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Discovery of Jesus Cave in Iraq Al-Amir, Southern Levant-Jordan

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Abstract:

This research is focused on Al-Basah village (Tyre or Tyrues cave); that is considered a new discovery in Jordan. Recent excavation conducted in old Tyrues (Modern Wadi-Sir) in Iraq al-Amir west of Amman City Capital of Jordan has revealed the presence of a number of the important archaeological building. One of them is a unique cave called by local community Mugharat al-Kaniseh, (Cave of the Church) a site with the remains of Roman- Byzantine architectural remains. The cave with its two churches; the first located inside the cave with distinguished mosaic floor and artifacts; the second built outside in front of the cave entrance, paved with the colored mosaic floor with inscription and attached rooms.

The cave, the two churches, and the surrounding monastic buildings indicated strong relations with the heritage of Jesus, John the Baptist, and disciples. The cave located on the old holy route close to the baptism site, Bethany Beyond the Jordan(site of Jesus Baptism) on the eastern bank of Jordan River.

Keywords: *Archaeology, Cave, Architecture, Roman and Byzantine Ages, Religion, Anthropology Excavations*

Introduction:

The cave of Tyrus in Al-Basah is situated 15 km west Amman capital of Jordan & 16 km east of baptism site in Wadi Al-Sir Region; the site consists of a major cave with two churches and nearby large cemetery dated to

Early Bronze, late Hellenistic early to late Roman, and Byzantine periods,(fig :1) other archaeological finds were discovered in and closed to the cave dated to Umayyad, Abbasside, Ayyubbi- Mamluk and Ottoman periods. The site had different names through historical periods; the cave area was named Tyres; with a unique palace built by Hyrcanus in the early 2nd BC. (De Vogue, 1964; Hill, 1963; Lapp, 1962, 1963, 1965, 1983, 1983, 1989; Nancy, 1979; Larche, 1981; Larche, Villeneuve and Zayadine, 1981, 1982; Saver, 1979).



Fig 1: Location of Tyres Cave west of Amman

Travelers Description:

Josephus the first who refers to Iraq el- Amir Area where the cave was discovered and called it Tyrus; (Hyrcanus the ruler of Tyrus determined not to return to Jerusalem anymore, but seated himself beyond Jordan. He also erected a strong castle, and drew round it a great and deep canal of water, he also made caves of many furlongs in length by hollowing a rock, and when he had brought the place to this state, he named it Tyres. This place (Tyres or Tyrus) is between Arabia and Judea, beyond Jordan not far from the country of Heshbon (modern Hesban). (2 Antiquities, IV; II)

Lieutenant Mantel and British surveyor Conder studied Iraq Al-Ameer caves; which are fifteen caves, six in the ground floor and nine caves in the upper floor. They also discussed the name of (**Tyrus**) considered the inscription found on the right of the door, high up of cave No: 13, is interesting and important, the reading is done by Euting which he reads (Turiah for Tyrus) while De Vogue read (Arabiah). (Conder, 1889: 77; fig: 20)

Excavation works inside these caves revealed microlithic tools like blades, scrapers, and bone tools used in hunting, which made us believe that these caves were used before the Hellenistic period and earlier to Natufian Period (Al- Khairi, 1971), the upper caves are connected by a path, 80 to 100 small basins were found next to the upper caves from the left side which could probably use to feed horses which indicate that these caves could be used as horse stable (McCown, 1957; Zayadine, 1997). Josephus mentioned that they were two main functions for their caves which were for habitations and for worshipping (2 Antiquities, IV). An inscription consists of (Turiah for Tyrus or Tobia name was found on the façade of two caves from the lower part of the mountain especially cave no.13as mentioned before (Conder, 1889: 76; Dentzer, 1999).

This reading fits Josephus' description who mentioned the name of **Tyrus**(modern Iraq al Amir) as the place where Hyrcanus built there a palace and water installation and later the monks used the area as hermitage site and targeted the well known cave in Al-Basah Village .

Conder suggested the interpretation of this inscription to mean either (Magharah: cave) or a (watchful). (Conder, 1889: 77) Both meanings refer to a fortified place used for protection and watching which could be targeted later during the Roman and Byzantine periods for those who found this area safe and rich with fruits, vegetables look like a forest and abundant running water.

The Gospel of Barnabas is a book depicting the life of Jesus, which claims to be written by the biblical Barnabas who in this work is one of the twelve apostles.

In chapter (99:1) (Jesus, having withdrawn into a hollow part of the desert in **Tyrus** near to Jordan called together the seventy - two with the twelve, and when he had seated himself upon a stone, made them sit near him).¹

The fortified site of Khirbat as-Sur (Sur-Tyre or Tyrus) located 3km west of Iraq Al Amir not far away from the cave is identified as Tyre dated to 2nd BC-3edAD. Recent name of the cave location or land plot according to a department t of land survey in Jordan is (Bytar) which refers to some changes occurs on the original name and its pronunciation (Tyre) it seems the name derived from Tor /Sur .(Talafeh : 2017)

The first wilderness of John and Jesus was very well defined the geographically zone in the minds of Christian Travelers and Pilgrims an area with terraced hills springs and woodland positioned within the triangle extending between Bethany Beyond the Jordan, Aenon near to Salem, and Tyre cave in Iraq Al-Ameer .

This was the place where the traditional cave of John and Jesus in the wilderness was believed to have existed.

The Tyre cave was conveniently pointed out in the center of this area between Philadelphia and Jordan River at a place called Tyre (The Fortress) overlooking Wadi Shittah and plains of Livias in Jordan Valley close to so called little Jordan (Wady Kafrein) with a path linking the slopes to the south and down to the second traditional place of baptism, Aenon near to Salem(John3:23) in a drive of 10 minutes or 10 km to the south near Kafrein Dam . The area from the cave down to the bed of the valley is full of springs, caves of the hermits where Tell al-Hammam and Tall Habasa (The prison) or religious endowment.

