

JARASH: MINIMAL PRESERVATION INTERVENTIONS IN THE EASTERN SECTOR OF THE SANCTUARY OF ARTEMIS, 2009 - 2010

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During the spring 2009 season¹, an archaeological preservation intervention that had been delayed for several years was finally carried out, *viz.* consolidation of the west façade wall of the Propylaea Church.

Of greatest concern was the dangerous lean of the pillar *in antis*, which originally belonged to the north-east edge of the trapezoid court of the Roman Sanctuary of Artemis and was incorporated into the west wall of the church in the Byzantine period.

The lean of the pillar can be attributed, if not to the seismic activity endemic in the region, to the removal of building material from ancient Gerasa during the early 20th century for the construction of modern Jarash.

Another event took place much later in exactly the same area, during the tragic riot of September 1970. During our archaeological work there, a number of likely Jordanian army firing points were identified at the abutment of the Artemis Bridge. This raised ground was presumably considered strategic for control of the 'Ammān-Irbid road passing just below it, with assorted machine-gun ammunition being scattered over the area.

Whatever was responsible for the lean of the pillar, the situation was made worse by severe deterioration and reduction of the load-bearing capacity of the ashlar at the pillar base (Figs. 1-3).

During our clearance work and excavations in the area, started some years earlier (Brizzi *et al.* 2001, 2010), the tumble at the base of the pillar was left untouched until March 2009 in the hope that the buttressing it provided might help

prevent the sudden collapse of the pillar.

At this point, the following work was undertaken to ensure the pillar's preservation, as it was considered significant visible evidence of the presence of the *via sacra* approaching the Sanctuary of Artemis (Parapetti 1983-84):

- (1) Removal of the tumble and archaeological excavation of the deposits below it down to the flagstone pavement of the church, on which a *tannūr* was found (Brizzi 2010: fig. 4). This confirmed the hypothesis that the structure had ceased to function as a church some time before the earthquake of 749, which caused destruction throughout the city.
- (2) Construction of scaffolding and removal of the 24 blocks in 12 rows that make up



1. West wall of the Propylaea Church in 1977, from the west.

1. In 2009, the management of the Italian expedition to Jarash was transferred from the *Centro Ricerche Ar-*

chaeologiche e Scavi di Torino (1977 - 2008) to *Monumenta Orientalia*, an NGO based in Rome.



2-3. North-west pillar in antis of the trapezoid court of the Sanctuary of Artemis, from the west and east before preservation intervention.



4. North-west pillar in antis of the trapezoid court of the Sanctuary of Artemis, from the east after preservation intervention.



5. North-west pillar in antis during dismantling, from the south-east.

the present pillar and plinth. These were all stacked on the ground, numbered and measured, and the two fragmentary blocks making up the upper cornice of the plinth restored (**Figs. 4-5**).

(3) Replacement of the deteriorated ashlars on which the plinth was originally laid with new ones on both eastern and western sides, and consolidation of the blocking that sealed the entrance to the church nave.

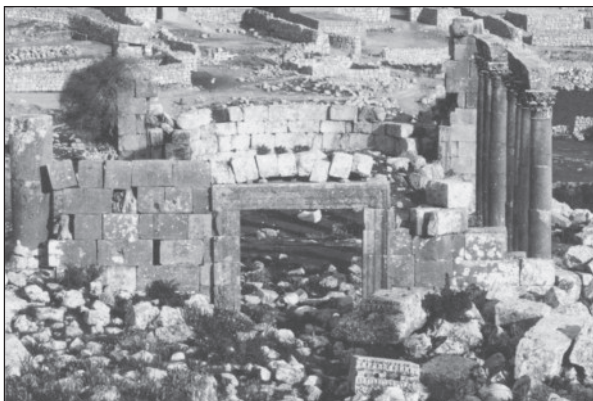
R. Parapetti: Minimal Interventions of Preservation of The Sanctuary Artemis

- (4) Repositioning the blocks in their original upright position, without any binding material as per the original construction (**Fig. 6**).
- (5) The following year, in 2010, *anastylosis* of the central portal of the west wall of the church was planned; it is now in progress.

