

2003 Excavation Report (revised 30 Oct 03)

Northeast Church [area supervised by Mark Schuler]

In 2003, systematic excavation exposed most of the *domus* of the Northeast Church (NEC). This report will address in turn work done in:

- A. The south aisle (L524)
- B. The north aisle (L542)
- C. Northern rooms outside the *domus* (L536)
- D. The chancel and apse (L504, L507, L518)
- E. The tombs in the chancel (L533 and L537)

Figure 1 is a detailed listing of loci, walls and floors.

General Description of Destruction Fill

There are no evident occupation layers above the floors of the NEC. Rather, the floors are covered by one to two meters of fill. The fill shows surprisingly little evidence of the massive earthquake of 748 C.E. as witnessed elsewhere on the site. Rather, the remains suggest decay and collapse over time.

The dominant soil profile of the destruction fill is as follows:

- A horizon - 0 to 15 cm; dark grayish brown (10YR 4/2) dry, very stony sandy loam, very dark brown (10YR 2/2) moist; weak fine granular structure; friable; 10 percent pebbles, 15 percent cobbles, 30 percent stones; clear wavy boundary.
- B horizon - 15 to 55 cm; grayish brown (10YR 5/2) dry, very stony sandy loam, dark grayish brown (10YR 4/2) moist; very weak, coarse subangular blocky structure; 10 percent pebbles, 15 percent cobbles, 35 percent stones; irregular boundary.
- C horizon - 55 to 150 cm; light gray (10YR 7/2) dry, very stony sandy loam, grayish brown (10YR 5/2) moist; massive; firm, hard in places near the floor; 10 percent pebbles, 10 percent cobbles, 20 percent stones; assumed to be calcareous (by color).

Soil in the slightly depressed center of the church is darker in color to a greater depth.

According to the USDA soil classification system this soil would be classified as an Inceptisol. This soil showed the beginning development of layers, called horizons that lie roughly parallel to the surface. The soil formed in material derived from the weathering of limestone, weathering of basalt, and wind blown material. The initial deposition of soil material started with the collapse of the church and reflects its construction with limestone, basalt, and other earthen material between the stones. Wind blown material of very fine sand and of silt from distant sources and coarser materials of sand from the adjacent hillsides were deposited on the site.

Grasses and other herbaceous plants contributed to the organic matter content of the soil. An abundance of snails and evidence of rodent, worm and insect activity were observed in the soil profile.

Pockets of an older buried soil were observed below the floor in the chancel. This soil was redder in color and more compacted. It appeared to be more developed but not enough was observed to make a detailed examination. The lighter colored C horizon lies on the floor of the church.¹

Within the destruction fill were various architectural fragments including cornices, lintel stones, numerous doorjambs (limestone and basalt), two chancel screen posts, two Ionic capitals, and one column drum.

¹ The soil analysis was prepared with the help of Glenn A. Borchers, M.S., retired soil scientist, NRCS-USDA.

Pottery and glass recovered from the destruction fill accord with the report from last year. They reflect a narrow band of time (5th to 8th CE), are very consistent, with prevailing types from 6th to 8th CE (Byzantine and Umayyad). See the Pottery Report below. Occasional bones collected from the fill belong to sheep or goats. There was one long bone from a cow.

South Aisle

The south aisle (L524) was cleared to floor level (F526; see **Plate 1**). At the west end is an entrance 90 cm wide. Its door would close from inside the *domus*. At the east end of the aisle just west of the base for the chancel screen is a second doorway to the south. It is 80 cm wide; its door would close from outside the *domus*; and it was blocked during a secondary phase of the church.

Most of the floor (F526) was destroyed in antiquity. Only the pebble foundation and plaster remain in most places. Four meters from the west wall (W511) next to the south wall (W510) and running for 1.13 m to the west is a segment of the original mosaic floor (**Plate 2**). The background field is white. There is a black band of two tesserae, a white band of four tesserae, and black band of one tessera, and then a simple guilloche pattern (Avi-Yonah pattern B2)² in black, white, red, and yellow (approximately 1cm² tesserae). At about three meters from the west wall (W511) the border turns to the north briefly. The border also runs to the east beneath a bench (see below) for four meters. West of this border is a 80 x 60 cm segment of tesserae in a circular pattern (portions of four circles). At the west end of the aisle, in the southwest corner, and in two fragmentary locations along the stylobate are segments of white mosaic tile of larger size (1.5 cm² tesserae). These seem to be a later repair.

