

DISCOVERIES AT ANCIENT HESHBON

BY. S. H. HORN

An archaeological expedition of Andrews University (Michigan, U. S. A.) closed its first season of work at Heshbon Friday, August 30, announced its director, Dr. Siegfried H. Horn. Ancient Heshbon lies at the present village of Hisban, a few miles north of Madaba. The personnel consisted of a foreign staff of 42 members representing a number of universities and seminaries, and 146 Jordanians including three representatives of the Department of Antiquities, and several students of the University of Jordan.

During the seven weeks of work remains of an apparently Byzantine church were discovered on the mound's highest spot. The apse, some column bases and the northern wall are still in place. In the apse and in the central aisle parts of multicolored mosaic floors were found. They have been removed and transferred to the regional museum in Madaba.

Excavated structures of the Arab period included vaulted rooms surrounding the acropolis, together with a stairway leading to it from the lower terrace. More than 50 coins from the Omayyad and Mamluk periods, and a great amount of painted and glazed pottery from the same periods — among them a few complete or restored vessels — testify to the importance of the site in the early Arab centuries.

A deep sounding shaft on the terrace surrounding the acropolis brought to light the foundation of defense wall from the Persian period, according to the associated pottery which comes mainly from the Iron II and III periods. This wall foundation consisting of huge field stones carefully laid into a foundation trench, four meters deep, was more than a meter wide, and was constructed with the purpose of preventing an enemy to enter the city by tunnelling under the wall.

Heshbon's ancient history reaches back at least to the late Bronze Age (middle of the second millennium B. C.) Some painted pottery belonging to this period was found in a deep probe, and it is hoped that more material remains of this period will come to light as the expedition penetrates into deeper layers in subsequent seasons of excavations. It is in this late Bronze Age period that, according to the Bible, Heshbon was the capital of Sihon, King of the Amorites.

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In the early Christian centuries it was the seat of a bishop, and after the Arab invasion the chief city of the Belqa.

Aside from coins and pottery representing Heshbon's history from the Hellenistic time through the Arab periods, many objects of utility were found, but also some pieces of art, such as the marble head of a ram, and last, but not least in value, a potsherd inscribed in ink. This inscription written in Aramaic characters of the 5th century B.C. needs much more study before its contents can be read because the letters have faded much since they were written many centuries ago.

The evidence brought to light in the first season of excavation has illuminated and supplemented in a most gratifying way the history of this important city as known from literary sources. Two more seasons of work are planned for the years 1970 and 1972. During those seasons the earlier occupation levels of ancient Heshbon will be penetrated, and it is hoped that this work will shed further light on the origin and early history of the city.

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