THE 1961 EXCAVATIONS AT 'ARAQ EL-EMIR

Of all the archaeological sites in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, none seemed a better prospect for obtaining Persian and Early Hellenistic stratification than Araq el-Emir, a site some 17 kilometers WSW of Amman. The Zenon papyri, Josephus, and two famous inscriptions on cave entrances, naming Tobiah at Araq, connect this site with the Tobiad family, and this family is mentioned regularly in literary sources between the sixth and second century B. C., and perhaps earlier. In terms of the purpose of the writer and his wife to extend precise pottery chronology in Palestine past the Iron II period into Persian, Hellenistic, and later periods, this site seemed a likely one to fill a gap in available evidence.

A second important attraction to this site was a monumental building called the Qasr el-Abd, a name connecting it with the Tobiads, one of whom was called Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite (Neh. 2:10, 19). Josephus describes the building as "a strong fortress, which was constructed entirely of white marble up to the very roof, and had beasts of gigantic size carved on it" (**Antiq.** XII:230). He attributes its construction to Hyrcanus, a Tobiad who lived at Araq from 187 to 175 B. C. Vincent, followed by a number of leading scholars, argued that the Qasr was built a century earlier in Ptolemaic times because of certain architectural features and the fact that the situation of Hyrcanus, as described by Josephus, would not make such a monumental undertaking possible. Albright, on the other hand, remained firm in the view that Josephus' attribution was correct.

One of the Zenon papyri (**P. Cairo Zen.** 59003) dated 259 B. C. refers to the Tobiad center as Birta ("fortress" in Aramaic), and some have used this as further evidence that the Qasr must have existed by that date. Yet, Birta is a place name, and it is likely that Josephus was confused when he described the Qasr as a fortress, wrongly associating the Qasr with the place name. For, whatever its function, the Qasr does not seem to have been a fortress either by structure or position. The stronghold should be near the caves at the village of Araq, not some 550 meters further down the slope at the Qasr. In any case, in addition to securing stratigraphy from a dark period, there was the prospect of solving the problems of Birta and the Qasr.

With these basic objectives in mind, a spring sounding was conducted from April tenth to May fifth and a more extensive fall excavation from September fourth to October twentieth. These operations were undertaken by the Jerusalem School of the American Schools of Oriental Research. Funds from the regular archaeological budget of the Jerusalem School were supplemented with contributions by the Graduate School of Con-

cordia Seminary in St. Louis through Professor A. von Rohr Sauer (spring), Bethany Biblical Seminary in Chicago through Professor David Wieand (fall), and a substantial grant from Iliff School of Theology in Denver through Professor Walter Williams. The cooperation and substantial help of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and its Director Awni Dajani, especially the loan of a railroad, contributed much to the success of the excavations.

The spring (s) and fall (f) staffs were composed as follows. Field supervisors were Fellows Huffmon (s), Zink (s), Harvey (f), and Nicol (f) and Honorary Lecturers Williams (f) and Wieand (f) of the Jerusalem School, Professor A. Sauer of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (s), Dr. J. Zimmerman of St. George's Cathedral, Jerusalem (sf), and Mr. A. Hassan of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities (sf). Object and pottery registrars were Mrs. Huffmon (s), Mr. J. Sauer (s), Mrs. Nicol (f), and Mrs. Williams (f). Plans were prepared by Mr. G. Wright (s), and by Mr. P. Parr assisted by Mr. W. Lankester and Mr. J. Kikuchi (f). Foreman was Mr. M. Taufiq and chief cook was Mr. M. Adawi. The writer's wife served as business manager while the writer supervised photography and served as archaeological director.

