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# <u>H</u>uqoq – 2022

Jodi Magness, Dennis Mizzi, Matthew Grey, Jocelyn Burney, Rangar Cline, Martin Wells, Karen Britt and Ra'anan Boustan 07/09/2023 Preliminary Report

In May–July 2022, the tenth season of excavations was conducted at Horbat Hugog (henceforth Hugog) in Eastern Galilee (License No. G-4/2022; map ref. 245000–500/754300–650; Magness 2012 (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\_detail\_eng.aspx?id=1959&mag\_id=119); Magness et al. 2013 (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\_detail\_eng.aspx?id=3331&mag\_id=120); Magness et al. 2014 (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report Detail Eng.aspx?id=12648); Magness et al. 2016a (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\_detail\_eng.aspx? id=25057&mag id=124); Magness et al. 2016 b (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/ report detail eng.aspx?id=25060&mag id=124); Magness et al. 2017 (http://www.hadashotesi.org.il/report\_detail\_eng.aspx?id=25304&mag\_id=125); Magness et al. 2018 (http:// www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report Detail Eng.aspx?id=25419); Magness et al. 2019 (http:// www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report Detail Eng.aspx?id=25653); Magness et al. 2020 (https:// www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\_detail\_eng.aspx?id=25880&mag\_id=128)). The excavation was undertaken and underwritten by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Austin College (Texas), Baylor University (Texas), Brigham Young University (Utah) and the University of Toronto (Canada). Additional funding was provided by the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, the National Geographic Society, the Kenan Charitable Trust, the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies and private donors. The excavation was directed by J. Magness, with D. Mizzi (assistant director), M. Golan (administration), J. Burney, M. Grey, and R. Cline (area supervision), J. Haberman (field photography), Griffin Higher Photography (aerial photography), M. Robinson-Mohr (registration), D. Schindler (ceramics), K. Britt and R. Boustan (mosaics), M. Wells (architecture), S. O'Connell (painted plaster), R. Mohr (drawing), S. Pirsky (drafting), R. Lowinger and L. Roundhill (site conservation) and M. Lavie (small finds conservation). The volunteers

consisted of undergraduate and graduate students from the U.S.A., Canada and Germany.

Excavations this season continued in Area 3000 (Fig. 1), where there are five main occupation phases: a Late Roman synagogue (late fourth–early fifth centuries CE); a Late Medieval public building (fourteenth–fifteenth centuries CE), which we now identify as a synagogue (Mizzi and Magness 2022); installations and a few scattered walls built after the Late Medieval building had gone out of use and was pitted and robbed out (sixteenth–eighteenth centuries CE); an open area with numerous *tabuns* associated with layers of ash and a few partition walls (eighteenth–nineteenth centuries CE); and houses belonging to the modern village of Yakuk from the Late Ottoman–Modern periods (nineteenth–twentieth centuries CE, up to 1948). In addition, walls belonging to pre-synagogue structures were discovered under the mosaic floor in the west aisle of the Late Roman synagogue and under the floor of the northwest aisle of the Late Medieval building, as well as outside the synagogue's east wall, at the very bottom of the wall's foundation trench. The following discussion describes the phases from the earliest to the latest, proceeding from west (subsumed under Area 3000N) to south (Area 3000S) to east (Area 3000E).

## **Pre-Synagogue Phase**

The Late Roman synagogue was not the earliest structure built in Area 3000 (Magness et al. 2019 (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report\_Detail\_Eng.aspx?id=25653); Magness et al. 2020 (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\_detail\_eng.aspx?

