

A Preliminary Report on Three Muslim Shrines in Palestine

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This article is a report on an architectural survey of three Muslim shrines carried out by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem in 1994. An introduction sets the buildings within the general context of Palestinian shrines. Each shrine is then described separately with a discussion of its location, history and architecture.

Since 1989 the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem has been carrying out architectural surveys of the medieval and Ottoman buildings in Palestine. In order to target the surveys more effectively the present writer has been compiling a list of standing buildings in Israel which will enable the British School to carry out research on particular types of buildings, historical periods or regions. The results of this work are being prepared for publication as a Gazetteer. One of the building types most frequently encountered is the Muslim shrine or *maqam*.

Despite their great number, very few of these buildings have been surveyed or studied in a systematic way. There have been several general works dealing with Muslim shrines in Palestine (e.g., McCown 1923; Masterman and Macalister 1916) as well as a detailed study of shrines in the vicinity of Jerusalem by T. Canaan (1927). However, these studies deal principally with the customs and religious beliefs associated with the shrines and do not discuss the archaeology or fabric of individual buildings. There have of course been such studies of the principal Muslim monuments and shrines in Jerusalem, Nablus and Hebron, but the monuments in the countryside, particularly in the area of Israel, have been generally ignored. One exception to this general rule is the work of L.A. Mayer and J. Pinkerfeld (1950), which deals specifically with Muslim religious buildings in Israel. However, their work was of necessity highly selective and has not been followed by any more extensive work. The reason for the comparative neglect of these buildings is that Islamic art historians generally prefer to concentrate on the finer examples of architecture. On

the other hand archaeologists of the period, with a few notable exceptions (see for example Pringle 1986 which combines an excavation report with a gazetteer of medieval buildings) generally prefer to work on excavated sites rather than standing buildings. There are, however significant incentives to the study of less well-known Muslim shrines. First the large number of buildings means that a systematic survey would be able to indicate patterns in their architecture, development, location and distribution. Secondly the shrines are an eloquent expression of a part of Palestinian culture which is rapidly disappearing under a uniform modern form of Islam. Thirdly many of the shrines do have architectural interest even though the quality and materials may not match those of better known monuments. One of the few studies of local shrines elsewhere in the Muslim world is a study of Moroccan *marabouts* which demonstrates numerous variations of a basic theme (Cauvet 1953).

Before the completion of the gazetteer it is not possible to draw any wide-reaching conclusions about Muslim shrines. As a prelude to this larger study three of the larger shrines were selected for detailed investigation. The criteria for selection were: 1) that they were no longer in use (both for ease of access and because they were less likely to have modern additions); 2) that they were large complexes which would show some architectural development over time and have some significance beyond their immediate village; 3) that they had not been studied before and were in danger of collapse either from neglect or deliberate acts of vandalism. The buildings chosen were Dayr al-Shaykh near Jerusalem, Nabi Rubin south of Tel Aviv and Nabi

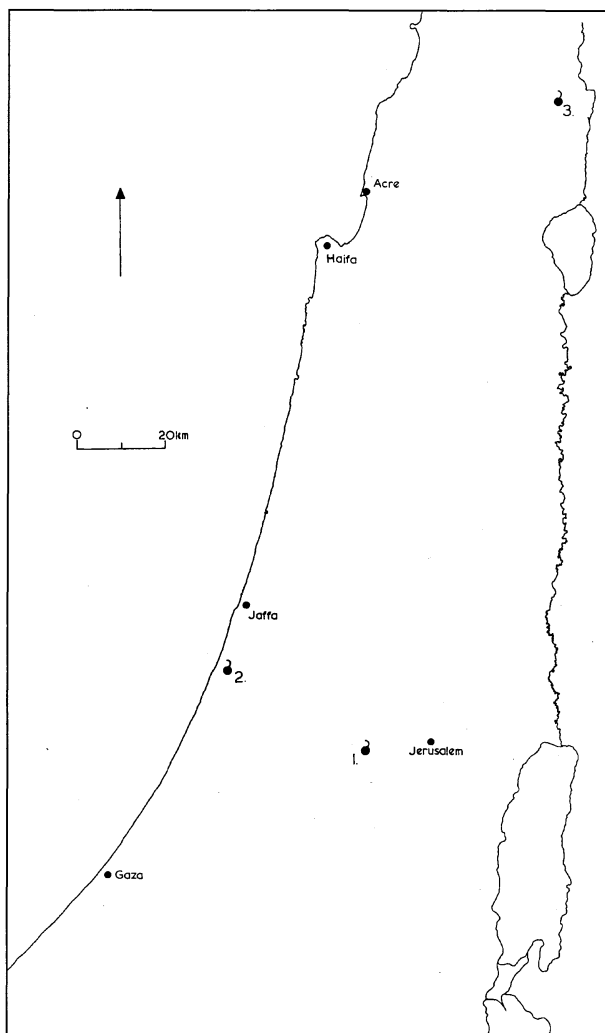


Figure 1. Map of Palestine showing location of shrines. (1) Dayr al-Shaykh, (2) Nabi Rubin and (3) Nabi Yusha.

Yusha near Qiryat Shimona in the north of the country (Fig. 1).

The surveys took place during July, August and September 1994. Members of the team were Lucy Lavers, Sophie Coe, Roger Cooke, James Birch, Imogen Grunden, Elizabeth Nettleship and Matt Bradley. Other buildings surveyed during the season included Khan al-³Izzam in Ramla and al-Mu^azzimiyya madrasa in Jerusalem.

Palestinian shrines

The shrines of Palestine may be classified into three main types: 1) major shrines with international significance (e.g., Dome of the Rock or Tomb of

Abraham); 2) large shrines with regional significance; and 3) village shrines with purely local significance. The buildings dealt with in this article belong to the second type. A number of terms are used to describe Muslim shrines in Palestine: these are *maqam* (sacred place), *mazar* (place to be visited), *kubbi* (literally a dome), *wali* (friend of God) and *mashad* (a place of a martyr or *shahid*). The term *maqam* will be used throughout this report to describe the room containing the tomb or cenotaph. Before describing the buildings surveyed in 1994 it is worth setting them in the context of Palestinian Muslim shrines.

All visitors to Palestine are aware of the vast number of religious shrines covering the countryside. Western visitors are mostly aware of the Christian shrines built to commemorate various events in Christ's life although they will also be aware of non-Christian shrines. Jewish and Muslim shrines are often located in close proximity to one another and may even share the same building, as for example with Rachel's tomb outside Bethlehem (Halevi 1993). On other occasions Muslims and Jews may venerate the same Old Testament prophet but place the tomb in different localities. For example since the time of Baybars according to Jews and Christians the burial place of Moses is located on the east bank of the Jordan whilst the Muslims have the famous shrine of Nabi Musa located in the Judean desert between Jerusalem and Jericho. Two of the shrines discussed in this article are associated with Old Testament or Jewish prophets who are also venerated by the Muslims. As well as places associated with Old Testament prophets there are also shrines associated with early Islam. One of the best examples is the shrine of Sa'd ibn Waqqas, a companion of the Prophet and Muslim general, located six miles north-east of Safed (Heyd 1960, 159).

