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Mario Parise, Carla Galeazzi, Roberto Bixio, Ali Yarıncı

Graffiti of Boats from the Hellenistic and Early Roman Period in Underground Chambers in the Judean Foothills, Israel

Eitan KLEIN¹, Boaz ZISSU²

¹ The Israel Antiquities Authority and the Institute of Archaeology, Ariel University (Israel)
(eitankn@hotmail.com)

² The Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology, Bar Ilan University (Israel)
(bzissu@gmail.com)

Abstract

Within the Judean Foothills, a hilly area lying about 30-40 km east of the coastal plain of Judea, thousands of underground artificial cavities and installations were handmade carved in the soft limestone rock. The local inhabitants have used these cavities throughout history for various purposes, such as agricultural installations, rock quarries, water cisterns, stables and underground storage installations for agricultural produce.

During the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, numerous underground installations were hewn and used in the Judean Foothills. Fixing the date of use for these cavities as well as identifying the ethnicity of the hewers is hard, even though sometimes it can be based on the style of quarrying, the integration of architectural, technical, or stylistic elements, the purpose of the spaces, the dated items found inside them, dating the site to which the installations belong to, and graffiti and inscriptions found on the walls of the installations. Large numbers of these underground installations were connected to each other by narrow tunnels allowing passage only by crawling and were integrated into underground hiding complexes. These complexes were installed under Jewish settlements that existed in the area until the time of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (132-136 C.E).

In this paper, four underground installations from the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods with graffiti of boats engraved on their doorpost or lintel will be presented. These installations, located in ancient sites in the vicinity of the Hellenistic city 'Maresha', were later integrated into hiding complex systems that were used during the Bar-Kokhba Revolt. We present a discussion regarding the use of these installations and the dating of the boat graffiti, and rise various proposals about the reason for their appearance and symbolic significance.

Keywords

Boats, Graffiti, Judean Foothills, Maresha, Hellenistic Period, roman Period, Bar-Kokhba Revolt, Hiding Complexes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Judean Foothills, a hilly area that stretches eastward for some 30-40 km from the Judean coastal plain, contains thousands of artificial cavities and chambers hewn out of the chalk bedrock. Throughout history, these cavities served the local residents in various ways, as it is typical for many types of artificial cavities [see Parise et al., 2013]: agricultural installations, quarries, water cisterns, underground stables, columbaria, and storage facilities for agricultural products.

Many of them were hewn out during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In many cases it is difficult to identify their exact chronology and the ethnic identity of the people who did so. Attempts to date these systems generally rely on several relevant factors:

1. The inclusion of various architectonic, technological, or stylistic elements in the structure.
2. The typology of the rooms and chambers.
3. Carvings and inscriptions found on the walls.
4. The relative stratigraphy of adjacent underground chambers.
5. Datable finds inside the chambers.
6. Context: dating of archaeological finds on the surface and their association with the underground chambers.
7. The style of hewing.

Most of the underground facilities in the area of this study that were hewn out during these periods were joined by narrow tunnels or burrows that are passable only on all

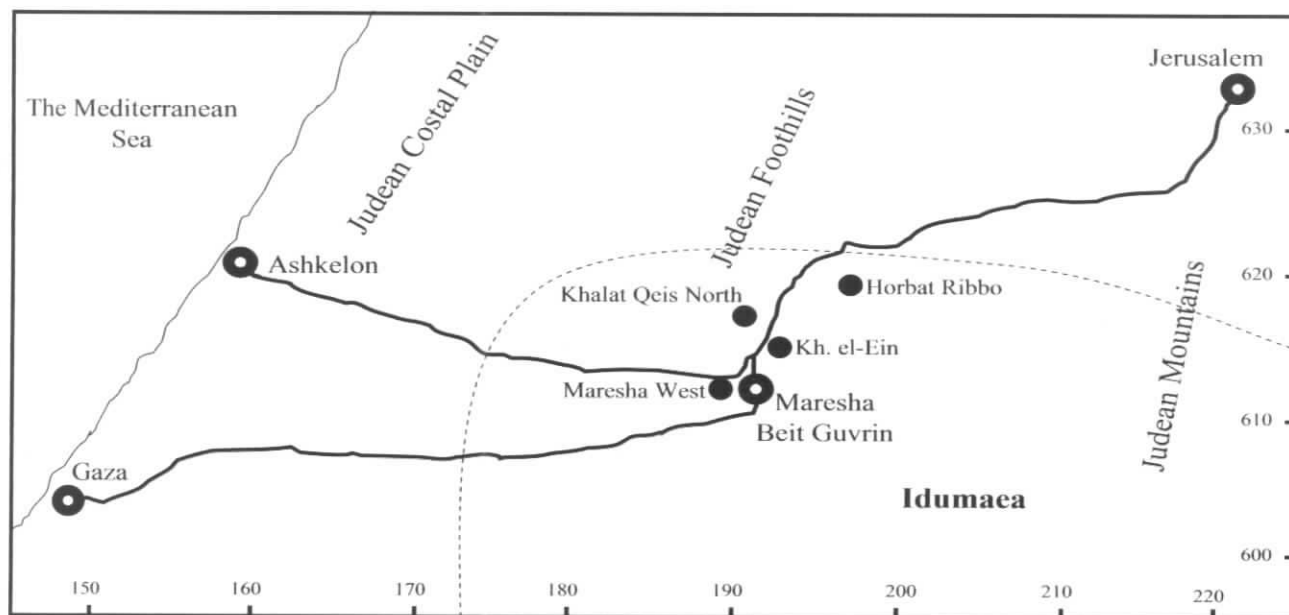


Figure 1: Location Map (drawing E. Klein)

fours and incorporated into the refuge systems that were prepared under residents' homes in the Jewish villages that existed in the region until the Bar-Kokhba Revolt.

