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Archaeological Museum Newsletter

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Summer 2001

Institute of Archaeology & Horn Archaeological Museum Newsletter Volume 22.3

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INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
HORN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM
NEWSLETTER

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Tall Hisban 2001

The Madaba Plains Project-Hisban excavated at Tall Hisban in Jordan this summer from May 24 - June 1. The primary focus of research this season was the Islamic occupation of the site. Proposals made during the 1998 season regarding the Mamluk period at Hisban were corroborated and clarified this season. The large residence that dominates the summit of the tell, dated to the fourteenth century A.D., served as the administrative center of the Balqa for the Mamluks, a dynasty of military slaves ruling from Cairo. Contemporary Arabic sources combined with excavation indicate that this building was the residence of the governor of the Balqa. It consisted of an open courtyard flanked by a private bathhouse, a *diwan*, and a reinforced rectangular tower. It is built of roughly hewn stone masonry and was completely barrel-vaulted. New squares opened on the north side of the tall uncovered a series of domestic rooms, which perhaps served as barracks and storerooms. On the south side of this complex is a large, barrel-vaulted storeroom full of sugar jars, glazed wares with military-style inscriptions, and javelin points. Earthquake collapse and fire from the mid-14th century destroyed the complex and preserved its contents.

One of the most significant discoveries of the season is an inscription in Safaitic script. It was found by Adeeb Abu Schmeis of the Department of Antiquities on a large building stone belonging to the Hellenistic wall which surrounds the summit of the tall. It contains some 40 characters, but has not yet been deciphered.

Lynda Carroll with Leen Fakhoury and four architecture students from the University of Jordan have been focusing on the Ottoman Turkish occupation at Hisban. For Jordan as a whole, the 17th through 19th centuries A.D. are hardly known. The Ottoman caves and buildings in the village of Hisban offer a much-needed window on these unknown centuries. Investigations drew on four interrelated lines of research: 1) examination of pottery and other archaeological evidence

(con't on p. 2)



Lintel with Greek Inscription

(Hisban, cont'd)

of the Late Islamic centuries on the tall; 2) architectural and archaeological surveys of buildings to the south of the tall; 3) ethnoarchaeological interviews with local residents; and 4), examination of pertinent textual sources and traveler's accounts dealing with these centuries.

A major focus here was a complex of farm buildings, known as the "qasr," in the village of Hisban. The team took measurements and mapped it, making artistic representations of these buildings. It appears that this complex has undergone several episodes of construction, destruction, and restoration. The earliest construction appears to be during the pioneer period, in which an earlier foundation (perhaps dating back to Roman times) was used for the building. An earthquake in 1927 destroyed parts of the house, but repairs have been made since the 1970s to restore the first floor for storage. In addition, two caves, beneath and extending directly to the south, were also modified for habitation and other uses. Possible cistern openings, a pen for animals, and a major structure inside the cave, possibly used as a storage facility, were also found.

Maria Elena Ronza (University of Rome), a Roman architecture historian, has discovered some important new insights about the nature of the Roman and Byzantine buildings on the summit. After spending time inventorying and drawing architectural fragments from various locations, she has established that some of the column bases and capitals were typical of Late Roman construction, while others are Byzantine. Based on these fragments and the remains of foundation walls, she affirms that a public building existed on the summit during Late Roman times. It had a small podium, four columns in front, a vestibule with anta-capitals, and a cella. It is likely that it was a temple, but could also have been an administrative building or even a nymphaeum. A very exciting discovery also relating to the Roman period was the finding of a neatly cut stone in Area M, which turned out to be an inscribed

door lintel. Found by Teddy Burg (Notre Dame University) and Keith Mattingly (Andrews University), the 1 m x .50 m stone contained four lines of neatly chiseled Greek letters. Initial reading indicates a Late Roman or Early Byzantine date for the lintel, which may have adorned the entrance to the Byzantine church on the summit. No inscription of this length (over 100 letters) has previously been found at Tall Hisban.

The political role of Hisban during the Umayyad (630's/40's - 750 A.D.) and Abbasid (750-12th century A.D.) periods was illustrated clearly for the first time this season. Earlier excavations suggested that these periods were ones of abatement. The new excavations uncovered two rooms in Field N, on the northwest corner of the tall. This is the first Umayyad-period architecture that has been identified at Hisban. The rooms, built against the Hellenistic fortification wall and close to the northern sally gate, attest to continued occupation of the tall well after the Islamic conquest. After an earthquake of the mid-7th century A.D., which was responsible for the collapse of the stone barrel vaults, the structure was reoccupied and continued to be used into the Abbasid period. (Øystein S. LaBianca and Bethany Walker)



Borstad Visits AU

Dr. Karen Borstad visited Andrews University from Feb 20-27, 2001. She developed the DIER system software used by the MPP for storing and analyzing excavation data. She is currently the assistant manager of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) responsible for the design and development of GIS applications for cultural resource research and management. While on campus she updated the Jalul database, and trained others to synthesize multiple seasons of data, link graphics to the database and generate statistical reports.

On Feb 26, Dr. Borstad spoke for the Horn Archaeological Museum Lecture-

ship. Her lecture was entitled: *The King's Highway: Its Role in the Holy Land in Biblical Times*. Her primary research involves the study of both roads from OT times and Roman roads.

