



Archaeological Explorations in Syria 2000-2011

Proceedings of ISCACH-Beirut 2015

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Jeanine Abdul Massih and Shinichi Nishiyama

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And to the staff of the Rotana Gefinor Hotel (Hamra, Beirut, Lebanon)

A Colonnaded Building in a Commercial Area at Seleucid Jebel Khalid

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Abstract

One building in a possible commercial area at Seleucid Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates has a colonnaded portico, making it a building of some importance. This paper discusses its location and function on the site, as well as the implications for the status of Jebel Khalid.¹

Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates was excavated by an Australian team from 1986 to 2010 when excavation ceased due to the political crisis. The Seleucid site lies on the west bank of the river, guarding a crossing place where the river narrowed. The site was founded early in the 3rd century BC, probably by Seleucus I, and totally abandoned in the 70s BC. No structures earlier than the 3rd century BC have been found, and the site was not taken over by the Romans in the 1st century BC. Thus, Jebel Khalid provides an invaluable source of information about Hellenistic buildings in the Near East and life under the Seleucids.

The 50 ha site, guarded on all but the steep river side by 3.4 km of wall punctuated with towers, has yielded, since excavations began in 1987, a Main Gate (Connor and Clarke 2002), a palatial building on the Acropolis (Clarke 2002), a Temple (Clarke forthcoming 2016), a complete housing insula (Jackson 2014), a Palaestra (Clarke forthcoming 2016) and a building complex called Area S (Figure 1). No Agora has yet been located.¹

This paper focuses on a colonnaded building within Area S and the part it may have played in defining the status of Jebel Khalid. The colonnade itself was first excavated in 1989 by the late P. Connor. In 1995 teams working there were transferred to the housing insula, where excavations were of priority, and it was not until 2006 that excavations resumed there under the author's directorship. The size of the whole complex has now been defined, but much remains to be excavated inside (Figure 2).

Area S: Building Complex

Area S is located on flattish land at the base of the more northern of the two hills of the *jebel*, some 800 m north of the Acropolis (see Fig. 1). Like the housing insula, and indeed conforming to the grid of the whole site, it was laid on a north-south grid between two major

roads running north-south. The walls surrounding it constitute a block measuring 77.5 m north-south and 35.5 m east-west; the latter dimension is close to that of the housing insula, and may represent the standard block width at Jebel Khalid. The northern and western boundaries had no access; in fact, the northern boundary was a double wall separating the complex from a quarry (Figure 2). Two minor entries were found in the only trench excavated on the southern boundary. The eastern boundary, on the river side, is largely obscured by a tangle of tertiary and last phase structures. However, at least two entries, one of which substantial, were located here. The entry on the east suggests preferred access to and from the river. This access would have been via a steep wadi leading down to the river bank where quays were visible under water before the construction of the Tishreen Dam altered the flow and depth. Steps had been cut into the rock within the wadi, undoubtedly to make transport of goods by mules, donkeys, or people easier. Entry was not impossible from the landside, i.e. the Main Gate at the west of the site (Figure 1), but the route would have been more devious.

The chronology of Area S, suggested by coins, lamps, stamped amphora handles, and datable fine wares clearly ranges from the early 3rd century BC to the abandonment in the 70s BC, consistent with other areas excavated at Jebel Khalid (Jackson forthcoming 2016: 51-4.) There, four phases within the Hellenistic period were identified (Figure 3):

1. An early phase belonging to the 3rd century BC that is irrecoverable, apart from the thick boundary walls of the whole complex and a few cut-down wall traces inside of it.
2. A main phase contemporary with the primary form of the colonnaded building (CB) and associated structures. This phase might have possibly begun during the reign of Antiochus III.
3. An intermediate phase recognised by a higher floor and new structures on the floor. Walls of this phase are orthogonal and well built. ESA was

¹A fuller version of this paper will be published in the next volume of the series *Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates, Volume 5, Excavations 2000-2010*.



