The Near Eastern Archæology Foundation BULLETIN

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Pella in Jordan 2007

Early Settlements, Mudbrick Temples and the Iron Age Palatial Residence

Archaeologists from Sydney University and other Australian institutions along with NEAF-sponsored volunteers, have successfully completed another six week season of excavations at Pella in Jordan, between 7 January and 15 February 2007. While we continued work in and around the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1900-1500 BC) Fortress temple in 2007, a new initiative saw work resume on Tell Husn after a more than ten year hiatus, where we began the search for the Greco-Roman temple complex. Due to size constraints, this report will detail work on the main mound of Khirbet Fahl. The new work on Tell Husn will form the subject of a later report.

Earliest Neolithic and Chalcolithic Period Settlements South of the Temple

Although our current primary aim is to explore the Fortress temple sequence, wherever we get the opportunity to sound the earliest periods of settlement, some 3000 years before the temple was founded, we continue excavation into the Neolithic (ca. 5500-4500 BC) and Chalcolithic (ca 4500-4000 BC) strata below the temple.

In a trench located fifteen metres south of the SW corner of the Fortress temple, we came upon the lower traces of a beautifully preserved Late Neolithic/Early Chalcolithic period (ca. 4800-4500 BC) roundhouse, with stone bin features and utensils of daily life preserved on the interior floor surface, where they had been left more than six thousand years ago. This house was cut into sterile gravels, and along with a number of external storage pits, represented the earliest phase of occupation in the trench.

Five metres to the northeast of this trench, work continued to expose a complex of well preserved Late Chalcolithic period (ca. 4200-4000 BC) architecture. This architecture

The Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation was established at the University of Sydney in 1986 to promote research into the archaeology of the Middle East and North Africa. Activities include educational programmes, study tours, residential weekends, and an annual dinner. Support for research is through travel grants, fellowships, publication subsidies, and field programme finance.

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One of the well-preserved rooms from the Iron Age palatial complex.

featured neatly constructed mudbrick walls, thickly plastered storage bins and work surfaces sporting deep postholes suggesting the presence of wooden racks and work benches. Along with these structural features, we came across one very large storage bin, unfortunately almost completely covered by a large Middle Bronze Age temenos wall, which we had previously decided to leave *in situ*. Nonetheless, enough of the storage jar was recovered to confirm that it was very similar in size and construction to a series of similar grain storage silos excavated twenty metres to the east during the 1992-1994 seasons (Bulletin 20, p. 8).

In the third trench to the south of the temple complex, we exposed further Neolithic (ca. 5200 BC) pits and at least one roundhouse fragment in a 3 x 3 metre sounding against the exterior south wall of the temple. Finally, in a 5 x 2 metre probe against the exterior east face of the southeast tower, we explored the constructional history of the massive tower flanking the southern entrance to the temple. Below these foundations awaited a final surprise.

For a number of seasons in the mid 1990s, we had explored a large raised stone platform, which was found to be covered in burnt grain when excavated in 1997. It dated to the Late Chalcolithic period (ca. 4200 BC), and given its size, was completely unprecedented for such an early period. While we struggled to explain both size and function, as it ran directly in under the Fortress temple this effectively scotched further efforts to explore it, or so we thought.

Completely unexpectedly, when the thin two metre strip of temple foundations were removed, we encountered the neatly constructed western end of what we can now see as a 6 x 3 metre raised rectangular platform, with a staircase leading up onto its eastern end. The thick grain excavated off the platform in 1997 was unusually 'clean', being more than 99% pure; a laboriously hand-sorted product, if simple bread making was the intended end-use. For some years, we have assumed that the platform was part of a larger grain storage facility, with the platform designed to raise the stored grain off the ground to keep it rodent-free and dry. And yet, the nearby ceramic silos would seem to deny this, as they are thickly plastered to achieve just such insulation. We now wonder if an earlier idea, which saw the platform as a raised altar, might be worth reconsidering.

