A ROMAN FORT AT KHIRBET AL-KILYA
IN THE WEST BANK HIGHLANDS OF PALESTINE

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ABSTRACT

[AR]

قلعة رومانية في خربة الكيلية في مرتفعات وسط فلسطين

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة خربة الكيلية التي تقع شمال شرق مدينة رام الله على مرتفعات وسط فلسطين التاريخية بالقرب من مدينة تل التل الكنعانية، حيث أسست السلطات الإسرائيلية المستوطنة التي تدعى ريمونيم بالقرب من خربة الكيلية في عام 1977. وقد أجريت التنقيبات الأثرية الوحيدة في الخربة من قبل سلطة الآثار الاسرائيلية باشراف الأثري يتسحق ماجن من خلال اجراء خمسة مواسم أثرية – غير شرعية- ما بين 1982- 1988م. علمًا بأنه حسب المادة (27) من اتفاقية جنيف بتاريخ (14/05/ 1954م) والتي تنص على حماية الممتلكات الثقافية في حالة النزاع المسلح والاحتلال العسكري. وقد توصلت نتائج التنقيب الأثري إلى اكتشاف قلعة رومانية تحولت فيما بعد إلى دير مسيحي في الفترة البيزنطية. وقد أعاد الباحث دراسة خربة الكيلية من جديد -والتي تبلغ مساحتها 20 دونم -من حيث الوصف المعماري وتحليل وانتاج الخرائط والمخططات ذات الجودة العالية اعتمادًا على نتائج التنقيبات الأثرية التي قام بها يتسحاق ماجن في بداية التسعينيات من القرن الماضي. وتوصل الباحث إلى الاستنتاج بأن الموقع قد أعيد استخدامه ليس فقط كدير مسيحي في الفترة البيزنطية، وإنما استخدم أيضًا في الفترات الاسلامية المختلفة، وبخاصة خلال الفترة الأموية والفترتين المملوكية والعثمانية كقاعدة عسكرية تشرف عل المناطق المجاورة لها كالغور الفلسطيني والمناطق الجبلية المجاورة في منطقة شرق رام الله. وكذلك لا بد من الإشارة إلى أن بناء مستوطنة ريمونيم الاسرائيلية بالقرب من خربة الكيلية يُعد انتهاكًا واضحًا للقوانين الدولية التي تتعلق بعدم اجراء تنقيبات أثرية في الأراضي المحتلة واغلاق المستوطنين والجيش الاسرائيلي للخربة وحرمان السكان الأصليين الفلسطينيين من كتابة تاريخهم بأنفسهم وزيارة مواقعهم الأثرية وتنظيم الرحلات السياحية إليها؛ لذلك فإن الهدف من هذه الدراسة تقديم معلومات جديدة مختلفة عن التي قدمها يتسحق ماجن تقوم على ترويج لثقافة الشعب الفلسطيني وحضارته في الفترتين الرومانية والبيزنطية.

[EN] In the central highlands of Palestine, a Roman fort at Khirbet al-Kilya in the was converted into a monastery during the Byzantine period. The site is located five kilometres to the east of the Israeli settlement of Rimonim. Overlooking Wādī Wahīda, the fort lies between the Palestinian villages of Dair Dibwan (near the Canaanite city, Tell ET-Tell) and al Taybeh. This paper aims to highlight the presence of Roman forts in Palestine, and their conversion to Byzantine monasteries. Specific goals were to investigate the fort at Khirbet al-Kilya (20 Dumns), to update the stratigraphical and chronological information for the site, and to document the structural remains. Additionally, other objectives included producing a site map and drawings of the building layout and architectural features, since the fort was neither mapped nor photographed by Magen. In addition, we reproduced high quality photos and plans of the archaeological site of Khirbet al-Kilya while providing a descriptive study of the site's architecture and analysis. The methodology of this study relied on sources and references published in various journals, books, and reports, particularly those published by Yitzhak Magen.

KEYWORDS: al-Kilya, Khirbet, monasteries, Palestine, Ramallah, Roman fort.

I. Introduction

This work aims to examine the role of fortifications found in the central highlands of Palestine, with a particular focus on the Roman fort at Khirbet al-Kilya[1] **[Figure 1].** Some of the forts functioned as important defensive structures for towns and palaces, while others served as military bases for garrisoned troops. The forts of Masada and Alexandrium, found in remote locations, do not appear to have been connected to any city, but due to their isolation and high altitude, they are thought to have served as royal refuges, as at Herodium and Masada[2]. Because peristyle courtyards and Roman baths were features found at several of the forts, it is unlikely that the forts were built solely for garrisoned soldiers. Many of them served as a network of refuges for Herod, away from palaces and towns. The reason he heavily fortified Sebastia would have been to create the safest possible refuge in his kingdom. Herod's strong defensive fortification strategy was not as much for the protection of ordinary citizens, as it was for his own and his family's safety, and the security of his property[3]. Examining the late Roman period fort at Khirbat al-Kilya[4] would explain the processes involved in its conversion into a monastery.

The research aims were to verify and update the stratigraphy and chronology of the site, to provide documentation on its building structures, and to create a site map with the aid of high-resolution imagery. We referred to primary and secondary sources and preliminary and final archaeological excavation reports. The research focuses on the Roman and Byzantine periods between 63 BC and 638 AD (16H) and concentrates on the central highlands of Palestine.

The Khirbet al-Kilya site is in Area C[5] and therefore comes under Israeli administrative and military control[6]. There were 675 inhabitants in 2019[7]. Located on high ground above Wadi Wahidah[8] between the Palestinian villages of al-Taybeh to the north and Dair Dibwan to the south, it is in close to proximity to the Canaanite city of Tall Et -Tall (Ai) **[Figures 1 - 3]**. Most of these places are located in Areas A or B and fall under Palestinian control, as laid down by the 1995 Oslo II Accord between the

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[1] Israeli archaeologists claim that this site is mentioned in the Old Testament. It talks about the valley of Achor which is mentioned in relation to the aftermath of the fall of Jericho when the Israelis came from Egypt to Palestine. Joshua 7: 24-26).

[2] Murphy-O'connor & Cunliffe 2008: 378–381.

[3] Lee 2005: 73.

[4] It can be written also as Khirbet el-Kiliya.

[5] The 1995 Oslo II Agreement divided the Palestinian territories, excluding East Jerusalem, into three zones: Area A) comprising disconnected districts, includes 17.2 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and is under the full security and civil control of the Palestinian Authority. Area B) 23.8 percent, is under Israeli security control, while the Palestinian Authority is responsible for some social and civil services. Area C) approximately 59 percent, is under full Israeli occupation. The three areas were theoretically a first step in Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank, as required under U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338. Further significant withdrawals, to be completed by May 1999, never took place. See Occupied Territories; Autonomous Areas; U.N. Resolutions.

