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A Byzantine and Early Islamic Building along the Southern Tyropoeon Valley

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Part of a building (Building 900) was uncovered along the Tyropoeon Valley. Three phases of use were identified: the first two dating to the Byzantine period, and the last phase, to the Abbasid period. The plan of the building, along with the quality of construction and some of the small finds, indicate the affluent status of the building's residents in both periods. The finds from this excavation, together with those of previous excavations in the area, shed light on the residential neighborhood that development on the lower half of the slope of the City of David in the Tyropoeon Valley, beginning from the sixth–seventh centuries CE. The presence of pig remains in the Abbasid-period building may attest that its inhabitants were Christian, or that the prohibition on pork consumption was not yet enforced in this early phase of the Early Islamic period.

Keywords: City of David, residential neighborhood, hoard, fauna

Introduction

Between October 2012 and May 2013, a salvage excavation was conducted in Jerusalem, in the courtyard of a residencial building located on the western side of Ma'alot 'Ir David Street (map ref. 222308/631148).[2] The excavation was located along the eastern slope of Tyropoeon Valley, in the vicinity of several previous excavations (Fig. 1), including Kenyon's Area N (Kenyon 1974:259–264; Steiner 2001: Fig. 1.1; see Reich 2011: Fig. 74,

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[2] The excavation (Permit Nos. A-6626, A-6693), on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, was conducted within the confines of the City of David National Park, funded by the City of David Foundation. The excavation was directed by the authors, with the assistance of Vadim Essman and Yakov Shmidov (surveying and plans), Assaf Peretz, Vladimir Naichin and Clara Amit (photography), Said el-Amali (metal detection), Avshalom Karasik (digital drawings), Carmen Hersch (drawings) and Victoria Nosikovsky (metal laboratory). Scientific analysis of the various finds was conducted by Debora Sandhaus (Byzantine pottery), Benjamin Dolinka (Islamic pottery), Tamar Winter and Adrianne Ganor (glass finds), Donald T. Ariel and Gabriela Bijovsky (numismatics), Nimrod Marom (faunal assemblage) and Inbar Ktalav (mollusks).