The overall preliminary pieces of evidence of Josephus description, the engraved inscription, the recently discovered churches and the gospels in addition to book of Barnabas refers directly to this cave in Tyre not far away from Jordan River as well as other nearby caves; which fits the location of newly discovered Tyres cave, both places are connected to each other through historical route which connects Jericho on western bank with Ebus(modern Hesban) and Nearby areas like Iraq al- Amir where Tyres cave located on the eastern bank.

The field survey of Wadi Iraq Al- Amir proved that the running stream water passing in front of Tyres cave descended and goes directly to join the running water coming from Wadi Shitta and both continue to join Wadi Ebus stream (Recently Hesban) and last part of this mixed water near wadi Gharaba complex (about 13km from the cave) was diverted through ceramic pipes to empties in the pools of the recently discovered Tell Mar Elyas / Bethany Beyond the Jordan (site of Jesus Baptism) (Waheeb,1997,1999).

Systematic Excavations and test trenches in pilgrims station of Wadi Gharaba complex revealed the presence of old ceramic pipes, which was designed to transport the coming water from Tyres and Hesban to the Baptism site and empties in the cisterns of Tell Mar Elyas.

¹ The Gospel of Barnabas was accepted as a Canonical Gospel in the Churches of Alexandria till 325 A.D.Iraaneus (130-200) wrote in support of pure monotheism and opposed Paul for injecting into Christianity doctrines of the pagan Roman religion and Platonic philosophy. He had quoted extensively from the Gospel of Barnabas in support of his views. This shows that the Gospel of Barnabas was in circulation in the first and second centuries of Christianity.In 325 A.D., the Nicene Council was held, where it was ordered that all original Gospels in Hebrew script should be destroyed. An Edict was issued that anyone in possession of these Gospels will be put to death.In 383 A.D., the Pope secured a copy of the Gospel of Barnabas and kept it in his private library.

A lot of Pilgrims refers to a traditional cave related to John and Jesus on the eastern side of Jordan River in Perea among of them Epiphanies the monk (Beyond the Jordan a cave in which Forerunner (Wilkinson 1977) see also (PGCXX 268f).

St Hellana (when she had crossed the river Jordan and found the cave in which ... she caused a church to be made in the name of John the Baptist). (Wilkinson 1977) see also (Guidi : 48 , PGCXLV1 : 113).

In his Partum spiritual, John Moschus refers to a cave where monk crossed the Jordan River and he was forced to rest in a cave John appeared to him in this cave saying (This Cave is greater than the Whole of Mount Sinai, our lord often walked in it when he visited me). The monk obeyed transformed the cave into a church and gathered brethren about him (Kopp: 1963).

The Hermits of Tyre cave deified by the thought that they like Elijah (Elias) were living and drinking from its waters, so the monks did not bring the Baptism and Jesus to this place, but he them. The Wadies where Elijah the Prophet Lived in during the iron Age II around Livias is rich with village Sites of this date among of them Habasah, Al – Matabe, which situated near modern Rawda Village on the mouth of wadi Hesban and Shitta.

The local community of Iraq Al-Ameer still sacrifice and respected a place in their territory and close to Tyre cave called Maqam Obeid Al-Tayar or / Tyre, the name could be translated as (holy Shrine of the flying believer), this holy place fits the miracle of Elias/ Elijah ascension to heavens, The location area of the shrine between Tyre cave and wadi Shitta where lot of spring still running nowadays became Johns and Jesus spiritual home.

It was by tradition part of Bethany of John and (Jesus John 1:28, 10:40)

What support this assumption is the traditions like what was mentioned by Conder when he visited this area saying Umm el- Kutifeh (Mother of St. John wort) Along ridge by which the road ascends from Kefrein to Arak El Emir. Wild flowers and plentiful here in spring (Conder 188:250).

In this wadi of Tyres cave the hermits used to rough living could have fitting abode in a cave during the rainy season and in a reed- hut in wadi Shitta and Kafrein during the heat summer.

In the eye-Witness accounts of pilgrims, too the cave of St John and place of Elijah's / Elias ascension remain neighbors see (Danial : Khitrowo 26; Phocas : PG CVVVIII 953,956) others mention only the cave of the Baptist .

Grethenios around 1400 AD heard that it is was supposed to lie (on the far side of the Jordan) but he did not venture there (for fear of the Arabs) (Khitrowo :187)

Livias is considered as the base for John and Jesus activities toward Aenon and Tyres to the east Egeria visited Livias through her pilgrimage from Jerusalem to Nebo (Egeria:1981).

Other Pilgrims refers to a cave east of Jordan River near Livias (Maurommitos 511-516) also during the period ranged between 1512-1520 AD most of them connected Elijah ascension with nearby cave of John the Baptist (Koikylides, 542)

According to Kopp who identify Bethany Beyond the Jordan on the eastern bank of Jordan River, he refers to another place of baptism connected with John and Jesus and said in this second place which many have taken place not far from the old place of Baptism on the east bank of Jordan River (Kopp 1963: 141).

The existed ruins of the cave confirm the traditions in the 5th-6th century hermits built a Church inside and outside the Tyres cave dwelling, in which was a spring which had daily life usage.

Traces of water channel engraved in the natural limestone rock is still seen and visible on the surface of the cave, the Channel drains the water coming from the classical eastern and the upper spring which becomes dry nowadays.

On a hill nearby opposite the cave situated what so called by local inhabitants the church of Bardhoun only fragments of tesserae and well cut ashlar and stone columns still found in site .(Fahed 2016 : personal communication).