In this article, we present four underground facilities from the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods where images of boats were carved into the doorposts or lintel of the entrance. These facilities, located in Second Temple period Jewish villages in the Judean Foothills (Fig. 1), were later incorporated into typical hiding complexes that were in use during the Bar-Kokhba Rebellion. The article will discuss the purpose of these facilities; we will also date the boat graffiti and consider their symbolic significance.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CARVING

Horvat Ribbo

Horvat Ribbo is an ancient site that covers an area of some 10 acres at the top of a knoll that rises to 420 m a.s.l. The site is located some 3 km south of the Elah Valley, 2.5 km south of Tel Sokho and 2.5 km northwest of Tel Adullam.

Victor Guérin visited the site in the mid-nineteenth century and focused on a stone lintel decorated with crosses, found on the edge of the site, and the adjacent stone columns. He proposed that a church existed there during the Byzantine period [Guérin 1969]. As a result, most scholars proposed identifying the site with Rebbō (Ροββό), which Eusebius, in his *Onomasticon* (early fourth century) locates on the eastern side of the territory of Eleutheropolis (i.e., Beth Guvrin) [Klostermann 1966; see Conder and Kitchener 1883; Thomson 1907; Beyer 1931; Abel 1967; Tsafirir et al. 1994]. The Israel Antiquities Authority conducted a survey under the supervision of Boaz Zissu and Amir Ganor in 2000–2001 (licenses G99/2000 and G35/2001). In the wake of antiquities looting, the IAA conducted additional

fieldwork at the site under the supervision of Eitan Klein in 2011–2013 (license A-6979/2013-01). These uncovered the remains of various buildings and facilities in and around the ruin—including columbaria, elements of an oil press, winepresses, quarries, underground storage chambers, cisterns, and several burial caves [Klein, Zissu and Ganor in print]. Among the other ancient elements reported was a rock-cut facility that includes a rectangular corridor descending towards an opening with an arched lintel and then leading to a trapezoidal inner chamber covered in gray plaster. This was identified as a *mikveh* (Ritual Bath), which allows us to assert that Jews lived on the site during the late Second Temple period [Zissu 2001].

The 2000–2001 survey found 23 bronze coins dating from the Hellenistic to Muslim periods; these include Ptolemaic, Hasmonean, and Herodian coins, as well as one coin from Year II of the Jewish War.

An extensive underground system (ICS coordinates 148165/118501), which had previously been penetrated by antiquities thieves, was documented in the northern section of the site, slightly south of the trail that crosses the saddle north of the ruin. The system includes several underground facilities that were linked by narrow tunnels (Fig. 2).

Today it is possible to enter the system through an elliptical shaft that was opened in the *nari* (hard limestone) crust that serves as the roof of Chamber B. Handholds were cut into the sides of the shaft to facilitate climbing in and out of the system. Chamber B is irregularly shaped, due to two large pillars of bedrock that were left in the northern and eastern walls.

The eastern section of the chamber—including the eastern pillar—was covered in the gray plaster that is typical of the

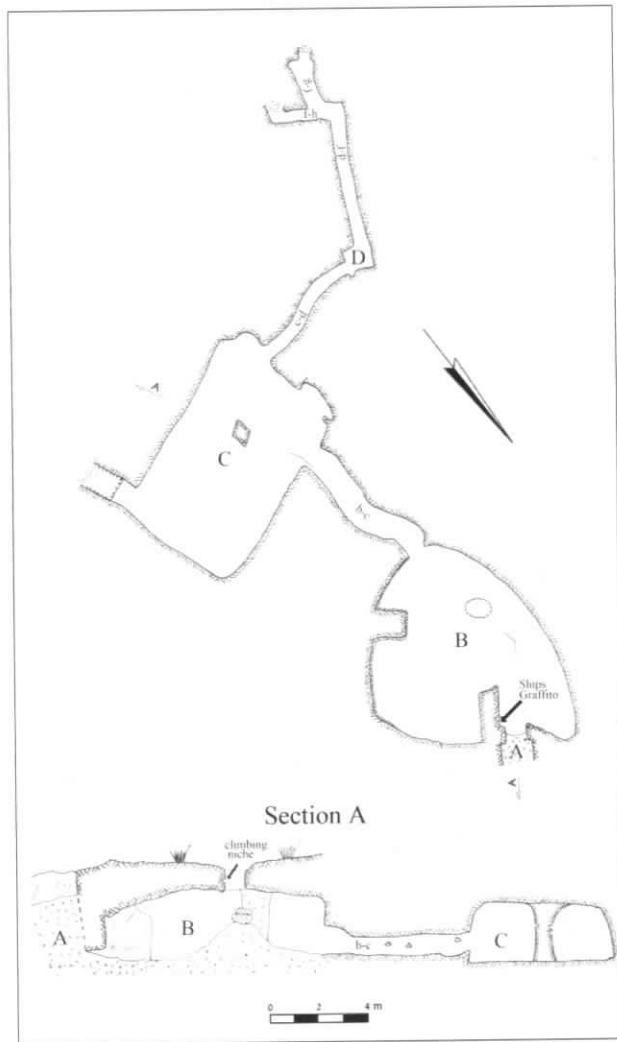


Figure 2: Plan and Section of the Hiding Complex, Horvat Ribbo (drawing E. Klein)

Herodian period; the chamber's western section was not plastered. An opening, 0.85 m wide, which had been sealed, was cut into the western section of the northern wall next to the stretch of bedrock.

A rectangular dromos (Dromos A) discovered at ground level outside the system leads to this opening and at one time afforded easy access to the chamber. It is possible that the pillars were left in Chamber B in order to support its ceiling; it seems more likely, however, that these were originally two or three adjacent chambers that were joined at some stage. The simple architectural plan suggests that the western section of the chamber, which was found without any remnants of plaster and with a dromos leading to it, served as an underground storage during the period before it was joined to the adjacent chambers.

A schematic carving of a maritime scene with two vessels was discovered on the northern pillar in Chamber B, alongside the opening and at the height of the lintel (Figs. 3, 4).



