

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS AND ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY IN GADARA (UMM QEIS) IN JORDAN, AREA I (1992)

by

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After a prolonged break, the excavations on the terrace¹ (Area I) situated at the foot of the western slope of the Acropolis hill at Umm Qeis were resumed, in order to find an answer to a question regarding the nature of the building south of the central church, still outstanding since the campaigns of 1976-79.² At the same time, the urban quarter of the terrace and its buildings, the adjacent part of the city's main street (*decumanus maximus*), the north-south street (*cardo*; area III)³ running along the west side of the terrace and the western theatre⁴ situated at the southern end of the terrace, were re-surveyed and inserted into the geodetic system for the ruins of Gadara established between 1986 and 1988.⁵ The excavation lasted from 9 till 28 May, the survey team worked from 9 May till 9 June.⁶

The Excavations (Figs. 1-3)

During the excavations of the central

church in 1976-1979, the area excavated extended to *ca.* 1.70 m south of the church building. There a north-south wall was detected, which abuts the southern side of the church about 2 m west of its southeast corner. To the east of this wall there was an *opus sectile* floor and to the west of it part of a room (7.00 x 1.70 m), once subdivided by two chancel screens, was excavated.⁷ At the time this room was supposed to be an annex built against the south wall of the central church, but it was only in spring 1992 that there was a possibility to test this hypothesis, when the excavation was carried out of a limited area (length: 9.00-11.00 m; width: 7.00 m) to the south of Area I, including the strip that had already been excavated to the south of the church but was filled up with rubble again (Fig. 1).

Soon it became clear that the partly excavated "annex" was in fact the northern aisle of a basilica.⁸ This basilica was built

1. U. Wagner-Lux, E.W. Krueger, K.J.H. Vriezen and T. Vriezen-van der Flier, 'Bericht über die Oberflächenforschung in Gadara (Umm Qes) in Jordanien im Jahre 1974,' *ADAJ* 23 (1979), pp. 33f.
2. U. Wagner-Lux and K.J.H. Vriezen, 'A Preliminary Report on the Excavations at Gadara (Umm Qes) in Jordan from 1976 to 1979,' *ADAJ* 24 (1980), pp. 157-161.
3. Wagner-Lux, Krueger, Vriezen and Vriezen-van der Flier, *op. cit.* (nt. 1), p. 33; U. Wagner-Lux and K.J.H. Vriezen, 'Preliminary Report of the Excavations in Gadara (Umm Qes) in Jordan 1980,' *ADAJ* 28 (1984), pp. 87-89.
4. G. Schumacher, *Northern 'Ajlûn*, (London, 1890), pp. 55-60.
5. P.C. Bol, A. Hoffmann and T. Weber, 'Gadara in der Dekapolis, Deutsche Ausgrabungen bei Umm Qais in Nordjordanien, 1986 bis 1988, Vorbericht,' *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1990), pp. 197f.
6. The members of the excavation staff were U. Wagner-Lux (Basel), K.J.H. Vriezen and F. van

den Bosch (Utrecht). The architectural survey was carried out by N.F. Mulder (Leiden) and R. Guinée (Delft), the coordinates to the geodetic system were prepared by T. Ernst and A. Gramlich (Karlsruhe). We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, in particular the Director-General Prof. Dr. Safwan Tell and the representative at the excavation Ibrahim Zubi, as well as the head of the German Evangelical Institute for the Archaeology of the Holy Land in Amman, Susanne Kerner and her staff who contributed considerably to the success of the work. The campaign was financed by the German Evangelical Institute for the Archaeology of the Holy Land in Hannover and the Theological Faculty of Utrecht University.

7. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), pp. 159f.

8. As for terminology, origin, development and typology, cf. F.W. Deichmann, *RGG3* I, col. 910-912; E. Langlotz and W.F. Deichmann, *RAC* I, col. 1225-1259; C. Delvoye, *Reallex. zur Byz. Kunst* I, col. 514-567.

