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AND PARKS
AUTHORITY



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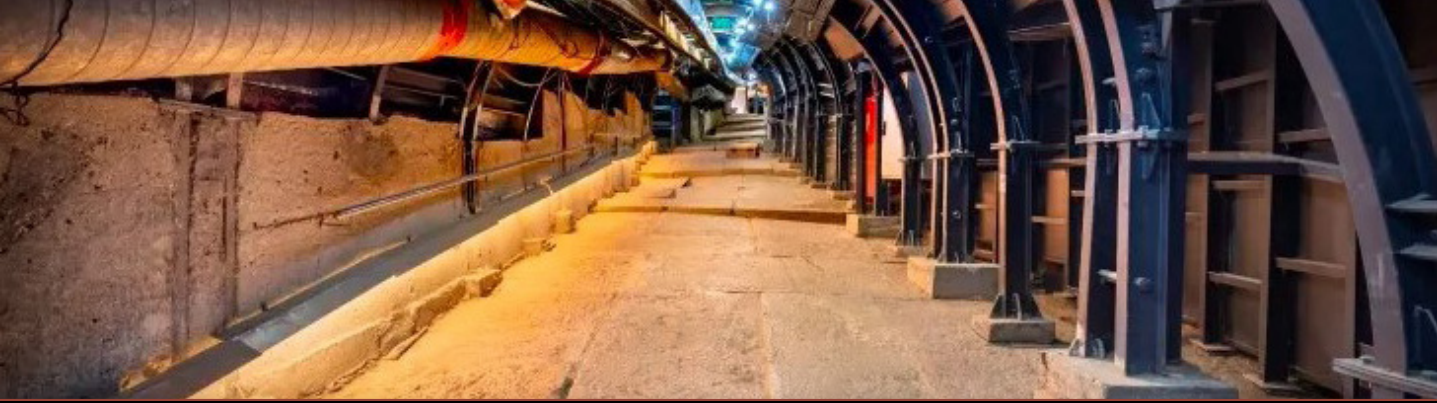
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“Not all Enclosures are Identical” (Mishnah, Beitzah 3, 1) the Mystery of the Fish Pond discovered in the City of David

===== Ari Levy | Rikki Zalut Har-Tuv =====

Israel Antiquities Authority



Excavations have been carried out in recent years in the Tyropoeon Valley,¹ parallel to the route of the stepped street from the Early Roman period (the end of the Second Temple period), which is one of the most significant remains uncovered in an excavation in Jerusalem (Fig. 1).

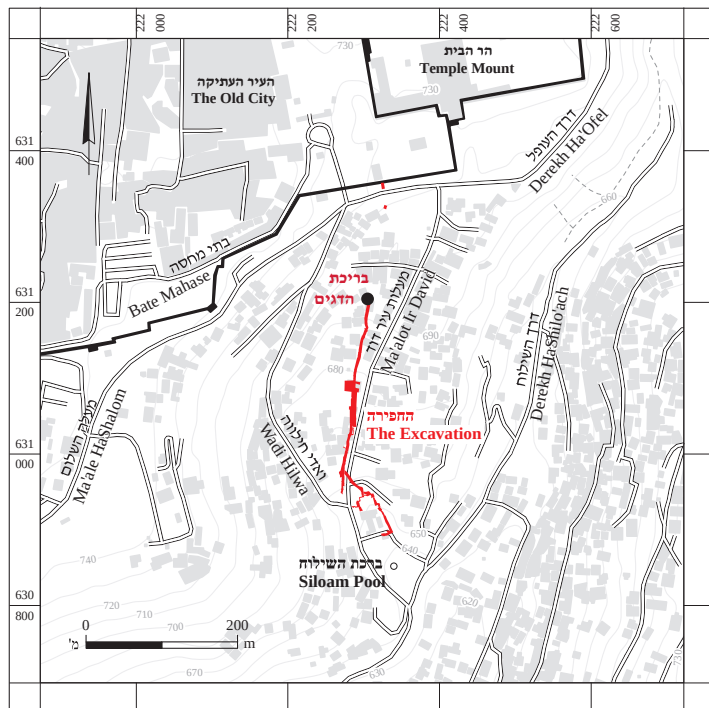


Fig. 1. Location map showing the area of the excavation discussed in this article (Or Rose- Zakaim; Levy and Baruch 2023).