Very recently (2005), archaeologists have discovered a series of massive grain storage facilities featuring similar stone features at the Chalcolithic site of Tell Tsaf, 20 kilometres northwest of Pella. Associated with these are a series of female figurines, which the excavators suggest imply a link between cultic practices and granaries. Our final discovery was a terribly battered ceramic female figurine fragment, a perfect match for the Tsaf figurines suggesting that we have we found evidence for religious activity on the site of the later Bronze Age temple, but over 2000 years before its construction.

Probing the Earliest Middle Bronze Age Mudbrick Temples

When excavations ceased at the end of the sodden 2005 field season (Bulletin 47, pp. 1-4), fragments of at least two small mudbrick temples had been detected below the massive stone walls of the later Fortress temple. Within the temple forecourt, the area available for excavation is restricted by stone features we wish to preserve *in situ*, which along with the massive cuts for the stone temple foundations, means that only small fragments of the early mudbrick temples will ever be uncovered. Nonetheless, their exploration is vital, as we seek to understand the origins of the cult behind the temple, and estimate the degree of continuity between early forms of worship and the later Fortress phase. In 2007, two separate trenches were excavated within the temple interior.

In the western trench, it was quickly realised that the majority of the sounding was taken up with a massive foundational cut and stone fill to support the Holy of Holies area of the later Fortress temple. This fill consisted of metres of thick layerings of clay and stone packing, carefully interleaved to maximise the strength and load-bearing capacity of the terraced foundations. This later MBA (ca. 1700-1650 BC) cut and fill construction had neatly removed the western end and all exterior deposits associated with the early mudbrick temples.

In the eastern interior trench, several off-white plaster floors and multiple phases of grouped postholes were encountered across the excavated area, suggesting the presence of a complex series of semi-permanent built features in some way associated with temple worship. We had initially assumed that these constructed features were situated within the front end of the 'brown mudbrick' temple, as a six metre stretch of a brown mudbrick wall is associated with the floor surfaces. However, if rather than a wall of the temple, this 'brown mudbrick' structure turned out to be a courtyard wall, then the pit and post-hole features discovered this year might well be located outside the temple proper, probably opposite its front (eastern) entrance. If so, comparisons with contemporary

structures at Megiddo, Tell Kittan and Nahariyeh suggest a number of possibilities, including stone massebot, tribal standards, fetish poles or inscribed stelai. Alas, whatever was originally positioned within these early Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1850 BC) posthole and pit groups are long gone, but these intriguing discoveries have prompted a complete re-assessment of the possible layout of the early mudbrick temples, and their positioning relative to the later stone-walled Fortress temple.

Exploring the Origins of the Iron Age Palatial Residence

Over the last three seasons (2001-2005) we have been gradually expanding our exploration of a very large and wonderfully preserved multi-room mudbrick and stone walled building complex immediately west of the temple (see Bulletin 47, p. 1 for an illustration). It is so large (estimated at 25 x 30 metres) and well constructed on a grid plan, that it seems certain to be a major civic building, either a very large multi-purpose storage facility attached to the Iron Age temple, or more probably the palace of the Iron Age rulers of Pella.

In 2007 in renewed work on the northwest edge of our excavation area, we combined further efforts to determine the northern extent of the structure, with the final excavation of a block of rooms preserved below a Byzantine mosaic fragment (Bulletin 47, p. 3), discovered in 2005 and removed around the middle of the season. Parts of four more mudbrick rooms were completely excavated, exposing around 20 x 15 metres of the central/eastern section of the palatial structure. The key finds came from the central room, which was found to be full of crushed storage jars and oil flasks. Perhaps predictably after all this Iron Age excitement, the northern 8 x 4 metre extension to the trench, which aimed to determine the northern extent of the Iron Age building, came down on two more rooms of well preserved Byzantine polychrome mosaic flooring bringing a halt to excavations in this area.

In other trenchs, work in 2007 concentrated on exploring the earliest phases of the Iron Age palatial structure. First the early Iron II (ca. 1000-900 BC) precursor of the well preserved palatial structure was uncovered. This proved to be very similar in plan and execution. Indeed, it appeared that 'our' destroyed Ninth Century BC structure was a rebuild, laid virtually on top of (and largely destroying) its Tenth Century BC precursor. Once the traces of this earlier structure were removed, we entered the 'Dark Age' of the enigmatic Iron I period (ca. 1150-950 BC). Here, as elsewhere on the tell, the Early Iron Age does not seem to have been a cultural highpoint. Many large inter-cut pits populate the landscape, making it very difficult to gain a coherent picture of lifestyles. However, towards the end of the season, a large painted sherd (probably from a jar or jug) of a warrior gives a precious insight into this period. We also recovered a sherd with a 'running spiral' painted motif, probably from an open bowl. This form is often linked with the Philistine coastlands, suggesting that some form of regional contacts were maintained during this murky period of apparent insularity.

