

EUTHYMIUS AND HIS MONASTERY IN THE JUDEAN DESERT

Y. Hirschfeld

The third monastery of Euthymius, which bears his name, was one of the most important monasteries in the Judean Desert. Euthymius was a model monk and a trail-blazer for many of the monks in the Judean Desert. Thanks to his forceful personality, his monastery became the most important and central among the monasteries of Palestine in the 5th century CE. It may be stated, with considerable justification, that the history of the monastery up to the death of Euthymius (473 CE) represents the history of monasticism in the Judean Desert. In following years, from the late 5th century on, the focus shifted from the monastery of Euthymius at Mishor Adummim to the monasteries of Sabas and Theodosius in the Kidron Valley.

The monastery of Euthymius and the events which took place there were documented in great detail by Euthymius' biographer, Cyril of Scythopolis. Cyril himself lived in the monastery for about 10 years (545-555), and his testimony is thus based on first-hand acquaintance with the site and its inhabitants. Sources of information after Cyril gradually become sparser, but are sufficient to allow a reconstruction of the history of the monastery, until it ceased to exist in the Middle Ages.

Further contributions to our knowledge of the monastery of Euthymius were derived from the archaeological excavations at the site. In fact, the monastery of Euthymius was the first monastery in the Judean Desert to undergo full-scale archaeological excavations. The excavation began in the late 1920s and was headed by the historian Derwas Chitty, author of the renowned book *The Desert a City*.¹ Chitty focused his excavations on

1. The results of Chitty's excavations at the monastery of Euthymius (Khan el-Ahmar) were never published. Only preliminary reports exist, published in the periodical of the Palestine Exploration Fund, see: D.J. Chitty and A.H.M. Jones, "The Church of St. Euthymius at Khan el-Ahmar, near Jerusalem", *PEFQS*, 1928, pp. 175-178; D.J. Chitty, "Excavation at the Monastery of St. Euthymius, 1929", *PEFQS*, 1930, pp. 43-47, 150-153; Idem, "The Monastery of St. Euthymius", *PEFQS*, 1932, pp. 188-203. For Chitty's book on monasticism in Egypt and Palestine during the Byzantine period (4th-7th centuries CE), see: D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, Oxford 1966.

the monastery's church and the underground burial structure adjoining it. In the 1970s, the site was again excavated by Yiannis Meimaris, a Greek epigrapher and archaeologist.² Meimaris extended Chitty's excavation areas and revealed a refectory beside the church.

In 1987, excavations were renewed by the author together with Rivka Birger-Calderon on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.³ Special efforts were made in the course of the excavations to preserve the site and provide proper documentation for the finds of the previous excavators. The various chronological stages of the monastery's thus existence thus became clear.

This article has a two-fold aim: to offer a summary of information about the monastery of Euthymius available from written sources, and to present the remains of the monastery as they appear on the site today. The first part of our article therefore presents the history of the monastery through its various phases; the second part describes the remains at the site, based on the excavations' data.

Historical introduction

From the arrival of Euthymius to the Judean Desert (405) to the dedication of the monastery (428)

The foundation of the monastery of Euthymius at Mishor Adummim is described in great detail in the "Life of Euthymius" by Cyril of Scythopolis.⁴ Euthymius was born in 377 to a noble family of Melitene, capital of Armenia

2. For a preliminary report of Meimaris' excavations, see: Y. Meimaris, *The Monastery of Saint Euthymius the Great at Khan el-Ahmar, in the Wilderness of Judaea: Rescue Excavations and Basic Protection Measures, 1976-1979*, Athens 1989.

3. The excavations at Khan el-Ahmar are intended to prepare the site as a tourist attraction. The excavations headed by the writers were renewed on the initiative of Micha Bar-On on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and in coordination with the IDF Officer for Archaeology in Judea and Samaria. The excavations were financed by the Jerusalem Economic Company, assisted by the Ma'ale Adummim municipal council and the IDF Officer for Archaeology. Participants in the excavations were Gideon Avni (archaeologist), Erez Cohen and David Huli (surveyors), Gabi Larom and Zev Radovan (photographers). Preservation work was done under the planning and supervision of Leen Rittmeyer. For a preliminary summary of the results, see: R. Birger and Y. Hirschfeld, "Khan el-Ahmar", *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, 82 (1988), p. 34.

4. Kyrillos von Skythopolis, *Leben des Euthymius* (ed. E. Schwartz, Leipzig 1939, pp. 3-84; below: Cyril, *Life of Euth.*). Cyril's book was translated into French by Festugière, see:

(currently Maltia, in central Anatolia).⁵ At the age of 29, after having been appointed a priest and having experienced the monastic life in his own country, Euthymius decided to make a pilgrimage to the holy sites of Jerusalem and to settle in the desert adjoining the city. In 405 Euthymius arrived at the laura of Pharan, in the upper part of Nahal Perat (Wadi Qilt), where he lived for five years. The laura of Pharan later served as a model for the foundation of his own monastery at Mishor Adummim (Fig. 1).

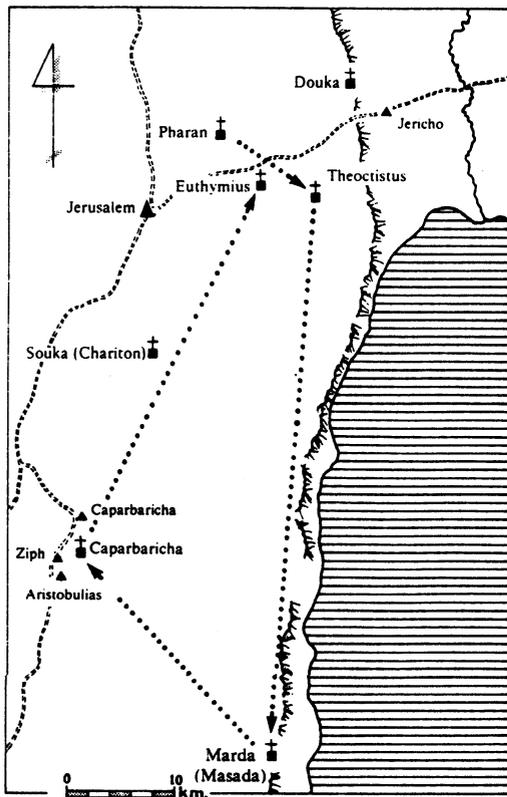


Fig. 1 The route of Euthymius in the Judean Desert.

A.-J. Festugière, *Les moines d'orient*, III/1-3, Paris 1962-63. I used a translation prepared by Leah Di Segni for the Israel Research Institute of Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, Jerusalem. I wish to thank the translator and Yad Ben Zvi for permission to use this translation before its publication. For English translation, see: *Lives of the Monks of Palestine by Cyril of Scythopolis*, translated by R.M. Price, Kalamazoo, Mich. 1991.

5. Two works were devoted to a study of the life of Euthymius and his monastery from the beginning of this century. One is by S. Vaillhé, "Saint Euthyme le grand, moine de Palestine (376-473)", *Revue d'Orient Chrétien*, 12 (1907), pp. 298-312, 337-355; 13 (1908), pp. 181-191, 225-246, 389-405; 14 (1909), pp. 189-202, 256-263; the other was published at the

Five years later, Euthymius left the lura of Pharan and, together with his friend Theoctistus, went deep into the desert. The two reached a cave in a gully that was steep and hard to reach (in Nahal Og, Wadi Mukallik), and after purifying the cave by their prayers they founded a coenobium around it, which was the first communal monastery in the Judean Desert.⁶ This monastery, named for Theoctistus, was Euthymius' home for about ten years (411-421). He soon became famous as a holy man, and many admirers flocked to him. Among them was a tribe of Saracens, nomads of the desert. The members of the tribe converted to Christianity due to the influence of Euthymius, and settled around the monastery.

Since his solitude was now disturbed, Euthymius chose to leave the monastery of Theoctistus and begin an anachoretic life with his pupil Domitian. The two reached a mountain called Marda (identified with Masada) and stayed on its top for some time, feeding on wild plants and salt bushes (*Atriplex*) and drinking the water collected in reservoirs which they found on the site. The chapel erected by Euthymius later served as the core for a small lura on the hilltop.⁷ Euthymius and his pupil Domitian later moved into the desert area east of Tell Ziph. Here Euthymius founded another coenobium, named after the main settlement of the area, Capar Baricha (Bani Na'im).⁸

After founding the Capar Baricha monastery, Euthymius decided to return to the plateau area west of the monastery of Theoctistus. According to Cyril, "he loved this place dearly, for it was rather level and at the same time quiet and blessed with fresh air, and most important of all... the place was lonely and not situated on a thoroughfare".⁹ Thus, Euthymius and his pupil Domitian left the Ziph area and settled at Mishor Adummim, in a small cave which later served as the burial place of Euthymius.

same time by R.P. Génier, *Vie de Saint Euthyme le grand*, Paris 1909. Another article is by von Riess, "Das Euthymiuskloster, die Peterkirche der Eudokia und die lura Heptastomos in der Wüste Juda", *ZDPV* 15 (1882), pp. 212-226.

6. For the monastery of Theoctistus and its history, see: G. Kühnel, "Wiederentdeckte monastische Malereien der Kreuzfahrerzeit in der Judäischen Wüste", *Römische Quartalschrift* 79 (1984), pp. 163-188.

7. For identification of the hermits' monastery at Masada, see my recent publication, Y. Hirschfeld, "Masada during the Byzantine Period – the Monastery of Marda", *Eretz Israel*, 20 ("Yadin Volume"), Jerusalem 1989, pp. 262-274

8. This monastery was identified by me as Kh. Umm Rukhba, about 4.5 km southeast of Bani Na'im, see: Y. Hirschfeld, "Khirbet el-Quneitra – a Byzantine Monastery in the Wilderness of Ziph", *Eretz Israel*, 18 ("Avigad Volume"), Jerusalem 1985, pp. 243-244.

9. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 14 (ed. Schwartz, p. 23, line 24 – p. 24, line 2).

At first, Euthymius refrained from founding a monastery on the site, but rather arranged it as a hermitage. Aspabet, the chief of the Saracen tribe whom Euthymius had baptized and named Peter, arrived at the spot and built whatever the two hermits required. In the words of Cyril, “Peter brought masons and had a great cistern made, with two mouths, the same one that can be seen to this day in the garden; and he built a bakery nearby and made for the holy elder three cells and a chapel, or church, in the middle between the cells”.¹⁰

In return, Euthymius chose a location for the encampments (“*parembolai*”) of the Saracen tribe nearby, drew the plan of their church on the ground, and prevailed on the archbishop of Jerusalem, Juvenal, to make the tribal chief, Aspebet-Peter, “Bishop of the Encampments”.¹¹ Euthymius’ positive attitude towards the Saracens was expressed later, when he gave instructions to restore two ancient water cisterns near his monastery, one for the use of the monks and the other for the use of the Saracens.¹²

The hermitage of Euthymius could not accommodate additional monks (except for a third cell which may have served for guests). Anyone who arrived and wished to join as a monk was therefore sent by Euthymius to the monastery of Theoctistus. However, some time later monks from his homeland arrived, and Euthymius agreed to turn the site into a *laura*. When eleven men gathered with him, Euthymius instructed Peter, “Bishop of the Encampments”, “to build small cells for them and to equip the church with all the (necessary) furnishings.”¹³ Cyril states explicitly that the monastery was founded according to the type (*typos*) of the *laura* of Pharan where Euthymius spent his first years as a monk in the Judean Desert. As one can reckon from the known data, the resemblance between the two monasteries was expressed in the organization of the *laura*, the number of its monks, and the size of its cells. The *laura* of Euthymius was restricted (numbering

10. Idem, 15 (ed. Schwartz, p. 24, lines 17-20).

11. The “encampment” (*parembole*) and the church at its center were discovered by Féderlin at Bir Zar’a, about 3.5 km southeast of the monastery of Euthymius, see: J.L. Féderlin, “Les campements des Arabes chrétiens des ‘*parembolis*’ au desert de Jérusalem (cinquième et sixième siècle)”, *La Terre Sainte* 24 (1907), pp. 177-184. Exploratory excavations I carried out at the site confirmed Féderlin’s suggestion, see: Y. Hirschfeld, “Monastery of St. Euthymius”, Survey and Excavations, *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 3 (1984), pp. 43-44.

12. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 51 (ed. Schwartz, p. 75, lines 1-6). The location of the two cisterns has not yet been found.

13. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 16 (ed. Schwartz, p. 26, lines 14-17).

12 persons) and its monks lived in unusually small cells.¹⁴ As in the Pharan laura, the monks spent most of their time solitary in their cells, and would meet on weekends only for common prayer and to restock their cells with food and the raw material they needed for their traditional craft (weaving baskets and mats, and plaiting ropes).

When the laura was completed, its church was dedicated on 7 May 428, in the presence of the heads of the Jerusalem church: Juvenal, then archbishop of Jerusalem, together with Passarion, who was country-bishop and archimandrite of the monks in the Jerusalem district, as well as Hesychius the priest and theologian. As mentioned below, the day the laura was dedicated – 7 May – became a sacred day throughout the period of the monastery's existence.

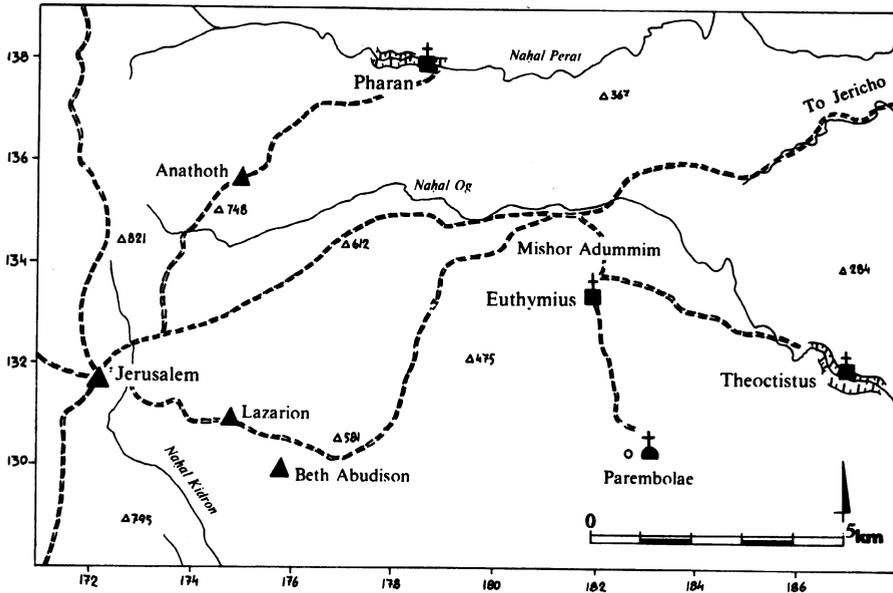


Fig. 2 Location map of the monastery of Euthymius.

14. Instructions to build the laura cells on a small scale were not accidental, but were derived from the monastic concepts of Euthymius. Later, in 457, Martyrius and Elias, who had been trained as monks in Egypt, arrived at the laura. According to Cyril, the two decided to leave the laura because "the cells of the laura were very narrow and uncomfortable", see: Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 32 (ed. Schwartz, p. 51, line 15). Martyrius and

From the dedication of the monastery (428) to Euthymius' death (473)

The laura of Euthymius was unusual in its central location, near the main road between Jerusalem and Jericho (Fig. 2). Hundreds and thousands of pilgrims traveled this road, en route to and fro between Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the baptismal sites on the Jordan, etc. Many of these pilgrims visited the desert monasteries, and their donations were the main source of income for these monasteries. The proximity of the laura of Euthymius to the pilgrims' road was therefore a significant factor contributing to its success and prosperity. This may be deduced from the account of the Armenian pilgrims. According to Cyril, a large group of Armenian pilgrims, numbering 400, on their way from Jerusalem to the Jordan, made a side trip to the monastery. Domitian, Euthymius' pupil, who was steward of the monastery, was instructed to receive the travelers. This only became possible after Euthymius wrought a miracle which caused the pantry to fill with loaves of bread, oil and wine.¹⁵ This incident illustrates the topographic advantages of the monastery of Euthymius. The pilgrims, traveling individually or in groups, chose to visit the monastery of Euthymius, since, in addition to the fame of its founder, it was located at an easily accessible spot. In fact, according to Cyril, since the incident of the Armenians, the property of the laura began to increase and the number of its members increased to fifty. In order to accommodate them, additional cells were built and pack animals were bought to supply the growing needs of the community.¹⁶

As the monastery grew, the ties between it and the monastery of Theoctistus grew stronger. According to the pattern originally specified by Euthymius, the coenobium of Theoctistus served to train novices. Lay persons and young monks who were still beardless and who arrived at the monastery of Euthymius were sent by him to the monastery of Theoctistus

Elias probably preferred more spacious cells in which guests could be received and some property collected. The monastic concepts of the two are extremely important, since later each of them in turn was Patriarch of Jerusalem (Martyrius in 478-486 and Elias in 494-518).

15. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 17 (ed. Schwartz, p. 27). On the arrival of 400 Armenian pilgrims to the laura of Euthymius, see M.E. Stone, "Holy Land Pilgrimage of Armenians before the Arab Conquest", *Revue Biblique* 83 (1986), pp. 94-96.

16. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 18 (ed. Schwartz, p. 28, lines 9-10).

for a long training period.¹⁷ In addition, both monasteries practiced a joint economy, headed by a single steward (*oikonomos*). The monasteries had joint farms at Mishor Adummim, as well as a joint hostel in Jerusalem.¹⁸ The analysis of Cyril's account indicates that this partnership was not planned, but rather that it developed gradually, and was based mainly on the personal link between the two founders, Euthymius and Theoctistus (after their death, the link between the monasteries was severed).

The monastery of Euthymius also produced a large number of monks who reached high church office in Palestine. For example, two of the first pupils of Euthymius, Cosmas and Stephen, were appointed deacons of the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (the *Anastasis*) and later served in other positions. Stephen was appointed head of the church at Jamnia, while Cosmas was appointed cross-warden in Jerusalem.¹⁹ The links of the monks with the church establishment in Jerusalem increased their involvement in religious issues which developed in the mid-5th century CE. In the theological discussions at the Councils of Ephesus (449) and Chalcedon (451), Euthymius consistently supported the Orthodox faction. After the Monophysite opponents gained control of the bishopric of Jerusalem, Euthymius retired from his monastery and went into the inner desert with a small group of monks. Two years later, Euthymius returned to his monastery, his position stronger than ever.²⁰

The status of Euthymius as a holy man may be deduced from his relationship with the Empress Eudocia. Until 456, the empress supported the party which opposed the resolutions of the Chalcedonian Council. However, in 455 she suffered a number of personal setbacks which convinced her to revise her position. According to Cyril, she sent messengers to Syria, to the

17. Thus, for example, Sabas (who later founded the Great Laura in the Kidron Valley) was sent to the monastery of Theoctistus for long years of training, see: *Life of Sabas* 7 (ed. Schwartz, Leipzig 1939, p. 91).

