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Archaeological excavations in and around Jerusalem since the 19th century have revealed numerous water installations, both large and small.¹

Among the installations that were discovered is a large group of pools characterized by perimeter steps. Most of these pools are hewn into rock, sheltered by a natural rock cover or covered with stone or with a constructed arch, and lack a drainage system. (Fig. 1).

The width of the steps themselves is uneven, with the height of the lowest steps steeper than the others. Alongside of the lowest step there may also be an auxiliary step. (Fig. 2).

The space inside the pool is not processed in straight angles, but are mostly asymmetrical and imprecisely worked. The surface has been smoothed and plastered with grey plaster in several layers, plaster characteristic of the late Second Temple era and 2nd century CE. Some of the pools have a division at the center of the steps effected by a low handrail, and in several cases, the entranceway features a double opening (Figs. 3 and. 4).

Pairs of pools with a shared wall were also excavated; sometimes the second pool has a low rail at the center of its steps, and the second one often has a double entrance opening (Fig. 5).

Adjacent to some of the installations with steps cisterns were found without steps. (Fig. 6)

Similar pools were found in Herodion, Jericho, Masada, and throughout Judea. (Fig. 7).

Some of the installations were found inside of clusters of residential houses and some were found in public areas. After the destruction of the Temple, pools with perimeter steps were found mainly in northern Israel (Fig. 8).

The pools were identified as those intended for the Jewish populace for ritual immersion during eras in which the people stringently and especially observed the laws of ritual purity, during and after the Second Temple period.

In Jewish textual sources since the Mishna period, major sections were devoted to clarification of the laws of impurity, purity, and the laws of the ritual baths. In this literature, ancient laws are embedded which originated from the period of the Second Temple. In these texts, the water

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¹ This article is based mostly on Prof. Ronny Reich's book, *Jewish Ritual Baths (Mikvaot Tohara)* (Ben Zvi Institute: Jerusalem, 2013), which provides comprehensive information on the water installations discovered throughout Israel, but especially in Jerusalem, since the Hasmonean period until the Byzantine era. The panoramic view offered by Reich affords a re-examination of all of the pools identified as ritual baths, to see if they were ritual baths or used for other purposes. Let us also note that Prof. Reich and others were in doubt about some of the pools I discuss in this article. Most of the figures in this article were taken from his book.

pool installation designated for ritual purity immersion is called a *mikvah*, or *mikvah* [from the Hebrew root meaning 'gathering of waters; plural; *mikvaot*, or *mikvaot* in English].

Pools with steps enabled the visitor to immerse the entire body all at once, as prescribed by law. It was also possible to gather rainwater in the installations (required for ritual purification) and ensure that they were sealed to prevent seepage.

These data are compatible with the requirements of Halakha – Jewish Law.

The pools with perimeter steps were identified as ritual baths – as *mikvaot*, or *mikvaot*.

Some of the installations comprised a double entrance and a low railing at the center of the steps. These additions were understood as representations of the stringency and adherence to the laws of ritual purity.² Classifying these archaeological finds as *mikvaot* seems, on the surface, to be a clear, unambiguous identification.

Pools with perimeter steps

Further to the pools with a single set of stairs, four pools were uncovered dating to ancient Jerusalem. Each one has steps all around their sides, not only along one side.

An examination of the plans of the pools surrounded by steps shows that the difference between these pools and the ones identified as ritual baths are not limited to only the steps along all the sides, but raise questions if, indeed, these are ritual baths after all.

Following is a description of the pools with perimeter steps listed from north to south according to their location in the Old City of Jerusalem.

1. L543 - Pool with perimeter steps L543 near Wilson's Arch (Fig. 9)³

West of Wilson's Arch, underneath the concavity, Dan Bahat discovered a rectangular pool with perimeter steps. The pool is constructed atop an earth-filled area, approx. 800*350 cm. Depth at the lowest point: 127cm. The steps are narrow, with the height of the risers ranging 18-34cm. The height of the lowest step is 49cm. On the underside of the pool a long, narrow basin approx. 40cm wide was formed. A filling channel above the third step allowed water in.

2. L2003 - Pool with perimeter steps in the Jewish Quarter (Yr-32) (Fig. 10)⁴

Prof. Nahum Avigad discovered the pool during 1969-1982, and Hillel Geva published the findings in 2017.⁵ The pool was located on the basement level of the building on the southeastern corner of what is now the Hurvah Square, at 2 Hamekubalim Street.

The pool is trapezoidal in shape, size: 1415*1160cm. Its bottom is not hewn into the rock. On its eastern side is a drainage channel. This pool has seven steps around its perimeter, with uneven tread, made of thick grey plaster.

² Eyal Segev, "Ritual baths of social classes and cults in Second Temple times in early Israel," *Cathedra*, 79, Spring 1996, pp. 3-21.

³ Bahat and Salomon, *Kotel Tunnels*, pp. 89-94; Bahat, *Minharot Hakotel*, pp. 42-44, 2017, p. 126.

⁴ Hillel Geva, 2016, 109-120; Reich 2013, 92; Grossberg 2017:125.

⁵ For a schematic description of the pool and discussion of the subject, see Ronny Reich, *Mikvaot Tohara* (2013:92-95).

The bottom of the pool is set deep, approx. 130cm. underneath the lowest step that was preserved. The lowest center section of the pool was placed on a fill of earth and was not hewn into the rock. It is likely that there was a closure mechanism in the drainage channel to close off the origin point of the water from the bottom of the pool into the drainage channel. No walls of any buildings were discovered around the pool.

3. YC-28 - A pool with perimeter steps on the Ophel (Fig. 11)⁶

At the east of the Ophel, south of the Double Gate, a pool was discovered with steps around its perimeter, excavated by Benjamin Mazar and Meir Ben-Dov.

The dimensions of the pool are 1090*950cm, 225cm deep, with a volume of approx..80m³

The steps have a narrow tread, but among them is a step with a broad tread. The lowest step has a broad tread and is high. At the center is a basin with the dimensions 250*120cm. Depth: approx. 80cm. At the bottom of the basin there is a drainage opening. No remnants of any wall or roof coverings were found.

4. The Siloam Pool [*Nikbat Hashiloah*] – a pool with steps around the perimeter (Fig. 12)⁷

In the south of City of David, at the edge of the Tyropeon Valley, discovered and excavated by Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron. We can assume that it had steps around the perimeter. The pool was partly found and it is assumed that its dimensions were approx. 5,000*6,000cm on an area of about three dunams [1 dunam=1/4 acre]. The steps around the pool are made of *gvil* stones (undressed fieldstones) plastered with grey plaster, while the steps are covered with dressed stones.

The staircase is are made up of groups of steps with narrow treads, and among them is one stone with a broad tread. The depth reaches approx.. 400cm.

The pool is apparently filled from the waters of the Gihon through the Siloam Pool. The drainage method was not identified. Adjacent to the pool is a covered stoa but the pool itself is not covered.⁸

Analysis of the findings

Pools with perimeter steps bear characteristics identical to mikvaot discovered in Jerusalem and its environs. The steps do not have steps of uniform width of tread, and feature combinations of narrow and broad steps (except for the pool near Wilson's Arch).

In most of the pools and mikvaot, the lowest step is usually high, and does not enable an easy descent. Both the pools and the mikvaot were plastered with grey plaster.

However, the pools with perimeter steps do have unique characteristics.

As mentioned above, the pools with steps around them surround the basin's perimeter, while the mikvaot have only a single set of steps.

The pools are built on a fill of earth as contrasted with the mikvaot most of which are hewn into the rock. Most of the mikvaot lack drainage systems, so they had to be cleaned manually.

⁶ Reich 2013, 107-108; Grossberg 2007, p. 123.

⁷ Reich 2013, 122-123.

⁸ Reich 2013, p. 122.

The pools with perimeter steps have a drainage system. In the pool near Wilson's Arch there was an upper drainage system, but had no such system at the lower portion of the basin. No drainage system has been discovered in the Siloam Pool, although its location in the Valley enables and requires a drainage system. Most of the mikvaot were covered with natural rock or with arches that formed an integral part of the mikvah. (Fig. 13).

The pools with perimeter steps had no covering. The covering of the pool near Wilson's Arch is not an organic part of the pool.

From the aspect of design and finish of the water installations, perhaps we should note that the pools with perimeter steps have been built with as straight angles as possible; in contrast, most the mikvaot are were hewn carelessly and roughly without professional processing, and the openings are not rectangular. (Fig. 14).

We can see the gap in the processing in the Tombs of the Kings. The place contains the burial cave and two mikvaot at the edge of the descent path into the cave. The burial cave is hewn with straight angles, while the cave contains a sculpted façade of pillars and architectural sculpture in the rock. The tomb entrances are also well planned and designed. In contrast, the mikvaot adjacent to the burial cave are processed roughly and not beautifully. (Fig. 15).

The designated purpose of the pools with perimeter steps

Archaeologists and scholars have differences of opinion, and argued about the identification of the pools with perimeter steps. It is not possible to identify the pools as ritual baths for purification because of the lack of modesty for those immersing. All of the explanations put forth as to the existence of secret portable installations have no proof.⁹

The installations with a single set of steps that were identified as mikvaot were covered, to provide privacy in the overall planning. In the pools with perimeter steps, there is no provision at all for privacy of the bathers. However, Halakha (Jewish Law) provides for the possibility of immersion while wearing clothing, but the Sages were afraid of people being exposed to people's view, and feared that for fear of privacy and out of embarrassment, women would not immerse themselves properly.¹⁰

Pools with a single set of steps provides for the separation of those descending and those ascending, through an agreed-upon sign. Those descending were very close to the right-hand wall, and those ascending would press against the left-hand wall or a barrier along the staircase or by creating two openings. In the pool with steps around the perimeter, it is not clear how to separate between the "impure" descending the steps to purify themselves and between those who had already immersed themselves and were ascending.

