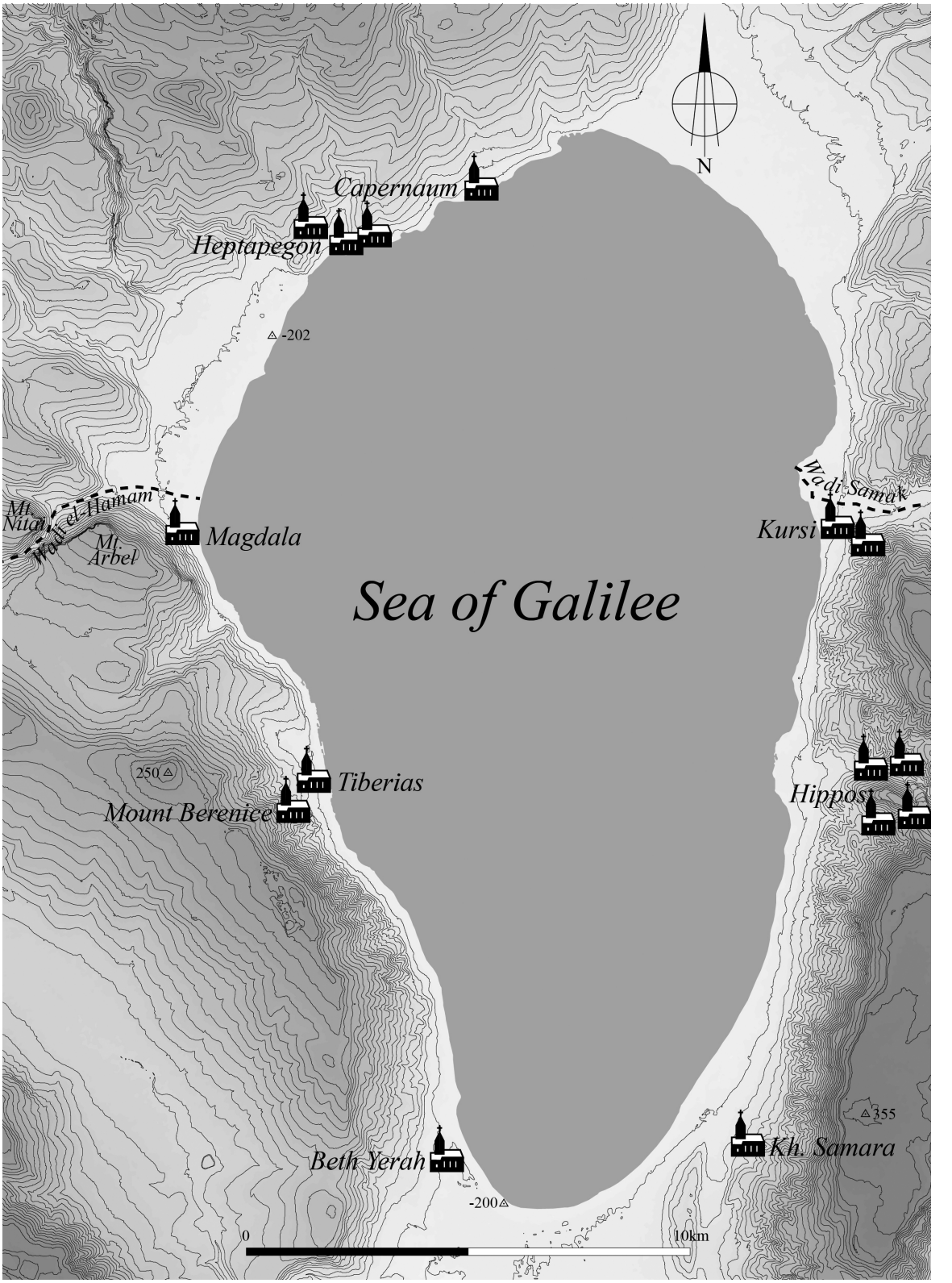


Fig. 1. Byzantine churches and monasteries around the Sea of Galilee (*del.* R. Sabar).

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A monastery in Magdala (Taricheae)?

Stefano De Luca and Uzi Leibner

Ancient Magdala is located at the foot of the E slopes of Mt. Arbel, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (map ref. 7477/2478) (fig. 1). The Aramaic name Magdala or Migdal Nunayya ("The tower of the fish"), mentioned in Rabbinic sources of the Roman period, is preserved in the name of the Arab village of "el-Mejdel" that stood on the site until 1948. The identification is also confirmed by ancient sources that indicate Magdala was located on the main road a few kilometers from Tiberias. In 1877, Charles Wilson suggested identifying this site also with the toponym Ταριχέα (Taricheae, "factories/vats for salting fish"), which is mentioned only in Greek and Latin sources (Cassius Longinus in Cic., *Ad Fam.* 12.11; Plin., *NH* 5.71-72; Strab. 16.2.45, Josephus [see below], and Suet., *Tit*. 4.3), although they do not mention the name Magdala. It becomes evident from these sources that the town was located on the shore near Tiberias; Josephus's explicit note, placing it 30 stadia (*c*.5.4 km) from Tiberias, exactly fits the site of el-Mejdel. Although some scholars raised alternative identifications, it has become widely accepted that the names Magdala and Taricheae are synonymous and that they should be identified with the Arab village of el-Mejdel.[1]

Several sources point to the town's importance and its large Jewish population in the Early Roman period. It is associated with a revolt against Rome that broke out shortly after the Roman conquest, resulting in its capture and the enslavement of 30,000 people (Jos., *AntJ* 14.120). In the 1st c. A.D., the site served as the capital of a toparchy (Jos., *BJ* 2.252; *AntJ* 20.158-59). It played a significant rôle in the events of the First Jewish revolt against Rome (e.g., Jos., *BJ* 2.573, 596, 599 and 632-41; *Vit*. 96, 127 and 132-64). The area around Magdala is apparently mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, but its name is corrupt. The epithet "Mary Magdalene" is thought to have derived from the toponym "Magdala" (on the Christian sources, see below). The site is referred to in Rabbinic literature reflecting the 3rd and 4th c. A.D. that mentions a synagogue and sages living in the town. The latest mentions in ancient Jewish sources appear in Byzantine liturgical poems (*piyyutim*) where it is one of the Galilean villages associated with the families of the 24 priestly courses that served in the Jerusalem Temple.[2] Subsequently, the site is mentioned only by Christian writers and pilgrims.

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1 W. F. Albright, "Contributions to the historical geography of Palestine: the location of Taricheae," *AASOR* 2-3 (1921-22) 29-46; Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni and J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani: Iudaea–Palaestina* (Jerusalem 1994) 173; S. Mason, *A history of the Jewish War A.D. 66-74* (New York 2016) 344-45 and 395-401. For Magdala in the Rabbinic sources, see G. Reeg, *Die Ortsnamen Israels nach der rabbinischen Literatur* (Beihefte TAVO; 1989) 391-97; F. Manns, "Magdala dans les sources littéraires," in E. Testa, I. Mancini and M. Piccirillo (edd.), *Studia hierosolymitana in onore di P. Bellarmino Bagatti*, vol. 1 (SBF Coll. Maior 22, 1976) 307-37. For discussion, see U. Leibner, *Settlement and history in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Galilee: an archaeological survey of the eastern Galilee* (Tübingen 2009) 217-25; S. De Luca and A. Lena, "Magdala/Taricheae," in D. A. Fiensy and J. R. Strange (edd.), *Galilee in the late Second Temple and Mishnaic periods*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis, MN 2015) 280-91; and now R. Bauckham, "Magdala in Rabbinic traditions," in id. (ed.), *Magdala of Galilee. A Jewish city in the Hellenistic and Roman period* (Waco, TX 2018) 307-44. For an alternative identification of Taricheae, see N. Kokkinos, "The location of Tarichaea: north or south of Tiberias?" *PEQ* 142 (2010) 7-23, with reservations by M. H. Jansen, "Magdala/Taricheae and the Jewish Revolt," in Bauckham ibid. 269-86.

2 Leibner (supra n.1) 231-32, and now R. Bauckham, "Magdala in the list of the twenty-four priestly settlements," in id. (supra n.1) 287-301.

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Large-scale excavations were conducted in the central and southern parts of the site by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (SBF) in the 1970s, directed by V. Corbo and S. Loffreda, and again between 2006 and 2012, directed by S. De Luca. From the 1980s on, several small-scale salvage excavations were conducted on the outskirts of the site by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). Since 2009, an ongoing, large-scale excavation is being conducted in the N part of the site by a joint expedition of the IAA and Universidad Anáhuac México Sur, directed by D. Avshalom-Gorni, A. Najjar and M. Zapata-Meza. A synthesis of the various excavations was recently published by De Luca and Lena.[3]

The earliest evidence of settlement (albeit very sparse) is dated to the Hellenistic period. During the Hasmonaean and especially the Early Roman periods, the site grew into a well-planned town covering an area of at least 100 dunams (10 ha). The excavations have revealed a meticulously-planned orthogonal layout that included partially paved alleys, a sophisticated system of channels for both water supply and drainage, and various public buildings such as a synagogue, shops, workshops, a spring house, a bathing complex, an anchorage, and a huge plaza surrounded by colonnades ("quadriporticus"). A massive tower near the anchorage apparently dates to the Hasmonaean period and may have given the town its Aramaic name. During the Late Roman period, the town saw a gradual decrease in size and population until it was almost completely abandoned by the mid-4th c. At some point during the Byzantine period, a large compound, identified by Corbo and Loffreda as a monastery, was built on the S part of the site. Large parts of this compound were unearthed in the 1970s and again in the early 2000s, but it remained almost unknown to the scholarly community since the only publication was a preliminary report describing the results of the first two excavation seasons.[4]

The aim of this article is to discuss the compound identified as a monastery. It begins with a description of the archaeological remains of the compound. The second part discusses the significance of the site in Christian tradition and surveys the literary sources from the canonical Gospels through Byzantine and Mediaeval pilgrimage itineraries down to the reports by modern visitors and surveyors. The article concludes with a discussion regarding the identification of the Byzantine compound.

The archaeological remains in the S part of Magdala

History of archaeological research

The Byzantine compound identified by Corbo and Loffreda as a monastery occupies the S part of ancient Magdala (until 1948, most of this area was covered by the Muslim village of el-Mejdel). One of the first to survey the site was V. Guérin, who noted only two massive walls near the shore, perhaps remains of a tower.[5] In 1866, Wilson noted that there is "a considerable extent of ground … covered with remains of foundations".[6] The surveyors of the Palestine Exploration Fund, however, only noted that the ruins do not appear to be "more ancient than Arab times".[7] In 1889, the Custodia Terrae Sanctae purchased the

3 De Luca and Lena (supra n.1).
4 V. Corbo, "Scavi archeologici a Magdala (1971-1973)," *Liber Annuus* 24 (1974) 5-37.
5 V. Guérin, *Description géographique, historique et archéologique de la Palestine*, 3.1-2. *Galilée* (Paris 1880) 204.
6 C. W. Wilson, "The sites of Taricheae and Bethsaida," *PEFQSt* 4 (1877) 12-13.
7 C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, *Survey of Western Palestine*, vol. 1: *Galilée* (London 1881) 413.

