On the Pilgrim's Way to the Holy City

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Just as Jews considered Jerusalem the centre of the world, so too for Christians it occupied a very special place. It was the site of the culmination of Christ's ministry on earth and of the birth of the Church. As early as the beginning of the 4th century, Christian pilgrims were assembling from all over the world to visit the 'Upper Room' on Mount Zion, the traditional site of the Last Supper; the Pools of Bethesda and Siloam which figure in New Testament narratives; the rock on the Mount of Olives where Christ had ascended to heaven and which bore his footprints; and, close by, the grotto where he taught his disciples.

When the Roman Emperor Constantine defeated his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge on 28 October 312, he attributed his victory to the intervention of the God of the Christians, and this spurred him into adopting Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. With the sudden change from proscribed cult to state religion, the status of Palestine also moved from being a provincial backwater to the Holy Land, the centre of worship, economically pampered by the emperors. Constantine had Aelia Capitolina razed to the ground, and built the Christian Jerusalem, to which pilgrims flocked from all over the Empire to worship at the holy places[1] adorned with imported marbles, precious stones, gold and silver – at the Holy Sepulchre, the Eleona Church on the Mount of Olives, and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. But this bejewelled crown of the Holy Land was reached only after an arduous journey by land or sea. Pilgrims braved long delays, storms and shipwreck as they embarked on merchant ships plying to and fro between the West and Syro-Palestine. Whether pilgrims travelled overland from the West to Constantinople and then followed the 'Pilgrim's Road' across Asia Minor to Tarsus and Antioch in Cilicia, or approached the Holy Land from the port of Alexandria, in all cases, they travelled along the great coast road linking Antioch and Alexandria – the *Via Maris*.

Standing on this road at Caesarea, Jerusalem lay only 73 Roman miles, or three days' journey, away, for on an average day the pilgrims travelled some 20–25 Roman miles. They changed mounts in *mutationes* (staging posts) and stayed overnight in *mansiones* (staging hostels), which consisted of large courtyards with facilities for feeding and stabling animals and for the accommodation of travellers. If the *mansio*

[1] Hunt, E. D. 1982. *Holy Land pilgrimages in the later Roman Empire AD 312–460* (OUP). This represents the definitive interpretation of the textual sources concerning pilgrimages.

was full, the pilgrim had to join other travellers in the local inn (*taverna*). *Mansiones* and *tavernae* had a doubtful reputation and the clergy were forbidden by ecclesiastical canons to enter them. To cater for the needs of Christian travellers, hostels or *xenodochia*, supervised by members of the clergy and often associated with monasteries, soon sprang up in towns along the main pilgrim routes. By AD 437 the route between Constantinople and Jerusalem was well supplied with *pandocheia*, inns specifically for pilgrims.