Some scholars and archaeologists have argued that it was possible to use these installations to separate those descending and those ascending so that people could descend from one set of steps and ascend on the other. However, in most of the cases, the depth of the basins do not enable people to pass from one set of steps to another.

(There are no data on the Siloam Pool)

⁹ Reich, 2013, pp. 122-123.

¹⁰ "Said Rav Shmuel b. Rav Yitzhak: A woman shall not immerse herself in a harbor" (Talmud Bavli, Nidda, 67a). The Tosafoth explain thus: "Out of embarrassment from the people who are there."

A proposal was raised that these pools were intended for the ritual immersion of vessels.¹¹ We have no textual sources on immersion pools specially designated for vessels, as there are referring to washing the hands. It is unclear as to what would be the advantage of having pools with perimeter steps for vessels. On the contrary: there is an advantage to pools with straight walls, so that vessels can be immersed at the edges of the pool, then pulled out without having to go into the pool.

Others have argued that these are swimming pools. But they are not similar to swimming pools which are much larger, and have only a narrow staircase at the edges of the pool.¹²

The idea that the pools served for ritual immersion and pleasure bathing together does not solve the problem, and it seems that the scholars were uncomfortable with that conclusion.¹³

The kashruth (halachic propriety)– of water installations that include a drainage system

a. In a mikvah, the water must be gathered into a permanent place (the Talmud uses the word in an “*eshboran*”). If water trickles out (*zohalin*), the mikvah is no longer ritually proper.

An installation constructed on earth with a drainage system at its bottom is at risk that the so-called mikvah would be deemed improper due to water seepage at its bottom. A cistern hewn into the rock and plastered over with grey plaster ensures that the waters in the mikvah would not trickle out and would not disqualify the pool as a mikvah.

This leads us to state that any pool constructed over earth with a drainage system is disqualified as a ritual bath. We may therefore say that all of the pools possessing drainage systems are likely to fail those who use them. The conclusion: the pools with perimeter steps were not to be used as ritual baths.

b. During the Second Temple era, the Jews were extremely stringent about keeping the laws of purity and impurity, and to a certain extent, went overboard in their stringent adherence to the laws of ritual purity.¹⁴ The laws of impurity referred to entering the Holy Temple in a state of ritual purity; the texts addressed issues of touching something impure; the prohibition of being in a closed space with a corpse which would make everyone impure; preserving the laws of the menstrual impurity period and nocturnal emission; the prohibition against eating sacrificial meat in a state of impurity and strict adherence to eating food in a state of purity. Among the purity prohibitions is the prohibition against eating “unclean creatures” (insects, rodents, shellfish, and the like).

According to Jewish Law, “unclean creatures of the waters created in cisterns and bushes and in caves, are not in flowing water, since they are in still waters. They are like water in vessels,

¹¹ Grossberg 2006, p. 132.

¹² Reich 2013, p. 94.

¹³ See the discussion on the subject by Asher Grossberg, *Dual purpose water installations for ritual purity and pleasure with perimeter stairs in Jerusalem of the Second Temple era* [Mitkanei mayim du-tachliti]. Grossberg 2006: 123-152. As for the proposed explanation of dual purpose, see *ibid.* p. 136.

¹⁴ The story is told of two priests who were running on a plank (*kvs*). One pushed the second from it. The second drew a knife and stabbed him in the heart... The boy's father came and said to them: I am your atonement. My son is still convulsing, but the knife has not become ritually impure. This teaches that the impurity of a knife is a more difficult issue for Jews than is bloodshed (Lieberman, Tosefta Yoma 81:12).

and it is permitted to swim and swallow the water, and no one hesitates to do so, even though they may swallow a thing that swarms in water while drinking.”¹⁵

Although there is an halachic advantage to water drawn from a well, because only such water can be used to purify someone with a bloody flow, a leper, or use it in the red heifer purification ceremony, a mikvah with still water has its own advantage, but the one using it should fear eating small creatures in the mikvah while immersing.

From an halachic viewpoint, there is no problem in elevating a mikvah. For example, in the Holy Temple, the High Priest’s ritual bath was located above the Water Gate, so that the water could drain out.¹⁶ However, archaeological findings show that the residents of Jerusalem preferred ritual baths hewn into rock without any possibility of gravitational drainage.

In a mikvah without drainage, it is possible to drink its water without fearing swallowing “unclean creatures.” This is why there is no drainage system in the mikvaot found in Jerusalem and its environs, despite its maintenance difficulties and the need to clean it manually.

In a bathing facility with a drainage system, whose water is not standing, there is a fear that the person immersing oneself will inadvertently swallow prohibited creatures, and transgress four religious prohibitions, thus be liable for flogging by the court, and lose more than the merit gained by following a religious precept.

The four pools we have described with perimeter steps have a drainage system, or we assume that they did. These installations are liable to entrap those who wish to use them for ritual immersion in a prohibition; and so we may conclude that these pools were not mikvaot.

Water quality in open-air pools

Water in ritual baths gathered in place comprised the rare ingredient of rainwater. They had to conserve the water for long periods of time. To prevent mold and algae formation, the mikvah water had to be covered so that the sun’s rays would not damage the water quality. This is why all of the mikvaot discovered are covered or in natural rock or under a stone arched overhang.

The pools with the perimeter steps are not covered. The pool underneath Wilson’s Arch is not covered in an organic way, and sunlight damaged the water quality from the southern side of the Arch. We may assume that the water in the pools were replaced at high frequency and are not mikvah water.

In light of these reasons, we may conclude that the pools with perimeter steps are not purification ritual baths; moreover, they are disqualified for use as ritual baths.

The designated use of pools with perimeter steps

Let us investigate two options for determining the use of pools with perimeter steps

Option A: The pools with perimeter steps – as fishponds

¹⁵ Maimonides, *The Laws of Forbidden Foods*, 82:18. The subject is not mentioned in the Mishna or the Tosefta. There is a hint in Sifra on the portion *Shmini*, and there is a discussion in the subject in the Babylonian Talmud 67a. I quoted Maimonides, a 12th century sage, because his statements are clear and unambiguous.

¹⁶ Mishna Middoth 5:3.

One of the interesting findings discovered in Jerusalem's middens is the large amount of bones of kosher fish. As we know, Jerusalem is not located near a water source. There is no river, lake, or sea in its environs, and yet nevertheless, there are large concentrations of fishbones in the middens near the city. The fish bones are not as big as animal bones, and yet there were many. This proves that there was a very high percentage of fish on their menus.¹⁷

The residents of Jerusalem lived in the shadow of the Holy Temple and were afraid of eating sacrificial meat when they were ritually impure or use meat that was consecrated for the Temple. To avoid doubt, apparently they preferred to enrich their diet with fish which is not at all in doubt as consecrated meat..

Smoked and salted fish arrived at the city markets but it seems that the Jerusalem residents delighted in fresh fish especially fish that live in sweet water.

Evidence of delivering fish to Jerusalem in the early Second Temple era is found in Nehemiah's rebuke to the people, scolding them because on the Sabbath the Tyrians sold fish to the Judeans.¹⁸

Even one of the city gates was called the Fish Gate both in the First Temple era and the Second Temple period.¹⁹

Because there is no halakhic prohibition against raising fish in Jerusalem,²⁰ it is likely that the pools with perimeter steps were used as fishponds to raise fresh fish. In the Jewish texts, the fish pools were called "fish menageries" (*beivar dagim*).²¹

The plans of the pools with perimeter steps facilitated a sophisticated way of catching the fish. While raising them, the fish have a wide space for activity, and when it is time to catch them, the water can be drained. The volume of the water decreases, as all the fish are concentrated in the lower basin, and then can be caught easily.

In the middens in Jerusalem, catfish bones were found. It is a non-kosher fish living in sweet water. This surprised scholars. If the residents of Jerusalem had bought the fish at the city gate, they would not have purchased catfish. And maybe catfish were found by chance in the fish pool. When they were discovered during fishing, the Jewish fishermen discarded them.

It may be that the pool near Wilson's Arch was used to raise small fish which is why draining the pool was in a high place because they were afraid that the fish would be swept away during water draining. The pools on the Ophel and in the Jewish Quarter were bigger, and meant for raising medium-sized fish. The pool in Al-Hamra was the largest, and that is where the largest fish were raised.

¹⁷ Ram Buchnik, Omri Lernau, Guy Bar-Oz, Ronny Reich. The Jerusalem fish menu in the late Second Temple era; Buchnik 2010:98-117.

¹⁸ Nehemiah 13:15.

¹⁹ Zephaniah I; Chronicles II, 33:14.

²⁰ "No raising of small animals in Eretz Israel-Palestine but they do in Syria and in the deserts of Palestine-Eretz Israel, no raising of chickens in Jerusalem because of the holy places...no raising of pigs anywhere. People may not raise dogs unless it is chained up. No spreading nets to catch pigeons unless it is 30 riis far from residential area." *Mishna Bava Kama* 87:7.

²¹ "No one should hunt fish from the fishponds on a holiday, nor should one feed them" (Mishna Beitza 83a).

