

YAŞİLEH: A NEW SITE IN NORTHERN JORDAN

by
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Geography and History

The discovery of some caves in the area of Yaşileh in the spring of 1988 was at the origin of the campaigns conducted in 1988 and 1989¹. Although it lies in an area where many surveys have already been carried out, the site of Yaşileh has not been mentioned at all before the discovery of 1988. Therefore, it must be considered as a new site, joining the numerous places revealed in the north of Jordan.

Yaşileh is located 8 km east of Irbid, on the borders of Ḥauran, in the centre of a vast agricultural zone intensively exploited (Fig. 1). However, it is worth noting that there is no modern built-up area near the archaeological site. The development of Yaşileh and the quality of the findings can be explained by the economic potential of the region, as well as its location at the junction of the trading routes connecting the Decapolis cities in ancient times.

Topographically, the site is divided into two areas, east and west, by a wadi called Wadi Yaşileh or (Warran), the slopes of the eastern area hanging above the whole site.

The information collected at present attest that the main occupation took place between the Late Roman period and the beginning of the Islamic period. But it is highly probable that the site was already occupied before the third century A.D. Some pottery sherds found on the surface indicate that Yaşileh remained inhabited during the Islamic period, though the habitation may have been more sporadic.

The Necropolis

In 1988, the work concentrated on the clearance of the caves uncovered in the

spring. Research carried out in the zone allowed us to identify the existence of a rock-cut necropolis on the eastern slope of Wadi Yaşileh (Pl. I,1; Fig. 2). At least thirty funeral chambers were brought to light during the 1988 and 1989 seasons. Twenty of them could be completely cleared. Most of the tombs consist of a wide room in the walls of which the alcoves and loculi are cut, permitting the burial of fifteen to thirty bodies. The use of sarcophagi is attested in only one case. In some chambers, loculi are dug in the ground (Pl. I,2).

Each of these tombs, which are particularly well-preserved due to their location, has a specific pattern of setting and decoration. Judging from the attention paid to the dressing of the walls where arches and niches were carefully cut, we can assume that the absence of pictorial decoration is quite deliberate (Pl. II,1). This feature differentiates the Yaşileh necropolis from others uncovered in this part of Jordan².

At least two of these tombs have doors made of a single squared block of stone, which pivoted on the axis. Beside the funeral chambers, individual burials were also found.

Because they were only partially pillaged in ancient times (the rooms were sealed with soil and stones), many finds were collected in the tombs. This material includes pottery (jugs and lamps), glassware and metal objects dated to the Roman and Byzantine periods.

The Church

While the excavation of the necropolis was being carried out, attention was also paid to a terrace located on the west bank of Wadi Yaşileh (Fig. 2). A sounding conducted there during the first season revealed the presence

1. The excavations are directed by the author with the assistance of a team including graduate students of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology - Yarmouk University. The financial support is provided by various institutions of Yarmouk University

in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities.

2. C. Vibert-Guigue et A. Barbet, 'Tombeaux peints du Nord de la Jordanie à l'époque romaine', *ADAJ* 26 (1982), p. 64-79.

