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Chhîm Explorations 2005

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CHHÎM

EXPLORATIONS 2005

Tomasz Waliszewski, Ingrid Périssé

The tenth season of excavations at Chhîm, carried out jointly by the Direction Générale des Antiquités and the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University, started on August 15 and ran through September 25, 2005.¹

Archaeological work concentrated on the continuation of earlier projects in two separate sectors: Temenos A, meaning the courtyard in front of the Roman temple, and village E in the section located to the north and northeast of this temple. The main objective was to complete the work in the temenos area, gaining new data on the layout and chronology of successive sanctuaries and their immediate neighborhood. As for the village, the present work added to our knowledge of the plan and development of the settlement. Studies of the collected material proceeded concurrently with the excavations.

1 The expedition was a joint Polish-Lebanese project financed by the Warsaw University Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Direction Générale des Antiquités. Team members included: Dr. Tomasz Waliszewski in charge of the expedition and assisted by Mrs. Bahija Traboulsi and Mr. As'ad Seif representing the Direction Générale des Antiquités; Ms Ingrid Périssé, archaeologist in charge of the excavation at Chhîm, Dr. Mahmoud El-Tayeb, archaeologist in charge of the regional survey; Mr. Jakub Prager, archeologist; Mr. Marek Puzkarski, documentalist; Dr. Krzysztof Domzalski, Ms Urszula Wicenciak, ceramologists; accompanied by students of archaeology from Université Paris I - Sorbonne, American University of Beirut and Warsaw University Institute of Archaeology: Ms Sophie Martin, Mr. Alexandre Hourany, Mr. Tomasz Góra, Ms Maria Kozarzewska, Ms Agata Strzelecka, Ms Joanna Sulewska, Ms Anna Zakrzewska. The expedition has enjoyed, as always, the competent support of the Lebanese Antiquities Service, for which we would like to thank the invariably efficient and helpful Director General of Antiquities, Mr. Frédéric Husseini.

