
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS AT ‘EN QOBI IN THE JERUSALEM HIGHLANDS AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF QUBE/QUBI

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ABSTRACT:

The article presents the results of archaeological excavations and surveys undertaken at and near the spring of ‘En Qobi.

‘En Qobi is a spring in the upper reaches of Nahal Qobi, a tributary of Nahal Refai’im, West of Jerusalem. There is evidence of human activity near the spring from the Bronze Age to the present – a span of approximately 3,000 years. The article presents and discusses (a) the spring and its water system; (b) partial excavations and the preservation of the interior of the medieval church located near the spring; (c) H. Tasit and a nearby refuge cave, both located west of the spring; (d) H. Qobi, situated east of the spring.

Our team cleaned the water system, which consists of a long spring tunnel, a large underground reservoir, an open pool and other elements typical of systems used to tap spring water in the Judean Hills. This system was apparently built in the Early Roman period, was renovated again and again and remained in use until recent times.

The medieval church has a rectangular nave, oriented east-west with well-preserved ashlar walls. The inner walls were covered with polychrome frescoes. Elbow columns topped with capitals, characteristic of Frankish (Crusader) architecture in the Jerusalem area, were found *in situ* on the northern and eastern walls. Our funds permitted only a partial excavation of some portions of the inner walls. Inadequate funding prevented a full excavation of the church walls and floors, so the construction phases of the structure were not fully clarified.

H. Tasit is a relatively small site, apparently an agricultural estate from the Roman and Byzantine periods. Unfortunately, the site was looted extensively in the past. On the nearby slope we detected and explored a small karstic cave that was apparently used for refuge purposes in the first – second centuries CE.

H. Qobi is a small, ruined village located on a prominent hilltop above the spring. Without extensive excavation it is difficult to ascertain its function and past. An underground olive press and some looted tombs on the slopes were explored. Pottery and finds from the Late Hellenistic, Early Roman, Byzantine, Medieval, Ottoman and British Mandate periods were collected.

‘En Qobi has been identified as Qobi, a location near Bethar mentioned in a story in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 95a) and in additional Roman-period, late antique and medieval sources. The article describes the sites and discusses their historical-geographical significance and identification.

REZUMAT: EXPLORĂRI ARHEOLOGICE LA ‘EN QOBI ÎN MUNTII IERUSALIMULUI ȘI IDENTIFICAREA QUBE/QUBI

Rezultatele săpăturilor arheologice efectuate la ‘En Qobi (identificat drept locația Qobi menționată în diferite texte antice) din apropierea unui izvor situat în partea superioară a Nahal Qobi, lângă Ierusalim indică prezența activității umane în zonă din epoca bronzului până în prezent.

Sunt evidențiate diverse aspecte, incluzând sistemul de apă al unui izvor, o biserică medievală parțial excavată și două situri, H. Tasit și H. Qobi. Sistemul de apă datează din perioada romană timpurie și este format dintr-un tunel, un rezervor subteran și un bazin deschis. Biserica medievală are zidurile bine conservate împodobite cu fresce policrome. Cu toate acestea, finanțarea inadecvată a împiedicat o săpătură completă a zidurilor și podelelor bisericii. H. Tasit dezvăluie rămășițe ale unei moșii agricole din epoca romană și bizantină, în timp ce o peșteră din apropiere a servit, probabil, drept refugiu în timpul secolelor I-II d.Hr. Situl H. Qobi, este situat pe un vârf de deal deasupra izvorului, dar fără o continuitate a săpăturilor, nu se pot înțelege mai mult.

KEYWORDS: ‘En Qobi, waterworks, Roman period, refuge cave, Frankish church, frescoes, Jerusalem Highlands.

CUVINTE CHEIE: ‘En Qobi, sisteme de apă, epoca romană, peșteră de refugiu, biserică francă, fresce, Munții Ierusalimului.

Archaeological Explorations at ‘En Qobi in the Jerusalem Highlands and the Identification of Qube/Qubi

‘En Qobi (‘En el-Kabu; ref. NIG 21121/62600) is a spring in the upper reaches of Nahal Qobi, a tributary of Nahal Refai‘m, west of Jerusalem (Figs. 1, 2, 3). There is evidence of human activity near the spring from the Bronze Age to the present—a span of approximately 3,000 years.

Research history

C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener visited el-Kabu on October 18, 1873, as part of the Survey of Western Palestine (SWP). They described a small Arab village with stone houses and two springs nearby. The British explorers focused on the church, which I will discuss below (Conder and Kitchener 1883, 25, 100).

The French explorer Victor Guérin toured the site in the 1860s while on his way back to Jerusalem from the Judean Foothills (Guérin 1868, vol. 2, 384):

... we went down into a valley where we found a large spring, ‘En el-Kabu. It flows out of an ancient pipe next to an old mosque named Jam‘a Sheikh Mahmoud al-‘Ajemi; its waters flow down into a small valley and irrigate its gardens, which are planted with fig, lemon, and orange trees, and vegetables. These orchards belong to the small village of Kabu, which is perched on the top of a steep mountain northwest of the spring like an eagle’s nest. We went around this mountain on the west, following a narrow path that was cut on the leveled rock, and which no doubt dates from a very long time ago. It led us to the edge of Wadi el-Kabu, in a deep embankment on our left.

The waterworks were studied by Z. Ron, who mapped its various elements (Ron 1992, 44–45, Fig. 8). The most detailed survey of the spring and its environs was carried out by M. Marcus as part of a survey of the Jerusalem Hills (Marcus 1993, 142–144).

The Jewish National Fund sponsored three seasons of excavations at the site (1999–2001), led by the author in cooperation with Daniel Weiss and Ya‘akov Billig of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). Among the finds uncovered in these excavations were the waterworks and the remains of a church and other buildings. Later, the IAA and the Jewish National Fund engaged in restoration and preservation work at the site (Zissu and Weiss 2004).