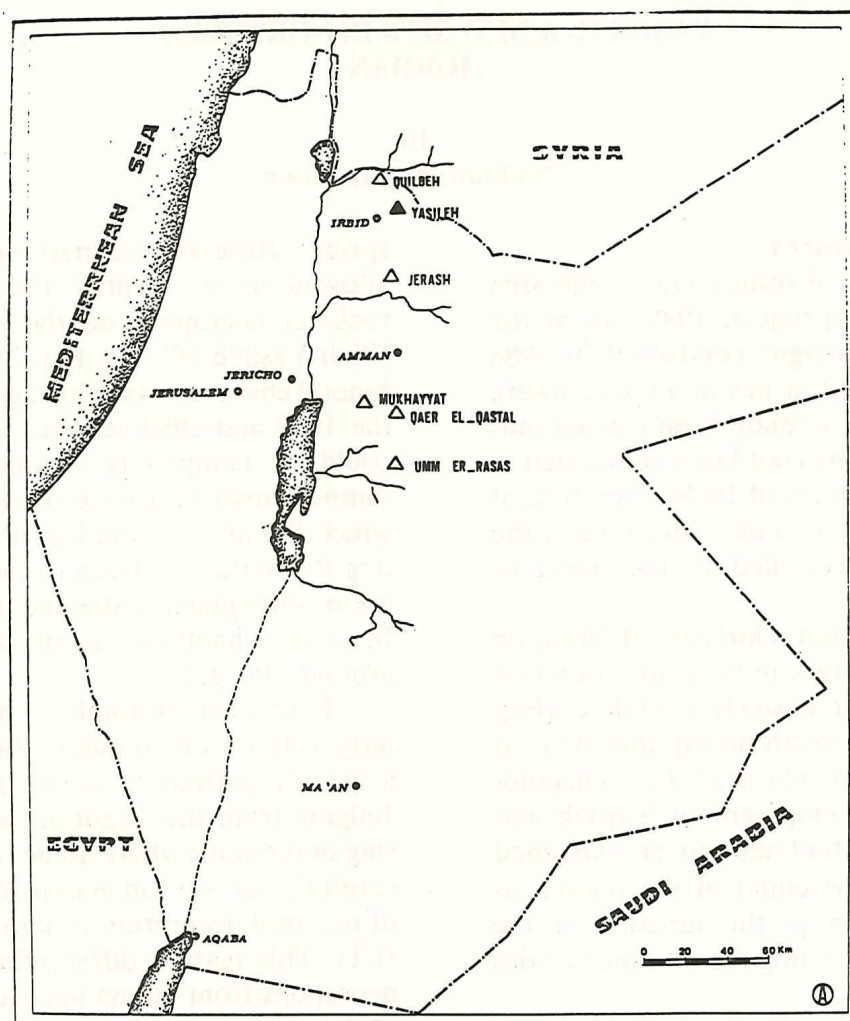


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Yaşileh.

of a mosaic pavement. Further clearance brought to light the entire pavement as well as the architectural remains of a church. All the walls were uncovered, except for the west side where the entrance was situated. The foundations attest to great care as indicated by the existence of thick layers of plaster to protect the walls.

The church, of basilica type, is divided by square pillars and includes three naves and a single apse. The internal dimensions are 15.50m by 12.50m. The floor is paved with mosaics consisting of panels disposed symmetrically. Except for some vegetal motifs, such as foliage, grapes and pomegranates, the style of the mosaic is fully geometric (Pl. II,2). However, some remains suggest that representations of animals (peacocks) were included as well.

Due to the fact that Yaşileh is located in a cultivated area, which threatens the pre-

servation of the church, some panels were removed at the end of the 1989 season.

The Habitation Areas

The unearthing of the necropolis, followed by that of the church as well as the presence of cisterns along the wadi, indicated the presence of an important site. But the remains on the surface were scarce because Yaşileh served as a quarry for the construction of neighbouring villages, especially the village of Howara. Therefore a series of soundings were carried out in order to survey the occupation area. One of the soundings revealed a rock-cut unit in the northern area of the eastern wadi bank. The unit includes an outside courtyard, several halls, as well as tanks and cisterns. The coins found on the floor of the main room and the markings and graffiti engraved on the walls prove that the structure was used continuously during the

