

Northeast Insula Project

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Preliminary Report of the 2016 Season

Introduction

The 2016 season marked the final of fifteen field seasons on the Northeast Insula Project conducted by Concordia University Saint Paul under the direction of Prof. Mark Schuler.

The project area sits north of the Decumanus Maximus and east of the Roman basilica. It is subdivided by three narrow cardines. In its later phases, the northern portions may have been part of an urban monastic complex surrounding a small chapel that venerated an elderly woman.

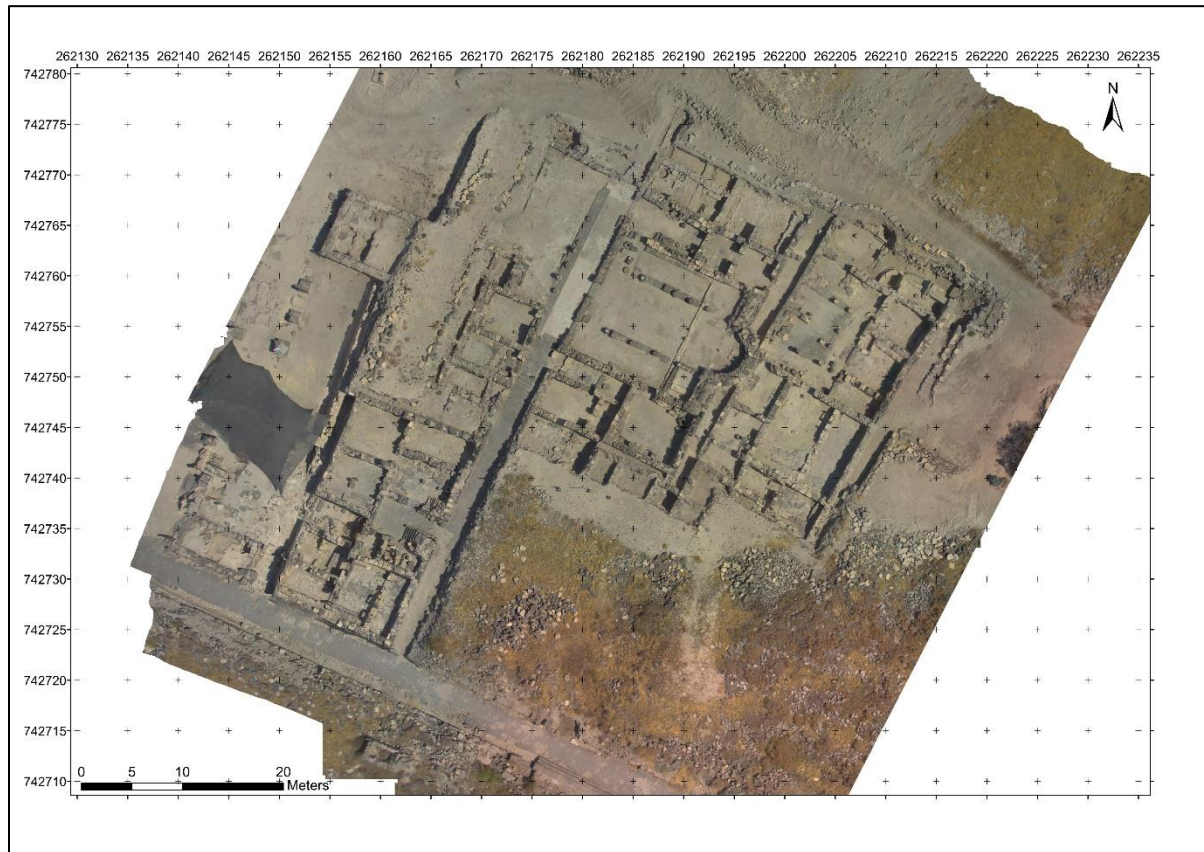


Figure 1: Photogrammetric model courtesy of the University of Haifa

The Eastern Work Zone

During the 2015 season, the team had been working on the southern part of the House of Tyche exposing a structure with an arched central room with window walls to the east and west. During 2016, the team completed excavation of the room east of the easterly window wall.