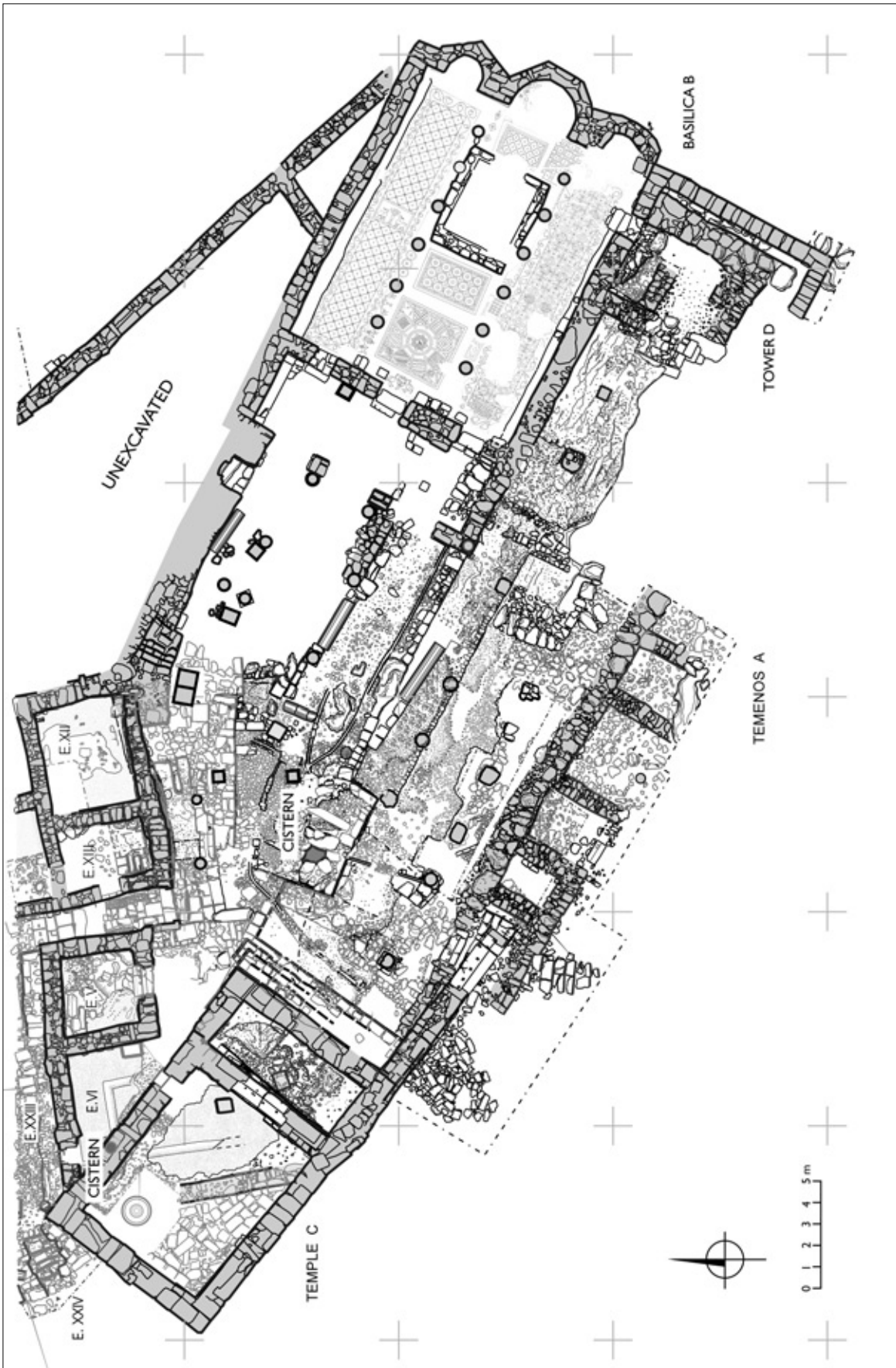


Fig. 1. Plan of the Roman sanctuary in Chbim
(Drawing M. Puszczarski)

ROMAN SANCTUARY (TEMENOS A AND TEMPLE C)

The present investigations within the sanctuary were limited to a series of verificatory test trenches coupled with the exploration of a cistern by the wall of Temple C.

"TOWER" D

From the start of excavations at Chhim, the structure referred to as Tower D has posed a mystery as far as function, inner divisions

and chronology are concerned. Trenches dug in 2004 along the south wall and the southeastern corner of this structure, against which Basilica B was constructed in a later age, dated its walls to the 3rd century AD.² The alterations introduced inside the building by the builders of the basilica have all but obliterated the inner divisions from the Roman age. The only evidence were the rock-cut foundation trenches discovered in



*Fig. 2. "Tower" D. Early structures exposed in 2005
(Photo I. Périssé)*

2 PAM XVI, *Reports 2004* (2005), 414.

the previous season, oriented North-South and parallel to the east wall proper, just 0.50 m away from it.

This season the existing E-W wall on the south side of the "tower" was dismantled revealing an earlier wall of the same orientation [Fig. 2]. This wall was built of large stone blocks and it adjoined at right angles the ghost walls signaled by the rock-cut foundation trenches.

A test trench dug in the center of the "tower" brought up ceramic material accumulated in a layer of compact clayey earth, indicating occupation of the spot earlier than in Hellenistic and Roman times. At least one layer with traceable connection with the rock-cut foundation trenches can be dated provisionally to the Bronze Age. While the pottery is still under study, it can be said with a fair amount of certainty that the Roman "tower" had walled in an earlier structure that may have already held significance as an ancient place of worship.

TEMENOS A

Verification and clearing work were planned in several areas of the Roman sanctuary in order to clarify the plan of the complex as a whole. In the southern part (sector XI), yet another small unit was added to the excavated three adjoining the north wall of the temenos [Fig. 1]. This wall now appears to run further to the east, disappearing under the modern road. The room itself has the wall foundations cut into bedrock, backing up slightly to join the east wall, thus suggesting that it was last in the row of cells situated on the slope of the sanctuary terrace.

The fill in this room, as in other units in this series, consisted of a 20-cm thick layer of earth and rubble, superimposed on a layer of blocks from the collapsed walls, especially the north wall which fell away

slightly to the south. Immediately underneath the blocks was the occupational layer lying on a pavement of irregular flagstones. The blocks which bonded with the north wall in the northwestern corner could have been part of a staircase. There is every reason to think that these rooms were all abandoned before their ultimate destruction.

Sector X in the northern end of the sanctuary covered an area just by the walls of houses E.XII and E.XIII, where an existing basin adjoining the wall was taken advantage of to check the stratigraphy down to bedrock. This was encountered 0.40 m below the floor of the basin. A layer of brown compact soil immediately under the bedding layer of the basin contained pottery



Fig. 3. Roman structures uncovered during the dismantling of a Late Antique platform in the northern part of the temenos (Photo I. Périssé)

material of earlier than Hellenistic date, although fairly difficult to identify for lack of parallels.

To the south of this basin, a "platform" from Late Antiquity was partly dismantled, removing reused architectural blocks (column drums, bases) [Fig. 3] and uncovering pottery, glass and coins from the Byzantine age. Immediately under this construction was a floor of white lime mortar with a base, 0.60 x 0.57 m in size and 0.50 m high, still in place and obviously contemporary with the floor. A column base found 0.50 m away could have rested on this block, later being turned around to fit the needs of the new "platform". Yet another base of similar size and standing in line with the former

two was recorded c. 2.30 m to the south of the cistern in the temenos. They could be viewed as the remains of an earlier portico, although the Late Antique alterations in this sector preclude any conclusions going further than that this part of the temenos was used already in Roman times.

