

# CHHIM

## EXPLORATIONS, 1998

Tomasz Waliszewski

*The third excavation campaign of the Polish-French-Lebanese archaeological expedition was carried out between June 29 and August 21.<sup>1</sup> This season the work was concentrated in Chhim, a village site some 30 km south of Beirut and 7 km as the crow flies from the Mediterranean coast. Archaeological work was supplemented with an extensive conservation and reconstruction program carried out between August 24 and September 21 by specialists from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw.<sup>2</sup>*

*The campaign was devoted to completing the exploration of the Byzantine basilica E, uncovering the narthex and atrium, clearing the Roman-Byzantine habitation and domestic complex F, excavating the structures underlying the Roman temple C and exploring and recording two oil presses E.II and E. III [Fig. 1].<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The expedition was directed by Tomasz Waliszewski, assisted by Renata Tarazi representing the Direction Générale des Antiquités, and Lévon Nordiguian from the Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient. The staff included: Jacek Konik, Ewa Chrzanowska, archaeologists; Abdallah Alaeddine, ceramologist, in charge of work in Temple C; Jarosław Gozdzalik, architect; Marek Puzzkarski, Anna Nowicka, documentalists; Tomasz Szmagier, photographer; Jakub Bałdyga, Olga Bazelak, Anna Dudzik, Dobrochna Janik, Marcin Kisielewicz, Maciej Ryś, students of archaeology from Warsaw University and the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw; Katarzyna Dziwińska, student of conservation from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw; Robert Sozański, Arabic studies student from Jagiellonian University in Cracow; Michel Helou, Ibrahim Nouredine, students of the Université Libanaise in Beirut.

The work of the expedition could not have proceeded so successfully without the kind and efficient support of the following institutions: Direction Générale des Antiquités, the Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient and Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University, in the persons of their respective heads: Dr. Camille Asmar, Prof. Jean-Marie Dentzer and Prof. Michał Gawlikowski, as well as the enormous effort of Mrs. Renata Tarazi of the DGA in organizing the expedition. The State Committee for Scientific Research of the Polish Republic has kindly provided funds to process the results.

<sup>2</sup> Mosaic conservation was charged to a team of specialists from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw headed by Krzysztof Chmielewski and assisted by Andrzej Karolczak; the group included students Wioletta Tkaczyk, Aleksandra Trochimowicz, Mariusz Makowiecki, Bazyli Piątkowski. The north wall of basilica B was restored by Paweł Jędrzejczyk and Bartosz Markowski.

<sup>3</sup> For the results of previous campaigns, see *PAM VIII, Reports 1996* (1997), pp. 147-156; *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), pp. 139-152.

## CHURCH OF PRESBYTER THOMAS (BASILICA B) [Fig. 2]

Work in the basilica could not be completed because of the north wall which was in danger of collapsing. Once it was finally protected during the present campaign, it was possible to clear the northern aisle of the 40 cm thick layer of soil which had safeguarded the underlying mosaic [Fig. 3]. The layer yielded a considerable quantity of roof tiles, some of them practically whole and lying in clusters on the floor. Apparently, the roof in the northern aisle had collapsed while the church was still in use or soon after it had been abandoned. Indeed, this reconstruction of events might be true of

the entire building. Parts of a bronze polikandelon, presumably from the ceiling, were found on the mosaic floor. The debris included blocks of stone, two of which still preserved traces of painted wall decoration; merely enough to say that the predominant colors were red, orange, gray and beige. Stones, earth and roof tiles protected the mosaic floor from any heavier damage; only the central part was crushed and sunk in places. The mosaic was surrounded by a border of laurel leaves of the same design as the mosaic in the southern aisle [Fig. 4].

