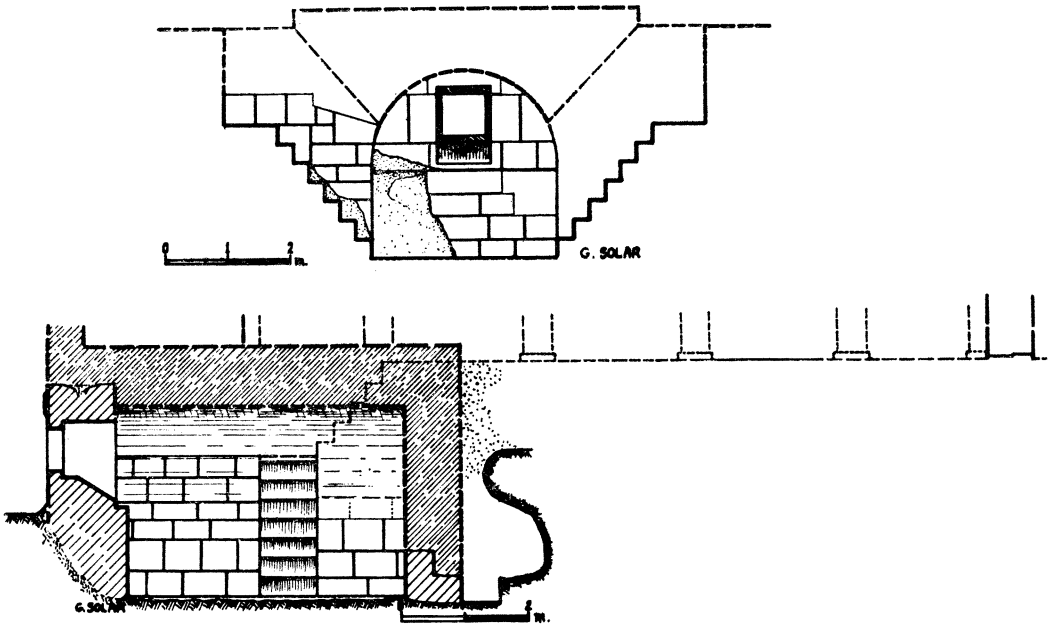
in fig. D), *ca.* 14.25 m. The inner space, up to the span of the apse, was (according to the same reconstruction) almost square in plan (11.10 × 11.75 m.). The nave was divided from the aisles by two rows of four columns and two half columns each, of which only the eight stones forming the substructures of the western half columns and of the three westernmost columns of each row were preserved (see fig. B). The six stones which formed the bases of the columns are square, measuring 50 cm. on each side, with shallow round sockets of the same diameter to accommodate the columns. Not a single drum was discovered in the excavation. The span between the columns was 1.95 m. (2.5 m. when measured from center to center). The width of the nave was 5.55 m. between the two rows of columns (*ca.* 6.05 when measured from center to center). For the aisles these measurements are 2.25 to 2.30 m. each or 2.50 to 2.55 m., respectively. When we convert these dimensions into the unit used at that period in Palestine (i.e., one foot = *ca.* 31 cm.),[6] we see clearly that the ground plan of the church was based on its exterior measurements, which are even figures: 50 × 40 feet. The measurements thus arrived at are as follows:

Exterior length of church = 50 feet
Exterior width of church = 40 feet
Interior length of church (including apse) = 46 feet
Interior length of church (excluding apse) = 38 feet
Interior width of church = 36 feet
Width of nave = 18 feet
Width of aisles = 7 feet.

The design of the church is more accurately executed than is usual in Byzantine buildings in Palestine. As we have already mentioned, the entire sanctuary of the church was destroyed and only substructures below floor level were preserved. The reconstruction of the apse and chancel (see fig. D), therefore, is principally based on the general layout of the church (columns and their intervals) and on the plan of the crypt and its staircases. One of the concave stones of the apse wall, which was discovered not in situ, was long enough (0.90 m.) to enable us to estimate the span of the apse as being close to 5 m. This confirms our reconstruction of the apse as having a width of 5 m., on the basis of the general elements mentioned above. The depth of the apse is reconstructed as being equal to half of the span, i.e., 2.50 m. This accords well with the thickness of the east wall of the crypt—and the depth of its window—which served as a substructure of the apse (see *infra*, p. 315; fig. E). A molded stone which was found in the church, but not in situ, probably was the base of one of the half columns at the sides of the apse (fig. 8). The width of the chancel was most probably the same as that of the nave, i.e., 5.55 m. Since the chancel platform was supported by the vault of the crypt,

[6] E. Schilbach, *Byzantinische Metrologie* (Munich, 1970), 13–16; F. M. Abel, "Chronique, I. Inscription grecque de l'aqueduc de Jérusalem avec la figure du pied byzantin," *RBibl*, 35 (1926), 284–88.

its projection into the nave was determined by the size of the crypt (fig. E); at the same time, it would have left room for exactly five rows of hexagons in the nave mosaic pavement (see *infra*, p. 307f.; fig. D). The chancel was reconstructed to project *ca.* 3.40 m. beyond the span of the apse. Its floor level was *ca.* 15 cm. above that of the nave, thus requiring no intermediate step. The first pair of columns at the east end of the nave partially obstructed the staircases leading up from the crypt. These staircases terminate on the inner sides of the two aisles, rather than, as in the church of Reḥovot in the Negev (see *infra*, p. 316f.), on the outer sides, the aim being to avoid placing an obstacle in the passage to the side rooms, which projected from the church toward the east.



E. Elevations and Suggested Reconstruction of Crypt. Above, Section, looking East; below, Section, looking South

The projecting side rooms were preserved only to the level of the foundations, below the floor. The southeast room was excavated down to bedrock. The walls, which were carefully built and dressed outside, were very roughly built inside (fig. 9). The resulting unevenness was filled with a hard compound of earth and stones. It was found to contain some fragments of Byzantine pottery, of which a fragment of an oil lamp made of pink clay (fig. M) is the most significant. This lamp belongs to the type of the "candlestick lamp," with a thick molded decoration of a palm branch, which sometimes resembles an elaborate menorah. It is a type common from the fourth to the seventh century but especially frequent in the sixth century.[7]

[7] O. R. Sellers and D. C. Baramki, "A Roman-Byzantine Burial Cave in Northern Palestine," *BASOR, Supp.*, 15–16 (1953), 47, fig. 51; J. Elgavish, *The Art of Lamps in Roman Byzantine Palestine* (Ph.D. dissertation, Jerusalem, 1962, unpublished), 209 (in Hebrew); C. A. Kennedy, "The Development of the Lamp in Palestine," *Berytus*, 14 (1963), 84, pl. XXVI: 659.

The northeast room was cleared on the outside (figs. 2, 3) and excavated only to the extent of tracing the outline of the walls. The two side rooms are almost identical in size, the interior measurements being *ca.* 3.50×5.45 m. Since there are no additional archeological data, it is not possible to know their exact function. Rooms flanking the apse on both sides were a very common feature of the fifth and sixth centuries;[8] they were used as pastophoriae in the preparation of the Eucharist, and were later called prothesis and diaconicon.[9] Sometimes they were used as martyria where relics were preserved.[10] In our case, the side rooms are bigger than usual in relation to the overall size of the church. Also, if our reconstruction is correct, the connection between the side rooms and the main sanctuary is somewhat indirect. For these reasons we preferred to interpret the side rooms as independent chapels, not integrally connected with the ordinary daily service. No sign of apses was detected in their substructures, but this does not prove that no apses existed above floor level. Although many examples of basilical churches with projecting chapels are known,[11] they still are a rare feature in the Palestinian area. The most important parallel is the sixth-century church of St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai, which has two projecting chapels at the sides of the apse.[12]

Each of the three entrances from the narthex into the hall of the church consists of threshold and step; they are symmetrically arranged and are centered on the nave and the aisles (fig. 10). It is clear that all the three doors were double-leafed because in each of the steps there are two side sockets and a central hole for the bar which locked the door leaves. The width of the central entrance was 1.30 m.; the inside step, which comprised the space into which the doors recessed when open, was *ca.* 1.65 m. wide. For the side doors these measurements are *ca.* 0.85 m. and 1.05 m. respectively.

There was no evidence that might indicate the height of the side chapels. Because their walls were as thick as those of the main body of the church, we assume that the chapels were about as high as the aisles of the church. However, the reconstruction of the various elevations of the church, presented in figure X, must remain hypothetical.

[8] R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Harmondsworth, 1965), 69; A. Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land* (Bonn, 1970), 195–96; A. K. Orlandos, Ἡ ἀπὸ τοῦ νάρθηκος πρὸς τὸ ἱερὸν μετακίνησις τοῦ διακονικοῦ εἰς τὰς ἑλληνιστικὰς βασιλικάς, in Δελτ.Χριστ. Ἀρχ.Ἑτ., ser. 4, 4 (1964–65), 353–72.

[9] G. Bandmann, "Über Pastophorien und verwandte Nebenräume im mittelalterlichen Kirchenbau," *Festschrift für Hans Kauffmann* (Berlin, 1956), 19–57, esp. 23ff.

[10] J. Lassus, *Sanctuaires chrétiens de Syrie* (Paris, 1947), 161–83; A. Negev, "The Churches of the Central Negev, An Archaeological Survey," *RBibl*, 81 (1974), 416–21.

[11] See, for example, Orlandos, *op. cit., passim.*

[12] G. H. Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian," *DOP*, 22 (1968), 10ff., fig. 2. In Sinai, however, there is a practical reason for the projection of the chapels: see Forsyth, discussion, 13ff. Recently, in 1977, a parallel arrangement of two projecting side rooms at both sides of the apse was discovered in a church at Kfar Maker, in western Galilee, Israel, by V. Tzaferis and J. Frost (not yet published). We thank the excavators for this information.

The Mosaics of the Hall

Only a minor part of the mosaics of the hall were preserved in an irregular strip at its western end (figs. F and 11). Fortunately, this coherent strip lays across the width of the church, thus enabling us to make a general reconstruction of the entire pavement. The mosaics are of relatively high technical and artistic quality. Also, the tesserae in the nave and intercolumniations are relatively small (*ca.* 155 tesserae per sq. dm.). The mosaics were divided into three parts: in the aisles, in the intercolumniations, and in the nave.

1. *The Mosaics of the Aisles* (figs. F and 12–14). The mosaics in both aisles have an identical geometric pattern and the tesserae are of medium size (100 per sq. dm.). The field is composed of seventeen rows of indented squares, which are distributed regularly on a white background, *ca.* 10 cm. distant from each other; these squares have a white tessera at the center, and red and gray ones at the edges (Avi-Yonah, type E).[13] The borders consist of a wide (13 cm.) strip of a three-ply guilloche (Avi-Yonah, type B3) in black, gray, red-orange, and white, between two straight black and red lines. The mosaic "carpet" of the aisles is surrounded by a narrow white band containing a row of flower-buds (Avi-Yonah, type 15) with black stalks, gray calyces, and petals in two shades of red; the distance between the buds is *ca.* 15 cm. At 5.70 m. from the west end of the north aisle, a surviving patch of mosaic belonging to this surrounding band depicts four such buds combined in the shape of a cross (fig. 14). A single bud which was preserved on its east side faces west, while the buds on the remainder of this band which is situated in the west half of the aisle face east; this shows that the cross of buds marks the north-south axis of the aisle mosaic. The discovery of this center point supports our general reconstruction of the mosaic of the aisles which, accordingly, is *ca.* 11.40 m. long. Although we are unable to adduce any exact parallel for this arrangement of geometric and floral patterns, these types of patterns are among the most common in the Roman and Byzantine periods.

2. *The Mosaics of the Intercolumniations* (figs. F, and 15, 17). The small size of the "carpets" of the intercolumniations (1.55×0.50) was dictated by the width of the bases of the columns and the length of the bays between them. Only one "carpet," the northwest one, was almost completely preserved. On the southwest side, only fragments of two other "carpets" survived. This is enough to show that, probably, all intercolumniations had a similar design, but the colors alternated. Each "carpet" was divided into three rectangles; the length of the largest, in the center, was 86 cm., and the width of the side rectangles was 36 cm. Each rectangle contained a lozenge. The four triangles which were thus left at the corners of each rectangle were made of dark red tesserae within white frames, alternating with yellow tesserae framed by

[13] M. Avi-Yonah, *Mosaic Pavements in Palestine* (reprinted from *QDAP*, II [1933] and III [1934]), 3. The classification of patterns in the present article is made according to this corpus.

black and white lines. Thus, it would appear that throughout the church the central rectangle in one intercolumniation contained red triangles while the side rectangles contained yellow triangles, and that in the neighboring intercolumniations this order of colors was reversed, yellow at the center, red at the sides. In the side rectangles each lozenge contained two more lozenges, one within the other, which were shaded so as to create an illusion of two three-dimensional rhombuses, one inside the other. In the only example which was preserved almost completely, the outer rhombus is made of dark colors, gray and black with white and light blue shading, and the inner rhombus is red with pink, orange, and yellow shading.[14] The lozenge inscribed in the central rectangle is framed by dark red, white, and black narrow bands. Inside the lozenge there is a finely designed pattern of wave crests in dark red on a white background, surrounding a central rectangle made of a frame of narrow black and white bands; in its center there are black and white intersecting lines surrounded by shades of light green, yellow, and orange, and by perpendicular red lines. It would seem that here, too, the artist tried, rather unsuccessfully, to achieve an illusion of the third dimension.[15]

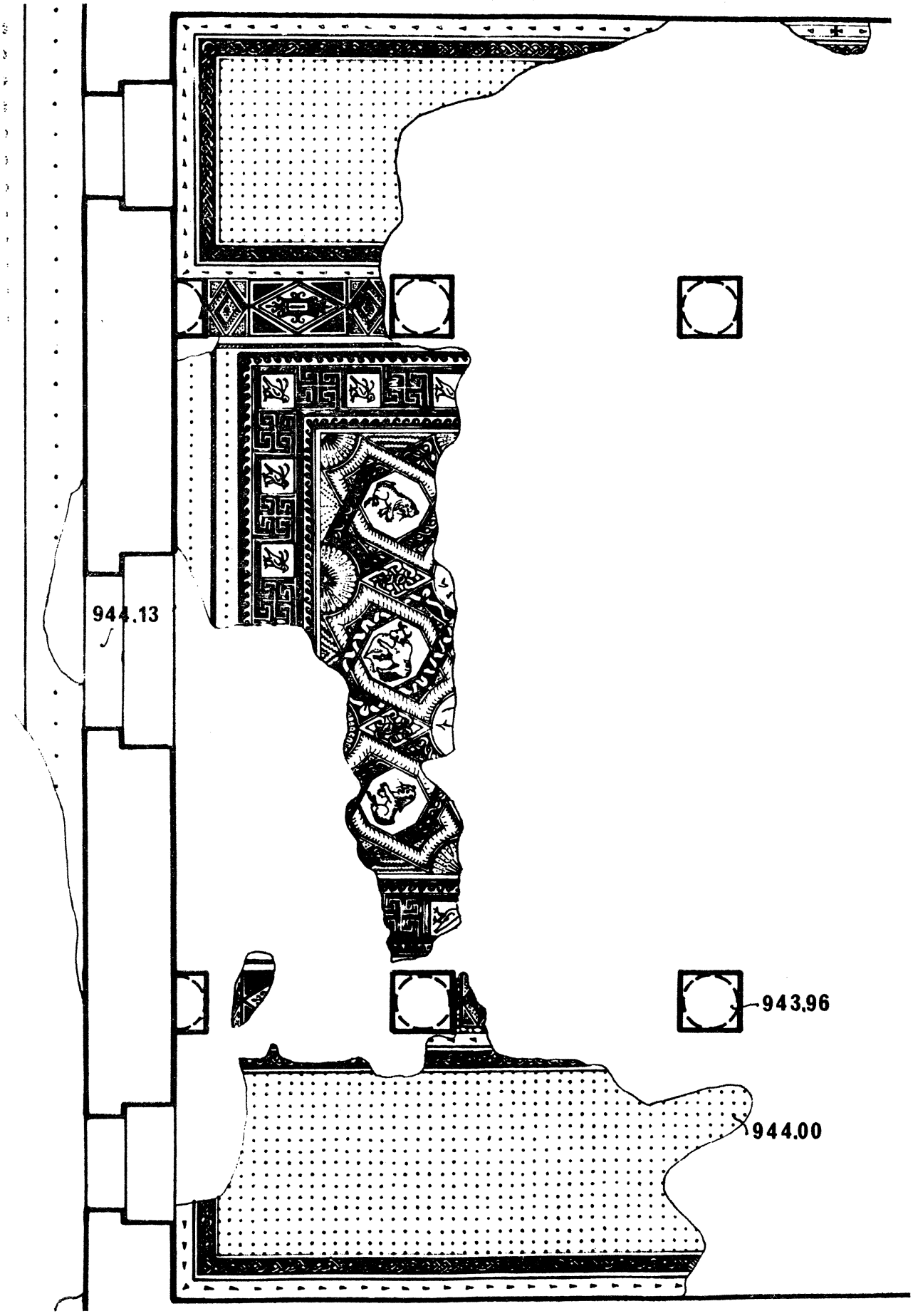
The motif of a lozenge inscribed in a rectangle is very common in the Roman and Byzantine periods. It appears in numerous variants and in different materials and techniques. Some scholars are inclined to find in this motif, or even in the pattern of an independent lozenge, a symbolic significance, either Christian[16] or Jewish.[17] These ideas were correctly rejected by Barag in his

[14] Many parallel examples of the pattern of the double "three-dimensional" lozenge occur in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. See, for instance, in Antioch: D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Princeton, 1947), pl. XXXV (House of the Boat of Psyches), pl. XLIII (House of Aion). Less successfully executed but closer chronologically and geographically is a mosaic found in a church at Beit-Govrin: D. C. Baramki, "A Byzantine Church at Mahatt el Urdi, Beit Jibrin," *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Liber Annuus*, 21 (1971), 130ff., fig. 4.

[15] Patterns of the same type, with inner rectangles, appear in the church at Beit-Govrin (*supra*, note 14). In this same pavement also appear several elaborate variations of the wave-crest pattern. Stylized wave crests are common as a filling of lozenges (Avi-Yonah, type I6). Here we shall restrict our list to the examples in which the lozenges are inscribed in a rectangular frame, as is the case in Ḥorvat Berachot. They occur in various parts of Palestine: in the early-fifth-century church at Evron, M. Avi-Yonah, "Evron," *Bulletin of the Department of Antiquities of the State of Israel*, V–VII (Sept. 1957), 34–35, pls. XXIX–XXXI (in Hebrew); in the synagogue at Hammat Gader, E. L. Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue of El Hammeh* (Jerusalem, 1935), pl. XI; in the "Birds" mosaic at the church at Cesarea, State of Israel, Archive of the Department of Antiquities and Museums (hereafter, Arch-IDAM), no. 13091; in the church at Emmaus, L. H. Vincent and F. M. Abel, *Emmaus, sa basilique et son histoire* (Paris, 1932), pl. XIId; in the Armenian mosaic at the Russian Monastery on the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, L. H. Vincent and F. M. Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, fasc. II (Paris, 1914), pl. XLIII; in the church at Tell Hassan in Jericho, D. C. Baramki, "An Early Basilica at Tell Hassan, Jericho," *QDAP*, 5 (1935–36), pl. LII,2; in the church at Kh. Um Jerar in the Negev, F. M. Drake, "A Sixth Century Greek Mosaic at Um Jerar," *PEFQ* (1918), 122–24; in the church at Mount Nebo, S. J. Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo*, II (Jerusalem, 1941), pls. 95, 112.

