# Israel

# Exploration

# Journal

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AASOR | Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research |
| *ADAJ* | Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan |
| *AJA* | American Journal of Archaeology |
| *AfO* | Archiv für Orientforschung |
| *ANET* | Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament³, ed. J.B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1969 |
| *BA* | The Biblical Archaeologist |
| *BASOR* | Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research |
| *BT* | Babylonian Talmud |
| *CAD* | Chicago Assyrian Dictionary |
| *CIS* | Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum |
| DJD | Discoveries in the Judaean Desert |
| *DSD* | Dead Sea Discoveries |
| *EI* | Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies |
| *ESI* | Excavations and Surveys in Israel |
| *IAA Reports* | Israel Antiquities Authority Reports |
| *IEJ* | Israel Exploration Journal |
| *JAOS* | Journal of the American Oriental Society |
| *JBL* | Journal of Biblical Literature |
| *JCS* | Journal of Cuneiform Studies |
| *JEA* | Journal of Egyptian Archaeology |
| *JNES* | Journal of Near Eastern Studies |
| *KAI* | W. Donner and W. Röllig: *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* 1–3, Wiesbaden, 1962–1964; 1⁵, 2002 |
| *NEAEHL* | The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (English Edition), Jerusalem, 1993 |
| *PEQ* | Palestine Exploration Quarterly |
| *PT* | Palestinian Talmud |
| *QDAP* | Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine |
| *RA* | Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale |
| *RB* | Revue Biblique |
| *RE* | Pauly-Wissowa's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft |
| *RQ* | Revue de Qumran |
| *VT* | Vetus Testamentum |
| *ZA* | Zeitschrift für Assyriologie |
| *ZDPV* | Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins |

# A Rock-Cut Burial Cave from the Roman Period at Beit Nattif, Judaean Foothills

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**ABSTRACT:** This article presents a tomb excavated in 1945 at Beit Nattif in the Judaean foothills and discusses it in light of the history and archaeology of the site. The burial chamber was initially a rock-cut water cistern, and at a later date, the cistern was converted into a burial chamber with *kokhim*. The tomb was used during the first and third–fourth centuries CE, as attested by the typical oil lamps, pottery and inscriptions.

Three distinct phases were observed: in the first, a water cistern was cut in the bedrock and its side walls were covered with plaster. Probably in the late first century BCE or the early first century CE, the cistern was converted into a burial chamber. The pottery and the oil lamps represent two different phases (2 and 3) of use of the former cistern for burial. At first, during the Early Roman period (phase 2), 12 *kokhim* and three *arcosolia* were hewn into the walls of the cistern. In this period the burial cave was probably still used by Jews, residents of Pella/Betholetepha — the capital of the Judaean toparchy. During the Late Roman period (phase 3), the chamber was reused by non-Jews for burial purposes. Names were incised on the plaster walls in this phase, and most of the oil lamps also belong to this phase.

Beit Nattif was still an important site in the Late Roman period. The place was now inhabited by Roman citizens and veterans, who settled the region as part of the Romanisation process that took place in the rural areas of Judaea after the Bar Kokhba war.

In September 1945, Mohammad A. Wahhab of the village of Beit Nattif (fig. 1) reported to the British Mandate Department of Antiquities (BMDA) that in the course of digging a cistern on his property, he had broken through into a large cave. The cave was inspected and subsequently excavated in the first week of October 1945 by Salem Abdul Salim Husseini, an antiquities inspector for the BMDA. A plan, sections and photographs of the cave were made, drawings and descriptions of the finds prepared and a report submitted to the BMDA on November 15, 1945. To the best of our knowledge, no full report of the excavation was ever published. This article, based on Husseini's report and on other information preserved in the IAA Archives (British Mandate record files, no. 32), presents basic data on this tomb chamber in light of what is known about the history and archaeology of Beit Nattif during the Roman and Byzantine periods.[1]

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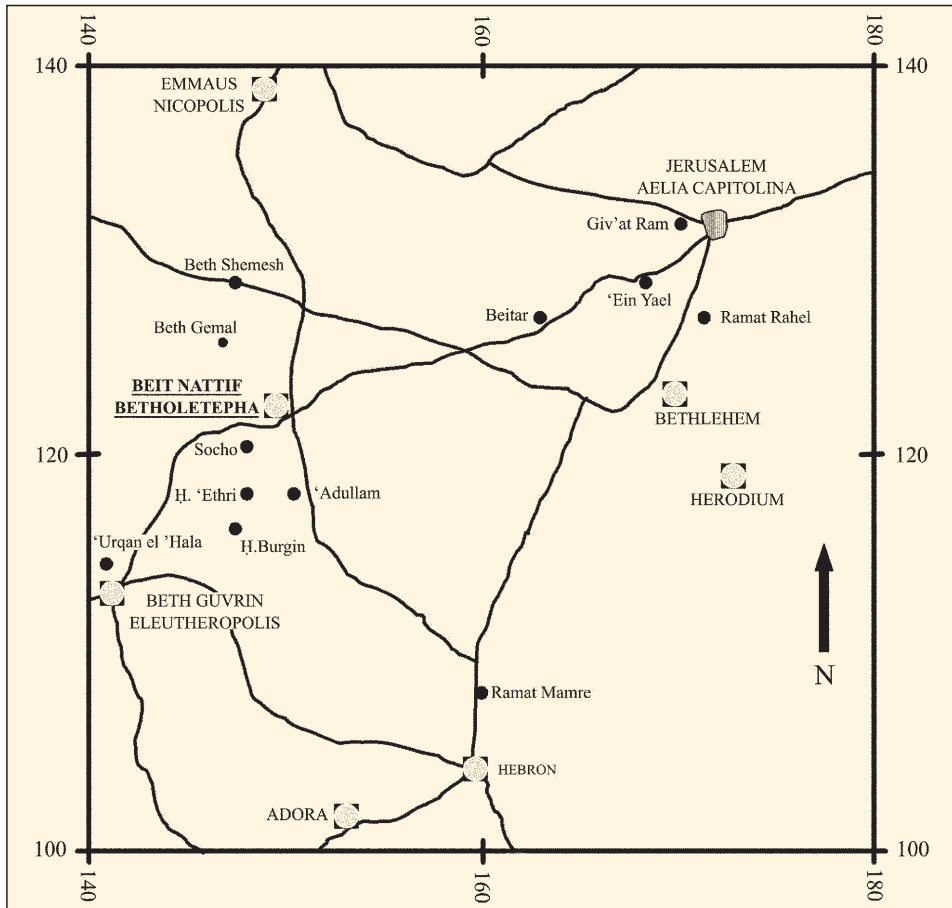
Fig. 1. Location map of Beit Nattif (illustration by E. Klein)

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE BURIAL CHAMBER (figs. 2–5)

Unfortunately, no information was provided regarding the exact location of the tomb, which was situated somewhere on the west side of the village. Regarding the depth of the tomb, Husseini wrote: 'M.A. Wahhab was found to have dug 1.5 meters deep in a black earth filling and blasted the rock for a depth of 2 meters when he broke into the cave.'

