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THE POLISH EXCAVATIONS IN THE MADABA PLAINS PROJECT
PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 1998 SEASON

Excavations were carried out at Tall al-'Umayri by the Polish Archeological Mission from June 24 to August 5, 1998.[1] The site is located ca. 30 km. southwest of Amman, on the Madaba Plateau in central Jordan.

The mission is part of the Madaba Plains Project, an interdisciplinary research project directed by a consortium of American and Canadian colleges and universities. The Polish researches, which involve the tomb project in the 'Umayri area, constitute part of the Tall al-'Umayri excavations,[2] and are firmed by the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Archeology.[3]

This season a team of 12 persons took part in the Polish fieldwork.[4] The goal of the group's research was twofold: the main objective of the 1998 season was to continue excavations around the dolmen uncovered during the 1994 season, in order to compare

[1] The 1998 season was financially supported by Bank Przemysłowo-Handlowy S.A., the Ministry of Education, the "Bratniak" Foundation for Students and Graduates of the Jagiellonian University, and the Stefan Batory Foundation.

[2] The Madaba Plains Project is divided for research purposes into three main sections: the excavations at Tall Jalul, directed by R. W. Younker; the excavations at Tall Hisban and associated work, directed by Ø. S. LaBianca; and the excavations at Tall al-'Umayri and vicinity, directed by L. Herr. The Polish project is part of the work at 'Umayri.

[3] The project receives essential support from the Chair of Egyptian and Near Eastern Archeology at the Jagiellonian University, directed by Prof. J. Śliwa.

[4] The field research was directed by E. Dubis (Jagiellonian University). The Square Supervisors team included Mariusz Górniak (Jagiellonian University) - the supervisor of survey work in the 'Umayri area and supervisor of excavations at site 010- were: M Kliengbaum (Germany/Bolivia), J. Juares (USA); Z. Zuher (Department of Antiquities, Jordan); A. Pieńkowska (University of Warsaw); and Justin Walsh. Several Jagiellonian University students also participated in the project: K. Lipińska, A. Bilik, D. Janowska, M. Bańdo, S. A. Gnat, and J. Parker (USA).

the stratigraphy there with the results obtained during the 1996 season; the second goal, as in previous seasons, was to search for cemeteries and tombs associated with the towns on the tall.

Fig. 1. Tall al.-'Umayri looking south-east. Photo M. Górniak

EXCAVATION AROUND THE MEGALITHIC TOMB

Four years ago a megalithic tomb was exposed on one of the terraces on the lower part of the southeastern slope of the tall.[5] To be sure, the lid, which is the most characteristic feature of this kind of structure, was not found, but the construction of the tomb suggests that it was a dolmen. Dolmens occur widely as sepulchral structures throughout the Levant, but our specimen is unique, in that it was not plundered and or put to secondary use. The megalith is dated to Early Bronze Age IB on the basis of the pottery ensemble found inside.

In 1994, four small probes were made behind and in front of the tomb, and also in an area to the north. In 1996, all of these probes were considerably expanded to the

[5] For preliminary reports, see B. Dąbrowski, Ø. S. LaBianca, E. Dubis, "Megalithic Tomb at Tell el-Umeiri," Biblical Archaeologist 57 (1994); B. Dąbrowski, E. Dubis, M. Kapica, H. P. Krug, Ø. S. LaBianca, "Funerary Sites in the Vicinity of Tell el-'Umeiri (Season 1994 of the Madaba Plains Project)," Studies in Ancient Art and Civlization 7 (Cracow, 1996); Bogdan Dąbrowski, "Funerary Sites near Tall al-'Umayri," in: Madaba Plains Project 1994: Excavations at Tall al-'Umayri, Tall Jalul and Vicinity, edd. Larry G. Herr, Lawrence T. Geraty, Øystein S. LaBianca, Randall W. Younker, Douglas R. Clark, ADAJ XL (Amman, 1996).

north, west, and east. Six levels were exposed, made of very hard earth and pebbles with an admixture of chalk, which gives them a plaster-like appearance.[6] The area excavated in 1996 was extended further to the north and west in 1998 (Fig. 2).

Three excavation units (Squares 3, 5, and 6) were opened, for a total area of ca. 108 square meters. One of these, Square 6, was dug down to bedrock.

To this point two phases of occupation have been established at Square 3, west of the dolmen. This square is located on a very steep slope, and the interpretation of the objects is very difficult.

