

MAN NEAR A ROMAN ARCH

Once I was sitting on the steps near the gate at David's Citadel and I put down my two heavy baskets beside me. A group of tourists stood there around their guide, and I became their point of reference. "You see that man over there with the baskets? A little to the right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period. A little to the right of his head." "But he's moving, he's moving!" I said to myself: Redemption will come only when they are told, "Do you see that arch over there from the Roman period? It doesn't matter, but near it, a little to the left and then down a bit, there's a man who has just bought fruit and vegetables for his family."

(The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai, selected and translated by Stephan Mitchell and Chana Bloch, University of California Press, 1996).

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MAN NEAR A ROMAN ARCH

Studies presented to Prof. Yoram Tsafrir



Edited by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations	,
Introduction	א
Sarai Tsafirir – Yoram Tsafirir's List of Publications – pp. 1–8 (Hebrew section)	
Benjamin Z. Kedar – The Historian and Fictitious Literature: On Yoram Avi-Tamar's The Life of Josephus – A Secret History – pp. 9–13 (Hebrew section)	
A. The Landscape: Archaeology and the Settlement Pattern	
Uzi Leibner – Settlement and Demography in Late Roman and Byzantine Eastern Galilee – pp. 14–28 (Hebrew section)	
Gideon Avni – The Invisible Conquest: The Negev in Transition between Byzantium and Islam in the Light of Archaeological Research – pp. 29–42 (Hebrew section)	
Rehav Rubin – Models and Relief-Maps in the Archives of the Palestine Exploration Fund in London – pp. 43–56 (Hebrew section)	
Israel Roll – Between Damascus and Megiddo: Roads and Transportation in Antiquity across the Northeastern Approaches to the Holy Land	1*–20*
B. Studies in Historical Geography	
David Amit – The Location of Jewish Carmel during the Mishnaic and Talmudic Period – pp. 57–63 (Hebrew section)	
Haim Ben David – Beyond the Jordan: Definitions and Borders through History – pp. 64–70 (Hebrew section)	
Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron – The Archaeological Setting for the Toponyms Gihon and Shiloah	21*–24*
Erasmus Gass and Boaz Zissu – Sel'a 'Etam and Samson Traditions, from the Biblical to the Byzantine Periods	25*–46*
C. Archaeology and Art	
Amos Kloner – Amphorae and Urns as Grave Markers in Idumaea, Judaea, and Nabataea – pp. 71–81 (Hebrew section)	
Gideon Foerster – The Production of Decorated Sarcophagi in Palestine and their Relation to the Sarcophagi from Main Workshops of the Roman World – pp. 82–87 (Hebrew section)	
Zeev Weiss – Mosaic Art in Fifth-Century CE Sepphoris: Iconography, Style, and the Possible Identification of a Local Workshop – pp. 88–99 (Hebrew section)	
Rina Talgam – The <i>Ekphrasis</i> of the Water-Clock and Measuring of Time in Sixth-Century Gaza – pp. 100–114 (Hebrew section)	

Mordechai Aviam – Unpublished Fragments of Architectural Elements from the Upper Synagogue at Gush Halav 47*-53*

Lihi Habas – Camel Caravans and Trade in Exotic Animals in the Mosaics of the Desert Margin 54*-73*

Shoshana Agady and Benjamin Y. Arubas – *Miḥrab* Representations in the Art and Architecture of Early Islamic Baysān 74*-87*

D. Archaeology and the Study of History, Culture and Religion

Lee-Israel Levine – Bet She‘arim in its Patriarchal Context – pp. 115–129 (Hebrew section)

Emmanuel Friedheim and Shimon Dar – When Did Paganism Cease in the Land of Israel? – pp. 130–134 (Hebrew section)

Yaron Z. Eliav – A Scary Place: Jewish Magic in the Roman Bathhouse 88*-97*

E. Epigraphy

Werner Eck and Hannah M. Cotton – Inscriptions from the Financial Procurator’s *Praetorium* in Caesarea 98*-114*

Leah Di Segni and Benjamin Y. Arubas – An Old-New Inscription from Beth Shean 115*-124*

Uzi Dahari and Leah Di Segni – More Early Christian Inscribed Tombstones from el-Huweinat in Northern Sinai 125*-141*

F. Urbanism in Roman-Byzantine Palaestina

Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, Alexander Onn and Renate Rosenthal-Heginbottom – The Eastern Cardo and the Wilson Bridge in Light of New Excavations – The Remains from the Second Temple Period and from Aelia Capitolina – pp. 135–159 (Hebrew section)

Joseph Patrich – The Wall Street, the Eastern Stoa, the Location of the *Tetrapylon*, and the Halakhic Status of Caesarea Maritima (interpreting *Tosefta, Ahiot*, 18:13) 142*-168*

Kenneth G. Holum – *Et dispositione civitatis in multa eminens*: Comprehending the Urban Plan of Fourth-Century Caesarea 169*-189*

G. Christian Studies

Lorenzo Perrone – Pierre l’Ibère ou l’exil comme pèlerinage et combat pour la foi 190*-204*

Michele Piccirillo – Liturgical Problems Related to the Church Plans and its Liturgical Furnishings in the Territory of the Province of Arabia (Fourth-Eighth Centuries CE) 205*-223*

Abstracts of the Hebrew articles 224*-229*

SEL‘A ‘ETAM AND SAMSON TRADITIONS, FROM THE BIBLICAL TO THE BYZANTINE PERIODS

ERASMUS GASS AND BOAZ ZISSU

1. Sel‘a ‘Etam – The Rock of ‘Etam

The name עֵיטָם (‘Etam), is mentioned four times in the Hebrew Bible (Jdg 15:8, 11; 1 Chr 4:32; 2 Chr 11:6. In another orthography [Etham, אֶתָם] this toponym refers to a place reached during the Exodus of the Israelites, cf. Ex 13:20; Num 33:6,7,8). ‘Etam appears twice in the Samson narrative in a construct chain with the *nomen regens* סֶלַע. Most probably this name refers to a certain rock formation, which distinguishes this toponym from the homonymous place. The toponym ‘Etam can be identified on three different sites (Ahituv 1995: 381; Schmitt 1995: 152; Nelson 1997: 287; Kotter 1992: 643–644; Kotter 2000: 429; Vos 2003: 453; Gass 2005: 374–375):

- a. The Judean ‘Etam, which was fortified by Rehoboam according to 2 Chr 11:6 together with other cities, was apparently located at Kh. el-Hoh, in the northern Hebron Hills, near ‘En ‘Atan. This place is also mentioned by Josephus and in Jewish sources.
- b. The Simeonite ‘Etam, on the edge of the northern Negev according to 1 Chr 4:32.
- c. The Rock of ‘Etam in the Samson narrative, discussed below. This place is also attested by Eusebius who mentioned in his *Onomasticon* a toponym ‘Etam “Where Samson lived in the cave of Etam beside the torrent” (*Onomasticon* 96,5: ἔνθα κατόκει Σαμψὼν ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ Ἡτὰμ παρὰ τῷ χειμάρρῳ; Freeman-Grenville et al. 2003: 55).

The word עֵיטָם is usually related to the substantive עֵיט, which refers to a bird of prey (Borée 1968: 56,110; Richter 1996: 130; Weippert and Weippert 1982: 93 n.77). Although the Samson narrative is replete with etiologies, there is no explanation of Samson’s hiding place. It seems that, unlike the

other stories which elucidate well-known toponyms by affiliating them with the deeds of Samson, the ‘Etam episode does not function etiologically. This may mean that the account of his hiding place was not a part of local folklore which was later applied to Samson.¹

The noun סֶלַע has cognates in other Semitic languages and can be related to the Arabic stem *šali‘a*, which means “to split” (Schwarzenbach 1954: 115–116; Wehr 1985: 588). Therefore, סֶלַע is most probably a “split” in the natural rock formation. LXX^a translates this word into “cavern” (Jdg 15:8) or “rock” (Jdg 15:11) whereas LXX^b suggests “rock” in both verses. The Vulgate considers “rock”, but displays two different words. Thus, even the versions meet some problems to render this word correctly.