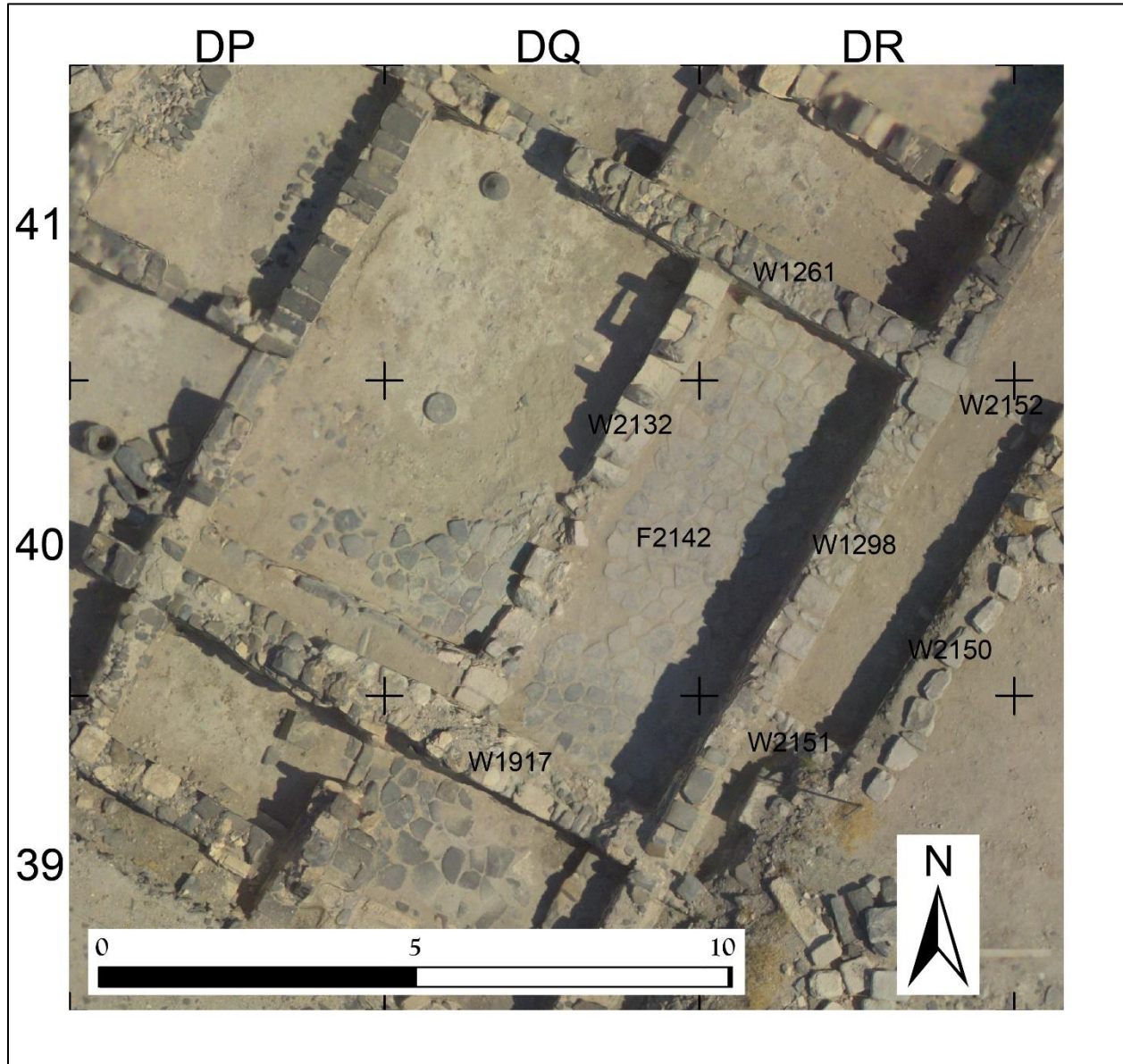


Figure 2: The eastern work zone

The storage room has an interior dimension of roughly 8 x 3.1 m.¹ The west wall is a window wall. Three upright pieces of the windows remain at the north end which stand 20-23 cm tall and have spacing gaps

¹ The interior lengths of the walls are:

W1917 is 3.02 m

W2132 is 7.97 m

W1298 is 8.06 m

of 66, 67, and 62 cm from north to south. The middle section of the wall was severely damaged with only a foundation course remaining. There is a doorway threshold at the south end of the wall yielding access to the storage space.

