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POLISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION TO PALMYRA

SEASONS 2008 AND 2009

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Abstract: The 2008 and 2009 seasons saw a continuation of excavations in the northern Basilica (No. IV), the largest church building in Palmyra. Both the eastern part of the nave and the southern aisle, as well as a large fragment of the apse, were cleared. The most unusual feature uncovered in the church is the so-called Syrian *bema*, located in the middle of the nave. This is the first time that this liturgical installation has been evidenced in central Syria. Excavations revealed also traces of Early Islamic (9th–10th century AD) occupation of the site, when the abandoned church building was re-oriented and transformed into an official/residential structure. This new arrangement reflected the changing urban landscape of Early Islamic Palmyra.

Keywords: Palmyra, Late Antiquity, Christianity, basilica, Early Islamic settlement

Following several campaigns aimed at completing excavations around the temple of Allat located inside Diocletian's Camp, the expedition returned to a research program focused on investigations of Late Roman/Byzantine Palmyra, carried out in an area to the north of the Great Colonnade. Fieldwork during the seasons in 2008 and 2009 concentrated on the excavation of a large basilical church (Basilica IV) located some 70–80 m north of the episcopal complex excavated in 2001–2002 (Gawlikowski 2001; 2003) and, separated from it by what appears to be a large rectangular *birkeh*.

The building with its six upright columns attracted attention of early travelers ever since the 18th century and was featured on several widely reproduced drawings and engravings. The general outline of the church was sketched by early

20th century surveyors and archaeologists (Gabriel 1926: Pl. XVI). Traces of several test trenches and adjacent dumps resulting from those early surveys (Wiegand 1932: 32–33, Pl. 18) are still clearly recognized in some areas (e.g. next to the apse and in the southwestern corner of the building). An initial probe dug across the mid part of the church in 2007 revealed a stone pavement in the side aisles and a large robbers' pit in the nave with virtually no trace of the pavement (Gawlikowski 2010: 522 and Fig. 7). In 2008, the trench was substantially expanded to the west. It turned out that almost all the flagstones within the pit limit had been removed by robbers. The adjacent structure of what appears to be a *bema* was likewise dismantled. However, placing the pit in time is difficult. Exploration of the featureless fill produced rare shards, mostly of Umayyad/Abbasid

age, but the stratigraphic position of the pit nonetheless, cutting through original deposition layers, points to a rather later date.

The 2008 campaign addressed a general chronological and architectural survey of the edifice and excavation of the northeastern part. All surface features were mapped and documented, whereupon large blocks scattered all over the site, as well as those found in the fill were

removed to a storage area located some 20 m south of the basilica. They will serve the purposes of partial anastylosis of the edifice, if deemed desirable. In 2009, the fieldwork was wholly geared to excavating the southeastern part of the building, including the apse, while evaluating the three basic occupation phases identified during the previous campaign. The full stratigraphic sequence of the excavated features is, however, still under analysis.

PHASE I. PRE-CHURCH OCCUPATION

It comes as no surprise that the area was apparently built over in the 2nd–3rd centuries AD as it follows well the basic picture of Palmyra's urban development. The nature of this occupation is

unclear, however, and regular domestic architecture would be the obvious choice. It merits note that a fallen gate with a lintel bearing a bilingual (Greek/Palmyrenian) inscription honoring Septimius Severus

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In 2008, students from the Warsaw University of Technology supervised by Wojciech Terlikowski surveyed and mapped the area of the planned excavations as part of their field training.

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and the imperial family was found in front of the basilica (*CIS* II 3970; Milik 1972: 255). One cannot but consider the possibility that the gate originally gave entrance to an as yet unidentified monumental building located in this area and was only later incorporated into the church complex together with any other extant architectural relics.

A small fragment of a structure predating the church was cleared within the robbers' pit occupying the middle of the nave. The structure itself was rather peculiar, featuring a casing wall (oriented east–west, the top preserved some 0.60 m below the church flagging) built of irregular hard limestone blocks in a manner typical of the architecture of the period. The northern side of the wall appeared to

be packed with assorted stones and some architectural debris set in lime mortar. A narrow stretch of lime floor (partly cut by the robbers' pit) adjoined the wall on the south. The whole structure looks as if it had been planned as a foundation platform for some as yet unidentified structure. However, the nature of the structure to which it had once belonged, escapes us and certainly requires further research.

Moreover, careful examination revealed that the north wall of the basilica was not structurally bonded with the rest of the church structure (apse and sanctuary wall) and as such, is most probably also of earlier date. By the same token one has to admit the possibility that it belonged to the pre-dating urban layout and was only later incorporated into the church complex.

