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The Caucasian Archaeology of the Holy Land

Armenian, Georgian and Albanian Communities between the Fourth and Eleventh Centuries CE

By

Yana Tchekhanovets

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Cover illustration: Mount of Olives, Byzantine gable above the entrance to the crypt. Photo by the author.

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Preface

The present study investigates the Armenian, Georgian and Caucasian Albanian Christian communities in the Holy Land during the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods. Monks and pilgrims of Caucasian origin played an active role in the multi-ethnic community of the Holy Land and established their own monastic centers, churches and scriptoria already in the formative age of the national churches of Armenia, Georgia (Kartli, or Iberia), and Caucasian Albania (Ałuank).[1]

Christianity arrived to the Caucasian lands quite early, long before the official conversion in the early years of the fourth century,[2] and became one of the determinative factors in the creation of national identity. The Christianization of the region was a long process, which extended over several hundred years, especially in the remote districts, far removed from the large cities and fertile valleys. The traditions of the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian Churches preserve a history of two waves of Christianization: the first is strongly associated with Jerusalem and the disciples of Christ himself, and the second, with the national 'Illuminators' and royal conversions.[3]

All three Caucasian Churches, especially the dominant Armenian and Georgian, oscillated between the Syrian and Greek traditions for a long time. The geopolitical position of the region made the church hierarchs highly dependent on the contemporary state of play in the great conflicts of the

1 The term 'Caucasian' was chosen here to serve as common definition for three neighbouring nations – Armenians, Georgians and Albanians – whose main cultural centers of the discussed period florished in the Southern Caucasian region. The objective national and geopolitical reality wasn't limited to geographic borders of the Caucasus and was even more complex than a modern 'Caucasian knot'. It included countless tribes and nationalities forming the population of the ancient kingdoms, with their expanding and shrinking borders, numbered spoken languages and vast territories, extended from the Caucasian ridge to Eastern Anatolia and the northern regions of Mesopotamia, united by the dominion of local dynasties or conquered and divided by foreign rulers.

2 The traditional date for the Christianization of the Armenian Kingdom is the year 301; however, the later date of 314 seems to have a historical basis: see Ananian 1961; Thomson 1988–89. Three dates were proposed for the conversion of Kartli: 320, 326 or 337: see Toumanoff 1963, pp. 83–84; Lordkipanidze and Mouskhelishvili 1988, pp. 49–52; Kiladze et al. 2007. Albania was converted sometime during the first third of the fourth century: Trever 1959; Papuashvili 1970; Bais 2001.

3 For discussion see Seibt 2006, Haas 2008, Karaulashvili 2012, 2016 and the comprehensive bibliography therein.

Sassanian and Byzantine empires. Nevertheless, the creation of the national ecclesiastical institutions, and the use of the local languages for liturgical needs, transformed the Caucasian churches into a formative and uniting force for the people of Armenia and Georgia, and to some extent also for Albania.[4] It was also a period of Christological controversies, which had considerable influence on the history of the Holy Land and of the Caucasian region.[5]

The earliest historical reports of Armenian and Georgian monastic presence in the Holy Land date already to the fifth century AD, soon enough after the conversion, and are associated with the names of the Armenian Euthymius the Great (ca. 377–473), native of Melitene in Armenia Minor, and Peter the Iberian (ca. 411–491), Georgian by birth; both became key figures of Palestinian monasticism. Archaeology offers similar dates for the beginning of Armenian and Georgian activity in the Holy Places. A number of Armenian inscriptions in the ancient *erkatagir* script and Georgian inscriptions in *asomtavruli* that were discovered in the Holy Land – in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Sinai – are generally considered to be among the earliest examples of the Armenian and Georgian writing.[6] The history of the Albanian community is the most obscure: apart from the palimpsests discovered in the Sinai, it left no known material traces in the region.

The first archaeological evidence relating to the Caucasian communities was discovered in the last third of 19th century. It is worth mentioning the report of the discovery of a chapel near the Mamilla Pool in Jerusalem in 1846, with an Armenian inscription: "Christ, have a mercy on the spiritual parents

4 Tarchnishvili 2001, Garsoïan 2004, Rapp and Crego 2012, and the extensive bibliography therein.

5 Garsoïan 1999; Rapp 2007.

6 All three national alphabets of Armenians, Georgian and Albanians were created *ex nihilo* in the fifth century, shortly after the conversion to Christianity, and were modeled on the Greek alphabet. The conversion generated an urgent need for translation of the Holy Scriptures and liturgical texts into the native languages. For an up to date discussion on the creation of Caucasian alphabets, see Seibt and Preiser-Kapeller 2011. The oldest examples of *erkatagir* in Armenia are the monumental inscriptions in the St. Sarkis basilica in Tekor (modern Turkey), dated possibly to *ca.* 490, and in St. Hripsime church in Vagharshapat, dated to 618. The oldest examples of *asomtavruli* are monumental inscriptions in the Sioni basilica at Bolnisi, Georgia, dated to 493–494. The Albanian inscriptions discovered in Mingechaur, Azerbaijan, are dated to 610. The fact that the some of the oldest dated Armenian and Georgian inscriptions and the unique Albanian manuscripts were found in the Holy Land, at such a considerable distance from the motherland, encourages the assumption that the ancient scripts were created in Palestine itself, possibly, by educated monks: see Seibt 2011; Codoñer 2014.

of Sarkis *vardapet*".[7] According to the report, the structure was immediately covered.[8] No trace of graphic documentation of this chapel has been found to date.

The proper "Armenian archaeology" of the Holy Land was born in 1871, when the Russian Church carried out construction works in Jerusalem, at the top of the Mount of Olives. In 1932, the first inscription that mentions Iberians (Georgians) was unearthed in the grounds of the YMCA complex in West Jerusalem. From that time, the number of archaeological sites related to the activity of the Caucasian Christian communities increased steadily, and is still growing today. Rich and diverse archaeological data still await scientific interpretation.

The present study aims at establishing the place of Caucasian Christian communities in ancient Palestine through synthesis of all the existing literary and archaeological evidence related to them. It seems important to understand the interrelations between them and their influence on the national churches of the Caucasus, starting with the Christianization of Armenia, Georgia and Albania in the early fourth century, and ending with the beginning of the Crusades (1099). Geographically, this investigation includes the area of the Holy Land in its traditional borders: i.e., the territory of modern Israel, Palestinian Authority, Jordan and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

The integrated study of the communities seems to have special importance: Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians are the only national Christian groups in multiethnic Byzantine Palestine, archaeologically distinguishable from the Grecophone majority of the monastic population in the country. The study concentrates on comprehensive analysis of the accumulated data, as well as the detection, characterization and comparison of the tendencies in the development of the Caucasian communities of the Holy Land. Certain specific broad subjects will be raised: the relations between the Caucasian Christian communities of the Holy Land themselves, and their structural and individual interactions with the Jerusalemite Church; the complex identity of the communities' members as reflected in the archaeological finds – architectural patterns, material culture, burial customs, linguistic preferences etc.; and the influence of the national communities of the Holy Land on the development of the Christian tradition in their home countries.

The basis of this book is the revised version of my PhD dissertation, submitted in 2016 to the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of

7 *Vardapet* – priestly title, unique for the Armenian church hierarchy, liter. "master of spiritual practices", "doctor".

8 Sawalaneants' 1931, p. 1040.

Jerusalem. I am deeply grateful to my mentors at the Hebrew University – Joseph Patrich of the Institute of Archaeology, Michael Stone and Constantine Lerner of the Department of Armenian Studies, for their patient guidance and for their most valuable lessons in scholarly behavior.

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List of Abbreviations

AAAS	*Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes*
AB	*Analecta Bollandiana*
AJNES	*Aramazd: Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
Alon	*Bulletin of the State of Israel Department of Antiquities* (Hebrew)
AS	*Anatolian Studies*
AT	*Antiquité Tardive*
ATS	Armenian Texts and Studies
BAIAS	*Bulletin of Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BGAS	*Bulletin of the Georgian Academy of Sciences*
BIE	*Bulletin de l'Institute d'Égypt*
BSAM	Beer-Sheva Archaeological Monographs
Baazov	*Baazov Museum of History and Ethnography of Jews of Georgia Works*
ByzZs	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*
CIIP	*Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*
COMSt	*Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies*
CSCO	*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
EHR	*English Historical Review*
EO	*Échos d'Orient*
ESI	*Excavations and Surveys of Israel*
EtTrav	*Etudes et Traveaux de l'Institut des Cultures Méditerranéennes et Orientales de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences*
GOTR	*Greek Orthodox Theological Review*
HA	*Hadashot Arkheologiyot*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUS	*Harvard Ukrainian Studies*
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
IAA Reports	*Israel Antiquities Authority Reports*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IIYIMK	*Izvestia Instituta yazyka, istorii i material'noi kultury*
IPS	*Ierusalimskii Pravoslavnii Seminar*
JbÖB	*Jahrbuch der Österreichenischen Byzantinistik*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JEH	*Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JMR	*Journal of Mosaic Research*

JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
JSAH	*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*
JSAS	*Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*
JSP	Judea and Samaria Publications
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LA	*Liber Annuus*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MedAnt	*Mediterraneo Antico*
MN DPV	*Mitteilungen und Nachrichtunger des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
MPMA	Monumenta Paleographica Medii Aevi
MUSJ	*Melanges de L'Université Saint-Joseph, Beyrouth*
OC	*Orient Chrétien*
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
PE	*Pravoslavnaya Encyclopedia*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PG	Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
POC	*Proche Orient Chrétien*
PPS	*Palestinskii Pravoslavnyi Sbornik*
RA	*Rossiiskaya Arkheologia*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
R&T	*Religion & Theology*
REArm	*Revue des Études Arméniennes*
REGC	*Revue des Études Géorgiennes et Caucasiennes*
RIGP	Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti Project
ROC	*Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*
RT	*Religion and Theology*
SBF	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SCI	*Scripta Classica Israelica*
SER	Salvage Excavation Reports
SH	Subsidia Hagiographica
SIPPO	*Soobscheniya Imperatorskogo Pravoslavnogo Palestinskogo Obschestva*
SWP	*Survey of Western Palestine*
TCL GT	Translations of Christian Literature, Greek Texts
QDAP	*Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*
VV	*Vizantiiskii Vremennik*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

During the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods no permanent Armenian, Georgian or Albanian secular colony is known to have existed in the Holy Land.[1] The presence of Caucasian Christians was restricted to monastic communities and pilgrimage. It is not always easy to distinguish between the monks and the pilgrims.[2] According to the literary sources, pilgrims often joined the local monastic communities and stayed in the Holy Land for years or even for their lifetime.

So far, the sole material traces of pilgrimage are graffiti left by pilgrims, mainly in the holy sites. The monastic communities left architectural remains as well. Identifying 'nationally affiliated' sites, and distinguishing them from other ancient ecclesiastical complexes, has always been a problematic issue. The archaeological approach to the problem is usually one-dimensional,

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1 The history of the Armenian lay community in Jerusalem which started from the artisans' families and grew significantly only after the Ottoman genocide between the 1880s and 1915, is widely discussed in the research. To mention only the main historical works written by the members of the community: Ter-Hovhannesiants' 1890; Sawalaneants' 1931 and the main scientific publications: Sanjian 1965; Stone, Ervine and Stone 2002; Mutafian 2012. Permanent Georgian lay community appeared in the vicinity of Jerusalem in the 14th–16th centuries, when the growing Georgian monasteries required working hands to farm the large agricultural lands that belonged to the Monastery of the Cross. A few dozens church serfs from Georgia were settled in Palestine, to protect the Georgian possessions and to work the land. Their descendants remained long after the Georgian clergy had abandoned its property in Jerusalem. At least two villages in the region of Jerusalem – Malkha and Katamon – are known to have been populated by Muslim Arabs that were descendants of Georgian settlers. Both these villages are within the grounds of the Monastery of the Cross; see Tsagareli 1888b, pp. 259–260. According to his evidence, the people of Malkha, about 600 in number, had long forgotten their native tongue and the faith of their ancestors, but all knew for certain that originally they came from somewhere in the North, from a far land, and they called themselves *gurji*. The Arabs also distinguished them as strangers. As protectors and servants of the Monastery of the Cross, the people of Malkha had an exclusive right to work the fields, rose gardens and vineyards of the monastery, yielding only one third of their harvest to the monastery. In turn, the monastery could not transfer the work to any other locals. Clermont-Ganneau (1896, pp. 459–461) mentions that the Muslim residents of the village paid special respect to the ruins of the church.

2 Bitton-Ashkelony 2002; Tsafrir and Di Segni 2012, p. 406.

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focused on one aspect of identity: civic, ethnic, cultural or religious, while in reality the identity can be much more fluid.[3]

The great majority of the international monastic community of the Holy Land spoke and prayed in Greek. The exceptions were a few Armenian and Georgian monasteries where, according to historical sources, the liturgy was celebrated in their own language (*V. Theodosii 18, 45–46; The Typikon of the Great Laura, 4*). Nevertheless, most of the Armenian and Georgian monks were merely members of large multi-ethnic Greek-speaking brethren, and only sometimes organized their own, ethnic monasteries. Their traces can only be found in Byzantine sources when the writer found it necessary to emphasize the nationality of the hero: 'Armenian', 'Iberian,' 'Lazic' or 'Bessoi'. It should be noted, that the word 'Armenia' in the early Byzantine texts could be used equally for Caucasian, Eastern Armenia or for Militene in Asia Minor, and the variety of names used for Georgians was especially large.[4]

To establish the 'identity' of a site, it is therefore necessary to look for artifacts with a specific Armenian or Georgian origin in the archaeological record, or to find inscriptions in national languages. However, some of the sites under discussion were also adorned with inscriptions written in Greek, or Greek in combination with Armenian or Georgian. The reason behind the language choice in these cases is obscure and will be discussed below.

Onomastic research is usually of little help, since most of the Caucasian clergy took Biblical or Christian names, common to all the Christian communities. Special difficulty is posed by the Armenians who came to the Holy Land from Melitene in Asia Minor, and were often bilingual or Grecophones.

Therefore, the basis for assigning national identity to sites should not depend solely on linguistic considerations. Obviously, the corpus of material evidence should include the epigraphic finds that have unequivocal reference to nationality: for example, the funeral inscriptions of Charate, described as an abbess of the monastery of Armenian women, or Samuel, called the bishop of the Iberians. A more sophisticated approach was shown by Di Segni, identifying the inscription from the Beit Safafa funerary chapel as one dated according to a Georgian era.[5]

To demonstrate the presence of a foreign group, at least of a temporary nature (short term visit, pilgrimage etc.), through archaeological remains, the researcher should look for artifacts of relevant foreign origin. Among the most important material culture markers that distinguish a foreign ethnic group

3 Hodos 2010; Knapp 2010, and the large bibliography therein; see also Bitton-Ashkelony 2010.

4 For the different names used for Georgians in the Byzantine texts see Van Elverdinghe 2014.

5 Di Segni 1993, 1997, pp. 641–646.

from the indigenous population, are specific types of vessels, and burial customs. The relevance of this analysis for the archaeological data obtained on the Holy Land sites related to the Caucasian communities will be discussed below.

The history of the Caucasian communities in the Holy Land has been the subject of several studies, usually with a focus on Jerusalem. The most important works dedicated to the Armenian community were compiled by clerics of the local Armenian Patriarchate, which has enjoyed continuous presence in Palestine since the establishment of the first monastic institutions. The rich archives of the Armenian Church preserve thousands of precious documents that testify to the activity of the community since the medieval period. The first history of the Armenian community in the Holy City was written by local priest Yovhannes (Hanna) *vardapet* in the 18th century (published in 1807). In the latter part of the 19th century, the Jerusalemites A. Ter-Hovhannesiants' (1890) and T. Sawalaneants' (1931) compiled two notable works that were based on these archival treasures. The subsequent compilations of M. Aghavnuni (1929, 1931) are less reliable, containing highly controversial and legendary stories, and should be used with considerable caution. However, all the authors were unaware of, or not interested in 'Armenian antiquities', and preferred to concentrate on the mythologized narrative of the early history of the community.

Research into the Georgian community had a different starting point, and was advanced not by the local educated clerics, but by scholars from foreign universities. In the 18th century the Georgian Church lost its share in the Holy Places, leaving in Palestine neither a monastery, nor an archive that could supply the primary sources for amateur historical studies. The first to describe the Georgian antiquities of Jerusalem was a Georgian bishop Timote (Gabashvili), who visited the Holy Land in 1750s. In the year 1883, A. Tsagareli, an eminent Georgian scholar in the service of Russia, was sent on an expedition to the Holy Land and Sinai to document and study Georgian antiquities.[6] Over five months Tsagareli documented the Georgian antiquities and manuscripts that were preserved in the monasteries of the Holy Land, primarily in St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai and in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In addition to the catalogue of antiquities, the study outlined the history of the Georgian community in the Holy Land. Tsagareli's research remains even today the first and foremost reference work on the subject, although it lacks archaeological evidence, which was unknown at the time.

The most valuable work for the present study is a list of non-Georgian historical sources referring to the Georgian presence in the Holy Places, which

6 Tsagareli 1888a; and the German resume, Tsagareli 1889.

was prepared by G. Peradze.[7] Another important work is the history of the Georgian community in Jerusalem during the 11th–17th centuries and its economic and social connections to Mother Georgia, by a group of scholars led by E. Metreveli.[8] Both these works are devoted mainly to the later periods. The same is true of the excellent study of A. Sanjian, who dedicated a significant chapter in his work to the early period in the history of the Armenian community.[9] As far as we know, no attempts have been made to write the history of the Caucasian Albanians in the Holy Land, due to the extremely limited material evidence, and even this is only recently discovered. However, the revived scholarly interest in the history of Albania in the last decade may provide the basis for such a work.[10]

Numerous studies have been dedicated to more specific fields: manuscripts, epigraphy, and mosaics. Manuscripts were always given the highest priority in the research of Georgian antiquities. The Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem and St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai were the most important cultural centers of the Georgian nation outside Georgia. The catalogues record hundreds of manuscripts preserved in the Holy Land.[11] The rich Jerusalemite collection of Armenian manuscripts preserved in St. James Monastery is also well studied and catalogued, however it preserves mainly medieval and later copies.[12]

The discovery of the forgotten library hall in St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, in 1975, brought to light a large collection of ancient Georgian texts. A trilingual catalogue of complete manuscripts was published,[13] and the study of fragmentary texts and palimpsests still continues. Especially significant is the discovery of the Armenian palimpsests in the collection, representing probably the earliest dated examples of Armenian manuscripts;[14] and the Albanian palimpsests, the only surviving texts of the Albanian literary school, and the sole material evidence to the presence of this national community in the Holy Land.[15]

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7 Peradze 1937, pp. 181–246. The Armenian sources related to Palestine were collected by Ter-Mkrtichian 1991.

8 Metreveli 1962.

9 Sanjian 1965, pp. 1–30.

10 To mention only the most important publications: Bais 2001; Gadjiev 2004; Nikonorov 2004; Alikberov and Gadjiev 2015, and the whole corpus of works related to the discovery of the Albanian palimpsests: Alexidze 2007; Gippert and Schulze 2007; Gippert et al. 2009.

11 Tsagareli 1888a; Marr 1903, 1940, 1955; Blake 1933; Garitte 1956.

12 Bogharian 1967–1991.

13 Aleksidze et al. 2005.

14 Gippert 2012.

15 Alexidze 2007; Gippert and Schulze 2007; Gippert et al. 2009.

The epigraphic finds related to the Armenian and Georgian communities have been extensively studied since the 19th century. Of particular importance are the studies of Stone in the Armenian field for the last 40 years. In relation to the Georgians, the most notable studies were published by Tarchnishvili (1955), Tsereteli (1960) and van Esbroeck (1982).[16] Remarkably, both the Armenian and Georgian inscriptions discovered in the Holy Land are among the earliest examples of these national scripts, and therefore have special importance for the study of Caucasian epigraphy.

The expeditions of the 'Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti Project' led by M.E. Stone,[17] revealed thousands of inscriptions that belong to the corpus of pilgrim graffiti. So far mainly the Armenian texts were published, while most of the Georgian ones have only partly been studied.[18]

Of great value is the recent contribution of the partly published *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae* (*CIIP*), which summarizes, among others, the giant corpus of Christian epigraphy of the Holy Land, including its Caucasian segment, and often proposes new readings or interpretations of long-known Greek inscriptions associated with the Georgian and Armenian communities.[19]

The early examples of mosaic art from sites attributed to the Armenian building activity that date to the Byzantine and Early Islamic period, were widely discussed in the past, and often misrepresented as examples of national artistic tradition.[20] In the last two decades, the close connection between the Caucasus and the Holy Land and its reflection in the architecture and iconography of the Caucasus became a subject of extensive research, with most interesting results.[21]

The number of purely archaeological publications in the field is extremely small and mainly includes excavation reports.[22] The large corpus of material

16 See also the recent survey by Gagoshidze 2014a.

17 Stone 1992–94.

18 For Georgian Sinaitic inscriptions see van Esbroeck 1982; for late medieval graffiti of the Holy Sepulchre church in Jerusalem, see Pataridze and Tchekhanovets 2016.

19 Di Segni 2012, *CIIP* I/2, various entries.

20 For example, Matsulevich 1961; Arakelian 1978; but see also contra: Narkiss 1979, pp. 21–28; Hachlili 2009, pp. 111–147, and Table VI-1a, p. 123; Talgam 2014, pp. 198–200, 204–205.

21 The most notable in the field of architectural studies are Plontke-Lüning 2007; Garibian de Vartavan 2009; Kazaryan 2012–13. For iconographic studies of sculpture and applied arts, see Machabeli 2008a, 2008b; Karanadze 2009; Hakobian 2010; Djavakhishvili 2014; for brief summary of Georgian material see Gagoshidze 2014b.

22 For excavation reports related to the Armenian presence, see Dmitrevsky 1885 [2006]; Séjourné 1894; Owsepian 1895; Schick and Bliss 1894, pp. 253–259; Amit and Wolf 2000;

evidence that testifies to the activity of the Caucasian Christian groups in the Holy Land has never been the subject of a single comprehensive investigation. A few publications refer to the Caucasian Christians in general discussion of the Christian communities or the ethnic composition of Byzantine and Early Islamic Palestine. An attempt to discuss the early Armenian data through the prism of theoretic approach to identity was undertaken by Britt, but rather unsuccessfully.[23]

In the 2000s, 'The Jerusalem Expedition', consisting of Georgian epigraphers, archaeologists, historians and art historians led by T. Mgaloblishvili, took an active part in the study of Georgian antiquities in the Holy Land, through a combination of archival research in Georgia and field work in Israel, actively participating in archaeological excavations of the Israel Antiquities Authority and Tel Aviv University.[24]

A similar initiative for a comprehensive and interdisciplinary study of the Armenian antiquities in the Holy Land is still unrealized. Traditionally, the field of Armenian studies, well represented in most of the academic communities worldwide, focuses on philology and modern history, leaving archaeology on the far periphery of the research. This is all the more reason to mention the fruitful collaboration between the Israeli armenologist M.E. Stone and the archaeological community of Israel, first and foremost with D. Amit. The most notable are the joint publications of the two dedicated to an archaeological complex discovered in Musrara, Jerusalem,[25] and an excavation project of a medieval Jewish cemetery in Eghegis, Armenia.[26]

Far more complex is the cooperation between the scientific communities of modern Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The complicated, sometimes even hostile relations between the three states have a detrimental effect on the scientific research, particularly in subjects related to interrelations between the countries in ancient times. Especially problematic is the study of ancient Albania, whose territory is mostly within the borders of Azerbaijan, but part of it is in the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) region, which is subject to territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The successful decipherment of the Sinaitic Albanian palimpsests demonstrates that investigation of

Stone and Amit 1997; Stone 2002. For Georgian community, see: Iliffe 1935; Landau 1953; Landau and Avi Yonah 1957; Corbo 1955; Seligman and Abu Raya 2002; Seligman 2004, 2015.

23 Britt 2011.

24 See Mgaloblishvili 2014.

25 See, for example, Stone and Amit 1997.

26 Amit and Stone 2002, 2006.

the communities in the Holy Land, if raised above geopolitical and nationalist barriers, may bring to light most important data relating to Caucasian history.

Notable is the attention given by the national schools of research to two Jerusalemite sites, which became the main ecclesiastical and spiritual centers of the Armenian and Georgian communities since the Middle Ages: the St. James Monastery[27] and the Monastery of the Holy Cross respectively.[28] Legendary traditions attribute the foundation of these establishments to the first Christian kings of Armenia and Georgia, or even to an earlier period. The following eloquent excerpt, which tells the story of the Armenian Sts. James compound in Jerusalem, confusing various historical periods, events and personalities, illustrates this common approach:

> Armenian pilgrims are mentioned along Roman roads when the army of Titus was approaching the Holy Land. Large groups stayed in and around Jerusalem. Those early Armenian settlements soon became important centers of religious and intellectual life (…) It is believed that in the first century, Queen Helena of Armenia[29] built a small chapel over the spot where the head of St. James was buried, and was helped by the Armenian soldiers of the Tenth Roman Legion, who were stationed at Herod's garden, which is at present opposite the Armenian Patriarchate.[30]

As long as the traditionary narrative and the scientific critical approach to historical evidence exist apart from each other, it is relatively easy to distinguish between the two. However, the indiscriminate mixture of legendary traditions with modern scientific terminology and an uncritical interpretation of material evidence may, and often does, create chimeric structures.

Examples of pseudo-historical compilations on the subject are countless and often cited. This dangerous tendency should be countered by basing research on reliable material evidence, and by a rigorous approach to the analysis of historical sources.

Hopefully the present work will help to bridge this gap in the study of ancient Palestine, and will present comprehensive and coherent research based

27 Vincent et Abel 1922, p. 551; Galoustian 1958; Tsafrir 1975, pp. 84–87 and 2013; Sanjian 1965, p. 12.

28 Tsagareli 1888a; Djanashvili 1899, 1912: 94–99; Takaishvili 1913: 154–162; Virsaladze 1974; Tzaferis 1987, 1993; Kühnel 1995, pp. 253–263; van Esbroeck 2000; Mgaloblishvili 2004, pp. 176–191; Didebulidze and Janjalia 2014, pp. 47–66.

29 Probably, Queen Helena of Adiabena, known from ancient sources as a Jewish proselyte: Flavius Josephus, *AJ* XX.2.1.

30 Antreassian 1977, p. 37.

on the synthesis of all the known material and historical evidence related to the activity of the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian communities in their early, formative period and will help to construct an objective picture, free of nationalist rhetoric.

Besides the obvious division along ethnic or geographic lines, the whole corpus of architectural remains and the material evidence associated with it should be further divided according to the reliability of the archaeological record. The finds revealed during stratigraphic archaeological excavations should serve as the primary and most trustworthy data for research, especially those discovered in the last 20–30 years. The architectural complexes and artifacts from amateur excavations of the 19th century, such as the Armenian monastery on the Mount of Olives, should be treated with considerable caution.

The assumption of higher reliability of the complexes discovered in recent decades is based on their more comprehensive recording within the archaeological context: today finds are documented not as isolated artifacts, but as parts of larger assemblages. Not only the 'beautiful', museum-quality works of art or inscriptions find their place in the reports, but also the 'modest', fragmentary objects are meticulously recorded in their stratigraphic context. The almost totally lost archaeological data from past excavation can, however, be reconstructed by modern research in a few cases. For example, the 'Bird Mosaic' with Armenian inscription that was discovered at the end of the 19th century in the Musrara neighbourhood of Jerusalem, lacks almost entirely any evidence regarding its archaeological context. The numerous reports published on this find concentrated mainly on its artistic qualities and on deciphering the Armenian inscription. The recent series of salvage excavations carried out some hundred years later by the Israel Antiquities Authority, uncovered parts of a large monastic complex, of which the 'Bird Mosaic' was probably an integral part. The new finds, even if still partly unpublished, make it possible to place the discoveries of the 19th century digs into a wider archaeological context. In other cases, as in the case of the British salvage excavations on the site of the future YMCA complex in Jerusalem, the material finds and the documentation files are physically preserved in the storerooms of the IAA and have been reexamined.

Certain sites excavated over a hundred years ago, however, were never properly published. The process of the excavations is unknown, graphic plans and other documentation are lost, and a great effort should be made to find their traces in archives and to reconstruct, at least partly, the archaeological remains that were exposed.

The substantial corpus of data that relates to the archaeological research of the sites associated with Caucasian communities, was obtained in the Israel

Antiquities Authority Archives. The Mandatory archive consists of Scientific Record Files (SRF) and Administrative Files (ATQ), ctreated by the British Department of Antiquities. All the files related to Jerusalem in these collections are fully digitized. The archive contains a colossal amount of archaeological documentation: inspection reports, hand-made sketches and plans, field photographs, excavation reports, and most intriguing – internal correspondence.

This archival documentation was particularly valuable in the study of the archaeological complex that was exposed on the site of the YMCA in Jerusalem in the 1930s, revealing the large quantity of unpublished documents, including field photos and plans. Moreover, the search showed that salvage excavations in this area were continued in 1947, but the results, supporting the identification of the site as a monastic complex, were never made public.

Equally interesting was the documentation preserved in the files of the Mandatory Antiquities Department about the conservation work in the Gethsemane area in Jerusalem, in the courtyard of the Virgin's Tomb. These documents shed light on the discovery of the tombstone with the Greek epitaph, which mentions the deacons of the Holy Anastasis and the Iberian monastery near the Tower of David.

The archive is today accessible online, with a convenient search engine and user-friendly interface (http://www.iaa-archives.org.il).

For the study of the Armenian monastic complex on the Mount of Olives, which was exposed during the construction works that were carried out by the Russian Church authorities in 1871–1873, various documents in the state archives of the Russian Federation are of great importance. The substantial corpus of data that relates to the discovery of the Armenian complex remains largely unpublished and unclassified until today.[31] The excavation process, the general plan of the complex and the corpus of related finds remain unknown, despite their importance for a proper archaeological and historical interpretation of the site. The documents include the diplomatic correspondence that mentions the discovered complex; the unpublished diary of the archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin), the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Palestine in the last third of the 19th century, who discovered the monastery on the Mount of Olives and described the day-by-day process of its unearthing; photographs, taken by members of the Russian mission during the excavations; and the documentation of the archaeological expeditions to the Holy Land under the direction of the Russian scholars Olesnitskii (1873–74) and Kondakov (1891) at the end of the 19th–beginning of the 20th century.

31 For published materials, see Lisovoi 2000.

Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin (1817–1894) played an important role in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Orient. A Byzantinist and a professor of the Kiev Theological Academy, he spent most of his life far away from Russia. In 1847 he was appointed to serve in Athens, and stayed in Greece until 1860, when he left for Constantinople, having been assigned as the priest of the Russian embassy church. In 1865 Fr. Antonin was appointed head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, which was established a decade earlier. In order to establish a strong position for the Russian Church in the Holy Land, he began to purchase land holdings and to build churches, hospices for pilgrims, and schools for local children.[32] He spent almost forty years in Jerusalem, and is remembered as the creator of 'Russian Palestine'.

A passionate antiquities collector, Kapustin often purchased plots of land 'with ancient ruins'. Archaeological remains were an important consideration in the decision to purchase the land for constructing the St. Alexander's Compound near the Holy Sepulchre Church, the St. Maria Magdalena Church in Gethsemane, the Ascension Monastery on the summit of the Mount of Olives, a guesthouse for pilgrims in Jericho, a large compound in Jaffa, and many more.[33] Some sites interested Kapustin only because of their archaeological significance. Such were the so-called 'Tombs of the Prophets' on the Mount of Olives and 'Pharaoh's daughter's tomb' in Silwan. Almost every building activity on the newly obtained sites was preceded by a survey of the remains, and excavations. Like many of his enlightened contemporaries, Fr. Antonin was an amateur scholar and antiquarian. He photographed and often excavated the sites purchased, and showed the most vivid interest in the research of ancient monuments. He was acquainted with the work of leading scientists working in the Holy Land in the last third of the 19th century, and knew many of them personally.

The mostly unpublished diary of Fr. Antonin includes all his Palestinian years, from his appointment to the position of the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in the Holy Land in 1865, until his death in 1894. It is an interesting and detailed source for the history of Jerusalem in the last third of the 19th century, presenting the most important events and personalities of the Holy City.[34] Publication of the manuscript started in 2010 and will continue

32 Fonkich and E.P.G. 2000, pp. 684–686.

33 For summary of Kapustin's archaeological activity on the acquired plots see Beliaev 2007, pp. 43–55; Beliaev, Butova and Lisovoi 2009, pp. 46–57.

34 The original notebooks are preserved today in the Russian State Historical Archive (РГИА), St. Petersburg. Собрание Св. Синода. Ф. 834. оп. 4. д. 1118–1132. For detailed description of the source and its research history, see Vach 2013, pp. 240–246.

for many more years. Some excerpts from the unpublished diary for the years 1871–1873, dedicated to the discovery of the Armenian monastic complex on the Mount of Olives, will be presented in this study.

Some of the Russian consulate diplomats showed great interest in the archaeological investigations of Fr. Antonin, and even took an active part in practical field-work. Others mention the discoveries just in order to supply a comprehensive report on the state of affairs in the Holy Land. The chase after the antiquities of the Holy Land became a subject of competition between the European empires and their church institutions, and therefore turned into a political issue. This purely political attitude can be seen in the reports of the Director of the Russian consulate V.A. Maximov.[35] This diplomat presents the complicated situation on the Mount of Olives, with the antiquities forming part of the general puzzle. The meaning of the discoveries does not interest the diplomat: he confuses facts and gives no comprehensive description of the discovered complex, but only lists some of the finds.

Of a totally different character is a report prepared by S.M. Dmitrevsky, the secretary of the Russian consulate in Jerusalem in the 1880s. This composition, titled *Russian Excavations on the Mount of Olives* was presented to the head of the Russian Imperial Palestinian Orthodox Society (*IPPO*), Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, a brother of Emperor Alexander III. The manuscript of the report is kept in the Library of IPPO in Moscow and was discovered and published only recently.[36] As is clear from the title, the report is dedicated to the discovery of the antiquities and to the subsequent construction work on the site. Dmitrevsky's report is well structured, consistent and helps to understand clearly the sequence of events in the discovery process. He also draws a general plan of the site, with its division into plots and the newly built structures, together with roughly marked ancient remains. His report may help us to understand the correlation between the upper structures, burials, cisterns and other elements of a large monastery, which is extremely important for an archaeological understanding of the complex.

Shortly after the discovery of the Armenian Monastery, in 1873–1874, the site was surveyed by members of the first Russian archaeological expedition to the Holy Land, directed by A.A. Olesnitskii. His brief report concentrates on the description of the underground structures unearthed on the site.[37] The report of the next Russian expedition, led by N.P. Kondakov in 1891–1892, pays special

35 State Archive of the Russian Empire Foreign Policy (АВПРИ) in Moscow, ф. Греческий стол, оп. 497. д. 2579. л. 11–16 об.

36 Dmitrevsky 1885 [2006].

37 Olesnitskii 1875, pp. 391–393.

attention to the architectural decoration revealed during the excavations of the ancient complex.[38]

Both Russian scientific expeditions to the Holy Land can be described as archaeological only in terms of the 19th century: their main focus, no doubt, was on the architectural and historical-geographic survey of the country. The solid reports published by Olesnitskii and Kondakov present the results of these large surveys and discuss the Mount of Olives complex only briefly. However, both expeditions prepared drawings and photographs of the monuments surveyed, although only small part of them was included in the final reports. Recently, the expedition journal of Kondakov was discovered in the Federal Archive of the Russian Academy of Science in St. Petersburg. It contains some interesting details regarding the antiquities discovered on the Mount of Olives and in the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem.[39]

One further study source is the collection of the 19th century Holy-Land photography from the archives of the Russian Imperial Palestinian Orthodox Society (IPPO).[40] Today the collection is accessible online (http://palestina.indrik.ru).

The collection includes over 7,000 pictures. The core collection contains the works of the well-known masters of Holy-Land photography: J. Graham, the Bonfils family, K. Krikorian, the 'American Colony' studio, etc., obtained by the IPPO between the years 1858–1917. Of greatest interest is the Russian part of the collection: photos by Fr. Antonin himself and by his assistants, works by Fr. Timon (Korotky), the official photographer of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, and the works of visiting Russian photographers, both professional and amateur: I.F. Barschevsky, A.A. Gagarin and others. Mostly unpublished are the pictures depicting the monuments of the Holy Land antiquities and their discovery. These photos are sometimes the only surviving documentation of various artifacts that are lost today. A number of photographs are relevant to the study of the Armenian Monastery on the Mount of Olives, documenting the ongoing process of the excavations and some of the discovered finds. For example, some photos present details that make it possible to draw some conclusions regarding the stratigraphy of the site; others show various details of architectural decoration discovered on the Mount of Olives, dated to the Byzantine period.

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38 Kondakov 1904, p. 257.

39 Federal Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ФА РАН), Ф. 115, опись 3, д. 12.

40 Photographic collection is kept in the State Museum of the History of Religion (GMIR) in St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER 2

The Literary Sources

The presence of Armenians, Georgians and Albanians in the Holy Land is attested in a number of ancient sources, from the end of the fourth century to the beginning of the twelfth century. Among these are documents of different character: historical chronicles, ecclesiastical documents of various types, pilgrim itineraries and hagiographic works. Within each category, the documents are presented in chronological order.

Chronicles

Procopius: De Aedificiis

De Aedificiis (*On Buildings*) was composed by Procopius of Caesarea (490/507–562), an eminent Byzantine courtier of Emperor Justinian, ca. 560.[1] Written in Greek, the composition presents Justinian as an ideal Christian ruler, who builds churches all over the Empire, including the Holy Land. Among the monasteries restored by Justinian in the area of Jerusalem, two Georgian institutions are briefly mentioned:

> The monastery of the Iberians in Jerusalem and the Monastery of the Lazi in the Desert of Jerusalem.
>
> *DE AED* V.9

Procopius thus verifies the evidence of *V. Petre Iberi* (*64*, Syriac version and *22–28*, Georgian version) to the existence of Georgian monastic institutions in Jerusalem and its vicinity. This evidence is the only reference of the imperial historian to the activities of the Caucasian Christian communities in the Holy Land.

Sebeos: The Armenian History

The Armenian History (*History of Heraclius*), written by Sebeos in the middle of the seventh century,[2] contains a correspondence between Modestos, the

1 Dewing 1954. See also: Cameron 1985, and a number of articles in the thematic volume *AT* 8 (2000), dedicated to Procopius.

2 Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999.

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locum-tenens of Jerusalem, and the Armenian Catholicos Komitas (Ch. 35–36).[3] Modestos thanks the Armenians for renewing the pilgrimage to the Holy City shortly after the tragic events of the Sassanian conquest. In his answer, Komitas talks of the consolation afforded to his people by the opportunity "to baptize their bodies [...] in the fiery currents of Jordan", to travel around Mount Sinai, and "to approach Mount Zion and the city of the living God" according to the apostolic direction. The practice of correspondence between the Armenian and Palestinian hierarchs is reflected also in the *Book of Letters*, a compilation of documents with a wide chronological range, from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries.[4]

Movses Khorenatsi: History

'The father of Armenian history', Movses Khorenatsi, in his *History* (III. 62) briefly mentions his visit to the Holy Land, most probably a legendary one, for pilgrimage and study purposes.[5] Traditionally, the life and work of Movses Khorenatsi is dated to the fifth century; however, most scholars today tend to date it to the ninth century.[6]

Movses Daskhurantsi: History of the Caucasian Albanians

The History of Ałuank Country, or *The History of Caucasian Albanians*, compiled by Movses Daskhurantsi (also known as Movses Kalankatuatsi) between the seventh and tenth centuries, is the only extant historical text about Albania.[7] *The History of Ałuank Country* is preserved in Armenian, but it is not clear whether it was originally written in Armenian or in Albanian. Being the only historical evidence to Albanian history, the source is of the greatest importance to this field of research. Interestingly, the final chapter of the chronicle (Ch. 52) contains a list of ten Jerusalemite monasteries that belong to the Caucasian Albanians according to the author:

> The monastery of Pand, situated on the east side of the Mount of Olives, built first by a monk named Panon from Albania and held at the present day by an Albanian priest.[8]

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3 The first Armenian Bishop of Jerusalem, Abraham, was appointed only in 638.

4 Tallon 1955; Melikset-Bek 1957; see also Stone 1986; Terian 2008.

5 Thomson 1978; Mahé and Mahé 1993.

6 For discussion see Garsoïan 2003–04.

7 Dowsett 1961; Arakelian 1983.

8 It was proposed by Gadjiev (2004) that the monastery holds the name of the Albanian Catholicos Pand/Pant.

> The monastery of Mruv, dedicated to the Forty Martyrs, close by the same region and now held by the Arab.
>
> The monastery of *Partava* in the name of St. Mary Mother of God, near the Tower of David. Half of it is kept by a woman from Shamkhor, called Miriam; while another half belongs to Arabs.
>
> The monastery of Kalankaytuk in the same region, at present half is held by a Christian named Theodoros, an Arab, son of Abraham, scribe of Abul Kami, from Aliovit, from [the town of] Zarisat, and half by the wicked and evil Arab.
>
> The monastery of Artsakh, named after the Mother of God, situated to the south of St. Stephen's, now wholly held by the Arab.
>
> The monastery of Amaras, named after St. Gregory, half of which is held by a woman called Grigorik, and half by the Arab.
>
> The names of the three other Albanian monasteries seized by the Arabs are not known. There is another monastery with the monasteries of the Afaweank in the middle of the suq now held by the Arab.
>
> It was owing to envy that the patriarchs of Jerusalem forbade the consecration of Armenians and Albanians by the monasteries, for there were more than a hundred of them. For these the Armenian princes gave 7 talents, that is, 70 000 dahekan, to King Justinian and thus wrested the monasteries from the tyranny of the patriarchs. Afterwards, however, through our lack of care, they all fell to ruins.
>
> DASKHURANTSI, 52

Some of the monasteries in this list appear also in the list of Anastas *vardapet*, where they are mentioned as Armenian (see below). It seems both texts derive from a common, unknown source,[9] and possibly reflect various stages of ownership on the same monastic institutions. Most of the monasteries in Daskhurantsi list cannot be identified today, but some of the locations are stated quite clearly. Two were located on the Mount of Olives – Pand on its eastern slope, facing the desert, and Mruv somewhere close to it. Paratava and Kalankaytuk stood within the city walls, in the west, close to the Tower of David. Artsakh monastery was located "to the south of St. Stephen" – probably, to the south of St. Stephen monastery, i.e. in the extramural quarter in Northern Jerusalem, between the basilica and Damascus Gate. Another monastery was built "in the middle of the suq" – probably, one of the market streets of the city, in the center or southern part of the town. As we shall see, this picture is not fully supported by archaeological data: all the evidences of national

9 Sanjian 1969a, pp. 286–287.

FIGURE 1 *Sites in Caucasian Albania, mentioned by Movses Daskhurantsi: 1 – Shamkhor; 2 – Kalankatuik; 3 – Partav; 4 – Amaras.*

Armenian and Georgian presence are rather pointing towards extramural location of the sites.

It is clear that the mentioned monasteries were known according to the origins of their builders. The toponyms point to the ancient Christian centers of Caucasian Albania (Fig. 1): Kalankatuik is located in the Utik region (territory of modern Azerbaijan), Amaras in Artsakh (modern Nagorno-Karabakh), and Shamkhor – not far away from Gareji Laura (border region between the modern Georgia and Azerbaijan).

The chronicle of Daskhurantsi also presents evidence regarding the pilgrimage of an Albanian monk named Mekhitar and his two companions from Artsakh to Jerusalem, where they receive the holy relics of St. George and St. Stephen (Ch. 50). Three years later the journey was repeated by another clergyman from Artsakh, Joseph, who hoped to bring home with him the relics of St. John the Baptist, but came back disappointed, for all the people of Jerusalem were affected by 'the contagion of Chalcedon'.[10]

Ecclesiastical Documents

The Typikon of the Great Laura

The Typikon of the Great Laura, also known as *The Rule of St. Sabas*, survived only in late copies, dated to the 12th–13th and 15th centuries. These copies

10 Stone 1986.

seem to contain early traditions going back to St. Sabas' lifetime (439–532); however, several additions, reflecting life in the monastery in later generations, can be clearly recognized.[11] For example, instead of the Armenian monks who lived in the Laura during St. Sabas' life, the survived text mentions the Iberians.[12] The Greek text supplies information regarding the presence of Georgian monks in the Laura, probably during the Byzantine period, and explains the liturgical practice of the non-Greek members of the monastic community:

> The Iberians or the Syrians [or the Franks] shall not be permitted to conduct a complete prayer service in their churches, rather, they will gather in them to chant the liturgical hours and the daily canon and will read the Apostle and the Gospels in their own language, and afterwards they will come into the great church and participate in the pure, life-giving Divine mysteries together with the entire brotherhood.
>
> *The Rule of St. Sabas*, 4[13]

The text clearly refers to the existence of national churches or chapels within the Laura. Since the rule of St. Sabas regulated monastic life not only in the Great Laura, but also in other desert monasteries that were established by the same saint and his disciples, a similar practice can be assumed in all of them.

However, it is difficult to establish the existence of a written liturgical text translated into Georgian already at this early stage: according to the known practice of the Jerusalemite church, the prayer may have been based solely on oral translation (*Egeria's Travels*, 47.3–5).[14] The liturgical regulations in the Great Laura of St. Sabas are also reflected in the Saint's *vita* (see below).

Commemoratorium

The Latin *Commemoratorium de casis dei vel monasteriis*[15] – the census of the major churches and monasteries in Jerusalem and its neighborhood, and their clergy, was prepared by the envoys of Charlemagne, perhaps by request of the Jerusalem church authorities, taking advantage of a period of good relations between the European Emperor and the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid in the year 808. The *Commemoratorium* is one of the few Christian documents that

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11 Dmitrievsky 1890; Kurtz 1894; Di Segni, in Patrich 1995, pp. 255–275.

12 Patrich 1995, p. 257, note 73.

13 Cited according to the translation of Di Segni in: Patrich 1995, p. 274.

14 Wilkinson 1971. I am grateful to Leah Di Segni for this observation.

15 Wilkinson 1977, pp. 137–138. For discussion see McCormick 2011.

shed light on one of the most obscure periods in the history of the Jerusalemite Christian community, the Abbasid period. Compiled in the hope of receiving political protection and financial help from Charlemagne, the detailed list of the Christian sites is generally accepted as a reliable source, although the precise number of clergymen on each site may be exaggerated.[16] The compilation of the text was made possible by a thorough reconnaissance and study throughout the country. Armenians and Georgians are numbered among the multilingual monastic population of the Mount of Olives:

> … hermits [*inclusi*] who reside scattered among their cells: xi who sing the psalms in Greek; Georgians [*Iorzani*], iv; Syrians, vi; Armenians, ii; Latins, v; one who sings the psalms in Arabic [*Saracina lingua*]. Along the steps, when you go up to the holy mount: ii hermits, one Greek, the other Syrian. At the top of the steps in Gethsemane, iii hermits, a Greek, a Syrian, and a Georgian; in the Valley of Joshaphat, i hermit.
>
> *Commemoratorium* 19–21[17]

The reuse of the ancient tombs of Joshaphat valley by Christian hermits in the Byzantine and Early Islamic period is well attested in the archaeological record; some epigraphic finds were also made in this context.[18] In addition, an Armenian establishment is mentioned, located on the Mount of Olives: "… at St. John, which the Armenians hold, vi monks" (*Commemoratorium* 24).[19]

Possible identification of this monastery with the 'Monastery of Pand' described by Anastas *vardapet*, and with the remains discovered on the Russian property, will be further discussed. No specific Georgian institution is mentioned. Interestingly, no specific statement is made about Armenian, Georgian, Syrian, or Greek monks in descriptions of the large monastic establishments of the desert – St. Sabas, St. Euthymius, Choziba and others – just the total number of inhabitants is given for each.

16 See Levy-Rubin and Kedar 2001, pp. 63–72.

17 Cited according to McCormick 2011, p. 207.

18 Schick 1890, 1891; Loffreda 1966; Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, p. 538.

19 Cited according to McCormick 2011, p. 207.

Holy Land Descriptions

Jerome, Epistle 46 to Marcella

Jerome (ca. 347–419/420) mentions the Armenians among other Christians from all over the world, coming to see the Holy Land. Letter 46 to Marcella, written in the name of Paula and Eustochium in Bethlehem, in 386, describes the charms of Jerusalem and the Holy Land and people streaming here, creating the multinational mosaic of the early Christian Palestine:

> Every man of note in Gaul hastend hither. The Briton, sundered from our world, no sooner makes progress in religion than he leaves the setting sun in quest of a spot of which he knows only through Scripture and common report. Need we recall the Armenians, the Persians, the peoples of India and Arabia? Or those of our neighbor, Egypt, so rich in monks; of Pontus and Cappadocia, of Coele Syria and Mesopotamia and the teeming east? In fulfilment of the Saviour's words, "Wherever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together", they all assemble here and exhibit in this one city the most varied virtues. Different in speech, they are one in religion, and almost every nation has a choir of its own.[20]

Itinerarium Placentini

The *Itinerarium Placentini*, dated to ca. 570, was compiled in Latin by an anonymous traveler from Piacenza.[21] The text mentions *Bessoi*, usually identified with Georgians,[22] in the description of the journey to Sinai, describing the three abbots of the monastery near the spring of Moses and the Burning Bush – i.e. St. Catherine's Monastery:

> It has three abbots who are learned in languages – Latin, Greek, Syriac, Egyptian and Bessan.
>
> *Itinerarium Piacentini*, 37[23]

20 Fremantle, Lewis and Martley, 1892.

21 Geyer 1965; Wilkinson 1977, pp. 79–89, and the discussion there, pp. 6–7; Limor 1998, pp. 219–246, and the discussion there, pp. 209–217.

22 For *Bessoi* as a name of one of the Georgian tribes, see Kekelidze 1956, pp. 84–98; Milik 1960–61, note 1; and contra: Festugière 1962, p. 124, note 291.

23 Cited according to Wilkinson 1977, p. 87.

Anastas Vardapet: List of the Armenian Monasteries

The List of Armenian monasteries in sixth-seventh-century Jerusalem, according to the tradition, was compiled by a *vardapet* Anastas, who visited the Holy City in preparation for the visit of his country's rulers.[24] This document, written in Armenian, survived only in later copies – the earliest known copy is dated to the 16th century – and in its known form can hardly be considered reliable. However, it seems to contain a core that reflects faithfully an earlier text which is not preserved, and which dates to the Early Islamic period, or even slightly earlier.[25] Anastas lists all the major and secondary sanctuaries of Jerusalem as Armenian, and states whether they remained Armenian or were transferred to foreign hands. He also mentions a number of Albanian monasteries and one Georgian.

Clearly, Armenians did not establish all the main sanctuaries of the Holy City that are mentioned by the author – among them the Nativity Church and the Holy Sepulchre. The list simply includes all the churches of Jerusalem, known to the author. Nevertheless, the list itself, regardless of the declared ownership of the holy places, may be relevant for our study, if the date of the creation of its core could be established.

There seems to be sufficient evidence to do so. A number of churches listed by Anastas: the Lamentation of St. Peter, the Forty Saints (probably, the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia), St. John the Baptist on the Mount of Olives, and more, are known from various Byzantine and Early Islamic sources, but not from medieval ones. All were abandoned or destroyed during the early period of the Arab occupation, most probably during the Abbasid period.[26] The numerous repetitions of the sentence "now occupied by *tačik*" ("Muslims") show that the author of the document visited Jerusalem sometime after the Arab occupation of the city in 638, but before the abandonment, or the destruction, of the churches mentioned. The original core of the document therefore, must reflect the situation of the Holy City in the Early Islamic period. It is worth mentioning that despite the medieval location of the major Armenian monasteries on Mount Zion, the author of the list describes them as located on the Mount of Olives and in the northern part of Jerusalem: locations where Armenian structures dated to the Byzantine and Early Islamic period have been discovered in archaeological excavations.[27]

24 Sanjian 1969a, pp. 265–292; Bogharian 1993; for recently published evaluation of the source see Terian 2016, who dates the original core of the document to the sixth century.

25 Sanjian 1969a, p. 266; Terian 2016.

26 Schick 1995, pp. 337, 348, 356.

27 Stone 2002.

The text of Anastas is the only source that mentions all three Caucasian Christian communities of Jerusalem. According to Terian, the mention of the Georgian institution reflects the traumatic separation of the Georgians from the Armenian Church.[28] Georgian property is mentioned in the list only once:

> The monastery of St. John, by the gate of Resurrection [Holy Sepulchre], which now is owned by the Georgians.
>
> *ANASTAS VARDAPET*, 45

Most scholars identify this site with the complex known from numerous documents of the 16th century as the birthplace of St. John the Evangelist, or the monastery *della Colonna* – the modern Franciscan monastery of St. Salvatore. Interestingly, this structure was once owned by the Georgians, but in a much later period: from the end of 15th till the middle of the 16th centuries.[29]

The source demonstrates the existence of four monasteries that belong to the Albanian community, one of which is mentioned by name. The text shows a certain similarity with the description of the Albanian possessions in Jerusalem by Movses Daskhuranci (52): most probably the two were inspired by one common source:

> The monastery of Pand, dedicated to Saint Karapet [St. John the Baptist], is located to the east on the Mount of Olives, which to date is owned by [Caucasian] Albanians; it too was built by royal expense, and named after the Holy Cathedral in the city of Vagharshapat. Three other [Caucasian] Albanian monasteries, now occupied by *tačiks*.[30]

28 Terian 2016, p. 287.

29 The Georgians possession of the monastery of St. John in 1489–1559 is well documented by the historians of the Franciscan order. According to them, after the expulsion from Mt. Zion in 1551 the Franciscans demanded from the Ottoman authorities some alternative place for a monastery, and were allowed to choose any convenient place. Their choice fell on St. John for two reasons: the site was close to Holy Sepulchre Church, and the Georgian owners of the place had seven other monasteries in their possession, but had not enough monks to man them all. Boniface of Ragusa, then a Custodian of the Holy Land, offered to buy the monastery, but the Georgians refused. Finally, in 1559 the Georgians were expelled from the site, and the place was sold to the Franciscans by the Ottoman Pasha. In 1593, 1594 and 1595 the Georgians made a few attempts to gain the site back, but without any success. The whole complex was rebuilt by Franciscans and received the new name of St. Salvatore. See he detailed bibliography by Peradze 1937, pp. 199–223.

30 Cited according to Sanjian 1969a, pp. 276–277.

Pseudo-Elisaeus: On Transfiguration

A document which describes the holy sites in a detail, but cannot be strictly considered part of the pilgrim itineraries, is an Armenian homily from the sixth–eighth centuries, *On the Transfiguration*, attributed to Pseudo-Elisaeus.[31] The text is an eye-witness account, describing in detail the pilgrimage of a large group of Armenians to the Mount Tabor sanctuaries. In addition to describing the monastic way of life and habits, the author emphasizes the wish of many pilgrims to stay in the monastery – one of the phenomena of the Palestinian monasticism, known from a number of hagiographic works. The testimony of this source regarding the pilgrimage to the sanctuaries in the north of the Holy Land can be examined in the context of the epigraphic evidences discovered in Nazareth (see below). However, the historical evidence relating to the Byzantine ecclesiastical institutions on Mount Tabor itself is confusing: *Itinerarium Piacentini*, ca. 570, mentions three basilicas at the site, as does Arculf ca. 690; Willibaldus in 723 mentions only one church, dedicated to Jesus, Moses and Elijah, and a *Commemoratorium* of 808 speaks of four churches, three dedicated to the Savior, Moses and Elijah (Math. 17:1–9), and the fourth unknown. From an archaeological point of view, the remains of the early churches are practically unknown. Some hewn structures that include a cave chapel, and presumably date to the Byzantine period, were revealed during the construction of the modern basilica in the 1920s by A. Barluzzi.[32]

Hagiographies

John Rufus: Vita Petre Iberi

Vita Petri Iberi, written by John Rufus ca. 500, is a source of information about Peter the Iberian (ca. 411–491) – an eminent Palestinian church authority of Georgian ancestry – and about early monasticism in the Holy Land. The text was originally written in Greek, but survived only in Syriac and Georgian translations.[33] The Syriac version is longer and, most probably, older than the Georgian one. The author of the composition was a close disciple of Peter and belonged to the Monophysite community of Maiumas.

31 Thomson 1967; Stone 1986, 2004.

32 Petrozzi 1976, pp. 146–147; Maraval 1985, pp. 292–293.

33 The Syriac version: Raabe 1895; Horn and Phenix 2008; the Georgian version: Marr 1896. For the discussion on the source see Lang 1951, pp. 158–168; Steppa 2005; Horn 2006, pp. 10–46; and Horn and Phenix 2008, pp. LVIII–LXXV; however in the last two publications the Georgian version of the *Vita* is almost completely absent from the discussion.

A son of noble parents, or even of Iberian king,[34] called at his birth Nabarnugios[35] or Murvan (Marouan),[36] Peter spent his youth as a hostage in the Byzantine royal court in Constantinople (*ibid. 24–30*).[37]As he grew up, he decided to escape to the Holy Land, and did so together with his teacher and compatriot, the eunuch Mithridat (*ibid. 31*). For the long journey they took with them the relics of Persian saints (*ibid. 32*). In Jerusalem both were received by Melania the Younger (ca.383–439), her husband Pinianus, and her mother Albina (*ibid. 39–41*). The two became monks in the Monastery of Gerontius on the Mount of Olives and received new names: Murvan became Peter, and Mithridat became John (*ibid. 44–48*). After the place of their origin, one was called Iberian, the other, Lazic.[38] Moved by the example of St. Passarion on Mount Zion, Peter decided to organize a monastery with a shelter for poor pilgrims (*ibid. 66–67*). The chosen place was Mount Zion in Jerusalem, near the Tower of David (*ibid. 64*).[39]

Following the advice of Abba Zeno, both entered a coenobitic monastery for a certain time (*ibid. 68*), and then came back to Jerusalem (*ibid. 70*). The Georgian version of the *Vita* mentions also the construction of another monastery in the desert:

> And then they left into the desert, gathered many brethren and built a monastery for themselves.
>
> *VITA P.IBER.,* 20

> And then the blessed fathers Peter and John went to the deserted place near the banks of Jordan River, and built a monastery there.
>
> *IBID.* 28

The text mentions also the construction of a church consecrated to the Blessed Mother of God in the desert monastery (*ibid. 22*). In the Syriac version the desert monastery is not mentioned.

Ca. 444 Peter and John left Jerusalem and moved to Gaza, where Peter was ordained as a priest, and seven years later became the bishop of Maiumas

34 For genealogy of Peter the Iberian, see the updated discussion by Horn 2014.

35 According to the Syriac version.

36 According to the Georgian version.

37 The verses are given according to the Syriac version of the *Vita* published by Horn and Phenix 2008, unless otherwise stated.

38 Lazistan, or Lazica – a region in Western Georgia, today in Turkey.

39 Tsafrir 2013.

(*ibid.* *72–75*). After many journeys to Egypt, Arabia, Phoenicia and around Palestine, and an active participation in all the ecclesiastical and political controversies of the time, Peter died in 491, surrounded by his disciples, in Jamnia (*ibid.* *177–181*). His disciples brought his body to his old monastery in Maiumas (*ibid.* *183–184*).[40]

Vita Petre Iberi is one of the earliest sources for Palestinian monasticism, reflecting the Christological controversies of its time. The Monophysite author describes the role of his teacher from the point of view of his own doctrine, while in reality the role of Peter in the conflict is unclear. Apart from the miraculous aspect of the story, typical for its genre, and the theological tendentiousness of the author, the *Vita* is a reliable source for the biography of St. Peter, one of the key figures of the Palestinian monasticism of the fifth century.[41]

It is important to stress that Peter's role in the monastic movement of the Holy Land was not confined to the Georgian ecclesiastical community, but rather he was accepted by all the streams of the Church. In his homeland, however, he was not particularly famous.[42]

Few attempts were made to relate the material evidence of the Georgians in the Holy Land to the activity of Peter the Iberian and his circle. In the 2000s, the 'Jerusalem Expedition' of Georgian scholars planned a large-scale archaeological survey of sites mentioned in the *Vita of Peter the Iberian*, spread over the territory of modern Israel, the Palestinian Autonomy, Gaza strip and Jordan. Unfortunately, this plan was never realized.[43] Until today, only the existence

40 Another author who may have touched on the figure of St. Peter is Zacharias Rhetor, also known as Zacharias Scholasticus or Zacharias of Mitylene (died in 536). The identification of Peter in Zacharias' writings as Peter the Iberian is generally accepted. Zacharias, a native of the Gaza region, who wrote in Syriac, probably never knew Peter personally, but mentioned him in a number of his works: *Chronicle* III, 4, 5, 7, 10; IV, 1; V, 4, 9; VI, 1 and 3: see Ahrens and Krüger 1899; Brooks and Hamilton 1899; Brooks 1914–1924; Greatrex et al. 2011; *The Life of Severus* 77–78, 83–89, 93–96, 98, 100, 102, 106–109, 111 and 115–116: see Kugener 1907. It has also been assumed that Zachariah wrote the hagiography of Peter. For a discussion see Honigman 1953, pp. 194–206; Lang 1951, pp. 158–168; Horn 2006, pp. 44–46, 159–160. Additional information on Peter the Iberian can be found in the *Universal History* of Stepanos Taronetsi (Asoghik), an Armenian historian of the 11th century: see Emin 1864.

41 For a discussion of the place of Peter the Iberian in the Palestinian monastic movement, see Kofsky 1997; Bitton-Ashkeloni 2004; Horn 2006; Perrone 2009. There is a suggestion that Peter the Iberian should be viewed not only as a monastic leader, but also as the real author of the philosophic works written under the name of Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite: see Honigman 1952; Nutsubidze 1958, pp. 84–145.

42 Marr 1896, pp. XX–XXII.

43 Gagoshidze 2003.

of certain Georgian establishments in the vicinity of the Tower of David in Jerusalem has been verified by epigraphic evidence, which was discovered during the excavations in the YMCA complex, at Gethsemane and Mount Zion (see below).

The Greek hagiographic corpus compiled by Cyril of Scythopolis (525–559),[44] and generally known as the *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, contains reports of the life and works of two of the key figures in Palestinian monasticism of Armenian origin: St. Euthymius (377–473) and St. John Hesychast (454–558), and of many more desert monks of Armenian and Bessian (Georgian) origin, some of them mentioned by name. In addition, the texts of Cyril supply the most important information regarding the place of the Armenian monks in the Great Laura of St. Sabas and the liturgical arrangements for the non-Greek communities inside the monastery.

Cyril of Scythopolis: Vita Euthymii

The biography of St. Euthymius is discussed by Cyril in detail in *Vita Euthymii.*[45] Euthymius was born in 377 to a noble family of Melitene, the capital of Armenia Secunda in Asia Minor (*V. Euth.* 2; ed. Schwartz 8.20–24). He was ordained as a priest in his hometown and was soon placed in charge of all the monasteries in the diocese. At the age of 30 he went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and chose to stay in the vicinity of the Pharan Laura (*ibid.* 6; 14.1–20). In 411 he moved to a desert hermitage, and established a monastery with his friend Theoctistus. The miraculous healing of the son of the Saracen tribal chief Aspebetus attracted many locals to Christianity, and Aspebetus himself became their bishop. Looking for solitude, Euthymius relocated to the far mountain Marda, near the Dead Sea (Masada fortress), and later moved to the Wildness of Ziph. When large crowds of admirers followed him again, he came back to the Judean Desert. The monastery was established by Euthymius in 428. According to Cyril, Euthymius chose to settle in a cave in the middle of an isolated small plain in the desert. By that time, monks start to gather around him, and the laura was built with cells for monks and with a decorated church (*ibid.* 14–16; 23–25). The popularity of the saint contributed to the establishment of various structures around the monastery, including the new monastic institutions founded by its disciples: the monasteries of Martyrius and of Gabriel, the church of St. Peter, and the church of the Saracens. The proximity

44 Binns 1989; Di Segni 2005.

45 Schwartz 1939, pp. 3–84; Festugière 1962 III/1; Price 1991, pp. 1–92, Di Segni 2005, pp. 73–139.

of the monastery to the Jerusalem – Jericho road attracted many pilgrims to the site, definitely contributing to its prosperity.[46]

When the monastery was still small, and the monks were needy, a large group of Armenian pilgrims, numbering 400 men, came there on their way from Jerusalem to the Jordan River. To offer comfort and food for the guests was possible only through a miracle (*ibid.* 17; 27.5–28.9).

Economically and socially the laura was tightly bound with the nearby Monastery of Theoctistus. In 457, young Sabas visited Euthymius, and was sent by him, as were many others, for novitiate to the Monastery of Theoctistus. The saint died in 473, and was buried in his monastery, in the funeral chapel built on the site of his cave hermitage (*ibid.* 42; 61.17–22). According to the will of Euthymius, a few years later the monastery was turned into a coenobium; the *Vita* describes the extensive works at the site, which included the construction of walls, a new church building etc. (*ibid.* 43; 64.14–21). A detailed description of the coenobium is presented in the work of Cyril, who himself spent ten years there (*ibid.* 43; 64.21–65.8).

The Monastery of St. Euthymius is identified with Khan el-Ahmar in Mishor Adumim. The site was excavated by four expeditions.[47] According to Hirschfeld, no preserved remains can be dated to the lifetime of Euthymius. The Byzantine structures – i.e. the funerary crypt, the church, the large water reservoir, part of the dormitories and the massive walls surrounding the monastery – should be dated to the coenobitic period of the monastery, although postdating the earthquake of 659.[48] In contrast to all the Byzantine monasteries of the Judean desert (except St. Sabas), the Euthymius Laura had an unusually long life: the last renovations of the complex are dated to the middle of the 12th century, when the central church was repaved, new chapel was erected over the tomb of the saint, new refectory and dwellings were built and the fortifications were restored. The end of the monastery is established in the 13th century.[49] No archaeological evidence of Armenian presence was discovered at the site.

