

New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and its Region

Collected Papers

Editors:
David Amit
Orit Peleg-Barkat
Guy D. Stiebel

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Israel Antiquities Authority
Jerusalem Region



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Collected Papers Volume IV

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and Guy D. Stiebel

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New Excavations on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and an Inscribed Stone Cup/Mug from the Second Temple Period

Shimon Gibson

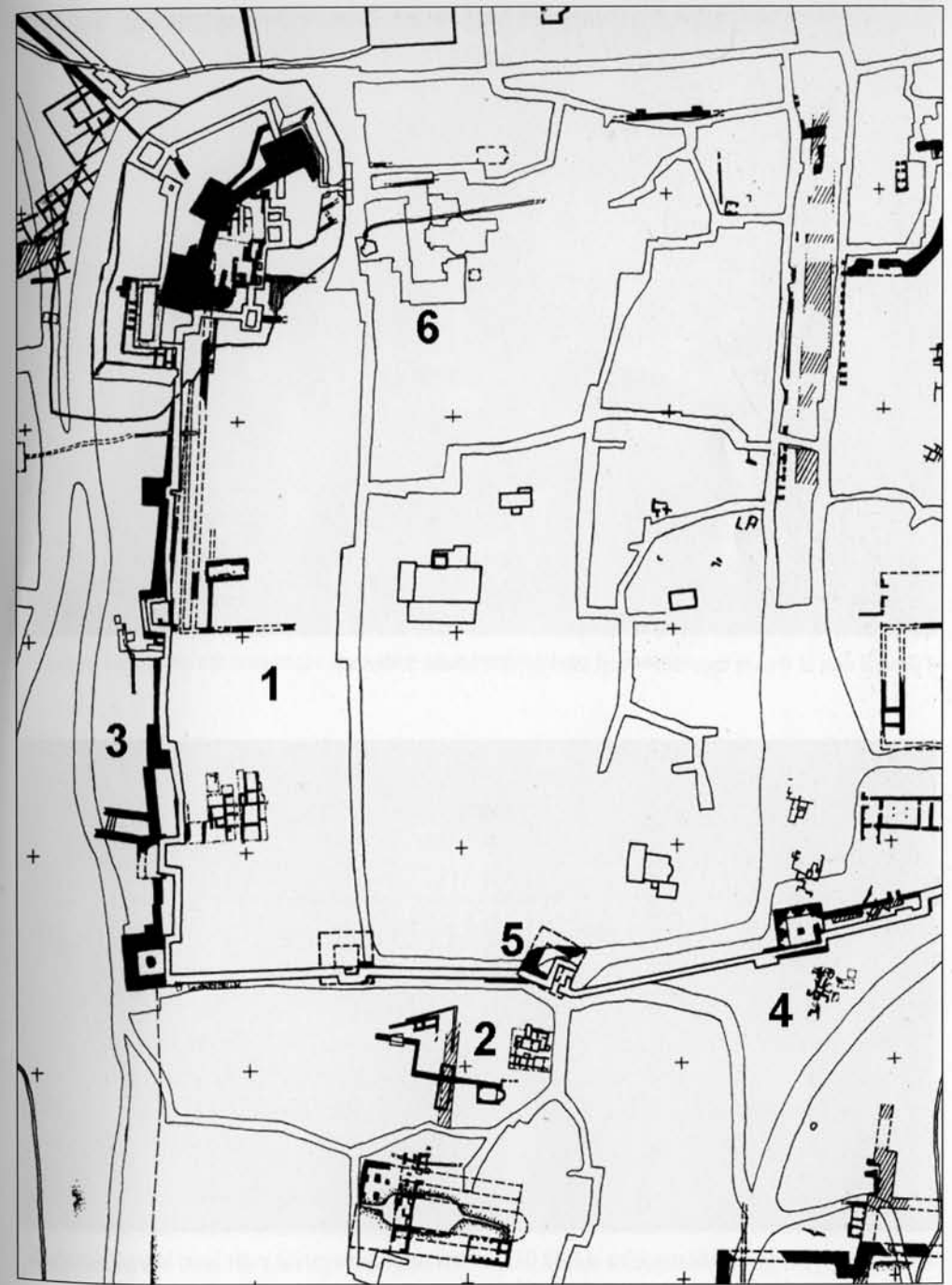
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
University of the Holy Land, Jerusalem

