

The Byzantine and Early Islamic settlement of Khirbat Shuwayka

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Abstract

Il sito di Khirbat Shuwayka è ubicato nel settore meridionale della moderna città di Ramallah/el-Bira, sull'antica strada che conduceva da Gerusalemme a Nablus. Nel presente articolo sono illustrati i risultati conseguiti nel corso della campagna di ricerche archeologiche condotte, nel 2003, dalle università "Al Quds" ed "Oxford". Ricerche che hanno consentito l'individuazione di un complesso residenziale (a nord-ovest); una chiesa (a nord-est) ed un complesso per la produzione vinicola (a sud-est). Il sito di Khirbat Shuwayka fu occupato soprattutto in epoca bizantina (IV-VII sec.) e nei periodi Umayyad e Abbaside (VII-XI sec.).

1. Introduction***

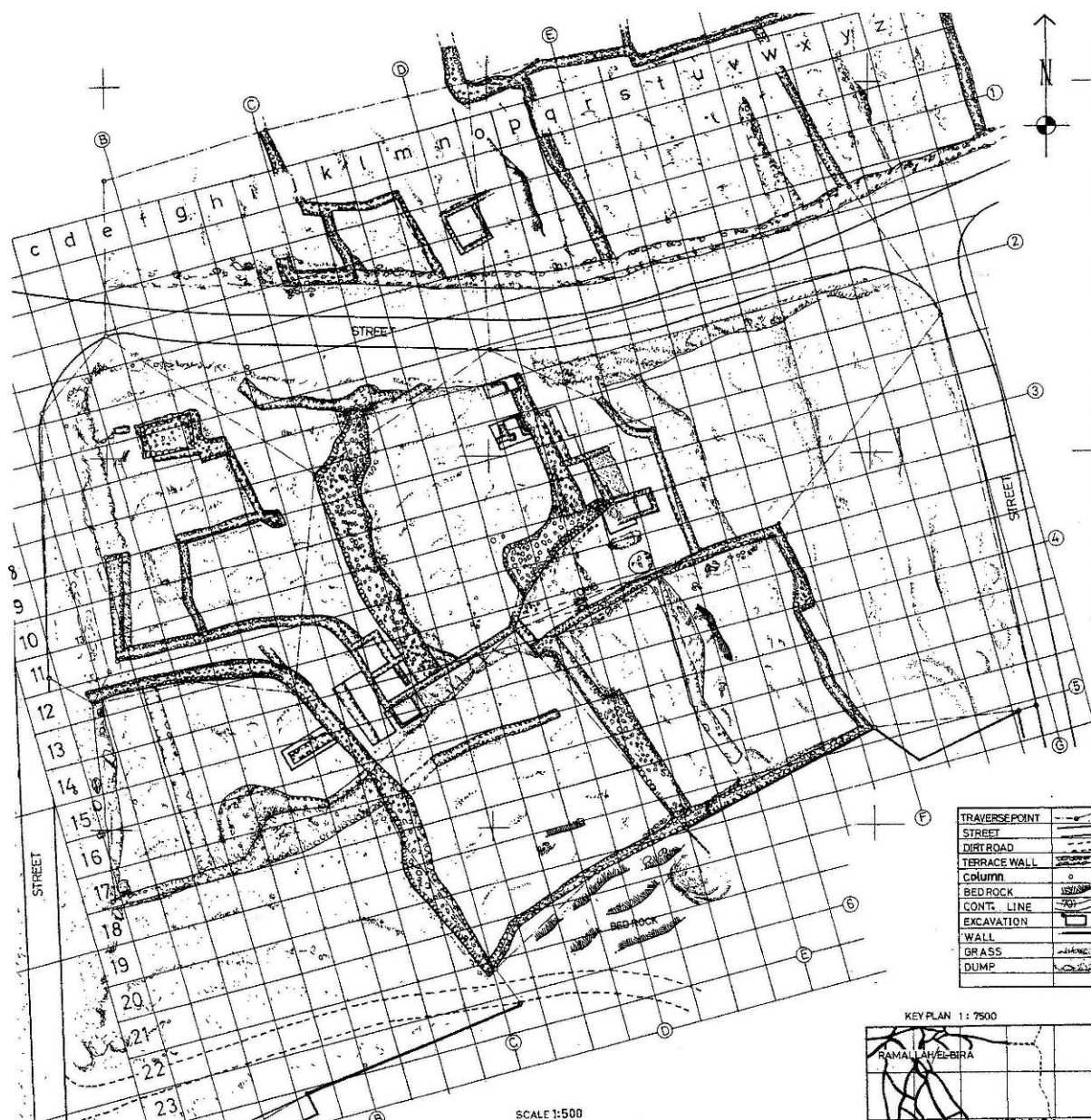
The site of Khirbat Shuwayka, a few hundred metres west of Tell en-Nasbeh and on the south side of modern Ramallah/el-Bireh, lies on the ancient road from Nablus to Jerusalem, only twelve kilometres north of the latter. In 1996 al-Quds University's Institute of Islamic Archaeology, under the direction of Drs. Marwan Abu Khalaf, Hani Nur Eddine and Robert Schick, initiated excavations there, primarily for the purpose of training B.A and M.A. students of al-Quds University in the practice of archaeology. Work has continued there ever since with the exception of 2002 season when political events made it impossible. Attention has been focused on a core area, which is about 100m east-west by 75 m north-south, bounded on the north, east and west by modern streets and on the south by modern houses (fig. 1). The area had been substantially cleared for agriculture, and the three very large rock piles visible on the site were the result of that clearance. The ancient site was very likely much more extensive, but modern houses built on the east, south and west sides preclude further investigation. To the north there is still an open area, and there are hints of ancient remains there, but field clearance and building of terrace walls have made interpretation impossible without excavation. Efforts were concentrated in two principal areas: one on the west side of the site around the intersection of two ancient walls and the other on the east side of the site around another ancient wall (approx. F-J 8-15 and N-P 8-12 on fig. 1, labeled areas A and B respectively by the al-Quds University team).¹ A number of squares were opened in both areas in order to understand the history and phasing in this part of the site and at the same time to examine the occupation related to the walls, which appear to be part of a large complex.

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¹ The results of prospection in these two areas in 1996-97 were published in Abu Khalaf *et alii* 1998.



1. Plan of Khirbat Shuwayka drawn up in 1999.

Three distinct archaeological features have emerged from the excavations: a residential complex in the northwest, a church in the northeast and a winemaking installation in the southeast. There are hints of Roman period occupation, but the principal heyday of the site was the Byzantine period (4th-7th centuries CE) when it evidences signs of monumental architecture and substantial wine-making activity. After that the site was abandoned for a time before being reoccupied sometime during the

Abbasid period (ca. 8th-11th centuries CE) as a complex of simple domestic dwellings. This article will give an overview of these results, particularly from the perspective of the season of 2003, pending the publication of a full archaeological report.

