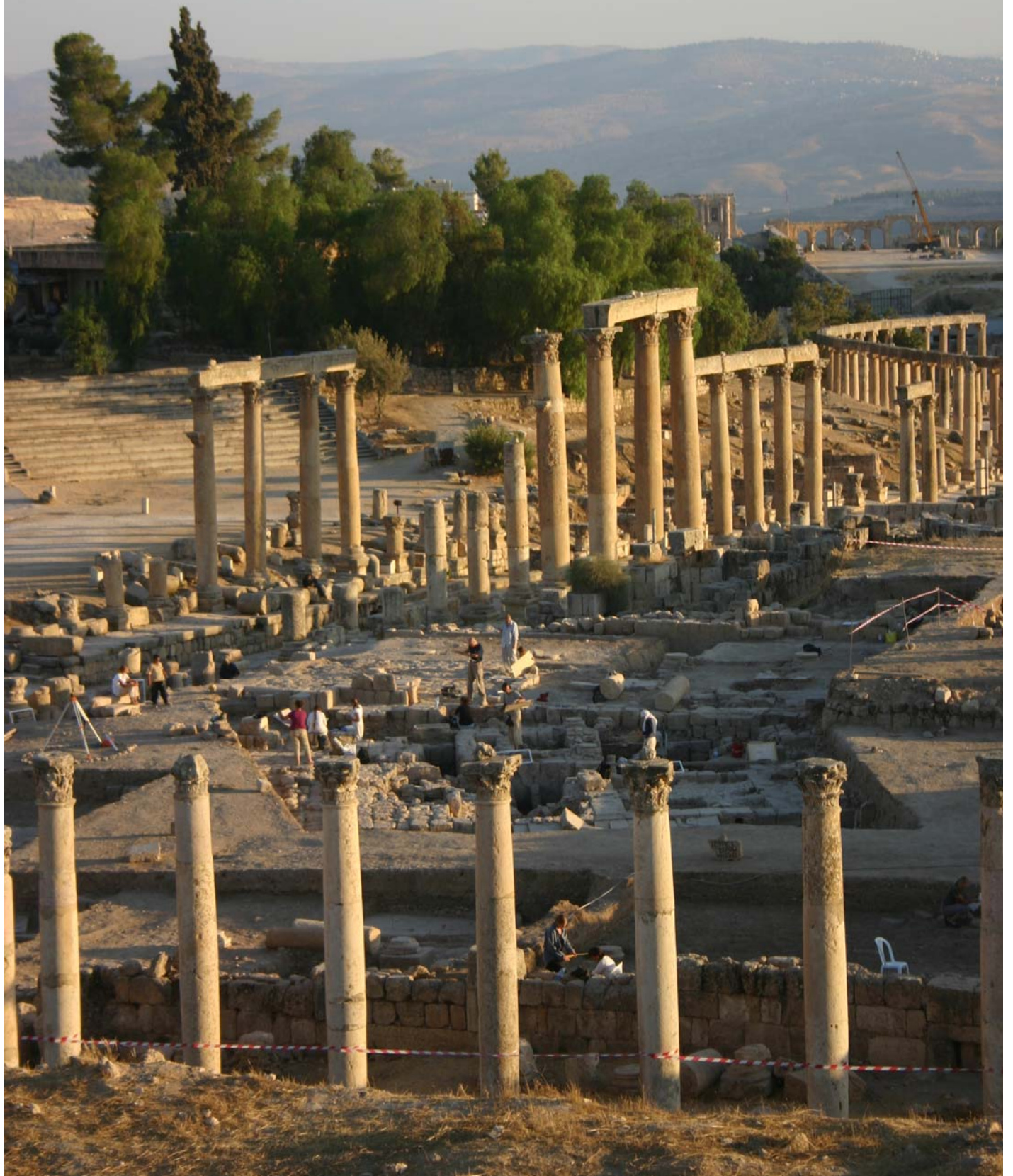


# New Discoveries at Islamic Jarash



# New Discoveries at Islamic Jarash: the mosque, *sûq* and related buildings

*A short report on the 2004 season of the  
Danish-Jordanian Islamic Jarash Project*

