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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN BASILICA
IN TUNISIA

by

Victoria Bennett

A thesis submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies and Research
of the University of Ottawa
in fulfillment of requirements for
a Master of Arts Degree

Ottawa, Ontario

Canada

August, 1985

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

AJA	American Journal of Archaeology.
Ant. Af.	Antiquités africaines.
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research.
BSAF	Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de France.
CEDAC	Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation Archéologique de la conservation de Carthage.
CIL	Corpus inscriptionum latinorum, Berlin, 1863 sq.
CRAI	Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum, Vienne, 1866 sq.
CT	Les Cahiers de Tunisie.
DACL	Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, D. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, H.L. Marrou, Paris, 1903-1953.
EMC/CNV	Echos du Monde Classique/Classical News and Views.
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies.
MEFRA	Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'Ecole Française de Rome, section Antiquité.
REL	Revue des Etudes Latines.
RHCM	Revue d'histoire et de civilisation du Maghreb.
RLouvre	La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France.
RSR	Recherches de Sciences Religieuses.

INTRODUCTION

The study of Christian basilicas in Tunisia began nearly one hundred years ago, while Tunisia was under French rule. Since that time numerous sites have been discovered and excavated. French colonists, explorers and clergymen alike all participated in these excavations. Few kept records of their work, and fewer still were qualified for this type of research. The main thrust of these excavations was usually the retrieval of epigraphic material and the rediscovery of martyrs' tombs. To achieve this end, most sites were stripped to virgin soil with little regard for the provenance of artifacts and none for the stratigraphy. This has led one scholar to lament that "...our ignorance regarding their [the churches'] dates, style or planning is appalling. It is due in part to obsolete publications and poor excavation techniques in the past..."¹. Only in the last twenty years or so have the excavation techniques used been acceptable by present day standards.

There exists no comprehensive study of the Christian basilica in Tunisia and few attempts have been made to look at the Tunisian basilicas as a group. One of the earliest works was P. Gauckler's, Basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie². While the text provides only limited information, (only the basilica at Dermesh in Carthage is covered in detail), the publication is of particular interest for the quality of its ground plans and for the rendering of the floor mosaics. In certain instances, basilicas that were fairly well preserved during Gauckler's day have since been destroyed. The only surviving evidence of their existence is Gauckler's plan. In 1933, J. Vaultrin published a resumé of excavations in Carthage entitled, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage³. The book was based largely on the work of A. Delattre, who was responsible for the excavation of most Christian sites in Carthage. At the Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana, held in Vatican City in 1938, P. Lapeyre presented a paper entitled "La basilique chrétienne de Tunisie"⁴. The paper dealt with numerous aspects of Christian architecture in Tunisia, including types of basilicas, baptisteries, and decoration. This paper is perhaps the closest thing to a comprehensive work. It is now nearly fifty years out of date. It does not attempt follow the chronological development of the basilicas.

During the late 1960's the French scholar N. Duval began work on Christian basilicas in Tunisia. Since that time he has participated in and directed numerous excavations and re-excavations of basilica sites in Tunisia. Duval was perhaps the first scholar to draw parallels between the different architectural elements of Christian basilicas in Tunisia, and the first to give particular attention to the chronological development of the individual basilicas. In 1973 he produced a major work entitled Les églises africaines à deux absides. Unfortunately, as the name implies, the publication deals only with double apsed basilicas. More recently the sites of two previously excavated basilicas in the region of Carthage were re-examined by L. Ennabli⁶. While her work made several important contributions to our knowledge of the basilicas themselves, the main thrust of both publications was not architectural but epigraphic.

In preparing this study, I surveyed over thirty basilicas before selecting eight for examination. Several factors played an important role in choosing which basilicas to present in detail. For basilicas outside the region of Carthage there were three essential factors: 1) The state of preservation at the site; 2) The quality of the excavation, and 3) The quality of the publication. For Carthage the situation was different. Here the state of preservation, especially at sites from the Christian era, is often very poor. In addition to this most of the Christian sites were poorly excavated and not one of the original excavations was ever given detailed publication. Yet Carthage was once the most important city in Christian North Africa, renowned not only for its wealth, its political importance and the number of its inhabitants but also for the strength of its influence in religious matters. Carthage is also the city for whose Christian basilicas there is the best evidence in literary sources. Although the criteria used in the selection of sites outside the region of Carthage itself cannot be met, a city of such importance should not be overlooked in a study of this nature; therefore, I have chosen three basilicas for which the largest amount of useful information can be gathered.

The goal of this study is, building on the work of previous scholars, to examine some early Christian basilicas of Tunisia, in hopes of establishing criteria for placing the basilical types, and the phases of specific basilicas, in chronological order. If this study establishes the framework for a chronology of Christian basilicas in Tunisia, it has succeeded.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Krauthelmer, Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture, p. 198.
- 2) Geuckler, P., Basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, Paris, 1913.
- 3) Voultrin, J., Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, Alger, 1933.
- 4) Lapeyre, P.G., "La basilique chrétienne de Tunisie", Atti del IV Congresso Internazionale di Archeologica Cristiana, Città del Vaticano, 1938, Rome, 1940, p. 169-244.
- 5) Duval, N., Les églises Africaines à deux absides, Paris, 1973.
- 6) Ennabli, L., Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de la basilique dite de Sainte-Monique à Carthage, Rome, 1975 and Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage - II la basilique de Mcidfa, Rome, 1982.

CHAPTER I: THE BASILICA OF BELLATOR

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Less than 150 meters from the three temples that marked the capitol of the Roman town of Sufetula, (see fig. 1, plate V), are the walled remains of a Christian basilica. Known as the "Basilica of Bellator"¹, the building stands on the remains of a monumental structure². The stylobate of this earlier monument was left in situ and was reused as the foundation walls of the basilica. The surrounding neighbourhood consisted of urban villas and elegant gardens. Archaeologists have been unable to determine whether these villas were still occupied during the initial phases of the basilica's use³.

Later a large number of these villas were demolished and another, much larger basilica with numerous annexes was built a short distance from the basilica of Bellator. With the construction of the second basilica, known as the "Basilica of Vitalis", (see following chapter), and its annexes, the neighbourhood of the basilica was gradually transformed into a distinctly Christian quarter⁴.

The basilica was originally excavated between 1907-1911, under the direction of Alfred Merlin. Almost the entire basilica was excavated during the summer and fall of 1907. These excavations were published by Merlin in a small book entitled Forum et Eglises de Sufetula, Paris, 1912. A much more detailed study of the basilica was conducted under the direction of Noël Duval, between 1963-1966. This second campaign of excavation and study has produced a great number of publications, the most detailed and comprehensive of which is Duval's Les Basiliques de Sbeitla à Deux Sanctuaires Opposés, Paris, 1971.

BASILICA COMPLEX

"Bellator" is one of seven Christian basilicas in Sbeitla, and may be the oldest. The basilica has a large central nave, lined on either side by eight double columns. Along each of the lateral walls of the quadratum populi, are four single columns. At different times apses were built at three separate places: at the southern end of the quadratum populi, at the northern end of the quadratum populi, as well as inside the basilica at the northern end of the central nave. The third apse replaced the northern apse and was built directly in front of it.

The basilica itself fit into a rectangle 36.30m long and 17.00m wide. The baptismal font used in conjunction with this basilica was part of a separate building located beside the basilica⁵. The entire complex, including the baptistery, several small annexes, and small courtyards was surrounded by a solid stone wall. The basilica is oriented North North-East / South South-West, along an axis which is 22° East of the geographic North⁶.

ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

PHASE I

Although preceded by neither atrium nor courtyard, the basilica was entirely surrounded by a solid stone wall that separated it from the streets of the town.

Excavators believe that the main entry was originally in the northern façade of the basilica, centered on the axis of the nave, (see Phase I plan, Plate I). The existence of such an entryway remains strictly hypothetical however, as the northern end of the basilica was later the object of considerable structural alterations. These alterations, which eventually saw the construction of the different apses, (see below), would have removed any traces of the original entry.

Two other doors open directly into the eighth bays of the eastern and western side aisles⁷. The eastern door has a width of 1.58m between its two jambshafts. The western door is slightly smaller, measuring 1.42m. Both door sills remain in situ. Hinge and bolt holes cut into the upper face of the stone sills indicate that both entryways closed with double leaf doors⁸.

PHASE II

Phase II is marked primarily by the loss of the hypothetical main entryway in the northern façade (see Phase II plan, Plate II). During this phase, the walls around the main doorway at the northern end of the basilica were removed to allow the installation of a small apse (see below). The doors in the lateral walls remained in use throughout the remainder of the basilica's history⁹.

PHASES III and IV

There are no changes to the entryways apparent during these phases.

QUADRATUM POPULI

PHASE I

The quadratum populi has an overall length of 24.0m and is divided by two colonnades into a broad central nave 7.00m wide and two side aisles, each with an average width of 4.50m (see Phase I plan, Plate I). Each colonnade has eight pairs of columns that divide the central nave and side aisles into a series of nine bays that vary in length from 2.60 to 2.70m. Although the distance between the quadratum populi's southern wall and the northernmost column from both colonnades was also 2.70m, the distance between the northern wall and the northernmost column pairs was somewhat greater and was compensated by a set of pilasters¹⁰.

The colonnades are set on a continuous stylobate of reused rectangular blocks. These blocks were set with their long axes perpendicular to the axis of the nave. They have an average width of 1.00m, but vary considerably in length, from 0.75 - 1.25m. The northern extremity of the stylobate stops immediately south of the northern wall of the quadratum populi. The southern wall of the quadratum populi was built on top of the stylobate's southern end¹¹. Each column had an independent base that was cemented to the stylobate. In every pair of columns, the individual bases were separated from each other by a distance of about 0.10m. Although the bases were taken from several different sources, there was a certain attempt at uniformity in the selection of size and profile¹².

During the 1907 excavations, two complete column shafts were found. Each complete column measured 2.50m in length and had a base diameter of 0.40m¹³. The numerous fragmentary shafts found inside the basilica also had 0.40m base diameters¹⁴. No capitals were found; it is therefore difficult to estimate the total height of the columns¹⁵.

The walls of the quadratum populi were built with large blocks of cut stone. The blocks vary from 0.60m to almost 1.00m in length and were 0.50 - 0.60m thick. Nearly the

entire length of the eastern wall has survived intact, its nine courses of massive stone blocks are surmounted by a richly sculpted cornice, which excavators believe was reused from an earlier monument. Together the wall and the cornice are preserved to a height of 4.60m¹⁶ (see fig. 1, Plate V).

The western wall was in much poorer condition. Its preserved height varies from 0.50m to 1.50m. When the basilica was studied by Duval during the early 1960's a segment of the quadratum populi that stood just west of the apse was preserved to a height of 3.20m. This was enough to indicate that the wall had once been pierced by a small arched window¹⁷. This section of wall has since collapsed, taking the remaining traces of the window with it.

The floor of Phase I was a simple cement layer that covered the stylobates of the central colonnades.

The basilica appears to have been covered by tiles supported on a tie beam truss roof. Although no timber survives from the wooden frame, Merlin found an abundance of roof tiles inside the basilica, as well as thirty-six terracotta antefixes. Twenty-one of these were decorated with winged heads resembling Mercury and were probably reused from an earlier monument. Six other antefixes were decorated with roughly molded female heads, palms, peacocks and vermicular ornamentation decorated the remaining antefixes¹⁸.

PHASE II

At some point the level of the quadratum populi floor was raised slightly, (less than 0.10m) and covered with a mosaic pavement¹⁹. At the time of their discovery during the original excavations, the mosaics of the central nave were in a fragmentary condition and since then have suffered considerable deterioration²⁰. The mosaics of the side aisles which were in an even poorer state of preservation have since been lost. The mosaics now visible in the third bay of the central nave were not uncovered until Duval's excavations in the early 1960's.

The motif throughout the basilica was predominantly geometric, only a few traces of

vegetal motif were found in the fourth and fifth bays of the central nave. No figural mosaics were found anywhere in the basilica. The decor consisted essentially of squares and circles. The interiors of these forms were ornately decorated with geometric patterns and garlands of leaves. The areas between the squares and circles were covered with rows of chevrons. The choice of colors - black, ochre, yellow, grey, white and dull red - produced a generally somber effect²¹.

Seven tombs were found beneath the floors of the quadratum populi. The majority of these were clustered at the southern end of the basilica. Four burials, (tombs 2, 3, 4, and 5), are in the ninth bay of the western side aisle. Near the northern end of the basilica, tomb 6 straddles the third and fourth bays of the eastern side aisle. Tomb 7 was installed in the third bay of the eastern side aisle against the lateral wall of the basilica. Not a single fragment of epitaph was found in connection with any of these burials. The lack of epigraphic material, in addition to the poor condition of the stratigraphy, has made the phasing of these burials difficult²². The excavators believe that the surfaces of most of these burials would have been flush with level II of the quadratum populi. This is of little help for the dating of the burials as level II appears to have been used as the floor for most of the history of the quadratum populi from phase II when it was installed until the basilica was abandoned. A vague terminus post quem can nevertheless be furnished for three of the burials. Tomb 1 was clearly installed before the stairway that gave access to the southern apse: the large console that formed the western edge of the stairway was placed above the southern end of the burial. Tombs Four and Seven clearly antedate Phase IV of the basilica since each was found beneath one of the lateral colonnades that reinforced the walls of the basilica.

PHASE III

The quadratum populi does not appear to have undergone any major architectural changes during Phase III (see Phase III plan, Plate III). There is however a significant change in the orientation of the basilica; the sanctuary is moved to the north end of the central nave, (see below). An apse was also installed outside the north end of the central nave, (see below). If the quadratum populi floors were repaved during this phase, no traces have survived.

PHASE IV

The most significant change attributed to this fourth and final phase of the basilica was the installation of a third apse inside the central nave after the apse at the northern end of the basilica collapsed. This collapse may have been the result of earthquakes, which could also have weakened other parts of the building. During Phase IV, a series of columns was installed along the lateral walls of the quadratum populi, apparently to reinforce them²³. These columns were roughly aligned with every second pair of columns in the central nave, (see Phase IV plan, Plate IV), and stood at the northern ends of the second, fourth, sixth and eighth bays of the eastern and western side aisles. It should be emphasized that the aligning of these columns is approximate. The northernmost column along the eastern lateral wall is actually set in the third bay²⁴.

There do not appear to have been any new floor pavements installed for the quadratum populi during Phase IV.

CULT AREAS: SOUTHERN APSE

PHASE I

At the south end of the central nave was a large semi-circular apse. The apse was freestanding with both the interior and exterior faces of the wall following the same curve (see Phase I plan, Plate I). The foundations at the open end of the apse, like those of the quadratum populi, were built on the stylobate of the monument that had previously occupied the site. At the closed end of the apse the foundations were built above the remains of other earlier structures. The material used for the construction of the apse wall was similar to that used for the walls of the quadratum populi, although the individual blocks were not quite as massive. Inside, the apse had an opening 6.00m wide and 5.00m deep²⁵. Excavators found isolated traces of the original chalk floor raised 0.15m above the quadratum populi floors of level I.

PHASE II

Phase II was marked primarily by the addition of a small apse at the northern end of the basilica. The construction of the second apse appears to have had little effect on the original southern apse which does not appear to have undergone any structural modifications at this time and was probably still used as the presbyterium.

PHASE III

At some point the southern apse underwent a campaign of construction which appears to have been primarily aimed at reinforcing the south end of the basilica (see Phase III plan, Plate III). The exterior walls of the apse were reinforced with reused blocks, fieldstones and mortar. The walls of the sacristies, which to this point had also been freestanding, were joined

to the apse walls to form a flat chevet²⁶. Although the interior wall remained curved, the original form of the apse was altered somewhat when the wall at the closed end was thickened by an arc-like wedge of masonry the maximum width of which is 0.50m²⁷. During Phase III the floor level was raised 0.45-0.50m and covered with flagstones²⁸. This elevation of the floor level inside the apse necessitated the addition of three steps²⁹. These steps were 4.50m wide and were placed between two large overturned consoles³⁰. The stairway was built entirely of large blocks of reused stone (see fig. 4, Plate VI and fig. 7, Plate VIII).

During Phase III, the northern apse was rebuilt on a massive scale. As a result the southern apse ceased to be used as the presbyterium and was transformed into a funeral chapel. Two large stone sarcophagi were placed inside the apse. The longitudinal axis of the sarcophagus in the eastern portion of the apse was parallel to the central axis of the nave; the axis of the large monolithic sarcophagus found in the western portion of the apse was distinctly oblique to the axis of the nave. No inscriptions were found in connection with these sarcophagi, which were empty at the time of excavations³¹.

PHASE IV

Despite the collapse of the northern apse, the southern apse does not appear to have ever been reinstated as the presbyterium. Instead, it retained its function as the funeral exedra until the basilica was abandoned.

CULT AREAS: THE SOUTHWESTERN SACRISTY

PHASE I

The southern apse was flanked to the west by a rectangular sacristy. The western sacristy was a small square room 4.00m wide and 4.00m deep (see Phase I plan, Plate I). It is accessible through a doorway 1.30m wide at the southern end of the western side-aisle. The doorway was not aligned with the central axis of the aisle, but was set only 0.20m from the western wall of the quadratum populi. This wall at the southern end of the western side aisle is the only wall that the western sacristy has in common with the basilica. The sacristy's western wall is not a continuation of the lateral wall of the quadratum populi, which follows the edge of the stylobate of the earlier monument³², but is offset about 0.30m to the west. The eastern wall of the sacristy was aligned with the westernmost line of columns and does not appear to have touched the curved wall of the apse. Only a few traces of the eastern wall remained in situ, as much of the wall was removed in antiquity, (see below). Though it was found in very poor condition the exterior face of the southern wall was clearly aligned with the southernmost face of the apse. The floor of this sacristy, which is believed by excavators to have been on the same level as the floor of the apse, has not survived.

PHASE II

There is no evidence of any alterations to the sacristy during this phase.

PHASE III

When the wall surrounding the apse was reinforced during Phase III (see above), the eastern wall of the sacristy was removed. The resulting room was slightly larger (4.50m wide X 4.00m deep). The eastern wall was now formed by the apse's western exterior face (see Phase III plan, Plate I).

PHASE IV

There is no evidence of any alterations during Phase IV.

CULT AREAS: THE SOUTHEASTERN SACRISTY

PHASE I

The southeastern sacristy was a wide rectangular room 3.90m deep and 7.50m wide. The eastern end of the room extends beyond the eastern edge of the Roman stylobate, some 4.60m, past the eastern wall of the quadratum populi (see Phase I plan, Plate I). The sacristy was accessible through a doorway 1.30m wide at the southern end of the eastern side aisle. The doorway was set 2.50m from the eastern wall of the apse (see fig. 7, Plate VII). This small segment of wall at the southern end of the side aisle, is the only wall of the eastern sacristy that is common with a wall of the basilica. The southern wall, as were those walls that extended east of the quadratum populi's eastern lateral walls, was built with large blocks of stone. A chain of opus africanum is still *in situ* along the southern wall of the sacristy. It is preserved to a height of 5.50m. Duval suggests that this chain of opus africanum, (see fig. 1, Plate V), may in fact survive from the earlier monument and that it was simply incorporated into the eastern wall of the sacristy at the time of construction³³.

Inside, the sacristy was divided into two separate rooms by a curtain wall of stone blocks³⁴. This curtain wall was aligned with the eastern end of the quadratum populi. The two sections of this sacristy were linked by a small passage 0.70m wide at the northernmost end of the wall. The floor of the sacristy has not survived, but is believed to have been roughly at the same height as the original floors of the apse³⁵.

PHASE II

Like its western counterpart (see below), the eastern sacristy does not appear to have undergone any noticeable changes during this phase.



PHASE III

During Phase III, the western wall was removed resulting in a room 3.90m deep and 8.70m wide³⁶ (see Phase III plan, Plate III). From this point onward the eastern exterior face of the apse served as the western wall of the sacristy. The south wall of the sacristy was thickened towards the interior by a wall of coarse rubble and small blocks. This wall was now over 1.00m thick. The lesser quality of this doubling wall is particularly evident when compared to the fine quality of the cut blocks in the *opus africanum* chain³⁷.

PHASE IV

There is no evidence of any changes occurring to this sacristy during this phase.

CULT AREAS: THE NORTHERN APSE

PHASE I

There was no northern apse during Phase I. Excavators believe the main entry was originally located in the northern facade of the basilica, (see Antechambers and Entryways).

PHASE II

At some point, use of the main entryway in the northern facade of the basilica was discontinued and part of the wall that had flanked the entryway was removed. These alterations enabled the construction of a small freestanding apse. (see Phase II plan, Plate II) The walls were built from reused material and were curved both inside and out. The foundations of the northern apse were noticeably higher than those of the quadratum populi³⁸, and were built with reused materials that included a number of column drums. Archaeologists found a great quantity of vaulting tubes, some fragments of painted ceramics as well as several small bronze coins in the fill that had been packed around the foundation walls of the apse. Excavators have provided no indications as to the date of the ceramic sherds, which were apparently very fragmentary, stating simply that they were Christian with painted decor. The coins all date from the late to the mid-to-late fourth century³⁹.

Inside, the apse was narrower than the central nave, measuring only 4.70m at the opening. Its maximum depth, 4.20m, is considerably shallower than its southern counterpart.

The floors of this apse have not survived, but are estimated to have been about 0.20m. above the quadratum populi floors of level II⁴⁰.

PHASE III

At some point the apse at the northern end of the basilica was completely rebuilt on a larger scale (see Phase III plan, Plate III). New foundations were laid along the exterior face of the foundations that had of the original northern apse. The crest of these new foundations, which were built from reused material, stood nearly 1.00m above the crest of the quadratum populi foundations. The walls followed the same curve inside as out, and were solidly built with large stone blocks, 0.70m wide and 0.75 to 0.90m long (see fig. 3, Plate VII). There was no supporting frame nor any reinforcing buttresses (see fig. 1, Plate V). Inside the apse, the open end was now as wide as the central nave (6.00m), and 5.90m deep⁴¹. On either side of the opening of the apse were two large blocks that may have served to support the column bases. The large number of vaulting tubes found inside the apse seems to indicate that the apse was covered with a semi-dome. The floor of the apse was raised about 1.00m above the quadratum populi floors of level II, and was now accessible by way of three steps, the lowest of which is no longer visible as it was covered by the construction of a later apse (see below). Inside the apse, the actual floor has not survived. The level is determined by the level of the third step which was also the threshold of the apse.

PHASE IV

Some time before the basilica itself was abandoned, the northern apse collapsed. The apse was never rebuilt. To replace it, a third apse was built in the first two bays of the nave, immediately south of the collapsed apse (see Phase IV plan, Plate IV). This third apse was encased in a rectangular frame of poor quality masonry (see fig. 3, Plate VI). This supporting frame was set on a thin layer, (0.10m) of lime mortar that had been spread across the stylobates and the mosaic floors of the nave (level II). The walls of the frame were built with a coarse mixture of reused material and fieldstones held together with thick layers of mortar. The inner columns of the two northernmost pairs from both colonnades were incorporated into the walls of the frame.

These walls have an average thickness of 0.80m, except at the open end of the apse where they are considerably thinner, (0.55m). The northern exterior face of the frame was flat and blocked the opening left in the northern wall of the basilica left by the collapsed apse, (see fig. 2, Plate V). Inside, this late apse was 4.70m deep with an opening 5.35m wide.

The level of the floor was raised about 0.42m above the quadratum populi mosaics of level II. This level of the apse floor is no longer visible as it was completely removed during the course of earlier excavations.

The nature of the roofing used to cover this apse is not certain. It appears that the columns of the central nave, some of which were incorporated into the walls of the late apse, continued to support the roof of the basilica. The late apse appears to be little more than a shell built inside the basilica seemingly to preserve the traditional form of an apse. Though the walls of this apse appear to have had little bearing value, Duval suggests that the apse could have been covered with a light half dome⁴².

In front of the apse was a rectangular bema, 6.57m wide and 2.40m long, (see fig. 9, Plate IX), that served as a sort of extension of the apse. The bema occupied the width of the nave and the length of the third bay. The edge of the bema was formed by large blocks of stone, which were laid in slots cut into the mosaic floor. The area between the blocks was filled with rubble⁴³. The mosaic floor now visible was only discovered in 1963 when excavators removed the fill from between the blocks of the bema, (see fig. 6, Plate VII and fig. 8, Plate VIII). The surface of the bema was actually 0.46m above the previous level of the nave, (level II). It was accessible by way of two axial steps 1.40m wide. The rest of the bema was enclosed by a chancel rail. Mortises from the chancel posts can be seen on either side of the stairway. Smaller mortises were cut at regular intervals of 0.80m along the remaining three sides of the bema, (see fig. 6, Plate VII and fig. 8, Plate VIII). There are no traces of any rabbets that might have helped to determine the nature of the chancel plaques⁴⁴.

CULT AREAS: THE NORTHERN SACRISTIESPHASES I-IV

It was only in connection with the Phase IV apse that any trace of a sacristy was found at the northern end of the basilica. A low fieldstone wall or barrier was built across the end of the second bay of the western side aisle.

The floors of the two northernmost bays were covered with 0.20m of fill, then covered with a mosaic pavement. Traces of these mosaics could still be seen against the northern wall of the basilica, beneath the remains of the arched window, as late as the early 1960's. Fragments of an altar table were found in the northeastern corner of this room. It is possible that there was a similar sacristy on the eastern side of the apse. However evidence in support of this idea is extremely tenuous⁴⁵.

CULT AREAS, THE SANCTUARIES

PHASE I.

Recent excavations have distinguished four major phases in the evolutions of the basilica's sanctuary. The original sanctuary, (see Phase I plan, Plate I), was a rectangular enclosure, 3.50m long and 3.70m wide⁴⁶, straddling the fourth and fifth bays of the central nave, (see fig. 3, Plate VI). Although the chancel plaques that surrounded the sanctuary were removed in antiquity to allow the installation of the Phase II sanctuary, (see below), the stylobates that supported these plaques were left *in situ*. Rabbets cut into these stylobates indicate that the sanctuary of Phase I was accessible only from the south where an axial opening 0.70m wide faced the apse⁴⁷. Unlike the other three sides of the sanctuary where there were continuous rabbets, the stylobate on either side of the southern opening had been cut with a series of rectangular slots. These slots may have been used to support a grill-like enclosure instead of the plaques that appear to have been used along the other three sides. Three of the four bases used to support the posts at the four corners of the sanctuary have remained *in situ*. These bases were made from reused column shafts, (0.33m- 0.36m in diameter), that had been sunk 0.50m into the floor of the nave. Rectangular mortises, (0.21 x 0.23m wide and 0.08m deep), had been cut into the upper surfaces of these shafts. Traces of mortar were found still stuck inside one of the mortises.

PHASE II

Phase II saw the original sanctuary replaced by a second much larger enclosure, 7.00m long and 6.80m wide (see Phase II plan, Plate II). This sanctuary was as wide as the central nave and occupied the entire length of the fourth and fifth bays as well as half of the sixth.

Along the eastern and western edges of the sanctuary, rabbets for the chancel plaques were cut directly into the stylobates of the central colonnades as were the mortises for the posts at the four corners of the sanctuary (see fig. 2, Plate V, fig. 3, Plate VI and fig. 7, Plate VIII)⁴⁸.

The northern and southern ends of the enclosure had separate stylobates for the sanctuary.

Unlike the Phase I sanctuary, this second sanctuary was accessible from both the northern and the southern ends. Both entryways were centered on the axis of the nave and were extended by narrow walkways. The southern walkway, 1.30m wide and 5.30m long, (see fig. 8, Plate VIII), ended less than 3.00m north of the steps leading into the southern apse. The northern walkway was 1.20m wide but only 1.50m long. Along the edge of the walkways were stylobates that supported a series of low chancel plaques. The four corners of both the northern and southern walkways were each marked by a post.

These posts were set in circular mortises, (0.30m in diameter), that had been cut into reused column shafts, (0.43m in diameter), (see fig. 3, Plate VI). These column shafts were all sunk into the floor of the nave in the same manner as the supports for the four angle posts of the first sanctuary had been installed⁴⁹. The rabbets found along the edges of the sanctuary as well as those along the walkways had an average width of 0.03m. Because of this narrow width, Duval suggests that wooden panels were used for chancel plaques. No altar was found in connection with this sanctuary, which excavators believe to be contemporary with the quadratum populi mosaics of level II⁵⁰.

PHASE III

When the northern apse was rebuilt and enlarged to be used as the presbyterium, a new sanctuary was built at the northern end of the nave, (see Phase III plan, Plate III). The southern extremity of this sanctuary was marked by a transverse barrier that ran across the middle of the fourth bay. In the barrier, was a 1.10m axial opening. The mortises for the posts supporting the chancel plaques were cut into the stylobate of the original sanctuary, (see fig. 3, Plate VI, and fig. 9 Plate IX). It is not clear whether there were chancel rails running along the intercolumniation of the colonnade or not, as much of the area between the transverse barrier in the fourth bay and the northern apse was covered by the construction of the late apse.

A plan of the basilica drawn by Ch. Emonts in 1908⁵¹ shows four square stone slabs in the first and second bays of the central nave. These slabs would have served as bases for columns supporting a ciborium above an altar. Although from the plan it appears that the altar would have been located inside the apse, it is unlikely that such an altar would have been used in conjunction with the later apse; not only is it very rare for the altar of an African basilica to be situated inside the apse, but the floor of the late apse was some 0.40m above the ciborium bases.

PHASE IV

When the late apse and bema were built inside the nave of the basilica, all but the southernmost end of the phase III sanctuary was covered over. The sanctuary for this phase of the basilica was probably contained within the confines of the bema's chancel rails.

SECONDARY STRUCTURES

The baptistery that was used in conjunction with the basilica of Bellator was not an integral part of the basilica⁵². Instead, it was located just over 10m away from the basilica inside the remains of a peristyle structure that appears to predate the basilica complex.

The baptistery was a small rectangular building, 4.40m wide and 6.10m long. In the northern wall was a small apse, 1.30m wide and 1.15m deep. The baptistery was entered through three small doors centered in the northern, southern and western walls.

The walls of the baptistery were of fieldstone and mortar but had been reinforced at the corners with blocks in *opus africanum*. The shape of the font was somewhat unusual, resembling a rectangle with large bulges along the long sides. At the short ends of the rectangle three steps descend towards the central floor of the font. The font had an overall length of 4.00m and a maximum width of 2.75m. The central portion was surmounted by a ciborium. The bases of the columns that supported the columns of the ciborium were still visible at the edge of the font at the time of the excavations in the early 1960's. This baptistery was later transformed into a funeral chapel⁵³.

CONCLUSIONS FOR THE BASILICA OF BELLATOR

PHASE I

It now appears clear that the history of the basilica can be divided into four main phases. Originally the basilica had a wide central nave that was separated from the two side aisles by colonnades of eight double columns. A single freestanding apse stood at the South end of the nave. To either side of the apse was a free standing sacristy. It is difficult to determine why the walls of the sacristies were not aligned with the quadratum populi walls, especially if they are contemporary as the stratigraphy indicates. However, it is possible that the sacristies were not part of the original plan but were nevertheless added during the first phase of construction. The doors in the eighth bays of the eastern and western side aisles date from the initial phase of construction but probably do not represent the main entryway. Traditionally, North African basilicas were entered through an axial doorway in the end of the basilica opposite the apse. The original entrance to the basilica of Bellator was probably at the northern end of the central nave. This end of the basilica was completely rebuilt with the installation of the northern apse, leaving no trace of the supposed original doorway. The small enclosure in the fourth and fifth bays of the central nave marks the sanctuary from this phase.

PHASE II

The second phase of construction was marked primarily by the construction of a small apse at the northern end of the basilica. This was not a large apse and does not represent a reorientation of the basilica. Duval suggests that this apse may have been built to house the two sarcophagi that are now found in the southern apse⁵⁴. The southern apse continued to be used as the presbyterium for the duration of Phase II. Its floor was raised slightly and paved with flagstones. The second sanctuary with its walkways and the quadratum populi floors of level II which are now visible in the central nave, all date to this same period. Excavators believe that this second phase was late Vandal or very early Byzantine⁵⁵.

PHASE III

The third phase of the basilica's history was marked by extensive reconstruction, possibly after an earthquake. The northern apse was entirely rebuilt on a larger scale and took on a new importance as the presbyterium. A new sanctuary, the third, was installed in the first three and a half bays of the central nave. An altar set beneath a baldachin was installed immediately in front of the rebuilt apse. At the opposite end of the basilica, the southern apse and its two sacristies were joined by a solid reinforcing wall. As this apse was no longer used as the presbyterium, the flagstone floor was lifted in certain areas to allow the installation of two sarcophagi. Excavators have not been able to establish a sure date for this phase of the basilica, but suggest a date towards the end of the sixth century⁵⁶.

PHASE IV

Before its final phase of construction the basilica once again suffered considerable damage, especially at the northern end of the basilica where the apse collapsed. The northern apse was left in ruins and a third apse was built on a much smaller scale inside the nave of the basilica. The bema and the northern sanctuary (contained inside the chancel plaques of the bema) were built in conjunction with this late apse. The lateral colonnades were probably installed at this time.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) The name "Bellator" was given to the basilica by archaeologists after the fragmented epitaph of a bishop by that name was discovered in 1907. The stone with the epitaph had been reused as rubble to block the southern door of the quadrum populi. The blocking of the door appears to be relatively recent, possibly by shepherds or squatters and does not date to the period of the use of the basilica. This inscription was originally published in Bulletin Archéologique, 1908, p. CLXXVIII, and then later by A. Merlin in Inscriptions Latines de Tunisie, 1944.
- 2) Although it is almost impossible to reconstruct a more complete plan of the Roman monument that previously occupied the site, without causing considerable damage to the Christian basilica, various aspects of its ground plan were clarified during the course of excavations. The Roman building was surrounded by a large rectangular enclosure 43.00 X 38.30m wide. Inside, three sides of a portico have been found, which would have formed a rectangle 35.13 X 27.12m wide. Contrary to most other buildings in the heart of the Roman town, this one does not appear to follow the orientation dictated by the urban cadastration, but rather angles a noticeable 2° away from the street grid. See Duval, Les Basiliques de Sbeitla à Deux Sanctuaires Opposés, Paris, 1971, p. 9-15.
- 3) A number of these Villas were demolished before the construction of the basilica of the Basilica of Vitalis was possible, (see following chapter).
- 4) The basilica of Vitalis and its annexes occupy nearly the entire insula west of the Bellator complex.
- 5) Duval, op. cit., p. 99-144.
- 6) Duval, op. cit., p. 17.
- 7) See Phase plan I.
- 8) Duval, op. cit., p. 23.
- 9) The column bases from these porches are present on Emont's plan of 1908. This plan was published by A. Merlin in Forum et Eglises de Sufetula, Paris, 1912, pl. IV.
- 10) Duval, op. cit., p. 26.

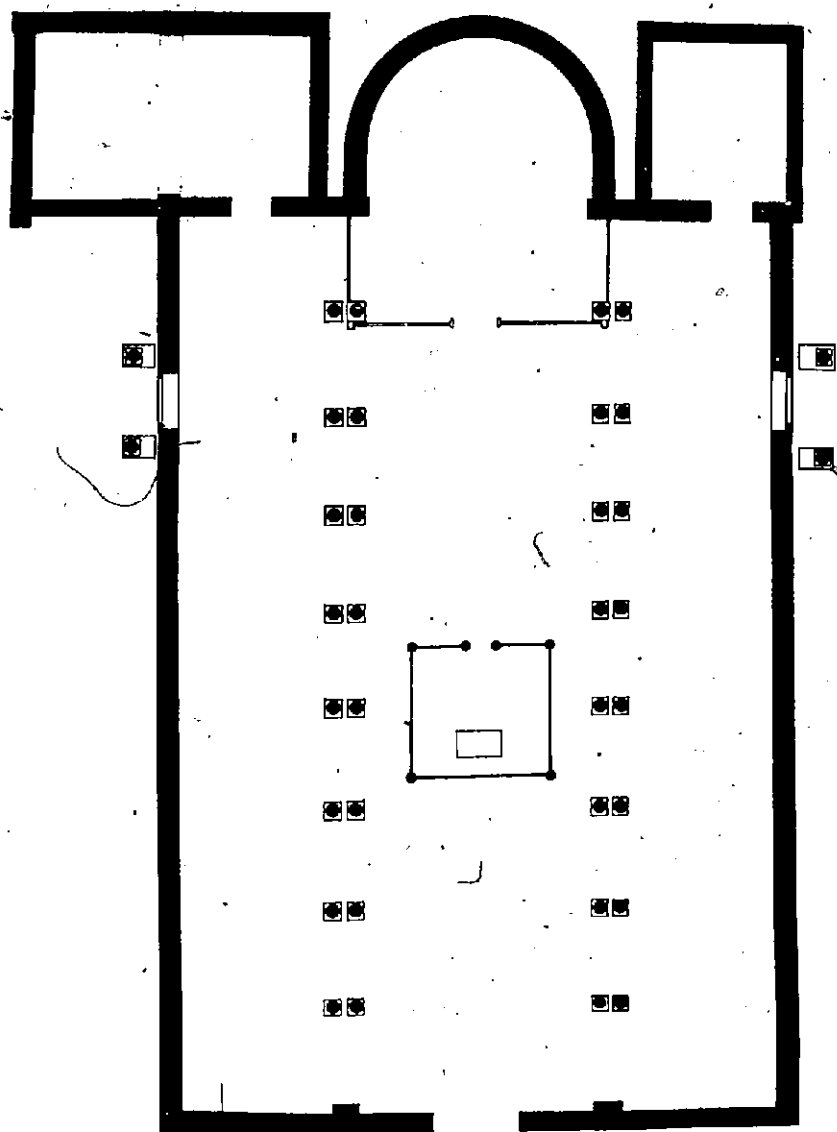
- 11) Of the seven Christian Basilicas found at Sbeitla, Bellator is the only one with a continuous stylobate; see also Duval, op.cit., p. 23-24.
- 12) Duval, op.cit. p. 24.
- 13) A. Merlin, op.cit., p. 36. No complete column can be found in the basilica today.
- 14) The diameter varies from 0.41-0.42m at the bases, to 0.37-0.38m at the top: Duval, op.cit. p. 25.
- 15) The height has been estimated at 3.10-3.20m, including the capitals and at 3.50m when the upper abacus was added. See Duval, op.cit. p.25.
- 16) Although the cornice was from reused material as were the walls, the entire cornice was taken from a single source. Duval suggests that the cornice may have been originally sculpted for the Roman monument that originally occupied the site. See Duval, op.cit. p.20.
- 17) A photo of the window was taken by A. Lézine in 1959, and later published by Duval, (op.cit., p. 20). This section of the wall with the window has since collapsed. The window appears to have been about 1.00m high and 0.80cm wide.
- 18) A. Merlin, op. cit., p. 36
- 19) A fourth century coin found in the cement of this layer provides a reliable terminus post quem. Duval, op.cit. p. 87.
- 20) Duval, op.cit. p. 33.
- 21) Duval, op.cit. p. 33.
- 22) Duval, op.cit. p. 56-60.
- 23) There are only four other known examples of similar colonnades in Tunisia: at Bulla Regia in the ecclesiastical complex, at Haidra in the basilica of Melleus (see following chapters), and in a small basilica near the Byzantine citadel (see Duval, "Rapport Haidra III" CRAL, 1973, p. 168-178), in Basilica III at Maktar, (Picard, G. "L'archéologie chrétienne en Afrique" Congrès International d'Archéologie Chrétienne, Aix en Provence, 1954, p. 55, fig.6).
- 24) Duval, op.cit., p. 25
- 25) The exterior measurements of the apse are 7.70m wide and 5.60m deep.
- 26) A flat chevet is fairly common in North Africa.
- 27) The thickness of 1.00m is only at one end of the apse. The thickness of the added material

decreases gradually until it merges with the original wall.

- 28) The remains of this floor could still be seen in the apse as late as 1908.
- 29) The new level of the apse was 0.60m above the quadratum populi floors of phase I.
- 30) The consoles were 1.20m long, 0.67m wide and 0.52m high. The whole stairway was built from reused material of unknown provenance.
- 31) The sarcophagus in the eastern portion of the apse measured 2.18m long, 0.58m at the head, 0.50m at the foot and was 0.34m high. The sarcophagus in the western section of the apse was 2.10m long 0.60m wide at the head, 0.57m at the foot and was 0.36m high. Both sarcophagi were installed with the head pointed south.
- 32) See remarks concerning the earlier occupation of the site, p. 1.
- 33) Duval, op. cit., p. 67
- 34) This wall was removed during the course of Duval's excavations. Before this dividing wall was removed, the sacristy immediately beside the apse would have been about 5.50m wide.
- 35) The foundations are the same as those in the apse, although this does not necessarily indicate an identical floor level.
- 36) Duval, op. cit., p. 87, fig. 82.
- 37) Duval, op. cit., p. 68-70.
- 38) These foundations varied in depth from 0.50m-0.85m, see Duval, op. cit., p. 67.
- 39) Duval, op. cit., p. 95-96.
- 40) It is very difficult to determine the exact duration of each phase. The latest floor level in the northern apse was about 1.00m above level I of the nave, 0.90m above level II of the nave and 0.80m above phase III of the sanctuary. See Duval, op. cit., p. 76.
- 41) Duval, op. cit., p. 78.
- 42) Duval, op. cit., p. 80.
- 43) The fill contained numerous fragments of Christian lamps, which, owing to their fragmentary condition, were of little use for dating purposes. See Duval, op. cit., p. 80.
- 44) Duval, op. cit., p. 76.
- 45) The only source indicating that such a sacristy might have existed is a sketch in the excavation notebook of M. Drappier, (a member of A. Merlin's team), in which the basilica plan has a line drawn across the eastern side aisle, symmetrically opposite the remains of the fieldstone wall found in the western side aisle. Merlin's Architect, C. Emonts, does not

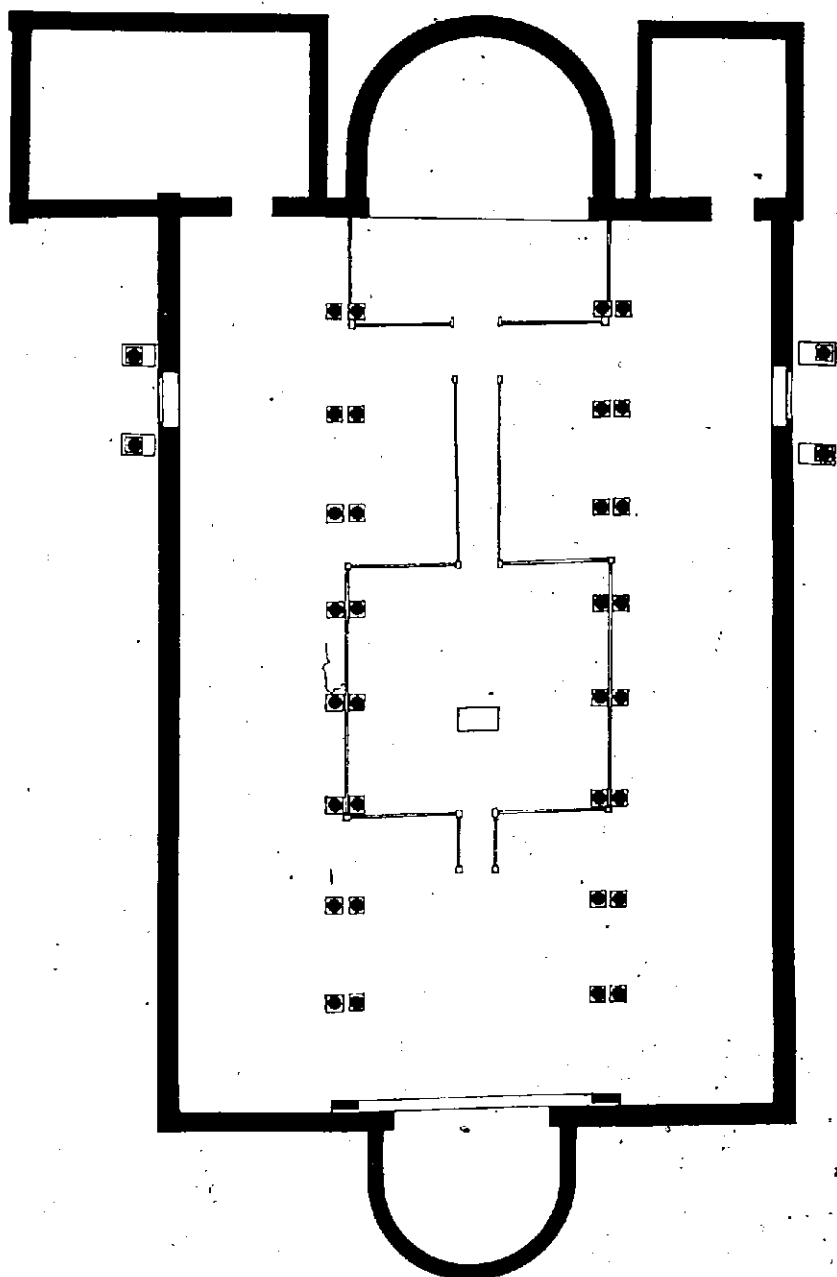
include this wall in his plan of the basilica that was published by Merlin: op. cit., pl. IV.

- 46) The measurement was taken from axis to axis of the angle columns, see Duval, op. cit., p. 38.
- 47) Deep and continuous rabbets cut into the stylobates indicate that the chancel plaques were continuous, see Duval, op. cit., p. 38.
- 48) Duval, op. cit., p. 38.
- 49) Duval, op. cit., p. 33, Fig. 26
- 50) Duval believes that the date is the same as that of level II of the quadratum populi floor. This is based not only on stratigraphical indications but on the similarities of the mosaics, see Duval, op. cit., p. 39.
- 51) A. Merlin, op. cit., pl. IV.
- 52) See The Basilica Complex, p. 2.
- 53) Duval, op. cit., p. 99-144.
- 54) Duval, op. cit., p. 85.
- 55) Duval, op. cit., p. 85-87, as well as p. 95 Section D. Monnaies no. 1, 6, and 7.
- 56) Duval, op. cit., p. 87 and 85 Section D. Monnaies, no. 5 and 6.