2. Previous work at the site

Despite its prime location just north of Jerusalem and on a major north-south road, the site of Khirbat Shuwayka has only very rarely attracted the attention of scholars. The famous Survey of Western Palestine, carried out in the 1880s, noted the existence there of “walls, foundations and heaps of stones; pieces of tessellated pavement”.² The American excavator of nearby Tell en-Nasbeh, in his season of 1935, was on the lookout for tombs and so “ran some trenches at Khirbet esh-Shuweikeh on the hill west of Tell en-Nasbeh. Instead of tombs, however, he uncovered the mosaic floor of a church and, since he did not wish to go into material so late, he covered it up to preserve it”.³ He did not record the exact place or results of his prospection in Khirbat Shuwayka, but he did describe the whereabouts, structure and contents of nearby Roman-Byzantine tombs which, since “for occupation of the Tell in the Roman and Byzantine periods there is no evidence”,⁴ must pertain to Khirbat Shuwayka. The next visitor to leave us some account was the Franciscan monk Bellarmino Bagatti, who traveled there in 1951, though he only wrote up his observations in 1979. His description is the only one we have, so it seems worth quoting them in full:

«In 1935 the excavators found the mosaic floor of an unexcavated church; and returning to the spot in 1951 I could see some of the church walls and mosaic fragments transferred from the original spot. Apparently some devastation had taken place in the meantime. Amid the cultivated land there appeared some walls of which I drew a plan. Seemingly the hall to the right formed the interior of the church, while the little room to the left was a diakonikon or sacristy.⁵ It was not possible to ascertain whether the apse was inscribed, as appears, because behind the east wall no traces of masonry are preserved. It is certain that the church was oriented from west to east for the length of at least the 25 m that that we were able to trace on the ground. It had three naves because fragments of columns (47 cm in diameter), bases and a cornice 29 cm high are scattered about, some preserved in the area of the church and others in secondary use in the drystone walls nearby. Unfortunately we could see nothing of the mosaic pavement in situ, but only fragments with red, black and white tesserae set in a bed

² Conder, Kitchener, 3.126 (map: sheet 17 ms).

³ McCown 1947, 1.9.

⁴ Mc Cown 1947, 1.109-28 (Roman-Byzantine tombs), 1.54 (Tell unoccupied in Roman-Byzantine period).

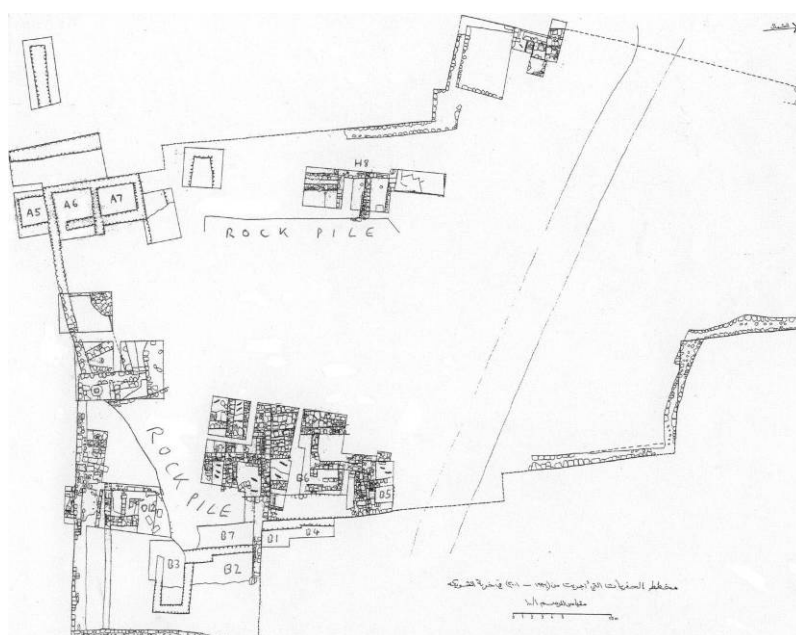
⁵ Bagatti here assumes that the north-south wall leading from the base of the apse to the north wall of the basilical hall of the church is part of a room, but it serves rather to strengthen the church structure at a point where the bedrock is some 1.8 m below the floor level of the church (see the section on the church plan below).

of white plaster. Some very small tesserae hint at fine designs, possibly with human figures. The walls are 78-87 cm thick and made with roughly dressed stones... The roof was covered with wood and tiles, as required by the thin walls; in fact we saw fragments of tiles. Scattered around was also a large quantity of Byzantine sherds of the usual well-known types».⁶

Finally, the Israel Antiquities Authority included an entry on Khirbat Shuwayka in their survey of the hill-country of Benjamin, conducted in the mid-1980s, which reads: "Ruin; terraces; traces of monumental building with columns; arcosolia burial cave; cisterns". And their surface sherding at the site gave the following statistics: "Hell - 9%; Rom - 8%; Byz - 79%; Eis - 4%; 99 sherds".⁷

3. The Residential Complex

In 2001 and 2003 attention was turned to the northern part of the west side which seemed to constitute part of a residential complex of some sort. In 2001 a small portion of it was excavated, square H8 (figs. 1-3), without any clear identification being made as to the nature of the building. This square consists of two rectangular rooms divided by a wall with an entrance at the western end. The northern room is approximately 1.85 x 3.50 m and the southern room approximately 2.05 x 3.23 m. It is thought that the entrance way between them was closed during the Abbasid period, since most of the deposits of glazed pottery fragments found there belonged to that period. It seems that the Abbasids used the site right down to the bedrock that forms the floor of the rooms, and hence there were only found a few pottery fragments sticking to the Byzantine wall on the east side of the rooms. In the western wall (L2) of these rooms one can still



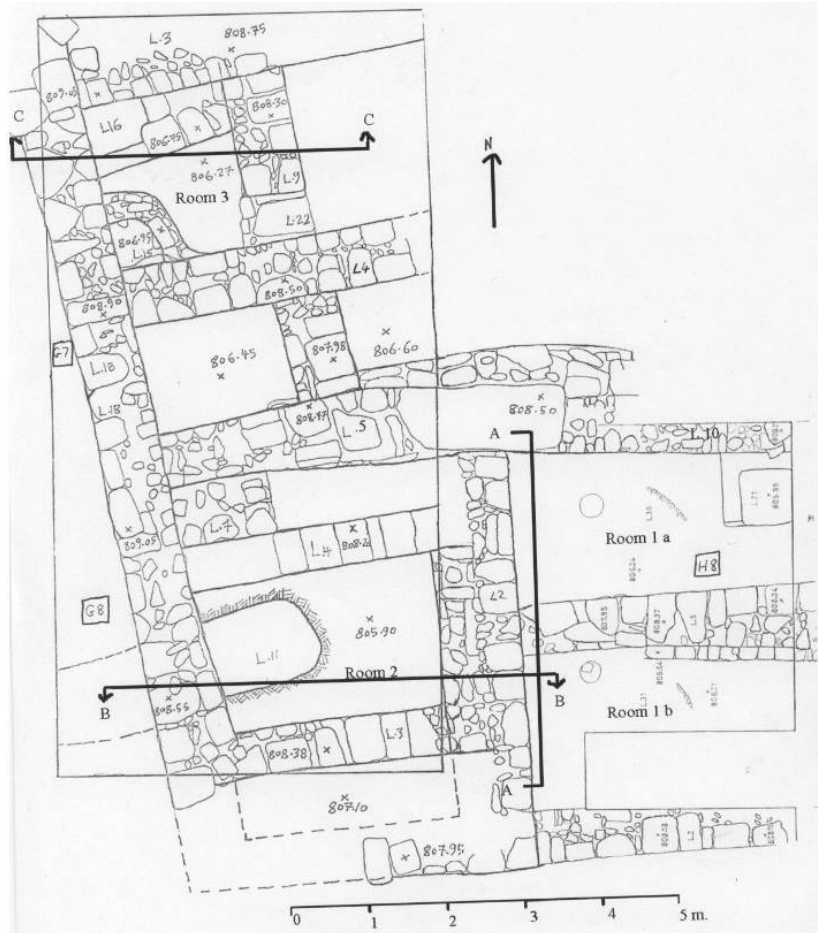
2. Plan of the squares dug by al-Quds University 1996-2001.