The landscape of Palestine also plays a significant role in the location and nature of Muslim shrines. It is worth repeating Tewfik Canaan's observation that only 45% of shrines within his survey area (the villages of Jerusalem) "belong to the built *maqam*". The other 55% may be classified into a variety of types including natural features, open air tombs and trees. Natural features are either associated with water or stone and include sacred springs, caves, piles of stones and single large stones. Open-air tombs are usually those of people who lived fairly recently and who were either members of a holy family or were shaykhs respected for their ability to cure the sick. Trees are one of the most prevalent features of shrines although they rarely occur alone: only 7% of Canaan's shrines were single trees. On the other hand most shrines incorporate a tree as an

integral part of the sacred area: Canaan wrote "I have no doubt that with few exceptions every Mohammedan sanctuary is, or once was characterised by trees." This introduces the concept that many larger shrines were originally natural features adapted to Muslim use by the association of a local Muslim saint. The creation of sacred landscapes is a well-known phenomenon in a medieval Christian context: in the area of St. Davids in west Wales "...relevant mythologies were adapted to fit features in the natural landscape" (James 1993, 105–12). A similar process took place in the Islamic world: thus Shalem (1995, 50) gives an example of how a story about a well in Syria became associated with Bi'r al-Waraq (Well of the Leaf) in the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Once a suitable story was associated with a place, depending on the suitability of the location, a built shrine could be established. It is suggested that this process took place with at least two of the shrines surveyed in 1994 (i.e. Nabi Rubin and Nabi Yusha) whilst the third had its basis in an actual grave (Dayr al-Shaykh). Even in the latter case landscape must have played a part as the Shaykh chose a remote place to settle.

The traditional form of a *maqam* is a single-celled square building covered with a dome. A doorway leads to an interior which usually has a grave in the centre marked by a rectangular cenotaph covered with cloth. There is sometimes a *mihrab* in the south wall, although in many cases this is absent as it might cause a confusion between praying towards Mecca and worshipping the saint. The interior is usually lit by a single window although there are often niches set into the wall to hold candles or oil lamps. From this basic form many variations have developed, although the domed *maqam* usually remains an essential feature of the complex.

Dayr al-Shaykh

Location

The abandoned village of Dayr al-Shaykh stands on the north side of Wadi Ismain (Nahal Soreq) directly below the modern Israeli settlement of Nes Harim (Palestine Grid reference 1564 1283). The village is located on a spur surrounded by abandoned terraces overgrown with cactuses and various trees including olive and almond. The village is mostly in ruins, although the plans of houses and the lines of streets can still be seen. Some of the houses appear to have been barrel-vaulted structures. The only standing building amongst the ruins is the mosque (Fig. 2).

History

According to tradition the *maqam* of Dayr al-Shaykh contains the tomb of Sultan Badr. The history of Badr is recorded both by Canaan (1927, 305–8) and by Masterman and Macalister (1916) who give substantially the same story. The title "sultan" refers to Badr's religious significance rather than indicating any secular power. He originated either from Khurassan (Canaan 1927, 307) or the Hejaz (Masterman and Macalister 1916, 12), and came to Jerusalem as a Dervish. According to Mujir al-Din (489, quoted in Canaan 1927, 305) all the saints of his time followed his teachings. Badr first lived in Shu'fat in Jerusalem but after his daughter's death (he had two or three daughters) he moved westwards to Wadi al-Nusur (now known as Wadi Ismain) where he lived in a cave. When he died he was buried in the tomb within the zawiya that he had built for himself, which became known as Dayr al-Shaykh. His tomb was visited by all the saints (holy men) and even by the animals. When his son Muhammad died, he was buried near his father, although Badr's daughter Badriya has her own tomb at Shu'fat. The exact dates of Badr's life are not known although it is known that his son Muhammed died in A.H. 663 and that Badr lived in the time of king Zahir (Baybars) which indicates a date some time in the thirteenth century.

By 1596 a village had grown up on the site with a population of 113. The village produced a number of crops including wheat, barley, olives and fruit (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977, 113). By the 1870s the population had risen to 400, though by 1881 the village was apparently deserted (Conder and Kitchener 1881, 3, 25). Under the British Mandate the village was repopulated and by the mid-1940s it had a population of 220 (Khalidi 1992, 288). Traditionally the shrine is visited by pilgrims from the western villages of Jerusalem.

Description

The mosque comprises four main elements: a courtyard, a prayer hall, a *maqam* and a crypt (Fig. 3 and 4).

The courtyard is bounded by the prayer hall and *maqam* to the north and an irregular-shaped enclosure wall on the other sides. The exterior ground level on the west side is considerably higher than that inside the mosque, although the ground falls sharply away on the other sides. As a result of this the height of the enclosure wall varies between two and four metres with an average thickness of half a metre. There is a window looking out over the wadi on the east side of the enclosure wall. The complex



Figure 2. General view of Dayr al-Shaykh with large dome of prayer hall and smaller dome of the maqam.

is entered on the west side of the enclosure wall through a doorway which leads on to a rectangular platform from which a staircase descends to the courtyard. The courtyard is divided into two areas, a lower part to the south which is paved with stone slabs and a higher area to the north. In the southern part of the courtyard, next to the west wall, there is a vaulted pavilion consisting of a cross vault resting on four piers (Fig. 3:6). There is a niche and a blocked archway in the back wall which is covered with soot from camp fires. On top of the structure there is a low wall or kerb suggesting that it may have been a viewing platform (there is a door at the back). Between the pavilion and the *maqam* there is a low platform containing the entrance to a well or cistern (not investigated). The north end of the courtyard contains a large number of vaulted tombs built one on top of the other. Each tomb is approximately two metres long and one and a half metres high, with a pointed barrel vault.

The *maqam* (Fig. 3:3 and 5) stands at the south end of the courtyard to the north-east corner of the prayer hall. On the exterior this is a square building surmounted by a white dome with an elliptical profile. The entrance is on the left-hand (east) side of the north face of the building; there is also a narrow slit window on the same side. The interior of the *maqam* can be divided into two areas: the domed chamber (Fig. 3:5) and a vaulted extension or iwan to the rear (Fig. 3:3 and Fig. 5). The domed chamber measures approximately two metres per side with two niches, one in the west wall and another in the north wall (this also contains the slit window). Corner squinches make the transition from the square to octagon whilst a plain cornice marks the transition from octagon to dome. The dome could perhaps be described as a domical vault as it converts the octagonal space into a circle without the intervention of a drum or further squinches. A small hole in the south side of the dome admits more light

to the interior. At the south end of the domed chamber there is a large open arch which leads into a low vaulted chamber partially blocked with a low wall. The alignment of the arch to the vault is not exact, suggesting that the vault existed before the domed chamber. The vault runs north to south and springs from ground level. In the centre of the vault there is a badly damaged grave lying east/west. There are two triangular niches in the west wall, otherwise the interior of the vault is very plain.

The prayer hall (Fig. 3:4), located in the south-west corner of the complex, is the largest single unit. Entry to the hall is through a large open archway in the south-west corner of the courtyard. The roof consists of a large hemispherical dome resting on a circular drum supported by spherical pendentives springing from massive corner piers. The drum is pierced by four large windows, one on each of the north, south, west and east sides. The corner piers are joined by large arches which form large recesses on each side. In the recess on the west side there are two large niches set high up into the west wall. The

south recess contains several features including a *mihrab*, a *minbar* and a large vaulted tomb. The *mihrab* is a plain undecorated deep-set niche and next to it (on the west side) there are steps which form the *minbar*. The vaulted tomb is a large structure (2 metres long, 1 metre high and 1 metre wide) which has been broken into in the middle. In the middle of the east wall there is an arched opening (two metres wide) which leads into a hall roofed with a pointed barrel vault (Fig. 3:2). The ground level of this hall seems to have been raised as the vault springs from the current floor level. In the north-west corner of the room there is a low vaulted niche which may originally have been a doorway to the vault at the back of the *maqam*.