The spring sounding had two chief purposes : first, to determine the date of the construction and subsequent history of the Qasr, and, second, to determine the stratigraphic history of the village of Araq. Both purposes were achieved only in part. Byzantine reconstruction had eliminated practically all of the evidence from the period of the Qasr's construction. The earliest Byzantine reoccupation lay directly upon Early Bronze debris. Yet, the history of the Byzantine use of the Qasr before and after the earthquake which destroyed it was clarified. In the village, four strata were isolated in two squares that were excavated to bedrock. These provided, besides a few coins and other artifacts, good groups of Iron I, Late Hellenistic, and Roman pottery. The fall excavation subsequently added four more occupational horizons, so that the spring sounding by no means exhausted the occupational history of the site.

Accordingly, in terms of the basic reasons for excavating at Araq el-Emir practically nothing was accomplished — no Persian or Early Hellenistic stratification and no evidence to provide a solution to the Birta-Qasr problems. Yet, very significant evidence was unearthed : pottery groups that could become a chronological standard for Palestinian pottery from the second to fifth centuries A.D. and evidence of Iron I occupation that made it possible to postulate a satisfactory identification for the Biblical site of Ramath-mizpeh (Josh. 13:26), to mention only the most prominent. These results, plus the hope that the original objectives might still be achieved, encouraged plans for a full-scale excavation in the fall.

The specific aims of the fall excavation were to excavate a larger area in the village to bedrock to recover plans of four strata, all of which seemed to be domestic areas, and in the Qasr to obtain three major sections that would permit definitive interpretation of the extant evidence. It was also decided to completely excavate, and if possible restore, the Square Building that lay between the Qasr and the caves. The architectural affinities of the fragments of this building with the Qasr suggested that if this building could be dated, a date for the construction of the Qasr could be arrived at indirectly. In the detailed summary of results below, it will readily be seen that these objectives were substantially achieved. Yet, the first-mentioned objectives connected with the selection of the site were still unattained, though results in the fall gave more promise that they might be reached in a future campaign.

In order to obtain the occupational history of the Qasr, three major sections were obtained, a N - S section of the "main hall", an E - W section from the center of the main hall to several meters past the west retaining wall of the Qasr, and a section extending south from the southeast corner of the Qasr. These sections indicate 1) a rather substantial EB settlement built, in part at least, on an outcrop of bedrock, 2) an imported fill laid in horizontal layers to provide a spacious platform for the Qasr, 3) the laying of megalithic foundations, 4) additional layers of fill laid horizontally against these foundations, 5) erection of the megalithic Qasr walls, 6) two intruding occupation layers utilizing exterior Qasr walls and reconstructing interior walls, 7) a two-meter horizontal fill inside and megalithic destruction debris (from an earthquake) outside the Qasr, 8) a thick layer of burned occupation debris inside the Qasr, and 9) rubble and stone of surface debris.

Stratum IV (1). From topographical examination, it would be expected that the platform for the Qasr should consist of fill scooped up from the depression around the Qasr that Josephus describes as a moat. This impression has been shown by excavation to be inaccurate on two counts. First, there is at least a small outcropping of bedrock upon which some of the main foundations for the Qasr were laid. Second, except for the northeast corner of the platform, all the platform fill contained a scattering of Early Bronze sherds from the last half of the third millennium B.C. Accordingly, it seems necessary to postulate an Early Bronze settlement on the bedrock outcrop. This occupation debris, after two millennia of erosion was graded into a level platform for the Qasr. Where this debris was not sufficient, as in the northeast corner of the platform, sterile **huwwar** from the vicinity was added to complete the fill.

Stratum III (2 - 5). The laying of this fill was the first phase of Stratum III, the period of the Qasr's construction and original use. This fill was prepared before any

Hellenistic use of the platform, because only one or two sherds in it belonged to the Hellenistic period, probably early second century B. C. On this fill were laid megalithic foundations of semidressed stones to a depth of three meters or more. One of the few things learned about the original Hellenistic building was that the "main hall" had a number of foundation walls running in both directions which were as substantial as the foundations for the exterior east and west Qasr walls. These indicate that the "main hall" was not a large open court but probably a series of walled rooms or was at least divided by series of colonnades. Against the foundations were laid series of horizontal fills, presumably to the tops of the foundations to serve as a base for the original floor. Upon these foundations were laid the beautifully dressed megaliths that are still preserved at the north and south ends of the east Qasr wall.

