

HAWARTE

EXCAVATION AND RESTORATION WORK IN 2001

Michał Gawlikowski

This spring a team from the Polish Center, working as a joint Syro-Polish mission on behalf of the DGAM represented by the Museum of Hama, continued with the work started in August 1998 and continued in June-July 1999 and June 2000. The season lasted from April 5 to May 31, 2001.¹⁾

1) The team included the Director, Prof. Michał Gawlikowski, and his wife Krystyna, Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek, archaeologist, who also filled in for the Director during the latter's absence, Eng. Wojciech Terlikowski, architect, and a team of restorers headed by Mrs. Ewa Parandowska, including Ms Aleksandra Trochimowicz, Ms Magdalena Muc, Mr. Bartosz Markowski and Mr. Cristobal Calaforra-Rzepka. Mr. Marek Puzkarski joined the mission for a few days as a draughtsman, as did a photographer, Mr. Tomasz Szmagier. The DGAM provided the mission with accommodation in its house at Qalaat al-Mudiq, covered part of the labor costs, provided tools and building materials as necessary. Our work was greatly facilitated by Mr. Nadim al-Khoury, Director of Afamia Museum, who spared no time and effort to assist us in every way.

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The mithraeum found recently under the church of Archbishop Photios, excavated by Maria Teresa and Pierre Canivet in the 1970s,²⁾ is notable for its mural paintings, which are unequaled not only in Syria, but in the entire Near East as well, and arguably in the Roman world in general. It is important to uncover the underground monument in its entirety, to protect it properly and make it accessible to the public. The overall program, as submitted to the Directorate General of Antiquities, proposes to excavate the complex and to build a permanent shelter over it.

This task had been hindered until now by the presence of a modern house built over the ruins of the church. Before the start of the present season, the house was expropriated and demolished by DGAM, and we could proceed with the excavation as planned.

Our restorers were not only busy consolidating and cleaning the murals, but also working on hundreds of detached fragments recovered from the fill during the excavation and preserved in Hama and Afamia. While many of them, probably most, will never be fit for exhibition, there is always a chance of their being used for a graphic restitution of the parts missing

from the walls of the grotto. It should be mentioned in this connection that a few large fragments of the painted ceiling from the main room were treated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw by Aleksandra Trochimowicz and have now been returned to Syria in one piece, ready for display.

A program of computer-aided virtual reconstruction of the paintings has also been implemented. Colors are being enhanced, the background neutralized, and different layers of painting separated on screen to render the subjects represented more readable. Simultaneously, snapshots of the paintings taken immediately after discovery are being treated in order to recreate murals that had disintegrated even before our mission began its work.

One of the planned objectives of the season was finding and excavating the original entrance to the mithraeum, to serve if possible as a permanent access to the underground site. We knew already that there was another painted room to the south of the main room, which could not be excavated as long as the modern house remained in place. Accordingly, it was our first task this year to tackle this area, hoping to discover the entrance (*Fig. 1*).

THE DOORWAY AND ENTRANCE

The excavation of this part of the subterranean complex was particularly difficult because of the presence of later walls and foundations. Even after removing the modern structure and lifting a patch of mosaic underneath, we were dealing with an area of barely 2.50 m by 2.70 m, which

had to be excavated to a depth of about 4 m. It is surrounded on three sides by the foundations of the church, laid in two phases (about AD 400 and 483), while on the fourth side there is a vertical rock face with the opening to the part of the grotto that had served as the entrance (*Fig. 2*).

2) M. T. and P. Canivet, Huarte. Sanctuaire chrétien d'Apamène (IVe-VIe s.) (Paris 1987).



Fig. 1. The south portico and southwestern corner of the church, showing our excavations underneath (Photo M. Gawlikowski)

