

Original article

JIYEH CHURCH, SOUTH OF BEIRUT- LEBANON: ARCHITECTURAL STUDY

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Abstract:

With the declaration of Christianity as the official religion of the Byzantine state in the year 381 AD, a campaign of destruction of the ancient temples spread throughout the Roman Empire. Their stones and columns were used to build cathedrals and Christian churches, distinguished by their designs. Some of those temples, distinguished by their architecture and tall buildings, were transformed into centers of worship appropriate to the new religion. These churches did not remain as they were because of their exposure in subsequent eras to destruction, especially the earthquakes⁽¹⁾ that struck the region and the successive wars⁽²⁾ and the looting and vandalism that accompanied them. In the sixth century AD, religious divisions increased, a Syriac cultural renaissance appeared, and loyalty to the Byzantine state weakened until it faded away in the seventh century AD. The state exhausted its resources and lost many lands during the Islamic conquests, and the empire lost its most important provinces, including this region. Among the important examples are the churches of Lebanon; one of them being the "Jiyeh church"

1. Introduction

Jiyeh is a coastal city in Lebanon, 23 km south of Beirut, fig. (1-a). In the Phoenician era, it was known as Porphyron [1] and was a thriving natural seaport that still operates today. The city is also famous for its seven-kilometer-long sandy beach, which is rare along the mainly rocky Lebanese coast [2]. The historic, archaeological city of Porphyron occupies its location on the southern shore of Mount Lebanon. It is one of the coastal cities that arose in different historical eras and was established on elevated views a few meters above the sea. The ancient site of "Porphyron" lies at the center of present-day "Jiyeh," approximately 20 km south of the capital, Beirut, fig. (1-b). Its remnants are scattered across an area overgrown with grass and wild gooseberries. The paradox surrounding the site is its challenging accessibility, attributed to neglect, juxtaposed with its significant historical importance and the insights it offers into the richness of urban history. It was mentioned in Assyrian texts dating back to the seventh century BC, which included the campaign of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon on the city of Sidon [2]. There is another text dating back to the year 218 BC in which the events of a battle that occurred between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies at its shore were mentioned. Jiyeh was recently the scene of extensive excavations to uncover elements of the Byzantine church, fig. (1-c), besides the group of tombs surrounding it,

which date back several centuries. Although Contenau identified the elements of the church, the residential neighborhood, and the cemetery in 1914, excavation work did not begin until 1975, when the antiquities mission of the Lebanese Directorate of Antiquities discovered most of the local architecture from the Byzantine era. Research was later conducted in Jiyeh by the Polish-Lebanese Archaeological Mission from the Polish Center for Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Warsaw. The rebuilding of the Jiyeh church took effect a few years after the civil war, fig. (1-d) [3].



