

Shiloh in the Transition from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Period

Reut Livyatan Ben-Arie

Abstract

As with many sites in the country, the change in the character of Shiloh in the transition from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period did not occur immediately with the Muslim occupation. From the analysis of the process with respect to various elements of the site, including churches, dwellings and industrial facilities, it is evident that most of the change occurred in the Abbasid period, after the earthquake of 749 CE. For example, the churches were restored and adapted to the new rules after the occupation but did not resume functioning after the earthquake. Even the complex winepresses and probably the dwellings on the mound remained in use during the Umayyad period. After the earthquake the location of the homes changed, commercial oil presses were established, and a monumental mosque – Jāmi‘ al-Sittīn – was built. Clearly, the Christian community grew progressively weaker throughout the Umayyad period and was unable to rehabilitate itself after the earthquake, while the Muslim community grew stronger, becoming dominant in the Abbasid period.

Keywords: archaeology, Shiloh, Byzantine period, Umayyad period, Abbasid period, churches, winepresses

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Introduction

Shiloh flourished in the Byzantine period. Written evidence of this is provided by Church fathers and pilgrims who lived early in the period (Schwartz and Shemesh 2018: 188–191), by the depiction of Shiloh on the Madaba map and by the many finds at the site – residential buildings, four churches, a baptistry, three winepresses, a fortified building and a pottery kiln, all from the Byzantine period.¹ Historical sources indicate that toward the end of the Byzantine period, the identity of biblical Shiloh was forgotten and its location was mistakenly identified elsewhere (Schwartz and Shemesh 2018: 191). Nevertheless, the excavation finds show that the Byzantine settlement continued into the Umayyad period with no significant change in its character: the churches remained in place, the winemaking industry continued, and modifications to residential buildings attest to continuity and development. Although there is evidence of the mid-seventh-century conquest and modifications were made to the churches at the beginning of Islamic rule, significant changes in the settlement's character only emerge at the end of the Umayyad period, and they probably occurred in the wake of an earthquake that struck the country in 749 CE. We know of only one religious structure from the Abbasid period – Jāmi' al-Sittīn² – although the open-air mosque (*wali*) discovered during the Danish team's excavations may also date from this period (Andersen 1985: 76–77). However, there was evidently an increase in the number of domestic buildings during the Abbasid period, since a residential neighborhood was uncovered near the remains of the Northern Churches and all three churches were divided into housing units. This article addresses the process of change in the type of settlement at Shiloh during the transition from the Byzantine to the Islamic period as reflected in the archaeological finds.³

1 Two of the churches, some of the dwellings and one winepress were discovered in the Danish excavations (Andersen 1985). One of them was re-excavated by the Civil Administration's Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOA; Dadon 2012). Two additional churches were excavated by the SOA (Magen and Aharonovich 2012). The remaining finds were unearthed in the SOA's excavations in 2011–2018 and are still unpublished.

2 For a summary of the excavation of the building and research into its history, see Schwartz, Livyatan Ben-Arie and Reuven 2021.

3 The main points were stated in a lecture at the Judea and Samaria Research Conference held at Ariel University in June 2019. I would like to thank the SOA, Hanania Hizmi, for initiating and encouraging the research.

Shiloh was first excavated in the 1920s and 1930s by an archaeological expedition on behalf of the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, directed by Hans Kjaer (Andersen 1985: 75). The team excavated several areas on the tell and uncovered buildings on the plain south of it. The Danish excavations yielded finds from nearly all the layers identified at the site, from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. The site was later excavated in the 1980s by a team from Bar-Ilan University, directed by Israel Finkelstein (1993). The excavations concentrated on the earlier periods and uncovered meager finds from later periods. Subsequent excavations, directed by Ze'ev Yeivin, were conducted in the 1980s on the northern platform of the tell and at Jāmi' al-Sittīn south of the tell (Yeivin 1973: 158–162; Yeivin 1993). The excavations at Jāmi' al-Sittīn yielded later finds that contribute much to our understanding of the changing character of the site during the Islamic period (see below). In 1990, another excavation, directed by Michael Dadon, was conducted on behalf of the Staff Officer for Archaeology (SOA) in the basilica excavated previously by the Danes (Dadon 2012). In 1998, 2006 and 2007, Yitzhak Magen and Evgeny Aharonovich excavated the area near the southern foot of the tell and uncovered the Northern Churches and other important finds relevant to this article (see below; see also Magen and Aharonovich 2012). From 2010 to the present day, excavations have been carried out on behalf of the SOA in various parts of the site and finds are emerging from all periods of Shiloh's past. Finds from the periods under discussion here have been found at the top of the tell (Area O), on its southern and western slopes (Areas J, L, N) and in the plain south of the tell (Areas P, Q).