1 The excavations along the southern Tyropoeon and the length and breadth of the stepped street in the city of David were carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority with the assistance of the Elad Association, within the Jerusalem Walls National Park, in the southern part of the historic Tyropoeon Channel. The excavation has been underway since 2013, co-directed by Nahson Szanton, Joe Uziel, Moran Hagbi, Yuval Baruch, Yiftah Shalev and Ari Levy (field photography), with the assistance of Rikki Zalut Har-Tuv, Shlomo Greenberg, Oscar Bejerano, Navot Rom, Helen Michline, Philip Vukosavovic, Uriah Amichai, Rifka Ben-Chelouche, Katarina Palmberger, Amy Kessler, Shira Ben-Shahar, Aliza Rier, Niv Moralli, Shlomo Cesana and Fleur Haber (area supervisors), Vadim Essman (surveying) Or Rose-Zakaim, Alexander Wigman and Oscar Bejerano (photogrammetry, plans and sections), Shai Halevi and Asaf Peretz (field photography and photogrammetry), Yotam Asher (analytical laboratory), Anna de Vincenz and Tehillah Lieberman (pottery consultants), Donald Tzvi Ariel, Robert Kool and Yaniv Levy (numismatic consultants), Yael Gorin-Rosen (glass), Tamar Klein, Aviya Elharar, Alexandra Drenka and Atalya Fadida (registration and storeroom management). Assisting and accompanying the excavation were also: Amit Re'em, Neria Sapir and Yehiel Zelinger (Jerusalem district, Israel Antiquities Authority), Kobi Gur-Arie (Elad Association), Avi Ajami (foreman for the developer) and day laborers. Our thanks to Yana Tchekhanovets, Joe Uziel, Tali Erickson-Gini, Ayala Zilberstein, Liat Oz, Peter Gendelman and Guy D. Stiebel for accompanying the project and advising on it.

These excavations uncover remains of great significance from various periods, as discussed in the past (Szanton et al. 2019; Szanton, Lieberman and Hagbi 2019; Szanton et al. 2020; Levy et al. 2021, with background and further references). The remains shed light on the development of the area throughout the periods represented in the excavations.

This article will focus on the discovery of a unique fish pond, to be described below. This pond attests to fish breeding in Jerusalem at the end of the Byzantine period and the beginning of the Early Muslim period. Fish ponds served a variety of purposes, from fish breeding to commerce, consumption and ornamentation, as well as for religious-cultic purposes. In this article we will describe these fish ponds in the context of the historical processes in the area of the City of David hill during the Byzantine and Early Muslim periods.

■ Historical Background

The southern part of the Tyropoeon Valley was one of the focuses of Jerusalem's development from the end of the Second Temple period and until it reached its zenith in the sixth century CE in the Byzantine period under Emperor Justinian (Levy et al. 2021).

During the excavations remains were uncovered of a paved stone street, which was built in the beginning of the first century CE under the rule of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate (Fig. 2). The street was one of the city's main thoroughfares at the end of the Second Temple period and one of its commercial centers until its destruction in 70 CE. This street connected the Siloam Pool and the southern gates of the city to the Upper City and Mount Zion (Fig. 3) (Levy et al. 2021: 188–189) Szanton et al. 2019).



Fig. 2. The stepped street (Ari Levy).



Fig. 3. Artist's rendering of Jerusalem and the area of the stepped street at the end of the Second Temple period, after Eyal Meiron (drawing: Shalom Kveller, courtesy of the Ir David foundation).

The character of Jerusalem and its southern boundaries during the Roman period – especially in the phase after the destruction of the city in 70 CE until the fifth century CE – are becoming clearer following the excavations and research that have been undertaken in recent years (for more information see Weksler-Bdolah 2020). The southern parts of the Tyropoeon Valley, from the Siloam Pool and northward, apparently continued to serve as a main street around which the city developed after the destruction of the Temple and the establishment of the colony of Aelia Capitolina. The processes that took place in the area reflect the desire to maintain the area and its importance. That importance stemmed mainly from the proximity to the Siloam Pool (see Fig. 3), which was a main water source for the city and had religious significance. This primacy was preserved although a key outcome of the destruction was a reduction in population, decline in construction in the area and especially farming activities

there (Szanton, Lieberman and Hagbi 2019: 264; Levy 2019: 62–63; Levy et al: 2021: 187). Presumably construction on the City of David hill and the slopes of Mount Zion took place on a limited scape after the establishment of Aelia Capitolina, in the second and third centuries. Toward the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, when the entire area became prosperous, a spate of construction began during which Jerusalem expanded southward (Levy 2021: 66). In the early Byzantine period, in the fourth century CE, with the increased impact of Christianity, the city underwent a number of processes that influenced its physical condition (Fig. 4). Among these processes, the growth of the city’s population should be noted, along with the city’s expansion, mainly southward toward the City of David hill and Mount Zion the paving of streets and the transformation of the city into a focus of religious activity, mainly Christian. These processes reached their height in the second half of the Byzantine period, particularly in the sixth century CE, during the reign of Justinian (Hagbi and Uziel: 2014: 26–28; Levy et al. 2021: 187).

