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Chhîm Explorations, 2002

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CHHÎM

EXPLORATIONS, 2002

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The seventh season of excavations at Chhîm was carried out jointly by the Direction Générale des Antiquités and the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University, and lasted from September 1 to October 11, 2002.¹⁾ The archaeological investigations this season were focused in three different sectors: temenos A (earlier courtyard separating the ruins of the Roman temple from the Byzantine basilica), village E (the part situated between the Roman temple and oil-press E.I) and oil-press E.II and the structures in its immediate neighborhood spread over the terraces above the church. The overall objective was to clarify the appropriation and chronology of particular features of the Roman settlement.

1) We are deeply indebted to Mr. Frédéric Husseini, Director General of the Direction Générale des Antiquités, for his interest and support which have made the research possible; for the proper day-to-day functioning of the expedition we are grateful to Mrs. Renata Ortali-Tarazi, who has been involved in preparing the ground for the team's work since the very beginning. The Mission was directed by Dr. Tomasz Waliszewski, assisted by Mrs. Renata Ortali-Tarazi representing the Direction Générale des Antiquités. The team included: Dr. Mahmoud el Tayeb, Mr. Kazimierz Kotlewski, Ms Ingrid Périssé (Université de Bordeaux), Ms Urszula Wicenciak, archaeologists, Mr. Marek Puszkarski, documentalist; Mr. Krzysztof Chmielewski, conservator; Ms Karolina Cichocka, Mr. Karol Juchniewicz, Mr. Jakub Prager, Mr. Adam Ryszkowski, Mr. Dariusz Smoczyński, Ms Anna Skłodowska, Mr. Paweł Tchorek, Ms Anna Zakrzewska, students of archaeology from Warsaw University and the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, as well as Ms Diana Abbany and Mr. Yahya Balhawan, students of archaeology from the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut.