[16] H. Leclercq, *DACL*, IX, cols. 2520–21.

[17] E. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, I (New York, 1952), 152. Goodenough's conclusion is based mainly on the appearance of these patterns in the synagogue at Hammam Lif (Naro) in North Africa: *op. cit.*, II, 89–100, figs. 887–88, 890–91; in the synagogue at Apamea in Syria (*ibid.*, 83–84, fig. 884); in the synagogue at Dura Europos, C. H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue, The Excavations at Dura Europos, Final Report*, VIII, I (New Haven, 1956), pls. XLIX, LI; in the synagogue at Cesarea in Israel, Goodenough, *op. cit.*, I, 263, fig. 996; and in the synagogue at Hammat Gader, Sukenik, *op. cit.* (note 15).



F. Church, Main Hall, Mosaics (detail of fig. B)

discussion of lozenges on small glass vessels.[18] The lozenge within a rectangle is a very elementary motif, easy to execute and at the same time handsome and adaptable. It was therefore used to fill rectangular panels and spaces as early as the pre-classical age. In mosaics we find it already in the late Hellenistic period,[19] but it became especially popular beginning with the Early Roman period. The appearance of the pattern of lozenges inscribed in rectangles in architecture, whether in opus sectile pavements,[20] or in ceilings,[21] or in marble dadoes and incrustations, i.e., in the imitation of marbles in fresco,[22] most probably had a strong influence on its widespread use in other media. This pattern occurs in large monuments as well as in the minor arts all over the Roman and Early Byzantine world.[23] Its inner decoration can vary from plain monochrome to very elaborate geometric or floral ornament; it may even include human figures. In an ecclesiastical context a cross can appear.[24]

3. *The Mosaics of the Nave.* Of the central "carpet" in the nave, only the northwest corner was completely preserved (figs. F, and 16, 17), although a narrow strip in the south side also survived. We can therefore reconstruct the

[18] D. Barag, "Glass Pilgrim Vessels from Jerusalem," *JGS*, 12 (1970), 35–63; 13 (1971), 45–63 (esp. 12 [1970], 42ff.).

[19] P. Bruneau, *Exploration archéologique de Délos*, fasc. XXIX, *Les mosaïques* (Paris, 1972), p. 69 and no. 174, figs. 145, 148; no. 214, figs. 177, 180–81; no. 267, figs. 234–36; no. 277, figs. 244–45.

[20] See, for instance, M. E. Blake, "The Pavements of the Roman Buildings of the Republic and Early Empire," *MAAR*, 8 (1930), pls. 9,2–3, 10,1; S. Aurigemma, *Villa Adriana* (Rome, 1961), fig. 158; see also, in general, Levi, *Antioch*, I, 552.

[21] Levi, *Antioch*, 57, following an article by Ronczewski (bibliographical details there) which has not come to our hands.

[22] See several examples in Pompei: A. Maiuri, *Pompeii* (Rome, 1929), after p. 40; *idem*, *Pompei* (Paris, 1938), after p. 80; J. Engemann, *Architecturdarstellungen des frühen zweiten Stils* (Heidelberg, 1967), pls. 39, 41. In Israel such patterns were discovered in the theater at Cesarea, A. Albricci, in A. Frova (ed.), *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima* (Rome, 1966), pls. I–II; and Masada, Y. Yadin, *Masada, Herod's Fortress and the Zealots' Last Stand* (London, 1966), 42–50. For the early date of this technique, see V. J. Bruno, "Antecedents of the Pompeian Style," *AJA*, 73 (1969), 305–19.

[23] It would be beyond the scope of this work to list examples proving the wide distribution of the pattern of lozenges inscribed in rectangles and the variety of materials and techniques. Therefore, in addition to those already mentioned above (notes 16–22), only some mosaics were selected to show this pattern's geographical distribution. In Pompei: E. Pernice, *Die hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji, Pavimente und figürliche Mosaiken* (Berlin, 1938), pls. 17,2, 22,3, 25,6, and *passim* (mosaic pavements); V. Spinazzola, *Le arti decorative in Pompei e nel Museo Nazionale di Napoli* (Milan, 1929), pl. 104 (stucco); D. Joly, "Quelques aspects de la mosaïque pariétale au 1er siècle de notre ère d'après trois documents Pompéiens," *La mosaïque gréco-romaine, Colloques internationaux du Centre national de recherche scientifique* (Paris, 1965), fig. 1, fig. a (wall mosaics). For mosaic pavements in Western Europe: K. Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1959), pls. 1,7, 5, 83,1; in North Africa, M. A. Alexander and M. Ennaifer, *Corpus des mosaïques de Tunisie*, I, fasc. I, *Utique, insulae I–II–III* (Tunis, 1973), pls. VIII, X, XIX, XLIII, LI; in Syria, Levi, *Antioch*, figs. 12, 18, 21 and pl. XCVb, 62 and pl. CIIa–e, pl. XXXV, and *passim*.

[24] See, for instance, a fifth-century marble plaque from Carpasia, A. H. S. Megaw, "Byzantine Architecture and Decoration in Cyprus: Metropolitan or Provincial?," *DOP*, 28 (1974), 61, fig. 10; a sixth-century panel from Asia Minor, C. Mango and I. Ševčenko, "Some Churches and Monasteries on the Southern Shore of the Sea of Marmara," *DOP*, 27 (1973), 258, fig. 134; a stone panel from Egypt, K. M. Kauffmann, *Die Menasstadt und das Nationalheiligtum der altchristlichen Ägypter* (Leipzig, 1910), pl. 65. The absence of a cross within our lozenge or in any other part of the mosaic (although suggested or concealed crosses were possibly represented in the aisles, see *supra*, p. 302, and in the crypt, see *infra*, p. 317), might suggest a date after A.D. 427 for the pavement, since it was in that year that Theodosius II prohibited the depiction of crosses on pavements. For the effect of this decree on Palestinian churches, see M. Avi-Yonah, in M. Prausnitz, *Excavations at Shavei-Zion* (Rome, 1967), 53.

whole composition with reasonable certainty. Starting from the outside, along the borders a line of small overlapping squares in black, red, and white (Avi-Yonah, type F28) runs on a white background. This is followed by a black line and a red wave crest (Avi-Yonah, type B7) facing inward. These strips are relatively close to each other, except on the west side, where two rows of indented squares (Avi-Yonah, type E) are added, of the sort already found in the aisles. The wave crest and the black line are repeated on the inner edge of the borders, but here the wave crest faces outward. The main design of the borders consists of a wide band of squares of double meanders, each forming a swastika (fig. 22; Avi-Yonah, type A19), interspaced with squares containing beribboned birds (fig. 19). These various strips and bands together are 68 cm. wide. The double meanders (figs. 16, 17, 19, 22) are rendered with red, gray, and white tesserae, and several intermediate colors, mainly shades of blue, brown, and yellow. The pattern of meanders is composed of two intersecting bands—one of red-brown, the other of gray-blue color—which at the same time serve to frame the squares of beribboned birds, thus achieving a balanced, continuous design. The double meanders divide the squares into quarters; diagonally opposite quarters are similar in color so that, taken together, they form pairs alternately red-brown and gray-blue. The shading achieves a highly effective illusion of third dimension, reminiscent of some classical works. The flat, white background in the squares with the birds forms a strong contrast to the meanders. As already explained, these squares are framed on two sides by a red-brown band, and on the two other sides by a gray-blue band, both a continuation of the meanders. The size of each square is *ca.* 30×30 cm. Borders of double meanders and squares with birds, animals, vegetable forms, objects, or geometric designs are very common in mosaic pavements, starting from the Early Roman period. Such borders were found in several fifth- to sixth-century sites, like Shellal,[25] Deir Daklah,[26] Susiya,[27] Mamshit (Kurnub),[28] and Tabgha[29] in Israel, as well as Gerasa in Jordan.[30]

The birds are beautifully depicted; the body is composed of light colors and shades, mainly green and yellow, with dark contour lines. The legs, the beak, and the ribbon are red. The birds which have survived are all alike in shape and color. Because of the ribbon knotted round their neck and certain zoological details (but not their colors), we might identify the birds as hunter's falcons. On the other hand, the stylization of the ribbon as well as its appearance on necks of other animals such as the beribboned lion and rams in Antioch[31]

[25] A. D. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic* (Canberra, 1957), 15, pls. 1–11 (dated by inscription to A.D. 561–62).

[26] F. M. Drake, "An Early Christian Mosaic at Deir Dakleh," *Burlington Magazine*, 34 (1919), 145.

[27] S. Gutman, Z. Yeivin, and E. Netzer, "Excavations in the Synagogue at Khirbet Susiya," *Qadmoniot*, 28 (1972), 49 (in Hebrew).

[28] A. Negev, "Mampsis, a Town of the Eastern Negev," *Raggi*, 7 (1967), 84–85, fig. 8.

[29] A. M. Schneider, *Die Brotvermehrungskirche von el-Tabga am Genesarethsee* (Paderborn, 1934), pl. 24.

[30] C. H. Kraeling, ed., *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, 1938), pls. LXVIa (St. John the Baptist), LXXIII–LXXIVb (SS. Cosmas and Damianos), LXXVb (SS. Peter and Paul), LXXXIb (private house.).

[31] Levi, *Antioch*, pls. LXXb–c, CXXXIVa–b.

raises the possibility that the ribbon was depicted purely as an ornament. In some of the Antioch mosaics similar birds were found, and were described as beribboned parrots.[32] In Israel, too, beribboned birds occur in mosaics at Kh. Um-Jerar,[33] Beth Shan,[34] and Tiberias.[35] These, as well as the examples from Antioch, were dated to the fifth to sixth centuries.

The central design forms the main part of the pavement. Its width was 3.85 m. and its length is reconstructed as being *ca.* 6.50 m. It consists of a composition of elongated hexagons with two concave ends. These hexagons are arranged in pairs, interlocking with each other and thus producing further geometrical shapes: lozenges, circles, triangles, and octagons (Avi-Yonah, type H5). The composition looks very elaborate and rich in patterns and colors, but rests on straightforward basic principles. Probably for that reason it became a favorite geometrical composition in Palestine and neighboring countries.[36] In his discussion of the mosaics at Shavei Zion, Avi-Yonah shows the wide range of dates of this basic design, which appears in the Byzantine[37] and also later periods.[38]

Of all the parallels, the mosaic carpet of the synagogue at Na'aran, dated to the fifth or early sixth century, seems the closest in size and contents (fig. 24). We reconstruct our carpet to contain 30 hexagons arranged in five rows, three pairs in each row, like the one discovered at Na'aran. As mentioned above, only the west row is preserved. Three of the elongated interlocking hexagons, one in each pair, are formed of colored bands changing gradually from red in the external outline, through yellow and light green shades to

[32] *Ibid.*, 358, pls. LXXXVb, CXXXVIIc (House of Ktisis), CXXXVIId (Dumbarton Oaks Hunt).

[33] F. M. Drake, *op. cit.* (*supra*, note 15).

[34] G. M. Fitzgerald, *Beth Shan Excavations 1921–1923, The Arab and Byzantine Levels* (Philadelphia, 1931), pl. 5; N. Zori, "The House of Kyrios Leontis at Beth Shan," *IEJ*, 16 (1966), 130, fig. 4 (where the birds are described as pigeons).

[35] *Israel Ancient Mosaics*, UNESCO edition (Paris, 1960), pl. XXI.

[36] In more eastern regions, a similar composition, although of different proportions, occurs near the Black Sea: V. Vostchinina, "Mosaïques gréco-romaines trouvées en Union Soviétique," *La mosaïque gréco-romaine* (*supra* note 23), 321–33, fig. 11.

[37] Avi-Yonah, in Prausnitz, *Shavei-Zion* (*supra*, note 24), 58–59, where this composition appears in the church at Shavei Zion; see pls. XXXIb–XXXIII, XXXVIIIa; in the church at Suḥmata, N. Makhuly and M. Avi-Yonah, "The Church at Suḥmata," *QDAP*, 3 (1934), 92–105, pl. XXVII; a mosaic in Tell el Far'a, ArchIDAM, no. 16.211; in the octagonal church at Mount Gerizim, ArchIDAM, no. 21.806; in a mosaic at Bag'a-el Gharbiya, ArchIDAM, no. 32.955; in a church at Shiloh, H. Kajer, "Shiloh, a Summary Report of the Second Danish Expedition, 1929," *PEFQ* (1931), 85, fig. 14; in a Samaritan church (?) near Tel-Aviv, H. Kaplan, "A Samaritan Church on the Premises of Museum Haarvetz," *Qadmoniot*, 42–43 (1978), 79 (in Hebrew); in the synagogue at Na'aran (Ain Douq), L. H. Vincent, "Le sanctuaire juif d'Ain Douq," *RBibl*, 26 (1919), 532–33; 30 (1921), 442–43, and esp. *idem*, "Un sanctuaire dans la région de Jéricho," *RBibl*, 68 (1961), 163–73, pls. XII–XIX (for a better reproduction, see *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, III [Jerusalem, 1977], 893); in the monastery of Bir el Qut, Corbo, *Siyar el Ghanam* (*supra*, note 2), photo 103; in a church at Tell Ḥassan, Jericho, Baramki, *QDAP*, 5 (1935–36) (*supra*, note 15), pl. L2; mosaic at Tell el Sardih, Jericho, ArchIDAM, no. 5170; a mosaic at Beer-Sheba, Avi-Yonah, *Mosaic Pavements*, no. 335, pl. v,2; in the west church at Mamshit, A. Negev, *op. cit.* (*supra*, note 28); in the church of Elianos at Madaba, P. M. Sejourné, "Dernières découvertes. L'Elianée de Madaba," *RBibl*, 6 (1897), 648–56; in churches at Gerasa, Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa*, pl. LXVIa (the Synagogue church), pls. LXXXd, LXXXIIId (Procopius' church); and in the church at Mount Nebo, Saller, *Mount Nebo*, pls. 86–87; in the mosaic at Ma'in, R. DeVaux, "Une mosaïque Byzantine à Ma'in, *RBibl*, 47 (1938), 235, fig. 2, pl. x.

[38] In the tenth-century mosaic in the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem, Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, pl. LXXXV,2–4.

blue-gray in the inner outline, thus creating the optical illusion of a convex surface. These three hexagons are oriented northwest-southeast. Two of the interlocking hexagons oriented southwest-northeast are formed of a rope pattern composed of two strands (Avi-Yonah, type B2), one in red, orange, and white, the other in gray and white. The remaining hexagon, in the center, is formed of a band of twisting red ribbon (Avi-Yonah, type B1). The interlocking of the hexagons forms octagons; and at the same time their concave ends form circles; both octagons and circles are populated with animals.[39] The border of the central part of the carpet cuts it so as to create semicircles along its edge and quarter circles in its four corners. These segments of circles are occupied by conches (Avi-Yonah, type I8). The outside, upturned parts of the conches and their insides are alternately red-brown and gray-blue. The spaces between the hexagons form lozenges; in each row three are oriented north-south and two east-west. Along the edges the lozenges are halved, resulting in isosceles triangles, each having an obtuse angle, which are filled with colored zigzag lines. Of the lozenges only two are completely preserved; they contain a pattern of two knotted cables (close to Avi-Yonah, type I1). Here, too, one of the cables is red-brown and the other gray-blue (fig. 23). Of the lozenges oriented north-south only part of one survives, and with it we can reconstruct a wave-crest pattern not unlike the one found in the intercolumniations (Avi-Yonah, type I6). Of the twenty-three fields in the octagons and circular medallions only three octagons are preserved in their entirety, all of them in the westernmost row; two fragments of medallions in the second row from the west also survive.

The two animals at the left and right ends of the first row are lions (figs. 18, 20); both are facing toward the entrance and each other. In the center is a buffalo eating the leaves of a plant (fig. 21). Each animal is about 45–50 cm. long. The lions resemble each other closely: both are roaring and sitting on their hind legs, ready to leap. A long tail is between their hind legs, and one front leg is raised. Although the bodies are not accurately proportioned and are rather stylized, the lions, especially their faces, are very lively. The outlines are rendered with dark red-brown or gray-black tesserae. Two single, dark red whiskers add color to one side of the octagons. The bodies are red, brown, orange, yellow, and light green, with some white patches. The eyes and the inner parts of the ears are emphasized by black tesserae, while blue and gray are added to the tails and manes. The lions appear on a white surface, with no indication of a background, but their "heraldic" arrangement on either side of the buffalo in the central octagon suggests that they are ready to attack. The buffalo is rendered mainly in dark colors, shades of gray and black interspersed with brown and blue. Here again the head of the animal is more carefully and vividly depicted than the rest. The left front leg is raised as

[39] On the problem of the insertion of animals within the geometrical carpets in the East during the fifth and sixth centuries, see E. Kitzinger, "Stylistic Developments in Pavement Mosaics in the Greek East from the Age of Constantine to the Age of Justinian," *La mosaïque gréco-romaine*, 341–52, esp. 345ff.

though for walking but is not in harmony with the rest of the body. The plant which the animal is eating has red-brown stalks and yellow-green leaves. Here, too, there is no ground line but only a white surface. Part of a similar plant is preserved in what survives of the south medallion of the second row.

Although lions appear frequently in pavements, either independently or as parts of a scene, the closest parallel in Palestine to the lions at Berachot is not a lion but a leopard: the one in the pavement of the synagogue at Ma'on[40] (fig. 25). The crouching position of this leopard is depicted, like that of our lions, so as to show part of the off-side leg, and the leopard's mouth, with the same two whiskers, is open; but its tail is raised. Certain details of the heads of the two lions flanking the menorah at Ma'on like heraldic emblems (fig. 26) are even closer to the lions of Berachot.[41] Also, the Ma'on lions, though standing, have their tails between their legs (preserved only in the one on the left side). By thus combining different details of the lions and leopard at Ma'on, we come to a very close parallel for the Berachot lions. Since both structures are dated only by means of stylistic comparison, it is not possible to say which of the two is earlier; but for reasons which we shall state below we suggest an earlier date for the church at Ḥorvat Berachot.

Buffaloes are less common than lions on mosaic pavements, but they are not at all rare. The closest parallel occurs in the pavement of the church at Beit-Govrin.[42] In two other cases a buffalo appears in what are clearly Nilotic scenes, one near the city of "Aegyptus"[43] and the other near the personification of the Nile and the city of Alexandria.[44] It would seem that the tradition of Nilotic scenes was the source for the depiction of the buffaloes in Palestine. Buffaloes existed in large numbers in the Nile valley, but they were common also in Palestine.