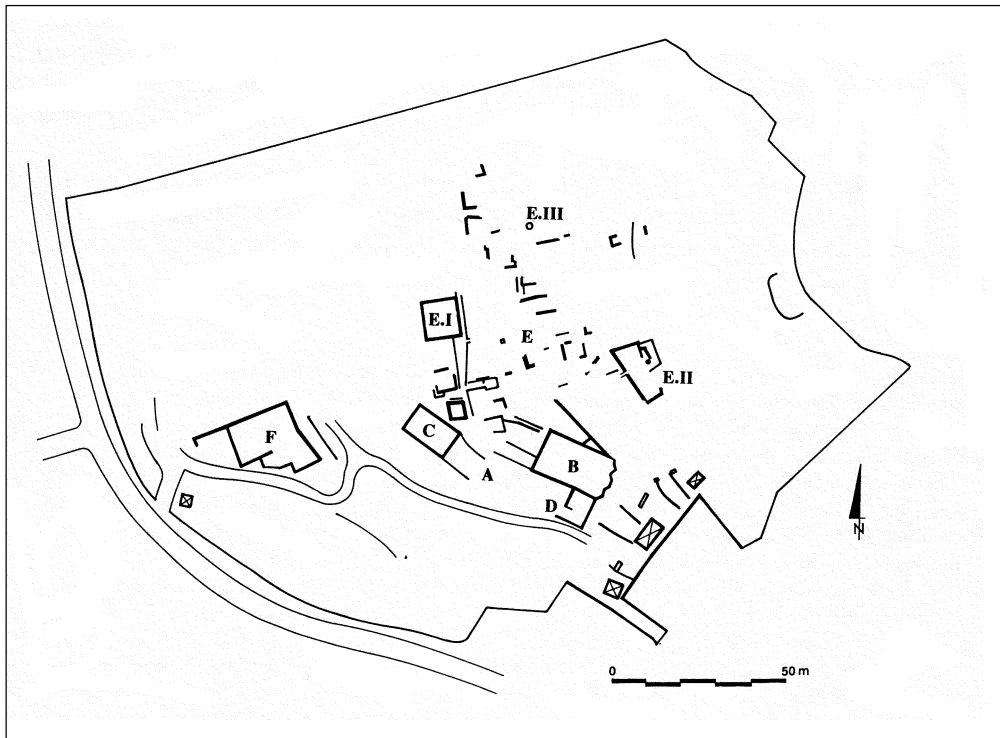


Fig. 1. Schematic plan of the village at Chhim. Excavated structures and objects identified during a survey marked: A - temenos; B - basilica of the Presbyter Thomas; C - Roman temple; D - tower; E - village; E.I, E.II, E.III - oil presses; F - habitation and domestic complex (Drawing M. Puzkarski)

