

Capricorno Alae VII Phrygum ...

(i) Interim report on the fort near Tel Shalem

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A multi-disciplinary research project has been begun in the fields next to the site of Tel Shalem (fig. 1), the locus of important discoveries since the 1970s (primarily the bronze statue of Hadrian). Recent geophysical prospections have detected the clear layout of a Roman fort and possibly even two successive forts. Two short excavation seasons carried out in 2017 and 2019, with a focus on the *principia*, resulted in finds that shed new light on the nature, history and identity of the site.

Tel Shalem lies in the plain of the Jordan Rift Valley *c.*2 km west of the river and close to the territories of two Decapolis cities (it is *c.*10 km southwest of Pella and *c.*12 km south-southeast of Nysa-Scythopolis). It controls a major junction of the road network. The highway which connects to the *Via Maris* running along the coast passes through the Jezreel, Bet She'an and Jordan valleys and, after crossing the Jordan river, continues either northwards to Syria or eastwards to the Trans-Jordan highlands. This road intersects other routes, one of which runs southwards along the Rift Valley past the Sea of Galilee through Scythopolis to Jerusalem by way of Jericho, the other of which runs from Neapolis (Nablus) in Samaria to Pella through Nahal Bezek (Wadi Shubash). Tel Shalem's location close to the Jordan facilitated firm control and monitoring of river crossings.¹ The Roman fort itself lies southwest of Tel Shalem on a low flat



Fig. 1. Map of the Roman province of *Judaea / Syria Palaestina* (M. Heinzelmann; archive AI UoC).

1 The significance of the river crossings near Tel Shalem is attested since Biblical times: the people of Jabesh Gilead may have passed the river while on their way to rescue the condemned bodies of King Saul and his sons from the walls of Bet She'an (1 Samuel 31:11-13); Judah Maccabeus may have passed here in 163 B.C. on his way back to Jerusalem from his military campaign on the other side of the river (1 Macc 5:52); Pompey the Great crossed the river here with his army in 64/63 B.C. while on his way towards Jerusalem (Jos., *Ant.* 14.49; *BJ* 1.133); and on his journey to the East in A.D. 129/130 Hadrian probably entered Judaea at this point, where he was welcomed by the governor Tineus Rufus before visiting Nysa-Scythopolis (K. G. Holum, "Hadrian and Caesarea: an episode in the Romanization of Palestine," *AncW* 23 (1992) 51-61; G. Mazar and A. Najjar, *Bet Sh'ean Archaeological Project 1986-2002. Bet She'an 1: Nysa-Scythopolis. The Caesareum and the Odeum* (IAA Reports 33; Jerusalem 2007). The river crossing near Tel Shalem (Salem) is portrayed on the Madaba Map.

hill that slopes gently towards the river. Despite the relatively flat terrain, it has an open view in all directions, particularly towards the plains and highlands of the Transjordan valley. A perennial if rather warm and saline source, 'En Avraham ('Ein Radgha), north-east of the fort at the foot of the ancient mound, may also have played a rôle in the choice of location, even if fresh water may have been brought to the fort by an aqueduct from springs lying on slightly elevated terrain to the west and southwest.

History of research

The site is identified with Salem or Salumias, the Biblical city of Melchizedek mentioned in the Gospel of John (3:23).² In Early Christian sources (Euseb., *Onom.* 40.3; Egeria 13.4, 14.2-3, 15.1 and 5) it is identified with Aenon, near which John the Baptist is said to have performed his baptizing activity.³ While visiting the church on top of the tel, the pilgrim Egeria was shown the ruins below and said:

Behold, these foundations which you see around the little hill are those of the palace of King Melchizedek.

On this basis Aenon-Salem were marked on the Madaba mosaic map, next to a river crossing.⁴

Numerous architectural elements of the Roman era, including shafts, capitals, pedestals and cornices, have been found scattered around the ancient mound.⁵ A Latin inscription found in 1970 c.100 m northwest of the mound refers to a detachment (*vexillatio*) of *legio VI Ferrata*.⁶ This gave rise to the assumption that the site saw a Roman military presence. This assumption was reinforced in 1975 by the accidental discovery of a bronze head of Hadrian,⁷ which prompted the Israel Department of Antiquities to carry out numerous probes between then and 1978⁸ when further fragments (some 50 in total) of the statue were recovered. After undergoing conservation and restoration at the laboratories of the Israel Museum, by 1984 they yielded an exquisite cuirassed statue of Hadrian (currently on display there). A bronze head of a youth was found at the same spot.⁹

Sections of the fort's internal structures, stone foundations with mudbrick superstructures, were also exposed at different points.¹⁰ Part of an elaborate bathhouse uncovered at the S edge of the fort included a large room decorated with a colourful geometric mosaic floor that was supported on *suspensurae*. The mosaic was surrounded by stone benches set along the walls that seem to have been added in a second phase.¹¹ These soundings sug-

2 Cf. Y. Tsafirir *et al.*, *Tabula Imperii Romani. Iudaea-Palaestina* (Jerusalem 1994) 219-20.

3 *Ibid.* 58.

4 One might speculate that in the late 4th c. the only ruins she could have been shown were those of the Roman camp. Further on she was told that when extracting building stones from those ruins fragments of silver and bronze could be found.

5 N. Zori, "An archaeological survey of the Beth-Shean valley," in *The Beth Shean Valley: the 17th Archaeological Convention* (Jerusalem 1962) especially 163-64 no. 66.

6 N. Tsori, "An inscription of the Legio VI Ferrata from the northern Jordan valley," *IEJ* 21 (1971) 53-54.

7 Cf. G. Foerster, "A cuirassed bronze statue of Hadrian," *'Atiqot* 17 (1985) 139, with n.1.

8 *Ibid.* 139-60.

9 This piece is not yet fully studied nor published, but it may be identified as Gordian III as a young emperor (our thanks go to D. Hertel for this suggestion).

10 See Foerster (*supra* n.7).

11 A trial trench in the bathhouse in 2017 showed that the benches, carved in white limestone,

gested that a fairly large fort (c.180 x 210 m) for a detachment of *legio VI Ferrata* must have existed at the site near Tel Shalem. The headquarters of that legion were recently identified c.40 km to the northwest, at *Legio* (Megiddo).¹² On the basis of coins and pottery, it was assumed that the fort at Tel Shalem existed for only a short duration (late 1st/early 2nd to mid-2nd c.). The finds of bronze statuary supported the notion that various pedestals for statues existed in the fort, presumably in its *principia*.¹³

Another extraordinary discovery was made in 1977 in a rescue excavation that took place in a field called Hilbuni c.2 km northwest of Tel Shalem. In a late-antique cemetery,¹⁴ 6 fragments of a monumental Latin inscription, of Hadrianic date, were found incorporated into the structure of two cist graves. On the basis of its unusually large dimensions (11 m wide x 1.3 m high; height of letters 0.41, 0.24 and 0.18-0.19 m), it was ascribed to a monumental arch that probably stood near the fort. Publishing the inscription in this journal, G. Foerster and W. Eck proposed that the arch was erected on the occasion of the successful conclusion of the Bar Kokhba revolt in A.D. 136. In their view it should be interpreted as a triumphal arch dedicated by the Senate to commemorate an important victory that took place near Tel Shalem.¹⁵ G. Bowersock and M. Mor, on the other hand, offering an alternative reading, claimed that it was an honorary arch set up at the initiative of the fort's commander as early as A.D. 130, on the occasion of Hadrian's visit to the region.¹⁶ If the interpretation by Foerster and Eck is correct, it has significant implications for the way we should view the course of the Bar Kokhba revolt, while also casting in bolder relief the fort at Tel Shalem, but the fragmentary nature of the inscription does not permit a definitive conclusion.

