

Volume 128 Year 2016 (reports_eng.aspx?id=124)

Huqoq – 2015

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07/09/2016
Preliminary Report

In May and June 2015, the fifth season of excavations was conducted at Horbat Huqoq in eastern Galilee (License No. G-34/2015; map ref. 24500–50/75430–65). The excavation was undertaken and underwritten by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Brigham Young University (Utah), and the University of Toronto (Canada). Additional funding was provided by the National Geographic Society Expeditions Council and Waitt Grants Program, the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, the Foundation for Biblical Archaeology (S. Bishop) and private donors. The excavation was directed by J. Magness, with S. Kisilevitz (assistant director), M. Golan (administration), M. Grey and D. Mizzi (area supervision), B. Coussens (assistant area supervisor), J. Haberman (field photography), M. Robinson-Mohr (registration), D. Schindler (ceramics), K. Britt (mosaics), A. Brown (faunal remains), N. Elkins (numismatics), E. Hubbard (geoarchaeology and micromorphology), R. Mohr (drawing), V. Pirsky (drafting), O. Cohen (site and small finds conservation), Griffin Aerial Imaging (aerial photography) and M. Lavie (cleaning of coins). The volunteers were undergraduate and graduate students from the U.S.A., Canada and Slovakia.

The excavations this season continued in Area 3000 (Magness 2012 (http://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&mag_id=121); Magness et al. 2016 (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124&previewit=TrUe)) where there are three main occupation phases, which will be described chronologically: the Late Roman period (fifth century CE), when the synagogue was erected and in use; the Middle Ages (twelfth–fifteenth centuries CE), when the Late Roman synagogue was reused as a public building; and the Late Ottoman – Modern Period (nineteenth–twentieth centuries CE, up to 1948), at which time the area was covered with domestic structures belonging to the village of Yaquq.

The Late Roman Period

The Late Roman level in the synagogue (Fig. 1) was reached in a square containing a small section of the west aisle and part of the nave; in three squares along a north–south axis in the nave; and in places where balks were dismantled in the east aisle. The removal of the balks, which surrounded mosaics that were exposed in previous seasons, revealed more of the foundations of the synagogue's south wall and the large paving stones in its courtyard. Additional mosaics in the east aisle, in a small part of the west aisle and in part of the nave were also exposed.

Mosaics in the East Aisle. In 2012, a patch of mosaic preserving part of a Hebrew or Aramaic inscription in a medallion flanked by female faces was discovered (Magness et al. 2013 (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=3331&mag_id=120)). In 2013 and 2014, the majority of the 'elephant mosaic' was uncovered (Magness et al. 2014

(http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=12648&mag_id=121); Magness et al. 2016 (www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124&previewit=TrUe)). The mosaics were backfilled at the end of the respective excavation seasons.

During the 2015 season, the backfill and the balks between the two scenes were removed, exposing the entire tripartite register 'elephant mosaic,' and specifically its western part. This part of the mosaic depicted a complete male figure raising a sword on the left side of the upper register; two additional male figures framed by arches on the left side of the middle register; and a fallen soldier holding a shield and a slain battle elephant with a dead soldier-rider on the left side of the lowest register.

The removal of the balks also revealed the Hebrew/Aramaic inscription to the south of the 'elephant mosaic'. It lies in the center of a symmetrical composition, forming a separate, square panel (c. 4.5 sq m). Although the southeast corner of this panel is missing, its composition can be reconstructed based on its symmetrical design. The inscription is encircled by a wreath that contains roundels with female heads on either side of the medallion; these heads, uncovered in 2012, turn toward the inscription. A third head, likely of a male, located in a roundel above and west of the medallion was uncovered this season; the eyes of this figure look down at the inscription. It is almost certain that an additional roundel, now missing, was set below the inscription. The wreath is held aloft by four male figures placed in each corner of the panel. They wear tight-fitting trousers belted at the waist and soft boots. Their upper bodies are bare and display enlarged pectoral muscles, with their arms raised overhead to support the wreath. The men are connected by a continuous garland that passes over the left shoulder of each figure and behind them. The figures' feet are positioned on spheres placed in each corner of the mosaic panel. The spheres are inscribed with quatrefoils containing masks; only the northwest mask is completely preserved (Fig. 2). Each sphere is held in the outstretched hands and arms of two winged putti placed parallel to the sides of the square panel. The arrangement of the visual elements in the panel is intended to direct the viewer's attention to the inscription at the center.

Mosaics in the West Aisle and the Nave. Due to time constraints, the synagogue floor here was reached only in half a square, revealing sections of partially preserved mosaic floors in the west aisle and the nave. The floors of the aisle and nave are separated by a robber's trench that follows the course of the original west stylobate. The mosaic floor in the nave is 0.2 m lower, indicating that the synagogue's nave was at a lower level than the aisles. The mosaics in both areas continue under the balks, beyond the boundaries of the square excavated this season.

The mosaic in the west aisle includes a patch of a guilloche border and a partially exposed scene (1.00 × 1.76 m), divided into two horizontal registers depicting the harvesting of dates. The upper register contains a row of six date palms, each bearing two clusters of dates. Stone vats for the production of date honey are placed between the trees. At the southern end of the exposed area of the upper register, a male figure is depicted carrying a jar on his shoulder. He wears a short tunic tied on one shoulder, leaving bare his legs and part of his upper body. The lower register contains a row of nine date palms. A male figure perched in one of the treetops uses a dagger tucked into his loincloth to cut the clusters of

dates. He lowers the clusters to the ground by sliding them down a rope to a similarly dressed male companion below and to the right.