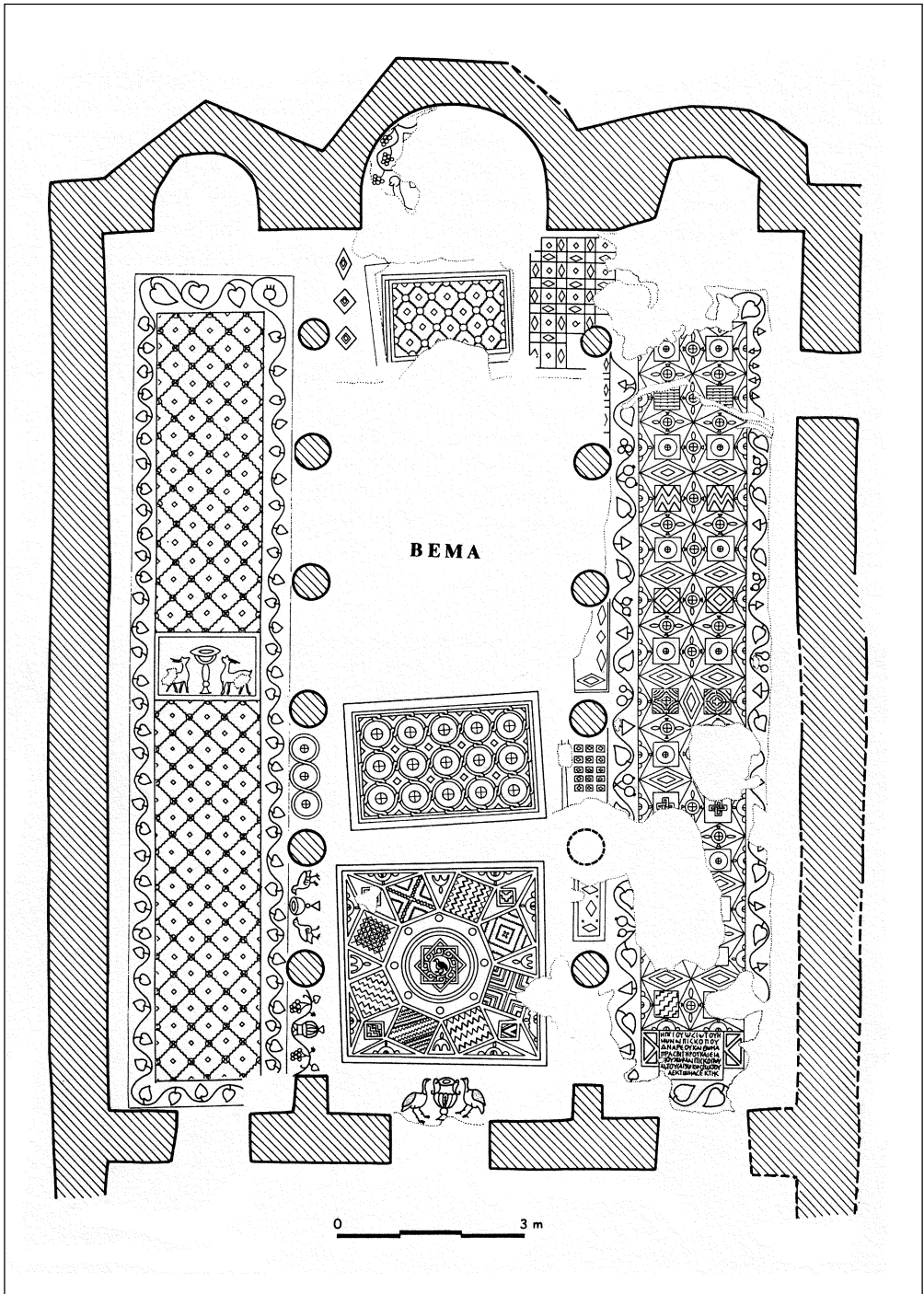


Fig. 2. Church of Presbyter Thomas  
(Drawing M. Puzskarski)

The field is filled with a geometric ornament of squares set at an angle. A rectangular panel decorated with two kids or deer flanking a cup was set in the center of the aisle. The mosaic ornament on the floor of the northern aisle is geometric in nature, but impossible to interpret before cleaning.

Further work in the basilica concentrated on removing later additions between the columns, which had obscured the architecture of the original phase of the basilica. A broken column in the third intercolumnar space from the east of the north aisle corresponds to a similar column in the opposite space on the south side of the bema. The two are presumably what remains of a liturgical installation of some kind (table support?).

In the course of conservation work, a burial was discovered under four blocks in the western end of the south aisle. Stones set up on end lined the rectangular grave which measured c. 2.00 x 0.60 m. Lying inside was a well-preserved skeleton with the head pointing west [Fig. 3].

The only furnishing is a wheel-made oil lamp dated to not earlier than the late 7th-early 8th century AD. The burial is obviously from the last phase of the basilica, presumably not long before its final abandonment.

The narthex of the church, cleared during the present campaign, measures 11.00 x 3.00 m. A stone bench and outer wall (surviving height 1.20 m) were found alongside the north wall. Practically the entire area of the narthex was



Fig. 3. Church of the presbyter Thomas. State in the summer of 1998.  
(Photo T. Szmagier)

covered with a well preserved lime mortar floor; the test trench dug by the step of the central entrance reveals that this surface was repeatedly renovated. To judge by the characteristic rustication, the pillars separating the narthex from the atrium were built of blocks taken from the Roman temple C.