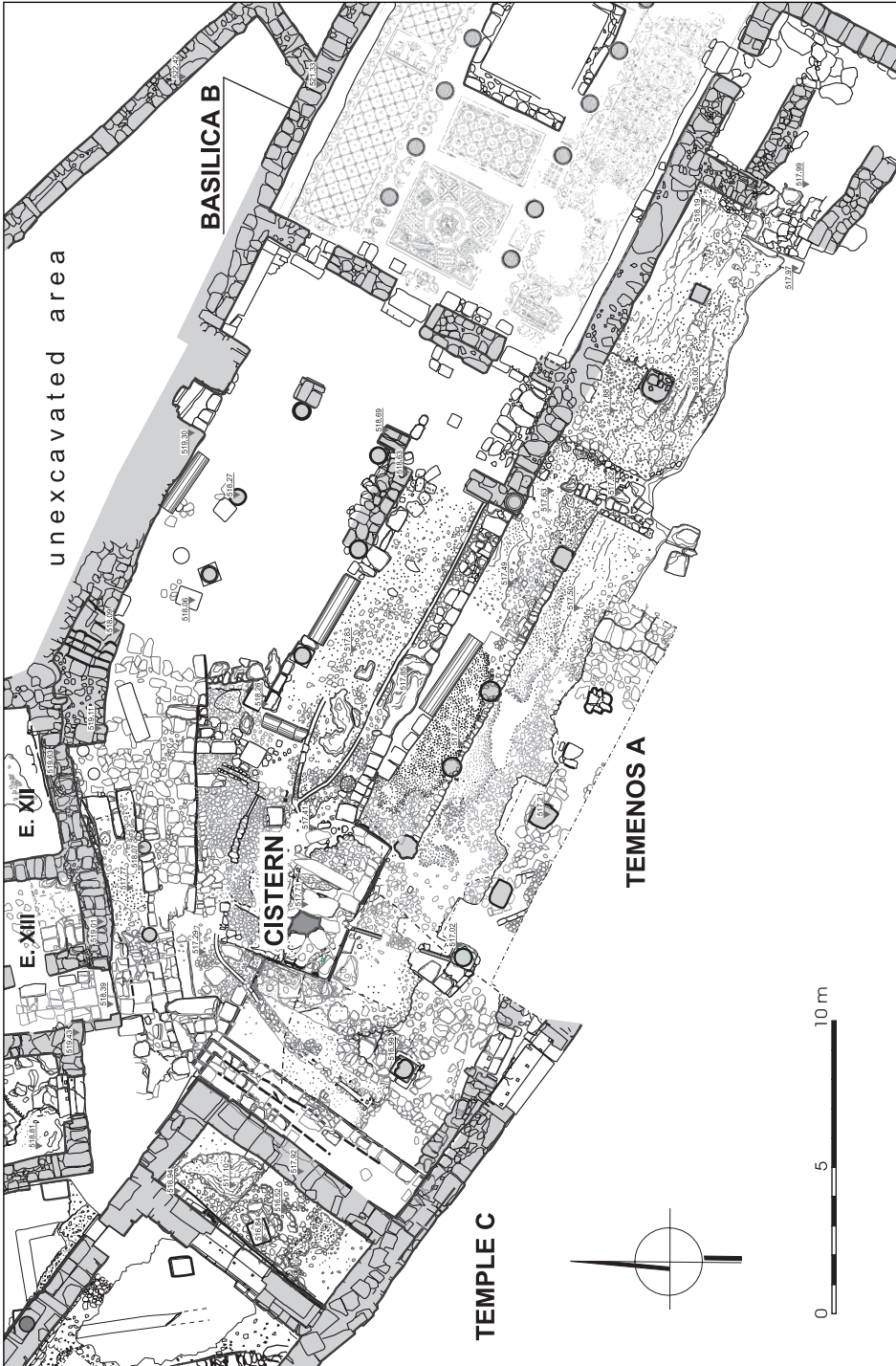


Fig. 1. Plan of the features uncovered in temenos A in 2002
(Drawing M. Puskarski)

TEMENOS A

ROMAN-PHASE FLOOR (*Fig. 1*)

A lime-mortar surface, preserved in good condition and showing evidence of wear, covered the entire length of the temenos from the temple steps to the northwestern church. A further section (much of it had already been uncovered in the previous season) was now discovered in the central-eastern part of the temenos. The presently explored part was 3.00 m long and 4.70 m wide. Earlier observations of a clearly delineated road linking the Roman temple with tower D to the east were confirmed. A colonnade (bases *in situ*) delimited it on the north. A parallel row of columns can be observed on the south, despite this section of the floor having been destroyed, presumably during conservation and restoration activities in the 1970s and 1980s. The south colonnade should be seen as part of the original temenos layout. The colonnade passageway had been shut off at the eastern end with a wall (surviving a mere few centimeters above floor level). It, too, belonged to the Roman phase. Despite no ceramic dating evidence being available for the floor, which survived practically on the surface, its connection with the building of the Roman temple in the middle of the 2nd century AD and the functioning of the temenos as such until the end of the existence of the church in the 7th or 8th centuries AD seems to be confirmed.

LATE ANTIQUE FLOOR

An area immediately to the east of the above described sector, 11.50 by 3.50 m in size, is limited on the north by the basilica and on the east by tower D. Its surface is made up of a 10-cm thick layer of lime mortar that lies some 10-13 cm above the level of the Roman-period floor. It is smooth and much less worn than the

previously described surface. To judge by the stratigraphy, it was connected with the functioning of the basilica, that is, the period from at least the 5th to the 8th century. In the middle of this area a single rectangular stone block was found sunk into the floor (cf. *Fig. 1*); evidence of another such block (now lost) 2.50 m away from the first one suggests that both had supported pillars, on which a Late Antique roof attached to the southern wall of the church had rested. A test pit north of the surviving block revealed the fairly simple stratigraphy in this area. The bedrock here was covered with an irregular clayey layer, on top of which came the Roman-phase floor consisting, as in the central section of the temenos, of a thin layer of lime mortar laid on a bedding of small stones. The highest layer here is the Late-Antique surface connected with the basilica. The piers were sunk even into the Roman layer and were originally a continuation of the northern colonnade that has now been traced in the central part of the temenos.