Large scale excavations were conducted by Magen Broshi during the 1970s at a number of locations on Mount Zion, notably in the Armenian Garden (in the area of the subsequent Seminary), within the courtyard of St Saviour ("House of Caiaphas"), along the western Old City wall ("Gan Bonei Yerushalayim"), and in the area of the Ayyubid Tower ("Area E") outside and to the east of Zion Gate (Fig. 1).¹ Additional sondages were made by Broshi in the area of Zion Gate and in the Christ Church compound.² These excavations are now being prepared for final publication, beginning with a volume on the western Old City wall.³

The purpose of the present article is to report on the results of new excavations made in the area immediately adjacent to the Ayyubid Tower (Broshi's Area E); this work has been conducted since 2007 by the author and James D. Tabor. We will also be reporting for the first time on the discovery of a stone vessel with a unique inscription dating from the first century C.E. and a suggested decipherment is discussed here as well (see also the article by Stephen Pfann in this issue).

The Ayyubid Tower site is situated about 100 m to the east of Zion Gate and excavations were originally conducted in this area in 1974–1978 (Fig. 2).⁴ The goal of these excavations was to

clarify the date of the fortification tower jutting out at the base of the city wall, and to establish the stratigraphy of the area immediately to its south. In front of the tower an enormous tumble of ashlar and two fragments of a monumental Ayyubid inscription (2.42 m in length), with *naskhi* script in relief, were subsequently uncovered. The inscription related that the tower was erected (or restored) by the nephew of Saladin, 'al-Malik al-Mu'azzem 'Isa (Governor of Damascus), in 1212 C.E. (Fig. 3).⁵ The tumble dates from the razing of the city wall in 1219 C.E. Among the ashlar were jamb stones and voussoirs (arch stones), suggesting the tower must have been a gate in the thirteenth century. Excavations made further to the south revealed superimposed building remains dating from Early Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. These excavations were intended to allow for the construction of a new gate to an underground car-park within the Jewish Quarter. Since plans to build this gate were not eventually pursued, excavations ceased abruptly in 1978 and were not resumed. The area was later included within the Jerusalem Municipal gardens (later the "Gan Sovev Homot") and it was surrounded by a low fence, but the deep pits in the excavation were a constant danger to passer-bys. Hence, in 2000 at our instigation



1 General map of Magen Broshi's archaeological excavations on Mount Zion: (1) St Saviour; (2) Armenian Garden; (3) western Old City wall; (4) Ayyubid Tower; (5) Zion Gate; (6) Christ Church (drawing: S. Gibson)



2 General view of the site towards the west taken in 1978 (photo: S. Gibson)



4 General view of the site towards the south-west taken in 2008 (photo: S. Gibson)



3 Inscription of 'al-Malik al-Mu'azzem 'Isa of 1212 C.E.. Restored and now on exhibit in the Israel Museum (photo: S. Gibson, courtesy of N. Brosh and the Israel Museum)

and with our funding, a new fence was erected and cleaning operations were made which were accompanied with some excavations.⁶

Since 2007 a new project of excavations is underway in the area to the south of the Ayyubid Tower (Fig. 4).⁷ Three seasons of work have so far been carried out.⁸ The aim of the new work is threefold: (1) to remove dangerous baulks and sections remaining from the old excavations; (2) to clarify the sequence of architectural remains uncovered in the 1970s; and (3) to acquire a secure stratigraphic picture of the area throughout the periods.

The earliest finds uncovered in the recent excavations are from the Iron Age II (eighth-sixth centuries B.C.E.), but nothing was found in situ, and building remains from this period

have yet to be uncovered. A layer of soil was uncovered at one location above bedrock containing large quantities of Iron Age II pottery; its significance will be investigated in future seasons of work at the site.

