Islamic and Crusader Beth Shean: From City to Settlement

Megan Boomer

The majority of scholarship on Beth Shean has viewed the large earthquake that destroyed much of the city center in 749 CE as a point of historical rupture.[1] Narratives of regional dynamics in the Abbasid, Fatimid, Crusader, Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods relegate the site to peripheral status on the basis of archaeological and textual evidence suggesting a decrease in population and a cessation of monumental construction. This image gives modern readers the impression that the former capital of *Palestina Secunda* survived principally as a desolate ruinscape for travelers passing through en route to Jerusalem, Tiberias, Caesarea, or other urban centers. However, as Gideon Avni noted in his 2011 essay "'From Polis to Madina' Revisited," recent archaeological excavations by the Israel Antiquities Authority and Hebrew University have revealed a rich afterlife to the settlement that cannot be strictly characterized as a "decline."[2] This essay will seek to retrace the post-Umayyad history of Beth Shean, placing the upper strata of the site in conversation with excavated artifacts and textual sources to explore how particular historical dictates shaped the constructed and social environment.

In prioritizing site-specific evidence over regional narratives, it becomes clear that reconstructions following natural disasters or at points of transition responded primarily to the needs and characteristics of the contemporary local populace. After reaching a peak population of between 30,000-38,000 in the mid-sixth century, archaeological evidence and textual sources suggest a precipitous demographic drop, though continued construction of residential, industrial, and defensive structures (and reference to its role as the center of a major agricultural area) highlight the settlement's continued vibrancy.[3] An assessment of this later history of Beth Shean is complicated by several factors: the relative absence of excavated structures that served as civic or collective space, the continued redeployment of building material from earlier periods in the site's history (making it difficult to clearly identify superposed phases of construction or specifically date new works), the likely presence of major medieval residential quarters under the modern town, and the miscategorization of Islamic artifacts and structures by the original University Museum excavation team, who subsequently removed much of

[1] Gideon Foerster and Yoram Tsafrir "Urbanism at Scythopolis-Bet Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 136 "The earthquake of 749 supplies a rare opportunity to study the shape of a town that was "frozen" at a single moment in its history."

[2] Avni, Gideon. " 'From Polis to Madina' Revisited—Urban Change in Byzantine and early Islamic Palestine." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21.3 (2011): 307.

[3] Tsafrir and Foerster (1997): 118; al-Muqaddasi (d. 946 CE) refers to a "town of wide extent" (*Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions* (1897): 268); William of Tyre (12th century) refers to the site's "few scattered inhabitants" (*A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea.* Vol. II: XXII.26 (1943): 494); 1596 Ottoman Daftar lists 38 households and 4 bachelors (Petersen *A Gazeteer of Buildings in Muslim Palestine* (2001): 112-113); 1922 Mandate census lists roughly 2,000 inhabitants (Bagatti *Ancient Christian Villages of Galilee* (2001): 258).

the upper level of the Tel.[4] While recent archaeological work has more thoroughly documented later histories of settlement, the prevailing emphasis on the monumental structures of the Roman and Byzantine city makes it difficult to fully reconstruct the post-eighth century townscape.

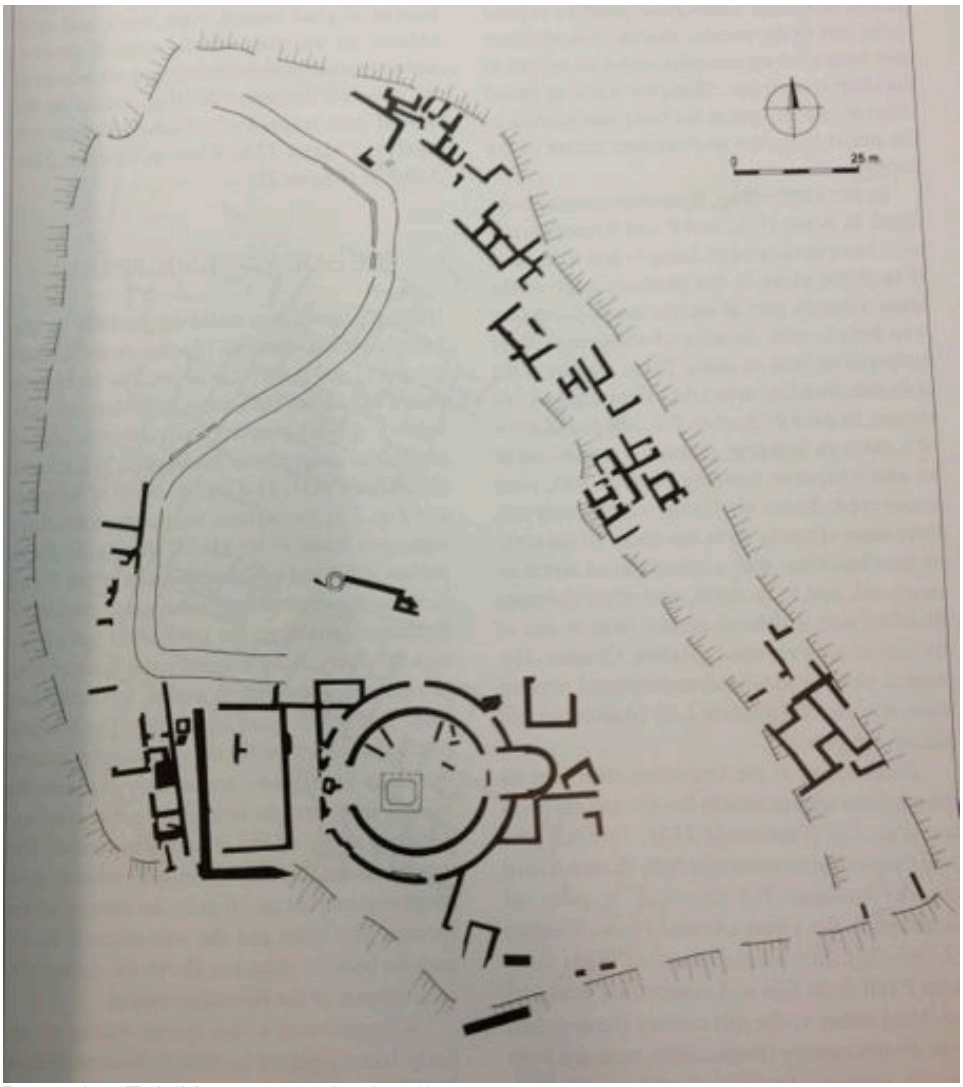
The topographic bounds of this particular study will be largely focused on Tel Beth-Shean, the location of the Round Church excavated by the University Museum in 1921 as well as an upper level of Islamic residential settlement superposed on the Byzantine terrace houses and ecclesiastical structures. Reexcavated by a Hebrew University team directed by Amihai Mazar from 1989-1996, the new proposed stratigraphy extends the period of occupation into at least the twelfth century, and possibly later. Given the relative paucity of medieval material for the Tel, artifacts and structures from the city center and surrounding areas will be used as evidence for the continued life of the site as a whole. Finally, descriptions of the region in Latin and Arabic from a variety of primary source genres will be incorporated as an indication of Beth Shean's place within broader regional dialogues.