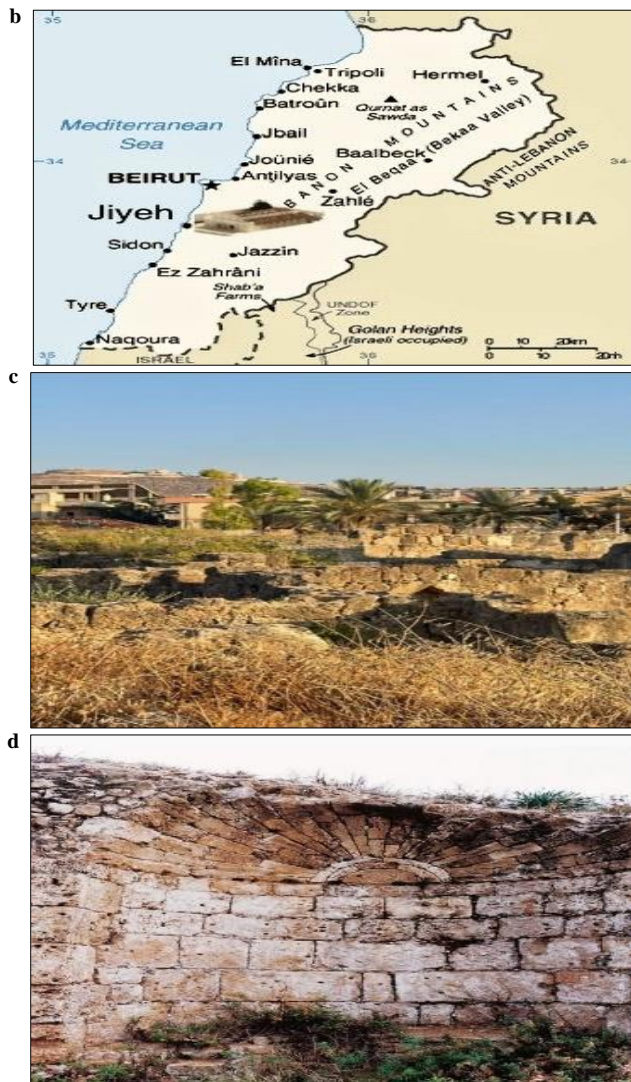


Figure 1 a. panoramic view of Jiyeh city, b. location map of Jiyeh church, c. Jiyeh church-current state, d. apse of the church-current State

2. Methodological Study

2.1. Building

In the Byzantine era, mosaic floors became an essential element in the interior decoration of homes and religious places. In spaces, mosaic patterns have spread throughout the Mediterranean basin, and the Jiyeh area was no exception, as recent excavations carried out by the Polish-Lebanese project confirmed the presence of mosaic floors, especially in the National Quarter, and all research has confirmed the presence of models of mosaic making in Jiyeh. In addition to studying the usual decorations and images, comparative studies were conducted with other sites near Jiyeh, fig. (2-a) The discoveries are considered a small part of what is supposedly present in the layers of the earth in terms of antiquities dating back to different historical eras. Whenever a civilization came, it was demolished, and a new civilization was built on the ruins of what preceded it. A visitor to the site can notice that it is divided into two parts. The first is a large, low space topped by a wide wall of polished stones facing the sea. It is the

interior façade of a Byzantine church, with an opening resembling a niche in the middle. The second section is high and contains continuous ruins, indicating a section of the city with its roads, buildings, and facilities [4]. It's worth noting that excavation efforts have successfully revealed a church situated directly on the seashore, approx. 60 meters away from the water. Remnants of its columns and visible pillars are apparent close to the beach. Ahmed Abdel Halim Younis explains that the church is "the type that is divided into three sections from north to south: first, the northern portico is 6.3 meters wide, the middle is 9.66 meters, and the southern is 4.4 meters. As for the length of the church from the inside without the apse," it is 41.5 meters long, and is also divided into three courtyard sections: the 1st is approx. 20 meters from the entrance to the middle, the 2nd is a place of worship in the middle of the church, 15.5 meters long, and the third is the structure, approx. 6 meters [5]. As for the apse, it is 2.9 meters wide and approx. 5 meters high. It was covered with glass mosaics and frescoes. These drawings and artistic formations were destroyed along with a large part of the mosaic panels, some of which date back to the Roman and Byzantine eras. During the excavations [6], 10 valuable paintings bearing Greek writings were also recovered, which helped determine the dates of the churches. The paintings are displayed in the National Museum. An attempt was made to plan this church located on the sands next to the sea-based solely on knowledge of the floors and some of the lower foundations that were dismantled and looted for building materials. The building, reconstructed by archaeologists, was a basilica with three aisles, measuring 19 meters in length, and its walls were 1.10 meters thick. Among the rows of pillars between the aisles, parts remained consisting of three columns and structures with a width of about 40 cm. On the eastern side of the northern part of the nave, three steps lead down to a stone floor, followed by a mosaic pavement perpendicular to the passages, possibly representing part of the baptistery, fig. (2-b). Unfortunately, the excavations did not reveal what could be considered the corridor between the stairs, the baptistery, and the annex room of the church, which is located on the south-eastern side. However, there is no doubt that there is a difference in height compared to the other rooms [7], and because of its location and the possible thickness of its stone walls, it should have been a target for reused material lovers. After reviewing the description, planning, and data provided by Contenau [8] about the site, it becomes clear that there was an axial surface with roofs 5 meters wide, wrapped to the north and south by a mosaic strip 1.60 meters wide at the eastern end of the northern side, fig. (2-c) But the most important thing that can be seen is Contenau's [8] work in the Jiyeh church, which showed that the paved surface in the center of the courtyard is nothing but a choir of the one-story Byzantine churches spread throughout Phenicia. This introduction of the choir is in the nave of the church, and on either side of it is a mosaic band, fig. (2-d) that extends along the pillars that separate the aisles, fig. (2-e). There is no doubt that there is an extension of this surface in the nave of the church [9], which will be explained later.