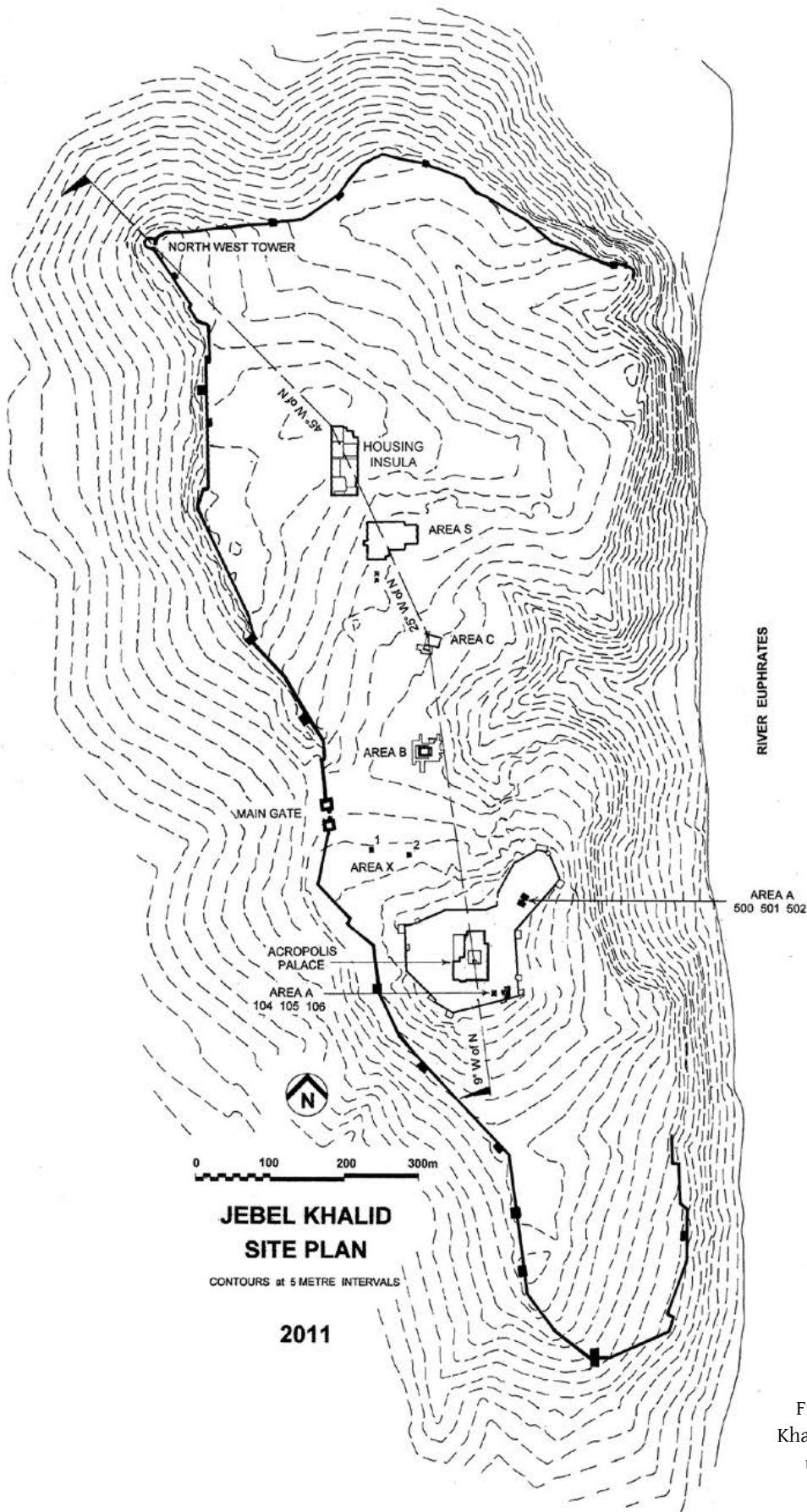


Figure 1: Contour map of Jebel Khalid, showing sites excavated up until 2010 (B. Rowney 2011).