⁶ Bagatti 2000, 121-122.

⁷ Finkelstein, Magen 1993, no. 174.

see three entrances (fig. 4). In 2003 two further squares were opened, G7 and G8 (see fig. 3). The latter comprises two opposing arches of well-cut limestone blocks (L3-4; fig. 5). Both, together with a northern wall (L5) and an as yet unexcavated southern one, support the ceiling and form a rectangular-shaped hall.⁸ The room can be accessed via the entrances in the western wall (L2) of the aforementioned rooms in square H8. North of this is another room (G7) that is accessed by a main doorway located on its eastern side (L22). During the Abbasid period G7 was divided into two parts by an east-west wall (L4).

We discovered Abbasid remains only in the earth deposits above the floor of the square, which makes it different from H8, where we encountered Abbasid material right down to the bedrock. At the west corner of the northern wall of G7 (L3) lies a circular depression (in L16), 70 cm in diameter, built with rough stones 30 cm deep, possibly used for storage jars. There is a stone platform (mastaba) adjacent to and running along the length of wall L3, ranging from 70-95 cm. in breadth. In the southwestern corner there is a hollow (L15) some 40 cm deep, which contained an iron-made spear, limestone lamp and some nails. The height of northern wall L3 is 3.20m, and cut into it are rectangular-shaped niches and a door-sill that is 30 x 40 cm (fig. 6).



3. Plan of the residential complex excavated in 2001 and 2003.

⁸ The style of the building is similar to one at Kurnub in the Negev. See Shereshevski 1991, Pl. 10 (Kurnub, House I).



4. View of entrances in squares H8-G8 of residential complex.

It is clear that the residential complex is as yet incomplete and needs further excavation.

However, a number of observations can be made: (a) there was very likely a courtyard on the east side of the excavated rooms, as is suggested by the east-west entrances of these rooms; (b) due to destruction we have no evidence for windows, but there are some rectangular niches in the north wall of G7, presumably for placing lamps;

(c) it is difficult for us to decide whether or not there are any other storeys, because no inner or outer stairways were found; (d) the floor surface is made of compressed soil, not stone, with the exception of H8, for which the bedrock was used as a floor. It is possible that G7 was used for storage because of the circular depression and the mastaba; there are no indications that it was ever used as a stable; (e) rooms G7-8 are connected by a north-south wall on the west side (L18) that forms the outer limit of the residential complex in this direction; (f) two building patterns are recognizable: arches constructed with well-cut limestone and four walls with a ceiling. The two patterns used fired bricks for building the roof, as is clear from the discovery of many of these during excavation; (g) the residential complex lies close to the main west gate of the settlement (around E6 on fig. 1), within a distance of 10 m, which means that the doors of the rooms open in the opposite direction to the street.

The pottery from the excavations (to be published in the full archaeological report) belongs mostly to two periods: Islamic, particularly the Abbasid period (ca. 8th-11th centuries CE), including glazeware, and Byzantine (4th-7th centuries), most notably a complete jug and cup (fig. 7) found in L13 of room G7 (along with a sixth-century coin). In addition, there were several lamps and coins:

- Lamps. All are of the well known type called Slipper lamps, either small or large size. The former have a radial decoration, no handle, and a cross motif be-

tween the hole and filament. According to Uzzielli,⁹ lamps that bear a cross motif date to the third-fourth centuries; other historians favour the mid-fourth century CE, whereas Nitowski maintains that a cross motif as a decorative element beside the filament hole did not appear on lamps before the sixth century CE (fig. 8a). As for the large size, we found three examples, all of which are characterized by a long body and a circular base. Two circles encompass the oil hole, the inner circle is high and wide while the outer circle is low and thin and goes straight and protrudes to meet another circle around the filament (fig. 8b). According to Nitowski,¹⁰ Rosenthal and Sivan,¹¹ this lamp-type belongs to the fifth-eighth century centuries, though Magness¹² believes that it dates back to the sixth century. One of our lamps has, in addition to radial decoration, Greek lettering (fig. 8c), which means that it and the building where it was located date to the fourth-seventh centuries CE.

- Coins. As for the coins found in the residential complex, they are all Byzantine copper folles of the fifth-sixth centuries CE. The most legible are the following, which were all found in square G7:¹³

Obverse	Reverse	Date	Fig.
Bust facing to the right; left margin: DNIUSTIN..	M. Above, cross. To l. and r., stars. Inex. CON(stantinople). Beneath ?	527-538 Justinian	
Bust facing to the right. Margins illegible.	M. Above, cross. To l. and r., stars. Inex. CON. Beneath Γ.	498-518 Anastas.	
Bust and margins effaced.	M. Above, cross. To l., ANNO and r., Ull. Inex., THEUP' (= Antioch).	571/2 Justin II	9
Bust facing to the right. Margins illegible.	M. Above, cross. To l. and r., stars. Inex., THEUP'. Beneath. A.	533-537 Justinian	

⁹ Uzzielli 1997, Fig. 5, Pl. III, 3.

¹⁰ Nitowski 1974, 34.

¹¹ Rosenthal and Sivan 1978, 116.

¹² Magness 1989, 829.

¹³ Compare Bellinger 1966, Justinian Æ28b.3 (Pl. XIV), Anastaius Æ23d.2 (Pl. III), Justinian Æ152c (Pl. LVI), Justin II Æ210a.1 (Pl. XXXV).