Pottery and Tiles

All around the main hall of the church many sherds of the Byzantine as well as the Early Arab period were collected. Among the latter, fragments of oil lamps, a fragment of a painted jar, and a glazed sherd are the most important. Because of the total disturbance of the stratigraphy and finds during the long period of stone robbing and agricultural cultivation, there is no possibility of relating the pottery to any stratigraphical sequence. However, numerous fragments of tiles were found in all parts of the church and all areas of the excavation. These tiles undoubtedly belong to the original roof. No complete tile was discovered, an indication that tiles were removed for use elsewhere after the church was deserted. Both flat *tegulae* and convex *imbrices*, which

[40] M. Avi-Yonah, "The Ancient Synagogue of Ma'on (Nirim), E. The Mosaic Pavement," *Bulletin of the Louis M. Rabinovitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues*, 3 (1960), fig. 13, pl. III,2.

[41] *Ibid.*, pl. VII,1.

[42] Baramki, in *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Liber Annuus*, 21 (1971) (*supra*, note 14), 138, fig. 6.

[43] M. Avi-Yonah, "The Haditha Mosaic Pavement," *Eretz-Israel*, 11 (=*I. Dunayevsky Memorial Volume*) (Jerusalem, 1973), 45–47, pl. 11 (in Hebrew).

[44] Zori, *op. cit.* (*supra*, note 34), fig. 4, pl. 12.

were set above the *tegulae*, were found; many were marked by maker's stamps, probably in order to count the quantity made by partners or workers from the same workshop. Eight different stamps were noted: a single small circle, two and three circles close to each other, a small thick circle, a double circle, a horseshoe sign, two opposed circle segments, and a cross-shaped mark (fig. 27). Some of these marks (together with others not found at Berachot) were also noted in the Byzantine monastery at Ramat Raḥel,[45] some thirteen kilometers to the northeast, as well as at Shepherds' Field.[46]

The Crypt

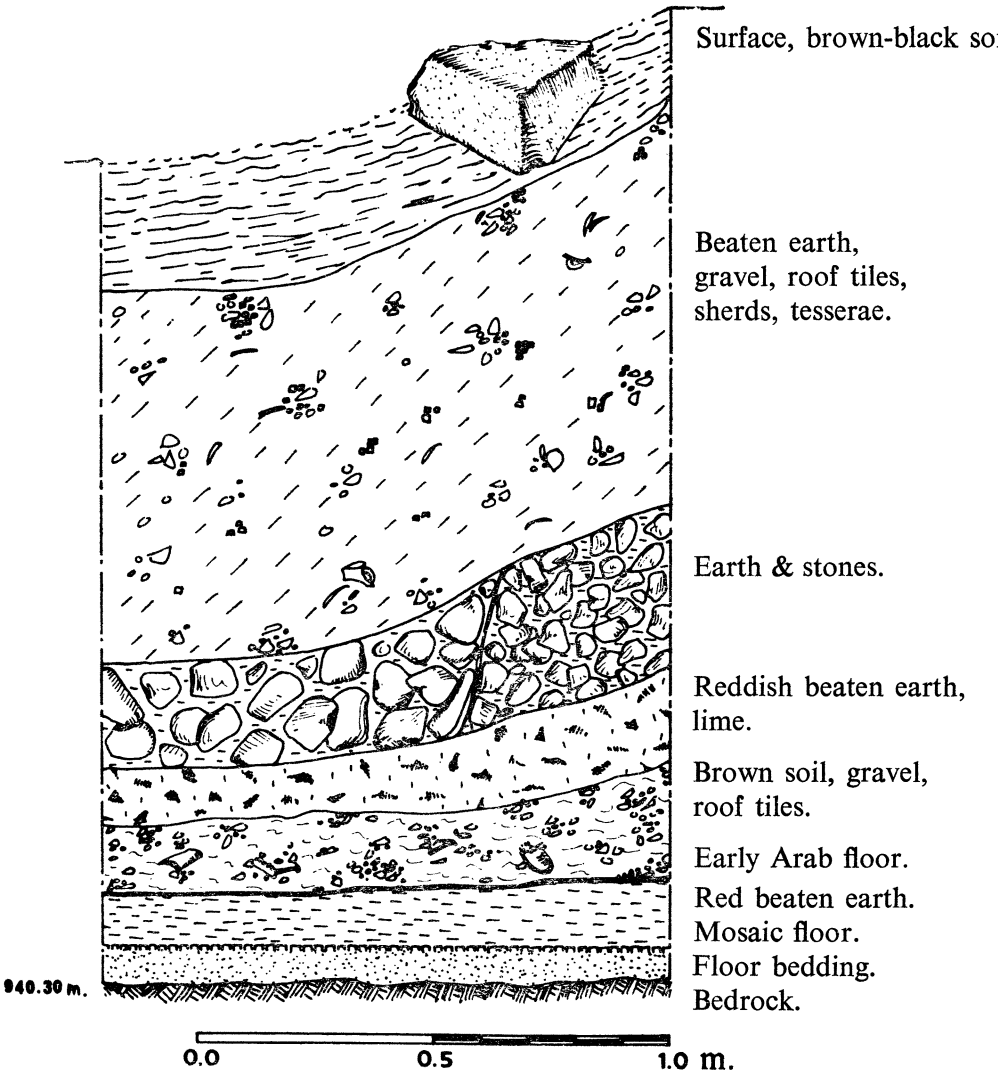
The most important find in the eastern part of the church was the vaulted chapel built under the chancel (figs. E, and 28, 29). Since this is a substructure of the sanctuary, the collapse of its vault caused the collapse of the whole bema and probably also of the apse. The crypt was almost completely filled by debris, as the section of its excavation shows (fig. G). But apparently it was partially cleared and used as a shelter or storage room in recent times. Fortunately, the lower part of the crypt was completely preserved and the stratigraphy is undisturbed. About 12 to 15 cm. above the original mosaic floor, a hard earthen floor was revealed; at this same level, the south entrance to the crypt had been provisionally blocked (fig. 30). The pottery found at this level made it possible to date this stratum to the Early Arab period. We also relate an Arabic inscription incised on the south wall of the crypt to this period of activity (see Appendix, p. 324 *infra*).

The original floor of the crypt was a beautiful mosaic pavement. Above this pavement, and sealed by the Arab floor, some objects of the Byzantine period were found. In the course of excavation it was discovered that the vaulted crypt was built within a natural cave which had been used as a shrine. This cave, too, had a mosaic pavement and its walls were partially cut in the rock and plastered. A small cist-like tomb was built on the floor, but was later blocked by the west wall of the new crypt. Thus, it is easy to distinguish the following stages in the development and decline of the shrine:

I. A natural cave used as a shrine
II. A vaulted crypt and the whole church edifice, erected on the same spot
III. A secondary use of the crypt and other parts of the church which occurred in the Early Arab period.

I. Because of the dangerous conditions of the rock, we were unable to clear completely the western part of the cave, but we believe that the plan shown in figure B represents it accurately enough. Fragments

[45] Y. Aharoni, "The Second Season of Excavations at Ramat Raḥel," *BIES*, 24 (1960), 77, fig. 2 (in Hebrew).
[46] Corbo, *Siyar el Ghanam*, photo 74.



G. Church, Excavation of Crypt, Section, looking East

of plaster were found *in situ* on the wall and many more pieces were collected in the excavation. At a height of 940.30 m. above sea level there was a mosaic pavement of rather large white tesserae (*ca.* 50 per sq. dm.), but well executed. At its western end the mosaic reached up to a plastered rock bench (fig. 31), and on its south side there was the small tomb (75 × 55 cm.) mentioned above. Its depth was 40 cm. The tomb was built of big limestone slabs and covered with two other similar slabs. It was coated with thick, smooth white plaster which sealed it completely (fig. 32). Inside it were fragments of three or four skulls as well as many fragments of other bones (fig. 33), some of them arranged with care across the width of the tomb. Although the number of bones was rather small, anthropological examination surprisingly revealed that parts of the remains of eleven

individuals were reburied here.[47] Perhaps the intention had been to remove remains of only three or four persons (as the number of skulls would indicate), and the other bones were carelessly collected from their primary burial place.

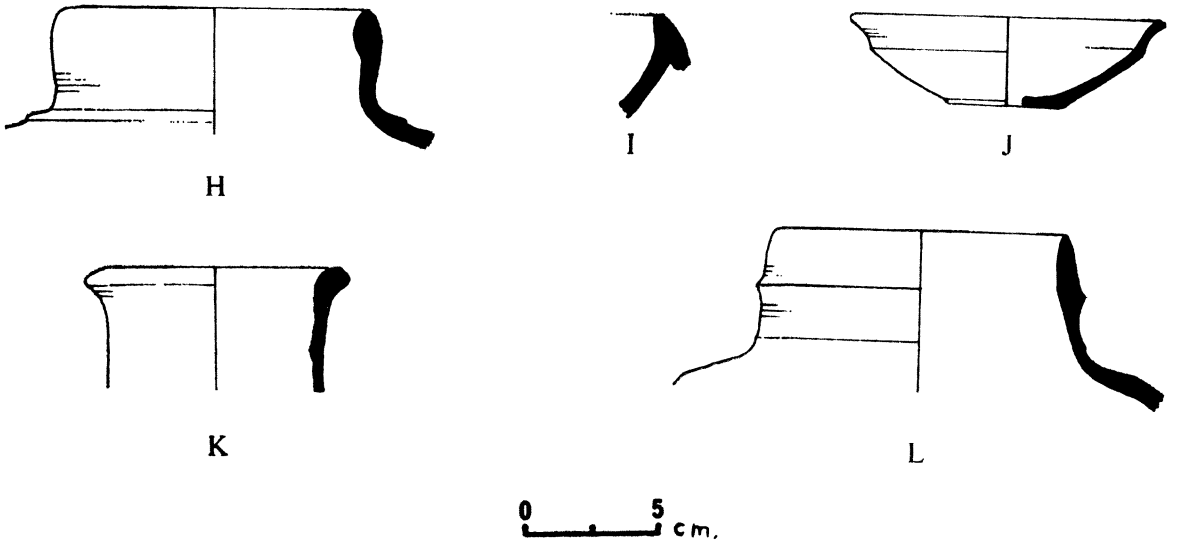
During Stage II, the west wall of the crypt proper was erected above the mosaic of the cave and partially above the tomb. As a result, the rest of the cave and most of the tomb remained blocked behind the wall. There is no indication to show whether higher up in this wall there was an opening for access to these hidden parts. Therefore, we prefer to conclude that the small tomb contained not relics of saints, but rather remains of devotees who for some reason were reburied in the holy shrine. When we were digging under the new mosaic pavement in a very limited area, in the hope of determining the relation between the old and the new floors, no remains of the earlier mosaic of the cave were discovered. Since the level of the new floor is only *ca.* 10 cm. above the level of the earlier one, it would seem that the builders were forced to destroy the earlier pavement in order to prepare the construction of the new crypt and the bed for the new mosaic. Also, the natural walls of the cave in its north, south, and east ends disappeared, and it is now impossible to attempt a reconstruction of the cave on those sides. However, the later development of the site, as well as the discovery of the tomb, shows that from the beginning (Stage I) this was a holy place. A similar development was found to have occurred in the church of the "Greek" Shepherds' Field, near Bethlehem. Here, the traditional Cave of the Shepherds was used for cult purposes in the fourth century and it was paved with mosaics. In a second stage, in the fifth century, the cave was enlarged considerably and its roof completely removed to make way for the building of a church. This, too, was an underground church furbished with new mosaics.[48]

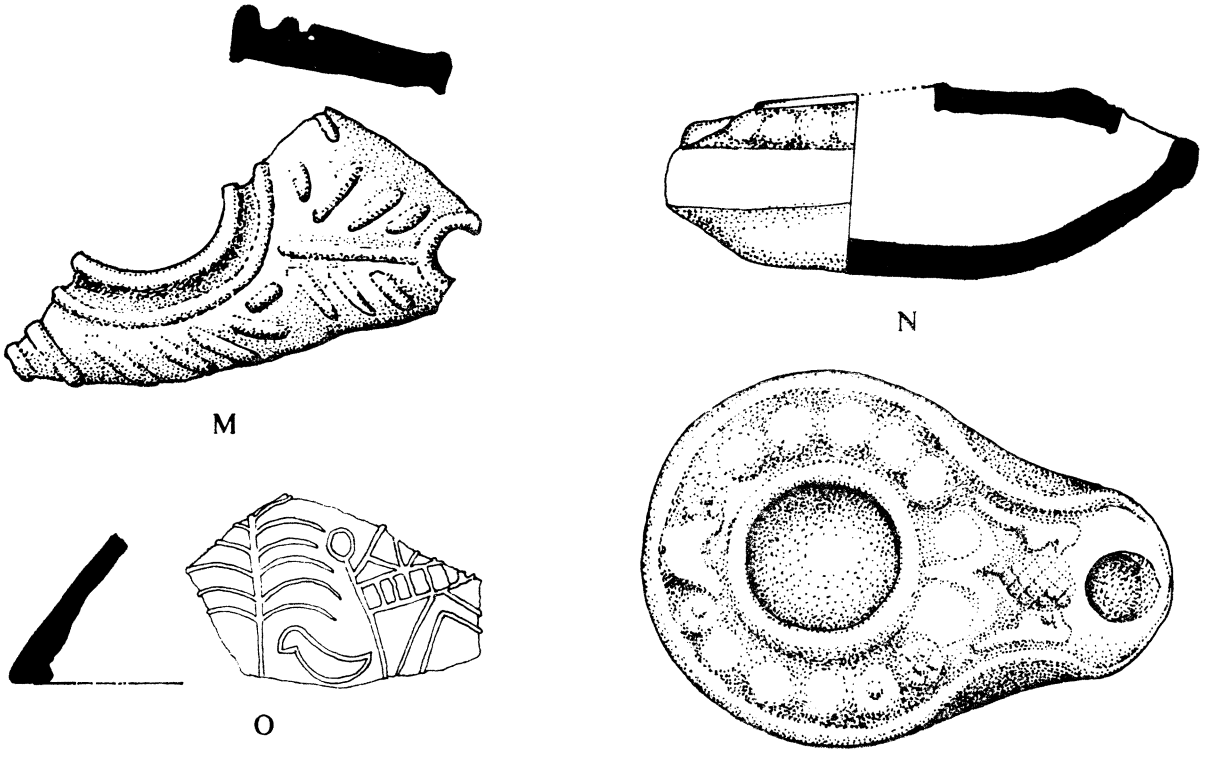
Among the objects found in our cave, the most important are an elongated iron ring (fig. Q), fragments of typical ribbed jars, and a ring base of a jar; all are characteristic of the Byzantine period.

[47] The anthropological report, prepared by J. Zias, Curator of the Israel Department of Antiquities, says: "Human skeletal remains dated to the Byzantine Period were turned over to the Department of Antiquities for anthropological exam ination. The results are as follows:

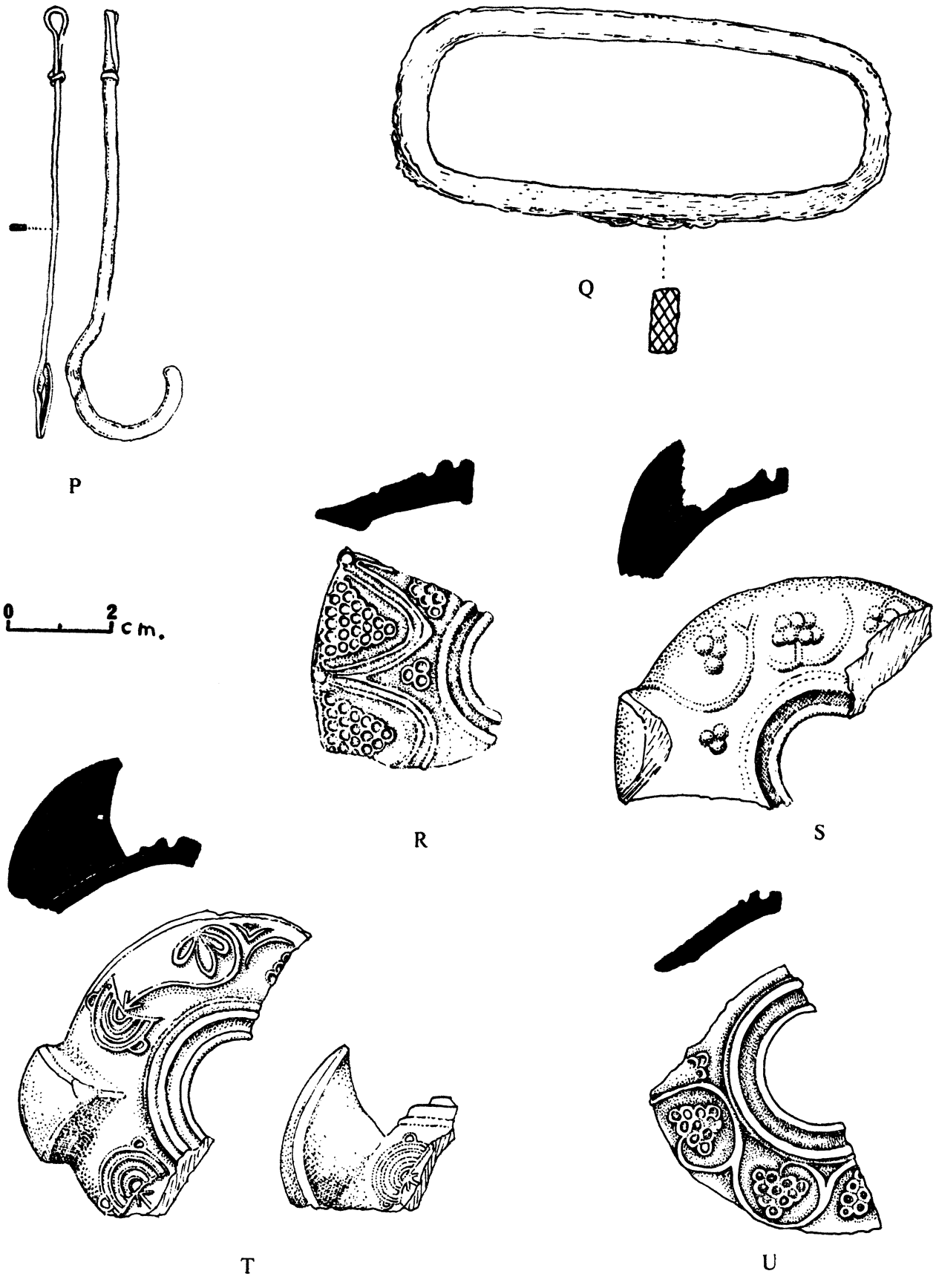
number of individuals	age	sex
1 child	3–6	indeterminable
2 children	5–10	,,
1 youth	15–18	,,
1 adult	18–25	,,
1 adult	20–30	,,
1 adult	30–40	f.
1 adult	40 +	m.
3 adults	unknown	indeterminable."