The entrance to the crypt (Fig. 3:1) is located in the south-east corner of the courtyard. At present the doorway is a low opening overgrown with plants. The interior floor level is at least one metre lower than that of the courtyard outside. The room is rectangular (5.5 × 3.5 m.) and covered with a pointed barrel-vault aligned north/south. On the floor of the

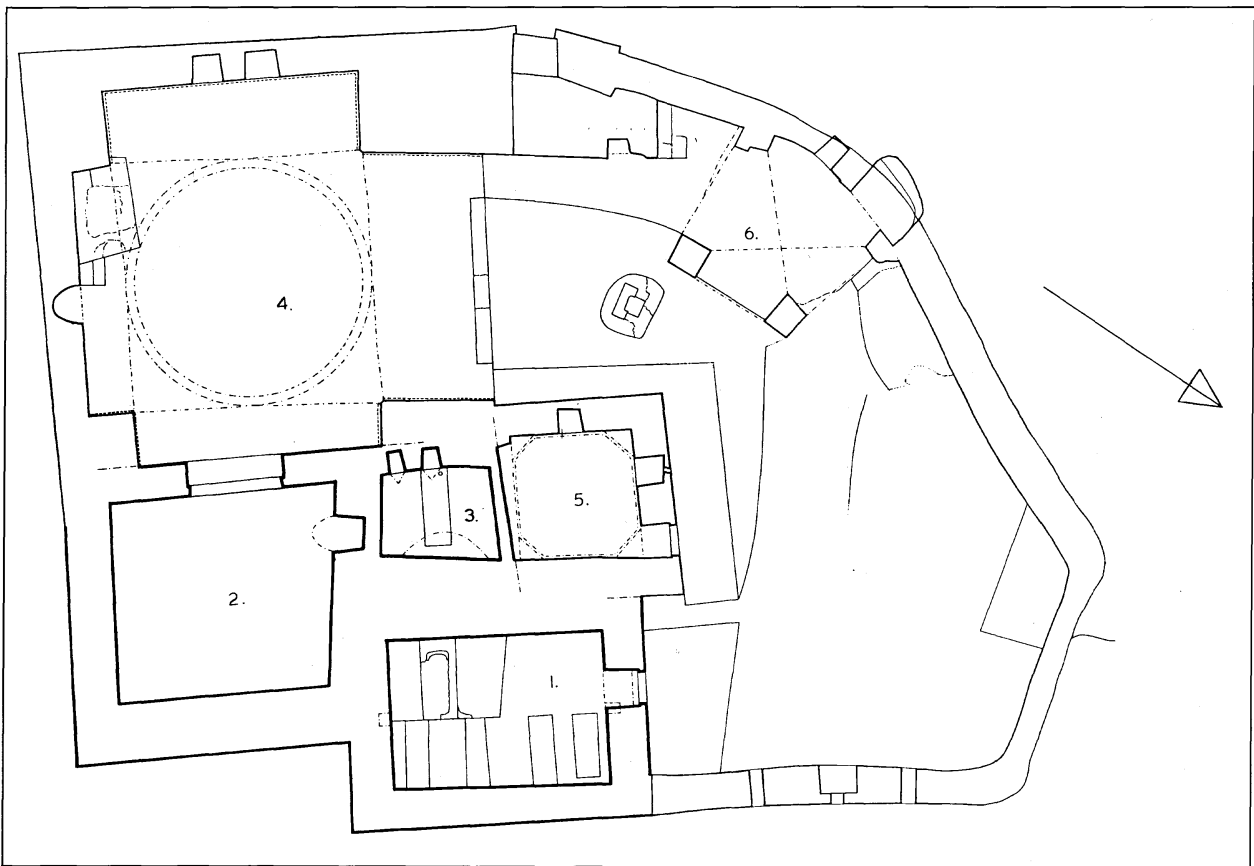


Figure 3. Plan of the complex at Dayr al-Shaykh. Nos. 1, 2 and 3 represent the earliest phase, No. 4 is the prayer hall, No. 5 is the shrine or *maqam*, and No. 6 is the vaulted pavilion.

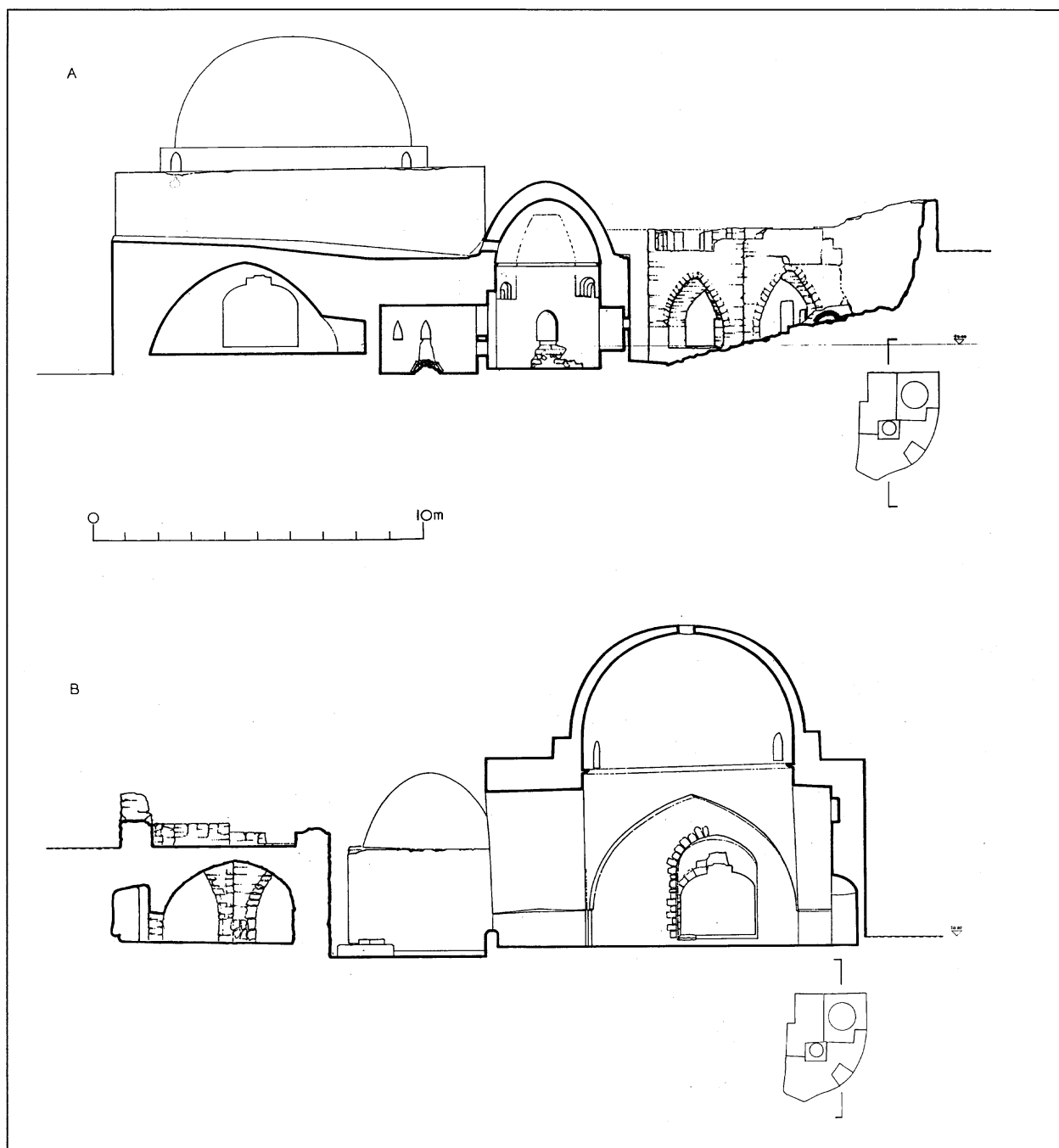


Figure 4. North/south section of Dayr al-Shaykh. (A) looking west; (B) looking east.

room there are at least seven graves arranged in two rows, one on the west side and the other on the east side. Each grave is marked by a low rectangular platform or kerb, there are no inscriptions or other forms of identification.