The burial chamber was initially a water cistern, cut in the friable limestone. The cistern was accessed through a rectangular opening in the *nari* limestone crust. The opening led to a rounded shaft (*c*. 3 m. high), hewn in the roof of the oval cistern (approximate dimensions: 7×9.5 m.). The original depth of the cistern is unknown, since its bottom was filled with limestone chips when it was converted into a tomb.
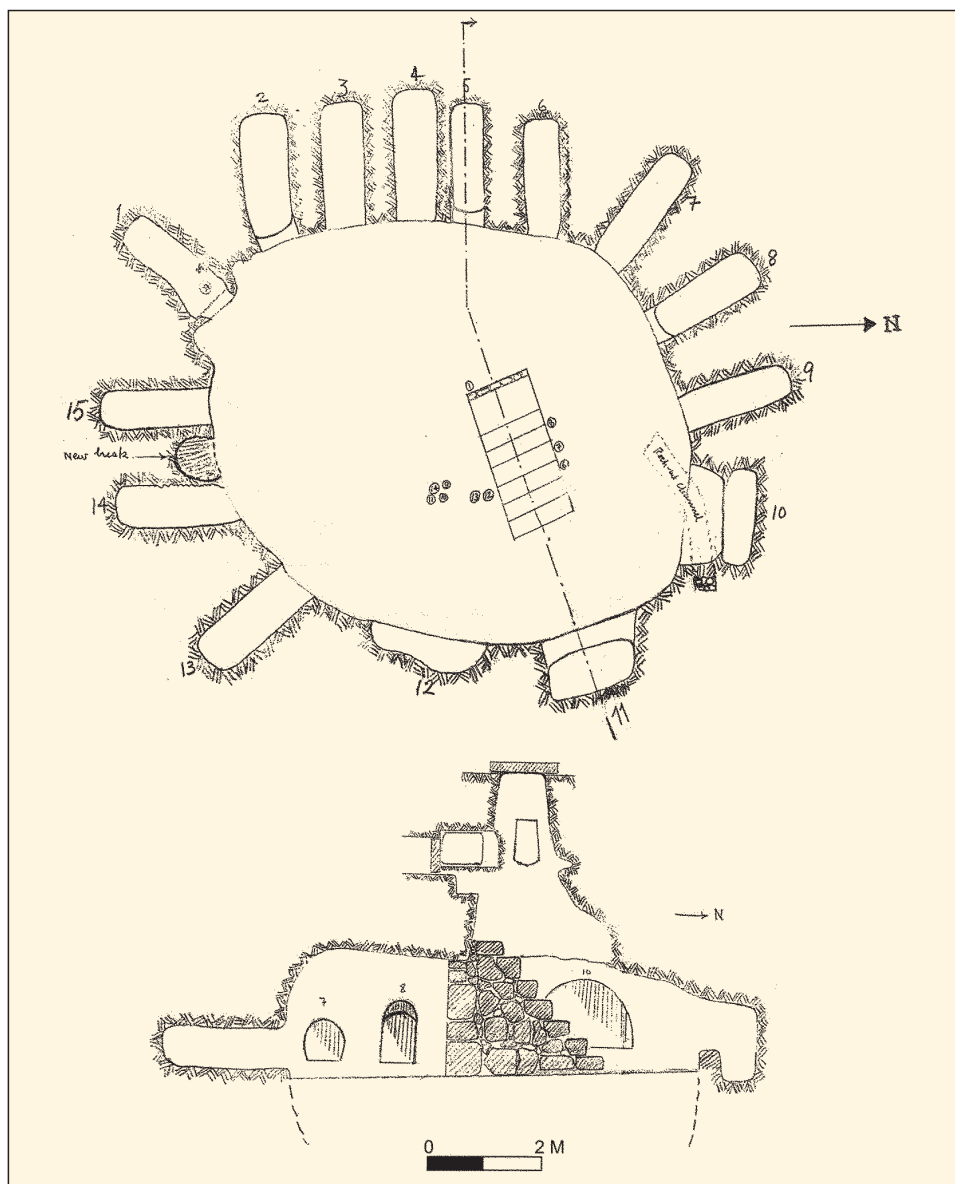
Fig. 2. Burial chamber: plan and section (drawings by S.A.S. Husseini, British Mandate record files no. 32)

The cistern was fed with water through a channel (*c*. 0.4 m. wide and 0.85 m. high) cut in its roof. The walls of the cistern had been covered with a hard layer of hydraulic plaster mixed with lime, ashes and grit. The same type of plaster also covered the lower part of the walls, below the top of the limestone fill, thus indicating that the plaster belongs to the initial stage (figs. 4, 5).

Fig. 3. The cistern opening closed by four stone slabs and the new entrance in the neck of the cistern closed with a stone slab (photo by S.J. Schweig, British Mandate record files no. 32)



Fig. 4. The staircase made of ashlar and field stones; *kokhim* 5–7 (photo by S.J. Schweig, British Mandate record files no. 32)

Fig. 5. *Kokhim* 1–6 and the plaster covering the walls (photo by S.J. Schweig, British Mandate record files no. 32)

At some later date, the cistern was converted into a burial chamber. The tomb was used during the first and third–fourth centuries CE, as attested by the oil lamps, pottery and inscriptions found on the walls. The following modifications were made at this point:

1.  The rectangular opening of the cistern was closed by four stone slabs.
2.  The water channel was blocked with rubble.
3.  The cistern floor was covered by limestone chips, thus raising it to a convenient level, *c*. 2.2 m. below the ceiling of the former cistern. The new level became the floor of the burial chamber.
4.  The neck of the cistern was pierced to create a new, rectangular, entrance, which was closed with a vertical stone slab, found *in situ*. (The external corridor leading from the surface to this entrance was not examined.)
5.  A step was hewn in the neck of the cistern, just below the newly opened tomb entrance. This step descended to a seven-stepped staircase (1.15×2.65 m.), built on the new floor (the surface of the limestone-chip fill). The steps and corners of the staircase were made of ashlar stones; the walls were made of fieldstones and rubble.
6.  The neck of the cistern was cut opposite the entrance and above the staircase in order to allow freedom of movement during interment.

