

**THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON THE HISTORY AND
ARCHAEOLOGY OF JORDAN, OXFORD**

(25-31 March, 1980)

The first of what is hoped will be a series of biennial conferences on the History and Archaeology of Jordan was held at Christ Church, Oxford, from March 25 to 31, 1980, under the patronage of H.R.H. Crown Prince Hassan. It was attended by more than 250 scholars from 25 different countries, and was formally opened by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales in the Sheldonian Theatre, one of the loveliest buildings in Oxford. By very general consent it proved to be not only an important and stimulating gathering, but also one of the most enjoyable conferences that the various participants could remember. The organization was excellent and for this heartfelt thanks are due especially to Dr. Adnan Hadidi, Director of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan, to Mrs. Crystal - M. Bennett, Director of the British Institute at Amman for Archaeology and History, and to Dr. James Sauer, Director of the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman. The setting in Oxford was, of course, delightful, but what gave the conference its special character was the gathering together of so varied a community of experts, ranging over a wide variety of scholarly interests, but all bound together by a deep and abiding love for the country of Jordan. There was also a sense of excitement at Participating in what was clearly intended to be not just another conference, but rather a moment of creation, the setting in

motion of something new and adventurous. H.R.H. Prince Hassan established this sense of adventure in both his opening and closing addresses and in smaller group discussions, when he persistently challenged his hearers to think not only of Jordan, and not only of the immediate future, but to plan on a much larger scale.

This first conference did not concentrate on one topic or one period, as future conferences will do, but laid the groundwork for these later conferences by surveying in one vast, panoramic sweep the whole enormous history of Jordan from the beginnings of the Neolithic to the end of the Ottoman period. It was a very crowded programme, during which more than forty papers were presented, most of them of a very high standard. A short report can obviously not do justice to so rich a feast and so I hope I may be forgiven if I mention only those which, in view of my own particular interests, made a special appeal to me. Many others quite outside my field, such as the very mathematical paper of Dr. H. Kalayan on "The Symmetry and the Harmonic Proportions of the Temples of Artemis and Zeus at Jerash," and Prof. Mohmud Ghul's paper on "Yet Another Rendering of the Sa-faitic Verb Wjm," have been omitted because of my own incompetence to comment.

The overwhelming intellectual impression left upon me by this conference could be summed up in the words, "Jordan: Known but Chiefly Unknown." We are so clearly just at the threshold of Jordanian Studies, and each paper not only brought new information, but demonstrated forcibly how much still needs investigation and discovery. There is clearly no period at all, in the more than 10,000 years surveyed, for which the small country of Jordan does not possess a rich treasure trove still to be discovered.

This was made clear by the opening papers by Prof. Vita Finzi on "The Prehistory and History of the Jordanian Landscape," and by Dr. David L. Kennedy on "The Contribution of Aerial Photography to Archaeology in Jordan." I would suggest, indeed, that one of the most urgent needs is the development of a comprehensive understanding of the Jordanian environment, perceived both as a varied, but coherent, whole and also in terms of the changes it has undergone in the course of its long history.

Subsequent tantalizing papers, opening up fascinating new possibilities, but posing many more questions than they were able to solve, were Prof. Basil Hennessy's on Teleilat Ghassul, Dr. Svend Helms' on Jawa, and Prof. Peter Parr's on the "Contacts between Arabia and Jordan in the Late Bronze Age." Each revealed dramatically the enormous importance of visualizing Jordan constantly, not in isolation, something on the edge of culture and civilization (as it is only too often conceived by western scholars), but as integral to a great spider's web of communications. Indeed, I am tempted to say-and this has been strongly confirmed by listening to the papers at this conference - that

the key to understanding Jordan is "interaction and communication".

My own special field of interest is the biblical period, and what a wealth of research still needs to be done here! It is still an uncomfortable fact that in all the biblical atlases the maps showing the area east of the Jordan (given only slight attention in some atlases) are still largely guesswork. They cannot indeed be anything else, because only very, very few of the sites mentioned in the Bible have been identified with reasonable certainty. For this reason I am particularly grateful to all seven of the papers on Iron Age I and II.

Dr. Asem Barghouti's paper, demonstrating the interplay of Hellenistic and Roman urbanization, with its western formal planning, and the compelling religions, traditions and feel for landscape which characterized the Middle East, as shown especially by the lay-out of Jerash, was for me one of the most interesting features of the conference. It had, however, a close companion in Prof. Hammond's study of the "Intercultural Aspects of Nabataean Architecture, Religion, Art and Influence", as exemplified by the excavations at Petra in 1974.

The final sessions of the conference were devoted to the Islamic period in Jordan, another subject which cries out for more thorough, and also immediate, study, since, as we were told in one of the discussions, much of the later Islamic material is severely threatened by the rapid modern development of the country. Mr. Suleiman Musa's paper, "Toward the End of the Ottoman Empire", provided a very useful reminder of the significance of those final Ottoman years. The area east of the Jordan was

then admittedly very marginal, though, of course, an important section of the Hajj passed through it, as the Hajj forts bear witness. It was then a land of small villages and great pastoral herds, with an interesting interaction of settled and nomadic peoples. Only a few of us who were at the Conference are old enough to remember that life, which still persisted, though already changing, in the time of the Emir (Later King) Abdallah. Soon it will have disappeared even from memory unless active steps are taken to preserve it for posterity. This work has, of course, already begun, but it needs to be strengthened.

The world of scholarship has sometimes been a little too dazzled by antiquity and has been insufficiently aware of the glories of the Muslim, and particularly the Umayyad period in Jordan. Drs. Antonio Almagro and Emilio Olavarri in their paper on the Citadel at Amman demonstrated convincingly that the "palace" is unquestionably Umayyad, related to the so-called "Desert Castles", which must now all be

recognized as Umayyad, even though the new *Encyclopedia of Islam* is unaware of this. We still need to know a great deal more than we do about this period of Jordanian history, with its quite remarkably peaceful transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule.

Finally, mention should be made of Prof. Abdel Aziz Duri's paper on "The Idea of Jerusalem in Islam". The western world too easily slips into thinking of "Jordan" as only the area east of the river, and of Jerusalem as somehow primarily Jewish and Christian, so that constant reminders are needed of its Islamic significance.

There can be no better place to end this brief introduction than at Beit al-Maqdis. In a sense everything else is tributary to this and the Oxford conference, despite the wonders of that city, bore witness to splendid and more ancient glories in the Hashemite Kingdom - "infinite treasure in a little room".

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