Dating

The complex obviously developed over several hundred years though the exact sequence of construction is problematic. Possibly the latest building on

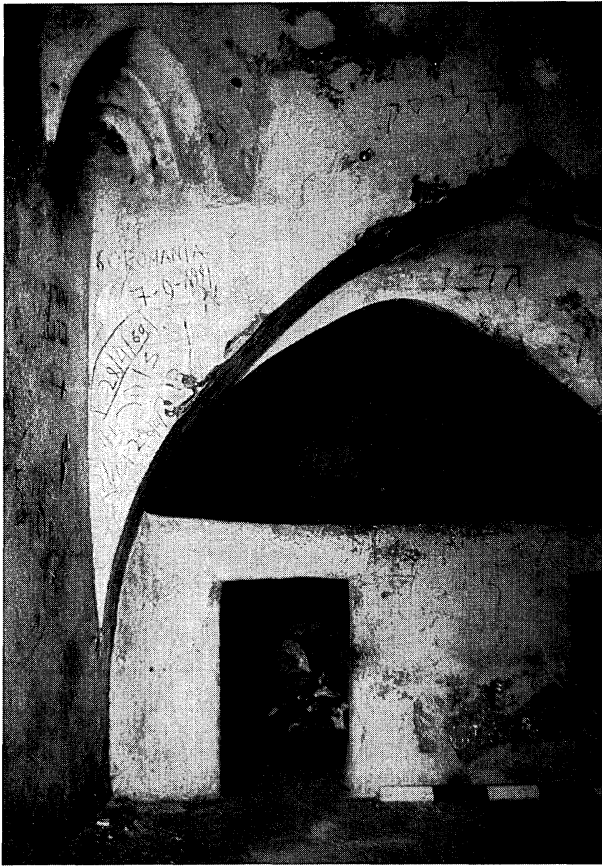


Figure 5. *Dayr al-Shaykh*. Interior of maqam.

the site is the cross-vaulted pavilion (Fig. 3:6) in the courtyard. The use of cross-vaulting and the fact that this structure has no direct relationship with the rest of the main building suggests a later date. In any case the building clearly post-dates the arch in the lower part of the enclosure wall. The *maqam* (Fig. 3:5 and 3) is built against the north-east pier of the entrance to the prayer hall and therefore post-dates the prayer hall. The *maqam* also post-dates the two barrel-vaulted rooms as it blocks the arched opening in the north wall of the south vault and has a higher floor level than either of the two vaulted rooms (the floor level of the south vault has obviously risen above its original level). The prayer hall butts against the west wall of the southern vaulted room which has had its floor raised to equal that of the prayer hall. The north vaulted room is of similar design to the south vaulted room and has its original low floor level indicating that it is of the same date. This sequence of construction may be summarised as follows: first the two vaulted halls were built, second the domed prayer hall was built, third the *maqam*

and finally the cross-vaulted pavilion.

Assigning absolute dates to the construction sequence is difficult and cannot be done with any certainty; however, the following provisional dates are suggested. The vaulted halls clearly belong to some earlier structure possibly associated with a *dayr* or monastery which probably dates from the Crusader period or earlier. The prayer hall may belong to the *zawiyyeh* established by Badr in the thirteenth century whilst the *maqam* may date to the same century or slightly later (the tomb seems to be located in the older part of the structure). The cross-vaulted pavilion may belong to any period between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Nabi Rubin

Location

Nabi Rubin is located approximately 15 km. south of Jaffa in the midst of large sand dunes (Palestine Grid reference 1249 1485). This building stands next to the river Rubin and is approximately 2 km. from the sea (Fig. 6 and 7).

History

Rubin (also spelt Reuben) was the son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 29: 31–32) and is the ancestor of the tribe of Rubin. The date at which Rubin first became associated with this site is not known although a shrine was certainly established by the Mamluk period (see below). During Ottoman times the tomb of Rubin became established as one of the major shrines of Palestine. Each year there was an annual pilgrimage and festival (*mawsim*) at the shrine. Canaan (1927, 215–6) gives the following account of the proceedings:

During the festival of Nabi Rubin the people gather in great numbers at the river which bears this name. The festival extends over one month, beginning with the new moon of August. During the full moon nights the place is most popular. The number of visitors to en-Nabi Rubil exceeds that of en-Nabi Musa. More coffee-houses and shops are erected. The plain around, especially that to the N.W. of the sanctuary, is full of tents. The pilgrims come principally from Jaffa, Lydda, Ramleh and the surrounding villages. It is a picturesque sight to see a small caravan of camels carrying a whole family with the necessary household equipment for spending several days or a few weeks at this place.

Indeed the festival was so popular that in Jaffa women would often say, "Either you take me to Rubin or you divorce me" (Canaan 1927, 216).



Figure 6. *Nabi Rubin, general view from the south before the destruction of the minaret in 1993.*

Description

The site comprises a mosque, minaret (now demolished) and *maqam* and at least nine wells dispersed in the sand dunes near by. The site is located in an area of shifting sand dunes which are gradually covering the various buildings. In particular sand is building up against the west wall of the enclosure and is spilling over into the compound.

The main complex comprising the mosque, minaret and *maqam* is at the south end of a large walled compound (Fig. 8). The compound has a trapezoidal shape with a tree in the centre and three gateways (one on each side except for the south). There are a number of graves (aligned east/west) lying along the west wall of the enclosure (at least three were clearly visible although sand may have covered others). The main entrance is located in the north wall; it consists of a rectangular stone frame containing a doorway set in a recess covered with a

trefoil arch. Immediately above the doorway there is a rectangular recess which probably carried an inscription. Both the other entrances are rectangular doorways, one on the east side (now blocked) and the other on the west side of the courtyard. There are two phases of building discernible in the enclosure wall; the earlier (lower) phase uses white lime mortar and plaster whereas in the later (upper) phases a dark pinkish-red mortar is used. This later phase was probably added to reduce the amount of sand blowing into the courtyard.

The mosque consists of an arcade (*riwaq*) of three tall vaulted bays supported on square piers with rounded corners (Fig. 8:3). The south face of the arcade opening on to the courtyard is decorated by a double hood-molding over the tall arches and a *cyma reversa* cornice along the top. The *mihrab* is a niche with a slightly pointed arched hood set in the south wall of the central bay. There was a direct

entrance to the arcade from the exterior at the west end although this has been blocked (presumably to prevent sand coming into the mosque). The entrance to the minaret (Fig. 8:4) is in the south-west corner of the arcade although the staircase is now blocked. The roof of the mosque is surrounded by a low wall two courses high with rainspouts on the north side.

The minaret stood at the north-west corner of the complex (Fig. 6). The lower part formed part of the south-west corner of the mosque of which it was an integral part. The base of the minaret up to the roof of the mosque was a square socle, above this point it was a tall cylindrical structure reaching a height of approximately fourteen metres. The shaft is decorated with three torus moldings set at intervals of four metres. Three metres below the top there is a circular balcony supported by projecting stone corbels, and at the top of the tower is a small dome. There were two entrances, one from the mosque at the bottom and one from the roof, inside there was

a spiral staircase. (The minaret was destroyed in the winter of 1993 by "bad weather"; the site is adjacent to an army firing range).

The *maqam* (Fig. 8:1) is located at a lower level than the rest of the complex and is surrounded by a wall 1.2 m. high which acts as a revetment against the sand (Fig. 9). The *maqam* comprises two rooms, a domed chamber and a vaulted chamber next door. The entrance to the domed chamber is set beneath a low arch which appears to be connected with the vaulted room. The low arch obscures part of the doorway which carries a Mamluk inscription covered with thick layers of paint. To the right (west) of the door there is a rectangular window with an iron grille. The interior has a roughly rectangular shape with the dome covering the east end and a barrel vault covering the west end. The dome is a semi-elliptical structure resting on an octagonal drum made up of on four corner squinches alternating with blind arches. In the centre of the chamber there is a large cenotaph (2 × 1 m. and 1.5 m. high) cov-

