

Summary Report on the 2015 Season

Northeast Insula Project

Hippos Excavations

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Excavation Plan

An area of approximately 10 x 10 meters inside the original boundaries of the House of Tyche remained unexcavated. The plan for the 2015 season was to expose this area in order to identify its function in its final phase and to determine, in so far as was possible, antecedent usage in the Roman peristyle house (as had been possible in the entrance foyer).

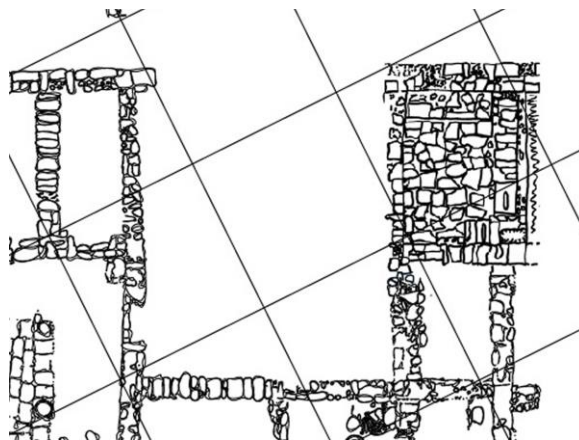


Figure 1: Excavation area for 2015

Spaces

Excavation work in 2015 revealed a large room (4.97 x 8.38 m) southeast of the peristyle court with window walls to the west and to the east.

The western window wall (W1270) was previously exposed. It has a doorway to the west with its exterior to the west. The base for the windows survives. But only two uprights are *in situ* at the south end.

The eastern window wall (W2132) is intact at its north end. The uprights are approximately .77 m tall. The first upright is .61 m from W2161. The upright is .24 m in width. The second upright is .54 m to the south and is .24 m in width. The third upright is .73 m to the south and is .18 m in width. However, after about 3 m, the wall seems to have exploded (earthquake damage?). One of the vertical pieces of the window wall has slid down two courses. Another vertical piece lies horizontal on the current surface of the fill. Most of the middle section of the window wall has been destroyed with even the base course showing some shifting. There is a doorway toward the south end of W2132. The doorway is .97 m wide and it begins 1.34 m from W1917. The bottom course (all that survives) seems to indicate that the

doorway was blocked intentionally in antiquity. The presence of this doorway explains the many limestone doorjambes in the destruction fill.

Next to the western wall of the room (W1288) is a high (.70 m) and wide (.70 m) bench. A light roof roller sits on its surface, possibly having fallen when the roof collapsed.

To the east of W2132, we excavated the southern portion of a second room. The room is 3.19 m from east to west with presumably the same north to south dimension of the central room (8.38 m).

Its southern wall (W1917) was in perilous condition and was mostly disassembled. The wall seems to have blocked the space between the east end of W1288 and the west face W1298 which it abuts.

W1298 is the east boundary of the room. We discovered that the original W1298 (about .70 m wide) has sitting on top of it a later wall (W2143, about .50 m wide) that seems to be the west wall of a much later building set atop the ruins of the house of Tyche. W1298 survives to an elevation of about 132.35. Approximately .70 m of W1243 sits above. About 2.55 m of W1243 is visible. At its south end a wall seems to proceed to the east across the line of the small cardo. There may be parallel walls at the midpoint and at the north end of the exposed section of the wall.

