

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS AND ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY AT UMM QAYS (ANCIENT GADARA), AREAS I AND III (1997)

by

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The excavations on the large Terrace (Area I) situated at the foot of the western slope of the Acropolis hill at Umm Qays were continued in 1997, between 3 May and 4 June. The campaign was supported by the German Protestant Institute in Amman, the Theological Faculty of the Universiteit Utrecht and the Department of Antiquities.¹

In earlier seasons—1976 - 1979 and 1992 – a centralised church with a narthex, a colonnaded courtyard (*atrium*) and part of a second church, a three-aisled basilica, were excavated in this area.²

During the campaign, the architectural survey of the Terrace and the surrounding urban area, which was commenced in 1992-1993, was concluded.³

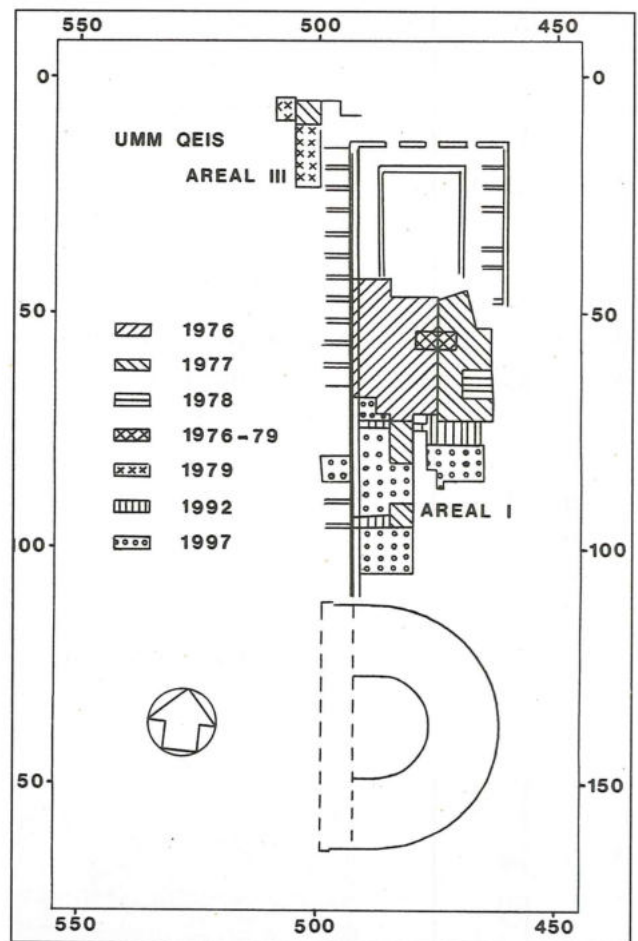
The Excavations

In the 1997 campaign, the excavations focused on two areas: the basilica and the south-western part of the large Terrace, i.e. the large area between the narthex/centralised church and the Roman theatre in the south (Fig. 1).

The Basilica

In 1992, only the northern half of the basilica was excavated up to the axis of the nave (cf. *ADAJ* 37 [1993], 387, Fig. 2). In the north aisle of this church, among other

things, the remains of two chancel thresholds, by which once the aisle had been subdivided, were uncovered. In the aisle's eastern part, two marble-lined reliquary containers (0.30x0.26x0.24m) were discovered



1. Umm Qays, Areas I and III. Excavation fields 1976-1997.

1. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Ghazi Bisheh, then Director-General of the Department of Antiquities, and Omar Reshedat, then representative in Umm Qays, as well as the head of the German Protestant Institute in Amman, Dr Hans-Dieter Bienert, and the Institute's staff Nadine Riedl, Nadia Shuqair and Jamil 'Amira (Abu Hassan) for their generous aid.

2. U. Wagner-Lux and K.J.H. Vriezen, *ADAJ* 24 (1980), 157-161; U. Wagner-Lux, K.J.H. Vriezen, F. van den Bosch, N.F. Mulder and R.L.J.J. Guinée, *ADAJ* 37 (1993), 385-395.

3. The members of the excavation team were from Switzerland: U. Wagner-Lux (Basel), and from the Netherlands: K.J.H. Vriezen (Utrecht), H.S. Hollander (Leiden) and R. van de Craats (Delft).