RECTANGULAR FEATURE NEXT TO TOWER D

Under the Late-Antique floor in the area adjoining the west wall of tower D excavations brought to light a rectangular feature, 2.40 by 1.40 m, consisting of a single course of long flat stone blocks (*Fig. 2*). Mortar on the western block testifies to the presence of yet another course of stones, receded in relation to the first in a step-like arrangement. Architecturally, the feature is one with tower D. Its function, however, poses some difficulty. It has been interpreted provisionally as a set of steps leading up to the tower D interior. In view of the fact that it is aligned with the axis joining the tower and the temple, it would suggest,

should the hypothesis as to its function be confirmed, that tower D was some kind of still indeterminate, but obviously cult-related structure.

SEWERAGE IN THE TEMENOS

A few new branches have been added to the plan of the sewerage system known to have been introduced in the temenos area in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD (*Fig. 3*). A set of four channels built into the lime surface in the northwestern part of the temenos, next to the passage leading to the village, reveals two principal directions taken by the system. Some channels led to a great cistern situated in the middle of the temenos, while others discharged rainfall collected from the courtyard surface to the south, beyond its limits. Late Antique potsherds found in the fill of these channels confirm the functioning of this system throughout

the existence of the settlement, well into the Early Arab period.

ENTRANCE TO VILLAGE E

Stone steps leading from the temenos to the village had been uncovered during the 2000 campaign. This structure from Late Antique times was now dismantled revealing underneath an earlier surface and steps (cf. *Fig. 3*), most likely connected with the Roman phase of the temenos dating from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

PRONAOS OF TEMPLE C (*fig. 4*)

Work inside the Roman temple concentrated on uncovering the pronaos and studying the stratigraphy in this spot. No traces survive of the temple floor level, which appears to have been dismantled already in Antiquity. Inside the pronaos, however, under a layer of rubble fill,



*Fig. 2. Rectangular structure adjoining tower D in the temenos area
(Photo T. Waliszewski)*

excavations brought to light a lime floor (Fig. 4) that is obviously a continuation of the surface dating from the 1st century AD already recorded elsewhere under the temple and in the area north of it. The southern section of this floor, which occupies the entire area of the pronaos measuring 7.33 by 2.75 m, was found virtually completely destroyed. The foundation trenches of the temple (0.30-0.40 m wide) had similarly destroyed the northern, eastern and western extremities of this earlier surface.

A test pit in the center of the pronaos revealed an earlier layer containing mixed Hellenistic and Roman sherds, linked directly with a wall of big, regularly dressed limestone blocks, which was used as a foundation for the temple façade. In chronological terms, the wall must be tied in with other walls excavated below the temple and under its north wall. The function of the building these walls formed still remains difficult to ascertain.

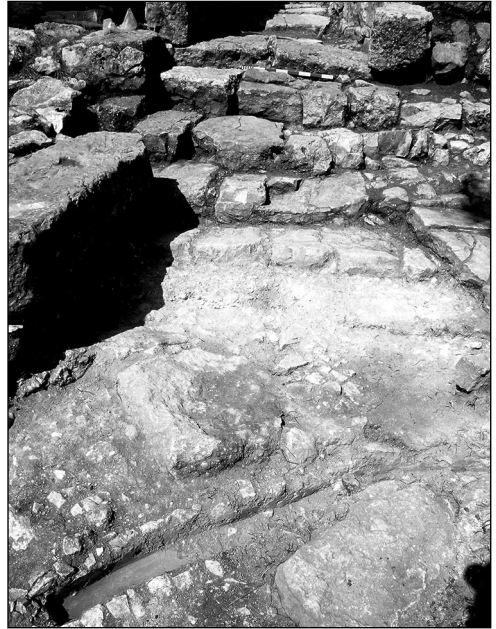


Fig. 3. Entrance to village E from temenos A; remains of Roman-phase sewerage in the foreground (Photo T. Waliszewski)