Above all there are still remains of a village site very close to Bardhoun dated to Iron Age II, the Village hollowed by the local inhabitant and named it after shekh Naseer (Conder 1881 : 216).

The village and surrounded holy shrines is connected with the storey of Elijah is ascension near livias and Tyres wadies and cave the original form of the names may have been lost and the local traditions still has signs of the old names.

Tradition may well imply the truth, in saying that John the Baptist lived in Tyre in a cave.

So far some signs of habitation in the time of Christ have been discovered. There is a serious archaeological difficulty inside the cave of Tyre and systematic excavations should start immediately. In spite of it the conclusion is permissible, that here was another Baptists base where Jesus passed through his Journey from north to south, the Baptist wanted to act in the spirit of Elijah, for this reason he felt himself obliged to connect his spiritual imitation with on imitation of his locality also the crossing of Elijah toward the east and living in Perea in Bethany , Aenon and Tyre may well have impelled him to live in the shadow of the hill and to follow his calling in the wilderness , in the footsteps of his model .

The crowds from Philadelphia north and west could easily reach him in this area in tyre, while crowds from Madaba could reach him in Aenon near Saleem.

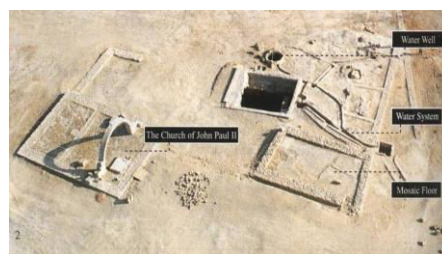
In Tyre John found men ready to open their hearts to the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Tyre wadies and caves where john and jesus later had worked could have remained a living memory until it was recorded in literature.

And so his sequestered wadi Iraq Al-Ameer has an historical claim, along with its (Tyres) to rank as a well established site in the history of redemption .



A



B



C

Fig 2: ABC, Byzantine ceramic pipes transport the water comes from Iraq Al Amir through Gharabah pilgrim's station to site of Jesus Baptism on the eastern bank of Jordan River (Waheeb : 2000)

Tyres Cave Description:

Tyres cave Geographically located within the municipality of Amman, and about 5km west of Wady as-seit Town located at Palestine grid coordinates 223.36 149.26 (map 3153.1.NW) (Figure 1) and is listed in JADIS under the site number 2214.034. According to Conder in 1881 AD El- Bassah (the Marsh) where the cave found; consist of two ruins, with a ruined mill only a few walls and stone heaps, remains found there. The valley is described as swampy (Conder 1889: 90).

The results of the limited excavations conducted in and around Tyres cave showed that a water channel above the cave was cut to drain the run off toward the cave, and impressive amount of human effort should go on creating a system that ensured that the cave used the water coming from the upper slopes,².

The local environment surrounding the cave is rich with water sources among of them Ain al-Khour 150m to the east of the cave with several pounds, while Wadi Seir with running springs all the year located 50m to the south, Al Basah(wet spot) now becomes dry situated 100m above the cliff to the north, and Wadi Zabdah which become active during winter season located 50m to the west of the cave. The geographical location of the cave on cross roads leading to four directions north- south and east- west as well as the abundance of water around the cave enrich the environment and make it attractive for people not only for normal settlement, but also for other purposes.²(see fig:2 ABC)

Field Excavations:

A- Internal Church Excavation works/First church:

The systematic excavations work started in the cave in 1974³; The digging concentrated in front of the cave façade in an area measured 2 x 4 m, field work revealed about 6 limestone staircase slabs which lead down to the entrance, at the bottom of the staircase the team recovered a broken circular marble plate decorated with a cross in the middle, functioned possibly as a table for holy practices. The broken part of this plate was found inside the cave mixed with Umayyad and Mamluk pottery shards, and few bones.

The recovered architectural remains through the excavation could be summarized as follow:(fig 3&4)

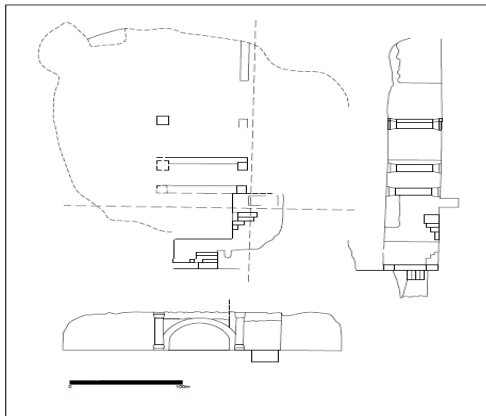


Figure 3: Top plan of internal churches (After Safer, 1974)



Figure 4: Front view of the external faced decorated with engraved cross.

² :a personal communication with local people living nowadays on the upper slopes of the cave refers to an active spring was been here before 50 years ago but becomes dry nowadays

³: The team of 1974 excavation consists of Zahida Safar, Rihab Al-hadeed, Lina Al-Sadi, Sabri Abadi, Anis Qraqeesh, Abed Al-Kareem Ghassab and Mr Ayesha with a number of workers.

Room 1:

After removing stones from the cave entrance, a door way discovered with two column on each side, one still intact, and the other is missing only has its base which is 8 cm height and 30 cm in diameter. Three stone steps were discovered leading down to inside room1 which covers an area of 1.65 x 2.80 m, the walls of this room are dated to Ummayed period, and were built directly on top of a Byzantine mosaic floor.

