

# Michał Gawlikowski

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## Palmyra

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Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 5, 133-143

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1994

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## PALMYRA

### Michał Gawlikowski

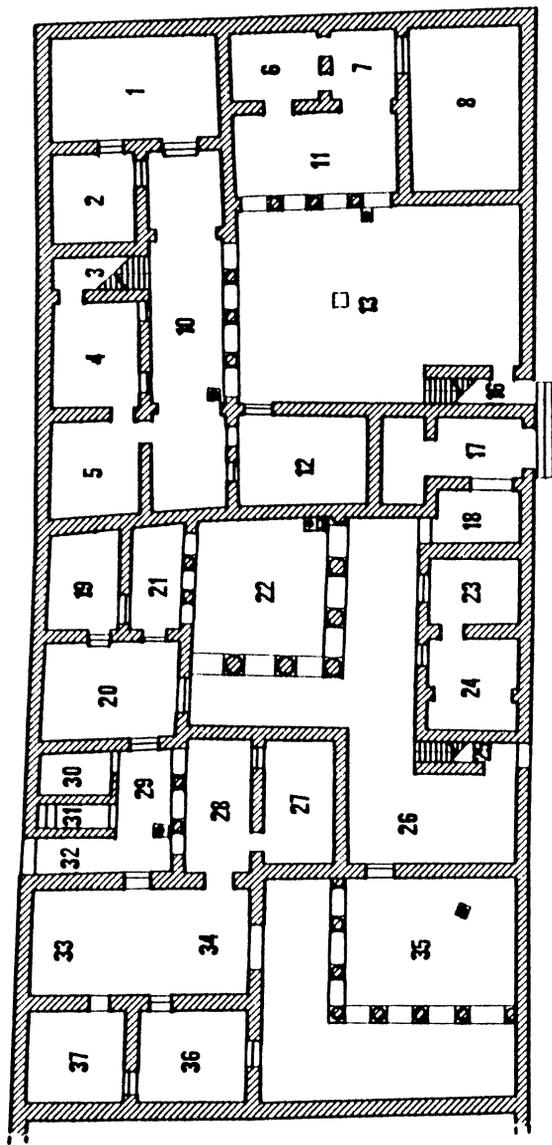
This 34th season lasted from 30 August to 6 October 1993, continuing the excavations in the sector allotted to the Mission by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in 1988,<sup>1</sup> covering three blocks north of the Great Colonnade between the Tetrapyle and the Funerary Temple, and south of the two unexcavated churches to be seen in the direction of Zenobia Hotel. The excavations concerned this year, for the third time, the residential part of this area (House N). In previous seasons (1988 and 1990) over 1000 m<sup>2</sup> were cleared, revealing incompletely a single house divided into two separate units and extending beyond the limits of the excavation.<sup>2</sup> This year a further 450 m<sup>2</sup> were uncovered, bringing the total house area up to about 1500 m<sup>2</sup>. We think indeed that the house is now excavated in its entirety, in spite of two passages going beyond the southern border of

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<sup>1</sup> The mission included, beside the present writer, Dr. Maria Krogulska, Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek, Mr. Janusz Byliński, Mr. Sławomir Kowalski, Mr. Waldemar Jerke, Miss Dagmara Wielgosz, Miss Anna Witecka. Thanks to the support of the Foundation Max van Berchem, Geneva, we had the assistance of Messrs Mario Borges and Constantin Socratidis, both professors at the École d'Architecture, Geneva University. Mrs. Krystyna Gawlikowska, an art historian, was present in private capacity.

We gratefully acknowledge the unfailing hospitality and helpful cooperation of the officials of the Palmyra Museum, Mr. Khaled As'ad, Director of Antiquities and Museums of Palmyra region, and his associate Mr. Ali Taha, both of whom served as inspectors attached to the Mission.

<sup>2</sup> See *PAM* I 1990, pp. 37-40; II, 1991, pp. 85-93; III, 1992, pp. 68-73.



PALMYRA 1993  
 House N  
 Original stage /ca 150–200 A.D./

*Fig. 1. The original phase of House N.  
 Drawing S. Kowalski.*

the dig. Indeed, these are obviously cut through the original wall at a late date and seem to have served to incorporate some parts of our house to the one joining it to the south.

