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HAWARTE

EXCAVATION AND RESTORATION WORK IN 2003

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The joint Syro-Polish mission working in Hawarte on behalf of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums continued an excavation and restoration program initiated in 1998. This season's work lasted from 20 September to 16 October 2003.¹⁾ As before, the DGAM provided the mission with lodging in its dighouse at Apamea, as well as supplied building materials necessary for a provisional shelter erected over the cave.

Four seasons of work have resulted in the clearing of most of the cave.²⁾ The mithraeum, as we now know, consisted of a main sanctuary-hall furnished with benches and cult niche (room A), adjoined on the west by a large antechamber (room B) and entrance vestibule (room C) opening onto it from the south (Fig. 1). As evidenced by the pottery finds the latter was also used for preparing sacred meals. In all previously explored rooms, walls were as a rule decorated with mural paintings representing various themes and motifs from Mithraic mythology.³⁾ It is these well-preserved paintings that make the mithraeum in Hawarte unique, not only in Syria but in the Roman world in general.

In keeping with the long-term program aimed at preserving paintings in situ and opening the site to the public, a team of restorers concurrently carried on extensive conservation work.

1) Mission Director Prof. Michał Gawlikowski, who was unable to attend for the entire season, entrusted the author of this report with responsibility for the fieldwork. The team included: Mr. Wojciech Terlikowski, architect, and Mr. Marek Puzkarski, documentalist. Mrs. Ewa Parandowska assisted by Ms Izabela Uchman-Laskowska and Mr. Cristobal Calaforra-Rzepka carried out the conservation work. The Syrian side was efficiently represented by Mr. Nadim al-Khoury, Director of Afamia Museum, who shared with us the arduous duties of daily work and who spared no time and effort to assist us in every way. Messrs. Nazzar Aliqi, archaeologist, Mohammed Malbawy and Ahmed Albush, architects, also joined the expedition for a few days, assisting in preparing the design of a permanent shelter over the mithraeum.

2) The mithraeum was discovered accidentally in 1997 under a church of the Archbishop Photios excavated in the 1970s by a French expedition, cf. M.T. and P. Canivet, Huarte. Sanctuaire chrétien d'Apamene (IVe-Ve s.) (Paris 1987).

3) Cf. reports by M. Gawlikowski, *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), esp. 201-204; *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), esp. 268-271; *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 309-314; id., "Un nouveau mithraeum récemment découvert à Huarte près d'Apamée", *CRAI* 2000 (2001), 119-127.