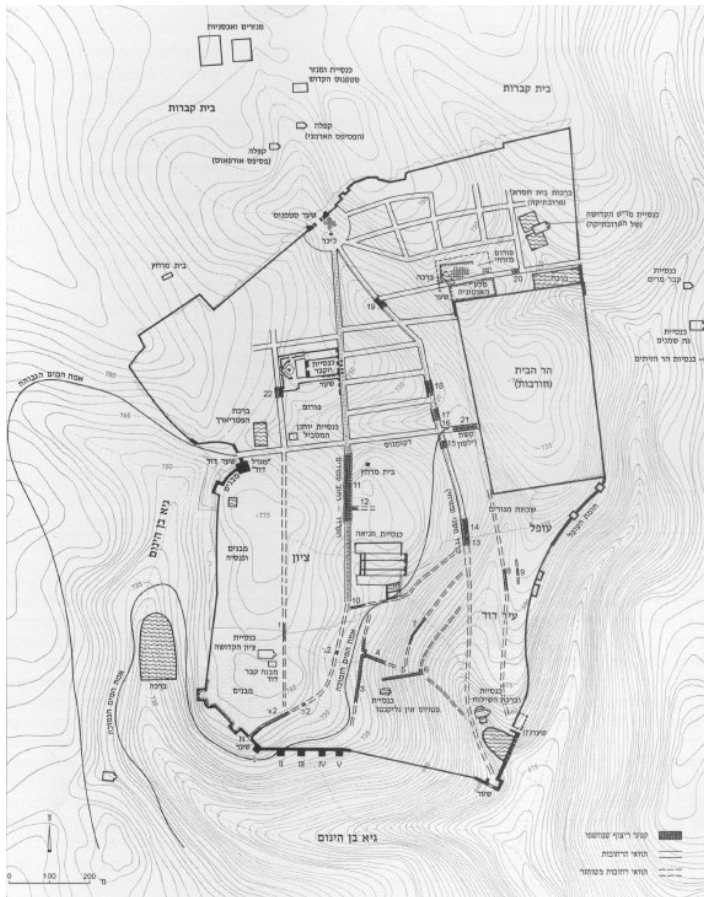


Fig. 4. Jerusalem during the Byzantine period (Gutfield 2008).

The southern part of the City of David hill and the slopes of Mount Zion attracted many pilgrims and were a focus of religious activity. This activity increased especially following the actions of Eudocia in the fifth century, who surrounded the southern parts of the city with a wall and this contributed to its security, making it part of the pilgrim's route and visits to the holy places in Jerusalem. In this context, the importance of the city in Christian tradition should be emphasized, following the story of Jesus' healing of a blind man (John 9: 1–11; Levy et al. 2021: 189). Eudocia built a church near the Siloam Pool that commemorated that tradition (Fig. 5) (Ashkenazi 2009: 70–100; Levy et al. 2021: 189). On the eastern slope of Mount Zion several segments of streets are known, including a paved stepped street, which ascends from the area of the Siloam Church and the southern part of the Tyropoeon Valley toward the present-day Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu and the summit of Mount Zion and Hagia Sion Church from the Byzantine period at the top. In Broshi's excavations of "Caiphas' House" (1973), a street was discovered ascending northward. This street may have connected Hagia Sion to the center of the Byzantine city – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The streets and remains of additional construction (see Fig. 4), documented in the area of the City of David hill and Mount Zion are associated with liturgical routes in the city, connecting the area to the heart of the Byzantine Jerusalem (Gutfeld 2008: 66–70; Levy et al. 2021: 199–202).

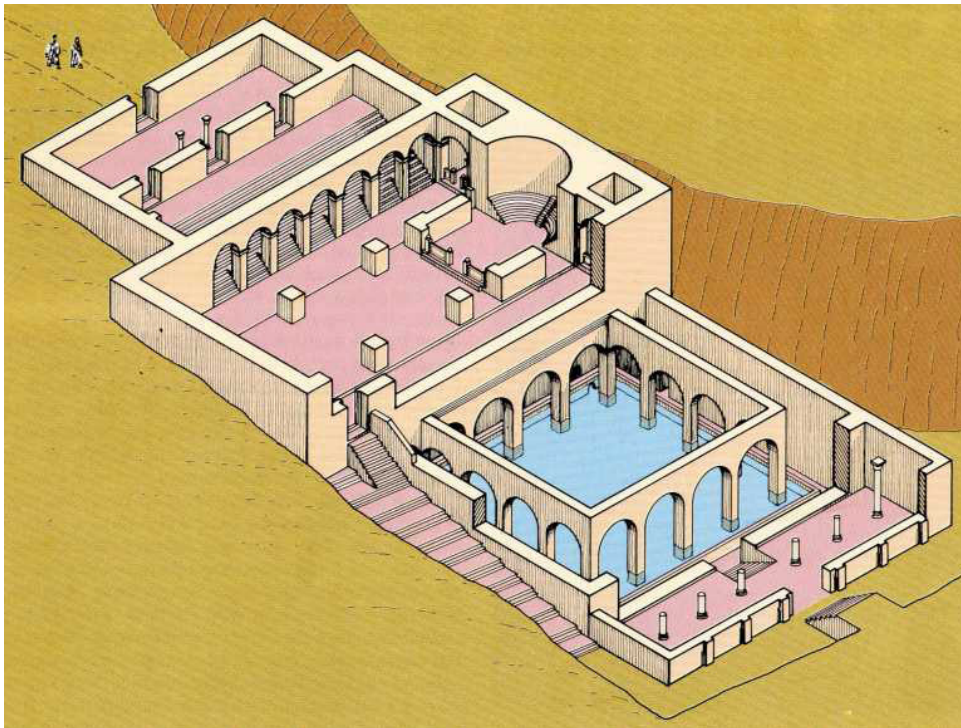
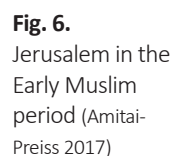