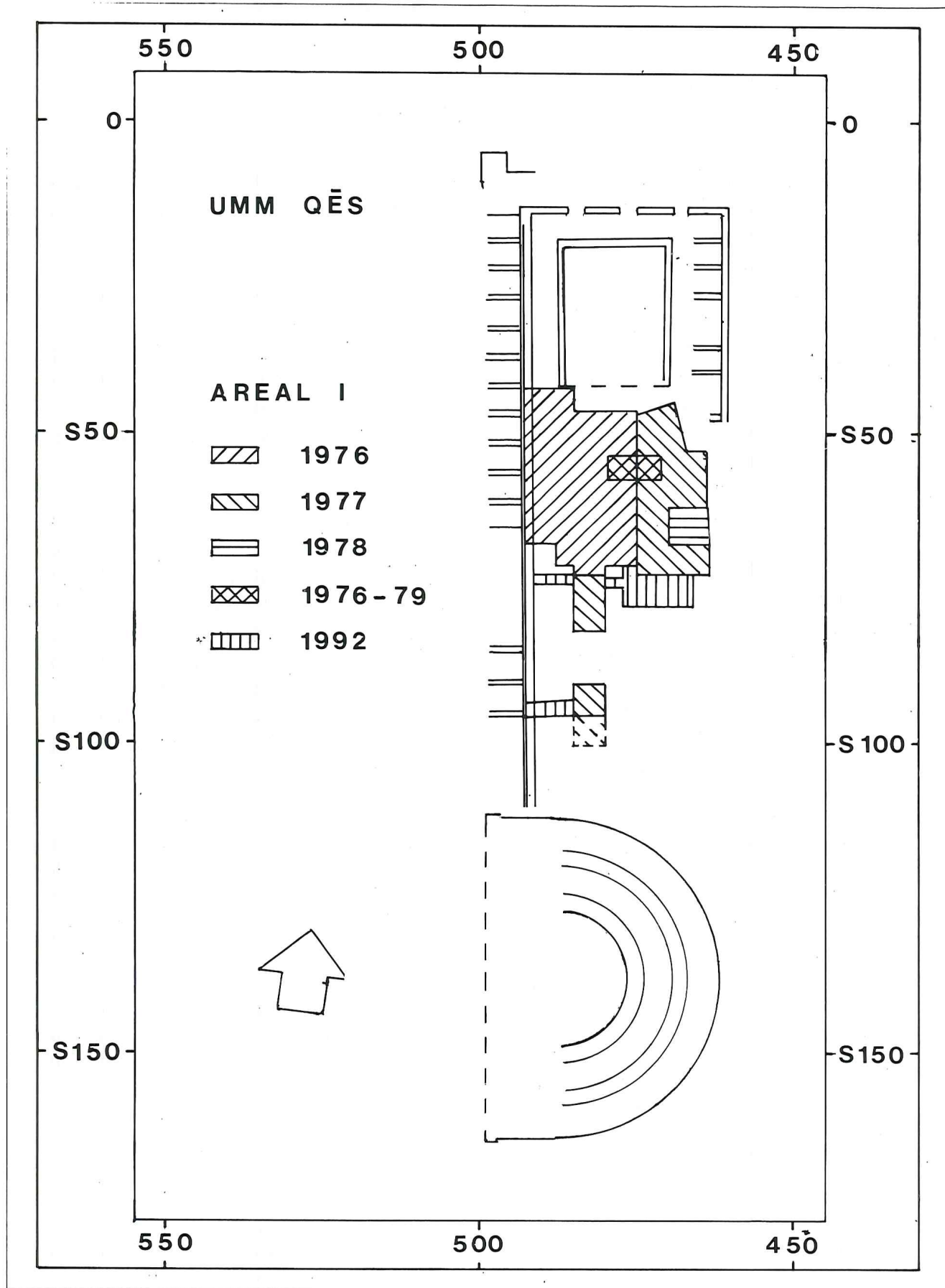


Fig. 1. Umm Qeis: Area I: Excavations from 1976 till 1992.