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land at the N end of the village.[8] The acquisition was effectively concluded only in 1912 when the German architect R. Lendle built a precinct wall around some ruins and began excavating the site.[9] In 1935, B. Bagatti and S. Saller surveyed the site and prepared a sketch map of the ruins.[10] They reported seeing a number of segments of ancient walls and mosaic floors scattered throughout the village and the Franciscan precinct. They also saw remains of a vaulted structure with an apse near the shore, which they suggested were remains of an ancient tower (perhaps the same tower described by Guérin).[11]

After 1948, the village which covered most of the Byzantine compound was bulldozed, apparently causing substantial damage to the ancient remains. In 1971 and 1973, V. Corbo and S. Loffreda conducted the first two excavation seasons, uncovering almost all the remains of the Byzantine compound located within the Franciscan precinct, as well as a long strip along the E border of the compound to the south of the precinct. Their plans to continue investigation of the Byzantine compound were not realized. All that was published is a short description mainly of the floor plan and mosaics, but fortunately the unpublished journals of Corbo and Loffreda are kept in the SBF Archives in Jerusalem.[12] The ancient remains were revealed just beneath the surface. Most walls were preserved at their foundation levels or up to a height of a few courses above floor level. Excavations apparently stopped whenever they reached the compound's floors, without continuing on to date the structure or expose earlier ones.

In 1992, salvage excavations conducted by H. Abu-'Uqsa (IAA) *c.*40 m south of the Franciscan precinct revealed remains of a large decorated building built over a bathhouse.[13] Other salvage excavations were conducted in the S and SW parts of Magdala, revealing mainly remains of domestic structures dating from the Hellenistic to the Ottoman periods.[14] During renovations of the saltwater conduit at the SW end of the site, a *c.*15 m-long segment of a massive wall (M30 on fig. 2; unpublished) was exposed by the IAA. The building technique and construction materials, in which the masonry stones are heavily coated with lime-based mortar, are similar to those of the E wall of the compound, and both walls run parallel to each other. The similar technique, materials and orientation all seem to indicate that this is the W wall of the compound. Then between 2006 and 2012 S. De Luca conducted large-scale excavations, uncovering a Roman residential quarter in the W part of the site and re-opening and documenting areas previously excavated by Corbo and Loffreda, including the compound in the Franciscan precinct.

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8 B. Talatinian, *Santuari di Terra Santa in possesso dei Francescani* (Jerusalem 2002) 102.

9 Unpublished; cf. Corbo (supra n.4) 7 and below.

10 B. Bagatti, *Antichi villaggi cristiani di Galilea* (SBF Coll. Maior 13, 1971) in the English transl. with additions, edited by L. Di Segni, *Ancient Christian villages of Galilee* (SBF Coll. Minor 37, 2001) 68-71, figs. 33-34.

11 Bagatti ibid. 70, fig. 34.

12 Corbo (supra n.4) 5-18; Loffreda (infra n.27); Corbo (infra n.28)

13 H. Abu-'Uqsa, "The findings from two excavations at Migdal," *'Atiqot* 42 (2001) 9*-25* [Hebrew], 321-22 [English summary].

14 Id., "Migdal," *ESI* 13 (1993) 28; id., "Migdal," *ESI* 16 (1997) 34; id. 2001 (supra n.13); id., "Migdal: final report," *ESI* 117 (2005), available at http://www. hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.asp?id=238&mag_id=110; D. Avshalom-Gorni, "Migdal: preliminary report," *ESI* 121 (2009), available at http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.asp?id=1236&mag_id=115; D. Avshalom-Gorni and E. J. Stern, "Migdal: final report," *ESI* 128 (2016), available at http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/ report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25051&mag_id=124.

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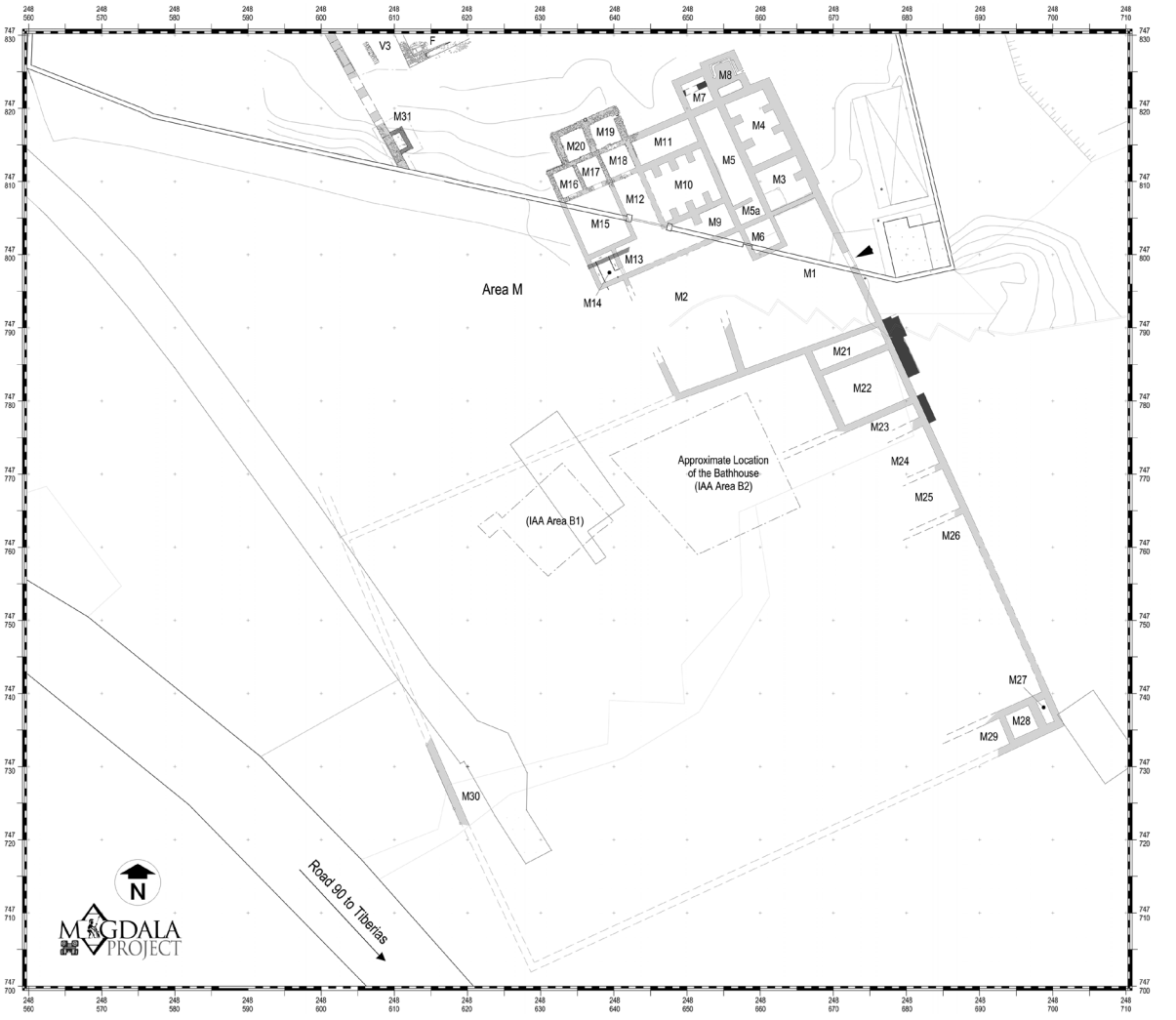


Fig. 2. Plan of the Byzantine compound at Magdala, according to the survey of visible remains and the plan published by Corbo (supra n.4) fig. 2, including approximate location of Areas B1 and B2 investigated by Abu-'Uqsa (supra n.13) 16*. *Quadriporticus* F lies to the north (only its SW end is shown here; it appears in fig. 13) (*del*. S. De Luca, © Magdala Project, updated from De Luca 2009 [infra n.38] pl. 4).

From the finds in the various excavations in the S part of Magdala, the following phases may be determined. The area, first settled in the Hellenistic period (stratum I), grew and developed in the Early and Middle Roman periods, and was abandoned in the Late Roman (strata II-IV). Remains from these periods comprise primarily domestic structures. Some time after the earthquake of 363, a Byzantine compound enclosed by a massive wall was built on the area occupied now by the Magdala beach and the S part of the Franciscan precinct (stratum V). The Byzantine structures were either rebuilt or renovated in the Early Islamic period (stratum VI), apparently due to damage caused by the earthquake of 749, but they seem to have retained their original purpose. A large anchorage east of the Byzantine compound is attributed to strata V-VI (see below). Remains of the Crusader/Mamlûk periods (stratum VII), including a large building and a sugar workshop, were uncovered in the SW part of the site; some stray finds from these periods were also found elsewhere. Finally, the area was occupied by the small village of el-Mejdel during the Ottoman and British Mandate periods (stratum VIII).

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Remains of the Byzantine compound

Corbo and Loffreda uncovered almost the entire N wing of the compound (*c.*1400 m^2; fig. 2), consisting of what seem to be two wide courtyards (M1-M2), and a dense cluster of rooms with mosaic pavements to their north (M3-20; see below). This wing is cut diagonally by the S wall of the Franciscan precinct. The excavators also uncovered almost all of the E wall of the compound (105 m in length, 0.85 m wide) and rooms, or parts of rooms, abutting it up to the SE corner of the compound. A parallel wall exposed by the IAA on the west (M30) apparently belongs to the compound and suggests it was nearly square (*c.*105 x 80 m).

The following description is based on Corbo's of 1974 (cited in n.4), with some additions. A large threshold (*c.*2 m wide; marked with an arrow on fig. 13) in the E wall marks the main entrance leading from the area of the anchorage into courtyard M1. This large courtyard (*c.*19 x 19 m) lies adjacent to a large, partially excavated, unit (M2) which seems to be another courtyard. The floor of courtyard M1 did not survive, but, based on the composition of its bedding, the excavators suggested it was paved with mosaic. East of this courtyard is a small anteroom with a staircase (M6; *c.*3.9 x 3.9 m) that leads into a long (15.5 m) N–S corridor (M5, *c.*3.7 m wide) opening eastward to rooms M3 (*c.*5.9 x 6.7 m) and M4 (*c.*9.7 x 3.9 m) and westward to rooms M9 (*c.*9 x 3.3 m), M10 (*c.*9 x 7.5 m), and M11 (*c.*9 x 3.3 m). The walls of rooms M4 and M10 contain engaged pillars that probably supported a vaulted roof. Two small (*c.*4.7 x 3.7 m, 4.9 x 3.7 m) rooms (M7-M8) in the NE corner of this wing contained channels beneath the (missing) floors. The W part of the N wing is better preserved. Room M12 (unexcavated) may have also served as a N–S corridor. It opens northward to room M18, which leads into room M19 (both *c.*3.7 x 3.8 m). Room M14 in the SW corner of the wing is similar in size to the above rooms but its mosaic floor is framed between deep stone channels and rows of basalt stones that exhibit shallow grooved channels (see below). To the north, a large (*c.*6.5 x 8 m) room (M15) contains an unusual mosaic, suggesting that the room was of special importance (see below). It leads into two small rooms (M16-M17) on the N side, which lead in turn into room M20 (all three being *c.*3.6 x 3 m) (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. View of rooms M15-20, looking north, with mosaic of M15 in foreground (D. Zanetti, © Magdala Project).