Fig. 4. Remains of a 1st-century AD floor under the pronaos of the Roman temple. On the right, an earlier wall, used as a foundation for the temple façade (Photo T. Waliszewski)

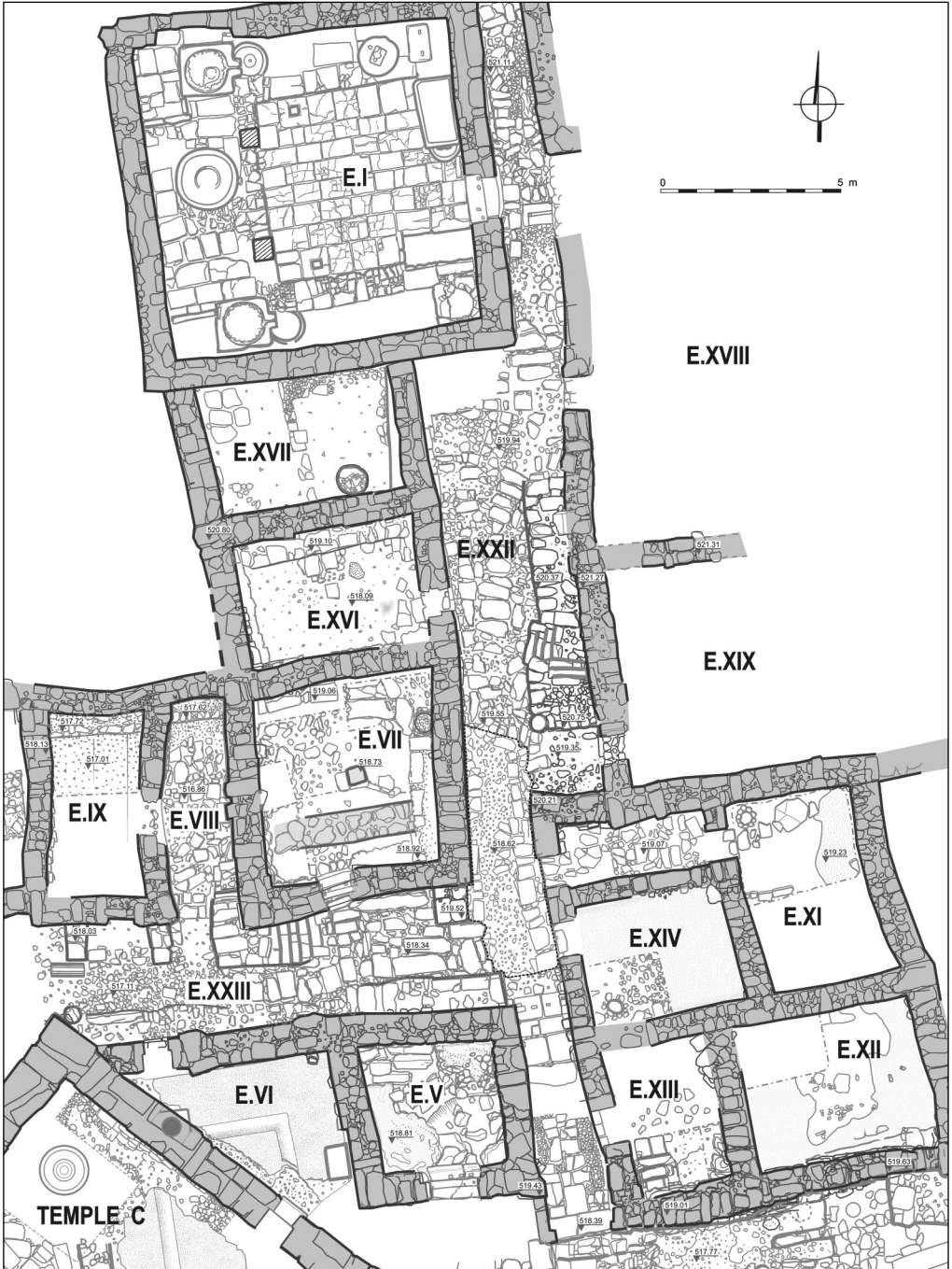


Fig. 5. Plan of structures excavated in village E in 2002
(Drawing M. Puzskarski)