Figure 3: Maritime Scene Graffito on the northern pillar of Chamber B, Horvat Ribbo, Hiding Complex, Looking East (photo E. Klein)

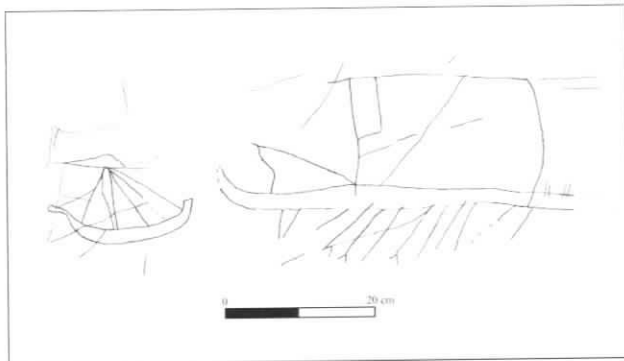


Figure 4: Maritime Scene Graffito on the northern pillar of Chamber B, Horvat Ribbo, Hiding Complex (drawing E. Klein)

The right-hand vessel—a warship with an elongated deck and a bank of oars—is 50 cm long and 28 cm tall. Though not all the details of the boat are clear, the orientation of the oars suggests that the boat is sailing towards the right. A diagonal line that represents a brace runs from the yard supporting a rectangular sail to the deck. Visible on the left side of the carving (the stern of the ship) is the *aphlaston* (ornamental appendage at the ship's stern); two short lines below it apparently depict the steering oar. A large triangle just to the right of the *aphlaston* and above the steering oar may be a tent for the helmsman. The ship's bow is not clearly visible. A similar engraving of a boat is known from the entrance to Jason's Tomb in Jerusalem, which has been dated to the first century BCE [Rahmani 1964]. Left of this boat is another one, a small trading vessel. It too seems to be sailing towards the right; i.e., its bow is on the right and stern on the left. This boat, which has a convex deck, is 17 cm long. A mast, 7 cm tall, stands at the center of the deck and is topped by a 10 cm yard (though its right-hand section has been erased). Two diagonal lines are visible above the yard, one of which stretches to the end of the yard; these may represent triangular topsails or topping lifts. The ship's rectangular mainsail seems to be furled. Six diagonal lines extend from the point where the mast and yard are joined to the deck; these are apparently braces.

Depictions of similar trading vessels are typical of the Roman period in general [Morrison 1980]. A similar

trading vessel is found in the southern panel of the spectacular mosaic floor discovered in Lod and dated to the third or fourth century CE [Avisar 1999; Friedman 2011].

A tunnel carved through the southern wall of Chamber B linked it to adjacent underground chambers, as part of a hiding complex that includes tunnels with a typical cross-section, an entry shaft with handholds for climbing, niches for oil-lamps, blocking stones, and tunnels that bend at right angles. Although it is not certain, the complexity of this system, as well as the fact that the gray-plastered chambers typical of the Herodian period were breached by the diggers, allow us to hypothesize that the system was used for hiding during the Bar-Kokhba period. The schematic depiction of the boats impedes identification of the exact type of vessel and makes it difficult to date them. It does seem, however, that the system was last in use during the Bar-Kokhba Revolt [for details about the characteristics of the Bar-Kokhba hiding complexes, see Zissu and Kloner 2009]. Because the graffito is located next to the original entrance to the chamber, it seems more reasonable to attribute it to the earlier stage, when the chamber was used for storage, before it was linked to the adjacent chambers. Because no other datable finds were discovered in the system, we can date the carvings no more precisely than to the Late Hellenistic–Early Roman period.

Khirbet Khallat Qeis (North)

Khirbet Khallat Qeis (ICS coordinates 1404/1181, also called Trig point 270 and *Ḥurbat Qimḥa*) is located in the Judean Foothills some 5 km north of Beit Guvrin and 2.5 km northwest of Tel Goded. The ruin, located at the top of a flat ridge, includes the remnants of various ancient structures and underground facilities.

During the various surveys of the site, it became clear that there was a Jewish village here from the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods through the Bar-Kokhba Revolt; a village also existed on the site during the Byzantine period. The finds from the earlier settlement include burial caves with *kokhim* (burial niches) and ossuaries, olive presses, cisterns, storehouses, and well-developed hiding complexes containing artifacts from the first century CE and the first third of the second century CE [Ya'aqoby and Miron 1985; Kloner 1987a, 1987b; Tepper 1992; Zissu 1997, 2001].

Another extensive hiding complex was discovered near the site in February 2012. It is located on the lower third of a ridge that is some 500 m north of Trig point 270 and approximately 40 m west of a large ancient structure that was found nearby on the ridge (ICS coordinates 140463/118484).

The architectural plan of the system is complex (Fig. 5) [for details of the various parts of this system, see Klein & Klein 2014]; it includes a *dromos* (Chamber A; approximately 6 m long and 1.7 m wide) that served as a passage into the system and had three openings in its walls, leading to three ancient chambers (B, C, and D) arranged in

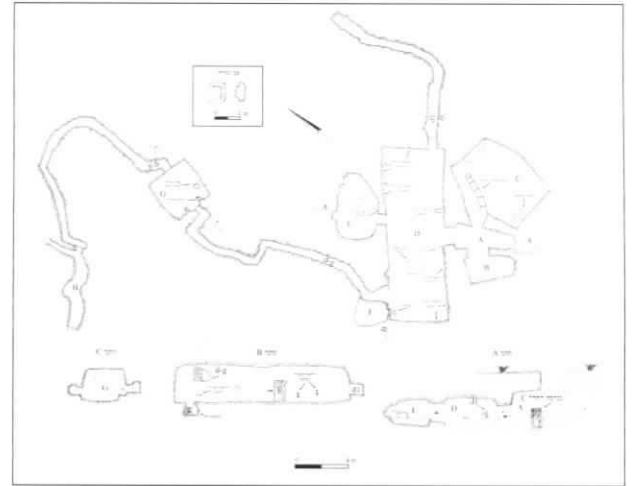


Figure 5: Plan and Sections of the Hiding Complex, Khirbet Khallat Qeis (drawing E. Klein)

a cloverleaf pattern.

