

## SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS IN BEIT RAS, 1985

by  
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During August and September, 1985, salvage excavations were conducted in Beit Ras, the site of ancient Capitolias, by the Department of Antiquities. Two areas were excavated: one the courtyard of an existing house; and, one in an open space created by the removal of a late nineteenth century housing complex where a new house is to be built. The data from these excavations will be incorporated into the interpretative work being done by the Yarmouk University Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Department of Antiquities, and a British/American team of archaeologists.<sup>1</sup>

Area 1 was a 4.00 by 4.00 metre square excavated in the courtyard of a house located north of the main village road and north of the mosque. While digging the foundations for two new rooms, an addition to the standing early twentieth century rooms, a substantial wall of nine courses was found. Stratigraphic excavation of this area showed that the wall was part of an Ottoman, ca. A.D. 1700, construction and had been reused and rebuilt as well. With three other walls, the main wall formed an area measuring 1.50 by 2.20 metres. A blocked doorway in the north baulk and a cave entrance to the south gave the indication that this small area may have formed an entryway. The floors and walls of the entryway were plastered with a fine lime-based plaster, as much as five centimetres thick in some areas. Sometime after the use of the construction as an entryway, the door was blocked and the entire area became a dump. In all likelihood, the dump layers were laid when the late nineteenth/early twentieth century houses were being constructed. The soil layers within the square and particularly within the entryway con-

tained valuable material culture remains, i.e., pottery, glass, statues, etc., from the period from ca. A.D. 400 to ca. A.D. 750; but, these remains were consistently mixed with those from the Ottoman period. The top fifty centimetres of the area were recent fill/dump layers and part of the water-laid courtyard surfaces for the present, partially standing houses.

Area 2 was located thirty metres to the west of Area 1. Workmen building a new house in the area brought the area to the attention of the Department of Antiquities. Foundation trenches for the new house were excavated in rows; each row consisted of four trenches measuring two metres by three metres, with a depth of two metres. As there is considerable build up of housing and courtyard layers in Beit Ras, usually measuring one to two metres in depth and not dating to before the last one hundred years, the workmen initially encountered soil layers with a mixture of material culture remains from the various periods of occupation of Beit Ras. In one foundation trench, a well-cut limestone block was removed revealing an arch below the topsoil layers.

This arch or vaulted area measured from three to four metres in height and was two and half to three metres wide. It was built against bedrock in the south and opened to the north and showed evidence of rebuild. To the west, there was an opening that led to three "caves," all of which contained evidence of late antique occupation. The vaulted area was filled with silt to a depth of one to two metres, indicating a period when the northern opening had been exposed. No evidence of any use of the vault was found in this silt layer, e.g., the indications were that the vault was open and not known about, and

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<sup>1</sup> C. J. Lenzen, R. L. Gordon, A. M. McQuitty, "Excavations at Tell Irbid and Beit Ras," *ADAJ*, forthcoming.

was covered before the building of the late nineteenth century housing complex. Below this silt, a large wall was encountered which divided the vaulted area into two separate areas: the small one to the north where a *tabun* had been, the fragments of which were found, and the larger one to the south. This southern area was divided into two chambers, one of which was for dung storage and can be associated with the use of the vault as a *tabun* house. The dating on this, although tentative in nature, is to the ca. A.D. 1700 period. Before this use of the vault, evidence was found on the floor and walls of the vault of it having been used as a house: mud-plaster was found, and niches for lamps, household articles were cut into the bedrock and built into the vault.

Unfortunately, there is no archaeological data to support the original date of the vault and this determination must be made on architectural grounds only. The vault was rebuilt or restored with re-used blocks and miscellaneous-sized stones. One can hazard the guess that this was done when the vault was made into a house, again there is no archaeological data to support an accurate date. From the construction of part of the arch and the southern retaining wall, it appears that the original use and construction of the vault

was ca. A.D. 300. The original parts of the vault are made of well-cut limestone blocks, and were rounded. Although the suggestion is a tentative one, it would appear that Capitolas of the period between A.D. 300-500 was built on different levels using the natural bedrock as support for series of vaults which defined the streets (blocks) of the city.

As in previous work conducted in Beit Ras, the stratigraphic data points to an elaborate Roman city, which was re-built and re-used in the following centuries. Very little *in situ* data was retrieved relating to the period between ca. A.D. 600-1400 during these excavations; however, our knowledge of the later periods has been expanded somewhat. Continued work in Beit Ras should provide a more complete picture of the nature of the occupation of this important ancient site.

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