

A SALVAGE EXCAVATION AT THE 'ABUDIYAH CHURCH IN ABUD - SAMARIA

H. Taha

The village of Abud is located ca. 30 km northwest of Jerusalem, lying on the principal Roman road via Gophna (Jifna) to Antipatris (Ras el-'Ain). Archaeological surveys have revealed a long history of occupation, stretching from the Roman period to the present (Photo 1). Evidence of Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman occupation was attested in several sites of the village. The coloured rock-cut tombs in el-Maqati', 2 km west of Abud were described by Guérin (1875: 116-118) and by Conder and Kitchener (1882: 361-364).

The site was identified with Casale Santa Maria of the Crusader period (Clermont-Ganneau 1898, Beyer 1942: 148, Pringle 1993: 18; see also Finkelstein and Lederman 1997: 203). Abud was mentioned in the Frankish sources (12th century) as the village of St. Mary sold by Baldwin of Mirable to the Hospital in 1167. From 1176 the income from the village was devoted to the provisions of white bread for the sick in the Hospital in Jerusalem (Pringle 1993: 17-18). In this period three Syriac monks from Abud are mentioned in the colophons of liturgical manuscripts. The first is Elias, who constructed the monastery of Deir el-Kaukab, between Abud and Deir Abu Mashal (Belfort), sometime after 1030; the second Mafrij Ibn Abu al-Hayr, copied a set of Gospels at Mount Sinai in 1104, and the third, Deacon Surur, acquired a book of canon tables near Cairo in the thirteenth century (Pringle, 1993: 13, Milik 1960: 201-3, Lagrange 1925: 499-504). Taquei ed-Din el-Dari el-Ghazi mentioned Ibrahim ben Mohammed ben Yusuf el-Abudi, known as Kamal ed-Din Abu Ishaq the prominent poet of Abud, whose grand-father was the Imam of the two mosques "el-Haramein" (ed-Dabagh 1991: 286-87).

In the Late Medieval (14 century) Islamic sources the village of Abud was mentioned by Yaqut Ibn al-Furat and by al-Maqrizi (Finkelstein 1997: 203). Yaqut described Abud as a small village near Jerusalem (Yaqut III: 585, Le Strange 1890: 382). The village of Abud was mentioned in the Ottoman *daftar*s in the late 16th century as part of the Ramla Nahiya (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977: 156). Later Abud was part of the Banei Zeid region.

A number of ruined churches dating to the Byzantine and early Medieval period were identified in and around the village of Abud, including Mar Abadiya church, St. Anastasia's Church, St. Barbara's church, St. Theodore's church and St. Mary church. The churches were described and studied by V. Guérin (1875: 87-88), A.M. Schneider (1933: 155-59, B. Bagatti (1959-60; 1979: 117-121), A. Ovadiah (1970: 17-18), and D. Pringle 1993: 17-23) and catalogued by M. Avi-Yonah, R. Cohen and A. Ovadiah (1993: 306). A coloured mosaic pavement was found in the site occupied by the Roman Catholic Convent built in 1912. Other fragments of white and coloured mosaic were found in the north terrace of the Convent (Avi-Yonah 1933: 137, Schneider 1933: 155).

History of the al-'Abudiyah church

The church of St. Mary, is known in the village with the local name al-'Abudiyah, and is located in the centre of the old village (Fig. 1). The church was dedicated to St. Mary, presumably during the Crusader period, when the village was renamed as Casale Santa Maria. An Aramaic inscription found on the vault of the south aisle (Milik 1960) indicates that it had been rebuilt during the Fatimid period, in "the 450th year of the Bedouins", which would bring us to the year 1058. The inscription mentions also the founder of the church. Another inscription mentioned by Conder (SWP, Mem. III, 303, see also RB 1893, 210, PJP 1928: 68) on the lintel of the main door of the church is no longer visible, as observed already by Schneider (1933: 155).

According to the popular religious tradition, Jesus Christ passed through this road to Nazareth avoiding the road via Samaria, because of the eminent hostility between Jews and Samaritans. The church is known for its miracles, and therefore occupies a distinguished position among the churches of Abud. It is visited by Christians of Palestine and Jordan, especially on the annual feast of the Virgin Mary, on August 28, for the blessings and making vows.

Archaeological, historical and ethno-historic evidence points to a series of building and restoration phases. The church was studied by Bagatti (1960, 1971) and by Pringle (1993). Four major architectural phases were distinguished in the history of the church. This distinction is confirmed in the light of the recent excavation.