Regardless of the origin of Euthymius, his role in the monastic movement of the Holy Land was never linked to the history of the Armenian community. Most probably, like many natives of Armenia Minor, he was a Greek speaker or bilingual. The episode of the 400 Armenian pilgrims probably should not lead us to assume some 'special relations' of the saint with the Armenians: the

46 Hirschfeld 1993, pp. 346–347; fig. 18.

47 Barrois 1930; Chitty and Jones 1928; Chitty 1930, 1932; Meimaris 1989; Hirschfeld 1993; Magen and Kagan 2012, no. 194, pp. 58–60.

48 Hirschfeld 1993, pp. 353, 362–365.

49 Ibid., pp. 356–357.

Armenian custom of traveling in large groups is well attested also in other literary sources.

Cyril of Scythopolis: Vita Joannis Hesychastae

No signs of special relations with the Armenian community can be found in the life story of St. John the Hesychast (454–557), the disciple of St. Sabas, as narrated by Cyril in *Vita Joannis Hesychastae*.[50] He was also born to a wealthy and noble family in Armenia Minor, in the city of Nicopolis – Devrighi in Pontus, modern Turkey (*V.J.Hes.* 1; ed. Schwartz 201.7–15). After the death of his parents he became a monk, and quickly progressed in the church hierarchy, becoming a bishop when only 28. After nine years, desiring a life of seclusion, he went to the Holy Land and joined the circle of St. Sabas (*ibid.* 5; 204.15–205.18). In the Christian tradition, St. John is commemorated as a miracle-worker and an anchorite of the strictest rule, living in seclusion in his cell for seventy-six years, and one of the first monks to practice hesychasm ('the inner prayer'). In his youth, Cyril met the elderly St. John, then 90 years of age (*ibid.* 20; 216.9–217.23).

One of the large cave complexes of the Great Laura of St. Sabas (Fig. 2), located some 200 m to the north-east of the monastery nucleus, is traditionally known as 'The Tower of St. John the Hesychast'.[51] The vertical hewn complex includes a dwelling cell and a water cistern, surmounted by hewn chapel, with remains of Greek inscriptions and a fresco depicting the companions of the prophet Daniel. According to Patrich, such large complexes with chapels were built to honor the most significant figures in the monastery, at the expenses of the laura, or by outside admirers.[52] No archaeological evidence of Armenian presence was discovered at the site.

Cyril of Scythopolis: Vita Sabae

The place of the Armenians in the Great Laura is well reflected in the *Vita Sabae*.[53] This monastery (Fig. 3), which was established by St. Sabas, the great leader of the Palestinian desert, in the Kidron gorge in 478, accepted many monks of Armenian origin, both natives of Armenia Minor, and Greater

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50 Schwartz 1939, pp. 201–221; Festugière 1963 III/3, pp. 13–34; Price 1991, pp. 220–244, Di Segni 2005, pp. 233–237.

51 The site was studied by Patrich 1993, 1994: Complex 29, pp. 79*–80*.

52 Patrich 1995, p. 106.

53 Schwartz 1939, pp. 85–200; Festugière 1962 III/2; Price 1991, pp. 93–219, Di Segni 2005, pp. 233–237; for discussion on the place of the Armenians in the Great Laura and other Sabaitic institutions, see Patrich 1995, pp. 46–47, 67, 250–251.

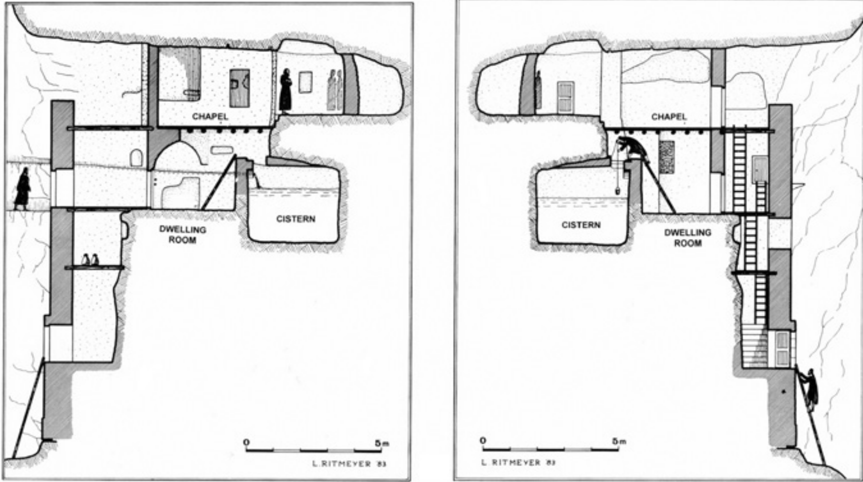


FIGURE 2 *The Tower of St. John the Hesychast, Great Laura.*
COURTESY OF J. PATRICH.

FIGURE 3 *The Great Laura of St. Sabas.*
COURTESY OF M. SHENKAR.

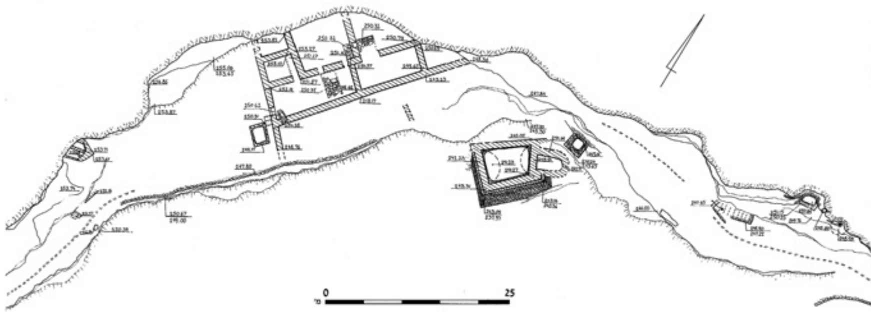


FIGURE 4 *The Laura of Jeremias.*
COURTESY OF J. PATRICH.

Armenia.[54] The Armenians constituted the second largest linguistic group in the Great Laura, after the Greeks (*V.Sab*. 20–21; ed. Schwartz 105–106; 32; 117–118). The first Armenians to join the monastery ca. 491 were Jeremias and his disciples Peter and Paul, who received cells and a small oratory on the eastern bank of the Kidron (20; 105). This first Armenian chapel has not been located in archaeological surveys of the laura.

Later on, in 531, Jeremias accompanied St. Sabas on his visit to the royal court of Justinian, and was appointed hegumen of his own monastery (74; 179). The Laura of Jeremias is identified with remains in Kh. ez-Zaraniq, 2.5 km north-east of Jebel Muntar (Fig. 4).[55] The nucleus of the monastery includes the remains of the chapel, monks' dwellings, bakery with kitchen, and water reservoirs. Three additional groups of cells were surveyed in the vicinity. No evidence of Armenian presence was discovered at the site.

The first monks in the coenobium of Castellion, established in 492, were natives of Miletene (*V.Sab*. 27; ed. Schwartz 110–112). The coenobium of Castellion is identified with El-Mird/Hyrcania (Fig. 5). The archaeological survey of the site showed that the Byzantine monks used the foundations of the Herodian structures to build the monastery. Among the finds are the chapel with mosaic floors, paved courtyard with water cisterns, the burial cave decorated with

54 Patrich 1995, pp. 46–47.

55 The site was studied by Patrich 1994, site no. 14, pp. 41*–43*; see also Magen and Kagan 2012, no. 227, p. 110.

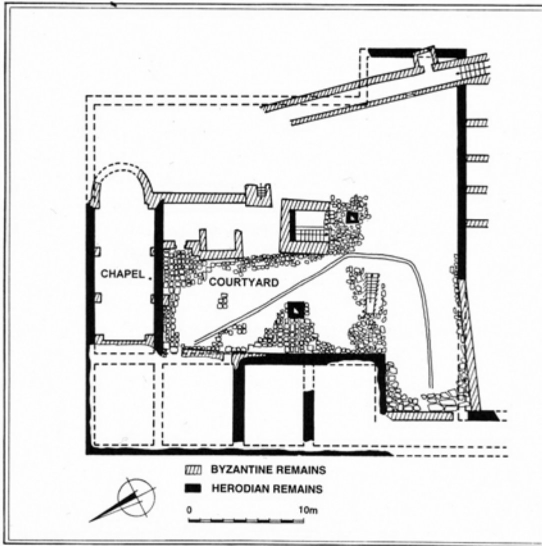


FIGURE 5 *The coenobium of Castellion.*
COURTESY OF J. PATRICH.

frescoes with Greek inscriptions, and numerous water installations. No evidence of Armenian presence was discovered at the site.[56]

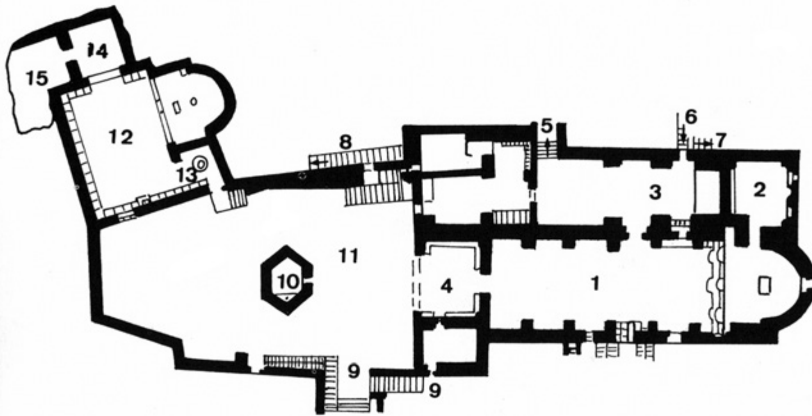
In the Great Laura, after the construction of the new large church dedicated to the Theotokos in 501 (Fig. 6.1), the growing Armenian community received the cave church of Theoktistos (Fig. 6.12), previously used by the Greek brethren, to accommodate their needs (*V. Sab*. 32; ed. Schwartz 117).

The Great Laura of St. Sabas (Mar Saba) is the only monastery in Palestine that existed since its establishment in the fifth century to the present day, with few periods of desertion in 1380–1480, around 1540 and in 1580–1592.[57] Archaeologically, the Great Laura and its surroundings were studied during the extensive survey of Patrich (1994, 1995). The nucleus of the monastery[58] is built along the side of the Kidron cliff. Its Byzantine core includes two churches: the main church of Theotokos and the cave-church of Theoktistos, nowadays dedicated to St. Nicolas, a paved courtyard with the tomb of St. Sabas, monks' dwellings, a guesthouse, storage and household facilities, water cisterns and fortifications. Forty-five dwelling complexes are documented in the gorge of

56 Patrich 1994, site no. 69, pp. 59*–60*.

57 Patrich 2001.

58 Patrich 1994, Complex 31, pp. 80*–81*.



12. Mar Saba. Plan of the two main churches: the Theoktistos Church, now dedicated to St. Nicholas of Myra; the Theotokos Church, the main church.

Legend
1. Theotokos Church
2. Sacristy
3. Northern narthex
4. Narthex
5. Passage to northern section
6. Staircase to refectory and kitchen
7. Staircase to balcony
8. Open corridor to the entrance gate
9. Passage to the southern cells
10. Sabas' tomb
11. Courtyard (cemetery underneath)
12. St. Nicholas Chapel (ancient Theoktistos Church)
13. Baptistry
14. *Diakonikon* (display of monks' skulls)
15. Repository of monks' bones

FIGURE 6 *The Great Laura of St. Sabas.*
COURTESY OF J. PATRICH.

Kidron. Apart from the Georgian manuscripts (see below), no material signs of Armenian or Georgian presence were discovered in the main complex or the surrounding hermitages.[59]

The text of the *vita* makes it possible to follow the changes in the liturgical regulations, which were established for the benefit of the Armenian members of the community.[60] First, the Armenians were allowed to conduct the office of psalmody in their small oratory in the Armenian language (*V.Sab*. 20; ed. Schwartz 105.10–11). After the moving of the Armenians to the Theoktistos

59 Recently, a Georgian graffito was discovered in a recluse cell, located far away from the Great Laura, on a mountainious cliff on the western side of the Dead Sea. I am grateful to Uri Davidovich and Roi Porat of Hebrew University for sharing with me this find, still unpublished.

60 After Patrich 1995, pp. 250–251.

cave church, Sabas permitted them to hold their services – reading the scriptures, reciting the Psalms and other prayers – in Armenian, but they were to join the Greek community for the proscomedia and Eucharist (32; 117.21–23). When Sabas learned that the Armenians were reciting the Trisagion hymn in Armenian, and adding the phrase "Who was crucified for us", he ordered them to recite this hymn in Greek, according to the traditional version.[61] Further, Sabas prescribed for the Armenians to assemble and pray in their church during the Saturday service, but for the proscomedia they were to cross the monastery courtyard and join the Greek-speaking members of the community in the main church. During the Sunday service, the Armenians should gather with the Greeks in the main church for the entire course of the rite. For the night vigil each congregation could stay in its own church (32; 118.17). Similar regulations are described in the *Rule of St. Sabas* (see above), but instead of Armenians, the text mentions Syrians and Iberians. Most probably, similar arrangements existed also in the coenobium of St. Theodosius.

In addition, the text provides information regarding the *Bessoi* monks, who took an active part in the street clashes that were provoked in Jerusalem by the edict of Justinian in the year 543. They fought on the side of the Orthodox, together with the Sabaite monks. Cyril mentions the *Bessi* monk Theodulus who bravely fought alone against the crowd, until he was hit by a stone, and died a few days later (86; 193.24–194.12).

Cyril of Scythopolis: Vita Theodosii

Cyril was also the author of *Vita Theodosii*, the hagiography of St. Theodosius the Cenobiarch (ca. 423–529), the father of the coenobitic monasticism of the Judean desert, who founded the monastery that now carries his name in 479 (Fig. 7).[62] From the text we learn that after the death of Theodosius, Sophronius (d. 543), a native of Zomeri near Sebasteia in Armenia Minor succeeded to the office of hegumen (*V. Theod.* 5; ed. Schwartz 240.1). Sophronius left his homeland in his youth and came to Palestine, where he soon took monastic vows in the coenobium of Theodosius. During the fourteen years

61 According to the Chalcedonian doctrine, the addition of "who was crucified for us" to the Trisagion, which is dedicated to the Holy Trinity, expresses the Monophysite position regarding the Cross sacrifice: not only the human, but the divine was crucified. The position of the anti-Chalcedonian communities, is that the Trisagion is a prayer which appeals not to the Holy Trinity, but only to its second hypostasis – the Son, and calls him "holy, strong and immortal", in denial of all the Arian and Nestorian heresies. See Sarkissian 1975.

62 Schwartz 1939, pp. 235–240; Festugière 1963, III/3, pp. 57–62; Price 1991, pp. 262–268; Di Segni 2005, pp. 251–256.

FIGURE 7 *The monastery of St. Theodosius (Deir Dosi).*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

of his rule, Sophronius extended the territory of the monastery four times, built a new church, and expanded the brethren thrice. The text also speaks of Sophronius' nephew Mammas the Eunuch, former cubicularius and courtier of the Emperor Anastasius I, who contributed all his wealth to the monastery (5; 240.16–21).

Theodore of Petra: Vita Theodosii

The additional *Vita Theodosii*,[63] the expanded hagiography of the saint written in Greek by his disciple Theodore, bishop of Petra ca. 530, mentions the special liturgical practices for non-Greek communities of the coenobium, which included Armenians and *Bessoi*. In each of their churches the daily liturgy, including the scriptures reading and the reciting of Psalms and prayers, was held in their own languages, but for the proscomedia all gathered in the main church for a common ceremony with the Greek-speakers (Theod. Petr., *V. Theod.*18; 45–46). The text makes no mention of the next hegumen, Sophronius, nor of his nephew Mammas, and attributes the expansion of the coenobium to Theodosius himself.

The coenobium of St. Theodosius (Deir Dosi) is located 7 km south-east of Bethlehem, on the fringe of the Judean desert. The ancient structure, abandoned sometime in the Early Islamic period, and reconstructed in the medieval period, was totally rebuilt in the 1890s. C. Schick, who visited the site prior

63 Usener 1890 (1975); Festugière 1963 III/3, pp. 81–160.

to reconstruction, documented the burial cave with the tomb of Theodosius, the main church, dwellings and storage areas, as dated to the Byzantine period.[64] During the modern archaeological survey the fragments of Byzantine enclosure walls and large water reservoir were found.[65] No evidence of the Armenian or Georgian presence was discovered at the site.

John Moschus: Leimonarion

The presence of monks of Armenian and Georgian origin in Palestinian desert monasteries is reflected also in the *Leimonarion* (*Pratum Spirituale*) by John Moschus, which was compiled in Greek during the voyages of the author, a Palestinian monk at the end of the sixth – beginning of the seventh century, to the monasteries of the Holy Land, Sinai and Egypt.[66] In search of monastic wisdom, Moschus with his companion, Sophronius, the future Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638) – visited dozens of monasteries and talked to hundreds of people. Hence, his composition became a great portrait of the Byzantine monasticism at its zenith, a few years before the Sassanian and Arab invasions. The author emphasizes the spiritual aspect of the stories, yet pays attention to geographical details and to the national identity of his heroes.

The biography of Moschus, especially his first years, is obscure. Sometimes Palestine is identified as his homeland, sometimes Damascus or Cilicia. Moschus became a monk in Palestine, in the Monastery of St. Theodosius, and later spent ten years in the Pharan Laura. After his first journey to Egypt, he spent ten more years in a Laura of the Aeliotes;[67] later he came back to Jerusalem and continued his journeys among the monastic centers of Palestine. Georgians treat Moschus with special respect and consider him their compatriot. According to the tradition of the Georgian Church, he was born in the Meskhi region, in south – western Georgia.[68]

Two episodes of the text mention monks of Armenian origin: the first is Patricius, an elder 113 years of age, "a native of Sebasteia in Armenia",[69] who

64 Schick 1899; Pringle 1998, vol. II, Fig. 74.

65 Hirschfeld 1990, pp. 26–28.

66 Migne, PG 87.3: 2847–3116; Rouet de Journel 1949; Wortley 1992; Déroche, Bouchet et Congourdeau 2007.

67 The location of the site is under debate: according to the Greek version, it should be located in Sinai. Nevertheless, most scholars identify it in the Judean Desert. For discussion, see Augustinović 1951, pp. 113–114; Hirschfeld 1990, pp. 55–56.

68 Nutsubidze 1958, pp. 149–150, 188–199; Gvaramia 1962; Khintibidze 1989, pp. 50–51.

69 Sebasteia in Armenia Minor, since 392 the capital of the province Armenia Prima, modern Sivas in Turkey.

refused the position of hegumen in his Laura of Abazan and came to live as a simple monk in the "monastery of our holy father Theodosios" (*Pratum*, 95).

The second episode mentions "Sergios the Armenian", the attendant of Abba Sergios the anchorite, who lived at the time in the Judean Desert (*Pratum*, 138 and 139). Patricius the Armenian is clearly a native of Armenia Minor; which of the two Armenias was the homeland of Sergios, remains unknown.

Another episode of the *Pratum* is relevant to the Georgian research. It tells of a dog that showed the way to one of the desert monasteries near the Jordan River (*Pratum*, 157). In the text, the Soubibes Monastery of the *Bessoi* near the Jordan River is mentioned. This monastery is also known from *Vita Sabae*, 86. The site is identified with a coenobium to the north of Wadi el-Qilt.[70]

Anastasius the Sinaite

Georgian and Armenian monks and pilgrims in Sinai are also mentioned in the Greek paterikon of Anastasius the Sinaite, a collection of short stories completed in the seventh century by this Sinaitic monk.[71] Anastasius, like Moschus before him, concentrated on the monastic wisdom, but his didactic stories may help reconstruct the ascetic life of the period.

One of the episodes recalls a desert father named Michael the Iberian and his disciple Eustaphius the Laz (*Anastasius*, 8). As in the story of Peter the Iberian, the author introduces a couple of monks that came from different regions of ancient Georgia: Iberia and Lazica.

In a different episode, the author describes a large group of 800 Armenian pilgrims ascending Mount Sinai, where they witnessed a miraculous fire (*Anastasius*, 38).[72]

Valuable information regarding the Georgian pilgrimage to the Holy Land can be derived from the *vitae* of two Georgian saints – David Garejeli and Hilarion the Iberian.

Arsenius: Life of David Garejeli

David Garejeli, an ascetic of the middle sixth century, is one of the most venerated saints of the Georgian Church, one of the '13 Syrian Fathers' who established monastic life in Georgia. He was the founder, and later the superior of

70 Féderlin 1903, pp. 300–301. See also Hirschfeld 1990, p. 55.

71 It is not clear whether the collection was compiled by Anastasius, a Sinaitic monk, or by Anastasius the Sinaite, the seventh century hegumen of St. Catherine's Monastery and a theologian. For French translation see Nau 1902a, 1902b.

72 Mayerson 1982; Stone 1982, 1986.

the famous Gareji Laura in the Kakheti region, Eastern Georgia.[73] His Georgian hagiography is part of the cycle known as *The Lives of the Syrian Fathers*, composed by the Patriarch of Georgia Arsenius II, and dated to ca. 955–980.[74]

According to the *vita*, David Garejeli went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a group of his disciples, but never entered Jerusalem. Approaching the high hill above the city, "the summit of Grace", he found himself too unworthy to walk in the footsteps of Christ. David took three small stones as souvenirs, and with them "the whole grace of Jerusalem." His companions continued on their pilgrimage, and he turned back to Gareji.

After the miraculous vision of the Jerusalemite Patriarch, two stones were taken back to the city, and the third one remained with David and found its place in the Gareji Monastery:

> Thus the Lord commands you – Through your faith, you have taken away the grace and favor from my holy city of Jerusalem, but it has seemed good to me to restore two parts to Jerusalem, so that the city may not be entirely excluded from my mercies; but I will present a third of it to you to take back to your wilderness. Go then in peace and take this stone as a sacred relic to your hermitage, as a memorial and a testimony to your faith.[75]

The 'stone of grace' was indeed brought back to the Gareji Laura, and became one of the most venerated relics of the Caucasus, increasing the number of the monks residing in Gareji and stimulating the pilgrimage to the site from all the neighboring countries.[76] Today the stone of David is preserved in the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The chronological gap between the events described in the text and the date of the composition itself, makes this source less reliable regarding the historical details of the Byzantine period. Even if the text describes the historical reality of the time of its composition however, its relatively early date (tenth century) makes it possible to treat this didactic story as an important source-evidence for the Georgian pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the Byzantine – Early Muslim periods.

73 Skhirtladze 2001.

74 Abuladze 1963; see also Sabinin 1871 (1994); Lang 1976, pp. 81–93; Martin-Hisard 1985–86; Gabidzashvili 2006.

75 Cited according to Lang 1976, p. 92.

76 Skhirtladze 1985; Kldiashvili 2001; Mirianashvili 2014.

Life of Hilarion the Iberian

Hilarion the Iberian (ca. 822–875) lived in the Kakheti region in Eastern Georgia and served as hegumen of one of the monasteries in Gareji. His *vita* was composed in one of the Georgian monasteries of Mount Athos, in the circle of the disciples of St. Euthymius Hagiorite (Euthymi *Mtazmindeli*), sixty or seventy years after the death of the saint.[77]

There are three extant versions of the text, the earliest, which is the original one, is a short composition dated to the tenth century; the other two are extended versions, embellished with numerous miraculous stories and dated to the eleventh century.

According to the text, one day Hilarion decided to leave his hegumen position, and went on a long pilgrimage to the Holy Land. With his companions, he traveled to Palestine through Syria. After meeting with a gang of robbers and other adventures, they reached the Holy Land. The *Vita* mentions their visit to Mount Tabor, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the Jordan River and the Laura of St. Sabas. Here Hilarion remained for seven years in the cave of a monastic hermitage.[78] This long pilgrimage ended with a miraculous vision of the Virgin Mary, who ordered the ascetic to return home.

The places which Hilarion visited on the way are described in considerable detail, making it possible to reconstruct the Georgian pilgrimage routes at the time and compare them with routes that are known from non-Georgian sources. As a discussion of one of the most obscure periods in the history of the Christian communities in Palestine, this document is of particular importance.

A later period of the Georgian community history, including description of the establishment of the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem in the 11th century, is reflected in the Georgian *Vitae* of St. George the Hagiorite and Prochorus Shavsheli.

Giorgi Mtsire: Life of George the Hagiorite

The hagiography of St. George the Hagiorite (Giorgi *Mtazmindeli*), the great Georgian ascetic and translator of holy books who lived in the 11th century, was compiled by his disciple Giorgi Mtsire soon after the death of the saint in 1065.[79] This Georgian text is generally accepted as a reliable source to the creation

77 Abuladze et al. 1967; see also Peeters 1913, pp. 236–269; Martin-Hisard 1981; Tsulaya 1998.

78 According to the extended version, the saint stayed not for seven, but for seventeen years in the cave of the prophet Elijah.

79 Abuladze et al. 1968; See also Sabinin 1871; Peeters 1917–19; van Ortroy et al. 1917; van Esbroeck 2000.

and development of the Georgian literary school of Mount Athos.[80] Beside the detailed description of the great translator's life, it contains an interesting passage on his visit to Jerusalem. The purpose of this journey was to deliver donations offered by the Georgian king Bagrat IV (1027–1072) and his mother Maria. According to the *Vita*, St. George with only one companion, reached the Holy City in 1056, visited many monasteries and brought the generous donations for the poor and needy of Jerusalem. Georgians also participated in the Byzantine project of reconstructing the Holy Sepulchre Church, which had been destroyed by the Caliph Al-Hakim.[81]

Judging by the text, the active participation of the Bagrationi royal family in the affairs of the Holy Land started in the middle of the 11th century. The gifts and donations brought to Jerusalem by St. George the Hagiorite represent the starting point of centuries of care and support of the Georgian ecclesiastical institutions in Palestine by the kings of the Bagrationi dynasty.[82]

The text also contains important information regarding the construction of the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem, and mentions the founder of the monastery, Prochorus:

> In these times the blessed Prochorus, according to the wish of the pious king Bagrat, constructed the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem.

Since the visit of the saint to Jerusalem is precisely dated, it is clear that in 1056 the monastery was still under construction. However, Prochorus was already collecting manuscripts. According to the text, Prochorus had asked St. George to supply the new monastery with some manuscripts – his translations of some sacred texts and liturgical books. This wish was only fulfilled after Prochorus's death.

For comment, it is necessary to add a note on the available information regarding the royal pilgrimages as reflected in the Georgian historical tradition, which associates the first pilgrimage with the names of the first Christian monarchs of the Kartli: Mirian III and Vakhtang Gorgasali, who visit the Holy

80 Djanashvili 1899; Shiolashvili 1960; Lefort 1985, 1990, 1994, 1995.

81 Ousterhout 1989, and further references therein.

82 The Bagrationi dynasty continued to rule the Georgian Kingdom until its alliance with the Russian Empire in 1783 ('The treaty of Georgievsk'), followed by the country's annexation in 1802. The last attempts of the Bagrationi royal house to protect the possessions of the national church in the Holy Land are reflected in the correspondence between the Georgian kings and the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem Dositheos II in 1699–1707. See Iosseliani 1866.

Land, and also received a precious gift from the Byzantine Emperor: the land in the vicinity of the Holy City where the Monastery of the Cross was eventually erected. The generally accepted view is that the whole narrative should be considered legendary, based on medieval realities.[83] Notably, an interesting medieval source, the Armenian "Letter of Love and Concord" is also standing for special rights in the Holy Places, based on similar claims.[84]

Life of Prochorus

The Georgian *Vita* of Prochorus (985–1066), the founder of the Monastery of the Cross, was compiled in Jerusalem at the end of the 11th–beginning of the 12th centuries. The anonymous author of the text most probably belonged to the circle of the monks of the Monastery of the Cross, and possibly witnessed the described events.[85]

According to the text, Prochorus was born under the name of Giorgi Shavsheli (Shavteli) in the region of Tao-Klarjeti[86] and was raised in a local monastery, where he eventually became a monk, and later a priest. Around 1010–1015, aged nearly thirty, Prochorus came to the Holy Land. He spent a number of years in the Laura of St. Sabas, one of the few active desert monasteries in the Holy Land. Then he went to Jerusalem, in an attempt to gather together his compatriots who were spread throughout the Palestinian monasteries. His activity in Jerusalem is described in the text as follows:

> Afterwards, with God's providence, he started to build the monastery near Jerusalem, on the western side, that holds a name of the Holy Cross. He built the church and decorated it with ornaments of all kinds. And he collected the ascetic brothers, imitating his virtues, and they were nearly eighty. And he gave them a rule and the canons similar to those of St. Sabas. And afterwards he built a hostel for pilgrims, spacious and beautiful. And when with the help of God he achieved all these things, his body became weak from works and years. Then he chose one of his disciples, George, and made him a superior [...] After that, he took with him two of

83 Tsagareli 1888a, p. 32; Menabde 1980, pp. 79–80; Tsulaya 2008, p. 127.

84 Pogossian 2010.

85 Abuladze et al. 1968; van Esbroeck 2000.

86 Tao-Klarjeti, Armenian Tajk – region with mixed Armenian and Georgian population, within the limits of Greater Armenia and historical Georgia, in modern north-eastern Turkey.

> his disciples, a priest and a monk, and went to the Arnon desert. Soon he left this world to meet the Lord.[87]

This text raises a number of important issues. The large number of Georgian monks that Prochorus gathered is very surprising, given the scarce material remains related to the Georgian community at the relevant period. The text states that Prochorus did not renovate an existing monastery, but built a new one, but there is no mention of an earlier Georgian possession of the site. These issues will become crucial for discussion on the history of the Monastery of the Cross in particular, and on the changing modus vivendi of the Georgian community on the eve of the Crusades in general.

87 Cited according to the French translation of van Esbroeck 2000, pp. 141–142.

CHAPTER 3

The Archaeological Evidence

The Armenian Community

The architectural remains that will be presented here were discovered in archaeological excavations in Jerusalem and its surroundings, and there is evidence to associate them with the Armenian building activity. They include the large unidentified monastic complexes on the summit of the Mount of Olives and in the Musrara neighbourhood, where numerous Armenian inscriptions were found, and the Monastery "of Theodorus and Cyriacus" on Mount Scopus, where an Armenian building inscription was discovered. Special attention will also be given to St. James Monastery, which has been the main ecclesiastical and spiritual center of the Armenian community since the medieval period. The main church of the complex stands on Byzantine foundations, and will be examined here with the aim of establishing the nature of its early structures and any connection it may have had to the Caucasian Christian communities when it was first built.

The discussion of the architectural remains will be followed by discussion of isolated inscriptions: epitaphs of the abbess Charate and Ioanes the Armenian, both from the slopes of the Mount of Olives, burial inscription from Choziba Monastery in Wadi el-Qilt, and two dedicational inscriptions from Hammat Gader, possibly related to Armenians. The section will conclude with a corpus of pilgrim graffiti from Jerusalem, Nazareth, Negev and Sinai.

Architectural Remains

The Monastic Complex on the Mount of Olives

The monastery on the summit of the Mount of Olives should be considered as the first discovered archaeological evidence of Armenian presence in the Holy City. The complex, containing numerous mosaics, Greek and Armenian inscriptions, and remains of ancient buildings and burials, was exposed in 1871–1873, during construction work that was carried out by the Russian Church authorities. The land of the Russian Monastery complex occupies 5.4 hectares that consist of 15 plots (Fig. 8), purchased separately by archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin), following the chance discovery of mosaic fragments on the site. Construction of the modern church started in 1873, was interrupted by the Russo-Turkish War over the Balkans in 1877–1878, and eventually completed in 1886. The new structures of the hospice, the archimandrite's house, the main

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FIGURE 8 *The Russian plot on the summit of the Mount of Olives, aerial photo.*

church of the Ascension and the chapel of the Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist were built over the antiquities (Fig. 9). Originally, the land was intended to be the site of a monastery, but in 1905 the women's Convent of the Ascension, which still exists today, was established.

Reports of the epigraphic finds that were discovered on the Russian plot were published by many leading scholars of the period, with whom the archimandrite was well acquainted.[1] However, due to the nature of the monastic establishment, the site has been closed to researchers, almost without exception, for over a hundred years, and remains inaccessible today. The only scholars who gained access after Kapustin's death were G. and E. Loukianoff, who in the 1920s managed to inspect some of the finds, after overcoming the determined resistance of the local nuns.[2] The result of this research was a study that interpreted all the remains as parts of a monumental ecclesiastical complex, built on the Mount of Olives at imperial initiative.[3]

1 Warren and Conder 1884, pp. 400–401; Riess 1885; Germer-Durand 1892, pp. 572–573; Séjourné 1893; Clermont-Ganneau 1896, pp. 326–345.

2 Kern 2013, pp. 62, 66, 70.

3 Loukianoff 1939.

FIGURE 9 *The Ascension church, 1880s.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

Since construction works overlay part of the antiquities, attempts to map the finds proved very difficult. The scientific reports of the late 19th century concentrate on the mosaics and inscriptions, and give scarce – and often contradictory – information about the location of the antiquities.[4] Other, less 'beautiful' finds are listed, or simply ignored. Further interesting information can be obtained from Russian archival sources, partly unpublished. The description of the site that will be presented here is a first attempt to summarize a large corpus of documents related to the discovery of the antiquities, and possible reconstruction of the complex, which allows verification of the provenance and attribution of the finds, will be proposed.

The Site

The large Russian plot has an irregular shape, elongated on an east–west axis. It is located on the summit of the mount, and the archaeological remains, including the subterranean structures, are concentrated in its central part. This picture most probably does not reflect the original plan of the ancient site, but

4 The most surprising is an extremely brief report of Warren and Conder, who visited the site in 1874, just after the discovery of the antiquities: the 'Russian house' served as a trigonometric station for their survey. *SWP* 1884, p. 400.

FIGURE 10 *Plan of the Russian plot prepared by Dmitrevsky, 1885.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

rather the system of excavation. Generally speaking, Kapustin's work can be described as 'salvage excavation 19th century style': no systematic excavations were carried out, and only ancient remains that were discovered accidentally during the construction works were fully exposed. Kapustin concentrated his construction efforts in the highest, relatively flat central part of the plot. Construction there was practical and achieved added prestige to the buildings. An added attraction was the shallow bedrock, which is visible in the central part of the area. In contrast, the eastern (Fig. 10, plot IV) and southern parts of the property (Fig. 10, plots XIV, XV and the southern parts of plots II and IV), located on the rock scarps, were unsuitable for Kapustin's purposes, and therefore were not developed. The archaeological potential of these areas has never been fulfilled: only a few modest structures were erected there, on shallow foundations.

Analysis of the archaeological finds at the site reveals a large monastic complex, with three distinct units (Fig. 11). The western unit is represented by the remains of the basilical church, reception hall (?) and water cisterns. The eastern unit includes a funeral chapel and a number of burial crypts. The northern unit probably includes a number of chapels. Below is the proposed reconstruction of the complex according to the units.

The Western Unit

The existence of an ancient basilica at the site was missed by the scholarly community and it therefore deserves a detailed description. Apparently, reports of golden mosaic fragments on site initially aroused Kapustin's interest in the plot.[5] However, construction works at the part of the site where mosaics were discovered, started only two years later. On January 15th 1873 Kapustin records "excavation at the altar of an ancient basilica",[6] and three days later – discovery of a large column base to the north of the golden mosaic concentration, "similar to the bases of the Bethlehem columns. *Tayeb*. So, we definitely found an ancient church".[7]

A report written by the contemporary Russian diplomat Dmitrevsky, which includes a schematic plan (Fig. 10), adds more details to the story, and reveals

5 The first record in Kapustin's diary to mention the site on the summit of the Mount of Olives dates to April 21st, 1871. RGIA, Собрание Св. Синода. Ф. 834. оп. 4. д. 1126, л. 178об. The records of the following days also recall the golden mosaic. Finally, on May 6th Kapustin visits the site and writes: "I saw the place, famous for its golden mosaics and came to the decision to purchase it": ibid., л.181.

6 Ibid., Ф. 834. оп. 4, д. 1127, л. 3об.–4.

7 Ibid., л. 4об.

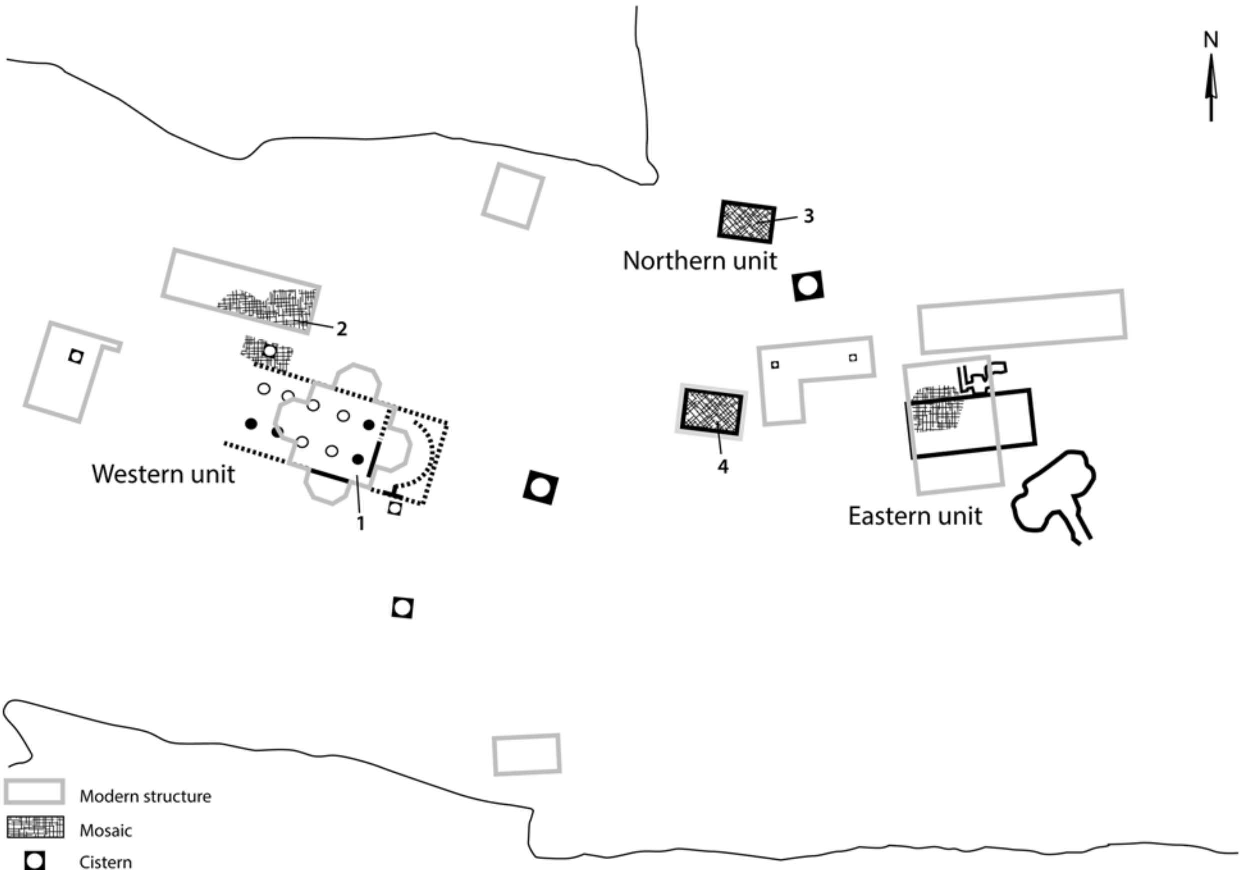

FIGURE 11 *Plan of the antiquities discovered on the Russian plot; numbers mark the discovered inscriptions:* 1 – *tombstone of Theodosia;* 2 – *memorial inscription of Theodosia cubicularia;* 3 – *memorial inscription of T'ew, Abas and Murik;* 4 – *memorial inscription of the reverend Yakob.*

the arrangement of the discovered finds.[8] Indeed, part of the semicircular wall of the church apse was discovered exactly at the spot that was rich in golden mosaic tesserae. To the west, a base of a chancel screen was found (Fig. 10, *t* on the plan), and farther west, four column bases (*s* and *y* on the plan), marking two rows of columns. The western pair was hewn from the bedrock itself "forming an integral part of it". The eastern base was later integrated into the modern church wall. South-east of the apse, a fragment of the wall was exposed, with a stone threshold (*v* on the plan), marking the entrance to the church from the south. Between the eastern column and the threshold (Fig. 11, 1 on the plan) a marble tombstone was discovered, 60 cm high and 45 cm wide, with an elaborate Greek funerary inscription of Theodosia, who passed away on September 14th of 592 (Fig. 12). The left side of the stone is missing. The text reads as follows:[9]

[--]ΑΧΟΥΣΑΘΕΟΔΟΣΙΑ
[--]ΑΠΡΕΨΑΣΑΣΩΜΑ
[--]ΑΙΝΟΜΕΝΟΝΤΗ
[--]ΓΚΑΜΕΝΗΤΟΝ
[--]ΕΝΤΙΧΩΧ̅Ω̅ΤΩΘ̅Ω̅Η
[--]ΘΕΝΔΕΕΙΣΟ̅Υ̅Ν̅Ο̅Ν̅
[--]ΜΕΝΗΜΟΝΑΧΟΙΣ
[--]ỊΚΟΝΑΝΘΟΥΣΥΣΚΗ
[--]ΠΤΕΜΒΡʃΔΙΝΙʃΙ̅Α̅ΒΑ
[--]ΛʃΧ̅Υ̅ΕΤΟΥΣΙ̅Α̅
[--] +

[Ἐνθάδε κεῖται ἡ μον]άχουσα Θεοδωσία | [--μετ]απρέψασα σῶμα | [--φ]αινόμενον τῇ |
[--προσενε]γκαμένη τὸν | [(?) βίον τῷ σταυρωθ]έντι Χ(ριστ)ῷ τῷ Θ(ε)ῷ ἡ|[μῶν -- ἀνῆλ]θεν δὲ εἰς ου(ρα)νόν | [--]μένη μοναχοῖς |[--]ΙΚΟΝ ἄνθους (?) ΥΣΚΗ|
[--μηνὸς Σε]πτεμβρ(ίου) ιδ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ια' βα|[σιλείας Μαυρικίου φι]λ(ο)χ(ρίστο)υ
ἔτους ια'

8 Dmitrevsky 1885 [2006], pp. 58–60.

9 The discovery of the inscription is recorded in the diary of Kapustin on January 24th: RGIA, Собрание Св. Синода. Ф. 834. оп. 4. д. 1126, л. 50б.–6. For the text, see Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 1006.

> [Here lies the] nun Theodosia … having been distinquished … visible (?) body, having dedicated (?) [her life] to Christ our God who was crucified … went to heaven … to monks … On the 14th of the month of September, indiction 11, in the 11th year of the reign of Christ-loving [Macarius].

To the north of the chancel screen, under the debris, a rectangular recess was found in the floor. It was the length of a person, 0.5 m deep, and lined with marble veneer. The size of the recess did not match the size of Theodosia's tombstone, and was possibly intended as a place for holy relics.[10]

North-west of the remains, fragments of white mosaic floor were found, with an opening of a large water cistern integrated in it (Fig. 11, *Z* on the plan). Additional cisterns were discovered to the east of the church structure (*a, b* and *x* on the plan). Mosaic pavements made of large tesserae, some with simple decoration, were discovered "in many spots". To the north of cistern *Z*, a well-preserved stone pavement was found, "suitable for construction". When it was dismantled, the workers reached "a layer of good soil" that covered another ancient mosaic floor (*A* on the plan). This white mosaic, partly damaged, which was exposed over an area of nearly 45 m², was embellished with Greek inscription, of which only three last lines survived. The top line, the longest, is 108 cm long; letters are 12 cm high, made of black tesserae on the white background (Figs. 11:2, and Fig. 13). The text reads as follows:[11]

> [--]
> [--]
> [--]
> [--]
> Θ[..]ΔΟΣΙ̣Α̣ΣΤ̣ΗΣΕΝΔΟ
> ΞΟΤΑΤʃΚΟΥΒΙΚΟΥΛΑ
>
> [--|--|--|--] | Θ[εο]δοσίας τῆς ἐνδο|ξοτάτ(ης) κουβικουλα|ρίας
>
> … of Theodosia, the most glorious cubicularia.

10 Marinis and Ousterhout 2015.

11 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 836.

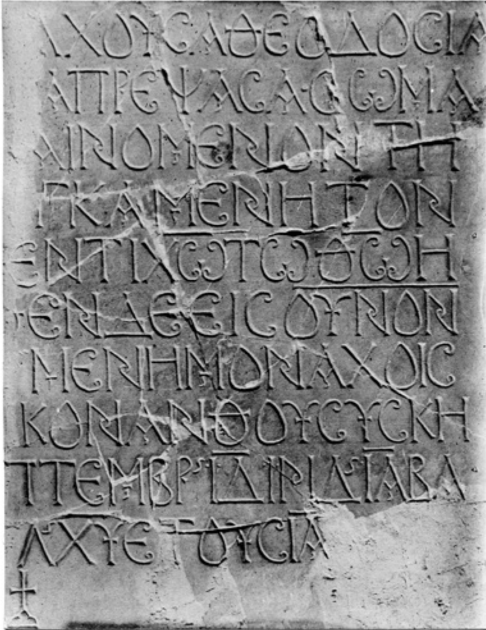

FIGURE 12
Tombstone of Theodosia.
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING

FIGURE 13 *Memorial inscription of Theodosia cubicularia.*
COURTESY OF A. AND N. GRAICER AND CIIP.

FIGURE 14 *The Russian plot, reuse of ancient building stones, 1885.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

All the worked stones discovered in the collapse were reused by Kapustin in the construction of the new church building (Fig. 14). Some of the fragments of the ancient church décor that were discovered *in situ*, i.e. the chancel screen base and some marble flagstones were preserved:

> The entire church floor was paved in large marble slabs ½ m long and ¾ m wide. Unfortunately, no complete slab was preserved. All of them were broken into small pieces, and all over it red spots were seen, like the spots of blood. […] Father archimandrite wished to renew the flooring to its original appearance. For this purpose, all the fragments of the marble slabs discovered here during the excavations, were scrupulously placed in the same order as found, and the missing parts were filled with new slabs, also made of marble.[12]

12 Dmitrevsky 1885 [2006], pp. 59, 61.

FIGURE 15 *Altar step of an ancient basilica seen beneath the 19th c. iconostasis, 1880s.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

The altar step of the ancient structure is clearly seen in the 19th century photos (Fig. 15),[13] as is the original marble floor, supplemented by new slabs. The chancel screen is covered today, but the floor slabs can still be observed by modern visitors to the Russian Ascension Church (Fig. 16).

The fragment of a large stone decorated with a medallion containing the *chi-ro* monogram, and *alpha* and *omega* within a wreath, was discovered in the same spot.[14] Complementary information regarding the architectural decoration of the structure can be gathered from the report of the Russian scientific expedition led by N.P. Kondakov in 1891–1892:

> On Eleona, in the Russian hospice, we saw some capitals, discovered during the cleaning of the construction site and collected by the hospice sponsor, archimandrite Antonin. In front of the building some fragments of colonnettes are standing (0.36 and 0.40 m in diameter), made of local pinkish marble,[15] and among them one larger piece (0.54 m) made of *verde antico*, and one matching capital of Corinthian order, with

13 GMIR, photos П-2505, П-2506.

14 The discovery is mentioned in Kapustin's diary on March 12th 1872: л. 234 об. For the inscribed stone see Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 865.

15 Local limestone was often mistaken for marble in the 19th century research.

FIGURE 16 *Marble pavement of an ancient basilica integrated into 19th c. floor.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

> two registers of acanthus leaves, large and low, and a register of ovoli on the top; and an additional capital, badly damaged (…), which cannot be dated prior to the fifth century. Other fragments are rather too small or too damaged.[16]

Some of these architectural elements, including the column shaft made of *verde antico* marble, were recently identified by author in the territory of the Russian nunnery. A few marble colonnettes and decorated relief fragments are stored in the underground caves; the larger fragments still decorate the garden, serving as stands for flowerpots (Figs. 17–18). In addition, a picture from the Russian photograph collection[17] shows a group of decorative architectural details that were discovered on the Mount of Olives, most of them dated to the

16 Kondakov 1904, p. 257.

17 GMIR, photo П-2532.

FIGURE 17
Column drum of verde antico *marble in the monastery garden.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 18
Byzantine column base in the monastery garden.
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 19 *Architectural details, tiles and tombstones discovered on the Mount of Olives, 1880s.* COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

Byzantine period (Fig. 19). Among them are fragments of six Corinthian capitals, one of them recognizable from the description of Kondakov, two marble fragments of chancel posts, and two tombstones with engraved crosses, one of them inscribed.[18]

In spite of the scarcity of the remains described, an interpretation seems possible (Fig. 11). The western unit includes a basilical church with a single apse, central nave and two side aisles, divided by two rows of columns. The schematic plan prepared by Dmitrevsky, with a scale in the old Russian unit of *sajen* (ca. 2.13 m), allows only an estimate of the measurements: over 20 m long and about 12.3 m wide. The architectural decoration of the church is remarkable. It includes carved details in local stone and various types of imported marble, as well as floor mosaics made of local stone and wall mosaics made of gilded glass tesserae. The mosaic floor with the dedicatory inscription to Theodosia can be interpreted as a reception hall or refectory, based

18 Possibly, the tombstones were discovered on the territory of the Greek Orthodox monastery Viri Galilaei on the Mount of Olives. See Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 919.

on numerous parallels in the monastic complexes of the city (for example, in Musrara and on Mount Scopus – see below).

In the absence of the small finds, the only chronological anchor to the western wing is the funerary inscription of Theodosia (592). Nevertheless, a later phase is represented by the raised, stone-paved floor above the original mosaics.

The Eastern Unit (Fig. 20)

Thanks to the high artistic value of the mosaic pavements and to the accompanying Armenian inscriptions – both causing sensation at the time of their discovery – the eastern unit of the complex received considerable scholarly attention. However, the mosaics and inscriptions are yet to be viewed through the prism of the archaeological context to find their proper place. The contradictions that exist in the scarce reports often cause great confusion in discussions related to the site.[19]

The main find in the eastern area is a colorful mosaic floor of a very high artistic quality, depicting a ram, fish, birds, grapes and other fruit, all placed inside elaborate guilloche frames (Fig. 21).[20] The arrangement of the decorative motives indicates that the surviving fragment, measuring 6.70 by 4 m, is only about a third of the original mosaic, or even less. According to Loukianoff, additional small decorated panels should be located to the east of the main carpet (Fig. 22, *k*, *p* and *r* on the plan).[21] To the north, an additional carpet was found, decorated with simple red and black 'diamonds' on a white background (*n* on the plan). On the northern margin of the main mosaic, an Armenian inscription is modestly executed in black tesserae stones on white background (Fig. 20.1 and Fig. 23). The inscription is 2.96 m long, the letters are 8 cm high. The text reads as follows:[22]

> ԱՅՍ ԴԻՐ Է [Ե]ՐԱՆԵԼՒՈ[Յ] ՇՈՒՇԱՆԿԱՆ ՄԱՒՐՆ ԱՐՏԱՒԱՆԱՅ ՀՈՌԻ ԺԸ
>
> Այս դիր է [ե]րանելւո[յ] Շուշանկան մաւրն Արտաւանայ Հոռի ԺԸ
>
> This is the tomb of Shushanik, mother of Artawan. Hoṙi[23] 18.

19 For example, see the discussion by Britt 2011, p. 143, stating: "There is no indication that a crypt or burial was discovered below the pavement".

20 For stylistic discussion, see Arakelian 1978; Narkiss 1979, pp. 21–23; Britt 2011; Talgam 2014, pp. 198–200, 204–205.

21 Not located.

22 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 925.

23 February. For Armenian months names, see Gippert 1989.

FIGURE 20 *Mount of Olives, Eastern unit of the Byzantine complex and its burial crypts. Numbers mark the discovered inscriptions: 1 – burial inscription of Shushanik, mother of Artawan; 2 – bilingual burial inscription; 3 – marble slab with fragment of Armenian inscription; 4 – painted crosses; 5 – burial inscription of Jojik; 6 – burial inscription of Shushan; 7 – burial inscription of Marin; 8 – memorial inscription of Vatan.*

FIGURE 21 *Shushanik mosaic, 1880s.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

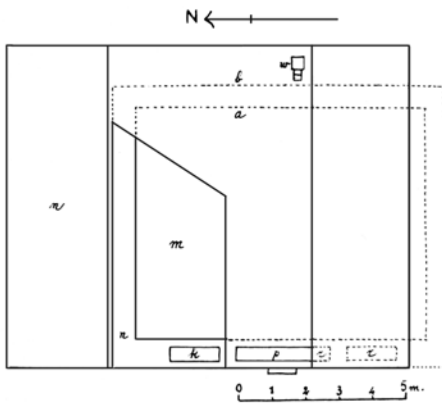

FIGURE 22
Plan of the Shushanik mosaic reconstructed by E. Loukianoff, 1939, Fig. 3.

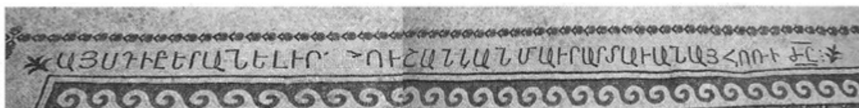

FIGURE 23 *Burial inscription of Shushanik, mother of Artawan.*
COURTESY OF A. AND N. GRAICER AND CIIP.

The curious history of 'the first Armenian antiquities' of Jerusalem is described in detail in the unpublished diary of Kapustin, and it seems appropriate to quote this unknown source here. We learn that the exploration started with tree-planting, which was interrupted by the discovery of the impressive mosaic carpet and ancient tombs just next to it. On May 29th 1871 Kapustin records in his diary:

> After the liturgy I went to Eleon, and indeed, saw the exposed tombs, already four in number. In front of me two more [tombs] were unearthed. Till ¼ they are filled with earth and some bones. Clearly, they are located under the mosaic, and therefore there is a good reason to believe, that they contain remains of the saints or some important or venerated people […] Back home, liturgy, dinner and guesses, who could have been buried in ancient times under our mosaic. Antonius in the sixth century saw on Eleona *copiosa monasteria*, and among them the relics of the holy apostles – James, son of Zebedee, Cleopa and others. Could it be, that we are discovering their graves?[24]

Work proceeded fast, and two days later the mosaic floor was ready for exposure. Fr. Antonin came to the Mount of Olives, surrounded by other priests and employees of the Russian Mission in order to:

> Expose today the whole mosaic floor. I felt myself to be on the peak of archaeological well-being. Soon enough the whole northern border of the magnificent floor showed up. By afternoon, the western border was unearthed too. Cleaning the earth, near the north-western corner, we exposed a Georgian inscription, like so [drawing of the Armenian text follows]. Till now I was expecting a Greek inscription, or even a Jewish one. My exaltation chilled after the discovery. While working, we did not feel how the day passed […] At home – tea, study of the inscription copy, efforts to understand its meaning … And what did I find? That the inscription is not Georgian, but Armenian. My disappointment grew enormously. Here you are, James the Apostle, son of Zebedee! Can it be, that the mosaic master was an Armenian by birth, and wish to honor his language? I wrote a letter to Fr. Melchizedek, the rector of the Armenian seminary, with a copy of inscription. Tomorrow we will clarify the story. There is a reason to believe that the text is of historical character. There

24 RGIA, Собрание Св. Синода. Ф. 834. оп. 4. д. 1126, л.185.

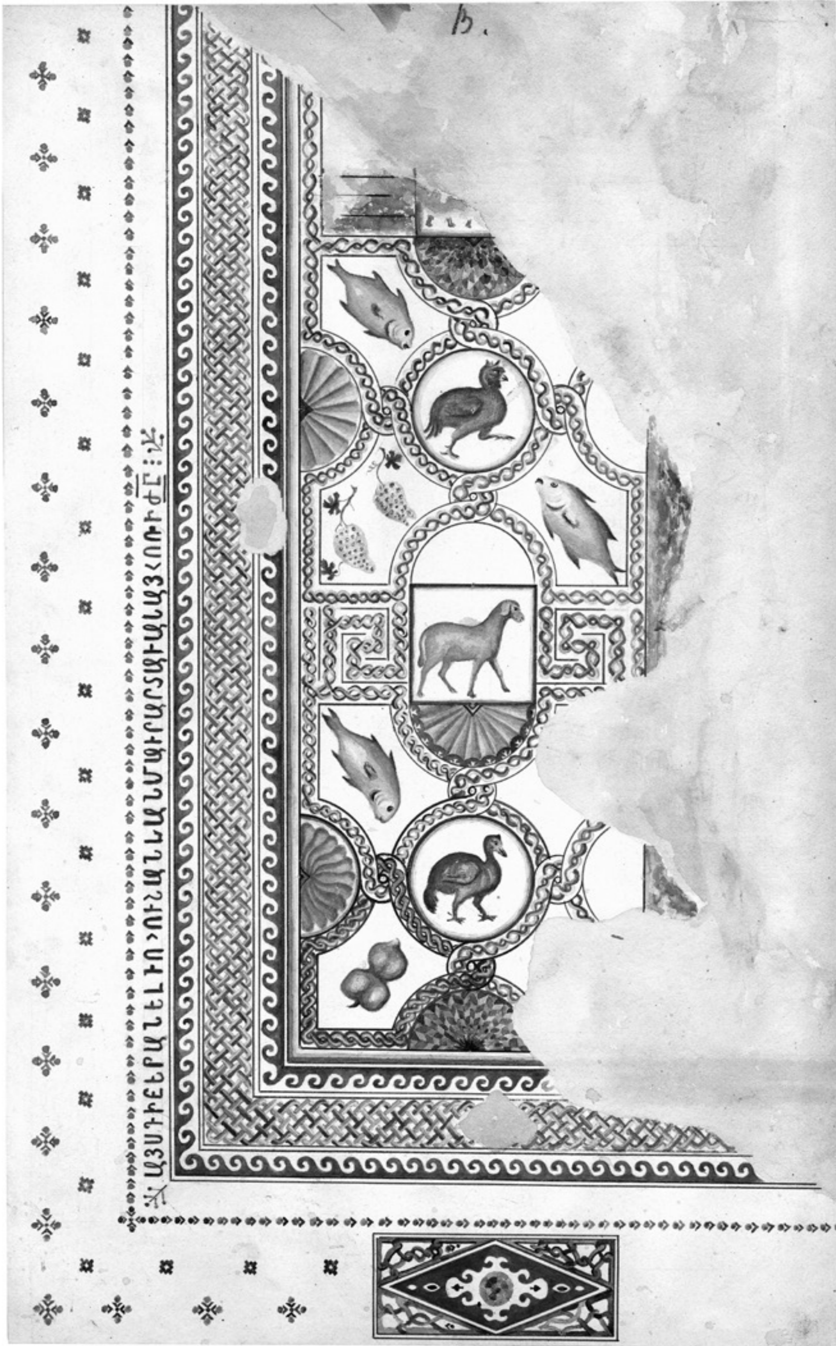

FIGURE 24 *Shushanik mosaic, wash-drawing, 1880s.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

> are, probably some numbers in the end, under the title. Pity, but what can we do?[25]

The next day, Kapustin was impatiently waiting for an answer from the Armenian Quarter.

> Early morning I sent Osman[26] to the Armenian monastery and was waiting for him to be back. The honorable *vardapet* told him that he will check the issue in the books and then will send his answer. [In the afternoon] came an answer from Fr. Melchizedek, saying: 'Tomb of blessed Shushanik (Sosanna), mother of Artaban. February 18". Short, but unclear. The news had a gloomy effect on all of us. A certain mother of a certain son, and both are Armenians … February 18, and nothing else![27]

Unfortunately, no photographs depicting the process of the mosaic discovery were taken. The oldest image of the find known today is a wash-drawing of unknown authorship added to the report of Dmitrevsky (Fig. 22) and a photo taken by the photographer of the Russian Mission Fr. Timon Korotky (Fig. 21), both showing the mosaic carpet fully exposed. Discussing the inscription, Clermont-Ganneau stressed the stylistic difference between the rich mosaic carpet and the modest epitaph.[28] Most scholars mention the unusual position of the inscription and the difference in the mosaic work, and interpret the inscription as a later addition.[29] In our opinion, the stylistic differences should not be interpreted as chronological (and see below).

The mosaic remains and the burial crypts were covered by the new house built by Kapustin, called in the reports 'the Russian house', or 'the house of the Russian archimandrite' (Fig. 25). In reality, the house was built for A.I. Kadysheva, a generous donor to the Russian church in Palestine. The first floor was reserved to store the collection of antiquities.

The reports concerning the burials in the vicinity of the mosaic contain many contradictions; the following is a summary of the finds that could be

25 Ibid., л. 185об.

26 Osman – *kawwas*, the Muslim guardian of the Russian Mission.

27 Ibid., л. 186–186об.

28 1896, pp. 333–334.

29 Avi-Yonah 1933, p. 168; Loukianoff 1939, p. 7.

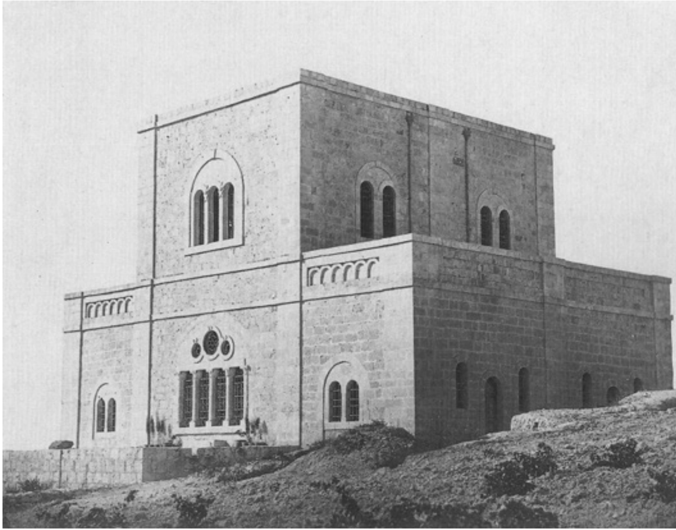

FIGURE 25 *The "Russian house", 1880s.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

verified, based on the reports[30] and the personal observations of the author.[31] Altogether, four different burial structures were unearthed in the eastern area (Fig. 21).

To the south-east of the preserved mosaic fragment a staircase consisting of four steps led to an underground hewn crypt, 5.14 m long and 1.67 cm high. The crypt contained six burial compartments, exposed already in the primary stage of exploration, simultaneously with the mosaic floor (Fig. 26). A symmetrical row of six burials was discovered to the south-west, belonging to the same crypt. All the burial compartments were of standard size: 1.9 m long and 0.65 m wide, and they were separated by carefully plastered low walls. Between the two groups of burials, an additional tomb was exposed, possibly representing yet another row of six burials. All the tombs were arranged on an east-west axis, a typical feature of Byzantine burials. One more row of six smaller cells

30 Based on the diary of Kapustin for 1871; Olesnitskii 1875; *SWP* 1884; Dmitrevsky 1885 [2006]; Reiss 1885; Guthe 1885; Clermont-Ganneau 1896; Loukianoff 1939.

31 The two burial crypts were visited in November–December 2015, by the generous permission of the mother superior of the Monastery of the Holy Ascension of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, hegumenness Moisseia (Bubnova) and the head of Russian Ecclesiastical Mission Fr. Roman (Krasovsky).

FIGURE 26
Exposure of the burial crypt, 1871.
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

was discovered farther west, each 0.7 m long and 0.65 m wide.[32] No inscriptions or other finds were reported from the crypt. It is important to add, that the crypt remained unexcavated: its exposure during the construction works was followed by the removal of visible human remains, but the burial compartments remained untouched, and are still full of debris even today.

An underground passage leading to a rock-cut tomb was discovered north of the mosaic. In the antechamber was a stone with a carved inscription in two lines, written in Greek and Armenian. The text reads as follows:[33]

ΘΗΚΗՈ
ԹԱՅՐԻ

Θηκη n
թայրի

Grave of …

The present location of the stone is unknown, but it was documented in the drawing made by Reiss (Fig. 27). Recently another drawing came to light, made

32 The small cells are rare in Byzantine burials of Jerusalem. Avni relates it to secondary burial practices: 1997, pp. 87–90.

33 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 926.

FIGURE 27
The bilingual burial inscription. After Reiss 1885.

FIGURE 28
Page from Kapustin's diary, July 20th 1871.
UNPUBLISHED, COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

by Kapustin (Fig. 28), who mentions the discovery of the inscription in his diary.[34] During the survey, another previously unrecorded epigraphic find was discovered in the narrow passage (Fig. 20.3). It is a broken limestone slab, measuring 45 by 31 cm and 6 cm thick, with fragmentary Armenian inscription, of which only two letters 10–14 cm high were preserved, probably the name of the deceased, since they correspond to the – el in theophoric names such as Michael, Gabriel etc.:

[--] ԷԼ
[--] էլ
[--] ēl

From the antechamber, a narrow curved passage leads to a burial cave containing two arcosolia. The walls of the passage and the burial cave are built of well-dressed ashlars, and plastered; the original fine white plaster is well preserved. On three walls – the northern, southern and western – three large crosses were painted in fresco technique, in yellow, red and green (Fig. 20.4). All three are identical, and belong to the elongated *crux gemmata* type, with the tips of the arms splayed (Fig. 29).

A third burial crypt was discovered farther to the south-east, east of the large mosaic carpet. The entrance to the chamber is from the south; above it was a gable with a cross, which is now incorporated into the modern masonry (Fig. 30). The rock-cut burial chamber, measuring nearly 6 m from north to

34 July 20th 1871.

FIGURE 29 *Painted crosses on the walls of the burial chamber.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 30
Entrance to the burial crypt to the east of the Shushanik mosaic; Byzantine gable with a cross incorporated into 19th c. masonry.
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

south and about 4.28 m from east to west, contained 16 tombs, arranged in four groups of four tombs each (Fig. 31). The inner space is divided by two narrow passages, 0.54 m wide; the ceiling is supported by two hewn pillars.