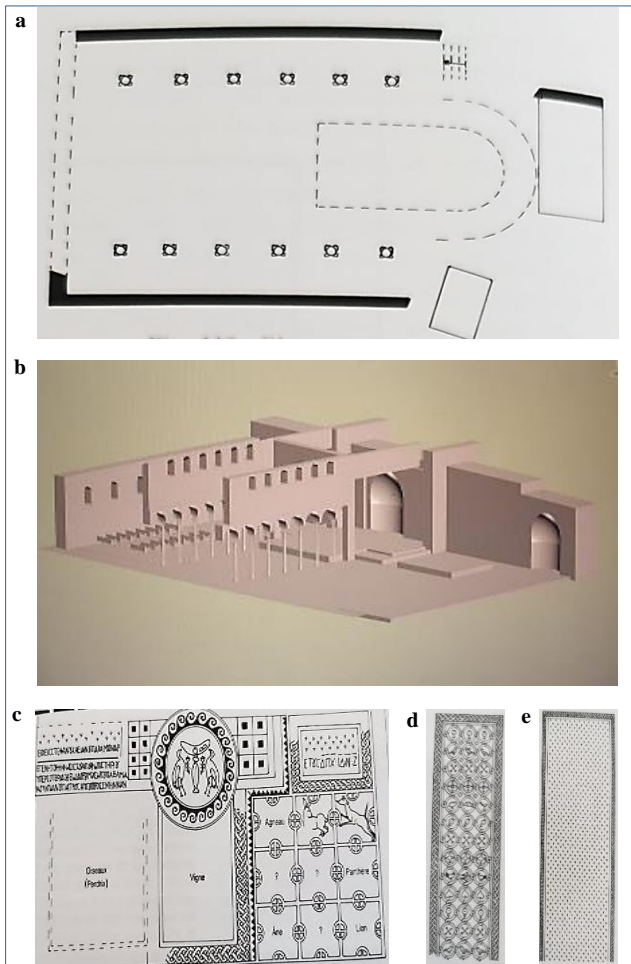


Figure (2) **a.** plan, **b.** concept of building by the author, **c.** mosaic pavement restitution plan, **d.** composition of interior collaterals, **e.** composition of exterior collaterals

2.2. Floors

On the edges of the middle nave [10] of the church, mosaic models were measuring 12.5 meters long and 1.60 meters wide, fig. (3-a). On the eastern end, there were remains of lower-quality ceramics from the eastern end of the courtyard, 5.90 meters long and 2 meters wide, while only a few parts remained in the southern aisle. In the south-eastern part, the remains of the baptistery floor are in good condition. The decorations depicted on the plate are perpendicular circles, fig. (3-b). Drawings such as pomegranate^(a), a bird (a sparrow^(b)), a ribbon-necked bird^(c), and a parrot^(d), a cross flower^(e), a rose^(f) or a star^(g), a fish^(h) between two birds, again a pomegranate, a cross flower, a star in a concave square, birds (a rooster⁽ⁱ⁾), two large and small birds, and a rooster again) A heart-shaped leaf^(j), again a pomegranate, a cross flower, and again a bird- and then the damaged mosaic appears [5]. We also find in this pattern a red square through the interlacing of two others, white and bluish-gray, and in the northern and southern aisle, fig. (3-c), the borders overlap for two threads of red, grey, blue, and white. The courtyard is a monochromatic white composition featuring red and bluish-gray rosebud hues. No carpet is specified between the columns [8]. The sanctuary was plundered even to the foundations [11], but it