Corridors like this, which make optimum use of the underground space, are typical of Maresha and other Hellenistic and Early Roman sites in the Judean Foothills [Kloner and Zissu 2013].

An opening (approximately 2 m high) in the eastern wall leads to a large square chamber (Chamber C; approximately 7 × 7 m) that served as a limestone quarry and whose floor was accessed from the opening by a staircase with a stepped railing.

The second opening, cut opposite the first one, in the wall of the western *dromos*, leads to a rectangular room (Chamber B; 3.8 × 2 m). The room, which is filled with sediment, appears to have been used as a storeroom.

Dromos A was purposely blocked off in antiquity by large fieldstones, but robbers managed to break through the barrier and roll the stones through a wide opening (1.1 m) at the front of the passage to the floor of a broad hall (Chamber D; Fig. 6; 4.4 × 11.5 m and 2.2–3 m high).



Figure 6: Chamber D, Khirbet Khallat Qeis, Looking West (photo B. Zissu)

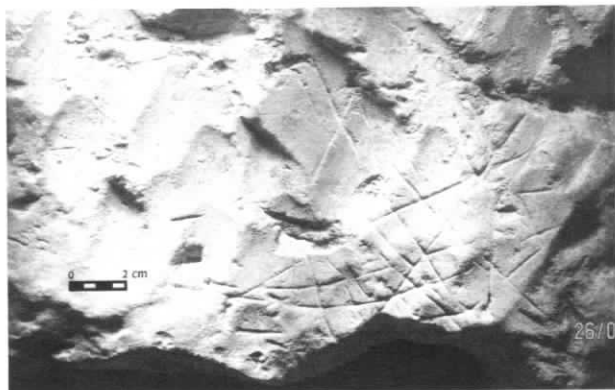


Figure 7: Sailboat Graffito on the Eastern Doorpost of the Entrance to Chamber D, Khirbet Khallat Qeis, Looking North (photo E. Klein)

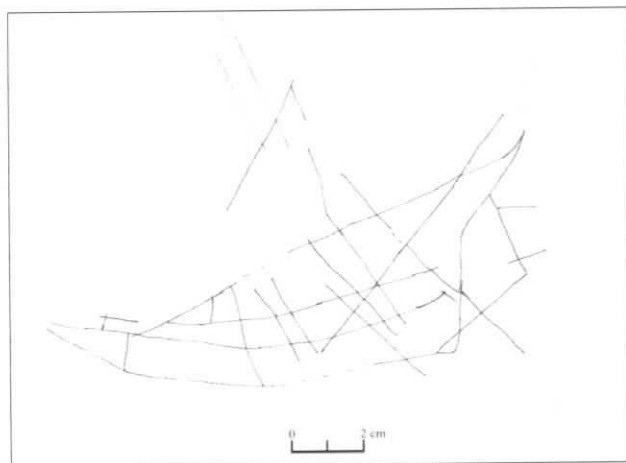


Figure 8: Sailboat Graffito on the Eastern Doorpost of the Entrance to Chamber D, Khirbet Khallat Qeis (drawing E. Klein)

Twelve holes for tying ropes were cut into the lower third of the four walls; a small trough was cut out of the rock near the southern wall of the chamber, west of the door. These features suggest that Chamber D was originally used as a pen for animals. A round opening (0.5 m diameter) was cut into the floor of Chamber D in the northwest corner; a niche around the hole is meant to hold a chalk cover stone.

This opening leads to a small storage area that includes a small bell-shaped rock-cut space from which an opening was hewn to Chamber F, which is oval (c. 3 × 3 m). Branching tunnels were cut into the eastern and northern walls of this space; they lead to interior halls and were part of the preparations to repurpose the system for hiding during the Bar-Kokhba Revolt.

The floor of Chamber D was covered by fragments of more than 100 jars, dated to the period between the last third of the first century CE through the first third of the second century CE, as well as cooking pots, oil-lamps, and glass vessels, all from the same period. The purpose of the room

seems to have been modified, apparently before the Bar-Kokhba War, from an animal pen to a storehouse.

A schematic representation of a sailboat (Figs. 7, 8) was discovered on the eastern doorpost of the entrance to this chamber. The carving is 14 cm long and approximately 6 cm high. The boat's bow points to the left and the stern faces right. The deck is long and narrow. A diagonal line extending from the left edge of the deck to the top of the stern is probably a furled sail. There may be an additional triangular sail above the deck, but that is not entirely clear. This image of the ship is similar to other depictions of ships from the Roman period, especially the drawing of the trading ship discovered in the Chapel of St. Vartan in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, which is dated to the second–fourth centuries CE [Broshi and Barkai 1985, 125–128].

Khirbet el-'Ain

Khirbet el-'Ain (ICS coordinates 141973/11497) lies at the top of a hill 340 m above sea level; it is located some 2.5 km northeast of Beit Guvrin, approximately 1 km southeast of Tel Goded, and next to the Roman road that linked Beit Guvrin and Jerusalem. R.A.S. Macalister documented several refuge systems and underground chambers on the site as part of the PEF excavations in the Judean Foothills, carried out in the late nineteenth century [Bliss and Macalister 1902]. B. Zissu documented a burial system from the late Second Temple period, which features a Greek inscription that has yet to be deciphered [Zissu 1999].

In early May 2012, antiquities thieves broke into a new area in the eastern section of the hiding system, which Macalister had previously documented at the top of the site, through a 2.6 m–high shaft. The opening of the shaft was discovered by Alon Klein from the Unit for the Prevention of Antiquities Looting during the course of his regular inspections in the region.

