

Tabaqat Fahl--Pella (1981)

Report from A. McNicall and R. Smith.

The third season of the Sydney/Wooster Joint Expedition to Pella was conducted during the winter and spring of 1981. It consisted of two sessions, the first under the auspices of the University of Sydney from 15 December 1980 through 23 February 1981, and the second under the auspices of the College of Wooster.

(a) Winter Session (Sydney)

The work of the season is a continuation of the previous seasons, involving:

1. The excavation of the Early Islamic remains in Area IV.
2. The excavation of the 'deep cut', a line of 9 x 9 m trenches on the S. side of the *tell*, which is exposing successive eras of Tabaqat Fahl's occupation.
3. Excavation of the East church (Area V).
4. Further excavation of tombs of the Middle/Late Bronze Age periods, and Roman/Byzantine era.

In addition to the above, we carried out the following programmes relating to the archaeology of Tabaqat Fahl.

1. Investigation of the sources of clay, the firing temperature of the various wares, and the recording of other phenomena relating to the ceramics of the site.
2. The examination of the geomorphology of the surrounding area with a view to establish-

ing the sequence of geological deposition and also the complete sequence of hominid occupation of the area.

3. Investigation of the Stone Age sites of the wadis to the north of the Wadi Jirm complex.

The season has provided further evidence for the importance of Pella in many epochs.

1. The geomorphological and archaeological surveys of the Wadi Hammeh, Himmar and Jirm, north of Tabaqat Fahl, give clear indication of the antiquity of human occupation in the area: tools dating back to the Palaeolithic were found in the Wadi Himmar bed and in the related pebble conglomerate. In deposits on top of the conglomerate concentrations of Kebaran-style artefacts have been found.

2. In the deep cut (Area I levels. In IIIC these levels relate to a large stone wall (probably the city wall), and to various subsidiary walls of mudbrick and stone.

3. In the area excavation (Area IV) further sectors of the Early Islamic town were exposed. The remains show further evidence that some houses were two-storied, and that animals were kept in the lower (ground) floor.

The most dramatic find of the season was made in IV JMP locus 10, where the skeleton of a young male was found in a small room. The man, about 25 years old, 166 cm high and well muscled, was crushed by the earthquake

which destroyed Pella at 11 a.m. on 18 January, 746 A.D. With him was found his savings consisting of four dinars, and his collection of ceramic and wood kitchen and dining ware. The importance of this find for the Islamic archaeology of Jordan cannot be overestimated.

4. In Area V the atrium and narthex of the East church were exposed. The question of the church's antecedents remains to be solved, and many problems about the form of the church are not yet answered. However, the layout of the western part of the building is clear. Entry was through an atrium consisting of a peristyle, cloisters and a small courtyard, in the middle of which is a hexagonal pool, possibly of Umayyad date. Passing through the narthex, one entered the tripartite basilical church through one of three doors. The church probably had a major order surmounted by a clerestory. Bases and pilaster capitals of the lower order have been found, along with bases, shafts and capitals of the upper order.

5. In Area VI south of Tell Husn, tomb material, both artefactual and skeletal, was recovered. One rich tomb of the Middle/Late Bronze Age (c. 1550 B. C.) and one of the Late Roman Empire (3rd-4th Centuries) were excavated.

Summary

Further important finds and architecture of the Bronze and Iron Ages and of Roman, Byzantine, Early Islamic and Ayyubid periods were made. Additional studies were made of the geology, prehistory and ceramic technology of the area.

(b) Spring Session (Wooster) (Report from R. Smith)

The field operations of the Wooster team, directed by Prof. Robert H. Smith with a staff of more than two dozen persons, were focussed on four areas, two of them new.

Area VIII, The West Cut, is the major stratigraphic probe into the history of the western side of the *tell* of Pella. Previous seasons had brought to light Byzantine-Umayyad remains and below those extensive Late Hellenistic remains, with some scanty representation of intervening periods. This year the stratum of particular interest was that of the Assyrian-Babylonian period, beginning in the 8th Century B. C. and continuing, it seems, into the early 6th Century. Little substantial architecture has yet been found, but a useful corpus of ceramic types is being assembled.

Area IX, The Civic Complex, is another area in which work of previous seasons was continued in 1981. The sanctuary east of the atrium was partially cleared, and evidence now suggests that the entire church and atrium had no Roman temple antecedents on that spot, but were built from the ground up with earlier architectural materials. South of the atrium, the floor of the odeon was finally reached, and the form of this small theater can now be reconstructed. On the west of the atrium a broad flight of stairs was exposed, part of a late Byzantine embellishment of the church. North of the atrium excavation continued in the chamber where six camel skeletons were found in the previous seasons, but the original function and form of the building--which seems originally to have been a temple--have not yet

been clarified, and cannot be understood fully until excavation proceeds further.

Area XIII was a new undertaking, the excavation of a large fortress situated 2.2 km. east-southeast of Pella, 350m. higher than the city on one of the highest hills in the entire vicinity. Sufficient evidence was found to enable the excavators to date the construction of the fort to Hellenistic times. Curiously, the structure does not seem to have been completed, and never occupied. Various nearby structures and walls have also been explored and mapped during the season.

Area XIV was a small Chalcolithic site discovered during the first days of the Spring Session. During the eight weeks of field operations, three chambers of the site were excavated,

producing much pottery--all found broken--and a number of basalt vessels. The assemblage is characteristically Chalcolithic; its usefulness lies not in any novelty of occupation or artefacts, but in the fact that the site appears to have had but a single period of use, so that all the artefacts are contemporary with one another.

Summary and Prospects

The Spring Session of 1981 was productive of much new information about the history of Pella, particularly in Chalcolithic, late Iron II, Hellenistic and Byzantine-Umayyad times. The weather was excellent throughout the time of field operations. In the future work will continue in the two major excavational areas, provided some mechanized aids for earth removal can be utilized.