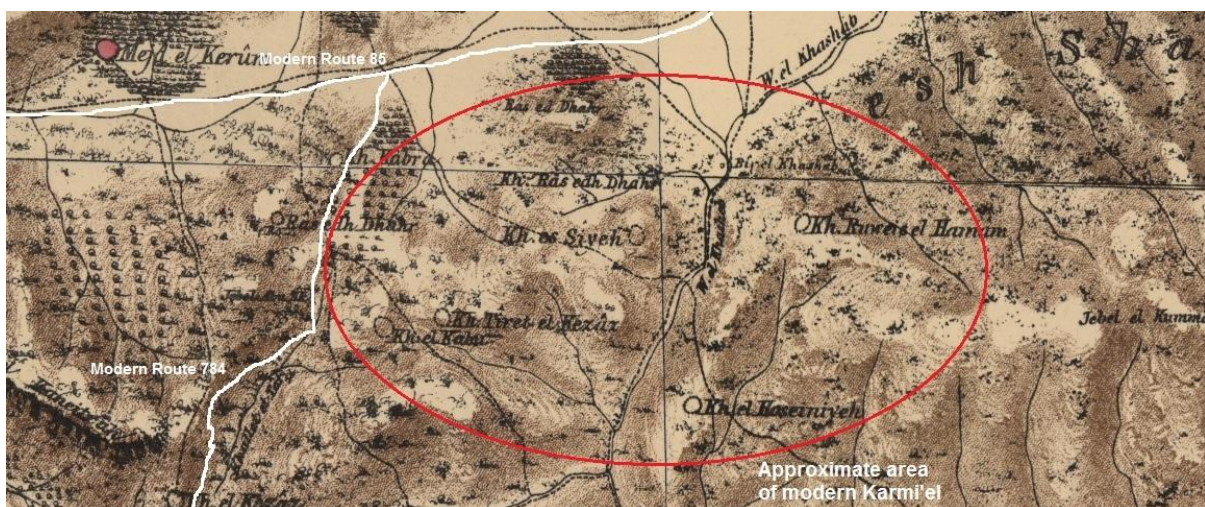


Is Karmiel a Christian city?

There are a lot of unknown, unmarked, small, unremarkable archaeological sites in and around Karmiel. You could look at them all in a day. So I had thought this would be a short blog post. But it turns out that the emerging history of Byzantine monasticism in the western Galilee takes some researching.

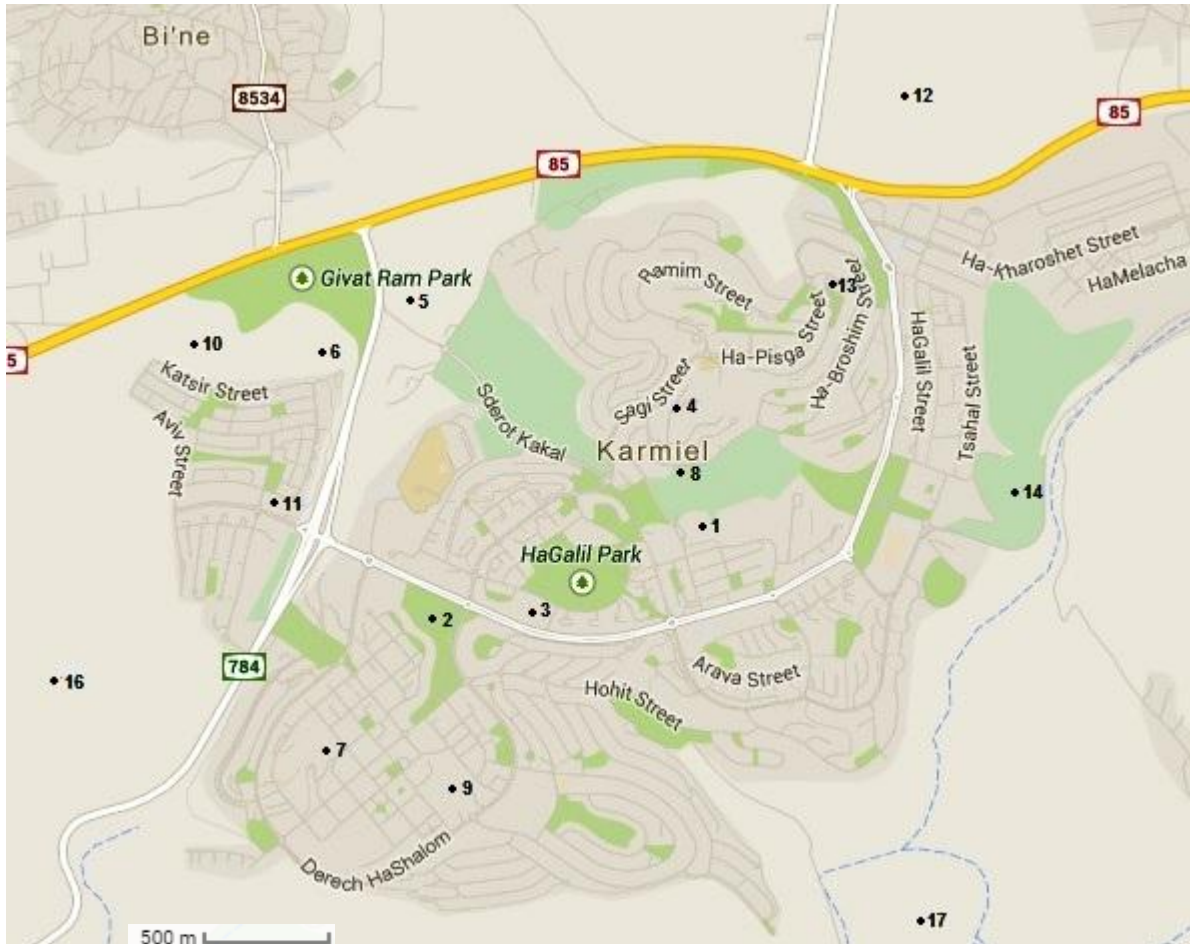
Well, having grabbed your attention – no, Karmiel is not a Christian city. I am not going to get into modern politics in this blog, but suffice to say that there is dispute over the land which the state of Israel earmarked for Karmi'el, a new city established in 1964 as a development town, and today a growing town, with Arabs today beginning to move into what was initially very-much a strategically-placed Jewish development town – even today [Karmiel municipality's website](#) makes no bones about it. However that dispute is over land ownership, and the fairness of the state taking private land for state use, an issue the world over. What it is not about (with the exception of the Bedouin settlement of Ramya – of which more later) is population displacement, since there were no settlements on the land which became Karmiel. No Christian settlements. No Muslim settlements. Correct?