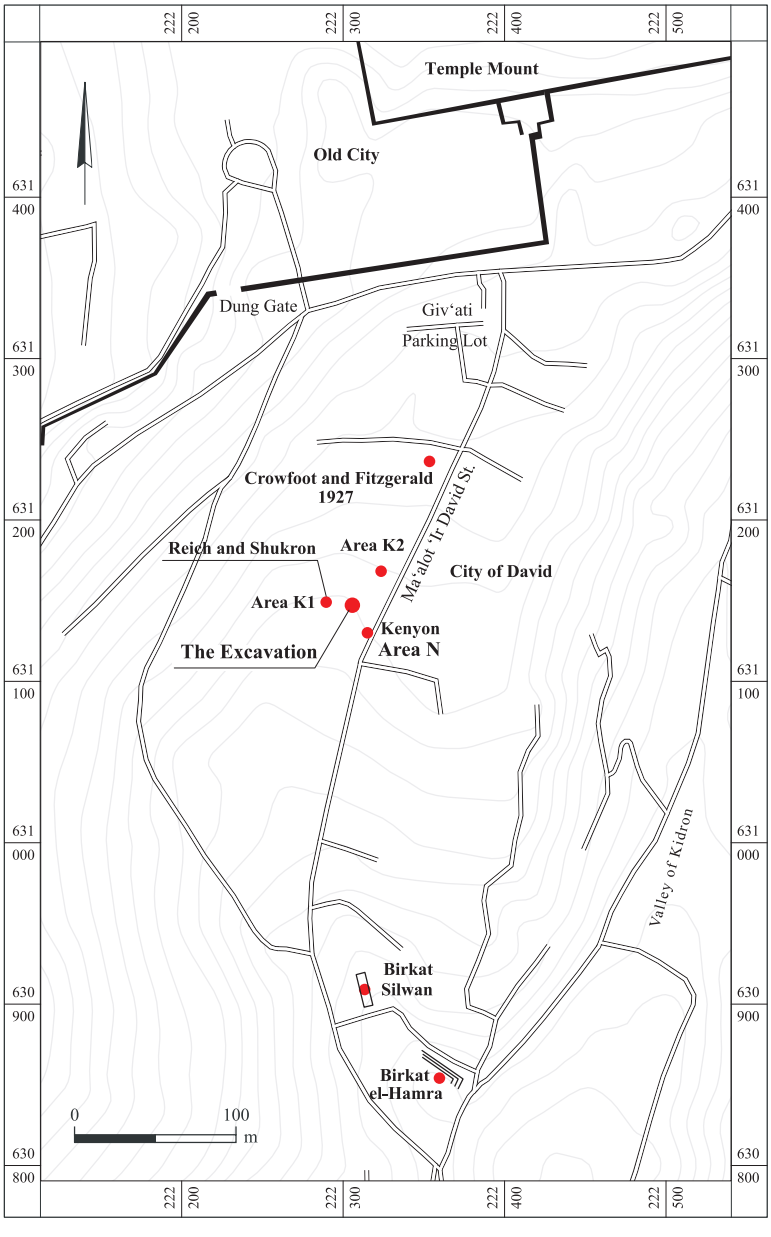


Fig. 1. Location map.

for the approximate location of Kenyon's excavation)[3] and Reich and Shukron's (2001:122–124, Fig. 2) Area K1, located 10 m to the west of the present excavation, where part of a building from the end of the Byzantine period was exposed.

[3] Preliminary reports of the Area N excavations, including a photograph of the area at the time of the excavation (Kenyon 1974: Pl. 100), indicate the presence of several phases of Byzantine occupation. The photograph clearly depicts thick accumulations of collapsed debris from the Byzantine period above an Early Roman stratum, a sequence well-known from other excavations conducted in this area (for a detailed description of the various excavations of the Early Roman street, see Szanton et al. 2019); large flagstones seen atop the collapsed debris represent Byzantine or later construction that may have reused stones from the Early Roman street.

The present excavation, conducted in two adjoining squares (3 × 3 m and 3.5 × 4.0 m), exposed another part of a Byzantine-period building (Building 900), possibly part of the same building exposed in Reich and Shukron's Area K1 (see below). The large building, erected at the end of the Byzantine period, was uncovered below a 2.5 m thick fill of dark gray soil devoid of stones, that contained a mixture of finds from various periods. Three phases of use were identified in Building 900, the first two dating to the Byzantine period (Phase IIa–b; Plan 1), and the last phase dating to the Abbasid period (Phase I; Plan 2). Due to the limited exposure of the building, no complete rooms were uncovered and none of the walls were exposed along their entire length.

