

# Beit Ras/Capitolias: an archaeological project 2014–2016

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**Abstract:** Polish excavations at the site of Beit Ras (ancient Capitolias) in the governorate of Irbid, northern Jordan, investigated an area in the northern part of the ancient town, to the west of the Roman-age theater. Three seasons of fieldwork were conducted, starting in 2014 with a survey using the electric resistivity method to detect ancient structures. The presence of architectural features was noted, dated by surface finds spanning a period from the 1st–2nd through the 12th–13th centuries AD. In the next two seasons, in 2015 and 2016, excavation of three archaeological trenches led to the discovery of the remains of a winery and a section of the city wall, as well as a sequence of floors. This established a chronology of usage from the Roman to the early medieval period and proved that this part of the town was mostly domestic in character, at least during the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. Evidence of destruction of a nearby church was also found, tentatively attributed to a Sassanian raid in AD 614 or soon after.

**Keywords:** Beit Ras, ancient Capitolias, archaeological survey, excavations, winery, city wall, church equipment, Roman to medieval period

Beit Ras (Bayt Rās) is a large village in the Irbid governorate in northern Jordan (part of the Biblical land of Gilead), a few kilometers to the north of Irbid (ancient Arbela) (Jordan archaeological data bases JADIS 2322001 and MEGA 2760). A significant part of Beit Ras overlaps the area of the Roman and Byzantine town of Capitolias, mentioned by Claudius Ptolemaeus in the 2nd century AD as one of the Decapolis towns (Ptol. *Geog.* 5.7.14). It is generally agreed that Capitolias achieved the status of *polis* as late as AD 97/98 (Lenzen 2000: 19), significantly later than other cities of the so-called Decapolis.

The etymology of the name is disputed; it is commonly believed to have been derived from the name of Jupiter Capitolinus. However, since the Semitic name of the settlement was Beit Ras (as today) already in the pre-Roman period, it seems very probable that a simple substitution of “ras” for “caput” may have taken place (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 25; see also Schumacher 1890: 168). Viticulture, olive and grain (wheat, barley, lentils) production, as well as livestock breeding seem to have constituted the base of the town’s economic subsistence (Lenzen 2000: 16). The town was situated on a plateau rising toward the western end

(approximately 614 m above sea level). The extent of the walled town was mapped by Gottlieb Schumacher on his visit in 1885 (Schumacher 1890: 154). It shows a roughly rectangular outline of urban space aligned east–west.

Modern archaeological research began in 1983 and continued through the end of the 1980s. It was conducted by Cherie J. Lenzen within the framework of a Joint Excavation Project of Yarmouk University in Irbid and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (for full references, see Lenzen 2000: Note 4; 2002; 2003: 75, Note 5). The excavation was focused on so-called Area A, situated roughly in the center of the ancient town approximately at mid-length of the *decumanus*, the latter overlaid by a modern road. By then most of ancient

Capitolias had been built up with modern houses. Nevertheless, the archaeological work in question, largely of a salvage nature, identified part of a market place with a series of vaulted shops (hence the designation of the area as “Vaults”), established in the Roman period and active through the early Islamic period. A church (only partly excavated due to modern usage of the area) was added probably in the latter part of the 5th century (Lenzen 1990: 474). The team also carried out a series of probes on the western, most elevated part of the ancient town (“Ras” or “acropolis”), as well as at what appeared to be the eastern extremity of the northern city wall as identified by Schumacher (Lenzen 1990: 474–475). Soon after that, at the latter site, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan unearthed

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and partly reconstructed a Roman-period theater built against the northern slope of the plateau once occupied by the ancient town (Al-Shami 2005). All in all, Lenzen's

project distinguished seven chronological phases from the foundation of Capitolias to the 20th century (Lenzen, Gordon, and McQuitty 1985: 236; Lenzen 2003: 74).

## FIELDWORK IN 2014–2016

In November 2014, a team from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology University of Warsaw undertook field research in an olive grove free of modern structures, situated on the northern slope of the Beit Ras plateau, to the west of the theater and to the northeast of Area A investigated by Lenzen's Joint Expedition [Fig. 1]. Non-invasive research in the first season aimed to detect the presence of ancient structures within the area in question and to examine its functional nature based on local topography and collected surface finds. A grid of six pairs

of squares, each 20 m by 20 m in size, was established, embracing an area of 40 m north–south by 120 m east–west; the pairs were marked as Sq. (=squares) 1-N and 1-S, 2-N and 2-S, 3-N and 3-S, etc., starting from the northwestern corner [Fig. 2]. An electrical resistivity survey coupled with a regular ground survey were carried out in search of archaeological features and artifacts.

The results of the geophysical survey strongly suggested the existence of an east–west wall, running from the Roman theater for some 150 m westwards; its western part

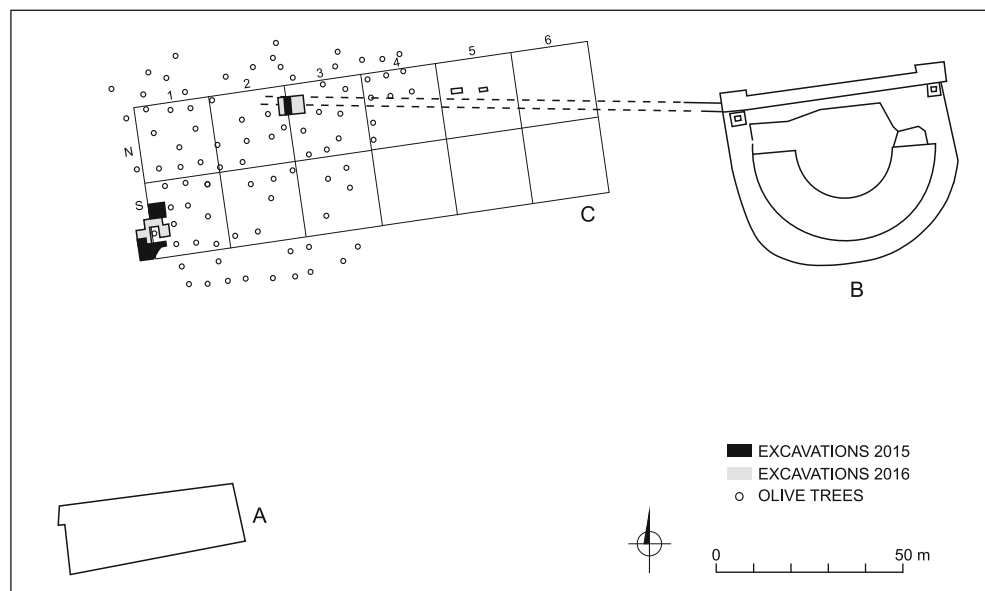


Fig. 1. Trenches excavated by the PCMA project (C) in relation to the Vaults area (A) and the Theater (B) (PCMA Beit Ras Project/R. Bienkowski)

