

ŞA'AD: NOTES ON THE 1996 EXCAVATIONS

by

Jerome C. Rose, Mahmoud El-Najjar, Nizar Tourshan and Saleh Sari

The University of Arkansas and Yarmouk University continued joint excavations at two necropoli at the site of Şa'ad in the al-Mafraq District during the summer of 1996. In addition to staff from both institutions, five American and seven Jordanian bioarchaeology field-school students participated in the excavation.

Two large chamber tombs with pit graves cut into the bedrock were located during the 1995 excavations in the flat courtyard area to the west of the Byzantine church (Necropolis I). Exploratory trenches located to the south of the church encountered the corner of a dwelling with plaster floors and stone walls. This is the first house encountered.

Further to the south, a large chamber tomb had been modified into a dwelling whose plaster floor covered, sealed and protected six pit graves covered by transversely placed rock slabs. Each grave contained multiple burials of individuals whose well preserved, but fragmented, skeletons were mingled. Preliminary analysis in the field suggests the following minimum number of individuals in each grave: Grave 1, 10; Grave 2, 3; Grave 4, 4; Grave 5, 5; Grave 6, 3. Grave 3 was never completed.

Necropolis II is located approximately 400 m north-east of the Byzantine church where horizontal rows of tombs were cut into the hillside. The 1995 excavations cleared 17 robbed and 13 partially intact to intact tombs. A total of 22 tombs were discovered, cleared and mapped in 1996. Of these, 68% had been robbed. These hypogean tombs have a dromos averaging 181 cm in length, and 77 cm in width and a tomb chamber averaging 214 cm in length,

77 cm in width, and 112 cm in height. The doorways were sealed by courses of undressed rock. Roughly cut stone sarcophagi (all for subadults) were found in 19% of the tombs. Two of the tombs were not of standard construction. Tomb 42 was cut vertically into the rock (no ceiling) and contained a sarcophagus. Tomb 47 was also cut vertically down into the rock and the skeleton, without grave goods, was covered by transversely placed roughly cut rock slabs. This tomb resembled the graves found in Necropolis I.

Grave goods of some note were found in 32% of the graves, while 9% had what might be considered a complete complement of personal items. The usual complement of personal items consist of gold foil earrings for the females, beads, bronze and iron bracelets and finger rings of bronze and iron. An alabaster trivet was found in Tomb 33.

Preliminary skeletal analysis indicates that there are 10 adults, 5 subadults, and 8 of unknown age grouping. Three of the adults are female. All of the adults are of small size and robusticity suggesting a rather poor childhood diet. This is in contrast to the remains from Necropolis I which are all large and robust suggesting a much richer childhood diet.

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Jerome C. Rose,
Mahmoud El-Najjar,
Nizar Tourshan
Saleh Sari
Institute of Archaeology
and Anthropology
Yarmouk University
Irbid, Jordan