Tel Beth Shean (Photo Credit Theodore Van Loan)

Although the precise chronology for the Byzantine level of the Tel is uncertain, the Round Church has been persuasively dated to the late fifth-early sixth century CE based on architectural comparanda.[5] Contemporary elite residential dwellings on the terraces to the north and east of the site have a range of domestic assemblages that suggest a period of occupation ranging from the fourth to the early seventh century, though later architectural intrusions from the early Islamic period render an exact reconstruction difficult. The vast majority of the numismatic material from the houses

[4] Jordan Pickett, "Contextualizing Penn's Excavations at Beth Shean (1921-1933)." *Expedition Magazine* 55.1 (2013): 12-15.
[5] Daira Nocera, "The Round Church at Beth Shean," *Expedition Magazine* 55.1 (2013): 16-20.

was retrieved in secondary context, so it cannot be used to securely date any of the structures. While mosaic floors and other architectural components clearly attest to a large and wealthy Byzantine presence on the Tel, the exact chronology and nature of this settlement cannot be conclusively determined. However, based on the Israeli excavations of the city center and the imposing presence of the Round Church, it seems likely that an active Byzantine quarter with both domestic and sacred spaces oversaw the thriving commercial hub below.

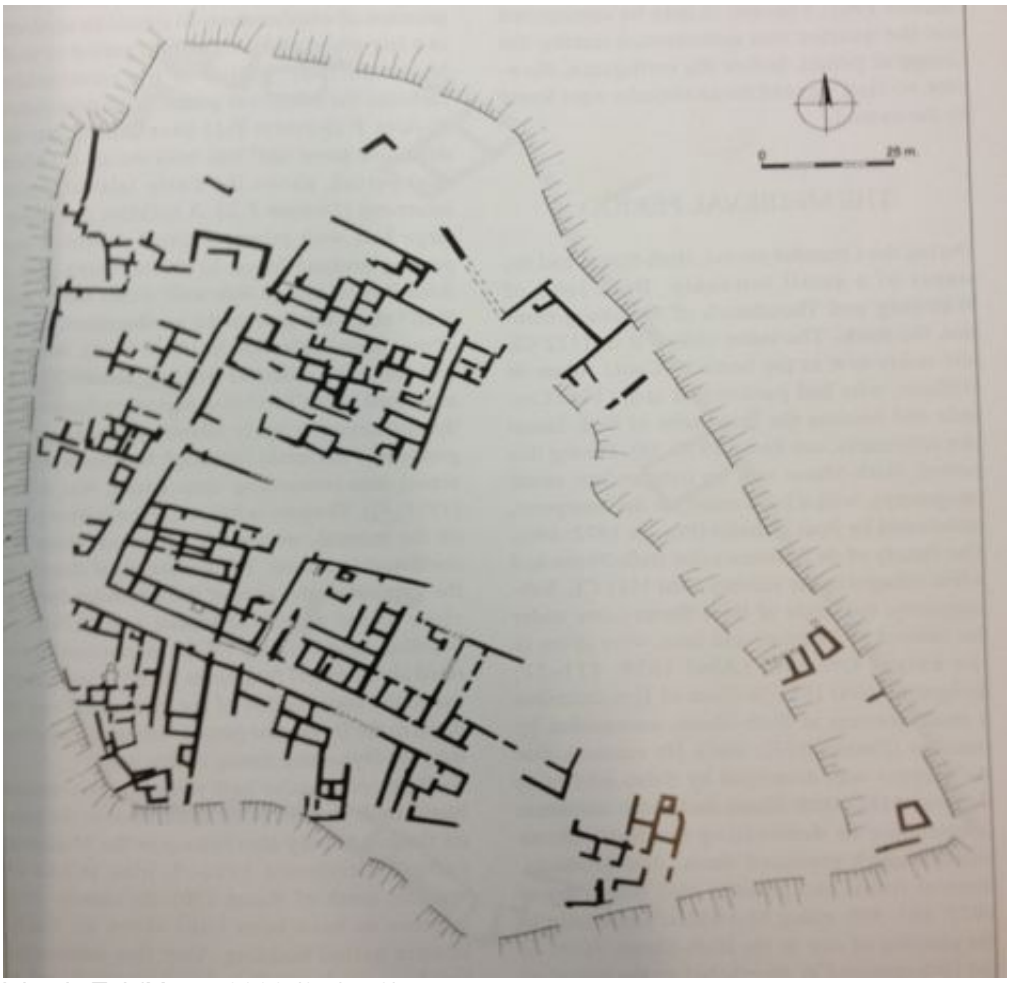


Byzantine Tel (Mazar 2006 (2.4): 41)

Yoram Tsafrir and Gideon Foerster, directors of the 1986-96 Israel Antiquities Authority excavations in the main commercial and civic spaces of the lower city, have noted that dramatic changes to the urban fabric of Beth Shean preceded the 636 CE capture of the city by Shurabhil b. Hasana and its subsequent incorporation into the administrative structure of the nascent Umayyad Caliphate.[6] Commercial and industrial intrusions

[6] Foerster and Tsafrir (1997)*;* Andrew Petersen, *A Gazeteer of Buildings in Muslim Palestine (Part 1),* New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001: 112.

into the Roman fabric of the city, which Gideon Avni characterizes as “a conceptual change in its urban landscape,” are increasingly attributed to changing patterns of patronage for new buildings and shifting demands and usages of previous civic space starting in the mid-sixth century.[7] The transfer of the regional capital from Beth Shean to Tiberias in connection with the new imperial context presumably heightened the move away from large civic construction, although Beth Shean continued to operate a mint and serve as a commercial hub well into the Umayyad reign.[8]



Islamic Tel (Mazar 2006 (2.5): 43)

Islamic settlement patterns on the Tel are much more difficult to date, though they represent the majority of the postclassical excavated structures. Contrary to the move towards an “organic” or “spontaneous” model of urban development seen in the city center, the large residential quarter overlaid on the terrace houses and Round Church was rigidly planned on orthogonal axes that ignored both topography and preexisting

[7] Avni (2011) 308, Tsafrir and Foerster (1997).