Well it is correct for the last several centuries. But what many people living in the area don't know is that this was not always the case. Karmiel is in fact built over a large number of rocky limestone and dolomite hills separated by small valleys in the Shagor range on the edge of the Beit HaKerem valley, almost all of which had churches and monasteries in Byzantine times (6th century CE). Most of the sites were not occupied after the Byzantine period, although some have evidence of early Islamic period occupation (7th-8th centuries CE), the Crusader and Mamluk periods (13th-14th centuries CE) and the early Ottoman period (15th-17th centuries CE). None were occupied in modern times, and indeed the famous 1877 Palestine Exploration Fund map of the Survey of Western Palestine shows only a series of places marked "Kh" for Khirbet (خراب), the Arabic equivalent to the Hebrew Chorva (חורבה), usually rendered Horva or Horvat in English. Apart from marking the various ruins, many of which I will write about, the map also shows Râs edh-Dhahr, known today as Mount Karmi. I will refer to this survey as the PEF survey.



I had hoped to get this post out a week ago in honour of Christmas, but it proved to be a much larger subject than I had realised, and necessitated much research. But here goes, a little late, my post in honour of Christmas, devoted to churches – well mostly!

Below is a map of modern Karmiel showing all the sites in this article.



Key to map

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Horvat Bata (Khirbet Sih, Siyeh) | 9. Site of unrecognised Bedouin village of Ramya (the surrounding streets are planned but have not been built yet) |
| 2. Horvat Qav (Khirbet el-Qabu) | 10. Horvat Midrasa (Khirbet el-Madrassa, Râs ed-Dweir) |
| 3. Horvat Zaggag (Khirbet el-Qazaz) | 11. Horvat `Amran |
| 4. Horvat Kenes (Khirbet el-Kanayis, Kanissa) | 12. Givat Zakif (Jalamat en Nuhf) |
| 5. Unknown hilltop site | 13. Horvat Zohara (Khirbet et-Thahar) |
| 6. Khirbet el-Qabra (al-Kabra) | 14. Horvat Rahaz |
| 7. Iron Age 1 Site | 16. Mount Karmi |
| 8. Remains of a small monastery | 17. Horvat Pahir |

Byzantine times

Before the founding of Karmiel, at least eight Christian Byzantine sites existed which were located within what would eventually be the municipal limits of the town. In addition to these, there were some smaller sites and burial caves that were situated mainly in the Sagi neighbourhood. Victor Guérin (1821-1891), the French intellectual, explorer and amateur archaeologist, visited some of these sites in 1860 – there were so many sites that he was unlikely to have stopped at every one during the single day of surveying he devoted to the Beit HaKerem valley. In addition, as mentioned, a number of these sites are marked on Sheets III-VI of the Palestine Exploration Fund's map of 1877 of the Survey of Western Palestine and it is likely that the survey team visited some of them. These sites form one of the densest concentrations of Christian sites, almost unparalleled in the western Galilee, even though the area was inhabited by Christians during the Byzantine period.