Fig. 5. The Siloam Pool (Leen Retmeyer).

In the transition between the Byzantine and the Early Muslim periods, the city underwent fundamental changes that, among other things, influenced its focal points and the city plan (Fig. 6). These changes also manifest themselves in excavations on the City of David hill. The excavations undertaken in the northwestern parts of the City of David and the northwestern parts of the Givati Parking Lot, parallel to the paved street from the Byzantine period that had been uncovered by Crowfoot and Fitzgerald (1929), clearly showed the changes that began in the area (Hagbi and Uziel 2015b; Ben Ami and Tchekhanovets 2020).



The excavation revealed that in the transition to the Umayyad period, the area became industrial. The street from the Byzantine period was narrowed in certain places and in other places was even removed. Parts of the street were covered with an unpaved road and industrial installations were built, mainly metallurgy – for recycling and repurposing of metals (Tchekhanovets 2022: 309–311).

At the beginning of the Abbasid period, the area underwent another transformation. Refuse heaps appeared, as well as additional industrial installations, and perhaps even a market (Ben Ami and Tchekhanovets 2020: 271–375; Tchekhanovets 2022: 314–318).

■ The Fish Pond in the City of David (Fig. 7)



Fig. 7. The fish pond (Ari Levy).

North of the stepped street from the late Second Temple period, the excavations unearthed the remains of a structure from the Late Roman period – the fourth century CE (Fig. 8). This structure apparently shows evidence of the abovementioned development of the city from the end of the third and early fourth centuries CE. In the northwestern part of the structure an installation was discovered that obviated one of its rooms after the structure went out of use (Fig. 9). Significantly, other parts of the structure also revealed various architectural elements from periods post-dating the use of structure, from the Byzantine and Early Muslim periods, which made secondary use of the structure and obviated its original use. These elements are undergoing separate research. The installation was identified as a fish pond (for the location

of the pond, see Fig. 1) The installation is 4.4 m long, 1.5 m wide and 1.4 m high. It consists of a peripheral wall, which was built of field stones averaging 0.6×0.8 m in dimensions. The stones were bonded by strong, dark material, the makeup of which will be determined as the research continues. As noted, the northern part of the installation rides over one of the walls of a structure from the Roman period, and obviated it (Fig. 10, 11). It may be proposed, at least at this stage of the research, that the installation was built within the structure in order to strengthen and stabilize it. The interior of the installation was coated with hydraulic plaster. Some 50 clay jars (Fig. 12) were imbedded in the plaster on the interior walls of the installation. The jars were 0.20 m deep on average, with a diameter of 0.7 m. The openings of the jars faced the interior of the installation. Notably, in the northern part of the structure and on the bottom, were three larger jars, 0.24 m deep and 0.15 m in diameter. The vaulted roof of the installation was preserved and covered its northern two thirds, while in our opinion, the southern third remained unroofed. The floor of the installation was coated with hydraulic plaster, sealed with fill consisting of gray clayey soil, in which some of the ceiling stones of the installation were discovered that had fallen after it went out of use at the beginning of the Early Muslim period. The excavation of the fill sealing the floor revealed numerous fish scales and a few bones that have not yet been identified (Fig. 13).



Fig. 8. The Roman structure (Riki Zalut-Har Tuv)