7.  Twelve *kokhim* and three *arcosolia* were hewn in the cistern walls. The
    *kokhim* (average dimensions: 2 m. long, 0.6–0.8 m. wide, 0.7–1 m. high) were
    cut perpendicular to the walls, destroying the plaster coating. *Arcosolia* 10 and
    11 had a single burial trough cut into their floor; *arcosolium* 12 had a flat floor
    and was apparently unfinished.

## STRATIGRAPHY AND FINDS

The chamber was found to contain a pile of black earth, deposited on the staircase
and sloping inward toward the sides of the cistern. This earth appeared to have
drifted in through the spaces left between the slabs covering the cistern's rectan-
gular opening. The upper part of this black fill contained some modern potsherds,
a modern knife blade, fragments of two clay pipes and a glass bracelet. The rest of
the fill contained lamp fragments 1 and 2, other lamp fragments similar to lamps
7, 8 and 11 (see below, fig. 7) and potsherds from the Early Roman and Late
Roman periods. The Early Roman pottery included a fragment of a medium-sized
square storage-jar rim dated to the first century BCE (fig. 6:1; for parallels, see
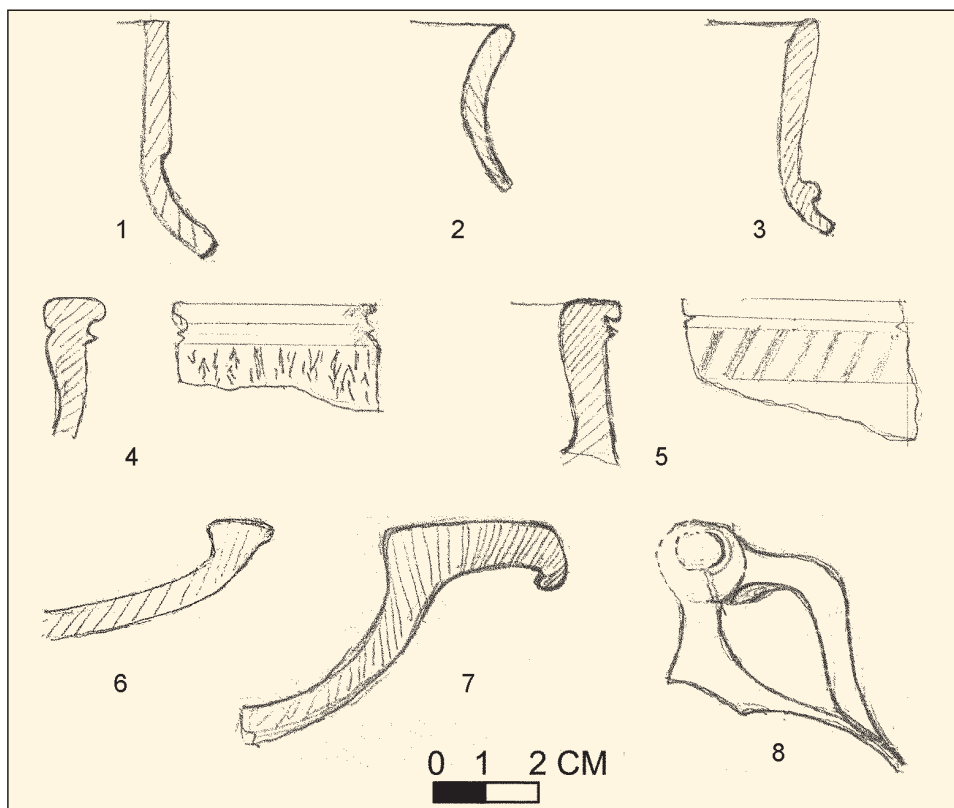


Fig. 6. The pottery (drawings by S.A.S. Husseini, British Mandate record files no. 32)

Bar-Nathan 2002: type J-SJ4B, pp. 28–31, pls. 3–4, nos. 19–24), two first-century CE storage jar rims (fig. 6:2–3; for parallels, see Bar-Nathan 2006: type M-SJ7B1, p. 55, pl. 5, no. 21; type M-SJ7B3, p. 56, pl. 6, nos. 29–30), and a fragment of a piriform juglet with a short narrow neck, a simple cup-mouthed rim and flat handle, dating from between the first century BCE to the first third of the second century CE (fig. 6:8; for parallels, see Bar-Nathan 2006: type M-JT1, p. 191, pl. 33, nos. 1–14).

The Late Roman pottery consisted of two fragments of rouletted bowls (fig. 6:4–5; for parallels, see Magness 1993: 185–187) and a fragment of an arched-rim bowl (fig. 6:7; for parallel, see Magness 1993: 204, no. 4), dating from the second to the fifth centuries CE (Magness 2005: 105–106), as well as a local imitation of Pompeian Red Ware with a purple horizontal line of slip on a triangular-profile rim, flaring wall and flat bottom (fig. 6:6; a similar fragment dated to the second–early third centuries CE was found in the Roman villa at ʿArqan el-ʿHala (A. Ganor: personal communication).

Below the black earth fill there was a layer of red earth, more distinguishable along the southern side of the staircase. Lamps 3–12 (fig. 7; table 1) and coin no. 11 were recovered from this layer.

The excavator remarked that the chamber was very damp and that the silt deposits found in the *kokhim* indicate a considerable flow of water into the chamber. This would explain the poor state of preservation of the human bones and of the wooden chests in which they were apparently interred.

