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CHHIM AND JIYEH

EXCAVATIONS 1997

Tomasz Waliszewski, Sławomir P. Kowalski and Anna Witecka

The Polish-French-Lebanese archaeological expedition was in its second season of excavations at two sites situated some 30 km south of Beirut: Chhim, from June 30 to August 23, and Jiyeh, from July 21 to August 23.¹ The work at Chhim was a continuation of last year's explorations, while at Jiyeh, investigations of Byzantine residential architecture were initiated.

¹ The expedition was headed by Mr. Tomasz Waliszewski, who was assisted by Renata Tarazi representing the Direction Générale des Antiquités and Lévon Nordiguian from the Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient. The team included: Sławomir P. Kowalski (in charge of excavations at Chhim), Anna Witecka (in charge of work at Jiyeh), Marzena Łuszczewska, archeologists; Frédéric Alpi, epigraphist; Abdallah Alaeddine, ceramologist; Janusz Smaza, Krzysztof Chmielewski and Andrzej Karolczak, conservators; Wioletta Tkaczyk, Anna Kosiorek and Krzysztof Jurkow, students of conservation from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw; Dobiesława Bagińska, Ewa Chrzanowska, Beata Dobosz, Wioletta Lipska, Łukasz Dziągwa, Artur Kaczor, Kazimierz Kotlewski, Michał Neska, Dominik Paszkowski, Hubert Stajniak and Rafał Zakrzewski, students of archaeology from Warsaw University, the Academy of Catholic Theology and the Copernicus University in Toruń; and Michel Hérou and Ibrahim Noureddine, students from the Université Libanaise in Beirut. Dr. Mounir Atallah was of considerable assistance in many ways. Expressions of gratitude are due to the directors of the Direction Générale des Antiquités, Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient and the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, represented by Camille Asmar, Jean-Marie Dentzer and Michał Gawlikowski respectively, for their personal involvement in the project. The Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw kindly provided the resources for the protection and recording of the excavations. Special thanks are due Mrs. Renata Tarazi from the DGA, whose administrative and organizational efforts helped make the expedition a success.

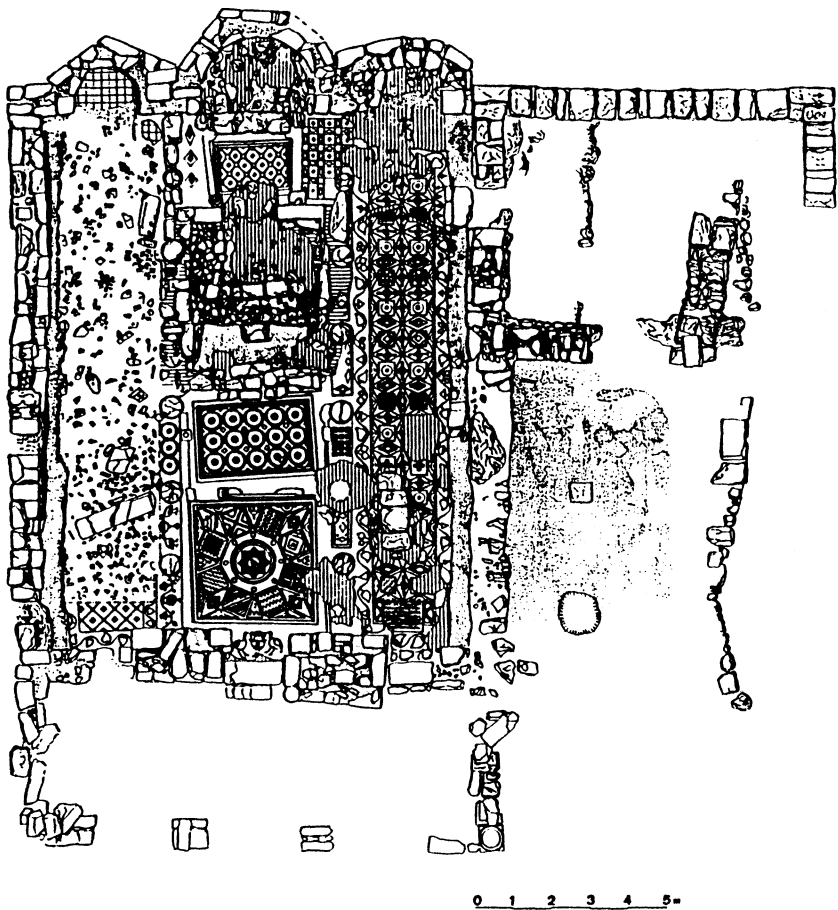


Fig. 1. Church of Presbyter Thomas (Basilica b).