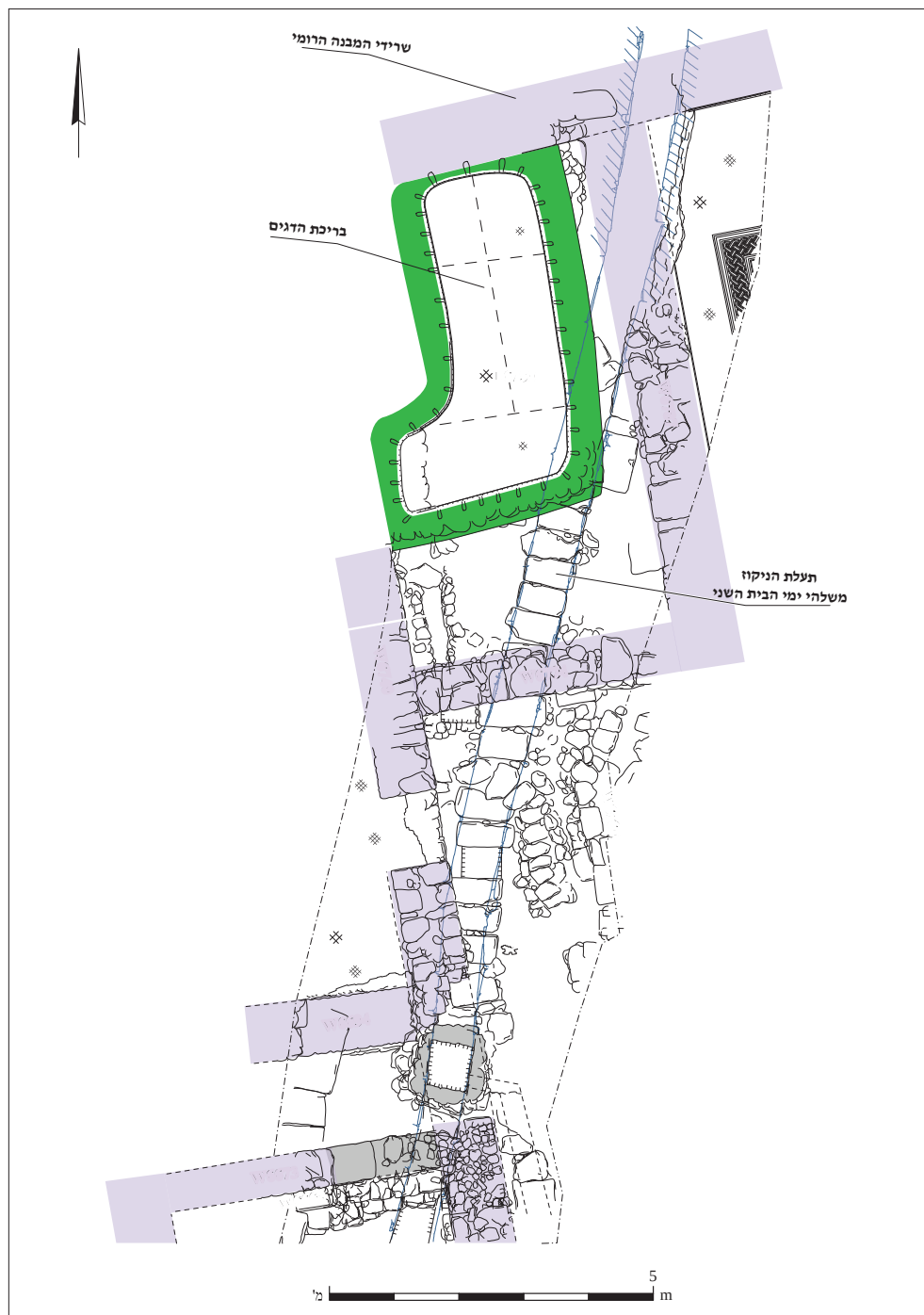


Fig. 9. The plan of the fish pond and its relationship to the Roman structure (Or Rose-Zakaim)



Fig. 10. View from the northwest of part of the fish pond, obviating the wall of the Roman structure (Ari Levy)



Fig. 11. View from the west of the northern part of the fish pond, obviating the Roman structure (Ari Levy).



Fig. 12. The jars embedded in the walls of the pond (Ari Levy).



Fig. 13. Fish scales discovered in the excavation (Kobi Herati).

The fish scales and the jars set into the interior walls of the installation, in addition to a small number of fish bones, attest to the use of the installation as a fish pond. The excavation revealed that it was built during the Byzantine period in the sixth century CE, and continued in use until the beginning of the Early Muslim period in the seventh century CE.

Significantly, the excavation revealed no water source or reservoir to feed the pool, such as a cistern or an aqueduct. But it is hoped that such a source awaits discovery in areas yet to be excavated. The closest natural source of water, which may have fed the pool, is the Gihon Spring. It should be noted that the Gihon Spring itself is not conducive to fish breeding. (Spiciarich et al. 2022). The northern and central parts of the pool were roofed and thus it may be posited that entry to the pool was via an opening in the upper southern portion. As for drainage and cleaning the pool, in our opinion, and as was suggested by Ayalon in his study of Khirbet Sabiya, the pool would have required draining and cleaning only once a year (Ayalon 1979).

We propose, based on the excavation data, that the fish pond we discovered was not used for commercial fish breeding, but rather for raising fish for a specific purpose, such as cultic activity associated with the religious significance of the area. Proof of this can be found in the small dimensions of the pond, which would not have supported commercial fish breeding. Additionally, its size would indicate that it not used for breeding fish, but rather, that fish were brought there fully grown. The fish were apparently of various species, based on the differing sizes of the jars embedded in the pond's walls. Future research on the bones and scales discovered in the excavation may confirm this.