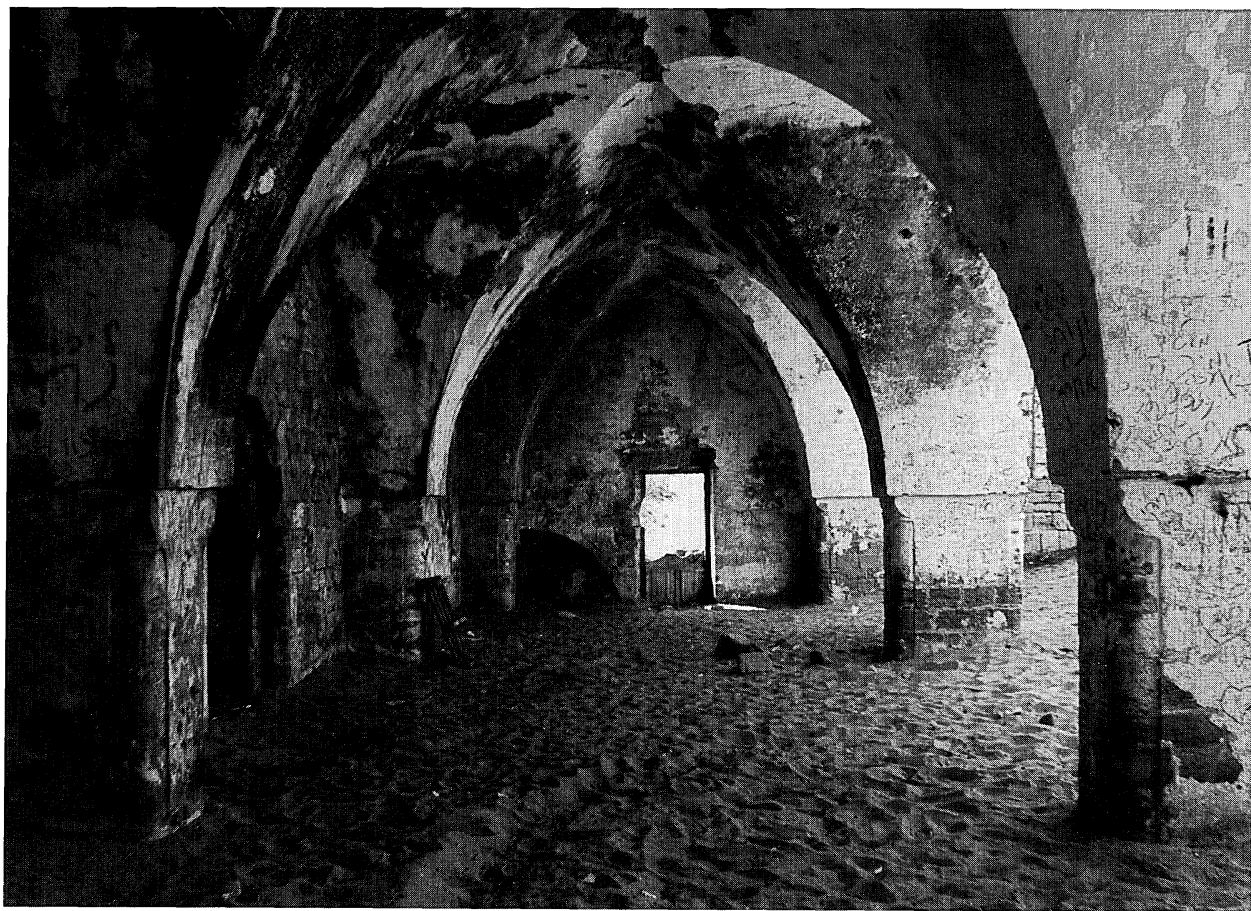


Figure 7. Nabi Rubin. Interior of arcade (riwaq) used as a prayer hall. Note mihrab on left.

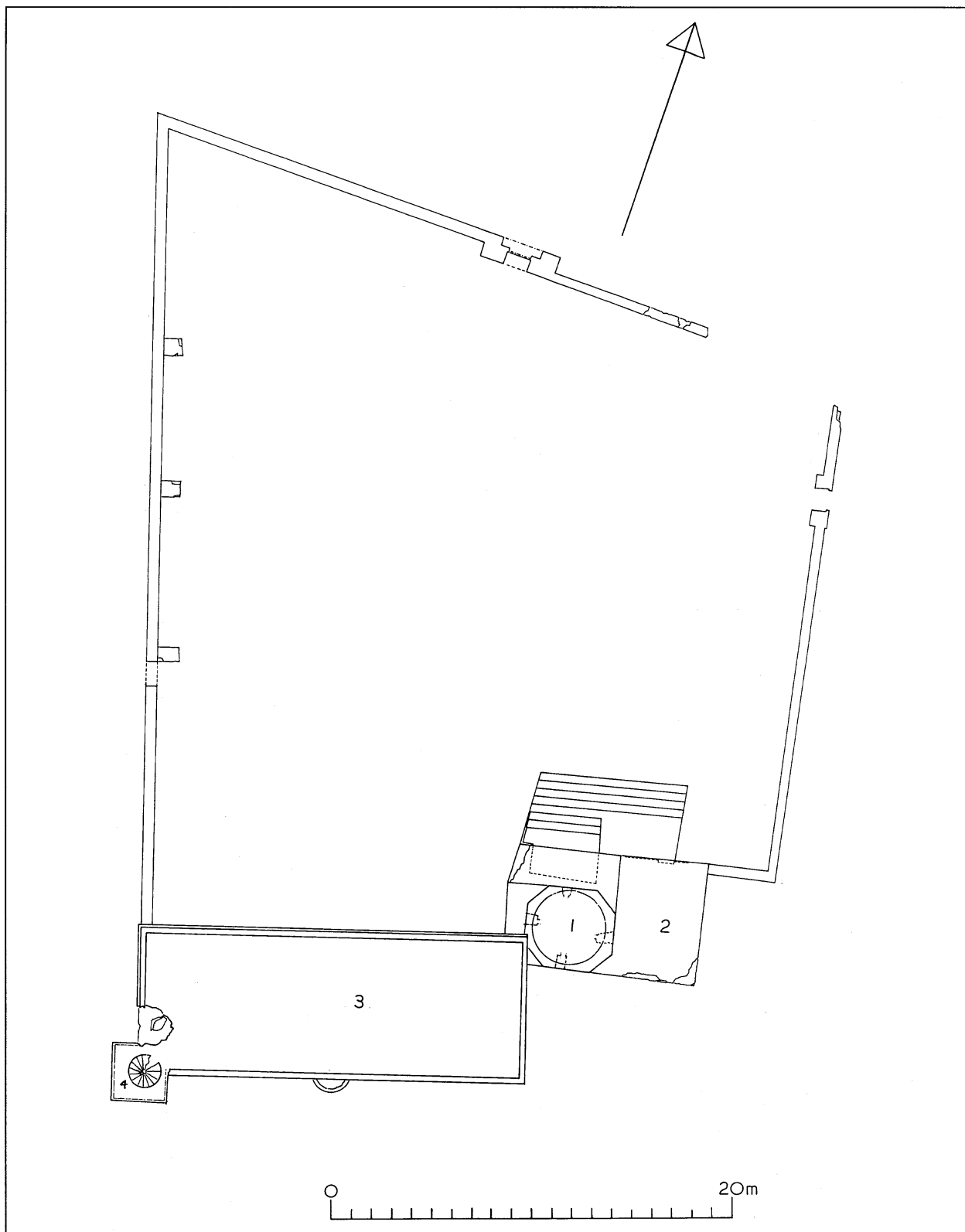


Figure 8. *Nabi Rubin. Plan of complex at roof level. No. 1 maqam, No. 2 side room, No. 3 arcade used as prayer hall, and No. 4 base of minaret.*