FIGURE 31 *Burial crypt to the east of the Shushanik mosaic.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

Three tombs in the northern group were found intact, covered by stone slabs fixed with cement, with human remains within. Three of the slabs were inscribed with the names of the deceased in Armenian *erkatagir* script. Remarkably, all three are names of women. It seems that all three were written by the same hand. It is worth noting that the first two inscriptions were on the covering slabs of the same tomb (Fig. 32). The first inscription (Fig. 20.5), 27 cm long, with letters 8 cm high, is oriented with the length of the tomb, and reads as follows (Fig. 33):[35]

+ՋՈՋԻԿ
Ջոջիկ

Jojik

35 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 927.

FIGURE 32 *Tomb with two burial inscriptions.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 33 *Burial inscription of Jojik.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

The second inscription, 30 cm long, with letters 6 cm high, is on the next slab of the same tomb, and oriented to its width (Fig. 20.6). The text reads as follows (Fig. 34):[36]

+ՇՈՒՇԱՆ
Շուշան

Shushan

The third inscription, 58 cm long, with letters 14 cm high, is on another tomb, across the passage (Fig. 20.7). The text reads as follows (Fig. 35):[37]

36 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 928.
37 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 929.

FIGURE 34 *Burial inscription of Shushan.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 35 *Burial inscription of Marin.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

+ՄԱՐԻՆ
Մարին

Marin (Mariam?)

On the morrow of its excavation, the crypt was repaired: a vaulted ceiling was built in order to reinforce the original vault, and a flat roof was placed on top, forming a sort of a balcony on the eastern side of the newly built house (Fig. 36).

The fourth burial was discovered farther to the south-east, when explosive were used to quarry stones. An entrance from the south-east opens into a narrow corridor, 0.8–1 m wide, 2.87 m long and 1.92 high, which leads to a small antechamber, measuring 1.9 by 1.82 m and 2.05 m high. The walls of the corridor and the antechamber preserve the remains of the original white plaster

FIGURE 36 *19th c. roof of the burial crypt east of the Shushanik mosaic.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

(Fig. 37). In the ceiling of the antechamber there is a square opening, measuring nearly 30 by 30 cm. On the floor of the antechamber a mosaic carpet was discovered (Fig. 20.8), bearing an Armenian *erkatagir* inscription of seven lines, measuring 100 by 69 cm, with letters 8 cm high, made of red tesserae on a white background (Fig. 38). The inscription is surrounded by an elaborate guilloche frame. The text reads as follows:[38]

ԲԱՐԵԽԱՒՍՈՒՆԵԼՈՎ
ԱՌԱ՟ԾԶՍՈՒՐԲ Ե
ՍԱՅԻԵԻԶԵՐԱՆԵԼԻ
+ՀԱՐՍՍԵՍՎԱՂԱՆԱ
ՐԱՐԻՎԱՄՆԹՈՂՈՒ
ԹԵԱՆՄԵՂԱՑԶՅԻ
ՇԱՏԱԿԱՐԱՆՍԶԱՅՍ

38 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 838.

FIGURE 37 *Corridor and the antechamber of Vałan's crypt.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 38 *Memorial inscription of Vałan. Loukianoff 1930–3.*

> Բարեխաւս ունելով | առ Ա(ստուա)ծ զսուրբ Ե|սայի եւ զերանելի | +հարսս ես Վաղան ա|րարի վասն թողու|թեան մեղաց զյի|շատակարնս զայս
>
> Having Saint Isaiah and the blessed fathers as intercessors to God, I Vałan made this memorial for the atonement of sins.

Today the inscription is covered by a protective layer of sand. From the antechamber, a hewn entrance and two stone steps lead to a large natural cave. The cave is of irregular elongated shape, measuring 3.6 m from south-east to northwest, and 9.36 from north-east to south-west. The inner space of the cave is divided by low walls 10 cm wide into 13 irregular compartments. Except for the hewn entrance, flanked by two worked pillars (the western with a bar socket), the walls and ceiling of the cave bear no signs of chiseling or plastering. When discovered, the entire cave was full of human bones. Most of them are still there, mixed with bones of animals and birds. Most probably, the cave served as a bones repository for a monastic structure.[39]

The Northern Unit

The remains discovered in the northern part of the plot include a large water cistern (*q* on the plan), ecclesiastical structure of unknown purpose and a funerary chapel. We have almost no information about the two structures, their nature or even their size; the 19th century descriptions concentrate on the Armenian inscriptions that embellished both.

The dedicatory Armenian mosaic inscription was discovered in 1872, during the search for ancient water cisterns still suitable for use. The text, written in black tesserae, is arranged in three lines separated by red stone strips (Fig. 11.3). The inscription is 119 cm long and 49 cm high (Fig. 39). The text reads as follows:[40]

> ՎԱՍՆԱՂԱԻԹԻՑԵԻՓՐ
> ԿՈԻԹԵԱՆԹԵԻԱՅԱ
> ԲԱՍՈԻԵԻՄՈԻՐԿԱՆ
>
> Վասն աղաւթից եւ փր/կութեան Թեւայ Ա|բասու եւ Մուրկան
>
> For the prayers and salvation of T’ew, Abas and Murik.

39 Numerous ossuaries are kept in the shelters of the monastery. However, their provenance remains unknown.

40 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 839.

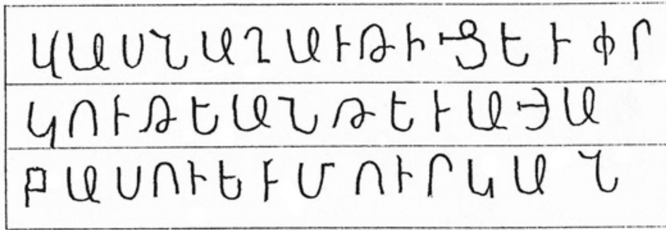

FIGURE 39 *Memorial inscription of T'ew, Abas and Murik. After Reiss 1885.*

The only information regarding its exact location is given in the report of Dmitrevsky (Fig. 10, *r* on his plan):

> To the north [of the cistern] additional mosaic was found with an ancient Armenian inscription: 'For the prayers and salvation of Tevot – i.e., 'princes', – Abas and Marik'. Suggesting, that two tombs may be located here, father archimandrite has decided not to touch it. To protect it from the weather he gave an order to surround it by a small wall and to cover with earth. With time, he intends to build here a canopy.[41]

Most probably, the tombs were never there: the text of the inscription should be interpreted as dedicatory, copying a well-known Greek formula. The canopy was never built, and the inscription remained covered. No photo of the find is available; the only drawing was published by Reiss, who probably saw the mosaic prior to its reburial.[42] Later the inscription was described by Clermont-Ganneau and other researchers only write *non vidi*, with misleading information regarding its location.[43]

Some twenty years later, at the end of 1892 – beginning of 1893,[44] an additional structure was discovered at the site (Fig. 11.4), to the south-west of the T'ew, Abas and Murik inscription. The floor of this building is decorated with three mosaic carpets (Fig. 40). The western carpet is of the simplest geometrical design of overlapping circles, made of red and black tesserae. The central, largest carpet is of high artistic quality, decorated with geometric pattern inhabited by various birds, animals and fruits; nearly a dozen colors were used

41 Dmitrevsky 1885 [2006], p. 58.

42 Reiss 1885, p. 158, Taf. IV:3.

43 Clermont-Ganneau 1896; p. 384.

44 Guthe 1895, pp. 51–53.

FIGURE 40 *Three mosaic carpets of northern unit during their exposure, 1893.* COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

(Fig. 41).[45] Close to the north-western corner of this carpet the mosaic sagged, forming a shallow rounded hollow. This recess, nearly 30 cm in diameter, was interpreted by the landowners as the spot where the head of St. John the Baptist was miraculously discovered (Fig. 42). The third, small eastern carpet has a simple geometric design of diagonal lines and small lozenges made of red and black tesserae. Similar lozenges decorate the whole space of white mosaic fragments around the three carpets. The area covered by mosaic was 6.5 m from east to west and nearly 3.7 m from north to south. The eastern carpet bears an Armenian inscription (Fig. 43), measuring 60 by 29 cm, with letters 4–4.5 cm high. The text reads as follows:[46]

45 For discussion of the motif, see Talgam 2014, pp. 198–200.

46 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 837.

FIGURE 41 *"The Birds mosaic".*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 42
Rounded recess in the mosaic floor.
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 43
Memorial inscription of the reverend Yakob.
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

ԱՅՍՅԻՇԱՏԱԿԱ
ՐԱՆՏՆՅԱԿՈՎԲԱՅ
ՈՐԵՂԵԻԻՁԵՌՆԽՆ
ԴՐԵԼՈՅ

Այս յիշատակա/րան Տ[եառ]ն Յակովբայ | որ եղեւ ի ձեռն խնդրելոյ

This is the memorial of reverend Yakob, which came into being by means of his request.

According to the text, the structure could be interpreted as a funerary chapel, built by a priest or a bishop named Yakob, or an ecclesiastical structure build in his memory. However, no burial was discovered: the mosaics were immediately covered by earth. After the death of Kapustin in 1894, a chapel was built at the spot, dedicated to the Second Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist.

Judging by the style, Clermont-Ganneau concluded that the Armenian mosaic postdated the other two carpets, and represents a subsequent addition to the building.[47] Loukianoff identified the building with the Martyrion built by

47 Clermont Ganneau 1896, p. 335.

FIGURE 44 *Mosaic of the reverend Yakob during its exposure, 1893.* COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

Innocent the Italian to keep the relics of St. John the Baptist (*Hist. Laus.*, 44),[48] later "usurped by the Armenians". However, no evidence can confirm such identification. Undoubtedly, the structure had few phases. Two photographs from the GMIR collection – numbers П-5154 and П-5155[49] – present details which make it possible to draw some conclusions regarding the stratigraphy of the site (Figs. 40 and 44). At least two construction phases postdated the original mosaic floor of the chapel. First, plaster walls were built on top of the decorated mosaic floor, which clearly passed beneath them. However, the builders of these walls took into consideration the design of the mosaic surfaces and left them exposed. Later, a new stone-paved floor was laid, abutting the plaster

48 Lowther Clarke 1918.

49 Photo П-5155 was reproduced by Séjourné 1893, p. 241, with a following remark: "Nous en donnons la reproduction d'après une photographie que nous devons à la bienveillance de M. le consul général de Russie, toujours dispose à favoriser les recherches archéologiques".

walls. In this phase the mosaic floor went out of use, replaced by the pavement. Of course, on the basis of the photographic evidence we cannot date the three construction phases.

To sum up, the interpretation of the finds as representing a single building, as proposed by Loukianoff[50], should be rejected as it was previousely proposed by Tsafrir.[51] The remains discovered on the Russian plot testify to the existence of a large monastic complex, with a basilical church, chapels – some of them with burials – rooms of non-ecclesiastical use, perhaps refectoria or reception halls, and water cisterns. The monastery was lavishly decorated, and possibly had, at least in its initial phase, a rich benefactor or benefactresses – possibly Theodosia, whoes name appears twice in the epigraphic finds from the site.

In the absence of the registered small finds – apart from the decorative architectural elements – dating the monastery is complex. The sole remaining chronological anchor is the Greek funerary inscription of Theodosia, dated to the year 592 (see above). It seems that the foundation of the complex should be established around this date. The presence of three stratigraphic phases (later walls and new floors, sealing the mosaics) suggests long use of the structures.

The coexistence of Greek and Armenian inscriptions, in our opinion, should not be interpreted as an act of Armenian usurpation of the existing site. Rather, the language used testifies to the existence of a large monastic establishment built in stages, by clergy of different origins.[52] As we shall see, this phenomenon is characteristic of all the large monastic complexes where signs of Armenian presence were discovered.

The Musrara Neighbourhood Complex

The discovery of archaeological remains associated with Armenian presence in Byzantine Jerusalem started already in the 19th century, when the 'Bird Mosaic' with an Armenian inscription was exposed during construction works in 1894. The numerous reports published on this find[53] concentrated mainly on its artistic qualities and on deciphering the Armenian inscription, and offered almost no evidence regarding its archeological context. Further research

50 Loukianoff 1939, Fig. 5.

51 Tsafrir 1999, p. 332.

52 Alternatively, it can be proposed that the establisher or patroness of the monastery, Theodosia, may have been of an Armenian origin, who choose to write in Greek due to her high status in the imperial court: Di Segni, personal communication.

53 Anon. 1894; Schick and Bliss 1894; Séjourné 1894; Owsepian 1895; Guthe 1895; Murray 1895; Bliss and Dickie 1898, pp. 253–259; see also Stone and Amit 1997, pp. 27–30; Stone 2002.

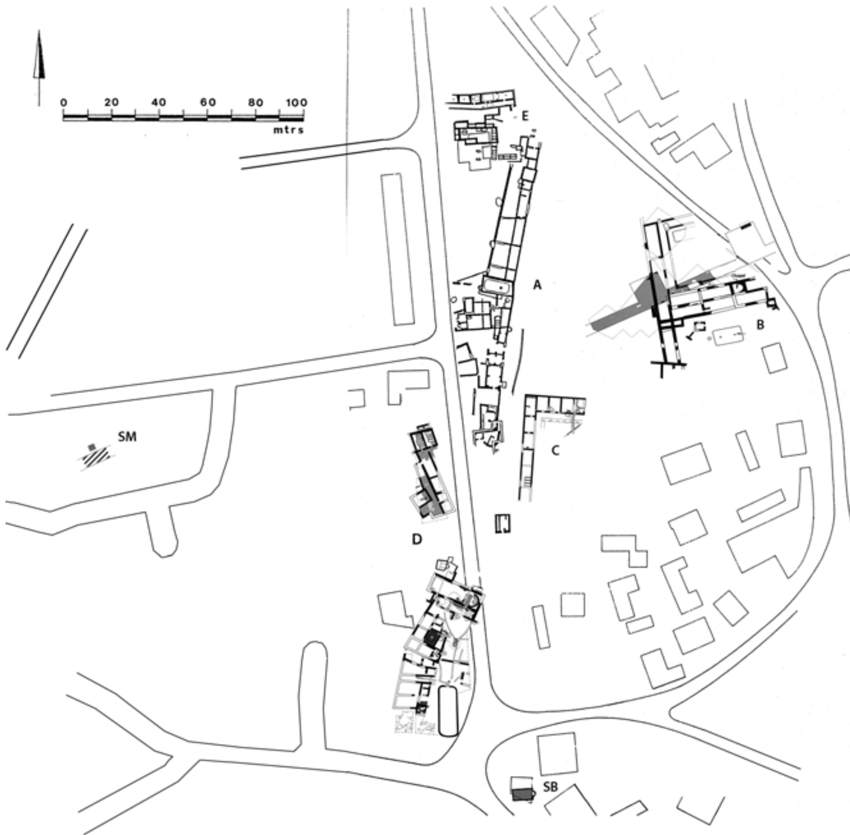

FIGURE 45 *The extramural monastic complex in Musrara neighbourhood: SB – Schick and Bliss excavations; SM – Sukenik and Mayer excavations; A, B, C, D, E – excavation areas of the IAA Third Wall project.*

of the area, carried out years later,[54] and especially the recent series of salvage excavations of the Israel Antiquities Authority in the 1990s–2000s, discovered the other parts of an extramural 'monastic quarter", an agglomeration of ecclesiastical institutions, maybe the largest in Jerusalem, of which the 'Bird Mosaic' was probably an integral part (Fig. 45).[55]

54 Sukenik and Mayer 1930; Baramki 1938; Ben-Arieh 1973.

55 Amit et al., 1993; Shukron and Savariego 1993; Stone 1997, 2002; Stone and Amit 1997; Abu Raya 1998; Amit and Wolf 2000; Tzaferis et al. 1991, 1996, 2000; Adawi 2005; Reem 2009; Zilberbod 2011.

Possibly, the funerary chapel with the 'Orpheus Mosaic' that was discovered near Damascus Gate should be ascribed to the same complex.[56] Altogether, four monasteries were discovered in the new series of excavations, with residential units that most probably served local monks and pilgrims, three small churches, three bathhouses, and household units: kitchens, ovens, water cisterns and channels. Numerous tombs were integrated into the monastic complexes, in hewn and built crypts, forming part of the northern necropolis of Jerusalem.[57]

The monasteries and *xenodochia* discovered on the large area of nearly 20 dunams to the north of the Damascus Gate, could be related to the Basilica of St. Stephen, one of the major holy sites of Byzantine Jerusalem, or may represent the further development of the facilities for pilgrims, started by the St. Stephen hospices (for discussion, see below). The construction activity at the site started in the middle of the fifth century, and continued without gap until the eighth–ninth centuries. In most cases, only the foundation courses of the walls were preserved. Large areas were decorated with mosaic floors; some of the toms preserve the remains of fresco decoration.

All the areas revealed ceramic evidence of large scale construction activity in the Late Byzantine and Umayyad period; other finds included numerous coins, glass vessels assemblages – especially from the burials – fragments of rich marble decoration and liturgical furniture, two reliquaries (one of them *in situ*, beneath the church altar table), metal and bone tools, and more. The final report, summarizing the new series of excavations, is still in preparation.[58] The remains testifying the presence of the Armenians were discovered in the southern (Fig. 45, D on the plan) and eastern (Fig. 45, SB on the plan) parts of the complex and were comprehensively studied by Amit and Stone.[59]

The 'Bird Mosaic' Chapel

The chapel of the 'Bird Mosaic' was discovered during the construction works in 1894 (Fig. 45, SB). The mosaic floor is embellished with depiction of a vine scroll springing from an amphora; the vine tendrils are populated with various

56 Vincent 1901; Ovadiah and Mucznik 1981.

57 Avni 1997, pp. 309–342; 2005.

58 Deep gratitude should be expressed to Jon Seligman (IAA), who is responsible for the publication of the final report of the 'Third Wall Excavations Project', for his kind permission to study the documentation of D. Amit's expedition.

59 Stone and Amit 1997; Stone 1997, 2002.

FIGURE 46
"The Birds Mosaic" in Musrara.

FIGURE 47
Musrara; The Armenian inscription of "The Birds Mosaic".
COURTESY OF A. AND N. GRAICER AND CIIP.

birds (Fig. 46).[60] The inscription itself is located just beside the apse of the chapel, on the east, set in *tabula ansata* (Fig. 47). The first line is 198 cm wide, in uncial *erkatagir* letters 8–8.5 cm high; the second line is 197 cm wide, with letters 6.5–7 cm high. The text reads as follows:[61]

60 Arakelian 1978; Narkiss 1979; Evans 1982; Hachlili 2009, pp. 112–123; Britt 2011; Talgam 2014, pp. 86–96.

61 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 812.

ՎԱՄՆ ՅԻՇԱՏԱԿԻ ԵՒ ՓՐԿՈՒԹԵԱՆ
ԱՄԵՆԱՅՆ ՀԱՅՈՑ ԶՈՐՈՑ ԶԱՆՈՒԱՆՍ Տ[Է]Ր ԳԻՏԷ

Վամ յիշատակի եւ փրկութեան | ամեմայն հայոց զորոց զանուանս Տ[է]ր գիտէ

For the memorial and salvation of all Armenians whose names the Lord knows.

The Armenian text follows a common Greek formulae used in dedicatory and memorial inscriptions: "for memory" – Ὑπὲρ μνήμις,[62] "for salvation" – Ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας[63] and "whose names the Lord knows" – ὧν (ὁ) Κύριος γινώσκει τὰ ὀνόματα.[64] According to the comparable finds from the excavations that were carried out a century later (see below), the inscription is dated to the Late Byzantine – Early Islamic period.

According to the reports, under the mosaic floor was a cavern measuring nearly 3.5 m^2, which contained human remains. Accompanying small finds included some glass vessels, a number of pottery lamps, and a marble slab with a cross and an Armenian inscription. Discoveries of other tombs containing bones, and one a fragment of a Greek inscription in the neighbourhood are also mentioned.

An additional inscription in Armenian, mentioning Petros and Yohan, was found not far from the 'Bird Mosaic'. It was incised on a marble (?) slab[65] and broken into several fragments. The slab disappeared without a trace soon after discovery. According to the first anonymous publication of 1894, the finds from the site were taken by local authorities to Istanbul. However, the transfer of the broken slab to the capital, while the mosaic itself was left *in situ*, seems improbable. No drawing or photograph of the find was made; it is described only in the written reports of 19th century explorers. C. Schick stated that the stone measured "12 inches square, with a cross of the Knights of St. John on it, and below some writing in two lines of a language unknown to me. The slab was broken into five or six pieces, but no pieces were lost, so that they can be put together and everything seen. This slab was not found on the [mosaic] pavement, but about 25 feet distant from it, where a new house has been built, and where tombs also are said to have been found. I am sorry that I did not see the

62 For example, Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, nos. 793 and 794.

63 Ibid., no. 819.

64 Ibid., nos. 854, 869, 1084.

65 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 813.

latter, as they were soon covered again."[66] In another report,[67] Owsepian added that the inscription was written on a marble slab broken into seven pieces, with an Armenian text as follows:

> Յիշեալ Պետրոս որ արար եւՅոհան որ ետ առնել զխաչս զայս
>
> Having remembered Petros who made and Yohan who commissioned this cross.

Since no graphic documentation of the find is preserved, nothing can be added regarding the type of script or its dating. Regarding its dating, it was most probably written in uncial *erkatagir* script. Stone agreed with the proposition of Schick and Owsepian that the inscription can be related to numerous tombs discovered in the area, and mentions another Greek inscription from the area that was copied by Séjourné.[68]

It seems that the inscription should not be regarded as funereal, but rather as a dedication. Invocations of donors on liturgical furniture are known in the archaeological record. For example, two inscribed fragments of marble chancel screen were discovered in the Ophel excavations, bearing a standard formula "for salvation" – Ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας;[69] a complete chancel screen with the same dedication was reported in secondary use in the external decoration of the Dome of the Rock building.[70] Similar formula "for the memory, and repose, and remission of the sins" – Ὑπὲρ μνήμις καὶ ἀναπαύσεως καὶ ἀφέσεως ἁμαρτιῶν, was used in the inscription discovered in the Gethsemane cave.[71] Most likely, the Armenian text reproduces a common Greek formula.

The 'Cross of the Knights of St. John' ('Maltese cross'), with four symmetrical split vertexes, is well known in the Byzantine period, but should not be characterized as Armenian in style. This stone was definitely not as a *khachkar* – the medieval Armenian stelae in the shape of a stone cross.[72] In the Holy Land such crosses were popular elements of the reliefs in marble and stone, in liturgical furniture and architectural decoration; some are painted, carved or

66 Schick and Bliss 1894, p. 260.
67 Owsepian 1895, p. 89.
68 Séjourné 1894, and Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 877.
69 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, nos. 793 and 794.
70 Ibid., no. 863.
71 Ibid., 819.
72 Owsepian 1895, p. 89.

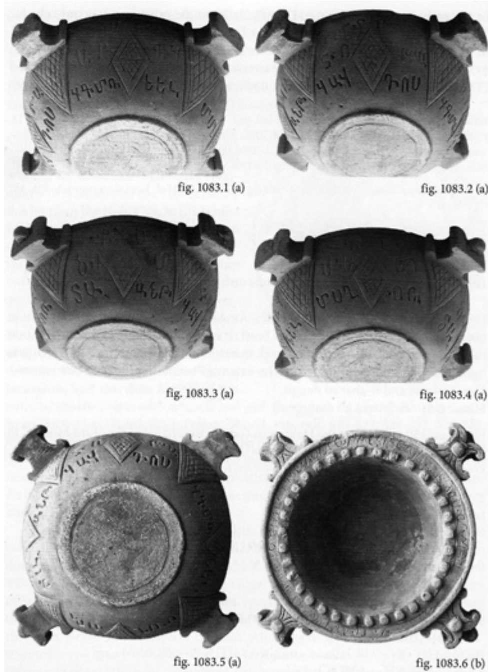

FIGURE 48
Stone bowl with Greek and Armenian inscriptions.
COURTESY OF A. AND N. GRAICER AND CIIP.

plaster-molded on the walls of water cisterns, or wineries;[73] some decorate epitaphs.[74] However, a larger number of the inscribed and plain tombstones from Jerusalem are decorated with Latin crosses.[75]

It is possible to propose that the lost inscription from Musrara was originally a piece of church furniture decorated with a cross, and inscribed by its donors, Petros and Yohan.

Nearly two decades ago, a new find was added to the complex of the 'Bird Mosaic', orally reported to have been discovered at the site. It is a unique stone bowl, kept today in the Museum of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem (Fig. 48). The bowl is engraved with Greek and Armenian inscriptions: the first indecipherable, and the second incomprehensible.[76] Reexamination of the find itself and of the records relating to it raises serious doubts regard-

73 For example, in the monastery discovered on the YMCA grounds: Iliffe 1935, pl. LI: 2.

74 For example, in the tomb of Thecla the Bessian: Di Segni 2012 I/2, no. 962, and in the tomb on the summit of the Mount of Olives (see above).

75 For example, Viri Galilaei on Mt. of Olives: Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, nos. 917–919.

76 For the full description of the bowl and its inscriptions, see Stone and Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 1083. I am indebted to Michael E. Stone and Leah Di Segni for their interest in

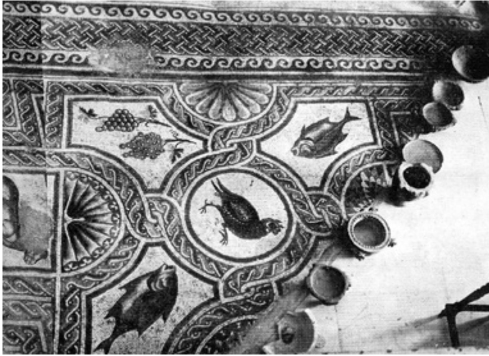

FIGURE 49
The stone bowls in the Russian antiquities collection on the Mount of Olives, 1920-s. Loukianoff 1939.

ing the vessel's provenance and authenticity, and it is discussed here with the explicit purpose of its exclusion from future discussions of the Armenian archaeological finds.[77]

The large bowl (diameter 31 cm, height 20 cm) is made of soft local limestone. The disc base is flat; the wide grooved rim is decorated with raised carved dots, and similar dots are repeated on each of the four elaborately ornate handles; the outside surface of the bowl is decorated with alternating raised rhomboids and triangles, filled with cross-hatch design. The decorative scheme of the bowl as a whole, lacks any known archaeological parallels and consequently represents a suspicious *mélange hybride*. The four Armenian inscriptions are deeply incised, each confined to a section between two handles. All four are indecipherable, except for the repetitive *nomina sacra*: "Jesus, Christ, Lord, God". Similarly, the letters of the Greek inscription, lightly incised on the vessel's rim, are described as "illegible or uncertain".

It is unclear when the bowl came into possession of the Museum of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem, since no relevant records were maintained. Most probably, it was never discovered near the 'Bird Mosaic' in Musrara. First, no description, or photographs, or graphical representation of the bowl appeared in any of the numerous and detailed reports dedicated to the Armenian mosaic at the end of the 19th century, mentioned above. Second, the bowl can be clearly seen on the photo made by the end of 1920s in the Russian Museum on the Mount of Olives (Fig. 49), among other finds of the archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin) collection.[78] This unexpected appearance

the subject, fruitful discussion, and important remarks. Deepest gratitude is expressed to Hannah M. Cotton for her kind assistance and advice.

77 Tchekhanovets 2015.

78 Loukianoff 1939, Pl. VII.

in a Russian antiquities collection contradicts the claim that the bowl has been in possession of the Armenian Patriarchate since its discovery. Moreover, it is also clearly seen on the photograph from the early 1970s that illustrates the article of B. Narkiss.[79] Finally, reexamination of the find[80] shows, that the vessel has no trace of patina, except on the inside surface at the bottom, and that the incised letters and ornaments were deliberately filled with muddy dirt.

It seems that the stone bowl should be regarded as a 19th century forgery[81] and must be excluded from the corpus of the finds related to the Armenian community of the Byzantine period. It can be proposed that the bowl was fabricated by local masters, following the great public interest provoked by the Armenian discoveries in Jerusalem, namely the mosaics and inscriptions found on the Mount of Olives and in Musrara. The Greek and Armenian inscriptions that embellish the bowl are gibberish, as is typical of forgeries, except for the *nomina sacra*, which could easily be copied. The forgery, intended probably for an Armenian or Armenophile customer, somehow found its way into the Russian collection of antiquities. The most recent whereabouts of the find are obscure: most likely, it was sold to private hands in the beginning of 1970s, like other precious items in the Kapustin collection. On this occasion, it ended up in the hands of the Armenian clients.

The 'Armenian Monastery'

A monastic complex with a number of Armenian inscriptions was exposed in Area D of the Israel Antiquities Authority excavations at Musrara in 1990–1992 (Fig. 50).[82] The quality of the excavation, which followed the stratigraphy of the site, produced the most reliable and trustworthy data for research, and renders this the most important of all the remains related to the ancient Armenian presence in the Holy Land.

The monastic complex included a small church (Fig. 50, 1 on the plan) with underground burials (2 on the plan), residential units (3), and an elaborate water system with a large reservoir (4), a number of smaller cisterns and numerous water channels (5). The foundation of the complex was dated by the excavators to the fifth–sixth centuries; it was significantly expanded in the middle of the seventh century by the addition of some residential units, a bathhouse and a reception hall, and by extending and embellishing the

79 Narkiss 1979, p. 23, Fig. 33.

80 Deep gratitude should be expressed to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and personally to Fr. Pakrat (Berjekian) for the opportunity to examine the vessel.

81 Clermont-Ganneau 1885a; Salmon 2000; but see Sabo 2013.

82 Excavated by D. Amit and S. Wolff.

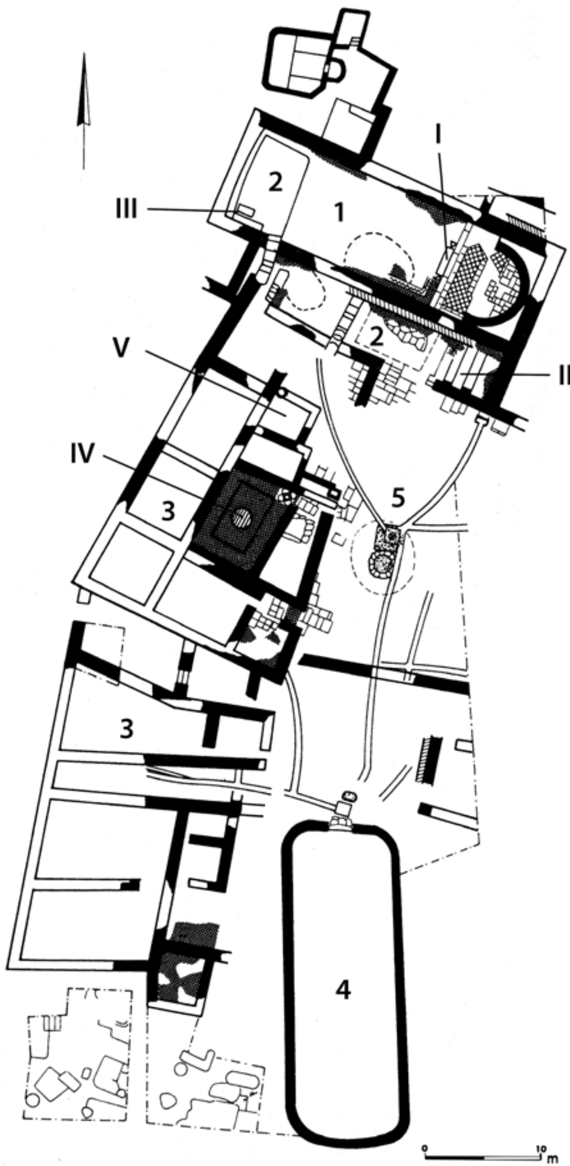

FIGURE 50 *The "Armenian monastery", Area D of the IAA excavations in Musrara: 1 – church; 2 – underground crypts with burials; 3 – residential units; 4 – water cistern; 5 – water channels; I – Greek building inscription of hegumenos Silvanus; II – Armenian burial inscription of Petros of Sodk; III – Armenian burial inscription of Abeł; IV – Armenian building inscription of the priest Ewstat; V – Armenian abecedary inscription.*

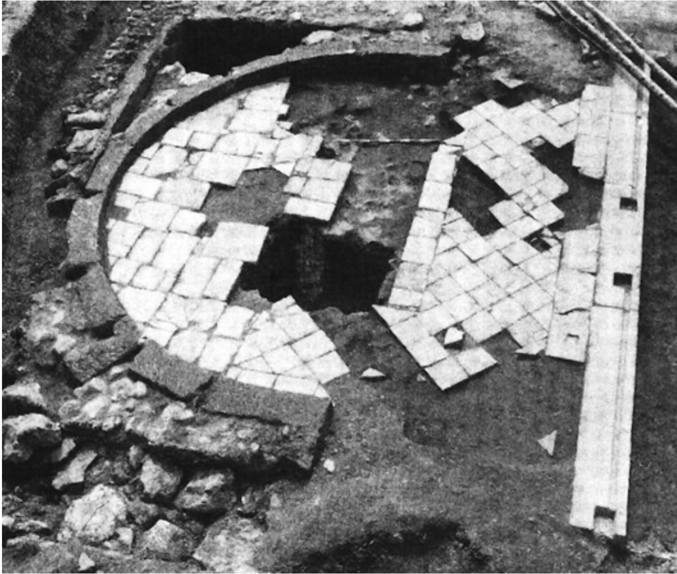

FIGURE 51 *Musrara, Area D, apse of the church.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

church. The characteristics of the complex testify to it being not only a monastic institution, but also a pilgrim hostel, at least in its later stage. Beside the Armenian material, two rare coins of the Axum mint were found at the site, testifying to the presence of Ethiopian visitors. Apparently, the structure was abandoned sometime during the Abbasid period, i.e. in the eighth–ninth centuries: its final phase is represented by ceramic and numismatic finds dated to the Umayyad and Abbasid period, including Beth-Shean type storage jars, buff ware jugs, etc.

The church is of a relatively modest size (18 by 5.6 m), and belongs to the monastery chapel type, with a single nave and an inscribed apse (Fig. 51). The bema area was paved in white, red and a black stones, laid diagonally; the nave floor was decorated with a simple floral mosaic Greek dedicatory inscription, placed in *tabula ansata* in the eastern side of the nave, slightly damaged on the left side (Fig. 50, 1 on the plan). The text is inscribed with black tesserae on the white background. The frame is 68 cm high and 210 cm wide, letters hight varies from 11–13 to 5–6 cm (Fig. 52). The text reads as follows:[83]

83 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 809.

FIGURE 52 *Musrara, Area D, Greek building inscription of hegumenos Silvanus.* COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

> [--]ΛΟΥΑΝΟΥΘΕΟΦΙΛʃΔΙΑΚΟΚΗΓΟΥΜΕΗΠΑΡΟΥΣΑ
> [--]ΙΣΕΓΕΝΕΤΟΚΗΚΟΓΧΗΚΗΠΡΟΣΘΗΚΗΤΟΥΝΑΟΥΜΙΚΟΥΣ
> [--]ΥΨΟΥΣΠΧϚΜΝΗΣΘΗΤ[--]ΚΕΕΝΤ[--]ΑΣΙΛΙΑΣΟΥ
>
> [Ἐπὶ Σι]λουανοῦ θεοφιλ(εστάτου) διακό(νου) κ(αὶ) ἡγουμέ(νου) ἡ παροῦσα |
> [?ψήφωσ]ις ἐγένετο κ(αὶ) ἡ κόγχη κ(αὶ) ἡ προσθήκη τοῦ ναοῦ μίκους | [π(ή)χ(εις) --]
> ὕψους π(ή)χ(εις) Ϛ. Μνήσθη[ι αὐτοῦ] Κ(ύρι)ε ἐν τ[ῇ β]ασιλίᾳ σοῦ
>
> In the days of Silvanus, the most God-loving deacon and abbot, the present mosaic (?)
> was made, and the apse and the annex of the church, for a length of … cubits and a height
> of 6 cubits. Remember him, o Lord, in Thy kingdom.

Remains of the chancel screen were discovered *in situ*. The entry hall, measuring 15 by 3 m, was discovered to the south of the church, sealing the burial crypt. Additional crypts were discovered west of the church and further to the north (Fig. 50, 2 on the plan).

Possibly, the church was erected above existing burials of the fifth–sixth centuries, and was enlarged at a later stage, during the sixth century. The Greek inscription of the hegumenos Silvanus, paleographically dated to the seventh century, may refer to renovations: the addition of the apse and narthex. A number of pottery vessels and a rich assemblage of glass vessels were found in the crypts. Two Armenian tombstones were discovered in the underground burials beneath the church structure, in the eastern and western crypts.

FIGURE 53
Musrara, Area D, Armenian burial inscription of Petros of Sodk.
COURTESY OF A. AND N. GRAICER, *CIIP.*

The first tombstone is inscribed in *erkatagir* script (Fig. 53), carved on hard limestone slab 87 cm high, 52.5 cm wide and 8 cm thick. The letters are 8 cm high.[84]

ՊԵՏՐՈ
ՍԻՍՈԳԱ
ՑԻՈՅ

Պետրո/սի Սոդա/ցւոյ

[This is the tomb of] Petros of Sodk‘

Sodk‘ is a district in Eastern Armenia, well known from historical sources. The inscription was discovered in one of the rectangular, built tombs, under the

84 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 873.

FIGURE 54 *Musrara, Area D, Armenian burial inscription of Abeł.* COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

'entrance hall' to the south of the church building (Fig. 50, II on the plan). The tombs preserved the skeletal remains of several individuals, at least one of them in an articulated position. The finds include an assemblage of intact glass and pottery vessels, a fragment of a cypress tree with iron nails, identified as part of a coffin, and a coin dated to the fifth century. The fragmentary remains of the mosaic floor that sealed the tombs in the 'entrance hall', was dated to the sixth century.

The second inscription (Fig. 54) is fragmentary. It is carved on a limestone slab 45 cm high and 70 cm wide, the letters height is 13 cm.[85]

ԱԲԵՂ

Աբեղ

[This is the tomb of] Abeł

The *erkatagir* letters have an unusual rounded shape and were possibly written with the help of a compass. The ligature of the letters ԲԵ is one of the oldest ligatures known in Armenian writing.

85 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 874.

FIGURE 55 *Musrara, Area D, reception hall.*
UNPUBLISHED, COURTESY OF J. SELIGMAN AND ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

The slab was found in the 'main" crypt under the western part of the church (Fig. 50, III on the plan). This crypt, partly carved into bedrock, had a vaulted ceiling. The human remains that were discovered here were disarticulated. The stepped entrance leading to the courtyard allowed pilgrims' visits. It is not clear if the slab was discovered *in situ*: since the crypt was open, some fragments were thrown into it after the destruction of the complex, including elements of liturgical furniture.

To the south of the church a residential unit was excavated. It included a number of household rooms, storage rooms, and a bathhouse with water-heating installation. In one of the rooms, a particularly rich assemblage of ceramic and glass vessels was found, including a large number of cooking pots. The central room of the unit was identified by the excavators as a 'reception hall" (Fig. 50, IV on the plan). In this room, measuring 5.5 by 4 m., a well-preserved mosaic was discovered, decorated with a simple floral pattern (Fig. 55). The text of a dedicatory inscription in Armenian uncial *erkatagir* script was set in a large medallion of 1.19 m diameter (Fig. 56). The text reads as follows:[86]

86 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 817.

FIGURE 56
Musrara, Area D, Armenian building inscription of the priest Ewstat.
COURTESY OF J. SELIGMAN, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

ԵՍ
ԵՒՍՏԱԹԵՐԷՑԱ
ՐԿԻՋՅԱԽՃԱՊԱԿՍ
ՈՐՄՏԱՆԷՔԻՏՈՒՄՍԶԻՍ
ԵՒԶԵՂԲԱՅՐԻՆԶՂՈՒ
ԿԱՍՅԻՇԵՑԷ[Ք]Ի
ՔՍ

Ես Եւստաթ երէց ա/րկի զյախճապակս / որ մտանէք ի տունս զիս / եւ զեղբայր իմ զՂու/կաս յիշեցէ[ք]ի / Ք[րիստո]ս

I, Ewstat the priest, laid this mosaic. [You], who enter this building, remember me and my brother Lucas to Christ.

A coin of Arab-Byzantine type was discovered in the mosaic foundation and dates the floor to the middle or second half of the seventh century.[87]

In addition, a bowl inscribed with Armenian letters (Figs. 57–58) was discovered during the excavations of the bathhouse, on the floor of the entrance room (Fig. 50, V on the plan).[88] The large vessel, with horizontal ledge rim and

87 Stone and Amit 1997, pp. 27–30; Amit and Wolf 2000.
88 Stone and Amit 1997, pp. 43–44; Stone 1997, p. 267.

FIGURE 57 *Musrara, Area D, bowl with Armenian abecedary inscription.* COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

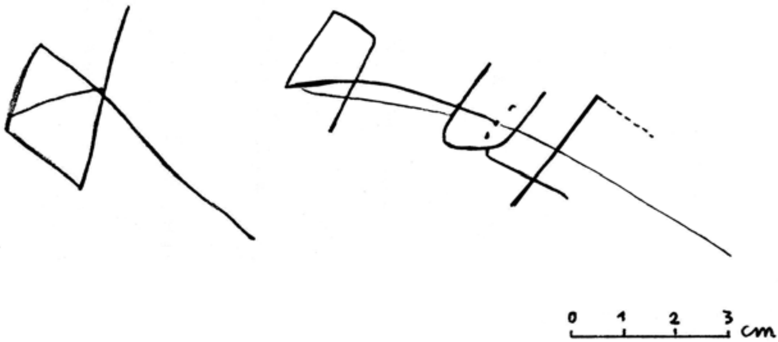

FIGURE 58 *Musrara, Area D, Armenian abecedary inscription. Drawing by D. Amit.* UNPUBLISHED, COURTESY OF J. SELIGMAN, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

ring base, is dated to the middle seventh–ninth centuries.[89] Four *erkatagir* letters 2–2.5 cm high are unskillfully scratched on the outer surface of the vessel:[90]

ԳԳԱԲ

GGAB

89 Magness 1993, p. 201, Type FBW 2D.

90 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 1064.

The letters represent the only known example of an Armenian abecedary inscription. Numerous *abecedaria*, containing the complete alphabet or its first letters, were discovered in the Near East in various archaeological contexts. Inscriptions of this type have appeared since the invention of alphabetic script. The largest number of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek abecedaries date to the Early Roman period, but some examples can be found in later contexts.[91] As far as we know, the latest ancient alphabetic inscription is from the Early Islamic period,[92] a similar date to that of the Armenian find from Musrara. It is worth noting that no inscriptions of this kind have been discovered in the Caucasus region, and therefore the find should be regarded as representative of local, Palestinian tradition.

To sum up, the architectural remains of the 'Armenian Monastery' and the funereal chapel with the 'Bird Mosaic' that were discovered in Musrara seem to be an integral part of the surrounding monastic/pilgrimage quarters. Architectural, construction and decorative characteristics do not permit their separation from the rest of the complex; the only distinction is the use of the Armenian language. Of special interest is the coexistence of Greek and Armenian in the dedicatory and burial inscriptions at the site. Judging by the stratigraphic sequence proposed by the excavators, the gravestone of Petros belongs to the initial stage of the structure. The gravestone of Abeł, together with the Greek dedication of Silvanus inside the church and the Armenian dedication of Ewstat, belong to the second construction stage, dated to the middle of the seventh century. It seems that as in the case of the Mount of Olives complex, we may not speak of 'Armenian usurpation' of the existing institution, but rather of coexistence of Greek and Armenian speaking monks (for discussion, see below).

"The Monastery of Theodorus and Cyriacus"

The large monastic complex discovered on Mount Scopus served as a pilgrimage center.[93] Located on the eastern slope of Mount Scopus, on the side of the Roman road leading to Jericho and the Jordan River, it contained a church with burial crypt, a sophisticated water-supply system, stables with mangers, bathhouse, and various agricultural facilities, all arranged around a central courtyard (Fig. 59).

---

91 Ben Ami and Tchekhanovets 2008.

92 A Hebrew-Arabic inscription, dated to the eighth century, written in ink on a marble slab, discovered in the Umayyad palatial complex of Khirbet al Mafjar: Hamilton 1959, pp. 42–45, pl. 94.2.

93 Amit, Seligman and Zilberbod 2003; Stone et al. 2011.

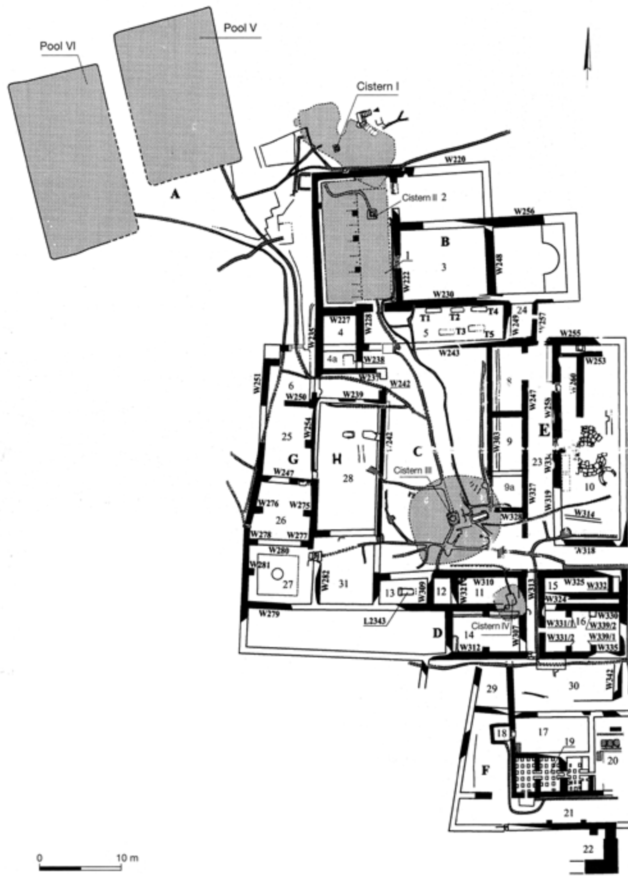

FIGURE 59 *The monastic complex on Mount Scopus.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

The Byzantine dedication of the monastery is unknown. The Greek mosaic inscription discovered in the reception hall of the establishment mentions the builders, or more probably the restorers, of the complex: hegumen Theodorus and the monk Cyriacus, possibly the architect, or the one in charge of the hospice (Fig. 60). The text is settled in a round mosaic medallion with a floral frame, 137 cm in diameter; letters are 6.5–7 cm high, written in black, with red separation raws between the lines. The text reads as follows:[94]

94 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. App. 10*

FIGURE 60 *Mout Scopus, Theodorus and Cyriacus building inscription.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

ΕΠΙΘ
ΕΩΔΟΡΟΥ
ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕ
ΡΟΥΚΗΓΟΥΜΕ
ΝΟΥΚΚΥΡΙΑΚΜΟ
ΝΑΧΟΥΕΓΕ
ΝΕΤΤΠΑΝ
ΕΡΓΟΝ

Επὶ Θ|εοδόρου | πρεσβυτε|ρου κ(αὶ) ηγουμε|νου κ(αὶ) Κυριακ(οῦ) μο|ναχοῦ ἐγέ|νετ(ο)
τ(ὸ) πᾶν | ἔργον

Under Theodorus priest and hegumen and Cyriacus monk all this work was done.

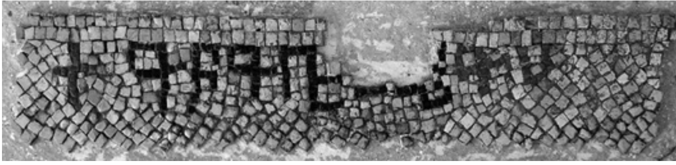

FIGURE 61 *Mount Scopus, Armenian building inscription of Grigor.* COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

On paleographic grounds, the inscription is dated to the seventh or early eighth century. This date correlates with the archaeological finds: according to the excavators, the structure was established during the fifth century; a few more construction phases are dated between the Early Islamic period and the eighth century. Other epigraphic finds from the site include fragments of marble panels, bearing fragmentary Greek inscriptions.

The short Armenian inscription, 86 cm long, was set in the mosaic floor, on white background, close to the opening of a large water cistern beside the monastery's church.[95] The text is written in *erkatagir* uncial letters ca. 10 cm high, with a usage of ligatures; one of the abbreviations cannot be deciphered (Fig. 61). The reading is as follows:

+ ԳՐԻԳՈՐԵ Ն(?) ՔՍ

+ Գրիգոր ե ն (?) Ք[րիստո]ս

+ Grigor E – N (?) Christ

The cross and *nomen sacrum* are executed in red stone, the rest of the text is black on a white background. Based on the coins discovered under the white mosaic floor, the inscription can be dated to the sixth century. The black and red tesserae of the inscription are of the same size as the white mosaic background and clearly form an integral part of it; i.e. the Armenian letters cannot be regarded as a later addition to the original floor.

The text is another example, alongside the monasteries on the summit of the Mount of Olives and in the Musrara neighbourhood, of Armenian language usage in a monastic complex where Greek inscriptions were discovered.

95 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 817B.

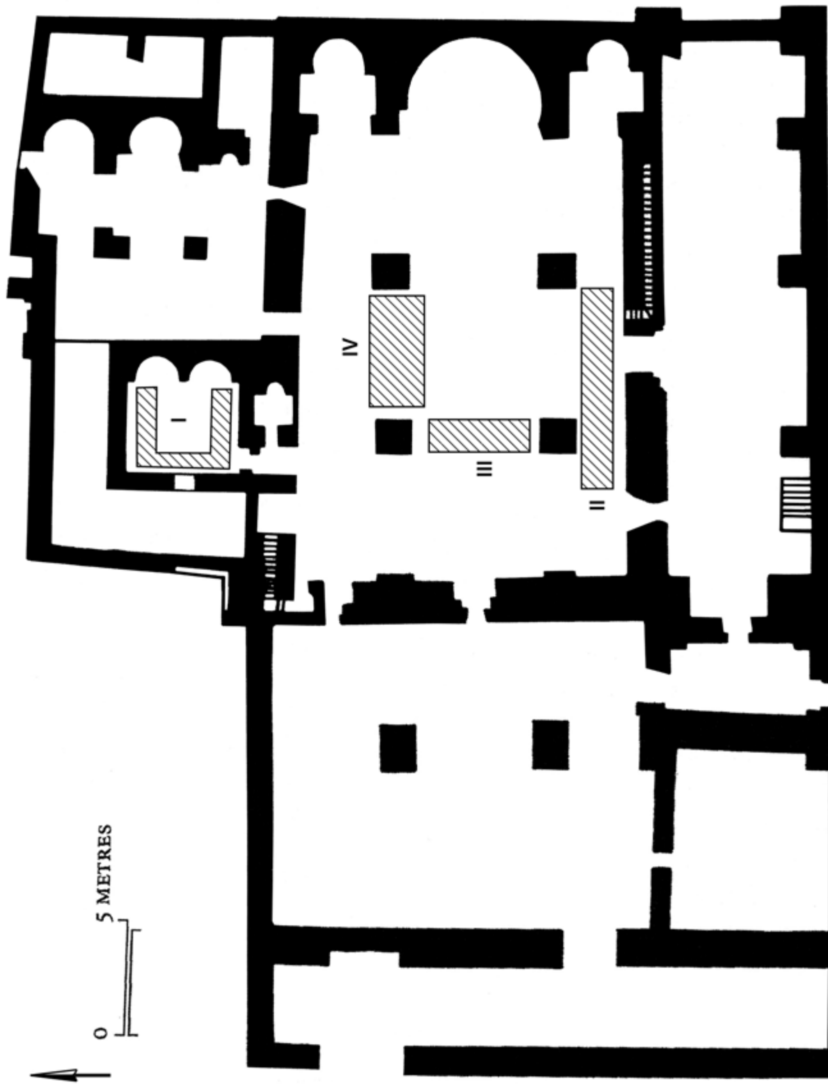

FIGURE 62 *The Armenian cathedral of St. James. The Roman numbers mark the excavation areas of bishop Shenork Galoustian.*

St. James Monastery

Located on Mount Zion, within the walls of the Old City, the St. James Monastery serves as the principal Armenian church of Jerusalem (Fig. 62). Its connection with the Armenians is well documented since the 12th century.

However, the establishment of the present structure should be dated to about a century earlier, in the middle of the 11th century, and there are vague hints that attribute its construction to the Georgians. Rebuilt in the 12th century, and then repaired in the 17th and 18th centuries, with some structural changes, the complex preserves also some Byzantine remains. These early stages of the structure merit a detailed discussion.

The oldest part of the existing structure is the small chapel of St. Menas or Minas, known today as the chapel of St. Sarkis, which is integrated in the northern part of the Sts. James cathedral (Fig. 62, 1 on the plan). The existence of a martyrium dedicated to St. Menas in the monastery built by Bassa in the fifth century, is registered in the Byzantine sources. The ancient Jerusalem Lectionaries also preserve the information regarding the services performed in this church.[96] It should be mentioned, that the tradition of the veneration of the tomb of St. James the Major on this site was unknown in the Byzantine period.[97]

A superficial study of the ancient chapel brought Vincent and Abel to the conclusion that the Armenian cathedral preserves the remains of a Byzantine martyrium, dedicated to St. Menas and dated to the fifth–sixth centuries.[98] The identification of Vincent and Abel is generally accepted today. The original chapel is almost square in plan, measuring from outside 7.05 by 7.15 m, with two small inscribed apses. The structure is built of well-dressed ashlar stones. Scholars also mention the similarity of the chapel fronton to the one of St. Catherine, built by Justinian. The arched entrance to the chapel from the west is probably medieval. The limestone lintel, probably covered in the 1920s, and therefore not mentioned by the Dominican fathers, is decorated with *tabula ansata* (Fig. 63). It bears no visible signs of inscription (possibly erased), but decorated with two crosses on the sides.[99]

The ancient foundations of the complex have never been properly studied archaeologically. In 1957, amateur excavations were undertaken during the renovation and paving works. The report, in Armenian, illustrated by a number of photographs, was published in *Sion*, the magazine of the St. James

96 In memory of Isaiah, Menas and Focas on May, 5 and October, 31; Isaiah on June, 16; Menas on July, 10 and December, 11; and in memory of Bassa on December, 6. See Tarchnishvili 1959, pp. 1032, 1084, 1335, 1357, 1401; Garitte 1958, pp. 64, 73, 101, 103, 108, 216, 253, 382, 404.

97 Vincent et Abel 1922, pp. 519–522; Eliav 2004.

98 Vincent et Abel 1922, pp. 544–546.

99 The external walls of the chapel were recently renovated, exposing numerous Armenian graffiti and crosses of later date. For uninscribed *tabula ansata* decorated with relief of a cross, see for example, the lintel from Yatta: Magen and Kagan 2012, p. 253, Pl. 328.1.

FIGURE 63 *The chapel of St. Menas,* tabula ansata *above the western entrance.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

Brotherhood, by the bishop Shenorhk (Galoustian), who was responsible for the renovations.[100] No professional archaeologists assisted in the work, however Galoustian mentions the visits of "the Latin fathers, the famous archaeologists" – probably, scholars from the École Biblique. The only preserved graphic plan presenting the plastered installation (below) is signed by Fr. H.M. Coüasnon. Due to the lack of available sources on the subject, it seems appropriate to bring here an extended summary of this report.

The inner size of the chapel as recorded by Galoustian – 4.65 by 3.75 m – differs from the measurements of Vincent and Abel. Three trenches were excavated in order to expose the ancient foundations of the chapel: close to its northern, western and southern walls (Fig. 62, 1 on the plan). The eastern side was left untouched, in order not to damage the altar. Naturally, this excavation method left us with no hope of establishing, even *post factum*, the stratigraphy of the site. The base of the northern foundation wall was discovered 1.8 m

100 Galoustian 1958, pp. 194–197, 232–238, 289–293.

FIGURE 64 *Byzantine wall and its foundation in St. Menas chapel.* COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

below the level of the modern floor; it was built of large field stones, roughly worked (Fig. 64). In the trench itself scattered mosaic tesserae were discovered.

FIGURE 65 *Colored tesserae discovered in St. Menas chapel.* COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

The trench excavated along the western wall "revealed nothing, accept the continuation of the wall below", partially covered by ancient plaster. Under the southern wall, which borders the St. James tomb chapel, the wall itself did not continue, but only its foundations were found (possibly, the ancient southern entrance?). Excavating deeper, the workers found numerous fragments of the coloured plaster and mosaic of large and medium size cubes of white, red and black color (Fig. 65). At a depth of 1.7 m, in the south-eastern and north-western corners of the chapel, a few fragments of mosaic floor were discovered *in situ* (Fig. 66). The remains of the mosaic floor were broken, probably by the collapsed ashlar stones that were found above it. The dig continued about 15–20 cm deeper between the floor remains, until it reached "rows of stones, with bone remains in between" – tombs? At this stage it was decided to stop the excavations, in the hope of continuing proper archaeological work in the future.

Galoustian concludes that the ancient chapel was ruined by an earthquake or "by barbarians", and the top rows of the masonry collapsed, shattering the mosaic floor. During the medieval renovations, the early structure was not

FIGURE 66 *Fragment of mosaic floor discovered* in situ *in St. Menas chapel.*
COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

dismantled, but incorporated into the new church: the walls were raised, and a new floor was laid over the collapse layer.[101] The pottery, mosaic and fresco fragments were stored in the Armenian patriarchate, with other small finds that were collected. Unfortunately, we were unable to find any trace of them.

The remains that were described in the St. Sarkis chapel could be identified as the Byzantine St. Menas chapel, or another contemporary structure: a different part of Bassa's nunnery, the metokhion of the St. Sabas Monastery, or part of the monastery of the Iberians, built by Peter the Iberian close to the Tower of David.[102] If the last proposition is correct, it may well explain the reappearance of Georgian monks at the site of St. James in the medieval period.

Additional ancient remains were discovered on the same occasion by bishop Shenorhk in the area of the main cathedral, where the floors where replaced (Fig. 67; for the excavated areas, see Fig. 62). In total, three trenches 1–1.3 m deep were excavated, cruelly cutting the ancient remains (Fig. 68). Trench II was dug parallel to the southern wall of the church and the threshold of the St. Etchmiadzin chapel (Fig. 62, II on the plan). Six individual human burials

101 Galoustian 1958, p. 293.
102 Tsafrir 1975, pp. 84–87.

FIGURE 67 *St. James Cathedral. Excavation trenches II, III and IV, 1957; view to SW.*
COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

FIGURE 68 *St. James Cathedral excavations, 1957. Two ancient floors are visible in the right section of the trench.*
UNPUBLISHED, COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

FIGURE 69
St. James Cathedral. Skeleton discovered in the trench II.
COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

were uncovered in it (Fig. 69), among them the skeleton of a child, and a seventh grave, which was full of bones and skulls. The burials were arranged in a row, approximately 1–1.5 m to the north of the church wall, and were described in the report as "a ditch" 12 m long and 1 m wide. Trench III, 4 m long, was excavated between the western pair of central pillars (Fig. 62, III on the plan). Two skeletons were discovered at a depth of 1–1.3 m below the floor level. It should be emphasized that the description of the burials agrees entirely with the Christian burial practice of Byzantine Palestine; however due to the character of the excavation the stratigraphic sequence cannot be established here. Trench IV was opened between the northern pillars of the church (Fig. 62, IV on the plan). The remains of an ancient structure were discovered here, but "its purpose remains obscure even to the leading archaeologists".[103] Luckily, the photograph and the plan of the mysterious structure appear in the published report, identified by an architect Ch. Coüasnon as "pool and canalization, related to Byzantine remains" (Figs. 70–71). "Canalization", placed on the north–south axis, can be possibly interpreted as part of chancel screen with

103 Galoustian 1958, p. 232.

FIGURE 70
St. James Cathedral. Installation discovered in the trench IV.
COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

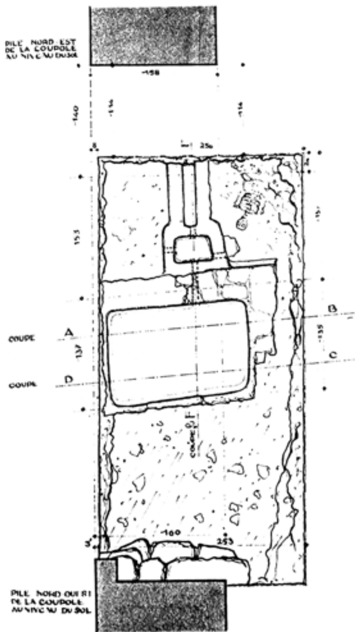

FIGURE 71
St. James Cathedral. Plan of the installation discovered in trench IV.
COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

an elongated space made for screen itself and square hole for chancel post. In such a case, the plastered pool should be interpreted as some sort of water installation connected to the ritual activity: baptistery, *thalasa* etc. Another possibly for interpretation is to see in the square installation a collecting vat, connected by a channel to a treading floor on the east, which did not survive. The possible occurrence of an agricultural installation within the Byzantine urban perimeter opens the way for a discussion regarding the status of this part of Jerusalem.

A number of bell-shaped water cisterns in the courtyard of the cathedral and under its floors should be added to the list of relevant finds.

Nothing is known about the structure between the end of the Byzantine period and the 11th century, when the church and the area surrounding the monastery were rebuilt, – according to some vague later evidences – by Georgians. From that time on, the complex is known as St. James Monastery.

The foundation of St. James Cathedral is usually dated to 1072–1088.[104] This was the period when the Georgians were reinforcing their position in Jerusalem under the protection of the Bagrationi royal dynasty: a monastery with a scriptorium was established near Golgotha, and the Monastery of the Cross was rebuilt by Prochorus Shavsheli. However, neither the *Vita* of the saint, nor any other contemporary Georgian source mentions the great building project of St. James.[105]

Vincent and Abel, stressing the architectural similarity between St. James cathedral and the main church of the Monastery of the Cross, even succeeded in identifying remains of 'Georgian masonry' in the church, chronologically following the Byzantine masonry of St. Menas chapel.[106] Nevertheless, no unequivocal material evidence of Georgian presence was ever discovered at the site.

In any case, Georgian ownership of St. James, if any, did not last: during the Crusaders' rule the whole complex was transferred into the Armenian hands. The first European traveller to report Armenian activity in St. James is John of Wurzburg, in 1165. The earliest dated Armenian inscriptions in the church

104 Tamarati 1910, p. 313; Vincent et Abel 1922, pp. 522–524; Sanjian 1965, pp. 12–13; Pringle 2007, p. 169.

105 Recently there was a report of an undated colophon of an 11th century Georgian manuscript in Arabic, which may perhaps be interpreted as evidence of Georgian ownership of Sts. James: Frantsouzoff 2014. The manuscript is part of a collection that was brought from Jerusalem to St. Petersburg in 1820 by the Georgian prince G.I. Avalishvili, a diplomat in the service of Russia: Khopelia and Tseradze 2013.

106 Vincent et Abel 1922, pp. 551–553, Figs. 222, 223, 224; Pl. LIV.

is an inscription dated to 956, and two inscriptions dated to 1151–1153. All are inscribed on memorial stone-crosses (*khachkars*) that were discovered during the renovations of 1835, and are incorporated today in the masonry of the western facade.[107] Recently, another *khachkar* was discovered in secondary use, incorporated into the wall of the upper floor, and dated to 1112.[108] The genuine firman confirming the rights to the monastery, given to the Armenian community by Salah ad-Din, is kept in the Patriarchate archive.[109]

At the beginning of the 14th century, and again two hundred years later, the Georgians made a few attempts to gain possession of the church, but in vain. These attempts are well documented in Ottoman and Armenian documents.[110] The memory of the Georgian presence at St. James lasted in Jerusalem for a long time. In the 15th–17th centuries some European visitors describe the Armenian St. James as a church originally built by Georgians or 'Spaniards' – a common confusion between the Georgians (Iberians), and the Spanish (Iberians).[111]

There is at least a century long gap in our evidence regarding the history of the medieval sanctuary. It seems that the founders of the 11th century site cannot be conclusively identified at this stage. It is possible that the forthcoming renovations of the church complex will bring to light more finds that will clarify the picture.

Inscriptions

The Tomb of Hegumenness Charate, Jerusalem

A large stone slab, decorated with a large cross in relief and a Greek inscription, also in relief (Fig. 72), set in *tabula ansata* in its upper part (height 0.49 m, width 67 cm), was discovered in 1870 by Clermont-Ganneau in Qasr Abed ed-Dhanaf, above the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem.[112] Today the inscription is kept in the Louvre Museum. The inscription was found in the modern house which was built beside the hewn tomb that was decorated with paintings of Christian motifs: crosses, doves, palms, A and Ω etc. The text reads as follows:[113]

107 Sawalaneants' 1931, vol. 2, p. 1219; Galoustian 1958, p. 234; Khatchadourian et Basmadjian 2014, pp. 25, 118.

108 The *khachkar*, still unpublished, was discovered in January 2016 during the renovations of Sts. James cathedral.

109 Published in Armenian translation by Sawalaneants' 1931, vol. 2, p. 409; the critical edition and English translation is in preparation by Fr. Pakrad (Berjekian).

110 Ter-Hovhannesiants' 1890, pp. 202–205, 231–233, 241–246; Sanjian 1965; pp. 172, 352; Tsagareli 1888a, pp. 117–120; Peradze 1937, pp. 224–225.

111 For later sources see Vincent et Abel 1922, pp. 523–528; Peradze 1937, p. 202.

112 Clermont-Ganneau 1896, pp. 325–326.

113 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 909.