The south aisle is separated from the nave by a row of four column bases set on a stylobate. The stylobate (97-93 cm wide, comprised of diverse stones some in secondary use) runs west from the base of the chancel screen to the fourth column. The intercolumniation averages 2.1 m. The shafts of the column bases are 52 cm in diameter with variant base profiles rising 30 cm and extending outward 10 cm.³

Next to the south wall (W510) is a stone bench. It is 4.01 m long, 38 to 44 cm wide, and 26-30 cm high. It begins 47 cm west of the blocked south doorway and ends 4.2 m from the southwest corner. It is constructed of stones of various lengths (60, 40, 100 cm) and was plastered. Some remaining wall plaster curves onto the top of the bench. The bench is secondary to the original construction of the church as it sits on top of the original mosaic floor.

Benches are uncommon in the Byzantine churches of Palestine. Both the entrance hall and narthex of the church at the monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma^cale Adummim have benches. In the narthex, the benches were part of a 6th CE renovation.⁴ Benches also are reported against the west wall in the church on the coast at Ostrakine⁵ and in one of the three rooms of the monastic oratory at Wadi Fra^ciyeh.⁶ In trans-

² M. Avi-Yonah, "Mosaic Pavements in Palestine," Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine 2 (1933): 139.

³ Descriptions are similar to those published a more than a century ago. G. Schumacher, Beschreibung des Dscholan," Zeitschrift d. Deutschen Palastine-Vereins 9 (1886): 331, figs. 106 and 107.

⁴ Yitzhak Magen, "The Monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma^cale Adummim," in Ancient Churches Revealed, edited by Yoram Tsafrir (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993): 178. Pachomian sources indicate that monks used three postures when praying the hours: standing, sitting, and prostration (Columba Stewart, Cassian the Monk [New York: Oxford, 1998]: 103).

⁵ Elizer D. Oren, "A Christian Settlement at Ostrakine an North Sinai," Ancient Churches Revealed: 307.

⁶ Uzi Dahari, "Remote Monasteries in Southern Sinai and Their Economic Base," Ancient Churches Revealed: 347.

Jordanian regions, benches occur occasionally. H. C. Butler notes a bench on the north side of the nave between the second and third columns in the west church at Bakirha.⁷ At Gerasa, benches occur in a southern side chapel at the church of St. Theodore, against the north wall of the Synagogue Church, and on the north, west, and southern walls of the nave of the Mortuary Church.⁸

In the destruction fill at the west end of the aisle, a basalt cross with base was discovered resting on its side on a thin layer of dirt above the floor (**Plate 3**). The cross is of Greek style with flaring arms (40 cm high x 37 cm wide x 23 cm deep). The cross sits on a base (20 cm high x 23 cm wide x 56 cm deep). Cross and base are carved from one stone. Plaster on the edges of the base and numerous roof tiles in the fill suggest that the cross came from the peak of the western facade. Artistic renditions of such a cross at the peak of the Constantinian edicule may provide a point of comparison.⁹

The exposed southern wall (W510) is of poor quality. It is essentially two rows of mostly reused stones of diverse sizes approximately 0.8 m thick. Ashlars are used in corners and to frame doorways. Walls were plastered on the inside.

North Aisle

The north aisle (L542) was cleared to floor level (F538) at the west end. The entire run of columns and the stylobate were also exposed. The stylobate is of similar construction and dimension to that of the south aisle. However, the column bases and placement show a significant variance. Visible are five intact column bases (**Plate 4**). Again the column shafts are 52 cm in diameter but the base profiles vary dramatically in form and height. The intercolumniation averages 1.1 m, except between the third and fourth bases from the east where the intercolumniation is 2.7 m. If a similar column base were placed in the midst of this gap, then all the intercolumniations would average 1.1 m. In that case, there would be six bases for the north aisle and four for the south – a most unusual configuration for a Byzantine church. Alternatively, some feature of the yet unexcavated part of the north aisle may explain the wide gap of the third intercolumniation. Of further note, the stylobate ends 7.2 m west of the base of the chancel screen, as it does in the south aisle. The westerly column base (of larger diameter) sits a plaster foundation. Perhaps the north aisle of the church underwent some major structural modification at some point in the history of the church.