[8] For late Umayyad urbanism, see Elias Khamis, “Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions from the Umayyad Market Place in Bet Shean/Baysan.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64.2 (2001): 159-176. Coins believed to have been minted in Umayyad Beth Shean post-697 CE have been found in the City Center and Citadel areas (Citadel: Berman *ESI* 15 (1996): 47; City Center: Berman *ESI* 11 (1993): 52).

architectural features. Coinage from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods and the reuse of Byzantine architectural elements clearly reflect the neighborhood's continued activity after the 749 CE earthquake, but a precise chronology is difficult to establish.[9] Construction over the Round Church may be a particularly fruitful avenue of exploration, as two toppled columns were marked by graffiti that spoke to their own continued visibility in the Abbasid city.

Column A in Situ (UPM Archives)

Nicholas Harris has translated the Hebrew and Arabic inscriptions on the two columns, noting in particular the text reading: "[This is] the writing of Ahmad ibn Sa'id ibn al-Khattab al-Bajali, in the spring of the year 190 [=January-March, 806]."[10] Based on paleographic information and their placement on the column, he dates the additional three Arabic notes and the two Hebrew markings to the ninth or tenth century. One piece of Hebrew graffiti draws on a a passage from Genesis 39:23, reading "In the name of the Lord, we will d[o and will prosper]."[11] The two pieces of Arabic graffiti on the second column include a citation from Qur'an 48:2, which reads "O God, forgive Ahmad ibn Jami' his sins, what came before and what will follow. Amen."[12] According to Harris, this reference can be persuasively placed within the rhetorical tradition of the *'ibra* in

[9] Amihai Mazar. *Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean 1989-1996.* Vol. I: From the Late Bronze Age IIB to the Medieval Period. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006: 42-44.
[10] Nicholas Harris, "Beth Shean Columns in Lower Egypt." *Expedition Magazine* 55.1 (2013): 18.
[11] Harris: 18.
[12] Harris: 18.

which larger meaning is derived from historical narration or example.[13] A viewer, seeing the toppled marble columns, would be prompted to express his feelings regarding the ephemerality of constructed civilization and history through inscription on the material of the past. This evocative response to the fallen column carries connotations of a surrounding environment of sixth-century monumental detritus, toppled by natural forces but remaining visible as a testament to the power of God, an impression evoked by the 1921 photographs of the excavations of the church.

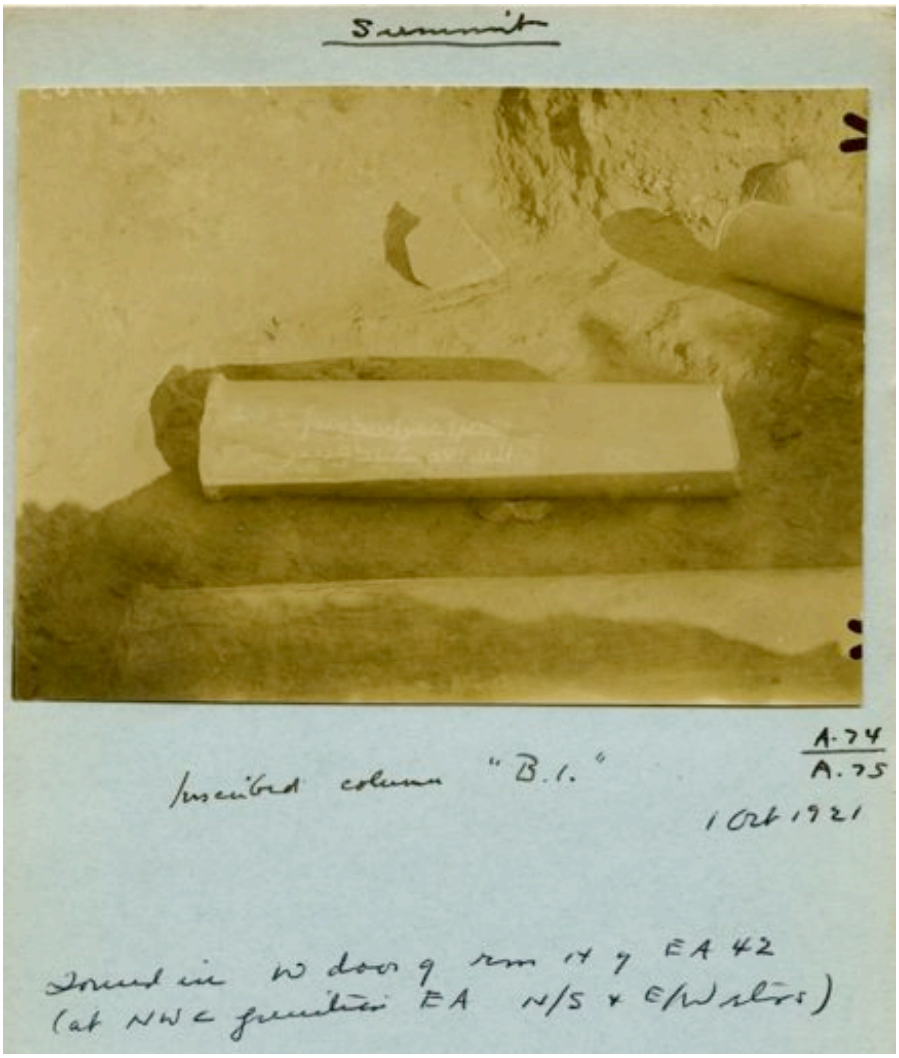
Round Church (UPM Archives)