5. View of arches in square G8 of residential complex.



6. View of niches and entrance in square G7 of residential complex.



7. Juglet and cup found in residential complex.



8. Oil lamps found in residential complex.



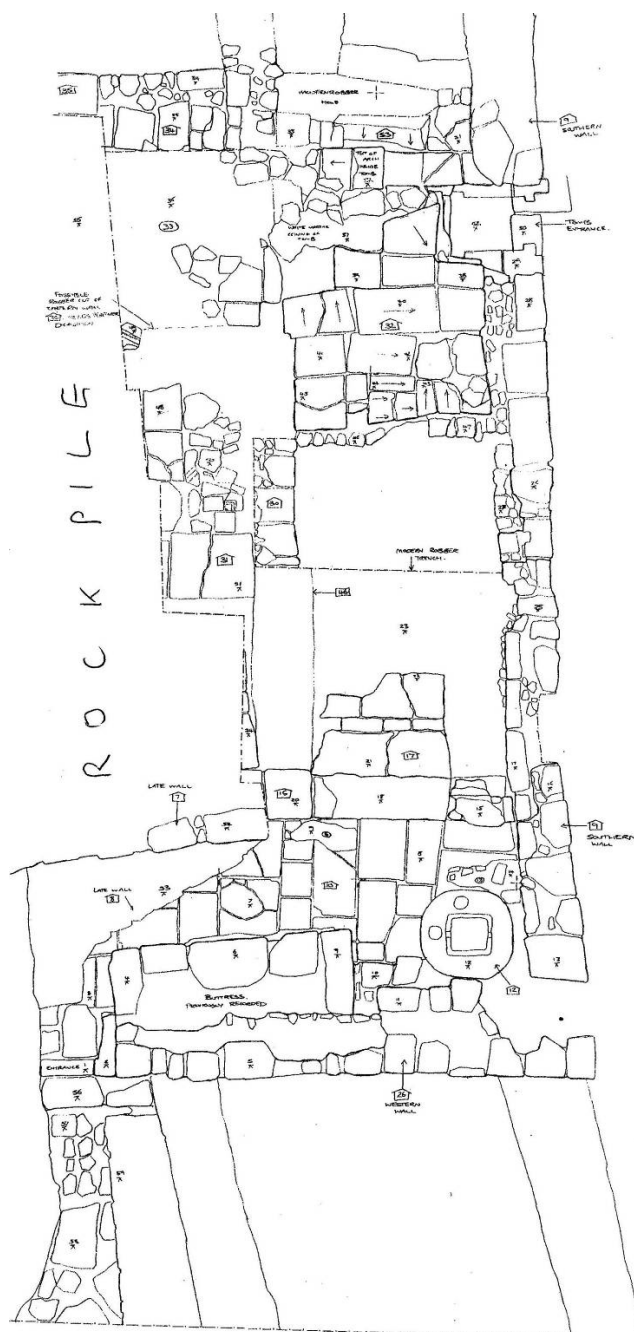
9. Coins found in residential complex.

4. The Church

A considerable number of squares had been opened up on the eastern side of the site in the years 1996-2001 (see fig. 2), but the nature of the principal building in this area was not clear to the excavators.

They considered the option of a church, but were unsure because “nothing was found to add to Bagatti’s evidence for a church at the site” and because “the east end of the building, where an apse would have been, is completely destroyed below floor level by the modern field clearance and ploughing”.¹⁴ For this reason, and because earlier squares had become dilapidated and further robbing taken place, it was deemed best, when excavation was resumed in 2003, simply to clean up the whole building and also to remove the top-soil (only about 5-7 cm deep) from the unexcavated eastern part in the hope that the building’s function would become clear.

Such an approach seemed justified in that it was obvious we were dealing with a single monumental building and so it could be treated as a single archaeological unit. Moreover, since heavy agricultural use had severely disrupted this terrace, we did not have to worry about disturbing any intact deposits. This approach quickly paid



10. Plan of atrium of church, 2003.

¹⁴ Abu Khalaf *et alii* 1998, 8, 15. This report gives a full description of the excavation of squares B1-7 (see fig. 2).

off in that after four days an east-facing apse was uncovered, which, together with the mosaic floors, under-floor tomb and side aisles, made it evident that the building was a church.

The church is in essence a three-aisled basilica, 27.7 m in length and 11.4 m in breadth, with a chapel on its northern side (13.4 x 7.8 m). We will first give a description of its constituent parts and then discuss its phasing (numbers in this section refer to context numbers in figs. 10-11).

4.1. The Atrium

One enters the church by a substantial door, 0.7 m wide, in the western wall into a forecourt neatly paved with large flagstones (no. 10; fig. 12). To the south, in the southwest corner of the church, is a cistern approximately 4 m deep (no. 12; fig. 12). Between this cistern and the door-way a buttress supports the rear (western) wall (no. 26). At a distance of 1.7 m from the near wall there is a late wall to the north (no. 7, above which is an even later wall, no. 8), sitting on top of the flagstones, and to the south there is a cut, where a few flagstones have been robbed out. Between these two features is a large worked limestone block (no. 16), which marks the beginning of an east-west wall (no. 30), which is in alignment with the southern aisle wall (no. 47) of the basilical hall. Passing across the robber cut one comes to another area of flagstone pavement (no. 17),



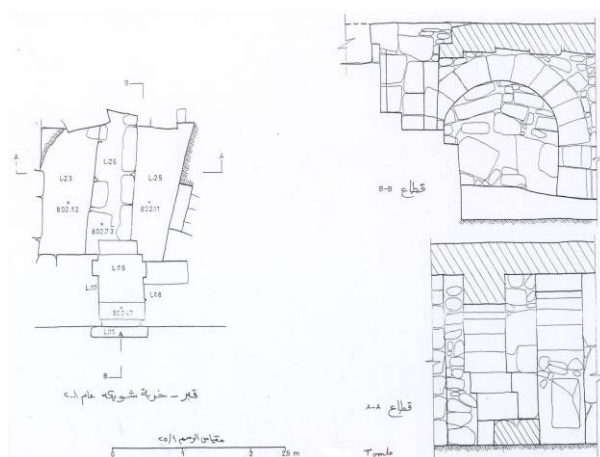
11. Plan of basilical hall and northern chapel of church.



12. View eastwards of west end of church, including entrance and cistern.



13-15. Possible fragments of chancel screen embedded amid flagstones of atrium.



16. Plan of the tomb below atrium of the church drawn up in 2001.

slightly different to the previous one and with a thick mortar capping. The flagstone surface is then disrupted by a modern robber trench, but continues to the north (no. 31), where it is mixed with some re-used stone, including possible pieces of chancel screen (figs. 13-15), and to the east (no. 32), where it provides the covering of an arcosolia-type tomb (Fig. 16).¹⁵ The latter is entered via a door built into the southern outer wall of the church (no. 9) and below the level of the church floor; a piece

¹⁵ The tomb was cleaned out when we saw it, but Dr. Salah al-Houdalieh was told that some small phials and oil lamps were found in it not so long before excavations began in 1996.

of the lintel survives and bears a Greek inscription attributing the tomb to a certain Paul (see section on inscription below). The relationship between the different flagstone surfaces is unknown due to the robber cuts that exist between them. One must also bear in mind that at present the whole northern part of the forecourt is hidden under a huge rock pile some 2.5 m high.