The Hebrew word סַעִיָּה is difficult to explain. This noun appears only in a construct chain with the noun סֶלַע עֵיטָם (סַעִיָּה סֶלַע עֵיטָם) so that one has to assume that this word is a more accurate labelling of the corresponding noun. As it is twice used with the preposition ב, one can assume that it is a room within the cliffs (Jdg 15:8; Isa 2:21). In Isa 2:21 סַעִיָּה סֶלַע parallels נִקְרֹת הַצִּרִּים. Since the parallel noun נִקְרֹת is a “hole, crevice”, one would expect the same meaning for סַעִיָּה. In Isa 57:5 the construct chain סַעִיָּה סֶלַע עֵיטָם is used with the preposition תַּחַת, which might be due to the parallelism with the preceding

1 There are plenty of reference points in most Samson stories to Aegean myths which could have been adopted by the Israelites via the Philistines or via the common concept of heroism in the Ancient Near East (Margalith 1966; Bartelmus 1979: 109–111; Margalith 1985: 224–229; Nauwerth 1985; Margalith 1986a; Margalith 1986b; Margalith 1987; Nocquet 2004: 59–63). Witte (2000: 547 n. 93) does not assign the ‘Etam story to the original Samson sagas. Perhaps the background of this episode should be sought in existing border conflicts between Judahites and Philistines (Weitzman 2002).

sentence, and need not therefore indicate a different meaning (Weise 1960: 28–29; Schwarzenbach 1954: 48). In Jdg 15:11, for example, this peculiar word is employed with the directive preposition **אל** so that the noun is treated like a room in the cliffs.

LXX^a translates this word into “ravine” (Jdg 15:8) or “hole” (Jdg 15:11) whereas LXX^b suggests “hole” in both verses. The Vulgate considers “cavern”, but displays two different words. Thus, the versions are again not unanimous with the correct rendition of this term.

The difficulty in explaining this mysterious word is also etymological. Most probably this noun should be related to the Arabic *ša‘aba* “to split” (Schwarzenbach 1954: 49; Wehr 1985: 656). This is exactly the rendering of the Aramaic translation of all four biblical texts (**שקפה** “split”). The Arabic noun *ša‘fa* “summit” (Wehr 1985: 659) does not fit the biblical description, since, given the parallel words and the use of prepositions, the noun **סעיף** does not refer to the highest part of the formation. All in all, the word **סעיף** seems to indicate a split in the cliffs. Due to the above mentioned use of a local preposition, it could denote a “hole”, “cave” or “place” within a cliff. This is also in accordance with the Vulgate (“*spelunca petrae*” or “*specum silicis*”). Moreover, a “crevice” or “canyon” does not seem to be a suitable hiding place for Samson.

2. Literary aspects of the ‘Etam story in Jdg 15:8b–14a

2.1 Scope of the ‘Etam story

After Samson has taken revenge on the Philistines who killed his wife and his father-in-law, he flees and hides himself in the Rock of ‘Etam. According to Jdg 15:8–11 Samson and the Judeans who came to bind him descended (**ירדו**) to the Rock of ‘Etam. This might indicate that one has to “step down” a countersunk cleft. In that respect Samson did not descend from Timna to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, he first went up the eastern mountains like the Philistines who were pursuing him. Afterwards he descended to the cleft of ‘Etam. The ascent was not mentioned in the narrative (Niemann 1985: 180–181). In the Samson narrative there is no need for a fortified city ‘Etam on the spot where

Samson hid (Birch 1881: 324). A craggy environment would fit the story line fully.

In Jdg 15:8b a new story starts, which is made obvious by some difficulties within the Hebrew text (Bader 1991: 104–105,108).

- a) The locations from which Samson is coming and to which he is going are missing.
- b) Topographically one would expect that Samson went up the hills to hide himself.
- c) **עיטם** and **להי** are new toponyms which set this story apart from the previous account.

The ‘Etam story ends with Jdg 15:14a. From Jdg 15:14b onwards a new story starts which is concerned with events that happened in and around Lehi and explain how Samson managed to escape the Philistines. In addition to the new theme there are some other indications that a different narrative starts in Jdg 15:14b (Bader 1991: 91–92,108).

- a) As in Jdg 14:6 the reader is not prepared for the sudden appearance of **רוח יהוה**. Moreover, it is never mentioned later that Samson is fulfilling his deeds by means of the spirit of God.
- b) The preceding and following scenes do not require the theological commentary with which the new story is introduced. There is therefore a clear indication that something new starts after Jdg 15:14a.
- c) The sentence **ותצלח עליו רוח יהוה** can also be found in Jdg 14:6, 19. It seems that it is introduced by the redactor as a structuring device.
- d) The reference to the **רוח יהוה** clearly contradicts Jdg 15:16, where Samson boasts about his exploits accomplished on his own.

Jdg 15:8b–14a is the first of three stories that recount how the Philistines tried to capture Samson. Twice they attempted to catch Samson in his homeland by means of other people (the Judahites and Delilah) and once to catch him when entering their home territory in Gaza.

The mention of Lehi in Jdg 15:9 might be a redactional link to the following story, which is set in Lehi. The story of Samson’s imprisonment at the cliff of ‘Etam does not require the Philistines to deploy around Lehi. Since the Philistines camped against Judah, the statement narrowing their action to Lehi in the vicinity of ‘Etam is not at all necessary. The

sentence *וינטשו בלהי* could thus be an explanation of the Philistines' whereabouts that connects both stories. This would also explain why the meaning of the name Lehi is given only in the following story, especially in Jdg 15:17 where the place is called Ramat-Lehi. Thus, while Lehi is understandable within the Samson cycle in Jdg 14–15, it is unnecessary in the 'Etam narrative alone. Further signs of a coherent integration of the 'Etam narrative within the Samson cycle might be found in the sentences containing the *lex talionis* (Nel 1994: 25–27) in Jdg 15:10, 11 insofar as they refer to the context of the whole Samson cycle (Meurer 2001: 245–251).

To sum up, the story in Jdg 15:8b–14a seems to be nicely integrated within the Samson cycle (Bader 1991: 123–124). The vocabulary of Jdg 15:8b–14a also consists of words which are used throughout the Samson cycle so that one gets the impression that the whole story is dependent on the lexicon of the cycle's redactor (Gass 2007: 394 n.87). Furthermore, the actual biblical 'Etam story is only understandable in the context of that which precedes and follows it (i.e. the *lex talionis* refers to the preceding stories). Such connections throughout the Samson cycle make it nearly impossible to postulate an independent original unit. Moreover, there are no underlying linguistic clues or syntactic tensions which would allow one to postulate earlier forms of the 'Etam narrative and thus to delve deeper into the stratigraphy of this text.

Thus the story about 'Etam, although it presents another detail within the Samson cycle, is carefully woven into the Samson cycle as a whole. Perhaps the underlying story was passed on in oral tradition before being incorporated into our rendering of the Samson cycle (Alter 1990: 48; Crenshaw 1992: 951; Jonker 1992: 55; 1996: 132 n.99). It seems that the tradition about 'Etam was worked into the complex of Jdg 14–15, which is concerned with Samson's marriage to a Timnite woman and its consequences (Amit 1999: 268–275).