The shaft (Fig. 9; designated I on the new plan), with a square cross-section, was covered with rectangular slabs that had apparently been incorporated in the floor of a building that previously existed on this site (Fig. 10).

Parallel shelves were cut into the northern and southern sides of the shaft; these were used to support wooden beams or a rock slab that blocked off the upper part of the shaft, while permitting passage on all fours beneath it. There is a low, narrow opening to a tunnel four meters long at the bottom of the northern wall of the shaft. This tunnel cuts through another tunnel, which joins a blocked rectangular shaft (Shaft II) and a rectangular chamber (Chamber III) in which a collection of pottery vessels and fragments of stone vessels, typical of the first and second centuries CE, were found (Fig. 11).

These finds suggest that the hall was used by Jews. It is clear from the layout of the system that Shaft II and Chamber III are part of an earlier storage system that was

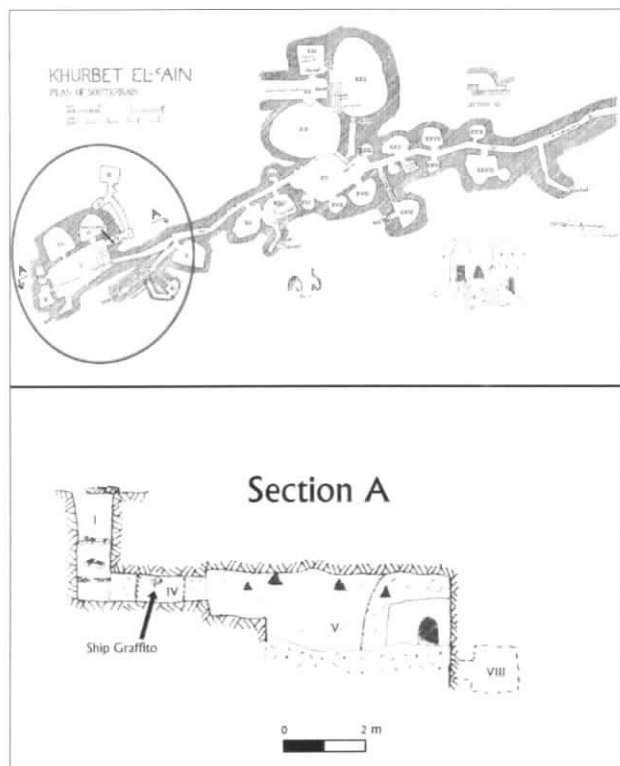


Figure 9: Plan and Section of the Hiding Complex, Khirbet el-Ain (drawing R.A.S. Macalister; E. Klein)



Figure 10: The Entrance and the Stone Slabs Covers to the Hiding Complex, Khirbet el-Ain, Looking North-West (photo B. Zissu)

subsequently linked to the hiding system via the tunnel from the bottom of the adjacent shaft. Another tunnel, 2.2 m long and 0.6–0.7 m high, opens onto the southeast wall of the bottom of Shaft I. The tunnel, which widens slightly (creating Chamber IV) some 0.4 m from its opening, continues to the upper section of the northwestern wall of a large rectangular hall (Chamber V), whose walls are pierced by openings that give access to smaller rectangular rooms. In the southern part of the northwestern wall of Chamber V, an opening bordered by a carved

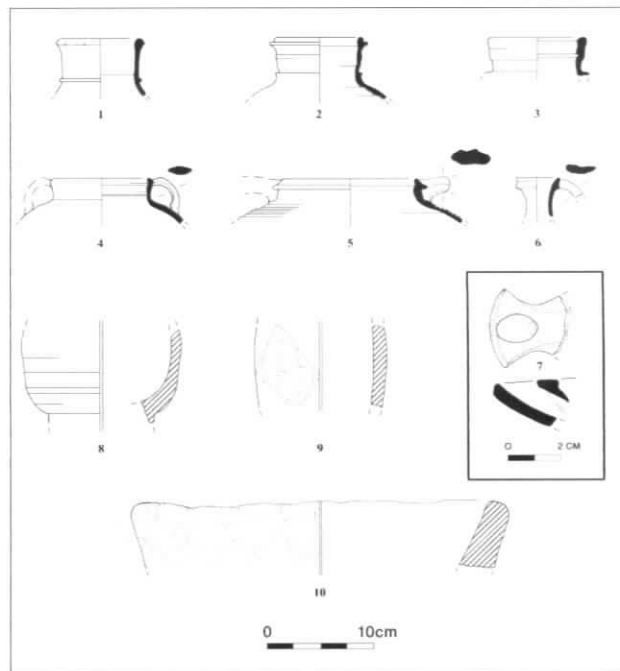


Figure 11: Finds from Chamber III in the Hiding Complex, Khirbet el-Ain (drawing J. Rudman)

stepped frame leads to a long tunnel that connects this chamber to the other parts of the system (Fig. 12).

Macalister entered Chamber V from the other part of the system; when he documented the system, tunnel IV was blocked, so that Shaft I does not appear on his plan. Macalister accordingly believed that Chamber V was dug out to serve as a refuge room and was an integral part of the refuge system [Bliss and Macalister 1902]. The discovery of the shaft and the tunnel leading from it to Chamber V made it clear, however, that the shaft, the tunnel, and Chamber V are all part of an earlier underground facility that was linked by tunnels to other, nearby facilities when the system was converted into a hiding complex.

A schematic depiction of a sailing vessel in profile was found on the southern wall of the wider section of Tunnel IV (Figs. 13, 14). The carving is 31 cm long and 20 cm tall. To judge from the deck, the ship is sailing towards the right (i.e., the bow is on the right and the stern is on the left side of the carving). A slightly curved mast, 12 cm tall, rises from the center of the deck. Two diagonal lines extending from the top of the mast to the bow and stern apparently represent braces. Two vertical lines that run from the braces to the bottom of the deck are apparently a schematic representation of a rectangular sail. Another clearly visible line runs down from the stern to below the left side of the deck; it is probably a schematic drawing of the steering oar. An inscription, apparently in "square" Hebrew letters, characteristic of the Second Temple period, can be made out along the length of the bow and the right side of the sail, but we were unable to decipher it.