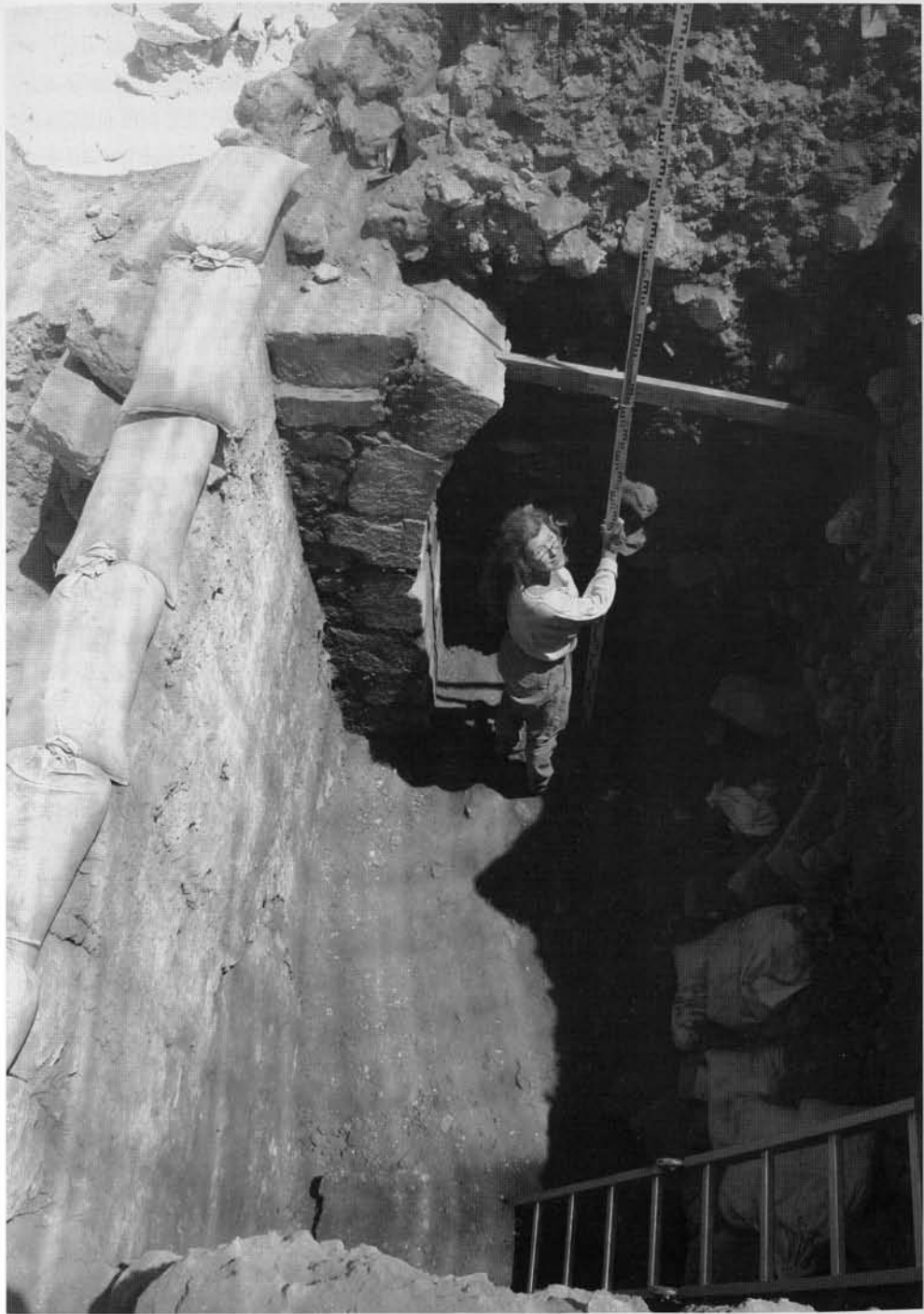
The basement of a well preserved dwelling was uncovered dating from the Early Roman period, with associated finds dating from the first century C.E. It included a plastered cistern, a stepped and plastered ritual bathing pool (*mikve*) with a well preserved barrel-vaulted ceiling (Fig. 5), and a chamber containing three bread ovens (*tabuns*) (Fig. 6). This dwelling had at least two building phases. Numerous finds from the Early Roman period were found, including pottery, lamps, stone vessels (including a *qalal* jar rim with egg-and-dart decoration), scale-weights, *murex* shells, and



