

THE MONASTERY OF AGHIOS LOT AT DEIR 'AIN 'ABATA IN JORDAN

During an archaeological survey carried out at the southeast end of the Dead Sea in 1986, the ruins of an ancient site were found near a spring named 'Ain 'Abata in the Ghor es-Safi¹. Its situation attracted immediate attention. After further investigations, it became evident that it was the Sanctuary of Agios (Greek: saint) Lot near the biblical city of Zoara/Ghor es-Safi (**fig. 1**) since it shared the same geographic location as the church depicted on the 6th century AD mosaic floor map at Madaba in Jordan (**fig. 2**)². Biblical scholars and archaeologists interested in identifying the more than 150 places portrayed on the Madaba map had been searching for this site for decades³.

Within a year of the discovery and identification of Deir 'Ain 'Abata (Arabic: the monastery of the abbot's spring), an international team of archaeologists was assembled to excavate and study the site. Support came from the British Museum (London) and from the Jordanian and Greek governments, as well as from private sources. After more than ten years of excavations and research, the final report is about to be published⁴.

The site is located on a steep mountain slope 3 km southeast of the Dead Sea shore (**fig. 3**). The initial work was to make a series of topographic maps and contour plans and to conduct surface collections⁵. From the outset, it was obvious that this seemingly small site was unusual; firstly, because of its precarious situation, which could not be rationalised as defensive and, secondly, because of the wealth of surface finds eroding out of the site. Architectural stones, metal and glasswork, mosaic cubes and pottery sherds were strewn in abundance amongst the ruins.

The first years of work at Deir 'Ain 'Abata were treated as rescue excavations and so they concentrated on retrieving as much information as possible from the site, which was threatened by erosion and the encroaching modern village of Safi with its growing population, which was expanding its agricultural activities and constantly searching for ancient treasure.

The first area chosen for excavation was within the highest preserved wall of the site, which was clearly visible from the road below the mountain. It was revealed as being part of a 7 m deep, arched reservoir covered by palm trunks (some still preserved in situ) and fed by a complex water catchment system complete with settling tanks and internal conduits. A structure such as this to secure a water supply is imperative for settlement in the arid climate of the southern Levant but at Deir 'Ain 'Abata it was comparatively very large (**fig. 4**).

A trench was dug in the northwest part of the site rich in ashy midden deposits. It was meticulously excavated, employing both on-site dry-sieving and an off-site flotation machine used to extract carbonised plant material. These processes enabled the team to retrieve a quantifiable amount of pottery, glass and metal objects, as well as animal and botanical remains, which were analysed in order to identify the species that existed there and how they were exploited in ancient times.

Environmental studies have shown that horses, donkeys, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, roe and fallow deer, foxes, hares, domestic fowl, partridges, quails, stone curlews, Cursorious cursors, rock/stock and palm

¹ MacDonald, Survey.

² Avi-Yonah, Madaba Mosaic Map 42-43 pl. 4.

³ Saller / Bagatti, Nebo 192-199. – Donner, Sanctuary 87-92.

⁴ Politis et al, Sanctuary.

⁵ Politis, Excavations 1988. – Politis, Excavations 1990.

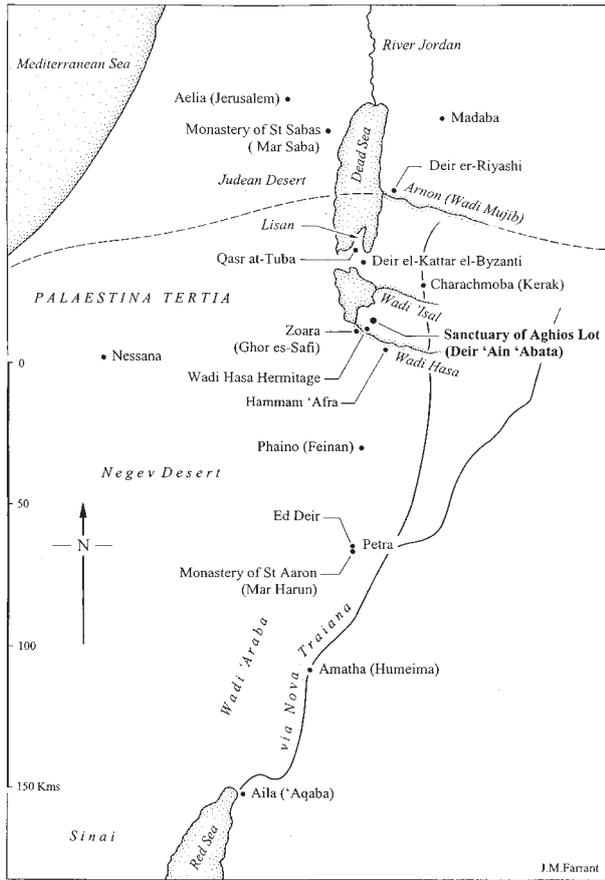


Fig. 1 Location map of the Monastery of Aghios Lot in relation to other early Byzantine sites in *Palaestina Tertia*.

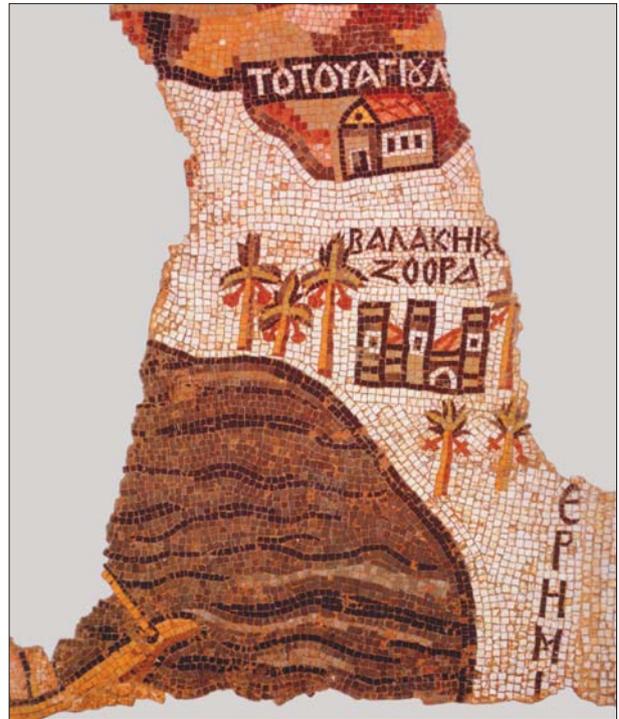


Fig. 2 Depiction of Monastery of Aghios Lot on 6th century AD mosaic floor map at Madaba.



Fig. 3 View of Monastery of Aghios Lot from Dead Sea plain at Ghor es-Safi.