Option B: The pools with perimeter steps as laundry installations

To wash clothes, people had to use cleansing materials such as lye or natron.²² These materials had to be drained, and everything had to be rinsed after using, which is why it is possible that pools lacking a drainage system were not used for laundry. We may assume that the pools with perimeter steps and a drainage system were used as laundry basins.

The women would gather around the perimeter steps, each one washed her household's clothing. When the quantity of water decreased during various times of the year, the women could descend the steps and wash the clothing on the lower steps. The surplus lye and natron drained into the lower basin and were then drained by the system at the side or the bottom of the basin.

In southern Jerusalem, near the city gate, water arrived at the city from the Siloam Pool as well as rainwater that drained southwards in the drainage channel all along the Tyropean Valley. Concentration of such large stores of water all throughout the year made it possible to erect an extremely large water installation for laundry. This installation mainly served the pilgrims who arrived in Jerusalem filthy and covered with dust after their long journey.

It may be that the remaining laundry installations on the Ophel and the Jewish Quarter and adjacent to Wilson's Arch mainly used mainly by city residents which is why the installations were smaller.

These laundry installations were uncovered and very sunny. In this way, the laundrywomen could inspect the laundry and ensure that all of the stains were removed.

The 3-letter Hebrew root *KVS* has two meanings:

One meaning, commonly-accepted today, means to launder clothes and cleanse them from their accumulated dirt. The second meaning is cleaning raw wool and processing it by treading on it to prepare it for weaving.

It may be that at the pools with perimeter steps, the women were mainly engaged in treating woven wool, processes that included using the water to cleanse wool from dirt and oil, treading it with the feet, and even using barrels of urine to improve the quality of the woven wool. This work was performed on the steps, and when there was only little water, they descended to the lowest step. The remains of the dirt and oils were concentrated in the lower basin, and from there, were cleared by the drainage system on the bottom of the basin.

The industry of processing the woven wool was accompanied by noxious odors, so it is reasonable to assume that this process was not performed in the city.

The pools in Jerusalem located in public urban spaces were used only for washing clothing.

²² "Though you wash with natron and use much lye, your guilt is ingrained before Me" (Jeremiah 2:22).

The word *KVS* has a parallel root – *RGL*, which also refers to cleaning dirty clothes and also to the processing/improvement of wool tapestries. The Aramaic parallel is *KaTzRa* which also has a double meaning, of cleaning dirty clothes as well as processing of woollen hangings.²³

We must note that in Jerusalem and its environs there are several sites that preserve the verbs *KVS* and *RGL*.

The Bible mentions '*Ein Rogel*' several times:

- "...from there the boundary continued to the waters of 'Ein Shemesh and ran on to 'Ein Rogel" (Joshua 15:7)
- "...along the southern flank of the Jebusites to 'Ein Rogel" (Joshua 18:16)
- "Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at 'Ein Rogel..." (II Samuel 17:17)
- "...at the Zohelath stone which is near Ein Rogel" (I Kings 1:9)

The Fuller's Field – Sdeh Kovess – is mentioned three times in the Bible:

- "...at the end of the conduit of the Upper Pool, by the road of the Fuller's Field" (Isaiah 7:3)
- "...they took up a position near the conduit of the Upper Pool, by the road of the Fuller's Field..." (II Kings 18:17)
- "Rabshakeh took up a position near the conduit of the Upper Pool, by the road of the Fuller's Field..." (Isaiah 36:2)

In the Second Temple era, Josephus described walking along the third wall and on the northeastern corner there was a launderer's station.²⁴

Most scholars are of the opinion that these sites were in the north of the city outside the walls.

The name '*Ein Rogel*' even preserves the action of the launderer (*RGL*, foot). This location has been identified in the south of the city outside of the city wall. It may be that during the First Temple era, laundry was done outside of the city, but the place-names preserve the activities that took place there in the past.

During the Second Temple era, the laundry sites were displaced into the city, and they are the pools adjacent to Wilson's Arch, on the Ophel, in the Jewish Quarter, and the al-Hamra pool in the south of the city.

As for the proposal that the pools with perimeter steps served as public laundry installations, there are objections. The process of laundering in which women bent over to rub and squeeze out the clothing has created immodest situations. The Sages were aware of this, and stated:

²³ *Ein Rogel* was translated by Yonatan b. Uziel and by the Pshista as *Ein Katzra*, i.e. the Fuller's Spring.. Rashi explains (Babylonian Talmud 29b, re: *katzri*) "That is its name in the Ishmaelite language, and they launder there. I heard them use the word *mekatzrin* when talking about cleansing clothing made of wool when they trample them in their legs in water that they call "vorleir" and they translate 'Ein Rogel as '*eina de Katzra*." The Septuagint and Vulgate mostly translated the word *kovess* using its common meaning as cleansing dirty clothing. The meaning in the Bible of *kovess* is washing and cleansing clothes. For a comprehensive discussion on the translation and meaning of the words *rogel*, *kovess*, and *katzra*, see Grossberg 2009:82-95.

²⁴ Wars of the Jews, 5:4, B. Simhoni transl.

"He who closes his eyes from seeing evil" is the one who does not look at women standing over the laundry.²⁵

But the laws of partnership laid down the following: "In every partnership they delay each other (in the joint room) except for laundry, since it is not the custom of the Jewish women to embarrass themselves over the laundry."²⁶

As the Yerushalmi Talmud states, "In all partnerships, they delay each other in the courtyard except for laundry, because of the Jewish women's self-respect ["honor"]."²⁷ "Since it is not the custom of Jewish women to embarrass themselves and stand barefoot on the river and expose their shins."²⁸

This means the women were required to avoid laundering in public places. On this subject, the Jerusalem Talmud stated that the aforesaid objections do not apply in a place where men are the launderers.²⁹

It may be that the water pools with perimeter steps located in public zones served for laundry with the conditions that only men would work at it. The women laundered at home. The place in which many of the purification installations identified as mikvaot it may be that some of these with a single set of steps are laundry installations for women only.

The prohibition against using laundry installations as mikvaot.

The Mishna *Tractate Mikvaot*, states: "Eretz Israel is pure and its mikvaot are pure...since in Eretz Israel, except for thethose close to the city and the road are impure from the laundry and the distant ones are pure."³⁰

Maimonides explains: "...all of the mikvaot in the Land of Israel in the cities before the entrance to the city gate, are deemed invalid. Since the people of the city launder in them and draw into them water always, and all of the mikvaot located in the Land of Israel outside of the city gate are deemed pure, since they are deemed to be from rainwater."³¹

Maimonides lays down the law following what is written in the Mishna: "He who wrings out his clothing and holds it high, and the water from it falls from these places, these are invalidated."³²

There is a fear that in a mikvah whose precise dimensions are 40 seahs, they laundered clothing. Raising up the wet laundry transforms the mikvah into an invalid one, because the amount of water is small. Wringing out the water from the clothing which is water whose thickness is a weight of three logs per mikvah invalidates the mikvah and cannot be repaired. (*Tifereth Israel*).

We can draw two conclusions:

²⁵ Bavli, Bava Batra 57b; Bavli, Makkot 24a.

²⁶ Bavli, Bava Batra 57b.

²⁷ Jerusalem Talmud (Vilna edition), Nedarim 85a.

²⁸ *Pnei Moshe*, ibid.

²⁹ See n. 22. Note the feminist issue: both men and women did the laundry in this era.

³⁰ Mishna Mikvaot 88a.

³¹ Rambam, Laws of Mikvaot, Chapter 10, Law no. 5. All comments in parenthesis are by the author, T.S.

³² Ibid., 85:2.

1. There is no visible difference between a water installation that is a mikvah and between the water installation that is a laundry pool, and only according to the location of the installation in the urban space and the rural space can it be identified as to whether it is valid for immersion or not.

If the people of that era did not know what the difference was between a kosher installation and a laundry installation invalid as a mikvah, we may assume that we, today, were making an error and that not all of the installations excavated are mikvaot.

2. Jerusalem is a walled city. All of its mikvaot located inside of the city gate are invalid. According to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer, the water installations close by the city and the main roads are invalid.

All of the so-called mikvaot are laundry installations and invalid for immersion for purification. Thus, all of the pilgrims to Jerusalem were unable to use these pools for purification.

Response to the law invalidating all of the mikvaot located in walled cities

We may assume that the residents of Jerusalem were aware of the law and attempted to address the problem. The solution was to mark the installations meant for immersion by low railings as a visible designation only for ritual purification, or by building double entranceways that clarified to every guest that this pool was intended only for purification.

This is the reason that in Jerusalem, a walled city, there were so many mikvaot with a double entrance and many with divided stairways. In rural areas, there was no need for markings except for in the city and on the margins of the main roads.

This teaches us the reason for the pairs of pools with steps, with one with double entranceway or low railing and the second one without any special signs: one installation was for immersion and the second was for laundry. This is why there is no connection for flow between the pools although they are adjacent. Each pool had a different purpose.

The installations that are emphasized with a low railing or a double entranceway were not intended for priests with a high lineage³³ and were not designated for solving density problems³⁴ but were meant to solve an halakhic problem that invalidated the city mikvaot.

This solution spread all around outside of Jerusalem and was found in the periphery of Jerusalem up to a distance of 20 km. from the city.³⁵

In some instances, the owners of the purification bath wanted to transform the mikvah into a laundry pool. They blocked up one entrance, thus invalidating the installation as a mikvah. We

³³ Eyal Regev, 1996: 3-21.