In 2017, a survey was conducted in the vicinity of the spring by the Bar-Ilan University Institute of Archaeology in cooperation with Danny Bickson. In the course of this survey, two adjacent sites were documented northwest of ‘En Qobi—Horvat Tasit and Horvat Adash—and the ruins of H. Qobi (el-Kabu), situated northeast of the spring, were re-examined.

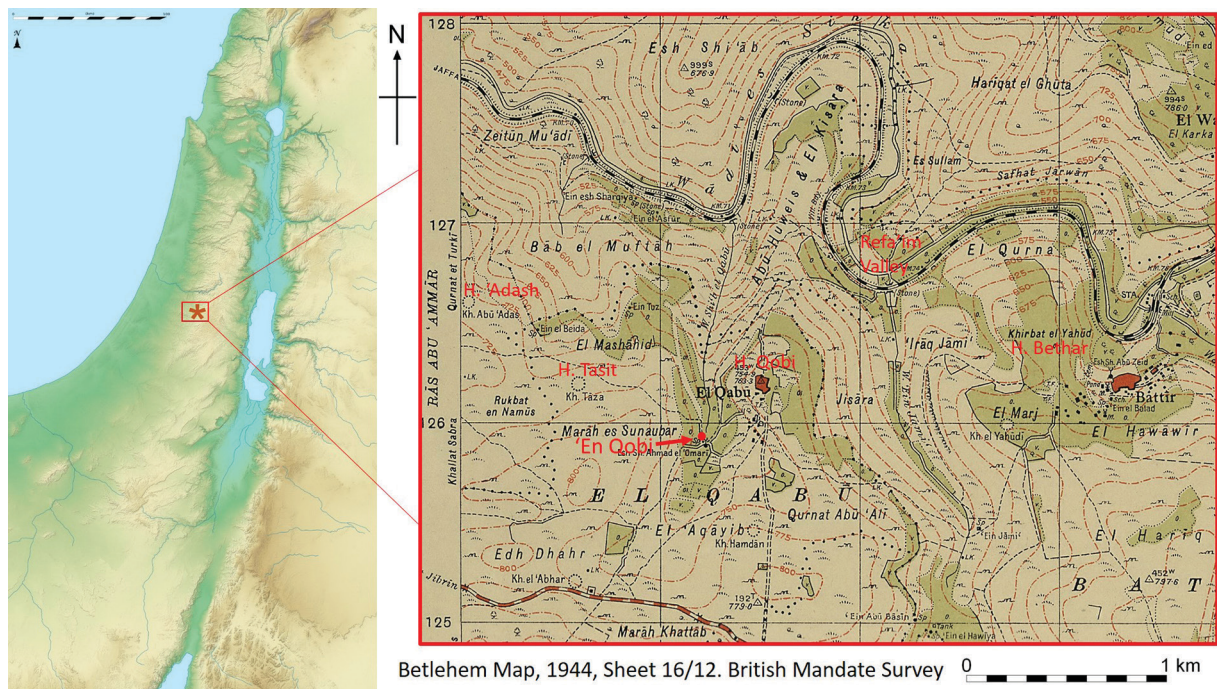


Fig. 1. Location map of sites mentioned in the article (B. Zissu).



Fig.2. The vicinity of 'En Qobi and Nahal Qobi: 'En Qobi (1), Nahal Qobi (2), H. Qobi (3), ancient Bethar (4), aerial view towards the northeast (photo by B. Zissu).

Historical-geographic identification

'En Qobi has been commonly identified as Qube/Qubi/Qovei/Qobei, a location (perhaps a town) near Bethar,¹ mentioned in a story in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 95a;² see Sasson 2010, 37–39; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994, 209, and literature cited there).

T. Milik (1962, 269), followed by M. Avi-Yonah (1976, 89) and other scholars, believed that Qube/Qubi/Qovei/Qobei should be identified with Quba or Qove'ah, a place where silver was hidden according to the first-century CE Copper Scroll from Qumran ("In Quba, the silver from the sacred offering"). Various readings and interpretations of this text have been proposed, and it is difficult to decide among them.³ (See the summary of opinions and bibliography in Lefkovits 2000, 293–296.)

A description of sacred sites in and near Jerusalem is found in a tenth-century CE Georgian manuscript (published as *Le Calendrier palestinogéorgien du Sinaiticus* 34) discovered at Saint Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai. One of the places mentioned there is Enbikumakube.

Milik believed that the toponym *En Kube* in the manuscript should be identified with 'En Qobi (Milik 1960, 577). He did not notice that the first part of the name, *bikuma* (in the original Aramaic), resembles the phrase *kum bei* in the talmudic story mentioned above (B Sanhedrin 95a).

Four twelfth-century documents that describe the lands of a Frankish knight, Iohannes Gothman, refer to five sites on his property: Bethaatap, Culi, Derxerip, Derhassen and Gastina Leonis (Bresc-Bautier 1984, docs. 87–88, 135, 146, 200–203, 261–266, 283–287). All these sites are located southwest of Jerusalem; there is a consensual identification of some but not others.⁴ What is relevant here is the possible identification of Culi with Qobi, proposed

¹ Bethar was an ancient town in Judea, near Jerusalem. It is known as the headquarters of Shimon Bar Kokhba and the site of the decisive battle between the Romans and the Jewish rebels during the Second Jewish-Roman War in 132–136 CE. The Romans, led by Hadrian, defeated Bar Kokhba's Jewish forces and destroyed Bethar. The events had a significant impact on the Jewish people and the development of Judaism (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.6.1–4; Eshel and Zissu 2019, 118–121).

² I would like to thank Dr. Omri Abadi for his assistance.

³ The Copper Scroll is a unique artifact discovered at Qumran. The scroll, written on thin sheets of copper and dated to the first century CE, contains a list, in Hebrew, of 64 locations where treasures are said to be hidden. The origins and purpose of the scroll are still a matter of debate among scholars. While the authenticity of the list of treasures is debated, scholars agree that the toponyms listed are real. Despite many attempts to locate the hidden treasures, there have been no significant finds to date. Nevertheless, the Copper Scroll continues to be of great interest and is considered one of the most intriguing artifacts from Qumran.

