

LATE ANTIQUE JARASH PROJECT

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The LAJP examines the southwest district of Jarash over the long *durée* with a primary research focus on the site's Late Antique and Early Medieval history (A.D. 300–1100). Previous field seasons included a survey in 2011 and geophysics study and excavation in 2015. In 2016, LAJP carried out a study season of mainly ceramic material retrieved from the excavation in 2015. In 2017, LAJP returned to the field to excavate five trenches and to carry out a survey, a finds study, conservation of metal finds (especially coins), and archaeobotanical studies. The following text summarizes selected highlights from 2017.

The focus of excavation in 2017 was on areas that could bring new information to our understanding of the city's water supply, street systems, and residential history. Trench 5 exposed the southwest corner of the area's main reservoir revealing several phases of construction and use. Most significant are a series of steps leading to a cave that predated the construction of the reservoir (Fig. 28). Our examinations so far suggest a caustic system (natural spring) in which water was retrieved manually via the steps. The ceramic assemblage associated with the



Fig. 28. Trench 5 showing steps leading to cave (left side of picture) and southwest corner of a Roman-period reservoir (right side of picture)

cave and steps suggest a construction date in the Hellenistic period. The staircase was blocked and backfilled in the early Roman period before the construction of the reservoir.

Trench 6 explored a north–south running street, which can be traced over 300 m from the triple-church complex to the hilltop in Jarash’s southwest district. Our excavation revealed that in the Abbasid period, the street was stripped to the level of its Roman period surface and two parallel east–west running walls blocked the southernmost extent of the street. These walls mark the second phase of encroachment—in Late Antiquity, residential structures were enlarged onto the street thus reducing its width from 8 x 4 m—but only in the Abbasid period did the street go out of use. The space between the two walls was used to dispose household rubbish, such as animal bones and broken glass and ceramic vessels.

The partial excavation of two residential structures (Trenches 7 and 9) confirmed that Jarash’s southwest district saw a major refurbishment after the earthquake in A.D. 749. Large quantities of ceramics dating to the Abbasid period were retrieved from Trench 7. The excavation of Trench 9 exposed a section of a room that went out of use after a devastating conflagration. The room comprised a stamped clay floor, stone walls, and a flat roof made from wooden beams that supported a thick layer of packed clay. The fire caused the beams to burn and the roof to collapse, thus sealing all material relating to the final use of the room. This material included thousands of carbonized lentils, wheat, barley, and a few figs and dates. The lentils were found in a large pile on top of a stone platform, which implies that they were kept in a sack that disintegrated in the fire. The grain and fruit were found in and around a ceramic vessel that was crushed by the weight of the collapsed roof. This bowl, along with a severely damaged oil lamp, is clearly Abbasid in date. Further analysis and dating of the carbonized material are currently underway.

Next season (2019) of the LAJP will focus on furthering our understanding of Jarash’s water supply and the extent and nature of the area’s residential usage over the *longue durée*.