First Phase. The first church was built during the 5th century A.D. The remains of the Byzantine church include the foundation of the lower courses of the outer walls of the present church, the southern annex and

columns, bases and capitals (Photo 2). The masonry of this phase, which consists of large dressed ashlar still exists about 4 m above the present level. The stones are of soft chalky limestone, hewn in the local quarries west of the village, known as el-Maqati'. The stones are roughly dressed. The quality of masonry is relatively poor. The early church would then have measured 12.20 / 12.30 m (N-S) by 14.15/14.30 m (E W), with walls 0.90-1.20 m thick; on the east it has a semicircular apse (radius 2.05 m) (Pringle 1993: 18). The main hall of the church follows a basilical plan, it is divided by columns into a nave and two aisles. In the east the rectangular hall ends at a bema, flanked by three apses.

Second Phase. The church was rebuilt again in the middle of the 11th century. The wooden roof was replaced by vaulting similar to the vault of the present church. The north arcade was replaced by two square masonry piers (1.20 by 1.20 m). Two columns in the south aisle were encased within the masonry piers. The walls were raised with irregularly shaped stones.

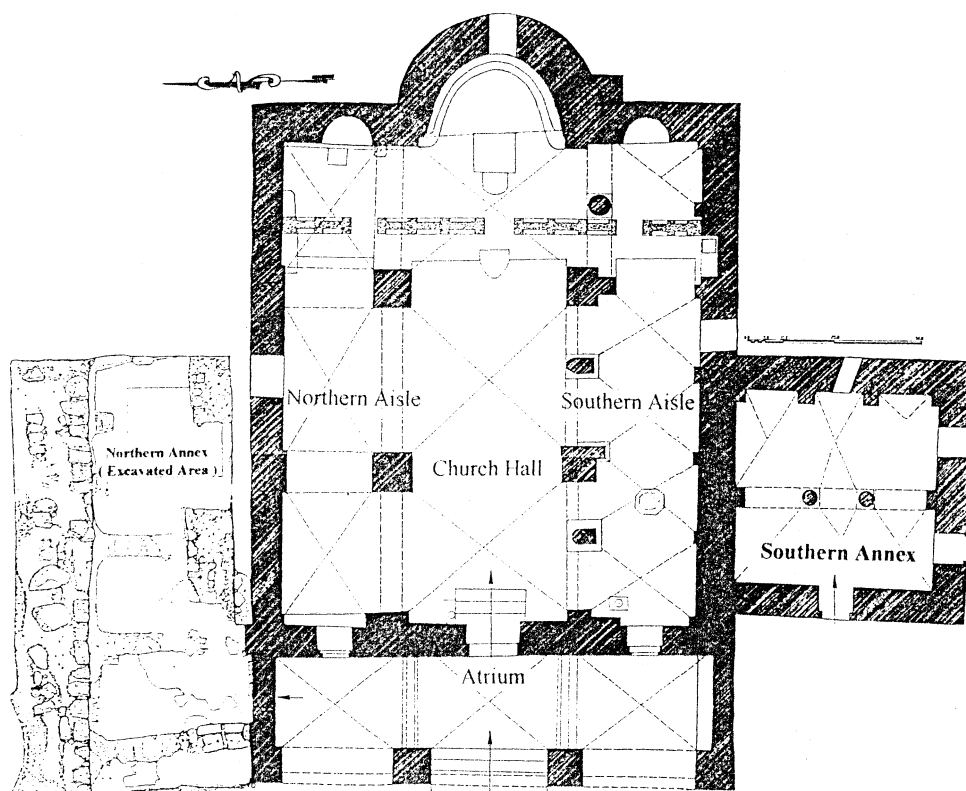


Fig. 1 Ground plan of the church.

The third phase is represented by the west doors, most of the windows, some of the vaulting and the entire northern wall: and may be dated to the middle of the 18th century A.D.

In 1997 a series of restorations were carried out inside and outside of the church. The work included removal of the cement plaster and re-plastering the vaults with traditional mortar, cleaning the stones inside the church, building a stone wall against the west part of the northern wall, and the re-paving of the atrium. During the removal of the plaster inside the church, several crosses were uncovered, as well as other architectural elements pertaining to the earlier history of the church.