[6] Abu Alsaud 2018: 191.

[7] Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019: Localities File (XLS).

[8] *IOG* 18265/14875; *ITM* 23265/64875.

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel. However, as the Khirbet al-Kilya site is located in Area C, under Israeli administration and military control, Palestinian archaeologists and researchers are prohibited from visiting the site.

Due to this, our study focuses on reports of archaeological excavations at the site that were carried out by Y. Magen between 1982 and 1988, over a five-month period in total. Over a century earlier, in 1869, Victor Guérin had visited and described the site (REF). East of the site, there are several caves that may have served as monastic cells. The monastery complex, covering an area of over 2000 m² (2 dunams) comprises two adjoining units, labelled Buildings 1 and 2. Both buildings are square and Building 1 is to the north of Building 2. On the eastern side of the monastery on the slope above the wadi, there are several caves that may have served as cells for the monks, a large cistern, steps hewn into the rock, and agricultural terraces. In the south-eastern and north-western parts of the grounds, there are circular structures that may have been sheep or goat pens during the Islamic period.
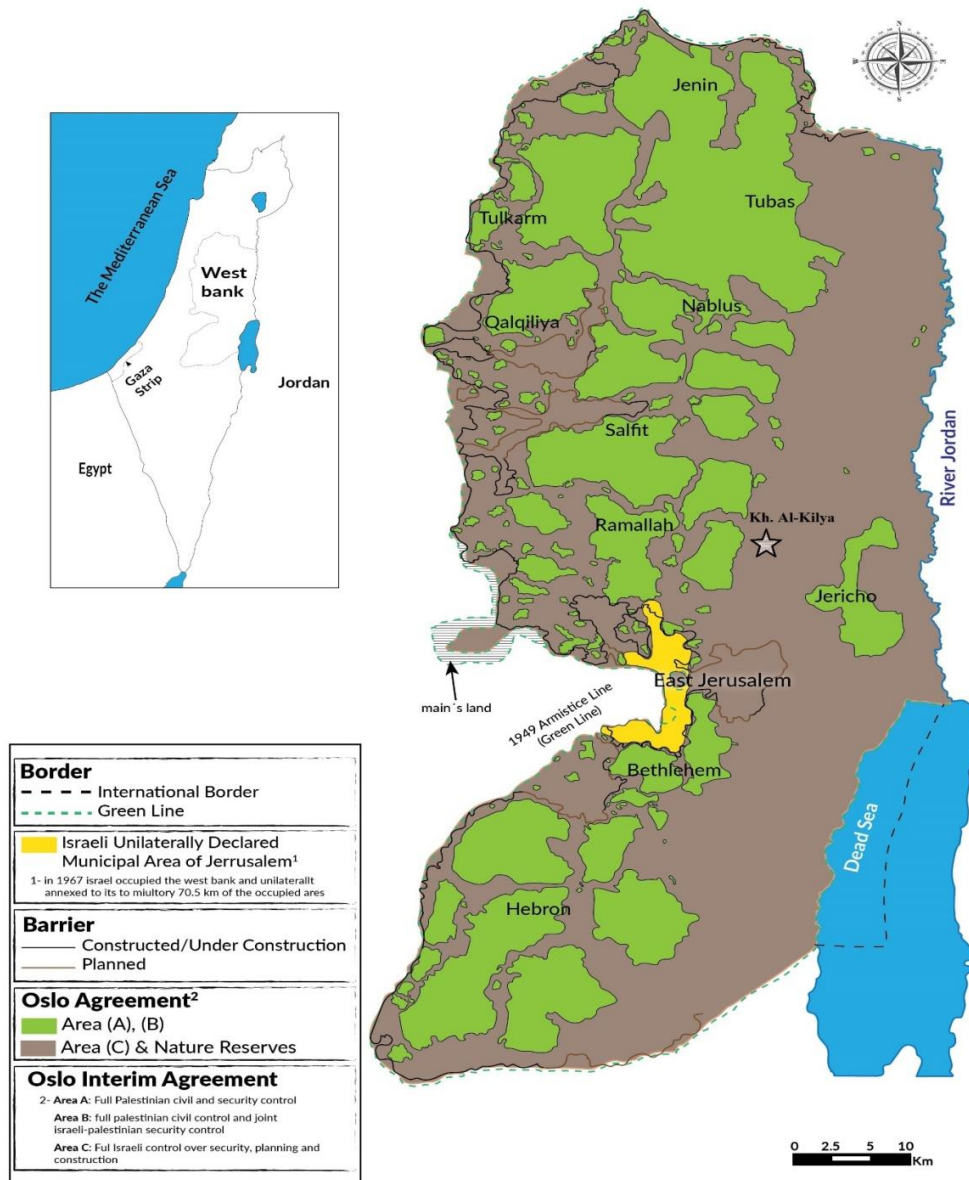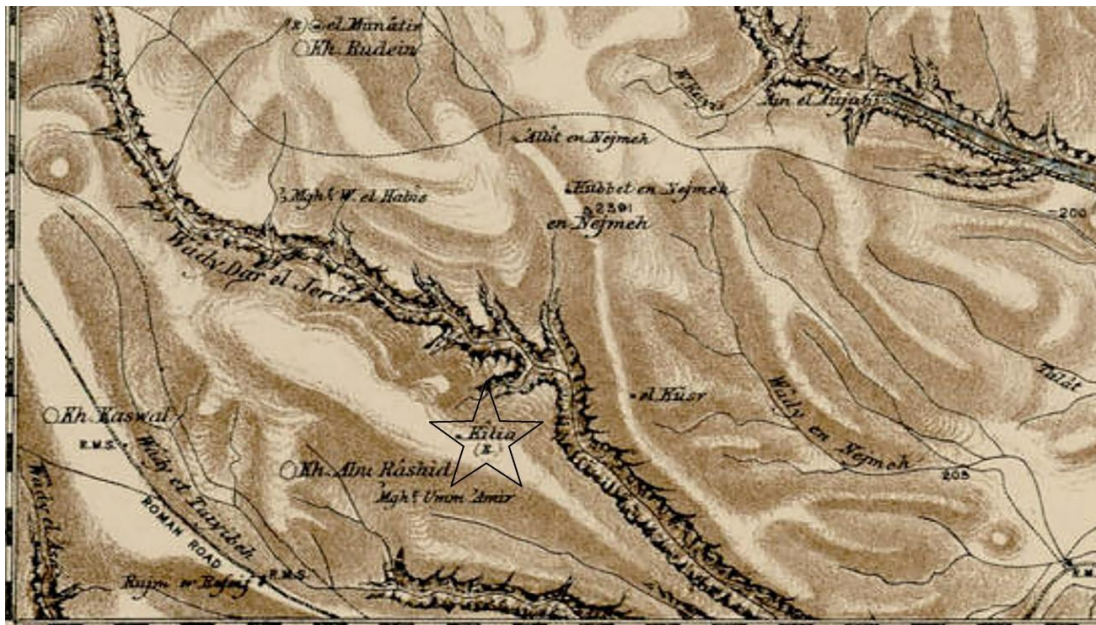