2.2 The theological scope of the 'Etam story

Within the 'Etam story the Judahites are criticized in a number of ways (Soggin 1981: 249–250; Feldman 1988: 179). They are presented as obedient and submissive vassals of the Philistines who promptly acquiesce to their demands. They con-

sider Samson an immediate threat to the current peaceful situation and forfeit the chance to cast off Philistine dominion. They do not rely on the physical strength of Samson, who could have led them to ultimate victory over the Philistines. They certainly know about Samson's power because they have to employ three thousand men to imprison him. But given that knowledge, it seems to be rather unwise not to unite under the rule of a great warrior in order to fight the much-hated Philistines. All in all, they are characterized as fearing Samson even though he readily surrendered in the cave of 'Etam. In that way they are truly collaborators with the Philistines. They function as a compliant albeit anxious task force on behalf of the sovereign. As they are especially afraid of Samson, they bind him with new ropes to make sure he cannot escape from the Philistines. The Judahites are thus true and loyal vassals. Moreover, the seemingly secure binding is a sign of their mistrust of Samson (Schneider 2000: 215) – they are afraid of turning him over to the Philistines unbound, as he might escape before the transfer. In the end, the Judahites are dispensable for the storyteller and disappear in silence. Thus the portrayal of the Judahites seems to be a parody of the proper relationship that should be maintained between a political leader, his people and their common enemy (Wenham 2000: 65).

The Philistines are also depicted unfavourably. Not only do they wage war against the whole of the Judahite people, even though they only want to capture the outlaw Samson; they are also too timid to do the job on their own and enlist a Judahite task force to find and arrest Samson. Furthermore, although they know about his special strength, they rather naively think that a bound Samson could do them no harm. Samson, moreover, misses no opportunity to humiliate the Philistines not only in this story but also in the whole Samson cycle (Gordon 2004: 26; Gass 2007: 384–396).

3. Portrayal of Samson in later periods

In the following, the impact of the Samson cycle shall be examined, not only in the biblical books but also in historiographic, rabbinic and patristic tradition.

The book of Ben Sira does not list Samson in

its extensive catalogue of examples in ch. 44–50. The Judges are merely summarized in Sir 46:11 (Siegert 1992: 276). But only those Judges whose hearts were never disloyal and who never turned away from God are regarded as an example of faith. Whether or not Samson fulfilled this requirement is not stated in Ben Sira's catalogue.

In Hebr 11:32–34 Samson is recorded as an outstanding figure of faith. Thus, he is counted alongside Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. Unfortunately, the actual deeds of each character are not related separately. But some of the descriptions could refer to Samson: The heroes named are praised for their administration of justice, which can indeed be said of Samson. A clear connection to Samson is surely found in the reference to the closing of the mouths of lions. Moreover, it is stated that these figures showed their greatness as their weakness was turned to strength, which could also be applied to Samson.

According to Josephus, Samson was a prophet, though this is not stated in the biblical account (*Ant.* V 8,4 [285], Feldman 1988: 205; Witte 2000: 526–536). Josephus has a rather long account of the biblical exploits of Samson in *Ant.* V 8 (275–317). Samson's mischief, his self-satisfaction and his assimilation to foreign culture notwithstanding, he is a hero of great virtue who must be admired for his valour, his strength, the grandeur of his death and for his wrath against the enemy (*Ant.* V 8,12–317). Josephus refers particularly to the divine will behind all of Samson's deeds and to human nature which is readily inclined to sin (*Ant.* V 8–275–317; see discussions by Feldman 1988: 173–214; Witte 2000: 535–536; Millard 2003: 229; Roncace 2004: 189–207). All in all, Josephus follows the biblical story closely. It is a matter of dispute whether there are indications that Josephus wants to stress Samson's wisdom, courage and temperance and whether he wishes to protect Samson against the charge of injustice (Feldman 1988: 173–214; against Roncace 2004: 189–207).

Pseudo-Philo (*L.A.B.* XLIII–XLIV; Jacobson 1996: 61–64, 162–165), however, does not assess Samson positively, but contains some negative traditions such as Samson's admission that he was intoxicated by Delilah, here a harlot, in the Philistine city of Gerar (*L.A.B.* XLIV, 5–6; Millard 2003: 230.

The comparison with Joseph made by Pseudo-Philo is also found in the patristic rendering of the Samson story. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* III 9,68,3; Mondésert et al. 1970: 136–137). The author criticizes Samson for mingling with foreign women, resulting in lust that will become a stumbling block and lead to his blinding. Moreover, Pseudo-Philo fills in some gaps in the biblical account. He mentions the name of Samson's mother (Eluma) and vividly elaborates the Gaza story, having Samson kill 25,000 Philistines with the city gates. The numbers of the defeated enemies are always particularly exaggerated in Pseudo-Philo's account. Furthermore, Pseudo-Philo passes over other traditions with only a short reference because they are recorded in-depth in the book of Judges. Thus, the 'Etam pericope is not mentioned at all by Pseudo-Philo.

A synagogue prayer dated to the second–third century CE calls Samson and 32 other persons "righteous in their generations". This is because he offers a mourning prayer after the battle at Lehi which can be compared to the oblations of Abel, Noah, Abraham and Barak, Deborah, Gideon, Manoah and Jephthah (Darnell and Fiensy 1985: 684–685).

The Talmud states that Samson was given a name that is usually applied to God, who is called "sun" in Ps 84:12.² The rabbis maintain that Samson's

2 bSot 10a; The name Samson is usually derived from the substantive "sun" (שמש) to which a diminutive ending is suffixed, so that this name can be interpreted either as "small sun", "sunny boy" or as "child of the sun" (Witte 2000: 539 n. 58). According to Schneider (2000: 202), this name introduces important themes of the composition. The above etymology is rather old: bSotah 10a; Yalkut 2.69; Jerome, *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Philemonem liber 752*, PL 26,645 ["et totam Samson fabulam, ad veri solis (hoc quippe nomen ejus sonat) trahere sacramentum"]; Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos LXXX*, 14.70–73 (Dekkers and Fraipont 1957: 1129; Boulding 2002: 164) ["Unde Samson noster, qui etiam interpretatur sol ipsorum, eorum scilicet quibus lucet, non omnium, sicuti est oriens super bonos et malos, sed sol quorundam, sol iustitiae (figuram enim habebat Christi)"]; Jerome, *Liber Interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum. Iudicum M–Z*, 23–24 (Lagarde 1959: 101), combines the two roots "sun" and "strength": "Samson sol eorum vel solis fortitudo" (see also Stamm 1980: 380–381). Apart from this etymology the name is sometimes connected either to the root "to serve" (שמש), which describes Samson as an obedient servant (Segert 1984: 459). This root may be related to the interpretation of Pseudo-Philo, who trans-

strength, which can be compared to Goliath's, was divine in origin (bSotah 10a; Genesis Rabbah 98,13; Tanhuma wayehi 12; Feldman 1988: 184). In that respect he is a source of ethnic pride as he was as strong as Goliath. Moreover, Samson is equated with Bedan, who is mentioned in 1 Sam 12:11, because Samson stems from the tribe of Dan. Samson is also considered to be like Aaron in his generation. Although of questionable character, Samson is placed on the same level as some of the most estimable figures in Jewish tradition (bRosh HaShanah 25a–b). However, Jewish writers criticize Samson's lack of temperance, especially in the episodes with the foreign women. Samson's greatest weakness was his attraction to foreign women who defiled him (Gunn 2005: 172–174). Since Samson “followed his eyes” he was blinded like Zedekiah in 2 Kgs 25:7. Because, according to the rabbis, his decadence began in Gaza, Samson had to be punished in Gaza. His punishment was on account of his strength – the feature that distinguished him from others and was due to his creation in the likeness of God. A pun on his strength is portrayed ironically in his beloved Delilah. Her name is related to the verb “to make weak”. According to the rabbis, she weakened his strength, his heart and his actions (bSotah 9b–10a). Moreover, on the basis of Gen 49:17, the Talmud asserts that Samson was lame in both feet (bSanhedrin 105a). Even the problems with his being a Nazirite are discussed at length by the rabbis (bNazir 4a–b). All in all, the rabbis express many negative views on this ancient hero.