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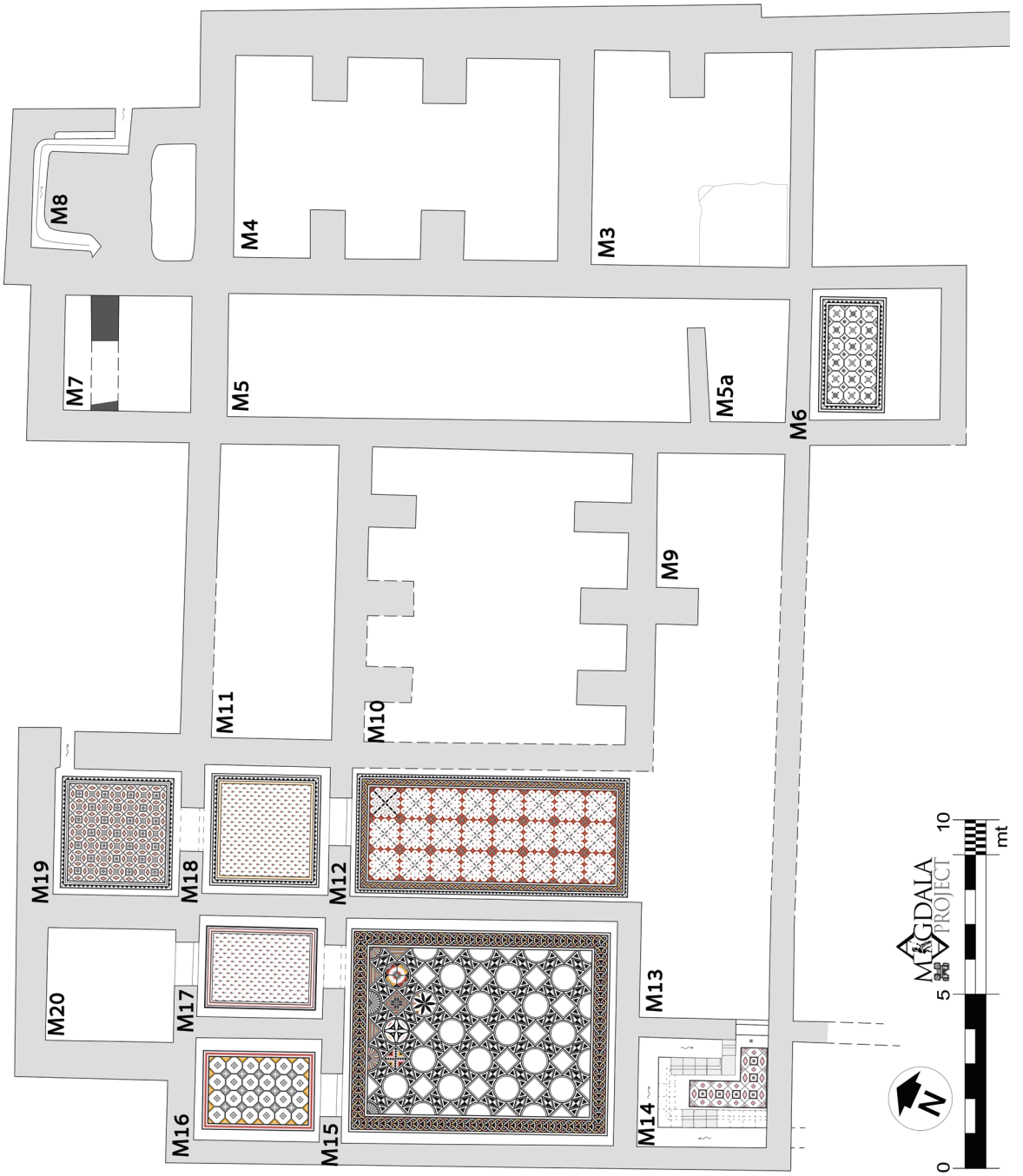


Fig. 4. General plan of N wing of the Byzantine compound, with a reconstruction of the mosaic floors based on the remains and on historical photographs (*del.* S. De Luca, © Magdala Project).

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To the south of courtyard M1, rooms M21 (*c.*10 x 2.9 m) and M22 (*c.*10 x 7.5 m) were fully excavated, but the adjacent room M23 (2.9 m wide) only partially. A concentration of architectural elements found in M22, such as fragments of a marble chancel screen and a balustrade pillar made of stone (see below), led the excavators to suspect at first that a church was located in this area, with room M22 functioning as a wide nave and M21-M23 serving as narrow aisles on the north and south, but excavations to the east revealed only buttresses supporting the E wall (see below). The lack of an apse, however, may not be a decisive argument against the identification of a church here, since quadrangular churches exist in the country. Parts of rooms M24, M25 and M26 were excavated along the E wall of the compound, while rooms M27 and M28 (*c.*1 x 3.3 m and 3.3 x 3.8 m, respectively) in the SE corner were excavated in their entirety.

Mosaics

Mosaic pavements preserved in 9 rooms in the N wing were partially published by Corbo[15] and later catalogued by A. and R. Ovadiah[16] and A. M. Madden.[17] The surviving mosaics mostly exhibit simple repetitive geometric carpets. Based on regional parallels, they can be dated generally to the 5th, 6th and perhaps even the 7th c., but we should not assume that all necessarily belong to a single building phase. The overall reconstruction of the surviving mosaics in the N wing is given in fig. 4 (colour). All are geometric carpets, although the patterns vary from room to room. Mosaic beddings found in additional rooms suggest that most, if not all, of the rooms in this wing had mosaic floors. Here we focus on two of special interest.



Fig. 5. Mosaic floor of M15 as seen during the 1971 excavations, looking southwest (V. Corbo, © Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Archives).

Room M15 (fig. 5; (fig. 6 in colour)

This pavement, more colourful than most, displays complex alternating designs. This, together with the exceptional size of the room (*c.*52 m^2), seems to point to some special function. The carpet is framed by a polychrome double

15 Corbo (supra n.4) 9-18.

16 R. Ovadiah and A. Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine mosaic pavements in Israel* (Rome 1987) 110-11 no. 186, pl. CXXIV.1-2.

17 A. M. Madden, *Corpus of Byzantine church mosaic pavements from Israel and the Palestinian territories* (Leuven 2014) 157-58 no. 229.

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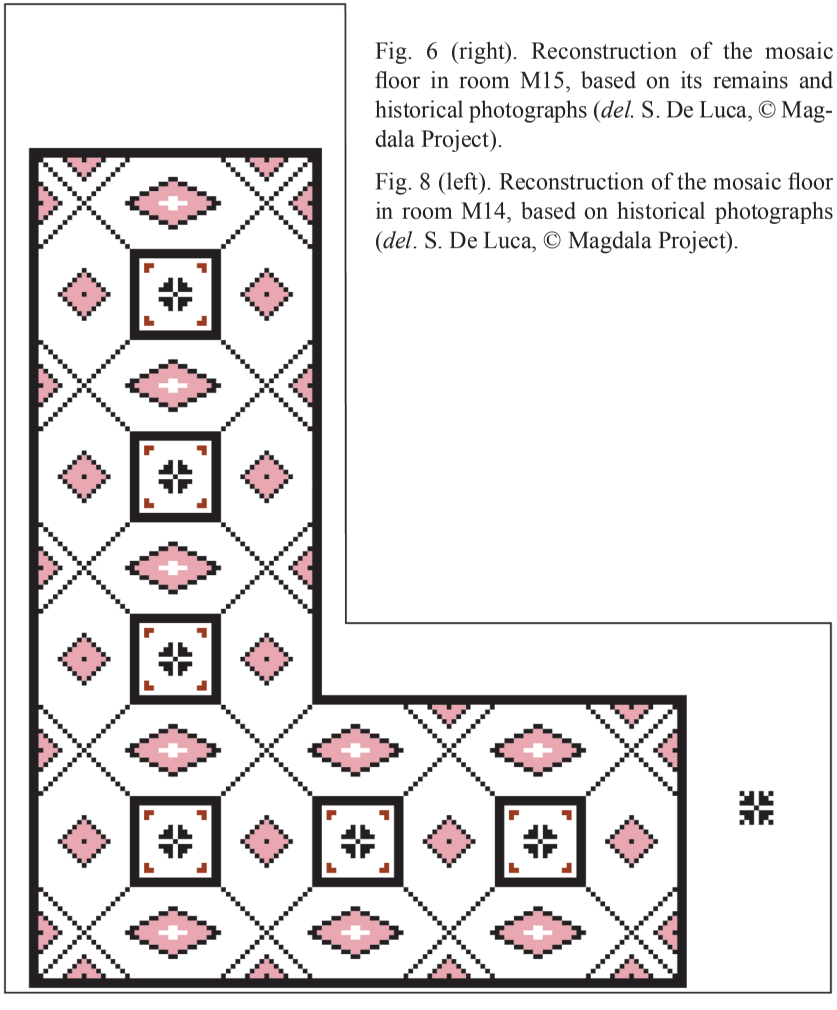
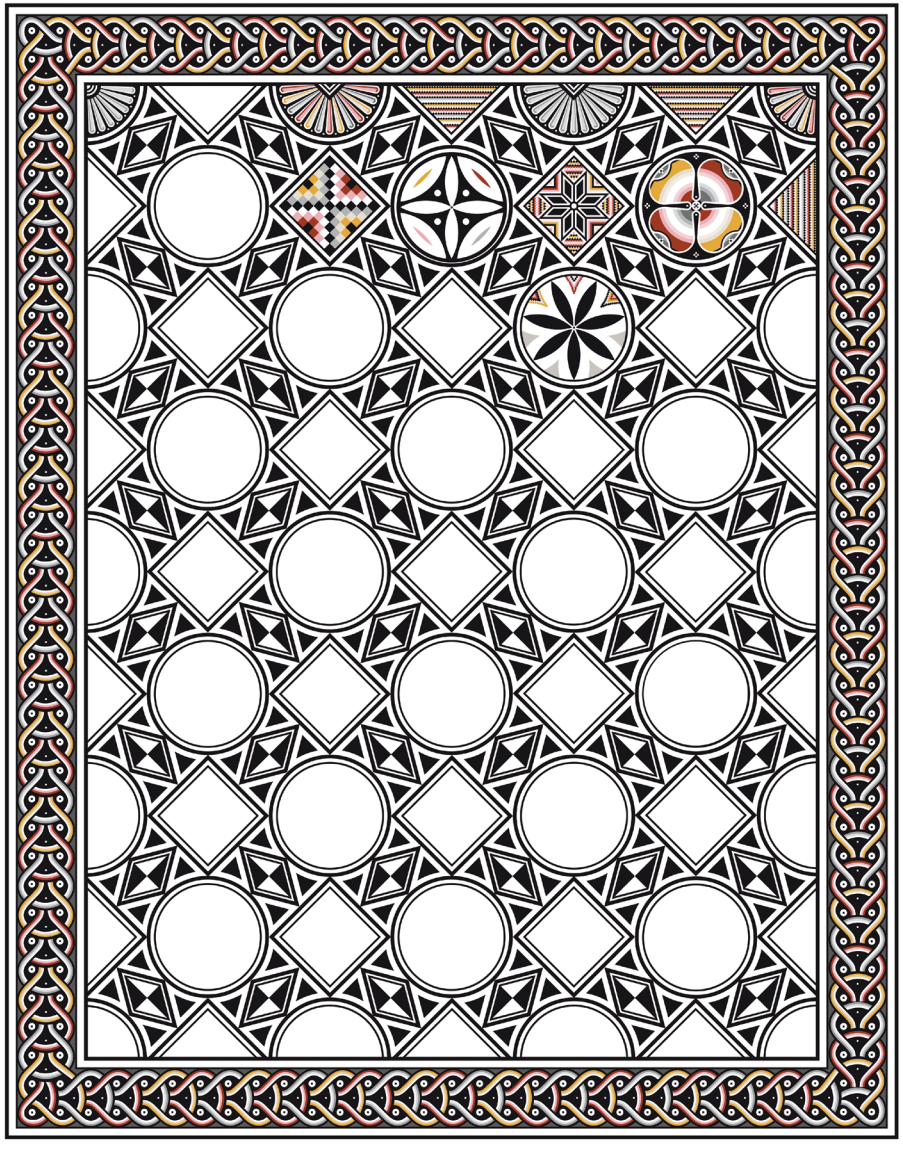


Fig. 6 (right). Reconstruction of the mosaic floor in room M15, based on its remains and historical photographs (*del.* S. De Luca, © Magdala Project).