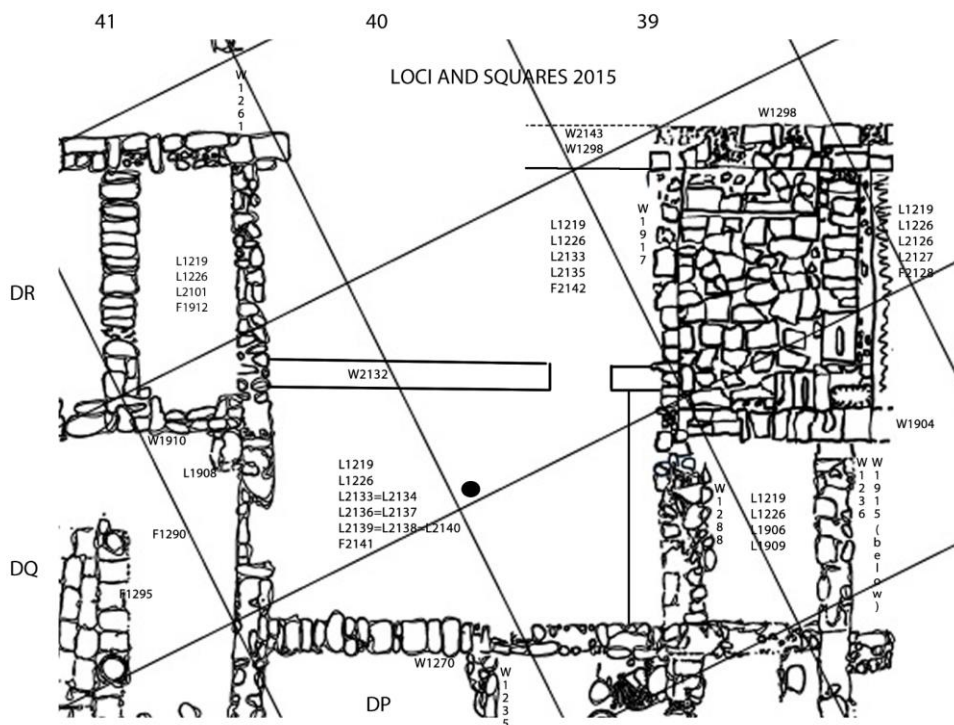


Figure 2: Loci and squares

Floors

The floor of the central room (F2141) is a mud/plaster combination on top of flat stones or cobbles. Some of the plaster floor remains against the western wall (W1270). The survival of the floor is inconsistent, with gaps and holes. In the southeast corner of the room, flat stones form a flagstone surface near the doorway to the eastern space. Some flat stones continue across the southern end near the bench.

The floor of the eastern room is entirely flat stones. The stones abut W1298 and W1917. As they sit at the same level as the threshold to the space, they may be from a second phase