VILLAGE E

Investigations of the Roman settlement in the area between the Roman temple and oil press E.1 focused on the study of the chronology of already uncovered rooms and the clearing of new ones (*Fig. 5*). All were used for habitation purposes, obviously in a period from the 1st century AD though the 6th-8th centuries. All were constructed in the same technique: two outer faces of dressed limestone blocks with a core of earth and stone debris, forming a wall about 80 cm thick.

STRUCTURES E.XI, E.XII, E.XIII

A trial pit dug in the middle of room E.XI cleared the previous year uncovered bedrock already 0.25 m below the Roman-phase floor. The bedrock sloped westwards. No evidence of earlier habitations was brought to light.

Another trial pit in E.XII, which also uncovered westward-sloping bedrock, yielded evidence of earlier occupation (*Fig. 6*) in the form of a Late Hellenistic or Early Roman jar base found on the bedrock. There is no other evidence, unfortunately, for the chronology of this phase.

Room E.XIII, which was originally part of E.XII, was separated out at some point by a transversal wall with a narrow entrance in it. The wall was built on top of a clay-and-lime floor of the Roman phase, the original occupational surface in this unit. The later modifications of the interior organization, which have been provisionally dated to the 5th-6th century, consisted of blocking the main entrance to E.XII-E.III and installing a set of four steps in the southwestern corner. One of these steps was reused from the Roman temple located just a few meters



Fig. 6. Room E.XII, view showing the bedrock in a trial pit dug in the floor of the room. At the top, late partition wall separating out room E.XIII (Photo T. Wąliszewski)



Fig. 7. General view of the sector of village E explored in 2002. Street E.XXII runs down the middle with structures E.XVI and E.XVII visible on the right. The Roman temple seen in the right background (Photo T. Wąliszewski)



Fig. 8. Tannour in room E.XVII (Photo T. Wąliszewski)

away from this spot. The steps presumably led up to a secondary entrance that had been made in the corner of the room.

STRUCTURES E.XVI AND E.XVII

At the time of their founding, E.XVI and E.XVII, which occupy the area between E.VII and oil press E.I (Fig. 7), were independent structures, albeit E.XVI (a square, 4.10 by 4.10 m) constituted an annex to house E.VII and was connected to it by a doorway in the southern wall. The stratigraphy recorded in the course of exploring this unit did not depart overall from the stratigraphy observed in virtually all of the structures excavated so far in this sector. The surface layer was a tumble of stone blocks from the structure's walls, fallen onto a gray-brown earth that is interpreted as evidence of a clay roof covering a wooden frame. The deposits below this include two tamped-clay floors, one from Late Antiquity, the other, some 0.20 m lower down, from Roman times. Below the lower floor a trial pit revealed light brown soil containing Hellenistic pots sherds.

In the late occupation phase, structures E.XVI and E.XVII appear to have been connected through a passage that was pierced in the wall separating them. A set of provisional steps installed in E.XVI facilitated the communication between them.

Structure E.XVII (4.00 by 4.10 m) adjoins the walls of oil-press E.I and appears to have been built at a slightly later date than the press. Two niches in the wall of the press siding E.XVII (each measuring 0.70 by 0.65 m) may have been used as closets.

