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Chhîm Explorations, 2000

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CHHÎM

EXPLORATIONS, 2000

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For the fifth season in a row the Polish-Lebanese archaeological expedition to Chhîm conducted excavations in the ruins of the Roman and Byzantine settlement situated in the hilly region between Beirut and Saida. The work was continued from July 3 to August 25, 2000.¹⁾

The chief thrust of this year's work was on sectors that could provide new information concerning site chronology. The particular excavation areas are presented respective to their location on the settlement plan.²⁾

1) The team was formed jointly by the Direction Générale des Antiquités du Liban and the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University. Once again, we are deeply grateful to the Director General of the Direction Générale des Antiquités, Mr. Frédéric Husseini, for making our effort possible, and to Mrs. Renata Tarazi for her continuous and extremely efficient cooperation. The mission was directed by Dr. Tomasz Waliszewski, assisted by Mrs. Renata Ortali-Tarazi representing the Direction Générale des Antiquités and Mr. Lévon Nordiguian of the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut. Team members included: Dr. Mahmoud El Tayeb, Mr. Kazimierz Kotlewski, Ms Ingrid Périssé (Université de Bordeaux), archaeologists; Mr. Marek Puzskarski, documentalist; Mr. Tomasz Szmagier, photographer; Ms Marta Bołtowiec, Ms Aleksandra Trochimowicz, Mr. Krzysztof Chmielewski, Mr. Bartosz Markowski, conservators from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts; Ms Magdalena Bilewicz, Ms Aleksandra Chabiera, Ms Anna Glasek, Ms Marta Tchórzewska, Ms Urszula Wicenciak, Mr. Ryszard Cichocki, Mr. Grzegorz Grabek, Mr. Robert Gruszczyński, Mr. Marcin Łazicki, Mr. Tomasz Pelc, Mr. Maciej Ryś, students of archaeology from Warsaw University and the Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw, and Ms Nathalie Hanna, Ms Myriam Ziadé, Mr. Yahya Balhawan, Ms Rina Saliba and Mr. Mario Badawi, students of archaeology from the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut.

2) For reports on the previous seasons' results, cf. *PAM VIII, Reports 1996* (1997), 147-156; *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), 139-152; *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 177-185; *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 237-245.

BASILICA B

TRIAL PIT IN THE NAVE

The unfortunate incident with the robbing of the mosaic floor from the nave of Basilica B in 1999 provided the opportunity to open a trial pit, measuring 2.00 by 2.00 m, in the middle of a space delimited by the western wall of the structure, the colonnades of the aisles and the presbytery steps. Directly beneath the lost mosaic floor a thin, barely 10 cm thick layer of lime mortar bedding with small and medium-size stones appeared. Under what should be interpreted as the mosaic substructure there was a well-preserved lime floor, some 3 cm thick, laid on brown soil that had been used to level the unevenness of the rock. It was the last level identified in the trial pit, although one should add a channel cut directly in bedrock and running along an east-west line. The channel, some 10 cm wide and 15 cm deep, was plastered to even out its walls.

The discovered floor is part of a bigger surface, which in all probability covered most of the terrace under the Byzantine basilica. Another part of this floor together with a plastered bench abutting the wall was unearthed in 1997 under the bema of the church. The amphorae and imported ware sherds above and below this floor are Roman in date. The similarity of this

surface to the floor under Temple C is striking. The latter floor had been in use in the 1st century AD. Hence, it appears justifiable to think that the area under Basilica B had been occupied in Roman times. The channel, used perhaps to head off water to one of the cisterns, belongs presumably to an earlier phase. The nearest cistern is situated in the temenos in front of Temple C. It is highly probable that Tower D belongs to one of these earlier phases, while the entire zone described here was tied in chronologically and functionally with the settlement, parts of which are specifically from the first half of the 1st century AD.