Already in patristic writings Samson is compared to and sometimes even identified with

lates Samson's name as “holy” (see Feldman 1988: 180 n. 21). Another possible connection is the root “to be strong” (שׁמַח or שׁמַח), which refers to the special strength of Samson. This can be compared to Josephus, *Ant.* V 8,4–285 who explains that Samson's name means ἰσχυρός. The second stem שׁמַח “oil” could be a hint behind the interpretation of Samson's name as the “anointed”. The name Samson is nevertheless best explained by the first etymology, as there are many indications of solar imagery in the Samson cycle: long hair symbolizing sunbeams, the story of the foxes, the opposing name Delilah which can be related to “night” (לילה), the blinding of Samson in the concluding story and last but not least the localisation of Samson's exploits near Beth-Shemesh – a possible center of solar worship (Witte 2000: 539). The first etymology should therefore be preferred to all other possibilities.

Hercules. The similarity between both figures is mentioned particularly by Eusebius and Augustine (Eusebius, *Hieronymi Chronicon* XI, 13–15; LXII, 16–19; Helm 1956: 11.62a; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XVIII 19, 5–9; Dombart and Kalb 1957: 610). Occasionally, pagans were accused of forging their figure of Hercules based upon the model in the Samson narrative (Filastrus, *Diversarum hereseon liber* VIII. See especially PL 12, 1122; Heylen 1957: 220). The positive patristic view of Samson might be based on Hebr 11:32–34 where Samson is counted among the outstanding witnesses of faith (Webb 1995: 119; Wenham 2000: 134).

The positive treatment of Samson is used by Athanasius and predisposes his view of Samson whom he calls a “saint” (Athanasius, *Epistola ad episcopos Aegyptii et Libyae* XXI 70, PG 25, 588B; Robertson 1978: 234). Clement of Alexandria likewise counts Samson among the Jewish prophets. In his picture, Samson ruled the Jewish people after they returned to God and he defeated the Philistines (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* XXI 109–111; Caster 1951: 131–132). Gregory of Nazianzus regards Samson as a supporting pillar of the church whereas the Philistines represent all enemies of the church (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* XXI 26,1–15; Mossay 1980: 164–165).

According to Augustine, Samson's strength came from grace and not from nature, in that Jdg 13:25 says that the Spirit of the Lord accompanied him. In that respect Samson was only a vessel that was filled by the Spirit (Augustine, *Sermo CCCLXIV De Samson* 2; Paronetto and Quartiroli 1989: 432; Hill 1995: 276). Pseudo-Tertullian expressed a similar view – Samson's strength was a gift of the Spirit: *spiritus hoc donum (Carmen adversus Marcionitas* III, 119–125; Pollmann 1991: 92–93).

Typological exegesis interpreted Samson as a type of Christ (Houtman and Spronk 2004: 134–140). Many Church Fathers developed a certain Samson-Christ typology (e.g. Ambrose, *De Spiritu Sancto* II,1–19; see Deferrari 1963: 98–103; Fallar 1964: 88–93; Augustine, *Sermo CCCLXIV De Samson* 2–6; see Paronetto and Quartiroli 1989: 432–442; Hill 1995: 276–280).³ In that re-

3 A good example of Samson-Christ typology is the treatment of Jdg 16:26 by Hippolytus: he draws parallels between

spect, Samson's deeds are a mere foreshadowing of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The first parallel is drawn between their birth narratives, but other episodes are also linked: Samson's victory over the lion is a type of Christ's overcoming sin and death, Samson's breaking off the city gates of Gaza is a type of the breaking down of the gates of hell, Samson's destruction of the temple of Dagon is a type of Christ's victory over paganism (Sieger 1992: 278).

Nevertheless, there is also some critique of Samson by the patristic writers. According to Clement of Alexandria, Samson is the negative antitype of Joseph who lives chastely (*Paedagogus* III 9,68,3; See Mondésert et al. 1970: 136–137). Also Hippolytus, *Fragmenta* XXXIX, criticizes Samson's fornication as a sin against the body, which is the temple of God. Formerly *Fragmenta* XXXIX were attributed to Irenaeus, see Harvey 1857: 507). Ambrose held that the Samson story warns against marriages between Christians and non-Christians (*Epistula* LXII 8–34; Zelzer 1990: 124–142; Savon 2004: 75–95).

In early Christian art Samson is depicted in elegant costume, wearing tunica, pallium and sandals (Bulst 1972: 31; see also Réau 1956: 236–348). The fight with the lion is an especially popular motif. Samson – as a type of Hercules – strangles the fronting lion in upright position or keeps apart his jaws (Bulst 1972: 31; Stern 1970: 88–97). The depiction of Samson's fight with the lion interpreted Jdg 14,6 typologically as the overcoming of devil and death by Christ and theologically as the moral combat of man (Réau 1956: 236–237; Cf. already Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Iudices*. See especially PG 87/1, 1077–1078).

The fight of Samson with the lion was depicted on the walls of a famous catacomb, which was discovered in 1955 in Rome near the junction of Via Dino Compagni and Via Latina. In this catacomb, dated to the first half of the fourth century CE, some episodes of the Samson narrative were depicted: thus,

a beehive was already placed in the muzzle of the killed lion. This can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of Jdg 14:8. A second fresco with the lion combat is only fragmentarily preserved. Furthermore the slaying of the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass and the binding together of the foxes are also shown in this catacomb (Kötzsche-Breitenbruch 1976: 89–93). Most probably the Palestinian-Syrian manner of illustrating the bible, which was concerned in exhaustive manner with the Samson narrative, had a strong impact on the early Christian painting of the fourth century CE. Various scenes of the Samson narrative have been found in a basilical building in Misis – the Cilician site of Mopsuestia. The cycle of Samson, only fragmentarily preserved, has nine scenes altogether. It shows the fight with the lion, the removal of honey from the carcass of the lion, the binding together of the foxes, the slaying of the Philistines, Samson in Gaza, Samson in Delilah's bosom, the blinding of Samson, Samson before the Philistines and Samson's death. The identification of this building as a synagogue remains uncertain, although in Christian mosaic art there are usually no scenes of the Old Testament. Moreover no exclusive Christian symbols and ornaments have been applied. For these reasons we should not exclude the possibility that the building at Mopsuestia may have been a synagogue (Avi-Yonah 1982: 189–190; Ovadiah 2002: 94–103). According to M. Avi-Yonah the Samson tradition in Mopsuestia might be explained by linkage of the Danite Samson with the legendary ruler Mopsos of the Danuna – דננים (a name mentioned in the Karatepe inscription *KAI* 26 A 16–18).

Several reliefs with scenes of the Samson narrative have been discovered in the Martyrion of Seleucia Pieria. One of these reliefs depicts Samson's fight with the lion in front of the city gate of Timna. A further relief shows the episode of Samson carrying away the city gates of Gaza (Weitzman 1941: 137–138).

All in all, there are many examples of a positive treatment of Samson in the post-biblical era. This seems to be the background for a certain veneration of Samson in the Byzantine period.⁴ Thus, even

Samson and Christ, the little boy and John the Baptist, the temple and the world and between the two columns and the two Testaments. See especially Richard 1966: 14–15. The text was formerly attributed to Irenaeus, *Fragmenta* XXVI, see Harvey 1857: 492.

⁴ Against Nauerth 1985: 111, who thinks that “die Simsongeschichte sonst in frühchristlicher Zeit keine für uns erkennbare

veneration of the place of Samson's refuge in the cave of 'Etam is possible. In that respect, the mention of a Sampso-Monastery by Johannes Moschos (Gass and Zissu 2005: 172–174; and see also discussion below) is in line with the overall record of those times.