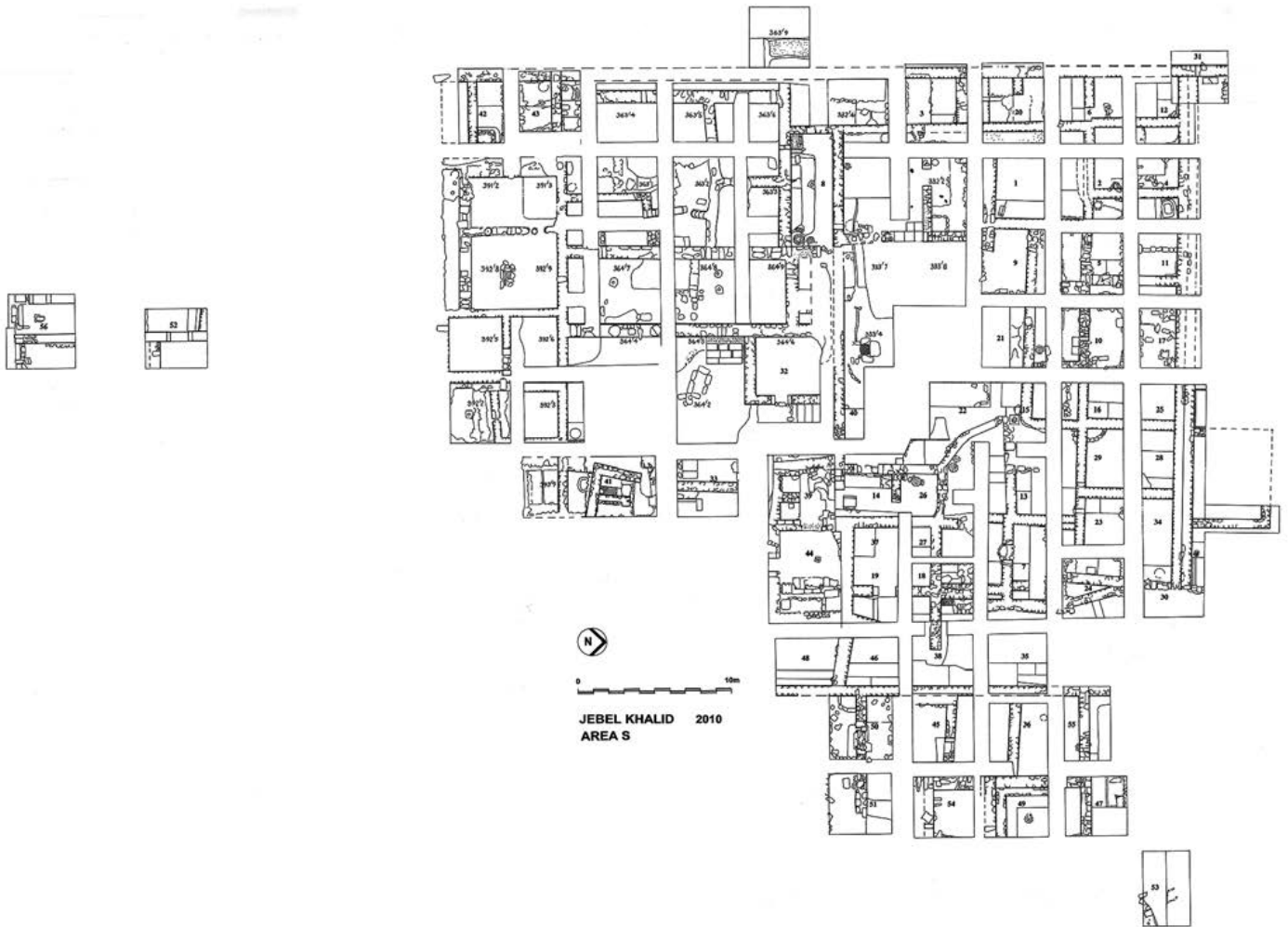


Figure 2: Plan of trenches excavated in Area S (B. Rowney 2010).

often found in the fill below these new floors, so this phase is post 150 BC.

4. A late phase distinguished by higher floors, or the re-using of the latest floor, and with non-orthogonal structures re-using building material, probably from already collapsed buildings. In other parts of the site this is usually dated to the first quarter of the 1st century BC and associated with the latest coins, i.e. the Metropolitan Antioch issues (92-72 BC) (Nixon 2008; 2002).

The Colonnaded Building

Fig. 3 shows the position of the colonnaded building (designated CB on the plan) facing east onto the large courtyard A. The colonnaded porch fronts a large rectangular building with interior dimensions of 14.2 m x 9.6 m (133 m²), enclosed on all sides except for the east portico and a minor door in its north wall into the adjacent wing. The dimensions of the original form of the colonnaded portico are difficult to establish, as the stylobate, beautifully structured at the south, degenerates, as its excavator noted, ‘into a pile of rubble at the north.’ One can suggest, however,

that the stylobate originally extended to the primary east-west wall to the north. This assumption gives an original north-south length of 17.4 m; the east-west width of usable floor space in the colonnade is 5 m. Two column bases were found resting on the stylobate of ashlar blocks, approximately 80 cm in diameter and 2.8 m apart (measuring from the centre of each), although measurements cannot be exact due to the degradation of the stone (Figure 4). If this was their original placement, we can calculate that six columns may have been used, with one on either side of the three steps, 2.5 m wide, leading up to the floor of the portico. A fluted Doric capital was found *ex situ* on the floor of the porch, to its south. The shaft of the capital measured 46 cm in diameter, with the standard Doric 20 flutes. The column bases appeared unfluted, but it is possible that the easily damaged lower shaft was left plain, as in the Northern Stoa at Priene (Winter 2006: fig. 176). However, in the adjacent trench, a larger Doric capital of an unfluted column, inverted, and re-used as a quern or pot stand, was found on the floor of the portico. The diameter of this shaft was 64 cm. It seems more likely that the columns on this stylobate were entirely unfluted and that the fluted capital belonged elsewhere. Indeed, it was later found to match fluted,