Table 1. The contents of the *kokhim* and *arcosolia*

| *Kokh / Arcosolium* | Deposits | Osteological remains | Finds* | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Kokh* no. 1 | Black silt | Traces of bones, infant's jaw | Broken bronze bracelet (no. 26), iron earring (no. 27), fragments of iron nails (no. 28) | – |
| *Kokh* no. 2 | Black silt above limestone chips | Traces of bones | Five large iron nails (no. 29) | – |
| *Kokh* no. 3 | Black silt | – | Iron angle fragment (no. 38), iron bracelet (no. 39) | Objects found outside entrance to *kokh* |
| *Kokh* no. 4 | Black silt | Traces of bones | Fragments of decayed wood and wood powder, coin (no. 31), and bone (?) bead (no. 32) | – |
| *Kokh* no. 5 | Limestone chips covering reddish earth | Traces of bones | Fragments of decayed wood and wood powder, 14 nails | – |
| *Kokh* no. 6 | Limestone chips covering reddish earth | Traces of bones | Fragments of nails | – |

* The numbers are from the original report by S.A.S. Husseini.

| Kokh / Arcosolium | Deposits | Osteological remains | Finds* | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kokh no. 7 | Limestone chips | Traces of bones | Fragments of decayed wood | – |
| Kokh no. 8 | Rubble, on limestone chips over layer of reddish earth | – | – | – |
| Kokh no. 9 | Rubble on limestone chips | – | Coin (no. 37), some ribbed potsherds | – |
| Arcosolium no. 10 | Rubble and limestone chips | – | – | – |
| Arcosolium no. 11 | Black earth, rubble and limestone chips | A few traces | – | – |
| Arcosolium no. 12 | Black earth | – | – | – |
| Kokh no. 13 | Black silt | – | – | – |
| Kokh no. 14 | Rubble and limestone chips | – | Coin (no. 36), lamp fragment | Partly damaged |
| Kokh no. 15 | Rubble and limestone chips | – | – | – |

## THE OIL LAMPS

The oil lamps found in this tomb (fig. 7) can be divided into two distinct groups, indicating the different phases of use of the tomb chamber. The first group consists of lamps belonging to the Roman Imperial type, characterised by a coat of red slip over the body and a small filling hole. Their shapes and motif designs were well known throughout the Roman world during the first century BCE and first century CE. Although it is difficult to determine on the basis of the drawing, fig. 7:1–2 may belong to this group. The second group can be divided into two sub-groups with homogeneous characteristics and decorative features: ovoid lamps with a large filling hole (fig. 7:4–5) and 'Beit Nattif lamps' with a bow-shaped nozzle (fig. 7:3,6–12), dating from the third and fourth centuries CE (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: 99–108).

## THE GREEK INSCRIPTIONS

Names written in Greek were incised on the wall plaster above the entrances to *kokhim* 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 with a sharp utensil (fig. 8). In all the inscriptions, the word ΘΑΡCΙ ('Be brave') appears before or after the name of the deceased. This formula is well known throughout the Roman world; it was used by Jews, Christians and pagans. The object of this formula was to fortify the deceased facing the dangers of passage into the next world with courage. Due to iotacism, the word ΘΑΡCΙ was written without an epsilon in the imperative ending -EI, as in the inscriptions at Beth She‛arim (Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974: 2, 201). An
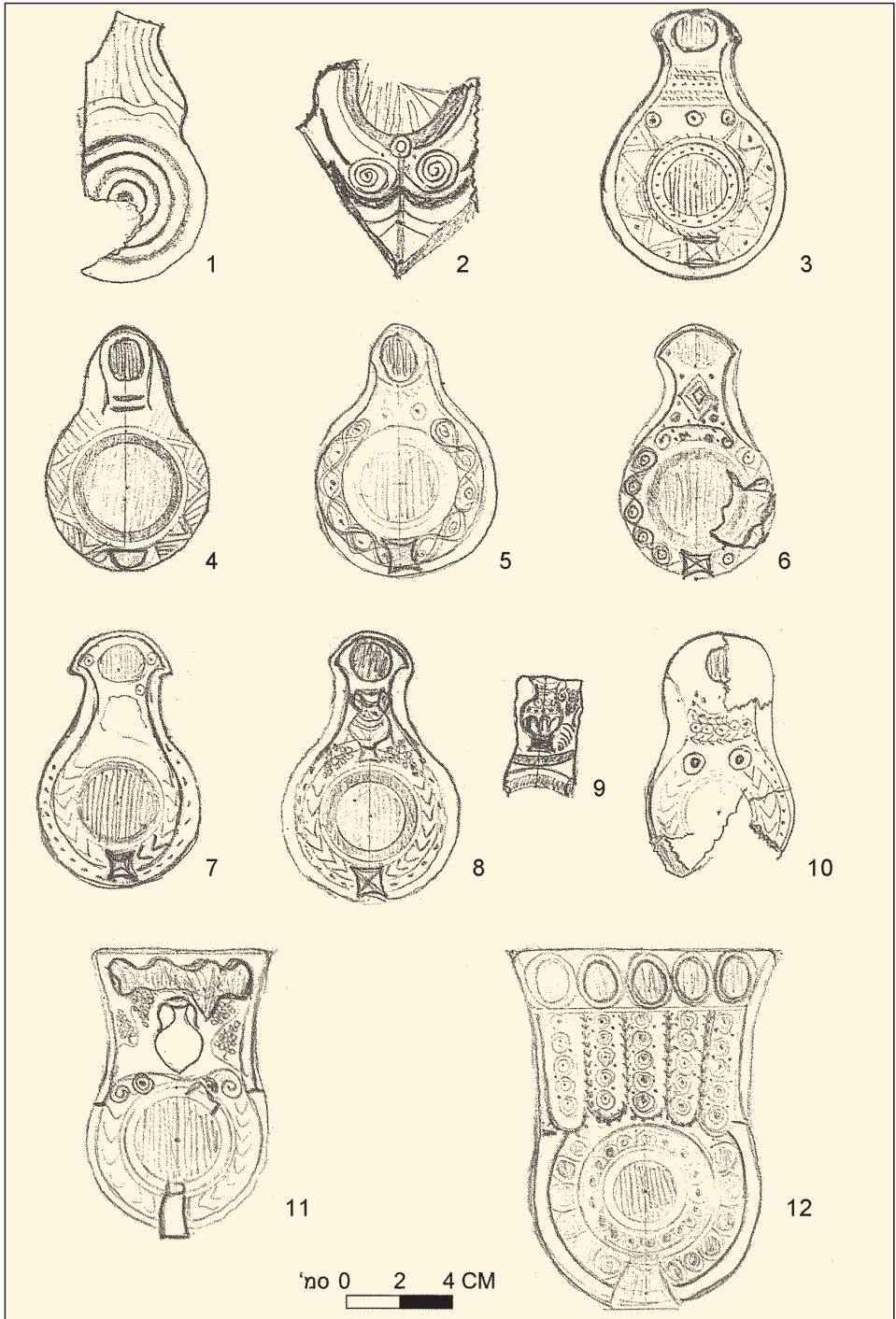
Fig. 7. The oil lamps (drawings by S.A.S. Husseini, British Mandate record files no. 32)