Towards the end of the season, trenches in the east of the area were reaching into the latest Bronze Age deposits (ca. 1200-1150 BC), and in one trench, a very large stone-paved structure was beginning to be revealed. Scraps of large stone walling was encountered in 2005, and it seems probable that these earlier fragments will all join up into one very large building. We don't know what it is just yet, but in all contemporary Bronze Age temples elsewhere, the palace is rarely very far from the place of worship, so we have modest hopes that this structure may be the long sought-after Bronze Age palace of Pella. Work in the 1980s, 25 metres to the southwest, uncovered massive stone terrace walls and underfloor burials of some richness. We now suspect this terracing was constructed to level up an area of the southern tell in preparation for the construction of the palace, which would stretch over perhaps 50 x 50 metres if we're correct. Needless to say, we'll be continuing in this area next season.

Conclusion

On the main mound, while further Neolithic remains were always welcomed, unexpected discoveries have changed our view of the Chalcolithic period considerably. Continued work on the early Middle Bronze Age mudbrick temples may finally have probed the earliest beginnings of the temple sequence. Several beautiful Byzantine polychrome mosaic floors were uncovered as we strived to delimit the northern face of the Iron Age palatial structure, and another four rooms full of destruction debris were excavated. In two nearby trenches we penetrated below the earliest Iron II palatial structure, and explored the decidedly enigmatic Iron I settlement. By season's end, there was every indication that a massive Late Bronze Age structure lay immediately below the few remaining Iron I deposits. This promises to be the key discovery from the period of the nearby temple's greatest prosperity.

Stephen Bourke

Fragment of an Iron I painted jar or jug depicting a warrior.

Looking for Liduma (not!)

One of the joys of archaeology is observing the finely honed capacity for mis-quotation that most journalists sent out to cover an archaeological discovery seem to display. One has to admit it takes a lot of training to turn 3000 BC into 300 BC, to make black white, and to generally state as categorically true exactly what an archaeologist has taken great pains to couch in a warm bed of 'ifs' and 'maybes'. And of course journalists, whose names often don't even appear on a story issued by a news agency, are never culpable. It's always the archaeologist who is left to pick up the pieces, so to speak.

As if I haven't encountered this enough in 35 years of archaeological fieldwork, I was treated to yet another serving of journalistic creativity towards the end of February while working in Iran. This year the joint mission of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (ICAR) and the University of Sydney was conducting test excavations at a site first visited in 1924 by the great (sic, 'infamous') Orientalist Ernst Emil Herzfeld. This is one of those sites which, just to confuse archaeologists, goes by three different names, each of which is susceptible to multiple spellings. I invite you to take your pick. You can call it Jinjun, Djinjun, Jinjan (sounds rather Chinese, doesn't it?), or Tepe Servan or Survan, or you can be like us, and call it Qaleh Kali in print, and Jinjun in conversation. Well, this may take some explaining, but basically, the name of the closest village is Jinjan. In local parlance the final -an becomes -un, so the villagers and residents in the area refer to the place as Jinjun. But then again the mound itself is Tepe Servan or Survan. When we're feeling really perverse we even call it MS 46, the number we gave it in our survey of the region.

Jinjun is a beautiful place, and Herzfeld thought it was so nice that he claimed the ruins of an entire Achaemenid city lay buried there. This rather exuberant statement was prompted by the presence of an enormous Achaemenid column base, sticking out of the ground, and a few other bits and pieces of carved stone lying around. In fact, the base is so big, that it's only marginally smaller than the column bases used at Persepolis in the Hall of 100 Columns.