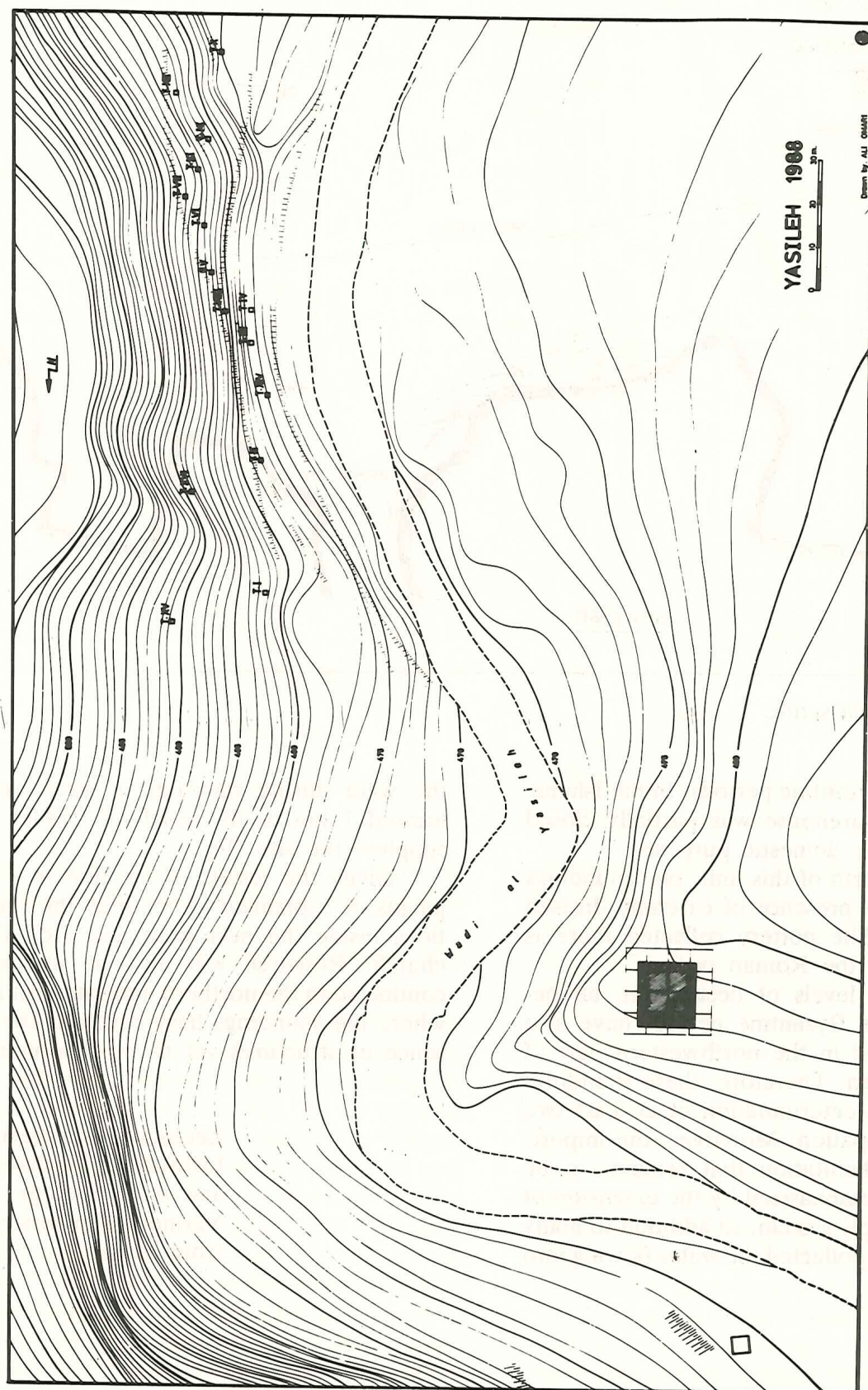


Fig. 2. Plan of the Necropolis 1988. The church is to the left in the foreground.