5 Interior of ritual bathing pool (*mikve*) towards the east (photo: S. Gibson)



6 Bread ovens from the Early Roman dwelling. Note the Byzantine consolidation wall built over the earlier walls (photo: S. Gibson)



7 Part of arched chamber of Umayyad date on the east side of the excavation area (photo: S. Gibson)

coins. A fragment of an ornate window screen made of stone was also found. In fills situated above the rubble collapse of 70 C.E. there were a few Tenth Legion stamped roof tiles, but there were no signs of any construction activities in the area from the Late Roman period. The Early Roman period dwelling appears to have remained in ruins until the Byzantine period.

In the Byzantine period, the walls from the Early Roman dwelling were raised and reconstructed for consolidation purposes, and sealed beneath an artificial leveling fill poured across the entire area. The intention of the builders was to create a substantially elevated and flattened area for construction purposes. This fill (2-3 meters thick) contained primarily Early Roman finds, except for a very sparse quantity of Late Roman and Byzantine potsherds. The exact date when this leveling operation took place is uncertain. It conceivably took place at the time of the construction of the nearby Nea Church in the

mid-sixth century C.E.

A very large building with thick walls was constructed in the area in the Umayyad period (seventh-eighth centuries C.E.), with plastered walls and decorated mosaic floors (of which only patches have survived), a channel leading to a cistern, and other features. The edge of a large arched chamber (preserved to a height of 3 meters) with a mosaic floor was uncovered on the east side of the area (Fig. 7). The building had a long life and continued to be used during the subsequent Abbasid period (eighth to ninth centuries C.E.) according to finds from the extant floors. Additional building remains were identified which are likely to be of Fatimid date. On the north side of the area is a very large and well preserved plastered cistern separated into two chambers by a divider wall; this installation is of Ayyubid date, perhaps serving those entering the adjacent gate-tower.

In the 2009 season part of the large stone



8 Threshold stone belonging to the Ayyubid Gate (photo: S. Gibson)

tumble of ashlar and voussoirs derived from the Ayyubid Tower was uncovered. Among these stones is a large threshold stone which we surmise may have come from the city gate, suggesting that it was somewhat smaller than originally envisioned (Fig. 8).

Among the special finds from the 2009 season of excavations was a soft white limestone cup dating from the first century C.E. bearing an incised inscription, with ten or perhaps eleven lines of script on its sides. The cup was found broken into four pieces within a fill containing pottery that was exclusively of first-century C.E. date, superimposed above the barrel-vaulted ceiling of a ritual bathing pool.⁹ The mug has since undergone cleaning and conservation in the scientific laboratories of the Israel Museum.¹⁰

The cylindrical cup (or mug) is a well known type of hand-carved vessel found in first-century deposits in Jerusalem, and it has a wide