TRIAL PIT NORTH OF BASILICA B

A small rectangular trial pit (1.50 x 1.00 m) was opened at the foot of a wall running at an angle from the northern wall of the basilica. The foundations of this wall were revealed, thus making it clear that the dressed blocks had been positioned directly on top of the leveled bedrock surface. The pottery from the trial pit was Roman (1st-2nd century AD), although it is hardly a basis for dating the wall itself. What is certain is that the course of this wall fits in practically perfectly with the overall layout of other substructures of the settlement dated to Roman times.

TEMPLE C

WORK INSIDE TEMPLE C

The 1999 trial pit inside the 2nd-century Roman temple was now extended to the east and west, bringing confirmation of the stratigraphy reported on previously: below the lime floor of the 1st century AD there

is a layer containing pottery of the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, and below this and directly upon bedrock, another layer yielding scarce evidence of Greek and Persian wares of the 5th-4th centuries BC with a few Iron Age fragments mixed in.

TRIAL PIT

BY THE NORTH PRONAOS WALL

The foundations of Temple C, revealed in a trial pit excavated outside the northern pronaos wall, reached a depth of over 2.50 m below the surviving top of the

wall. The blocks that were already below the ground surface were less well dressed and were laid directly upon bedrock. The construction of Temple C disturbed this entire area, hence there is no evidence predating the 2nd century AD.

VILLAGE E

Much of the excavation effort this season was directed at exploring the substructures situated in a sector extending north of Temple C. The rows of small rooms that were uncovered line two of the village streets, one following an east-west line (connecting temenos A with oil press E.1) and the other intersecting it at right angles and running toward the northwestern corner of the Temple. The chief objective was to test for earlier settlement in the village and to identify the key elements of a typical Chhîm house.

SUBSTRUCTURE E.V

This rectangular room (3.50 by 3.50 m) is situated between Temple C and the alley opening onto temenos A. Its entrance facing the temenos and temple facade was monumental by the standards of other doorways in the village. At some point the double-wing door was removed and the opening blocked. Another doorway was pierced instead through a wall abutting the street. The interior was filled completely with stone blocks coming from the ruined walls. In the southwestern and northeastern corners of this space large fragments of a lime floor on a bedding of small stones was preserved. The floor level, which was 20 cm thick on average, corresponds to that of the original threshold. Traces of red-painted plaster on the southern wall constitute the sole evidence of interior decoration. Long

flagging stones supported on two pillars, found below this floor, constituted the vaulting of an underground room. Despite exploring the entire space inside this substructure, it was impossible to identify the actual occupational surface of this unit. Instead, a double wall (about 80 cm thick) was cleared alongside the southern wall of building E.V. It was presumably a supporting wall for steps that had led down to the underground room.

The pottery originating from the interior is mixed Roman and Byzantine. Merely the trial pit in the corner of the underground room yielded a few dozen Hellenistic sherds of the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, all from below the level of the foundations.

The exploration of structure E.VI (see below) has provided sound evidence for dating the construction of E.V to at least the 1st century AD. Its function, in view of the monumental entrance opening onto Temple C, remains enigmatic.

SUBSTRUCTURE E.VI

The triangular space between the north wall of Temple C, southern wall of substructure E.V and the extension of the latter's western wall (*Fig. 1*) brought the most important determinations of the season concerning site chronology.

Once the stone blocks covering this space had been cleared (already in the 1999 season), it turned out that the area could be