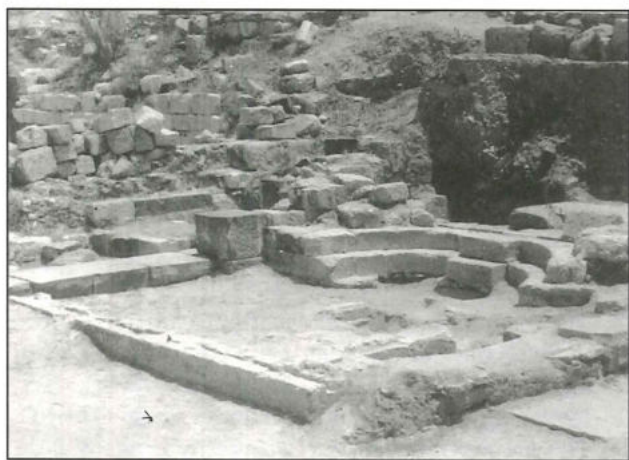
The architectural survey was carried out by N.F. Mulder (Leiden) and R.L.J.J. Guinée (Bergen op Zoom), also from the Netherlands, with the help of Osama Hamouri, draftsman from the Department of Antiquities in Umm Qays, to whom we express our thanks for his kind cooperation.

sunk into the floor. In the nave, part of the sanctuary - including synthronos and kathedra in the apse - was excavated. It was once separated from the nave's western part by a chancel screen, the threshold of which runs in line with the western one of the two thresholds in the northern aisle.

In the centre of the sanctuary, a fragment of a stone reliquary container was found *in situ* sunk into the floor, no other remains of this object were discovered afterwards.

In 1997, the southern half of the basilica was excavated in an area varying in length between 9.70m and 11.70m and in width between 5.30m and 7.30m (Figs. 2 and 3). In an additional test trench (1.80x1.50m), part of the basilica's south wall (0.92m wide) could be located together with its foundations composed of reused basalt slabs, that once belonged to a Roman stylobate. From this data it may be concluded that the church hall (inside) was ca. 15m wide (width of the aisles from north to south: 3.00 - 5.80 - 4.60m; width of the partition walls/colonnades between the aisles: 0.80m and 0.88m).

In general, the finds in the southern half of the nave correspond to the situation in the northern half, except for the southern part of the sanctuary, where a grave was discovered. The grave (1.74x0.58m) was sunk



2. Umm Qays, Area I. Basilica (looking NE).

4. B. Kötting, *Der frühchristliche Reliquienkult und die Bestattung im Kirchengebäude*, Köln-Opladen 1965.

0.67m deep into the floor. Its walls were made of reused building stones, while its bottom - with a 0.08m high headrest at its west end - was carved into bedrock.⁴ The only finds that it contained, were some bone fragments and a large amount of glass tesserae.

