

# THE EXCAVATIONS AT TAWILAN, NR. PETRA.

BY. C. Bennett

The first exploratory season of excavation at Tawilan, sponsored by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and the British Academy, and in full co-operation with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities has now been concluded. Under the direction of Mrs. Crystal-M. Bennett, the excavations lasted from the 26th March to the 11th June, with Mr. Ahmed Shishtawi acting as the representative of the Department of Antiquities. Most grateful thanks are due to His Majesty King Hussein, the Jordanian Army and the Department of Antiquities for all their help in making these excavations, carried out in very trying conditions, both possible and successful.

Tawilan, more than 4,500 feet above sea level, is a naturally defended site. The Djebel Heidan rises above it to the east, the Djebels Unagreh and Shabaraheh to the north, and to the south and west Tawilan overlooks Wadi Musa and Elji, the village east of Petra. To north and south, it is fed by the waters of the Wadis Heidan and Musa. The site is about half an hour's walk from Ein Musa.

Interest in Tawilan was aroused for several reasons: 1 - on Umm el Biyara, the great rock massif overlooking Petra from the west, excavations by Mrs. Crystal-M. Bennett, had revealed a flourishing small community living there in the 7th Century B.C. The community may have been small, but it was sufficiently important to receive a missive from the then King of Edom, Qos-Gabr, whose seal impression was found during the excavations. This was the first royal seal impression ever to be found in Jordan or Palestine. 2 - numerous sherds picked up on the surface at Tawilan on various visits suggested that there, also, was an Edomite community, but a much larger one, probably contemporary with the earlier than the Edomite community on Umm el Biyara and, 3 - according to some Biblical scholars, Tawilan was to be equated with the Biblical Teiman, one of the main cities of the Edomites (perhaps its southern capital?), against which the later prophets had inveighed so vehemently.

Visible on the surface, on one of the main terraces of Tawilan, was a wall, enclosing an area of some 30 dunams. Within this wall, there seemed to be another wall with two watch towers, one to the north and the other to the south. Trenches were accordingly put down and across these strategic points. It was quickly proved that the visible outer wall was nothing

more than a field boundary wall, of a date after the Nabataean occupation. In fact, it is doubtful if the Iron Age town of Tawilan ever had a town or defensive wall, because, even a superficial glance at and from the site, shows how well nature had provided for its defence. One of the trenches across this outer wall uncovered an enormous pit, the limits of which were never reached, full of Iron Age pottery of the 8th and 9th Centuries B. C.

Trenches were also put across the inner wall and the two towers. Extensive remains of domestic buildings have been uncovered, and although every effort was made to get the plan of one complete building, it proved beyond our resources, because the house complexes are so big. An interesting feature of all the buildings, so far excavated, is the extremely poor workmanship: not one properly cut or dressed stone has been found. In the very large building, which is being excavated to the west of the plateau, there are a series of plastered floors and a large courtyard, with 3 regularly spaced central columns (the rest have yet to be uncovered). It is too soon to say what the function of this building was, but it may be significant that from this building came a scarab of unusual type. On it, is an altar, in the shape of a house, between two trees. Rising from the base is a post, adorned with fillets, with a crescent at the top. The crescent is the symbol of the moon-god and appears frequently in that form on cylinder seals of the 9th - 8th C.B.C. On the relief of Bar-Rekub at Sindjirli, it is the special symbol of Sin, the moon god of Harran.

The crescent is surmounted by a star, the symbol of Ishtar: the crescent and the star are often found in association, but the star is usually depicted beside the crescent-and-not as in this case - inside the crescent. Nothing is known of Edomite religion or worship, other than that their national god was Qos. Have we then here, the first recorded example of a symbol of their god?

The Edomites of the 8th-9th centuries B. C. were certainly an agricultural community, as evidenced by the large number of storage pits, stone-lined and unlined, stone mortars, grinders, pestles, iron sickles and knives.

The outstanding discovery at Tawilan this season has been undoubtedly the emergence of the Edomites as masters of the potters' art. Some of the very fine pottery is equally as well fired and as thin as the now famous Nabataean pottery. Great attention has been paid to the painting, which, in some cases, harks back to a Late Bronze Age tradition, but has essentially its own individual stamp. Much use is made of cream slip, on which, bands of different colours are then painted. There are obvious affinities with the painted pottery from Moab and Ammon.

Anyone who has suffered the constant high winds at Tawilan will appreciate the great effect erosion has had on the site over the past three thousand years. For this reason, in some instances, we were dealing, not with the actual building, but with its foundations. All that was left of the so-called watch tower to the south, were the last two courses of the foundations.



To this, we have given a provisional medieval Arabic dating. This tower overlay part of a vast complex of walls belonging to the 8th c. B.C. When the part of the building excavated went out of use, the area was then used as a burial ground. No fewer than 15 skeletons, of all ages, have been uncovered, and where the complete skeleton has been revealed, the body is always orientated eas-west, with the head turned towards the south. It would seem therefore, that we have here an early Islamic burials, which cut into the Iron Age house levels.

The conclusions then, of these very important initial excavations are:

- 1) The three main areas excavated show that there is a complex of buildings extending all over the plateau and that this is part of a large Edomite city, which in the area excavated, had its floruit during the 8th and part of the 9th centuries B.C.
- 2) There is no evidence of a fortified city; the natural defences were sufficient.
- 3) Agriculture played an important part in its life.
- 4) The inhabitants of Tawilan were very indifferent masons, despite the fact that they lived in stone country.
- 5) They excelled in the potters' art: much of the pottery discovered is intirely new, but with affinities with that from Moab and Ammon. The exact stratification of the excavations at Tawilan will enable us to date more accurately the Moabite and Ammonite pottery and to put the ceramics of the three states into proper perspective. It may well throw light on the origins of Nabataean pottery, which may prove to be indigenous.
- 6) As it is a stone area, we are unlikely to get successive periods of occupations, one on top of the other.
- 7) There are surface indications, however, on the terraces above and below the plateau investigated, of earlier occupation, going back to as far as 4,000 B.C., making the whole area of Tawilan a vital centre for the history of Southern Jordan from the present day, traversing written history and ending at a time when man first became sedentary.

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