cannot be denied that the belief that its pavement was made of panels was also recovered, like those on the axis of the central nave and the benches of the wall, fig. (3-d). The concrete section to the east of the aisles and the south and west of the baptistery space is difficult to explain. Was it a phrase? Is there a sidewalk for service areas or outdoor courtyards, or just preserved lower layers of mosaics or tiles? The room called the Baptistry is decorated with mosaics in distinctly different colors; there are light blue, purple, light yellow, dark yellow, red, and black. There is only an exceptional use of the color green. The rectangular carpet is organized complexly into several panels, numbering six, sharing the carpet in the middle lengthwise. On the center side of the plate, there are three square panels, and on the eastern side, there is a circular panel between two panels containing inscriptions. The three panels in the center and the southeast panel are surrounded by the same outer frame with a width of 0.33 meters, where fish and birds are frolicking, and no other indications show these animals follow each other freely on a certain background that connects them. The northern panel toward the center contains elements. A few are on the western, northern, and eastern sides, where coils of leafy acanthus tree [5] appear in blue and green, inhabited by birds resembling partridges. As for the central panel, framed by two lines of thread, the braid is decorated with coils of vines. The southern corner panel is organized in a straight grid of thin bands that carry small circles between the intersections and defines nine lancet rooms in the shape of a cross that include animals and include a gray donkey, a lion in two shades of yellow, a tiger in two shades of “blue” and spots of red, and a lamb. A blue-gray, a yellow-gray hair, and a purple-collar dog appear to be running after the hare, which turns its head toward it. In the other three compartments, the animals are destroyed. On the east side of the room, the north corner bears a quadrangular panel surrounded by a triple grid; the east half is decorated with monochromatic white scales with pink buds; the middle bears an inscription of four lines, of which the longest is 1.87 m. The first is entirely in the same frame as the rosebuds. The remaining three were outside and below, in a kind of border, on the middle and south sides. The letters were red on a white background. They were large, rectangular letters and long. Ἐπὶ εἰς Στεφάνου κ (αἰ) Αἰεῖάνου παραμοναρ (ἰων) ἐγένετο ἡ ψίφωσις τοῦ ἁγίου φωτιστηρίου ὑπὲρ ας Θεωδόρου μουσωτοῦ παξαμᾶ κ (αἰ) Οὐλπιάνου πατρὸς αὐτοῦ προσένηκαν. Under the sole responsibility of Stephanos and Ianus (the custodians of the sanctuary chamber), the making of the Holy Baptism mosaic was undertaken. She made an offering to save Theodoros and his father, Ulpian. What is striking at the beginning of this inscription is that the official expression “ἐνί” does not identify membership in one of the elite clergies [12]. Rather, the only title or description mentioned was the custodian of the sacred chamber (sacristans) [13]. The materials used in this engraving are made of glass paste instead of ceramic. In this technique, a large amount is used. If the majority were not glass mosaics, this interpretation may allow us to explain what is found in the inscription about Theodore, who specialized in mosaics and wall decoration but sometimes paid more attention to floor decoration. As

for the next panel, it occupies most of the area of the eastern half of the mat. Glass cubes, unlike those found in ceramics, is opaque and homogeneous like stone or allow a more precise technique developed for wall decorations, where the inclination of the cube allows it to play the role of a surface or mass depending on the incident light. In the latter, where we find some rare examples of the term “<uov-Oeiov” (and similar) for mosaic pavement, the signature of an artist calling himself “μουσωτής” [8]. A small network of ties or bands overlaid on a large, circular medallion. Within the space, there are squares colored red, blue, and grey; The outer frame of the panel includes a line of indented triangles and two interlocking bands on the south side and towards the center of the plate [14]. The medal has a frame made up of a row of red and white columns with a diameter of 1.15 meters and represents two large birds and other evil animals according to the monumental design. In the front is a very open cup shape on a high, pointed, decorated base flanked by two flowers with their stems. The southeast panel has a border of interlaced double threads with no clear break, and just like the northeast panel, it is decorated with a monochromatic composition with rose buttons on the east side and the inscription occupying the side towards the center. It is a single line written in the same long, rectangular letters as the previous inscription, which represents the end Ετους ΔΠΙΧ ι (ν) δ (κτιω) ν (οϷ). In the year 684, the seventh of the indictment^(k). The date is from 573-574; the seventh year of the indictment runs from September 1, 573, until September 1, 574. The inscription is placed in two parts on either side of the cup medallion, but there is no exact integration with each other in terms of importance or its relationship to content [8]. The paved mosaics in the south-eastern annex of the church were made of a single field of tangent circles overlapping each other, forming concave squares connected by a small circle inscribed with ornament. The circles are decorated in the form of particles, resembling the decoration of a church nave: a bird, a pate cross, a pomegranate with its stem, or a flower.

