

EXCAVATIONS AT ALAHAN 1967

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Excavations suspended 1966 owing to the recent illness of the Director, were resumed at Alahan Monastery during July and August 1967. Apart from the Director, those taking part were Messrs. G. Bakker, P. Pratt and R. Wylie, all architects; Mrs. G. Bakker and Miss M. McGregor, conservationists, and as fieldassistants Misses H. Cash and M. MacDonald and Messrs. P. Percival - Price, A. A. Ray and L. Thomas. Mrs. Gough was in charge of camp administration, while Bayan Nihal Dönmez represented the Turkish Ministry of Education. An average of twenty - five workmen was employed for a total of fifty one days, during which a very considerable programme of excavation, conservation and restoration was carried out.

Excavation was restricted to two main areas, the first to the south of the Western Basilica, and the second about a hundred and fifty metres to the east of the whole complex. In these operations the door to the undercroft of the basilica was uncovered (Pl. I); it had been blocked in antiquity, possibly in connexion with the decision to link all the buildings of the complex by a continuous colonnade, with a walkway at a higher level than that originally planned south of the Basilica. The undercroft itself was not excavated, since to have emptied it might well have undermined the stability of the whole structure. East of the monastic complex a large well-house was excavated; the western part of the system consisted of a rock - cut approach, originally barrel - vaulted with masonry, giving access to a spring issuing from a fissure in the limestone and drain-

ing into a small cistern (Pl. II). The water from this drained in its turn into a slightly larger cistern with a paved floor. The eastern approach to the well - house was not completely excavated, but it is apparent that it was again partly rock - cut and roofed with a barrel - vault. This passage gave access to a partly natural, partly man - made cavern with a perfectly preserved floor of smooth flagstones. At its north - west corner a flight of three steps led upwards to the larger of the two cisterns.

It will be remembered from earlier reports that the original appearance of the Western Basilica had been obscured by secondary builders in the 12 th (?) century. Finding the church in ruins and choked with debris, they found that the most convenient way of disposing of surplus building material was to build high walls along the original line of the stylobates and to pile up any remaining stone against the original north and south walls. This year all these secondary walls were dismantled, and thus with nearly all the original material available for inspection it was possible for us to obtain a much more accurate picture of the Basilica in its primary phase than ever before. On the northern stylobate all the column bases were found *in situ*, and it was discovered that the first four intercolumniations from the east were all grooved for sculptured stone slabs (Pl. III). The same feature was also observed on the southern stylobate which was otherwise in less than perfect condition (Pl. IV). Slightly smaller bases and capitals, together with their shattered shafts,

proved the existence of a second order above the lower arcading, and it was interesting to observe that the bases of these columns also were grooved for the fitting of stone screens. The bases and capitals of this second order have for the present been set up on their appropriate string-course blocks in the north aisle as a rough and ready aid to the easier comprehension of the building (Pl. III). Similarly the arch voussoirs of the main order have been laid out along the length of the nave. These had originally been plastered and painted with geometric patterns in red, yellow, green, blue and black, and wherever possible these were cleaned and strengthened. Perhaps the most important result of the dismantling of the secondary walls of the Basilica was the discovery of many more fragments of sculptured screenwork to be added to the large number already found in previous seasons. Although broken and dispersed in many parts of the building, these screens still represent a major contribution to our knowledge of 5th century Christian art. The preliminary work of reassembling the parts and joining together the many pieces that have certain fits has now begun, and certain observations can already be made. The screens fall into two main categories; the first being carved on both sides and possibly to be thought of as having been set up across the opening into the chancel, the second carved on one face only and thus more likely to have been fitted between the intercolumniations with the worked side facing the nave and the blank surface toward the side aisles. There is a wide variety of decoration, the simplest consisting of a cross in a wreath, a cross interlaced with foliage or a cross with rosettes to either side or set in the angles of intersection. More elaborate are the screens decorated in high relief with luxuriant foliage, a shoal of lively, writhing fish or a combination of vine and pomegranate motifs. Most of these screens are bordered with deeply undercut leaf mouldings and in many cases an individual screen was

divided into four panels, each with a different type of decoration. Almost all the fragments are now safely housed in the village of Geçimli. In the field of restoration the south-west corner of the *narthex* was rebuilt (Pl. V); capitals were re-erected on three columns at the west end of the church proper and fragmentary column shafts set up on the bases along the stylobates to act as 'markers'. Since the upper part of the original north wall of the building had been distorted and dislodged by roots. The fill behind was carefully removed and treated with weedkiller. A new fill of concrete was substituted, dislodged building blocks reset in place, and a sloping layer of concrete laid on the top of the wall to prevent penetration by flood water during the winter months.

In the western sector of the main Colonnade linking the Basilica with the East Church, a 30 metre stretch of the southern wall of sustension had collapsed as a result of exceptionally heavy rainstorms in the winter of 1965-66. As a preliminary to rebuilding and to allow the insertion of a secure fill for the future, the walkway was excavated northwards to ascertain the original drainage system. This operation revealed a stoutly built wall of dry stonework. Clearly designed to sustain a route for building materials and personnel as the building of the monastery proceeded eastwards (Pl. VI). The monumental Colonnade, probably never completed, would thus have been a final refinement to the complex after the rest of the monastery had taken definitive shape. The rebuilding of the collapsed wall was undertaken during the two final weeks of the season and a strong fill of stone laid behind it to act as a natural drainage outlet.