The excavaion's architect expects to prepare a new plan of the Qasr, but until then the plan offered by Butler in his publication of the Princeton Expedition in 1904 (Division II, Section A, Pl. III) is quite adequate, except for the interior of the main hall. The building is twice as long as it is broad including the north (front) and south porches, both of which consist of a vestibule flanked by anterooms, the one in the northeast corner being a stairwell. Of the interpretations advanced for the use of the building, the fortress theory has been rejected above. In addition to its geographical position, it seems unlikely that the builders of a fortress would have built spacious porches and entrances at each end of the building. The series of crosswalls or colonnades inside seem too complicated to permit the building to have been originally intended as a temple (or **Seeheiligtum),** and there is little to favor its use as a palace, audience hall, or for some other administrative function. Perhaps the best hypothesis in light of present evidence is Albright's suggestion that this was the Tobiad Mausoleum. This would help to explain why all traces of its original use had to be eradicated before the Byzantine people considered it a place fit for habitation.

Stratum II (6). The reason that practically no evidence of Stratum III occupation remained is that both inside and outside the Qasr Stratum II, Byzantine occupation penetrated down to a meter below the original floor level. What happened to the Qasr between its Tobiad use in the second century B. C. and the early fourth century A. D. is unknown. Quite likely it was abandoned and fell into disrepair. Perhaps it was used as a shelter by shepherds and by squatters, but of this there is no evidence. What is certain is that the main exterior walls of the Qasr remained substantially intact. There is no specific evidence on the nature of the group that prepared the Qasr for reuse in the early fourth century A.D., but it did feel a compulsion to clear out completely the interior of the Qasr. A plausible reconstruction would seem to be that a group of monks removed the interior

walls, floors, and even sub-floor remains, and when all was cleared out they reused the megaliths, hewn into smaller blocks in building an administrative center along lines similar to (but not identical with) the original. These would be entirely explicable if the walls and floors contained (or had previously contained) burials. The walls that were erected, though quite miserable compared to the megalithic walls, were quite substantial and high and took a considerable amount of organized labor to reconstruct. A curious feature of the reconstruction here and at the Square Building was the building of poorer Byzantine walls directly against and along the megalithic walls — as if the megalithic walls were not dependable. None of the reconstructed rooms is very large; the largest excavated is slightly larger than $3\frac{1}{2} \times 8$ meters with three irregularly-spaced arches, preserved as high as the first springer course. The floor level of the first Byzantine occupation was approximately half a meter below the top of the foundations of the original building. Little has been recovered from that occupation, a few sherds from below the floor being of a slightly earlier date than those of the next Stratum II phase and of Stratum I.

A little later, about a half meter of fill was laid on the first Byzantine floor both inside and outside the Qasr, and associated with this was a completely preserved oven and other indications of domestic use, perhaps by the original settlers, perhaps by another group. In any case, this occupation was brought to a disastrous end by an earthquake that tumbled most of the Qasr megaliths probably in A.D. 365.

Stratum I (7-9). Some thirty or more years elapsed before an attempt was made to reuse the Qasr, and at this time it was apparently decided that only the inside area of the fallen Qasr could be reused. A two-meter horizontal fill was laid, raising the floor level to a height above the fallen megalithic debris (of the main east and west walls, both of which had fallen outward). Walls of the previous Byzantine period were raised, and an earth ramp covered the megalithic debris. The date of this operation is given a **terminus post quem** by the latest coin in the two-meter fill dated A.D. 394.