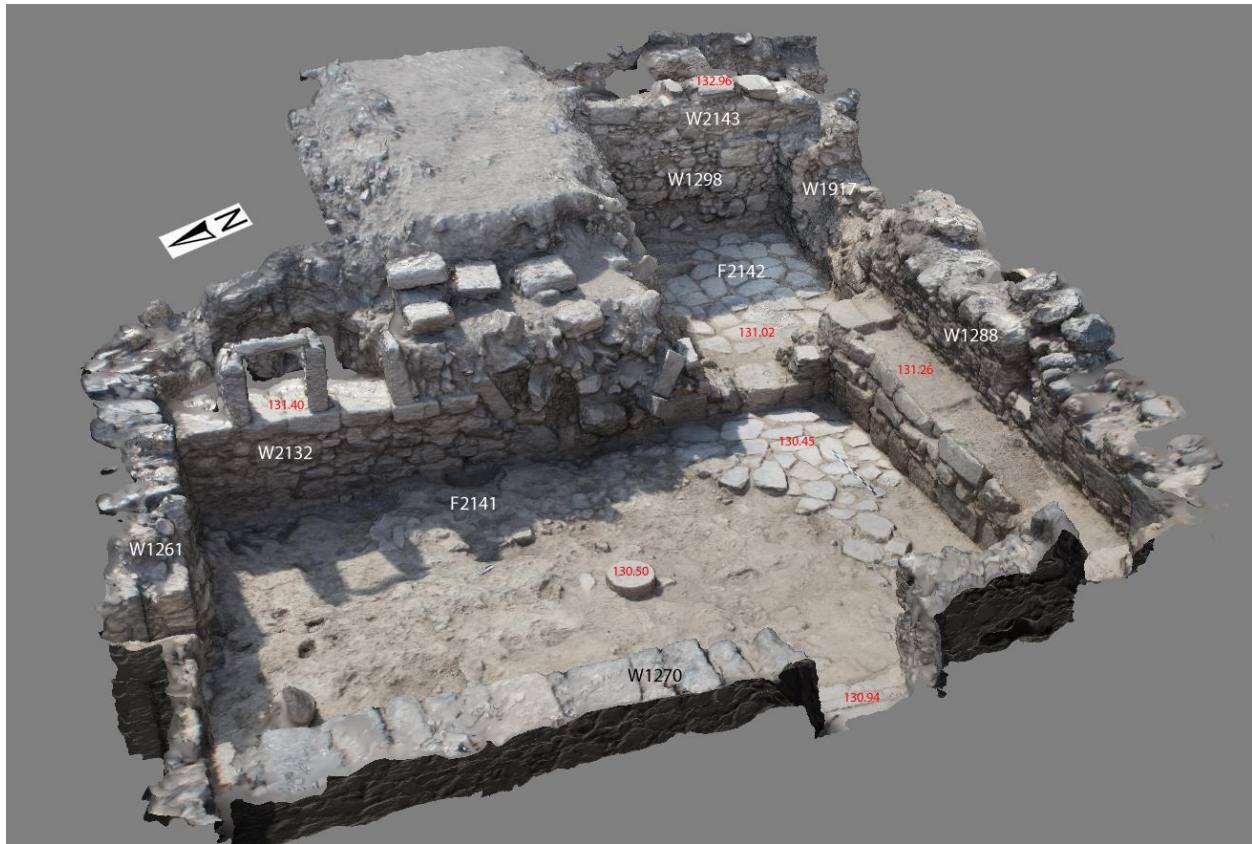


Figure 3: Loci and elevations (3D model)

Roofing

We discovered a column base/drum protruding from the plaster floor of the central room at 130.50. The column in the center of the room is .48 m in diameter. It is 3.87 m from W1261 and 3.78 m from W1288. It is 2.27 m from W2132 and 2.21 m from W1270. Destruction fill suggests that an arch spanned from wall to column to wall. As it would be easier to cover the 2.2+ m gap with branches and mud than a gap of around 3.8 m, we surmised that the arches went from north to south (from W1261 to the column base to W1288). Examination of the walls indicated a crude pilaster in W1261 just to the east of the doorway and there seems to be a notch in W1288 to receive the arch. The pilaster and notch are on a straight line with the column base.

We opened the floor to the south of the column base and found that it was a base (not a drum). A 15 cm shaft protruded above the floor. The upper torus is 6cm, the scotia is 5 cm, and the lower torus is 9 cm. The column base is not from previous construction at the site but was brought to the room from elsewhere as it sits on and is held in place by crude stones (no pedestal or stylobate).

Ceramics and other small finds

A heavy concentration of pottery shards was recovered from the middle portion of the central room near the column base about 15 cm above the floor. Most were Beisan jars (some restorable) and cooking pots. The collection included a restorable Byzantine funnel (larger than the Umayyad funnels found south of the NW church in the wine vat area in previous seasons). Our field reading did not identify any distinctively Umayyad pottery in the collection (a more formal reading is to follow).

An intact ceramic unguentarium (6th century?) was retrieved next to the floor just to the right (east) of the north doorway. It is 20 cm. length.

Close by, two oil lamps were recovered intact from a small crevice next to the north doorway in W1261 on the right side. They were 6 cm in width, 9 cm in length, and 3 cm high. Field reading is Byzantine. One has beads around the filling hole. The other has a herringbone pattern on the shoulder and a round decoration between the nozzle and the fill hole. Further investigation suggests that these are so-called “North Jordan” lamps type, dated (mainly on stylistic criteria) to the late 5th and the 6th centuries AD. Their manufacturing center might have been Beit Ras (Capitolias of the Decapolis) where hundreds of them were found.¹



Figure 4: Byz funnel



Figure 5: Unguentarium



Figure 6: North Jordan lamps

In the eastern room, a deposit of glass in layers was discovered next to W1298 about 1.2 m from W1917 at an elevation of 131.39. The layer was very fragile and shattered. After gentle exposure, it appeared to be a crushed bowl (three sections alternating concave and convex). Fragments were gathered for subsequent analysis.

¹ K. da Costa, “Economic Cycles in the Byzantine Levant: the Evidence from Lamps at Pella in Jordan.” *Levant* 42 (2010): 70-87.

Lastly, in the central room, an anta for an hourglass grinding mill sits just inside the northerly door. It is similar to the two that sit outside the room in the peristyle court.