[FIGURE 1]: The location of the Khirbet al-Kilya in West Bank and the political divisions A-B & C area © Drawing by ABU ALSAUD & JAWABREH.
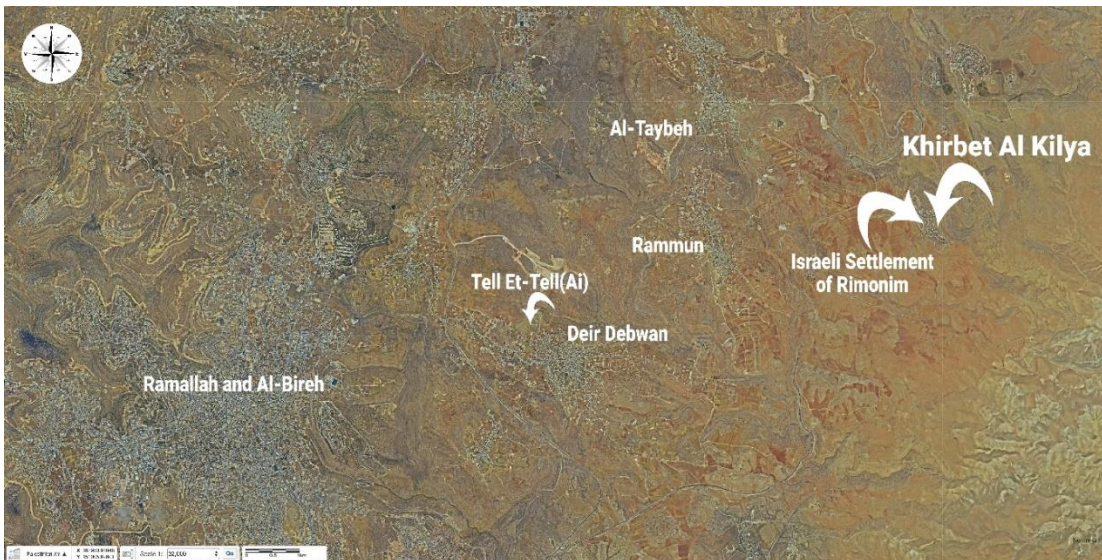
[FIGURE 2]: Areail view of the site © Geomolog: www.geomolog.ps, accessed on (15/03/2024)

[FIGURE 3]: Map of the site according to the survey Palestine © PEQ in 1880, Sheet 15.

II. STUDY METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study relied on sources and references published in various journals, books, and reports, particularly those published by Yitzhak Magen (1990 & 2012). In addition, this study produced high quality photos and plans of the archaeological site of Khirbet al-Kilya (20 Dunms). Finally, the researcher conducted a descriptive study of the site's architecture and analysis to create a database about the ancient fortress in Palestine. It is very important for Palestinian archaeologists to develop this site database for the tourism sector when Israel ends its occupation of the study area, and becomes subject to Palestinian control.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Palestine, along with other provinces of the eastern Roman Empire, came under Roman occupation in 63 BC, with the arrival of Pompey in the Middle East. The Transjordan area was in a state of turmoil at the time, ravaged by a civil war between two brothers, Hyrcanus and Artistobulus. Aristobulus forced Pompey's intervention in the conflict by bribing him to help when he was besieged by Hyrcanus in Jerusalem. Pompey placed Hyrcanus in charge of the kingdom as ethnarch and high priest. In addition, Pompey freed Greek coastal and Transjordan cities from Jewish control and formed the Decapolis, an alliance of ten cities[9].

After the rise of Julius Caesar and the defeat of Pompey, the port city of Jaffa was assigned to Palestine. The former ruler of Antipater became king of Palestine after the death of the regional ruler and his two sons, Herod and Phasaelus, who had become governors of Jerusalem and Galilee, respectively. Antipater was assassinated by means of poisoning, but his pro-Roman policy and useful connections were later exploited by Herod the Great in his rise to power. With the support of the Roman Senate, Herod became king of Palestine in 40 BC, but did not gain complete military control until three years later. He promoted Hellenization by founding the Greek cities of Caesarea and Sebastia and contributing to existing ones. His Roman and Greek policies made him unpopular with his Jewish subjects, and rebuilding the Jewish temple on the Temple Mount was not enough to appease these non-Greek subjects. However, he was held in high regard by the Roman authorities and the Roman Emperor, Augustus, who added new territory to his domain. This included several coastal cities, Samaria, and territories in Jordan. Herod's reign was seen as a time of prosperity and growth for Palestine, but excessive taxation ended this[10].

After Herod's death in 4 BC and the death or dismissal of all his sons, Palestine became a Roman province ruled by a governor from Rome. The province included Palestine, Samaria and Idumea, but not Galilee, Gaulanitis, Perea or the Decapolis cities. A Roman prefect remained governor until Julius Agrippa gained control of the territories of Herod's sons in 39 AD. He was succeeded in 44 AD by his own son, Agrippa, who ruled for forty-two years. Both father and son were dependent on the Roman procurators of the central highlands. In 66 AD there was a Jewish uprising in Jerusalem. To stop the revolt before it spread, Cestius, the legate of Syria marched on Jerusalem with the Legio XII Fulminata and some auxiliary units of the Syrian Army. The Roman army was ambushed and defeated by the Jewish rebels at Betonia on its way to Jerusalem. This led to further rebellion in the province. The Jewish-Roman war lasted seven years although it officially ended after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD[11]. The following three years marked the final stages of defeat, culiminated in the siege of Masada in 73 AD. Jerusalem was destroyed and garrisoned by the Legio X Fretensis. The province became a praetorian province administered by a praetorian legate[12].

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[9] GICHON & APPLEBAUM 1967: 7.

[10] GICHON & APPLEBAUM 1967: 8.

[11] SAFRAI 1994: 22.

[12] SAFRAI 1994: 23.