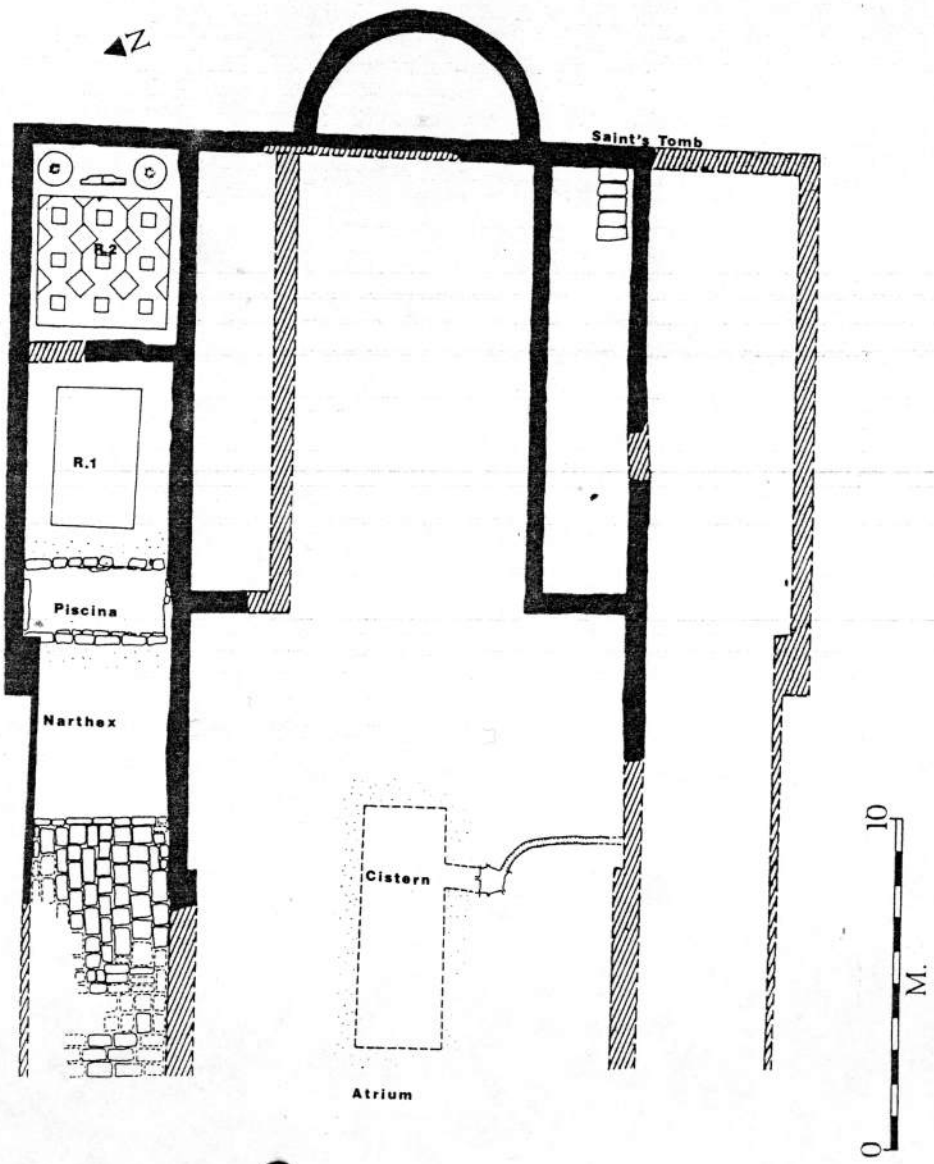
Nevertheless the route presented hardships, especially for pilgrims who had adopted an ascetic diet which undermined their strength to bear the deep snow in the winter in Anatolia and, in the summer, dry dusty conditions, followed by the intense humid heat of coastal Cilicia. Etheria, the abbess of a monastery in northwest Spain, travelled to the Holy Land in 381–4. She reached the summit of Mount Sinai on foot and climbed Mount Nebo on donkey and foot, sustained, she affirms in her diary, by her *locorum sanctorum desiderium*, her yearning for the holy places. This *desiderium*, which led pilgrims up mountains and into the deserts, was a longing to see with one's own eyes the scenes of events which were so familiar from the scriptures.

The 'travel-kit' of pilgrims included the Bible, and guide-books based on the *Onomastikon*, a descriptive list of sites in Palestine compiled by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, and translated from Greek into Latin around 390 by St Jerome. Bible and guide-books in hand, and often accompanied by guides, the pilgrims punctuated their approach to Jerusalem by visiting other holy sites. They worshipped at the shrines of local saints: Elias' grotto on Mount Carmel on the coastal road to Caesarea, and inland, Jacob's town of Sechem where Joseph was buried, and Sechar, the place of Jacob's well and of Christ's meeting with the Samaritan woman. One such locality for pilgrims to stay along the *Via Maris* on the way to Jerusalem was the episcopal basilica of Dora.

It lies 30 km south of Haifa and 10 km north of Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, a massive tel juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, the result of the accumulation of layers of human occupation since the 14th century BCE when Dor was one of the thirty-one fortified Canaanite cities conquered by Joshua.[2] In the Byzantine period, Dora was a border city between the provinces of Phoenicia and Palestina Prima, and was the capital of the archepiscopal see of Palestina Prima. Its population appears to have abandoned the summit of the tel, where there remained only a military outpost, and settled on its northeast slope and at its foot. This site was also chosen by Jewish colonists from Turkey and Russia to establish Kibbutz Nahsholim in 1948.