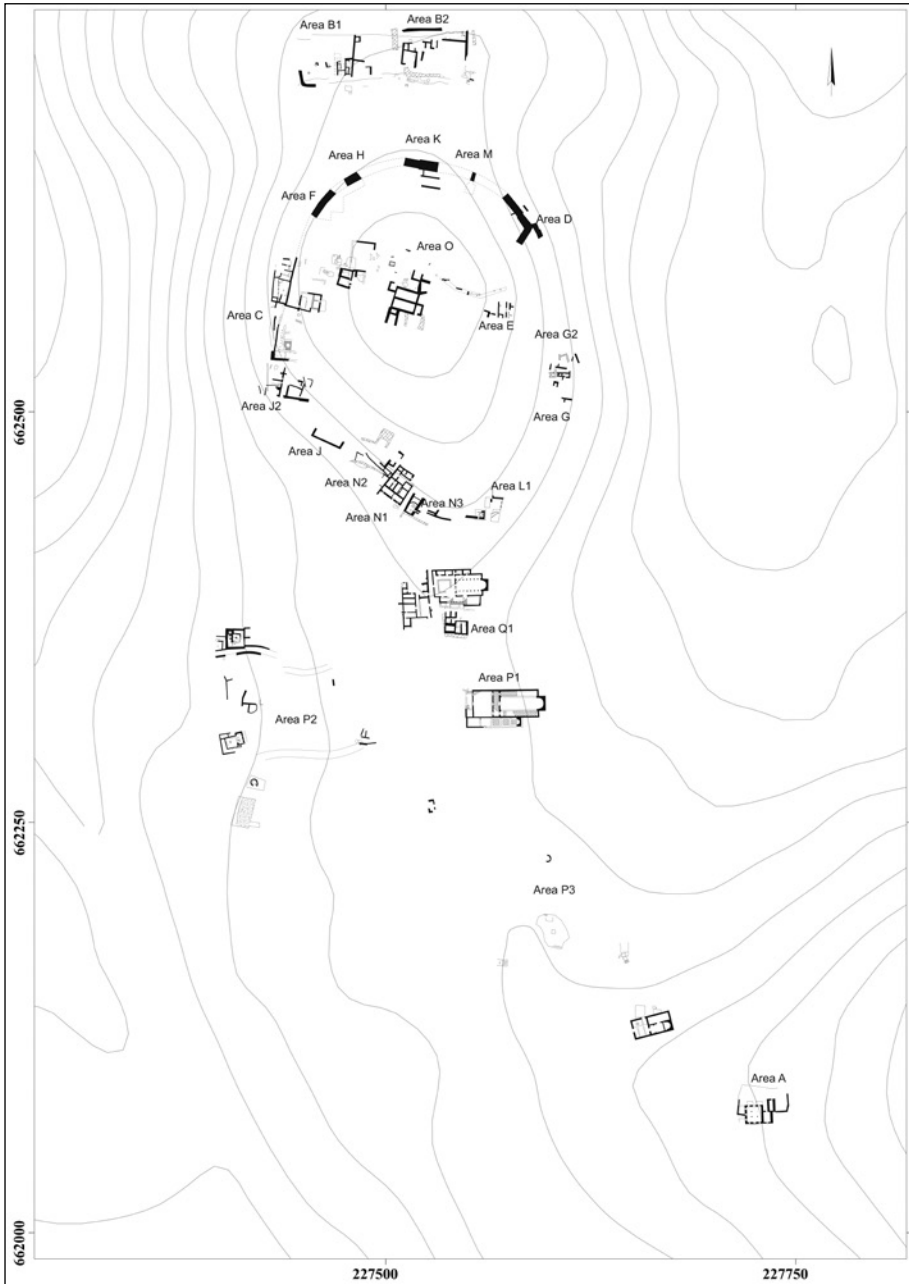


Figure 1: Map of the site (drawing and preparation for publication: Felix Portnov and Anna Harel)

Several aspects of the transition from the Byzantine period to the Early Islamic period have been discussed in the research literature. Many studies have examined the changes that occurred during this transition at a particular site or in a certain geographical area (e.g. Levy-Rubin 2006; Walmsley 2011; Taxel 2013b; Avni 2014). Others have examined the implications of the transition for religious communities of one kind or another (Shboul and Walmsley 1998; Holum and Lapin 2011). There are also studies of specific cultural features during this period, such as monasteries (Taxel 2013a), Greek inscriptions (Di Segni 2009) and the presence of figurative depictions in mosaics (Yuval-Hacham 2018). No comprehensive research has been carried out to date on the region of Samaria during this era, and the archaeological evidence from Shiloh can contribute greatly to our understanding of the transition process in the region.

Changes in the nature of a settlement and its population may be reflected in its material culture. In order to identify these changes, the finds from the Late Byzantine period at the site should be examined to determine whether the buildings continued to be used in the same way in the Islamic period, whether they changed in any way or, alternatively, whether they were abandoned altogether. The abandonment of buildings at the exact transition point between periods suggests a settlement break that may be related to violent occupation and destruction, whereas continuous, uninterrupted use indicates that the shift in the ruling power did not significantly affect settlement at the site. The appearance of buildings in places that were previously uninhabited may attest to changes in the site's boundaries and size, while changes in building styles are associated with a different occupational culture.

More significant cultural changes can be identified in religious structures. For example, if it can be proved that a church continued to be used for worship for a certain period of time, it follows that there was a continued Christian presence at the site. The appearance of a mosque at a certain time indicates a strengthening of the Muslim community. The simultaneous presence of mosques and churches indicates that two strong congregations – one Christian and one Muslim – coexisted, while the absence of such an overlap indicates that one religious community became extinct at a specific point in time, when two strong congregations were unable to coexist.

Industrial buildings are also indicative of their owners' culture, preferences and consumption habits, as well as attesting to the main industries. In the transition from the

Byzantine period to the Early Islamic period, the wine industry declined and the oil industry grew (Magen 2008: 258). Although the change did not occur suddenly and wine production did not completely disappear from the region, the shift is significantly prominent and is probably related to the fact that Muslims abstain from drinking wine for religious reasons. Therefore, the abandonment of winepresses and the emergence of oil presses may indicate a decline in the Christian and Jewish population and an increase in the Muslim population.

In light of the above, this article reviews continuity and change in dwellings, religious structures and industrial installations from the Late Byzantine, Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid periods found at Shiloh. It examines the dating of the buildings, the changes they underwent at various times and the appearance of new buildings in the Early Islamic period. This is followed by a proposed interpretation of those aspects that continued unchanged, those that changed and those that emerged for the first time in the Islamic period, in order to identify the changes undergone by the settlement during the transitions between the various periods.

Religious Buildings

There were three churches at the site in the Late Byzantine period: the later Northern Church, the Basilica and the Pilgrims' Church (see Fig. 1 above). Ancillary rooms discovered in each of these suggest, along with other evidence, that they were part of a monastery that was annexed to the village.⁴ The Pilgrims' Church was excavated by the Danish team in 1929 and published by Andersen in 1985. The church complex comprises numerous rooms that surround the north and west sides of a prayer hall (12.20×25.50 m; Andersen 1985: 61–75). The prayer hall and the two halls to its north were the most important sacred areas and had colorful mosaic floors, whereas the western rooms were paved with stone slabs or white mosaics.⁵ The northwest room contains a water cistern; to its north,

4 A "village-annexed monastery," according to Taxel's proposed classification (Taxel 2009: 195).

5 After the Danish excavation, a kind of reconstruction was built onto the eastern part of the church. The western part remained open and its remains are now scarcely discernible on the surface.

outside the church, is a large, rock-hewn basin that was also intended for water storage. The basin and cistern are connected by a pipe. Excavations in the western rooms yielded a layer of ash, and a collapse was discovered in the outside basin, attesting to destruction that the excavators attributed to the Muslim conquest. The destruction was dated to the mid-seventh century based on the most recent finds in the collapse – a Byzantine coin from 641–668 CE and an Umayyad coin found above the collapse (Andersen 1985: 75). Traces of a fire were also visible on the mosaics in the eastern part of the church, but since no layer of ash was discovered there, the church had evidently been cleaned and remained in use. Following the fire and the removal of the ashes, the depictions of animals in the mosaics were effaced, a phenomenon discovered in churches that continued to be used during the Islamic period (Yuval-Hacham 2018: 23–24; Fig. 2).⁶



Figure 2: Mosaic in the Pilgrims' Church (courtesy of the British Mandate Archive of the Israel Antiquities Authority)

6 The motives for effacing the figures may have been external, as suggested by Yuval Peleg and others who associate the phenomenon with the edict of Yazid II (Peleg 2012: 483), or they may have been internal, as maintained by Noa Yuval-Hacham, who attributes the phenomenon to an internal decision made by the Christian world (Yuval-Hacham 2018: 23–25). In either case, the figures were evidently effaced by members of the community, who attempted to replace the mosaic tesserae, albeit in a different order, to keep the pavement intact.