During the first half of the 5th century CE, new settlements, mainly villages but also some monasteries, began to appear in Western Galilee. Monasticism in Western Galilee was clearly a widespread phenomenon. Yet, unlike other monastic centres, that around what is now Karmiel remains obscure: the region is not mentioned in the New Testament and there were no holy places to attract pilgrims or church officials. These monasteries apparently failed to produce any known chroniclers, scribes, theologians, great teachers or intellectuals. Nevertheless, during the Byzantine period there was great prosperity in the then densely populated Western Galilee region, with rural communities whose livelihood was mainly based on production of oil and wine. The monasteries would have taken a lead in the economic life of the villages, and helped the rural community to exploit the land. Monasteries were not isolated but close to villages; they were often small and included agricultural industries that would have produced products in commercial quantities, beyond the needs of the monastic communities.

Legislation enacted from the time of Roman emperor, Theodosius I (4th century CE), to the time of emperor Justinian (6th century CE) granted the Church exemptions, credits and preferences that strengthened its position and status in both rural and city areas, and encouraged lay people to join the clergy. There was imperial encouragement for the building of monasteries, especially in the countryside, and the Church itself encouraged monks to dwell in the countryside, perhaps explaining the large size of the distribution of monasteries in rural Galilee dating to this time.

Also important was legislation enacted by emperor Arcadius, from 398, giving legal ownership on *agri deserti* – uncultivated lands that were private property of the imperial court – to farmers that made the soil fertile. This may have influenced the spread of monasteries in rural areas, perhaps motivating villagers to initiate their foundation in unused lands around their villages.

But economic and geo-political changes around the Mediterranean during these centuries also may have had an influence. During the fifth and sixth centuries, vast quantities of oil and wine from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean were exported to consumers in the west. It is thought that the monasteries around what is now Karmiel took part in this growing production.

The life associated with the monasteries and surrounding villages came to an end when most of these Byzantine sites were destroyed in the 7th century CE during the Persian and Arab conquests.

Modern times

In the two decades before the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, many years prior to the founding of Karmiel, some of the hills on which the town was subsequently established were used as stone quarries that left the landscape damaged and scarred. The area of these old quarries was harnessed in developing the beautiful Galilee Park in Karmiel. Zvi Gal, editor of the Archaeological Survey of Israel, has written that by preserving the old quarries as a public park, town planners “created an absurdity where it was preferred to preserve the destruction that the modern quarries caused to the regional landscape rather than invest in preserving the cultural heritage.” Gal suggests that this approach may have arisen directly or indirectly from the desire to avoid preserving archaeological sites because of the financial investment entailed. With the exception of one site which is preserved within a park and signposted (Horvat Qav) and one site which is preserved but signposted as a memorial lookout (Mitzpor Shai) rather than an archaeological site (Horvat Zaggag), the sites are unsigned, relatively inaccessible and unmaintained. Though some have been excavated, others have been covered over or even damaged and destroyed. Thus it has been suggested that Karmiel is missing a trick here. In a 2012 paper presented at the 2nd Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference in Corfu, three researchers at the Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee, including the prestigious archaeologist, Mordechai Aviam, posited the use of the unique local monastic heritage of the area as a catalyst for tourism development in and around Karmiel.

Documents in the archives of the Antiquities Authority show that, prior to the founding of Karmiel in 1964, meetings were held between representatives of the Department of Antiquities and the Ministry of Construction and Housing in order to coordinate development plans. However, construction ran on apace, resulting in damage to some sites and the complete destruction of two: Khirbet et-Dhahr (in the Sagi neighbourhood) and Horvat Rahaz (the site of the Alon Park, on the east of the town). At the same time, an archaeological excavation was carried out at Horvat Bata and the remains incorporated into a park (see below). Nothing happened until 1984, when an archaeological survey was conducted, as a result of which, Horvat Bata, Horvat Zaggag and Horvat Qav were incorporated into the town’s master plan as protected antiquity sites that should not be touched. Nevertheless, nothing has yet been decided what to do with them, and the other sites were not granted similar status or their value assessed until the 1990s, when the current wave of development began in Karmiel. Because the development plans had been approved years previously, the Antiquities Authority gave them the go-ahead on condition that salvage excavations were performed prior to construction, and some minor initiatives were undertaken to ensure the preservation of a number of small sites, some with more success than others.

The sites: Horvat Bata (Khirbet Sih, es-Siyeh)



Figure 1 Piles of stones mark the various buildings of the village on top of Horvat Bata.

In the PEF survey the site is named as Kh. es-Siyeh, but the full Arabic name was Bat es-Siyeh, from which the modern Hebrew name of Bata, meaning scrubland, arises. The PEF survey noted "Heaps of small stones, foundations, and cisterns" against the site.