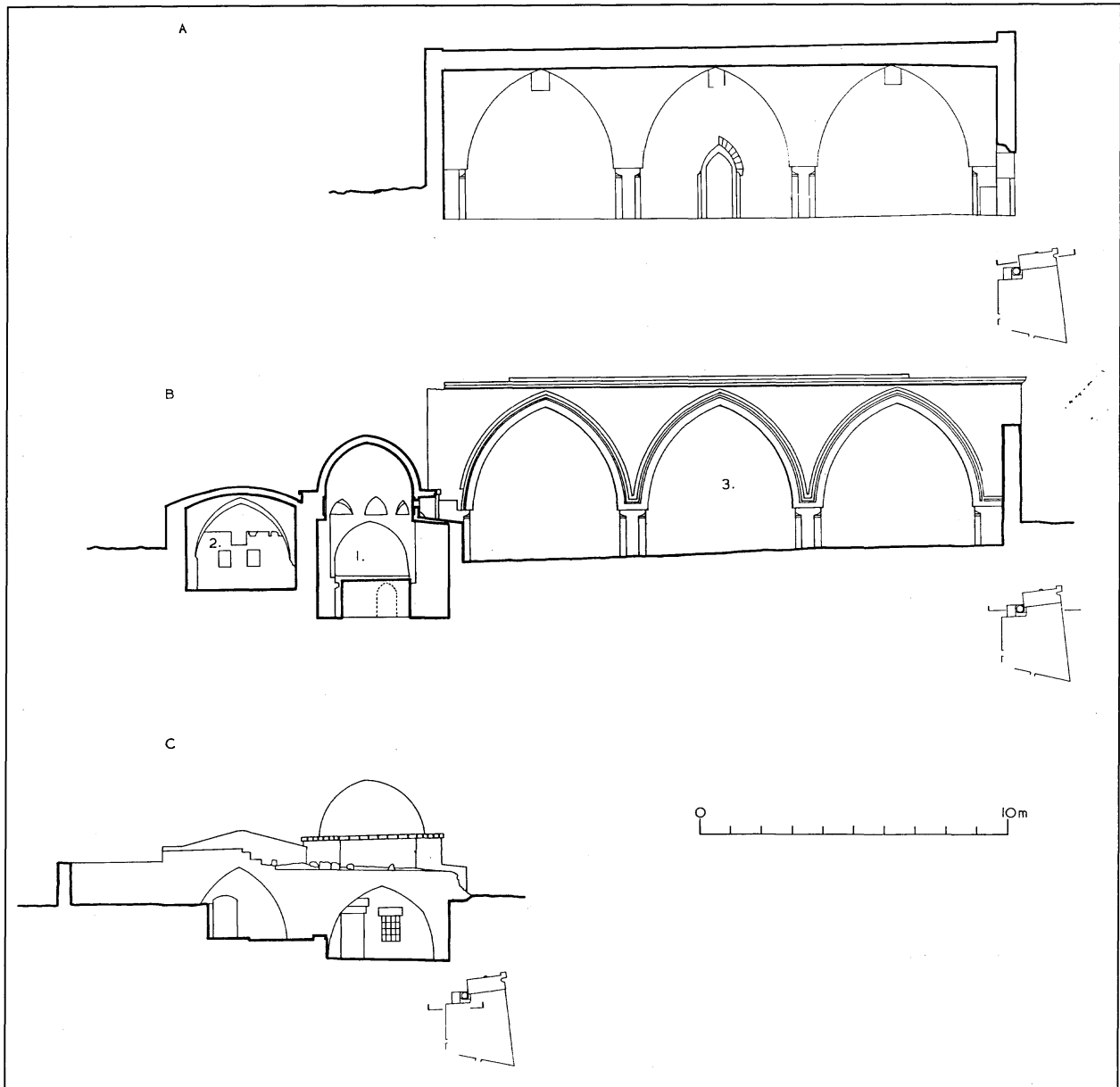


Figure 9. Nabi Rubin. (A) Elevation of arcade, (B) East/west section through the complex and (C) elevation of maqam.

ered in green and black cloth. There is a plain deep *mihrab* set low down in the south wall. The walls are coated with grey and white plaster which contains fragments of grey and red, ribbed pottery. Currently the tomb seems to be used as a Jewish shrine. The cross-vaulted room to the east (Fig. 8:2) is badly damaged and partially filled with sand. It is not possible to determine whether the room originally had a *mihrab*.

The wells were widely dispersed around the west

and north sides of the shrine, the furthest was nearly a kilometre from the shrine. All the wells are partially covered in sand and none appears to be in use. The design is fairly standard and consists of a circular well shaft covered with a shallow dome with an arched opening on the north-east side (i.e. away from the wind). Each well is made of dressed limestone with a core of rubble held together by a hard lime mortar with shell inclusions (Fig. 10).

Despite its obvious importance very little is being

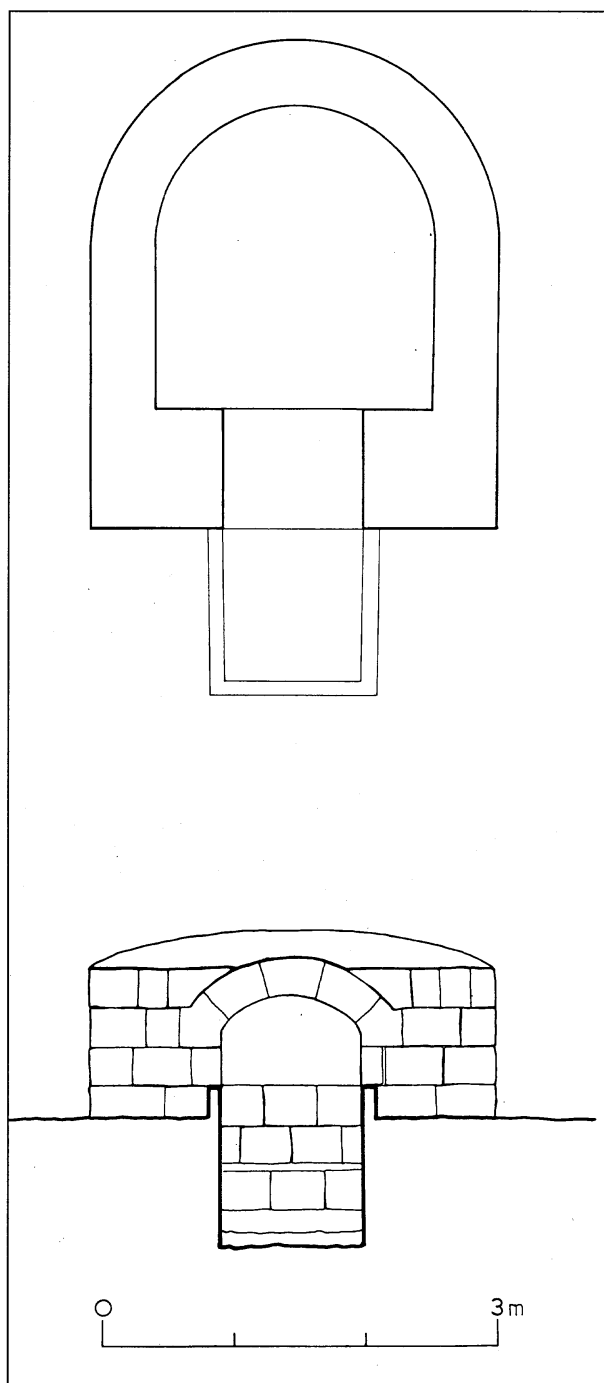


Figure 10. Nabi Rubin. Plan and elevation of one of the wells.

done to protect this site either from the "bad weather" or from continuous action of the sand. Large cracks can be seen on the west side of the dome due to a tree which is growing on the roof.

Dating

The oldest part of the complex is the *maqam* itself around which the other structures have been built. The small vaulted room to the west is slightly later than the *maqam* itself, as one of its arches partially obscures the inscription above the entrance to the tomb. At some later stage the *riwaq*, minaret and enclosure wall were built. At some later stage the minaret was re-built and the height of the enclosure wall increased.

Unfortunately the inscription above the door to the *maqam* is badly defaced and cannot be read until it is properly cleaned. The only thing that can reliably be said is that the inclusion of a blazon indicates that it belongs to the Mamluk period. The vaulted room to the south may also belong to the Mamluk period although it may also have been built in the early Ottoman period. The *riwaq* and minaret were built in the latter part of the Ottoman period, probably in the nineteenth century.