id=25880&mag\_id=128)). In 2018, remains of two fieldstone walls were found under the Late Roman north and northeast stylobates, and in 2019 two walls forming a corner were discovered under the floor in the northwest corner of the Late Medieval public building. In 2022, the remains of another pre-synagogue wall were discovered under the floor in the north part of the Late Medieval building's west aisle. This wall follows the same orientation as the north—south wall of the corner structure, but it is not aligned with it and is located farther to the east (Fig. 1:A). Therefore, this wall may represent a different pre-synagogue structure that predates the other walls, or it may be a feature

associated with the same structure to which they belonged. The southern continuation of the north–south wall of the corner structure is no longer preserved, likely because it was disturbed by the foundation trench of the west wall of the Late Medieval building. A small segment of another north–south wall was exposed in 2022 in a sondage under the Late Roman synagogue's west aisle (see below). Finally, a narrow sondage in the foundation trench outside the synagogue's east wall, which was first excavated in 2012 and 2013, was reopened and cleaned, re-exposing an *in situ* column base and unearthing the tops of several other architectural features aligned in a north–south row below the base of the synagogue's east wall (Fig. 5:A). The function and date of the structure(s) to which these pre-synagogue walls belong are unknown, as no associated surfaces were discovered.

#### The Late Roman Period

#### The Late Roman Synagogue

The remainder of the synagogue's west aisle, south of the Elim panel uncovered in 2019, was excavated in 2022. Mosaic panels were uncovered in two places (Fig. 1:F; see below): a wreathed inscription flanked by kraters with vines forming medallions that frame animals at the north end of the excavation area, and a scene from Judges 4–5 at the south end of the aisle. Two small, fragmentary patches of mosaic were discovered between these, on the west side of the aisle. No other mosaics were preserved in this area. This provided an opportunity to open a sondage (0.8 × 2.5 m) below the bedding, which, unlike in other parts of the Late Roman synagogue, was a hard, concrete-like mortar laid over a dense, concrete-like layer containing unused tesserae and mosaic debitage. Underneath was a layer of cobbles, with a soft layer of soil below it mixed with numerous tesserae and mosaic clusters. The presence of unused tesserae, mosaic clusters and debitage under the bedding indicates the existence of an earlier, otherwise unknown mosaic floor, or, more likely, a repair to the mosaic, as suggested by the dislocation of the guilloche border at the southeast end of the west aisle (see below). Below the layer of soft soil was an earth fill that overlay part of the small segment of a north–south wall that was exposed in a sondage under the Late Roman synagogue's west aisle. The latest ceramic types discovered below the bedding are local wares of the fourth-fifth centuries CE.

The mosaics at the south end of the west aisle were damaged by fire, which, as elsewhere in the Late Roman synagogue, was localized and therefore does not appear to have been part of an overall conflagration of the building. In some places, the Late Medieval construction fill directly overlay a thin accumulation of yellow-white earth covering the Late Roman mosaics and bedding.

#### The Mosaics

During the 2022 season, efforts were concentrated on uncovering, conserving and documenting newly revealed mosaics located at the center and south end of the west aisle of the Late Roman synagogue. Similar to the mosaics uncovered in the synagogue's east aisle, individually framed panels originally covered the entire width of the west aisle. Their fragmentary state of preservation makes it impossible to determine the precise measurements of the individual panels and, in some cases, also their subject matter.

The recognizable subject matter of the mosaics in the west aisle, from north to south, includes a wreathed inscription flanked by inhabited vine scroll panels, two male figures with raised arms, and Deborah and Yael (Jael) from the book of Judges. In addition to these panels, two very fragmentary segments of mosaic were preserved. One segment, located to the east of the wreathed inscription panel, is part of the outer border that framed the mosaics in the west aisle. The second segment is next to a medieval buttress on the west side of the aisle; it is impossible to determine the subject matter of this segment of mosaic. Besides the mosaics in the west aisle, a patch of the nave mosaic floor, reaching the blocks of the Late Roman north stylobate, was uncovered under a cobble layer that made up part of the foundations of the Late Medieval east stylobate (see below).

Wreathed Inscription Flanked by Inhabited Vine Scroll Panels. This mosaic was found at the center of the west aisle. The panels are oriented to a viewer standing in the western part of the aisle looking east toward the nave, probably indicating a door in the

synagogue's west wall that is not preserved.