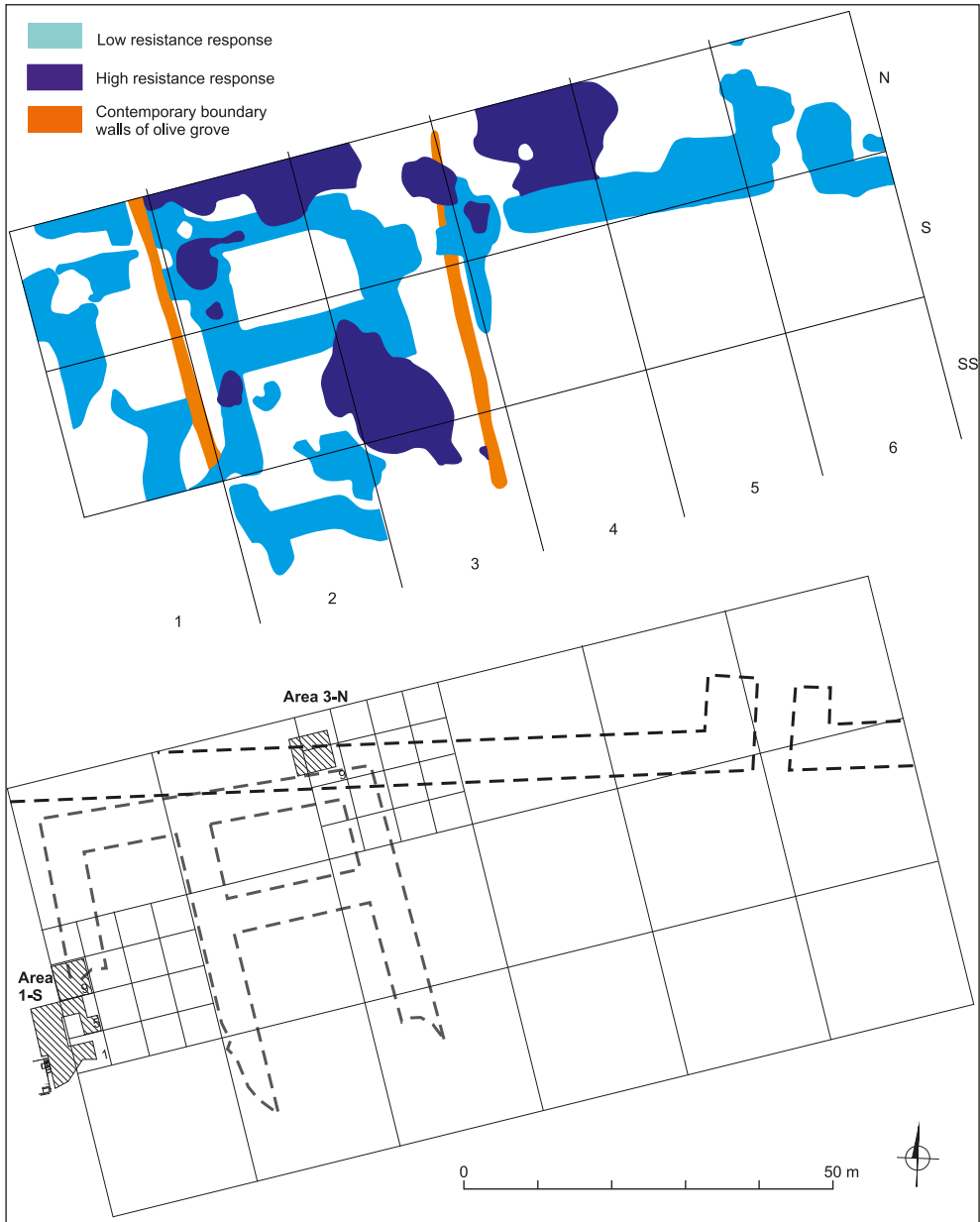


Fig. 2. Sector investigated by the PCMA Project: top, results of the electrical resistivity survey (2014); bottom, extent of trenches excavated in 2015–2016 in relation to the results of the electrical resistivity survey (PCMA Beit Ras Project/interpretation of survey results J. Ordutowski; plan J. Ordutowski [2014] and M. Burdajewicz [2015–2016])

seemed to be superposed by another large structure or structures [see *Fig. 2* top]. A fragment of a north–south wall to the southwest of the investigated area, partly visible above the ground, was identified as “Wall 4” of the Joint Excavation Project of 1985 (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 33, *Fig. 5*). Re-cleaning of the western face of this wall now revealed three phases of relative chronology [*Fig. 3*]: 1) a small rectangular (water collecting?) basin; 2) north–south wall; 3) later east–west wall, its foundation sitting on the edge of the basin, with a threshold visible above. The probable cultural dating sequence is: 1) late Roman, 2) Byzantine, 3) early Islamic.



*Fig. 3. “Wall 4” of the Joint Excavation Project as seen from the west, revealing three phases of relative chronology (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo M. Burdajewicz)*

A roughly circular opening, apparently of a water cistern, was recorded in Square 4-S. It was surrounded by mounds of earth, suggesting that at least the top of the fill had been disturbed rather recently by local treasure hunters. The rubble mixed with earth yielded pieces of the clay body of a domestic oven or perhaps a workshop kiln or furnace. Traces of charcoal and pieces of slag suggested a workshop (glass-making? pot-making?), while the assorted pottery finds gave a date in the Byzantine and Umayyad periods. Other remains of industrial activities from the surveyed area included many small fragments of handmade rings of clay that had been used most probably as “separators” between individual vessels placed in a potter’s kiln for firing [*Fig. 4* top], as well as raw glass chunks and slag pieces with adhering glass “crystals” (Burdajewicz 2017, in this volume). Also collected during the ground survey of the area were mosaic cubes, fragments of marble slabs, roof tiles, and fairly abundant potsherds, dated from the 1st–2nd through the 12th–13th centuries AD, that is, from the Roman, Byzantine, early Islamic and Ayyubid/Mamluk periods [*Fig. 4* center and bottom].

Probes dug in May 2015 verified the results of the geophysical survey and established a chronological phasing for this part of ancient Capitolias. The grid squares of 2014 were renamed “Areas” and subdivided into squares 5 m by 5 m to facilitate mapping of trenches that had to avoid the olive trees from the private grove. Of the three trenches opened at the site one was situated directly to the west of Area 1-S/Squares 1 and 5, the second in Area 1-S/Square 9 and the third in Area 3-N/Square 9 [see *Fig. 2*].





Fig. 4. Finds from Square 4-S: top, fragments of clay rings, probably used as “separators” in a kiln; center, sherds of glazed pottery (including Early Lead Glazed imports from Egypt), 8th–10th century; bottom, sherds of Mamluk painted pottery, 12th century (PCMA Beit Ras Project/ photos J. Młynarczyk)

#### AREA 1-S(W), SQ.1(W)

The first trench, 1-S(W), Sq.1(W) in its main part, was located directly to the west of the southwestern corner of Area 1-S [Fig. 5]; it was opened in order to understand the chronology of the north–south wall designated as W I, and identified as “Wall 4” of the Joint Excavation Project of 1985 (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 33, Fig. 5). The western face of this wall, the lowest course of which rested on bedrock with clear traces of quarrying, was cleaned in 2014 and revealed three phases of relative chronology [see above and Fig. 3]. In 2015, the eastern side of the wall was exposed and its width was determined at 0.65 m. The trench was enlarged to the north and east, assuming an L-shaped outline, covering most of Sq.1(W) and part of Sq.5(W), both of them in Area 1-S, as well as the southwestern corner of Sq.1 in Area 1-S.

The rock-cut foundation of a wall (W V, not strictly perpendicular to W I) is aligned with the east–west axis of the trench. The wall was robbed out entirely with the exception of a few blocks still in place at the west end, leaving a thin layer of earth with pale grey spots (disintegrated limestone? mortar remains?). Exploration of this ghost wall revealed a series of rectilinear cuts, apparently evidence of stone quarrying prior to the construction of the wall.

Floor F I was identified to the east of W I (between W I and W V) [Fig. 6 background]. It consisted of small irregular stones set in pale brown earth with some lime mortar and some larger stone slabs. Upon this floor, there was a layer up to 0.50 m thick, particularly rich in pottery. Most of the potsherds represented “Beisan” type jars (that is, jars of the Palestinian “baggy” shape with linear decoration



Fig. 5. Trench in Areas 1-S and 1-S(W). Key: light grey – floors; hatched – mosaic floor of the winery (PCMA Beit Ras Project/drawing M. Drzewiecki [2015], drawing and digitizing M. Burdajewicz [2015–2016])

painted in white against a dark grey, grey-brown or orange-brown surface); a few of the jars had circular holes drilled through their shoulders, probably in order to ensure safe wine fermentation [Fig. 7]. One should bear in mind a number of mentions of wine production and the wine trade at Beit Ras in the 6th–7th centuries and probably later (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 35 and notes 61, 62). The shape and decoration of the wine jars discovered on the floor were typical of the 7th century rather than late 7th-to-8th centuries (for a closely comparable 7th-century type of wine jar from Susita/Hippos on the eastern coast of the Sea of Galilee, see Młynarczyk 2013: 480–481 and 484–485, Figs 15–32). The Byzantine date of this deposit of wine jars is confirmed by single examples of fine wares like the rim of a Jerash(?)

dish/bowl (Inv. 002.6) imitating an LRC ware dish, form Hayes 10C (Hayes 1972: 343–346, Fig. 71:13) of the early and mid-7th century AD, and the rim of an ARSW bowl/dish (Inv. 003.1), form Hayes 104C (Hayes 1972: Fig. 30:23), dated to about AD 550–625 (for the pottery from that trench, see Młynarczyk in press).

A still later floor or rather rough walking level, which would be designated as F “0”, is detectable directly upon the layer containing wine jar sherds. It seemed to be marked by some blocks laid flat, possibly tumbled from the wall W I. The topsoil above them yielded very mixed ceramic material, from a fragment of a jug in Eastern Sigillata A ware of not later than 1st century AD date to some pieces of glazed (Islamic) pottery. Thus, the dating of the presumed late walking



Fig. 6. Two successive floor levels: F I (background) and F II (foreground), W I to the right, view facing south (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo J. Młynarczyk)



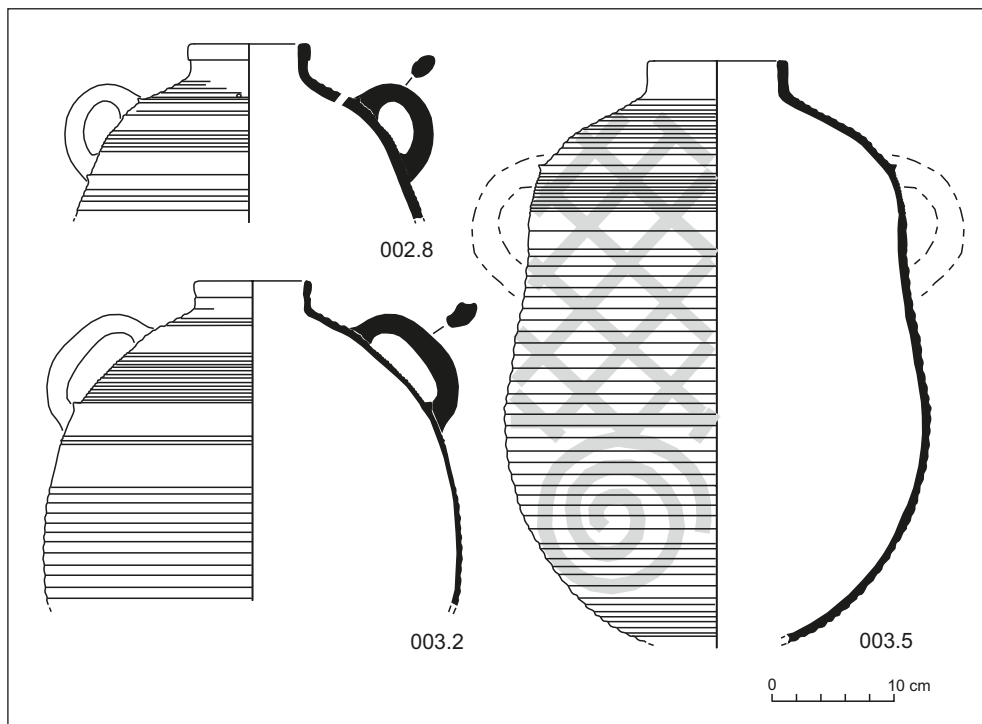


Fig. 7. Wine jars (fragments) of the “Beisan” type from the deposit above floor F I; 7th century (PCMA Beit Ras Project/drawing M. Burdajewicz)