■ Fish ponds from the Byzantine Period discovered in the Land of Israel

Caesarea. A rock-cut fish pond was discovered at the site, northeast of the city wall and near the bathhouse. Approximately 60 jars were set into in the walls of the pond. Sea water filled the pool via rock-cut channels. The excavators of the site proposed that this pool, which is dated to the Byzantine period, was used to raise fish (Dalali-Amos and Tepper 2021: 45; Flinder 1976).

‘Illut. The site is located in the middle of the village of ‘Illut in the Lower Galilee. During excavations at the site, a fish pond was unearthed that was dated from the Middle Roman to the end of the Byzantine periods. Five antilia jars were embedded in one wall of the pond, the openings of which faced the interior. According to the excavators, fresh-water fish were raised in this pool (Dalali-Amos 2021).

Khirbet Sabiya. A fish pond from the Byzantine period was found at the site, located in the Sharon region near Kefar Sava. Complete jars and half jars were set into the pond's interior walls and a cylindrical vessel was set into one of the corners of the pond. According to the excavator, because the pond was not built near a water source, such as an aqueduct or a natural source, the pool may have been fed from a cistern or a well. Even without a permanent water supply, fish could have been bred there and ensure the cleanliness of the installation, changing the water once a year (Dalali-Amos and Tepper 2021: 45; Ayalon 1979: 178–179).

Hadera. The excavation took place about 1 km south of Nahal Hadera, revealing the remains of a fish pond that was dated to the Byzantine period. During the excavation a white mosaic floor was uncovered. In the center of the floor a settling basin was found as well as a cross decoration. Three walls of the pool were also uncovered. Along them and abutting them, remains of shelves were found on which spawning jars were apparently set, of which a few body fragments survived (Chocron 2023).

Tel Tananim. Tel Tananim is located near the Nahal Tananim estuary, c. 5 km north of Caesarea. Two fish ponds were unearthed at the site. One is quadrilateral and along its inner walls, jars were embedded whose openings faced toward the interior. The second pool was also quadrilateral, with interior-facing amphora set in its walls. The two pools were in use until the end of the Byzantine period (Stieglitz 1998: 54; 2006: 63–92, 226).

Ein Bikura. The site is located in the Jerusalem Mountains west of Ein Karem above the bed of Nahal Sorek. A pool identified as a fish pond was uncovered at the site. The pool was plastered on its interior with two rows of jars embedded in the plaster. The openings of the jars faced the interior of the pool (Gibson, Ibbs and Kloner 1991: 41).

Yavne-Yam. A rock-cut, plastered installation was found, identified as a fish-breeding pond, during excavations at the site, located on Palmachim beach. At the bottom of the installation and near its walls, jars were uncovered that embedded horizontally. These jars were used as hatcheries and places for the fish to hide (Ajami et al. 2015).

The Third Mile Estate. The site is located in Ashkelon, c. 2 km east of the beach. During the excavation a compound was discovered including a bathhouse, nearby which three trapezoid-shaped pools were discovered. The interiors of the pools were coated with plaster. They were apparently fed by water that came from the bathhouse via a system of channels. According to the excavators, the pool was used to hold adult fish brought to the site from some outside source (Israel and Erickson-Gini 2013: 184–185).

Ein Hanya. The site developed around a spring on the southern bank of Nahal Refa'im (Baruch and Zilberbod 2016: 195). During the excavation at the site, headed by Y. Baruch and I. Zilberbod from 2012 to 2015, water systems were unearthed and documented that included feeder channels and a quadrilateral plastered pool. A number of round holes, c. 0.2 m deep, were made in the interior walls of the pool. The excavators propose that the compound consisted of a peristyle courtyard including a fish pond surrounded by a roofed portico, which raises the possibility that this was an ornamental pool. In addition, the presence of the holes sunken into the interior walls of the pool suggests that it was used for fish breeding. It may be suggested that the fish were bred for ornamental purposes. It should be noted that the theory that this was a fish pond is still under study. Also significant is the fact that in the 1930s, excavations were carried out at the site by D. Baramki. These excavations focused on exposing a church from the Byzantine period in which two phases were discovered, one from the fifth–sixth centuries and the second from the end of the Byzantine period and until the Early Muslim period – the eighth century CE. An architectural arrangement of a church and an adjacent pool were identified, also known from other sites in the region, such as the Siloam Church. This does not necessarily indicate that fish were bred there, but rather, the architecture is an accepted means of symbolizing a ritual association with water (for more on the Siloam Church, see Levy et al. 2021). The location of the site in what were clearly agricultural surroundings may support the theory that at some point the pool at Ein Hanya was used to raise fish (Baruch and Zilberbod 2016: 198–204).

