

THE SABAITE MONASTERY OF THE CAVE (SPELAION) IN THE JUDEAN DESERT

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The flourishing of monasticism in the Judean desert during the sixth century CE was due to a large extent to the activity of St. Sabas (439-532 CE). Establishing, together with his disciples, seven laurae and six coenobia in this desert (Fig.1)¹ - the desert of the holy city Jerusalem – and serving as an archimandrite for the laurites and anchorites of the desert (from 494 CE), he was considered already by his contemporaries as the monastic leader who “transformed the desert into a city” (*Vita Sabae* 6, 90, 8-10). His monastic legislation regulated the life of each monk in his cell as well as the administration of each of his monasteries, either a laura or a coenobium. His first laura was considered the greatest in entire *Palaestina*. In later generations it became a center of literary activity, taking a leading role in the adherence of the monks and the Palestinian Church to Orthodoxy during the theological disputes of later centuries – the Origenistic controversy of the sixth century, the iconoclastic controversy during the eighth century and the controversy regarding the *filioque* at the beginning of the ninth century (Patrich 1989). One of the monastic establishments of St. Sabas is the subject of this article.

a. Historical Survey

The Monastery of the Cave was established in 508 CE in a gorge 30 *stadia* (ca. 6 km) distant from the Great Laura, to the west of Kastellion. It was constructed around a cave in the northern slope of the wadi, in which

1. The laurae are: the Great Laura (483 CE), the New Laura (507 CE), Heptastomos (510 CE), Jeremias (531 CE), Firminus, The Towers, Neelkeraba (last three were founded by Sabas disciples, presumably ca. 514/15 CE). The coenobia are: Kastellion (492 CE), The Small Coenobium (493 CE), The Cave (Spelaion) (508 CE), Scholarios (509 CE), Zannos (511? CE), Severianus (St. Sabas' disciple, ca. 514/15 CE). See also Fig. 1.

2. In *Vita Sabae* (37, 126) the distance mentioned between the Great Laura and The Cave is 15 stadia, while in *Vita Iohannis* (9, 208) it is stated that the distance is 30 stadia. The aerial distance between the monastery of Mar Saba and Bir el Qattar is more than 3.5 km, and along the pedestrian track it is close to 6 km, i.e., the correct version is 30 stadia.

Sabas used to retire from time to time (*Vita Sabae* 37, 126-7). It was here that Sabas retired in September 499 CE, when the Patriarch Elias turned down his request to ordain Iohannes Hesychastes as a priest, and it was here that the reason for the rejection was revealed to him: Iohannes was not only already a priest, but he was a bishop, a fact which he attempted to conceal because of his humility and his desire to live as a simple monk (*Vita Iohannis* 9, 208).³ The Monastery of the Cave was established only nine years later.⁴ During Lent of 508 CE, when Sabas returned from the New Laura, after a five-month

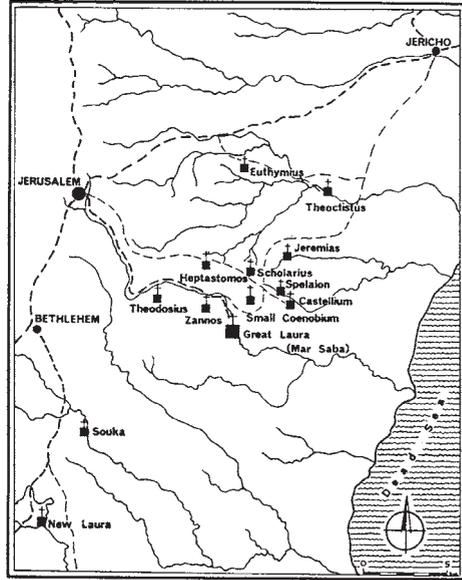


Fig. 1 Map of the Sabaite monasteries in the Judean desert.

stay in which he had been occupied with its establishment, Sabas went into seclusion in this cave, accompanied by an elderly monk named Paulus. Then, after returning to the laura and celebrating Easter there, he returned to the place with the architects Theodolus and Gelasius, “brothers in the flesh” from Isauria, and with the aforementioned Paulus and others. He transformed the cave into a chapel, and on the slope established a coenobium, which he called the “Monastery of the Cave” (τὸ τοῦ Σπηλαίου κοινόβιον). He was aided in this enterprise by Marcianus, priest of the Church of the Anastasis and *hegoumenos* of the monks of the Holy

3. Iohannes Hesychastes (454-559 CE), a native of Armenia Secunda, served there as a bishop of Colonia before escaping from this post and withdrawing to the Holy Land, where he joined St. Sabas in his Great Laura (491 CE). He spent 55 years of his life as hesychastes (a recluse) in his cell. His biography was written by Cyril of Scythopolis (Schwartz 1938). The ordination incident took place after Iohannes had concluded an annual office as steward of the Laura (September 1, 499) perhaps during a routine visit of the fathers of the monasteries to the Patriarch, during the festival of the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (September 13-20).

4. Vailhé 1899-1900, 283 erroneously fixed 509 CE as the year in which the monastery was established.

5. The Church of Holy Zion and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were the two most important pilgrim churches in Jerusalem, and therefore it is clear that Marcianus held a central

Zion Church,⁵ who visited Sabas frequently, bringing many contributions. In addition to financial aid, he and his sons Antonius and Iohannes helped the monks with their own hands in the building.⁶

Initially Sabas settled only four monks there. As administrator (διοικητής) of the monastery he appointed Paulus the Elder, and with him were three brothers from the Laura: Georgius, Cyriacus, and Eustathius. In time the place filled up and expanded. After Paulus' death the leadership of the monastery was transferred successively to Cyriacus and Sergius, and close to the years 557-559 CE the position went to Eustathius. Cyril knew the latter personally and cited episodes he had heard from him (*Vita Iohannis* 22, 218). It is doubtful that it was the same Eustathius who served in this position when Iohannes Moschus and Sophronius visited the coenobium (*Leimonarion* 186, 3061), during the years 590-604 CE (Chadwick 1974, 55-58). The third among the first three brothers, Georgius, was appointed bishop of Pelusion by Zoilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria (542-551 CE).

The proximity of Kastellion and the Cave led to close relations between them, and a few times they are mentioned together. Sabas would at times meet with the administrators of these two monasteries in the hostelry of the Laura in Jericho (*Vita Sabae* 46, 136-7). Cyril also mentions a contribution of two curtains by a woman from Scythopolis for Kastellion and the Cave (*Vita Sabae* 80, 186).

