

Summary Report on the 2012-2013 Seasons

Northeast Insula Project

Hippos Excavations

By Prof. Mark Schuler
Concordia University Saint Paul

Nomenclature

As the work of the Concordia team has spread beyond the Northeast Church to assume a responsibility for a fifty by sixty meter area east of the Roman basilica and north of the *decumanus maximus*, this report begins by subdividing the renamed Northeast Insula Project (NIP) into zones and then labeling identifiable structures within those zones.

The NIP is subdivided by three narrow *cardines* (Cardo 2, 3, and 4 North) as identified in previous reports. These *cardines* provide a convenient way of delineating three excavation zones within the NIP: the Western Zone, the Central Zone, and the Eastern Zone.

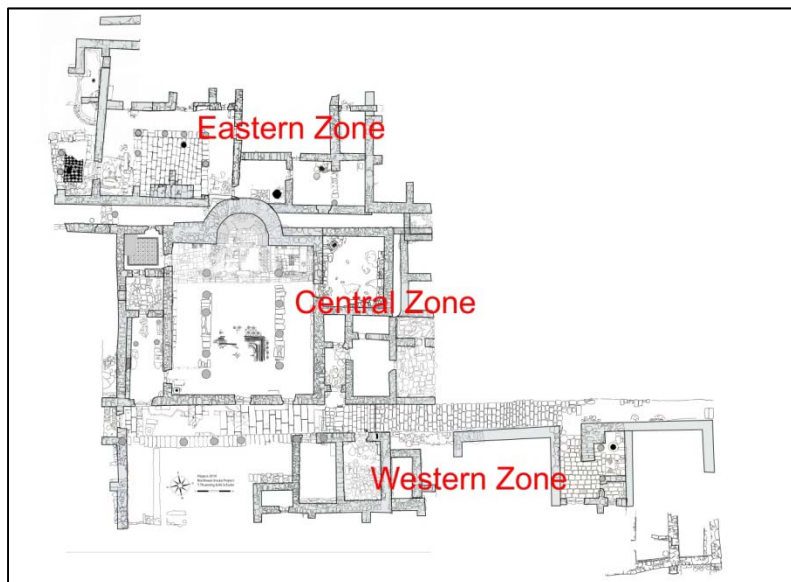


Figure 1. NIP zones

The Eastern Zone is bounded to the east by Cardo 4 North, a small section of which was identified in 2010, and to the west Cardo 3 North. In the Eastern Zone are the peristyle house and what may be a Umayyad structure. The Central Zone is bounded to the east by Cardo 3 North and to the west by Cardo 2 North (*via sacra*). The Northeast Church is the most prominent feature of this zone. The Western Zone is bounded to the east by Cardo 2 North (*via sacra*) and to the west by the Roman basilica. Within this zone seemingly are several buildings that we are labeling with Greek letters from south to north. Buildings Alpha, Beta, and Gamma were partially exposed in previous seasons. The foundation of a

possible Building Delta was previously identified (see 2008 report). The existence of a Building Epsilon is posited due to walls proceeding north from the current excavation area.

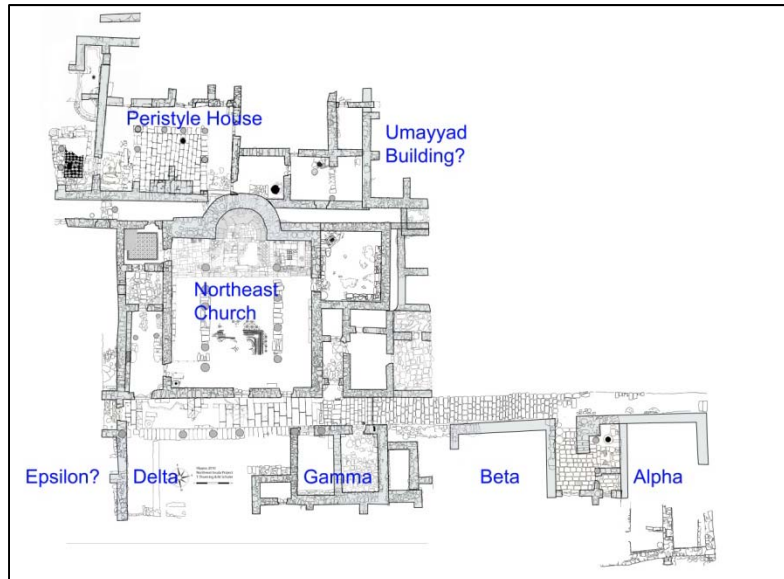


Figure 2. Major structures

Eastern Zone

2012-2013 work in the eastern zone of the NIP focused in two areas: a room directly east of the peristyle court and the southeast corner of the original structure. Additionally minor work was done on the westerly entrance to the peristyle court near the apse of the Northeast Church and the cistern of the peristyle court was documented.