4. Post-biblical reception of the 'Etam narrative

Not only the Samson stories as a whole, but also the tiny 'Etam narrative was considered by later writers. In the following, the post-biblical reception of the episode at 'Etam is taken into account. This will show that 'Etam was a significant place in the Byzantine era, so veneration of Samson at this place is possible.

According to Josephus (*Ant.* V 8, 8 – 297–299), Samson settled at a place called Aita, which surely refers to biblical 'Etam and which is described as a secure rock within the territory of Judah. The Judahites objected to being blamed by the Philistines for Samson's exploits because they paid the Philistines tribute. The Philistines responded that the Judahites must deliver Samson in order to exonerate themselves. Josephus interpreted Jdg 15:11 as a reprimand against Samson because the Philistines were in a position to lay waste Israel. Moreover, the Judahites tried to persuade Samson to submit of his own free will. Samson's reference to the *lex talionis* as justification for his actions is omitted by Josephus. Furthermore, Josephus thinks that Samson had to descend from the rock to the Judahites, assuming most probably that he was in a secure position, which is not stated in the biblical account. After binding Samson the Judahites brought him to the Philistines. In his account, Josephus seems to explain the submissive act of the Judahites through his own additions to the biblical story. Moreover, his version is at odds with the biblical topography. Whereas the Judahites had to descend to the cave in Jdg 15:11, in Josephus' account Samson has to descend to the Judahites. In contrast, Pseudo-Philo completely ignores the

'Etam story. Even in his brief survey of different Samson traditions mentioned in the biblical book of Judges he skips the events at the cliff of 'Etam (*L.A.B.* XLIV, 4). The Talmud mentions a place called Kefar 'Etam (כפר עיטם) where an apparently famous terebinth grew (bYebamot 106b). However, it is doubtful whether this place is to be identified with the rock of 'Etam in the Samson story. It could simply refer to the Judean 'Etam, and most probably does (Reeg 1989: 474).

The patristic tradition also takes the 'Etam narrative into account. Hippolytus believed that the breaking of the ropes in the 'Etam narrative indicates the release from sin by repentance (Richard 1966: 14; formerly attributed to Irenaeus, *Fragmenta* XLII; Harvey 1857: 509). Moreover, Hippolytus mentioned a certain rock which can be identified with 'Etam. Furthermore, he interpreted the rock spiritually: the rock is useful against the persecutors of the church, just as the jawbone that is itself a type of the body of Christ. In this typological treatment, Samson is a type of the church under persecution. Thus, Hippolytus sees the actual persecution of the church in the pursuit of Samson. By fleeing to the spiritual rock 'Etam and by using the jawbone (which is a type of the body of Christ), Christians are able to retaliate (Richard 1966: 14–20. Formerly attributed to Irenaeus, *Fragmenta* XL; Harvey 1857: 507). According to Origen, one should strive to break the bonds of sin on one's own like Samson did, otherwise double punishment will be meted out (Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos. Psalmus* II 3, PG 12,1105).

Eusebius mentioned the 'Etam story in his *Onomasticon* (96:5–6), where he refers to the cavern of 'Etam – the dwelling place of Samson (Klostermann 1904: 96; Notley and Safrai 2005: 92). According to Eusebius, 'Etam is located beside a torrent or ravine. Thus, he follows the tradition of LXX^a preserved only in Jdg 15:8. The Greek word χειμάρρονς has many meanings and can also be interpreted as a watercourse in a valley, which is important for the identification of the Sampso-monastery below.

Ambrose described 'Etam, Samson's place of refuge, as a rock near a torrent in the desert (*Epistula* LXII 19–22; Zelzer 1990: 132–134). Thus, he combined the tradition that Samson lived

Rolle spielt." For a discussion and for a map of veneration places of Samson in Byzantine Palestine, see Gass and Zissu 2005: 170–172.

in a place beside a torrent with the biblical account that a place called 'Ethem lies in the desert (Exod 13:20; Num 33:6–8). In that respect, he had confused two differently written toponyms ('Etam vs. Ethem). But Samson's 'Etam should not be sought in the desert but in or near the stage of the Samson narrative – the Judean Shephelah or at the edge of the Judean Hills. According to Ambrose, there was a fortification at 'Etam belonging to the Judahites. The Philistines dared not climb the steep and hazardous rock, and therefore pressured the Judahites to imprison Samson. Contrary to the biblical text, the 3,000 Judahites climbed up the rock to get Samson. In a rather long speech, Samson vindicated himself and blamed the Judahites for being submissive slaves of the Philistines. He warned the Judahites not to be contaminated by unjust bloodshed and allowed them to bind him with ropes, which will be sufficient testimony to their submission to the Philistines. Moreover, he hoped to find some weapons while bound. Only following this narrative is it stated that Samson resided in a cave; beforehand he is described as being in the rocky fortification of 'Etam but not in a cave. Ambrose most probably confused the two places sharing the toponym 'Etam. In this way his misconceptions can be readily explained.

To conclude, even the brief story of 'Etam is discussed by the post-biblical writers and the church fathers. However, these literary contributions are of little help in correctly locating geographically the cave of 'Etam since difficulties in the biblical text are smoothed over and sometimes misunderstood. Be that as it may, by outlining the Samson story and especially the account at 'Etam, early interpreters sought to exhort and edify their audiences by means of spiritual and typological exegesis.

5. Historical-geographical identification of Sel'a 'Etam

Near the northern Judean Shephelah – the stage of the Samson narrative – there is only one distinctive place with cliffs situated above the Valley of Soreq, at the lower part of this valley, near its exit from the Judean Hills to the Shephela: 'Iraq Isma'in (map ref. 1527.1302; Schick 1887: 143–146; Buhl 1896: 90; Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 220; Moore 1958:



1. Valley of Soreq (Wadi Isma'in / Wadi es-Sarar), looking north. The cliff of 'Iraq Isma'in and Me'arot Shimshon are located in the center-left side of the photo (photo by authors).

342–343; Simons 1959: 301; Gold 1959: 153; Ehrlich 1992: 644).⁵ – a vertical rock face in Wadi Isma'in which is the continuation of Wadi es-Sarar (Valley of Soreq; Fig. 1). The Rock of 'Etam might be identified at 'Iraq Isma'in. There is a huge natural cave which could have been used for refuge purposes in antiquity. According to a local tradition this cave was regarded as *Maqam* of the famous Sheikh Isma'in who lived here in the past (Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 220). The fellahin (peasants) of nearby Deir el-Hawa told Ch. Clermont-Ganneau (who apparently never visited the cave) that the size of the cave is considerable and an ancient *keniseh* (church) previously used by the *Kuffâr* (Christians) is located inside. The appearance and position of the cave led Clermont-Ganneau to identify in this place the hiding place of Samson.

When looking for the Rock of 'Etam in Samson's country, near Zorah, 'Iraq Isma'in would be the best candidate for identification. Furthermore, 'Iraq Isma'in suits the requirements of the *Onomasticon* on 'Etam – most probably following LXX^a – as it lies in a cliff above the torrent of the Valley of Soreq. It is a matter of dispute whether LXX^a had preserved first hand knowledge of the geography of

5 The Arabic name 'Iraq Isma'in cannot be linked etymologically with Samson. Perhaps the name of the Hasmonean Simon has been preserved in the name of 'Iraq and Wadi Isma'in, since nearby Khirbet Sammuiniyye could be identified with ancient Tur Shim'on: Zissu 2004. All in all, it seems that in the local Arabic toponymy the name of Simon, not of Samson, can be found.



2. Me'arot Shimshon, looking west, towards Beth Shemesh and the Judean Shephelah (photo by authors).

Samson's country. Its acceptance by Eusebius who usually has a good view on the topography of the Holy Land is nevertheless noteworthy. Presently, 'Iraq Isma'in is called Me'arot Shimshon ("The Caves of Samson"; Marcus 1993: 86–87 and 1:50000 maps of the Survey of Israel; Fig. 2). This official Hebrew name is apparently based on a modern popular tradition without scientific background (Vilnay 1978: 4602). Most probably this is due to the proximity of 'Iraq Isma'in to the main area of Samson's activities (see discussion below).