The walls comprising the northwest corner of the church (W511, W521) stand to the height of two poorly constructed runs. There is no western door for the north aisle. Instead, in the northwest corner is the “wellhead” (65 x 60 cm) for a cistern (**Plate 5**). It stands about 30 cm above the floor on a platform of paving stones (1 x 1.5 m). The wellhead has a 30 cm opening and was covered with a round 43 cm lid (lost). The cistern appeared empty to a depth of 3 m. Cisterns are commonly found in the atrium and narthex of a Byzantine church, not in the *domus*.¹⁰

Against the north wall (W521) is a bench of similar dimensions to the one against the south wall (W510). It, however, begins 2.24 m from the west wall and proceeds to the east. This bench is clearly tied in with a mosaic floor of white 1.5 cm² tesserae (identical to the mosaic from the second phase in the south aisle). A

⁷ H.C. Butler, Early Churches in Syria (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929): 213.

⁸ Carl H. Kraeling, Gerasa: City of the Decapolis (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research: 1938), plates xxxiii, xxxvi, lii.

⁹ Martin Biddle, The Tomb of Christ (Phoenix Mill, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1999), figs. 18, 19, 26.

¹⁰ A precedent does exist in the cave church at Khirbet ed-Deir at the head of the south aisle (Yizhar Hirschfeld, The Early Byzantine Monastery at Khirbet ed-Deir in the Judean Desert: the Excavations in 1981-1987 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1999), figs 37 and 43. However the location of the cistern in that monastery is most likely a consequence of topography. Of minor note is a 42 cm sump in the southwest corner of the church at Khirbat al-Karak; see Pinhas Delougaz and Richard C. Haines, A Byzantine Church at Khirbat al-Karak (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960): 14.

raised ridge of stones (3-4 cm wide x 5-7 cm high) runs south from the corner of the bench to the west end of the stylobate. Small patches of similar mosaic abut the west wall (W511).

Northern Rooms Outside the *Domus*

In preparation for future work, 1 m trenches were dug on the exterior of W521 (L536), beginning at the northwest corner following surface indicators of walls. Some 7 m from the northwest corner of the church, a wall (W539) was identified that proceeds in a northerly direction. 1.5 m to the north, the wall has a doorway (74 cm wide) to the east that would close from the east, suggesting that a room lies to the east (see below for doorway to the same room from the chancel). The wall proceeds north for 62 cm to another wall (W540) that runs roughly east/west, skewing north somewhat from line of the north wall (W521) of the *domus*. A later wall (W541) veers from the top of W540 in a southwesterly direction. The outer wall (W540) is significantly thicker (1.3m) than other walls and partially incorporates a column base. Two other column bases (diameters of the shafts are 43 and 52 cm) are visible next to W521 near the corner with W539. Larger quantities of late Roman pottery shards were recovered from this locus. A primitive basin is attached to the west end of W521. The function of this area is unclear.

Chancel

The entire chancel and apse were cleared to the level of the *opus sectile* floor (F516; **Plate 6; Figure 2**). The chancel is clearly demarked from the rest of the *domus* by the base for a chancel screen that runs across nave and aisles in a north/south direction. Two chancel posts of divergent design were recovered from the destruction fill along with a fragment from the top of a third. No part of the screen itself has been recovered. The base splits the first intercolumniation just west of the most easterly column bases. There were three openings in the chancel screen: one from the center of the nave, and one from each of the aisles next to their respective columns. The south end of the base for the chancel screen had been partially covered by W514 and plaster in a later phase of the church.

Against the apse wall (W502) is a highly eroded *synthronon* of soft limestone covered by plaster. Its depth of 1.0-1.12 m would accommodate one row of presbyters. The central section of the *synthronon* protrudes an additional 10-15 cm into the apse and rises 26 cm above the rest of the *synthronon*. The remainder of the apse floor (F516) is covered with stone *opus sectile*. Some of the tiles are in secondary use. Although some variance in color is visible, no design pattern is discernable.

The section of the chancel at the east end of the north aisle has a discernable focus. A single panel of the chancel screen spanned the north/south dimension of this area, allowing an entrance to the cancel from the west just north of the easterly pillar in the north run (see Figure 1). In an original phase of the church, access to this same part of the cancel was possible through a 1.06 m doorway. The doorway in the north wall (W521), which closed from outside the *domus*, was blocked in a later phase. The floor (F516) is *opus sectile* of no clear pattern, some tiles of which are in secondary use. There are two voids in the floor. One is centrally located in the middle of the axis of the northerly chancel screen panel. In it was a *loculus* for a reliquary (31 x 31 x 17 cm deep). Surrounding plaster suggests the lid was some 5 cm thick and rested some 10 cm below floor level. Next to the east wall (W520) and slightly south of the central axis was a second void. It too seems to a *loculus* for a reliquary, but its dimensions are smaller (20 x 20 cm) and its construction is poorer. Original wall plaster intact between the structure of this *loculus* and the wall confirms that F516 and both *loculi* are secondary to the original construction of the church. Conceivably, the north door in W521 was blocked at the time of the installation of the *loculi* due to the increased sanctity of this part of the chancel.