Jerusalem remained under the guardianship of the Legio X Fretensis for the following sixty years. Jewish and Christian groups came to Jerusalem to try to start a new life. Until the reign of Hadrian and his declaration to rebuild Jerusalem, there were no significant changes in the city. The Central Highlands underwent a major change with the third Jewish revolt (the Bar Kochba War). The conflict ended with the siege of Battir (Betar) in 135 AD[13]. The Jewish population of the province was either enslaved, expelled, or chose to leave before the Romans arrived. Galilee and the cities of the eastern Mediterranean coastal towns became new centers of Jewish culture and learning. The province itself was renamed Syria-Palestina and became a consular province[14].

The Severan period brought development and renewal to the province. The cities of Diospolis, Eleutheropolis and Nicopolis flourished at the turn of the 2nd century AD. The regions of Bashan and Huaran also benefitted from the prosperity that the Syria-Palaestina province enjoyed, until the crisis of the 3rd century[15].

IV. Presence of Roman Legions in the Central Highlands

Archaeological evidence does not provide an exact figure to the number of Roman legions stationed in the central highlands, nor to the number of auxiliary units in Palestine. From the time of Herod, the Great, only one garrison of six auxiliary units is known to have been in the area. This is confirmed by epigraphic material[16]. No Roman legions were in Palestine before the first revolt in 70 AD. One of the six auxiliary units was a cavalry regiment from Sebastia, Ala I Sebastenorum. The other five were infantry units, one of which was from Sebastia, Cohors I Sebastenorum. The Sebastia units were created by Herod the Great by recruiting inhabitants from Samaria and Sebastia[17]. Due to the antagonism between the Jewish and Sebastia communities, Sebastia soldiers were used to control the rebellious Jewish population. After Herod the Great's death in 4 BC, most of the army supported the Romans, including the 3,000 Sebasteni from the one *ala* and five *cohortes*[18]. The rest of the auxiliary forces may have been formed or replenished in Palestine. The first Roman legion stationed in Palestine was the Legio X Fretensis. This legion was stationed in Jerusalem after 70 AD and was the main legion in the region until it was transferred to Elat during Diocletian's reign (244-311 AD)[19]. The second legion to be stationed in Palestine was probably the Legio VI Ferrata, which was stationed in Modern Lajjun near Megiddo[20]. The site of the camp believed to be at Legio was excavated and surveyed by various scholars, but no trace of a camp large enough

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[13] Safrai 1994: 22; Lewin 2005: 33.

[14] Gichon & Applebaum 1967: 11.

[15] Debatable & Bar 2002: 43-54.

[16] Speidel 1992: 224, 234.

[17] Le Bohec 2004 : 129.

[18] Speidel 1992 : 224, 234.

[19] Geva 1984 : 239-254.

[20] Le Bohec 2004 : 241.

to house an entire legion was found[21]. The legions remained stationed in Palestine until the time of Diocletian when major changes took place on the eastern frontier.

One major concern of the Roman army in the highlands of Palestine was the *Limes Palaestinae*, a subject studied by the scholar Mordechai Gichon. This defensive system comprised of a chain of fortifications from Gaza to Ein Geddi[22]. The limes would have played a significant part in the defenses of the region, but its existence is disputed among scholars[23].

V. KHIRBET AL-KILYA SITE HISTORY

Early Byzantine Period (4th-5th Centuries AD)

The fort at Khirbet al-Kilya was built either at the end of the 4th century or the beginning of the 5th century. It overlooked the Roman road from the Jordan Valley to Jericho. The primary purpose of the fort was to provide security for the road and the eastern wall of the valley. The two-storey structure, with 130 cm-thick walls and measuring 20.7m in length, was one of two defensive structures protecting the area. A Roman tower on the other side of Wadi Wahidah also served as a defensive monument.

In 1990, Y. Magen observed that the late Roman forts in the central highlands of Palestine shared common characteristics. They were not erected as defensive structures but as military bases for soldiers patrolling the main roads and borders. Therefore, they lacked towers. They were all located on hilltops above riverbeds, overlooking Roman roads, and were at a distance from farms and towns. They were expertly built using high-quality materials,[24] to deter Palestinian rebellions and better control the conquered peoples therein.

Byzantine Period(6th-7th Centuries AD)

The fort at Khirbet al-Kilya was abandoned at the end of the 5th century, and was converted into a cenobite (communal) monastery in the 6th century when the structure was rebuilt using the structural remains. Other Roman forts in the central highlands, such as Khirbet Dair Sam'an and Khirbet Dair Qal'a were converted in the same way [FIGURE 1]. A chapel, farm buildings, and additional rooms were added in the process of adapting the fort to its new usage. Community life with a daily routine was an alternative to eremitic life, which could endanger mental health. There was a great increase in the number of these communal monastery settlements in the area during this period due to the growth of Christian monks inhabiting Jersualem's the desert area: approximately sixty monasteries were established to accommodate 10,000-30,000 monks[25]. However, the monastery at Khirbet al-Kilya was deserted during the early Islamic period (638-1099 AD)[26].

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[21] TEPPER 2002: 231-237.

[22] GICHON 1978: 1-320.

[23] JANCZEWSKI 2019: 123-127.

[24] MAGEN 1990: 321-332 & 2012: 261-296.

[25] Further information, please read the following link: «Byzantine Monks of the Judean Desert», www.biblewalks.com/ByzantineMonks, Accessed on (26/ 06/ 2024).

[26] MAGEN 1990: 321-332.

Nineteenth-Century Exploration and Surveying

Between 1866 and 1877, Khirbet al-Kilya was surveyed by Wilson, Conder and Kitchener on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Foundation (PEF). However, the archaeological significance of the site was not recognized, and the survey report recorded the structures as homestead ruins[27]. The survey map shows the ruins of Khirbet al-Kilya above the deep gorge of Wadi Dair Jerir **[Figure 2]**. On the other side of the gorge, the ruins of a Byzantine monastery are seen at el Kusr.

A Roman road was located two kilometres south of Wadi et Taiyibeh (named after the Arab village three kilometres to the west). In 1948, the road was given the name Tariq Abu George and was paved over by the Jordanian Army. It connects Ramallah and Jerusalem to Jericho and is still in use.

Modern Period

In 1967, the local territory on which the Khirbet al-Kilya site is located was seized from the Jordanians by the Israeli army and, in 1977, a Nahal settlement was established near the monastery ruin. A Nahal settlement is one created by the paramilitary Israeli Force that combines military service and farming. A large number of these Nahal bases were later converted into housing for civilians. In 1980, twenty-five civilian families were the first to form a community in a Nahal settlement and called it Rimmonim, in reference to the biblical rock of Rimmon. The international community considers Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal under international law[28]. In 1990, an archaeological team, headed by Y Magen, archaeology staff officer of the region, carried out excavations at the site. The findings from these excavations are the main source of information on the site. The following description of the fort (later monastery) complex at the site, is based on Magen's 1990 account.