Fig. 8. Terracotta lamps: left and center, fragments from the deposit under F I; right, found on F I; 6th century AD (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photos J. Młynarczyk)

level remains uncertain. Moreover, the chronology of the structures discovered to the east of W I remains obscure. Under the debris accumulated against the eastern face of W I (Loc. 001) were two additional features: W VI described provisionally as a “pillar” buttressing W I, and W VII which looks like a blockage [see *Fig. 6* background right]. However, since this spot could not be explored further to the south or east, it is not clear whether there was another wall running east–west to which the blockage could have belonged. All three vertical elements (W I, W VI, W VII) rested on the level of floor F I, which means that they were more recent than the floor in question.

Finds from the layer below floor F I date its construction fairly closely to not later than the 6th century AD. These included, apart from potsherds, Late Roman (4th/5th century?) bronze coins (BR 2015/19/5, 6 and 7), as well as five fragments of terracotta oil lamps [see *Fig. 8* left and center], all of them pertaining to the same “North Jordan type” dated to the 5th-to-6th century (da Costa 2010: 75–76 and *Fig. 15*); another lamp of the same type (BR 2015/19/1) was found upon the floor F I [*Fig. 8* right].

An earlier floor, F II [*Fig. 6* foreground], of tamped earth and overlying a thin layer of soil directly on bedrock, was discovered about 0.50 m below F I. Potsherds from under F II were few, but they were notably accompanied by a bronze Roman coin (BR 2015/19/8), probably from the mid-3rd century AD. It is possible then that F II may have been constructed not later than the 4th century AD; it was connected probably with an east–west wall W V.

The northern edge of the robbed-out W V was extended as a walking level or

floor of rather poor quality (F III), of whitish earth (mortar or eroded limestone?), further to the north in Sq.5(W). It is limited on the west by the remains of a north–south wall (W VIII) that is stratigraphically unrelated to W I. A concentration of rubble (Loc. 003 in Area 1-S, Sq.1) with a small trough for domestic animals(?) carved from a limestone block [*Fig. 9*] seems to be part of the same occupation phase. The removal of F III in Sq.5(W) yielded two fragments of Islamic glazed pottery of presumably Fatimid and Ayyubid date, that is, of the 10th/11th through the 13th century, unlike the fill of the W V trench which contained late Byzantine and Umayyad potsherds. The presence of glazed pottery confirmed the results of the Joint Excavation Project (1985), which had found a deposit of 11th century pottery in the nearby Cave A4 (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 44); it may indicate some kind of domestic activity taking place in the area in the medieval period.

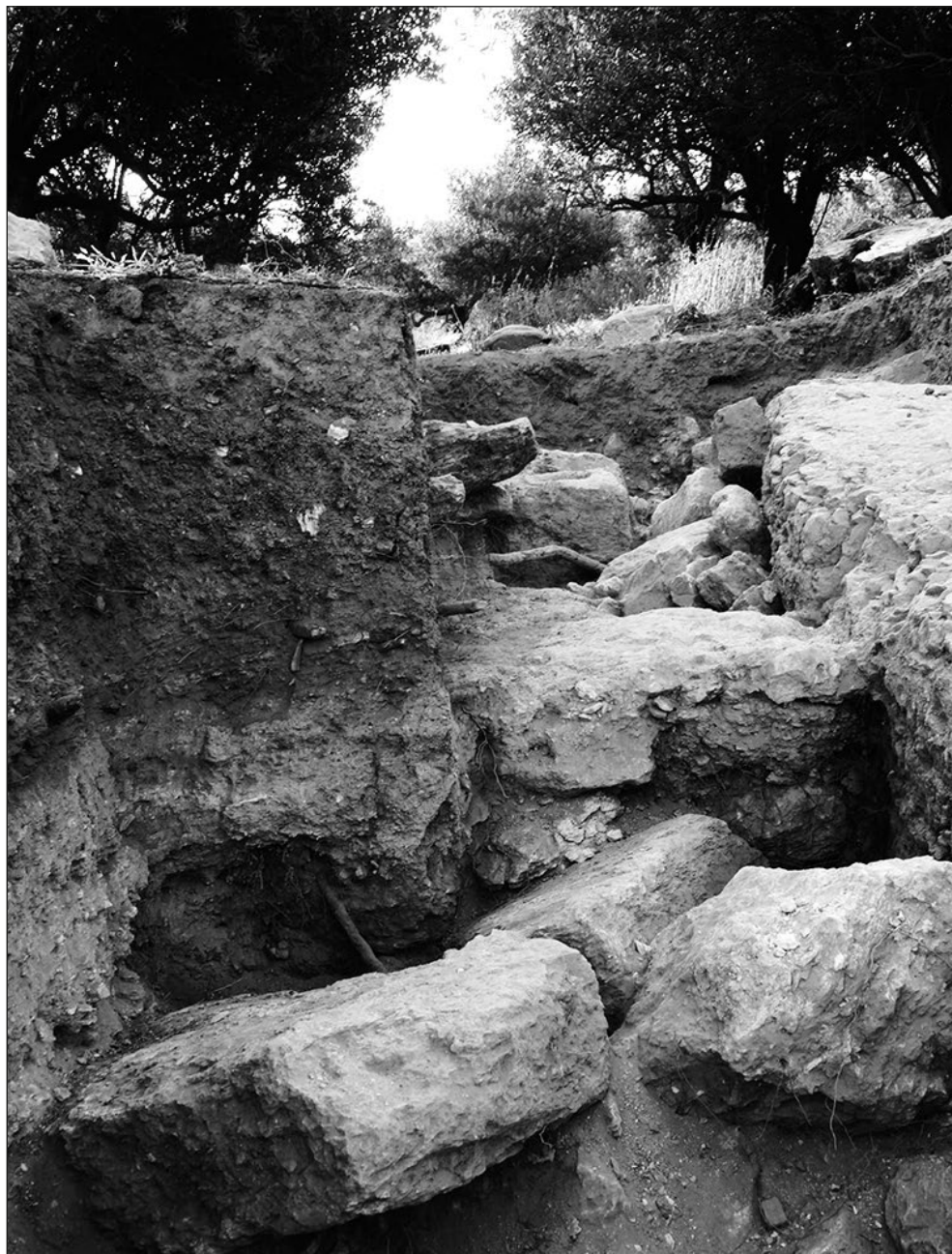
F III rested in part upon quake-related debris of mostly regular limestone blocks tumbled in a northerly direction, doubtlessly from W V [*Fig. 10*]. The blocks lay on a compacted earthen floor F IV, approximately 0.65 m below F III. The ceramic material sealed below F IV does not seem to be contaminated and pertains to the late Byzantine to Umayyad period. It is to be assumed, therefore, that the earthquake evidenced by the collapsed blocks was that of AD 749.

An earlier floor (F V) in Sq.5(W) lay about 0.52 m below F IV. It was a layer of dark orange-brown soil with some ashes, small pieces of burnt limestone and remains of a destroyed clay *taboun* (domestic oven). Two architectural elements were



*Fig. 9. Late habitation level (corresponding to F III) on the northern side of W V, view facing west (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo M. Burdajewicz)*





*Fig. 10. Blocks tumbled from wall W V, with part of floor F III above, view facing east (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo J. Młynarczyk)*

placed horizontally, apparently marking the walking level [Fig. 11 left]. One was a fragmentary shaft of a small limestone column, the other part of a marble colonnette (BR 2015/19/20), doubtlessly from a church chancel [Fig. 11 right], of a type common in the 6th to 7th centuries (for the use of identical colonnettes, see a lateral chancel dated to the 6th/7th century in the Northwest Church in Susita/Hippos of the Decapolis, Młynarczyk and Burdajewicz 2013: 207, Figs 279a–279b). The presence of these elements in the purely domestic area, out of their original context, may be due to the destruction of a nearby church, in all likelihood the one found in

front of the “Vaults” on the northern edge of the plateau above our site (Lenzen 1995: 330; 1990: 474). This destruction may have occurred during the Sassanian invasion of Palestine, in AD 614 or soon after. A Byzantine *foliis* of the 6th (or early 7th?) century (BR 2015/19/4), found in the layer directly above F V, confirms this date. A north–south wall (W VIII) also rested on F V; its somewhat sloppy eastern face (about 1.20 m high), consisting of three courses of blocks, gives it the appearance of a retaining wall.