The mosaic floor was partly decorated with frames and circulars with geometrical designs, of white red, and black Teassers. Such this decorations were discovered in St. George Church during Byzantine period in Madaba (Bagatti and Saller, 1949: 4)

The southern wall length is 1.15 m, while the western wall length is 1.65 m, the eastern wall length is 0.60 m, two loops round notch were carved in the rocky roof seem to be used as a handle for lamps. After removing a dirt layer, a gravel floor was revealed (the Ummayed floor), beneath this floor a Byzantine mosaic floor rested which runs from the first stair until the northern wall (See Safar, 1974: plate 2-2). This floor is broken in the northern and western sides as a result of erecting the Later Ummayed walls. The Byzantine floor consists of interacted circles in the middle, and the frame consists of geometrical decorations. The main colors of the floor are white, red and black. A similar and identical mosaic floor was found in Saint George church about 9 km west of Madaba as mentioned above.

The excavation work inside the cave was conducted in slow because of a big quantity of dirt that should be removed, also the roof was not stable and could collapse at any moment. The most important findings in this room were golden coins, silver coins and few metal pieces, some Ummayed pottery sherds with Arabic inscriptions and geometrical decorations in red color (See Safar, 1974: plate no. 3, 4, and 6).

Room 2:

At the end of the eastern wall a doorway was opened leading to the second room, the room was partly excavated and not completed due to the roof falling ,this continued during the excavation work which refers to protection measurements should be adopted before continue the work; A layer of ash was noticed in northern corner possibly as a result of using fire place in this area; another mosaic floor was discovered in this room, but different in size and color from the previous mosaic floor of the first room, only white colored treasures found here. The floor was severely suffered from the destruction caused by later occupation.

A tomb was dug in the natural rock measures 1.80 x 80 cm was found covered with a stone slab. A bench was built of well-cut ashlar in the western side of the cave, but still, the function of this bench is unclear.

Among other architectural remains were an arch system based on two columns were found one in the northwestern corner, the column still standing up to 2.50 cm, while the second standing on the western side of the cave. The internal space of the cave was divided according to the basilica style of the Byzantine churches; the central nave flanked by 3 columns in each side supporting arch system, the first and second were still preserved in situ.

The excavations revealed that the cave witnessed three occupational phases the Roman- Byzantine 5th- 6th AD, the Umayyad 661- 750 AD, and the Ayyub- Mamluk 1260- 1400 AD period (See Safar, 1974).

Discussion**The original shape of the cave:**

The team spent a lot of time thinking about the original shape of Tyre cave, this was not a natural cave nor a man made one, but a mixture of both, originally was been a natural cave, it was partly hewn out of the rock by human hands.

It was enlarged like semi circular extending from south to north for a distance of meters, with a breadth of .. meters, from wall to wall, and with a total depth approaching 2,50-3m From ceiling to floor. A small shaft cut into the ceiling _ almost like a chimney _ linked the cave to the area above and outside. Six broad steps led down from the right side of the external part of the cave to the entrance.

The top of the cave doorway was decorated with pediment with three cross signs inside the pediment, such this pediment is found in classical Greek temples. A prominent example is found in the Decapolis cities in Jordan, where it contains a tympanum decorated with figures in relief sculpture. This architectural element was developed in the architecture of ancient Greece. In Ancient Rome, and Byzantine architectural, the pediment was used as a non-structural element over windows, and doors. The pediment of Tyre cave built over the doorway of the cave entrance consisting of a gable, as usually of a triangular shape, placed above the arch shape entrance. The entrance under the pediment was medium and allowed one person to enter in the upright position, the floor of the cave was made lower than the entrance, three steps lead down to the first room as mentioned above. There can be tough that this cave was not pre-plan created in stages, in other words, the general shape of the cave body is the same as those hewing it originally conceived it. With modifications inside and outside, the internal division and the buildings added inside & outside the cave.

There is absolutely evidence that the cave was enlarged and expanded during the Byzantine Period.

The cave was cut out of limestone cliff, the top layers of the expanded portions of the rock were left to serve as the roof of the cave. Usually quarryman would get out their chisels, Mattocks and metal rods would cut out lumps of rock by chiseling around them, as seen around the outside area of the cave, they worked in different directions until the overall shape of the cave must have been less complicated, because the layers of the limestone were naturally thin and the seams separating them facilitated the removal of irregularly shaped blocks with only a limited expenditure of labor.

And then for the blocks to be shifted out of the cave and hauled away by the skillful workman, possibly the monks themselves to rebuild them in the construction of the church.

The peculiarities of the limestone in this district ensured that it was in demand in antiquity for building the nearby structures such as in khirbet al-Basah and al_Bardhoun in the opposite slopes.

B- Cemetery Excavation:

In 1993 the author of this article conducted salvage excavation in Al-Basah village ⁴, the work concentrated in front of the entrance Tyres cave. A large cemetery was found, only four tombs were discovered and documented, the recovered materials and artifacts dated back to Early Bronze Age IV. Field survey for the cave and its surrounding area revealed about the followings: (See Waheeb and Polumbo, 1994)

Rock cut tombs surrounds the cave area from all sides used during Roman and Byzantine periods from 1st-5th century AD. Recently an Islamic cemetery established here, with more than 100 graves dug from the begging of the 20th century; as well as, a new mosque was built close to this modern cemetery.

The discovered classical burial caves, cisterns, cup marks, and canals were dug & found near Tyre cave as well as cist tombs cut in the natural rock surrounding the cave from east and north direction; while the major valley with its running stream represents the southern border of the cave. The recovered materials during the survey was dated from Bronze Ages till Ottoman Periods; indicated that this area witnessed continues occupation from 3000 BC until recent times.

The team of 1993 excavation consist of Dr.Mohe,d waheeb Archaeologists zuhair Zubi , Yazeed Elyan , and logistic team members ⁴ from Dept of Antiquities.

The field work revealed four tombs documented as follow:

Tomb I: has an oval shape, its entrance from the eastern side, 3.30 m length, 2.30 m width and 1.30 m height, the real entrance to this tomb is from the street direction that runs in the front of the cave since it is a shaft tomb, few bones, and pottery shared were found.