6. The Byzantine monastery Sampso

Johannes Moschos mentioned in his book *Pratum Spirituale* a monastery Sampso (*Pratum Spirituale* CLXX 1–2, PG 87/3 3035; Rouët de Journal 1946: 223; Wortley 1992: 139. For life and works of Johannes Moschos Eucrates see: Hirschfeld 1992: 246; Wortley 1992: XVI–XX). Unfortunately, the exact distance that could assist in the location of the monastery is missing in the Greek original. Only in the Latin translations there are indications for

locating the monastery: "*Distabat ab Jerosolymis fere viginti passuum millibus*". The monastery of Sampso is to be situated at a distance of "about" 20 Roman miles from Jerusalem. Unfortunately, no indication of direction is given.

The name Sampso is sometimes thought to be a scribal error for Sapsas (Rouët de Journal 1946: 223 n.1; Wortley 1992: 253. The monastery of Sapsas is also mentioned by Johannes Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale* I–II, PG 87/3 2853; cf. Abel 1932: 251 n.1; For Sapsas cf. Wortley 1992: 233). Near Sapsas a cave was changed to a church. However, the name Sapsas is only a short form of Sapsaphas (Abel 1932: 251 n.1). This monastery also appears in the Madaba map (Donner 1992: 38). It lies in Transjordan and approximately suits the distance mentioned in the Latin translation of Johannes Moschos (about 21 Roman miles; for Sapsas cf. Abel 1932: 248–252). However, the different writing Sampso is clearly the *lectio difficilior* and could not be explained easily since Johannes Moschos also preserved the correct name Sapsas.

The sought-after Sampso cannot be identified with the place Sappho/Sampho mentioned by Josephus (*B.J.* II 5,1 – 70; *Ant.* XVII 10,9 – 290; Avi-Yonah 1976: 92; Möller and Schmitt 1976: 166–167) as the double transmission Sappho/Sampho can be traced back to phonetic reasons (shift of $\pi\phi$ to $\mu\phi$) whereas the shift of ϕ to ψ is difficult to be explained (Abel 1936: 539). The distance to Jerusalem (about 15 Roman miles) is too short.

The biblical name Samson is translated $\Sigma\alpha\mu\psi\omega\nu$ by the Septuagint. This complies with the spelling of Johannes Moschos. In this respect, the monastery mentioned by Johannes Moschos might be a Samson monastery, which commemorated and venerated the deeds of Samson. In Byzantine times, the veneration of Samson was widespread in Palestine (Gass and Zissu 2005: 171–172). Since monks retreated to places hard-to-reach, the cave of Etam would be a suitable location for a monastery. The Samson tradition possibly connected with Etam could have been normative for the monastery's name. The tradition of Samson clings to the northern part of the Shephela, especially to the environs of Zorah and the nearby Valley of Soreq. Therefore, the monastery Sampso should be looked for in exactly this area. Thus, one has a vague in-

dication of the direction for the distance given by Johannes Moschos.

The distance “about 20 Roman miles” suits Beth Shemesh, Tell er-Rumele (Abel 1936: 538–542; Wilkinson 1977: 153.172). According to the *Onomasticon* (54,11–13), Beth Shemesh lies 10 Roman miles from Eleutheropolis/Beth Guvrin (map ref. 1402.1128), whereas the distance from Eleutheropolis to Jerusalem amounts 30 Roman miles (Abel 1936: 540).⁶ One approaches Beth Shemesh via a side road to the main road from Jerusalem to Eleutheropolis. This side road branches off at the 11th mile stone (Thomsen 1917: 80) to northwest and reaches Beth Shemesh after about 8 Roman miles via Beit ‘Itab and Deir ‘Aban.

Admittedly Beth Shemesh is not the only site in the northern Shephela located about 20 miles apart from Jerusalem. In the environs of Beth Shemesh there are several sites with a distance of 10 miles apart from Eleutheropolis according to Eusebius’ *Onomasticon*, as Esthaol and Sara‘a (*Onomasticon* 54,11–13; 88,12–14; 156,15. See especially Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994: 86, 123, 263). Eusebius seems to have applied the distance of 10 Roman miles to several sites in the whole area of Beth Shemesh. In fact, nearly every site in this region is suited for identification with the monastery of Samson. Furthermore, the indication in the translated versions of the work of Johannes Moschos is not an exact value but only an estimated one.

In the area east of Ierimouth/Khirbet Marmita (map ref. 1514.1304) are the only cliff formations in the whole region. The Byzantine tradition about the biblical Rock of ‘Etam could have clung to ‘Iraq Isma‘in (map ref. 1527.1302) so that the Byzantine monastery of Sampso might most probably be located on this location, as we will claim below. We assume that its purpose was to commemorate the biblical Samson narrative. By combination of several Byzantine distances one can make the point that the place of the sought-after monastery of Sampso

6 According to Eusebius (*Onomasticon* 156,18), Sokcho/Sukkot lies 9 miles apart from Eleutheropolis, whereas the distance from Sukkot to Jerusalem accounts for 20 miles according to Johannes Moschos 180; Rouët de Journel 1946: 236; Wortley 1992: 149.

should be actually looked for in the east of Tell er-Rumele.

According to Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* the distance of Kariathiareim to Jerusalem accounts for 9–10 Roman miles. Kariathiareim is located on the road to Diospolis/Lod (map ref. 1405.1515) via Nicopolis (*Onomasticon* 48,24; 114,23–25; Thomsen 1907: 78).⁷ Due to the arduous ascents and descents the distance from Kariathiareim/Deir el-‘Azhar (map ref. 1599.1353) to Ierimouth/Khirbet Marmita (map ref. 1514.1304) must be about 10 further miles even though both sites are 7 miles away as the crow flies. Moreover, the Latin translation of the work of Johannes Moschos locates the site of the monastery of Samson only approximately. Most probably this is due to the difficult location of this remote place situated far away from the major traffic routes.⁸ Thus there can be only a vague description.

The Pilgrim of Bordeaux locates Nicopolis/‘Imwas (map ref. 1493.1387) at about 22 Roman miles apart from Jerusalem (*Itinerarium Burdigalense* 20; Donner 1979: 63). The place Ayalon/Yalo (map ref. 1523.1388) lies at the second milestone from Nicopolis to Jerusalem (Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994: 59), so that even this site suits the distance given by Johannes Moschos. Drawing circles around Jerusalem with the radius of Jerusalem to Ayalon one reaches directly Ierimouth/Khirbet Marmita (map ref. 1514.1304). An identification of the nearby ‘Iraq Isma‘in (map ref. 1527.1302) with the Byzantine monastery Sampso is in full accordance with the various distances given in the sources.

In 1911 Mackenzie excavated a structure in the southeast portion of Tell er-Rumele (map ref. 1476.1286) – the biblical Beth Shemesh – on behalf

7 According to Theodosius, *De Situ Terrae Sanctae* 8, who confused Kariathiareim with Silo, the distance was only 8 miles; Wilkinson 1977: 164; Donner 1979: 203. Afterwards one has to leave the Roman road to arrive at Chasalon and Ierimouth. No Roman side road has been documented for this rocky region so far.

