

NOTES AND REVIEWS

BAYDA: CONSERVATION AND PRESENTATION PROJECT, APRIL—NOVEMBER 2003

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Project Objectives

The Bayda Project was initiated in 2001 to conserve the early Neolithic site and present the complex remains to the public. The project is a joint collaboration between the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL) and the Department of Antiquities in Jordan with a strong emphasis on community involvement. The project has been funded by a grant from the British Embassy, and has received substantial help in kind from the Department of Antiquities and CBRL.

The early Neolithic in the Levant, and specifically within Jordan, is critical to our understanding of the transition from hunter-gatherers to farmers, the beginnings of agriculture, the birth of religion, and the emergence of community life. One of the most important changes directly documented in the material evidence is the rapid development of architecture associated with increasing sedentism and community size, both central to most models of the transition.

The Bayda project has three main components: to conserve and protect the ancient remains; to conduct research on Neolithic architecture through experimental reconstruction; and, with the assistance of the results of the first two objectives, to interpret the remains for the public.

Conservation and Protection

In 2003 the project continued to employ a local guard to look after the site. In 2002 considerable efforts had been made to stabilise the site by back-filling some trenches, conducting minor conservation works, building terrace walls, and laying out paths to keep visitors off the fragile walls. Monitoring in 2003 showed that these steps had all contributed to slowing the rate of deterioration. The paths had had limited success, especially regarding groups with guides, who continued to lead their parties according to past practice, rather than according to the paths.

Limited additional work was undertaken on this

objective in 2003. This included enhancing the paths, making them clearer and erecting signs around their course. The signs (as well as acting as an interpretative tool) (Figs. 1, 2), also explained the purpose of conservation efforts. It appeared that during the course of 2003 these efforts were having some success in leading visitors around the site in a manner, which did not cause damage.

In addition, by working with the local community, we believe that there is now a greater awareness of the site and its importance, which is having a beneficial effect on conservation efforts.

Experimental Reconstruction

Despite remarkably good preservation on some sites, construction techniques, overall form, and function of the buildings remain poorly understood, severely limiting our understanding of important social developments. A series of reconstructions are being built, within the fence that protects the site, but away from the archaeological remains.

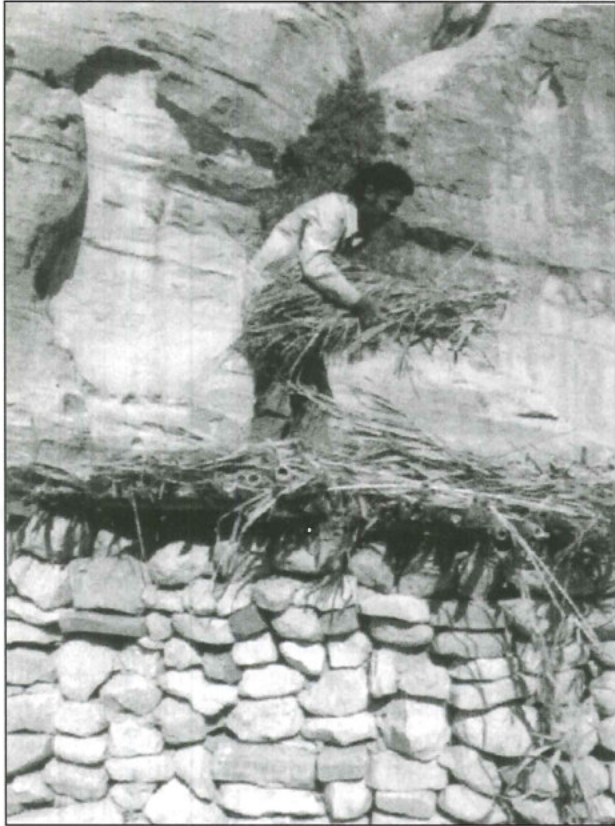
The project is examining the problems of conflicting interpretations made by archaeologists and adapting these interpretations for a wider audience. The experimental structures can help provide insights regarding the continuing debates concerning structure size and organisation, function of individual buildings, site location, organisation of interior space, and intersite variability over time. They will consequently help our understanding of significant patterns of social organisation of settlement types, domestic activities and storage space, and settlement population.

The 2003 Fieldwork

A series of experimental reconstructions of Neolithic structures, based on evidence from the excavation, were built through the summer, autumn and winter.

This photograph shows (from top to bottom) Experimental Building 49, 48, and 10.

The reconstructions are based on evidence from



1. The reconstructions from two main phases of early Neolithic occupation at Bayda.

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Experimental Building 49, based on Diana Kirkbride's archaeological evidence of House 49, is a circular semi-subterranean structure 5m in diameter with walls 1.20m high and 0.50m thick. The wall, built of stones from the wadi bed, consists of three main parts: inner wall, mud and stone fill, and the outer wall, all built simultaneously to allow the mud and stone to bond. The timber roof is lashed to the upright timbers that have been placed within the stone wall.

Experimental Building 48 is based on evidence of House 48. It is similar in construction to Experimental Building 49 with the exception of the roof design. This structure has an almost flat roof compared to the sloped roof of the previous structure. This experimental, involving different roof designs, will try to address the continuing debates about what the roofs may have looked like.

Experimental Building 10 is based on evidence of House 10 from the excavations. It is an example of a 'pier' structure. The walls are made of stones and mud and measure 1.60m high.

The flat roof is constructed of three timber rafters covered by mats of reeds, and then covered

with layers of mud. The function of these structures is still unknown.

Interpreting the Site

This year, in addition to experimental reconstruction work, the project placed temporary signs on site containing information on the archaeological excavations at Bayda, the experimental structures, and conservation issues. Signs were all produced with an English and Arabic version of the text. A limited supply of laminated brochures in English, Arabic, German and French were produced to help guide visitors around the site. The experimental structures were all used as part of the method for explaining the rather complicated structural remains on the archaeological site, and the path took visitors to these structures before going to the ancient remains.

A small-scale open-day was held, attended by representatives of the Department of Antiquities, the British Embassy and British Council, as well as other interested parties. Following a number of requests, plans are being made to have guided visits by groups of students from various Jordanian Universities in 2004.