

The Institute of ARCHAEOLOGY Siegfried H. Horn Museum



Table of Contents

	Page
<i>Balu'a 2017</i>	1
<i>Al-Makátba</i>	3
<i>Random Survey</i>	4

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
HORN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM
NEWSLETTER

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Balu'a 2017

The 2017 season of excavation of the Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project was conducted at the site of Khirbat al-Balu'a from August 6-25. The directors of the project this season were Friedbert Ninow, Kent V. Bramlett, and Monique Vincent, all from La Sierra University. The international sponsors of the project are La Sierra University (USA), and the Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, in Germany. Arwa Massadeh served as the representative for the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.

The site incorporates nearly 25 hectares. Located beside the Wadi Balu'a, which is a tertiary tributary to the Wadi Mujib, the site of Balu'a lays at a position that controlled the major north-south road during the pre-Classical periods and guarded access from the north to the Ard al-Karak.

The archaeological periods represented at at Khirbat al-Balu'a include the Bronze and Iron Ages, and the Nabataean and Middle Islamic periods. Excavations at the site have primarily revealed Iron Age II and Nabataean remains. Showcase architecture includes: a massive fortress structure still preserved to a maximum height of 7 meters, a casemate defensive system, extensive visible wall lines of residential and public buildings, a Nabataean cultic platform, and an Ayyubid-Mamluk caravanserai and village. This season's work focused on three field locations: Squares 24.42, 25.62, and 41.31.

The goal of this season's excavation was to narrow down the date of the large standing structure called Qasr Balu'a. Past speculation has placed its construction variously in the Iron Age I, Iron Age II, or post-Iron Age. Our intent here was to excavate against the northwestern external face of the structure, attempt to ascertain its founding level, and examine the strata that related to

(cont'd on p. 2)



Walls Parallel to Qasr.

its construction, use, and abandonment. Due to a heavy rock fall all around the qasr, a front-end loader was arranged with the cooperation of the Department of Antiquities representative, the regional offices, and the municipal district. We mapped and numbered about 60 of the large blocks in the area we wanted to work. Photogrammetry was conducted on the area in case of future reconstruction efforts. Then the loader pulled back fallen blocks from a 4.0-m wide section along the north wall of the qasr.

A 3 x 3 m probe in Square 24.42 was opened against the qasr's north wall in the area of preparation. Sloped debris layers were excavated that contained mostly Iron Age II pottery, perhaps representing a late collapse of an original mud-brick superstructure. A cobble and packed-earth surface was reached at about level with the surrounding area. A few pieces of Roman glass and early-Nabataean pottery sherds indicate an early first-century AD Nabataean-period reuse of the structure and surrounding area. Excavation below this level revealed two east-west walls and several layers of earth debris covering, and running up to the qasr wall. Diagnostic pottery indicated Iron Age IIB as a probable date for the deposition of these layers. A lot of bioturbation and disturbance was encountered along the qasr wall, but further excavation established that the earth layers that sealed against the qasr wall had not been cut by a foundation trench. Time limitations did not allow us to excavate to the bottom of the qasr wall. The lowest layer excavated appeared to consist of destruction debris interspersed with charred wood and animal bone fragments. This layer contained a quantity of pottery which dated earlier than any of the layers previously encountered. Late Bronze Age pottery dominated with some Iron Age I forms present. Tentatively, it appears this debris layer, if not of secondary deposition, could provide a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the qasr, which would place its construction date in the early Iron Age.

The excavators returned to Square 25.62 with intent to expand the exposure



Wall Between Rooms and Plasterd Surface (I).

of a domestic structure encountered in 2012. A major objective was to establish a date for the destruction of the building and to understand the phases of use represented by several surface layers encountered in the earlier sondage. Two rooms were partially exposed, with additional rooms indicated by an unexcavated doorway to the southwest and a passage to the east. The latest use-surface was cleared in all areas excavated of the 3.0 x 3.0 m area. A rectangular bin was located in the eastern room and two circular bins in the western room. The western room also had several pithoi, crushed by the collapse of the dividing wall between them. This wall was oriented roughly north-south and had collapsed, producing a pile of wall stones and rubble, mostly on the west side. The courses near the base of this wall had shifted eastward, evidence of an earthquake emanating from the Great Rift Valley to the west. The surfaces of these two rooms were constructed over a prepared-plaster surface, associated with the lowest level of the walls of this house. An earlier surface, just above bedrock, associated with a lower central wall represent a substantially-different phase and layout.