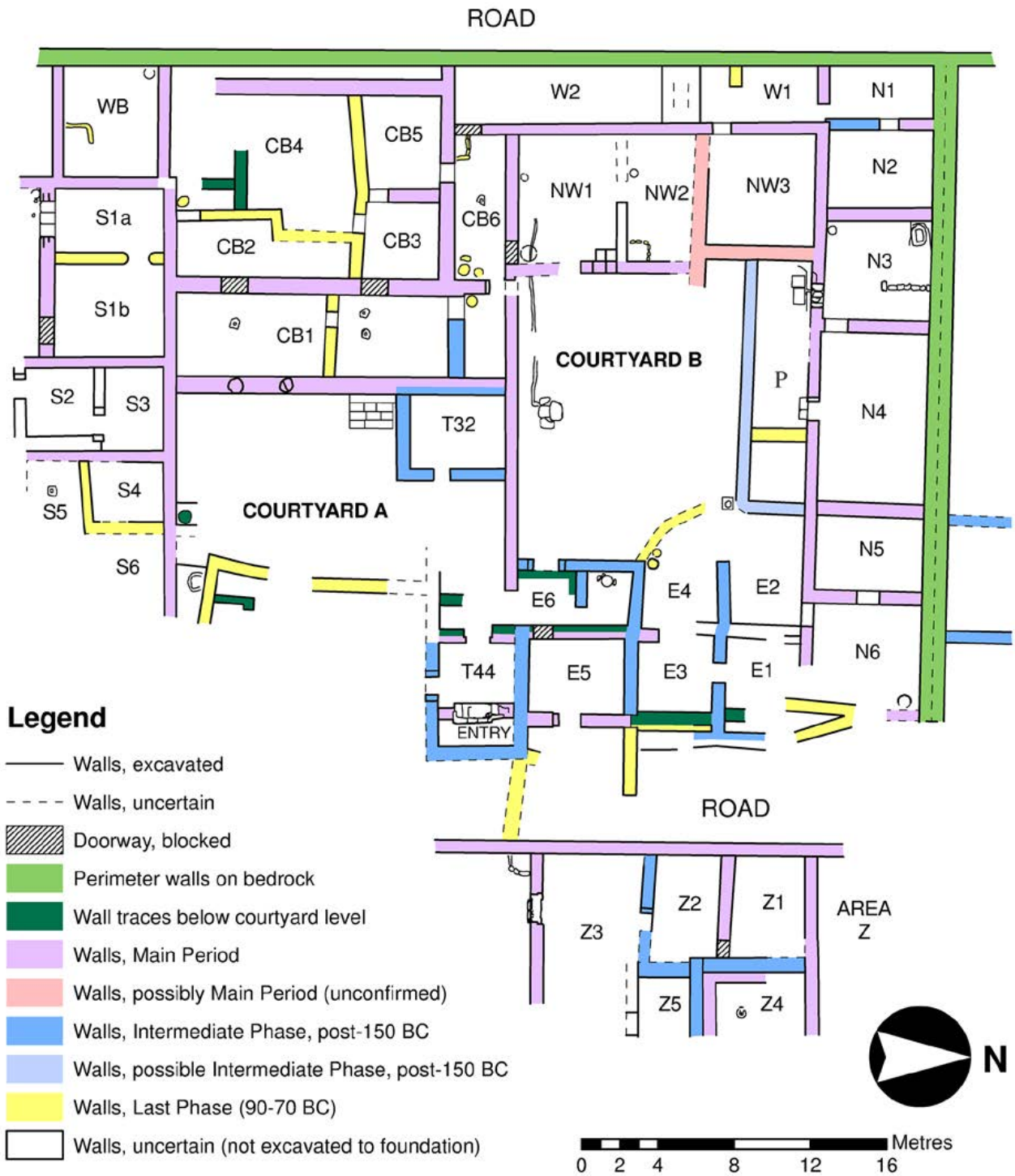


Figure 3: Plan showing reconstruction of phases in Area S (B. Rowney, H. Jackson, and M. Negus Cleary 2015).