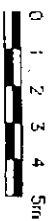


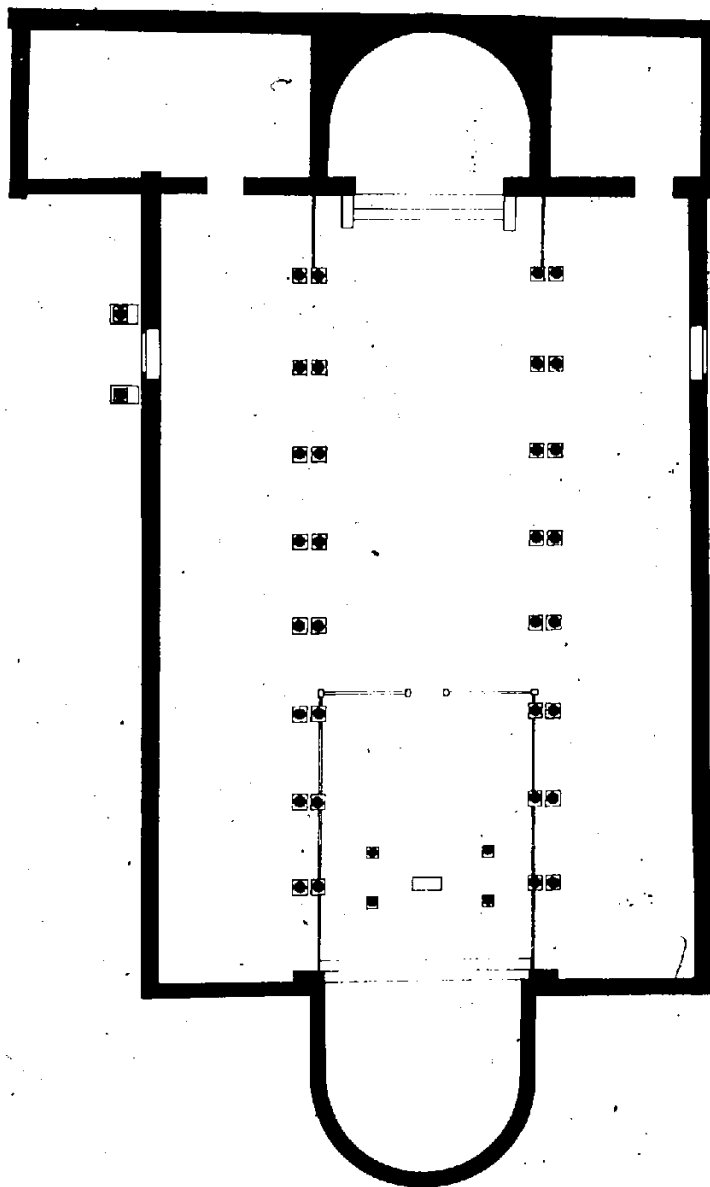
The Basilica of Bellator
Phase I Plan





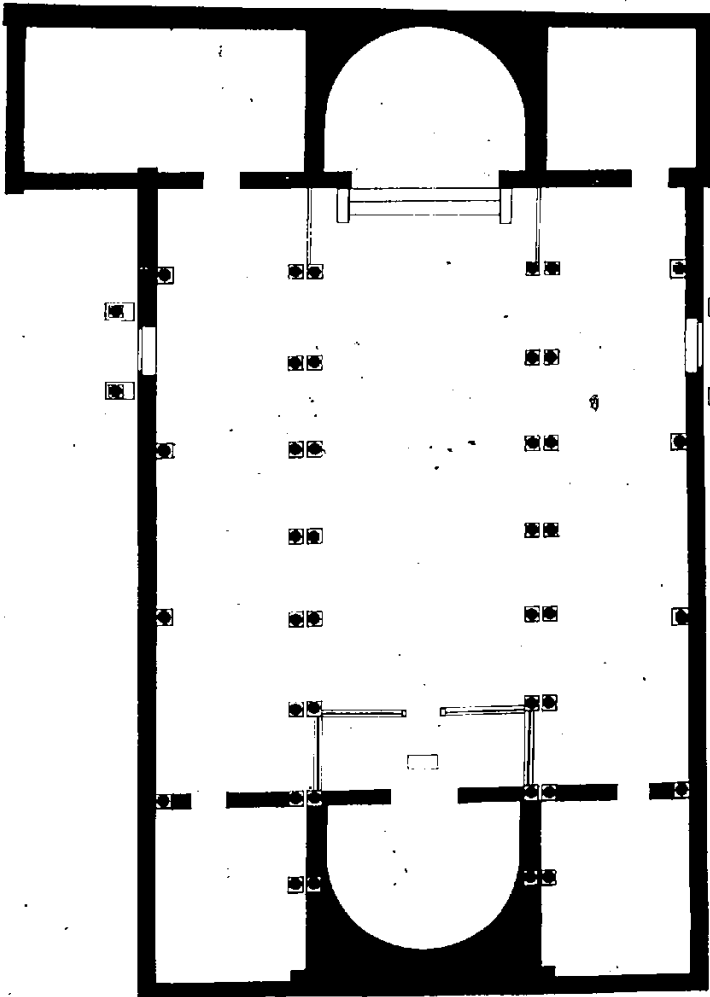
The Basilica of Bellator
Phase II Plan





The Basilica of Bellator
Phase III Plan





The Basilica of Bellator
Phase IV Plan





Fig. 1 View from northern apse across basilica to Roman temples.



Fig. 2 Phase III and Phase IV apses at the northern end of the basilica.
Phase II sanctuary in foreground.



Fig. 3 Traces of Phase II and Phase III sanctuaries.



Fig. 4 Southern apse seen from eastern side aisle.



Fig. 5 Foundations of Phase II northern apse inside walls of Phase III northern apse.



Fig. 6 Northern apse - Phase IV.

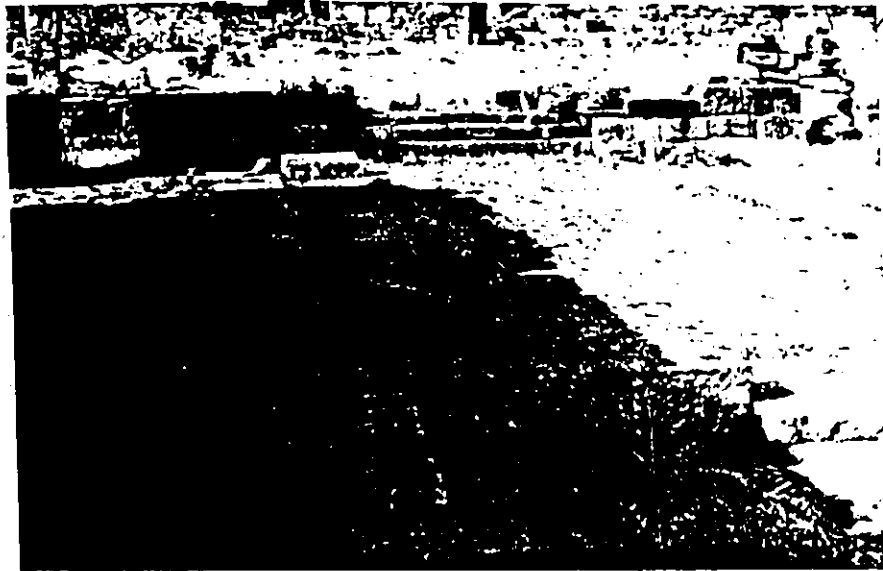


Fig. 7 View towards southern apse from Phase IV bema; note Phase I mosaics inside the frame of the bema and rabbets from the Phase II sanctuary cut into the stylobates.



Fig. 8 Traces of Phase III sanctuary.

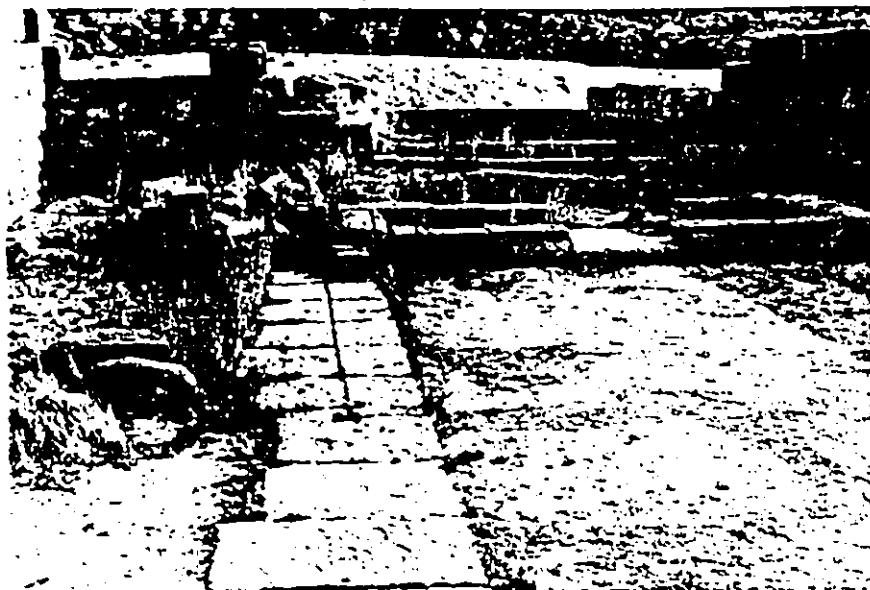


Fig. 9 View towards northern apses - note traces of Phase III sanctuary.

CHAPTER II: THE BASILICA OF VITALIS

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The Basilica of Vitalis¹ is part of a large religious complex built at the northern edge of Sbeitla. This complex, which included the basilica of Bellator², occupied the entire width of a city insula and part of a third. Between the two basilicas was a large baptistery that had at some point been transformed into a funeral chapel³. A smaller baptistery was built immediately behind the southern apse of Vitalis. Both basilicas were surrounded by numerous annexes. Immediately west of Vitalis is a large building that appears to have served as an episcopium, or lodging for the clergy. The building was separated from the basilica itself by a long narrow courtyard which was closed off from the street by a gate and wall. North-west of the basilica complex is a bathing house that appears to have served the episcopium⁴.

The entire religious complex was built in such a manner that it is almost impossible to enter any of the buildings from the street⁵. Some areas of the complex, such as the baptistery that was attached to the basilica of Vitalis, and the episcopium, had been built with their backs along the streets, and were generally entered through the courtyards. Other parts of the complex, including the courtyard that ran between the episcopium, the area behind the southern chevet of the basilica of Bellator, and the area along the eastern wall of Vitalis that had once been a cado, were cut off from the streets by stone walls⁶.

The basilica was originally excavated between 1911 and 1913 under the direction of A. Merlin, and mapped by C. Emonts. The publication appeared in *La Revue de Tunis*, 1917, p. 265-285, under the title "L'Eglise de Vitalis à Sbeitla". It was later studied by N. Duval between 1963 and 1966. Duval published a detailed report entitled, Les Basiliques de Sbeitla à Deux Sanctuaires Opposés, Paris, 1971.

THE BASILICA COMPLEX

The basilica of Vitalis is the largest known Christian basilica in Sbeitlā. Its wide central nave was flanked to the east and west by interior and exterior side aisles. At both the northern and southern extremities of the nave are U-shaped apses. Immediately south of the Southern apse and its sacristies is a baptistery and several small annex rooms. The whole basilica was built from field stone with thick layers of mortar. The walls were reinforced roughly every three meters with blocks in opus africanum. The basilica of Vitalis is not quite parallel to the cardines that run beside it. Instead, it appears that the basilica conforms to the orientation of some earlier structures which excavators have as yet been unable to explore. The main axis of the basilica runs North-East / South-West, and is 20° east of geographic north⁷.

ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

PHASE I

The basilica of Vitalis is believed to have originally been entered from the north through a main doorway that was preceded by a vestibule⁸. The vestibule, a poorly squared rectangular structure, was slightly off center from the central axis of the nave, extending 0.23m further to the east than to the west, (see Phase I plan, Plate X). The vestibule was 8.96m wide at its southern end and 9.20m wide at its northern end⁹. The lateral walls extended unequal lengths from the northern wall of the quadratum populi; 5.23m in the east and 5.10 in the west. The foundation walls of the vestibule were built on the same level as the quadratum populi's foundations, although the foundations of the vestibule butt against those of the quadratum populi. Likewise walls above the vestibule's foundations were built against the walls of the quadratum populi. A single door at the eastern corner of the north wall led into the vestibule from the exterior. The door sill was found *in situ* between a pair of stone jambposts. The vestibule had a simple chalk floor.

The actual entryway into the basilica appears to have been a doorway 2.50m wide in the northern wall of the quadratum populi. This doorway was centered on the axis of the nave, and led directly into the quadratum populi from the vestibule¹⁰.

Trial trenches conducted in the fill that had been packed around the foundations of the vestibule produced a cache of 85 small bronze coins. Over half of the coins were illegible; those that were legible were from the second half of the fourth and the early fifth centuries¹¹.

The quadratum populi was also accessible through smaller doors at the southern end of each lateral wall. In the eastern wall a small door opened into the ninth bay of the side aisle. The door sill is *in situ*, set between the two large stone blocks that formed the door frame. The sill measures 1.18m between the blocks of the frame. The door appears to have been installed before the floors of the quadratum populi, as the mosaics of Phase I are several centimeters higher. Holes cut into the upper surface of the stone sill indicate that the door was closed by two

leaves¹².

Almost directly across the basilica is a second doorway that coincides with the placement of the columns separating the ninth and tenth bays of the western side aisles. The sill as well as the lower portions of the stone door frame are *in situ*. Holes cut into the upper surface of the sill indicate that the door was closed by a single leaf. This sill measured 1.40m between the door posts and projected several centimeters above the mosaics of Phase I¹³. Although excavators do not specify whether the mosaics of the aisle butt against the door sill, the excavation reports as published seem to imply that they do. In the case of these last two doorways, the width of the side aisles was sufficient that neither doorway was obstructed by the colonnade that ran in front of it. There is however, no sense of monumentality or importance to either entry; it is of passing interest that the basilica of Bellator has small porches preceding its lateral entryways, which Vitalis does not.

PHASE II

At some point the main entryway at the northern end of the basilica went out of use. The wall through which this door passed was removed in part, to allow the installation of a small apse at the north end of the central nave, (see below). At this time the doorway into the vestibule was closed off by rough-hewn blocks of limestone that contrast with the unhewn sandstone that had been used in the construction of the vestibule and the main body of the basilica (see Phase II plan, Plate XI)¹⁴.

PHASE III

The largest of the basilica's lateral doorways opens onto the fourth and fifth bays of the east exterior side aisle, and appears to be a later addition to the basilica's plan (see Phase III plan, Plate XII). Unlike the lateral entries seen in Phase I, this entryway does not have a stone door frame built into the walls of the basilica. The doorsill, though fragmented, is *in situ*. The

sill was built with reused material, (apparently two doorsills), and measures nearly 2.00m long. The level of this door sill coincides roughly with the level of the quadratum populi floors of Phase III¹⁵. This doorway appears to be a late addition to the basilica, coinciding with the raising and repaving of the quadratum populi floors during Phase III¹⁶. This doorway was probably installed to replace the main entry lost during the Phase II alterations.

THE QUADRATUM POPULI

PHASE I

With the exception of two irregularities, the quadratum populi forms a rectangle 35.00m long, with an average width of 23.80m. For two bays' lengths at the north end, the basilica is at its widest, (24.55m) due to the presence of a shallow niche on the eastern side (See Phase I plan, Plate X). Four colonnades divide the quadratum populi into a broad central nave 7.10m wide and four side aisles of varying widths. To the east of the central nave is an interior side aisle 4.50m wide and an exterior aisle 3.50m wide. To the west of the nave are an interior aisle 4.80m wide and an exterior side aisle 3.90m wide¹⁷.

The central nave is separated from the interior side aisles by colonnades, each with ten pairs of double columns (see fig. 1, Plate XIII). Each interior aisle was in turn separated from its neighbouring exterior aisles by a file of double columns. The colonnade that separated the two eastern side aisles had the same number of columns as did the colonnades along the central nave. Its columns were aligned along the same transverse axis as the columns on either side of the nave. Between the two western side aisles, however, there were only nine double columns, with no column corresponding to the tenth, or southernmost column of the other colonnades. The western exterior side aisle was 3.70m shorter than the other three aisles, and the portion of the basilica that might normally have been occupied by the tenth and eleventh bays of this side aisle was instead occupied by the northern end of a rectangular room, Room 1, (see below). Only the five northernmost column pairs were aligned with the five northernmost column pairs of the other three colonnades¹⁸. The bays of the western exterior side aisles became progressively shorter, from the standard length of 3.10m at the northern end of the basilica, to 2.75m at the southern end of the basilica. The irregularities in the alignment of the southern end of this colonnade appear to be a direct result of the placement of room 1. Had the builders adhered to the transverse axis that had been established by the columns of the other three colonnades while installing the western colonnade, the tenth bay of the western exterior side aisle which is 2.75m long would have been barely 2.00m long¹⁹.

At the north end of the east wall of the quadratum populi is a recess nearly 6.00m long and 0.70-0.90m deep. This recess dates to the time of the basilica's construction and seems to have played an important part in determining some of the basilica's basic proportions²⁰. First: the distance from the eastern wall of the recess to the western wall of the quadratum populi is 24.55m. This is the maximum width of the basilica on which the placement of the central axis and the alignment of the apses was established: the central axis is 12.275m from the eastern and western walls at this niche; elsewhere it is not strictly central. The eastern aisles are both slightly narrower than their western counterpart, in order to minimize the effect of misproportion in the exterior aisle caused by the reduction in the basilica's width at Bay III. Second: the northern wall of this recess is extended to become the northern end-wall of the eastern exterior aisle. The wall is placed 3.10m north of the northernmost pair of columns in the eastern side colonnade (see fig. 2, Plate XIII). This distance of 3.10m is the standard length of the bays for all four colonnades. Directly north of the colonnade, the wall juts northward 1.60m to join the northern wall of the basilica. The distance between the northern wall and the first set of columns of the other three colonnades was in each instance 4.70m. To compensate for this greater distance, three piers, each 1.60m long and aligned with the colonnades, were built extending from the northern wall of the basilica. It therefore appears that the planned length of the basilica is shown by the position of this eastern wall. This hypothesis is strengthened by the column placement. Excavators offered no explanation for the various irregularities in the basilica's dimensions, nor are any explanations evident from the excavations as published.

The columns of the quadratum populi were not set on continuous stylobates as were the columns in the basilica of Bellator. Rather, each pair of columns was set on a separate stone slab. The column bases were attached to the stylobate blocks with mortar. The bases appear to have been made for the basilica. All have identical profiles, apart from a difference in scale: the bases from the central colonnades were larger than those of the side colonnades. The bases resemble Attic bases but have very shallow profiles, giving the impression of being rather flat²¹.

The columns of the central colonnade had unfluted shafts that stood 2.74m high. A single column has survived more or less intact and fragments of numerous other columns were

found at the site²². All four colonnades used similar capitals, although capitals from the side aisles were slightly smaller and had a simple design. The style of the capitals denotes a certain degree of originality. These capitals were slightly elongated and rather plain. The only decoration was three narrow bands of simple geometric motifs: a few centimeters above the base of the capital was a flat band of chevrons. Another band of small flat beads circled the middle of the capital. Just below the abacus was a low triangular ridge, on which was a row of shallowly incised chevrons. The capitals from the side colonnades had a low register of zigzags and a simple flat band near the top²³. Although the abacus of each column was carved in the same block, every pair of columns was united by a single large abacus that was set on top of the smaller separate abaci. This upper abacus was fashioned from a single block of stone. It was divided into three registers that gradually increased the dimensions of the monolith from 1.00m X 0.42m at the bedding plane to 1.10m X 0.50m at the upper surface²⁴. The supports in the central nave must have measured about 3.60m from the stylobate to the top of the upper abacus. It is impossible to establish with certitude the heights of the arches that ran between the supports.

The entire floor of the quadratum populi was originally paved with mosaics. In some areas, notably in the nave, the remains of the mosaics were very fragmentary. Archaeologists have nevertheless distinguished seven individual panels in the nave. Each panel had a separate geometric motif: squares, diamonds, circles, cables etc. Despite the variety of colours used, the choice, (black, grey, beige, ochre-yellow, white and dull red), resulted in an overall somber effect. The mosaics between the columns of the central colonnades were also extremely fragmentary. Only a few traces of geometric motifs were found²⁵.

In the side aisles the mosaics were generally in better condition. At the time of the original excavations, large sections of the eastern interior side aisles were still covered with mosaics. The decor consisted largely of multicoloured medallions linked with intertwining cables. This same design was used to cover the entire length of the nave. The floor between the columns that separate the two eastern aisles was decorated with small polychrome panels. Each panel had a different geometric motif: squares, circles, chevrons, etc. All the panels were bordered by monochrome bands of white unpatterned mosaics.

The entire floor of the eastern exterior side aisle was paved with a very simple geometric design: a series of dull red diamonds with black borders and yellow centers. Between this diamond design and the exterior wall there was a narrow border of plain white mosaic cubes. The border follows the contours of the recess in the northern corner of the quadratum populi. The floor of the recess is paved with the diamond design continuous with the pavement of the side aisle.

Across the basilica in the western interior side aisle, it was only in the northernmost bay that a small fragment of the mosaic floor was preserved. The design appears to have consisted primarily of circular and octagonal medallions, with cruciform fleurons and greek crosses inscribed within. The floors between the columns that separate the two western side aisles were decorated with small geometric panels, different from those in the eastern aisles. Here once again it is in the exterior side aisle that the mosaics in the best state of preservation were found. A single motif was used for the entire western exterior side aisle: the eastern exterior side aisle also used a single motif but very rigidly. Here, octagons were surrounded by multi-coloured circles, ovals, stylized crosses and curvilinear motifs. The interiors of the octagons were decorated with a variety of motifs ranging from the very simple, such as triangles, X's etc., to intricate Solomon's knots and highly stylized vegetal motifs²⁶.

Little is known about the type of roofing that was used to cover the nave and side aisles. Excavators believe however that the central nave was covered by some form of tie beam truss and tile roof. During the course of the excavations, numerous roof tiles, both flat and imbricated, as well as antefixes, some decorated in relief with human figures, were found strewn about the quadratum populi²⁷. Duval has suggested two possible solutions for the roofing of the side aisles. One involves an individual tie beam truss covered with tiles above each of the side aisles with the rafter roofs of the interior side aisles raised above the rafter roofs of the exterior side aisles so as to allow light into the interior side aisle. The other solution calls for rafter roofing that would slope downward from the raised walls of the central nave to rest upon the lateral walls of the quadratum populi²⁸. A third solution for the elevation and roofing of the basilica was suggested by J. Christern. Christern's solution is similar to Duval's first suggestion of a sloping rafter roof above each side aisle. Christern suggests that both side aisles

were surmounted by galleries. Christern therefore places the roofs of the interior side aisles at a much greater height than they are in Duval's reconstruction²⁹. Although technically feasible, Christern's solution remains hypothetical: No architectural elements that might have come from an upper story were reported to have been found either in or around the basilica.

PHASE II

This phase is essentially marked by the addition of an apse at the north end of the basilica. There were no obvious changes to the quadratum populi during this phase.

PHASE III

For unknown reasons, the recess at the north eastern corner of the basilica was completely filled in with large rocks, fieldstones and mortar (see Phase III plan, Plate XII). The quadratum populi floors were raised about 0.15m and covered with mosaics, the remains of which were so fragmentary and isolated that they do little more than confirm the existence of a later floor level.

To date thirty-five burials have been found in the basilica of Vitalis, all but one of these in the quadratum populi³⁰. The majority were concentrated in the central nave, although it should be remembered that none of the four side aisles has as yet been fully excavated. Of the twenty-eight tombs with legible inscriptions, eighteen are children or youths. The ten adults were a mix of priests and elders of the community. It is difficult to determine the dates of these burials. Of those with inscriptions, all but one appear to be later than the third quarter of the sixth century. The sole possible exception is the burial in the Northern apse. In the case of all the burials that have been explored to date, the mosaics of level I had been cut through to allow the installation of the tomb. Because of the fragmentary state of the Phase III mosaics, it has not been possible for archaeologists to determine if these mosaics were laid after the tombs had been installed or if they too had been cut through by the tombs³¹.

CULT AREAS: THE SOUTHERN APSE

PHASE I

At the south end end of the central nave was an apse built inside a solid rectangular frame, of fieldstone and opus africanum (see Phase I plan, Plate X and fig. 1 Plate XIII). Foundation trenches for the apse and its frame were cut into the remains of the structures that lay under the basilica. The structures in this area had been leveled off and covered with about 0.30m of loose fill, which contained numerous fragments of marble plaques, a few lamp fragments (none of which were very useful for dating), and a small coin thought to be Vandal ³².

Inside, the apse itself had a maximum width of 6.29m and a depth of 5.20m. The level of the floor was raised 0.20m above the quadratum populi floors of Phase I. The apse floor of Phase I was a simple cement layer. The walls were covered with plaster, a few traces of which were found still stuck to the curved wall of the apse.

PHASE II

There were no major structural changes during Phase II of the southern apse, although the floor level was raised about 0.20m and a mosaic pavement installed. These mosaics, all geometric, were extremely fragmentary at the time of excavation ³³. The end of this phase was marked by extensive destruction, possibly due to earthquakes.

PHASE III

After the destruction that brought about the end of Phase II, the southern apse was rebuilt (see Phase III plan, Plate XII). The debris left from the collapse of the Phase II apse was covered with a layer of fill, then repaved with mosaics. The floor level of the southern apse was

now 0.45m above the floor of the quadratum populi in use at the time, (level II)³⁴. A stepped synthronos was installed along the apse wall. The synthronos was 0.70m wide and was preceded by a small step 0.20m deep. Both the synthronos and the step were interrupted over a distance of c. 1.00m at the closed end of the apse, possibly to allow the installation of an episcopal throne in this area. A fragment of mosaic inscription was found in the floor of this open area³⁵. A narrow mosaic border of lotiform flowers ran along the edge of the steps. Several fragments of mosaic pavement were also found cemented to the risers of the steps. The mosaics in the central portion of the apse were in a very poor state of repair, and it was difficult for excavators to determine the nature of the decorative scheme. One surviving section was decorated with a small peacock made with glass tesserae. Only one portion of the peacock has survived³⁶.

The actual entry into the apse was reduced by two narrow walls. These walls, like the synthronos, extended 0.70m from the eastern and western sides of the apse opening³⁷. The height of this wall is unknown. The entry was further reduced by a series of chancel plaques that left an axial opening 2.36m wide. Rabbets for the chancel plaques as well as square mortises for the posts that supported them were cut into the upper surface of the third step which also served as the threshold for the apse. A fragment of the marble chancel plaque was found *in situ* still set into the rabbets of the third step. The plaque had an opisthographic inscription. One side of the plaque had a dedication to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. The stone was later reused as a Christian epitaph, before becoming a chancel plaque. Because of the style of the inscription used for the Christian epitaph, Duval believes that the epitaph dates to some time shortly after the initial period of Byzantine occupation³⁸. It would seem reasonable to suppose that the funerary inscription was reused some considerable time after its original emplacement. Hence, the chancel rail is likely to belong to a later phase of the Byzantine period. Phase III of the southern apse appears to have continued in use until the basilica was abandoned.

CULT AREAS: THE SOUTHEASTERN SACRISTY

PHASE I

At the southern ends of the two eastern side aisles and to the immediate east of the southern apse was a wide rectangular sacristy (see Phase I plan, Plate X). The southeastern sacristy is the same width as the two side aisles, forming a rectangle 7.50m wide and 3.20m deep. The eastern wall of this room is a thickened extension of the east side wall of the basilica. Excavators do not specify whether this building up of the inner face of the exterior wall dates to the first phase of construction or not. The room's western wall is formed by a frame of masonry that surrounds the apse. The southern wall is party with room II³⁹.

The sacristy was accessible from the eastern exterior side aisle through a 1.17m doorway. At the time of the original excavations under the direction of A. Merlin, the door sill was still in situ, set between two stone jambposts. Although the sill has since been lost, excavators reported that this doorway would have closed with a double leaf door. A second, slightly smaller, door in the southern wall led into a large square room; (see secondary Buildings, Room II). This door sill was also in situ and measured 1.00m between the jambposts of the door. Only a very small section of mosaic pavement was preserved inside the room at the time of the original excavations. The motif used on the surviving fragments consisted of small squares with a variety of polychrome designs in their centers. These mosaics, reported to be on the same level as the mosaics of level I of the quadratum opus, have since been lost⁴⁰.

PHASE II-III

Excavators make no mention of any modifications to this sacristy during the basilica's subsequent phases.

CULT AREAS: THE SOUTHWESTERN SACRISTY

PHASE I

To the immediate west of the southern apse is a small rectangular sacristy, 3.80m wide and 4.70m deep (see Phase I plan, Plate X). The northern wall of the sacristy marks the southern end of the western interior side aisle⁴¹. The sacristy was accessible from this aisle through a doorway 1.20m wide. The door sill was in situ between the two stone jambposts at the time of excavation. Holes cut into the upper surface of the sill indicate that the door closed with a single leaf.

The eastern wall of the sacristy is formed by the masonry frame of the apse. Its western wall is common with the eastern wall of Room VII, (see below), although this wall had been built up towards the interior of the sacristy. Excavators do not specify whether the building up of the sacristy wall dates to the initial phase of construction. It may be of note, however, that the blocks in opus africanum used along this stretch of wall are not as thick as the walls, and are visible only along the wall's westernmost face. This is somewhat unusual as the thickness of blocks in opus africanum normally corresponds to the thickness of the walls. The planned width of the wall seems to be indicated by the width of the blocks in opus africanum; however the excavation architect's plans do not indicate the presence of an earlier wall face. The southern wall of the sacristy was aligned with the southern wall of Room VII, but again, like the eastern wall, the southern wall was built up towards the interior of the sacristy. A 1.10m doorway at the eastern end of this wall led into Room V, (see below). The door sill was found in situ, between the lower portions of two stone jambposts. It appears from the excavation reports that the refacing of the eastern and southern walls occurred during the original construction of the basilica. Duval suggests that these walls may have been thickened to allow the installation of a small dome or vault above the sacristy⁴². Although it appears structurally possible that the sacristy was roofed with a small dome, there is no mention in the excavation reports of any vaulting material found in the sacristy.

The floor of the sacristy was covered with a geometric mosaic pavement that was 0.20m below the level of the quadrum populi floors of Phase I. These mosaics have since been lost⁴³.

PHASES II-III

The excavation reports, as published, make no mention of any modifications to this sacristy during the basilica's subsequent phases.

CULT AREAS: THE NORTHERN APSE

PHASE I

During Phase I, there was no apse at the northern end of the basilica.

PHASE II

Considerable restructuring of the northern end of the basilica was undertaken to allow the installation of a small apse inside the existing vestibule (See Phase II plan, Plate XI). Most of the wall at the northern end of the central nave was removed from on top of the 0.75m wide foundation wall, leaving *in situ* little more than a strip of rubble 0.05m high and two square blocks, (0.50 X 0.50m). Duval believes that these blocks, set 1.25m to either side of the basilica's central axis, served as pedestals to support the bases of the columns that marked the original main entryway⁴⁴.

Foundation walls for the apse were dug through the chalk floors of the vestibule. The crest of these foundation walls for the apse was 0.40-0.45m above the level of the crest of the foundation that supported the walls of the *quadratum populi* and the vestibule⁴⁵. Although the northern apse was built inside the pre-existing vestibule, which surrounds the apse like a frame, the walls of the apse do not touch the walls of the vestibule at any point. Unlike the southern apse, the northern apse remains freestanding inside the frame that surrounds it. The apse was centered along the axis of the nave even though the vestibule in which it was built was not aligned with the central axis of the basilica. As a result the apse appears to be off center inside the vestibule. At the open end of the apse a distance of 0.60m separates the western exterior face of the apse from the interior face of the vestibule. Along the wall at the eastern side of the apse the distance between the apse and the wall of the vestibule was only 0.37m.

The curved wall of the apse was built in *opus africanum*, with rough fieldstone blocks for the curtain walls⁴⁶. Inside, the opening of the apse was 6.10m wide, a full meter less than the width of the central nave. The apse has a maximum depth of 4.62m. The apse floor was raised

0.15m above the quadratum populi floors of Phases I and II, and was covered with a mosaic pavement. Only scattered pieces of this pavement, including elements of geometric decor and a few fragmented letters, have survived. The size and condition of the fragments was such that it was impossible for archaeologists to reconstruct any elements of the pattern⁴⁷.

At the northern end of the apse was a massive stone sarcophagus. The installation of the sarcophagus seems to coincide with the construction of the apse. The chalk floors of the Phase I vestibule were cut through to allow the installation of the tomb. The lid of the sarcophagus was 0.45m below the surface of the mosaic floor⁴⁸. The fragments of letters from this floor were found directly above the tomb. Too little of this inscription has survived to permit the reconstruction of the text. The sarcophagus was placed parallel to the central axis of the basilica. Directly beneath the central axis of the apse where it intersects the curved wall of the apse, was a solid wall of masonry that remained from an earlier structure. In order to place the tomb squarely on the axis, this wall would have had to be removed⁴⁹.

When the sarcophagus was opened the skull was found at the northern end, set a certain distance from the rest of the skeleton. Although Duval admits this disturbance could be the result of earthquakes, he believes that it is also possible that the head was separated from the body before being placed in the sarcophagus. The remains of the skeleton were not examined in detail at the time of the excavations; thus, it was not possible to determine whether the displacement of the skull was the result of decapitation, earthquake, or a disturbance that might have occurred during the course of a secondary burial. It should be noted that the excavation reports make no mention of any evidence that would support the theory of a secondary burial, although Duval does mention that the tomb was not robbed⁵⁰.

PHASE III

At some point the northern apse suffered considerable damage, possibly due to earthquakes. The extent of the damage was such that a complete reconstruction and remodeling of the northern apse was necessary (see Phase III plan, Plate XI). After reconstruction, the

northern apse was no longer contained within the confines of the vestibule but extended into the central nave between the two piers that marked the northern ends of the central colonnades. A retaining wall of roughly hewn blocks was built across the central nave between the southern ends of these two piers. As none of these blocks were aligned with any apparent care, it is probable, (especially given the rough finish of these blocks), that the southern face of the wall was not intended to be seen but was revetted with mosaics or marble plaques⁵¹.

The apse was accessible by way of a three-stepped semi-circular perron placed slightly off the alignment of basilica's central axis. The perron was *in situ* at the time of the original excavations⁵². Its remains were later found scattered around the *quadratum populi* by members of Duval's team, who restored the first two steps of it⁵³ (see fig. 2, Plate XIII).

The entryway into the Phase III apse was reduced to a central passage 1.00m wide by a series of chancel plaques. These plaques were supported by a series of rabbets cut into the upper surface of the apse's retaining wall. To either side of this axial opening a rectangular mortise had also been cut into the upper face of the retaining wall. These mortises, (one of which is intact, measuring 0.27 X 0.21m and is 0.15m deep), would have held small posts that provided additional support to the chancel rail. A third similar mortise was found at the eastern edge of the apse's opening. A fourth may also have existed at the apse's western end, but this portion of the retaining wall was not preserved⁵⁴.

The floor level of the Phase III apse was about 0.55m above the level of the Phase II floors. The floors between the two piers as well as the interior of the apse had been covered with a layer of fill, then paved over with mosaics. These mosaics were very fragmentary when discovered during the course of the original excavations in 1913. Several fragments of a vegetal motif with lotiform flowers were discovered along the curved wall of the apse. These mosaics have since been lost⁵⁵.

At the time of the original excavations, a stone block was found inside the northern apse. This stone, since lost, had a rectangular cavity, 0.27 X 0.21m wide and 0.15m deep, cut

into its upper face. Although the exterior measurements are not given, the stone appears on Emont's plan of 1916, as a 0.40m square⁵⁶. It has been suggested by Duval, that a small ornate column capital found in the nave, near the apse, might have been used as part of a ciborium above the reliquary⁵⁷. There is little evidence in the excavation report, as published, that could support this hypothesis.



THE NORTHERN SACRISTIES

No sacristies have been discovered at the northern end of the basilica.

CULT AREAS: THE SANCTUARIES

PHASE I



Despite the very poor condition of much of the surviving material, excavations have distinguished three major phases in the development of the sanctuary at the basilica of Vitalis. Very little survives from the first sanctuary, which dates to the original construction of the basilica. This sanctuary is thought by excavators to have occupied the entire length and width of the fifth, sixth and seventh bays of the central nave⁵⁸. This would have resulted in an unusually large sanctuary, 7.10m wide and 9.30m long (see Phase I plan, Plate X). The sanctuary was enclosed by a series of narrow stylobate blocks that ran along the intercolumniations of the central colonnades, between the double columns. Remains of this stylobate have also been found along the western edges of the fourth and eighth bays of the central nave. Excavators have offered no explanation for this nor is any clear from the excavation reports as published. The northern and southern ends of the sanctuary were marked by a similar stylobate system⁵⁹. Many of the stylobate blocks were *in situ* at the time of the original excavations. The majority have since disappeared.

The sanctuary was accessible from the north by way of an axial opening, 1.50m wide. A similar opening is thought to have existed at the southern end of the sanctuary. The southern entryway is also thought to have been preceded by a narrow walkway, 1.50m wide, that ran to the northern end of the eleventh bay, just in front of the presbyterium. Like the sanctuary, the walkway was enclosed with a series of chancel plaques. These were later removed when the second sanctuary was installed. There was no trace of an altar found from this period⁶⁰.

PHASE II

The original sanctuary was replaced with a second sanctuary that straddled the end of

the fifth bay of the central nave, all of the sixth bay and the beginning of the seventh. All that remains from this sanctuary are a few segments of a stone stylobate that formed a rectangle 3.70m wide and 5.50m long (see Phase II plan, Plate XI). The stylobate supported the posts and chancel plaques that enclosed the sanctuary. Narrow rabbets had been cut into the upper faces of these blocks. A block with a circular mortise, (0.90m deep with a 0.27m diameter) for a chancel post survives *in situ* at the northeastern angle of the sanctuary⁶¹. The sanctuary was also accessible by way of two axial entries. Although only a fragment of the southern door sill remains *in situ*, the northern door sill was almost intact and measured 1.15m. This northern doorway could be closed by a two leaf door or gate that could be bolted in the middle⁶². During this phase, stylobates running north and south were installed along the intercolumniations of the central colonnades in order to support a more extended system of chancel plaques. With the excavation of narrow openings on the eastern and western sides of the third and tenth bays, the central nave was now completely cut off from the various side aisles. These narrow openings allowed people to pass from the eastern to the western sides of the *quadratum populi*, without having to leave the basilica⁶³.

PHASE III

Although the remains of the first two sanctuaries are fairly scant, the third and final sanctuary is in a considerably better state of preservation. The Phase III sanctuary was marked by a low stone frame that occupied nearly the entire length of the central nave's eighth and ninth bays. It had been built with stone blocks 0.40-0.45m high, that formed a rectangular frame, 5.40m long and 3.93m wide⁶⁴ (see Phase III plan, Plate XII). The Phase I mosaics of the *quadratum populi*, as well as the thick layer of cement that supported them, had been cut through to allow the installation of the frame. The upper surface of these blocks was only a few centimeters above the surface of the Phase I mosaics. The length and width of the stone blocks varied, their exterior faces had been trued so as to present a uniform surface along the perimeter of the platform⁶⁵. It is improbable that the irregularities of these blocks would not have been evident: the whole structure is likely to have been paved over with mosaics.

Rabbets and mortises cut into the upper surface of the stone frame indicate that the sanctuary was surrounded by chancel plaques. The sanctuary was accessible by way of two axial entryways: the northern was 0.80m wide, the southern 0.75m wide. Additional support was given to the chancel plaques by small rectangular posts. One of these posts, 0.20 X 0.15 X 1.35m high and terminating in a hemispheroid, has survived intact⁶⁶.

The northern end of the enclosure was sheltered beneath a ciborium 3.50m long and 3.93m wide. Mortises for the bases of the column shafts to support the ciborium were also cut into the upper surfaces of the sanctuary's stone frame. One of the bases, a monolithic base and pedestal, was found beside the altar platform. Notches were cut into the sides of the pedestal in order to provide additional support for the chancel plaques⁶⁷.

In the center of the area protected by the ciborium, a section of column shaft 0.92m high with a diameter of 0.30m, was sunk into the floor of the nave. A small cavity, 0.20m long, 0.135m wide and 0.125m deep was cut out of the core of the column. Inside the cavity, 0.25m from the top was a tiny ledge, 0.01m wide, that could have held a cover in place⁶⁸. This column was *in situ* at the time of excavations. The cavity was probably intended to contain a small reliquary.

The altar base was found nearby, broken into two pieces. It originally had been a rectangular-monolith, 1.65m long, 1.03m wide and 0.18-0.20m thick. The stone was roughly hewn, indicating that it had probably been revetted with mosaic. A rectangular mortise was cut into each of the four corners to hold the feet of the altar table. In the center of the upper surface of the stone was a small two-stepped cavity for a reliquary. Directly beneath it, on the lower face of the altar base was a circular cavity 0.37m in diameter⁶⁹. According to Duval, the top of the column shaft *in situ* in the sanctuary floor was meant to fit into the circular cavity on the lower face of the altar base⁷⁰. During the original excavations a column and several upper abaci from the ciborium were found. The column was in very poor condition. Its 1.80m shaft was decorated with helicoidal fluting⁷¹. The abaci were all cut to the same design: a blocky profile with a single incised band just below the top⁷². A capital that had been attributed to the ciborium by Merlin, was re-examined by Duval, who suggests, (on the grounds that it was

found near the eastern apse), that the capital may in fact have been used in conjunction with a ciborium in the eastern apse of Phase III⁷³.

During Phase III, a transverse barriers were installed at the northern and southern ends of bay III. Each barrier had a 1.00m axial opening⁷⁴. This third form of the sanctuary appears to have remained in use until the basilica was abandoned.

SECONDARY ROOMS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Excavators cleared a series of small rooms including a baptistery that were found clustered beside and behind the southern apse (see plan of secondary rooms, Plate XIV). The excavation reports make little or no reference to the stratification or phasing of these rooms. Nevertheless, the evidence, as published, seems to indicate that while the construction of these rooms may in fact date to the original campaign of construction, they may not have been part of the original building plan. The planned width of the walls seems to be indicated by the width of the blocks in opus africanum. Normally, (and this is the case throughout the rest of the basilica), the blocks in opus africanum and the rubble walls that run between them are the same width. If these walls were originally built in the normal manner, that is to say with the width of the rubble walls corresponding to the width of the opus africanum blocks, one might expect to find the original faces of the walls indicated of the excavation architect's plan. Due to the lack of adequate information, these rooms will not be divided into phases.

THE BAPTISTERY

A small baptistery, 6.65m wide and 4.50m deep, is located immediately south of the basilica's southern apse⁷⁵. The southern face of the masonry frame that surrounds the basilica's apse, is used as the northern wall of the baptistery. The eastern and western walls are common with the western and eastern walls of Rooms II and V, respectively. Symmetrically placed in both of these walls were large doorways. The lower portions of the jambposts as well as both doorsills are still in situ. The eastern doorway is 2.30m wide⁷⁶; the western is 2.20m wide⁷⁷. Holes cut into the upper surfaces of the door sills indicate that both entries could be closed off with double leaf doors.

In the southern wall of the baptistery was a small apse, 2.12m wide and 2.45m deep. This apse was centered, like the southern apse of the basilica, along the central axis of the nave. The eastern, western and southern walls were all thickened towards the interior of the baptistery⁷⁸.

In each of the baptistery's four corners was a column. The bases of these were still *in situ* at the time of excavation. These bases had probably been taken from earlier monuments. They were all Attic style, but no two of them had the same profiles⁷⁹. Because of the thickness of the walls and the placement of the four angle columns, Duval believes that the baptistery was covered by a vault. Massive springers and consoles fashioned out of reused cornices were found in Room II. These are believed by the excavators to have been part of the vaulting system for the baptistery⁸⁰.

There appear to have been at least two different floor levels in the baptistery, an earlier level, 0.33m below the level of the Phase I nave, and a later mosaic pavement, 0.05m below the level of the nave floors of Phase I⁸¹. Excavators have provided no explanation of the nature of the earlier floor level.

The baptismal font itself was similar to the font found in the baptistery between the Basilica of Vitalis and the Basilica of Bellator. It resembled a rectangle with large bulges along the long sides. At the short ends were three steps descending towards the central floor of the font. The font had an overall length of 3.95m and a maximum width of 2.75m. The rim of the font stood 0.25m above the level of the baptistery floor which was 0.05m below the floor level. The entire structure was covered with a mosaic pavement. Four column bases were set on the raised rim of the baptismal font. It is possible that these were used for columns supporting a ciborium above the central portion of the font⁸². Along the northern edge of the font was the mosaic inscription from which the basilica takes its name. It reads as follows:

VITALIS
ET CARDE
LAVOTV
MSN (83)

Room II

Immediately south of the eastern sacristy is a large room, 7.40m wide and 6.40m deep. The northern wall of Room II, (in which there is a doorway leading in from the sacristy), is common with the southern wall of the eastern sacristy, (see above). The eastern wall, like the eastern wall of the sacristy, is an extension of the quadratum populi and has also been thickened along its interior face. The western wall is formed in part by the southeastern end of the frame surrounding the apse and by the eastern wall of the baptistery, (see above). The southern wall is also the northern wall of Room III, (see below). The two rooms were joined by a doorway, nearly 2.40m wide. The lower portions of the jambs are in situ, but no trace of a doorsill was found⁸⁴.

In the center of the room were the bases of four columns that formed a 2.35m square. The columns that would have been set upon these bases may have been used to support a lantern or raised portion of the roof.

The floors of Room II were covered with a geometric mosaic pavement at a level 0.20m below the floor level of the eastern sacristy and the Phase I nave. The design used for the pavement consisted of rows of small diamonds similar to those used in the eastern exterior side aisle. These mosaics were visible when the basilica was first excavated, but have since been destroyed⁸⁵.

ROOM III

South of Room II was yet another small rectangular room, 7.50m wide and 3.00m deep. The northern wall of the room is common with the southern wall of Room II. The eastern wall was in very poor condition but was clearly an extension of the eastern wall of the quadratum populi. In Room III the eastern wall had not been thickened along its interior face, as it had in the sacristy and Room II. The southern wall is part of the same wall that marks the southern end of the courtyard and runs along the edge of the street. The eastern wall of the courtyard is also the western wall of room III⁸⁶.

There were no traces of floor surviving, nor was there any indication as to what type of roofing was used, if any, to cover the room.

THE COURTYARD

Behind the baptistery and Room V runs an open air courtyard 15.40m long and 3.00m wide. The northern side of the courtyard is common with the southern walls of Room V and the baptistery, in fact the curved wall of the baptistery's apse protrudes considerably into the courtyard. The southern wall runs along the edge of the street. The northern wall is an extension of the lateral wall of the quadratum populi. It has the same width as the wall in the quadratum populi, unlike the external walls of rooms VII and V. The eastern wall of the room is aligned with the eastern wall of the baptistery, and is common with the western wall of Room III, (see above). A 1.30m doorway, the doorsill for which is still in situ, led into Room III.

About 2.50m from the western wall of the courtyard were two columns. One column was built against the southern wall that lined the street, the other was built against the courtyard's northern wall. Excavators are not sure what these columns were for.

No remains of any form of floor have been identified⁸⁷.

ROOM V

Immediately south of Room VII and the western sacristy, was a rectangular room, 4.50m long and 7.70m wide. The northern wall of Room V is common with the southern walls of Room VII and the western sacristy. The western wall is a continuation of the western exterior wall of the quadratum populi, though like the western wall of Room VII it too has been thickened along its interior face. The southern wall is in very poor condition, but was clearly thickened along its interior face. The eastern wall was common with the western wall of the baptistery.

Room V was accessible from both Room VII, (see below), and the baptistery, (see above). The doorway from the baptistery occupied nearly half of the total depth of the eastern wall. A doorway in the southern wall of this room led into a long and narrow open air courtyard. Owing to the poor condition of the southern wall it has not been possible to establish the exact dimensions of this doorway.

In the middle of the floor of this room were four columns that formed a 2.50m square. Duval suggests that the columns were used to support a small dome or lantern. Although no columns were found inside Room V, a 3.22m long column with a diameter of 0.38m was found nearby in Room VII. Excavators suggest that this column may be from Room V as no column bases were found *in situ* in Room VII. The diameter of the column also corresponds to the diameter of the bases found in Room V⁸⁸.

The floor level of Room V was 0.20m lower than that of the central nave. Fragments of a mosaic pavement with highly stylized four leaf rosettes were still *in situ*. This mosaic has since been lost.

ROOM VII

Room VII is a rectangle, 3.55 wide and 8.63m long, that juts into the southwestern corner of the quadratum populi. It occupies the space that falls between the western sacristy and the western exterior wall of the quadratum populi, as well as the area where the tenth and eleventh bays of the western exterior side aisle would otherwise have been. Room VII's western wall is a continuation of the western wall of the quadratum populi wall although it has been thickened towards the interior. The northern wall of this room marks the southern end of the western exterior side aisle. Room VII is accessible from this aisle through an axial doorway 1.25m wide. The lower portion of the jambposts as well as the doorsill are *in situ*. The eastern wall of the room is aligned with the colonnade that separates the two western side aisles. The wall also marks the western edge of parts of the tenth and the eleventh bays of the western

interior side aisle. Its southern section is common with the western wall of the western sacristy. A 1.25m wide doorway at the northern end of bay eleven leads into Room V, (see below). The lower portions of the doors' jambshafts as well as the doorsill are in situ. The southern wall of Room VII is aligned with the southern wall of the western sacristy. A 1.10m wide doorway in this wall lead into Room V, the lower portion of the jambshafts as well as the doorsill are in situ. These walls are also aligned with the southernmost face of the apse frame. Were the line that is formed by these walls and the apse frame to be continued eastwards to the basilica's eastern wall, the plan of the basilica's chevet would bear a much stronger resemblance to the most common type of chevet found in Tunisia.

The floor of Room VII was on the same level as the quadratum populi floors of Phase I. When the basilica was first excavated the remains of the floor could still be seen along the western wall of the room. The motif was geometric, consisting of rows of a somber scale pattern. A small band of plain tesserae ran along the edge of the wall. This mosaic has since been lost⁸⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

As is the case with so many North-African basilicas, it is nearly impossible to determine the original date of construction. Many of the architectural elements such as columns, capitals, bases, large stone blocks etc, were reused from earlier monuments. There are few legible coins and little datable pottery to help date the construction phases. The recording of stratification in the excavation reports is frequently incomplete.

