

The Institute of ARCHAEOLOGY Siegfried H. Horn Museum



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INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
HORN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM
NEWSLETTER

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'Umayri Excavations 2014

The 2014 season of excavations at the Madaba Plains Project site of Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan was carried out from June 25-July 30, and focused on three field locations (Fields H, J, and P) and one survey site (Site 84). The directors are Douglas Clark and Kent Bramlett and the representatives from the Department of Antiquities of Jordan were Abdelrahim Al-Dwikat and Jihad Haroun.

Field H on the SW part of the Acropolis was supervised by Monique Vincent, and assisted by Mary Boyd. This season the team returned to Square 7K02, located on the SE edge of the field, on the brow of the tell. This square, previously excavated in 1998, revealed the edge of a Byzantine period structure, and a series of Late Iron Age II and Late Iron Age II/Persian period structures.

The objective of revisiting this square was to explore the nature of Wall 2. During the 2012 season, the top of the destruction layer of the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age settlement was discovered, confirming the southern extent of the settlement at that time. While the wall dating to this period has been excavated along the entire edge of the tell, where it turns and heads south remains unknown. Although Wall 2 is a strong candidate for this southern perimeter wall, only its later manifestations, in the Late Iron Age II/Persian period, were known up to this point. Unfortunately, the goal of determining the founding date of Wall 2 was not reached this season, but it was confirmed that it predates the other walls here, which were founded in the Late Iron Age II/Persian period.

An earlier Late Iron Age II/Persian period phase in the northern part of the square contained a large stone bench, measuring 2.3 x 0.72 m. While two other benches dating to Iron Age II have been

(cont'd on p. 2)



Matthew Vincent flying Octicopter.

found in Field H in contexts that could have been used for ritual purposes, this one does not appear to have been used that way, as only sherds from a typical domestic assemblage were found nearby.

Field J, on the Southern Slope was newly opened this season, and also supervised by Monique Vincent. It is a step trench consisting of seven consecutive squares that connect Fields L and D, down the southern slope. These two previously-excavated fields represent both ends of occupational history at the tell, with Hellenistic remains on top of the tell, and Early Bronze Age remains on the slope. The goal of opening this field was to connect these fields stratigraphically and explore the nature of occupation and the fortification on the southern slope.

Because the western slope appears to be the most vulnerable, due to the topographic saddle of bedrock connecting it with higher land to the west, it was uncertain whether the Iron Age inhabitants had made a similar investment in fortification at other locations around the tell. It was found that the Iron Age I fortification glacis, identified on the western slope, continued around, and also protected the southern slope. Soundings identified the layered matrix of rampart material in two areas that comport with the mid-elevation portion of a fortification system.

Unfortunately, the wall at the top of the rampart was not reached, nor was the

base of the slope, where one might expect a revetment wall. However, we now know that the Iron Age rampart fortification system was also constructed on the southern slope of the tell.

During the summer of 2013, a survey was performed using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) in the area surrounding the Field K dolmen. Earlier excavations discovered a megalithic dolmen dated to the Early Bronze Age and a Middle Bronze Age cave tomb, both containing multiple burials and in the case of the dolmen, some associated architectural features including a small retaining wall and a plaster surface. The results of this survey revealed several anomalies that appeared to indicate caves, depressions or openings in the bedrock beneath the surface. Two of the anomalies from the survey were chosen (Squares 4N80 and 4N93).

Hence, Field P, on the SE shelf of the tell, was opened in the 2014 season, adjacent to the Field K dolmen excavations of 1994 and later, and was supervised by Nikki Oakden. The field was placed here with the intention of further exploring the area and possibly expanding the previous excavations, as well as determining the presence of additional tombs or dolmens in the area.

The excavation of Square 4N80 uncovered two small field walls running parallel in what appeared to be a semi-circular curve. Associated dates of these fea-

tures are unclear due to the mixing of hillside tumble, but are likely post-Early Bronze Age and the difference in elevation between the two walls might suggest possible agricultural terracing. Below the easternmost terrace wall was an older wall, dating to the Early Bronze Age and directionally parallel to the natural curvature of the hillside as well as the wall feature in Field K. This feature appeared to have been subjected to some destruction or material recycling in antiquity, as what remained comprised only a single course of stones set atop a construction layer, laid directly over the bedrock and covered by a mortar collapse. A large gap in the wall might be an entryway, or merely the result of further destruction. Bedrock is present in only the western half of the probe.

It was revealed that the anomaly in Square 4N93 was a naturally-occurring fissure in the bedrock, likely from an earthquake. The seismic event would probably have preceded the Early Bronze Age activity in this immediate area, as a plaster surface dated to this time had been laid directly into the crevice in the northern end of the square. This surface and a series of four evenly-spaced postholes may be related to a similar plaster surface laid in the south end of the square on the lower bedrock shelf, also dating also to the Early Bronze Age. This second surface was accompanied by six evenly-spaced postholes on the edge of the upper



Field J Step Trench.

shelf, above a deep outcrop which had been filled in order to construct the plaster surface. The lower surface correlates closely in depth with a similar surface that had been previously found just south of Square 4N93, adjacent to the dolmen, and visible in the northern balks of squares in Field K. These features, and their corresponding Early Bronze Age dates, may indicate the presence of one or more structures erected near the Field K dolmen, adding to the architectural features already associated with it. While additional tombs were not discovered this season, a human mandible was found against the south balk of Square 4N93.