The surrounding desert was a grazing area for the shepherds of the desert. The friction that existed between them and the monks during the years of the drought (516-521 CE) is indicated by the episode related by Cyril (*Vita Sabae* 59, 160), when some shepherds disturbed the monks of the coenobium by grazing their flocks in the lands of the monastery (ἐν τοῖς τοῦ μοναστηρίου τόποις) and leaving them no peace with their repeated demands for food. The harassment ceased only after the flocks stopped yielding milk, so that the young kids and lambs died of starva-

post in the administration of the liturgical rites in Jerusalem at that time, if he served in both offices at the same time, and that he was a prominent official in the Church of Jerusalem (see also next note).

6. Marcianus therefore began a monastic life after previously having had a family. He was close to the archbishop Elias, who subsequently appointed him bishop of Sebastia. His son Antonius was appointed deacon of the Church of Ascalon, an act which strengthened Patriarch Elias' supporters in this city where the monophysite party was particularly strong, (Chitty 1966, 103-104; Perrone 1980, 92; 121; 136; 139; 148; 150; 153; 166; 186). Iohannes, his second son, was appointed deacon of the Anastasis, and eventually, after the exile of Elias, became the Patriarch of Jerusalem (516-524 CE).

tion. This occurrence, which most probably was caused by the drought, was perceived as a punishment for annoying the monks and disregarding Sabas' rebukes. The flow of milk was restored only after the shepherds promised to stay away not only from this monastery, but also from all Sabas' foundations⁷.

The Monastery of the Cave was a coenobium surrounded by a wall. The concept of the "lands of the monastery" mentioned in the above episode is to be understood as a marked and fenced area, outside the coenobium wall but regarded as being within its boundaries. The remains of fencing walls which were traced around the monastery, at a distance of several hundred meters, presumably were meant to demarcate this area (see the map – Fig. 2).

At the end of May, in the fourth year of the drought (520 CE), the water in the cisterns of the monastery gave out, and the monks turned to Sabas, requesting permission to abandon the monastery. The appearance of a cloud from which rain fell only on the monastery was perceived as a miracle, the answer to the prayers of the elderly Sabas (*Vita Sabae* 66, 167). Incidental to this story, mention is made of the cisterns (δοχεῖα: cf. *ibid.* 32, 17) and the water conduits of the monastery.

Iohannes Moschus mentions an elderly hesychast named Abba Elias, who lived in the Monastery of the Cave, and who complained to him about the moral decline which had set in in his time: "In the days of our fathers three virtues were cherished: poverty, mildness, and temperance; while now avarice, gluttony, and insolence rule the monks" (*Leimonarion* 52, 2908). Incidentally we learn from this that recluses also lived in the coenobium.

The coenobium continued to exist for many years after the Moslem conquest of Palestine. In 749 CE Zacharias, Stephan Sabaite's uncle, was appointed hegumen of the Kastellion and the Cave, an office he filled for only a short time before he died. The common leadership of the Kastellion and the Cave was presumably caused by a sharp decrease in the number of monks; yet, both of them continued to exist. During this period the monastery was also known as the Cave of St. George (*Vita Stephani Sabaitae* IX.1, 352 – ed. Garitte).

7. In terms of the chronological order in Cyril's writings, this chapter is to be dated between 516 and 518 CE, i.e. between the exile of Elias and the death of the Emperor Anastasius. This was therefore during the drought years, and this circumstance is apparently the background to the harassment of the monks by the shepherds, in their search for food.

b. History of the Research

According to Cyril's writings, the Monastery of the Cave was located to the west of Kastellion, to the northeast of the Great Laura, five *stadia* to the east of the Monastery of Scholarius (*Vita Sabae* 66, 167). These data fit Bir el Qattar. The name Bir el Qattar (ref. point 1843.1258), which means "the well of drops" (Palmer 1881, 341), denotes on the map the upper cistern of the monastery (see below), which is used to the present day by the shepherds of the desert. Underneath the cistern, in the middle level of the monastery, there is a cave, in the eastern wall of which there is a sort of recess closed by a small wall which was intended to collect the drops of water issuing from a cleft in the rock – a sort of seepage. This water did not originate from a spring, but rather from the upper cistern, whose water dripped down here in a very thin stream (cf. Hirschfeld 1987, 43).

The cistern was marked on the map of the Palestine Exploration Fund, but was not designated as an archaeological site. Palmer (1881, 341) only comments that the cistern was fed by a conduit. The first description of the ruins and attempt to identify them as the remains of a monastery were by Schick, who apparently only looked at the site from afar, on his way from el-Mird (Kastellion) westward. He mentions on the northern bank of Wadi Abu Shu'la ruins of buildings, called Qattar by the Arabs, under which there are, according to them, caves, a small room, and cisterns. Since he claimed that el-Mird is the monastery of Euthymius, he also was of the opinion that Qattar is to be identified as the monastery of Martyrius. Marti (1880, 24), rejected these identifications, but did not offer an alternative proposal. Furrer (1880, 235), in his comments on Schick's survey and Marti's article, correctly proposed identifying the remains with the Monastery of the Cave, an identification which has since been accepted by all. Vailhé (1899-1900, 283-284) provides a short historical survey. The ruins were described by van Kasteren (1890, 110-112), Pierri (1947, 13), and Compagnoni (1978, 66-67). Corbo (1958, 250) notes that the site is too ruined for a detailed research.

c. The Archaeological Remains

During the course of the survey of the area included in the "Mar Saba Map", a thorough survey and mapping of all the ruins at the site was conducted in 1981-82. In March-April 1983 a limited archaeological excava-