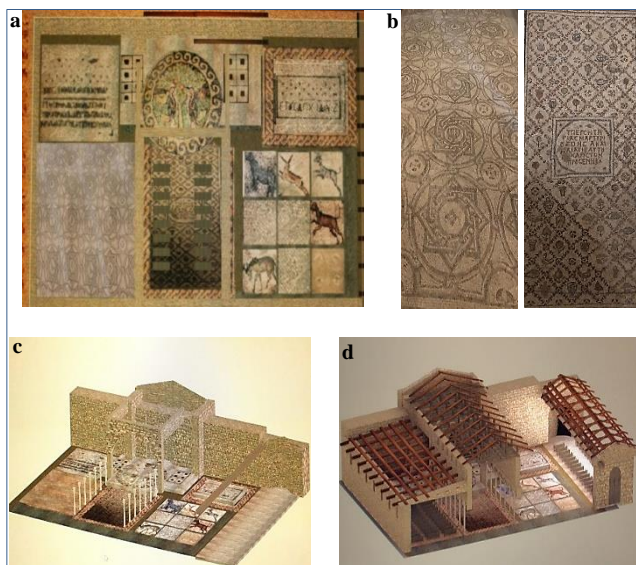


Figure 3 a. top view tile Jiyeh, b. parts of mosaic aisles, c. interior perspective, d. perspective front view

2.3. The date

The date of the inscription in the baptistery is late (573-574), but that is due to the installation of the mosaics in the church nave, fig. (4-a). However, the south-eastern room will not be far from it in terms of the period, as there are clear similarities in technique and content between them, fig. (4-b), as well as with other mosaics similar in terms of period, as the chair is dated. In 585, the Prophet Yunus also in 585, which is sufficient to determine the date of the whole to the period of the seventies of the sixth century, fig. (4-c).

