

# JIYEH (PORPHYREON)

## EXPLORATIONS 2005

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*Modern Jiyeh lies on the seashore about 20 km due south of Beirut. The site situated within the boundaries of the present towns of Jiyeh and Nebi Younis has been identified as Greco-Roman Porphyreon.<sup>1</sup> It consists of an urban zone with a basilica on the south and a necropolis located about 200 m to the north of it.*

*Rescue excavations at Jiyeh in 2005 were focused on recording the remains of ancient structures in the southern and central parts of the site.<sup>2</sup> This short report presents the results of our investigations in two areas: the Byzantine basilica and the stratigraphical trench situated on the beach, between the basilica and the northern necropolis. A more detailed and comprehensive study of recent discoveries is under preparation for the forthcoming Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaise (BAAL), the annual of the Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities.*

1 For a general outline of the history of the ancient town, cf. T. Waliszewski, "Jiyeh (Porphyreon). Explorations 2003-2004", *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 421-422.

2 Excavations were conducted by a Polish-Lebanese Mission, established as a joint project of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University and the Directorate General of Antiquities of Lebanon. The team consisted of Dr. Tomasz Waliszewski, head of the expedition, assisted by Dr. Mahmoud El-Tayeb, Mr. Asa'ad Seif and Mrs. Bahija Traboulsi, archaeologists, the latter two representing the Directorate General of Antiquities; Prof. Dr. Karol Piasecki, anthropologist; Dr. Krzysztof Domzalski, Ms Urszula Wicenciak, ceramologists; Mr. Kazimierz Kotlewski, photographer; Mr. Marek Puskarski, documentalist; Mrs. Sophie Garreau, Mr. Karol Juchniewicz, Mr. Paweł Tchorek, archaeologists; Ms Karolina Kisielewicz, registrar; Mr. Marcin Kisielewicz, metrologist; as well as students of archaeology and engineering from the Université de Paris I - Sorbonne, Warsaw University, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Warsaw University of Technology and Jagiellonian University in Kraków: Ms Iwona Brodzka, Mr. Paweł Drakus, Ms Jolanta Górniak, Mr. Tomasz Góra, Ms Natalia Koperniak, Ms Dominika Kuczyńska, Ms Magdalena Makowska, Mr. Karol Ochnio, Mr. Cezary Olczyk, Mr. Piotr Prejs, Ms Izaura Prusik, Ms Renata Skrzypczak, Ms Agnieszka Szulc, Mr. Haidar Nairusz Vela, Ms Małgorzata Żukowska. Our heartfelt thanks are extended to the team of restorers from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, headed by Dr. Krzysztof Chmielewski, who participated in the last days of the season and secured fragments of wall paintings discovered in the basilica and in one of the late Roman tombs on the necropolis: Mrs. Izabela Uchman-Laskowska and Ms Marta Banaś, Mrs. Eliza Hugo-Bader, Mr. Wojciech Osiak, Ms Agnieszka Wielocha, Ms Kamila Wojtowicz.

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## BYZANTINE BASILICA Q

Continued excavations in Basilica Q were aimed at clearing as much as possible of the modern rubbish dump overlying the building in an effort to map surviving outer walls and internal divisions. Test pits in 2004 had traced two sections of walls in the western part of the structure, indicating the width of the narthex, but nothing certain could be said about the dimensions of the building.

Initially, little more than the east wall with apse could be seen, preserved in places to a height of 5 m [Fig. 1]. The nave was covered with an uneven layer of sand and soil. Stone blocks, presumably from

collapsed walls, rose in a mound mixed with earth over the northern aisle. Sand had piled up in the southern aisle, mostly along the southern wall and part of the eastern one. The top of the east wall along with a fragment of the vault over the apse also lay under sand. The few surviving sections of the outer walls of the northern and southern aisles were also less than legible.

The east wall of the basilica upon clearing proved to be no more than c. 0.50 m thick. It must have adjoined a thicker wall, the top of which survives as a smooth surface inclined eastward, suggestive of the spring of a vault. It could have been a big



*Fig. 1. Basilica Q in the course of excavation in 2005. View from the north. On the left, east wall of the church and beyond it, zone of the Late Antique settlement (Photo T. Góra)*



*Fig. 2. East wall of the presbytery with the apse  
(Photo T. Góra)*



*Fig. 3. Interior of the apse with the synthronon. View from above  
(Photo T. Góra)*



long room or passage of unidentified chronology and function. Further explorations in this direction should clear up the issue. The sand fill contained late pottery, pieces of mosaic floors, minor fragments of painted wall plaster and mortar.