Practically on the last day of work, the tomb in the southern end of the narthex, next to the entrance to the southern aisle, was uncovered. The flat stone slabs closing it were lifted to reveal a rectangular outline (c. 1.80 x 0.55 m) narrowing to the east, lined with stone slabs set up on end. Inside, there were 26

human skulls, painstakingly arranged along the west side, and the other bones all mixed up. On the very bottom there were two rather more complete skeletons, perhaps laid to rest at an earlier date. The modest furnishings included a few rings, pendants, an earring and two gold coins of Phocas (602-610), both found on the floor of the grave. The coins might be evidence for the dating of the last phase before the mass burial. For now, it is possible to assume that the bones belonged to victims of the Persian raids, who were buried only after the invaders had left, in a spot of such exceptional importance, close to the foundation inscription of the church.



Fig. 4. Mosaic floor decoration from the north aisle of the Church of Presbyter Thomas. State from the 5th cent. AD (Photo T. Szmagier)

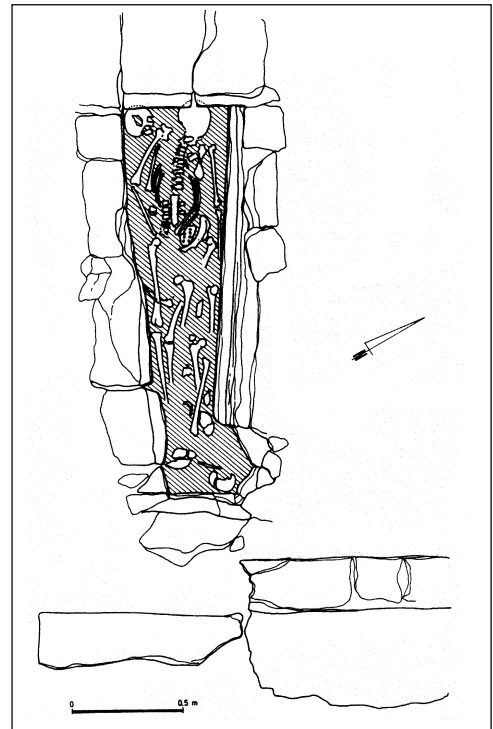


Fig. 5. Burial in the church aisle (Drawing M. Puzkarski)

## ATRIUM OF BASILICA B

Three passages formed by two rectangular pillars led from the church narthex to the atrium. The rectangular area uncovered this season (c. 19.20 x 10.50 m) was delimited on the north by a wall which was an extension of the northern narthex wall. A break in it revealed the face of another wall indicating that already the original wall in this place had been deformed under the pressure of the mountain slope and had had to be reinforced with a new wall while the basilica was still in use. A column base has survived in each of the four corners of the atrium, but the lime mortar floor is present only in the eastern part of the space.

The rebuilding mentioned above was also linked to a set of steps which appeared at the western end of the atrium and which presumably led to the upper terraces of the village; to judge by their positioning, the flight of steps was presumably in line with the steps leading to oil press E.II.

Originally, the atrium had four columns supported on square blocks dug into the ground or hewn into the bedrock. On the south, it was delimited by a

series of at least three columns (belonging perhaps even to the Roman phase) with a small channel running alongside (0.15 m wide, 0.10 m deep) starting from the corner of the basilica narthex and continuing in the direction of the cistern situated under the central part of temenos A. The channel served to drain water into the cistern, but since it was cut by the narthex wall, it must belong to a phase preceding the Byzantine one.

Later installations in the atrium, presumably of a domestic nature, include an irregular stone platform at the western end of the court, already near the first village structures. The platform consists of a single course of dressed stone blocks with a rectangular basin lined with waterproof plaster and storage vessels inside it. Running through the center of the atrium on an E-W line is an irregular and carelessly constructed wall.

Apart from an insignificant quantity of pottery, the only finds helpful in determining when the atrium was in use are coins of Theodosius I (379-395), Maurice Tiberius (582-602) and an Omayyad imitation of a *folles* of Constans II (641-668).

## TEMENOS A

In the first three weeks some 700 blocks from Basilica B and Temple C were removed from the temenos and atrium. Pieces of architectural decoration were placed in a lapidary or left in place. As a result, the roof was uncovered, as well as the entrance to an unexplored cistern cut into the rock to a depth of at least 4 m.