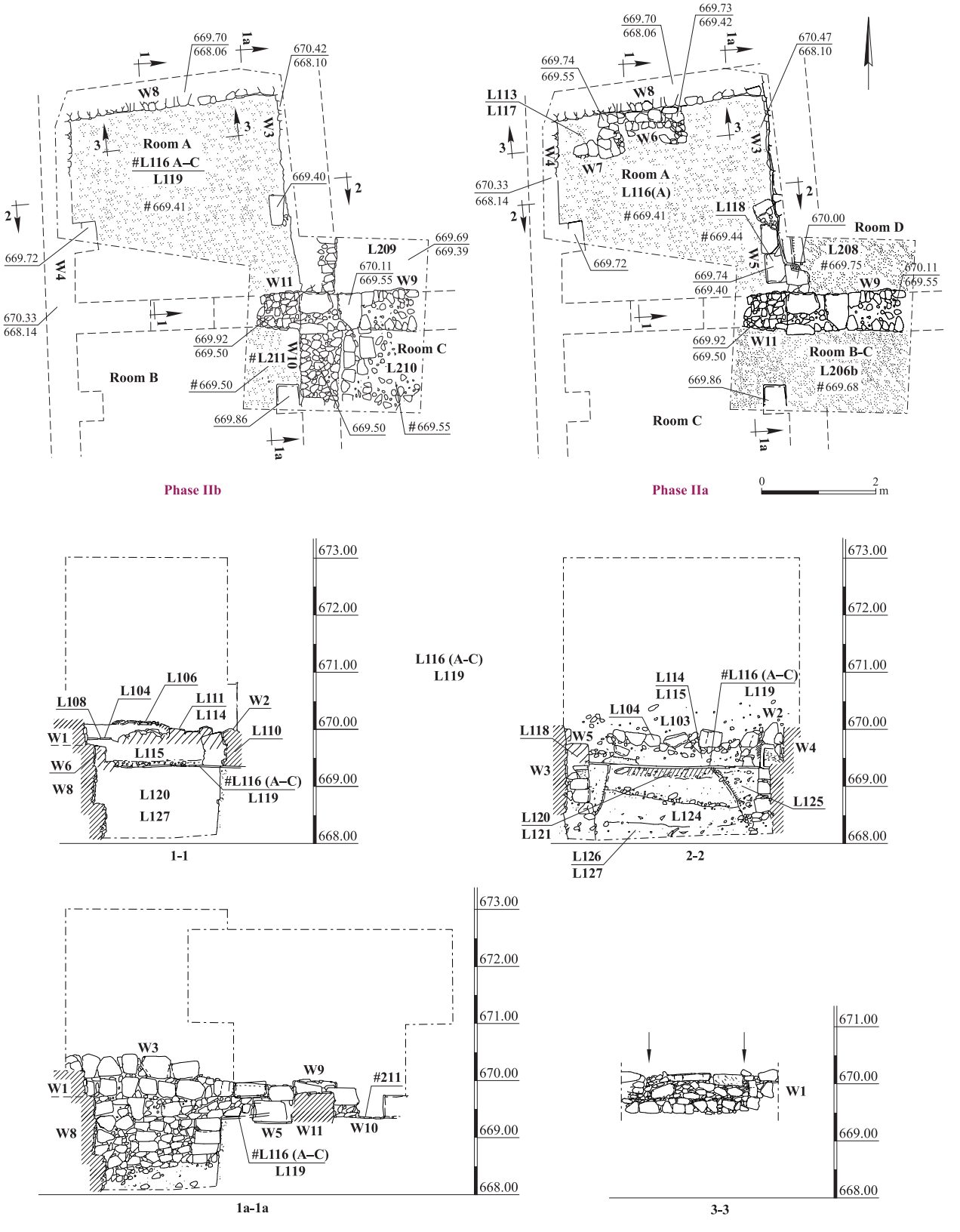
The Excavation

The Byzantine Period

Phase IIb (Plan 1)

Parts of three rooms (A–C) of Building 900 were exposed. It seems that the building had an elongated plan with two relatively large rooms (A, B). Remains of the piers of an arch, built of ashlar masonry against the long north–south walls of the building (W3, W4, W10), indicate that it had an arch-supported roof or a second story. An east–west wall (W11; Plan 1; Fig. 2) crossed W3/W10 at a right angle and separated between Rooms A and B. The joint of these two walls was slightly thicker than the walls and built of large roughly cut stones (the largest 0.45 × 0.65 m) and hence, it may have been strengthened.

Fig. 2. Building 900, Phase IIb, join of W3, W9, W10 and W11.



Plan 1. Building 900, Phases IIb, IIa, plan and sections.