Now call me old-fashioned, but I can't see why a column base that size would be used on its own. Where there's smoke there's fire, and there must be more column bases buried under the ground. Nor can I see why column bases that size would be employed in a small, domestic structure. I don't say that Herzfeld was right in suggesting the ruins of an entire Achaemenid city are to be found at Jinjun, but surely a column base like this belongs to a biggish building.

The actual mounded area at Jinjun covers about 30 x 50 metres, and is 2 metres high. It certainly looks, at first glance, like a rectangular building. Sir Aurel Stein visited the site in 1935, but he was sort of in the doghouse with the Iranian authorities, and had no permission to excavate. It must have killed him to stand there, looking at the site just sitting there, ripe for the taking, and I can imagine him kicking the column base in frustration, with the pent-up emotion exhibited by so many of the great Anglo-Hungarian explorers of the 1930s. A brief sounding in 1959 by Messrs Atarashi and Horiuchi, of the Second Tokyo University-Iran Archaeological Expedition, helped to clear the air somewhat. A few more column bases were found, still in their original positions, as well as a small area of flagstone pavement. The Japanese concluded that, rather than the ruins of a great Achaemenid city, Jinjun was probably the site of a pavilion on the Royal Road.

If you read up on the Royal Road, as described by Herodotus, you'll see that it ran from Susa in southwestern Iran to Sardis, the capital of Lydia. This is undoubtedly true, but as there were no direct flights in those days between Persepolis and Susa, there must have been a road or roads across the Zagros mountains to get Darius, Xerxes and their friends from the big smoke (Persepolis), to the slightly smaller smoke (Susa) and eventually to Babylon and Sardis. Many scholars have pondered where that road may have run, and because of the folded nature of the Zagros mountains, and the orientation of the valleys that make it possible to cross them, almost all of them think that the route ran through the Mamasani district of Fars where we're working. Not to put too fine a point on it, Jinjun is in a valley that all experts agree was traversed by the eastern extension of the Royal Road.

This year we re-excavated the column bases found by the Japanese and exposed more of the pavement that they first encountered (see illustration). We came up with a few more large architectural elements, heavy bits of limestone that look, in one case, like a bit of a door lintel, and in another, like part of a door frame. We also found some exceptionally beautiful, fine stone vessel fragments (pink, white and green) as well as pieces of super-thin, glass cups. These are the sorts of things found at Persepolis itself, and I venture to suggest that the average Persian farmer wasn't quaffing the sparkling water of the nearby Fahliyan River from these beakers and eating off of polished marble bowls. I think these finds, like the column bases, point to the presence of some pretty élite visitors to the site. A few clues to who such guests might have been are given in the texts excavated 70 years ago at Persepolis by Herzfeld.

In 1933 Herzfeld discovered an archive of uncertain size - between 15,000 and 22,000 tablets, but impossible to be certain given the broken nature of many of them - at Persepolis. Far from documenting the workings of the entire Persian empire, the archive, which extends from the 13th to the 28th year of Darius the Great's reign (509-493 BC), is mainly concerned with 'the handling (not the production *per se*) of locally grown, produced and bred foodstuffs and livestock' and, as the Dutch scholar Wouter Henkelman wrote in his 2006 dissertation, 'Its purpose was to arrange, survey, record and account for the streams of these commodities within... the "Persepolis economy". The prime tasks involved were the intake, taxation, storage and transport of goods and their redistribution to gods,

members of the nobility, officials, travelleres on the royal roads, workers and livestock.'

Alongside disbursements of food and drink to work gangs, their supervisors, messengers and bureaucrats, a small number of the disbursements went to élite members of the royal family. Sometimes the goods were 'dispensed before the king'. In other cases, Darius' wife Irtashduna is mentioned. His son Arsames also appears, as does his brother-in-law (and simultaneously his father-in-law) Gobryas. These are the sorts of people, I think, who might have rested their weary heads in the pavilion at Jinjun.