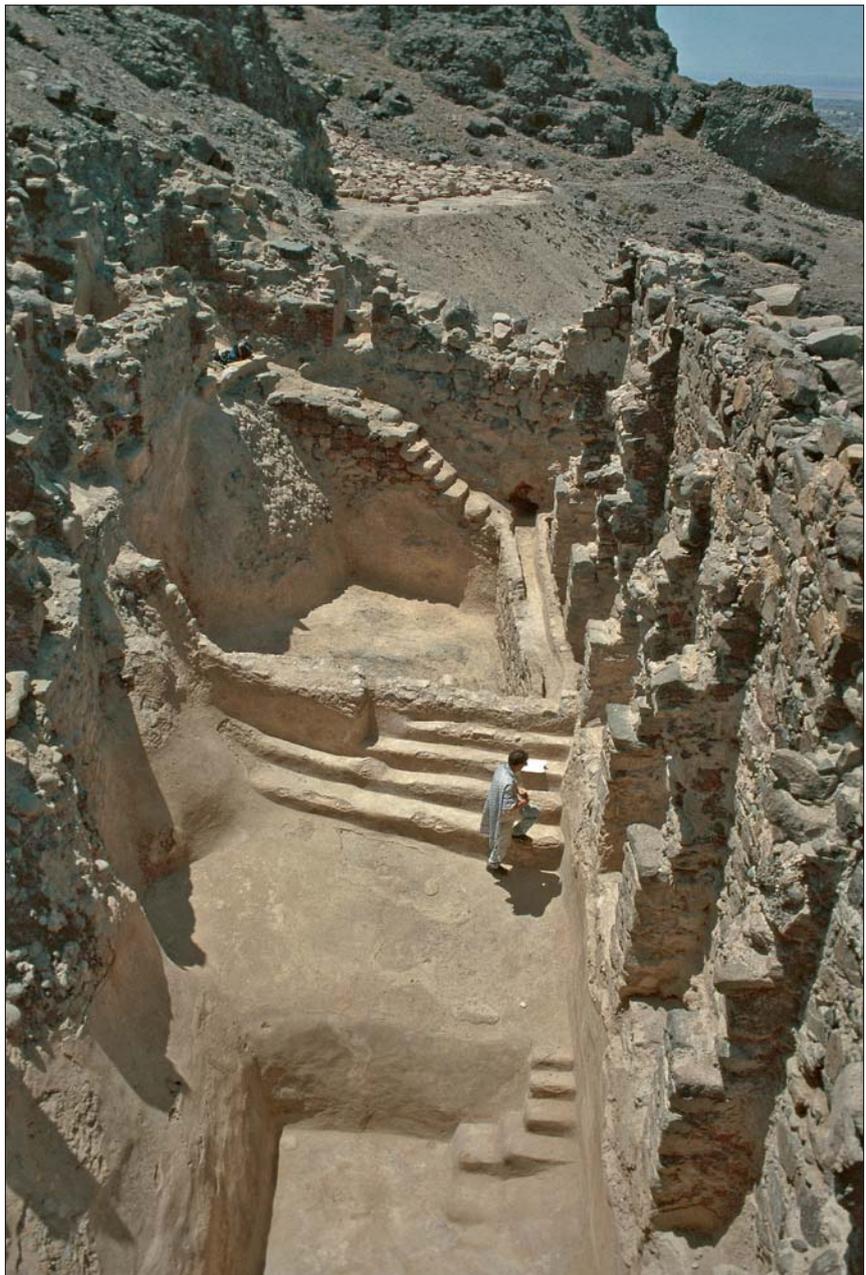


Fig. 4 Reservoir at Monastery of Aghios Lot.

doves, lark vultures, parrot fish, groupers and some smaller freshwater fish, probably from the local spring, existed and were probably consumed on the site⁶. The botanical finds identified include olives, dates, bitter vetch, grapes, apricots, lentils, barley, bread wheat and cucumbers and/or melons. These results revealed that the community living at Deir 'Ain 'Abata had a relatively rich diet of domestic and wild species of plants, animals and fish, some of which were imported, at considerable expense, from as far away as the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

The ceramic finds from Deir 'Ain 'Abata included moulded oil lamps, cooking pots with lids, drinking cups, inscribed store jars, bowls, pitchers, pilgrim flasks, lanterns and fine plates. Of particular importance were

⁶ Politis, Excavations 1991, 284.



Fig. 5 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, glazed pottery sherds dating to the 5th- 6th centuries.

several hundred green and brown glazed sherds that, after chemical and technological analyses, proved to be an incidental soda wood-ash glaze on a stone-type ware⁷. This represents a new type of pottery in the early Byzantine period (approx. 5th-7th centuries AD) of the Levant and sheds light on the technique of glazed pottery of all periods (fig. 5).

Other finds typical of the early Byzantine period included marble bowls, glass vessels and hanging oil lamps, copper and iron implements, painted plaster and some 3000 copper alloy numeii coins, including two coin hoards (figs 6-7).

A number of fine architectural pieces were also retrieved, including a block carrying an inscription in Greek invoking Saint Lot to bless Sozomenou, Ulpious and a third indistinguishable name (fig. 8). The inscription

⁷ Freestone / Politis / Stapleton, Glazed Pottery.

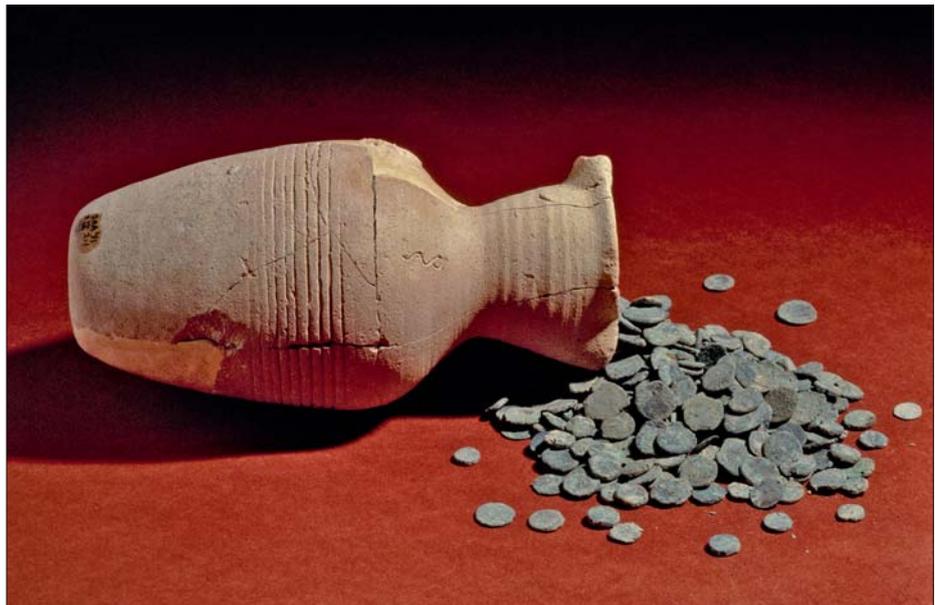


Fig. 6 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, coin hoard found in a pottery vessel.



Fig. 7 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, coin hoard found in a cloth sac.

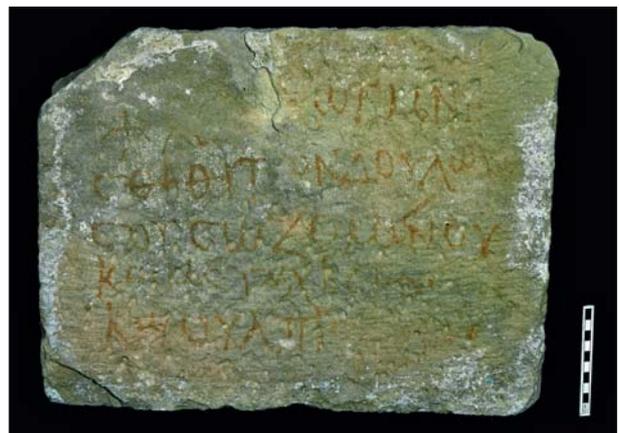


Fig. 8 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, greek inscription invoking Aghios Lot by three named monks or pilgrims.



Fig. 9 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, greek inscription invoking Aghios Lot by the builders of the church.



Fig. 10 View of Basilical church of Aghios Lot from NW.

was written by three monks who were probably living at the site. This was the first decisive piece of evidence indicating Lot's association with Deir 'Ain 'Abata. Another stone built into the south apse of the church was also inscribed in Greek and called upon Saint Lot to bless the builder of the church (fig. 9). A third Greek inscription still in situ on the south side of the central apse also invokes St. Lot.

In 1991, investigations in the area immediately north of the reservoir revealed a triple-apsed basilica church. The building was particularly well preserved against the eastern mountainside where it still stands to a height above the cornice where the vaulted roof began (fig. 10). Two fallen columns preserved in situ provided vital information on the precise height of the roof. The complete excavation and planning of five distinguishable layers of tumbled architectural stones enabled an accurate reconstruction of the church to be made (fig. 11). The nature of the collapse and the lack of many in situ objects on the church floors led to the conclusion that it was peacefully abandoned and did not suffer destruction either by earthquakes or invaders.

The basilica church was paved with four mosaics (fig. 12), three of which had Greek inscriptions. The first, in the north aisle leading to the cave, was decorated with a geometric design of stepped squares, diamonds and candles. At its eastern end in front of the cave entrance is an inscription four lines long enclosed within a tabula insata naming the Bishop Iakovos, the Abbot Sozomenos and giving a construction date of April 605/607 AD. Technically, this pavement was of the highest quality found at the site.