against already existing walls, i.e. in the north against the south wall of the central church (width: *ca.* 0.85 m; preserved height: up to 1.37 m) in the east against the wall of the room with the *opus sectile* floor (width: *ca.* 0.94 m; preserved height: up to 1.73 m). In this last wall, a 1.10 m wide door opening was closed with masonry. During the campaign the eastern part of the probably three-aisled basilica was uncovered up to 0.45 m south of the axis of the nave (Fig. 2). Supposing the southern half of the building has the same measurements as the northern half, the total width of the body of the church may be estimated at just over 13 m (width of the nave: 5.60 m; width of the aisles: 3.00 m each; width of the colonnades: *ca.* 0.80 m each). The subsoil — especially on the western side — was very much disturbed because of building activities in modern times, therefore it was impossible to establish the length of the building.

Between the nave and the northern aisle, there is an east-west wall (preserved height: up to 1.31 m) that is built against the north-south wall, i.e. the east wall of the basilica, the line of which is continued westwards by a row of pillars or columns. Two basalt blocks, slightly moved off-line, probably constituted the western continuation of this colonnade, the westernmost block was uncovered in a narrow trench extending to the west.

In the eastern part of the nave stands the sanctuary. It was once separated from the western part by a chancel screen and its floor was raised by 0.08-0.10 m. The only traces of the screen are the grooves for the posts and the panels cut into the threshold. An interruption in the grooves shows that the entrance to the sanctuary was situated on the axis of the nave. An apse with a *cathedra* for the bishop and three rows of

seats along the semicircular wall constitute the eastern end of the sanctuary. The lower stone courses of the apse were uncovered and it appeared that the apse wall was built into the pre-existing north-south wall. Below the foundations of the partition wall between the nave and the aisle, a basalt column base was found.⁹ In front of the *cathedra* — sunk into the ground — a rectangular stone basin was found (length: 0.60 m), which may have been the container of a reliquary. The pavement of the sanctuary has disappeared altogether, but a large part of its stone-flagged foundation was found undisturbed. Underneath a deposit of three layers — a reddish brown clay layer, a yellow layer of earth mixed with grains of limestone, and a yellow clay layer — the floor paved with large slabs of limestone, which was uncovered in various places on the terrace in the previous campaigns was found.¹⁰ This floor was laid upon a layer of mortar mixed with ash and below this was a layer of reddish brown earth deposited on bedrock. The rock surface, reached at a depth down to *ca.* 0.55 m below the stone-flagged foundation of the sanctuary floor, showed cuttings in various places. On the pavement of the nave, which was situated at the same level as the pavement of the central church, some marble tiles were found *in situ* west of the chancel screen, laid in mortar mixed with ash and on a reddish brown clay foundation layer. The chancel threshold itself was found still partially plated with marble tiles (P1. I, 1). But for the rest the subsoil of the western part of the nave, and of the northern aisle as well, was much disturbed by modern pits (P1. I, 2).

The northern aisle is subdivided into three parts by two still partially preserved chancel thresholds with the usual grooves. The eastern threshold has an entrance to the eastern part of the aisle at its northern end

9. This circular column base has the same profile as the base B16 in the narthex of the central church,

cf. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), p. 159.

10. Cf. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), pp. 158-160.

(P1. I, 2). Behind the middle of this threshold two marble-lined basins (0.30 x 0.26 x 0.24 m) were discovered sunk into the ground, they may have been reliquaries.