VI. Description of Structural Remains[29]

The overall structure of the monastery complex at Khirbet al-Kilya consists of two annexed buildings, labelled Buildings 1 and 2, and an exterior courtyard. The two buildings are from the Byzantine period. Building 1, built with large ashlars and walls up to 1.3m thick is smaller than Building 2. Building 2 is built with small ashlars and the walls are 0.7 m thick. The inner courtyard of Building 1 is mainly paved with regular, well-fitted flagstones while those of Building 2 are irregular in shape. The rooms in Building 1 are small, while those in Building 2 are larger and rectangular, with some being long and narrow. Building 1 has an upper story, but there is no evidence of a second story in Building 2. There is no staircase and the walls are not thick enough to support an upper story. There is an additional fortifying wall surrounding the northern and eastern sides of Building 1. Building 2 does not have additional fortification. Indications are that Building 1 was the principal building and that Building 2 was an
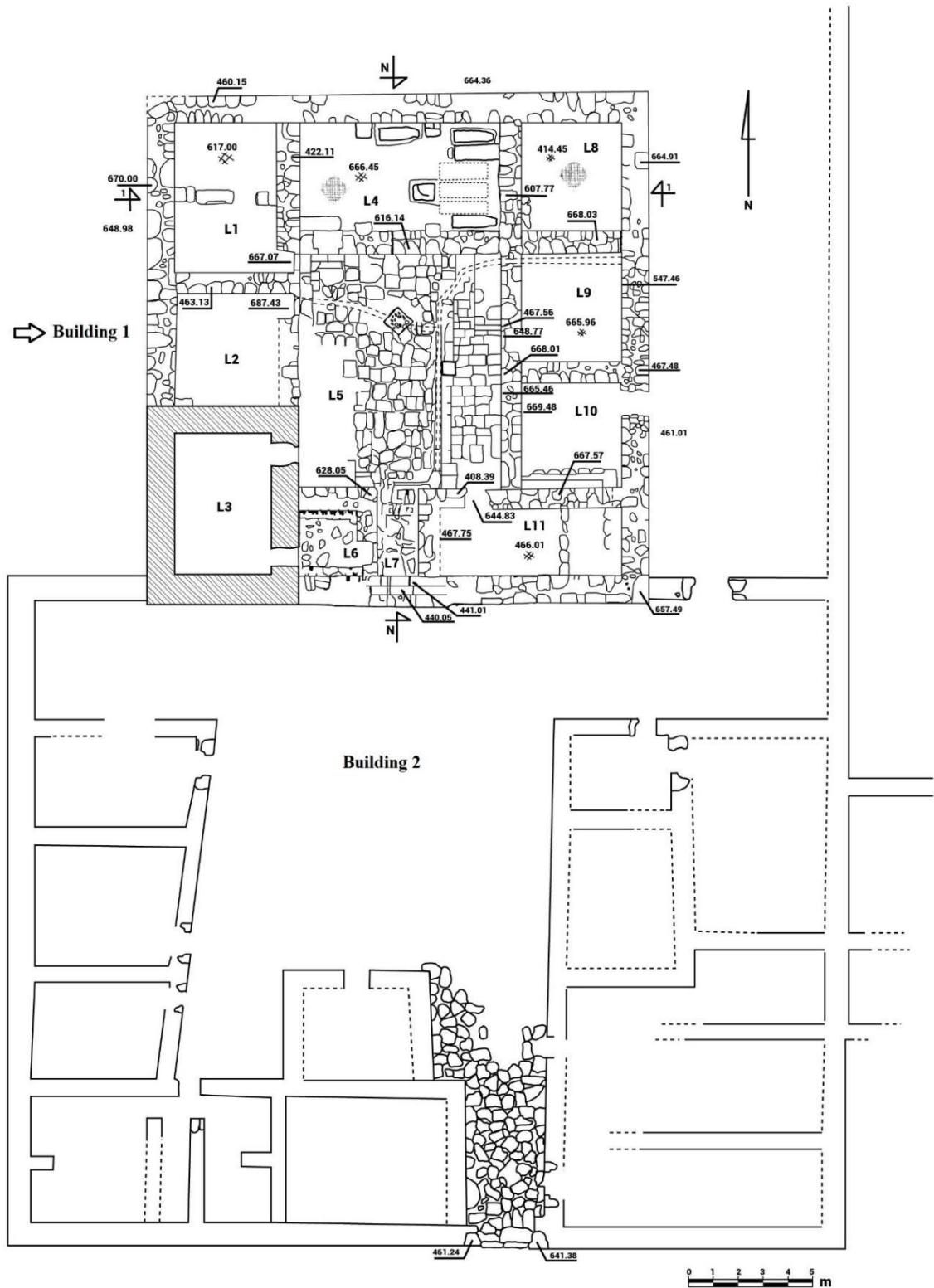
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[27] Conder & Kitchener 1881–1883: vol.2, sheet 15: 395.

[28] «The Geneva Convention», BBC News, (10/ 12/ 2009), retrieved (27/11 /2010).

[29] All the description of the architectural discoveries were obtained from the publication reports of Magen 1990 & 2012.

auxiliary service building, which included living quarters, storage areas and facilities for housing animals. [**FIGURE**S **4 & 5].**

[**FIGURE 4]: Top plan of the architecture of the site of Khirbet al-Kilya.**
MAGEN 2012: FIG.2, 262.

[Figure 5]: General views of Khirbet al-Kilya © https://www.biblewalks.com/kilya, accessed on (16/ 02/ 2024).

Building 1

Building 1 is located in the northern part of the building complex, and consists of several rooms surrounding an inner courtyard. The footprint of the building is an exact square, with each wall measuring 20.7 m. A fortified wall encloses a large courtyard on the northern and eastern sides. The entrance to Building 1 is on the southern side through Building 2. The rooms, without interconnecting doorways, are accessed from the inner flagstone courtyard. The straight walls are built of large, crudely hewn ashlars with a central boss. The exterior walls are built of two layers of stone, with small stones between them, creating an overall thickness of up to 1.3 m. Partially preserved white plaster coats the mainly dry-built, walls (without mortar or Roman concrete) of the interior. The rooms, including the inner courtyard and the burial chamber, are labelled from L1 to L11. They are divided into the Western, Northern and Eastern sections.

