

THE NEAR EASTERN ARCHAEOLOGY FOUNDATION BULLETIN

NUMBER 52

February 2008

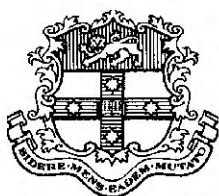
Searching for the Roman Empire

The first season of the Borders of Arabia and Palaestina (BAP) project took place in November and December 2006, sampling ceramics from eleven sites in northern Jordan, in the beautiful hills east of Pella. The team included students from the University of Sydney (Lily Taperell-Withycombe and Jacque Venesjärvi) and Macquarie University (Clare Rowan and Rob Bruce). Franz Reidel was the field director, Hugh Barnes our surveyor, Toni Licciardo the illustrator and Mel Kennedy as staff archaeologist. Clara and Lukas da Costa-Reidel and Katie Licciardo came as Junior BAP and were, despite Lukas' broken arm, very helpful. We shared the dig house with Jaimie Lovell's Ritual Landscapes team, who were exploring caves large, small, smelly and mainly empty in the same part of Jordan. Can you blame us for referring to them as The Cavemen, as they struggled back each day having fought through bat-poo, dead animals and the normal detritus that you can imagine and I'm not going to put into print? They did succeed in finding a few caves with ritual objects and further details are available here: <http://www.cbri.org.uk/research/Ritual.shtm>.

Our BAP project is seeking to establish an archaeological methodology to overcome a lack of written documentation about the organization of the Roman empire. We know that the Empire was divided into provinces, and over time, the territories of each province changed. But we don't know (apart from initial conquest) what the basis for assigning cities to one province or another really was, and why territory changed. A fairly obvious first step would be to establish the extent of each province, and how that changed over time. And this is where conventional history has hit a barrier – or rather, the lack of one. Just as there is no physical line along the border between, say, NSW and



Although occupation at Mahrama started in the Chalcolithic, our attempts to put in soundings to reach the Byzantine levels were thwarted by collapsed Mamluke walls.



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.

NEAF: SOPHI, A14 University of Sydney NSW 2006 (neaf@arts.usyd.edu.au)
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Lily, Clare, Lukas and Jacque completing the collection of surface pottery from a square at Rasoun.

Queensland, so there was no fence or ditch between the provinces of, for example, Arabia and Palaestina – the two provinces modern Jordan fell into. But the dividing line was known to bureaucrats because they kept land registers for tax purposes. Very often, topographic features formed part of the border too – like the Murray River between NSW and Victoria, the Wadi Rayyan (formerly Yabbis) is thought to be part of the provincial border. Continuing the Australian analogy, just as in pre-Federation times, there was a customs duty on the borders between Australian colonies, there was a customs duty between Roman provinces. This tax, which was probably only about 2.5%, was enough to stop distributors of low-profit, locally made ceramics from trading across the border. It was not just the tax itself, it was the paperwork (makes you think of BAS, doesn't it?). Imagine, if you will: you have a wagon load of storage jars from Jarash and you've travelled along the nice Roman road west towards Pella. You reach the customs point – where, we're not entirely sure, but somewhere near the town of Ba'un – and see the traffic jam in the camel-park. There are several long camel caravans which have arrived from the Arabian peninsula, having travelled up the Wadi Sirhan, paid 25% duty near Azraq, crossed the Roman province of Arabia and are heading for the Mediterranean with their loads of frankincense, myrrh, emeralds and Indian cotton. They are ahead of you in the queue. Someone has gone to find the bloke who should be staffing the customs booth. Having waited for some time for the caravans to pass through, you reach the head of the queue. And the bloke decides it's time for a break. Once he comes back, you calculate the value of your load and pay the 2.5%. Finally, clutching your receipt (possibly written on a potsherd and consequently an ostraca of the type found by the hundreds in Egypt), you cross into Palaestina. It's a bad time of year, and you only sell half the load. On the way back, you arrive at the customs booth, drag out your receipt and attempt to get a refund on the tax for the material you didn't sell. In modern life, who has ever gotten a VAT refund at Heathrow? On the other hand, you could decide it isn't worth the fiddle to sell

Jarash pottery in Palaestina, and instead, you just take your wagon of pots around Arabia. In return the sellers of Palaestian pottery don't bother to come into your province.