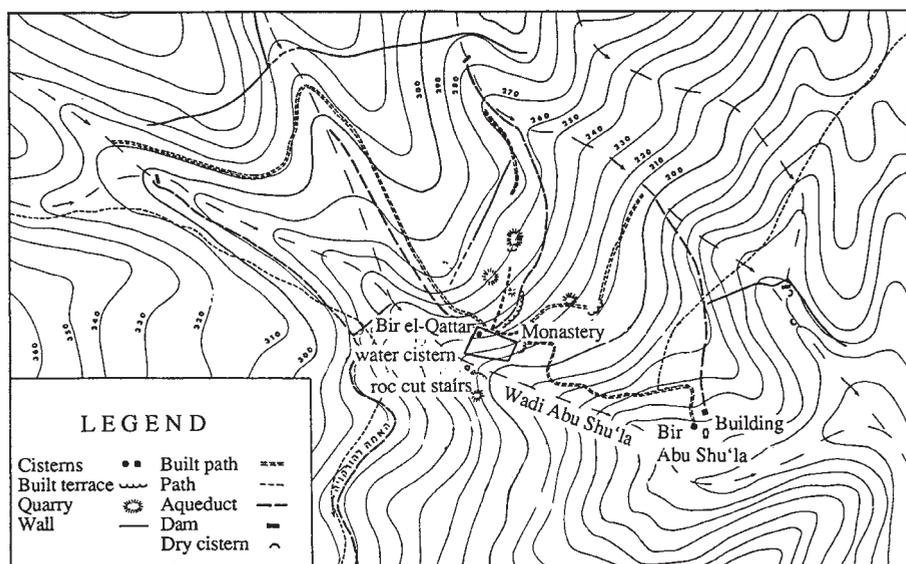


Fig. 2 General map of the ruins around the Monastery of the Cave.

tion was carried out there, during the course of which the mosaic floor of the church (see below) was discovered.⁸

The Monastery of the Cave is built on the northern bank of Nahal Secacah (Wadi Abu Shu'la), which begins on the eastern slopes of Jebel el Muntar, and is one of the main tributaries of Nahal Qumran. Ruins related to the monastery are visible already at a distance of 400-600 m from the its core. These include built paths, water channels and reservoirs (*harabeh*), boundary walls, an isolated building, a lime kiln and quarries (Fig. 2).

Built paths. The path leading to the monastery split off from the "Road of the Monasteries" – the south-north road running to the east of Jebel el Muntar near Bir el-'Amra. From this point it was possible to walk comfortably on the northern bank of the streambed which becomes more and more canyon-like as it progresses eastward. In the place where the cliff

8. The survey of the "Mar Saba Map" was conducted on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of Israel. In this I was assisted by Erez Cohen (surveyor) and Asaf Ron. The excavations were conducted with student volunteers from the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Most of the illustrations were measured and drawn by Erez Cohen; Fig. 2 was drawn by Mrs. Tania Gornstein, Fig. 5 by Benny Levenstein, Fig. 6 by Leen Ritmeyer. I am indebted to all of them. The photographs were taken by the author.

sections begin, it is possible to clearly discern a constructed path leading to the monastery along the northern bank of the wadi. The level path, ca. 1m wide, was created by the building of a low terrace on the side facing the slope.

The road connecting the Monastery of the Cave and the Kastellion passed along the ancient aqueduct, which began at the dam across Wadi Abu Shu'la (Patrich 1989a). A steep path descends from the monastery to Bir Abu Shu'la. This path also serves to drain the rainwater into Bir Abu Shu'la. Hence the path continues to the Valley of Hyrcania, running slightly above the streambed itself. In a few places along this route the path was

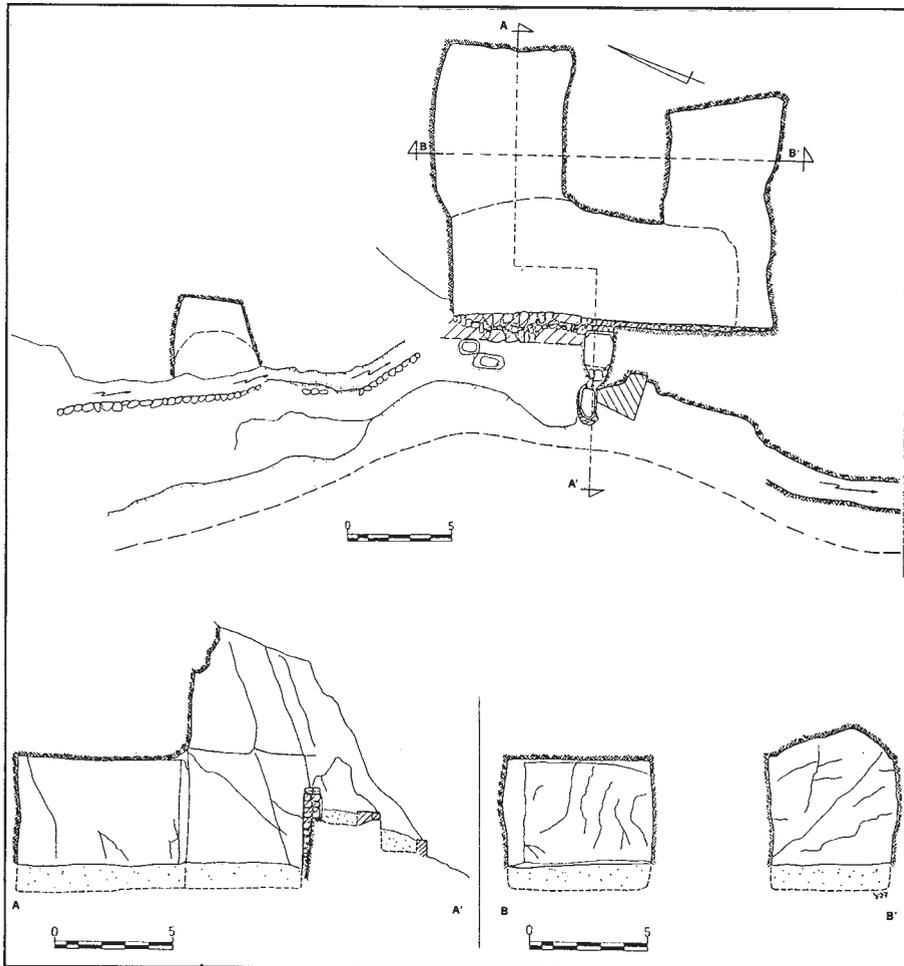


Fig. 3 Bir Abu Shu'la: a. plan; b. cross section A-A; c. cross section B-B.

reinforced by a supporting wall. Two additional paths go out from the monastery to the north and northeast, leading to the quarries.

Water Channels. Below the main path arriving from the northwest there is a ca. 350 m long channel built of fieldstones placed next to each other, which collected the rainwater and fed the upper cistern of the monastery. A second channel arrived from the north. It is ca. 500 m long and begins at a small damlike terrace extending across the wadi. On a lower level of this wadi another conduit begins, which today feeds the bell-shaped cistern next to Bir Abu Shu‘la.