Lying immediately on this fill was a thick layer of burned destruction debris in nearly every square excavated in the Qasr. With this debris were associated an immense number of cooking pots and other artifacts indicating domestic occupation. Especially important were the latest coins which indicated that the destruction took place toward the end of the fifth century A.D., pointing to the fact that this final occupation at the Qasr (before modern times) lasted approximately through the fifth century A.D.

A few comments on the retaining wall, moat, and quarry associated with the original Qasr seem appropriate here. Although in disturbed condition, it is clear that

there was a retaining wall extending the platform on which the Qasr rested some twelve meters beyond the exterior walls on all sides. Part of it was excavated west of the building, and at this spot it was not too substantial, consisting of several courses of medium to large semi-dressed stones. Whether, as Butler (following Josephus) suggests, there was an actual moat around the original Qasr is difficult to decide. The vast amount of land that would be inundated makes the idea dubious, but the Qasr retaining wall as well as remnants of retaining walls at the outer confines of the "moat" and a canal, first discovered near the Square Building, which conducts water directly to it imply that there was in fact a moat as Josephus suggests. Exploration of the crest of the range directly west of the Qasr has revealed fragments of columns of diameter identical with those for the entrance of the north porch and rectangles carved into the flat surface of the rock from which the megaliths undoubtedly were secured. This was the quarry for the Qasr, and the finished stones must have been let directly down the slopes since a broken, dressed magalith was abandoned on a line between the quarry and the Qasr near the foot of the slope after it had broken **en route.**

Much work remains to be done at the Qasr. The plan of the Byzantine building and interior lines of the "main hall" of the Hellenistic building should be completely exposed by excavation ; a good portion of the megalithic shell of the Hellenistic building could be reconstructed without great expense by means of earth ramps and jacks ; especially a thorough architectural study of the building in light of comparative material must be made. At least the last should be undertaken by the American School excavations in the future.

The Square Building lies just over half way down the slope between the caves and the Qasr. The purpose of excavation here, you may recall, was to secure a dating for the construction of the Qasr indirectly by dating this building which has close architectural affinities with the Qasr. Excavation of the Square Building was carried to virtual completion, and an occupational history strikingly similar to that of the Qasr was revealed. Early Bronze occupation is followed by construction of a Hellenistic building in the second century B. C. This is entirely disturbed by fourth and fifth century Byzantine occupation. The only variant is evidence from the bottom of a pit of occupation or minor use about A. D. 200.

Stratum IV. The same Early Bronze sherds as were found at the Qasr appeared in the coarse, hard fill overlying sterile clay that formed a base for the original Hellenistic building. No evidence of Early Bronze structures was discovered.

Stratum III. Nearly all traces of the original plan of the Hellenistic building have disappeared, but a competent architect should be able to provide a satisfactory plan of the original building based on the large number of dressed and decorated stones preserved near the site, and, in fact, actual reconstruction seems quite feasible. The lines of several terrace walls and a wall of well-dressed stones lying directly under the Byzantine pavement indicate that the Hellenistic building was oriented in a slightly different direction from the Byzantine Square Building, and there is nothing to suggest that the earlier building had a square plan. In terms of the purpose of the excavation, what was most important was a group of Hellenistic sherds, including Rhodian jar ware, that could be dated to the first half of the second cenury B. C. This group came from below the first Byzantine pavement and was mixed with Byzantine and Early Bronze sherds. Yet, this was the clearest evidence available for attributing the Qasr, the Square Building, and probably two large buildings still to be investigated in the village to the period of Hyrcanus.

These few sherds demand a reëvaluation of the stature of Hyrcanus, who is commonly considered, in light of Josephus, a defeated man pining away his last years at Araq el-Emir warring against the Arabs. On the contrary, here was a man with enough money to bribe himself into a position of dominance in Jerusalem (II Macc. 3) and enough power to cause complaint by Gileadites (I Macc. 5:10-13. II Macc. 12:17). Here was the agent upon whom the Ptolemies staked their fortune in the retaking of Palestine. These buildings are monuments of his power and measures of his Ptolemaic support.

