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Chhîm Explorations, 2001

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CHHÎM

EXPLORATIONS, 2001

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The joint Lebanese-Polish archaeological mission of the Direction Générale des Antiquités and the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University worked on the site of the ancient village of Chhîm for the sixth season in a row.¹⁾

With an eye to clarifying matters of chronology and stratigraphy the mission concentrated on digging in the area of the temenos situated in front of the Roman temple and of the dwellings immediately north of it (Fig. 1). Progress was also made in the uncovering of the E.II oil-press located on the terrace above the Byzantine basilica.

1) Fieldwork would have been impossible without the all-encompassing support of the Director General of the Direction Générale des Antiquités, Mr. Frédéric Hussein. We are immensely indebted to Mrs. Renata Ortali-Tarazi for her efforts to make our working time at the site effective.

The Mission was directed by Dr. Tomasz Waliszewski, assisted by Mrs. Renata Ortali-Tarazi representing the DGA. The staff included Dr. Mahmoud el-Tayeb, Ms Marzena Łuszczewska, Mr. Kazimierz Kotlewski, Ms Ingrid Périssé (Université de Bordeaux), Ms Urszula Wicenciak, archaeologists; Mr. Marek Puskarski, draftsman; Mr. Krzysztof Chmielewski, conservator; Ms Magdalena Bilewicz, Ms Agnieszka Dębska, Ms Marta Tchórzewska, Ms Małgorzata Wybieralska, Mr. Mirosław Kostanek, Mr. Artur Radomski, Mr. Grzegorz Grabek, Mr. Paweł Tchorek, students of archaeology (Warsaw University); Ms Nathalie Hanna, Ms Myriam Ziadé, Mr. Yahya Balhawan, Ms Joyce Nassar, students of archaeology (Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut).