The eastern room

Directly east of the peristyle court and sharing a common southern wall is a room of approximately 8 x 6 that was subdivided by a window wall in a later phase.

The east interior length is 6.94 m; the south interior width is 4.33 m; the west interior wall is 7.45 m; and the north interior dimension is 4.53 m. The south section of the room is 2.03 m wide on the east end and 2.17 m wide on the west end. From the north side of the window wall to the south edge of the shelf is 3.57 at the east end and 3.81 at the west end. The gaps between the three columns are 0.74 m from the east wall to the first column, 0.81 m between the first and second column, and 0.78 m between the second column and the westerly most surviving column.

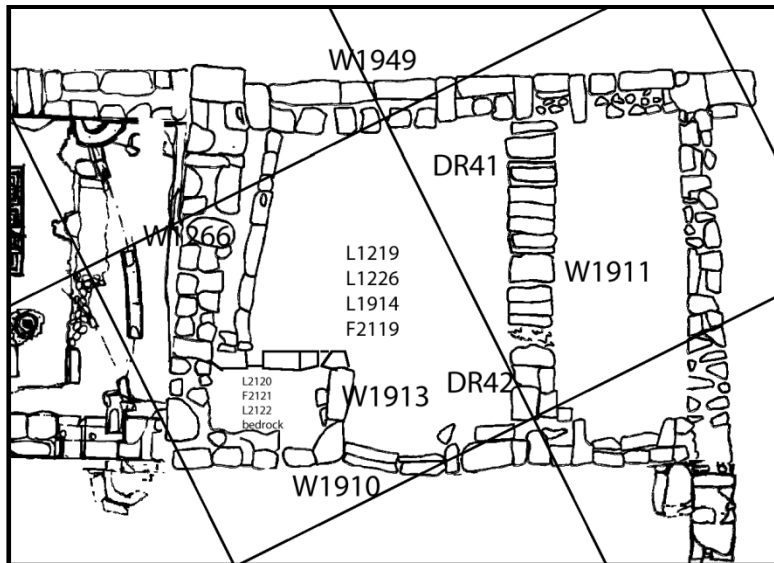


Figure 3. Eastern Room

Window walls have been found at a number of ancient sites, and seem to have served at least a couple different purposes. At Chorazin, where this structure was first discovered, the window wall divided a large multipurpose room from a smaller storage or service area. This same plan was found in three apartments that were all part of a large complex at Tel el-Joukhadar, as well as in two village homes in Qatzrin.¹ A similar design was found in an ancient house at Horvat Kanaf.²

The window wall apparently allowed for light and air to flow easily through both rooms. Archaeologists at Qatzrin speculate that the large room was where the majority of family activity took place, including eating. They also believe that a sleeping loft, reached by a wooden ladder, was located above the smaller room.³ At Capernaum, the smaller room functioned as an animal stable with each window acting as a separate stall to which the animals were tied. On cold nights warmth from the animals spread to the sleeping loft directly above.⁴

The fixture in the northwest corner of the eastern room is 1.98 m on east, 2.09 m on the west, 1.2 on the south, and 1.19 on the north. There is a shelf next to the north wall of the space. The dimensions of the shelf are 3.40 m east to west. Its width varies from 0.67 m on the west to 0.70 m on the east. Its height is 0.65 m on the east and 0.57 m on the west.

A blocked doorway was identified in W1261. Doorway is 0.92 m wide; the west edge of the door is 2.80 m from the west face of W1910. The exterior of the door is to the north.

¹ A. Killebrew, B. Grantham, and S. Fine, 'A "Talmudic" House at Qasrin: On the Use of Domestic Space and Daily Life during the Byzantine Period', *Near Eastern Archaeology*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 2003, pgs. 59-72.

² S. Pfann, 'Village', *Surveys and Excavations at the Nazareth Village Farm*, 2002, pgs. 19-21.

³ A. Killebrew, and S. Fine, 'Qatzrin-Reconstructing Village Life in Talmudic Times', *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 17, no. 3, 1991, pgs. 44-57.