This is all pretty interesting, but of course everyone in Iran (and a few outside of it) wants to know the ancient name of our site. Hundreds of place-names are mentioned in the Persepolis archive and it stands to reason that one of them belongs to Jinjun. Until we find an inscription, though, it's going to be virtually impossible to decide what the correct name might be. Nevertheless, towards the end of our season in late February we had reporters from Iranian newspapers and television descend on us like proverbial locusts. These things are mixed blessings. Sure, it's nice to get good media coverage. It's nice that the people of this small, rural locale find themselves on national television, but as it happened, we'd already begun to back-fill our trenches when the great television gods began to wave their wands, and true to form, we were asked to dig out all the dirt we'd already put back on top of our precious monuments. OK, that wasn't the most fun thing in the world, but it was manageable and my team from Sydney performed admirably in making this all happen as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Unfortunately, the film crew didn't arrive until the afternoon, and I was in no mood to drop everything - as I madly photographed sherds and small finds, scanned drawings, and dealt with a mass of receipts that needed sorting out prior to our departure. So my very competent co-director, Alireza Askari, went out to the site with them, and they filmed until the sun went down, while I kept at it, chained to my desk. "Could I identify the site?" Alireza asked. "What do you mean?" I said. "You know, the ancient name." "Well," I said, flipping through the mental file cards, "there are half a dozen places that are thought to be located around here, some of them mentioned on a couple of dozen occasions in the Persepolis texts, sometimes with royal visitors. It could be Kurdushum, maybe Bessitme, possibly Liduma, even Taôke has been suggested."

Hours later, I finally fell into bed. Most of what had to be done had been achieved, maybe not everything, but almost. Alireza had successfully dealt with the journalists, and I had done what had to be done. The next night we were on national television (I say 'we' loosely because I had steadfastly refused to appear on camera, so obsessed was I with finishing all the documentation). A few days in Tehran, and then it was off to Sydney for the start of semester.

Now don't get me wrong, Alireza is a great guy, lovely fellow, good archaeologist, a pleasure to work with in every way. But somehow, a few days after our return, I began to have slight misgivings about not talking to the journalists. Not that they could speak English, or I Persian. But you know what I mean, maybe I should have done the needful, so to speak. But I don't blame him - whatever he said to the journalists was likely to be mis-quoted, re-dated, turned upside down, and generally manhandled.

Returning to a mountain of email messages in Sydney, my eye was caught by one in particular, which had 'Liduma found?' in the subject line. Hmmm... This looks interesting, I thought. In the click of a mouse I found myself staring, wide-eyed, at an Iranian press release, the actual title of which was 'Lost ancient city unearthed in Iran'. According to the anonymous article, 'Archaeologists have discovered an ancient structure in southern Iran believed to be the fourth largest site of the Achaemenid era after structures in Susa, Pasargad, and Persepolis. They say the site may be the lost city of Liduma which is mentioned in the ancient tablets discovered in Persepolis'.

Oh dear. Herzfeld, Stein, Atarashi, Horiuchi - wherever you are, I apologise. I swear I did NOT say that Jinjun was Liduma. And I am sure Alireza didn't either. Journalists of the world beware. One of these days, I'm going to get you!

Dan Potts

The Achaemenid Period remains at Jinjun uncovered in early 2007.

One of the largest monumental cairns recorded by the survey.

The Petra-Shobak Tomb Survey

Many NEAF members have been lucky enough to explore the rose-red city of Petra in southern Jordan. Some of you may have even ventured half-an-hour up the highway to poke around the eerie Crusader castle at the small town of Showbak. If so, then you would have driven past thousands of rubble cairns scattered throughout the stark esh-Shara mountains between these two sites. These cairns are ancient tomb monuments, and they form a vast and intriguing mortuary landscape.

Past projects in the area have focussed on the large settlement sites such as Petra, so we know virtually nothing about the cairn tombs themselves. We don't know how old they are, who built them, or how these highly visible and enduring monuments continued to affect the living long after they had interred the dead. But we can make a few guesses. Sherds excavated in a few cairns in the eastern desert of Jordan date to about 3000 BC, and some scholars have claimed that the cairn tombs in the esh-Shara mountains are just as old. Also, at over 1600 m above sea level, the mountains would have provided cool pastures for ancient nomads and their flocks escaping the heat of the desert in summer, and the cairns may mark the burials of these nomadic peoples.