Throughout the excavation of the chancel at the head of the north aisle, numerous fragments of plaster were recovered. At higher levels most were white. Lower in the square, colors, lines, and patterns were observed. The dominant color is red although some yellows are also visible. It is possible to reconstruct from the fragments of PC1831 a broad red band (6-7 cm wide) that is bordered by one to three very narrow stripes (1-2 mm). On the opposite side of the narrow stripes, the background color is yellow. From PC1833 comes a fragment with a white background, a yellow band (4mm), and a red blotch that may be grapes. From the same potter container comes a fragment with a yellow background, a brown band (4 mm) and a small red blotch. A small fragment from PC1835 may capture the edge of a round red object.

Access to the central section of the chancel (at the east end of the nave) was gained through a central opening in the chancel screen. A 114 x 30 cm stone (in secondary use) spans the entrance. Although most of the *opus sectile* floor (F516) had been destroyed, two bands (1x2.2 m) of square-in-square pattern (dominant squares on end) are discernable on the north and south margins of the central section of the chancel. In the rest of the central section, some fragments of a decorative frame and one incised piece are suggestive of what is now lost. No evidence of an altar was found.

Under the level of the destroyed floor is the plaster layer of the first floor (F517). Many loose tesserae were recovered from the fill. Cut into the plaster layer (and thus part of a secondary phase) was another *loculus* for a reliquary (17 x 26).¹¹ Preserved partially, it sits on the central east/west axis of the church. Just to its south is another similarly sized *loculus* made of thin marble slabs. It had been plastered full. A third possible *loculus* is west of the first, but its poor form makes such identification debatable.

Tombs in the Chancel

To the north of the central axis is a cist tomb (**Figures 3 and 4**) in an east/west orientation. Three basalt stones were *in situ* covering the western half of the tomb. The eastern cover stones (limestone) were broken. The sidewalls of the cist tomb are basalt ashlar creating an opening 0.97 x 2.16 m. Two runs of the sidewall were exposed. The top run is 18-27 cm deep and the bottom run is 34-44 cm deep.¹²

Between the second and third covering stones, a lead pipe extends down into the tomb. The lead pipe is rolled, not melted. It was not meant to guarantee delivery of all the oil to the burial. Its top was hammered into a funnel. The pipe is 72 cm long (partly broken at 16 and 35 cm from the top). The exterior diameter of the pipe is 2.44 cm. The thickness of the lead is 0.37 cm. The funnel end has a diameter of 4.58 cm. A plaster mound held the funnel to the level of the *opus sectile* floor (F516).

At about 75 cm below the level of the *opus sectile* floor (F516) is the limestone box of a sarcophagus (its SE corner is 8 cm below its NE corner). The box measures 2 x 0.6 m.¹³ Its walls are 11-12 cm thick and its internal depth is 30-34 cm. The box of the sarcophagus was covered by six stones 4-9 cm thick (secondary use; two were marble). Between the second and third stones from the west, two triangular stones and plaster connected the lead pipe to the burial below.

The burial was undisturbed. A good portion of the box was filled with dirt. A single skeleton was partially exposed (**Plate 7**).

¹¹ For examples of similar *loculi*, see E. Baccache, Églises de Village de la Syrie du Nord (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1980), plate 153.

¹² Similar construction is visible in the tombs in the northwest corner of the *Martyrion d'Antioche-Koussié*. See, Jean Lassus, Sanctuaires Chrétiens de Syrie (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1947), plate xli.

¹³ Comparative measurements to *sarcophagoi* on the surface in the cemetery outside the east gate at Hippos:

	Length	Width	Depth
#1	191	63	48
#2	198	66	49
#3	196	67	71
#4	212	89	unclear

See Schumacher (pp. 328-329) for further discussion of *sarcophagoi* from Hippos and their burial in a north/south direction.