HAWARTE
SYRIA

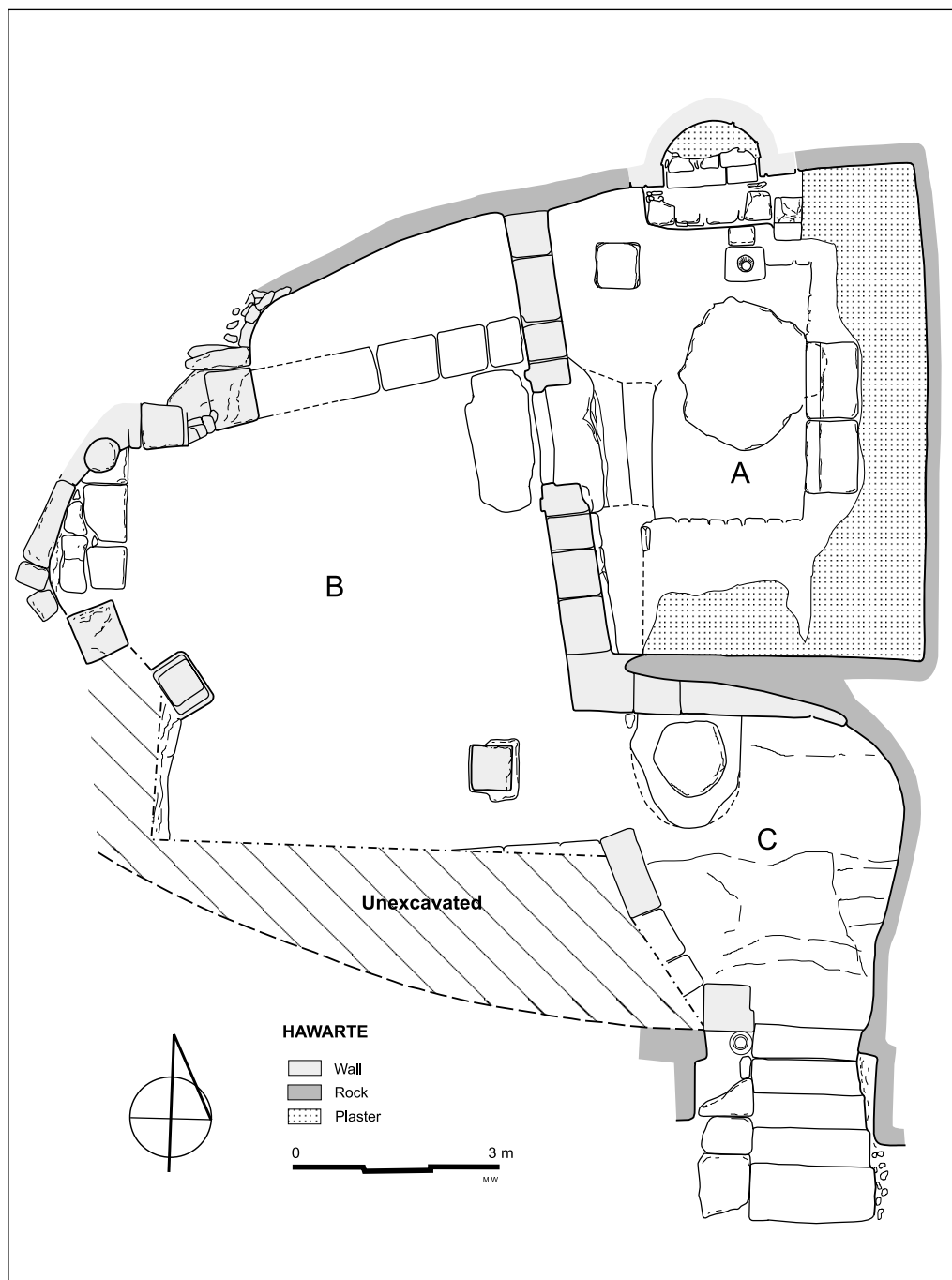


Fig. 1. Plan of the mithraeum
(Drawing G. Majcherek, W. Terlikowski, M. Wagner)

EXCAVATIONS

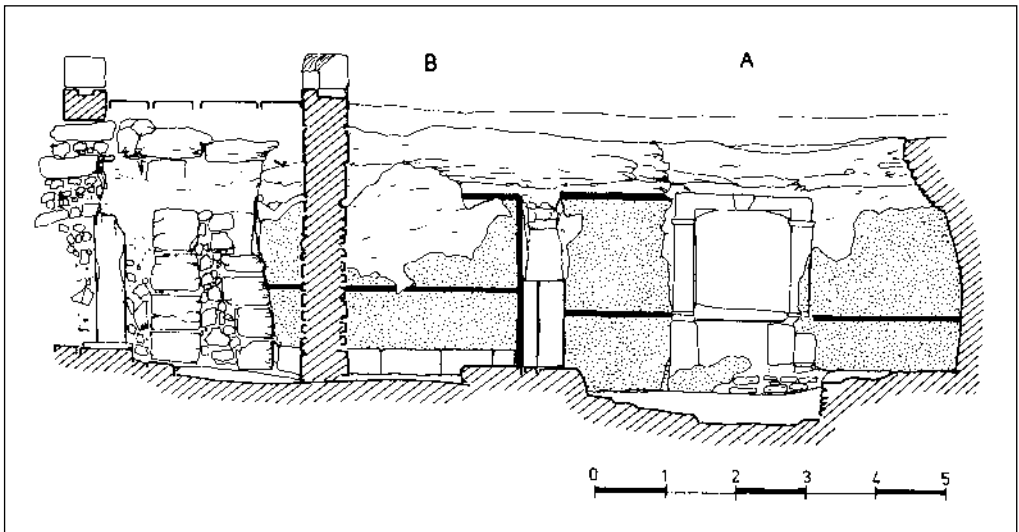
With the goal of completing archaeological research and preparing the site for display, the team conducted detailed site data collection and completed the excavations of the cave by exploring its western limits. Concurrently, architectural and substantive designs for the final display of the mithraeum were prepared.