Fig. 8 (left). Reconstruction of the mosaic floor in room M14, based on historical photographs (*del*. S. De Luca, © Magdala Project).



guilloche on a black background.[18] The carpet itself (type H15) contains an orthogonal pattern of alternating and tangential circles and squares set diagonally, forming bobbins with inscribed diamonds using black and white tesserae.[19] The outline of the entire pattern is in black tesserae on a white background. Each circle and each square contain a differently-coloured geometric motif. The motifs in the circular (1-3) and square (4-5) compartments in the surviving parts of the mosaic are as follows:

(1) Rosette of 4 contiguous coloured petals on a black background. The space between the petals forms a black *croix pattée* kind of design.[20]

(2) Rosette of 4 non-contiguous, white, spindle-shaped leaves arranged orthogonally around a central point. A recumbent, white, spindle-shaped leaf fills the space between the outer apexes of every pair of spindles. The rest of the background is filled with black concave triangles, each containing a small white disc in the centre.[21]

(3) Black 8-leaf rosette on a white background, with a coloured triangle filling the space between each pair of leaves.

(4) Black 8-pointed star with a white border, the resultant spaces being filled with coloured rainbow patterns. The centre is marked by a small white disc.[22]

(5) Square containing 4 serrated triangles, each comprising groups of differently coloured tesserae having a common vertex in the centre. The final effect resembles a black cross surrounded by 4 coloured triangles.

The carpet is bordered by alternating coloured triangles as well as half- and quarter-circles. The triangles are filled with rainbow-coloured bands gradually diminishing toward the apex. The circles contain shell-like motifs on a black background, creating a three-dimensional illusion. No exact parallel to this design is known in the region, but a close parallel (unpublished) was found in 2007 in the N aisle of a 5th-c. church in the centre of ancient Tiberias that was excavated by M. Hartal and E. Amos (IAA). There is a strong resemblance between rosette no. 1[23] and the extensive use of the rainbow-colour style.[24] This resemblance, as well as parallels from Lebanon and Syria,[25] seem to suggest a 5th-c. date for our mosaic.

Room M14 (fig. 7; fig. 8 in colour)

A prominent feature is the system of water channels running along the interior of its E, N and W walls. The channels (*c.*0.5 m wide, 1 m deep) heading toward the northeast are carefully plastered on their interior, paved with basalt slabs, and bordered with basalt ashlars displaying grooves on top. It probably functioned as a latrine.

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18 C. Balmelle *et al.*, *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine*, vol. 1 (12th edn., Paris 2002) 125, pl. 75b.

19 Ibid. 222-23, pl. 146d; 240-41, pl. 156b-c.

20 C. Balmelle *et al.*, *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine*, vol. 2 (2nd edn., Paris 2002) 52-53, pl. 255i; 74-75, pl. 275g.

21 Ibid. 52-53, pl. 255e.

22 Ibid. 96, pl. 295c; 98, pl. 296a-b.

23 S. Miller, *The mosaics of Tiberias and Hammat Tiberias during the Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic periods* (M.A. thesis, The Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem 2011) pl. 9.2. On this church, see K. Cytryn, "Tiberias' houses of prayer in context," in J. Patrich, O. Peleg-Barkat and E. Ben Yosef (edd.), *Arise, walk through the land. Studies in the archaeology and history of the Land of Israel in memory of Yizhar Hirschfeld* (Jerusalem 2016) 236*-240*.

24 Ibid. pl. 9.5-6. On the use of this style in the region, see ibid. 55-56.

25 P. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban: décor, archéologie et liturgie* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1988) 342 fig. 326, 97 fig. 67, pl. 4.

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Fig. 7. Mosaic floor of M15 as seen during the 1971 excavations, looking southwest (V. Corbo, © Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Archives).

The mosaic floor is contemporary with the hydraulic installation since its design, framed by a simple black fillet, conforms to the L-shaped plan. Set against a white background, the pattern is of squares with thick black outlines in the centre of the carpet, each having a 4-petalled black crosslet in the centre and 4 red, gamma-shaped motifs in the corners. The rest of the pattern has contiguous hexagons framed by serrated black outlines; these in turn frame alternating squares and diamonds, all of which have a black serrated outline and a pink fill. A single tessera marks the centres of the squares, while a white crosslet marks the centres of the diamonds.[26] This pattern, comparable to other mosaic carpets in the region (e.g., at Tabgha, Kursi, Nazareth, Kefar Cana and Susita), together with other finds in the room, such as two Late Roman red ware bowls stamped with crosses,[27] suggest a 6th-c. date for use of the room.

The missing church

The Franciscan archives indicate that in the early 20th c. Lendle discovered a church with mosaic pavements inside the Franciscan precinct. A large palm tree purportedly grew inside the apse which ran for a length of "about 8 m", while its E part was "still very well visible" (cf. fig. 9).[28] By 1935, Bagatti and Saller could locate neither the apse nor the palm tree, and the remains of the church were never rediscovered.[29] According to Lendle's notes, the land on which the Franciscan precinct stood was rented to local farmers whose

26 Balmelle *et al.* (supra n.18) vol. 1, 260-61, pl. 169e, type O3; Ovadiah and Ovadiah (supra n.16) 244; Madden (supra n.17) 7.

27 S. Loffreda, *Diario di scavo II, 1973-1977* (unpublished notebook) 11-12.

28 V. Corbo, *Diario di scavo I, 1973-1974* (unpublished notebook) 1; id. (supra n.4) 7. However, the exact place of discovery of the apse is unknown.

29 Bagatti 2001 (supra n.10) 68-71, figs. 33-34.

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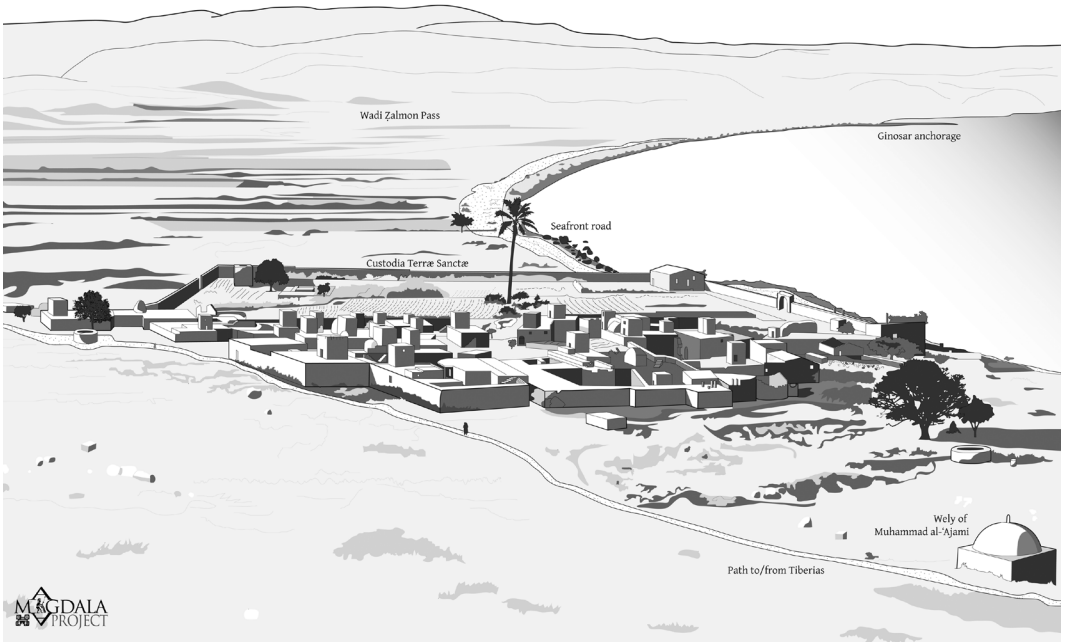


Fig. 9. Sketch of el-Mejdel and the Franciscan precinct in *c.*1912, looking northeast, based on archival photographs (*del*. S. De Luca, © Magdala Project).

agricultural activities damaged and concealed the remains.[30] If a palm tree indeed grew within the remains of the church, it would be tempting to locate it in the area where *Quadriporticus* F was later exposed, since all the historical illustrations of the village show one large palm tree here.[31] The church may have been located above the S colonnade of *Quadriporticus* F, where a limestone threshold and remains of Byzantine mosaics were uncovered *in situ*.[32] Probes conducted by De Luca showed that the pool in the centre of *Quadriporticus* F was re-used down to the Early Islamic period, and Byzantine to Early Islamic remains were documented between *Quadriporticus* F and the walled compound.[33] However, no remains could be unequivocally associated with a church.

30 Photographs of the early 20th c. point to intensive agriculture inside the Franciscan precinct.

31 Illustrations include: J. M. Bernatz (text by G. H. von Schubert), *Album von Palästina. Bilder aus dem Heiligen Lande* (Stuttgart 1841) no. 34; C. W. M. van de Veldem, *Le pays d'Israel* (Paris 1857) no. 81; W. M. Thomson, *The land and the book: or, Biblical illustrations drawn from the manners and customs, the scenes and scenery of the Holy Land* (New York 1859) vol. II, facing p. 108; L. Lortet, *La Syrie d'aujourd'hui, voyages dans la Phénicie, le Liban et la Judée*: *1875-1880* (Paris 1884) 527. Photographs include: D. B. Shepp, *The Holy Land photographed* (Chicago, IL 1894), available at https://archive.org/details/Holy_Land_Photographed_D.Shepp 91; W. W. P. Sanday, *Sacred sites of the Gospels* (Oxford 1903) pls. 31-32; E. W. G. Masterman, *Studies in Galilee* (Chicago, IL 1909) 31; R. S. Hichens, *The Holy Land* (New York 1910) 121; A. Aracil, *Album ilustrado de Tierra Santa con planos y notas historico-descriptivas* (Jerusalem 1912) 160-61.

32 V. Corbo, "La città romana di Magdala: rapporto preliminare dopo la quarta campagna di scavo: 1 ottobre – 8 dicembre 1975," in Testa *et al*. (supra n.1) 356 fig. 1; id., "La piazza e villa urbana a Magdala," *Liber Annuus* 28 (1978) 235, fig. 71.

33 S. De Luca and A. Lena, "The harbor of the city of Magdala/Taricheae on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine times: new discoveries and preliminary results," in S. Ladstätter, F. Pirson and Th. Schmidts (edd.), *Häfen und Hafenstädte im östlichen Mittelmeerraum von der Antike bis in byzantinische Zeit. Neue Entdeckungen und aktuelle Forschungsansätze*, vol. 1 (Byzas 19, 2014) 113-63, especially 139, 127 fig. 4.

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Fig. 10. Fragment of marble chancel screen decorated with cross (left), and fragments of carved limestone slab with cross inside medallion (centre and right) (V. Corbo, 1973, © Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Archives).

Architectural elements

The following architectural elements from the 1970s excavations (when they were collected in the Byzantine compound) were never published. They show the resources (such as imported marble) available to the local builders and reinforce the identification of the compound as a Christian complex, since they are typical of church furnishings. Some of the elements may be Byzantine, some are probably Umayyad, while most seem to be from the Crusader period. These seem to confirm that a church stood here in the Middle Ages too.



Fig. 11 (left). Fragment of a white marble panel with a bas-relief of grape clusters, grape leaves and spiral tendrils (right), and part of a white marble frame with a bas-relief of stylized flowers and leaves (left) (V. Corbo, 1973, © Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Archives).

(A) Fragment of a marble chancel screen, adorned with an arm of a bas-relief *croix pattée* with concave ends. The cross is framed by a recessed square panel with a simple, cornice-like moulding (figs. 10 and 12).