CHHIM

The research this year brought more information on the chronology of the Byzantine basilica and Roman temple, and permitted part of a habitation district located underneath the ruins to be cleared.²

CHURCH OF PRESBYTER THOMAS (BASILICA B)

Current work was concentrated in the church presbytery. The investigations in the previous season had already confirmed that the mosaic in the presbytery belonged to a later phase of the building. The original mosaic in the side aisles and the nave, dated by inscriptions to the late 5th century, clearly continued under the blocks that delimited the presbytery on the south.

The pit excavated last year in the central part of the presbytery had yielded fragments of oil lamps of the same type, dated to the late 7th-early 8th century. A stratigraphical study now determined the extent of the pit, as well as its chronology and character. Further pieces of oil lamps of the turn of the 7th century indicated that the pit had been a robbers' trench, made in early Arab times in order to get at the rich equipment of the already disused church.

Conservators removed and protected the mosaic in the presbytery. It turned out that compared to the eastern part of the floor, which contained representations of lionesses, birds and fish, the western part was in a much worse condition. Also the cubes of which the mosaic was made were different, as were the layers of bedding. In the western end, the mosaic was laid on a thin layer of mortar set on a compact layer of small pebbles, while the eastern end, together with the lionesses and the decoration of the apse, rested on a thin layer of mortar laid

² For the 1996 campaign, see *PAM VIII*, 1996 (1997), pp. 147-156.

directly upon the ground. Obviously, the mosaic was not homogeneous and had been laid in two different periods.

Upon exploring the presbytery, it was found that immediately under the top mosaic in the apse and the eastern end of the presbytery there was another mosaic linked directly with the mosaic in the southern side aisle and dated similarly to the late 5th century. The level of the apse was slightly elevated with a small step giving access to it. The decoration of the mosaic in the apse is floral. The untouched mosaic of the original presbytery, decorated with a big geometric panel in the middle, stops at a row of stone blocks laid transversally to the basilica axis, in line with the second intercolumnar space. In the center of the geometric panel, the stone bases of the *ciborium* and *cancellum* were cleared, situated around the altar which was in the middle. The level of the original presbytery next to the altar was the same as in the rest of the church aisles.

The above-mentioned blocks constitute the border of yet another level in the presbytery, elevated with respect to the rest of the church by about 0.40 m. The stone blocks formed an almost square space. The steps discovered last year seem to have led to the presbytery in its first building phase.

The described structure, which constituted a square platform in the middle of the church, is the first *bema* (space reserved for the liturgy of the Word) ever to be recorded in Lebanon. The western part of the mosaic removed at the beginning of the season has thus turned out to belong to the original furnishings of the church, that is, it dates from the late 5th century. Rectangular *bemas* are known primarily from the Eu-

phratensis province.³ The semi-circular *bemas* from Syria are better known.

The discovery of a *bema* in Lebanon puts the history of the liturgy in this area in a new light. Extremely interesting from this point of view are all the other changes in the presbytery identified in the course of the research. In brief, a *bema* had stood in the middle of the church in the first stage of its existence; between it and a slightly elevated apse, there was the altar with the *cancellum* around it or a *ciborium* above it. In the next phase of liturgical changes, the *cancelli* were removed from around the altar and the nave. The next serious rebuilding necessitated covering with earth the space left by the altar and the laying of a new mosaic picturing lionesses, birds and fish in a geometric framework. Hence, the presbytery was made to be more in line with what was then the standard in Phoenicia.

The presbytery also revealed some exceedingly interesting structures belonging to a stage preceding the basilica. In its western part, transversally to the church axis, a plastered structure with a kind of bench-projection was built into the *bema*. The structure was linked with a mortar floor, which had been destroyed in the southwestern corner by a robbers' pit. Perhaps the structure belongs to a period corresponding to the level already revealed under the Roman temple.

Important conservation work was carried out on the north wall of the basilica, which was threatening to collapse. The wall was dismantled to the ground and reconstructed, the displaced elements being restored to their original position. This will provide more sound protection for the basilica and will per-

³ P. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises de Syrie et du Liban*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988, pp. 521-522.