W1917 to the south is of poor construction. It is a conglomeration of reused stones and architectural items (small column drums, the diameter of one is 56 cm and of another is 40 cm). In the southeast corner, part of W1298 abuts W1917 and part penetrates it. This circumstance is reinforced by the observation that W1298 shows multiple phases of construction/repair, the final of which was the used of the line of the wall by the western wall of a small structure that sat on top of the ruins. The west end of W2151 forms the northwest corner of that late structure. A more detailed description of W1298 will be part of the final report on the 2016 season.

W2161 is the north wall of the structure. It was modified from its earlier use by the blockage of a substantive doorway to the spaces to the north. As this blockage was smooth on both faces, the blockage was functional for the final phase and not part of decommissioning the structure.

The floor of the storage areas is paved with irregular flat stones that fit together loosely. The paving is most consistent and tightly fitting in the center of the room and toward the southwest doorway, reinforcing the idea that the room was used for storage. Large quantities of Beisan jar fragments confirm the hypothesis. An almost complete oil lamp was recovered on the floor near the middle of W2132. It is parallel to a type reported from Bet Shean from 5-6CE and almost early 7CE.²

We also cleared about a meter of the line of Cardo 4N east of W1298. In so doing, we identified the western wall of a building to the east (W2150) along with a small perpendicular wall blocking the cardo between W1298 and W2150 on the line of W1261. Its function is uncertain. (It could also be a step, as appear further to the north in the cardo leading down to the entrance to the porch/garden.)

The Northern Work Zone

There are several indications in the Northeast Church that a building functioning as part of the compound sits immediately to the north. Previously, we noted the blocked passageway in the North Medial Chamber, two doorways in W575 and wall fragments proceeding north (now labelled W2153, W2154, and W583). There are also the remains of a staircase next to the south wall of the North Lateral Chamber that seemed to serve the building to the north, as there was no evidence of a balcony in the church.

We therefore opened a 5 m section paralleling W540. Work further to the north was restricted due to an access driveway along the north edge of the site. We subsequently did cut a trench into the driveway following W2161 to its north end where it formed a corner with W2167 proceeding to the east. Before the close of the season, the trench was refilled, so that the driveway could be restored.

Based on our work during the season and assuming W2167 eventually connects to W575. We posit a Northern Building of two stories with an interior dimension of 7.6 m from north to south and 15 m from east to west on the south widening to approximately 15.75 m on the north (W575 and W2153 skew away from each other slightly). The building is subdivided into two sections by a central wall running

W2161 is 3.20

² Hadad 2002, p.65 Type 25 (n.281).

north to south (W2154) and the westerly section is again subdivided by a wall running east to west (W2156)