CHAMBER B

It was apparent from the outset that chamber B, excavated already in 2001, originally reached beyond the church facade.⁴⁾ A sounding dug in this area revealed the edge of painted plastering. Huge foundations supporting the heavy load of facade wall were built across the chamber covering at the same time some of the painting decorating the north side of the cave (*Fig. 2*).

It was decided therefore to extend the excavation to the west, into the area of the portico running along the western facade of the church. Fragmentarily preserved portico paving, as well as an adjoining small stretch of the stylobate were removed after being recorded in photo and drawing. All the preserved blocks and flagstones were duly marked and stacked nearby for future reconstruction.

After clearing a thick leveling layer, composed mostly of detritus and loose building debris, and associated with church construction, the original fill of the mithraeum was uncovered. The church foundations were recognized as being built in a deep trench cutting into the fill. The existence of this foundation trench is instrumental for understanding the final phase of cave occupation. It argues that the



*Fig. 2. Cross-section through chambers A and B
(Drawing G. Majcherek)*

4) M. Gawlikowski, *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 271-278.

mithraeum had been abandoned and partly destroyed well before the decision to build the church. While there is no doubt that the cave must have been desecrated by zealot Christians as evidenced by several crosses carved on the paintings, it is also obvious that the construction of the church of Photios on top of the pagan temple was not the immediate reason for its destruction.

As before, the fill in this area consisted of stone rubble, occasional large blocks of masonry and several assorted fragments of architectural decoration. Some ceramic

fragments found in the fill apparently post-date the Mithraeum function and belong to the 5th century horizon. Contrary to other areas of the cave, very few fragments of painted plastering were retrieved from the fill, dashing hopes for further murals. And indeed, a fragment of painting was found preserved only on a small section of the north wall. The painting is divided by a broad red stripe into two registers (*Fig. 3*). In the upper one, a lion's back with a long and twisted tail is visible. To the left, there is a fragmentary representation of a person (preserved from the waist down)



*Fig. 3. Fragment of mural painting uncovered in chamber B
(Photo C. Calaforra-Rzepka)*

dressed in a short tunic. Garlands and other floral designs identical to those already known from other walls decorate the lower register.

A piece of mural discovered this season apparently belongs to a large painting found in 2001 on the other side of the church wall, depicting two facing lions tearing apart black men.⁵⁾ This perhaps, is one of the most impressive representations discovered in the cave, but its exact symbolic meaning remains unclear.