PHASE II. CHURCH BUILDING

At an unknown point in time (most probably in the 6th century, although there is no direct evidence to support this assumption as yet) a large church was built on top of the ruined or dismantled building.

The church is a typical monoapsidal basilica with two rows of three columns dividing the interior into a nave and two aisles [*Fig. 1*]. Monolithic columns on either side of the nave are spaced at regular distances of some 8.50 m (measured between the column axes). Massive piers protruded from the walls at both ends, thus making for four arcades. Basilica IV is definitely the largest church building in Palmyra [*Fig. 2*]. Its overall size is impressive. The external measurements of the main body are 47.50 m by 27.50 m,

making it by far the largest in Palmyra and one of the largest in Syria. The span of the nave reaches 12.60 m. Lateral aisles are proportionally smaller, but still, they exceed 6 m. Being the largest church building in the city, it was also the tallest. The overall height of the basilica can be calculated at 22 m: 7 m (columns height) + 4 m (height of the arches) + 7 m (distance between the top of the arches and horizontal trusses, including clerestory windows) + 4 m pitch of the roof. The timbered roof was apparently tiled. Some large flat roof tiles and rounded imbrices were recovered from the fill [*Fig. 3*].

Contrary to previously discovered churches (Basilicas II and III, see Gawlikowski 1998: Fig. 3; 2003: Fig. 1) the building has more elongated

proportions. It was not incorporated into a regular street grid. Its façade was built aligning the “Church Street”. Eight heavily eroded columns of the exonarthex (some 5.70 m deep), complete with capitals and architraves, can be seen toppled and partly covered with sand. But the apse and pastophoria extended well to the east, encroaching freely onto the next parallel street. The church was entered from the west through a large gate, 2.60 m wide, and two smaller lateral doors opening onto aisles. At least two more additional entrances were traced also in the north wall.

The large apse, which is polygonal on the outside (12.30 m inside diameter),

is flanked by two lateral chambers. The southern one, accessible from the aisle, took on the shape of an elongated rectangle with apsidal ending. A door with a threshold leading to it was found at the head of the southern aisle. Curiously enough, neither this door nor the door leading to the northern chamber seems to have been equipped with doorjambes.

Identification of this chamber as a *martyrium* is warranted not only by its location within the complex, i.e., south of the apse, in a manner rather typical of Northern Syria (Lassus 1947), but further supported by an alabaster reliquary recovered there in rather obscure circumstances sometime in the 1930s and



Fig. 1. Basilica IV. General view, looking east
(Photo K. Juchniewicz)