### **GENERAL LAYOUT**

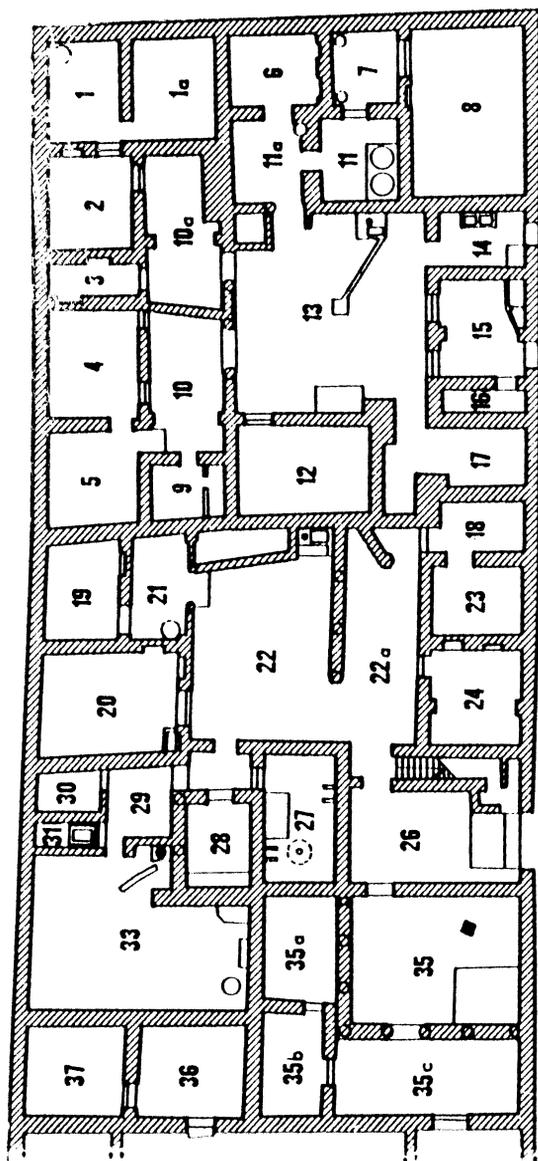
The house is located between two parallel streets running northward from the Great Colonnade: Diogenes Street, so called because of an inscription on the corner column, and Church Street, leading to the mentioned basilical buildings of Byzantine date. These streets, 25.50 m to 26.50 m from each other, are linked by a narrow lane at a distance of about 135 m from the Colonnade, marking the northern limit of the house; some 56 m to the south the house touched the neighboring building, as yet unexcavated.

The house, which was built in the second half of the 2nd century AD as presented in my former reports, included at the beginning four distinct units serving different functions. There was, at the northern end, the large unpaved courtyard (loc. 13), apparently used for household purposes. To the south there were two parallel living units, each opening from a peristyle, loc. 22 and loc. 35 respectively. They are separated from each other by a file of rooms including the entrance hall (loc. 26) and, grouped around a small courtyard, a kitchen (loc. 27), lavatory (loc. 31), and secondary entrance (loc. 32). These common rooms were easily accessible from each of the living units. It would be reasonable to suppose that one of these, presumably around the more readily accessible loc. 22, represented men's quarters, while the more secluded apartments opening off loc. 35 were reserved for women.

Needless to say, during the six centuries of occupation the house underwent repairs and modifications, as previously re-

ported. In fact, the whole character of the habitat changed, from a large residence of the well-to-do to a cluster of small, rather rustic dwellings occupying the premises from the 6th-7th century on. The process possibly reflects the natural course of sharing the inheritance within a family, and certainly the generally impoverishment of the people in Byzantine Palmyra.

The excavations of this year have uncovered the southern court and the kitchen court, both with their dependencies (loci 27 to 37). There are practically no loose finds other than pottery, except a few fragments of stucco supplementing the important collection recovered previously in other parts of the house, already restored and partly exhibited in one of the rooms of the Museum. Pottery sherds merely confirm what was established in 1988: the building remained in use until the late 8th-early 9th century, and was abandoned in the Early Abbasid period. This is consistent with evidence gained elsewhere in Palmyra, for instance in the suq built into the Great Colonnade or in Diocletian's Camp. This last stage is characterized by modifications which, as far as the part of the house excavated this year is concerned, consisted of a dwelling being separated out, including loci 27 to 31 and a large courtyard loc. 33. The modifications also included parts of the original house becoming architecturally incorporated into the neighboring one (loci 36-37 and the courtyard loc. 35 with dependencies). This was done mainly by closing some doors, dismantling some earlier walls and opening new passages through them; there are few late structures other than earthen benches or bread ovens installed in the corners of some rooms. The floor levels were raised sometimes quite considerably, indicating a probable replacing of original ceilings. Apparently, this wing of the house never had a second storey.