The Basilica was discovered in the Danish team's third excavation season (Andersen 1985: 49–55). Unfortunately, since the excavators' field logs are missing, the excavation publication could not be based on them. Instead it relies mainly on the preliminary survey conducted during the second excavation season. The Danes unearthed the narthex of the church and the prayer hall.⁷ Two excavation seasons were subsequently conducted by the SOA, the first in 1990, when the atrium and all the mosaics in it and in the nave were uncovered (Dadon 2012: 223–234), and the second in 2013, when a chapel, the atrium and additional rooms to the south and west of the church were excavated (directed by the current author, unpublished). Significantly, the presence of a chapel and a main prayer hall is characteristic of monastery churches, where the chapel was intended for monastic prayer. The monks' chapel is often long and narrow, with a rectangular or rounded apse at the end (Taxel 2009: 198). Two phases are evident in the Basilica chapel. In the first phase, although there is no architectural indication of the direction of prayer, the location of the mosaic pavement indicates that the eastern part of the room was left clear for liturgical furniture. In the second phase, a rounded apse was built on top of the mosaic. Based on analysis of the excavation finds from the three expeditions, three phases of architectural modifications can be reconstructed: the replacement of mosaics, the raising of floors and the effacing of figurative representations.⁸ Since the changes in the church between the first and the second phases occurred in the Byzantine period, they are beyond the scope of the current discussion and will be addressed elsewhere. By the end of the Byzantine period, the church compound was composed of a basilica prayer hall, a narthex, an atrium, a chapel and additional rooms to the south, west and north of the narthex (Fig. 3).

7 Andersen was unaware of a probe inserted by the expedition in 1935 beneath the church floors; a handwritten summary of the finds in the Israel Antiquities Authority Archives remains unpublished. Following the excavation, the narthex and prayer hall were reconstructed, while the apse remained outside the structure.

8 Dadon notes the different sections of the mosaics and proposes dividing them into different phases (Dadon 2015: 225–230). It is unclear on what basis the mosaic parts are attributed to one phase or another. Apparently, then, the only conclusion that can be drawn at this stage from the existence of sections of mosaic that do not fit together is that there were several phases in the paving of the church.

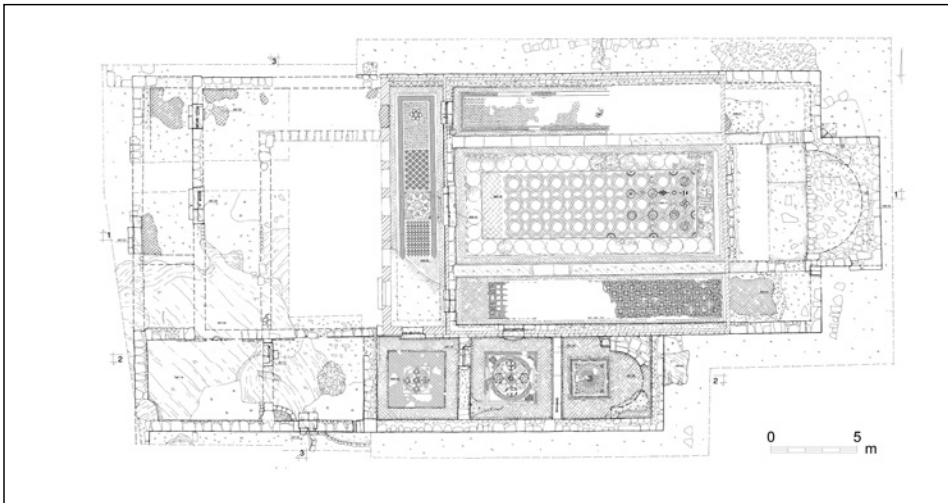


Figure 3: Plan of the Basilica (drawing: Felix Portnov)

Evidence of the destruction of the church in the seventh century was found in the nave and in the two rooms south of the atrium. Only the eastern part of the mosaic in the nave was preserved, and it retained traces of fire. The western part of the mosaic was destroyed, probably in the same event, and it was replaced with a plain mosaic with larger tesserae (Andersen 1985: 51). One of the rooms to the south of the atrium yielded a burnt layer dated by pottery to the seventh century, indicating that it should be attributed to the Muslim conquest.⁹ In addition to the pottery, inverted stone bowls and numerous glass vessels were discovered in the room, as were bronze vessels, many of which had been fused into one piece by the fierce fire, although fragments of a hanging bronze lamp were still identifiable. The room to the west was devoid of finds other than an iron skillet and two bronze lids that lay at its western end. On top of the floor and the metal vessels, collapsed mosaic chunks and plaster were discovered that probably came from a destroyed upper floor.

After the destruction in the seventh century, a few alterations were made to the

⁹ I am grateful to Yodan Fleitman for the pottery reading. Yodan is currently working on a full pottery report, to be published with the excavation report.

building and it continued to be used as a church. The faunal figures that had been in the nave mosaic were removed and the tesserae were replaced either randomly or to produce simple vegetal motifs (Peleg 2012: 485). In the two rooms south of the atrium, which had suffered from the devastating destruction, the floors were raised and the internal division was eliminated. The chamber that was created was apparently used for storage, given that numerous jars were found in it. This room and the church itself remained in use until their destruction in the mid-eighth century, probably in the earthquake in 749 CE. The devastating effect of the earthquake is most pronounced in the southern part of the building (Dadon 2012: 231). The type of jars found in the storage room is consistent with this date (Fig. 4).

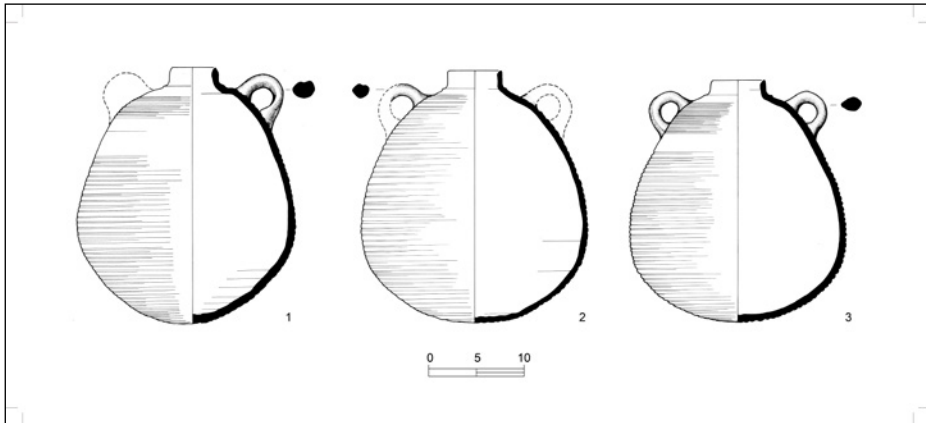


Figure 4: Umayyad jars (drawing: Mani Goodman; table: Anna Harel)

The later Northern Church was built in the sixth century on top of the remains of the previous Northern Church. The church contains an atrium surrounded by four side aisles and a basilican prayer hall. Ancillary rooms to the north and south of the church suggest that it was part of a monastery. This is also indicated by the presence of a fortified tower beside the complex (see below). To the southwest of the church is a baptistry that was built together with the earlier church but continued to be used alongside the later church (Fig. 5). Figures depicted on the mosaic of the nave were destroyed, probably under Umayyad rule. The excavators of the church therefore suggested that it continued to be used in the Umayyad period (Magen and Aharonovich 2012: 179–188).

