

THE 1993 AND 1994 SEASONS AT UMM AL JIMĀL  
THE UMM AL-JIMĀL PROJECT, 1993 AND 1994 FIELD SEASONS

by  
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1993 FIELD SEASON: GOALS AND PROCEDURES

The 1993 Umm al-Jimāl field season was held from June 21 to July 23 with a team of six senior staff and 12 students. Staff energies were devoted to the three following spheres of interest.

**A. Consolidation and Site Preparation**

One of the main goals of the Umm al-Jimāl Project is to prepare the sites for both scholarly and touristic visitors. In the fall of 1977 the author and the Department of Antiquities consolidated the perimeter walls of the Barracks by injecting aerated cement into the wall cores with the object of forestalling further collapse and rendering the building safe for the numerous visitors who enter it.

In January of 1983 the author again worked with masons of the Department of Antiquities to clear the south gate of House XVIII and consolidate its walls. This has made the courtyard of Umm al-Jimāl's finest house accessible to visitors. On both occasions a pathway was cleared to take visitors on a tour of the site described in a tour guide first published by the Ministry of Tourism and then in a revised edition in the al-Kutba series, *Umm el-Jimal*, "Gem of the Black Desert" (de Vries 1990).

In spring 1992 the Department of Antiquities cleared and levelled room floors of the Praetorium and House 49. And in the 1992 field season detailed studies were made of the Praetorium façades, in preparation for consolidation, and of the plan and façades of house 119, in preparation of its adaptation as a museum-visitor center (de Vries 1993: 438-44).

The work of 1992 led to the writing of a site development strategy, "Restoration at Umm el-Jimal" (de Vries 1994). This includes an analysis of site preservation needs at Umm al-Jimāl from two points of view: (1) the need to prevent ongoing collapse of structures and (2) the important place of the site in relation both to Jordan's antiquities and to its modern culture. Arguments were presented for making the site accessible and attractive to both the local community and visitors from outside. Recommendations for consolidation include the targeting of selected significant buildings: the Barracks, house XVIII, house 49, the Double Church and the Praetorium.

Finally detailed proposals, prepared by the author and architect Amjad al-Bataineh, for consolidation of the Praetorium and the adoption of house 119 as a museum-visitor center were presented.

These last two proposals gave the impetus for the field work plans of the 1993 season. Because no funding was available for major consolidation work, a temporary wooden shoring, designed by architect al-Bataineh, was installed in the southwest corner of the Praetorium atrium. This was considered necessary because the atrium west wall, which reaches up to the high pedimented roof, and the masonry around the west window of the south wall are so unstable the whole corner appears on the point of collapse (Fig. 1). While consolidation of this corner would require dismantling, and the stones have already been numbered for that purpose (de Vries 1994: 49), the main reason for erection of the scaffolding is the safety of the tour groups that frequently crowd into the room.

In anticipation of the development of



1. SW corner inside Praetorium atrium before installation of wood shoring. Note the separation of the masonry on the west wall (on the right) and the buckling of the double lintel over the window on the left (Photo by B. de Vries).

house 119, the 1993 field season was devoted entirely to the further architectural recording of the building, and a complete stratigraphic analysis of its site. The architectural recording was done by field architects al-Bataineh and Douglas Winnail, and became the basis for the detailed development plans completed by al-Bataineh in the 1994 season (see below). This included stone-by-stone drawings of the plan of stables A and B and room C, and elevations of the north facade of the stables (Figs. 2, 3, 4). Excavation of the house was the major goal of the season.