At the bottom of the northern panel, two grape vines emerge from a vessel that resembles a ribbed double-handled volute-krater. The vines curve upward and intertwine to form scrolls that frame a leopard and a wild boar eating from clusters of grapes. The top part of the panel is not preserved.

To the south of the inhabited vine scroll panel, another panel contains an inscription framed by an acanthus wreath. The wreath is damaged, and little of the Hebrew inscription within the wreath is preserved. Only one or two letters at the end of each of the four preserved lines are extant, and several of these are fragmentary. The subject matter of the inscription—whether a dedication, a donation, a memorial or otherwise—is impossible to determine at this stage. At the bottom of the panel, an eagle's right wing is preserved, indicating that there was an eagle below the wreath. The eagle's wing is loosely encircled by a red ribbon that was likely from a bow, which is no longer preserved.

Immediately to the south of the wreathed inscription panel is a second inhabited vine scroll panel. This panel was conceived as a pendant to the other inhabited scroll panel, although the vessel at the bottom of the south panel is not preserved. Two vines curve upward and intertwine to form two scrolls framing a fox (Fig. 2) and a hare nibbling on grape clusters. The top part of the panel is not preserved.

Two Male Figures with Raised Arms. Farther to the south, a mosaic fragment is preserved along the west side of the west aisle. The subject matter is oriented to a viewer standing in the eastern part of the aisle looking toward the west. The fragment partially preserves the upper bodies of two male figures placed side-by-side. The torsos, necks and faces of the figures suggest that they were rendered in a three-quarters-view and faced toward the north. Both figures raise their arms in front of their bodies in what appears to be a gesture of supplication or offering.

**Deborah and Yael Panel**. Two mosaic fragments uncovered at the south end of the west aisle are part of a single panel divided into three registers of roughly equal size that

are read from top to bottom. The panel is oriented to a viewer standing in the eastern part of the aisle looking toward the west. The panel depicts episodes from Judges 4–5 about the defeat of the Canaanite general Sisera under the leadership of the judge and prophet Deborah.

The scene in the top register of the panel depicts Deborah under a date-palm tree having summoned Barak son of Abinoam (Fig. 3), so that she might instruct him to lead the Israelites in battle against the Canaanite general Sisera and his army (Judges 4:5–9). The subject of the middle register appears to be Sisera in the tent of Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. It seems that Yael stands before Sisera, who is seated, offering him a drink of milk, as recounted in both Judges 4:19 and 5:25. The scene in the bottom register depicts Yael wielding the hammer that she uses to drive a large tent peg through Sisera's temple and into the ground (Judges 4:21 and 5:26–27). Sisera lies dead on his side, his head bleeding profusely into the earth. His weapons are scattered on the ground around him.

The east side of the panel underwent some dislocation, which resulted in shifting the bottom register over part of the outer border. Understanding the causes of this dislocation will require further investigation, as there is no evidence of similar damage or dislocation elsewhere in the building.

## **Southern Courtyard of the Late Roman Synagogue** (Fig. 4)

New paving stones (Fig. 4:B) from the Late Roman courtyard were exposed in two areas south of the south wall of the Late Medieval public building, and within the pi-shaped structure of the same building. As in previous seasons, these sections of the courtyard pavement consisted of limestone ashlars laid in tightly packed rows. The pavement slopes down about 0.2 m from east to west, probably due to settling, as there is no evidence of a step between the rows of stones. The paving stones rest on a thin layer of compact earth, stone chips and small stones, which, in turn, rest on a layer of fieldstones. The fact that the paving stones end in an east—west line about 5 m to the south of the Late Roman synagogue's south wall suggests that there was a porch on this side, as in the Capernaum synagogue.

The excavation in the Late Medieval pi-shaped feature revealed that the cistern (Fig. 4:A) it enclosed was originally dug in the Late Roman period, when its opening was ringed by limestone blocks cut into a trapezoidal shape. It also revealed the continuation of the Late Roman synagogue's south wall, which was abutted by the courtyard pavement to the south. The wall consists of a row of limestone ashlars laid tightly together as headers, with a thin layer of packed earth in-between them. To the north, the wall was abutted by the mosaic floor of the Late Roman synagogue.