In this threshold an extra socket was carved, the same phenomenon was encountered in the threshold across the nave. The western threshold showed a passage in the middle of the screen and was situated more or less in line with the threshold across the nave. The pavement had disappeared, but a mortar mixed with ash was found, just like the layer below the pavement of the western part of the nave. Underneath this mortar a yellow clay layer was situated in which the thresholds were placed. Below this is a thin mortar plaster, possibly a floor, that covered the limestone-paved floor, which was also uncovered below the nave (P1. II, 1). A pit dug in modern times west of the western threshold had reached bedrock in various places at a depth of 0.54 m below the supposed level of the pavement of the aisle. Later a new floor was laid, 0.22 m higher, which covered the chancel thresholds and the reliquaries. Its pavement consisted of *opus sectile*, part of which was found at the south side of the aisle (P1. II, 1).

The building material used for the basilica mainly consists of *spolia* of the same workmanship as the ones used for the central church and its narthex. Additional architectural elements like the *synthronon*, the chancel thresholds and the reliquary container in the nave were made of limestone.

From the numerous tiny glass mosaic tesserae in the debris, especially in the sanctuary, it may be concluded that at least part of the walls of the basilica, like the central

church,¹¹ were decorated with a wall mosaic.

The ceramic finds in the foundation layer below the floor of the sanctuary as well as in the debris above it contain sherds of Umayyad pottery, which point to a date between the middle of the seventh and the middle of the eighth century for the construction and for the destruction of the basilica.

Although the adjacent central church was built in an earlier period (probably in the first half of the sixth century),¹² there are sufficient indications that there was a strong connection between both churches (Fig. 3). The character of this relation cannot be established without further study of the excavation results. In this regard two possibilities should be considered: the sole central church was enlarged and became a twin church,¹³ or the basilica replaced the central church which, e.g. because of an earthquake,¹⁴ had become inaccessible.

Two test trenches were dug to explore the area west and southwest of the basilica. They are located between the western retaining wall of the terrace and the fields, which were excavated in 1977 between the central church and the West Theatre (Fig. 1).¹⁵ In the northern trench (length: 7.60 m; width: *ca.* 1.80 m) the limestone-paved floor was uncovered extending unto the western edge of the terrace: here however very much destroyed by falling columns and modern house building. In the southern trench (length: 8.10 m; width: *ca.* 2.50 m), the limestone slab floor also extended up to the retaining wall of the terrace, that once had a large entrance at this spot, of which part of the doorsill and -jamb were found *in*

11. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), p. 158.

12. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), p. 160.

13. For this view and for comparable twin-churches see: K.J.H. Vriezen, 'The centralised church in Umm Qais (anc. Gadara),' a paper read at the Third International Conference of ARAM on the Dekapolis (Oxford, Sept. 1992; to be published in

ARAM 4).

14. Cf. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), p. 160; K.W. Russell, 'The Earthquake Chronology of Palestine and Northwest Arabia from the 2nd through the Mid-8th Century' A.D.,' *BASOR* 260 (1985), pp. 37-59.

15. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), p. 160.