Although there was much destruction of sites both due to quarrying prior to the

establishment of Karmiel, and during its establishment in 1964, there was an understanding in principal between the Department of Antiquities and the Ministry of Construction and Housing that archaeological excavations would be carried out. But in practice, as I explained, this understanding was often outpaced by events on the ground. Nevertheless an archaeological excavation by Yeivin in the 1980s, in which local school children participated, was begun at Horvat Bata, within the centre of modern Karmiel, and continued for several years during the 1970s. It uncovered the remains of a large village of the 4th-



Figure 2 The village church, Horvat Bata, when newly excavated (Photo: Yeivin 1991)

7th centuries CE, including a large village church with mosaics, on the hill top, which may have been a "mother" church for the other settlements nearby. Horvat Bata is the only known Byzantine village in Galilee, if not Israel, which was surrounded by a defensive wall. Among the dwellings, a pottery kiln was found on the eastern side of the village, an oil press in its centre, some cisterns and a large reservoir. Not much could be seen beneath the winter herbage when I visited in December 2014. A summer trip, when the earth is again bare, will no doubt reveal more.



Figure 3 This structure may have been a quarry, although the mixture of plaster and broken ceramic visible on parts (inset) may indicate a reservoir.



Figure 4 This rock may have been part of the oil press, used to collect and funnel the oil.

At the bottom of the hill, attached to the village wall, a second more modest church was found, decorated with limestone chancel screens incorporating crosses. The rooms around it, visible today, include an oil press, which helped its identification as a monastery, rather than a simple church.



Figure 5 The monastery, Horvat Bata, when newly excavated (Photo: Aviam)

Even though the remains that were uncovered were impressive and quite well preserved, neither their conservation nor the idea of integrating them into the plans for the surrounding development were pursued, and today the site stands wild and unkempt within a wider area of park, semi-park and woodland. Nevertheless one can see more of the monastery today than one can the church atop the hill.



Figure 6 General view of the monastery with two oil press rooms with vats sunken in the floor (left and inset).





Figure 8 Left: Limestone column in the monastery.

On the south side of the hill, overlooking the monastery, is a large cistern with its roof caved in, which was probably used as one of the sources for water for the village and monastery.



Figure 7 Cistern overlooking the monastery.

Another eleven churches and chapels were identified near the village, of which six have been excavated. Six of them were identified as belonging to monasteries. This is an unusual phenomenon in the archaeological landscape of late antique Palestine, similar only to some sites in Trans-Jordan and in north-west Syria, around the city of Aleppo. In the excavated sites of Karmiel, coloured mosaic floors were uncovered, some with Greek Inscriptions.

Horvat Kenes (Khirbet el-Kanayis, Kanissa)

In what is now the Sagi Neighbourhood of Karmiel, there were a number of small sites and burial caves, of which Horvat Kenes, on a hill north of Horvat Bata, is one. Megadim School was constructed there and, in the midst of the school and other community buildings, the hill's summit was the site of a salvage excavation that was carried out for the Israel Antiquities Authority in 1993 by Dr Mordechai (Motti) Aviam, uncovering a large church (25 x 50 metres) which was built directly on the bedrock, with rock-cut foundations and mosaic floors. The central nave was paved in white and red stone pavers, with the two isles paved with colourful mosaics in geometric design. There were six Greek inscriptions on the pavement of the church. To the south, adjacent to the church there was a small chapel, paved with mosaic and a small cross-shape baptistery in front of its apse.



Figure 9 The church at Horvat Kenes (Photo: Aviam).

Also in 1993, Lea Porat excavated two squares around the church, in order to determine if the church was part of a village or limited to a section of a monastery. She concluded in her final report that: "...it appears that the church was an isolated structure in the area."

The Antiquities Authority denied the school permission to expand into the site and suggested it be integrated into the campus: the site was in a fine state of preservation with high quality mosaics in situ. However no funding was allocated for the completion of the excavation and the site's conservation, let alone the suggested development and the ancient building is currently covered



Figure 10 Details of mosaics uncovered at Horvat Kenes (Photos: Aviam).

over with earth. At my visit, because of winter growth of herbage, nothing was visible in any event, and a summer return-trip will enable me to see what else remains that hasn't been covered over with earth. The site is unmarked, and probably un-noticed by passers-by.



Figure 11 Tomb found under the floor of the church at Horvat Kenes on excavation (Photo: Aviam).



Figure 12 Horvat Kenes today: Megadim school, with the ancient church buried beneath earth on top of the small hill to the left.

Remains of a small monastery

South of the church at Horvat Kenes, the remains of another small monastery, one of a number of small sites and burial caves in the Sagi neighbourhood, was originally included in one of the lots slated for construction. However, the Antiquities Authority argued that the site was well preserved and probably included mosaic floors, persuading the Ministry of Housing to modify the designation of the lot where the monastery is located, changing it to an open public area.

Today the site appears as a typical piece of urban waste-land, flat and gravelled, with parts of the bed rock visible. It could be an informal parking lot, though there is no evidence it is used as such! The area has been kept clear of vegetation, and the public uses it as a short cut, but nothing obvious is visible of the monastery, other than a tiny fragment of rapidly-decaying plain mosaic. Knowing the site was a monastery, one can perhaps make out the shape of the foundations, visible on the surface. It remains to be seen whether the Ministry of Housing's thoughtful act saved the monastery: none of the development ideas have been taken forward, and no archaeological excavation has taken place.