(B) Fragment of a carved limestone slab exhibiting traces of *croix-pattée* arms inside a circular medallion. The circlet in the centre houses a quatrefoil motif incised with a compass. It may have been used as a door or window lintel or, less likely, as a chancel screen (figs. 10 and 12).

(C) Perhaps a second fragment of no. 2, with parts of a cross-pattée arm inside a circle, together with an incised, multi-petalled rosette inscribed in a circlet (figs. 10 and 12).

(D) Fragment of a white marble-grained panel decorated with a bas-relief depicting clusters of grapes, grape leaves, and spiral tendrils emanating from both sides of a twisted branch.[34] Parts of an

34 27.5 x 29.5 x 5 cm, 5.94 kg; Jerusalem, Terra Sancta Museum cat. no. CTS-SB-03777.

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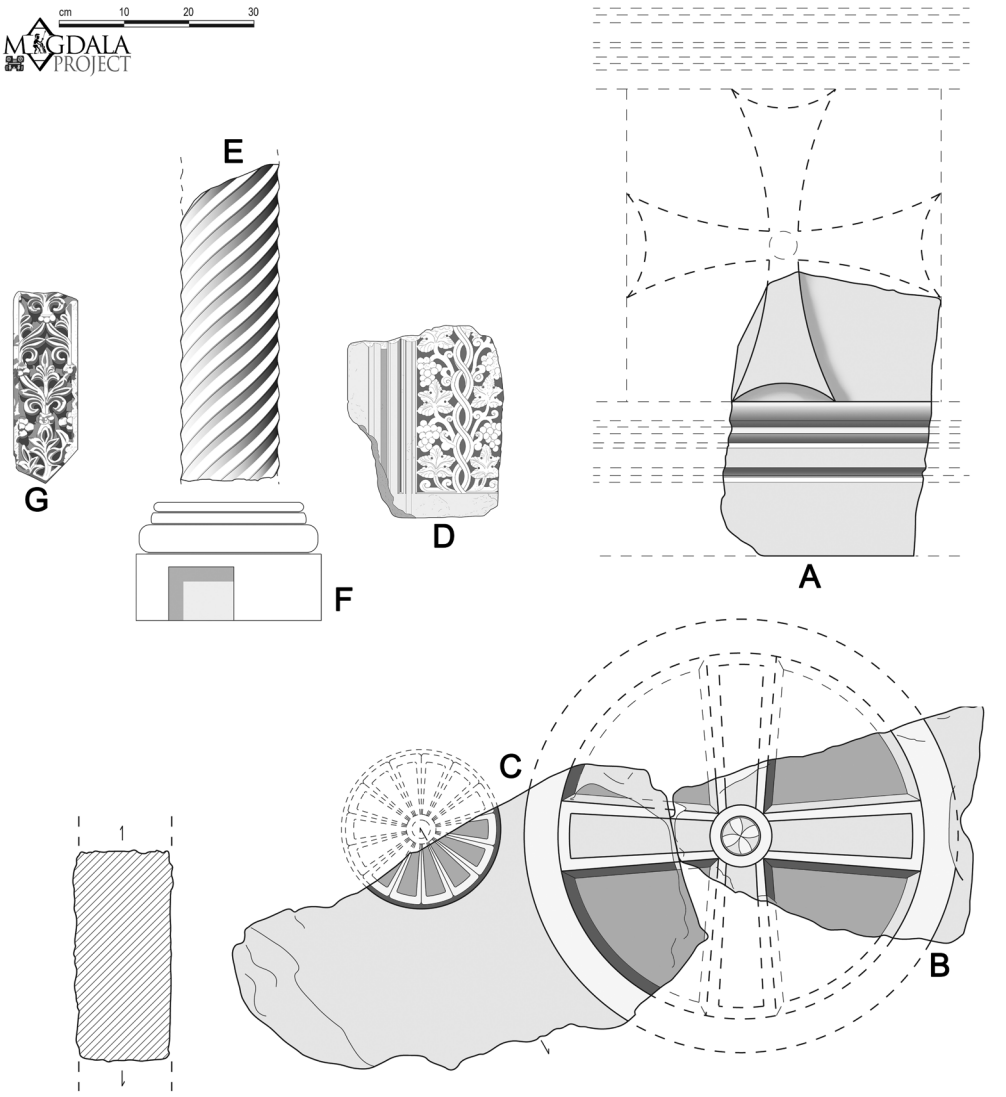


Fig. 12. Schematic drawings of some architectural elements recovered in 1971-73 (*del*. S. De Luca, © Magdala Project).

articulated, deeply-moulded cornice and of a flat rim are visible on the left side. Extensive use of a drill for the treatment of the leaves is well discernible (figs. 11-12).

(E) Fragment of a small limestone drum from a spirally-fluted column (fig. 12).

(F) Moulded limestone base for a small column exhibiting a torus and astragal above a square plinth. A deep rectangular groove, perhaps for affixing a chancel screen, is carved on one side of the plinth (fig. 12).

(G) Fragment of a coarse-grained white marble frame, with a bas-relief depiction of stylized flowers and leaves with recessed ribs.[35] Possibly part of a door jamb or some such frame, a suggestion supported by a hole for affixing a hinge on one of its sides (fig. 12).

Two additional small marble fragments seem to be Crusader in style. Lendle had discovered a stone engraved with a Crusader cross and bearing the date 1389.[36]

35 10 x 32 x 6 cm; 3.75 kg; Jerusalem, Terra Sancta Museum cat. no. CTS-SB-03778.

36 Corbo 1973 (supra n.28) 1; D. Pringle, *The churches of the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem. A corpus*, vol. II: *L-Z (excluding Tyre)* (Cambridge 1998) 28.

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The aqueduct and the bathhouse

Also Byzantine is an aqueduct on a series of arches conveying water from the main spring beneath tower A1 to the Byzantine compound some 130 m to the south. The tower was apparently equipped with a wooden wheel (*noria*) that pumped water to the top of the aqueduct. Its arched pillars were built on the paved Roman road, blocking and superseding Roman structures. The effort invested in building this sophisticated system points to the resources available to the occupants of the Byzantine compound as well as to a great need for water probably for the bathhouse (see below) and perhaps also for workshops.

In 1992, Abu-'Uqsa conducted rescue excavations *c.*12 m south of the SW corner of courtyard M2, revealing remains of a bathhouse featuring two *caldaria* with *tubuli* in their walls and a *frigidarium* containing a semicircular pool and two steps.[37] Based on the design and the Byzantine to Early Muslim finds on the floors, she suggested dating the structure to the Byzantine era. It became clear that the bathhouse was part of the walled compound (see below). Probably around the late 8th or early 9th c., a large building oriented E–W and decorated with mosaic floors was erected on top of the bathhouse. According to the excavator, this may have been a church, although no clear supporting evidence was found. Its remains stood near and in line with rooms M21, M22, and M23 at the east, where Corbo and Loffreda suspected a church once stood and where most of the church furnishings were found.

The anchorage (fig. 13)

In the Byzantine period, when the water level of the Sea of Galilee dropped significantly, a new anchorage was constructed northeast of the Byzantine compound and south of the old Hellenistic-Roman anchorage located next to *Quadriporticus* F.[38] This is the largest anchorage known around the Sea.[39] It includes a sheltered basin protected by a breakwater (6 x *c.*70 m) made of limestone and basalt field boulders, and a *c.*100 m-long landing that extends parallel to the coastline next to a paved road (2.0-3.5 m wide), with what seems to be a dry dock running perpendicular at its N end. The foundations and retaining walls of the road and dry dock were built of limestone blocks, with basalt fieldstones used for the fill.[40] All these structures, including a mooring stone found *in situ*, lie *c.*211 m below sea level, or *c.*3 m lower than the level of the Late Hellenistic/Roman anchorage which lies *c.*80 m west of the Byzantine coastline. In the Byzantine period, the early anchorage filled with sedimentation and went out of use as a result of the coastline's recession.[41] At the S end, the road next to the later landing led directly toward the main gate in the Byzantine compound's E wall which opens onto courtyard M1. This supports the conclusion

37 Abu-'Uqsa (supra n.13). This bathhouse should not be confused with an earlier one some 130 m to the north, which was abandoned in the Late Roman period.

38 S. De Luca, "La città ellenistico-romano di Magdala/Tarichaeae: gli scavi del Magdala project 2007 e 2008: relazione preliminare e prospettive di indagine," *Liber Annuus* 59 (2009) 430-35, pls. 3 and 33; De Luca and Lena (supra n.33) 141-42 and 146-47, fig. 5.

39 M. Nun, *Sea of Kinneret: a monograph* (Tel Aviv 1977) 85-87 [Hebrew]; id., *The Sea of Galilee and its fishermen in the New Testament* (Ein Gev 1989) 61; id., *Sea of Galilee: newly discovered harbours from New Testament days* (3rd rev. edn. 1991) 34-35; id., "Ports of Galilee: modern drought reveals harbors from Jesus' time," *BAR* 5.4 (1999) 28-29.

40 A. Raban, "The boat from Migdal Nunia and the anchorages of the Sea of Galilee from the time of Jesus," *IJNA* 17 (1988) 319 and 323, fig. 9.

41 G. Sarti *et al.*, "Magdala harbour sedimentation (Sea of Galilee, Israel): from natural to anthropogenic control," *Quaternary Int.* 303 (2013) 120-31.

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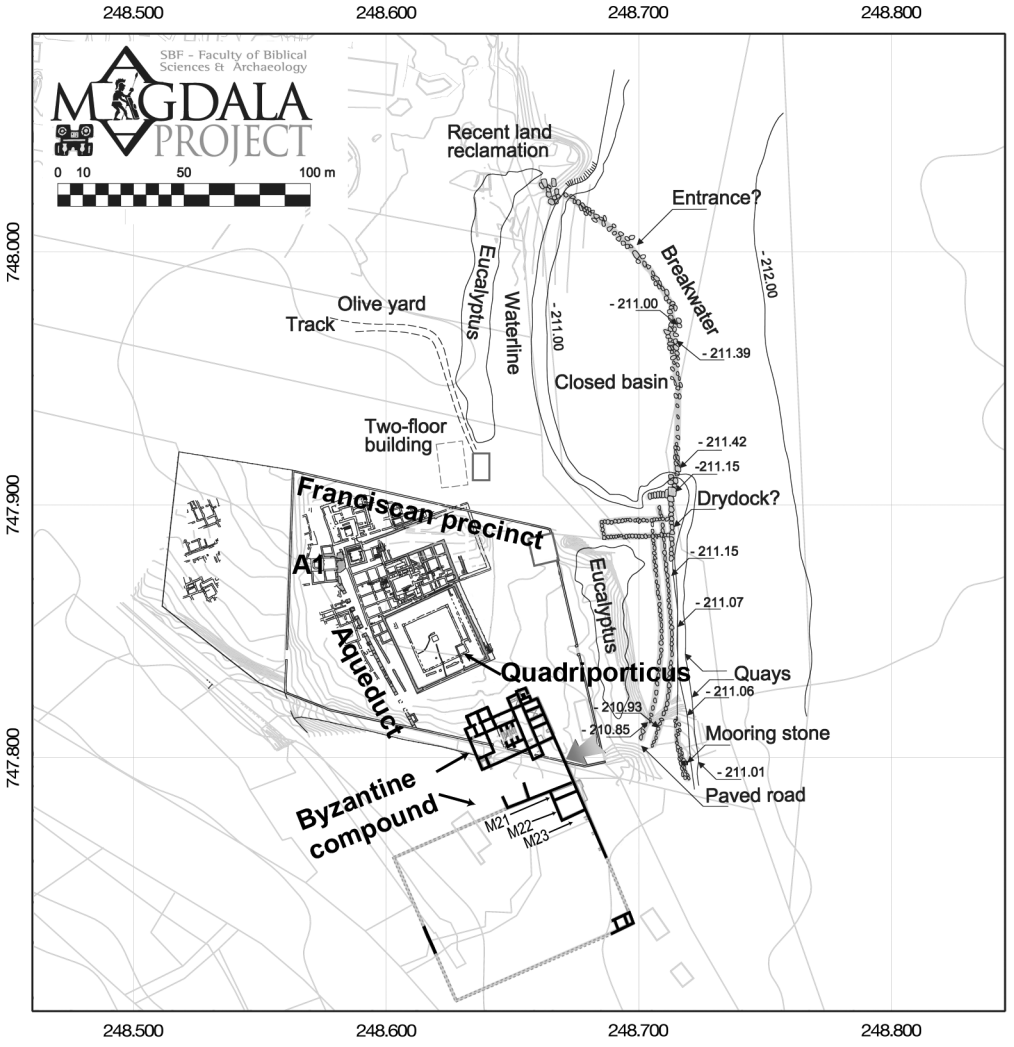