18. The joint steward (*oikonomos*) is mentioned by Cyril, *Life of Cyriac* 6 (ed. Schwartz, Leipzig 1939, p. 226, line 5); on the existence of joint farming estates at Mishor Adummim and the hostel in Jerusalem, see: idem, 7 (ed. Schwartz, p. 226, lines 13-17). The description of the early period of the lura at Mishor Adummim shows that the partnership with the monastery of Theoctistus developed at a later period in the existence of the monastery. It is evidence of a change in Euthymius' concept of monasticism. The new model created by Euthymius, based on cooperation between a communal monastery and a lura, was adopted in varying versions by the founders of other monasteries, such as Gerasimus, John of Choziba, and Sabas.

19. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 20 (ed. Schwartz, pp. 32-33), see Chitty, *The Desert* (above note 1), p. 85.

20. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 27-28 (ed. Schwartz, pp. 44-45).

revered monk, Simeon the Stylite, to ask his advice, and he instructed her to follow Euthymius' guidance. The energetic empress lost no time, and hearing of Euthymius' refusal to come to Jerusalem, she built a tower on the highest peak of the "eastern desert", where she could meet him and hear his teaching.²¹ This peak, identified as Mt. Muntar, was later the site where Sabas founded the monastery of Scholarius.

In the years following the council of Chalcedon, the monastery of Euthymius reached the peak of its prestige. In the spring of 457, Sabas was received by Euthymius, who sent him as a novice to the monastery of Theoctistus. In the summer of that year, Elias and Martyrius – two experienced monks – arrived from Nitria, in Egypt.²² They stayed in the monastery of Euthymius for a time, and then went on to found their own monasteries: Elias founded two coenobia near Jericho, and Martyrius founded one of the largest and most beautiful communal monasteries in the Judean Desert.²³ The arrival of these monks was part of a wave of monks who came to the Judean Desert at that time. This trend was enhanced not only by the personal renown of Euthymius, but by the understanding and unanimity of opinions between him and Juvenal, the new patriarch of Jerusalem (unlike the situation in Egypt, where religious riots were taking place at that time).²⁴

Euthymius was now the undisputed leader of the monastic movement in the Judean Desert. This fact found expression in the network of monasteries and ritual buildings which surrounded his monastery. Among these was the monastery of Theoctistus, the church of the Saracen encampment (*parembole*), the tower of Eudocia at the top of Jebel Muntar,

21. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 30 (ed. Schwartz, p. 48, lines 6-11). On this incident and the stirring events which occurred in Jerusalem after the Council of Chalcedon, see E. Hönigmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), pp. 209-279.

22. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 31-32 (ed. Schwartz, pp. 49-51). Martyrius was a native of Cappadocia, while Elias was from Provincia Arabia (Transjordan). They both received their monastic education at the large monastic center of Nitria, in Egypt (above, note 14).

23. The remains of the monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim have recently been revealed in their full splendor, see: Y. Magen and H. Hizmi, "The Monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim", *Qadmoniot* 18 (1985), pp. 62-92 (Hebrew); Y. Magen and R. Talgam, "The Monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim (Khirbet el Murassas) and its Mosaics", in *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land. New Discoveries* (SBF Collectio Maior 36), edd. G.C. Bottini, L. Di Segni and E. Alliata, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 91-152; Y. Magen, "The Monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim", in *Ancient Churches Revealed*, ed. Y. Tsafir, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 170-196.

24. On developments in the Judean Desert during this period, see: Chitty, *The Desert* (above, note 1), pp. 92-93.

and another church named after St. Peter which was built on the Jerusalem-Jericho road. In addition, in the sixth decade of the century, monasteries were built by two pupils of Euthymius: the monastery of Martyrius, mentioned above, and the monastery of Gabriel, northwest of Mishor Adummim (Fig. 3).

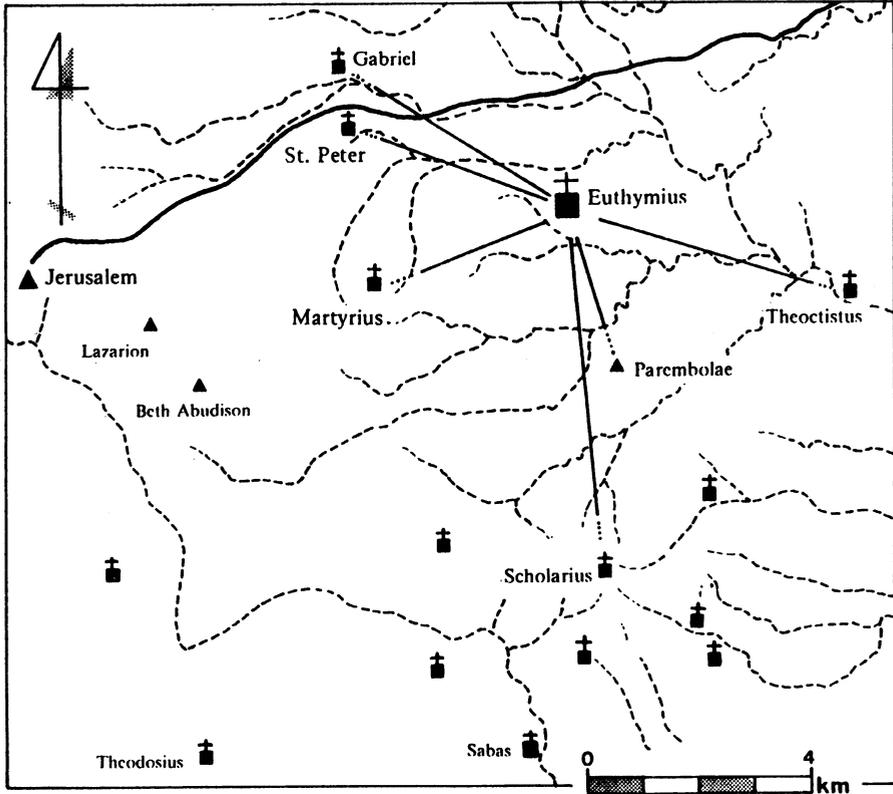


Fig. 3 Satellite monasteries around the monastery of Euthymius.

Euthymius died on 20 January 473, at the age of 94.²⁵ According to the account, he was handsome and of good bearing. Cyril describes him as follows:

25. Many of the monks mentioned in the sources are described as reaching an extreme old age. Thus, for example, two of Cyril's figures – John Hesychast and Cyriac – died aged over one hundred years. John Moschus reports a monk who died at the age of 113, see: Johannes Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* (ed. M.-P. Migne, PG 87, 3, col. 2953). It seems that the monastic way of life and a desert existence contributed to the monks' longevity.

“His face was rounded, clear and shining, with sharp eyes; he was a midget, with a beard that was entirely white and flowed down over his stomach. All the parts of his body were whole; indeed, his eyes and teeth did not deteriorate at all (due to old age); rather, he remained strong and vigorous to his last day.”²⁶

Word of his death soon spread, and many visitors – headed by the Patriarch and his retinue – soon arrived. The body of Euthymius was deposited in a coffin, which was then given temporary burial. Among the mourners was the deacon Fidus, who was instructed to build a magnificent tomb for Euthymius. The tomb, which was three months in the building, is described in detail by Cyril. Cyril relates the construction process as follows:

“The deacon Fidus built the funeral chapel with great zeal, in the site of the cave where great Euthymius had first lived in seclusion. He demolished the cave, and in only three months he erected a great and beautiful vaulted chamber. In the middle he placed the holy man’s grave, while on both sides he prepared graves for hegumens, priests and other saintly men”.²⁷

The tomb was completed before 7 May 473. On that date, which was sacred in the history of the monastery, the Patriarch arrived from Jerusalem, interred the remains of Euthymius in the prepared burial niche, and covered it with a marble slab which had been prepared especially.²⁸ This slab was not found, but all the other components described by Cyril, including the central niche in which the saint was interred, were found by Chitty in the course of his excavations of the site (see below).

The death of Euthymius marked the end of the golden age of the monastery. The monastery status declined, especially after it was transformed from a *laura* to a *coenobium*.

26. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 40 (ed. Schwartz, p. 59, lines 16-22).

27. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 42 (ed. Schwartz, p. 61, lines 17-22).

28. A decorated burial slab was discovered at the nearby monastery of Martyrius. That slab, found *in situ*, was of reddish limestone, and inscribed: “This is the grave of Paul, priest and archimandrite”. See: Magen and Hizmi (above, note 23), p. 65. This find may serve as an example of the appearance and form of the slab which was placed over the grave of Euthymius.

From Euthymius' death (473) to the end of the Byzantine period (638)

In the years after the death of Euthymius, two events took place, indirectly linked to each other: the changeover from a *laura* to a *coenobium*, and the split between it and the transformation of the monastery of Theoctistus. Cyril devotes a long, detailed chapter to a description of the transformation of the monastery into a *coenobium* – which, according to his hagiographer, was ordered by Euthymius himself on his deathbed. Construction began in 478, when Martyrius (a former member of the monastery of Euthymius and founder of a monastery which bore his own name) was appointed patriarch of Jerusalem. The construction was once again entrusted to Fidus, who brought an engineer, workmen, and many supplies. The construction process lasted three years, and the monastery's structure underwent significant changes. In the process, the seclusion cells of the *laura* were destroyed. Cyril describes the rebuilding of the monastery as follows:

“So Fidus took an engineer, a multitude of craftsmen and much building material, descended to the *laura* and built the *coenobium*, surrounded it with a wall and fortified it. Also (Fidus) transformed the old church into a refectory and built the new church above it; and he also erected a tower inside the *coenobium*, very strong and very graceful, and co-ordinated the works so that the funeral chapel would stand in the middle of the *coenobium*”.²⁹

The dedication of the *coenobium* was set for 7 May 482. Among the monks who worked on the construction was Cyriac, who later told Cyril about the split between the two monasteries of Euthymius and Theoctistus, three years later (see below). According to Cyril, the changeover of the monastery from a *laura* to a *coenobium* was done according to the will of Euthymius. The changeover of a *laura* to a *coenobium* is extremely rare, though not unknown.³⁰ It possibly meant a decline in prestige, since the status of the members of the *laura*, as “cell-dwellers”, was higher than that

29. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 43 (ed. Schwartz, p. 64, lines 14-21).