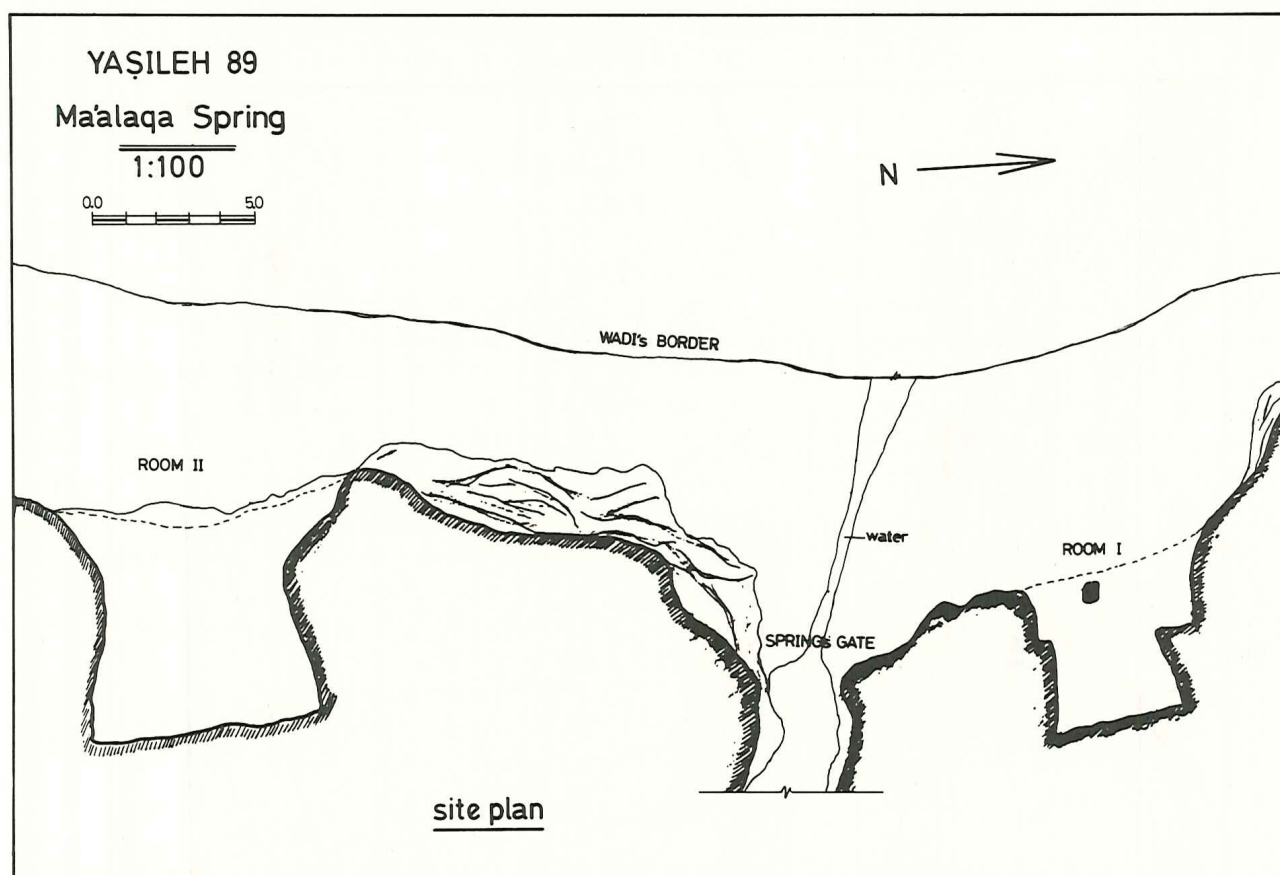


Fig. 3. Ma'alaqa spring.

Roman and Byzantine periods. In the Islamic period, the storehouse was partially closed and reused for domestic purposes.

To the north of this unit, two soundings uncovered the presence of carefully dressed stone walls. The pottery collected there is exclusively of the Roman period.

Different levels of occupation, all belonging to the Byzantine period, have also been identified in the northwestern part of the church area. Therefore, these soundings permitted the determination of at least two zones of occupation. Moreover, the importance of the habitation that remains to be uncovered is emphasized by the extension of the water supply system. In addition to many cisterns which collected the water flowing into

the wadi during rain fall, a water source located 1 km to the north of Yaşileh also supplied the site (Fig.3).

Given the results of the first two campaigns, it is planned to continue the excavations inside the necropolis and around the church. Research will also be intensively conducted in the northern and southern areas where the soundings have revealed the presence of structures yet to be determined.