Water Reservoirs. Bir Abu Shu‘la (Conder and Kitchener 1883,191) is a large reservoir excavated in the chalk, with two chambers separated by a thick dividing wall, in front of which is a transversal corridor connecting them. These chambers, which look like two caves, apparently are the source of its name – “the well with the cavern” (Palmer 1881, 340). In plan it has a U-shape, with a shorter right arm (Fig. 3). Its breadth is 15.5 m and its maximal length is 12.3 m. The reservoir is closed towards the wadi by a wall ca. 1.5 m thick in its upper part. The hydraulic plaster contains red and black potsherds in great density, almost without gravel and without glazed potsherds. The composition of this plaster fits the early Moslem period. This reservoir therefore belongs to a stage later than the establishment of the monastery.

Two additional reservoirs are located in the wadi to the northeast of Bir Abu Shu‘la. One is cut in the eastern bank of the streambed, next to a dam that diverted the water into the reservoir. At present it is full of silt. Several rock drawings are carved in its inner wall. A second reservoir is cut in the western bank, ca. 100 m further south. It is quite possible that these two reservoirs were intentionally installed by the monks at some distance from the monastery for the use of the desert shepherds, so that they would not disturb the inhabitants of the coenobium.

The cistern built to the south of the monastery, beyond the streambed, is of another type (Fig. 4). Two walls, 2.2 m and 3 m thick, were built against a cave, thereby forming a cistern 8 m long and 5 m wide. Its depth at present is ca. 4 m. The cave was faced with courses of small stones 10 × 30 cm in dimension, forming a facing wall above which a layer of gray plaster was laid; over it flat stone chips were imbedded. Over this layer was applied hydraulic plaster, including reddish potsherds. The gap between the southern wall of the cistern and the ceiling of the cave was roofed by an arch, spanning its entire breadth. The cistern apparently was used to irrigate the garden of the monastery, which was located below, in the streambed, as indicated by the traces of several terraces.

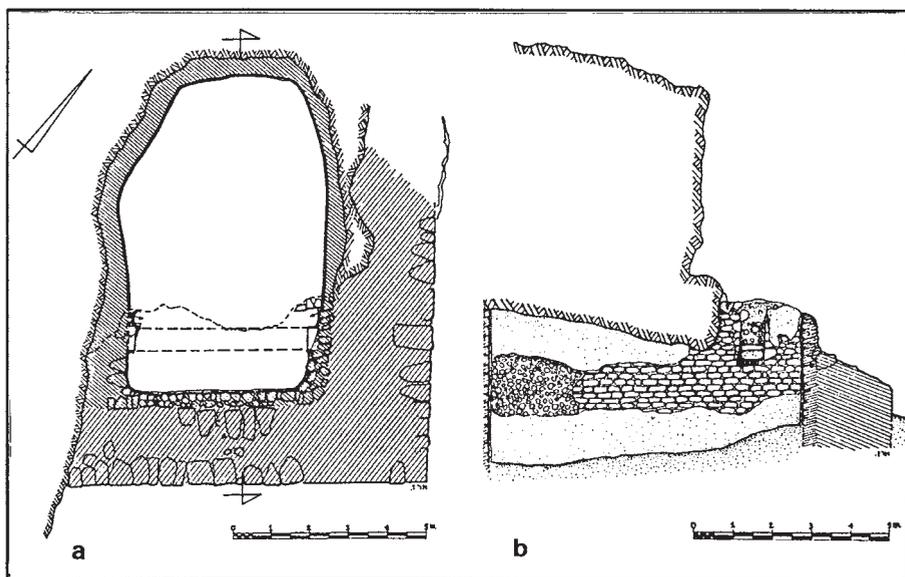


Fig. 4. The Monastery of the Cave. Water cistern on the southern bank of the stream: a. Plan; b. Cross section.

Boundary Walls. At a distance of ca. 400-500 m to the north of the monastery, traces of a boundary wall delineating the bounds of the monastery are visible across the spurs. The wall, ca. 0.6 m thick, has two faces, with the space between filled with earth and small stones. To the north-west of the northern quarries protrudes the top of an additional wall of unclear nature. To the east of the monastery, next to the two reservoirs described above, an additional boundary wall is clearly visible, crossing the wadi and ascending the spur westwards. Meshel (1984) was of the opinion that this is a part of the circumvallation wall of the siege system constructed by Herod the Great around the fortress of Hyrcania (over which the monastery of Kastellion was subsequently built by Sabas); later however, he accepted (orally) my opinion, namely, that this is a boundary wall intended to mark the area of the monastery.

Tower-like Building. In order to fix the boundaries of the monastery, a building was erected at the top of the north-south elongated hillock, on the western slope of which the cistern of Bir Abu Shu'la was cut at a later period. This structure is rectangular (Fig. 5) and measures 5.3×9 m (external dimensions). Its outer walls are 0.8 m thick. The building is divided into three rooms. It has a white mosaic floor, and its entrance faces south. Two stones of the eastern jamb of the entrance connecting the entry room with

the northern space are preserved *in situ*. The height of the jamb courses is 0.35-0.40 m. The 0.7 m-thick dividing wall, in which this entrance was incorporated, has been preserved to a height of 0.8-0.9 m above the floor level. The northern space is divided by a 0.4 m-thick partition into two smaller rooms. Owing to the quantity of the debris, in which both mosaic *tesserae* and large fragments of Byzantine pottery are mixed in a level much higher than the floor, it may be

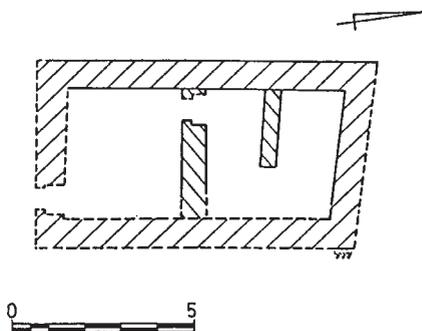


Fig. 5 The tower-like building above Bir Abu Shu'la.

assumed that a second storey existed above these rooms. The structure therefore looked like a tower, which marked the boundaries of the monastery on the east, overlooking the outlet of Wadi Abu Shu'la.