The earliest floor, which was about 0.20 m below F V, was reached to the north of W V. This is a very hard and

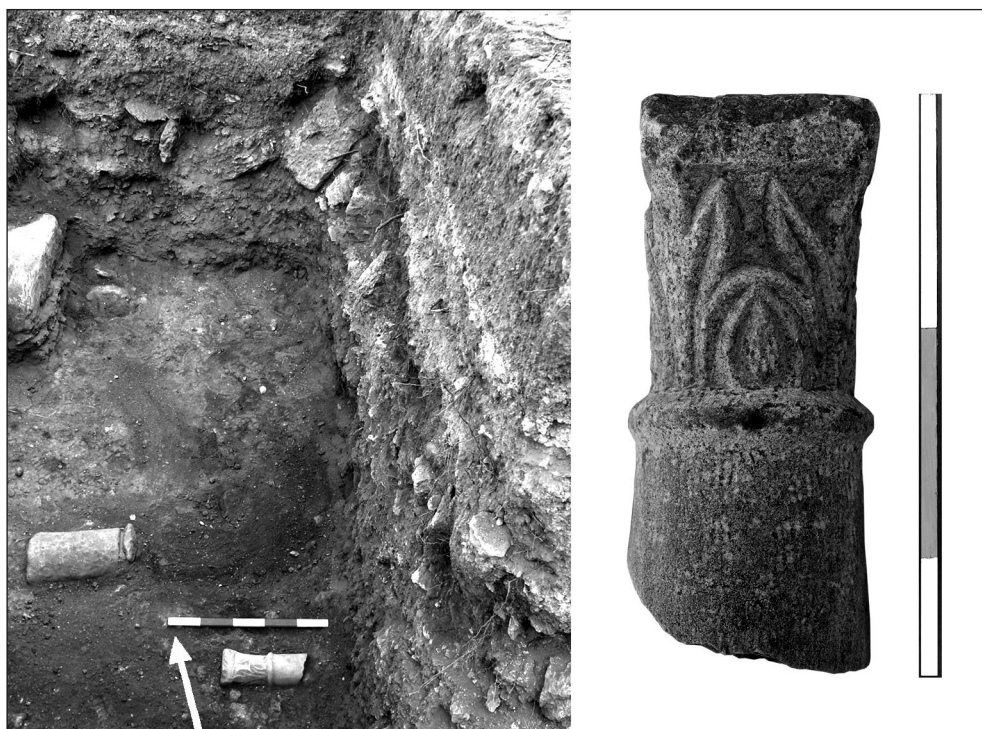


Fig. 11. Elements of architectural decoration from a church: left, as found on F V, view facing north; right, fragmentary marble colonnette (BR 2015/19/20), probably from a church chancel (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photos M. Burdajewicz)



smooth earthen floor with large patches of lime mortar, directly overlying the bedrock. To the east, it borders on W IX, a well fitted row of ashlar just 0.30–0.32 m wide, set directly on bedrock [Fig. 12]. It frames a shallow basin (Loc. 004) paved with a plain mosaic made of big cubes (“industrial” mosaic type). In 2015, only the southwestern corner was uncovered, lined inside with white plaster of excellent quality [Fig. 13]. To judge by the preserved height of the plaster, W IX had at least two rows of ashlar. The plaster extends also up to the vertical rock-cut surface, approximately 1.30 m high, which also served as a foundation for W V. Neither the size nor the nature of

the basin could be determined during that season; the corner explored in 2015 was found filled with extremely compacted, stone-hard pure clay sediment. It seemed obvious that the basin pertained to the same architectural phase as F VI, both attributed to the Byzantine period (6th century?), probably contemporary with F I on the upper “terrace” (south of W V).

#### AREA 1-S, SQ. 9

A second trench [see Figs 2, 5] was opened in Area 1-S, Sq. 9, a short distance (about 6 m) to the north of the first. The rock-cut foundation of an east–west wall (W II) was found running parallel to the northern edge of the trench [see Fig. 14].

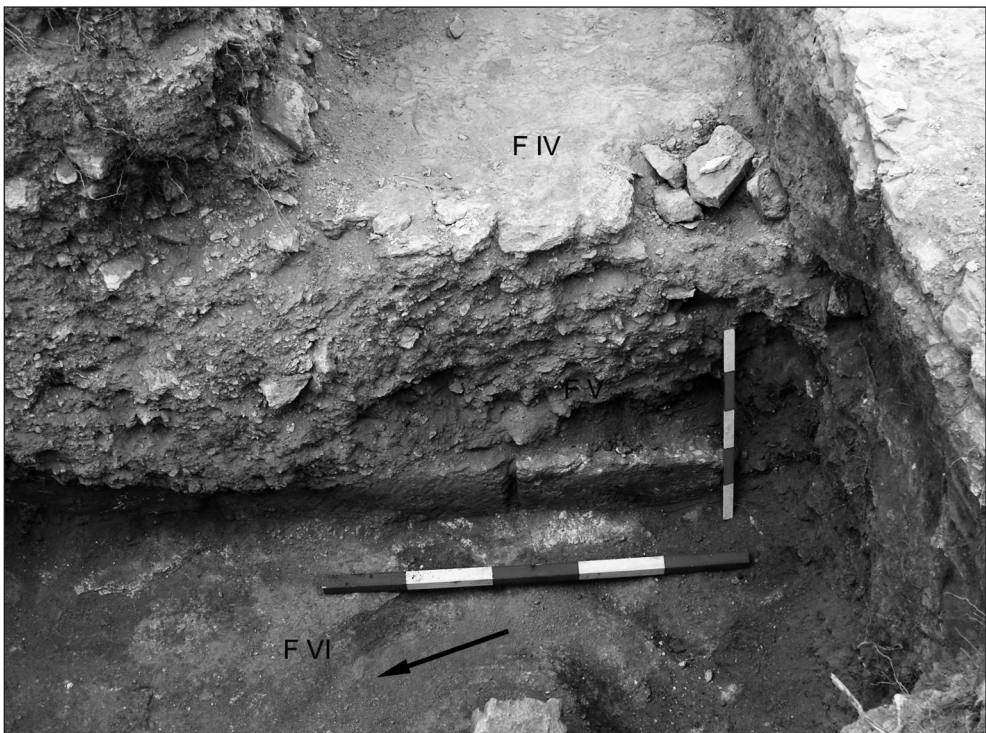


Fig. 12. Floor F VI and the western frame of a basin (Loc. 004) with floors F V and F IV sealing it; view facing east (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo J. Młynarczyk)

It resembled closely the rock foundation of W V, which lay some 12 m away to the south. The two walls (W II and W V) were not only parallel, but also of the same width (about 1.15 m), both standing on bedrock that bore traces of stone quarrying carried out prior to their construction. Some of the ashlar blocks from W II were preserved at the western end where it intersected another wall (W III), also built on a rock-cut foundation and running north.

The space between W II and W III in the northeastern part of the trench was found filled with ashlars tumbled from the wall(s). The collected pottery is evidence

of earthquake destruction in AD 749, even if this unsealed debris contained some intrusive material of a later (Abbasid) period. The lack of a floor above this deposit proves that habitation ceased in this particular area after the earthquake. The rubble was left in place without ascertaining the floor on which it rested.

Continuing the line of W III on the southern side of W II was another north–south wall. W IV was only 0.35 m wide, and of most careless structure, more like a fence than a wall. It stood on a floor of compacted silty earth (F IX) which directly overlay the bedrock and must have been contemporary

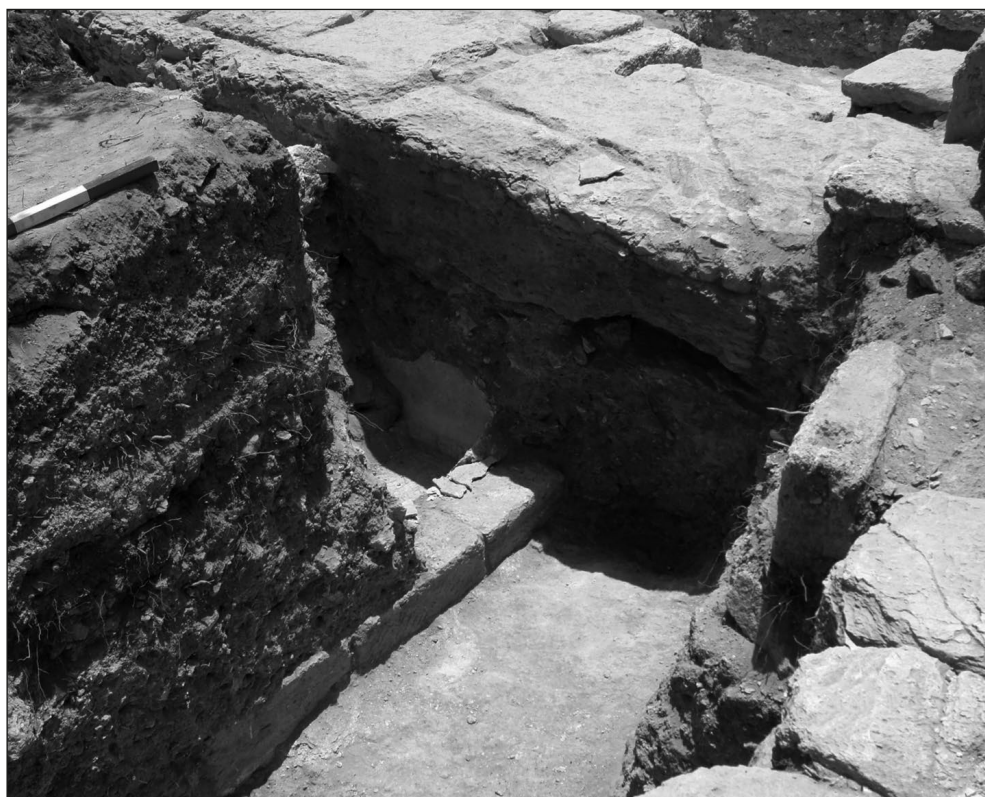


Fig. 13. Southwestern corner of basin Loc. 004, as viewed against the rocky terrace of W V, facing southeast (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo J. Młynarczyk)



Fig. 14. Trench I-S, Sq. 9, with W II in the background, W IV to the left and stone casing of the cistern (Loc. 006) in the foreground, facing northwest (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo J. Młynarczyk)



Fig. 15. Cistern casing (Loc. 006) with well-head about 0.70 m above the original floor level (F IX); view facing southeast (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo M. Drzewiecki)



with W II. However, no sealed layers were found in this part of the trench; even the trench sections did not reveal any definite levels. The prevailing ceramic material from the trench dated from the late Byzantine and early Islamic (Umayyad) period (6th/7th–8th centuries AD), although the presence of some Abbasid-period potsherds should be noted as well.

