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H̄uqoq – 2019

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Preliminary Report

In May–June 2019, the ninth season of excavations was conducted at H̄orbat H̄uqoq (henceforth H̄uqoq) in Eastern Galilee (License No. G-2/2019; map ref. 24500–50/75430–65; [Magness 2012](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1959&mag_id=119) (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) (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) (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) (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25057&mag_id=124); [Magness et al. 2016b](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25060&mag_id=124) (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25060&mag_id=124); [Magness et al. 2017](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25304&mag_id=125) (http://www.hadashot-esi.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) (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&mag_id=127) (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25653&mag_id=127)). 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 Kenan Charitable Trust, the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies, 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), J. Burney, M. Grey and D. Mizzi (area supervision), J. Haberman (field photography), M. Robinson-Mohr (registration), D. Schindler (ceramics), K. Britt and R. Boustana (mosaics), M. Wells (architecture), S. O'Connell (painted plaster), J. George (paleobotany), R. Mohr (drawing), V. Pirsky (drafting), K. Untch (site conservation), M. Lavie (small finds conservation) and Griffin Higher Photography (aerial photography). The volunteers consisted of undergraduate and graduate students from the U.S.A., Canada, Slovakia, Greece and Scotland.

Excavations this season continued in Area 3000 (Fig. 1), where there are five main occupation phases: a Late Roman synagogue (early fifth century CE); a Late Medieval public building (fourteenth–fifteenth centuries CE), which reused the Late Roman synagogue; a rebuilding and expansion of the Late Medieval public building (fifteenth century CE); installations and a few scattered walls built after the Late Medieval public building had gone out of use and was pitted and robbed out (sixteenth–eighteenth 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 a pre-synagogue structure were discovered below the northwest corner of the Late Medieval public building. The following discussion describes these phases from the earliest to the latest, proceeding within each phase from north to south to east.

The Pre-Synagogue Phase

The Late Roman synagogue was not the earliest structure built in Area 3000. In 2018, the tops of two walls were exposed under the foundations of its north and northeast stylobates (Magness et al. 2019 (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25419)). In 2019, two walls forming a corner were discovered under a floor in the northwest corner of the Late Medieval public building (Fig. 2). One of these walls was cut by the west wall of the Late Roman synagogue, indicating that it predates the synagogue. Only the foundations of these walls are preserved, with the uppermost course of one of them incorporating a threshold made of two stone blocks. These foundations are built of unhewn fieldstones alternating between courses of large and small–medium-sized stones. The function and date of the structure to which these walls belong are unknown as no associated surfaces were discovered. Like the pre-synagogue walls discovered in 2018, the two walls discovered in 2019 are oriented differently from those of the synagogue and the Late Medieval public building.

The Late Roman Period

The Synagogue

The excavation focused on the northwest part of the building. Remains of the synagogue's west wall were discovered at its northwest corner, overlaid by the north wall of the Late Medieval public building, which extended the structure to the west. Here the synagogue's west wall was preserved at the foundation level, together with one or two blocks from the first course of the superstructure. We can now confirm that the synagogue was 14.19 m wide. Two new mosaic panels were exposed in this area: the 'four beasts of Daniel's vision' at the west end of the north aisle, in the northwest corner of the synagogue building; and the 'Elim' mosaic at the north end of the west aisle (below). Soundings in two spots where the 'Elim' mosaic was not preserved but the bedding was intact indicate that the bedding comprised three layers: a bottommost layer made of basalt cobbles embedded in a matrix of packed earth; an intermediate layer of packed earth with many small rocks and pebbles; and an uppermost plaster layer composed of lime, charcoal bits and small pebbles. Below the bedding were earth fills that yielded only a small quantity of local ceramic types, the latest of which have an upper date limit of the fourth–fifth centuries CE.

This year's excavation revealed the south face of the euthynteria course of the synagogue's north stylobate, which is constructed of well-dressed, rectangular limestone blocks with a thin layer of mortar. The west stylobate was robbed out in the Late Medieval period and replaced by a new stylobate farther to the west, above the line of the synagogue's robbed-out west wall. About a meter south of the north stylobate, a small patch of mosaic that is an extension of the mosaic in the west aisle was found overlying the line of the synagogue's west stylobate. This patch extends eastwards and abuts a roughly worked, medium-sized stone block placed along the east edge of the line of the stylobate. It is clear, therefore, that in some places the mosaic floor of the aisles extended beyond the line of the stylobate, which raises critical questions about the synagogue's internal architectural arrangement. In addition, because this stylobate consisted of two stone courses, it would have hindered access to the nave, which was 0.2 m lower than the aisles. This problem could have been solved by placing access points along the length of the stylobate, meaning that its upper course would not have