Speculation on usage



Figure 7: Window walls (circled in red)

Window walls are a common feature of the final phases of the Northeast Insula Project. They are characteristic of larger but varied trends in the Byzantine period that “blurred the separation between private and public domains... Cities were gradually transferred into more complex but lively and developing urban tissue in which various functions were located together in the same area.”² Especially in the House of Tyche they mark the remaking of space for more functional purposes. East of the peristyle, the former triclinium (likely) was so subdivided. The space excavated this year, with its large central room and window walls to the east and west is most notable. Here, we do not see subdivision (at

² Gideon Avni, “From Polis to Madina’ Revisited – Urban Change in Byzantine and early Islamic Palestine,” *JRAS, Series 3*, 21, 3 (2011): 328.

least not yet), but rather reconstruction. The southeast corner of the House of Tyche seems to be separate from this larger central structure with side rooms to the east and west.

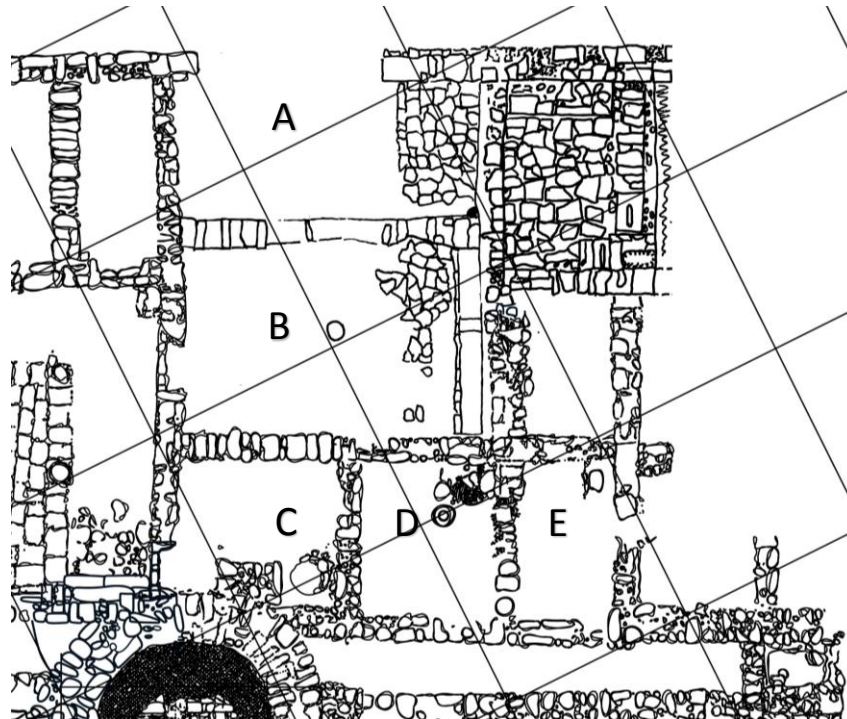


Figure 8: Southern room complex

Window walls are characteristic of domestic construction. Katharina Galor writes:

Most houses excavated in the Galilee and Golan (except for those at Sepphoris) include window walls. These walls, fenestrated about seventy centimeters above the floor at regular intervals for their entire length, are characteristic of the building style in the Hauran and Bashan regions. Window walls are usually located in the rooms immediately adjacent to the courtyard, hereby allowing air and light to enter the rear rooms.³

But this construction seems to be more than just domestic and very different from the multifamily structure at Chorazin and Capernaum. Room B, the largest room, seems to have been an assembly place. Room C has benches on the east and west with doorways to the north and south. Room D has a cistern and was likely not roofed. It has access to the alley as well as access to Room B. It may have been a kitchen (although it lacks an oven). Room E was for storage (amphorae with dipinti were found there). At this point, our ideas are highly speculative, but we do wonder if Room B served as a refectory for the community for which the Northeast Church was its memorial center. Detailed reading of the ceramic finds from Room B as well as complete excavation of Room A may move us beyond speculation.

³ Katharina Galor, "Domestic Architecture in Roman and Byzantine Galilee and Golan," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66:1-2 (2003): 53.