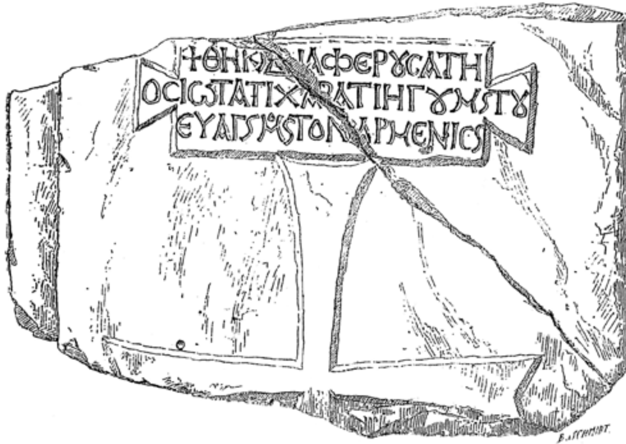

FIGURE 72 *Mount of Olives, burial inscription of hegumenness Charate. Clermont-Ganneau 1885.*

> + ΘΗΚʃΔΙΑΦΕΡΟΥΣΑΤΗ
> ΟΣΙΩΤΑΤΙΧΑΡΑΤΙΗΓΟΥΜʃΤΟΥ
> ΕΥΑΓʃΜΟʃΤΟΝΑΡΜΕΝΙΣʃ
>
> + Θήκ(η) διαφέροσα τῇ | ὁσιωτάτ῾ῃ᾽ Χαρατ῾ῃ᾽ ἡγουμ(ένῃ) τοῦ | εὐαγ(οῦς) μο(ναστηρίου) τõυ | Ἀρμενισ(σῶν)
>
> + Tomb belonging to the most saintly Charate, hegumenness of the chaste monastery of the Armenian women.

Although the name Charate is not of Armenian or Greek origin, but known in the Palmyra region.[114] It is generally accepted that the 'monastery of the Armenian women' could be identified with a monastery on the summit of the Mount of Olives, where the mosaics with Armenian inscriptions were discovered.[115] However, the tomb may equally belong to a different institution (and see the discussion below).

114 The Armenian equivalent of the name, Shnorhik is attested since the 15th century: Acharian 1942–62, vol. 4, p. 178.

115 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 909.

FIGURE 73
Mount of Olives, the Greek burial inscription of Ioanes the Armenian, 1890s (*?*).
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

The Tomb of Ioanes the Armenian, Jerusalem

Item Π-2477 of the Russian photographic collection, is an image of a gravestone with Greek inscription that mentions the name of the deceased: Ioanes the Armenian (Fig. 73).

+ ΘΗΚΗ
ΙΩΑΝΟΥ
ΑΡΜΕΝΙΟ
ΣΤΑΒ

According to L. Di Segni,[116] the text reads as follows:

Θήκη / Ἰωάνου / Ἀρμένιο[υ] / σταβ[υλαριου]

Tomb of Ioanes Armenian, *stabularius*.[117]

116 Deep gratitude should be expressed to Leah Di Segni for primary decipherment of the inscription.

117 Inn-keeper or groom.

The photograph has never been reproduced; the present location of the find is unknown, and no information is available regarding its findspot. Clearly, since the photograph is in the Russian collection, the inscription was discovered prior to 1917. According to L. Di Segni, the epigraphic traits of the inscription are characteristic of the Byzantine epitaphs discovered on the Mount of Olives. Following this clue, the search for the background that appears in the photograph started, and was soon identified: the metal bars on which the stone leans, apparently belong to the window of the refectory of the St. Mary Magdalena Russian convent near Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives. Most probably, the inscription was discovered not far away from this spot.[118]

Armed with this identification, it was possible to trace the inscription in the dispatches that Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin) sent to Russia in the 1890s.[119] Describing the construction works on the plot of St. Maria Magdalena church, he wrote:

> The society started the construction of two houses in the northern part of the plot, when the workers found two caves [...] The second cave is located to the east of the houses; its measures are from north to south 4 arshins [2.84 m], 2 3/4 arshins [ca. 2 m] wide, and 2 arshins [1.42 m] high. Inside a gravestone was discovered, of the size of a square arshin [0.7 by 0.7 m], of 4 vershki [18 cm] thick, with an inscription, which can be dated, according to the shape of the letters, to the sixth century: Αρμένιοσ Ταρ, i.e. an Armenian from the region of Taron.[120]

No photo of the inscription is supplied, but the text leaves no doubt: the gravestone of Ioanes the Armenian was discovered in the rock cut tomb on the northern part of the St. Maria Magdalena plot.

The whole area was rich in archaeological finds, and during the construction works the builders discovered numerous tombs. According to Kapustin, in the lower part of the plot, bordering Gethsemane, many square dark openings were seen, leading to Byzantine graves. Digging the foundation trenches for the church, the workers found hewn tombs five or six times. Some were collapsed and covered by earth, and some "preserved the remains of burial couches, in a shape of garden beds, separated by high frames."[121] Some of the graves were blocked and preserved; others were leveled and covered by earth.

118 Tchekhanovets 2017.

119 Kapustin 1892, 1895.

120 Kapustin 1892, pp. 355–356.

121 Id. 1895, pp. 355–356.

FIGURE 74 *Mount of Olives, Byzantine tomb at the construction site of St. Maria Magdalena church, 1890s.*
COURTESY OF K. VACH AND INDRIK PUBLISHING.

The remains of Byzantine tombs can be seen in the photographs documenting the construction of the St. Maria Magdalena church (Fig. 74). A few Byzantine funeral inscriptions were discovered on the plot, and all were published.[122] The systematic survey of the plot carried out recently by the author,[123] revealed a dozen tombs dated to the Byzantine period, mostly blocked in the 19th century.

Some archaeological finds that were discovered in the tombs, were preserved in the small museum of the monastery. The brief list of the finds was compiled by the Russian Church authorities after the death of Fr. Antonin in 1894. It includes:

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122 See Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2: tomb of Mamas of Gades, no. 912; tomb of Theodulus and Petrus, no. 913; tomb of Stephanus, no. 914; tomb of Ioanes the tanner, no. 989.

123 The survey was carried out on 29.3.2014, with the kind permission of the mother superior of the St. Maria Magdalena Monastery for women of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, hegumenness Elizaveta (Schmelts).

FIGURE 75 *Choziba Monastery in Wadi el-Qilt.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

> two skulls, glass vases, clay lamps and stone fragments; stone sarcophagus; ten small crosses and one larger cross; thirty-four ancient coins. [...] In the cellar there are three stone slabs with ancient inscriptions.[124]

Shortly after the death of Kapustin, the finds were transferred to the main repository of 'Russian antiquities' on the Mount of Olives. There they became part of the general collection, and no identifying documents were left.

Burial Inscription from Choziba Monastery in Wadi el-Qilt

The monastery was established ca. 420–430, by five Syrian monks who built hermitages, a chapel and burial structures on a long, narrow step on the northern cliff of Wadi el-Qilt (Fig. 75). Soon after that, between 480 and 520/30 the monastery was enlarged and turned into coenobium, with hermits living beside it in cells, forming together a composite institution of a rare type. The history of the monastery and its inhabitants is well documented by Antonius of Choziba in the early seventh century.[125] From the eighth century on, the written sources begin to associate the monastery with the parents of the Virgin Mary, Joachim and Anne, and events described in the Apocryphal Gospels. The latest evidences that refer to the monastery are dated to the 11th–12th centuries.

124 Zelenina and Belik 2011, p. 166.

125 For review of the sources, see Patrich 1990, pp. 205–206.

The monastery was studied already during the survey by Conder and Kitchener, who prepared its systematic description and were also the last to see the site before the modern reconstructions of 1878.[126] The most comprehensive study of the history of the monastery and its ancient remains was published by A.M. Schneider.[127] Apart of the chapels and cells, he describes the burial caves, located nearby, some 100 meters to the east, on the same cliff. Typical for desert monasteries, burials were installed in natural caves. Schneider discovered this ancient cemetery untouched, full of bones, with rows of sculls. The walls of the main cave were covered with thin layer of white plaster, and the low ceiling was plastered in red-brownish color. Walls and the ceiling were covered completely by graffiti of crosses and Greek inscriptions, painted in red, grey and yellow. Some of the inscriptions were calligraphically performed and clearly readable, others were pale and undecipherable. According to the description, most of the texts contained the name of the deceased, sometimes his cleric rank, his origin, and the day of the month and the indiction, although without a year.

Regardless the laconic character of the inscriptions, they contain precious information regarding the ethnic composition of the monastic community. Among the deceased were monks from Antioch, Ascalon, Gaza, Byblos, Damascus, Thessaloniki, Cappadocia, Cyprus, Persia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Rome, but also from Armenia and Georgia. The most interesting for the purpose of our study is the fragmentary text that reads as follows:[128]

Ἰωάννις
διάκων(ος)
Ἀρμενίς
νεων .
μ …
.. νου
.. Λ

Ioannes the Armenian, the deacon (of a?) new (?)…

The report contains no graphic or photo documentation of the inscription. The researcher gives a general dating of the whole corpus of the inscriptions,

126 *SWP*, pp. 192–199. For archaeological surveys see also Hirschfeld 1990, pp. 29–31; Patrich 1990, pp. 205–226.

127 Schneider 1931.

128 Schneider 1931, Inscr. 7, p. 317.

stating that they earliest can be paleographically dated to the fifth century and the majority of the finds – to the sixth-seventh centuries. The name of the Armenian deacon Ioannes is unknown from the literary sources. According to Schneider, the name "Ioannes" was the most popular in Choziba onomastics, and appears among the inscriptions 32 times, since it was the name of the establisher of the monastery at the site.

The monastic presence of Armenians at the Choziba Monastery is not mentioned by written sources, but in this case is supported by epigraphic finds, dated to the Byzantine – the Early Islamic periods.

Dedicational Inscription from Hammat Gader

Hammat Gader, known in ancient sources as Emmath or Amatha, famous recreation site with hot mineral springs, is located in the valley of Yarmouk River, to the north of the city of Gadara. The site, built during the Roman period, was flourishing during also the Byzantine and Early Islamic rule, survived few earthquakes and pass through numerous reconstructions. The main structures of the complex, extensively excavated in 1979–1982 by Y. Hirschfeld under the auspices of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Israel Antiquities Authority, include a large bath complex, theater and a synagogue.[129] Clearly, the site equally attracted Christian, Pagan and Jewish visitors.

Dozens of inscriptions, mainly in Greek, were incorporated into the floors and walls of thermal bath complex, praising the curing power of the site. Additional inscriptions are commemorating the construction and renovation works, performed on the behalf of Byzantine rulers – Empress Eudocia (421–460), Emperor Anastasius (491–518), and the building inscription of the Umayyad caliph Muawiyya (661–680).

Especially rich in epigraphic finds is the stone pavement in the Area E of the bath, literary covered with dedicational inscriptions (Fig. 76). The pavement was laid after the earthquake occurred in 455. Some of the inscriptions were incorporated into the original pavement, but most were engraved during the course of the fifth century, or even later, until the Early Islamic period.[130] Almost all the Greek inscriptions are starting from the words "in this holy place …" Most were dedicated by private persons on the occasion of their visit to the site, in gratitude to the healing powers of the baths. All are carved by professional stonecutters, and therefore cannot enter to the category of graffiti inscriptions.

129 Hirschfeld 1997.
130 Di Segni 1997a, p. 253.

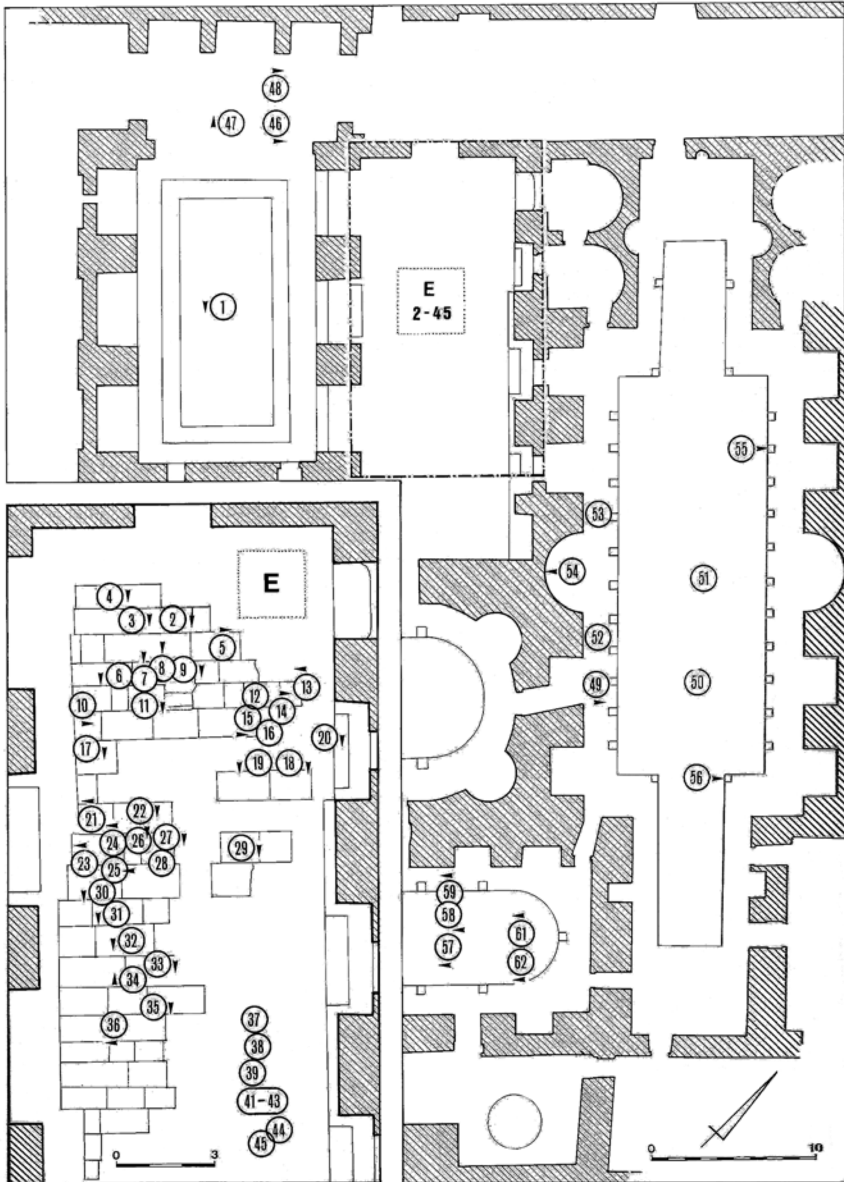

FIGURE 76 *Hammat Gader. Plan of the bath complex with location of inscriptions.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL EXPLORATION SOCIETY.

Among the inscriptions of the stone pavement two (Insc. 10 and 11) contain names, foreign to the common onomastics of the Holy Land, of Parthian origin, which were in use in ancient Armenia and Georgia, although mainly in the royal court circle: Tigranes and Farzamanes.[131] Based on stratigraphic analysis of the site, both of the inscriptions belong to the Phase IIb, dated to 450–661.[132]

An inscription of Tigranes the piper is carved on a slab of grey marble in five lines. The flagstone is 176 heigh, 76 wide and 3.3 thick, letters height 3 cm, longest line is 72 cm. Underneath the inscription there is an amphora engraving (Fig. 77). Text and amphora are facing east, toward the center of the hall. The text reads as follows:[133]

> ΕΝΤωΙᵉ . ωΤΟΠʃΤΟVΤʃΜΝΗCΘΗΤVΓ.ΑΝ.C
> ΚΑΛΑΜΑVΛΙCʃΘΑVΜΑCΙΑΑVΤΟV
> ΓΑΜΗΤΗʃΕVCΕΒΙΑʃΚωCΜΑCΑVΤ
> ΤΕΚΝΑʃΓΕΝΑΔΙΟVʃΗΛΙΑʃΤωΝΑVΤˢ
> ΦΙΛωΝ
>
> Ἐν τῷ ἱε[ρ]ῷ τόπ(ῳ) τούτ(ῳ) μνήσθη Τυγ[ρ]άν[η]ς | καλαμαύλις (καὶ) Θαυμασία αὐτοῦ | γαμήτη (καὶ) Ευσεβία (καὶ) Κώσμας αὐτ(ῶν) | τέκνα (καὶ) Γεναδίου (καὶ) Ἠλία (καὶ)
> τῶν αυτ(ῶν) | φίλων
>
> In this sacred place may Tigranes the piper be remembered, and Thaumasia his wife, and Eusebia and Cosmas their children, and (may remembered be) of Gennadius and Elias and their friends.

If the hypothesis of the Armenian origin of the name Tigranes is correct, the inscription of Hammat Gader is the only Armenian evidences from secular context, not related to the Holy Places or ecclesiastic activity.

Pilgrim Graffiti

The Piacenza Pilgrim who visited the Holy Land in 570 admits: "We came to Cana, where the Lord attended the wedding, and we actually reclined on the

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131 Names of Parthian origin were usually given to the kings or aristocrats, in pre-Christian and early Christian period of Caucasian history. The names mentioned here are known in their Armenian (Տիգրան) and Georgian forms (ფარსმან).

132 Hirschfeld 1997, pp. 477–480.

133 Di Segni 1997a, pp. 197–198, Fig. 13.

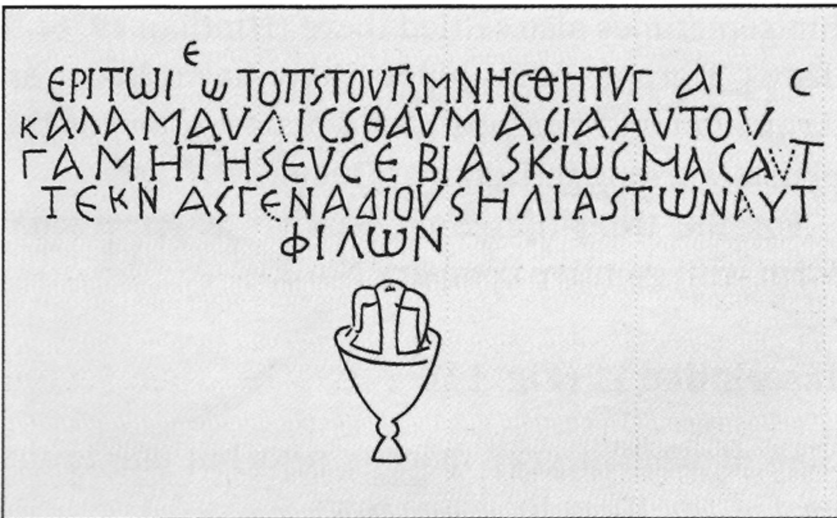

FIGURE 77 *Hammat Gader, inscription of Tigranes the piper.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL EXPLORATION SOCIETY.

couch. On it I unworthy wrote the names of my parents".[134] Graffiti, an unofficial form of interaction with sacred space, is known from ancient times as a

134 Cited according to Wilkinson 1977, p. 79.

form of physical manifestation of personal encounters with the holy site.[135] A person writing his name, or the names of his dear ones who could not come to the sanctuary in person, was on a quest for the blessing of the holy place and its patrons. This meaning is clearly expressed in the Byzantine inscription discovered on Mount Nebo: 'O Lord, have mercy on me, your servant Ioannes who wrote it".[136] In the Byzantine and later periods many illiterate Christians drew the sign of the cross, and those who could read and write, wrote their names or a standard short formulae addressed to God, saints or the holy site itself: "Have a mercy …", "Help …", "Pray …" Often appearing in clusters, graffiti inscriptions show the use of the same expressions, sometimes repeated dozens of times.[137]

Graffiti inscriptions are rarely found in a well dated archaeological context, although occasionally it happens, when a venerated structure is sealed under a later, usually more monumental edifice, as in the case of St. Peter memorial on Vatican hill.[138] In our case, archaeologically dated inscriptions left by Armenian pilgrims were preserved *in situ* in Nazareth. The three pilgrim inscriptions from Jerusalem represent more complex cases: they come from well-dated contexts, but were all relocated, and were not found in their original surrounding. However, more often graffiti are found on open surfaces in the venerated sites, and the writings of many generations can only be distinguished on paleographic grounds. Such a dating will always be problematic, because of our limited understanding of the early stages of development of the Armenian (and Georgian) script, and because, graffiti, unlike monumental lapidary inscriptions, were incised on rough surface, which is difficult to write on even when the stone is a semi-soft sand-stone. Sometimes the writing process is complicated by the choice of location, or is subject to the limitations of the writer: his writing skills, health condition, fatigue etc.

Pilgrim Graffiti from Jerusalem

Graffito from Mamilla Excavations

An inscription (Fig. 78) 4 cm high and 7 cm wide, scratched on a marble slab, was discovered in the extramural quarter of Byzantine Jerusalem, immediately to the west of Jaffa Gate. The letters are in uncial *erkatagir* script, 0.9–2.2 cm

135 For pre-Christian graffiti, see Baird and Taylor 2012.

136 Saller 1941, p. 266.

137 For early Christian graffiti, see Yasin 2015.

138 Yasin 2015, p. 39.

FIGURE 78 *Mamilla, the Armenian graffito of Tiratur.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

high, and are closer to the tradition of manuscript writing than to lapidary script.[139] The text reads as follows:[140]

> ՏՐ ՈՂՈՄԵԱ
> ՏՐՏՐՈՅ ԵՒ ՍՈՒՐԴ
> ՅԱՐՈՒԹԻՒՆ
> Յ]ԻՇԵԱ[--]
>
> Տ[է]ր ողորմեա / Տ[ի]ր[ա]տրոյ եւ Սուրբ / Յարութիւն / [յ]րշեա [--]
>
> Lord, have mercy upon Tiratur and Holy Resurrection (?), remember …

The text is an invocation for divine mercy, typical of pilgrimage graffiti. Սուրբ Յարութիւն, – literally, Holy (Saint) Resurrection, may be understood in two ways: as an appeal to a certain saint named Harutiun, i.e. the Armenian form of Anastas, or to the Holy Resurrection, i.e. the Holy Sepulchre church.

The western extramural quarter of Byzantine Jerusalem was exposed in a series of salvage excavations of the Israel Antiquities Authority in 1989–1995 (Fig. 79). No final report that summarizes the entire data was compiled, and only a few short preliminary notes were published, containing certain contradictions regarding the findspot of the Armenian graffito.[141]

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139 Stone 1997, p. 342.

140 Stone 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 810A.

141 Reich, Bilig and Shukron 1993; Reich and Shukron 1995, 2002; Maeir 1993, 2000.

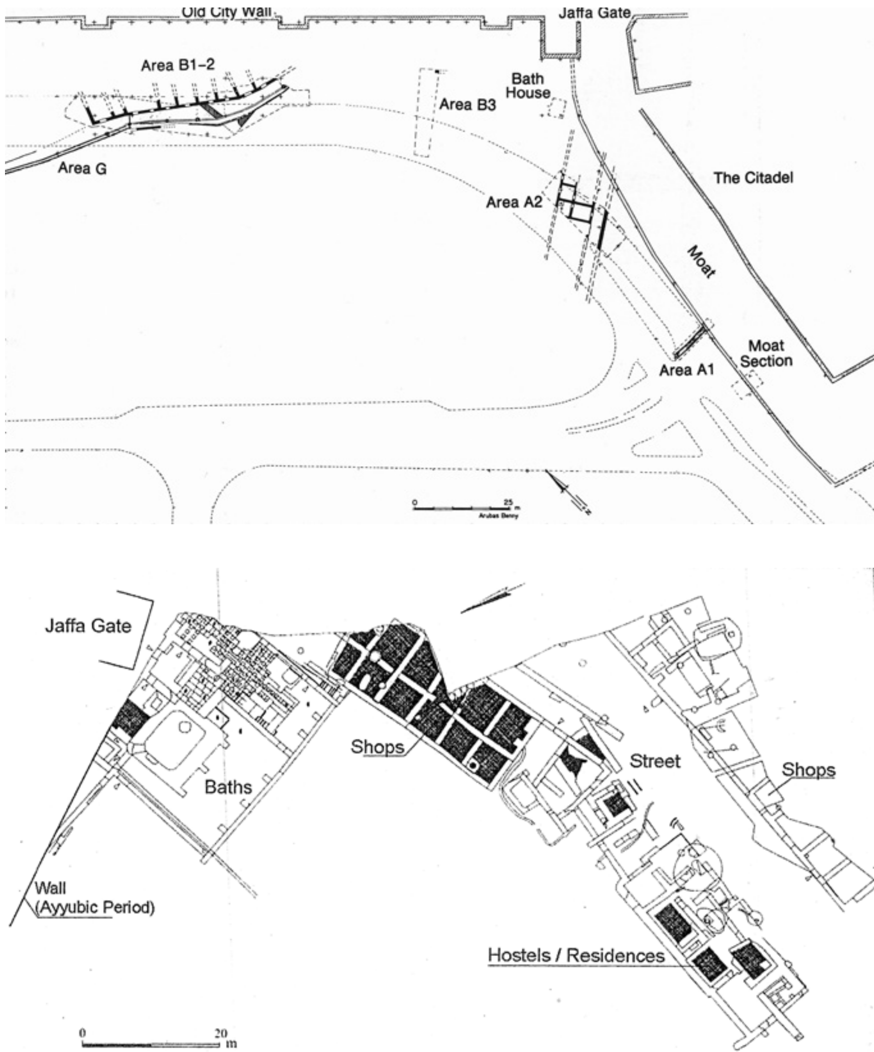

FIGURE 79 *General plan of the Mamilla excavations.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

The finds include two commercial lanes: the first running to the north, along the line of the Ottoman city wall, and the other to the west. Along these streets there are buildings with rooms of a similar size, and entrances leading to the street, which were interpreted by excavators as shops. The excavated neighbourhood contains also a large bathhouse in the northern part of the area, and a structure in the west that was identified as a pilgrim hostel. The latter

contained the remains of mosaic floors; one of them is decorated and has three Greek inscriptions with quotes from the Psalms.[142] The building construction was dated by coins of Justinian (527–565) and Justin II (565–578), that were discovered under the floors. According to Reich and Shukron, the complex functioned for about a century, into the Ummayad period; Maeir even mentions additional building activity in the area already during the Early Islamic phase.

Two of the finds testify to the presence of foreign pilgrims: the Armenian graffito discussed above, and a pilgrim's ampulla from Ephesus, the souvenir of faraway travels to Asia Minor.[143] Clearly, being so close to one of the main entrances to the city, the commercial area was attractive to the numerous visitors that came to Jerusalem.

However, the identification of the pilgrim hostel remains doubtful. A close study of the preliminary report shows that both finds that are crucial for the identification of the structure were not discovered within the limits of the building itself: the ampulla was found in one of the shops nearly 200 m to the east, and the graffiti was on the beaten earth floor of the commercial lane running from Jaffa Gate westwards, unaccountably called by the excavators "a paved road leading from Jerusalem towards Bethlehem".[144]

The inscription is incised on a well-polished slab of a white *pavonazzetto* marble with purple veins. This imported marble, quarried in Phrygia, was used in Byzantine Palestine mainly as wall-veneer and floor-tiles, in civil and ecclesiastical buildings alike. Clearly, the stone was not part of a street pavement, and therefore should be considered one of the dislocated finds. One may speculate that the slab was originally installed in some luxuriously decorated structure, possibly, but not necessarily in the Mamilla area, and was here in secondary use.

Two Graffiti from Givati Excavations

Recently, two Armenian graffiti were discovered in the excavations of the Israel Antiquities Authority at Givati Parking Lot, in the north western part of the City of David hill in Jerusalem.[145] The first graffito (Fig. 80) is incised on a slab of white-greyish Proconnesian marble, probably. The inscription is 9 cm long;

142 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 810, raises the possibility of identifying the room as a chapel.

143 Maeir and Strauss 1995.

144 Reich and Shukron 2002, p. 194.

145 The site has been excavated under the direction of D. Ben Ami and the author in 2007–2016.

B351021

FIGURE 80 *Givati excavations, the Armenian graffito of Hakob.* COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

the letters are 1.3–1.5 cm high; the script is uncial *erkatagir*. The text reads as follows:[146]

ՅԱԿՈԲ

Յակոբ

HAKOB

The fragment is from the lower part of a chancel screen panel, decorated in plain open relief, in a repetitive imbrication pattern. Parallels to the pattern are known from Byzantine churches in the region.[147] When found, the slab was incorporated in a wall dated to the Abbasid period (eighth–ninth centuries), which therefore post-dates it. Clearly, the slab was inscribed by a pilgrim named Hakob, when it was still in its original place, in one of the churches of the Byzantine or Early Islamic period.

Historical sources mention a few churches in the immediate proximity of the excavated site: by the Siloam pool; on Mount Zion – i.e. Holy Zion, the

146 Stone, Ben Ami and Tchekhanovets 2016–17.

147 Smith and Day 1989, Fig. 35.

FIGURE 81 *Givati excavations, the Armenian graffito of Karapet.* COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

Penitence of St. Peter, and the Nea; Pretoria – not far from the Temple Mount; and numerous Christian structures erected on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.[148] Some of the ecclesiastical complexes have been discovered during archaeological excavations.[149] It should be emphasized that the architectural decorative elements are absent from most of the churches, and were probably stripped for secondary use elsewhere. Naturally, the original location of the liturgical furniture fragments that were discovered in the Givati excavations cannot be established. Moreover, the variety of the marble finds points to different origins in several sites that were eventually re-deposited haphazardly in various contexts. The poor preservation of the inscription allows no dating more precise than pre-eighth century.

The second inscription (Fig. 81) from Givati is incised on a large limestone slab, which was probably part of paving. The first line is broken and the top of the letters is lost, therefore their height cannot be determined; their width is ca

148 For discussion see Tsafrir 1999; Voltaggio 2011b.

149 Bliss and Dickie 1898, Pl. XVIII; Germer-Durand 1914; Gutfeld 2012.

1.6 cm; the first letter is written in *bolorgir*, the rest of the inscription is written in uncial *erkatagir* script. The text reads as follows:[150]

ց Ա Թ
[ԿԱ]ՐԱՊԵՏ

ց Ա Թ | [Կա]րապետ

[--] | [KA] RAPET

The first line is undecipherable. The second line is most probably the name (Karapet), an Armenian name for St. John the Baptist ("the Forerunner"), equivalent of the Greek πρόδρομος. Based on paleographic criteria, the inscription should be dated to the tenth century.[151]

Unfortunately, the archaeological context of the find is of little help: the inscription was discovered in a large trench excavated by the archaeological expedition of K. Kenyon in 1963–1964.[152] The trench of the British expedition was refilled after the excavations, and therefore contained many present-day finds, including 20th century bricks and tiles, sewage pipes and sanitary supplies, floor slabs, and modern marbles. The inscribed stone described here was uncovered at the western end of the trench, together with numerous stone paving-slabs, most probably from some local residence of the 19th–20th centuries.

The importance of the find, regardless of its context, is in its discovery in the southern part of the city, in an area possibly related to tenth–eleventh centuries activity of the Armenians in Jerusalem, and at a time when the focus of the their presence was well established in the southwestern area of the city, i.e. the present Armenian Quarter.

Pilgrim Graffiti from Nazareth

Pilgrimage to Nazareth, the city of the Annunciation, is recorded from the fourth century onwards. The earliest evidence comes from the pilgrimage itinerary of Egeria, ca. 383: "In Nazareth is a garden in which the Lord used to be after his return from Egypt (…) There is a big and very splendid cave in which

150 Stone, Ben Ami and Tchekhanovets 2014.

151 Dating is based on the form and orientation of letter Տ and a shape of ց, having parallels in dated manuscripts of the tenth century: see Stone, Ben Ami and Tchekhanovets 2014, p. 150.

152 Kenyon 1964, pp. 7–18.

she [Virgin Mary] lived. An altar has been placed there."[153] Jerome mentions that his disciple and companion Paula visited the city (Ep. CVIII 13.5).[154] The 'House of Mary' is mentioned also in the notes of a Piacenza Pilgrim in 570.[155] Most probably, the modest early shrine of Nazareth did not attract the pilgrims as did the holy places in Jerusalem: Nazareth was at a certain distance from the main road, populated by Jews, and the road from Jerusalem passed through hostile Samaritan lands.[156]

During the excavations that were carried out by Franciscan Fathers under the direction of Bagatti in 1955–1960 at the traditional place of the Annunciation, the remains of an ancient edifice were discovered, under the remains of the Byzantine church.[157] On the thick coat of colored and white plaster that covered various architectural elements of this early construction, a large number of pilgrim graffiti in the Greek, Syriac, Latin, Armenian and Georgian languages were found (Fig. 82). The architectural plan of this early structure is unclear: only a few fragments of walls, which were later incorporated into the Byzantine church building, survived. However, it is clear that the site was venerated by Christians since relatively early times.[158]

The remains of the pre-Byzantine structures where the graffiti were discovered are dated by the excavator to the fourth–beginning of fifth century.[159] This assertion was based on the ecclesiastical sources and on the dating of the Byzantine mosaics with cross decoration that sealed the early structure. The date of the Byzantine mosaics covering the early sanctuary was established by Bagatti as not later than 427, according to the imperial edict of Theodosius II, which prohibited the use the cross motif in floor decorations. However, it seems that in reality the prohibition was never properly adhered.[160]

These conclusions were reevaluated by Taylor, who established a different chronological frame for the early sanctuary: between 340 to the mid-fifth century, most probably up to the 447 earthquake.[161]

Most of the inscriptions were incised with a sharp instrument, and some were written with charcoal (Fig. 83). All the graffiti are of religious character and

153 Franceschini and Weber 1965, pp. 35–90; Maraval 1982. Cited according to Wilkinson 1971, p. 193.

154 Wilkinson 1977, pp. 47–52.

155 Wilkinson 1977, pp. 79–89.

156 Taylor 1993, p. 266.

157 Bagatti 1969.

158 Bagatti 1969; Corbo 1987, pp. 333–348; and contra: Taylor 1993, pp. 221–267.

159 Bagatti 1969, pp. 213–218; Corbo 1987, p. 343.

160 For discussion, see Habas 2015.

161 Taylor 1993, pp. 239–266.

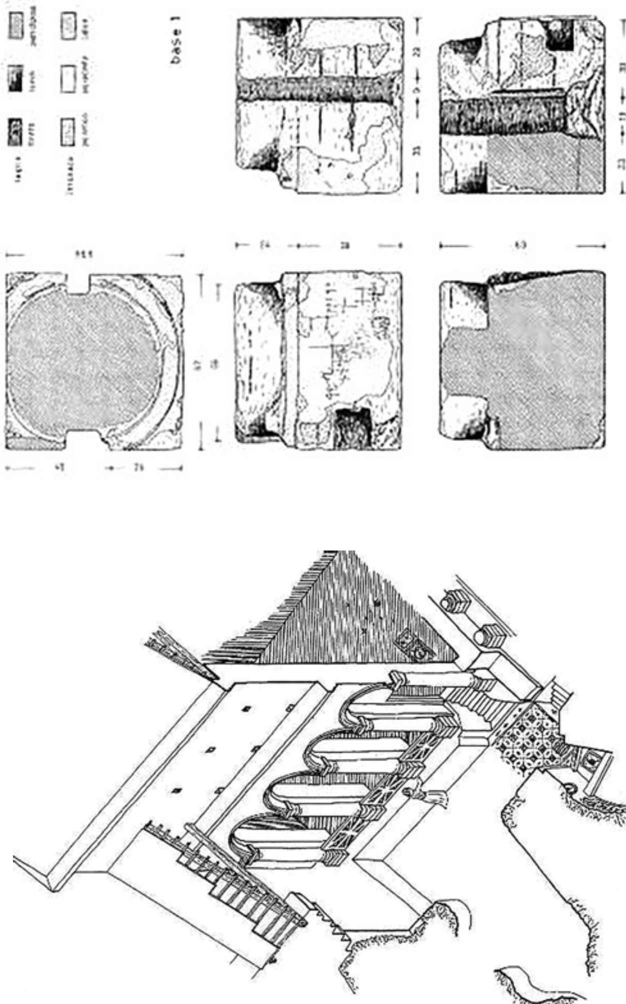

FIGURE 82 *Nazareth; inscribed architectural details.*
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

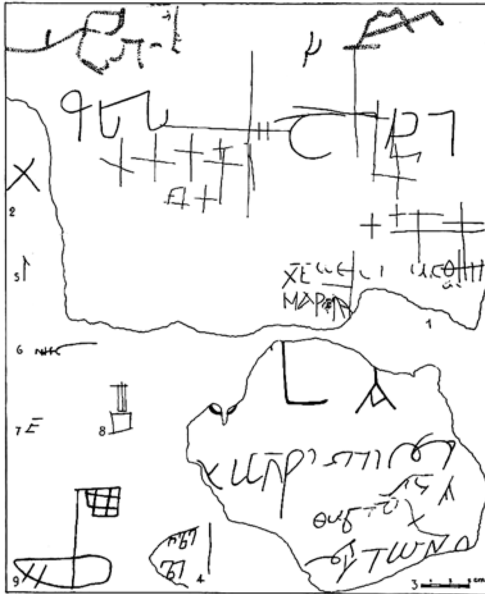

FIGURE 83
Nazareth, Greek, Armenian and Georgian graffiti.
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

contain private names and requests for divine mercy, typical of pilgrim inscriptions.[162] The Greek, Syriac and Latin inscriptions were read soon after excavation, and the results were published in the final archaeological report in Italian, and shortly afterwards in English.[163] However, the Armenian and Georgian inscriptions posed greater difficulty. A number of Armenian inscriptions were misread, and appear in publication with mistakes. Others were not considered to merit a proper scientific publication until some twenty years later.[164]

The first Armenian inscription (Fig. 84) is written in uncial letters, 12–20 mm high. The text reads as follows:[165]

ԱՆԱՆԻԱ [-]ԱՐԵՄԱՐԴ
[--]ՌԵՆ

Անանիա [-]արեմարդ ///[--] ռեն

Anania [-]aremard /// [--]ren

162 Testa 1969, p. 57.

163 Bagatti 1967, 1969, pp. 123–131, 148–169, 196–218.

164 Stone 1990–91; Stone, van Lint and Nazarian 1996–97.

165 Stone 1990–91, N Arm 1.

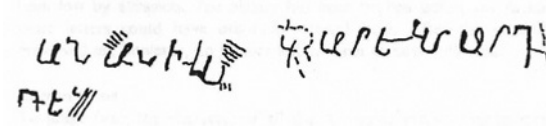

FIGURE 84 *Nazareth, the Armenian graffito of Anania.* COURTESY OF M.E. STONE AND RIGP.

FIGURE 85 *Sinai, the Armenian graffito of Anania. After Stone 1982.*

The text contains three names, only one of them is clearly legible – Anania. Interestingly, the same Anania left his signature on the way to Sinai, on the rock surface in Hadbat Haggag.[166] The uniformity of the handwriting in the two inscriptions is remarkable (Fig. 85).

The second inscription (Fig. 86) contains only three letters, 4.5–5.5 cm high, written close to the left arm of the incised cross. Most probably, it is also a name:[167]

[ԲԱԲ]ԳԵՆ

[Բաբ]գեն

Babgen

The ending գեն can fit a few Armenian male names (Vazgen, Gurgen, etc.), but according to Stone, in this case it should be reconstructed as Babgen: apparently, this pilgrim also left his signature twice on Hadbat Haggag road in Sinai (Fig. 87).[168] It is worth noting, that both Anania and Babgen left their marks on the same Sinaitic rock, and may have even traveled together. With a great measure of caution, the identity of the couple can be proposed:

166 Ibid., pp. 322–323; Stone 1982, H Arm 6.

167 Stone 1990–91, N Arm 2.

168 Stone 1982, H Arm 26, H Arm 65.

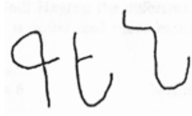

FIGURE 86
Nazareth, the Armenian graffito of Babgen .
COURTESY OF M.E. STONE AND RIGP.

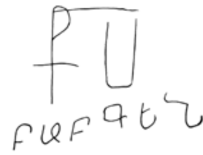

FIGURE 87
Sinai, the Armenian graffito of Babgen. After Stone 1982.

Anania, bishop of the Sunik region in Eastern Armenia, and the Sunik prince Babgen.[169]

The last three inscriptions[170] have very few letters, barely legible.

The importance of the Nazareth graffiti for the study of Armenian script development is immense: in practice, they represent one of the oldest datable examples of the Armenian writing. According to the ecclesiastical tradition, the Armenian *erkatagir* script was invented in 404. The most ancient lapidary inscriptions known from the Takor and St. Hripsime churches in Armenia date to the end of the fifth century and 618 respectively. The finding of the inscriptions in Nazareth, so far away from home, so soon after the appearance of the script itself, is therefore outstanding.

Pilgrim Graffito from Sobata (*Shivta*)

Recently, an unpublished early medieval Armenian graffito was observed in the southern church of Sobata (Soubeita, Shivta), in the Negev desert.

Sobata, located in the central Negev, together with Nessana, Elusa, Oboda, Rehobot and Memphis belongs to a group of Nabatean towns established along the caravan Incense Route, leading from Arabia towards the Mediterranean coast. Cities grew and flourished during the Byzantine period owing to sophisticated agricultural strategies. The extensive cultivation of this arid zone made it one of the most productive areas in Palestine. For Byzantine Palestine these cities served as the major pilgrims' stations on the

169 Stone 1990–91, citing N. Bogharian's oral proposal.

170 Stone, van Lint and Nazarjan 1996–97, N Arm 19, 20 and 21.

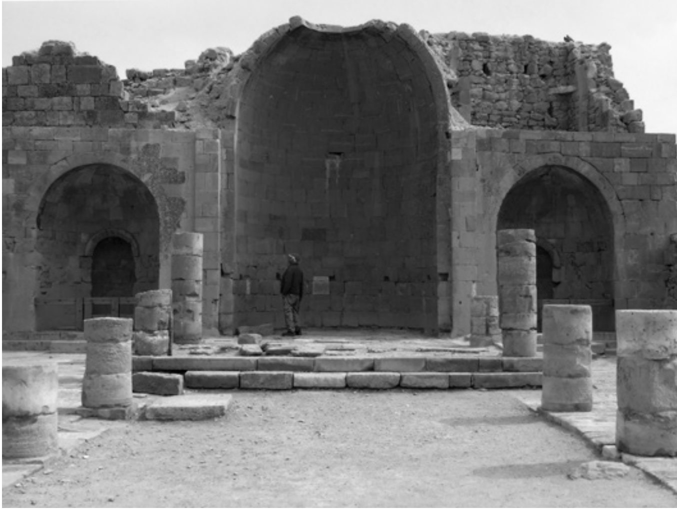

FIGURE 88 *Sobata, the southern church.*
COURTESY OF Y. TEPPER.

way to the Sinai Peninsula, and were embellished by churches and monastic institutions.[171]

The southern church of Sobata, the oldest one in the city, most probably was built during the fifth–early sixth century as a triapsidal basilica, measuring 19 by 14.3 m.[172] According to a Greek graffito detected on a wall, it was dedicated to St. Stephen.[173] Similar to other structures of the city, the walls of the southern church are preserved standing on significant height (Fig. 88). In the southern apse the fresco depicting the scene of Transfiguration was still seen in the mid-20th century.[174] The Greek inscription preserved in the southern aisle records that the floors were relaid in 639/640 by a bishop George and the archdeacon and economus Peter. Based on parallels from other Negev sites, it was proposed that the side chapels of the church were containing the holy relicts that were exposed for numerous pilgrims.

171 For Christian pilgrimage routes in Negev, see Figueras 1995, for Sobata pp. 436–442.

172 Baly 1935, pp. 176–177; Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1982, pp. 63–83; Segal 1986; Hirschfeld 2003.

173 Figueras 1996, no. 4, Fig. 5.

174 Figueras 2006–2007.

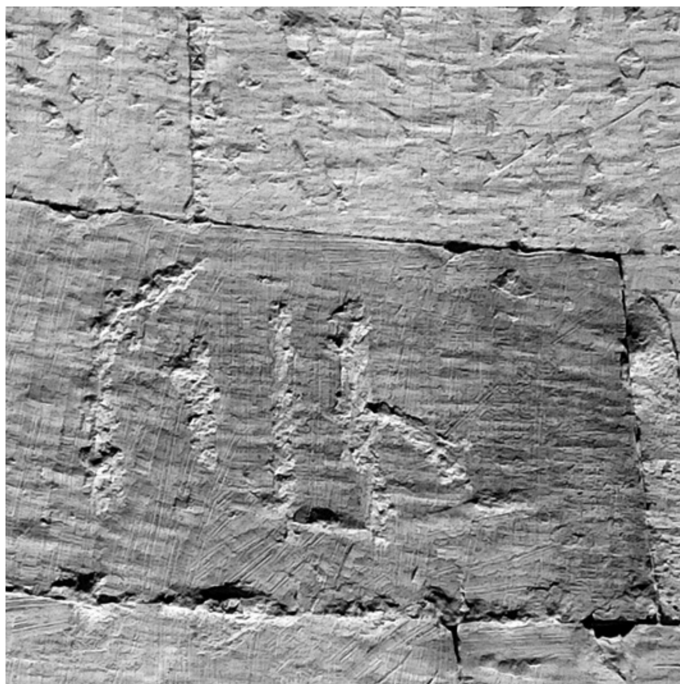

FIGURE 89 *Sobata, the Armenian graffito on the apse wall of the southern church.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

The Armenian graffito inscription is incised by a sharp instrument on the central apse wall, at significant height. Due to its location, the precise measurements of the inscription are not available; an approximate height of the letters seems to be ca. 12–15 cm. The text consists of only two letters (Fig. 89):

ԲԱ

Judging by the shape of the second letter, – Ա has no loop on its right arm, which is typical for post eighth century inscriptions, – the graffito most probably dates to the ninth–eleventh centuries, i.e. already after the abandonment of the city. This paleographic dating matches well with its context. Clearly, no pilgrim could possibly leave his signature on the apse wall of the functioning church. Most probably, the by-passer wrote it when standing on the heap of stones that collapsed from the church wall. For unknown reasons, the inscription was never completed. It should be mentioned, that beside the Armenian

letters, dozens of Arabic graffiti are seen on the very same apse wall, possibly left by Bedouins.

Similar to other Negev town, Sobota was abandoned sometime after the Arab conquest. First, the parts of its residents left the site, others adopt Islam. Some of the architectural fragments of the church décor were used for newly built mosque. Cufic inscription dates it construction to the ninth century. The date of the final abandonment of the town is debatable,[175] waving between the seventh to the tenth centuries. Excavated by numerous expeditions, the town becomes a subject of systematic research only recently,[176] and its finds remain mainly unpublished.

However, the Christian pilgrimage movement towards the Sinai sanctuaries did not stopped also after the Arabic conquest and continued, almost without interruption, till modern era. This first modest Armenian evidence from the Negev region may supply “a missing link” in the pilgrimage route between the major holy sites of central and northern Palestine and the Sinai Peninsula.

Pilgrim Graffiti from the Sinai

The mountainous desert of the Sinai Peninsula, the traditional place of Moses' revelation, became a Christian holy site at a very early period. Among the earliest monks in Sinai mentioned by the sources, is a Syrian father named Julian Saba, who lived in the middle of the fourth century.[177] Egeria mentions monks living in cells, and the church built by them.[178] In the middle of the sixth century Emperor Justinian built the basilical church of the Burning Bush, with a monastery and massive fortifications around it. This site, known as St. Catherine, remains today the oldest continuously inhabited Christian monastery in the world.

Archaeological research shows that the first monastic cells and small chapels appear in Sinai already before the middle of the fifth century.[179] Gradually, a large network of monastic communities and isolated hermitages was created, with three major centers: Rhaithou (el-Tur), Pharan (Feiran) and Jebel Musa (Mt. Sinai). The zenith of monastic life on Sinai should be dated to the end of the sixth and early seventh centuries, with an estimated number of

175 For Byzantine – Islamic transition debates, see Rubin 1996; Avni et al. 2008.
176 Tepper, Weissbord and Bar-Oz 2015.
177 For sources see Caner 2010.
178 Wilkinson 1971, p. 93.
179 Finkelstein 1985; Dahari 2000.

about 600 monks of different origins,[180] who included Armenians, Georgians, and possibly also Albanians.

The increasing wave of pilgrims visiting Sinai reached its peak during the sixth and seventh centuries, with particularly large groups of Armenians, consisting of several hundred each.[181] The Arab conquest had no direct effect on the monastic life and pilgrimage.[182] The decline was slow, and certain monastic settlements existed also in the tenth century, but already in the eighth–ninth centuries most of the Sinaitic monks were concentrated within the walls of the fortified St. Catherine's Monastery.

Surprisingly, no archaeological remains related to the pilgrimage have been discovered in Sinai: no hostels or road signs, and there are practically no graves along the pilgrims' routes.[183] The only signs are graffiti inscriptions in different languages, engraved by the pious travelers.

A systematic study of the graffiti from Hadbat Haggag in Eastern Sinai was undertaken by A. Negev.[184] Thanks to his survey, hundreds of rock-cut inscriptions, written in various languages, were discovered, starting with the Nabatean period, and up to modern Bedouin ones. According to Negev's classification, all the inscriptions that have Christian character, mainly written in Greek, but also in other languages, should be dated not earlier than the fifth century;[185] subsequent research verified this chronology. The main survey of the Armenian finds of Sinai was carried out by the Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti Project led by M.E. Stone with the express aim of discovering Armenian graffiti that may have escaped researchers who did not know the Armenian language.[186] As a result, nearly a hundred Armenian inscriptions were recorded, and a few more written in Greek, Georgian, Latin and Ge'ez.[187]

The graffiti were left by pilgrims on their way to the sanctuaries of Sinai or on the way back, and in the vicinity of the holy sites themselves: Mount

180 Dahari 2000, p. 167.

181 Stone 1982, pp. 27–31.

182 Kraemer 1958, pp. 205–208; Negev 1977, pp. 76–80; Mayerson 1982, pp. 44–57.

183 Dahari 2000, p. 164.

184 Negev 1977.

185 Negev 1977, pp. 76–80.

186 Stone 1982, 1984.

187 Due to the large number of Sinaitic inscriptions only isolated examples will be described here. For discussion, see the relevant references to Stone 1982, whose numeration is used here. The first letter in the numeration indicates the site of discovery: H – Hadbat Haggag, M – Wadi Mukatab, S – Mount Sinai. For key see Stone 1982, pp. 5–6.

Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine.[188] Their distribution may help in reconstructing the major pilgrimage routes to the holy sites. Wadi Mukatab together with Wadi Maghara were parts of the main route through Western Sinai. According to the historical records, this was the road that is most frequently mentioned as used by pilgrims to Mount Sinai. The Hadbat Haggag road runs through the Eastern part of Sinai. The distribution of the Armenian inscriptions described by Stone is surprising: only five graffiti were found along the western road, while seventy inscriptions were discovered in Hadbat Haggag. Notably, the distribution of the Greek Christian inscriptions is equal along both roads, eastern and western.[189]

Most of the inscriptions are incised in relatively low, easily accessible places. The Armenian characters are usually small, their size not exceeding few centimeters. None is of monumental character, the size of the letters and the spaces between them are not uniform, and the lines are irregular and curving. Most of the inscriptions are written in uncial script.

Given the total absence of any dated archaeological context for the Sinaitic inscriptions, only paleographic criteria are relevant in establishing their chronology. Due to the paucity of early dated Armenian inscriptions, it is not always possible to date the graffiti precisely.[190] A total number of 27 inscriptions fit the chronological range of the present study. According to the chronology established by Stone, one inscription is dated to the seventh century (S Arm 11); two should be dated to the time span of the seventh–eighth centuries (S Arm 17); two to the seventh–ninth centuries (H Arm 34, 67); two to the eighth century (H Arm 11, 44); two to the eighth–ninth centuries (H Arm 55, 71); twelve inscriptions are dated to the tenth century (H Arm 25, 31, 38, 45, 47, 52, 54, 58, 61, 62, 66, 72); one to the eleventh century (H Arm 38); and three more to shortly after the tenth century (H Arm 18, 48, 50). Thanks to the well-dated Nazareth finds, five or six more inscriptions can be dated as early as the fifth century (H Arm 6, 24, 26, 49, 65, and perhaps H Arm 71).[191] The content of Armenian pilgrim inscriptions is not different from the standard repertoire of other Christian graffiti. Mainly, the text contains proper names, sometimes in addition the request: "remember …" Some names belong to the standard Christian repertoire: Anania, Davit, Eprim (Ephraim), Yakob, Aharon, Yohannes, Ezekiel, Grigor, Pavlos, Azaria; others are specifically Armenian: Babgen, Vasak, Vanik, Trdat, Astuacatur, Varaz, Vazgen. Women's names

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188 Stone 1982, p. 57; Mayerson 1982, pp. 44–57.

189 Stone 1982, pp. 41–51.

190 Stone 1982, pp. 11–17.

191 Stone 1990–91, pp. 324–325.

appear twice: Varazdukht (S Arm 11) and Tatanoysh, who signed together with Eprim (H Arm 34).

Individual names usually appear without titles, ranks etc.[192] It is not clear, whether this is an indication of certain pilgrimage tradition, or if all the authors were simple people.[193] Only in one case (H Arm 61) a name is followed by a clerical title: "Yohnik the hegumen" (վանխայր). The standard self-humbling epithets are rare in the corpus of early inscriptions (H Arm 39, 42). In one case, a diminutive form of the name: Movses – Movsesik is used (H Arm 66).

A few inscriptions are outstanding. H Arm 71 (Fig. 90), possibly dated to the fifth century, for example, declares: "I circumvented Moses!" Probably, it was written by a pilgrim on his way back from Mount Sinai (Jebel Musa).

Only one inscription, H Arm 42, dated from the eighth–ninth centuries, presents a relatively long text of eight lines, yet it is badly damaged. It mentions three pilgrims: Petros, Yahan and Gałen, and their voyage and prayers "to St. Catherine".

Of special interest is the inscription S Arm 9 (Fig. 91), dated to the eleventh century or even slightly later:

> Տէր ողորմեաց // գամեղի եւ խոդէգոսի
>
> Lord, have a mercy on the camel and the guide![194]

For 'camel' and 'guide' the author used not the proper Armenian terms, but the transliterations of the Greek words: *gamely* (κάμηλος) and *khodegosi* (ὁδηγός). The inscription could have been written by a bilingual Armenian, someone coming from the Greek-speaking areas. Such 'Hellenization' is also characteristic of certain names that appear in the later Armenian inscriptions of Sinai.[195] Apart from the inscriptions that were discovered in archaeological excavations in Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Hammat Gader, and the graffiti left in Shivta and along the Sinai roads, numerous Armenian graffiti were found in the Nativity Church in Bethlehem and in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.[196] However,

192 For discussion see Yasin 2015.

193 Stone 1982, p. 20.

194 Comp. inscription on the Byzantine fresco from Caesarea Maritima, "… save the animals": *CIIP* II, No. 1153.

195 Stone 1984.

196 See the database of the Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti Project: http://rockinscriptions.huji.ac.il.

FIGURE 90 *Sinai, Armenian pilgrim's graffito. After Stone 1982.*

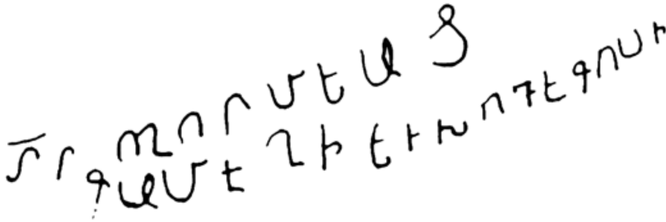

FIGURE 91 *Sinai, Armenian pilgrim's graffito. After Stone 1982.*

all of these should be dated to the Crusader period or later times, mostly to the 14th–17th centuries, at the zenith of the Armenian pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The same is true regarding numerous graffiti exposed on the walls of the sanctuaries of the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem.

The Georgian Community

The architectural remains that will be presented here were discovered in archaeological excavations in Jerusalem and the Shephelah (Judean foothills), and for various reasons can all be associated with Georgian building activity in the Holy Land. These include small monastic complexes in Bir el-Qutt and Umm Leisun, where Georgian *asomtavruli* inscriptions were found; the YMCA church complex which has a large cemetery, where the gravestone of a Georgian bishop was unearthed; and a small funerary complex in Beit Safafa, with an inscription that seems to be dated according to a Georgian era. Of particular interest is the Monastery of the Cross, which became the main ecclesiastical and spiritual center of the Georgian community in the medieval period. Archaeological research identified the monastery as standing on Byzantine foundations, and it will be examined here with the aim of

establishing the nature of the early structure and its possible connection to the Georgians. The last building is the monastic hermitage that was discovered in Horvat Burgin, and most probably dates to the pre-Crusade period. Some of these complexes were published in great detail and therefore, will be described here only briefly (Bir el-Qutt and Umm Leisun); others need more detailed discussion or complete revision of the accepted views (the YMCA complex).

After the architectural remains, isolated inscriptions will be discussed: the epitaphs of Thecla the Bessian and the Deacons of Anastasis, both from Jerusalem; epitaph from the monastic cemetery in Choziba Monastery in Wadi el-Qilt, pilgrim graffiti; and finally, two out-of-context epigraphic finds: an undeciphered inscription from the Ascalon area and a stamp from Mount Zion, Jerusalem.

Architectural Remains

St. Theodore Monastery at Bir el-Qutt

The monastery was discovered by V. Corbo during his 1952–1953 excavations at the site of Bir el-Qutt, in the vicinity of Bethlehem near the Shepherds Field.[197] The complex contains a number of structures built around central courtyard (Fig. 92). The entrance gate was in the east (Fig. 92.15 on the plan), leading directly to the rectangular courtyard, which is surrounded by a colonnade (13 on the plan). In the northern part of the monastery a chapel was discovered, measuring 6 × 15 m (1), with a semi-circular apse inscribed in the external wall. The entrance to the chapel was from the south, through a small passage (3) that led also to the funerary chapel on the east, which could serve also as a *diaconikon* (2).

Under the eastern part of the floor in each chapel, there was a crypt with a number of tombs, all aligned east–west (Fig. 92. 1, 17, 18). The burials in the most prestigious place under the church were identified by the excavator as 'abbots graves' (Fig. 93). All but one of the graves were empty. Grave 3 contained human remains and a silver ring with a red stone. Rooms nos. 17 and 18 contained four tombs, aligned east–west, all of them empty. Six more tombs, similarly aligned, were discovered further east (Fig. 92. 16). Burials 1 and 3 contained bones; in tomb 1 there were three large oil lamps of 'candlestick' type.

In the southern wing of the monastery were a number of household rooms of unknown purpose (Fig. 92.8–11), and to the west the oil and wine presses (Fig. 92.6, 7), a kitchen and a refectory (Fig. 92.4). The whole complex was

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197 Corbo 1955, pp. 110–139.

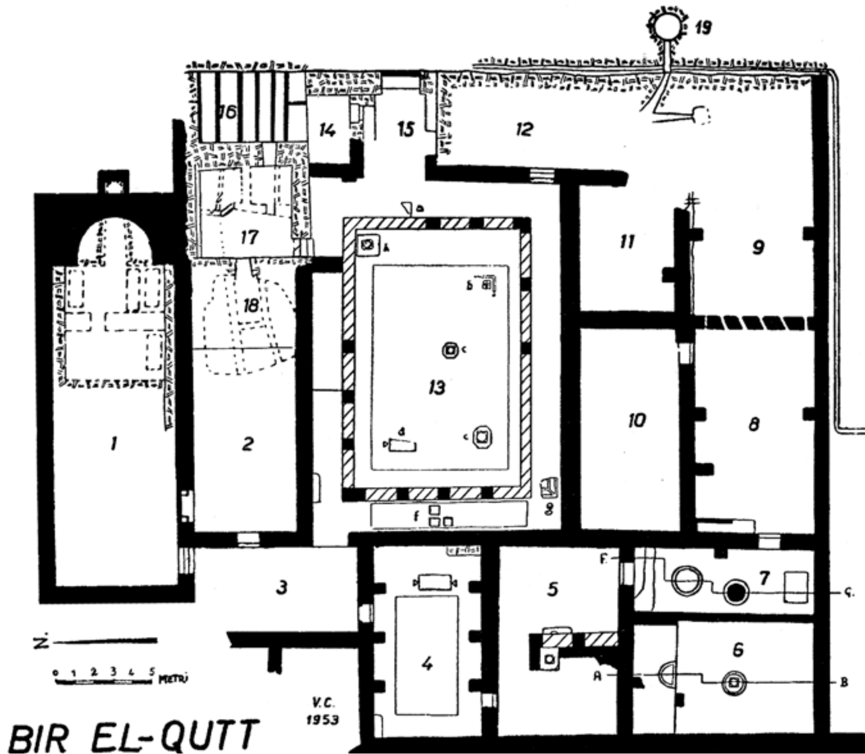


FIGURE 92 *St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt.*
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

built of reddish limestone. Two capitals and a number of stone and marble architectural details were found, among them parts of the chancel screen and colonettes (Fig. 94). In the northern wall of the chapel and in the walls of the household rooms, a few well-dressed stones were incorporated, identified by the excavators as stones from the Constantinian basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem.[198] Not far from the monastery, to the east, an Early Roman tomb was discovered,[199] probably reused by the Byzantine monks: an encircled cross was carved above the entrance.

198 Corbo 1955, photos 98, 114.

199 Ibid., pp. 128–129, fig. 39.

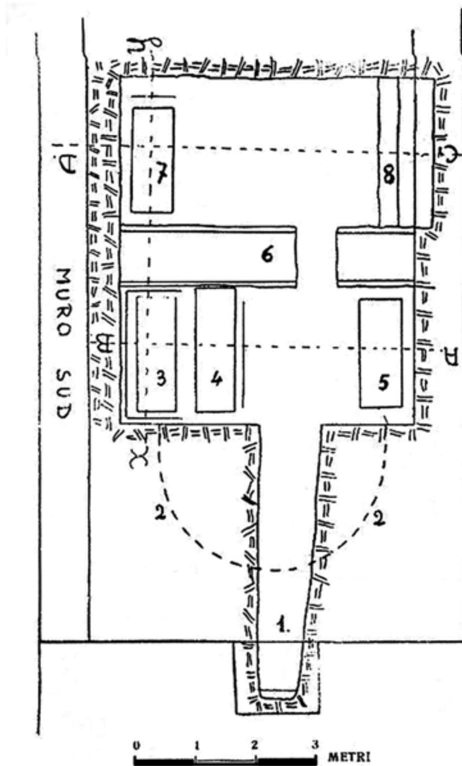
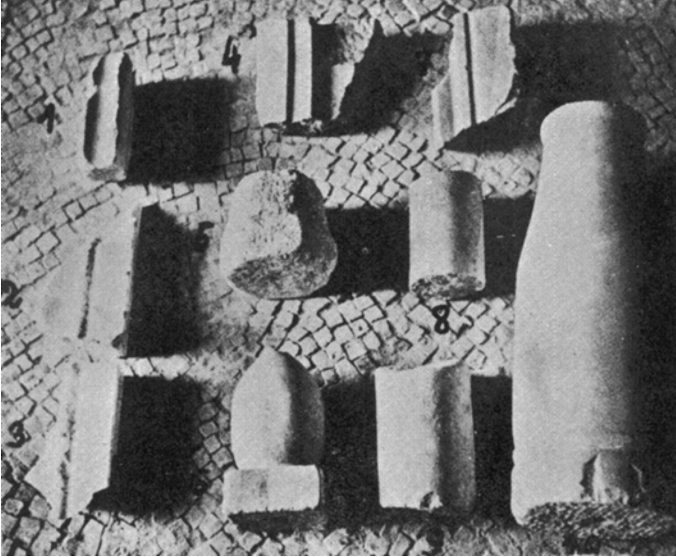


FIGURE 93
St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; plan of the main burial crypt.
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

Late Byzantine and Early Islamic pottery vessels were found,[200] among them a relatively large quantity of storage jars of various types, large candlestick oil lamps, Fine Byzantine Ware bowls and a number of Abbasid vessels: storage jars, jugs and a mold-made oil lamp with four Greek letters ABHB (Αβηβας ?). A few fragments of glass vessels were found as well, and a decorated vessel made of 'soap-stone' (Figs. 95–96). Numismatic finds included five coins: one dating to Valentinianus II (375–392), a folis of Anastasius I (491–518), Constantinopolitan folis – the "M" hardly legible – a coin of Constans II (641–668) "reminted by Arabs",[201] and another coin dated to the Ayyubid period. The last should be attributed to casual passersby, since no architectural or other material remains dated to this period were ever found at the site.

200 Corbo 1955, pp. 131–133.
201 Ibid., p. 134.



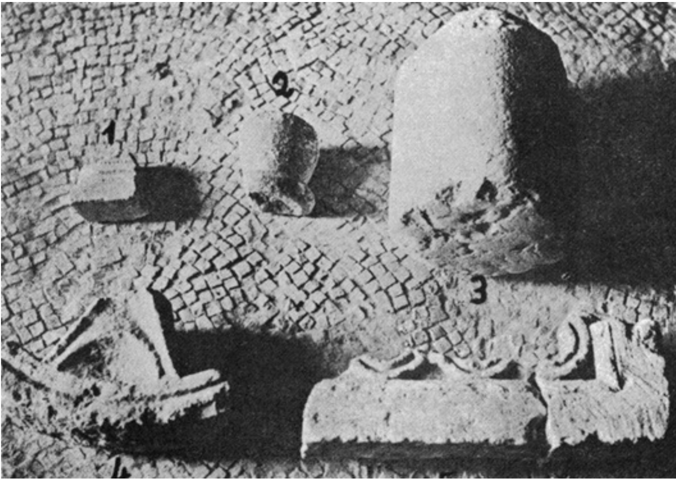


FIGURE 94 *St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; fragments of marble and stone liturgical furniture.*
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

The large spaces of the complex were decorated with mosaic pavements, remains of which were preserved in two chapels, the refectory, the courtyard and its porticos. The mosaic floors were either simple white or decorated with geometric and floral designs (Fig. 97).