Excavation of the North Annex, 1997

During the restoration work, undertaken by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, a short salvage excavation was carried out at the site on behalf of the Department of Antiquities, between 21 of August and 28 of September 1997, under the direction of Dr. H. Taha, with W. Hamamera as field supervisor and I. Halayka, M. Siekh and N. Barakat as square supervisors, I. Sarie as physical anthropologist and A. Najjar as draftsman. The restoration work was supervised by Arch. O. Hamdan and M. Deiab. The main objectives of the excavation were to examine the northern area adjacent to the church, to isolate the northern wall and to get stratigraphic material which may shed light on the history of the church. The restoration work and the salvage excavation was carried out as part of the Emergency Clearance Campaign of Archaeological Sites, funded by the Dutch Government.

An area about 72 sq. m (12 x 6 m) was excavated in the garden, along the northern wall of the present church (Photo 3). The excavation began as a salvage operation, following bulldozing a small area to build a staircase in the north west corner of the church. Four squares were plotted in this area and the whole northern annex of the church was uncovered. The excavation shed light on the history of the church.

The loci of the squares I, II, III and IV and the baskets were numbered beginning with 1, 200, 300 and 400 consequently, according to the following scheme (Fig. 2).

Locus Description

4	The northern wall of the northern Annex
11	Mosaic floor of Room No. 2
12	The western supporting wall

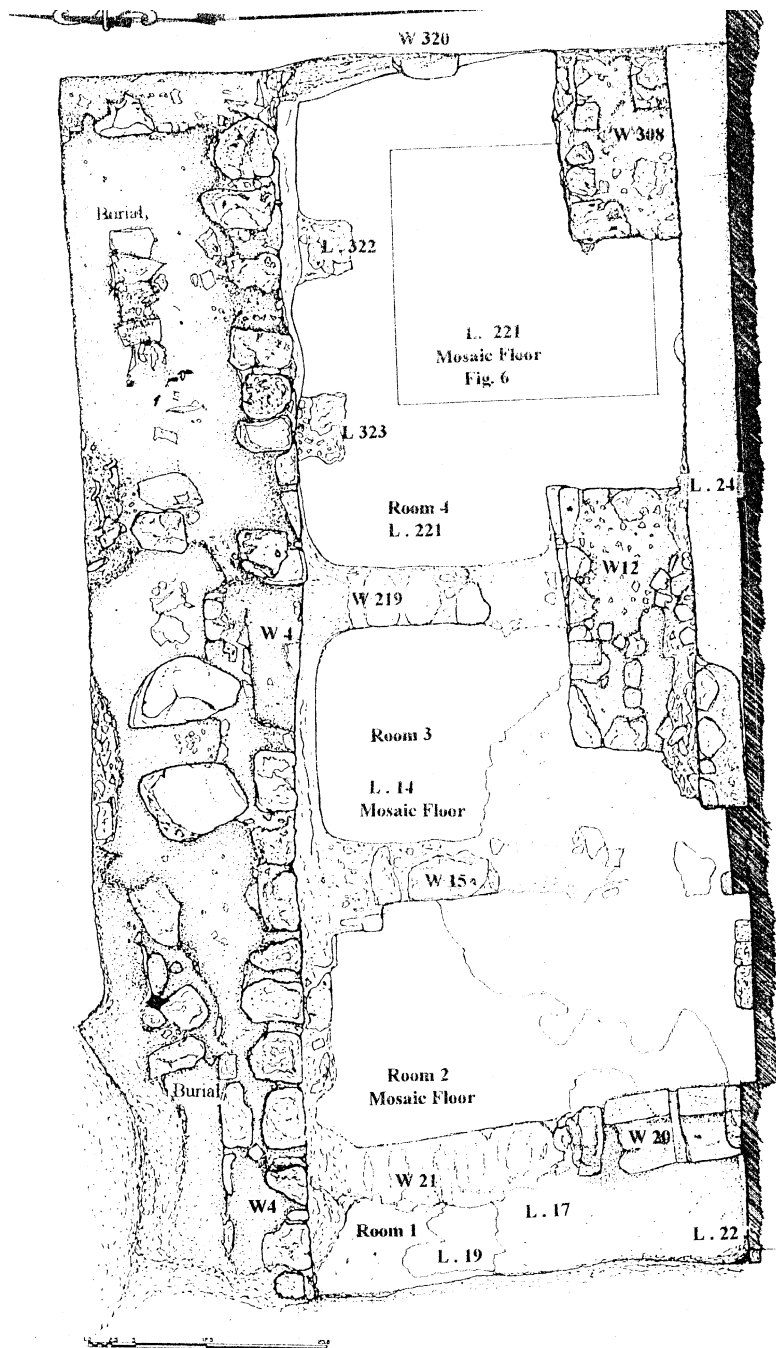


Fig. 2 General view of the excavations.