Inside E.XVII there were features not found in E.XVI. A stone flagging of irregularly dressed slabs appeared in the north-western corner in the late occupational phase. It bore evidence of subdivision in the form of low walls of smaller stones. In similarity to house E.VII, there was

a regular block in the very center of the room, presumably used to mount the beam holding up the roof. A typical Near-Eastern *tannour* or round bread oven, measuring 0.90 m across, was found in the south-eastern corner (Fig. 8). The walls were made of clay 3 cm thick and the outside perimeter at the base was fitted with sherds of Roman pottery. It collapsed in on itself, burying a thick layer of ashes inside.

As in E.XVI, a trial pit dug into the Roman-phase floor revealed evidence of an earlier occupational layer containing Hellenistic and Early Roman material.

STREETS E.XXII AND E.XXIII

The paving of two small streets was uncovered in the course of the 2002 season of fieldwork. Street E.XXII ran a N-S course



Fig. 9. Alley E.XXIII seen from the east (Photo T. Waliszewski)

and was joined at right angles from the west by a transversal alley E.XXIII (cf. *Fig. 5*). The entire length of the latter was cleared and as much of the former as is currently accessible for excavation.

The paving, which appeared under a thin layer of earth, consisted of big limestone blocks running down the middle of the street in a regular line that resembles the covering of a channel, even though none exists. The surface on either side of these blocks is paved less regularly. The pottery material from under the paving provides a Late Antique date for this surface.

Testing under the paving, which forms a layer some 0.50-0.60 m thick, revealed an older street surface made of tamped clay mixed with small stones and two rows of regularly laid blocks one on either side of the passage. These acted as pavements of sorts, facilitating walking during heavy rains.

A long rectangular stone substructure was aligned with the east part of street E.XXII. The steps that had presumably led to the roofs of structures in this sector of the village must have started from this elevated base.