⁴ I would like to thank Prof. Rehav Rubin for his assistance with this issue. For a detailed discussion of the identification of the toponyms and the estate of Iohannes Gothman, see Rubin 2018, 92–104.

by R. Ellenblum (2010, 161–164; 1991, 220–221). Ellenblum believed that the text should be read “Cubi,” the *b* having been replaced by an *l*, as is common in Latin manuscripts. The Crusader remains described above and the possible mention of a place by the name of Cubi in a twelfth-century manuscript support the possible identification of Qube/Qubi/Qovei/Qobei/Cubi at our site.

The Spring and the Waterworks

The waterworks (Figs. 3, 4) collected and regulated the output of the spring. The karst spring flows from the interface of the Aminadav formation dolomite and the Motza formation marlstone aquifer. A rock-cut shaft lined with stones, 6 m deep and 0.8 m in diameter, provides access to the source of the spring (Fig. 5). The water is conducted through an upper rock-cut tunnel roofed with stone slabs, 17 m long, 0.5 m wide and 1 m high (Fig. 6). This spring tunnel drains into a rectangular underground collection chamber (11 × 5 m), entered by a flight of stone steps supported by a well-crafted barrel vault (Fig. 7).

The lower portion of the chamber walls is built of large ashlar joined by gray mortar. The walls were covered with several layers of plaster; the original layer is gray. This type of plaster is found in waterworks from the Early Roman period in the Jerusalem region (van Zuiden and Asscher 2021, 236*–241*). The upper portion of the walls is built of much smaller stones and modern concrete. Its vaulted ceiling is cast from modern concrete; a square opening at its center serves for drawing water and letting in sunlight.

The chamber has two levels. The well-plastered southern half, on a lower level, serves as a collection pool (5.5 × 5.2 m, with a maximum depth of about 2 m). Near its floor, water flows from a small niche that was produced by the removal of some of the ashlar at the base of the eastern wall of the chamber. This perennial flow fills the pool in dry seasons.

The floor in the northern half of the collection chamber is about 1 m higher than that of the southern half. It was designed this way so that the water would collect in the southern half of the chamber and make it easier to draw water.

A channel in the floor of the upper level carries the overflow from the pool into the lower tunnel. An irregularly shaped chamber at the start of this tunnel was apparently originally a natural flaw in the rock. It is roofed by a pointed vault, at the summit of which is a square shaft built of dressed stones that admits light and air.

The lower tunnel carries the water north from this chamber to the external section of the waterworks. This part of the tunnel, hewn out of the rock and roofed with stone slabs, is about 17 m long. Its tight dimensions (width



Fig.3. 'En Qobi, aerial view to the east; (a) location of access shaft to the source of the spring; (b) fountain (sabil); (c) stone trough; (d) plastered installation; (e) external collection pool; (f) maqam structure—Esh Sh. Ahmad el 'Omari; (g) channel; (h) church; (i) transverse building (photo by B. Zissu).

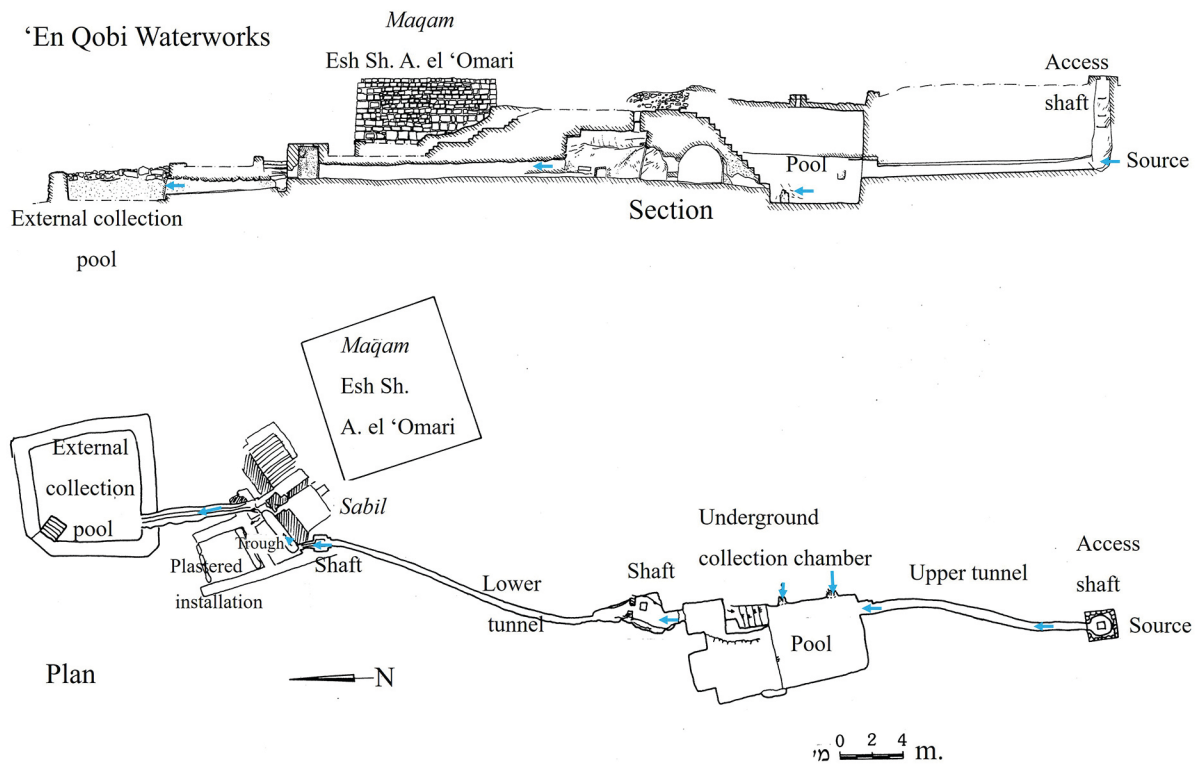


Fig.4. 'En Qobi: plan and sections (after Z. Ron 1992).