Tomb II: has an unspecific shape because of severe disturbance work on the site, it seems consisted of two rooms, measures 4.30 m length, 1.80 m width and 1.70 m height. The entrance located at eastern side represented by three stairs, the main finds of this grave are two skeletal remains, seven jugs, one plate and a pottery jar.

Tomb III: similar to tomb II in shape, it measures 2m length, 1.70 m width and 1m height, a skull traces, pottery shards, and bones were found inside.

Tomb VI: completely destroyed by bulldozing activities during road construction. The pottery vessels and shards in addition to the type of construction of these recovered tombs dated to the early Bronze Age IV. (Waheeb and Polumbo, 1994: Fig 1:2) (see fig 5&6)

Laboratory work confirmed that the pottery sherd dated to early Bronze Age and has Syriac influence since similar were found in Palestine (Kenyon, 1956: 205). (See figure 3).

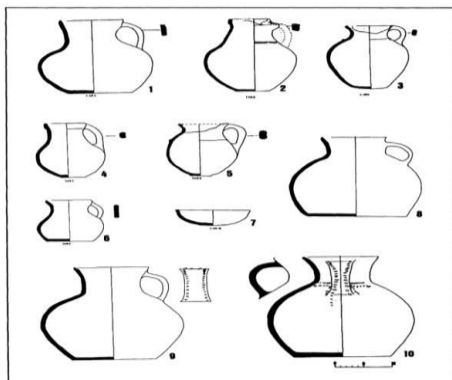


Figure 5: EBIV Vessels from the recovered Tombs (Elyon, 1994).

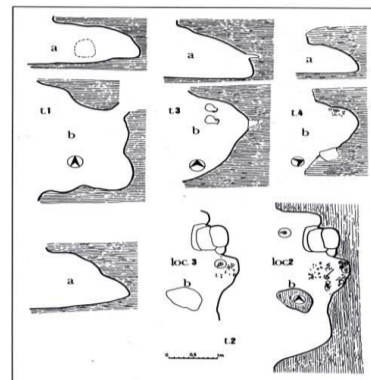


Figure 6: Architectural remains of the discovered tombs (Elyon, 1994).

C- External Church Excavation works:

Field excavation was continued and conducted at Tyre cave during 1996. The field work concentrated on the outside space of the entrance in front of the main doorway of the cave; excavations revealed the presence of a church measures 21 x 10 m; built of well-cut limestone ashlar, the outer walls built of two rows, While the apse built of medium limestone blocks of two rows; the space between them filled with chunks, only three courses of the apse still existed and standing up to 1.35 m, its diameter is 4.25; and consist of two rows of seats coated with white plaster.

The floor was furnished with mosaic floor using different kind of colored tesserae like red black and white. An inscription was found on the mosaic floor written in old Greek language translated as follow (Jesus the savior from the first and last):

The rooms:

Excavations revealed four rooms built around the apse and the nave of the church as follow:

First room: built adjacent to the apse wall and measures 2.85 x 2 m with stone courses standing up to 1.15 m built of two rows of well-cut limestone ashlar, the inner side was coated with white plaster layer, while its

floor was covered with white mosaic teasers, the doorway was constructed in the western wall with two steps used as staircase.

Second room: situated opposite the first room to the west; its measurement 1.60 x 2m and its walls still standing up to 1.28 cm, the floor paved with white mosaic teasers.

The northern rooms: the first room situated to the north along with the apse wall, and measures 2.80 x 1.65 cm; its wall still standing up to 1.65 cm built of two rows of limestone blocks. The doorway was opened in the western wall with 85cm width and 1.45 high; as well as, two steps were built in front of the doorway, the floor was paved with white mosaic teasers.

The second room built opposite the first one measures of 1.75 x 2.40 cm, its courses still standing up to 1.66 cm. With its doorway opened in the western wall, its floor also paved with white mosaic teasers. (Al- Zaben, 2002)



Fig7: View of External Church (Waheeb 2012)

The Nave:

The church nave was divided into three aisles as follow: (fig: 7)

The floor of the nave was paved with a colored mosaic floor of red, black and white tarsers decorated with different styles and designs such as geometrical, floral like grape, and fauna of birds which is partly affected and destroyed during the last iconic period.

The nave was surrounded by three walls from north, south, and west, only four column bases were found in the northern wall which is running to 11.45 cm and 63 cm width. The length of the southern wall is 11m and 1.26 cm width distinguished by finding three column bases while the fourth one is lost.

The left and right aisle of the nave is identical in its measurement 19 x 1 m while its floor was paved with white mosaics.

According to the result of field excavation, the nave was been accessible through three-foot paths during the period of the second church period; the first with its length 9m and 1m width located adjacent to the east wall of the apse. The second foot path located parallel to the first path in its measurement, while the third footpath built adjacent to the former one and represent the largest one 9m in length and 2.13 cm width and was paved with cobblestones (Al-Zeben, 2002).(fig: 8)

Excavation in the eastern area of the paths revealed Ayyubbi- Mamluk and late Islamic walls which extended to 15m length and 1.55 width; this wall represents part of big structures needs more excavations.

Depending on the recovered materials and artifacts the church was dated back to the Byzantine periods, analyzing on the recovered artifact such as pottery and way of construction, the church could be dated to the 5th-6th century A.D, and continued to be used during Islamic periods.

There were two principal sources of rainwater: the first was on the hill slope above the cave.

Our investigations showed that a small and oblong shape cistern was been hewn into the rock surface 1) above the cave. The main aim was to collect by degrees the run _off surface rainwater draining from the slope of the mound and to direct it down into the cave.

The second source of water was from the valley itself.