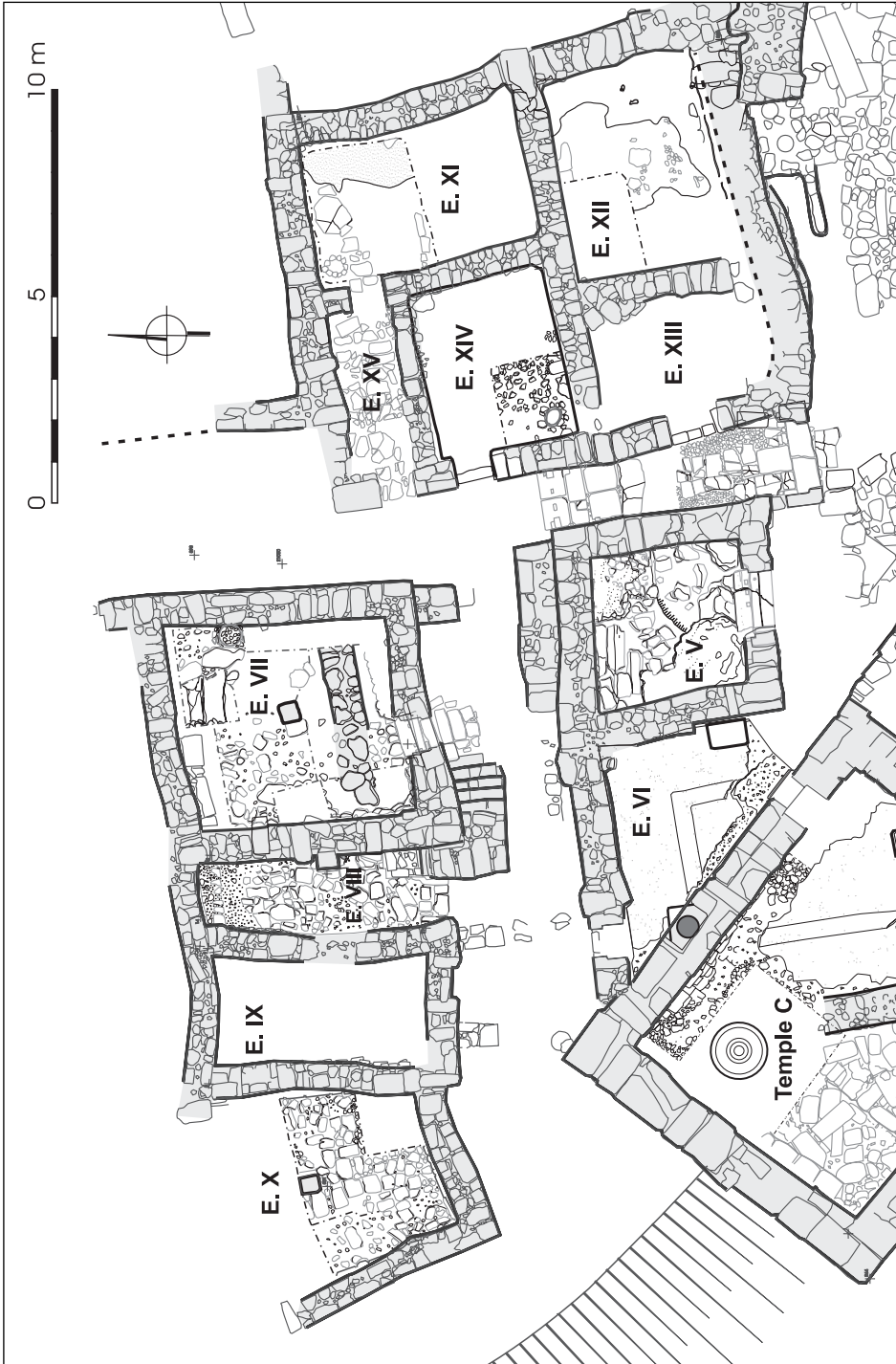


Fig. 1. Plan of structures discovered in Village E
(Drawing M. PuszkarSKI)

VILLAGE E

STRUCTURE E.VII

Previous work in this structure revealed the presence of two consecutive floors, provisionally referred to as Byzantine (upper) and Roman. Excavations outside the entrance to the structure, immediately to the left of the entrance, brought to light two hearths made of *pithoi* bottoms enconced in a circle of small stones (diameter 0.50 and 0.60 m respectively). Large quantities of ashes filled the hearths and surrounded them. This was apparently the kitchen annex of the house in the Byzantine phase (an analogous installation but of Roman date had been discovered on the opposite side of the room last year.²⁾

The Roman-period floor – tamped earth on a bedding of small stones – was cleared throughout the interior. It was identical in structure with the part already uncovered in the northeastern section of the room. Current pottery finds have confirmed the general dating of the occupation corresponding to this floor level from at least the 1st through the 3rd century AD.

A test pit under the Roman-period floor in the northeastern quarter of the structure, just by the northern house wall, reached bedrock at a level about 0.50 m lower down. The rock appears to run continuously under the entire area.

The most interesting discovery from the point of view of site chronology came to light in the southern half of the structure. Just below the Roman-period floor, the remains of a wall, c. 0.80 m wide, were traced (*Fig. 2*), running in an E-W line that parallels the southern wall of structure E.VII. Blocks of big and medium size constitute the face of the wall, its core

being an earth-and-stones fill. This earlier wall continues unbroken beyond the overlying eastern and western boundaries of the uncovered structure and is covered with a layer of light brown soil containing insignificant quantities of sherds dated provisionally to the Hellenistic period. It is, however, also connected with a layer of gray-brown soil, in which sherds of Persian and even Iron-Age date have been recorded.

Apart from one or two structures under Temple C, this wall seems to constitute the sole evidence of settlement on the site previous to the Roman period and should be viewed in context with the pottery of Hellenistic, Greek, Persian and even Iron-Age date that is found in small quantities under all the excavated buildings on the site. The wall is sufficiently long and massive in structure to be considered as part of some bigger structure, which disappeared from existence not later than when E.VII was constructed. This wall has been recorded as continuing in the test pit dug inside E.VIII.

Current research has also proved beyond doubt that the walls of the house had been founded straight on the ground, without any underpinning or deeper foundation.

STRUCTURE E.VIII

A test pit was opened in the southern end of the room in order to check for earlier occupational phases. Under a floor of flat stones of Roman-Byzantine age, a light brown compact layer was noted – the same as in E.VII. It contained a considerable concentration of Hellenistic potsherds (more precise dating is still lacking

2) For a report on last season's work, cf. T. Waliszewski, *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 297-306, for E.VII, see esp. 303, Figs. 3, 4.

unfortunately). This layer is not connected with the early wall in E.VII.