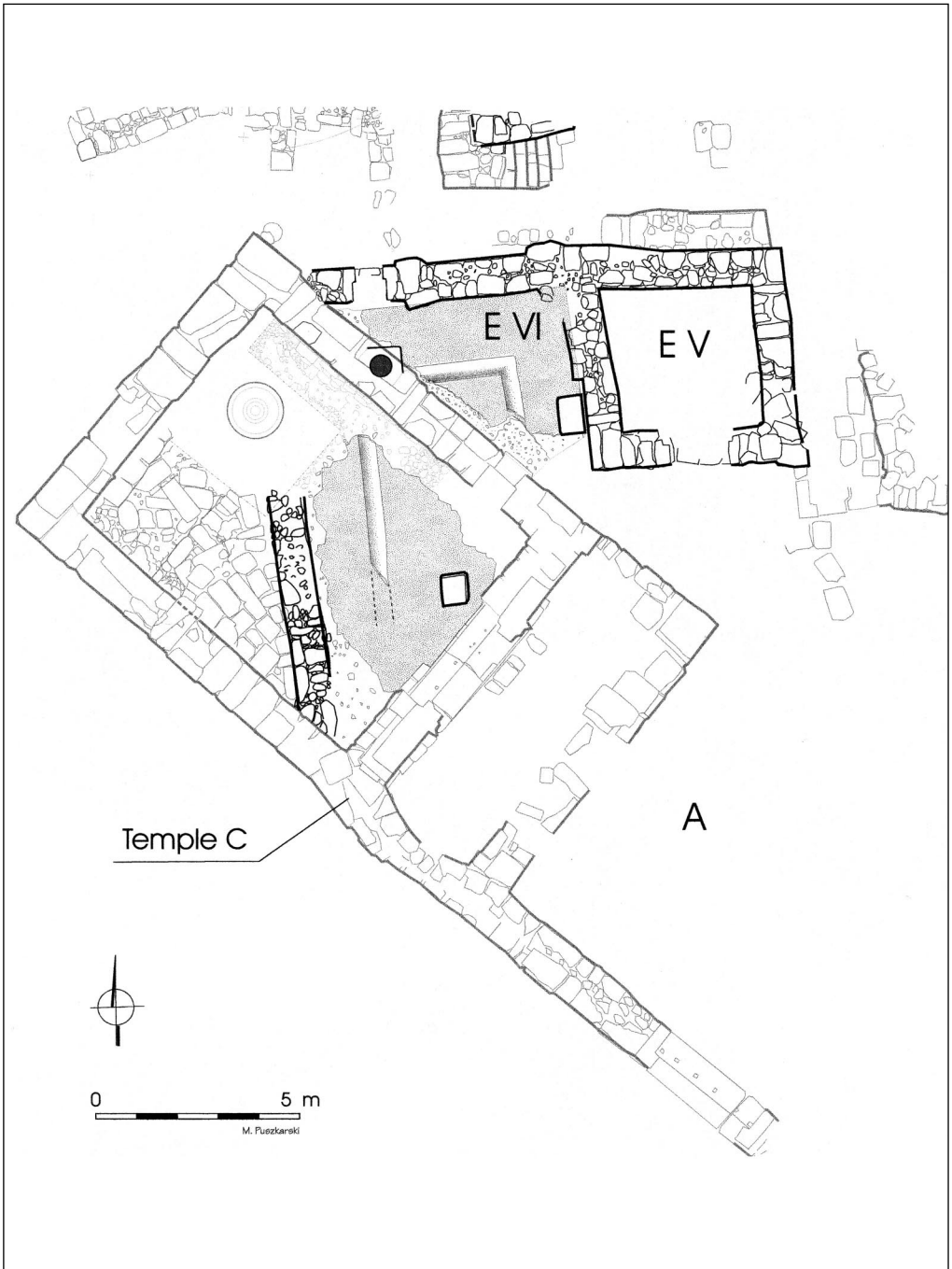


Fig. 1. Plan of structures discovered underneath Temple C and substructures E.VI and E.V
(Drawing M. Puzzkarski)

entered from two sides (*Fig. 2*). The eastern entrance – facing temenos A – preserves evidence of two thresholds corresponding to two phases in the mounting of the door, presumably Roman and Byzantine. A bronze pivot bed was found in one of these thresholds. The western entrance led out onto the street that intersected at right angles the chief street in this part of the settlement.

The well-stratified deposits consist of three main levels, starting with the topmost one:

- Lime floor from the Byzantine period, surviving in the western part of the triangular space. A bench of stone blocks salvaged from Temple C stood on this floor, lining a wall of substructure E.V. The floor had been laid on a thin layer of fill.

- Lime-floor strip about 1.00 m wide, running along the north wall of the Roman temple, bordered on the north with a structure of mortar-bonded stones. On pottery grounds, this level should be related to the operation of the temple in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. This floor lies on a layer of fill some 0.30 m thick.

