

A SHORT NOTE ON THE EXCAVATIONS OF YĀJŪZ 1994-1995

by

Emsaytif Suleiman

The site of Yājūz occupies an entire hillside directly east of the modern cemetery of Shafā Badrān about one kilometre north of the Šūwayliḥ-az-Zarqā' road. The site is registered in the files of the Department of Antiquities as a Roman-Byzantine ruin (Dept. of Antiquities 1973: site no.411) and has been visited by a number of scholars (Merrill 1883; Condor 1889; Mecown 1930; Glueck 1939).

They described an extensive Roman-Byzantine city which served as a mile station 7 miles out of Philadelphia ('Ammān) on the way to Gerasa (Jarash), some 23 miles away. The ruins include at least two churches and other public buildings, plus two cemeteries, one on the north slope and one on the south slope. In 1972 H.O. Thompson excavated a Roman tomb at the site of Khirbat al-Kom which is the east part of the site of Yājūz (Thompson 1972: 37-41). During the summer of 1994 and 1995 the Department of Antiquities conducted two long seasons of excavations at the site under the supervision of the author.

The first season of excavation extended from April 2 until September 15, 1994. A large basilican church and adjacent building complex (Figs.1 and 2), a compound of several rooms, were uncovered. The church measures 28 x 17 m and comprises a central hall with two aisles and an apse at the east end (Fig.3). It is similar in plan to the Hisbān church (Lawler 1980: Fig.4). The entire floor of the church was covered in mosaics, except for one room at the south-east side that had slab-flooring. The mosaics all seem to have had geometric designs (Fig.4) similar to those of the church of Shūnat Nimrīn (Piccirillo 1982:336). The mosaic floor which was mostly destroyed,

was repaired in antiquity, as two distinct levels of mosaics can be identified.

The church was entered through a side doorway 3.40 m wide (see Fig.2) with three steps that gave onto a paved courtyard (9 x 9 m) and at the north-west side of it there was a bell-shaped cistern that held up to 30 cubic litres of water. The gateway, the paved courtyard and the cistern served the church and the adjacent building complex. The walls of the church and the building complex were plastered and painted, evidenced by some remains of red paint, and long benches ran along the base of the main halls. Both the church and the building complex had vaulted roofs covered with roof tiles, the walls having been built of reused capitals, drums, bases, architrave, altars and dressed stones of former Roman buildings (Fig.5). The reused stones suggest the presence of a Roman temple in the area. Some Byzantine pottery juglets, bronze coins, basalt stonetools and a lot of roof tiles were found. The church and the building complex date from the middle of the fifth to the end of the seventh century AD.

The second season of excavations extended during the period of June 15 to September 15, 1995. A large part of the huge building complex (Fig.6:a and b) consisting of a number of houses, were uncovered immediately south-east of the church. The structure of the rooms of these houses looks like the Byzantine rooms at the citadel of 'Ammān (Bennett 1977:Pls.62:1,64:1,72:1). The roofs of these rooms were vaulted and the walls were plastered but the floors were made of hard yellow clay (*Hūwwār*) over the bedrock or of plaster, besides slab-flooring in some cases. Several complete Byzantine pottery lamps, some pottery

bowls, juglets, jars, a bronze pot, some bronze coins and basalt stone vessels and tools were found. The finds of this building complex make it contemporary with the church.