Directly in front of the entrance to the village and by the northeastern corner of the temple some late structures of blocks placed flat on the ground were discovered. They presumably constituted part of the atrium installations. A narrow passage winding among the blocks ran from the village to the temenos.

## TOWER D

A test trench dug on the extension of the southern wall was designed to locate the southwestern corner of the tower and the southern extension of the temenos A wall. Just below the surface, a well preserved wall built of finely dressed limestone blocks measuring 1.10 x 0.80 m was discovered. At least two courses of these blocks, all inclined c. 10° away from the tower, were ob-

served in the trench, but the foundations were not reached. Neither was the wall of temenos A found. Instead, it became obvious that the present eastern wall of the tower had been restored presumably during the earlier works carried out by H. Kalayan. Pottery found in the fill inside the tower is mostly Byzantine in date, but there are a few obviously Late Hellenistic sherds.

## TEMPLE C [Fig. 6]

One of the purposes of this year's campaign was to complete the exploration of the southern half of the temple. Below the fill of the Roman period, which had been identified already in the past season, structures of finely dressed stone blocks were discovered, primarily an obliquely running wall. It is parallel to a thickening of the mortar in the lime floor investigated in 1997. On its northern side, it bears traces of decoration in the form of painted black lines. The fill yielded many pieces of plaster with a geometric and floral decoration painted in red, black and green. On the south side, the wall is adjoined by three courses of well-dressed blocks laid flat and closely fitted (aver-

age dimensions: 0.40 x 0.50 x 0.30 m). The highest level forms a podium of sorts abutting the above mentioned wall, while the other two descend gradually in the direction of the western temple wall. Blocks from this platform are inserted in the Roman temple wall, suggesting that the Roman builders of the 2nd century AD dismantled the rest of this structure which had extended beyond the building they intended to raise. To judge by the traces of paintings and the pottery, the uncovered phase should be dated to the 1st century BC-1st century AD. Earlier phases, if any, under the lime floor will be explored in test trenches planned for the coming season.

## COMPLEX F

Exploration of Complex F, a habitation area developed in a later period to include an oil press (room F VIII) started in 1997.<sup>4</sup> Presently, the occupational levels were reached in all the remaining units. Unit F III turned out to have the biggest area in the habitation quarters. Under a layer of earth 30-40 cm thick, a floor with surviving sections of a lime mortar surface was cleared; it had been

laid directly upon bedrock and was some 0.20 m thick and tending to thicken in a southerly direction, where the bedrock sloped downward. Finds from the level of the floor included bowls, kitchen ware, but primarily cups and plates of Late Roman Ware of the Phocaeian and Cypriot type. Similar finds come from the remaining units dug during this campaign: F IV, F V, F VI, F VII, F X, F XI,

<sup>4</sup> See report from the last season of work in *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), pp. 145f.

with a specially big accumulation in unit F VI. The pottery documents the Byzantine phase in the occupation of the structure; two coins of Heliogabal (218-222)

and probably Alexander Severus (222-235) might testify to a part of the building being in use already in the 3rd century AD

### OIL PRESSES E.II AND E.III

The site survey this year was extended to document two domestic structures found in the village of Late Antiquity.

Some 25 m north of basilica B, already on the slope where the village had been located, the outlines of a big rectangular structure designated as E.II had been previously discovered (c. 12 x 19 m). The entrance was in the southern wall and opened on a street (and presumably steps) leading down to the basilica. The

outlet of this street might have been located next to the steps found this year in the northwestern corner of the atrium. Inside the structure, in the central and western ends, the ground surface is littered with oil press installation elements: three counter-weights, a pressing-area and a monolithic basin to collect oil.