4.2. The Basilical Hall (nave, side-aisles and apse area)

At a distance of 10 m from the rear (west) wall of the church there is a north-south wall (no. 34), which marks the division between the forecourt and the basilical hall (fig. 17). In its center, and in line with the door to the church, is a threshold stone (no. 35), 1.5 x 0.4 x 0.25 m, which marks the entrance to the nave. There would also appear to be another threshold stone (no. 53), 1.05 x 0.3 x 0.25 m, at the entrance to the southern aisle of the basilical hall. The latter is 15.1 m in length and 10.6 m in breadth, and consists of two side aisles and a nave; the surviving pieces of column drums (fig. 17) point to the likely existence of colonnades running east-west either side of the nave and borne by two stylobates (nos. 19 and 47). The east-



17. View eastwards of church's basilical hall with square O12 in foreground.

ern end of the hall culminates in a semi-circular apse, 4.5 m in diameter (fig. 17).

The central part of the hall comprises a mortared cobble surface (no. 15 and fig. 18), which may have constituted a floor in its own right or have formed the base for flagstones. In 2001 this floor continued further westwards, but was then removed in the course of their excavation of square O12 (see section on phasing below). This floor is missing in the eastern part of the basilical hall, removed by modern ploughing.

Above this floor is a compact reddish brown silty clay layer (nos. 51-52), about 0.1 m thick, containing angular limestone fragments (fig. 18). This forms the leveling deposit for the cobbled make-up layer found in the rest of the hall, which in turn forms the bedding for a mosaic floor (see below) that was still largely in place when

al-Quds University began their excavations (square B3 and loci 7-8 in their numbering), but which has since been almost wholly robbed out bar a few scattered patches in the side aisles. A modern robber trench in the south central part of the hall clearly shows that the mortared cobble floor rests upon a rubble make-up layer (nos. 48-49), composed of a yellowy brown silty clay deposit with frequent rough limestone



18. Leveling deposit between phase II and phase III floors of church area.



19. East face of modern robber trench in south central part of church, showing rubble make-up above bedrock (foreground) and below phase II floor of church (note flagstones top right = south aisle of church).

blocks, which itself lies directly on the bedrock (fig. 19). This was necessary because the bedrock varies between about 0.6 m and 1.8 m below the floor level of the church, descending towards the east. This is the reason for the north-south cross walls either side of the bases of the apse, lending support at a point where the bedrock dips sharply and preventing any movement in the large mass of rubble required here to provide a level base for the floor of the church.

Just south of the modern robber trench in the south central part of the basilical hall, in the southern outer wall of the church, there appears to be a blocked-up doorway. A cut alongside the wall at this point, made in the course of the al-Quds University excavations of 2001 to examine the southern outer wall, apparently revealed steps, now no longer in place. On the outside of the wall the footings are very clear, with mortar bonding to the wall, which suggests there was a floor surface here. Presumably there was a corridor, arrived at by a door in the southern outer wall and down a stairway, and leading to the tomb of Paul (fig. 20), and perhaps also, in the other direction, to the nearby wine-making installation (see below).



20. View eastwards of corridor outside southern outer wall of church from blocked-up doorway (top left) to tomb entrance (bottom left), showing footings against wall.

4.3. The Northern Chapel

On the north side of the basilical hall is a chapel, 13.4 m in length and 7.8 m in breadth. It has two distinct floors, as with the basilical hall, but differs from the latter in that the lower one is also a mosaic floor, as is clear from the cobble make-up layer (no. 39) that still exists below the make-up layer (no. 37) of the surviving mosaic (no. 43). Between the two make-up layers there exists the same compact reddish brown silty clay deposit (no. 38) as is found in the basilical hall (nos. 51-52), presumably having the same function, namely to act as a leveling deposit (fig. 21). The upper mosaic is still intact in squares B2 and B7 (see below); elsewhere in the chapel modern ploughing – its marks clearly visible on the make-up layer – has destroyed the mosaic and only small patches and loose tesserae remain, mostly blue, red and white in colour. On the eastern edge of square B2 are evenly spaced pillar bases, and in the center of the part of the chapel east of this is a square limestone-block installation (1.6 x 1.6 m) with a projecting ceramic pipe at the northeast corner (fig. 21). This is most probably either a font or a reliquary, and the pipe the conduit either for water or for holy oil (leading down to a saint's relics housed



21. View westwards of northern chapel floor with possible font/reliquary in centre.

there). In the northwest corner of the chapel (in the west wall of square B7) there appears to be a blocked-up doorway, which would then have led through to the rooms behind it that were excavated in previous seasons (see fig. 2). If this is so, then it is likely that the church was part of a monastic complex, and this idea receives additional support from the proximity of a substantial wine-making installation (see below).

4.4. The phasing of the church

In brief, we can say that there are three phases to construction on this site:

Phase 1: either a smaller church or a different building together;

Phase 2: construction of the church according to the layout that we see now;

Phase 3: refurbishment of the church, especially the laying of a new mosaic floor.

The argument for phase 1 is rather complex, and those who wish to skip this may move straight to phase 2.

Crucial for understanding the phasing of the church is square O12 (notation assigned by reference to fig. 2; see figs. 17, 19 and 22), which was excavated by al-Quds University in 2001. In the following discussion I use the numbers from the al-Quds University plan (fig. 11).

It would seem that mosaic L20, wall L16 and mosaic L19 are contemporary, for both mosaics have carefully arranged borders with L16 (fig. 22). The limits of the two mosaics are unclear. Both the eastern limits have been lost to robbing activity since 2001. Even from the 2001 plan of O12 it is unclear where the limits are, as the mosaics end in a rough and abrupt manner. Possibly they halted at wall L23, a north-south wall, since no evidence of any flooring can be seen in the eastern balk of square O12. The western limit of L19 may well be where it is



22. Detail from square O12 (looking eastwards) showing mosaics L19-20, walls L16 (centre) and L17-18 (top left), and bedrock and wall L15 (top right).

now, for a number of triangular tesserae and their impressions in the underlying mortar make-up layer can be seen, suggestive of a border. Moreover, just west of where L19 stops there is a very mixed deposit with mosaic fragments in it, which may be where a wall has been robbed out and then backfilled. At some point the east-west wall L17-18 has been cut through mosaic L19, for here there is no neat border, just ragged edges (fig. 22). The south and west faces of L17-18 have then been plastered over. L17-18 would appear to abut wall L23, thereby creating a very narrow corridor with L16 (fig. 22) for reasons unknown (drainage?).

Incompleteness makes mosaic L20 as difficult to understand as L19. Even before robbing activity had taken its toll, the connection with wall L23 to the east and wall L15 (no. 47 in fig. 11) to the south are, to judge from the 2001 plan, unclear. On the west side it would appear that wall L6 is sitting on L20, so the latter evidently continued further westwards. One should note that wall L6 is built into wall L15, which suggests that L23 is cut by L15. It is not certain whether L23 continued south of L15, since this portion was excavated down to the bedrock. However, it may have joined the east-west wall L28; some stones do jut out on the north side of L28 in alignment with L23 and both have been to some degree robbed out in antiquity and overlaid with a thick rubble deposit, which would seem to be the same as the make-up layer for the floor of the church (nos. 48-49). Also worth noting is the fact that wall L16 is constructed from a different stone to the rest of the church, much grayer and grittier than the local limestone, perhaps an import.

