

Khirbet Yattir: a note on the church in area D

Hanan Eshel, Jodi Magness and Eli Shenhav

Work in the final season at Khirbet Yattir (August 1999) brought some clarifications to areas discussed in *JRA* 12 (1999) 411-22. In 1999 we excavated in area C (on the ridge to the south of the site) and area D (on a terrace on the NW slope of the Tel, just below the summit). In area C we concentrated on the atrium and narthex of the monastic church. Two depressions or sumps, to collect sediment from water that flowed into the cistern in the center of the atrium, were uncovered in the mosaic floor. A system of channels beneath the floor of the atrium and the room to the south (which may be a chapel) evidently carried overflow to a further cistern north of the church.

Most of our work, however, focused on area D, which had been opened where a large pilaster capital was found and because columns and pedestals were seen on the slope below. The building is now clearly identified as a church (fig. 1 overleaf). The E end of the church had washed down the slope so its original length cannot be determined, but the nave was over 12 m long. In 1999 we uncovered parts of the N and S walls of the church and established the lines of the stylobates which divided it into a nave and two aisles. The nave was 12.5 m wide and each aisle 2 m wide. The stylobate supported pedestals for columns. The church was not oriented due east but deviated *c.*40° to the southeast, perhaps due to the limited size of the terrace on which it was built. The W half of the church is better preserved than the E half because it had been buried beneath deeper accumulations. The church was originally paved with polychrome mosaics using small tesserae (1 cm square) but these have only survived in a few places. In the NW corner of the nave, next to the stylobate, an eagle facing right is preserved, and a matching eagle was presumably located in the SW corner; they resemble the patterns that encircle the mosaic floor in the monastic church (area C). The polychrome mosaic was succeeded by a plain, white mosaic using larger tesserae (2 cm square).

Opposite the entrance from the narthex into the S aisle a complete, 4-line dedicatory inscription in Greek was found; it is framed within a *tabula ansata*, and reads (fig. 2):

In the days of the most holy Bishop Theodoros and Sabinios the Presbyter, all of the work on the mosaic was done [by] Abesobo and Jonathan and Jeremiah in the 14th Indiction.¹



Fig. 2. Inscription in mosaic in the church in area D.

¹ We owe this translation to L. Di Segni.