Inner Courtyard: L5

The 9.4 x 8.4 m courtyard is paved with hewn flagstones. Slightly north of the center of the courtyard, there is the opening to a large cistern, which is over 10m deep. The bell-shaped cistern is hewn into the courtyard floor and is thickly covered in whitish-pink plaster that is unlike the reddish-coloured plaster of the Byzantine-Arab period. Water flowed from roof gutters into a small settling pool, from where it ran along two channels into the cistern. The channels are covered with irregular stone slabs: one of them runs from the south-west and the other from the west. Two additional channels running eastward drained excess water from the courtyard to prevent flooding. The paving in the eastern part of the courtyard is well-fitted and a row of stones forming a type of stylobate may have supported a colonnaded porch. A 0.9m wide and 3.5 high staircase, built of low-grade stone, is at the north-eastern corner of the courtyard. The staircase leads from the ground level to an upper storey. Six arched pillars that support the second storey were found on the ground level. Four of the pillars, measuring 1.05 x 0.58 m, are close to the walls, and two square pillars, with sides measuring 58 cm, are centrally located. The arches run north-south. A number of dressed archstones were found in the excavated area. It is clear that the hard limestone pillars are a later addition because they are on top of the paving stones. A small passageway is located off the courtyard leading to an entrance in the southern wall, and measures 3.55 x 1 m (L7). The passageway is formed by building room L-6 to the west.

Room: L-6

Room L6 was built to support pillars for the upper story.

Passageway: L7

Passageway L7, runs southward from the courtyard to a 1.1m wide doorway in the south wall, which is 1.2 m high today. The doorway forms an entrance to the building. There would have been a wooden door, and additional security was ensured by a 0.32 m thick circular rolling stone made of soft limestone. The area around the doorway was strengthened with very large stones when the rolling stone was installed. The rolling stone appears to have been added in the second construction phase.

Western Section
Room L1

Measuring 6.2 x 4.2m, Room L1 is in the northwestern corner of the structure. The outer walls have been preserved at a height of 2.5 m. The floor consists of a layer of small stones covered in white plaster. Two square pillars, built against the longitudinal walls, supported arches. In the western wall, there is a small settling pool into which the water from the gutters flowed. Water ran from the settling pool via a covered channel that passed under the threshold into the inner courtyard. The channel belongs to the second construction phase. The well-preserved doorway to the room is located at one end of the room, as in the case of the other rooms. A lintel stone, with an indentation for a wooden lintel, was found in the middle of the room. The doorway has six bolt sockets.

Room L2

Room L2 is a square, with each side measuring 4.2 m. It has not yet been excavated. The entrance is located at one end of the room and there are sockets in the door frame. A hewn channel, plastered over and covered with stone slabs, runs from the room to the cistern in the inner courtyard.

Room L3

The interior arches and pottery found in Room L-3 (5.6 x 3.4 m) indicate that the upper part of the walls was rebuilt in either the Mameluke or Ottoman period, with two building phases plainly seen. The room had two doorways along the eastern wall, one at each extremity, but the southernly one was closed off by Room L-6's construction during the second construction phase. The rebuilding seems to have destroyed earlier structural elements.

Northern Section
Room L4: Burial Chamber

Room L4 is a long rectangular room (8.4 x 4.4 m) and served as a burial chamber with a partially underground crypt. The mosaic floor of large tesserae consists of white with inlaid red and black crosses. One entrance, with a width of 1.2 m, is found halfway along the wall on the courtyard side. The doorway could not be closed and the threshold was unfinished. Another entrance, found on the western wall, was preserved to a height of 1.8m and width of 0.9 m. There is a step up to this entrance, which would have been the original entrance to the room. It was built near a corner and has a bolt socket for closure, as in the case of the doorways to all the other rooms. Four pillars adjoining the northern and southern walls would have supported the upper story.

Five tombs covered with stone slabs were found underneath the mosaic floor. Four were hewn into the rock, and one was partly hewn and constructed above floor level in the centre of the room. There were a number of skeletons found in the graves. There is a large trough-like tomb, containing four skeletons, positioned with their heads facing east, are centered along the northern wall. It measures 2 x 0.7 m and may have been used as a water basin during the first phase of use. The tomb was covered with stone slabs, leaving an air vent in the middle. There are two more tombs on the eastern side of the room. One, resembling a sarcophagus, is hewn from a single stone and measures 1.9 x 0.7 cm. The single stone forming the lid has a recessed hole for ventilation in the centre. The inner side of the stone lid is engraved with a large cross, centrally positioned. The second tomb, lying alongside the first, has the same dimensions. The tomb and lid, which includes a ventilation hole, are made of flagstones that have been plastered over. The fourth tomb, also consisting of plastered flagstones, is located near the doorway to Room L-8, on the eastern side. The lid, composed of flat stones, has a ventilation hole in the centre and the heads of the skeletons are positioned to the east. The fifth tomb is near the centre of the room, and is partly below ground level, with the lower part hewn from the bedrock. The crypt-style tomb is accessed with downward steps. It measures 3.86 x 2.6 x 1.6 m. The entrance lid is a square stone slab, with a central hole for ventilation. The interior is divided by low walls into two troughs,

each measuring 2.15 x 0.6 m. They are covered with a stone slab with a hole for ventilation. The ceiling is barrel-vaulted. Fifteen skeletons were found in the two troughs, as were a quantity of small items, such as ceramic lamps, glass artifacts and some bronze tools. There is no doubt that the room served as a burial chamber for the monastery. All the tombs were covered with mosaics that needed to be removed for reopening, except for the crypt-style tomb that could easily be reopened.

Room L8

The dimensions of Room L8 are 4.4 m x 4 m. It is located in the north-eastern corner of the monastery complex and can only be entered through Room L4, the burial chamber. Room L8 is the only room not directly accessed from the inner courtyard. The mosaic floor in the room is composed of white tesserae, similar to that of the burial chamber. It is probable that there are tombs underneath the floor, but the room was not excavated to preserve the floor. The plaster in the room, consisting of three layers, is well preserved; the second layer is embedded with small stones. It clearly dates to the Byzantine period when the stones were recoated.

Eastern Section
Room L9

Room L9 measures 4.4 x 4 m and is accessed from the inner courtyard through a strongly constructed doorway with three-bolt sockets. The floor, coated with a thick layer of plaster, is set lower than the floor of the inner courtyard. A channel covered with stone slabs runs along the northern wall of the room, which is preserved to a height of 2.2 m, Due to the lower level of the room, the channel would have drained excess water away from the cistern through the room to the outer courtyard. The room is accessed from the inner courtyard by a doorway that would have supported a bolted door. A doorway was later added on the eastern wall.