#### **B. Excavation of House 119, Area Y**

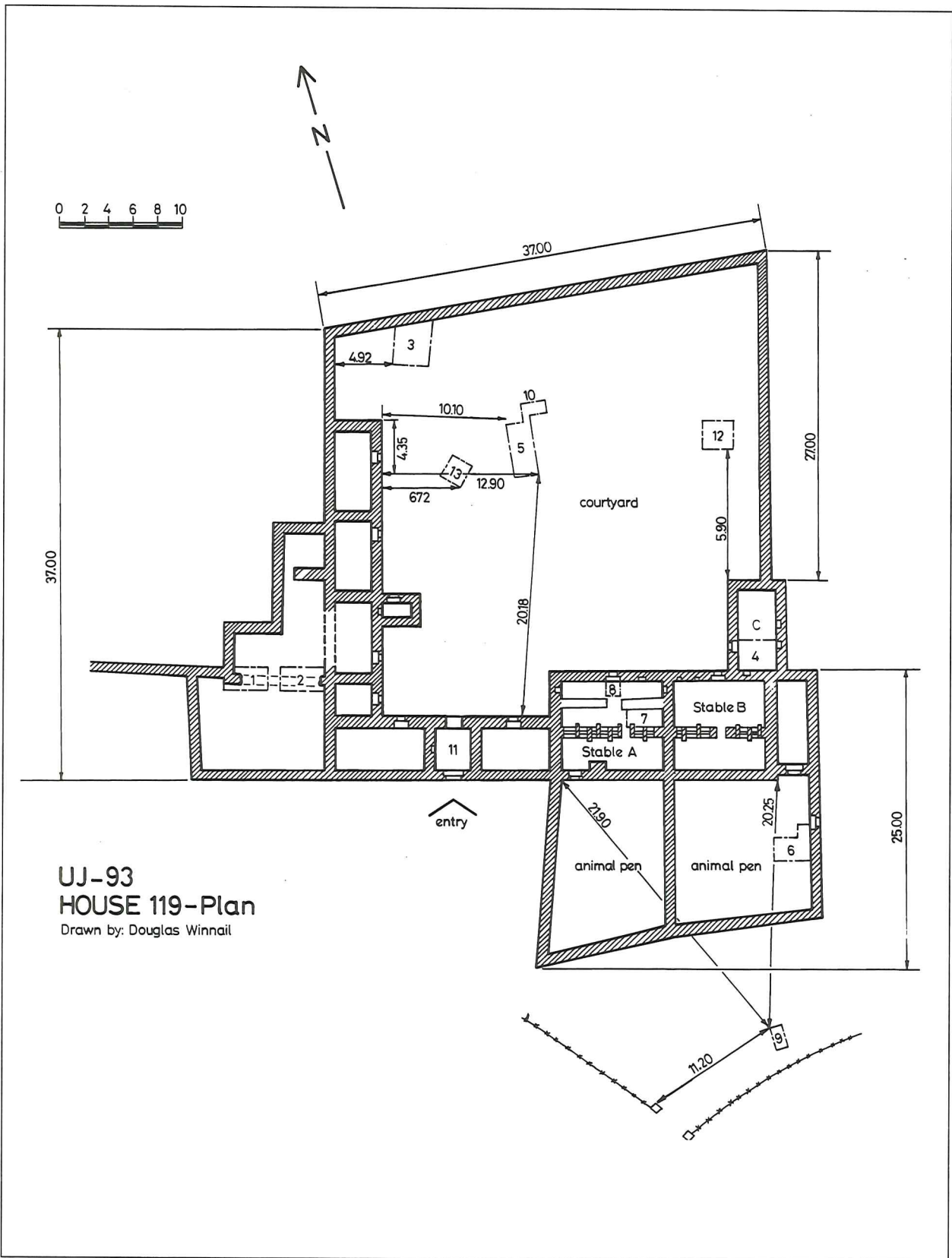
House 119, a rather modest domestic complex ca. 40 x 40 m in size (Fig. 3), consists of a large open courtyard, an entry gate, seven small ground floor rooms (including room C on the east of the court-

yard) and two larger rooms (stables A and B) south of the courtyard. The stables are ca 7 x 8 m each and are partitioned lengthwise by walls that contain a doorway and a row of mangers accessible from both sides and are suitable for larger domestic animals like cows and horses. Stable A especially is well preserved, with its manger wall intact to the ceiling, and some corbels still in place on it (Figs. 5, 6). The rest of the rooms are in relatively poor condition. The building was targeted for development because it is located at the modern entrance to the site, at the east side of the entry drive opposite the Barracks (Figs. 2, 7). The poor state of preservation was also a consideration, because better preserved buildings like House XVIII and the Praetorium should be left undisturbed as premium specimens of the ancient town culture.

Because of the large surface area of the building, and because some parts are deeply buried in heavy collapse debris (stable B, the row of rooms west of the courtyard), it was decided to use a number of strategically placed soundings, Y.1-13 (see Fig. 3 for their exact locations), to achieve the desired stratigraphic profile. Y.1 and Y.2 were laid out in a totally ruined set of rooms that appear to have been built against the west exterior of the complex in order to recover the architectural layout and determine the stratigraphic relationship between the rooms and the rest of the building. Y.4 sectioned the south third of room C to determine its use. Y.7 in stable A was to test for floors and to determine the relationship between the stable wall on its south and the incomplete secondary partition (thought to be aborted Drūz construction) to its north (Fig.4). Y.8 also was to check for floors of stable A and the rebuilding history of its doorway. Y.11 was a north-south section of the entry gate in preparation of its clearing and reconstruction for modern reuse as an entry into the courtyard.



2. Map of southern section of Umm al-Jimāl showing the location of house 119. Building 1 is the Barracks, 2 the Praetorium, 8 the temple built into house 49, 13 the Numerianos church (Drawing by B. de Vries).