Geophysical prospection

In 2008, the present authors conducted geophysical surveys in the field in which the Roman fort was thought to be located. In 2013, the survey was extended to the adjacent strip of land to the north, running for c.400 m up to the spring of 'En Avraham. A total of 6.6 ha has now been investigated by means of magnetometry and a further 2.1 ha by electrical resistivity.¹⁷ Magnetometry proved to be particularly successful under the local conditions (figs. 2-3), with wall alignments appearing as negative anomalies that suggest

resemble the kind of benches (seats) found in Roman theaters. They were attached to the perimeter walls against earlier layers of wall-plaster and set on top of the mosaic floor.

12 On the latest investigations at *Legio*, see Y. Tepper, J. David and M. J. Adams, "The Roman VIth Legion Ferrata at *Legio* (el-Lajjun), Israel: preliminary report of the 2013 excavation," *Strata* 34 (2016) 91-124.

13 Cf. A. Johnson, *Römische Kastelle* (3rd edn., Mainz 1990) 131.

14 W. Eck and G. Foerster, "Ein Triumphbogen für Hadrian im Tal von Beth Shean bei Tel Shalem," *JRA* 12 (1999) especially 294-97.

15 *Ibid.* 297-313, especially 311; W. Eck, "The Bar Kokhba revolt: the Roman point of view," *JRS* 89 (1999) especially 87-88.

16 G. W. Bowersock, "The Tel Shalem arch and P. Nahal Hever," in P. Schäfer (ed.), *The Bar Kokhba War reconsidered* (Tübingen 2003) 171-80; M. Mor, "What does Tel Shalem have to do with the Bar Kokhba revolt?" *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 11 (2013) 79-96.

17 The prospectations took place on January 20-25, 2008 and on April 23-24, 2013. A four-sensor Caesium magnetometer (Geometrics G-858) and a resistance meter RM 15 from Geoscan were used. For a more detailed description of the geophysical prospectations of 2008, see M. Buess and M. Heinzelmann, "Ein hadrianisches Militärlager bei Tel Shalem," *Kölner und Bonner Archaeologica* 2 (2012) 175-80.

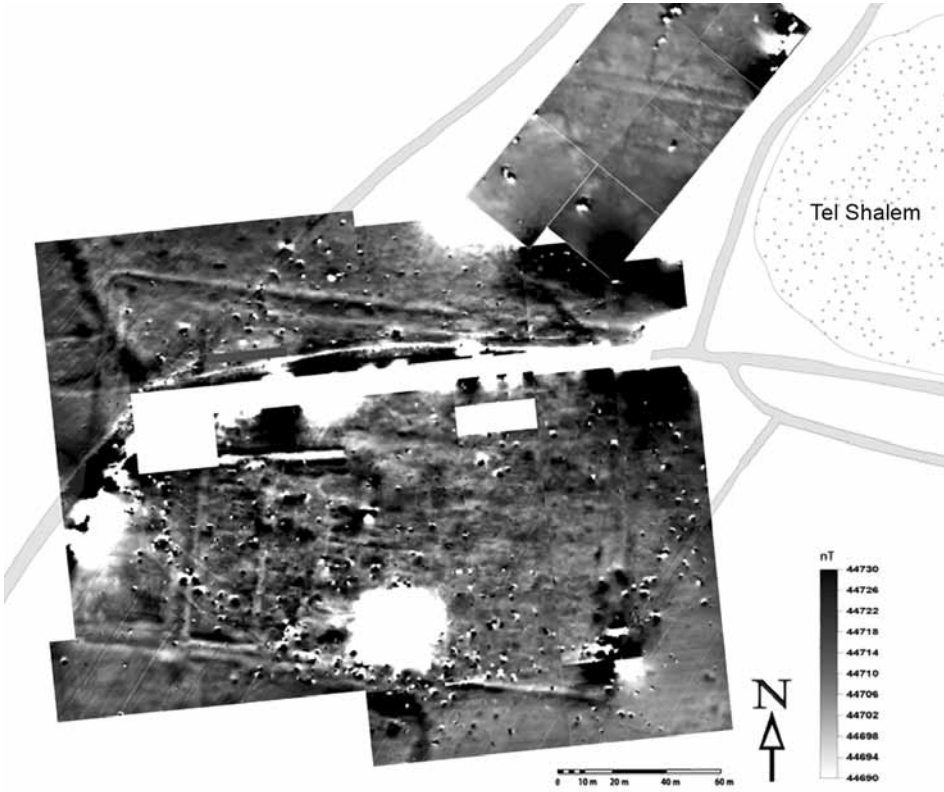


Fig. 2. Tel Shalem fort: results of magnetometry surveys, 2008 and 2013 (archive AI UoC).

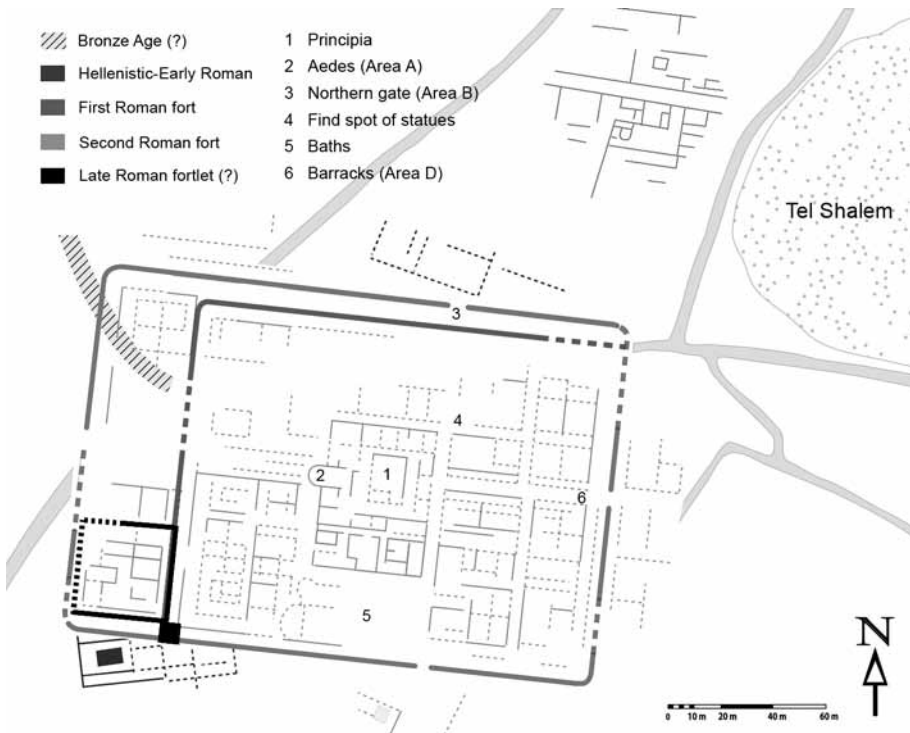


Fig. 3. Tel Shalem fort: interpretation of the results of geophysical prospection (M. Heinzelmann; archive AI UoC).

the presence of stone structures. Overall, the geophysical results suggest a number of phases: a presumed Hellenistic/Early Roman settlement, two superimposed Roman forts, and an associated civilian settlement.

The magnetometry clearly revealed the external walls of a rectangular (140 x 210 m = 2.9 ha) fort of the 'playing-card' type. Set into it is a somewhat smaller (130 x 170 m = 2.2 ha) enclosure. The longitudinal axes of the two superimposed enclosures run E–W. The ramparts of the larger fort exhibit the characteristic rounded corners typical of forts and camps of the Early and High Empire, of which numerous examples exist, not least in the East.¹⁸ There is no evidence for towers. The N gate (*porta principalis sinistra*) can be detected in the external N wall of the larger camp. The internal structures visible in the magnetometry lie on the longitudinal axis of the larger fort. Subject to confirmation by excavation, it is surmised that the smaller rampart represents an earlier fort which was built over.