It is likely that both the sidewalls of the cist tomb and the covering stones of the box of the sarcophagus were plastered, as a few small pieces of plaster were still adhering. One larger piece of painted plaster (in several sections) was recovered just above the stones covering the sarcophagus. It showed a dark band, a yellow background and the four fingers of a near life-sized left hand (outlined in red) on a parallel line to and below the dark band. The hand was likely part of a fresco in the area above the sarcophagus but below the original covering stones. By way of comparison, outstretched hands feature prominently in depictions of saints and in frescoes from Christian catacombs.¹⁴

As was described in last year's report, a sarcophagus with a monolithic lid sits partially exposed above floor level in the chancel portion (L507) of the south aisle. The exposed sarcophagus is surrounded by later walls (W514, W515) and faced on its sides by marble slabs. The top is sealed and leveled by plaster. A basin and hole provide facility for anointing the remains (see 2002 Report for specifics).

To allow access to the sarcophagus, the west wall (W514) was removed. The wall sat directly on F516 and veered in a southwesterly direction over the base for the chancel screen. The wall was sealed to the floor with plaster. The exposed channel in the base for the chancel screen was also filled with plaster. Portions of the *opus sectile* floor (F516) were removed to the north, west and south of the sarcophagus. Fill was cleared to the plaster base of F517. A 1 m section of mosaic tile from F517 was still intact in L529 next to the south wall (W510). Visible was the same black band that characterized the border of the mosaic in L524.

The pieces of marble that faced the sides of the sarcophagus were removed. These pieces were clearly embedded into the plaster of F517.

On the east face is a single piece of unadorned marble 3.5 cm thick and 65 cm wide. The top portion is broken and missing. On the south, two thicker pieces faced the tomb to the level of the top of the lid (142 x 45 x 6.5 cm and 63 x 44 x 6.5cm). On the west is a single piece of marble 3.5 cm thick and 65 cm wide. It too was broken at the level of the top of the sarcophagus box, with the top pieces coarsely plastered back. An inscribed cross was discovered under the crude plaster. As with the cross inscription on the north face, the cross is "Teutonic" in form, each of the arms flaring to points. Small disks or dots are inscribed just beyond each point (**Plate 8**).¹⁵

Four pieces of marble faced the north side. From east to west:

- 57 cm wide x 45 cm high x 3.5 cm, broken in three pieces and plastered back in place
- 34.5 x 29(45?) x 2.5 cm, the top half is missing and was filled in by plaster
- 61 x 51.5 x 4.5 cm, inscribed with "Teutonic" cross and alpha and omega
- 56 x 47 x 4.5 cm broken horizontally and repaired by plaster.

Plaster was used to fill the gaps between the facing pieces and to level the rounded top of the monolithic lid of the sarcophagus. This plaster held the 9 cm basin in place over the hole that had been bored through the lid to allow anointing (**Plate 9**). This plaster also filled the gap between the east end of the sarcophagus and the east wall (W509) of the chancel.

The box of the sarcophagus¹⁶ is a single piece of limestone. Its width varies from 61.5 cm at the west end to 64 cm at the east end. Its length is 2 m on center. The walls range between 10 and 12 cm thick. The

¹⁴ André Grabar, *Martyrium: Recherches sur le Culte des Reliques et l'Art Chrétien Antique*, vol. 2 ([Paris]: Collège de France, 1946), plates xxix – xxxii.

¹⁵ This style of cross is frequently used for bronze processional crosses. See J. A. Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses*, *Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications*, No. 10 (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Center Studies, 1994), figs 8 and 9.

¹⁶ The use of an exposed sarcophagus is without precedent in Byzantine churches in Palestine. For a discussion of the use of *sarcophagoi* in and near Byzantine churches of Syria, see Lassus, 231-232.

interior is rounded at the west end, beginning 33 cm from the west. The interior depth slopes from 35 to 38 cm west to east. Carving stokes on the interior of the north side angle down from east to west at about 60 degrees. On the south side, there are some discernable stokes in a downward direction.

The lid is a monolithic piece of limestone 23 cm high x 197cm long x 59 cm wide. Small stones and plaster on the edge of the box created a 2-3 cm gap at the west end. There was a rather large gap in the northwest corner between lid and box.