However, Clarence Fisher's stratigraphic plans move the columns out of the realm of fable and into a bustling ninth-century neighborhood. A card for inscribed column "B1" states that it was "Found in W door of room 14 of EA 42 (at NW junction of EA N/S and E/W sts)." According to contemporary maps and Gerald Fitzgerald's interpretation of the excavation notes and accompanying documentation, the complex in question fully altered the visibility of the church, whose apse and ambulatory it covered and destroyed, and the burial of the column under the upper level implies a post-ninth century date for the street and surrounding construction.[14] The second column bearing

[13] Harris draws on the exegetical framework surrounding Q. 12:111 "There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding." (Sahih International translation)

[14] Fitzgerald, Gerald M. *Beth-Shan Excavations 1921-1923: the Arab and Byzantine Levels.* Philadelphia: University Press for the University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1931: 15.

the dated inscription was found on the street level near the entrance to Room 38, referred to as a small mosque in photographs and the 1931 publication due to the presence of a niche framed by small columns in the direction of Mecca.[15] In addition to the Byzantine architectural detritus outside the chamber, the interior preserved mosaic floors from the earlier Round Church layer on which it stood.[16] While the graffiti and reuse of architectural elements in a variety of contexts in the uppermost levels of the site cannot be used to conclusively date the ensemble, the appeals to divine salvation and human mortality in the inscriptions may reflect medieval residents' awareness of the history under their feet and in their walls.



Inscribed Column "B1" (UPM Archives)

[15] Fitzgerald,17.
[16] Fitzgerald,16.

Stratigraphic Plan of Tel (Southern Portion) (UPM Archives)

Room 38, identified as by excavators as a mosque (looking south, Level I over ambulatory of Round Church) (UPM Archives)

Medieval texts repeatedly reference a historical understanding of Beth Shean's status in the Roman or early Islamic past. Lying along the primary road from Jerusalem to Tiberias, and at a junction point between several East-West routes, the site continued to serve as a waystation for travelers throughout history.[17] Islamic geographies and Christian pilgrimage texts refer to a selection of associated miracles, martyrdoms, and sacred structures, though the patterns of veneration or physical location of the shrines cannot be traced. Writing during Beth Shean's Byzantine flowering, Theodosius' *Topography of the Holy Land* states that "From Sebastia to Scythopolis it is thirty miles; my Lord Basil was martyred there."[18] Fifty years later, the Piacenza Pilgrim failed to note a martyr named Basil, but discusses "the capital city of the Galilee. It is called Scythopolis, and stands on a hill, and it is where St. John performs many miracles."[19] Beth Shean was the Galilean episcopal seat until 1103 CE, but was not directly mentioned as a site of visitation in Latin texts written between 635 CE and the arrival of the Crusaders in 1099. However, many of the written trajectories of sacral visitation imply pilgrims may have passed through while progressing up or down the Jordan from the Sea of Galilee to the site associated with Jesus' baptism from the seventh-century onwards.

Although none of the mosques in Beth Shean can be conclusively dated to the Umayyad period, al-Harawi's late-twelfth century guide for Islamic pilgrims to the region mentions "a congregational mosque attributed to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab [the second Rashidun caliph, d. 644 CE]."[20] Andrew Petersen associates this structure with a small post-749 mosque excavated by Tsafrir and Foerster in the area of the nymphaeum, though the Jami' al-Arb'ayn Ghazawi, or "Mosque of the Forty Warriors," located near a hill to the south of the Byzantine and Umayyad city center in what Avni has identified as the main post-earthquake forum for the city is another plausible candidate for the attribution.[21] The present mosque was rebuilt during the Ottoman period, but the minaret appears to be Abbasid and an inscription on the wall above the mihrab dates the completion of the project to the end of the eighth or early ninth century.[22] The relative absence of excavated Islamic sacred architecture may be partially due to the apparent shift in the public life of the settlement to the area currently covered by the modern town. Settlement prior to the twelfth century appears to have been fairly dense, and the mid-tenth century geographer al-Muqaddasi claims "water is here abundant, and the town is of wide extent."[23]

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[17] The construction of the Khan al-Ahmar (dedicated 1308 CE) to the south of the City Center and its maintenance throughout much of the Ottoman period (Petersen references its falling out of disuse towards the end of the nineteenth century) reinforces Beth Shean's status as a regional trading hub, regardless of the level of economic activity happening in the city itself. For more on Khan al-Ahmar see Petersen (2001): 115-116.

[18] Theodosius c. 518 "The Topography of the Holy Land" Trans. Wilkinson (2002):103.