Fig. 13. Location of the Byzantine anchorage, adapted from Raban (supra n.40) fig. 7 (*del.* S. De Luca and A. Ricci, © Magdala Project, updated from De Luca 2009 [supra n.38] pl. 33B, and De Luca and Lena 2014 [supra n.33] fig. 5).

that the southern landing and the Byzantine compound were contemporaneous, one that is reinforced by the almost identical elevations.[42] It is worth noting that the layout of the Byzantine compound is comparable to that of the monastery at Kursi on the opposite side of the Sea, which also has a large adjacent anchorage.[43]

The presence of hermits in the caves of Mt. Arbel and Mt. Nitai

Three clusters of caves are located on the cliffs and steep slopes of Wadi el-Ḥamam; between 800 and 2000 m west of Magdala. The Kul'at Ibn Ma'an and the Arbel caves are on the S slope and the Mt. Nitai caves are on the N slope. These clusters contain hundreds of

42 De Luca and Lena (supra n.1) 326-27 n.178.

43 Raban (supra n.40) 323-27, pls. 11 and 14-18; Nun 1989 (supra n.39); id. 1991, 7-18; id. 1999 (supra n.39) 31 and 64; V. Tzaferis, "The excavations of Kursi-Gergesa," *'Atiqot* 16 (1983) 1-65.

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Fig. 14. Byzantine lead *bulla* from the Mt. Arbel caves. Obv.: Mary holding the infant Jesus. Rev.: monogram of one Theodoros (T. Rogovski).

isolated man-made and natural caves, in addition to a few large interconnecting and multi-storeyed cave complexes. The caves were surveyed some two decades ago as part of the Eastern Galilee Survey; the Mt. Nitai caves were surveyed again recently by the Wadi Ḥamam Expedition.[44] Plastered water cisterns, ritual baths, storage facilities and various quarried spaces were discovered in several caves high up on the cliffs, indicating they were prepared for refuge. The caves were mapped and small finds such as pottery, coins and arrowheads were collected from the surface and slopes near the entrances. In total, some 400 diagnostic potsherds and 21 coins were collected from the three clusters, suggesting that the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman eras saw the most intensive activity in the caves. After a long hiatus, the abundance of finds of the 6th and 7th c. suggests another peak of activity, with further finds pointing to activity in the Crusader and Mamlûk periods. They include local Byzantine pottery and Late Roman Red Ware imported from N Africa, Cyprus and Asia Minor, alongside 4 Byzantine coins and one each of Early Arab, Fâtimid, Crusader and Mamlûk pieces. Of special interest is a late 6th/7th-c. lead *bulla* from the Arbel caves which depicts Mary with a nimbus above her head, holding the infant Jesus at her breast, while the reverse bears a monogram of one Theodoros (fig. 14).[45] This type of *bulla* was commonly used by Byzantine officials, Christian clergy and monks to seal documents; it is often found in monasteries and other Christian contexts.[46]

Some of these caves bear a close resemblance in shape to Byzantine monastic laura cells from the Judaean Desert. Cave 139 on Mt. Nitai (fig. 15), for example, located on the uppermost level of the cliff facing east, is accessible only by ropes from above; an aperture

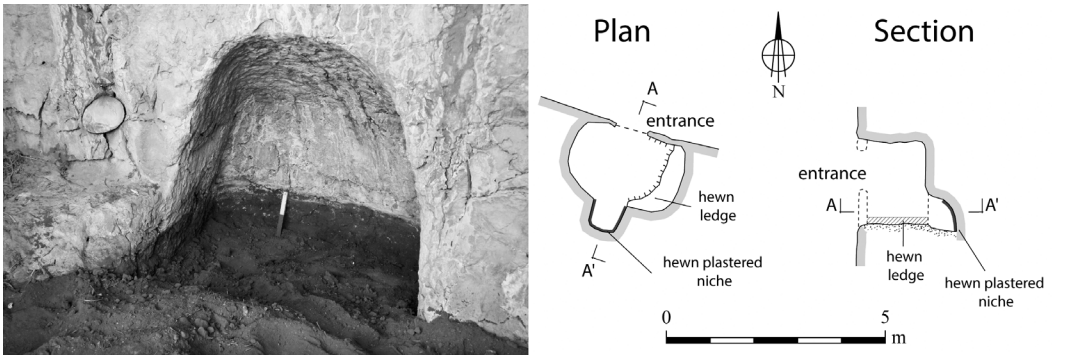


Fig. 15. Plan of a supposed cell (cave no. 139) with hewn ledge and apse, perhaps the home of a recluse monk in the cliffs of Mt. Nitai (photo B. Langford; *del*. R. Sabar).

44 Leibner (supra n.1) 213-14 and 237-42; R. Sabar *et al.*, "The Mount Nitai caves survey," in U. Leibner (ed.), *Khirbet Wadi Hamam: a Roman-period village and synagogue in the Lower Galilee* (Jerusalem 2018) 286-303.

45 Leibner (supra n.1) 423 no. 10 (identification made by R. Kool).

46 See, e.g., C. Kotsifou, "Sealing practices in the monasteries of late antique and early medieval Egypt," in I. Regulski, K. Duistermaat and P. Verkinderen (edd.), *Seals and sealing practices in the Near East* (Leuven 2012) 149-62.

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for fastening a rope or rope-ladder was hewn in the rock near the entrance. The cave contains a single cell (2.5 x 1.7 m) that is 2 m high. Short orthogonal hewing marks on the walls and ceiling show that this is a man-made cave. A ledge that may have served as a bed was hewn along the cave's E wall, while a plastered apse (0.7 x 0.6 m) serving perhaps for liturgical purposes was set in the S wall.[47] We propose that monks lived in isolated cells in the cliffs of Wadi el-Ḥamam during the Byzantine period; they were perhaps related in some way to the Byzantine compound in nearby Magdala.

Magdala in Christian literary sources

According to the Gospel of Matthew (15:39), after the miracle of feeding the four thousand with 7 loaves of bread and fish, Jesus got into a boat and went "to the region of Magdala" (εἰς τὰ ὅρια Μαγδαλά – *Textus Receptus*) or Magadan (Μαγαδάν – critical editions). According to the parallel tradition in Mark (8:10), he went "to the district of Dalmanutha" (εἰς τὰ μέρη Δαλμανουθά).[48] As elsewhere in the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 15:21, 16:13; Mark 7:31), the phrase "the district of *X* …" seems to refer to the territory of a city. While the version "Magadan" in Matthew seems to be a corruption of the name Magdala, G. Dalman proposed that the name in Mark, "Dalmanutha", is derived from the full Aramaic name of the site, Migdal Nunayya.[49]

Important to our topic is the epithet Mary Magdalene (Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή) for Jesus' female disciple, which appears in all four canonical Gospels (Matt. 27:56 and 61; 28:1; Mark 15:40, 15.47; 16:1, 16.9; Luke 8:2, 24:10; John 19:25, 20:1, 20.18). Already in late antiquity this epithet was understood to be indicative of her geographic origin and to be derived from the toponym Magdala (see below). Indeed, Aramaic-, Arabic- and Syriac-speakers commonly formed ethnic attributes in Greek by adding the suffix -ηνός, feminine -ηνή, to the place of origin. In Syriac, too, the simple meaning of the epithet *Māryām Maġdəlāyṯā*, being the feminine of *Maġdəlāa°/Maġdəlāyā°*, is an ethnonym and means Mary of Magdala (and not "Mariam the Tower-ess," as suggested by Taylor[50]).

Neither Eusebius in his *Onomasticon* (early 4th c.) nor Jerome in his *Liber nominum*, the Latin edition of that work (written in the late 4th c.), identifies the "Magadan" of Matthew as being located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee ("Dalmanutha" is absent from their compositions). Rather, both locate the site next to Gerasa, despite the fact that the tradition explicitly mentions the Sea of Galilee as the site of the events and states that Jesus arrived there by boat. This is probably because Eusebius confused Gerasa in Transjordan with Gergasa of the miracle of the swine, and Jerome translated it without comment.[51] However, in his *Quaestiones ad Marinum* (2.6-7), Eusebius notes explicitly that Mary (actually, two women by that name) hailed from μιᾶς πόλεως ἢ κώμης τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς, "a city

47 Cf. Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean desert monasteries in the Byzantine period* (New Haven, CT 1992) 176-90 and figs. 97, 102-3, 120 and 128.

48 For manuscript variations of these names, see De Luca and Lena (supra n.1) 286 nn. 20-21 and R. Bauckham, "Magdala as we now know it," in id. (supra n. 1) 65-67.

49 G. H. Dalman (transl. P. P. Levertoff), *Sacred sites and ways: studies in the topography of the Gospels* (London 1935) 128. See also J. F. Strange, "Dalmanutha (Place)," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (1992) 4; R. Bauckham, "Where was Dalmanutha? Mark 8:10," in T. D. Still (ed.), *Texts and contexts: Gospels and Pauline studies* (Waco, TX 2017) 23-29.

50 J. E. Taylor, "Missing Magdala and the name of Mary 'Magdalene'," *PEQ* 146.3 (2014) 208.

51 E. Klostermann, *Eusebius of Caesarea. Das Onomastikon der biblischer Ortsnamen* (Eusebius' Werke 3/1; Leipzig 1904, repr. 1966) 134-35. For Gergasa, see ibid. 64-65.

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or village of the Magdalene"; it is clear from the context that this place was in the Galilee.[52] Jerome too, apparently borrowing from Eusebius, notes (*Ad Hedybiam* 4) that the two women named Mary were natives of *vicum Magdalum*. The fact that he mentions only a village seems to indicate he knew Magdala was not a city proper. In any event, both Church fathers seem to have known that Mary came from a site in the Galilee called Magdala. This place may not have been referred to in the *Onomasticon* because it was mentioned in the Gospels only as an epithet and not by the site's explicit name.