[48] V. Tzaferis, "Shepherds' Field (Beit Sahur), Notes and News," *IEJ*, 23 (1973), 118–19, pls. 31–32; see also plan and illustrations, *idem*, "Excavations at Shepherds' Field, Bethlehem," *Qadmoniot*, 23–24 (1973), 120–22 (in Hebrew); and mainly *idem*, "The Archaeological Excavations at Shepherds' Field," *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Liber Annuus*, 25 (1975), 5–52, esp. 7–14, 49–50.





H-O. Byzantine Pottery



P-U. Byzantine Metal Objects and Fragments of Early Arab Oil Lamps

The most interesting find was a complete oil lamp with bow-shaped nozzle which was discovered at 940.94 m., at the same level as the cover of the tomb (figs. N and 34). The lamp is made of buff clay with remains of a red-brown slip. It is molded with floral patterns and two birds (peacocks?) pecking at a cluster of grapes. Close, although not exact, parallels for shape and decoration were dated in different excavations to the Late Roman-Early Byzantine periods (i.e., from the end of the third century to the fifth to sixth centuries).[49] This type of lamp is generally accepted as a product of the third century, but more especially of the fourth or beginning of the fifth;[50] this fact helps us date Stage I (as we shall see below) to the fourth century—the early period of the Christian regime in Palestine.

II. As part of the erection of the new edifice on the site, a vaulted crypt was built within the cave. As we have already mentioned, the relation between the new crypt and the former cave on the north, south, and east sides is not completely clear. The east wall of the crypt, which is, at the same time, the foundation of the east wall of the church, was built on bedrock; the rock was hewn away down to the level of the pavement and revetted by four courses of ashlar (figs. E and 28). The leveled bedrock inside the crypt is *ca.* 1.30 m. lower than the leveled bedrock outside it on the eastern side (see also *infra*, p. 320). The interior walls were coated with white plaster, of which the largest patch was preserved on the north end of the east wall. In the east wall a window was built 1.90 m. above floor level. This window is 0.70 m. wide outside, and 0.80 m. inside; its outside height is 0.65 m., and because its sill slopes toward the inside, the inside height is 1.20 m. As we can infer from the holes in the window frame, there was a grill of three vertical and four horizontal metal bars. On the exterior face of the lintel there was a cross carved within a circle (fig. 35). The crypt is 4.50 m. long and 3 m. wide. Its east wall, 1.25 m. thick at the base and 1.05 m. above the fourth course, was thicker than the other walls, because it had to carry the weight of the apse above it. The side walls began curving inward from the fifth course; the sixth course was cut diagonally to serve as the spring of the vault (fig. 28). Since this vault was a barrel vault we can reconstruct the height of the interior of the crypt as being *ca.* 3 m. Two staircases, each made of eleven steps (of which only nine were preserved), led down into the crypt from the north and the south. These staircases were 80 cm. wide, with steps *ca.* 30 cm. high and *ca.* 25 cm. deep. They ascended to the church with two

[49] V. Sussmann, "Ancient Burial Cave at Reḥobot," *Antiqot*, 5 (1969), 79, pl. XIII,12 (in Hebrew); Loffreda, *Cafarnao, Ceramica*, 188 fig. 32,14; N. Zori, "The House of Kyrios Leontis at Beth Shan," *Eretz-Israel*, 11 (=*I. Dunayevsky Memorial Volume*) (Jerusalem, 1973), fig. 9,8 (in Hebrew); R. H. Smith, *Pella in the Decapolis* (London, 1973), 188 pl. 63,169.

[50] Sellers and Baramki, in *BASOR, Supp.*, 15–16 (1953), 36 fig. 39; Kennedy, in *Berytus*, 14 (1963), 79, pl. XXIII,540.

flights of steps, each of seven steps, facing north and south respectively, a square landing, and four more steps (of which two are reconstructed) facing west. It is not possible to reconstruct the roofing of the staircases. It would, however, have been necessary to leave the highest part of the staircases, from the seventh step upward, unroofed.

This arrangement of two staircases, which undoubtedly served as entrance and exit to the crypt, shows that the crypt and the church were visited by considerable numbers of worshipers and pilgrims. They were drawn, most probably, by the tradition of the sanctity of the cave which, as was the case in the neighboring Shepherds' Field (see *supra*), prompted the building of the church. Its topographical location, on the slope of the hill, below and outside the center of the settlement, also supports our conclusion that the site was chosen for some particular tradition of sanctity, not to serve as a parish church. Unfortunately, we have no data for the identification of the site and the special tradition which was remembered here. We can only remark on the large number of holy sites connected with religious tradition in the neighborhood, many of which focused in or above caves. The best known of these are at Bethlehem and in its surroundings, i.e., the Church of the Nativity, Rachel's Tomb, the Tombs of Jesse, David, Solomon, and of other biblical heroes, that of the infants massacred by Herod, Shepherds' Field, the Fountain of Philip in Beth-zur south of Ḥorvat Berachot, and, further south, Mambre and Hebron.[51] If the Early Arabic inscription really proves continued awareness of the holiness of the site in the Early Arab period (see Appendix, p. 325 *infra*), it is preferable to connect this crypt with some Old Testament tradition rather than a later, Christian one. It was, in any case, a tradition of secondary importance, since it was not mentioned by any of the pilgrims.

Similar pairs of staircases, serving as entrance and exit to crypts and facilitating the movement of processions and pilgrims, occur in some of the major pilgrim churches in Palestine. Most significant of all was the Justinianic rearrangement of the crypt in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem in the second quarter of the sixth century;[52] very probably, the two staircases also appeared in the fourth-century Church of Eleona on the Mount of Olives.[53] The chapel of Elianos in Madaba[54] has this same disposition of staircases; a very close parallel of a vaulted crypt with staircases was

[51] See bibliographical references in M. Avi-Yonah, *Gazetteer of Roman Palestine*, Qedem (Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), 5 (Jerusalem, 1976).

[52] E. T. Richmond, "The Church of the Nativity: the Alterations Carried Out by Justinian," *QDAP*, 6 (1936–37), 67–72.

[53] Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, 349ff., esp. the reconstruction in fig. 154.

[54] E. Sejorne, in *RBibl*, 6 (1897), 648–50.

discovered in Reḥovot in the Negev (Kh. Ruḥeibeh) (fig. 36).[55] As Forsyth has shown, the Church of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai has a similar arrangement, but here the direction is horizontal, leading into the garden of the Bush which was situated behind the sanctuary, rather than vertical, into a crypt located under the main sanctuary.[56] In all these places, groups of pilgrims were able to pass through the aisles and enter the place of relics without disturbing the regular service in the sanctuary and main hall.

The mosaic pavement of the crypt was almost completely preserved. No signs of altar supports or of an apse were observed on it; therefore, we suppose that movable furniture was used for the liturgy in the crypt. The mosaic "carpet" consists of rows of flowers of three kinds (figs. 37, 38). It is surrounded by a frame formed by a line of red tesserae and a wide (35 cm.) border of a six-ply guilloche (Avi-Yonah, type B6). Here again, the strands composing the guilloche alternate colors, one strand being rendered in shades of red-brown and white, the next in gray-blue and white, and so on. On the outside of the guilloche there is another line of red tesserae and between this and the wall, a row of small flower buds (Avi-Yonah, type F15) of the same kind as those which are depicted along the borders of the mosaics in the aisles. The crypt mosaic is well executed and the tesserae are relatively small (*ca.* 145 per sq. dm.). The main design of the "carpet" is composed of eight rows and two half rows of alternating, larger cross-shaped and smaller round flowers (fig. 37). Each petal of the cross-shaped flowers is divided vertically into two halves of different colors: green and black in one flower, orange and brown in the other. These green and black and orange and brown flowers occur alternately in every row. Each one is surrounded by four small buds of green-blue and red-brown, of which two are turned toward and two are turned away from the larger flower. The smaller round flowers which alternate with the cross-shaped ones are orange, red, and white with a blue center and are divided into four petals by a blue cross. It is just possible that we have here an instance of concealed crosses, after the depiction of crosses on pavements had been forbidden in A.D. 427.[57] The composition as a whole is rare and we have no exact parallel for it. Most of the details—the guilloche, the small flowers or buds, and the round flowers—are very common and examples of each appear in many places. The cross-shaped flowers, however, are found, to our knowledge, in only one other place, the Church of St. John in Ein-Karem, near Jerusalem (fig. 39).[58]

[55] This church already existed in A.D. 488, as the inscription of that year shows. See Y. Tsafrir, "Reḥovot (Kh. Ruheibeh) (Chronique Archéologique)," *RBibl*, 84 (1977), 422–26.

[56] Forsyth, in *DOP*, 22 (1968), 10–18.

[57] See *supra*, note 24.

[58] S. J. Saller, "Discoveries at St. John's," *Ein Karim, 1941–1942* (Jerusalem, 1946), 152–53, figs. 7–12.

The "carpet" at Ein-Karem is more varied than that of Ḥorvat Berachot for it comprises a larger number of flower and leaf types (among them also the round flowers of our mosaic), but it seems to be based on the same concept, even as regards the general composition. Links between the two pavements seem to be undeniable, so that both works can be attributed to the same center, possibly to the same workshop.[59] As for the nave and crypt mosaics at Berachot, the similar quality of execution, the almost identical size of the tesserae, the use of the same sort of flower buds between the border and the outer walls, and, above all, the same dual system of alternating red-brown with gray-blue shades lead to the conclusion that both these mosaics were executed by the same artist.

The Objects. The Byzantine stratum of the crypt was completely sealed by the Arab hard earth floor above (fig. G). In red beaten earth, which contains the finds of the Byzantine period, fragments of tiles and sherds were found, among them: part of a flared bowl with a shallow disk base (fig. J);[60] the high neck of a jug made of light pink clay with brown slip, of a rounded type with a ring base and one handle (fig. K); and the neck and shoulder of a bag-shaped amphora (fig. L).[61] These sherds belong to the last period of use of the crypt and the days after its desertion; they support an early date for this event, not long after the Arab conquest in the seventh century. Also above the mosaic were found a small copper hook (fig. P), a fragment of a marble altar (fig. 6), and the lower part of a small marble column with square base; it was probably one of the supports of the altar of the church (fig. 43).

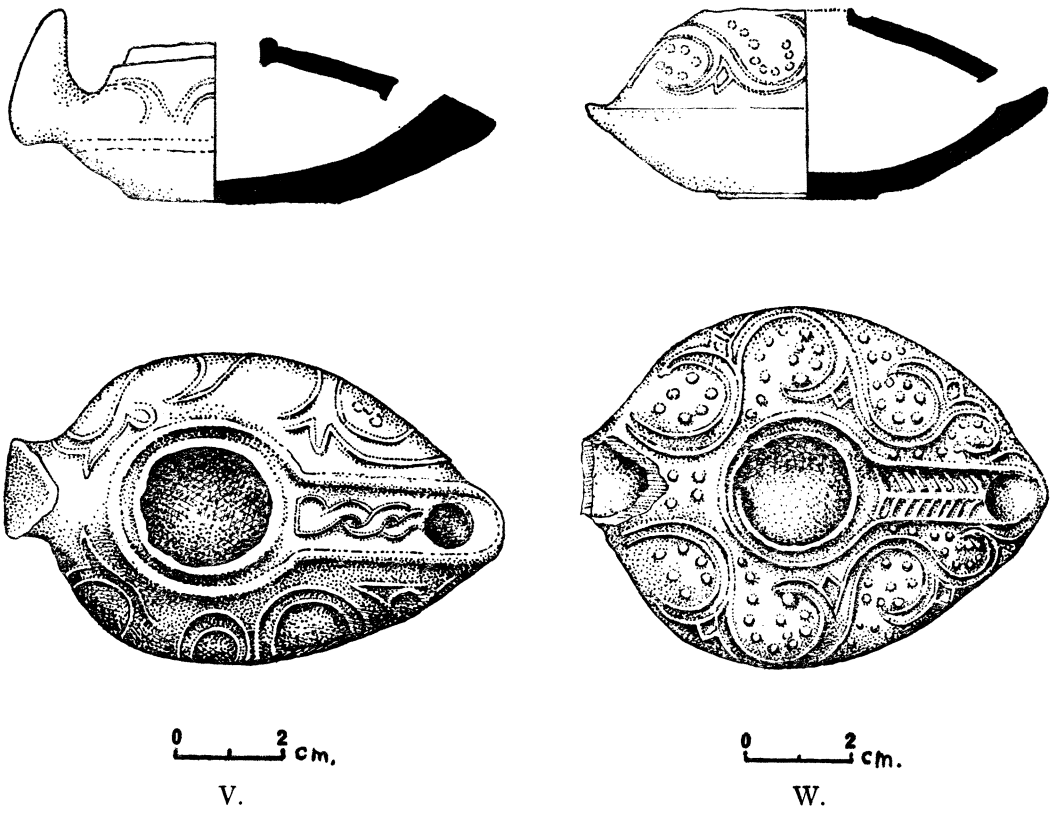
III. The hard earth floor of the Early Arab occupation was very easily recognized some 12 to 15 cm. above the mosaic. In this period the south entrance was blocked and the crypt was most probably used as a dwelling place or for storage. However, a Kufic inscription incised on the south wall suggests that the crypt was used, at least for a short period, as the shelter of a devout Moslem (see Appendix, p. 325 *infra*).

Most important among the pottery finds from the proximity of the north staircase are some oil lamps collected in the northeast part of the crypt at 940.60 m. Figure V shows a complete oil lamp of pointed oval shape, biconical in section, with a prominent tongue handle.

[59] This conclusion is based on stylistic comparisons only. Recently, Claudine Dauphin made an important attempt to classify "clusters" of mosaics and trace schools of mosaicists on the basis of objective arguments about technique and interrelations among the various elements of the scene and the borders: C. Dauphin, "A New Method of Studying Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements (Coding and Computed Cluster Analysis) with Special Reference to the Levant," *Levant*, 8 (1976), 113–49. The author shows that there existed in Jerusalem a center, or "school." As Dauphin's analysis only covers the type of mosaics with "inhabited scrolls," we cannot relate our mosaics to her charts.

[60] Cf. Riley, in *BASOR*, 18 (1975), 35, fig. 34,25.

[61] *Ibid.*, 26, fig. 29,6; Loffreda, *Cafarnao, Ceramica*, 94, fig. 9,6.



V. W.

Early Arab Oil Lamps from Crypt of Church

The lamp is made of reddish clay and decorated with geometric and floral moldings. On the base are remains of geometric decoration. Figure T shows a fragment of a lamp of the same type, made of a yellow-brown clay, with different decoration. Figure S shows another fragment of the same type, made of reddish clay, with a molded decoration of vine scroll and grapes. This type of lamp is known between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries A.D. We tend to prefer the earlier date, i.e., the eighth century, for our find because of the absence of glazed pottery in this stratum, and because well-dated lamps similar to ours in shape and decoration have been discovered in Early Arab strata at other sites.[62] The lamps thus belong to the last phase of the use of the crypt (apart from partial reuse in recent times). To the same family belongs also a lamp which was found at a higher level (941.37 m.), above the ruins of the west wall of the crypt (fig. W).

[62] Kennedy, in *Berytus*, 14 (1963), 90, pl. XXIX,785; M. Rosen-Ayalon and A. Eitan, *Ramla Excavations. Finds from the VIII Century C. E. (The Israel Museum, Catalogue, no. 66)* (Jerusalem 1969); D. C. Beramki, "The Pottery from Kh. el Mefjer," *QDAP*, 10 (1944), 73, pl. XVIII,6; Loffreda, *Cafarnao, Ceramica*, 187, fig. 27,2; R. Rosenthal and R. Sivan, *Ancient Lamps in the Schlossinger Collection* (Qedem, 8; Jerusalem, 1978), 129–36 (Group A, Variant B).

Discoveries Outside the Main Building

Outside the walls of the main building of the church, two areas were excavated down to bedrock: Area A, outside the east wall and between the two projecting chapels, and Area B, outside the north wall of the church and the north chapel.

Area A. Except for a natural incline in the rock face at the north side of this area, the bedrock was cut and leveled, probably when the surface for the construction of the church was being prepared, at *ca.* 941.65 m. above sea level. No remains were preserved from the first phase of the shrine in the natural cave. Between surface and bedrock thin layers of earth, chalk, and stones were revealed. There was no trace of any proper floor or hard beaten earth. A large quantity of Byzantine and Arab sherds mixed together, slabs of opus sectile, marble fragments, pieces of mosaic, and many tesserae were collected. All this clearly was an accumulation of waste which had been thrown out of the main building when the robbing of the stones was taking place in a more recent period. The most remarkable of the finds were the opus sectile slabs (fig. 7), already mentioned, a round, flat fragment of marble (part of a table or of a column base), and a fragment of a small Corinthian capital, perhaps part of a screen balustrade.

Area B. Here the bedrock was reached at a relatively high level (941.93 m.). Parts of a shallow plastered water channel were discovered which collected rainfall from the walls and the roof into a cistern which was located further east but has not yet been found (see *supra*, p. 296). Sherds were found here which we were able to classify only typologically. Most remarkable are some fragments of decorated oil lamps, most of which belong to the Arab period; two examples of molded decoration representing clusters of grapes are shown in figures R and U.

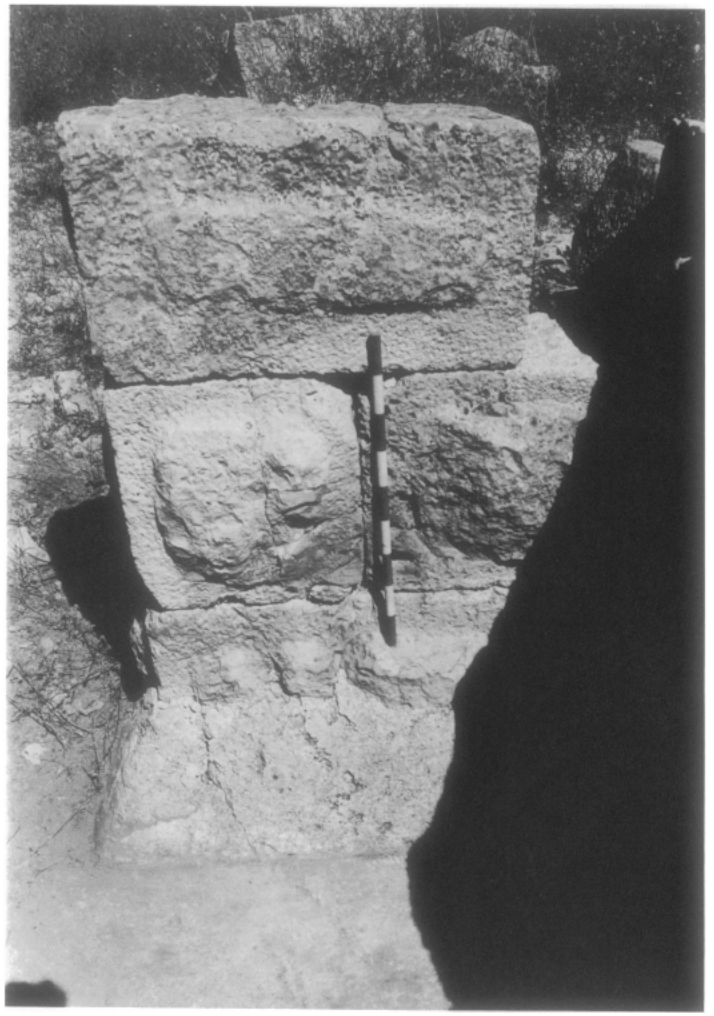
But most interesting is a small piece of an oil lamp of the Byzantine period (fig. O). It has linear decorations of a tree, a bird, and part of a building. A similar, complete oil lamp, perhaps molded in the same mold, was discovered in a Byzantine layer at the Hill of the Ophel in Jerusalem (fig. 42),[63] and two other fragments of the same kind were found in stratum II at Ramat Raḥel.[64] The lamp discovered in Jerusalem shows the entire scene: two symmetrical, gabled edifices, each flanked by two poles with circles and with a triangular object inside; at either side of the edifices are doves and trees. Avi-Yonah has proved that this lamp represents the betyl and temple of Astarte as Aphrodite at Paphos in Cyprus, a symbol which, surprisingly, survived in the Byzantine period.[65] The roof support, the poles with circles, which according to Avi-

[63] R. A. S. Macalister and J. G. Duncan, *Excavations on the Hill of Ophel, Jerusalem, PEF Annual*, IV (1923–25), pl. 12,1.