Fig. 7

| No. | British Mandate Reg. No. | Location | Description | Parallels |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | – | Unknown | Fragment, buff ware, traces of dark red slip | **Corinth:** Broneer 1930: 76–79, Broneer type 22/23, first century CE; Perlzweig 1961: 78, pl. 3, nos. 72–73, first half of first century CE |
| 2 | 45.218 | Unknown | Soft buff ware, raised curved handle with Ionic volutes, red slip | **Corinth:** Broneer 1930: 73–76, Broneer type 21?, late first century BCE–first century CE |
| 3 | 45.208 | Near south-west corner of staircase | Buff ware, darkened slip, triangular design on shoulders, large filling hole and bow-shaped nozzle, conical knob | **Beit Nattif:** Baramki 1936: pl. XI, no. 6, third–fourth centuries CE; **Dominus Flevit:** Bagatti and Milik 1958: 114–121, fig. 26, no. 9, third–fourth centuries CE |
| 4 | 45.211 | South side of staircase, in red earth | Almond-shaped buff ware, traces of red slip, semicircular knob and triangular design on shoulders | **Beit Gemal:** Strus 2003: 507, fig. 3:5, second–fourth centuries CE; **Dominus Flevit:** Bagatti and Milik 1958: 111, 113, 118, fig. 25, no. 20, third–fourth centuries CE |
| 5 | 4.215 | Unknown | Buff ware, interlacing loop design on shoulders, dark red slip | **Jerusalem, Tyropoeon Valley:** Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929: 90, pl. XVII, no. 9, third century CE; Israeli and Avida 1988: 131, no. 380 |
| 6 | 45.210 | Unknown | Buff ware, broken body, interlacing design on shoulders and diamond design on neck, bow-shaped nozzle with traces of burning | **Ramat Mamre:** Mader 1957: ill. 161, A, Late Roman–Early Byzantine periods; **Beth Guvrin amphitheatre:** Kloner and Hübsch 1996: 102, fig. 25, no. 12, third–fourth centuries CE; Israeli and Avida 1988: 121, no. 344, but with two wick holes |
| 7 | – | Near north side of staircase | Buff ware, design of amphora and grapes on neck flaked off (probably like lamp no. 8), fish-bone design on shoulders, dark red slip on body, traces of burning on bow-shaped nozzle, conical knob | **Ramat Mamre:** Mader 1957: ill. 161, B, Late Roman–Early Byzantine periods; **Beth Guvrin amphitheatre:** Kloner and Hübsch 1996: 102, fig. 25, no. 6, third–fourth centuries CE; ʿ**Amwas:** Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 486, A |
| 8 | 45.209 | Unknown | Buff ware, design of amphora and grapes on neck and of fish bone on shoulders, traces of red slip on body, conical knob | **Ramat Mamre:** Mader 1957: ill. 161, B, Late Roman–Early Byzantine periods; **Beth Guvrin amphitheatre:** Kloner and Hübsch 1996: 102, fig. 25, no. 6, third–fourth centuries CE; ʿ**Amwas:** Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 486, A |
| 9 | – | Found near entrance to *kokh* 14 from layer of black earth | Buff ware, fragment of the neck with design of amphora and grapes | **Beit Nattif:** Baramki 1936: pl. X, no. 18, third–fourth centuries CE; **Ramat Mamre:** Mader 1957: ill. 161, B, Late Roman–Early Byzantine periods; **Beth Guvrin amphitheatre:** Kloner and Hübsch 1996: 102, fig. 25, no. 6, third–fourth centuries CE |

| No. | British Mandate Reg. No. | Location | Description | Parallels |
|-----|--------------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|
| 10 | 45.212 | South side of staircase, in red earth | Buff ware, dark red slip on inner and outer faces, fish-bone design on shoulders | **Gezer:** Macalister 1912: 338–339, pl. XCII, no. 11, third–fourth centuries CE; **Dominus Flevit:** Bagatti and Milik 1958: 114–121, fig. 26, no. 12, third–fourth centuries CE; **Beit Gemal:** Strus 2003: 507, fig. 3: 6, second–fourth centuries CE |
| 11 | 45.213 | South side of staircase, in red earth | Soft buff ware, four wick holes with design of amphora and bunches of grapes on neck and fish bones on shoulders, small loop handle, traces of dark red slip | **Jerusalem, Tyropoeon Valley:** Crow-foot and Fitzgerald 1929: 93, pl. XVII, no. 40, third century CE; **Gezer:** Macalister 1912: 316–317, pl. LXXVII, no. 19, third–fourth centuries CE |
| 12 | 45.214 | Unknown | Buff ware, dark red slip, on inner and outer faces, five wick holes, loop handle, broken bottom, design of five arcades on neck | **Beth Guvrin amphitheatre:** Kloner and Hübsch 1996: 102, fig. 25, no. 8, third–fourth centuries CE; Israeli and Avida 1988: 126, no. 364 |
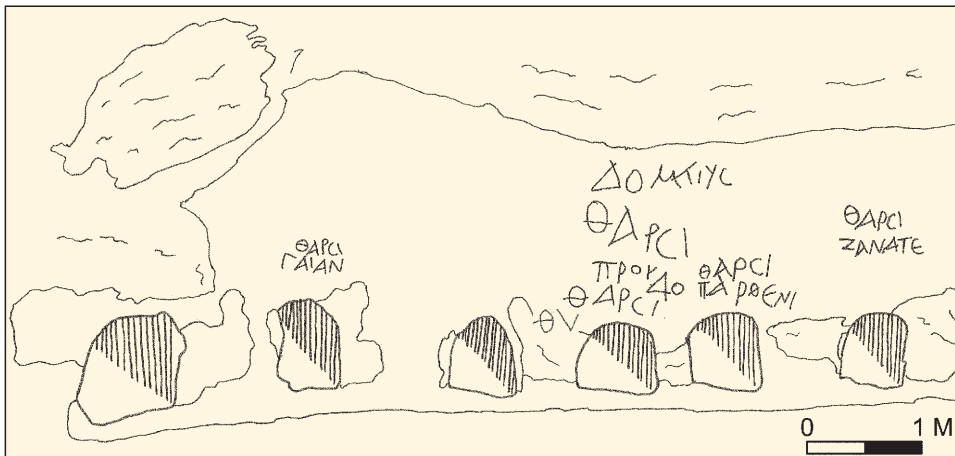


Fig. 8. *Kokhim* 1–6 and the inscriptions on the plastered wall (drawing by E. Klein)

examination of the palaeographic features of the inscriptions and the frequency of the incised names among Jews and pagans could assist us in a more precise dating of the inscriptions.