30. Among the many monasteries whose histories we possess, there are only a few examples of monasteries in which cells were torn down and rebuilt according to the *coenobitic* pattern as in the monastery of Euthymius. Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus in northern Syria, recounts the history of a monastery of a monk named Publius. His community was originally in individual cells, but at a later time the monks decided to dismantle the cells and build a communal monastery structure instead. See: Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* 5 (82, 1354), translated by R.M. Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria by Theodoret of Cyrrhus*, Kalamazoo, Michigan 1985, pp. 58-62. Another example is the monastery of Peter the

of the monks in the communal monasteries. Cyril aptly quotes the phrase ascribed to Sabas, that “the coenobium is to the laura as the flower to the fruit”.³¹ This step may have complemented the process begun earlier, with the increase in size of the laura and the communal relations which developed between it and the communal monastery of Theoctistus.³²

At any rate, the change was made, and from 482 onwards the monastery of Euthymius was a communal monastery in every detail. This construction project laid the foundations which largely determined the current form of the monastery.

In 485, 12 years after the death of Euthymius and three years after the coenobium was dedicated, the split between it and the monastery of Theoctistus occurred. The immediate cause was the inheritance of Terebon, the son of Aspabet-Peter, head of the Saracen tribe who had been baptized by Euthymius (see above). According to Cyril, Terebon left his property to both monasteries, but the monks of the monastery of Theoctistus “snatched” Terebon’s body and so set up a claim to his inheritance. In the wake of this act, the joint estates owned by the monasteries were divided by a fence and a tower, and the share of Euthymius’ monastery in the hostel

Iberian near Mayumas, in the Gaza region. It was a small monastery at first, including a small number of cells. After his death, his successors decided to rebuild it as a communal monastery, see: *Petrus der Iberer* 143-144 (ed. R. Raabe, Leipzig 1895, pp. 130-131). The section describing the rebuilding of the monastery has been translated into Hebrew, see: Hirschfeld (above, note 8), p. 247. Meimaris notes additional examples of laura monasteries which became communal monasteries, as it were, see: Y. Meimaris, *Sacred Names, Saints. Martyrs and Church Officials in the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Pertaining to the Christian Church of Palestine*, Athens 1986, p. 160, note 2. The very existence of the phenomenon expresses a strengthening of the coenobitic trend in the monastic movement of Palestine and neighboring countries.

31. *Life of John Hesychast* 6 (ed. Schwartz, p. 206, lines 7-10).

32. It is possible to make the far-reaching assumption, despite the account of Cyril, that the will of Euthymius was fictitious, and that in fact it was not he who gave instructions to turn the laura into a coenobium but rather his successor as abbot. This may explain “strange” facts in this matter. First, if Euthymius had wanted to turn his monastery into a communal monastery he had had enough time and strong links with the church in Jerusalem to implement this during his lifetime (especially after the Council of Chalcedon). Second, despite his instructions to carry this out urgently, the dismantling and reconstruction of the laura only began five years after the saint’s death, i.e., in 478. In that year, Martyrius – a consistent supporter of the coenobitic system – acceded to the Patriarchate (see above, note 14). It is not impossible that Euthymius’ successor as abbot, together with Martyrius, decided to turn the laura into a coenobium; they attributed their decision to the will of Euthymius in order to lend it greater authority. Obviously, this reconstruction of events is only an assumption.

they owned in common in Jerusalem was purchased for 200 gold pieces. Using this money, the abbot of the monastery of Euthymius acquired the hostel owned by the monastery of Chariton (the Old Laura) in the western hills of Jerusalem (possibly a hint at some financial problems which faced the monks of the monastery of Chariton).³³ This was not the only hostel owned by the monastery of Euthymius. According to Cyril, it owned another hostel in Jericho, like other monasteries in the Judean Desert which maintained hostels in Jerusalem as well as in Jericho.³⁴ The split between the monasteries of Euthymius and Theoctistus is apparently connected with the change in character of the monastery of Euthymius. The changeover of the Mishor Adummim lura to a coenobium in effect canceled out the role of the monastery of Theoctistus as a communal monastery which accepted the novice monks of the lura and trained them for a solitary life. This change as well as other factors (such as the personalities of the main figures) brought about the split between these two monasteries.

For ten years (544-554), the walls of the monastery of Euthymius were the home of Cyril of Scythopolis, the most important historian and hagiographer of monasticism in the Judean Desert. His detailed description of the monastery and its surroundings during this period has survived, and is one of the most beautiful and rare descriptions of the desert. The contents indicate the concept of the monks, according to which the desert is an ideal as well as a suitable and attractive place of residence. In Cyril's own words:

“I shall try to depict by word of mouth the location of the coenobium, for it is beautiful to see, on account of the excellent evenness of the terrain, and suitable for monks to practise asceticism because of its mild and temperate climate. Now, there is a very small hillock bordered to the east and to the west by two tiny valleys which converge to the south and unite together. On the northern side there is a very pleasant plain, which stretches for three stadia, and to the north of this plain there is a ravine descending from just about the eastern slope of the holy Ascension of our Lord Christ. In this same plain rises the tower and stands out the gatehouse of the coenobium. And the place is all

33. The main source for the split between the two monasteries and the results of this split is the work of Cyril, *Life of Cyriac* 6-7 (ed. Schwartz, pp. 225-226).

34. The hostel of the monastery of Euthymius at Jericho is mentioned by Cyril, see: Cyril, *Life of John Hesychast* 20 (ed. Schwartz, Leipzig 1939, p. 217, lines 5-6). On the hostels owned by the desert monasteries, see: V. Corbo, “L'ambiente materiale della vita dei monaci di Palestina nel periodo bizantino”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 153 (1958), pp. 243-244.

cultivated and wonderful, as it enjoys a temperate climate, as I said. For it is warmer than the coolest spots (in the region), but cooler than the hot places; moreover, it is drier than the too humid areas, but more humid than those which are quite dry".³⁵

Ten years later, Cyril was called to settle in the New Laura south of Tekoa.³⁶ This was in early 555. From that time on, information about the monastery of Euthymius is extremely sparse. Except for isolated references, such as the name of the hermit Theodorus who embarked on his monastic life at the monastery of Euthymius,³⁷ there are no sources for the history of the monastery in the late Byzantine period. Life in the monastery apparently continued without extraordinary changes until the Muslim conquest (638 CE). It may be assumed that the monastery of Euthymius, like most other Judean Desert monasteries, was not harmed during the Persian conquest 614. The most serious damage to the monastery was done during the next chapter of its history, in the early Muslim period.

The monastery from the end of the Byzantine period (638) to its abandonment (about 1250)

Some twenty years after the Muslim conquest, in the summer of 659, a severe earthquake caused damage to two monasteries: the monastery of John the Baptist (Qasr el-Yahud) by the Jordan River, and the monastery of Euthymius at Mishor Adummim. The earthquake's epicenter was in the Jericho region, which also suffered extreme damage. Information about this earthquake has survived in a Maronite chronicle, which states:

"And in those days when the Arabs assembled there [Jerusalem] with Mu'awiya there was a trembling and a severe earthquake. In it fell the greater part of Jericho and all of its churches, and the house of Saint John of the Baptism of our Saviour, which is on the Jordan, was uprooted from its

35. Cyril, *Life of Euth.* 43 (ed. Schwartz, p. 64, line 21, p. 65, line 8).

36. On this event, see: B. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l'oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis*, Paris 1983, pp. 31-32.

37. John Moschus 124 (*PG*, p. 2985).

foundation and all of the monastery, and the monastery of Abba Euthymius with many cells of monastics and solitaries, and many places fell in it".³⁸

The severity of the destruction in the monastery of Euthymius may be deduced from the results of the excavations. During our excavation at the site, it became clear that most of the monastery – except for the crypt, whose vaults remained intact, and another vault which survived at the north end of the church – was rebuilt after the earthquake of 659. At this stage, the basilical church was reconstructed over the vaults; the latter are not Byzantine, as Chitty suggests, but early Muslim.³⁹ The floor of the church was decorated with fine mosaic patterns. These have also been dated, on the basis of their style, to the early Muslim period, i.e., following the earthquake of 659. Reconstruction of the monastery probably took place not long after the earthquake, in the second half of the 7th century.

Life in the reconstructed monastery continued according to the pattern set in the Byzantine period. The monastery of Euthymius was one of the major monasteries in the Judean Desert, along with the monasteries of Sabas, Theodosius, Chariton, and others, which continued to exist until the Crusader period. These monasteries constituted a "reserve" of Byzantine culture surrounded by a population which was undergoing increasing Muslim influence. Various items of typical Byzantine character, such as mosaic stone floors, have been dated to the early Muslim period and even to the Crusader period. Multifarious literary activity took place inside these monasteries. Most of this activity, which consisted of original writing and the translation of works from Greek into Arabic, and vice versa, was focused on the lauras of Sabas and Chariton; however, the monastery of Euthymius was in close contact with them. A letter of the greatest writer of

38. References to the original text and English translation were published in the study of R. Schick, *The Fate of the Christians in Palestine during the Byzantine-Umayyad Transition, A.D. 600-750*, I (unpublished dissertation), Chicago 1987, 165. For dating of the chronicles and the earthquake, see: K.W. Russell, "The Earthquake Chronology of Palestine and Northwest Arabia from the 2d through the mid-8th Century A.D.", *BASOR* 260 (1985), pp. 46-47.