# Eastern Courtyard of the Late Roman Synagogue (Fig. 5)

The 2022 excavation exposed the remains of a large, paved courtyard extending at least 11.5 m to the east of the Late Roman synagogue (Fig. 5:B). The pavement continues into the unexcavated east balks of the area. In the gap along the synagogue's east wall, where the pavement no longer survives, layers of bedding—including a concreted plaster bedding and a yellow layer comprising soil and stone chips—indicate that the courtyard originally ran directly up to the base of the wall. Coins were associated with each of these features, including clusters of *minimi* in the plaster bedding below robbedout paving stones, and a hoard of over 100 coins found in the fills above the pavement, which come from areas where the paving stones were missing or upturned. An east—west stylobate (Fig. 5:C) originally ran parallel to what seems to have been the south wall of the courtyard, creating a colonnaded portico (width c. 2.2 m; Fig. 5:D). The floor of this portico was also once paved, but the flagstones had been robbed out before renovations were made to the complex during the Late Medieval period, leaving only the concreted bedding below.

## The Late Medieval (Mamluk) Period

Our previous reports described two main phases in the Late Medieval public building. This season's excavations focused only on remains associated with the early phase. Additional pottery was retrieved indicating that the building dates from the fourteenth—fifteenth centuries (Mamluk period; Magness et al. 2020 (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\_detail\_eng.aspx?id=25880&mag\_id=128)). The pottery comes from underneath

the building's floor and from the south wall's foundation trench. In addition, a massive Late Medieval vaulted structure was found to the east of the building.

#### **The Late Medieval Public Building** (Figs. 1, 4)

Excavations under the floor in the north part of the west aisle of the Late Medieval building uncovered the foundation trenches of its west wall and west stylobate (Fig. 1:B, C). The former was filled with a thick packing of large stones, whereas the latter was filled with dark brown earth and stones. The stylobate blocks were laid on a foundation course of fieldstones and reused architectural elements from the Late Roman synagogue, including a limestone pedestal and a broken column. The west stylobate of the Late Medieval building ran along the line of the west wall of the Late Roman synagogue, suggesting that the foundation course of the west stylobate was laid directly above the foundation course of the synagogue's west wall. However, the 2022 excavation did not reach deep enough to substantiate this hypothesis, nor did it allow identifying the foundation trench of the synagogue's west wall.

Farther to the south, on the eastern side of the west stylobate, excavations under the floor of the nave of the Late Medieval building revealed two additional buttresses (a third one was exposed partly in 2015 and partly in 2019) made up of mortared stones and architectural elements (Fig. 1:D). These abutted the inner face of the west stylobate and provided support for pedestals. The northernmost of these three buttresses was built on top of the northern half of the inhabited vine scroll panel, though its west end was laid inside the foundation trench of the west stylobate. The two buttresses to its south, however, cut through the mosaic bedding and the fills underneath it. It is apparent that the Late Medieval builders tried to preserve the mosaic floor wherever they could, thus ensuring its survival, but they damaged the floor at the westernmost edge, where they had to cut the foundation trench for the stylobate.

Excavations also resumed in the foundation of the Late Medieval east stylobate (Fig. 1:E). On its west side, three buttresses were built to support the three central—of a total of five—pedestals that sat on the stylobate. The buttress walls were built with one to two courses of repurposed architectural elements paired with two to four courses of small to

large boulders, broken ashlars and fieldstones. A hard mortar was used as a binding agent. By contrast, the first pedestal from the northeastern corner of the stylobate had no corresponding buttress. Instead, part of a monolithic column was placed against the stylobate foundations and mortared to them. Farther below, however, there was a structure identical in construction methods and materials to the lowest part of the three buttresses just described. The fifth pedestal from the northeast corner did not have a buttress either, and it was supported instead by a column drum and capital placed against the stylobate's foundation.