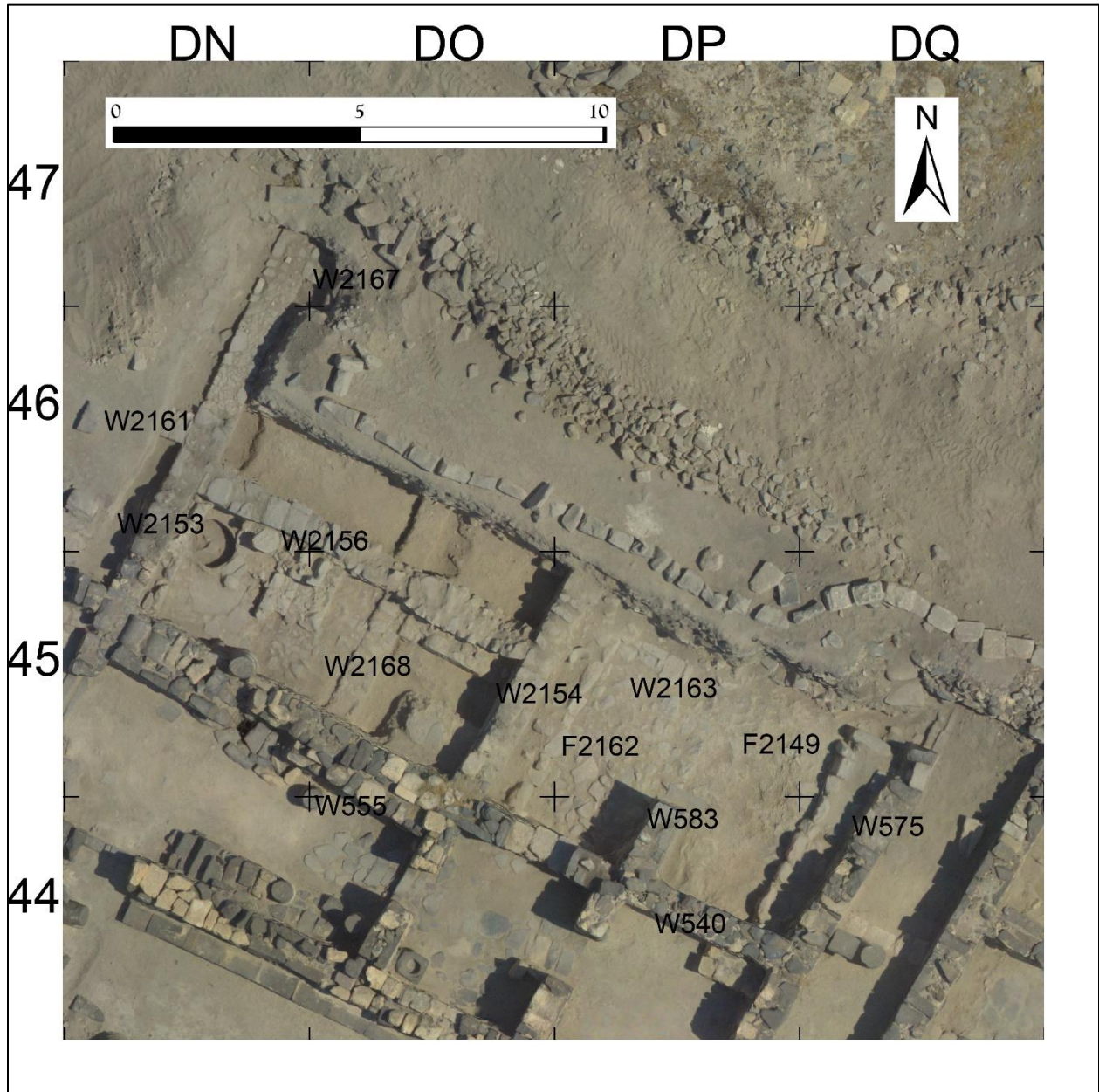


Figure 3: The Northern Work Zone

The Eastern Section

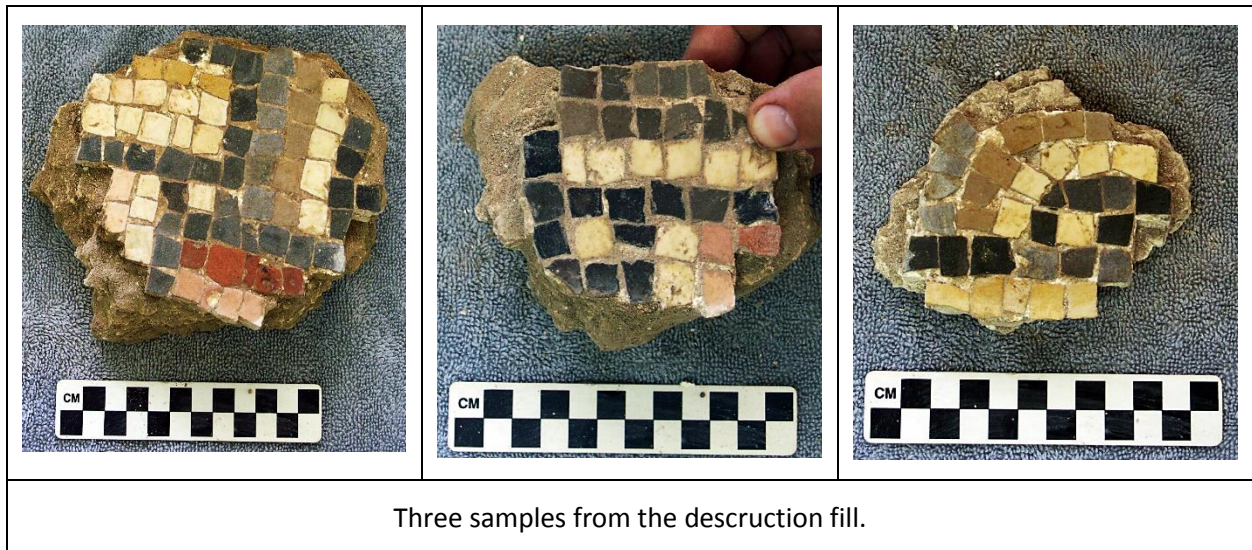
We have exposed all the eastern section, except the northern third. The space is 8.8 m from east to west. 3.1 m west of W575 is a pilaster that protrudes 1.7 m into the room. We presume it is matched by something similar next to the still buried W2167. An arch between the two pilasters would hold up the second story.