Studies on the trade of general pottery to Pella, ceramic lamps in the southern Levant and recent work on bag-shaped amphorae by Paul Reynolds have all confirmed that locally produced pottery in modern Israel, Palestine and Jordan has a distorted distribution pattern, just as we would expect from the effect of the tax on the provincial borders. So the BAP team is hunting down this type of distortion by sampling ceramics from sites in the area we think the border ran through. Although there was some leakage across the border – the odd souvenir brought home by visitors or relatives – cataloguing should show that most of the pottery on a site was either Palaestian or Arabian, and consequently that site will be assigned to one province or the other. The border must run between the sites. If we can sample twenty sites we should have a much better idea of where the border ran.

And so from the theory to the practice. Arriving in Jordan in late October we found the Pella dig house in its usual quaintly charming state of disrepair. In fact, it was raining **INSIDE** the bathroom wing. Some quick handiwork by Franz to arrange roof drainage and the carefully considered application of steel jacks and plastic flowers and, voila, the bathroom roof will now stay up, even if the rest of the dig house falls down. Our departmental representative, Khaled Junaideh, arrived from far northern Jordan, already missing his gorgeous 3-year old daughter Tuta. Khaled's calm, diplomatic manner proved to be a great help during the season, as many of our sites are on private land. Land values have soared in recent years in Jordan, and many families were naturally wary of a bunch of clearly lunatic foreigners taking a keen interest in their properties. One group of siblings, whose father drove from Amman to meet us at their farm in Kh. el-'Asif, were rightly worried. The location, atop a steep cliff above the gorge of the Wadi Rayyan, with "Romani" olive trees hundreds of years old, a pomegranate grove in full autumn yellow, wild herbs and a slightly over-restored late 19th century house, had all of us wondering if foreigners could buy property in Jordan. It must have been as enticing a spot in antiquity too, because, under about 1.5 metres of overburden we saw a thick layer of Roman – Byzantine pottery abutting a wall the land-owner said had been built by his grandfather. Unfortunately, very little of that pottery lay about the surface, which is a very good illustration of the drawbacks of surveys which must rely only on surface finds. We were able to sample from the exposed section, and may have to go back in 2008 to take more samples.

We spent an average of three days at each site, although in fact this varied from two days at places like Kh. en-Nasar, which was actually in a back garden, through to five days at Kh. Mahrama, where the walls of Mamluke houses still stand to vault height, or Kh. Fara, a village apparently

abandoned in the 5th century AD and never reinhabited. The greatest surprise was the extent of reuse and remodeling of naturally occurring caves in the region (one reason we kept passing The Cavemen on the road, and had a competition with them about where the best falafels are to be found in northern Jordan). Openings we had assumed led always to tombs, and on occasion did lead to tombs, were more frequently the doorways to small dwellings or stables. The identification was simple – along at least one wall we found carved archways, with manglers beneath, and plenty of teathering holes, with small niches blackened by lamp smoke. Although vandalism in Jordan is relatively rare, agricultural development and housing pressure is putting all ancient sites in danger. During the 2008 season, we'll be spending some time documenting these underground establishments by plan, photograph and video, so that at least some record can be kept. Our current funding is not enough even to do the border hunting which is our main aim, so at present we cannot undertake any excavation of the caves – that, I hope, will be a future project.

The BAP project will be in the field for Season 2 from early November to mid December 2008. If you are interested in joining us as a Paying Volunteer, please visit the web site <http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/bap/> and click on 'Fieldwork opportunities'. Alternatively, contact the director, Dr Kate da Costa on (02) 9036 9497 or by email on kate.da.costa@art.usyd.edu.au

Kate da Costa



One of our 'sub-surface sampling' soundings near the industrial quarter of Kh. Fara, with the walls of the main settlement behind.

Hugh Barnes is pointing to a remaining section of hydraulic plaster, lining the inside of one of the vast reservoirs at Qabla.



Excavations on Tell Husn

PELLA IN JORDAN

The spectacular view from the top of Tell Husn looking west.

