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**DEI Excavations on the Southwestern Slope of Mount Zion (2015–2019)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **DEI Excavations on the Southwestern Slope of Mount Zion (2015–2019)**

Dieter Vieweger – Jennifer Zimni – Friederike Schöpf – Michael Würz

The excavations of the GPIA Mount Zion project are located around the Protestant Cemetery in Jerusalem. Three areas reveal archaeological remains dating from the Iron Age II up until the Islamic period. After reinvestigating the area of the »Gate of the Essenes« the GPIA excavated further living quarter structures, mainly dating into the Early Roman as well as into the Byzantine era. The results shed new light on the course of the ancient city walls (Iron Age – Ayyubid) as well as on the population living on Mount Zion in Roman and Byzantine times.

## **KEYWORDS**

Jerusalem archaeology, Mount Zion, Roman Jerusalem, Byzantine Jerusalem

# DEI Excavations on the Southwestern Slope of Mount Zion (2015–2019)

## Introduction

<sup>1</sup> While today Mount Zion lies outside of the walls built during the Ottoman era, it has been included into Jerusalem's fortification several times, although the earliest course of the Iron Age city wall in this area is not yet quite clear<sup>1</sup>. During the Hasmonean/Herodian era, the walls of the city extended along Mount Zion's slopes towards Hinnom Valley – until the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 B.C. With the rise of Christianity in Late-Roman and Byzantine times, Mount Zion became the home of several Christian rites and shrines. Therefore, the walls once again encircled the south-western hill<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The excavation areas of the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology of the Holy Land (German: Deutsches Evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes; DEI) »Mount Zion Project« are located on the southwestern slope of Mt. Zion (Fig. 1). This article shall give a short overview of the results so far.

<sup>3</sup> Archaeological research in the Anglican-Prussian Cemetery<sup>3</sup> started with Henry Maudsley and was proceeded by Charles Warren and Charles W. Wilson<sup>4</sup>. Henry Maudsley investigated the rock-scarp along the south-western hill during the years of 1873–1874. His research also included the property of the former Bishop Gobat School (today: Jerusalem University College). Lieut. Claude R. Conder summarized Maudsley's finds in his report to the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1875<sup>5</sup>. There, he correctly concluded that the worked section of rock scarp along the perimeter of the Gobat School and the cemetery must have been the foundation of the historic fortification of Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> A double-*mikve*, situated close by in the rock scarp, has been cleaned, documented and mapped. These are currently (2019–2021) being restored<sup>6</sup>. Charles Warren

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion see Geva 2003, 504–517.

<sup>2</sup> Built by empress Eudocia in the fifth century.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief history of the cemetery see Schultz 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson 1865, 61.

<sup>5</sup> Conder 1875.

<sup>6</sup> Thierry – Vieweger 2019.



1

Fig. 1: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Overview of the GIA excavation areas

and Charles W. Wilson examined the rock cut steps along the northern border of the cemetery on behalf of the Ordnance Survey.

5 At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the archaeologist Frederick J. Bliss explored the area together with the architect Archibald C. Dickie. They built upon the previous results of Maudsley and continued following the hewn rockscarp. During their excavations Bliss and Dickie discovered a tower<sup>7</sup>, a dry-moat<sup>8</sup>, a gate and its surrounding walls<sup>9</sup> as well as some sections of the wall connecting these elements<sup>10</sup>. Already back then they claimed to have found the city wall erected by empress Eudocia<sup>11</sup>.

6 From 2015 onward, excavations carried out by the DEI continued in the area adjacent to the city wall and revealed, beyond the gate, more of the Early Roman, the Byzantine and Early-Islamic buildings and installations inside the ancient walled Jerusalem. The largest one, Area I, was located south of the Anglican-Prussian cemetery's border. Area II, now refilled, can be found in the so-called Greek Garden, on the plateau of Mount Zion. Area III is situated in the northern part of the Anglican-Protestant Cemetery itself.

7 DEI Area III.

8 DEI Area III.

9 DEI Area I.

10 Bliss 1898, pl. I.

11 Bliss 1894, 254.



Fig. 2: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Gate area with fortification walls and tower

2

## Area I

7 Bliss and Dickie explored the area by tunnelling along the rock scarp as well as digging shafts. Assuming there must be a gate somewhere in the excavated wall, they followed the remains of a street with a sewage channel running underneath until they finally came upon a gate and the remnants of fortification walls<sup>12</sup>. The gate featured three distinct phases of which the earliest might be dated to Hasmonean/Herodian times and the latest into the Byzantine era<sup>13</sup>. Following the descriptions of Flavius Josephus, Bliss and Dickie identified the gate they found as the »Gate of the Essenes«<sup>14</sup>, a view challenged at various times but largely accepted today<sup>15</sup>.

8 Almost a century later, between 1977 and 1988, a monk of the nearby Dormition-Abbey, Bargil Pixner, reinvestigated the area around the gate<sup>16</sup>. Based on the name »Gate of the Essenes«, he was inspired by his own theory of a »Quarter of the Essenes« situated nearby this gate. Not supported by any archaeological evidence, this idea is widely rejected by scholars today. Besides from verifying his theory, dating the earliest wall is the biggest challenge today. According to Pixner, this older structure had been built by emperor Hezekiah at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (cf. prophet Isaiah 22, 9–10). The methods used by Pixner to excavate, however, do not provide the necessary information for safely dating this earliest wall.

9 The other excavated city walls with the tower also feature various phases of construction whereas the main part of the wall which is still visible today dates into the Byzantine period, as Bliss and Dickie assumed. Yehiel Zeligner managed to trace the ancient city wall along the slopes of Hinnom Valley to the south of the Ma'ale HaShalom. He dates his finds mostly into Hasmonean/Herodian and Byzantine times<sup>17</sup>.

12 Bliss 1894; Bliss 1895; and Bliss 1898.

13 Palmberger – Vieweger 2015.

14 Josephus, Bell. V 142–145.

15 Küchler 2014, 442–446.

16 Pixner 1976, 1997; Pixner – Chen – Margalit 1989.

17 Zeligner 2010.

Fig. 3: Jerusalem, Mount Zion.  
Aerial view of the excavation  
Area I, end of 2019