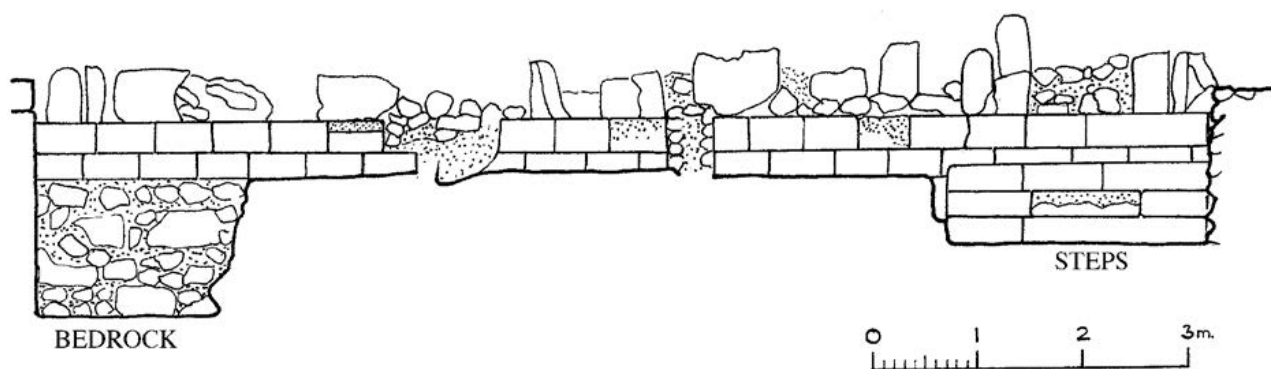
smaller columns in a room to the south of the CB. Also found ex situ on the stylobate was an unfluted column drum tipped sideways and one other possible capital, severely modified and used as a quern in the latest phase. A fragment of an architrave with well-spaced dentils was found on the surface in front of the stylobate. Dentils are more usually associated with the Ionic order, so this find is a little puzzling. The dentils also do not conform to Vitruvius' ideal dimensions for dentils, being further apart than half the depth of the

projection (Vitruvius 3.5.11). Either this fragment's use was somewhere else, which seems unlikely from its findspot directly in front of the stylobate, or a composite mixing of orders was employed. F. Winter comments that 'problems posed by the elements of the Doric frieze could be avoided by placing an Ionic entablature over the Doric columns'. In view of the fact that not a single fragment of Doric triglyph or metope was found, this seems a likely explanation. The Temple site had preserved fragments of its Doric frieze, in spite





Figure 4: Stylobate with two column bases. View to the north (P. Connor 1989).



N-S SECTION LOOKING WEST ~ AREA S
JEBEL KHALID

Figure 5: Section of east face of stylobate (B. Rowney 1990).

of severe robbing (Clarke forthcoming 2016: 20, figs. 2.12-2.13). The effect of an Ionic entablature would be simpler and perhaps less expensive. According to J. Coulton (1976: 119), 'the use of Ionic features in the Doric order is a general characteristic of the Hellenistic architecture of Asia Minor.' This mixing of orders was not confined to stoas, as the Bouleuterion at Miletus (Winter 2006: 24, 223) and the Council House at Herakleia (Winter 2006: 144) attest.

The floor of the portico was not paved, but was constituted of packed earth covered with finely-crushed limestone on a fill of limestone chips and rubble. The stylobate itself consisted of a levelling layer of thin ashlar blocks topped by more substantial ashlar blocks, averaging 55 cm in width (Figure 5).

The building is accessed by two doors. The three steps onto the porch are in line with the more northern of the two. The dimensions of this latter doorway are unclear because the baulk has not been cleared, but the more southern door in the same wall, blocked with rubble, was 1.3 m wide. Therefore, one could suggest that this was also the width of the northern door, taking the Hellenistic love of symmetry into account. The tentative reconstruction proposed here adopts this hypothesis (Figure 6).

Two doors may imply two different rooms but here we have a problem. The original layout of the interior is unclear and it is obvious that the space was remodelled many times. The space is far too large (14.2 m N/S x 9.6 m E/W) to not be supported by interior walls or



Figure 6: Reconstruction of front of colonnaded building. View to the west. (S. Young 2016).

supports. However, there are no indications of any support, and the walls excavated are largely late-phase and built on the packed-earth floor and not on the bedrock. P. Connor assumed a dividing wall running the full east-west width of the interior, based on the existence of two main doors (Connor 1995).