³⁴ Grossberg 1997:155-156.

³⁵ Klein and Zissu, 2013: 227. This situation conforms with R. Eliezer's opinion.

may assume that sealing the opening was a public notice that this site was no longer providing immersion services (see Fig. 16).³⁶

It may be that there are additional solutions to signify that the water installation with steps was intended solely for ritual immersion, such as mats, a door, or an inscription, but these signs did not leave traces on the site.

The four installations with perimeter steps were intended as men's laundry pools. The installations with a single staircase without any sign, were designated women's laundry pools. We may assume that the laundry techniques differed from pool to pool. In the pools with perimeter steps, they would wash the water and drain the laundry water. In the pools that were similar to a mikvah, the water was re-used multiple times. It may be that this arises from the type of various fabrics that were laundered in each installation and the type of cleansing materials they used.

Summary

The pools with perimeter steps comprising a drainage system are not proper for immersion lest the mikvah water would seep down into the soil and invalidate the mikvah, and from fear of eating "unclean creatures" in the installation whose waters seep out.

It may be that the pools with perimeter steps are fishponds or laundry pools.³⁷

In light of the law that all of the pools in the city are suspected of being laundry pools invalid for ritual immersion, the Jerusalemites acted to mark clearly which pools were meant for laundry and which ones were designated for ritual immersion.

The marking out was made by having a double entrance or a low railing in the middle of the stairwell or by another type of mark that did not leave traces in any archaeological finding.

It is a good idea to re-examine the findings of the water installations that were discovered in Jerusalem and its environs, in Jericho, Herodion, and Masada, in the Galilee and Transjordan. It may be that not all of them were used as mikvaot.³⁸

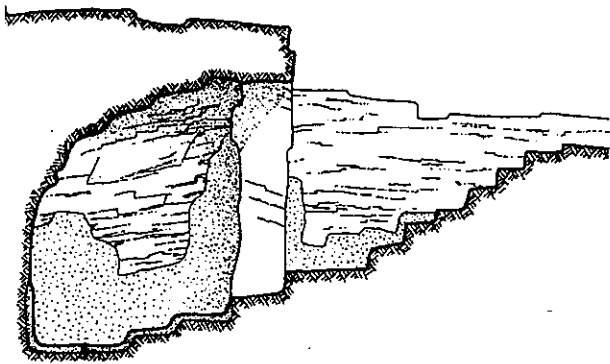
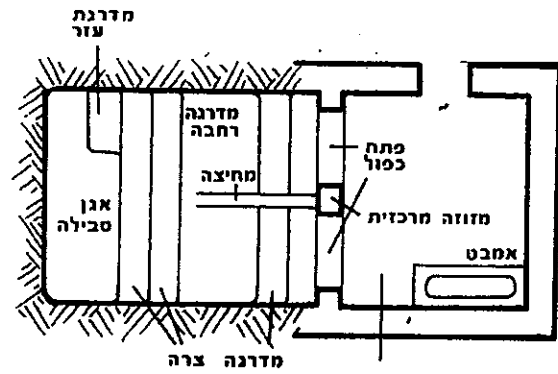
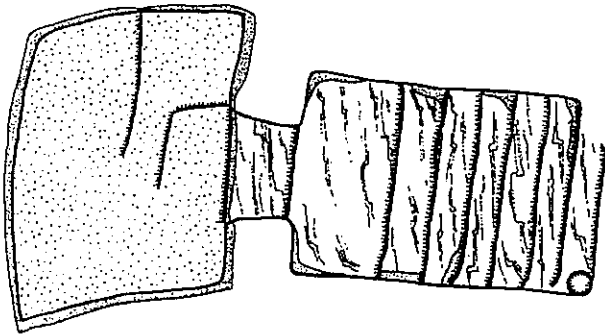
In light of this article, we can see the lifestyles of the residents of the capital and its notables of the Second Temple era in a new light.

At the same time as keeping the laws of ritual purity and modesty, Jerusalemites maintained proper hygiene and ate fish delicacies.

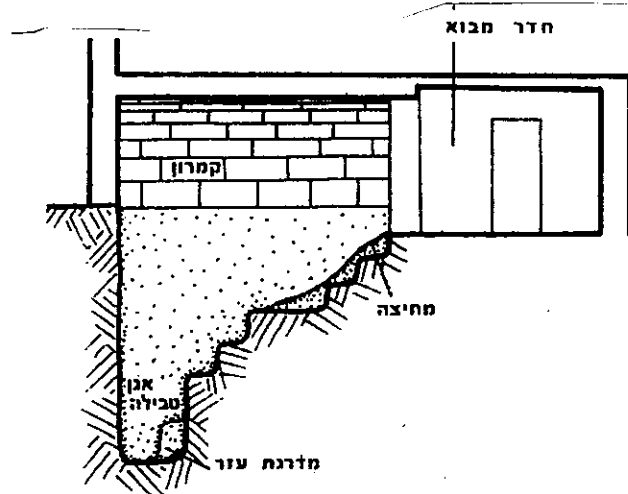
³⁶ Ibid., 242-244.

³⁷ Ronny Reich asked those who opposed his opinion to provide a different definition for the essential function of the many pools with perimeter steps that were discovered (Reich 2013:51). It seems to me that some of the installations are invalid for use as mikvaot and it is possible to find alternative designations for the pools with perimeter steps.

³⁸ Grossberg 2016:142; Netzer 2001:131-135.

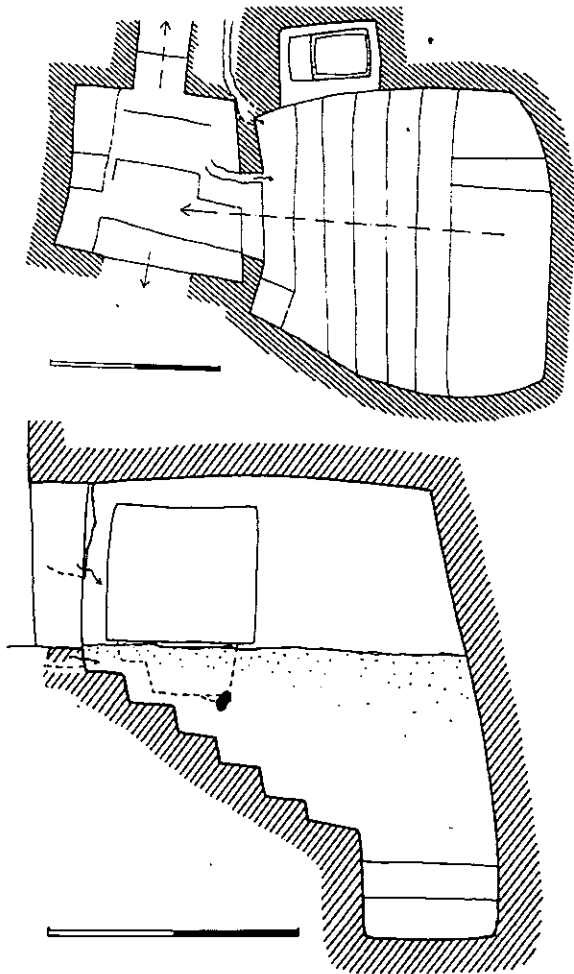


איור 248: מקוה גדרו בח'רבת ג'זרה, תכנית וחתך



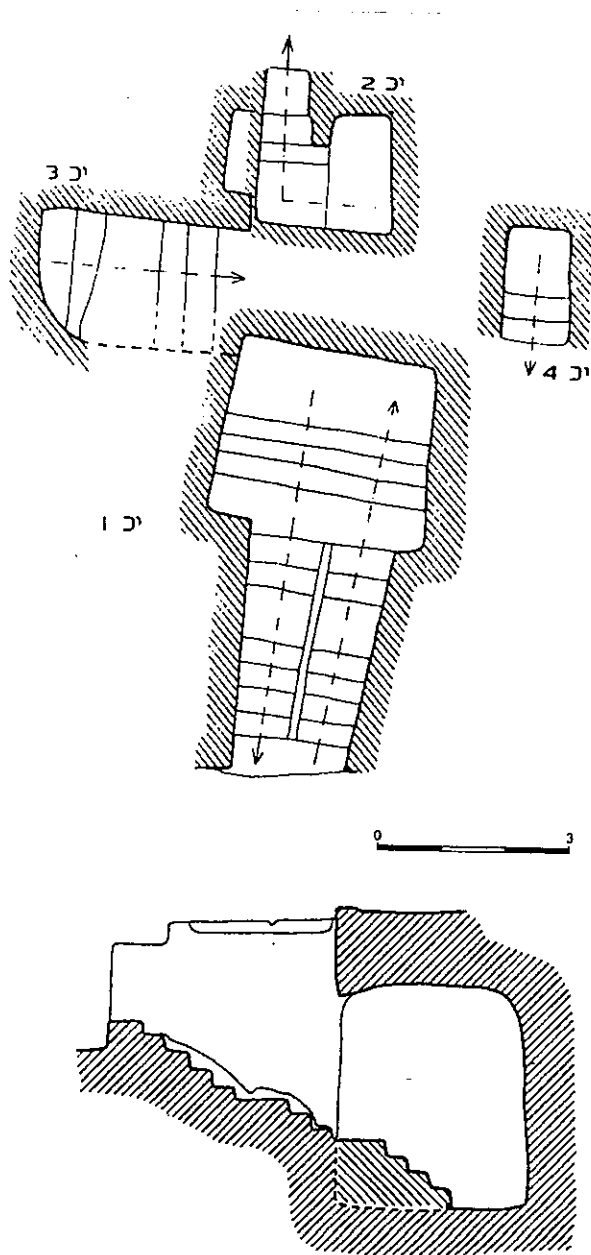
איור 5: מקוה טהרה, מונחים טכניים בשימוש

Fig. 1. A water installation with steps, underneath rock or covered with stone (Reich 2013)