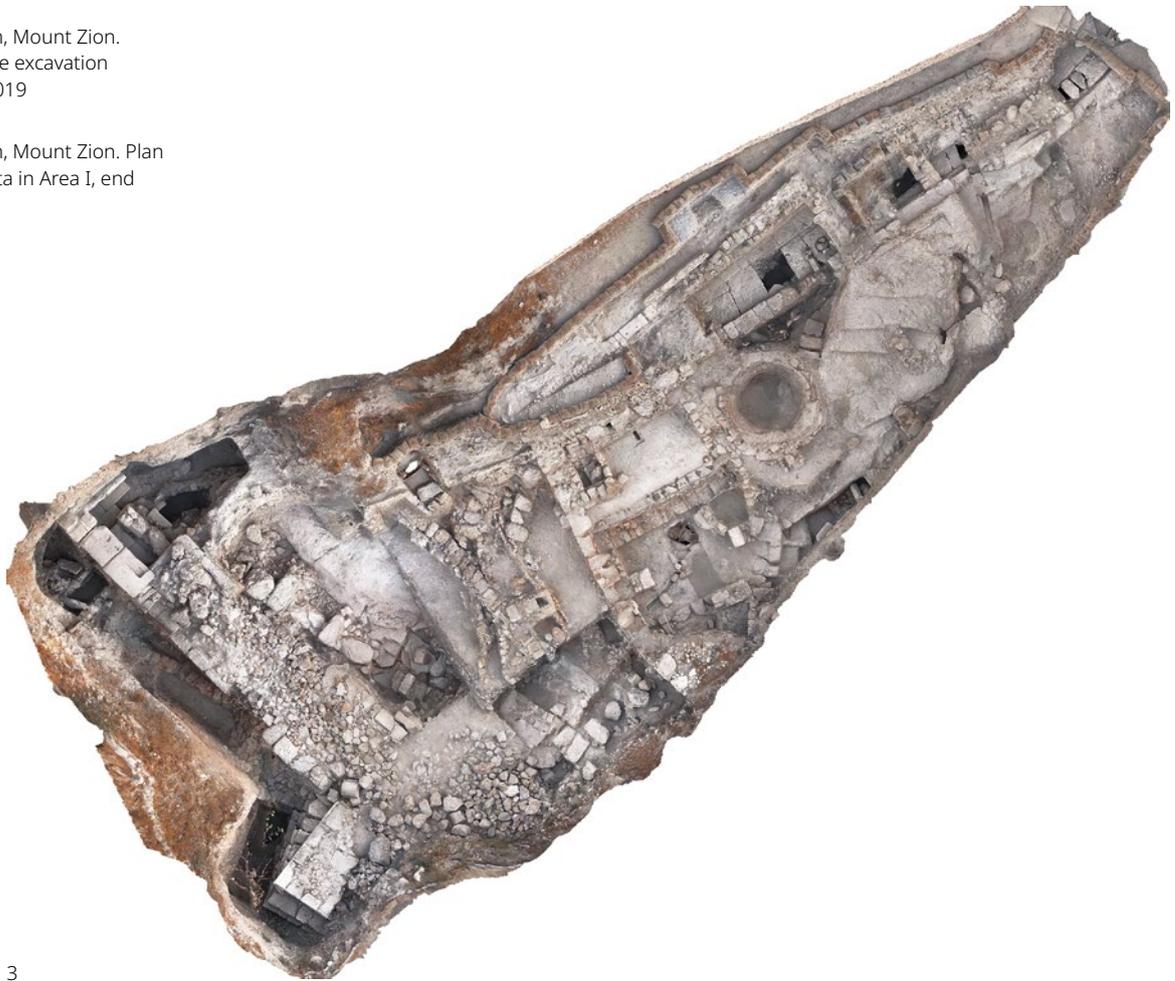


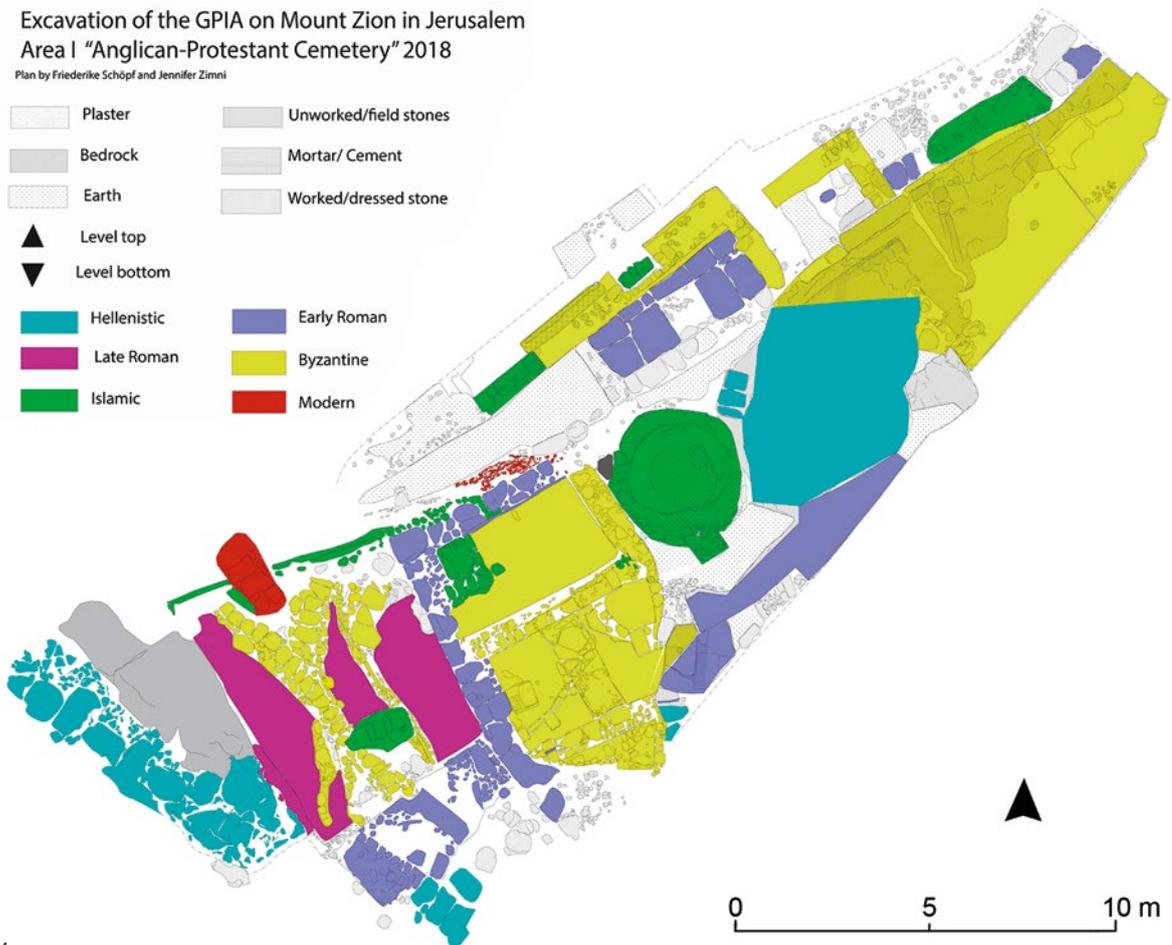
Fig. 4: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Plan  
of different strata in Area I, end  
of 2019

3

Excavation of the GPIA on Mount Zion in Jerusalem  
Area I "Anglican-Protestant Cemetery" 2018

Plan by Friederike Schöpf and Jennifer Zimni

- |  |              |  |                       |
|--|--------------|--|-----------------------|
|  | Plaster      |  | Unworked/field stones |
|  | Bedrock      |  | Mortar/ Cement        |
|  | Earth        |  | Worked/dressed stone  |
|  | Level top    |  |                       |
|  | Level bottom |  |                       |
|  | Hellenistic  |  | Early Roman           |
|  | Late Roman   |  | Byzantine             |
|  | Islamic      |  | Modern                |



4

10 Since 2015 the DEI under the direction of Dieter Vieweger has been working along the slope of the southwestern hill of Jerusalem. The first campaign was used to clean, document and reinterpret the old excavation<sup>18</sup>. The gate, walls and the tower became visible again (Fig. 2). In 2016 the adjacent neighbourhood to the east was being investigated for the first time (Fig. 3). The squares were supervised by Katja Soennecken (2015–2016), Friederike Schöpf (2016–2019), Katharina Palmberger (2016–2017) and Jennifer Zimni (2018 ff.). The excavation campaigns revealed remains from the Iron Age until the Later Islamic period (Fig. 4).

### Iron Age

11 No actual architectural remains can be dated to this period, except for the wall already mentioned by Pixner<sup>19</sup>. As he had taken out the entire filling of the wall and did not publish his finds, the wall's presumably dating into the Iron Age II cannot be proven archaeologically today. Therefore, in 2020 the course of the wall shall be investigated elsewhere in the area of the Protestant cemetery.

12 However, the amount of pottery sherds dating to Iron Age II suggests some kind of activity at Area I during this period. Furthermore, the use as stone quarry of the bedrock in the area east of the city wall could have begun during the Iron Age II, maybe even used afterwards for building the fortification walls.

### Hellenistic Structures

13 Already Pixner assumed a Hasmonaean wall in which a break was made for building the oldest (Early Roman) sill of the gate<sup>20</sup>. The contexts northeast of the city wall clearly showed another wall made of massive ashlar, smaller stones and the bedrock (Fig. 5). The wall structure is comparable to other fortification walls – especially to the building structure as well as the ashlar the Samaria/Sebaste from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. – hinting towards a Hellenistic dating of this wall<sup>21</sup>. The course of the wall integrates the worked bedrock into its structure and moreover follows the natural line of the bedrock in its own alignment. Parts of this wall had been robbed in order to build a new, early roman city wall. Some ashlar even run underneath the Early Roman floor layers, who reused them as foundation. A pre-Early Roman dating can therefore be assumed.