We reported in the previous Bulletin on the main discoveries made during the recent Pella 2007 field season on the main mound of Khirbet Fahl. Here we report some of the discoveries made on the western summit of the high hill of Tell Husn, which towers above the main mound. Between 1988-93 Pam Watson led four seasons of excavations investigating the massive Byzantine period (ca. 500-650 AD) fortress on the eastern summit of Husn. In 1993 John Tidmarsh joined Pam to carry these investigations deeper into the Hellenistic period (ca. 100 BC). Bronze Age remains had been detected below the Byzantine fortress, so I led two seasons of exploration into what proved to be extensive EBA (ca. 3200 BC) and less complete MBA (ca. 1600-1400 BC) remains in 1994-95. But since that time, there had been no further work on Husn until this year, when John Tidmarsh led a crew of stout-hearted naturalists up the slopes in renewed explorations.

The North West Summit Excavations: The 'Coin Temple' and the MBA Burial (Area XXXVII)

Renewed excavations, this time concentrating on the western half of the summit had a series of interlocking aims, but the key element among them was the search for what we assume to be a great Roman temple, that apparently dominated Pella's Imperial Roman landscape. This temple is known from bronze coins dating to the reign of Commodus (ca. 184 AD) and others from the reign of Caracalla (ca. 217 AD), and would seem to have been dedicated to a male deity (Greek Apollo, perhaps Canaanite Hadad). Inevitably, we have taken to calling it the 'coin temple'. As it was first noted at around 180 AD, we assume it was built during the great upsurge in civic construction during the Antonine period (ca. 130-180 AD). The coin appears to show a tetra-style temple (four columns in front) raised upon a high hill, with a colonnade running around the base of the hill.

Although there are several possible locations for this major structure, the one area that we hadn't explored was the northern region of the western summit of Tell Husn. If such a temple had been placed along this northern edge, then it would have been truly a most spectacular monument, as the 'temple coin' implies. Teasingly, three handsome pink marble blocks peeked out from the topsoil layers right on the northern edge of the western summit. We positioned the long thin 20 x 2 metre excavation area right over the top of these suggestively placed blocks. Alas, the first few days of work demonstrated that these pink blocks had been reused as part of a large two-phase Byzantine period structure (ca. 500 AD).



While the absence of the Imperial temple was a disappointment, it wasn't really a surprise, as the Husn summit has been very heavily re-worked by the Byzantine military when they first fortified the hilltop. What was definitely more surprising was the presence of a nice little Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1700-1600 BC) chamber tomb directly below the Byzantine housing. Perhaps 100 metres to the east scraps of a Middle Bronze Age structure (a small fortress I suspect) were discovered in 1994, and a few burials were detected in and around the building. However, our new discovery may imply that the main cemetery area for this little fortress lay to the west of the buildings.

The tomb produced several burials (one more or less fully articulated, and three to four disarticulated bone scatters) along with a small but elegant pottery assemblage, consisting of storage jars, bowls, jugs and jars. As well, a lovely alabaster ointment jar was found beside the articulated burial, probably that of a young woman. More exceptionally, a small dog seems to have been interred beside her. This little tomb will add to our extensive burial database, and open another small window into the belief systems of the Bronze Age people of Pella. The tomb is exactly contemporary with the massive stone temple on the main mound.

Finally, right at the bottom of several trenches, small amounts of EBA pottery (ca. 3200 BC) and fragmentary walls suggest the first presence of EBA domestic occupation on the western summit, complementing the massive fortress located to the east.

The South West Summit Excavations: Hellenistic and Roman Civic Remains (Area XXXIV)

On the southwest corner of the summit of Tell Husn Imperial Roman deposits (ca. 100 AD) had been exposed across a 5 x 5 m probe at the end of the 1989 field season. In 2007 this probe was expanded some seven metres to the south and four metres to the north, exploring a roughly 17 x 5 metre area of the southwest summit. Thin Byzantine layers quickly gave way to Imperial Roman remains,

which consisted of patches of stone paving and the edge of a colonnade.

One large and apparently formless stone boulder proved to be a nicely carved piece of entablature when 'rolled over' (no easy task). This has led to the suggestion that the structure from which it came may have formed part of a small gatehouse, providing entry into a colonnaded streetscape. This far southwest corner of the summit would have been the first area sighted by anyone coming north down the Jerash road to Pella, so an elaborate gate entablature is not so unlikely.