Fig.5. Access shaft descending to the water source (photo by B. Zissu).

0.4 m, height about 0.7 m) do not allow for comfortable passage. Near its northern end, an additional small chamber was built of concrete and small stones in the modern period. There is a square opening in its ceiling.

The tunnel splits into two at its northern end. One section flows east towards a drinking fountain (*sabil*)⁵ installed in the Ottoman or British Mandate period (Fig. 8a, b), to which one descends by stairs. The other section flows north to a stone trough (Fig. 8c); there is a plastered installation nearby, apparently meant for watering livestock. At the eastern edge of the trough is a channel roofed with stone slabs that runs to an unroofed trapezoidal collection pool (7 × 7 m, about 1.8 m deep, walls 0.8 m thick; Fig. 9). This pool is lined with multiple layers of hydraulic plaster, evidence of continued use and maintenance. An opening in the floor of the pool, at the bottom of its northern wall, carried water to irrigate the fields in the Nahal Qobi valley. A trench dug in the center of the channel collects runoff, floodwater, and overflow from the pool.

Adjacent to the outlet of the waterworks is a square *maqam* structure with a dome, constructed of reused ashlar (Esh Sh. Ahmad el-'Omari). A *mihrab* was installed in its southern wall. A column (in secondary use) was incorporated in its southeastern corner on the outside.



Fig. 6. Upper tunnel, looking south (photo by B. Zissu).



Fig. 7. Vaulted collection pool, looking south towards the upper tunnel (photo by T. Sagiv).

⁵ *Sabil* is a term used in Islamic architecture for a type of drinking fountain, often decorated, typically found in the Middle East and North Africa. These fountains were often built as charitable structures to provide water for travelers and the local community, especially during times of drought.



Fig. 8. External elements of the waterworks: (a) sabil; (b) interior of sabil; (c) trough (photos by B. Zissu).



Fig. 9. External collection pool, looking south; in the background, the maqam structure—Esh Sh. Ahmad el 'Omari (photo by B. Zissu).



Fig. 10. Channel cut on the west bank of Nahal Qobi, looking south (photo by B. Zissu).

A channel carved into the western slope of Nahal Qobi was discovered in 2000 (Fig. 10). It was apparently connected to the sophisticated irrigation system that had been previously set up near the spring. The channel, which is at least 300 m long, about 0.3 m wide and about 0.3 m deep, was carved out of the steep stone cliff. Water flowed from holes in its walls into agricultural plots.

Dating of the waterworks

The waterworks functioned for a long time and underwent many renovations and repairs, most recently during the British Mandate period (1918–1948). The modern elements are well integrated into the system and include secondary use of ancient elements. This makes it difficult to date the installation without disassembling its elements and excavating it properly. Perhaps a careful examination of the plaster of the various stages would help date the different elements.

It seems likely that the earliest stage of the installation dates back at least to the Early Roman period. Most of the current system may well belong to this earliest stage, except for the vaulted concrete ceiling of the underground chamber and the fountain and trough where the water reaches the surface.

Other springs in the Judean Hills, such as ‘En Zuba, ‘En Handaq, Sataf, ‘En Yael, ‘En Hanya, ‘En el-Hadaf and Battir, have waterworks similar to those found at ‘En Qobi. We currently have no clear-cut archaeological evidence that would enable us to date all these systems, but an early period is hinted at by several details.⁶ In a detailed study of the tunnel system that captures the flow of springs at Wadi Biar in the northern Hebron hills, part of the Roman-period water system that served Jerusalem (Mazar 2002), plaster samples dated using C_{14} suggest a construction date in the mid-first century CE and a restoration in the second century CE (Yechezkel et al. 2021).

Yechezkel et al. (2022) presented data on 210 spring tunnels documented in Israel. Most of them are located within the central mountain range, and particularly in the region under discussion—the Jerusalem Hills. Such tunnels

⁶ Ron (1977, 246–249; 1985) and Yechezkel et al. (2022) discussed the dating problems and showed evidence of dates from the Iron Age II onwards for some springs.

were probably first created in our region during Iron Age II, around the eighth century BCE. The similarity among these systems supports the hypothesis that by the Early Roman period the residents of Judea had learned how to systematically exploit the scarce aquifer water, channel it through tunnels to collection pools and distribute it onward to irrigated agricultural systems.

Spring tunnels solved the basic human need for water and enabled the foundation of rural settlements and the establishment of irrigated agricultural landscapes in a semi-arid region.

The church

The church was built on a slope about 50 m east of the spring (Fig. 1/i). The well-preserved structure attracted the attention of the SWP explorers. They documented the building in 1873 and assigned it to the Crusader period (Conder and Kitchener 1883, 100).

Good photos of the church were taken by the staff of the Department of Antiquities of the British Mandatory government in the 1930s (unpublished material, IAA Archives, el-Kabu file; Fig. 11). The church was briefly described by B. Bagatti, whose book includes archival information about M. Gisler's 1939 survey. Gisler examined the church and reached the conclusion that it should be dated to the Byzantine period. He noted the secondary use of good-quality ashlar in its walls as evidence of restoration after the Sasanian invasion. Gisler also noted the presence of mosaic stones mixed into the mortar in the walls (Bagatti 1983, 26, Fig. 8.1).

The most comprehensive survey of the structure was carried out by D. Pringle on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (BSAJ) in 1981 (Pringle 1998, 156–157). Pringle described the design and elements of the building. In his account of the walls, he emphasized the secondary use of stones, without the diagonal chiseling characteristic of the Frankish (Crusader) period.