14 The stepped bedrock in the center of the Area I might also date into Hellenistic times. It runs from north to south with steps of 0.5–0.7 m in height cut into the rock. Its northern edge had

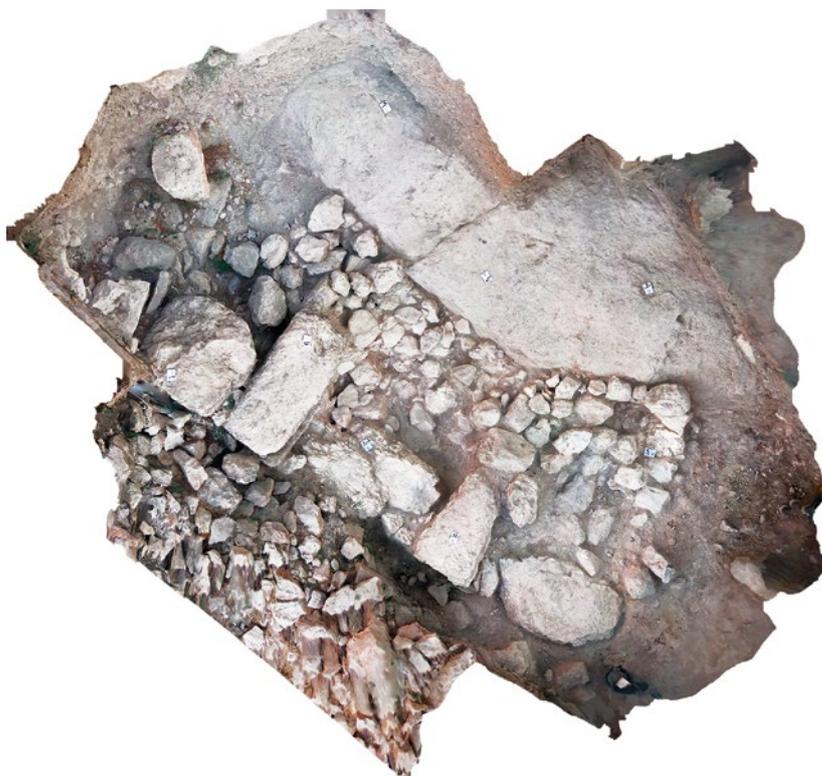


Fig. 5: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Overview of the probably Hellenistic fortification wall

18 Palmberger – Vieweger 2015, 201–207.

19 Chen – Margalit – Pixner 1994.

20 Chen – Margalit – Pixner 1994, 79.

21 The parts of the wall excavated by Bargil Pixner were interpreted as early Hasmonaean structures as well. However, no archaeological material is known.

# Excavation of the GIA on Mount Zion in Jerusalem Area I "Anglican-Protestant Cemetery" 2019

Plan by Friederike Schöpf and Jennifer Zimm

	Plaster		Unworked/field stones
	Bedrock		Mortar/Cement
	Earth		Worked/dressed stone
	Level top		
	Level bottom		

0 5 m

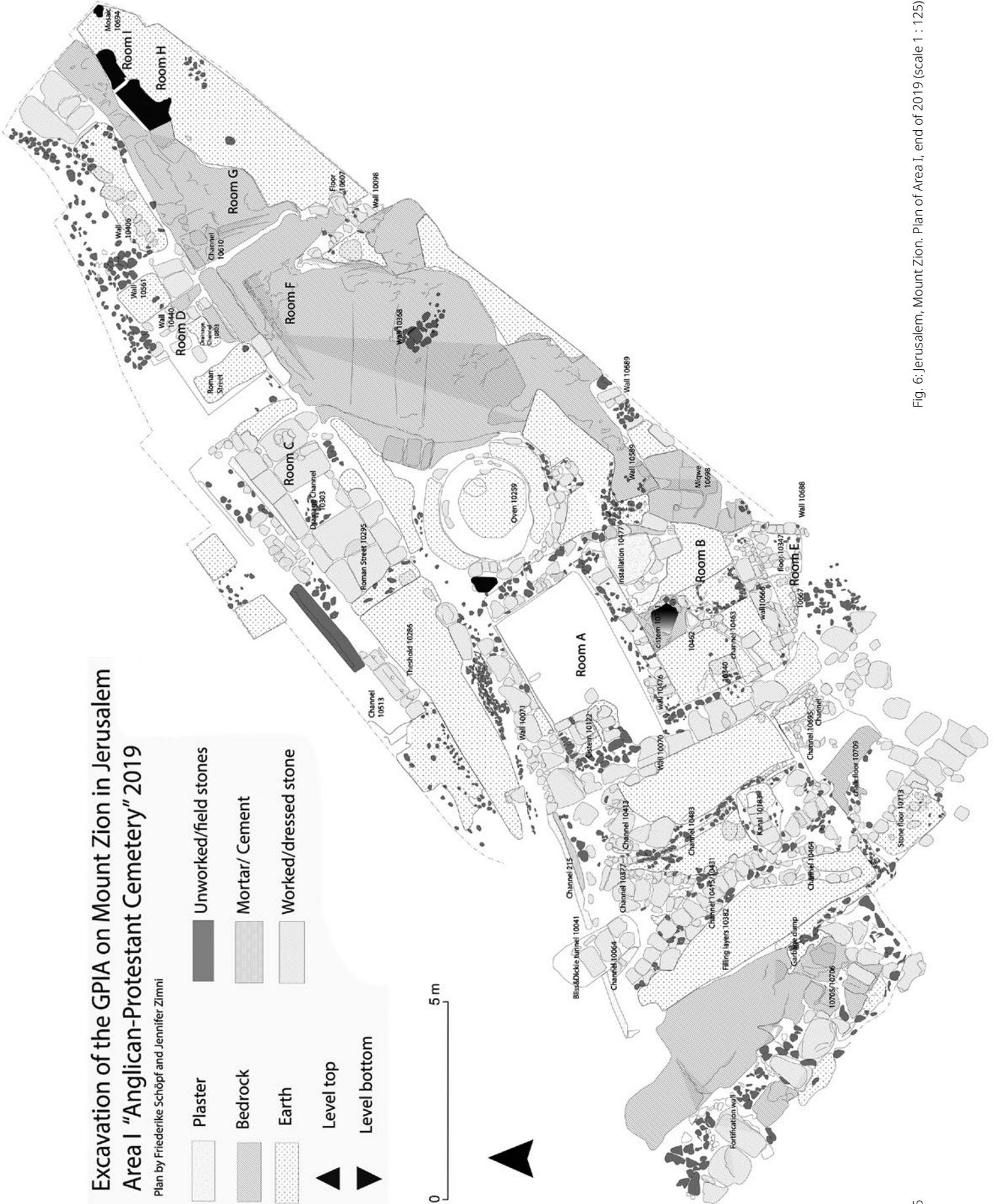


Fig. 6: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Plan of Area I, end of 2019 (scale 1 : 125)

been remodeled in later (either Roman or Byzantine) times. Due to a lack of further archaeological evidence, its exact dating remains uncertain.

15 It can only be stated that the hewn bedrock must be part of a building dating prior to the Roman street as no architectural connection is recognizable. Three ashlar blocks set aligned to the bedrock may be part of the wall of this building, running from north to south continuing in the south as separate wall (Fig. 3)<sup>22</sup>.

## Roman

### Early Roman

16 Corresponding to the Early Roman gate layer there is a street leading from the gate to the northeast towards the inner city of Jerusalem, approx. 0.8 m below the Byzantine houses. Some parts of the street as well as the area connected to the gate were already excavated by Frederick Bliss and Archibald Dickie<sup>23</sup> as well as Bargil Pixner<sup>24</sup>. Its original width measured 6.7 m<sup>25</sup>. Large stone slabs simultaneously form the walking level for the street as well as the cover for the drainage channel below (Fig. 6). Some of the slabs had been removed or destroyed, creating a hole – for example below Room C. Perhaps they were removed by rebels hiding from the Romans in 70 A.D. below the ground<sup>26</sup>. The same can be observed at the stepped street north the Siloam pools<sup>27</sup>.

17 The Roman fill layers southeast of the Byzantine channel system, running underneath, contain a lot of pottery, bones and metal objects. One of the Roman fresh-water channels<sup>28</sup> leads into a house wall and ends at a ritual stepped pool supplying it with water (Fig. 7). It is cut into the bedrock with steps of approx. 0.4 m height, leading down eastwards. When the *mikve* was discontinued, its entrance has been remodeled to serve as an entrance for the Byzantine room B. Due to the excavation borders the full extent could not be excavated. The C14 dating hints towards a re-use of this area in the Byzantine times. The large amount of amphora sherds as well as the archaeobotanical results suggest that the former *mikve* was used as a storage room by the Byzantine inhabitants.