Two further mosaic floors were uncovered which were probably of the same early 7th century AD date. One is just inside the cave entrance and consisted of multi-coloured mosaic cubes randomly arranged to

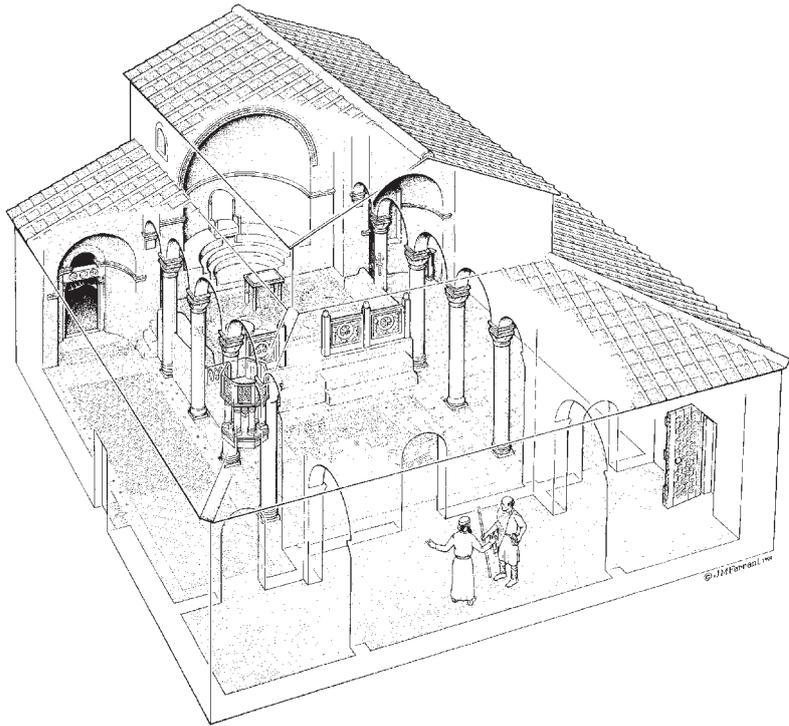
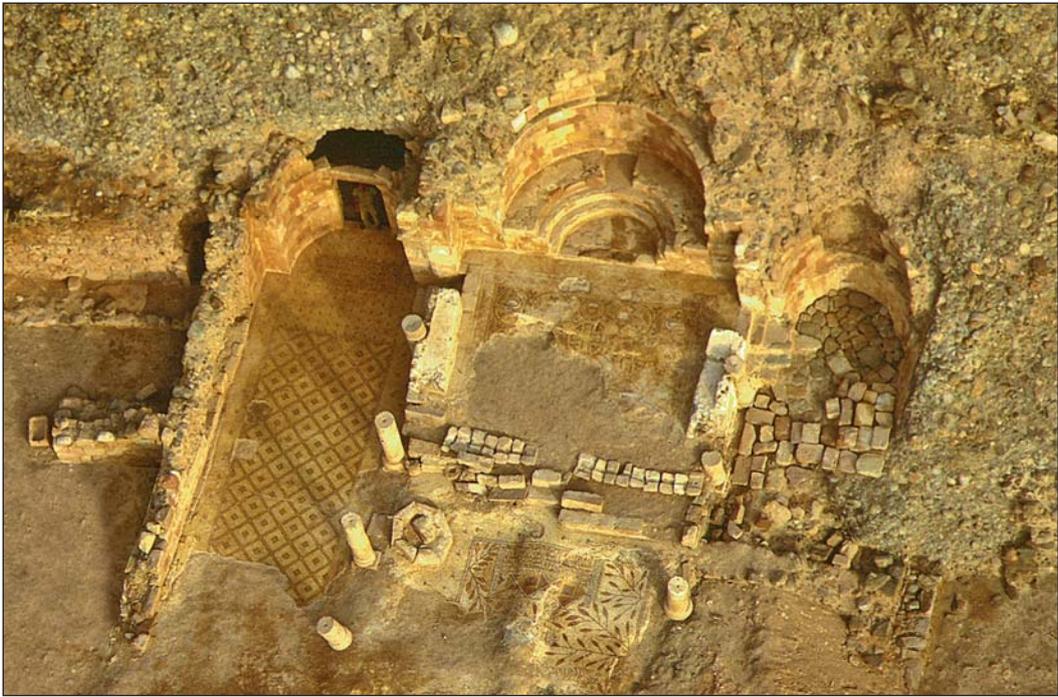


Fig. 11 Reconstruction of the Basilical church of Aghios Lot.

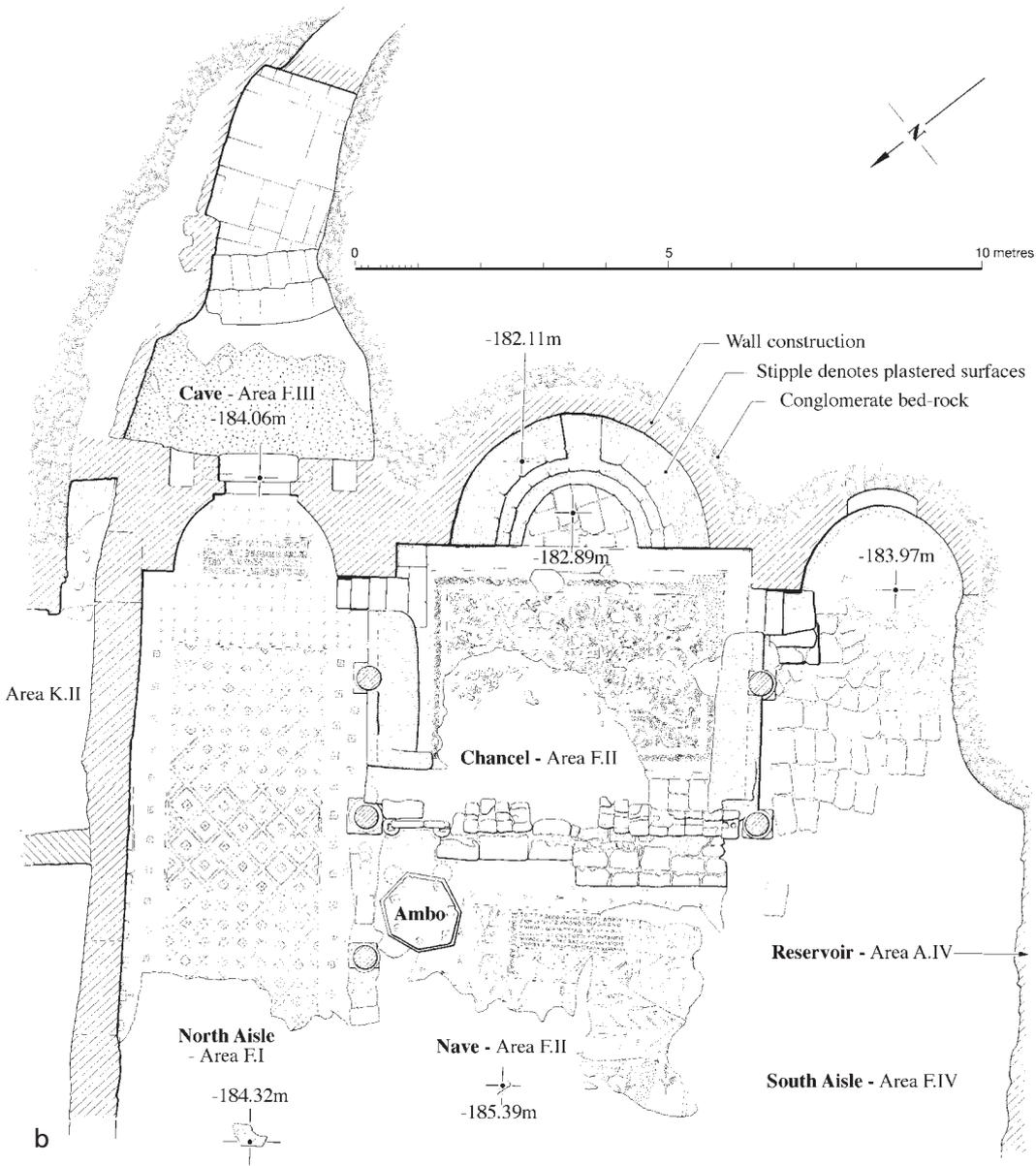
resemble the natural conglomerate rock of the cave. The second lies in the chancel of the church and is decorated with typical early Christian/Byzantine motifs such as birds, a lamb and a peacock, all surrounded by vines. In the centre, at the spot where the altar once stood, is a stylised depiction of a chalice and below it an encircled cross inscribed with the Greek words »TELOS KALON (literally: Good End)«. This may be interpreted as a wish for our last days on earth to be good ones.