The church has a rectangular nave, oriented east-west (Fig. 12; exterior dimensions about 16 × 11.6 m; interior dimensions about 12 × 7.5 m). The doorway (about 1.8 m wide) was in the middle of its western wall. The threshold has survived *in situ*. There were doorposts on either side of the opening. The northern doorpost has survived, but the southern doorpost was destroyed at some time in the past when a dirt road was built. The apse (radius 2–2.5 m) was in the eastern wall and has not been uncovered.

The exterior face of the walls is made of ashlar, 0.2–0.5 m high, placed horizontally. The interior face consists of undressed stones and small stones embedded in mortar. The walls, about 1.9 m thick, are preserved to a maximum height of about 6 m.



Fig. 11. The outer face of the north wall of the church—photograph from the 1930s (no. 4038; courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

The excavation conducted together with Daniel Weiss of the IAA in 2001 led us to the conclusion that the nave had been intentionally filled with fieldstones and dirt, apparently when nearby agricultural plots were cleared for use. We dug down 2 m into this fill, which included broken roof tiles and white mosaic stones. We were able to date the fill thanks to modern artifacts such as tin cans and shards of black pottery (Gaza ware, dated roughly to the Ottoman period). The fill did not include identifiable shards. The excavation required uprooting four olive trees and one almond tree from inside the church. Our funds allowed for only a partial excavation of some portions of the inner walls, which were subsequently covered for protection (Figs. 13, 14). A lack of adequate funding prevented a full excavation of the church walls and floors; therefore the construction phases of the structure were not fully clarified.

We presume that the ceiling consisted of two transverse arches supported by elbow columns, as the base of one such column was found integrated into the center of each lengthwise wall (Figs. 15, 16). An elbow column is a column-shaped bracket projecting horizontally from the wall and then bending vertically. Each of our columns was topped with a carved capital decorated with schematic floral designs, topped by an abacus that supported a transverse arch. The arches were looted in the past. The elbow columns—“an original Crusader creation,” in Esther Grabiner’s words—are found in ecclesiastical architecture in Jerusalem and its environs, where some 70 examples were found. Elbow columns were apparently made in a Jerusalem workshop and can be dated precisely to the first half of the twelfth century (Grabiner 1999, 193–201; Boas 1999, 216).

The elbow columns appear to belong to the second stage of use of the building, during the Frankish period. We therefore propose that the church was indeed constructed in the Byzantine period and renovated in the Frankish period, with the secondary use of its original building stones and the installation of a vaulted ceiling supported by elbow columns.

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A few stones that belong to the lower face of window jambs were preserved in the eastern part of the northern wall. The window appears to have been shaped like a crenel—narrow on the outside and wide on the inside.

Several other churches from the Crusader period have a similar design: at Kh. ‘En el-Kanisa near Beit Jala (Pringle 1993, 27–28), ‘En al-Ma‘amudieh near Hebron (*ibid.*, 29–30), Kh. al-Tannur west of ‘En Qobi (*ibid.*, 47–51), and Beit Pagi east of Jerusalem (*ibid.*, 157–160).

The plaster on the inner face of the walls was smooth and light-colored. Because the plaster covers the elbow columns, they clearly date from the same period. Polychromatic wall paintings were preserved on the plaster. During the excavations in September 2001, we uncovered short sections of the northern and southern walls, which enabled us to examine the quality and preservation of the drawings (Figs. 17–20). They then underwent preliminary conservation by IAA experts and were covered over to prevent damage. The fresco discovered on the northern wall includes two arms of a person, who seems to be facing right and is wearing a red cloak (Figs. 17, 18).

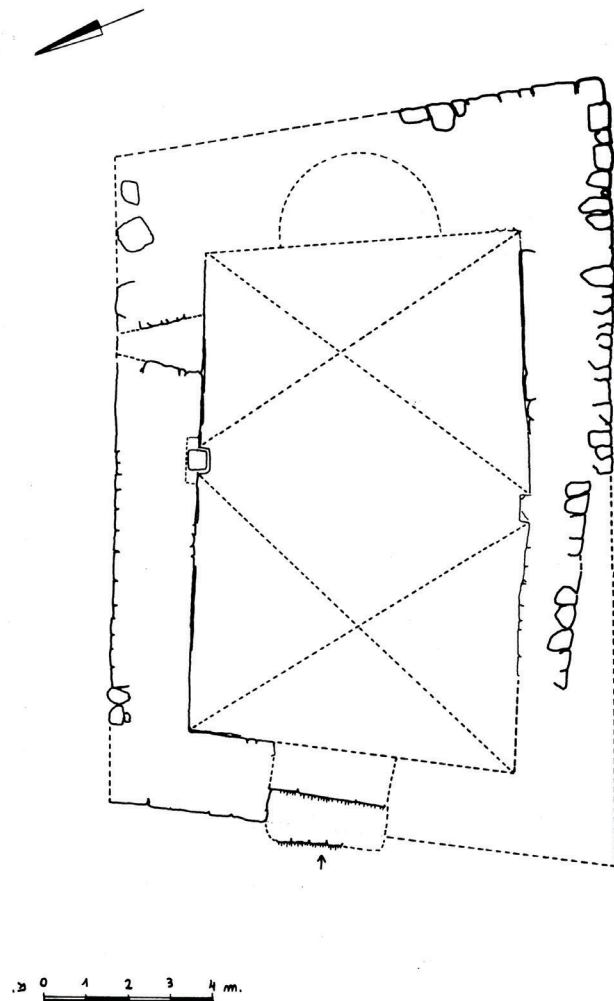


Fig. 12. Plan of the church (2001; D. Weiss, A. Hajian, N. Zak; courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).



Fig. 13. The church at the end of the 2001 season, looking west. The partly excavated walls were covered for protection (photo by B. Zissu).