18 Few architectural remains from this period could have been excavated, although the Byzantines reused several earlier structures<sup>29</sup>. Additionally, in the aerial view (Fig. 3) the Early Roman layout, cut into the bedrock, becomes more obvious with several (at least two) buildings which line the street as is usual in the Roman period.



7

Fig. 7: Jerusalem, Mount Zion.  
Early Roman *mikve*

22 Context 10688.

23 Bliss 1898.

24 Pixner – Chen – Margalit 1989.

25 Dimensions are calculated based on an archive picture by Pixner excavating in the »plot 29«. With a standardized width of 1.2 m for a roman chariot. Two of those could pass there easily.

26 Josephus, War VI 370–371.

27 Reich – Shukron 2019, 82 f.

28 Context 10671.

29 e. g. wall 10700.

## Late Roman

19 The Roman stratum is characterized mainly by fill layers<sup>30</sup>. Those lie underneath the Byzantine fill layers east of the city wall. The earth was organic, containing a lot of bones, coal and burnt material. The pottery suggests that the landfilling of this area happened during the Late Roman period.

20 No other architectural remains have been found, except for these fill layers, dating specifically to the Late Roman period. One find<sup>31</sup> definitely corresponding to this period is a stone with an inscription which has been reused as spolie for the Byzantine room D<sup>32</sup>.

## Byzantine

21 In the Byzantine period, Mount Zion became a flourishing center of Christianity and for Christian pilgrimage due to the erection of the church Hagia Sion and the associated Christian traditions. Fill layers and remains of a terracing wall east of the city wall represent the first phase of Byzantine building activity. Those were probably built during the erection of the Byzantine city wall under Eudocia which includes the Byzantine gate sill<sup>33</sup> ensuring that the level of the newly built structures remained equal to the gate.

22 Between the gate area and an adjacent living quarter, a system of water channels was excavated (Fig. 8). The Byzantine channels are generally built from field and worked stones in different sizes and in some cases also in secondary use. They formed a system of wastewater drainage and fresh water supply from and towards the area. Different channels had different building phases, due to fact that they block each other in some cases.

23 All in all, two different housing complexes consisting of the rooms A to I could be excavated dating to the fifth and sixth century. The terminus post quem relies on a find of a stamped foot of an Amphora which was set directly into the mortar of room C as well as on a bronze oil lamp hanger (see below, room E). Generally speaking, the Byzantine structures were built on older Roman structures on one hand and the natural bedrock on the other.

24 Rooms C and D were built directly above the Roman street using it as a foundation. Whereas the street of use, its large drainage channel still was used by the Byzantine inhabitants to pour their wastewater out of the city. The area between the street and the floor (approx. 0.8 m) has been filled up with stones, loose rubble and dirt. Much of the architecture in the southeastern part of the site, such as rooms G, H and I, was destroyed by Islamic terracing walls.

25 There is evidence for additional rooms in the east of area I. In the earth layers covering the Roman street, large amounts of loose tesserae and pieces of mosaic (white and coloured) were found. However, these rooms were completely destroyed by a later Islamic wall.

Fig. 8: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. System of channels of different periods



8

30 Southwest of wall 10070.

31 Aside from a few coins and stamps with *leg X* impressions.

32 See Eck – Vieweger – Zimni in press.

33 Pixner – Chen – Margalit 1989, 86.

## Room A

26 Room A reuses an Early Roman wall<sup>34</sup> by attaching smaller field stones covered with a well-preserved plaster to the larger Roman ashlar. The plaster on the walls is perforated in order to apply another layer of decorated plaster. Below the room, a rectangular shaped cistern with an almost intact plaster had been built. It was fed by rainwater collected by imbrex tiles from the roof. In the Early Islamic period the cistern's entrance had been raised in order to adapt it to the new floor level.

27 In the Byzantine period there used to be a simple white mosaic floor on top. The floor showed traces of burning and destruction around the enclosed cistern, with traces of ash, charcoal and many iron nails. It derived therefore most likely from burnt wooden roof.

## Room B

28 South of room A, there is room B, also reusing Roman structures. These walls also had been covered with plaster. At one point the room had been vaulted, but a destruction layer, especially in this room, suggests some kind of fire from which these vaults collapsed. Some mosaic remains found in situ on the floor level hint towards a simple white mosaic that had once covered the floor.

29 A clay pipe coming from the roof led rainwater into a small channel underneath floor level which ends in a small settling basin. This brings the water into a cistern, below room B. The cistern expands to the south in a pear-shaped manner, and it runs parallel to the one underneath room A. After its use as a water cistern, it was probably used as a trash dump as the massive fill of bones, stone artefacts and organic earth can show. Another feature in room B is a chalk plastered installation, enclosed by worked stones, possibly to store food<sup>35</sup>.

## Room E

30 Room E is directly attached to room B in the south, with a slightly higher floor level. Both rooms are separated by a wall. Room E has a floor made of paved stones and is bordered on the eastern side by a roughly worked wall, previously mentioned as a possible Hellenistic wall<sup>36</sup>. The dating of the room into the fifth or sixth century A.D. could be determined by the sealed find of a metal hanger for oil lamps underneath room E's floor, which is comparable to the bronze hangers found in the Monastery at Bet She'an<sup>37</sup>.

## Room C

31 Room C, built upon the Roman road, is bordered in the northwest and northeast by plastered walls of large field and worked stones (Fig. 9). The plaster is incised in the same manner as in Room A. The room's southern expansion cannot be clarified since the southeastern walls had been destroyed by later structures<sup>38</sup>, but it can be said quite with certainty that it stretched farther south in Byzantine times. Inside the room, a corner (Fig. 8) was excavated, showing that this room was possibly subdivided into smaller sections. A white mosaic floor covered the room's floor in the Byzantine period, as indicated by remains found in situ.

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34 Context 10070.

35 Context 10477.

36 Context 10688.

37 Fitzgerald 1936, pl. 3.

38 Mainly by an Early Islamic lime kiln 10259.

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9

Fig. 9: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Room C, end of 2017

32 Northwest of room C, attached to its northwestern wall, a plastered channel<sup>39</sup> was discovered. It leads from west to east towards the gate area. In some places its northeastern counter side with a width of 0.34 m was found. This likely represents a Byzantine channel pouring the inhabitant's wastewater through the gate towards the Hinnom Valley which was once running below or parallel to the corresponding Byzantine street. The only remains of a Byzantine street could be detected close to the gate, but most likely it ran north of room C, following the course of the channel. Late Islamic terracing destroyed any other remains.

### Further Rooms (Rooms D, F–I)

33 Towards the east of Area I, are five other Byzantine rooms of which not many remains are visible. Adjacent to the east to room C, is room D, nearly rectangular shaped. It seems to be connected to room C, but due to recent disturbances by Bliss and Dickie<sup>40</sup> the connecting wall could not be excavated. In the northeast, the room is bordered by a thick wall consisting of large worked stones, forming an outer house wall. In the southeast, the hewn bedrock forms the foundation for the room's wall. It has been cut rectangular to fit the Byzantine layout<sup>41</sup> and some large worked stones as part of the wall were still in situ laid on top of the rock cut foundation. The northwestern wall features a plastered water channel running into the Roman drainage channel.

34 Although few architectural remains in room F could be excavated, the layout of the bedrock southeast of room D suggests that another room must have been there. The rock in the east is cut as if it was forming a continuing wall. The rectangular cut shape of the bedrock continues southwards containing remains of a mosaic bedding or at least a floor.

35 No building material, except for the line of the cut bedrock, remained of room G. The previously mentioned rectangular shaped rock cut borders room G in the west. The room's main feature is a rock cut channel<sup>42</sup> leading into the Roman drainage channel. The channel itself cannot be dated with certainty into Byzantine times, it might already derive from an Early Roman building. South of this the earth consisted of several tiny potsherds mixed with brown-reddish earth, forming the substructure for a floor level. A part of the floor could be excavated in the southern part of room G adjoining the excavation border.