The fourth mosaic pavement located in the nave of the church is perhaps the most interesting. It has a Greek inscription of six lines, naming the County Bishop and Presbyter as Christoforos, the Presbyter and Steward as Zenon, the Governor as Ioannis son of Rabibos and describes the site as a Holy Place and the church as a Basilica. The mosaic construction is dated to the Macedonian month of Xanthikos (roughly May) 691 AD. The name of Georgios the Sacristan was squeezed in, perhaps in a last-minute effort to satisfy this minor church official who presumably was not originally intended to be included. The entire inscription is enclosed in a rectangle, which has an additional diagonal inscription naming Iannis son of Sabinaou who was presumably the mosaicist. Considering the fact that this name is not Greek and that it was incorrectly spelt, we may assume that the mosaicist spoke a local Semitic language, such as Aramaic.

This inscription is of considerable importance for a number of reasons. By describing the church as a basilica, it means that it was large enough to accommodate pilgrims, whereas a small monastic community would normally only require a chapel in which to congregate. The inscription specifically calls the site »AGIOS TOPOS (holy place)« which infers an association with a Biblical episode. There is also clear evidence for the existence of local Christian communities from the Semitic names of Rabibos and Sabinaou on the mosaic. Finally, the 691 AD date of the church's renovation is significant because it is well into the period of the Umayyad Dynasty's Islamic rule in the Levant (636-750 AD). Their policy of religious tolerance and collaboration is therefore confirmed at Deir 'Ain 'Abata as it has been from over a dozen recently excavated



a



b

Fig. 12 a Aerial view of the Basilical church of Aghios Lot showing mosaic pavements. – b Plan of the Basilical church of Aghios Lot.

monasteries and churches. These attest to vibrant Christian communities during the first decades of Umayyad reign, such as those at Mefa'a/Um er-Rasas and Mt Nebo/Siyagah (prov. Madaba)⁸.

The nave's mosaic floor has one of the most free-flowing floral designs known in the Levant and surrounds an inscription. Its long sprawling branches tipped with large orange-coloured leaves are reminiscent of the painted decorations on Nabataean fine ware pottery. Indeed, this motif may mark a continuity of Nabataean art styles emanating from Petra that lasted well into the early 'Islamic' period. It would not be surprising if this mosaic was influenced in this way since the site is relatively close to Petra. This theory would concur with the horned capital, 'dogtooth' designs on other stones, moulded oil lamps and characteristic thin-bodied fine wares distinctive of Nabataean material culture that were found at Deir 'Ain 'Abata.

Unfortunately, the nave mosaic has suffered serious damage as approximately a quarter of its length has eroded down the mountain after the western front of the church collapsed. The remaining floor had dangerously subsided and, in 1994, a major conservation task was undertaken to preserve it⁹. The first step was to remove it completely. When this had been completed successfully, a small section of an earlier mosaic floor was found below, which belonged to the earlier 605/607 AD phase of the church. Of equal interest were the layers of lime mortar and cobbles on which the mosaic was founded. Surprisingly, several footprints of the ancient mosaicist could clearly be seen in the lime mortar (**fig. 13**).

At the northeastern end of the nave, we found the remnants of the upper and lower levels of a heptagonal/seven-sided ambo, or pulpit. It was adorned with carved panels and seven collonettes made of gypsum, some decorated with crosses and vines (**fig. 14**). During the removal of the mosaic floor, it was necessary to lift the ambo. Stairway post stubs and traces of an earlier ambo associated with the 605/607 AD mosaic pavement were found beneath it. There was no clear indication why the mosaic floor



Fig. 13 Footprint in lime mortar bedding of mosaic in nave of Basilical church of Aghios Lot.

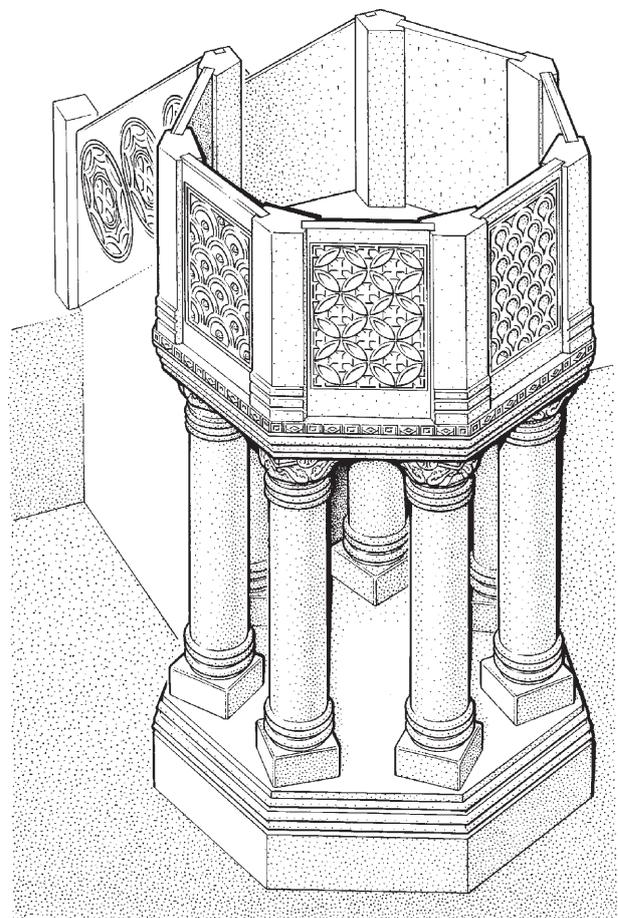


Fig. 14 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, reconstruction of ambon/pulpit.

⁸ Najjar / Sa'id, Umayyad Church 547-560. – Piccirillo, Church St. Stephan 46.

⁹ Chlouveraki / Politis, Monastery.

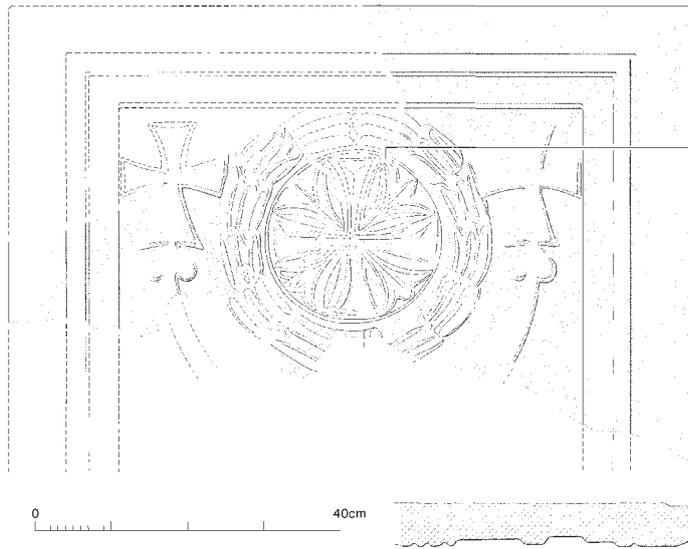


Fig. 15 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, chancel screen panel.

and ambo were remade in 691 AD. However, in other parts of the basilica, there were other alterations and repairs which could also be related to this later period renovations. The northern doorway leading into the hostel was blocked, the mosaic pavement in the chancel showed signs of repair and the walls and columns were replastered.

The chancel screen separating the nave from the chancel area was made of imported white marble. Although it was broken into many pieces, it has been restored sufficiently to distinguish its decoration, which once again consists of crosses and vines (**fig. 15**).

The south aisle of the basilica was paved with sandstone slabs rather than mosaic pavement. At the eastern end was a small niche flanked by two limestone collonettes. This was the only area in the church to have been severely disrupted in antiquity. Many of the floor slabs were overturned in what may be interpreted as a search for a hidden treasure. It is very likely, therefore, that the south aisle was the church diaconicon or vestry where valuables were known to be stored. Unfortunately, none were found.