The water was then channeled artificially either from Ain Al-Khour or the running wadi the channel was been covered with flat slabs of stone to prevent it from silting up, unfortunately, most of the channel was removed during construction of the new road and nearby modern cemetery.

The cave could be said to be usefully close to the bed of the running wadi seir, but at the same time is higher above the level at of the wadi bed on a sharp edge to the north direction, the cave and the whole surrounding cemetery were safe from flooding and would have been under constant safe condition from being silty and subsequently the difficult task of maintaining it.

Another possibility is that it was chosen because a natural flow or a wet land (Basah) of water from an aquifer was originally spotted at this location. Some local villagers reported but not ruled out a deep shaft location in front of the cave used to reach the water of the wadi instead of using traditional way by going down the valley to bring the water with leather containers.

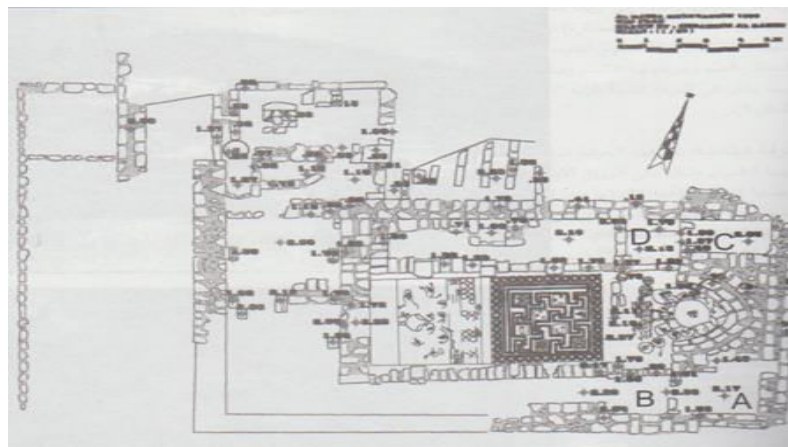


Figure 8: Top plne for the church remeains outside the cave (Al- Zaben, 2002)

However as far as I can see, there is evidence for such speculation, the local farmers in the wadi tried to reduce the level of the water aquifer by diverting the traditional tracts of running water to new locations in order to benefit from the limited land plots located directly close the valley bed.

Moreover the shape of the cave especially the north eastern wall where is a medium opening hewn in the northern wall leading to known direction possibly refers to resemble spring- caves, such these caves were found down in Iraq al-Amir area, when Hyrcanus dug the caves (Josephus II).

This if proven will make three sources of the elaborate water system to entrap running water from three different sources, the hill slope, the spring, and the valley, its location at the sensitive juncture between these topographical zones. Water in Iraq al-Amir area is very valuable and responsible about early settlement in this area, water installations found everywhere in surrounding area at the cave. The area has several natural water resources, such as springs, streams, running wadies, much thought was put into the shape and appearance of eastern and reservoir for drinking and irrigation purposes, the opening of these cisterns were kept small to prevent evaporation, especially during the hot summer months, and to prevent the infiltration of dirt and detritus, cisterns tended to be round and or rectangular in plan and bell shape in section.

The date:

The preliminary proposed date for the cave according to the three seasons of excavations was not defiantly completed specially inside the cave due to several reasons among of them the fragile ceiling and high possibility of collapsing, the available data could be summarized as follow: Bronze, Roman, Byzantine, Umayyad, and Ayyubi- Mamluk periods.

- 1- Bronze Age according to the discovered tombs under the southern foundations of the cave The recovered tombs and materials dated back to EBIV, from 2600 BC to 2000 BC .
- 2- The Roman- Byzantine (Classical) period depending on the recovered materials such as churches, mosaic floor, and other artifacts which dated back to 4th- 6th A.D.
- 3- Islamic period, depending on golden and silver coins and pottery dated to 661-750A.D.
- 4- Islamic (Ayyubi- Mamluk – Ottoman period) represented by pottery sherds found, which dated between 1260 and 1800 A.D.

This date of historical sequences depended mainly on architectural analysis and comparative studies as well as analysis of coins artifacts and preliminary reading of pottery and some related objects.

It was quite astonishing, and during our filed excavations during 1993 it did seem to be inconsistent with our archaeological findings, which had brought to light different periods. The limited conducted survey in the vicinity of the cave and the cemetery revealed rock cut classical tombs, cisterns, wells, wine pressed, rock cut features such as quarries and channels, and Early Bronze, Roman and Byzantine pottery sherds scattered here and there. (Wheeb and palumbo1994:57).

In stratigraphically terms, however, we had to concede that we had uncovered direct evidence for the date of construction of the cave, but only a date for the earliest possible time inside the cave that a larger of dump covered a large space some mixed with small stones and pebbles rested directly and accumulated over the mosaic floor which needs urgent systematic excavations analysis and interpretation.

All we could say there for was that the hewing or expanding the natural cave must have occurred at some point in time before the Byzantine period and possibly during the Roman period. The cave is the work of a community closely related to Christianity, the cave represent the center of a sect, and that in some hour of danger they had hidden themselves inside the cave, Tyres cave like an enormous monastery housed considerable number of monks, a center for meeting and sometimes for meals taken in common, immersion was carried out in running water in the wadi. This religious life with members lived in simple caves is practiced everywhere in the holyland. The synoptists do not enable us to fix place where john and Jesus lived. Even less can we find the site of Christ's temptations.

Move by the Holy spirit Jesus went into the wildness after his Baptism.

From the Jordan the majestic wilderness of Perea highlands would be bound to attract him, where a lot of caves enriched the area of Tyres in Iraq Al-Ameer not far away from Jordan River and Livias.

During his ministry in Perea, and according to the biblical scheme of things, Jesus may resting upon a hill and in a cave in quiet contemplation, as later traditions confirm and liked to imagine, also it's a time of lonely, meditative wandering through deep wadies and slopes also across bleak mountains tops like Tyres mountains and distinguished known caves since Iron II through Hellenistic Ages.