In the middle of the southern edge of the trench, a heap of both dressed blocks and irregular stones [*Fig. 14* foreground] was initially interpreted as a would-be part of a dismantled well; however, it soon became evident that it was a makeshift boarding of a water cistern (rather than a well). Its original opening was cut into bedrock, most probably during the first habitation period, when W II with accompanying F IX were constructed. This water installation was then reused only after the place had been abandoned, most probably due to the earthquake of AD 749. Not only was that later-period well-head placed as high as approximately 0.70 m above F IX without any clear floors in between [*Fig. 15*], but also the boarding of the cistern was of extremely poor construction. The well-head frame, its opening about 0.30 m in diameter, rested simply on top of what appeared to be the most carelessly made “chimney”, maybe constructed from above (in an excavated shaft?). The well-head was assumed to correspond to a walking level, even if no specific floor was noted around it; if so, it would pertain to the same chronological phase as the makeshift wall W IV and as F III in trench Area 1-S(W), Sq.5(W). The very presence of a water cistern proved that the space to the south of wall W II was unroofed in both phases of its use.

During the field season of 2016, the two neighboring trenches (in Area 1-S together with 1-S(W), and in Area 3-N, Sq.9), termed the “southern” and the “northern” respectively, were joined, the overriding goal being to work around the olive trees [see *Figs 2, 5*]. The southern trench was extended north- and eastwards in an attempt to determine the size and nature of the mosaic-paved basin (Loc. 004), as well as to clarify the stratigraphical and spatial relations between the basin and the opening of the cistern in neighboring Sq.9. The exploration revealed the northwestern corner of the basin, uncovering 3.73 m of its length north–south. Both the west (W IX) and the north wall (W XIII) of the basin were constructed of ashlar placed as stretchers, of which just one course has survived [*Fig. 17*]. It should be noted, however, that the state of preservation of the plaster which used to line the interior of the basin, as found in 2015 at the south end of W IX, strongly suggests that there were once at least two courses of ashlar framing the basin.

The western part of the basin was divided into two compartments by an east–west wall (W XII); two ashlar belonging to this wall were discovered in upright position, their faces covered on both sides with white plaster (not hydraulic in nature), the same as in the basin. The laying of mosaic cubes on the basin floor (F VII) on both sides of this partition wall proves that the division into compartments was part of the original arrangement. The eastward extent of this partition wall could not be determined because of the obstacle posed by an olive tree in the middle. The dimensions of the basin had to be estimated for the same reason; the length east–west

did not exceed 6.60 m. Probing 3.50 m to the east of the northwestern corner of the basin, in a space available for digging, revealed another section of the north wall of the basin with a well-preserved mosaic floor (F VIIc) inside it [Fig. 16]. This eastern section of the wall (W XIV) was constructed of two (and not one) parallel rows of blocks, amounting to an average width of 0.50 m, unlike its western section (W XIII), built of a single row of ashlar, just 0.35 m wide. In all probability, there is a north–south wall closing the two compartments of the basin from the east. No further subdivisions of the main basin could be identified.

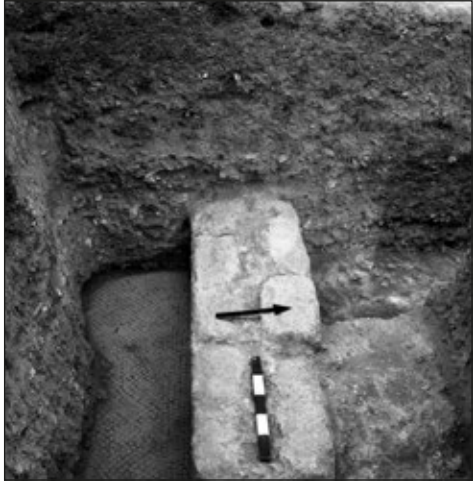


Fig. 16. Eastern part of the north wall (W XIV) of a winery basin with mosaic floor (F VIIc) to the left; later floor (F V) to the right; view facing west (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo M. Burdajewicz)



Fig. 17. Western part of a winery basin with two compartments: left, view facing north; right, view facing southeast (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photos M. Burdajewicz, D. Mazanek)



There is no doubt that we are dealing with part of a winery installation, containing at least two (and perhaps more) compartments, apparently intended for storing grapes before pressing the juice. Similar compartments were found in two Byzantine–Umayyad period wineries in Susita/Hippos, another town of the Decapolis (Młynarczyk and Burdajewicz 2013: 215). It has also become clear that the basin in question was the very first structure made on this particular level of the slope, that is, to the north of the rock-cut “platform” on which W V stood perhaps since as early as the 4th century AD. Specifically, the vertical rock surface was shaped into a right angle to create the southwestern corner of an apparently open-air room [see *Fig. 5*]. The cavities in the northern face of the rock were filled with small blocks in the shape and size of bricks in order to obtain a vertical surface to be plastered [*Fig. 17* far end].



*Fig. 18. Floor (F V) of 7th century(?) date, sealing the winery basin; note thick ash deposit, view facing east (PCMA Beit Ras Project/ photo M. Burdajewicz)*

The circumstances that led to the winery basin going out of use are unclear. The function of two ashlar orderly placed on the mosaic floor of the northern compartment [see *Fig. 17*] is unknown, but they do not seem to have ever had any logical connection with the functioning of the winery. Moreover, they were found covered with a leveling layer topped by a floor (F V), made of a mixture of earth and limestone chips, with large amounts of ashes upon it, pieces of charcoal included [*Fig. 18*]. The latter most probably came from a domestic oven, many parts of which were discovered in place during the exploration of the same floor level in 2015, directly to the west of the basin, associated with sherds of cooking vessels. Apparently, it was during the same chronological phase (F V) that the rock-cut southwestern corner of the space previously housing the winery basin was extended to the north by constructing W VIII [see *Fig. 5*]. This new open-air room must have served as a domestic (kitchen) yard, containing the said oven.

The fragmentary marble colonnette described above [see *Fig. 11*], most probably pertaining to the chancel screen of a church, was associated with precisely the same “kitchen level” (F V), the date of which was established as most probably the first half of the 7th century. A miniature bronze spoon [*Fig. 19* top right], apparently an Eucharistic spoon pertaining to the liturgical equipment of the church in question, was found in 2016 in the same layer, above the western end of the winery basin. Fragments of two terracotta oil lamps with Christian symbols were also discovered in connection with the basin fill, dated to the 6th and into the 7th century. One of them, with a cross on the nozzle,

represented the so-called North Jordan lamp type, tentatively dated to the 5th- to 6th century and probably manufactured at Beit Ras itself (da Costa 2010: 75–76, Fig. 15). The other, with two birds flanking

a tree, presumably in expression of Christian symbolism [Fig. 19 top left], was of the so-called Jerash type, manufactured between the latter part of the 6th and 8th century (da Costa 2010: 78–79,