Another two layers were recorded below it – a dark brown layer of soil and a layer of dark clay. Both these layers reached a wall, which turned out to cross the later room, being a continuation of the wall discovered in E.VII. Both layers contained Hellenistic material mixed with earlier, presumably Persian and Iron Age sherds. The clay layer rests directly on bedrock.

STRUCTURE E. X

The outline of this room lying on the western outskirts of the village was recorded last year, leaving excavations for the present season. The southern part of the interior was now cleared except for a

small fragment by the wall on the eastern side. A pavement of irregular slabs of dressed stone was uncovered lying about 0.40 m below the ground surface. It turned out to be present everywhere inside the structure. The biggest slabs appear in the center, in line with the square stone that held the wooden support of the roof, similarly as in E.VII. East and west of this pillar, the flagging is less in evidence, even disappearing completely in places.

STRUCTURE E. XI

This rectangular space (about 3.05 by 5.00 m) is accessible from the street through structure E.XV (*Fig. 3*). The fill, which is some 0.80-0.90 m deep, consists of blocks that have collapsed from the



Fig. 2. House E.VII during excavations. Pre-Roman wall visible in the foreground (Photo K. Kotlewski)

upper parts of the walls on top of an accumulation layer on the floor of the structure. The entrance is in the western wall.

The floor – a level of tamped soil and lime mortar – was uncovered just below the level of the threshold in the doorway. A stone circle just by the door served presumably as a pot-stand. A line of small dressed stones can be traced across the room.

The household character of the structure is beyond doubt despite of the fact that only its northern end has been explored. The period of occupation, evidenced by pottery and coins, falls in Roman and Byzantine times and lasts a few centuries, similarly as in all the investigated structures elsewhere in the ancient village.

STRUCTURE E. XII

South of E.XI there is a rectangular space (c. 3.10 by 4.00 m) that had once formed a single whole with E.XIII. Like other spaces in this complex, it was filled with accumulated soil followed by a layer of collapsed stone blocks from the upper parts of walls. The total thickness of the fill here was 1.20-1.40 m. A large piece of red granite – without any visible traces of dressing however – was found in the fill.

The northern and eastern walls originated from the same period. There are two rectangular niches in the eastern wall, both placed 0.70 m above the floor. Both measured c. 0.60 by 0.80 m and were c. 0.40-0.50 m deep. Traces of plastering have been preserved inside the left niche. Both



*Fig. 3. Rooms E.XI-E.XV during exploration
(Photo K. Kotlewski)*

must have been used as cupboards to hold household utensils. Exploration along the southern wall revealed clear evidence of interior plastering. On the west, the wall closing the room is of later date, having incorporated in the middle section a pillar that had once supported the ceiling of the initially combined spaces E.XII and E.XIII. A column could have served as the other roof support – two shaft drums were discovered in the fill. At the northern end of this wall a small passage was left to ensure communication between the two rooms.

A heavily damaged lime floor was cleared throughout the structure.

STRUCTURE E. XIII

This year we removed only the upper layer of the fill consisting of collapsed stones from the upper parts of walls. A door opening onto a street, now blocked, was subsequently observed in the western wall.

STRUCTURE E. XIV

The room (c. 4.25 by 3.25 m) is accessible through a door in the western wall. In an earlier phase, the northern wall did not yet exist, there being instead a pillar presumably supporting the roof. All other elements of the wall that have been brought to light are part of a later

blocking. Once the fill was cleared, the floor turned out to be a relatively well-preserved tamped-earth-and-lime-mortar surface spreading all over the space. Potsherds from the fill provide evidence of occupation in the Byzantine period. A low bench of a few flat stones survives in the northeastern corner. Supplementing the interior furnishings is a rectangular niche with triangular top in the eastern wall; at some point in the room's occupation this niche was blocked with stones.

A test pit in the southwestern corner of the room uncovered an earlier floor level, presumably Roman, some 0.30 m below the Byzantine one. Many small stones were found on this floor, as well as a hearth of fired clay, some 0.45 m in diameter and filled with ashes.

STRUCTURE E. XV

In the last phase of use, this long space (c. 4.60 by 1.75 m) served as a corridor leading to room E.XI. Irregular stones paved the floor, turning into low steps that led up to the threshold of room E.XI on the east. A similar floor to that in E.XIV was found under the pavement. It appears probable that E.XV and E.XIV had once constituted a single room with a pillar in the center supporting the roof.