In an attempt to address these questions, a team of five intrepid young archaeologists surveyed over 500 cairns in July-August 2006, armed with nothing more than their grit, their perseverance, and several bottles of the local Haddad port. The aim of the survey was to map three cairn fields and to work out how many different tomb types we were dealing with in each. This meant recording the physical traits of each cairn, including its size, its orientation, its construction techniques, and the number and shape of any visible burial chambers. Each tomb was mapped using a differential GPS system that we were assured was fool-proof by our computer-man back in Sydney: "It's built for the American military," he claimed, "you can't go wrong!" Yeah, just like Iraq, we grumbled, strapping the base aerial to the dighouse roof on Day One, only to have it declare we were somewhere in equatorial Africa.

But such minor hiccups were soon overcome, and we spent three successful weeks clambering up hill and down wadi, bounding from cairn to cairn in an alpine extravaganza that would have done Julie Andrews proud. And the hills were certainly alive, albeit with the sounds of grunting camels, flatulent goats, and the mournful cries of "well can you see me here?" as various intrepid young archaeologists tried to find a toilet spot in a treeless landscape when their four mates were invariably sitting on top of rock piles with excellent panoramic views.

The survey was highly successful and we recorded four cairn types. The most common was a rubble tumulus defined by an outer kerbing of larger limestone blocks. However, the most striking type consisted of a monumental pile of large rocks often over a metre long, and the largest example of this type stood over seven metres high. These monuments were only found on high-points in the landscape such as ridge-tops, accentuating their visual impact. It is possible that cairns of this type were not tombs at all, but served some other function as visible and permanent markers in the landscape.

In addition to the survey, we spent two weeks excavating several small soundings in eight cairns in an attempt to establish when the various types were built. Cairn-tombs are notoriously hard to date. While their visibility may have been significant for the people who built them, it also means that tomb robbers know exactly where to dig, and most cairn tombs that have been excavated by archaeologists were previously robbed out, usually in antiquity. Unfortunately, this proved to be a problem for us as well, finding several robbed out tomb chambers but no in-situ burials. However, we were able to establish a very general date for some cairns by excavating through the rubble tumulus and into the soil underneath to bedrock. We recovered Iron Age and Classical period sherds below several cairns, contrasting the traditional view that cairn tombs are a prehistoric phenomenon. Instead, the practice of burying the dead in rubble cairns may have endured for millennia.

The data collected in the survey will form an important case-study in my doctoral research into cairn tombs across the Levant. I thank Anne-Marie Beavis, Guadalupe Cincunegui, Holly Miller and Ngaire Richards for their fantastic work in the field. I am also indebted to the Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation and the Carlyle Greenwell Bequest, without whom this fieldwork would not have been possible.

James Fraser

Places I Love: Aswan & Abu Simbel

The world is full of amazing places to be seen; far more than can be visited in one lifetime. The list gets longer when those sites that draw one back are added to those unseen. One such place for me is southern Egypt, more specifically Aswan and Abu Simbel.

Aswan, situated at the First Cataract on the Nile, is the southern gateway to Egypt. Here only a narrow fringe of date palms along the river marks it from the surrounding desert. It has a slow uncrowded feel, quite different from the rest of Egypt. The river dominates, white-sailed feluccas carry stock, tourists and provisions to the villages further north and the sculptured granite boulders of the cataract jut out into the blue of the Nile. It is heaven. It is here that one of the relocated monuments of Pharonic Egypt lies above the waters of the lower Aswan Dam, the Temple of Isis on the island of Philae. This is the last great temple complex dedicated to the ancient gods constructed in Egypt. It was among those buildings that were moved during the massive rescue mission of the 1960s that saw a number of the Nubian temples relocated. These were complexes that would be submerged by the waters of the Aswan Dam; some were moved to higher ground as at Abu Simbel, others removed to museums worldwide such as the temple of Dendur to the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