Room L10

Room L10, which has the same dimensions as Room L9, is accessed through a doorway near the northern wall. The doorway would have been able to support a bolted door. An eastern doorway was added later. Near the south wall, there is a plastered, hewn channel that drained excess water from the inner courtyard to beyond the monastery boundary. The channel seems to have been abandoned during the second construction phase.

Room L11

Room L11 is a long rectangular room measuring 7.5 x 2.6 m. A doorway with bolt sockets, preserved to a height of 1.7 m, opens onto the inner courtyard. The floor is coated with a thick layer of white plaster and there is a north-south partition across the middle of the room. When the rolling stone was installed, alterations were made to the southern wall of the room near the southern entrance to the building.

Building 2

As only a small part of the structure has been unearthed, the exact layout and usage of Building 2 is yet to be determined. The northern wall of the 33.6 x 26.7 m structure adjoins the south wall of Building 1. The eastern wall of Building 2 extends northward beyond the building, forming a fortifying wall for part of Building 1, together with the large courtyard on the eastern and northern sides. The building also has an inner courtyard paved with large, irregular flagstones. A 2.2 m wide double gateway to the courtyard on the southern wall provides access to the building. There are structural remains outside the gateway that may have been a gatekeeper's hut. On the inner side of this entranceway, there are two arch-bearing pillars. These suggest part of the passageway (10 x 4.6 m), leading from the entranceway to the inner courtyard, was roofed.

The eastern section of the building consists of five rectangular rooms of various sizes and orientations measuring 10 x 2.7 or 10 x 3.7 m. They are accessed on the western side through the inner courtyard. They have not been excavated and their purpose is not clear, but their long, narrow shape indicates they may have been used as stables or storerooms. However, it is clear that they were part of the later construction phases. There may have been an entryway to the monastery on the eastern wall of Building 1 in the north-eastern corner where there is a flag-stoned passageway to the central courtyard.

Along the southern wall of the building, west of the main entrance, three identical square rooms are found, all with the walls measuring 4.4 m. Inward from the western wall, there is a row of rectangular rooms, opening onto the inner courtyard. Some of these are from the second construction phase and others are from the third. Additional rooms from the latest construction phase adjoin the eastern and western sides of the building.

Small Finds: Pottery, Coins & Artifacts

The site yielded only a modest number of small archaeological finds [FIGURES 6 & 7]. Large-scale destruction and looting of valuable artifacts had taken place during various periods after the site was built. The excavated pottery assemblage belongs to four periods, as follows: Late Roman, Byzantine, Early Islamic and Late Islamic.

Among the finds are vessels decorated with the roulette technique, which belong to the Late Roman period. However, the majority of the pottery found dates to the Byzantine period and were found in the crypt of the burial chamber [FIGURE 5]. It comprises of jars, bowls, cooking pots, jugs and juglets, as well as amphorae that have parallels to those found at Tell Sufan and Bir al-Hamam in Nablus. Additionally, eight lamps, some of which are decorated with crosses, and one lamp with six mouths, and decorated with crosses and two palm branches, were found. The lamps date to the 6th and 7th centuries AD. The early Islamic pottery is Omayyad like those from Khirbet el-Mefjar. The pottery is white ware, featuring lamps, and adorned with intricate plant and animal motifs. Late Islamic pottery is from the Mameluke and Ottoman periods. The pottery finds clearly demonstrate that the site was occupied before the Byzantine

period[30]. Non-pottery finds included an entire glass vessel found in the crypt, coins and a few metal artifacts such as keys, a needle, a bronze arrowhead, and an iron grinding tool. The coins were the most significant finds due to being dated to the different construction phases identified. One coin was dated 31 AD, and is from the governorship of Pontius Pilate. There was also an imperial coin from Ascalon, dating to either the late 2nd or early 3rd century AD, a late Roman period coin, three coins that each dated to the reigns of Arcadius (395-408 AD), Honorius (395-423 AD) and Theodosius II (408-450 AD). The remaining coins have not been identified but may date to the 5th century AD. Few loose structural remains were found, but those that were indicate that a church was once at the site. These architectural finds include two Byzantine-style capitals, a column base, arch stones and three marble chancel-pillars. Most of the construction elements from the upper storey seem to have been looted.
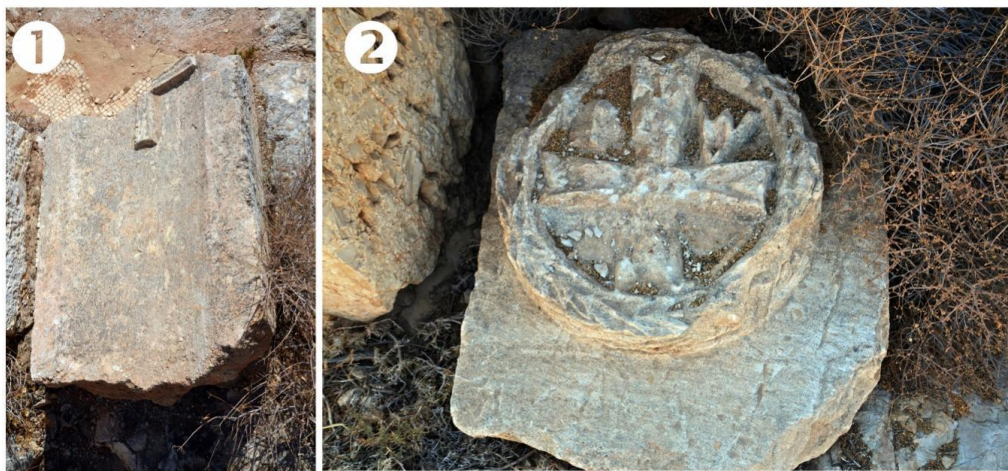
[FIGURE 6]: 1. Part of broken sarcophagus; 2. Remains of an architectural cross. MAGEN 1990. FIG.3, 331.
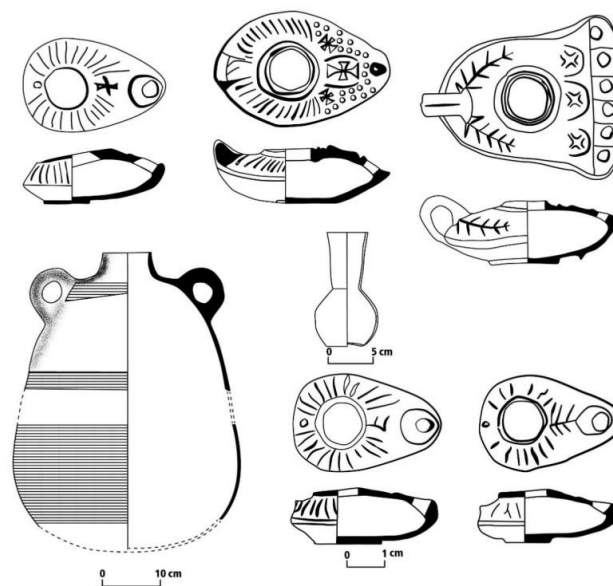
[FIGURE 7]: Pottery and lamps from Khirbet al-Kilya. MAGEN 1990: FIG.4, 332.