⁴ L. Stager, 'Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 260, pgs. 12-17.

Along with the typical destruction fill, significant quantities of molded plaster were recovered, especially as we approached the floor. One collection of 9 pieces of molded and painted plaster is typical. The two most prominent pieces have a double bevel near the top, followed by a longer inward bevel and one more outward bevel. One smaller piece may be the same double bevel as the top of the two prominent pieces. Other pieces in the collection appear to be painted, some with a dark color (either blue or black) or with a red color.

Likewise, several pieces of painted fresco were recovered from the fill. They seem to portray portions of a disk or medallion with a gold center crossed by red lines (a sun disk?).



Figure 4. Fresco

During the Roman Period, the First Pompeian Style of painting (beginning in the 4th century BCE) introduced colors such as red, yellow, black, green, and purple into wall paintings. These colors continued to be popular for the next several centuries, and well into the Byzantine Period.⁵ Byzantine Art was primarily religious art, most often depicting religious figures, such as Jesus, Mary, or the apostles.⁶ However, figures of animals and birds were also common, especially in Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan. These figures were usually isolated, and set against a geometric background. Scenes of months, seasons, and the sun and moon were also popular in wall paintings.⁷

⁵ Ling, Roger. *Roman Painting*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pgs. 13-25.

⁶ Hutter, Irmgard. *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*. New York: Universe Books, 1971. Pgs. 64-71.

⁷ Beckwith, John. *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Pg. 67.

As we approached the floor, we began to recover large quantities of tesserae. Most tesserae in the fill are individual of the 1cm or slightly larger size and white in color. There are also a good number of smaller tesserae. Occasional clumps of tesserae were recovered. One clump of tesserae indicated a merging of two flows of white tessera. There is a single border of black tesserae. To the border cling a red, yellow, and red tesserae. The colors coordinate with the fresco fragment found in the room.

Portions of a plaster floor (F2119) (or a sublevel to a mosaic floor) survive. However, we never found any tesserae intact in the plaster. The floor survives best next to the northerly shelf and in NE and SE corners. In the middle and toward the west, less of the floor survives. The plaster shows indications of going up the front of the shelf. So, during at least one plastering, the shelf was also plastered. The fixture in the northwest corner of the room sits on the plaster. The window wall is imbedded into the plaster. We did open a 1 x 2 m probe in the northeast corner of the room (L2123), but we shortly reached bedrock. There were almost no remains in the plaster. Elsewhere in the room, no plaster remained on top of the bedrock.

The ceramic assemblages near the floor level were mostly from the sixth and seventh centuries. Nothing distinctly Umayyad was found.

In its final phases, this eastern room of the House of Tyche underwent the typical subdivision and domestication of larger structures in the time of the Byzantine to Umayyad transition. Its original function in the House of Tyche may have been as a reception hall or triclinium. But all evidence of that function, besides the shape of the room, has vanished.

Southeast Corner of the House of Tyche

A square was opened in the southeast corner of the House of Tyche in an attempt to identify the intersection of W1298 and W1915.