The interior of this building must have been very dark, as there seems little opportunity for windows, in that the western wall is built right up against the perimeter wall, with only a narrow gap between, and both north and south walls have structures built against them. If those latter structures were single-storey and the CB was a higher building, then clerestory-style windows placed high in the north and south walls would have been possible. Otherwise, the only light would have come from the two main doors in the eastern façade. This must be borne in mind when considering function, e.g. too dark for manufacturing activities?

The function of the CB is uncertain. Its short length and the depth of the rectangular building behind it rule out 'stoa'; it is not 'a great deal longer than it is... deep' (Coulton 1976: 4). It was built entirely of stone – no ashlar blocks have survived from the façade and the other external walls were of fieldstones. The building was roofed with Corinthian tiles; large deposits of these were found in the excavations. The architectural evidence of the colonnaded façade, the two wide entrances, and the amount of space inside, suggests a public building of some importance. But the artefactual evidence is mainly from the latest phase and is similar to that of the same phase in the housing insula, e.g. tannours, grinders and pounders, and loomweights. Several large deposits of the latter were found, notably on the portico floor (80 total) and inside the building in the NW corner room CB5 (approximately 60). Although these numbers may not suggest industrial-scale weaving (Jackson 2014: 565-573), the rare discovery of a

substantial fragment of woven material in a late-phase 'bin' in CB6, a room which had access into this building, does perhaps add evidence to such activity, but only for the last phase. In this last phase, the portico floor was partitioned off in two places by walls of reused masonry, perhaps sheltering weaving activities in good light or preparation of grains, as evidenced by the querns and pounders found. Large jars and amphorae were dominant in the pottery from this building, but again, most of the evidence is from the late phase, when the portico was at least partially ruined.

Courtyard A

Courtyard A, located to the east of the colonnaded building, must be closely associated with the function of the building. Its full dimensions are uncertain but it originally extended the full north-south width of the colonnaded building, i.e. 17.4 m inside the walls. The east-west measurement at the north must have extended originally to the entry room in the eastern boundary wall in T44, to a length of 17.4 m from the actual entry, which makes it equal to the north-south dimension. It is unknown if this is a coincidence or a planned symmetry. Whether it was originally a full rectangle, worthy of being the approach to the colonnaded building, is uncertain as its south-east quadrant is unexcavated. What is certain is that later structures were built in this courtyard but on various floors. Courtyards notoriously have their surfaces renewed fairly frequently. The floor contemporary with the base of the steps into the colonnaded building is a very thick, strong limestone floor and must have been the floor of the main period of occupation. It was also the floor associated with a substantial threshold in what is probably the original eastern boundary of the complex (Figure 7). It has an external dimension of 2.5 m, allowing an internal access width of 2 m, although the wooden doorposts indicated by the square sockets



Figure 7: Threshold in T44. View to the west. (S. Hay 2010).

might have further reduced that dimension. This threshold and the associated wall are separated from the bedrock, located some 25 cm below them, by a deep layer of ashy soil. This is one of the indicators that the complex it gives entry to was not the earliest structure here.

The character of this courtyard A is of interest. Only on the latest floor was a typical courtyard installation found, in the form of a rectangular enclosure roughly made of reused masonry, probably a rubbish pit or *kopron*. Also on the latest floor was a large stone vat and a large circular basalt stone with a central hole for the insertion of a beam, possibly belonging to a press. Both are perhaps indicative of some industrial activity in the late phase. Only a small area of the courtyard floor contemporary with the foundation of the CB has been excavated, but it yielded nothing indicating typical courtyard use as seen in the houses. Unlike the domestic courtyards it does not give access to a variety of rooms encircling it. It was enclosed at the north and probably at the south (the southern wall is unbroken for the length of its excavation) in the main period. There is no sign of a cistern or drainage. With a formal, lockable entry in T44, possibly with the rebuilding of its western wall making it into an entry room rather than giving direct access to the courtyard, one wonders why access to this courtyard and ‘public’ building was restricted. The threshold, while impressive, is not, at 2 m, wide enough for more than a small cart. Plus, there are no wheel marks on the threshold. In summary, Courtyard A gave privileged access to the CB and seems not, at the current level of excavation, to have been a workaday courtyard in the phase associated with the foundation of the CB.

