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Huqoq – 2016

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Preliminary Report

From May 31 through June 29 2016, the sixth season of excavations was conducted at Horbat Huqoq in eastern Galilee (License No. G-6/2016; map ref. 24500-50/75430-65; [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. 2016B](#) (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124); [Magness et al. 2016A](#) (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25060&mag_id=124)). The excavation was undertaken and underwritten by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Baylor University (Texas), Brigham Young University (Utah) and the University of Toronto (Canada). Additional funding was provided by the National Geographic Society, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Foundation for Biblical Archaeology (S. Bishop) and private donors. The excavation was directed by J. Magness, with the assistance of S. Kisilevitz (assistant director), M. Golan (administration), M. Grey and D. Mizzi (area supervision), J. Haberman (field photography), M. Robinson-Mohr (registration), D. Schindler (ceramics), K. Britt (mosaics), M. Wells (architecture), 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) and Griffin Aerial Imaging (aerial photography). The volunteers were undergraduate and graduate students from the U.S.A., Canada, Sweden and Slovakia.

The excavations this season continued in Area 3000 (Fig. 1), where there are three main occupation phases, which will be described chronologically: the Late Roman period (fifth century CE), consisting of the remains of a synagogue; the Middle Ages (twelfth–thirteenth centuries CE), when the Late Roman synagogue was reused as a public building; and the post-Middle Ages (thirteenth–sixteenth centuries CE) and Late Ottoman–Modern periods (eighteenth–twentieth centuries CE, up to 1948), when the robbing-out and pitting of the monumental public building were followed by the erection of domestic structures belonging to the village of Yaquq.

The Late Roman Period — The Synagogue

The Late Roman synagogue, which included a mosaic floor, was exposed in four squares in the northern half of the nave and in a small sounding in the southern part of the nave. The synagogue's nave was separated from the aisles by a stylobate on the east, north and west. In the 2015 season, the robber's trench of the western stylobate was discovered, indicating that the width of the synagogue's nave is 5.0–5.3 m and its floor is 0.2 m lower than the aisles. The total dimensions of the synagogue are 15–16 × 20 m. During the 2016 season, the continuation of the robber's trench to the north was excavated, revealing a small patch of mosaic abutting a stone block that is part of the original western Late Roman stylobate, preserved *in situ*. We assume but cannot yet confirm that the western stylobate of the later monumental public building (below) overlies the line of the synagogue's western wall.

The mosaics exposed in the nave consist of two large panels, depicting Noah's Ark (Fig. 1:1) and the Parting of the Red Sea (Fig. 1:2); three small panels (Fig. 1:3) preserved in fragments north of the Noah's Ark mosaic; an incompletely exposed interlacing roundels mosaic with symbols of the Zodiac (Fig. 1:4, 5); and mosaics of a fishing scene (Fig. 1:5). All these mosaics are oriented toward a viewer looking north. The panels are individually framed by simple fillet borders enclosed within a wide border, partially preserved on the western side. This elaborate border is composed of rectangular panels depicting animal chase scenes alternating with squares of a geometric meander motif. Although not preserved on the eastern side of the squares, the same border almost certainly enclosed the mosaic panels on this side of the nave as well.

In the middle of Area 3000, north of the Noah's Ark mosaic, a sounding (0.7 × 0.8 m) was made where mosaics were not preserved but the bedding layer was intact (thickness 5 cm; Fig. 2). This layer yielded a cooking-pot rim that dates from c. 300 to the early fifth century CE. Beneath the bedding layer was a thick fill of soil containing only Hellenistic-period pottery and an Early Roman-period glass bowl rim (first century BCE–first century CE).

The Noah's Ark Mosaic. The northernmost biblical panel contains a scene depicting Noah's ark (2.15 × 2.86 m; Fig. 1:1). The scene is divided into registers containing pairs of animals arranged to face the center of the panel (Fig. 3). The animals are placed against a white background devoid of landscape. Five registers are preserved; fragments of mosaic at the top of the panel indicate that there were additional registers that were not preserved. The readily identifiable animals include donkeys, elephants, bears, camels, leopards, a lion and lioness, snakes, sheep, foxes and ostriches. Near the center of the scene, spanning two registers, is the sole fragment of the ark, which is depicted as a wooden box supported on legs. To the right (east) of the ark is a partially preserved building with a red tile roof. The relationship between the ark and this building is unclear as the connecting segment of mosaic was damaged by a later silo.