Although the narthex on the west end of the basilica (about one quarter of the building) had completely collapsed down the slope, enough of the foundations survived to distinguish the western extent of the church. The main entrance of the basilica was probably located on the southwestern side, adjacent to the reservoir. During the course of the removal of the collapsed lintel and door jamb, more than a dozen carved wooden plank fragments of the door were discovered (**figs 16-17**). This find was not only rare, but it was also interesting because the rosette decorations mirror those on the architectural stones and ceramic vessels of the site.

In the same area, other well-preserved organic finds were made. They included leather (**fig. 18**), ropes (some still knotted) (**fig. 19**), basketry and textile fragments of cotton, wool and goat hair (among which were the oldest-known evidence of ikat) (**fig. 20a-b**). Perhaps the most significant was a piece of parchment inscribed in 5/6th century AD early Christian Palestinian Aramaic, attesting to the presence of a local Semitic population (**fig. 21**).

Further south, more than 900 large sections of mosaic were also recovered, which once paved the entrance room of the church (**fig. 22**). They were handsomely decorated with animal and floral scenes. A large urn had a Greek inscription naming Kosmas, the mosaicist (**fig. 23**), as well as other church officials. This discovery was even more important because the mosaic was dated to 572/573 AD, the year the church was »renewed«.



Fig. 16 Carved wooden panel from main door of Basilical church of Aghios Lot.

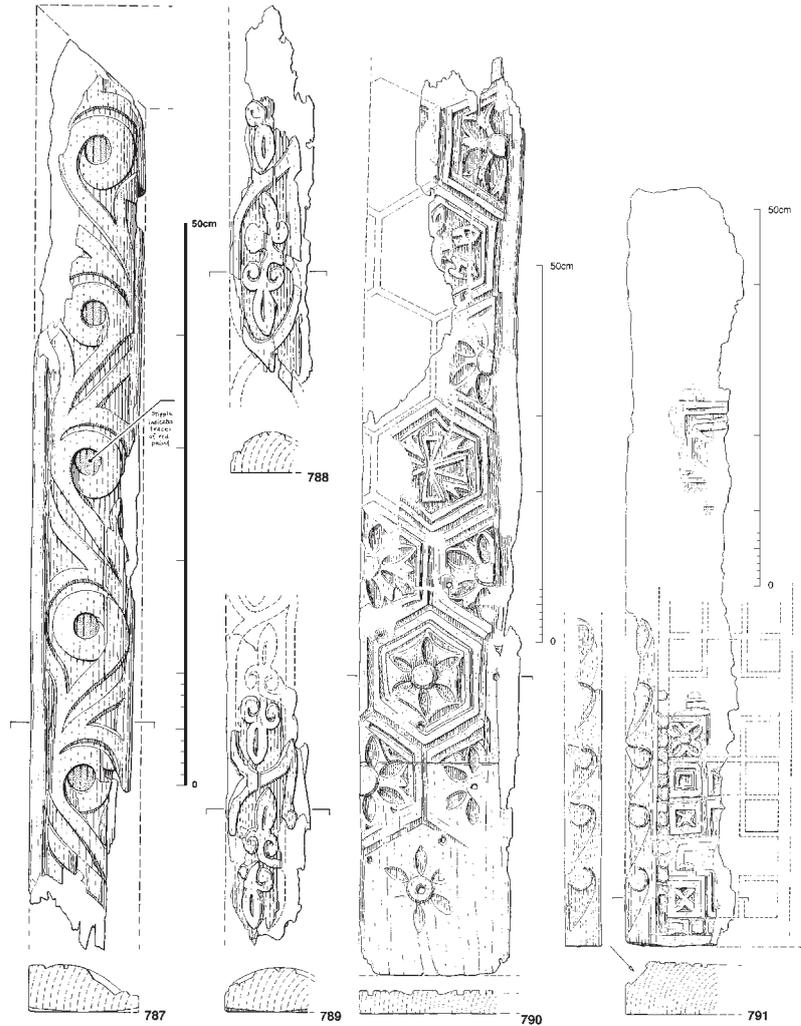


Fig. 17 Drawings of carved wooden panel from main door of Basilical church of Aghios Lot.

It is the cave, however, discovered in the north aisle of the basilica, which was intended to be the focus of the entire site. According to Genesis 19 in the Old Testament of the Bible, the early Christians believed that Lot and his two daughters lived here after their flight from the sinful city of Sodom and their brief stop at Zoar. Isolated in the mountains without contact with other people, the daughters began to fear they would never have an opportunity to find a husband and continue their lineage so they plotted to get their father drunk with wine and seduce him in order to procreate. The result of this incestuous conspiracy was two sons: Moab from the eldest daughter and Ben-ammi from the younger one. Their descendants formed the biblical tribes of Jordan, the Moabites to the south and the Ammonites to the north.

Although this story can be interpreted as highly immoral, it should be noted that there are other stories in the Bible that describe seemingly unethical conduct, but there is usually some obscure reasoning behind them. In the case of the righteous Lot, God had not only saved him from the destruction of Sodom but also did not blame him for the sin he had committed with his daughters since they had made him drunk beforehand. The daughters also seemed to have been excused because of the need to regenerate after the annihilation of their people. Another interpretation is that this story, as with all others in the Old Testa-



Fig. 18 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, leather bag.



Fig. 19 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, rope with knot.



a



b

Fig. 20 Deir 'Ain 'Abata. – a-b Ikat and goat hair fabric.



Fig. 21 Bible parchment fragment inscribed in Aramaic, Deir 'Ain 'Abata.



Fig. 22 Aerial view of entrance hall in foreground and monastic complex of Aghios Lot.

ment, was written by the Israelites who were perpetually at war with the Moabites and Ammonites and so they wrote it so as to discredit their traditional enemies to the east after they had defeated them. This may be the most plausible explanation¹⁰.

When the entrance to the cave was revealed, it was preserved to its original height but had no signs of door fittings (**fig. 24**). The sandstone pilaster capitals on either side are carved with eight-cornered/Maltese-type crosses with traces of red paint. The lintel had a similarly engraved cross in the centre and was flanked by two rosettes, also with traces of red paint. On the south side of the entrance, the plastered wall had a number of scratched designs, crosses and graffiti. One such in Greek named a local Christian woman as »Nestasia Zenobius«. Another in Kufic Arabic is an Islamic invocation (**fig. 25**).

Many ceramic oil lamps ranging from the 4th century to the mid-8th to early 9th centuries AD were found inside the cave. These later Umayyad/Abbasid types, which we also found on the church floors, date the last period of occupation at the site (**fig. 26**).

Further excavation of the cave revealed a series of steps leading into a very small room measuring 2 × 2.5 m and paved with fine white marble slabs (**fig. 27**). There was no evidence of an altar or any other furniture. It was a simple room in a natural cave, which the early Byzantine Christians believed was the place where Lot and his daughters took refuge. However, why did the Byzantines decide to venerate this specific cave when there are others in the vicinity? Perhaps there was an ancient tradition identifying this one as Lot's place of refuge.

¹⁰ Politis, Story of Lot.

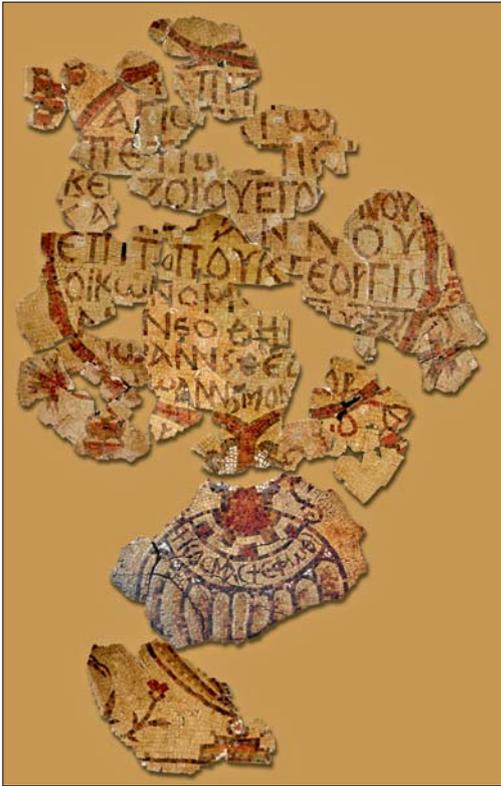


Fig. 23 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, central part of mosaic from entrance hall naming church officials and mosaicist.