*Site Name:* Jarash

*Project Name:* The Danish-Jordanian  
Islamic Jarash Project

*Duration:* 17 July – 12 September 2004

*Number of Workers/Staff/Students:* 30

Jordanians and 60 internationals

*Infield cost of Project:* JOD 19,000

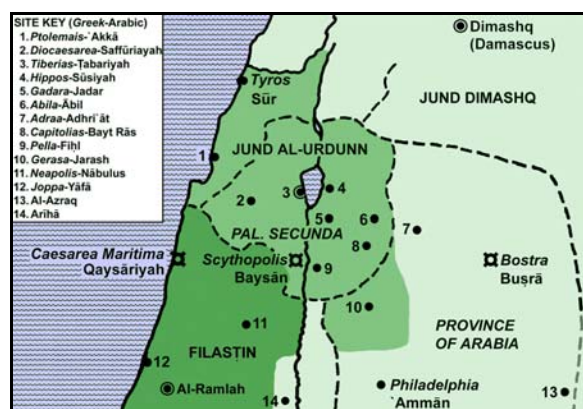
*Sponsor:* University of Copenhagen,  
Denmark, in collaboration with the  
Department of Antiquities

*Director:* Professor Alan Walmsley

*Representatives of the Department of  
Antiquities:* Mr Abd ar-Raheem

Hazeem (17 July – 13 August) and Dr  
Rafei Harahesh (17 August – 12  
September).

The Umayyad mosque at Jarash,  
discovered in the summer of 2002,  
changes the way we view towns in Early  
Islamic Bilad al-Sham (**Figure 1**). Once  
seen as less important than their

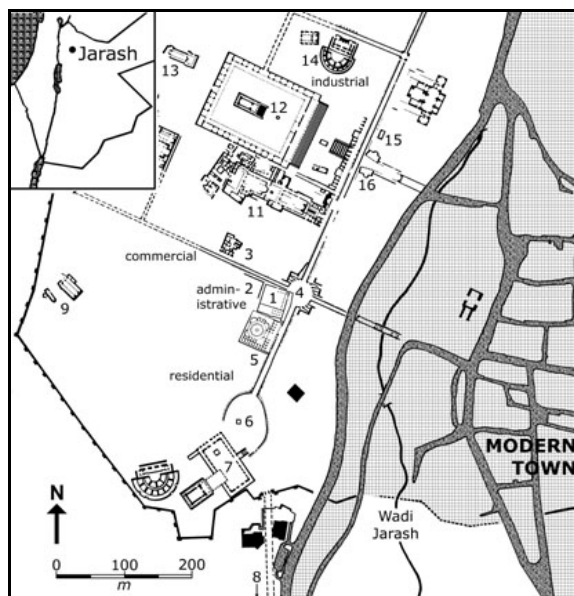


**Figure 1:** Map showing the Late Antique – Early Islamic administrative divisions affecting Jarash (site 10)

predecessors dating to Roman (1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup>  
centuries CE) and Byzantine (4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup>  
centuries CE) times, the recent work at  
Jarash and other sites such as Pella,  
Amman and Madaba, now demon-

strates that the early Islamic towns of  
Jordan prospered as regional social and  
economic centres.

The discovery of a mosque at Jarash  
shows that the Roman and early Chris-  
tian town is also an Islamic centre, and  
in addition to a Friday mosque, other  
important buildings can be expected  
(**Figure 2**). The Islamic Jarash Project  
seeks to document the Islamic history of  
Jarash, in collaboration with the  
Department of Antiquities of Jordan.