Figure 12: Chamber V, Hiding Complex, Khirbet el-'Ain, Looking East (photo B. Zissu)

Horvat Maresha-West

Horvat “Maresha-West” lies approximately 800 m west of Tel Maresha and some 350 m south of Horvat Ada, at the top of a flat hill that rises approximately 300 m a.s.l. Visible on the surface are many openings to bell-shaped cavities and cisterns, some with collapsed roofs, and stone fences that incorporate ashlar. A lime pit at the center of the ruin has been preserved to a height of 3 m. The opening to an underground system was found a few meters east of the lime pit in late February 2012, after antiquities looting at the site.

The system we documented (ICS coordinates 139401 / 111128) comprises ancient underground chambers that were linked by long, narrow tunnels—equipped with oil-lamp niches throughout their length—into a hiding complex, typical of the Bar-Kokhba period (Fig. 15). The system resembles those that have been discovered at many other sites throughout the Judean Foothills. We found pottery and glass shards typical of period from the last third of the first century CE through the Bar-Kokhba Revolt [for details, see Klein and Zissu 2015]. One of the early facilities that was integrated into the refuge system is the bell-shaped cistern E, oval in contour (at the level of the tunnel, it measures 4.5 m long and approximately 3 m wide). A high opening (approximately 0.8 m wide) was created in the northern wall of the cistern, from which spiral stairs descend to the floor. This architectural plan is characteristic of the cisterns that were cut during the Hellenistic period in nearby Maresha [Kloner 2003].

A system of tunnels connects Chamber E and Chamber H. The latter is round (approximately 6 m in diameter and 5–6 m high), with walls that widen slightly towards the floor. An entrance affording easy access (approximately 2.5 m high and approximately 1 m wide) was cut in its northern wall.

This opening was deliberately blocked off by large ashlar, one of which had previously served as the weight of an olive press. At the northwestern corner of Chamber H, near



Figure 13: Schematic Sailboat Graffito on the southern wall of Tunnel IV, Khirbet el-'Ain, Looking South (photo B. Zissu)

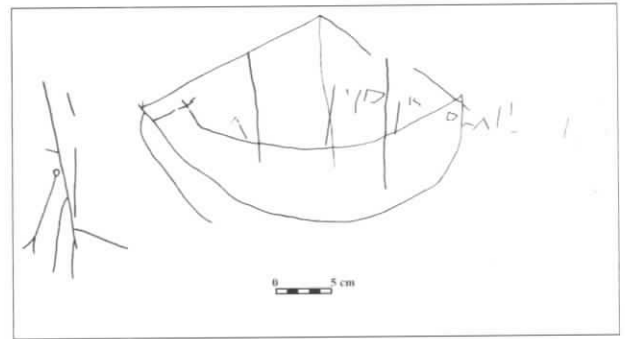


Figure 14: Figure 14: Sailboat Graffito on the southern wall of Tunnel IV, Khirbet el-'Ain (drawing B. Zissu)

the floor, antiquities looters discovered the opening to a short, 2.5 m-long tunnel (Tunnel h-i) leading to Chamber I. The entrance to this tunnel from Chamber I, which has a shallow frame carved around it, is approximately 1.2 m high.

Chamber I is oval in shape (approx. 9 m long, 5 m wide, and 6 m high above the sediment that has accumulated on its floor). A high, wide entrance in the western wall (2.2 m high and 1 m wide at the narrowest point) once allowed easy access to the chamber. Steps were hewn out from the opening along the western wall of the chamber. This flight of stairs had a low railing cut from the chalk, typical of many underground chambers in Hellenistic Maresha. Tunnel h-i, described above, was cut into the tread of one of the lower stairs (Fig. 16).

The entrance doorposts were shaped like pilasters with Doric capitals that have a triangular diagonal echinus and a short vertical abacus. Above the doorposts, a stepped cornice-like lintel was carved into the rock. The combination of the pilasters and the stepped lintel (a sort of entablature) gives the entrance the look of a classical building, similar to the decoration of the openings to other underground chambers in Hellenistic Maresha [for an example, see Kloner 2003]. The lowest step of the lintel

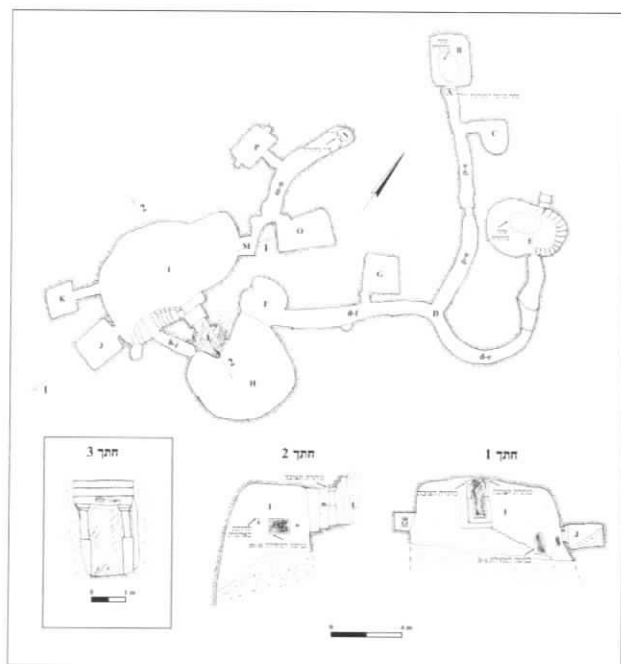


Figure 15: Plan and Sections of the Hiding Complex, Horvat Maresha-West (drawing E. Klein)

contains an inscription in Greek alongside a schematic carving of a sailing vessel (described below). The entrance chamber (Chamber L), which leads to the ornamental opening to Chamber I, was blocked by a layer of dirt and rocks that made it difficult to photograph the opening and the inscription. The fact that the entrance to Chamber I is opposite to that of Chamber H suggests that the two chambers were planned together as a pair of adjacent underground storerooms with a shared *dromos* (Chamber L) that descends from ground level, in the manner typical of Maresha and its environs [Kloner and Zissu 2013]. The *dromos* (Chamber L) affording entry to Chambers H and I seems to have been blocked deliberately, apparently when the refuge system was created and the chambers were linked by Tunnel h–i.