36 East of room G are the rooms H and I, they are separated by a plastered wall which adjoins the worked bedrock in the north. Room H is approx. 1.3 m wide; the south eastern expansion cannot be determined due to later destructions. It has been covered with a mosaic floor (Fig. 10)<sup>43</sup> whose colourful tesserae were not set in a decorative pattern. The adjoining bedrock in the north has been used as a room wall, holding remains of incised plaster similar to room C.

39 Context 10513.

40 Bliss 1895, 253.

41 This work might originate from the Early Roman period.

42 Context 10610.

43 Context 10500.

37 Further east, in Room I, the remaining white mosaic (Fig. 10) measures approx. 0.9 m × 0.4 m. Another piece of the mosaic floor<sup>44</sup> suggests that the mosaic floor once was decorated with a floral repetitive pattern. Presumably the room could be entered from there since a threshold had been cut into the rock north of the room which served as an entrance very likely already in the Roman period.

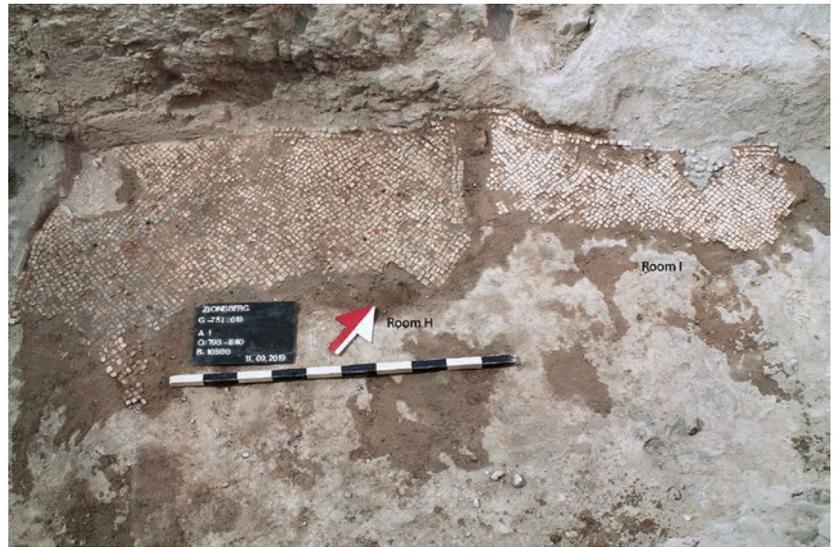
## Islamic Umayyad

38 The Early Islamic layers consists mostly of fill layers, reuse of the Byzantine structures and minor building activity. The Byzantine rooms A and B were filled in and overbuilt by small channels and mainly straight chalk floors, with no additional structures attached. Only the Byzantine cistern (context 10122) was enclosed during the Islamic period by small wall settings suggesting a reuse in the eighth century A.D. The walls around the cistern enabled the inhabitants to reach the cistern and keep it clean regularly, in which the floor level was already 0.7 m higher than the Byzantine one. The newly built water channels as well as the straight built chalk floors hint towards an industrial use of the area.

39 An Islamic lime kiln has been built adjoining the eastern wall of the Byzantine room A, destroying a white byzantine mosaic floor. It has a round shape with a diameter of 2.2 m and a depth of 1.8 m. The kiln cannot be dated with certainty, although the C14 dating hints towards the Umayyad period. During that time the living quarter was not inhabited anymore, but turned into an Industrial quarter<sup>45</sup>.

## Medieval

40 A striking architectural feature in the (Late) Islamic period which has now been removed, were two terracing walls running from northeast to southwest, across the site, built of field stones (Fig. 11). They correspond with plastered floor levels leveling the ground. Furthermore, another wall<sup>46</sup> can be dated into the Islamic era due to surrounding pottery finds. Running from east to west, it consists of unworked stone as well as a re-used column with sand filling in between. No further architectural connection here is recognizable.



10

Fig. 10: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Mosaic floors of rooms H and I

44 Context 10694.

45 The same happened in the area south of the Temple Mount (Ben-Ami – Tchekhanovets 2019).

46 Context 10406.

## Area II



11

Fig. 11: Jerusalem, Mount Zion.  
Late Islamic terracing wall

41 On the plateau of Mount Zion, to the south of the Dormition Abbey, the Tomb of David and the *Coenaculum* lies a patch of land called the ›Greek Garden‹. Here, the DEI started excavating under the direction of Dieter Vieweger with the permission of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III in 2017, when Katja Soenneken conducted a sounding reaching Hasmonean/Herodian levels. In 2018, the DEI opened another area (Fig. 12), supervised by Michael Würz of approximately 150 m<sup>2</sup> immediately north of the excavation on behalf of the Israel Antiquity Authority of Amit Re'em and Neria Sapir.

42 The excavated area is situated

below a soccer field, built in the 1970s. After modern layers, and below mounds of debris and waste of the Mamluk and Ottoman eras were excavated. But the most striking discovery has been a formerly rich Byzantine building. Although much of the original building material was missing, the layout still is very obvious. A well-preserved mosaic is an outstanding testament of the formerly rich interior.

43 Earliest archaeological research along rock-scarp, including the southern brink of the ›Greek Garden‹, is summarized in Lt. Claude R. Conder's report, as mentioned above. 15 to 20 feet of the face of the worked rock-scarp and the bases of at least two towers were well visible during his visits<sup>47</sup>.

44 Today, a modern fieldstone wall sits in place of the ancient city wall and confines the Anglican-Prussian Cemetery towards the ›Greek Garden‹. The southern part of the area was levelled during the 1970's using massive amounts of debris to accommodate a soccer field. Lt. Conder's report includes several structures above the rock-scarp such as cisterns and a lime kiln<sup>48</sup>. To the east, above the *mikvaot* in the Anglican-Prussian cemetery<sup>49</sup>, Conder's map shows a rectangular structure, marked »massive wall« – that until today projects from the debris. Inspected and described by Fr. F.-M. Abél in 1911<sup>50</sup>, those walls mostly consist of reused stones, including stone slabs formerly used as road paving. On top of those walls, the remains of a likely Byzantine mosaic floor can still be seen. One of the cornerstones is turned in such a way that it permits entrance to enter into a cavity below the walls. In order to examine the structure described by Abél and its further extension to the north, the Israel Antiquity Authority conducted a small excavation led by Amit Re'em and Neria Sapir. A first small sounding along the southern edge revealed mostly modern and medieval layers covering the remains of the Byzantine era.

47 Conder 1872.

48 Conder 1875.

49 Thierry – Vieweger 2019.

50 Abél 1911.



12

### The Upper Layers

45 The layer following the topsoil consists of modern building debris was brought in during the 1970s as a foundation for the soccer field by the Greek-Orthodox Church. Below, there is a 1.00–1.20 m massive layer of brown coloured soil that is almost free of finds and thus hard to date.

46 Underneath those lies the first strata containing archaeological relevant finds in form of medieval debris and waste. In the sections the different size mounds<sup>51</sup> become clearly visible (Fig. 13). The debris consist of very mixed material, from Byzantine sherds and tesserae to Mamluk and Ottoman sherds and small-sized gravel.

47 Below the medieval debris several compact loamy layers<sup>52</sup> covered the remains of a Byzantine building. The bedrock had been shaped to a certain extend to provide level foundations for walls and installations, surfaces for floors or basins for

Fig. 12: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Plan of Area II (scale 1 : 75)

51 Context 2018GG7.

52 Context 2018GG23.



13

Fig. 13: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Medieval debris and waste in Area II

Fig. 14: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Entrance of the cistern in the north east of Area II



14

water storage, yet it remains unclear whether all preparations of the rock go back to Byzantine times or might be of an earlier date. In at least two instances, the remains of the Byzantine occupation do not align with the preparations of the bedrock suggesting the possibility that some preparations of the rock might be older than the superimposed building – the same can be observed in Area I. Several cavities are known throughout the 'Greek Garden', most likely natural caves some of which have later been remodelled to be used as cisterns. Towards the rock-scarp along the southern edge of the garden the bedrock becomes more irregular before dropping into the so-called rock-scarp.

As we will see below, the irregularity of the rock towards the south made a different construction necessary during Byzantine times.