This part of the mithraeum is structurally different from the rest of the

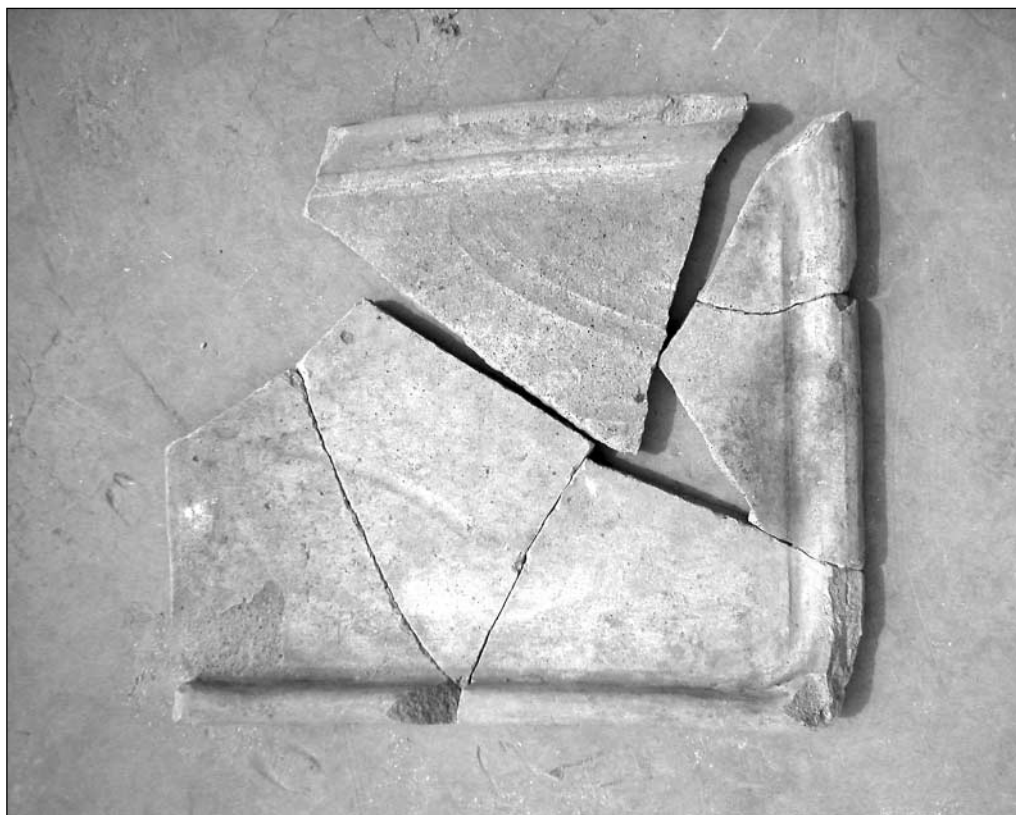
cave. Instead of being cut into bedrock, the north wall was built in pillar technique, with large pillars constructed of huge dressed blocks and smaller haphazardly set stones filling the intervals. Sometimes an ashy mortar was applied, but very often the joints were left unpointed (*Fig. 4*). There is a strong possibility that walls of this kind separate the mithraeum from another, as yet unexplored part of the cave.

The southern end of the chamber exhibits a different arrangement. A large freestanding pillar was cleared down to the foundation. It now rises some 1.90 m

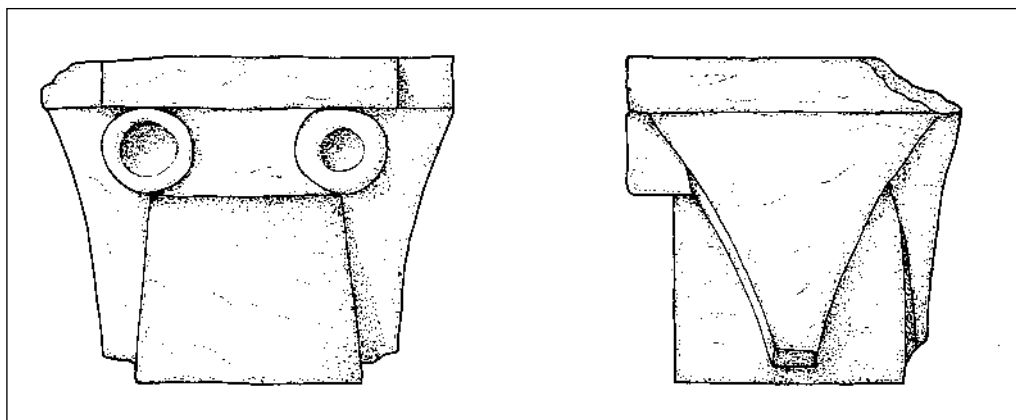


*Fig. 4. Western end of chamber B as excavated in 2003
(Photo C. Calaforra-Rzepka)*

5) Id., *PAM XII*, loc. cit., esp. Fig. 3.