The inside face of this east wall turned out to be in good condition. The internal division of this end of the church is distinct. The nave ends in a small apse built into the thickness of the wall [Fig. 2] and the aisles ends are straight. The vault of the apse has survived practically whole with a keystone bearing decoration in the form of a relief cross. At some point in its existence, the apse was furnished with a bench constructed of stone blocks, serving as a *synthronon* [Fig. 3].

Walls bordered the presbytery on the north and south. Excavations uncovered a threshold in the presumed location of a door opening into the southern aisle.

About half the length of the nave was cleared this season. Evidence of the most recent salvage works carried out in 1987-1988 is present everywhere. At the time, the mosaic floors were lifted and removed to safety in the Palace Museum of Beiteddine, where they can be seen today. Heavy equipment was used in 1988 to check for any further objects of interest in the ruins. In the end effect, practically the entire church was left under a layer of disturbed blocks and earth.

Excavations of the presbytery revealed the mosaic bedding of lime mortar with clear traces of cubes impressed in it. All that can now be said is that it featured a geometric design. Careful analysis may perhaps identify it among the pieces preserved in the Beiteddine Palace Museum. Traces observed on remnants of the floor also suggested the presence of marked off rectangular spaces on either

side of the apse, in the northern and southern corners of the presbytery. These spaces of unknown function must have been connected in some way with the liturgy.

Still surviving in its original position in the northeastern corner of the presbytery was a fragment of painted geometric border frame enclosing a bigger composition. Traces of a painted medallion containing the remains of an illegible Greek inscription and a cross have been preserved in the upper part of the east wall to the north of the apse. Nonetheless, most of the walls appear to have been revetted in marble, dozens of such broken tiles having been recovered from the fill everywhere inside the basilica. The walls of the presbytery bear additional evidence in the form of a series of holes for mounting such revetment. Thus, the painting in the upper parts of the walls constituted an additional form of decoration.

Investigations of the nave in the central part of the church recorded a transversal wall that apparently delimited the presbytery on the west. Two test pits dug further to the west of the presbytery uncovered evidence of a balustrade separating this part of the church from the congregation. The post mountings were circular, made of pierced blocks [Figs 4, 6]. In at least three cases, *orbis* stones, a semi-circular element from oil press installations, had been used for this purpose, similarly as in one of the churches at Khan Khalde, a few dozen kilometers north of Jiyeh.

Work in the aisles concentrated on removing the modern dump, which rose to some 3 m in places. The debris contained many broken roof-tiles, although it cannot be said with certainty that they came from the roof of the basilica. The east wall closing the nave, which rises to some 5 m, as already noted above, demonstrates a series of rec-

tangular openings forming a horizontal line. These are the sockets for mounting the wooden beams of a presumed roof or, and this is more likely, an upper floor. Nothing can be said at this point about the dating of this feature.



Fig. 4. View of the church nave from the west. Bases of the altar screen posts in the foreground (Photo T. Waliszewski)

The floor by the east wall turned out to be a smooth lime surface. The substructure consisted of tamped earth at the bottom under a layer of small pebbles in lime mortar, evened out on top with a thin hard leveling layer. Evidence of this floor is missing to the west, obviously destroyed during the work in 1988. Neither is there any evidence for the function of this part of the building.

The only trace of the original floor in the northern aisle was preserved by the north wall, about 9 m west of the east wall, where