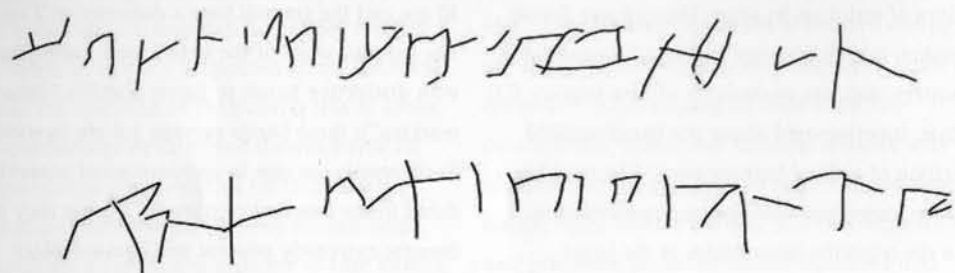
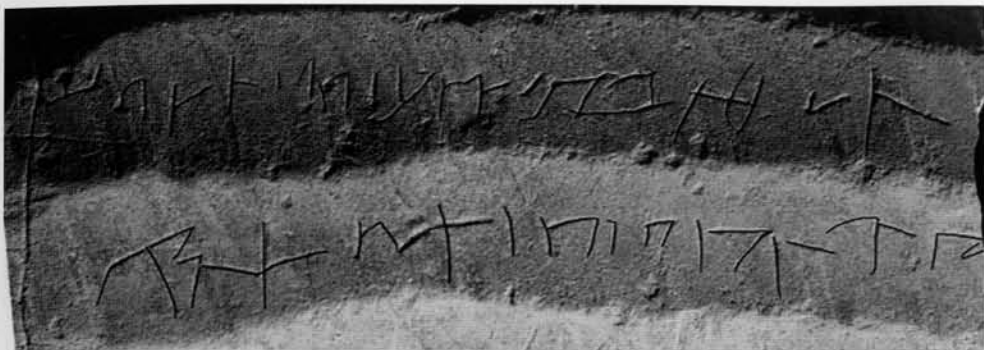


9 The stone cup with a cryptic inscription on its exterior after reconstruction in the laboratory of the Israel Museum (photo: J. Tabor)

distribution not only in Judaea but across the country (Fig. 9). Such vessels were once referred to in publications as "measuring cups," but since no common standard is evident in the interior capacity of such vessels, the term "cups" or "mugs" should be used instead.¹¹ The general height of such vessels found in Jerusalem usually ranges between 5 and 15 cms; our example is of medium size, with a height of 12 cm. The mouth of the vessel has a diameter of 10 cm and the smooth base a diameter of 7 cm. The exterior walls of the vessel were knife-pared with distinctive bands or facets (Cahill's "chisel-marking"); these bands average 1.5 cm in width. Such vessels are rare in archaeological contexts dated to the late first century B.C.E., but they do become extremely popular and commonplace by the mid-first century C.E. In Jerusalem, these stone vessels ceased to exist with the destruction of the city in 70 C.E.¹²

A detailed examination of the inscription was made by Stephen Pfann, the staff epigrapher, using special photographic enhancing methods (PTM/RTI imaging) in order to clarify the fine spidery writing and to exclude accidental marks and incisions (see Pfann's article "The Mount Zion Inscribed Cup: Preliminary Observations," below). The inscription had evidently been carefully incised by a scribe into the pre-existing knife-pared bands on the exterior of the cup (Fig. 10). Anyone attempting to read the inscription would have had to tip over the vessel on its side. The incisions were probably made with a stylus or a small sharp nail.

Individual letters are identifiable and deftly drawn (letters average 0.6 to 0.9 mm in height);



10 Two facets with inscribed letters (photo: S. Pfann)

clearly the person inscribing the cup took his time drawing the script. While some letters were not always successfully drawn, the inscription was on the whole well executed. It was not a random graffito, nor was it scrawled in the manner of quickly-drawn names known from stone ossuaries in burial caves.¹³ Undoubtedly, much thought and dedication went into the making of the inscription on this cup, notwithstanding the difficulties the scribe must have had owing to the curved conical surface of the vessel, on the one hand, and the existence of incisions in the facets derived from the knife-

paring, on the other. Epigraphic finds from excavations in Jerusalem are extremely rare and inevitably are always of interest. It was immediately clear at the time

of the discovery that the inscription was not going to be easy to read and that it was not after all a straightforward Hebrew or Aramaic cursive inscription. Pfann's study has shown that there are ten, or possible even eleven, lines of script visible on the vessel, with the rest of the facets filled up with zig-zag lines, perhaps intentionally in order to ensure that no further script might be added to the vessel. Pfann has identified three different scripts in the inscription: (1) a script previously known from the Dead Sea Scrolls as "Cryptic A" script (Pfann also calls this "Hebrew Hieratic"); (2) an unknown cryptic script which is unique to this specific inscription, even though some letters bear a resemblance to cryptic letters and signs already known in the Dead Sea Scrolls; and