PHASE I

The basilica of Vitalis appears to have been built as a large functional basilica meant to hold a large congregation. Originally the basilica had a wide central nave that was separated from the interior side aisles by a colonnade with ten double columns. The interior and exterior side aisles were separated from each other by ten double columns in the east and nine in the west. A single apse stood at the southern end of the central nave, encased in a masonry frame. To either side of the apse were rectangular rooms that appear to have served as sacristies. The doors in the ninth bays of the eastern and western side aisles date from the initial phase of construction but like the side entries in the basilica of Bellator, they probably do not represent the main entryway. The basilica was preceded by a small vestibule at the northern end of the central nave. Excavators believe that this vestibule led to the main doorway that would have been situated at the northern end of the central nave. The Phase I sanctuary occupied the entire length of the fifth, sixth and seventh bays of the central nave. The floors of the basilica were covered by a mosaic pavement with a geometric pattern.

A baptismal complex was located immediately south of the apse. The excavations, as published, have not demonstrated phasing in this area. The area does not appear to have undergone any architecturally significant alterations.

PHASE II

As is the case with the basilica of Bellator, the second phase of construction is marked primarily by the installation of a small apse at the northern end of the central nave, inside the preexisting vestibule. Unlike Bellator, however, the southern apse appears to have remained in use as the presbyterium. Duval suggests that the new apse may have been built as a funeral chapel not long after the original construction of the basilica. Duval further suggests that the apse may have housed the tomb of Praesidius, a bishop of Sbeitla who is mentioned in the Notitia for 484 and who is also mentioned by Victor of Vita for his decapitation at the hands of the Vandals.

In Phase II, a new sanctuary was built inside the area of the Phase I sanctuary. In addition to this, the chancel plaques were added to cut the central nave off from the side aisles.

The large doorway that straddles the third and fourth bays of the eastern side aisles was probably installed at this time, perhaps to make up for the loss of the main entry that is thought to have been located at the northern end of the central nave.

PHASE III

Before its final phase of reconstruction the basilica of Vitalis suffered considerable damage especially at the northern and southern ends of the basilica where both apses collapsed. The collapse of the apses may have been the result of an earthquake. The third phase of construction is primarily marked by the reconstruction of the northern and southern apses. The southern apse appears to have remained in use as the presbyterium, unlike the southern apse in the basilica of Bellator that appears to have lost its role as the presbyterium at some point. The floor of the southern apse was raised and a synchrosis was added. The width of the actual entry into the apse was reduced by the installation of chancel plaques.

The northern apse was enlarged so that it now occupied the area between the piers that mark the sides of the central nave. The floor of this apse was also raised.

The sanctuary of Phase III was installed towards the southern end of the central nave and occupied a small rectangular area inside the eighth and ninth bays of the central nave. There were also several alterations to the preexisting chancel rails, notably the installation of transverse barriers at the northern and southern ends of the third bay. The floor was repaved with mosaics and the recess in the north eastern corner of the quadratum populi was filled in.

Despite the number and the extent of the interior rearrangements and refittings, there is nothing to suggest that there would have been at any point a need for modification of the roofing of the quadratum populi.

FOOTNOTES

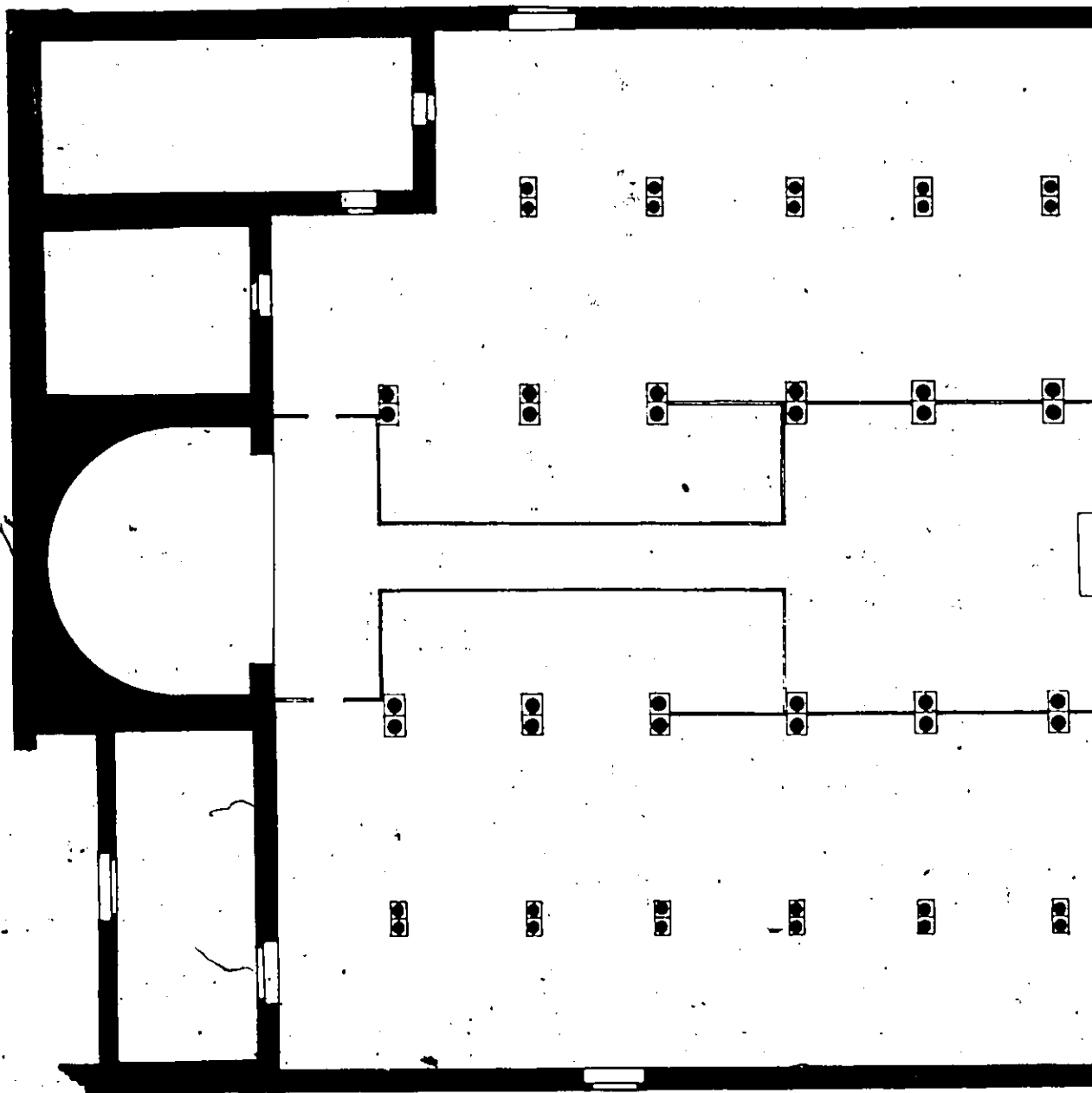
- 1) The name Vitalis was given to the basilica in 1916 by the excavators who discovered the epitaph of a priest by that name as well as a mosaic inscription along the edge of the baptismal font indicating that the font was donated by a man also named Vitalis. The epitaph is of particular interest because the date on it refers to the reign of Genseric thus providing a reasonably good *terminus post quem*. The epitaph was published by A. Merlin and P. Monceaux; "L'építaphe du prêtre Vitalis", *CRAI*, 1914, p. 482-488.
- 2) See the Basilica of Bellator, Chapter I.
- 3) Duval, *Les Basilíques de Shetla à Deux Sanctuaires Opposés*, Paris, 1971 p. 100-144. Here the construction of the baptistery within a preexisting peristyle structure and its subsequent modification as a funeral chapel are examined in detail.
- 4) The *Episcopium* and bath house are discussed by Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 299 - 309.
- 5) This is not meant to imply that there was any form of over all plan for the complex before any part of it was built.
- 6) Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 296-297, fig. 334 - 335.
- 7) Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
- 8) Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 257 and 258, fig. 279
- 9) These are external measurements. The internal measurements are not given by the excavator but would be roughly 8.46m X 8.70m.
- 10) Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
- 11) All of the legible coins date from the mid fourth to early fifth century, see Duval, *op. cit.*, Appendice III, Catalogue Sommaire des Trouvailles D. Monnaies, p. 321-322.
- 12) Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
- 13) Excavators maintain that it is not impossible that the door sill was removed when the floor of the *quadratum populi* was repaved during Phase III, and then reinstalled to coincide with the level of the new mosaics, see Duval, *op. cit.*, p. 166. It should however be noted that the excavators do not appear to have conducted excavations in this area to confirm their theory. In light of the numerous anomalies and the generally poor quality of the workmanship that went into the the construction of the basilica, a slight inconsistency in the placement of a door sill would not be surprising.

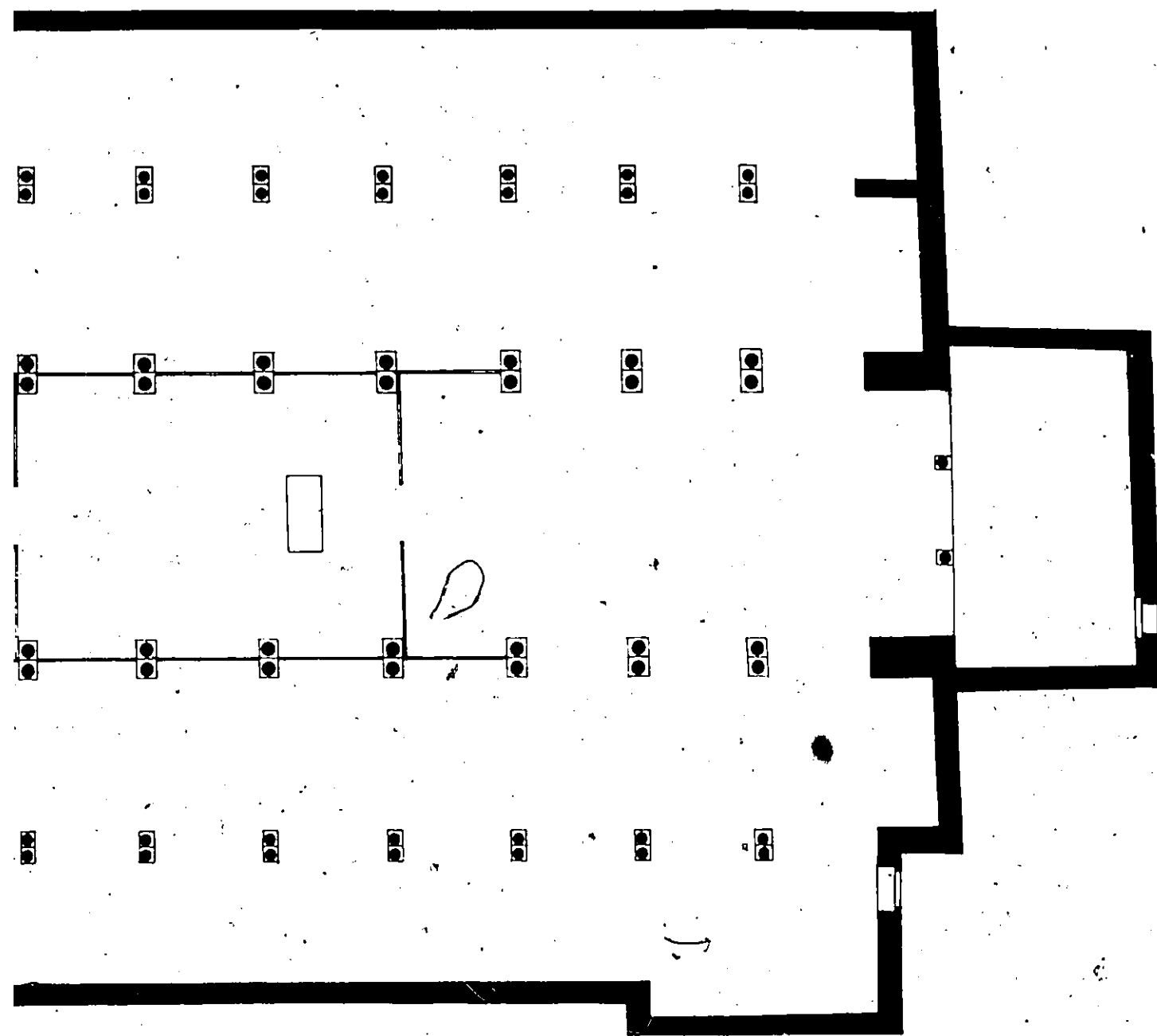
- 14) Duval, op. cit., p. 256.
- 15) Duval, op. cit., p. 168 fig. 172 and p. 169, fig. 174.
- 16) Duval, op. cit., p. 166.
- 17) Duval, op. cit., p. Dépliant V, fig. 157.
- 18) Duval, op. cit., p. 164-165.
- 19) It should be noted that on his phase plans Duval has regularized the positioning of the columns. As a result, these anomalies are not evident.
- 20) Duval, op. cit., p. 165.
- 21) Duval, op. cit., p. 171, 172, figs. 178 and 180.
- 22) Duval, op. cit., p. 171, 172, fig. 177.
- 23) Duval, op. cit., p. 174-175, figs. 181-183, 186 and 187.
- 24) Duval, op. cit., p. 172 and 172, fig. 177.
- 25) Duval, op. cit., p. 210-222, figs. 224-234, 236, 237, 239-253.
- 26) Duval, op. cit., p. 216-221.
- 27) Duval, op. cit., p. 177.
- 28) Duval, op. cit., p. 176-177, figs. 190 and 191.
- 29) J. Christern "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika", Akten VII Kongr. Christ. Arch. p. 418, 24 pl. CXCI, fig. 6. c-d and pl. CCVIII fig. 26.
- 30) Duval, op. cit., p. 222.
- 31) Duval, op. cit., p. 222-238.
- 32) Duval, op. cit., p. 247.
- 33) Duval, op. cit., p. 247.
- 34) Duval, op. cit., p. 243.
- 35) Only a very small fragment of the inscription survived at the time of the original excavations. This fragment has since been destroyed, although Duval has published a previously unpublished plan by Ch. Emonts from 1916, which includes the fragmented inscription BA, Duval, op. cit., p. 149, fig. 154 and p. 240, fig. 266.
- 36) Duval, op. cit., p. 242, figs. 269 and 270.
- 37) Duval, op. cit., p. 240, fig. 266.
- 38) Duval, op. cit., p. 239.
- 39) The southeastern sacristy is referred to as "Salle I" on Duval's plan, op. cit. Dépliant

V, fig. 157.

- 40) Duval, op. cit., p. 267.
- 41) The southwestern sacristy is referred to as "Salle VI" on Duval's plan. op. cit. Dépliant V, fig. 157.
- 42) Duval goes as far as to suggest that the walls could have supported a second story above the vaulted roof. In his published report, he makes no mention of any evidence, apart the thickness of the walls themselves, that would support his theory.
- 43) Duval, op. cit., p. 286.
- 44) Duval, op. cit., p. 257.
- 45) Duval, op. cit., p. 255.
- 46) Duval, op. cit., p. 259.
- 47) Duval, op. cit., p. 261.
- 48) The sarcophagus measured 2.17 x 0.58m, Duval, op. cit., p. 259.
- 49) Duval, op. cit., p. 248 fig. 279.
- 50) Duval, op. cit., p. 259.
- 51) Duval, op. cit., p. 257.
- 52) The perron is clearly illustrated in Ch. Emonts' plan of 1916, see, Duval, op. cit., p. 149, fig. 154.
- 53) Duval, op. cit., p. 252-253, fig. 285-286.
- 54) Duval, op. cit., p. 250, fig. 283 and p. 149, fig. 154.
- 55) Duval, op. cit., p. 250.
- 56) Duval, op. cit., p. 149, fig. 154.
- 57) Duval, op. cit., p. 251.
- 58) Duval, op. cit., p. 206, fig. 223.
- 59) Duval, op. cit., p. 194-195, figs. 215 and 217. There appears to be very little archaeological evidence that would support Duval's reconstruction of the southern end of this walkway.
- 60) Duval, op. cit., p. 206, fig. 223, and p. 207-208.
- 61) Duval, op. cit., p. 180.
- 62) Duval, op. cit., p. 181.
- 63) Duval, op. cit., p. 206.
- 64) Duval, op. cit., p. 182.

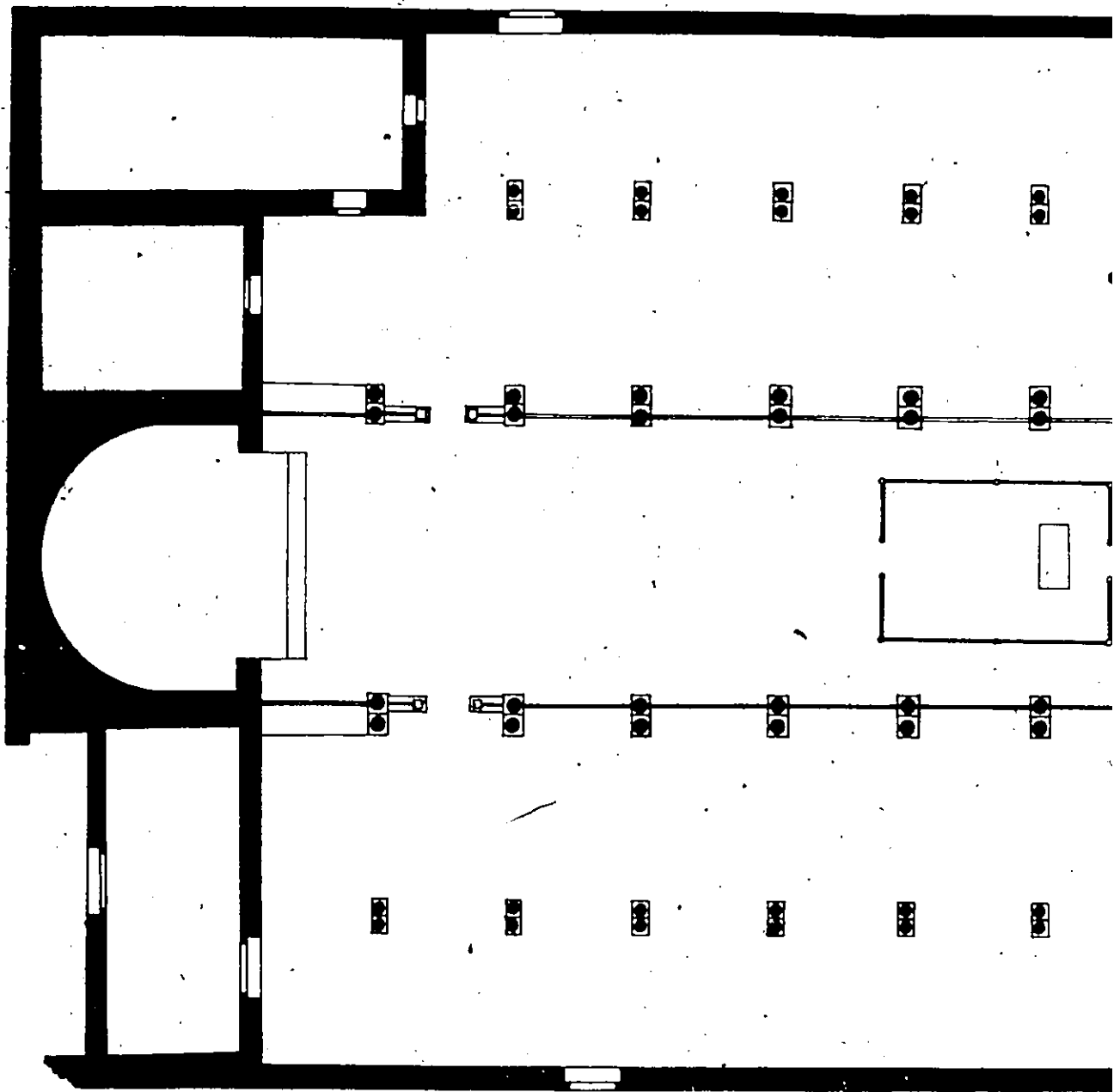
- 65) Duval, op. cit., p. 183.
- 66) Duval, op. cit., p. 204-205, fig. 186.
- 67) Duval, op. cit., p. 184, fig. 196-7.
- 68) Duval, op. cit., p. 183 fig. 195 and p. 188, 206.
- 69) Duval, op. cit., p. 189-192, fig. 207-210.
- 70) Duval, op. cit., p. 170.
- 71) Duval, op. cit., p. 184-185, fig. 198.
- 72) Duval, op. cit., p. 186 fig. 201-203, and p. 187.
- 73) Duval's restoration of a ciborium in the northern apse, remains strictly hypothetical.
It is based essentially of the presence of the stone block found inside the northern apse during the original excavations. See Duval, op. cit., p. 149, fig. 154.
- 74) Duval, op. cit., p. 209.
- 75) Duval, op. cit., p. 269-284.
- 76) Duval, op. cit., p. 267.
- 77) Duval, op. cit., p. 284.
- 78) Duval, op. cit., p. 269.
- 79) Duval, op. cit., p. 270.
- 80) Duval, op. cit., p. 270.
- 81) Duval, op. cit., p. 283-284.
- 82) One of the clearest illustrations of the font dates to the time of the original excavations. The drawing, executed by Ch. Emonts during the original excavations in 1913, has been reproduced by Duval, see, op. cit., p. 279, fig. 318.
- 83) Duval, op. cit., p. 279, fig. 318.
- 84) Duval, op. cit., p. 267.
- 85) Duval, op. cit., p. 267.
- 86) Duval, op. cit., p. 268.
- 87) Duval, op. cit., p. 268.
- 88) Duval, op. cit., p. 284.
- 89) Duval, op. cit., p. 285, fig. 327, and p. 286.

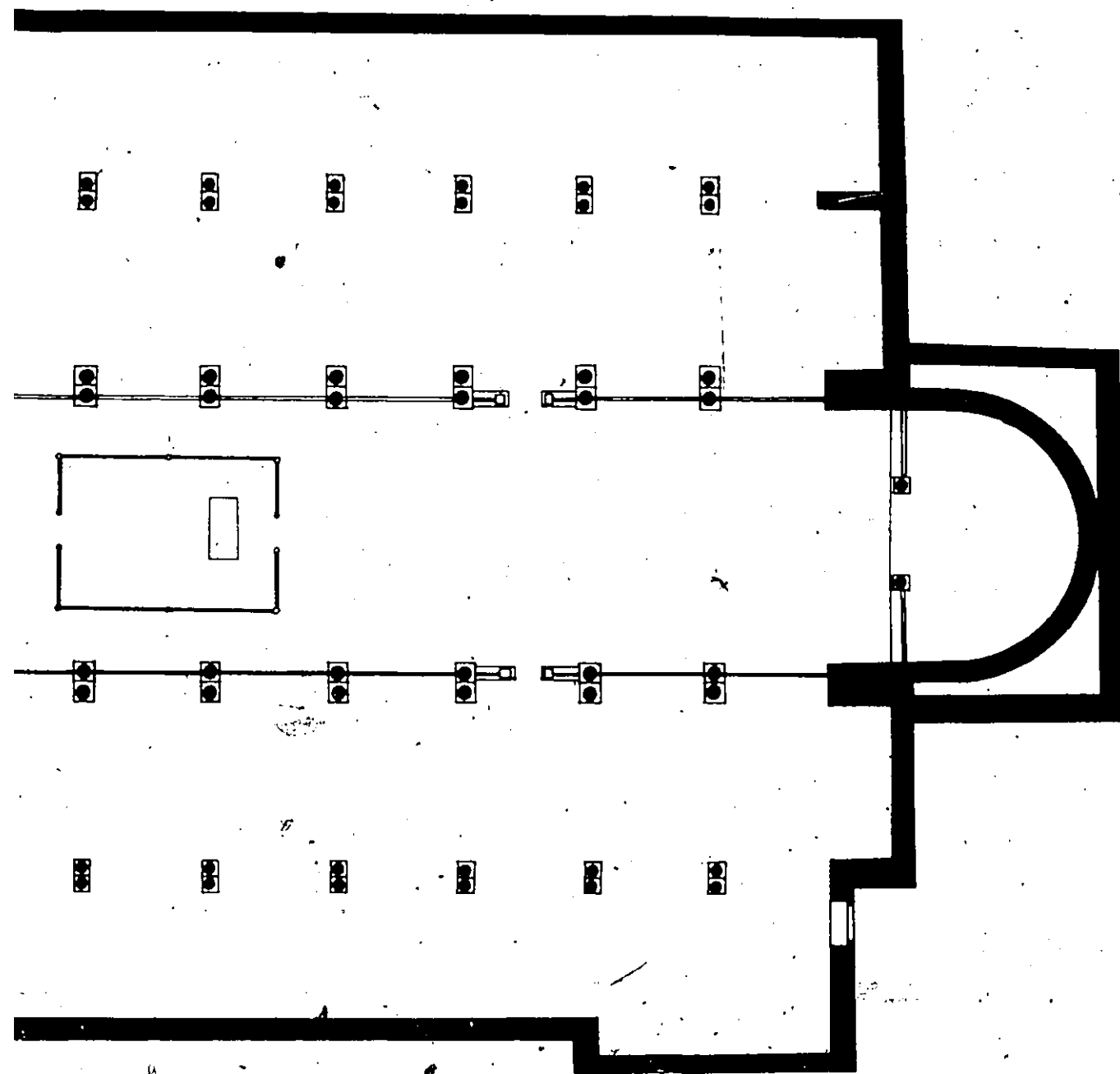




The Basilica of Vitalis
Phase I Plan

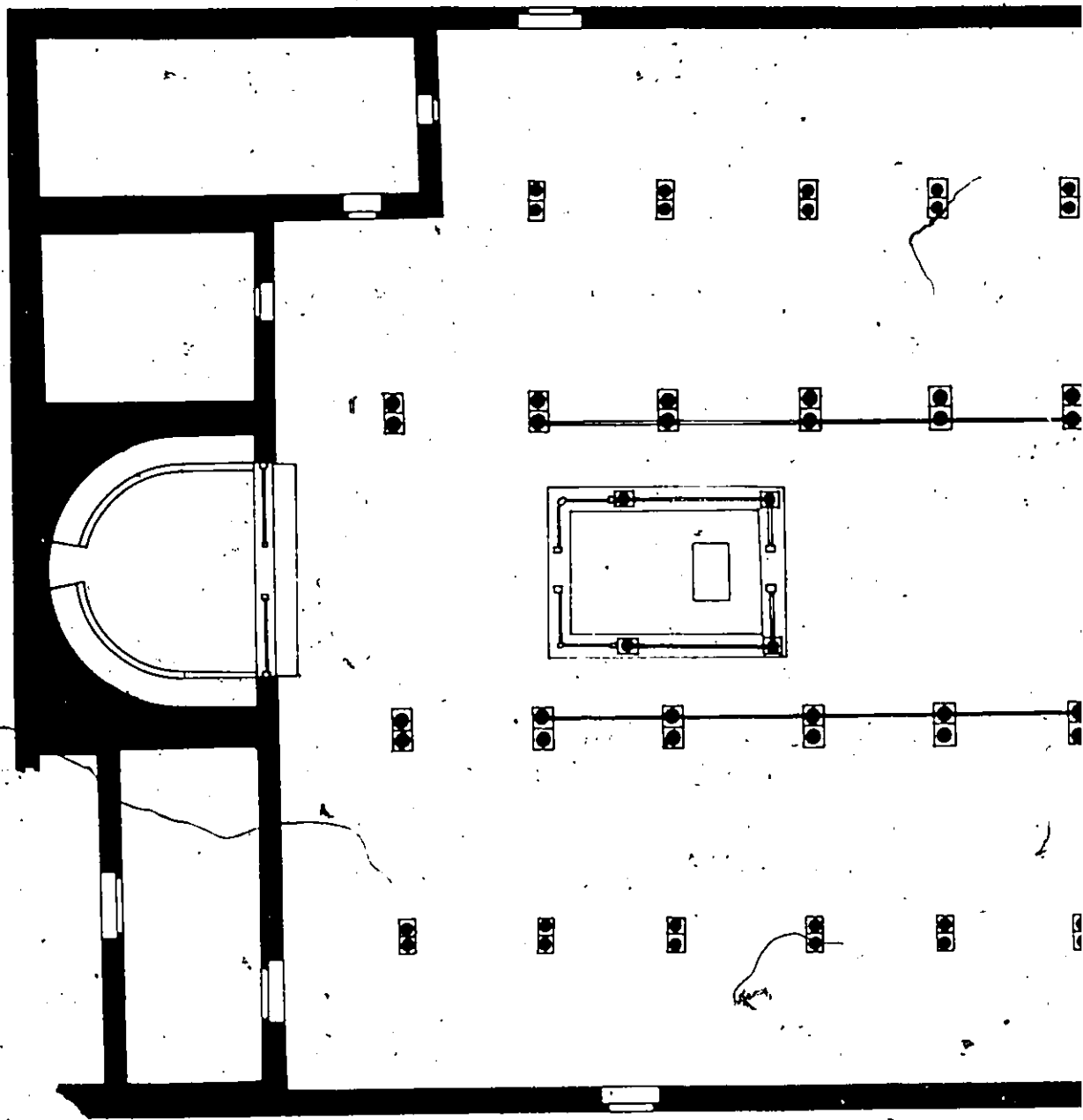


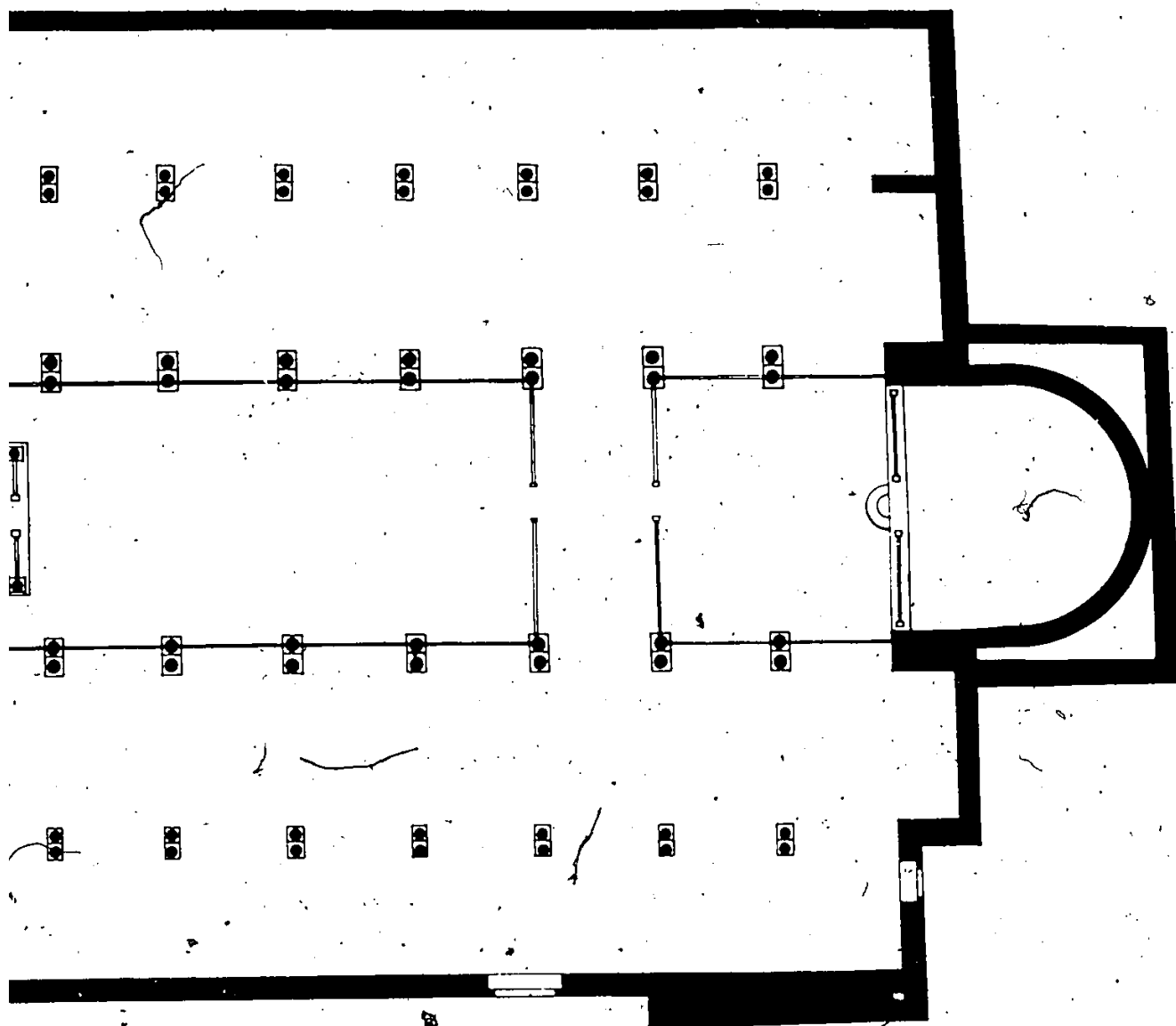




The Basilica of Vitalis
Phase II Plan







The Basilica of Vitalis
Phase III Plan

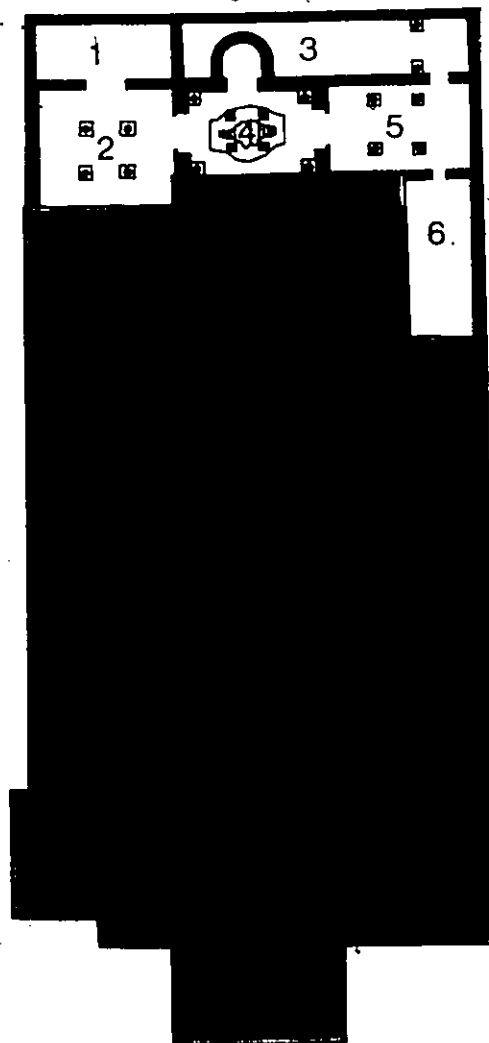




Fig. 1 Quadratum populi and southern apse.

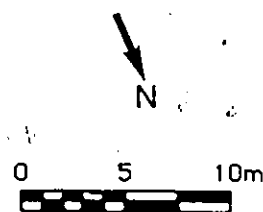


Fig. 2 Northern apse - note in foreground the irregular eastern corner of the quadratum populi.



Relation of secondary rooms to the Basilica of Vitalis.

1. Room III.
2. Room II.
3. The courtyard.
4. The baptistery.
5. Room V.
6. Room VII.



CHAPTER III: THE BASILICA OF MELLEUS

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Known as the basilica of Melleus¹, the largest of Haïdra's five Christian basilicas was built just west of a large tetrastyle temple and adjoining forum that marked the center of the commercial activity of the Roman town. Sometime during the sixth century, after the Byzantine reconquest, a large section of Haïdra was fortified². The basilica of Melleus was not included inside the fortified area, but lies 100m north of the citadel's northern wall. The exclusion of the basilica from the fortified area appears to have been primarily for reasons of defensibility, and does not indicate that it was no longer used. The basilica was surrounded by numerous small rooms that appear to have been annexes. Excavations have yet to be conducted in the areas beyond these rooms.

The basilica was studied during the late 1800's and early 1900's by S. Osell³ and P. Gauckler⁴, but was first excavated in 1934 by Dr. Dolcamascolo with the authorization of L. Poinssot, Directeur des Antiquités de Tunisie. These excavations were never published and there is little documentation of any kind from these excavations. Between 1967 and 1978, the basilica was studied in considerable detail by a French team from the École Française de Rome under the direction of N. Duval. This team also supervised the reconstruction and restoration of the basilica⁵.

BASILICA COMPLEX

The entire basilica forms a rectangle 40.50m long and 15.40m wide. It is preceded by a large open-air courtyard, and is surrounded by numerous small annex rooms. Inside, the basilica is 39.60m long and 14.50m wide. It has a central nave and two side aisles. Although there are two sanctuaries, one at either end of the central nave, only the western end of the nave ends with an apse.

The basilica lies along an East-West axis. The central axis of the basilica is perpendicular to the axis of the neighbouring temple and forum⁵.

ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

PHASE I

Excavators attribute the courtyard to a second phase of construction. There is no mention of what might have originally preceded the eastern end of the basilica before the courtyard was built. Excavators mention that the courtyard could have been built roughly at the same time as the basilica proper, possibly as a later stage of the original campaign of construction, although this is only mentioned briefly at the end of the excavation report⁷.

PHASE II

At some point not long after the original construction of the basilica, a large trapezoidal court was built at the east end of the basilica (see Phase II plan, Plate XVI). The courtyard is not thought to be contemporary to the original construction of the basilica, because the northern and southern walls of the courtyard and the façade of the basilica are abutting and not joined. The phase II courtyard measured 14.40m in the east, 18.50m in the north, 17.85m in the south and 14.45m in the west⁸. Its northern and southern walls abut against the façade of the basilica. The eastern wall was built along the street that slants to the north, which accounts for the irregular shape of the courtyard. The eastern wall of the courtyard was 0.50m thick and was solidly built with large blocks of cut stone. There were no doorways at any point along this wall.

The fabric of the northern wall is not homogeneous. At the east end of this wall, the first 3.50m were built with large blocks of cut stone averaging 0.70m in width. The remaining stretch of the wall that ran westward to join the façade of the basilica, was only 0.50m thick. This portion of the wall was built with a mixture of fieldstone and reused material and reinforced at regular intervals of about 1.40m with blocks in opus africanum. There were two entryways in the northern wall. One was set 6.50m from the street, the second 0.50m from the basilica's façade. The eastern doorway, that nearest to the street, was 0.90m wide. Its

jambshafts, still *in situ*, are preserved to a height of 1.50m. The jambshafts of the western doorway are also *in situ* and are preserved to a height of 1.50m. This doorway is only 0.75m wide⁹.

The entire length of the south wall was built with fieldstones and was reinforced at intervals of 1.50-2.00m with blocks in *opus africanum*. Unlike its northern counterpart, which appears to have been built above several different earlier walls¹⁰, the southern wall was built on a single solid foundation wall, 1.00m deep. This foundation wall which excavators believe may date from an earlier construction, was set directly on bedrock¹¹. There appear to have been two entrances in the southern wall of the courtyard. The first, or easternmost was set just slightly over 1.00m in from the street, the second c.2.50m from the facade. It should be noted that this section of the wall is in a very poor state of preservation.

The easternmost doorway was preceded by a small rectangular room, (room XIX on the excavator's plan), 4.60m wide and 3.00m deep. The room appears to have served as a porch. The eastern wall of the room or porch was built immediately along the eastern wall of the courtyard¹². More than one third of room XIX's east wall was occupied by a large doorway. The door sill is *in situ*. Holes cut into the upper surface of the sill indicate that the porch was entered by way of a double leaf doorway 1.80m wide. The upper surface of this monolithic door sill was 1.00m above the surface of the street, and was preceded by a three-stepped perron. The perron was 1.00m wide and was built on top of the surface of the road. A lintel found in the street immediately in front of this entryway is thought to be from this doorway¹⁴. The lintel was decorated with the chi-rho flanked by an alpha and omega.

A second entry, in the southern wall, was found in a considerably better state of preservation. It is located less than 2.00m from the facade of the basilica. Both the door sill and the jambshafts are still *in situ*, preserved to a height of 0.50m. Hinge and bolt holes still visible in the upper surface of the door sill indicate that the 0.75m opening was closed by a single leaf door. This doorway opens onto a long narrow room, (room XXII), which appears to be a corridor that led to the courtyards from some point inside the annexes. Although the doorway itself appears to date from the time of the construction of the courtyard, the eastern and western walls of the corridor

preceding it were built against the southern wall of the courtyard and were clearly a later addition¹³. The courtyard's southern wall served as the northern wall of the corridor.

The basilica was entered by way of a large central door, 2.20m wide, and two smaller doors, each 0.75-0.80m wide¹⁵. These doorways were located in the eastern façade that corresponded to the central nave and the two side aisles. All three door sills are still *in situ*. None of the doors appears to have had stone jambshafts; all simply had wooden frames. All three doors appear to have closed with two leaves (see fig. 2, Plate XIX and fig. 4, Plate XX). Mortises that would have been used to enable the barring shut of the northern door are still visible inside the door at a height of 1.20¹⁶.

Little has survived that can be attributed with certitude to the upper portions of the basilica's façade. Possible exceptions are two long stones, 1.46m and 1.35m long, that may have formed a peaked ornament. One end of each stone has been cut at a 45° angle so that the two stones fit together forming an isosceles triangle. The intrados faces of these stones were carved with a multilobed decoration. The base of the triangle formed by the union of these two stones is however only 2.10m wide. This is too narrow for the stones to have been part of a mitered relieving arch above the main entryway. Duval suggests that these stones were used on the façade where they played a purely decorative role¹⁷.

In the center of the courtyard is a large rectangular stylobate that isolates an area 11.50m long and 8.00m wide. The stylobate was built with large rectangular flagstones set flush with the floor of the courtyard (see fig. 2, Plate XIX). These flat stone slabs vary in length but have an average width of 1.00m. Three meters north of the southeastern corner of the stylobate was a small channel that passed beneath the stylobate, and was used to drain rain water from the central part of the courtyard, (see Phase II, Plate XVI).

Excavators believe that this stylobate was used during Phase I of the courtyard to support the columns of a four sided portico, or atrium, which was removed when repairs were made to the courtyard. This atrium would, according the excavators¹⁸, have had four columns along the eastern and western ends and six along the northern and southern sides. It should be

noted, however, that actual archaeological evidence that would support the existence of such an atrium is extremely tenuous, consisting essentially of three elements: 1) the water channel that passes under the eastern end of the stylobate and empties onto the street¹⁹, 2) two columns set one to either side of the central axis of the basilica on the western end of the stylobate which have disappeared since excavation²⁰ and, 3) traces of mortar found at the southeastern end of the stylobate that may have supported a column base²¹. These traces of mortar have also disappeared since.

PHASE III

At some point burial was permitted inside the courtyard or atrium. Duval reports identifying 35 inhumations, many of which were anepigraphic. Only a few of these have been excavated. Duval does not explain how he came to his total number of burials²². As many of these burials are anepigraphic, they are almost impossible to date. The highest concentration of burials was immediately in front of the basilica's façade. Of those burials with legible inscriptions, the majority have been dated, on the basis of their epigraphic style, to the late sixth century²³. Two other burials with inscriptions were found, but at some distance from the façade. One, that of a 69 year old man named Crescentinus, was placed parallel to the northern wall of the courtyard. The other was beside the eastern wall, and was roughly parallel with the street. These burials both have inscriptions that date to the very late sixth or early seventh century²⁴.

Phase IV

Excavators believe that at some point both the basilica and the courtyard suffered substantial damage, possibly as the result of earthquakes²⁵. Consequently, considerable reconstruction was needed, and it was at this point that the columns and the roof of the atrium were removed altogether, and two massive piers were installed in front of the basilica's façade (see fig. 1, Plate XIX and fig. 2 Plate XX). The piers were both 2.90m east of the façade and were both

founded on bedrock. The southern pier was slightly longer and wider, (2.30m x 1.45m) than the northern pier, (2.10m x 1.30m). The northern pier is preserved to a height of 5.70m, the southern pier is slightly higher at 6.00m²⁶. The piers were built with large blocks of reused stone, and had smaller stones and cracked rocks packed into the uneven joints.

Each pier was joined to the basilica's façade by an arch, much in the manner of the flying buttresses used in Gothic architecture²⁷. These arches served to counteract the force of the lateral push exerted by the superstructure of the basilica. Arches sprang from the northern pier at a height of 2.60m and at a height of 2.50m from the southern pier. These arches are estimated to have joined with the façade of the basilica at a height of 5.40m²⁸.

Between the two piers were two columns, each set at a distance of 1.75m from the nearer pier; the intercolumniation between the two was 3.25m. These columns supported three arches. The outer arches were supported on corbels that projected from the piers at a height of 3.85m in the north and 3.70m in the south, as well as by the columns. The distance from the upper surface of the stylobate to the intrados face of the keystone is estimated to have been about 4.30-4.50m for the side arches that sprang from the piers and 5.00m for the central arch. This central arch was completely supported by the columns²⁹. Excavators believe that the area between the two piers and the façade was covered by a small roof. Although no elements of roofing have been found, there are large grooves in the section of each pier that rises directly behind the springer of the arch. These grooves appear to have been mortises that could have held wooden beams for a roof³⁰.

At some point, possibly just after the installation of the piers, large rabbets (0.15m wide and 0.04-0.05m deep) were cut into the upper surface of the stylobate along three sides corresponding to northern, southern, and eastern sides of the court³¹. This allowed the installation of a large stone cancel rail, one stone of which is still *in situ*³² (see fig. 2, Plate XIX).

The eastern wall of the courtyard, which had originally been 0.50m wide, was thickened to a total width of 1.10m. This refacing was built with reused blocks of stone, (most of which were 0.06-0.65m cubes), which were set immediately against the interior face of the original wall. The new interior wall was built above several earlier Christian tombs, including that of Crescentinus. At some point, the door at the northwestern angle of the courtyard was blocked off with large blocks of stone. It is not clear when this occurred³³.

Excavations did not produce any evidence of change to the doorways into the basilica during Phase IV. It is possible that use of the central doorway was discontinued when a sanctuary was installed at the eastern end of the nave, (see below). This could have been accomplished by simply locking the door.

QUADRATUM POPULI

PHASE I

The quadratum populi forms a narrow rectangle 32.00m long and 14.40m wide. It is divided by two colonnades into a broad central nave 8.00m wide and two side aisles each 3.20m wide (see Phase I plan, Plate XV). Each colonnade stood on a continuous stylobate. The stylobate consisted of large stone slabs of varying lengths but with an average width of 1.00m. These slabs which were raised just slightly, (0.10m), above the flagstone floors of the quadratum populi³⁴ were an integral part to the pavement of the nave, (see below). Each colonnade had ten freestanding columns that divided the central nave and side aisles into eleven bays³⁵. The colonnades each ended with a half column built immediately against the eastern wall of the quadratum populi³⁶. The column bases, shafts and capitals were all reused material. The capitals and some shafts were of Chemtou marble. The remaining shafts and all the bases were recycled limestone³⁷. As a result of the diverse origins of much of the material, the heights of the individual supports varied. This was particularly evident among the column shafts. In order to compensate for the differences in height of the various supports, each column was set on a pedestal. These pedestals were large square blocks of cut stone and varied in height from 0.70-0.90m, depending on the height of the individual shaft each pedestal supported³⁸. The pedestals were originally devoid of any form of decoration or inscription (see fig. 5 and fig. 6, Plate XXI).

The columns were joined by a series of arches. Enough arch stones were found scattered around the pedestals and column bases, to enable the excavators to reconstruct several complete arches. Each arch had a keystone with three voussoirs on either side of it. At either end of the arch the voussoirs were supported by two superimposed springers that were in turn supported by a column capital³⁹. The distance from the quadratum populi floor of Phase I to the intrados face of the keystone has been calculated at 5.60m⁴⁰.

Earlier plans of the basilica, notably that which appears in Gauckler's well known Basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie⁴¹, depict a lateral colonnade running flush against both the

northern and southern walls of the quadratum populi. Gauckler's plan also shows eleven hypothetically restored intersecting vaults above both side aisles. Excavations have revealed there was no lateral colonnade along the southern wall of the basilica, and that the northern colonnade was in fact a much later addition, and that intersecting vaults even above the northern aisle is a very unlikely solution (see below, Phase III).

The floor of the quadratum populi was entirely paved with large reused rectangular flagstones, (0.13 to 0.15m thick). The central nave and intercolumniation of the two colonnades was covered by rows of flagstones placed end on end so that their long axes were parallel with the central axis of the basilica. These slabs varied in width from 0.75 to 1.00m⁴². At the western end of the eighth bay, the rows of stone slabs that were used to pave the central nave stop immediately in front of a low stone frame. The floor level inside the frame was raised to form a platform that stood 0.12 to 0.20m above the level of the central nave (see fig. 7, Plate XXII). The stone frame and platform marked the area of the western sanctuary, (see below). The rows of flagstone slabs that ran along the intercolumniation of the two colonnades and served as the stylobates were not affected by this installation.