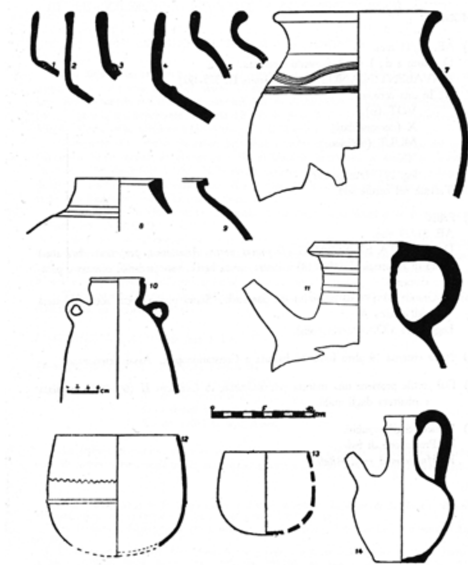


FIGURE 95
St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; Late Byzantine – Early Islamic pottery finds.
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

FIGURE 96
St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; Early Islamic pottery, glass and stone finds (*excluding no. 5 – the Early Roman unguentarium*).
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

Four mosaic inscriptions in Georgian *asomtavruli* script were incorporated into the floors in the central part of the monastery, and they were the first Georgian epigraphic finds discovered in the Holy Land.[202] All four were removed from their original spot, and are preserved today in the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Archaeological Museum, Jerusalem.

The most complete inscription of the complex, perfectly preserved, contains five lines. It was discovered in the eastern part of the refectory hall, set

202 Tarchnishvili 1955. See also Tsereteli 1960; Danelia and Sarjveladze 1997, pp. 29–31; Fähnrich 2013, pp. 177–180.

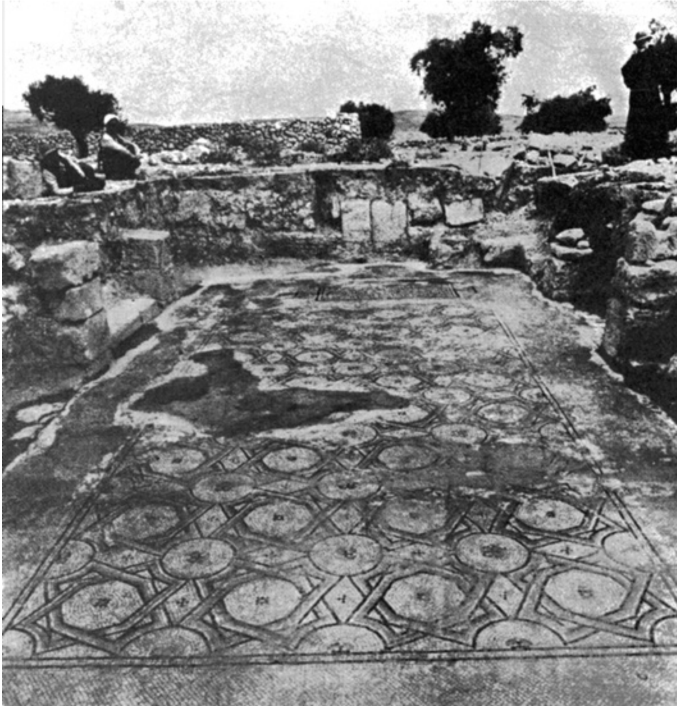


FIGURE 97 *St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; the large mosaic of the refectory.*
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

into a mosaic floor decorated with geometric design (Fig. 98). Made of black tesserae, and placed into *tabula ansata*, it is 81.5 cm high, with letters 10–11.5 cm high. The text reads as follows:[203]

ႸႤႜႤႥႬႨႧႠ Ⴕ˜ႱႨ ႧႠ ႣႠႫ
ႤႭႾႤႡႨႧႠႜႫႨႣႨႱႠႧ˜ႤႰႱႨႧႠ
Ⴘ˜ႬႠႬႲႭႬႨႠႡႠႰႣႠႨႭႱႨႠႫႭ
ႫႱႾႫႤႪႨႠႫႨႱႱႤႴႨႱႠႰႣႠႫႠ
ႫႠႣႤႣႠႰႨႭႱႨႠႰႱႨႠႫႤႬ

203 Tarchnishvili 1955, Inscription A, pp. 135–137, photos 103, 104; Fähnrich 2013, p. 178.

FIGURE 98
St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; Georgian inscription of Abba Antony.
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

> შეწევნითა ქ(რისტ)სითა და მ|ეოხებითა წმიდისა თ(ეოდორ)ესითა შ(ეიწყალე)ნ ანტონი აბაჲ და იოსია მო|მსხმელი ამის სეფისაჲ და მა|მა დედაჲ იოსიაჲსი ამენ
>
> By the help of Christ, and with the intercession of St. Theodore, have mercy O, Lord, on the Abba Anthony and on Iosiah who laid this mosaic and on the father and mother of Iosiah. Amen.

Another dedicatory inscription was discovered in the western portico of the central courtyard (Fig. 99). Made of black tesserae, and placed into the colored frame of the mosaic, it was 98 cm high and 45 cm wide, with letters 9 cm high. The text is arranged in three framed squares, each originally contained four lines; most probably, the fourth square is missing. The inscription is incomplete; the beginning is missing, and the last three lines are badly damaged. The text reads as follows:[204]

> ႡႠႣႭႱႣ
> ႤႳႦႬႨႫ
> Ⴀ႙ႬႨႱႠ
> ႵႭႱႰႡႠ
> ႢႰႨႭႰႫ
> ႨႦႡႡႠႫ
> Ⴀ႘ႭႱႬႤ
> ႫႠ႙ႬႨ+˜Ⴄ
> [--]
> Ⴘ[--]Ⴈ[--]Ⴌ
> ႠႫႤႬ

204 Tarchnishvili 1955, Inscription B, pp. 137–138, photos 119–120.

FIGURE 99
St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; Georgian inscription of Bakur and Gri-Ormizd.
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

FIGURE 100 *St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; Georgian inscription of Maruan and Burzen.*
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

> და ძუძ|ეულნი მ|ათნი ბა|კურ და | გრი ორმ|იზდ და ნ|აშობნი | მათნი ქ(რისტ)ე | … | … | შ(ე)ი(წყალე)ნ | ამენ
>
> And their alumni Bakur and Gri-Ormizd and their children. Christ [--] have a mercy. Amen.

The third inscription, of four lines, was discovered in the northwestern part of the courtyard. It is made of black tesserae and set into *tabula ansata* (Fig. 100). It is 132 cm long, with letters 9–11.5 cm high. The third and fourth lines are poorly preserved; therefore reading of the names is problematic. The text reads as follows:[205]

> ႼႫႨႣႠႭႧႤႭႣႭႰ
> ႤႫႠႰႭႣႠႬႣႠႡႭ
> ႣႰႆႬ [--]ႤႬႠႫႨ
> [--]Ⴄ[--]
>
> წმიდაო თეოდორ|ე მარ[უ]ან და ბუ|რზნ..............ენ ამი | … ე …
>
> St. Theodore, Mar[u]an? and Burz[e]n? [--] e [--][206]

The last inscription was discovered in the eastern colonnade of the central courtyard (Fig. 101). Unlike the other three, this one is made of red tesserae;

205 Tarchnishvili 1955, Inscription C, p. 138, photo 107.

206 Fähnrich 2013, pp. 178–179, proposes to complete the lacuna as: (შეხეწი)ენ ამი(ს) ე(კლესიაჲსა)…

FIGURE 101
St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; damaged bilingual (?) inscription.
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

the letters are larger, up to 9.8 cm high.[207] The text is too fragmentary for us to propose a translation. It is possible that the last two lines were written in a script other than the Georgian *asomtavruli*.

[--]
Ⴆ[--]
Ⴈ[--]
CO[--]
MCO[--]

[--]|ზ [--]|ი [--]|CO [--]|MCO [--]

Together with the inscriptions that were discovered at Umm Leisun and Nazareth (see below), and the Bolnisi and Jvari inscriptions from Georgia, dated to the end of the fifth–sixth centuries, the Bir el-Qutt finds should be considered among the earliest preserved examples of Georgian writing. The style of the characters, the orthographic norms and the abbreviations used in the inscriptions, all testify to the existence of a well-established writing tradition already in the sixth century.

207 Tarchnishvili 1955, Inscription D, pp. 138–139, foto 118.

It is generally accepted that the patron of the Bir el-Qutt monastery should be identified with St. Theodore Tyron, a martyr of the fourth century, whose cult was very popular in the ancient Christian Orient.[208] He was commemorated in the Jerusalem Church five times a year; a church or a monastery dedicated to his name existed in Jerusalem and was known as 'the building of John the Merciful', in honor of the Alexandrian patriarch who restored it.[209]

Abba Anthony is mentioned in the *Vita Marthae*[210] as a Jerusalemite monk of Georgian origin, who with two other Georgian monks brought a relic of the True Cross to St. Simeon Stylite the Younger. This event took place a year after the death of St. Martha in 551, and after Simeon was installed on the pillar in 552. According to the *Vita*, Abba Anthony remained in Syria, and later became the bishop of Seleucia. It is clear, that the inscription at Bir el-Qutt could not be later than 552. On the other hand, according to the text, twenty years before traveling to Syria Anthony was still in Georgia. Thus, the date of the Bir el-Qutt inscription can be established between the years 532 and 552, which correlates well with the archaeological data.

The name of the mosaicist Iosiah, is Hebrew in origin and not common in the ancient Georgian nomenclature. The two other names that are mentioned in the inscriptions – Bakur and Gri-Ormizd – are of Parthian and Persian origin. Persian and Parthian names were popular in Georgia (and Armenia) not only in the pre-Christian period, but also in the centuries after the end of the Persian political and cultural domination.[211] The Arabic name Murvanos is known from the Georgian version of the *Vita Petre Iberi* (4 and 18), as the birth name of the saint. The identification of Maruan with Peter the Iberian was followed by the creation of a genealogy: Burzen was identified with his father, and Bakur with his grandfather. As a result, ever since its discovery, the Bir el-Qutt complex was identified in the Georgian research as a desert coenobium built by Peter the Iberian and his companion Ioanne the Laz.[212] According to this hypothesis, the monastery was built between the years 429 and 444 by Peter and his companions. This dating is based on selective reading of historical sources, and should be rejected.

208 Tarchnichvili 1955, p. 136.

209 Kekelidze 1912, pp. 185–188.

210 Van den Ven 1970; for discussion see Tarchnishvili 1955, p. 136, and Tsereteli 1960, p. 17.

211 Tsereteli 1960, pp. 71–72.

212 Tsereteli 1960; Nutsubidze 1958; Chachanidze 1977; Lordkipanidze and Muskhelishvili 1988; Mgaloblishvili 2007, etc.

The combined analysis of epigraphic, numismatic and ceramic finds dates the establishment of the coenobium to the years 532–552. To solve this problem, it was proposed to define two architectural phases of the monastery: the first, dated to the days of Peter, and the second to the reconstruction of the church by Abba Anthony a hundred years later, i.e. to suggest that Abba Anthony was the rebuilder, but not the founder of the complex.[213] However, no remains of earlier structures of earlier construction phases were discovered during the excavations. According to Nutsubidze, the first two lines of the dedicatory inscription should be attributed to the first, original phase of the monastery, i.e. to the fifth century, while the three lines that follow, were a result of the monastery's renovations. However, there is no sign that any of the inscriptions was renovated. Paleographic and artistic analysis shows a total unity in the style of the letters and their composition inside the mosaic frame. All the inscriptions were inlayed in the mosaic floors of the complex at the same time, during the construction phase in the sixth century. Under the circumstances, the combination of the names 'Maruan', 'Burzen' and 'Bakur' in the inscriptions should be regarded as coincidental, or written *in memoria*.

The identification of the Bir el-Qutt complex with the desert monastery of Peter the Iberian becomes doubtful also in light of the historical sources, mainly the saint's *Vita.* According to the text (*44–48*), immediately after arriving to Jerusalem Maruan and Mithridat became monks, and following their ordination changed their names to "Peter" and "John". It seems impossible, that the dedicatory inscription in the monastery would call them by their birth name.[214] After the ordination, the person known by the old name is dead for the world, and the new person with a new name comes to the world instead. The mention of a monk, a bishop, or a great church authority under his secular, birth name rather than his ordination name, makes no sense.

Peter was buried near Maiumas (*183–184*), his bishophoric seat, in the monastery which he established and where he spent his last years, and there is no reason to look for his tomb on the fringe of the Judean desert. The burial place of John the Laz described in the Georgian version of the text (*30*) is uncertain: he was buried in a Georgian monastery, but it is unclear, whether in Jerusalem or in the desert.

According to the Georgian version of the *Vita* (*22*), Peter built in the desert monastery a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In Bir el – Qutt, however, the monastery was discovered to be dedicated to St. Theodore. Most probably, the church of the monastery was consecrated to the same saint.

213 Tsereteli 1960, pp. 29, 50; Chachanidze 1977, p. 231.

214 Danelia and Sarjveladze 1997, pp. 30–31.

To add, one would expect to find some epigraphic evidence to the imperial iniciative in monastery renovation, testified by Procopius (*De Aedificiis V. 9*). Such an imperial inscription by Justinian was discovered in the Nea Church in Jerusalem.[215] Since in the time of Justinian the monastery complex was known as the "Lazic monastery", as Procopius states, some form of that name should occur also in the dedicatory inscriptions. However, there is not mention of the "Lazic monastery" nor of the Emperor in any inscription.

The above considerations bring us to the conclusion that the complex of Bir el-Qutt cannot be identified with "the desert monastery" of Peter the Iberian, built in the fifth century by the saint himself and renovated in the sixth century by the order of Justinian. It is a totally different structure, built by an abbot named Anthony in the years 532–552. In this specific case, the excavations supplied all the necessary information for identification and dating of the site: the name of the monastery, the name of its founder – known also from historical sources, and datable archaeological finds. Claiming a connection between Peter the Iberian and the Bir el-Qutt monastery would contradict all the archaeological and historical evidence known today.

The abandonment of the monastery was dated by the excavator to the first part of the sixth century, sometime after the Arab invasion. Abbasid pottery and stone vessels published by Corbo, however, make it possible now to postpone this date to the eighth or even ninth century.
The rustic character of the Bir el-Qutt complex attracted special consideration from Corbo. The agricultural installations (Fig. 102), especially the wine press, encouraged the Georgian scholars to stress the national aspect of the complex, "since wine presses were not typical for other monasteries in the same locality".[216] However, subsequent research into the monastic settlements of the region showed that olive and wine presses were the most common features of Byzantine rural monasteries, where the monks were engaged in regular agricultural work.[217] The Bir el-Qutt complex was a link in a chain of monastic settlements that connected the two holy cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, or possibly Jerusalem and the Great Laura of St. Sabas. Other monasteries along the ancient roads were part of this chain, including Givat Homa, Umm el-Asafir, Khirbet Luqa, Deir el-Amud, Siyar el-Ghanam, Umm Leisun, and more.[218]

215 Avigad 199, pp. 133–135.

216 Chachanidze 1977, p. 231.

217 Corbo 1955; Hirschfeld 1992; Seligman 2011.

218 Seligman 2015, pp. 145–146, fig. 1.

FIGURE 102 *St. Theodore monastery at Bir el-Qutt; remains of oil press.* COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

Umm Leisun Monastery

Another Georgian monastery was discovered in 1996, during excavations of the Israel Antiquities Authority close to East Talpiyot, Jerusalem.[219] The complex (Fig. 103) was badly damaged by modern construction works. Part of the walls and floors were demolished, but from the remains that were preserved, it is possible to reconstruct a small rural monastic settlement, similar to the Bir el-Qutt complex, built along the road leading from Jerusalem towards Bethlehem and Mar Saba. A chapel, 7.6 × 14 m (Fig. 103, Area A, Room I on the plan), was adjoined by a smaller room (Room II), both with mosaic pavements of geometric design. The apse of the chapel did not survive. It is not clear whether it was a single-room chapel, or a multi-room structure that included a monastery-type chapel and *diaconikon*.

Stairs were leading to two symmetrically placed crypts (Area C) with 24 burials were found to the north-east, below the floor layer of the chapel (Figs. 104–105).

219 Seligman and Abu Raya 2002; Seligman 2004; Seligman 2015. Work was renewed in 2002–2004, in cooperation with a group of Georgian scholars, leaded by I. Gagoshidze.

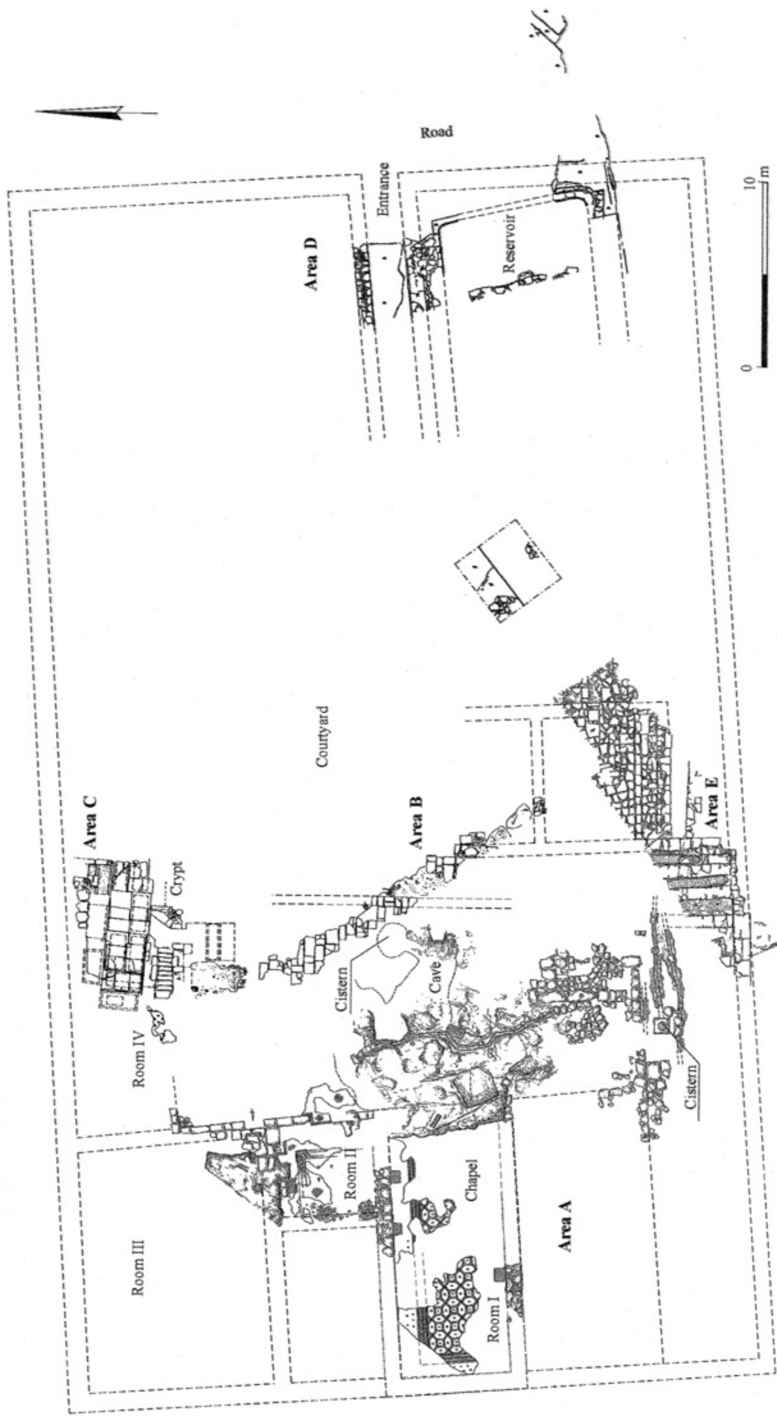


FIGURE 103 *Umm Leisun monastery; proposed reconstruction.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

FIGURE 104 *Umm Leisun monastery; burial crypt.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

From the twelve inspected graves, the remains of 23 individuals were excavated. All those whose sex could be determined – 18 adults and three children – proved to be male.[220] Above the main tomb, which contained the remains of an elderly man, a limestone slab with a Georgian *asomtavruli* inscription was found *in situ* (Fig. 106). The slab is 81 cm long and 49 cm high. After the excavations, the inscription was removed by the IAA and today it is exhibited in the Archaeological Garden of Knesset, in Jerusalem. The text reads as follows:[221]

ႤႱႤ ႱႠႫႠႰႾႭჂ
ႨႭႡႠႬႤ ႴႭჃႰ
ႲႠႥႤႪ ႤႮႨႱႩႭႮႭ
ႱႨႱႠჂ ႵႠႰႧႥႤ
ႪႨႱႠჂ+

ესე სამარხოჲ | იოჰანე ფურ|ტაველ ეპისკოპო|სისაჲ ქართვე|ლისაჲ +

This is the tomb of Iohane bishop of Purtavi, a Kartvelian.

220 Nagar 2015.

221 Tchekhanovets 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 973; Gagoshidze 2015.

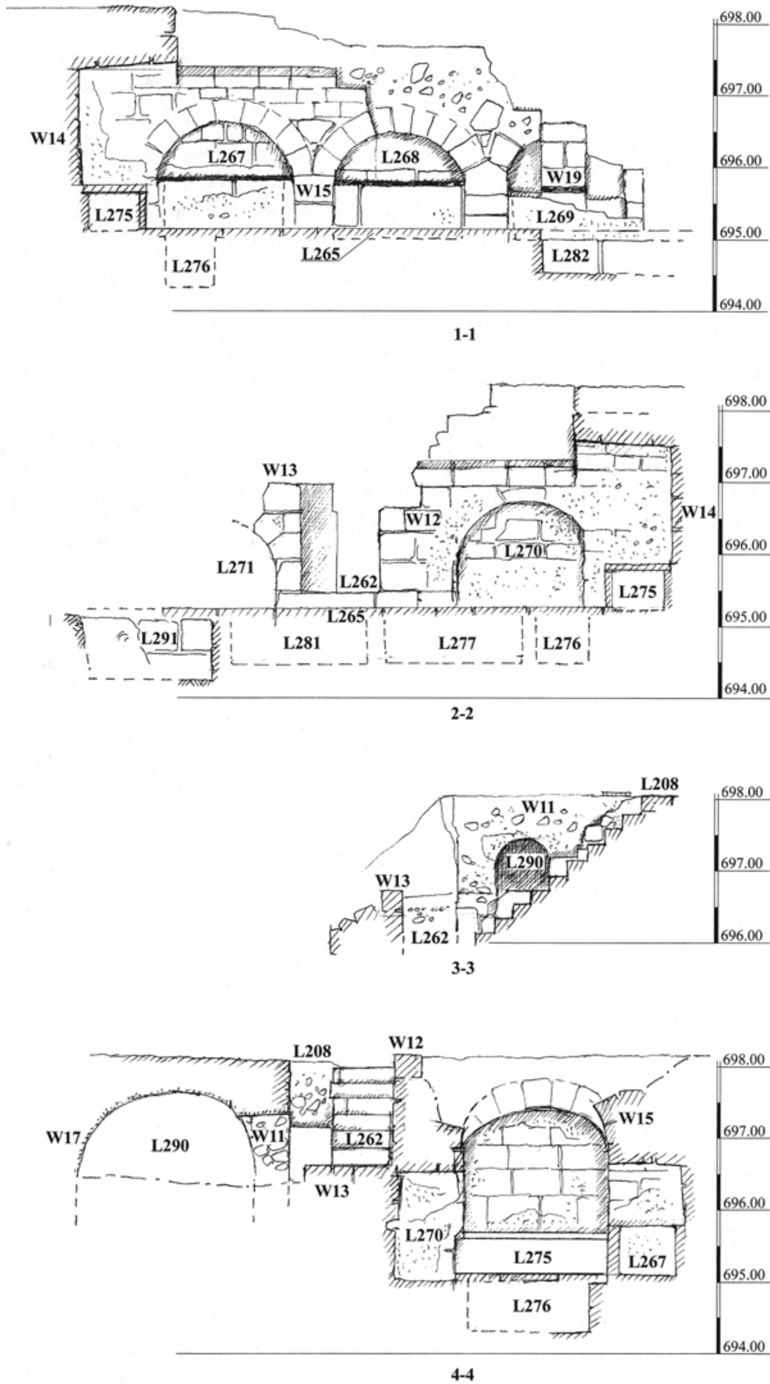


FIGURE 105 *Umm Leisun monastery; sections of the burial crypt.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

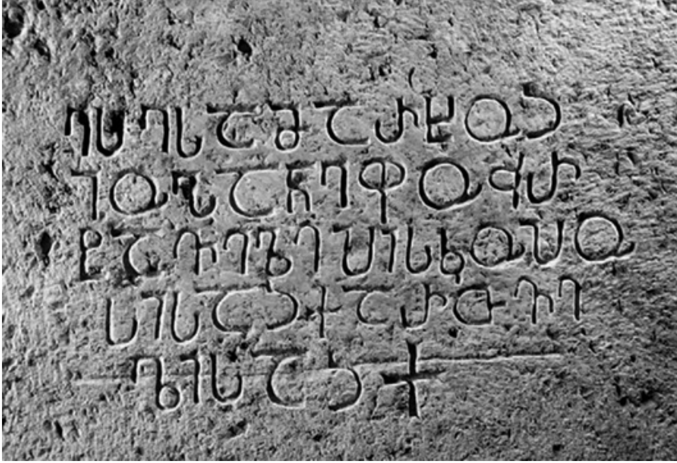


FIGURE 106 *Umm Leisun monastery; Georgian burial inscription of the bishop Iohane.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

Based on paleographic characteristics, the inscription was dated by the Georgian epigraphist G. Gagoshidze to the end of the fifth–first half of the sixth century;[222] the archaeological data dates the burial context to the sixth–seventh centuries. The characters have a well-developed form, similar to the script of the Bir el-Qutt inscriptions, and the difference between the two is in the choice of material – mosaic as opposed to stone. Besides, the epitaph from Umm Leisun includes no abbreviations; all the words appear in their complete form. The spelling of the name იოჰანე is typical for the fifth–early seventh centuries. The ethnonym ქართველი (Kartvelian, from Kartli) is probably the earliest known use of this self-identification term. Still, the need for such a national definition seems unclear since the text itself is written in Georgian.

The term ფურტაველი, identifying the place of origin, Purtavi, is not entirely clear. It was proposed to see it as the name of the Umm Leisun monastery, derived from the Aramaic פורתא or Hebrew פורה.[223] However, nothing is known of such a bishopric seat in Byzantine Palestine. Another interpretation of the inscription was proposed,[224] in connection to the city of Partav (Bardav in modern Azerbaijan), the ancient capital of Caucasian Albania and an important ecclesiastical center. The city of Partav was established in the

222 Gagoshidze 2015.
223 Mgaloblishvili 2015, pp. 189–190.
224 Tchekhanovets 2014.

fourth century, and a hundred years later, during the reign of the Albanian king Vache II (459–481) became the capital of the country and the bishoporic seat. In the following centuries the bishop of Partav was also regarded as the head of the Albanian Church, or Catholicos.

According to the observation of Gadjiev, in the Georgian sources the name of the Albanian capital appears as Barda, Bardav (Bardavi), and the form Partav (Partavi) is unattested.[225] However, in the same time, in the Armenian translation of the Georgian *Kartlis Tskhovreba* chronicle the city is indeed called Partaw.[226]

The meaning of the Umm Leisun text becomes clearer if "the bishop of Purtavi" can be read as "the bishop of Partav", and "kartveli" as "from Kartly", rather than as "Georgian."[227] The inscription then refers to a person buried in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and was a native of the Kartli, but served far away from his country, in Albania.

In our opinion, it can also explain the most prestigious place of the bishop's grave in the burial crypt and the rather large number of deceased buried around. Most probably, bishop Iohane was the founder of the monastery of Umm Leisun or played some other important role in the life of the community, in the Holy Land or outside its borders.

It worth mentioning, that "Partava Monastery" in Jerusalem, located near the Tower of David, is mentioned in the *History of Ałuank Country* by Movses Daskhurantsi (for discussion on the the source, see above).

In the same text (*26*) list of the catholicoses of the Albanian Church the name of Ioannes appears twice: the first Ioannes led as early as in the fourth century, even before the transfer of the Albanian capital to Partav. The second was the head of the Church in the years 644–671. This date corresponds well to the date of the Umm Leisun complex according to archeological evidence. However, we have no information on pilgrimage, migration, or death in the Holy Land of any of the Albanian catholicoses. It is not clear; was the bishop buried in Umm Leisun an active head of the Church hierarchy during the period of the Caucasian Churches unity, or, was he to the contrary, one of the schismatics, whishing to escape the endless conflicts of the Caucasian tie? Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered at the current state of research.

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225 My deep gratitude is expressed to Murtazali Gadjiev of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography, Daghestan Center of Russian Academy of Science for this important remark (personal correspondence).

226 Thomson 1996, p. 5.

227 Gagoshidze 2015, p. 183.

In addition to the tombs that were revealed in modern excavations, a crypt containing 24 tombs, which was probably also part of the monastery, was found in its vicinity in the 19th century by Bliss and Dickie.[228] Bliss and Dickie also discovered the remains of a square structure, 64 × 64 m, with remnants of walls and a large rock-cut and plastered cistern decorated with molded cross. Unfortunately the exact location of this site is now lost. Even before the modern discovery of the chapel, it had been suggested that the crypt was part of a Byzantine monastery.[229]

Various household structures of unknown purpose, and a well-planned system of water supply – channels and cisterns – were unearthed in Umm Leisun complex. Some rooms had simple white mosaic floors, and some were stone-paved. The large number of tiles indicates that the whole complex had a tiled roof. A number of marble chancel-screen pillars were discovered. The pottery finds included, among others, Gaza ware jars, candlestick oil lamps, and Fine Byzantine Ware bowls, mainly dated to the sixth–eighth centuries. Ceramic finds and epigraphic material date the foundation of the Umm Leisun complex to the sixth–seventh centuries, and its end probably to the eighth century.[230]

The YMCA Complex

During the salvage excavations carried out by J. Iliffe of the British Mandatory Department of Antiquities in Jerusalem west of the YMCA complex in 1932, a cemetery and part of an extensive building (Fig. 107), Christian in character, were uncovered: a monastery, according to the excavator.[231] Only the eastern part of the building was excavated: the main part of the structure, built of rubble, with a number of poorly preserved ashlar walls, forming altogether an ablution block or household wing, with two damaged rooms and plastered cisterns (Fig. 108). Few fragments of simple white mosaic floors were found, as well as parts of clay drain-pipes (Fig. 109) and the stone pavements of the rooms. On one of the cistern walls a large encircled cross was molded in the plaster (Fig. 110).

Reassessment of the 'monastery' showed that the remains should be attributed to a winepress of the composite type, characteristic mainly of agricultural monasteries.[232] The remains of the white mosaic floor was originally part of

228 Bliss and Dickie 1898, pp. 239–243.

229 Avni 1997, pp. 407–408.

230 Seligman 2015.

231 Iliffe 1935.

232 For discussion see Seligman 2011, pp. 386–392, 393–394, table 14.1; for a map of ca. 130 composite type winepresses of Byzantine Palestine see Avrutis 2015, pp. 63–71, 202–203; see also Młynarczyk 2013.

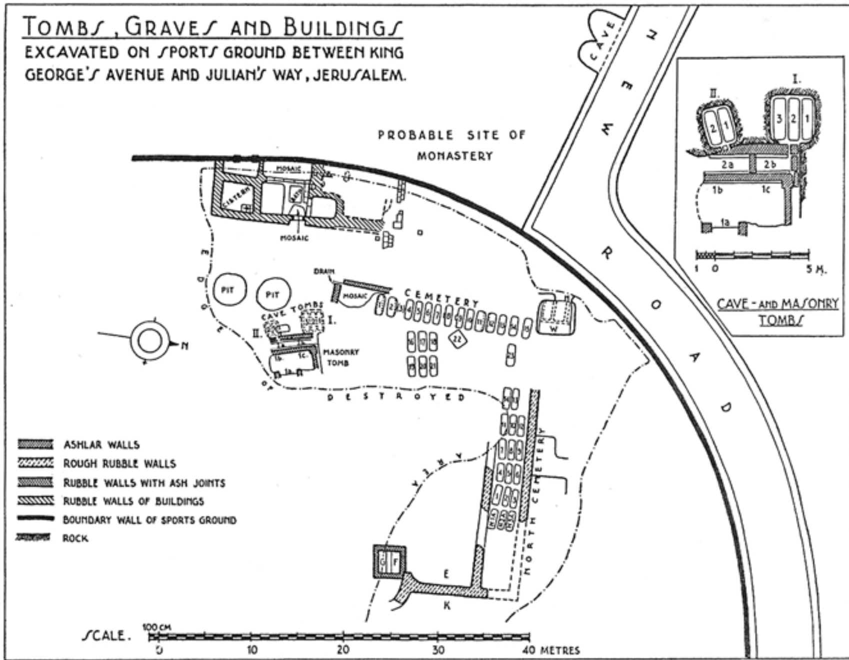

FIGURE 107 *The YMCA complex; plan of excavated area. After Iliffe 1935.*

FIGURE 108 *YMCA, "Monastery"; rooms and plastered cisterns (winepress).*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

FIGURE 109 *YMCA, "Monastery"; clay pipe near mosaic.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

FIGURE 110 *YMCA, "Monastery"; plastered "bath" (collecting vat).*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

the central treading floor; the mysterious 'arched recess niches' are actually the chambered vats, overlapped by ancillary raised treading floors; even their connection with a central floor is preserved (Fig. 111). The plastered cistern with stairs is a typical collecting vat, often decorated with a cross, especially in monastic context.

FIGURE 111 *YMCA, winepress of the combined type: central treading floor covered with white mosaic; in the center – the square plastered collecting vat; chambered vats covered by ancillary raised treading floors to the left.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

Pottery from the complex included candlestick oil lamps decorated with a cross and the inscription "Good lamp" in Greek, and rouletted bowls. The pottery (candlestick lamps and rouletted bowls are the types mentioned specifically in the report) and glass finds date the structure to the fifth–seventh centuries.

To the east, a large number of graves were discovered by Iliffe, dated to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.[233] The most ancient were the hewn 'cave tombs' (Fig. 107, I and II on the plan), which contained lead and wooden coffins, together with small finds dated to the second–third centuries (Fig. 112).[234] The entrance to these caves was blocked by a later mausoleum (Fig. 107, 'masonry tomb' on the plan; Fig. 113) of the third century, containing lead coffins, decorated with pagan motifs (Fig. 114).[235] To the north of the mausoleum, numerous rock-cut tombs were uncovered, suggesting a well-planned cemetery of some institution (Fig. 107, 'cemetery' and 'north cemetery' on the plan). The tombs were systematically laid out in rows (Fig. 115), forming two sides of a

233 For an updated discussion on the YMCA graves, see Avni 1997, pp. 381–383.

234 Iliffe 1935, pp. 70–75, figs. 1–6.

235 For discussion of lead coffins see Rahmani 1999, pp. 100–103, nos. 47, 48, 55, 58.

FIGURE 112 *YMCA, Late Roman cave tomb I, grave 3 before and after removal of the slabs.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

large rectangle. About half of the cemetery was destroyed prior to the beginning of the excavations,[236] but nevertheless over 40 graves were unearthed. The tombs were cut into the rock and covered with stone slabs. Wherever the

236 Burials were destroyed throughout the years of the YMCA construction. See the report of D.C. Baramki, then a "student inspector" of the Department of Antiquities, dated to 31.3.1928: IAA archive, file "Jerusalem B11 – Nikoforiya YMCA".

FIGURE 113 *YMCA, Late Roman cave tomb blocked by masonry wall of the mausoleum.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

FIGURE 114 *YMCA, lead coffin discovered inside the mausoleum.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

rocky surface was not high enough, the walls of the graves were built up, using rough blocks of limestone or rubble (Figs. 116). All the burials were arranged on an east–west axis, with the deceased's head to the east, lying on his back in extended position. The report contains no relevant anthropological information

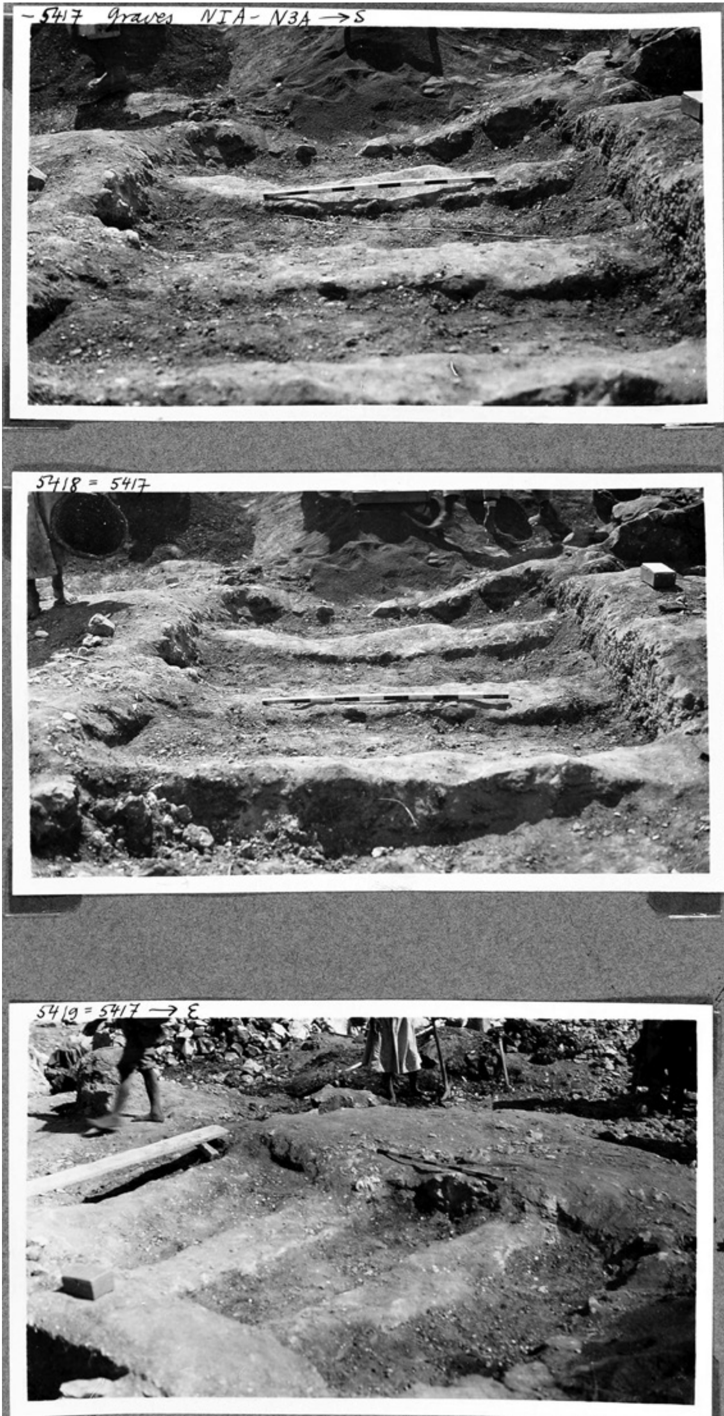

FIGURE 115 *YMCA, "the north cemetery"; rows of the Byzantine tombs.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

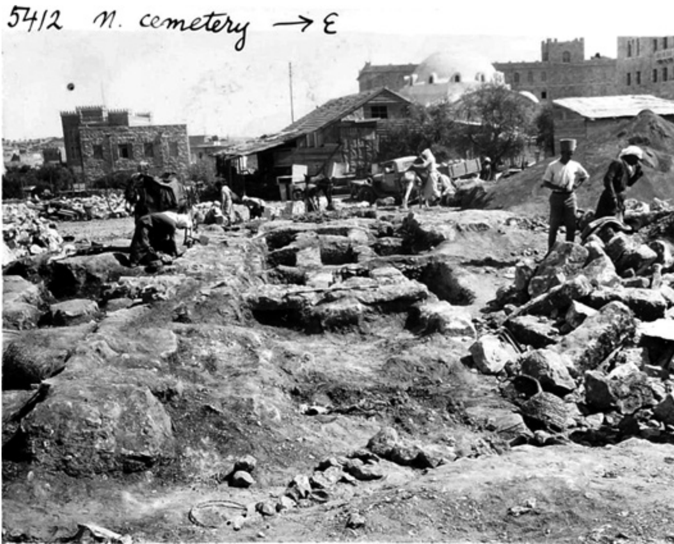

FIGURE 116 *YMCA, "the north cemetery" under exposure, looking east; to the left, the remains of massive walls are seen, bounding "the cemetery" from the north.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

regarding the sex and age of the individuals. Seemingly, most of the tombs contained the remains of a single individual.[237]

The content of the tombs was relatively poor: candlestick oil lamps, some Byzantine pottery, some "green glazed ware" (Abbasid glazed?), glass vessels, and a number of Byzantine and Umayyad coins, dated to the wide range from the fourth to the eighth centuries.[238] On the surface were some marble and stone fragments, including two Corinthian capitals, a roughly made relief showing a left arm of human figure, and fragments of Greek inscriptions; large stone lintels were also exposed (Fig. 117). A few remains of walls were found, aligning the tombs: this led Avni to propose that the rows of burials were "parallel to the large building that once stood on the site".[239]

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237 In the photographs of the excavation process, two skeletons are visible in at least two tombs (nos. 7 and 8): IAA archive, file "Jerusalem B11 – Nikoforiya YMCA", photos 5399, 5400.

238 Coins from IAA excavations were lost and can give no additional chronological information.

239 Avni 1997, p. 382.

FIGURE 117 *YMCA, "the northern cemetery"; the large stone lintels.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

It is noteworthy that a fragment of the mosaic pavement was preserved in the south-eastern corner of the cemetery, sealing the graves (Fig. 118). The cemetery was associated by the excavator with the monastic building. The orderly structure of the cemetery, its topographic location, and the chronological correlation with the finds of the 'monastery', suggest their contemporary existence.[240]

Two more burial structures were discovered: one on the eastern edge of the excavated area (Fig. 107, G and F on the plan), and the other on its northern edge (Fig. 107, W on the plan). The latter 'structure of unknown purpose" is not described in the report and was not photographed. As far as can be seen on the plan, it was a hewn burial cell, containing two couches. In the debris near structure W, a limestone slab measuring 112 × 67 cm was discovered, with a Greek epitaph dedicated to the Iberian bishop Samuel (Fig. 119). The text of the inscription reads as follows:[241]

+
[.]ΝΗΜΑΔΙΑΦʃΡΣΑΜ[--]
[.]ΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΥΙΒΕΡΩ[--]
ΚʃΤΗΣΜΟΝΗΣΑΥΤΟΥΟΗΓ[.]
ΡΑΣΑΝΕΝΤΩΠΥΡΓΩΔΑΔ

240 Iliffe 1935, p. 77.
241 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 1000.

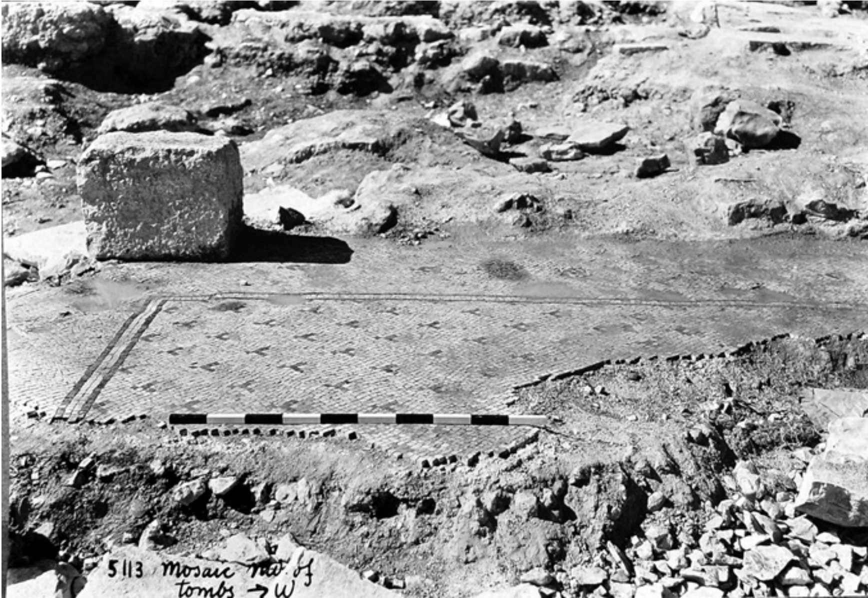

FIGURE 118 *YMCA, mosaic floor sealing the graves of "the cemetery".*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

FIGURE 119 *YMCA, tombstone of Samuel, bishop of the Iberians.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

[Μ]νῆμα διαφ<έ>ρ(ον) Σαμ[ουὴλ] | [ἐ]πισκόπου Ἰβέρω[ν] | κ(αὶ) τῆς μονῆς αὐτοῦ ὃ ἠγ[ό]|ρασαν ἐν τῷ πύργῳ Δα(ουί)δ

Tomb belonging to Samuel, bishop of the Iberians, and to his monastery, which they bought in (the area of) David's Tower.

The establishment of the Iberian monastery and the hostel for pilgrims near the Tower of David is known from the *Vita* of Peter the Iberian, as is the problematic issue of the land purchase (for discussion, see below). It would be reasonable to assume, that the structure was the burial place of the bishop himself.[242] According to the common practice of the Byzantine period, the dead were buried outside the city, and clergymen were no exception.[243] Iliffe proposed that the cemetery belonged to the Iberian monastery near the Tower of David, or possibly served the whole Georgian monastic community of Jerusalem.

In 1947, salvage works in the area continued further to the west by British Mandatory Department of Antiquities, in order to enlarge the street. The results were never published, but the general plan of the site and a report signed by C[ederic] N[orman] J[ohns] are preserved in the mandatory archive of the Israel Antiquities Authority.[244] Due to the nature of salvage excavation, the architectural remains were exposed in a fragmentary manner, but they still render considerable help in the reconstruction of the complex. A series of rooms form the north-western corner of a large monastic complex, extending over 80 m westwards from the western edge of the church. All the discovered walls were built "of rubble plastered over", a construction similar to that of the winery that was discovered by Iliffe. The floors were plastered, some paved with stones others with simply decorated mosaics. Towards the west, the level of the floors drops, due to the slope of the terrain. Most of the rooms were small and cell-like, except for one relatively large hall located some 10 m north-west of the basilica. This room contained remains of an installation interpreted by Johns as a mill – according to the description, it was probably an olive press. The roof was supported by stone arches and tiled; numerous tiles with cross-shaped stamps were discovered. A number of drainage and water channels were found, associated with a large bell-shaped water cistern. The pottery from the complex was dated to the fifth–seventh centuries, and no other finds

242 Avni 1997, p. 382.

243 Goldfus 1997, p. 97. See, for example, Macalister 1900, pp. 225–248 for Hagia Zion; Hamilton 1938, pp. 155–156 for Probatike; Milik 1960–61, p. 160, and Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 977 for the Holy Sepulchre Church.

244 File "Jerusalem B11 – Nikoforiya YMCA".

were reported. According to Johns, the structure clearly belongs to the same monastic complex which was exposed by Iliffe.

The new analysis of the YMCA finds undertaken for the present study, reveals a more complex picture than was proposed by Iliffe (Fig. 120). The orientation of the tombs, and their alignment with the walls remains, allow the reconstruction of a large basilical church of a cemeterial type.[245] Practically no upper structures of the church building were preserved: most probably, all were razed to the ground prior to the beginning of excavations. The floors of the structure also vanished, except for a tiny fragment in the south-western corner. The field photographs show that the walls that were preserved, were barely higher than the covers of the tombs, and should therefore be interpreted as foundation walls, about one meter wide (Fig. 116). The parallel walls of the 'north cemetery' make it possible to reconstruct the northern aisle; to the east, the remains of the eastern wall are seen, crowned by an external semicircular apse. The western boundary of the structure can be established with the help of the row of tombs ('cemetery') and the corner of the walls on the southeast. This proposed reconstruction outlines the general plan of the church: it is a large basilica, 37.5 m long and 30 m wide, with a single apse, wide central nave and two side aisles. With some caution, pastophoria rooms can be reconstructed according to the clear boundaries of the burials in the eastern end of the northern aisle. Unit G-F, just in front of the apse, should most probably be interpreted as a venerated tomb, located under the church altar. No section of unit G-F is available; therefore the extent of its superposition with the apse wall is unclear. However, on the sketch prepared by Illife, the word 'rock' is written to the north and south of the structure, probably indicating that it was hewn in the bedrock. Similarly, the Late Roman burials (I, II and 'masonry tomb') can be regarded as earlier funerary monuments, revered by the builders of the church, and probably the origin of the tradition of veneration at the site.[246]

To sum up, the YMCA complex is a lavish example of a large agricultural coenobium, surrounded by walls, and containing various household facilities, including wine and olive presses, and a well-developed system of water supply. Even in its current fragmentary state, the area of the complex can be calculated as ca. 8450 m^2. A large basilical church of a rare cemeterial type (for discussion see below) may point to multiple functions of the monastery, such as providing

245 I am grateful to Josef Patrich for this observation. The following interpretation of the remains is my own responsibility.

246 See Di Segni 2007.

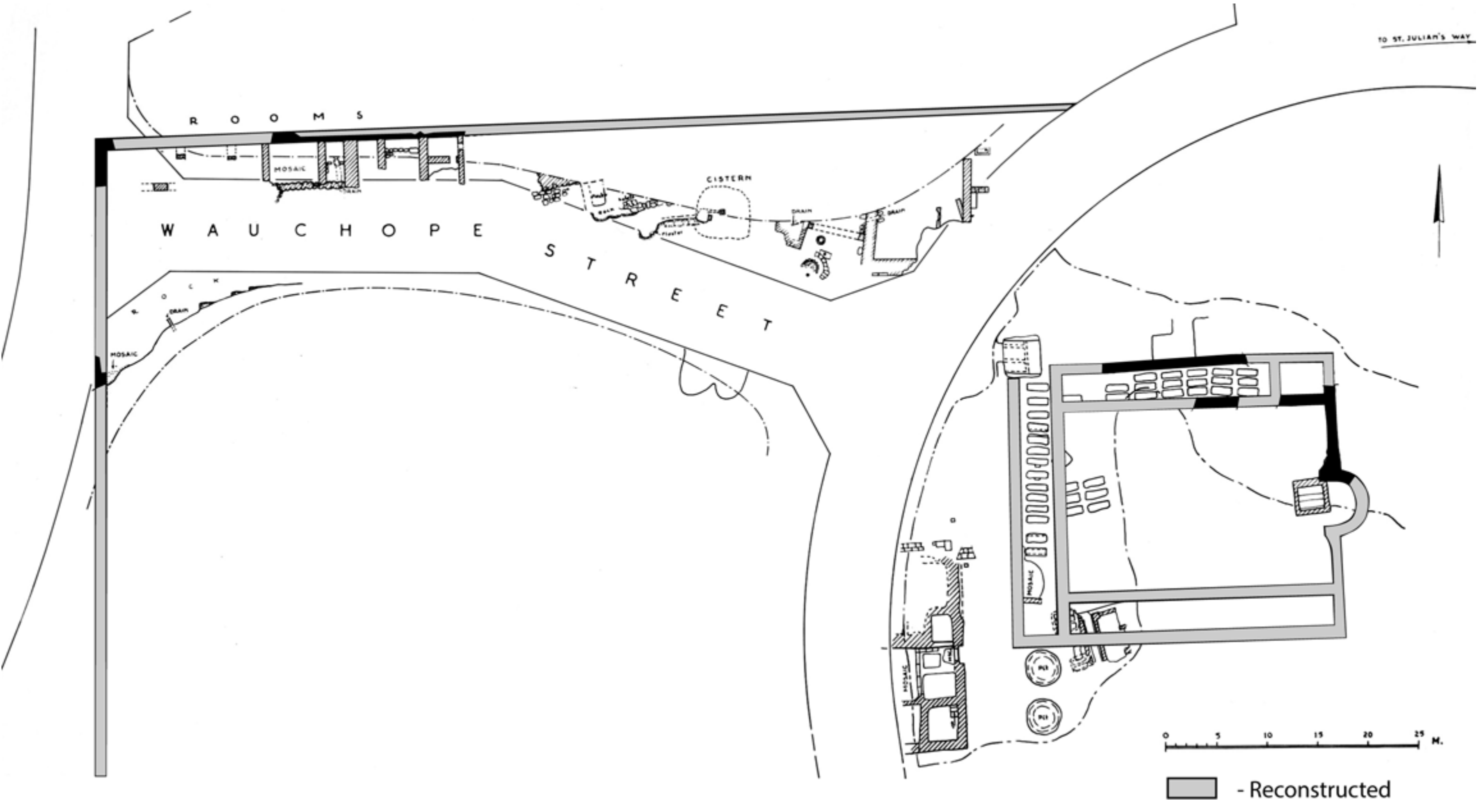

FIGURE 120 *YMCA, proposed reconstruction of the monastic complex and the cemeterial church.*

services to non-residents, whether pilgrims or locals.[247] The possibility of identification of the structural type of the church as *basilica discoperta* (unroofed), practices should not be rejected.[248] The position of the church in the complex is not clear: it may have been enclosed within the monastery, or set outside, along the outer walls, as in the case of Khirbet es-Suyyagh.[249] It seems that burial inside the church was considered prestigious; possibly because of the presence of venerated relics, or because of specific Christian tradition related to the site and forgotten today. Within this cemetery, the Iberian bishop Samuel received one of the most privileged positions. The identification of the complex remains obscure, as does the identity of its builders. As is the case for each and every unnamed monastic establishment discovered to the west of the city, St. George *extra muros*, which is mentioned by Antiochus Strategius, can be offered as a speculative proposition.[250]

The Beit Safafa Funerary Complex

A small funerary complex was discovered in 1952 by Landau in Beit Safafa.[251] It comprises a vaulted burial crypt, with a small chapel adjoining (Fig. 121). The external walls of the complex were built of ashlar stones. The burial crypt was divided into eight burial compartments, aligned east–west, covered by flat stone slabs. Three compartments were discovered empty, four contained a lead coffin each, and in one there were two (children's?) coffins. All were decorated in the same style, characteristic of Christian lead coffins of the early Byzantine period: with crosses, small garlands and rope ornaments (Figs. 122).[252]

The chapel itself measures 7.5 by 8 m, with entrance from the east. It has no apse and rows of columns divide it into a nave and two aisles. On the northern edge of the eastern wall a large threshold, 3 m long with two steps, was discovered. The remains of a damaged mosaic pavement to the east of the threshold make it possible to reconstruct an extension of the building eastwards. A large number of tiles indicate a tiled roof. The finds include glass and pottery vessels, among them: Jerusalem rouletted bowls; candlestick oil lamps with Greek inscription: "Christ's light shines for all"; vessels that according to the

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247 Taxel 2009a, p. 195; Seligman 2011, pp. 510, 515–517.

248 The type of *basilica discoperta* developed from the pre-Christian ritual sites, often related to the cult of the dead: see Schneider 1950.

249 Taxel 2009a.

250 See Milik 1960–61, pp. 138–141; for the Ketef Hinnom remains see Barkay 2000. An additional Byzantine monastic complex was discovered west of the city wall, on the territory of Park Teddy: Zilberbod 2012.

251 Landau 1953; Landau and Avi-Yonah 1957.

252 Rahmani 1999, pp. 110–11; nos. 78–83. According to the style, Rahmani dates the coffins to the second half of the 5 c.

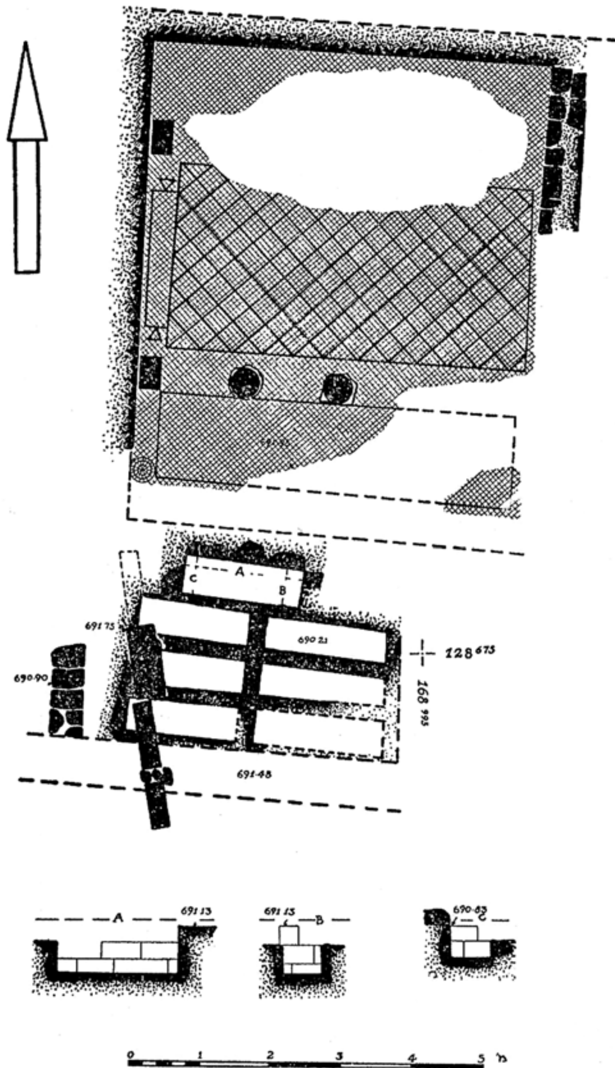

FIGURE 121 *Beit Safafa funerary complex; general plan and section.* COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

description should be identified as Fine Byzantine Ware; and a handle with Arabic stamped inscription. The described assemblage, even *non vidi*, can be dated to the sixth–seventh centuries. The architectural finds include four column fragments, a capital decorated with a cross in relief, and a fragment of marble chancel-screen.

FIGURE 122 *Beit Safafa funerary complex; lead coffin.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

FIGURE 123
Beit Safafa funerary complex; dedicatory inscription of Samuel.
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

The mosaic pavement of the chapel was made of large white, blue and pink tesserae and decorated with a simple diagonal pattern. An inscription in Greek, 230 cm long and 30 cm high, was set in a *tabula ansata* in the floor, between two pilasters beyond the western edge of the plain mosaic (Fig. 123). The text of the inscription is oriented west, and arranged in reverse line order. After the excavations, the mosaic floor was preserved *in situ* and covered by protective layer of sand. The text reads as follows:[253]

253 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 848.

ΑΠΑΥΣΣΩΣΤΩΝΠΟΛΑΒΟΤΩΝΕΝΜΗΙΟΥΝΙΩΙΝΔΙΔΕΤΟΥΣϛΣ
ΜΨΣΩΣΣΑΜΟΥΗΛΟΥΚΤΩΝΑΥΤΟΥΔΙΦΕΡΟΝΤΩΝΚΥΠΕΡΑΝ
ΟΥΤΩΝΑΓΙΩΝΜΑΡΤΥΡΩΝΥΠΕΡΣΩΤΗΡΙΑΣΚΑΝΤΗΛΗ
+ ΕΓΕΝΕΤΟΤΩΠΑΝΕΡΓΝΤΗΣΑΝΕΓΕΡΣΕΩΣΤΟΥΟΙΚ

Ἐγένετο τ⸢ὸ⸣ πᾶν ἔργ<ο>ν τῆς ἀνεγέρσεος τοῦ οἴκ|ου τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας κ(αὶ) ἀντιλή|μψ⸢ε⸣ως Σαμουήλου κ(αὶ) τῶν αὐτοῦ δι<α>φερόντων κ(αὶ) ὑπὲρ αν|απαύσ⸢ε⸣ως τῶν πολ⸢υ⸣βότων, ἐν μη(νὶ) Ἰουνίῳ ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ιδʹ ετους ϛσʹ

The whole work of the erection of the house of the Holy Martyrs was accomplished for the salvation and succor of Samuel and his household, and for the rest of the many-feeding (benefactors?), in the month of June of the 14th indiction, year 6200.

The excavators dated the chapel and the mausoleum to the Late Byzantine period, not earlier than the fifth century, and the inscription to the year 490, i.e. practically the same period. But it is clear that the burials in lead coffins must predate the upper structure of the chapel, which is characterized by relatively late pottery finds.

The enigmatic date of the inscription provoked long discussions. Finally, Di Segni demonstrated that the inscription of the Beit Safafa chapel follows the Georgian Jerusalemite era of Creation and could be dated to 596 or 701.[254] If so, this inscription is the only epigraphic evidence for a chronological era kept by the Georgian community in Jerusalem. Previously, the independent Georgian era was known only from the eighth century.[255]

It should be noted that the suggestion that the funerary chapel at Beit Safafa was associated with the Georgian community predates the recognition that the inscription refers to the Georgian calendar. Bagatti[256] proposed that 'the holy martyrs' to whom the chapel was dedicated should be identified as the 40 Sebastian martyrs, soldiers of the Twelfth Legion Fulminata, who were drowned in a frozen pond ca. 320 for having confessed their Christian faith. Peter the Iberian brought the relics of these martyrs to the Holy Land in the fifth century (*Vita Petre Iberi, 26*). It is also possible that the inscription

254 Di Segni 1997b, pp. 641–646.

255 Grumel 1958, p. 152.

256 Bagatti 1983, p. 23.

"referred to the dead buried in the adjoining and much earlier vault, whose real identity had been forgotten".[257]

To continue the Georgian line of the story, one may speculate regarding the identification of the Samuel who is mentioned as Samuel the bishop of the Iberians, in the epitaph that was discovered in the YMCA complex. It is worth noting that the rare term πολ⌜υ⌝βότων ('many-feeding") from the Beit Safafa inscription appears only once more in Palestinian epigraphy,[258] again in relation with the Georgian community: on the tombstone of the deacons of Anastasis, discovered in Gethsemane (see below).

The Monastery of the Cross

The most eminent Georgian monument in the Holy Land, the Monastery of the Cross, is located in the Valley of the Cross in West Jerusalem. Its connection with the Georgian community is well documented since the middle of the 11th century. However, the early, Byzantine stages of the complex deserve detailed discussion.

Unlike most of the ecclesiastical structures discussed here, which were established during the Byzantine period and abandoned sometime during the Early Islamic period, the Monastery of the Cross is still active today, as part of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Throughout its long history the monument went through many renovations and structural changes, and it was partly destroyed and rebuilt a number of times.

The complex remains one of the least studied Christian monuments of Jerusalem. Surrounded by numerous legends and sacred traditions, extremely rich in historical evidence, the complex of the monastery was scientifically explored in the 1970s, when the Greek architect A. Economopoulos carried out restoration work and excavations on site. Economopoulos published a preliminary report,[259] in which he lists four phases: the first two of construction, and the subsequent two of repairs.

The earliest phase is represented by the remains of a three-aisled basilica, with a single, semicircular inscribed apse, a "*prothesis*" and "*diaconikon*" (Fig. 124). To this early phase belong also the external walls of all the architectural components of the building, and two rows of a stylobate. In the apse, partly hewn and partly built on the high rock scarp, a hewn and plastered cruciform socket was exposed, originally placed below the altar table

257 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 848, p. 220.

258 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, p. 220.

259 Economopoulos 1984; the excavator consulted a number of specialists: the names of V. Tzaferis and Y. Meshorer are mentioned in the report.

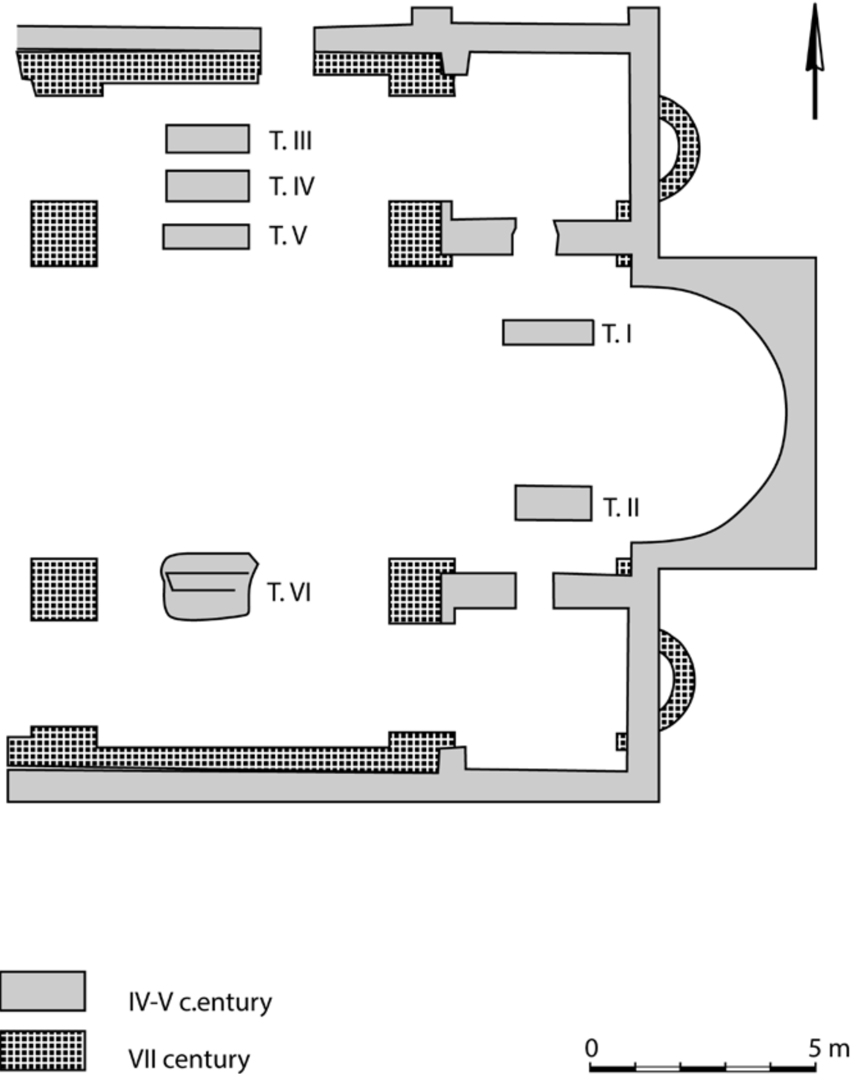

FIGURE 124 *The Monastery of the Cross; two Byzantine phases, and burials in the church, after Economopoulos 1984.*

(Fig. 125, b on the plan).[260] On the lower surface of the cruciform socket, the remains of a painted cross were found. Besides, a *thalassa* – a small basin for

260 *Enkaenion*, according to excavator, who associates the find with the Byzantine rite of consecration of a church, which included the placement of the holy relics. For discussion, see Permiakov 2009.