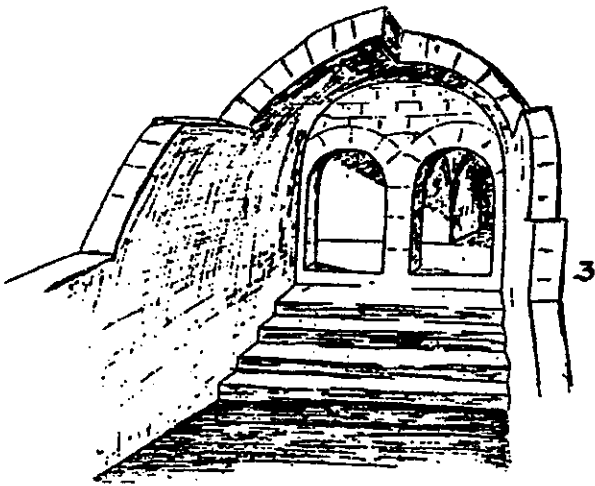
איור 173: מקווה חז"ל בחורבת חזן

Fig. 2. A water installation with steps. The lowest step is higher than the lower portion of the basin. Two auxiliary steps make it convenient for descending (Reich 2013)

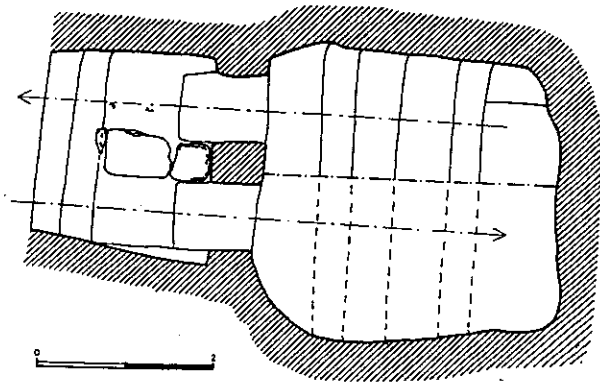


איור 95: מקוואות יכ'1, יכ'2, יכ'3, יכ'4 סמוך לקשת רובינסון

Fig. 3. A pool with steps, with a stairway in the center and a low railing (Reich 2013)

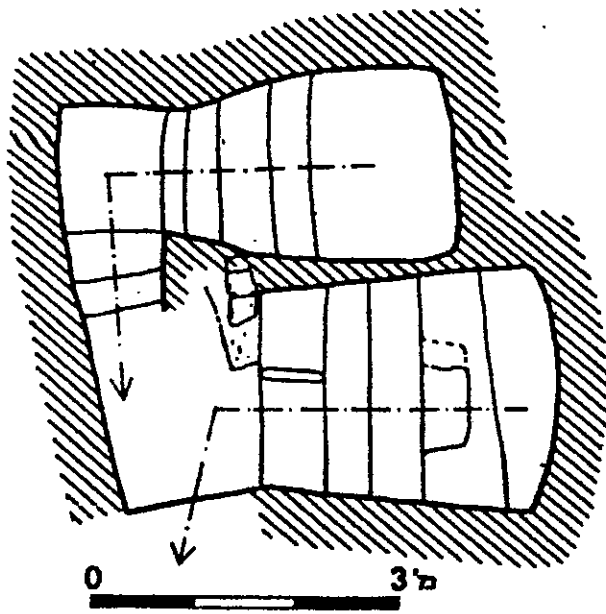


איור 159: מקווה גד־6 בתל גזר



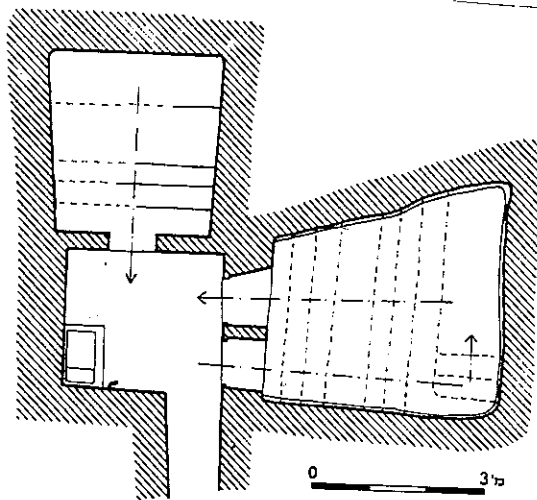
איור 124: מקווה עס־1 בעסאניה

Fig. 4. A pool with steps and a double entrance (Reich 2013)



איור 13: צמד מקוואות סמוכים בהר ציון שבירושלים, מקוואה יד־3 למעלה, ומקוואה יד־3א למטה

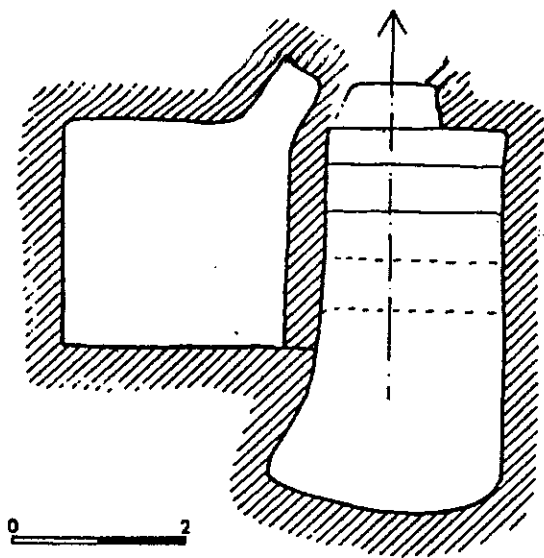
A pool adjacent to a wall comprising a lowered railing at the center of the stairway.



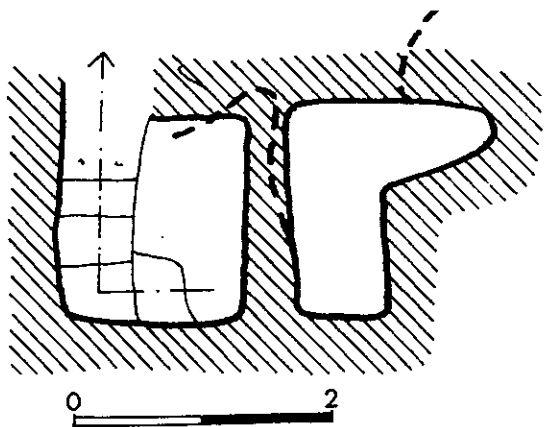
איור 18: חדר רחצה וממנו גישה אל מקוואה יר־1 (בצד ימין) ומקוואה יר־2 מתחת לחצר הבית (שטח פ')

A pool adjacent to the wall with a double entranceway.

Fig. 5 A pair of pools (Reich 2013)



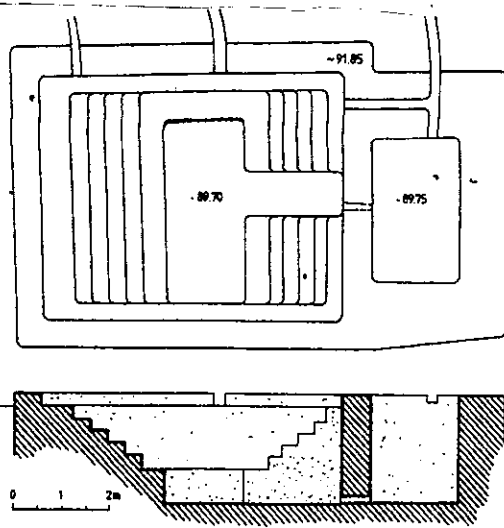
איור 78: מקווה יד־4 בהר ציון



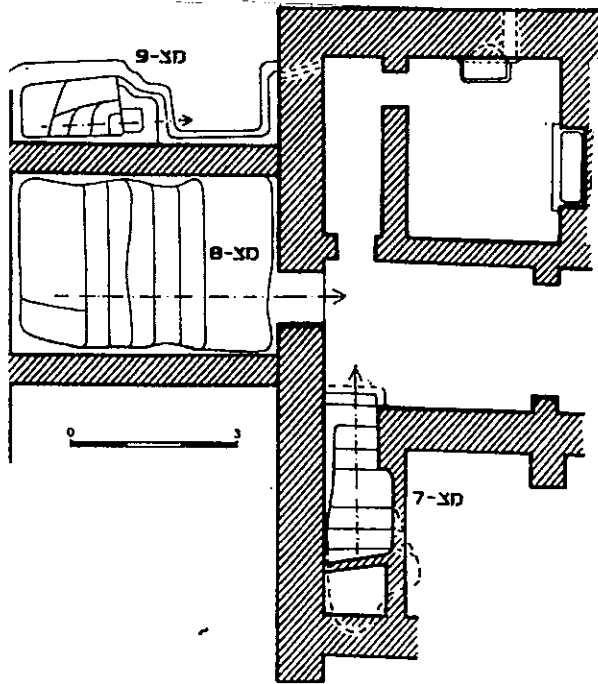
איור 32: מקווה יר־27 ובצדו בור מים (שטח ו־4)

Fig. 6. A pair of pools.