3. Plan of house 119 showing layout of the rooms and location of the excavation units( Drawing by D. Winnail).



4. Stable A with architect al-Bataineh recording its masonry. The wall with the mangers is on the left and the Drüz wall intended as filler for the erection of an arch in the center.(Photo by B. de Vries).

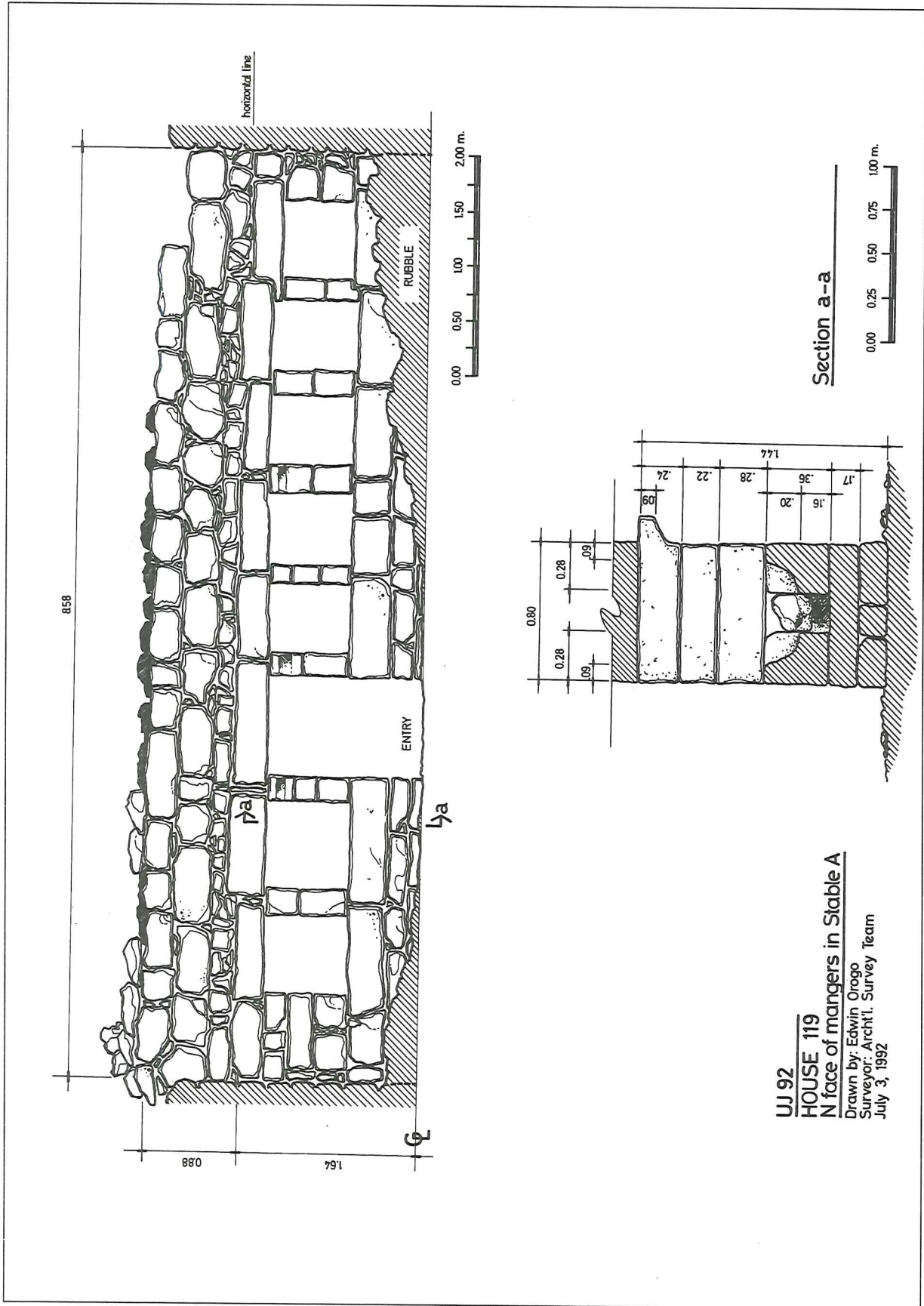
Four courtyard probes served various purposes. Y.3 was laid against the poorly preserved north courtyard wall and collapse debris on its west. Y.5 straddled a possible secondary division of the courtyard. When it was found that stratigraphic remains appeared to go deeper beyond its north balk, Y.10 was opened there. Y.12 and Y.13 were small probes to date masonry that appeared only at ground surface levels. Two probes were located south of the structure proper. Y.6 was to check the date and use of the apparent animal pens, and Y.9 was a sounding of the ashy mound that spreads south of the animal pens and extends across the paved road.