(3) the standard Jewish/Aramaic square script of the period (with only a few words evident in lines 5-6). Another interesting feature is the appearance of repeated letters: *he* (appearing four times in line 4), *yud* (appearing four times in line 7), *waw* (appearing four times in line 7), and *tsade* (appearing four times in line 10). Were these letters written without purpose, or did each one of these letters signify a repeated musical notation or prayer?

Clearly the scribe who made this inscription did not want it to be easily read, and to that end this person deliberately did not provide word dividers and intentionally wrote a text with a variety of scripts. Interestingly, Pfann has suggested that lines 5-6 might even be a paraphrasing of Psalm 26:8, and the words "Adonai shavti..." are fairly clear, even if the rest is not. If we combine this with the strange mixing of scripts and with the repetition of letters, it does seem as if the inscription must have had some mystical or liturgical significance. Clearly, it would have been easier for the scribe to have written this text on a large potsherd (an *ostrakon*), rather than on the side of a stone vessel. For this reason I think there must have been a direct connection between the *content* of the inscription and the *function* of the stone vessel. One possibility is that the cup was used for the purpose of the ritual cleansing of hands ("netilat yadaim"). Stone vessels are mentioned in the Mishnah as utensils used for ritually cleansing hands: "they may not ... pour [water] over the hands, save only in a vessel; and only vessels that have a tightly stopped-up cover [i.e. a lid] afford protection" (Yadaim 1:2; Danby edition).

The quantity of water is specified as a quarter of a *log* or more, but one must assume that in the first century the quantity was more likely to have been assessed rather than measured. Of the three main types of vessel that generally characterize the stone vessel assemblage – cylindrical cups, small open vessels and large jars – it seems reasonable to assume that the large jars were actually used to *contain* the ritual water and the reference in John 2:6 to six stone jars used "for the Jewish rites of purification" at Cana may be adduced as additional proof of this. However, the stone vessels that were used for the act of *pouring* the water are more likely to have been the cylindrical cups which had handles. Such cups appear to be mentioned in *Parah* 3:2: "[In Jerusalem] ... they brought oxen with doors laid upon their backs, and on these the children sat bearing in their hands cups of stone. When they reached [the spring or pool of] Siloam they alighted and filled the cups with water and got up again and sat upon the boards. Rabbi Jose says: 'The child used to let down his cup and fill it without alighting.'" If these stone cups were used primarily for the washing of hands ritual then it remains feasible that the content of the Mount Zion inscription might be related to purification practices as well. Indeed, hand-washing might have extended beyond Pharisaic custom.¹⁴ The discovery of the cup in the area of the Upper City of Jerusalem, in which priestly families are known to have resided (including the Qatros family), may hint at the original priestly function that this specific vessel had some two thousand years ago.¹⁵