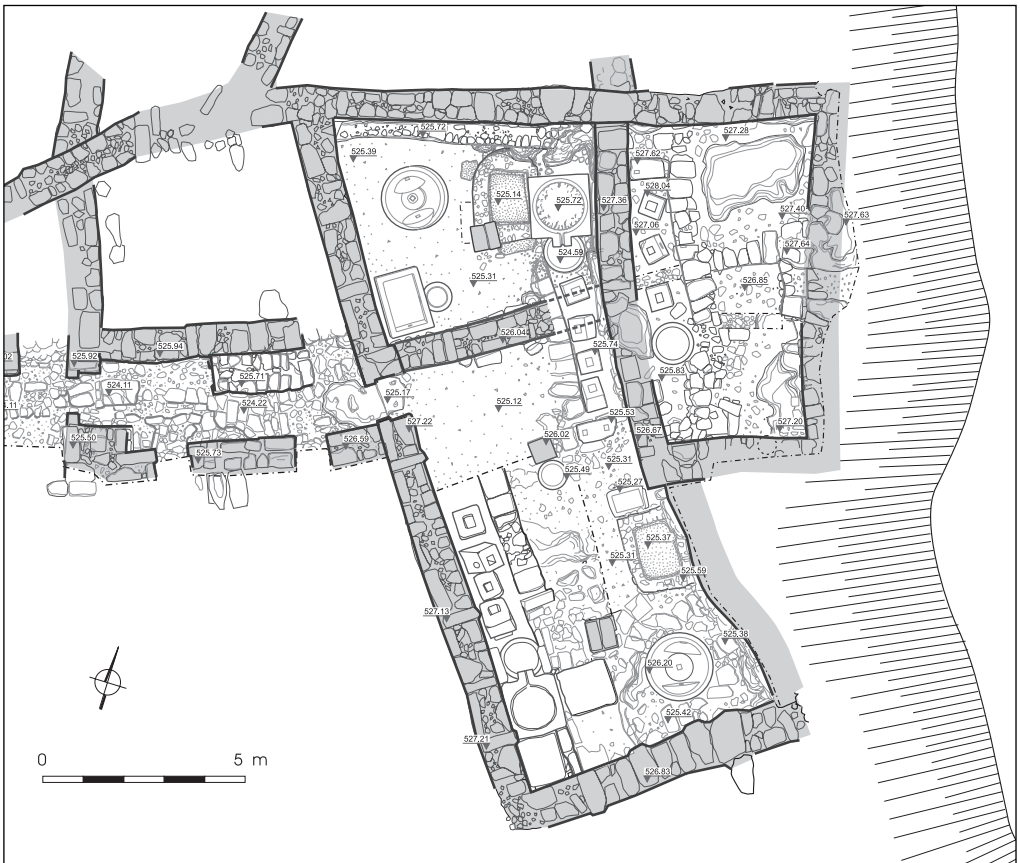


Fig. 10. Plan of oil press E.II following excavations in 2002 (Drawing M. Puzzkarski)

Lack of time excluded testing for any potentially earlier phases of use under the transversal street E.XXIII. A haphazard paving of large blocks was noted to slope

westwards, toward the corner of the Roman temple, where a gateway had been recorded previously (*Fig. 9*). This gateway gave passage outside the inhabited area of the village.

OIL PRESS E.II

Removal of a late partition wall dividing the lower part of the oil press into two areas revealed all the missing elements of the installation uncovered last year, that is, a monolithic basin, four weights and the substructure for the beam runner. The great querns with the *orbis* still in place were now cleared completely in the northwestern part of the room and a system for oil purification, consisting of two basins situated on different levels, was also uncovered.

The last stage of research in this installation was the clearing of a third press standing on a higher terrace of the building (*Fig. 10*). This part is in much worse condition than other parts of the installation, simply because it had been visible on the surface prior to the excavations. Consequently, the lack of ceramic dating evidence of any substance did not come as a surprise. Even so, the higher terrace with just one typical oil-pressing installation should be considered as the oldest element of this establishment, which was developed at a later date to include the lower level with two more presses (*Fig. 11*).

STREET E.XXV

Street E.XXV began at the main entrance of the oil press E.II (cf. *Fig. 10*). It descended gradually toward the temenos and basilica, a narrow passage of just 1.30 m running between walls preserved to over 2 m in height. The paving was of irregular cobbles that actually formed a narrow channel down the middle, draining rainfall water from neighboring

roofs. Three surviving doorways give evidence for at least three rooms opening off the alley. Just 7.50 m away from the facade of E.II, the street was blocked with a wall that had a doorway in it. It seems justified at this point to consider the oil press and the rooms lining the alley as forming one functional complex that may have belonged to a single big family.

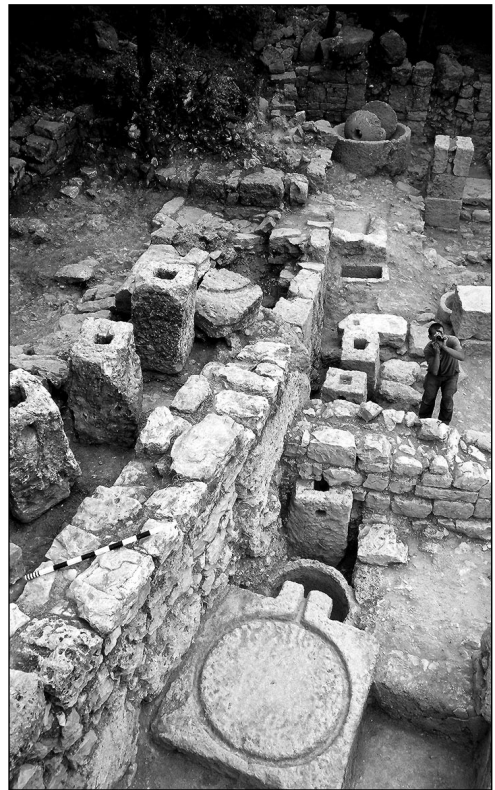


Fig. 11. Oil press E.II: the upper and lower levels of the installation seen from the north (Photo T. Waliszewski)