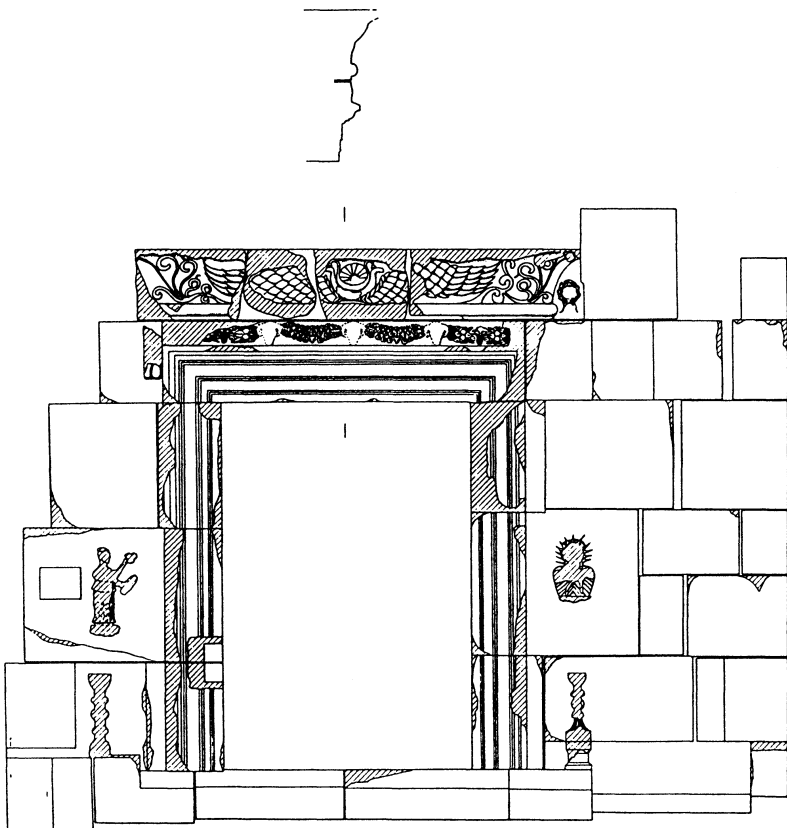


Fig. 2. Facade of Temple C.

mit the as yet unexplored mosaic in the northern aisle of the church to be uncovered. In consequence of the dismantling of the north wall of the basilica, it was found that a wall running for at least 30 m to the north of the building, preserved to a height of 2 m in places, was surely earlier than the basilica which was later added onto it.

Detailed epigraphic studies of the inscription revealed last year in the southern aisle have indicated that the mosaic was laid in AD 498.

TEMPLE C

In 1996, a test trench had been located in the southwestern corner of the temple temenos; it now continued to be explored. The northeastern half of the building was uncovered, confirming the earlier provisional stratigraphy. The Byzantine layer on top had left no vestiges in the part currently explored. What was well visible was a layer of fill consisting of small stones mixed with pottery of the 2nd century AD. Additionally dating the layer was a coin of Antoninus Pius from c. AD 140. The layer constituted the fill that leveled a layer of earlier structures under the Roman temple. Underneath, there was an extensive floor made of mortar, its northeastern edge cut off by a foundation trench of the temple. In the southeastern part, there was a square structure of stone blocks covered with plaster – presumably traces of a pillar. The pottery found immediately above these structures is dated to the 1st century BC - 1st century AD. Fragments of wall plaster with geometric and floral painted motifs, corresponding with the earliest described phase, may testify to the presence on this spot of a decorated building before the 2nd century Roman temple.

COMPLEX F

On a terrace below the temple, there is a complex of rooms occasionally preserved to a height of 1.80 m. The walls were of an average thickness 0.90 m, founded directly on bedrock and