- 13 A fragment of mosaic floor in Room No. 2
 14 Mosaic floor of Room No. 3
 15 Wall between Room No. 2 and Room No. 3
 17-18 A layer of debris
 19 Fragment of white mosaic floor in Room No. 1
 20 Wall between Room No. 1 and Room No. 2
 21 Threshold of the door leading from Room No. 1 to Room No. 2
 22 Test-pit
 23 Door
 24 A make-up for a layer of plaster built against the northern main wall of the church
 25 The northern main wall of the church
 26 The northern wall of the atrium
 27 The western extension of the northern wall of the church
 219 Wall between Room No. 2 and Room No. 3
 220 Mosaic floor of Room No. 3 (extension of L. 14)
 221 Mosaic Floor of Room No. 4
 225 Burial 44 (9/II) cut into wall 4
 308 The eastern supporting wall
 320 The western wall of Room No. 4
 322 The eastern column base in Room No. 4
 323 The western column base in Room No. 4

Stratigraphy

Stratigraphically, five main occupational strata (Figs. 3-4) were distinguished in the excavated area.

I	Modern	20th century	Dump
IIA	Ottoman	16th-19th centuries	Cemetery
IIB	Crusader-Mamluke	12th-10th centuries	Cemetery
III	Fatimid-Crusader	11th-12th centuries	Buttress wall
IV	Byzantine-Medieval	7th-11th centuries	Destruction debris
V	Byzantine	5th-6th centuries	

Stratum I

The top-soil layer consists of agricultural deposits, characterised by coarse light brown to greyish soil, ca. 25-30 cm thick, which covers the

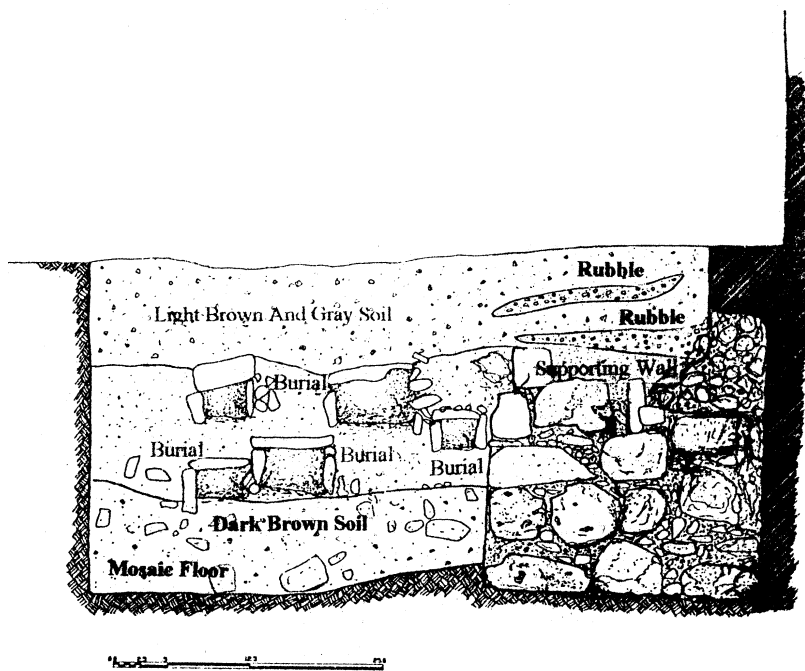


Fig. 3 Section of the eastern baulk (sq. 1).

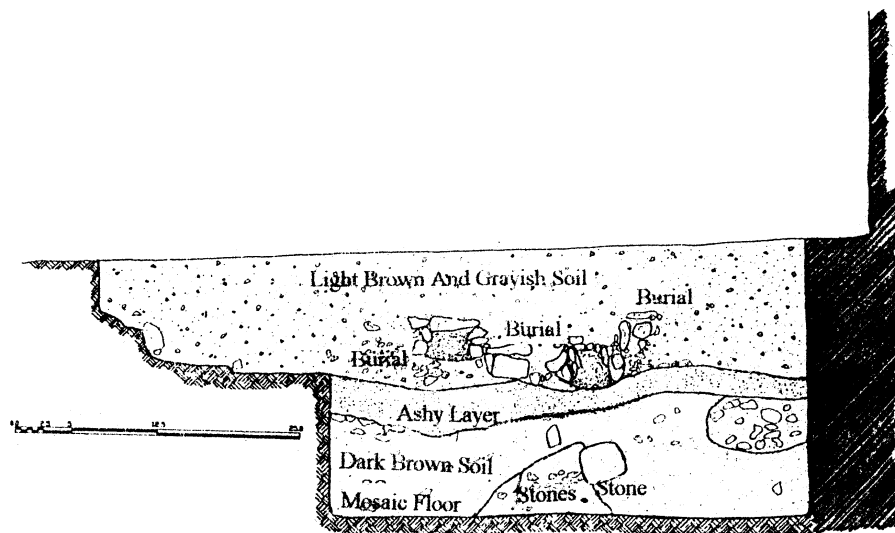


Fig. 4 Section of the eastern baulk (sq. 2).