Interpretations on the function of the colonnaded building

At this point, one needs to look at the relationship of the CB and Courtyard A with the rest of the complex (see Figs. 2-3). Directly adjacent to Courtyard A is Courtyard B to the north, but with no access to Courtyard A until the latest phase. Unlike Courtyard A, Courtyard B had a cistern and was surrounded by rooms on three sides. Those on the east are late-phase structures but those on the west and north belong to the main period. They can be interpreted as a series of rooms with, in each case, one larger room giving access to smaller rooms with more evidence of activities (Jackson forthcoming 2016: 67-9, 73). While jars and amphorae were relatively more common than tableware in these rooms, no storage pithoi were found. However, in 1995, a trench to the east, further down towards the river, had unearthed two very large pithoi, with the possibility of more in the same room left, however, unexcavated. It is possible that this constituted a storage area, intermediary between Area S and the river quays. Excavation to the east of Area S had also unearthed, in Area Z, rows of large rooms with some evidence of industrial activity (Jackson forthcoming 2016: 69-71).

Interpretation of Area S has always been influenced by the title given to it when it was first published in 1995 (Connor 1995: 122), i.e. ‘commercial buildings/stoa complex’. Jebel Khalid needs a commercial area, but is this it? It was stated earlier that an agora has not been located, but it is difficult to believe that Area S located far from the Main Gate, Temple, and Acropolis, is the agora. A more likely position for the agora would be between the Main Gate and the Temple, an area where

a short-lived Roman camp was built in the 4th century AD. Apart from the location, the use of space within this complex (e.g. two separate courtyards with possibly different functions) does not resemble that of an agora, even if one adduces a Near Eastern influence, such as claimed for the agora at Dura-Europos (Ward-Perkins 1981: 347-350).

There is no doubt that the CB dominates Area S, physically and powerfully, with its façade, tiled roof, and position. It may have been visible from the river. The river is an important factor here. Visitors or traders arriving by river at this point would choose, depending on their business, whether to climb up to the Temple, and thence to the Acropolis via the southern wadi, or to Area S via the northern wadi (Figure 8). Any goods brought by river could more easily be carried to Area S or the intervening Area Z, where the pithoi were found; the Temple route would involve circumventing the *temenos*. Here at Jebel Khalid, the river narrows, making it suitable for a crossing point, where ships might stop to unload, or to load goods coming from inland (e.g. Antioch). This makes Jebel Khalid very suitable as a control point for river traffic and possibly for collecting tax revenue imposed on river trade. With a suggested population of only c. 4500-7500 persons (Clarke forthcoming 2016: 444), many of whom were employed in the garrison rather than in agriculture, the site would have been 'dependent on an extensive regional *chora* and the cheapest and easiest form of transport from the productive riverine area was by river' (Clarke, personal communication). It was suggested earlier that the CB was founded in the reign of Antiochus III, whose conquest of Coele Syria and Phoenicia must have opened up trade routes further south into the Middle Euphrates, which would have been of prime economic importance after the Romans deprived him of all territories north of the Taurus, including the access ports in Asia Minor (Kosmin 2011).

At other Hellenistic sites, the design of the CB, i.e. a rectangular building with a short colonnaded façade, is difficult to parallel. At Assos, a rectangular colonnaded building of larger proportions, the bouleterion, opened on to the agora. There are difficulties with identifying the CB as a bouleterion. Firstly, in a military settlement such as Jebel Khalid (and Dura-Europos), administrative issues of the settlement would presumably have been discussed in the headquarters of the military governor on the Acropolis, and not in this distant building. Secondly, the interior shows no signs of seating for a *boule*, although rows of wooden seats, such as those at Assos, would have not survived (Steele 1992: 49; Winter 2006: 146). Thirdly, a bouleterion would have access to the agora or a street, whereas at Jebel Khalid, it opens to a courtyard, although this argument is weakened by the existence of colonnaded courts outside the 'Assembly Hall' at Priene, the magnificent Bouleterion

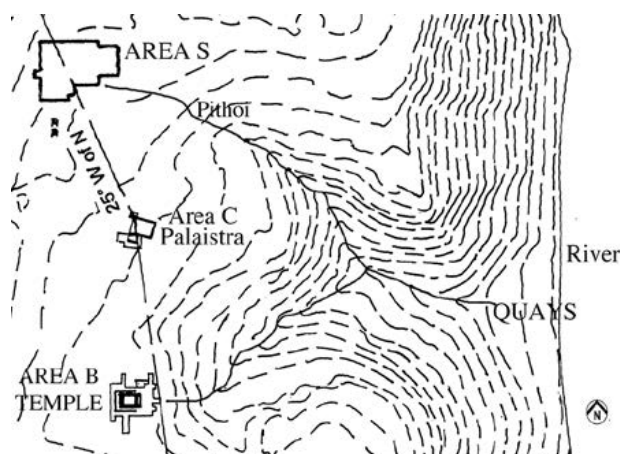


Figure 8: Detail of paths to river (B. Rowney 2011).