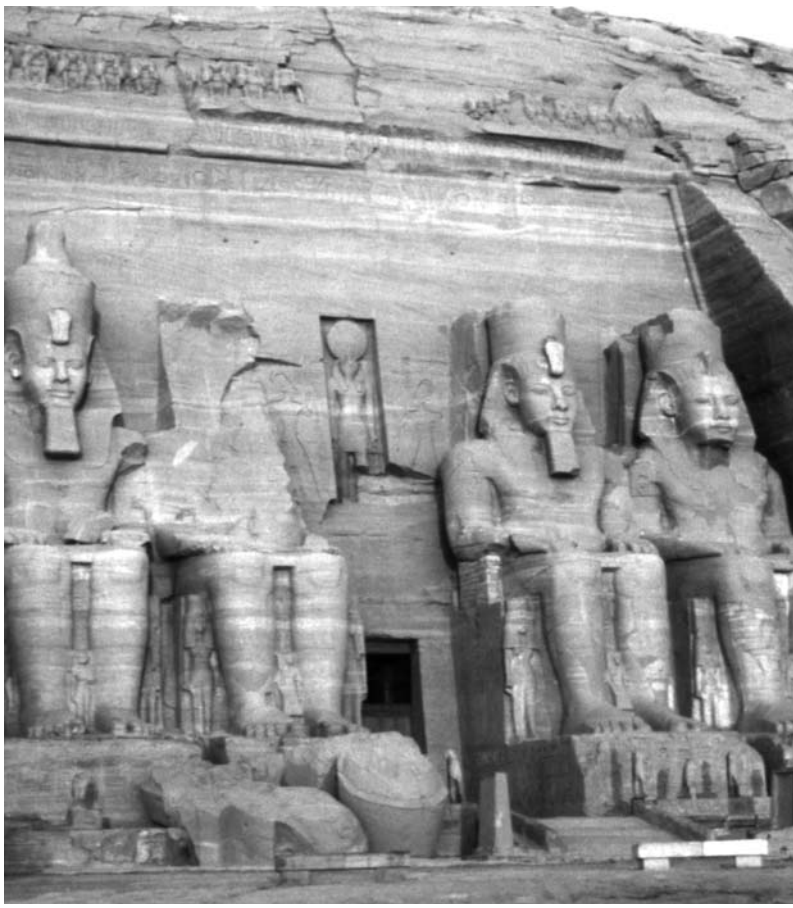
The Temple of Isis was moved onto the nearby island of Agilkia. There is no sense of its remove from its original position when approached by boat. Nor is there when moving through the complex. I love this temple for it really bookends Pharonic Egypt both geographically and chronologically – the Old Kingdom Pyramids at Giza and the Ptolemaic/Roman Period Temple of Isis at Philae. Arrival is by boat and a long colonnaded court with its late style capitols leads you to the temple. The temple follows traditional design with the series of pylons and courts; its fascination for me is in who built here, Augustus, Tiberius, Hadrian, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Here mighty Rome came to honour this much more ancient culture and its deities. Also take a close look at the stones and the graffiti that adorns them. Here is a history of the Nile, the explorers and soldiers that mapped and fought along its banks have left their mark, their vandalism now historic. It is the small buildings adjacent to the main temple that add to its charm. The first is the small Temple of Hathor where a wonderful series of reliefs depict the god Bes - fun at any time – playing different musical instruments. Beside it is the beautiful small kiosk of Trajan which stands sentinel at the river's edge.

The small village of Abu Simbel, stranded in the Sahara close to the Sudan border, is usually visited by plane as a day trip but to capture its magic you must stay overnight. On the edge of Lake Nasser is one of the world's greatest testimonies to one man's ego, and to the capacity of modern engineering, the re-sited temples of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel. After the last plane leaves and you wander to the edge of the new dam it is so silent. The sun, Ra himself, baths the façade of the main temple in a golden light. The sky divides into a vivid blue and an orange–red. Looking out over the darkening water are the four colossi of Ramesses II. These 21 metre seated statues are best viewed at dawn as the stone of the temple façade and the statues slowly absorb the increasing intensity of the light. They go from a misty ill-defined grey through soft pinks to warm rose and then golden red with the rising Ra. Visit the temple at night and over three thousand years melt away. You will hear the swish of a temple priest's robes in the corridor adjacent to the main corridor or catch the glimpse of a disappearing priestess in the gloom. All the while the great standing statues of Ramesses stare down at you. Ahead are the three great deities, Amun-Ra, Ptah, Harakhty and, of cause, the man himself, now a god, Ramesses II.