Room C, to the east of Room B, was enclosed by W9 (0.65 × 1.5 m, preserved height 0.56 m above the floor) on its north and W10 (0.75 × 1.25 m, preserved to the same height as the floor) on its west. A gray plaster floor (L210), uncovered in the corner of Room C, was sealed by Phase IIa Floor 206b (see below).[4]

Room A was enclosed by four walls (W3, W4, W8 and W11) built of small–medium-sized fieldstones, two of which (W3: 3.00 × 0.65 m; W4: 0.2 × 1.1 m) were preserved to a height of up to one meter above a series of plaster floors (L116A–C); Wall 8 (0.6 × 3.5 m), the northern wall of Room A, was preserved to a height of 0.3 m above the floor level. Floors 116A–C were made of gray plaster mixed with crushed chalk, laid over a foundation of small fieldstones (L119). Several earth fills (L120, L121, L124–127: Plan 1: Sections 1–1, 2–2) were sealed below the floors; they yielded sherds dating to the fifth–sixth centuries CE (see Sandhaus, this volume: Figs. 2:1, 2; 3) and a coin of Anastasius I, dated to 491–498 CE (see Ariel and Bijovsky, this volume: Cat. No. 31), providing a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the floors above the fill and Building 900 as a whole. Floor makeup L119 yielded sixth-century CE pottery (see Sandhaus, this volume: Fig. 4:2, 11). Loci 125–127 comprised a one-meter-thick construction fill, in which material appeared to have been laid down in a number of dumping episodes, as part of the construction of Building 900. The fills yielded coins (see Ariel and Bijovsky, this volume: Cat. Nos. A2, A8, A12, A13), two bone spatulas, a small gold stick, a stone bead and a game dice, also made of bone.

The foundations of W3 and W8 were neatly bonded, without a projection of one of the walls beyond the line of the superstructure (Plan 1: Section 1a–1a; Fig. 3). While W8 was bonded with W4, it merely abutted the western face of W3. At the wall foundations, W3 was flush with the superstructure, while W8 was wider; W8 was bonded with both W3 and W4 at its foundation. Two ashlar-built piers were erected against the interior faces of W3 and W4, one opposite the other (Plan 1: Section 2–2), indicating that an arch had once existed in this space; the uppermost course of the western pier had drafted margins, and was likely in secondary use (Fig. 4). Floors 116A–C reached the bases of the two piers (Plan 1: Sections 1a–1a, 2–2).

A patch of a plaster floor (L211) was uncovered in Room B abutting the western face of W10. A large ashlar stone, of which only part was exposed (0.36 × 0.40 m), was placed against W10, near the northeastern corner of Room B. The stone must have served as the base of a pier that would have supported another arch, oriented parallel to the arch that appeared to have traversed Room A; a counterpart of the exposed pier base may have lain in the unexcavated part of Room B, on its western side. Floor 211 reached the ashlar stone, as was the case with the bases of the two piers in Room A. Thus, Rooms A and B appeared to be constructed in a similar fashion, each apparently comprising an arch supported by two piers. A slight north–south inclination could be observed in the plaster floors of Rooms A and B, with a 9 cm elevation difference between the two rooms.

[4] Only unidentifiable coins were found on this floor and hence, its date could not be determined with precision.

Fig. 3. Building 900, Phase IIb,W3 and W8, looking south.

Fig. 4. Building 900, Phase IIb, W4 and a pier built against it, showing its uppermost, drafted-margin dressed ashlar.

Part of what may have been an open area, possibly a courtyard (L209), was exposed to the east and north of the three rooms described above; although, this reconstruction is tentative, as only a rather small part of this space was excavated. Locus 209 yielded pottery from the third–fifth centuries CE (see Sandhaus, this volume: Fig. 1).

The entrance to Building 900 was not exposed. It is possible that the building was entered from the south, through an entrance exposed by Reich and Shukron (2001: Fig. 2) in nearby Area K1.

As the latest pottery and coins found in association with the Phase IIb remains dated to the late Byzantine period, it is clear that Building 900 was originally constructed during this period. The remains from this phase revealed a large, well-planned structure, whose construction must have required considerable investment of time and resources. The walls of the building were quite thick, and the use of piers indicated that arches had to support the ceiling, and possibly a second story. While only a small part of the building was exposed, it appears to have been of the peristyle type, with rooms arranged around a central courtyard. This reconstruction is further supported by the layout of remains unearthed in nearby Area K1 and a reconstruction based on the combined finds from that and the present excavations. This type of building is generally common in the Byzantine period (Hirschfeld 1995; Seligman 2011), particularly in Jerusalem, as seen for example in the ‘Ofel excavations South of the Temple Mount (Mazar 2003; 2007; Gordon 2007).