[64] Y. Aharoni, "Excavations at Ramat Raḥel, *IEJ*, 6 (1956), pl. XXI,17.

[65] M. Avi-Yonah, "Oriental Elements in Palestinian Art," *QDAP*, 10 (1944), 147–48; see also J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*[3]. Part IV. *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, I (London, 1914), 32ff.

1. Israel, Ḥorvat Berachot, Aerial Photograph



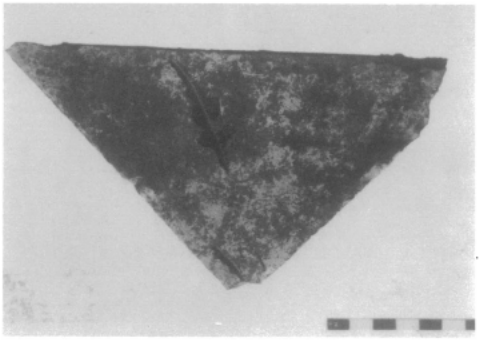
2. Typical Stone Dressing and Sloping Revetment. Area B

4. Probe near Central Door of Hall, looking East, Showing Foundation of Threshold to Church

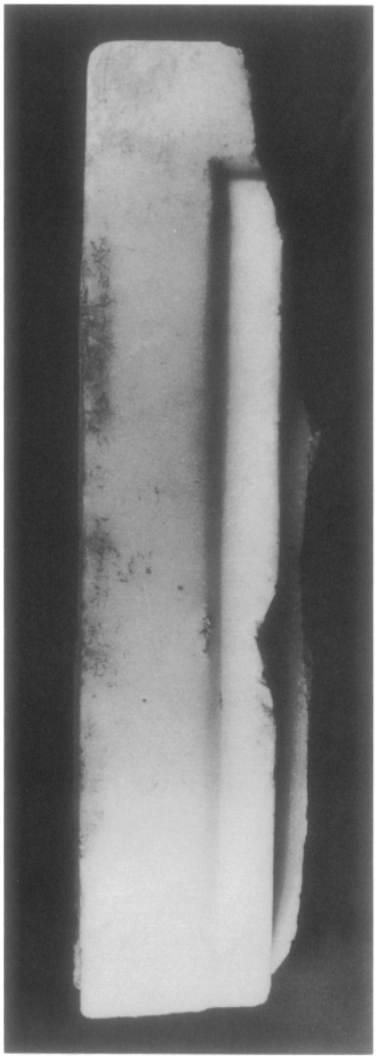
3. Typical Stone Dressing and Sloping Revetment

Ḥorvat Berachot

5. Depression in Mosaic at Southwest Corner of Hall: Drain for Waste Water



7. Triangular Slab from Opus Sectile

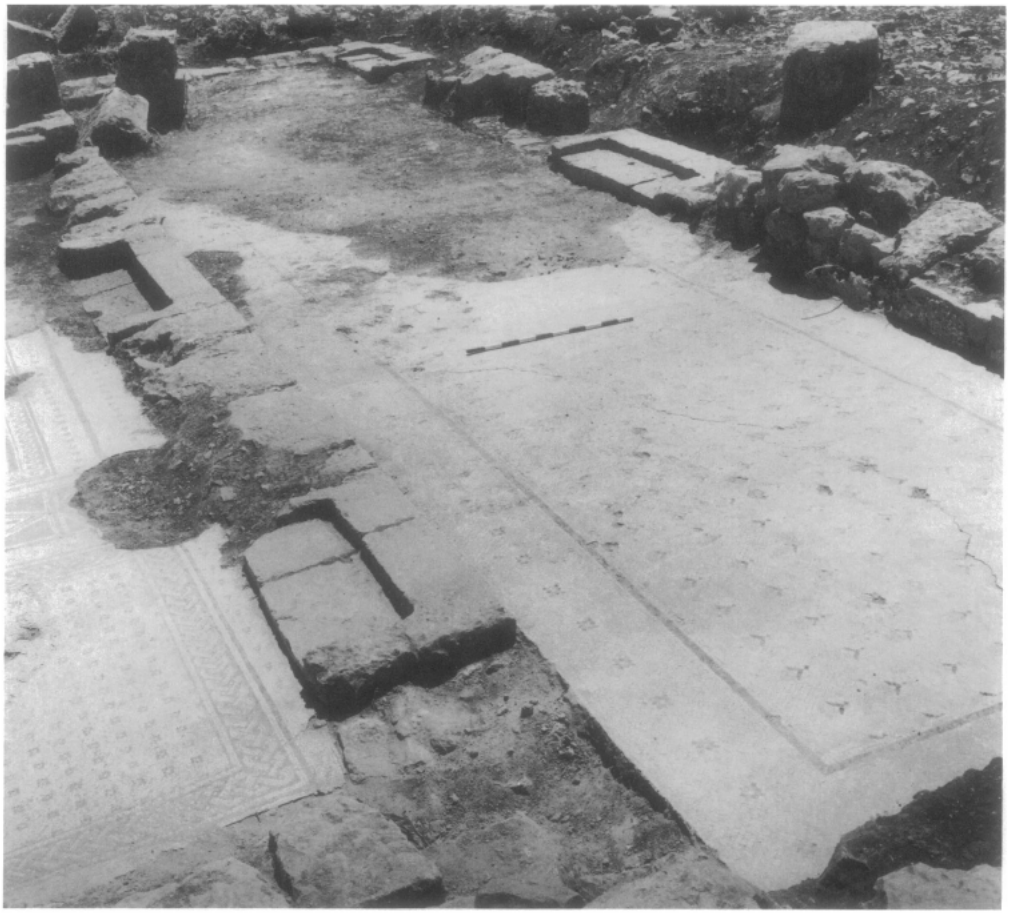


6. Fragment of Marble Altar, found in Crypt

Ḥorvat Berachot, Church

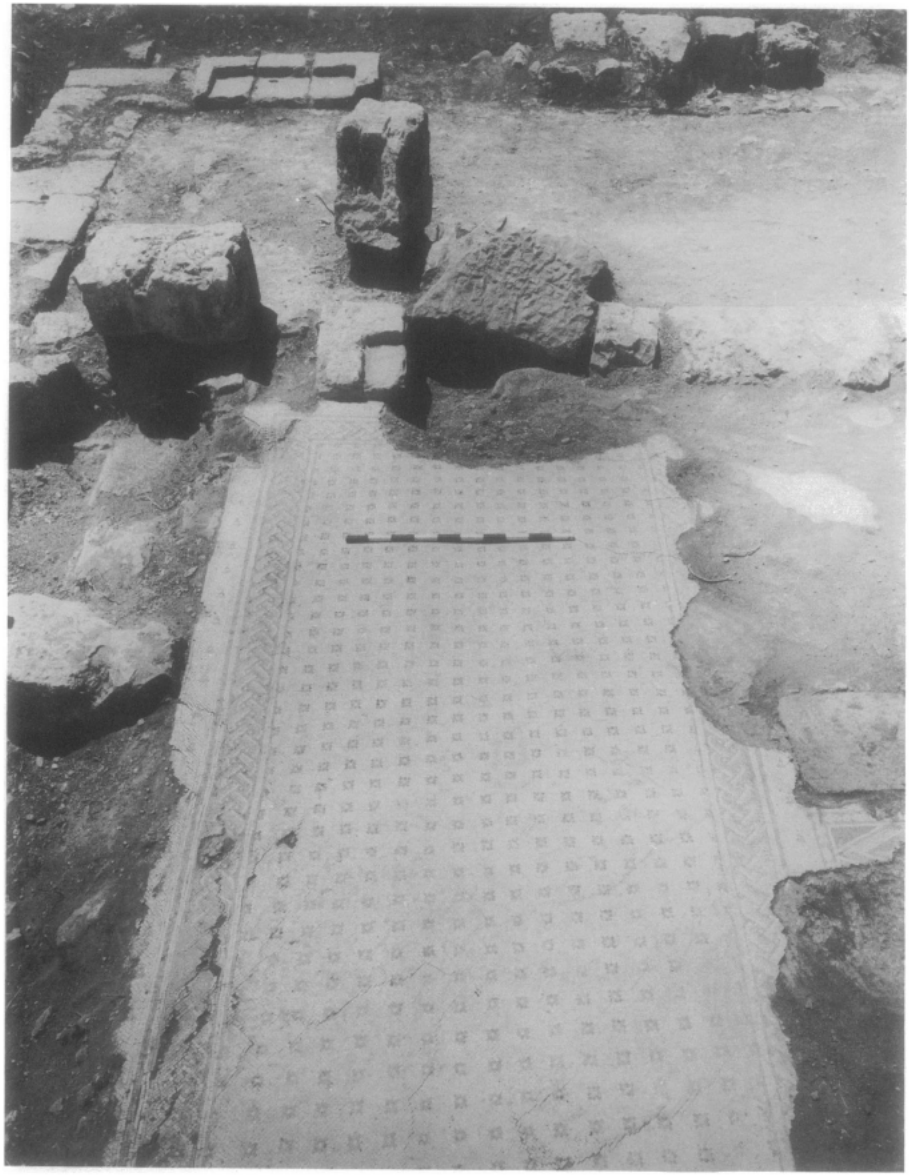
8. Base of a Pilaster, Probably Originally Located at Side of Apse