These probes varied in size according to need. Some like Y.1 (2 x 4 m) were larger to expose unknown architecture, others,

like Y.10 and Y.6 (both 1 x 2 m) were as small as possible to check soil layers vertically. All were excavated either to undisturbed soil or to bedrock. Most trenches were shallow (ca 0.50 m deep) and contained few distinct loci. The exception is Y.9, the dump probe, which had 12 distinct superimposed soil layers above bedrock cap in a total depth of ca 2 m.

#### **C. Rescue Excavation of Cist Burials, Areas Z and AA**

In the middle of the field season Sultan es-Serour gave us a tour of his father's (Sheikh Hail) olive garden in which several robbed cist burials are exposed with their basalt masonry side walls and part of their cover slabs still in place. They are typically located up to 1m below rich red top soil.



UJ 92  
**HOUSE 119**  
**N face of mangers in Stable A**  
 Drawn by: Edwin Orogo  
 Surveyor: Archt'l. Survey Team  
 July 3, 1992

5. North elevation and sections of mangers in stable A (Drawing by Edwin Orogo).



6. Doorway and manger in stable A (Photo by B. de Vries).



7. View of Barracks with courtyard of house 119 and excavators in the foreground (Photo by B. de Vries).

From their distribution throughout the olive grove, it is clear that these are a small portion of a larger, partly undisturbed cemetery. One tomb, discovered when the action of irrigation water caused a surface collapse, was still intact below its cover stones. It was designated Z.1, and excavated by Melissa Cheyney, whose report on the contents appears below in this issue.

During the close-out week, when work was confined to artifact processing and recording at the Umm al-Jimāl girls' school, a coffin-sized cist burial was discovered by the owner of a lot adjacent to the school yard while excavating the foundation trenches of his new house. Although the tomb was disturbed in the process, the skeleton was "rescued" by Cheyney and the tomb designated AA.1. The building site received a thorough investigation by the Mafraq office staff of the Department of Antiquities before construction was allowed to resume.

#### 1993 FIELD SEASON: STRATIGRAPHY OF HOUSE 119, AREA Y

##### A. The Stratigraphic Sequence

The following stratigraphic chronology is based on field readings by project ceramicist Cherie Lenzen, whose preliminary pottery report will appear in the next issue of *ADAJ*. Eric Lapp's analysis of area Y lamp fragments follows in this issue of *ADAJ*. A striking feature of house 119 stratigraphy is that the dominant construction and occupational loci are Umayyad, preceded by some Byzantine loci, and followed by Abbasid post-collapse squatters' loci. Purely Byzantine loci survive only in ephemeral remnants of dismantled architecture. Superimposed on all this are significant Late Ottoman (Drūz) and modern loci.

A clear and representative sequence was obtained from room C, Y.4, and summar-

ized here mostly in the words of excavators Lynda White and Michael Horstmanshof: The first evidence of occupation was a pre-construction undatable firepit on bedrock. Also constructed on bedrock was the south wall of the room (= the north wall of stable B), and butted against it, the east and west walls of the room. Laid directly on bedrock was an excellent floor constructed of flagstones set in a very hard plaster-cement (Fig. 8), with embedded potsherds dated Late Roman and Early Byzantine (third-fourth century), which was plastered up against all three walls. Thus the initial construction and use of the room appears to be third-fourth century. Immediately on top of this, without intervening occupational debris, was another fine floor, constructed of mud-plaster hardpack (laid on a low stone curb along the east wall), with embedded Late Byzantine and Umayyad pottery, thus representative of an early seventh century remodelling of the room. An artifact-poor soil layer on top of this floor is indicative of a period of abandonment, possibly caused by the earthquake of 747/8. Though the rest of the building may have suffered severe collapse, room C survived, for above that soil layer are four firepits and a thick deposit of ashes containing multitudes of bone fragments, indicative of kitchen/cooking use. Prevalence of Umayyad and Abbasid pottery places this use of the room in the eighth-ninth century. These ash layers were covered by an upper abandonment layer which contained much collapsed masonry, some of which was used to form a crude retainer wall on top of the remnants of the original west wall of the room, possibly evidence of the Drūz reoccupation. All this was covered by topsoil indicative of modern abandonment.

This room C stratigraphy provides a framework for a tentative reconstruction of the historical use of the site of house 119, supplemented with information from the



other 12 soundings:

*Early Byzantine.*

The building appears to have been constructed in the fourth century. However, except for the cement-flagstone floor and the related walls in room C, there is no other evidence of an occupation history for the period. In fact, no floor in a domestic structure at Umm al-Jimāl dated prior to the Umayyad period has been found besides this one. Other, but very ephemeral, remnants of Byzantine walls were found in Y.1, 2 and 12.