*Fig. 5. Roof tile from chamber B
(Photo C. Calaforra-Rzepka)*



*Fig. 6. Pseudo-Ionic capital found in chamber B
(Drawing M. Puzskarski, M. Wagner)*

above floor level, but its original height could be estimated at 2.50 m. A similar pillar had been cleared previously west of the facade wall. The evidence considered as a whole leads to the inevitable conclusion that this part of the mithraeum took on the form of a large hall. It seems that at some unspecified moment the original rock ceiling had collapsed and was consequently rebuilt as a tiled roof supported on pillars. This assumption is further corroborated by a large quantity of broken roof-tiles found in the overfloor layer (Fig. 5).

The western end of the chamber is more peculiar. It might have been originally shaped as an apse flanked by a pillar and a much decayed limestone column, set c. 1.90 m apart. A complete Pseudo-Ionic capital with unusually shaped full-rising volutes, most probably toppled from the column, was found nearby (Fig. 6). Later on, this part of the cave was presumably transformed into an additional entrance, as evidenced by a hastily made three steps leading down to the floor level. Two altars were found reused in their construction. Other proof of rebuilding and alteration include two spheroid basalt stones found by the northern wall and used in the construction of a small banquette (Fig. 7). In all probability, when put one on top of the other, these stones could be interpreted as yet another symbol in Mithraic mythology, representing the *omphalos* – the sacred stone from which Mithra was born.

CHAMBER A

A large oval rock-cut pit (c. 2.15 m in diameter) located almost in the middle of chamber A was explored. It was used as a decanting bin for some libation rites as proved by a small channel leading from a nearby altar and emptying into it.

The pit apparently predated the existing arrangement of the sanctuary, since it was found partially sealed by a bench built along the eastern wall of the cave. It proved to be filled with alternating layers of ashes and loosely packed soil down to the bottom at c. 1.50 m below floor level. Much to our surprise the exploration produced a substantial deposit of ceramic wares of Early Roman date.

Careful processing of the finds resulted in a significant number of vessels restored. While common wares were rather scarce, tableware appeared in great quantity. Apart from imported thin-walled drinking cups, a dozen or so examples of Eastern Sigillata A plates was also recorded,



Fig. 7. Basalt *omphalos* found in the cave (Photo C. Calaforra-Rzepka)

representing mostly Atalante forms 34-35 (Fig. 8).⁶⁾ Particularly interesting were examples of oil lamps (Fig. 9) and last but not least, a large *skyphos* (or crater) with applied decoration featuring scrolling vine (Fig. 10). In chronological terms, the assemblage is quite homogenous, being dated to the second half of the 1st century AD.

The content of the pit (pottery and glass vessels, numerous animal bone frag-

ments and ashes) provides convincing evidence that it had been used originally as a *bothros* for offerings.

This unexpected find raised questions about the earliest phase in the occupation of the cave. It is very tempting to see the beginning of the Mithraic cult at Hawarte in the late 1st century AD. The earliest extant historical and archaeological records point to the end of the 1st century AD – beginning of 2nd century AD as the generally agreed upon date for the beginning of the diffusion of Mithraic worship in the Roman world. On the other hand, the view has prevailed that Mithraism in the East was a later back-formation of the cult in the West. Recent discoveries of mithraea at Caesarea and Doliche, both dated to the turn of the 1st century AD, have challenged this widespread notion⁷⁾ and our findings at Hawarte appear to corroborate this revision.