39. Chitty seems to have dated the church to 482, even before beginning the excavation, see: Chitty and Jones, "The Church" (above, note 1), pp. 175-176. This was done despite the fact that the mosaics of the church were dated by the Dominican archaeologist Père Savignac to the 7th-8th centuries (ibid.). The early dating of the church was reiterated by Chitty later, see: Chitty, "The Monastery" (above note 1), p. 194.

the Great Laura, John of Damascus, mentions Anastasius, abbot of the monastery of Euthymius.⁴⁰

In the late 8th century, security in the region diminished, and many monasteries were attacked by the Saracen inhabitants of the area. The monastery of Euthymius is mentioned in connection with the Saracen attack on the monastery of Mar Sabas in 796. Later, in 809, the monastery of Euthymius itself was stormed by Saracens who plundered it as well as other desert monasteries.⁴¹ Nonetheless, according to the list of monasteries and churches of 808, there were then 30 monks in the monastery of Euthymius.⁴²

Damage to the monasteries was severe, but they continued to exist. The monastery of Euthymius is mentioned several times in the work of Stephen Sabaites, a monk at the monastery of Mar Saba in the late 8th century, and later in the letter of Theodore Studite, the famous abbot of the Studion monastery in Constantinople in the early 9th century. The monastery is again mentioned in the "Life of St. Lazarus", a source dating from the early 11th century. This source depicts a grave picture of unceasing pressure on the monks who were surrounded by a hostile local population.

One of the important descriptions concerning the history of the monastery of Euthymius is in the work of the Russian pilgrim, the Abbot Daniel, who arrived in the country in the early 12th century (1107). He describes the monastery as follows:

"To the east of the laura of St. Saba, only behind the mountain, is the Monastery of St. Euthymius, three versts away, and there lies St. Euthymius, and many other holy fathers lie there, and their bodies are as those of living people. There is a little monastery on a level place, and about it are rocky mountains some distance off. The monastery was established with a surrounding wall and the church was elevated. And there is quite close to it the Monastery of St. Theoctistus, under the mountain only half a day's walk

40. The later sources mentioning the monastery of Euthymius were collected by Chitty in two articles, D.J. Chitty, "Two Monasteries in the Wilderness of Judea", *PEFQS*, 1928, 137-139, and in his 1932 article, see: Chitty, "The Monastery" (above note 1), pp. 188-190.

41. For the account by Theophanes, see: Theophanes, *Chronographia* (ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig 1883, 484).

42. The number of monks in the monastery of Euthymius is mentioned in the "List of Monasteries", see: *Commemoratorium de casis Dei vel monasteriis* (edd. T. Tobler and A. Molinier, St. Gallen-Paris 1879, 303). On the date of the list, see: J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, Jerusalem 1977, p. 12.

from the Monastery of Euthymius, and all this has been destroyed now by pagans”.⁴³

This description indicates that the monastery wall was not intact at the beginning of the Crusader period. Nonetheless, life in the monastery seems to have continued, since the graves of Euthymius and other saints are mentioned by the Abbot Daniel as still intact and in their original locations.

Some 70 years after the visit of the Abbot Daniel, in 1177, another pilgrim named John Phocas arrived at the site. Phocas describes the monastery of Euthymius as a fortified, well-guarded monastery:

“... there is the monastery of St. Euthymius the Great and it is also walled all around by towers and by great battlements. In the middle of its stands the church which has a cylindric (vaulted) roof and beneath it there is a cave and in the middle of the cave is the tomb of the Great Euthymius...”⁴⁴

Since Phocas describes the walls as intact and fortified, it may be assumed that between the two visits, some time in the mid-12th century, the monastery underwent comprehensive reconstruction. The rulers in Constantinople at this time were the Comnenus emperors (1081-1185), who were renowned as maintainers and expanders of the Byzantine Empire.⁴⁵ This phase of reconstruction is clearly noticeable in the remains of the monastery, and includes a new pavement in the church, construction of a chapel over the grave of Euthymius, various new rooms and a refectory, a vaulted passageway, etc.

The last historical source to mention the monastery is the work of Neophytus, a priest from Cyprus, dated 1185. Neophytus describes the history of a Stylite monk named Gabriel, who was sent from the monastery of Mar Saba to the monastery of Euthymius. According to this account, Gabriel used to carry a load of firewood to the bakery and the kitchen that weighed almost as much as a camel. Later in the account, Saladin's conquest is mentioned as having caused a great decline in the number of

43. Daniel, *hegoumène Russe, Vie et pèlerinage* 39 (ed. B. de Khitrowo, *Itinéraires russes en orient*, Geneva 1889, 35). Translation from: Chitty, “Two Monasteries” (above, note 40), p. 138.

44. Johannes Phocas 18 (ed. Migne, *PG* 133, col. 949), and translated by Leah Di Segni. See also: A. Stewart, “Pilgrimage of Joannes Phocas”, *PPTS*, 5, London 1896, pp. 33-34.

45. Chitty, “The Monastery” (above, note 1), p. 196, ascribes the last period of construction at the monastery to the time of Emanuel Comnenus (1143-1180).

monks in the community.⁴⁶ Since this is the last mention of the monastery of Euthymius, it may well have been abandoned in the wake of Saladin's conquest of the country. However, abandonment may have occurred later, during the reign of the Mamluk sultan Baybars (1260-1277). One proposal is that the deserted monastery became a road station (khan) for pilgrims on the annual procession from Nebi Musa, not far from Jericho to Jerusalem.⁴⁷ This provides an explanation for the Arabic name of the site, Khan el-Ahmar – the “Red Khan” – which has survived to this day.

Summary

Summarizing the history of the monastery of Euthymius, four main dates of construction are clear:

1. 428: dedication of the laura church. Solitary cells, a bakery, a water cistern with a double opening, and a garden were founded alongside the church. From this date on, the laura expanded and the number of its monks reached fifty. In the year of Euthymius' death (473) the original seclusion cave was transformed into a vaulted underground tomb.

2. 482: reconstruction of the monastery as a walled coenobium. The grave of Euthymius remained at the center of the monastery. The Old Laura church was demolished and in its stead a refectory was built with a new church over it. A large water reservoir was excavated alongside the monastery, surrounded by walled farming plots. A tower and gatehouse indicated the boundaries of the monastery's estates. Two hostels, one in Jerusalem and the other in Jericho, were owned by the monastery.

3. 659: severe damage was caused by an earthquake. In the wake of the damage, most of the monastery's components were rebuilt, except for the underground tomb which survived from the Byzantine period.

4. About 1150: large-scale restoration and construction of the monastery. The central church was paved, a chapel was built over the grave of Euthymius, as well as a new refectory and rooms; the wall was restored.

46. *Neophyte le reclus* 18, ed. H. Delehayé, “Saints de Chypre”, *AB* 26 (1907), pp. 171-172.

47. Chitty, “The Monastery” (above, note 1), p. 190.

Remains of the monastery

The monastery of Euthymius (Khan el-Ahmar) is located in the middle of the industrial area of Mishor Adummim (1819/1333). The access road leads south for a distance of 3 km from the Jerusalem-Jericho road. The new road cuts through one of the tributary valleys of Nahal Og. The ancient access road to the monastery stretched along the bed of this valley and reached the monastery gate from the northwest (the area is currently completely destroyed). This road ended at the plaza before monastery's gate.

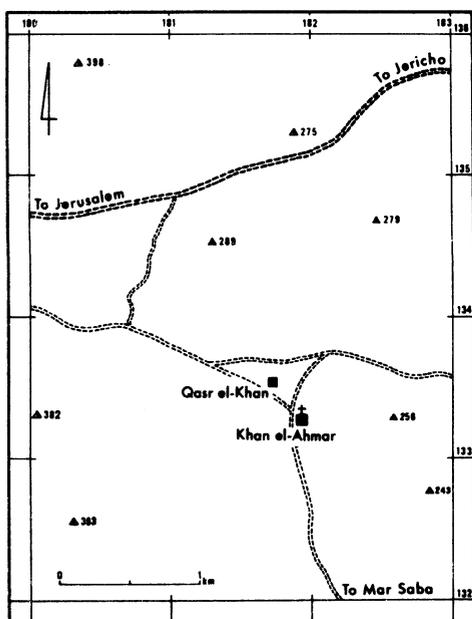


Fig. 4 The monastery and its surroundings.

Water supply to the monastery

According to the descriptions of Cyril, the monastery was surrounded by a cultivated agricultural area, guarded by a tower. The location of the tower has been identified with the remains of the structure named Qasr el-Khan, about 300 m northwest of the monastery (Fig. 4).⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the

48. Chitty, "The Monastery" (above, note 1), p. 151.

remains of the tower have been completely destroyed and cannot be investigated. On the other hand, around the monastery – mainly to its east and south – the remains of the garden and the water supply system of the Byzantine period can be identified (Fig. 5). East of the monastery, Chitty identified the two water cisterns mentioned in the sources.⁴⁹ The first is an underground reservoir adjoining the monastery wall. The reservoir, which is rectangular (about 12×18 m in area), was completely preserved. Its roof, supported by pillars, consists of two parallel long vaults. The water was drawn through four openings. The reservoir is currently about 12 m deep, but its original depth was greater; thus, its capacity was over 3000 m³. This gigantic reservoir was fed through channels and gutters which drained rainwater from the courtyards and roofs of the monastery. This was apparently the reservoir which was added to the monastery when it was changed from a *laura* into a *coenobium* (about 480). About 50 m east of this reservoir, another, simpler reservoir was discovered which has been identified as the “two-mouthed” reservoir serving the *laura* from its foundation (428) onwards. About 15 m north of it, another, round reservoir was preserved. South of the water reservoirs, on a lower level, agricultural terraces were preserved which were probably irrigated by force of gravity. In addition, two gardens were identified in the area south of the monastery. The gardens were surrounded by stone walls, the remains of which are still visible. Their total area is 2500 m², and they served to cultivate vegetables and fruit trees, as mentioned in the sources.