Nabi Yusha

Location

This building is located high up on the western side of the Hula valley looking east towards the Golan heights (Palestine Grid reference 202 279). The site comprises the shrine of Nabi Yusha and the remains of a small village. Immediately to the north is the British Mandate police post of Koah which is now used as an Israeli police station and war memorial. The ground rises up steeply to the west and north of the site and falls away sharply on the east side. Little remains of the village except some cisterns, an extensive graveyard and some ruined houses of which the outlines are barely visible (Fig. 11).

History

It is not known when this site first became associated with Joshua although the nearby site of Tell Kedesh (identified as Hazor) was one of the major cities of the north subdued by him (Joshua 11:10–13; Wilson 1880, 102–3). The location and topography of the site indicate that it may have been established as a shrine long before any buildings were erected. According to Khalidi (1992, 481) the mosque and associated buildings were established in the late eighteenth century by the Al al-Ghul. The al-Ghul were a Shi'ite family and about fifty members of the family lived around the shrine. In the mid-nineteenth century the shrine was visited by Selah Merrill (quoted in Wilson 1880, 107) who described the following:



Figure 11. *General view from north of Nabi Yusha.*

On the brow of a hill which overlooks the lake is a large white domed *wely*, or tomb, of Nabi Husha, i.e. the prophet Joshua, which is a place of famous resort, and we have sometimes seen about it scores of people engaged in festivities of various kinds.

Description

The shrine forms a rectangle aligned north/south with the principal rooms at the south end and auxiliary rooms on the east and west sides; at the south end there is an enclosure wall (Fig. 12). The complex was entered through a gateway at the north end, the only remains of which are a set of steps descending into the courtyard. The courtyard is paved with stone slabs barely visible under the grass and undergrowth. The west range of the building consists of a range of seven rooms built on a raised platform or terrace. A double set of steps near the centre of the

west side of the courtyard leads up to a broad pavement from which the rooms can be entered. Each room had a door and window and was roofed with short branches of wood covered with earth, resting on transverse stone arches (these have mostly collapsed). The buildings on the east side of the courtyard have a similar design although they are on a lower level without the raised terrace in front (Fig. 15).

The principal rooms are at the south end of the courtyard (Fig. 12: 1–2). They comprise a vaulted arcade, three auxiliary rooms and two domed chambers. The arcade is divided into three cross-vaulted bays springing from brackets set in the walls and two large square piers. The floor of the arcade is raised approximately half a metre above the level of the courtyard except for two pathways each of which leads to a domed room. At the west end of the arcade there is a flight of stairs leading to the roof. To the south of the staircase there is a large rectan-

gular room cut off from the rest of the complex with an external doorway. On the east side of the arcade there is a square room (Fig. 12:3) entered by a doorway from the courtyard and to the east of this another square room with the floor resting on a series of small arches. The principal room of the complex is the western domed chamber (Fig. 12:1) entered from a doorway in the middle of the south wall of the arcade. The doorway set within a trefoil arch is flanked by two large windows fitted with iron grilles. Immediately above the door there is a space for an inscribed panel which has been removed. The

interior of the chamber consists of the central domed area and a wide arched recess on each of the four sides. The hemispherical dome rests on a low circular drum supported by spherical pendentives. Beneath the dome, there is a large rectangular cenotaph (approximately half a metre high, three metres long and one metre wide) draped with green and pink cloth (Fig. 14). In the arched recess on the west side there is a small rectangular niche whilst in the centre of the southern recess is the *mihrab*. The hood of the *mihrab* is in the form of a horseshoe arch with the voussoirs decorated with carvings of geometric

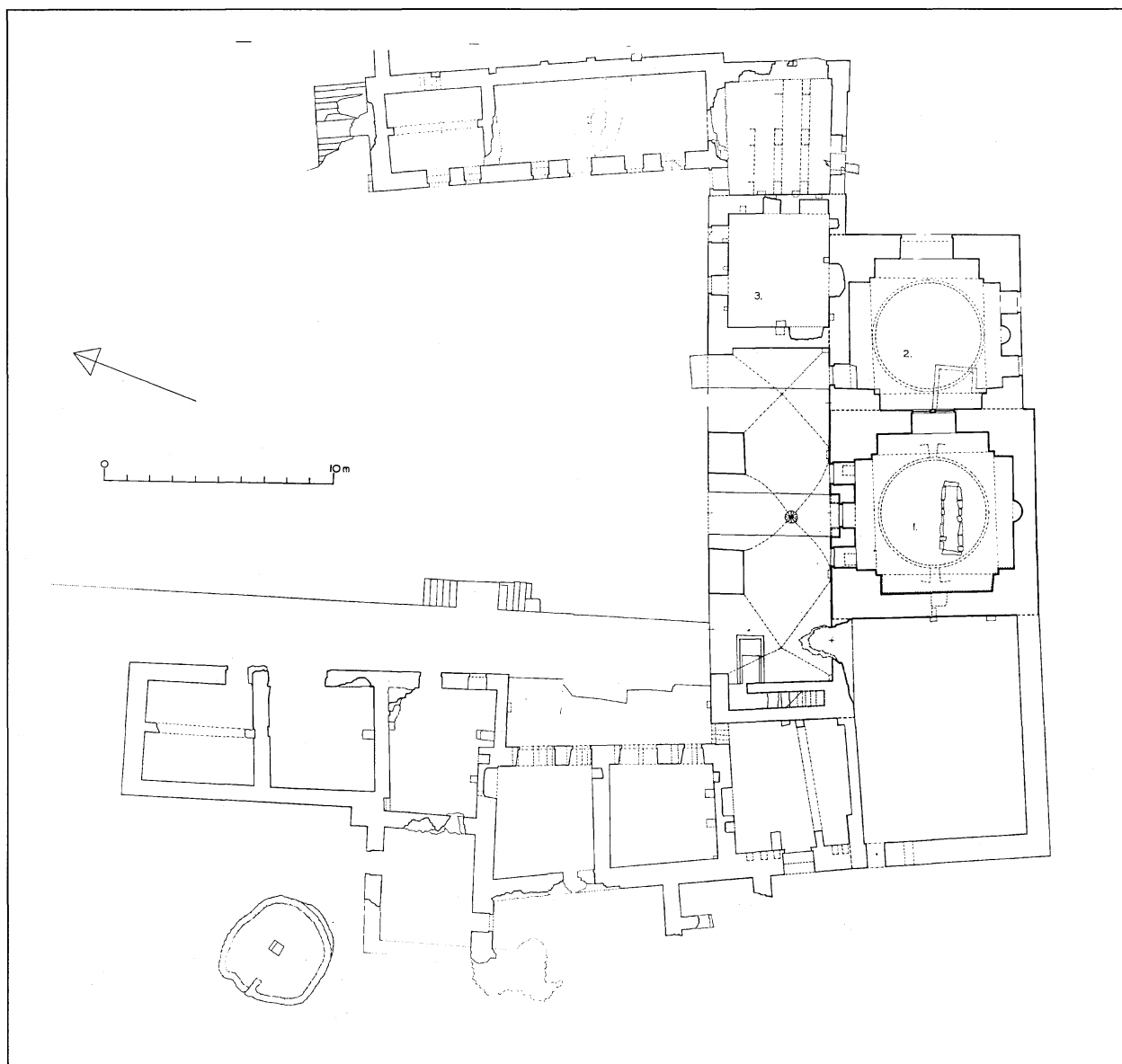


Figure 12. Nabi Yusha. Plan of complex. (1) Shrine of Nabi Yusha, (2) secondary shrine and (3) side room.

