

# Excavations of Byzantine Churches and Mosaics in 1973

During 1973 work continued on the Byzantine churches and their mosaics in the Madaba area by the Department of Antiquities. Bastiaan Van Elderen, director of the American Center of Oriental Research, supervised the work with the assistance of Mahmud Rusan, inspector of antiquities in Madaba.

## CHAPELS OF THE VIRGIN MARY AND ST. ELIANOS

In central Madaba a small Byzantine chapel has been used as a private house and storage garage for the past 75 years. The oval-shaped chapel contains a mosaic floor, almost intact, with three Greek inscriptions. Each inscription mentions the name of the Virgin Mary. The property was abandoned in late 1972 and in early 1973 the Department of Antiquities was able to clean out the room and expose the mosaic (Plate LI). A date-line in one of the inscriptions dates the floor in A.D. 662/663.

In the same operation the mosaic floor in the Chapel of St. Elianos, located nearby, was cleaned and exposed (Plate LII). This floor is dated in A.D. 595/596.

In 1974 further excavations in the vicinity of these two chapels have exposed a portion of the main east-west street of Byzantine (and Roman) Madaba which lies between the two chapels. This street and the chapels will be part of the Department's preservation and restoration of the antiquities in this part of Madaba.

## GHISHAN CHURCH

In the Spring Mr. I. Ghishan, a resident of Madaba, accidentally discovered a mosaic floor about 30 cm. below

the surface of his backyard. This site is located east of the Byzantine church identified as the Cathedral in Madaba, excavated by the Department in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

During April and May the apse, presbytery, a portion of the nave and a portion of the south aisle of a Byzantine church were uncovered in the Ghishan property. Unfortunately, the remainder of the basilica was in neighboring property and under modern walls. The walls in the northeast corner of the Ghishan property were built over the apse wall of the church (Plate LIII, 1). Four courses of the ancient wall were preserved in the modern walls. No traces of the floor in the apse were found. A large portion of the presbytery was uncovered and its floor was made of alternating blue and white tiles with a circular design in the center which was badly mutilated (Plate LIII, 2).

Only the east portion of the nave could be uncovered and its mosaic floor contained designs and figures typical of middle sixth century Byzantine churches (Plate LIV). The large portion of the mosaic floor in the south aisle consisted of an ordered sequence of diamond-shaped designs. The existence of an earlier floor below was also ascertained. The south wall of the church was a meter wide and very well constructed.

The discovery of this church brings the number of Byzantine churches in Madaba to fourteen. There is evidence that all of these contained mosaic floors. This concentration of Byzantine churches and their close proximity to each other are subjects for closer investigation.

(1) ADAJ 14 (1969), pp. 16-67 (Arabic).



## THE MA'IN AREA

Near the main intersection in Ma'in a local resident discovered a mosaic floor when digging a drainage trench around his house. Further investigation and excavation identified the floor as part of a Byzantine church but nearly all of the architecture and mosaic had been destroyed a number of years ago when the modern house was built. Traces of early Islamic occupation were identified above the small portion of the church preserved.

At Deir, near Ma'in, excavations in November and December uncovered the remains of a Byzantine monastery complex. The complete floor plan of the small church or chapel was uncovered. The walls were preserved to a height of one or two meters. The entire area—apse, side aisles, presbytery, and nave—was covered with a mosaic floor containing geometric figures and interlaced designs. An inscription in the east end of the nave mentions the name of Theodorus "the most glorious and illustrious" and the one-line inscription on the altar table contains the name of John "the sinner." On the south side of the church is a complex of rooms only partially excavated in 1973. These appear to be the installations related to the monastic community. Future excavations will completely expose the complex and hopefully identify the various rooms and their functions.

This site was not occupied after the Byzantine period. The destruction of the buildings may have been occasioned by an earthquake, possibly in the seventh century, since a male skeleton was found in the north aisle under fallen stones from the north wall.

## AJLUN AREA

In the Ajlun area traces of a Byzantine church were found at Deir as-Smadiyah during the construction of a mosque in the Spring of 1973. At Farah a portion of a Byzantine mosaic floor was found as part of a modern house. Military occupation of Mar Elias has exposed portions of mosaic floors, presumably from Byzantine churches on the site.

The year 1973 was very productive in the new evidence regarding the Byzantine period. The heavy concentration of Byzantine churches, in various parts of East Jordan as well as in the Madaba area, and their elaborate mosaics and architecture suggest an extensive population possessing wealth and artistic appreciation. Further study of the art, liturgy, theology, and demography of the area becomes essential in the light of these new data.

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