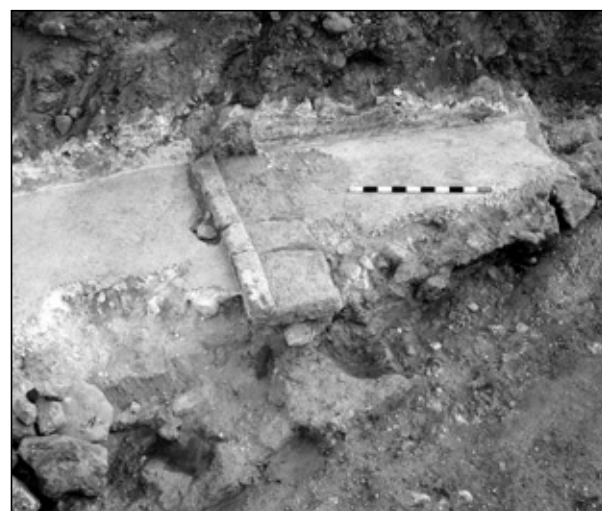


Fig. 5. Traces of floor and threshold dividing the northern aisle (Photo T. Waliszewski)



Fig. 6. Bases of the altar screen posts in the southwestern (left) and northwestern part of the nave (Photo T. Waliszewski)



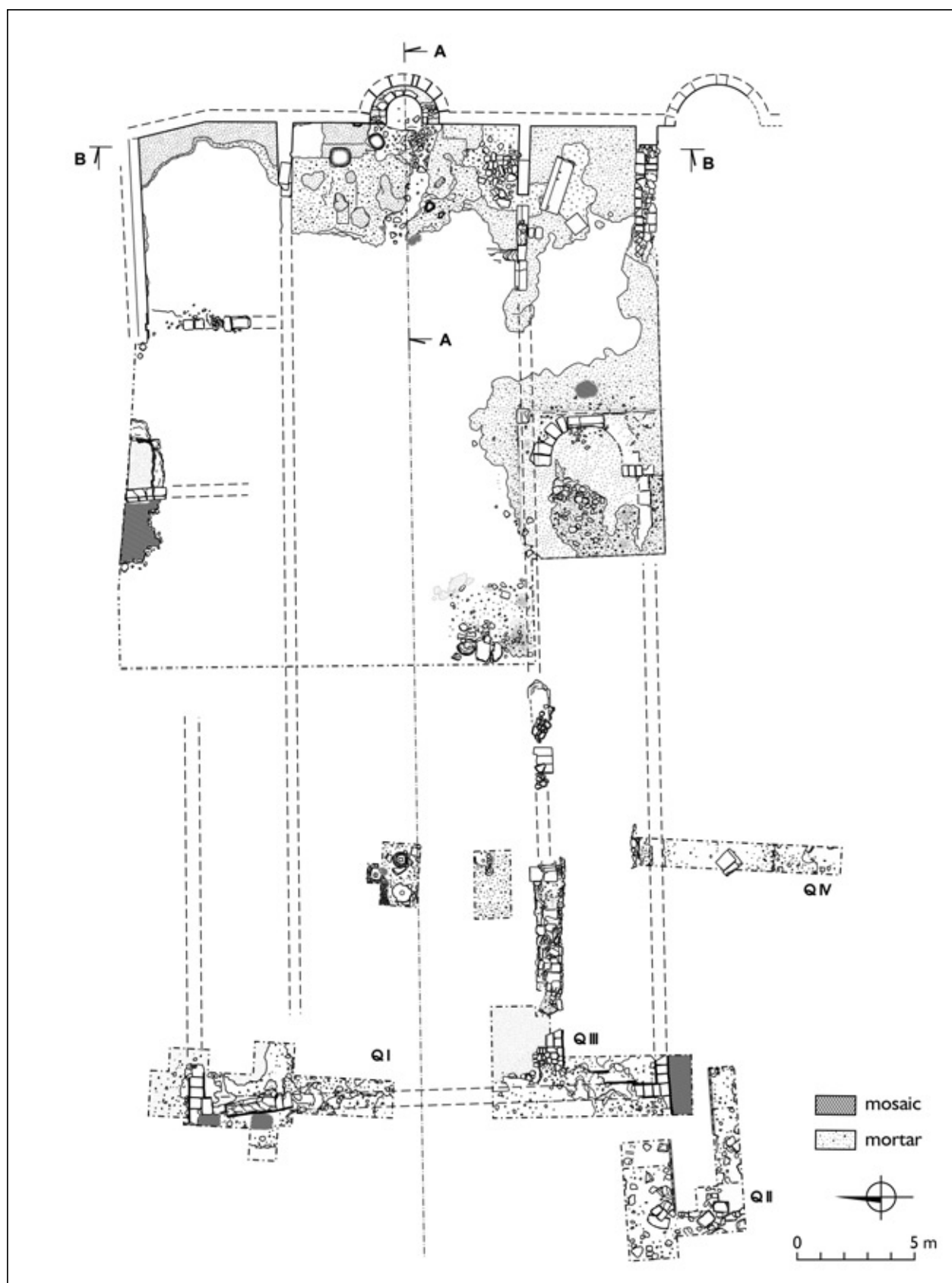


Fig. 7. Provisional plan of Basilica Q  
(Drawing M. Puskarski)