Phase IIa (Plan 1)

Several changes were made to Building 900 in Phase IIa. A stepped entrance (W5; L118; 0.3 × 1.4 × 0.3 m) was added on the southern end of W3, using small stones to fill gaps between the stones of the doorframe and the larger stones of W3 (Fig. 5; Plan 1: Section 1a–1a). Large threshold stones, with a hinge socket and a niche used as a door stopper, comprised the stepped entrance. From the position of the niche and socket, it is clear that the door would have opened to the east, i.e., leading from Room A to the space to its east, which during this phase appears to have been closed off (Plan 2: Room D). The step leading to the doorway, abutting the western face of W3, was built from large, roughly worked fieldstones, without mortar. The builders of W5 removed the upper part of the pier in the corner of W3 and W11, while using its lower courses to shore up the newly added step (Plan 1: Section 2–2; Fig. 5). The foundation stones of W5 reached beyond the pier and were built directly on the earlier Phase IIb plaster floor (Fig. 6).

There were two adjacent installations in this phase: one (W6; 0.60 × 0.80 × 0.37 m) is enclosed on three sides, forming a half-square, and the other (W7; 0.6 × 1.0 × 0.4 m) is L-shaped. Both installations abutted W8 to the north (Plan 1; Fig. 7). The installations were poorly preserved, with only three courses remaining, likely due to partial dismantling in the course of leveling work and modifications made to the building in Phase I (see below). The manner that the installations and the entrance (W5) were placed atop Floor L116(A), lacking foundations below the floor, indicated that they were added in Phase IIa.

Fig. 5. Building 900, Phase IIa, Floors 116 and 119.

Fig. 6. Building 900, Phase IIb W3 and the stones added in Phase IIa to fill the gaps caused by the addition of an entrance at that time, looking east.

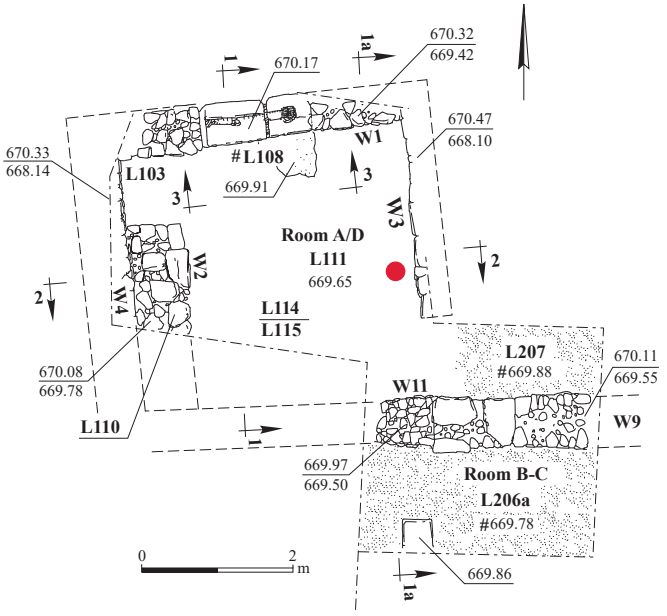
Fig. 7. Building 900, Phase IIa, Installations 6 and 7, looking north.

A floor (L208) of yellowish plaster was laid down east of W5, attesting that Room D replaced the earlier courtyard (Plan 2). This floor abutted the stone threshold (W5) and was laid upon a foundation of small fieldstones, which yielded pottery dating from the fourth–sixth centuries CE (see Sandhaus, this volume: Fig. 1), including material that post-dated the pottery found in underlying L209. A similar plaster floor was exposed south of W9 (L206b), extending over the remains of Phase IIb W10 into what was previously Room B, forming a contiguous space (Room B–C). In this space, Phase IIa Floor 206b abutted the pier of Phase IIb.