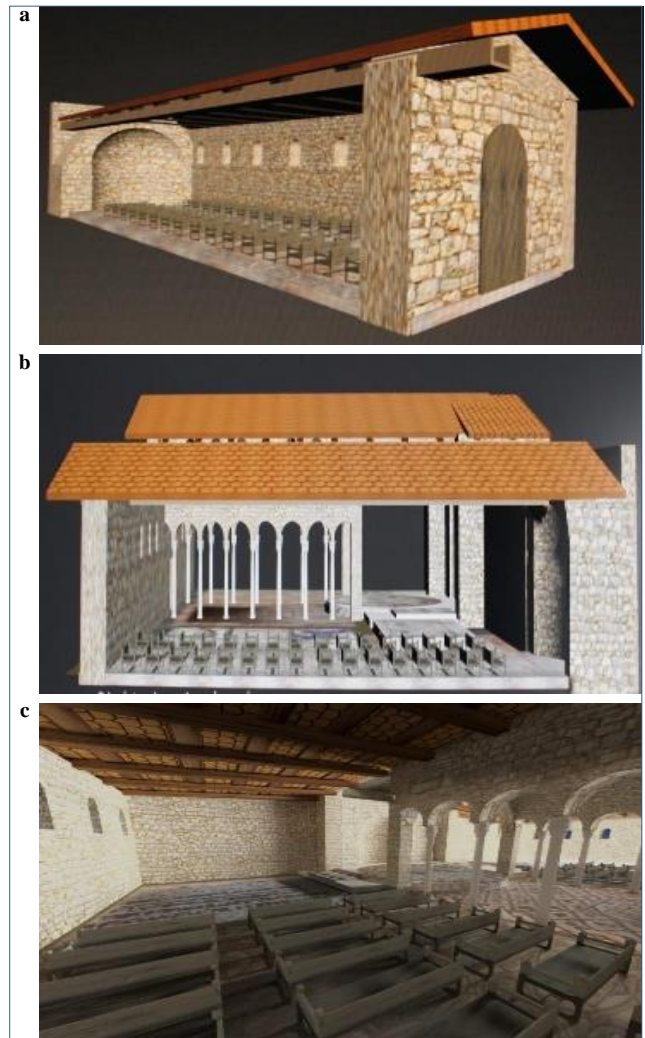


Figure 4 a. church extension, b. right view of church, c. interior side view

3. Results

The diversity and abundance of colors in the mosaic cubes of the church, their spread in different places and multiple spaces between the bands on the walls and entrances, alongside the diversity of themes and images in the medallions scattered in different spaces, enriched the church and made it distinctive from other Lebanese Byzantine churches. This reflects the artist's culture, philosophy, imagination, love, and appreciation for nature with its plants and animals, as well as his ability to depict human behaviors, interests, and

beliefs, demonstrating his talent through embodying some intertwined and complex images and forms. As for the texts and inscriptions, their prominence and importance were intentional in the church's floors. For example, the text related to Theodore's salvation, its content, and the way of using letters and the formula derived from the Greek language with the addition of the Roman era's spirituality, which characterized the sixth century. There is a similarity between this text and what was mentioned in the mosaic of the Tomb of Hiram church, as Renan clearly expressed, confirming that the mosaic of the tomb of Hiram church and the inscriptions in it date back to the second half of the sixth century, while Naggerieh and Rossi considered the mosaic much older than the inscription, attributing the mosaic's history to the fourth century AD, whereas the inscription dates back to the era it carries. When comparing the mosaic of the Jiyeh church and the mosaic of the tomb of Hiram church, we find a significant similarity in terms of organization, design, and the nature of themes such as plants and animals, especially birds and fish. What distinguishes the Jiyeh church from the rest of the churches is that its construction and divisions are more complex, especially in the rear part of the building, despite being close to Khan Khaldah church, its construction was simpler and clearer.

4. Discussion

The inscription commemorates the placement of a mosaic in the baptistry. These small panels and their edges are of great importance; in the acanthus leaves and narrow rosebuds in the baptistry and the two outer aisles, in the simple-figure decoration in the north-east room, and through the two inner aisles, we find all the elements of basilica decoration, fig. (5-a). The presence of large shapes and sizes and gradations in the levels, which appear simple and with stereotypical movements, constitute a model from the half of the sixth century AD [3], where large compositions of pastel colors are rare to meet in a very small space with a lot of fields and frames: Four of the six panels have a common outer frame along with fields with rosebuds and an inscription in the two eastern corners, fig. (5-b) [8]. As for the decoration of the floor of the middle courtyard, the two sidebands located in the Khalda church of Choueifat, the Upper Khan Khalda church, and the Zahrani church can be observed along the northern and southern borders of the platform of the sanctuary. In Khan Khaldeh, the shape is unchanged and extends 9 meters in length over the two sections of the choir, which has the same width everywhere. As for Khaldet Al-Shuweifat, the two compositions are identical along the length of the platform. But the space becomes narrower toward the platform, fig. (5-c). As for the Al-Zahrani church, the composition on the northern side remains one with the carpet of the entire nave, except for the extension along the southern edge of the platform, where the composition is not the same as that

aisle; the composition on the northern side extends in stages. It extends to the east with a width of about 1 meter along the length of the platform, and along the level of the choir, the field expands to become approximately 1.5 meters wide. After this 14.5-meter extension in the form of a ribbon, it continues from one side to the other in the central courtyard. As for the carpets in the choir, they are independent. In Bustan al-Sheikh church, the carpet of the lower choir appears unadorned. These complete archaeological components allow us to understand the paving process in the Al-Jieh church through the choir pavement and the two bands with interlocking circles remaining in the nave. On the eastern side, the northern structure is 1.60 meters wide, and it appears that the width varied from 2.40 in the courtyard to 1.6 in the aisle. It is noted that in the Khan Khaldeh church, the width of the structure remained constant. The main central structure, whose width measured about 5 meters, is not extended and continuous. From the entrance to the apse, we see that the altar in Phoenicia is close to the front part of the other half of the courtyard [4]. The back of the building is shown in a more complex way than in the Khan Khaldeh church, where the sanctuary room is not in its normal place but slightly skewed to the side, and it is not clear whether the mosaics belong to large covered rooms or more or less carefully paved courtyards. The dimensions of the concrete part and the spaces between the aisles and the baptistry mosaics with a baptistry width of 3.70 m are not clearly defined. Between the perimeter of the apse and the potential apse on the one hand, and the borders of the mosaic on the other hand, the space could be a kind of portico. Therefore, the central apse was not surrounded by the sacred room facing north.