Field Phase 2

In the north part of the square, on its highest side, two utility surfaces made of clay were discovered. They are located to the west and east of a small stone structure, a horizontal slab surrounded by small boulders of uncertain function. Considering the incomplete nature of the excavations - the square was not dug down to the bedrock - the interpretation of the objects is very troublesome. The surfaces and the stone structure seem to be contemporary with each other, but it will be possible to establish the relation between them and make other, more detailed suggestions only after excavations have been completed on the square and expanded northward. The pottery suggests a date in EBII, Phase 2.

Fig. 2. Excavations around the megalithic tomb. Photo L. G. Herr

[6] For a preliminary report, see, E. Dubis, M. Górniak, "Funerary Sites in the Vicinity of Tell el-'Umeiri (Season 1996 of the Madaba Plains Project)," Studies in Ancient Art and Civlization 8 (Cracow, 1997); Elżbieta Dubis, "Field K: The Tombs," in Madaba Plains Project 1996: Excavations at Tall al-'Umayri,

Field Phase 1

Excavations on the north part of the square, on its highest side, exposed debris from mud bricks and lime or plaster. This debris probably came from the building located to the north of Square 3, and covers the clay surfaces and the stone structure.

The two north excavation units, Nos. 5 and 6, constitute a continuation of the utility surfaces found in 1996, extended from the megalith to the north. However, only one excavation unit was dug to bedrock, yielding four sub-phases from two phases attributed to the transitional EBIB/EBII period, and to EBII/very early EBIII.

Field Phase 2

The earliest features were found on bedrock, where the natural formations appear to have been incorporated. The bedrock was specially prepared, smoothed, leveled, and covered by a layer of beaten earth mixed with clay and lime. Near the dolmen, steps were cut in the bedrock leading down to the level of the dolmen's lower level. Although the excavations reached about 10 meters to the north of the dolmen, the outer boundaries of the surfaces were not found. In the northwest part of Square 5, the corners of an architectural structure were exposed. Outside of this structure a sort of fireplace was found, with scorched tools and pieces of pottery. Unfortunately this unit was not dug down to bedrock, and it is very difficult to ascertain the nature of the building. On the one hand, there are no finds of objects related to domestic activity, other than pottery; on the other hand, the building has been excavated only in part, and the ensemble of artifacts is not complete. The pottery has been dated to Early Bronze IB / Early Bronze II.

Field Phase 1

This phase consists of two utility surfaces without outer boundaries, made of beaten earth mixed with clay and plaster. The pottery seems to suggest a date in Late EBII, or even the transitional period EBII / very early EBIII.

It is to be hoped the results of next season's work can help to answer many of our questions.

SURVEY RESEARCH, EXCAVATION AT SITE K010

Sounding and surveys were done in the 1998 season with limited resources.[7] The aim of the sounding was to determine if the Middle Bronze IIC chamber tomb (Site K002) is part of a larger cemetery located on the southeastern slope of the tall, or a single isolated grave. Based on comparisons with contemporary Palestinian funerary sites, one might expect other tombs to be located on the same terrace. A long trench of ca. 35 meters in length was dug down to bedrock to search for a possible site. Only a relatively large amount of ceramic material was found, from the Early Bronze to Islamic, with no traces of a burial. Most of the pottery is EB and MB II. The EB sherds come from a settlement located high on the slope of the tall, dated to the third millennium BC. The quantity of MB II pottery fragments, and the fortified city from

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Tall Jalul and Vicinity, edd. Larry G. Herr, Lawrence T. Geraty, Øystein S. LaBianca, Randall W. Younker, Douglas R. Clark, ADAJ XLI (Amman, 1996).

that period (excavated by the Canadian-American team), which was limited to the top of the tall, may indicate that any other burial sites would have to be in the vicinity of Site K002. However, we had to exclude the terrace-like plan of the MBI II cemetery from this season's work. Further fieldwork will be needed in subsequent seasons in order to draw final conclusions from the results of the last three seasons of excavation in this area.