9. Foundations of Southeast Side Room, looking South

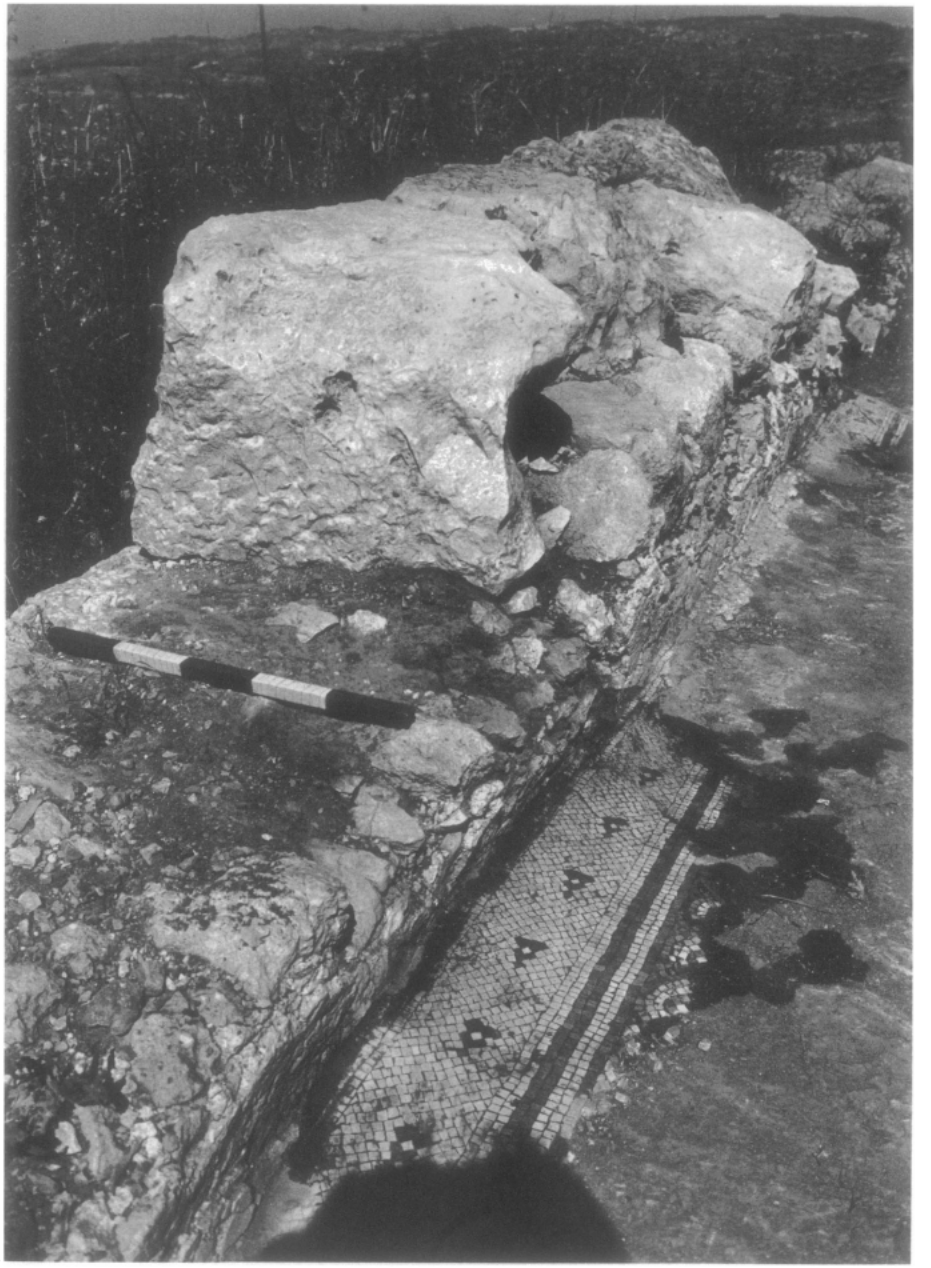


10. Narthex and Entrances to Hall, looking Southwest

11. Excavation, looking Southeast, Showing State of Preservation of Mosaics

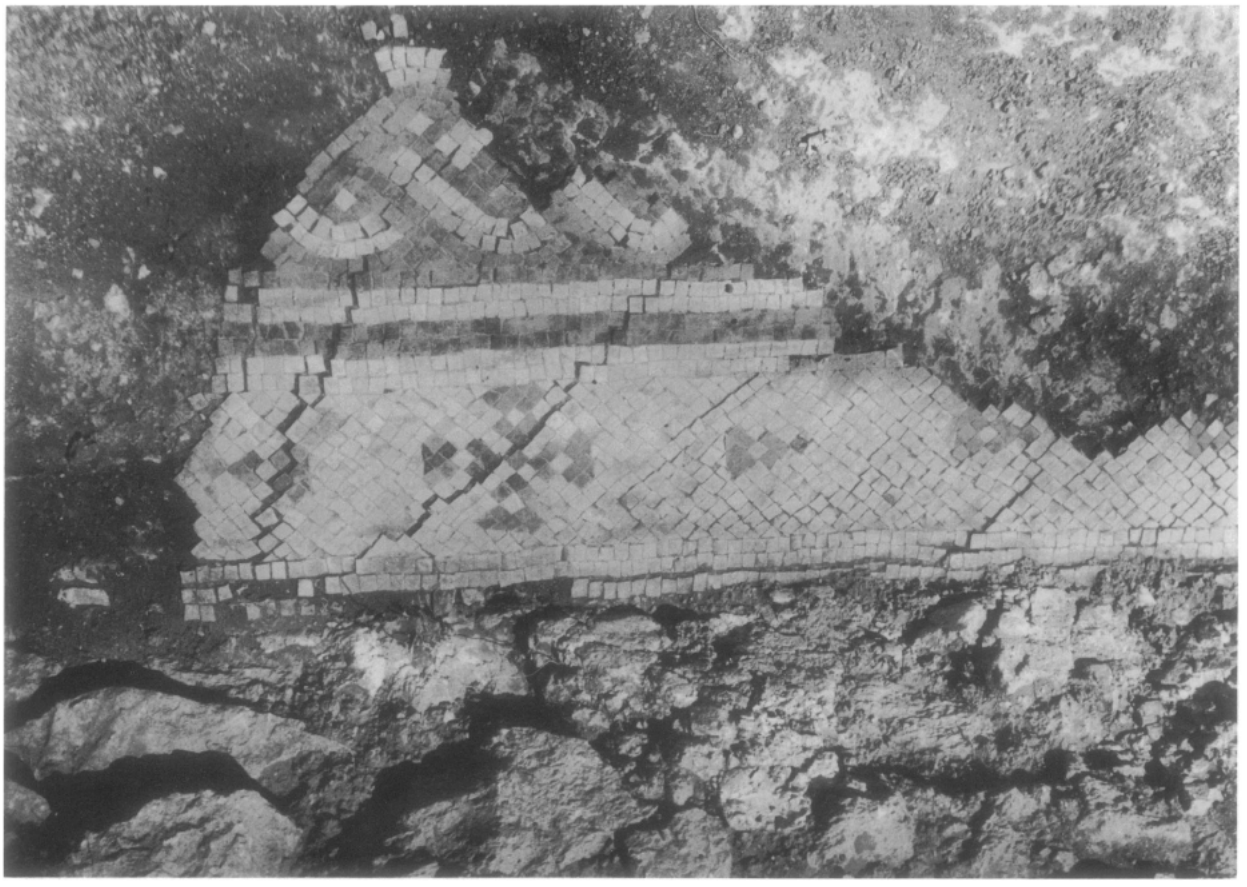


12. Mosaics of South Aisle, looking West

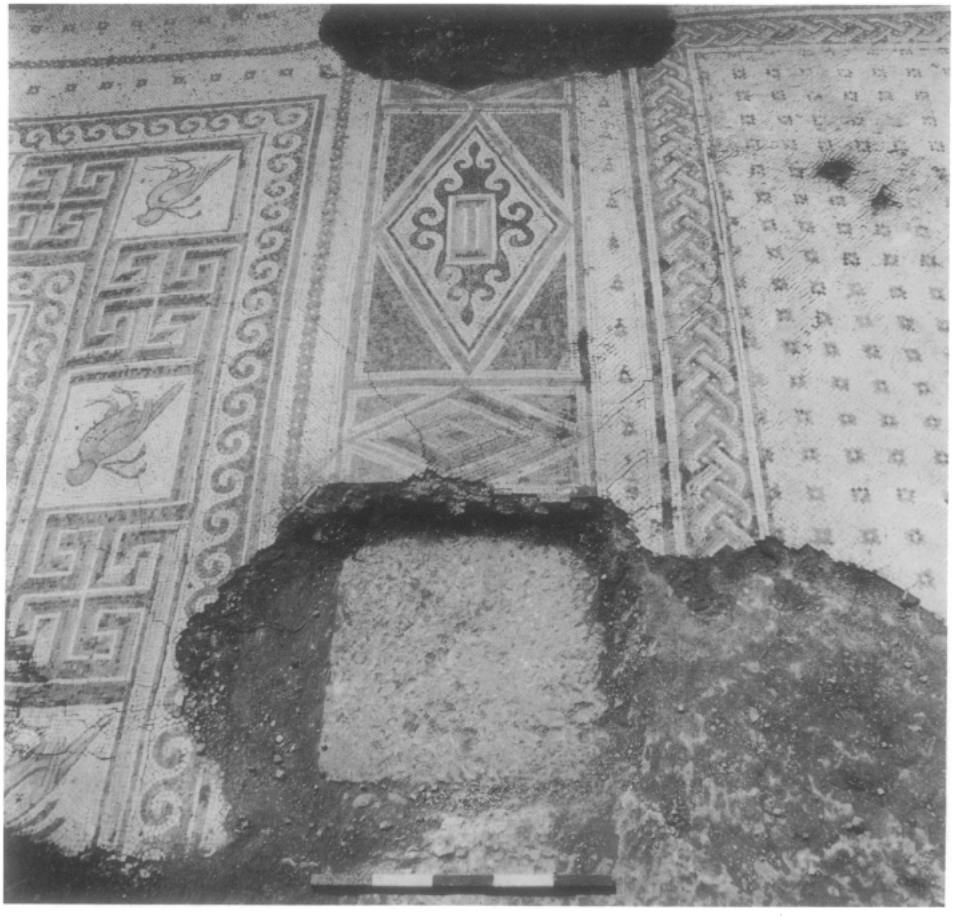


13. Mosaics of North End of North Aisle, looking Northeast

Ḥorvat Berachot, Church



14. Mosaics of North Aisle, Border, detail of Buds forming Cross in Center



15. Mosaics of Northwest Intercolumniation, looking West

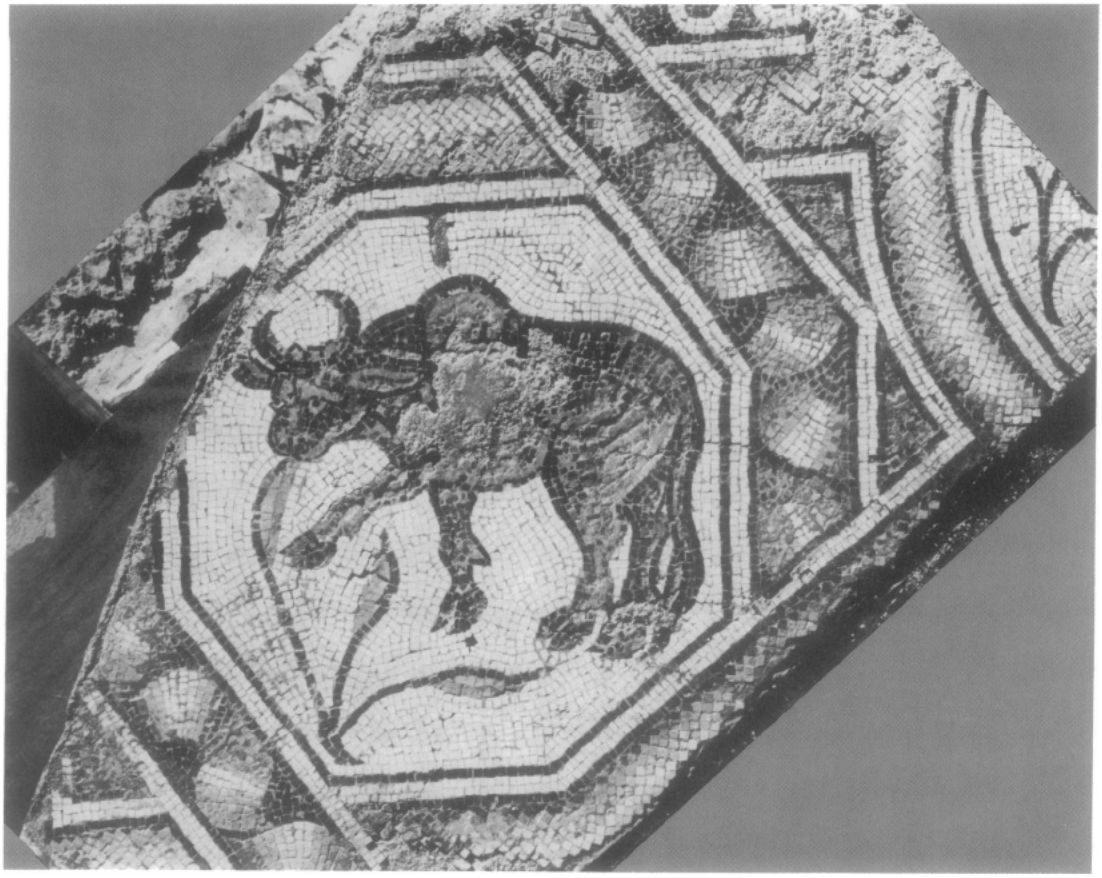
16. Ḥorvat Berachot, Church, Mosaic of Nave, looking West

17. Ḥorvat Berachot, Church, Mosaic of Nave, after Repairs

18. North Octagon, detail of Lion

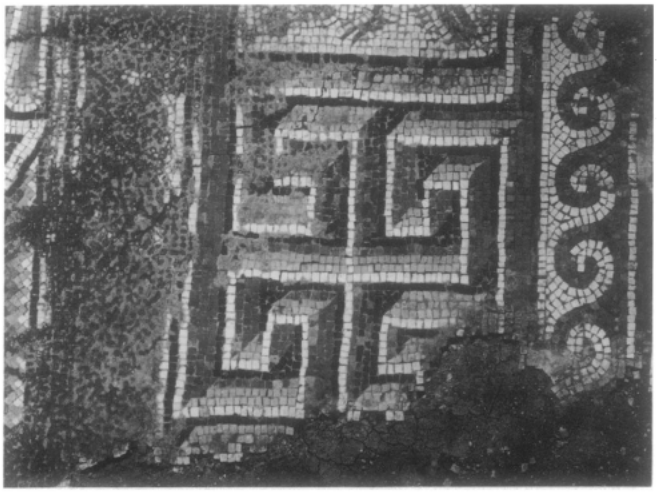
19. Northwest Corner, detail of Beribboned Bird

