

The Excavations at Tell Hesban, 1973

The third season of excavations at Tell Hesban, Madaba District, was carried out from June 25 to August 10, 1973, with a staff of 57, of whom 48 were foreigners and 9 Jordanians. Half of the staff had served at Hesban before, either in one or both previous seasons which had been conducted in 1968 and 1971. In addition to the staff about 140 other Jordanians were employed by the expedition. The Hesban expedition was again sponsored by Andrews University, Michigan, USA, and was supported by the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, by Calvin Theological Seminary and several private donors. It carried out its work under a license granted by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan with the assistance of five employees of the Department. The help and support of the Department of Antiquities, and especially of its director-general, Yacoub Oweis, is gratefully acknowledged by the expedition. As in previous seasons Siegfried H. Horn of Andrews University served as director and Roger S. Boraas of Upsala College as chief archaeologist.

The results of this third season supported and modified the conclusions reached from the previous work. The seasons of 1968 and 1971 had produced evidence that Hesban had been occupied from the 7th century B.C. to the Mamluk period, but architectural remains had been found only from the Roman, Byzantine, Omayyad and Ayyubid-Mamluk periods. This time evidence came to light pushing the history of Hesban back to the 12th century B.C., because strata as well as a wall belonging to the Early Iron Age (12th-11th century B.C.) were discovered in two areas on the mound.

To the later Iron Age period (7th-6th century B.C.) belong a hard, smooth layer

of plaster, 30 centimeters thick, which was discovered in Area B below ten meters of debris. It is probably the bottom of a water reservoir, of which parts of the eastern retaining wall also came to light in the form of a plastered header-stretcher wall and several sections of plastered rock scarps, all having originally formed a continuous waterproof wall of about 15 meters in length.

The Hellenistic Age is represented by various architectural remains, especially by a perimeter wall surrounding the acropolis. From the Roman period date among other structures a monumental stairway which originally may have given access to a large public building, such as a temple, of which foundation walls and decorative stone work was discovered in various places.

The Byzantine period is especially represented by the ruins of a Christian church of which parts had already been excavated during the two previous seasons. A large part of the ruins of that church has now been laid bare, including many fragments of multi-colored and plain white mosaic floors, as well as a fine courtyard paved with well-cut flagstones.

The most prominent structure of the Islamic period excavated this season is an elaborate bath installation of Mamluk times built on top of the western end of the ruins of the Byzantine church. The furnace, hot and cold water basins, the bath room with a stone water basin, a heated tile floor and plastered walls, as well as the entrance hall are reasonably well preserved.

Several Roman and Byzantine tombs were discovered in the ancient southwestern cemetery of Hesban. They had been robbed in medieval times but still

produced several glass vases, whole pottery vessels, lamps and various other objects of utility and art.

A team was in the field all the time studying the surrounding area of Hesban in a radius of 10 kilometers. Ancient sites were explored by recording all visible ruins and collecting potsherds from the surface in order to place Hesban's ancient history in its right environmental and

ecological perspective. Also the Roman road from Hesban, which in Roman times was called Ebus, to er-Rame, the ancient Livias, was traced. On this process several milestones, so far not noted by earlier explorers, were discovered, as well as the ruins of ancient rest stations and guard towers.

All in all, the 1973 season of excavations at Tell Hesban has been most successful and rewarding.

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Heshbon Expedition