*Late Byzantine.*

No evidence of fifth-sixth century Byzantine occupation was found, and there would appear to be a gap between the fourth century construction and the Umayyad reuse of the area. However, that is prob-

ably not the case. Square Y.9, located on the ashy mound south of house 119, proved to be a dump containing much Byzantine material. While two soil layers below the dump were Early Byzantine and Byzantine, ten successive layers above them, alternations of various ashy and soil deposits, constituted a mass 2 m deep with a concentration of Byzantine and Umayyad sherds that allowed no chronological differentiation between the first and tenth loci.

The interpretation is that all these layers were deposited in a systematic dumping and burning over a short time early in the Umayyad period, and that this dump was the product of a systematic cleanup of the site in preparation for the Umayyad reconstruction. That there was sixth century use of the site is indicated by the word "IMMANUEL" painted in red letters around an embossed cross on a lintel over a



8. View toward south wall of room C in house 119 with flagstone paving and cement flooring in foreground and under meter stick. The trench on the right is from partial excavation of the floor (Photo by B. de Vries).

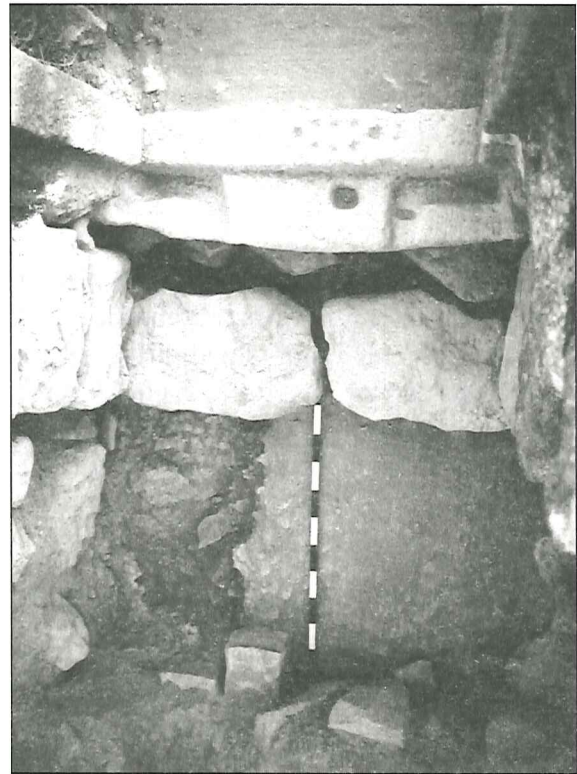
door leading from the courtyard into a west room, which seems stylistically contemporary with the texts on the Barracks tower.

*Umayyad.*

This Umayyad preparation for reuse of the site may also have included the robbing of badly damaged portions of the Byzantine building, such as the walls of the rooms in Y.1 and 2, which, though remaining in only one or two courses, were not covered by collapsed masonry. In fact, the possible arch straddling the two squares was entirely removed, except for the stubs of the piers where they were bonded into the opposing walls (Fig. 6). Pre-Umayyad wall remnants in the Y.12 courtyard probe also only remained at the foundation course level. This Umayyad remodelling, though taking advantage of the surviving walls of room C, may have involved a completely new construction of other parts of the building. This is possibly true of the mangers of stable A, and likely true of all the masonry of the entry gate. In fact, the combination of the Umayyad cleanout and the thoroughness of the reconstruction warrant the labelling of house 119 as "Umayyad" rather than "Umayyad reuse of a Byzantine house."

Ironically, while the evidence of Umayyad reconstruction is good, there is little evidence of Umayyad occupation outside of room C. The possibility is that room C was occupied and refloored while the cleanout and reconstruction was going on, but that completion of the construction work was so close to the 747/8 earthquake collapse, that no Umayyad use of the new building actually took place.

In stable A, for example, there was no accumulation of domestic dung or other living debris on the bedrock cap in either Y.7 or 8. In Y.8 roof beams were found lying directly on bedrock cap in association with both Umayyad and Abbasid pottery (Fig. 9).



9. Overhead view of doorway into stable A (Y.8). The meter stick rests on sterile bedrock cap, with the trench on the left its removal down to bedrock itself. Two roof beams protrude from the balk to the lower left of the meter stick (Photo by B. de Vries).

*Abbasid*

The post-collapse Abbasid cooking activity in room C is substantiated by similar ash and animal bone deposits in the northern half of the courtyard (Y.5 and 10). The interpretation is that the population of

Umm al-Jimāl did not abandon the site in the mid-eighth century, but that it no longer had the manpower and economic resources to repair the damage done by natural catastrophe. Thus the Abbasid occupation made use of the still inhabitable portions of the Umayyad town, and did not resort to either reconstruction or the founding of an entirely new settlement as at Ṭabaqat Faḥil.

An accumulation in the entry gate of a thick layer of decomposed dung containing Umayyad and Abbasid pottery indicates that it, rather than the stables was used to

house animals in this period.