In the two side aisles, the long axis of the flagstones was placed perpendicular to the central axis of the basilica. Although these stone slabs varied in length from c. 1.00 to 2.00m as did those used in the central nave, they tend to be slightly narrower. The width of the flagstones varied from 0.50 to 0.85m in the northern side aisle and from 0.60 to 0.90m in the southern side aisles⁴³. The original floor appears to have been used throughout the basilica's use.

The walls of the quadratum populi were roughly 0.50m thick and built in opus africanum. The curtain walls that ran between the blocks in opus africanum were built with small blocks of roughly hewn field stones and some reused material, including a dedication inscription from a temple of Jupiter Dolichenus. The walls set on large square foundation blocks and were probably revetted with stone plaques or plaster. No traces of revetting have survived⁴⁴.

As the original excavators failed to record whether any elements of roofing were

discovered in or around the basilica, it is impossible to determine with certitude the type of roofing that would have been used to cover the basilica. It does, however, seem highly probable, especially when one considers the type of central supports that were used and the thickness of the walls of the quadratum populi, that the central nave was covered by tiles supported on a tie beam and truss roof, while the side aisles would have each been covered by timber rafters⁴⁵.

PHASE II

At some point during the years of the Vandal occupation, the tomb of a bishop was installed near the eastern end of the central nave. The sarcophagus itself was placed longitudinally along the central axis of the basilica, occupying space in the second and third bays of the nave, (see Phase II plan, Plate XVI)⁴⁶. The lid, (a monolith, 2.50m long, 0.67m wide and 0.14m thick, that had been broken in antiquity, apparently before being used as a lid), was found 0.37m below the floor level of the nave. At floor level the flagstone slab that covered the burial had been carved with the inscription, "Victorinus, episc[opus] in pace". Below this inscription was written in another hand, and presumably at a later date, "Vandalorum"⁴⁷.

The tomb itself was surrounded by a rectangular enclosure. Although nothing survives from the enclosure which was removed in antiquity, the six large mortises that were cut into the flagstones of the floor to support the barrier around the tomb can still be seen. These mortises were roughly squared, measuring 0.30m on a side. They mark the limits of an enclosure 3.30m long and 2.50m wide⁴⁸. The eastern end of the enclosure was 5.50m from the main door of the basilica. Excavators are not sure what this enclosure would have looked like, nor is it possible to tell whether it was removed simply to allow the installation of a new sanctuary or as a reaction against the Vandals after the byzantine reconquest. Some mortises were carefully filled in with mortar and small stones, while others appear to have simply been left open after the posts were removed. Several of the mortises had epitaphs carefully inscribed around them on the flagstone slabs⁴⁹. In one instance, the epitaph can be dated to 560 A.D.⁵⁰. Excavators have suggested, and probably rightly so, that the enclosure around the tomb of Victorinus was probably no longer standing at this time. The installation of the later burial would have necessitated the removal of the flagstone into which the mortise was cut. While not impossible,

necessitated the removal of the flagstone into which the mortise was cut. While not impossible, this maneuver would have been extremely difficult if the post the mortises supported was still in place.

Archaeologists have not recognized any other traces of changes, or installations that can be dated to Phase II.

PHASE III

At some point after the installation of Victorinus's tomb other burials were permitted inside the basilica. Epitaphs were cut into the flagstone floors as well as some of the pedestals that supported the columns along the central nave. There is little information concerning these burials as only a few of the tombs have been excavated⁵¹.

PHASE IV

Later, possibly as the result of an earthquake, the basilica suffered considerable structural damages. It was at this time that twelve columns were installed against the weakened northern wall of the quadratum populi (see Phase IV plan, Plate XVIII). These columns were roughly aligned with the eleven columns of the central colonnade, and a twelfth column was placed in the corner where the northern and western walls of the quadratum populi meet⁵² (see fig. 7, Plate XXII). Unlike the central colonnades that both begin in the east with a half column flush against the eastern wall of the quadratum populi, the lateral colonnade begins in the east with a full column, (see Phase Plan III). These columns were taken from different sources and varied in height; to compensate for these differences the columns of the lateral colonnade were also placed on raised pedestals, similar to those used for the central colonnades. The original flagstone pavement of the northern side aisle was removed to allow the installation of the pedestals. In some cases fragments of broken Christian epitaphs were found fitted back around a pedestal⁵³.

The columns were joined to the northern wall by a series of twelve massive stone corbels. These corbels were found scattered along the northern wall of the quadratum populi.

Their roughly hewn blocks had simple profiles, similar to those found in the basilica of the Byzantine citadel. It appears that the eorrels were placed across the upper surface of lateral wall and across the top of the column capitals in order to reduce the amount of the roofs' weight that was supported by the weakened lateral wall⁵⁴. Apart from the repairs that undoubtedly occurred to the roof above the northern side aisle there are no traces of any changes or repairs to any other parts of the quadratum populi during Phase III. Contrary to what appears of Geuckler's plan, (a lateral colonnade supporting intersecting vaults above the southern side aisle) excavators found no remains of vaulting material or trace of a colonnade along the southern wall of the quadratum populi⁵⁵.

THE WESTERN APSE

PHASE I

At the western end of the central nave was a large slightly U-shaped apse, built inside a massive frame of large cut stones. The frame, a trapezoid, measured roughly 6.50m along the northern and southern sides, and 8.40m wide in the west⁵⁶. The exterior face of this frame does not form part of the exterior face of the basilica's chevet as might be expected. Instead it forms the eastern wall of a narrow passage behind the apse that joins the northern and southern sacristies, (see Phase I plan, Plate XV).

Inside, the apse had a maximum width of 7.12m and was 6.00m deep. The cut stones had been worked in such a manner as to present a gently curved surface inside the apse⁵⁷. To either side of the open end of the apse was a monolithic column in grey granite. They supported an arch at the head of the apse. The Attic bases that supported the columns are still *in situ*. These bases were 0.30m high and had an upper diameter of 0.60m (see fig. 8, Plate XXII). Notches cut into the bases could indicate that the entryway was further reduced by a chancel rail, although no traces of one have been found. The columns though no longer *in situ* were found inside the apse. The northern column was broken into three pieces. The southern column is intact, measuring 4.17m in length, with a diameter of 0.55m at the base, and 0.50m at the summit⁵⁸. Although no capitals were found that can be attributed to this support system, a number of voussoirs from the arch were found near by. Unlike the voussoirs from the arches of the central nave, those used for the arch at the head of the apse were decorated with several concentric bands of flat molding or tori that emphasized the curve of the arch. The keystone was also found. It had been decorated with a monogram but was too badly damaged to read⁵⁹.

The apse was also accessible too the northern and southern sacristies, (see below), through narrow doors in the curved wall of the apse. Both doorways were set about 1.10m from the open end of the apse. The southern doorway is 0.89m wide and roughly 1.90m high. Its well worn door sill is still *in situ*. A notch cut into the wall beside the door at a height of 0.93m would have permitted the door to be barred shut from within the sacristy. The northern doorway

is 0.85m wide and 2.00m high. Its doorsill, also well used, is in situ⁶⁰.

The floor of the apse was raised 0.90m above the quadratum populi floors of Phase I and 0.70m above the level of the sanctuary that preceded it, (see below)⁶¹. The floor of the apse was paved with roughly concentric rows of limestone slabs. This pavement was badly damaged at the eastern end of the apse. There was no trace of a synthronos⁶².

Excavators do not appear to have found any roofing material inside the apse. It is possible that the apse was covered by a half dome.

PHASE II - IV

There are no apparent changes that can be attributed to any of these phases.

THE NORTHERN SACRISTY

PHASE I

Immediately north of the apse is a long narrow room that may have served as a sacristy. The room was 7.11m long and varied in width from 2.90m in the east to 3.35m in the west⁶³. The northern wall of the room is an extension of the lateral wall of the quadratum populi. The southern wall is formed by the massive stone frame that surrounded the apse. The room's eastern end is formed by the wall that marks the western end of the quadratum populi. The inner face of the basilica's chevet serves as the western wall (see Phase I plan, plate XV).

The northern sacristy is accessible from the apse through a narrow passage in the northern wall of the apse. The room is also accessible from the northern side aisle through a 0.88m wide doorway. This door was preceded by three steps as the floor level of the northern sacristy was roughly 0.75m above the level of the quadratum populi floors; the door sill, though badly worn, is *in situ*. The doorway is preserved to a height of 1.70m. Notches cut into the walls beside the door indicate that it could be barred shut from inside the sacristy at a height of 1.35m⁶⁴.

In the northern wall of the room, 1.60m from the northeastern corner of the room, is another door, (0.75m wide) that led into a long narrow room, (room IV), built against the northern wall of the basilica, (see below). Although room IV is clearly an addition, excavators have not specified whether the door leading into it from the sacristy dates to the time of the original construction, or if it was opened specifically from room IV⁶⁵. The southwestern corner of the sacristy opened onto a 1.07m wide passage that ran behind the frame encasing the apse, to the southern sacristy. The western wall of this corridor forms the western chevet of the basilica. The floor of the sacristy has not survived. Excavators do not mention the discovery of any roofing material in this corridor⁶⁶.

PHASE II to IV

At some point burial was permitted in the northern sacristy. To date archaeologists have excavated a total of thirteen tombs in this room. No inscriptions were found in connection with any of the burials and little datable material has been found. It is as of yet unknown when burial was first permitted in the northern sacristy, or until what date it was continued⁶⁷.

THE SOUTHERN SACRISTY

PHASE I

Immediately south of the apse is another room (see Phase I plan, Plate XV). This room, the southern sacristy, was 7.10m long in the north and 6.90m long in the south. The width of the room varied from 3.15m in the east to 3.20m in the west⁶⁸. The northern wall of the room was formed by the southern face of the frame that encased the apse, the southern wall being an extension of the southern wall of the quadratum populi. The eastern wall is common with the western wall of the quadratum populi. The western wall is an extension of the chevet wall, (see Phase plan I). The room was accessible through a narrow passage in the southern wall of the apse, as well as from the southern side aisle through a door about 0.85m wide. This doorway was in a very poor state of preservation at the time of excavation; it was preceded by three steps, only two of which are still in situ⁶⁹. Excavators believe that there was a third door in the southern wall located somewhere between 1.75m and 3.50m from the southeastern corner of the room. This theory is based on the presence of a massive three-stepped perron placed against the exterior face of the southern wall of the basilica. The upper step of this perron forms a square 1.45m to a side⁷⁰. It is unusual that there should be such a monumental entryway from outside a basilica into one of its sacristies. As is the case for the northern sacristy, no material has survived from either the roof or the floor.

PHASE II to IV

Once again the dating of changes from the later periods is very difficult. As in the northern sacristy, burial was permitted in this room although it is not known from what date this started or when it was discontinued. To date excavators have found only three burials in the southern sacristy, far fewer than the number found in the northern sacristy. Again no inscriptions have survived in connection with any of these burials, nor was any datable material recovered⁷¹. There was no evidence of any structural changes that could be attributed to these phases.

WESTERN SANCTUARY

Introductory note

It should be noted that in the text of the published excavation reports, excavators are very vague as to what installations belong to any specific phase. It is only when reviewing the phase plans provided by the excavators that it becomes clear which installations are attributed to any one phase.

PHASE I

At the western end of the central nave was a large sanctuary, 6.75m wide and 8.50m long⁷². This sanctuary occupied the entire length and nearly the full width of the three westernmost bays. It is surrounded by a low stone frame that stands 0.12-0.21m above the floors of the quadratum populi. Inside the frame, the floor of the sanctuary is paved with flagstone slabs identical to those used in the quadratum populi. This floor is raised to the same level as the frame (see Phase I plan, Plate XV).

The raised floor of the sanctuary was paved with eight rows of flagstone slabs roughly aligned with the flagstones used to pave the nave. Several of the rows have flagstone slabs that are slightly narrower than the corresponding rows of flagstones in the nave in order to compensate for the width of the stone frame⁷³. The manner in which the flagstone pavement of the nave and western sanctuary were installed gives several strong indications that the slightly raised sanctuary was a planned part of the original paving of the central nave. Firstly, the length of the westernmost flagstone in each of the eight rows had been carefully selected so as to end immediately east of the point where the sanctuary's frame crossed the nave. It does not seem that these stones were cut through at a later date. Second, the stones of the frame were clearly placed against the western end of the pavement of the nave, on the same footing as the pavement of the nave, and were not set on top of the nave floor. Third, the floor level of the sanctuary was raised only 0.12 - 0.21m above the floor level of the nave. This difference is so slight that it would not easily allow for an earlier floor level equal to that of the quadratum populi floors. Trial trenches conducted in this area have confirmed that no earlier floor levels existed⁷⁴.

The excavation reports give no indication as to where the Phase I altar might have been located.

PHASE II

Archaeologists have found no traces of any changes that can be attributed to Phase II.

PHASE III

At some point a series of rabbets and mortises were cut into the upperface of three sides of the stone frame that surrounds the western sanctuary (see Phase III plan, Plate XVIII). The narrow rabbets (0.03m wide) held chancel plaques, that ran along the north, south, and east sides of the sanctuary. It would seem likely from the narrow width of these rabbets that the chancel plaques were wooden. The only exception to this was a c.1.00m segment along the northern and southern sides of the sanctuary, immediately east of quadratum populi's western wall. Here the rabbets were twice as wide as they were elsewhere and excavators suggest that stone plaques might have been used here⁷⁵. Additional support was provided every 2.50-3.00m by small posts of varying dimensions set into the mortises⁷⁶. A few of these posts were found nearby by the original excavators who set them back into their mortises⁷⁷.

These rabbets and mortises also indicate that the sanctuary was accessible from the central nave by way of a 1.00m wide axial passage. Hinge and bolt holes indicate that this entryway could be closed by a double leaf door or gateway⁷⁸. The sanctuary was also accessible from the eleventh bays of the northern and southern side aisles through doorways 1.00m wide. Unlike the posts found on either side of the central and northern entryways which were rectangular, those placed on either side of the southern entry way were circular⁷⁹.

In the center of the sanctuary, straddling the ninth and tenth bays of the central nave, was a ciborium. All four bases from the columns that supported it were found in situ at the time of the original excavations and three can still be seen today (see fig. 8, Plate XXII). From the

placement of the column bases it is clear that the ciborium was square, measuring 2.60m to a side⁸⁰. Notches cut into the bases that supported the columns indicate that the area was surrounded by a chancel rail.

In the center of the area covered by the ciborium, excavators found a rectangular cavity 0.77m long and 0.61m wide. At the time of the original excavations an inscribed flagstone slab, thought to be a cover for the cavity, was found nearby. The plaque indicates that the relics of St. Cyprian had been deposited by the bishop Melleus during the fourth year of the reign of Justin II. This would date the installation of the relics to the year 568 or 569⁸¹. Excavators believe that the altar, at least during the later phase of the basilica's occupation, was placed immediately above the reliquary cavity, although no traces of any such altar have been found⁸².

When the Bishop Melleus died, his remains were placed in a shallow grave, 0.65m below the surface of the sanctuary floor. The burial was parallel to, and slightly south of, the basilica's central axis, between the area covered by the ciborium and the first step of the stairway leading into the apse. The bishop's tomb was crudely built with slabs of reused stone, placed together to form a rough stone box 1.92m long, with a width that varied from 0.50-0.40m⁸³. During the early 1930's, Dr. Dolcemascolo removed the stone on which Melleus's epitaph was carved and the bishop's remains were excavated. The epitaph is now in the Bardo museum in Tunis. The skeletal remains were turned over to the archbishopric of Carthage⁸⁴. Excavators make no mention of any other finds that can be attributed to the Phase III sanctuary, which appears to have remained in use until the basilica was abandoned.

PHASE IV

As the Phase III sanctuary remained in use until the basilica was abandoned, and there were apparently no further structural changes made to it, this sanctuary has no Phase IV.

CULT AREAS: THE EASTERN SANCTUARY

PHASE I

There were no traces of a sanctuary found at the eastern end of the basilica that can be attributed to Phase I.

PHASE II

During this phase the tomb of the Vandal bishop Victorinus was installed at the eastern end of the central nave, (see Quadratum Populi, Phase II). No other installations were found at the eastern end of the basilica that could be dated to Phase II.

PHASE III

At some point the enclosure that surrounded Victorinus's tomb was removed and a sanctuary was installed at the eastern end of the central nave. This sanctuary is thought to have occupied the first three bays of the central nave, thus covering an area 8.00m wide and 8.75m long⁸⁵. The sanctuary was surrounded at least in part by a series of chancel plaques that ran along the intercolumniation of the central nave (see Phase III plan, Plate XVIII). The narrow rabbets, (0.03 to 0.04m wide and 0.01 to 0.02m deep), that were used to support these plaques can still be seen along the sides of the second and third bays, cut into the upper surface of the stylobates of the central colonnades. No traces of rabbets or any other form of support for chancel plaques were found along the edges of the first or easternmost bay of the central nave⁸⁶. Mortises cut into the stylobate indicate that additional support was provided to the chancel plaques by a single rectangular post on either side of the second bay, as well as by two rectangular posts on either side of the third bay. A transversal barrier ran across the western end of the third bay; the rabbets of this barrier cut into the flagstone pavement of the nave, and also cut into a Christian epitaph dated epigraphically to the third quarter of the sixth century⁸⁷.

There was a 1.00m wide axial opening in the barrier. To either side of the opening additional support was provided to the chancel plaque by a rectangular post. The mortises for the posts were cut into the flagstone pavement of the nave.

Inside the sanctuary, at the eastern end of the second bay, was an altar platform centered along the axis of the basilica (see fig. 6, Plate XXI). The platform was built with large blocks of cut stone set on a layer of masonry, 0.10m thick. At the time of the original excavations, the altar platform was more or less intact, measuring 2.45m wide and 2.63m long⁸⁸; it has since suffered considerable damage especially along the eastern edge. The surface of the altar platform stood 0.25-0.30m above the quadratum populi floors. In both the northwestern and southwestern angles of the altar platforms excavators discovered square mortises, (0.30m to a side), which they suggest may have been used to stabilize posts supporting a ciborium above the altar platform. These posts have not been identified among the remains of architectural fragments found inside the basilica. Four small rectangular mortises were cut into the upper surface of the block that formed the western edge of the altar platform. Mortises were set immediately beside both the northern and southern corner posts; two mortises were placed along the western edge of the platform, one on either side of the central axis, (about 0.50m apart).

Excavators suggest that the entire altar platform was enclosed by chancel plaques, although no traces of mortise were found along the northern or southern edges of the platform, (the eastern edge has been lost). They further suggest that the only entryway onto the platform was from the west, between the two mortises set 0.50m apart on either side of the central axis. Although excavators also admit that the four mortises in question may have held small posts used in supporting a chancel rail, it is the first hypothesis, (that of an enclosed altar), which appears on the Phase plans of the basilica⁸⁹. Either solution is possible, although the single 0.50m wide entry from the west would appear to be rather narrow. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the block at the western end of the platform was reused material and that the mortises had nothing to do with the altar platform. It is possible that the entire platform was covered with plaques of marble, mosaics, or plaster although excavators do not mention finding traces of any of these materials.

No traces of an eastern altar were found although one probably stood above a rectangular cavity found in the center of the altar platform. The cavity measured 0.51 X 0.61m wide and 0.60m deep. This cavity is thought to have contained a stone reliquary that was found nearby. The reliquary, discovered in 1934 by Dr Dolcemascolo, was 0.57 X 0.52m wide and 0.51m high. It had been cut from a single piece of limestone. A rectangular recess 0.50m X 0.45m wide and 0.04m deep had been cut into center of the reliquary's upper face. Five small cavities were in turn, cut into the upper surface of the recessed area. These individual cavities were roughly 0.20m long, 0.10m wide and 0.12m deep⁹⁰. Small boxes containing the remains of saints or martyrs are thought to have been placed inside the cavities. A lid for the reliquary was also found near by. This lid measured 0.45 X 0.50m wide and was 0.04m thick. The lid fit neatly into the the recessed area of the reliquary's upper surface. The monogram of Cyprian, the Carthaginian bishop martyred in 258, was engraved on the upper surface of the lid.

Although there is no evidence of chancel rails along the northern or southern edges of the nave, nor any evidence that the main door was blocked, it would seem very unlikely that the lay people would have had ready access to the altar itself through the main doorway. During Phase III, the main entry into the basilica was probably locked and possibly concealed behind ornate drapery⁹¹. The quadratum populi appears to have remained accessible through the doorways at the eastern end of the northern and southern side aisles.

PHASE IV

No changes were found that can be attributed to this phase.

SECONDARY STRUCTURES

Introductory note:

The basilica of Melleus was surrounded by numerous small rooms, many of which have not yet been completely excavated. Only one of these rooms appears to have been used as an extension of the basilica. This is a long narrow room, (room IV on Duval's plan) immediately north of the northern sacristy.

THE NORTHERN ANNEX ROOM, (Room IV)

PHASE I & II

During these phases there does not appear to have been a room that communicated with the northern sacristy.

PHASE III

At some point a poorly squared rectangular room was built immediately north of the eleventh bay of the northern side aisle and the northern sacristy (see Phase III plan, Plate XVII). The room measures 9.20m along its northern wall and 8.95m along the southern wall; 2.90m in the east and 3.00m at its western end⁹². The northern wall of the northern sacristy and part of the quadratum populi's northern wall was used to form the southern wall of this room. The other three walls were built in opus africanum. The curtain walls between the large stone blocks were built with roughly hewn field stones⁹³.

The only entryway into this annex room was through the door in the northern wall of the northern sacristy. The very worn doorsill is in situ, and holes cut into the upper surface of the doorsill indicate that the 0.75m wide doorway was closed with two leaves. The floor of this room was not preserved. Inside, excavators have identified six burials. Only two of the six tombs

were opened; those that were contained no dateable material. The only epitaph found inside the room was a small fragment of inscription on a broken stone mentioning a 15 year old girl. According to excavators this appears from the epigraphic style to be a relatively late burial. There is no mention of any roofing material being found⁹⁴ Test pits revealed that room IV was built above the remains of a room with a mosaic floor depicting Ulysses. Larger sections of this same mosaic were discovered to the north and east of room IV when test pits were dug. Experts have attributed the mosaic to the fourth century⁹⁵.

PHASE IV

Excavators mention no changes that can be attributed to this phase.

CONCLUSIONS

PHASE I

It appears from the published excavations, that the basilica proper underwent few major changes⁹⁶. The original plan, with its broad central nave separated from the two side aisles by files of eleven columns, and its western apse flanked to the north and south by a sacristy, remained basically unchanged throughout the years of the basilica's use. The main question concerning archaeologists is the date of construction. Both H. Saladin and S. Osell, who studied the basilica briefly during the late 1800's, suggest a date some time during the very late fourth or early fifth century. Saladin based his date on the construction technique⁹⁷. Osell, agrees that the construction technique is that of the late fourth or early fifth century. Osell has suggested that the lintel with the chi-rho chrismon was sculpted during the late fourth or early fifth century⁹⁸. The lintel was found in connection with the southern entryway into the courtyard. Excavators, date the origin of the chi-rho chrismon to the mid fifth century but are quick to point out that it remained popular over the course of several centuries⁹⁹. They are, hesitant to attribute the courtyard to Phase I of the basilica's history. The construction technique used for the basilica, they agree, is very similar to that of early fifth century structures, notably the nearby and more securely dated basilica complex at Tebessa. The construction material, including the bases, column shafts, capitals, and flagstone slabs, cut blocks and even a third century dedication inscription from a temple of Jupiter Dolichenus, were taken from earlier monuments. Although it is impossible to be certain, one is tempted to think that a certain number of years elapsed between the construction of the temple and its subsequent dismantling for reuse as scrap material. Excavators also see the basilica's orientation with its chevet at the western end of the central nave, as a sign that the basilica was built some time before the byzantine reconquest. There are exceptions to this rule, notably the citadel basilica at Hafdra, although it appears to be very unusual for a basilica dating from after the byzantine reconquest to have been built with the sanctuary in the west. Excavators have suggested (but with great caution), a date in the very late fourth or most probably, early fifth century for the original construction of the basilica; in light of the present state of research this appears to be a reasonable conclusion¹⁰⁰.

PHASE II

The most noticeable change that can be attributed to Phase II, is the construction of a large courtyard at the eastern end of the basilica. Few other changes from this period which probably dates to immediately before the Vandal conquest can be identified. During the years of occupation the basilica was used by the Vandals; it was during this time that the tomb of Victorinus was installed.

PHASE III

The most significant changes attributed to this period are the final arrangement of the western sanctuary and the installation of the of a new sanctuary at the eastern end of the central nave. Although the installation of the relics of Cyprian by the bishop Melleus can be safely dated to 568 or 569¹⁰¹, the exact date of the installation of the eastern sanctuary is not certain. Nevertheless excavators suggest that the final phase of these two sanctuaries are roughly contemporaneous¹⁰². It was probably at this time that general burial was permitted in the courtyard preceding the basilica, and the quadratum populi. It is possible the installation of the relics of Cyprian rendered the basilica a desirable place of burial.

PHASE IV

The fourth and final phase of construction was intended to reinforce the façade and lateral walls of the basilica that were weakened after an earthquake. It was at this point that the lateral colonnade was installed along the northern wall of the quadratum populi. The most striking aspect of this phase is the construction of the two massive piers in front of the eastern façade of the basilica. The arches that sprang from these piers to the façade of the basilica were used to absorb the outward thrust of the weakened eastern wall. This was an original and ingenious solution to a very specific problem, there is no other known example of a similar type of flying buttress type of support before the twelfth century

FOOTNOTES

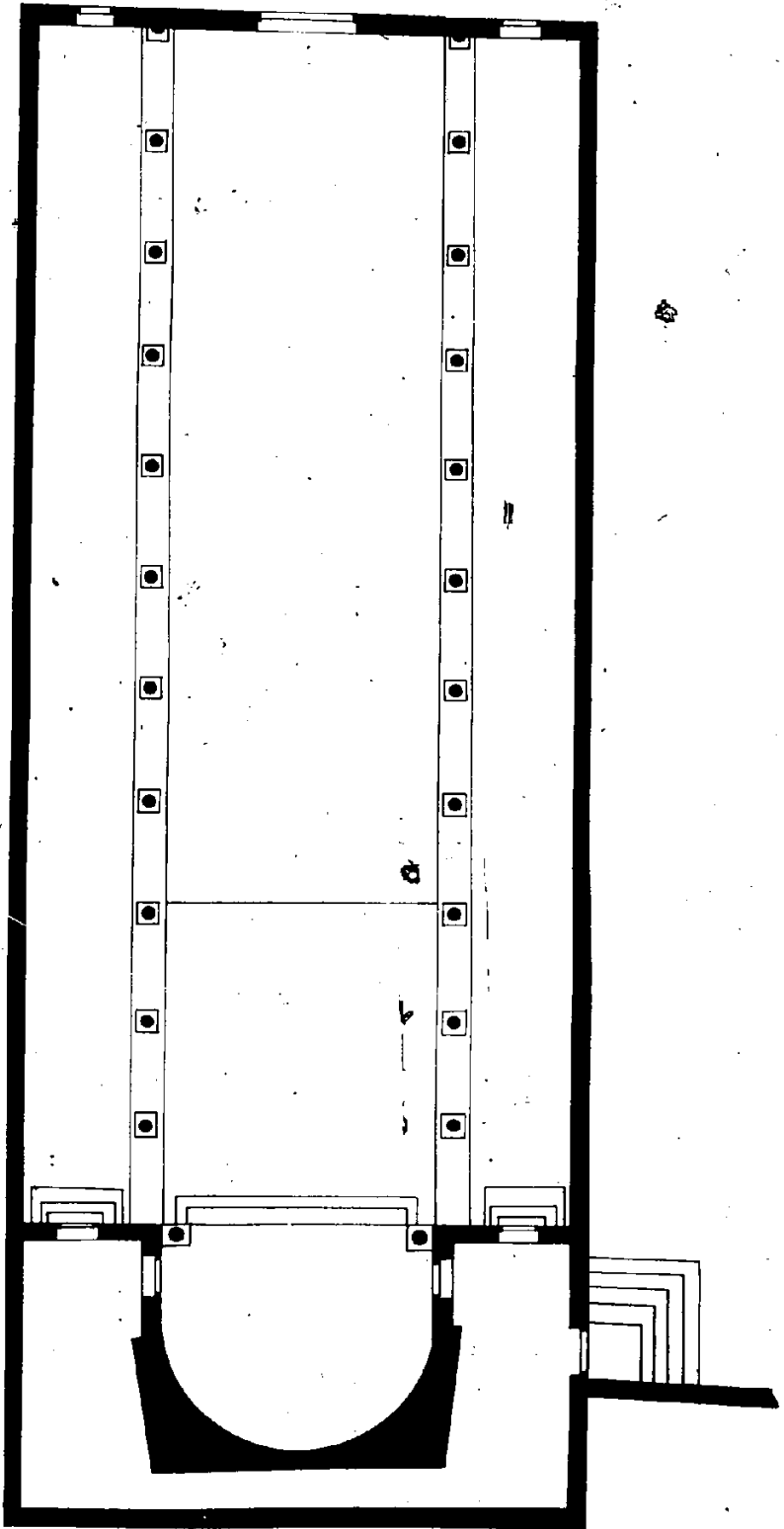
- 1) The ruins have been referred to as the "basilica of Melleus", since 1934, when an inscription was found inside the basilica that attributed the installation of a reliquary to a bishop of Haidra named Melleus. The inscription claimed that the reliquary was installed during the second year of the reign of Justin II (568/9), and contained the remains of St. Cyprien. L. Poinssot, CRAI, 1934, p. 249-254.
- 2) Procopius, De aedificiis, VI, vii, 18.
- 3) S. Gsell, "Les édifices chrétiens de Thèlépte", Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Archeologica Cristiana, p. 195-249, Rome, 1900.
- 4) P. Guackler, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie, Paris, 1912.
- 5) This excavation was published by N. Duval in a work entitled, Recherches archéologiques à op. cit., La basilique I d'île de Melléus ou de Saint-Cyprien, published by the Ecole Française de Rome, Palais Farnèse, 1981.
- 6) F. Baratte, N. Duval, Les ruines d'Ammaedara - Haidra, - Société Tunisienne de Diffusion, 1978, p. 5.
- 7) Duval, Recherches archéologiques à Haidra II - La basilique I de Melleus ou de Saint-Cyprien, p. 204.
- 8) Duval, op. cit., p. 36.
- 9) Duval, op. cit., p. 49, fig. 49.
- 10) Duval, op. cit., p. 48.
- 11) Duval, op. cit., p. 51, fig. 54.
- 12) Duval, op. cit., p. 49, fig. 49.
- 13) Duval, op. cit., p. 51-52, p. 72 fig. 74.
- 14) Duval, op. cit., p. 45, fig. 47a and 47b, The maximum preserved length of this lintel is 1.75m. If the chrismon marked the central portion of the monolith, as it in all likelihood did, the lintel would have measured 2.35m before it was broken.
- 15) Duval, op. cit., p. 65.
- 16) Duval, op. cit., p. 65.
- 17) Duval, op. cit., p. 65-66

- 18) Duval, op. cit., p. 53.
- 19) Duval, op. cit., p. 41 fig. 40, It should be noted that although two openings are visible from the road, only the southernmost one, (in the foreground), has been excavated.
- 20) Two earlier photographs, believed to have been taken by Dr. Dolcemascolo in 1934 and 1935, clearly indicate the presence of two column bases. These photographs were reproduced by Duval in op. cit., p. 10, fig. 40 and p. 12, fig. 12.
- 21) Duval, op. cit., p. 57 fig. 58.
- 22) "Ces inhumations n'ont pas été recherchées systématiquement, faute de moyens en main d'oeuvre et en personnel scientifique." Duval, op. cit., p. 54.
- 23) Duval, op. cit., p. 64.
- 24) Duval, op. cit., p. 55-56.
- 25) Duval, op. cit., p. 205.
- 26) Duval, op. cit., p. 62-65.
- 27) There are strong parallels between the structural principals used for the buttresses at Haïdra, and those used in early gothic architecture. There are no other known examples of the use of this system of buttressing in Christian architecture before the twelfth century. These buttresses appear to be a unique and isolated occurrence, an original solution to a very specific problem.
- 28) Duval, op. cit., pl. II.
- 29) Duval, op. cit., p. 64.
- 30) Duval, op. cit., p. 64.
- 31) Duval, op. cit., p. 49, fig. 49.
- 32) Duval, op. cit., p. 61 fig. 61
- 33) Duval, op. cit., p. 51 fig. 53.
- 34) Duval, op. cit., p. 89.
- 35) F. Baratte, N. Duval, Les ruines d'Ammaedara - Haïdra, p. 52.
- 36) This is unlike the western end of the citadel basilica, (in Haïdra), where a proper column was installed flush against the eastern wall of the basilica.
- 37) Duval, op. cit., p. 90-91.
- 38) Duval, op. cit., p. 90.

- 39) A reconstructed portion of this arcade can be seen today, set on the solid stone stylobate in the courtyard preceding the basilica. Placed here, the arch gives the somewhat misleading impression of having something to do with the courtyard. See fig. I and II; Duval, op. cit. p. 97, fig. 106.
- 40) Duval, op. cit. p. 98.
- 41) Gauckler, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie, pl. XIII.
- 42) Duval, op. cit. p. 86.
- 43) Duval, op. cit. p. 88-89.
- 44) Duval, op. cit. p. 83-86; The inscription dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus has been attributed to the third century.
- 45) This is the simplest and lightest type of roofing possible and, given the strength of the basilicas walls, it is the most likely type of roofing to have been used. Duval, Haïdra II, p. 107-108.
- 46) Duval, op. cit. p. 117, fig. 130.
- 47) Duval, op. cit. p. 119, fig. 133b.
- 48) Duval, op. cit. p. 116.
- 49) Duval, op. cit. p. 117, fig. 130.
- 50) Duval, op. cit. p. 118, fig. 131.
- 51) Duval, op. cit. p. 91, fig. 93, p. 94-95.
- 52) Duval, op. cit. p. 98.
- 53) Duval, op. cit. p. 100, fig. 110.
- 54) Duval, op. cit. p. 111, p. 102-104.
- 55) Duval, op. cit. p.
- 56) These are exterior measurements.
- 57) Duval, op. cit. p. 129 & 130, fig. 145.
- 58) Duval, op. cit. p. 131.
- 59) Duval, op. cit. p. 131-133 & pl. III.
- 60) Duval, op. cit. p. 134 & 139.
- 61) Duval, op. cit. p. 129.
- 62) Duval, op. cit. p. 130, fig. 145.
- 63) Duval, op. cit. p. 138.

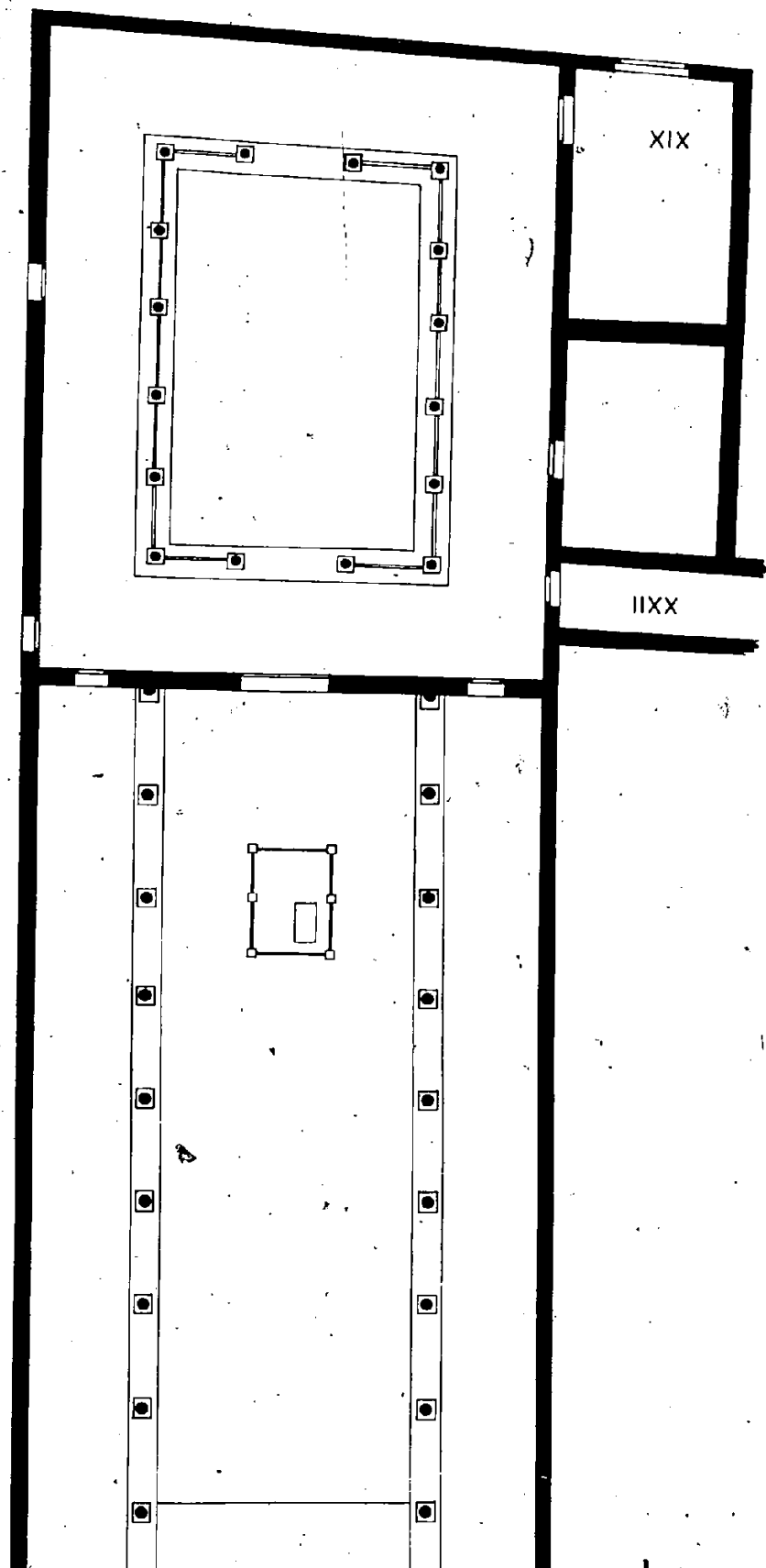
- 64) Duval, op. cit. p. 139.
- 65) Duval, op. cit. p. 140.
- 66) Duval, op. cit. p. 136-137.
- 67) Duval, op. cit. p. 140-144.
- 68) Duval, op. cit. p. 134.
- 69) Duval, op. cit. p. 134.
- 70) Duval, op. cit. p. 135.
- 71) Duval, op. cit. p. 135-136.
- 72) Duval, op. cit. p. 111.
- 73) Duval, op. cit. pl. V.
- 74) Excavation notes concerning the stratigraphy beneath the platform are not very clear.
Duval, op. cit. p. 86.
- 75) Duval, op. cit. p. 112.
- 76) Duval, op. cit. p. 111-112.
- 77) The small rectangular posts appear in two photographs of the basilica taken around 1934 and attributed to Dr. Dolcemascolo. These two pictures have been reproduced by Duval, see op. cit. p. 10 fig. 10, and 11.
- 78) Duval, op. cit. p. 111.
- 79) These posts were roughly 0.30m in diameter, see Duval, op. cit. p. 111.
- 80) See fig. VIII, as well as, Duval, op. cit. p. 113.
- 81) CRAI, 1934 p. 249-50 & n. 2 p. 249; N. Duval, Recherches archéologiques à Haïdra
L. Les inscriptions chrétiennes, Rome 1975, p. 20-22, fig. 4-5; as well as Duval,
op. cit. p. 114, fig. 128.
- 82) Duval, op. cit. p. 114.
- 83) Duval, op. cit. p. 115.
- 84) Duval, op. cit. p. 115.
- 85) Duval, op. cit. p. 120.
- 86) Duval, op. cit. p. 120.
- 87) Duval, op. cit. p. 120, fig. 134 & p. 121.
- 88) Duval, op. cit. p. 121-122.
- 89) Duval, op. cit. p. 122.

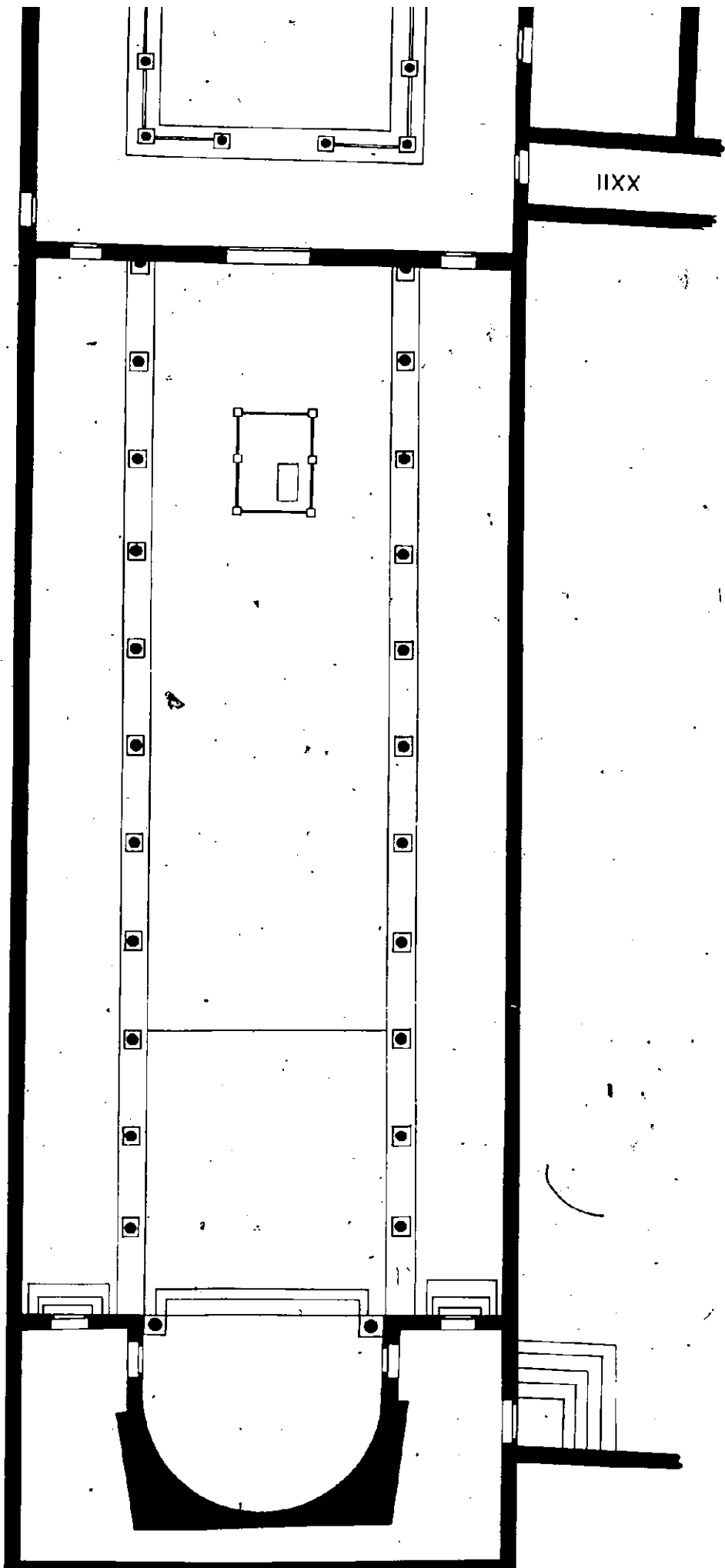
- 90) Duval, op. cit., p. 123 fig. 138 & p. 124.
- 91) Although I cannot find any examples specific to North Africa, doorways, sanctuaries, or arcades covered with rich drapes appear quite frequently in contemporary Christian art from other parts of the Empire 1) A Virgin and Child enthroned between two angels; Christ enthroned between St. Peter and St. Paul on a mid sixth-century Ivory diptych from Constantinople - Staatliche Museum, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Frühchristlich-Byzantinische Sammlung, 564/565, (see M. Frazer, Age of Spirituality, 1977, p.79, ill. 68. 2) The use of rich drapery can be seen depicted in numerous mosaics at Ravenna, including, the Theodora Mosaic from S. Vitale, c. 547 A.D., [see L. Ottolenghi, L'art pictural byzantin, pl. II]. 3) An illustration of the Legislation on Mt. Sinai from Ashburnham Pentateuch ms. nouv. acq. lat. 2334 fol. 76 recto. (late sixth or early seventh century) - Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; shows an altar surrounded by an abundance of drapes, (see J. Beckwith, Early Christian and Byzantine Art, p.144, ill. 121).
- 92) Duval, op. cit., p. 144.
- 93) Duval, op. cit., p. 159 fig. 170.
- 94) Duval, op. cit., p. 144-146.
- 95) Duval, op. cit., p. 30, fig. 32, p. 36, and p. 211-213.
- 96) Duval, op. cit., p. 202
- 97) S. Gsell, "Les édifices chrétiens de Thèbès", Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Archeologica Cristiana, p.195-249, Rome, 1900.
- 98) H. Saladin, "Rapport sur la mission de 1882-1883", Archives des missions XIII, 1886, 171-176.
- 99) Duval, op. cit., p. 203.
- 100) Duval, op. cit., p. 203.
- 101) Duval, op. cit., p. 114.
- 102) Duval, op. cit., p. 204.