### Courtyard

48 The east of the excavation is taken up by what seems to have been an open space, most likely a courtyard (Fig. 12). Several installations for water supplies have

been hewn into the bedrock. In the north-eastern corner of the courtyard an open basin or cistern<sup>53</sup> was partially uncovered (Fig. 14). The basins edge is lined by a wall which is preserved to a height of 0.5 m. The masonry consists of hewn stones and fieldstones of various sizes. Plaster is attached facing the open space. A rock cut canal<sup>54</sup>, about 0.15 m wide and 0.20 m deep enters the excavation from north and runs alongside the basins western edge towards south. Some remains of a cover for the canal, consisting of stones and mortar, are preserved. Further south the small channel leads into a second cistern<sup>55</sup>. It is based on a roughly L-shaped cavern in the lime-stone rock<sup>56</sup>. At the northern end of the chamber a niche opens to the west, its floor raised to a bench. Just south of the cisterns' mouth a small canal<sup>57</sup> emerges from the eastern section, continuing in south-western direction. This channel is mostly built out of smoothed mortar and stones, but also the remains of one clay pipe have been found on the eastern stretch. It cannot be said with certainty whether this is the continuation of the canal in the north of the courtyard. Yet it seems plausible that the small channel ran across the open space providing water for all cisterns, acting as an overflow when a reservoir was filled and conducting the remaining water to the next reservoir. Further to the north of the excavation, at least four more underground cisterns were excavated. Towards the south, the rock becomes more irregular and sloped and needed to be levelled by a bedding

53 Context 2018GG102.

54 Context 2018GG103.

55 Context 2018GG73.

56 In the ceiling a second, circular opening closed with stones can be seen. Further west, separated by a passage with a somewhat lower ceiling, one enters a second chamber. The eastern side of it had been destroyed in modern times by the construction of a supporting wall of the garden terrace.

57 Context 2018GG84.

layer consisting of a reddish, loamy soil and up to fist size large fieldstones. On these the remains of a floor consisting of multiple layers of gypsum-plaster rested. There is evidence that, during an earlier phase, the level of the floor was lower and steps<sup>58</sup> led into room III. The floor might have been raised during subsequent repairs.

### Room I

49 Room I measures 9.00 m in length and is up to 2.80 m wide. It can be entered from the east through the entrance of which only the foundation for the gate's remain. Most of the northern wall is preserved at a height of up to 0.80 m.

50 On the opposing wall, a hint of a less deep counterpart of a wall can still be recognized in form of some stones and plaster. The rock cut foundation provides space for a rising masonry. Of this, only some plastered remains are preserved along the southern edge of the wall as well as some stones in the east. Between a recess in the wall and the room's north-western corner the rock has been stepped which continues further north of the wall. Here, a pear-shaped cistern had been cut into the bedrock<sup>59</sup>.

51 Of the room's western wall what could have been the foundation for a rock hewn bench remained. Behind it, the first course of the wall, consisting of roughly hewn stones, is preserved. Of the southern wall only the worked bedrock forming some kind of foundation, remained. About midpoint, a U-shaped groove hewn into the bedrock<sup>60</sup> resembles drainages typically found in doors, suggesting an entrance towards room II.

### Room II

52 To the south of room I, rooms II and III are situated. Both are smaller, these together take up the length of room I. Room II could be accessed from the west where a well-preserved doorsill<sup>61</sup> was found in situ. From the floor of room II only one square stone slab remains, as does a small portion of the levelling layers. Those levelling layers have been ever more necessary towards the southern parts of the building since here the bedrock becomes increasingly more irregular.

53 A basin of a rectangular cistern has been partially unearthed along the southern edge of the excavation. Along the northern edge of the basin a grade suggests the base of a barrel vault that would have covered the cistern from east to west. Its north-eastern corner was excavated to a depth of almost 2.00 m, but work was stopped due to security concerns about the adjacent section. The homogenous and soft soil removed from the basin included only occasional stones and differs from the overlying medieval debris. It must have been accumulated earlier, mostly in a natural way after the cisterns cover was removed or collapsed.

### Room III

54 To the east of room II lies room III which was only accessible via the courtyard. Here, two worked stones form a step towards a small annex<sup>62</sup> preceding a floor covered by a mosaic (Fig. 15) with a repetitive pattern and multiple frames. In the annex, slightly smaller sized tesserae have been used to form a floral pattern on a light-coloured background, of which only a small part is preserved. The central mosaic consists of white, red and black tesserae. It features a repetitive, floral-geometric pattern. Repeating

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58 Context 2018GG111.

59 Approximately 2.50 m deep and 4.00 m wide at the bottom. The opening is covered by a large stone slab with a circular mouth cut into it to provide access to the cistern which has been fed with rainwater by a clay-pipe. The cistern's inside was plastered and only slightly filled with debris.

60 Context 2018GG104.

61 Context 2018GG108.

62 Context 2018GG111.

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15

Fig. 15: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Mosaic of room III

Fig. 16: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Detail of substructures in the south of Area II



16

floral motives form a netting on a white background. Into the squares formed by the netting, floral motives have been set so that they form a cross-like pattern. Multiple frames of floral and geometric patterns surround the inner motif. Levelling layers of reddish, loamy earth and small stones provide a base for the following grey screed on which the mosaic has been laid.

### Further Test Trenches

55 In the south-eastern corner of the excavation the bedrock starts sloping more towards the south, making it necessary to erect substructures to support the building. Here, two test trenches have been excavated to explore underlying structures. One trench (T 3) was placed in north-south direction along the eastern

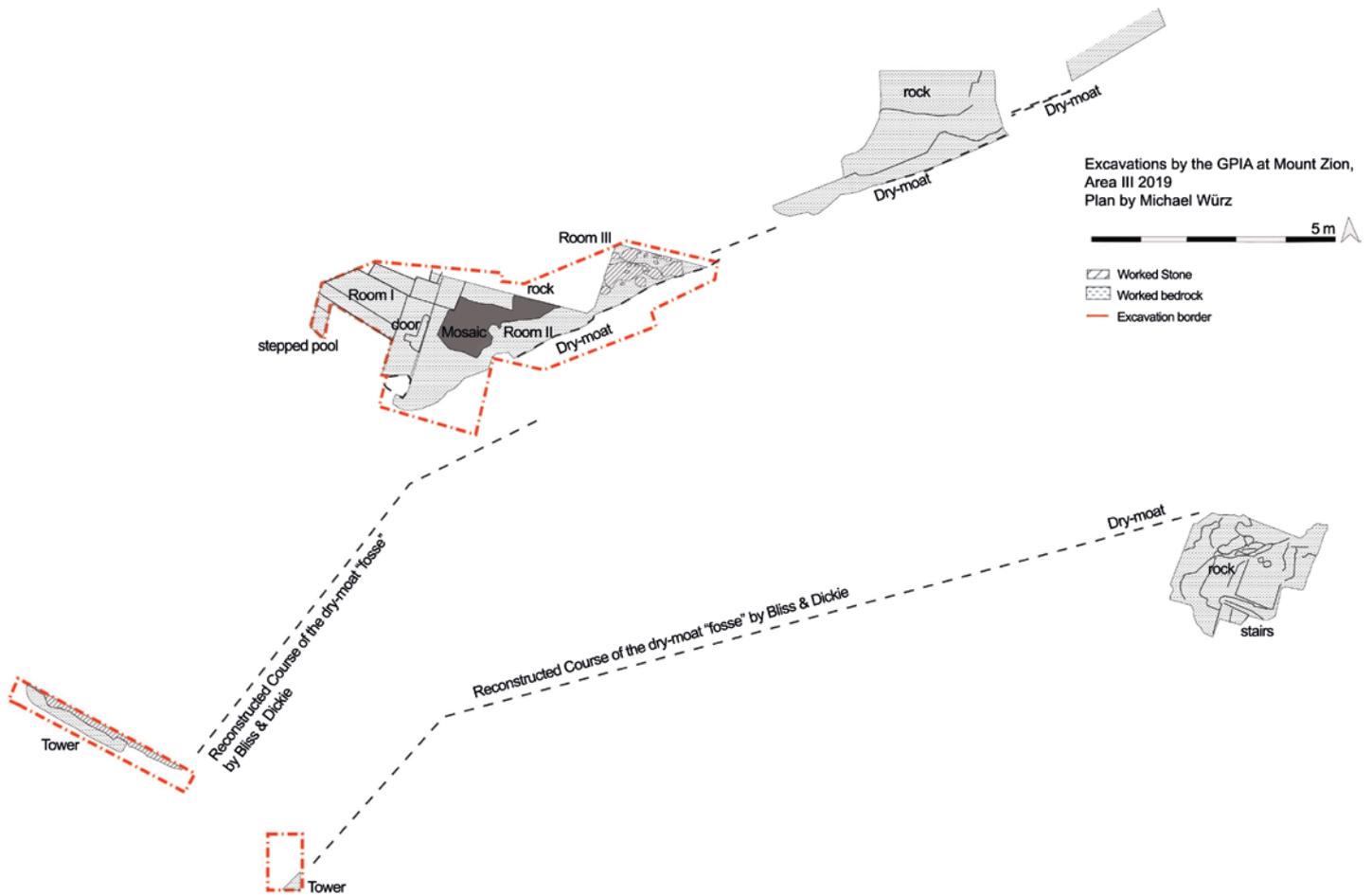
edge of room III. The second, T 4, was placed in west-east direction along the southern edge of room III.