Lime Kiln. Below the hillock, to the south of the tower-like building, slightly above the streambed, there is a lime kiln.

Quarries. To the north and northeast of the monastery there are four small quarries which supplied the building stones for its construction. Next to them there are also small plots, levelled off by the building of a terrace. These plots apparently served as sites for the gathering and loading of the beasts of burden – donkeys and mules – which carried the building stones to the monastery.

The ruins of the monastery

The Monastery of the Cave is a coenobium spread out over a cliff, similar to the present-day Mar Saba monastery (Fig. 6). There is a vertical differential of more than 38 m between its top and its bottom. To this type of monasteries also belong the Monastery of Theoctistus, the Monastery of Choziba (Corbo 1958, 250), and Khirbet ed Deir (Hirschfeld 1987, 151-154).

The upper level. In the upper level there are the enclosure walls, the opening of the upper cistern, and the remains of a structure built to the east of it (Fig. 7). On this level the northern wall of the monastery encloses a strip 90 m long and 20-25 m wide which slopes to the east and to the south.

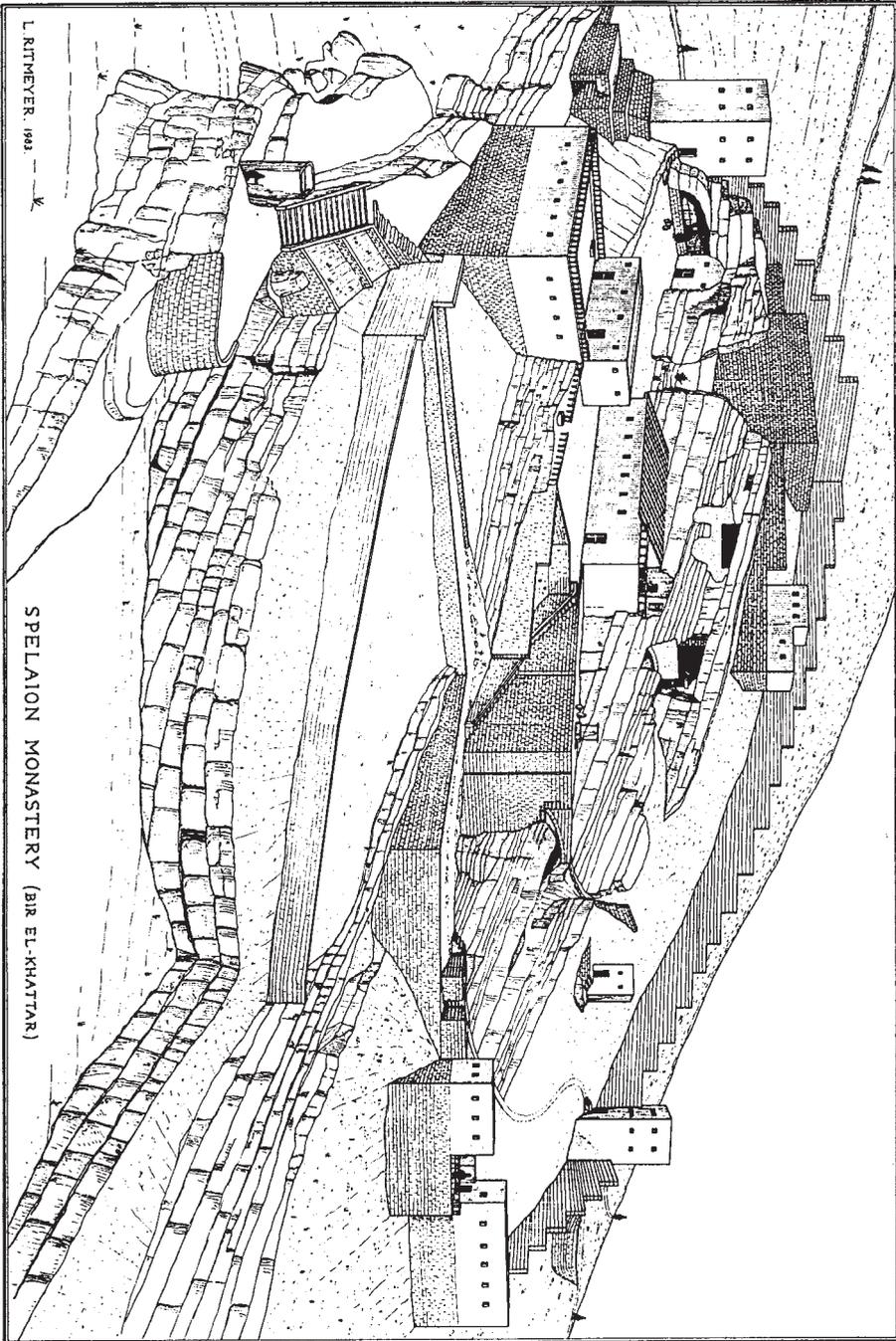


Fig. 6 The Monastery of the Cave - a reconstruction.

The upper structure. To the east of the cistern several walls are visible. A long wall is built along the edge of the cliff, and three 0.5 m thick walls are built perpendicular to it. Van Kasteren mentions a mosaic floor in the upper level, but we did not see it.

The middle level. This is the main level (Fig. 8), with cisterns, three dwelling caves, the church of the monastery, and the central structure.

The cisterns. The most prominent remains in this level are the walls of the central cistern (Figs. 8, 9; Phot. 3). Its inner dimensions are 4 × 14 m, and its depth is ca. 5 m. The southeastern corner of the cistern has been preserved to its entire height of 6 m. The vaulted roof has partially collapsed, but the upper opening for drawing water has been preserved. Especially impressive is the feeding channel (Fig. 9; Phot. 3-4), which looks like an external arch of a building, with its eastern end resting against the rock, and its western end supporting the cistern. The ca. 0.25 m wide channel is plastered. Attached to the southern wall of the cistern, a staircase has been preserved almost in its entirety. Its width at the bottom is 1.3 m and further on 1 m. It led from the lower level to the church and to the central structure in the middle level.

A second, large, L-shaped cistern, with a maximal width of 3.2 m and a depth of ca 3.5 m, was installed within a cave at the western end of the middle level (Fig. 8). There are also smaller cisterns. One is located to the east of the entrance of the lower dwelling cave (see below). A second one is located in the foundations of the western defensive tower, as mentioned above, and two additional ones, the existence of which is indicated by their arched roof, are located to the east of the central cistern, under the path leading to the structures at the eastern end of the monastery. All the cisterns are plastered with the characteristic Byzantine hydraulic plaster.