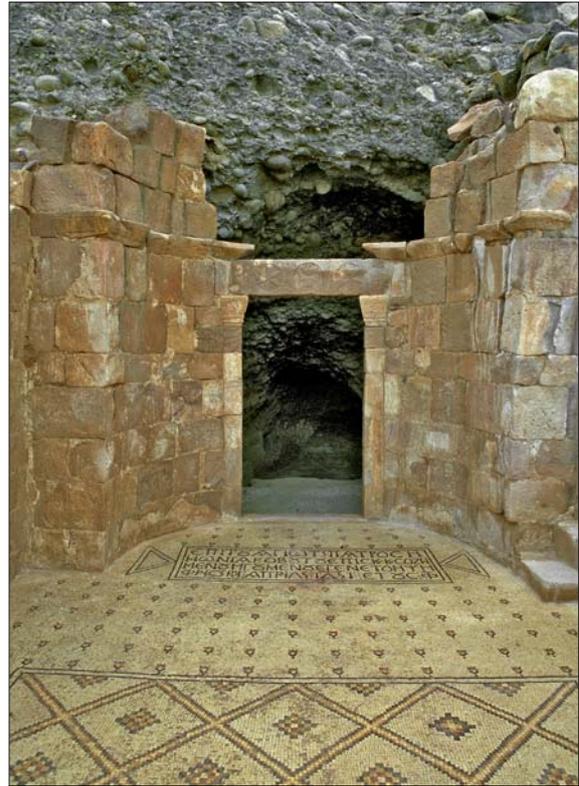


Fig. 24 North aisle of Basilical church of Aghios Lot leading to 'Lot's Cave'.

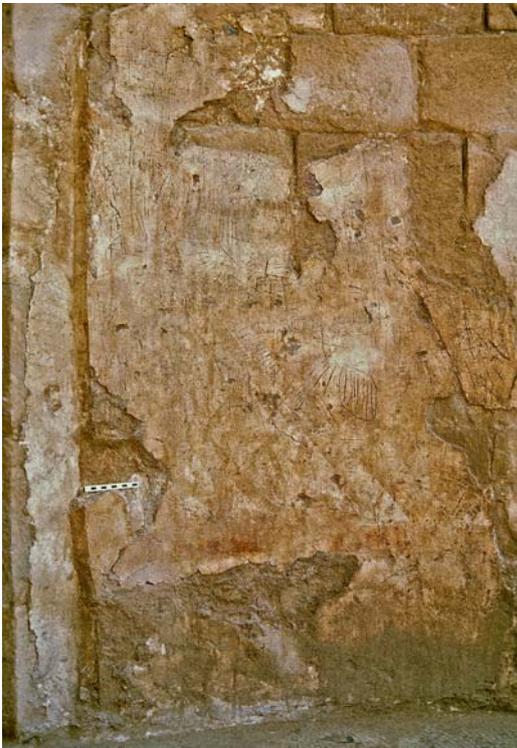


Fig. 25 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, wall plaster at entrance of »Lot's Cave« with Greek and Arabic graffiti.

Destructive earthquakes are a common phenomenon in the Jordan Rift Valley. Salt formations, which could have inspired the tale of Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt, occur naturally in the Dead Sea region. These ingredients, in combination with tribal disputes, may have inspired the writing of this Old Testament episode.

However, the concept of traditional locations for such biblical events should not be underrated. Oral story telling was a common practice for a long time before people became literate. As historical events were passed down through the generations by word-of-mouth, they may have been misquoted or altered to suit the politics of the day. Some facts, however, may have survived.

Excavating below the Byzantine-Abbasid floor level in the cave, ceramic and glass oil lamps were found dating from the earlier Byzantine period, approx. 4th-6th centuries AD (fig. 28). Beneath this were fine Late Hellenistic-Nabataean vessels from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD, which may have been

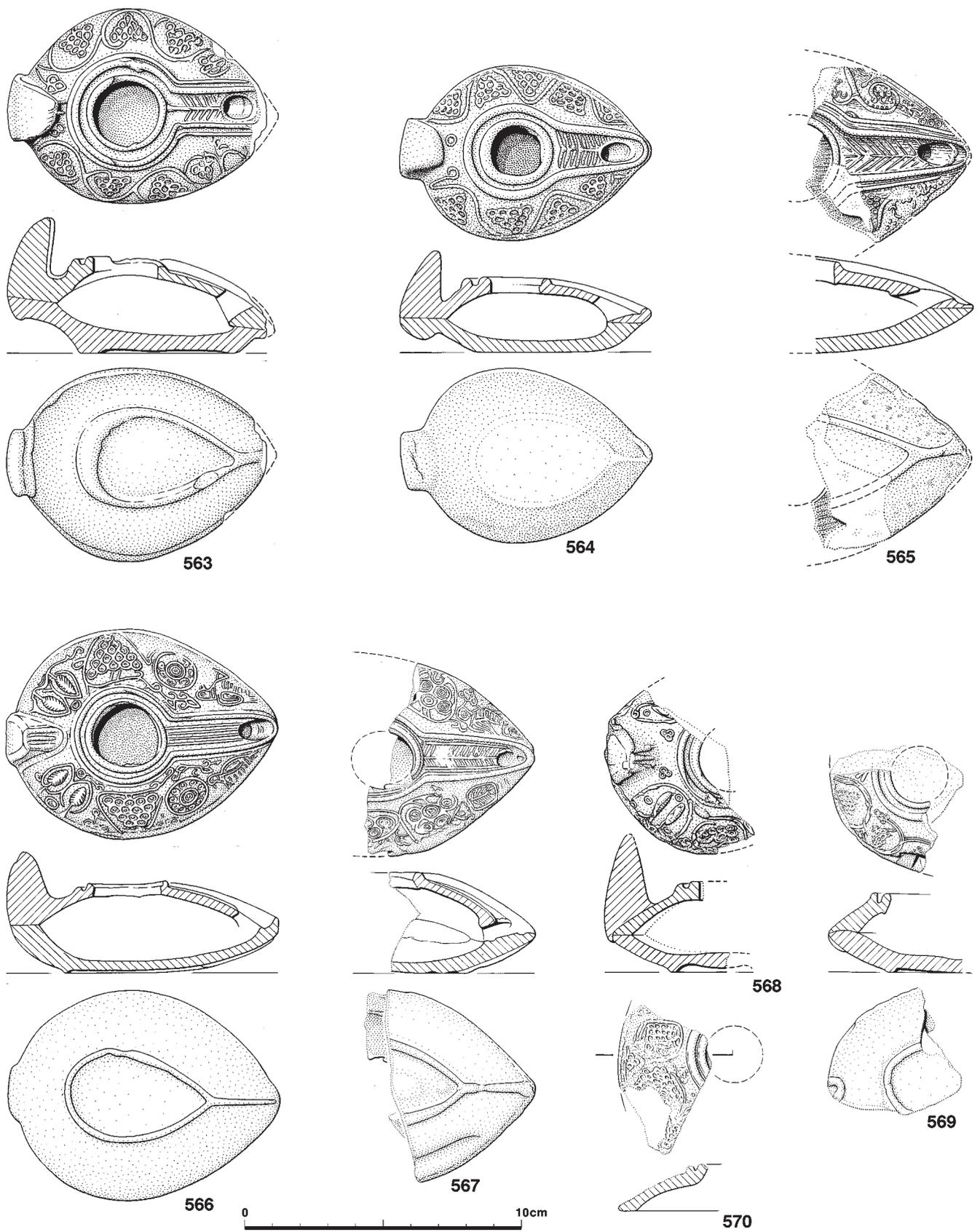


Fig. 26 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, 7th-8th century AD moulded ceramic oil lamps.