*The Inscription above Kokh 2* (fig. 9)

1.   ΘΑΡCΙ
2.   ΓΑΙΑΝ(Ε)

'Be brave, Gaianos'

The Latin praenomen/gentilic Gaianos may be derived from the Greek earth god ΓΑΙΑ or the Latin praenomen Gaius. Alternatively, it may be a transliteration of the Arab name Ghaiyan; this could explain the absence of the vocative ending after the personal name, as seen in Semitic names at Beth Sheʿarim (Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974: 203).
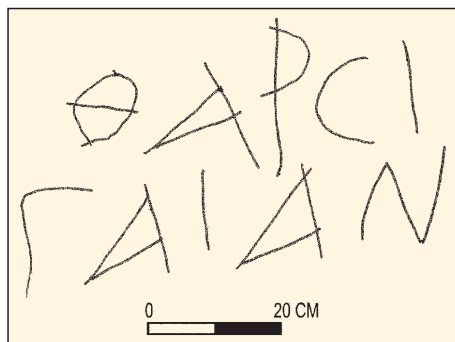


Fig. 9. Inscription above *kokh* 2 (drawing by E. Klein)

In Israel, the name appears on the third-century CE mosaic floor inscription in the Christian prayer hall in the Roman Legion camp at Legio (Tepper and Di Segni 2006: 35) and on a mosaic inscription from a fifth-century Byzantine church at Kh. Karkara, in the western part of the Upper Galilee (Avi-Yonah 1966).

The name is common in Late Roman inscriptions from Syria (Jalabert and Mouterde 1929: 54; Jalabert and Mouterde 1939: 278–280; Jalabert, Mouterde and Mondésert 1959: 86; Rey-Coquais 1967: 205); during the second and third centuries CE in Egypt (Preisigke 1922: 78), Athens (Fraser and Matthews 1994: 91), Macedonia and Thrace (Fraser and Matthews 2005: 76–77); and during the third–fifth centuries CE in Sicily (Fraser and Matthews 1997). The only example of a similar name dating from before the second century CE appears on a pre-70 CE Jewish ossuary, probably found in Jerusalem, bearing the name ΓΑΙΩΝΟΣ (Rahmani 1994: 136, no. 239). Except for this parallel and a third–fourth-century CE epitaph inscription from a Jewish catacomb in Rome (Ilan 2008: 493), there is no evidence of Jewish use of the name.

*The Inscription above the Opening to Kokh 4* (fig. 10)

    1.   ΔΟΜΙΤ(Ι)ΥC
    2.   ΘΑΡCΙ
    3.   ΠΡΟ(Κ)ΛΟ
    4.   ΘΑΡC(Ι)
    5.   ΘΝ…

    'Domitius, be brave; Proklos, be brave, Thn…'

*Line 1.* — Domitius is a well-known Latin gentilic. Although written here in Greek letters, the form of the name is derived from the Latin nominative with the suffix -US. The name appears in an inscription from Jerusalem from the beginning of the third century CE, dedicated to the commander of the Tenth Legion by Gaius Domitius Sergianus, a Legion soldier (Isaac 1999: 174). There is no
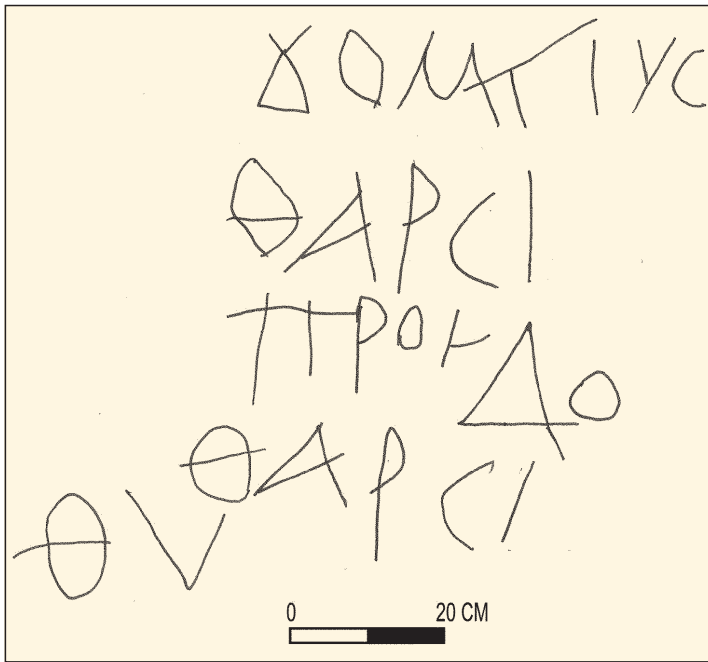
Fig. 10. Inscription above *kokh* 4 (drawing by E. Klein)

evidence of the use of this name by Jews in Israel. The name has been found on Jewish catacomb epitaphs in Rome (Ilan 2008: 486–487). The appearance of this name on the tomb apparently indicates that the deceased were Roman citizens.

*Line 3*. — Proklos is a rare praenomen but a common Latin gentilic and cognomen. It should be in the vocative with the case ending -E. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first record of such a name in Israel, although Jews in the Diaspora used it, as attested by Jewish epitaphs from Italy (Ilan 2008: 533–534).

*The Inscription above Kokh 5* (fig. 11)

ΘΑΡCΙ
ΠΑΡΘΕΝΙ

'Be brave, Parthenios/Parthenis'