The Parting of the Red Sea Mosaic. The panel (Fig. 1:2) located to the south of the Noah's Ark mosaic depicts an unusual representation of the parting of the Red Sea in which Pharaoh's soldiers are being swallowed by fish (Fig. 4), amid overturned chariots and horses. Pharaoh's soldiers appear as Roman soldiers and the chariots are depicted as carts or wagons containing multiple soldiers with a driver. The mosaic is set against a white background without any indication of the setting—land or sea.

Fragments of Three Small Mosaic Panels (Fig. 1:3) were uncovered directly north of the Noah's Ark panel. The panels are arranged in a row, each framed by a simple fillet border. The preserved mosaic in the eastern panel contains fragments of a human figure and a horse. The figure supports a vessel on his head with his raised left hand and holds a shepherd's crook in his right hand. The mosaic in the central panel contains a floral wreath preserved in two fragments and the mosaic in the western panel is preserved in three fragments. The eastern fragment contains a human figure bearing a vessel on his head and a crook in his arm—identical to the figure in the eastern panel, described above. Based on their identical subject matter, it is reasonable to assume that these were pendant panels, framing the floral wreath. The center fragment in the western panel contains an

indeterminate V-shaped object, and the western fragment in this panel preserves only a small piece of a red line set against a white background.

Interlacing Roundels Mosaics with Symbols of the Zodiac. A panel uncovered directly south of the Parting of the Red Sea mosaic contains the upper edges of four interlacing roundels preserved in two fragments (Fig. 1:4). Single dolphins are visible in the triangular interstices between the interlacing roundels. The group of roundels is enclosed within a circular fillet border. Based on the sizes and the arrangement of the exposed roundels and the measurements of the circular border, this panel contains twelve interlacing roundels. The large circle framing the interlaced roundels is set within a square fillet border that delineates the boundaries of the panel. The placement of the circle within the square panel creates triangular spaces (spandrels) in the corners. In the northwest spandrel, the wings of a partially preserved bird of prey are stretched out above a recumbent bull. These interlacing roundels continue to the south under a balk and adjacent to it, in the small sounding in the southern part of the nave (Fig. 1:5). In this sounding, a mosaic roundel containing a set of scales of the zodiac symbol Libra and the leg of a human figure was exposed.

Mosaic of Fishing Scene. The small sounding in the southern part of the nave, just south of the zodiac symbol Libra, also revealed a separate mosaic panel depicting a fishing boat (Fig. 1:5). A fisherman, standing on the bow of the boat, spreads a net, while an oarsman sits behind him. A rounded object with a crisscross design to the left (west) of the fishing boat appears to be the sail and the mast.

The Middle Ages — The Monumental Public Building

In the Middle Ages (twelfth–thirteenth centuries), a monumental public building was erected on the same spot as the Late Roman synagogue, reusing some of the earlier structure's architectural elements. This public building was expanded to the south and west and its floor was raised c. 1 m (see Fig. 1). The synagogue's stylobates and pedestals were raised to the new floor level.

In the 2016 season, the continuation of the northern wall, bench abutting the wall, stylobate and aisle were exposed in the northern part of the area, and the line of the western wall and stylobate, which were robbed, was uncovered. The large pavement and threshold blocks on the western side of Area 3000, which first came to light while clearing the overgrowth in 2011, although not *in situ*, apparently were part of the building's western wall. These discoveries indicate the dimensions of the building: the outer width was c. 18.3 m; the length of the northern stylobate was up to 10 m; the width of the nave was c. 8.35 m; and the width of the aisles, c. 3.6 m. The bench abutting the northern wall was built of two courses of stones and plastered. Portions of outer structures that abut the outer face of the building's northern wall were uncovered; their function is unclear as they lie mostly outside the excavated area.

The 2016 excavations indicate that the monumental public building extended farther south than previously thought, although how far is not yet known. At the southern end of the nave, the upper surfaces of two L-shaped rows of large ashlar stones are incorporated into the building's floor; one row was oriented east–west and the other oriented north–south (see

Fig. 1). The east–west row of ashlar corresponds roughly with the presumed line of the Late Roman synagogue’s southern wall. The roughly square outline of the two ashlar rows and their position suggest a possible ‘bema’. However, the north–south row of blocks continues southward beyond the line of the monumental public building’s southern wall. The 2017 excavations will hopefully clarify this feature’s date and function.