**Figure 2:** Plan of Jarash in the early Islamic period. The mosque is centrally located at (1).

We especially offer thanks to Dr  
Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, Director-  
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Why should Jarash have a Friday mosque in the Umayyad period? We know that Jarash was a district capital of the *Jund al-Urdunn* (**Figure 1**), and minted both pre-reform and post-reform Umayyad coins. Earlier excavations at different places throughout the antiquities site had revealed a thriving economy in early Islamic times. When considered together this evidence, especially the coins, suggested the presence of an Islamic administration, one which would have required a political and religious centre, focusing on a mosque. This was the building we needed to find to demonstrate conclusively a major Islamic settlement at Jarash, and which was first located in 2002 (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3:** General view of the area southwest of the south Decumanus, beginning of work 2002 (IJP\_D006)

This year, our understanding of the mosque has increased enormously (**Figure 4**). Naturally, the arrangement of the building did not work out exactly as expected, and many new problems and questions have been raised. What has become clear is that we are dealing with a building that had a limited life before its destruction, and therefore the Jarash mosque is one of the few existing Umayyad mosques that largely preserves – if a little fragmentarily – its



**Figure 4:** General view of the excavated area of the bath house and mosque, end of season 2004 (IJP\_D1323)

original plan and structure. We can contrast that with other known Umayyad mosques, such as the Great Mosque of Damascus, which has been repeatedly modified since its construction under the Caliph al-Walid (705 – 715 CE).

Further light has also been cast on structures to the west and east of the mosque, which confirm that the mosque was just one part of a wider development plan for Jarash during early Islamic times in which the city centre was equipped with important buildings serving vital religious, administrative and commercial roles in the social life of the town.

### The Mosque Area

Considerable effort was made to establish in greater detail the main features of the mosque, located to the southwest of the Tetrakonia plaza. The new work has focussed on:

1. The Prayer Hall
2. The entrance portico, adjacent to the south decumanus;
3. The earlier bath installation of Byzantine date.

### General plan

A new detailed plan of the mosque was made this year, in which it was revealed that the north (entrance) wall of the mosque, measuring 38.9 m., was constructed well over two metres longer

than the principal qiblah wall, which measures 36.57 m (**Figure 4**). The



**Figure 5:** Plan of the mosque, also showing areas excavated (modified from an original by H. Barnes)

difference in wall length explains the irregular axial symmetry of the building between the entrance doorway on the south decumanus and the main mihrab of the mosque. Both the main mihrab and the opposing street entrance doorway are located exactly in the centre of their walls, as they should be, but because of the greater length of the north wall the doorway is offset to the west. As the south, east and north walls lie at right angles, the correction for this irregularity must be in the western wall, as yet largely unexcavated.

### *The Prayer Hall*

Further excavation of the Prayer Hall has uncovered several interesting features: a new (third) mihrab, more evidence for the colonnades and roofing, and a raised platform in the northeast corner of the prayer hall.

An important discovery was a third mihrab, which although expected was found to be located further west in the qiblah wall than initially thought. Excavation in this area is continuing, but it would seem as though our third mihrab

was built as part of the original plan. Like the central mihrab, the western mihrab has a rounded salient, while the probably later eastern mihrab has, externally, a square plan. As discovered in the first season, the original main mihrab was blocked in a later phase and a small doorway inserted into the blocking. This change suggests the use of the mihrab as a place of storage. It is logical to suggest that this event coincided with the insertion of the eastern mihrab.

Excavation of more of the prayer hall has confirmed the existence of two parallel colonnades in front of the qiblah wall, with an entrance from the courtyard (*sahn*) of arches on solid piers. Their deep and substantial foundations indicate they were designed to carry the considerable weight of a tiled roof. Many fragments of roof tiles have been recovered this season, and in total over 5 tonnes of smashed roof tiles have been excavated within the prayer hall area.



**Figure 6:** The Raised Platform in the northeast corner of the Prayer Hall. View to north (IJP\_D756)

A most interesting and unusual feature is the discovery of evidence for solid walls at either end of the entrance to the prayer hall, at the point where the east and west courtyard porticos join the façade of the prayer hall. They probably helped to support the porticoes, which were also tiled, at their south ends. On the east, the wall was pierced with a doorway, the threshold

of which survives. The doorway led to a raised paved platform area in the northeast section of the prayer hall (**Figure 6**). The purpose of this area is not clear, but perhaps functioned as the *madrasah* of the mosque.