*Fig. 8. View of the southern aisle from the west. Fragment of an apsed structure in the foreground with remnants of a geometric mosaic floor beyond it (Photo T. Waliszewski)*

impressions of the balustrade or screen wall dividing the aisle transversally were noted. A section of the lime floor had been preserved here, clearly revealing more evidence of a screen or threshold. Directly beyond it were traces of a simple white mosaic floor. The north wall breaks off at this point [Fig. 5]. This limited evidence is the only indication of the internal divisions of the basilica, but they are hardly sufficient for proper interpretation.

Explorations in the southern aisle revealed the lime bedding under a mosaic floor, fragments of which were recorded *in situ*. An apse-like construction, preserved only in outline on the level of the floor, was noted c. 12.30 m west of the east wall. It occupied the entire width of the aisle. More work is needed to explore this feature thoroughly, although for now it may be viewed as belonging to a building that preceded the basilica currently under investigation [Fig. 8]. The wall closing the aisle on the east had two large niches, evidently preserving traces of wooden shelves and a door. Taking this feature in connection with the threshold indicative of a doorway between the southern aisle and the presbytery, we can assume that the eastern end of the aisle was arranged as a closed-off space for objects necessary in the liturgy.

Work on the south outer wall of the church uncovered evidence of a structure that has been interpreted provisionally as a chapel. The eastern end was closed with a small apse furnished with at least one niche. Fragments of wall painting preserved in the northeastern corner consist of a yellow-pink-red border guilloche [Fig. 9]. This was lifted from the wall and preserved by the team's restorers before the close of work for the season.

Following the clearing of about half of the basilica area in the 2005 season, there can be no doubt that the building was

bigger than previously assumed. The length measured along the south wall is at least 39 m, the width about 22.60 m [Fig. 7].

The church in Jiyeh was indubitably one of the biggest of the currently known Byzantine churches in Phoenicia Maritima. Unfortunately, the only sources to record anything about its chronology are two inscriptions now in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beiteddine. One of these is dated to AD 506 and commemorates the laying of a mosaic floor in the baptistery of the basilica (still not located), the other comes from the narthex and is dated to AD 595.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 9. Fragmentarily preserved painted decoration from a room to the south of the church (Photo T. Waliszewski)



## STRATIGRAPHICAL TRENCH

A long trench was dug through the central part of the site, on the beach, some 200 m north of the basilica. It revealed a complex stratigraphy of more than six layers containing ceramic material extending from the 1st to the 6th century AD.

While not part of our concession, the trench was very conveniently located at the western edge of a piece of land adjoining the Byzantine church on the north and the ancient necropolis on the south.<sup>4</sup> It was the result of a local owner's need to have a wide courtyard immediately adjacent to the seashore. The ground here formed a mound sloping gently southward from the highest point at about 7 m in the north; the lowest point in the south was only 0.50 m above

ground level. The full length of the section is 54 m [*Fig. 10*].

An analysis of the results indicated that the sea level had once been higher and had reached further inland (at present the shore is about 100 m distant). The mound consisted of several layers representing different periods of occupation, but most of the pottery assemblage is to be dated to the 3rd century BC. The presence of wasters in the section layers is strong evidence in support of local pottery production.

Eight features were recorded, but only one identified as an apparent bread oven (Arabic *tannur*). The remaining features, mostly sections of walls of local sandstone blocks coated with lime plaster, were too fragmentary for interpretation.



*Fig. 10. Part of the stratigraphic section through the central part of the site. View from the west (Photo T. Góra)*

3 Mr. Frédéric Alpi (CNRS-Paris) is preparing a corpus of Greek inscriptions from Jiyeh.

4 Cf. site plan in *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 424, Fig. 1.