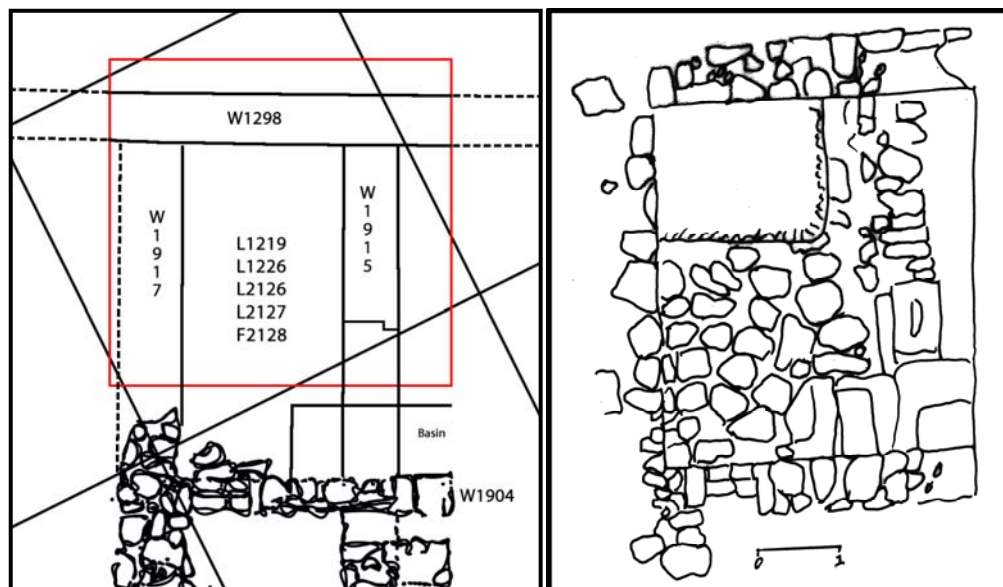


Figure 5. Southeast Corner of the House of Tyche

Initially, we followed the south face of the northern wall (W1917) to a junction with the east wall (W1298). The wall is of poor quality and clearly comes from a later time than the House of Tyche, as it blocks access to the rest of the house. Only the foundation course of the south wall (W1915) of the peristyle house remains. A threshold is in situ in the wall, indicating that there was a door to the south. The threshold is 53 cm wide and begins 2.58 m from W1298. 0.83 m of the threshold is visible. The rest is covered by a plastered basin.

A plastered basin was exposed in the southwest corner of the square overlaying W1915. The basin curves to a flat bottom and continues to the south into the balk. The basin is preserved to a depth of 90 cm next to the wall (W1904). It is 41 cm east to west and more than 65 cm north to south. It is preserved to a height of 26 cm to the north. Two fragments of a threshold are placed, seemingly intentionally, against the north side of the basin. A double headed ax (16.0 x 21.0 x 2.5 cm) missing one of the heads was recovered near the basin along with a large gastropod likely from the Red Sea and indicating importation.



Figure 7. Items from southeast corner of House of Tyche

The entire space is roughly paved with flat basalt pieces, but at an elevation higher than the threshold in W1904. The paving seems to come from the same phase as W1917. These later additions suggest that by the Umayyad period the area consisted of small dwelling that used part of the previous House of Tyche after its southeast corner collapsed.

The ceramic assemblage dated from the 6th century AD to the 8th century. The deposits were heavy, mostly medium sized fragments of cooking vessels and Bet Shean jars with a large quantity of handles, several LRC wares and an ARS rim. Indicative wares included LRC (Hayes) form 10A from late 6 AD - early 7th AD and form 10C from early 7th AD; Late BYZ - UMM casserole; LRC (Hayes) form 3F from 6th AD; oil lamp made of buff material (parallel to Zusman 1978, pp.105, number 424) from 4th AD – 6th AD. We recovered two restorable Bet Shean jars next to the north wall.

A full assessment of the southeast corner of the House of Tyche awaits excavation of areas to the north and south. However, some late usage of the corner as a courtyard could have been combined with the

cubiculum to the west to be a small domestic space in the ruins of the House of Tyche. The corner was apparently used up until the demise of what little remained of the city.

House of Tyche – Miscellaneous clarifications

Several small projects were carried out in parts of the House of Tyche in 2013.

Previously, we had speculated that the blocked doorway at the west end of the south portico of the peristyle court had provided access to the northern rooms of the Northeast Church after its apse had interrupted cordo 3N and intruded into the western wall of the House of Tyche. Upon removing the blockage, we discovered that the original doorway (1.35 m) had been constricted by limestone door jambs to a width of 0.55 m. This smaller doorway is 30 cm above the previous threshold and off center to the north by 20 cm. Outside the doorway, a plaster platform of about 10 cm has been poured between the doorway and the apse, up next to the apse, proving that the doorway (and thus at least part of the House of Tyche) was used by the monastery associated with the Northeast Church. Similar limestone door jambs narrowed both doorways from the *skeuphylakion* into the street and into the chancel. The step down to the plaster slab is 45 cm. The ceramic assemblage from the blockage dates to the 7th and 8th AD.