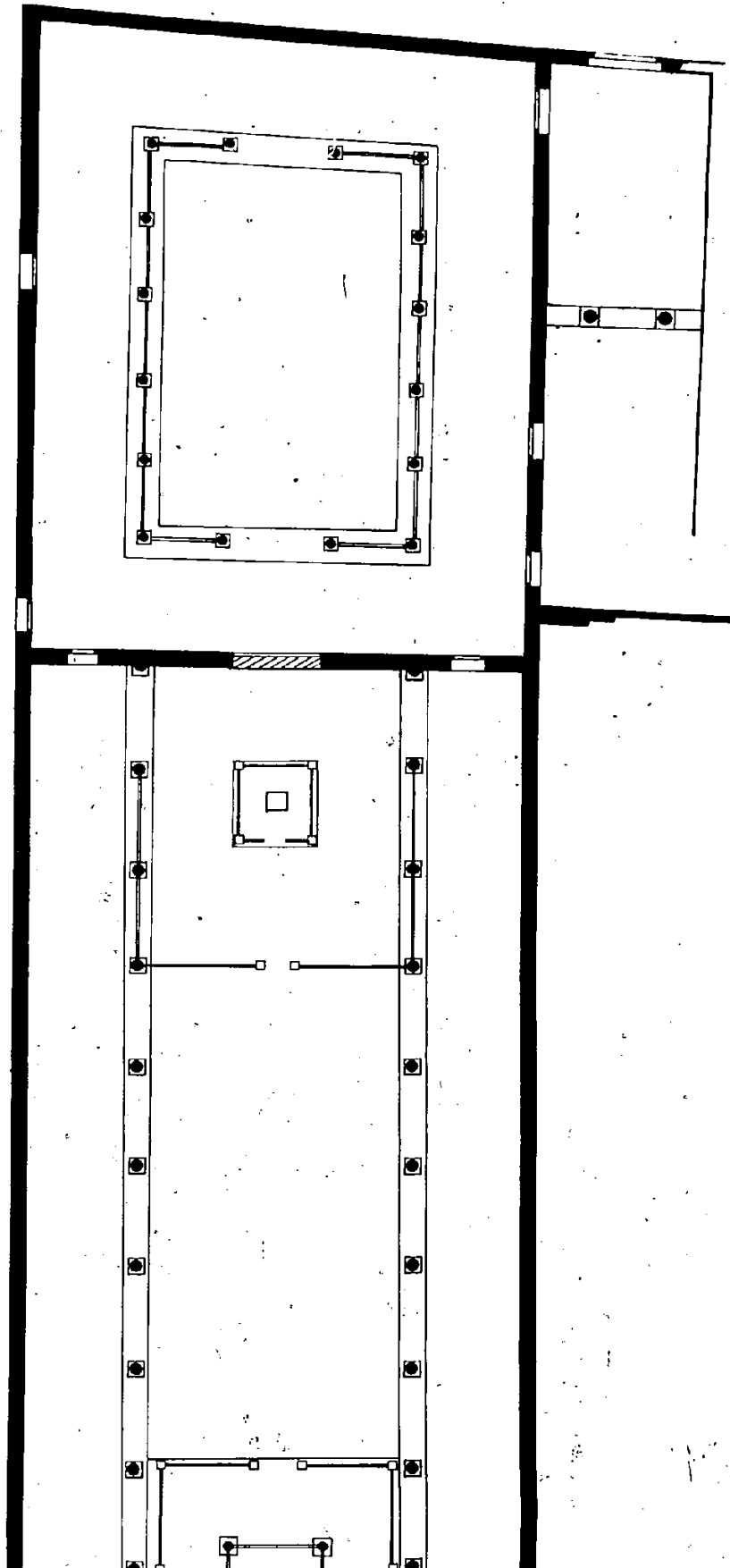
The Basilica of Meliteus
Phase I

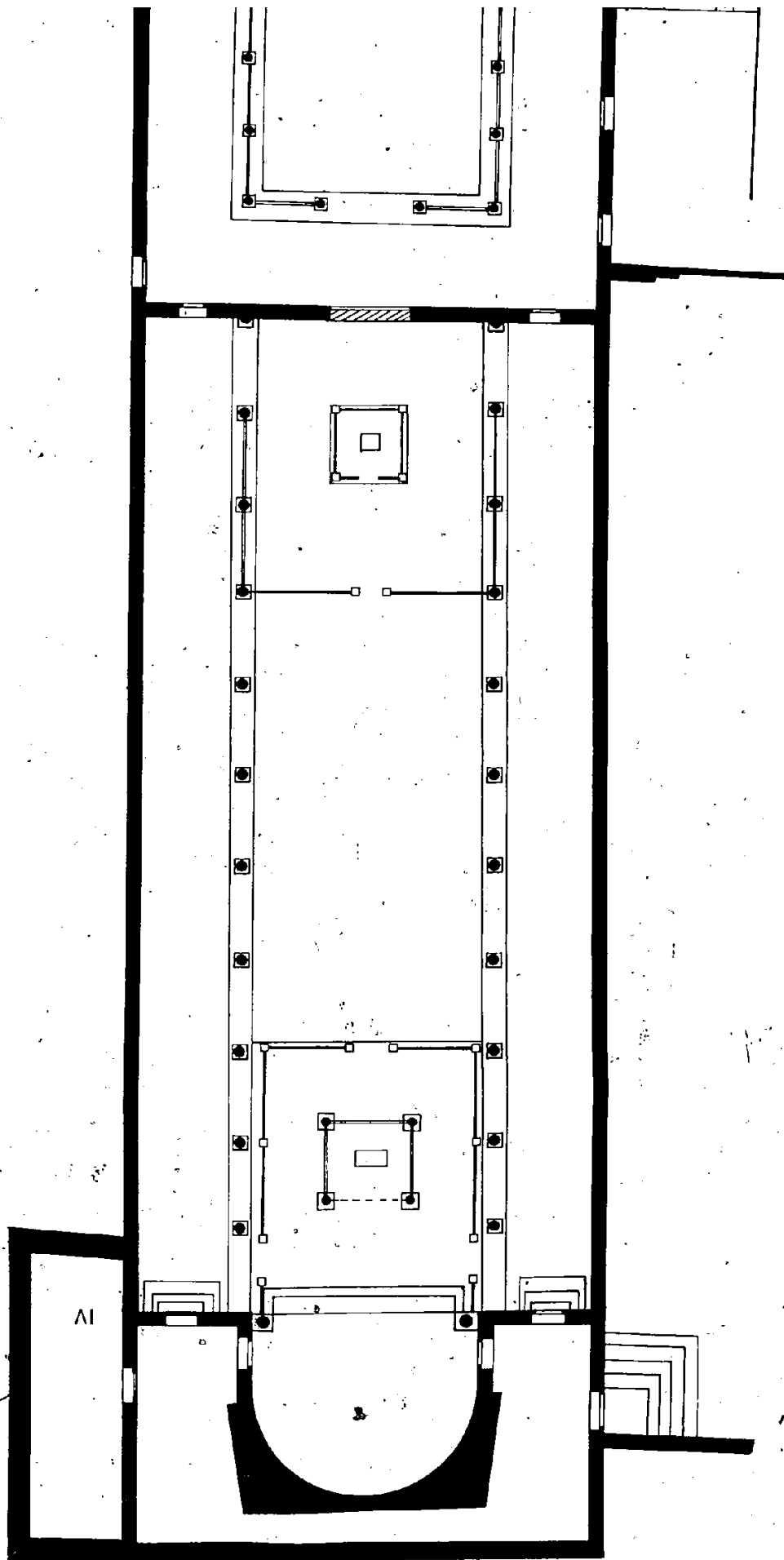






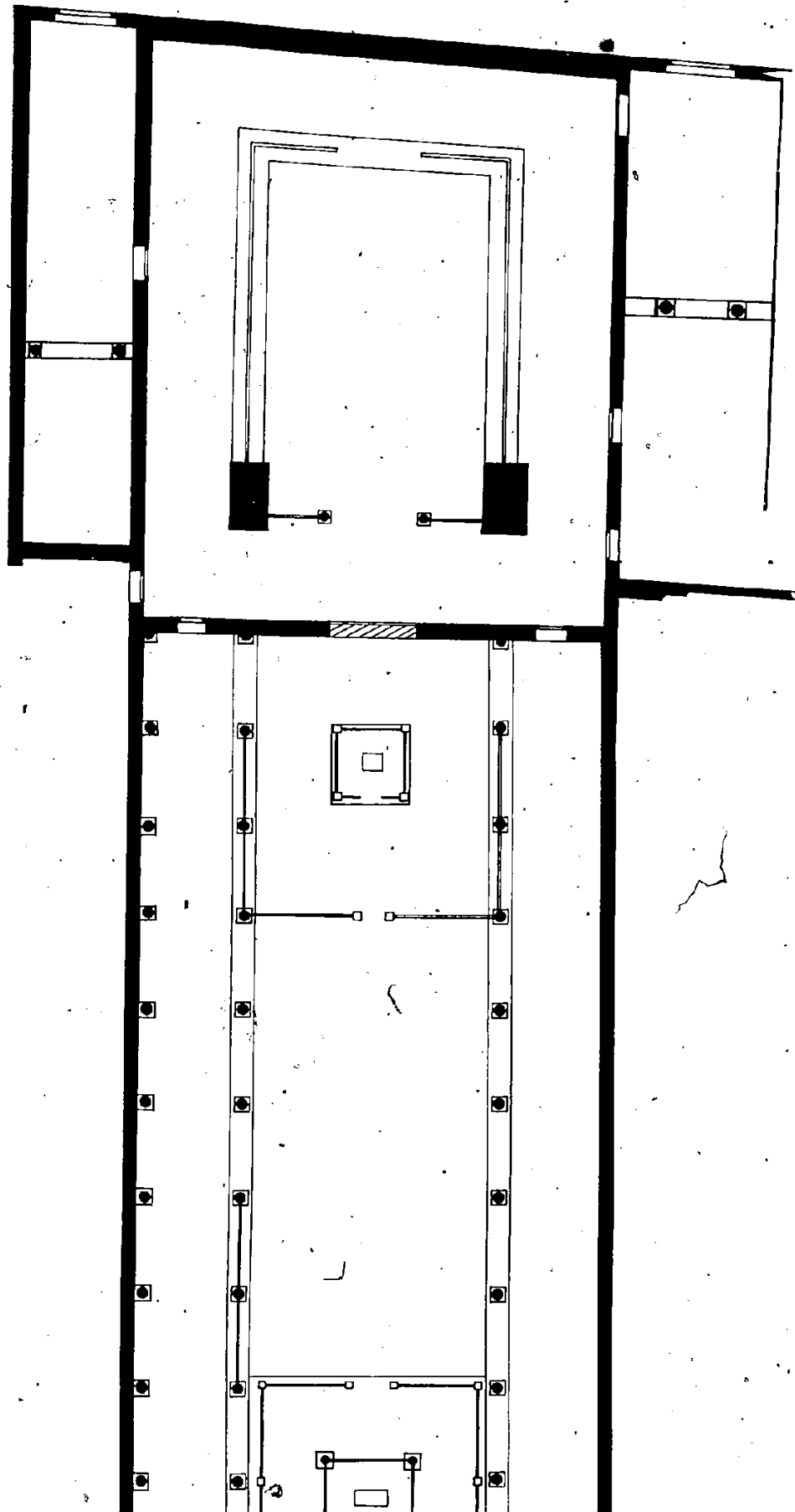
The Basilica of Melles
Phase II

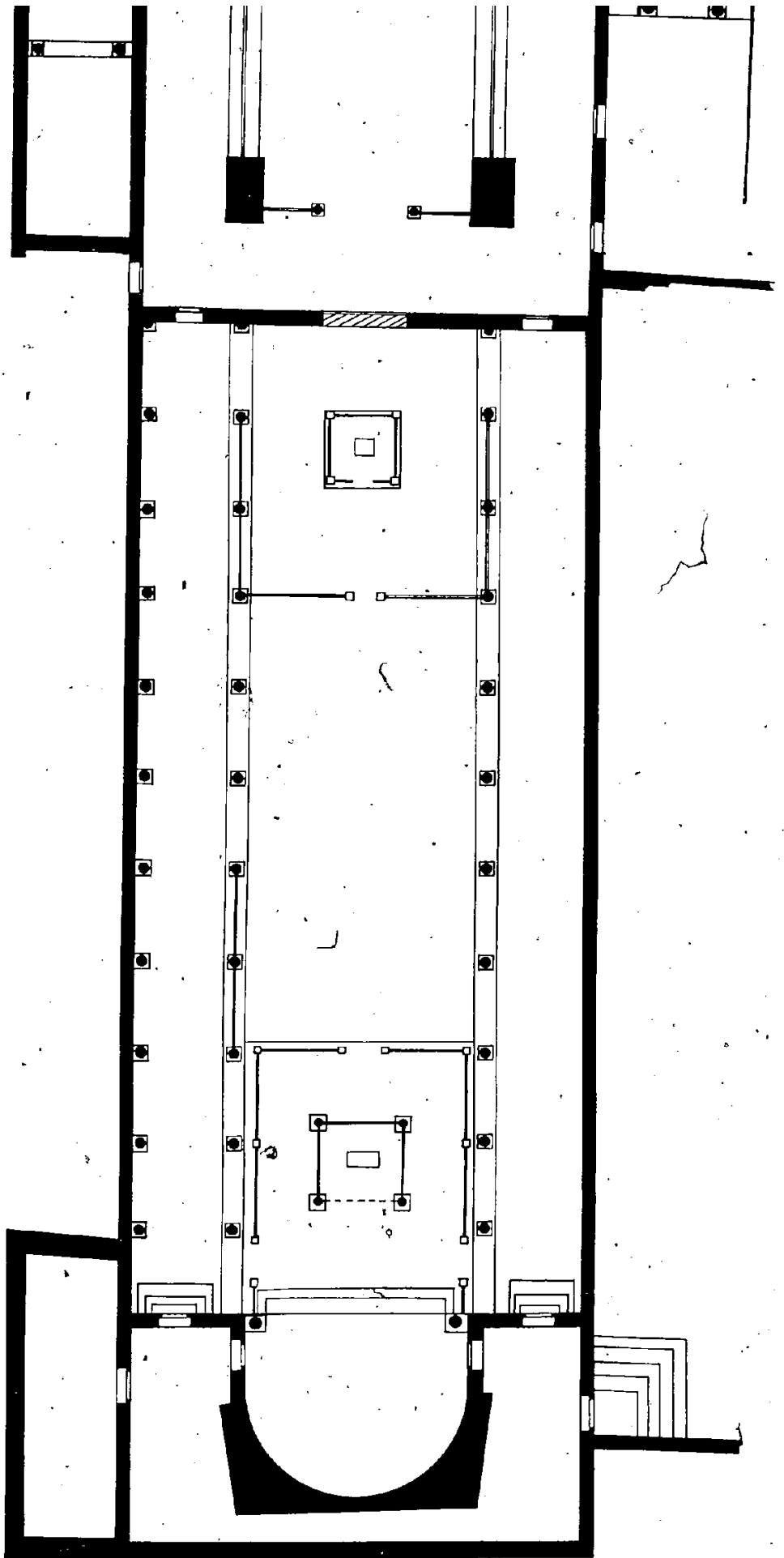




The Basilica of Meliteus
Phase III







N
The Basilica of Mellis
Phase IV





Fig. 1 Atrium and western face of supporting piers.



Fig. 2 Stylobate in atrium - note the portion of reconstructed arcade from quadratum populi colonnade set on the northern edge of the stylobate.



Fig. 3 Eastern face of supporting piers.



Fig. 4 Entry into the northern side aisle.



Fig. 5 Quadratum populi viewed from west to east.

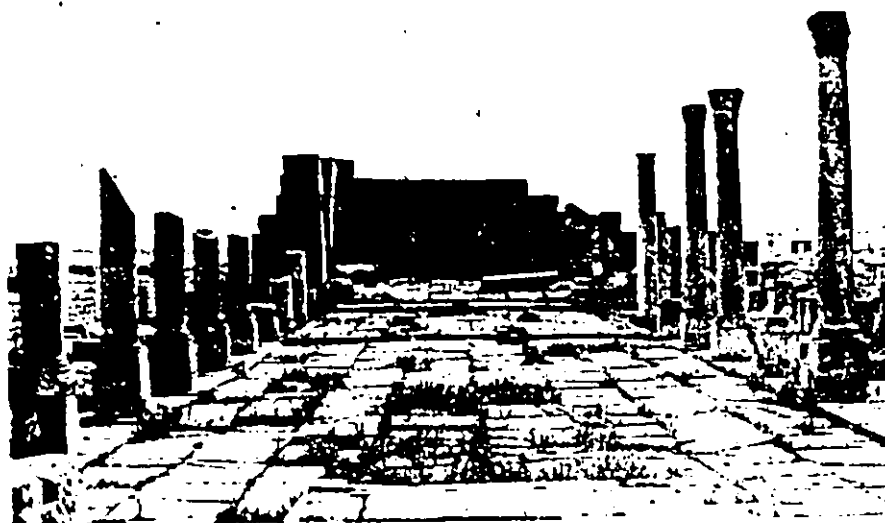


Fig. 6 Quadratum populi viewed from east to west - note portion of Phase II altar platform in foreground.



Fig. 7 Northern side aisle and remains of Phase IV lateral colonnade

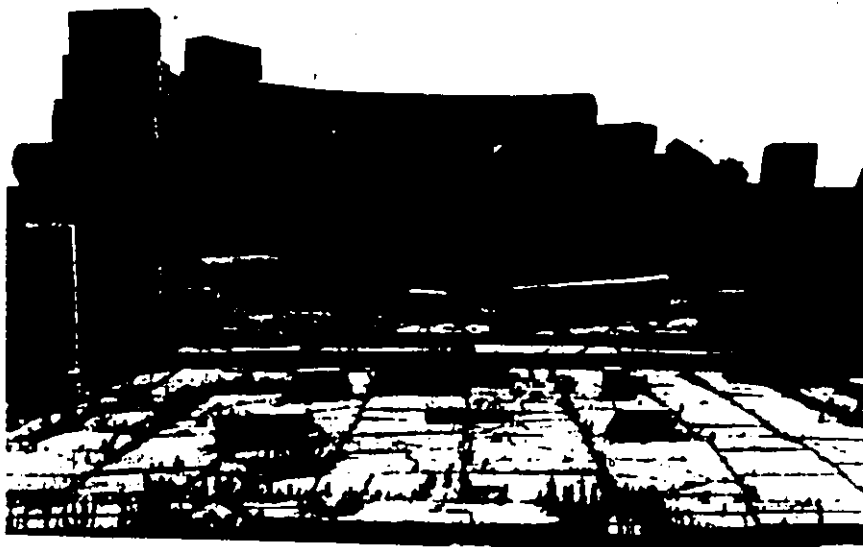


Fig. 8 Western sanctuary and apse note bases for ciborium columns
still in situ.

CHAPTER IV: THE CITADEL BASILICA OF HAIDRA

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

According to Procopius, the citadel of Haïdra was fortified by Justinian, to protect it from Moorish tribesmen, (*Μαυροῦνοι*) who had been overrunning this region of the province¹. The fortifications would have allowed officials residing in Haïdra to exercise a stricter control over the activities along the road from Tebessa to Carthage. Some time after the construction of the fortification walls, a small Christian basilica was built inside the citadel. The walls of the basilica's chevet were built up against the curtain walls of the western ramparts. Only limited excavations have been conducted in and around the basilica. As a result many questions concerning the basilica's earlier phases as well as previous occupation of the site have remained unanswered.

The basilica was partially excavated by Dr. Dolcemascolo² between 1933 - 1935, but has never been the subject of extensive excavations. It has since been studied by J. Christern³ and in some detail by N. Duval, during the late 1960's and early 1970's⁴.

THE BASILICA COMPLEX

To date the citadel basilica is the only religious building found within the confines of Haidra's fortification walls. The small three-nave basilica built from reused material forms a rectangle 23.40m long and 13.25m wide⁵. An entryway at the eastern end of the basilica was preceded by a narrow narthex. A single apse at the western end of the basilica was flanked to either side by a small sanctuary. The basilica was solidly built with large blocks of cut stone and originally had a second storey. The basilica lies along a line running roughly east-west, with the apse at the western end⁶.

ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

PHASE I

The eastern façade of the basilica was preceded by a narrow rectangular narthex or vestibule. The narthex was 3.70m wide and ran the entire width, of the basilica's façade. The eastern wall of the narthex is in extremely poor condition and extensive excavations would be needed to determine the exact number of entries that there were in the façade of the narthex (see Phase I plan, Plate XXIII). The southern wall of the narthex was an extension of the southern wall of the quadratum populi wall, and had no doorways. The northern wall of the narthex, an extension of the quadratum populi's northern wall, had a narrow doorway. The door gave access to a small room that formed the base of a square tower. Inside, the tower measured 3.70m to a side and housed a stairwell giving access to an upper storey or raised gallery⁷.

The western wall of the narthex was formed by the eastern wall of the quadratum populi. There were three doorways in the eastern wall that led into the basilica. The thresholds and lower portions of the jambs from all three doors were still in situ. The central and principal entryway was a 2.70m doorway that was aligned with the central axis of the basilica. Corresponding to both the northern and southern side aisle was a doorway 1.35m wide. The northern doorway is almost completely intact from the sill to the lintel⁸.

During Phase III the basilica was also accessible through two large doors in the northern walls of the basilica. These doors, each 1.80m wide, opened onto the second and fourth bays of the northern side aisle⁹.

Phase II

During Phase II the two doors that opened onto the second and fourth bays of the northern side aisles were walled up with large blocks of reused stone (see Phase II plan, Plate XXIV). A small portion of each doorway appears to have been left unblocked, possibly to allow light into the basilica¹⁰.

THE QUADRATUM POPULI

PHASE I

The quadratum populi is divided into three parts by a broad central nave, 6.00m wide and two side aisles each 3.15m¹¹ wide. The quadratum populi had a consistent width of 12.30m but varied in length from 13.20 along the southern wall, to 13.40m along the northern wall¹². Each side aisle was separated from the nave by a file of five single columns. These colonnades divide the nave and side aisles into a series of five bays each with an average length of 2.60m (see Phase I plan, Plate XXIII).

Both colonnades were set on a continuous stylobate of reused rectangular blocks, set end-on-end. The bases, shafts, and capitals were all reused material. The diameter of the column shafts varied from column to column, as did the type of shaft used. Certain shafts were smooth, others, fluted, some were monolithic, while others were composed of a series of drums. The bases were either Corinthian or Attic, and varied in width from 0.57-0.77m in diameter. All the capitals found inside the basilica were Corinthian¹³.

The easternmost column of each colonnade was set immediately against the eastern wall of the quadratum populi, although it was not actually embedded in the wall. The easternmost column of the northern colonnade has remained in situ, as has the capital on top of it (see fig. 1, Plate XXV). The springer and one of the arch stones from the arch that was supported by the column were partially embedded in the eastern wall of the quadratum populi¹⁴.

At the western ends of the colonnades there are no columns set against the walls of the basilica. Instead, the arches of both colonnades sprang directly from the quadratum populi wall (see fig. 2, Plate XX).

Both the northern and southern walls of the quadratum populi are relatively well preserved. Along the northern wall, the beginnings of three windows opening onto the first,

third and fifth bays of the northern side aisle can still be seen. The bases of all three windows were three meters above the level of the existing quadratum populi floor. The preserved height of the southern wall is not sufficient to determine whether there was a similar set of windows along this wall¹⁵.

PHASE II

At some point the floors of the quadratum populi were covered with a layer of loose fill and repaved with large slabs of flagstone. This second floor level was about 0.15m above the level of the original floor. It is this floor level that is now visible in the basilica. Excavators have found no other changes to the quadratum populi that can be attributed to Phase II. †

Excavators have noticed a small number of epitaphs engraved onto the northern wall of the quadratum populi, as well as on some of the fallen column shafts. None of these burials have been excavated¹⁶.

CULT AREAS: THE WESTERN APSE

PHASE I

At the western end of the central nave is a large rounded apse, encased in a massive stone frame. The westernmost extremity of this frame forms a portion of the basilica's flat chevet, and has been built in part against the curtain wall of the citadel¹⁷ (see Phase I plan, Plate XXIII).

Inside, the apse is 4.75m deep and 5.70m wide at the open end. The apse was preceded by three steps and stood roughly 1.00m above the floors of the quadratum populi. An arch at the head of the apse was supported by two massive marble columns. Both columns are still *in situ* and stand on Corinthian bases at the northern and southern extremities of the entrance to the apse (see fig. 2, Plate XXV). Each column was cut from a single block of marble and has a diameter of 0.62m. A Corinthian capital and carved springer are still in place on top of the southern column¹⁸. The bedding plane of the capital has a diameter that is noticeably smaller than that of the upper surface of the column shaft on which it rests. The springer was decorated with three carved rosettes: archaeologists believe the springer to have been recycled from earlier monuments. Above the springer, several courses of arch stones are still *in situ*. The engaged ends of the arch stones are an integral part of the western wall of the quadratum populi¹⁹.

Immediately west of each column is a small doorway in the wall of the apse. The doorway that is west of the northern column is 0.94m wide and leads into the northern sacristy. The southern doorway was smaller, measuring only 0.86m. This doorway gave access to a southern sacristy²⁰.

The apse was covered by a ribbed semi-dome. The ribbing divided the dome into seven sections; five large sections measuring 1.75m along the base of the dome and two smaller ones that measured only 0.90m. The two smaller sections were on either side of the entry into the

apse, immediately west of the two large marble columns, and directly above the doorways into the two sacristies²¹. The ribs of the dome rested on a series of consoles that projected from the wall of the apse, and were supported by a series of small columns, many of which were still *in situ* at the time of the original explorations of the basilica but have since disappeared. The columns were supported on a broad stone ledge that was formed by the first two courses of stone from the apse wall. Together the blocks of these two courses stood well over 1.00m high and projected about 0.40m from the inside wall of the apse. The columns were about 1.55m high and had been crowned with small Corinthian capitals. A series of curved stone plaques projected from the apse walls and ran between the consoles above the columns²². The bases of the seven sections of the dome rested on these curved plaques. The ribs themselves were supported on the consoles of the individual colonettes. Three of these consoles have remained *in situ*. The basic profile is identical in all three although one has an additional carved decoration²³.

At the closed end of the apse was a broad flat niche, 1.00m wide and 0.20m deep (see fig. 2, Plate XXV). The niche was aligned with the central axis of the basilica and had originally been preceded by a step. The revetting that formed the exterior surfaces of the steps has since been lost, although the toothing stones have remained *in situ*²⁴.

PHASE II

Archaeologists have made no mention of any changes that could be attributed to this phase.

THE CULT AREAS

THE NORTHERN SACRISTY

The apse is flanked to the north and south by sacristies. The northern sacristy was a rectangular room approximately 7.75m wide and 4.00m deep. The room was accessible through a small door at the western end of the northern side aisle as well as by way of the small door in the northern wall of the apse. The northern wall of the frame that encased the apse forms the southern wall of this sacristy. The western end of the frame, (which forms the flat exterior of the apse), continues northward to become the western wall of the sacristy. The northern wall of this sacristy is not aligned with the north wall of the quadratum populi, as the sacristy extends nearly 4.60m north of the lateral walls of the quadratum populi. (see Phase I, Plate XXIII):

The doorway leading into the northern side aisle was only about 0.80m wide. This doorway stands on the same level as the floors of the northern side aisle and is preserved in its entirety (see fig. 2, Plate XXV). The second door which leads into the sacristy from the apse is slightly wider, measuring 0.94m²⁵. This second door is on the same level as the floor of the apse and is therefore a meter higher than the doorway at the western end of the northern side aisle. In its present state the sacristy is full of rubble which appears to be the collapsed debris of an upper storey. This sacristy has never been excavated and as further collapse of the superstructure appears imminent it was not possible to enter and check the floor level²⁶. Owing to the differences in the levels of the two doorways into the sacristy, there must have been stairs leading up and down in front of at least one of the doorways.

THE SOUTHERN SACRISTY

The southern sacristy is a rectangular room 3.15m wide and roughly 6.00m deep (see Phase I plan, Plate XXIII). Like its northern counterpart, the southern sacristy is accessible by way of two small doors, one leading into the sacristy from the apse, the other from the southern side aisle. The southern wall of the apse, through which the door into the sacristy passed, also

served as the northern wall of the sacristy. The doorway at the western end of the southern side aisle was preceded by a large perron with two steps (see fig. 2, Plate XXV).

A third step, formed by the doorsill, was level with the threshold of the apse. The doorway is preserved in its entirety, and was slightly wider than its northern counterpart, measuring 0.90m²⁷. This sacristy has never been excavated and is full of rubble which is the collapsed debris of an upper storey. It has nevertheless been possible to determine that the level of the sacristy floor is roughly equivalent to that of the apse. Two small windows were pierced in the southern wall of the sacristy²⁸.

At the southern end of the sacristy, there was a stairway that led up to the second story. The floor of this room was supported on a series of small corbels that can still be seen projecting from the walls of the room²⁹. The eastern wall of this upper storey room was common with the western wall of the quadratum populi. A small door was centered in this wall directly above the door that led into the sacristy below from the southern side aisle. Archaeologists who have studied the basilica believe that the door led onto a raised gallery that would have run above the southern side aisle³⁰.

CULT AREAS: THE SANCTUARIES

PHASE I

Very little survives of the original sanctuary whose exact measurements are unknown. Trial trenches revealed that while the Phase I chancel plaques were removed in antiquity, the blocks that served as the stylobate to support the chancel plaques had been left in situ on the flagstone floor of level I. The stylobate itself was built with reused material and had originally been a richly carved cornice³¹. Traces of this stylobate were found at the western end of the first bay of the nave. Here the stylobate ran as a transverse barrier across the nave. More fragments of the stylobate were found running along the southern edge of the second bay of the nave. The stylobate appears to continue towards the apse³² (see Phase I plan, Plate XXIII). Further excavation would be necessary before more could be said about the Phase I sanctuary.

PHASE II

At some point the original chancel plaques were removed and the stylobate blocks that had supported them were covered with a layer of loose fill. The floors of the quadratum populi were then repaved with a new flagstone floor³³. A second series of chancel plaques was installed along the intercolumniations of the two colonnades. These new plaques ran from the western wall of the quadratum populi to the eastern end of the nave's second bay. Rabbets into which the chancel plaques could be set were cut into the upper surface of the stylobate blocks that supported the columns of the central nave, as well as into the bases of the columns themselves³⁴ (see Phase II plan, Plate XXIV). Although no remains of chancel plaques have been identified among the rubble, the positioning of the notches in the column bases and the rabbets in the upper surfaces of the stylobate indicates that the chancel plaques began immediately west of the columns separating the first and second bays of the central nave. The chancel plaques ended against the western wall of the quadratum populi, to either side of the opening of the apse. The type of mortise cut into the western wall of the basilica has led certain archaeologists to suggest that the chancel plaques along the northern and southern edges of the fifth bay may have been removable³⁵. No traces of any form of transverse barrier was found across the eastern end of

this sanctuary.

The remains of a bema or raised altar platform were found at the western end of the central nave. The bema which ran from the western end of the third bay to the opening of the apse, was a poorly squared rectangle 3.10m wide and 4.50m long³⁶. Its upper face was 0.20m above the floor surface of the Phase II quadralum populi. At the western end of the fourth bay a rectangular cavity 1.60m long and 1.00m wide was cut into the altar platform. In the center of the cavity was a section of column shaft, (0.50m in diameter), into which a 0.35m square cavity had been cut³⁷. A similar cavity was found cut into a column shaft in the Phase III Sanctuary at the Basilica of Vitalis at Sbeitla, (see chapter II, p. 48). In both Vitalis and the Citadel basilica, the cavity is thought to have contained a reliquary³⁸. The altar is thought to have been placed immediately above the reliquary cavity, as it was in the Sbeitla basilica.

Above the altar was a ciborium. Two bases of the column shafts that supported the ciborium were found in situ on the altar platform. From their placement it is clear that the ciborium would have covered an area 2.10m wide and 1.50m deep³⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

The Citadel basilica at Haïdra is a unique structure on several accounts. First, this basilica is the only Tunisian basilica for which there is a solid terminus post quem⁴⁰. Second, even though the basilica was clearly built after the Byzantine reconquest the chevet is located almost due west. Occidentation is rare in Byzantine structures, especially when one considers the number of basilicas in which the orientation was changed from west to east after the reconquest⁴¹. Third, the Citadel basilica of Haïdra appears to be the only basilica in Tunisia for which the presence of tribunes is clearly attested.

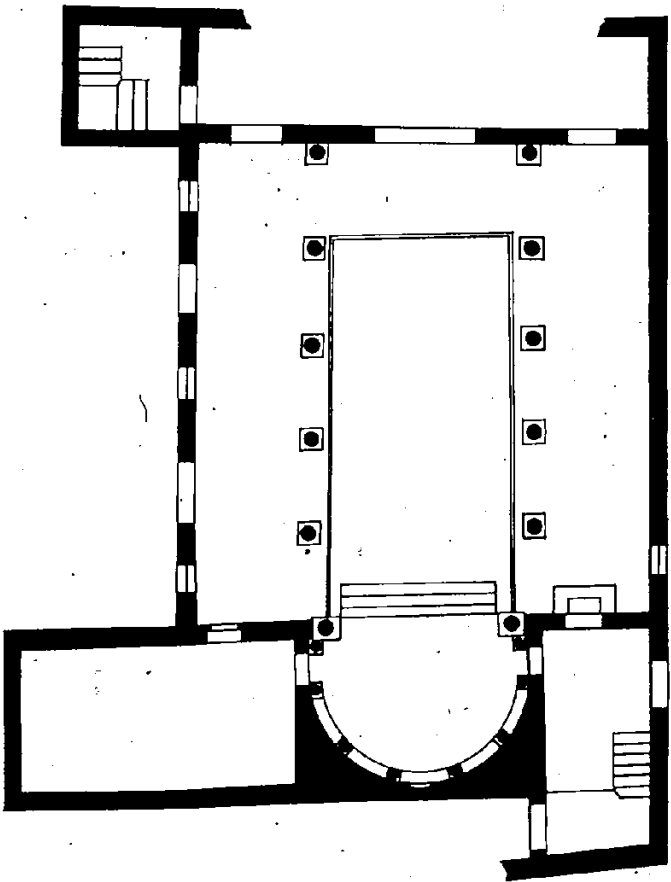
The basilica can clearly be divided into two phases although none of the Phase II changes appears to reflect major architectural changes such as those seen at Bulla Regia, Sbeitla or other basilicas in Haïdra. The ground plan of original basilica was very similar to that of the ruins today. The only differences appear to be the presence of doors along the quadratum populi's northern wall, a slightly lower floor level; and of course, the Phase I sanctuary. Phase II was marked essentially by the installation of the bema or altar platform at the western end of the nave, and the raising of the floor level. The two doors along the basilica's northern wall appear to have been blocked at this time. Excavators offer no explanations as to why this was done, nor is any satisfactory explanation evident from the published notes.

FOOTNOTES

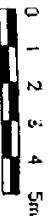
- 1) Procopius, De Aedificiis, VI, v, 18.
- 2) These excavations were not published.
- 3) J. Christern, "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika", Akten des Internationalen Kongresses für Christliche Archäologie, Trier, 1965, p. 420; pl. CXC VII, abb. 9a; pl. CXC VIII abb. 10a; pl. CXC IX abb. 11a; pl. CCV Abb. 19-20; CCVIII abb. 25; CCIX abb. 28.
- 4) N. Duval, "Les églises d'Haïdra III, l'église de la Citadelle", CRAI, 1971, p. 136-166.
- 5) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 143.
- 6) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 138, fig. 1.
- 7) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 144.
- 8) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 144; Christern, "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika", CCVIII abb. 25.
- 9) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 145, fig. 7.
- 10) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 145.
- 11) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 147.
- 12) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 145.
- 13) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 147.
- 14) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 148, fig. 10.
- 15) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 145.
- 16) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 156-160.
- 17) Gauckler, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie, pl XIV.
- 18) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 150.
- 19) Christern, "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika" pl. CCV abb. 20.
- 20) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 150.
- 21) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 151, fig. 12.
- 22) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 151, fig. 12 and p. 152.
- 23) Christern, "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika" pl. CCV abb. 20.
- 24) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 152.
- 25) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 150.
- 26) While visiting the basilica in 1982, I tried to enter the sacristy in question.

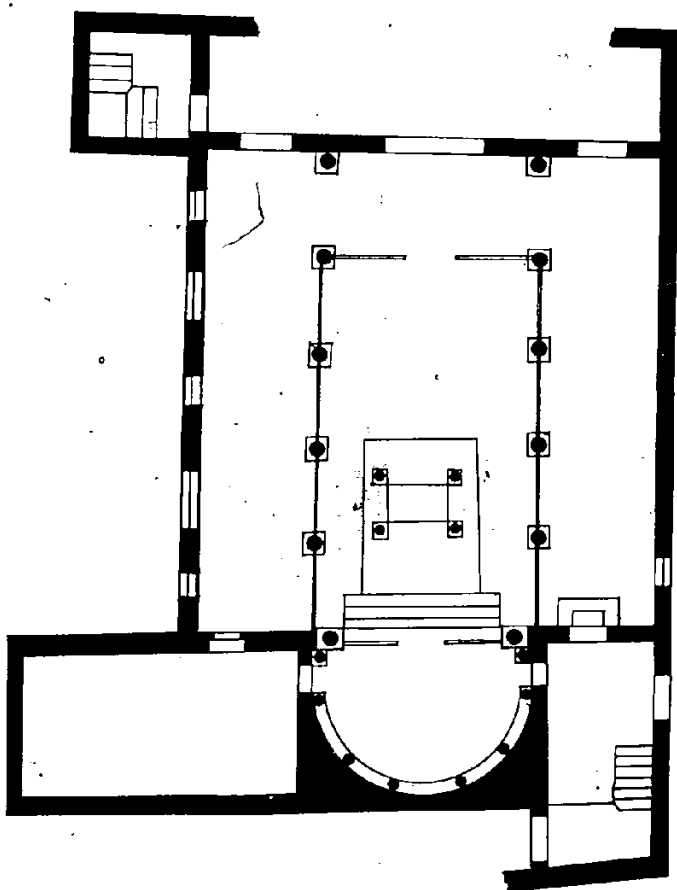
however, the floor was piled high with fallen debris and imminent collapse of the surviving superstructure appeared to be a distinct possibility.

- 27) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 152.
- 28) There is a single window on Christern's plan: see "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika" pl. CXC VII abb. 9a, Both Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 152; and Gauckler, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie, pl XIV, maintains there are two.
- 29) Christern "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika", pl. CXC VII, abb. 9a; Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 152.
- 30) Christern "Emporenkirchen in Nordafrika", pl. CXC VIII abb. 10a; Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 149.
- 31) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 154-155 (fig. 14).
- 32) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 145 fig. 7.
- 33) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 154.
- 34) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 155.
- 35) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 155.
- 36) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 153.
- 37) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 153.
- 38) Duval, Les Basiliques de Sbeitla, p. 189, fig. 195 and 206.
- 39) Duval, op. cit., 1971, p. 145, fig. 7, 154.
- 40) Procopius, De Aedificiis, VI, vi 18.
- 41) In Hafdra itself there are several examples of reorientation dating from the Byzantine period including, the basilica of Melleus, as well as the basilica of Candidus, located in the necropolis that lies to the east of the citadel on the outskirts of town, (for lack of adequate excavation notes this basilica has not been included in this study). Similar reorientation can also be seen in Bulla Regia and in the basilica of Bellator at Sbeitla. While excavators are inclined to believe that the second apse at the easternmost end of the basilica of Vitalis, was not the principal presbyterium, it indicated, at the very least the commencement of new cult activity at the eastern end of the basilica. An extensive catalogue of double apses basilicas many of which are in Tunisia has been compiled by N. Duval, (see Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, Paris, 1973).



The Citadel Basilica
Phase I





The Citadel Basilica
Phase II

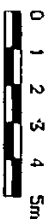




Fig. 1 Eastern end of the quadratum populi and doorway into narthex from northern side aisle.



Fig. 2 Western apse and doorways into sacristies

CHAPTER V: THE BASILICA COMPLEX AT BULLA REGIA

The Built Environment

The basilica at Bulla Regia is part of a religious complex located near the northwestern edge of the town. Though located some distance from the activities of the market area, it is not isolated from the town, but rather situated in the middle of a wealthy residential area. The villas in the neighbourhood surrounding the basilica complex house some of the finest mosaics preserved in North Africa today¹.

The basilica is oriented along an axis that runs roughly North-East / South-West. The complex was originally excavated between 1952 and 1954, by M. Retiro under the direction of M.P. Quoniam, then conservator of the Bardo Museum. N. Duval, collaborating with the Institut National d'Archéologie de Tunis², resumed excavations and studies in 1960 and continued until 1962.

THE BASILICA COMPLEX

Rather than being placed perpendicular to the central axis of the basilica, the exterior wall of the chevet of the basilica follows closely the line of the street. Immediately to the north of the basilica is a small chapel which was built against the northern wall of the quadratum populi and set slightly back from the edge of the street. Both the southern and the eastern sides of the basilica are surrounded by a series of annexes which, though not yet excavated, are thought to have been part of the religious complex. The basilica has a wide central nave which is separated from each of the neighbouring side aisles, by a colonnade of piers and double columns. There is a small apse at both the eastern and western end of the central nave. Immediately in front of the western apse is a large cruciform baptismal font. The basilica has an overall length of 27.40m, and an average width of 11.80m³.

THE ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

PHASE I

As the area immediately east of the basilica was not excavated, it is not known whether the basilica was preceded by an atrium or courtyard. Excavators suggest that it was here, at the eastern end of the basilica, that the original entryway was located, centered on the axis of the nave⁴ (see Phase I plan, Plate XXVI). It should be noted, that the existence of such door remains strictly hypothetical, as the eastern end of the basilica was later extended to make it possible to build an apse. Foundation trenches cut for the construction of the new apse may well have eradicated any traces of the supposed main entry. Nonetheless, in light of all other archaeological evidence, (notably that for Phase II of the northern and southern sacristies)⁵, it is only at the eastern end of the central nave that one could reasonably expect the main entryway to have been placed.

A narrow axial entryway, c. 0.75m wide, at the eastern end of the southern side aisle opened onto the first bay of the southern side aisle. A second spacious entry, 1.75m wide, straddled the first and second bays of the southern side aisle both doorways appear to have remained in use throughout the life of the basilica, and both are believed to have joined the annexes to the basilica proper⁶.

There are two doorways along the northern side aisle: one, narrow doorway c. 0.60m wide at the western end of the first bay; the second, 1.14m wide, in the fourth bay. This doorway was preceded by a small marble step, indicating that the floor or ground level immediately north of the basilica was somewhat higher than the floor level of the basilica itself⁷.

PHASE II

Phase II is marked primarily by the loss of the hypothetical main entry into the eastern façade. This change does not appear to have affected the use of the doorways into the side aisles. During this phase two small doorways were opened at the western end of the basilica⁸.

PHASE III

There is no evidence of any antechambers or entryways being built during this phase.

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THE QUADRATUM POPULI

PHASE I

The quadratum populi had an overall length of 19.00m⁹. The lateral walls of the basilica are not parallel, and the width of the quadratum populi varies from 11.80m in the east to 12.40m in the west. This inconsistency in the width appears to be a result of accommodations made because the western facade is aligned with the street¹⁰ (see Phase I plan, Plate XXVI).

The quadratum populi was divided by twin colonnades into a central nave 4.80m wide, and two side aisles, each c. 3.50m wide. Each colonnade had six pairs of double columns that divided the nave and side aisles into seven bays with an average length of 2.70m¹¹. Only a few unfluted column shafts and several Attic bases, all believed to be reused material, were found still inside the basilica. No traces of any column capitals were found.

The walls of the quadratum populi were built in opus africanum. Small fieldstone blocks and some reused materials were used to build the curtain walls between the large opus africanum blocks. A broad gently curving niche was built into the western end of the quadratum populi's southern wall. The niche caused a gentle, but nevertheless noticeable bulge in the exterior face of the southern wall¹². Inside, the niche was 2.55m long and had a maximum width of 0.45m. It straddled the sixth and seventh bays of the southern side aisle. Excavators offer no explanation concerning the use of this niche¹³.

During Phase I the floors of the quadratum populi were covered with a flagstone pavement. Nothing has survived from the Phase I roof. It would, however, seem highly probable, given the type of supports used along the nave and the thickness of the walls, that the basilica was covered with tiles supported on a tie beam truss roof¹⁴.

PHASE II

At some point the liturgical orientation of the basilica was shifted from the west to the east. This resulted in some major alterations to certain parts of the basilica, (see Cult Areas and Eastern Apse). As a result of this reorientation, the quadratum populi was no longer accessible from the supposed main eastern doorway. The two small doorways into the first bay of the southern side aisle appear to have remained in use (see Phase II plan, Plate XXVI).

The most noticeable change to the quadratum populi, was the construction of a large cruciform baptismal font in the sixth and seventh bays of the central nave¹⁵ (see fig. 1, Plate XXIX). The set of columns in front of the western apse may have been removed at this time as there is no evidence of column bases on the opus sectile floor which is thought to have been installed at the same time as the baptistery. Excavators offer no explanation. A certain portion of the nave at its eastern end may have been blocked off to allow the installation of the new sanctuary, possibly where the bema is now.

It was probably during this second phase that the entries were cut into the western walls of the sanctuaries, thus allowing the quadratum populi to be entered from what were originally the sacristies.

PHASE III

During a third and final phase of construction the quadratum populi underwent several significant changes (see Phase III plan, Plate XXVIII). Several sets of columns appear to have been removed from the colonnades. The columns separating the second and third bays, and the fifth and sixth bays of the central nave were removed and replaced with large stone piers. The columns separating the first and second, and the sixth and seventh bays of the central nave, were also removed but were not replaced with an alternate form of support, (see fig. 2, Plate XXIX).

The eastern wall of the quadratum populi was thickened by 0.50m to attain a total width of nearly 1.00m. The niche at the western end of the southern wall was filled in¹⁶. Series of piers were added to both the northern and the southern walls of the quadratum populi. The placement of these piers corresponded to the placement of the new supports along the central nave, although none were in the alignment of the columns that had been removed but not replaced. These piers are 0.70-0.80m long and project 0.50-0.60m from the lateral walls of the quadratum populi. At this time the southern wall was thickened slightly, (0.10-0.20m), from the beginning of the third bay to the end of the fifth¹⁷. It was only after the southern wall was thickened that the northern and southern side aisles were of equal widths. The only thickening of the quadratum populi's northern wall occurred in the sixth and seventh bays where the wall was thickened by a wedge of masonry that increased in width from 0.01m at the eastern extremity of the sixth bay to 0.40m at the western end of the seventh bay. The thickening of this wall served no obvious structural role. Instead, it appears to have simply been intended to render less evident the northward inclination of the wall.

Duval suggests that the installation of the strong piers at the eastern and western extremities of the central nave, as well as the reinforcing of the eastern quadratum populi wall, was to allow the installation of two small domes, one at either end of the central nave. One, according to Duval, would have been placed above the altar at the eastern end of the nave, the other at the western end above the baptismal font¹⁸. The piers at the western end were installed some time after the opus sectile floor that surrounded the baptismal font: the opus sectile design had been cut through in order to install the piers¹⁹.

After the rest of the last phase of construction was finished, the quadratum populi floors were covered with a mosaic pavement. The borders of these mosaics follow the edges of all the latest installations and can be safely dated by their style to the late sixth century²⁰.

In the central nave, all but a small patch of mosaics in the southwestern corner of the third bay was destroyed. The side aisles, especially in their westernmost bays, have fared considerably better. The northern side aisle was paved with a lavish vegetal motif and framed by a band of geometric design that did not run along the wall of the quadratum populi, but just in

front of the pilasters that were installed during Phase III to reinforce the lateral walls. A single motif appears to have been used to cover the entire northern aisle. The floor between the pilasters was covered with a slightly more rigid geometric mosaic pavement²¹.

In the northern side aisle, the decoration is considerably more ornate, and appears to have been divided into panels corresponding to the bays of Phase III, that is to say that the sixth and seventh bays that originally were the two westernmost bays of the side aisle, were treated as a single bay. In this area, a colourful series of birds and water fowl were inscribed inside circular medallions. Like the peacocks on the threshold into the southwestern sacristy, (see below), these birds are right side up when viewed from the east. In the northeastern corner of the panel was a small bust of a bearded man²². Immediately south of this motif, at the western end of the fifth bay, is a similar panel, but here the birds are inscribed in small boxes. Little more than the first row of boxes survives. Like the northern side aisle, the frame surrounding the panels of the southern aisle, (a cable motif), ran in front of the piers installed during Phase III. The areas between the piers was decorated with different geometric panels. The only exception is immediately in front of the bricked up niche, where seven brightly coloured dolphins swim eastward with great determination²³.

PHASE IV

At some point the tomb of a small child was installed beneath the floor of the second bay of the southern side aisle. The tomb contained a small cache of Ummayyad coins. It is difficult to determine whether the burial marks a separate phase of the basilica's use or not²⁴. Part of the difficulty is that archaeologists cannot be certain whether the burial was installed in the ruins of the basilica, after the basilica was abandoned, or whether the basilica continued to be used for a short while after the Arab invasions.

CULT AREAS: THE WESTERN APSE

PHASE I

At the western extremity of the central nave was a U shaped apse. This apse was encased in a massive stonework frame, the exterior of which formed the flat chevet of the basilica. The exterior wall of the chevet follows the line of the street so closely, that it misses being orthogonal to the central axis of the basilica by nearly 30° , (Phase I plan, Plate XXVI). Nevertheless, the transition between the masonry of the western chevet and the masonry of the lateral walls of the basilica clearly indicate that this anomaly dates to the original construction of the basilica.

Inside, the apse had an opening 3.90m wide and a maximum depth of 4.40m. Only the foundation wall of the original inner face of the wall has remained *in situ*. The schist threshold of the Phase I apse was found *in situ*²⁵. The placement of this threshold indicates that during Phase I, the apse and *quadratum populi* floors were on the same level. Mortises cut into the upper surface of the threshold indicate that a chancel rail ran across the opening of the apse. There was an 0.80m axial opening in the chancel rail that could be closed with a small gate. A hole for the bolt that held the gate shut can still be seen cut into the threshold at the northern end of the opening²⁶.

Although nothing survives from the roof of the Phase I apse, the thickness of the walls and the solidity of the frame indicate that it probably was covered by a half dome. Excavators have not mentioned what type of floor pavement was used during this phase.

PHASE II

Although there were no architectural changes to the western apse during Phase II, it is likely that the apse lost its role as the presbyterium when a second apse was built at the eastern end of the basilica. Access to the western apse was restricted by the construction of a baptismal

font immediately east of the open end of the apse, (see Phase II plan, Plate XXVII).

PHASE III

Phase III is characterized by an extensive remodeling of the western apse. The walls on either side of the entryway underwent considerable alterations in order to enable the incorporation of two massive piers into the apse wall. These piers were aligned with the two piers built at the western end of the central colonnades, and helped to support a small dome above the baptismal font²⁷ (see Phase III plan, Plate XXVIII).