In a late 19th century photograph, the entire portal is standing - even the relieving arch above it (**Fig. 7**). However, in photographs of the 1920s it is decidedly reduced, being evidence for the spoliation mentioned above. In the photo at **Fig. 8**, the lintel is missing while the jambs are entirely preserved. Two blocks from the topmost row of the church's apse are also missing. In two



6. North-west pillar in *antis*; upper cornice of the plinth during dismantling, from above.



7. West wall of the Propylaea Church in the 1880s.

other photos at **Fig. 9**, taken before and after the American excavation there (Crowfoot 1935), more elements of the jambs are missing.



8. West wall of the Propylaea Church in the 1920s.



9. West wall of the Propylaea Church in 1934 after excavation.

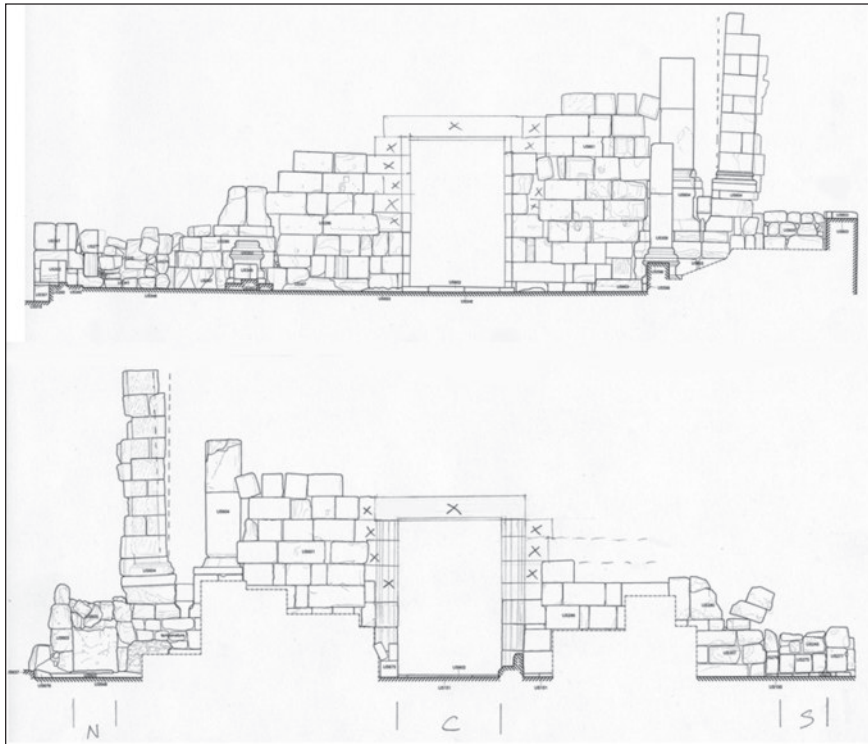
By moving and reorganising the enormous number of collapsed architectural elements on the ground during our previous seasons, we have been able to identify part of the portal's lintel, *viz.* the eastern of the two back-to-back elements it originally consisted of. Fewer than half of the moulded jambs are presently preserved *in situ* and only one element was recovered on the ground (**Figs. 10-11**).

Regarding the *anastylosis*, the following work has been carried out to date:

- (1) Consolidation of the wall north of the portal. The two uppermost misaligned rows of blocks were taken down - one had deteriorated to such an extent that it had to be replaced - and then reassembled (**Figs. 12-13**).
- (2) New stone blocks have been purchased to replace the missing elements of the jambs; their final shaping will be the next task in the programme of works².

2. The abovementioned work has been possible thanks to the collaboration of Abdulmajid Mjelli, responsible for

restorations at Jarash, and his staff.



10-11. West wall of the Propylaea Church; plan of preservation interventions (east and west sides).



12. West wall of the Propylaea Church in 2009, from the north-west.

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13. West wall of the Propylaea Church; north side after consolidation, from the south-east.