Figure 13 General view of the site, which at first site appears as empty scrub. The hill immediately behind the trees is Horvat Bata.



Figure 14 A line of foundation stones (left) and a small remnant of plain mosaic (right) is all that is visible today.

Horvat Zaggag (Khirbet el-Qazaz)

Zaggag means glazier, which is a translation of the Arabic, Qazaz; the name was because of the large number of glass fragments associated with the site, possibly indicating the existence of a glass factory there. This site is located atop a small, isolated hill just west of Horvat Bata, where it occupies about ¼ acre. Byzantine period pottery, coloured tesserae, roof tiles and a winepress were found here and, in 2005, an excavation by Mordechai Aviam on behalf of the Institute for Galilean Archaeology revealed a small chapel with an inner apse on the summit of the hill, together with three rooms, one of which was an oil press. Aviam's team included Arab high school pupils from Arabe and students of the Megadim school in Karmiel; they reconstructed several rooms on the south side, the oil press on the north side, and the adjacent chapel. The apse of the chapel was paved with a colourful mosaic floor in the design of a conch shell, though this is not visible today.



Figure 15 Today, although Horvat Zaggag is looked after and accessible, the path up the hill is signposted "Mitzpe Shai" (Shai's lookout), as there is a small memorial at the top in remembrance of a soldier, Shai Ashkenazi. There are no sign boards indicating or interpreting the archaeology.

The small size of the site, the rooms around the chapel and the agricultural installations all pointed to a clear identification of the site as a monastery.



Figure 17 The oil press at Horvat Zaggag at excavation (Photo: Aviam)

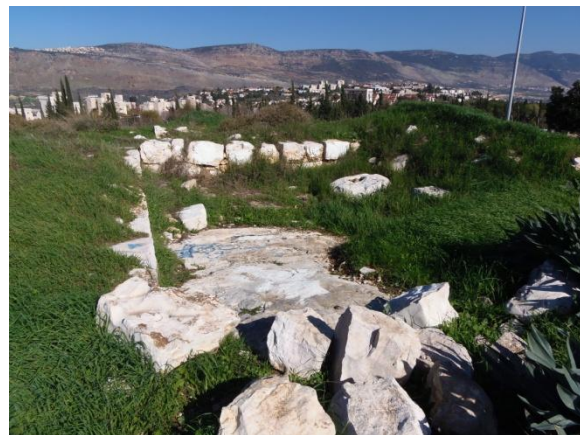


Figure 16 The oil press today.



Figure 18 The base of a wine press: the square treading floor, cut into the rock, leads to a collecting pit which is now covered with weeds.

Horvat Qav (Khirbet el-Qabu)

This site is located on a small hill a little west of Horvat Zaggag, and was severely damaged during quarrying in the 1960s. One of Karmiel's main arteries, Nasiei Israel Boulevard, was planned to extend across the outer precincts of Horbat Qav. In addition, the Ministry of Construction and Housing wanted to lay out a large public park across the site, remodelling the landscape of the hill without any account being taken of the antiquities, but the Antiquities Authority made its approval conditional on carrying out salvage excavations at the site and integrating the archaeology as a central component of the planned park. The Ministry agreed to shoulder the responsibility for the planning and the financial burden.

Thus two salvage excavations were conducted along a small part of the site in the 1990s (Gurin and Stern). The first, on the northern edge of the site, revealed the remains of a building that had been destroyed in a fire, and a hoard of 50 gold coins was discovered in an oil lamp retrieved from between the stone pavers in the courtyard.



Figure 20 Underneath the floor of one of the structures, in the area of grass north of the church, this oil was found, containing 50 Byzantine gold coins. The latest coin is dated to 641-668 during the reign of Constantine II.

7th century CE during Persian and Arab rule, new residents occupied the structures, and the site was used for industrial purposes including a ceramics factory. The hoard of coins bears testimony to the site's continued use.

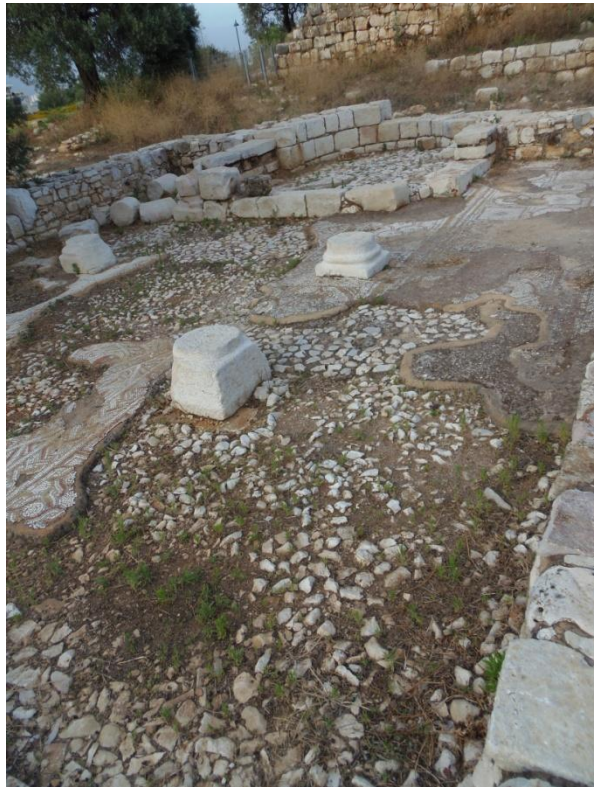


Figure 19 The church at Horvat Qav.