PALMYRA 1993  
 House N  
 Last stage / 7th 9th c.A.D./

*Fig. 2. The final phase of House N. Drawing S. Kowalski.*

## SOUTHERN COURTYARD

The courtyard loc. 35 is practically square (11.60-11.80 m). It is located in the southeastern corner of the house, being bordered by the street wall to the east and by another house, yet unexcavated, to the south. There was a colonnade running on a stylobate along the southern and western sides: three columns to the west and four columns to the south, counting the corner column twice; there were pilasters at the points where the stylobate met the walls.

Three columns of the southern court are still standing, and the bases of others remain in place. They measure 50 cm in diameter and the upper level of the architrave, still in place on the corner column and its eastern neighbor, is 5.67 m above the ground. Counting with floor level variations, this was 0.75 m lower than around the middle court, but 0.70 m higher than the ceiling over the kitchen porch (see lower). One can conclude that there was no communication on the terrace level and, because there were no stairs in this part of the house, the rooms depending on the southern court could not have carried a second storey.

The open court preserved the original pavement of huge slabs, with a draining well near the northeastern corner. Access was originally through a door in the northern wall from the entrance hall loc. 26, from where the other middle court could also be reached, while the staircase loc. 25 led through the mezzanine level to the northern household courtyard.

Under the portico to the west two doors opened into rooms 34 and 36, each commanding a backroom, respectively loc. 33 and 37. There were also doors between rooms situated side to side, from 34 to 36 and from 33 to 37. Other passages allowed access to the kitchen court and to its porch.

## KITCHENYARD

This unit had an independent entrance from Diogenes Street, later blocked, and included close to it a lavatory and another room of uncertain purpose (loci 30-32). Opposite, there opened a porch of two columns between pilasters (loc. 28), giving access, by means of two parallel doors, to a room behind (loc. 27). This was later used as a kitchen, and it would be reasonable to suppose that it was so from the very beginning. Made to communicate easily with the living units to the right and left, these rooms were obviously much lower than the adjoining wings on either side. The diameter of the columns in the porch being 45 cm, the roof over them would be at about the same level as over the similar porch loc. 21, that is some 0.75 m below the terrace of the adjoining southern colonnade, and twice as much below that of the middle court. There was, then, no passage on one level between the loci of the upper floor.

A well was found in the court. It is the fourth well in the house, now filled in but used throughout the long history of the building, as the raised level of the stone casing of the well clearly indicates. There was also a drainage well under the floor level nearby. It has already been established previously that no outside water adduction was available in Antiquity (however, in the Islamic period there were water pipes laid along streets on either side of the block).

The lavatory loc. 31 was thus not equipped with running water. In the front part of this recess, there was a water tank 0.60 m deep, covered with slabs forming the floor. Behind a cross wall a paved ditch 1.30 m deep emptied through a vaulted opening under the street, probably into a drain.

## LATER USE OF THE HOUSE

The clear disposition described so far is blurred by late transformations, more important here than elsewhere in this house. The most striking feature of the late arrangement is the large courtyard which was formed by abolishing the walls between loci 32, 33 and 34; the earthen floor of this yard was some 20 cm above the only hard surface preserved, a plaster floor of loc. 33, already late in date as suggested by the red paint, and indicating clearly the position of the walls removed with their foundations.

This yard was closed on all sides except from the north, where it could be approached through small rooms installed in the former kitchen yard loc. 29 and in the porch of the kitchen itself, still in use on a higher level. Several consecutive fireplaces are partly preserved in loc. 27, some marked only by traces of soot on walls. While difficult to date in absolute terms, they seem to continue the original function of the room. Similarly, a washing facility and a lavatory subsisted in loc. 31 opposite. This dwelling opened into the courtyard loc. 22, as did two other comparable units excavated in 1990.

Two southernmost rooms (loci 36 and 37) remained unchanged in outline, but they became attached to another house by a door cut into the southern wall, and closed on other sides. In loc. 37 an oil press seems to have been installed, of which only sockets and stone supports on the floor level remain.

Similarly, a door was cut from the south into the courtyard loc. 35, which retained its original form except for a small room built into the corner of the colonnade (loc. 35b) and for stone fences set between columns, so as to isolate the remaining parts of the portico. Together with the court, still open, this dwelling was accessible from the north through the original entrance hall

loc. 26, at that time largely opened on the street, and included some more rooms belonging originally to the neighboring house.