An inscription consisting of eight characters in cursive Aramaic script was found on the northern wall of Chamber I (Fig. 17; average letter width 0.6–0.7 cm, height approximately 1 cm). The letters resemble the Aramaic letters on *ostraca* (potsherds used to write on) that have been found at Maresha and its environs, which have been dated to the fourth–second centuries BCE. Such letters are typically formed with upward strokes [for parallels and a discussion of the letter shapes, see Eph'al and Naveh 1996]. The inscription was cut into a small area on the chamber wall, which was smoothed for this purpose by a wide chisel.

We propose reading $\text{בן יהלדבע} (\text{BDLHY ZB(N)})$. 'BDLHY is a well-known Idumean name that appears on an ostrakon from the fourth century BCE [see Eph'al and

Naveh 1996]. The prefix 'BD was common in Idumean names of this period. If this reading is correct, the carving apparently documents a transaction between 'BDLHY and someone else. The root Z.B.N. in Aramaic is related to commerce and is found, for example, in the words for "purchase" (*zabun*) and "merchandise" (*zabina*). In talmudic Aramaic, the verb is used for *buy* (in the *qal*) and *sell* (in the *piel*). We can assume that these goods were warehoused in the underground storerooms where the inscription was found; the inscription may attest to the ethnic identity of the people who used it during the Hellenistic period.

The Greek inscription above the lintel at the entrance to the cave (Fig. 18) was engraved in thin lines by an unsure hand. Each letter measures approximately 4 cm in both height and width. We propose the following reading:

$\Phi (A/\Lambda) \text{ΠΑΤΡΙΚΟΣ}$

The first letter (Φ) may be the abbreviation of a name, perhaps that of the carver. This is followed by ΠΑΤΡΙΚΟΣ , which is apparently the Greek form of the common Latin name *Patricius*, which means "noble" or "honored" and is related to "patrician." The Greek word *patrikos* means "derived from one's fathers, hereditary; of/belonging to one's father, paternal" [Liddell and Scott 1996]; perhaps the inscription is meant to convey that the owner of the storehouse was named "Abba" ("father" in Aramaic). That said, it seems more likely that the name derives from Latin, which is not common in the Greek form. We believe it was the name of the storehouse owner at some point in the Early Roman period, though we cannot rule out an earlier date, i.e., during the Hellenistic period.

To the left of the Greek inscription is an extremely schematic depiction of a ship (Fig. 19; 26 cm long, total height approximately 12 cm). The ship, with an elongated deck, appears to be sailing towards the left. The mast, 6 cm high, topped by a yard that is 18 cm long, stands mid-deck. A rectangular sail hangs from the yard.



Figure 16: Chamber I, Horvat Maresha-West, Looking East (photo B. Zissu)



Figure 17: Aramaic Inscription the Northern Wall of Chamber I, Ḥorvat Maresha-West (photo B. Zissu)

Two diagonal lines extending from the yardarms to the center of the deck apparently represent braces. Above the bow is a vertical line ending in an oval object. This may be the rounded prow typical of boats from the classical age, as in a fresco from the house of the priest Amandus in Pompeii, dated to the mid-first century CE [Morrison 1980]. Another option is to see it as a schematic representation of an artemon (foresail). A line extends under the stern and ends in something shaped like a backwards L and filled with hatching. This is probably meant to be the steering oar. At least six approximately vertical lines that end in a square run down from the deck—probably the oars.

The schematic nature of the graffito makes it difficult to identify the exact type of vessel and when it was carved. Based on the overall context, we propose dating the Greek inscription and the vessel to the Early Roman period.

3. DISCUSSION

We have presented four graffiti of sailing vessels, incised with a sharp tool on walls, doorposts, lintels, and hewn passages. What all these underground chambers have in common is that they are ancient rock-cut cavities that were apparently used at one stage or another to store agricultural produce and were later integrated into hiding systems that can be dated with a high degree of certainty to the Bar-Kokhba Revolt. Dating the graffiti is extremely difficult, however, because they may have been executed only in the last stage of the systems' use (during the Bar-Kokhba Revolt), but could just as well have originated at some earlier time. Accordingly we have assigned them to the Hellenistic/Early Roman period without further specification.

Judea engaged in extensive maritime trade during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. New harbors were developed along the coast. The surge in seaborne commerce made the coastal plain and major coastal cities



Figure 18: Ship Graffito and Greek Inscription above the Lintel at the entrance to Chamber I, Ḥorvat Maresha-West (drawing E. Klein)



Figure 19: Ship Graffito above the Lintel at the entrance to Chamber I, Ḥorvat Maresha-West, Looking East (photo B. Zissu)

extremely important. From the Jewish point of view, the Hasmonean rulers and Herod and his successors devoted major attention to developing maritime trade [Kashtan 2001]; this is evident from the designs on their coins [Meshorer 1997].