The "King's Highway" or the royal road was the main N-S route stretching from the Gulf of Aqaba to Damascus. In biblical times, Moses promised Edom and Sihon, king (Num 21:25; Deut 2:26-27) of Hesban (Tall Hisban) that the Israelites would strictly follow the road while passing through their territory. According to the 9th-century B.C. Moabite stone, King Mesha claims that he repaired that part of the highway that crossed the Arnon (Wadi Mujib). Later, the road was used by Nabataean traders until Trajan conquered them and had it rebuilt. After that time it was known as the "Via Nova" or "Trajan's Road." By the end of the Roman period much of the Road was paved with cobblestones and marked with milestones. Today the modern Jordanian King's Highway and many other roads use the much of the same route from ancient times.

Dr. Borstad has discovered cobblestone paving and milestones along the King's Highway as well as traces of other ancient roads. Using the GIS she is able to predict their routes through rough terrain. One newly discovered road served as a pilgrim route from Amman to Mt. Nebo and then onto Palestine. Many of these routes began in antiquity as com-



Karen Borstad

mon paths which developed into the roads connecting Palestine with the King's Highway or the Desert Highway. Through the GIS program Borstad is rediscovering these ancient routes. (Robert D. Bates)



Herr Lectures

On May 3, 2001 Larry Herr, the director of the MPP-Tall al-'Umayri excavations in Jordan, presented a lecture entitled *Where O Where Have the Amorites Gone?: Tall al-'Umayri and the Bible* for the Horn Museum Lecture Series. Although there are earlier (an EB I dolmen and an EB III domestic complex) and later (an Iron II/Persian administrative complex during Ammonite times) features at the site, Dr. Herr focused primarily on the Bronze and early Iron Age ruins which may have been ethnically Amorite.

Possible Amorite ruins at MB and LB Age Tall al-'Umayri consist of a moat cut into a ridge on the western side of the tall with a rampart up to the city walls and a large multistory building with two well-preserved rooms. Fertility figurines and ceramic imports (Mycenaean ware) were among the artifactual remains.

The above building was suddenly destroyed toward the end of the LB after which a new settlement was begun (ca. 1225 B.C.). This phase was short-lived however, being destroyed by an earthquake ca. 1200 B.C. The inhabitants of the following settlement rebuilt the MB moat, added a retaining wall, a new rampart and a perimeter wall with evidence that it was built in sections with different size stones, possibly by different families. Two large buildings (A, with a shrine and hearth; and B, a 4-room house) with ceramics similar to those found in Cisjordan near Mt. Ebal were also found. Further to the south a late Iron Age I plas-

tered-cobbled surface was located on which a fenestrated cultic stand was found. (Paul J. Ray, Jr.)



Larry Herr



Women Potters of Cyprus

A film by Gloria London

This film is a 26 minute video based on 15 years of ethnoarchaeological research among traditional potters in Cyprus.

Traditional women potters working on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, who coil build cooking Pots, jars, jugs, ovens, and other clay Containers on a slow moving turntable, use a technique reminiscent of ancient pottery. The women are the last of their generation. The similarities between traditional and ancient shapes, incised decorations, materials, and wood-burning kilns, provide an ideal ethnoarchaeological study of craft specialists.



Available in NTSC or PAL for \$24.00 plus \$2.00 shipping.
To order, contact:
Gloria London,
7701 Crest Dr., N.E.,
Seattle, WA 98115-5215

RANDOM SURVEY

Sean Dever Memorial Prize:

Sean Dever, the son of Bill and Norma Dever, died on April 13, 2001. He was a gifted writer and creator of visual effects, with several movies to his credit. Born in Jerusalem, it was only natural for a memorial to be set up through the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, where the Devers spent several years as Director of the Center. The memorial prize is a cash award for the best published paper presented at a conference by a Ph. D. candidate in Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archaeology.

Stonehenge in Yemen?

A Bronze Age Stonehenge-like enclosure of 3 m tall, 7 ton granite and basalt monoliths dating to ca. 2000 B.C. has recently been found near the Red Sea coast of Yemen by excavators from the Royal Ontario Museum. Four skeletons have been found under separate pillars as well as a cache of copper weapons and a chunk of obsidian.

To discover more about archaeology, the Institute, and the Museum, contact us at:

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Velazquez Wins Award:

Efrain Velazquez, assistant to the curator of the Horn Museum and Andrews University Ph. D. student in archaeology, has recently won an award from the *Hispanic Theological Initiative*, a program which promotes the presence of Latina/o faculty in seminars and schools of theology and the training of leaders who will teach ideas that will inform and impact the Latino community. Congratulations, Efrain!

Sumerian Town found in Iraq:

A Sumerian town stretching over 6 sq km has been discovered in the desert region of Um al-Aqareb, ca. 120 km north of Ur, in Iraq. Excavations by Haidar Abdulwahad since 1999 have uncovered many houses, a palace ziggurat, and a temple dating to 2700 B.C. A cemetery with thousands of tombs dating between 2600-2300 B.C. has also been located. In addition, two bodies in flexed position, ceramics, figurines, jewelry and weapons have been found.

Underwater City Discovered:

The submerged city of Yarmuta has recently been discovered about 800 m out to sea off the coast of Lebanon between Zahrani and Serapta. Roads, squares and statues can be seen just a few meters below the surface.

N E W S L E T T E R



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