The Early Islamic Period

Phase I (Plan 2)

The Phase II remains served as the foundation of the building activities of Phase I, when Building 900 underwent several changes. In this phase, the internal subdivision of the building was modified, and the floors were raised to allow for this change, sealing the earlier floors. Rooms A and D were combined at the southern end of W3 (Room A/D), and a new floor (L108, L207) was laid above the earlier floors, sealing W5 and Installations W6 and W7; fairly well-preserved Floor 207 abutted the northern face of W9. Unlike the earlier floors of Phase II, Floor 108 had no stone foundation, and it was composed of a mixyure of plaster, beaten earth and crushed chalk, conferring it a yellowish-brown shade. Floor 108 was poorly preserved due to its flimsy manner of construction and the eventual collapse of large stones (L111) atop it, an event which brought the use of the building to an end; this event seems to have occurred in the ninth century CE, according to ceramics from L111 (see Dolinka, this volume: Fig. 1:7–12). In places, the collapsed debris reached down to levels below the Phase IIa stepped entrance. Pottery from the makeup of Floor 108 was dated to the Umayyad period, providing a *terminus post quem* for Phase I. The latest pottery and coins in fills below the floor makeup (L113, L114, L115; Plan 2: Sections 1–1, 2–2; see Sandhaus, this volume: Fig. 6:5–8;



Plan 2. Building 900, Phase I; the location of the coin hoard is marked by a red dot (for sections, see Plan 1).

see Ariel and Bijovsky, this volume: Cat. No. A32) date to the sixth century CE, possibly indicating that only a short period of time elapsed between Phase IIa and Phase I.

The small surviving patch of Floor 108, uncovered on the west side of Room A/D, abutted the southern face of a newly erected wall (W1; 0.5 × 3.8 m; Fig. 8; Plan 1: Section 3–3), in which an entrance with a threshold was built (0.5 × 1.4 m). Wall 1 was built of small and medium-sized fieldstones, without mortar atop the remains of Phase II W8 that was levelled to serve as its foundation. It abutted W3 and bonded with the upper part of W4 (see below).[5] The threshold comprised two large stones in secondary use, reworked so that they fit each other and the stones of W1. The two stones differ from one another in their thickness, level of finishing (the western stone is finer than the eastern one) and carving style (Fig. 7; Plan 1: Section 3–3). Two door sockets were carved into the threshold stones, indicating that the entrance was a double door; the doors would have opened to the south and closed against a niche on the northern side of the threshold (Fig. 9).

Pottery found atop Floor 207 dated to the Abbasid period (see Dolinka, this volume: Fig. 2), indicating the time in which the floor was laid down. The attribution of Floors 207 and 108 to one construction phase is based on their similar elevation and manner of construction, despite the fact that the latest pottery found below the foundation of Floor 108 was of Umayyad date.

[5] The bonding between Phase II W4 and Phase I W1 indicated that W4 was first partly dismantled and subsequently its upper part rebuilt at the time of Phase I.

Fig. 8. Building 900, Phase I, W1 abutted by Floor 108, looking north; note threshold in W1.

Fig. 9. Building 900, Phase I threshold built atop Phase IIa W8, looking north.

An additional change made in Phase I was the construction of a north–south wall against the eastern face of W4 (W2; 0.60 × 1.25 m), built of a single course of unworked fieldstones. The wall was sloppily built, and its lowermost course was at the same elevation as that of W1, both overlying Fill 113 from which Byzantine-period pottery was retrieved (see above). The dismantling of W2 exposed Abbasid-period pottery in its core (L110; see Dolinka, this volume: Fig. 1:5, 6), and revealed that W2 sealed the pier of Phase II W4 (see Plan 1: Section 2–2). While no floor remnants of Phase I Room A/D survived near W2, it is likely that the floor abutted the eastern face of W2, based on the similar elevations of Floor 108 and the bottom of the lowermost course of W2 (670.08–669.78 and 669.91 m asl, respectively).