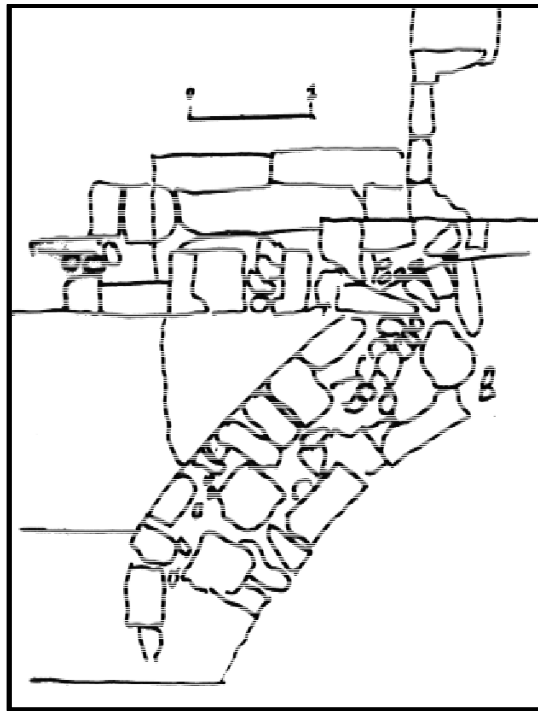


Figure 8. Modified doorway in west wall of the House of Tyche

Some collapse of the north balk of the garden area of the House of Tyche allow some exploration of the small plastered tank/pool previously identified in the balk. First, we cleared the upper width of the tank (140 cm) from east to west to a level of 15 cm., observing the plastered exterior and marble top (12 cm wide) of the tank. We opened a 50 x 50 cm probe in the southeast corner of the tank, to a depth of 70 cm. We found that the interior of the tank and the bottom was sealed with a plaster coating. The first 30

cm of the interior of the probe was baseball sized rock and ceramic shards. From 30 cm to 58 cm the fill was sediment, smaller shards, and smaller rocks. From 58 cm to the bottom, the fill consisted of fine sediment with a small amount of tesserae.

Thirdly, we entered and surveyed the cistern below the peristyle court. Two basalt beams are used, one the east and one on the west, to form the opening and to hold up the paving. We identified a ceramic pipe that brought water from the north to the cistern. The cistern is bell shaped, with at least two layers of grayish plaster. It is about 3.2 m deep with a neck of 34 cm.

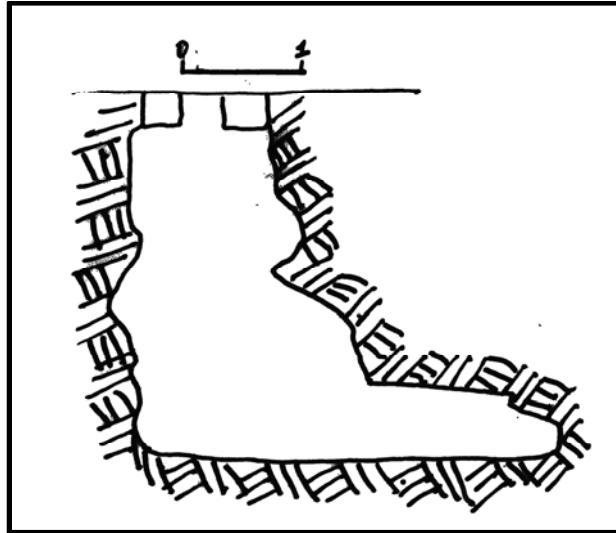


Figure 9. Profile of the cistern under the peristyle court

Conclusion

Work on the House of Tyche in 2012 and 2013 has more fully defined the dimensions of the house and provided glimpses of its original glory, while also pointing to significant modification and reuse of portions of the house in later phases. Exposure of the remaining unexcavated portion of the house in 2015 should be these matters into greater focus.

Western Zone

The Beta building complex has a westerly face of 10.9 meters that is preserved to a height of four to five courses in places. It is located 9.75 m from the gate of the church complex. The Beta building complex is an L-shaped structure that wraps around the northwest corner of the paved plaza.

Between the Alpha and Beta Buildings

The Beta Building is set 2.75 m to the north of the Alpha Building. To access the area, we removed W1286, a floating wall with three courses surviving. It likely comes from some pastoral occupation of the site in more recent times. The wall could have fenced in animals, as did other floating walls on the site.

The gap between the buildings was blocked on the west end by a simple wall thrown up between the buildings after the original construction. Likewise, the gap was blocked on the east end by a small room with a bench/bed set onto the pavers of the plaza. Originally, it was possible to pass between the buildings. There seemed to be the remains of a staircase next to the north wall of the Alpha building, indicated by one surviving basalt beam positioned perpendicular to the wall. The rest of the staircase was robbed out likely to build the blocking wall on the west, as it contained two similar basalt beams. The staircase would have provided a second entrance to the Alpha Building, perhaps from the west. The remains were removed as they were unstable.