The mosaic floor with its decorations dated broadly to Byzantine period, while the above compacted layer of sand dated to Umayyad period or broadly to the Islamic period.

It is logical to assume that the cave was dug during Bronze or Iron Age, but before classical periods, archaeologists always need something a bit more tangible than just a probability. At one point, we had found structures with pottery that seemed to be of late Iron Age date in close areas such as the circular tower of al-Deir and Umm al-Daboul settlement 1 km to the south East of the cave. However clear and incontrovertible evidence from the Iron age did not emerge during the execution further layers of fill were found as well as roof fall extending all over the surface. The Iron 11 settlement in Iraq Al Amir suggest the existence of road system of the period connecting the Jordan Valley particularly along Wadi Kafrein And Wadi Seir to Iraq l Amir, this proposed trade route, and defence system may be related to plateau fort (Prag : 1996) this route appears to have been intensively reused in the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and early to late Islamic periods (Ji1998: 602-603) According to the survey results the Roman sites are rather evenly scattered over the survey area so the settlement population levels were relatively low in the Roman Period, in contrast, there must have been a substantial settled population in the Byzantine Period(Ji1998: 603) .(fig:9)



*Figure 9: Byzantine Pottery from the /second church
(Waheeb, 2002)*

Discussion:

The discovery of the cave, the tow churches, and the holy remains that surrounding the area opened a discussion among some archeologist, experts and holy men about the function of the cave in early days of Christianity.

Some scholars refer to a diversity of architectural classical remains in the area around Tyre cave such as settlements caves, hermitage caves, monasteries, water installation as well as holy shrines (Conder 1881, Lapp 1979).

Field investigations showed that the Tyre cave was surrounded by Ad- Deir (the Monastery) from southeast; where now remains of architectural complex buried under modern dumps (A. Fahad Personal communication 2016).

Another site situated less than 1 km to the south east direction is well known as Muallakated-Deir (Hanging place of the monastery) use as mortuary, where there are around 2300 niches designed for the monk's skulls who lived near and around the cave area (Conder, 1881)

Another monastic or hermitage remains were found in Mullakat Al- Bardhoun just 1km to the south of the cave; a cave and water installations found dug in the natural cliff (Waheeb, 2016).

The stream in the valley (Wady es-Seir) is attractive and fresh, perennial and abundant; it was surrounded with oleanders, which have grown to enormous size, being almost as large as forest trees. The cool shade beneath these thick trees beside the water is extremely refreshing, which may attract a lot of monks to live in and to cultivate some types of vegetables and fruits using Tyre cave for praying and crossing the valley to Al-Bardhoun Village and Al-Basah village opposite the cave for settlement.

Field investigation and surveys in Al-Bardhoun village to the south of the cave at a distance of 200 meters revealed the presence of village site dated mainly to Roman & Byzantine Periods, among the several documented remains are rock cut tombs and large cemetery of Roman- Byzantine type; cisterns, burial caves, with decorated facades, monk cells, press, and disturbed mosaic floors here and there refers to remains of destroyed churches. Few engraved steps were still existed and noticed dug in the natural rocky slope of Al-Bardhoun, which represent as an evidence of crossing between Tyre cave and the village site. According to local inhabitants, these architectural remains were been existed before the last destruction caused by urban development, and extend over an area of (12hectare) approximately (Abdullah, F Personal communication :2015).

Other large remains of Byzantine date were found in Al-Basah village directly to the south east direction opposite Tyre cave at a distance of 150 m; a mosaic teaser's possibly represented mosaic floors of destroyed churches, caves, architectural remains mostly walls of well-cut ashlar, all indication of the holy men community living here and have strong relations with Tyre cave.

Recently a large cemetery of classical remains (Roman- Byzantine) was found situated on a high slope overlooking the nearby areas close to Tyre cave in an area called by local inhabitants (Arqoub- Hamdeh) (Waheeb, 2016).

Several holy shrines respected by the local community were found to the southern area of the cave among of them sheikh Nasir shrine, Al- Mughrabi shrine, and Obeid al- Tayar shrine those shrines represented by structures and rounded circles respected by the local community till nowadays. These shrines were dated back early to hundred decays according to the people who dug their modern cemeteries close to these shrines, field works revealed Late Iron Age- Roman-Byzantine Classical and Islamic pottery sherds scattered around these remains.

This will encourage us to investigate more about the traditions of prophets and holy men in this area before and during Christianity, where Elijah the prophet activities witnessed several episodes in the general area on the east side of Jordan River, taking into consideration the importance of field works around the cave since Iron Age II 900– 700 BC some remains found very close to the cave were abundant especially the village site of 10 Acre near Ain -Tarabeel/ Tarateel 500 meters south east of the cave was known as Basah cemetery is known from previous explorations (Waheeb, 2016). This site linked with Elijah's movement in the Wadi near the cave where John and Jesus later came to continue the message of God, traditions still existed here where Conder refers to Umm el Kutifeh as (Mother of St .John) (A long ridge by which the road ascends from Kafrein to Arak el-Emir. Wild flowers are plentiful here in spring) (Conder 1881:250)

The Holy Text

The discovery of Roman, Byzantine remains at Tyre cave confirms what the gospel show, this cave and the surrounding zone down to the Baptism site was an integral part of the history of Christianity. The cave and the nearby hermitage sites from all directions, the discovered churches and its related outpost down the western valley toward Kafrein, Rama & Ain Saleem played a vital role in the events recorded. What supports our idea is that the area of Tyres was at a point near the Esbus- Jericho road and not far away from Jordan River to which old roads came down.