‘Umayri Survey Site 84 was supervised by David and Amanda Hopkins. The ancient workers on the hill-slope of

Umayri Survey Site 84 created a dense mélange of rock-cut features. Their activity have been surveyed earlier in 1989, 1992, and 1994. The prominent (9.8 x 9.8 m) rectilinear structure (84:1) most likely managed intensive agricultural production.

The excavations in 2014 season concentrated on thorough documentation of the features that constitute Site 84. Documentation included newly-identified rock-cut features, including a curvilinear pressing surface, a set of cup holes/post-holes, a pressing surface, and two large and one small basins. The goals for the 2014 season also included mapping features of the site on a GIS map in order better to understand the possible relationship of various features.

The 2014 season was intentionally arranged in order to allow testing of new technologies for the precise and accurate recording of tell features and discoveries. Of major significance were the use of an octicopter (UAV) capable of supporting GoPro cameras to produce 3D video and still photographs, a Steadicam for recording 3D videos, and Structure-from-Motion photographic technique in order to produce 3D stills of squares and features over large portions of the site. With these new technologies, the team was able to document everything from small objects to the entire tell site with fully manipulable images for a wide range of research applications. (Douglas R. Clark and Kent V. Bramlett)

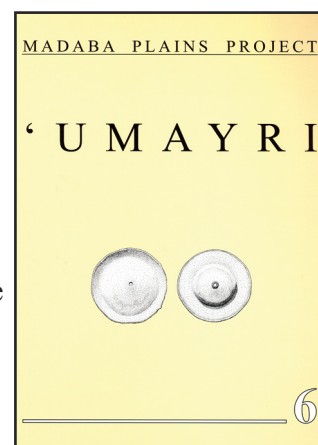


Madaba Plains Project — ‘Umayri 6: The 1996 and 1998 Seasons at Tall al-‘Umayri and Subsequent Studies

Edited by: Larry G. Herr, Douglas R. Clark, Lawrence T. Geraty, Randall W. Younker and Øystein S. LaBianca.

This volume contains reports on four excavated fields (A, B, H and L) as well as specialist reports on the pottery, objects, Early Iron Age I Egyptian and Egyptian-style objects, textile artifacts, ceramic technology, production technology of Bronze and Iron Age pottery at the site, ground penetrating radar, an infant burial, and a pair of cymbals from the 1996 and 1998 seasons at Tall al-‘Umayri.

Included are 107 photos, 157 pottery plates and site plan illustrations, eight tables, three maps, and an index.



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RANDOM SURVEY

Thera Eruption:

Based on previous evidence, the volcanic eruption of Thera (or Santorini) has been dated between 1627 and 1600 BC. A recent study of bean weevil insects found in a storage jar containing seeds of sweet peas discovered at the Bronze Age settlement of Akrotiri, on the island, suggests that the eruption took place in early summer, sometime between June to early July. It is only during these months, just after threshing, that the insect would have had an opportunity to infest the crops and end up in the storage area.

Excavations at Ashdod-Yam:

A massive mud brick wall and rampart fortification, dating the 8th century BC, possibly made in advance of the Philistine rebellion against Assyria, has recently been found at Ashdod-Yam, Israel. Remains of buildings, coins and weights from the Hellenistic period were also found.

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Cypriot Finds:

Located near Larnaca, on Cyprus, the 25-50 hectare site Hala Sultan Tekke is one of the largest Bronze Age cities in the Mediterranean. Recent excavations at the site have located a previously-unknown part of the city, dating to ca. 1600-1100 BC. Finds include a copper extraction facility for the production of bronze objects, including smelting furnaces and about 300 kilos of ore and slag, evidence of the production of luxury purple textiles, and ceramics and other objects imported from Egypt, the Levant, Turkey and Mycenaean Greece.

Egyptian Town Found:

A walled town with the remains of a temple dedicated to the god Seth has recently been discovered in the Delta (Lower Egypt) at Tell el-Yahoud. It dates from the Middle Kingdom to Greco-Roman period times and includes both royal (with New Kingdom palaces of Merneptah and Ramses II) and residential areas, as well as a Hyksos-period necropolis with rock-cut tombs. Small finds include amulets, ceramics and faience floor tiles.

Greek Goddess Mosaic Found:

A mosaic with the image of a goddess being swept off to the underworld has been found in a 2,300-year-old tomb near the Amphiopolis, Greece. She is identified as Persephone, the daughter of Zeus, on the basis of a similar painting from the royal cemetery of Vergina.

NEWSLETTER



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