The essential features of the internal structure of the larger fort can be reconstructed on the basis of the magnetometry. It was divided by the N–S *via principalis* into a *praetentura* 65 m wide at the east and a *retentura* 135 m wide at the west. In the E sector, the *via praetoria* (6 m wide) follows the main axis to the centrally located *principia*. Its line continues on the rear of the *principia* as the *via decumana*. Various intersecting roads subdivide the area within the fort. The *principia* is recognisable in the magnetometry as a block of 41 x 41 m arranged around a central courtyard. Its W side is considerably wider (c.12 m); the central room, which projects beyond the W wall with an apse on the longitudinal axis, may be identified as the shrine of the standards (*sacellum* or *aedes*). South of the *principia* is a complex made up of small rooms which might have served as the commander's residence (*praetorium*). Farther south, separated by a road, is the bath building that was partly excavated by G. Foerster in the 1970s. Other structures are apparent elsewhere within the fort. For example, features typical of barracks can be reconstructed in the vicinity of the *praetentura*. At the SW corner of the outer perimeter wall the magnetometry revealed the lines of walls 3–4 m thick that create a nearly rectangular shape with possibly a tower in the SE corner, but excavation is required to confirm the nature and date of this structure.

Outside the walls of the fort lie a variety of structures which may belong to different phases. For example, the orientation of walls belonging to a rectangular structure near the fort's SW corner deviates considerably from the alignment of the two forts. Possibly they are on the southern outskirts of a Hellenistic/Early Roman settlement the nucleus of which may have lain in the vicinity of the 'Ein Avraham spring. Some 70 m north of the fort is visible an E–W road with structures set at right angles to it on both sides; on the same alignment as the forts, these may be part of a civilian settlement (*vicus*) contemporary with them.

Preliminary results of the new excavations

In 2017 and 2019, two brief excavation seasons were conducted with the hope of verifying the geophysical observations and better understanding the circumstances of the Roman presence at the site, the structures and chronology. Within the *principia* (Area A), work focused on the central western room, the supposed shrine of the standards. Further probes focused on the site of the N gate (Area B) and on one of the barracks along the *via*

18 S. Gregory, *Roman military architecture on the eastern frontier*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam 1995) 59–60.



Fig. 4 (above left). Tel Shalem area A: aerial view.



Fig. 6 (above right). Area A: aerial view of the mosaic floor (archive AI UoC).

Fig. 7 (right). Area A: detail of mosaic floor with building inscription close to the entrance (archive AI UoC).



praetoria on the E side (Area D). The 1970s trench in the southern bath building was also partly re-opened for further study and documentation. Outside the camp, a trench was opened on top of a small rise northwest of Tel Shalem (Area C) where a few architectural elements had been identified.

We will focus here on the results of the main excavation within the *principia* (Area A). A trench of c.270 m² investigated the supposed *aedes* or *sacellum*, which was completely uncovered, along with parts of the two adjoining rooms, the area in front, and a segment of street west of the building (fig. 4 in colour). All the remains, which were preserved to a height of c.0.8-1.0 m, were covered by an occupation layer dating to the Mamluk period. The *aedes* exhibits at least 3, possibly 4, phases of construction (figs. 5-6 in colour). In the **first phase**, this unit may have been a rectangular hall without an apse, the only visible remains being two wall stumps constructed of roughly-cut limestone rubble bound together by adobe mortar.

The **second phase**, a thorough restructuring, left little of the earlier phase and is equivalent to an almost completely new construction, with only a few parts of the older walls being incorporated. The façade of the *aedes* and its side walls were renewed, while a semi-circular apse was added on the W side occupying the full width of hall. The walls, covered in white plaster, now have a width of c.1.0 m, the core of *opus caementicium* faced with smaller limestone blocks. The compact mortar, which has a dark greyish colour, contains a large amount of ashes. This wall ends at a height of c.0.40 m above floor level, at a level that served as the base for a mudbrick superstructure (the N wall still preserves a few bricks *in situ*). In the centre of the apse, on its axis, a small round niche, facing inwards, had been inserted. This niche was evidently intended for the unit's standard (*signum*), as is proven by the dedicatory inscription of the next period (see below). The E façade wall is largely destroyed but from the remains preserved it can be seen that it had a door 2 m wide in the centre, to which at least two steps originally led up from the east. The exterior of the façade had a strongly protruding cap moulding at a height of c.60 cm, resembling that of a podium temple. Due to this difference in height, the floor level inside was c.0.6 m higher than that of the area in front of the *aedes*. The white stucco floor, still well preserved, lies beneath a later mosaic pavement. Currently visible only in front of the niche and in a few places where the columns are missing, it imitates rectangular stone pavers.

In the **third phase**, the interior of the room was completely remodelled although its main structure was not changed. Two sets of columns were placed directly on the older stucco floor. One row of columns was set along the outer walls. Built of re-used circular drums and without bases, they were attached to the walls with a thick white mortar, creating the impression of engaged columns. A second row of freestanding columns was set up in the interior, parallel to the main axis of the *aedes* so that it was now divided into a central nave and two aisles. Although the outer and inner columns correspond to each other, it is unclear whether they were actually erected at the same moment. It is possible that only the inner row existed initially. The inner columns are somewhat narrower and, unlike the outer ones, have their own bases. It is also possible that the inner set of columns had already been erected in the second phase. Fragments of stucco mouldings, some with traces of colour, found in the débris point to a rich decoration. It is unclear if this decoration was limited to an *aedicula* in front of the niche or to a part of an overall decoration. Numerous glass panes attest to the presence of windows in the upper part of the walls.

The central nave was occupied by an elaborate polychromic mosaic (figs. 5 and 7 in colour). The central part took the form of a large rectangle (3.15 x 6.80 m) with elaborate



Fig. 8. Area A: detail of mosaic floor with dedicatory inscription to the Capricorn (archive AI UoC).

motifs. It was subdivided into three smaller rectangles. The one closest to the main entrance contains in the centre a *tabula ansata* (0.8 x 1.15 m) with a Latin inscription (fig. 7 in colour; all inscriptions are studied and translated in the next contribution):

Aedem | Alae VII Phryg(um) | Pomponius Sanctianus praef(ectus) | eq(uitum) de novo refecit

The inscription was surrounded by various geometric designs into which four smaller inscriptions were integrated (see further below):

Ala (left) Felix (top) VII (right) Phryg(um) (bottom).

Farther to the west, the two other rectangles with geometric designs fill the centre of the floor: the central one contains a large circular element set into a rectangular frame with stylized *peltae* in its corners; the last one has interlaced geometric motifs.

Set directly in front of the small niche in the W part of the mosaic, separate from the large rectangle, is another Latin inscription in the form of a *tabula ansata* (0.7 x 1.6 m) (fig. 8 in colour):

Capricorno alae | VII Phrygum Pom | ponius Sanctia | nus, praef(ectus) eq(uitum) | de novo refecit

Both mosaic inscriptions record the same Pomponius Sanctianus, prefect of the 7th Phrygian equestrian unit. But while in the first he appears as the person responsible for the reconstruction of the *aedes*, in the second he is recorded with a dedication to the *Capricornus* of the *ala VII Phrygum*, probably a standard representing the particular *numen* of that unit.¹⁹ Both inscriptions show a change in which the word *novo* replaced an earlier word (see A. Ecker, following). In view of the space available and the size of the letters of the remaining inscriptions, it is likely that both inscriptions originally contained the word *suo*.

19 See A. von Domaszewski, *Die Fahnen im römischen Heer* (Vienna 1885); on the *signa* of cavalry units, see K. Töpfer, *Signa militaria. Die römischen Feldzeichen in der Republik und im Prinzipat* (RGZM Monog. 91; Mainz 2011) 148-53.



Fig. 9. Area A: statue pedestals in front of the *aedes* (archive AI UoC).



Fig. 10. Area A: marble inscription in front of one of the pedestals, during excavation (archive AI UoC).

