



Fig. 16. Mosaic floor from the atrium of the Area G church (photo: CNRS)

ABILA OF THE DECAPOLIS

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Abila was a Decapolis city 12 Roman miles east of Gadara (Umm Qeis). The site evidences its most substantial occupation in the Late Roman, Byzantine, and Umayyad periods. However, since the 1980s stratified remains have been excavated indicating nearly continuous occupation from the Early Bronze to the Abbasid periods (with some reuse of the site in the later Islamic eras as well).

The central goals for the 2016 season of the Abila Archaeological Project were: (1) To deepen the excavation in key squares in Area AA on the North Tall in order to examine how the Byzantine, Hellenistic, Iron and Bronze Age habitations extended east and north on Tall Abil; (2) to continue the excavation of two Byzantine churches (Areas G and E) in preparation for publication, and for better presenting the churches for tourism; and (3) to excavate a presumed "market-place" in the area adjacent to the basalt road in Area B.

Area AA represents the history of Tall Abil from the Early Bronze to the Abbasid periods. Along the northeast side of Area AA, a fortified wall was uncovered and traced down 2.30 m, but the bottom of the structure was not reached. Further excavation and study during our 2018 season of excavation will hopefully yield evidence of the use of the structure and the possible dates of construction. At present, pottery findings seem to indicate a date of construction during the Hellenistic period, although more excavation is needed for firmer dating.

In addition, work was completed in Area AA Square 5, where excavation was halted at what we believe is 60cm above bedrock, based on findings in an adjacent previously excavated

square. Pottery from the lowest excavated levels dated to the Early Bronze Age, including Khirbet Kerak ware.

After a hiatus of 12 years, three squares were opened in Area B, the "theater cavea," in an attempt to locate a presumed marketplace along the western ends of the black basalt road that runs through the area. Many well-constructed walls running perpendicular to the basalt road were located, but no floor surfaces were reached in 2016. Pottery finds ranged from the Late Roman through the Abbasid periods.

The Area G church is an ecclesiastical structure comprised of a three-aisled, single-apsed basilica with adjacent rooms located on the northeast end of Tall Umm al-Amad. The previous two seasons of excavations (2012 and 2014) focused on the uncovering of a room on the south side of the structure that may have served as diaconicon.

The 2016 season uncovered more of the space leading up to the church from the west, along with clearing of the diaconicon's western end. Three 4 x 4 m squares were opened west of the diaconicon and the narthex space leading to three entrances that open to the central nave and two side aisles. A final photo from Square 43, the central excavated square revealed a mosaic floor surface (Fig. 16).

In Area E, excavations were conducted on the north side of the area following the mosaic paved processional passage first exposed in 2014. On the northeast section of the area excavated in 2016, a large wall was encountered that joined with what appears to be an apse structure (Fig. 17). Further excavation will be needed to determine the exact nature of this structure, but with nearly 12 courses of stones in situ, this structure will likely give us important evidence into the nature of the occupation in Area E. At present excavators are suggesting that the apsed structure, adjoining the main sanctuary of the Area E church is a baptistry, since one has not yet been located in the Area E church.



Fig. 17. Eastern passageway along the Area E "baptistry" (photo: CNRS)