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## Hawarte: Third Interim Report on the Work in the Mithraeum

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# HAWARTE

## THIRD INTERIM REPORT ON THE WORK IN THE MITHRAEUM

Michał Gawlikowski

*A team of the Polish Centre of Archaeology, Warsaw University, went on this summer with the work started in August 1998 and continued in June-July 1999. We were working in Hawarte on behalf of the DGAM represented by Mr. Abdel Razzaq Zaquq from June 3 to 29, 2000, as a joint Syro-Polish mission.<sup>1)</sup>*

1) The team included, beside the present writer, Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek, Ms Marta Żuchowska, archaeologists; Eng. Wojciech Terlikowski, architect; and a team of restorers headed by Mrs. Ewa Parandowska, including four students of restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw: Ms Magdalena Muc, Ms Aleksandra Trochimowicz, Mr. Bartosz Markowski, and Mr. Oskar Rabenda. Mr. Marek Puzkarski joined the mission for a few days as a draftsman, together with photographer Mr. Tomasz Szmagier. Mrs. Krystyna Gawlikowska participated in a private capacity. The DGAM provided the mission with accommodation in its house at Qalaat al-Mudiq, a car, a group of workers, tools and building materials as required. Our work was greatly facilitated by Mr. Nadim al-Khoury, Director of Afamia Museum, who spared no time and effort to assist us in every way.

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Our activities this season were originally meant to complete the excavation and restoration of the mithraeum found recently under the church of Archbishop Photios that had been excavated originally in the 1970s.<sup>2)</sup> The program for the present season, as submitted to the Directorate General of Antiquities, included the excavation of the whole complex and the building of a permanent shelter over it.

The complete uncovering of the mithraeum, and a workable project for a permanent protection of the site, shall not be possible, however, without expropriation and demolition of a house built over the ruins of the church. We were promised to

have these preliminaries completed before our arrival this year.

Unfortunately, the undertaking could not be executed for reasons independent of the mission. It seemed appropriate under these circumstances to cut the projected season to one month and to concentrate on the restoration of the remains already cleared. Indeed, we had recovered previously hundreds of mostly tiny fragments of painted plaster, which needed treatment and study in order to prepare a computer-aided virtual reconstruction of the paintings. A large piece of the painted ceiling of the mithraeum is being currently treated in Warsaw, and many more fragments from this ceiling and from



*Fig. 1. The passage from the main room to the vestibule with the partly restored northern jamb (Photo T. Szmagier)*

2) M.T. and P. Canivet, Huarte. Sanctuaire chrétien d'Apamene (IV<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> s.) (Paris 1987).

the walls are stored for processing. During this season they were sorted, partly reassembled and put in storage in 18 specially designed flat wooden frames, 120 by 80 cm, filled with sand. It shall be possible from now on to study them at leisure without risk of damage or loss.

Parallely, the conservation of paintings still on the walls of the cave was given our full attention. Mrs. Paradowska and her team have spent many days injecting chemicals under the painted layer, cleaning the painted surface and fixing the detaching edges. This tedious work, which under usual circumstances would have taken many months, was advanced to the point when it is safe to leave the paintings waiting for the next season, planned for spring 2001. The whole place is covered

and protected against rain and excess humidity, though of course only the local guards can effectively prevent vandalism or robbery.

One of the planned objectives of the season was finding and excavating the original entrance to the mithraeum, to serve if possible as permanent access to the underground site. We knew already that it was not located opposite the main niche of the mithraeum, as is usually the case. Last year we found remains of a doorway leading to the main room from the west, that is, on the wall to the left of the niche (*Fig. 1*). We had also noted another painted room on that side and had hoped to excavate it completely during the current season.

As this was not possible in the end, we decided to excavate as much as we could,



*Fig. 2. The excavated part of Room B with the restored jambs and the later foundation to the south (Photo T. Szmagier)*

that is, the narrow space under the narthex of the first church. As a preliminary step, a stretch of the narthex mosaic about 1.80 m by 1.60 m, left in place by the previous excavators, was lifted and transported to the museum. The border of this mosaic is still blocked by the modern house standing directly over it.

Under the mosaic level a trench was excavated on both sides of a foundation dug into the mosaic by the builders of the second church. This done, we found ourselves between the exposed foundations of the church on the west and south (*Fig. 2*), some 4 m below the level of the earlier mosaic, and the original east and north walls of the mithraeum vestibule (Room B). The fill

consisted for the most part of broken tiles, most likely from the roof of the room, and loose stones, all thrown in to support the narthex mosaic dated to about 400 AD.

The north wall, which is bedrock with small stones and tiles filling the cavities (seen already in 1999) was exposed again and consolidated. The painting is badly damaged due to the poor quality of the support, but the subject is clear: two facing lions tear apart little black men, presumably representing some evil forces (*Fig. 3*). It was estimated that the original west wall of this room runs not further than 50 cm behind the foundation of the church facade.

The east wall of room B had been used as a foundation for the dividing wall between



*Fig. 3. The north wall of Room B with remains of the lion painting (Photo T. Szmagier)*

the narthex and the nave. As the latter was dismantled in 1999, recovering some stones belonging to the original structure, it now became possible to restore the dividing wall of the mithraeum nearly completely; in particular, two doorjambs were erected to their full height. One of them still bears some painted plaster.

Room B had served probably as an entrance hall to the mithraeum. It should have been approached from the south,

where the hewn rock under the side aisle of the church marks an open corridor leading to this room. Sideways to the east, the rock wall opens beneath into yet another room, now completely filled with stones but having the paintings preserved apparently to their full height on the north wall, which separates it from the main room of the mithraeum. It was not possible to excavate more of this complex due to the dangerous overhang of the modern house.



*Fig. 4. The horseman to the right of the entrance to the main room  
(Photo T. Szmagier)*

Right and left of the doorway leading from vestibule B into the main room A, there are some very unusual paintings. The one on the left was cleared already during the last season. It represents a dismounted horseman holding on a chain a monstrous creature: a naked black man with two heads. We had initially assumed this to be Mithra himself, but now another horseman, practically a mirror projection, has appeared on the other side of the door (*Fig. 4*). The part of the wall where his prisoner would have been depicted is not preserved, but every other detail is mirrored from one side to the other. There were two layers of painting representing consecutively the same subject. The two horsemen were apparently conceived as guardians of the entrance to the main room of the mithraeum, warding off the forces of evil.

We are probably about halfway through the excavations. There remains for us to uncover the western wall of the vestibule, the entrance, and the room opening from the entrance, to say nothing about the unexpected. The murals need lengthy on site treatment, if they are to be preserved on the walls. The shelter over the mithraeum should be at least twice as big as first envisaged.

The shelter should in my opinion not only protect the underground rooms, but also show their relation to the later church. The most satisfactory solution would be to use the lateral walls of the church, completed with ancient blocks to offer support at the height of about 2 m above ground level. The problem is being studied, but of course any final decisions should wait until the excavations have been completed.