In most *principia*, the space in front of the *aedes* is designed in the form of a portico or transverse *basilica*. In our case, neither the geophysical surveys nor the excavations provided a clear answer. Only a large white beaten floor of crushed limestone was uncovered

extending over a distance of *c.* 8 m to the east, where it broke off in a relatively straight edge. There were no clear indications as to how this space was designed architecturally.

Directly in front of the *aedes*, the remains of 4 statue pedestals, added in a secondary phase, were found on the floor (fig. 9). To judge by the differences in design and size, it can be assumed that the two outer ones (1.20 x 1.10 m) were erected first, then some time later the two inner ones (1.15 x 0.95 m). Installed in two phases, they created a symmetrical framing of the entrance to the *aedes*. In front of the second pedestal from the south, a broken but almost complete marble Latin inscription (0.68 x 1.06 m) was found. Originally it had apparently been set into the front of that pedestal (fig. 10; fig. 11 in colour):

Imp(eratori) Ca[esari] M(arco) | Aure[lio Anton]ino | Augus[to, Imp(eratoris) C]aesa[ris]
L(ucii) S[eptimi] Severi | Pii Per[thin]acis Aug(usti) | filio, <<[Ar]abico, Adia|benico,
Par(thico), Brittan>>ico | <[ma]ximo>> Ala VII Phryg(um) | [s]ub Attidio Praetex|tato legato
augg(ustorum) | pr(o) pr(aetore), curante | Q(uinto) Pomponio Sancti|ano praef(ecto)
eq(uitum).

It records the dedication of a statue to Caracalla by the *Ala VII Phrygum* by the charge of the same *praefectus equitum* (Pomponius Sanctianus) who remodeled the interior of the *aedes*. The statue with the inscription was erected under the governorship of Attidius Praetextatus, who was previously known only as a consular. Thanks to the particular formulations of the imperial titles, the date can be narrowed down to the part of Septimius Severus's reign when Caracalla was already Caesar, thus to A.D. 197-209. It may be assumed that the second base set symmetrically on the N side of the entrance carried a statue of Septimius Severus. We may assume that the somewhat larger and earlier bases on the outside carried statues of other emperors. It is speculation that the statue of Hadrian found nearby in 1975 originally stood here.

The two neighbouring rooms of the *aedes* have been only partially excavated (figs. 4 and 9). The wall of the room to the south of the shrine of the standards was lined with a large stone bench, which shows that this room served a prominent rôle within the *principia*. Possibly it was used as a *tabularium* or *aerarium*. The room north of the shrine of the standards is barely excavated but its entrance was framed by large columns, apparently part of an *aedicula*-like framing of the door, which would indicate that this room too had a prominent function.

Outside the *principia* on its W side we found several superimposed *viae glareatae* of a N-S street, the gravel pavements of which were still fully intact (fig. 4). While the uppermost *viae glareata* was attached to the apse and apparently was contemporary with the redesign of the *principia* during its second phase, at least two street layers below were cut by walls of the *principia*'s first phase. Two drains found immediately west of the possible *tabularium/aerarium* also went out of use when the first phase of the *principia* was constructed. Apparently these structures and street surfaces belong to a significantly earlier phase, most probably to the older of the two military camps. According to the preliminary evaluation of the pottery, the earliest datable group of finds in this stratigraphic sequence dates back to the late 1st or early 2nd c. A.D. In another deep sondage *c.* 5.5 m west of the shrine of the standards, the remains of an earlier construction phase were found below the vestibule's white floor of crushed limestone (fig. 4). Here a N-S wall had a base of limestone rubble and an upper part of mudbrick and local travertine. It is on the same orientation as the *principia* but, to judge by the low level of its foundations and its stratigraphic position, must have been destroyed before the latter's construction. Like the early structures on the W side of the *principia*, it probably belongs to the older of the two military camps. This wall rests on a layer with heavy inclusions of ash and ceramic material, possibly a levelling

placed directly on the rock. Analysis of the pottery from contexts associated with the early wall did not provide any direct dating, but material from the underlying layer dates back to the Late Hellenistic/Early Roman period. This may constitute evidence of a civilian settlement that preceded the two military camps.

Thus far we do not have good dating evidence for the abandonment of the later camp since the pottery is not obviously datable or diagnostic and C¹⁴-analyses are still pending. The associated layers suggest that the military camp was abandoned not as a result of a destruction but as part of an orderly retreat. The fort seems to have been purposefully cleared and the structures intentionally levelled. As a result, all the rooms were filled with a compact layer made up of fragments of roof-tiles, wall-plaster and stucco, but with no datable finds and almost no pottery. Many of the roof-tiles bear stamps of three different types (see the following contribution). They confirm that the 7th Phrygian cavalry unit was involved in the construction of the second fort and its *principia*. They also document another previously unknown prefect, by the name of Antius Antoninus.²⁰

To summarize, the excavations carried out so far in Area A have provided evidence of three main phases:

1) indirect evidence for an early settlement from the Late Hellenistic/Early Roman period was found in a debris layer directly over bedrock;

2) several remains of buildings and street horizons of a first military camp, possibly from the late 1st or early 2nd c.; and

3) extensive remains of the *principia* of a subsequent, larger fort. This *principia* in turn presents three major phases;

a) Initially, the *aedes* existed as a simple rectangular hall.

b) In a second phase, the *principia* was thoroughly restructured and the *aedes* was built anew having a large apse with a niche in its centre for the shrine of the standards, and the room received an elaborate stucco floor. Since in this phase there were massive changes to the structure of the building, there may well have been alterations to the roof, and the stamped tiles of the prefect Antius Antoninus could possibly belong to this renovation. The dating of the two earlier phases remain open (see below). Possibly one of the phases was connected with Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) whose bronze statue found nearby may originally perhaps have been set up on one of the two earlier pedestals in front of the *aedes*.

c) In a third phase, through the care of the prefect Pomponius Sanctianus, the interior of the *aedes* was elaborately redesigned with the installation of a set of engaged columns and extensive redecoration, including an elaborate mosaic floor. Statues of Caracalla and probably of Septimius Severus were erected in front of the entrance wall, next to existing older statues. This latest phase of the *principia* can be securely dated to between the years 197 and 209 from the marble inscription. The last two phases can also be attributed to the *ala VII Phrygum*, which is known from a relatively large number of documents. There are some clues that the *ala* may have been transferred to Syria-Palestine from Asia Minor.²¹ It was already in Judaea before the Bar Kochba War. The latest secure evidence thus far had come from 4 military diplomas of the year A.D. 160.²² Now it is clear that it stayed in Tel Shalem at least until the Severan period.

20 We thank W. Ameling and W. Eck for kindly discussing this issue.

21 D. Kennedy, "Ala Phrygum and Ala VII Phrygum," *ZPE* 118 (1997) 300-4; M. Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt: the Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE* (Leiden 2016) 314.

22 Kennedy *ibid.* 302, Table 2 no. 14.

Ultimately, the later camp was purposely abandoned and its *principia* systematically levelled. If the identification of the second bronze portrait as Gordian III is correct, this might have happened around the middle of the 3rd c. or a little later.