As with other Phase II walls, W3 remained in use at the time of Phase I, until its collapse after the building went out of use. Below the collapsed debris (L111) in Room A/D, a small hoard of eight Byzantine *folles* of Justin I, two dating from 518–527 CE and the other six, from 527–538 CE, was discovered near the western face of W3 (see Ariel and Bijovsky, this volume: Cat. Nos. B1–B8).[6]

Many roof tiles were also found among collapsed debris L111, along with fragments of mosaic floors made of white tesserae, joined together by the plaster foundation of the floors; some of the fragments were found face-down. The presence of mosaic floor fragments, and the upside-down position of some of them indicate the existence of a second story in Building 900, at least in Phase I. The building probably collapsed after it went out of use.

Discussion: Development of the Byzantine and Early Islamic Residential Area in the Southern Tyropoeon Valley

The present excavation exposed parts of several rooms of a probably large building, located along the Tyropoeon Valley, remains of which were previously uncovered several meters to the west (Reich and Shukron 2001). The building was originally constructed in the late Byzantine period and remained in use until the Abbasid period, undergoing changes in its structural plan; it may be tentitavely identified as a peristyle building (Plan 3), recalling other such buildings from the Byzantine period in Jerusalem, such as Rooms 26–27 in the Monastery of Theodorus and Cyriacus (Amit, Seligman and Zilberbod 2003), Room 10 in the ‘Ofel excavations (Mazar 2003: Pl. I.2; 2007: Fig. 14.1; Gordon 2007: Figs. 1, 4) and Room 37, excavated by Crowfoot and Fitzgerald (1929; see also Magness 1992:69). All of these buildings are characterised by a central courtyard with surrounding rooms.

The plan of Building 900, along with the quality of construction and some of the small finds uncovered in the excavation, indicate the affluent status of the building’s residents

[6] A hoard of the same date and precisely the same number and composition of coins, was found at the mouth of Naḥal Qidron in the Dead Sea region (Dahari 2002:238; see Ariel 2002:24–29, 240–241) and assigned to the time of the plague of 558 CE (Ariel 2002:299–300).

Plan 3. Block plan of Building 900 with the adjacent previously exposed building remains in Area K1 (following Reich and Shukron 2001).

in the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods (see Mazar 2007:113–147, for a similar interpretation of the Byzantine-period architectural remains). Of particular interest is the small hoard of eight coins (see Ariel and Bijovsky, this volume), whose position suggested that it may have been deposited within W3, thus conforming the sixth-century CE dating of the construction of the building. According to this scenario, the hoard, found in the collapsed debris on the Phase I floor, represents the initial construction phase. Alternitavely, the hoard's findspot, near one of the walls, may indicate that the coins were kept in a moneybox or pouch that was placed on a shelf near the wall for safekeeping. The latter understanding, however, is less likely as the building was abandoned, suggesting that items of value would have been removed. Regardless, the small hoard does seem to contribute to our understanding of the affluent status of the residents. Reinforcing evidence for this interpretation comes from the zooarchaeological finds from Building 900 (see Marom, this volume; Ktalav, this volume) that reflect the rich and diverse cuisine consumed by the building's inhabitants. The presence of pig remains among the Phase I faunal assemblage is of particular interest, as this phase is dated to the Abbasid period, when the Islamic prohibition of pork was supposedly in effect. Pork consumption was also attested in Islamic-period contexts at Giv'ati Parking Lot (Bar-Oz and Raban-Gerstel 2013:352, Table 23.1), although, the latter excavations exposed industrial and commercial areas (Ben-Ami and Tchekhanovets 2008), while the present excavation exposed a domestic context. It is possible that the Phase I inhabitants of Building 900 were Christian, or that the prohibition on pork consumption was not yet enforced in this early phase of the Early Islamic period. Analysis of additional faunal assemblages from the period in question may further contribute to our understanding of this intriguing phenomenon.