*Late Ottoman/Mandate.*

Sounding Y.7 gave excellent stratigraphic evidence of the Drūz remodelling of stable A. The partition between the mangers and the north wall of the stable is clearly an arch whose construction was abandoned in process. After the Umayyad/Abbasid abandonment of the stable a thick layer of yellow sandy soil was deposited to bring the floor level of the entire room up above the level of the eighth century ceiling collapse debris, possibly by the Drūz themselves, possibly earlier (the latest pottery was early Ottoman). In order to set the east pier for this arch, a foundation trench was dug through this sandy layer, which stratigraphically is later than early Ottoman and historically may be associated with the Drūz reconstruction activities of the 1920s and 1930s.

**B. Significant Considerations**

*Byzantine-Umayyad Transition.*

The site-wide scraping and dumping in preparation of Umayyad construction requires some adjustment to the previous hypothesis that occupation was continuous from the Byzantine to Umayyad periods. In general this is still true. The Umayyad reuse of Byzantine houses elsewhere on the site and the general style of the rebuilt structure here indicate architectural continuity, and the remodelling of various churches in the Umayyad period also indicates religious continuity. The interruption, therefore, does not appear to be religio-political or cultural.

The thorough removal and burning of Byzantine remains could be related to the prevalence of disastrous plagues that swept the Levant beginning with the Justinianic plague of 542. The seventh century Umayyad builders may have deemed it necessary to do a methodical cleansing of the site in order to restore disease-free habitability.

Study of the skeletal samples from the 1993 and 1994 excavations will include a search for corroborating pathological evidence for the possible incidence of plague at the site.

*Population Decline from the Sixth to Ninth Century*

The architecture indicates clearly that the late antique population of Umm al-Jimāl peaked early in the sixth century. In the seventh and eighth century we find some buildings like the Barracks in ruins, but extensive refurbishing and reconstruction is indicative of a still thriving though reduced community. Then in the aftermath of the ubiquitous 747/8 earthquake we find, not total abandonment as previously thought, but continued occupation of usable building spaces into the ninth century. One area to look for an explanation is the gradual change in economic and political circumstances brought on by the transition from Byzantine to Umayyad imperialism. Another is a more precise assessment of the long term demographic weakening brought on by the ravages of the pandemic of 542-749 just mentioned. While the first of these may receive answers from historical sources, the second has a strong archaeological component. It is hoped that future work at Umm al-Jimāl will help provide data on the relationships between disease and population decline.

**1994 FIELD SEASON**

The 1994 field season was conducted from June 20 to July 29 with a staff of 25 archaeologists and students and 20 field workers from the Umm al-Jimāl village. The field work involved four separate areas of operation.

**A. The Museum-Visitor Center (House 119)**

Department of Antiquities representative, architect Amjad al-Bataineh, completed field measurements and produced a set of

detailed plans, including room layout and wall and roofing details for the proposed Museum-Visitor Center at house 119 (Figs. 10, 11).