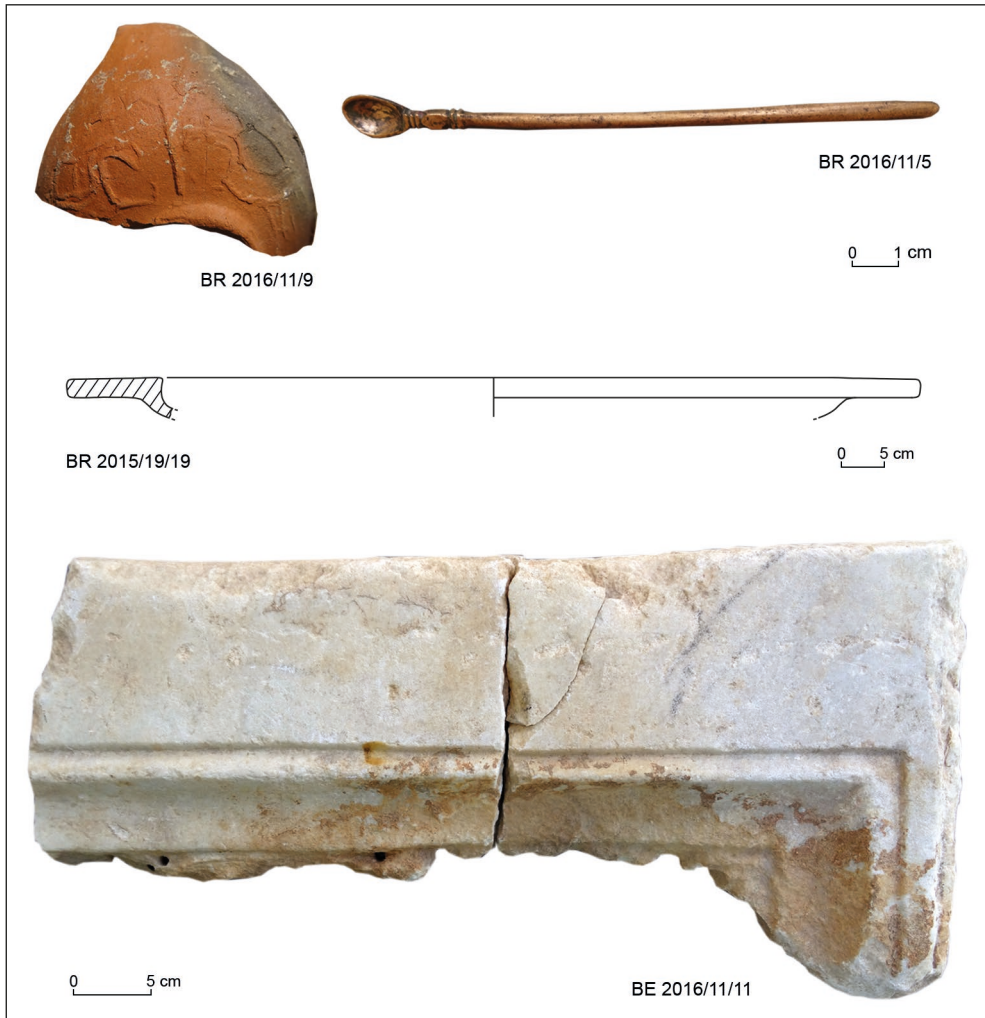


Fig. 19. Finds from the basin fill: top left, fragmentary lamp of the Jerash type with depiction of two birds adoring a tree, 6th/7th century; top right, miniature bronze spoon, 6th century(?); center, marble tray fragment, probably an auxiliary mensa from a church; bottom, marble chancel screen fragment, 6th–7th century (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photos M. Burdajewicz, drawing J. Młynarczyk)

Fig. 25), and of a characteristic Jerash fabric. All of the above suggests a rather violent destruction of the church, the equipment of which would have been dumped and dispersed.

Two more objects doubtlessly belonging to a church came from the exploration of the neighboring trench in Area 1-S, Sq.9. One of them was a fragment of the rim of a large circular tray of white marble [Fig. 19 center] retrieved from the debris out of any stratified context; its diameter approaches 0.90 m. This kind of tray may have been used in churches as an auxiliary altar. It represents type E in the classification of altars by Eugenia Chalkia (1991: 47–53 and 195–215), who notes that they are as a rule of white marble and that their diameter rarely exceeded 1.00 m, usually amounting to just 0.60 m. According to Chalkia, they are rather rare in the Levant (the modern countries of Lebanon, Israel/Palestine and Jordan), unlike in Greece and Italy. However, of importance is the fact that a similar “plate” of white marble, 0.96 m in diameter and almost complete, was found, apparently in place, in the northern pastophorium of the church in Khan Khaldé (Chéhab 1957: 118; 1959: Pl. LXXIX:5) meaning that it could have served as a prothesis altar for the preparation of Eucharistic offerings. Another meaningful fragment of the church equipment was part of the frame of a chancel screen, also of white marble [Fig. 19 bottom]. It was found reused in the late casing of a cistern in the same trench.

Two churches have been archaeologically attested in Beit Ras. One of these was situated *extra muros*, to the north of the town (Lenzen 2000: 21; 2003: 75, Note 14). The other church, however, was

erected a short distance away to the south of our trenches (no more than 60 m, see Fig. 1:A), and right above them, on the northern edge of the plateau, in front of the “Vaults” of the Roman-to-Islamic-period market place. The church was first recognized by Gottlieb Schumacher (1890: 159; Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 29, Fig. 3) who identified the existing remains as those of the northern aisle; Lenzen’s team reinvestigated (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 33, Fig. 5) what was defined as “two-thirds of the main or central apse and approximately one-third of the northern aisle” (Lenzen 1990: 474), but what looks like a part of the southern aisle today. No detailed account of the exploration of this church was ever published and the information available is far from clear. The date of church construction (which the excavators initially described as three-apsidal, built on the spot of a non-descript Roman-period structure) was proposed first “on pottery” as the latter part of the 5th century (Lenzen, Gordon, and McQuitty 1985: 236–237 and Note 14), and then changed to the first half of the 6th century (Lenzen 2000: 21). No date was proposed for the abandonment of this building (Lenzen, Gordon, and McQuitty 1985: 237), and the statement that the church may have functioned “well into the 9th century and perhaps beyond” (Lenzen 1995: 331) is unjustified. An 8th century story of the martyrdom of St. Peter of Capitolias, which allegedly took place in AD 715, gives the name of the Virgin Mary or Theotokos, probably referring to a cathedral (main church of the town) (Peeters 1939: 301, 314; Milik 1959–1960: 170–173); Milik specifically wanted to place the cathedral close to the modern mosque, which is the precise location of “our” church.

In the light of the excavations by the PCMA team, it is fairly clear that the church in question was damaged, its interior decoration and equipment destroyed and dumped. This is most likely to have happened during the Sassanian occupation of Palestine in AD 614–629, to judge by the 7th century context of the colonnette from the chancel [see *Fig. 11* right], even if some authors question the very fact of a Sassanian occupation in Transjordan (Shboul and Walmsley 1998: 278). The church may have been rebuilt soon afterwards, and it apparently was, assuming that it was the building of the Virgin Mary/Theotokos church mentioned in the martyrdom story of St. Peter, during the second decade of the 8th century.

However, while the stratigraphy above the southwestern part of the winery basin excavated in 2015, supported by well-known pottery types and coins, seemed to be fairly clear in reflecting the chronological sequence from the Byzantine to the early medieval period, the picture obtained during the 2016 season was rather confusing. The same sequence of floors was recorded, with as many as three “walking levels” (counting from the top: F III, F IV, F V) above the Byzantine-period basin floor (F VII), but none of the layers yielded uncontaminated pottery. To the contrary, throughout all the contexts the ceramics represented the same Byzantine–Umayyad wares and shapes, mostly fragments of wine jars and cooking vessels [*Fig. 20*], but also many pieces of jugs and amphorae made of pale-bodied fabric with linear ornaments painted in red of a rather late Umayyad date [*Fig. 21* top]. Moreover, the level assigned during the 2015 season to the Umayyad period (F IV, equated to F X of

2016) contained several examples of types considered to be of an Abbasid date, the 8th to 9th century [see *Fig. 21* bottom]. The only explanation of this state of affairs are serious disturbances, most probably caused by the re-arrangement of the access to the cistern (during the 11th century?) within the border area between Sq.5 and Sq.9 in Area 1-S.

The stratigraphy of the surroundings of the cistern was double-checked in 2016, as was the connection between the northern border of the winery basin and the rim of the cistern to the north of it [see *Fig. 14*]. The northern frame of the basin and the cistern mouth are just 3.50 m apart, making it more than probable that they originated



*Fig. 20.* Cooking pot lid (fragment), Byzantine/Umayyad period, from Area 1-S trench Sq.9 (season 2016) (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo J. Młynarczyk)





Fig. 21. Pottery from Area 1-S, trench Sq. 9 (season 2016): top, closed-form vessels of Umayyad Painted Ware; bottom, vessels of "Islamic Cream ware", Abbasid period (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photos J. Młynarczyk)



in the same period and pertained to the same industrial installation.

A series of floors corresponding to those recorded to the west of the winery basin were identified above the eastern part of the basin (that is, in Area 1-S, Sq.5) as well. The uppermost of them (F III), probably of early medieval date, sloped northward rather steeply down to the mouth of the cistern. The framing of the cistern, as already noted during the 2015 season, was a rather careless construction of reused stones, apparently retrieved from earlier (mid-8th century?) earthquake debris. The square capstone of the cistern corresponded to the level of F III identified in Squares 1, 5 and 5(W),

and equaling F VIII in Sq.9. The stone boarding of the cistern was approximately 0.70–0.80 m high, spanning the distance between the lowest floor (F VI = F IX) and the uppermost one (F III = F VIII) [Fig. 22]. Upon dismantling the shaft, the said fragment of a marble chancel screen was found [see Fig. 19 bottom], doubtlessly coming from the church situated above the site, and reused in the casing of the cistern.

The first phase of use of the cistern must have been connected with a Byzantine period (6th century?) floor F VI in Sq.5 and Sq.5(W), equaling F IX in Sq.9, that is, with the clayey/earthen floor directly above bedrock. The original mouth of the cistern, 0.75–0.70 m in diameter, was



Fig. 22. Cistern framing (Loc. 006) in Area 1-S, Sq.9 on bedrock with traces of the original stone quarrying; note the semicircular line of W IV to the left; view facing north (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo D. Mazanek)

cut into the bedrock surface, which bore right-angled traces of an earlier episode of quarrying stone blocks [see *Fig. 22*]. The interior of the cistern appeared to be bottle-shaped, but exploration ceased for safety reasons at about 2 m below the opening. The excavated upper part of the fill yielded pottery mostly of Umayyad, but also of early medieval date (11th century?), proving a lengthy period of use of this water facility.