A sounding in the southern foundation trench of the Late Medieval building's south wall (Fig. 4:D), which cut through the stone pavement of the Late Roman synagogue, revealed that the foundations were constructed of large limestone blocks, fieldstones, and reused architectural fragments. Excavation in the pi-shaped structure at the south end of the building revealed no evidence of a later reconstruction, contrary to what we had concluded in 2019. The western half of the pi-shaped structure's north wall was dismantled to expose the mosaics at the south end of the Late Roman synagogue's west aisle.

Work in the pi-shaped structure (Fig. 4:E) also clarified the relationship of the Late Roman cistern (Fig. 4:A) to the Late Medieval building. The cistern was incorporated into the later building's south wall, to which it was bonded with fieldstones and mortar, and the original opening to the cistern, part of which had been robbed out, was rebuilt and raised to the level of the Late Medieval floor. A north—south channel fed the cistern from the south, while another water channel carried roof water away to the south. The latter was built on top of the paving stones of the Late Roman porch.

## **The Late Medieval Vaulted Structure** (Fig. 5)

During the Late Medieval period, a large, vaulted structure was built directly on top of the surviving southern portion of the Late Roman courtyard. The extant western part of this structure was originally built with its north wall placed on the courtyard pavement and supported by an exterior buttress (Fig. 5:E); its south wall built over the foundations of the courtyard's original south wall (Fig. 5:F); the southern half of its west wall placed

over the concreted bedding of the original portico pavement; and the northern half of its west wall, like the north wall, placed directly on the Late Roman pavement (Fig. 5:G). Extant entrances are indicated by a northern threshold in the east part of the north wall, a southern threshold in the south wall, and a slightly lower western threshold in the west wall. The floor in the northern half of the space delineated by these walls reused the surviving Late Roman pavement north of the surviving stylobate. In contrast, the floor in the southern half of this space—south of the stylobate, where the Late Roman pavement had been robbed out (Fig. 5:D)—consisted of a compact soil layer deposited on the concreted plaster bedding of the original paving and plastered over to create a sturdy walking surface.

It appears that the Late Medieval builders removed a strip of the Late Roman courtyard pavement (2.5–3.5 m wide) along the east wall of the synagogue. Furthermore, as with the floor and stylobate in the synagogue's interior, the Late Medieval builders raised this strip to create a narrow (c. 2 m wide) porch. The only portion of this porch that survives is a section outside the northeast corner of the Late Medieval building. The builders then constructed a monumental staircase made of three steps descending from this porch to the level of the original, Late Roman courtyard and re-used the courtyard's eastward continuation (Fig. 5:H).

At some time during the use of the Late Medieval vaulted structure, its northwest corner collapsed, requiring repairs and renovations in that part of the building. These included a thickening of the west wall; an additional—if crudely built—buttress extending to the west from the juncture of the north wall and west wall; an expanded entrance near the western threshold in the west wall; and a replastering of the floor in the south side of the room—all of which presumably allowed the structure to continue in use until its repurposing in the Late Ottoman/Early Modern era.

#### The Late Ottoman to Modern Periods

Two new squares were opened at the southeast corner of Area 3000. The upper levels contained remains from at least three distinct subphases dated to the nineteenth—twentieth centuries: a cobble floor that apparently was part of an outdoor space

associated with the early twentieth century village; beneath it, there were plaster surfaces with <u>tabuns</u> dating from the late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries; and below were two plaster surfaces of the nineteenth–twentieth centuries. Excavation in these squares will continue in 2023.

To the north of the Late Medieval vaulted structure, two large semicircular features built of fieldstones and architectural blocks in secondary use were found (Fig. 5:I). These were likely connected with the numerous *tabuns* of the nineteenth century elsewhere in Area 3000. By the early-to-mid twentieth century, both features were covered with fills, and two walls that apparently belonged to the modern village houses were constructed above them. The Late Medieval vaulted structure was repurposed as a modern building that developed in multiple phases. This was done with the construction of a new, large north—south wall inside the western part of the room, thus shrinking the size of the building's interior space; by building upon and filling in thresholds of the north and south walls of the building; by constructing pilasters to support structural arches in the new building; and by installing a series of fills and floors.