**B. Late Antiquity Burials - Areas Z and AA**

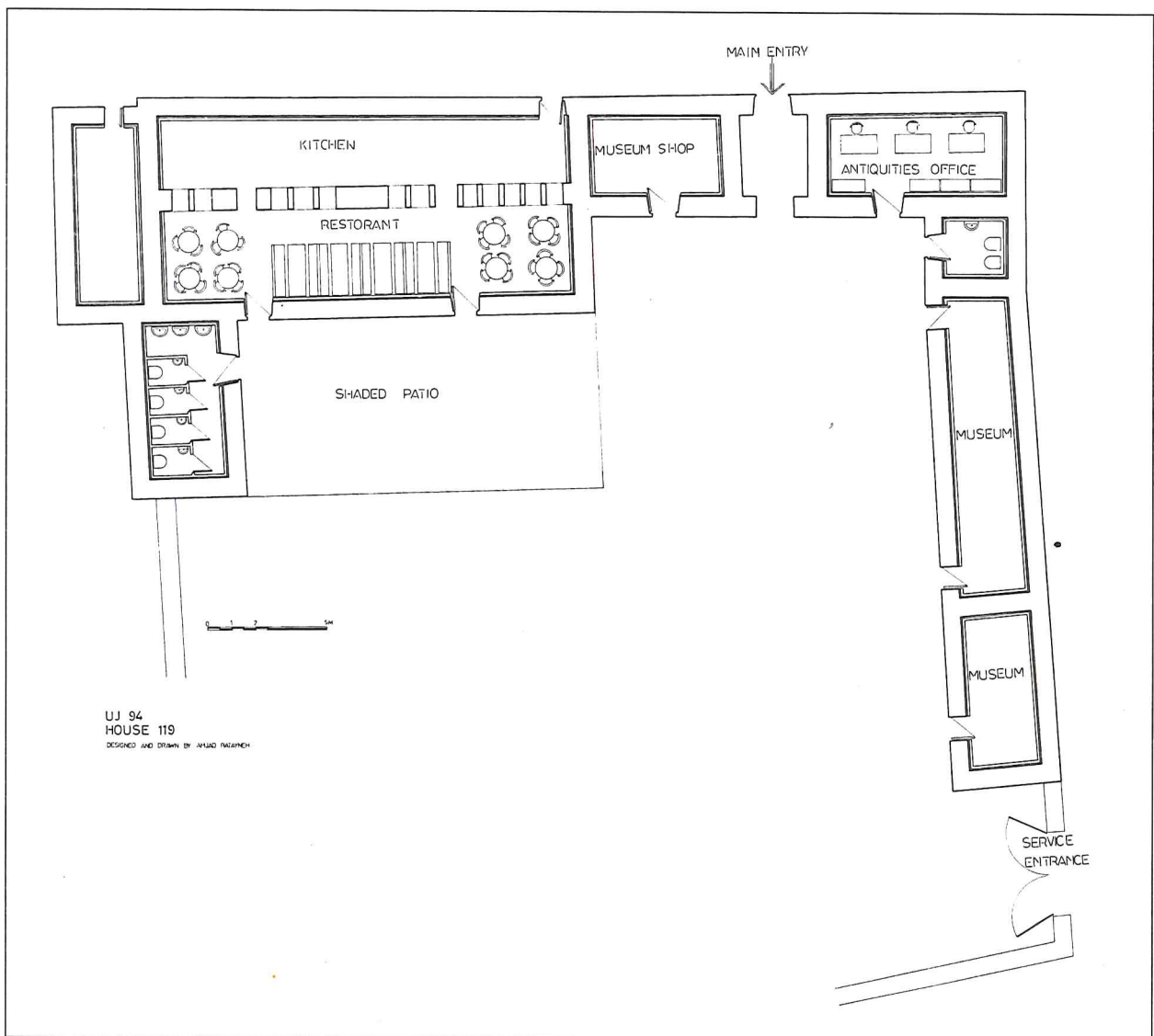
The tomb rescue excavations of the 1993 season inspired a carefully planned excavation of cist burials for the purpose of understanding the sociology of Umm al-Jimāl in late antiquity and to collect a sufficient sample of skeletal remains for pathological study and determination of disease patterns.

Two new tombs, Z.2 and Z.3, were excavated in the olive garden of Sheikh Hail

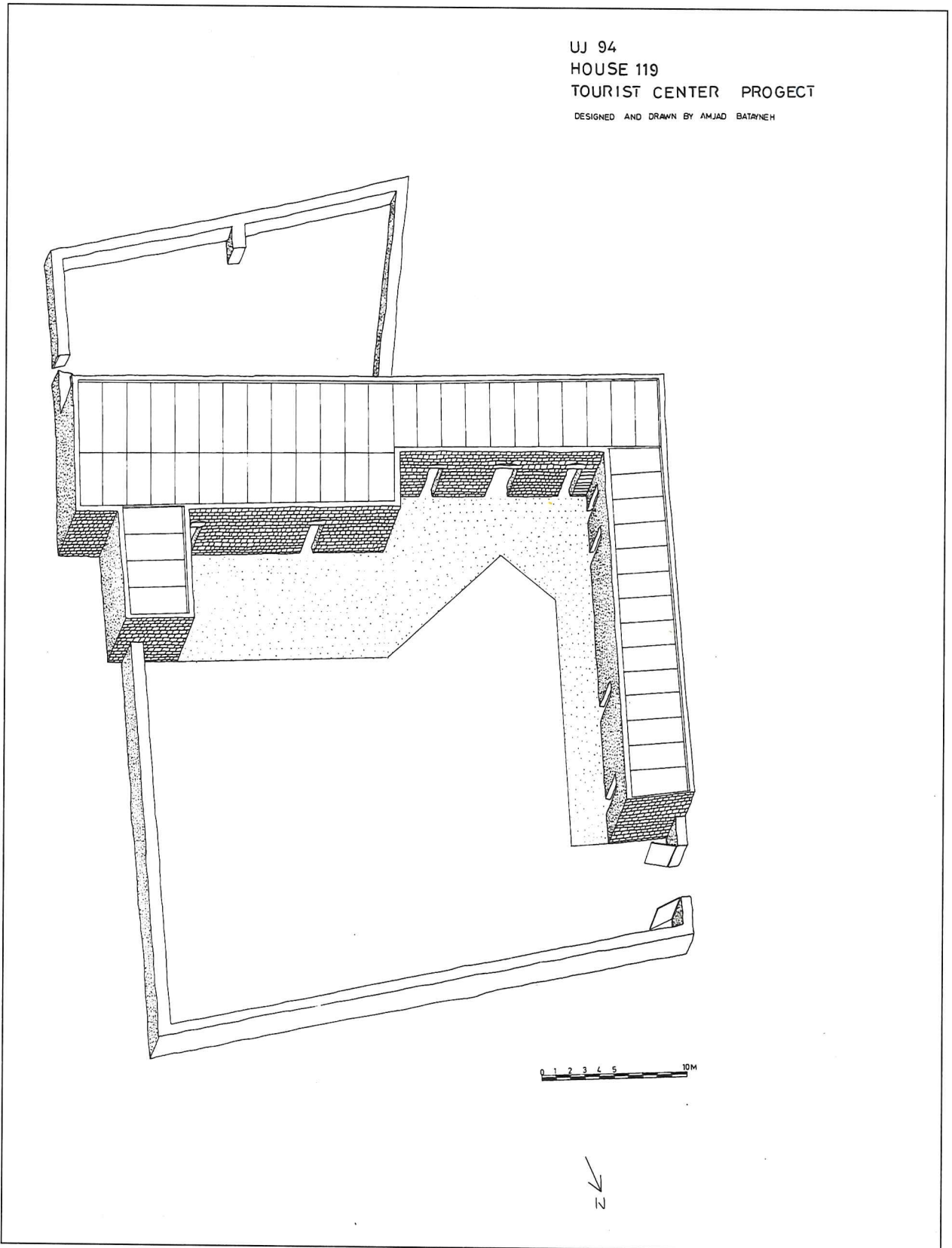
es-Serour, and more than a dozen cist tombs were excavated in area AA, conveniently located in the playground of the girls' school. A report on the results written by Janet Brashler follows in this issue of *ADAJ*. The skeletal remains are being processed in the anthropology laboratory of the University of Western Michigan.