Stratum II. Unlike the Qasr, the Stratum III building had apparently collapsed before a Byzantine group came to occupy the site in the fourth century A. D. We know nothing about the period between the second century B. C. and the fourth century A. D., except that at least one of two pits (plastered for containing water or another liquid) just outside the entrance of the Stratum II building had been in use about A. D. 200, for pottery of that horizon was recovered from the bottom. The group that constructed the Square Building is likely the same one that completely renovated the inside of the Qasr. After clearing out the stones of the collapsed building, levelling a space for the new building, perhaps cutting into the terrace at the northwest corner, and cutting some of the larger stones into smaller blocks, they erected the Square Building, the plan of which is now visible. The construction was very poor. The north and west walls appear to have been built directly into terrace rubble, and the rough-hewn walls in the eastern part of the building were buttressed with larger stones of the original building, haphazardly laid. The entrance was toward the middle of the east wall. An E-W wall with a break in the middle divided the building nearly in half, and column fragments inside the

building suggested that its roof was originally supported with columns. The floor showed better workmanship than the rest of the building. It was of rather carefully laid flagstones covered by a layer of plaster. Just outside the entrance were two pits or cisterns. Each was carefully plastered, the larger with two layers of plaster. This latter had a column fragment placed upright in the center of the floor and also plastered. The time of their construction and their original use are unclear, but they were certainly open in the fourth century A. D., and must have been covered so that they did not hinder access to the building. Since the larger was not completely cleaned out in the fourth century, it seems clear that, during Stratum II occupation, these were used for water storage. The best dating evidence for Stratum II is a coin imbedded in the floor between the two cisterns. Whether this coin is to be associated with the construction of the floor or, more probably, became imbedded there during the course of its use is not clear. In any case, the coin is one of Constantius II dating between A. D. 335-337 and fits perfectly with the pre - A. D. 365 date suggested for Stratum II occupation at the Qasr.

Stratum I. Except for a disturbance in the center of the building which may indicate a collapse of the roof, the A.D. 365 earthquake seems not to have damaged the Square Building, for a rougher floor about 20 centimeters above the Stratum II floor was discovered inside and outside the building. On and above this floor were large quantities of fifth - century Byzantine pottery and a coin of Arcadius (A.D. 384-408). Apparently this occupation continued until the end of the fifth century, because late fifth century pottery was abundant and filled the two cisterns, indicating that they were used until the end of the occupation.

Some 220 meters directly below the overhanging cliffs which contain the caves made famous by the two Tobiah inscriptions, in a southeasterly direction, lies the village of Araq. This site commands a view of the rather steep, terraced slope to the south (where the Square Building and Qasr are situated) and the precipitous descent to the floor of the Wadi es-Sir nearly 300 meters below to the east. An ancient (probably Hellenistic) aqueduct, which still supplies water for the village and neighbouring fields, passes between the caves and the village. The village is built on the edge of the cliffs overhanging the Wadi es-Sir on an outcrop of rock slightly higher than the adjacent territory to the south, west, and north.

Traces of walls bounding the ancient village in these three directions indicate a village area of about 8500 square meters (slightly over two acres). Ancient debris lies upon the rock outcropping from a depth of from two to over five meters in the northwest quarter where excavation was undertaken. Much of the rest of the village is encumbered

with modern houses, including at least parts of two monumental buildings with architectural affinities to the Qasr and the predecessor to the Square Building. Analysis of the stratification of the village is not yet complete, but a brief summary of its occupational history is offered below.