The older, smaller (130 x 170 m) fort is known thus far only through geophysical prospection and a few structural remains which can be dated to the late 1st or early 2nd c. A.D. We hope that future excavations will determine the circumstances of the construction of the early fort, and by which unit, as well as the reasons for its abandonment. In view of the *vexillatio* inscription found, it may have been used by a unit of *legio VI Ferrata* stationed at Legio. Probably in the Hadrianic period the older fort was built over by a larger one (140 x 210 m), which would see use for more than a century by the 7th Phrygian cavalry unit. The reasons for a transition to a larger fort are unclear but a connection with the Bar Kokhba revolt cannot be ruled out. The design of the newer auxiliary fort is unusually elaborate. In its final phase, its *aedes* is among the most ornate of its kind, both architecturally and decoratively.²³ The elaborate nature of the finds highlights the importance of this fort. The monumental arch nearby gives further expression to the importance of the site, but it remains to be clarified exactly where, when, and by whom that “triumphal arch” was built.²⁴

The project was initiated by Benjamin Arubas (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) and David Mevorah (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem). It is jointly directed by them and by Michael Heinzelmann (University of Cologne) and J. Andrew Overman (Macalester College). Other team members are: Michael Osband and Naama Brosh (ceramicists), Eckhard Deschler-Erb (for small finds and military equipment) and Yaniv Shauer (numismatist). The first campaign of excavation took place on March 12-24, 2017, the second on March 14-April 5, 2019. Further participants were: M. Angenendt, D. Brunner, S. Braun, S. Knura, E. Krewer, Sh. Moshfegh Nia, L. Niehues, F. Nietschke, A. Schröder, J. Steffestun, D. Wozniok, K. Zerzeropoulos, H. Goldfus and O. Ron, along with students from Macalester College and Bar Ilan University and numerous volunteers. Our particular thanks are extended to the members of Kibbutz Tirat Zvi for their logistical support. The mosaic floor, plaster and other structures were treated by restorers from the conservation laboratories of the Israel Museum (A. Vainer, Sh. Tager, A. Bartfeld, V. Uziel, A. Kedem, C. Green) and by restorers from Macalester College (E. Gibbs, K. Coia and M. Kreher). The trench is now completely backfilled. This article was written immediately following the second excavation season with the goal of quickly sharing the new discoveries with colleagues. The interpretations presented are therefore our initial thoughts and subject to change following a thorough analysis of the data.

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23 Cf. Johnson (supra n.13) 123-52; R. Fellmann, *Principia – Stabsgebäude* (Aalen 1983).

24 Eck and Foerster (supra n.14) 297-313; Eck (supra n. 15) 87-88.

(ii) Interim report on the inscriptions from the *aedes* of the fort near Tel Shalem

Avner Ecker, Benjamin Arubas, Michael Heinzelmann
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Ever since the discovery of a building inscription of a *vexillatio* of the *legio VI Ferrata* near Tel Shalem,¹ it was clear that the area was a locus of Roman military activity. In the following years the vicinity of the Tel yielded the inscription of a Hadrianic arch whose letter-size is surpassed only by the lettering on the Pantheon and the Arch of Titus in Rome.² Most recently, the headquarters complex of the fort (*principia*), and in particular the regimental shrine (*aedes* or *sacellum*), have been uncovered (see above). Within and in front of the *aedes* were found three inscriptions:³ a dedicatory inscription to Caracalla on a statue base in front of the building (no. 1), and two mosaic inscriptions inside, one at the entrance to the nave (no. 2), the other at its far end (no. 3). The fills covering the building produced stamped roof-tiles bearing three different formulae. The new inscriptions prove that the building was the *aedes* of the *Ala VII Phrygum*. The earliest attestation of its presence in *Syria Palaestina* is inferred from a military diploma of A.D. 139⁴ found at Apheka, not far from Tel Shalem. Assuming that the *Ala Phrygum*, attested without the number VII in the province of *Syria* up to A.D. 88,⁵ is the same unit as the *Ala VII Phrygum* of our inscriptions, its transfer to *Iudaea* is most likely to be associated with the suppression of the Bar Kokhba Revolt.⁶ The inscriptions published here provide the latest known date for its stay in *Syria Palaestina*, some 40 years after the latest date so far attested in military diplomas.⁷

1. Base of a statue dedicated to Caracalla (see figs. 10-11)

Four statue bases were discovered at the entrance to the hall. An inscribed marble slab (107 cm high, 70 cm wide, depth varying from 3.8 to 6 cm) broken into 14 pieces was found

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- 1 N. Tsori, "An inscription of the Legio VI Ferrata from the northern Jordan Valley," *IEJ* 21 (1971) 53-54.
 - 2 W. Eck and G. Foerster, "Ein Triumphbogen für Hadrian im Tal von Beth Shean bei Tel Shalem," *JRA* 12 (1999) 294-313; *AE* 1999, 1688.
 - 3 Two other small fragments, each with no more than 3 letters inscribed in Latin on marble, are not treated in this interim report.
 - 4 *CIL* XVI 87.
 - 5 Following D. Kennedy, "Ala Phrygum and Ala VII Phrygum," *ZPE* 118 (1997) 300-4; P. Holder, "Two commanders of Ala Phrygum," *ZPE* 140 (2002) 287-95. See mentions of the *Ala Phrygum* in military diplomas: H. M. Cotton and W. Eck, "The impact of the Bar Kokhba revolt on Rome: another military diploma from AD 160 from Syria Palaestina," *Michmanim* 23 (2011) 7-22; W. Eck and A. Pangerl, "Eine Konstitution für das Heer von Syria Palaestina aus der Mitte der antoninischen Herrschaftszeit mit einem Auxiliarpräfekten Cn. Domitius Corbulo," *SCI* 35 (2016) 85-95, especially 93. For the creation of *auxilia* from Asia Minor, see J. Bennett, "The regular Roman auxiliary regiments formed from the provinces of Asia Minor," *Anatolica* 37 (2011) 251-74.
 - 6 See W. Eck, "The Bar Kokhba revolt: the Roman point of view," *JRS* 89 (1999) 76-89; id., *Rom und Iudaea* (Tübingen 2007) 125.
 - 7 The latest diplomata of soldiers in *ala VII Phrygum*, three in all, date to A.D. 160; see Eck and Pangerl, *SCI* (supra n.5) 93. They consist of: *RMD* VI 612; *RMD* III 173; *AE* 2005. 1730 = *RMD* VI 613; *Michmanim* 2011 (supra n.5) 7ff. = *AE* 2011. 1810. The *cohors quarta Phrygum* mentioned at *Not. Dig. Or.* XXXVII as a unit in *Palaestina* cannot be considered the same unit.

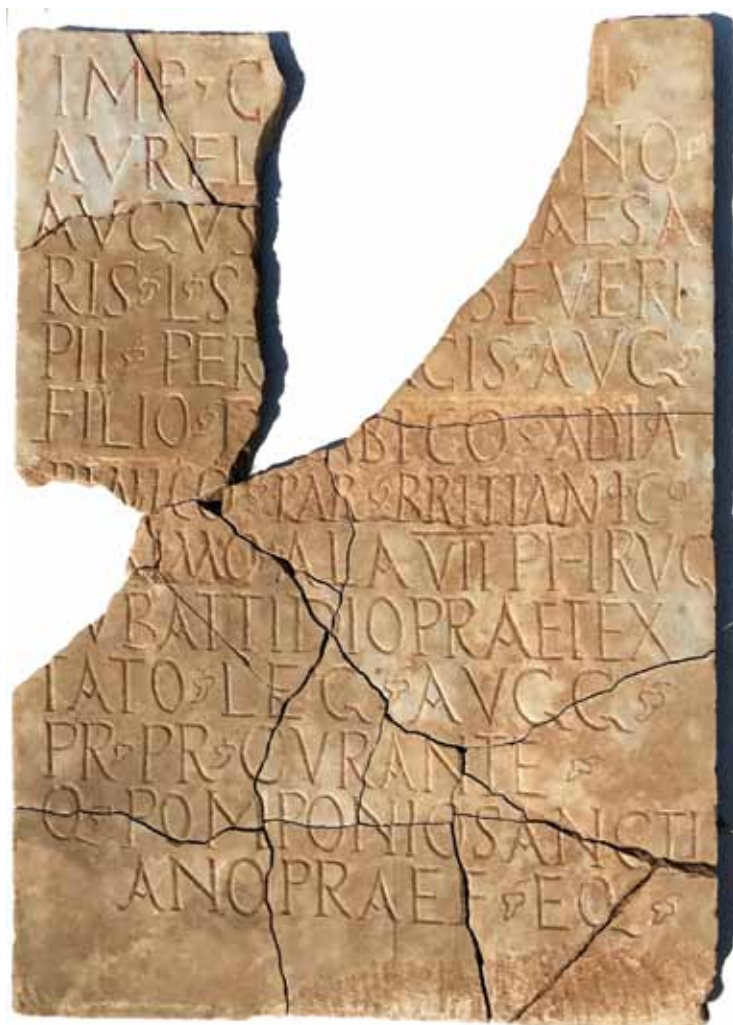


Fig. 11. Tel Shalem area
A: marble inscription re-
assembled (archive AI
UoC).

lying in front of the second base from the left. It had been fitted with a frame which left white lines of plaster on its base and top. With its frame the slab was fitted into a groove at the foot of the pedestal to which it was attached. The almost-complete inscription contains 13 lines with letters 6-7 cm high. Traces of red paint are discernible inside the incised letters. Lines 6-8 have a deliberate erasure, over which a second text was written in letters of about the same height (l.6: 7 cm; l.7: 5.5 cm; l.8: 6 cm).