Dwelling caves. In the western end of the middle level, next to the western cistern, is a cave 7.4 m deep and 3.2 m wide. Against its eastern side is built a wall, with a sort of niche at its southern end, in which water seeping from the rock was stored. A thick calcareous layer which accumulated there indicates that this is a very old seepage. As was mentioned above, the origin of this water is in the upper cistern, and this thin dripping is the source of the Arabic name of the place – Bir el Qattar (“the well of drops”).

On a higher level, in the cliff separating between the middle and upper levels, there are the openings of two additional caves (Fig. 9). The eastern, smaller cave, is 2.2 m deep and 3.6 m wide at its opening. A closing wall, whose foundations rest on an arch, was erected here. The approach is from the east, against the cliff. The second cave is “Sabas’ Cave” after which the

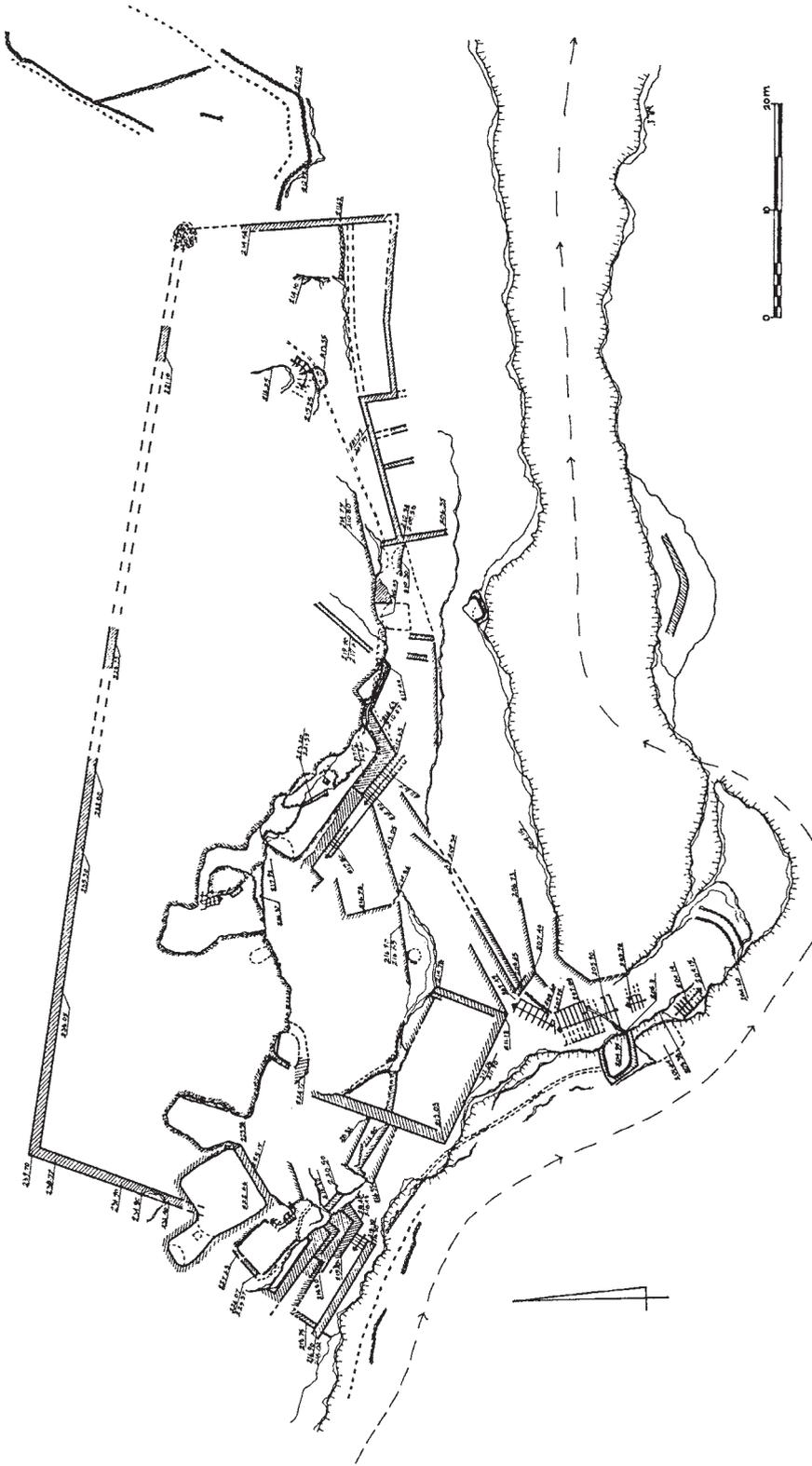


Fig. 8 Plan of the ruins in the middle and lower levels, including the outline of the wall in the upper level.

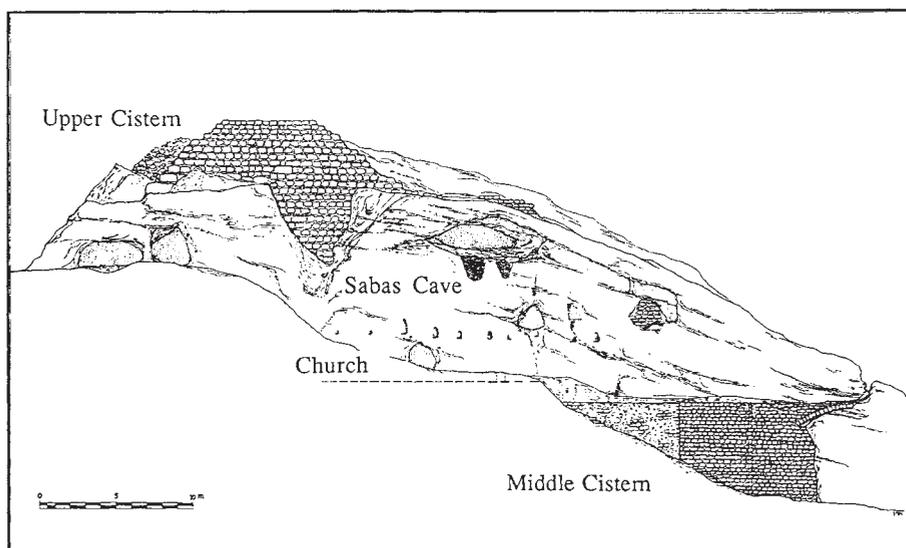


Fig. 9 Drawing of the actual state of the ruins. View to the north.

monastery was named (Figs. 8, 10). Its maximal depth is ca. 10 m, and its width ca. 4 m. Along its natural opening, ca. 5.5 m wide, a railing wall was built: its foundations rest on supporting walls which seal cracks in the rock (Fig. 9). The approach is through a steep L-shaped tunnel, with its lower entrance opening in the cliff, ca. 4 m below the floor of the cave. In several places sections of white plaster have been preserved on the rock walls of this tunnel, and in its floor steps were cut to facilitate climbing.