The ceramic forms from the final phase of the house date to the Late Iron Age II or even into the Persian period, while retaining mostly late Iron Age II characteristics. The founding phase, just

above bedrock, dates to earlier in Iron Age II.

An area of excavation was chosen to overlie what appeared from the surface and GIS mapping to constitute a defensive wall that separated the upper city from the lower, eastern expansion. This wall probably served as the external wall prior to the late Iron Age expansion, and thus might provide us with information that could establish a chronology of the upper city and a date for its lower extension. Additionally, this part of the wall appeared to represent a passageway from the upper to lower city as visible wall lines crossed through the north-south, seven-meter wide, fortification wall.

Excavation this season has revealed three phases of fortification, all dating to Iron Age II. The latest phase appeared to entail the construction of towers along the destroyed or abandoned line of the earlier fortification wall. Spaces between these towers could allow passage through and access between the city areas. Excavation between two towers showed the wall to actually consist of two large parallel walls, with a room between. Although the full extent of the room was not accessible for excavation due to the tower foundations obstructing movement to the north and south, the layout strongly suggests a casemate construction for Phase Two. A short wall extending east-west between

the casemate walls, but with a door or passageway allowing movement into the next presumed room, suggested an inter-linking of casemate rooms.

A third phase was indicated in a probe on the eastern, external side, of the east casemate wall. This probe extended more than 3.0 m down to its founding level, on bedrock, and indicated three phases of construction. The alignment of the courses of the wall corresponds to the tower phase, at the top, a middle phase, as represented by the excavated portion of the casemate room, and a lower phase not reached in the interior. The pottery from the lower phase probably indicates a date early in Iron Age II. (Kent V. Bramlett, Monique Vincent, and Friedbert Ninow)



Wall showing Phasing.

AL-MAKTABA
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RANDOM SURVEY

Archive Sealings Found:

Over 1,000 2nd-3rd century AD sealings, with images of the Greco-Roman pantheon, including Zeus and Hera, have recently been found in the municipal archive at Doliche (Tell Dülük), in SE Turkey. The site was colonized in the 2nd century BC (during the Hellenistic period) by people from Thessaly, and was named after a city of the homeland by the same name. At that time, the region was dominated by the Seleucids, who adopted the local storm god, Baal, whom they renamed Zeus Dolichenus, also building a Temple to Jupiter Dolichenus at the site.

Reanalysis of Ancient Fresco:

Before WWII excavators found a 3rd-cent. house-church at Dura-Europos, in Syria. One of its adjoining rooms served as a baptistery, and had frescos, one of which is a portrait of a woman beside a well. While originally interpreted as the Samaritan woman, recent analysis suggests that it instead portrays the Annunciation, making this painting the earliest image of the Virgin Mary.

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Ancient Plague Narrowed Down:

While Emperor Justinian I (482–565 AD) is known for reconquering nearly all of the former Roman Empire, building the world's largest cathedral, the Hagia Sophia, and establishing legal codes, his reign was also marred by the spread of the so-called Justinian Plague, which killed millions of people in the 540s. Recent bacterial analysis on DNA samples from 6th century skeletons from Germany has linked the agent of this plague to the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, confirming it as an earlier incident of the Black Death which occurred eight centuries later.

Seal Impression Found:

A 1.3 x 1.5 cm seal impression that says "governor of the city" (*sar ha'ir*) has recently been found in Jerusalem in a building west of the Temple mount dating to the 7th-6th centuries BC, sealed underneath a 2nd century AD street of the Roman city of Aelia Capitolina. The upper part of the impression depicts two standing figures in striped, knee-length garments, facing each other. The phrase also appears in 2 Kgs 23:8 and 2 Chr 34:8 in the Bible.

Harbor Found?

Archaeologists working at the Giza Pyramids have recently discovered a basin full of groundwater, which may have been part of a thriving harbor that kept the complex supplied with goods, including wood from Lebanon and granite from Aswan.

NEWSLETTER



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