56 In the sounding along the eastern side of room III the remains of an older basin have been found below the floor of the courtyard and a channel<sup>63</sup>. The rock hewn, plastered and approximately 0.70 m deep reservoir had not been used during the last phase of the occupation. To support the eastern wall of room III, a substructure of different sized stones (Fig. 16), including reused segments of blocks with dressed surfaces, has been constructed in the basin. An approximately 0.50 m wide second wall of unhewn irregular sized fieldstones has been placed parallel to the first, likely in an attempt to further reinforce the ground. The remains of the basin had been filled with debris and soil.

57 A second sounding (T 4) was excavated along the southern side of room III in which the continuation of the above-mentioned basin has been found. As in the east, a substructure had been constructed in the basin<sup>64</sup> to support the southern wall of the room. The stones used here were still hewn, but not as well as those encountered along the eastern edge of the room. South of the substructure, the basin had been filled with loose soil and debris of worked and unworked stones, rather resembling a filling.

63 Context 2018GG84.

64 Context 2018GG106.



17

## Area III

58 Area III is located between area I and II, on the upper terrace of the cemetery's extension after 1902/1903. To the north, this terrace is confined by the rock-scarp, on which the northern cemetery wall has been erected (Fig. 1)<sup>65</sup>. Just east of the two *mikvaot* the wall turns towards the north-east while the rocky outcrop continues roughly in western direction. Along the edge of the rock, the remains of at least three rooms belonging to an Early Roman housing structure were discovered, all destroyed by a later dry-moat (Fig. 17)<sup>66</sup>. The DEI started to excavate here because of the rock scarp described by Bliss and Dickie which destroyed the Hellenistic and Byzantine course of the ancient city wall. It seemed necessary to re-evaluate on their discoveries in the light of today's state of research.

59 Most parts of the rooms are built directly on the bedrock. The latter has been shaped to a certain extend to provide rather level foundation for walls and installations. They can be dated into the Early Roman Period, especially because of an excavated *mikve* connected to one of these rooms. Unfortunately, not much is known about the Early Roman inhabitation in the close vicinity of this area<sup>67</sup>. Therefore area III plays an important role to shed light on this period of Mount Zion. It revealed a somewhat wealthy population living on the plateau of the southwestern hill.

Fig. 17: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Plan of Area III (scale 1 : 150)

65 Maudsley already assumed here the course of the ancient city wall of Jerusalem (Conder 1875, 81–89).

66 Described by Bliss and Dickie as »fosse« (Bliss 1894).

67 Excavations by Pixner and Eisenberg had been carried out, revealing some Early Roman structures (Eisenberg 1985, 33; Pixner 1991, 349). On the eastern slope of Mount Zion remains of Early Roman houses had been excavated on behalf of the UNC Charlotte (Gibson et al. 2019).

## Early Roman

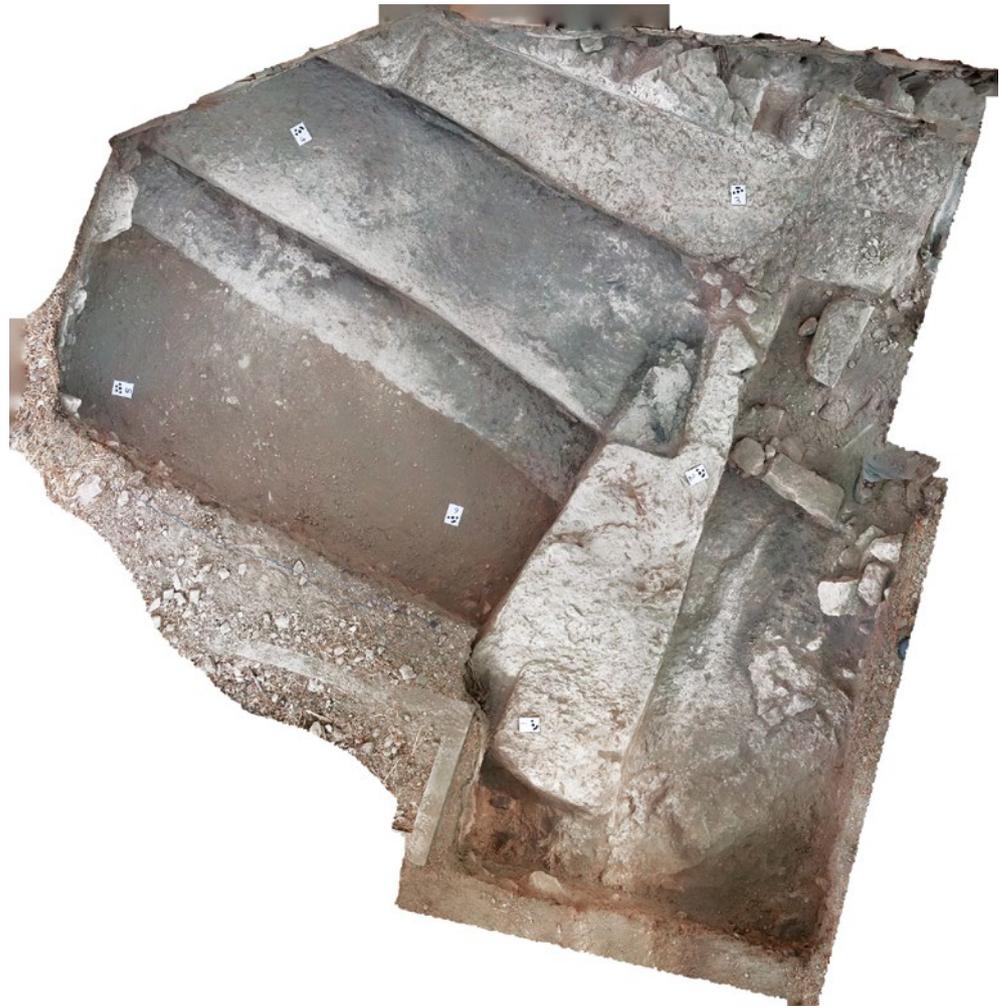
### Room I

60 From the western room I, only the north-western corner remained due to the destruction by the »fosse«. What is left of the northern wall consists of cut bedrock which served as a foundation for the rising masonry. In front of the wall a bench has been carved out of the bedrock, with a height of about 0.40 m and a depth of 0.40 to 0.68 m. South of this bench, the remains of a stepped *mikve* have been found (Fig. 18). The steps are around 0.34 m deep and 0.30 m high. The following level found an additional step or the bottom of the basin. This level could not be fully exposed due to limitations of the site. The basins had been covered with several layers of a grey plaster containing ash and mineral inclusions. To the east of the upper step, a threshold carved from rock, lead into the adjacent room II. Of the eastern wall only a foundation cut out of the rock remained.

### Room II

61 In room II only the worked bedrock is preserved of the walls. Also here, most of the southern part had been destroyed by the *fosse*. Along the western boundary, two steps have been worked out of the rock. The upper one is 0.10 m high, the lower approximately 0.20 m. Remains of a red coating or painting have been found on the plaster along the stairs, as well as on the northern and western wall (Fig. 19). Originally, the room featured a mosaic floor which is only partially preserved (Fig. 20). At the southern edge the remains of a black geometric feature have been preserved. An approximately four black tesserae wide, rectangular section is recognizable.