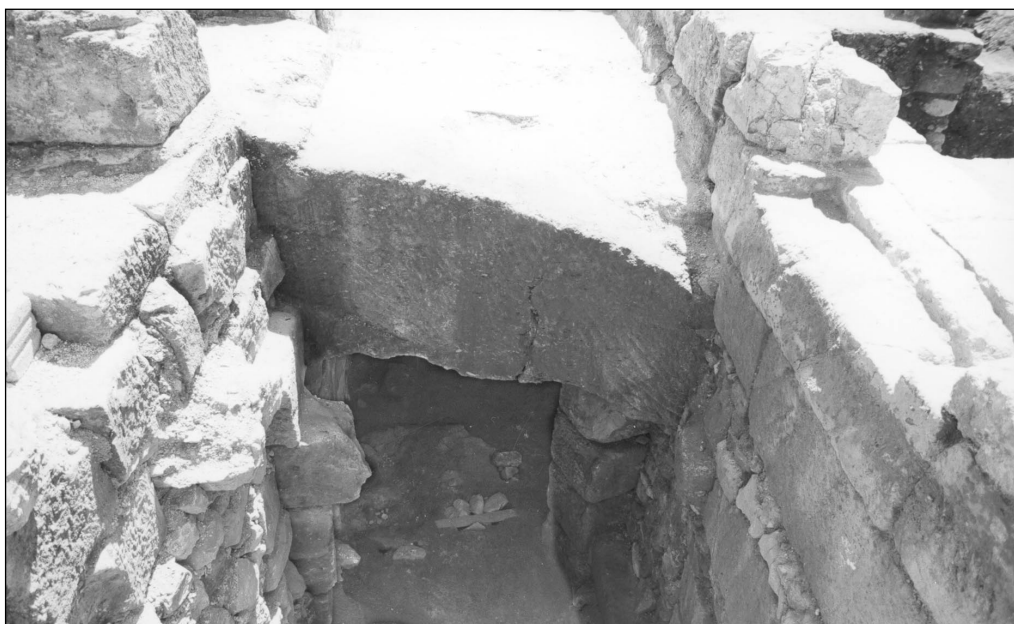


Fig. 2. The excavation under the south aisle of the church with the rock ceiling of the mithraeum where it had been cut away (Photo M. Gawlikowski)

A stone pillar was erected on the floor of this pit when the mithraeum was still in service.

After excavating this cramped area, we proceeded to clear the space under the rock roof. This was filled to its full height with loose stones thrown in by the

church builders. Gradually, it appeared that the room opened southwards to the outside. This entrance was also filled with stones and soil and covered with a mosaic which paved the southern portico alongside the church (*Fig. 3*). The mosaic is plain white, so we did not hesitate to



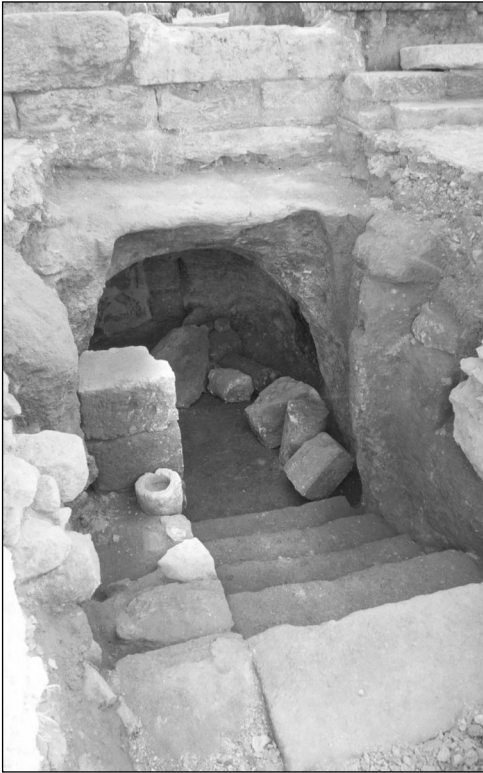
Fig. 3. The south portico as cleared during the present season, "Maison Khalil" in the background (Photo M. Gawlikowski)

lift a part of it, which was already repaired in antiquity and further damaged by the subsiding fill.

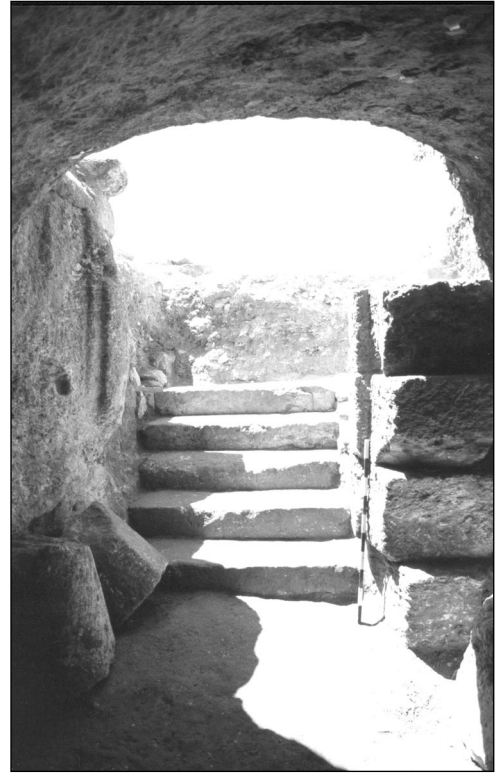
Underneath, a flight of five steps was found, 1.50 m wide (*Figs. 4-5*). The stone steps are set in a dromos cut in the rock and lead to a doorway preserving in place two jambs: the one to the right is rock-cut, the other built of stone blocks and secondary. The lintel is not preserved. The door itself was apparently fitted into a wooden frame. Elements of two columns that could have adorned the doorway have been found. Just behind the doorway, to the right, the rock wall is blackened with soot and displays a horizontal row of holes