8 According to Dorsey 1991: 154–155; 186–188 there were more roads in this region during the Iron Age. Dorsey claimed: “While the Roman road continued westward from Kirjath-Yearim to Emmaus, evidence suggests that the Iron Age road turned southwest toward Beth-Shemesh, roughly along the course followed by the Turkish period road” (1991: 186–187).

of the Palestine Exploration Fund. The excavator suggested that this structure should be regarded as the temporary abode of the arc of covenant in Beth Shemesh (Mackenzie 1911b: 141). Abel (1936: 538–542) identified this building with the above-mentioned monastery of Sampso. Since then this structure has been interpreted as a Byzantine monastery. The present authors suggested that this structure should be interpreted as a fortified Byzantine site, consisting of rows of rooms arranged around an inner courtyard with an adjacent tower (Gass and Zissu 2005: 174–177). It could have been used as a road-station, a fortified estate, a villa rustica, a guarding-post, or in some other function. The exact use of this compound remains unclear, since clear evidence for religious assignment is missing. Thus, it cannot be the monastery of Sampso.

7. The Byzantine monastery of Samson at 'Iraq Isma'in – the biblical Sel'a 'Etam

The ancient site is located in a prominent cliff, situated on the northern slope of Nahal Soreq (Wadi Ism'ain, Survey of Western Palestine Map). This section of the slope is very steep and its middle part forms an impressive cliff, 15–20 meters high (c. 390 m. above sea level), named 'Araq Ism'ain on the Survey of Western Palestine Map. The topographical character of this section of the valley is outstanding, since it is the steepest place in the western Jerusalem mountains, and the single place in the area where natural cliffs of this size exist (Figs. 1, 2).

In our opinion, the large natural (*karstic*) cave situated in the only cliff existing in the area, above the Valley of Soreq, and the traditions about Samson's activities in the Shephelah were the main factors which led to the identification of this place in the Byzantine period. This identification led to the veneration of the cave as the hiding place of Samson and to the building of a monastic complex in and around the cave.

The complex consists of a huge natural cave, which housed a church and water installations, surrounded by well-built rooms, rock-cut stairways, paths and water cisterns. All these elements are located along a long and narrow shelf, at the foot of the cliff (Figs. 3, 4).

Following Hirschfeld's typology, it is tempting to regard this venerated cave as part of a monastery built next to a memorial church (Hirschfeld 1992: 18; 55–58) or as integrated within a monastery of the "cliff coenobium" type (Hirschfeld 1992: 34–42), since no hermits' cells were detected in the surrounding area. Judging from the character of the site, its conspicuous topography and its location, it seems to us possible that this compound should be identified with the monastery mentioned by Johannes Moschos. The archaeological evidence supports this assumption.

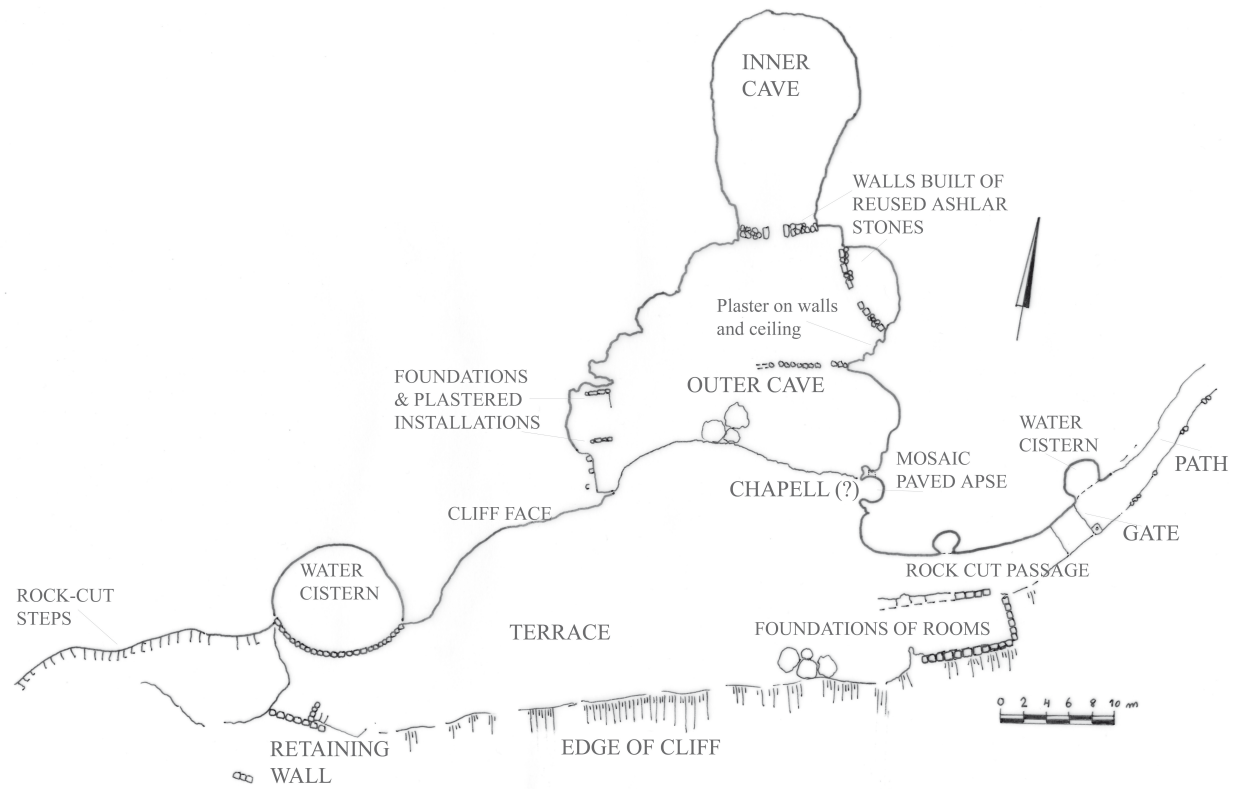
The site was surveyed by the "Survey of Jerusalem Mountains Team"⁹ in 1991–1993 and visited again by the present authors in 2004 and 2005. The following description of the archaeological remains is based on preliminary surveys and visits. This interesting site awaits proper excavation and detailed study.

Three paths lead to the site: the first two from the ridge located to the north of Nahal Soreq (the ridge is marked on modern Israeli maps as "Samson's Mountain"). A path descends toward the cliff and forks near the northeastern edge of it. One branch approaches the site from the east, following the bottom of the cliff. The other branch turns northwest and descends the cliff entering the architectural complex through the rock-cut staircase which will be described below. The third path reaches the site from south, after a steep climbing from the bottom of Nahal Soreq.

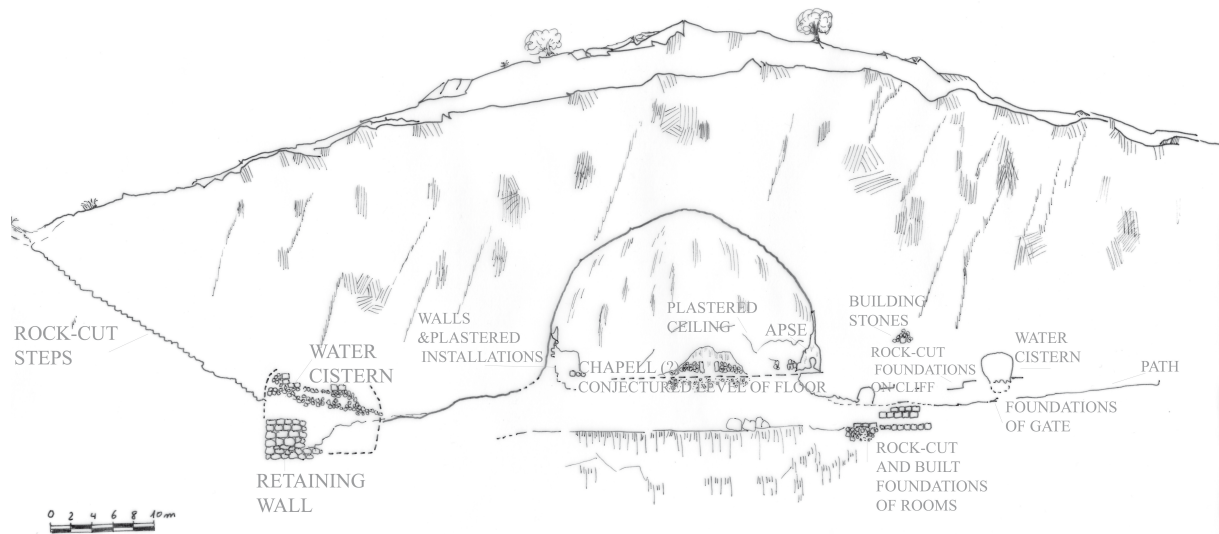
It appears that the main entrance to the compound was from the east. The last 15 meters of the ancient path are well preserved, and the terrace build built in order to support the path is still visible.

