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Chhîm Explorations, 2003

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CHHÎM

EXPLORATIONS, 2003

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The eight season of excavations at Chhim, conducted jointly by the Direction Générale des Antiquités and the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University, took place between August 25 and October 3, 2003.¹⁾ The work began with an intensive clearing of the lush greenery overgrowing the ruins, as a result of which many fragmentary walls visible on the surface could finally be mapped. This was coupled with a study of last year's assemblage. The excavations proper were a continuation of the 2002 effort in three sectors: Temenos A (court fronting the Roman temple), village E in the northern part north of this temple, and streets E.XXV and room E.XXVI situated in the immediate vicinity of oil press E.II, on terraces above the church. Emphasis was placed on clarifying the chronology of particular buildings and on understanding the layout of the village through the discovery of further sections of the plan. Some limited testing was also undertaken. Essential conservation work was also carried out in the course of the season in the Byzantine basilica.

1) The Mission was directed by Dr. Tomasz Waliszewski, assisted by Mrs. Renata Ortali-Tarazi representing the Direction Générale des Antiquités. The team was composed of Dr. Mahmoud el Tayeb, Ms Marzena Łuszczewska, Ms Ingrid Périsse, Ms Urszula Wicenciak, Mr. Krzysztof Domżański, Ms Karolina Cichocka, Mr. Paweł Tchorek, archaeologists; Mr. Marek Puzkarski, documentalist; Mr. Krzysztof Chmielewski, Mr. Krzysztof Olszowski, restorers; Mr. Kazimierz Kotlewski, photographer; Ms Beata Capik, registrar; Messrs. Tomasz Herbich and Robert Żukowski, archaeologists-geophysicists; Ms Dianna Abbany, Ms Małgorzata Bajka, Mr. Cezary Olczyk, Mr. Tomasz Góra, Mr. Krzysztof Napiórkowski, Mr. Jakub Prager, Ms Anna Skłodowska, students of archaeology. Our heartfelt thanks to Mr. Frédéric Hussein, Director General of the Direction Générale des Antiquités, for his support and to Mrs. Renata Ortali-Tarazi and Mr. Bahija Traboulsi, both of the DGA, for their unfailing cooperation and efficient assistance at every step. The Lebanese government has contributed enormously to the progress of the work by providing the financial resources for hiring 25 extra workers.