- Lime floor preserved in excellent condition all over this triangular area, contemporary with the plaster on the western and northern walls. Ceramic evidence from the layer lying directly on the floor surface consists of 1st-century AD wares exclusively. In the middle of the triangular space, part of a flat rectangular structure was discovered. It was set into the floor deep enough to form a kind of small pool, as indicated by the presence

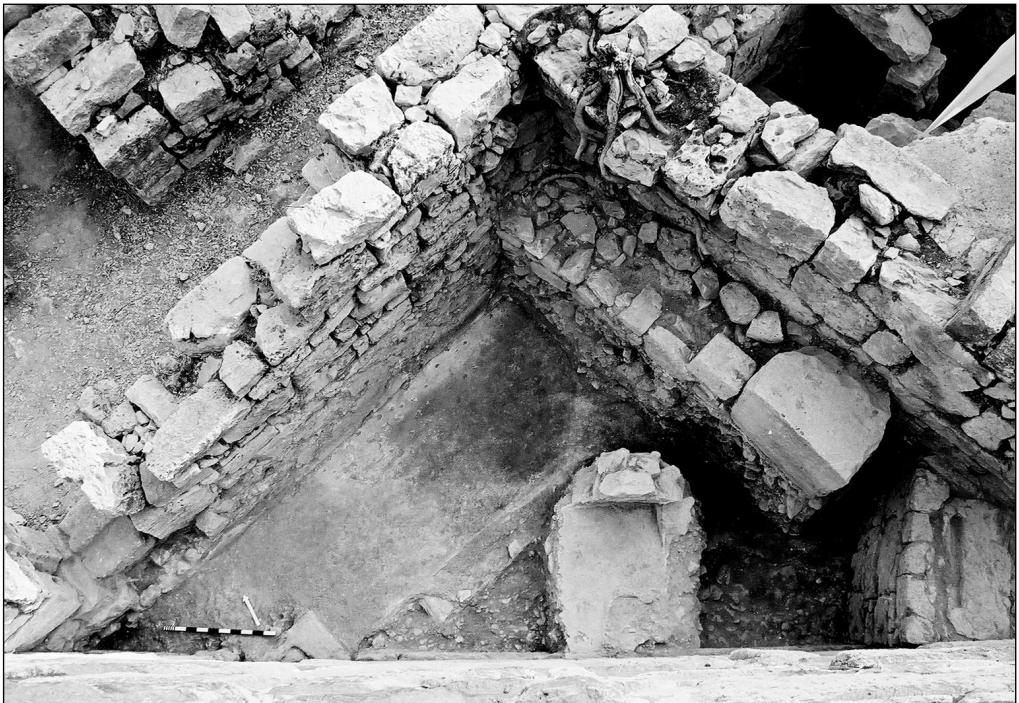


Fig. 2. The triangular space E.VI with evidence of successive occupational phases (Photo K. Kotlewski)

next to it of a cistern inlet, the cistern being situated under the north wall of Temple C and used throughout the existence of this part of the settlement. A rectangular structure of plastered stone had been attached to the northern wall of the triangular space (which is a wall of E.V at the same time). Its surface bears evidence for the mounting of some kind of rectangular object – perhaps a statue base or an installation connected with the cistern?

These determinations throw some light on the interpretation of the remains uncovered below the Roman temple in the course of the previous seasons. It is now possible to connect the lime floor discovered there in 1996 with the floor from the triangular space that has been dated to the 1st century AD. The above-mentioned pool would belong to the same

phase. One should imagine, therefore, preceding the construction of the temple in the 2nd century AD, a rectangular space surrounded by walls that were plastered and decorated with painted black lines. In the middle of this space there was a rectangular pool and the inlet to a cistern. Added to this are two substructures in the eastern part of the courtyard, both identified as "bases" or "pillars". The dozens of painted plaster fragments discovered on either side of the northern wall of the temple suggest that its construction destroyed some kind of structure with painted walls that had stood in the center of the courtyard.