ΠΑΡΘΕΝΙ is the vocative of the woman's name Parthenis, but could also be the vocative of the man's name Parthenios after iotacism. It is used as a Greek surname and also as a Latin praenomen — Parthenius (for Latin examples, see Rohden and Dessau 1898: 13). Epigraphic and historical sources indicate that this name was in use in Egypt, Cyrenaica, mainland Greece, the Aegaean Islands, Magna Graecia, Sicily, and Italy from the fourth century BCE until the fourth century CE (Preisigke 1922: 279–280; Fraser and Matthews 1987: 362; 1994:
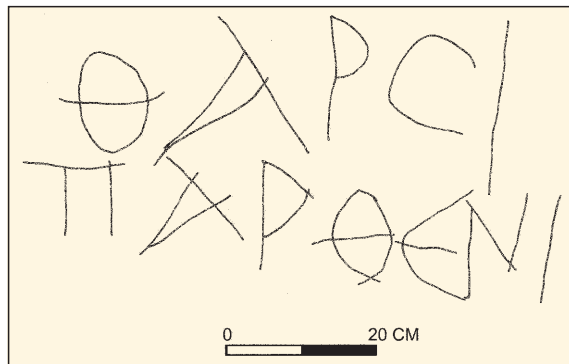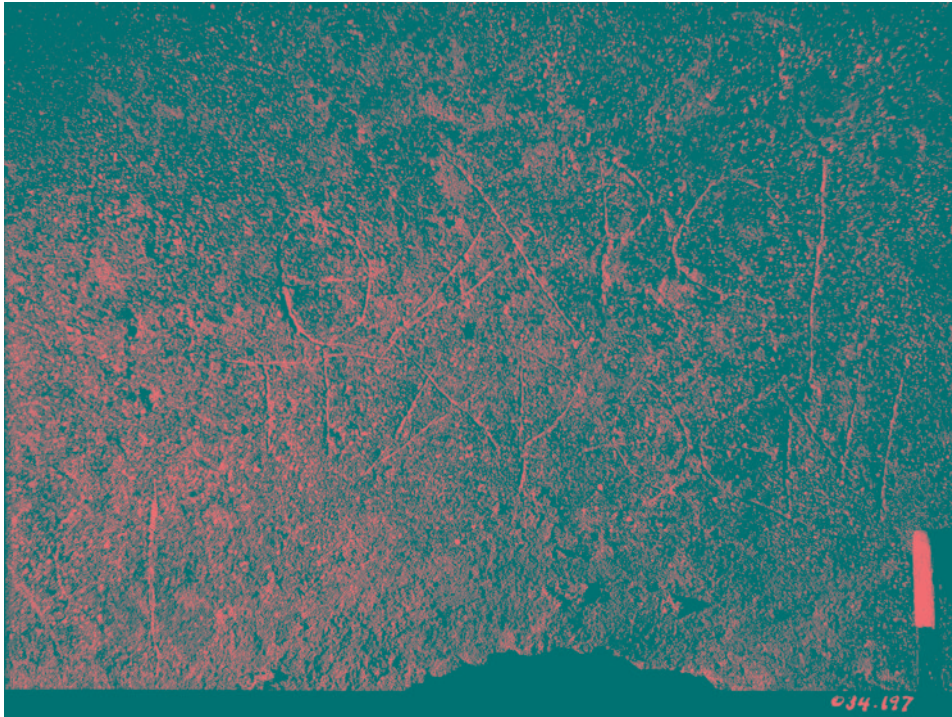
Fig. 11. Inscription above *kokh* 5 (photo by S.J. Schweig, British Mandate record files no. 32; drawing by E. Klein)

361; 1997: 352; 2000: 335). The name Parthenius is found in Israel on a Christian inscription at Ramat Mamre, probably dating from the fourth century CE (Dalman 1906: 51). A similar name, ΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΠΗΣ, was found incised on a fifth-century CE rock graffito near the Monastery of Theoctistus (Patrich and Di Segni 1987: 274). The appearance of this name above an *arcosolium* in the second–third-century CE Jewish cemetery at Beth Sheᶜarim (Conder and Kitchener 1881: 347) and in two epitaphs from Jewish catacombs in Rome (Ilan 2008: 353–354) indicates that the name was used by Jews.

*The Inscription above Kokh 6* (fig. 12)

    1. ΘΑΡCΙ
    2. ΖΑΝΑΤΕ

    'Be brave, Zanatos'

The full meaning of Zanatos is 'the one who is full of life inside'. This rare Greek name appears in a stone inscription from Beroia, Macedonia, dated to 118 BCE (Fraser and Matthews 2005: 141) and in a fourth-century CE inscription in Egypt (Preisigke 1922: 117). There is no evidence of Jewish use of the name.
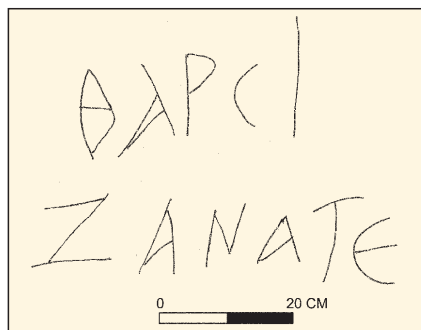


Fig. 12. Inscription above *kokh* 6 (drawing by E. Klein)
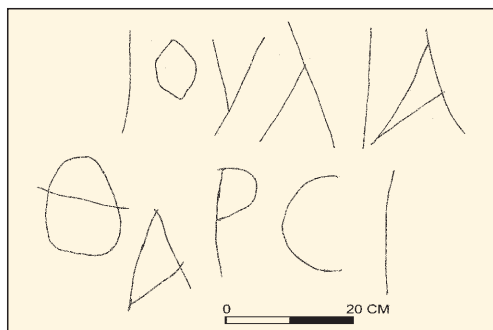


Fig. 13. Inscription above *kokh* 7 (drawing by E. Klein)

*The Inscription above Kokh 7* (fig. 13)

    1. ΙΟΥΛΙΑ
    2. ΘΑΡCΙ

    'Ioulia, be brave'

Ioulia is a well-known Latin praenomen and was also the gentilic of an important ancient patrician family in Rome. The name, which means 'youthful', was popular among female Roman citizens in the last days of the Republic and throughout the Empire period.

    The name appears among Jews in Israel from the first century CE (Rahmani 1994: 188–189, no. 498; Puech 1983: 522–524; Ilan 2002: 343–344), but became much more popular among Jews in the Diaspora in the second–fourth centuries CE (Frey 1936: 85–86, 226–227, 352; Ilan 2008: 588–589). A Latin inscription bearing the name Juliae Sabinae was found incised above the door in the façade of 'Simon the Just's tomb' in Jerusalem. The inscription probably indicates that secondary use was made of the Second Temple period tomb by a Roman citizen during the Late Roman period (Clermont-Ganneau 1896: I, 269–270). At Beit Nattif, the name Ioulia appears on the third-century CE tomb inscription of the

wife of Titus Flavius Valens, an officer in the Roman army (see below; Savignac 1903a: 291).

Palaeographical examination of the inscriptions appears to date them to the third century CE.[2] Historical considerations suggest that the inscriptions were incised by a member of the non-Jewish population that settled in the Beit Nattif area after the disastrous Bar-Kokhba war (Eck 1999; Eshel 2006).

## THE HISTORICAL SOURCES

On a list of Judaean toparchies from the late Second Temple period, Josephus Flavius mentions the capital of a toparchy called Πέλλα. This toparchy appears after the toparchy of Αμμαοῦς and before Ιδουμαία (Josephus, *War* III.55). In the context of the military campaign conducted by Vespasian's forces in the Judaean foothills in 68 CE, Josephus mentions the toparchy of Βεθλεπτηνφών, located between Emmaus and Idumaea (Josephus, *War* IV.444–446).