OIL PRESS E.II

The western end of this installation, which is located to the north of Basilica B, was now explored (*Fig. 4*). The dimensions of the building as a whole are 6.20 by 9.50 m. The aim of the present work was to achieve a better understanding of interior layout.

An extension of last year's trench³⁾ revealed a second pillar, also square in section, standing in line with the first one.

Close to the building entrance, in the southeastern part of the structure, two stone blocks were discovered side by side; both had a single regular hole cut in them and had obviously constituted the foundation of a wooden support of the press-beam. All around there was a tamped-earth floor lying straight on bedrock, which comes up in places. The

3) Cf. *Ibid.*, 305-306, Figs. 5, 6



Fig. 4. Oil press E.II
(Photo K. Kotlewski)

floor reaches the threshold of the entrance to the building of the press.

Just beyond the doorway a wall divided the room transversally. It is constructed of finely dressed stone blocks with a core of earth and small stones. The thickness is 0.95 m. It is structurally interconnected with the outer building wall; hence, it should be assumed as belonging to the original structure. Its southern end has been destroyed right down to the floor, as if a passage had been cut in it at a later date to connect the two parts of the building. This is illogical to the extent that just beyond this "passage" there is the huge basin where oil was separated, which must have quite effectively blocked any communication whatsoever.

West of this transversal dividing wall another oil press was uncovered. The full installation survives in excellent condition – definitely the best anywhere on the site. The floor here is of tamped earth, too. A low bench of mortar-bonded stones runs along the west wall, resting directly on bedrock at the northern end. A third pier supporting the roof – in line with the first two – was discovered next to the basin of the press.

A round mill, 1.45 m in diameter, had stood in the southwestern corner of the building (*Fig. 5*). It preserved the place where the pin for the two olive-crushing stones was mounted. Unexpectedly, the iron pin itself was found in place, set in its bed of molten lead. Two hemispherical



*Fig. 5. Oil press E.II – mill with preserved iron pin
(Photo K. Kotlewski)*

orbes elements are found on either side, just as they had been positioned in antiquity, missing only the wooden beam that had connected them.

East of it was the monolithic separator basin measuring 1.51 by 1.18 m, where the oil was refined. Under the outflow opening pierced just above the floor of the basin a smaller circular basin had been set up to collect water and impurities.

The oil-press installations of the oil press took up the northern part of the building. These included a niche in the western wall, a stone bed and a basin at its foot, and a single weight. Lacking space for a basin where the bags could be set aside, the original builders erected an appropriate

structure of plastered stone on the southern side.

An interesting change in the functioning of the oil press has been observed. At some point in time, which is difficult to ascertain, the niche was blocked, the weights lowered and a transversal wall built to cover them. The remaining installations continued in use.

It is now clear that Oil Press E.II consisted of three independently functioning presses (the one on the upper terrace remains to be excavated). The difference in levels is presumably a factor of site layout – bedrock rising higher here forced the ancient builders to situate one of the presses on a higher level.

TEMENOS A

Excavations in the temenos in front of the façade of the Roman temple concentrated, on one hand, on finding remains connected with the temple itself and on the other, on gaining a better understanding of the chronology of potential earlier structures that could be connected with the settlement phase of the 1st century AD recorded under the temple during previous campaigns.⁴⁾

The gently sloping area of the temenos permitted the floor level in its northern part to be uncovered under only a thin layer of accumulation. The phase dated to the 2nd century AD includes a four-step staircase in excellent condition, discovered next to the northeastern corner of the temple and leading to its pronaos (*Fig. 6*). On the southern side these steps had been removed in antiquity so completely that no traces survive. The lime floor that was uncovered preserves fragments of *rudus* in the form of a layer of stones (especially near the

cistern). Two sewage channels oriented on a N-S line were set into this floor. They emptied toward the south. The eastern channel made of terracotta pipes starts in the upper part of the cistern opening; at some time during the functioning of the complex it was blocked with mortar. The western channel, which runs between the temple steps and the cistern, is rectangular in section and was made entirely in mortar; its beginning, as well as its end has yet to be excavated.

Undoubtedly, the most interesting find connected with this floor is the presence of a road lined with columns on either side, following a line marked out by the long axis of the temple. The northern edge of this street is quite distinct. The street surface is separated from the portico floor by a raised substructure (7-8 cm high) for the columns, which are c. 0.44 m in diameter (to judge by the imprints in plaster that are all that survives of the

4) Cf. *Ibid.*, 298; and *id.*, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 238-241.

colonnade). The portico was some 1.90 m deep and presumably closed with a back wall. The southern edge of the road raises more doubts, as it is largely destroyed. Traces that can be discerned in strong sidelight would put the width of this passage at c. 1.20 m.