Similar to the Late Medieval walls that preceded it (e.g., the north wall), the new north—south wall was built directly on the floor of previous buildings—the Late Roman pavement in the north half of the Late Medieval vaulted structure, and a compact fill in the southern half of the structure, where a plaster surface had once been. Because this wall could not have a proper foundation trench, builders constructed a substantial foundation for it consisting of two parallel rows of large fieldstones (Fig. 6). The trench created by these two lines of stones was filled almost a meter high with pottery sherds, mostly of Late Roman—Byzantine bag-shaped storage jars. The new north—south wall was then built on top of this artificial foundation trench.

With the construction of the new north—south wall and its foundation, the original west wall of the Late Medieval vaulted structure went out of use, and the space between it and the new north—south wall was filled with soil and rubble, creating a new alleyway outside and to the west of the modern building. Inside the modern building created by the new north—south wall, builders laid the foundations for at least two pilasters to support the arches that spanned this building.

At some point, this first phase of the modern building must have experienced a significant collapse, as indicated by a thick layer of rubble. After this event, the entire room was again covered with fill, and a new floor was laid at a higher level. In the third and final phase of this modern building, the floor was raised once again before the building was destroyed by fire, likely during the destruction and abandonment of the village of Yakuk in 1948.

One more excavation season at <u>H</u>uqoq is planned to take place in 2023, when work will focus on the southern part of the Late Medieval public building's west aisle; the south end of the Late Roman synagogue (nave and aisles), including removing balks left in earlier seasons between the Samson mosaics; and the area east of the synagogue.

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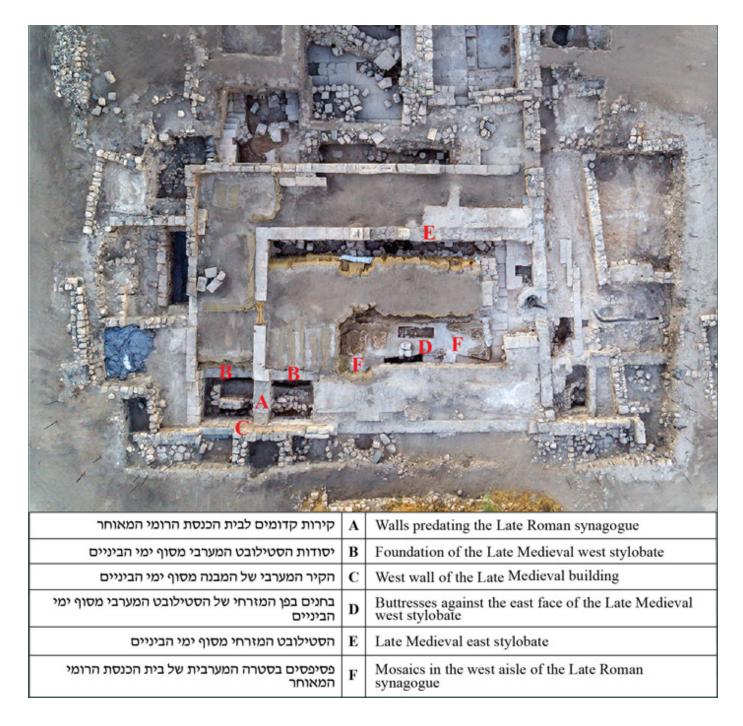
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- 1. Area 3000 at the end of the 2022 season, aerial view to the east. (Images//G-4-2022-1.jpg)
- 2. Mosaic showing fox eating grapes. (Images//G-4-2022-2.jpg)
- 3. Mosaic showing the head of Barak son of Abinoam. (Images//G-4-2022-3.jpg)
- 4. Area 3000, south of the Late Roman synagogue, aerial view to the north. (Images// G-4-2022-4.jpg)
- <u>5. Area 3000, east of the Late Roman synagogue, aerial view to the east. (Images//</u>
  <u>G-4-2022-5b.jpg)</u>
- 6. Foundation trench of the modern north—south wall filled with broken pottery. (Images//