Fig. 27 »Lot's Cave«.

part of an offering. Digging deeper, the team came across a fine ceramic chalice and a copper duck bill axe-head dating to the Middle Bronze Age II period (approx. 1900-1550 BC)¹¹. There are 18 cairn tombs, which were identified just north of the monastic complex and which belong to this same period (figs 29-30)¹². These tombs represent the only known Middle Bronze Age evidence south of the Dead Sea. Some scholars argue that this may have been the actual era of Genesis. Excavating further down, the team found over a dozen Early Bronze Age I (approx. 3300-3000BC) pottery juglettes and cups associated with multiple burials (fig. 31). These were surrounded by a stone wall. Flint tools, a complete jug with a dipper and drinking cups characteristic of this period attest to an occupational phase to the west in front of the wall¹³. Final excavations at Deir 'Ain 'Abata brought to light the full extent of the Byzantine monastic complex of Aghios Lot and its later occupation during the Abbasid period¹⁴. A refectory complete with long benches and a stone-built oven, 3m in diameter, was unearthed immediately north of the basilica church. An early 9th century AD moulded jug with a unique Kufic inscription around its shoulder was found in the upper levels associated with the final occupation period of the site (fig. 32)¹⁵.

¹¹ Politis, Excavations 1995, 341-342.

¹² Politis, Excavations 1994, 483-488. – Politis, Excavations 1995, 344-347.

¹³ Politis, Excavations 1995, 341-342.

¹⁴ Politis, Monasticism.

¹⁵ Politis, Excavations 1994, 480-482.

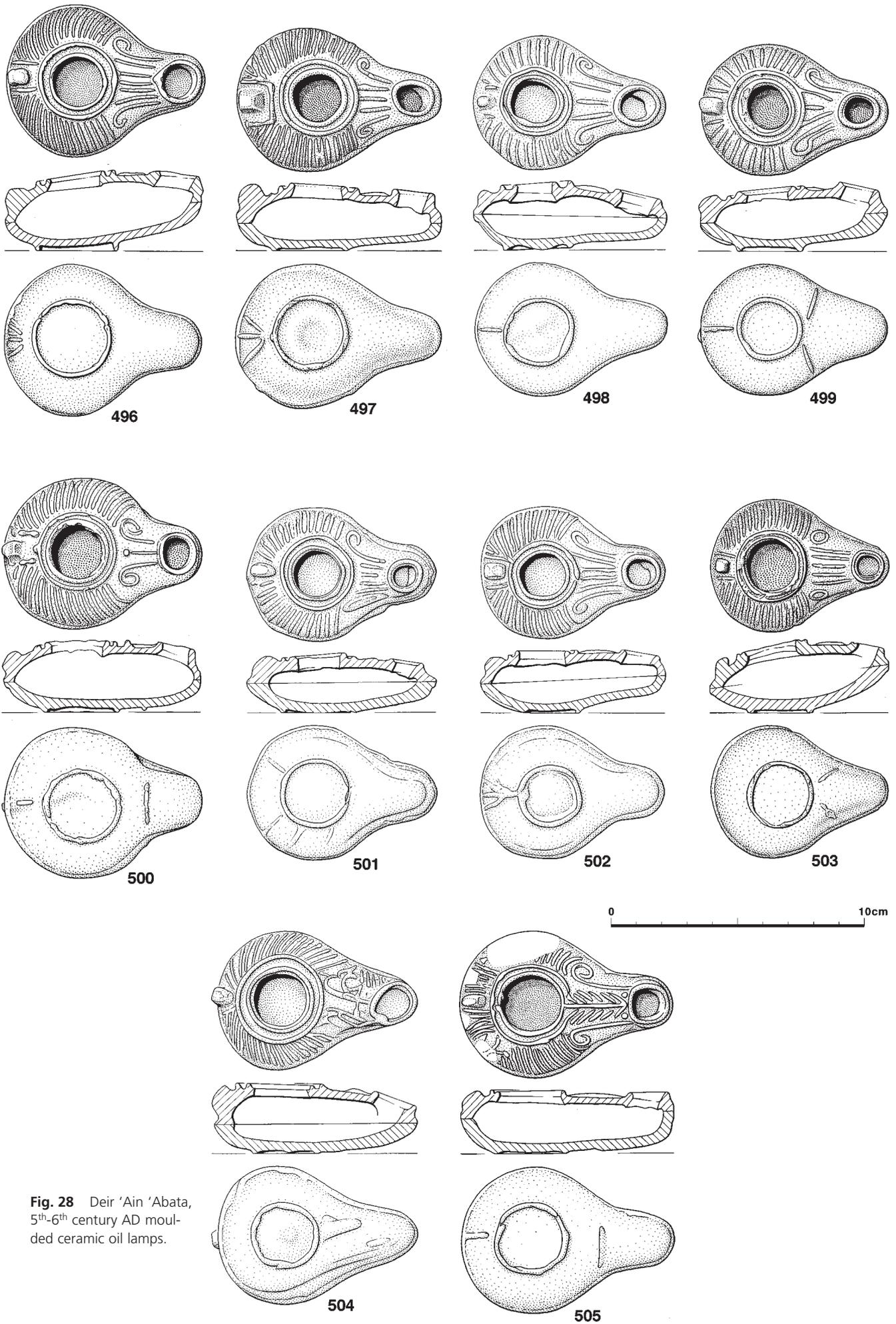


Fig. 28 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, 5th-6th century AD moulded ceramic oil lamps.

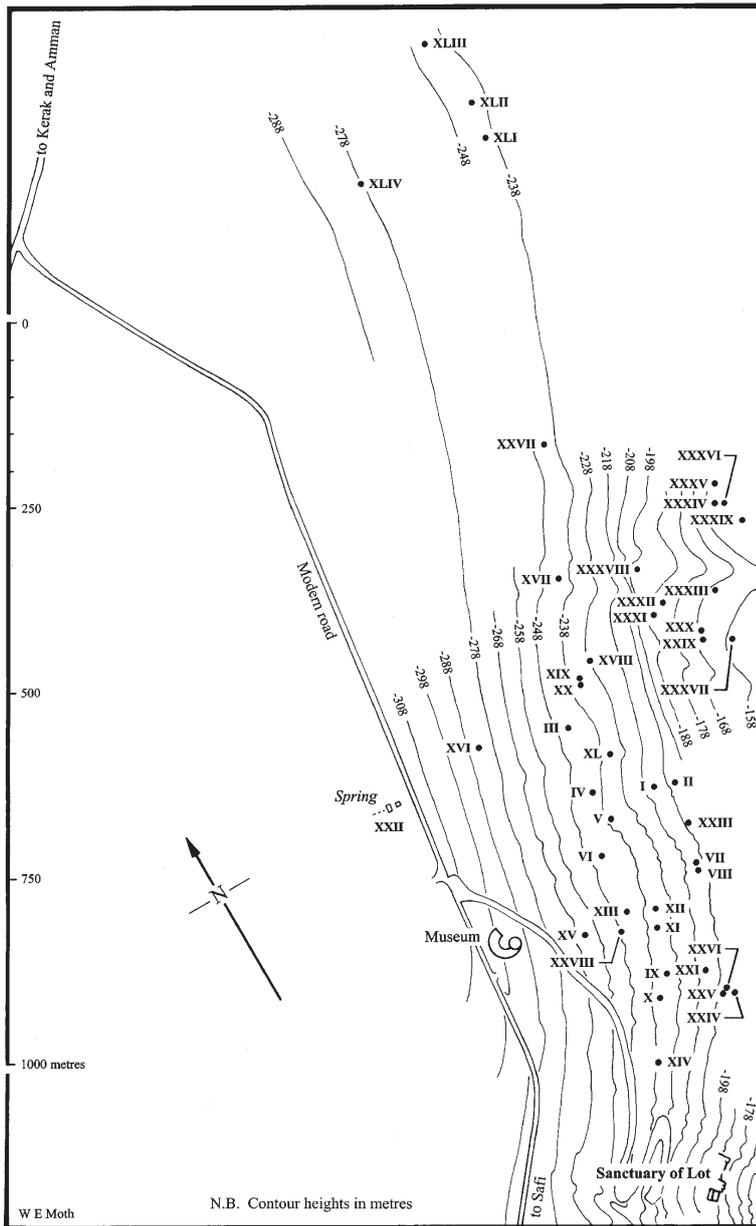


Fig. 29 Contour plan of Deir 'Ain 'Abata locating Lot Monastery and Middle Bronze Age tombs.