whole area. This layer was full of tree roots, indicating cultivation activities. Finds consist mainly of white and colourful tesserae, and Byzantine and Mamluk-Ottoman pottery shards as well as modern material, and scattered bones.

The other main feature of this stratum is the structure built along the northern wall of the church. It was visible on the surface of the garden prior to the excavation. The belt is 8.50 m (E-W) long and 50 cm wide and 50 cm deep. It consists of a few courses of medium-sized stones built roughly as a make-up for a cement plaster layer. It was built on loose earth, just in two points it was erected on the top of the supporting walls L. 12 and L. 308 of stratum III. The make-up has no obvious structural function. But it was built to prevent water from penetrating deep into the northern foundation of the church, and to minimise humidity in the northern wall resulting from the attachment of the deep layer of soil (1.70 m) accumulated along the external wall of the church. The stones were mixed with lime material, and plastered with a layer of cement, indicating that it was built during the last restoration phase in 1954.

Stratum II (the Cemetery)

The second stratum is represented by a series of cist graves (Photo 4), located in spatial relationship with the church, attesting that the north area of the church was used intensively as a formal burial ground. A total number of 56 cist graves were excavated in the four squares. Stratigraphically, two main superimposed phases of burials were distinguished in the excavated area.

The upper burial layer consists of 22 cist graves, while the lower layer consist of 32 cist graves. Other two graves were not excavated. The cist graves are generally rectangular in shape. No evidence of wooden coffins was attested at the cemetery of Abud. All these tombs represent primary inhumation in single and multiple burials.

The size of the cist grave is associated with the age of the deceased. Four main types of cist graves associated with adults, adolescents, children and infants were found. The average adult and adolescent graves range from 2.20-1.90 m long and 70-45 cm wide and 40 cm in depth. The average of child graves range from 50-80 cm long and 50-40 cm wide. While the infant graves range from 110-60 cm long and 50-35 cm wide. The graves were covered with stone slabs. No high differential treatment in the cist graves was observed. The continuity of the burial

type attest to the continuity of the population of Abud during this long period.

Only primary age and sex determination was made, providing yet no reliable data about sexual distinction. Four age groups were identified adults, adolescents, children and infants. The dead were laid on their backs in an extended posture. The hands were flexed on the chest or extended on the pelvis.

Consistent orientation was observed in the cemetery of Abud. All the dead were oriented east-west, with the head to the west and the feet to the east.

More than 70 artefacts were found in association with the graves of Abud. Grave goods were found in 35 burials out of 56 graves, including 15 burials out of 22 burials of phase I and 20 graves out of 34 graves of phase II. The grave goods of the first phase (Photo 5) consists mainly of personal ornaments, including beads, coins, rings, bracelet, necklace. Pottery bowls were found in three graves, a glass vessel in one grave and crosses in two graves. A shoe was found in one burial. A differential treatment may be indicated by the occurrence of a knife in a child burial. The occurrence of a shoe in one burial indicates that the deceased were interred dressed in their clothes. The goods of the second phase consist of personal belongings and ornaments, including beads, coins, bracelets, rings, and earrings. Two burials (No. 16 and 50) were accompanied by two glazed bowls of Crusader/Ayyubid date. A glass vessel was found also in burial 16. The time span of the cemetery ranges from the Crusader/Ayyubid period to the late Ottoman period. The early date is evidenced by the occurrence of several glazed bowls of the Crusader/Ayyubid period in the graves of the first phase. According to ethno-historic sources, the church was abandoned around the turn of this century. Only few graves of the priest family were interred in the cemetery in 1930 and 1960s as well as one of an Intifada martyr, at the end of the 1980s.

Stratum III

This stratum consists of two supporting walls, built up against the northern wall of the present church. The western wall L. 12 in sqs. I and II and L. 308 in sq. III. The western supporting wall L. 12 (Photo 6) is 2.40 m long (E-W), 1.35 m wide and being preserved to a height of 1.60 m. It consists of 5 courses of stones. The wall is filled with small stones, mixed with lime. The eastern supporting wall L. 308 in sq. III is 2.10 m long (E-W), 1.15 m wide, and preserved to a height of 1.65 m. It consists also of 5 courses of stones and is filled with small stones, resembling the technique

of the western supporting wall L. 12. The two supporting walls were overlaid by the relatively modern construction L. 24 of Stratum I and partially by the graves of the second phase of stratum II, and the debris of stratum IV against its northern side.