Conclusions drawn from the exploration of this triangular space are of significance for the settlement as a whole. For the first time since the beginning of



*Fig. 3. Entrance to house E. VII and staircase leading up to the roof
(Photo K. Kotlewski)*

the project it may be stated with a certain measure of conviction that at least part of the village dates back to the middle of the 1st century AD. Hellenistic potsherds from the trial pits in E.V and E.VII, as well as below the temple itself open the possibility of moving Chhîm origins even further back in time.

SUBSTRUCTURE E.VII

Continued clearing work behind the Roman temple uncovered substructure E.VII, which is almost square with an entrance in the eastern wall (Fig. 3). In the center there is a stone block that had served as the base of a wooden support for the flat roof. Two stone benches along the northern and western walls complement this view of a typical Chhîm private house (Fig. 4). The room survives to a height of

1.80 m. Excavations have revealed floors connected with two habitation phases – Byzantine and Roman. The pottery assemblage from the Roman phase includes some mixed potsherds of the 1st-to-4th centuries AD, together with a few Hellenistic pieces of the 3rd and 2nd centuries. A coin of Ptolemy I found in the floor underscores the Hellenistic-period evidence. The last discovery of the season was a typical local *taboun* or bread-baking oven, which had been installed in the northwestern corner of the room.

SUBSTRUCTURE E.VIII

A long and narrow room south of E.VII, it was also excavated this year. A door leads to the interior with a floor made of stone slabs lying some 0.30 m below street level. A bench was found in the back; it passes



Fig. 4. General view of house E.VII
(Photo K. Kotlewski)