The other area in sector X inside the sanctuary where some verificatory archaeological work was completed this season was ensconced between the north wall of the temple pronaos and the south wall of room E.V. Blocks used in Late Antiquity to raise the floor level here were now dismantled, revealing pieces of crushers from an oil press. Three stone steps were also uncovered, lying in a line with the steps



Fig. 4. Corner of the temple steps on the left and steps leading to the village exit gate (Photo I. Périssé)

leading out of the village and interconnected with the steps of the Roman temple [Fig. 4].

TEMPLE C

Inside the Roman temple, explorations were completed in the northern part of the pronaos (C.V).³ A test pit was dug by the north wall in an effort to phase the portico walls, which are undoubtedly later than the cella itself. Even before the digging started on the level of a 1st-century AD floor reached during the excavations in 2002, it

was possible to observe traces of a dismantled wall running alongside the north wall of the pronaos. This earlier wall delimited a rectangular room of the 1st century AD, known to have existed under the cella of the Roman temple and excavated in the first seasons of work on the site [Fig. 5].⁴

The results verified the known stratigraphy of the area established in the 2002 season.

The task of clearing the cistern by the north wall of the temple (C.VI) was



Fig. 5. Test pit in the pronaos of the Roman temple. Lime floor of the 1st century AD in the middle, north temple façade wall seen at top (Photo I. Périssé)

³ For earlier work, cf. *PAM XIV, Reports 2002 (2003)*, 268-269 and Fig. 4.

⁴ Cf. *PAM X, Reports 1998 (1999)*, 183 and Fig. 6; *PAM XII, Reports 2000 (2001)*, 298-303 and Figs 1-2.

continued from the previous season. The cistern appears to have been constructed in the earliest architectural phase dated to the 1st century AD. It functioned in connection with a basin uncovered in the rectangular room excavated under the temple. At the widest point, the cistern measured 2.85 m in diameter. To ensure safety in the course of the exploration (which started at a level 2.75 m below the cistern mouth), the digging proceeded in steps. This also ensured a good section profile. At a depth of c. 6 m digging was interrupted due to difficulties with air supply. The bottom, however, was not reached and indeed the cistern appears to be deeper than any other facility of the kind identified so far on the site. The inside walls are coated with thick waterproof plaster, confirming its function

as a water container. No traces of any channels leading either to or from it have been recorded and it cannot be excluded that it was filled simply through the mouth.

The fill contained abundant ceramic material, including North African imports, oil lamps, glass vessels, metal objects, animal bones and plain white and painted wall plaster. Internal layering of the fill is evident, but the material is more or less homogeneous in all of the explored depth. The cistern appears to have been used as a convenient dump for refuse in the period from the 4th through the 7th century AD. The work will be continued in an effort to establish the original function of the cistern, as well as to understand when and how the Roman temple was abandoned as a cult place.

VILLAGE E: OIL PRESS E.III

Last year's work in Oil Press E.III located north of the sanctuary and the central part of the village was now continued. The crushing basin that was discovered then proved to be a rare type of device, called a *trapetum*, characteristic only of the southern parts of Late Antique Phoenicia Maritima [Fig. 6]. Further excavations identified rooms on the north, west and south. To reiterate last season's findings, the oil-pressing installations consisted of stone press beds for the frails with olive pulp [Fig. 7], a stone basin for catching the flow of oil and huge stone beam weights. A monolithic stone cylinder by the south wall must have anchored the wooden screw that operated the pressing beam [Fig. 8].⁵

This year two test pits were dug in order to reach the floor level inside the building of

the oil press. A floor of small stones embedded in lime mortar was identified in the first trench located by the northwestern crushing basin. It was also reached in the second trench, which revealed moreover the square stone base of a central post 0.60 m in diameter, once supporting the roof structure.

A semicircular stone (*orbis*), one of a pair that once ground the olives to pulp inside the crushing basins, was identified north of the cylindrical monolithic support.