Perhaps the most fascinating discovery was that of a communal burial found in a disused cistern, which contained 32 individuals (28 adult males, one adult female and three infants/children), most were presumably monks (fig. 33)¹⁶. One of the most interesting conclusions of the study of these skeletons is that an unusual number of them suffered serious diseases. It seems that the monastery also served as a hospital, nursing the weak of the community. Next to the communal burial chamber were several cist burials cut into the bedrock, which contained four young juveniles, a foetus and a newborn. These may also have been accepted for burial near a holy site in exchange for some kind of support to the monastery.

¹⁶ Politis, Excavations 1992.



Fig. 30 Pottery vessels from Middle Bronze Age tombs at Deir 'Ain 'Abata.



Fig. 31 Pottery vessels from Early Bronze Age occupation in »Lot's Cave«.



Fig. 32 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, monastic kitchen and refectory.



Fig. 33 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, communal burial chamber for monks.



Fig. 34 Deir 'Ain 'Abata, greek inscription from monastic hostel.

Further north was an open courtyard leading to a »pilgrim's hostel«. An inscription was found here naming a builder, Ioannis Prokopios (**fig. 34**). The northern enclosure walls were exposed along with a rubbish dump rich in information about the 6th-7th centuries AD.

The positive identification of Deir 'Ain 'Abata as Lot's Sanctuary has not only brought to light the only known church solely dedicated to Lot in Christendom, but has also helped clarify the location of other sites on the Madaba map, such as the city of Zoara and the nearby river Zared¹⁷. Other sites, such as the Church of Saints Lot and Procopius near Mt Nebo, the monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and the mosque at Beni Na'im near Hebron, which also venerate Lot, allude to a cult of Lot in the Dead Sea area¹⁸.

The cave, which is the focal point of the entire monastic complex, had a long period of occupation suggesting long-standing use as a refuge. Since the Christian site had a strong pilgrimage interest, monks serving there would have had to cater for such visitors, as well as for the sick. This, along with the archaeological and architectural evidence, leads to the conclusion that it was a coenobium type monastery where monks would congregate regularly. The close relationship of the monastery with the nearby city of Zoara is evident from recent finds¹⁹ (**fig. 35**).

The environmental studies conducted on the animal bone and plant remains from various excavation areas provided the first scientific evidence regarding the dietary practices of monks and pilgrims, as well as the wider Byzantine community in the Holy Land during the 6th to 7th centuries AD. The fact that meat consumption was high supports the theory that the monastery catered for pilgrims and the sick since ascetic monks were normally vegetarian.

The 691 AD renovations at the Monastery of Aghios Lot provide clear evidence for the peaceful continuity that Christianity enjoyed in the early Umayyad period in Jordan and Palestine, during the early 9th century AD. Arabic inscriptions on the site may indicate a Muslim interest in Lot, who is described as a prophet in the Qur'an (37:134). In the 10th century AD, early Arab writers, such as Yaqut and Ibn 'Abbas, mention the story of Lot and add the names of his two daughters as being Rubbah and Saghur and identify the two traditional springs by which each was supposed to have been buried²⁰. These springs may correspond to

¹⁷ Politis, Sanctuary 225-227.

¹⁸ Saller / Bagatti, Nebo 194-199.

¹⁹ Politis, Survey and Rescue.

²⁰ Le Strange, Palestine 291-292.



Fig. 35 Reconstruction of Monastery of Aghios Lot.

the two main water sources in the area, one near the village of Safi and the other at 'Ain 'Abata. This, in combination with accounts of pilgrims travelling to Lot's Cave, such as Saint Stephen the Sabaite in the 9th century AD²¹ and the Russian Abbot Daniel in the early 12th century AD²², attest to a continued veneration of Lot by both Christians and Muslims into the medieval period.

²¹ Garitte, *Saint Etienne* 365.

²² Wilson, *Pilgrimage* 47-48.

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Fig. 1 Drawing J. M. Farrant.

Fig. 2 Illustration K. D. Politis.

Fig. 3 Photo T. Springett.

Fig. 4 Photo T. Springett.

Fig. 5 Photo T. Springett.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG / ABSTRACT / RÉSUMÉ

In der Bibel ist Lot die einzige gute Person in der sündigen Stadt Sodom, eine der fünf »Städte der Ebene«. Er und seine Familie wurden vor der Zerstörung Sodoms errettet und konnten in die benachbarte Stadt Zoara flüchten, wo sie in einer Höhle lebten. Hier zeugte Lot zwei Söhne, Moab und Ben-Ami, die Stammväter der Moabiter und der Ammoniter. Lots Frau wurde in eine Salzsäule verwandelt. Lot wird auch im Koran als ein Prophet verehrt. In jüngster Zeit kamen im südlichen Ghors archäologische und geologische Belege zutage, die der Geschichte von Lot entsprechen. In frühbyzantinischer Zeit folgte das tägliche Leben in christlichen Klöstern strengen Regeln. Die Menschen, die in diesen Klöstern lebten, wurden als »Mönche« bezeichnet, das griechische Wort für jemanden, der allein lebt. Sie beteten, arbeiteten und aßen allein, in kleinen Zellen oder Höhlen in der Umgebung des Klosters. Normalerweise ernährten sich die Mönche von Brot, Fisch, Obst und Gemüse. An Festtagen trafen sie sich zum gemeinsamen Gebet in der Kirche und nahmen möglicherweise zusammen im Refektorium Fleischspeisen zu sich. Üblicherweise arbeiteten Mönche im Gemüsegarten, stellten Körbe her und versorgten Pilger und Reisende mit Wasser. Die jüngsten archäologischen Untersuchungen in Deir 'Ain 'Abata liefern hierfür neue Belege. K. K.

In the Bible, Lot was the only good person in the sinful city of Sodom, one of the five »Cities of the Plain«. He and his family were saved from its destruction and escaped to the neighbouring town of Zoara, where they lived in a cave. There he fathered two sons, Moab and Ben-Ami, the forefathers of the Moabite and Ammonite people. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt. Lot is also venerated in the Qur'an where he is considered a prophet. Recently, archaeological and geological evidence has been discovered in the Southern Ghors, which remarkably attests to the story of Lot. During the early Byzantine period, daily life in a Christian monastery was organised according to strict rules. People in these monasteries were called »monks«, the Greek word for someone living alone. They prayed, worked and ate by themselves, in small cells or caves around the monastery. Monks normally survived on bread, fish, fruits and vegetables. On feast days, they met for communal prayers in the church and might eat meat all together in the refectory. Monks usually worked in vegetable gardens, made woven baskets and offered water to pilgrims and travellers. Recent archaeological work at Deir 'Ain 'Abata provides new evidence of this. K. D. P.

Dans la bible, Loth est la seule personne de bien à Sodome, la ville du péché, une des cinq « villes de la plaine ». Lui et sa famille furent sauvés de la destruction de Sodome et purent s'évader dans la ville voisine de Tsoar, où ils vécut dans une caverne. C'est là que Loth éleva deux fils, Moab et Ben -Ammil, les ancêtres des Moabites et des Ammonites. L'épouse de Loth fut transformée en statue de sel. Le Coran vénère également Loth tel un saint prophète. Récemment, des preuves archéologiques et géologiques qui confortent l'histoire de Loth virent le jour. Dans la haute période byzantine, la vie quotidienne obéit à des règles strictes dans les monastères chrétiens. Les hommes qui vivaient dans ces établissements, furent désignés comme moines, nom grec qui signifiait »qu'il vivait seul«. Ils priaient, travaillaient et mangeaient seul, dans de petites cellules ou cavernes dans les environs du monastère. En général, les moines se nourrissent de pain, de poissons, de fruits et de légumes. Aux jours de fêtes, ils se retrouvaient autour de prières communes dans l'église et mangeaient, éventuellement en commun, dans le réfectoire des mets à base de viande. Habituellement, les moines travaillaient dans le potager, fabriquaient des paniers, procuraient de l'eau aux pèlerins et voyageurs. Les recherches archéologiques récentes à Deir'Ain Abata nous livrent là-dessus de nouveaux éléments. E. L.

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