The mosaic in the nave includes a panel containing animals, such as donkeys, bears and a leopard, arranged in five rows, and a panel to the south that contains a row of four soldiers rendered as half-length, frontal figures. They appear to be in a cart driven by a seated male figure and pulled by a four-legged animal partially visible in the southeast corner of the panel. A decorated border along the west side of these panels incorporates two designs: an inner border of guilloche and an outer border of alternating figured and geometric panels. The latter contains rectangular panels of animal chase scenes that alternate with squares of perspectival meander pattern. Whereas the harvesting scenes in the west aisle are oriented inwards, toward the nave, the nave mosaic is oriented to the south, presumably toward the original main entrance of the synagogue.

The Medieval Period

In the Middle Ages (twelfth–thirteenth centuries CE), a monumental public building was erected on the same spot as the Late Roman synagogue, reusing some of the earlier structure's architectural elements but apparently expanding it in size to the south and west (see Fig. 1). The medieval building reused the synagogue's east wall, which it extended farther to the south; the north wall, which was extended farther to the west; and the stylobates and pedestals, which were raised to the level of the medieval floor. The following discussion proceeds roughly from north to south.

This season, the northeast corner of the medieval building was discovered. Although it preserves the line of the original synagogue's walls, a significant part of these walls was rebuilt, reusing ashlar blocks of various sizes. A bench made of large stone blocks lines the inner face of the east and north walls. The nave is separated from the east and north aisles by a finely dressed stone stylobate with large pedestals that appear to have been reused from the synagogue building, having been lifted about one meter to the level of the medieval floor. The floor is made of a bedding of large cobbles covered with a thick layer of plaster. Signs of multiple repairs to the floor attest to the building's continued use. The construction of this building involved robbing-out and reusing the original, Late Roman stylobates. In the process, parts of the Late Roman mosaics and of the fills that accumulated above them were cut through. The floors of the medieval structure were laid on massive leveling fills, consisting of alternating layers of brown soil and yellow stone chips similar to those discovered in previous seasons under the medieval floor in the east aisle ([Magness et al. 2016 \(http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124&previewit=TrUe\)](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124&previewit=TrUe)). The stylobates are 0.75 m wide and are made of large, finely cut stones, mostly rectangular but including interlocking L-shaped blocks.

Reused architectural pieces, including plastered column drums still preserving their original painted decoration of red and yellow vine or ivy leaves, were placed underneath the east stylobate (Fig. 3), to support it and the weight of the pedestals. In 2014, one pedestal was discovered still sitting atop the stylobate ([Magness et al. 2016 \(http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124&previewit=TrUe\)](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124&previewit=TrUe): Fig. 9), while another one, found in 2015 toppled on the medieval floor next to its original location, was restored to its original position. Additional support for the pedestals was provided by short, east–west

buttress walls that were laid on top of the architectural elements and stone rubble or collapse under the floor.

In the southern half of the building, the medieval remains are much less well-preserved. Although the medieval cobble floor was partially preserved in the east aisle, the stylobate was robbed out and little of the medieval floor survived inside the nave. Furthermore, under the level of the medieval floor, the area to the west of the stylobate is filled with collapsed stones. A single column, sitting on top of the medieval floor level, was found at the south edge of the nave. Two stone-lined silos were found cutting through the medieval floor in the nave.

The Late Ottoman–Modern Period

During this season, remains of the modern village of Yaquq were uncovered mainly in the northeastern and the southwestern parts of Area 3000. In most of the other excavated squares, pre-modern levels had been reached in previous seasons.

During the last five seasons of excavation, three main phases belonging to the Late Ottoman and Modern periods were discerned throughout Area 3000: (1) an intermediate phase between the medieval building and the nineteenth century, including fragmented and detached remains; (2) an open area with numerous cooking installations (*ṭabuns*) and a few partition walls dating to the nineteenth century; (3) a number of residential buildings separated by an alley running north–south, dating to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Remains associated with the outdoor cooking area of Phase 2 were reached only in the northeast part of Area 3000 in 2015, and consisted of a single poorly-preserved *ṭabun* surrounded by a thick layer of ash. Remains associated with Phase 3 were encountered in the northeast and southwest parts of Area 3000. These consisted of structures equipped with installations, with sub-phases represented by the addition and cancellation of partition walls and the elevation of floors. The structures in the southwest contained one or two sets of supporting arches for the roof, which were carried on pairs of pilasters built of hewn rectangular stones set upon a rectangular block with a foundation of packed stones (Fig. 4). The structures all seem to be residential and were filled with a massive layer of collapsed stones and ash from a conflagration, apparently from the village's destruction by fire in 1948. This destruction layer yielded finds such as metal wires and tools and glass bottles.

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[/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124&previewit=TrUe](#)).

1. Aerial view of Area 3000 at the end of the 2015 season: the Late Roman synagogue and medieval building, north at the top. (Images//34-2015-1.jpg)

2. Mask in the mosaic floor of the synagogue, east aisle, looking southeast. (Images//34-2015-2.jpg)

3. Painted column drum from the synagogue in secondary use, east aisle, looking south.

(Images//34-2015-3.jpg)

4. Pilasters supporting arches in a nineteenth–twentieth century house in Yaquq, looking south.

(Images//34-2015-4.jpg)



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