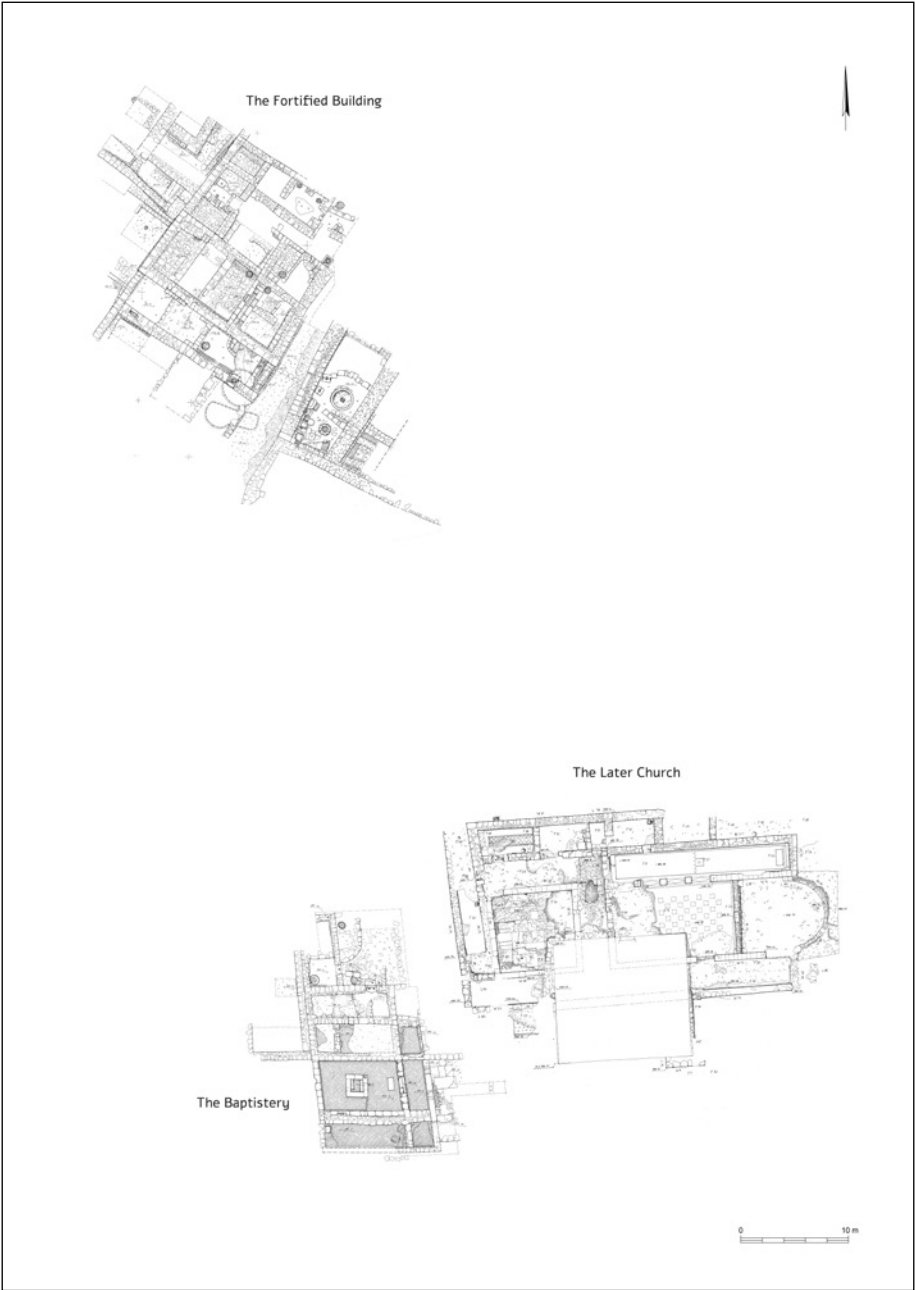


Figure 5: Plan of the later Northern Church, baptistery and fortified structure (drawing and preparation for publication: Felix Portnov and Anna Harel)

To summarize, two of the churches discovered in Shiloh provide evidence of destruction in the mid-seventh century, probably due to the Muslim conquest. However, there is no evidence of destruction in the Northern Church, which apparently continued to be used until the end of the Umayyad period.¹⁰ In those churches that were destroyed, the exterior of the church was either left in ruins or underwent architectural changes, while the prayer hall was cleaned and remained in use during the Umayyad period. In all three churches, the figures were effaced from the mosaics, a phenomenon familiar from other churches and synagogues in the Umayyad period in Eretz Israel and eastern Transjordan.¹¹ Some have linked the phenomenon to the religious zeal of the Umayyad caliphs Omar II and Yazid II (Peleg 2012: 491; and see references there to additional research in notes 5 and 6). Others are of the opinion that this resulted from an anti-figurative trend that developed in Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity (Yuval-Hacham 2018: 21–22). The Basilica was destroyed in an earthquake, probably in 749 CE. The other churches may also have been destroyed in the same earthquake, although there is no evidence for this. However, none of the three churches remained in use in the Abbasid period, when internal walls were built on top of the mosaic floors to form living quarters (below).

The first Muslim site of worship was built at Shiloh during the Abbasid period. The mosque, called *Jāmi' al-Sittīn* in the nineteenth century, was built south of the Pilgrims' Church, at the southern end of the site. It is mentioned in descriptions by late-nineteenth-century explorers (Guérin 1875: 21–27; Conder and Kitchener 1882: 369; Clermont-Ganneau 1899: 299–300) and was thoroughly surveyed by the Danish team (Andersen 1985: 77–81). In 1973, Ze'ev Yeivin surveyed the structure and carried out renovations on the sloping northern walls, which were in a state of partial collapse (Yeivin 1973: 158–162). In 1981, Yeivin headed an excavation inside the building (Yeivin 1981: 18–19). In 2014, the site was cleaned and excavated by the SOA (Schwartz et al. 2021; Fig. 6).

10 It should be noted that a burnt layer was discovered in an SOA excavation to the north of the remains of the Northern Churches (Yodan Fleitman, pers. comm.). The study of this excavation has not been completed, but it can cautiously be suggested that the burnt layer reflects a destruction that occurred outside the church during the Arab conquest, as was found in the other two churches.