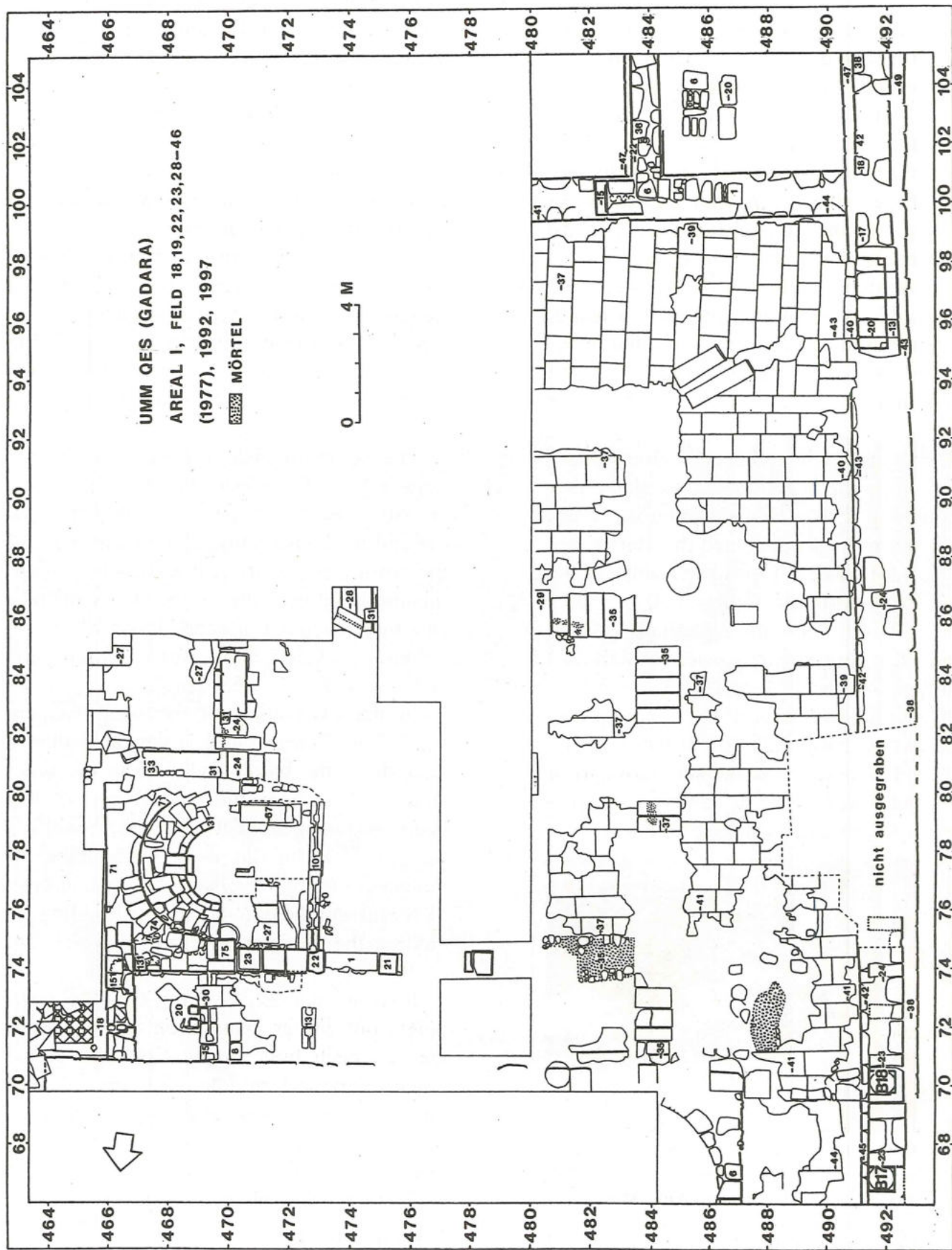
The floor of the nave (including the sanctuary) was once paved with marble tiles, of which only a small amount was preserved. The partition wall between the nave and the southern aisle only stands in its eastern part (length: ca. 2.50m) and its foundation of basalt slabs was discovered for another 4.50m westwards. The continuation of this partition, including the colonnade, to the west has disappeared.

The southern aisle was destroyed, to a large extent, by modern building and living activities. However, it is clear that the layout and the construction differ from those of the north aisle, as its east wall is not a continuation of the wall of the northern aisle and the nave, but instead, this wall is set 3.70m westwards. This wall is 0.86m wide and still stands ca. 0.55m high.

In the excavation of the south-western part of the Terrace area, it appeared that in later times the basalt stylobate in the limestone pavement of the Roman period, had been used as a foundation for the basilica's west wall. From this data, it could be established that the basilica's length had been 18.80m from the east side of the building including the west wall (width of west wall: ca. 0.90m).

It seems that, as a result of the 1997 campaign, our earlier assumption that the basilica had been built in the first half of the Umayyad period (middle of the seventh century)⁵ cannot be maintained anymore. Rather, it appears that there may have been two building phases. Supposing that the row of building stones uncovered immediately in

5. K.J.H. Vriezen, 'The centralised church in Umm Qais (ancient Gadara)', *ARAM* 4 (1992), 376.



3. Umm Qays, Area I. Plan of the basilica and the south-western part of the Terrace area.

front of the eastern chancel threshold in the northern aisle are the remains of a back wall, then in the first building phase the two side aisles were equal in length, while the nave protruded eastwards and east of the northern aisle there was a small room with a doorway on its east side. In the second building phase the northern aisle was extended by tearing down the existing back wall, blocking the doorway and introducing a second chancel screen in the room now added to the aisle. The synthronos, built into the semi-circular apse, could also belong to the second phase. The first building phase may be dated to the later part of the Byzantine period,⁶ while the remodelling may have taken place in the

middle of the seventh century.⁷ It is, however, not clear whether the grave and the reliquary container in the sanctuary belong to the first or to the second building phase.