Moving to the pilgrimage literature, we should emphasize at the outset that no extant source explicitly mentions a Christian edifice at Magdala before the 7th or 8th c. The first mention of Magdala in the pilgrimage literature is found in the early 6th-c. compilation of itineraries known as *Theodosius's Topography of the Holy Land*:

> From Tiberias it is two miles to Magdala, where Saint Mary [Magdalene] was born. From Magdala it is two miles to Seven Springs ... From Seven Springs it is two miles to Capernaum ….[53]

Neither a church nor a monastery is noted here, but the same is true for many other sites mentioned in this text, such as Tabgha and Capernaum, where such structures clearly stood. The account seems to imply that Magdala was a recognized station in the route of pilgrims in the early 6th c. Magdala is mentioned again in the *Vita sancti Willibaldi*, which describes an early 8th-c. pilgrimage:

> From that place [i.e., Tiberias] they went along the sea and approached *vico Magdalene*. And they arrived at the famous village of Capernaum.[54]

Elsewhere, this text mentions the liturgical memorial day of St. Magdalene, on July 22.[55] A version of *The Life of St. Willibald* redacted by an anonymous writer in the 10th or 11th c. tells of Willibad and his companions who "came to Magdala, the village of Lazarus and his sisters".[56] This tradition seems to stem from Saint Mary Magdalene being seen as a conflation of three different women of the Gospels: the anonymous sinner in Luke, Mary of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene. This idea was first raised in the 6th c. by Pope Gregory the Great and was further developed in the Middle Ages. It influenced western liturgy and the sacred geography of Latin pilgrims first and foremost in the identification of Mary Magdalene's dwelling at Bethany (see below).[57] Eastern Christianity, however, and especially the Greek Orthodox Church, opposed this view, in both its liturgy and exegesis maintaining the distinct identity of Mary Magdalene.[58]

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52 R. Pearse (ed.), *Eusebius of Caesarea: Gospel problems and solutions. Quaestiones ad Stephanum et Marinum (CPG 3470)* (Ipswich 2010) 111; critical edition, C. Zamagni, *Eusèbe de Césarée: Questions évangéliques. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (SC 523; Paris 2008) 213-14.

53 *Itineraria Hierosolymitana* ed. P. Geyer (CCSL 175, 1965) 115; J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem pilgrims before the Crusades* (2nd rev. edn., Warminster 2002) 103.

54 Vita Willibaldi, ed. Holder-Egger (*MGH* SS 15/1, 1887) 95-96; Wilkinson ibid. 239-40.

55 *MGH* SS 15/1, 1887, 104; G. H. Brown, *A companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, UK 2009) 86-87; V. Saxer, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident: des origines à la fin du Moyen Âge*, vol. I (Paris 1959) 6.

56 T. Tobler, *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII, IX, XII et XV* (Leipzig 1874; repr. 1974) 63; id. and A. Molinier, *Itinera hierosolymitana et descriptiones Terrae Sanctae: bellis sacris anteriora et latina lingua exarata* (Geneva 1879; repr. 1966) 289.

57 Gregory the Great, *Homily* 33; Saxer (supra n.55) vol. I, 32-33; vol. II, 328-29; S. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor* (2nd edn.; New York 2005) 3-32 and 95-97; K. L. Jansen, *The making of the Magdalen: preaching and popular devotion in the later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ 2000) 32-35.

58 V. Saxer, "Les saintes Marie Madeleine et Marie de Béthanie dans la tradition liturgique et

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Overall, it may not be surprising that the earliest and only extant pilgrimage text in Greek, the guidebook of Epiphanius *monachus Hagiapolita* (its original core dates to the 7th or 8th c.), contains the first reference to a church at Magdala, but this passage may date to the 10th or 11th c.:

> Going on from there one comes to the place Capernaum, in which lived our Christ and God … About a mile further on stands a stone marked with the sign of the cross. That is where he healed the woman with the issue of blood. And again about a mile further on you find a village [*lit*. a castle], containing a large church, the so-called Heptapegon at which he performed the miracle of the 5 loaves and 2 fishes. And again about 2 miles away is a church, in which place is the house of the Magdalene at the place called Magdala. There the Lord healed her. And from there one goes to the city of Tiberias … [59]

A church at Magdala is also mentioned by Eutychius (Sa'îd ibn Batrîq), the Melchite patriarch of Alexandria (877-940), although he did not visit the site himself. In the *Kitâb al-Burhân*, he wrote:

> The Church of Magdala near Tiberias bears witness that Christ here drove out the 7 demons which were in Mary Magdalene.[60]

Then the anonymous Greek text *Vita Constantini*, probably written between the 9th and 11th c., includes an anachronistic excursus on the building works of St. Helena in Palestine:

> Then, with devotion, she [Helena] left that place [Tabgha] and went on her way in gladness and joy for a further 2 miles, where she found the House of Mary Magdalene, and there too she erected a church [ναός – "sanctuary"].[61]

In 1106-8 the region was visited by the Russian pilgrim Abbot Daniîl, who provided a detailed description of his journey. After a long passage on Tabgha, he noted:

> Nearby is the house of Mary Magdalene where Christ cured her of 7 devils, and this place is called *Magdalija*.[62]

It is not entirely clear whether Abbot Daniel refers to an actual building, though in this diary the word "place" is commonly associated with "holy places".[63] However, he explicitly mentions the Greek Orthodox tradition (already expressed by Eutychius and Epiphanius) that it was in Magdala that Jesus healed Mary by casting out from her the seven demons (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9). Moreover, in accordance with the Greek Orthodox tradition, and contrary to those of the Latin Church, he does not associate the anonymous sinner in Luke 7 with Mary Magdalene, nor does he mention traditions referring to her in his visit to Bethany.

An interesting reference to the region of Magdala comes in the pilgrimage account of Neophytos Enkleistos (the Recluse) from 1158, shortly before he founded the Monastery of the Holy Cross near Paphos on Cyprus. He made his pilgrimage in search of a desert father or recluse who could be his spiritual master:

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homilétique orientale," *Rev. Sciences religieuses* 32 (1958) 2; id. 1959 (supra n.55) vol. I, 31.

59 H. Donner, "Die Palästinabeschreibung des Epiphanius Monachus Hagiopolita," *ZDPV* 87 (1971) 78, X.245; Wilkinson (supra n.53) 214.

60 P. Cachia (ed.), W. M. Watt (transl.), *Eutychius patriarch of Alexandria: the Book of the demonstration [Kitâb al-Burhân]* (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Orientalium 193, Scriptores Arabici 21; Leuven 1960) 136.

61 *Vita Constantini* (ed. Guidi 1907) 645.28-646.1; Wilkinson (supra n.53) 390.

62 Abbot Daniîl (ed. Prochorov 1980) 92-93; J. Wilkinson, J. Hill and W. F. Ryan, *Jerusalem pilgrimage 1099-1185* (London 1988) 159.

63 M. Garzaniti (intro., transl. and notes), *Daniil Egumeno, Itinerario in Terra Santa* (Rome 1991) 32-34.

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> For which purpose, having first searched out the region of Tiberias, even as far as the desert in which Christ blessed the loaves, and the hills of Magdala and Mount Tabor, and then, after venerating the holy and life-possessing tomb … searched the desert of Souka, the torrent of Saint Sabas and the regions of the Choziba and of the Jordan ….[64]

In addition to the known Greek Orthodox monastic centres in the Judaean Desert, Neophytos searched the area near Tabgha and the mountains near Magdala and Mt. Tabor. The context suggests that he was guided by a monk from the Monastery of St. Sabas, where he was being hosted in looking for Greek Orthodox monasteries that were still active or at least exhibited some remnants of their memory. Neophytos does not record any church or monastery at Magdala, but his attention was aimed at hermits. Thus it may refer to a hermitage, or the memory of a hermitage, in the mountains above Magdala — i.e., Mt. Arbel or Mt. Nitai. Similarly, in a passage from his *Historia Hierosolymitana* (chapt. 53), Jacques de Vitry refers to the presence of hermits in the area of the Sea of Galilee:

> Others of these religious men went to that wilderness near the Sea of Galilee where the Lord often preached, and where he fed the multitude with barley loaves and small fishes … Here they chose their solitary dwellings, some of them on the plain, where there was much hay from dried grass; others on the neighboring mount, to which the Lord was wont to go apart to pray.[65]

In this context we should mention Gerard of Nazareth's fragmentary *Vita abbatis Eliae* (early 12th c.). He states that Abbot Elia's monastery, Palmaria, lies "not far from Tiberias". Contemporary Crusader charters indicate it was located north of Tiberias and close to the shore (i.e., in the general area of Magdala).[66] Archaeologically speaking, the only substantial Crusader remains known to date in our area come from el-Mejdel and include massive structures, alongside finds such as glazed pottery from N Italy.[67]

Magdala is also mentioned during those years (1137-38) in Rorgo Fretellus of Nazareth's *Descriptio de locis sanctis*:

> At the second mile from Gennesaret [you find] *Magdalum oppidum* after which Mary [is called] Magdalene.[68]

While Jerome and Willibald defined Magdalum as a *vicus*, Fretellus referred to it as an *oppidum*, a term used in Mediaeval Latin for a walled town/small castle/fortified monastery, etc. The topography in Fretellus's influential account, which served as the basis for several later works (e.g., those of John of Würzburg, Theoderic), is well reflected in the so-called Ashburnham Libri Map dated to *c.*1150 (fig. 16).[69] Here "Magdalum" is surrounded by mountains, reflecting Fretellus's words "the mountains in a hollow of Gennesaret, [which

64 C. Galatariotou, "Neophytos: testamentary rule of Neophytos for the Hermitage of the Holy Cross near Ktima in Cyprus," in J. Thomas and A. C. Hero (edd.), *Byzantine monastic foundation documents: a complete translation of the surviving founders' Typika and Testaments* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies vol. 35; Washington, D.C. 2000) 1350.

65 A. Stewart (ed. and transl.), *The History of Jerusalem (A.D. 1180) by Jacques da Vitry* (PPTS 11.2; London 1896) 28-29.

66 B. Z. Kedar, "Gerard of Nazareth: a neglected twelfth-century writer in the Latin East. A contribution to the intellectual and monastic history of the Crusader States," *DOP* 37 (1983) 55-77; id., "Palmarée, abbaye clunisienne du XIIe siècle en Galilée," *Revue bénédictine* 93 (1983) 260-69; Pringle (supra n.36) vol. II, 153-56; M. Barber and K. Bate, *Letters from the East: Crusaders, pilgrims and settlers in the 12th-13th centuries* (Farnham 2010) 70.

67 Abu-'Uqsa 2001 (supra n.13); id. 2005 (supra n.14); Avshalom-Gorni and Stern (supra n.14).

68 P. C. Boeren, *Rorgo Fretellus de Nazareth et sa description de la Terre Sainte* (Amsterdam 1980) 23-24.

69 P. D. A. Harvey, *Medieval maps of the Holy Land* (London 2012) 31-39.

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Fig. 16. Detail of the Ashburnham Libri Map, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham Libri ms. no. 1882, late 12th c. (*del.* S. De Luca, © Magdala Project, after Harvey [supra n.69] fig. 22 and R. Röhricht, "Karten und Pläne zur Palästinakunde aus dem 7.-16. Jahrhundert," *ZDPV* 18 [1895)] 173-82, pl. V).

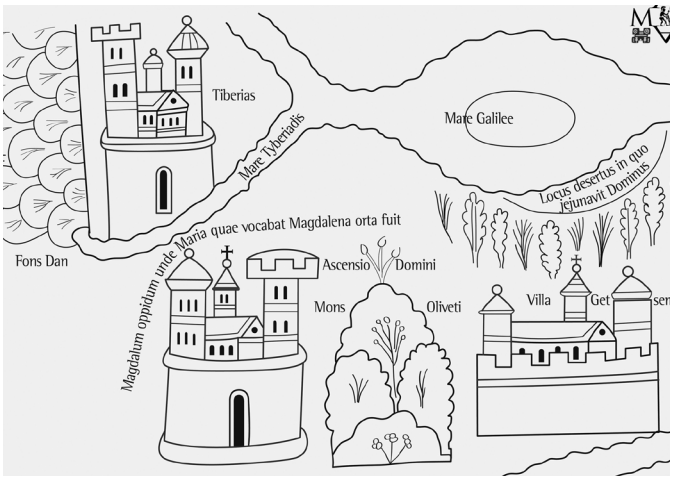


Fig. 17. Detail from the round map of Jerusalem (*c.*1180), attached to a *Passionale, pars aestivalis* (*c.*1250). Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, ms. Cod. bibl. fol. 56, fol. 135r (*del.* S. De Luca, © Magdala Project, after a photograph at http://digital. wlb-stuttgart.de/purl/bsz332499766 [p. 277 = fol. 135r, colophon]. The transcription of captions conforms with Röhricht, *ZDPV* 15 [1892] 34-39, pl. 4, with a few additions).

means] 'place generating breeze' ".[70] Similarly, the Stuttgart round map of Jerusalem of the 1180s (fig. 17) includes a depiction of a compound at Magdala with the caption "The *oppidum* of Magdalum, where Mary, who was called Magdalene, was born".