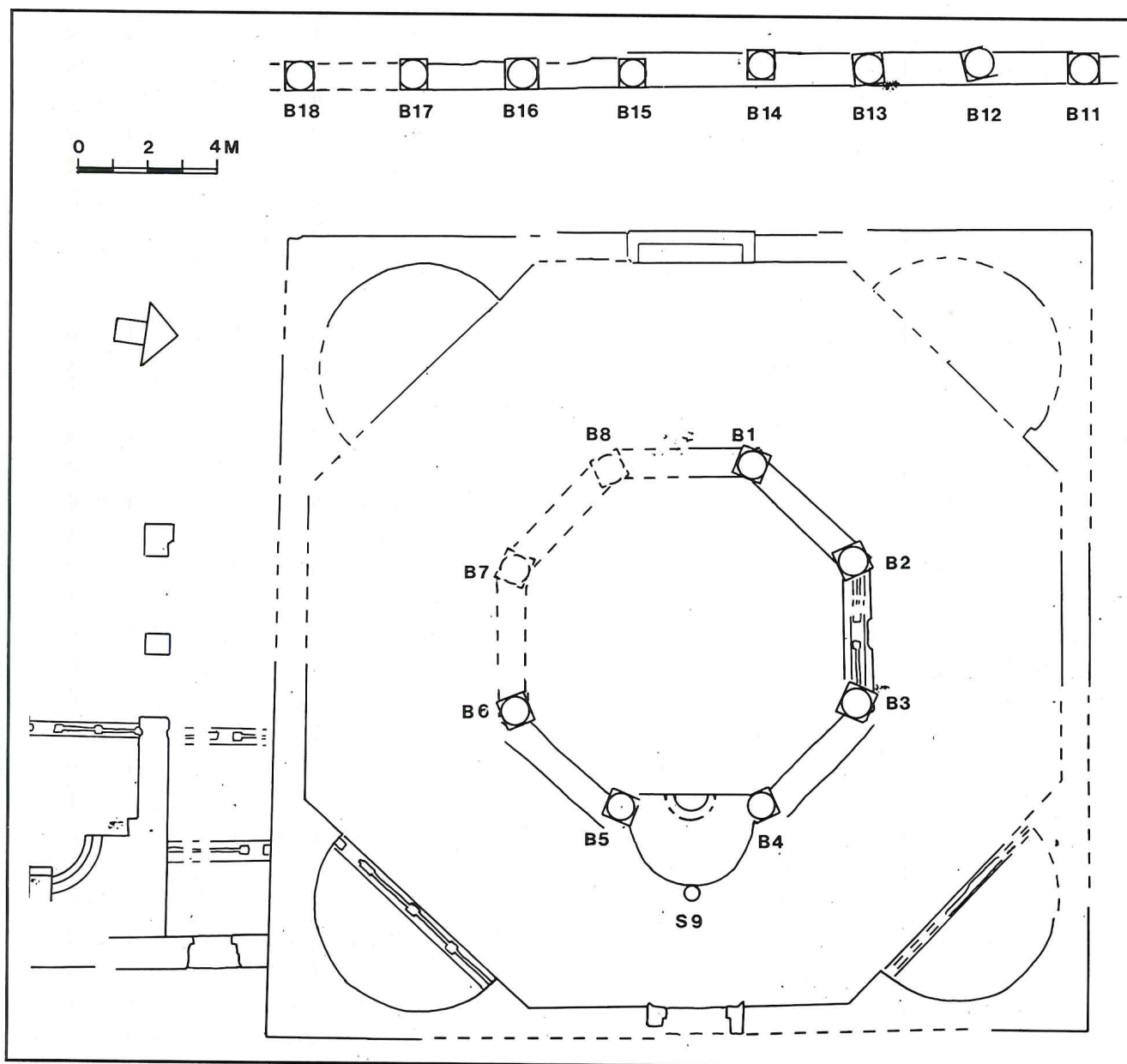


Fig. 3. Umm Qeis: Area I: Plan of the central church with basilica.

situ. In later times a grave was arranged here between two fallen columnshafts used to flank the body; the skeleton was reinterred in the present-day cemetery.

The Archaeological-Architectural Survey (Fig. 4)

This survey and study is planned to prepare a documentation and reconstruction of the quarter including the terrace and its buildings, the *cardo* with the vaulted rooms and the West Theatre, to define the typology of the buildings and their archaeological-historical placing in local and regional developments.¹⁶

16. The area covered has the coordinated NW X 1000/Y 2200 (terrace) and NW X 900/Y 2200 (West Theatre). In co-operation with Th. Ernst and A. Gramlich (Fachhochschule Karlsruhe) new measuring points were laid out in the area

and from these the buildings were surveyed with the use of a theodolite. In order to get a better understanding of the buildings in various places — e.g. in the West Theatre — parts had to be cleared from debris covering them.