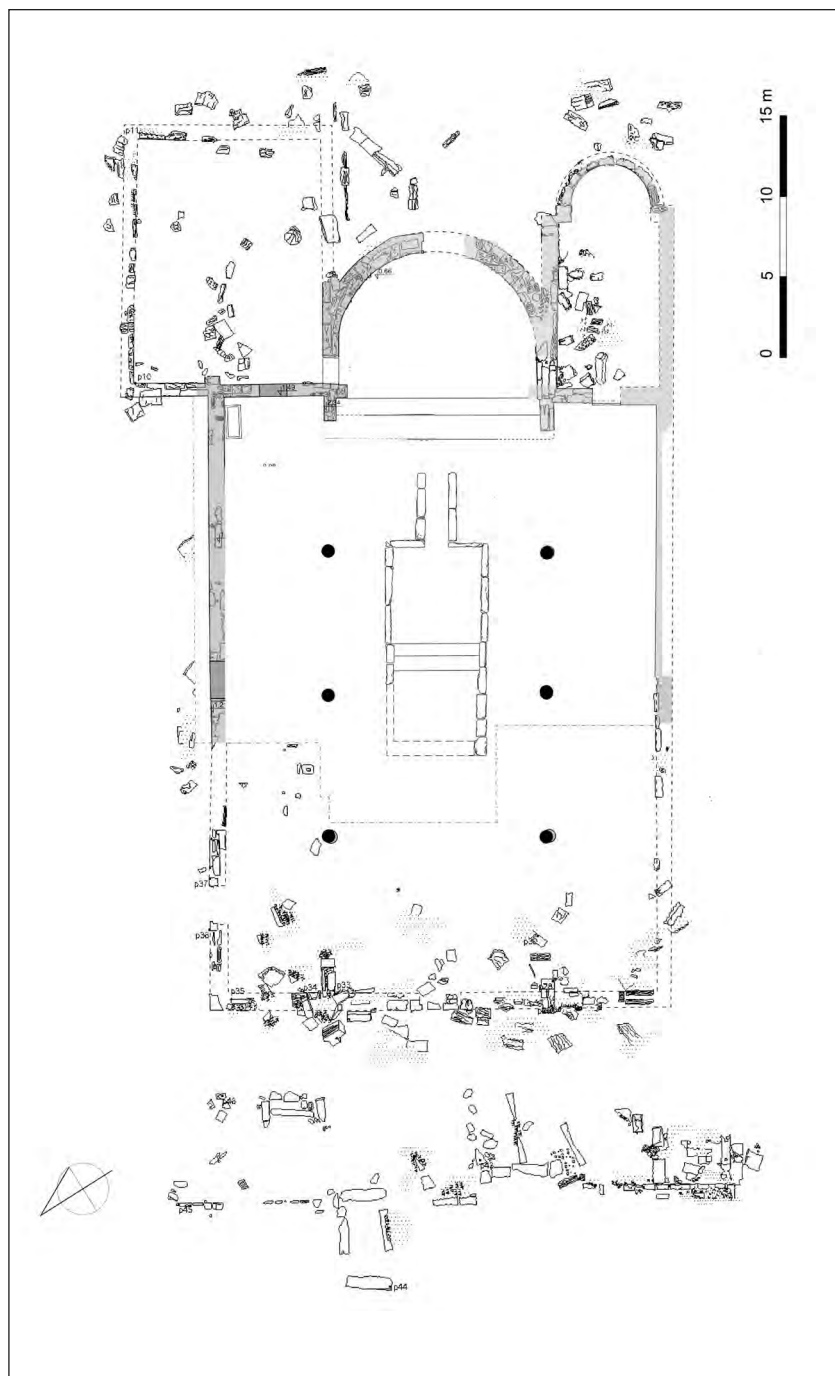


Fig. 2. Plan of Basilica IV
(Drawing W. Terlikowski, M. Wagner)



Fig. 3. Roof tiles from the fill of the church
(Photo M. Wagner)



Fig. 4. Reused sarcophagus in the northern
church aisle (Photo G. Majcherek)

now displayed in the Museum (exhibit no. 9445).

A grave was found dug into the church pavement next to the southeastern corner of the aisle. It was constructed of upright limestone slabs and most probably covered with horizontal slabs, which were placed level with the flagging. Only a few bones were retrieved from the grave. The nature of this grave is difficult to ascertain, but it was in all probability a later burial *ad sanctos*, a common enough feature in late antique churches.

A wide doorway (1.85 m) at the eastern end of the northern aisle gave access to a large rectangular annex (approximately 12 m by 15 m). Its precise function and internal layout has yet to be recognized. In front of the northern chamber on the left side of the door, next to the wall,

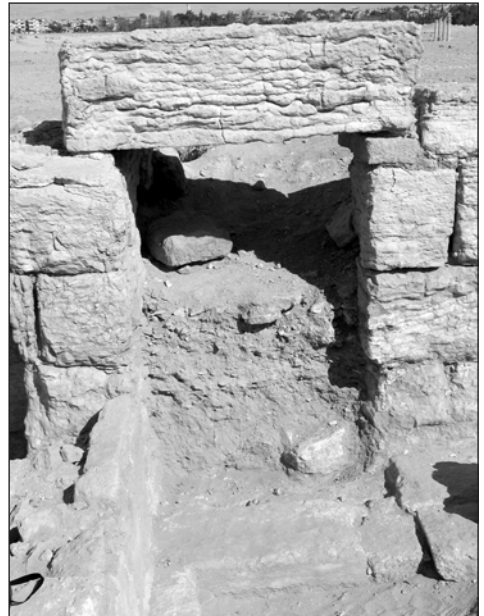


Fig. 5. Northern door of the apse
(Photo G. Majcherek)

there was a large (2.10 m by 0.90 m) monolithic stone basin sunk into the floor [Fig. 4]. The basin (reused sarcophagus) has no outlet. Its function remains unknown, although a similar basin found in the Basilica III was conjectured as a holy water container (Gawlikowski 2003: 282).

Both the *martyrium* and the northern dependency communicated directly with the sanctuary through a pair of large doors (1.45 m wide). Both lintels, set at a height of 2.30 m above the threshold are still preserved in their original position [Fig. 5]. A similar symmetrical arrangement allowing for transversal circulation was also noted previously in Basilica III (Gawlikowski 2003: 282).

Of particular interest are the remains of a *bema* occupying the center of the nave. A theoretical reconstruction is possible despite extensive robbing of the feature. It was apparently a large rectangular structure measuring approximately 7.20 m by 6.30 m [see Fig. 2]. A large, right-angled block preserved in the southwestern corner is tangible proof that, contrary to multiple other examples, the *bema* in Basilica IV did not follow the standard hemicycle plan. Although very rare, similarly outlined rectangular *bemas* are known from the small church in Fafertin in Jebel Sem'an (Tchalenko 1979: Figs 81–83) and from the basilica in Dibsi Faraj (Harper 1975: Fig. D). Two wide steps lead to an elevated



Fig. 6. Basilica IV. Remnants of the *bema* in the nave, looking south
(Photo G. Majcherek)

podium, most probably accommodating tiered benches for the clergy and a *thronos* for the Gospel (now lost) [Fig. 6].