After Saladin took control of the region in 1187, the sources no longer mention recluse monks or an active church. In the mid-13th c., however, when Christian pilgrims again visited holy places around the Sea of Galilee, they still mention an old church at Magdala and note that Mary Magdalene was born here.

After more than a century from its last mention by Abbot Daniil, the Dominican friar Burchard of Mount Zion, in his *Description of the Holy Land*, reported his visit to Mary Magdalene's house at Magdala in *c.*1283:

> Two leagues south from there (i.e., Bethsaida) is Magdalum the *castrum* (variants *castellum*) of Mary Magdalene, whose house I have seen and entered there even now. It is sited on the shore of the sea … On its west and south sides it has a large plain full of pasture.[71]

Another Dominican friar, Riccoldo of Monte Croce from Florence, a few years later referred to Magdala as a church still standing but in ruins:

> Returning from there around the Sea of Galilee, towards Bethsaida and Ginnesar, we came after 6 miles to Magdala (*Magdalum*) the *castellum* (variant: *castrum*) of Mary Magdalene beside Lake Ginnosar; and weeping and crying because we found the beautiful church not destroyed but made into a stable, we sang and preached the Gospel of the Magdalene.[72]

Conversion of the church into a stable is also mentioned in one of Riccoldo's letters written after 1291.[73] Note that the terms *castrum* and *castellum* are used almost synonymously

70 Wilkinson *et al.* (supra n.62) 192.
71 Burchardus de Monte Sion (ed. Laurent 1864) 40-41; D. Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187-1291* (Farnham 2012) 263.
72 Pringle ibid. 363.
73 Ricoldo de Monte-Croce (ed. Röhricht 1884) 278-79; Pringle (supra n.71) 363 n.20.

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in Crusader literature.[74] Similarly, B. Z. Kedar notes that "fortified monasteries could be perceived as castles, and the same was true of some substantially fortified villages".[75] Therefore, at least in the Crusader period, Magdala could apparently be compared with other settlements in the Latin Kingdom in which "the church is the nucleus of a settlement".[76]

Niccolò of Poggibonsi's *Libro d'Oltramare*[77] was the first explicitly to locate a second Magdala at Bethany, near Jerusalem. Western itineraries of the 15th-17th c. usually do not associate traditions of Mary Magdalene with el-Mejdel, but rather with Bethany (and often with Jerusalem itself). The location of *Magdalum castrum* north of Tiberias, however, is recorded in several of these accounts and on contemporary maps,[78] a few of which note explicitly that the site was abandoned and stood in ruins.

While the memory of the Christian edifice at Magdala diminished, a few travellers' itineraries of the 15th to 18th c.[79] mention monastic hermitage caves in the cliffs of nearby Mt. Arbel. Similar observations, clearly not referring to active hermitages, appear in accounts of modern surveyors of the region. Most informative is that of Wilson, cited in *The survey of Western Palestine*:[80]

> From Mejdel, we made an expedition to the caves in Wady Hamám, once inhabited by robbers, but afterwards the resort of hermits and monks ... The appearance of the masonry and other details gave us the impression that the caverns had been used by Christian communities after the robbers had disappeared, and reminded us strongly of the similar establishment in the Mount of Temptation near Jericho …

As noted above, archaeological finds that may point to hermitage presence in the Byzantine era were indeed found in isolated caves high up in the cliffs of these mountains.

Summary and discussion

Excavations in the S part of ancient Magdala have revealed much of a large compound dating to the Byzantine period which seems to consist of two parts: a large rectangular walled structure on the south and a structure with many small rooms on the north (fig. 2). The various spaces of the N wing are interconnected and the rooms are paved with mosaics, a phenomenon rarely found in private dwellings in the surrounding rural area. A sophisticated aqueduct conveyed water to the compound, again pointing to ample available resources. Activity continued into the Early Islamic period, although its extent is unknown; there is also evidence for activity in the Crusader period. Several identifications of the Byzantine compound are possible: a mansion, a large bathhouse complex, or a

74 R. Ellenblum, *Crusader castles and modern histories* (Cambridge 2007) especially 84-101.

75 B. Z. Kedar, "*Civitas* and *castellum* in the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem: contemporary Frankish perceptions," *Burgen und Schlösser* 50 (2009) 199-210 = id., *Crusaders and Franks: studies in the history of the Crusades and the Frankish Levant* (London 2016) no. 22.

76 R. Ellenblum (transl. T. Bellorini and E. Hoade), *Frankish rural settlement in the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge 1998) 103-18.

77 Niccolò of Poggibonsi, *A voyage beyond the seas (1346-1350)* (Jerusalem 1945) 67 and 71.

78 E.g., William Wey's itinerary from 1458: B. Bandinel (ed.), *The itineraries of William Wey, fellow of Eton College* (London 1857) 129.

79 E.g., Francesco Suriano, Bonifacio Stefani of Ragusa, and Richard Pococke; see G. Golubovich (ed.), F. Suriano. *Il trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente* (Milan 1990) 145; B. Stefani, *Liber de perenni cultu Terrae Sanctae, et de fructuosa eius peregrinatione* (Venice 1573; repr. 1875) 267; R. Pococke, *A description of the East and some other countries*, vol. 2/1 (London 1745) 75, respectively.

80 Conder and Kitchener (supra n.7) vol. I, 410-11.

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monastery. One should recall that the large-scale excavations at Magdala showed that the town itself was nearly or completely deserted in the 5th-7th c. Solitary lavish and walled mansions in the countryside are known elsewhere in late antiquity (e.g., Spain, N Africa and Sicily), but to date not one has been found in Late Roman Palestine. Large bathhouse complexes with many rooms paved with mosaics are known from the cities of Late Roman Palestine (one was excavated in nearby Tiberias[81]), but no such bathhouses are known on rural sites of this period, and at Magdala there seems to be no settlement at this period for a bath to serve.

We should also keep in mind the other considerations: the impressive anchorage built adjacent to the compound in this period; the sources on pilgrimage to Magdala; the remains of a church previously seen at the site and the fragments of church furnishings, even if most are probably post-Byzantine; and the mention of a church in sources from the 7th/8th c. onwards. To these we should add the location of at least one tower in the compound, a feature present in many monasteries of the Judaean Desert and on the limestone massif between Aleppo and Antioch.[82] If we take all these factors into account, it is plausible to identify the compound as a monastery,[83] as Corbo and Loffreda suggested. It seems that by the early 6th c. the site was a pilgrimage destination to what was identified as the home town of Maria Magdalena. Later sources associate the site with the liturgy connected to her memory in Eastern Christianity. In the absence of published datable finds from the Franciscan excavations, the only dating criteria for the compound are the style of the mosaic pavements and the small finds from the bathhouse and superimposed structure that were published by Abu-'Uqsa. Those indicate that a monastery may have stood here in the 6th c. The monumental late 8th- or early 9th- c. structure built above the bathhouse would seem to indicate that it will have continued to function well into the Early Islamic period.

Magdala's geographical location seems to have contributed to the development as a pilgrimage site and as a monastic compound.[84] It lies at the intersection of two main arteries, one leading from the 'Akko plain through the Bet Netofa valley and then through Wadi el-Ḥamam (Arbel) to the Sea of Galilee, which served as the main route from the Mediterranean coast to Sepphoris, Nazareth and Kefar Cana and to the pilgrimage destinations around the Sea of Galilee (including Tabgha and Capernaum), and the other encompassing the Sea of Galilee. The conditions for mooring and sailing by the site were an advantage for pilgrims arriving via Wadi el-Ḥamam who wished to visit sites such as Capernaum and Kursi without continuing their journey on foot. The abundant local springs supplied fresh water while the rich soil of the adjacent Gennesar valley yielded ample produce. Building materials were available in the deserted town of Magdala for re-use.

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81 Unpublished; cf. R. Talgam, "Mosaic pavements from Tiberias," in Y. Hirschfeld (ed.), *Tiberias: from her founding to the Muslim conquest* (Jerusalem 1988) 125-31 [Hebrew].

82 See, respectively, Y. Hirschfeld, "List of the Byzantine monasteries in the Judean desert," in G. C. Bottini, L. Di Segni and E. Alliata (edd.), *Christian archaeology in the Holy Land: new discoveries* (Jerusalem 1990) 1-90; D. Hull, "A spatial and morphological analysis of monastic sites in the northern limestone massif, Syria," *Levant* 40 (2008) 110-13.

83 Cf. Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green (supra n.1) 173; J. Ashkenazi and M. Aviam, "Monasteries, monks, and villages in Western Galilee in late antiquity," *J. Late Antiquity* 5.2 (2013) 273-74.

84 On the connection between monasticism and pilgrimage in Eastern Galilee, see M. Aviam and J. Ashkenazi, "Late antique pilgrim monasteries in Galilean *loca sancta*," *Liber Annuus* 64 (2014) 559-73.

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To date, bathhouses are known in only a handful of monasteries in the Holy Land, but all contained hostels for pilgrims and all of those lay on major pilgrimage routes. They include the Monastery of Theodorus and Cyriacus, on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and the river Jordan;[85] the monastery at Ḥorvat Zikhrin on the road from Jerusalem to Antipatris;[86] the monastery at Tell Umm el-'Amer south of Gaza;[87] and the monastery at Kursi-Gergesa on the E shore directly across from Magdala. Recently excavated by the late V. Tzaferis,[88] it contains a compact bathhouse (*c.*100 m^2) adjacent to the hostel on the N part of the site. Tzaferis suggested that hostel and bathhouse provided an additional source of income for the monastery,[89] serving not only visitors to Kursi itself but also the pilgrims who journeyed along the route encompassing the Sea that was dotted with Christian sites. This theory suits Magdala too. To complete the route around the Sea, *c.*55 km in length, pilgrims traveling on foot would need to journey for at least two days. Magdala and Kursi, set about a day's walk apart, were both equipped with bathhouses, which may suggest that Magdala also had a hostel for pilgrims. In this case, perhaps the northern multi-roomed wing served as a hostel while the southern rectangular wing was a monastery. The Kursi and presumed Magdala monasteries shared other characteristics: their considerable dimensions (Kursi *c.*17.8 dunams, Magdala *c.*8.4); enclosing walls; nearby boat landings and breakwaters; and locations at the outlets of wadis and in areas with dense Jewish populations.

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85 D. Amit, J. Seligman and I. Zilberbod, "The 'monastery of Theodorus and Cyriacus' on the eastern slope of Mount Scopus, Jerusalem," in G. C. Bottini, L. Di Segni and L. D. Chrupcala (edd.), *One land — many cultures: archaeological studies in honor of S. Loffreda* (SBF Coll. Maior 41, 2003) 139-48.

86 M. Fischer, "Excavations at Horvat Zikhrin," *Qadmoniot* 71-72 (1985) 112-21 [Hebrew].

87 R. Elter and A. Hassoune, "Le monastère de saint Hilarion: les vestiges archéologiques du site de Umm el-'Amr," in C. Saliou (ed.), *Gaza dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Salerno 2005) 13-40.

88 V. Tzaferis, "New archaeological finds from Kursi-Gergesa," *'Atiqot* 79 (2014) 175-95.

89 Ibid. 184.

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