One might initially think that these walls and mosaics relate to the earliest phase of the church as we see it now. However, this does not fit the evidence. Mosaic L20 continues under L6, the western wall of the basilical hall; wall L17-18 is directly in front of the entrance to the basilical hall from the forecourt; and the deposits below L19 and L20 are different to those found elsewhere in the church. Moreover, O12 has cut through the cobble/flagstone and mortar floor of the church (no. 15) and the features of O12 discussed here underlie this floor. Yet, the modern robber trench in the south central part of the church reveals no such features, but rather shows that, here at least, floor 15 sits directly on a rubble make-up layer, which itself sits directly on bedrock (fig. 19). It seems more likely, then, that the walls and floors of O12 belong to a building in existence before the church and had simply been incorporated into the leveling make-up for the phase I church floor (no. 15). Whereas elsewhere a rubble make-up was used to level out the variations in the depth of the bedrock and to create a level surface for the phase I church floor, in O12 the floor was placed directly on to the surfaces of the earlier building, removing no more than parts of walls L17-18 and L23. What this earlier building was is unclear; a flagstone with two cross motifs (fig. 23) in floor no. 15 may originally have come

from it, so it may have been a smaller church, but the flagstone could as well have been taken from some Christian structure outside this immediate area.

Above the mortared cobble (phase 2) of this building there appears in many places a reddish brown silty clay deposit containing limestone fragments and approximately 0.1 m thick (fig. 18). This is probably a leveling deposit, meant to serve as a base for the mosaic floor that survives in patches throughout the church. What was exposed in the previous excavations was wholly geometric in character (see below), though there may have been different designs in the eastern part of the church, which has unfortunately been destroyed by modern ploughing. One should note that the north chapel had a slightly different history in that its earliest floor was also a mosaic floor, possibly indicating that this space was considered to be of some importance (because it housed relics?).

Precise dating of the church is as yet rather difficult to determine. As noted above, the deposits below L19 and L20 are different to those found elsewhere in the church and in this layer were found some sherds of rilled-rim basins, which Jodi Magness has dated to the 3rd-5th centuries.¹⁶ This belongs to phase 1 (i.e. when the



23. Flagstone with cross motifs from phase II floor of church area.

¹⁶ Magness 1993, 157.

church was a different shape or when there was a different building on this site), and hence the church in the form that we see it now must post-date this. The tomb is integral with the church as it now stands and so belongs to phase 2 of the site. This must, therefore, be contemporary with the inscription on the lintel of the tomb, which most likely belongs to the fifth century (see below). A limestone capital (fig. 24) was found in 1996, built into a late wall of square B4, which seems to be a standard Corinthian capital of the late 4th/early 5th century.¹⁷ Possibly this could be taken as the date for the beginning of phase 2 of the site (i.e. of the church in the shape it is now), though it cannot be excluded that the capital belongs to phase 1.

The next phase of the church (phase III of the building in this area), which involved



24. Capital reused in late wall in square B4 (1996).

the laying of a new mosaic floor throughout the basilical hall and the north chapel, might plausibly, though of course not necessarily, be connected with a period of great prosperity for the settlement of Khirbat Shuwayka. The substantial wine-making installation a few metres to the southeast of the church (see below) and the residential building some twenty metres to the west of the church (see above), both yielded a number of sixth-

century Byzantine coins. And one might argue that this offers a likely time for the refurbishment of the church, especially given that it was, as is well known, an economic boom period throughout the Levant. How long this phase of the church continued is as yet undetermined.

The second phase of the church in its present layout was its last, as is clear from square B2, where a compacted green clay layer, fallen from the roof of the church, lies directly on the upper mosaic floor of the chapel, and above this stands a secondary north-south wall. There was evidently, therefore, a period of abandonment before secondary reuse of the church. How much of the church was reused outside of square B2, when, for how long and in what way is at the moment impossible to say: the eastern part was heavily ploughed out, so its information is lost, and though much of the southwestern part has been excavated, its records have yet to be studied. The period of reuse most probably occurred in the Abbasid period (8th-11th centuries),

¹⁷ Identification courtesy of J.P. Sodini; compare Wilkinson 1987, 122.

since substantial quantities of Abbasid pottery were found in the residential building in area A, which exhibited a similar history of early Byzantine construction and occupation followed by abandonment and reuse in the Islamic period. The unexcavated northwestern part of the church, unfortunately buried under a rock pile, may well give us the answers to these questions as well as help determine the relationship between the church and the structures that lie immediately west of it.

4.5. The Mosaics

Areas B2 and B7 (see fig. 25)

Surviving Dimensions: *ca.* 7 x 4.5m

State of Preservation: Extant portion under backfill.

Tesserae size: 0.015- 0.02m²

Colour: Black and white with some red.

Description:¹⁸ Border of rows of *spaced and serrated polychrome squares on a white background* (similar to R5a) alternated with a row of R83a *Rows of spaced recumbent rosebuds*. Within this border is a square field (*ca.* 3.6 x 3m) enclosed by a simple white band, two tesserae thick, defined by a single line of black tesserae either side. The main field consists of a grid of bichrome serrated triple filets, the compartments here enclosing a parallel serrated square (similar to R124c and e).



25. Detail of flower motifs in mosaic in B2 (1997).

To the east of the main field, within the outer border is a small damaged panel which appears to be a door-mat panel (fig. 25). This panel (1.5 x 0.45 m surviving) consists of a border of R9c *Bichrome serrated saw-tooth pattern, creating the effect of a serrated zigzag*. Within this border is a section of the surviving field of R238b *Bichrome pattern of intersecting circles forming sal-tires of spindles and concave squares (here with an inscribed poised square, the colours counterchanged)*.¹⁹

¹⁸ The standard description as defined in Balmelle *et alii* 1985. This takes the form (R + number) with the standard description in italics (for example: R 64b *Voluted stylized scroll*).

¹⁹ There is another Palestinian example of this in Hirschfeld 1999, 108 fig. 2, where it is dated to the last quarter of the fifth century (*ibid.*, 116).

Parallels: The most unusual feature of this design is the use of R83a which can be paralleled with another Palestinian example at Eshtemoa, 9 miles south of Hebron.²⁰ R9c is also found at this site. Given the infrequency of this R83a design and the combination of the R9c design, it is possible that this may be an indication of a shared workshop or craftsperson production.

Area B3 (see fig. 26)

Surviving Dimensions: *ca.* 3 x 4 m (but only survives in patches).

State of Preservation: Very poor

Tesserae size: 0.015- 0.02m²

Colour: Black, white and red

Description: Of the surviving fragments it is possible to define an outer border of R83a *Rows of spaced recumbent rosebuds*. Within this border is a simple border consisting of a white band, three tesserae thick, within this, a band of black and a band of white each of two tesserae thickness and final a single black band of tesserae. Within this is a main field of a grid of bichrome serrated triple filets, the compartments here enclosing a parallel serrated square (similar to R124c and e).

There is a range of bedding types within the area of the Basilica complex. That which is certainly connected with the mosaics consists of a mortared cobbled layer of a depth of *c.* 0.10 m – 0.15 m.



26. Detail of a surviving (in 1996) portion of the mosaic floor in B3.

²⁰ Yeivin 1972.