Against the north entrance wall more clear evidence for the portico has been revealed, with column bases spaced at an even 3.85 metres. On the east side of the court the columns were placed 3.4 metres apart. Perhaps worth mentioning again is the square tower base in the northeast corner of the mosque, perhaps an early type of minaret. It is clearly a later addition (perhaps related to the rearrangement of the mihrab?).

### *The Bath*

Much effort has been directed at excavating the earlier bath, which occupied the area under investigation before the construction of the mosque. It is now quite clear that the bath had already fallen largely into disuse before the construction of the mosque. Following



**Figure 7:** Overview of the bathhouse hypocaust system with the later mosque prayer hall to the right built over the baths (IJP\_D1377)

the in-filling of the complex's hypocaust system, small basins were constructed in the rooms. These appear to have been for industrial purposes, as the residue from the waste drains suggests. In addition, the entrance piers of the prayer hall were also dug into the hypocaust fill.

### **Adjacent buildings**

The arrangement and function of buildings adjoining the mosque have been considerably clarified this season. On the east were shops, to the northeast and north were approach platforms, and to the west, positioned on the opposite side of a laneway, at least two major buildings.

### *The shops*

Excavation along the outside of the east wall of the mosque has exposed a row of shops (**Figure 8**). These project south



**Figure 8:** The Cardo shops on the east side of the mosque. View looking northeast (IJP\_D1282)

of the qiblah wall of the mosque, but align with the lane that ran between the mosque and the macellum along a line drawn from the main mihrab to the south wall of the shops (**Figure 5**).

The shops were built to butt against the mosque's east and south walls, and faced eastwards onto the cardo. Their eastern limits are not preserved, and seem to have been removed when the cardo was cleared in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Built of stone with bright yellow to reddish-yellow clay floors, the shops appear to have had a very short life before their destruction. An earthquake is the most likely cause — perhaps the devastating one of 749 CE — as the extensive stone tumble from the mosque south of the qiblah wall also suggests (**Figure 9**).



**Figure 9:** A long view to the south of the mosque, looking west, showing a section of the shops in the foreground with, behind, the stone collapse of the qiblah wall (IJP\_D945)

### *The approach platforms*

To the northwest and the north, elevated terraces originally gave access to the mosque. While evidence for this has largely gone on the north side of the mosque, due to earlier twentieth century clearing, some features can be identified revealing the importance of this approach to the mosque. Notably, the northern platform could have only existed if the south colonnade of the decumanus had been dismantled, for it ran over the stylobate of the colonnade.

### *The West Buildings*

Evidence for at least two large buildings located in a level area west of the mosque is just beginning to be revealed. Of these two buildings, the southern one might well be the governor's palace, given its proximity to the prayer hall and, especially, the positioning of a

mihrab at the western end of the qiblah wall.

Both buildings were separated from the mosque by a roughly 2.5 meter-wide laneway, which linked the lane between the mosque and the macellum of the south with the south side of the south decumanus to the north.

The two buildings west of the mosque also do not stand in isolation. Clearly, years of work lie ahead in uncovering the true extent of Islamic Jarash, and presenting it in an appropriate way to the visiting public.

### **Finds**

The finds from the excavations are not spectacular: much broken roof tile (over 5 tonnes to date), numerous copper coins especially from the bath house and much corroded, architectural pieces and Jarash-made pottery including lamps. The nature of occupation in the mosque area precludes, perhaps, great finds – but maybe the rewards will be better in the buildings to the west, one of the new objectives of the 2005 season.

### *Summary of major finds in 2004*

Copper alloy coins: 377

Jewellery (glass bracelets, stone beads, metal rings): 26

Gross categories of pottery sherds, glass fragments, bone, metal fragments and tesserae were also recovered.

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Alan Walmsley  
Project Director  
24 September 2004

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