The Post-Middle Ages and Late Ottoman–Modern Periods

Three phases were distinguished in Area 3000, after the public building went out of use (Phases 1–3; Magness et al. 2016A (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25060&mag_id=124)).

Phase 1. Post-Middle Ages activity consisted of robbing stones from the walls and digging pits and silos into the floor of the monumental public building, and below it, through the mosaic floor of the Late Roman synagogue. At the same time or perhaps slightly later, scattered and fragmentary fieldstone walls and installations were constructed, the complete plan and function of which are unknown. These walls and installations were built above a soil accumulation that covered the floor of the monumental public building and yielded pottery dating to the Late Mamluk or the Early Ottoman periods (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries CE).

Phase 2. Sometime in the eighteenth or nineteenth century CE, numerous cooking installations (*ṭabuns*) were installed in proximity to two cisterns: one at the eastern foot of the area and the other in the southern part of the area. These *ṭabuns* were part of open spaces used for food preparation; the ash associated with them was deposited in thick layers throughout the area.

Phase 3. The houses of the modern village of Yaquq were established above the ash deposits. At the northern end of Area 3000, portions of a modern house were uncovered, most of it excavated in previous seasons. In the southern part of the area, the excavation of a large building (Unit I) dating from the 1920s–1948 was completed. This house had at least two major occupation phases, distinguished by the raising and narrowing of a semicircular entryway accessed by a ramp from a north–south alley (Fig. 5).

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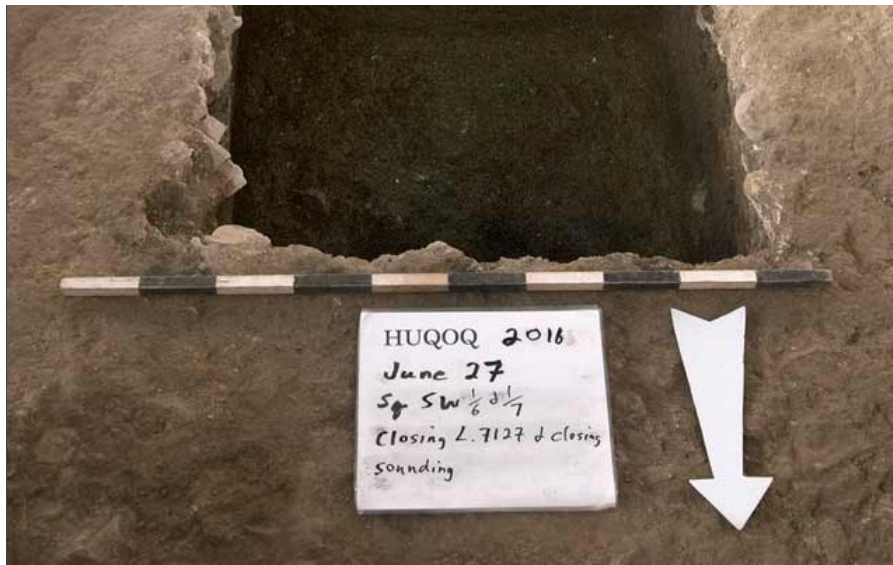
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1. Area 3000 at the end of the 2016 season: Late Roman synagogue and monumental public building from the Middle Ages, aerial photo to north. (Images//G-6-2016-1.jpg)
2. Sounding under the bedding for the mosaic at the north end of the nave (north of the Noah's Ark panel) looking south. (Images//G-6-2016-2.jpg)
3. Pair of donkeys in the mosaic of Noah's Ark. (Images//G-6-2016-3.jpg)
4. Fish swallowing one of Pharaoh's soldiers in the mosaic of the Parting of the Red Sea. (Images//G-6-2016-4.jpg)
5. Two phases of a twentieth century semicircular entryway, looking south. (Images//G-6-2016-5.jpg)



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3. Pair of donkeys in the mosaic of Noah's Ark.

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4. Fish swallowing one of Pharaoh's soldiers in the mosaic of the Parting of the Red Sea.

(Images//G-6-2016-4.jpg)



5. Two phases of a twentieth century semicircular entryway, looking south.
(Images//G-6-2016-5.jpg)

Built teti-tu (<http://www.tetitu.co.il>)

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