IMP ♣ CA[ESARI]M ♣
 AVRE[LIO ANTON]INO ♣
 AVGV[S]TO ♣ IMP ♣ C]AESARIS ♣ L ♣ S[EPTIMI]I ♣ SEVERI ♣
 5 PII ♣ PER[THIN]ACIS ♣ AVG ♣
 FILIO ♣ <<[AR]ABICO ♣ ADI>>A
 <<BENICO ♣ PAR ♣ BRITTAN>>ICO
 <<[MA]XIMO>> ♣⁸ ALA VII PHRVG
 [S]VB ATTIDIO PRAETEX
 10 TATO ♣ LEG ♣ AVGG ♣
 PR ♣ PR ♣ CVRANTE ♣
 Q ♣ POMPONIO ♣ SANCTI
 ANOPRAEF ♣ EQ

Imp(eratori) Ca[esari] M(arco) | Aure[lio Anton]ino | Augus[to, Imp(eratoris) C]aesari
 L(ucii) S[eptimi]i Severi | Pii Per[thin]acis Aug(usti) | filio, <<[Ar]abico, Adia|benico,
 Par(thico), Brittan>>ico | <[ma]ximo>> Ala VII Phryg(um) | [s]ub Attidio Praetex|tato legato
 augg(ustorum) | pr(o) pr(aetore), curante | Q(uito) Pomponio Sancti|ano praef(ecto)
 eq(uitum).

8 Following the Leiden sigla system, <<abc>> means letters written in the erasure.

To the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, great victor over the Arabs, the Adiabenes, the Parthians, (and) the Britons, son of the Emperor Caesar Lucius Septimius Severus Pius Perthinax Augustus, the 7th Ala of the Phrygians (dedicated this statue) under Attidius Praetextatus, governor of the Augusti with the rank of propraetor, Quintus Pomponius Sanctianus, commander of the cavalry, was in charge (of the work).

Since the emperor Caracalla is mentioned first and in the dative, the inscription stood beneath a statue of him. His father is mentioned as a living Augustus; the abbreviation AVGG (l.10) in most cases under the Severans indicates a dual reign⁹ (the triple reign of Severus, Caracalla and Geta from the end of A.D. 209 to December 211 was usually marked instead with the abbreviation AVGGG¹⁰). As Septimius Severus and Caracalla reigned together from the autumn of 197 to September/October 209, this should be the date range for our inscription.¹¹ In December 211, Caracalla murdered his younger brother Geta and ordered his *damnatio memoriae* (Caracalla also ordered Plautilla's *damnatio memoriae* after her murder in February 211, but her name would have appeared in the inscription only if the entire family were mentioned). The name and titulature of Geta should be those erased in ll. 6-8. A close inspection of the erasure reveals the remains of an apex and hasta of the letter P at the beginning of the erased portion in l.6, confirming that the abbreviated *praenomen* Publius appeared at that point. As in many other inscriptions, the titles of Caracalla or other members of the imperial family were then written over the erasure.¹² The number of erased letters in each line is: c.12 in l.6, c.17 in l.7, and 5-6 in l.8. Letters A and C at the ends of ll. 6 and 7 are written over ivy-leaves of the text that was erased. The erased text should have read:

[[P ♣ SEPTIMII ♣ GETAE]] ♣
 [[NOBILISSIMI CAESARIS]] ♣
 [[FRATRI]] ♣

Thus, the full text of the inscription before the erasure should have been:

Imp(eratori) Ca[esari] M(arco) | Aure[lio Anton]ino | Augus[to, Imp(eratoris) C]aesar[is L(ucii) S]eptimi[i] Severi | Pii Per[thin]iacis Aug(usti) | filio, [[P(ubl]ii) Septimii Getae]] | [[Nobilissimi Caesaris]] | [[fratri]], Ala VII Phryg(um) | [s]ub Attidio Praetextato legato augg(ustorum) | pr(o)pr(aetore), curante | Q(uinto) Pomponio Sanctiano praef(ecto) eq(uitum).

To the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, son of the the Emperor Caesar Lucius Septimius Severus Pius Perthinax Augustus, brother of Publius Septimius Geta, the noblest Caesar, the 7th *ala* of the Phrygians (dedicated this statue) under Attidius Praetextatus the governor of the Augusti with the rank of propraetor, Quintus Pomponius Sanctianus commander of the cavalry being in charge (of the work).

Written over the erasure (possibly quite shortly after the erasure) were victory titles of Caracalla, all ones he had received no later than A.D. 211. In 213, Caracalla also gained the title *Germanicus*. Since all the titles except for *Parthico* are completely spelled out, it seems that the stone-cutter went to great lengths to fill up the space, and did so before 213.

9 See C. Bruun and J. Edmondson (edd.), *The Oxford handbook of Roman epigraphy* (Oxford 2014) 684 and 788.

10 A search in the Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby for "Geta" between the years 209 and 211 renders 29 results: there is no instance of the use of the abbreviation AVGG to mark the triple reign; in 7 instances there is use of the abbreviation AVGGG. A search for "legato AVGG" and not "legato AVGGG" and then a search for the name "Geta" within the results gave 27 relevant instances, all clearly relating to dual reigns.

11 All dates here are based on D. Kienast, W. Eck and M. Heil, *Römische Kaisertabelle: Grundzüge einer römischen Kaiserchronologie* (6th edn., Trier 2014) 149-61.

12 A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus, the African emperor* (Londo 1988) 189 and n.3 on 253.

Attidius Praetextatus is a hitherto-unknown governor of *Syria-Palaestina*; he is also absent from the consular *fasti*.¹³ He was probably a suffect consul at some point in the reign of Septimius Severus or the latter's joint reign with Caracalla. A man of the same name is mentioned, possibly as the son or grandson of a consular, in an inscription from Althiburos (*Africa Proconsularis*).¹⁴ Due to the rarity of the name and the senatorial rank, our Attidius Praetextatus may be the same person as the unnamed African consular or his son/grandson.

Quintus Pomponius Sanctianus appears in this inscription and in two others (see below). Commander of a cavalry unit and a member of the equestrian order, he is otherwise unknown. Sanctianus is a previously unattested *cognomen* in inscriptions from *Syria Palaestina* and its vicinity; relatively rare, it is known mainly in parts of N Gaul/Germany and in central Anatolia.¹⁵

The presence of a statue of Caracalla during his joint reign with his father indicates also a statue of Septimius Severus, which probably stood on the pedestal to the right of Caracalla's, since the two statue bases are identical (see preceding article).

2. Mosaic inscription in the nave of the *aedes* (see fig. 7 above)

Those entering the nave of the *aedes* immediately encountered the inscription in the polychrome mosaic. The inscription has 5 lines of letters (ll. 1-2: 10 cm high; ll. 3-5: 9 cm high) in red tesserae (1 cm³) on a white background within a *tabula ansata* (74 cm wide, 73 cm high) of blue tesserae. At all four corners the *tabula* is surrounded by cross-like motifs decorated with a guilloche pattern and at top and bottom with two floral decorations within a frame shaped like a coat-of-arms.