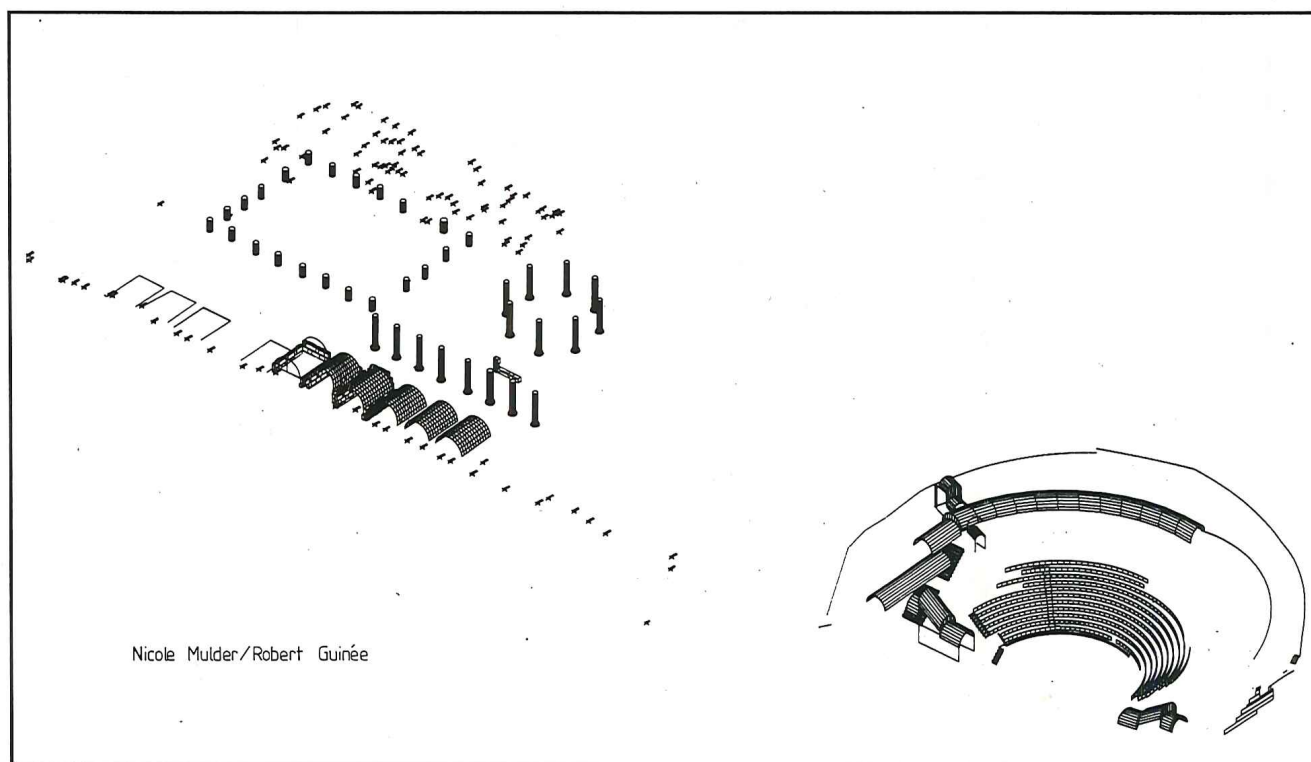


Fig. 4. Umm Qeis: Provisional spatial reconstruction of the terrace quarter including the *cardo* and the West Theatre.

The Terrace and its Buildings

At the moment one can identify three building phases on the terrace: one Roman (first/second century A.D.), one Byzantine (sixth century A.D.) and one Umayyad (seventh/eighth century A.D.).

To the Roman lay-out belong the monumental entrance to the terrace from the *decumanus maximus* on its north side flanked by two *antae* and the limestone-paved floor on the terrace. Perhaps two stylobates may also be attributed to the phase, but this requires further investigation.

Dated to the Byzantine period are the central church with the narthex on the west side and the columned courtyard (probably the atrium) on the north,¹⁷ together with the north-south wall with the entrance to the *opus sectile* paved room southeast of the church (later: the east wall of the basilica).