Pliny the Elder includes a city in Judaea called 'Bethletephenen' on his list of toparchies (Pliny, *Natural History* V.70). E. Schürer suggests that the toparchy of Πέλλα and the toparchy of Βεθλεπτηνφών, mentioned in the aforementioned sources, were one and the same, locating them at Beit Nattif (map. ref. 1496/1227), on the basis of the phonetic resemblance between the place names and the geographical context of a district located in the Judaean foothills between Emmaus and Idumaea (Schürer 1907: 232–233). This identification has been accepted by many scholars (Thomsen 1907: 33; Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green 1994: 84).

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AT BEIT NATTIF

The site was visited by E. Robinson, Guérin and the members of the Survey of Western Palestine conducted by the PEF in the nineteenth century. They provided topographical, cultural and environmental data on the village and its inhabitants, but no archaeological information was recorded (Robinson 1856: 15–20; Guérin 1868: 374–377; Conder and Kitchener 1883: 24).

In 1892, during a tour by the École Biblique, a mosaic pavement was discovered on the western side of the village (in the home of Ibrahim Ahmad Khumayyis), adorning a rectangular room measuring 3.3×3.1 m. The frame of the mosaic was surrounded by red and black crosses. No date or possible uses for this paved room were suggested (Séjourné 1892: 263).

In 1903, R. Savignac reported the discovery of a rock-cut ornamented tomb chamber, 200 m. east of the village. A total of 36 *kokhim* were hewn in two storeys on three walls of the main rectangular chamber (4×5 m.). On the wall opposite the entrance, an *arcosolium* and two columns adorned the upper storey. One of the

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2  We wish to thank Dr. Leah Di Segni for her advice on this matter.

covering rock slabs bore a Greek inscription with the sentence 'Titus Flavius Valens … ex-decurion of a cohort, made [this grave] in his area for himself and Julia Valentina, his very religious wife' (Savignac 1903a: 291). A limestone sarcophagus, decorated with two garlands held by knots in the middle and on the sides, was placed inside the *arcosolium* and covered with a rounded lid. An abbreviated form of the above inscription was engraved on the outer side wall of the sarcophagus: ΤΙ/ ΦΛ/ ΟΥΑΛ/ ΑΠΟ/ Χ/ Φ/ Ι/ Γ/ Ε. Within the grave there were fragments of a marble statue of Aphrodite leaning on a bearded head of Hermes, with winged Eros beneath her leg (Savignac 1903b: 431–434). The tomb was probably used in the third century, as suggested by the garland decoration and the door design. The tomb and its contents are indicative of the pagan character of the Late Roman inhabitants at Beit Nattif.

In October 1933, D.C. Baramki excavated a rectangular structure with a decorated mosaic pavement near the Weli of Sheikh ʿAbdallah, and suggested that it was the narthex of a fifth- or sixth-century CE church (Baramki 1934: 119–121).

In October 1934, Baramki excavated two adjacent cisterns at Beit Nattif, containing a large assortment of oil lamps, terracotta figurines, stone moulds and a few other objects and coins. It appears that the cisterns were hewn in the first century CE. In the third century CE, these artefacts, apparently refuse from a potter's workshop, were dumped into the cisterns (Baramki 1936).

In February 1942, S.A.S. Husseini uncovered two vaulted chambers and a round rock-cut cistern 15 m. north of the mosaic church floor. When he excavated the remains, in January 1943, he uncovered a room or a court paved with a white mosaic, two vaulted rooms, a rock-cut chamber and two rock-cut cisterns. Two limestone columns and an ornamented capital bearing a small figure in the centre of each of its sides were found in the mosaic-paved room. Access to one of the rooms (room II) was gained by a rock-cut passage. Immediately inside the door of this room, stairs run across the entire breadth of the room, leading down to a rectangular tank. The rock-cut tank and stairs are roofed with a vault of well-cut voussoirs and plastered with a dark greyish plaster. Three rock-cut steps lead from one of the other excavated room (room III) toward two doors. The first door leads into a rock-cut rectangular chamber with greyish plaster covering the walls. Two coins from the Jewish War — one from the second year (67/68 CE) and the other from the third (68/69 CE) — and one coin of Constantius II (337–362 CE) were uncovered in the middle of this room. The other door leads into another rock-cut plastered chamber on a lower level, considered by the excavator to be a cistern (British Mandate record files no. 32, ATQ 286). Because no plans or sections were prepared, it is difficult to determine the initial use of these underground facilities. In our opinion, the rock-cut passage, the entrance hall cut in the side wall, the greyish plaster, the stairs and the two coins from the time of the Jewish War suggest that room II and the two adjoining chambers were initially ritual baths serving the Jewish inhabitants of the village in the late Second Temple period.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Three distinct phases are evident in the burial cave excavated by Husseini at Beit Nattif and presented in this article. In the first phase, a water cistern was cut into bedrock and its side walls covered with plaster. Later, probably during the late first century BCE or early first century CE, the cistern was converted into a burial chamber. The ceramics and the repertoire of oil lamps represent two distinct periods of use of the cistern as a burial cave (phases 2 and 3). At first, during the Early Roman period (phase 2), twelve *kokhim* and three *arcosolia* were hewn into the walls of the cistern. At this point, the burial cave was probably still used by Jews, as attested by the historical sources concerning Beit Nattif as the capital of a toparchy in Judaea during the later part of the Second Temple period and the discovery of two coins from the Jewish War and what were apparently ritual baths at the site and in its vicinity (Zissu 2001: 153). During the Late Roman period (phase 3), the chamber was again used as a burial cave, this time by non-Jews. In this phase the names of the deceased were incised on the plaster walls. Most of the oil lamps belong to this phase. The Latin names originating in Husseini's tomb and the inscriptions recorded by Savignac (1903a) indicate that Beit Nattif, which functioned as a major rural site on the road between Jerusalem and Beth Guvrin during the Second Temple period, was still an important site in the Late Roman period. The place was now inhabited by Roman citizens and Roman legion veterans. The Roman legionary tomb at Manaḥat (Gath and Rahmani 1977), the remains of Roman villas at ꜥEin Yael (Edelstein 1990) and Ramat Raḥel (Aharoni 1964; Lipschits *et al*. 2009), and the Tenth Legion's kilns found at Givꜥat Ram (Arubas and Goldfus 2005) are only a few indications of the Romanisation process that took place in the rural area surrounding Aelia Capitolina during the Late Roman period. The burial chamber described in this article attests to this phenomenon in the rural areas between Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem) and Eleutheropolis (Beth Guvrin).

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