In the region south of the current monastery, remains of structures were found which may be ascribed to the *lauritic* phase of the monastery (428-479). To date, the remains of three cells have been found: two southwest of the monastery and one to its southeast. The poor state of preservation makes investigation of these remains impossible without systematic excavations. In addition, the part of the garden south of the monastery also contains two sections of wall which have no architectural connection with the monastery itself. These are apparently also remains of the *laura*, but a full archaeological excavation would be necessary to substantiate this assumption.

The gate and walls of the monastery. The monastery complex is surrounded by massive ashlar stone walls (Phot. 1). The length of the complex, from north to south, is 65 m; its width from west to east is 54 m (Fig. 6). The total area of the monastery within the walls is about 3500 m².

49. Chitty, “The Monastery” (above, note 1), pp. 190-191.

The entrance gate is in the northern wall. Its arched lintel is intact (Phot. 2). It is 2.1 m wide and 3.2 m high at its highest point. The lintel arch is pointed, and its stones with dressed margins are typical of the Crusader style of stoneworking. The current entrance gate therefore would seem to date to the last construction period of the monastery, i.e., the 12th century.

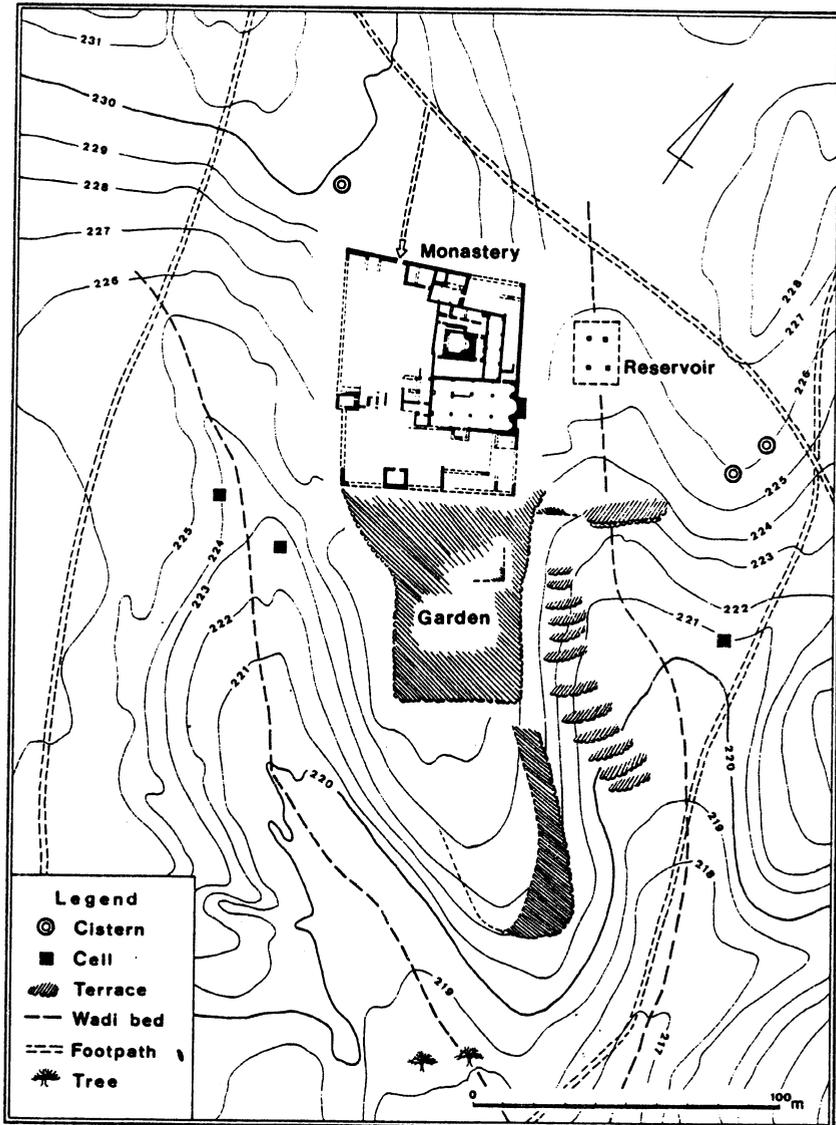


Fig. 5 The monastery of Euthymius, general plan of the site.

The monastery walls have survived to a maximum height of about 6 m. Photographs from the turn of the 20th century show the walls to have survived to twice their current height or more. Near the northwestern corner of the monastery, the wall includes two horizontal rows of projecting stones, each 1.8 m long divided by a vertical space 0.8 wide. Photographs from the turn of the century reveal one more, upper row. These projections may have served to support wooden beams which in turn supported a wooden structure built high up in the wall. Nothing remains of this device, but it may be assumed that it was used to lift various objects and goods, and

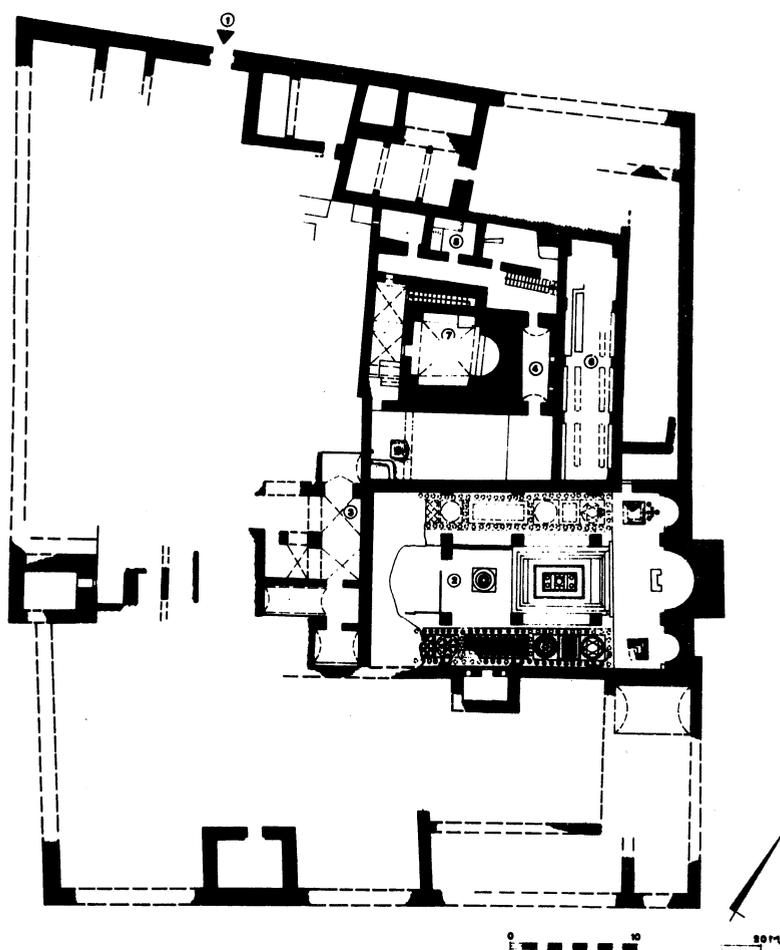


Fig. 6 The monastery of Euthymius, sketch plan.

perhaps even people, over the wall and into the monastery by means of a rope and basket. Such lifting devices are familiar from many monasteries, such as St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai. During periods of poor security, such devices enabled the monks to avoid opening the monastery gates.

The Monastery Church. The church was revealed by Chitty's excavations in 1930. Several necessary preservation operations have recently been carried out in the church; nevertheless, there is still serious danger of collapse, mainly in its northern aisle.

The church structure with its fine mosaic stone floors is the most impressive element on the site (Phot. 3). The church is in the center of the monastery, adjoining its eastern wall. It is raised by means of three vaults underlying it. This conforms with the description of the Abbot Daniel, of the early 12th century, which states that the church is a superstructure, higher than its surroundings. Chitty used historical considerations to date the church and its mosaics to 482.⁵⁰ This error was accepted unquestioningly by scholars, and the church of Khan el-Ahmar was considered to be one of the earliest tri-apsidal churches in Palestine.⁵¹ The error was corrected in the last season of our excavations. In an exploratory excavation underneath the church floor mosaic, in the southeastern corner of the *bema*, layers of fill in the church floor were revealed, and under them – the vault underlying the church (see below). The ceramic content of these layers included potsherds from the 6th-7th centuries. The vaults as well as the overlying church were therefore built after the Byzantine period, in the wake of the earthquake of 659. From that time until the monastery was abandoned in the 13th century the church underwent quite a few changes, as is indicated.

The church is rectangular. Its inner length, including the apse, is 25.4 m, and its width is 13.8 m. The three main entrances, of which nothing survives, were in the western wall. The inner space of the church was divided by two rows of square stone piers (each about 1×1 m wide), with 3 piers in each row. These piers supported a series of arches, which in turn supported the vaulted stone roof of the church. Four piers in the eastern part of the church supported a dome which corresponded to the central medallion of the decorated floor underneath it. The final design of the church apparently dates to the last period of the monastery's construction, in the Crusader period.

50. Chitty, "Excavation" (above, note 1), p. 138.

51. This date was adopted, for example, by Ovadia, see: A. Ovadia, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land*, Bonn 1970, pp. 103-104, No. 97.