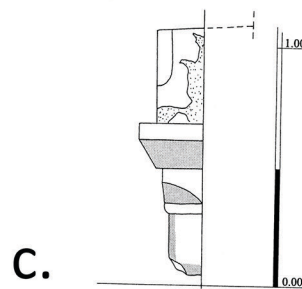
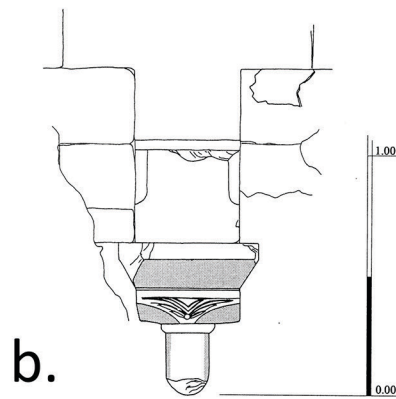


Fig. 15. Elbow column, with the capital and the lowest stone of the arch in situ in the northern wall, looking north (a: photo by T. Sagiv; b, c: drawings by A. Hajian and N. Zak).

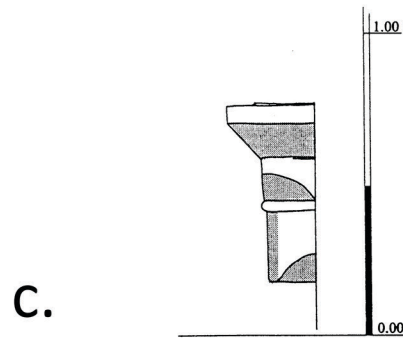
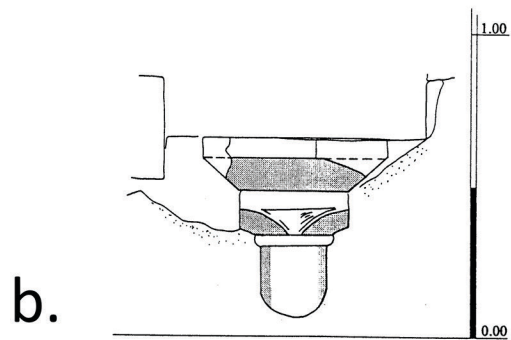


Fig. 16. Elbow column, with the capital in situ in the northern wall, looking north (a: photo by N. Davidov; b, c: drawings by A. Hajian and N. Zak).



Fig. 17. The north wall of the church during excavation. Note the good state of preservation, the location of the elbow column and the location of the fresco, marked with a V (photo by N. Davidov).



Fig. 18. Details of fresco on the north wall of the church (photos by N. Davidov and B. Zissu).



Fig. 19. Exposing and preserving the fresco on the south wall of the church (photo by B. Zissu).

The hands are holding an elongated handle in a vertical position. Another, shorter figure with its back to the standing figure may have been drawn to the right of (in front of) this figure. Only a few locks of hair on the nape of the neck survive from this second figure.

The section uncovered on the southern wall depicts the front leg of an animal—a mule or donkey—walking towards the left (Figs. 19, 20). To its right is a human figure shown frontally. It is wearing a short red garment that ends above the knee. The right knee and shin are clearly visible. This foot is bare; presumably the figure was barefoot. The animal's leg and the lower part of the person's leg were later covered with light green paint. Perhaps this was the well-known New Testament scene in which Mary travels to Bethlehem or the New Testament story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. Only full exposure of the frescoes will allow complete identification of the scenes depicted on the church walls.⁷

Crusader-era frescoes are very rare in Israel; to date they have been discovered only in five buildings from that period: the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Church of St. Jeremiah in Abu Ghosh, the Theoctistus Monastery in Nahal Og in

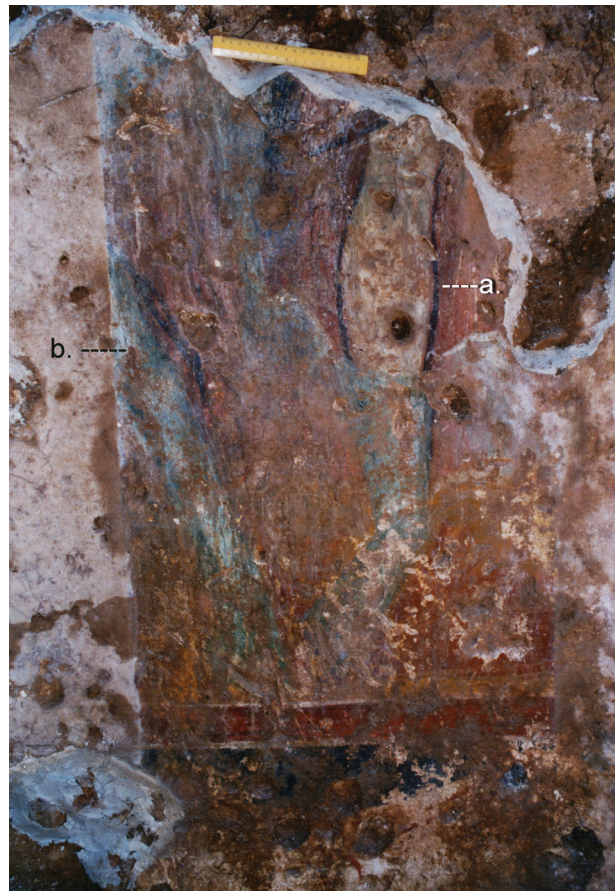


Fig. 20. Detail of fresco on the south wall (photo by B. Zissu).

⁷ I would like to thank Ms. Tamar Avner, whom I consulted on this matter. The responsibility for this suggestion remains with the author.

the Judean Desert, the Chapel of John the Baptist in Sebastia, and the Church of Gethsemane in Jerusalem (Boas 1999, 205–210 and additional literature cited there).

North of the church are additional buildings covered with soil. We could not estimate their dimensions or character. The church and the nearby buildings are related to activity that took place near the spring, and possibly to the ancient road from the Judean Foothills to Jerusalem (Avi Yonah 1940, 44).

