



Fig. 88. The 'Ayn Gharandal church facing North

The primary objective for the 2017 season at 'Ayn Gharandal was the excavation of a small apsidal structure first discovered in 2015 and tentatively identified as an Early Christian church within the Late Roman fort. Although the 2015 excavation revealed only the southern edge of this structure, its identification as a church was based upon the discovery of a raised apse accessed by a set of stairs flanked by a large sculpted stone with a set of notches and grooves for a chancel screen. The 2017 excavation areas were chosen with the goal of fully excavating the interior of the church, exposing its exterior walls, and determining how the structure, known to be secondary to the original construction of the fort, made use of and modified the existing architecture in its design and construction. In addition to meeting these objectives, the 2017 field season also discovered and excavated an ancillary room built on the church's north side, which provided access to the church through a doorway near the northwest corner in the church's north wall via a set of stairs. The north room was, presumably, associated in some way with the function of the church (Fig. 88).

Additional architectural elements of the church were originally identified during the 2015 season, including its southern wall with a bench running along the length of its northern interior face, piers in the southwest and southeast corners of the nave, a small section of the apse wall, and a second bench abutting the east interior face of the church's west wall. Expectations for the layout of the rest of the church were guided by these

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previous discoveries and, for the most part, excavation of the church proceeded as anticipated, with a few surprises.

The wall of the apse was preserved up to 3 courses which rested on foundation stones and was constructed using both an exterior and interior row of cut stones between which was a rubble core composed of sand and small to medium cobbles. The exterior row is composed of square-cut blocks ca. 0.45 x 0.40 x 0.35 m in size, with smaller chink stones filling in the gaps created from the wall's curvature. The stones making up the interior were less uniform in size and shape (ca. 0.24 x 0.30 m), probably because they would have been plastered over as part of the decoration of the church's apse.

Given that only two to three courses of the apse wall are preserved, most of its stones were not found *in situ*, but rather as part of a large collapse event that extended outward from the apse. The collapsed stones were of varying sizes and qualities of dressing, reflecting their position as part of both the interior and exterior apse wall rows. Discovered among the collapsed stones and still in its relative position to the apex of the apse wall was a well-dressed, oblong, stone with a cross carved in relief on one side still bearing traces of red paint (Fig. 89). Comparisons with apsidal half-dome construction elsewhere in Jordan suggests that this stone was likely situated in the center top of the apse with its decorated cross facing the nave of the church.

The discovery of the doorway providing access to the church in its northwest corner answered the immediate question of how individuals entered the structure. The realization that an entire ancillary room had been built to the church's north side raised a host of additional questions, only some of which were answered with the excavation of this room. Although in terms of construction sequence it is clear that the church was built first and the ancillary north room second, it is unclear whether the north room was built immediately after the church or whether it represents a subsequent modification of the church.



Fig. 89. Cut stone with relief of cross from the apse