A more unusual arrangement is to be seen in front of the bema. Two parallel low socles (only some 0.25 m higher than the pavement level), stemming from either corner of the structure, extended to the east, forming a spacious vestibule, 5.50 m square. A narrow corridor, again bordered by a socle, led toward the sanctuary. There is a strong possibility that the whole structure, which closely resembles a *solea*, was additionally screened with a chancel wall. Two large slabs found next to its northern socle may be quoted in favor of this assumption. The *bema* was apparently part of the original layout of the church, as evidenced by closely fitting flagstones around it. Fragments of two spirally fluted colonnettes found reused in later, early

Islamic structures, even if not forming part of *ciborium*, may have belonged to its original decoration [Fig. 7, left; see also Fig. 14].

Original flagging was cleared all over the excavated part of the church. Made of extremely large slabs, quite often exceeding 2 m in length, the pavement was laid in closely fitted rows perpendicularly to the axis of the church. The setting was a lime ashy mortar.

The whole width of the sanctuary was cleared during the last two campaigns. It advanced some 2.50 m into the nave. The difference in levels between the nave and apse pavements (the apse was some 0.50 m higher) was negotiated by three wide steps, taking up the whole width of the nave. The sanctuary was enclosed by a low wall with a central passage in the form of an arched doorway (*fastigium*) [Fig. 8]. Both preserved doorjambes apparently served as arch abutment, as suggested by the leaning upper surface of the preserved northern one. Originally, however, the sanctuary must have been separated by a typical chancel screen, although this is no longer extant. The only tangible proof of its existence is a single, incomplete chancel post (1.02 m by 0.32 m) [Fig. 7 right] found in the debris next to the early Islamic entrance cut at the top of the apse. The two adjacent sides of the post decorated with carved vertical panels indicate that it was originally fixed in the corner of the chancel. Since neither slots nor impressions were preserved on either of the remaining sides one may assume that the chancel screen was not made of marble slabs but took the form of a thin wall instead. Apart from these poor remains of the chancel, the only surviving elements of the original church decoration are a few pieces of broken

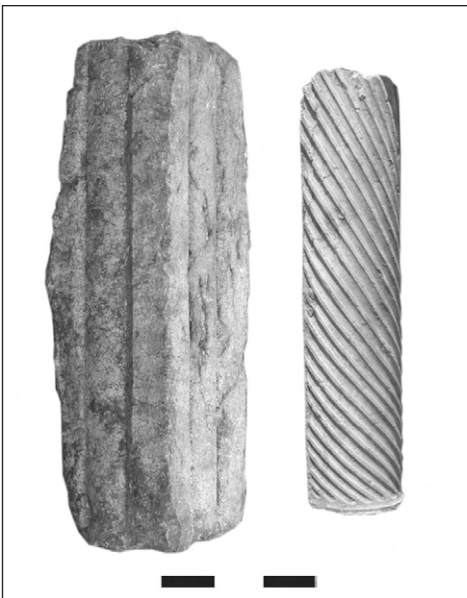


Fig. 7. Colonette and chancel post
(Photos G. Majcherek)

colonnets and fragments of marble revetment tiles retrieved from the fill.

The builders of the church relied heavily on *spolia*. Most of the building material and architectural decoration originated from dismantled classical buildings. This is particularly clear in the case of the apse, where three Corinthian pilaster capitals were reused as ready-made ashlars. Four large column capitals were recorded (plus one still *in situ*); they are, however, apparently not from the same period. Columns are another point in case. Given their uniform size (5.75 m

in height and 0.85 m in diameter), they must have obviously come from a single monument. Such monolithic columns are usually associated with temple tombs. A ready parallel is offered by Tomb 86.¹ It is particularly noteworthy that the lower parts of the columns, notwithstanding their heavy weathering, seem to have been trimmed substantially to adjust their diameters to the size of the bases [Fig. 9]. This peculiar arrangement may be explained only by the fact that the bases, smaller in diameter as they are, originated from yet another building, if not from the



Fig. 8. Remains of the church apse, looking east
(Photo K. Juchniewicz)

¹ Columns of similar size and of apparently similar origin were widely reused in Diocletian's Camp. See, for instance, the building of the *principia* and the tetrapylon

structure predating the church (see above, section on Phase I). Curiously enough, the bases, although partly sunk into the flagging and therefore not prone to erosion, were also seriously weathered to the point of complete obliteration of their original molding.