The South-Western Part of the Terrace Area

It was only after the demolition and the clearing away of the remains of modern housing that it became possible to dig the area between the narthex/centralised church and the Roman theatre. Here, an area of 34.50x13m was excavated together with the south part of the narthex, 4.24x3.10m (Figs.4-6). In this area, the 1.55m wide southern perimeter wall of the Terrace was



4 .Umm Qays, Area I. The Terrace's west retaining wall with basalt doorsill; southern perimeter wall (looking W).

6. If the first layout of the basilica had a transversal chancel screen, starting in the north aisle at the originally sole screen (i.e. the western one) and continuing across the nave (and the south aisle?), then a date at the end of the 6th century may be

suggested; A. Ovadia, *Corpus of the Byzantine churches in the Holy Land* (Theophaneia 22), Bonn 1970, 196-197.

7. Pottery from the Umayyad period is found beneath the sanctuary floor.



5. Panorama of Area I (looking N).



6. Area I: the south-western part of the Terrace area (looking N).

uncovered, enabling to establish the Terrace's total length of 87.43m (north-south; the width is ca. 31.50m).⁸ To the south of this wall, the remains of rooms were uncovered, their walls built in the same style as the Terrace's perimeter and retaining walls. In one of the rooms fragments of a mosaic floor were found, whereas in another room secondary building remains point to post-Roman reuse of the room.

As the area of excavations was not extended quite up to the Theatre's north wall, it could not be ascertained how the Terrace and the Theatre are connected and interrelate. On the Terrace's west retaining wall, between the narthex and the southern perimeter wall, the basalt doorsill of a wide portal, already mentioned in the 1992 report⁹ was uncovered in full (length: 3.80m; width: 1.40m; Fig. 4).

On the Terrace, in an area of ca. 30x10.90m, remains of the Roman pavement made of large limestone slabs, that had been noticed already in several trenches in 1977 and 1992,¹⁰ were discovered (Figs. 3 and 7; the slabs measure between 0.90x0.78m and 2.60x0.85m). In this limestone pavement there is a stylobate composed of basalt slabs, on which the basilica's western wall was built during the Byzantine period (see above), running parallel to the Terrace's western retaining wall, at a 5.90m distance. In Roman times, this stylobate apparently belonged to a colonnade surrounding the Terrace's inner space, as may be concluded from the robber trench of this stylobate, running parallel to the southern perimeter wall at more or less the same distance, and from the change of pattern in the

limestone pavement (Figs. 2 and 7).

It is still under debate, which type of building in Roman times was built on the Terrace.

The Archaeological-Architectural Survey

The architectural survey pursued a three-fold objective. Firstly, during the excavations of the Terrace, the newly recovered building remains were added to the already existing documentation. Secondly, data collected in earlier campaigns were verified. And finally, additional investigations and measurements of the buildings on the Terrace, the monumental entrance on its north side, the vaulted rooms buttressing the Terrace's western wall and the Roman theatre were carried out. Further clearance in the area of the vaulted rooms (Area III) revealed that the number of rooms is larger than previously supposed and totals up to twenty. Furthermore, to the detailed documentation of architectural building elements many pieces were added, like column drums, bases, capitals, parts of door frames, friezes and cornices. Especially, the reuse of building materials as spolia was investigated.

Parallel studies of similar buildings and construction techniques were carried out at other cities of the Decapolis, like Gerasa, Abila, Capitolias and Skythopolis, and at Umm al-Jimāl.