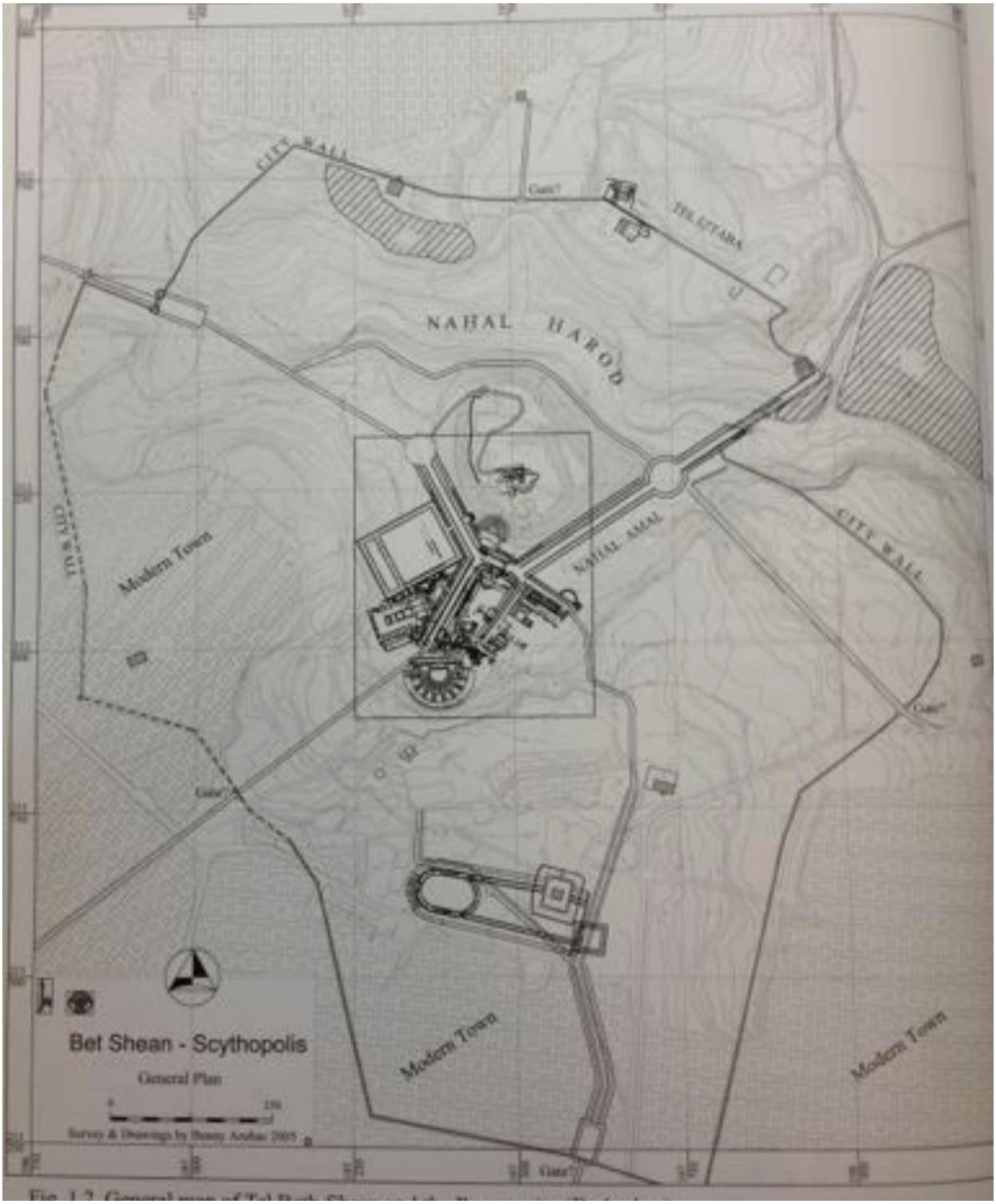
[19] Piacenza Pilgrim c. 570, "Travels" Trans. Wilkinson (2002): 135.

[20] al-Harawi d. 1215, *Lonely Wayfarer's Guide to Pilgrimage.* Trans. Meri (2004): 42.

[21] Petersen (2001), Avni (2011): 307, Abbasid mosque over city center basilica referenced in Foerster and Tsafrir *ESI* 11 (1991): 7.

[22] Avni: 307 dates 794-95 CE; Petersen: 114 dates 9c; Camille Enlart (1925: Vol. II, 44) claims it is 14th century mosque on top of Romanesque church.

[23] al-Muqaddasi: 268, Avni: 307 references large private buildings to south and east of mosque that were "extensively inhabited between the eighth and the eleventh centuries".



Plan of Beth Shean. Note the Jami' al-Arb'ayn on south road between city center and Crusader and Ottoman structures (Mazar 2006 (1.2): 8)

Abbasid Mosque from southwest (Petersen 2001 (Pl. 60): 113.)

Easy access to water drove much of Beth Shean's industrial and agricultural production in the period. Rachel Bar-Nathan and Gaby Mazor, directors of the Israel Antiquities Authority excavations around the Roman theater in the southern portion of the city center, noted two major industrial installations covered by the 749 CE destruction level using elements of the site and rerouted drainage.[24] A piered building north of the theater was leveled and turned into what may have been a large domed textile production and dyeing facility, while much of the northeastern quadrant of the complex was converted into an extensive pottery workshop with ten kilns and a new supply system for the water needed to produce the pieces.[25] Although no post-Umayyad textile facilities (or textiles) have been securely located, later references to Beth Shean's export of indigo make it likely that the site continued as a center for dyed fabrics.[26] Luxury ceramics from the site are less well known, though a collection of Mamluk fritware bowls excavated at the site and now housed in the Israel Museum have been attributed to a heretofore-unknown local industry.[27] Beth Shean also served as a major glass production center for much of its history, with a major revival in the Mamluk period giving rise to new forms.[28]

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[24] Rachel Bar-Nathan and Gaby Mazor. "City Center (South) and Tel Iztabba Area: Excavations of the Antiquities Authority Expedition." *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* Vol. 11: Bet She'an Excavation Project, 1989-1991 (1993): 38.
[25] Bar-Nathan and Mazor *ESI* 11 (1993): 38.
[26] al-Muqaddasi (1897): 296-297; early sixteenth century sources re: Petersen 112.
[27] *Chronicles of the Land: Archaeology in the Israel Museum Jerusalem* (2010): 211.
[28] Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, *Islamic Art and Archaeology in Palestine,* Trans. E. Singer. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2002: 127.

Excavations in the Valley Street area by Hebrew University revealed new drainage systems and water channels cut into the site after 749 for agricultural, industrial, and domestic purposes, including two medieval flour mills.[29] Tsafrir and Foerster attributed the abandonment of this quadrant, at one point in the medieval period the "most densely occupied part of the city," to frequent flooding of the water delivery system and health risks of the stagnant pools—an explanation potentially corroborated by repeated references to the water's abundance and "heaviness" or the site's "marshiness" in primary sources.[30] The fecundity of the landscape is underscored by Byzantine pilgrims and al-Muqaddasi, who claims Beth Shean "produces all the rice consumed in Palestine and the Jordan district."[31] In the thirteenth century, the economy of Beth Shean was further stimulated by large scale sugar crystallization on the site of the Crusader Citadel, with thousands of vessels used in production found in nearby fills.[32] The plentitude of water in Beth Shean helped to maintain settlement levels and support resource-intensive industries and agricultural cultivars in the medieval period.