4.6. The tomb entrance inscription (fig. 27)

The short text is written in clear large Greek letters, most likely of the 5th century, and not later than the early 6th (confirmed to me by Dr. Leah di Segni). It reads simply: + Mnh[mh] / diaf[er(ousa)]/ Paul[ou] or "Private tomb of Paul..". One would have expected an epithet of Paul or a reference to his family, but there seems to be no room, since the stone is neatly cut just below the third line, presumably to fit onto the slab closing the vault.



27. Greek inscription on lintel of tomb entrance.

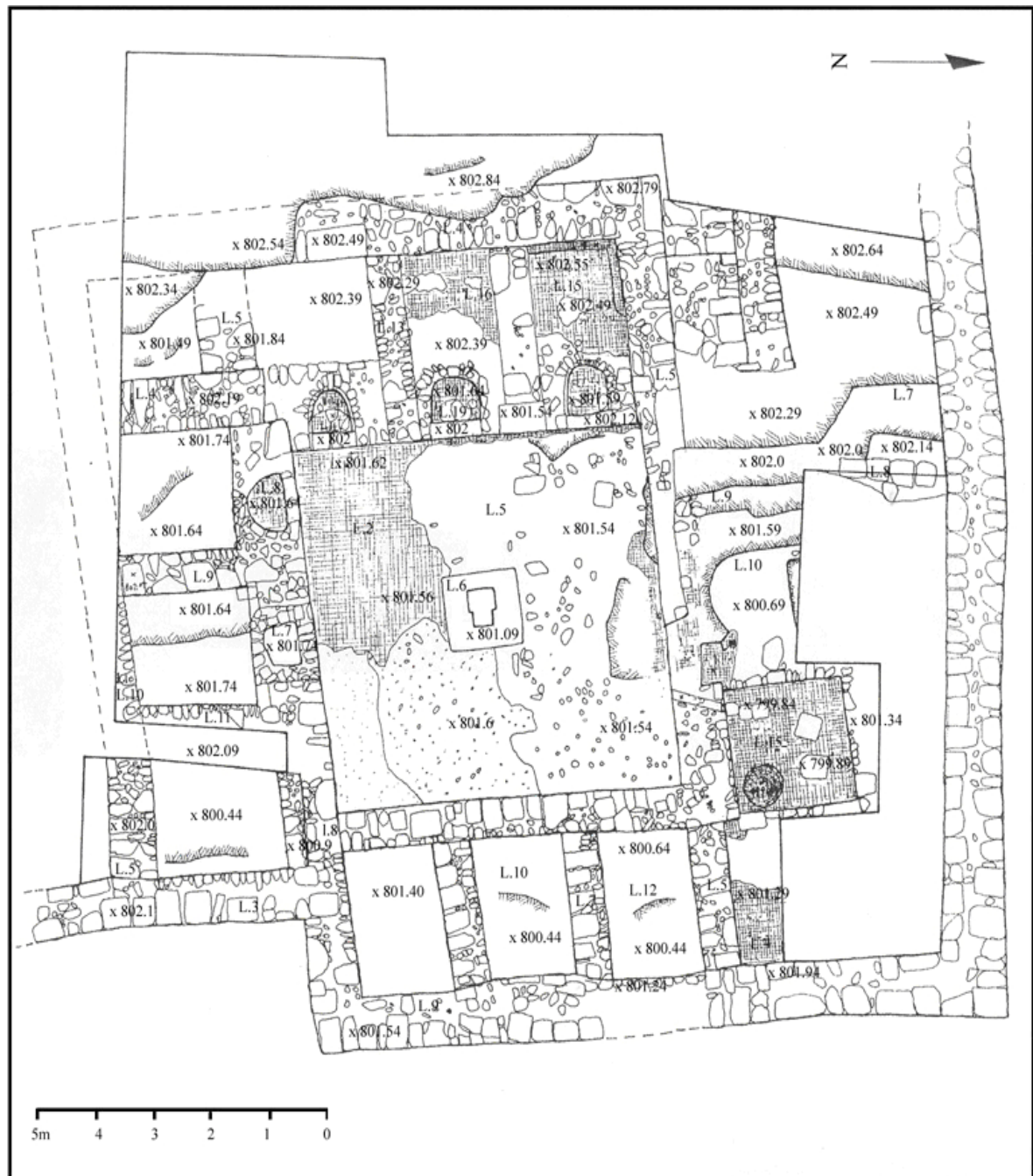
5. The Winepress

The winepress is situated at the eastern foot of the hill, directly inside the fortification wall and next to the church (within squares QRST 13-16 on fig. 2). The press is joined to the gate, found in the western wall, via a path running along the southern wall of the church. The path, 1.5 m wide and made of compacted earth, can be accessed from the church by two entrances in its southern wall. The area of the winepress is about 160 m² (figs 28 and 29). It consists of three chambers connected by channels with three juice-collecting vats on the western side, a large treading vat, a main juice-collecting vat on the northern side, four chambers on the southern side and four more chambers on the eastern side. The walls of these facilities were built of different sized stones, 95 cm wide, with horizontal irregular



28. View westwards of wine-making installation showing treading floors (opposite), storage rooms (left) and press area (center).

bonds, and reaching a maximum height of about 1.6 m. The results of the archaeological excavations show that the press had passed through two successive phases.



29. Plan of the winepress excavated in 2003.

5.1. First phase: construction and use of the winepress

(a) The western chambers: The inside dimensions of the northern chamber are 3 x 1.6 m. It is separated from the middle one, similar in dimension, by a stone wall 60 cm wide. The southern chamber is about 2 x 3 m. Its floor consists of white mosaic and has a regular downward west-east slope of about 5%. Each of the three chambers in its eastern part is linked by a channel of 10 cm in diameter to a half-circular collecting vat that is 70 cm long by 55 cm high and 70 cm deep. The inside walls of these vats are coated by lime mixed with a high percentage of small stones, ash and grog, and the floors are tessellated white.

(b) The treading vat: The internal dimensions of this vat are about 6 x 5.85 m. The walls were built of different size stones at a height of 80 cm. The internal sides were bleached with lime mixed with small stones and grog 3 cm thick. Inside the southern wall, which is 1.1m wide, two small half-circular vats, unconnected to the treading vat, were found. Their sides were bleached and the floor of the western one was tessellated in a similar way to those in the western chambers. Possibly, the height of these two vats is similar to the height of the wall (80 cm). The floor of the vat that slopes from southeast to northeast at 2% and of a lower level than the western chambers at 95 cm consisted of a plaster layer. It was laid on top of compressed mud accumulations. A stone base containing a regularly cut hollow cavity was discovered; it was evidently used to fix a wooden spiral shaft.

(c) The main collecting vat: The treading vat and the collecting vat are separated by a stone wall 90 cm wide within which there is a pottery pipe 12cm in diameter. The end of this channel protrudes about 8 cm inside the collecting vat. The collecting vat (2 x 2.1 m and 1.45 cm deep) was built of medium-sized stones with regular horizontal bonds 70 cm wide. The internal sides were bleached with a plaster layer about 5 cm thick. At its northwest corner two protruding separate stones were found. These two stones were thought to be used to facilitate the up and down movement from and to the vat. Possibly, its floor, which was restructured in the second phase, was tessellated with mosaic, like the floors of the western chambers.