footnotes

- 1 I am grateful to Magen Broshi for suggesting that I take on the task of publishing his excavations on Mount Zion. For preliminary reports on the excavations: Bahat and Broshi 1975; Broshi 1975; Broshi and Gibson 1994. See also Gibson 2007. Recent work on the publication of the western Old City wall excavations was undertaken with a grant from the Shelby White – Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications, for which I am most grateful. My thanks to Phil King for his great interest in our work.
- 2 Work on the mapping of the Christ Church compound and the study of the subterranean areas below it, including a water tunnel extending beneath Christ Church, which was an extension of the Upper Aqueduct leading to the area of the Upper City, was made possible with grants received from the Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation. I would like to record my thanks to the late Sandy Brenner for his support and enthusiasm; and to Sheila Bishop of The Foundation for Biblical Archaeology for facilitating these grants.
- 3 Apart from the archaeological materials from the western Old City wall which were stored in the Israel Museum, most of the pottery and objects from the main Mount Zion excavations and its paperwork (field diaries, locus cards and maps) went missing in the early 1980s and this inevitably held up the publication process. This situation has now changed with the discovery last year of almost all of the missing archaeological materials during renovations made in the Armenian Museum in the Old City. I am grateful to Yana Tchekhanovets for alerting me to this discovery, and to Father Pakrad Berjekian for his support and for providing us with work space in the museum. A comprehensive inventory of this material is now underway supervised by Mareike Grosser. Additional artifacts, including much of the missing paperwork, dig records, photographs and plans, also came to light provisionally within stores within the compound of St Saviour. I am grateful to Father Emmanuel Atajanyan for his help and support in locating this material. Additional plans from the St Saviour excavations were recently provided to us by courtesy of Ehud Netzer, who was the Architect of the Mount Zion expedition in the 1970s. I am also grateful to Scott Elder for providing us with copies of his archival plans for those same excavations.
- 4 These excavations were conducted by Magen

- Broshi on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities (now the Israel Antiquities Authority) and the Jewish Quarter Reconstruction and Development Company. Staff included archaeologists Nahman Gershon and Eliot Braun. Preliminary reports on the results of the work appeared in Broshi 1987; Broshi and Gibson 1994: 153–154.
- 5 Only two-thirds of the inscription has been recovered. One of the aims of the renewed work at the site is to uncover the missing part of the inscription. Meanwhile, the inscription in its present state has been conserved and is now exhibited in the new Islamic gallery in the Israel Museum, under the curatorship of Naama Brosh to whom I am grateful for allowing me to take a photograph of it (August 2010).
- 6 This work was conducted by Shimon Gibson (IAA License G27/2000).
- 7 These excavations are being conducted by Shimon Gibson and James D. Tabor on behalf of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. We are grateful to Gideon Avni, Jon Seligman and Yuval Baruch from the Israel Antiquities Authority for their help. The work is conducted within a park administered by the Israel Nature and National Parks Authority, to whom we are grateful, notably Eviatar Cohen and Tsvika Tzuk. Professional dig staff consists of Rafi Lewis (field director), Egon Lass (field director), Mareike Grosser (site manager and finds registrar), and Yusuf Kholesy (foreman). Surveying was undertaken by Dov Porotsky and staff. Warren C. Schultz (DePaul University) is in charge of numismatic finds and participated in the excavations as well. Specialist staff include: Stephen Pfann (epigraphic finds), Ram Bouchnik (archaeo-zoological remains), Eric C. Lapp (lamps), and Jessie Pincus (ground-penetrating radar). We are grateful to the numerous financial sponsors of the excavation. An important sponsor of this project is The Foundation for Biblical Archaeology, headed by Sheila Bishop. Additional funding was received from the Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation to whom we extend our thanks; this funding was facilitated through ASOR and the Albright Institute and we are grateful to Seymour (Sy) Gitin for this.
- 8 IAA Licenses G52/2007; G-12/2008; G-44/2009.
- 9 The larger fragment of the cup was found on 21 June 2010 by Joel Kramer, a student of archaeology at the University of the Holy Land, who immediately alerted staff to the discovery; he noticed faint incised "decorations" along

the edges of the cup. Further excavations and sieving of material brought to light additional fragments of the cup at the same spot. During careful washing supervised by staff member Mareike Grosser, we became aware of the possibility that this was an inscription and not just incised decorations as we originally thought it to be.

- 10 We are grateful to Curator Dudi Mevorach for facilitating the cleaning and conservation of the stone vessel in the scientific laboratories of the Israel Museum.

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- 11 Gibson 2003: 292–3; Cahill 1992: 210; Magen 2002: 97.
 - 12 In the vicinity of Jerusalem stone vessels continued to be made and used until the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt: Sklar-Parnes et al. 2004: 39.
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