Fig. 18: Jerusalem, Mount Zion.  
Partly excavated *mikve* in Area III



### Room III

62 To the east of room II, the remains of another room was discovered. Only a small part remained, also due to the cutting of the moat. What is left was some wall plaster along the original rock-cut walls. In front of those, two walls of different masonry had been set, presumably during different periods. While the older might have been a change of the original structure, the latter is similar to the supporting masonry set into older basins to allow the construction of the Byzantine building in Area II.

### Further Trenches

63 In trench 3 the eastern counterpart of the moat has been found. In addition, the remains of a staircase carved into the rock have been revealed. Those cannot be dated with certainty. Following, a threshold carved from bedrock, two steps leading down into eastern direction were found, as well as the beginning of either another step or the bottom of a pool. The upper step is 0.37 m deep, the following 0.27 m deep. Next to the staircase, is a tributary that has been cut into the rock with a width of approximately 0.14 m. Above the stairs are the remains of a passage. Since the rock is destroyed to the south, only about 0.70 m are preserved.

### Ayyubid/Crusader Architecture

64 When Bliss and Dickie investigated the southern slope of Mount Zion before the extension of the cemetery in 1902, they excavated the remains of a tower of which were two rows of the masonry preserved<sup>68</sup>. Nearby, they followed the course of a dry moat which they called »fosse« whose purpose and dating remained unclear to them<sup>69</sup>.



19

Fig. 19: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Remains of a red plaster in room II



20

Fig. 20: Jerusalem, Mount Zion. Mosaic floor in room II

68 Bliss 1894, 248.

69 Bliss 1898, 9 ff.

Their mapping though shows clearly that the moat cuts the former Byzantine line of defense<sup>70</sup>.

65 It is not known precisely when the Byzantine city wall surrounding Mount Zion came out of use, but it can be stated that at least in the Ayyubid period the course of the fortification all moved closer to today's city wall, leaving the outermost slopes of Mount Zion outside the city<sup>71</sup>.

66 While the Byzantine wall continued further south-east down the hill towards the Hinnom Valley<sup>72</sup>, the Ayyubid fortification of Mount Zion<sup>73</sup> turned towards the north at this point. Some remains of the Ayyubid fortification could be revealed in 2019 by the DEI: At the lower foot of the upper terrace, about 10 m east of the rock-hewn staircase<sup>74</sup> and the original line of the pre-19<sup>th</sup> century western cemetery wall, Area III is situated. The modern terrace wall was founded on the two remaining layers of worked stones, of which the upper one was still visible. Area III revealed the tower mentioned above once again.

67 The remaining two courses of masonry have been uncovered. The hewn and worked blocks were set onto a foundation consisting of the prepared rock-scarp. The blocks are between 0.90 m and 1.00 m wide and around 0.70 m in height. If bossed, the bosses are up to 0.23 m deep, with margins 0.05 m wide with dented marks. Bliss and Dickie described this style as »pockmarked«<sup>75</sup>. Bliss notes in his account that also: »Many of the fallen stones, however, show on their drafts the diagonal comb-pick«<sup>76</sup>. While Bliss mentions those were usually associated with Crusader times, we know today those mostly stem from an earlier context, and have been indeed found already being reused in Byzantine contexts in the DEIs excavation in the »Greek Garden«.

68 The south-eastern corner of the tower has been built using particular stones cut as cornerstones with two faces in some courses. While different stones have been used, those with margins are the ones hinting to the date of the tower. Those can also be found on the still existing remains of the city's Ayyubid fortification in front of today's western Ottoman fortification.

### The Dry-Moat or »Fosse«?

69 The dry moat or what has been described as the »fosse« by Bliss and Dickie had already been followed by them, although at different places than the DEI, towards the Tomb of David, then called Nebi Daud<sup>77</sup>. An edge in the rock-foundation uncovered nearby the Ayyubid tower marks the southern end of the dry moat. When exposed by Bliss and Dickie, it measured 16.5 feet in height according to their account at that point<sup>78</sup>.

70 Further southeast, the opposite side of the dry moat has been exposed. Here, only one, roughly hewn block could be found still resting on the bedrock. From here, the dry moat ran north for some meters until turning towards the north-eastern direction slightly and widening significantly. The western edge of the moat has been located north of the tower in trench three where the Roman era houses mentioned above had been destroyed during the building process. A small segment of the eastern side of the moat could be discovered. In the north-west corner of the section, the eastern edge of the dry trench was uncovered.

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70 Bliss 1894.

71 Wightmann 1993, fig. 85.

72 Visible again in Area I and Zelinger 2010.

73 Wightmann 1993, fig. 85.

74 Wilson 1865, 61.

75 Bliss 1894, 251.

76 Bliss 1894, 251.

77 Bliss 1894, 249.

78 Bliss 1894, 251.

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## Historic Interpretation

71 The Ayyubids established a defense line around Jerusalem also including the summit on Mount Zion most likely as a result of the events and experiences of the first Crusade. In order to forestall any attempt by the hostile forces to attack the vulnerable southwestern city wall Saladin built the city's fortification on the high summit of the southwestern hill. From here, the lower inner city of Jerusalem could be well protected.

72 Probably the dry-moat has served on the one hand as an additional element of defense as well as a quarry for the newly erected city wall as described by historical sources, such as the historian Abu Shama (1203–1267)<sup>79</sup>. The Ayyubid Sultan Muhammed al-Malik al Kamil (Egypt; 1218–1238) faced a challenging situation due to the arrival of Crusader forces (Crusade of Damiette), as he was at war with his Nephew An-Nasir with whom he contested his legacy, the rule of Damascus. Facing the possible surrender of Jerusalem, all of Jerusalem's fortifications were ground in 1219 by the Emir of Syria/Palestine Malik al-Mu'azzam. Jerusalem remained unfortified for a long time. Although the Ayyubids were victorious near Cairo in 1221, emperor Frederick II. soon threatened the Ayyubid empire in 1228/1229. Therefore, in 1227, the sultan renewed his offer from 1219 that he would be willing to return Jerusalem under certain conditions. Both sides compromised on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1229 in the »Treaty of Jaffa« which returned Jerusalem, Betlehem, Lydda and Nazareth to the Christians<sup>80</sup>.

## Conclusion

73 All in all, the DEI was able to excavate remains of ancient Jerusalem throughout the time – ranging from (possibly) the Iron Age II until medieval times. The results display how much change in significance and function the southwestern slope of Mount Zion has undergone. Previous excavations were re-analyzed in the light of modern research, as well as new archaeological discoveries were made. Area III proofed a somewhat wealthy population all along the slopes of the southwestern Mount Zion in the Early Roman period. The inhabitants lived in houses of several rooms with painted walls and colourful mosaics, equipped with several *mikvaot*. These results reveal the so far unknown Early Roman Archaeology of the southwestern slope of Mount Zion.

74 After a probably small Late Roman quarter<sup>81</sup>, Mount Zion became a wealthy and flourishing settlement in Byzantine times again. The quarter surrounding the church Hagia Sion was inhabited by wealthy people who could afford large mosaic floors and fine pottery vessels as well as precious marble interior for their houses. At some point in the Early Islamic period, this precious living quarter was turned into an industrial crafts quarter.

75 Area I shows, how much the southwestern slope of Mount Zion changed over the course of time, from the Early Roman Period to the late Byzantine-Ummayyad period. Most likely the continuity of settlement there ended due to the impact of the earthquakes in 747–749 A.D. On the one hand older structures had been re-used, such as house layouts and water channels. On the other hand, also new structures, such as a new street system, had been added. Remodeling of the houses shows that something happened there at the beginning of the Early Islamic period which discontinued the original byzantine houses<sup>82</sup>. Area II tells about the precious houses which once stood on the plateau of Mount Zion in the vicinity of the Byzantine church Hagia Sion.

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79 Wightmann 1993, 273 f.

80 On 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1229 Frederick II. placed the crown of Jerusalem on his head.

81 This will be topic of further research.

82 This will be topic of further research.

76           After leaving the hill outside the walled city in the later course of the Islamic period, it was not inhabited anymore, only terracing walls were set upon the ancient remains. Further, the Ayyubid fortification line around Mount Zion could be re-examined. Future research will include the Iron Age city wall.

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