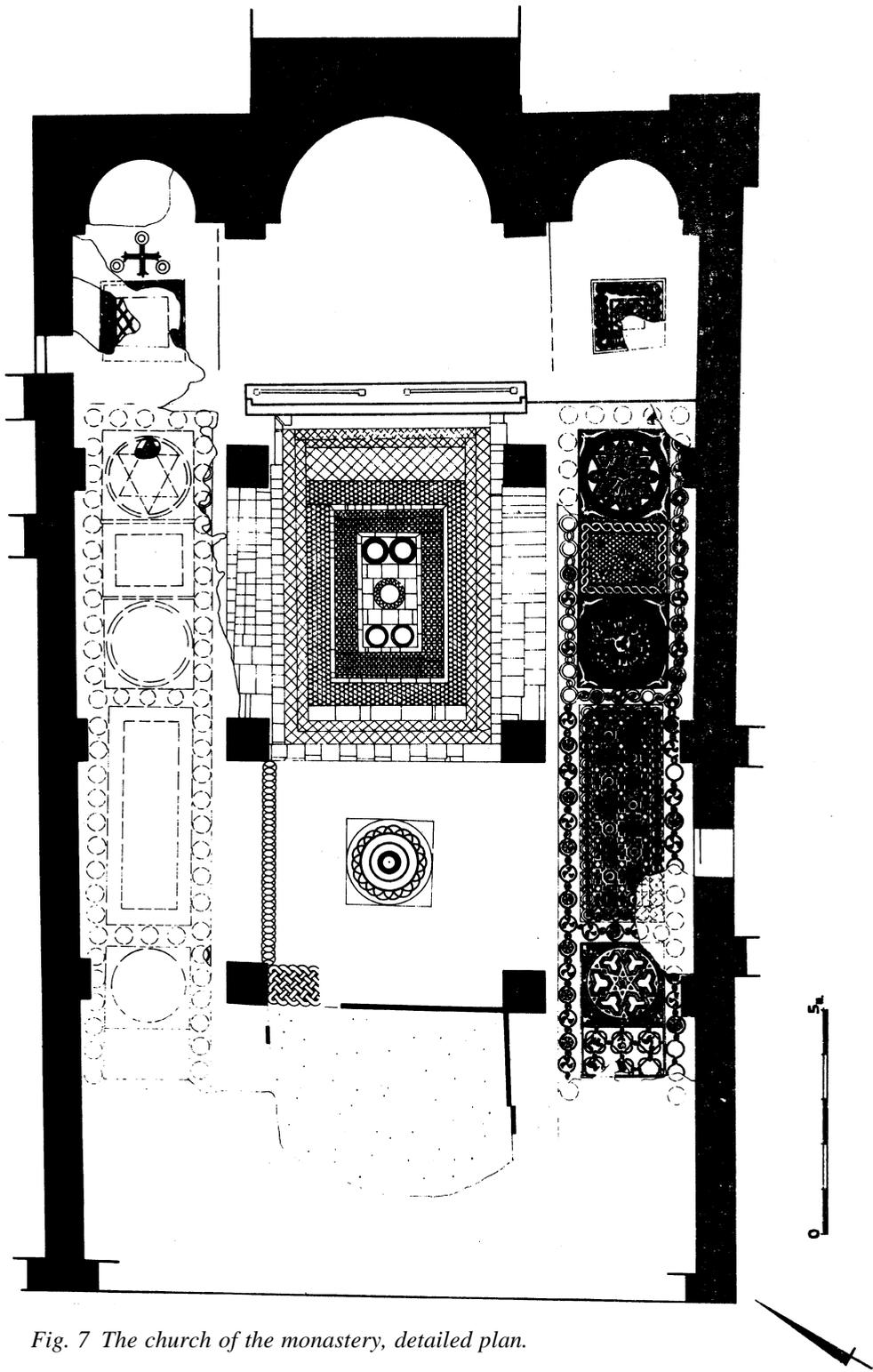


Fig. 7 The church of the monastery, detailed plan.

The mosaic pavements of the church date, as has been noted, to the Umayyad period (Fig. 7). These mosaics survive mainly in the southern aisle, as well as in the northern and the southern apses. The dominant type of the mosaic design are geometric combinations in different versions. The floor of the southern aisle is decorated with a succession of alternating rectangular and round units. The easternmost unit contains a six-pointed star pattern with a red chalice at its center. The westernmost unit, on the other hand, contains several discernible animals (birds, and a type of lion), of schematic execution reminiscent of popular art. The mosaic stone pavements of the northern aisle were almost completely destroyed, except for a small section at its eastern end. In this section a small portion has survived of a six-pointed star identical with the six-pointed star of the southern aisle. It may therefore be assumed, though not decisively, that the mosaic pavements of both aisles were symmetrical.

The central floor of the nave apparently underwent considerable changes. The Umayyad stone mosaic pavement was replaced by sections of rougher mosaic, and at the center a magnificent *opus sectile* pavement was inserted. This section consists of interlocking geometric forms, in different-sized pieces of stone. The pieces are the local limestone in varying shades of red, orange, pink, and beige. A rayed medallion appears at its center. This apparently marked the location of the church dome, fragments of which were found in the course of the excavation.⁵² The *opus sectile* floor of the monastery of Euthymius is one of the best preserved in the country, and is a rare example of this type of stone mosaic pavement. Its closest parallels are in various 12th-century churches in Constantinople.⁵³ Thus, this floor, like the final design of the church nave, may be dated to the last phase of construction in the monastery.

The finds in the church were quite numerous. The piers of the southern aisle were covered with frescoes of saints, including two figures bearing shields. This section also yielded parts of a glass window within a frame of

52. Chitty, "The Monastery" (above, note 1), p. 195-196, notes the discovery of the dome pendentives during excavation of the nave.

53. The closest example is the *opus sectile* floor of the church of Christ Pantocrator in Constantinople, built between 1118-1136 as part of the monastery of the Comnenus dynasty, see: C. Mango, *Byzantine Architecture*, Milan 1978, p. 134. Another, earlier example is the *opus sectile* floor of the church of the Theotokos at the monastery of Hagios Lukas in Greece. This church was built in approximately 1040, see: R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1965, p. 277, Pl. 157.

molded stucco (currently on display at the Israel Museum). In the eastern part of the church, parts of the altar and of the iconostasis which spanned the width of the church were found.⁵⁴ These finds and others which are briefly mentioned in Chitty's excavation report have largely disappeared and cannot now be located.

The vaults under the church. The superstructure of the church is supported by three lengthwise, parallel vaults. The inner length of the vaults is 24 m. Their width, on the other hand, varies: the central vault is wider (4.9 m) than the flanking vaults, each 2.1 m wide. The entrances to the vaults are in the western wall. The walls supporting the vaults are very massive; they are 1.8 m wide, while the surrounding walls are 1.4 m wide. The vaults are built of fieldstones bonded with cement. This constitutes an essential difference between them and the Byzantine vaults surviving in the crypt and at the eastern end of the northern vault (see below). The vaults were used for various purposes. The central vault could have served as a refectory. It is a spacious hall, its ceiling 3.2 m above the floor (Phot. 4). Its area is 117 m². This hall could have contained the necessary features of a refectory, i.e., one or two rows of tables flanked by benches. Natural lighting penetrates the hall through the western entrance, especially in the afternoon - the time when monks usually took their meal.⁵⁵ An opening 1 m wide (currently blocked) connected the central and southern vault. The function of the southern vault is as yet unclear, but it probably served as a pantry, or perhaps even as a kitchen.

The accepted view was that the complex of vaults overlain by a church were built on the site of the monastery's original church. Indeed, Chitty found remains of construction of an earlier period at the level of the foundations of the central vault. These remains include a section of a lengthwise wall, two crosswise walls at right angles to it, and a white stone mosaic pavement abutting it. Chitty, who dated the erection of the church and its underlying vaults to the construction stage of 482, was certain that these were the earliest remains of the original church of the laura.⁵⁶ Now

54. Chitty and Jones (above, note 1), pp. 176-177. The window with molded stucco is currently on display at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Also see: Chitty, *The Desert* (above, note 1), pp. 197-198.

55. Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*, New Haven and London 1992, pp. 80-81.

56. Chitty, "Excavation" (above, note 1), pp. 46-47.

that the date of the vaults and the overlying church has been advanced to the early Muslim period, it seems more reasonable to assume that the remains of walls and stone mosaic pavements at the foundations of the central vault are the remains of the refectory which was built in 482. This assumption is substantiated by an exploratory examination which we carried out under the foundations of the mosaic pavement, where we found a homogeneous assemblage of potsherds belonging to the Byzantine period. Thus, the mosaic pavement and remains of walls date back to this period (the potsherds cannot be dated precisely, but they provide no grounds for changing the dating of the mosaic to the period of construction of the laura church, in 428).

The northern vault apparently served as a passageway to the northern wings of the monastery (see below). At its northern end, under the northern apse of the church, the vault widens into a room with the inner dimensions of 4×4.6 m. The level of this room is lower than the floor of the vault. An opening in its eastern wall gave direct access from outside the monastery. Chitty's excavations made it clear that this room was a burial chamber. Plastered burial troughs were installed at the sides of the room, separated by a narrow passage. The northern trough contained the skeletons of an old man, a woman, and a child.⁵⁷ The burial chamber is roofed by a well-made Byzantine vault. The ashlar construction and cylindrical shape of the vault are identical with those of the Byzantine vaults in the crypt (see below). These vaults seem to have been the only ones to survive the earthquake of 659.