11 Many scholars have discussed the phenomenon, most recently Yuval Peleg (2012) and Noa Yuval-Hacham (2018). For further studies on the subject, see Yuval-Hacham 2018: 8–9, note 2.

The building has two rooms: a large square hall and a smaller rectangular annex to the east. It is built of large, neatly dressed ashlars that were probably taken from the ruins of the nearby church. The square hall has three entrances from the north, three windows in the west and two windows in the south, one on either side of a *mihrab*. The rectangular room has an entrance from the north and a *mihrab* in the south. The square hall yielded remnants of columns and Byzantine-style Corinthian capitals that were probably taken from the Basilica church. Above the jambs of the building's central entrance was a lintel decorated with a relief.¹² The center of the lintel depicts an amphora, with garlands of flowers on either side flanked by horned altars. The lintel was apparently the side of a Late Roman burial niche incorporated in secondary use in the building (Klein 2011: 172).

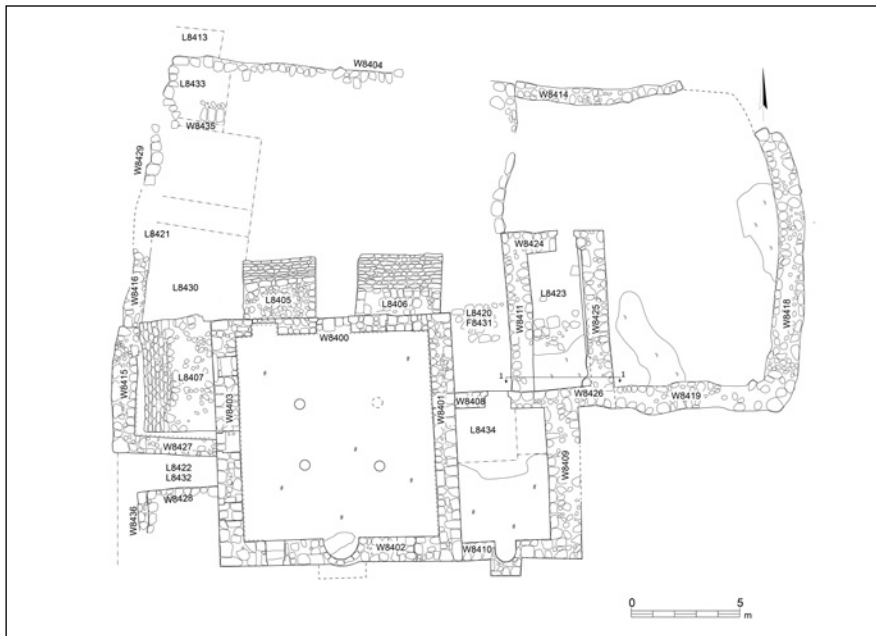


Figure 6: Plan of Jami' al-Sittin (drawing: Anna Harel)

- 12 When Conder and Kitchener visited the site (between 1865–1875) the lintel was still in place, as it was during the visit of Samuel Manning, who drew the structure (Manning 1890). In a photograph taken in 1894 the lintel no longer rests on the jambs (Robert E. M. Bain; the photograph is in the Jacob Wahrman Archive, owned by the National Library of Israel), and until 1970 the lintel still lay at the foot of the entrance to the building. In 1970 it was stolen, found buried in a nearby field, and taken to the Rockefeller Museum (Damati 1970).

Based on the pottery found in the loci abutting the walls and foundations, the construction of the building can be dated to the Abbasid period (Fig. 7).¹³ The Corinthian capitals, which are identical to the capitals found in the Basilica, also indicate that the building was constructed after the church was abandoned. The structure continued to be used until the early Ottoman period. Alterations to it over the years include the closure of openings, the construction of outer retaining walls and the addition of a vaulted unit and a courtyard. The al-Sakīna Mosque mentioned in Mamluk-era sources should most probably be identified as this building.¹⁴

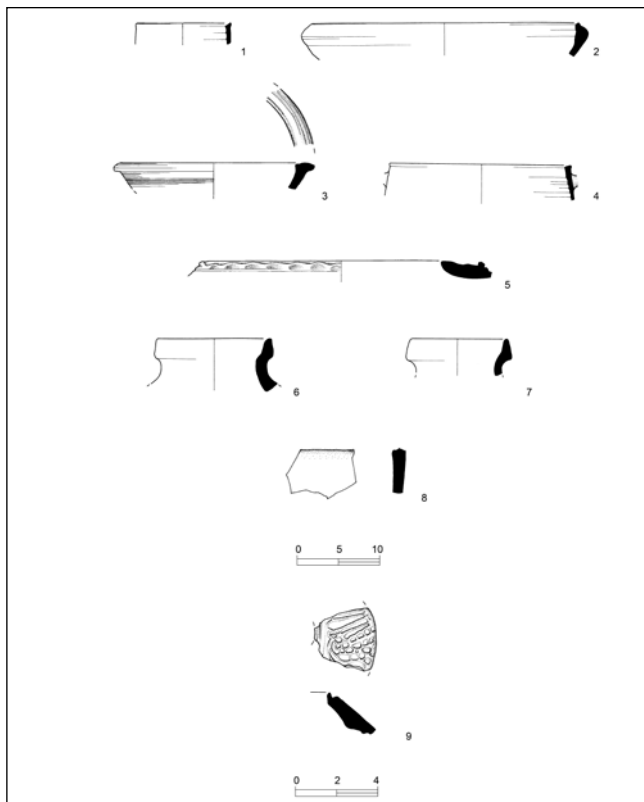


Figure 7: Pottery found near the foundations of Jāmi' al-Sittīn (drawing: Miriam Manoukian; table: Anna Harel)

13 The pottery report from the excavation was written by Peretz Reuven and will be published in the excavation report on Shiloh.

14 In written sources, the mosque is also called "Qubbat al-Sakīna" and "Domus Dei." For a discussion about the identity of the building, see Schwartz et al. 2021.

Another prayer structure, the open-air mosque (*wali*), was discovered in the Danish excavations to the south of the site (Andersen 1985: 76–77). It is a rectangular structure with traces of a *mihrab* in its southern wall. The northern wall, which apparently contained the entrance to the building, has not been preserved. Since the ground had been plowed up and intermixed there was no stratigraphic division, but the pottery was exclusively Muslim and the building was therefore dated to the Middle Ages.¹⁵ Eight tombs were discovered beside the structure. Two of the deceased were discovered in anatomical articulation consistent with typical Muslim funerary practices, oriented roughly from east to west with the head in the west and the face turned southward. Glazed pottery was found in one of the tombs. Assuming that they are associated with the mosque, both the tombs and the mosque can reasonably be dated to the Early Islamic period.

It can generally be determined that the three churches existed at Shiloh until the late Umayyad period, and then one or possibly two mosques were built in the Early Islamic period. The churches and mosques did not exist at the same time, suggesting that the community's transition from one religion to the other was rapid and extreme. Starting from a certain point in time, the Christian community had insufficient strength to rebuild its churches, whereas the Muslim community was able to build a large mosque using high-quality construction in a style familiar from other sites of the same period (Schwartz et al. 2021).