We dug a 1.5 x 2.75 m probe in the east end of the gap to a level of cobbles, identified as the base for the stylobate previously seen as running to the north in the alpha building . The stylobate is clearly visible in W2007, but has been robbed out to the north. There is no evidence of the stylobate in situ in south wall (W1945) of Beta Building, although at least two stones of similar shape were used in the wall as well as in the south wall (W2108) of the northeast room. Two feeding troughs were discovered at the level of the cobbles. We conclude that the Beta Building was built after removal of the stylobate for the purpose of getting building stones for constructing the building. We infer that the Beta Building was constructed after the Alpha Building, although some other structure likely stood in the locale previously (see below). The ceramic assemblage was mostly 7th and 8th CE.

The southern room

The southern room of the Beta Building has an interior dimension is about 4.5 x 5 m. The west interior wall is 4.28 m, the east wall is 4.55 m, the north wall is 4.98 m and the south wall is 5.14. 5.62 m from the southwest exterior corner is a seam in the west wall. The seam aligns with the north face of the north wall of the room (W2114). W2114 has a north-facing doorway 87 cm from its east end. The doorway is 95 cm wide and is blocked. The threshold is .65 cm above the floor. There is a 1.20 m doorway to the east that provides access to the paved plaza.

The floor (F2116) of the southern room sits one half meter below the paved plaza and is itself paved with basalt pavers of similar size and orientation. The pavers abut the east, west, and south walls. But the north wall sits on top of the pavers, suggesting that that the space was originally an outdoor plaza. Apparently a roof was added to the room in this later phase. The roof was help up by a double arch. The arch spanned from an inverted base (63 x 64.5 cm) next to the south wall that functioned as a pilaster to a central column base (36 cm diameter) sitting on top of the paved plaza to a y-shaped limestone block on the top of W2114 that aligns with the central column and the southern inverted base. Several fragments of the arch were recovered in the fill, as was a small roof roller. We presume that the arch continued to the north over the northwest room.

In the SW corner of the room sitting on the floor was a 75 x 173 marble panel. It is broken and undecorated on either side. We revealed two limestone column drums and a broken spiral-fluted column in the northwest corner of the room. The fluted column has a square bottom measures 22 x 21 x 6 cm. The square portion has 3 horizontal bands with a total measurement is 10 cm (top band is 3 cm, middle band is 3 cm, and bottom band is 4 cm). The upper portion of the fragment has carved spirals 51 cm long, 16 cm wide at top, and 17 cm at bottom. We speculate that these fragments supported the marble panel and functioned as a table.

Northwest room

The northwest room (4.75 x 5 m) in the Beta Building complex is more poorly constructed and was abutted to the south room perhaps secondarily. The west interior face is 4.77 m; the east interior face is 4.72 m. The north interior face is 4.99 m and the south is 5.04 m. The exterior faces are basalt ashlars with crude and sometimes undefined interior faces.

There was a small doorway (0.93 m) without a door jamb from the southeast corner of the room into a courtyard to the east. The floor is compressed earth. The floor is of packed earth and was identified by the foundation trench for the south wall (W2114). A coin retrieved at floor level was from the reign of Theodosius I (393-395 CE). The meager pottery assemblage was from the 7th and 8th CE.

Northeast room

The northeast room (6 x 2.75 m) is of similar construction. The interior face of the north wall is 6.34 m, of the south wall is 6.08 m of the west wall is 2.81 m and of the east wall is 2.75 m

It has a single doorway (1.11 m, door is 1.22 m) in its southeast corner that gives access to and interior courtyard court yard to the south. The exterior of the door is to the south.

The floor (F2105) is of pressed earth and is at a similar elevation to the floor in the northwest room. Besides a concentration of pottery shards and small bones at the middle of the south wall, no other distinguishing factors identify the room. The ceramic assemblage consists mostly of medium-sized shards of jars and cooking vessels. Indicative wares include: UMM casseroles (parallel to Bet Shean, Bar-Natan 2011, fig 11.17/5 and parallel to Hamat Gader, Ben Arie 1997, plate III 31-34) and UMM grey Bet Shean jars.

A probe was dug in the northeast corner of the room. The probe reached bedrock at a depth of approximately 1 m below the floor. The probe also revealed that the lower three courses of W1244 were of earlier and better construction (ashlars). The lowest course rests on bedrock and runs into the line of W1239. The north section of the Beta Building was constructed on the ruins of a previous structure.