20. South Octagon, detail of Lion

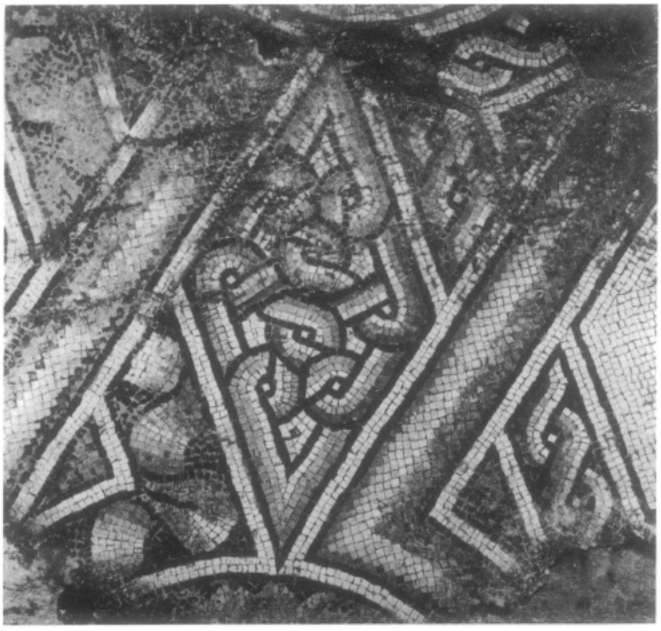


21. Central Octagon, detail of Buffalo

Ḥorvat Berachot, Church, Mosaics of Nave

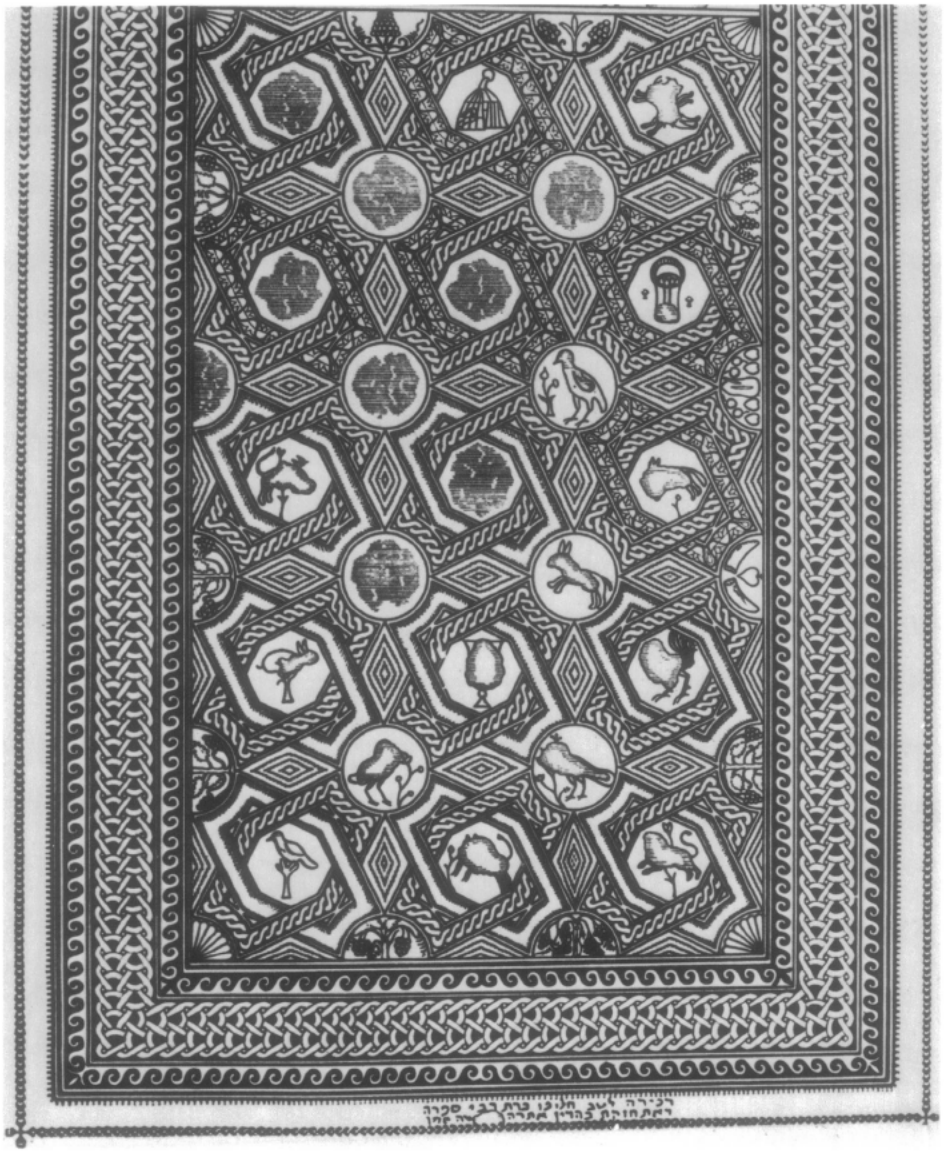


22. South Border, detail of Double Meander



23. Detail of Lozenge

Ḥorvat Berachot, Church, Mosaics of Nave

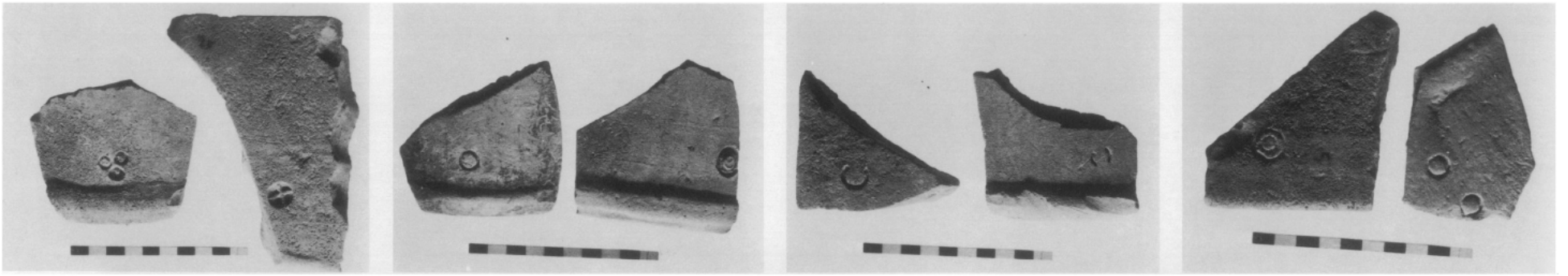


24. Na'aran, Synagogue, Nave, Mosaic Pavement

25. Mosaic Pavement, detail of Leopard

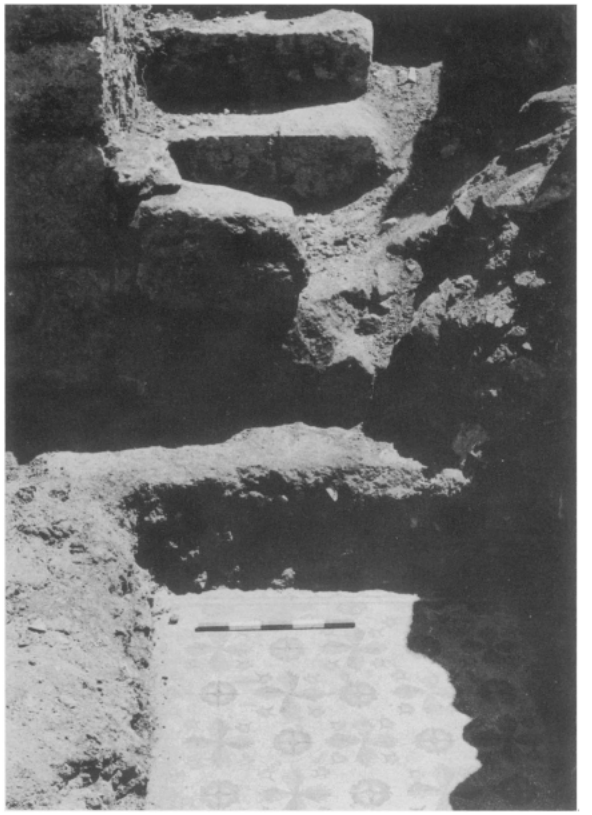
26. Mosaic Pavement with Lions

Ma'on, Synagogue



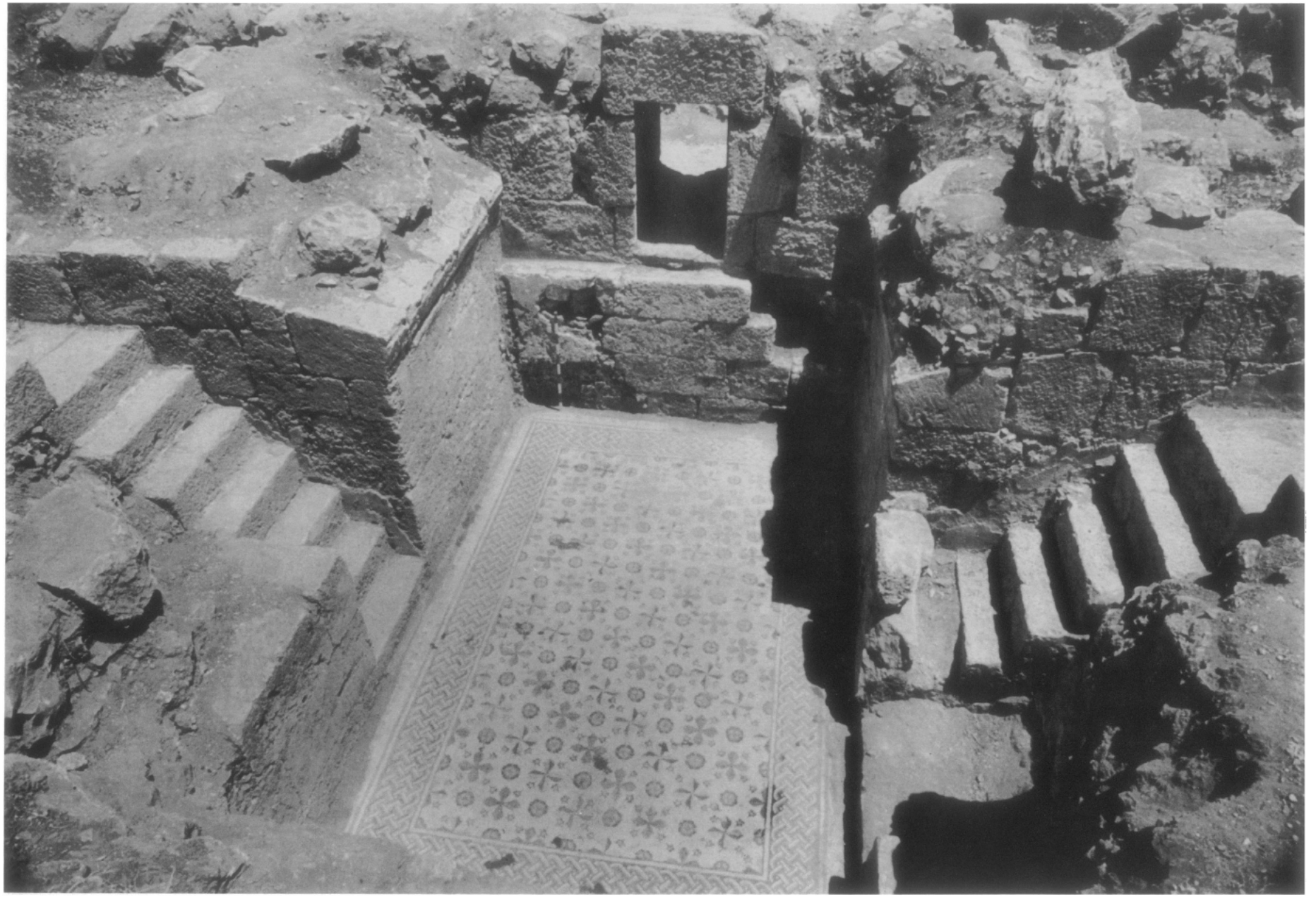
27. Tiles from Roof

28. Crypt, General View, looking Northeast



29. Crypt during Excavation, looking South, Showing Arab Level and Blocking of South Staircase

Ḥorvat Berachot, Church

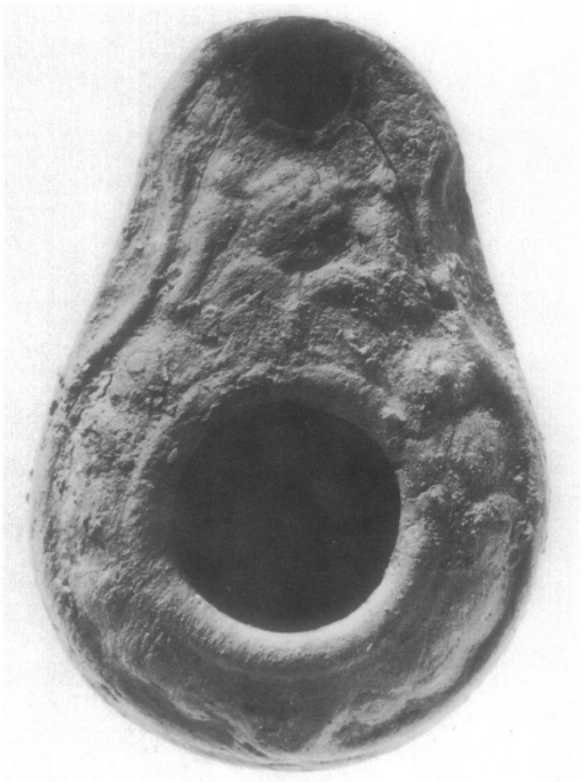


30. Ḥorvat Berachot, Church, Crypt, General View, looking East

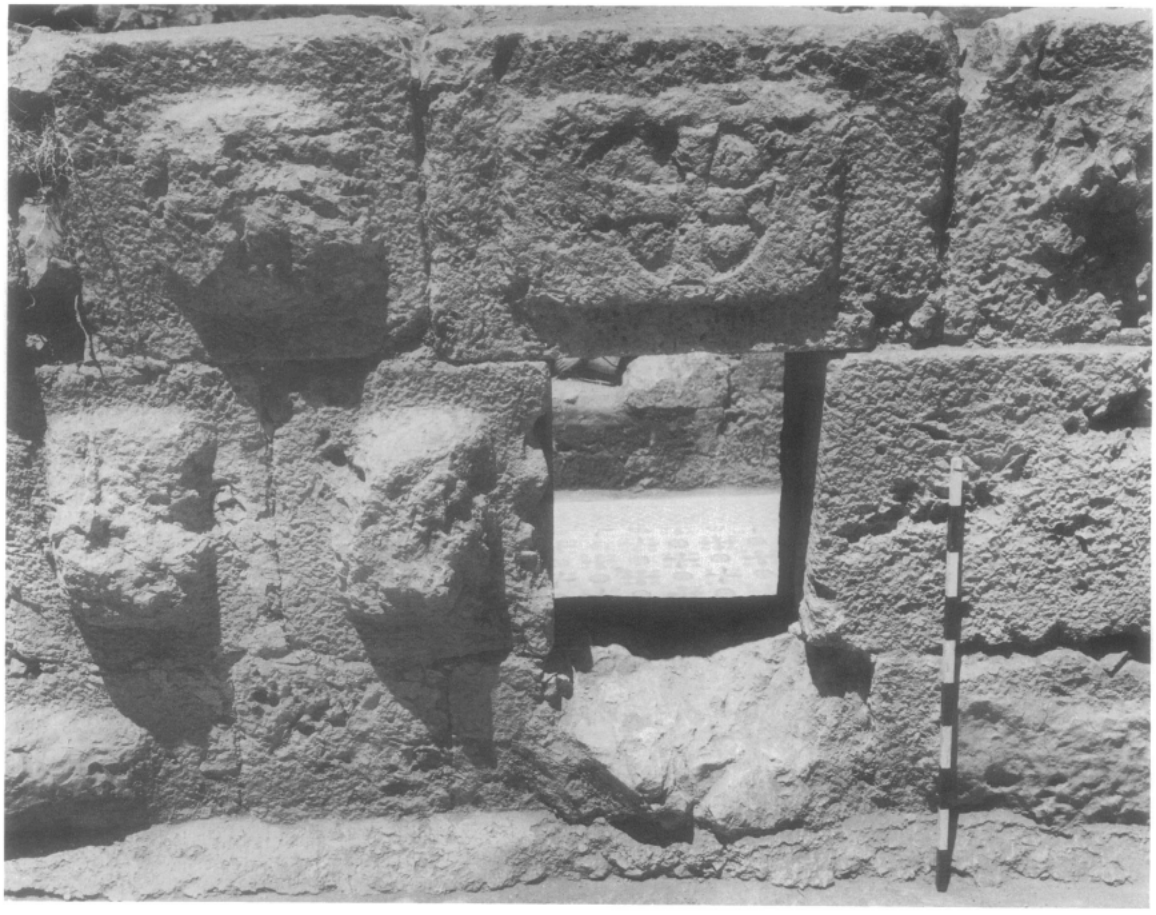
31. Cave Outside West Wall of Church Crypt, looking South, Mosaic