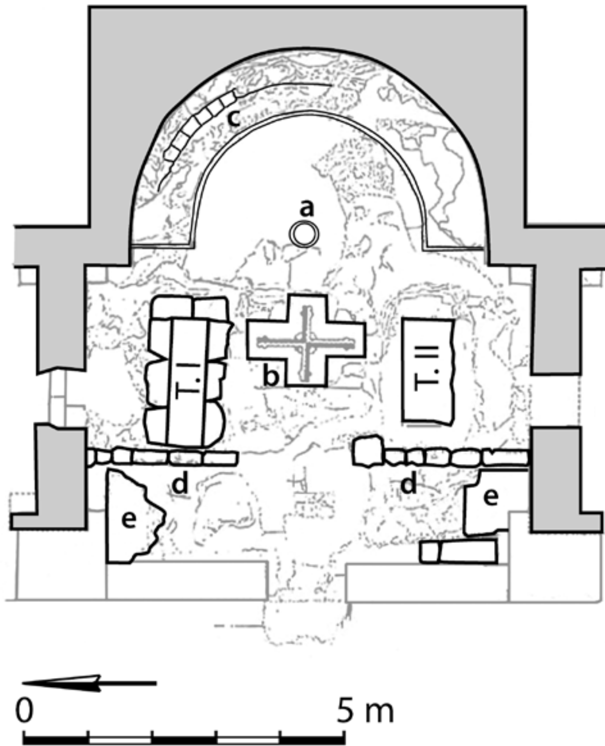

FIGURE 125 *The Monastery of the Cross; plan of the Byzantine sanctuary. After Economopoulos 1984.*

ceremonial washing – is mentioned (Fig. 125, a on the plan). Marble slabs, parts of the original pavement, were partly preserved (e on the plan), as were the remains of hewn synthronon steps (, c on the plan). Remains of colorful mosaic pavements with geometric and vegetal ornaments were discovered in the "*prothesis*", the "*diaconikon*" and the southern aisle. Other mosaic fragments discovered in the courtyard of the contemporary church, westward of the modern narthex, demonstrate the existence of additional structures of the early phase complex.[261]

Below the floor level of the early sanctuary, on either side of the altar, two built tombs were found (Figs. 124–125, T.I and T.II on the plans). The northern Grave I contained the remains of an old man, possibly a prelate or hegumen of the monastery. A coin of Arcadius and Honorius was found in this tomb, dated

261 Economopoulos 1984, p. 388; Tzaferis 1987, p. 19.

to 395–408. The southern Grave II was destroyed in antiquity and contained few human bone fragments "mixed with earth", and a coin dated to the sixth century. Probably the finds testify to the removal of remains in the second phase of the church.

A row of four additional graves was uncovered under the mosaic floors of the central nave and northern aisle, dated by the excavator, on stratigraphic basis, to the end of third–beginning of the fourth centuries. Three of them (Graves III, IV and V) were simple cist graves; Grave VI had the form of an underground hewn arcosolium with a small antechamber. Graves III and V were found empty, and indeed were never used. The other two burials contained the most intriguing anthropological finds.[262] Thus, Grave IV contained the remains of two women, 75 and 40 years old, with clear signs of burns on their hand bones. Grave VI contained remains of three men and a woman, some with marks of terrifying injuries:

- Skeleton of the woman whose atlas was fractured by a cutting instrument, with a piece of arrow at the bregmatic region, and laurel leaves (*sic!* – Y.T.) around the neck;
- Skeleton of an old, solidly built man, 60–70 years old, with vertebra fractured by a cutting instrument;
- Skeleton of a man 22–24 years old, with calcified pelvis; right arm cut at the upper joint by a cutting instrument, with clear marks of burns on the right arm and the spine.
- Skeleton of a man 25–30 years old, with no visible pathologies.

The character of the described injuries clearly testifies to a torturous death: the victims were beheaded or hacked by sword, and their corpses were burned. According to the excavator, the tombs predate the construction of the first basilical church, but they were discovered under the floor of the second stage.

The second phase shows some changes in the plan (Fig. 124). The church was transformed to a three-apsidal, domed basilica, measuring 15.5 × 14.2 m, divided by two rows of three square pillars. The geometric mosaic of the nave, with a design of interlocking rhombs enclosing birds (Fig. 126), also belongs to this phase.[263] This later structure forms the major part of the church that

262 According to Economopoulos (1984, p. 381), the human remains were examined by Dr. Nico Haas of Hadassah Hospital.

263 Kondakov 1904, p. 266; Tzaferis 1987, p. 20. This decorative pattern appears already in the late fifth–sixth centuries, for example, in the Monastery of Martyrius, and at Horvat

FIGURE 126 *The Monastery of the Cross; mosaic pavement of the central nave.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

survives today. The pottery discovered in the second-phase floor is dated to the Late Byzantine–Early Islamic period.

The precise date of the two early phases is unclear. On the basis of the ceramic and numismatic finds, Economopoulos dates the earliest, one-apsidal basilica, to the last quarter of the fourth–first quarter of the fifth century, and asserts that it was destroyed during the Persian invasion of 614. Shortly afterwards, at the end of the Byzantine period, it was restored in the shape of a three-apsidal basilica. Economopoulos notes the similarity of the second basilica with the church of St. Euthymius monastery, both in plan and in its location within the monastery enclosure. In comparison, the latter was restored after the earthquake of 659, and decorated with new mosaics.[264] According to Tzaferis,[265] who examined the material evidence during the excavations, the pottery should be dated to the fifth–sixth centuries, and accordingly the first phase of the church should be dated to the sixth century, most probably to the reign of Emperor Justinian. Tzaferis proposed that the site was damaged during the Persian invasion, and later restored, allredy under the rule of Heraclius. According to Tzaferis, the well-preserved mosaic in the nave should be dated to the very end of the 11th century. On the contrary, R. Schick proposed that the monastery went out of use before the iconoclastic period, since its mosaic

Berachot, both dated to the second half of the sixth centuries. However, the closest parallel is to be found in the acropolis church of Ma'in, Jordan, dated to 719–720. For stylistic discussion, see Talgam 2014, pp. 95–104, 150–151, 391.

264 Hirschfeld 1993, p. 354.

265 Tzaferis 1993, p. 145.

floors did not suffer any damage.[266] This may fit well with the stylistic characteristics of the mosaic and the pottery dating.

A few architectural fragments from the Byzantine period – columns bases, cylinders and simple capitals – are scattered as decoration throughout the grounds of the monastery and around it (Figs. 127).

Some paltry information regarding the antiquities discovered on the site can be gathered from the unpublished journal of N. Kondakov's Russian archaeological expedition:[267]

> We went on donkeys to the Monastery of the Cross (…) The Patriarch himself showed us the antiquities. In the library – cupboard with antiquities, and there, beside various trash, there is one lamp with a cross and lions, and one censer with inscription made in the name of Anastasius, with appeal to saints and Kyric.[268]

The dedication of the early church is unknown. No epigraphic or any other relevant finds that could help in the identification of the site or its builders were discovered during the excavations.[269] The sanctuary is not mentioned in any literary sources up to the middle of the 11th century, when it starts to appear often, always linked to the Holy Cross and the Georgian community.[270]

To complete the description of the early stages of the complex, the agricultural activity in the vicinity of the site should be mentioned. The fertile valley surrounding the site was used for viniculture from the Byzantine period in.[271] Just 200 m to the west, a large winepress of the composite type was discovered, dated on the basis of finds to the sixth–seventh centuries. Another press of the same type and date was discovered some 500 m to the north, close to the Qirya

266 Schick 1995, p. 341.

267 I wish to thank Michael Butyrski of the Institute of Oriental Studies, the publisher of N. Kondakov' s archaeological expedition journals, for the possibility to study this important source.

268 The visit to the monastery took place on 7th of July 1891. The "Lamp with cross and lions" may probably belong to North-African Red Slip Ware: see Hayes 1972, pp. 310–314; 1980, pp. 66–69, pl. 34. The inscription on the (bronze?) censer seems to be misread; possibly, the text contained the appeal to the "Holy Anastasis" and "Lord".

269 The proposition of Economopoulos to identify the complex with a church dedicated to the Holy Cross on the basis of the cross fresco in the lower surface of *enkaenion* is problematic.

270 For sources see Peradze 1937, pp. 185–186.

271 Rahmani 1991, pp. 95–110; Ayalon, Frankel and Kloner 2009, pp. 317–320.

FIGURE 127 *The Monastery of the Cross; dislocated Byzantine architectural fragments.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

complex. It seems appropriate to link the presses to the known Byzantine remains, and to propose the existence of the monastery at the spot.

The third period in the history of the establishment starts in the 11th century, with the Georgian monk Prochorus Shavsheli (985–1066) who is mentioned in Georgian literary sources as the builder of the place (see above). Interestingly, the texts do not mention the earlier Georgian ownership of the site. The construction of the monastery church was completed ca. 1056, the oldest manuscript of the Holy Cross scriptorium (Sin.Geo.O.77) dates to 1055.[272] The damaged (in the days of Caliph Al-Hakim?) large monastery at the site, was mentioned by Seawulf 1101–1103,[273] and a few years later it received a particular description from the Russian hegumen Daniel:

> This place is behind the mountain, west of Jerusalem. At this place the rest of the Crucifixion was cut, to which the feet of Jesus were nailed. And this place is fenced all around, and in the middle of the encircled area a very tall church is erected, in the name of the Holy Cross, well decorated. And beneath the great altar, deep beneath the table, the stump of the True Tree is kept, covered by slabs of white marble. A small round window is cut through in front of the tree. This is the Iberian monastery.[274]

The text testifies to the birth of a new tradition: the footrest cross-bar of the crucifixion (*suppendaneum*) will, with time, turn into the cross-tree itself, and later, the legendary story of this tree *ab Abrahae* developed, and of its origin in Paradise. The venerated site is showed, according to the text, under the main altar, and not in the side chapel, as today.

With time, the Georgian tradition developed, identifying the founders of the monastery with the known historical figures of the first Christian rulers of Georgia.[275] The fresco decorations of Prochorus' church, mentioned by hegumen Daniel, did not survive; the earliest layer of mural paintings visible today is dated to the 14th century.[276] The last changes in the church can be dated unequivocally to the 17th century, and they include the new floor slabs that were

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272 van Esbroeck 2000, pp. 139–170.

273 Peradze 1937; Pringle 1998, p. 33.

274 Cited acc. to Russian critical edition: Prokhorov 2007.

275 Tsagareli 1888a, pp. 32, 36.

276 Virsaladze 1974, and contra: Kühnel 1995.

removed in the 1970s, the gallery of donors' portraits, and numerous Georgian and Greek inscriptions.[277]

Horvat Burgin Hermitage

The rural site of Horvat Burgin (Khirbet Umm Burj) is located in the center of the Shephelah region, 7.5 km northeast of Beth Guvrin (Eleutheropolis) and 17 km northwest of Hebron, near the ancient Jerusalem-Eleutheropolis road. A series of surveys and small-scale excavations was conducted by the Antiquities Robbery Prevention Unit of the Israel Antiquities Authority in 1995–1996, under the direction of B. Zissu and A. Ganor.[278] The work concentrated on the subterranean complexes in the vicinity: burial caves, hiding complexes and agricultural installations such as columbaria, winepresses and water cisterns.

Two Georgian inscriptions were discovered during the survey, on the walls of Cistern G.[279] The narrow round opening of the cistern penetrated a layer of hard *nari* limestone, and the bell-shaped body was hewn in the soft chalk bedrock. The cistern is nearly 8.5 m deep; its bottom is oval in outline, measuring nearly 8.6 × 7.3 m (Fig. 128). To the west of the cistern another hewn cavity (max. diameter 8 m.) was connected to the main space of the cistern by rock-hewn steps. Crosses and other symbols were engraved on the walls of Cistern G, and two short inscriptions were incised on the southern wall. Shortly after the excavation report was published in 2008, the cistern was reexamined.[280] Unfortunately, the first inscription has by then been vandalized: its letters were erased with a sharp tool. The only documentation left of the inscription, is that of the survey records.

277 The renovations of the monastery and the church complex were completed by an abbot Nikipore-Nikoloz Cholokashvili in 1643–1649. To this stage should be attributed the gallery of the donors' portraits, including the famous portrait of the Georgian national poet Shota Rustaveli. See Tsagareli 1888a; Takaishvili 1913; Gagoshidze 2014a. Didebulidze and Janjalia 2014 date the donors' portraits to the 16th century.

278 Zissu and Ganor 2008; Zissu et al. 2013.

279 Zissu and Ganor 2008, pp. 35–39, 61*.

280 Tchekhanovets 2013.

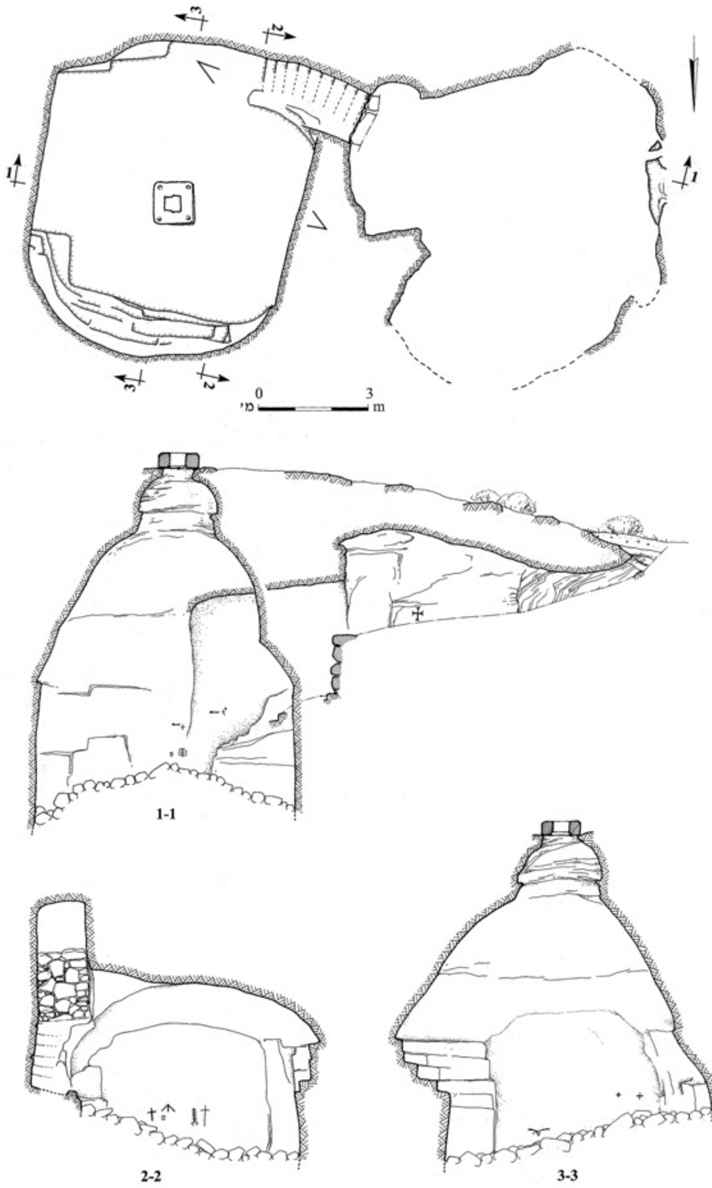

FIGURE 128 *Horvat Burgin; Cistern G, plan and section.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

FIGURE 129
Horvat Burgin; Georgian anchorite's graffiti.
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

The first inscription (Fig. 129) is 14 cm long and 5 cm high. The text reads as follows:[281]

> Ⴕ(ႰႨႱႲ)Ⴄ Ⴘ(ႤႨႼႷႠႪ)Ⴄ ႺႾႰႠჁ (ႺႾႭႰႤႡႠჁ?)
>
> ქრისტე შეიწყალე ცხრაჲ (ცხორებაჲ)
>
> Christ, have mercy upon Tskhrai (Tskhorebai?)[282]

The second inscription (Fig. 130) is 18 cm long and 4 cm high. The text reads as follows:

> Ⴕ(ႰႨႱႲ)Ⴄ Ⴘ(ႤႨႼႷႠႪ)Ⴄ ႫႭႰႹႠჁ
>
> ქრისტე შეიწყალე მორჩაჲ
>
> Christ, have mercy on Morchai.

Both inscriptions contain invocations for divine mercy, and were written by two different people: the letters in the first inscription are elongated, the vertical bars continuing far below the line; the letters of the second one are more rounded, and confined within a straight, orderly line. Both inscriptions use the standard abbreviations for the words 'Christ' and 'mercy'; both

281 The reading of the inscriptions was completed with the generous assistance of Zaza Skhirtladze, Tbilisi State University.

282 This decipherment of the abbreviated name is proposed by Temo Jojua, Ilia State University, Tbilisi. Another possible interpretation, proposed by anonymous reviewer, reads ცხრაჲ as "nine" (martyrs? brothers? etc.).

FIGURE 130
Horvat Burgin; Georgian anchorite's graffiti.
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

contain rare personal names which are not typical of Georgian Christian onomastics. Taking into consideration the context of discovery, the inscriptions must have been written by anchorites, who turned the water cistern into a hermitage.

Archaeological dating of the inscriptions is problematic, since Cistern G was not excavated. It had two stages of use: the first, original one, dates to the Early Roman or Byzantine period when the cistern was hewn and used for water storage; in the second stage, subsequent to its abandonment, it was transformed into a hermitage. According to paleographic criteria, the inscriptions should be dated to the end of the tenth–beginning of the eleventh centuries: the letters belong to the transitional form between two variants of Georgian script: *khutsuri* and *mkhedruli*.

The name mentioned in the second inscription from Horvat Burgin is known from elsewhere. Morchais-dze ('son of Morchai'), an architect, was responsible for the reconstruction of the Ishani cathedral in the Tao region, today in north-eastern Turkey.[283] His name appears in a long building inscription above the window of the southern façade, dated to 1032.[284] It is worth noting that King Bagrat IV (1024–1072) of the Bagrationi dynasty, who rebuilt the cathedral in Ishani, was the same ruler who sent large donations to Jerusalem to help the Georgian monks rebuild the Monastery of the Cross, which lay in ruins.[285] It is possible that the anchorites of Horvat Burgin belong to the monastic circle of Prochorus Shavsheli, the first hegumen of the Monastery of the Cross. The possibility that one of the monks, Morchai, was

283 I'm grateful to Zaza Skhirtladze for this observation.

284 Djobadze 1992, pp. 191–217, Fig. 78; Zakaraya 1992, pp. 21–41; Fig. 18.

285 van Esbroeck 2000, and bibliography therein.

the father of the architect Morchais-dze, who built the cathedral in Ishani, cannot be discounted.

Almost nothing is known regarding the monastic life in the Shephelah in the pre-Crusades period. During the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods, numerous rural monasteries flourished in the region: major roads connecting the principal cities, a large concentration of minor holy places, and fertile land suitable for agriculture, attracted the monastic population and stimulated pilgrimage.[286] Among the Shephelah sites, two ancient water cisterns were clearly identified as monastic hermitages.[287] At Tel Lavnin, close to Horvat Burgin, on the plastered walls of a cistern, a Greek inscription mentions the priest Ioanne and another name, Daniel, with a graffito depicting a lion. According to the excavator, the graffito symbolizes Daniel in the lions' den.[288] Another cistern transformed into a hermit cell was discovered in Beit Loya, preserving traces of a Greek inscription: "Jesus is here".[289]

The origin of reclusive life inside a deep pit or water cistern can be traced to Syria, the home of extreme ascetic practice,[290] and the practice was also known in Georgia. One of the sixth-century 'Thirteen Syrian Fathers', legendary establishers of the monastic institutions in Georgia,[291] Shio Mghvimeli ('Simeon of the Cave') chose a deep cave for his hermitage. Very soon, however, the administrative issues associated with the establishment of a monastery forced the holy man to leave the cave, but once all the problems had been settled, the community had received the Rule, and a new hegumen had been elected, the saint descended "into a deep and gloomy cave, or in other words, a deep pit" with great relief. Shio spent many years in prayers and psalmody in the pit, and eventually died and was buried there. According to the *Vita*, he never lost contact with the world: in difficult times his disciples used to come and seek help and guidance; every day one of the monks let down a rope to which was tied a basket with bread and water.[292]

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286 Taxel 2008.

287 For different interpretation of graffiti, see Klein and Distelfeld 2015.

288 Zissu 1999, pp. 564–569.

289 Gutfeld and Ecker 2013.

290 Peña, Castellana and Fernandez 1980, pp. 28–35; Peña 1992, pp. 14–19; 46.

291 Lang 1976, pp. 81–83; Rapp 2003, p. 321; Haas 2008, pp. 101–126. The first part of the 'Lives of Syrian Fathers', (John, Shio, and David) were composed by the Georgian Catholicos Arsenius II (ca. 955–980). For later development of the hagiographic tradition, see Martin-Hisard 1985–86.

292 *V. Shio Mgv.*, Sabinin 1871 (1994), p. 120.

It is not clear, what attracted the monks to this site. It is possible to infer that there was a monastery in the vicinity of the village, and that the Georgian anchorites came from there. Recent salvage excavations of the IAA at Horvat Burgin revealed a Byzantine basilical church, dated, however, to a significantly earlier period (fifth–seventh centuries).[293] In any case, monks or local villagers had to supply the monks with the necessary food and water.

Inscriptions

Tomb of Thecla the Bessian

The inscription was discovered by Macalister[294] in one of the caves in Aceldama (Fig. 131), engraved on the wall of a burial chamber. The inscription is divided into two parts (letters 2.5–3.5 cm high), separated by a large cross (Fig. 132). The text reads as follows:[295]

ΘΗΚΗΔΙ	ΗΓΟΥΜʃ
ΑΦΕΡʃ	ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡʃ
ΘΕΚΛΑ	ΙΟΥΒΕΝΑʃ
ΒΕΣΑ	ΤΟΥΓΕΟΡ
ΓΙΟΥ +	

Θήκη δι|αφέρ(οσα) | Θέκλᾳ | Βέσᾳ | ἡγουμ(ένῃ) | μοναστηρ(ίου) | Ἰουβενα(λίου) | τοῦ Γεορ|γίου

Tomb belonging to Thecla the Bessian, abbess of the monastery of Iuvenalius (daughter) of Georgius.

Today it is generally accepted that the text mentions a nunnery founded by Juvenalius, patriarch of Jerusalem (ca. 421–458). Prior to his patriarchy, Juvenalius lived as a monk in a monastery in the Kidron valley, and possibly founded a church near Siloam Pool.[296] Most probably, Georgius is not a name of the saint to whom the monastery was dedicated, since it is mentioned without the addition of ἅγιος. Thecla, the hegumenness of the monastery, is a Bessian – a national term, similarly to Iberian, or Lazic – indicating her Georgian origins.

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293 I am grateful to the archaeologist Peter Gendelman of Israel Antiquities Authority for this information.

294 Macalister 1900, pp. 237–241.

295 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 962.

296 Milik 1960–61, p. 145.

FIGURE 131 *Aceldama; burial cave of Thecla the Bessian. Macalister 1900.*

FIGURE 132 *Aceldama; burial inscription of Thecla the Bessian. Macalister 1900.*

Tomb of Deacons of Anastasis

This large tombstone (1.03 m high, 0.7 m wide) was found in secondary use in the southeastern corner of the pavement in the courtyard of the Tomb of the Virgin in Gethsemane,[297] its top partly inserted in a niche of a late wall (Fig. 133). The Byzantine period Greek inscription (Fig. 134) is badly damaged, especially on the left side. The text is reconstructed as follows:

297 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 977.

FIGURE 133 *Gethsemane; south-eastern corner of the yard in front of the Tomb of the Virgin.*
AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

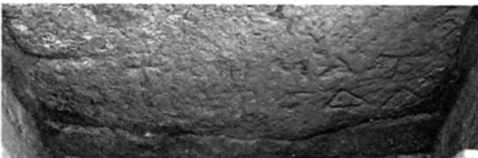

FIGURE 134
Gethsemane; burial inscription of the deacons of Anastasis.
COURTESY OF A. AND N. GRAICER AND CIIP.

[--]ΗΜΑΔΙΑΦΑΒ
[--]ΚΗΡΥΚΟΥ
[--]ΝỊỊΟΛΠΟΤΩΝ
[--]ΝΤΗΣΑ
[--]ΤẠΣΕΩΣΣΥ
[--]ΡΟ [--]Μ
Ω[--]ΙΒ̣ΕΡΟΝ
+ ΜΝ̣ΗΜΑΤΟ
ΥΠΥΡΓΔΑ

[Μν]ῆμα διάφ(ερον) Ἀβ[--|--καί] Κηρ⸢ι⸣κοῦ | [τῶ]ν πολ(υβ)ότων (?) [?διακόνω]ν τῆς Ἀ|[νασ]τάσεως συ | [γκλη]ρο[νό]μ|ω[ν τῶν] Ιβέρ⸢ω⸣ν |
+ Μνῆμα το/ῦ πύργ(ου) Δα(ουίδ)

Tomb belonging to Ab … and Cericus the many-feeding (?) deacons (?) of the Anastasis,[298] joint heirs of the Iberians.
+ Tomb of the Tower of David.

According to the text, the tomb belonged to the Georgian community of the monastery near the Tower of David, known from literary sources and epigraphic monuments. It is generally accepted that the cemetery of this monastery was located to the west of the city, on the grounds of the modern YMCA. It is possible that the community owned burial grounds also in Gethsemane, where the Georgians shared the rights with two clergy members of the Anastasis Church (Holy Sepulchre). It is worth mentioning that some of the terminological characteristics of the inscription echo the language of the Beit Safafa inscription (above), also related to the Georgian community.[299]

The inscription was discovered during the preparation of the Jerusalem volume of CIIP, and is first published there. It is not entirely clear, how a large inscribed stone in one of the most crowded holy places of the city could escape the attention of researchers for so long.

Apparently, the epitaph was seen before. It was first discovered by the British Mandatory Department of Antiquities already in October 1946, during the restoration of the church façade and the courtyard. Different phases of the restoration are documented by series of photographs, kept in the Israel

298 Possibly, this should be related to the activity of *diaconia*, a charity institution responsible for donations of food for the poor and pilgrims. For discussion see Voltaggio 2011a, p. 200.

299 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, p. 356.

FIGURE 135
Gethsemane, south-eastern corner of the yard after the removal of the Ottoman pavement, October 1946. In the background, the inscribed flagstone is visible.
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

Antiquities Authority archives.[300] During the works, later architectural additions were removed, including the Ottoman pavement. Under it, the remains of a Crusader pavement were unearthed, and in it, the slab under discussion can be clearly seen (Fig. 135). The caption of the relevant photo is: "Inscribed flagstone at S.E. rner of the present courtyard". It is hard to understand why the inscription was not published, and the stone itself was not removed from its find spot: no written report of the restoration works is preserved in the mandatory archive. However, it can be concluded that the large stone was in use in one of the large communal burials in the area, and was reused for pavement in the Crusader period. The precise provenance of the inscription is obscure; however, taking into consideration the exceptionally large dimensions of the tomb, Gethsemane Grotto can be regarded as possible candidate (for discussion, see below).

Burial Inscription from Choziba Monastery in Wadi el-Qilt

In the rock-cut burial caves of Choziba monastery (Fig. 75), previously described in relation to the Armenian finds, one inscription testify the presence of a monk of Georgian origin. According to the records of Schneider,[301] one of

300 File "Jerusalem B3 – Gethsemane", esp. photo 36.680.

301 Schneider 1931, Inscr. 180, p. 327.

the inscriptions on the plaster covering the walls of the funerary chapel, reads as follows:

> ἐνθάδε
> κῖτε Στέ
> φανος Ἴβερ
>
> Here lies Stephanos the Iberian

The report contains no graphic or photographic documentation of the inscription. The researcher gives a general dating of the whole corpus of the inscriptions, stating that they earliest can be paleographically dated to the fifth century, and the majority of the finds – to the sixth–seventh centuries. The name of the monk Stephanos the Iberian is unknown from the literary sources. Interestingly, the monastic presence of Georgians (or Armenians) at the Choziba Monastery is not mentioned in written sources, but in this case is supported by epigraphic finds, dated to the Byzantine – the Early Islamic periods.

Dedicational Inscription from Hammat Gader

Among the dedicational inscriptions from the stone pavement of Roman-Byzantine bath complex in Hammat Gader, previousely discussed in relation with Armenian finds (Fig. 76),[302] one contains a Parthian name of Farzamanes (Insc. 11), foreign to the common onomastics of the Holy Land, but known for its use in royal court circle of ancient Hellenized East. Based on stratigraphic analysis of the site, the inscription belongs to the Phase IIb, dated to 450–661.[303]

Inscription (Fig. 136) in four lines is carved on a slab of white-greyish marble, in the same row with the inscription of the Armenian (?) Tigranes the piper. Slab is 75.5 heigh, 115 cm wide and 4.1 cm thick. Letters are 3–4 cm high, the longest line is 86 cm. Under the text a cross is engraved, but it is not certain that it was a part of the inscription. The text reads as follows:[304]

302 Hirschfeld 1997; Di Segni 1997a.

303 Hirschfeld 1997, pp. 477–480.

304 Di Segni 1997a, pp. 198–199, Fig. 14.

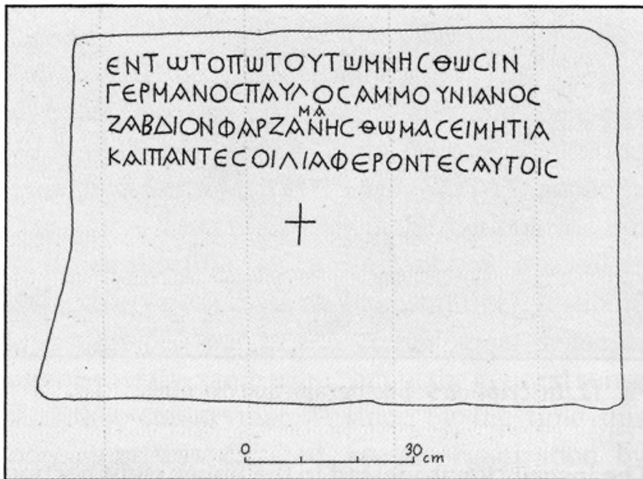

FIGURE 136 *Hammat Gader, inscription of Farzamanes.*
COURTESY OF ISRAEL EXPLORATION SOCIETY.

ΕΝΤωΤΟΠωΤΟΥΤωΜΝΗCΘωCΙΝ
ΓΕΡΜΑΝΟCΠΑΥΛΟCΑΜΜΟΥΝΙΑΝΟC
ΖΑΒΔΙΟΝΦΑΡΖΑ^{ΜΑ}ΝCΘωΜΑCΕΙΜΗΤΙΑ
ΚΑΙΠΑΝΤΕCΟΙΔΙΑΦΕΡΟΝΤΕCΑΥΤΟΙC

Ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ μνήσθωσιν | Γερμανός, Παῦλος, Ἀμμουνιανός, | Ζαβδίων, Φαρζαμάνης, Εἰμητία, | καὶ πάντες οἱ διαφέροντες αὐτοῖς

> In this place may be remembered Germanus, Paulus, Ammonianus, Zabdion, Farzamanes, Imetia and all their kinsfolk.

Pointing towards the different origins of the names mentioned in this inscription, – Egyptian Ammonianus, Latin Germanus ans Paulus, German Imetia and Parthian Farzamanes, known also from Georgia, and a name of the woman, who does not appear to be wife or sister of any of the men, – Di Segni proposed that all the dedicators could share the same occupation. Possibly, all were a travelling company of performing artists, like the Tigranes the piper (Inscr. 10) and other actors and musicians mentioned in other inscriptions from the site (Inscr. 6, 19, 25, and 44).[305] If the hypothesis of the Armenian origin of the name Tigranes and of the Georgian origin of the name Farzamanes is correct, the two inscriptions of Hammat Gader are the only Caucasian evidences obtained from secular context.

Pilgrim Graffiti

Up to date, Georgian pilgrim graffiti dated to the relevant period, were discovered only in two sites: Nazareth and the Sinai Peninsula. The finds belong to two different categories: the first are graffiti that were found in a sealed archaeological context, and therefore can be securely dated; the second are inscriptions that were incised on the exposed rocky surfaces, and their dating is based therefore only on paleographic criteria.

Pilgrim Graffiti from Nazareth

A number of *asomtavruli* inscriptions were found during the excavations carried out by Franciscan Fathers under the direction of Bagatti in 1955–1960 at the traditional place of the Annunciation, when the remains of an ancient edifice were discovered under the remains of the Byzantine church (Fig. 82). This early structure was dated by the excavator to the fourth–beginning of the fifth centuries;[306] later on, a more precise chronology was established by Taylor, between 340 and the middle of the fifth century, probably before the earthquake of 447, which ruined the edifice.[307] The poorly preserved Georgian inscriptions, incised on plaster, were discovered side by side with the Greek, Syriac, Latin and Armenian finds (for the archaeological context and its dating, see above).

305 Ibid., p. 199.

306 Bagatti 1969, pp. 213–218; Corbo 1987, p. 343.

307 Taylor 1993, pp. 239–266.

FIGURE 137 *Nazareth, Georgian graffito of Giorgi.*
COURTESY OF M.E. STONE AND RIGP.

The Armenian bishop Garmasaragan, who helped Bagatti with the translation, said that the letters he did not recognize because they are absent from the contemporary Armenian alphabet, should be ancient ones. The unknown letters were in reality ancient Georgian *asomtavruli* script. Due credit must be given to Bagatti, who said: "Simply for comparison we can note that this letter appears several times in the Georgian inscription of Bir el-Qutt, which students place in the fifth century".[308] The Georgian inscriptions were eventually published by Alexidze as part of the Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti project.[309] All the finds are preserved in the Franciscan Museum near the Basilica of Annunciation at Nazareth.

Only one of the Nazareth inscriptions (Fig. 137) can be interpreted as a complete sentence. It is worth mentioning that all four words of the sentence are written in abbreviated form. No dimensions are available. The text reads as follows:[310]

Ⴘ˜Ⴄ Ⴈ˜Ⴓ Ⴕ˜Ⴄ Ⴂ˜Ⴈ

შ(ეიწყალ)ე ი(ეს)უ ქ(რისტ)ე გ(იორგ)ი

Jesus Christ, have mercy on Giorgi.

The three other inscriptions are fragmentary, consist of few letters, and cannot be safely deciphered. Regardless of the fragmentary character of the graffiti,

308 Bagatti 1969, p. 156.
309 Alexidze 2000.
310 Ibid., p. 21: Nazareth Kart. 3.2.

their historical importance cannot be overemphasized. Like the Armenian data, the Georgian inscriptions present the earliest known stage in the development of the national script, and can hardly be compared with other contemporary informal epigraphic finds. The graffiti from Nazareth are one of the crucial keys in the discussion of the invention and early development of the Georgian script.

Pilgrim Graffiti from the Sinai

Pilgrim graffiti in Sinai written in the Georgian language were first documented by A. Negev,[311] then subsequently studied within the framework of the Rock Inscriptions and Graffiti Project, and finally published by van Esbroeck.[312] During the RIGP survey a total of twelve Georgian inscriptions were discovered, eight of them within the chronological range of the seventh–eleventh centuries, all written in *asomtavruli* script.[313]

Like similar Greek and Armenian inscriptions, the Georgian graffiti were left by pilgrims on their way to the sanctuaries of Sinai or on the way back, in the Wadi Mukatab and Hadbat Haggag areas.[314] Regardless of the centuries-long Georgian presence in St. Catherine's Monastery, no Georgian graffiti of the relevant period were found in the area of the monastery itself.

The distribution of the Georgian inscriptions is similar to the Armenian ones: six were discovered in Hadbat Haggag, and only two on the major route that passes through Wadi Mukatab.

In the complete absence of any datable archaeological context, only paleographic criteria are relevant when trying to determine the date of the Sinaitic inscriptions. According to the reading of van Esbroeck, the chronology of the Georgian inscriptions from Sinai should be established as follows: two inscriptions should be dated to timespan of the seventh–ninth centuries (H Georg. 5 and H Georg. 10); one is dated to the eighth–ninth centuries (M Georg.1); three to the tenth century (M Georg 2; H Georg. 8 and H Georg. 9), and two to the tenth–eleventh centuries (H Georg. 4 and H Georg. 6).

The content of the Georgian pilgrim inscriptions is no different from the standard repertoire of other Christian graffiti. They mostly contain requests for divine mercy, and individual names that usually appear without titles,

311 Negev 1977, pp. 76–80.

312 van Esbroeck 1982.

313 Due to the large number of Sinai inscriptions, just isolated examples will be described here. For discussion, see the relevant references to van Esbroeck 1982, whose numeration is used here.

314 Stone 1982, p. 57; Mayerson 1982, pp. 44–57.

ranks etc.[315] Pilgrim inscriptions, whether short or long, nearly always contain proper names: Basili, Eusebi, Grigol, Miski, Zosime. With one exception, all belong to the standard international repertoire of Christian names. The unusual 'Miski' (H Georg. 9) may probably be a derivation of the Georgian 'Meskhi', i.e., Meskhian. Only in one case the name is followed by a surname: 'Basili Džabaris-dze', i.e. 'son of Djabar' (M Georg 2). The same garrulous Basili supplies additional information about himself and adds his clerical position: 'Your monk' (Fig. 138). Since most of the names are very common and lack any additional information, no identification of the individual pilgrims can be proposed.

Some inscriptions contain only the name, others include a request for divine mercy: "O Christ, have mercy on …" or "O Lord, have mercy …", or application to the Holy Place (Fig. 139): "Holy Sinai, have a mercy on me, o holy!" (H Georg. 10). It is worth noting that the standard self-deprecating epithets ('sinner', 'worthless', 'disobedient' etc.) were not in use in early Georgian inscriptions, while they do appear in the later examples. Most of the inscriptions use the abbreviations for *nomina sacra*.

Apart from the inscriptions that were discovered in Nazareth and along the Sinai roads, Georgian graffiti were found in the Nativity Church in Bethlehem,[316] in the Holy Sepulchre and St. Nicolas monastery in Jerusalem.[317] However, these should be dated to later periods, mostly to the 14th–17th centuries – the peak of Georgian activity in the Holy Land. Interestingly, no inscription that could be dated to the 11th or 12th centuries was found in the Monastery of the Cross, although it was considered to be the main Georgian ecclesiastical center of the Holy Land, and was inhabited by the Georgians already in the 11th century. It is obvious that Georgian pilgrims could not possibly have by-passed the major sanctuaries of the Nativity and the Resurrection on their way to the more remote pilgrimage centers. The absence of early Georgian pilgrim graffiti in Jerusalem and Bethlehem can only be explained by random preservation.

Varia

Inscription from the Ascalon Area

This *asomtavruli* inscription (Fig. 140) is written on grey, polished Proconnesian marble slab, 24.5 cm high and 13 cm wide. The left side is broken, the three

315 For discussion see Yasin 2015.

316 Gagoshidze 2014a, pp. 71–74, fig. 1.

317 Tsagareli 1888a, p. 114.

FIGURE 138 *Sinai, Georgian graffito of the monk Basili* (*M Georg 2*).
COURTESY OF M.E. STONE AND RIGP.

FIGURE 139 *Sinai, Georgian pilgrim's graffiti* (*H Georg 10*).
COURTESY OF M.E. STONE AND RIGP.

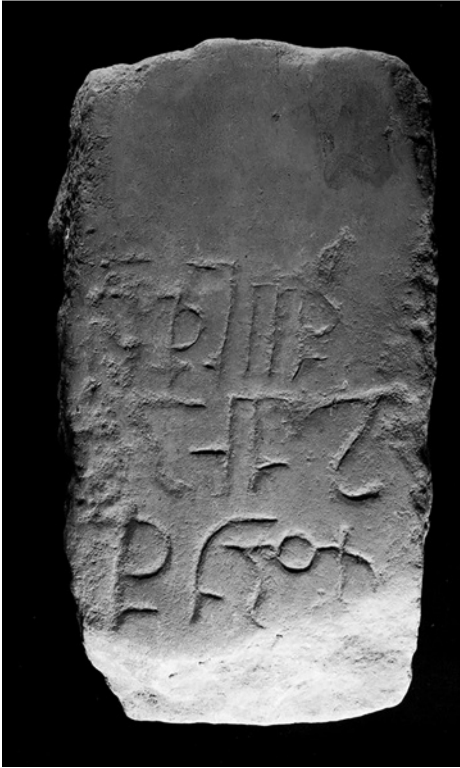

FIGURE 140
Ascalon, undecipherable Georgian inscription.
COURTESY OF ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

lines of the text are hardly visible: most probably the inscribed stone served as a paving slab in secondary use. The letters, 3.5–4 cm high, are carelessly incised on the polished surface of the stone. The slab was discovered in 1951 in the mosque of the city of Ascalon, together with other fragmentary inscriptions. Most probably, it originated in the city itself, or its surroundings. Since its discovery, the inscription has been kept in the IAA store rooms (Catalogue no. 1951–135) and was never published. The text is undecipherable, only some letters can be identified. However, it fits the chronological boundaries of the present research, and can be roughly dated to the eighth–ninth centuries. The inscription is the only material find associated with the Georgian community that has been discovered so far in the southern coastal region.

[--]ႡႨ[Ⴀ?]Ⴐ
[--]ႧႱ[--]Ⴑ
[--]ႰႱႣ

FIGURE 141
The stamp from Mount Zion. Germer-Durand 1906.

The Stamp from Mount Zion

The hardstone disc inscribed in Greek, was discovered during the excavations of the Assumption Fathers on Mount Zion, at the present day church of St. Peter in Galicantu, in undated surface debris.[318] The disc is 12.5 cm in diameter, and is decorated with three concentric circles and an inscription in Greek, within the inner circle close to the center (Fig. 141). The letters, 1.4 cm high, are carved in mirror script:

[--]ỊBEPIΩ[.]

The excavator interpreted the disc as a mold for metal casting, and the inscription as dated to the Roman period, with a text reading [T]ιβερίο[υ] or [Λ] ιβερίο[υ]. However, according to Di Segni, the large size of the find makes it unsuitable for token casting. The following proposed new reading places the find in the Byzantine period:[319]

318 Germer-Durand 1906, pp. 131–132, no. 4.

319 Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, no. 1078.

[(Μονῆς) τῶν] Ἰβερίω[ν]

(Of the monastery) of the Iberians

If correct, this version connects the find to the large ecclesiastical institutions established on Mount Zion by Peter the Iberian, and known also from other epigraphic finds. The stone disc, previously kept in the Museum of Notre Dame de France in Jerusalem, is now lost and could not be reexamined.

CHAPTER 4

Manuscripts and Colophons

Manuscripts that originated in the Holy Land in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods are a rich source of information regarding the development of the language and of the literature and liturgy of the Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians.[1] Early, pre-Crusader, Armenian manuscripts are extremely rare in the local collections. The quantity of early Georgian manuscripts on the other hand, is impressive and they supply invaluable evidence regarding the history of the community. As far as the Albanians are concerned, their manuscripts remain the only material evidence to their presence in the region in antiquity.

Fragments of the most ancient translations of the Bible, including books of the Old and New Testament, were preserved in the Armenian and Albanian palimpsests from Sinai (Sin.Geo.N. 13 and 55), dated to the seventh–ninth centuries.[2]

Manuscripts also supply important information about the development of the rites and liturgy in the Jerusalemite church, since some of whose early liturgical texts are preserved only in Armenian and Georgian translations. The most important of these are the Armenian Lectionary,[3] which reflects an early stage in the development of the Jerusalem rite in the fifth century, the Georgian Lectionary, which reflects a slightly later stage in the sixth–seventh centuries,[4] and the Georgian calendar, dated to the tenth century.[5]

The Caucasian textual traditions appear to be highly conservative, and preserved many early texts, or early versions of texts.[6] Regarding the history of the early Church liturgy, the Georgian version is considered to follow most faithfully the old liturgical style.[7] The majority of the Georgian manuscripts in the

1 For comprehensive discussion of the manuscripts, see the introductory volume of *COMSt* 2015, by various authors: for the Armenian manuscripts see Kouymjian; for the Georgian see articles by Gippert and Pataridze; for the Albanian see Gippert.

2 The earliest complete dated Armenian manuscript is the *Lazarian Gospels*, preserved in Yerevan, Armenia, dated to 887 (Matenadaran no. 6200). The *Queen Mlk'ē Gospels*, preserved in Venice, is dated by specialists even earlier, to 851.

3 Renoux 1969. The oldest copy is dated to the tenth century, but as Renoux demonstrated, it reflects a much earlier period.

4 Kekelidze 1912, Tarchnishvili 1959.

5 Garitte 1958.

6 Gippert 2015b, p. 404.

7 Galadza 2013.

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collection of St. Catherine's Monastery date to the ninth–tenth centuries, i.e. to the pre-Athonian period of the Orthodox Church history, and preserve the old tradition of the Jerusalem Church, which left little trace in the literary output of the Athos school, based as it was on the Greco-Byzantine practices.

Of special interest are non-liturgical texts that are preserved only in Georgian translation. This is the case of report of Antiochus Strategius *The Sack of Jerusalem by the Persians*, the most detailed description of the Sassanid conquest of 614, written by a witness of the events, a Sabaite monk.[8] Another text, which originated in the St. Sabas Monastery, can contribute to the discussion regarding the construction of the first mosque on the Temple esplanade, since the monks witnessed it from the roof of their monastery, probably located on Mount Zion.[9] Noteworthy are the earliest known copies of the national historical and hagiographic compositions in the Holy Land collections, such as the Georgian chronicle *Mokcevai Kartlisai* and certain *vitae* (see below).

Colophons of manuscripts provide information, sometimes very detailed, about individual members of the community – monks, interpreters, scribes and donors – and about various ecclesiastical institutions – monasteries, churches, scriptoria etc. The existence of manuscripts in a certain ancient collections, their number and their date, can also serve to reconstruct the history of the relevant community.

Armenian Manuscripts

The position of the Armenian Church in the Christological disputes obviously prevented the preservation of its manuscripts in the collections of dyophysite communities. As a result, only few isolated folios were preserved in the major Orthodox book collections of Jerusalem[10] and Sinai.

The earliest surviving texts are the fragments of two Armenian palimpsests, discovered in the so-called 'new collection' of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai – the only surviving depository of ancient books that was never

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8 The text was originally written in Greek, but is only preserved in Georgian and Arabic translations. For the Georgian version see: Marr 1909b; Garitte 1960; for the Arabic: Garitte 1973–1974; Engl. transl. by Conybeare 1910; for a discussion of the credibility of the various versions, see Baras 1982, pp. 302–304.

9 The text, which dates to ca. 668, was originally written in Greek, and was later translated to Arabic, but is preserved only in a Georgian translation of the Arabic. See Flusin 1992, pp. 17–31.

10 Clark 1953, p. 21.

robbed during its 1500-years history, a unique collection of ancient Christian writings. The monastery collection contains over 3300 manuscripts and nearly 1700 scrolls. Two thirds of the texts are in Greek, and the remainder in Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Slavonic, Georgian and Armenian. In 1975, renovation works of the old part of St. Catherine's complex followed a fire in the monastery. During the renovations, a cell was discovered in one of the thick internal walls, sealed and forgotten for nearly two centuries. The cell turned out to be a safe-deposit of manuscripts in Greek, Georgian, Syriac and Slavonic. This corpus is known in the research as 'the new collection'.

The Armenian palimpsests were discovered in the lower layer of a Georgian codex (Sin.Geo.N. 13 and 55). They represent the fragmentary remains of two different original Armenian manuscripts of the seventh–ninth centuries.[11] The first, of which 20 pages are preserved, is characterized by slanted uncial letters, and contains quotations from the Old Testament and from St. Paul's epistles. The second, of which 60 pages are preserved, is written in rounded uncial letters, and contains the Solomonic books: Ecclesiast, Song of Songs and Proverbs. The text is an important testimony to the early stage of the Bible's translation into Armenian.

The largest collection of ancient Armenian manuscripts in the Near East, containing nearly 4,000 manuscripts, is kept in the collection of Sts. James, at the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.[12] The earliest dated manuscripts in the Sts. James collection are from the 11th century,[13] but the earliest to be copied in Jerusalem are later, and date to the 14th century.[14] It should be noted, that an early colophon, dated to the year 879, attributes the translation of certain works, including some of the most popular works of the Byzantine period, to the Armenian community in Jerusalem.[15] If an Armenian scriptorium indeed existed in the fifth-century Jerusalem,[16] it would have been located probably elsewhere than in the St. James Monastery, however, no early specimens were preserved in the Jerusalemite collection. As a result, the particularly long and detailed colophons, which are usually characteristic of the

11 Gippert 2012; Gippert et al. 2010.

12 Stone 1969; Kouyumjian 2015, p. 38; for catalogue see Bogharian 1967–1991.

13 No. 2556, dated to 1028–1064 and no. 1924, dated to 1064–65. Garegin 1951, cols. 237–244, 245.

14 No 271, copied, according to the colophon, of the scribe Stepanos in 1316 in the Church of Archangels in the Armenian Quarter. Another manuscript, copied by the same scribe at the same location two years earlier, is preserved in Philadelphia, USA. See Stone 1969, pp. 27–28; Simsar 1937, pp. 197–198.

15 See Stone 1969, p. 27.

16 Sanjian 1965, pp. 4, 314.

Armenian manuscripts,[17] are missing from the period chosen for the present study. The number of manuscripts, including the illuminated books, produced by the community increased significantly only from the 14th century on:[18] first the Armenian books were copied in the scriptorium of the Church of the Holy Archangels, and later also in the scriptoria of St. James Monastery, the Church of St. Savior, and St. Stephen's (Stepanos) monastery in the city.[19]

Georgian Manuscripts

Two major depositories preserve the main collection of Georgian manuscripts from the eighth–eleventh centuries: the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the library of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai.

The library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem contains nearly 2400 manuscripts in eleven languages. It is a composite and relatively young depository, created during the last 150 years from a number of separate collections. The core component, although not the largest one, is the library of the Holy Sepulchre Church. The largest part of the manuscripts comes from the St. Sabas Monastery, the Monastery of the Cross and a number of smaller collections. Almost three quarters of the collection comprises manuscripts in Greek; the next most significant corpus is the Georgian, which numbers 160 codices.[20]

The collection in the library of St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai contained until recently 93 Georgian codices.[21] The discovery of the 'new collection' in 1975 added, among other finds, 143 more Georgian manuscripts to the corpus. It is evident that the old and the new collections once formed a single body. Some pages from the texts of the 'new collection' belong in fact to texts in the main manuscripts collection.[22] The complete codices and scrolls of the new collection were published; nearly 1800 isolated fragments of manuscripts

17 Sanjian 1969b.

18 Abu Salih al-Armani's chronicle (early 13th century) talks about transfer of 350 Armenian books from Egypt to Jerusalem to the Monastery of St. Sarkis "outside the walls" (unlocated). Evetts and Butler 1895, pp. 5–6.

19 Stone 1969, pp. 26–30; Mutafian 2012, pp. 712–713.

20 Catalogued by Tsagareli 1888a; Marr 1903, 1955; Blake 1933.

21 Catalogued by Tsagareli 1888a; Marr 1903, 1940; Garitte 1956; studied and microfilmed in 1950 by the Congress Library expedition under the direction of Clark. For overview, see Pataridze 2015b.

22 Shanidze 2002, pp. 22–29.

are still under study.[23] Most of the manuscripts are written on parchment; only few papyri are known, roughly dated to the tenth–eleventh centuries.[24]

The 93 manuscripts from the old collection, and the 143 from the new one,[25] represent only the remains of a larger Georgian library that once existed in St. Catherine's Monastery. Some fragments from the old collection belong to manuscripts that remain hitherto unknown. Similarly, a few colophons mention names of texts that are lost today. For example, the inserted folio of the manuscript Sin.Geo.92 from the old collection lists 52 books that once belonged to the Sinaitic Georgian monasteries.[26]

Some Georgian manuscripts of Palestinian origin are kept in libraries other than these two major collections. Already during the ninth–tenth centuries some manuscripts found their way to Georgia, and were held in safekeeping in the distant mountainous regions until the end of the 19th–beginning of the 20th century.[27] Today they are kept in the National Center of Manuscripts in Tbilisi. A number of isolated pages of lost Georgian manuscripts are kept today in the Sts. James collection, at the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.[28] One of the oldest Georgian translations of the Prophets, preserved in the palimpsest of Cairo Genizah, was overlaid by a portion of Jerusalem Talmud.[29]

As a result of donations and purchases during the 19th century, a relatively small number of Holy Land manuscripts found their way outside its borders. Individual manuscripts are preserved today in the collections of the National Center of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, the National Library of Russia and the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Bibliothèque national de France, the British Library, Princeton University Library and in private collections.

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23 Aleksidze et al. 2005.

24 Gippert 2015a, p. 178.

25 The numbers represent all the catalogued manuscripts; in reality some manuscripts were since lost, and others may represent fragments of codices that were registered earlier.

26 Shanidze 2006, p. 255.

27 Kekelidze 1912.

28 According to the catalogue of the collection, these 15 pages served as fly-leaves at the beginning and the end of Armenian manuscripts (MSS Nos 207, 711, 831, 1353, 1458, 1614, 1638, 1653, 1698, 1725, 2312, 2331, 2412, 2470, 3135). The fly-leaves were studied and photographed by the Abashidze expedition in 1966, by van Esbroeck in 1979 and by Outtier in 1985, but as far as we know they were never published. For the catalogue see Bogharian 1991, Vol. 11, p. 466.

29 British Library Or 6581. The text is preserved in three fragments, dated to the sixth–early ninth centuries. See Blake 1932; Peradze 1935, pp. 82 ff.

Palestinian Scriptoria

The earliest evidence for Georgian literary activity in the Holy Land dates to the eighth–ninth centuries. It is related to the St. Sabas Monastery, and was most probably a consequence of the Arab invasions to Georgia. The Georgian Church found itself in an extremely difficult position at that time: many priests and monks faced persecution, scribal activity was limited, and there was a massive movement of monks from their homelands. The Laura of St. Sabas that "served as the intellectual center of the See of Jerusalem",[30] was the natural focal point for the great literary activities of a multilingual monastic community: copying, translating and original composition.[31] The Georgian scriptorium of Mar Saba flourished from the eighth to the middle of the tenth century and had great influence on the development of the Georgian language and literature as it became the most ancient and most important center of Georgian literature outside the borders of Georgia.

The earliest known Georgian manuscript written in St. Sabas, the *Sinai Homiliary*, is dated to 864 (Sin. Geo.O. 32-57-33) and contains 50 works of 18 authors.[32] Different parts of the homiliary – works by Epiphanius of Cyprus, Ephrem the Syrian, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom etc., were translated into Georgian in the Laura of St. Sabas.[33] According to the colophons, the homiliary was copied by the Georgian monks Pimen Kakhi and Amon, under the supervision of Macarius Leteteli, and was presented to the Georgian brotherhood of Mount Sinai.[34]

The scholars and scribes at St. Sabas edited various versions of biblical texts, and translated hagiographical and ascetic compilations from Greek and Arabic: *St. Sabas Martyrologue* and *Synaitic Martyrologue* by Ammonius, *The Sack of Jerusalem by the Persians* by Strategius, etc. An unknown eighth century monk translated a new version of *The Life of St. Sabas*. In the ninth century, the Georgian monk Seiti translated various texts from Greek and Arabic, including the *Paterikon of St. Sabas*. At the end of the ninth–beginning of the tenth centuries the calligrapher Giorgi Tbileli copied a compilation of Ephrem the Syrian's works.

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30 Patrich 1995, p. 358.

31 Peristeris 2001, pp. 171–194.

32 Manuscripts earlier than the ninth century are known only in palimpsest form. These texts are characterized by special verbal and nominal affixes, consisting of the letters *x* and *h* – so-called *xanmeti* and *haemeti* forms, dated to the fifth–eighth centuries. See *COMSt*, Pataridze 2015a, p. 292; and Gippert 2015a, p. 176.

33 Mgaloblishvili 2001, pp. 230–233.

34 Tomadze 2006, p. 252.

The most important Georgian hymnographical works were also composed in the Laura of St. Sabas during the ninth–tenth centuries. Thus, Basil Sabatsmindeli is known as the author of canticles in honor of St. Sabas and the poetic *Martyrdom of St. Michael Sabatsmindeli*. Other well-known ninth century scribes from the Laura of St. Sabas are the scholars Michael Chikhuareli, Michael Dvali, Ioanne Kius and Hilarion the Iberian.[35] The famous Georgian scribe and hymnographer Ioane-Zosime, who compiled the liturgical calendar of the Jerusalem Church (Sin.iber.1 and 34) lived in the Laura of St. Sabas in 945–965. Traditionally, Ioane-Zosime is regarded also as the author of *Ode to the Georgian language* (Sin.Geo.O.38). His handwriting and book-binding style are easily recognized by modern scholars who work on the St. Sabas and Sinaitic Georgian manuscripts.[36]

Literary activity was among the occupations of the monks in the Old Laura (Palavra) of St. Chariton. According to the colophons, in the year 986 a Georgian monk from the monastery, Ioanne Sapareli, copied the works of George I, the patriarch of Alexandria, and *The Life of St. John Chrysostom*. Towards the end of the tenth–beginning of the eleventh century, a calligrapher from Palavra named Pavle Palavreli copied a collection of hagiographies. In the eleventh century, Grigol Kharitontsmindeli compiled a collection of sermons written by the Church fathers: John Chrysostom, Ephrem the Syrian and others.

In the 11th century the Georgians owned the 'Golgotha Monastery' in Jerusalem, in the vicinity of the Holy Sepulchre Church. Names of some of the monks who translated and copied manuscripts in this place are known: the hegumen Ioanne Golgotheli, Michael, Nistereon and Kvirike Aghdgomeli.[37]

In the Abbasid period, most of the Georgian monks left Palestine. Their traces can be followed on the Sinai. The Georgian manuscripts that were copied in the Laura of St. Sabas and other monasteries of the Holy Land were brought to St. Catherine's Monastery. Some manuscripts roamed the country with their Georgian owners, finally coming to rest in the new library of the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem, which was built in the middle of the 11th century by Prochorus Shavsheli, a Sabaite Georgian monk. It seems, however, that a minor part of the Georgian manuscripts remained in the library of St. Sabas Monastery even after the mass migration of its Georgian residents. An important manuscript of *Iadgari* (*Tropologion*), dated to the ninth century, was discovered in the monastery's library in the mid-19th century. Three more

35 Tomadze 2006, p. 253.

36 Frøyshov 2011; Kalligerou 2011.

37 Tsagareli 1888a, p. 112; Tomadze 2006, p. 254.

Georgian manuscripts were recently discovered in St. Sabas' library. The earliest dates to the tenth–eleventh centuries.[38]

The Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem is associated with the relatively late stage of Georgian activity in the Holy Land. Rebuilt in 1064 by Prochorus Shavsheli, the monastery quickly became home for Georgian monks scattered all over the country. Dozens of them came and joined the new monastery, and many brought their holy books with them. According to the colophons (Jer. Geo.2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 48), in the early days the manuscripts for the Monastery of the Cross were commissioned from different places: the Laura of St. Sabas, monasteries of the Black Mountain in the region of Antioch, and Mount Athos.[39] The earliest manuscript written in the Monastery of the Cross itself dates to 1055 (Sin.Geo.O.77): the local scriptorium started its work even before the renovation works were completed. Another colophone of the manuscript preserved in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem,[40] and dated to the same year, contains the name of the scribe Iohane Dvali from the Monastery of the Cross.[41] According to Tsagareli, "little by little Prochorus gathered in his monastery savants, scribes, book illuminators and other members of the brotherhood."[42] Starting with the beginning of the Crusades, the Monastery of the Cross served for almost half a millennium as the main spiritual and cultural center of the Georgians in the Holy Land.

Sinaitic Scriptorium

Georgian literary activity in the Sinai started after the mass migration of the monks from the monasteries of the Holy Land during the ninth–tenth centuries. The oldest manuscripts preserved in St. Catherine's library are of Palestinian origins. Some were copied and prepared as a donation to the Georgian community of Sinai, and some were brought by monks who left the Holy Land. Georgian manuscripts were produced in the St. Catherine's monastery from the tenth century onwards.[43] The repertoire of the texts is extensive: Holy Scriptures, hagiographic works, Apostolic and Church Councils decisions, and an almost full range of liturgical books: Lectionaries, *Euchologia, Typicons*, and hymnographical works.

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38 Skhirtladze 2003.
39 van Esbroeck 2000.
40 Blake 1933, no 14.
41 Lerner 2004b, pp. 132–133.
42 Tsagareli 1888a, p. 93.
43 Aleksidze et al. 2005, pp. 357–372; Shanidze 2006, p. 254.

In the 'new collection' of St. Catherine's library there are two manuscripts that contain original Georgian literary works, indicating the close ties of the Sinaitic monks with their distant homeland. One of them, dated to the tenth century, is the earliest known version of the historical chronicle *Mokcevay Kartlisay* (Sin.Geo.N.48, 50). The other, contains the Lives of two 'Syrian Fathers', Ioanne Zedazeneli and Abibos of Nekresi, the founding fathers of Georgian monasticism (Sin.Geo.N.50). The earliest Georgian versions of these works known hitherto also date to the tenth century, but the Sinaitic one seems to predate them.[44]

Colophons

No systematic study of the Georgian colophons has been undertaken so far. In general, the early Georgian manuscripts are not provided with colophons as often as the Armenian comparable writing tradition.[45] The preserved texts of this type are rare and usually include the standard formulae, such as "Christ, have mercy", followed by the name of the scribe or donor, and lacking any detailed information. Often the colophons were left by 'later hands' who witnessed the rebinding or moved the book from one place to another.[46]

The colophons of the Sinaitic manuscripts contain crumbs of information about the history of the Georgian community at the site and its connections with the homeland. One of the texts, dated to the first half of the tenth century, presents a surprising inventory list, of the treasury and the library of two famous monasteries in Georgia: Zedazeni and Gareja (Sin.Geo.N.50).[47] Other colophons give evidence to the existence of a Georgian church of St. John the Theologian on Mount Sinai, in the vicinity of the main church of St. Catherine's complex, where the liturgy was performed in Georgian (Sin.Geo.O.17, Fol.308v; Sin.Geo.O.69, Fol.150v). The local Synodikon (Sin.Geo.77)[48] and the colophons (Sin.Geo.O.67, loose leaf; Sin.Geo.N.2, Fol.20v; Sin.Geo.O.50, Fol.183v) testify to the existence of various churches owned by the Georgian community – as for example the church of Mother of God of Maqlovani at the beginning of the tenth century, or the abode of St. Moses on Mount Sinai – and to scribes, clients and payments for calligraphic works. Noteworthy among the monks who worked in the Georgian scriptorium of Mount Sinai, are Ioane-Zosime

44 Aleksidze et al. 2005, pp. 365–366.

45 *COMSt*, Pataridze 2015a, p. 292.

46 *COMSt*, Gippert 2015a, pp. 184–185.

47 Aleksidze 2001.

48 Kldiashvili 2008. The Synodikon of Mount Sinai is the oldest preserved Georgian commemoration book, compiled between the 13th–15th centuries, with some later additions.

from St. Sabas Monastery, with his distinctive handwriting,[49] and his followers Kvirike Midznazoroeli and Kvirike Sokhastreli – all of them active at the end of the tenth–first half of the eleventh centuries.[50] Another scribe of this period, Cyriacus, left detailed record regarding his life and work (Sin.Geo.N. Fol.20v):

> I have come to this Holy Mountain, the spiritual harbor. And God has allowed me by His grace to serve in the church on the Holy Mountain from the time of my youth till my old age – throughout all the days of my life. And by the grace of God I have built the [small] church outside the doors of the Great Church. And I have built houses for the Arabs to stay there and to pray. I made their abode and their staying-place outside. And I have acquired books for the Holy Mountain – a list follows.[51]

Albanian Manuscripts

In the history of the research of the Albanian community, manuscripts play a central role. The alphabet of Caucasian Albania, which contains 52 letters, is known from an Armenian encyclopedic manuscript preserved in the Matenadaran collection in Yerevan (MS 7117, dated *ca.* 1442)[52] and from a number of lapidary inscriptions and graffiti, discovered during the archaeological excavations in Mingechaur, in the territory of Azerbaijan.[53] All the attempts to decode this script however, were unsuccessful until the discovery of Albanian manuscripts in the Sinaitic 'new collection' some fifty years after the discovery of the Matenadaran manuscript. These manuscripts led to the decipherment of the Albanian alphabet, and consequently, to a totally new approach to the history of the Albanians in their homeland and in the Holy Land.[54]

The two codices that were found, were Georgian palimpsests dated to the tenth century (Sin.Geo.N.13 and 55). Albanian texts were discovered in the under-writing, i.e., the early layer of the manuscripts. The decipherment,

49 Aleksidze et al. 2005, p. 363.

50 Shanidze 2006, p. 254.

51 Shanidze 2006, p. 264.

52 Shanidze 1938; Abuladze 1938; Hewsen 1964.

53 For summary, see Trever 1959, pp. 335–339, tab. 28–34; recently, the decipherment of the Mingechaur inscriptions was proposed by Gippert 2016. The study of the Albanian script is still in its primary stage, but already obscured by numerous epigraphic forgeries: see, for example, the case the 'Albanian Book': Gadjiev 2007.