Residential Buildings

The Byzantine residential buildings discovered in the various excavations conducted at the site are all concentrated on the southern and western slopes of Tel Shiloh. The Danish team's excavation in the top part of the southern slope uncovered one building that was erected in the Roman period and continued to be used in the Byzantine period.¹⁶ We do

15 There is no more precise dating and it is unlikely that further examination of the pottery will be able to contribute much, since the report on the pottery from the plain south of the tell classified it all as one group.

16 This excavation area is called the "Summit Sector" even though it is actually located on the southern slope and not the summit.

not know when it was finally abandoned, but based on its relationship with two Umayyad structures, the house was probably still standing when they were built (Andersen 1985: 34–41). The house has two rooms paved with stone slabs. Remains of another Byzantine-period building were discovered in a probe to the north of this area (Andersen 1985: 42). Given the extreme thickness of its northern wall (2.35 m), it is unlikely to have been a residential building. In any case, the fragmentary nature of the finds makes it difficult to understand the plan and function of the building.

In the western part of the tell, the Danish excavations unearthed a building containing at least four rooms and a courtyard. Another courtyard, discovered south of the building, probably belongs to an adjacent structure. The terrace supporting the western part of the building is dated to the Early Byzantine period and the house was probably built in the same period. The lower part of the northwest room is partially hewn and was a semi-basement. A 70 cm deep olive oil collection vat was found in one of its corners (see below). At some point in the building's existence, the oil press was made unusable and the bottom part of the room was filled to reach the same height as the floors in the other rooms (Andersen 1985: 24–28). Based on the finds from the fill, Andersen determined that the oil press was rendered obsolete in the Byzantine period. He was also of the opinion that the entire building was abandoned later in the same period, based on the paucity of pottery in the overlying fills that was glazed and painted with geometric motifs. Since the publication of the report, however, much research has been done on the pottery of the Late Byzantine and Umayyad periods, and the assemblage discovered in the oil-press fill is completely compatible with the Umayyad period. A glass bracelet that was also recovered from the fill supports the later dating. If the oil press was not made unusable until the Umayyad period, the abandonment of the whole building should necessarily also be dated to no earlier than the same period. The paucity of glazed and painted pottery in the fills above the building cannot be used to date the abandonment of the building to the Byzantine period, since glazed pottery is also quite scarce in the Umayyad period; even at Tel Shiloh itself, few potsherds of this type have been found in Umayyad assemblages. The date when the whole building fell into disuse should therefore be reassigned to the Umayyad period or later. Two rooms discovered to its east date from the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods and were thus built after the structure described above was demolished (Andersen 1985: 28–29).

The Danes opened up another excavation area (now covered over) on the southeastern slope of the tell. Their excavation unearthed two buildings whose construction is dated to the Late Roman/Byzantine periods. Based on the fills they contained, Andersen determined that the buildings had fallen into disuse at the end of the Byzantine period, but in this case as well, their pottery finds require further analysis. Most of the finds are compatible with both the Late Byzantine and the Umayyad periods, making it impossible to determine exactly when the buildings were abandoned. In any case, there are no finds that can explain why the building was abandoned and there is no evidence of violent destruction.

At the foot of the southern slope of Tel Shiloh, a fortified dwelling built at the end of the Byzantine period was discovered (Hizmi and Haber 2014; see Fig. 5 above). Its inner core consists of a row of four rooms with a courtyard to their north. The easternmost room is fortified and a roll-stone was set in its entrance to secure it from hostile intruders. The use of roll-stones for defense and fortification purposes is a familiar feature in this period, especially at monasteries, indicating that this structure was a part of a monastery (Hizmi and Haber 2014: 105, note 3). In a second phase, additional rooms were built on the western side of the courtyard. There was clearly settlement continuity from the Byzantine era to the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. The walls of the earlier phase continued to be used throughout all these periods, although over time inner walls were added to form internal subdivisions and additional rooms were built on the outside.

Excavations conducted by the SOA in 2006 and 2007 along the sides of Jāmi' al-Yatīm unearthed Abbasid-period dwellings west of the Northern Churches (Magen and Aharonovich 2012: 161, Fig. 1). Other walls discovered directly on top of the mosaics of the later church probably belong to residential units from the same period.¹⁷ Another dwelling was uncovered in SOA excavations in 2016 to the south of Jāmi' al-Yatīm (unpublished; Fig. 8). In the two churches excavated by the Danes, the Basilica and the Pilgrims' Church, evidence was found of subdivision of the prayer hall into residential units after the church fell into disuse. In the Pilgrims' Church, walls and a *ṭabun* were added inside the building (Andersen 1985: 75). The Basilica contained two south-north walls that formed a narrow room across the nave and the south aisle (Andersen 1985: 54).

17 Yevgeny Aharonovich, pers. comm.

The walls were laid directly on top of the mosaics and were composed of elements that had originally been part of the church.



Figure 8: Area Q1 – Abbasid dwelling, looking south (photo: Shlomi Amami)

The evidence from the Late Byzantine period at Shiloh attests to the presence of a village on the southern and western slopes of the tell. The building excavated by the Danes in the western part of the tell apparently remained in use until the Umayyad period, based on its fills. The building uncovered by the Danes at the top of the southern slope was also probably used at least until the Umayyad period. As for the building in the southwestern part of the site, it is difficult to determine when it was abandoned, but its fill suggests that it ceased to be used in the Late Byzantine or Umayyad period. It would therefore seem that during the Byzantine period, the residential area was concentrated on the southern and western slopes of the tell and this pattern probably remained unchanged during the Umayyad period. In contrast, the building found at the foot of the slope was used without interruption from the Byzantine to the Abbasid period and it is associated with the residential area that developed during the Abbasid period on the plain south of the tell – south and west of the remains of the Northern Churches and within the remains of the three Byzantine churches.

Industrial Installations

Three winepresses from the Byzantine and Umayyad periods were discovered at the site. All were found in the plain south of the tell, and each one is associated with one of the churches (Fig. 9). The southern winepress at Shiloh was discovered by the Danish team approximately 100 m west of the Pilgrims' Church (Andersen 1985: 77). Although it is poorly preserved, a treading floor, intermediate vat, collection vat and screw-press base can be identified and there are traces of three compartments to the south of the treading floor.