On the west side of W575 is a crude bench (75-115 cm deep south to north and approx. 40 cm high) that was installed in a second phase after the southern doorway in W575 was blocked. Most of the floor (F2149) is missing in the eastern section of this space. But near the still open doorway are two bricks (roughly 20x20 cm) remaining from the original flooring (*comparanda* will be provided in the final report on the season). 20 cm from the western line of the arch, the floor rises (F2162) about 10 cm and is paved with irregular flat stones to W2154. A low bench sits next to W2154 (80 cm deep and 34 cm high).

3.8 m north of W540 and parallel to it is the remains of a door threshold (55 x 103 cm) from an earlier construction (W2163). The exterior of the threshold is to the north. Opposite it in W540 is the blocked passageway from the north medial chamber. The threshold is 1.4 m above F2162. There is no evidence of a stone stairway.

Mosaic Fragments

In the destruction fill beginning about 40 cm above the floor we recovered hundreds of individual tesserae, many small clusters, and several dozen fragments that showed evidence of geometric patterns.



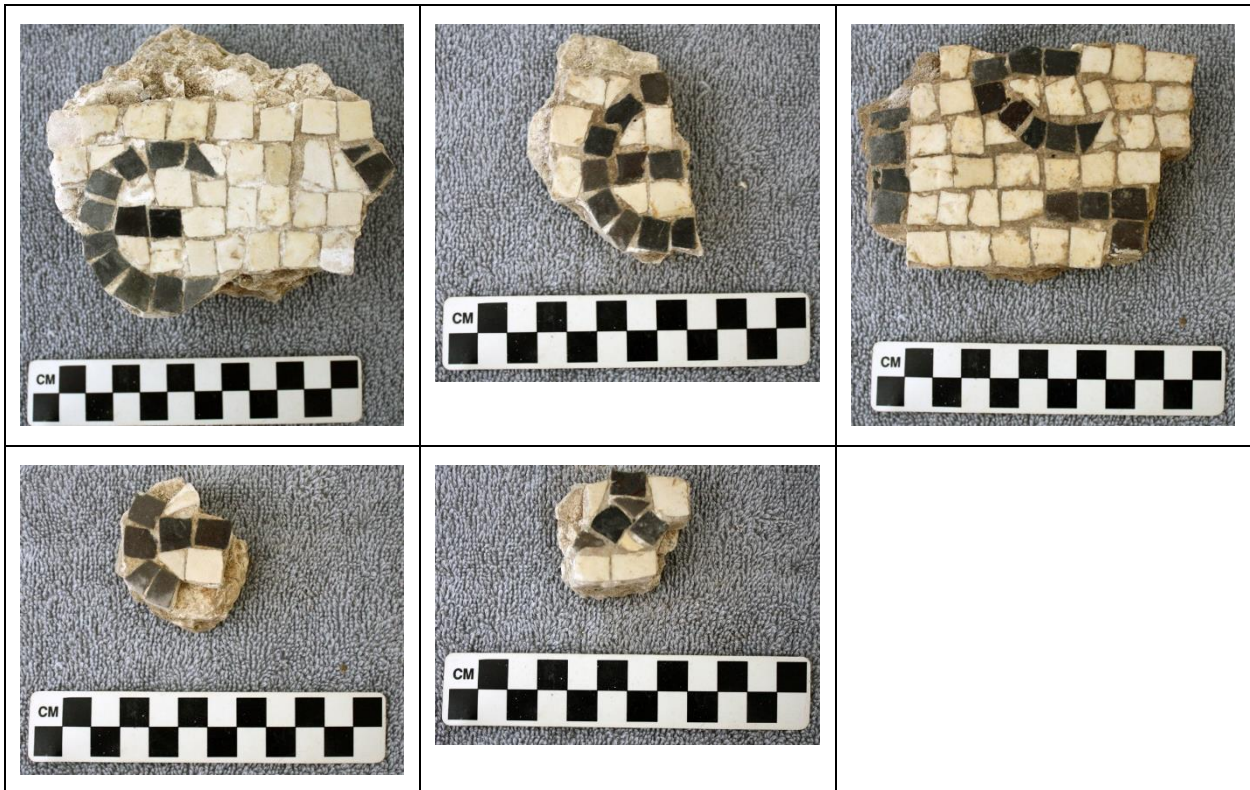
Three samples from the destruction fill.