♣ AEDEM ♣ *vacat*
ALAE VII PHRVG
POMPONIVSSAN
CTIANVSPRAEF
EQDENOVOREFECIT

Aedem | Alae VII Phryg(um) | Pomponius Sanctianus praef(ectus) | eq(uitum) de novo refecit.

Pomponius Sanctianus commander of the cavalry renovated anew the sanctuary of the 7th *ala* of the Phrygians.

CIT in l.5 are ligatured, the I is set within the C, and the T is written with a short upper cross-bar and stretched between the apices of the C.

The letters NOVO are in different coloured (blue) tesserae and occupy the space of 3 letters (16.5 cm). It is apparent that they were an emendation to the mosaic (see discussion below).

The frame of the inscription is surrounded by 4 smaller oblong frames (one on top, one on the bottom [both 28 cm high and 50 cm wide], and two on the sides [20 cm high, 25 cm wide]). Letter height: 12 cm.

13 P. Leunissen, *Konsuln und Konsulare in der Zeit von Commodus bis Severus Alexander* (Amsterdam 1989) 133-35.

14 *PIR*² A 1344, *CIL* VIII 1647 : [--] M(arci) f(iliae) co(n)s(ularis) Attidi Praetextatu[s et ..] / [... pii]ssimae ac sanctissimae [matri?..].

15 For attestations of the name, see H. Solin, "Analecta epigraphica CCXVI-CCXXII," *Arctos* 38 (2004) at 184. For Sanctii and Sanctiani, see T. Drew Bear and M. Christol, "De la notabilité locale à l'ordre sénatorial: les Flavonii d'Antioche de Pisidie," in S. Demougin and J. Scheid (edd.), *Colons et colonies dans le monde romain* (Rome 2012) 184-88.

Top frame: FELIX
 Side frames (left to right): ALA VII
 Bottom frame: PHRVG

(Taken together) Felix || Ala || VII || Phryg(um)

The fortunate 7th ala of the Phrygians

The whole inscription is a building inscription for the shrine (*aedes*) of the *ala* housing its standards. The order of the reading suggested here preserves the proper order of the name of a military unit (unit type—number—appellation). On the one hand, due to its position at the beginning of the text *Felix* hints that it should be taken as an attribute rather than as an official epithet.¹⁶ Nowhere else is *ala VII Phrygum* attested with such an epithet, but this is its latest known attestation. On the other hand, considerations of symmetry could have driven the artist to choose this composition, in which case *Felix*, which by this time had already been in use in the army as an epithet (e.g., *Cohors III Gallorum Felix*¹⁷), could have been one of its official titles. Thus the reading Ala || VII || Phryg(um) || Felix cannot be entirely excluded.

3. Mosaic inscription, *tabula ansata* (see fig. 8 above)

The next mosaic inscription seen as one proceeds farther along the nave is a dedication of a statue or altar to the Capricorn, the zodiacal sign that decorated the unit's standard. Five lines are set within a *tabula ansata* (70 cm high, 160 cm wide) composed of orange tesserae with a red contour line in the inner side. The letters (10-11 cm high) are in red tesserae.

CAPRICORNO ALAE
 VII PHRVGVM POM
 PONIVSSANCTIA
 NVSPRAEFEQ ♣
 DENOVOREFECIT ♣

Capricorno alae | VII Phrygvm Pom | ponius Sanctia | nus, praef(ectus) eq(uitum) | de novo refecit

To the Capricorn of ala VII of the Phrygians, Pomponius Sanctianus, commander of the cavalry, has restored (the shrine?) anew.

The Capricornus, a sign of the Zodiac, refers to the emblem which appeared on the standards of *ala VII* of the Phrygians. The standard was probably a *vexillum* which probably bore this sign.¹⁸

16 *Contra* the editors of *RIB* 1337: [f]elix ala II Astor(um), and *RIB* 1466: felix ala I Asto(rum), see the remarks of M. P. Speidel, "Felix legio vestra. A building inscription from Romula-Malva," *ZPE* 30 (1978) 121.

17 W. Eck and A. Pangerl, "Weitere Militärdiplome für die mauretanischen Provinzen," *ZPE* 162 (2007) 242-43, diploma II.1 (October 26, A.D. 153).

18 See the seminal studies by A. von Domaszewski, "Die Thierbilder der Signa," *Archäologisch-epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Österreich-Ungarn* 15.2 (1892) 182-93; id., "Zu den Thierbildern der Signa," *ibid.* 17.1 (1894) 34. For representations of Capricorn, see Capricorne s.v. Zodiacus in *LIMC*; H. G. Gundel, *Zodiakos. Tierkreisbilder im Altertum: kosmische Bezüge und Jenseitsvorstellungen im antiken Alltagsleben* (Darmstadt 1992) nos. 265-68. For the meaning of this zodiacal sign in imperial propaganda, especially with respect to the good fortune of emperors, see T. Barton, "Augustus and capricorn: astrological polyvalency and imperial rhetoric," *JRS* 85 (1995) 33-51; B. Weissner, "Roman imperial imagery of time and cosmos," in J. Evans (ed.), *Time and cosmos in Greco-Roman antiquity* (Princeton, NJ 2016) 177.

As is common in Latin dedications, the object of the verb *refecit*, that which Sanctianus renovated for Capricorn, is not mentioned, since this was obvious to all when the building was complete. Three options exist:

- (i) that Sanctianus re-made or fixed a ruined statue of Capricorn. Normally one does not renovate a statue, but an instance does exist;¹⁹
- (ii) that Sanctianus renovated an altar placed at the end of the hall, or an entire *aedicula* or other decorative arrangement around the locus of the unit's ensign;
- (iii) taking the first mosaic inscription with the second, to suppose that Sanctianus adds information here by saying that he renovated the entire *aedes* for the sake of the regimental insignia.

The letters NOVO are a later addition to the inscription. They are set in lighter red tesserae and are narrower than the rest of the letters. The letters are condensed within the typical width (c.30 cm) given to 3 letters in the last 2 lines (the letters of ll. 1-2 are more widely spaced). The insertion of NOVO after the DE creates a hendiadys, for *de novo* and *refecit* express the same idea. This hendiadys is attested in Latin epigraphy at Vesontio and Fanum with *restituit* and *refecit* which retain their original connotation of 'restored/rebuilt'.²⁰ Since *de novo refecit* (or rather *a novo*) is an attested hendiadys, it may well have been in our inscription all along. Yet the fact that this insertion occurred in both inscriptions rules out the possibility that the letters NOVO are merely a poorly executed repair without a change to the original text. Thus, the first version of the text must have been different — the letters replacing an erased word. One cannot prove which word was erased, but it can be suggested, both because these four letters occupy the space of three and because of the general contents of the inscription, that the letters NOVO could have replaced the letters SVO (i.e., *de suo refecit*). If so, then it is tempting to suggest that some form of censorship imposed by oneself or from above is involved. Was the *praefectus* chided for having infringed a rule of decorum, if such existed, by writing *de suo*? But in fact there is no proof for the existence of such rules: e.g., a centurion boasts in an inscription in the *schola centurionum* in the *praetorium* at Caesarea that he dedicated a statue *s(ua) p(ecunia)*;²¹ or, again, in A.D. 198 a *signifer* in the camp of *legio III Augusta* at Lambaesis paid from his own pocket for a statue of the *genius legionis*, recording it with the common phrase *de suo posuit*.²² Perhaps the simplest explanation for the erasure of the text — provided that *de suo* was in fact written there — may be that Pomponius Sanctianus did *not* pay for the renovation out of his own pocket, and this required the text to be amended. In the first inscription (see above), the prefect's rôle in the erection of the statue to Caracalla is defined by the word *curante*: Sanctianus oversaw the erection of the statue, but this in no way implies that he had paid for it. Be this as it may, a formulaic error may have led to the erasure in the mosaic inscription.