Water was not just an essential feature of daily life in Beth Shean, but was sacralized within a selection of Islamic and Christian texts. Al-Muqaddasi's enumeration of holy sites in Palestine prominently includes "the sacred shrine at Baisan," which may be linked to a variety of traditions regarding the area's fecundity and abundance of resources.[33] Two twelfth-century Arabic sources, a geography and a guide to pilgrimage, both locate 'Ayn al-Fulus, "which it is said is among the four blessed springs" at Beth Shean, implying that water was not just an engine of industry but also of local devotion.[34] Intriguingly, an 1106 account by a Russian abbot, Daniel, who passed through the site on a pilgrimage to the region, also references a sacred spring, albeit in a very different exegetical mode:

> The rivers flow from Bashan into the Jordan and there are many lions at that place. Nearby to the east of the town a remarkable cavern in the form of a cross has been formed. From this cave flows a spring and there is a wonderful pool there which has formed itself as if made by God. In this pool Christ himself bathed with his disciples and one may see to this day the place where Christ sat on a rock; here we unworthy sinners also bathed.[35]

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[29] Gideon Foerster and Yoram Tsafrir, "City Center (North); Excavations of the Hebrew University Expedition." *Excavations and Surveys in Israel.* Vol. 11: Bet She'an Excavation Project, 1989-1991 (1993): 7.

[30] Tsafrir Foerster *ESI* 11 (1993): 24; References to water's abundance and quality in al-Muqaddasi (1897): 268, 303; William of Tyre (1943) Vol. II: XXII.16: 473 and XXII.26: 494; Daniel the Abbot (1988): 156.

[31] al-Muqaddasi (1897): 296-297.

[32] Denys Pringle, *Secular Buildings in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: An Archaeological Gazeteer* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 26; Jon Seligman, "Bet Shean, the Citadel." *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 15 (1996): 45.

[33] al-Muqaddasi (1897): 242-247.

[34] al-Harawi (2004): 42; Yaqut (cited in Muqaddasi 1897: Footnote 2, 247)

[35] Wilkinson *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099-1185*: 156. Daniel goes on to set the poll-tax verse "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matt.22 20-21) and the injunction to Peter "Go to the sea and cast a hook, take the first fish that comes up and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel, take that and give it to them for me and for yourself" (Matt.17 27) in

Each of the narratives also implicitly place the sacred springs into a historical framework that extends perpetually forward and backward in time, tying the twelfth-century town to past and future grandeurs on the basis of its resources and, presumably, the tangible signs of urban monumentality in the landscape.

Daniel's account of visitation at the spring was written at a point of great change to the architectural and political structure of the surrounding settlement. In 1099, Beth Shean was occupied by Crusader forces, who established it as an independent seignory under the jurisdiction of Count Adam of Bethune.[36] The bishopric was quickly transferred from Beth Shean to Mount Tabor (in 1103) and then to Nazareth, and a new court for the local bourgeois was established.[37] The two major elevated points in the city limits were refortified with Frankish defensive structures that capitalized on the vantage point they provided of the surrounding trade networks and agricultural vista. The city center was largely unsettled (though an Ayyubid-Mamluk residential quarter was subsequently reconstructed near the Nymphaeum) and the social dynamics of the site are difficult to reconstruct based on the lack of non-structural material culture definitively associated with the Crusader town.[38]

William of Tyre's account of attempted Ayyubid sieges of Beth Shean contains some clues regarding life in the settlement and the defensive advantages of the site in two lengthy passages regarding the incursions of 1182 and 1187. On Salah al-Din's first attempt, his armies "made a vigorous assault on a small fort situated on marshy land," but were successfully repelled by the townspeople.[39] He notes as part of his contextualization of the attack that the town was once called Scythopolis and served as the "metropolis of Palestina Tertia," and further develops the perceptible presence of the past capital in his more extensive description of the site's capture:

> From there, following the course of the river, he [Saladin] proceeded toward Skythopolis. As has often been mentioned, this place, now called Bethsan, was once the capital of all Galilee. Many evidences of its former greatness are still to be seen in the ruins of the ancient buildings and in the quantity of marble which exists among them. It is now reduced to almost nothing, with only a few scattered inhabitants, only a sparsely settled hamlet situated in a marshy place…although the people dwelling there were well supplied with arms and food in proportion to

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Beth Shean, as well as the nearby healing of the two blind men (Matt.20 34). It should be noted that no other account in the Wilkinson collection references the spring or surrounding events, though given the other anomalies and as the sole Russian text in the anthology, it is possible Daniel was drawing on local exegetical tradition.

[36] Bagatti (2001), 257.

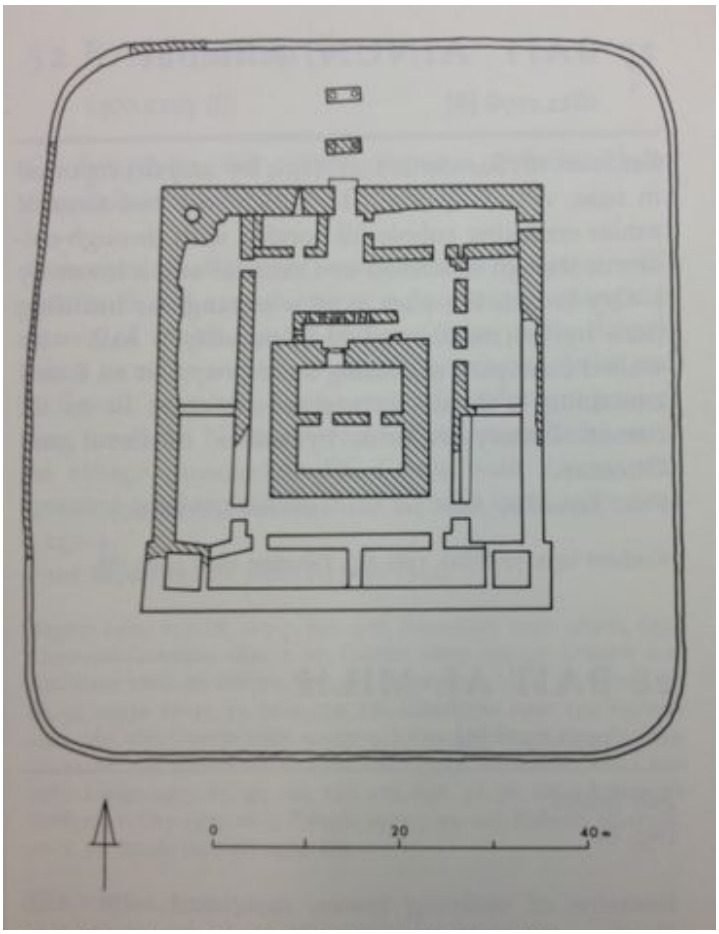
[37] Mazar (2006), 44.