As mentioned, the excavation of the church has not been completed. Its floors have not yet been exposed, nor have trenches been excavated below them. For now, we assume that the building was constructed in the Byzantine era and renovated in the Crusader period with reuse of the original ashlar. Additional future excavation aimed at full exposure of the floors and sections underneath the floors is needed to confirm these hypotheses. Such an excavation must include proper exposure and preservation of the frescoes.

The transverse building

About 50 m west of the spring is a massive transverse building uncovered during the 1999 excavation season (exterior dimensions about 13 × 7 m, walls about 2 m thick; marked I on Fig. 3; Fig. 21). Its interior was disturbed in antiquity, when it was filled with soil so as to support agricultural terraces; therefore, our excavations could not date it clearly. The fill included a few non-indicative shards, apparently from the Byzantine period and the Middle Ages. Because additional work near the building disturbed the layers of soil around it, we unfortunately are not able to establish the date of the building. The exact function of the building remains in question.

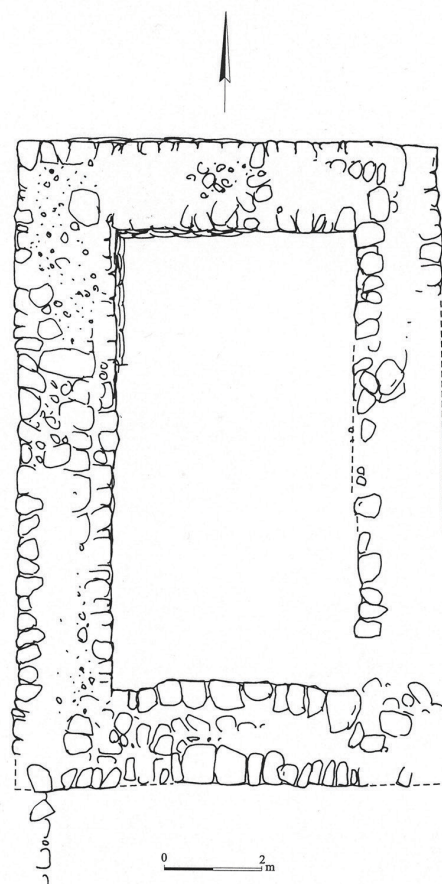


Fig. 21. Plan of the transverse building (A. Hajian, N. Zak, IAA).

Discussion: The identification of Qube/Qubi/Qovei/Qobei

It is far from clear where the Second Temple-period settlement of Quba was located, given that we have yet to find any significant remains of buildings, facilities, caves or quarries typical of settlements of that period. In the 2000 season, exploratory trenches were dug on the western slope of Nahal Qobi, about 50 m above the spring. A few remains of walls were discovered but could not be assembled into any clear pattern. The fill in the agricultural terraces that covered these buildings yielded shards from the Early Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods and the Middle Ages. These sparse finds indicate that the ancient settlement that was home to the people who used the spring and farmed the fields in the Nahal Qobi riverbed was located in the vicinity, but apparently not in the riverbed above the spring. Since good-quality arable land, whether irrigated or not, is relatively scarce in the highlands, it seems that this area was used for agriculture. At Kh. Qobi (al-Kabu, 16150/12620), on a knoll about 500 m northeast of the spring (Figs. 1, 2), the remains of a large ruin were surveyed. Scanty remains of foundations and walls are visible, as well as some cisterns, an underground olive press in a reused cistern (Fig. 22) and some stone quarries. Pottery and finds from the Late Hellenistic, Early Roman, Byzantine, Medieval, Ottoman and British Mandate periods were collected. Some Early Roman rock-cut tombs (Fig. 23) were found on its slopes.

At the center of the ridge, which descends gently to the north, about 600 m west of Ein Qobi, is H. Tasit (Kh. Taza; ref. NIG 21055/62610; Fig. 1), where we have found an ancient settlement that covers at least 1 hectare.

Illegal excavations undertaken in the early 1990s exposed walls and floors of buildings, including a building constructed of large ashlar with a massive corner (Fig. 24). A hiding complex with typical tunnels was found under the buildings. Two tunnels cut through a stepped, plastered installation, apparently a ritual bath. In the waste



Fig. 22. Kh. Kabu: olive press in an earlier cistern near the summit (photo by B. Zissu).



Fig. 23. Opening of a rock-cut tomb from the Early Roman period (photo by B. Zissu).



Fig. 24. H. Tasit: remains of an ancient building (photo by B. Zissu).



Fig. 25. H. Tasit: terrace built on top of a massive earlier wall (photo by B. Zissu).

heaps of the illegal excavations we found shards from the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (first century BCE and first century CE), as well as shards from the Byzantine period (5th–5th centuries CE).

To the east of the foundations of the buildings, a terrace was noted. This terrace was apparently based on a massive earlier wall, possibly used for fortification (Fig. 25).

The rock exposed along this ridge is of the Aminadav formation from the Cenomanian Age, which is characterized by developed karst. At the center of the ridge, about 600 m south of Horvat Tasit (ref. NIG 21601/626029), Yoav