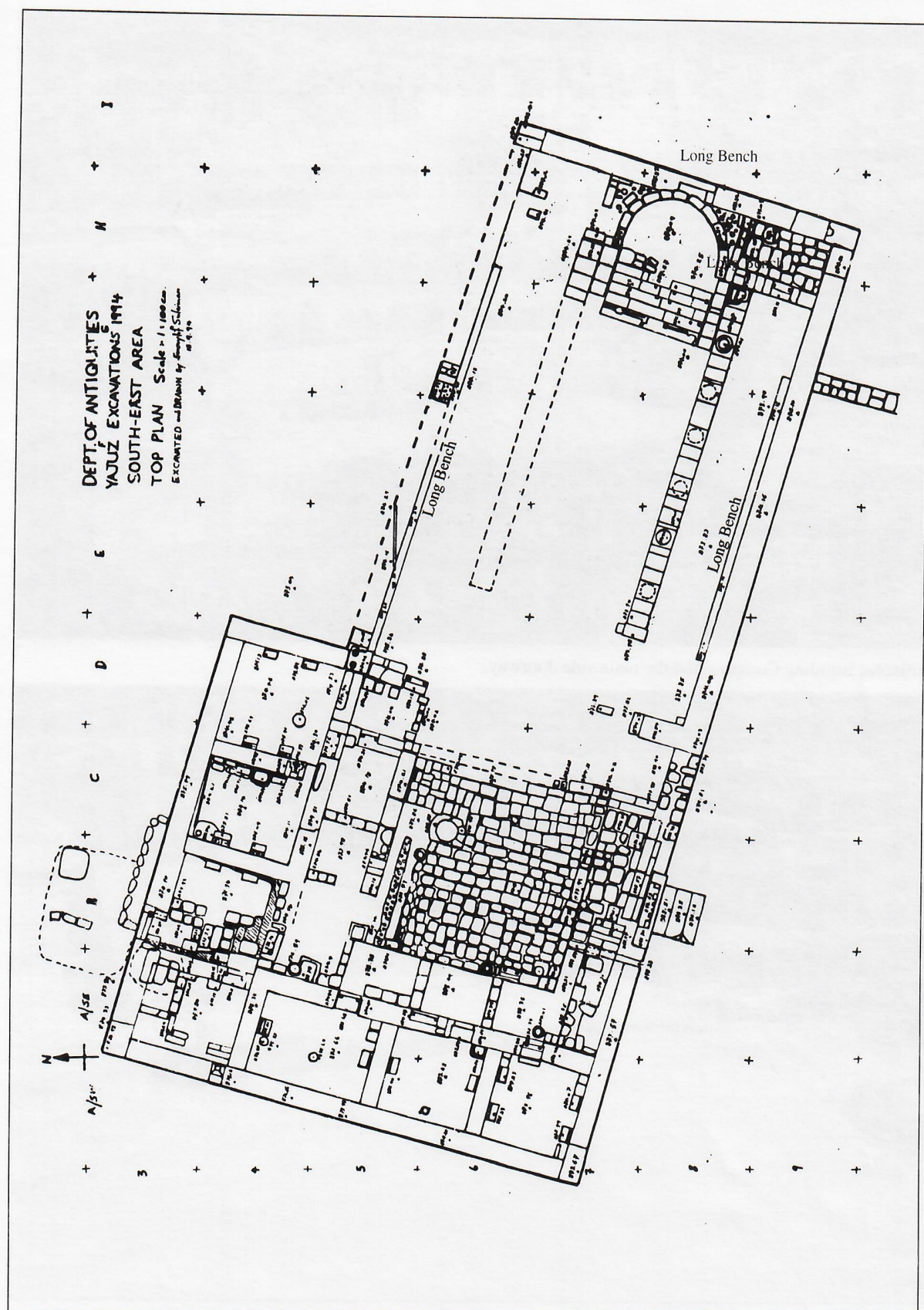
During this second season of excavations, a team of students of the Archaeology Division of the Jordan University, directed by Lutfi Khalil, excavated the north-west

side of the site. They uncovered a chapel and some rooms north of it. West of the chapel is a room with four internal arches and an eight-line Greek inscription dating to the middle of the seventh century.

Emsaytif Suleiman
Department of Antiquities
Amman, Jordan

Bibliography

- Bennett, C.-M.
1979 Excavations at the Citadel (Al-Qal'a), Amman, 1977. *ADAJ* 23: 115 - 160.
- Condor, C.R.
1889 *The Survey of Eastern Palestine, PEF*, vol.1. London.
- Department of Antiquities
1973 *The Archaeological Heritage of Jordan. Part 1*. Amman
- Glueck, N.
1939 *Explorations in Eastern Palestine III*, *AASOR* 28-29:177-178.
- Lawler, J.
1980 The 1978 Excavation of the Hesban North Church, *ADAJ* 24: 95-105
- Mecown, C.C.
1930 Spring Field Trip. 1930, *BASOR* 39: Oct.30: 12-13.
- Merrill, S.
1883 *East Jordan*. New York.
- Piccirillo, M.
1982 A Church at Shunat Nimrin, *ADAJ* 26:335-242.
- Thompson, H.O.
1972 A Tomb at Khirbat Yajuz, *ADAJ* 17:37-45



1. Plan of Yājūz excavations 1994. South-east area.



2. Adjacent Building Complex and the main side doorway.



3. East Side of the Church of Yājūz.



4. Part of the Mosaic Floor of the Church.



5. Reused Roman Architraves, Capitals and Bases in the Church.



6 a. West Side of the Building Complex. House A, Room 1.



6 b. North-east Side of the Building Complex. House A, Room 3.