[38] On the Ayyubid and Mamluk quarter near the Nymphaeum, see Tsafrir and Foerster *ESI* 9: 123. The absence of crusader pottery is discussed by Ruth Gertwagen in *ESI* 11: 58, which she credits to "the assimilation into the local culture of the Christian crusader inhabitants." Adrian Boas' 1999 book *Crusader Archaeology: The Material Culture of the Latin East* discusses the misperception that Frankish roles in rural areas were limited to administrative functions (60), though the precise nature of Crusader settlement patterns in Beth Shean is difficult to reconstruct based on available excavated and textual evidence.

[39] William of Tyre (1943) Vol. II XII.16: 473.

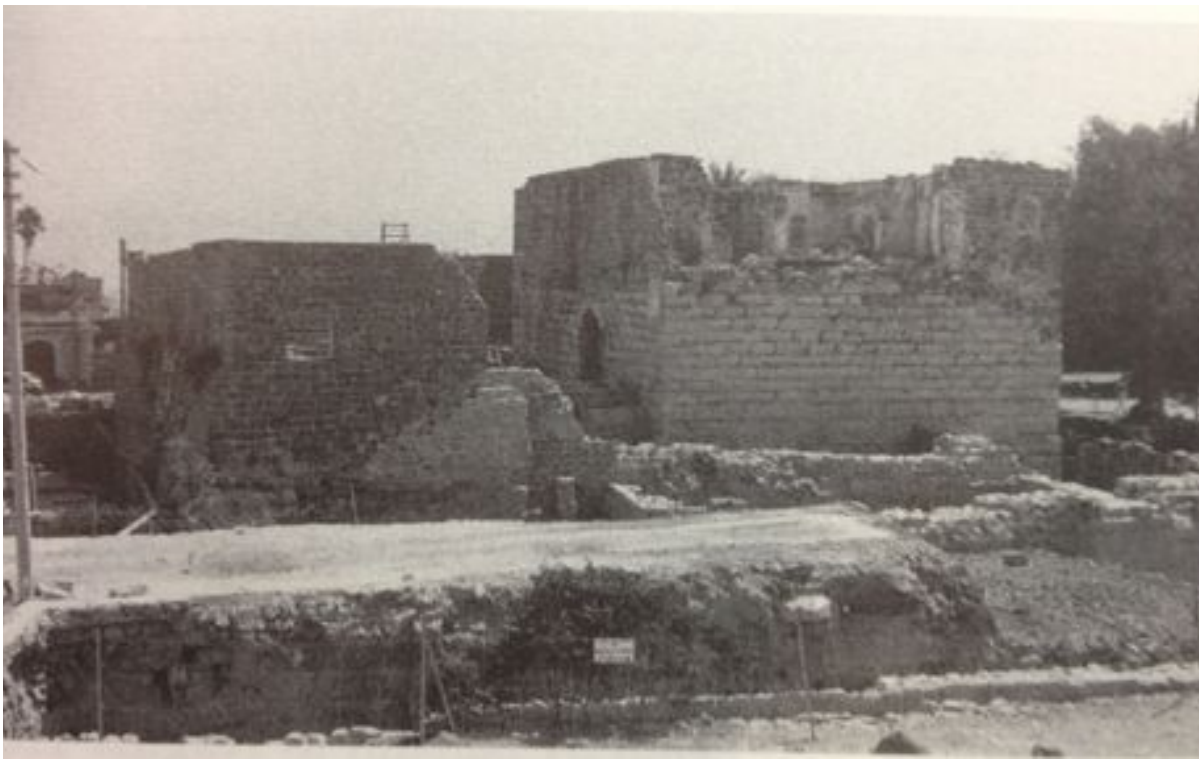
their number and the size of the place, yet they felt no confidence in the defenses of their citadel. Before the hostile army arrived, therefore, they abandoned the fortress, leaving all their possessions behind, and repaired to Tiberias.[40]

Given the paucity of non-military structures and material uncovered from the Crusader levels of the site, it is difficult to fully balance William of Tyre's demographic assertions with any kind of archaeological evidence. However, his assessment of the defensive capabilities of the citadel, which was not captured but abandoned by inhabitants, seems in keeping with the formidable structure excavated by Ruth Gertwagen and Adrian Boas from 1989-1991 and by Jon Seligman in 1993.[41]



Crusader Citadel (Pringle 1997: 25).

[40] William of Tyre Vol. II, XXII 26: 494. According to Mazar (2006): 44, in 1161 CE the de Béthune family lost control of the site and administrative duties were transferred to Tiberias, though the fortress appears to have been in continuous operation and shows no signs of capture.
[41] Seligman *ESI* 15 (1996): 43-47; Ruth Gertwagen "The Fortress" *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 11 (1993): 56-60.



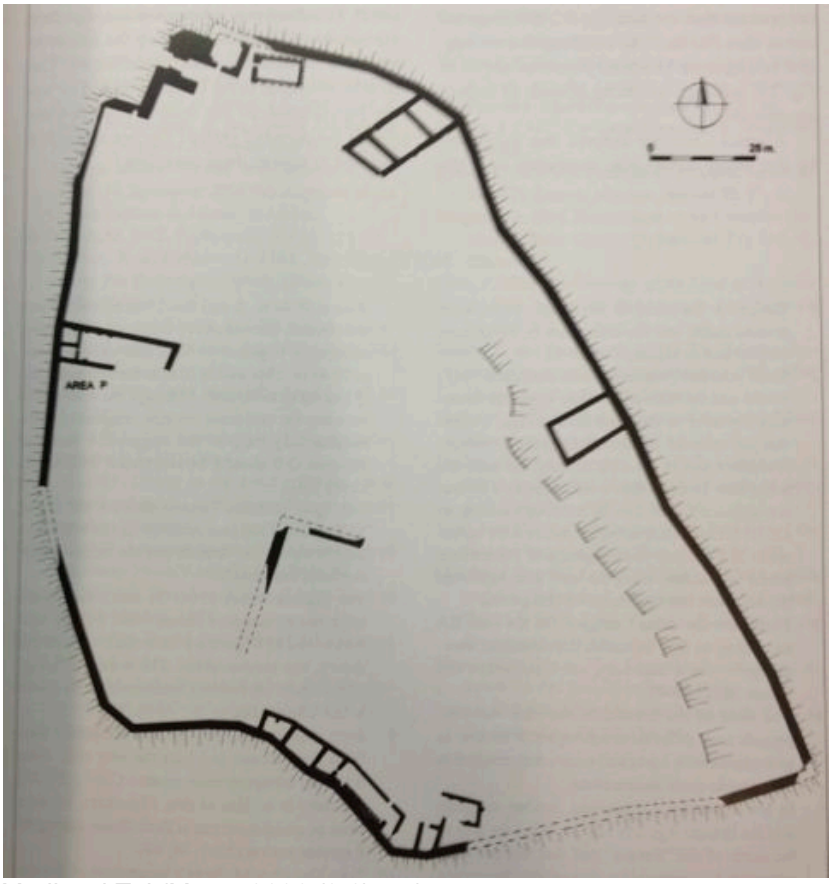
Crusader Citadel (Pringle 1997: 25)