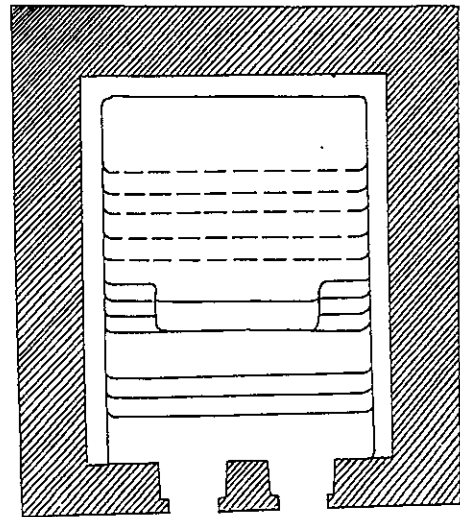
A pool with steps. The pool adjacent to the first pool has no steps. (Reich 2013)



איור 10: מתקן F1-F4, תכנית וחתך מזרח מערב (נצר ולוריס-צ'אצי 2004: 46, איור 53)



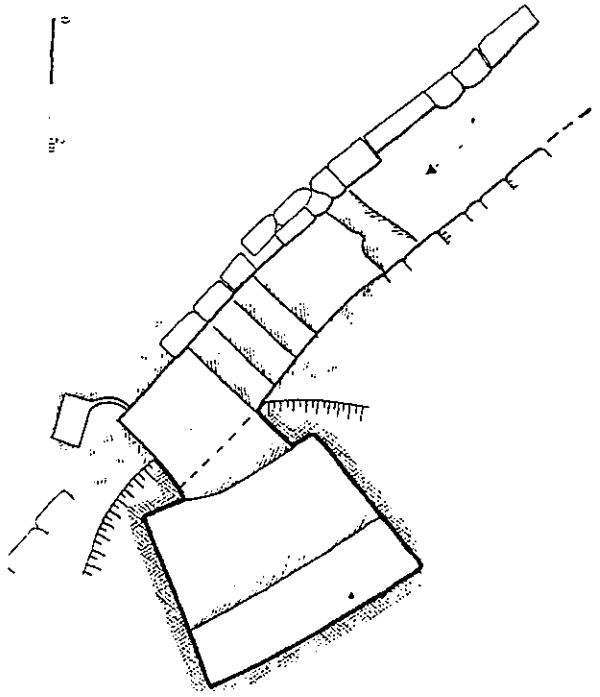
איור 208: מקוואות מ-7, מ-8, מ-9 במצדה



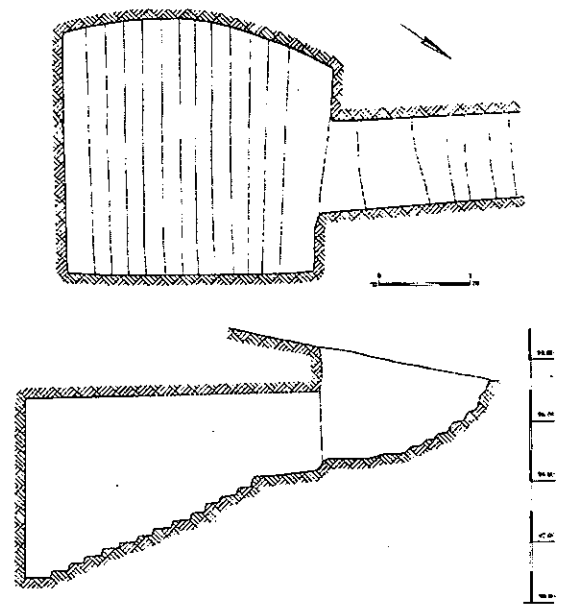
איור 144: מקווא הר"ט בהרודיון

48 נצר, גילויים חדשים ביריחו, עמ' 25.
 49 ידן, מצדה, עמ' 28; הנ"ל, מצדה סקירה ראשונה, עמ' 65-66.

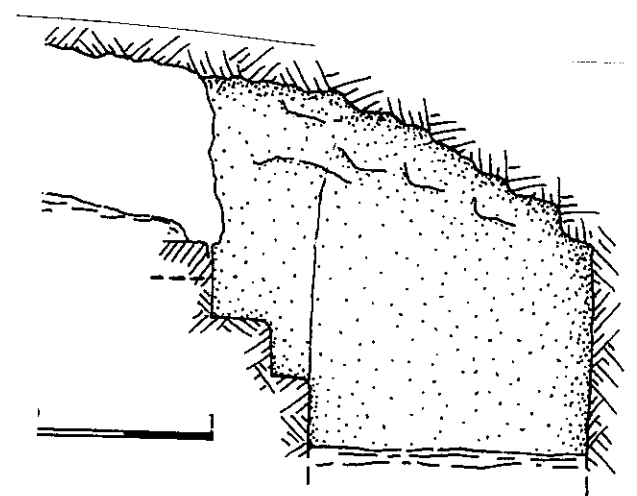
Fig. 7. Pools with steps, in Herodion, Jericho and Masada. (Reich 2013; Netzer 2004)



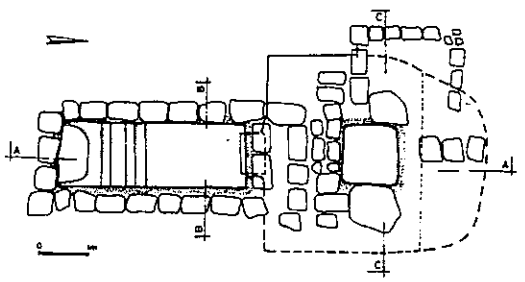
איור 275: מקווה בע"פ בבית שערים



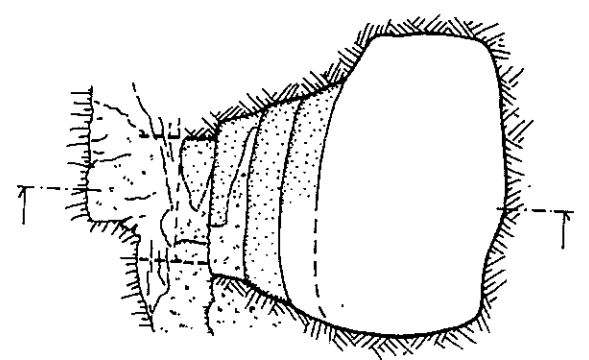
איור 274: מקווה בע"פ בבית שערים



איור 234: מקווה אר"ו בהר ארבל



איור 276: מקווה סק"ו בחורבת סומקה



איור 235: מקווה אר"ב בהר ארבל

Fig. 8. Pools with steps in northern Israel dated to after the era of the destruction of the Temple

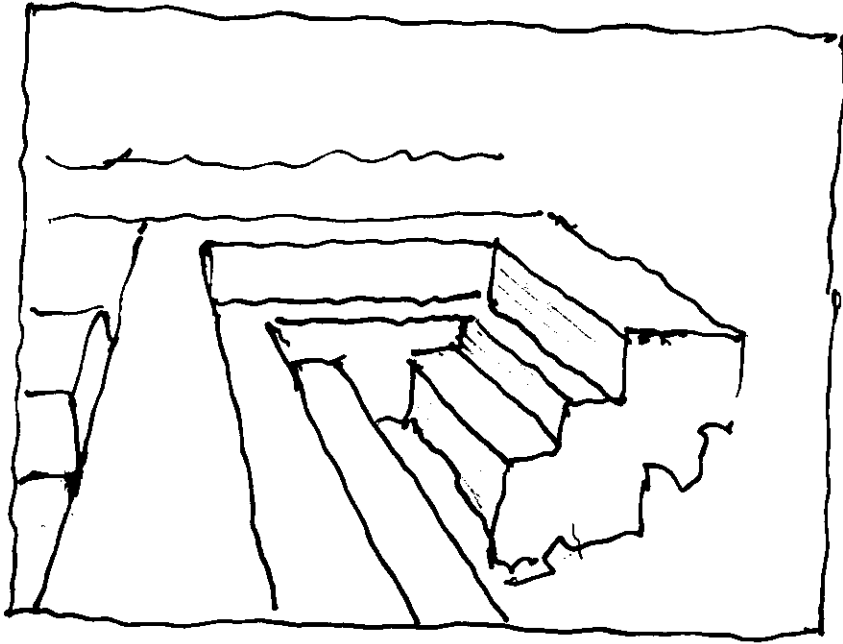
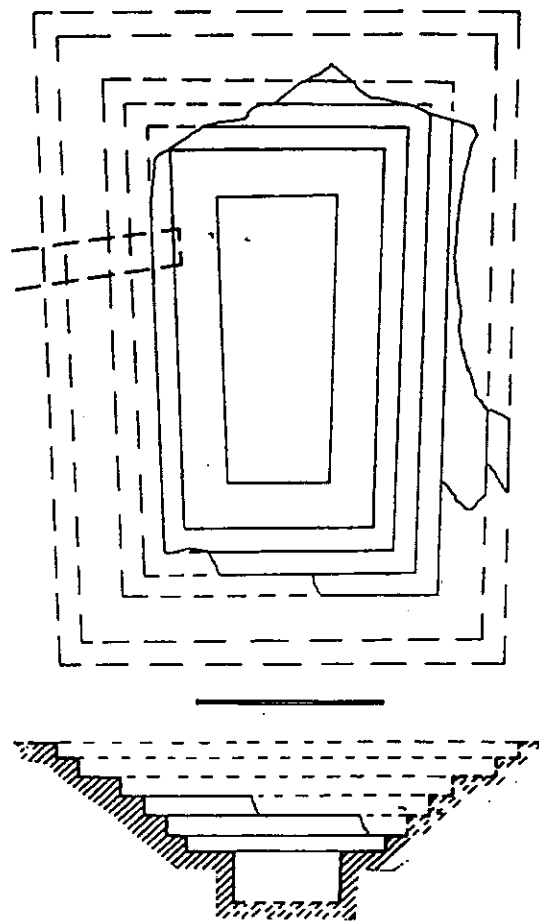
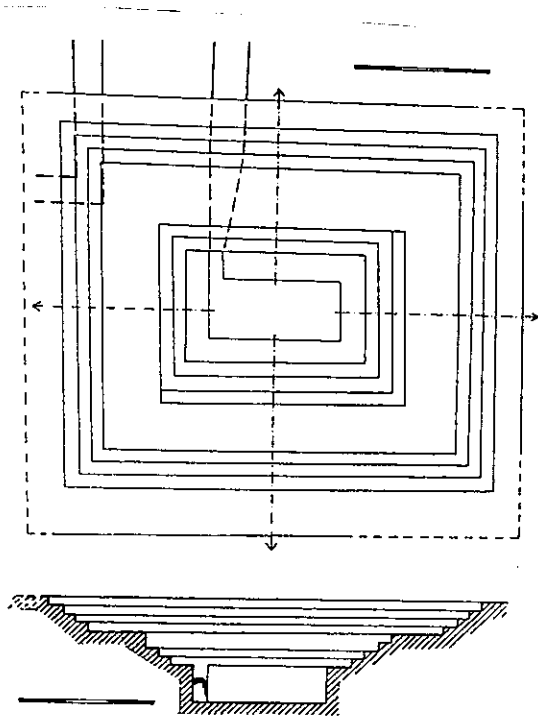