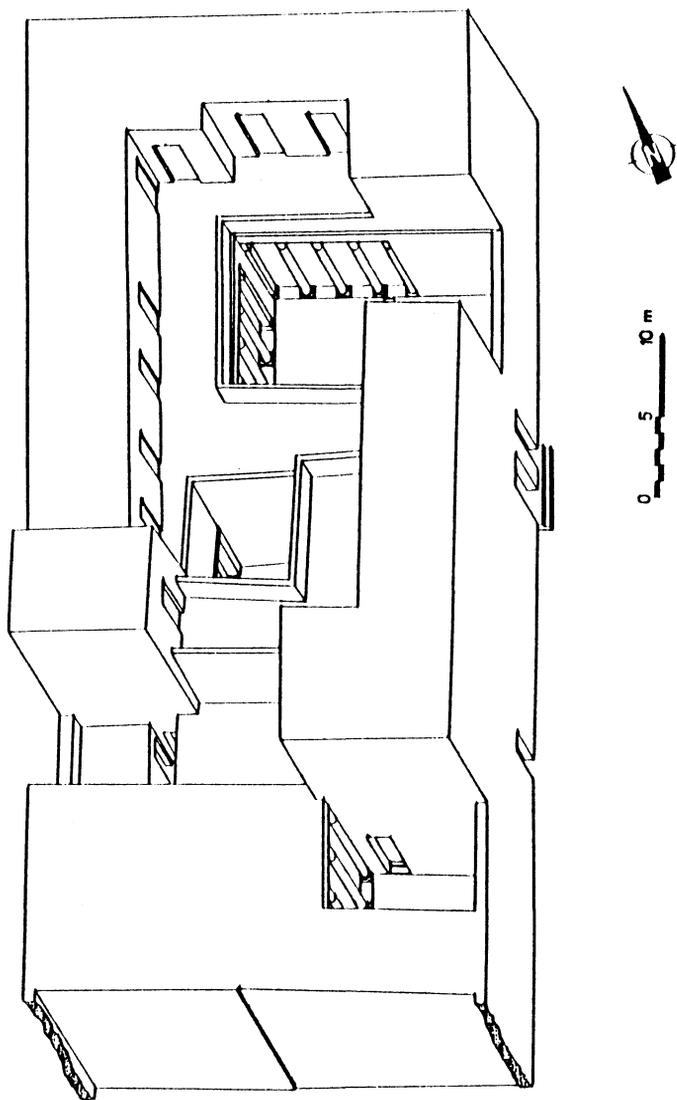
### **SOUNDINGS AROUND THE BASILICA**

This important building, excavated in 1989 and later, has already become a tourist attraction, being the only major monument cleared between the Tetrapylon and the Funerary Temple. A church in its latest stage, it was abandoned about AD 600, before its walls finally collapsed some two centuries later, apparently toppled by an earthquake.

We have proceeded this year with a series of test trenches aimed at establishing the chronology of the earlier stages. In particular, the dating of the apse had to be verified, my first conclusion about it being a 4th century addition appearing unsafe.

As a matter of fact, the foundations of the apse do sit on a 4th century fill; an enlarged trench has shown, however, that this fill accumulated gradually even higher, up to a hard floor cut through by the foundations. It must be admitted, then, that the apse was added about the middle of the 6th century. At the same time, various of the building's dependencies were restored, following a period of devastation.

More trenches in front of the church, under the pavement of the narthex, revealed, however, that there was after all an important building phase early in the 4th century. A colonnade was set along the south wall of the basilica, implying that the new access to the aisle was already opened in the middle of the wall. A closed courtyard in front was added, with a gate opening from the Great Colonnade, strikingly similar to the atrium of some Constantinian churches. It seems that these activities can be dated in connection with the Diogenes inscription in the Colon-



*Fig. 3. Axonometric reconstruction of House N. Drawing S. Kowalski.*

nade, stating that a renovation was conducted there around AD 328.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The domestic architecture in Palmyra being very little known as indicated by a recent conference in Damascus (June 1992), it is now possible to fill the gap to some extent with the results of the excavation of a complete house. At the same time, the importance of later periods in the occupation of the site is made clear. The urban history of Palmyra does not stop in 273. The town continued, however diminished, until the early 9th (3rd AH) century, when a distinct break of continuity followed and the downtown area was finally abandoned.