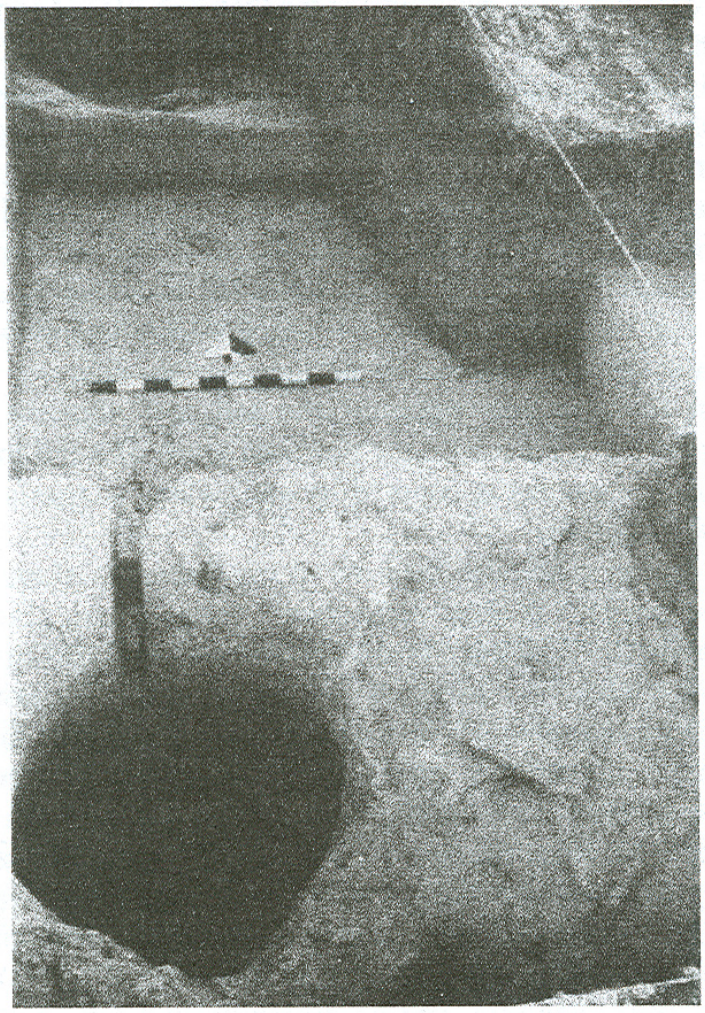

Fig. 3. The winepress installation. Photo M. Górniak

The sounding done ca. 100 m. to the west of Site K002, along with the exploration of the area of a shallow depression at the soil level, brought to light a winepress installation (Site K010), hewed out of the bedrock. The 28-square-meter excavation area exposed the larger part of the winepress (Fig. 3). In spite of careful investigation, no clear locus was distinguished, which makes it impossible to date the wine system with any certainty. The confirmed ceramic fragments come from EB through the MB II, the Iron Age, to the Roman and Byzantine periods. The majority from the lowest strata are from EB II-III and MB II. Nevertheless, on the basis of analogies with several other winepress installations discovered in central Jordan by the survey team of G. Christopherson (personal communication), it would appear that the 'Umayri

press comes from the Roman/Byzantine period. Still, all the winepresses so far exposed in the MPP research area have been merely recorded and not excavated. Only further excavation around the exposed structure will provide more certain data.

The winepress consists of a huge rough treading floor, hewed to a depth of 0.4 meters into the bedrock, and a collecting vat, hewed to a depth of 1 meter. The treading floor and the vat are connected by a channel with some sort of blocking installation to prevent dirt from entering the jar that was placed in the vat when it was in use. The presence of plaster on the surface of the structure indicates that the whole primary surface of the winepress was plastered. The dimensions of the winepress are quite large, which suggests that there was a large wine production center in the 'Umayri area in antiquity.

During this season also the structure of a retaining wall was discovered about 10 meters south of Site K010. It would appear that this wall was only part of a larger agricultural installation. The dating of the wall-like structure is also uncertain. The recorded ceramic materials come primarily from the Iron Age; however, some pottery from earlier and later periods was also found in loci of the site.

The survey on the southern slope of the tall and adjacent fields by Ground Penetrating Radar revealed a cave on the northern slope of a tall located south of Tall al-'Umayri.[8] The cave entrance is covered by soil, which suggests the possibility that it contains not robbed burials.

More, another burial cave was discovered on the same slope of the tall by the survey team. The partly exposed rectangular entrance and the roughly circular chamber are hewn into the bedrock. There are traces of the hewing tool still visible on the ceiling of the chamber. No bones or pottery were found during sounding probe exploration inside the chamber. From traces of erosion inside the chamber it would appear that the tomb was robbed in antiquity. Only general comparison with other burial caves may eventually indicate the Late Bronze Age or even Iron Age origin of the structure. Even though the site was robbed, its very presence (along with the cave recorded by GPR) may indicate that the area south of Tall al-'Umayri was used as a cemetery in antiquity, along with the southern and eastern slopes of the tall. This area will be explored in subsequent seasons.

[8] The Ground Penetrating Radar Team consisted of John Cole and Gerald Sandness.