The hoard was dated to 663 CE at the earliest, the Early Islamic.

The second excavation, on the top of the hill, uncovered a small church containing the remains of a mosaic floor, with a small baptismal chapel next to it together with a further side chapel. The church was surrounded by rooms, and there was a very large winepress attached to the north side. Two heavy stones found were probably part of an oil press, although they were not *in situ*. It is highly likely that this range of buildings belonged to a monastery and associated farm but, since the site as a whole was badly damaged, it cannot be said for certain whether the entire complex was part of the monastery.

After this and other sites were destroyed in the



Figure 21 The treading floor of the wine press, with the collecting pit beyond, to which the floor slopes.

During the Ottoman period (16th to 20th centuries CE), an arched structure was built on top of the Byzantine ruins, giving the site its name – “the arched basement” (Khirbet el-Qabu). Although “Kav” is also a Hebrew word, used in the Mishna for a unit of capacity of about 1.3 litres, its use here is simply a transliteration of the Arabic name for the site. This “basement”, though now above the ground level, was an underground storage room. It is a typical Ottoman-era structure found in many Galilee sites, and was reconstructed during the excavations.



Figure 22 The wine collecting pit, with access stairs.

Further excavations were carried out in 2000, when the surrounding Rabin Park was constructed, showcasing the ancient remains. The Ottoman-era structure is fenced off, and although there are interpretive information boards, these are worn out and illegible. The site is apparently maintained by the HaReut school of Karmiel.



Figure 23 Mosaic floor in the apse of the church.



Figure 24 Mosaic floor of the nave of the church.



Figure 25 One of a pair of oil press stones, found not *in situ*.



Figure 26 The Ottoman-era storage structure reused masonry from earlier structures.



Figure 27 The interior of the Ottoman-era storage structure , looking towards its main entrance in the east. There is a side entrance on the left.

Horvat al-Kabra (Khirbet el-Qabra)

The site is located atop an isolated hill at the western fringes of Karmiel, on the northern edge of the Givat Ram neighbourhood. The PEF survey shows the site as Kh. Kabra. The site's name may be a form of Arabic word Kabr, meaning Great.



Figure 28 Horvat Al-Qabra, at the northern edge of the Givat Ram neighbourhood of Karmiel, with the Matlul-Zurim cliffs over the Beit Hakerem valley behind.



Figure 29 A large, collapsed cave on the east of Horvat Qabra, possible dwelling cave or monastic cell. Clearly the cave is still occupied by vagrants!



Figure 30 From top left, clockwise: a winepress pit; general view of the hill and the remains of foundations; large ashlars; tesserae and ceramics; one of several cisterns; the base of a building with an apparent threshold carved into the bedrock.

In 2001, a team led by Edna Stern carried out a salvage excavation of the site. They found numerous building remains, as well as rock-cut tombs, agricultural installations and many water cisterns on the hill and along its edges, attesting to the extensive occupation of the site. Pottery found at the site dates from the Byzantine and Mamluk periods, and coloured mosaic tesserae were found between the foundations of walls, together with roof tiles. Much of the masonry has been taken and reused in Arab times. Traces of a public building, which may have formed a church and a winepress, have been found here, indicating a possible monastery.

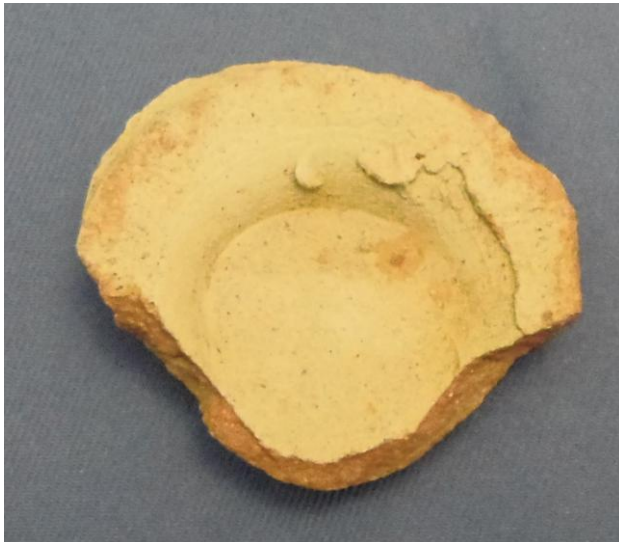


Figure 31 The base of an earthenware jar, found by me at Horvat Qabra, December 2014.