Two different wall-structuring techniques were used in church construction. The presbytery, southern martyrium and short adjacent stretch of the south wall were built in isodomic courses of regular header–stretcher bond. The well-dressed limestone blocks are all well fitted and set in gray mortar. The apse, still rising to a height of 3.00 m, was made of larger blocks, most of them slightly curved on the inside to adjust to the inner semicircular outline. The arrangement of the blocks in the apse suggests an outer polygonal outline, although this could be merely a result of using recycled architectural elements and not the actual plan.

The walls of the main body of the church were built in a different masonry technique. They were structured as two-

faced walls of large dressed stones with chunks of limestone filling the spaces between the inner and outer faces. The outer walls are preserved to an almost uniform level of some 1.30–1.50 m above the floor, once again allowing the much debated possibility that a stone socle supported mud bricks. Indeed, structural collapse excavated in the northeastern part of the building included some mud melt and bricks. The original walls are all two-blocks thick (0.90 m). It appears that originally the entire stretch of the south wall may have been structured in the same manner. It was apparently dismantled following the abandonment of the building and later replaced with an Early Islamic structure.

The analysis of church layout is still far from complete. One should note, however, that the presence of a structure combining features of both the *bema* and *solea* in the middle of the nave is most unusual. The latter was discovered previously in Basilica III (Gawlikowski 2003: Fig. 1), but it is nonetheless considered as typical of some Constantinople churches (Matthews 1980; Krautheimer 1986: 84–85, 100–102). On the other hand, while the *bema* is common in churches of northern Syria, particularly in the Limestone Massif, it is the first time that such a structure has been discovered this far south.

For the time being there is little explicit chronological and stratigraphic evidence concerning this phase of the building. The basilica has been tentatively recognized as a Justinian-age foundation,² but only after further investigation will a sounder basis for the church history be established.



Fig. 9. *Trimmed column of the nave*
(Photo G. Majcherek)

² Most of the churches discovered in Palmyra are traditionally attributed to the rebuilding program undertaken by Justinian, see Malalas XVIII 152, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn 1831), 424–425.

PHASE III. POST-CHURCH OCCUPATION

Following an unspecified span of time (both the walls and lower sections of columns showed clear signs of extensive erosion), the church building underwent a thorough transformation, resulting in the introduction of an entirely new internal layout.

In general, the intercolumnar spaces were blocked by thick, soundly built walls. Likewise, the aisles were subdivided into two rows of regular independent units by partition walls (0.80–0.90 m wide) stemming from the intercolumnar walls and set directly on the church flagging [Fig. 11]. Newly created rooms took up the whole width of the aisles (approximately 6.40 m), their width comprised between 4.50 m and 5.00 m. Each unit was approached from the courtyard (formerly the nave) through a wide doorway (approximately 1.30 m wide) [Fig. 10]. In two of these, thresholds set some 0.25–0.30 m higher than the church flagging were found. Their level corresponds to a packed dirt floor cleared inside the rooms. However, neither doorjambs nor door sockets were identified, indicating wide openings rather than regular doors. No additional installations whatsoever, which could help to identify specific function of these units, were found.

In several cases, mostly in the southern aisle, some parts of the walls are missing; nevertheless mortar imprints left on the flagstones leave no doubt that they continued originally all the way across the aisle.

Recycled material was found repeatedly reused in the wall fabric, e.g., small column and pilaster capitals in the wall between rooms 8 and 9, and large blocks

with curved inside surface, apparently originating from the apse, in a wall dividing rooms 1 and 2. The wall dividing rooms 7 and 8 is of particular interest in this respect. It was structured in an uncommon pillar technique, elongated blocks some 0.60–0.70 m tall being set vertically at even distances and the spaces between them filled with small rectangular stones. Most of the partition walls, however, were structured of limestone blocks of different quality and varying height, set in two rows with the space between them filled with mortared rubble [see Fig. 11, bottom]. Beside the hard local limestone (*azraq*), a conspicuous chalk limestone can also be observed among the blocks.