run continuously along the aisles of the building. The patch of mosaic abutting the roughly worked block over the edge of the west stylobate trench may represent one such passageway in or out of the nave, with the block perhaps serving as both a border for the floor and a step to access the nave. A roughly worked block that was found in the north stylobate in 2018 may represent another passageway. Given the absence of benches along the walls of the synagogue, the stylobate could have doubled as a bench. At two courses high and assuming both courses were roughly of the same height (c. 0.27 m), the stylobate would have been about 0.50–0.55 m above the floor level in the nave, and thus high enough for people to sit comfortably.

Damage to the mosaic floor in the north aisle appears to be due to the collapse of the building's superstructure. The damage consists of depressions or gaps in the mosaics, which were caused by fallen architectural elements; some of the damaged spots contained traces of burning and pieces of charcoal. A layer of dirt that yielded pottery dating as late as the fourth–fifth/sixth centuries CE overlay a thin accumulation above the damaged mosaics. The absence of collapsed blocks on the floor indicates that they had already been removed by the time the layer of dirt was deposited above the accumulation over the mosaics. In the west aisle, a Late Medieval construction fill directly overlay the thin accumulation that covered the mosaic, showing that in some places the Late Medieval builders re-exposed the Late Roman floor.

The Mosaics

During the 2019 excavation season, two sets of mosaic panels and two mosaic patches were uncovered in the synagogue: the 'four beasts of Daniel's vision' mosaic at the west end of the north aisle of the synagogue building; the 'Elim' mosaic at the north end of the west aisle; and the two small patches of mosaic consisting of white tesserae which were preserved in the synagogue nave and abutted the south edge of the euthynteria course of the north stylobate. The latter presumably lay in a part of the mosaic outside the decorated border that originally enclosed a figured panel.

The 'Four Beasts of Daniel's Vision' Mosaic, set in the west end of the north aisle,

was arranged in individually framed panels organized in two superposed rows. The individual panels, while incompletely preserved, were presumably the same size as the panels uncovered in 2018 elsewhere in the north aisle. The panels in the top row are preserved in small fragments, making it impossible to determine the appearance of the images depicted in those scenes, although one panel preserves part of an Aramaic inscription. The two panels in the bottom row depict, from east to west, a wild boar and a bear, evidently from Daniel’s vision described in Daniel 7.

The Aramaic inscription was set near the center of the top of the westernmost upper panel. Partially preserved, it reads קדמיתה [...] | דינשר לה, citing Daniel 7:4 (“The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings”; קדמיתהא כאריה, וגפין די-נשר לה). This verse describes the first of the four beasts of Daniel’s vision. To the right of the inscription, an animal’s tail is the only part that remains of what was likely a winged lion.

The panel beneath the lion-like figure depicts a bear-like creature in profile view striding toward the left (west). The bear-like features of the animal and especially the three objects that protrude from its mouth permit it to be identified as the second beast described in Daniel 7:5: “Another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, had three tusks (or ribs) in its mouth among its teeth and was told, ‘Arise, devour many bodies!’” (וארו חיה אחרי תנינה דמיה לדב, ולשטר-חד הקמת, ויתלת עלעין בפמה, בין שניה (שנה); וכן אמרין לה, קומי אכלי בשר שגיא).

The panel to the east of the lion-like creature likely depicted a leopard with some of the attributes described in Daniel 7:6, although nothing remains of that figure.

In the panel to the east of the bear-like creature is a wild boar that is clearly intended to be the fourth beast described in Daniel 7:7: “After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns” (באתר דנה חזה הנית) בחזוי ליליא, וארו חיה רביעה (רביעה) דחילה ואימתני ותקיפא יתירה ושנין די-פרזל לה רברבן, אכלה (ומדקה, ושאר אברגליה (ברגלה) רפסה; והיא משנה, מן-כל חיותא די קדמיה (קדמה), וקרנין עשר, לה). In both classical rabbinic and Patristic literature, the fourth beast of Daniel’s vision is frequently identified as a pig (חזיר) or a wild boar (חזיר היער) symbolizing the Roman

Empire.