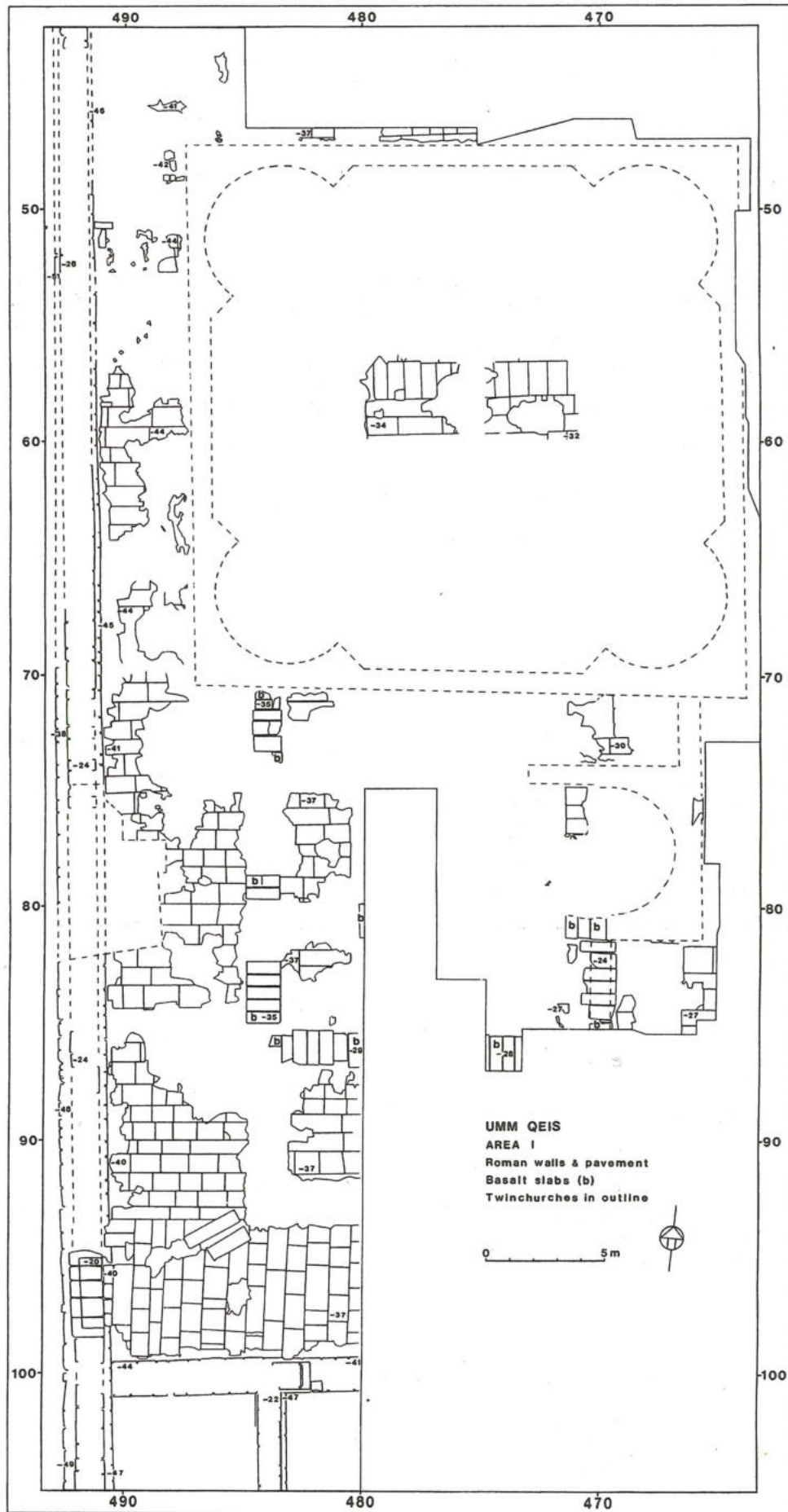
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8. Before, it was assumed that another wall situated more to the south, was to be identified as the Terrace's south wall. It now appears, that this wall belongs to the Theatre; U. Wagner-Lux, E.W. Krueger,

er, K. and T. Vriezen, *ADAJ* 23 (1979), 33-34.

9. *ADAJ* 37 (1993), 389.

10. *ADAJ* 24 (1980), 157,158,160; *ADAJ* 37 (1993), 388-389.



7. Umm Qays, Area I. Plan of Roman walls, stylobate and pavement (centralised church and basilica in outline).