The presence of a second storey in the refashioned building seems to be attested clearly enough by numerous fragments of a lime floor set on a thick ashy-mortar bedding, recovered from the fill. This assumption is further corroborated by some architectural features identified in the structure of the edifice. In the easternmost and largest chamber 4 (northern aisle), two low piers were cleared against the walls [Fig. 12]. They apparently supported an arch bearing the load of the ceiling. Furthermore, the walls blocking intercolumnar spaces were supplemented with a row of solid piers (1.20 m square) set at regular intervals, which at first glance may be seen as a way to reduce the span of the nave in an attempt to roof it [see Fig. 2]. Closer examination, however, revealed that they were designed to support an outer staircase leading up to the second storey. Three steps (and imprint of a fourth) were cleared next to the easternmost pier [Fig. 13]. The total distance between the first step and the last

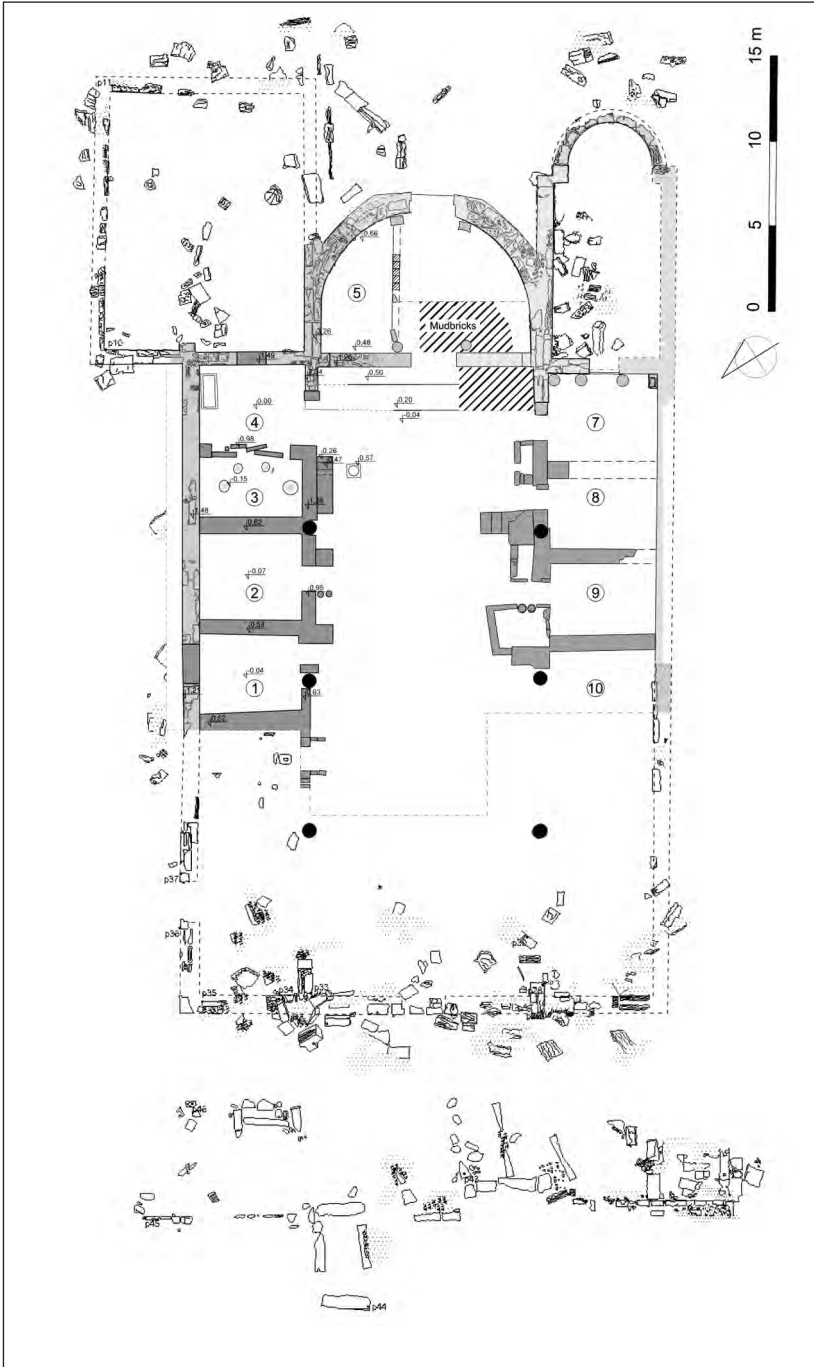


Fig. 10. Plan of early Islamic structures inside Basilica IV (walls shaded in gray)
(Drawing W. Terlikowski, M. Wagner)



*Fig. 11. Early Islamic structures in the northern (top) and southern aisles, looking east
(Photo G. Majcherek)*

(westernmost) pier is 10.50 m. Therefore, the structure would have supported most probably a flight of some 30–32 steps — enough to negotiate the difference between the ground level and the first floor set some 7 m higher. The piers were positioned next

to the intercolumnar wall, as if flanking the entrances, apparently in order not to obstruct free approach to the dwelling units. The largest span (some 3.50 m) between piers 2 and 3 was further reduced using two column shafts acting as additional support. It is still unclear whether the whole staircase was an arched or a post-lintel structure. The latter seems most probable, as no voussoir stones whatsoever were found in the accompanying debris.