Interior courtyard

Directly south is a crudely paved (F2104) interior court yard. Most pavers are rectangular in basalt. Some are basalt building stones. In the eastern part of the square, some of the floor is plaster/mud over cobbles.

In the center of the courtyard is a column base upon which there was a drum tilted to the north in the destruction fill. The presence of this column suggests that the courtyard may have been partially roofed. The pavers against the north wall are raised about 15 cm and may have functioned as a low bench.

A wall (W1250) separates the courtyard from the paved plaza to the south. There is a doorway in W1250 located 4.98m from the southeast exterior corner of the building. The exterior of the door is to the south. The opening is 1.28 m; the door was 1.38 m wide.

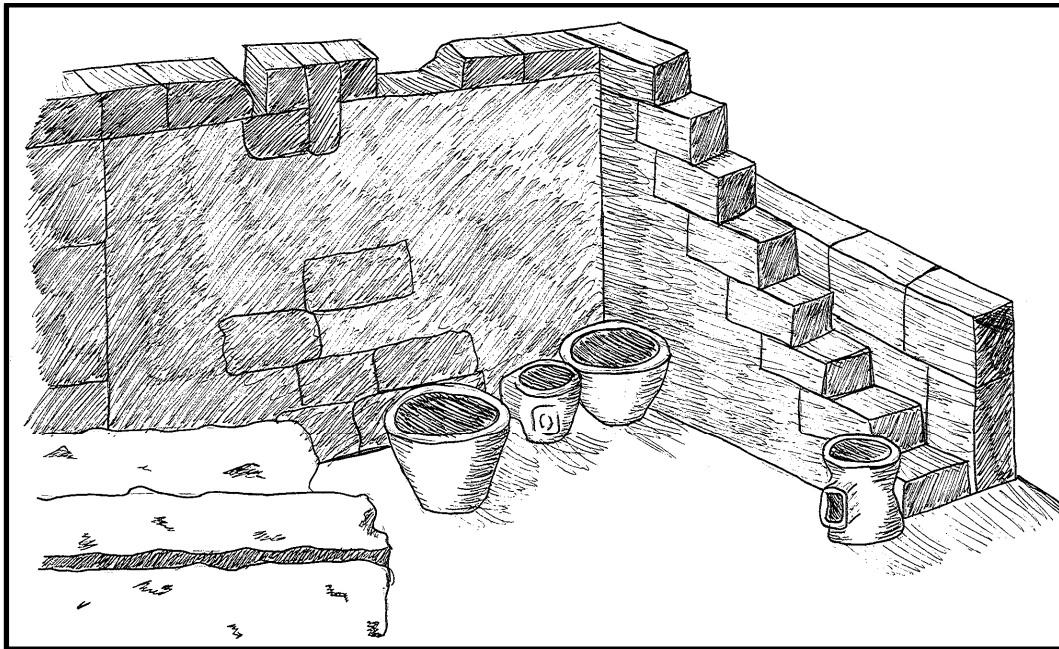


Figure 12. Staircase in the interior courtyard of the Beta Building

In the southeast corner is a makeshift limestone staircase which rises to the east toward W1239. It led to the roof or a second story. Eight stairs remain. The treads are 15-22 cm; the stairs rise 22-24 cm. Elevations of the steps are: 128.766 (Bottom step); 129.041 (Step 2); 129.214 (Step 3); 129.451 (Step 4); 129.636 (Step 5); 129.881 (Step 6); 130.095 (Step 7); 130.272 (Step 8).

Two basalt bowls were found in the southeast corner of the room next to the west wall. Between was a small crude grinder with a handle. All three were sitting on the floor. At the base of the stairs is an hour-glass mill with two rectangular notches on the sides across from each other for handles.

Conclusion

Remarkable in the excavation of the rooms of the Beta Building was the relative paucity of ceramic finds. No restorable vessels were found. The heavy stone bowls were pushed against a wall and doorways were intentionally blocked. A similar situation was discovered a domestic area and street in the western part of Hippos. It seems that the Beta Building was abandoned prior to the earthquake of 748 CE. The westerly structures not only illustrate the extreme poverty of the Umayyad period, but they also mark a trend notable throughout the excavation area of the Project. This quadrant of Hippos, located as close

as it may be to the center of the city, was essentially abandoned well before the earthquake. Such would likely be true of much of the rest of the city. The glories of Antiochia Hippos were in the distant past.