The excavation presented here adds data on the occupation in the City of David of the Tyropoeon Valley in the late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. Previous excavations to the north and south of the present excavation revealed parts of domestic quarters, public buildings, roads and a church, all dating to the late Byzantine period (Bliss and Dickie

1898:143–210; Macalister and Duncan 1926; Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929; Kenyon 1974; Mazar and Mazar 1989:3–12; Reich 2008; Ben-Ami 2013:43–45).

The residential neighborhood to which Building 900 belonged appears to have been extensive. The Byzantine-period Siloam Church (see, e.g., Levy et al. 2021, and references therein), and nearby remains of a tower from this period (Weksler-Bdolah 2013; Weksler-Bdolah and Lavi 2013), are located 100 m from the present excavation to the south, while the site of Crowfoot and Fitzgerald's excavations is located at a distance of 150 m to the north. The remains from this period uncovered nearest to the present excavation comprise the Byzantine building remains exposed in Reich and Shukron's (2001) Area K1, located only 10 m to the west, and additional Byzantine remains of a building with an arch-supported roof from Shukron and Reich's excavations (2008:139–140; and see Reich 2011: Fig. 83, for the location of the various excavations) Area K2, at a distance of 20 m to the northeast.

The excavations summarized here reveal the development of a residential neighborhood on the lower half of the slope of the City of David in the Tyropoeon Valley, beginning from the sixth–seventh centuries CE. Remains from excavations on the upper part of the same slope (Ben-Ami and Tchekhanovets 2008; 2013; Ben Ami 2013:31–45) reveal a different picture of ongoing occupation from as early as the Late Roman period through the Early Islamic period.

The context in which the thriving Byzantine neighborhood came to an end has previously been linked to the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in the early seventh century CE (Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929), based on finds from the upper part of the slope of the City of David, the southeastern part of the hill. Crowfoot and Fitzgerald dated the domestic quarter and a road found at its center, which were uncovered in their excavations, to the sixth–early seventh centuries CE, and argued for its destruction in 614 CE, as part of the Persian conquest of the city (Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929:41–43, 52–55). Reviewing the same evidence, Magness (1992; 1993:51–71; 2010:56*) claimed that no indication of such destruction can in fact be found in Crowfoot and Fitzgerald's report and furthermore, that the evidence from the Byzantine road indicate its continued use in the Early Islamic period.

Nevertheless, excavations at Giv'ati Parking Lot, c. 120 m from the present excavation to the northeast, have uncovered evidence of destruction of a large building complex, as well as Early Islamic construction atop a segment of the same Byzantine road exposed by Crowfoot and Fitzgerald, an activity which must have terminated the road's use (Ben-Ami, Tchekhanovets and Bijovsky 2010:211; see also Avni 2010; 2011, for further discussion of the possibility that these finds testify to the Persian takeover of Jerusalem).[7] It is noteworthy in this regard that no evidence of a destruction was found in the present excavation, where

[7] As part of these excavations, a hoard of gold coins dating to 613–614 CE, i.e., the eve of the Persian conquest, was found below collapsed debris of a large administrative building from a late phase of the Byzantine period (see Bijovsky 2014). Other gold hoards from this period were discovered in St. Peter's Church (Geva 2008:1815) and in the renewed excavations of the 'Ofel (Ophel) (Mazar 2015). Further evidence of building activity atop the Byzantine street and the termination of its use was uncovered in recent excavations northwest of Giv'ati Parking Lot (Hagbi and Uziel 2017).

continued use of Building 900 is attested between the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods. However, the small area uncovered prevents far-reaching conclusions regarding the possibility that Jerusalem was conquered and partly destroyed by the Persians; it is possible that Building 900 was not destroyed, while other parts of the city were destroyed.

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