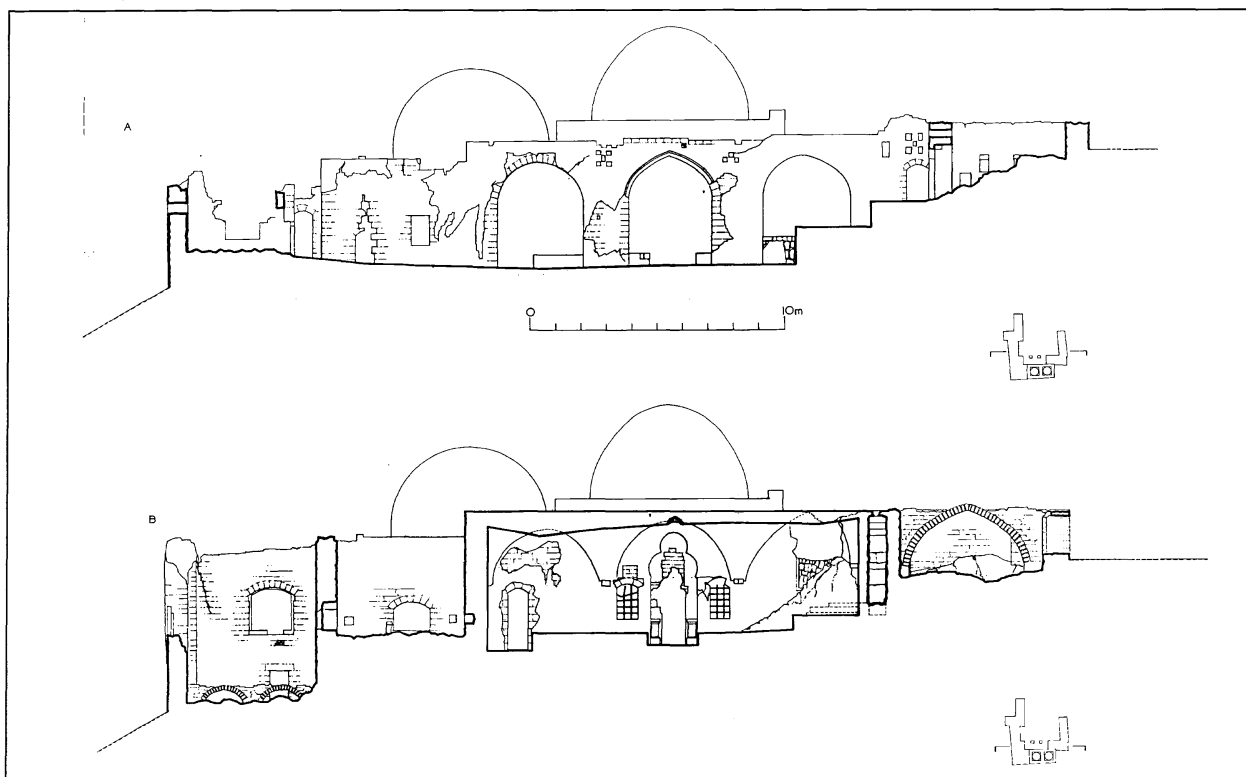


Figure 13. *Nabi Yusha. (A) Elevation of portico and (B) section through portico.*



Figure 14. *Nabi Yusha. Interior of shrine with tomb of Yusha (Joshua) in foreground.*

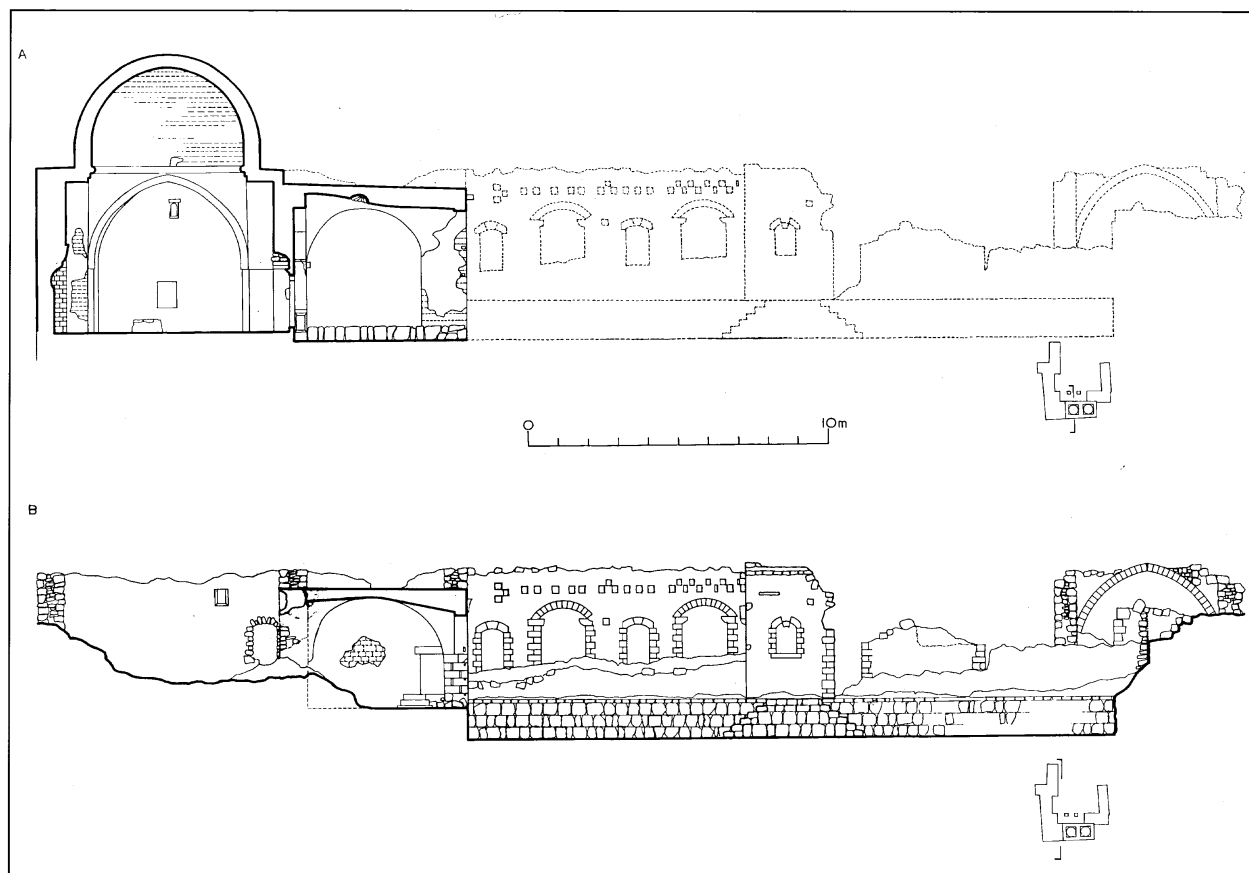


Figure 15. *Nabi Yusha. (A) North/south section through shrine and (B) elevation of west side of courtyard*

discs. On the east side of the chamber there is a large casement containing a pair of windows opening into the eastern domed room.

The east domed chamber (Fig. 12:2) is entered through a doorway at the east end of the arcade. The internal layout is similar to that of the western chamber with a few minor variations. Firstly the entrance is at the west end of the north wall rather than in the centre. Secondly the *mihrab* is flanked by two large windows and perhaps most significantly the grave is built up against the west window (i.e. close to the main chamber) instead of in the centre of the room.

Dating

The earliest part of the complex is the west domed chamber (Fig. 12:1) followed by the east domed chamber, the arcades and then the auxiliary rooms on the west and east sides of the courtyard. The architecture of the west domed chamber is consistent with an eighteenth-century date.

Conclusion

It is not possible to draw any real conclusions until further detailed studies are carried out; however, a few general remarks are possible. First, it is notable that all three shrines shared an isolated location, in the case of Dayr al-Shaykh and Nabi Yusha, high up on a mountain side; and in the case of Nabi Rubin in the midst of desert-like sand dunes. Second, each of these shrines was the centre of an annual festival (*mawsim*) which attracted people from outside the immediate locality. The implication of these observations is that the location of the shrines may depend on topographical features as much as any strictly religious considerations. This does not mean that religious factors are unimportant, but that they are inextricably bound up in the landscape. This reminds us of the fact that a large number of Muslim shrines were established in Palestine after the expulsion of the Crusaders as a means of spiritually reclaiming the land.

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