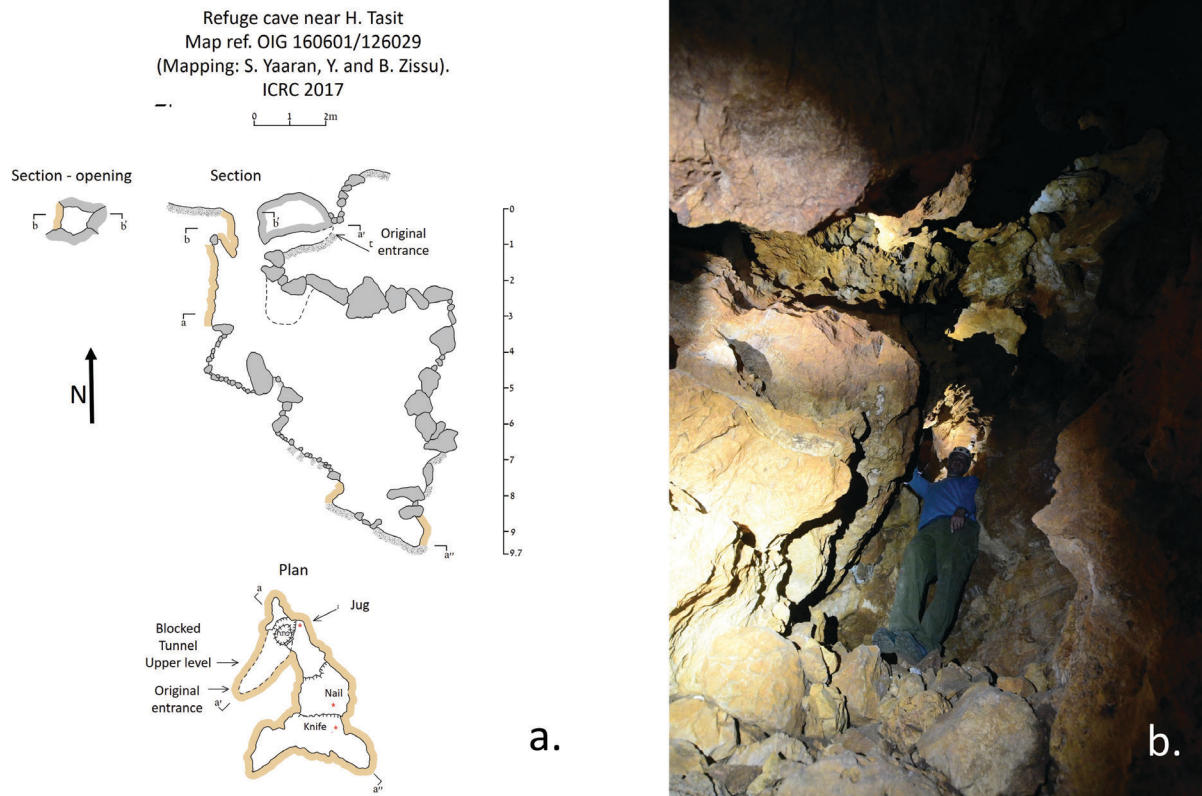


Fig. 26. Refuge cave near H. Tasit: plan and photo (S. Yaaran, Y. Zissu, Y. Negev, B. Zissu).

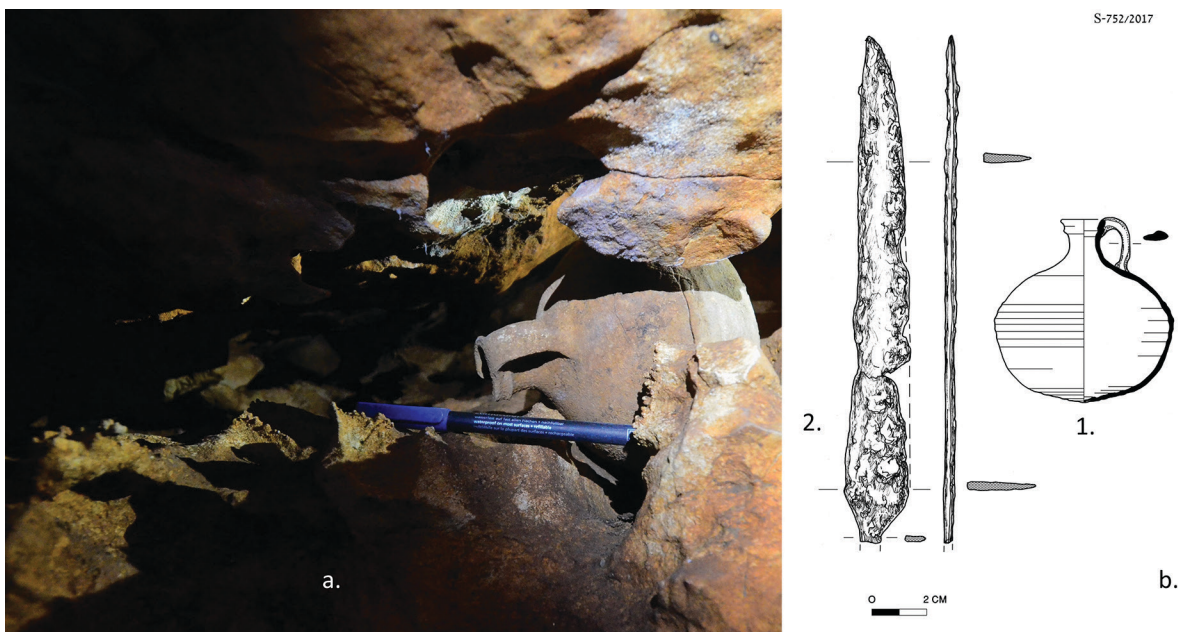


Fig. 27. Finds from the refuge cave: (a) jug in situ; (b) drawings of jug and knife (Y. Rudman and B. Zissu).

Negev found an elongated karst fissure that had opened as a result of the winter rains. A karst cavity developed inside the crack (maximum depth of about 10 m; Fig. 26), along whose walls there are karstic cracks and crevices. In the lower part of the cavity are two branches going towards the south (maximum length of approx. 2 m each). No signs of quarrying or cutting by human hands were seen in the cavity. In a small crack in the upper third of the space, a complete pottery jug was found (Fig. 27a, 27b:1), dating to the first or second century CE. In the lower part of the cavity, a nail and an iron knife were found (Fig. 27b:2). These artifacts were probably left by a person who entered the cavity in ancient times through a narrow opening on its western side. This opening is visible from below but is presently sealed. The deep, dark space and the narrow opening may indicate that it was used as a refuge in times of need.

We assume that ancient Qovei comprised not only the spring, but also the ancient sites located to the east (H. Kabu) and west (H. Tasit). An additional ruin examined by our team, H. Adash (ref. NIG 210002/626636) may also belong to the settlement system surrounding the spring.

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