During this phase the apse was divided into two distinct parts, an eastern part and a western part. The open end of the apse retained its width of 3.90m for a distance of 2.80m. This formed a rectangular area at the eastern end of the apse. Immediately west of the rectangular area, the apse wall begins to curve. Here excavators uncovered a band of large blocks projecting 0.42m from the lower portion of the apse wall. These blocks that line the circular portion of the apse are not the base of a synthronon, but rather the continuation of the foundation blocks that support the walls of the rectangular frame around the apse. Duval suggests that originally the interior wall of the apse rose from this base, and that during phase III the apse enlarged by cutting into the fabric of the wall and removing a few layers of the fieldstone, resulting in the present form²⁸. This solution, though feasible, is not without its problems.

Despite the considerable destruction that occurred inside the apse, it is possible to determine the approximate level of the Phase III floor. Duval suggests that the floor level for the third and apparently final phase of the apse, may have been raised as much as 0.70m above the quadratum populi floors of Phase III. Because of the height of the apse floor, at least two steps would have been needed to enter the apse with ease. No traces of any such steps have been found. The 0.70m elevation is based on the level of the bared foundation stones along the curved section of the apse and on the placement of an adult burial found inside the apse. The burial was set almost parallel to the central axis of the nave. From the type of construction, it is apparent that the sarcophagus was meant to be buried leaving the lid just below the surface of the apse floor.

When the apse was studied by Duval during the early 1960's, the sarcophagus stood nearly 0,60m above the quadratum populi floors of Phase III, even with the lid missing²⁹. This sarcophagus has since been removed from the apse.

CULT AREAS: WESTERN SACRISTIES

PHASE I

To either side of the western apse was a small trapezoidal sacristy (see Phase I plan, Plate XXVI). The western walls of these rooms is a continuation of the same wall that encloses the western apse and forms the basilica's chevet. Although the chevet wall was parallel to the street, the walls of the quadratum populi were not strictly perpendicular to the chevet; as a result, both sacristies were trapezoidal³⁰. The northern sacristy was a short squat room; its northern wall was 3.70m long, the southern wall 3.75m long. The eastern wall was just 3.60m long while the western wall measured 3.80m. The southern sacristy was a narrow room measuring 5.00m along the northern wall and 5.20m along the southern wall. The room was 2.40m wide at its eastern end and 2.60m wide along the western wall. The exterior side wall of the eastern and western sacristies are extensions of the eastern and western side walls of the quadratum populi³¹.

Neither sacristy had a street entrance, nor was either sacristy accessible from the apse. Each room must have had an opening into the seventh bay of the corresponding side aisle. Due to the considerable alterations that occurred during Phase III of the sacristies, it has not been possible to determine the exact nature of the eastern walls of these rooms, nor the width of their door openings. At least part of the southern sacristy's eastern wall was formed by a small segment of wall that jutted southward from the southeastern corner of the frame that surrounded the apse. There may have been a similar arrangement for the northern sacristy; however, all traces would have been lost when the piers were installed at the eastern end of the apse³².

Both sacristies were paved with flagstone floors that were on the same level as the quadratum populi floors of Phase I³³.

PHASE II

Phase II coincides with what appears to be a liturgical reorientation of the basilica. The phase was marked primarily by the construction of a small apse at the eastern end of the central nave, where the main entry into the basilica is thought to have existed³⁴.

At this point it appears that the western apse ceases to be the focal point of the basilica's cult activities and that the sacristies are no longer used as such.

Once the rooms on either side of the apse ceased to be used as sacristies, the street entrances were installed (see Phase II plan, Plate XXVII). The western doorway in the northern sacristy was 1.25m wide and its stone door sill is still in situ. Holes cut into the upper surface of the sill for the hinges and bolts of the door are clearly distinguishable, indicating that a single-leaf door swung into the room. The doorway and door sill in the western wall of the southern sacristy were also in situ and measured 1.16m. The jambshefts of both doorways are in situ and are preserved to a height of 1.00m³⁵ (see fig. 3, Plate XXX).

PHASE III

During Phase III there were again alterations to these rooms, this time to the eastern walls (see Phase III plan, Plate XXVIII). The Phase III alterations are not as apparent in the southern room where part of the original wall, (the segment that jutted south from the apse wall), appears to be still in situ. During this Phase III, the exterior walls of both rooms were thickened from 0.50m to 0.85m along the southern wall of the southern room and from 0.50m to 0.92m along the northern wall of the northern room³⁶. To achieve this a fieldstone wall was added along the interior faces of the original walls. Duval suggests that this was to allow the installation of vaulted ceilings³⁷. The pier at the southeastern corner of the southern room may have been added at this time. This pier served also as a jambpost for the entryway into the room and was aligned with the piers that had been added to the open end of the apse. The entryway into the southern room from the quadratum populi was 1.60m wide.

Alterations were more evident at the eastern end of the northern room where the wall was completely rebuilt. About 1.00m of wall at the eastern end of the apse appears to have been completely removed and replaced with a large pier. At the eastern end of the northern room two columns were placed on top of a monolithic slab. These served as jambshafts for the 1.70m wide doorway. From the manner in which the columns were incorporated into the eastern wall it is quite clear that the walls were built up around the columns after the columns were in place³⁸.

At some point the floors of the southern sacristy were covered by a mosaic pavement, raising the floor level by several centimeters. Only a few isolated segments of this mosaic survive today. At the time of excavation there was a nicely preserved section of mosaic between the two jambposts at the eastern end of the room. The fragment depicted a pair of peacocks facing each other. These birds were right side up when viewed from the east³⁹.

CULT AREAS: THE EASTERN APSE

PHASE I

During the first phase of the basilica's use there was no eastern apse.

PHASE II

The construction of the eastern apse appears to coincide with the second phase of the quadratum populi. The part of the eastern wall in which the Phase I main entrance is thought to have been located was removed to allow the construction of a small freestanding apse.

This apse can be divided into two distinct parts, (see Phase II plan, Plate XXVII). The westernmost portion of this apse formed a rectangular platform 3.95m wide and 1.80m long. The platform was raised 0.40m above the surface of the bema that preceded it⁴⁰ and 0.55m above the level of the quadratum populi; it was reached by a single intervening step. A small doorway at the northeastern corner of the apse platform opened onto a corridor that ran behind the small apse of the minor basilica. The semi-circular portion of the main basilica's eastern apse was 3.30m wide and 2.30m deep. The apse is relatively narrow when compared to the central nave and thus slightly unusual for North Africa where the opening of an apse usually corresponds at least roughly to the width of the central nave. Along the inside wall of the apse are the remains of a synthronos, that was preceded by a step 0.29m high⁴¹. When this synthronos was complete, there would have been very little room left for movement inside the apse.

The exterior face of this apse was not encased inside a masonry frame as was the western apse; instead, the exterior face of the wall followed the same curve as the interior wall. This apse was built with small blocks of roughly hewn stone, placed between larger blocks in opus africanum. The actual fabric of the wall does not appear to be as close fitting as the fabric of

the western apse wall. The stones used in the construction of the eastern apse were considerably larger than those used for the western apse. The walls of the eastern apse were 0.80m thick⁴². It is possible that the apse had a mosaic floor; however, no mosaic has survived.

PHASE III

The eastern apse is thought to have continued in use throughout Phase III. Excavation reports make no mention of any changes that can be attributed to this phase.

CULT AREAS: THE BAPTISMAL FONT

PHASE I

No baptismal font was found inside the basilica of Bulla Regia that could be attributed to Phase I.

Phase II

At some point a large cruciform baptismal font was installed in the sixth and seventh bays of the central nave, (see Phase II plan, Plate XXVII). The main section of the font ran along the central axis of the nave. At either end of the main body of the font were four marble covered steps. This section of the font was 2.30m long and 0.70m wide at floor level. Each arm of the font was 1.40m long and 0.57m wide at floor level⁴³. Both arms had marble covered steps that descended towards the intersection of the cross. At the intersection of the main body and the arms of the cross, the floor of the font was 1.40m below the opus sectile mosaic that covered the floor of the seventh and part of the sixth bays of the central nave (see fig. 4, Plate XXX). Due to the manner in which the steps all descend towards the center of the cross, the actual floor is only a small square 0.34m wide. This floor level is 1.40m below the opus sectile pavement⁴⁴. Excavators were unable to determine by what methods water was introduced to, or drained from the baptismal font.

Above the font stood a ciborium. The four bases on which the columns had been set were found still in situ on top of the opus sectile floor. These bases were all reused material from earlier monuments and had mortises cut into them to support chancel plaques. The chancel plaques enclosed a square area, (2.40m on a side), around the baptistery⁴⁵. The two eastern most columns of the ciborium are still in situ (see Plate XXIX fig. 2). Both columns have unfluted shafts and are also believed to have been taken from earlier monuments.

PHASE III

It appears that during a third phase of construction the baptismal font was covered by a small dome. Four massive piers were built on top of the opus sectile floor. A pier stood at either end of the apse opening, (see Western Apse, Phase III). The others replaced the two sets of twin columns that stood between the fifth and sixth bays of the central nave⁴⁶.

PHASE IV

At some point the original shape of the baptismal font was modified by a series of marble plaques that were placed along the sides of the main body of the font. These plaques rendered the center of the cross inaccessible from the arms. The longest and uppermost plaques were 2.30m long and extended 0.12m above the opus sectile floor⁴⁷ (see Fig. 4, Plate XXX). It is very difficult to determine when this blocking of the baptismal font occurred, or why, although it may have been done in an effort to conserve water. There are two other examples in Tunisia of cruciform baptisteries where the use of the arms was discontinued: at the Oued Ramel and at Thuburbo Majus⁴⁸.

CULT AREAS: THE SANCTUARY

PHASE I

Excavators have failed to find any remains that can be attributed to the original sanctuary. If the original sanctuary was situated near the Western end of the central nave, as the original apse would suggest, most traces of this sanctuary would probably have been lost during the expansions of the western apse and installation of the baptismal font and the opus sectile floor.

PHASE II

Excavations have failed to unearth any traces of a Phase II Sanctuary. During Phase II a sanctuary was probably located towards the eastern end of the basilica where the new presbyterium was installed. It is possible that the remains of the sanctuary used during Phase II lie beneath the Phase III altar platform.

PHASE III

During this third and final phase of major construction the bema or raised altar platform that is visible today at the eastern end of the central nave was installed. The remains of the bema, though still clearly visible, have suffered considerable deterioration since the time of excavation during the early 1950's (see Phase III plan, Plate XXVIII).

From the manner in which the bema is installed, it is clear that it was built after the piers at the eastern end of the central nave were in place and after the eastern wall of the quadratum populi had been thickened. Excavators believe that the two massive piers that stood at the eastern end of the central nave served to support a small dome above the sanctuary (see quadratum populi Phase III)⁴⁹. This sanctuary occupied the entire width of what had been the first and second bays of the central nave, although since the colonnades were altered, these two bays were grouped together to form a single bay. Roughly hewn blocks formed a frame 4.80m

wide and 4.90m long around the sanctuary⁵⁰. These blocks were probably revetted with plaques of coloured marble although the excavators did not mention finding any traces of such plaques. Inside the stone frame, the mosaic floor of the bema was raised 0.15m above the Phase III quadratum populi floors⁵¹.

The mosaic pavement formed a rectangle 3.80m wide and 4.30m long. With the exception of several centimeters along the southern edge, the bema's mosaic pavement was in good condition at the time of the original excavations. Although most of the mosaic's central section was destroyed, several traces of a narrow mosaic border were found near the center of the sanctuary. This inner mosaic border may have run around the base of the altar. No traces of the altar itself were found. Between the inner and outer mosaic borders was an ornate geometric pavement. Duval sees strong parallels between this pavement and several other mosaic pavements found in basilicas at Haidra and Sbeitla⁵².

The sanctuary was separated from the central nave by a chancel rail. The rabbets and mortises of the chancel rail were cut into the upper faces of the roughly hewn blocks. The chancel rail was additionally supported by four small posts that were set into the mortises. A single base from one of the posts remained in situ at the time of excavation. There was an 0.80m axial opening in the chancel rail⁵³. There were no traces of chancel rails along the northern or southern edges of the sanctuary.

THE SMALL BASILICA

Immediately to the north of the basilica at Bulla Regia is a second smaller basilica⁵⁴. The entire building is less than 17.00m long. It was built along the same orientation as the main basilica. Although set back nearly 7.00m from the street, this small basilica was preceded by neither atrium nor narthex. Three doors in the western facade opened directly into the quadratum populi. The central door was 1.00m wide; the side doors were each 0.80m wide⁵⁵. Inside, the quadratum populi is divided into a central nave and two side aisles. The central nave was 3.50m wide, the northern and southern side aisles were 2.20m and 2.40m wide respectively. On either side of the central nave is a colonnade. Both colonnades start in the first bay with a pilaster against the western wall of the basilica. The beginnings of the second and third bays are both marked by a set of double columns. The first three bays are all 2.80m long. The fourth and final bays of the nave and both side aisles are 3.50m long. In the nave the fourth bay begins with a massive set of piers that may have supported a dome over the altar. The northern and southern walls of the quadratum populi were reinforced with pilasters aligned with the piers. The final bay of the nave is 3.50m long, as are both side aisles (see Plate XXXI).

The walls of the quadratum populi were almost a meter thick. The walls had been built with blocks of fieldstone and reinforced at the angles by blocks in opus africanum. There is no southern wall that is proper to the small basilica, instead, the small basilica was built immediately against the northern wall of main basilica, using a portion of the wall as a common wall. The only exception is in the eastern end of the fourth bay where a massive block of masonry juts into the side aisle. This block of masonry angles northward to form the eastern wall of the quadratum populi. A small door in the third bay of the southern side aisle leads into the northern aisle of the main basilica. Another small door in the eastern wall of the quadratum populi, just north of the apse leads into the annexes that surround the basilica.

Only the two easternmost bays of the nave and side aisles appear to have been covered with mosaics. There is no trace of any mosaics in the western half of the basilica. Borders of the surviving mosaic indicate quite clearly that if the western half of the basilica had at some time been covered by a mosaic pavement, there would have been a distinct division between the eastern and western half of the basilica. There are certain parallels between the mosaics of the two basilicas. The northern side aisle of the small basilica was covered with a skillfully executed

geometric decoration reminiscent of the decoration in the northern side aisle of the main basilica. The mosaic pavement in the southern side aisle, like that in the southern aisle of the main basilica, was composed of intricate medallions filled with colourful birds. It is interesting to note that while generally thought to be contemporary, the birds used to decorate the medallions in the main basilica's mosaics are right side up when viewed from the east, and those in the small basilica are right side up when viewed from the west⁵⁶.

The sanctuary occupied the two easternmost bays of the central nave and was raised 0.15m above the level of the quadratum populi by a bema. Like the eastern sanctuary in the main basilica the sanctuary of the small basilica was surrounded by a frame of stone blocks. This border runs from the edges of the apse, along both sides of the sanctuary to the western end of the third bay where it crosses the central nave. The decoration of the sanctuary floor can be divided into three distinct parts. First, the western half of the third bay is covered by a rectangular mosaic panel with two peacocks facing each other over a jar of water. The eastern half of the bay was covered with a stark flagstone floor. The third portion of the decoration included the entire fourth bay. The floor was covered with a geometric motif and framed with a geometric border. The central part of the mosaic is in very poor condition⁵⁷.

Immediately east of the sanctuary is an apse 4.00m deep and only 2.70m wide. It was built much like the eastern apse of the main basilica, with small sections of wall between large blocks in opus africanum. The walls of the apse are straight for the first 2.25m. In the southern segment of the straight wall, is a small doorway leading into a corridor that once opened into the fifth bay of the northern side aisle of the main basilica. After the first 2.25m the width of the apse is decreased to 2.25m. It is only after this point that the walls of the apse begin to curve. This unusual reduction in the width of the apse is similar to the reduction that occurs in the main basilica⁵⁸. Unlike the main basilica, there was no trace of a synthronon.

The construction technique used in the small basilica is similar to that used for some of the later additions to the main basilica. The surviving mosaics can easily be dated to the sixth century⁵⁹. Despite the many similarities between the two basilicas there is little evidence on which a precise date could be based.

CONCLUSIONS

Introductory Note:

The basilica of Bulla Regia clearly underwent several phases of construction. This is particularly evident in the quadratum populi, the walls of which have two different surfaces, as well as at the western end of the central nave, where two large piers were built on top of the elegant opus sectile pavement. Duval suggests that the construction and subsequent modifications can be divided into three major phases⁶⁰.

PHASE I

The basilica appears originally to have been a simple three-nave structure, entered from the east, with two sacristies, one on either side of a western apse. The central nave was separated from the side aisles and divided into seven bays by six pairs of double columns. The entire structure would, in his view, have been covered by a tie beam truss roof.

Despite certain unproven elements, this appears to be an acceptable reconstruction especially when certain aspects of the western end of the basilica are taken into consideration. The western apse together with the two rooms found on either side of it, would, (were it not for the doors leading onto the street), resemble the type of three part chevet that is common to many North African basilicas. The external walls of these two rooms, the frame surrounding the apse, and the lateral walls of the quadratum populi, all form an integral part of the earliest phase of the basilica. If the doors in the rooms on either side of the apse were installed at a later date, as they appear to have been, the two rooms could easily have once served as sacristies for the western apse. In all likelihood, access to the sacristies would have been restricted to members of the clergy, in which case those attending religious ceremonies would barely have been able to perceive the oblique angle of the western walls from the quadratum populi.

Although it is difficult to date with any more precision, the three-nave basilica with its western tripartite chevet probably dates from the mid to late fifth century.

PHASE II

At some point a small apse was added to the eastern end of the basilica. Unlike its western counterpart, the eastern apse is clearly a later addition. Not only is the transition from apse walls to the main body of the church awkward, but the building technique is clearly different. The construction of the apse walls is less compact: very short stretches of walls were placed between heavy blocks in opus africanum.

As the construction of the eastern apse appears to mark a reorientation of the basilica, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the installation of the bema or altar platform in front of the apse, postdates the construction of the eastern apse. With this new apse the basilica would have no longer been accessible from its eastern end; however as this same reorientation also appears to have stripped the western end of the basilica of its liturgical functions, it was possible to install a new entryway at the western end of the basilica. A central entryway would have entailed difficult and extensive restructuring of the western apse and its massive walls. It was probably for this reason that the western walls of the two sacristies were chosen for the new entryways. It appears to have been at this time during the second campaign of construction that the baptismal font and the opus sectile floor that surrounded it were installed.

PHASE III

Still later the basilica underwent a third and final phase of construction. The most striking change is the apparent addition of two small domes at either end of the central nave. One dome stood above the altar, the other above the baptismal font. With the installation of the domes, the system of supports in the central nave was altered. The first two sets of columns in front of each apse were removed. The space in front of the apse where the first set of columns had stood was left empty. Two large piers were installed where the second set of columns had stood, (see Phase plan III). Both apses were now preceded by bays that were twice as long as the other bays of the basilica. New stronger supports were installed to serve as jambposts for the western apse. The eastern wall of the quadratum populi was thickened by 0.50m in order to

absorb some of the weight of the dome over the new sanctuary. In the quadratum populi, certain sections of the lateral walls were thickened; both walls were reinforced by a series of pilasters that correspond roughly to the supports of the central nave. As the final stage of the Phase III construction, mosaic floors were installed. The borders of the mosaics follow all the edges of the latest installations and can easily be dated by their style to the late sixth century.

At the western end of the basilica, just inside the southern doorway, was the tomb of a small child. Buried with the child was a cache of Umayyad coins. Although it is possible that the basilica was used for a short time after the Arab invasions of the late seventh century, nothing has been found that could confirm or deny this. The presence of such coins does not prove that the basilica was in use at the time of the burial, although it could have been used for a short period after the Arab invasions.

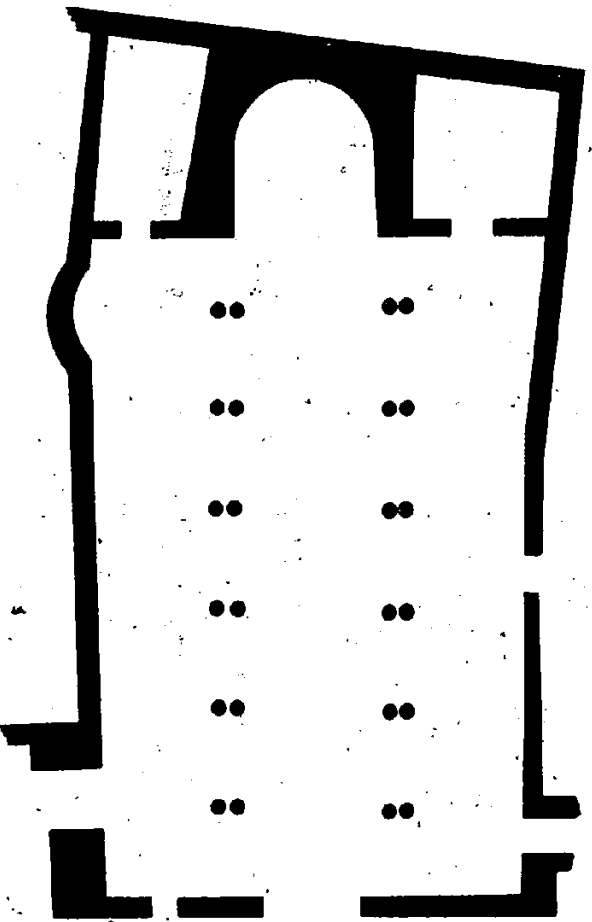
It is not certain when the second smaller basilica was built. Basilica II reflects many of the Phase III elements of the main basilica, suggesting, but by no means proving, that it is contemporary to, or postdates, Phase III of the main basilica.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Hanoune, R., Recherches archéologiques franco-tunisiennes à Bulla Regia: les Mosaïques I, Ecole Française de Rome, 1980.
- 2) The original excavations were published by M.P. Quoniam in an article entitled, "Fouilles récentes à Bulla Regia", CRAL, J 952 p. 460-476.
- 3) These are internal measurements. See Duval Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, Paris 1973, p. 43.
- 4) Duval, "Le dossier du groupe épiscopal de Bulla Regia", BSAE, 1970, p. 227 and 228 fig. 5.
- 5) See Sacristies, p. 121-123.
- 6) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 216.
- 7) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 216.
- 8) See Sacristies, Phase III.
- 9) The length today is somewhat shorter due to the thickening of the eastern wall.
- 10) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 208, fig. 1.
- 11) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 227, fig. 5.
- 12) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 208, fig. 1.
- 13) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 216.
- 14) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 227-228.
- 15) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 228.
- 16) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 216.
- 17) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 216.
- 18) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 216-7.
- 19) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 224.
- 20) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 217-218 and p. 228.
- 21) One of the clearest illustrations of the mosaics dates to the 1955 excavations by P. Quoniam. Duval has reproduced the illustration in op. cit. 1970, pl. XVII.
- 22) The birds included rustlers, hens, ducks, a goose, a partridge, and what appears to be a swan. See Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 218.
- 23) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 209, pl. XVII.

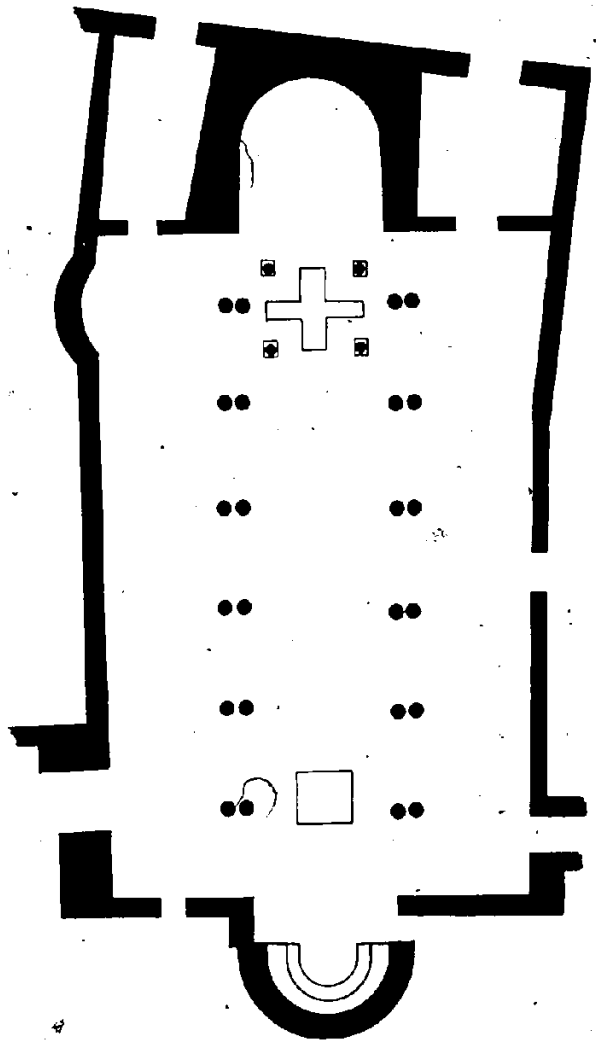
- 24) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 220.
- 25) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 222.
- 26) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 208, fig. 1.
- 27) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 208, fig. 1.
- 28) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 222.
- 29) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 222.
- 30) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 208 fig. 1.
- 31) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 214.
- 32) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 227, fig. 5.
- 33) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 215.
- 34) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 227, fig. 5.
- 35) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 214.
- 36) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 214-15.
- 37) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 215.
- 38) This is clearly evident to anyone standing inside the ruins of the basilica.
- 39) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 220.
- 40) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 220.
- 41) Duval, Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, p. 48.
- 42) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 220.
- 43) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 220.
- 44) Duval, Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, p. 47, fig. 22 as well as Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 222, fig. 4.
- 45) Duval, Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, p. 46.
- 46) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 222.
- 47) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 223, fig. 4.
- 48) P.O. Lapeyre, "Les basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie", Atti del IV Congresso Internazionale d'Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano, 1938, p. 204-205; P. Gauckler, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie, Paris 1913, p. 20 pl. XVIII; Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 225.
- 49) Duval, op. cit. 1970, p. 228.
- 50) Duval, Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, p. 47.

- 51) Duval, op. cit., 1970, p. 221.
- 52) Duval, Les basiliques de Sbeitla, p. 214 fig. 235.
- 53) Duval, Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, p. 47.
- 54) This small basilica has never been the subject of a detailed study. It is briefly reviewed by Duval in op. cit., 1970; p. 229-34, as well as in Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, p. 49.
- 55) Duval, op. cit., 1970, p. 229.
- 56) Duval, op. cit., 1970, p. 233.
- 57) Duval, Les églises africaines à deux absides, tome II, p. 49.
- 58) Duval, op. cit., 1970, p. 232-233 The only other known example of a similar apse in Tunisia, is in the main basilica of the Bulla Regia complex.
- 59) Duval, op. cit., 1970, p. 233.
- 60) Duval, op. cit., 1970, p. 228.
- 61) Duval, op. cit., 1970, p. 227, fig. 5 and 228.

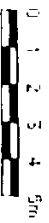


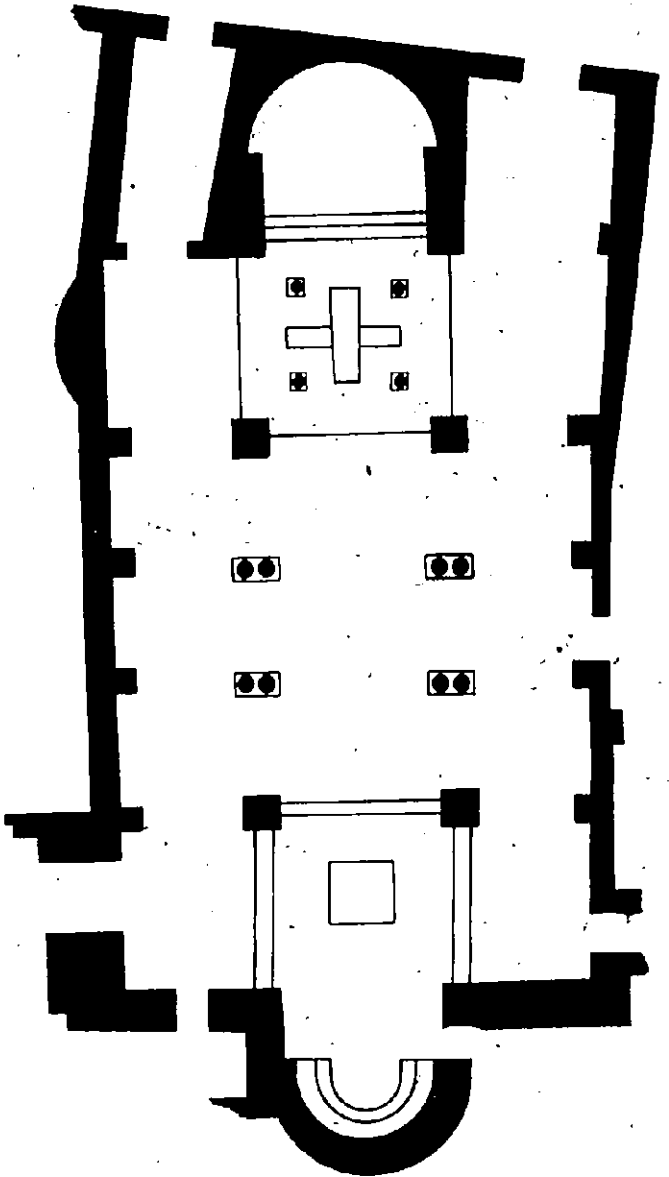
The Basilica of Bulla Regia
Phase I Plan





The Basilica of Bullia Regia
Phase II Plan





The Basilica of Bultha Regia
Phase III Plan





Fig. 1 Quadratum populi and western apse.

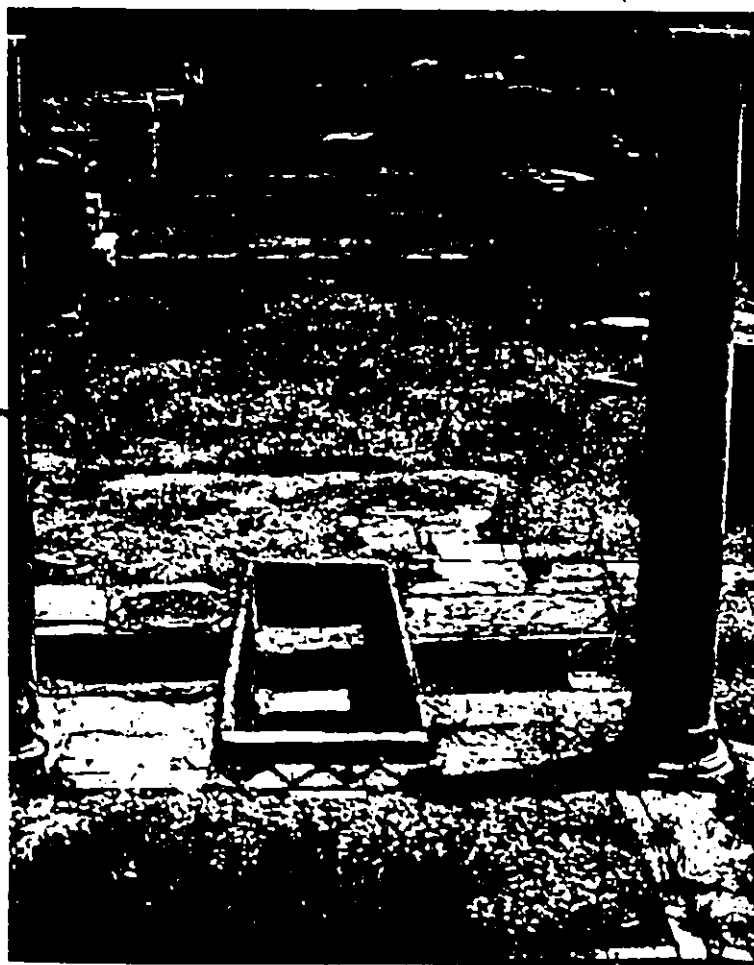


Fig. 2 Quadratum populi: view towards the eastern apse.



Fig. 3 Phase II door in northwestern sacristy.

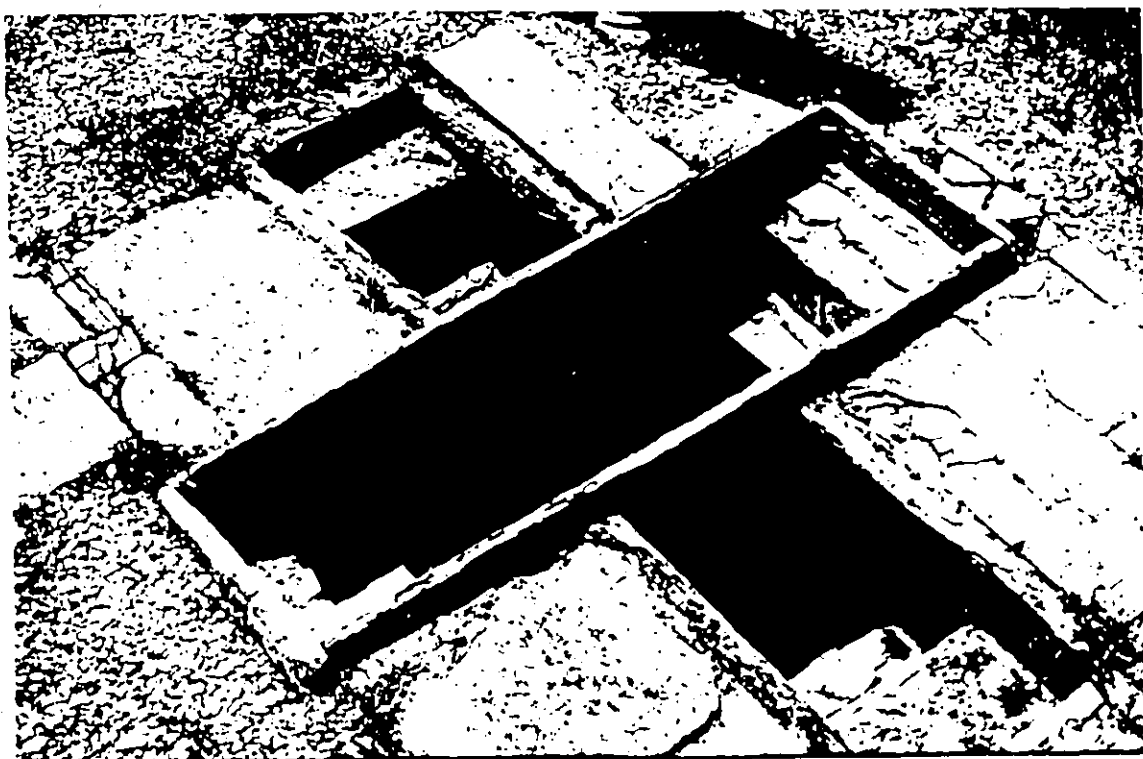
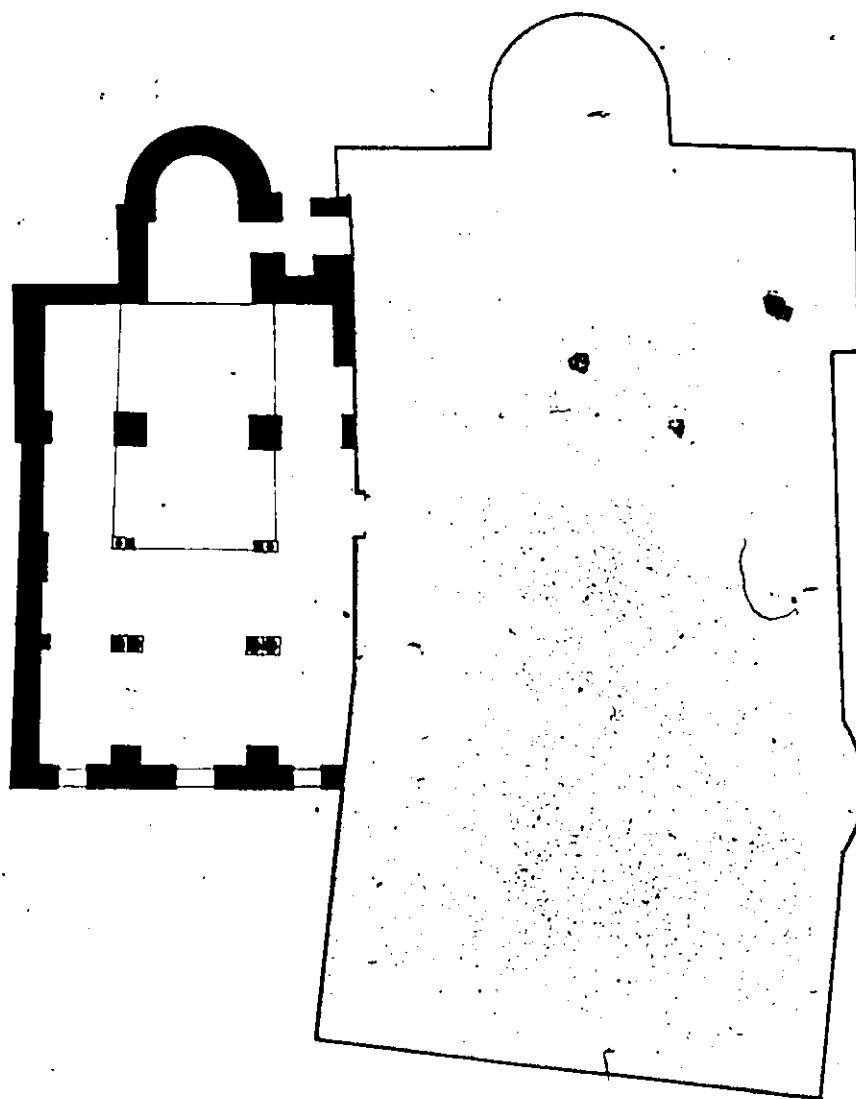


Fig. 4 Baptismal font.



Relation of secondary basilica to the main basilica of Bulla Regia.



CHAPTER VI. THE BASILICA OF DERMESH

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The basilica of Dermesh is part of a religious complex discovered by P. Gauckler during his explorations of the Punic necropolis at Dermesh, a neighbourhood of Carthage, during the late 1890's¹. Commonly referred to as Dermesh I², the basilica is located in the insula between cardines XIII and XIV and decumani III and IV, only 100m west of the Antonine Baths. The neighbourhood of Dermesh appears to have been a predominantly Christian area, at least during later years. South of the basilica, but still in the same insula, are the remains of another smaller basilica, Dermesh II. Almost directly across cardo XIII from Dermesh I is a small building often referred to as a basilica³. Several other basilicas of varied dimensions were located in the surrounding insulas. Given the present state of publication, it has been impossible to establish a chronological sequence of their construction.

Trial trenches dug in and around the basilica indicate that the site was originally used as a Punic burial ground from as early as the eighth century B.C. until about 500 B.C. The site appears to have remained unoccupied until the construction of the Christian basilica nearly a millenium later. The grounds surrounding the basilica were used as a Christian cemetery⁴.

The basilica was apparently in an excellent state of preservation at the time of its discovery, as much of the building had been buried beneath several meters of earth⁵. Subsequent exposure to the elements has, however, resulted in considerable destruction.

THE BASILICA COMPLEX

The basilica of Dermesh I is part of a small religious complex which, in addition to the main basilica, has a baptistery, a small chapel, and several annex rooms. The whole complex forms a rectangle 40.00m long and 34.00m wide. The main basilica has a wide central nave with two side aisles on either side of it. The complex is oriented precisely east-west. The eastern end of the basilica is marked by a U-shaped apse.

THE ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

PHASE I

The ~~façade~~ of the basilica was built along the edge of cardo XIII. Although an entryway opposite the apse might be expected, especially as no trace of a second sanctuary was found, the west end of the basilica was completely closed to the street. The omission of an entry in the western wall appears to be the result of the ~~terrain~~ which sloped upwards towards the hills of Borj-Djedid and Sidi-Bou-Saïd⁶. Because of this slope the northern end of the ~~façade~~ was in part below the surface of cardo XIII (see Phase I plan, Plate XXXII).

The basilica was accessible through a large door about 3.00m wide⁷ in the third bay of the southern wall as well as through one of four entries in the northern wall of the quadratum populi. Two of these entries, (each 1.25m wide), lead from the baptistery into the first and third bays of the basilica's northern side aisle. The fourth and fifth bays are straddled by a 3.75m wide entryway that opens onto a small courtyard. The entire width of the eighth bay, (3.00m) opens onto a corridor that leads into the annex rooms.

PHASE II

There does not appear to have been any modification to the entryways during this period of the basilica's use.

THE QUADRATUM POPULI

Introductory Note

Several anomalies in the positioning of the walls and rooms at the eastern end of the basilica seem to indicate that the present form of the quadratum populi is not the original one. Due however to incomplete excavations at the eastern end of the basilica as well as the lack of adequate published material, it has not been possible to determine all of the original dimensions for the quadratum populi; (see Annex, rooms IV & V)

PHASE I

The quadratum populi must have had an over all length that was in the vicinity of 30.00m; it was divided by four colonnades into a broad central nave and four side aisles. The 8.80m wide central nave was separated from the inner side aisles by colonnades. Each colonnade had two large piers⁸ at its western end and at least seven pairs of double columns set on raised pedestals. The pair of double columns situated immediately west of the apse's open end (see Apse, Phase II) may also have been part of the original colonnade, bringing the total number of column pairs to at least eight (see Phase I plan, Plate XXXII). These columns divided the central nave and the two interior side aisles into at least nine and possibly ten bays, each c.3.00m long. Each exterior side aisle was separated from its neighbouring interior side aisle by two small piers at the western end and a minimum of seven single-columns, also set on pedestals. One might expect there to have been an eighth column level with the column pair which Gauckler's plan shows almost touching each butt of the apse wall (see Plate XXXIV) Published excavation reports are unclear on this section.

In all four colonnades the first pier was built against the western wall of the basilica and a second pier stood directly in front of it marking the start of a second bay. Although Gauckler suggests that these piers were the remains of a narthex⁹, there is little evidence to support this theory. There is no change in the mosaic pattern used for this area, nor did excavators mention any trace of barriers or walls that would have been used to separate such a

narthex from the quadratum populi. As there are few notes concerning the stratigraphy of the quadratum populi, it is impossible to determine when the piers were installed. It is clear from Gauckler's illustration that the mosaic border did not follow the contours of the piers. Still it remains difficult to determine whether the piers were 1) built above the mosaics of the quadratum populi, 2) cut into the mosaics of the quadratum populi, or 3) installed before mosaics were laid up against them.

The individual columns and column pairs were all reused material taken from a variety of earlier monuments. The column shafts were either smooth or cut with spiral fluting; they had been cut from granite and basalt as well as from red, white, pink, and black marbles¹⁰. Like the column shafts, the bases had all been taken from earlier monuments. The excavation reports do not specify whether the bases were of equally diverse provenance. The heights of the pedestals varied in order to compensate for the difference in the heights of the individual columns: the pedestals were probably custom made for the basilica. Along the nave a single pedestal was used for every column pair in order to assure the solidity of the support¹¹. The capitals were either Corinthian or Composite and had also been taken from earlier monuments¹². Above the capitals were abaci that appear to have been made for the basilica; the remains of a badly damaged abacus decorated with a simple byzantine cross were found in the quadratum populi¹³. Once again, in order to strengthen the support, a single abacus was used for each pair of columns along the central nave.

Along both the central and the side colonnades vertical grooves or mortises, (0.10-0.13m wide), had been cut into many of the column bases and pedestals. This has led some scholars to suggest that the quadratum populi had at some point been divided into a series of small compartments by light mobile barriers that could have been slipped in and out of the grooves¹⁴. The apparent complexity as well as the numerous inconsistencies in the layout of these cancel plaques has led some scholars to doubt the feasibility of such a system and to suggest that the grooves were cut into the column bases before they were used in the basilica¹⁵. If this were the case it would be difficult to explain why many of the pedestals, which appear to have been made specifically for use in the basilica, (in order to compensate for the irregular height of the columns), were also cut by mortises.

The mortises cut into the column bases and the pedestals are aligned in such a way that in the event that these grooves were cut to support a system of chancel barriers inside the basilica, the eastern half of the southern interior side aisle from the eastern end of the third bay onwards would have been divided into a series of rectangular stalls. Plaques would also have run on both the northern and southern sides of the nave, from the central colonnade to the chancel plaques that surrounded the sanctuary¹⁶.

Along the northern side of the nave, the first in the series of these plaques was set at the eastern end of the fourth bay; on the southern side, the first plaque was at the eastern end of the third bay. It would also have been possible to block off the eastern end of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth bays of the northern interior side aisle as well as the southern side of the eighth and ninth bays. The southern side of the eighth bay of the northern exterior side aisle could also have been blocked.

The entire quadratum populi floor was paved with mosaics. All four side aisles as well as much of the central nave were covered by the same geometric motif. The motif used for the quadratum populi's floors consisted essentially of a series of neatly aligned squares with decorated centers. A simple band of geometric motif ran along the edge of the quadratum populi to form a narrow mosaic border. This border does not follow the contours of the two rooms that were built at the eastern end of the northern and southern exterior side aisles. Nor does this mosaic border follow the contours of the piers at the western end of the basilica.

The quadratum populi walls were carefully built with neatly cut blocks of stone and reinforced at the time of construction with large blocks in opus africanum. These walls were c. 0.50m thick. According to Gauckler, who studied the building before it suffered considerable deterioration from exposure to the elements, the stone work of the basilica was not meant to be seen. The exterior faces of the quadratum populi's walls were entirely covered with a uniform layer of parqueting. Plaques of marble and porphyry as well as painted plaster and stucco moldings covered the interior face of the walls¹⁷.

THE EASTERN APSE

PHASE I

As stated in the introductory note preceding Phase I of the quadratum populi, it appears that the present form of the eastern end of the basilica is not the original form. Due to incomplete excavation notes it has not been possible to determine what form the eastern end of the basilica might originally have had. It is fairly certain however that the apse now visible at the eastern end of the basilica was not part of the original construction.

PHASE II

At some point a large U-shaped apse was built at the east end of the central nave. The apse was freestanding with both the interior and the exterior of the wall following the same curve¹⁸. The apse was over 1.00m thick and was reinforced during construction by six large chains of opus africanum blocks (see Phase II plan, Plate XXXIII). These blocks were placed at regular intervals and protrude slightly from the exterior face of the apse wall and appear on the ground plan as shallow buttresses¹⁹. This projection of the blocks is unusual in North African basilicas.

Inside, the apse has an opening 8.80m wide and is nearly 6.00m deep. To either side of the opening is a pair of double columns. These column pairs were aligned with the column pairs of the central colonnades, and could possibly be part of the original colonnade. Although the floor of the apse has not survived, a retaining wall at the opening of the apse indicates that the apse floor would have been raised about 0.25m above the Phase I floor of the quadratum populi, and 0.15m above the floor of the Phase II sanctuary²⁰. Traces of mortar found along the western face of this retaining wall indicate that the apse was preceded by a three step perron. Although the width of the apse was equal to the width of the central nave, the actual entryway was reduced to a 3.60m axial passage by a series of low barriers that ran from the eastern end of the Phase II

sanctuary.

Gauckler suggests that the apse originally housed an altar that was later replaced by a synthronos when the altar was moved to its final location in the Phase II sanctuary²¹. On the ground plan of the basilica provided by Gauckler himself, there is no indication of an altar in the apse. Gauckler has also neglected to include in his report any mention of archaeological evidence that would support this theory²². On either side of the opening of the apse is a large block of cut stone which Gauckler sees as the beginning of a synthronos. It should however be noted that no other blocks were found at any point along the interior edge of the apse wall: for this reason, Duval has suggested that the blocks may have been used as pedestals for columns supporting an arch at the opening of the apse²³. In a reconstruction of this apse by Vaultrin, there is an episcopal throne set at the closed end of the apse²⁴. As in the case of Gauckler's altar, there appears to be little archaeological evidence in support of this theory.

As excavations were never carried out east of the apse, it is impossible to determine the form of the chevet at any point of the basilica's history. Given the proximity of the apse to cardo XIV, it is not improbable that a flat wall ran immediately east of the apse along the western edge of the cardo. This proximity to cardo XIV does not exclude the possibility of an earlier apse that may, at least in part, have blocked the cardo. It is interesting to note that in Tunisia, the only other example of a basilica with an apse that is surrounded by the continuous mosaics of the side aisles, is the Phase IV apse at the northern end of the nave in the basilica of Bellator at Sbeitla. In the case of the Sbeitla basilica, careful excavations revealed that the apse had been built inside the central nave only after the collapse of an earlier apse that had stood at the end of the central nave, outside the quadratum apuli.