The fascinating thing about this experience is that above and around this atmospheric space is a vast dome of concrete and a web of steel gantries for the temple was cut from its rock home and lifted piece by piece to the cliff face above, more Bond than Belzoni. Without this amazing endeavour the temple would lie below the waters of Lake Nasser.

A smaller temple, dedicated commemorating Ramesses' queen, Nofretari, lies beside the Great Temple. It is quite lovely but it lacks the impact of the Great Temple. It is this temple that at dawn and dusk, or under a full moon, is a time-warping, ethereal experience, one of the great places on earth to spend twenty-four hours at least.

Maree Browne



The Temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel.

NEAF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURS

TOURS IN 2008

SYRIA: A LEVANTINE WONDER

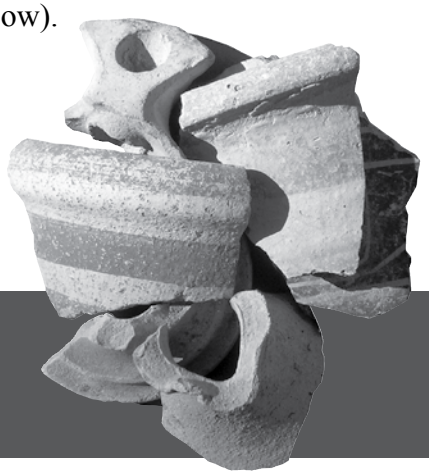
with Ben Churcher

29 April - 16 May 2008

Syria is a hidden jewel of the Middle East; little visited although it remains a secure destination for travellers. From the moment we step into the spectacular souks of Damascus, we will be immersed in a fabulous history stretching back thousands of years. From the Mediterranean coast to the Euphrates River, this tour will visit Crusader castles, ancient tells, Roman forts, 'the bride of the desert' - Palmyra - and the oriental splendour of the souks, mosques and towns of Syria.

This 18 day tour to the highlights of Syria is followed by a 4 day optional extension to visit Lebanon where the tour will visit the Roman temples at Baalbek, the ancient entrepots of Byblos and Sidon, and the city of Beirut.

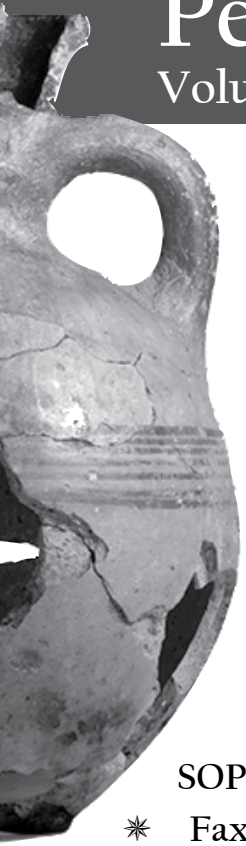
Full itineraries and pricing is now available from the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sydney (details below).



All enquiries and bookings:
Danielle Turner, Centre for Continuing Education (02) 9036 4765
email: dturner@cce.usyd.edu.au
Priority Booking forms are available from CCE to secure a place on these tours.

Pella in Jordan

Volunteer Scheme Jan/Feb 2009



In early 2009 excavations will continue at Pella as archaeologists uncover one of Jordan's richest ancient sites.

For over 15 years our Volunteer Scheme has allowed people from all walks of life to become a member of the team working in Jordan.

In 2009 we will continue excavations in the Middle Bronze Age Migdol Temple, the adjacent Late Bronze/IronAge building complexes and the Hellenistic/Roman civic buildings on Tell Husn.

We hope you will be able to join us.

For further information:
Pella Volunteer Scheme, NEAF
SOPHI, A14 University of Sydney NSW 2006
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Anthony McNicoll
Visiting Lectureship 2007

Discovering the Tombs of the Kings of Qatna (Syria)

Professor Peter Pfälzner

Thursday 15 November 2007

The discovery of the royal tomb began when a long staircase was identified which led from the throne room through the thick mud brick palace foundation. At the bottom of the staircase was the royal burial chamber which contained two intact sarcophagi, vases, ceramic vessels and golden objects.

More details available soon, or contact NEAF at neaf@arts.usyd.edu.au