Many depictions of boats, carved in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, have been found in Judea. Most of them are in burials contexts, functioning perhaps as a symbol of the passage of the souls of the deceased to the world to come. This is reminiscent of the myth of Charon, who ferried the souls of the deceased to the other side of the River Acheron/Styx in return for payment [Sourvinou-Inwood 2003]. At some point, this symbol seems to have penetrated Jewish rituals, too, albeit without the pagan mythological context [Goodenough 1958]. Noteworthy are the engraving of a boat in a sixth-century BCE burial cave at Ḥorvat Beit Loya [Naveh 1963]; two boats in a burial cave at Maresha dated to the Hellenistic period [Hadad and Artzy 2011]; the schematic depiction of a boat in a Second Temple-era burial cave at Khirbet Haruf in the Judean Lowlands [Batz 2004]; the charcoal drawings of boats in the entryway to Jason's Tomb, which are dated to the Hasmonean or Early Roman period [Rahmani 1964]; a rough image that has been taken for a boat, carved into a third-century BCE arcosolium near Tel 'Itun [Tzaferis 1982]; and on the facades of tombs and sarcophagi in the

Jewish cemetery at Beit She'arim, which dates to the Late Roman period [Mazar 1957]. Two schematic drawings of boats, one with its sail unfurled, were carved on the plaster of the eastern cistern at Herodium, located just underneath the Royal tomb. These carvings could be dated to several periods, including when the cistern was cut, when the tomb was built and walls were constructed inside the cistern to support the ceiling, and even to the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, when the rebels utilized the cistern as part of the system of refuge tunnels. The members of the excavation team assigned the graffiti to the period when the tomb was built on top of the cistern and proposed that they may represent the victory of the deceased over death [Zissu 2015].

Graffiti of sailing vessels from the Hellenistic and Roman periods that do not have a funerary context have been found in the past in the Judean Foothills and elsewhere in Judea. Bliss and Macalister found a chalk tablet with a carving of a boat in Maresha during their excavations in 1900. Gibson dated this carving to the late second century BCE [Gibson 1992; Kloner 2003]. Three depictions of sailing vessels were found in the northern palace on Masada, originally constructed during Herod's reign. One was found on a wall above a bench in the palace guardroom [Aharoni and Rothenberg 1960; Netzer 1991]. Graffiti of three more boats, along with an exercise in writing the Latin and Greek alphabets, were found on the wall of the adjacent Storeroom 120. They seem to have been drawn by soldiers and palace servants who copied what they had seen in the past; alternatively, they may have been documenting ships on the nearby Dead Sea [Cotton and Geiger 1989; Netzer 1991]. From the Second Temple period, we know of the depiction of a sailing vessel anchored in a harbor on a stone tablet claimed to have been found at Turmus'Ayyeh in the Shilo Valley [Rahmani 1974]. A graffito of a Roman warship, dated to the second century CE, was found at Hurbat Rafia' on a loose building stone [Kloner 1981]. On one of the walls of the Chapel of St. Vartan in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher there is an ink drawing of a typical Roman-period sailing vessel, with a Christian inscription in Latin below it. It has been proposed that this graffito was executed by a pilgrim who came to Jerusalem by sea during the late Roman or Early Byzantine period [Broshi and Barkay 1985].

That said, these boat graffiti have nothing in common that would allow us to draw any conclusions regarding the significance of these images; perhaps each has its own symbolic significance. On the other hand, all of the boats presented here share a date (Hellenistic-early Roman periods), archaeological context (passages, doorposts, or lintels of underground facilities), and geographical provenance (north and east of Maresha in the Judean Foothills). Perhaps a more detailed analysis of these characteristics could help identify the symbolic significance of these inscriptions. Throughout the Hellenistic period this region was inhabited by Idumeans, until they were

converted to Judaism, voluntarily or by force, during the reign of Johanan Hyrcanus I [Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13; Shatzman 2005; Rappaport 2009]. From then until the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, the population was Jewish. During the Hellenistic period, Maresha was home to a Phoenician-Sidonian community (though it is not clear whether this group also held estates in the rural district surrounding the city). We are best-informed about the family of Apollophanes, the leader of the Sidonian community, whose burial plot was discovered in the city's eastern cemetery (Peters and Thiersch 1905). It is interesting to note that some members of Apollophanes' family bore Semitic names, while others had Idumean theophorics; this suggests a process of assimilation into the local Idumean society [Kloner 2003]. The Phoenicians were a Semitic group who occupied a narrow strip on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Phoenician history is intimately linked to the sea, seamanship, maritime trade, and shipbuilding [Salles 2003]. We can therefore cautiously suggest that the ship graffiti on the doorposts and lintels of the underground chambers could be related to the Sidonians who lived in the region during the Hellenistic period (Recently, during his lecture at a conference in honor of Prof. Amos Kloner, Dr. Ian Stern made a presentation about a large drawing (2 m long) of a sailing vessel. It was discovered in an underground chamber bearing ritual characteristics in the course of the archaeological seminars he runs at Tel Maresha. The graffito may be connected to the Sidonian community that lived there during the Hellenistic period). Self-identified remnants of this group may have survived in the area around Maresha even after Johanan Hyrcanus converted the local population, throughout the Second Temple period, and until the Bar-Kokhba Revolt. It is more likely, however, that most of the Phoenicians refused to accept Judaism and were expelled [see Rappaport 2009].

Another plausible conjecture draws on the fact that the four underground chambers with graffiti at their entrances served, at some time in their history, to store agricultural produce. The ships may have been a way of marking the produce that was meant for export through the ports of Ascalon and Gaza, located some 30–40 km (a day's journey) from the region. It is also possible that the symbols have no practical significance but expresses the storeroom owner's desire to take part in maritime trade, i.e., to succeed and prosper. Finally, images of boats—especially during the Roman period—served an apotropaic function (in other words, they are meant to ward off evil influences) and were meant to protect the produce in the storeroom from harm [Friedman 2011]. If this explanation is correct, perhaps the boat graffiti were meant to protect the refugees hiding there during the Bar-Kokhba Revolt.

We have proposed several theories (a link to the Sidonian community, maritime commerce, an apotropaic symbol) for the boat graffiti found in underground systems in the

Judean Foothills. Whether or not these theories are correct, this is a new, fascinating, and mysterious phenomenon. Scholars who study the riddles of the Judean Foothills should be aware of this phenomenon, because we assume there are other boat graffiti throughout this region that are waiting to be discovered.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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