Belonging to the third building phase are the rooms built in the east portico of the columned courtyard and the basilica to the

south of the central church.

The Cardo with the Vaulted Rooms

Of the eighteen similar rooms that once lined the east side of the *cardo*, only eleven still have their barrel-vaulted roofs preserved (P1. II, 2). The construction of this street may have been carried out in the Roman period, probably in the first/second century A.D.

The West Theatre

To the south of the terrace and bedded into the slope of the Acropolis hill, the so-called West Theatre is situated, built in Roman times (P1. III, 1; 2). The south side of the theatre and its western part together with the *scaenae frons* have collapsed to a large extent. The *cavea* consists of three stories, each subdivided in four *cunei* (wedge-shaped segments of audience seats). Underneath the second storey runs the *crypta* (gallery), from which four *vomi-*

17. ADAJ 24 (1980), P1. XCIX, 3.

toria (entrances) lead to the *praecinctio* (circular wall above which the seats are located). The building had numerous entrances of which the ones on the west side had collapsed almost completely.

In the end it may be pointed out that for certain parts of the area surveyed, the measurements suffice to present a reliable reconstruction. This regards the *cardo* especially,

where the facades of the vaulted rooms, and the Theatre, where the western entrances as well as the collapsed part of the *crypta* with the seats above, can be reconstructed.

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1. Umm Qeis: Basilica (toward ENE).



2. Umm Qeis: Basilica (toward SW).



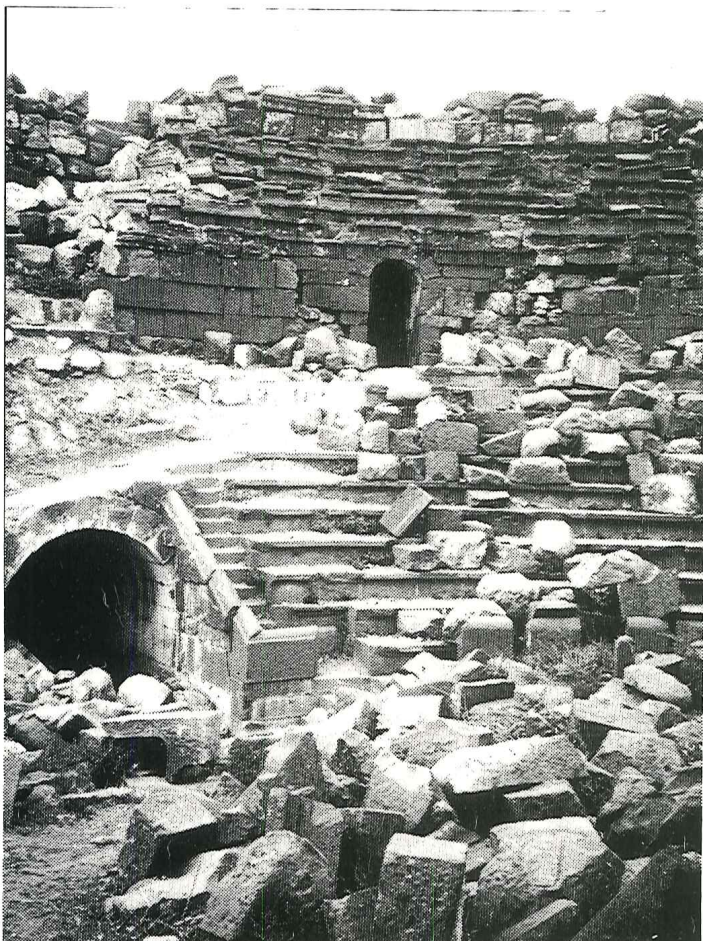
1. Umm Qeis: Basilica (toward ESE)



2. Umm Qeis: *Cardo* (toward SSE).



1. Umm Qeis: West Theatre (toward NE).



2. Umm Qeis: West Theatre; detail (toward NE).