Studies and Reports

Abu Hamid Fourth Season of Excavation

In the Jordan valley, 16 km north of Deir Alla, a Jordanian-French expedition under the direction of Dr. Zeidan Kafafi and Dr. Genevieve Dollfus finished its fourth season of excavations at the site of Abu Hamid. These excavations took place from October 21st to December 7th of 1991. The project was funded by Yarmouk University, the French National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS) and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Department of Antiquities and the French Institute of Archaeology of the Near East (IFAPO) in Amman were also helpful in getting this project underway.

This site, which is located in the Qattaras area, was first discovered in 1975 by Moawiyah Ibrahim, James Sauer and Khair Yassine when they were surveying the Ghor area. In 1985, the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of Yarmouk University and the French National Center of Scientific Research agreed to begin an interdisciplinary research project on northern Jordan and the Jordan Valley of Jordan during the 5th and 4th millennia.

Although this period is important for archaeological investigation, it is still not well known. It is during this period that major animal species such as sheep, goats and cattle were domesticated, and cereals (wheat, barley, lentils and peas) were cultivated. New pottery techniques seem also to have appeared at this time. However, the socio-cultural level which made urbanization possible was not yet reached. Urbanization seems to have started in this area during the second half of the 4th millennium.

To arrive at general conclusions about this period, the Jordanian-French team excavated new sites in the Jordan Valley and in the northern part of the country. Considering the rapid extension of the irrigated fields in the Jordan Valley, and on the advice of the General Director of the Department of Antiquities, it was decided to begin excavating a site in the Ghor area rather than moving to the plateau. After consulting with Dr. Moawiyah Ibrahim, the decision was taken to excavate Tell Abu Hamid first.

During the first three seasons, 2000 m² of the ca. 4 ha settlement of the 4th millennium were excavated. Some houses had their walls built with plano-convex bricks laid on stone foundations and were similar to those excavated in the upper levels at Għassul, a site located 6 km north of the Dead Sea. In other houses, the floors of the rooms were cut form the marl, like the chalcolithic houses of Jebel Sartaba near Tabaqat Fahl which are also cut from the rock. Next to the roofed rooms were unroofed courtyards, some of them enclosed by a stone wall. It is in these courtyards as well as in other open spaces that most of the kilns, hearths, and pits were located. It was also noticed that the site was occupied for the first time during the late 5th millennium. Some buildings were lying over a very thick layer of terra-rosa. This soil is excellent for cultivation and we can well imagine that it is one of the

An East-West Sounding Trench; Notice a Late Fifth Millennium Curvilinear House Dug into the Terra-Rosa (Photo by Yusuf Zu’bi)
reasons why the first group decided to settle there. During the 1989 season two buildings of this period were discovered and partially excavated: One is in the northern part of the excavations and the other is in the southern part.

In the 1991 season, the excavations of these two buildings continued. The northern one has several small rectangular rooms that were originally roofed and one closed, unroofed area. In one of the rooms, along a wall, a mud-brick platform was uncovered. This platform could have been used for sleeping. It should be noted that its bricks are of a different kind than the ones used for construction. On the floor of that room grinding utensils were found.

In the unroofed area, animal bones, pits and hearths were also found. In the southern area, one compound consisted of two buildings, one which could have been used for storage and one which may have been a dwelling. Both buildings were built on the sterile soil without any stone foundations. The bricks have a plano-convex section. The face of the walls was very well plastered. On the floor of one large rectangular room several pieces of ceramic sherds, flint tools (such as adzes) and spindle whorls were recovered. Outside this building, in an open area, many hearths, oval fire pits and conical basins dug into the natural soil with plaster were found. The basins could very well have been used to store the water as it is still the case today in the nearby village of Abu Sido.

To this level pertain a series of very large pits containing lumps of clay that were well levigated and ready to be modelled. Some unfinished figurines and a large number of animal figurines were also recovered. Most of those figurines are small (4-5cm in length) but some reach up to 17cm in length. What is important is that in this period olive trees were apparently cultivated for the first time. Wheat, barley, lentils and peas, were also grown. The pottery, which already resembles the pottery of the upper levels in terms of its shapes and its decoration (bands in reliefs with finger impressions, incisions, paintings) shows ties with sites in Palestine such as Munhatta, Abu Zuraiq (Hazorea) and Wadi Rabah.

However, the most unexpected result of this season were two long stratigraphic trenches from which we were able to determine that the natural soil was not originally level as we had thought but presented some irregularities. In some of the depressions were dwellings. One of them, which was partially excavated this year, seems to be curvilinear and slightly cut into the sterile soil. It is lined in some places with small stones and in other parts with clay. A large number of pits, some of them very large and deep, had been dug in this first level of settlement.

The artifacts are abundant. A very coarse pottery which shows similarities with that ones excavated at Abu Thawwab, Sahab and Tell Wadi Feinan is accompanied by painted pottery such as jars with painted handles and painted motifs (sun) on their shoulders, cups, and bowls with painted decoration on interiors and exteriors. The painted patterns, and in some cases their disposition, suggest a relation between this pottery with some pottery found in sites at Syria such as Hama (Late Halaf, early Obeid cultures). The animal bones have not yet been identified. Their analysis will show whether hunting, which had almost disappeared in the upper levels, was still playing a role or not. Judging from the botanical macro-remains it seems that olive trees were not yet cultivated. But this will be confirmed when more samples are collected next season.

The finds which were uncovered during this season indicate that the first occupation of the site could date to ca. the end of first half of the 5th millennium or even earlier, and that
the site does not show any sign of long abandonment.

We hope that a thorough analysis of the artifacts collected during the four seasons and hopefully the fifth one, scheduled in 1992, will help us to trace socio-cultural and techno-economic evolution and determine when and how the major steps of this evolution took place. Abu Hamid will then become without any doubt a site of reference for the whole region.

As during the previous seasons, Jordanian and French students and also students from other nationalities (Ethiopia, Japan, Germany, and Spain) have been trained in field methods and registration.

It has also been a great pleasure for the team to welcome many visitors, and more specifically to introduce a class of children from the Modern School of Yarmouk University to archaeology as it had been done in 1989 with pupils from the French School of Amman.

Zeidan Kafafi
Genevieve Dollfus

Excavations at Khirbet ez-Zeraqoun 1991

Khirbet ez-Zeraqoun is located about 13 km northeast of Irbid at the western edge of Wadi eh-Shallaleh. The excavations there are a joint project between Yarmouk University's Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology - represented by Prof. Moawiyah Ibrahim - and Tübingen University's Biblisch Archäologisches Institut - represented by Prof. Siegfried Mittmann. These excavations were conducted in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities.

This fifth season went on for eight weeks, starting August 25 of 1991, and concentrated on the upper and lower town in order to uncover extensions of certain architectural units and complexes which had appeared during previous seasons. Another goal of this season was to solve some stratigraphical problems associated with the building phases of the city wall, the main gate of the town, the temple complex and the domestic area of the lower town.

Upper Town
During this season it was made clear that the main gate showed four major changes or stages. The earliest stage represents the widest opening (ca. 15m wide) of this installation. During the following phases it became progressively narrower until it was reduced to a small, zigzag passage way. The exterior part of the gate features two curving, tower-like additions to the city wall, while its inner part is connected to two square towers. These inner towers, with other adjacent rooms, surround a road which leads directly to the temple area and the economic quarter. The floor of the gate and the passage way consists of beaten earth and paved areas with small stones.

The temple area is also accessible from the eastern side by a long road that is approximately 1.5 m wide. A large architectural unit was exposed on the north side of the road adjacent to the temple area on its east side. This unit consists of square and