The masonry of the supporting wall consists of irregular, rough stones, and few ashlar of secondary use, filled with small stones and rubble. It has generally the form of a rectangular buttress. The construction technique resembles that of the rectangular piers built inside the church during the second major building phase of the church in the 11th century. Both supporting walls were built directly on top of the Byzantine mosaic floor, thus, destroying the southern extremities of earlier Byzantine walls. The stratigraphic position of these walls attests to the later date of this construction. It became evident that this was the battered supporting wall of the northern main wall of the church. It has a pure structural function to enforce the high northern wall of the church. In the western part of the northern wall of the present church a small blocked door has been uncovered. The door (Fig. 5) which formerly linked the main entrance of the church with the northern wing is 1.10 m high and 58 cm wide. The jumps, threshold and lintel are built of dressed stones in secondary use. The lintel (Fig. 6) which bears a decoration consisting of a rosette and a chalice has been cracked in the middle and the eastern end of the lintel is missing, indicating that the stones of the door are of secondary use. The wall itself is built of irregular stones, and belonged to the third building phase of the church during the 18th century. Although the foundation of the wall may date to the Byzantine period, it was probably rebuilt during the early Medieval period. Above the level of the door several stones protrude (25-30 cm) from the wall, indicating that it was used primarily as a staircase leading to the roof of the church, which was replaced by the staircase built during the last restoration phase.

Stratum IV

This stratum is represented by a layer of rubble and debris, ranges between 70-80 cm in thickness, and is situated just below the burial layer. This stratum divides into three phases, the later phase consists of a layer (8-15 cm thick) of ash and lime (L. 8 sq. I; L. 213 sq. II; L. 314 sq. III), which cross cut squares I, II and III, concentrated along the northern wall of the church, 6 m long and 1.50 m wide. The plaster layer may date to the second building phase of the church. Below that is a layer of light brown soil full of rubble (L. 7, 17 sq. I; L. 214, 216 sq. II; L. sq. III). This layer represents

the accumulation in this part of the church from the abandonment of this part to the Medieval period. Finds consist mainly of Byzantine pottery shards, with few lamp fragments from the Late Byzantine period. Below that is a thin layer of fine light brown soil (L. 9, 10, 18 sq. I; L. 217, 218 sq. II; L. 319 sq. III), 5-10 cm thick found above the mosaic floor. A considerable amount of Byzantine shards and tesserae were found in this layer, representing accumulations after the abandonment of the Byzantine church. This stratum indicates a considerable time interval of abandonment from the end of the Byzantine period to early Medieval period, predating the rebuilding of the church in the mid of the 11th century.

Stratum V

This stratum represents the first construction phase of the church. It consists of four small rooms, walls and mosaic pavement, forming the north annex of the church. It has a rectangular shape. Stratigraphically, this stratum is divided into two main building phases. Stratum VA and VB. Stratum VA is later and consists of partition walls, and the mosaic pavement. Stratum VB, the earlier, consists of the external wall of the north annex. Four rooms were found in this area.

Architectural Remains

Apart from the Medieval remains represented by the supporting walls L. 12 and L. 308 (see below), the whole northern wing and the foundation of the northern wall of the present church may be attributed to the Byzantine church of the 5th-6th century A.D. The northern wing (Fig. 5, Photo 7) consists of four small rooms, walls, and a mosaic pavement.

Room No. 1

Room No. 1 is to the west. Only a small section (90 cm wide) of this room has been excavated, since the main bulk of this room is located below the main street in front of the church. A small strip of mosaic (90 x 80 cm) was found in the north-east corner of this room. The rest of the mosaic floor is not preserved. Part of the mosaic framework consisting of two rows of mosaic were found adjacent to wall L. 21. The wall L. 20 goes on the line