A rock-cut tomb on the southern slope of Horvat Qabra, thought to be of the Byzantine era, is dedicated as the tombs of Rabbi Eliezer Hakappar and his son Bar Kappara, despite the evidence of the monastery on the hill. Rabbi Eliezer Hakappar was among scholars of the fifth generation of *Tanna'im* (70-200 CE) whose views were recorded in the Mishna. He was a friend of Yehuda Hannasi, who was head of the Sanhedrin and compiler of the Mishna. He was known for his love of the Land of Israel and his love of peace. His son, Shimon Bar Kappara, was a student of Yehuda Hannasi, and was of the first generation of the *Amorai'm*, the scholars who followed the

Tanna'im.



Figure 32 The tomb of Rabbi Eliezer Hakappar and his son Bar Kappara; now regularly visited; there was evidence of recently-written prayers left in the cracks in the rock.



Figure 33 Mount Karmi (Râs edh-Dhahr) from Horvat Qabra.

Horvat Midrasa (Khirbet el-Madrasa, Râs ed-Dweir)

This is a small site on top of an isolated hill, half a kilometre west of Khirbet el-Qabra. An oil press was found in the ruins on its southern side, and coloured mosaic tesserae and roof tiles were collected on the surface. The Arabic work *madrasa* is an educational institution: It is not known why this site was called by this name. *Midrasa* is a transliteration into Hebrew, notwithstanding the equivalent word in Hebrew, “*medrash*.”

However its alternate name in Arabic, ‘*Dweir*,’ means monastery. It is possible the monastery was also a teaching institution.

The PEF survey shows the adjacent site, Khirbet el-Qabra, as well as the villages of Majd al-Krum, el Ba’neh and Deir el-Asad, but omits Khirbet el-Madrasa. However it has been noted by scholars that the survey was not fully comprehensive; for instance Guérin was only able to visit some of the sites in the area in 1860 - there were so many of them that he was probably unable to stop at each one during the single day of surveying he records.

During the 1930s and 1940s several stone quarries operated around what would become Karmiel. One of these cut away the northern



Figure 34 Horvat Midrasa from Horvat Qabra.

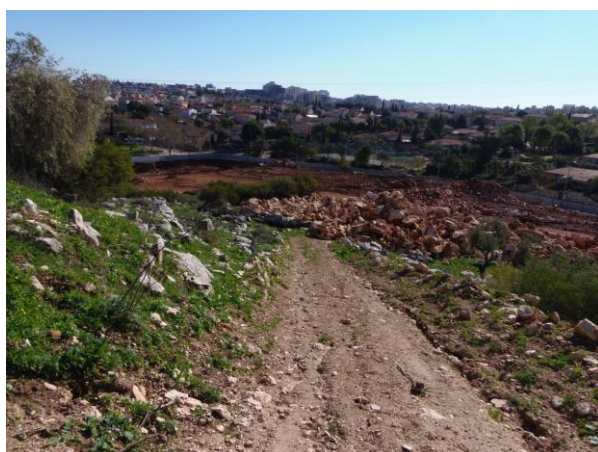


Figure 36 Looking south from Horvat Midrasa to the Givat Ram neighbourhood of Karmiel, you can see the earthworks associated with the new railway.



Figure 35 The north side of Horvat Midrasa was quarried in the 1930s, and has now been further cut away for the Karmiel-Acco railway.

hillside of Horvat Midrasa, leaving a cliff visible from the main Acco-Karmiel road; this has now been deepened with the construction of the new Acco-Karmiel railway. Horvat Midrasa is yet to

be excavated.

At the time of my visit, Horvat Midrasa was fenced off because of massive earthworks

associated with the construction of the Akko-Karmiel railway to its north; access and other works are ripping up the countryside between Horvat Midrasa and Horvat Qabra.



Figure 39 A storage pit at the foot of the south side of Horvat Midrasa, cordoned off from the construction work (left); its interior may be descended on steps along the inside of the retaining wall (right).



Figure 38 Terraces and building walls are in evidence near the top of the hill.

There are a number of cisterns and other structures suggesting a monastery, as well as a cross cut into a stone. A crypt or suite of underground store rooms can be found on the north side of the top of the hill.



Figure 37 A cistern at the top of Horvat Midrasa.



Figure 40 At first glance another cistern with fig trees growing in it (top left, moving clockwise), this is in fact a carefully carved out underground crypt or store room complex; steps leading into the sunken courtyard; two chambers; the passageway between them, and one of three doorways leading into the complex from the sunken courtyard.



Figure 41 On the south side of the top of the hill is what looks like a cistern head (top left) over a collapsed cave, which can be entered from below (top right). Moving clockwise: inside is an oil press stone and other related masonry. There are also wall paintings mostly with Arabic inscriptions, of unknown but presumed modern date, on the walls, some with mixed religious imagery.