Passageway. An entrance leads from the northern vault into a small courtyard with a stone mosaic pavement. The courtyard is 14.5 long from west to east and 5.2 m wide. A water cistern with an adjoining trough, were installed in the northeastern corner. Above the cistern at the western end of the courtyard, an elevated passageway linked the crypt directly with the church. The passageway was supported by an arch, its remains still noticeable *in situ*. The vaulted passageway leads from the courtyard into a row of rooms in the northern wing of the monastery (Phot. 5). These rooms served various purposes. One room contained two adjoining stone benches (Phot. 6). They are 1.8 m long, and each includes a headrest. This room, relatively small in size (2.7×3.5 m), may have been the infirmary of the

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45, and *idem*, *The Desert* (above, note 1), p. 193.

monastery. Infirmarys are reported to have been a common feature, at least in the large monasteries of the Judean Desert.⁵⁸

Alongside these rooms, a staircase led east from the passageway to the “late” refectory. The foundations of the staircase were preserved *in situ*, while its upper part has recently been restored. Thus, there was easy access to the refectory which was on the same level as the church. The refectory hall was discovered in Meimaris’ excavations.⁵⁹ It is 18.8 m long and 4 m wide (Phot. 7). In the excavations, the remains of three long, narrow tables were found built parallel to the lengthwise walls of the refectory. The remains indicate that the number of tables was actually twice as large. The refectory is built over vaults, which were dated to the Middle Ages. It seems, therefore, that for some reason the monks chose to move the refectory from the vault under the church to the ground level hall to its north.

Northern tower. North of the row of rooms in the northern wing of the monastery (see above), a structure of a tower-like nature was excavated. The structure, which is incorporated in the wall of the monastery, is square (each side 10.5 m long). Its walls, built of ashlar, are 1 m thick. Its inner space is divided into two lengthwise rooms running east-west. The entrance to the structure was apparently in the eastern wall of the southern room (the inner door linking the two rooms has not yet been excavated). The tower floor was paved with white stone mosaic, and its ceiling was apparently vaulted. Remains of the vault and its supporting arches have been found. The northern tower structure was apparently built in the early Muslim period (after 659) or the early Crusader period.

The Burial Crypt. This is undoubtedly the most important element of the monastery. It contained the grave of St. Euthymius, flanked by the graves of monastery abbots and senior monks. The crypt was the destination of numerous pilgrims who visited during the Byzantine period and later. Its location at the center of the monastery and the corridors leading to it indicate its central role in the life of the monastery.

A small Crusader chapel was built over the crypt. The chapel is dated on the basis of the cross-vaulted roofing, its remains still visible in the corners.

58. The sources mention several monks who were in charge of treating the ill, such as the monk Cyriac from the Old Laura (monastery of Chariton), see: *Life of Cyriac* (ed. Schwartz, p. 226, lines 23-24).

59. Meimaris (above, note 2), 49.

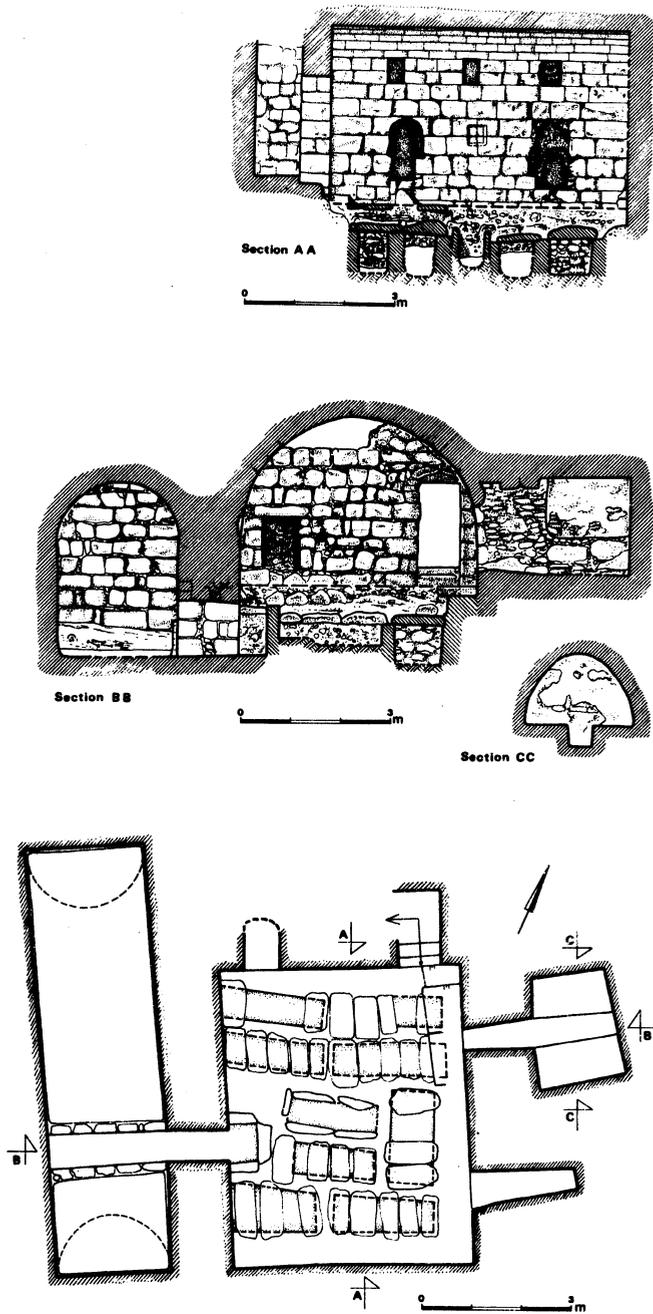


Fig. 8 The crypt of St. Euthymius, plan and sections.

The chapel is nearly square, with inner dimensions of 8.8×8.4 m. The entrance to the chapel was in its western wall. The threshold is 0.6 m above the adjoining corridor, and was probably climbed by a small wooden staircase. A corridor 2.5 m wide extended across the width of the chapel; this corridor was also roofed by cross vaults. It connected the monastery church through the small courtyard adjoining it (see above) with the crypt.

The underground tomb has survived intact and is one of the finest and most complete examples of its type in the country. The grave is reached by a long, narrow flight of stairs (Phot. 8). It is 0.5 m wide and consists of 13 steps descending from west to east. The stairs end in a small landing leading into the crypt through an entrance 0.8 wide and 1.7 m high. Two steps lead down to the floor of the crypt (the crypt is currently closed off by a locked grating until the site can be opened to the public).

The crypt itself contains two burial chambers: a central hall and a secondary hall to its west (Fig. 8). The main hall is rectangular, 4.7×5.8 m in dimensions. Its walls are built of fine ashlar. The vault, its lengthwise axis pointing north-south, rests directly on the walls (Phot. 9). This is a characteristic barrel-shaped “Roman” vault, built of ashlar. Its maximum height above the floor is 3.5 m.

The floor of the crypt is missing, except for several paving stones remaining near the entrance. Chitty found nine graves about 0.5 m beneath floor level. The graves consist of adjacent burial troughs covered by stone slabs. They are an average 2 m long and 0.5-0.7 m wide. Some of the graves contained a considerable number of skeletons (15 in one of the graves), as well as various finds, mainly Byzantine oil lamps placed as offerings.⁶⁰ Chitty assumed that the central grave was that of St. Euthymius. This assumption is based on the description of Cyril, who states implicitly that the grave of the saint was in the center of the crypt. This grave is not impressive in its current form, but according to the sources it was covered by a fine marble slab and surrounded by a marble balustrade.

Opposite the central grave, adjoining the eastern wall of the crypt, Chitty found a constructed altar table. The altar was removed, but nothing was found underneath it. Two burial niches were installed on either side of the altar. The northern niche is larger and widens into a small room 1.6×2.1 m in dimensions. Its vaulted roof reaches a maximum height of 1.7 m. Two burial ledges were installed at the sides of the niche. The southern niche is

60. Chitty, *The Desert* (above, note 1), p. 202.

long and narrow (0.6×2.1 m). Both niches were disturbed by grave robbers, and were therefore found empty.

The crypt was originally illuminated by natural light, through six windows built into in the vaulted roof. The windows are arranged in two parallel rows, three on each side. The windowsills are about 2.4 m above floor level, and their dimensions are 0.4×0.5 m. When the Crusader chapel was constructed over the crypt, these windows were blocked up. Instead, a window was created in the southern wall of the crypt. This window faces the courtyard between the crypt and the church and allows the penetration of light and air.

The additional burial hall, alongside the main hall, was discovered by Meimaris. The opening connecting the two halls is cut through the foundations of the western wall. It is a low opening (1.1 m high) only 0.6 m wide, and it was found blocked. When the block was removed, the lid of the opening was found bearing the monogram of the word “*taphos*” (grave). A burial slab bearing the name “*Petros*” in Greek was also found. Meimaris believes that this name should be identified with Aspabet-Peter, the chief of the Saracen tribe who was baptized by Euthymius.⁶¹ The burial hall itself is long and narrow, 8.5 m long and 2.4 m wide. Its ashlar walls and vaulted roof are well-built (Phot. 10). The vault is similar in character to the vault of the main hall. Two large burial troughs were built into the floor of the room; between them, opposite the entrance, is a narrow passage as wide as the entrance (0.6 m). The troughs were used for primary burial which was communal (Phot. 11). They are well-plastered, and when found contained over one hundred skeletons. The room may be assumed to have served as a tomb for monks who held office in the monastery, such as priests and their assistants, deacons or senior monks. The main hall, on the other hand, was allotted for burial of the founder of the monastery and his succeeding abbots. If this assumption is indeed correct, there is still no indication where the ordinary monks, who held no offices, were buried.

Summary

To date, the cultic sections of the monastery of Euthymius are the main areas that have been excavated: the church, the burial chapel, and the crypt

61. Meimaris (above, note 2), pp.34-35.

underneath it. Other nearby elements have been revealed, including the vaults underlying the church, the “later” refectory north of the church, and the row of rooms north of the crypt. However, many wings connected with daily life are still concealed under the ruins of the site. These include dwelling cells, storerooms, stables, bathrooms, latrines, and possibly a hostel. The excavation of these elements will shed further light on the complex and will complement the information from literary sources reflecting its nature when it was an active monastery.

Yizhar Hirschfeld
Israel Antiquities Authority