In the course of preparing the area for the construction of new houses, ancient remains came to light. This called for a rescue excavation, conducted in February 1952 by Dr J. Leibovitch on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums. The semi-circular eastward-oriented apse of the central nave of a large basilica was cleared, as was part of the mosaic pavement of a north aisle. Besides

[2] On Dor prior to the Byzantine period, see Negev, A., *Archaeological Encyclopaedia of the Holy Land*, [illegible] Dor', *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel*



Pl[redacted]the Basilica at Dor (Drawing: S. Gibson).

the impressive size of the building, one find in particular supported Leibovitch's assertion that this was the episcopal basilica of Byzantine Dora. An episcopal ivory sceptre lacking its handle, was discovered. It was shaped like a hand, the three middle fingers extended in a characteristic episcopal blessing symbolizing the Holy Trinity. One of the fingers bore an ivory ring. The excavations were discontinued after the illness and death of Leibovitch, and the site was abandoned. But the remains were sufficiently important for the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums to reinitiate the excavations of the Church at Dor. So far I have conducted two seasons of excavations, sponsored by the Israel Department of Antiquities and the Russell Trust, Scotland, in June and July 1979 and 1980.

The Byzantine church complex covers an area of at least 1000 sq. m. The core of the structure (see plan, p. 27) seems to have consisted of a three-aisled basilica 25 m long and 14.50 m wide. The central nave, 7 m wide, terminating in the east in a semi-circular apse 3.20 m in external radius, was flanked by side-aisles, each 3.25 m wide. Both the nave and the side-aisles were paved with mosaics of which only small patches have so far been found.

Outside each side-aisle, there was an 'external aisle', 4.75 m wide, along the entire length of the building. The external northern aisle (see right) was laterally subdivided into four zones. The first two of these are, from west to east: a room (5 m×3.50 m) with a plastered floor, giving access to a shallow plaster-lined rectangular baptismal *piscina* (3.50 m×2.50 m). The eastern and western edges consisted of two steps, each 12 cm high. This pair of zones was followed by two mosaic-paved rooms. The mosaic of Room 1 (6 m×4.97 m) was decorated by sixty red-ochre rose buds each enclosed in a dark-grey calyx on a white ground. At the eastern end of the field a fragmentary *tabula ansata* marked the central axis of the field. The pavement of Room 2 (4.60 m×5.75 m) had a pattern of irregular red-ochre octagons and grey/black, yellow-ochre and red-ochre squares and stepped lozenges on a white ground. To the east of this, a stone step probably gave access to an elevated area – a chancel or altar now destroyed. Marble screens encased it on its northern and southern faces. The mosaic floor of Room 2 extended eastwards on either side of the stone step. Its decorative motif repeated itself symmetrically on either side of the step. It consisted of a red-ochre circle, 1 m in diameter, enclosing five interlocking red-ochre circles, with five black petals in the centre.

The external southern aisle was almost entirely destroyed by the construction of kibbutz houses.

To the west, the church was preceded by an atrium paved with stone slabs. Its western limit and the western entrance of the complex have not yet been located. Along the east-west axis of the apse and occupying most of the width of the atrium, the floor-slabs covered the collapsed vault of a large cistern (7.4 m×3.15 m×3 m). Its plaster lining covered even its pavement of crude white tesserae. Three pairs of corbels protruded from the internal northern and southern faces of the cistern. Water entered through three plaster-lined channels which led from the west south of the cistern, down which gutters probably directed water from the roof. A shaft was cut in the [illegible] beside the cistern, 0.90 m in diameter and 3 m deep, plaster lined and

Dor: the Basilica. External northern aisle (Rooms 1 and 2) seen from the west. The mosaic pavement has been penetrated by [illegible]

with seven footholds at 0.25 m intervals cut into its eastern and western sides. It was linked to the cistern by a doorway cut into the southern wall of the cistern.

The hypothesis that the church had been erected in the 4th or early 5th century, on the basis of 3rd- and 4th-century coins found in the sandy fill supporting the church, was verified in the 1980 season by the discovery at the eastern end of Room 1 of a mosaic pavement with a geometric design (4.25 m×2.75 m), 0.38 m below the upper pavement. The design in red ochre and yellow ochre on a yellowish-white ground consisted of a trellis of squares.