As some of this paved colonnaded area had been detected in 1989, further discoveries more confirm the future promise of the area (unburdened by the massive Byzantine fortress buildings covering the eastern summit) than surprise outright. It seems probable that the Imperial Roman structure extends both to the north and east of our excavation area, and we certainly plan to explore this area more intensively. A lovely little ivory gazelle-headed pin hinted at the wealth deployed roundabout.

If the Roman remains were more or less as expected, what lay below the Roman materials was most definitely a complete surprise. A small 2 x 5 metre probe north of the colonnade (within and below the street) soon came upon a fiery destruction layer filled with late Hellenistic (ca. 80 BC) pottery. The reason this discovery was so unexpected is that we had previously assumed that Late Hellenistic Tell Husn had escaped the violent destruction of the main mound, probably at the hands of the Jewish Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus in 83 BC. We certainly found no trace of it on the eastern summit. This changes our view of the Hellenistic history of Pella, and

emphasizes the utter ruination of the settlement at the hands of Jannaeus. In the debris of destruction a collection of loomweights, small glass beads and a large fragment of an iron sword (or sarissa?) were discovered, suggesting that the destruction debris remained largely undisturbed until later Roman times.

Finally, below the Late Hellenistic remains, a small patch of Early Bronze Age (ca. 3200 BC) material was found cut into the sterile orange gravels that lay at the base of occupation in this region of the summit. It emphasizes the extensive nature of low-intensity EBA occupation across the western summit, and underlines the continued absence of Early Hellenistic (ca. 300-150 BC) remains in this newly explored region. We have been searching for 'Alexander's city' since excavations began, but the western summit of Husn contains no trace. But we'll keep looking, as he's down there somewhere...

Conclusion

On Tell Husn the search for the 'Coin Temple' temple continues. Excavations on the northwest summit have ruled this area out as a possible location, but earlier Bronze Age discoveries suggest this area merits more exploration, and we plan a modest expansion during the next field season. The architectural discoveries on the southwestern summit have proved most promising, with a extensive paved area, a length of well-constructed colonnade and elaborate entablature blocks all hinting at major discoveries to come. The Hellenistic destruction horizon below the Roman paving also merits more work. We plan to continue and expand explorations along the western edge of the summit next season.

Stephen J. Bourke (Photos by Bob Miller)



Burial from the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1700-1600 BC) Chamber Tomb.



Ruth Ward documenting some of the contents of pit deposit XXXIY 11.82 (LBA temple interior).

Fortress Temples, Ceremony and the Humble Pit

A NEAF Grant-in-Aid of \$2,500 in 2005 and the inaugural Sam Eames Grant-in-Aid of \$2,000 in 2006 assisted in funding Ruth Ward's doctoral research visit to Jordan, Israel and the USA in 2007.

Introduction

The discovery of a pit at an archaeological site is often the cause of much angst among archaeologists. Discreet concentrations of bone, pottery or atypical objects can be telling clues for these habitually shy contexts. Much time, muttering and patient trowelling in the right light assists in locating the cut line of a pit within a seemingly uniform buff deposit. Often labelled 'rubbish pits', their excavation and recording can also result in definitions including 'intrusions' or, depending on the level of treatment they provoke, a nuisance. However, despite these all too personal accounts, studies have indicated that there's more to pits than meet the eye – there's something in 'em!

Research Background

At least seven buildings identified as 'fortress' or 'Migdol' temples dating to the Middle Bronze Age (MBA, ca. 1800-1500 BC) have been excavated in Palestine since the early 20th Century. These large freestanding buildings share particular design details including a long-room monumental temple style, a single long room, thick walls, symmetrical plan and entrance via a central axis. Often constructed on top of a high podium, they were also located within a distinct temenos precinct. Examples discovered at Shechem and Megiddo set the architectural precedent with more recently discovered types identified at Hazor, Tel Kittan, Tel Haror, Tell el-Hayyat and Pella. Excavation at all these sites confirms more than just one phase of construction, while several reflect a long history

of use. Antecedents of this unique architectural style dating to the Early Bronze Age exist in Syria to the north, as do further MBA examples.