A similar arrangement was identified also in the southern aisle. Also there, the walls blocking the intercolumnar spaces were supplemented with piers positioned alongside one another, apparently supporting an outer staircase leading up to the second storey. The staircase, however,



Fig. 12. Pier supporting an arch in chamber 4, looking west (Photo G. Majcherek)



Fig. 13. Courtyard (formerly nave) with early Islamic installation, looking west (Photo G. Majcherek)

was designed differently. Instead of a simple long flight of steps, there was a lowermost run of six steps built at right angle, leading to a wide landing set some 1.60 m above the church flagging. From there, the stairs (1.25 m wide) turned to the right and were supported by a 2.80 m long pier attached to the intercolumnar wall. The second pier was built at a distance of 4.15 m. In similarity to the northern aisle, this relatively large span was reduced by a pair of columns (set next to the entrance to unit 9), acting as additional support.

It seems obvious that the roofing over both aisles must have been supported on wooden beams and indeed the impression of a well cut straight timber was found preserved in the mortar on a piece of wall fabric found in the fill. Although its original position could not be ascertained, one has to admit the possibility that at least some parts of the walls were structured entirely in stone and not in mud brick.

The original church flagging was retained in all units during the Phase III occupation. The only exception was the courtyard where the deposition process

was less controlled, resulting in a packed dirt surface, occasionally reinforced with assorted stones, roof tiles and randomly laid reused flagstones.

The water supply system relied on wells. Two such wells were found in the courtyard. Both were constructed as rectangular ashlar-built shafts leading to wide bell-shaped cavities. The eastern one retained its original well head with a rectangular scatter of cobbling around it [see *Fig. 13*]. The wells in the church were 6.50 m deep, in similarity to several other wells noted in nearby houses located in insula F — clear evidence of a constant water table in the area throughout antiquity and the early Islamic period (Gawlikowski 2007). A water conduit made of terracotta pipes was found running parallel to the walls [*Fig. 14*].

Chamber 3 apparently served as a kitchen, as evidenced by four partly preserved small round ovens sunk into the floor in the area where the original church flagging was removed [*Fig. 16*]. A thick deposit of ashes and kitchen waste containing charred animal bones, eggshells



Fig. 14. Terracotta pipe conduit in the early Islamic structures inside the church (Photo G. Majcherek)

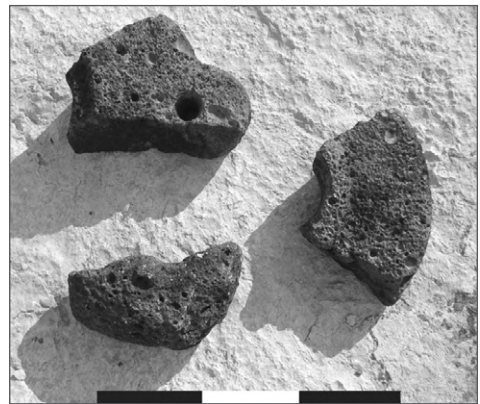


Fig. 15. Fragments of handmills (Photo G. Majcherek)

and unidentified organic material, as well as charcoal was found both in chamber 3 and the adjacent room 4. At some point chamber 3 was entirely blocked using upright flagstones. Later, the same system was also applied for blocking room 4.

In unit 7, an interesting feature was constituted by two column shafts (some 1.52 – 1.57 m tall, and 0.70 m in diameter) set directly on the church flagging on either side of the entrance and adjacent to its east wall (formerly front wall of the martyrium). Yet another column occupied the northern corner, while a pillar stood in the southern one [see *Fig. 11*, bottom, far back].

The arrangement was apparently designed to carry short-spanned vaults, but its purpose defies explanation. It may

have been introduced to emphasize the monumental character of the entrance; if so it should belong to the church phase rather than the early Islamic one. In the same unit, next to the entrance to the former martyrium, a reused sarcophagus was found (2.00 m by 0.95 m). The front side, originally decorated with a row of busts, now heavily eroded due to prolonged exposure, was substantially lowered and equipped with an outlet. It is not impossible that the sarcophagus (reused as a basin or trough) was originally set up somewhere in the martyrium.

The finds recovered from the fill: cookingware, household utensils, handmills [*Fig. 15*], grinders and querns, as well as *tannur* ovens, attest to the domestic nature



*Fig. 16. Ovens in chamber 3, looking south
(Photo G. Majcherek)*



*Fig. 17. New entrance from the early Islamic phase at the top of the apse
(Photo K. Juchniewicz)*



*Fig. 18. Mud-brick collapse in the apse, looking east
(Photo M. Wagner)*

of the structure. The building appears to have been a large dwelling, featuring a series of regular but separate units, grouped around a central courtyard. But this seemingly straightforward picture is put in question by observations made during the excavation of the presbytery.