A *terminus ante quem* for the laying of the lower pavement was provided by a bronze tremessis of Emperor Constantius II (337–61), minted at Cyzicus, which was found on the pavement. The building of the first stage of the church must therefore be assigned at the earliest to the first half of the 4th century. The lower pavement of Room 1 was burnt at its northern end, in a destruction which preceded the erection of the upper building. A higher mosaic pavement was laid in the external side-aisles, and a mosaic introduced in the aisles and nave.

Outside the main building, 2 m north of the external northern aisle and orientated slightly further to the southeast, was the southern wall of a monumental building of Late Hellenistic or Roman date. It fell into disuse after its destruction by fire. Its slab floor was removed and reused by the Byzantine builders of the neighbouring basilica – hence the similarity between the slabs of the monumental building and those of the northern wall of the basilica.

The basic layout of this basilica is unique in Israel: the only parallels being the church outside the city walls (El-Ḥoṣn) at El Bāra and Church A at Dair Ṣolaib, both of them in Syria. One aspect of the Dor basilica, however, appears to be unique. The location of the *piscina* next to the atrium is inside, not outside the ecclesiastical complex. This illustrates the recommendation by the *Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, a canonical law text of the second half of the 5th century, which laid down the rules concerning the plans of churches, that the baptistery should be connected with the atrium. The tripartite plan of the external northern aisle of the basilica at Dor corresponds to the first three stages of the baptismal liturgy as described in the mid-4th-century *Mystagogical Cathecheses* of St Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem: the renunciation of Satan, the anointing and baptism by the bishop, and the celebration of the Eucharist.

The external southern aisle of the basilica served a different purpose: it would have sheltered the sick who came to be healed by undergoing a period of *incubatio* – a time of prayer, fasting and deprivation of sleep. The practice of incubation held a prominent place in the rites of divine healing in ancient Greece, such as in the Temple of Asclepios, the God of Medicine, in his sanctuaries at Epidaurus and Pergamon. It was adopted by Christianity and is well attested by Saints' Lives. At Dor, the sick gathered round the remains of a saint, whose name is not known, but whose tomb was found in the eastern end of the southern aisle. The tomb was closed by five slabs. A small hole, 16–18 cm in diameter, lined with an earthenware pipe, had been cut in the centre of the tomb. Oil would have been poured into the tomb through this pipe [illegible] with the remains of the saint. The oil would then

have drained into a plaster-lined basin (2 m×1.40 m) between the tomb and the northern wall of the southern aisle, and would then have been used for healing the sick.

The Byzantine centuries were an age of relic hunting. It is no surprise therefore that pilgrims visited Dor, which could pride itself on possessing a memorial of Christ's death. In the 1952 excavations, a grey marble column was found: 0.92 m above its base a three-line Greek inscription had been carved – 'A stone of the Holy Golgotha'. Beneath the inscription there was a hollow cross, which probably contained a fragment of the Golgotha, the rock of Calvary, enclosed in a cross-shaped metal reliquary, riveted into the column. Such a prized relic must have exercised tremendous magnetism over pilgrims travelling from the north along the *Via Maris*, or disembarking at the port of Dora.

The final fate of the basilica of Dor is clearly imprinted on the remains. Dor was destroyed by fire, as evidenced by an ashy layer and collapsed material: lumps of wall plaster, tiles, marble fragments, shattered storage jars, glass window panes, glass chandeliers or *polycandela*, lie mixed with iron nails, door-latches and a fragmentary lead *polycandelon* molten by fire. Unlike most destructions of Byzantine ecclesiastical sites in Palestine, this one can be dated neither to the Persian invasion of 613–14 nor to the Moslem conquest in 636. At the Council of the Lateran in 649, Bishop Stephen of Dora was introduced to Pope Martin as vicar of the see of Jerusalem. His role was to institute bishops, presbyters and deacons as long as there was no possibility of appointing a Patriarch in Jerusalem due to the Arab takeover.

By the 8th century the basilica of Dor was employed as a cemetery by Arabs. Tombs dated by grave-goods to between the 8th and 14th centuries were dug into the upper mosaic pavement of the external northern aisle, north of it and at the eastern end of the church. Dor was to remain Moslem until the 12th century when the Crusaders founded the Christian village of de Mérel around the harbour which regained its ancient importance as one of the ports of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

But, by this time, even the site of the basilica of Dor was no more than an overgrown mound.