Oil press E.III is situated some 30 m to the northwest of oil press E.I, which was explored in 1996. The rectangular

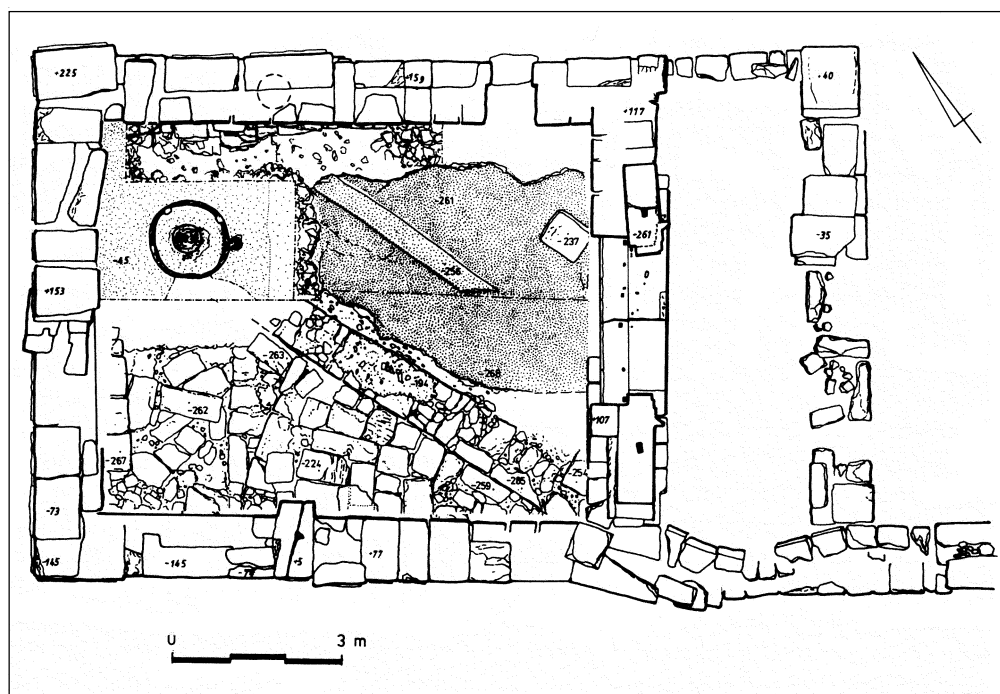


Fig. 6. Temple C after the 1998 season  
(Drawing M. Puzskarski)



outline of the building, about 8 m long, is strewn with stone blocks. In the center of the accessible area, there is an enormous circular quern with a diameter of 2.05 m used to grind olives in the first phase of the process. Next to it, a cylindrical "anchor" stone was found, once serving to mount the wooden screw and beams pressing the sacks filled with olives. While most of the oil presses discovered at Chhim follow the beam-and-counter-weight principle, the E.III press,

as well as one of the presses in the E.I establishment, represent a beam-and-screw type of installation believed to be more modern and efficient.

The presses described here are only a few of the numerous installations of the kind which were in operation in the ancient village in the 5th-6th century AD. Many private houses await excavation, as do the alleys and streets. The survey should help to understand the village plan and the communication system inside it.

## CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION WORK IN BASILICA B

The team of conservators and students of conservation from Warsaw completed the third season of work at the site. This year attention was focused on completing the conservation and partial restoration of the mosaic floor in the southern aisle and the eastern part of the presbytery of Basilica B. The decision was made to remove the original lime substructure and to provide a new bedding for the floor. The mosaic was made to adhere to layers of cotton gauze using a 20% solution of polyvinyl alcohol and then detached, step by step, from the bedding and rolled onto a wide cylinder. Under the original lime bedding an extremely well made substructure was discovered in the form of tightly packed small stones. The mosaic was set in a new stable lime mortar bedding and the missing parts in places where the reconstruction generated no doubts of any kind

were filled in with cubes recovered from the excavations. The southern edge of the floor in the south aisle was protected with a reconstructed substructure of a stone bench which had existed in the church when the building was in use.

Work on the conservation of the deformed northern basilica wall was also completed this year. The wall, which had threatened to collapse under the pressure of the earth gathered against it on the outside, was dismantled and remounted after leveling particular courses of blocks. The joints were reinforced with a cement mortar.

In Temple C, the conservators took down from the wall and protected the face of pieces of wall plastering with traces of 1st century BC-1st century AD painting. Two small fragments of painted decoration from the northern aisle of Basilica B were treated in similar fashion.