Early Strata. A very few Chalcolithic sherds and larger groups of Early Bronze and Middle Bronze I - IIA sherds appeared, especially in pockets near and in rock outcroppings. No structures are associated with these horizons, and, in fact, no clear homogeneous groups are available except for the Early Bronze horizon. The gap in occupation between Middle Bronze IIA (actually about 1800 B.C.), until the eleventh century B. C. (Stratum IV) is interesting in connection with the commonly held view that there was little or no sedentary occupation of Transjordan between the nineteenth and thirteenth century B. C. (Material from this period in Transjordan consists either of tomb groups or sites that may have been periodic stopping-places for non-sedentary groups.) No stratum numbers are provided for these early horizons in the hope that substantial stratification from these horizons might be recovered in future excavation.

Stratum IV. Already, in the spring, a thin layer of Iron I occupation lying directly on bedrock was discovered, and the sherds from it suggested occupation in the eleventh century B. C., predominantly its first half. In the fall, it was discovered that more than two meters of debris from this stratum was preserved in places, and a whole complex of walls began to be uncovered. One of these walls extended through three excavated squares and was a meter-and-a-half thick, undoubtedly a fortification wall of some sort. The association of this occupation with the Gadites, one of the two-and-a-half tribes that settled in Transjordan at the time of Joshua, makes further excavation to determine the nature of the fortress and the circumstances of its abandonment or destruction highly desirable.

The discovery of Iron I remains has made it possible to suggest Araq el-Emir as the most likely site for identification with Ramath-mizpeh (Josh. 13:26). Previously suggested identifications either were in an improper geographical position (Hosn 'Ajlun, Khirbet Jel'ad) or lacked Iron I remains (Khirbet es-Sar).

Stratum III. Although isolated pottery groups and coins from the third and early second century B. C. have been recovered, the layer immediately overlying the Iron I debris is a fill for a floor (in most places of heavy plaster) that was laid toward the end of the second century B.C. A number of major walls were erected at this time, some

founded directly on the plastered floors. This substantial building operation likely obliterated earlier Hellenistic occupation for which there is evidence from sherds, coins, and a few vestiges of plastered walls and floors. The late second century B. C. occupation is designated Stratum IIIb and to it are to be ascribed the major walls containing the city to the north and to the east that continued to be utilized through the final Roman occupation of the site and were used virtually without alteration until about the middle of the first century A.D. By that time in one instance the floor level had risen about half a meter. Remains associated with the upper floor and the end of this occupation are designated Stratum IIIa.

Stratum II. There appears to have been a quarter - or half - century gap in occupation at Araq in the last half of the first century A. D. At the end of the century or beginning of the second a complete renovation of the Stratum III structures was undertaken involving changes in entryways, new partition walls, and a fill raising the floor level a half - meter. Stratum II occupation seems to have continued without interruption until near the end of the second century when it was ended violently, judging by the burnt destruction layer from the end of this stratum. Sherds in this debris were only slightly earlier than those from Stratum I, and it appears likely that Stratum I occupation directly followed the end of Stratum II occupation about A.D. 200. However, this date is based only upon relative ceramic development and may need revision.

Stratum I. The floor level of this stratum corresponded approximately to the present surface of the site and was raised by imported fill about 80 centimeters above the Stratum II floor. Though almost entirely disturbed, this floor was attested by an **in situ** threshhold stone and oven. As in the case of all the Hellenistic and Roman remains, there was nothing to suggest anything more than domestic occupation in this northwest quarter of the city, and partial plans of courtyard - type houses have been recovered together with a multiplicity of cooking, grinding, sewing, and farming artifacts and installations.

The excavations in the village underline the dangers of building archaeological arguments from silence. A careful surface exploration did not reveal traces of Iron I occupation, to say nothing of Early Hellenistic, Middle Bronze I - IIA, Early Bronze, and Chalcolithic. These last four horizons were not even encountered in two squares which reached bedrock in the spring, and no evidence of Iron I fortifications appeared until fall. While a sobering experience for one attempting to set down archaeological conclusions, it also provides a perspective of expectation for what might appear "from silence" in future work at Araq el - Emir.

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PAUL W. LAPP, DIRECTOR
American School of Oriental Research