CHAMBER C

On the western side of the entrance chamber, in what appears to have been originally a small side room, later used as a dumping place, a large deposit of kitchen refuse and discarded pottery was partially cleared already in 2001.⁸⁾ Exploration of this deposit was continued this year, bringing to light more broken cooking pots, jugs and drinking vessels. The collection of recovered and partially recomposed vessels turned out to be particularly significant for chronological considerations, as it represents a rather unique assemblage of forms dated mostly to the late 4th century AD, i.e., the final phase in cave occupation.

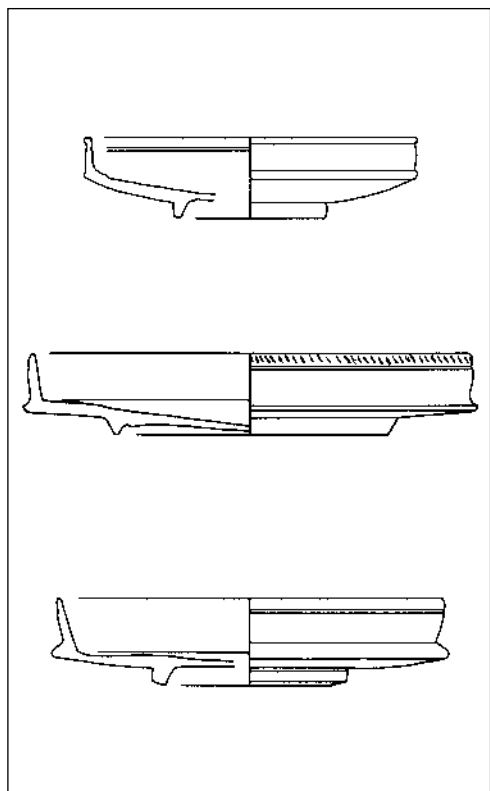


Fig. 8. Early Roman tableware from the *bothros* in Chamber A (not to scale) (Drawing G. Majcherek, M. Wagner)

6) Cf. J.W. Hayes, "Sigillate Orientali", in: Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica, Atalante delle forme ceramiche (Roma 1985), 9-47.

7) For a recent discussion, cf. R. Beck, "The mysteries of Mithra: a new account of their genesis", *JRS* LXXXVIII (1998), 115-128.

8) Gawlikowski, *PAM* XIII, op. cit., 276-278.



Fig. 9. Early Roman lamps from the bothros in Chamber A
(Photo C. Calaforra-Rzepka)



Fig. 10. Skyphos with applied decoration from the bothros in chamber A
(Photo C. Calaforra-Rzepka)

CONSERVATION

The wall paintings were found to be in generally good condition, although the prolonged sealing of the mithraeum has resulted in some salt precipitation on the mural surface. This was caused mainly by a slow but constant damp rising from the bedrock. All painted surfaces were once again cleaned, first mechanically with brushes and scalpels and then by rinsing with a 30% solution of ethanol. Some minor damages to the lime-sand mortar band protecting the edges were repaired. Voids and blisters were injected with fine sand, calcium carbonate and water solution of PRIMAL AC-33 (ratio 1:1:1.5). Previously untreated gaps and lacunae were now filled with lime-sand putty. A similar, standard conservation procedure was also followed for the newly uncovered painting in chamber B.

Upon concluding the campaign, protective timber-supported roofing made of corrugated sheet iron was constructed over the newly excavated area.

It turned out that hundreds of smaller detached fragments previously recovered from the fill and stored in the basement of the Hama Museum were in critical condition requiring immediate intervention.⁹⁾ It appeared that some of the wooden trays had deteriorated due to fungal decay as a result of the increased damp noted in the museum stores. New trays were made to replace the damaged ones and the affected plaster fragments were disinfected with PREVENTOL (20% solution in ethanol). As a preventive measure, the trays were additionally treated with fungicide.

9) For the initial treatment, cf. E. Parandowska, "Hawarte. Conservation of a mural", *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 295-299.