54 Aleksidze 2007.

which was started by Alexidze, followed by an international group of scholars, showed that the early layer contained fragments of the Gospel of John and a Lectionary (fragments of the Gospels of Matthew, Marc and Luke, Pauline and the Catholic Epistles). Nearly 120 pages have been published to date.[55] If it were not for the biblical content, the attempts to decipher the texts would have most probably failed, since neither the language nor the script were known well enough.[56] The content of the Lectionary points to a particularly early date – the earliest stage in the development of Lectionaries – back in the sixth century, or even earlier.[57]

Apart from its importance for Albanian studies as such, the discovery of the palimpsests may serve as an additional evidence for the close ties between the Georgian and Albanian communities of the Holy Land – ties that were previously known only through vague hints in historical sources.

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55 Gippert et al. 2009.

56 *COMSt*, Gippert 2015b, p. 403.

57 Renoux dates the compilation between 439 and 614: 2012, pp. 250–256.

CHAPTER 5

Finds vs. Texts

Archaeology and Literary Sources

In their fundamental studies dedicated to the archaeological research of Palestinian and Sinaitic monasticism, Hirschfeld (1992), Patrich (1995) and Dahari (2000) demonstrated the importance of written evidence in practical examination of archaeological remains. The literary and archeological evidence complement each other, often making it possible to interpret the most modest remains of monastic dwellings, or to verify settlement patterns and pilgrimage routes.

The paucity of detailed literary narrative relating to the presence of Caucasian Christians in the Holy Land makes any attempt to confront the literary and archaeological evidence very challenging. Most of the foreign sources simply mention Armenian and Georgian monks and pilgrims in Palestine, usually referring to them and their languages as part of a list. National sources, mostly hagiographies, are also laconic in their descriptions, focusing on the spiritual side of the monastic or pilgrimage experience. At the same time, the archaeological material associated with Caucasian Christians is abundant enough to allow construction of a typology of the various types of institutions. Among the known complexes where Armenian and Georgian presence was attested, there are two rural coenobia: Bir el-Qutt and Umm Leisun; two or possibly three pilgrimage hospices in Jerusalem: in Musrara, on Mount Scopus ("Theodosius and Cyriacus") and in Mamilla; an outstanding example of cemeterial church: YMCA; and numerous burials. None of these types is specified in literary evidence.

Types of Institutions

Rural Coenobia

Two of the monastic sites, previousely described in details – Bir el-Qutt near Shepherds' Field and Umm-Leisun in the south-eastern part of Jerusalem – belong to the type of 'rural coenobia'.[1] Noteworthy, these two, clearly identified Georgian sites, were built according to local Palestinian standards and could only be attributed to a specific nationality on the basis of epigraphic

1 Taxel 2009a, p. 196.

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finds. Their typological and technological characteristics are identical to those of other Byzantine Palestinian monasteries built in areas conducive to agricultural work. The well-preserved complex of Bir el-Qutt near Shepherds' Field (Fig. 92) can even be regarded as a model of the local coenobitic monastery – orthogonal in plan, compact, enclosed and clustered around the central courtyard, with a small church beside it. Like many monasteries of this type, Bir el-Qutt survived on its own agricultural product, specifically wine and oil production. The complex discovered on YMCA site in the western part of Jerusalem also contained the remains of various agricultural installations, and a complex type winery. Similar wineries were discovered near the Byzantine foundations of The Monastery of the Cross, suggesting the possibility that this site too could belong in the same typological group of rural coenobia.

The production of these sites was far too large for the needs of the monasteries themselves. As it was demonstrated by Seligman, they would have formed "the rural hinterland" of Byzantine Jerusalem, supplying the needs of the permanent population of the city and its numerous visitors.[2]

Xenodochia

Two of the sites under discussion can be attributed with certainty to the category of *xenodochia* – pilgrimage hospices. The first and more impressive is the complex of monastic institutions with pilgrimage services that was discovered to the north of the city of Jerusalem, in the modern Musrara neighbourhood (Fig. 45). Each of the Musrara institutions, including the Armenian monastery located among them, contains all the facilities necessary to provide hospitality for numerous visitors: residential rooms, refectories, chapels, well-developed water supply systems, bathhouses and even burial grounds. It is the largest complex of xenodochia discovered in Jerusalem. Perhaps the complex foundation should be related to the nearby St. Stephen's basilica, one of the major holy sites of the city, which attracted many visitors. It is also possible, that the cluster of Musrara institutions was a result of natural growth in pilgrimage facilities, due to the advantageous location: just outside the city walls, along one of the main roads leading to Jerusalem from the north.[3]

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2 Seligman 2011, pp. 515 f. and esp. pp. 522–524; Table 19.5.

3 Mosaic dedicational inscription, dated to 550/1, discovered in salvage excavations of Israel Antiquities Authority in 2017, mentions the names of the Emperor Justinian and priest Constantine, abbot of the famous Nea church in Jerusalem. The small-scaled excavation in Musrara, close to the remains described here, was conducted by David Gelman of IAA; the inscription was deciphered by Leah Di Segni of Hebrew University. For primary

The second xenodochia complex is the large monastery "of Theodorus and Cyriacus" discovered on the ridge of Mount Scopus, on the road leading east, where the Armenian presence was attested. This pilgrimage center also contained residential rooms, stables and mangers, bathhouse and agricultural facilities.

The third site that should be mentioned in connection with the pilgrimage activities in the city, is the commercial quarter discovered in Mamilla, to the west of the ancient boundaries of Jerusalem. The area contained shopping lanes, bathhouse, and possibly a chapel. Small finds uncovered in the excavations – the Armenian graffito and the pilgrim ampulla from Ephesus – can be interpreted as indications of distant traveling.

A few pilgrim hospices in Jerusalem are known from literary sources. Among them is the large complex of the Nea church (*Itin. Piacent*. 23; *De Aed*. V.6.25–26); the hospice built by Peter the Iberian (*V. P.Iber*. 20); the xenodochion of St. Sabas (*V. Sab*. 31) and a number of small institutions owned by desert monasteries.[4] None of these institutions is known archaeologically. Interestingly, none of the xenodochia that were discovered in archaeological excavations was mentioned in the sources, not even the largest complex of the Musrara monasteries, most probably built by initiative of imperial authorities.

According to the known recommendations, pilgrims were advised to stay in hospices that were owned by the church authorities, in order to keep themselves as far as possible from the temptations of the journey. Local bishops and monks were responsible for providing hospitality to travelers and pilgrims.[5] However, the sources also testify to the wide use of private services of transportation and lodging for pilgrims. One of the isolated finds discussed here – the Byzantine period tombstone of Ioanne the Armenian, "the inn-keeper", possibly points to the existence of such private hostels in the Jerusalem region.

The best preserved Palestinian example of a monastery hospice was archaeologically studied during the excavations of the Martyrius Monastery in Ma'ale Adumim.[6] The structure was built just beside the monastery, yet was isolated, with its own entrance and services. Similar spatial arrangements were used in the monastic hospices of Syria, where a few dozens of such institutions were surveyed along the principal roads and around the important pilgrimage

information on the find, see the IAA press-release: http://www.antiquities.org.il/Article_eng.aspx?sec_id=25&subj_id=240&id=4309.

4 Recently discussed by Voltaggio 2011, pp. 199–202.

5 For the early period, see the detailed discussion by Hunt 1982, pp. 60–65; also Wilkinson 1977, pp. 16–20; Voltaggio 2011, p. 198.

6 Magen and Talgam 1990; Magen 2015.

centers.[7] Another known example of a monastic hospice in the vicinity of Jerusalem is so-called "Good Samaritan Inn" (Tala'ay ed-Damm).[8]

In the most eminent pilgrimage sites of the Byzantine world, such as Abu Mena in Egypt[9] or Qal'at Sem'an in Syria,[10] pilgrimage centers, and often whole cities, grew around the venerated site: saint's tomb, stylite pillar etc. Similarly, in Ephesus, the venerated site was located on the outskirts of the city, and the pilgrimage complex grew around it.[11]

In Jerusalem, the holy sites were spread all over the existing packed city, and therefore the formation of the pilgrimage centers followed a different pattern. Summarizing the historical sources and the archaeological evidence, we can conclude, that the known intramural monastic xenodochia of Jerusalem were all built between the Tower of David and Holy Zion, an area long deserted and with plenty of space for construction work. The only exception is the hospice of the Nea Church, built together with other charity institutions by imperial initiative. Since the intramural city had no available grounds for large-scale building activity, this was transferred to extramural areas. By the end of the Byzantine period, and far into the Early Islamic times, the main pilgrim centers surrounded the city on the outside: Musrara at the north, the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus at the east, and possibly Mamilla at the west. Possibly, the growth of extramural pilgrim facilities in the Early Islamic period should be related to the taxation policy towards non-Muslims: it could be cheaper for Christians to lodge outside the city walls.[12]

Judging by the literary and archaeological evidence, Armenian and Georgian pilgrims would lodge in the common xenodochia, or establish their own institutions.

Cemeterial Church

To this type should be attributed the reconstructed basilical church discovered at the YMCA site in Jerusalem (see the description of the finds above). Examples of burials inside the churches and monasteries of the Holy Land are countless; nevertheless, proper *ecclesiae coemeterialis*, i.e. churches built with an intention to serve as a cemetery, are extremely rare in Byzantine Palestine.

7 Penã 2000a, pp. 83–87; 2000b.

8 Magen and Kagan 2012, no. 164, pp. 311–312.

9 For the development of the site see Mulder 1993; Bangert 2010.

10 Biscop et al. 2002–2003; Biscop 2005.

11 Bangert 2010.

12 Patrich 2011, p. 211.

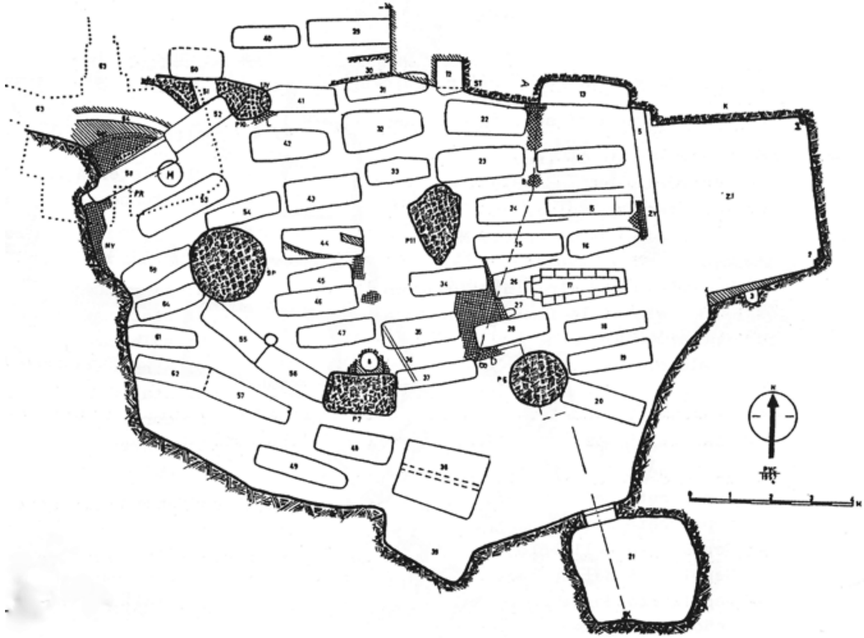

FIGURE 142 *Burials in the Gethsemane grotto.*
COURTESY OF STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM.

The Gethsemane Grotto, where a large number of individual graves were found under the pavement, but unlike the YMCA site, were randomly distributed, should be mentioned as the sole example of similar burial in Jerusalem (Fig. 142).[13] This parallel is especially interesting, when taking into consideration a possible attribution to the Grotto of the gravestone that mentions the deacons of Anastasis and the Iberian Monastery near the Tower of David. If the attribution of the epitaph to the Grotto is correct, Gethsemane and YMCA sites can be regarded as two burial grounds with similar funerary patterns, located to the east and to the west of the city but belonging to the same monastery.

In the Holy Land, the closest architectural parallel to the YMCA church is a basilica in Horvat Karkur,[14] although smaller in size and in the number of burials: 20 in Karkur versus 40 visible tombs in the YMCA.[15] However, the closest

13 Corbo 1965, pp. 3–49.

14 Figueras 2004, fig. 3; Zias and Spiegelman 2004.

15 The exact number of burials in the YMCA church is unknown, owing to the destruction of the antiquities prior to the beginning of excavations. Based on the number of surviving

parallels to the complicated superposition of burials, predating the construction of the church and contemporary with it, lie outside the Holy Land, in Rome[16] and especially in Dalmatia, in the cluster of early extra-mural basilicas of Salona.[17]

The phenomenon of cemetery churches established on sites of ancient necropoleis, is well known in Christian architecture, especially at its earlier stage.[18] As was demonstrated by Di Segni,[19] the building of memorial churches in Palestine was often stimulated by discovery of ancient tombs, dated to the Early Roman period. Since no other venerated Christian site is known in the vicinity of the YMCA, one may assume that the discovery of ancient, in this case – not Early Roman, but Late Roman tombs, – served as an inducement to the foundation of the 'cemeterial church' at the site. Two more sites previously discussed here were erected over re-discovered ancient tombs. The first is the monastic complex containing Greek and Armenian inscriptions on the summit of the Mount of Olives, which has a significant number of Early Roman burials. The second is the funerary chapel at Beit Safafa, built upon Late Roman grave containing numerous lead coffins. Unlike the YMCA example, no cemeterial church was erected at the spots. Possibly, the unusual character of the YMCA complex can be interpreted as a cemetery established and used by the Georgian community of the country.

Identification of the Sites

Paradoxically, it proved extremely difficult to identify the Armenian and Georgian sites known from the historical or archaeological record.

The common tendency to ascribe all the existing 'mute' archaeological sites to known historical figures, despite the objective obstacles, chronological and stratigraphic, or to propose random identifications based on the known lists

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tombs in the northern aisle, similar pattern can be reconstructed for the southern aisle. In such a case, the total number of tombs in the church should reach 60 or even more.

16 Odahl 1995.

17 For the well preserved examples from Dalmatia region, see the updated discussion of Yasin 2012.

18 See Figueras 2004, pp. 67–68.

19 Di Segni 2007.

of sites, should be rejected in favor of critical approach to both the literary sources and the archaeological data.[20]

In brief, none of the Caucasian Christian institutions known archaeologically is mentioned in historical sources, or at least cannot be safely identified as such. At the same time, none of the Armenian, Georgian or Albanian sites known from the historical sources was ever discovered, or at least cannot be securely identified. This complex interrelationship between the literary and archaeological sources is summarized in the following tables: data related to the Armenian community in Tables 1 and 2,[21] and data related to the Georgian community in Tables 3 and 4. Information regarding the Albanians in Jerusalem is strictly limited to historical sources, and is presented in a single table (Table 5).

TABLE 1 *Sites in the Holy Land and the Sinai associated with Armenian activity, mentioned in the literary sources (5th–11th cc)*

Name	Location	Literary sources	Date	Identification	Material evidence of Armenian presence
The Monastery of St. Euthymius	Judean Desert	*V. Euth.*	5th c.	Khan el-Ahmar	none
The Great Laura of St. Sabas	Judean Desert	*V. Sab.; V.J.Hes*	late 5th–6th cc.	St. Sabas Monastery	none
The Coenobium of Castellion	Judean Desert	*V. Sab.*	late 5th c.	el-Mird (Hyrcania)	none
The Laura of Jeremias	Judean Desert	*V. Sab.*	late 5th–6th cc.	Kh. ez-Zaraniq	none

20 See, for example, the constantly increasing number of archaeological sites identified with the name of Peter the Iberian: the monastic complexes in Bir el-Qutt (Tsereteli 1960; Chachanidze 1977, etc.), Umm Leisun (Mgaloblishvili 2007) and even the Monastery of the Cross (Mgaloblishvili 2004). For Armenian example, see Britt 2011.

21 The information in the list of the "70 Armenian monasteries" of Anastas vardapet is excluded as highly exaggerated with no possibility to check any of the sites; an exception is made for the Monastery of Pand, mentioned also by other sources.

Name	Location	Literary sources	Date	Identification	Material evidence of Armenian presence
The Coenobium of St. Theodosius	Judean Desert	Cyr. Scyth., *V.Theod.*; Theod. Petr., *V. Theod.; Pratum*	6th–early 7th cc.	St. Theodosius Monastery	none
The Monastery of St. John (Pand?)	Mt. of Olives	Ant. Strat. (?); Anastas vardapet (?); *Commemoratorium* (?); *The History of Ałuank* (?)	808	Monastery on the Russian plot, Mt. of Olives (?)	numerous dedicational and funerary inscriptions
The Monastic hermitages on the slopes of the Mt. of Olives	Mt. of Olives	*Commemoratorium*	808		none

TABLE 2 *Archaeological sites in the Holy Land associated with Armenian activity (5th–11th cc.)*

Name	Classification	Location	Literary sources	Date
Pand (?) or the Monastery of St. John the Baptist (?)	urban monastery; nunnery (?)	summit of the Mt. of Olives	Ant. Strat. (?); Anastas *vardapet* (?); *Commemoratorium* (?); *The History of Ałuank* (?)	6th–8th cc.
unknown	urban monastery and pilgrim hospice	Musrara, Jerusalem	none	6th–8th cc.
unknown	urban monastery and pilgrim hospice	Mt. Scopus	none	5th–8th cc.
Choziba Monastery	desert monastery	Wadi el-Qilt	none	5th–7th cc.
St. James Monastery	monastery	Mt. Zion	none	early 12 c.

TABLE 3 *Sites in the Holy Land and the Sinai associated with Georgian activity, mentioned in the literary sources and colophons (5th–11th cc.)*

Name	Location	Literary sources	Date	Identification	Material evidence of Georgian presence
The Monastery of the Iberians near the Tower of David	Mount Zion	*V.P.Iber.*; Procopius, *De Aed.*; epigraphic finds from Jerusalem	5th–6th cc.	–	–
Hospice near the Tower of David	Mount Zion	*V.P.Iber.*	5th c.	–	–
The Monastery of the Lazi	Judean Desert	*V.P.Iber.*; Procopius, *De Aed.*	5th–6th cc.	–	–
The Great Laura of St. Sabas	Judean Desert	*V. Sab.; The Rule of St. Sabas*	6th c.	St. Sabas Monastery	mid-9th c., manuscripts
The Coenobium of St. Theodosius	Judean Desert	Theod. Pet., *V. Theod.*	6th c.	St. Theodosius Monastery	none
The Burning Bush	Mt. Sinai	*Itin. Piacentini*; Anast. Sin.	6th–7th cc.	St. Catherine's Monastery	10th c., manuscripts
The Soubibes Monastery	near the Jordan River	*Pratum*	early 7th c.	Coenobium to the north of Wadi el-Qilt	–
The Monastery of St. John	near the Holy Anastasis	Anastas *vardapet*	8th–9th cc.	St. Salvatore (?)	none
Monastic hermitages on the slopes of the Mt. of Olives	Mt. of Olives	*Commemoratorim*	808		none

Name	Location	Literary sources	Date	Identification	Material evidence of Georgian presence
The Old Laura of St. Chariton	Judean Desert	colophons	late 10th c.	Kh. Khureitun	late 10th c., manuscripts
The Golgotha Monastery	Holy Sepulchre church	colophons	mid-11th c.	–	mid-11th c., manuscripts
The Monastery of the Cross	near Jerusalem	*V. Georg. Hagior.; V. Prochor.*	mid-11th c.	Monastery of the Cross	mid-11th c., manuscripts

TABLE 4 *Archaeological sites in the Holy Land associated with Georgian activity (5th–11th cc.)*

Name	Classification	Location	Sources	Date
St. Theodore	rural coenobium	Bir el-Qutt	–	6th–8/9th cc.
unknown	rural coenobium	Umm Leisun	–	6/7th–8th cc.
unknown	monastery and cemeterial church	YMCA, West Jerusalem	–	5th–7th cc.
The Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia(?)	funerary chapel	Beit Safafa	–	6th c.
Choziba Monastery	desert monastery	Wadi el-Qilt	–	5th–7th cc.
unknown	Monastic hermitage	Horvat Burgin	–	10th–11th cc.
The Monastery of the Cross	Coenobium	Jerusalem	*V. Georg. Hagior.; V. Prochor.*	mid-11th c.

TABLE 5 *Sites in Jerusalem mentioned in the literary sources as associated with Albanian activity (5th–11th cc.)*

Name	Location	Sources	Date	Identification
The Monastery of Pand, dedicated to St. John the Baptist	eastern slope of Mt. of Olives	Daskhurantsi; Anastas *vardapet*	Early Islamic period	The Monastery on the Russian plot, Mt. of Olives (?)
The Monastery of Mruv	Mt. of Olives	Daskhurantsi	Early Islamic period	–
The Monastery of Partava Theotokos	near the Tower of David, Mt. Zion	Daskhurantsi	Early Islamic period	–
The monastery of Kalankaytuk	Mt. Zion	Daskhurantsi	Early Islamic period	–
The Monastery of Artsakh of Theotokos	to the south of St. Stephen	Daskhurantsi	Early Islamic period	–
The Monastery of Amaras of St. Gregory	unknown	Daskhurantsi	Early Islamic period	–
Afawevank (?)	“in the middle of the market”	Daskhurantsi	Early Islamic period	–

Study Cases

Two most remarkable sites were chosen as study cases for discussion of the complex correlations between the historical and archaeological data. The first is the Iberian Monastery near the Tower of David, mentioned by a number of Byzantine sources and contemporary epigraphic evidence, but still not identified archaeologically. The second is the monastic complex discovered on the summit of the Mount of Olives, usually identified as the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, which is known from numerous sources and dates to the Early Islamic period.

“The Monastery of the Iberians Near the Tower of David”

The first Georgian establishment in Jerusalem, the monastery built by Peter the Iberian near the Tower of David, is the only “Caucasian” structure of the Holy Land known both from the historical sources and independent epigraphic

evidence of the Byzantine period. The site is mentioned in two Greek epitaphs of Jerusalemite clerics: that of bishop Samuel, discovered at the YMCA site, and the common grave of the deacons of Anastasis (Holy Sepulchre) and the Iberian Monastery near the Tower of David, discovered in Gethsemane. In addition, the Greek name of the monastery is mentioned on a stamp discovered on Mount Zion (see above). For almost a century, the site was a focal point of the research of Georgian activity in the Holy Land, and therefore deserves special attention.

The narrative in Peter the Iberian's *Vita* tells the story of the monastery's establishment in remarkable detail: during the 430s–440s the southern part of Jerusalem lay deserted and in ruins, so that any private person or monastic leader could choose a place and start building. Later on, a conflict arose between Peter and his companion John, and a Jerusalemite clergyman, who also claimed the right to build on the site chosen for the monastery. The argument over the possession of the property was resolved in a miraculous way: the opponent of Peter simply died (*V. P.Iber.* 65). Soon enough, after 438 Peter himself left or fled Jerusalem and never came back to the city, but the monastery remained in the hands of his compatriots, possibly, as a result of a new purchase. The Georgian version of the *Vita* (20) talks also about the pilgrim's hospice "for Iberian and Greek brethren", where special places were prepared "for foot washing, dining room and beds", i.e. with all the standard facilities of a pilgrim hospice: bath, refectory and dormitories.

Remarkably, the text of the epitaph of Samuel, bishop of the Iberians, discovered on the site of YMCA, places an unusual emphasis on the issue of property purchase. According to Tsafrir, it may be interpreted "as a hint that there was still some malicious gossip in Jerusalem about the legitimacy of the Iberians' holdings in the city".[22]

It is interesting to note, that all three existing epigraphic sources that mention the monastery, use the Greek language. Possibly, the monastery established by the Georgian natives was from the beginning inhabited by an international monastic community, using the Greek language as the common one, or eventually becoming grecophone (for discussion on language use, see below).

Details given in the hagiography made it possible to identify the location of the Iberian monastery.[23] According to the text, it was built to the north of the gates of the Tower of David, on the right side of the road leading to the sanctuary of Mount Zion (*V. P.Iber.*, 64). This road led from the heart of Jerusalem – the Holy Sepulchre Church – to Mount Zion, passing through the territory of

22 Tsafrir 2013, p. 253; see also 1975, pp. 38–40.

23 Vincent et Abel 1922, pp. 516–526; Tsafrir 1975, pp. 37–40, 84–87, 137; 2013.

the modern Armenian Quarter of the Old City. Most probably, this was one of the last intramural areas still available for large-scale construction, and was developed in the fifth–sixth centuries, under ecclesiastical patronage. Numerous institutions – churches, monasteries and pilgrim hospices – which were built here are known from literary sources.[24] It is in this area that one should look for the Iberian monastery.

The major part of the territory of the modern Armenian Quarter has not been subject to systematic archaeological exploration. Few expeditions worked in the area,[25] and some revealed the remains dated to the Byzantine period. The Byzantine foundations of the Armenian Monastery of Sts. James were already described elsewhere. To add, during the works of K. Kenyon's expedition of behalf of British Archaeological Institute in Jerusalem the remains of a Byzantine basilical church with three apses were discovered on Area L ("the Armenian Garden").[26] The finds included a mosaic floor decorated with floral patterns, a hare, other animals and a Greek dedicatory inscription, poorly preserved. Dated to the fifth century, the ecclesiastical structure was identified by the excavators as the institution of Bassa, known from the Byzantine sources (*V. Euth.*, 30). Bassa, an intimate friend of the Empress Eudocia, probably accompanied her during her visit to Jerusalem in 438, and is known as the founder of the church of St. Menas and the monastery in the vicinity of the Tower of David. The poor preservation of the dedicatory inscription, however, makes it difficult to confirm the identification. The structure discovered by Kenyon may just as well be any other Byzantine institution on Mount Zion – such as a pilgrim hospice or a monastery.

Byzantine strata were discovered in the series of excavations undertaken by M. Broshi near the Armenian Seminary and the Dormition Abbey, but the results of these excavations are still unpublished.[27] Recently, a small-scale salvage excavation was carried out within the walls of the Armenian Quarter by the Israel Antiquities Authority, exposing a fragment of a monumental building, dated by excavators according to the pottery finds, to the fifth–seventh centuries.[28]

24 For an overview, see Tsafrir 2013, pp. 255–256; for discussion on urban monasteries, see Goldfus 2003.

25 For an archaeological review of the area of Mount Zion in the Byzantine period see Tsafrir 1975; and short resumé in Tsafrir 2013, pp. 256–257.

26 Kenyon 1974, pp. 273–274, pls. 113–114; Tushingham 1985, pp. 65–104.

27 Only short popular articles were published so far: see Broshi 1976; Bahat and Broshi 1976; Broshi and Gibson 1994. After the recent discovery of the documentation and finds of Broshi's expedition in the shelters of the Armenian Patriarchate, the final report is prepared for publication by S. Gibson.

28 Sion and Rapuano 2014.

A few additional sites within the borders of the modern Armenian Quarter may possibly stand on Byzantine foundations, although this hypothesis has never been proved archeologically. The first is the el-Yakoubye Mosque, built to the east of the Tower of David, and dated by the researchers to the Byzantine period with some medieval modifications,[29] or as a pure Crusader structure built on the remains of a Byzantine one.[30] It was proposed that the site should be spotted at a medieval church dedicated to St. Jacob the Persian, whose relics are known to have been kept in the Byzantine monastery of Peter the Iberian.[31] However, the site can also be identified with the medieval church and metochion of St. Sabas, known from the description of the Russian hegumen Daniel, who stayed here during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1106–1107.[32] Possibly, the medieval structure succeeded the ancient hospice established in 494 by Sabas himself (*V. Sab.* 86; ed. Schwartz 194.1).[33]

Another candidate is Dar el-Dissi, a large dwelling complex in the immediate vicinity of the Kishle – the police station of the Old City. For a few centuries it has been occupied by the Jerusalemite Muslim Dissi clan. The surface study of the ancient remains demonstrated the ecclesiastical character of the building, possibly a church or a whole monastic complex, dated to the Crusader period. An earlier date was proposed by C. Schick,[34] but not supported by other scholars. The identification of the remains with the Iberian monastery is questionable: both the Church of the Three Marys and the metochion of St. Sabas were proposed as alternatives.[35] Since the complex is heavily populated and sub-divided into dozens of living units and the cemetery occupies the lion share of the ancient remains, its study, and in particular the search for pre-medieval occupation, seems impossible in the near future.

One more site is the medieval Church of St. Thomas of the Germans, a small, poorly preserved Crusader structure, situated on the bend of St. James street close to the corner with the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate road. The church was tentatively identified by the surveyors of the 19th century as *St. Thomas Alemannorum*, known from 12th–13th-century documents. Some ancient remains were identified by 19th century explorers, and then reexamined after

29 Schick 1895a, p. 324; Clermont-Ganneau 1897; see also Pringle 2007, pp. 189–192.
30 Vincent et Abel 1922, pp. 558–561.
31 Vincent et Abel 1922: 516–518; 558–561; Tsafrir 1975, p. 88.
32 Prokhorov 2007.
33 Vincent et Abel 1922, p. 518; Tsafrir 1975, pp. 40–42; Patrich 1995, pp. 165–166.
34 Schick 1895a, pp. 326–327.
35 Vincent et Abel 1922, p. 518; Tsafrir 1975, p. 87; Pringle 2007, pp. 355–358.

1967.[36] It is important to note that the church is situated in the second story of the building and not on the ground level. Since the earliest phase of the building was never studied, one can only speculate about the possibility of a Byzantine origin.

The last unexcavated site relevant to the discussion is a small Armenian church of the Holy Archangels (Deir el-Zeitun, or 'The Monastery of the Olive Tree'), situated in the south-eastern part of the Armenian Patriarchate grounds. The site is venerated as the house of Annas, the father-in-law of the High Priest Caiaphas (John 18:13). The site derives its name from the two olive trees growing in its courtyard, to one of which Jesus was bound according to local tradition. One of the relics is a massive Herodian stone-block, the 'screaming stone' that cried out while the disciples of Jesus kept silent (Luke 19:40). The complex first appears in the records of western pilgrims only in the 14th century. Schick dated the structure to the Byzantine period, but this proposition was rejected by other scholars.[37] The visible remains seem to preserve no trace of building activity prior to the medieval period. No archaeological excavations have been undertaken in the church or its vicinity. Regardless of the absence of Byzantine remains, the site has been mentioned in relation to the Iberian monastery.[38] Most probably, the reason for this association is the Georgian ownership of the site in the later period, from the 15th century.[39] However, subsequent Georgian ownership of the site is no proof of their presence there in the Byzantine period. It is hard to establish any connection between this site

36 Warren and Conder 1889, p. 272; Schick 1895a, pp. 321–323; Bahat 1993, p. 124; see also Pringle 2007, pp. 386–389.

37 Schick 1895b, p. 252; and contra: Vincent and Abel 1922, pp. 500–504.

38 According to Peradze (1937, p. 225) the lands of the monastery may have been acquired already at the time of Peter the Iberian.

39 According to the testimony of Johann, Count of Solm (1483), the Georgians "possess the Church of Angels, which stands on the site of the house of Annas the Bishop": cit. according to Peradze 1937, pp. 193–194. Heinrich von Sedlitz and the Cartusian abbot George gave similar testimony in 1493 and 1507 respectively: Peradze 1937, pp. 194, 197. The last information about Georgians on this site comes from Martinus Seusenius, who visited Jerusalem in 1602–1603: Muklau 1903, p. 57. In the 1606 Ottoman Hatti-Sherif of Sultan Ahmet the First Chelebi, 'the Monastery of the Apple' (Deir el-Tuffah) is mentioned among the monasteries that are situated inside the city walls. 'The Apple Monastery', also called 'House of Gannon' (Hanan?), appears in the list of Georgian monasteries that are under the protection and supervision of the Greek Orthodox authorities: Sanjian 1965, p. 177. For the Armenian translation of Hatti-Sherif see: Ter-Hovhannesiants' 1890, pp. 281–282. Some pilgrims described the site not with olive trees, but with a venerated apple tree to which Jesus was bound: this would explain the name 'the Apple Monastery'.

and the Byzantine monastery of the Iberians: not only because the existence of Byzantine remains in Deir el-Zeitun is has not been proved, but also because the site is located too far from the Tower of David.

The scarce Byzantine remains that were discovered on Mount Zion and in the area between its sanctuaries and the Tower of David, preserve no material evidence that could be clearly identified with the monastery built by Peter the Iberian. Many of the sites that have been discussed by scholars as possible candidates have never been excavated. It seems that regardless of the wealth of literary sources and contemporary epigraphic finds, the question of the location of the monastery of Peter the Iberian cannot be securely resolved at the present state of research.

The Monastic Complex on the Summit of the Mount of Olives

The original dedication of the monastic complex discovered on the summit of the Mount of Olives remains in doubt. In his classical articles on the topography of Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem, Milik[40] confidently identifies the site with martyrion, and later the monastery of St. John the Baptist, established in the end of the fourth century by Innocent (*Hist. Laus.*, 44).[41] The monastery is mentioned under various names by numerous Byzantine and Early Islamic sources: as St. John the High (Antiochus Strategius),[42] St. John the Ancient (Sin.Geo 34),[43] St. John on the Mount of Olives (Anastas, 2), the Albanian Monastery of Pand dedicated to St. Karapet "to the east, on the Mount of Olives" (Daskhurantsi, 52), and St. John of the Armenians on the Mount of Olives (*Commem.*, 24).

Nevertheless, the identification of the site with the monastery of St. John the Baptist can be disputed by the epigraphic evidence discovered on the Russian plot. None of the numerous Greek and Armenian inscriptions revealed at the site refers to St. John. Moreover, except for St. Isaiah (Vałan inscription), no venerated figures are mentioned. The inscriptions provide no clue that makes it possible to conclude whether the monastic establishment was intended for men or women. It is striking that all the funerary inscriptions discovered at the site are of women: Theodosia, Shushan (Shushanik), Jojik and Marin (Mariam). On the other hand, most of the dedicational inscriptions commemorate men: T'ew, Abas, Murik, Vałan, and priest Yakob. The only exception is the Greek mosaic inscription of Theodosia.

40 Milik 1960–1961, no 24, p. 184; 1960, no 34, pp. 562–563.

41 Lowther Clarke 1918.

42 Conybeare 1910.

43 Garitte 1958, pp. 251–252.

Evidence for the cult of the prophet Isaiah can be found in the lectionaries of the Jerusalem church and in epigraphic finds.[44] It seems that the memory of the prophet was mainly venerated in the foundations of the Eudocian period and in the nunneries: in St. Menas, which was established by Bassa, St. Isaiah was commemorated on May 5th, June 16th and October 31st, together with St. Menas and St. Phocas. On July 6th the memory of the prophet was celebrated in the institution of Melania the Younger, and on June 3rd and October 15th in the establishment of Flavia, both located on the Mount of Olives. In the monastery (nunnery?) built by the Patriarch Juvenalius and mentioned in the epitaph of Thecla the Bessian (see above), the memory of St. Isaiah was commemorated on August 25th, together with the prophet Zechariah, the Three Youths of the fiery furnace, and the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia. Twice a year, on May 9th and October 2nd it was celebrated in 'Apostoleion on the Mount' – an annex of Eleona. Anastas *vardapet* (6) mentions *Noravank* ('the new monastery'), "near the tomb of the Prophet Isaiah", in his times demolished by *tačiks*. Finally, a Greek inscription that dates to the seventh–eighth centuries and mentions Isaiah, was discovered in the Kidron Valley.[45]

The reference to Isaiah in the Armenian inscription from the Mount of Olives, together with certain gender bias observed in the inscriptions, allows speculation that the site was a nunnery.[46] The existence of an Armenian nunnery on the Mount of Olives is confirmed by the Greek epitaph of the abbess Charate (see above).

A number of suggestions may be put forward in explanation to the process of development of the site. The first is that the site could be the successor of the known establishment of Melania the Younger, preserving the original dedication of the ancient institution. The second, that the commemoration of St. Isaiah may have been transferred from 'the new monastery" (*Noravank*), somewhere on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The third, that the institution on the summit of the Mount of Olives may have changed its role in the course of a long life to which the existence of several stratigraphic stages give evidence.[47]

44 After Garitte 1958, p. 383, and Milik 1960, p. 563, and references therein.

45 Possibly, the inscription is a 19th century forgery: see Di Segni 2011, CIIP I/2, App. 17*.

46 For Byzantine nunneries in Palestine, see Dahari and Zelinger 2014.

47 According to the later evidence of Anastas *vardapet*, the Armenian monks often left their monasteries in the Early Islamic period, due to the heavy burden of taxes imposed by the Muslim authorities, and women and deaconesses, who were exempt from the levies, took their place: Sanjian 1969a, p. 278. Most probably, this practice was not exclusive to the Armenian community.

CHAPTER 6

Caucasian Communities and the Holy Land

The Patterns of Interaction

The place of the Caucasian Christians in Palestinian monastic life and in the pilgrimage movement to the Holy Land is attested in numerous historical sources. Caucasian monks and pilgrims settled in the proximity of the holy places side by side with their brothers in faith from Greece, Cyprus, Rome, Constantinople, Asia Minor, Armenia, Syria, Arabia and Africa.[1] The great majority of the monks of Palestine spoke and prayed in Greek. The exceptions were a few early Armenian and Georgian monasteries where, according to historical sources, the monks celebrated the liturgy in their own language. Nevertheless, most of the Caucasian monks were merely residents in a large, multi-ethnic, Greek-speaking community, at least in the initial stage.

However, the picture given by the sources is incomplete, and limited both chronologically and geographically. The most detailed sources, first and foremost the hagiographic corpus of Cyril of Scythopolis, cover mainly the life of the desert monasteries in the sixth century, while the great majority of the archaeological evidence related to the Armenian and Georgian communities comes not from the desert, but from Jerusalem, and its surroundings, and dates to the end of the Byzantine – beginning of the Early Islamic period, i.e. to the sixth–eighth centuries.

Therefore, it is important to examine the interrelations of the Caucasian communities with the Church of the Holy Land through analysis of archaeological remains. The analysis should concentrate on several categories of evidence:

- architectural characteristics of the structures associated with the Armenians and Georgians;
- pottery vessels and burials, the most important identity markers that can be studied archaeologically;
- epigraphic data, demonstrating preferences in the choice of language.

1 Di Segni and Tsafrir 2012.

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Interaction with the Church of Jerusalem: The Archaeological Evidence

Architectural Characteristics

Analysis of the architectural remains from the 'nationally affiliated' sites denies the possibility of identifying the Caucasian structures in the Holy Land according to their architectural or decorative features. All the construction activities follow the mainstream style of ecclesiastical architecture in the Holy Land, and belong to the type of relatively modest monastery architecture with a clear preference for a basilical form of church.

The peak of Caucasian activity in Palestine overlaps the period in which the ecclesiastical architecture of the Caucasus reaches its zenith,[2] when the early basilical form was almost totally abandoned, and when the highly original type of central-domed churches was developed, spanning the widest variety of forms: cruciform, cross inscribed in a square, rectangle, circle, and various forms of tetraconchs, crowned by conical domes.[3] No sign of this architectural style can be seen in the structures built in the Holy Land. The same seems to be true in regard to church decoration: Caucasian architecture rarely used mosaics,[4] but lavishly decorated the interior and exterior of the buildings with stone reliefs: the sacred compositions, portraits of the donators and founders, animals and birds, masters with their tools, floral and geometric ornaments.[5]

The appearance of the free-standing stone-cross stelae in Armenia and Georgia is dated to the same period, imitating the Golgotha Cross (Fig. 143).[6] Noteworthy is a newly discovered ecclesiastical complex in Dmanisi, Georgia,

2 The research dedicated to the architecture of the Caucasus region is enormous. For recent works, see Plontke-Lüning 2007; Kazaryan 2012–13; Maranci 2001; 2015, all precenting a comprehensive bibliography on a subject. For typology of polyapsidal churches – tetraconches, triconches etc. see Giviashvili 2009.

3 A type which is completely unknown outside the Caucasian region is the tetrachonch with corner niches. Two masterpieces of Caucasian architecture belong to this type: the church of St. Hripsime in Vagharshapat, Armenia, built in 618 and the Jvari (Holy Cross) church in Mtskheta, Georgia, built in the 640s. A variant of this type – a tetraconch with ambulatorium – is represented by the Zvartnotz (Vigilant Forces) church in Vagharshapat, Armenia, built in 643–650.

4 The only small fragment of floor mosaic pavement was discovered in the Armenian Dvin Cathedral (608–615), remains of wall glass mosaics were found in Etchmiadzin (rebuilt ca. 620) and Zvartnots (643–650) in Armenia.

5 See, for example, elaborated reliefs in Zvartnots in Armenia (643–650), Bolnisi in Georgia (478–493), Mingechaur in Albania (610).

6 Machabeli 2008a; Hakobian 2010; Djavakhishvili 2014.

FIGURE 143 *Medieval* kvajvara *in Manglisi, Georgia.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

FIGURE 144 *Medieval stone crosses* (khachkars) *in Noravuz, Armenia.* AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

dated to the sixth–seventh centuries, where dozens such stone crosses, *kvajvara*, were unearthed within a relatively small area.[7] In Armenia, the cross-shaped stelae were transformed into *khachkars* – memorial or devotional stone boards elaborately decorated with carved crosses (Fig. 144).[8]

In contrast, the decoration of Palestinian Caucasian churches mirrored the standard local Byzantine style: the floors were usually paved with mosaics (Mount of Olives, Musrara, Monastery "of Theodosius and Cyriacus", Bir el-Qutt, Umm Leisun, YMCA, Bet Safafa), sometimes representing the best examples of local masters' work, as in Musrara and the Mount of Olives complexes. The stone relief decoration was limited to friezes and capitals and liturgical furniture, made of marble, and imported to Palestine from abroad. No free-standing sculpture of any kind was discovered in any of the excavated sites. It seems that the Armenians and Georgians made no efforts 'to raise the flag' and enrich the local architectural repertoire with the latest achievements of their national schools.

The reasons behind this modesty are not entirely clear. The architectural solutions and decorative patterns may have been dictated by the expectations and preferences of the local Christian population and the foreign pilgrims who visited the monastic sites and received their various religious services. In such a case, the Caucasian monks saw no need to disassociate themselves, even visually, from the other clergymen of Palestine.

Most probably, the Caucasian monks themselves were not builders, and their monasteries were erected by local masters. Our information regarding the identity of the builders is extremely limited. The name of the mosaicist Iosiah, discovered at Bir el-Qutt, is not attested in the Georgian onomastic record and most probably testifies to his Palestinian origin. The repairs of the reverend Yakob's mosaic on the Mount of Olives were obviously performed by craftsmen who didn't know Armenian. On the contrary, the unskilled Armenian signature of Grigor, set in the mosaic floor of the Monastery "of Theodosius and Cyriacus" on Mount Scopus may be interpreted as a sign of the involvement of the foreign monks in the construction work. One can also speculate on the existence of certain restrictions, unattested in the documents of the era, regarding building activities in the Holy Land.

The explanation to the phenomenon may also derive from the cause behind the genesis of Caucasian church architecture, inspired by iconography of early martyria and baptisteria, and by compositional concepts of the churches of Palestine – the Tomb of Christ, the Rotunda of Anastasis, the Ascension and

7 Kakhiani et al. 2012.

8 Yakobson 1986; Petrosyan 2015.

Cathisma Churches in Jerusalem, the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, and also the Hagia Sophia and the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople.[9] In the Holy Land, in the presence of the sacred sites themselves, such an approach would be completely unnecessary.

It is worth mentioning that the local Palestinian styles were adopted not only in the architecture and décor, but also in the spatial planning of the monasteries, and in their peripheral activities, for example, in agricultural works, including the cultivation of olives and the production of olive oil, totally foreign to the Caucasian region; and wine production according to Palestinian technique, completely different from the wine-making techniques known in the Caucasus.

'Pots and People'

Among the most important material culture markers that distinguish a foreign ethnic group from the indigenous population, are specific types of vessels – especially cooking wares – and burial customs.[10] These are two categories of evidence that relate to the basic behavioral patterns that tradition preserves – food and death – and are generally recognized as most conservative and durable.

Up to date, no ceramic, glass, numismatic or any other small finds that can be related to the early Armenian, Georgian or Albanian communities were discovered in the Holy Land. Most probably, artifacts of Caucasian origin would not have been overlooked by archaeologists. The usual ceramic and numismatic repertoire of the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods is well known and repetitive in the sites of these periods, therefore any rare objects, especially imported, stand out sharply.[11] No Armenian artifacts were reported from the amateur excavations on the Mount of Olives in the 1870s, nor were any preserved in the Russian collection of antiquities from the site. No special finds of Caucasian origin were reported from the IAA excavations of monastic complexes in the Musrara neighbourhood or on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. Major sites associated with the Georgian community were excavated with the participation of Georgian scholars: M. Tarchnishvili studied the material of Bir el-Qutt, and a group of Georgian scholars led by Y. Gagoshidze took part in the excavations of Umm Leisun. The Georgian scientific community showed considerable interest in the results of both major excavations, and numerous

9 Kazaryan 2012–13, Vol. IV, pp. 190–206.

10 Antonaccio 2010, and the extensive bibliography therein.

11 See, for example, the detailed discussion on the lidded glazed bowl produced in southern Iraq, unique for the archaeology of the Holy Land, discovered in the Nestorian monastery at Jericho (Taxel 2014).

reports and studies were published in Georgia. The earliest finds, discovered during the excavations at the YMCA site in Jerusalem in the 1930s, are kept now in the storerooms of the Israel Antiquities Authority, and were examined by the author. In total, the pottery assemblages of all the excavated sites related to the Armenian and Georgian activity, including the recently excavated Musrara, "Theodosius and Cyriacus" and Umm Leisun complexes, mirror the contemporary monastic sites of Jerusalem and its surroundings. Apparently, a similar phenomenon was observed during the excavations of the monastery at Tel Masos, attributed to the Nestorian community.[12]

The absence of Georgian coins in Palestine can be explained by external circumstances: large-scale state minting started in Georgia relatively late, after the centralization of royal power in the Middle Ages.[13] During the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods, Georgia made use mainly of the Byzantine and Umayyad coins. Similarly in Armenia, which was subject to numerous partitions between the Sasanian and Byzantine empires, mainly the imperial coins were in circulation.[14]

Burial Customs

A few monastic sites associated with the Armenian and Georgian presence (the monastic complexes on the summit of the Mount of Olives, Musrara, Monastery "of Theodosius and Cyriacus", Bir el-Qutt and Umm Leisun) preserved numerous burials, usually located in hewn underground crypts that are integrated with the upper structures.[15] Most of the crypts contain multiple burials, sometimes with several deceased placed in one tomb. Of particular interest are several burial complexes to the north of Jerusalem associated with nearby monasteries, among them the Armenian pilgrim hospice in Musrara. Altogether, the well preserved burials of the 'Northern necropolis' contain hundreds of deceased, buried at the site during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods.[16] Another huge concentration of tombs of various types, dated to the same periods but not as well preserved, is located to the east of the city, on the

12 Fritz and Kempinski 1983, pp. 153–158.

13 Kapanadze 1955, p. 46 ff.; see also online catalogue: www.geonumismatics.tsu.ge.

14 Mousheghian 1997, p. 83 ff., and compare with reported numismatic finds representing the early fourth century coinage of the Axum Kingdom that were discovered in Jerusalem, at Ketef Hinnom (Barkay 2000, p. 90) and Musrara (Amit and Wolff 2000, p. 298).

15 For detailed discussion of the typology and geographical distribution of the Byzantine burials in Jerusalem, see Avni 1997.

16 Avni 1997, pp. 309–342; 2005.

western slope of the Mount of Olives, especially on its lower part, bordering Gethsemane.[17] Several large burial sites were discovered also to the west of the city. Tombs associated with members of the Armenian and Georgian communities were discovered in all three clusters around Jerusalem.

Although the number of excavated early monastic sites in Armenia and Georgia is extremely small, it can be argued that this type of burials remained foreign to the Caucasian region. The few burials discovered in the early Christian structures usually contain the tomb of the founding abbot, and in some cases, of his closest disciple. The ordinary members of the clergy and the flock, on the other hand, would be buried in the nearby graveyard.[18] It is therefore clear, that in the Palestinian sites associated with Caucasian Christian communities, the deceased were buried in accordance to the customs of the Holy Land.

In the discussion of the burials, the relevant anthropological data is notably missing. Unfortunately, due to external constraints, imposed on Israeli archaeology, most of the skeletal remains from the recent archaeological excavations could at best be examined superficially by a physical anthropologist, as in the case of Umm Leisun,[19] or not at all, as in the case of the Musrara complex, where as a result of violent protests from the ultra-orthodox neighbourhood resident Jewish community, the burials were excavated in haste, in hard winter conditions.[20]

To the best of our knowledge, only one relevant large scientific project in the Holy Land undertook a comprehensive anthropological and osteoarchaeological analysis of human skeletal material. The assemblage was that of the skeletal remains buried in the crypt of St. Stephen's Monastery in Jerusalem.[21] The research focused on over 15,000 bone fragments and 1,500 teeth, recovered from the crypt at St. Stephen's, and led to a true 'biocultural reconstruction' of the life of the deceased, and to most intriguing results regarding their origins.

17 Avni 1997, pp. 343–369.

18 Skhirtladze 2006.

19 Nagar 2015. But see also anthropological reports from other monastic sites, for example Zias and Mitchel 1996 for the Monastery of Martyrius, Nagar 2014 for Horvat Hani, etc.

20 The excavation files contain a series of publications in the local press regarding the conflict, as well as inner-tube correspondence on the subject.

21 Sheridan 2000; Ullinger 2002; Sheridan and Gregoricka 2013, 2015.

The results of the study, partly published, confirmed a significant component of non-locals at the monastery, some of Levantine origin, and some Europeans.[22]

The anthropological study of the burials located within the Armenian and Georgian sites could help answer numerous questions, both in the framework of the general research of monasticism and pilgrimage in the Holy Land (sex and age estimation, pathologies, diet etc.), and in relation to the more specific issue of Caucasian presence here. Taking into consideration the anthropological differences between the Armenians, Georgians and Albanians, such a study may help distinguish between various national groups, and shed light on the origins of the monasteries' residents and the pilgrims.

Interaction with the Church of Jerusalem: The Epigraphic Evidence

The Choice of Language

The study of the inscriptions attributed to the Armenian and Georgian communities, raises a number of questions regarding the use of language as a marker of self-identification, especially in the context of foreign linguistic environment.[23]

Prior to a discussion of specified finds and their linguistic character, we have to remember that the preserved epigraphic material may not be a true representation of the linguistic situation, in the specific case of Byzantine and Early Islamic Palestine. Most of the surviving epigraphic finds belong to the category of monumental lapidary and mosaic inscriptions, "made of during materials for an enduring public memory."[24] Overall, however, most of the inscriptions were made on perishable materials, and had suffered almost total extinction.

The Armenian and Georgian epigraphic corpus of the Holy Land includes the earliest examples of national scripts. The communities that created these inscriptions were monks and pilgrims who constantly refreshed their lines of communication with the homeland through contact with new arrivals. Therefore the epigraphic finds make it possible to follow different stages in the evolution of the lapidary scripts, but rarely allow to follow the linguistic markers that are characteristic of national groups that live long-term in foreign

22 Sheridan and Gregoricka 2015.

23 Geiger 2002; Dmitriev 2009.

24 Eck 2009, p. 17.

environment – linguistic borrowing, specific mistakes, use of the prevalent foreign alphabet for transcription of their language, etc.[25]

In Byzantine Palestine, the Greek language was first of all the official language of the administration. Judging from epigraphic evidence, its use in various spheres reached its zenith in the sixth–early seventh centuries, prior to the Arab invasion.[26] However, this is of little help when attempting to estimate the linguistic preferences of the Caucasian communities: most of the epigraphic material in Armenian, Georgian and Greek is within the same chronological framework. The general tendency of Arabization in the local Christian population of the Holy Land[27] is not visible in the Caucasian epigraphic evidence; although the Arabic language is soon to become important in the development of national literature, at least in Georgia.[28]

Additional difficulties are posed by the finds themselves, especially by the Greek segment of the evidence. Greek inscriptions can be identified as part of the Caucasian corpus only when the national affiliation is stated: "Ioanne the Armenian", "Thecla the Bessian", "Bishop of the Iberians", etc. It is therefore possible that some of the Greek inscriptions that mention people of Caucasian origin without national epithets were not attributed to the Caucasian corpus of Palestine. This is a crucial consideration in the case of pilgrim graffiti – short inscriptions, often containing only personal names. Only graffiti that were written in the national languages by Armenian and Georgian pilgrims are known, simply because when written in Greek they will remain unrecognized.[29] Particular difficulty is posed by Armenians who came to the Holy Land from Asia Minor and where bilingual or grecophone, and by Albanians, who could possibly use the Armenian. Up to date, no examples of Albanian inscriptions were discovered in Palestine – perhaps, written in Armenian, they remain unrecognized.

The following diagrams (Tables 6–9) illustrate the language preferences of the Armenian and Georgian communities, as reflected in the epigraphic finds. The Arabic numbers are showing the amount of the inscriptions, while the pie diagram illustrates their percentage share in total epigraphic data related to community.

25 Price and Naeh 2009; Di Segni 2009; but see Stone 1984.

26 Di Segni 2009.

27 Griffith 1997; Di Segni 2009.

28 For Georgian translations from Arabic, see Nanobashvili 2003; Pataridze 2013.

29 But see Stone 1984 for longer texts, providing additional linguistic tools for identification.

TABLE 6 *Language use: Armenian epigraphic finds from the Holy Land and the Sinai*

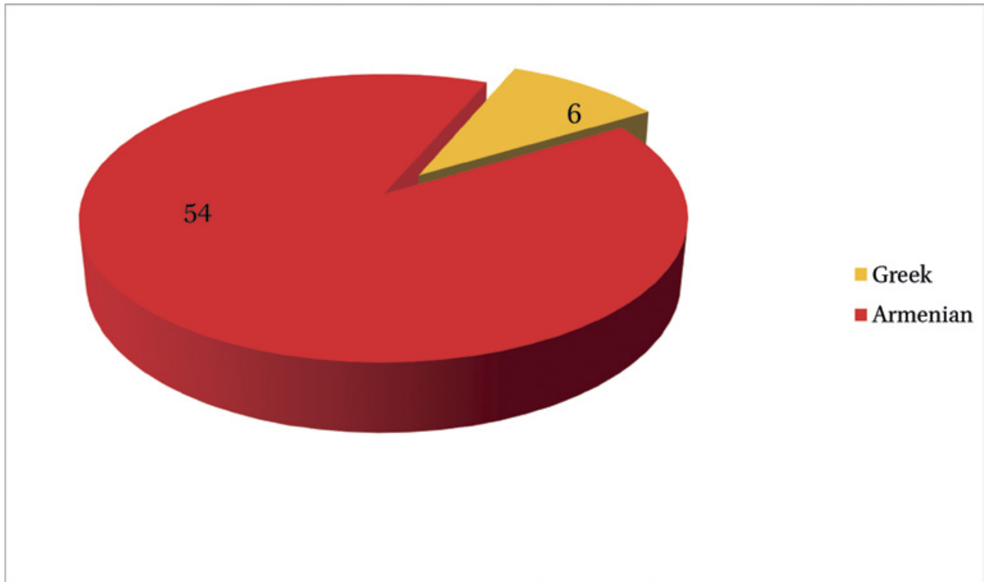


TABLE 7 *Language use: Armenian epigraphic finds arranged typologically*

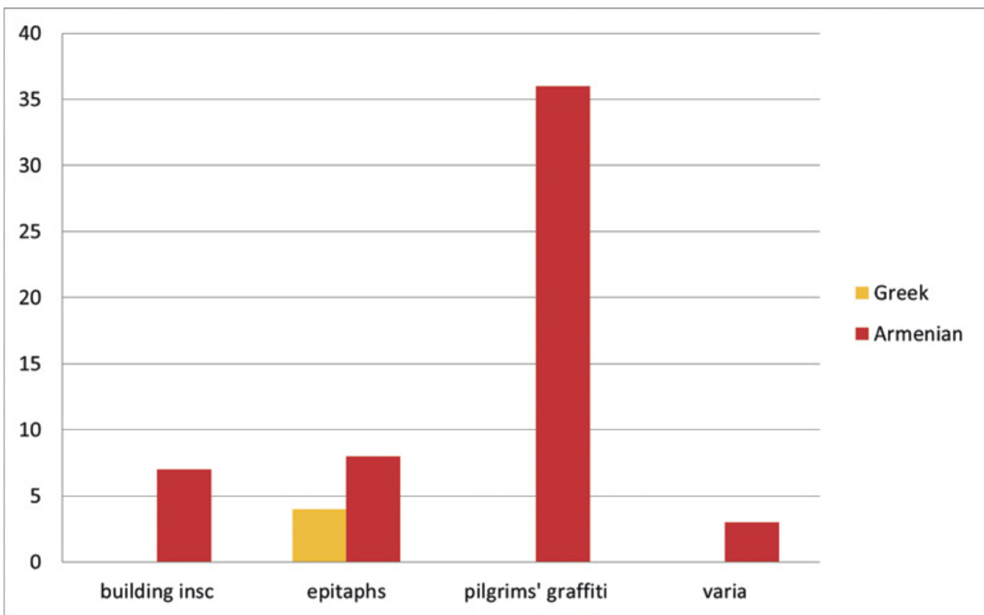


TABLE 8 *Language use: Georgian epigraphic finds from the Holy Land and the Sinai*

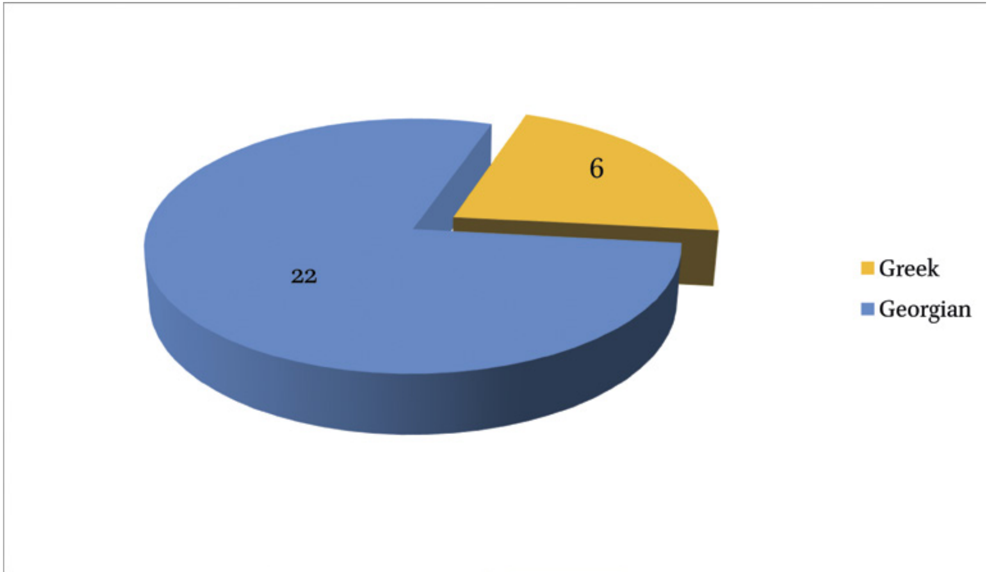
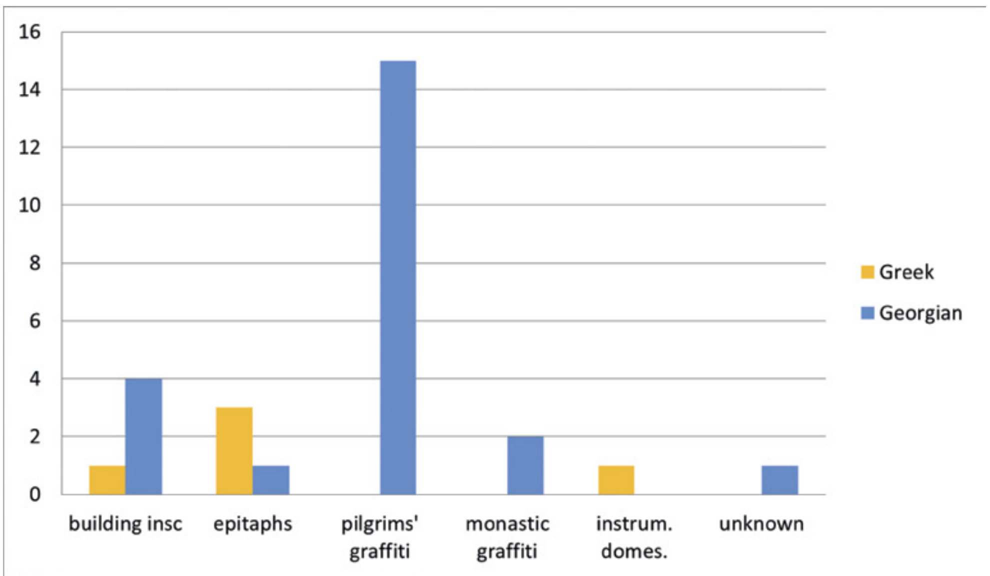


TABLE 9 *Language use: Georgian epigraphic finds arranged typologically*



At first glance, it seems that the Georgians used Greek more frequently. However, a closer look reveals a more complex situation, showing the deep affinity of the Caucasian communities to the Greek Church culture.

'Joint Enterprises'?

A number of architectural complexes preserve inscriptions written in two languages, which may indicate 'joint enterprises' of two different groups. All are large monastic complexes, attributed to the Armenian building activity: on the summit of the Mount of Olives, in Musrara and on Mount Scopus (for description of the finds, see above). Only one funerary inscription from the Mount of Olives can be identified without a doubt as bilingual: the words "Grave of …" are written in Armenian and in Greek. In all other cases, the Armenian inscriptions are next to the Greek ones, always presenting a different text, and not a translation. In fact, none of the architectural complexes associated with the Armenians, is free of Greek epigraphic evidence.

The most remarkable is the example of 'the Armenian Monastery' at Musrara, where the inscription, which was set in the mosaic to commemorate the renovations by hegumen Silvanus, is written in Greek, while the dedicatory inscription of the priest Ewstat, set in the mosaic in the refectory, is in Armenian. Both mosaic inscriptions belong to the same construction phase, in the middle of the seventh century. The archaeological evidence therefore contradicts a scenario of 'Armenian usurpation' of the monastery, similarly to the sequence suggested by Loukianoff for the monastery on the Mount of Olives,[30] or the passing of the Armenian monastery into Greek hands. One may argue, that the Greek inscriptions of Musrara were written by mainly grecophone Armenians; however, one of the Armenian gravestones in the crypt shows that at least one of the interred came to Jerusalem from the region of Sodk, in Eastern Armenia.[31]

The texts of the Greek inscriptions in the complexes discussed above, and the common Christian names mentioned in them, as Theodosia, Silvanus, Theodorus, Cyriacus, – make insistence on the Armenian origin (or any other specific national origin) of these individuals impossible.

Various guesses may be hazarded regarding the character of these 'joint enterprises': for example, they may be possibly a result of collaboration between Orthodox and Monophysites, or common monasteries of Melitenian and Eastern Armenians, etc.

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30 Loukianoff 1939.

31 But see the Greek and Syropalestinian inscriptions from the church at 'Anab el-Kabir: Bar-Asher 2012.

The Monastery of St. Theodore at Bir el-Qutt may possibly serve as a sole example of such a 'joint enterprise' led by Georgian clergy. The fragmentary inscription that was discovered in the eastern colonnade of the courtyard, contains two lines written in script other than Georgian – most probably, Greek.

Greek Epitaphs

The majority of the Greek 'Caucasian corpus' consists of epitaphs; only two inscriptions belong to other categories: the building inscription from Beit Safafa and the stamp from Mount Zion. Three Greek epitaphs mention Armenians: the Abbess Charate, Ioanne the Armenian and deacon Ioannes from Choziba Monastery; four others relate to Georgians: Bishop Samuel, Thecla the Bessian, the Deacons of Anastasis – all from Jerusalem, and Stephanos from the Choziba Monastery. Keeping in mind the existence of epitaphs in the Armenian and Georgian languages, the Greek funerary inscriptions require explanation. Most probably, they were first and foremost intended to be readable to others. In other words, it may be suggested that the choice of Greek was motivated by the special rank of the deceased themselves, or of the institutions they represented.

Charate and Thecla were hegumennesses in charge of the monasteries of Armenian and Bessian women; Samuel was the bishop of the Iberian Monastery, an institution which – regardless of its name – is apparently mentioned only in Greek epigraphic finds. The tomb of the Deacons of Anastasis was probably jointly owned with the brethren of the same Iberian Monastery. The burial inscriptions of the deacon Ioannes the Armenian and a monk Stephanos the Iberian were parts of multiethnic and Greek-speaking community of Choziba Monastery. However, the *stabularius* Ioanne does not fit into the category of people of high clergy rank. Possibly in this case, the man was a native of Greek-speaking Melitene, or, even more likely, spent his life in multiethnic environment, that spoke Greek.

Use of Common Greek Formulae

Some of the Armenian inscriptions represent an accurate translation of common Greek formulae, widely used in Byzantine Palestinian epigraphy. To this category belong one of the inscriptions from the Mount of Olives complex:

> For the prayers and salvation of T'ew, Abas and Murik

and two inscriptions from Musrara:

> For the memorial and salvation of all Armenians whose names the Lord knows;

> For the memory of Petros who made and Yohan who commissioned this cross.

None of these formulae is attested in the oldest surviving examples of the Armenian seventh century dedicatory inscriptions in Tekor, Vagharshapat, Mren and Talin,[32] but all are well known from the Greek parallels.[33] To the same category the unique Armenian abecedary inscription from Musrara should be added. No abecedary inscriptions were discovered in Armenia, or in the whole region of the Caucasus, and therefore the find should be regarded as representative of local, Palestinian tradition.