The point where the path enters the ancient site (map ref. 152609.130166) was marked by a rock-cut flat area (4 x 3 m), flanked by a bell-shaped rock-cut water cistern (3 x 2.5 m, 4 m deep). Some graffiti covered by patina were discerned on the cliff face, above the cistern. Since this area was accessible only by somebody standing high above, we

9 We wish to thank our friends and colleagues Dani Weiss, Gideon Solimany, Yair Tzoran and Nikola Willner for their assistance. The research was supported by the Calgary Institute for the Humanities, University of Calgary (Alberta, Canada), and the German Society for the Exploration of Palestine (Deutscher Verein zur Erforschung Palaestinas).



3. Schematic plan of Me'arot Shimshon, showing location of Byzantine-period remains discussed in the article (prepared by Y. Tzoran and authors).



4. Schematic section of Me'arot Shimshon, showing location of Byzantine-period remains discussed in the article (prepared by Y. Tzoran and authors).



5. Rock-cut passage leading from the eastern gate to the area of the cave (photo looking east; by authors).



7. Wall built of well-drafted ashlars, belonging to rooms, in the eastern part of the compound (photo looking west; by authors).



6. Foundations of walls belonging to two parallel rows of rooms, in the eastern part of the compound (photo looking west; by authors).



8. Cliff flanking passage to main cave from eastern entrance (looking north). The cliff was initially covered with masonry, as evidenced by foundations cut on its face and traces of masonry, still *in situ* c. 6 meters above ground (marked by arrow; photo by authors).

assume the cistern was covered, and someone stood on the conjectured roof to write the graffiti.

The open area and the cistern were apparently located outside the gate. From the point at which the gate is assumed to have stood, a 20 m long and 3.6 m broad passage was created by rock-cutting (Fig. 5). This passage led toward the center of the compound; it is bounded by sections of walls to the south and the cliff to the north.

The walls belong to the foundations of two parallel rows of rooms (4.4 x 8 m each), apparently the remains of a rectangular building, which initially stood to a height of two storeys (Fig. 6). They are built of well-drafted ashlars, and in some places are intact to a height of three courses (Fig 7). On one of these ashlars some letters were inscribed in Arabic

characters, most probably after the monastery went out of use.

Additional foundations cut to the west of this building and in the same orientation, suggest that additional rooms stood there.

As explained above, the passage is flanked by the cliff, which was hewn in order to create a rock-cut vertical wall (2–7 meters high). This wall was initially covered with masonry, as evidenced by foundations cut on its face and traces of masonry, still *in situ* (Fig. 8). In our opinion some carved foundations and traces of masonry located c. 6 meters above the floor level of the entranceway provided the framework for a structure at least two stories



9. Eastern edge of central courtyard; Photo looking west towards the Valley of Soreq and Beth Shemesh (photo by authors).

high. We assume that a prominent feature stood here – presumably a tower.

Broad steps were carved in the floor of the passage, which descends gently to a flat terrace – most probably a central courtyard flanked on its northern side by the cave complex and on its southern side by the slope which descends steeply to the bottom of the valley (Fig. 9). The poor state of preservation of the remains does not allow for a reconstruction of the units, which probably stood to the south of this courtyard.

A spacious cave in the cliff (c. 25 m wide at its opening, a maximal depth of c. 37 meters, with a c. 5–10 m high ceiling) housed the church (Fig. 10). In order to create a broad, flat area on which the church could be erected, a retaining wall was built at the opening of the cave, on the slanted bedrock. This conjectured wall (of which nothing remains)

supported a fill of stones and mortar, parts of which still survive *in situ* (Fig. 11).

The church was partly built and partly rock-cut, as attested by well-drafted stones found inside the cave. One of these stones has a rounded profile, thus indicating its former use in a barrel vault or as part of an apse. Some colored mosaic *tesserae* and few fragments of tiles indicate as to the possible shape of the roof and floors. The upper parts and ceiling of the cave contains large traces of plaster made of mud and straw, laid in two layers. Many ribbed shards of Byzantine storage jars were imbedded in the plaster. In some places, a “fish-bone” pattern was incised in the plaster.

The eastern wall of the cave (Fig. 12) was adorned by apses. A rounded apse (1.2 x 2 m) remains, probably the southern, small apse, while almost nothing survived from the other two. This



10. Me'arot Shimshon, looking borth. The spacious cave in the cliff which housed the church (photo by authors).



11. Fill of stones and mortar, *in situ*, belonging to artificial "podium" on which the cave' church was erected (marked by arrow; photo by authors).



12. The eastern wall of the cave looking east. Arrow marks small, southern (?) apse (photo by authors).



14. Small, southern (?) apse, looking east. The apse was plastered and paved with mosaics. Arrow marks level of mosaic floor (photo by authors).



13. Small, southern (?) apse, looking south (photo by authors).



15. Large oval cistern (marked by arrow), and the main cliff looking east, towards the main cave (photo by authors).

apse (Fig. 13) was mostly rock-cut, plastered and paved with mosaics, with a 1.8 m opening (?) in its northern wall. The mosaics were systematically destroyed, but a single row of *tesserae*, imbedded in the plaster which covered the walls survives (Fig. 14). Two rounded depressions can be seen in the upper part of the eastern wall. These depressions are apparently all that remains of the two other apses

of the church, but without excavating the floor of the cave it is not clear whether the depressions were actually incorporated in a three-apsidal church or whether the church was monoapsidal and the depressions (together with other cavities) were only plastered and were shown to pilgrims and visitors who wished to see Samson's hiding cave.



16. Large oval cistern looking east (photo by authors).



17. Large oval cistern; detail of masonry, looking west (photo by authors).

At the western edge of the cave, opposite the apse, some foundation walls made of small stones and mortar were detected on the cliff face. The remains of a plastered vault are visible, but it is difficult to determine whether they formed part of water

installations or other kind of building (see upper part of Fig. 11). Some additional niches, including a larger one (1.8 x 1 m, 1.8 m high) were located as well in this section of the cave. The cave church was heavily damaged after the Byzantine period.



18. Large oval cistern and flight of rock-cut steps, looking west (photo by authors).



19. Flight of rock-cut steps, detail (photo by authors).

The survey of the site along the main cliff found the remains of a large oval cistern (map ref. 152536.130120); (Figs. 15, 16); ca. 11 m long, ca. 10 m wide, ca. 5 m deep. Its northern side was carved out of the cliff and its southern side (ca. 2.5 m wide) was built of stone. The lower part of this wall was made of large fieldstones and mortar, while its upper part was built of large and well-drafted ashlars with prominent bosses (Fig. 17). The curving line of the upper part suggests that the roof had been a half dome, leaning against the cliff. The inner face of the reservoir and its ceiling were covered with hydraulic plaster. Its capacity has been estimated at about 450 m³.

Another element found to the south of the cistern is a strong retaining wall. Additional walls were found outside the compound, attesting to the existence of buildings on the slope.

A flight of steps entirely cut in the rock, mark the westernmost point of the complex (Fig. 18, 19; map ref. 152531.130119). This 0.7 m wide and almost vertical flight of steps was the only available means to climb the cliff, and connect the compound to the path arriving from north-west.

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