The ‘Elim’ Mosaic (Fig. 3), which lay at the north end of the synagogue’s west aisle, to the south of the panels with the ‘four beasts of Daniel’s vision,’ was fully exposed this season. A small section of this mosaic was initially uncovered in 2015 ([Magness et al. 2016a](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25060&mag_id=124) (http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=25060&mag_id=124)).

The mosaic is a large, framed panel that originally covered the entire width of the west aisle. However, due to damage caused by the collapse of the building’s superstructure, the robbing out of the Late Roman west stylobate to its east, and the construction of the Late Medieval west stylobate to its west, the mosaic is incompletely preserved.

The panel is divided into three registers, which are referred to here as the west, middle and east registers. The east and west registers were conceived as two pendants containing scenes that mirror each other. The west register depicts a row of date palms and three agricultural workers engaged in activities related to date harvesting. At one end of the register, a male figure dressed in a loincloth climbs a tree using an omega (zip-line). A small vignette near the center of the register shows a worker standing amid palm fronds at the top of a tree. He cuts the clusters of dates using a small scythe-like hand tool and slides them down the rope to a worker standing on the ground. The middle register depicts a walled city with a gate, identified by a Hebrew inscription above (“Then they came to Elim”; ויבאו אילמה) as biblical Elim described in Exodus 15:27—“Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they encamped there by the water” (וְשָׁם שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה עֵינֹת מַיִם, וְשִׁבְעִים) (על-הַמַּיִם וַיִּבְאוּ אֵילְמָה תְּמָרִים; cf. Numbers 33:9). A man carrying a jar on his shoulder is about to enter the city through the gate, presumably returning to the city after filling the vessel with water from the springs. In the rest of this register, wells constructed of ashlar masonry representing the city’s twelve springs alternate with palm trees. The east register depicts a row of date palms, exactly like its pendant counterpart on the west side of the panel. Two agricultural workers engaged in activities related to date harvesting are depicted near the center of this register.

South of the Synagogue Building

Three sections of stone pavement belonging to a courtyard which lay to the south of the Late Roman synagogue were exposed in 2019, all consisting of large limestone ashlar laid in tightly packed rows. This arrangement is similar to that of the flagstones exposed in 2013 immediately outside the foundation of the synagogue's south wall. So far, it appears that the courtyard did not extend beyond the synagogue's west wall.

The Late Medieval Period: Early Phase

Nearly a millennium after the Late Roman synagogue was constructed, a monumental public building with a similar basilica plan was erected on the same spot. This building reused some of the Late Roman synagogue's architectural elements, expanded the structure to the south and west, and lifted the synagogue's stylobates and pedestals about one meter to a new floor level. Pottery fragments found in previous seasons in the make-up of this building's thick, concrete-like floor and in fills sealed beneath it suggested a twelfth–thirteenth century CE date for its construction. However, a small number of glazed sherds recovered from sealed contexts in 2019 apparently date to the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries CE, that is, the Late Medieval period. This would make the building contemporary with a hoard of gold and silver coins found in 2018, suggesting significant wealth at the site. This later date for the building would be consistent with the early fourteenth-century CE description by the geographer Ishtori Haparchi of “a synagogue with a very old floor”; it is possible that Haparchi visited the medieval village prior to the construction of the public building over the Late Roman synagogue, and what he saw were the synagogue's ancient mosaics. This means that some of the original mosaics would have been visible at that time, and that the building was still identified as a synagogue, centuries after it fell out of use. Hopefully, future analysis of the ceramic material and radiocarbon dating of charcoal samples will enable us to determine the date of this building with greater precision.

The 2019 excavation exposed the foundation trench on the inner side of the west wall of

the Late Medieval public building and the westward extension of its north wall, indicating that these walls were built together, with the latter abutting the northwest corner of the Late Roman synagogue. On the east side of the Late Medieval public building, the east stylobate was found to consist of finely carved blocks resting on foundation courses made of repurposed architectural elements from the Late Roman synagogue, including column drums, pedestals, capitals and ashlar blocks. The foundations of the north stylobate incorporated the Late Roman stylobate, while the west stylobate was laid on a foundation fill of earth overlying the remains of the Late Roman synagogue's west wall. Buttresses of mortared stones and architectural fragments abutting the inner faces of the east and west stylobates provided support for pedestals.