constructed of roughly dressed stone. An analysis of wall bonds revealed the presence of two principal development stages: Phase I, when the habitation consisted of rooms F.I, F.II and F.III, laid out in a single line with interconnecting doorways, and Phase II, when the house was enlarged to encompass rooms F.IVA, F.IVB, F.V, F.VI, F.VII and F.VIII. This last room, which was quite big, held two oil-presses installed alongside the long walls. The press by the east wall has all the stone elements preserved in place: the opening in the northern wall to mount a beam, the stone for pressing the olives, a monolithic basin for the oil, three suspended weights and a mounting for the beam. The condition of the press installations is even better than in the case of press E.I investigated in the 1996 season. Quantities of charred olive stones were found around the presses. Of the other press, only a few elements are still in place. The room of the presses opened onto corridor F.VI. Room F.I should also be linked with the operation of the presses. It was partitioned off from room F.II, but had direct access to the corridor through a doorway immediately next to the room of the presses. Rooms F.IVA, F.IIB and F.VI divided the house in half and were used as corridors providing access to the various parts. The main entrance to the building was on the south, in room F.IVB. It seems possible for an alley to have run along the south wall of the building; this alley seems to have ended in steps leading up to the second terrace. The original floor level has been uncovered in rooms F.I, F.VIII and partly in F.VI. The pottery material indicates the occupational phase of the building to have been in the 4th-6th centuries AD. A later phase of use for room F.VIII (oil presses) was identified next to the western press, which had been dismantled (presumably in the Early Islamic period) and the floor raised, so that a pillar supporting the roof could be introduced on the level of the monolithic oil basins.

Complex F was not the first structure to exist in this place. Abutting the complex on the west there is a fragment of a Roman necropolis, traces of which are visible also in other places on the same level as the lower terrace. On the side of the oil presses, two stone sarcophagi have been preserved supporting the west wall of room F.VIII, as well as two burial pits cut in the rock.

CHRONOLOGICAL REMARKS

The site chronology proposed following the previous season has not undergone any significant changes. The mosaics, and presumably the church itself, are dated to AD 498. The earliest occupation of the site seems to be quite clearly from the turn of the 1st century BC and encompasses the structures under temple C and the remains built into the church bema. The origins of the Byzantine settlement should be moved back to the 4th century. Investigations of complex F should provide valuable information on what is until now the practically unknown Byzantine residential architecture of Lebanon.

JIYEH

The ancient town remains on the Mediterranean coast had attracted the attention of scholars already a long time ago.⁴ Roger Saidah from the Direction Générale des Antiquités managed to begin work on the site in 1975, uncovering a large stretch of the Byzantine residential district.⁵ Civil warfare and Saidah's premature death unfortunately interrupted the work, also causing his documentation regrettably to be lost.

⁴ Earlier discoveries from the Roman and Byzantine periods were reported by E. Renan, *Mission en Phénicie*, Paris, 1864-1874, pp. 509-514; G. Cautineau, *Mission archéologique a Sidon* (1914), *Syria*, 1, 1920, pp. 295-305.

⁵ R. Saidah, Porphyron du Liban, *Archéologia* 104, 1977, pp. 38-43.