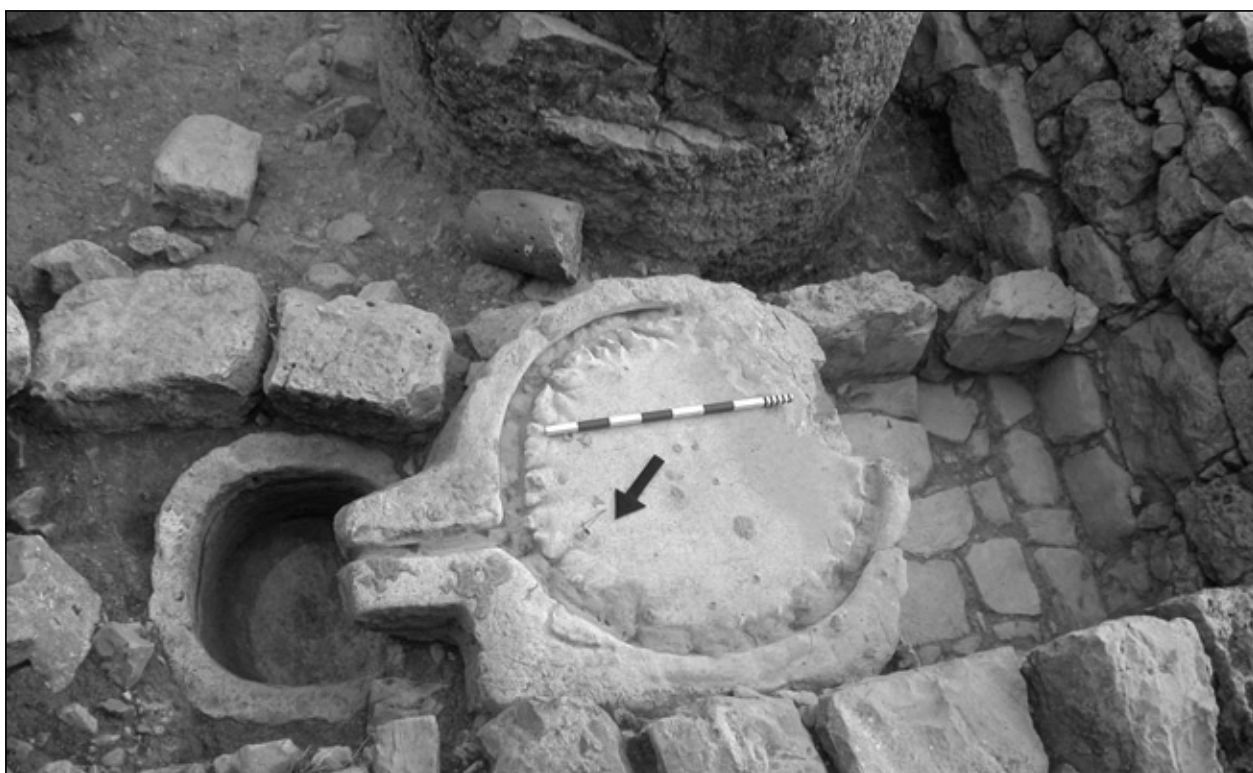
The space between the cylinder and the *trapetum* was paved with blocks of stone, which could be even 0.50 m high, forming a platform for the workers operating the oil press.

Further explorations in an eastward direction uncovered another 2 m of the length of the building and brought to light

5 PAM XVI, Reports 2004 (2005), 417-418.



*Fig. 6. Oil press E.III. Trapetum seen on the left
(Photo T. Góra)*



*Fig. 7. Oil press E.III. Press bed and basin for the oil belonging to the northern press installation
(Photo T. Góra)*

one more beam weight located in the northwestern part.

This particular press appears to have had two separate installations in opposite corners of the facility. The end of the beam belonging to the southern pressing installation must have been placed in the east wall, and by analogy, the end of the beam of the other installation by the northern wall would have been set in the west wall, a theory that the bond of the preserved section of this wall confirms.

As suggested already in last year's report, the findings clearly demonstrate the processes of technological change occurring in this area in the Byzantine period, when the new model with mounted wooden screw

gradually replaced an older and more traditional variant of oil press with horizontal beam and beam weights.

NORTH AND WEST STREETS

The cistern known to lie north of the complex of Oil Press E.III was explored sufficiently to identify it as being of typical piriform shape. Its walls were coated with waterproof mortar and the vault constructed of stones up to 0.30 m in size, bonded in lime mortar.

A street appears to have separated the cistern from the oil press. It was constructed already after the cistern was in place (its northern edge is supported in part on the cistern), leaving no doubt as to



Fig. 8. Oil press E.III. On the left, cylindrical weight anchoring the wooden screw belonging to the southern press installation (Photo T. Góra)

the contemporaneous use of the cistern and oil press. The rubble overlying the street surface yielded a stone cylinder (0.47 x 0.30 m) like many others found so far at Chhim. These rollers were used to repair the flat roofs of houses and workshops in the settlement. The fill on the street also

yielded a Late Roman *fibula* and a small balance made of bronze.

Directly connected with the north street was a street running west of the building of the oil press. Part of the walking surface was leveled with big stones to facilitate pedestrian traffic.