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[30] ABU ALSAUD 2018: 187.

VII. Discussion

The most recent stage of occupation at the site was during the Mameluke-Ottoman period when Room L3 was rebuilt. Bearing in mind the lowest course of the new structure, indications are that the former structure was largely destroyed by then. one does not know how the site functioned during this period, but it may have been used by herders. The circular enclosures on the site and the rich Omayyad pottery finds indicate that a livestock (sheep and goats) was kept and that a farm was probably built on the site during this period. The large cisterns and the location of the site, near the main route from the Jordan Valley westward, would have attracted settlers.

When excavations began, the building was thought to have been erected as a monastery. The discovery of the burial chamber with Christian crosses and chancel-pillars, which would have belonged to a church, was evidence that a monastery had stood on the site during the Byzantine period. But the question also arose as to whether the monastery had been converted from a former Roman structure. Other ceramic and numismatic finds, dating prior to the Byzantine period, indicate that a Roman settlement occupied the site during the 3rd and 4th centuries. It is not clear whether the coin from the time of Pontius Pilatus was brought to the site or whether there was a structure on the site at that time. However, it is possible that the site was in use during the Middle Roman Period (70-135 AD). Although the small finds indicate the presence of a Roman structure, the most significant evidence is found in the architectural design and techniques used for the structural remains. The different construction phases and the layout of the complex are consistent with what is typical of a Roman frontier fort.

The floor plan of the monastery is unlike that of other Byzantine monasteries in the Jerusalem Desert and elsewhere, showing no similarity to any other known monastery. Furthermore, the characteristic elements of a Byzantine monastery are not found in either Building 1 or Building 2. The overall layout, typical of the Roman frontier fort, consists of a fortified structure and tower, as in the case of Building 1, and a service building, as in the case of Building 2. The differences are shown in the architectural design that is comparable to other Byzantine monasteries. These are shown in the dimensions and laying pattern of the dressed ashlar stones, in the accuracy of the measurements of the dimensions of the rooms, in the straight alignment of the walls, and in the use of exact right angles. Other aspects that indicate a former Roman fort are the thickness of the building 1 walls, the location of the doorways to the rectangular rooms at the extremities, the large number of bolt sockets in the door frames, the type of white plaster used to line the cistern, which differs from that used during the Byzantine period, and the adherence to set building designs and techniques. There are indications that the structure was erected by an agent of the state who was knowledgeable of standardized building practices; this person used accurately laid out plans.

In converting the remains of the fort to a Byzantine monastery, changes were needed to provide for religious needs, such as a church and a burial chamber. However, the monks do not seem to have modified the original layout of the earlier structure. Room L4 was converted into the burial chamber by moving the entryway and installing

a mosaic floor. An upper level was created for the church, since the floor plan of the old fort did not fit the needs for a church. Building the upper level involved building a roof over the previously open inner courtyard, building stone arch supports in the ground-level rooms, and building a staircase for access to the upper story. Gutters were built on the church roof and channels were created in the courtyard to drain the rainwater from the gutters into the cistern. Nevertheless, the floor plan of the ground floor building does not indicate the exact location of the church on the upper level. It may have been built above the northern section adjoining the inner courtyard. The only remains of the church were the chancel pillars, two capitals, and a column base, as mentioned. A round stone, engraved with a cross, which was found in the burial chamber, may have belonged to the church. Building the church on an upper story provided a view over the wadi and surrounding landscape.

The fort at Khirbet al-Kilya is not unique in being converted into a monastery during the Byzantine period. The foremost examples of others are the monasteries built on the remains of early Roman period Herodian forts, such as at Masada, Hyrcania, Herodium, Dok, Cypros and Nuseib «Uweishira». Monastic settlements in secluded, desert locations, and on the fringes of existing settlements, meant that the ruins of former forts were converted into monasteries. The remains of forts and buildings were used by the Roman army along the main roads. The limes were converted into monasteries. Finding monastic settlements among the fort ruins located on the limes is also common in Syria. Rulers seem to have been favorable to monks settling along borders and vulnerable inland transportation routes, which are isolated areas.

Large-scale research is not needed to understand the importance of the structure at Khirbet al-Kilya during the Roman period. It should be mentioned that a similar structure, El-Qasr-the fort, was found in the Wahida Valle. It is smaller (18 x 14.3 m) and is built with large ashlars, similar to those found at Khirbet al-Kilya. It has a fortified tower with thick walls and an adjacent courtyard. The fort overlooks the Roman route from Jericho to Taibya, and the Khirbet al-Kilya site is clearly seen from it. These two structures probably form part of a chain of Roman forts, monitoring the route from the Jordan Valley westward towards Jerusalem. It is also possible that one of these routes passed along the wadi between the two sites.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the chronological sequence of the site dates from the early and middle Roman period. A coin from the time of Pontius Pilatus found at the site, either brought there or in use there, leads to the conjecture that the site may have been used in the Middle Roman period (70-135 AD). Evidence of a Roman structure, particularly a fort, is found in the structural elements and techniques, the layout of the complex and the different construction phases. A number of small finds corroborate the Roman presence. There are indications that construction of the Khirbet al-Kilya fort began in the late 4th or early 5th century, and that it ceased to be used in the late 5th century.and The fort was converted into a monastery in the 6th century AD.

The pottery finds mainly date to the Byzantine period when the monastery occupied the site. Descriptions of the buildings are based on the work of Y Magen who

excavated at the site in the 1980s. The Byzantine monastery was later abandoned but seems to have been somewhat occupied during the early Islamic period (638-1099 AD). The construction phase demonstrated by the building of Room L3 shows that the latest occupation of the site seems to have been during the Mameluke-Ottoman period and that the earlier structure had mainly been destroyed. At that time, herders may have used the site, and a farm for livestock and agriculture may have been built there.

Now, in the modern period, Palestinians are denied access to the Khirbet al-Kilya area, although all other communities have access. Consequently, Palestinian archaeologists are prevented from carrying out research or excavations at the site. Rimonim, an Israeli settlement, was established in 1977 after the Israeli military takeover of the site in 1967. Israel's construction of this settlement, which occurred in 1970, is believed by the international community to be illegal under international law.

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