■ Fish and their Importance

Fish have always been an important component of the human diet. Findings of remains such as bones and scales, pools for raising fish both near water sources and distant from them, such as Jerusalem or the Negev, can attest to the importance of fish and the fish trade. Such commerce often attests to prestige, especially regarding the import of exotic species (such as parrot fish from the Red Sea) and the development of means of conserving and transporting fish over long distances. In the region of the Land of Israel, the commercial fish trade thrived in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, fresh water sources such as rivers and lakes, and the Nile in Egypt (Blevis et al. 2021).

In Jerusalem, fish remains were found in many of the city's excavations, which is important evidence of the centrality of fish in the local diet, especially considering the city's inland location. In this connection, both the political and religious importance of Jerusalem set it off from other cities (Spiciarich et al. 2022).

Evidence of fish farming in pools appears beginning in the second millennium BCE in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In the Roman world, it is known from the second century BCE. Two types of fish-farming pools were known to the Romans: salt water and fresh water. At first, pools for fish farming in the Roman world were established to raise only salt-water species, in areas near the beach in order to exploit the seawater. Later, pools were created to raise fresh-water species. These pools appear in public areas as well as in private dwellings, and were fed by municipal pipelines. The presence of pools in private dwellings attest to the high social class of the inhabitants.

The use of fish ponds in general can be divided into four categories:

- A. Farming and commercial fish breeding for consumption
- B. Ornamental fish breeding.
- C. Fish breeding in private dwellings as a sign of status and economic prowess of the breeder.
- D. Fish breeding for cultic purposes.

In most pools used for fish breeding, niches or recesses can be seen, as well as pottery jars, set into the walls or the bottom as spaces for egg-laying, spawning and shaded concealment. In some pools, jars of various sizes were installed that were used for different species of fish, to protect them from aggression by other species (Gurevich 2016: 153; Shemesh 2017: 100; Ayalon 1979: 179).

Fish ponds required certain conditions to ensure an optimal environment in terms of oxygen, temperature and food. In addition, the pool water had to be of high quality and there the pond had to have a drainage and filling system. Some pools were used to raise adult fish that were transported to them. The fish could be held in such pools for up to one year without changing the water (Dalali-Amos and Tepper 2021: 45; Ayalon 1979: 179).

■ Literary Sources Mentioning Fish-Breeding Pools in the Roman World

Written sources mention the importance of fish-breeding for commercial as well as religious purposes. Various sources reveal the cultural and material milieu in which fish were bred and traded for various purposes.

At the time of the Second Temple a wide variety of fish species were probably consumed in Jerusalem. There may have even been a fish market in the city, based on the name “Fish Gate” (Nehemiah 3:3) for one of its gates. During the time of Nehemiah, the people were even scolded for buying fish from the Tyrians on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 12:17; Buchnik et al. 2010: 98–99). The ancient rabbinic sages called fish ponds “enclosures of fish” (Mishnah, Beitzah 3, 1; Kosman 1993, and see discussion there). Fish are mentioned

in the Mishnah and the Tosefta in contexts associated with fishing work and the ritual purity of various types of fish for consumption that were brought to markets.

The first-century CE Roman author Lucius Columella, the author of *On Agriculture*, describes fish ponds in which cells were installed for the fish to hide from the heat and light of the sun (*On Agriculture* 1954)

Also in the first century CE, Pliny the Elder mentions fish ponds in his work *Naturalis Historia*, but more from the artistic viewpoint of wall paintings (116:35) and the various minerals described in the context of fish ponds (66:37).

Fish are an important religious symbol and serve as one of the characteristics of the Eucharist. Various depictions of fish appear in Byzantine iconography, together with bread and wine (Zilberstein 2018: 341 and see further references there). During excavations in the Givati Parking Lot, north of the excavation of the pool that is the subject of this article, a fragment of an ossuary was discovered bearing graffiti of a number of scenes (Fig. 14). The fragment was dated to the Byzantine period, given that it was found above the occupation level of one of the rooms of a structure dated to that period, and based on the motifs incised on it (Zilberstein 2018; 2020: 251).