The pi-shaped stone structure exposed in the south part of the medieval public building in 2016–2018 was further excavated in 2019. It comprises two phases, corresponding to the public building's initial construction and its later rebuilding and expansion. This pi-shaped structure encloses a cistern that lies approximately in its center, and it is delineated to the south by the building's south wall. A plaster floor abuts the first phase of the west wall of this structure. This season's findings indicate that a layer of hard mortar was deposited around the cistern, probably to stabilize the opening and prevent water damage near it; this layer was sealed by the plaster floor to the west. An assemblage of glass oil lamps, ceramic wick holders, as well as metal hooks and chains, all belonging to a hanging polycandelon/chandelier, was found in a fill above the plaster floor in the northwest corner of the pi-shaped structure.

To the south of the Late Medieval public building, sections of two stone channels that carried water away to the south were found, covered by fills associated with the building's construction. A third channel empties into the cistern on its south side, although its date—Late Roman or Late Medieval—has not yet been determined.

The Late Medieval Period: Late Phase

The 2019 excavations confirmed the existence of a second main phase of construction in the Late Medieval public building, when it was rebuilt and expanded. These changes

include the reconstruction of the pi-shaped structure and the laying of a new, less substantial floor in the southwest corner of the nave, probably coupled with the replastering of the building's entire floor. Parts of the walls were rebuilt, in some places from the bottom course up, and rooms were constructed around the west, north and east sides of the building. It is unclear whether a catastrophic event, such as an earthquake, precipitated these modifications, which seem to mark a change in the building's function. Deposits of roof tiles found to the north and south of the building are attributed to this phase, presumably having been disposed of after the structure was damaged. A newly opened extension of Area 3000, to the east of the synagogue/public building, revealed five walls, apparently from this late phase of the Late Medieval public building. These walls belong to a large vaulted structure that was attached to the building's south wall (Fig. 4). No associated floors or foundations have yet been found.

The Post-Medieval Period

Following the second phase of the Late Medieval public building, the structure was abandoned. Installations, walls and small floor segments found throughout the excavation area are associated with occupation following the abandonment of the building. These include a cobble pavement laid on an accumulation above the building's robbed-out south wall, its floor and the southern part of the west wall of the pi-shaped structure. The cobbles extend over areas that had been both inside and outside the Late Medieval public building. During this phase, many of the Late Medieval public building's elements were robbed out, and silos were dug into its floor. The majority of remains attributed to this phase do not include floors or clearly datable material, nor do they allow for a clear internal phasing. For now, these remains are attributed in a general manner to the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries CE.

The Late Ottoman to Modern Periods

As documented in previous seasons, the post-medieval remains are overlaid by a thick layer of ash associated with numerous *ṭabuns*. Three of these *ṭabuns* were excavated in

2019 in the area to the south of the synagogue. Aside from a nineteenth-century CE wall dismantled at the beginning of the season, built structures dated to these periods were found only in the newly opened extension to the east of the synagogue. These structures comprise the remains of at least two houses constructed in the early twentieth century. The most completely exposed dwelling utilized the north and south walls of the vaulted structure on the east side of the Late Medieval public building. This dwelling displayed two construction phases, both likely dating from the early twentieth century. Like the modern village houses exposed previously in other parts of Area 3000, these dwellings had plastered floors and arches resting on pilasters for roof support. Also like the other modern houses, these dwellings were destroyed in a violent conflagration, as evidenced by charred roof timbers on the floors.

We anticipate continuing work at H̱uqoq for two more years (2021–2022), until the entire synagogue and Late Medieval public building have been excavated. The parts of the synagogue remaining to be excavated are the southern half of the west aisle, the southern end of the nave, and the baulks overlying the ‘Samson’ mosaics at the southern end of the east aisle. Excavations will also continue in the synagogue’s paved courtyard in the south part of Area 3000, and in and around the vaulted structure of the Late Medieval public building on the east side of Area 3000.

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1. Aerial view of Area 3000 at the end of the 2019 season; north is at the top.

([Images//G2-19-1a.jpg](#))

2. Aerial view of pre-synagogue walls under the northwest corner of the Late Medieval public building; north is at the top. ([Images//G2-19-2a.jpg](#))

3. Detail of the 'Elim' mosaic. ([Images//G2-19-3a.jpg](#))

4. Aerial view of the Late Medieval vaulted building to the east of the synagogue; north is at the top. ([Images//G2-19-4a.jpg](#))





1. Aerial view of Area 3000 at the end of the 2019 season; north is at the top.
(Images//G2-19-1a.jpg)





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(Images//G2-19-2a.jpg)



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(Images//G2-19-3a.jpg)



4. Aerial view of the Late Medieval vaulted building to the east of the synagogue; north is at the top.
(Images//G2-19-4a.jpg)

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