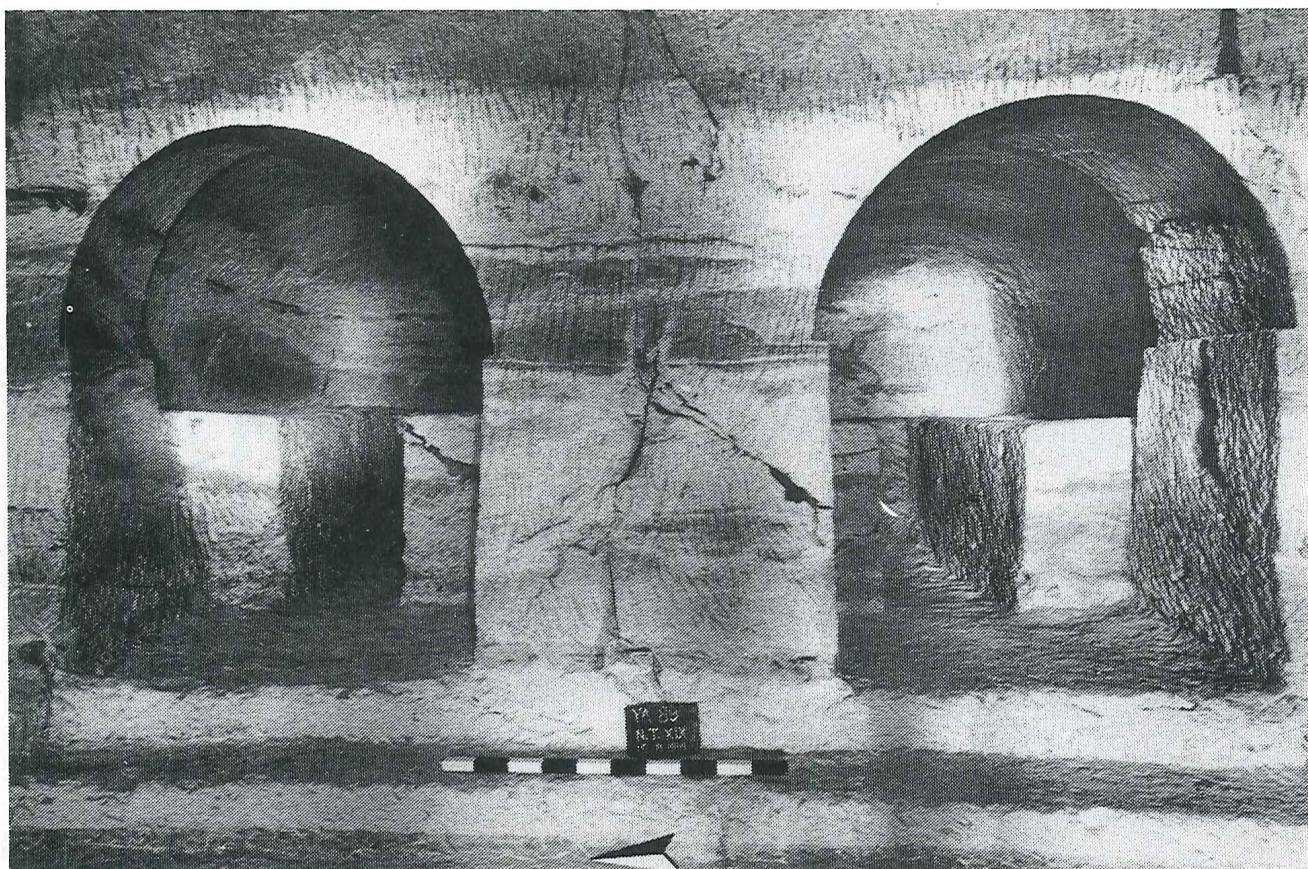
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1. View of the Necropolis.



2. Interior of Tomb XIX.



1. Tomb XIX, the back wall and the alcoves.



2. Detail of the mosaic.