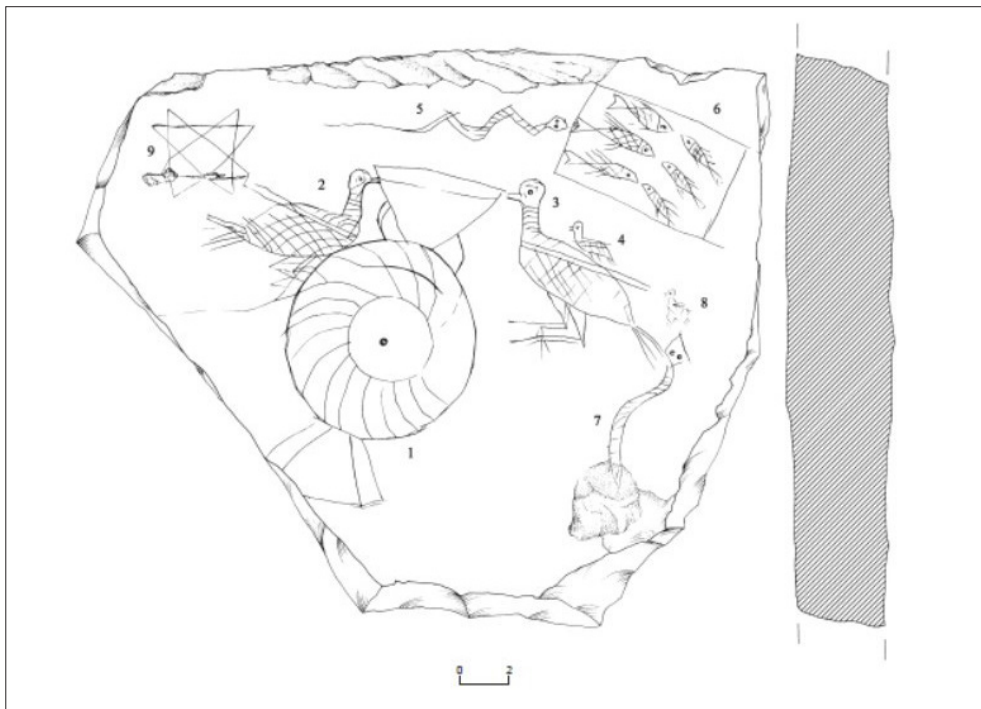


Fig. 14. Fragment of ossuary from the Givati Parking Lot incised with a fish graffito in a rectangular frame – see no. 6 (Zilberstein 2020: 253 Fig. 9.2)

One of the scenes that appears on the back of the ossuary fragment depicts three pairs of fish, facing each other, apparently surrounded by a frame. This frame might represent a fish pond, but it should be noted that the depiction of fish in a frame or a pond like the one on this object appears in no other artistic representations known from the Byzantine period (Zilberstein 2018: 337; 2020: 255)

■ Conclusion

The fish pond uncovered in the excavations of the City of David is situated near the urban road network in the southern part of Byzantine Jerusalem, and near the Church of Siloam and the city gates from the south, and Mount Zion from the west (for more about urban planning and focuses of sanctity see Levy et al. 2021).

We suggest that the pond was used to contain and store live adult fish brought there specifically. This required a constant import of fish, which may have been transported to a shop or a merchant, who sold or donated them. That would explain the fact that there is no drainage opening in this pond, an opening that is found in pools used mainly to raise fish from spawning to adulthood, as can also be seen in the fish ponds uncovered in Khirbet Sabiya (Ayalon 1979). The proximity of the pond to the main focuses of worship in the area – the Church of Siloam and the holy places on Mount Zion – and the proximity to the road network connecting the focuses of worship, may allude to cultic significance associated with fish that were brought to the pond – whether for various rituals or as part of the agriculture that supported the Christian community living in the area or pilgrims arriving in the city and visiting its sacred sites.

One of the special characteristics of the fish pond uncovered in the City of David is its presence in a city in the interior of the country, not near a water source that could support commercial fish-breeding. We emphasize that the fish pond within Jerusalem is a rare find, of a type never before documented in the archaeological research of the city.

As the excavation showed, the pond was built during the Byzantine period, after the city had extended southward toward the southern parts of the city of David and Mount Zion. The pond was constructed in an area that was already built up at the time of its construction, proof of which is seen in the obviation of a room in the structure from a period predating the pond, and the use of that structure's built remains to support the pond.

The find that emerges from the sealed layer of the pond's floor shows that it was abandoned ceased use during the Early Muslim period, somewhat before the beginning of the Abbasid period. It may be proposed that it went out of use due to

the following reasons:

The transition from the Byzantine to the Early Muslim period was gradual and reached its zenith in the Abbasid period, when the Christian cultural space of the city was abandoned. In 614 CE, the Persians conquered Jerusalem and lived there for a number of years thereafter. In 638 CE, the city was conquered by the Muslims. These events led to the abandonment of many sites that were active in the city during the Byzantine period, among them churches and ritual centers, public buildings, commercial structures and roads.

In the seventh century CE, in the transition between the Byzantine and the Early Muslim periods, at the beginning of the Umayyad period, the area of the City of David had already begun to fundamentally change, and became industrial. Some streets in the area were cancelled out, some were narrowed, and industrial installations were built over or near them (Hagbi and Uziel 2015a; Tchekhanovets and Ben-Ami 2018: 216–222). The Church of Siloam in the southern part of the Tyropoeon Valley went out of use and an industrial installation was built on the floor of the northern aisle, apparently a lime kiln (Levy et al. 2021: 192–193).

In the mid-eighth century, during the transition to the Abbasid period, the character was transformed again, this time into a commercial zone with a market (Hagbi and Uziel 2015b: 44; Tchekhanovets 2018: 235–236). This is the phase in which the fish pond was abandoned. At this point in the research, the reasons for its construction, its nature and the reasons for the cessation of its use have not yet been clarified; we hope these will become clear as research progresses.

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