The various layers of plaster and floor tiles, especially to the east to the east of the sarcophagus, and well as the gaps and broken pieces, suggest several phases. The exposed sarcophagus is contemporaneous with the building of the church and the laying of F517, as its marble facing is set into the plaster of the floor. Subsequently, F516 was laid (phase 2). Some plaster from W509 curves on top of the tile of this floor east of the tomb. In a third phase, the sarcophagus was opened by breaking the western marble face and its inscribed cross. Then the lid was pried up from the west (gap in NW corner, eastern facing broken above the level of F516, the breaking of two of the north facing pieces). If the sarcophagus had a marble top piece, it was lost/destroyed at this time. The lid was then lowered back into place. Plaster filled gaps left by broken pieces and leveled the top. A basin for holy oil was plastered over the hole bored into the lid (newly bored at this time?). The shattered western inscription was put back and plastered over. Due to similar heavy use of plaster and the similar crude building of the walls that surround the sarcophagus (W514, W515), it is hypothesized that the walls also belong to this third phase. Desecration seems to be a logical explanation for the third phase, the repair done by the poor survivors of whatever had happened.¹⁷ But, it is also possible that the damage was done while removing relics, a practice of eastern Christianity.¹⁸

When the exposed sarcophagus was opened, it contained the bones of a single small woman of 60 plus years (see separate anthropological report in this volume). The bones were gathered under the anointing hole, long bones placed in a frame around fragments of the skull, pelvis and other smaller bones (**Figure 3, Plate 10**). A small quantity of earth was also recovered from the box of the sarcophagus (remains of decomposition). In the earth at the east end of the box were some fifteen metatarsals and phalanges of the foot. Four white tesserae were also recovered. While the sarcophagus was originally used for burial, after it was opened, the remaining bones were arranged under the location of the anointing hole, except for the bones from the feet that were missed in the decompositional remains.

The striking burial and saintly veneration of a woman in the chancel of this small Byzantine chapel in the heart of a Decapolis city raises questions of identity that are complicated by her anonymity. Barring a fortunate epigraphical discovery, the particular identity of the burial will remain unknown. However, a plausible parallel is the Kyria Maria church at Scythopolis. The chapel was part of an urban monastic community (for recluses). There are tombs in the northeast and southeast corners of the chapel. A mosaic inscription over the tomb at the east end of the south aisle reserves the tomb for "Lady Mary who founded this church."¹⁹ The burial in the NEC at Hippos has the additional distinction of demarcating the tomb within the chancel, providing for on-going veneration, and according a degree of anonymity appropriate for a foundress/abbess. Should the hypothesis gain additional support, it could be suggestive of the function of the NEC and its surrounding structures.

¹⁷ A significant massacre took place at Kursi during the time of the Sasanid invasion in 613 CE. Kursi was within the territory of Hippos. Charles R. Page, "Kursi Excavations Resumed: Two New Seasons (2001, 2002)," address, Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Toronto, Canada, 23 November 2002.

¹⁸ V. Saxer, "Cult of Martyrs, Saints, and Relics," in *The Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 533.

¹⁹ Gerald. M. FitzGerald, *A Sixth Century Monastery at Beit-Shan (Scythopolis)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939): 27.

Phasing and Date

While significant work remains to complete the excavation of the *domus* and surrounding rooms, currently one can posit at least two phases in the NEC. When the church was built, it housed the exposed sarcophagus, had a mosaic floor with a guilloche border in both chancel and aisles, and had entrances from the north, south, and west. Likely, the cistern was dug at this point or pre-existed the church. In a second phase, reliquaries were placed in the north and central parts of the chancel, the cist tomb was dug, and an *opus sectile* floor was laid. In a second phase in the aisles, benches were added to the north and south walls and carpets of plain white mosaic tile were laid. Some major structural repair/alteration might have occurred in the north aisle. It is presumed that the second phases in the chancel and aisle are contemporaneous. The opening of the exposed sarcophagus, its repair and the construction of W514 and W515 would plausibly be part of a third phase, following a destructive act. But it is also possible that these alterations were intentional and even part of the second phase. Whether the blocking of the north and south doors is secondary or tertiary cannot be determined at this time.

Due to similarities in the border pattern among the mosaic floors of the NEC, the Northwest Church, the baptistery of the cathedral, the monastery church at Khirbet Samra, and the baptistery at Kursi (see discussion in the 2002 Report on the NWC), a late sixth century *terminus a quo* is assumed until other more datable remains are recovered. As no convincing evidence has been recovered demonstrating on-going usage of the church at the time of the earthquake in 748 CE,²⁰ the NEC seems to have been closed or abandoned before that time.

²⁰ Kenneth Russell, "The Earthquake Chronology of Palestine and Northwest Arabia from the 2nd through the mid-8th Century A.D.," in Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 260 (Fall 1985): 49.