It turned out that the apse also underwent substantial and unusual rearranging. Firstly, it was separated from the former nave by a low parapet wall (1.20 m high), which was most probably a survival feature from the earlier, church phase. A pair of column shafts was found edging the opening immediately behind the central doorway. Two parallel walls forming a passage ran toward the apse top where they touched yet another pair of column shafts topped with reused capitals, flanking a wide doorway pierced at the top of the apse [Fig. 17]. This new wide entrance is certainly a most unexpected feature. The gate (some 2.20 wide) was framed with regular doorposts positioned on a wide threshold.

The fill in the apse included abundant mud melt pointing to some mud-brick structure existing in the vicinity. Indeed, a fallen mud brick wall was cleared immediately below the upper strata of the structural collapse. The collapsed structure covered an extensive area in the southern half of the apse. It was made of large square bricks (about 40–42 cm to the side), laid in regular rows with mud mortar still bonding the courses [Fig. 18]. The exact nature of the collapse is difficult to recognize. The westernmost part must have fallen from the parapet wall separating the apse from the courtyard (former nave), as evidenced by several courses of such mud-brick wall preserved on top of it. It is not to be excluded that the eastern part with

diagonally-laid bricks may have come from the collapsed pitched vault covering the passage leading to the entrance.

The collapsed mud brick structure was left largely in situ to permit the study of the destruction mechanism. Once this is done, further chronological evidence is expected to come from the material now concealed under the collapse.

Two consecutive destruction layers have been identified all over the newly explored area. Lowermost there was a thin, approximately 0.20–0.35 m, layer of wind-blown soil, consisting mostly of small stone fragments and mortar with occasional pieces of flooring originating from the upper storey. This layer should be related in all likelihood to the abandonment of the building, and consecutive plundering (removal of the roofing, wooden fittings etc.). The upper layer, separated by yet another facies of mostly wind-blown soil, included the usual array of architectural rubble, but also most of the fallen masonry. It apparently corresponds to the final destruction and dismantling of the edifice.

Both the fill and the layer found directly on top of the pavement produced quite a number of dateable finds. The recorded material is surprisingly homogenous in terms of the dating and apart from a few residual sherds is all relevant to the early Islamic period. It comprised several fragments of wheel-made lamps (Fellman's group L, dated to the 8th–9th centuries AD, see Fellman 1975) [Fig. 19], broken brittle ware cooking pots, locally manufactured coarse ware and steatite vessels, and some artifacts of bone.

The most interesting nonetheless is quite a large repertory of glazed sherds. They belong mostly to the so called Abbasid "Samarra horizon", represented



Fig. 19. Early Islamic lamps
(Photo A. Kubiak, G. Majcherek)

by cobalt blue painted glazes, molded wares and bichrome and monochrome luster wares (Mason 2004) [Fig. 20, top left]. Some early lead glazed splashed wares [Fig. 20, top right], as well as typical Abbasid blue-glazed jugs [Fig. 20, bottom] were also recorded. Completing the collection are two small fragments of Chinese celadon.

Overall, the artefactual material points to the 9th–early 10th century as the most plausible date for this phase of occupation.



Fig. 20. Glazed pottery sherds: Abbasid blue on white and luster wares (top left), splashed wares (top right), blue-glazed ware (Photos A. Kubiak, G. Majcherek)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The exact sequence of rebuilding and phases of early Islamic occupation is not clear, although some important insights into the development of the architecture have been gained. A total re-orientation of the building appears to have been the core of the replanning. The original western access was replaced by a new eastern gate introduced in the apse. It seems that this peculiar arrangement simply reflected the changed urban landscape of the early Islamic Palmyra. The western confines of the city may have been abandoned by this time and the eastern orientation could have assured better communication with the rest of the city. It is still unclear what exactly the function of the newly planned building was. The general layout with a central courtyard and separate rooms grouped around it, plus lodging areas on the upper storey, as well as only one large kitchen in the northern aisle, may point

to a commercial (*khan*) or administrative function. The latter possibility is further supported by a monumental gate hall built in the apse. It is therefore tempting to see it as an official residence of some local authority.

In the latest stage of occupation the building was partly ruined. Some of the units were simply abandoned, while alterations were made in others, suggesting rather haphazard use. The opening in the wall separating the apse from the nave was blocked and a new passage was opened on a higher level. Another entrance leading to unit 10 was pierced in the main south wall. The building ceased to be occupied most probably with the final abandonment of the urbanized area within the city walls. By the end of the 10th century AD the settlement was restricted solely to the temenos of the temple of Bel (Gawlikowski 2009).

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