Fig. 9. A pool with perimeter steps underneath Wilson's Arch (based on a photograph by A. Grossberg)



איור 59: מקווה ירד' 32 בעל גרם מדרגות היקפי (שטח ק)



איור 92: מקווה יכ-28 בעל גרם מדרגות היקפי מדרום להר הבית

Fig. 11. A pool with perimeter steps south of the Temple Mount (Reich 2013)

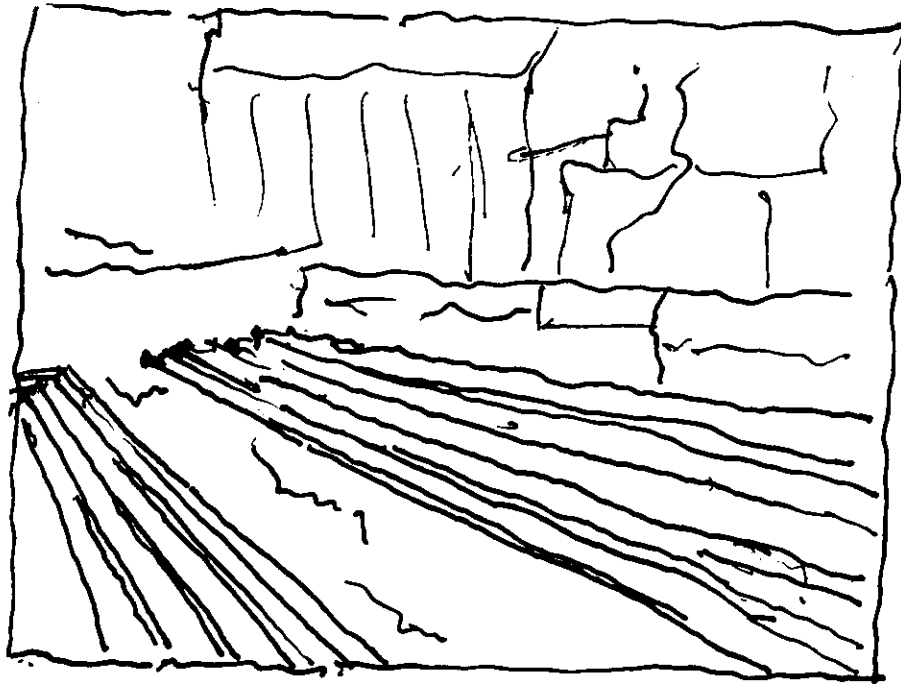
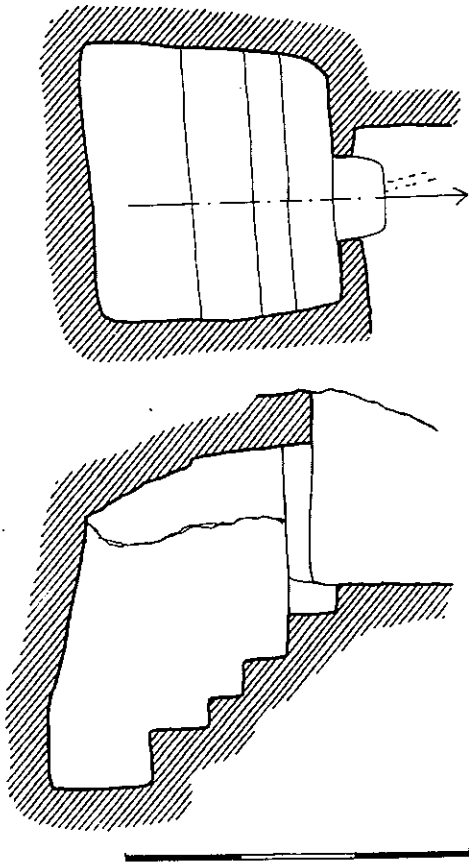
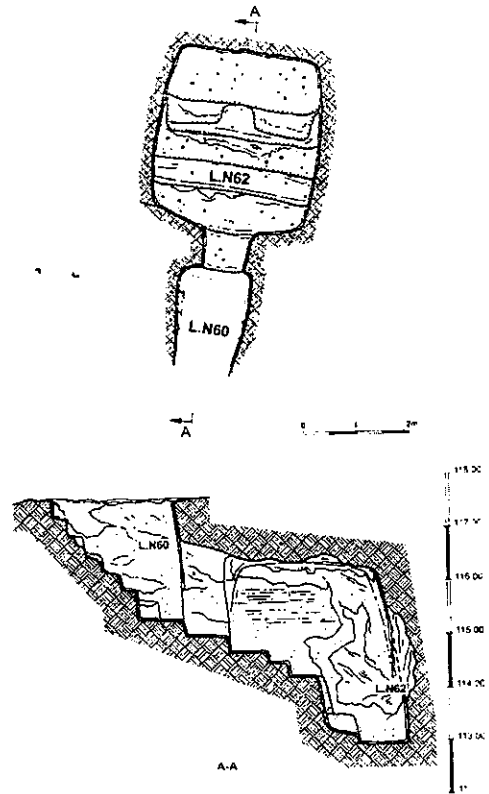


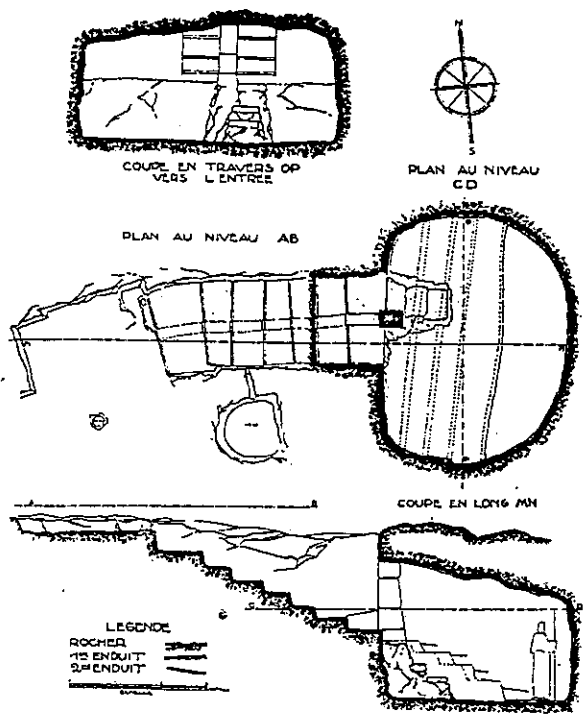
Fig. 12. The Siloam Pool – a pool with perimeter steps (based on a photograph by A. Grossberg)