The top two examples on the right in the figure above are reminiscent of the same guilloche pattern discovered in the first layer of the mosaic floor of the *domus*, an example of which is provided in the figure below. Additional *comparanda* for patterns will be part of the final report on the season.



First layer of the mosaic carpet in the *domus*.

In addition, we found a few fragments that indicate an inscription was part of the mosaic from the second story.



The letters identified include an epsilon followed by a space and then a new word perhaps beginning with a lambda, a theta, an epsilon beginning a line with a tau beginning the next line, a second theta, and the bottom of an omega or the top of an upsilon. Of the letters, our epigrapher, Adam Łajtar, wrote, “Unfortunately the fragments are too small to say something certain about the content of the inscription. What seems important to me is that the letters are of two different heights. If so, we probably are dealing with some abbreviated words. Smaller letters were shifted to mark abbreviations.”³

The Northwest Quadrant

Due to access limitations, we were only able to excavate a 1.5 m swath of the northwest quadrant to the north of W2156. There are no architectural features from the space and access to the quadrant was either from above or through a doorway currently hidden in the unexcavated area.

We postulate that the area was used primarily for storage. The ceramic assemblage included storage jars and cooking pots (5-6 CE), and the notable find of a fully intact small storage jar.⁴



The layer of fill toward the bottom of the wall was particularly rich in larger animal bones, many chopped. Toward the bottom of the wall we reached a layer of soil relatively lacking in small finds and containing some plaster. It was likely the floor.

We excavated below the level of the foundation trench of the wall to bedrock (40-90 cm). Sitting on bedrock under the wall was the foundation trench of an early wall (W2168), 4.3 m east of W2153. It runs under W2156, through the southwest quadrant, and under the north wall of the church building (W540).

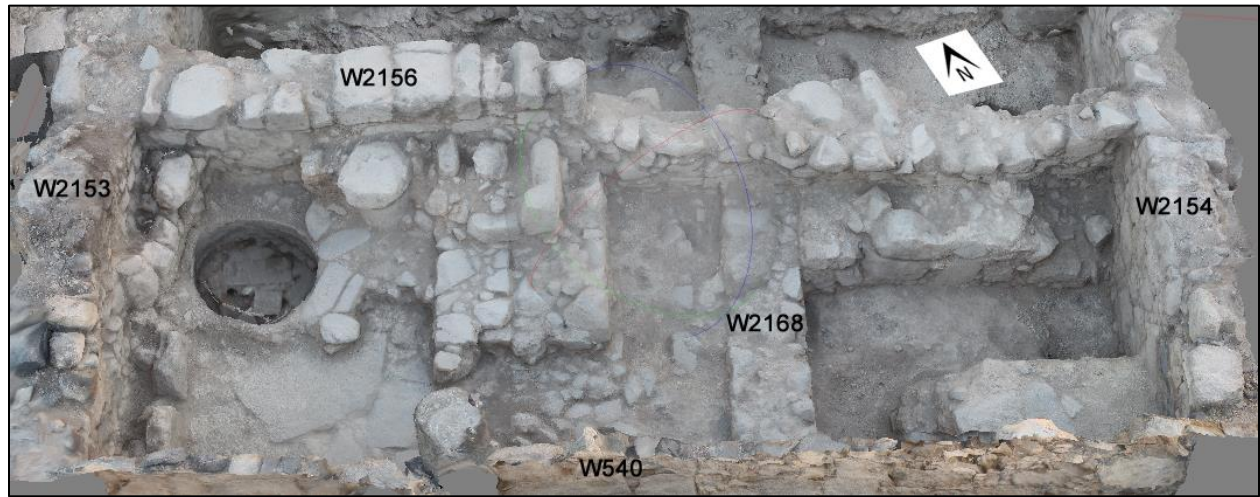
While tracing W2153 to the north, we discovered the top of another wall

perpendicular to and running to the west. This 70 cm wall is 4.1 m from the southwest corner of the Northern Building.