that could have kept in place a grill or some other kind of cooking installation.

Once down inside, the visitor was confronted by a huge lion striding left, painted on a wall separating the entrance room from the main chamber behind it. The animal was painted repeatedly in the same place and posture, no doubt as a symbolic guardian of the mithraeum. Unfortunately, the painting is very fragmentary. In front of it there is a round rock-cut pit, 1.60 m deep, which was found covered with a flat stone slab. This feature could have been used during initiation ceremonies, of which we have but a dim idea based on the extant sources.



*Fig. 4. Steps and doorway to the mithraeum beneath the church wall
(Photo T. Szmagier)*



*Fig. 5. The steps seen from inside the mithraeum
(Photo T. Szmagier)*

The collected evidence suggests that this part of the grotto suffered massive damage, possibly in an earthquake. There is a crack in the ceiling from side to side, apparently contemporary with the destruction of the left doorjamb. Moreover, the vertical cut of the rock further west means that a part of the cave had become roofless. This is best explained, if we assume that the natural roof had been damaged beyond repair and was replaced with a built cover, supported by the pillar surviving in the corner between the church foundations.

Another pillar still supports the remaining roof, which is cracked (Figs. 6–7). The bench that was formed between this pillar and the repaired doorway was filled with an abundant deposit of kitchen refuse: ashes, bones, and ceramic sherds. The pottery assemblage is particularly rich, consisting mainly of broken cooking pots, plates and drinking vessels. Most of the bones were of chicken, with some mutton and beef present as well. Apparently, an overall cleaning of the place had been ordered after the destruction and the trash swept into a corner. As the pottery is

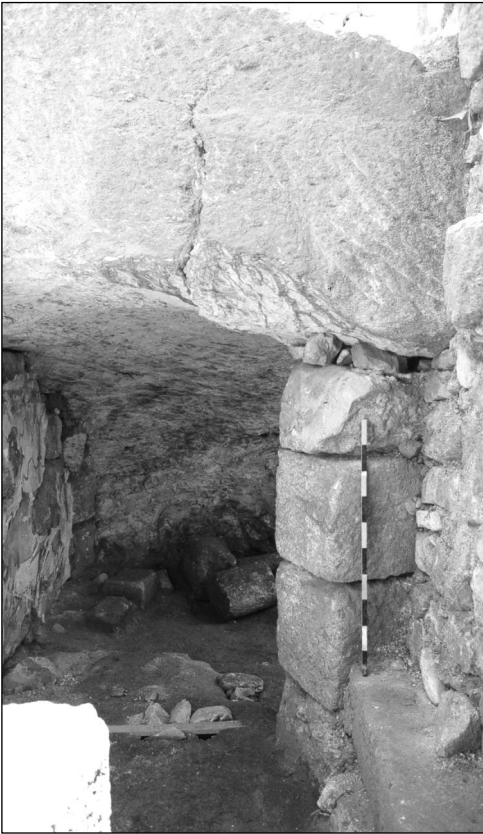


Fig. 6. The entrance room and the sheared-off rock ceiling supported by a pillar to the right (Photo T. Szmagier)



Fig. 7. The supporting pillar seen from inside, the covering of a pit in the foreground (Photo T. Szmagier)