Single examples of glazed potsherds of the 9th–11th centuries were found also to the south of the cistern mouth at a considerable depth, pointing to some disturbances having occurred at the site after the Umayyad period. The pottery may have been linked not only to the cistern reuse, but also to the construction of a narrow, fence-like wall (W IV) resting directly on the lowermost floor (F VI = F IX). The south end of the wall in question was found to the west of the cistern mouth. Unexpectedly, it curved away to the west [see *Figs 14, 22*], leaving the issue of its exact purpose without resolution.

Wine jars dominated the pottery assemblage from the trench in question, from all the layers dated to between the Byzantine and the Umayyad/Abbasid periods. Even if the winery basin appears to have gone out of use after the Byzantine period, the shape and ware details of the wine jars recorded at the site prove that wine-making in this particular place or anywhere nearby must have continued at least until the mid-8th century and probably beyond. Written sources confirm that the “proverbial wines of Bayt Ras (Capitolias) and Baysan” were still being enjoyed at the end of the 7th century (Shboul and Walmsley 1998: 272). Citations from Arabic literature gathered by Lenzen and

Knauf leave no doubt that the local wine of Beit Ras was highly valued not only in the 6th–7th centuries (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 35–37 and Notes 61–63), but also throughout the Umayyad period (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 38–39 and Note 81) to as late as the Abbasid period (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 41 and Note 92).

Other popular ceramic categories represented in this trench included closed-shaped vessels (jugs, table amphorae) of Umayyad Painted Ware [see *Fig. 21* top] and Grey Ware basins (most probably milking vessels), the latter made by hand and adorned with grooved/incised decoration. Traditionally considered to be of the Umayyad period, they are first observed in late Byzantine layers. This last group is particularly well-represented in Beit Ras, featuring the many variants of rim shape and a range of color variants of the fabric that is strongly suggestive of a well-developed regional (if not strictly local) industry.

#### AREA 3-N, SQ.9

The third trench of 2015 was opened in Area 3-N, Sq.9, approximately 40 m to the northeast of the trenches in Area 1-S and 1-S(W), in order to verify the nature of a long NE–SW wall detected by the electrical resistivity survey in 2014 [see *Fig. 2*]. Two successive lime mortar floors, F I and F II, were uncovered, presumably abutting an east–west wall (W I) constructed of fine limestone ashlar. The ashlar from the upper courses of this wall have been robbed out leaving only a robbery trench (for this first stage of exploration, see Młynarczyk in press: *Figs 27–30*). Time constraints in 2015 permitted only the southern face of the wall to be exposed, and the exploration was halted at about 1.40 m below the

modern surface without determining the thickness of the wall.

In 2016, the trench was extended to the north, east and west to cover parts of Area 3-N Sq.9 and 13, and Area 2-N Sq.12 and 16 [see *Figs 1, 2* bottom]. This enlargement revealed a section about 3.80 m long of the northern defense wall of Capitolias [*Figs 23–25*]. Its inner (southern) face has been excavated to a depth of 3.20 m without having reached bedrock yet. The outer (northern) side of the wall was explored to a depth of only about 1.50 m, that is, down to the first preserved course of its facing blocks. The city wall was 2.50 m wide, its inner face carefully constructed of limestone ashlars [see *Figs 23, 25* top]. In its present state of preservation, one can see three rows of headers and stretchers in between two layers of stretchers. The lowermost layer of the stretchers is in fact the top of the wall plinth of unknown height. The core of the wall was made of both undressed and semi-dressed stones, and was faced with square basalt blocks on the outer (northern) side [*Fig. 25* bottom]. The eastern part of the trench in question revealed a robbery pit 1.45–1.60 m deep [*Fig. 24*] associated with the dismantling of the wall, in particular with the removal of the limestone ashlars from the inward wall facing. The pit cut through as many as three floors recorded on the southern side of the wall: F IV (equaling F I/2015), F V (equaling F II/2015) and F VI. Examination of the pottery retrieved from the robbers' pit strongly suggests that the blocks were extracted not earlier than at the end of the Umayyad period, perhaps even later. This must certainly have happened after the city wall had been destroyed by an earthquake, as suggested by a concentration of collapsed ashlar

visible in the northern section of the trench [see *Fig. 25* top].

After the destruction of the city wall during an earthquake (presumably that of AD 749), but before the robbing out of what had been preserved of it, a north–south wall was built, apparently encroaching upon the remaining part of the defenses; on its eastern side there was a cobbled surface with a carefully constructed and tightly covered channel running parallel to the wall [*Fig. 27*]. Its purpose may have been to evacuate rainwater(?) or sewage(?) toward the north, beyond the abandoned city wall. Although the scarce pottery collected from under the cobbled floor (F I) was of late Roman date, it seems logical to assume that its construction pertained to a later period, possibly to early Islamic (late Umayyad or Abbasid?) times.

Two other floor levels abutting the city wall on the south were associated with the period of its functioning as a defensive structure [see *Fig. 24*]. Of these, floor F V (corresponding to F II of the 2015 exploration) has been dated provisionally by the ceramics from the underlying layers to the late Roman period (4th–5th centuries AD). The lower floor, F VI, can confidently be considered as being of an earlier (3rd century AD) date, on the basis of scores of Roman-period pottery tentatively dated to between the late 1st and the 2nd/3rd(?) century. The pottery collected from the layers distinguished below F VI, even when not very easy to be dated (most of them being plain-ware domestic vessels of local/regional types), definitely pertains to middle Roman times. Therefore, the construction of the city wall can be dated securely to the Roman period, apparently not later than the 2nd century AD. It should be emphasized



Fig. 23. Central north trench (Areas 2-N and 3-N): plan and southern elevation of the city wall (W I) (PCMA Beit Ras Project/drawing M. Drzewiecki; digitizing M. Burdajewicz)

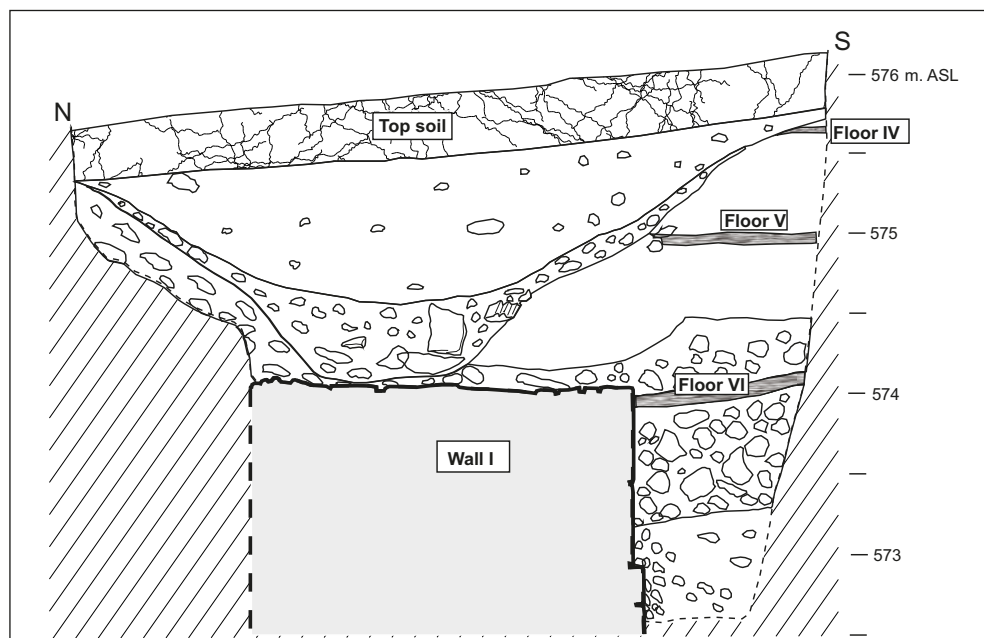


Fig. 24. Eastern section of the central north trench showing the depth of the robbers' pit in Area 3-N, Sq.9 and 13 (PCMA Beit Ras Project/drawing M. Drzewiecki; digitizing M. Burdajewicz)