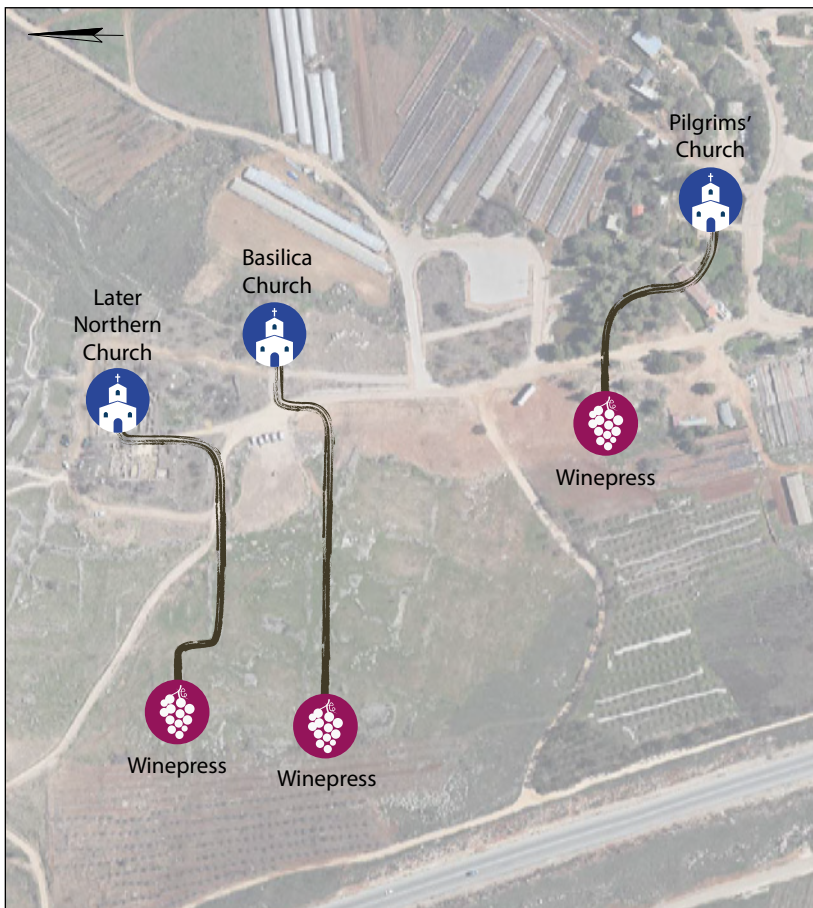


Figure 9: Winepresses, roads and churches at Shiloh
(preparation for publication: Anna Harel)

The central winepress was excavated approximately 160 m west of the Basilica church, to which it is linked by an ancient road.¹⁸ The winepress has three phases, the last of them represented by the complex winepress type, dated to the Byzantine period (Fig. 10). This type of winepress consists of two collection vats, on one side of which is a large treading floor with a base for a screw press in its center. On the other side is another, smaller treading floor. The walls surrounding the treading floors incorporate small compartments used as collection vats; a system of peripheral walls had raised treading floors that drained into the small compartments. The establishment of the third phase is dated to the Byzantine period on the basis of potsherds from the fills beneath the treading-floor mosaic, inside a collection vat removed in the transition from the second to the third phase, and from the fill in the peripheral units around the western treading floor. Pottery, glass and coins discovered in the initial deposition layer on the winepress floor and in the vats indicate that the winepress became obsolete in the Umayyad period.

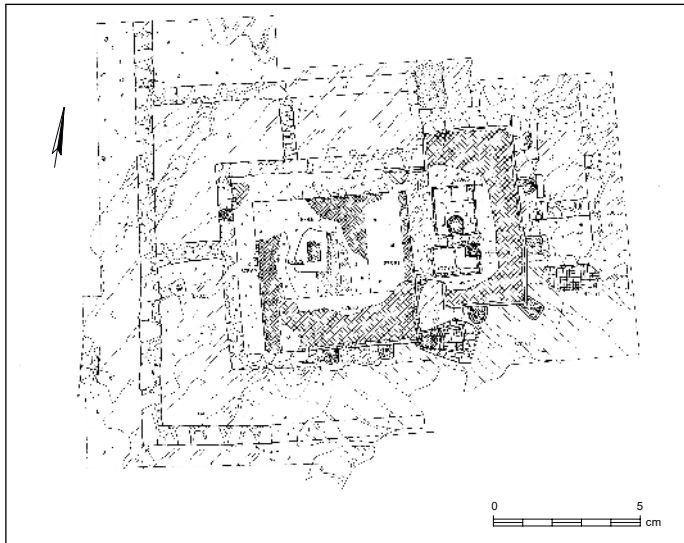


Figure 10: Plan of the central winepress (drawing: Felix Portnov)

18 The northern and central winepresses were excavated by the SOA prior to the establishment of a convention and concert center and have not yet been published. The northern winepress was excavated under the supervision of Ofer Gat and the central one under the supervision of the current author.

The northern winepress, unearthed in the northern part of Area P2, had two phases. The second phase is represented by a complex winepress with one collection vat,¹⁹ a treading floor paved with a mosaic and with a base for a screw press in its center, compartments for collecting small quantities of must, and a peripheral system with raised treading floors that drained into the compartments. The winepress was located beside a road that led eastward from it to the Northern Church, approximately 130 m away. It has been dated to the Byzantine period based on parallel examples of the complex winepress type. It probably remained in use until the Early Islamic period, based on the most recent potsherds found in the overlying layer of alluvium.

All three winepresses are examples of the complex winepress type that has been found in many parts of the country (Frankel 1999: 150–153).²⁰ Similar winepresses have been found on the central mountain ridge at Qalandia (Baramki 1933), at Kh. Ras Abu Ma'aruf (Seligman 2009: 278–280), on Mount Gerizim (Magen 2008: 269–270), at Umm el-'Aşfir (Batz and Greenfeld 2009: 96–99) and at Kh. 'Istuna (Klein and Erlich 2013: 178–179) and have been dated to the Byzantine period. It is worth noting that the association between winepresses and church complexes is characteristic of rural monasteries, attesting to one of the main sources of income for these monasteries (Taxel 2009: 195). Some of the wine may have been traded to foreign markets, as evidenced by Byzantine sources (Magen 2008: 258).

The Danes found a domestic oil press from the Byzantine period in a residential building on the western side of the tell (see above). The lower part of one of the rooms in the house was hewn out of the rock and a 70 cm deep collection vat for olive-oil production was found in one of the corners. The vat is overlain by a cover stone with a hole in its

19 It should be noted that the poor state of preservation of this vat prevents us from determining whether the more ancient collection vat at the southern end of the winepress continued to be used in its second phase.

20 Although an intermediate vat is considered a necessary feature of complex winepresses (Avshalom-Gorni et al. 2008: 58), only the southern winepress at Shiloh was found to have one; however, all the other features of the complex winepress appear in all the Shiloh winepresses. Significantly, additional complex winepresses have been found in the central highlands with no intermediate vat. It would be worth conducting a regional study of complex winepresses in the highlands.

center and a drainage channel around it, and the rock wall to its east contains a niche for the insertion of a pressing beam. The pressing beam clearly pressed baskets that stood directly above the collection vat, but it is impossible to know what applied the pressure to the beam since no other elements such as weights or a screw base were discovered (Andersen 1985: 24–28).²¹ As noted above, the oil press apparently fell into disuse during the Umayyad period.