Beth Shean's fortress was positioned at the summit of the southern hill and looked out over the contemporary sites of Belvoir and Mt. Tabor to its north, establishing a visual line of defense and connection.[42] The twelfth-century citadel was built on top of Byzantine, Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid structures that charted the transition of the southern neighborhood from suburb to center.[43] Frankish builders elected to cut through several of the older levels to construct a 14-meter wide moat that, based on silt deposits and the efforts to coat the walls of the counterscarp and citadel wall, appears to have been filled with water—an unusual feature for construction in the region that might further highlight the particular aquatic abundance of the site.[44] The citadel was reached via a northern drawbridge supported by paired columns, which was overseen by a northwestern tower with an internal well. On arriving at the citadel, the visitor would either enter the eastern chamber of the peripheral walls or proceed into the internal courtyard that allowed access to the 17.3m x 17.3 m keep. The citadel itself was largely constructed of local basalt, but the multi-story keep was made of limestone blocks removed from the Roman amphitheater and partially redressed.[45] Twin barrel-vaulted rooms divided the keep into northern and southern quadrants, with a stairway in the north allowing access to upper levels that likely contained the apertures necessary for defensive fire from the interior. While the citadel remained in use through the Ottoman

[42] Seligman, 44.
[43] Gertwagen, 58.
[44] Seligman, 44.
[45] Seligman, 45.

period, it was quickly repurposed as a site of sugar production, smithing, and later served as a school in the central settlement area of the Ottoman village.[46]

Despite the clear resources invested in the construction of the citadel and the lack of clear textual and material evidence for an extensive twelfth-century community on the site, recent archaeological work has compellingly demonstrated that the uppermost level of the central Tel originally excavated by the Penn Museum is contemporary with the fortress. Defense appears to have been a priority on both plateaus, with fortifications built around the entirety of the terrace and summit levels. Structures dated to the twelfth-century on the basis of their relation to the wall have been excavated on all four sides of the Tel, although their function cannot be conclusively ascertained from the material remains. Contemporary pottery excavated by Amihai Mazar further underscores the Crusader presence, and may suggest that some of the superposed internal courtyard buildings from Fisher's "Arab" levels could be recategorized as later construction.[47] One structure excavated by Penn, which Fisher dubbed the "refectory," presents a particularly exciting window into a possible twelfth-century community on the Tel.



Medieval Tel (Mazar 2006 (2.6): 45)

[46] Seligman, 47.
[47] Amihai Mazar "Tel Bet She'an 1992/1993" *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 14 (1995): 59-60; Mazar (2006): 261-263.

"Crusader Gate after clearing, looking West" (with contemporary tower in foreground) (UPM Archives)

Crusader "refectory," looking west (UPM Archives).

Crusader level of southern quadrant, looking east (note lower walls of Round Church on left) (UPM Archives).

Fisher's excavation diary for August 1921 contains repeated references to the excavation of Rooms 4, 12, and 5 (labeled on the colored drawn plan above), three rectangular stone chambers abutting the southern wall that seem to belong to one of the latest phases of settlement.[48] Room 5 and 12 were originally joined, and bear engaged pilasters on their lateral faces that clearly show initial arch springings to support a possible vault.[49] The low stone walls running between the transverse arches on each side have been identified as possible benches for a refectory or dining hall of some kind, a hypothesis potentially supported by the parallel elevated plinth that may have served as a southern table, and the apparently deliberate placement of other stone elements to serve as additional pieces of furniture in the space. A limestone sarcophagus visible on the eastern end of the room was apparently used as a water trough, possibly supplied by the nearby drainage system and reservoir.[50] Fisher expressed skepticism about the dating of the masonry, claiming that the irregularity of the structure seemed uncharacteristic of the Crusaders and might be more profitably

[48] Clement Fisher. *Diary of Beisan Excavations: Season 1921.* Unpublished typed manuscript copy, entries for August 4 (23), August 6-8 (24), August 22 (28).
[49] Fitzgerald (1931), 16.
[50] Fitzgerald (1931), 16.

associated with the Ayyubids.[51] However, the near complete absence of pottery and lack of coinage once again frustrates all attempts to establish a chronologically delimited history of construction and occupancy. Nevertheless, the presence of the later complex on the southern portion of the Tel and the twelfth-century construction of the walls and gate extend Beth Shean's history considerably beyond the destruction of the Round Church, whose footprint can be seen buried well below the "Refectory" wall level.

Conclusion

Although several major earthquakes in the Byzantine and Islamic history of Beth Shean caused major damage to the infrastructure of the site, residents continued to rebuild and shape the town according to the particular exigencies of their historical moment. The site did not reclaim its role as a central administrative city within the political apparatuses of the centuries under consideration, but continued to serve as an economic and agricultural supplier at the juncture of major trade routes that placed its people and products in communication with the local metropolises. Its strategic location brought in travelers and allowed goods to circulate, while its plentiful supply of water supported several industries with material remnants testifying to their extent and longevity. The current archaeological record has shed new light on the medieval history of occupation, and has suggested that many of the assumptions made by the Penn Museum excavators should be revised through new archival research and by reexamining the artifacts from the uppermost level on the Tel. While many of the homes and gathering spaces of the Islamic-period residents of the site may still be buried, closer attention to the neglected post-Umayyad material and textual sources will most likely generate exciting new narratives about the continuity of Beth Shean.

[51] Fisher *Diary of Beisan Excavations,* August 22, 1921.

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