19 Veii, *CIL* XIII 0381: ... Cn(aeus) Caesius Athictus ... statuam ex ruina | templi Martis vexatam sua i<m>pensa | refecit et in publicum restituit.

20 Vesontio, *CIL* XIII 0537: Deo Mercurio Cisso|nio Dubitata Castula | natione Syria templum | et porticus vetustate | conla<p>sum denuo de suo | restituit. Fanum, *CIL* XI 6225: T(itus) Varius T(itus) f(ilius) Pol(lia) Rufinus | Geganius Facundus Vibius Marcellinus | equo publ(ico) quinquennal(icius) nomine suo et | T(itus) Vari Longi filii sui | balineum a L(ucio) Rufellio Severo p(rimo) p(ilo) tr(ibuno) factum | quod res publica a novo refecerat incendio ex maxima parte | consumptum operibus ampliatis pec(unia) sua restituit.

21 *CIIP* II 1275

22 *CIL* VIII 1647 = *CIL* VIII 18039; many other examples exist.



Fig. 12. Stamped roof-tile of type 1 (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem/Eli Posner).



Fig. 13. Stamped roof-tile of type 2, partial preservation (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem/Eli Posner.)



Fig. 14. Stamped roof-tile of type 2, partial preservation (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem/Eli Posner).



Fig. 15. Stamped roof-tile of type 3 (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem/Eli Posner).

Stamped roof-tiles and the commanders of *Ala VII Phrygum*

Some 50 fragments of stamped roof-tiles were collected in the area of the *aedes* and its forecourt. Several complete examples allow us to identify three stamp formulae. Since many more tiles were discovered in the latest season, further analysis may reveal more formulas, as well as variants.

Stamp type 1 (fig. 12 in colour)

Two lines of text in a rectangular frame (h. 6.7 cm, w. 12 cm), letters 1.9-2.5 cm high; impressions of wood fibers between letters; the A is without a cross bar, in l.1 the V is U-shaped, the G and V are ligatured.

ALA VII
FRVGV

Ala VII | Frygu(m) (*sic*)

Frygum instead of Phrygum is elsewhere attested,²³ but it is still rather remarkable that the creator of the stamp did not use the common spelling of his own unit's name.

Stamp type 2 (figs. 13-14 in colour)

Four lines of text within a rectangular frame (h. 10 cm, w. 13 cm), letters 1.0-1.8 cm high. The letter-forms are as above; in l.1 the G is cursive, in ll. 2-3 the Ns are written in a retrograde order, in l.4 the CT are in ligature.

ALAEVIIFRG
PERANTIVM
ANTONINVM
PREFECTVM

Alae VII Fr(y)g(um) | per Antium | Antoninum | pr(a)efectum

(Product of) the *Ala VII Frygum*, by (supervision) of Antius Antoninus, the prefect.

Stamp type 3 (fig. 15 above in colour)

Four lines of text within a rectangular frame (h. 9 cm, w. 13 cm), letters 1.0-1.8 cm high; the Ns are written in a retrograde order.

ALVIIFR
PERANTIO
ANTONINO
PRE *vacat* EQ

Al(ae) VII Fr(ygum) | per Antio | Antonino (*sic*) | pr(a)e(fecto) eq(uitum)

(Product of) the *Ala VII Frygum*, under Antius Antoninus, prefect of the cavalry.

The use of the ablative case after *per* is a well-known error; perhaps the writer confused *per* with *ab*, or had in mind an ablative of means.²⁴

Tiles produced by cavalry units are rare, although the second instance of its occurrence in Israel: thus stamps of the *Ala I Antiana* have been discovered at Kh. 'Arâk Hâla north of Beth Guvrin, where the evidence for the presence of a Roman fort is quite plausible.²⁵ Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these stamp impressions is the appearance on them of the name of another commander of *Ala VII*, Antius Antoninus.²⁶ Did Antius precede or

23 OLD *s.v.* Phrygia and Phrygius; *Not. Dig. Or.* XXXIV: *cohors quarta Frygium*.

24 OLD *s.v.* Per 15: ... per procuratore L(ucio) Val(erio) Lucretiano Matidio ... (*AE* 1907, p. 28, n.90; *AE* 1906, 0172). Many other instances are known: *TLL s.v.* Per, *pars altera* I.2.a.

25 B. Zissu and A. Ecker, "A Roman military fort north of Bet Guvrin/Eleutheropolis?," *ZPE* 188 (2014) 292-312.

26 For the *nomen gentile* Antium, see W. Schulze, *Zur Geschichte lateinischer Eigennamen* (Berlin 1966) 123 and 337.

succeed Sanctianus? The answer seems to lie in the stratigraphic phases of the building itself. One cannot rule out the possibility that Antius Antoninus refurbished the roof of the *aedes* at some point later than Sanctianus, which would add yet another phase to a structure with already three successive stages. Therefore, it would seem best to try and fit the renovation of the roof into one of the existing stages. Had Sanctianus renovated the roof, his name should have been mentioned on some of the tiles, but this is not the case. The preferable scenario is therefore that Antius Antoninus had overseen an earlier stage of the construction, having been the earlier of the two.

Epilogue

Tel Shalem has yielded an epigraphic bounty. The excavated structure is the *aedes alae VII Phrygum*, hence the fort of this auxiliary unit, whose emblem, the Capricorn, and two of its prefects, Antius Antoninus and Pomponius Sanctianus, have now become known to us. A new governor of *Palaestina* some time between A.D. 197 and 209, Attidius Praetextatus, has also been added to the provincial *Fasti*. At that time, Quintus Pomponius Sanctianus, commander of the *ala*, embellished the *aedes* in the *principia*: he set up two statues at the entrance, one of Caracalla (inscription no. 1) and another one of Septimius Severus; he paved the floor of the nave with a polychrome mosaic; and he raised a statue or an altar to the zodiacal sign Capricorn (nos. 2-3).

Imperial statues regularly decorated focal points in Rome's military and administrative complexes, and one need not look for a special occasion for their erection.²⁷ In the case of the *aedes alae VII Phrygum*, however, the erection of the statues was accompanied by a decorative scheme which seems to have been hastily put together: the mosaic floor has a particularly thin bedding, and the pedestals are awkwardly fitted into place between two earlier statue bases. In 199/200, Septimius Severus visited *Palaestina* on his way from *Syria* to Egypt.²⁸ Such visits required months of preparations in advance: the stocking of provisions, the paving of roads, sometimes the erection of statues.²⁹ During their tours emperors would visit cities and military bases. Tel Shalem, located at the crossing from *Syria* into *Palaestina*, housed a permanent military camp, a likely stopover for the emperor. Perhaps Pomponius Sanctianus set out to embellish the headquarters of his camp in anticipation of the arrival of the imperial entourage.

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Hannah M. Cotton who first examined the Capricorn inscription and has given her advice on the final text. We thank Werner Eck for his assistance in fixing the date of inscription no. 1. The illustration credit to AI UoC refers to the Archaeological Institute at the University of Cologne. The images may not be reproduced without initially seeking permission by way of M. Heinzelmann at that Institute.

27 J. M. Højte, "Imperial visits as occasion for the erection of portrait statues?," *ZPE* 133 (2000) 221-35.

28 Dio 75.13.1; *SHA, Sev.* 17.1; H. Halfmann, *Itinera principum* (Wiesbaden 1986) 217 and 220; W. Eck, "'Praesentia Caesaris' in der Provinz Judäa/Syria Palästina," *SCI* 33 (2014) 21-22.

29 Halfmann *ibid.* 86; F. Millar, *The emperor in the Roman world* (London 1992) 31-40.

