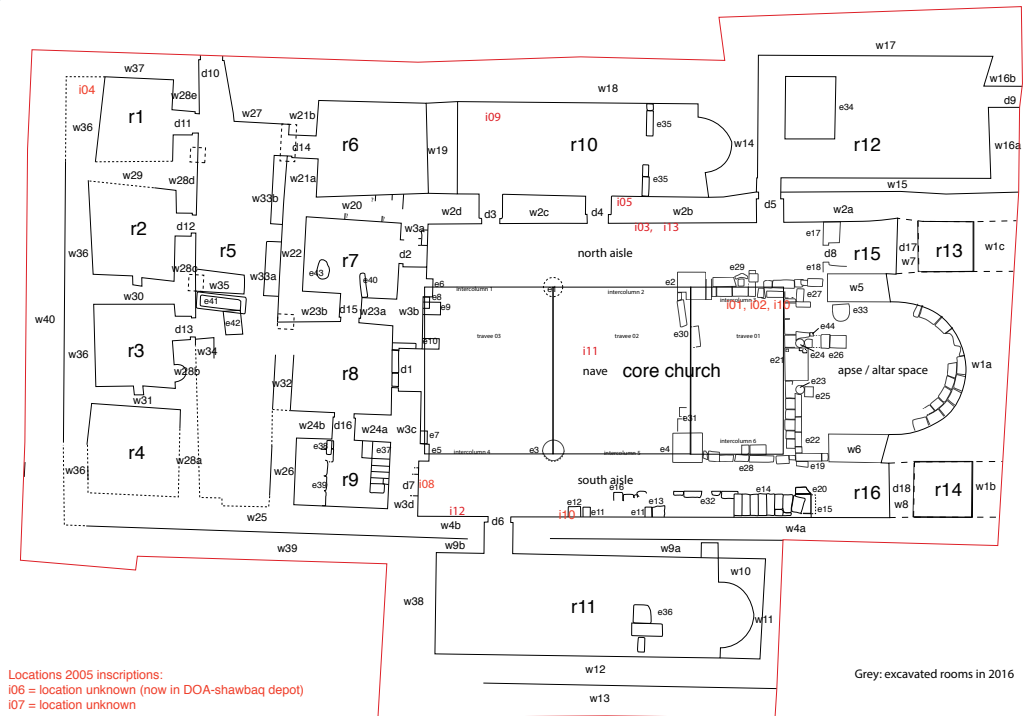


Fig. 86. Provisional layout with building sequences of the extramural church at Udruh. In red are the location of the 2005 inscriptions (Illustration by Frans Theuvs).



UDHRUH

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Udruh, a Late Roman fortress and Byzantine-Islamic town in Southern Jordan, surrendered to Mohammed's armies in A.D. 630. Historical texts and retrieved inscriptions make clear that this was not the end of its Christian community. After several years of research on the actively exploited 48 km² region around Udruh we have focused since 2016 on Udruh's extramural church, studying its architectural history, its inscriptions, and its changing conditions, together with historical texts in order to comprehend the site's religious transformation from Late Antiquity into the Mamluk period.

The extramural church of Udruh—still largely covered with the debris of centuries—was first explored archaeologically by the French Dominican monk Père L.-H. Vincent in the last decade of the 19th century. After that visit the church must have remained nearly untouched for another century, as can be seen in aerial photos taken throughout the 20th century. In 2005 major parts of the church were "cleared" of rubble, and walls were "restored" by the local representative of the Department of Antiquities. This was carried out as part of a program to make the archaeological heritage of Jordan more visible, attractive, and accessible to potential visitors and tourists. The quality of this work was not what archaeologists would expect today, and has resulted in the loss of essential archaeological information. Several parts of the church interior walls were plastered with multi-layered stucco containing thirteen Christian graffiti and inscriptions both in Greek and Arabic. Four of the Arabic Christian inscriptions were quite complete and could be dated on the basis of handwriting to the 13th and early 14th centuries (Al-Salameen et al. 2011, 234–237). Arabic-Christian communities were still living in Udruh until the early days of the Mamluk Sultanate, and in these times complex and intriguing bonds were formed between the authorities and different Christian groups (Pahlitzsch 2005). The last decades of the 13th century were used by the Mamluks to secure the defense of their eastern frontier against Mongol attacks (Walker 2013, 184–185). Mamluk reinforcements made at the north-western part of the Udruh fortress seem to underline this.



Fig. 87. 3D-reconstruction of the Udhruh Church, made by means of Leica P30 Laser-scan (Image by Maarten Sepers)

During our field campaigns in 2013–2015, we put some emphasis on measuring the walls and trying to get grip on the construction history of the church. This has resulted in a preliminary layout of the church, and its different phases (Fig. 86). We noticed a rapid deterioration of the monument as a result of children using it as a playground and continuous illicit digging, and decided the time had come for more intensive research. The research targets include small-scale excavations, examining the 2005 “clearance” spoil heaps, OSL and C14 dating, transcribing inscriptions, and making 3D reconstructions. Some parts of the church were untouched during the cleaning in 2008. Their excavation is one of the other aims of the project. We have focused in the last few years on the two pastophoria (R17–18), several parts of the core of the church, and the “connecting” walls to the southwestern corner tower of the Udhruh fort. The construction and several transformation processes over time have already become clear through the observed stratigraphy.

The 2005 spoil heaps, next to the church, were examined and sieved for small finds and architectural elements. These small finds gave some rough clues on the dating of the site. In order to date the individual building phases accurately, we took mortar samples from the walls and foundations. OSL-dating, but especially C14 dating of charred twig inclusions in these mortars, has resulted in solid dating of the different phases.

Nine inscriptions found in 2005, both in Arabic as in Greek, are still in the process of being transcribed, as are five new inscriptions retrieved during the last year’s field campaigns. In order to finalize the layout and phases, we have made both photogrammetry and laser-scan 3D reconstructions of the church and its vicinities, for comparison. Finally, a Leica P30 laser scan was used, which resulted in a 3D reconstruction of the current state of the church (Fig. 87). Since 2011, detailed pictures of the interior and exterior of the church have been made, which are used in our 3D models to monitor the ongoing process of deterioration and looting of the monument.

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