Despite having cleared much of the surface of the temenos, no evidence of an altar has been recorded. It seems possible instead that the above-described colonnaded road joined the temple with Tower

D, which was situated opposite it and near the Byzantine basilica.

A test pit dug in the western part of the sector, immediately in front of the entrance to the temple, revealed a leveling layer under the floors of the 2nd century AD and, below it, some earlier structures which could correspond to the village settlement of the 1st century AD. The most evident feature is a threshold that is situated immediately next to the threshold of the 2nd-century entrance to the temenos.

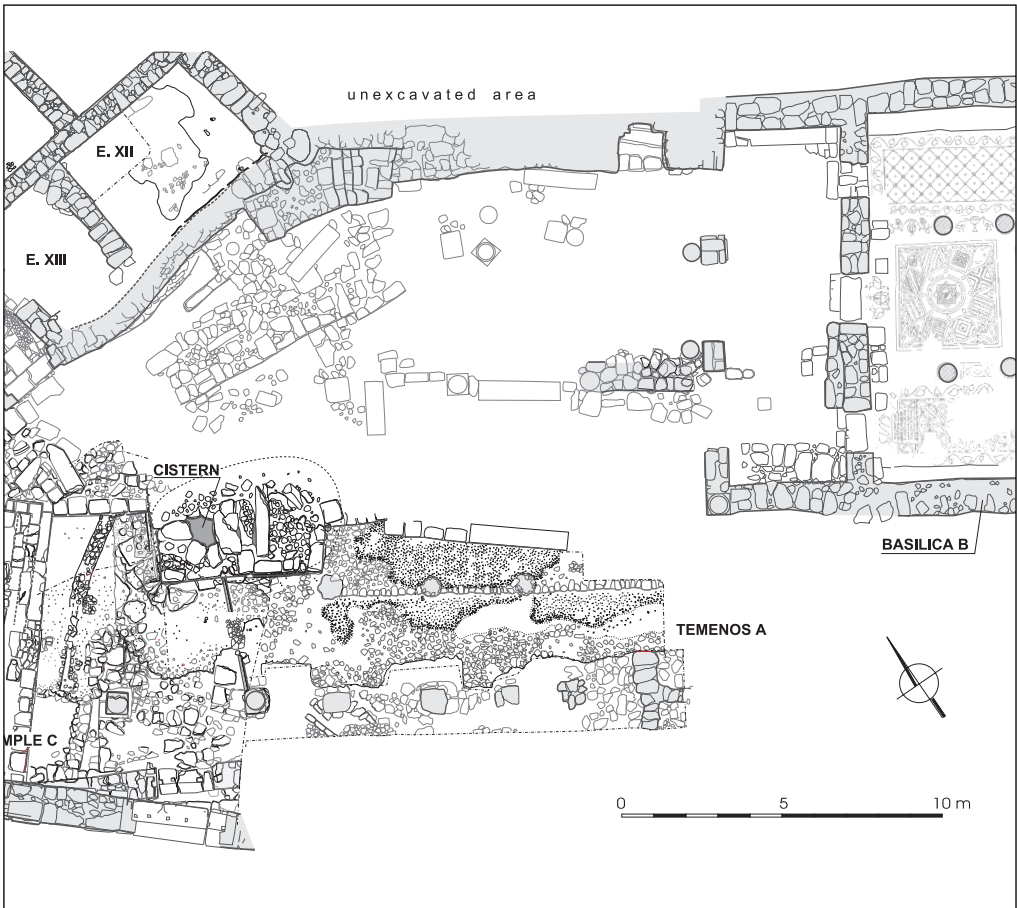


Fig. 6. *Temenos A. Steps leading to the Roman temple, next to them the sewage channels*
(Drawing M. Puzskarski)

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it should be noted that the results of the present campaign have confirmed beyond all doubt the existence of structures older than the village of the 1st century AD (in house E.VII). The possibility of there being a functional

connection between the Roman temple and Tower D has posed intriguing new questions, while the discoveries in oil press E.II have shown once again the spectacular importance of Chhîm for scholars studying oil production in ancient Phoenicia.