Three oil presses were discovered on the southern fringes of Tel Shiloh. The westernmost one, found in Area N1 in 2011, dates from the Abbasid period, although it was built inside an earlier structure (Hizmi and Haber 2014: 110–111). It contains a raised crushing basin, the base of a beam-and-screw pressing installation with a cylindrical weight, and a suspended weight, press bed, collection vat and round work surface, possibly for filling the baskets. In the southern part of Area N1, another oil press containing a crushing basin and the cylindrical weight from a screw installation was partially unearthed (excavated in 2018 under the direction of Yoden Fleitman, unpublished). During the excavation of Area L1 approximately 60 m east of Area N1, another crushing basin was found inside a building. Only the southeastern corner of the building has been excavated. Fragments of the crushing basin were discovered to the northeast of this building in secondary use in a later partition wall. Pressing installations composed of a beam, screw and cylindrical weight begin to appear in the Early Islamic period (Magen 2008: 257). The series of oil presses discovered at the foot of the southern slope of Tel Shiloh can therefore be interpreted as an olive-oil production area that developed during the Umayyad or Abbasid period. This industrial area was adjacent to the north side of the residential quarter from the same period.

In addition to the winepresses and oil presses, a single threshing floor was discovered in the Danish excavations beneath the open-air mosque. From the absence of a significant accumulation layer between the threshing floor and the mosque building, the excavators deduced that it was abandoned not long before the mosque was established (Andersen 1985: 76–77). It was therefore probably a threshing floor used in the Byzantine and Umayyad periods. However, the possible time span for the construction of the open-air

21 The excavation of the western side of the room was not completed.

mosque is very broad and it has generally been attributed to the Middle Ages, so the threshing floor may also have been used after the Umayyad period.

It can be stated in general that the site contained complex winepresses and a domestic oil press during the Byzantine and Umayyad periods. Both the complex winepresses and the domestic oil press ceased to be used at the end of the Umayyad period. As noted above, numerous storage jars were discovered in a large room to the south of the atrium of the Umayyad-period basilica (see Fig. 4 above). Similar jars found at Nabi Samuel and Ḥorbat Kfar Murr have been attributed to oil storage (Magen 2008: 329–331). If the jars at Shiloh were indeed intended for oil and not wine, we can conclude that Shiloh's commercial oil industry began as early as the Umayyad period; based on the oil press erected in the Abbasid period, the industry evidently grew in importance during this period. It therefore seems likely that the wine industry was greatly diminished during the Umayyad period, when the olive-oil industry became the economic mainstay of the village. This find is consistent with Yitzhak Magen's conclusion that the oil industry replaced the wine industry in the Early Islamic period (Magen 2008: 258).

Summary: Changes in the Settlement at Shiloh in the Transition from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Period

A review and analysis of the finds from all the excavations at and around Tel Shiloh enable us to reconstruct the process of change undergone by the settlement in the transition from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period. During the Byzantine period, a village existed at Shiloh that was concentrated on the western and southern slopes of Tel Shiloh. Three nearby church complexes were most probably monasteries in view of their location outside the village, the number of rooms adjoining the churches, the connection between the complex winepresses and the church complexes, the presence of a fortified tower near the Northern Church complex, and the chapel in the Basilica church.²² Rural monasteries of this kind that were annexed to ordinary villages are also familiar from other sites, for example Ramat Raḥel, Shoham, Ḥorbat Zichrin, Ḥorbat Beit Loya and Ḥorbat Yatir

22 For the frequency of fortified towers and chapels in monastery complexes, see Taxel 2009: 198.

(Taxel 2009: 195). They had ties with the village and served as a focal point for pilgrimages.²³ On the other hand, basilica churches are less characteristic of monasteries and are more common at pilgrimage sites (Taxel 2009: 198–199). However, ancient sources attest to pilgrimages to Shiloh, which was associated particularly with the remains of the Tabernacle altar and the place where the Ark of the Covenant stood (Schwartz and Shemesh 2018: 188–191). The monasteries at Shiloh were apparently annexed to the village and included an element of commemorative pilgrimage. The less monumental nature of the Pilgrims' Church complex and its distance from the center of the ancient village suggest that this church was not in fact a center for pilgrimage, but merely a rural monastery.²⁴

The destruction reflected in the finds at the Pilgrims' and Basilica churches attests to the partial devastation of these monasteries during the Muslim conquest, unlike many monastery churches where no evidence of destruction has been discovered (Avni 2011: 4–7). The lack of any evidence of destruction in the residential buildings, together with the continued functioning of the monasteries during the Umayyad period, shows that the devastation was not total, and that the Christian community in Shiloh continued to exist and even successfully rebuilt its institutions after the Muslim conquest. Nevertheless, it is likely that under Umayyad rule, the monasteries' economic means declined as a result of the decrease in Christian pilgrimages (Schick 1995: 109). It is also possible that prior to the Islamic conquest, some of the revenue of the monasteries at Shiloh came from wine exports, and the political break from the Byzantine Empire, as well as the depletion of the Christian population in the coastal towns, led to a decline in this industry (Hirschfeld 2002: 189; Levy-Rubin 2006: 62–65). Given this decline, it is hardly surprising that the community failed to rebuild its monasteries after the earthquake in 749 CE.²⁵ The crisis

23 Relations between monks and neighboring rural populations are discussed in a study by Ashkenazi and Aviam. In their opinion, the monks had a special status among the rural population. They healed the sick, supported the needy and conducted services for the local congregations. Most of the rural monks were themselves from the nearby villages and did not have to cut themselves off from the life of the community when they joined the monastery (Ashkenazi and Aviam 2013: 28).

24 The name "Pilgrims' Church" was given to it by the site excavators (Andersen 1985: 61).

25 The question of whether or not a church would be rebuilt after an earthquake depended on the community's economic means (Schick 1995: 123–124).

and the settlement hiatus following the earthquake are also evident in other changes, such as the relocation of the southern residential center and changes in the main component of the local economy.

The decline of the Christian community at Shiloh apparently gave way to the growth of a new community. The transition from a wine industry to an oil industry was probably well-suited to the economy of the Jund Filastin district under the Abbasid regime and to trade networks that now mainly looked eastward, toward the Arab Empire, instead of the west-focused trade networks that had prevailed under Byzantine rule. This change improved the population's economic means, as reflected in the construction of a new public building – this time a mosque, Jāmi' al-Sittīn, which shows that by then Islam was the dominant religion in the village. In the newly emerged economic reality, without the stable support of the monasteries and in the wake of Abd al-Malik's administrative and monetary reforms, many Christians apparently chose to convert to Islam (Taxel 2013a: 145). The new village lay on the plain south of the tell in the Abbasid and Fatimid periods, with a mosque at its southern end and an olive-oil production area at its northern end.

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