Clear stylistic similarities suggest that parallels may also exist in the practices and ceremonies occurring within these monumental precincts. Why do some temple pits contain complete and rather odd vessels? Do the pits reflect ceremonies, the details of which lie underneath the

sands (or mud bricks) of time? Is there evidence of a belief system unique to the fortress temples alone? Recognising and documenting signs of ritual activity within the pits will reveal various aspects of the core belief systems held during the Second Millennium BC. The role these deposits played within temple confines and court throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Age (ca. 1800-1200 BC) now forms the crux of my doctoral research.

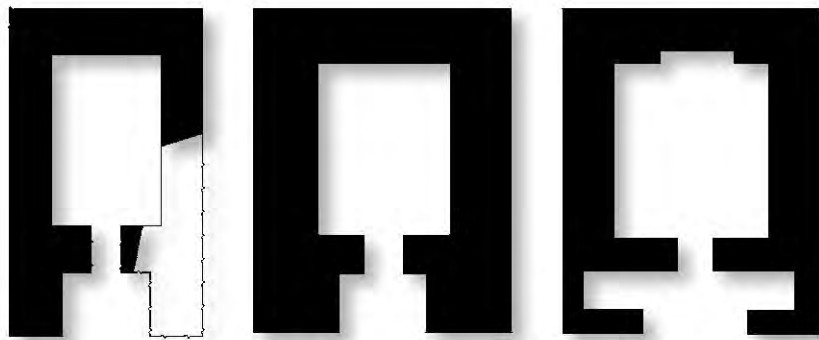
Research Trip

Much is known of the fortress temple buildings themselves. My research trip enabled me to view the material and excavation archives of several of these at close hand, with particular emphasis on the relevant pit deposits.

I began at the site of Pella where volunteers kindly extracted pottery filled polystyrene boxes from their storage place in preparation for my analysis. Ongoing excavations in the temple precinct have confirmed a comprehensive history of activity within this location over a long period of time (ca. 1800-800 BC). At least seven major building phases have now been identified, built one atop the other, with the most impressive being the enormous MBA fortress temple. Since 1994, the recording of more than 200 pits from MBA/LBA levels in the temple area has enabled their detailed examination. Interestingly, Dr Stephen J. Bourke has discussed some of the more elaborate artefacts excavated from the Pella temple sequence in recent NEAF bulletins (#45, December 2003; #46, October 2004 and #47, April 2005) – note the frequency with which these and other atypical objects are retrieved from pits and other cut features (e.g. plaster lined bins)!

After participating in the excavation season, I spent nearly a week examining and documenting the contents of a long list of pits from these periods. The fortress temple there represents the largest example of this architectural style in Southern Canaan, and as much of the assemblage remains at the site, the time spent was invaluable to my research. It was also a useful opportunity to discuss aspects of my topic with colleagues and Dr Bourke, the excavation Director.

A three-week visit to the USA was planned, however as



Schematic plan showing architectural comparisons of, from left: Pella, Shechem and Megiddo fortress temples (not to scale).

only two weeks became feasible, the opportunity emerged to visit Professor Eliezer Oren at Ben-Gurion University in Beer Sheba, Israel. This enabled me to view and discuss the collection from the fortress temple excavations at Tel Haror. Located c. 20km west of Beer Sheba, the building there represents an important southern example of this architectural group. Viewing some of the ceramic repertoire from the excavations of 1982-1990 confirmed that regional differences existed from the comparable Pella material. Professor Oren reinforced the importance of the temple pit deposits at the site, from which were excavated whole vessels and even a donkey complete with bronze bridle bit! It was also a good opportunity to meet his doctoral student Pirhaya Nahshoni, who took time off work to assist in me viewing the collection.

With a brain full of pits and pots from Pella and Tel Haror, my next port of call was Arizona, USA. Surrounded by remarkable mountain ranges and cactus deserts, Phoenix is the home of Arizona State University where Professor Steven Falconer, director of excavations at Tell el-Hayyat let me view the material from the site's fortress temple sequence. Located just 5km southwest of Pella, excavations from 1982-1985 revealed a sequence of four building phases and many associated pits. A week's accommodation at a colleague's house was generously organised along with study space at the university. Professor Falconer spent much time discussing the excavations and allowed me to pull out bag after bag of pottery for viewing. In addition, he provided access to the site excavations database enabling me to isolate areas for study quickly. Not only was the week greatly beneficial to my research but I also got to meet many University colleagues.