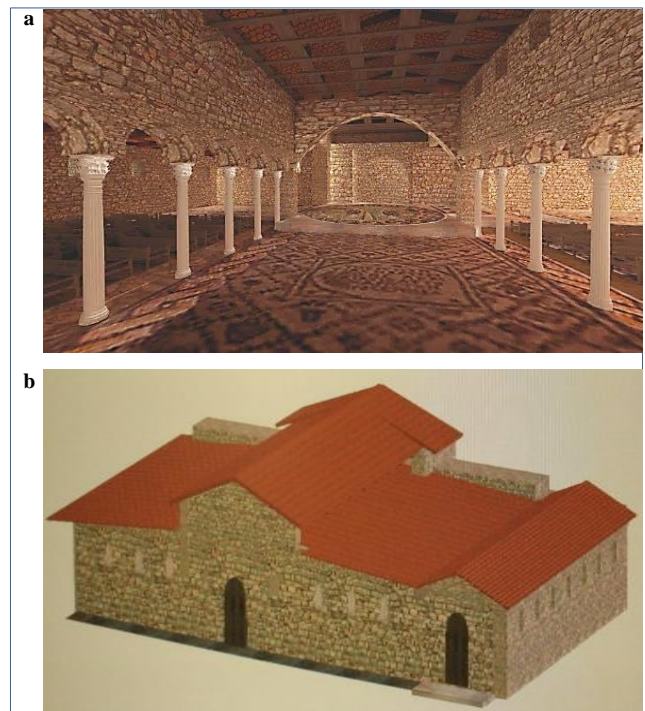




Figure (5) a. interior central view, b. perspective view, c. perspective front view

5. Conclusion

The church of Jiyeh presents a captivating blend of basilica and Byzantine architectural styles, reflecting the late Roman period's cultural convergence. Its mosaic artwork, adorned with spiritual inscriptions, unveils a rich tapestry of cultural expression. The process of reconstructing the church has been challenging, requiring careful historical research, on-site examinations, and architectural expertise to resurrect its original form with remarkable precision. Despite challenges, the church stands as a testament to Byzantine heritage, inviting further exploration into the enduring legacy of the late Roman era.

Endnotes

- (*) The Beirut Earthquake in 551 AD. caused a vast destruction and its impact reached most of the Lebanese coastal Cities.
- (**) The Lebanese Civil War (1975- 1990)
- (a) pomegranate in Christianity symbolizes fertility and abundance and it appears in an architectural ornamentation as symbol of life and renewal.
- (b) sparrow is often used as a symbol of vigilance and God's care for even the smallest creatures. It can also represent the soul's journey towards salvation and divine protection.
- (c) The ribbon-necked bird, often symbolizes the soul's journey towards spiritual enlightenment and transcendence. It represents the idea of liberation and the pursuit of divine wisdom.
- (d) The parrot symbolizes immortality and the resurrection. Its vibrant colors and ability to mimic speech are seen as attributes of eternal life and the promise of spiritual renewal.
- (e) the cross flower represents the union of the divine and the earthly realms. It symbolizes the victory of Christ over death and the promise of salvation.
- (f) the rose often symbolizes purity, love, and beauty. It can also represent the Virgin Mary or the divine feminine aspect of spirituality, roses are sometimes associated with martyrdom and the blood of Christ.
- (g) the star often represents divine guidance, enlightenment, and the birth of Christ.
- (h) The fish symbolizes various aspects of Christian faith, including Christ, abundance, and baptism.

- (i) Rooster often represents vigilance, resurrection, and the passage of time
- (j) Heart-shaped leaf, also known as “cordiform”, is a common motif in byzantine ornamentation. The heart-shaped leaf symbolizes love, devotion, and divine affection
- (k) A census issued every fifteen years in the Roman Empire determines the assessment of properties for use as a basis for taxation.

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