THE SACRISTIES

No traces of any sacristies were found to either side of the apse where the sacristies are traditionally located in North African basilicas. It is possible that the rooms I and II which are located at the eastern ends of the two exterior side aisles served as sanctuaries, at least during Phase II. There is, however, no evidence in the published reports that could confirm this hypothesis.

CULT AREAS: THE SANCTUARY

PHASE I

Although nothing has survived that can be attributed with certainty to the sanctuary of Phase I, it is highly improbable that a basilica would have been built that had none. The sanctuary floor that was visible at the time of excavation was raised only 0.10m above the mosaics of the quadratum populi. As a result of this very slight elevation, excavators originally believed these to be the mosaics of the original sanctuary. It was not until the deterioration of these sanctuary mosaics subsequent to excavation that it became apparent that the sanctuary mosaics found during the original excavations were from a later sanctuary. These mosaics had been placed above the original quadratum populi mosaics and clearly represent a later phase in the basilica's development.

PHASE II

During Phase II, a second and presumably larger sanctuary was installed inside the central nave. The central section of this sanctuary, (that which housed the altar), consisted of a large rectangular enclosure that occupied the entire length of the sixth and seventh bays and was 6.00m wide. At the western end of the sanctuary was a 3.00m wide axial opening that was extended westward to the western end of the fourth bay by a walkway of the same width. At the end of the fourth bay the walkway is reduced to a width of 1.10m and continued to the western end of the third bay (see Phase II plan, Plate XXXIII).

A series of low white marble chancel plaques surrounded the sanctuary and its walkways. Fragments of these plaques were found strewn about the nave and side aisles of the basilica²⁵. Although no chancel plaque has survived intact, a number of the white marble bases from the posts that supported them were found *in situ* at the time of excavations. Mortises cut into the bases indicate that the posts were generally rectangular, though they varied slightly in size²⁶. A single marble chancel post was found intact. The post was almost square, (c. 0.16m along the sides), and stands 1.08m high including the small round knob at the top²⁷. A 0.04m

wide rabbet had been cut into the column from the base to the knob. There were some inconsistencies in the placement of the chancel posts around the central area: some were set on the same level as the mosaics of the quadratum populi²⁸, while the rest were on the new raised floor level. Although it is not impossible that the posts survive in situ from the Phase I sanctuary, it is equally possible that the posts represent a later repair to the chancel rails of the Phase II sanctuary. All the bases of the posts that were set along the edges of the corridor that ran westward from the sanctuary, were set on a raised floor.

In the middle of the seventh bay an altar was centered above a reliquary. Both the altar and the reliquary had already disappeared by the time of the excavations, however the 0.60m deep cavity into which the reliquary had been set was clearly evident. The sides of this cavity formed a neat square 0.75m wide²⁹. A single base (since lost) for one foot of the altar table survived *in situ*. Traces from the mortar that would have held the other three feet in position indicate that the rectangular altar table would have covered an area 2.20m long and 1.20m wide³⁰. The altar was covered by a ciborium, supported on four columns cut from pink Chemtou marble³¹. The bases of these columns had, like those of the colonnades, been set on raised pedestals. The sides of the pedestals were decorated with incised Byzantine crosses set inside circles³². The floors of the Phase II sanctuary were completely covered by mosaics. The same design was used for the whole walkway as well as for the western extension. This design consisted essentially of a simple geometric motif: neat rows of tiny squares.

Immediately east of the sanctuary a rectangular mosaic pavement occupied the entire length of the eighth bay. The pavement, identical to the pavement used inside the sanctuary, was 5.00m wide and bordered by a narrow band of geometric motifs. As in the sanctuary, the floor level was raised 0.10m above the level of the quadratum populi floors. No chancel plaques surrounded the pavement in the eighth bay. A walkway 3.60m wide, extends the pavement towards the apse. The floor of this eastern walkway was also raised to the same floor level as the sanctuary floor. Barriers stood along the northern and southern sides of the walkway. A stone base was found *in situ* at the southwestern corner of the eastern walkway. In the center of the base was a rectangular mortise (0.155 X 0.175m). The side of the base that faced the apse was cut by a rabbet 0.05m wide³³.

SECONDARY STRUCTURES

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Along the Northern side of the basilica are a series of rooms including a baptistery and a small chapel that form an integral part of the basilica complex. Collectively these rooms form a rectangular annex 12.50m wide and 34.00m long. The only irregularity is at the south-eastern end of the annex near the apse, where the southern corner of Room 4 juts 2.50m into the quadratum populi (see Plate XXXIV).

The series of small rooms immediately east of the chapel and the adjacent courtyard are barely mentioned in Gauckler's excavation reports and have yet to be the subject of a detailed study. Of the published documents that make reference to these rooms, the most informative material is contained in two ground plans of the basilica complex. The first plan, was drawn in 1899 during the original-excavations by Gauckler and his architect Sadoux³⁴. This plan, (see Plate XXXIV), indicates that many of the annex rooms were irregularly shaped; some also contained broad flat niches 1.75 to 2.50m wide. The floors of these rooms were paved with a far more ambitious range of mosaic patterns than had been used in the main basilica or the baptistery. The second plan, published in 1933 by Vaultrin, was a slightly modified edition of Gauckler's 1899 plan³⁵. Vaultrin included with her ground plan a cross section of the floor level of the annex rooms indicating that the level of the floors varied from room to room. Unfortunately a scale was not included with the ground plan and it is impossible to determine what the difference between the various floor levels would have been.

Due to the lack of adequate published material these rooms will not be divided into phases

THE BAPTISTERY

At the west end of the annex was a baptistery. The baptistery was accessible from the north by way of a small door set 5.50m in from cardo XII and the western facade of the basilica. The wall at the western end of the baptistery is a continuation of the wall that forms the western facade of the basilica. The western end of the basilica's northern quadratum populi wall was common with the southern wall of the baptistery. Inside, the baptistery is 12.50m wide and 10.25m long. Two small doors in its southern wall led into the first and third walls of the basilica³⁶. The northern end of the eastern wall opens onto a small chapel.

In the center of the baptistery is a sunken baptising font. The font was hexagonal at ground level. Two sides of the hexagon were cut by stairways, each with three steps that led to a second lower level in which a circular basin had been built. The entire font had originally been revetted with white marble³⁷. Above the font was a baldaquin supported by four columns of pink Chemtou marble³⁸. According to Gauckler, a cistern, (which has not been included on any plan of the basilica), cut into a Punic burial chamber located just outside the walls of the annex, provided the baptismal font with water. How the water was actually channeled to the font is not clear. Drainage was by way of a small channel that ran into a small reservoir covered by a disc, just inside the northern wall.

A 6.50m square area in the center part of the baptistery was surrounded by a square colonnade set on a continuous stylobate. Each side had four columns which Duval believes allowed the part of the roof that covered the font to be raised above the rest of the baptistery. The floor of the baptistery in the area that lay between the hexagonal font and the square colonnade was covered by four mosaic panels. Although simple geometric designs were used throughout, each panel had a separate motif. A single mosaic motif was used to cover the floor between the stylobate of the colonnade and the walls of the baptistery³⁹. The motif was composed of geometric decoration, variegated hexagons, birds and flowers⁴⁰. A narrow band of geometric design ran along the walls of the room.

In the south wall of the baptistery, between the two doors that led into the basilica, was a broad flat niche, almost 2.00m long and 0.35m deep, (the wall was 0.50m thick at this point)⁴¹. The floor inside the niche was covered with geometric mosaic in the form of a Greek key. At the time of excavation the plaster covered walls of the baptistery were still preserved to a height of three to four meters⁴². Dauckler's often quoted description of the now lost plasters provide a rare and valuable insight into the iconography used in North African basilicas.

"Les murs étaient recouverts d'un enduit blanc orné de pelles, de rosaces, d'entrelacs aux vives couleurs et de palmiers mystiques chargés de régimes se détachant en relief comme des pilastres de plâtre découpé. Tandis que sur la corniche de couronnement se succédaient des croix byzantines dorées, alternant avec les rameaux d'acanthus spinosus." ⁴³

THE CHAPEL

The northeastern corner of the baptistery opened onto a small chapel. This chapel was 12.50m long and 7.20m wide, with a small apse and two sacristies at its eastern end. has been described by Duval as "*une petite église en miniature à trois nefs*"⁴⁵ by P.G. Lapyere as "*une réduction de la basilique*"⁴⁶, while Jürgen Christern mentions that "*Der Altar befindet sich im Mittelschiff*"⁴⁷. All these descriptions seem to imply that the chapel was a proper basilica, albeit a rather small one. A closer examination of the chapel, however, indicates that it was little more than a rectangular room arranged to have some resemblance to a small basilica. The chapel was originally thought to have been divided into a central nave (3.20m wide) and two side aisles (each 2.00m wide) by a file of four columns on either side of the so called "nave". These columns, however, do not seem to constitute a true colonnade. Firstly, there is no apparent consistency in the lengths of the "bays" created by these columns; the first and fourth "bays" are each 2.50m long, the second was 3.00m long, while the third measured only 1.50m. The western ends of the first and second "bays" were also marked by pilasters that were built against the lateral walls of the chapel. This is not the case with the third and fourth bays. It is possible that the two sets of columns that mark the western end of the first and second bays, along with their corresponding pilasters, served to form a narthex or small entryway. There was no wall at the western end of the chapel, only the two piers at the western end of the first bay and a pair of columns set 1.25m to either side of the chapel's longitudinal axis at the entry point. The piers and columns could have been used to support an arcade that would have marked the entrance into the chapel.

At the eastern end of the third bay of the central aisle was a large rectangular cavity, (1.00m X 0.75m wide. This cavity was probably intended to hold a reliquary⁴⁸. In North Africa the altar was frequently set above a reliquary. The second two sets of columns may have been used to support a baldachin above the altar, although it is difficult to be certain as only traces of the mortar that held their bases in place have survived.

The central aisle is divided into two distinct zones by its mosaic. The western half of the aisle was covered by a very ornate pavement and surrounded by a narrow geometric border.

These mosaics stop immediately west of the third bay or sanctuary area where, with the exception a small rectangular frame 3.20m wide 1.00m long and 0.10m thick, in the fourth bay, there are no mosaics.

The entire length of the northern and southern side aisles was paved with a uniform geometric design. The design consisted of a shell-like motif placed alternately right side up and upside down, to produce a wave-like pattern. A narrow geometric band ran around the edge of each pavement and separated the side aisles from the central nave.

Immediately east of the fourth bay is a small semi-circular apse, flanked to the north and south by small sacristies. Although the side walls of the apse were freestanding, the closed eastern end was partially engaged in the flat wall that runs north-south and also forms the eastern extremities of the two sacristies. Inside, the opening of the apse was the same width as the central aisle. The opening was marked to the north and south by single columns. These columns were not aligned with the files of four columns found along the edge of the central nave but were both set just inside of the corresponding side aisles. There was no trace of any barrier that would have restricted entry into the apse. The curved interior face of the apse wall was lined with a synthronos. The floor was richly decorated by a mosaic pavement with birds and vegetal motifs. Vaultrin has suggested that the rectangular mosaic frame, (0.50m wide X 0.57m long), at the eastern end of the apse may indicate a special space reserved for the installation of a bishop's chair⁴⁹.

The apse was flanked to the north and south by small sacristies. Each sacristy was accessible from the chapel by way of a 1.20m wide doorway, as well as from the annex rooms by passages of a similar width. The exterior walls of both sacristies were extensions of the chapel's lateral walls; the interior walls were formed by the curved walls of the apse.

Excavators have made no mention of the remains of roofing materials being found in the chapel. The chapel could, given its reduced size, have easily been covered by a tie beam truss covered with roof tiles supported on the lateral walls of the chapel.

THE REMAINING ANNEX ROOMS

The chapel was separated from the basilica by an open air courtyard. The courtyard ran the full length of the chapel, (12.50m), and was about 4.80m wide. It was accessible through a doorway 2.00m wide, in the chapel's southern exterior wall. A much larger passage, (c. 3.75m wide) opens onto the fourth and fifth bays of the main basilica's northern side aisle. A third passage, 2.00m wide, is located at the northern extremity of the courtyard's eastern wall. This passageway opens onto a corridor, 2.50m wide that runs immediately east of the courtyard and the chapel's southern sacristy. There is no wall at the southern end of this corridor, which leads directly into the eighth bay of the northern exterior side aisle of the main basilica, nor is there a wall at the northern end which leads into Room I. The floor of the courtyard was paved with flagstones. The floor of the passageway was covered by a mosaic pavement, little of which survives.

Room I

Room I is located immediately east of the apse and the north sacristy of the chapel. The room has an irregular shape with a maximum width of 4.50m and roughly the same maximum length. The floor was only partially paved by a geometric patterned mosaic that is surrounded by a geometric border. The shape of the mosaic does not conform to the shape of the room. In the northern wall of Room I there is a broad flat niche, 1.25m long. The south eastern corner of the room opens onto what appears to have been another open air courtyard, 1.75m wide and a maximum length of 5.75m. Along the northern edge of this courtyard was a rectangular pavement. It is difficult to determine from the illustrations provided in the report of Gauckler's excavations, whether there was a wall or partition separating the courtyard and the mosaic. Vaultrin, in her publication of the basilica, indicated that the mosaic pavement was raised above the level of the courtyard. This raised pavement, or room II, was 5.00m long and 2.50m wide. The mosaic was fairly ornate and was surrounded by a geometric border. Towards the western end of the northern wall there was a broad flat pilaster, 1.20m long. It is impossible to determine whether the pilaster was installed before or after the mosaic floor.

Room III

South of the second courtyard was Room III. Much of the northern wall of this room appears to have opened directly onto the secondary courtyard. A 2.20m opening in the northwest corner of the room leads onto the passageway that was paved with mosaics, while another 2.20m opening lead down into room IV. (It appears from Vultrin's illustrations that Room III was on the same level as the smaller courtyard). Room III was over 4.50m wide and had a maximum length of c.6.75m when measured from east to the west. With the exception of the floor of a broad flat niche located in the western wall of the room the floor was covered by a very ornate geometric mosaic that was surrounded by a wide geometric border. The niche itself was over 0.75m wide and 2.50m long⁵⁰. There is no indication as to whether the floor of the niche was on the same level as the mosaic floor of room III.

ROOM IV

Immediately south of Room III is Room IV which may have served as a sacristy. The room is 7.00m long and 4.50m wide, and was accessible from Room III as well as by way of a 3.50m passage in its southern wall that led into the ninth bay of the northern interior side aisle. The south western corner of this room stood immediately east of the eighth bay of the northern exterior side aisle and was built directly against the seventh column of the northern side colonnade. The mosaic border that frames much of the quadratum populi does not follow the contours of this room. Had Room IV been part of the original plan of the basilica, it would seem unlikely that the seventh column would have been installed, or that the border of the quadratum populi mosaics would not have followed the contours of the room. Inside, the floor was paved with mosaics. Though strictly geometric, the motif used was by far the most ornate in the entire basilica complex. The central portion of the mosaic was surrounded by a wide and very ornate geometric border. Along the eastern wall of Room IV there was a slight change in the mosaic

border. A mosaic design in the form of an elongated horse-shoe was centered on the room's longitudinal axis. Although the mosaic appears to have been meant to underline the importance of this area, it is not clear what the area was used for. In the northwestern corner of Room IV was a broad flat niche, 1.75m long and 1.00m deep. The mosaic border of the floor passes directly in front of the recess and no traces of any mosaics were found inside.

Room V

A fifth annex room was located just south of the apse. As only the northwestern corner of this room was excavated it has not been possible to determine the actual dimensions of Room V. Enough of the room was unearthed to indicate that its southern end was not aligned with the southern wall of the quadratum populi, but was located some undetermined distance further to the south. The seventh column of the southern exterior side aisle was incorporated into the fabric of Room V's western wall. If Room V was part of the basilica's original plan, it would seem very unlikely that the seventh column would have been installed in the wall that marks the eastern end of the southern interior side aisle. The room was accessible from the ninth bay of the southern interior side aisle through a passage c. 3.00m wide. The floor was paved with a geometric mosaic, the motif of which was considerably less ambitious than the mosaics of room IV. The mosaic border that runs around the edges of the quadratum populi does not follow the contours of this room.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the lack of epigraphic material⁵⁰ and stratigraphical records, the construction of the basilica at Dermesh can be dated with reasonable certitude to the sixth century. According to Gauckler, all surviving elements of construction and decoration pointed towards this relatively late date. The diversity of reused columns, bases, capitals etc, used in the construction of the basilica also favor a later date and seem to indicate that material from a considerable number of buildings (probably ruined ones) must have been available for recycling; furthermore, all architectural elements that were made specifically for the basilica had the heavy profiles that are so common to monuments of late antiquity⁵¹.

With the exception of its eastern end, where there appears to have been extensive reconstruction, the basilica does not seem to have had any major structural modifications. The manner in which the mosaics of the side aisles continue around the side of the apse, the lack of sacristies, in addition to the anomalies in the alignment of rooms IV and V, all point to a later alteration of the chevet area. Further exploration of the Dermesh basilica, previously unexcavated chevet area would be needed to provide conclusive evidence about its original form.

Phase II

At some point a second sanctuary was installed. This may have coincided with a relocation of the altar, or with transformations to the shape of the original sanctuary. Once again there is not enough evidence to clarify this. The alterations of the cult area do not appear to reflect any radical changes, such as a complete reorientation of the building which occurs in some North African basilicas, but rather a sort of fine tuning meant to accommodate minor changes in the ceremonies. According to Duval⁵², the final form of the sanctuary, with its extended walkways, reflects the typical plan of a Byzantine solea. Duval has also pointed out the strong parallels between the final sanctuary in the Basilica of Dermesh, and the later phase sanctuary at three basilicas in Sbeitla⁵³.

The form of the baptismal font and the style of the mosaics that surround it point to a date sometime in the mid sixth century. Chronologically, Duval situates the polygonal form of

the baptismal font between the simpler pre-Byzantine forms, (i.e. round or square fonts), and the later cruciform shape. At Carthage, similar hexagonal shapes were found at the Damous-el-Karita as well as at Bir Ffouha⁵⁴. Although these fonts were covered with mosaics instead of being revetted with marble plaques as the Dermesh font is, they are generally believed to date from the early to mid sixth century. The sunber colouring of the mosaics used in the quadratum populi of the basilica, fit well with a date sometime in the early or mid sixth century. The considerably more ornate mosaics that were found in some of the annex rooms can probably be attributed to a repaving as the level of the floor varies from room to room⁵⁵.

The basilica of Dermesh was probably destroyed in 698 when Carthage fell to invading Arab forces under the command of Hassan. Gauckler, who claims to have seen signs of violent destruction during his studies of the basilica⁵⁶, quotes a seventh century Arabian author, El Kairouani, as saying that Hassan destroyed Carthage from top to bottom and dispersed her inhabitants⁵⁷.

After the basilica's ruin by either violence or neglect, the building was eventually covered by earth. This covering afforded considerable protection for the mosaic floors and the remains of the decorated walls. Tragically, subsequent exposure to the elements after excavation has resulted in nearly total destruction of the basilica's walls as well as considerable deterioration to the mosaic floors.

FOOTNOTES

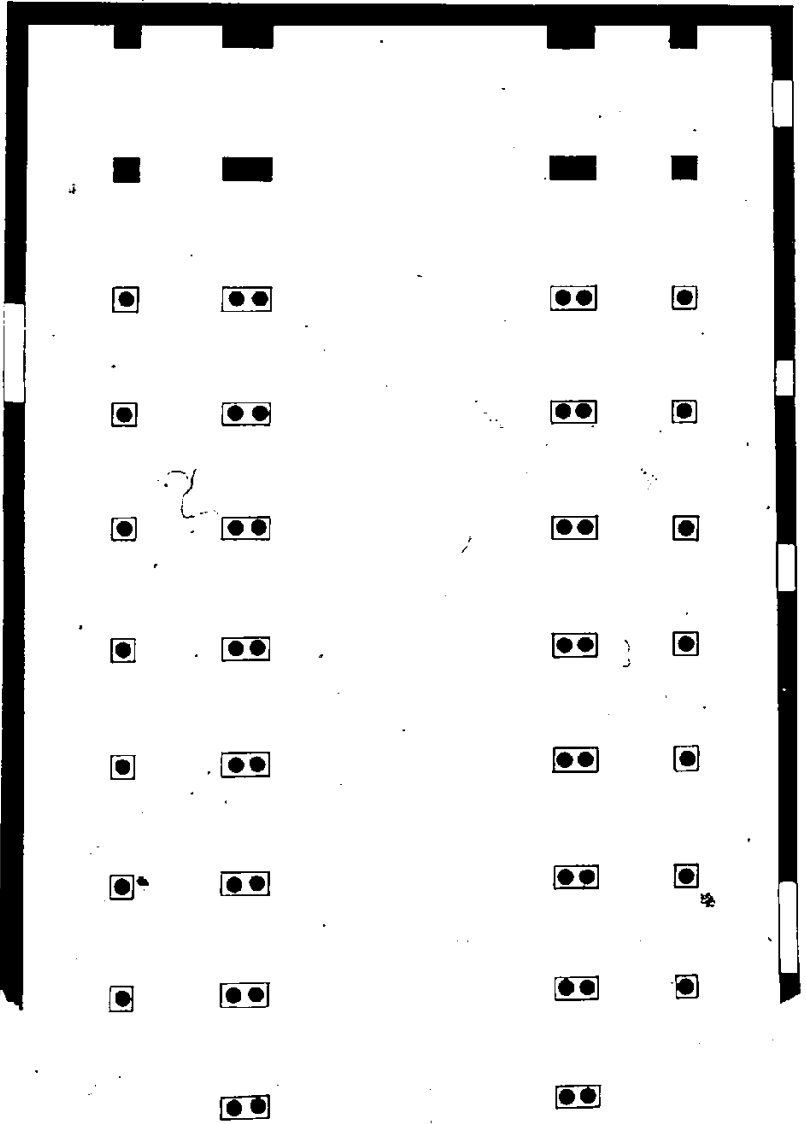
- 1) Gauckler, Les Basiliques Chrétiennes de Tunisie, p. 11.
- 2) The basilica takes its name from the neighbourhood of Carthage in which it is located.
- 3) This basilica has since been completely destroyed by Gauckler during his continued exploration of the Punic cemeteries: see Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1079. This structure was never properly studied and published reports tend to differ considerably concerning the exact location of the site.
- 4) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 11.
- 5) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 11-19.
- 6) It was only at the southern end of the basilica complex that the interior floor level was equal with the exterior ground level. At the time of the excavations the northwestern corner of the complex was preserved to a height of 3.00 to 4.00m.
- 7) The width is difficult to determine owing to the poor condition of the southern wall: see Gauckler, op. cit., pl. 1.
- 8) The dimensions of the piers used at the western end of the side colonnades, are equivalent to the dimensions of the stylobates used beneath the single columns. Likewise, the dimensions of the piers found at the western end of the nave correspond to the dimensions of the stylobates that were used to support the double columns.
- 9) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 13.
- 10) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 16.
- 11) Duval, "Etudes d'Architecture Chrétienne Nord-Africaine", MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1084, 1972.
- 12) Vaultrin, Les Basiliques Chrétiennes de Carthage, Alger, 1933, p. 115.
- 13) Gauckler, op. cit., pl. 1.
- 14) This has been suggested by both Gauckler op. cit. p. 14, and by Vaultrin op. cit. p. 116.
- 15) Duval maintains that some of these mortises may have been cut for uses in earlier buildings. He has also seen what he believes to be traces of ancient mortar blocking up these mortises, op. cit., p. 1087.
- 16) The inner column of the pair that marks the beginning of the fourth bay may also have

had mortises for a barrier that would have run across the central nave, as well as another barrier running to the columns that mark the start of the fifth bay.

- 17) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 12.
- 18) J. Christern claims that the outside wall of the apse has a seven sided polygonal surface, "*Die erhöhte Apsis, in der Breite des Mittelschiffes war innen halbrund, ausses siebenseitig polygonal ummantelt*", "Kartago", Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst, Stuttgart, 1978, p. 1166, (section IIb Kirchengeschichte). Christern appears to be the only scholar to hold this opinion, and offers no further explanation of his theories.
- 19) Duval believes these have a slight resemblance to the "lésènes", pilaster strips of certain churches in Ravenna, op. cit., p. 1089.
- 20) Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 115.
- 21) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 13.
- 22) In this region of North Africa, no basilicas have been found to date with the altar placed inside the apse.
- 23) Duval, op. cit., p. 1090.
- 24) Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 115.
- 25) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 14.
- 26) These posts measured: 0.16 X 0.17, 0.14 X 0.10, 0.14 X 0.12, etc. See Duval, op. cit., p. 1088 note #2.
- 27) This post has since been lost. An illustration of it appears in Gauckler's Basiliques Chrétiennes de Tunisie, pl. I.
- 28) Notes treating the stratigraphy of this basilica are practically nonexistent. It would however be fairly safe to assume that the original mosaics were set on a layer of cement. The illustrations provided by Gauckler, (see above, note 3), indicate that the bases from at least some of the columns that supported the chancel had been set on the same level as the original mosaics. The others were set on top of the mosaics.
- 29) Gauckler, op. cit., pl. I.
- 30) Duval, op. cit., p. 1088.
- 31) Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 116.
- 32) Gauckler, op. cit., pl. I and Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 116.

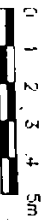
- 33) Duval, op. cit., p. 1089.
- 34) Gauckler, op. cit., pl. I.
- 35) Vaultrin, op. cit., pl. XVIII.
- 36) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 15.
- 37) Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 117.
- 38) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 15.
- 39) Duval, op. cit., p. 1091.
- 40) Another hexagonal baptismal font was discovered at Tabarka; it too had been revetted with white marble. See P.G. Lapeyre, "Les Basiliques Chrétiennes de Tunisie", Atti del IV Congresso Internazionale d'Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano, 1938, p. 206-207, and Duval, op. cit., p. 1090.
- 41) Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 117.
- 42) Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 117.
- 43) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 16.
- 44) This measurement includes the apse.
- 45) Duval, op. cit., p. 1091.
- 46) Lapeyre, op. cit., p. 203.
- 47) Christern, op. cit., p. 1167.
- 48) It should be noted that Gauckler's and Vaultrin's plans do not agree on this point. I believe Gauckler's plan to be the more accurate.
- 49) Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 118.
- 50) Of the few inscriptions found in the Dermesh complex, the majority were essentially "chrismes" for example  &  etc. The only text, "FIDELIS IN PACE", was on a stone with an opisthographic inscription. The reverse side was inscribed with a chrisme. See Vaultrin, op. cit., p. 119.
- 51) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 16.
- 52) Duval, op. cit., p. 1088.
- 53) See phase II of the Basilica of Bellator at Sbeitla, p. 17-18, phase I of the Basilica of Vitalis at Sbeitla, p. 46-47, as well as phase II of the Basilica of Servus. Duval, Les Eglises Africaines à Deux Absides, tome II, p. 347. There is strong archaeological evidence in support of a byzantine date for the sanctuaries of all three basilicas.

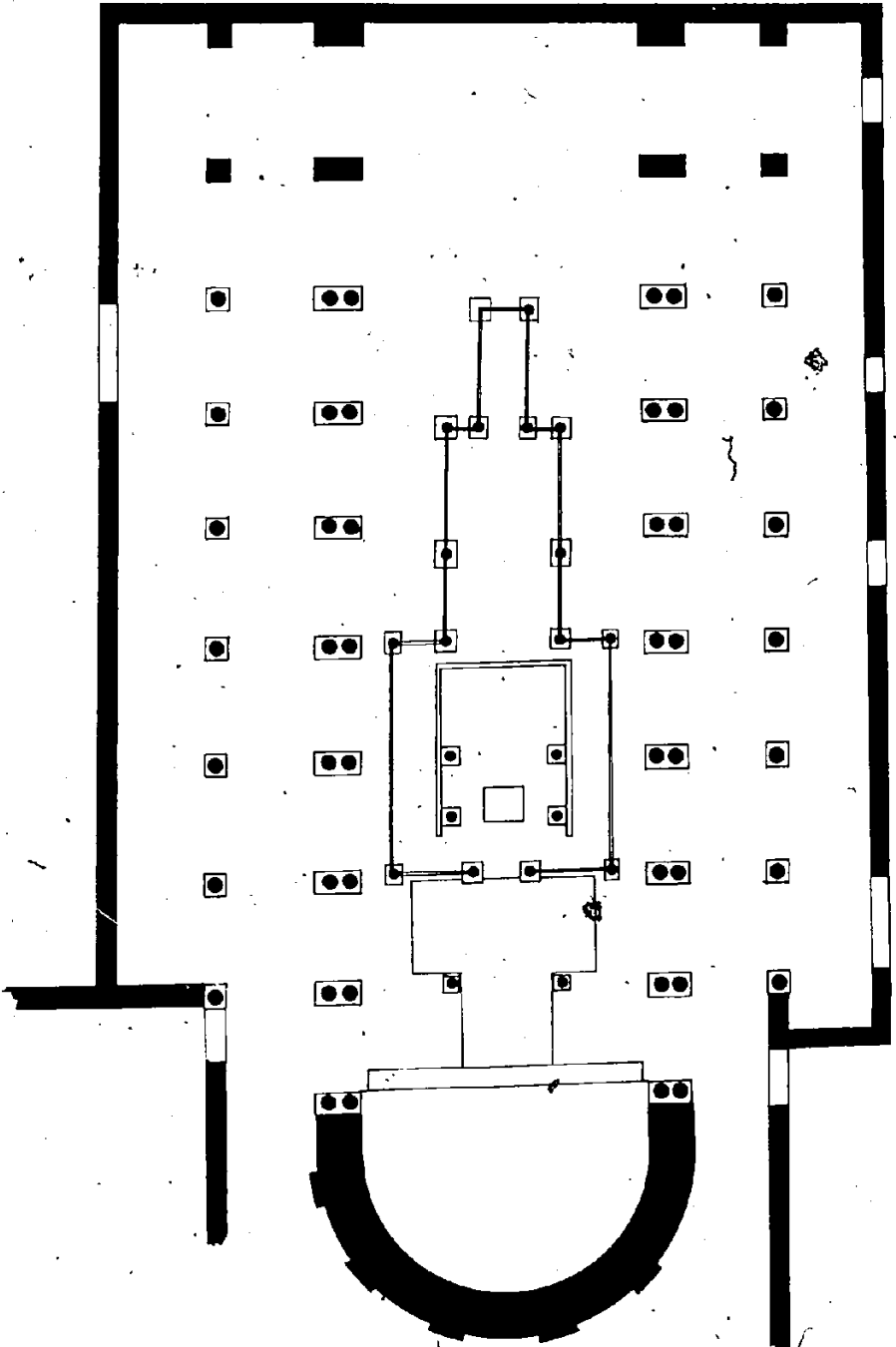
- 54) Duval, op. cit., p. 1090.
- 55) Vaultrin, op. cit., pl. XVIII.
- 56) Gauckler, op. cit., p. 17.
- 57) *"... elle a été saccagée par les arabes. Ce que fut cette destruction, l'état dans lequel j'ai retrouvé la basilique suffit à nous en donner une idée. Toutes les sculptures qui se trouvaient à portée de la main des envahisseurs furent brisées avec rage à coups de masse; une des bases, ornées de croix et du ciborium, était cassée en dix-huit morceaux. Les autels furent renversés, les reliquaires violés et dépouillés de leur contenu."* Gauckler, op. cit., p. 17.



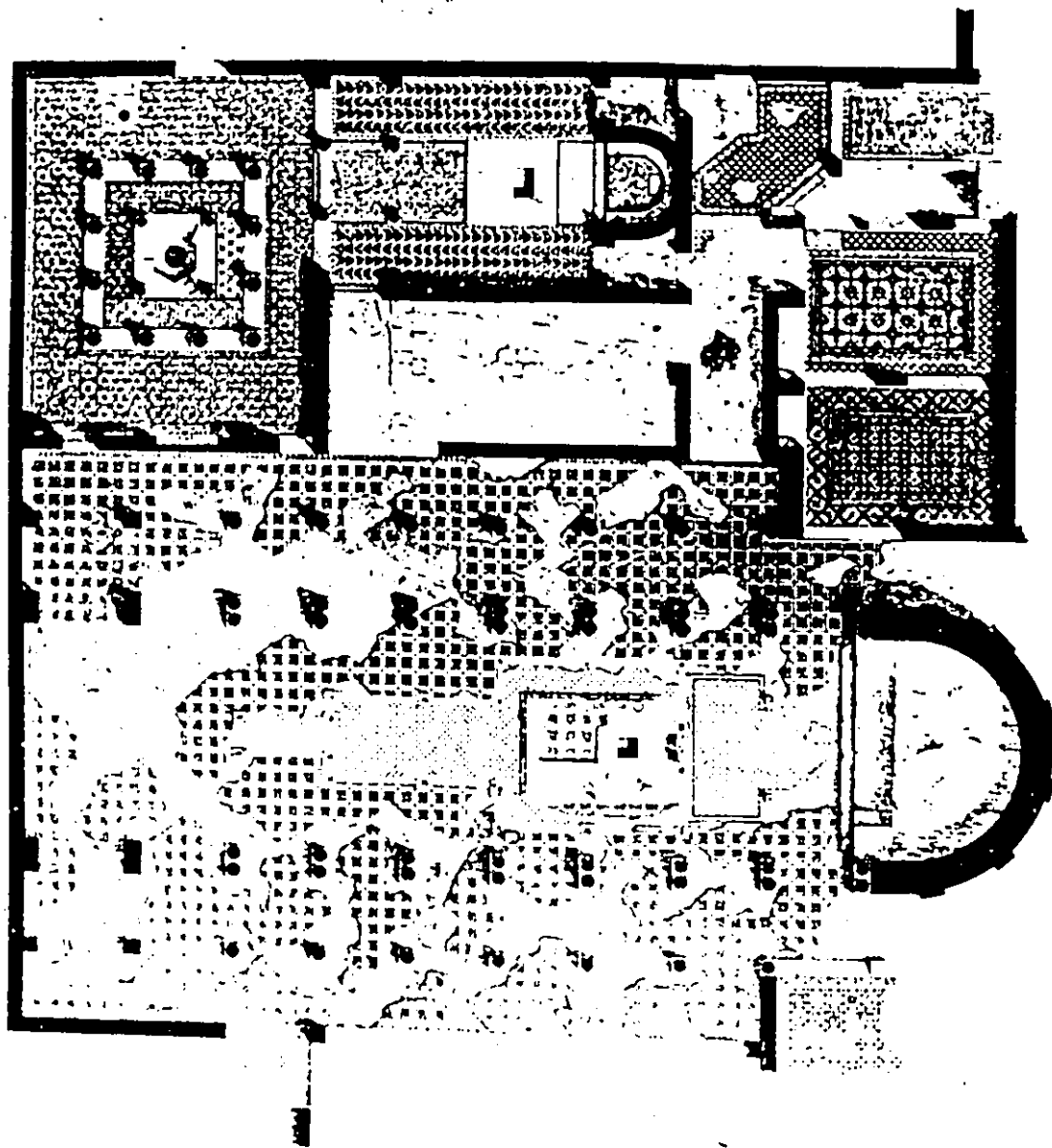
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The Basilica of Dermesh
Phase I Plan





The Basilica of Dermesh
Phase II Plan



Plan of the Basilica of Dermesh by Gauckler and Sadox.

CHAPTER VII. THE BASILICA OF MCIDEA

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Due to the poor conditions of the site and the lack of adequate excavation notes, it is not possible to date the original construction of the basilica. Nor is it possible to distinguish all the various phases in the history of this basilica, as it was for the basilicas in the earlier chapters. Despite the less than ideal conditions of the site and the poor methods of excavation, there is, nevertheless, enough surviving architectural and epigraphic material to confirm that this was a major Christian basilica on the outskirts of Carthage. On those grounds alone it merits investigation.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In 1833, A. Delattre discovered the scattered remains of a vast Christian basilica in the fields of the Mcidfa plateau that lie to the north of ancient Carthage. The basilica is located nearly a kilometer north of the walls that once marked the limits of Carthage, and almost due west of the present day Hamilcar station of the T-G-M commuter line. At the time of discovery little remained of the basilica itself. No other buildings were found in the neighbourhood of the basilica. It appears to have been surrounded by Christian burials; whether these burials predate the basilica or not is unclear.

Excavations began in June of 1906, under the direction of Delattre, and were continued over the course of the next two years. After excavation the trenches were backfilled. In 1929 the basilica was unearthed and certain previously unexcavated areas were explored. This second campaign of excavation and the restorations that accompanied them were conducted to enable the use of the basilica for certain open air ceremonies during the 1930 Congrès Eucharistique de Carthage.

Archaeological reports from the 1906-1908 campaigns reveal that the excavations were conducted with little or no regard for the stratigraphy¹. Excavation notes consisted

essentially of a vague inventory of interesting finds, visitors of note, and reports concerning the quantity of inscriptions found per work day². Delattre wrote little about the re-excavation of the basilica in 1929, although Vaultrin includes a resumé of these later excavations in the chapter dealing with the basilica at Mçidfa in her book, *Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage*³.

This basilica has sometimes been referred to as the "Basilica Majorum". The name has been used since March of 1907, when Delattre discovered a fragmented inscription mentioning the well known Carthaginian martyrs, Felicitas and Perpetua⁴. The actual inscription reads as follows:

//// SVNT MARTY ///
 •SATVRVS SATV/////
 •REBOCATVS SEC/////
 •FELICIT PERPETPAS/////
 //////////⁵

Influenced by a text of Victor Vitensis stating that the bodies of Felicitas and Perpetua were buried in a building known as the basilica Majorum: *Et ut necessariis loquar basilicam majorum, ubi corpora sanctarum martyrium Perpetuae atque Felicitatis sepulta sunt*⁶, Delattre has restored the inscription to read as follows:

•HIC SVNT MARTYRES
 •SATVRVS SATVRNINVS
 •REBOCATVS SECVNDVLVS
 •FELICIT PERPETPAS NONMART
 •MAIVLVS⁷

Although it is possible that the basilica in the Mçidfa plateau is that referred to by Victor de Vita, Delattre's addition of "HIC" at the beginning of the inscription tends to create an air of certainty and precision that the actual fragments of inscription do not adequately support.

THE BASILICA COMPLEX

The basilica complex at Mçidfa was over 100m long and over 50m wide at its widest point. The basilica itself is over 70m long including the single apse that was centered on its northern end (see Plate XXXV). A large walled courtyard preceded the basilica. Inside, six colonnades divide the basilica into a wide central nave and six side aisles⁸.

The longitudinal axis of the basilica runs North-North-West/ South-South-East. This orientation of the basilica conforms to neither the urban nor the rural cadastration of Carthage⁹.

ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

The southern extremity of the basilica was preceded by a large open air enclosure, 41.00m long and 51.00m wide¹⁰ (see Plate XXXV). Within the enclosure are the remains of several large funeral monuments, in addition to a multitude of simple burials, the majority of which were placed perpendicular to the central axis of the basilica¹¹.

There were no traces of any colonnaded galleries that would have indicated that the enclosure had been used as an atrium. Instead, on account of the numerous burials and funeral monuments, it appears that the courtyard preceding the basilica was in fact an area, or walled cemetery¹².

During the excavations of 1929, a semi-circular structure resembling a large apse was unearthed 22m in front of the basilica's southern façade. This structure, of which little more than the foundation walls survive, had an opening 22m wide and a maximum depth of 14m from the open northern end to the closed southern end of the structure. Originally excavators believed it to be an apse¹³. It should be noted however that, in addition to the problems raised by the considerable distance between this structure and the façade of the basilica, the actual dimensions of this so called apse create serious doubts about the feasibility of any roofing system, if it was in fact an apse. Inside there was no trace of columns or piers that would have supported a roof of any sort. The curved walls of the structure were only 1.00m thick and had not been reinforced, thus a vaulted roof, even in the form of a half dome, would have been impossible. Although this structure was aligned with the central axis of the basilica and not with the central axis of the area, (which was c.3.00m further east), there is no apparent physical link with the basilica. Traces of wall were found running east and west away from the opening of the structure towards the wall of the area. Duval has suggested that this semi-circular structure might be the remains of an earlier rounded atrium such as the one found preceding the Damous-el-Karita¹⁴. Further investigation would be needed to confirm this theory.

In the north eastern angle of the area was a large square cistern, (10.50m²). The cistern was built in part against the façade of the basilica. It was covered by a series of nine

groin vaults that were supported by four piers and by the corners of the cistern walls. The piers and walls were all at nearly 7.00m high. It is not clear what this cistern was used for as the basilica appears to have had neither a baptistery, nor adjoining living quarters for the clergy. There was a second, much smaller cistern located in the western half of the area just north of the western edge of the large semi-circular structure mentioned above¹⁵.

A funeral exedra was built along the outer face of the area's northern wall. The exedra took the form of a semi-circular apse, with a width of 7.00m along the northern wall of the area and a maximum depth of 4.72m. Three sarcophagi, burials of two adults and one child, were found inside the exedra. The adults were buried beneath a rectangular stone work platform, 2.30m wide and 1.30m long, that may have been used as an altar base. It is not uncommon to find small altars set above tombs in North Africa, especially over the burial of a wealthy or venerated personage. In this instance the tomb appears to be of a wealthy person as one of the skeletons was found shrouded in the remains of gold cloth. Other finds included lamps and bowls decorated with Christian symbols, glass vases, jewelry, stone weights, several sundials, a large bronze cross and an abundant collection of small coins. The majority of the coins, (Delattre does not specify exactly how many were found) predate the Vandal invasion, although at least one was found from the Byzantine period¹⁶.

No traces were found of an entry; one has been suggested in the restored southern wall

QUADRATUM POPULI

The quadratum populi is a rectangle 61.00m long and 45.00m wide. It was divided by colonnades into a broad central nave and six side aisles by colonnades (see Plate XXXV). Each of the six colonnades had twelve supports that divided the nave and neighbouring side aisles into thirteen bays each c. 4.70m long¹⁷.

The central nave is 16.00m wide and occupied over a third of the basilica's total width. It is flanked by a series of supports that were much sturdier than those used between the side aisles. The fifth and eighth sets of supports were noticeably larger than the other supports that were used along the central nave, and appear on Delattre's ground plan as four massive piers. Centered in the middle of the rectangle formed by these piers was a martyrium. The piers may have been used to support a small groin vault or cupola above the martyrium¹⁸.

It is impossible to determine whether the colonnades were made up of columns, piers or a mixture of both. The only ground plan of the basilica dating to the time of the excavations used rectangles to indicate the positioning of all the supports, with the sole exception of two small colonnades set inside the nave itself, (see below). This does not necessarily indicate that piers were used instead of columns, but possibly that only the pedestal bases or plinths survived *in situ*¹⁹.

During the course of his excavations, Delattre observed that much of the soil inside the basilica was mixed with a pale greyish powder that contrasted with the distinctive red clay soil of the Mqidfa plateau. It is possible that this may be the result of deteriorating plaster that once covered the walls of the basilica²⁰. A variety of architectural remains: column drums, bases, capitals, stone cubes with mortises cut into them, chancel plaques and bricks were also found, but Delattre failed to mention the quantity or location of the items found, stating simply that many had been taken from earlier monuments²¹.

At some point a small columnade was installed inside the central nave, 4.00m to either side of the basilica's central axis. The bases of the individual columns were considerably smaller

that those from the colonnades on either side of the nave. As the columns of this colonnade are aligned with the other columns of the other colonnades in the basilica, scholars maintain that these two files of columns represent the true limits of the central nave and that the basilica was in fact a nine nave structure. Although the eight meter wide corridor that ran between these two colonnades may at one point have been the focal point of ceremonies and cult activities inside the basilica, certain aspects of the colonnades seem to indicate that they do not represent the original nave. First, at Mqিদfa the apse is nearly eight meters wider than the area between the two small colonnades, a difference not to be expected if this colonnade represents the true limits of the original nave. In the majority of North African basilicas the width of the central nave corresponds roughly to the maximum width of the original apse. Secondly, when colonnades of varying strengths were used, the strongest were always placed along the edges of the nave. In the basilica of Mqিদfa, the strongest colonnades are aligned with the eastern and western edges of the northern apse and probably represent the true limits of the nave. Some scholars have suggested that these smaller columns were installed during a second phase to reinforce the roof¹⁷, although given the great width of the nave, it is difficult to envisage what type of structural support such fragile columns would have provided. From the excavation notes as published, it would seem most probable that these smaller columns were installed to underline the importance of the area surrounding the martyrion, and may have supported an iconostasis.

The ground beneath the quadratum populi contained many burials, the majority of which were set parallel to the central axis of the basilica. The funeral inscriptions from these burials varied considerably in formula and decoration. Inscriptions were found in both Greek and Latin, and covered a wide range of time from the middle of the third century to the advanced Byzantine period²³. As Delattre failed to record in what aisles the various inscriptions were found, it is impossible to determine whether there was any pattern to the location of the graves. He did observe however, that unlike the burials in the side aisles, which were covered with stone, all those in the central nave were covered by mosaics. In the sixth bay of the side aisle immediately west of the central nave was a rectangular pit 1,80m x 1,60m wide. The pit was lined with masonry and conserved the same dimensions for a depth of well over 30m, where it encounters the water table. The pit was filled with the remains of hundreds of human skeletons. Mixed in with the human bones were the fragmented remains of hundreds of Christian epitaphs.

Most of the earlier inscriptions, written in either latin or greek, were found around the 30m level. One of these epitaphs, found at a depth of 32,50m reads, **PERPETVE**  **FILIE DVLCISSIMAE**. Owing to the quality and small size of the letters, (2.8cm high) Delattre thought the inscription might be the original tombstone of the martyr Perpetua, provided by her pagan father at the time of her death in 203. The inscription has since been attributed to the early fourth century by Ennabli²⁴. At the time of the excavations many of these mosaics were in a very fragmentary condition and little record was kept of their iconographic schemes. A single photograph of the nave mosaics, provided in Delattre's 1907 report, shows three separate burials covered by one mosaic pavement. The pavement was divided into three parts by narrow bands of different coloured tesserae. The names of each of the deceased was inscribed in a circle. Beside two of the circles were small birds²⁵. The funeral inscription of the third tomb was flanked by two peacocks standing on branches. It is interesting to note that the birds are upside down in relation to the text of the epitaphs, a good indication that the mosaicists were illiterate.

Excavators make no mention of any roofing material being found either in or around the basilica. Given the great width of this basilica, a tile and tie beam truss roof appears to be the most feasible solution.

CULT AREAS

CULT AREAS: THE NORTHERN APSE

Little more than the fragmentary sections of foundation wall survived from the vast apse that once stood at the northern extremity of the central nave. Scanty excavation notes do little to elucidate the nature of the surviving material, although plans provided by the excavators indicate that the apse was free standing. There was no trace of a supporting frame and no indication that the curved walls had ever been reinforced with buttresses²⁶.

Inside, the open end of the apse was over 15.00m wide. The apse had a maximum depth of 11.00m (see Plate XXXV). Excavators do not mention any trace of a synthronon, nor do they mention whether it was possible to determine whether the floor of the apse had been raised above the level of the quadratum populi.

There is no record of any roofing material found among the ruins of the apse, although the thin walls could only have supported a wooden roof.

THE SANCTUARY

Excavations uncovered little evidence of a sanctuary. There was no trace of an altar or even an altar platform, only a few fragments of broken marble plaques possibly from a chancel plaques. A number of stone blocks with mortises cut into them were found scattered around the quadratum populi. These blocks may have been used to support chancel plaques.

THE MARTYRIUM

In the middle of the central nave where the altar is traditionally located, was a martyrrium (see Plate XXXV). Much more than the simple reliquary cavity often found beneath the altars of North African churches, the Mjridfa reliquary has the form of a small square funeral chapel, (3.60 X 3.70m). The martyrrium was built in the seventh bay of the nave, about 4.00m below the floor level. It was approached by way of two small stairways. The southern side of the martyrrium ended with a small apse, (this is opposite to the basilica which has its apse at the north). A square niche, 1.00m wide and 1.00m deep, marks the northern end. The floor of the martyrrium had been covered with mosaics but only two small sections survived in situ: a small portion with a cable pattern near the eastern side of the apse, and the remains of a peacock on the western side of the apse. Fragments of the mosaic pavement, including the remains of many inscriptions were found scattered about the martyrrium. Other finds included cut stone blocks, large field stones, Byzantine style capitals with broad flat leaves, sculpted pilasters on which traces of coloured plaster could still be seen. Both flat and curved roof tiles, bases from colonnettes, and fragments of inscriptions on stone were also found²⁷.