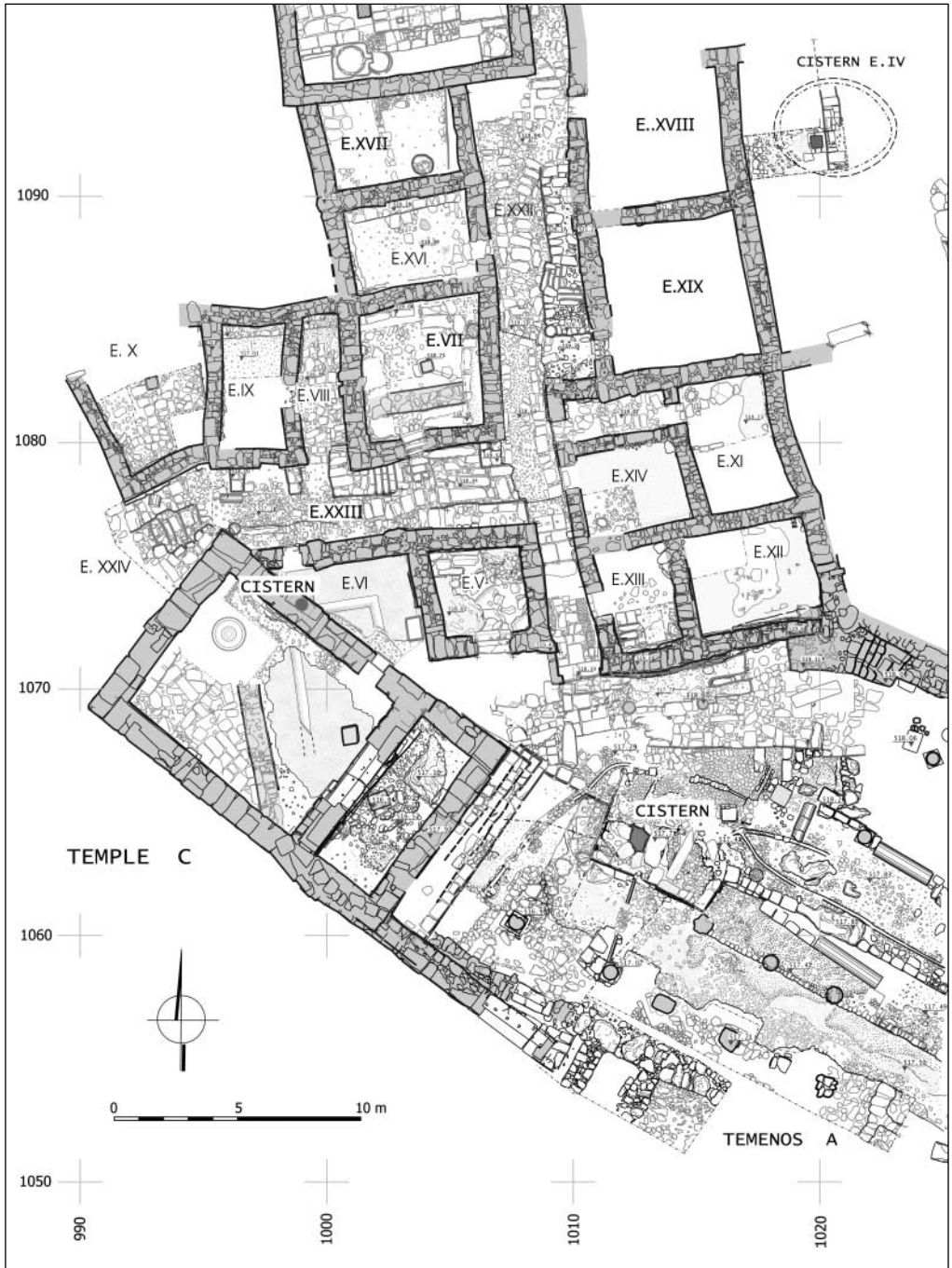


Fig. 1. Plan of the temenos and the village beyond the Roman temple, state following fieldwork in 2003 (Drawing M. Puzskarski)

TESTING IN TEMENOS A

A trial pit (7.00 x 3.50 m) opened in the area directly southwest of the last block in the south temenos wall was intended as a means of explaining the difference in levels between the 2nd-century floor in the temenos and a 1st-century room uncovered in the trench of 1999.²⁾ It also provided information on the architecture in this part of the court in front of the Roman temple. At 0.30 m below ground level, a massive structure of limestone blocks appeared along the entire length of the trench (Figs. 1,2). The uncovered part (it is still partly concealed in the baulks) is 1.30 m wide and about 0.50 m high. This wall or merely its foundation runs parallel to the

colonnade in the uncovered part of the temenos. It is probable, therefore, that the newly cleared structure was in reality the south wall of the portico closing the temenos on this side. The dating needs to be verified in the course of next year's campaign, but is very likely that it was connected with the already cleared 2nd-century wall of the temenos.

Two walls of c. 0.90 m width were attached to the south side of this structure. They constituted reinforcement of the portico wall or, equally likely, formed small rooms. In either case, they buttressed the portico on the side of the escarpment. Their connection with the neighboring



Fig. 2. Structures discovered in the court in front of the Roman temple, view from the northwest (Photo K. Kotlewski)

2) Cf. PAM XI, Reports 1999 (2000), 241.

room, discovered in 1999 and dated to the 1st century, remains to be determined.

Based on the present findings, it may be proposed that the great wall of the temenos, which started at the southwestern corner of the temple pronaos, terminated immediately beyond the monumental doors opening into the court. The temenos wall then turned to the northeast and after 2.50 m joined the portico wall described above.