(d) The southern chambers: Large parts of four chambers next to each other were found in this industrial installation. While the internal space of the western chamber is 1.75 x 1.75 m, the internal space of the other three chambers is between 1.8 x 2 and 2 x 2.1 m. Their floors consist of a brown earth layer compressed to reach 10cm to 1m. The walls whose heights were between 40 cm and 1.5 m were built of different sized stones directly on the

bedrock. No lime remains were found on the internal sides. No holes indicating any entrances were noted. This means that the sides were as high as the southern wall of the treading vat. Getting in and out of the eastern chamber is effected through wide stone stairs. Possibly these chambers were used for the temporary storage of jars filled with juice, so that the farmers could transport their grape juice to their permanent storage places.

(e) The eastern chambers: Directly inside the fortification wall four chambers adjacent to the treading vat and the collecting vat were discovered. Full excavation down to the bedrock was carried out in two of them. In the two others excavation was partially done at relative depths. The walls of these chambers were built of stones of mostly medium and large size. Mortar and small stones were used to fill in the gaps between the bonds horizontally and vertically. The three southern chambers are of similar dimensions, about 1.55 x 2.3 m. As for the fourth chamber which is next to the collecting vat, part of it (1.75 x 0.75 m) was unearthed. The height of the walls of these chambers is about 1.15 m. No bleach remains on their internal sides were noticed nor either any holes indicating entrances. This means that the eastern chambers had a similar function to the southern ones. The floors of the two middle chambers had the same make-up as the floors of the southern chambers.

5.1.1. The Pressing Technique

Grape bunches are picked and transported in baskets from the field to the wine-press. The farmer collects his grapes in one of the western chambers after cleaning it from the remains of the grapes of a previous farmer. It is possible for the farmer to use the three western chambers to collect his grapes provided that he takes his grapes to the treading vat as soon as the previous farmer finishes his work. As a result of the heavy weight of the accumulating grapes, quantities of juice run onto the floor and into the collecting vat at the front of each chamber. It is possible that if the vat were full, the channel connecting it to the collecting chamber would be closed to prevent the juice from flowing into the treading vat. Next, the juice is left for a period of time to get rid of impurities. Then jars are filled with it to make wine of a particular quality.

The process is completed by pressing the grapes in the treading vat after putting them in layers separated by circular baskets or cloth around a spiral wooden shaft, the lower part of which is fastened tightly in the stone pit. Pressing is done by a wooden cylinder fixed to the spiral and is turned by horizontal levers. This causes the juice to run onto the floor of the sloping treading vat towards the main collect-

ing vat, the mosaic floor of which gradually slopes towards the southeastern corner where there is a half-circular hollow cavity 70 cm in diameter and 30 cm deep. The operation of the spiral shaft can be clearly observed in the mosaic floors of the churches of Saint George, Lot, and Procopius in Khirbat al-Makhit, which dates back to the sixth century AD.²¹ The juice is left in the collecting vat for about six hours so that the yeast enzymes that line the dregs of the grapes can function in the preliminary fermentation.²² This also enables the juice to rid itself of impurities before it is filtered through a piece of cloth and filled in jars that are tightly closed; then the jars are transported. If the farmer has a large estate and he wishes to press all his grapes at one go, and is busy picking and pressing the grapes, he would have to assemble his full jars in one of the southern or eastern chambers and transport them after paying part of his juice to the owner of the press.

It is possible that the key remains or a large part of them were collected in the two vats which were found in the southern wall of the treading vat. They are left for one day and after pouring water on them they are pressed using the same procedures to produce a lesser quality juice. It is expected that these remains were spread for a second time to be used as animal feed. In terms of the canalicule, this press is similar to others found in Palestine and Jordan that date back to the Byzantine period.²³

5.2. Second phase

At the beginning of this phase, modifications were made to some of the elements of this industrial installation while still retaining the general structure of the first phase in use. These modifications were re-flooring of the three western chambers, the treading vat, the main collecting vat and the northeast chambers with white pieces of mosaic and coating the internal sides with a thick plaster layer. A change in pressing technique accompanied these modifications. Traditional pressing (treading the grapes by foot) was taken up again after removing the wooden spiral shaft and closing the opening where the shaft was fixed with a stone slab.²⁴

²¹ Piccirillo 1993, 177-184.

²² Ahlstrom 1978, 19-49.

²³ E.g. at Amwas, Kh. Atara, Mevo Modiin, Givat Qumi, Sheikh Bureik and Jelemiye (Hirschfeld 1983, 211-218, esp. figs. 5 and 7); Kh. Duran (Roll, Ayalon 1981, 111-115, figs. 2 and 7); Sile (Ahlstrom 1978, 23-30, figs. 5-7, 12, 14, 23); Kh. Kafer Qari' (Sion 1991, 117, fig. 130); Ezbube (Ahlstrom 1978, 36, fig. 27); Kh. Hermeshit (Yron-Lubin 1994, 84-85, fig. 78), Pisgat Zeev (Seligman 1993, 54, fig. 61), Kh. El-Mekhayyat (Saller, Bagatti 1949, 13-15), Abu Sarbout near Madaba and Umm As-Simmaq south of Amman (al-Hadidi 1981, 15-36); al-Yasila, Deir S'eed, Beit Ras, Jarash Berkit Ad-Deir and al-Hisin (Melhem 1995, 29-35).

²⁴ For this technique compare the presses of Tel Zif (Brauch 1997, 43, fig. 4.), Amwas (Hirschfeld 1983, 43, fig. 4), Taannek, Sile and Givat Massua (Ovadia 1993, 75-76, fig. 89).

5.3. Dating

Despite the discovery of a coin of the Roman emperor Hadrian,²⁵ it seems clear that the winepress dates to the Byzantine period (i.e. 4-7th centuries), and this for several reasons:

- The layers above the winepress floors contain Byzantine material culture.
- The winepress floors at Khirbat Shuwayka, particularly their being paved with white mosaic tesserae, resemble many other winepress floors in Palestine and Jordan that have been dated to the Byzantine period.
- The cutting technique of the tesserae which formed the winepress floors flourished during the early Byzantine period.
- The pressing technique of using the wooden screw first appeared during the early Byzantine period.

The result of our excavation showed that the winepress was abandoned by or during the early Islamic period. At a later date it was reused, but no longer as a winepress; possibly as a graveyard, since human bones were found in one collecting vat during the excavation. The pottery discovered in the winepress area is not representative of the history of the site as a whole, because we did not find any Roman pottery, and very few Umayyad and Abbasid pieces.

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²⁵ Struck at Tiberias, type BMC Palestine p. 9, no. 32-33 (identification courtesy of Michel Amandry); needless to say, as a unique piece it cannot serve as dating evidence and all the other coins were sixth-century Byzantine folles.

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All images are of authors. All the plans were drawn by I. Iqtat.