In the middle of the martyrrium were the remains of a two-story container, built of masonry. Inside, traces of white plaster were found still stuck to the walls of the structure. The contents were sieved by Delattre who found a great number of tiny round-headed nails, a small lock and a bronze bolt. Delattre suggests, that these items may have been from a small reliquary casket that would once have held the human hand and foot bones that were also found inside the masonry container²⁸. In addition to these finds the sieving also retrieved a great number of small mosaic cubes, a bronze nail, and amphora fragments²⁹.

Inside the apse of the martyrrium was a rectangular cavity lined with a fine yellow veined marble. In the eastern wall of the apse was a niche that enclosed a mosaic covered burial. Part of this multi coloured mosaic depicting a chalice was still intact at the time of the original excavations³⁰.

The martyrion was covered with groin vaults supported by four massive piers, one at each of the four angles, and by two intermediate piers, one in the middle of the eastern and the western walls. A photograph published by Delattre in 1907 shows the fragmented edges of the ruined vaults still partially covered with traces of white plaster. This photograph clearly demonstrates that the groin vaults were built with thick layers of field stone³¹.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the basilica of Mqিদfa was clearly a funeral basilica, in which the martyrium which is believed to contain the remains of Perpetua, Felicitus, Revocatus, Saturninus, Secundus and Saturus, occupied a position of great importance (the area normally reserved for the altar), it is highly unlikely that the basilica dates to the time of their deaths. Nor is it likely that the basilica was built within the few decades immediately following their deaths. All were executed in the amphitheater of Carthage on the seventh of March in 203, during the persecutions of Septimius Severus³². Given the attitudes held towards Christians at that time, it is improbable that such a conspicuous monument could have been built even on the outskirts of Carthage. Instead, some scholars have suggested that the family of the Vibii, (of which Perpetua was a member), may have purchased land outside of Carthage on which she, and several other family members (who, from their epitaphs, do not seem to have been Christians), were buried³³. Some time later, as the site became popular with pilgrims, a memoria was built on the site of Perpetua's tomb. Still later the basilica and its elaborate martyrium were built; there is however as yet no evidence that would enable scholars to determine whether the martyrium is contemporary to, or post dates the construction of the basilica itself, nor have any similar structures been found in any other Tunisian basilicas³⁴.

Although the poor state of preservation and the lack of adequate excavation notes have made it impossible to date the basilica of Mqিদfa with accuracy, the surviving material, including nearly 7,000 fragments of inscriptions,³⁵ has provided some interesting insights into the funeral practices of Christian Carthage.

FOOTNOTES.

- 1) Delattre, CRAI, 1906, p. 422-432; CRAI, 1907, p. 516-531; CRAI, 1908, p. 59-69.
- 2) Delattre, CRAI, 1906, p. 422.
- 3) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 81-100.
- 4) Upon his discovery of the martyrion in the spring of 1907, Delattre sent the following telegram to the Académie des Inscriptions;

"Suis heureux vous annoncer découvert en morceaux dans nos fouilles
de la pierre tombale des saintes Perpétue et Félicité. Malgré lacunes
on lit après mot martyrs les noms Saturus, Saturninus, Rebocatus,
Secundulus, Felicitas, Perpetua.-Delattre"

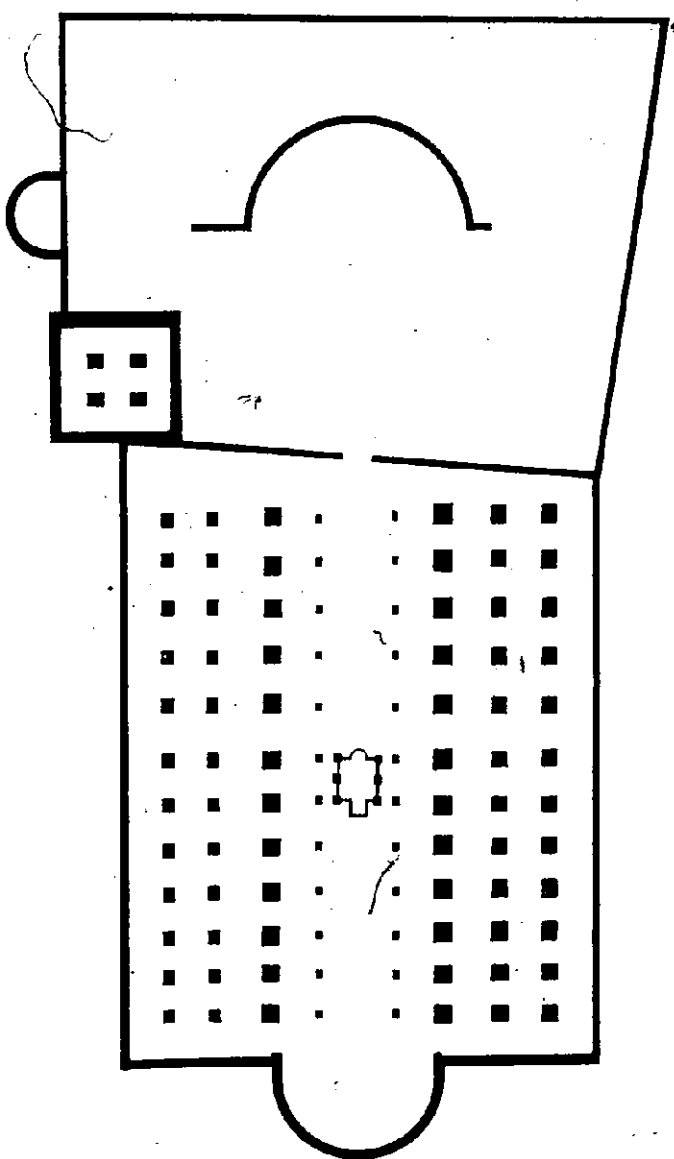
This telegram was dutifully published in CRAI, 1907, p. 176-177. It was followed however by the observation that in 1902, P. Gauckler found in Carthage, at a place known as the "Monastery of St. Étienne", a mosaic medallion with an inscription claiming that Sanc(tu)s Saturus and Sanc(tu)s Saturnius, were buried there, and that Gauckler had published his discovery in the 1903 edition of the Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, on p. 416.

- 5) CIL, VIII, no. 25038.
- 6) Victoris Episcopi Vitensis, Historia Persecutionis Africanæ Provinciae, I, III, 9.
- 7) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 176-177.
- 8) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 11 fig. 5.
- 9) Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 116.
- 10) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 82.
- 11) Delattre, CRAI, 1917, p. 509; Lapeyre, Carthage, p. 57; Leclercq, DACL, 11/1 p. 35, fig. 7860.
- 12) Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1117 fig. 19 and p. 1119.
- 13) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 83.
- 14) Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1119.
- 15) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 82; Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1117.
- 16) Delattre, CRAI, 1906, p. 442; Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 82; Leclercq, DACL, 11/1 p. 34 and DACL, 11 p. 22-33.
- 17) Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1117, fig. 19.

- 18) Delattre, CRAI, 1917, p. 509, fig. 2.
- 19) Delattre, CRAI, 1917, p. 509, many well known plans such as Leclercq, DAI, 11/1, p. 36, fig. 7860; Lapeyre, Carthage, p. 57 and Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, pl. X, were all based on Delattre's plan and use rectangles to indicate the positioning of the supports. In the case of the basilica of Dermesh I at Carthage, early photographs clearly indicate that the bays of the nave and side aisles were separated from each other by columns, (see P. Cintas, Manuel d'Archéologie Punique, pl. XLII). Nevertheless, widely circulated plans such as Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, pl. XVIII, show only the rectangular plinths of the columns. It may be that the same convention was followed with Delattre's plan of Majda.
- 20) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 521.
- 21) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 518.
- 22) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 83.
- 23) The majority of the surviving inscriptions have been published by L. Ennabli in Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage, Rome 1982.
- 24) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 69.
- 25) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 529, fig. 5; Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 233.
- 26) Delattre, L'épigraphie funéraire chrétienne à Carthage, p. 14.
- 27) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 516.
- 28) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 518-519.
- 29) Fragments of an amphora were found under similar conditions at a basilica in Uppenna, where they are believed to have been used to house parchments; see Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 84.
- 30) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 520.
- 31) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 517, fig. 1.
- 32) Delattre, CRAI, 1907, p. 516-519.
- 33) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 90.
- 34) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 86 and 90. These people were not Carthaginians, but had been brought to Carthage from Thuburbo Minus, (Tebourba). Vibia Perpetua was a young matron from one of Thuburbo Minus's wealthiest Roman families; Felicitas and Revocatus were her slaves, Saturninus and Secundulus were

freed men. They were joined voluntarily by Saturus, a deacon who had apparently played an active role in their conversion. The veneration and cult of these martyrs was wide spread in antiquity, not only in North Africa, but also in Rome. The names of Perpetua and Felicitas were later incorporated in the Eucharistic prayers of the Roman Catholic Church and remain there even today, albeit not in the most commonly used versions. See also, Passio SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis, Ruinart, Acta Mart. 1689, p. 86-96.

- 35) Vailtrín, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 91



The Basilica of Mçidra



CHAPTER VIII: THE BASILICA OF ST. CYPRIAN

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Like the basilica of Mqirda, the basilica of St. Cyprian was not in good condition at the time of the original excavations; nor were the methods used in its excavations adequate by modern standards. The surviving material and a recent re-evaluation of the site have brought forth some interesting contributions to our knowledge of early Christian architecture.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Just outside the northern walls of ancient Carthage near the edge of a steep cliff overlooking the Bay of Tunis are the remains of a vast Christian basilica. The basilica was discovered in 1915 by Delattre, who subsequently supervised its excavation between 1915 and 1920¹. Since that time the ruins have been known by two names: most often it is called the "Basilica of St. Cyprian", taking the name from a text of Procopius that states *"Cyprian, a holy man, is revered above all others by the Carthaginians. And they have founded a very noteworthy temple in his honour before the sea-shore, in which they conduct all other customary services, and also celebrate there a festival which they call the 'cypriana'"*². Occasionally, the basilica has been referred to as the basilica of Ste. Monique (see below).

Presuming that the site has been correctly identified by scholars as the one dedicated to the memory of Cyprian, there is sufficient textual evidence to indicate that the site was used as such from an early date. The temple of which Procopius speaks was clearly built prior to the Vandal conquest, for he goes on to say: *"This temple the Vandals took from the Christians by violence in the reign of Honoric. And they straightway drove out their priests from the temple in great dishonor..."*³. In book V of his Confessions, St. Augustine tells of persuading his mother on the night he boarded a ship bound for Italy *"to stay that night in a place hard by our ship, where there was an oratory erected in memory of St. Cyprian"*⁴, (hence the reference to Ste. Monique). Augustine's departure

from Carthage has been dated to c. 383 A.D.

Victor Vitensis mentions two places sacred to the memory of Cyprian, one where the bishop is said to have been executed, the other where he is buried. There is some question as to whether either of these places is the site by the sea mentioned by Augustine and Procopius as Victor Vitensis does not clearly specify the location of either site, stating only that they were located outside the city walls⁵. While Procopius clearly states that the temple by the sea was taken over by Honoric, Victor Vitensis claims that both the execution site and the burial site were confiscated under the reign of Honoric's father, Gizeric⁶. This is not intended to cast doubt on either historian, but to underline some of the problems with the textual evidence, and to raise the possibility, as Monceaux has suggested⁷, of there being a third center dedicated to the memory of Cyprian. None of the above texts make any reference to the size or appearance of these buildings.

The site itself was used long before the Christian era, possibly as early as Punic times. It has been suggested by W. Frend, that the remains of an earlier structure unearthed along the northeastern wall of the basilica are those of a pagan temple dedicated to Securitas. Frend also suggests that a cistern found in the atrium of the basilica testifies to an earlier domestic occupation of the site⁸.

Before the present basilica was built, the site was used by Christians as a cemetery. It was observed by Delattre at the time of excavations, that the eastern wall of the quadratum populi had been built over earlier Christian burials⁹. After excavations were completed, Delattre restored the walls of the basilica. Epigraphic material surviving from this excavation has since been reevaluated by L. Ennabli, who has divided the inscriptions into four groups. Group I contains the oldest inscriptions, dating from the end of the fourth century to the very early fifth century. Groups II and III both date from the time of the Vandal occupation, group II has a single epitaph dated to 459, while the material in Group III appears to date from just prior to the Byzantine reconquest. The fourth and final group contains material from the Byzantine era¹⁰.

Recent studies of the numerous pottery sherds collected by Delattre indicate that the site was used after the Arab conquest from as early as the eighth century to as late as the fifteenth. At some point a small turret was built in part over the western lateral wall of the quadratum populi. The date of this tower is uncertain¹¹.

In its present state very little remains in situ. Little more than low stubs of wall can be seen beneath the vegetation. Shrubs and small trees grow freely in the quadratum populi. Today the basilica site is surrounded by private houses.

THE BASILICA COMPLEX.

The basilica of St. Cyprian is a vast structure, measuring 71.34 in length and 35.55m in width¹². It is preceded in the south by an atrium, and ends in the north with a large U-shaped apse (see Plate XXXVI). The area behind, or immediately north of, the apse has not yet been excavated.

Earlier plans depict all the walls of the quadratum populii and atrium as being at right angles to one another. Recent surveys of the basilica have revealed that this is not the case¹³. The basilica lies along an axis that is roughly North/South, with the atrium in the south and the apse in the north. This orientation corresponds to neither the rural nor the urban cadastration of Carthage¹⁴.

ANTECHAMBERS AND ENTRYWAYS

The basilica is preceded by an large trapezoidal atrium (see Plate XXXVI). The northern and southern ends of the atrium are the same width as the basilica, 35.65m. The western side is approximately 21.50m long while the eastern side is only about 20.50m long. Inside, the eastern, western and southern sides of the atrium were lined by porticoes. The columns of the porticoes stood c. 4.00m from the atrium wall. There were nine columns along the southern end of the atrium and five along the eastern and western walls, for a total of 17 columns. All columns were spaced at regular intervals of 3.20m¹⁵. Excavators do not mention finding any traces of porticoes along the northern end of the atrium.

In the center of the atrium, perpendicular to the long axis of the basilica, is a narrow subterranean room 18.00m long, 4.25m wide and 5.00m deep. The long axis of this structure is also parallel to the long east-west axis of the chevet. The room is thought to have been covered by a barrel vault, supported by three pilasters, of which only the toothing stones survive. The pilasters were placed at equidistant intervals of 4.50m along the northern and southern walls of the room and could have supported arch bands along the barrel vault¹⁶. The center set of pilasters was aligned with the central axis of the basilica. Delattre noticed traces of wall paintings at the time of excavation, but no stairway leading down into the room was found. In the eastern wall of the room 1.60m above the floor, was a small (0.70m square) niche¹⁷. It is not clear what the niche was used for. The room was filled with a considerable quantity of architectural debris, including fragments of column shafts, capitals, cornices, chancel plaques, and thin strips of marble. Sculpted fragments of sarcophagi and Christian epitaphs were abundant, but the room does not appear to have been a funeral chamber. Three bronze brooches as well as lamps from both the Christian and Arab periods were found in the room¹⁸. L. Ennabli suggests that the room was originally built as a cistern and that the wall paintings are from a subsequent reuse of the room, the date of which is not certain¹⁹.

Near the northeastern corner of the atrium was a Punic style cistern 8.75m long and 1.75m wide. Delattre does not mention whether the cistern had been reused as a burial chamber or if debris of any sort was found. The remaining free space in the atrium was filled with

burials. Excavators did not mention the range of date or any special groupings of the burials.

The principal entry appears to have been via a large door centered on the long axis in the southern façade of the basilica. This is appears to be the only entryway in the façade of the basilica and may have been almost as wide as the central nave itself. There are four side entries into the basilica, three along the eastern wall of the quadratum populi and a single entry in the western wall. The eastern doorways open into the fifth, seventh, and eleventh bays of the exterior side aisle. The single entry along the western wall also opens onto the fifth bay of the exterior side aisle. No architectural elements such as jambposts, door sills, or thresholds have survived from any of these entryways. There is no indication that any of them were preceded by small porches.

THE QUADRATUM POPULI

The quadratum populi is a vast, poorly squared rectangle 61.60m long and 35.55m wide (see Plate XXXVI). It is divided by six colonnades into a broad central nave and six side aisles. The central nave is 11.35m wide and was lined to either side by thirteen piers or columns that divide the nave into fourteen bays. The exact type of support used along the central nave is uncertain. On Delattre's plan, the positioning of all supports in the quadratum populi is indicated by black squares; the squares flanking the nave are significantly larger than those indicating the position of the lateral colonnades²⁰. Several interpretations are possible: the nave may have been lined by a series of piers, although this is not a common solution in Tunisia; it is more probable that the squares indicate the presence of stronger foundations for larger or doubled columns. Modern plans differ slightly; Ennabli has cautiously used only a small circle to pinpoint the spot where traces of a support or its foundation are located. Duval has restored a series of double columns along the flanks on the nave and single columns between the side aisles²¹. While Duval's proposed restoration is a realistic one, little archaeological evidence survives to provide concrete proof of this arrangement. The remaining four colonnades each had thirteen single columns. The aisles were approximately 4.00m wide. The columns found inside the basilica had been taken from a variety of earlier structures and differed in both styles and dimensions²².

The western wall of the quadratum populi is not perpendicular to the lateral walls of the nave, but rather corresponds to the horizontal axis of the apse and two sacristies, (the long axis of the subterranean structure in the atrium is also parallel to the long north-south axis of the chevet). The columns themselves were placed perpendicular to the eastern wall of the basilica, and therefore are not equidistant from the eastern and western walls of the quadratum populi. As a result, the eastern exterior side aisle becomes progressively wider as it approaches the northern end of the basilica. Likewise, the western exterior side aisle becomes narrower as it nears the southern end of the basilica²³.

In the tenth bay of the western interior side aisle is a well over 5.00m deep. A number of small Roman cisterns were also found in the quadratum populi of the basilica. Many

had been transformed into funeral chapels²⁴. Much of the remaining space in the quadratum populi was filled with groups of Christian burials. Although Delattre identified several specific groups of burials in the central nave he provided little information concerning the location of most other burials. Instead the word "tombeaux", has been written lengthwise in each of the side aisles on his plan²⁵. Many of the stone slabs on which the various epitaphs were inscribed were removed by Delattre, who claims to have gathered over 9,400 fragments of funeral inscriptions from nearly every period of Christian history in Carthage²⁶. In light of her recent studies, Ennabli suggests that this estimate might be somewhat optimistic, pointing out that of the 471 inscriptions published between 1916 and 1940, only 125 can be accounted for today²⁷.

Excavators do not mention the type of roofing that might have been used to cover the basilica; however, given its substantial dimensions, roof tiles supported on a tie beam truss is the most likely solution.

THE NORTHERN APSE

At the northern end of the central nave is a large U-shaped apse. Inside, the apse has a maximum width of 9.58m and is 9.74m deep²⁸ (see Plate XXXVI). The floor of the apse was raised above the floor of the quadratum populi, and was accessible by way of several steps²⁹. Excavators do not specify by how much the floor of the apse might have been raised.

To either side of the open end of the apse foundations for columns supporting an arch at the head of the apse were found³⁰. At the time of the excavation Delattre reported seeing the remains of a transverse colonnade across the entry of the apse³¹. Vaultrin confirms the existence of this transverse colonnade (which has since been lost) as late as the early 1930's³². The columns are thought to be part of an iconostasis that may have isolated the apse from the rest of the basilica³¹.

At some point the exterior wall of the apse was built up and reinforced by five strong buttresses. When or for what reasons this was done is uncertain. It is, however, possible that the presence of the strong buttresses indicates that the apse was covered by a new half dome that was either very heavy or unusually high³³.

THE NORTHEASTERN SACRISTY

Immediately east of the apse is a large rectangular sacristy c. 12m wide and c. 9.50m deep, just slightly shallower than the apse itself. (see Plate XXXVI). The room is in a very poor state of preservation and the doorways are difficult to distinguish. The sacristy was clearly not accessible from the apse, whose curved wall marked the western limit of the room. The sacristy may have been accessible from the quadratum populi through a small door in the southeastern corner of the room. The southern wall of the sacristy is common with the northern wall of the quadratum populi. Little remains of the eastern wall, but it appears to be an extension of the quadratum populi's eastern wall. The northern wall is also poorly preserved; it is parallel to the northern wall of the quadratum populi and appears to have had two doors leading into the areas north of the chevet, which have not been excavated³⁴. Although the floor pavement has not survived, it is believed to have been on the same level as the floors of the quadratum populi³⁵.

THE NORTHWESTERN SACRISTY

The sacristy immediately west of the apse is considerably smaller than its eastern counterpart and forms a poorly squared rectangle c. 7.75m wide and 8.25m deep. This sacristy appears to be a late addition and has only one wall common with the basilica, the northern wall of the quadratum populi which was used to form its southern wall (see Plate XXXVI). The eastern wall stood immediately west of the buttressing that was added to reinforce the apse. There was no communication between the apse and this sacristy. Unlike its eastern counterpart, the lateral wall of the quadratum populi does not continue to form the exterior wall of the sacristy. Instead, a new wall was built several meters east of the basilica's north-western corner. This wall is not perpendicular to the basilica's lateral wall, but slopes gradually westward. The northern wall of the sacristy was reinforced with buttresses, and had a single doorway at its northeastern end leading into the area behind the chevet, still unexcavated³⁶. Inside, were two columns aligned with the columns of the two westernmost colonnades. Their purpose is unclear. The sacristy floor is believed to have been raised to the same level as the floor of the apse³⁷.

THE SANCTUARY

During the course of the original excavations Delattre discovered the remains of an altar platform straddling the ninth and tenth bays of the central nave³⁸. Traces of column bases found at the four corners of the platform indicate that the altar was probably covered by a baldachin. Although numerous fragments of delicately worked chancel rail were found scattered about the nave, not enough evidence has survived to enable the reconstruction of the sanctuary boundaries³⁹.

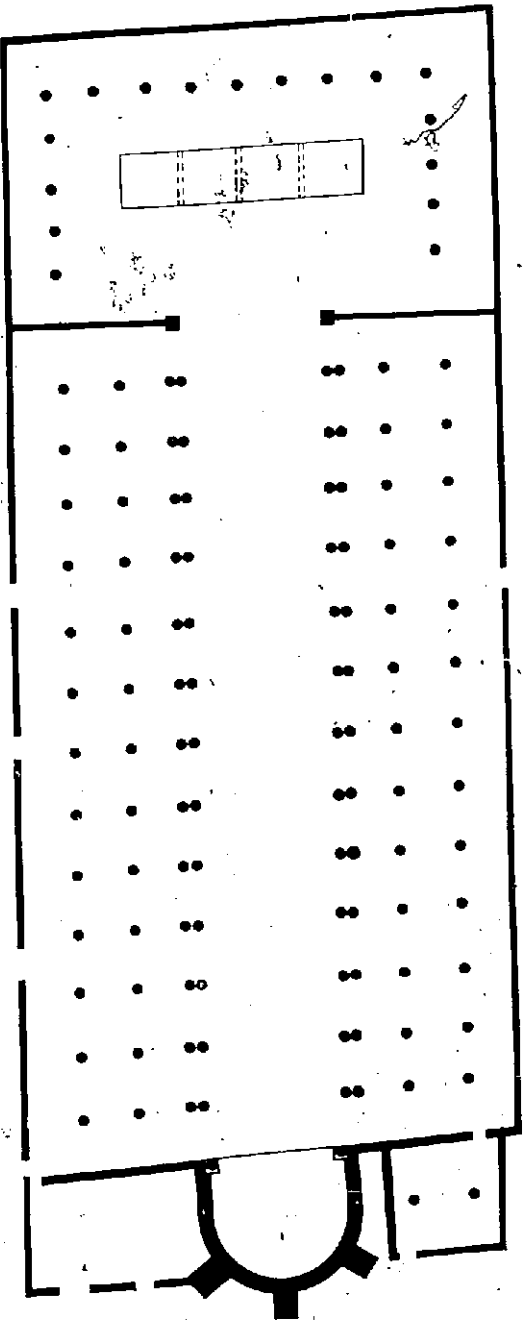
CONCLUSIONS

Once again, as for the basilica of Mçidfa, the poor state of preservation and lack of adequate excavation notes have seriously hampered any attempts to accurately date the basilica. Nevertheless this basilica should not be overlooked. The basilica of St. Cyprian has many similarities to the basilica at Mçidfa. Both are built outside the city walls on sites that had already been used by the local Christian population over a long period of time. Basilicas with such massive dimensions are not found outside the region of Carthage. The extremely high concentration of burials is also restricted to the area around Carthage.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Delattre, A., CRAI, 1915, p. 496; CRAI, 1916, p. 432, 450; CRAI, 1917, p. 507; CRAI, 1920, p. 191.
- 2) Procopius, History of the Wars III, xxi, 17-18.
- 3) Procopius, History of the Wars III, xxi, 19-20.
- 4) Augustine, Confessionum, V, viii, 15.
- 5) Victoris Vitensis, Persecutionis Africanæ Provinciæ, I, 15.
- 6) Procopius, History of the Wars III, xxi, 19 and Victoris Vitensis, Persecutionis Africanæ Provinciæ, I, 2.
- 7) Monceaux, P., Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne: depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion Arabe, tome II, p. 369-375.
- 8) Friend, W., "The Early Christian Church of Carthage", ASOR, Michigan III, p. 27.
- 9) "Elle paraît même avoir été construite sur un cimetière plus ancien; le mur latéral nord-est passe sur des sarcophages laissés en place.", Delattre, CRAI, 1917, p. 512.
- 10) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de la basilique dite de Sainte Monique à Carthage, p. 33-35.
- 11) Vitelli, G., Islamic Carthage, p. 123-125.
- 12) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes de la basilique dite de Sainte Monique à Carthage, p. 16.
- 13) One has only to compare the plan published by Delattre, CRAI, 1917, p. 508 fig. 1., with the recently surveyed plans used by Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 19. and Duval, MEFRA, 1972, p. 1105 fig. 14., to see the differences. Until recently most plans of the basilica were based on Delattre's 1917. interpretation of the ruins, see Voultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, pl. XIII.
- 14) Duval, MEFRA, 1972, p. 1104.
- 15) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 18.
- 16) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 18.
- 17) Delattre, CRAI, 1917, p. 516.
- 18) Delattre, CRAI, 1917, p. 516-517.

- 19) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 18.
- 20) Duval, MEFRA, 1972, p. 1105 fig. 14.
- 21) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 18.
- 22) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 19.
- 23) "Des citernes plus anciennes que la basilique paraissent avoir été utilisées comme caveaux funéraires." Delattre, CRAL, 1917, p. 513 fig. 4.
- 24) Delattre, CRAL, 1920, p. 195.
- 25) Delattre, CRAL, 1917, p. 508, fig. 1.
- 26) Delattre, CRAL, 1920, p. 195.
- 27) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 26.
- 28) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 20.
- 29) Delattre, CRAL, 1917, p. 511.
- 30) Delattre, CRAL, 1917, p. 511.
- 31) Delattre, CRAL, 1917, p. 510.
- 32) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 104.
- 33) Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1105, fig. 14, and Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 19.
- 34) Vaultrin, Les basiliques chrétiennes de Carthage, p. 104.
- 35) Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1105, fig. 14, and Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 19.
- 36) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 19.
- 37) Duval, MEFRA, t. 84, p. 1105, fig. 14, and Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 19.
- 38) Ennabli, Les inscriptions funéraires chrétiennes, p. 19.
- 39) Delattre, CRAL, 1917, p. 511.



The Basilica of St. Cyprian

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CHAPTER IX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I - SUMMARY OF GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Christian Basilicas Prior to 427

The earliest Christian basilicas identified in Tunisia date between the middle of the fourth century and the early fifth. Lack of epigraphic material, outmoded excavation techniques, and the generally poor state of preservation at many sites, have prevented archaeologists from establishing dates with greater precision. Despite these problems, several characteristics can be ascribed to this initial phase.

Although a number of these early basilicas are oriented roughly east-west, with their apses at the westernmost end, it does not appear to be the actual compass point that influenced orientation. The main axis of these basilicas was more often than not dictated by the street grid, by the foundations of an earlier structure, or simply by the space available. This can be seen at Sbeitla, where the basilica of Bellator makes use of the stylobate left in situ from an earlier occupation of the site¹ and where the basilica of Vitalis appears to follow the orientation of earlier, but as yet unexcavated structures². In Bulla Regia, where maximum use was made of limited space, both the street grid and the small lot on which the basilica was built played a part in determining the basilica's alignment. The quadratum populi appears to have been fitted carefully in the available space, while the chevet of the main basilica was built immediately against the edge of the street. The exterior wall of the chevet follows the line of the street rather than running perpendicular to the central axis in the main body of the basilica³.

Principal entryways generally appear to have been aligned with the central axis of the nave and placed at the opposite end of the basilica from the apse. Though entries are frequently located at the easternmost end of the basilica, there does not appear to have been a conscious attempt at orientation to any compass point. Little can be said with certainty about the principal entryways, as few have survived. Many are thought to have been destroyed in antiquity when apses were added to the end of the basilica opposite the original apse, (see below). Excavators

now believe that the principal entries at Bellator⁴, Vitalis⁵ and Bulla Regia⁶ were all lost when a second apse was added during a later phase of the basilica's history⁷. Side doorways were common. At Bellator, considerable attention was given to the construction of the side doors which were preceded by little porches supported on small columns. Though side entries are common, small porches preceding them, such as those seen at Bellator, are not. Porches were not used on the side doors at the neighbouring basilica of Vitalis, which excavators believe to be slightly later than Bellator.

Despite the popularity of the atrium in many other areas of the empire, few atria have been identified in Tunisia. The majority of those identified precede the extramural basilicas of Carthage⁸, which are difficult to date. The basilica of Melleus in Haidra is a rare example of a basilica preceded by an atrium outside the region of Carthage⁹.

Inside, a basilica's quadratum populi is divided into a broad central nave and side aisles by colonnades. The nave was usually bordered to either side by a single aisle as in the basilica of Bellator¹⁰, the basilica of Melleus¹¹ and at Bulla Regia¹². Less frequently, as in the basilica of Vitalis, two side aisles are placed on either side of the nave¹³. At Carthage, the basilicas of St. Cyprien and Mçidfa stand out with their vast central naves, eleven and sixteen meters wide respectively¹⁴, each flanked to either side by three side aisles. But while Christians prior to the Vandal invasion in 438 clearly used the sites on which the remains of these basilicas now stand, the poor state of their preservation, coupled with the unsophisticated methods used for their original excavation, have excluded them, (at least for the time being), from being safely seen as an example of any specific chronological category¹⁵.

Whether the colonnades separating the nave and various side aisles were single or doubled was apparently left to the discretion of the individual architect or his patron. In some instances, it can be effectively argued that twin columns were necessary to provide adequate structural support, as in the large basilica of Vitalis¹⁶; however twin columns also appear in such diminutive basilicas as that of Bulla Regia¹⁷. The columns themselves were frequently recycled from earlier monuments. When all material could not be acquired from a single source, a certain attempt at uniformity was usually made through the selection of architectural elements

similar in both style and proportion. Less commonly, the different elements of a colonnade were cut specifically for an individual basilica; this appears to have been done for the basilica of Vitalis¹⁸.

The floors of the nave and side aisles could be covered with a simple cement pavement as seen in the basilica of Bellator¹⁹, or with flagstones as were found both in Bulla Regia and at the basilica of Melleus²⁰. Mosaic pavements, though less frequent, are not uncommon in earlier basilicas. When they are used, their design is somber and geometric; this is clearly illustrated with the Phase I mosaics found in the basilica of Vitalis²¹.

Opposite the main entryway at the end of the nave was an apse. These apses, either semi-circular or U-shaped, could be free-standing, as at Bellator²², or encased in a solid masonry frame as at Bulla Regia²³ and Vitalis²⁴. Inside, the open end of the apse corresponded roughly to the width of the nave. The floor was rarely raised more than several centimeters above the floor of the quadratum populi. These apses were usually covered with half domes built with pottery vaulting tubes and concrete.

A single sacristy commonly stood on each flank of the apse forming a tripartite (sacristy-apse-sacristy) chevet. These sacristies were usually accessible from the corresponding side aisle; less frequently (as in Melleus),²⁵ through the apse as well.

The sanctuary was axial, standing just slightly closer to the apse than to the main entry. The altar was centered along the axis of the nave and was generally surrounded by a chancel rail²⁶. The sanctuaries were small, thus the altar, centre of cult activity, though physically separate because of the rail, was never far removed from the general populace²⁷.

Simple tie beam trusses covered with ceramic roof tiles were used to cover these basilicas.

Christian Basilicas during the Vandal Period

The Vandal occupation appears to have had limited influence on basilica architecture. That is to say, the Vandals appear to have built few basilicas for themselves, and to have done little to alter those already standing. It is not impossible that a number of the pre-vandal basilicas were damaged during the years of the Vandal occupation. Vandals were notorious for allowing city walls to fall into ruin²⁸, and were reputed to have stabled their horses and other animals in certain churches²⁹. In other instances, however, the Vandals are said to have simply taken over for themselves pre-existing basilicas and the cults associated with them, including that of the distinctly Carthaginian martyr, Cyprian³⁰.

The damage that occurred during the years of Vandal occupation may not all be the result of deliberate destruction. It is possible that, for lack of funds, many communities were unable to maintain their basilicas, which thus deteriorated simply through neglect. While there is little question that numerous African Christians were killed or tortured by the Vandals, especially during the reign of Honoric³¹, other Vandal leaders, notably Trasamundus, were "especially gifted with discretion and highmindedness"³². Ilderic, though he enjoyed only a short period on the Vandal throne, was a personal friend of Justinian and like Trasamundus was more inclined to be lenient towards the Catholic population³³. Difficult as it might be to imagine that basilica architecture remained totally static for nearly a century, there is limited evidence to the contrary. The tomb of the bishop Victorinus in the basilica of Melleus³⁴ is one of the few testimonies of Vandal construction, and it is on a small scale. The removal in antiquity of the superstructure from Victorinus's tomb, leaving only the grave itself, might well be an indication of what happened to other Vandal churches or construction on a small scale. If this was the case it is hardly surprising that little Vandal material has survived. At the basilica of Bellator, excavators suggest that the initial construction of a small apse at the northern end of the basilica and the Phase II modifications of the sanctuary could also date from the late Vandal period, though they do not attribute these changes to the Vandals, but to the local Catholic population³⁵. As there does not appear to be architectural or physical archaeological criteria for distinguishing between contemporary Christian and Vandal constructions, this argument appears circular.

Some of the earliest examples of intramural burials date from the years of the Vandal occupation. This practice appears initially to have been restricted to people of a certain importance, such as the Bishop Victorinus in the basilica of Melleus.

Christian Basilicas after the Byzantine Reconquest

Shortly after the Byzantine reconquest in 535, many of the basilicas included in this study appear to have undergone a campaign of extensive construction. The most striking feature of this period was the reorientation of many basilicas. A reorientation usually involved the construction of a new apse at the opposite end of the central nave from the original apse, especially in intramural basilicas. This can be seen in Sbeitla at Bellator³⁶, in Bulla Regia³⁷, and in Haïdra at the basilica of Melleus³⁸, where a new sanctuary was installed at the eastern end of the central nave even though no new apse had been built³⁹. This reorientation was so consistent that it should almost certainly be seen as characteristic of Byzantine influence in Tunisia. There is only one known example of a basilica built during the Byzantine period with its sanctuary at the western end of the nave: the citadel basilica at Haïdra⁴⁰. An exception to the general rule of orientation may have been made in this particular instance as space inside the fortified area was almost certainly at a premium. Still, it should be stressed that construction of an "eastern" apse or sanctuary rarely signifies an orientation in the strictest sense of the word. In certain instances, notably at the basilicas of Vitalis and Bellator in Sbeitla, excavators speak in terms of eastern and western apses, when in fact both basilicas lie along a North-East / South-west axis, which is only 20° east of geographic north in the case of Vitalis⁴¹, and 22° east of geographic north in the case of Bellator⁴². At the basilica of Melleus in Haïdra the original pre-Vandal basilica lies along an East/West axis with its original sanctuary at the western end of the basilica. When a new sanctuary was installed at the opposite end of the basilica, the orientation continued to conform to the compass directions.⁴³

Sanctuaries installed during the Byzantine period were placed much closer to the new apse or "eastern" end of the basilica, than sanctuaries of the earlier phases had been to the

original apse or presbyterium. Though altars remained centered along the axis of the nave they became progressively more isolated from the general congregation as the area delimited around the altar by the chancel rails was increased. In some instances, such as in the basilica of Vitalis at Sbeitla, nearly the entire length and width of the central nave was isolated from the rest of the quadratum populi by chancel rails⁴⁴. Occasionally the altar was set on a raised platform, immediately in front of the open end of the apse. These platforms or bemas, as can be seen in Phase IV of Bellator⁴⁵ and Phase III at Bulla Regia⁴⁶ are generally attributed to an advanced date of Byzantine influence rather than the period immediately following the reconquest. Reliquaries were frequently placed beneath these altars. Small cavities destined to contain reliquaries have been found at Sbeitla in the Phase III sanctuary of Vitalis⁴⁷, at Haïdra in both the eastern and the western sanctuaries from Phase III of Melleus⁴⁸ as well as in Phase II of the Citadel basilica⁴⁹, and at Carthage in Phase II of the basilica of Dermesh⁵⁰ and its neighbouring chapel⁵¹. The altars in all the above mentioned basilicas, as well as in the basilica of Bellator, were covered by ciboriums.

The use of mosaic floor pavements became increasingly widespread during the period of Byzantine influence. While earlier mosaics were generally somber geometric pavements, Byzantine pavements, especially later ones, were often very ornate, depicting exotic plants, birds and other animals. Bulla Regia provides a fine example of both figurative and geometric mosaics⁵² as do the chapel and annex rooms of the Dermesh basilica in Carthage⁵³. In Sbeitla, fragments of a peacock and lotiform flowers were found in connection with the phase III apses of Vitalis⁵⁴. In other instances large portions of the quadratum populi floors were paved with funeral mosaics: several good examples survived until the early 1900's in Carthage at the Mçidfa basilica, although much of what was found at the time of the original excavations has regrettably been lost⁵⁵. At other basilicas, such as Melleus, mosaics do not appear to have been used in any context at any point of the basilica's history.

The construction of basilicas and especially additions to existing basilicas becomes progressively more careless after the Byzantine conquest. Little effort was made to find columns that matched in either size or style. At the basilica of Dermesh in Carthage not only are both composite and Corinthian columns used but the various column shafts differ in size, colour and

material⁵⁶. It seems unlikely that this was for strictly economic reasons as the installation of the ornate mosaic floors must have entailed a considerable expense. Although both smooth and fluted shafts were used in the citadel basilica at Haidra, all the capitals used were Corinthian⁵⁷. In basilicas with two apses the quality of construction used for the later apse (there are no known examples of two contemporary apses) rarely compares favorably with the earlier apse. This can be seen in the religious complex at Bulla Regia⁵⁸ and at Sbeitla with the basilica of Vitalis⁵⁹. Perhaps the most striking example is the third and very late Phase IV apse built at Sbeitla inside the central nave of the basilica of Bellator⁶⁰. (An exception to this general condition is in the same basilica of Bellator where the Phase III apse at the northern end of the basilica is particularly well built⁶¹.) In other instances, and this is particularly evident in the Basilica of Melleus at Haidra, rabbets and mortises, for the new chancel rails that encompassed progressively larger areas around the altars, were cut into Christian epitaphs⁶². Ornate decoration (in the form of mosaics, marble plaques stucchi etc.) may have been used to hide poor or careless construction techniques such as the rough retaining wall at the southern end of Vitalis's northern apse⁶³ or at Bulla Regia where the edge of the bema is formed by coarsely hewn blocks⁶⁴.

Though the Byzantine fondness for domes and vaults is well documented in other areas of the Mediterranean, it appears to have had limited influence on the basilical architecture of Christian Tunisia. Of the basilicas included in this study, only in the basilica at Bulla Regia do domes and possibly barrel vaults appear to have been added to the basilica proper⁶⁵. In Sbeitla vaulting may have been added but only to several small annex rooms at the southern end of the basilica, and above the baptistery⁶⁶.

Intramural burial, which may have started during the Vandal occupation, becomes increasingly common during the Byzantine period. By the seventh century the practice is widespread. Burials have been found in atriums⁶⁷ and entryways⁶⁸, scattered about the quadratum populi⁶⁹, or clustered near the sanctuaries⁷⁰. Epitaphs, albeit only a few, were even found inside the citadel basilica of Haidra, where space must have been at a premium⁷¹. Some of these burials, especially the anepigraphic burials, may date to shortly after the Arab conquest, although this can be confirmed only in such isolated cases as that of a child burial in the basilica

of Bulla Regia which contained a cache of Umayyad coins⁷². At Dermesh, the only intramural Carthaginian basilica included in this survey, no burials were found.

It is an interesting feature of the basilical architecture of Christian Tunisia, that over the course of three and a half centuries there is very little architectural innovation. The earliest basilicas, whether they clung to the outskirts of town or were fitted into an available space nearer to the town's center, appear to have been essentially functional structures. These basilicas were solidly built. Their architects rarely indulged in monumentality or unnecessary detailing. The wide central nave flanked to either side by a single side aisle reflect a simplicity of form that was to survive virtually unchanged, through a century of Vandal rule and well into the Byzantine era. Had more internal decoration, such as wall paintings, survived it might have been possible to document subtle changes in stylistic or even theological tendencies.

While a period of relative prosperity followed the Byzantine reconquest, the immediate architectural changes were essentially cosmetic and consisted primarily of installation of new pavements, and presumably repairs to neglected roofs and walls. The reorientation of numerous basilicas is the single most striking change. It is an interesting point in itself that the Christians of the late sixth and early seventh century Tunisia clung to their original basilicas apparently unimpressed by the dome and cross plan which was now enjoying considerable success in other areas of the empire, notably at Constantinople, (St. Sophia, [532-7]; St. Irene, [532]; St. Sergios and Bakchos, [536]); and Ravenna, (St. Vitale, [546-8]). With the possible exception of Bulla Regia, there appears to have been little experimentation with domes and vaults. Whether this simply reflects a conservative attitude among North African Christians, or is a result of energy and resources spent on religious controversies and political upheaval, remains to be seen.

Surviving mosaic pavements and pieces of architectural sculpture indicate a definite preference for ornate and richly coloured decoration. There is a marked tendency away from the plastic realism of earlier Roman painting and mosaics, towards a stylization of vegetal and animal motifs. Representations of humans appear naïve, especially if judged by the standards of second and third century Roman mosaic portraiture in North Africa. Although no significant

fragments of wall paintings from this period have been preserved, Gauckler's description of the now lost wall paintings in the baptistery of the Dermesh basilica seem to indicate that the same taste for stylized opulence was as prevalent in painting as it was in mosaic and architectural sculpture.

One tendency that can be followed from the late fourth century through to the end of the Byzantine era is the progressive isolation of the altar from the congregation. Not only is an increasingly larger area around the altar encompassed by chancel rails, but, by the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the altar itself is frequently set on a raised platform or bema set immediately in front of the easternmost apse.

II - TOWARDS FURTHER WORK

Considerable contributions have been made to the study of Christian archaeology in Tunisia over the course of the past few decades. It is nevertheless evident that much work remains to be done. It would be very useful for someone to study the many previously unexcavated basilical sites. Re-evaluation of the numerous basilicas excavated prior to Tunisian independence in 1956 could also prove enlightening. N. Duval's re-excavations of the basilicas of Bellator and Vitalis at Sbeitla, the basilica of Melleus at Haïdra, and the small basilica in Bulla Regia, have provided a wealth of information, much of which was missed by the original excavators. L. Ennabli's re-evaluation of the St. Cyprian and Mçidfa basilicas in Carthage has made it possible to correct misconceptions and to clarify many difficult points. This work needs to be continued and expanded.

In recent years it has become increasingly evident that the rate at which many ancient sites succumb to the ravages of time or human indifference, far exceeds the availability and resources of the archaeologist to keep abreast of the problem. Thus, it is of primary importance, in furthering this field of study, that an index of all known Christian basilicas in Tunisia be compiled as soon as possible. Such an index would need to include the precise location, orientation and condition of the surviving monuments. It is of equal importance that the monuments be properly surveyed and mapped, and their measurements recorded. A precise

visual record (photograph or illustration) should be made of all material surviving in situ (mosaic floors, column bases, bemaes etc.). Similarly, details of fallen architectural elements remaining on the site should be recorded. Special attention to decoration, signs of wear and signs of previous use would also be valuable. Inscriptions, even fragmentary, should be properly recorded and illustrated, with special attention given to the location of those in situ.

An index of this nature would be a vitally important research tool for the student of late Roman and early Christian architecture. The results of such a study would refine and expand our general knowledge of the Christian basilica in Tunisia. It would provide researchers with a comprehensive picture of what is now known, and should prove to be instrumental in establishing new excavation priorities.

FOOTNOTES FOR CONCLUSIONS

- 1) Chapter I, p. 23 note 1.
- 2) Chapter II, p. 59. note 7
- 3) Chapter V, p. 111.
- 4) Chapter I, p. 3
- 5) Chapter II, p. 29.
- 6) Chapter V, p. 112.
- 7) A number of double apsed basilicas located in Tunisia, as well as Algeria and Lybia have been studied by N. Duval, see, Les églises Africaines à deux absides, tome II, Paris, 1971.
- 8) The Darnous-el-Karita, the basilica of St. Cyprian, and the basilica at Bir Knissa, all Carthaginian basilicas, are preceded by atria, see Vaultrin, p. 34-74, p. 101-112, and p. 131-134. The Basilica at Mçidfa is often classified as a basilica preceded by an atrium, see Vaultrin, p. 81-100, however the walled area preceding the southern end of the basilica is not lined by a columned portico and does not appear constitute a proper atrium but rather a funeral area.
- 9) Chapter III, p. 65.
- 10) Chapter I, p. 4.
- 11) Chapter III, p. 71.
- 12) Chapter V, p. 114.
- 13) Chapter II, p. 32.
- 14) Chapter VII, p. 168 and Chapter VIII p. 185.
- 15) See introductory note, p. 163 concerning the problems with Carthaginian chronology.
- 16) Chapter II, p. 32.
- 17) Chapter V, p. 114.
- 18) Chapter II, p. 32-33.
- 19) Chapter I, p. 5.
- 20) Chapter III, p. 72 and Chapter V, p. 114.
- 21) Chapter II, p. 34

- 22) Chapter I, p. 8.
- 23) Chapter V, p. 118.
- 24) Chapter II, p. 37.
- 25) Chapter III, p. 76.
- 26) See Plates I and X.
- 27) See Plates I and X
- 28) Procopius; III xxi, 11-14
- 29) Procopius; III viii, 20
- 30) Procopius; III xxi, 17-25
- 31) Procopius; III viii, 3-4
- 32) Procopius; III vii, 8
- 33) Procopius; III ix, 5
- 34) Chapter III, p. 73
- 35) Excavators believe Phase II of North apse to have been built by the Catholics.
- 36) Chapter I, p. 13.
- 37) Chapter II, p. 42
- 38) Chapter V, p. 124
- 39) Chapter III, p. 82.
- 40) Chapter IV, p. 40.
- 41) Chapter II, p. 28.
- 42) Chapter I, p. 2.
- 43) Chapter III, p. 64.
- 44) Chapter II, p. 46-49.
- 45) Chapter I, p. 19.
- 46) Chapter V, p. 128
- 47) Chapter II, p. 48
- 48) Chapter III, p. 83.
- 49) Chapter IV, p. 106.
- 50) Chapter VI, p. 148.
- 51) Chapter VI, p. 152.
- 52) Chapter V, p. 116-117

- 53) Chapter VI, p. 153.
- 54) Chapter II, p. 38 and 44.
- 55) Chapter VII, p. 170.
- 56) Chapter VI, p. 142.
- 57) Chapter IV, p. 99.
- 58) Chapter V, p. 133.
- 59) Chapter II, p. 43-44.
- 60) Chapter I, p. 14-15.
- 61) Chapter I, p. 14.
- 62) Chapter III, p. 84.
- 63) Chapter II, p. 44.
- 64) Chapter V, p. 129.
- 65) Chapter V, p. 166.
- 66) Chapter II, p. 51.
- 67) Chapter III, p. 68; Chapter VIII, p. 163.
- 68) Chapter VII, p. 166.
- 69) Chapter I, p. 5; Chapter II, p. 36; Chapter III, p. 74, and Chapter V, p. 117.
- 70) Chapter II, 36.
- 71) Chapter IV, p. 100.
- 72) Chapter V, p. 117.

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