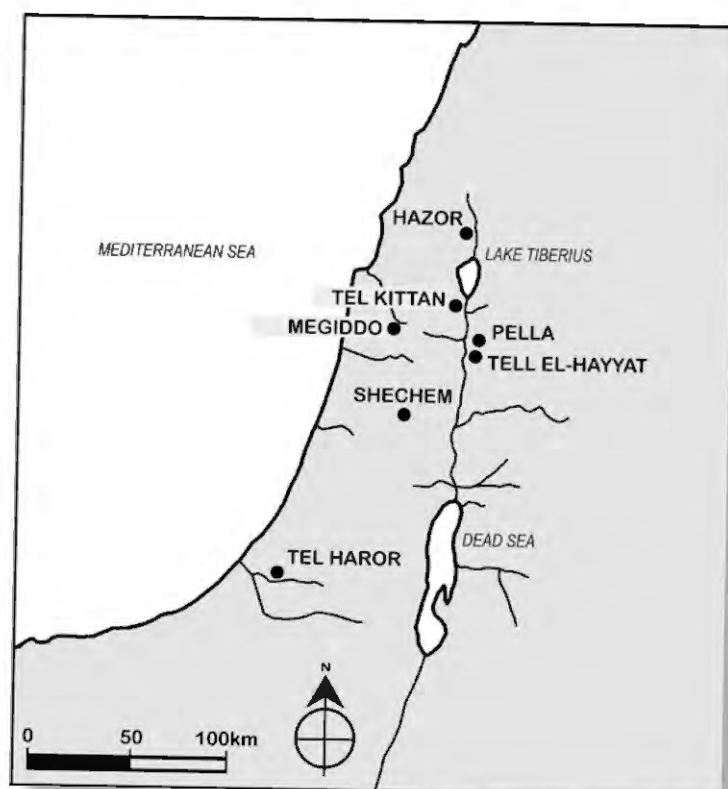
A week in chilly Chicago came as something of a shock after balmy Arizona. Large sheets of melting ice drifted down the city river and Lake Michigan looked decidedly frosty! I spent the entire week in the snug basement of the Oriental Institute Museum trawling through the archive and material of the 1935-1939 excavations at Megiddo, directed by Gordon Loud. Hand inked plans, photographs and typed records with annotated notes over 70 years old revealed keys to the pit deposits of the fortress temple sequence uncovered there. Insights into an era of early excavations revealed details of visits by other prominent archaeologists, rain, and labour strikes. The Museum Archivist, John Larson and Keeper of Collections, Helen McDonald were extremely accommodating and not only had the collection ready for my arrival but also located particular records or objects upon request. I was also very

fortunate to meet Raymond Tindel, the Museum Registrar almost on the eve of his retirement.

Every stage of this unique research visit provided an opportunity to view and discuss archives and collections pertinent to my research and I returned to Australia with a 'fortress temple full' of work to do!

I would like to thank the NEAF for granting me funding to facilitate this research trip, without which it would not have been possible. In addition, I wish to thank my referees, Professor Alison Betts and Dr Stephen Bourke for supporting my NEAF application. I am extremely grateful to Dr Stephen J. Bourke, Professor Eliezer Oren and Professor Steven E. Falconer for granting me access to their site archives and assemblages and for their gracious time and important discussion. Thank you also to Dr Raymond Tindel, Ms Helen McDonald and Dr John Lawson of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago for facilitating my research of the Megiddo archive and collection. I am also grateful to Professor Elizabeth Brandt and her daughter Ana for their hospitality in Phoenix. Finally, I wish to thank Sam Gibbins for her endless assistance throughout this visit.

Ruth Ward



Map of sites mentioned in text.



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 entrepôts of Byblos and Sidon, and the city of Beirut.

This tour is now SOLD-OUT. A further tour is planned for 2009. Details from the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sydney (details below).



Excavation underway on Tell Husn at the site of Pella in Jordan.



All enquiries:

Mark Lalor, Centre for Continuing Education (02) 9036 4765
email: M.Lalor@usyd.edu.au

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/Iron Age building complexes and the Hellenistic/Roman civic buildings on Tell Husn.

We hope you will be able to join us.

*For further information about excavating at
Pella in Jordan, please contact:*

Pella Volunteer Scheme, NEAF
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