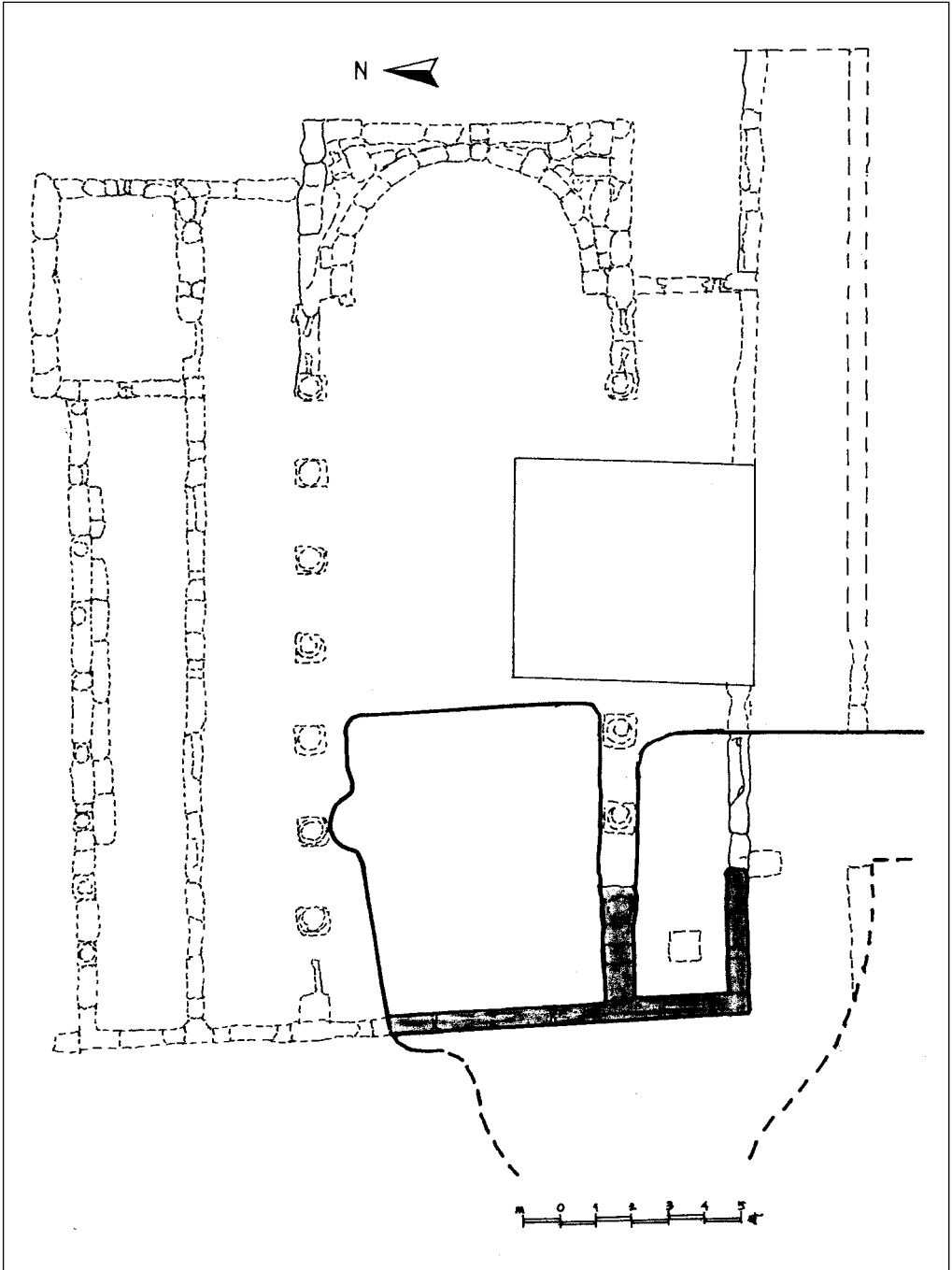


Fig. 8. Outline of the mithraeum under the church of Photios in its early phase
(Drawing W. Terlikowski)

typical of the 4th century, disaster must have struck rather late in the existence of the mithraeum.

Very few objects associated with the mithraeum were recovered. Of the several votive altars only one is inscribed, apparently in the course of the 2nd century (Fig. 9), bearing the name of one Marcus Longinus, in Greek. The feet of a statuette seem to have belonged to a Leontocephalus figure, well-known from Mithraic iconography (Fig. 10).

The original western limit of the cave is not known. It is clear, however, that it reached well beyond the line of the church façade (Fig. 8). A test pit in the western portico of the church revealed yet another pillar that had supported the roof built after the rock ceiling had been damaged. In another test pit the top of a painted wall was revealed barely 40 cm from the church foundation, so close that it cannot be investigated any further.



Fig. 9. Altar of Marcus Longinus
(Photo T. Szmagier)



Fig. 10. Feet of a marble statuette
(Photo T. Szmagier)