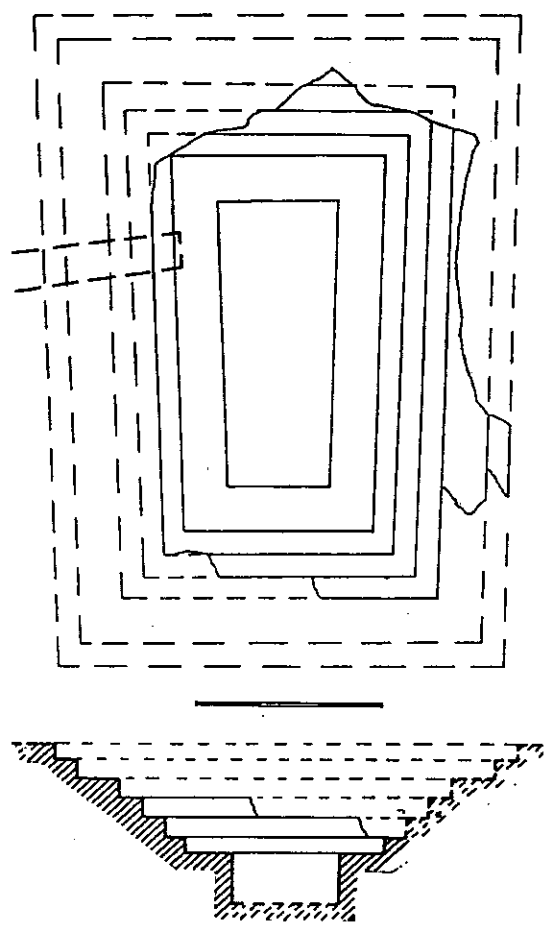
איור 118: מקווה קל"ב בקלנדיה



איור 154: מקווה סח"7 במחצבות נשר-רמלה (אלי-חרבה)

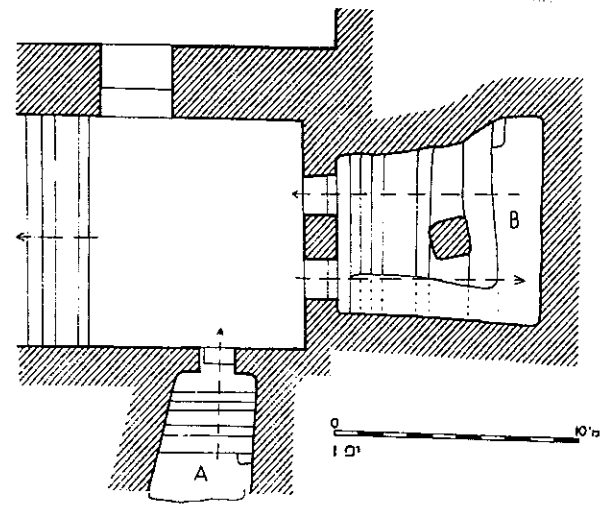
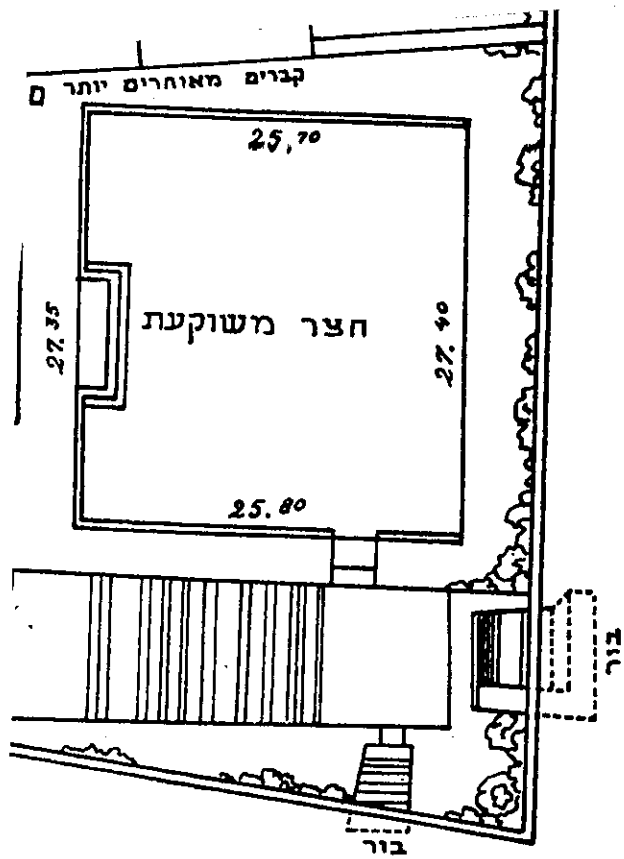


איור 132: מקווה בנוי באל-עזריה (בית עניה)

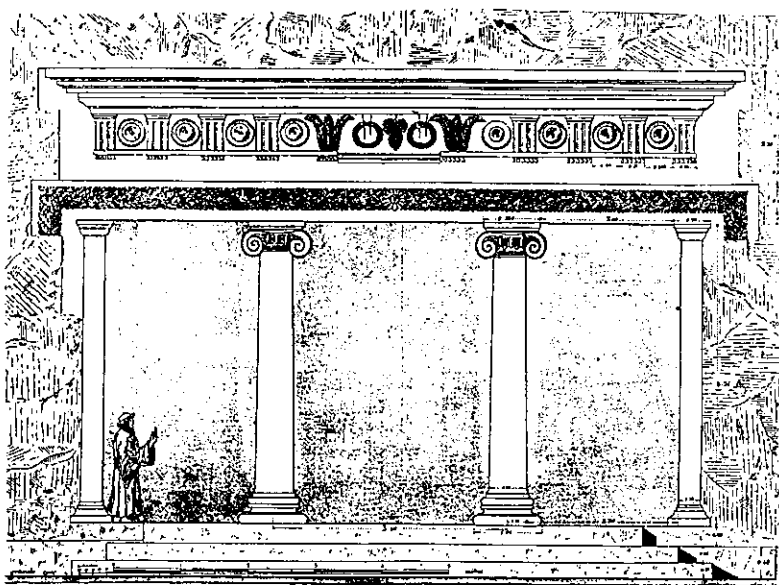


איור 59: מקווה יר-32 בעל גרם מדרגות היקפי (שטח ק)

Fig. 14. Well-constructed pools with perimeter steps, constructed in an orthogonal line. Pools with a single stairway are not designed well, and they were constructed roughly. (Reich 2013).



איור 126: מקווה יפ"ו בתחתית התכנית ומקווה יפ"ב בצד ימין, קברי המלכים



חזית קברי המלכים (שחזור)
 FACADE OF THE TOMBS OF THE KINGS (RESTORATION)

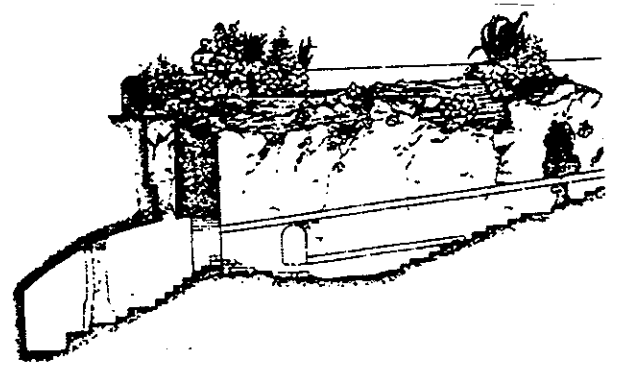
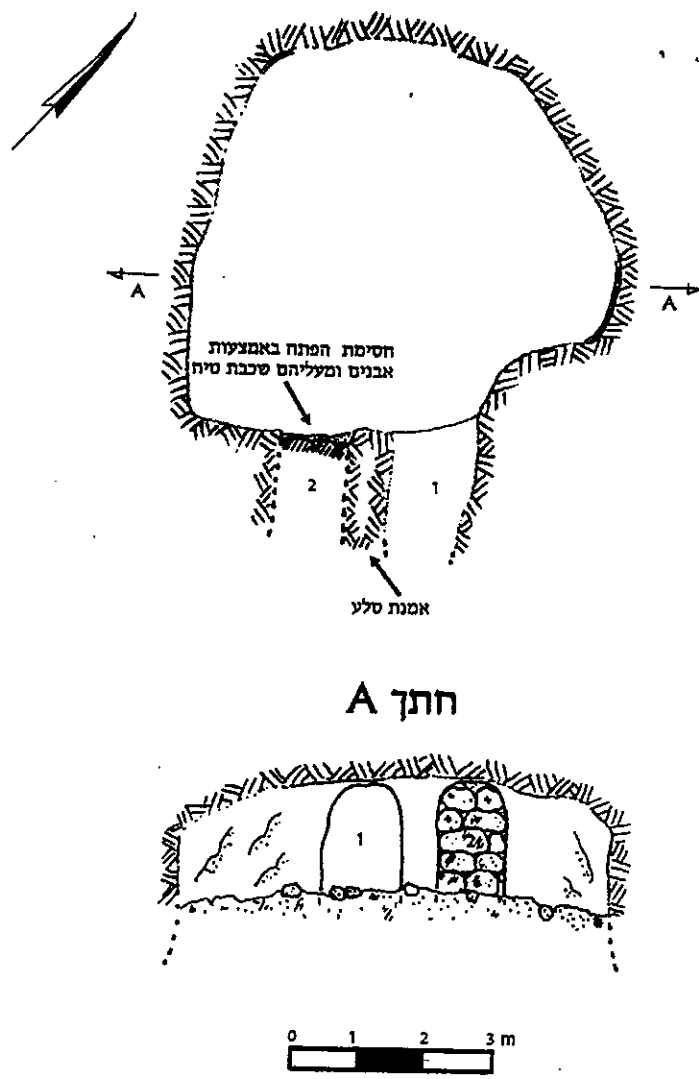


Fig. 15. A comparison between the courtyard of the cave of the Tombs of the Kings and their adjacent water installations (Reich 2013; Bahat 1980).



איור 4: תוכנית וחתך מקורה טהרה בעל פתח כפול בחורבת רביעה (שרטוט ב' זיסו)

Fig. 16. Pool with a double entranceway. The opening was sealed, while the installation continued functioning as a water installation with steps (Klein & Zissu, 2013)

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