³ Email correspondence 9 July 2016.

⁴ Parallel to Hamat Gader, plate XIII:9 BYZ-UMM, Buff ware.

The Southwest Quadrant



The southwest quadrant likely served as a food preparation area. On the east side of W2153 is a catch basin for water piped down from the roof. Although quite damaged, it seems to have held some water and channeled the excess south along and under W540 to the cistern under it. Next to it is a 90 cm taboun. The floor south of the taboun consists of flat stones. To the east of the taboun is a two-level platform/shelf the upper portion of which is composed of architectural fragments. The upper self is 65 cm deep. The lower section is 170 cm deep.

To the east of this working area, the floor was a dense and hard-packed yellowish layer that overtopped the earlier W2168 and abutted the 60 cm bench on the south side of the eastern portion of W2156. We broke through and sifted that layer recovering two coins (identification and commentary will be included in the final report on the season). We then dug an L-shaped trench to bedrock showing that W1268 and the easterly bench on the southern side of W2156 both sat on bedrock.

Access to this working area was from the North Lateral Chamber.



The doorway begins 60 cm from the corner and is 140 cm wide. This blockage in W540 along with the addition of a course of stones (W555) on the south face of W540 sealed off the Northern Building while allowing continued (domestic?) use of the North Lateral and Medial Chambers after the complex and the *domus* were decommissioned.

The ceramic assemblage included many cooking pots and jars from the 5-7 CE and are consistent with the posited usage of the complex from the fifth to early seventh centuries.

The features of the Northern Building would seem supportive of a larger community complex. The lower floor provided for food preparation and storage. The upper floor was more decorative, although its function cannot be determined.

Other Work

Additional exposure of a Water Feature



While cleaning up the northerly courtyard/garden of the House of Tyche, we exposed a bit more fully a second water feature north of the lower section of the courtyard. The first ledge is 33 cm above the floor and is 16 cm wide. The top of the water feature is 54 cm above the ledge. The feature is 143 cm wide from east to west. The interior measurement is 97 cm. The top ledge is surfaced with reused marble slabs 20-30 cm wide, some of which are decorated with ficus leaves. Inside the feature there is a ledge on the south and west sides of the feature 93 cm below the top ledge, with the bottom of the feature another 19 cm below. We sifted material from the water feature, recovering only small ceramic

fragments. After documentation and photography, we refilled this water feature and the fountain to the south to protect them from further damage.

An Early Entrance to the House of Tyche



After removing a blockage in Cardo 3N between W575 and the House of Tyche to the east, we revealed the top of a blocked doorway in the west wall of the house. The lintel stone (161x52 cm) is *in situ* and has double incising, the first being 30 cm and the inner incising is 5 cm. The depth of each incising is 2.5 cm. The lintel stone is flanked on each side by 60 cm stone with 8 cm incising. The door jambs are 25 cm wide. The doorway is 110 cm. There is an incised stone to the north of the north door jamb. Using the height of the doorway to the courtyard/garden as a comparison, the threshold for this doorway would sit at the approximate level of the black and white paving of the lower (western) covered courtyard. The current steps and drainage channel from the peristyle court are about 50 cm above that level. This dramatic doorway is likely remains of the first phase of the House of Tyche.

Conservation of a connecting doorway



Finally, we note the repair and conservation of the doorway between Cardo 3N and the west wall of the House of Tyche next to the apse of the church. The reconstruction was done by the conservation team onsite and worked to match as closely as possible the photographs of the doorway when it was first exposed. The conservation preserves a key piece of evidence for the hypothesis that the interconnected structures in the Northeast Insula may in their last phase have been an urban monastery.

M. Schuler

6 December 2016