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Khirbet Safra 2018

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The Institute of ARCHAEOLOGY Siegfried H. Horn Museum



Khirbet Safra 2018

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Andrews University had its first season of excavations at Khirbet Safra from June 17-July 27, 2018. The excavations on the site were directed by Paul Z. Gregor, Constance Gane, and Paul Ray of the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University, with Gane, Ray and PhD archaeology candidates Trisha Broy and Jacob Moody as Field Supervisors. Amal Rawahna and Nisrin Khaled Fugh'a served as representatives for the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.

Khirbet Safra is an approximately 2.6 acre, triangular-shaped site, located southwest of Madaba and Main, overlooking the Dead Sea, with a casemate-type wall system surrounding its perimeter. The excavation fields were laid out using GPS on the basis of a grid of 6.0 x 6.0 m squares placed over a topographic map created by the Department of Antiquities surveyors in 2017, with the tops of some partly-exposed walls also serving as fruitful locations for their initial placement.

The casemate wall system was exposed in three of the four excavation fields (A, B, and C) that were opened this season. In each field, the walls were freestanding, built directly upon bedrock, which is uneven, with a number of various-shaped crevices. These crevices were filled with a densely-packed, sterile, red-bricky-like material, lacking material culture. On top of bedrock a two-row outer wall, a one-row inner wall, and cross walls were constructed with large field stones and smaller chink stones. In two fields (B and C) doorways were found in the inner wall, leading between rooms on either side. In Field B the entrance was built over the step-like bedrock that rose up gradually (or was perhaps modified), leading from the broad room of the casemate into the long room of another structure, built immediately inside the inner wall. In each field,

(cont'd on p. 2)

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Khirbet Safra 2018 Excavation Team.

the initial construction of the casemate wall system dated to the early Iron Age I.

Field A, consisting of two squares (A1 and A3), laid out on the western edge of the site, was supervised by Constance Gane. Parts of both squares were excavated to bedrock. Early Iron Age I ceramic remains were found directly upon the bedrock in Square A1, which consisted of two rooms next to the outer casemate wall, both of which exhibited beaten-earth surfaces, with ceramics dating to early Iron Age I, with stone grinders and pestles, and numerous animal bones. Above this surface in both rooms is a mix of Iron Age I, Iron Age II and Byzantine period ceramics among what appears to be mudbrick superstructure collapse, indicating a violent disruption of occupation here.

Square A3, though also disrupted by tectonic activity, provides a clearer occupational history. A doorway provides access between the southern and northern rooms against the inner casemate wall. Here, the same early sequence of red-bricky material with early Iron Age I pottery was covered by a plastered floor, with early Iron Age I ceramics imbedded in the plaster, in the southern room. Above this level, a thick (up to 50 cm) ashy lens covered most of the two rooms, indicating a conflagration. Post-occupational debris suggests a period of abandonment. On top of this material is a beaten earth surface that dates to the Byzantine period. At this time substantial Byzantine walls were built, at least one upon an Iron Age I wall. A second beaten earth surface also dates to this time. These surfaces and walls indicate a relatively well-established Byzantine-period occupation on this part of the site.

Field B, supervised by Paul Ray, consisted of three squares (B1-3) laid out on the southwestern edge of the site, of which one (B1) was completely excavated, a second (B3) partly so, and a third (B2), while not excavated, was nevertheless used to trace the outer wall on this side of the site. Bedrock was reached in parts of both of the excavated squares.

In Square B1 several use layers were discovered. The first occupation layer,



Talmadge Gerald (r) and Local Worker Cleaning Surfaces in Field A at Safra.

dating to early Iron Age I, was located above the red-bricky fill material on top of bedrock. Many animal bones and a number of domestic and textile artifacts were found within this layer. During late Iron Age I, a beaten-earth surface was laid on top of the initial use layer, after which, during early Iron Age II, another beaten-earth surface was laid above a fill layer. Stone thresholds, connected with both beaten-earth surfaces were found in the doorway of the inner casemate to keep everything level on both sides of the wall.

A destruction, probably by an earthquake, sometime in Iron Age II, left ca. 0.75 m of the mudbrick superstructure in the broad rooms of the casemate structure in Squares B1 and 3, with smaller amounts of destruction debris in other parts of the building, after which the structures in this part of the site were abandoned. Later, during the Byzantine period, there seems to have been some squatter activities, as three isolated whole forms (a juglet and two cups) and part of a jar were found in pits dug in Square B3.

Field C is located on the southeastern corner of the site, and was supervised by Trisha Broy. The excavations in this field consisted of two squares (C1 and C2). Some Late Bronze Age II/early Iron Age I transitional pottery was found on the surface created from the red-bricky material on top of bedrock. This material was

sealed below a destruction layer, approximately 0.10 m thick, that contained a large amount of broken ceramic vessels and domestic food preparation objects, such as grinders and pounders. The ceramics dated primarily to the Iron Age I, with a few earlier forms.

A second occupational level consisted of a beaten earth floor in both squares. The entrance between the broad room of the casemate and the room immediately inside was blocked at this time, as was another entrance between rooms further north and east. Flat-lying pottery sherds, a pair of bronze bangles, and a roof roller were found on this surface. Above this surface was a series of ash layers, suggesting another conflagration. These loci contained ceramics that dated primarily to the Iron Age I. Above these ash layers is an abandonment layer consisting of boulders from wall tumble, dating to Iron Age II.

Field D, supervised by Jacob Moody, is located on the northernmost edge of the site. Three squares (D1-3) were planned for Field D this season, of which only two (B1-2) were fully excavated. This area was chosen for excavation because of the visible wall lines, some with stones larger than anything else visible on the site. The soil is also rather shallow in this part of the site, in places only 0.10 m deep above the bedrock.

As in the other fields, there is a clear preparation phase where the walls of buildings were laid upon a red-bricky material which leveled the uneven bedrock. The vast majority of this substance was without material cultural remains, but early Iron Age I diagnostic sherds were found on top of this fill layer, helping to date the earliest construction in this part of the site. The walls built on top of this material consist of sections of at least two buildings in a square layout, with portions of three-four rooms being excavated.

In these rooms, the first occupational layer, which had flat-lying early Iron Age I pottery, was built right on the bedrock, upon which was an ashy layer, with a half of a small storage jar, and a possible

incense stand in one room, and part of an early Iron Age I biconical jar and several grinding stones, pounders, and a possible hob in another one. Further excavation is needed to determine the function of these buildings.

No clear occupation layers were found above the ash layer, indicating, it would seem, a possible abandonment of this area of the site. These abandonment layers contained mostly Iron Age I sherds with a few datable Iron Age II sherds. The topsoil had nearly an even mix of Iron Age I and II sherds, with only two small Byzantine period body sherds. (Paul Gregor, Paul Ray, Constance Gane, Trisha Broy and Jacob Moody)



Erratum:

In the article on the ASOR 2017 Annual Meeting in Newsletter 39.2, the third sentence of the first paragraph should have read: The plenary address was presented by Irene Winter, Professor Emerita, former William Dorr Broadman Professor of Fine Arts at Harvard University, entitled “Archaeology, Object History, Art History: Questions of Definition and Discipline.” We apologize to Professor Winter and regret both the oversight and incorrect information in the published material.

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