The other trial pit (4.60 x 2.00 m) was traced by the southwestern corner of Tower D in order to determine the stratigraphy connected with this building. The results:

surface layer, 0.10-0.19 m thick; next a compact brown layer (c. 0.25 m thick); lowermost, a brown layer of earth, 0.35-0.55 m, in some places directly on top of bedrock. Two courses of limestone blocks from Tower D were also uncovered. Only a few centimeters are visible of the lower course, but the size of these blocks suggests that they were from an earlier structure. More work needs to be done before conclusions can be drawn. The clay layer lying directly on bedrock yielded Late Roman pottery, but this hardly explains when the tower was erected.

TRIAL PITS IN VILLAGE E

ROMAN TEMPLE CORNER

The trial pit (2.50 x 4.50 m) by the north corner of the Roman temple revealed structures from the Byzantine period under

a meter-thick layer of modern fill (cf. *Fig. 1*; *Fig. 3*). The function of these four limestone steps appears clear. The steps are c. 0.90 m wide with side walls on the



Fig. 3. View of the trial pit by the north corner of the Roman temple (Photo T. Waliszewski)

north and south. They lead outside the village, in the direction of habitation complex F. Pottery from the steps is of Byzantine date, but the actual dating of the structure needs to be verified in further excavations. It is likely that the late construction covers remains of the Roman period.

The trial pit also uncovered two courses of limestone blocks from the north wall of the Roman temple. The lowest visible course, built of enormous, well dressed blocks (the biggest is 2.75 m long), had not been touched by H. Kalayan's restoration works.

TRIAL PIT IN STREET E.XXIII

Another trial pit (0.70 x 0.50 m) traced in street E.XXIII, by the wall of room E.V, revealed the second surface of the road provisionally dated to the Roman period. A layer of compact brown earth (covered with blocks in Byzantine times) contained fine ware typical of the 1st-2nd century AD. The results correspond with the findings made in street E.XXII in 2002.³⁾

TRIAL PIT IN E.XVI

Work in this trial pit (in the northwestern corner of E.XVI) and the previous season helped to clarify the stratigraphy of this building, which is as follows (*Fig. 4*):

- 1) fill of limestone blocks,
- 2) grayish-black earth fill,
- 3) traces of Byzantine floor,
- 4) floor of Roman period,
- 5) Hellenistic level below the room foundation,
- 6) brown clay yielding significantly older pottery than in the layer above, provisionally dated to the Iron Age,
- 7) yellowish clay with no archaeological material, lying directly on bedrock.

It is very likely that the Roman settlement on the site was preceded by a Hellenistic phase and a difficult to define Iron Age phase. Finds of Iron Age date have been found in all the trial pits excavated to bedrock in the village area.

TRIAL PIT IN E.XVII

Room E.XVII (4.00 x 4.10 m), which adjoins E.XVI from the north, was excavated in 2002. This year a trial pit was dug in the northeastern corner and revealed two layers beneath the Roman-period floor. The younger one contained Roman and



Fig. 4. Section through the stratigraphy in the northwestern corner of E.XVI (Photo T. Waliszewski)

3) Cf. PAM XIV, *Reports 2002* (2003), 273-274.

Hellenistic pottery, and the older one Hellenistic wares and perhaps Iron Age material. A rounded wall made of small stones set off a limited area in the corner of the room. It was connected with both these layers. At the bottom of the pit, a uniform surface of irregular blocks was discovered under the layer containing Hellenistic and presumably Iron-Age material. The uncovered surface is too small to determine the nature of the find.

ROOMS E.XVIII-E.XIX

Rooms E.XVIII-E.XIX lining the east side of street E.XXII started being excavated this year (*Fig. 5*; cf. *Fig. 1*). The stone debris, lying 1.5 m deep, was removed from the eastern end of the rooms for a section about 9.00 m long. A very well preserved wall of dressed blocks appeared from under the debris. It borders the two rooms on the east. Further work is planned in the next season.