**C. The Roman Village at al-Herri Area R**

Analysis of the Nabataean/Roman village discovered in 1984 (de Vries 1986, 1993) is a major remaining challenge of the Umm al-Jimāl Project, because so far awareness of such a site in the southern Ḥaurān is



10. Plan of proposed museum-visitor center at house 119 (Design and drawing by A. al-Bataineh).



11. Oblique overhead view of museum-visitor center (as a migrating bird crossing from Azerbaijan to Mecca would see it). (Design and drawing by A. al-Bataineh).

unique. One of the 1984 probes, R.4, was expanded on a ten meter grid in which eight 5 x 5 m squares, R.4, 6-12, were laid out and excavated. Goals are to understand the stratigraphic history and analyze the architectural planning and cultural characteristics of the community. A report on the results by Ahmad Momani and Michael Horstmanshof follows in this issue of *ADAJ*. Major excavation to achieve greater horizontal and vertical exposure will continue in a subsequent season.

#### **D. Survey of Decorative Architectural Fragments and Inscriptions**

In the 1984, 1992 and 1993 seasons Sally de Vries has carried out a systematic survey of decorative architectural fragments and inscriptions, not only in the late antique town, but also in the modern village where numerous significant stones are built into home walls and fences.

Eight archaeologists came especially to continue this work with her during the final week of the season; they photographed, drew and recorded a large number of stone fragments in the late antique town.

#### **Acknowledgements**

The core staff included administrator Sally de Vries (1993, 4), Department representative and architect Amjad al-Bataineh (1993, 4), ceramicist Cherie Lenzen (1993, 4), student coordinator Rick Sherrod (1993), area supervisors Janet Brashler (1994) and Ahmad Momani (1994), surveyors Douglas Winnail (1993) and Hervé Irion (1994), photographer Gerard Hammink (1994),

surveyors of decorative fragments Sally de Vries (1993, 4) and Roger Brummel (1994), assistant area supervisors Melissa Cheyney (1994) and Michael Horstmanshof (1994), administrative assistant Lynda White. Both seasons included a field school attended by 15 Ambassador and 12 Calvin College students, whose field work, recording and artifact analysis was crucial.

Forty Umm al-Jimāl residents' labors, advice and good humor made the dirt move and kept field morale high. The Department of Antiquities and ACOR provided indispensable logistical support. The Ministry of Education donated the use of the spacious Umm al-Jimāl girls' school and the Ambassador Foundation its comfortable apartments in 'Ammān. Sheikh Hail es-Serour, his wife and sons extended generous hospitality and assistance, and the people of Umm al-Jimāl included us in all their summer festivities, especially the numerous weddings.

Major financial support came from the Ambassador Foundation (1993, 4), Calvin College (1993, 4), the Warner-Lambert Foundation (1993, 4) and several private donors. All these organizations and individuals are thanked profusely for their generosity, energy, brainthrust and esprit de corps.

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