

Excavation at Meqablein

by

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On a high small knoll (Pl. XLIII, 1) to the north-western side of the modern village of Al-Meqablein,¹ which itself stands on a mound 3 km. to the south-west of the Jordan broad-casting service, lies a rock-cut opening described by one of the villagers as an "important archaeological cave." The discovery seems to have instilled in the dwellers' minds an obsession to prove themselves better than the antiquities men by entering the cave in an attempt to find gold. This had been indicated by the presence of burnt papers and wood inside it. The Department of Antiquities undertook digging and clearance of the area belonging to Mohammad Es-Salik on June 13th, 1973 under the direction of the writer with eight workers. The photographer and the registration staff of the Department visited the dig from time to time.

The work area was divided into two trenches. The first one was 4,80 x 3,91 m. and 2,30 x 4,80 m. for the second one. In this later trench we found walls and mixed pottery sherds.² The finds of the first trench, that contains the rock-cut opening which I just mentioned were simply rubble 1,80 m. deep. Pottery sherds with a Jordanian half piastre, found at a depth of 1,50, were put aside.

Stratification, therefore, and the above mentioned pottery sherds were not taken into consideration, except for some rims and pottery handles found immediately on the rock surface of the cave. They date back to the Byzantine and Late Mamluk periods (see Pl. XLVI). Light from the said opening was not sufficient

to see the inside of the cave until three more rock-cut openings were found.

These four openings roofed with large slabs of stone (see Pl. XLIII, 2) helped when opened in seeing that the inside of the cave was divided by arches and cross vaults. The situation, however, was not clear until a third trench to the north of the two former trenches was opened. It was 4,15 x 6,35 m. The entrance we found in this northern trench was closed by stones of different size. The rock surface of the cave and its entrance in this trench area were levelled and plastered to form a floor for a mosque, but that floor had been disturbed and broken on the east side (see Pl. XLIV, 1). A wall of about 10,10 m. on the south side of the trench was found. It contained a plastered niche or Mihrab, one meter deep by one meter wide (Pl. XLIV, 1). A small part of the same plastered wall on the eastern side was found, and this helped in giving the exact size of the room. According to the pottery rims and handles found on its plastered floor, it is dated to the Mamluk period (ca. 13th Century A.D.).

Neither pottery sherds nor bones were found in our cave, except for heavy dust and rubble which had percolated through, and covered a considerable area inside the cave itself. The cave is divided into two equal sections by arches which were built to support the roof. These arches, according to the technique of building, date back probably to the Turkish period, a little known period in the History of Jordan. The springers of the arches were built with rubble and mortar.

(1) In his book "The Survey of Eastern Palestine" I, p. 184, Condor spells the name Al-Meqablein as "El-Makabelein". L. Harding

spells it "Meqabelein", QDAP, XIV (1950) p. 44
(2) Iron Age, Roman, Byzantine, and Umayyad sherds were found around the dig area.

CONCLUSION

A fairly careful examination of the site indicates that the area was populated from about the 4th millennium B.C.³ down to the Mamluk period (13th Cent A.D.) The cave we dug is one of the several large caves which dated back to the Iron Age.

Many other caves have been opened and used as stores by the villagers. The site in general contains many archaeological features, mainly of the Early Bronze and Iron Ages. The Iron Age remains indicate its occupation when the Ammonite were at their Zenith (1200-600

B.C.). A tower built from massive blocks of flint is standing not far from the dig (see Pl. XLIV, 2). Another watch tower built on the facing north-western mound seems to belong to the same period.⁴ (see Pl. XLV, 1-2). Many of the pottery forms and sherds resemble those found in tombs at Sahab and Amman which dated to the Iron Age.

The Jordan Museum contains an Iron and bronze mirror, pottery figurines and rings found by the department of Antiquities in a tomb at Al-Meqablein in 1964. The resemblance of these objects and the material found in Amman and Sahab is also visible.⁵

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(3) flint arrow-heads and fan scrapers were found on Tel Et-Tweihin which is to the east of the modern village of Al-Meqablein.

(4) The Arabic meaning for Al-Meqablein is "The two things facing each other", therefore,

Condor explained its meaning as "The two watch towers facing each other." Condor, "The Survey of Eastern Palestine," I, (1889) p. 184.

(5) QDAP, XI (1945) p. 67, and QDAP, XIII. (1948) pl.XXXV, 1 and 6.