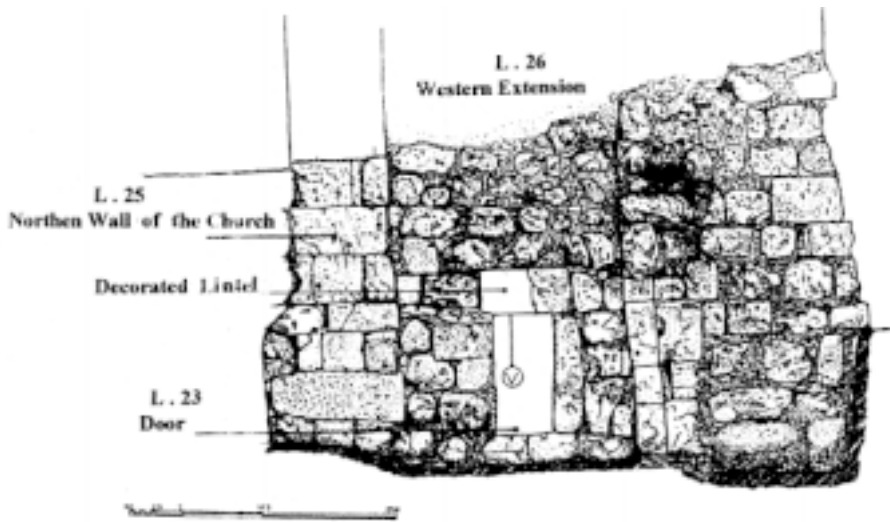


Fig. 5 The western extension of the northern wall of the church.

of the present western wall of the church. The wall was preserved only to the foundation level. A well-dressed threshold, consisting of two stones is still visible, indicating a door opening to the west and linking between Room 1 and Room 2.

Room No. 2

Room No. 2 was excavated in the mid of sq. I, and measures 5 m (N-S) by 2.30 m (E-W). The mosaic floor is well preserved in the northern part of the room, the southern part is partially damaged. The mosaic floor consists mainly of white mosaic with simple decoration using red and black tesserae. A framework of two mosaics is inserted along the walls.

Room No. 3

Room No. 3 was excavated in sqs. I and II. This room measures 2.65 x 2.10 m. The floor of this room is raised ca. 20 cm above the floor level of the western Rooms Nos. 1 and 2. The west supporting wall L. 12 is built on top of the mosaic floor of this room.

Room No. 4

The eastern room is the largest room, measuring 5.40 m by 4.10 m. This room is 20 cm higher than Room 3 to the west. The supporting wall L. 12 is erected on the top of the mosaic floor. A small strip 50 cm wide, and 2.50 m long was not excavated along the northern wall of the church because it lies directly below the stone belt L. 24 of stratum I.

The mosaic floor (Photo 8) of this room is in a good state of preservation. It consists of white and colourful mosaic.

In the middle of this room is a mosaic carpet 2.70 x 2.70 m with geometric patterns. The framework is 14 cm wide, consisting of three rows of white mosaic, two rows of black mosaic, two rows of white mosaic and one row of black mosaic. The geometric pattern inside the framework consists of intersecting semi-circular patterns (60 cm in diameter). The carpet consists of eight rows of semi-circular pattern. Each semi-circular pattern has a framework of three rows of white, black and red mosaic, followed by eight to nine rows of white mosaic.

In the centre is a triangle-shaped design, consisting of 12 red tesserae, with one of white tesserae in the corner and 5 black tesserae, with two black tesserae in vertical position exactly at the centre. The intersecting space is filled with white tesserae.

Stratum VB is the earlier main building phase of the church. It consists of the main wall (L. 4) of the northern wing of the Byzantine church. The direction of this wall is east-west, parallel to the northern wall of the present church. The wall is uncovered for a length of 12.80 m, the western extension of the wall is not explored, because continues to the west below the modern street, indicating that the original-plan of the church enclosed a larger area. There is 5 m distance between this wall and the northern wall of the church. The wall is preserved in average to a height of 1.50 m and ca. 90 cm in thickness. It is partly hewn in the rock and partly built. The preserved part consists of at least 4 courses of large irregular stones and roughly dressed stones, as it appeared from the inside. The upper surface of the wall was overlaid with the cist graves of the first phase. The interstice between the stones was filled in with small stones and earth mud. The wall was coated with plaster (Photo 9), which is preserved in some parts. At the base of the wall is a low bench, 20 cm. wide and 40 cm high, built to cover the bedrock at the foundation level, which is also coated with a layer of grey plaster. Two broken large fragments (90-80 cm) of rounded stones were found on the level of the wall surface, which may have belonged to a press. These two stones are out of place and clearly of second-

ary use. The northern wing is divided by three internal walls, connecting the northern wall L. 4 with the northern wall of the present church.