at Miletus, and the 'council house' at Herakleia under Latmos (Winter 2006: 144-145). However, these latter 'courts' are much larger than Courtyard A.

Could the complex have housed 'offices' that administered distribution of goods? There is a noticeable pattern, provided by the northern wing (Courtyard B), of 'units' comprising several inter-communicating rooms, usually with one larger room at the hub, and with associated workrooms. These are not small shops open to the street in a row. At Dura-Europos there were no Hellenistic colonnaded façades, and the agora, now known to have been constructed only in the 2nd century BC (Leriche 1996), housed two unpretentious market halls whose design does not at all resemble that of the CB. There the buildings resembled covered Oriental bazaars, with shops on both sides. Early excavators suggested that the rest of the space was filled with temporary stall holders (Rostovtzeff and Brown 1944: 15, 42). Perhaps Courtyards A and B could have housed awnings and stalls, but their operators would have had to gain access through the eastern doors. Closed market courts did exist in Hellenistic times, notably the North Market at Miletus bordered on the east side by a wall with a central propylon-type gate in the 1st century BC (Coulton 1976: 174, fig. 86). The reconstruction of Dura-Europos' agora also shows an enclosed space with three doors to the south (admittedly much wider than the T44 door) and one each on the east and west sides (Cocqueugniot 2011: 300, fig. 5). Market halls in the great Hellenistic cities of Asia Minor were stoa-like, massive colonnaded lengths, often multi-storey, and bordering the civic agora. The Market Hall at Miletus had three rows of 39 rooms behind a Doric façade (Köse 2005: 141). In Pisidia, even the relatively minor settlements, e.g. at Selge (Machatschek and Schwarz 1981: 55-58) and Pednelissos (Köse 2005: 144), had multi-storey market halls associated with the agora and much larger than the CB at Jebel Khalid. Granted, Jebel Khalid was a relatively small settlement, which might not have needed a large facility. The CB does not fit the image,



with its deep, rectangular building behind the short colonnade. But even so, it might be worth considering that this was one of its possible functions.

Another function to be considered for a building that was designed to be prominent is that of a public dining room. The domestic houses excavated at Jebel Khalid located near Area S, did not feature an identifiable *andron*, and it was suggested that there may have been some military mess-type arrangement for formal dinners (Jackson 2014: 556). But this would surely have taken place in the administrative building on the Acropolis, where the splendid Room 20 (and the stacks of plates found in an adjacent room) suggests banqueting on a grand scale. Parallels to this room are found in the Palace at Macedonian Vergina and in the administrative building at Kedesh (Berlin and Herbert 2012: 27; Berlin *et al.* 2014; Clarke 2002: 42-43). If there was a dining room, whom would it have served: port officials, market officials such as weights and measures inspectors, important merchants, or traders? The artefactual evidence does include fragments of drinking cups and plates in common ware, but these appear on all sites. In comparison with the housing insula, the pottery corpus of the CB is dominated by large jars, and the fine-ware cups and plates are relatively few.

To return to the possibility that Area S is a commercial trading area, it is conceivable that controlling Antioch was using Jebel Khalid's position as an intermediary port to send goods arriving overland from the west down the river to other Seleucid settlements, such as Nicephorion and Dura-Europos. Certainly, masses of Eastern Sigillata A pottery (probably made near Antioch) and Antiochene moulded bowls reached not only Jebel Khalid but also Dura-Europos and further south. In the other direction, green-glazed ware from downriver reached Antioch, almost certainly via Jebel Khalid (Jackson 2016; 2011). Such a use as a river port could justify the hypothesis that the original function of the colonnaded building was as a commercial administrative centre, perhaps involved in collecting river and port taxes. This would imply that the original military garrison had taken on a new or additional role apart from safeguarding river traffic, which would be a natural development of its position on this busy river. Such a facility, along with the Palaestra and Temple, adds to the impression that Jebel Khalid was no mere *phourion*, but had at least some of the characteristics of a *polis*.

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