It seems that in the absence of any specific Caucasian characteristics in architecture, décor and material culture, language remains the main, if not the sole, identity marker for members of the Armenian and Georgian communities of the Holy Land. The phenomenon of Caucasian epigraphy is exceptional for the Hellenized Holy Land: no Ge'ez inscriptions were left by monks or by visitors to Byzantine Palestine, the Latin and Syriac inscriptions are rare.[34]

In the field of Armenian linguistics, the powerful influence of Greek language is a known phenomenon. Being mainly a result of translations, the influence of Greek is seen in numerous syntax borrowings, equivalents and semantic calques.[35] Summarizing the discussion on epigraphic evidence from the Holy Land, we can conclude that the choice of language was in all probability driven by the dynamic in the development of the communities. In the initial stage, the Armenians and Georgians settled in Palestinian monasteries in which Greek was the common language, or established their own monastic sites, which were open to all. The best example of such a monastery seems to be the institution founded by Peter the Iberian near the Tower of David. The establishment kept the name of its founder, but not his tongue: it is no accident that only Greek epigraphic material of the Byzantine period preserved its memory. With time, the communities grew and national sites were established, in which Armenian and Georgian (and probably, Albanian) became the main languages of prayer and communication. Most probably, this stage should be dated to the end of the Byzantine – beginning of the Early Islamic periods,

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32 Hovsepian 1913; see also Orbeli and Barkhudarian 1966–1973.

33 For Greek parallels from Jerusalem, see Di Segni 2012, CIIP I/2, nos. 793, 794, 819, 854, 869, 1084.

34 See Di Segni and Tsafrir 2012, pp. 449–454; for Latin mosaic see Jeffery and Albright 1955; for graffiti: Eck 2012, *CIIP* I/2, Nos. 787, 842; for Syriac inscriptions: Baramki and Stephan 1935; Griffith 1997; Puech 2001; Bar-Asher 2012.

35 Weitenberg 2000; Muradyan 2012.

the time to which the majority of Georgian and Armenian finds belong. The ties with the surrounding Greek environment were never broken; it was rather internalized, exerting significant influence not only on architecture or liturgy, but also in the field of linguistics.

With the slow decay of Christian life in the Holy Land, and the decrease of the pilgrimage movement, the Caucasian monasticism of Palestine went into severe decline. Small communities and isolated anchorites were dispersed over the country, probably relying on the mercy of the indigenous population. The inscriptions left by two Georgian monks in Horvat Burgin in Judean Shephelah illustrate this period most vividly.

Compatriots or Heretics? The Impact of Christological Controversies on the Relations Between the Communities

The impact of the theological controversies – the Chalcedonian schism of the fifth century and the Monothelite disputes of the seventh century – on the life of the Jerusalem Church has been thoroughly studied by historians.[36] The place of the Caucasian communities of the Holy Land in these struggles is not entirely clear. For a relatively short period in the fifth–sixth centuries, the three Caucasian churches were united in their rejection of the Chalcedon Council decisions, and even seem to have had some common church institutions; however later on the whole Caucasian region became a true battle-filed of endless theological schisms, reconciliations and disruptions. Most probably, the Caucasian monastic communities of the Holy Land would have found it difficult to follow the fluctuations of the church schisms in their homeland.

The information on certain quarrels between the Greek and Armenian religious authorities in the Holy Land is preserved by a number of sources (*Narratio de rebus Armeniae*, 74; *The Letter of John IV of Jerusalem to Catholicos Abas of Albania*).[37] However, the image of a downtrodden Armenian community oppressed by the Chalcedonians, presented by some of the sources (*The History of Ałuank*, 50) is completely refuted by the archaeological evidence of the prosperous Armenian institutions in Jerusalem. Moreover, the 'joint enterprises' that are reflected in sites with Greek inscriptions seems to indicate a certain degree of tolerance and cooperation.[38] It is extremely difficult to see

36 Perrone 1998, 2002; Grey 2001; Levy-Rubin 2001; Bitton-Ashkeloni 2004; Horn 2006.

37 Garitte 1952; Garsoian 1999, App. V.2 and V.1; see also Aroutunova-Fidanian 2004; Stopka 2016, pp. 77–100.

38 For discussion based on literary sources, see Stone 1986, pp. 99–104.

these sites as institutions of the Chalcedonian Armenians: if this were the case, we would have had to conclude that all the known Armenian institutions of Jerusalem were Chalcedonian, and that no proper representation of the Non-Chalcedonian Armenian Church ever existed in the Holy City.[39]

The material evidence testifying to relations between the Caucasian communities is very limited. The only clear indications of such connections are palimpsests, Armenian and Albanian, which were discovered in St. Catherine's Monastery. In both cases, the earlier texts were overlain by Georgian: clearly, the language of the new owners of the old parchments.

It is probably worth noting that in fact the history of the Albanian community of the Holy Land is only known through Armenian or Georgian media:

- the list of the Albanian monasteries was preserved in the Armenian text of Anastas *vardapet*, and in the chronicle of Daskhurantsi, both in Armenian.
- the institutions in the above mentioned lists appear alternatively as Albanian or Armenian monasteries – probably by then ownership had passed from one to the other.
- the only known Albanian literary fragments with extracts of Biblical translation were preserved under a layer of Georgian text.
- additional information regarding the Albanians, on our opinion, may be found in the Georgian epitaph of bishop Iohane from Umm Leisun.

Although fragmentary and sometimes circumstantial, this combined evidence may testify to the existence of close ties between the Caucasian communities in the Holy Land. Back home, such ties are well attested, both in historical documents and in epigraphic evidence. Regardless of the bitter dogmatic controversies, and later – even the strict church prohibitions, Armenian pilgrims visited holy sites in Georgia, among them the Church of the Holy Cross (*Jvari*) in Mtskheta, Gareji Laura, etc. These visits are well attested by numerous graffiti inscriptions; Georgian pilgrim graffiti are also attested in Armenia.[40] If it was possible in the homeland, even under threat of excommunication, direct interactions – on a private or even institutional level – seem even more feasible far away from home, in the Holy Land.

39 For a radical view on this issue, see Garsoïan 2002.

40 See, for example, Muradian 1977, 1985; Alexidze 1978; Skhirtladze 1985; Mirianashvili 2014.

The Communities in the Holy Land and Their Relations with the Homeland

The influence of the Jerusalem Church on the formation of Caucasian Christianity cannot be overestimated. The early historical evidence firmly fixes the tradition of the Jerusalemite origins of the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian Churches. According to this tradition, Armenia became the missionary field of the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, both of whom preached in the country and were martyred there.[41] Another narrative, originaly Syrian, adopted by Armenians, speeks of Abgar, King of Edessa,[42] and his correspondence with Christ, but describes him as a king of the whole Armenia (Movses Khorenatsi 2.31–33).[43] The Albanian tradition names as the illuminator of the country the disciple of the apostle Thaddeus, Eliseus, who was ordained to his mission by the apostle James in Jerusalem (*Daskhurantsi* I.6; II.4; III.16–17, 23–24).[44] According to the Georgian tradition, the first news of salvation reached the country even before the apostolic mission had started, through the local Jews Elioz and Longinos, who witnessed Christ's crucifixion in Jerusalem and returned home with his seamless garment (*Mokcevai Kartlisai* VII. 43).[45] Soon after these events, Christianity was preached in Georgia by the apostles Andrew and Simon the Zealot (*Kartlis Tskhovreba* I. 38).[46] Although legendary, these ancestral traditions contribute to the self-image of the Armenians and Georgians as the custodians of Christianity.

Hints of the early presence of Christians in Armenia can be found in the writings of the early Church Fathers. Tertullian, quoting *Acts* 2.9, mentions Armenia among the countries whose languages were spoken by the apostles during the Pentecostal glossolalia (*Adv. Jud.* 7).[47] Armenian Christians are also mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea in the end of the third–beginning of the fourth century (*Hist. Eccl.* IV.46.2; IX.8.2).[48]

The second wave of Christianization started at the very end of the third century, with the martyrdom of the 35 virgins – St. Hripsime and her companions

41 van Esbroeck 1984.

42 Desreumaux 1993.

43 van Esbroeck 1972; 1984.

44 Dowsett 1961.

45 Takaishvili 1890–1891; Chkhartishvili 1989; Thomson 1996; Lerner 2004a.

46 Qaukhchishvili 1955; Rapp 1998; Metreveli et al. 2008.

47 Dekkers 1954, p. 1337 f. In the canonic text of Acts, "Judea" is used instead of "Armenia"; however, the Armenian variant is known also from the text of Augustine of Hippo (*Contra ep. Manich.* 9).

48 McGiffert 1890; Maier 2007.

(*Agathangelos*, 2).[49] The small community had escaped from Rome to Armenia, and there was martyred by order of King Tiridates III, except for St. Nino who fled to Georgia (*Mokcevai Kartlisai* I. 25).[50] The story of the miraculous royal conversion by St. Gregory the Parthian (Part'ew), followed by the mass baptism in the rivers of Arax and Aratsani and the official Christianization of the country, is discussed solely in the early Armenian chronicle *Agathangelos*, a redacted composition dated to the second half of the fifth–turn of the sixth-seventh centuries,[51] and in the *Vita* of St. Gregory.[52] According to Movses Daskhurantsi (9), the Albanian King Urnayr and his court were also converted by St. Gregory sometime during the first third of the fourth century.[53] A number of Byzantine ecclesiastical chronicles of the fifth century discuss the conversion of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli. Among them there are some that mention St. Nino, or an anonymous Illuminatrice (Rufin, *Hist. Eccl.* X.10;[54] Socrates Scholasticus, *Hist. Eccl.* I.20;[55] Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* VII;[56] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Hist. Eccl.* I.24).[57] Movses Khorenatsi (II.86) discusses the conversion of the country by St. Noune.[58] The most detailed narrative of the conversion of Georgia is in the national historical composition *Mokcevai Kartlisai* ('Conversion of Kartli'), and in the *Vita* of St. Nino.[59] In certain stage, the embellished version of St. Nino's biography was developed, stating that she was raised in Jerusalem, and that the Jerusalem Patriarch Juvenal was her uncle (*Mokcevai Kartlisai* III. 32–33), – again, stressing the special connection of the Georgian Church with the Holy Land.[60]

The process of true Christianization became possible only after the invention of the national scripts for the Armenians, Georgians and Albanians. Judging by the material evidence, this may have been achieved by the educated monastic communities of the Holy Land.

49 Thomson 1976; see also Outtier and Thierry 1990.
50 Thomson 1976, pp. 470–474.
51 Thomson 1976; for Greek transl. Lafontaine 1973. See also van Esbroeck 1971; Ter-Davtian and Arevshatian 2004; Thomson 2010.
52 Marr 1906; Garitte 1946; Thomson 2010.
53 Trever 1959; Papuashvili 1970; Bais 2001.
54 Amidon 1997.
55 Hansen 1994.
56 Festugière 1983.
57 Parmentier et al. 2006.
58 Thomson 1978; Mahé and Mahé 1993.
59 Lerner 2004a; see also Peeters 1932; Rapp 2003.
60 van Esbroeck 1998.

The first steps of national literature were closely related to the translation of the Holy Scriptures and of the liturgical books that were adopted in Jerusalem.[61]

The main characteristic of the Jerusalem rite was the use of the 'Liturgy of St. James' as its main Eucharistic rite.[62] It seems that the Armenian Church started to follow the short version of the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great as early as in the fourth century. At the beginning of the fifth century it was translated to Armenian, and became known as the 'Liturgy of St. Gregory the Illuminator'.[63] In Armenia and Georgia,[64] the church followed the liturgical practice of Jerusalem from the fifth century.

Among the most important liturgical sources are Lectionaries, containing the scriptural readings for the whole ecclesiastical year with the addition of certain hymns according to the ancient rites of the Jerusalem Church, and those preserved only in the Armenian and Georgian translations. The early Armenian Lectionary[65] reflects an early stage in the development of the Jerusalem rites, from the fifth century. Renoux's analysis of the two oldest versions of the Armenian Lectionary (*Časots*), which date to the tenth–eleventh centuries, showed that the surviving texts reflect the ancient practice of the Jerusalem Church in two successive chronological periods: between the years 417–439 and 439–442. The early texts are characterized by certain archaic features: a relatively narrow circle of holidays and a small number of saints. Until the 12th century, the successive modifications were recorded at the end

61 The number of sources relating to the ancient rites of the Jerusalem church is surprisingly large: an essential part of all the pre-Islamic liturgical books are extant, mostly in translation. From the tenth century on, a gradual 'Constantinopolisation' of the liturgy begins, and as a result these books fell out of use. The Greek originals were often lost, and they survived mostly in Georgian and Armenian translations. See Frøyshov 2012, pp. 227–228. According to Taft, the churches in the periphery "tend to hold on to older liturgical practices long after they have been abandoned by the Mother Church" (2001, p. 214).

62 Frøyshov (2012) distinguishes between 'Hagiopolite' liturgy, i.e. of Jerusalem proper, and 'Palestinian', which embraces all the traditions of the region: liturgy practiced in the St. Sabas and St. Theodosius monasteries, and in the Anastasis cathedral in Jerusalem.

63 For the development of the Armenian liturgical rite, see Taft 1997. For evidences on early liturgy provided by *Book of Letters*, see Gasroïan 1999, p. 322; Terian 2008, and recent study by Ch. Renoux, presented on the 6th international conference of the Society of Oriental liturgy, 11–15 September 2016 at Etchmiadzin. I am grateful to A. Terian for bringing this study to my attention.

64 For a complete list of texts of Euchologia in the Georgian versions see Xevsuriani 2006, pp. 236–237; Xevsuriani et al. 2007.

65 Renoux 1969.

of the ancient text, in order not to touch the Jerusalemite core of the composition. At that stages Armenian lectionaries expanded considerably, including a large cycle of national feasts and saints, and reflect clear influence of Constantinopolitan tradition.[66]

The Georgian Lectionary reflects a later period, usually considered to be the fifth–eighth centuries; according to Frøyshov, the date can be narrowed to the course of the sixth century.[67] The calendar cites fixed feasts and commemorative days for almost every day of the year: the dominical feasts, commemorative feasts for the Old and New Testament saints, feasts commemorating the occasion of transfer of relics, the consecration of the major churches in the Holy Land, and few specifically Georgian commemorative days. A distinctive characteristic of this Lectionary is the place given to the hymns composed by Christian authors, sometimes at the expense of the Psalms. Another, unique Georgian calendar, compiled by the Sabaite, later Sinaitic, monk Ioane-Zosime in the 940s–960s should also be mentioned. Intending to create the most complete ecclesiastical calendar, the author added to the Jerusalem Lectionary the commemorative days from three other calendars: the Sabaitic, Jerusalemite and Constantinopolitan.[68]

The fragmentary preserved unique Albanian Lectionary (see above), according to its content, should be dated to the earliest stage in the development of Lectionaries – back in the sixth century, or even earlier.[69] The codicological and paleographic development of this only survived example of the Albanian liturgical tradition is extremely advanced, and shows a well-developed system of manuscript writing: liturgical comments written in small letters in the margins, wide use of abbreviations etc.[70] The use of foreign words in the text – Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian – makes it difficult to establish the original language from which the Albanian Bible and the Lectionary could have been translated. Gippert and Schulze tend towards an Armenian original,[71] while according to Alexidze and Renoux, the Albanian Lectionary should be regarded as an independent composition, created by the Albanian community in Palestine: it is closely associated with the practice of the Jerusalem church, and at the same time contains a number of readings and psalms, which do not

66 Jeltov and Nikitin 2001, p. 357.

67 Kekelidze 1912; Tarchnishvili 1959. For a complete description of the Georgian Lectionary see Xevsuriani 2006 and Frøyshov 2012, incl. bibliography.

68 Garitte 1958.

69 Renoux dates the compilation between 439 and 614: 2012, pp. 250–256.

70 Alexidze 2007, pp. 162–165; Gippert and Schulze 2007.

71 Gippert and Schulze 2007, p. 209.

appear in other ancient lectionaries, whether Armenian, Georgian, Greek or Syrian.[72]

The Jerusalem Liturgy and the 'New Jerusalems'

Due to the stationary character of the Jerusalem liturgy, closely connected as it was to the particular sites of the Holy City, its assimilation on Caucasian soil had a most remarkable impact on the creation of the sacred landscape, causing the appearance of the so-called 'New Jerusalems'.[73]

In the last two decades, the creation of new Christian landscapes imitating the image of the celestial Jerusalem – and often copying the terrestrial one – became a subject of extensive research.[74] In the Caucasus, the most striking manifestation of 'New Jerusalem' was preserved in Georgia. The first sacred sites of the newly Christianized Georgian kingdom of Kartli copied the Palestinian sanctuaries and carried corresponding names: Calvary, the Tomb of Christ, Gethsemane, Zion, Bethlehem, Tabor, and the Sinai.

In Georgia, the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion of Kartli necessitated the creation of a new sacred space. The old pagan temenoi of the Armazi fortress near the capital city of Mtskheta, with its temples and idols, were miraculously destroyed (*Mokcevai Kartlisai* VI. 39) and replaced by the new Christianized landscape. The process of its creation took centuries. According to Kekelidze, the goal of recreating the layout of the holy places of Jerusalem was to emphasize the Jerusalemite origins of the Georgian Church, and was stimulated mainly by liturgical needs: all the major sites, around which the Jerusalem liturgy was constructed, were recreated in Mtskheta and in its liturgy.[75]

According to the tradition of Georgian church, prior to the mass baptism of the royal family and the people of Georgia, a big wooden cross was erected above the capital city of Mtskheta, on a high hill to its east. The place for the cross was shown in a revelation to King Mirian III, who had already accepted the new Christian faith, but was not yet baptized (*Mokcevai Kartlisai* XIV. 54). This visual symbol of Christian triumph can be associated with the erection of the True Cross on the top of Calvary hill in Jerusalem, and indeed it received the same name, and became its image. In the seventh century a stone church, the Jvari ('The Cross'), was erected at the very place where the wooden cross

72 Alexidze 2007, p. 166; Renoux 2012.

73 Karaulashvili 2016.

74 Biddle 1999; Pierotti et al. 2005; Lidov 2009; Beliaev 2013; Kühnel, Noga-Banai and Vorholt 2014; Bartal and Vorholt 2015.

75 Kekelidze 1957, pp. 362–363; Chkhartishvili 2006; Mgaloblishvili 2014.

had stood. In the center of the cross-shaped church, on a high pedestal, a new cross carved of stone was installed, representing Golgotha.[76] The remains of the pedestal can still be seen in the church.

The first church of Georgia in its capital city Mtskheta, was erected right in the center of the city, in the royal garden. It was built of stone, with cedar roof and pillars.[77] Miraculously, one of the cedar pillars remained suspended in the air (*Mokcevai Kartlisai* x. 48–49), giving the name to the newly erected edifice: *Svetitskhoveli* ('Life-Giving Pillar'). This place of special purity and devotion was to be the image of the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple, the place of God's presence or – in its Christian incarnation – the Place of the Resurrection. Later on, probably during the reign of King Vakhtang Gorgasali (446–502), the church received additional names: 'Mother of All Churches', and *Sioni*, after the basilica on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.[78]

According to the chronicle, another church was erected in Mtskheta by King Mirian above the hermitage of St. Nino near the royal garden, (*Mokcevai Kartlisai* xv. 58). The bramble bush is a clear reminiscence to the Burning Bush of Sinai, the place were Moses experienced a revelation, and a symbol of Theophany in Christian tradition.

Three major sanctuaries of Mtskheta – "the triangle of holiness" became the sacred center of the Christian Kartli, and its terrestrial "New Jerusalem". The early symbols found in Mtskheta were later repeated in ecclesiastical architecture all over Georgia. Accordingly, numerous churches were constructed with big stone crosses as the center of the architectural composition; at least twenty-six churches called *Sioni* appeared in different parts of the country; and in memory of the royal garden of Mtskheta, gardens were established around the church edifices. In this way, the pattern of Jerusalem, celestial and terrestrial, was reproduced in hundreds of copies throughout the territory of the Georgian kingdom.

The Armenian first attempts to create the "New Jerusalem",[79] perhaps not that obvious as in the Georgian case, but still significant, is identifyiable in the sources describing the building projects of the Catholicos Sahak the Great (354–439).[80]

Evidence can also be obtained through the architectural analysis, indicating attempts to embody the 'New Jerusalem' in ecclesiastical architecture.

76 Chubinashvili 1948; Amiranishvili 1963, pp. 103–108.

77 Probably, the reminiscence of Solomon's Temple: see Stone 2015b.

78 Gambashidze 2006, pp. 37–146; Mgaloblishvili and Gagoshidze 1998, pp. 42–43.

79 For biblical and Jerusalemite self-consciousness of the Armenians, see Stone 2015a.

80 For discussion, see Garibian de Vartavan 2009; Garibian 2014.

The influence of the compositional concepts of the Palestinian church architectural on the Caucasian ecclesiastical architecture has already been discussed. This tendency, according to Kazaryan, can be followed in the construction projects of the Catholicos Komitas Akhtsetsi (613–628), the builder of St. Hripsime church (618) and the renewed Etchmiadzin cathedral (620).[81] It seems that the dome-structure of the two churches – an umbrella-shaped hipped roof – may imitate the aedicule over the Tomb of Christ, and at the same time symbolize the celestial Jerusalem. According to researchers, the construction of the churches should be regarded as a reaction to the tragic events of the Holy Land – the sack of Jerusalem by the Sassanids and the capture of the Holy Cross, the principal relic of the Christian world. The church of Zvartnotz is another example, clearly showing the transfer of Palestinian architectural forms to the Armenian landscape. Erected in 643–650 by the Catholicos Nerses the Builder (641–661), the church copied, with some local accents, the Rothonda of Anastasis. Certain allusions to Celestial Jerusalem can also be followed in the reliefs decorating the cathedral of Zvartnotz.[82] Here again, the project can be regarded as a reaction to the Arab invasion of the Holy Land, and an Armenian attempt to create the 'New Jerusalem' close by. This theory may seem convincing, when the long struggle of the Georgians and Armenians for their faith and their self-image as protectors of Christianity is considered.

Models of the Holy Sepulchre

Even more striking is the less-studied group of the Caucasian architectural models of the aedicule of the Tomb of Christ, often serving as pedestals for the cross stelae, mainly known from Georgia.[83] Similar to the well-known western models, the very first Caucasian examples of this type were produced by eye-witnesses, or copied from the eulogiae brought from Palestine, and therefore may have a particular significance for reconstruction of the original shrine.[84] Even the schematic compositions preserve some elements of the aedicule, recognizable from the various objects of pilgrim art: the podium, the winding columns, and even the stylized presentation of the shell decoration. Noteworthy, the lower registers of the cross stelae are often decorated with reliefs representing the main scenes of the Christological cycle: Annunciation,

81 Kazaryan 2009.

82 Hakobian 2009.

83 Machabeli 2008a; Djavakhishvili 2014; Hakobian 2010; Kakhiani et al. 2012.

84 See Grabar 1958; Barag 1970–71; Weitzmann 1974; Rahmani 1993; Biddle 1999, pp. 15–28, not including the Caucasian examples.

Nativity, Baptism, Entry to Jerusalem, Crucifixion, etc., subjects that are typical for Palestinian ampullae.[85]

The Book Traffic

The connection between the Holy Land monastic communities and the Caucasian homeland is by now well established, at least in the Georgian case. Given the size of the Georgian community in the Holy Land, their consumption of manuscripts would have been relatively modest. Numerous copies of a limited number of works indicate therefore an intention of distributing these manuscripts. Apparently, the manuscripts of Palestinian and Sinaitic scriptoria were translated and copied specifically for distribution among the monasteries and churches in Georgia, and were sent there with pilgrims returning back home. The work of the Georgian monks in the Holy Land gains in importance when viewed in the context of the difficulties experienced by the Church in Georgia: the Arab invasions of the eighth–ninth centuries limited the scientific and scribal work of the Georgian monasteries for almost two hundred years. Various manuscripts – liturgical, hymnographic and hagiographic compositions – were probably distributed all over the country, but survived only in the isolated mountainous regions, especially in Svaneti, which never surrendered to the foreign occupation and turned into a veritable Christian treasury. In the hour of danger, during the endless invasions, when the churches and monasteries were destroyed by the invaders, the population of the plains transferred the most precious relics to the mountains, to save them from destruction.

Eulogiae and Liturgical Objects

Machabeli proposed that the first Palestinian liturgical objects – icons, crosses, censers and other paraphernalia – may have been brought to Georgia by the 'Syrian Fathers', the founders of monastic life in the country. Apart from their practical function, with time the liturgical objects came to be regarded as precious relicts from the Holy Land and became a model for local masters.[86] Whatever the exact circumstances, those responsible for the transfer of the liturgical objects could be, indeed, the monks, whose mobility is well attested by historical sources that discuss the pilgrimages.

A unique text that was discovered in the collection of St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai, lists the liturgical objects and manuscripts of the Zedazeni and Gareji monasteries in Georgia, testifying to traffic in liturgical goods between Georgia and the Holy Land.[87] This document, dated to the first

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85 Machabeli 2008b, pp. 122–123.

86 Machabeli 2008b, p. 121.

87 Aleksidze 2001, see also Kldiashvili 2001.

half of the tenth century, describes events that took place much earlier, most probably in the seventh–eighth centuries.

The study of the Palestinian 'objects on the move' is still in its beginning. Up to date, the only pilgrimage souvenir known from Georgia is of Syrian origin. It is a silver pilgrim token representing St. Symeon Stylite the Younger, dated to the tenth–eleventh centuries, which was discovered during the excavations in the Gareji monastery complex in Georgia.[88]

However, a large group of bronze decorated censers of Syro-Palestinian origin dated to the sixth –seventh centuries, was preserved in the Svaneti region, and is kept today in the National Museum of Georgia in Tbilisi and its branch in Mestia.[89] The original location of the censers is unknown: like the ancient manuscripts, they were probably removed to Svaneti from the central churches of the country and were preserved by the Svans as 'Christian treasures'. It is also not clear, whether the precious objects reached Georgia directly, or passed through intermediaries, as gifts.[90]

Presumably, similar objects that originated in our region may be discovered in archaeological excavations of sites of important Christian centers in Georgia, and possibly Armenia, which date to the period under discussion. It seems that a further in-depth study of the subject may bring to light numerous examples of Palestinian objects that were transferred by the devoted pilgrims, which will contribute to our understanding of the connection between the Caucasian region and the Holy Land.

"On the Map": Geographic Patterns of the Caucasian Communities

The material and literary evidence from the Holy Land related to the Caucasian Christian communities for the whole period under discussion, from the fifth to the eleventh centuries, can be summarized with the help of maps. Three custom-made maps (Maps 1–3) illustrate the data available for each of the communities: Armenian, Georgian and Albanian. The maps show the architectural remains, isolated inscriptions, historical accounts, and manuscripts' references; Map 4 integrates the evidence for the three Caucasian groups. Since the greater part of our evidence comes from Jerusalem and its vicinity, more detailed maps magnify the area of Judea (Maps 5–7) and Jerusalem itself (Maps 8–10). For these areas too, maps that present the individual communities

88 Skhirtladze 1995.

89 Machabeli 1982; 2008.

90 Vinogradov, in press, for Byzantine gifts to Georgian nobles.

(Maps 5, 6, 8, 10) are followed by combined maps, which facilitate comparison between various tendencies (Maps 7 and 10).[91]

Permanent monastic presence of Armenians, Georgians and Albanians was mainly restricted to the area of Jerusalem and its vicinity. The material evidence for pilgrimage spreads over much larger areas, including the Galilee in the north and the Sinai in the south. In many cases, the historical references find no support in archaeology. The most striking example is the most total absence of Armenian and Georgian finds in the monasteries of the Judean Desert, although their presence there is well attested by numerous literary sources and manuscripts. The only exceptional are the inscriptions, mentioning Armenian and Georgian monks discovered in the burial caves of the Choziba Monastery in Wadi Qilt – interestingly, not mentioned in the sources as the site were settled the monks of Armenian and Georgian origins.

When compared with settlement patterns of the general Christian population in the Holy Land in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods,[92] the evidence for Caucasian settlement seems highly fragmented and incomplete. Their absence in Transjordan, with its attested growth of Christian population during the Early Islamic period[93] is also noteworthy, although can be explained by insufficient survey work in the region. Obviously, one way of explaining this phenomenon is as random preservation, and even more random discovery of the finds, but it is also the result of insufficient awareness of the wider archaeological community of Caucasian problematics.

The current geographic distribution pattern definitely cannot be considered final. What is pertinent for archaeological research *in toto*, is definitely so for the still young field of Caucasian study: new archaeological finds constantly add entirely new areas to the Georgian or Armenian map of the Holy Land. For instance, the anchorites' graffiti from Hurvat Burgin hermitage and the still undeciphered inscription from Ascalon area have added two regions to the Georgian map that are not referred to by historical sources – the Judean Shephelah and the Mediterranean coast.[94] The discovery of the graffito in

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91 Since the Albanian community left no material remains, apart from manuscripts, it will be excluded from the Jerusalem region maps.

92 See Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green 1994, Map 5. The bibliography for the different regions of the Holy Land is extensive. To mention only the main publications: various chapters in Tsafrir 1993; Figueras 1995; Bagatti 1971, 1979, 1983; Hirschfeld 1992; Patrich 1995; Aviam 2004; Magen and Kagan 2012, and the forthcoming updated *Digital Corpus of Early Christian Churches and Monasteries in the Holy Land* by J. Partich.

93 Levy-Rubin 2011.

94 Recently, Byzantine mosaic with a Greek dedicational inscription dated according to a Georgian era was discovered in Ashdod-Yam on the Mediterranean coast, by the excavators of Tel-Aviv University and the IAA. According to the reading of

Sobata (Shivta) became the first Armenian evidence from the Negev region, supplying "a missing link" in the pilgrimage route between the sites of Judea and the Sinai Peninsula. It is possible that the foreseen excavation campaigns in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Mount Tabor will help to fill the gaps in material evidence in some of the major sites, and unexpected discoveries, mainly from random salvage excavations, will add more dots on the map.

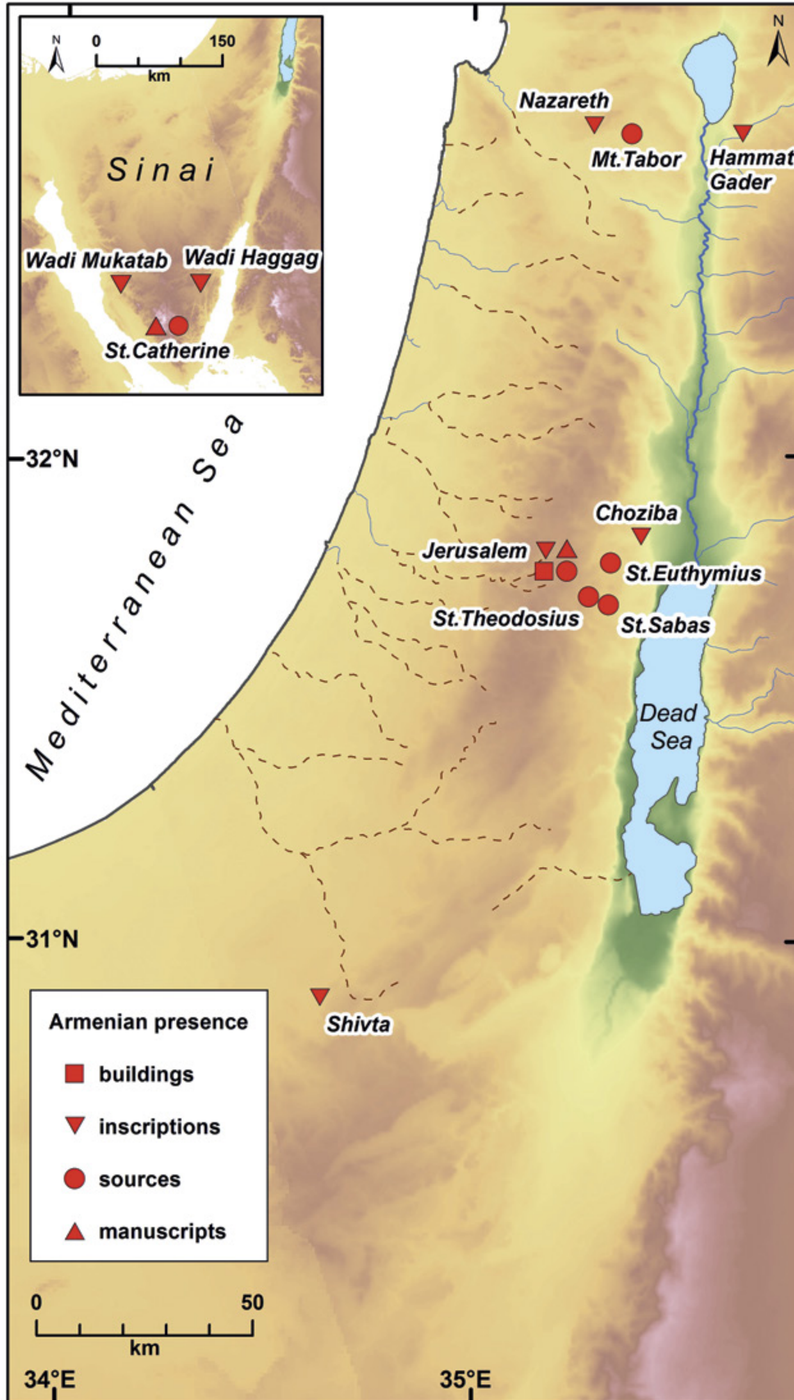
The extensive, although non-comprehensive evidence from the Jerusalem region (Maps 8–10) elicits certain geographic patterns.

Remarkably, the picture is dramatically different from the pattern so far widely accepted by the national Armenian and Georgian research schools: that of a central national church institution, responsible for a number of *metochia* and the whole community. It seems that the central national church became relevant for the Caucasian Christians of Jerusalem only from the mid-eleventh century, with the establishment of the Armenian Monastery of Sts. James on Mount Zion, and the Georgian Monastery of the Cross to the west of the ancient city. During the medieval period, these two institutions evolved into the most important ecclesiastical and cultural centers of the Armenian and Georgian nations. However, during the formative period, attested by the evidence in the Holy Land, the picture was different, showing the Caucasian Christians sharing their sites with other communities, and building their own establishments in the periphery. Archaeological evidence shows no central or core site, responsible for other, minor institutions.

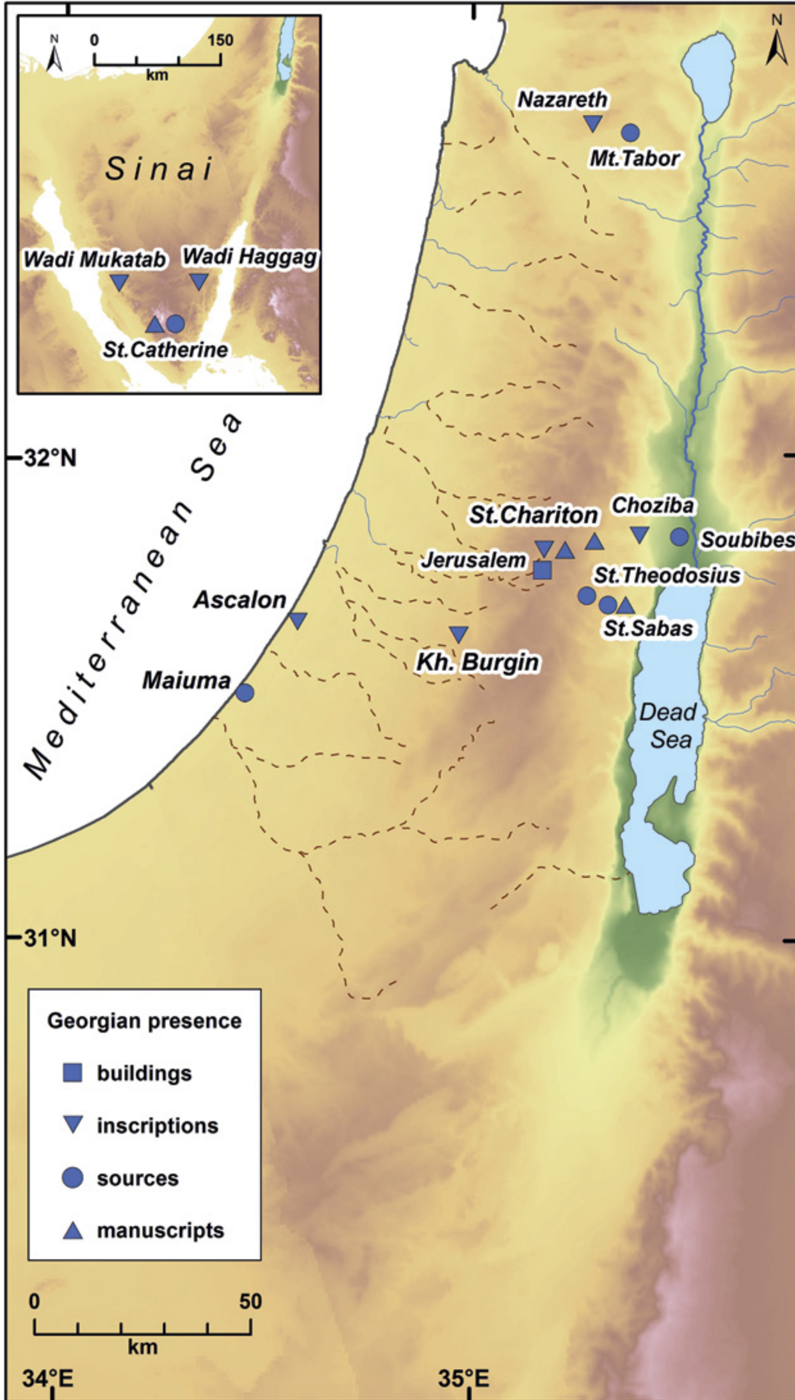
The Armenians settled not in the intramural quarters of the city, but on its 'prestigious periphery': on the Mount of Olives (and possibly, Mount Scopus) ridge in the east, and in the large extramural monastic quarter in the north. Both areas are known to be the largest concentrations of pilgrim hospices: probably, the choice of this location can be connected to the large stream of Armenian pilgrims, travelling in big groups, which is attested by historical sources. Georgian monasteries are located in the rural periphery, in areas suitable for agricultural work. The precise location of the Albanian monasteries in Jerusalem is archaeologically unknown; therefore the information given solely by the sources cannot at the moment be considered entirely reliable.

The funerary geography should be considered separately (Map 11). In addition to the burials inside the national monasteries (Mount of Olives and Musrara), tombstones that mention members of the Caucasian communities were discovered in areas known to be large burial grounds of Byzantine Jerusalem: in the eastern necropolis – on the slopes of the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane area, and in the western one – Aceldama and YMCA.

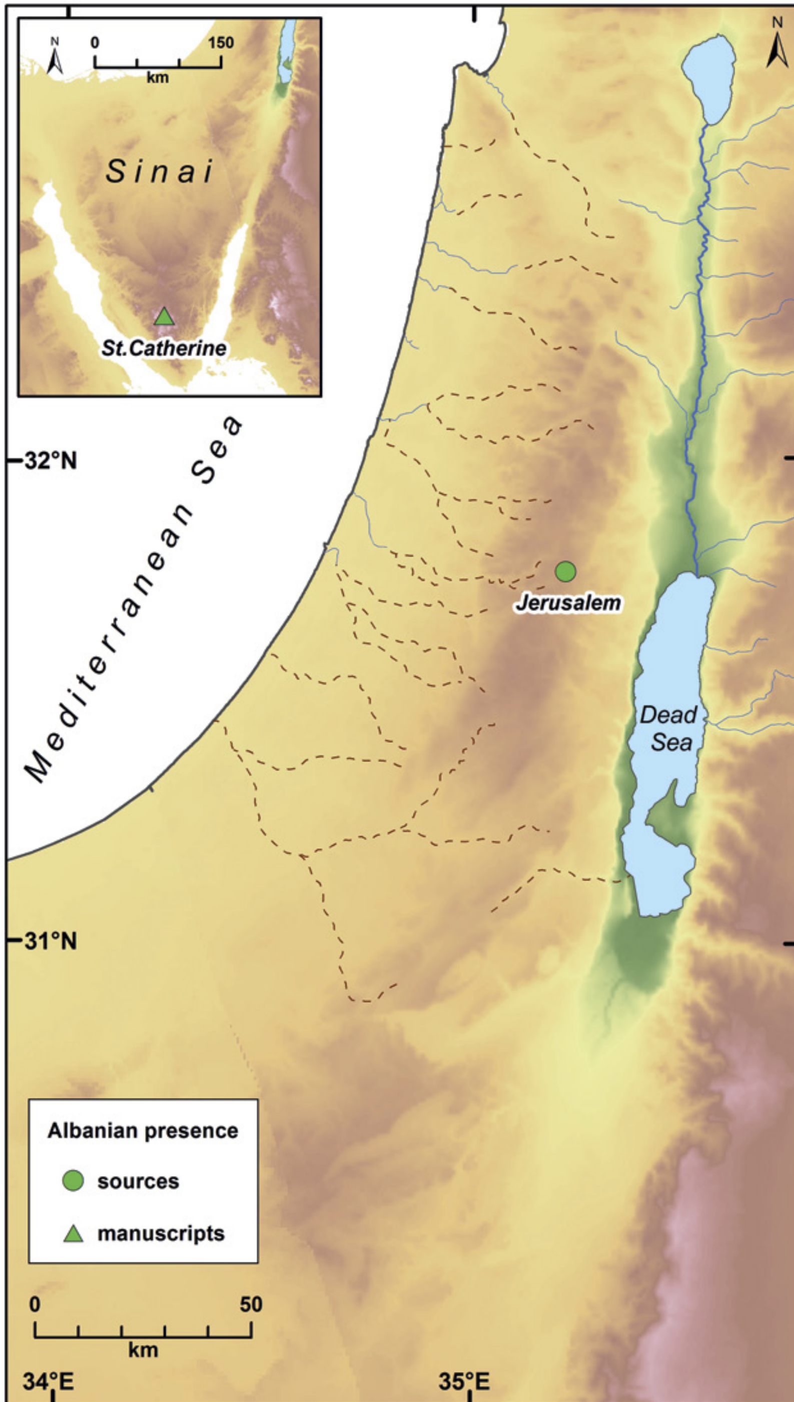
L. Di Segni, the inscription is dated to the year 539: http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Stunning-1500-year-old-Georgian-church-mosaic-discovered-in-Israeli-Port-City-515032.



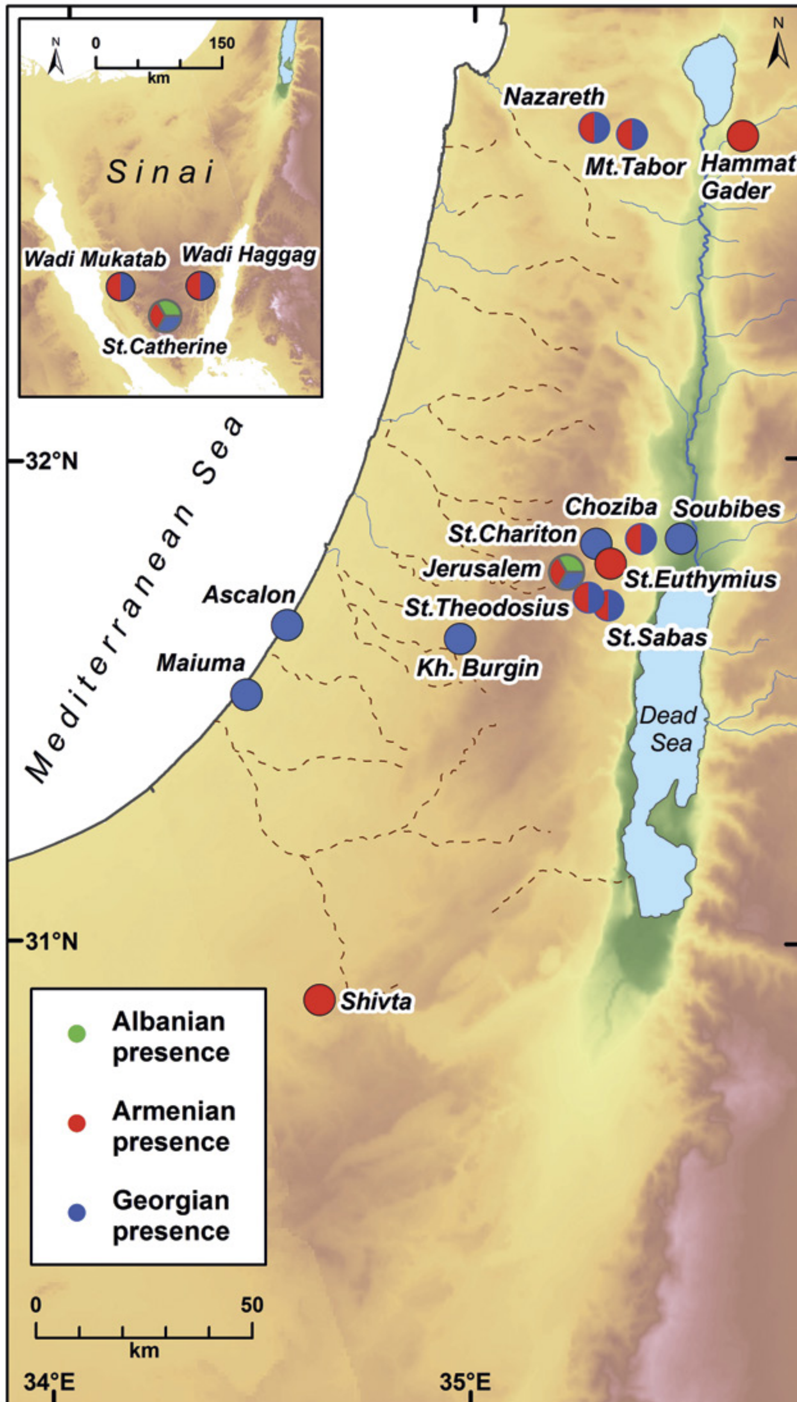
MAP 1 *Armenian presence in the Holy Land (5th–11th cc.).*



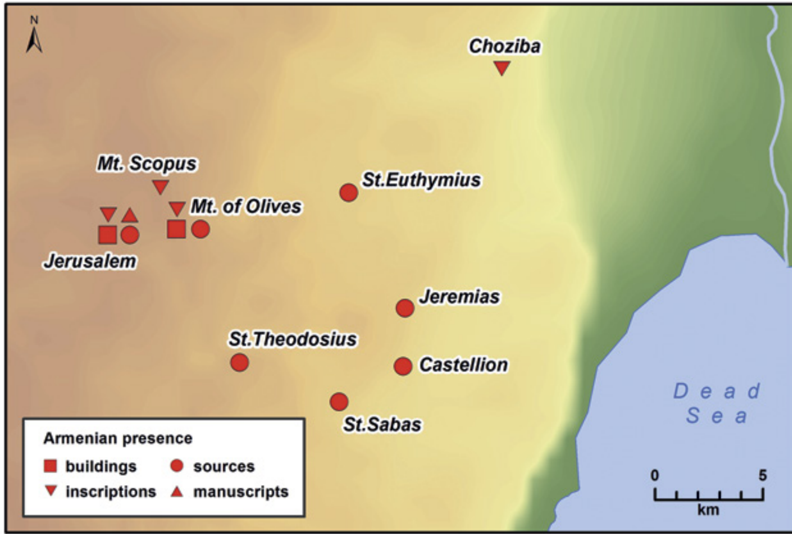
MAP 2 *Georgian presence in the Holy Land (5th–11th cc.).*



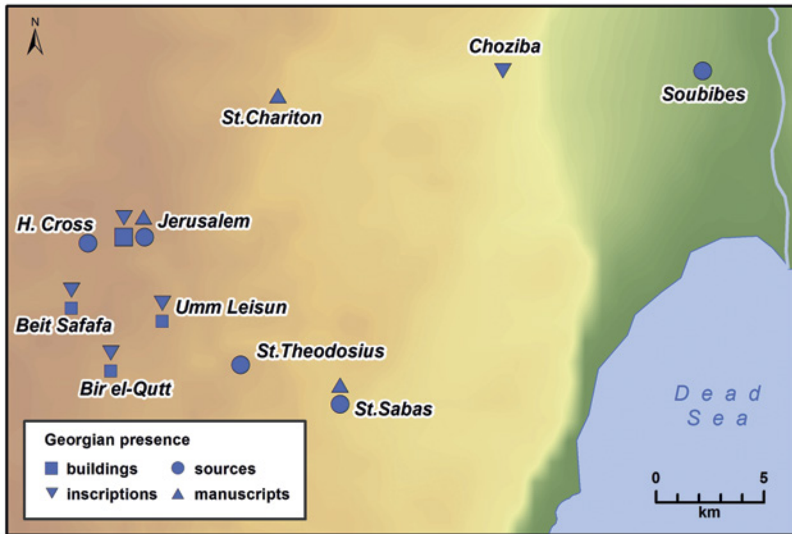
MAP 3 *Albanian presence in the Holy Land (5th–11th cc.).*



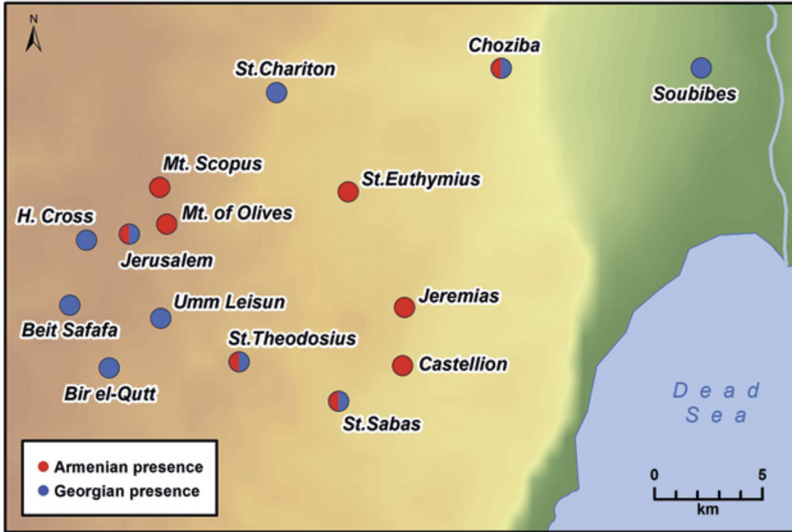
MAP 4 *Armenian, Georgian and Albanian presence in the Holy Land (5th–11th cc.).*



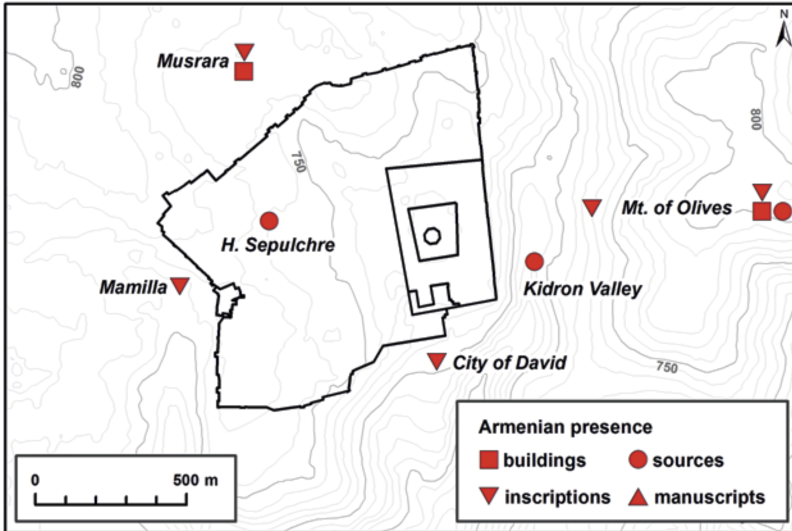
MAP 5 *Armenian presence in the vicinity of Jerusalem and Judean Desert (5th–11th cc.).*



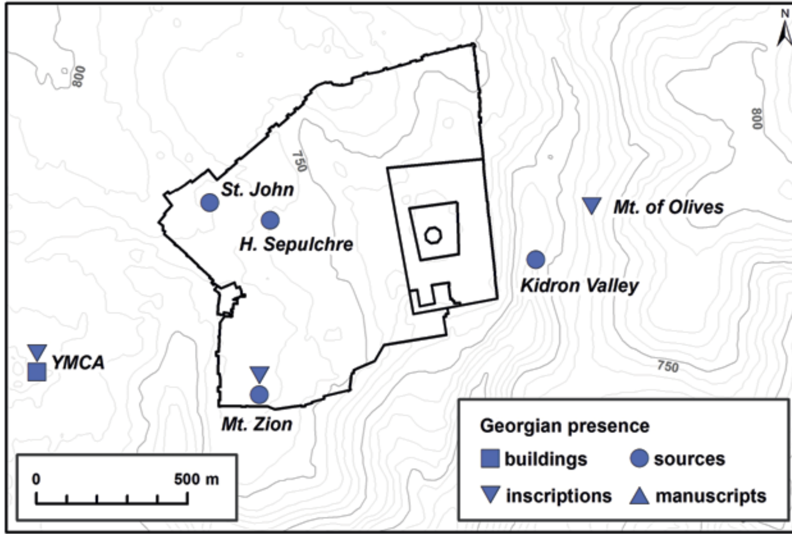
MAP 6 *Georgian presence in the vicinity of Jerusalem and Judean Desert (5th–11th cc.).*



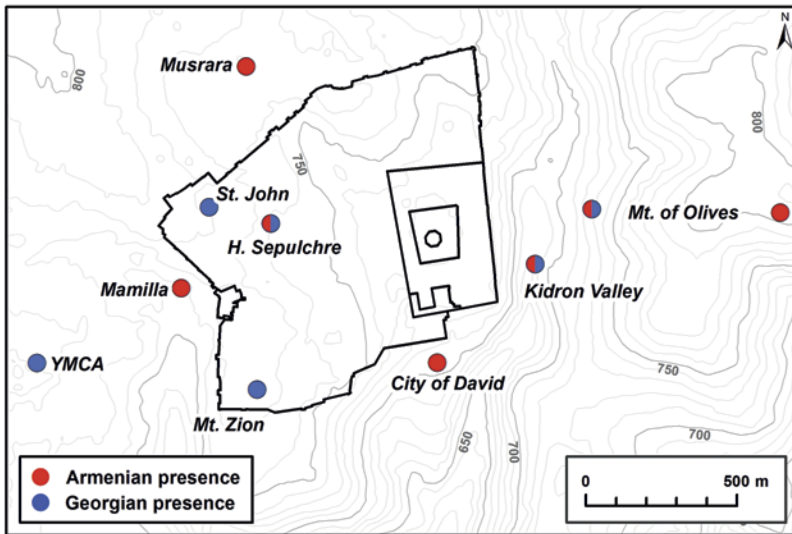
MAP 7 *Armenian and Georgian presence in the vicinity of Jerusalem and Judean Desert (5th–11th cc.).*



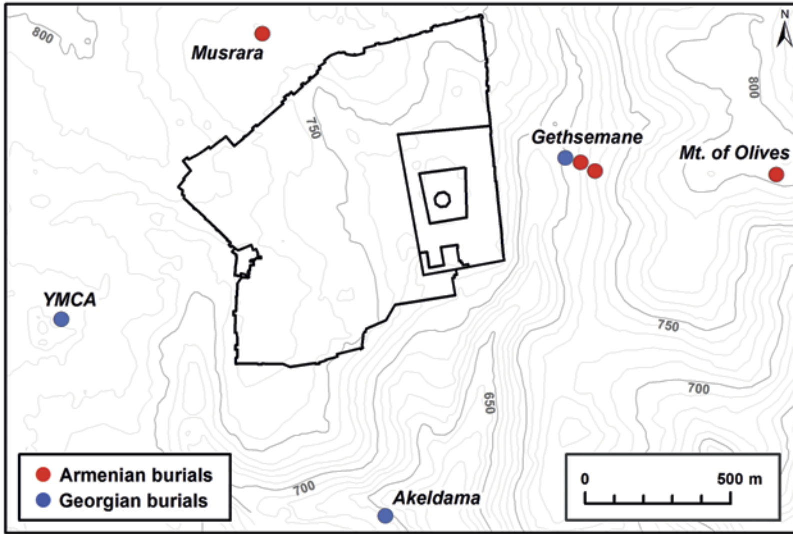
MAP 8 *Armenian presence in the city of Jerusalem (5th–11th cc.).*



MAP 9 *Georgian presence in the city of Jerusalem (5th–11th cc.).*



MAP 10 *Armenian and Georgian presence in the city Jerusalem (5th–11th cc.).*



MAP 11 *Armenian and Georgian burials in Jerusalem region (Byzantine and Early Islamic periods).*

Summary

The principal goal of the present research was to establish the place of each of the Caucasian communities in ancient Palestine, to understand the interrelations between them in the Holy Land, and the influence they had on the national churches of the Caucasus. In order to achieve this, the complete corpus of known literary and material evidence related to the activities of the Caucasian Christian communities of the Holy Land during the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods was assembled and analyzed; certain long-known monastic complexes and particular finds were reviewed and reconsidered; a number of new identifications were proposed for Georgian and Armenian sites, and association of material remains with the Albanian community was suggested for the first time.

A large corpus of archaeological material was introduced here for the first time. Study of the mandatory archives that are held by the Israel Antiquities Authority proved to be of great importance, contributing to a new understanding of the monastic complex at the YMCA site in Jerusalem. The meticulous study of the rich documentary material, mostly unpublished, from the state archives of the Russian Federation – diplomatic correspondence, private diaries, archaeological expedition journals, and photographic collection – made it possible to reconstruct the process of the 19th-century discovery of the large monastic complex on the summit of the Mount of Olives, at least to a certain extent. The combination of the archival research and the survey of the large plots in the possession of the Russian Orthodox Church – an area usually closed to scholars – made it possible to incorporate the finds into the remodeled archaeological context, and put an end to the inconsistencies regarding the time, place and circumstances of their discovery.

This study brought to light supplementary evidence to add to the corpus of Armenian epigraphic finds, including three pilgrim graffiti – two from the new archaeological excavations in Jerusalem, and an additional one observed on the church wall in Sobata, two freshly discovered funerary inscriptions from Jerusalem, and the exclusion of one forged artefact – stone bowl with Greek and Armenian inscriptions. New additions to the Georgian corpus include the graffiti left by the hermits in the Shephelah and the inscription from Ascalon, still undecipherable. However, it would be too early to declare the Caucasian corpus complete: new archaeological and epigraphic data continue to grow; often adding to the map not only isolated finds, but rather whole new regions. Even more supplementary data is to be expected with the growing awareness of the wider archaeological community to the Caucasian problematics.

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The next stage of research was the comprehensive analysis of the accumulated data, the detection, characterization and comparison of the tendencies in the development of the Caucasian communities of the Holy Land. The Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians may serve as a case study of national Christian communities in multiethnic Byzantine Palestine, being almost the only group, archaeologically distinguishable from the Greek-speaking (and mainly Greek-writing) majority of the monastic population in the country.

The present investigation demonstrates that attempts to confront the archaeological and historical data associated with the Christian Caucasian presence in the Holy Land can barely be considered productive: the two categories of evidence simply do not overlap. None of the Armenian or Georgian institutions that are known from the archaeological record is mentioned in historical sources, or at least cannot be identified as such with any certainty. The silence of the sources is explicable in the case of small rural monasteries such as Bir el-Qutt, but becomes truly enigmatic in cases such as the major pilgrim complex of Musrara.

Similarly, none of the sites known from the historical sources has ever been discovered, or cannot be securely identified. The critical approach to the sources, and particularly the renewed analysis of the archaeological data, shows that the extant random identification of excavated sites with activity of known historical figures should be categorically rejected.

Furthermore, the archaeological evidence offers no signs of Armenian and Georgian presence in the two main, iconic national sites – St. James Monastery and the Monastery of the Cross – as early as the Byzantine period. Any attempts to relate the two ancient sanctuaries to the earliest period of the Caucasian presence in Jerusalem are therefore unsubstantiated at the present state of research.

The history of the Caucasian communities in the Holy Land should be regarded as a dynamic process. During the first stage, which starts already in the fifth century and is well documented by literary evidence, the presence of the Armenians and Georgians is probably confined to the multiethnic monastic institutions of the Holy Land. Despite the origins of some of the key figures in the Palestinian monastic movement – Euthymius the Great and John Hesychast were natives of Armenia Minor, and Peter the Iberian was born in Georgia – their role at this stage was never restricted to the national communities. It seems that the famous 'Iberian Monastery' in Jerusalem, established by Peter, was never strictly speaking a national monastery and during its history always sheltered multiethnic brethren.

The presence of the Armenian, and especially Georgian monks in the laurae and coenobia of the Judean Desert is well attested also in the subsequent

stage, both by literary evidence and manuscripts, and the same is true for the stage after it, when the establishment of national monasteries starts. It is not completely clear if the Christological controversies triggered the process, or whether an increase in the number of Caucasians in the Holy Land left no choice but to establish new institution for all who wished to remain. Numerous new Armenian and Georgian monasteries – Mount of Olives, Musrara, Bir el-Qutt, Umm Leisun, – flourished during the sixth–seventh centuries. But not all the Armenian and Georgian monks concentrated there – as it is undoubtly shown by the burial inscriptions from the Monastery of Choziba in Wadi el-Qilt, leaving relatively complete list of the members of multiethnic monastic community.

Synthesis of the available material analyzed here shows that in this period, members of all three Caucasian communities were deeply involved in the life of the Church of Jerusalem, with local Christian population and pilgrims, not necessarily their compatriots. There is no archaeological evidence for the existence of any central or core Armenian or Georgian site at that time which may have been responsible for minor community institutions. Similarly, no sign of central administrative or royal initiative attested by literary sources can be traced in the archaeological record.

The last stage dates to the period of the slow decline of Palestinian Christianity. Despite some of the previous interpretations, none of the archaeological complexes that were discussed here was violently destroyed in the years following the Arab invasion. Quite to the contrary, most of the sites show traces of renovations and enlargement in the middle – end of the sventh century, and are still active during the eighth–ninth centuries, until their final abandonment. This picture is not unique to the Armenian and Georgian sites, but rather common to the churches and monasteries of Palestine.[1] The eventual depopulation of the desert monasteries[2] also had an impact on the Caucasian monks: at least in the Georgian case, the manuscripts allow us to follow their migration to St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai.

The most obscure period in the history of the Caucasian communities, as in the history of Palestinian Christianity in general, is the period between the ninth and the mid-eleventh centuries.[3] The rare evidence from Horvat Burgin shows that the monastic presence did not cease completely, and seems to demonstrate the strong bond with the local (still Christian?) population.

1 Schick 1995; Avni 2014.
2 Patrich 2011.
3 Reynolds 2011.

The pilgrimage movement from the Caucasus region, attested by numerous graffiti preserved along the Sinai roads, continued far after the Abbasid period, and most probably never stopped until the Crusades, and beyond.

Viewed against the background of the historical evidence, the archaeological corpus associated with the Caucasian communities presents a very complex picture, quite different from the one traditionally presented by the national Armenian and Georgian research schools. Apparently, despite the dogmatic schisms, the Armenian and Georgian communities were deeply involved in the life of the Jerusalem Church. The most striking is the epigraphic evidence, showing the use of common Greek formulae, in the Armenian sites mainly, and the wide use of Greek language by both Armenians and Georgians. The Palestinian monastic traditions were followed in everyday-life activities of the Caucasian monasteries, in the architecture and décor, and even in the funeral rites. Evidently, the archaeological record reflects the multiple identities – civic, ethnic, cultural and religious[4] – adopted by the Armenian and Georgian monks of Palestine: they were Caucasians, but chose to live in the Byzantine Empire; they were foreigners as far as the local Christians were concerned, but represent the Church of Jerusalem for visitors and pilgrims. They came here as modest suppliants to pray for their homeland, but found themselves among "the dwellers of this Holy Land", claiming to represent the truth of Christianity.[5]

Indeed, the eminence and the authority in which the monastic communities of the Holy Land were held by their home countries were outstanding. The evidence for the connection between the Palestinian monastic centers and the Caucasus is most significant, both in the material and the spiritual spheres.

With time, the role of the Palestinian centers in the intellectual life of Armenia and Georgia kept growing. In the mid-eleventh century, on the eve of the Crusades, the sparse and small Armenian and Georgian monastic communities were consolidated around new core centers – the freshly established Monasteries of Sts. James and of the Holy Cross – and began to grow rapidly. These new centers were created by noble or royal initiative, and were based on the ideology of national institutions, a concept that was previously totally foreign to the Byzantine Church of Jerusalem.

Although this study is only the first step in the research of the Caucasian archaeology of the Holy Land, the conclusions will help to fill the current lacuna and will serve future archaeological and historical study of Palestinian

4 Knapp 2010, pp. 194–195.

5 See Wilken 1992, pp. 169–170, and Bitton-Ashkeloni 2010, p. 253, discussing the petition of the monks of Palestine to the Emperor Anastasius (*V. Sab.*, 57).

Christianity. Many research questions were formulated here for the first time, and should direct future studies. The identification of the particular Armenian and Georgian sites is still problematic. Considerable research is necessary before progress can be made in the field of Albanian studies, given the almost total lack of material evidence related to this community. It is not always possible to trace the influence which the Church of Jerusalem exerted on the Christian culture of the Caucasus, whether directly, or as a mediated impact through Syria and Byzantium; nevertheless, analysis of the material evidences that testifies to the interrelations between the Caucasian region and the Holy Land seems to hold high promise, especially when relating to finds that originated from well-dated and secure archaeological contexts. Hopefully, this study will contribute to the joint efforts of multidisciplinary scholarly communities from different countries in their future research.

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