Both the circumstances of Johns and Jesus work and the recent archaeological discoveries emphasize that most of their activities were on the eastern side of Jordan River in Perea as well in (John 1:28,10: 40) here is clear reference to Johns and Jesus work where it is stated that he was lived beyond the Jordan. The unique and rather exciting ecology of the cave may here play a role in giving it a spiritual dimension in Roman-Byzantine periods.

Jesus began His journey, which was to end in Jerusalem. The expression "into the coasts of Judaea beyond the Jordan" means the region beyond Judea to the east of the Jordan River. By taking this route, Christ avoided Samaria, where He had ministered before and passed through territory that was new to His public ministry. As He went, others joined crowds following Him from Galilee.

The fourth gospel says that after the visit to Jerusalem at the feast of Dedication Jesus withdrew beyond Jordan to the place where John at the first was baptizing (John10:.40). Matthew and Mark also say that at the close of the ministry of Galilee Jesus departed and came into the borders of Judea and beyond Jordan and that in this new region the multitudes again flocked to him, and he resumed his ministry of teaching (Matt. xix.1f.; Mark x.1). What he did and taught at this time is not shown at all by John, and only in scant fashion by the other two. They tell of a discussion with the Pharisees concerning divorce (Mark x.2-12); of the welcome extended by Jesus to certain little children (Mark x.13-16); of the disappointment of a rich young ruler, who wished to learn from Jesus the way of life, but loved better his great possessions (Mark x.17-31); of a further manifestation of the unlovely spirit of rivalry among the disciples in the request of James and John for the best places in the kingdom (Mark x.35-45), a request following in the records directly after another prediction by Jesus of his death and resurrection (Mark x.32-34). Then, after a visit to Jericho (Luke xviii.35 to xix.28), these records come into coincidence with John in the account of the Messianic entry into Jerusalem just before the last Passover **According to John:1: 35-40**

((35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' 37The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.38When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' 39He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon)) **40** Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). **42** And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Cephas) While John was in Bethany, beyond the Jordan, there had been sent to him from Jerusalem a delegation from the leaders of the nation to ask whether he was the Messiah, Elijah, the promised Prophet. It was there that John presented Jesus as the Lamb of God, to the crowd and to his disciples, two of whom became disciples of Jesus. One of them was Andrew, as specifically indicated by the evangelist, who presents his brother Simon to Jesus who in turn receives Simon giving him the nickname Cephas, Rock (Jn 1). here we find the archaeologist Paul Lapp refers to a rock in

Iraq Al Amir saying that it represents Jesus (Lapp1989) Lapp Paul Iraq Al Amir *Archaeology of Jordan*, Akkadica, 7, 280-297.

Also, a reference in the gospel of John 6 refers that Jesus went to a mountain with his disciples 6. After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

NT commentators speak of Christ's Perea ministry. It began with His departure from Galilee (Matt 19:1; Mark 10:1) and ended with the anointing by Mary in Bethany east Jerusalem. Very few of the incidents recorded for that period of our Lord's ministry actually took place beyond the Jordan, so the designation "Perea ministry" is somewhat of a misnomer.

The Bethany of John 1:28 where Jesus was baptized is described as "beyond the Jordan." Jesus certainly passed through Perea on his many journeys from Nazareth to Jerusalem in the years before His public ministry. According to Gospels Christ. Movements in Perea was mentioned in Matthew 4:25 and Mark 3:8, crowds came from Perea to be healed by Christ.

John was tied to several places beyond the river, such as Aenon Near to Saleem near wadi Hesban, Livias, and wadi Shetta in Tyre, so he could wander up and down the lonely Jordan valley like a local inhabitant At these areas, wadies, springs, caves and small towns he found an audience and away down the steep banks and slopes to the water's edge, and the water of wadi Hesban and wadies— Seir did not flow so fast and deep in these places as to make immersion impracticable He many have lived from time to time with his disciples in caves near the water sources, Jesus too, many have hurriedly lived in one of these caves winter rain and floods often make passage across the softy marly bottom impossible .

John moved from place to another where there was running water, either in wadi es-seir (Tyre) of Kafrein (little Jordan) of Hesban (Aenon Near to Saleem) but where preaching and Baptism would not have to be abandoned during winter and bad weather. Here in Tyre the skies are blue and the ground is green while the water running smoothly, this may took him up to the slope where the crowds of Philadelphia and other nearby towns had gathered for him and Jesus.

In this place John and Jesus was beyond the river in Bethany in Perea and in Aenon near to Saleem and in Tyre, territory under Herod Antipas rule, in these places they were beyond the Jurisdiction of Sanhedrin.

Their movements from Bethany to a new place nearer to new towns and villages considered as an increasing threat by Antipas the ruler of the country.

In view of their challenge of the ruler John at least departed from Bethany in Perea

There did not go to Judaea, but to the east where is abundant of water.

Therefore John and Jesus are able to continue their Baptismal activity, with their disciples, away from the river and the Pharisees and Sanhedrin in the west bank who are watching him suspiciously.

Tyre in Perea was under Antipas rule who at this time was becoming a menace to John and Jesus. We must then conjecture that their living in this area almost in cave in Tyre.

This name Tyre is derived from strong or fortified place, a major fortified sites Known Khribet Sur and series of caves was discovered here wes of Tyre cave.

Jesus lived in Perea for unknown period, and used to baptize and (all men come to him) (John 3:25).

The two groups, John's disciples and Jesus disciples indicates the spread of Christianity in Perea and indicates the spread of Christianity in Perea and implies proximity.

The distance between Tyre, Aenon and Bethany are not great enough to hinder direct and indirect contact between the two groups of disciples.

For the time being, work is in hand for the re-opening and development of the sanctuaries on the east bank of the river. These had practically been forgotten due to the long abandonment and events of war.

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