To the south of the upper opening of the tunnel the foundations of a small altar were built against the eastern rock wall of the cave, which was transformed into a chapel. On the rock wall, to the right of the lower entrance of the tunnel, the remains of a moulded Corinthian capital can still be discerned (Phot. 5) – a unique find in the monasteries of the desert. Seemingly, here was a plastered rock surface, flanked on both sides by molded pilasters with capitals: possibly this surface contained an inscription which could be seen from the porch on top of the church (Fig. 6). Nearby have also been preserved drawings of crosses and a few indecipherable inscriptions, painted in red paint on the rock. These inscriptions are the work of pilgrims or of the monks themselves. From this porch one could ascend through the tunnel (Phot. 6) to “Sabas’ Cave”.

The church of the monastery. As mentioned, “Sabas’ Cave” was initially converted into a chapel. In the second stage, a larger and more comfortable church was built below the cave. Ten depressions cut in a horizontal

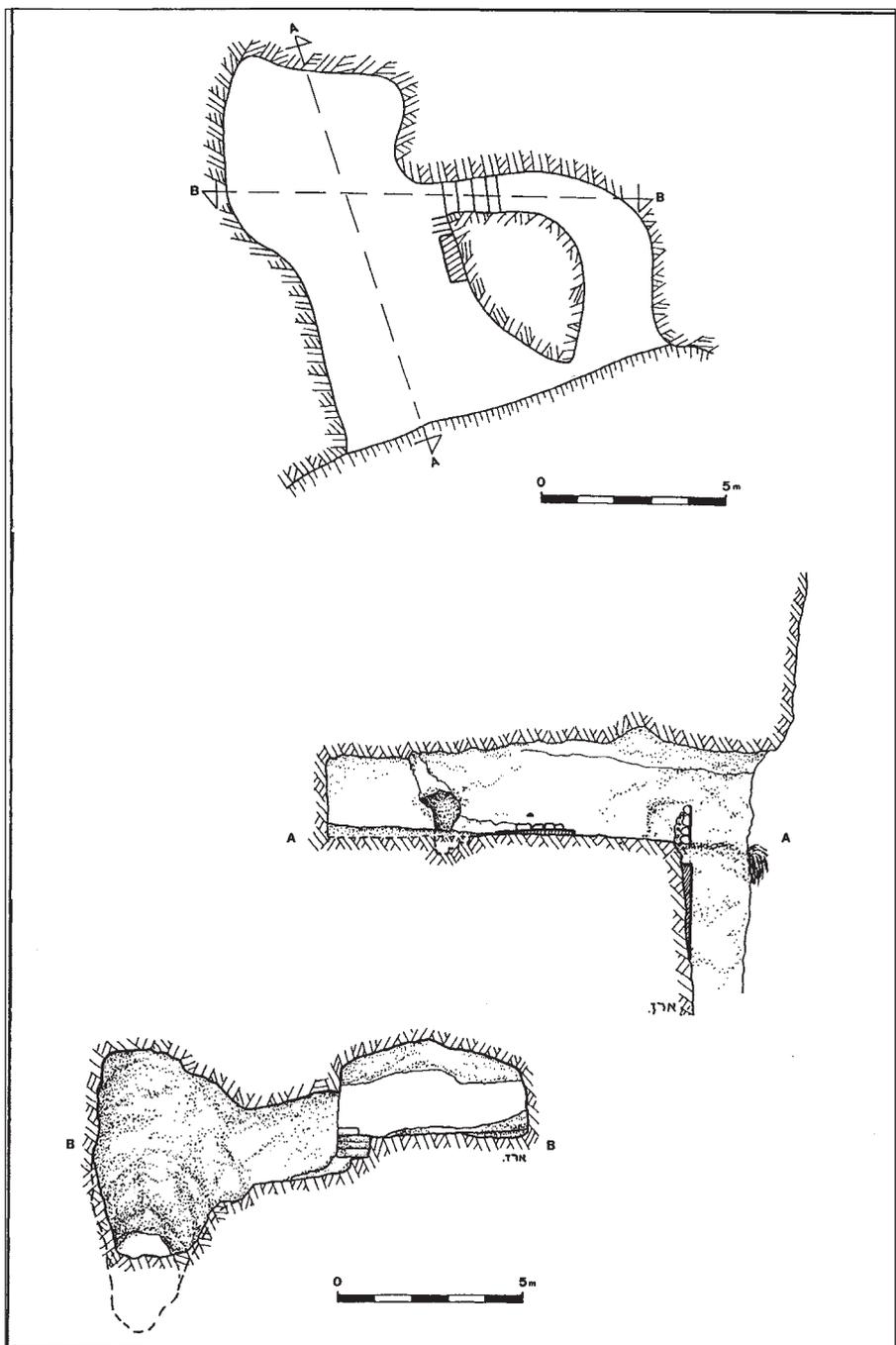


Fig. 10 "Sabas Cave". Plan. Cross sections, looking east and south.

level in the rock wall bounding the middle level on the north, ca. 1.2-2.5 m distant from each other, served to support the ceiling beams of the church. At 2.8 m below the level of the depressions, a white mosaic floor with a geometric pattern of black squares standing on their point has been partially revealed (Phot. 7). The floor has been damaged in many places. Fragments of an altar post and of a rounded altar plate, both made of gray marble (Fig. 1; Phot. 8), were also found in the excavation. The floor of the porch, which was built above the eastern end of the church, in front of the plastered surface, was also a mosaic carpet. A portion of it fell on its face and was preserved on the mosaic floor of the church. An analysis of the plan leaves room for a church 12 m long and 5-6 m wide (Fig. 6).