The northern wall of the atrium L. 26, which is the western part of the northern wall of the present church L. 25 is a critical area for the analysis of the architectural history of the building. As it is illustrated in the drawing of the north face of the western extension of the northern wall of the church (Fig. 5), different phases of this wall may be discerned. Wall 23 represents the lower courses of the northern wall of the church, built of ashlar stones (6 courses). The western extension of this wall is built of irregular stones and few ashlar stones of secondary use. The construction technique, type of stone and mortar, indicate its later date. The foundation stone of the middle wall, as well as the first three courses of western jumps and the door threshold, may date to an earlier phase corresponding with the eastern lower part of the northern wall of the church.

The western wall L. 21 and threshold L. 20 divides Room No.1 partially excavated to the west and Room No. 2 to the east northern part of the wall, 3 m long and 70 cm thick has been preserved to the foundation-level. The foundation course is of irregular stones with earthen mud in the interstice. The wall goes on the line of the present western wall of the church, and connects the church wall with wall L. 4 of the northern wing. To the south it ends with a small pile of stones (30 x 30 cm). The southern part of wall L. 21 is occupied by a threshold (L. 20) and consists of two well-dressed square stones, with holes indicating its function. A protruding stone is visible in the northern face of the church wall, about 1.50 m high, with two holes, indicating the existence of a door, linking Room No. 1 with Room No. 2. The threshold is raised 10 cm above the level of the mosaic floor of Rooms No. 1 and No. 2.

Wall L. 15 divides Room No. 2 and Room No. 3. It is preserved for a stretch of 4.50 m and is 65 cm thick, being preserved to a height of 30 cm above the mosaic floor of Room 2 and 15 cm. above the mosaic floor of Room 3. The wall going north south is parallel to wall L. 21 and 20 to the west. The southern part of the wall has been demolished, presumably during the second building phase of the church. This wall is built again of irregular stones, and coated with a layer of plaster similar to the main northern wall L. 4.

The third wall L. 21 divides between Room No. 3 to the west and Room No. 4 to the east. The direction of the wall is south-north, parallel to wall L. 15 to the west. The southern extension of this wall has been cut to build the supporting wall L. 12, and only 2.70 m of this wall is preserved, being 65 cm thick, and 30 cm in height. The eastern wall L. 20 was not

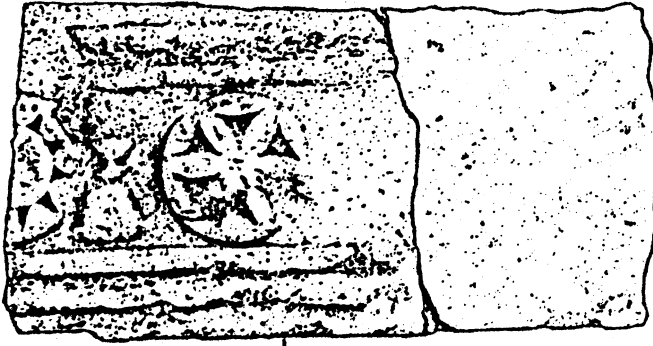


Fig. 6 Decorated lintel.

fully excavated, being preserved to a height of 80 cm. The southern end of the wall was destroyed to build the supporting wall L. 8. Similar to other walls it was built of irregular stones, and coated with a plaster layer.

The general quality of the masonry of the first phase is relatively poor. The walls were constructed from irregularly shaped stones with few ash-lars, with the core filled with small stones and mud, and the interstices between stones filled with plaster. Only the doors were built of well-dressed stones, such as thresholds, jumps, etc. The other characteristic is the lack of symmetry in building walls. The quality of stone is generally poor. It is a chalky limestone, many stones were found severely weathered and cracked. The height of the courses is not homogeneous. The walls must have supported a flat roof, since there is no evidence of a vaulted sub-structure.

Finds

The finds from the northern wing are generally very scanty and poor. They consist mainly of pottery shards, including a few Byzantine lamp fragments. The most outstanding discovery is the mosaic floor of the late Byzantine period, composed of white and colourful mosaic. Although the decoration is very simple, a beautiful carpet 2.70 x 2.70 m composed of geometric patterns was found in the eastern room of the northern wing. A decorated lintel of secondary use was found on the door linking the atrium and the northern wing. The end of the stone is broken off. It is surrounded by a frame and divided into two metopes by a vase. Each metope consists of one rosette. Most of the finds came out of the graves, consisting mainly of personal belongings and ornaments, including bracelets, necklaces, rings, earrings, anklets,

beads, coins, crosses. The occurrence of few glazed bowls as part of the burial offerings may indicate a differential treatment of the dead.

Hamdan Taha
Palestinian Department of Antiquities

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