1. Area 3000 at the end of the 2022 season, aerial view to the east. (Images//G-4-2022-1.jpg)

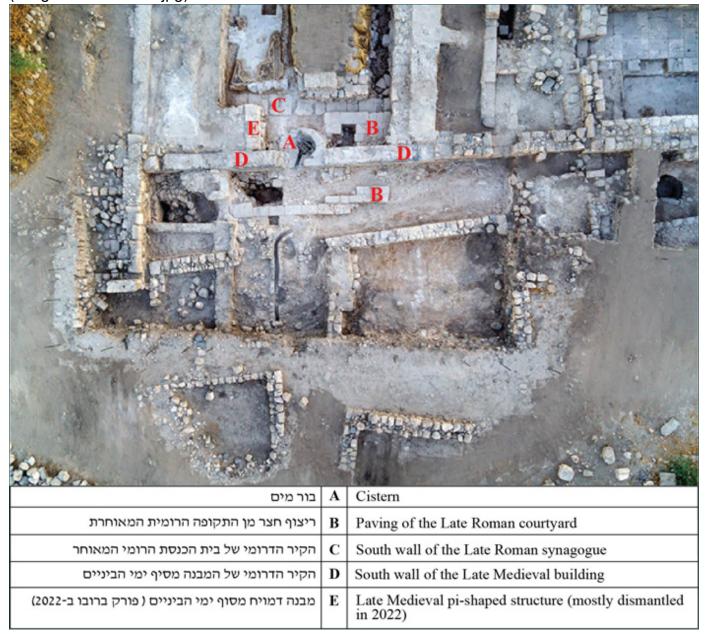




2. Mosaic showing fox eating grapes. (Images//G-4-2022-2.jpg)

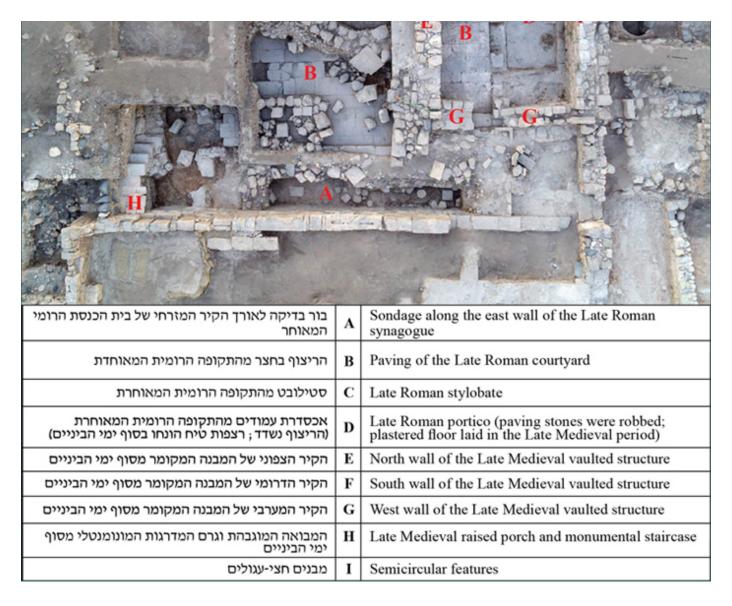


3. Mosaic showing the head of Barak son of Abinoam. (Images//G-4-2022-3.jpg)



4. Area 3000, south of the Late Roman synagogue, aerial view to the north. (Images//G-4-2022-4.jpg)





5. Area 3000, east of the Late Roman synagogue, aerial view to the east. (Images//G-4-2022-5b.jpg)





6. Foundation trench of the modern north–south wall filled with broken pottery. (Images//G-4-2022-6.jpg)

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