32. Cave, Tomb before Opening

33. Cave, Tomb after Removal of West Slab

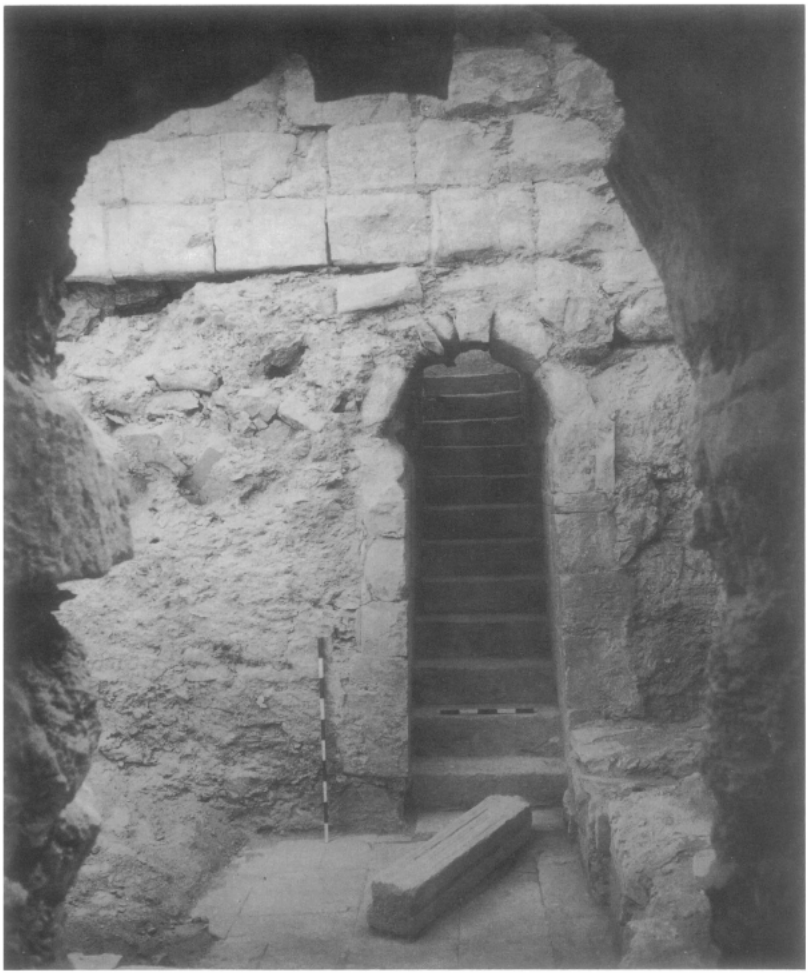


34. Byzantine Oil Lamp Found in Cave (*see also* text fig. N)

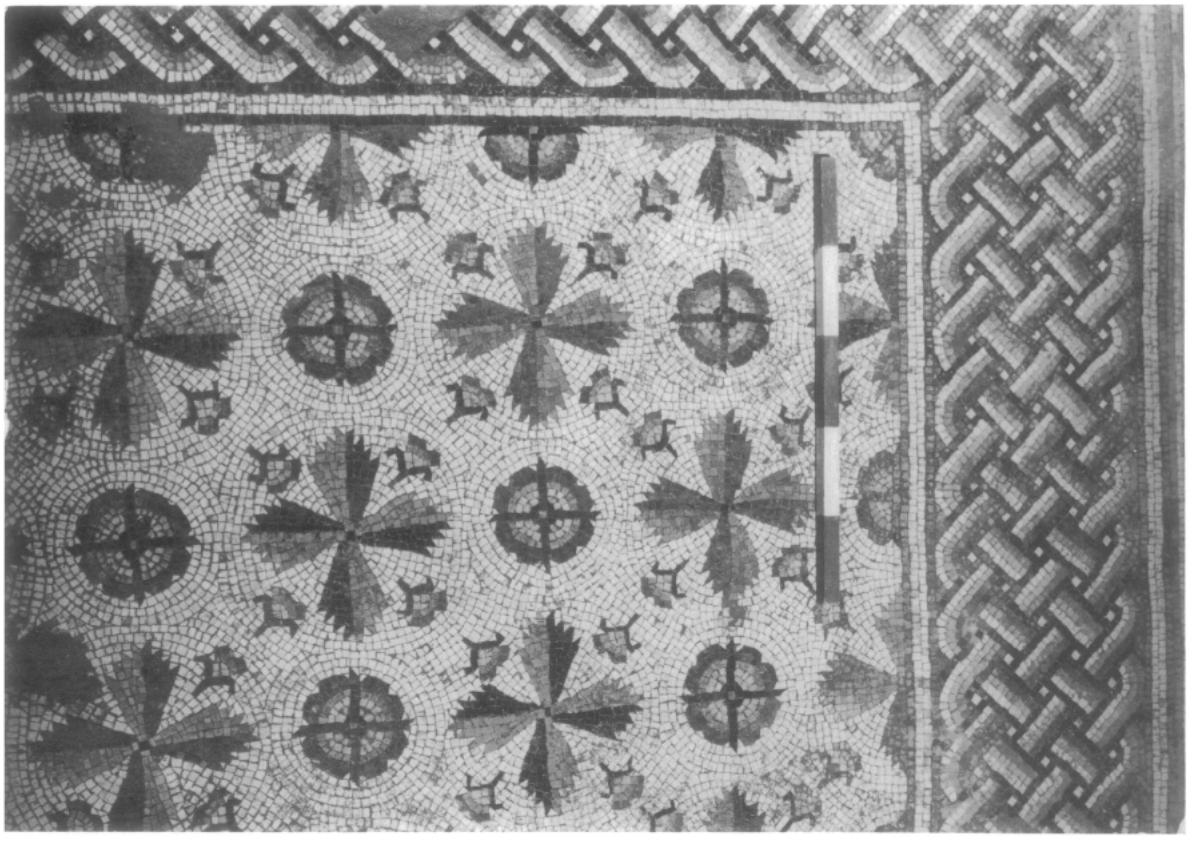


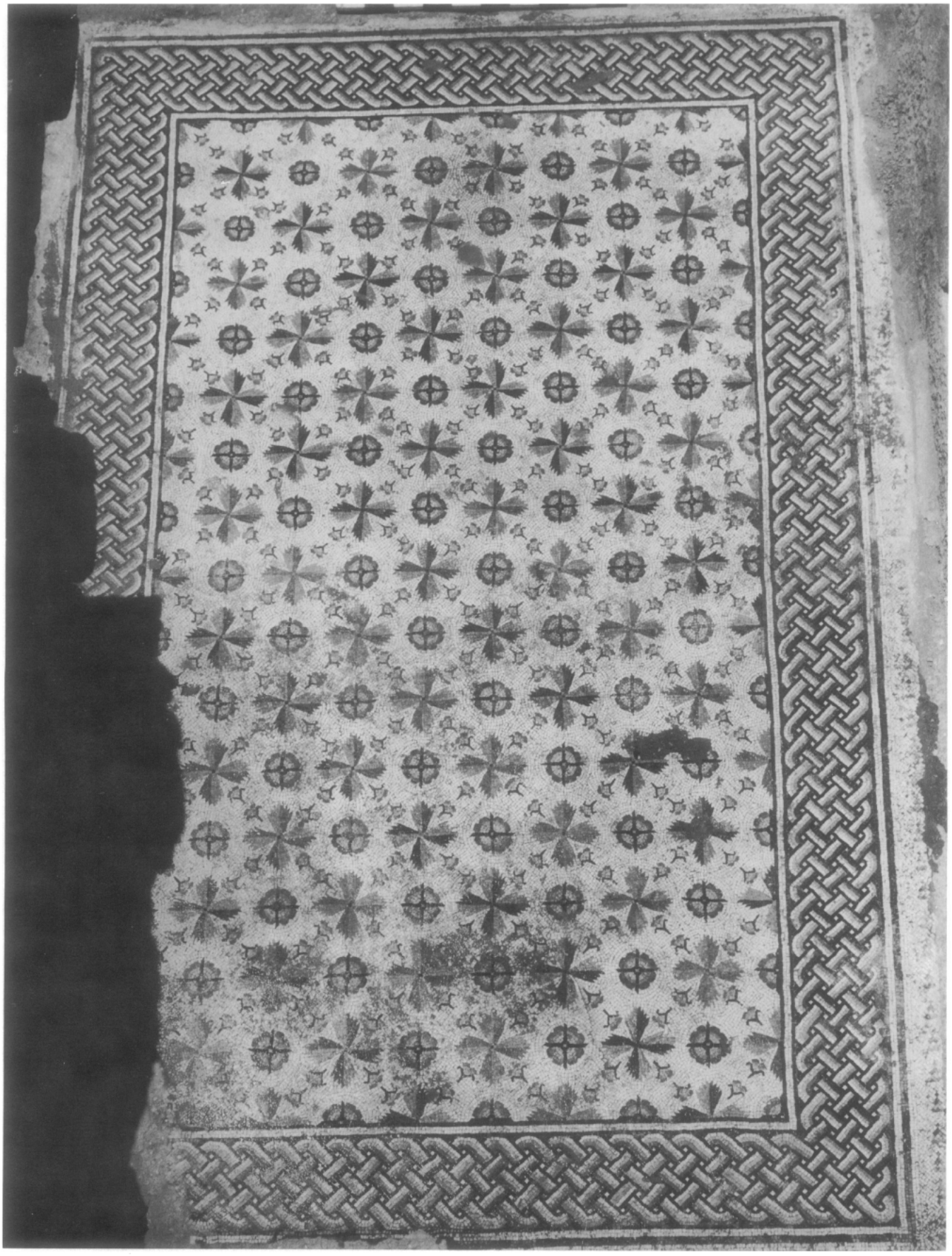
35. Cross on Outer Side of Crypt Window

Ḥorvat Berachot

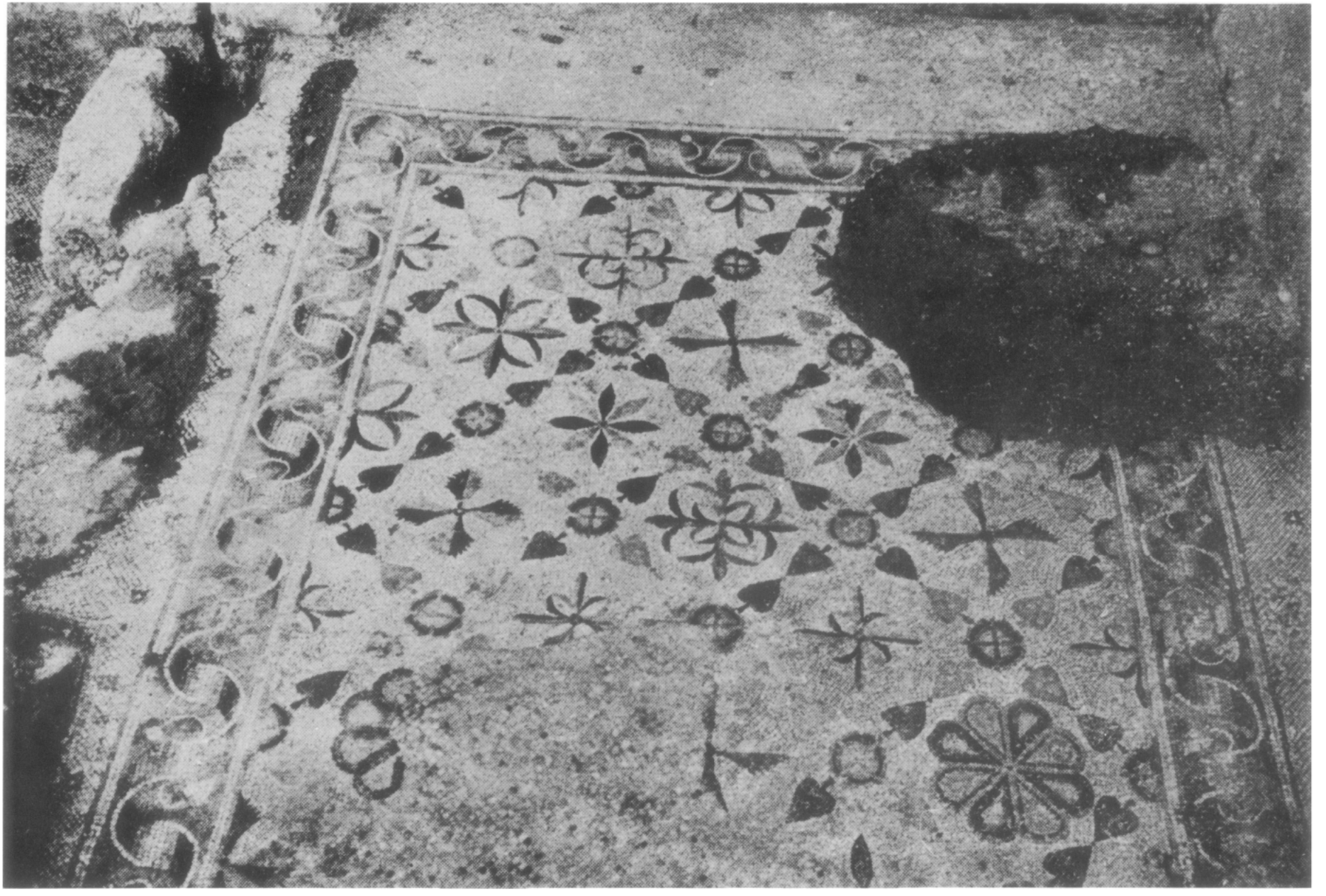


36. Reḥovot in the Negev, North Church, Crypt, North Entrance, View from Interior

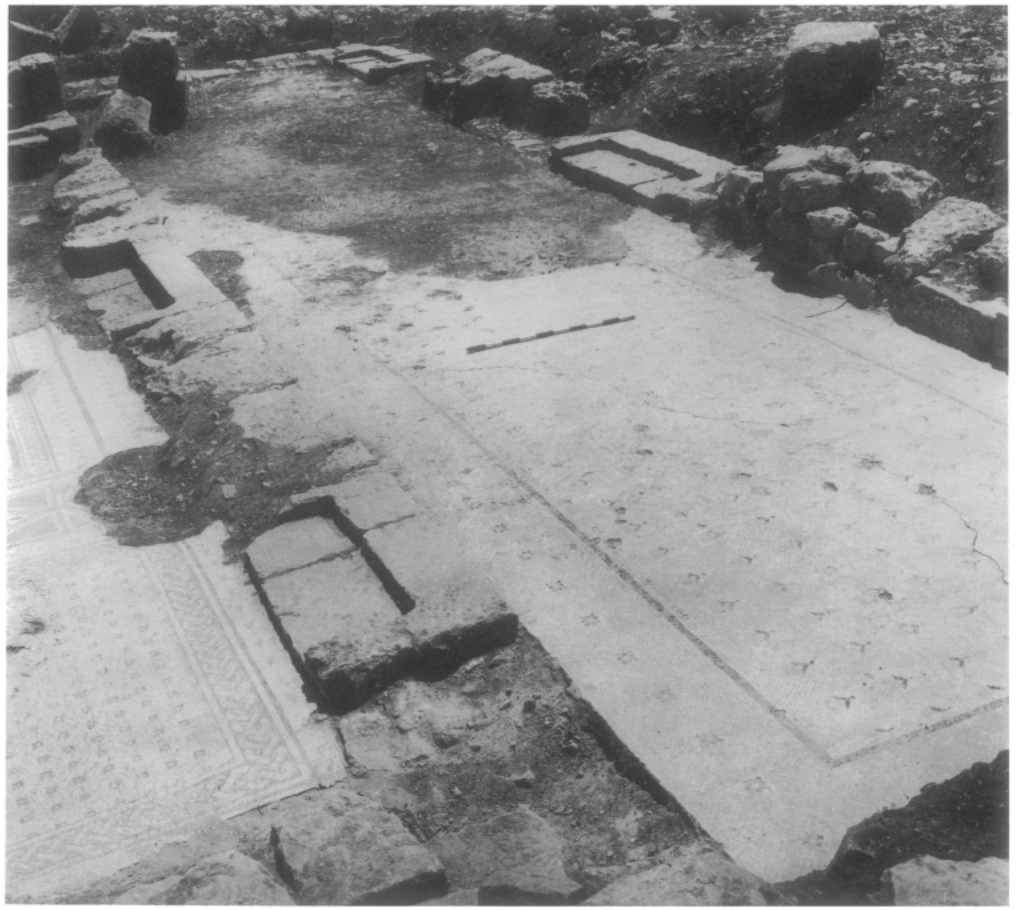




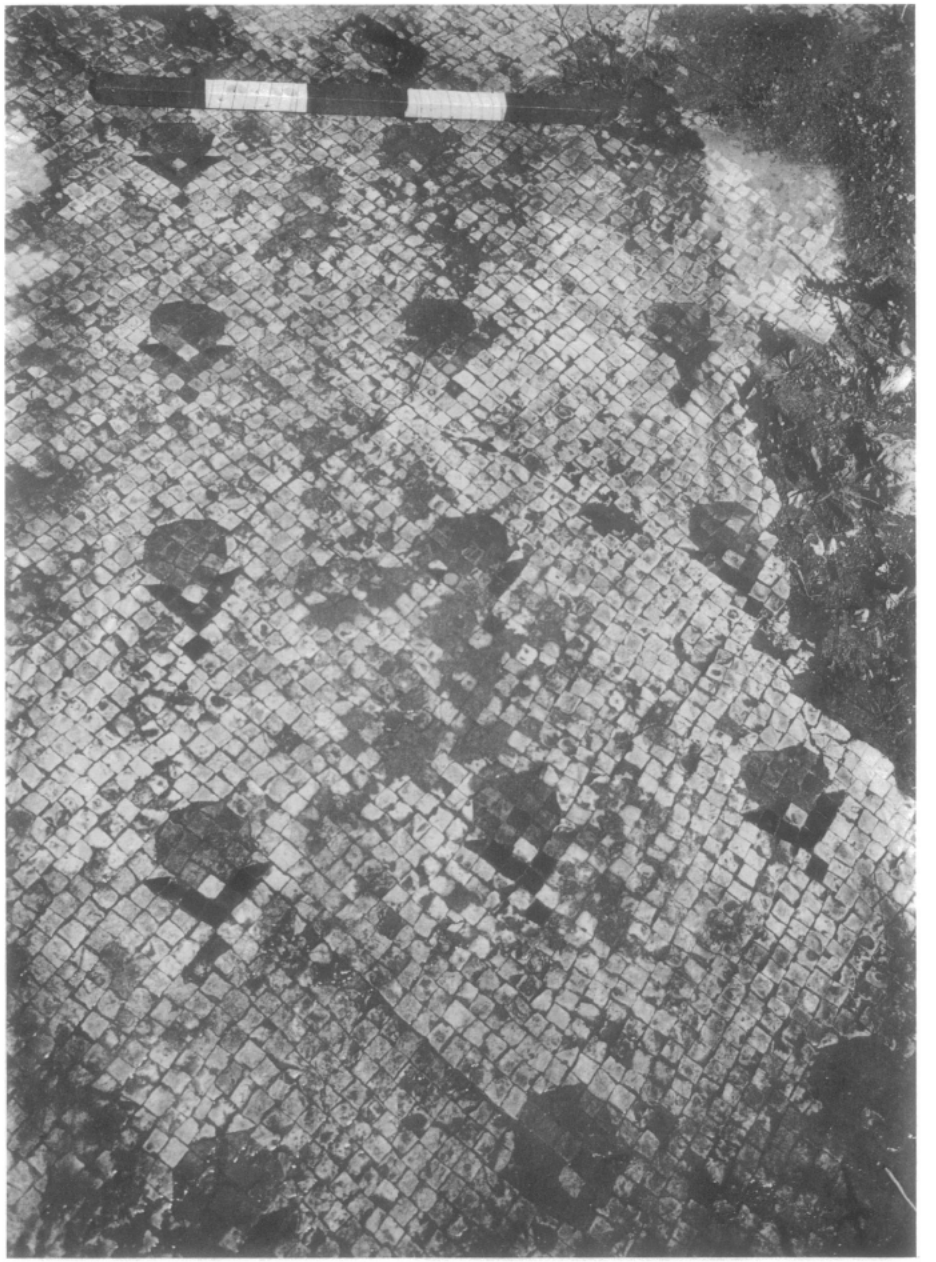
38. Ḥorvat Berachot, Crypt Mosaic, looking West



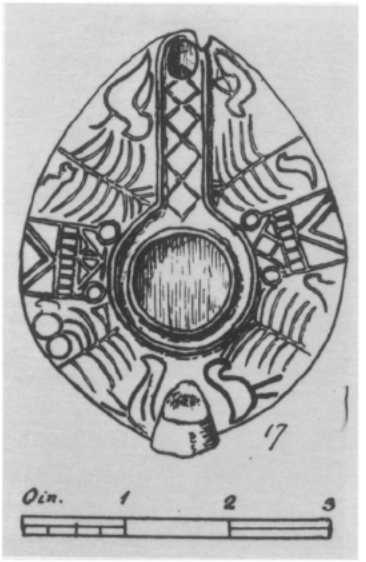
39. Ein-Karem, Church of St. John, South Chapel, Mosaic



40. Narthex, looking Southwest



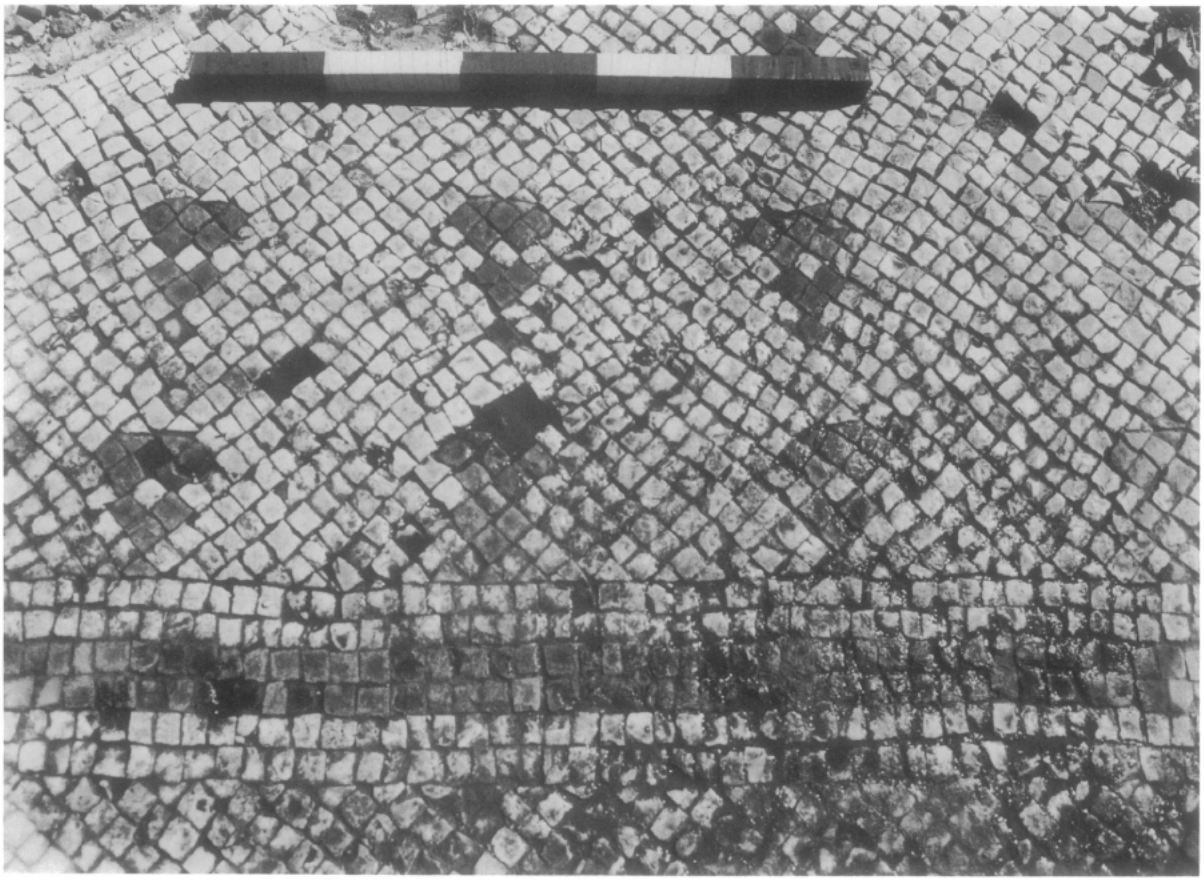
41. Narthex, Mosaic, detail



42. Jerusalem, Ophel. Oil Lamp Probably Made in Same Mold as Lamp of text fig. 0 (after MacAlister-Duncan)

43. Fragment of Marble Colonnette, Probably from a Support of Altar, found in Crypt

44. Atrium, Stylobate



45. Entrance Room, Mosaic, detail

46. Crypt. Arabic Inscription Number 1

Horvat Berachot, Church

47. Number 2

48. Number 3

Horvat Berachot, Church, Crypt, Arabic Inscriptions

Yonah are the "sky supports," were characteristic of the sanctuary, and the doves were famous as the birds sacred to the goddess. The discovery of this particular molded lamp only in the limited area of Jerusalem and Judea leads us to conclude that it was made in a local pottery shop, perhaps in the city of Jerusalem.

The Narthex

The narthex is adjacent to the west end of the main hall of the church (fig. 40). Its interior width is 3 m., its length 13.75 m. It is wider than the hall which it adjoins, having at both ends two projections of equal length. Three doors lead from the atrium to the narthex; the central one is located opposite the main door opening into the nave; it measures 1.50 m. on the inner, wider side, and 1.25 m. on the outer side. The lateral doors are located 0.50 m. from the north end of the narthex and 0.65 m. from the south end respectively. Their width is 1.10 m. on the inner side, 0.95 m. on the outer side. An additional door 1.05 m. wide connects the narthex with a room adjoining it at the south end—perhaps a vestibule (see *infra*, p. 322).

The narthex is paved with a rather coarse mosaic (*ca.* 36 tesserae per sq. dm.) with flowers or buds in black and red on a white background (figs. 40, 41). This mosaic "carpet" is surrounded by a black line and a row of indented squares (Avi-Yonah, type E). Inside the narthex there are rough fixtures from the period of secondary occupation—walls, steps, and stone installations. They all belong to the Early Arab settlers who occupied the place after it had been deserted by the Christians. Some of these secondary walls do not stand directly on the mosaic but on a thin layer of hard earth which had covered the mosaic, thus providing evidence that there had been a brief intermediate period when the site was totally abandoned.

The Atrium

The church complex was completed with the building of the atrium and the rooms flanking it (figs. B, X). Their masonry is similar to that of the main church, and the sloping revetment which was found around the church was discovered here, too. The atrium and the rooms around it forming a unit larger in size than the main church were only partially excavated. Most of their stones were carried away and sometimes only a robber trench alongside the revetment enabled us to trace the lines of the walls. In the west part of the atrium a large cistern was cut in the rock; its original roof has now partially collapsed. No pavement was discovered in the open, central part of the atrium. Perhaps this part was covered by slabs which have disappeared; but it is also possible that the floor consisted only of leveled bedrock.

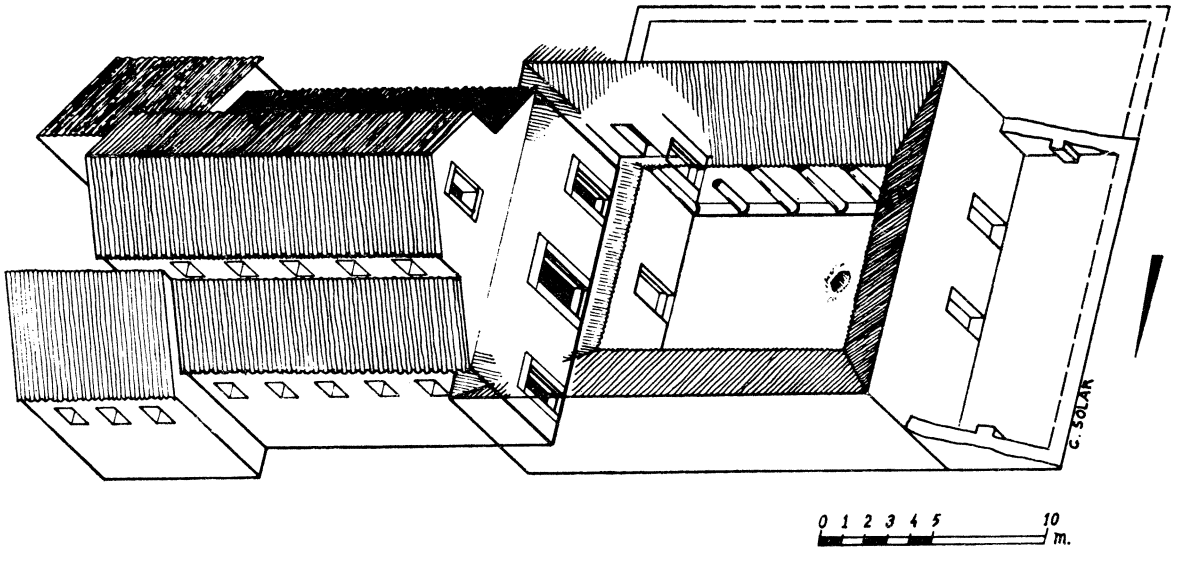
At the northwest and south sides of the atrium remains of a stylobate 52 cm. wide, made of well-dressed stones, were discovered (fig. 44). The porticoes of the atrium were paved with a white, crude mosaic. The atrium measured *ca.* 13.80 m. north-south by 13.40 m. east-west. The width of the por-

ticoes was 2.10 m. on the north and south sides, and *ca.* 2 m. on the west side. There were two doors in the west wall; that to the south measured *ca.* 1.20 m. and that to the north *ca.* 1.10 m. They are not symmetrically arranged within the wall, and the way the thresholds are cut shows that the door panels opened outward, to the west, into a hall or rooms which were built along that side. It is clear, therefore, that the main entrance into the atrium and church complex as a whole was not located, as it commonly occurs elsewhere, on the west side. On the south side another entrance (1.10 m. wide) was discovered, about 1.75 m. from the southeast corner.

The rooms (or hall) adjoining the atrium on the west were *ca.* 4.30 m. wide. The interior width of the rooms of the south wing was *ca.* 5.30 m. In both cases, the internal division of these wings is not clear, both because of bad preservation and because the site was not completely excavated. A square pier found on the north side of the west wing gives rise to the hypothesis that this hall or rooms were supported by arches. The function of these wings is not clear. In many other cases such rooms were proven to have been a monastery, and this is a possible interpretation in this case also.

A door 1.05 m. wide leads into the narthex from a wide room at the east end of the south wing. According to our reconstruction, this room was 5.90 m. long and 3.80 m. wide. It was paved with a mosaic of buds in red and black on a white background, like the mosaic outside the border of the "carpets" in the aisles and crypt, but the flower buds are much larger because the tesserae are larger (fig. 45). This mosaic is enclosed within a red frame with black lines on either side.

The room was most probably used as the main entrance of the church. We prefer this interpretation to that identifying the room with the "House of Servants" of the Syriac *Testamentum Domini*, which is believed to indicate



X. Church and Atrium from Above. Suggested Reconstruction

the diaconicon and would be in this area of the church.[66] However, the reconstruction of a main entrance into the church complex remains a difficulty, for this entrance appears to have been relatively simple compared to the quality of the other elements of the church.

In the atrium, too, were discovered remains of secondary, later use. They consist mainly of foundations of walls.

Conclusion

Since no definite dates were supplied by literary sources, inscriptions, or even coins, we were totally dependent on pure archeological data, comparative analysis of the architecture and mosaics, and the general historical background.

I. The first Christian activity took place in a natural cave which was converted into a chapel. In this phase the walls of the cave were coated with plaster and its floor was paved with mosaics. The small tomb with secondary burials also belongs to this period. We believe that this activity took place as early as the fourth century, when enormous effort was being devoted to finding and revering holy places in Palestine in general, and around Jerusalem and Bethlehem particularly. An analogy to this phase at Berachot would be the first phase of the "Greek" Shepherds' Field. The tradition related to Berachot, whatever it was, seems to have been of a somewhat secondary importance. Therefore, we incline to date the first use of the shrine to a later stage of the commemoration of holy sites, i.e., to the second half of the fourth century. The oil lamp discovered in the cave would seem to confirm a fourth-century date for the existence of the shrine.

II. In the second stage, a beautiful church decorated with mosaics, a crypt, and most probably a monastery were built. The pottery discovered in partial excavations under the floors, the comparative analysis of the building and crypt, and the stylistic analysis of the mosaics enable us to date this activity either in the fifth or the first half of the sixth century. Mainly because of parallels between Berachot on the one hand and the church at Shepherds' Field, the crypt at Reḥovot in the Negev, and some mosaics dated to the fifth century on the other, we are inclined to favor a date in the second half of the fifth century for the construction of the church.

III. The desertion of the church could not have occurred before the Arab conquest in the first half of the seventh century. Most probably, it took place only some decades later, in the second half of the century. The next and final stage was the period of the Arab squatters, mainly in the eighth century, as is shown by the pottery finds.

[66] Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani, *Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* (Mainz, 1899), 22; see also Orlandos, in Δελτ.Χριστ.Ἀρχ.Ἑτ., ser. 4, 4 (1964–65), 353ff.