The central building. To the south of the church, but on a lower level, were the foundations of large 14 × 14 m building. Close to its southeast corner is the lower entrance gate of the monastery. Since it was not excavated, it can only be conjectured that this structure served as the main service building of the monastery – the place of the kitchen, bakery, food storeroom, dining room, etc.

The lower level. This level includes the entrance gate, the network of paths, and the buildings located in the eastern end of the monastery. The garden of the monastery was located in the streambed.

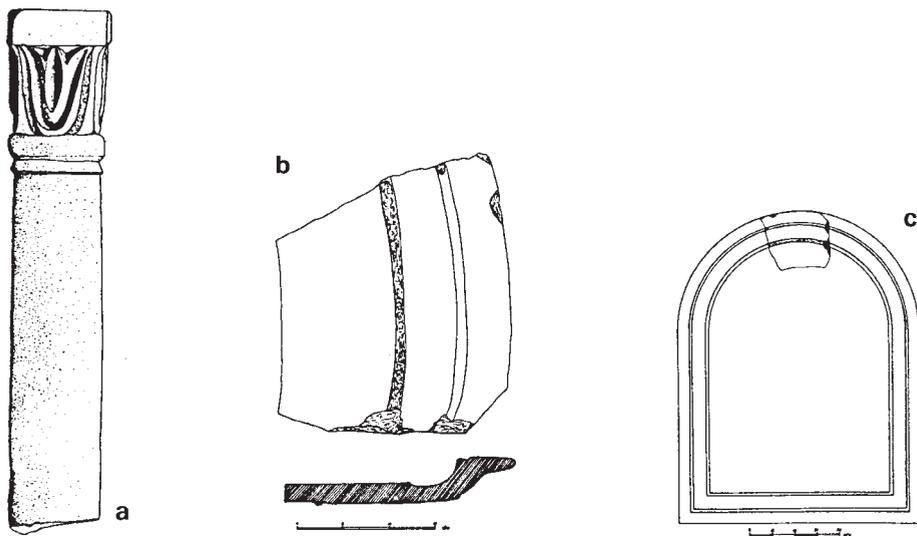


Fig. 11 Fragments of an altar leg and of an altar plate made of marble from the church. Drawings and suggested reconstruction of the altar plate.

The entrance gate. A rock-cut staircase leads from the wadi to a levelled open space, and thence, after a sharp turn, a flight of built steps, ca. 3.5 m wide, leads up to the lower gate (Phot. 9). Alongside the stairs is a 2.2×2.3 m cistern, which served to slake the thirst of those knocking at the monastery door. The feeding channel of this cistern was built and quarried underneath the flight of stairs.

Drainage channel. In a vault under this cistern and ca. 25 m away below the monastery and next to the rock, there is a built and rock-cut channel, which apparently was the drainage channel for the sewage of the monastery.

The paths within the monastery. A path, along which ruins of buildings and installations of unclear nature are visible, extends inwards from the entrance gate toward the southeastern corner of the central cistern. It was possible to ascend from here to the church by the staircase built alongside the cistern, or to continue toward the structures in the eastern wing of the monastery.

The eastern structures. Close to the edge of the cliff the ruins of a few walls, ca. 0.5 m thick, are visible. This may have been the dwelling wing of the coenobium (Fig. 6). Close by a number of steps cut in the rock might indicate the existence of an additional tower for seclusion.

The garden. This, as noted, is discernible by several lines of walls built in the streambed. It may reasonably be assumed that upstream were built several damming walls in order to prevent the erosion of the soil of the gar-

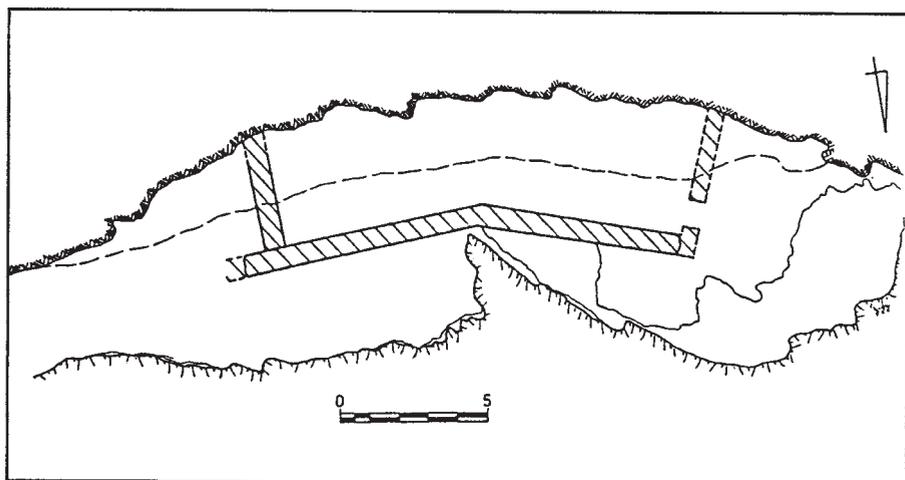


Fig. 12 A shelter for guests and pilgrims (?) on the southern bank of Wadi Abu Shu'la. Plan.

den. The dam of the Kastellion-Hyrkania conduit, which is built further up the wadi, as well as the conduit itself, built along the southern bank of Wadi Abu Shu'la, also considerably reduced the volume of water flowing in the stream, while the water of the northern slope was collected by the conduit of the monastery.

Shelter for guests (?). On the other side of the streambed, opposite the lower flight of rock-cut steps, under an overhanging rock, there are the ruins of a rectangular structure 14.5 m long and ca. 5 m wide (Fig. 12). Initially we supposed that the structure served as a stable for the monastery animals; however, it may reasonably be assumed that the stable was built inside the walls. This installation may have had a function comparable to that of the site of the inscriptions near the monastery of Theoktistus. The texts found there were inscribed by pilgrims – mainly women waiting at the site for their requests to be dealt with by the monks (Patrich and Di Segni 1987). However no inscriptions have been found in this case. On the stone ledge above this installation a number of rock-cut steps are discernible, apparently marking the start of a path leading to the Kastellion.

The careful study and analysis of all the remains enabled us to suggest the reconstruction depicted in Fig. 6. The result looks very much like the present Mar Saba monastery.

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