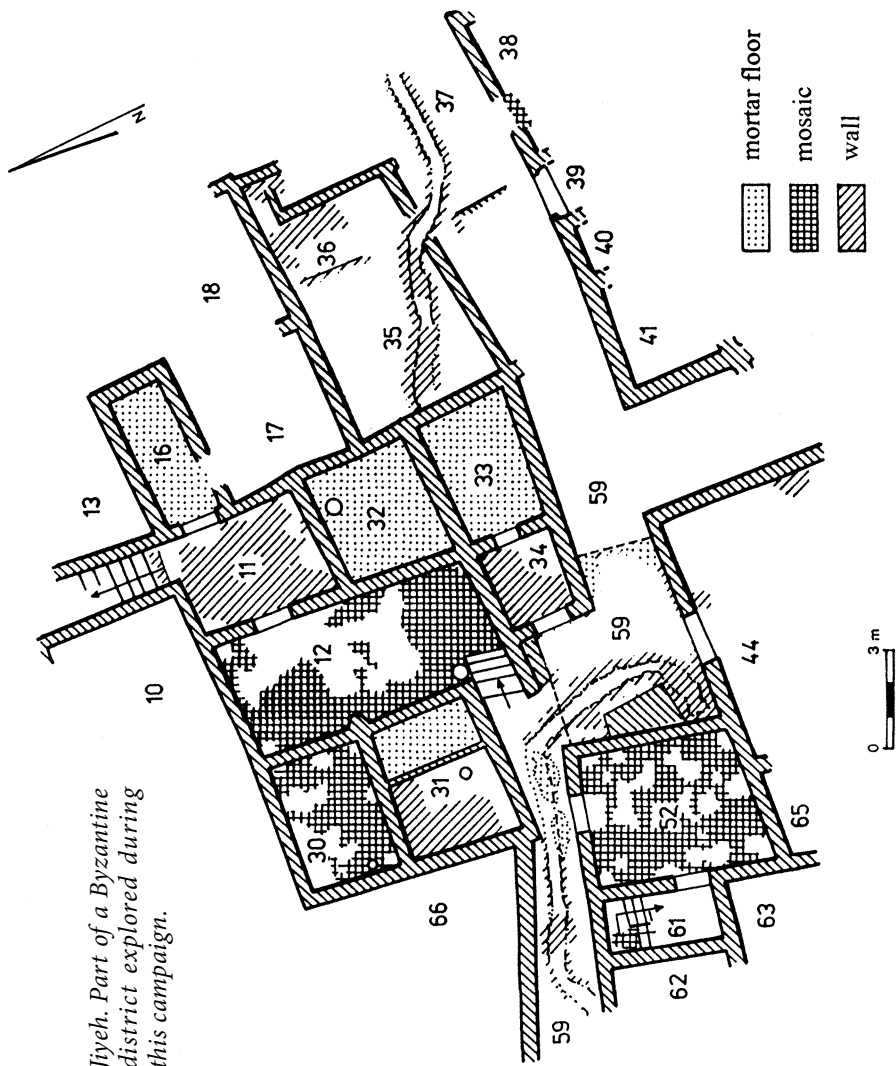


Fig. 4. Iyeh. Part of a Byzantine district explored during this campaign.

Current investigations were intended to record the results of the earlier excavations and to provide a canvas for a provisional site chronology.

The well preserved architecture (exceeding 2 m in places) required some clearing of the debris and sand accumulated over the past twenty years. The houses, consisting of 2-3 rooms as a rule, lined narrow winding streets which featured changing levels and sewage canal installations. The preserved remains of staircases (rooms 61, 9) are visible proof of an upper story being present in at least some of the houses. The building material in use was a crumbly local sandstone (*ramleh*). The walls were covered with plaster resembling mortar. In some cases, there were inscriptions in Greek, mostly quotations from the Psalms, on the walls. The floors of the rooms were covered mostly with mosaics made of white tesserae, as well as of stone slabs and mortar.

In the course of the explorations, it was possible to identify four presumed residential complexes: 1) rooms 12-32-33-34-11?; 2) rooms 30-31-66; 3) rooms 52-61; 4) rooms 16-17-18. The house with room 12 seems to have been the most imposing. Room 12, which is the biggest of those uncovered so far, was divided down the middle by opposing pillars. The shorter northern wall contains a centrally located rectangular niche. The floor was made of big white tesserae (cubes c. 1.3 cm in size). A band three cubes wide and differing in arrangement from the rest of the floor, runs around the room. This space was accessible by steps from street 59, which was located some 0.60 m higher up. There is also a pithos set into the mosaic. Indeed, there were vessels set into almost all the mosaic floors uncovered at Jiyeh. Perhaps they had served to collect water used to clean the floors or else they had been used as supports for amphorae.

Room 12 was connected on the east with room 32 and room 11. The latter of the two was presumably a court that opened out on street 9; it was paved with slabs covering the sewage system underneath. In the next stage, the room was rebuilt with the entrance being blocked by a staircase leading to the upper floor. Further rebuilding led to the house being enlarged by the addition of rooms 34 and 33. Stairs linked rooms 12 and 34, the latter being located on a level that was higher by about 0.60 m.

The preliminary nature of the investigations carried out so far precludes any chronological determinations of consequence. Most of the pottery finds originate from secondary fill. Only the one-meter fill in room 11, mixed with debris from the walls, appears to be original. The forms and the clay of the pottery from this layer is characteristic of vessels from the late 5th to the early 7th centuries.

More precise chronological data came from a test trench dug at a turn in street 59, where the habitations have been best preserved. The two layers found there yielded pottery and oil lamps characteristic of the 4th century and the 1st-2nd century respectively. The sewage system that has been uncovered corresponds to the layout of the rooms on the ground surface. But the structures identified below these habitations indicate that between the Roman and Byzantine periods there had occurred at least a partial change of orientation and a rebuilding of the existing rooms. Further stratigraphical research will help to determine in detail the exact nature of these transformations.

This season at Jiyeh brought the first chronological and architectural determinations concerning the residential architecture on the site. Another focus for future research is the necropolis lying about 500 m to the north of the city ruins. A preliminary survey in the area revealed the presence of several rock-cut tombs located on terraces descending in the

direction of the sea. Some of these tombs still feature painted decoration. Hellenistic and Phoenician pottery scattered on the surface would testify to the presence of earlier settlement at Jiyeh.