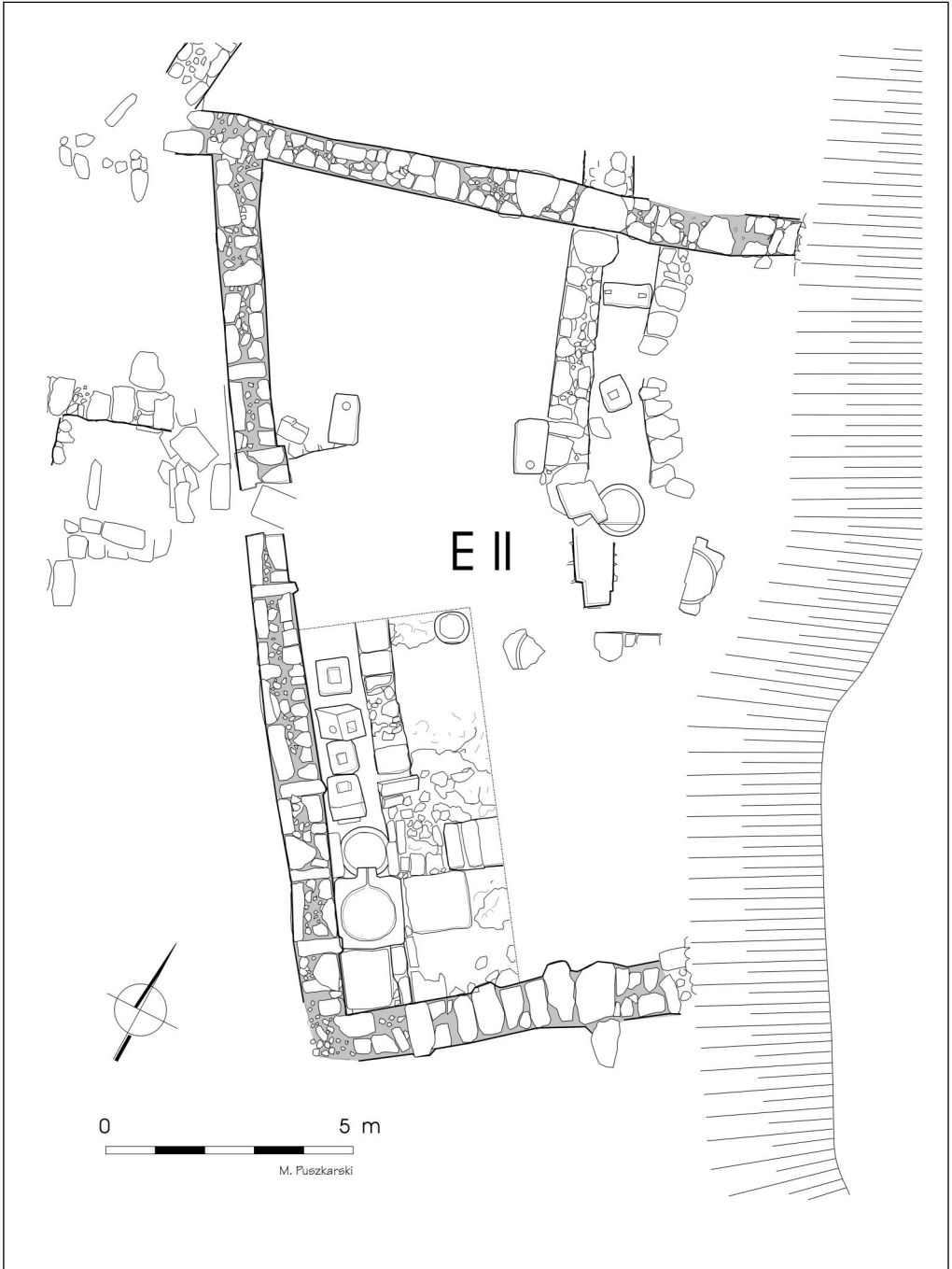


Fig. 5. Plan of oil press E.II after the 2000 season of excavations
(Drawing M. Puzzkarski)

under a wall separating the room from the next-door E.IX. Initially, it would seem that E.VIII and E.IX had formed one square house similar to E.VII.

SUBSTRUCTURE E.IX

Only a half of this room was uncovered, yet it contained the same floors and benches as E.VIII.

SUBSTRUCTURE E.X

Clearing of this sector will permit tracing the irregular rectangular outline of rooms which appear to have constituted the last row of houses in the village.

OIL PRESS. E. II (*Figs. 5, 6*)

A trial pit dug last year in the southeastern corner of this big rectangular building situated north of Basilica B had revealed oil press installations in very good condition.

This year the trench was extended to 5.00 by 2.50 m. The presses turned out to be at least two, mounted on two different levels. The stratigraphy here indicates the presence of three principal layers (*Fig. 7*):

- topsoil, gray-brown, c. 0.20 m thick;
- fill, brown, lots of small stones and wall blocks, c. 1.50 m thick;
- occupational level – stone flagging and lime floor.

The last mentioned level revealed the key elements of an oil press in excellent condition: pressing zone, container for the oil, four stone weights, low wall separating the installation from the rest of the building. On one of the weights it is still possible to recognize the metal system for attaching ropes. North of the press excavations brought to light a pillar, surviving to a height of 1.60 m; it had supported the roof.



Fig. 6. Oil press E.II. View of the southwestern corner (Photo K. Kotlewski)

The pottery from these three layers is mixed with Roman 1st-2nd century material interspersed with a Byzantine assemblage of the 6th-7th century. Nonetheless, it may be determined that the building was erected in Roman times and abandoned in the 7th-8th century.

CONSERVATION WORK

The presence of a team of conservators permitted work on two mosaic-floor panels from Basilica B to be completed. The mosaics, representing an antelope drinking from a cup and birds drinking from an amphora, had been removed from the church in 1999 for the sake of safety. Now they were mounted on a new, light and portable bedding substructure.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important discovery of the 2000 season is the evidence confirming that at least part of the village comes from the 1st century AD. Tantalizing traces of the Hellenistic period found below Temple C and sub-structures E.V and E.VII suggest that the settlement could have been even earlier.

The results of excavations in the triangular space E.VI are also of significance, providing for a credible history of the spot from the origins of the site until its abandonment.

Finally, there are the Roman traces under the basilica, which lead us to a continued search for the rest of the 1st century village under temenos A in front of the temple.



*Fig. 7. View of the stratigraphy inside the building of the oil press E.II
(Photo K. Kotlewski)*