The Baptistery had also suffered severe damage in the winter of 1965-66. Four large voussoirs had fallen from the northern semi-dome and shattered a part of the small altar below as well as the surrounding pavement slabs. The voussoirs were lifted, set back into place and secured

with stone glue. To allow for the drainage of rainwater, the voussoirs were backed with a sloping surface of strong concrete. As in the case of the Basilica, the secondary builders had piled the debris that they found in the building against the original walls and had constructed three unsightly piers along the line dividing the northern and southern sections of the building. Demolition of the stonework lining the west wall showed the latter to be in imminent danger of collapse, since the native rock on which the northern part rested was badly decayed. The five large blocks, weighing upwards of three quarters of a ton apiece, which bore down directly on this inadequate support were therefore temporarily removed from the wall while a stout concrete block was cast *in situ* to provide a bearing surface. When this had set, the stones were once again replaced.

In the eastern sector of the Colonnade, the surface of the walkway was everywhere taken down to the level of the southern stylobate (Pl. VII). This operation seemed to prove conclusively that the Colonnade had been begun from the east end, had progressed a certain distance as far as the Shrine, in fact, but had never been completed. In the first place, while there are traces of steps at the change of level at P2/PN2 there are none at P3/PN3 further west; in the second place the

rock face west of PN3 is only roughly chiselled and PN 3 itself is only summarily shaped in its lower courses; in the third, while there are a number of column plinths and bases *in situ* to the east of the Shrine, there are none at all to the west of it.

The south aisle of the East Church was systematically cleared of collapsed building material, and the 50 centimetres or so of earth on which it lay carefully excavated. Despite sieving, however, no securely dateable finds were made. Elsewhere, as in previous seasons, of the dateable coins discovered a significant majority were struck in the 4th and 5th centuries. Two coins of Justinian I and one of Justin II were the latest issues.

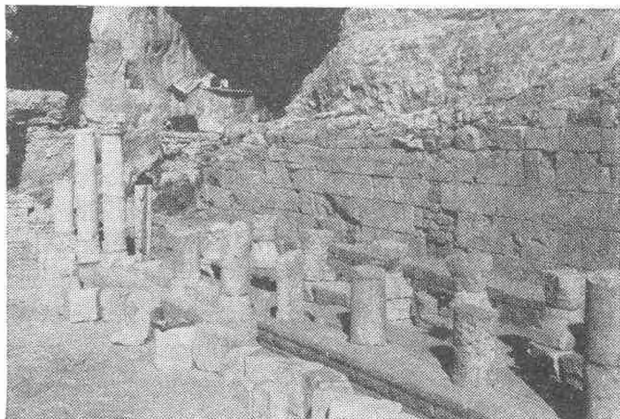
Apart from the work just described, further examination of the two main churches leads to the conclusion that the Basilica was an exceptionally richly decorated building, with evidence not only for wall and floor mosaics but also for the use of marble slabs including Proconnesan and porphyry. In elevation it may well have resembled the Acheiropoietos in Salonika. As for the East Church there exists no evidence for Professor Pevsner's conjecture of tunnel vaults over the aisles and nave. As he says 'This would make Alhan very memorable'. It would indeed, because as the building stands it would be a structural impossibility.



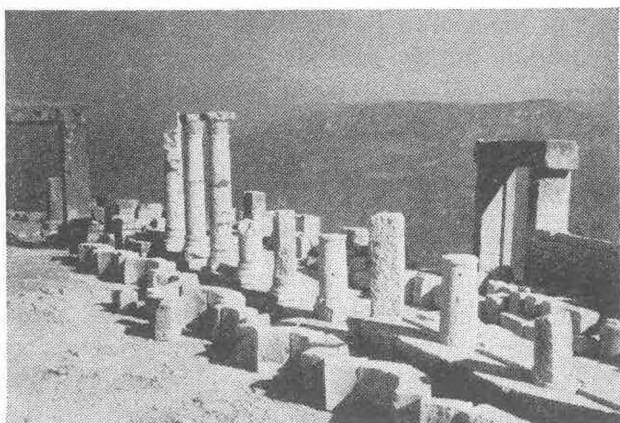
Pl. 1 — The Undercroft Door in the Basilica.



Pl. 2 — The Southern Entry to the Wellhouse.



Pl. 3 — The Basilica: North Side.



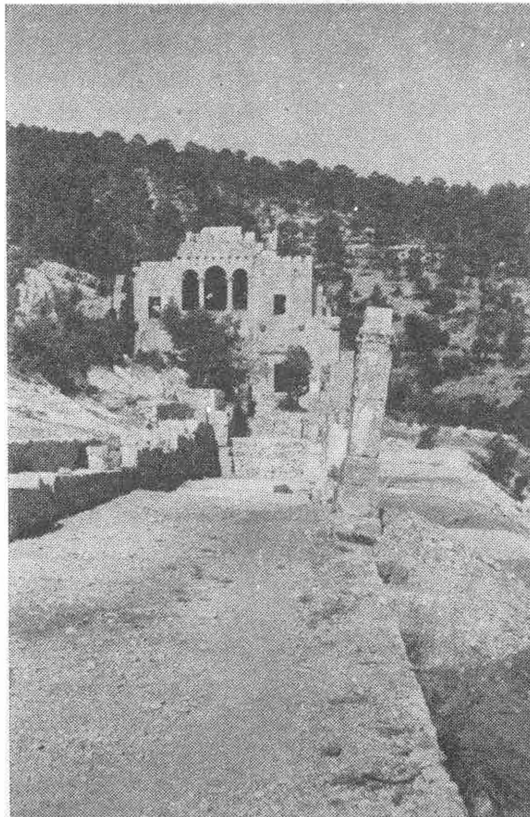
Pl. 4 — The Basilica: South Side.



Pl. 5 — South-west Corner of the Basilica restored.



Pl. 6 — Collapsed Blocks of the Walkway Sustension Wall. To the right, the Original Sustension Wall.



Pl. 7 — The Walkway from the West. In the background, the East Church.