OIL PRESS E.II SECTOR

STREET E.XXV

Work carried out in the area between Oil Press E.II and the Roman temple temenos was concentrated on clearing the western

end of street E.XXV. Its eastern section, running to the intersection with street E.XXIX, was excavated already in 2002.⁴⁾ The remains of a rectangular structure



*Fig. 5. Rooms E.XVIII-E.XIX during exploration
(Photo T. Waliszewski)*

4) *Ibid.*, 275.

(c. 0.90 x 1.60 m) was discovered, preserving just one course of stones. It is in all likelihood evidence of architecture that is typical of Chhîm – steps leading up to the roofs of buildings.

Exposed close to the surface for many centuries, street E.XXV is largely destroyed. Concentrations of stones that could have constituted the surface were preserved in a few spots. On the north the street is closed with a continuous facade of buildings interrupted by only two doorways.

The trial pit opened next to one of the doorways revealed a simple stratigraphy. The street consisted of four layers of which the earliest was laid directly upon bedrock: 1/ clay, 2/ light gray-brown earth on the

same level as the threshold to a building mixed with small stones and bits of lime (it is perhaps the Late Roman street surface), 3/ sand, 4/ brown earth like clay resting upon bedrock. A foundation trench was clearly visible and the pottery evidence from it dated to the 1st-2nd century AD. Innumerable Hellenistic potsherds were noted in the layer immediately on top of bedrock.

ROOM E.XXVI

The eastern part of room E.XXVI was explored. It proved to be an irregular rectangle (c. 6.50 x 4.90 m), attached to the west wall of Oil Press E.II. A thick layer (1.20-1.50 m deep) of tumbled blocks filled it (*Fig. 6*). These blocks



*Fig. 6. View of room E.XXVI during exploration
(Photo T. Waliszewski)*

rested directly on a layer of gray-brown earth (0.60-0.90 m deep), covering one of light-brown color, the latter connected with the threshold of the entrance in the south wall of the room, near the entrance

to oil press E.II. The floor remains to be located in this room.

For the present, it seems that the room was later than its north wall and perhaps also later than the oil-press here.

TRIAL PITS IN BASILICA B

Conservation work in the basilica created conditions for three limited trial pits to be dug. The first trench was situated in the northern aisle, on the spot of the antelope mosaic, which was lifted for conservation. The second was opened in the second inter-columnation of the north colonnade. Finally, the third test pit was located on the spot of a Greek inscription in the southern aisle. In all three cases, the stratigraphic

sequence was the same: below the bedding of the church mosaic floors there was a lime-mortar floor, the same that was discovered in a number of places elsewhere in the basilica and in the court in front of the Roman temple. It should be dated presumably to the 2nd century AD. Thus, it is now clear that the Roman-period temenos extended at least to the northern part of the present basilica.

CONSERVATION WORK

The purpose of conservation work in the basilica was foremost to clean and repair the church mosaics, last protected in 1999. The entire floor of the basilica was cleared of the protective layer of sand in order to inspect the mosaic pavement. Cracks were observed and damage caused by plants becoming rooted in it. Gypsum protecting bands were introduced in the voids. Generally, the state of the pavement was found to be satisfactory with no need for further conservation in the

next 3-4 years. The southern aisle pavement, which was fully treated in 1998, is best preserved. The mosaic floor was again backfilled after the season, the sand being laid on a layer of synthetic plastic bags ensuring, however, proper ventilation of the mosaics.

The fragments of mosaic floor from the church presbytery, lifted in 1997, were treated by the conservators in the course of the season.

GEOPHYSICAL PROSPECTION AT JIYEH

In preparation for excavations at the archaeological site of Jiyeh,⁵⁾ magnetic prospection was carried out by T. Herbich and R. Żukowski from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The survey covered the ancient necropolis, the residential district dating from Late Antiquity and the Byzantine basilica. The results will be published following archaeological verification in the coming season.

5) Cf. PAM IX, *Reports 1997* (1998), 148-152.