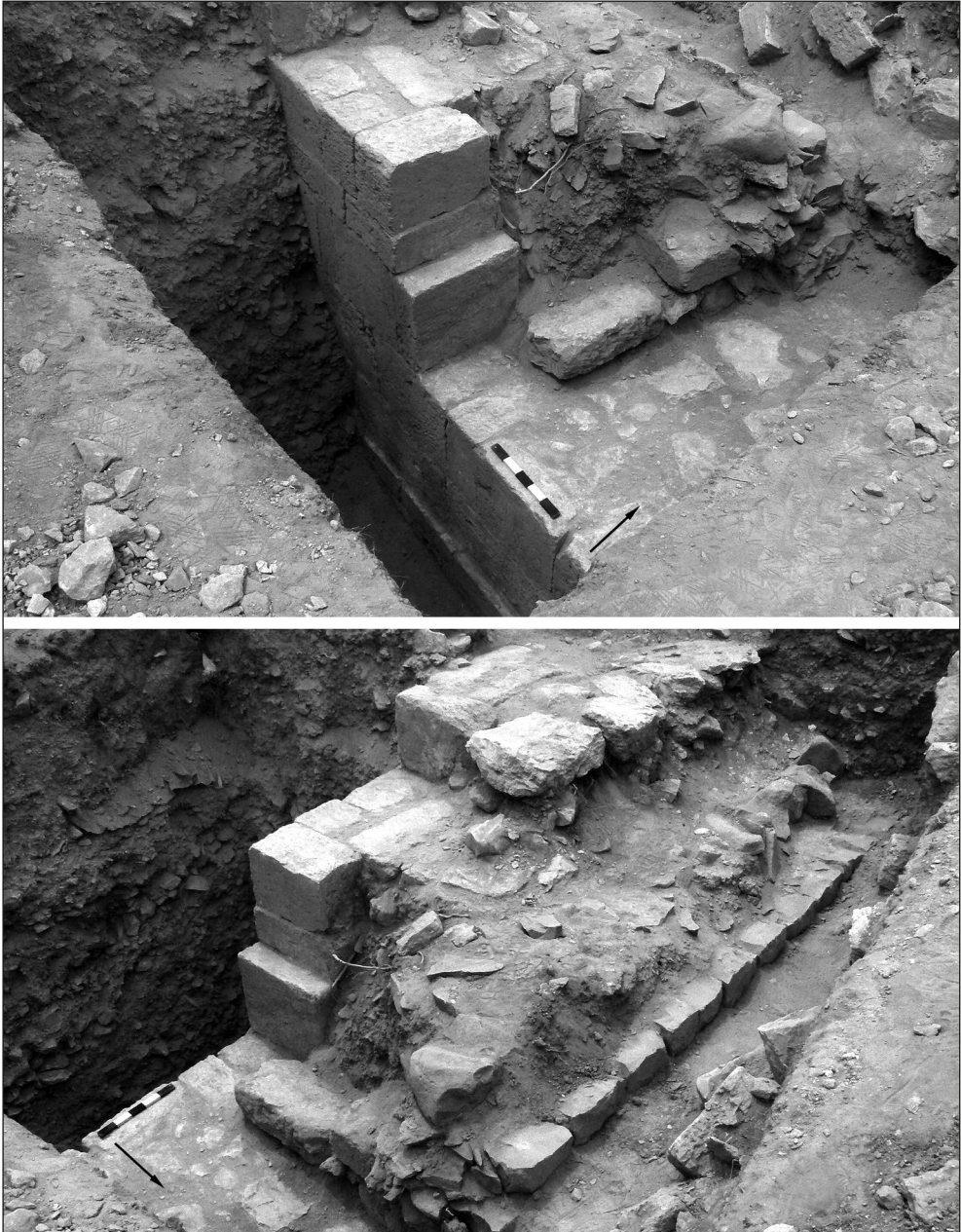


Fig. 25. Northern city wall of Capitolias (WI in Areas 2-N and 3-N): top, core of unhewn stones and inner (southward) face of limestone ashlars, view facing northwest; bottom, outer (northward) face of basalt blocks, view facing southwest (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photos M. Drzewiecki)





that the wall foundation was not reached, the exploration halting just below the top level of the plinth without uncovering the lowermost floor with its associated material pertaining to the period of wall construction.

A fragmentary juglet of common ware found in this context bears evidence of deformation during firing [Fig. 26]. This kind of kiln waster is sound proof of pottery manufacturing taking place at that site during the Roman-period (as probably was the case with the Byzantine and Umayyad periods). Indeed, many fragments of clay installations (kilns? ovens?) were also retrieved from the leveling layers under

Fig. 26. *Kiln waster: fragmentary juglet (No. 118.2) deformed during the firing process (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo J. Młynarczyk)*

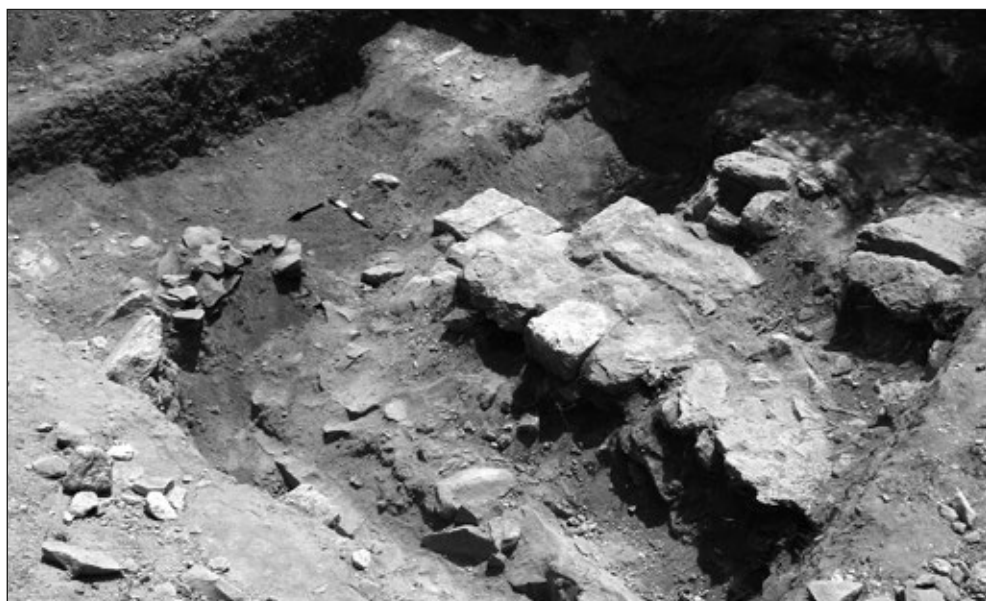


Fig. 27. *Stone-paved area with covered channel constructed after the city wall fell into disuse, view facing southeast (PCMA Beit Ras Project/photo M. Drzewiecki)*

the floors abutting the inner side of the city wall, together with pottery slag. All these finds, on top of the glass chunks discovered in the trenches and on the surface (Burdajewicz 2017, in this volume) as well as remains of iron slag recorded

during the surface survey in 2014, strongly confirm the artisanal character of this part of the Roman–Byzantine Capitolias, with workshops typically located on the outskirts to prevent environmental inconvenience to local inhabitants.

## CONCLUSIONS

The excavations of 2015–2016, even if limited in scope, verified the results of the electrical resistivity investigation of 2014. The line and an actual section of the city wall of Roman imperial times as well as a fragment of superposed building presumably of the early Islamic (Umayyad or Abbasid) period were located in the north-central trench (Areas 3-N and 2-N). The earliest pottery finds from the excavated site (single objects, found in stratigraphical contexts) were a couple of ESA ware sherds of the 1st century BC–1st century AD. This would be in favor of the hitherto prevailing view that Capitolias was founded in the latter part of the 1st century AD. However, one has to remember that the site, situated at the northern edge of the town circuit, on the slope of the plateau, is not necessarily representative of the cityscape of Capitolias. The research proved beyond any doubt that this part of the town, even if comprised within the city walls, was primarily destined for industrial activity (wine-pressing, pot making, glass production). Especially well recorded was the wine-making, both thanks to the discovery of part of a winery installation and the abundant finds of wine jars.

The southwestern trench in Area 1-S and 1-S(W) presented a stratigraphical sequence ranging from the late Roman (4th/5th century) to medieval, with

structures of strictly domestic character. A terrace-shaped slope was recorded with two parallel E–W walls: W V (upper terrace) and W II (lower terrace). This arrangement was presumably connected to the stone quarrying phase as reflected by cuts present in the bedrock of both terraces. The earliest occupation, probably during the late Roman period, is reflected by the F II level, presumably with accompanying W V. Directly to the north of it, on a lower terrace, there was a wine-pressing facility (winery basin with accompanying floor F VI = F IX and cistern), apparently of 6th century date; it is possible that also F I, with its wine jars deposit, belonged to the same period. The winery complex probably flourished into the 7th century, when it may have been abandoned; the mosaic-paved basin was succeeded by an earthen floor associated with a domestic oven. Fragments of liturgical equipment of a church found in this secondary context may testify to the destruction caused by the Sassanians in AD 614 or soon after.

Beside that episode, however, the Byzantine and Umayyad periods must have been a time of the *floruit* of Beit Ras in terms of economy and prestige. According to the sources, caliph Yazid II and his favorite wife Hababah had their palace there (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 39–40). It seems also that under the Umayyads the territories of Capitolias, Abila and

Gadara formed a unique administrative unit called Trichora, the “Land of Three” (Peeters 1939: 305; Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 40). Even in the 8th/9th century Beit Ras was still a place of importance, since it was mentioned as a *kurah* (one of 13 administrative districts) of the province Jund el-Urdunn (Walmsley 1988: 144).

Both trenches, the southwestern and the north-central one, excavated by the PCMA mission, yielded clear evidence of an earthquake, presumably that of AD 749. After that date this particular area seems to have been semi-abandoned, serving as a source of building material

and a place for grazing livestock. One possible exception could have been an enigmatic building, a small part of which was uncovered in Area 2-N, Sq.12, encroaching upon the destroyed city wall; it lacked, however, any chronological indications. Other traces of some kind of post-Umayyad occupation may be attested by the makeshift floors (F III, F VIII, perhaps also F 0) on roughly leveled debris of the mid-8th century, recorded in Areas 1-S(W) and 1-S and used apparently in the early medieval (Fatimid/Ayyubid?) period alongside the water cistern.

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