Figure 42 Panorama east from Horvat Midrasa: Horvat el-Qabra is in the centre with Karmiel behind it and to the right; the new Akko-Karmiel railway is being constructed along the Beit Hakerem valley, to the left, with Ba'neh to its left.

Giv'at Zakif

Givat Zakif is a tall, isolated hill in the centre of the Bet HaKerem Valley, north of the main Karmiel-Tzfat road, north of Karmiel, and west of Nahef. During a survey of the solid structure on the hilltop, pottery from the Byzantine period was found, together with roof tiles and mosaic tesserae. The masonry has mostly been stripped in past centuries, leaving only the foundations; nevertheless there is a clear apse to the east, and the site is thought to represent that of a monastery. I will visit on a future trip.

Horvat Zohara (Khirbet et-Dhahr/Thahar) & Horvat Rahaz

These two sites, in the area of the original town of Karmiel, were completely destroyed during its construction (see above). Horvat Zohara was situated near what is now Bnei Brit Square to the eastern side of the Sagi and Megadim neighbourhoods, part of it is the Wilmersdorfer Park.

Horvat Rahaz was situated near where the Alon park is now situated. The Rayman Family Youth Club now sits on the site of Horvat Rahaz, which was completely destroyed during construction.



Figure 44 Site of Horbat Zohara.



Figure 43 Site of Horvat Rahaz.

Iron Age I Site

In addition to these Christian Byzantine sites there existed, in the Ramat Rabin quarter in the south of the town, a small and remarkable site that dated to the Iron Age I (prior to 1,000 BCE), and was in use by local Bedouin who still claim rights to their unrecognised village of Ramya, now surrounded by Karmiel's latest building development.



Figure 45 Pictures of the site prior to development: looking south to the seasonal pond (left) and looking north (right) (Pictures: Gal).

The manner in which the Iron Age site was treated raises serious questions since this was an uniquely important site worthy of preservation, being one of the few Iron Age I sites located in this part of the Lower Galilee. However it was not identified as such in Karmiel's master plan, and the building plans for the site were presented retrospectively to the Antiquities Authority based on permits issued years earlier. In view of this the Antiquities Authority and the Ministry of Construction and Housing agreed to avoid the destruction of the site by covering it with soil, after a partial salvage excavation was conducted in order to document some of the remains.

Even after the first season of excavations it became clear that the site, located at the foot of a rocky outcrop, was better preserved than expected. It was also well connected to its historic surroundings. To its east a small valley extended in which ancient small tracts were cultivated until recent times by the Bedouin. Each winter, the run-off water accumulated in a pond in the middle of the valley that was used by both man and animals continuously from antiquity. The site represented a virgin reflection of the appearance of the region's landscape in antiquity. However this was realised too late and, though not destroyed completely, it was covered over with fill, as previously agreed, to a height of eight metres. The backdrop of the original surrounding landscape was destroyed, however: the hill was removed and a school and community facilities were built in its place, and a new neighbourhood was built in the small valley, and the run-off pond filled in. Today there are paved parking lots associated with the school on top of the infill.



Figure 46 The site today, covered to a depth of 6 metres, with the Ofek and Ramat Rabin schools and community centres on top.



Figure 47 Looking down to the remains of the site of the seasonal pond from the Ofek and Ramat Rabin schools and community centres.

Bedouin village of Ramya

Ramya is a small unrecognised Bedouin village, now surrounded by growing neighbourhoods in Karmiel. It comprises tin shacks and other semi-permanent structures, along with grazing and smallholding land. The village does not appear on the Palestine Exploration Fund map of the Survey of Western Palestine, but the residents claim they have been there for generations, and that their land was expropriated by the state in 1976. In 1995, Ramya residents signed an agreement with the

Israel Land Authority and the local municipality, which allocated thirty two-family plots, averaging 750 square meters each, for Ramya

residents in accordance with approved building plans. They also were promised 15 dunams of land for agricultural purposes and another 15 developed plots in the Beit HaKerem valley. But Ramya residents claim that the plots were only prepared for construction in 2003, eight years after the deal



Figure 49 Ramya could become integrated as an urban farm as well as a living Bedouin village, were it not for the interests of landowners, contractors and the local council.



Figure 48 Ramya, on the southern fringes of an expanding Karmiel.

was signed, and that their families have grown since then. They also claim the authority unilaterally determined the criteria for allocating land, which they say is being distributed unequally. A small number of plots allocated have nevertheless been developed.

The state claims it has upheld all of its obligations toward the Ramya residents. The Knesset Internal Affairs and Environment Committee discussed the issue at the beginning of 2014, following protests in Karmiel. The matter has been through the courts, and is awaiting a Supreme Court decision as of 2014.

Bibliography

Since there is no information on the ground at any of the sites except Horvat Qav, I am indebted to the following archaeological papers, from which you will see that the main protagonists in excavating the ancient churches and monasteries of the western Galilee are archaeologist, Dr Mordechai Aviam, and Dr Jacob Ashkenazi, an academic who specialises in early Christianity and monasticism and society in late antiquity, both of Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee.

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