RJ Hall

Subject: FW: TeHEP UPDATE 20 JANUARY 2010

Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project

Trinity Southwest University,
Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

in a Joint Scientific Project with the

Department of Antiquities,
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

TeHEP UPDATE

20 January 2010

An Exclusive Report for TeHEP Alumni, Financial Supporters, and Friends

[GLOSSARY OF CHRONOLOGICAL TERMS FREQUENTLY USED IN TeHEP UPDATES:
Chalcolithic Period = Copper/Stone Age, 4400-3300 BCE; EBA = Early Bronze Age, 3300-2350 BCE; IBA = Intermediate Bronze Age, 2350-2000 BCE; MBA = Middle Bronze Age, 2000-1550 BCE; LBA = Late Bronze Age, 1550-1200 BCE; IA1 = Iron Age 1, 1200-1000 BCE; IA2 = Iron Age 2, 1000-586 BCE; IA3 = Iron Age 3/Persian Period, 586-332 BCE; HP = Hellenistic/Greek Period, 332-63 BCE; ERP = Early Roman Period, 63 BCE-168 CE]

Hello All:

The weather looked a little iffy first thing this morning, but by the time we got out to the site, although cloudy, it was simply beautiful. The ground was still wet from the rains, but quite workable and not very muddy. Actually, we were surprised that it was as dry as it was. With some visiting folks from Amman augmenting our now-dwindling numbers, we got a lot of work done.

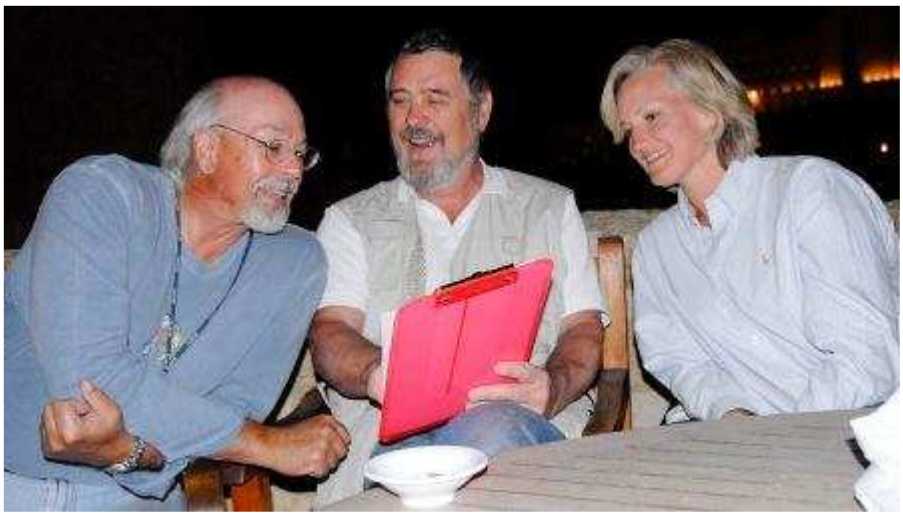
For the better part of the morning, I concentrated on trimming the west balk of Square LA.28P, which has become critical for the interpretation of our Bronze fortification systems. With that fresh trimming, and with the damp soil making the colors ‘pop’, the entire sequence of the site from the Chalcolithic Period through the Middle Bronze Age was as plain as the nose on your face. What we can see clearly in this balk (see the photo) is that, from the time the site was occupied in the late 5th millennium BCE until its terminal destruction in the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age, there were no occupational gaps whatsoever. Now, we’ve been seeing this in the pottery for the past two seasons, but this balk is a dramatic testimonial to that fact.

THE HISTORY OF TALL EL-HAMMAM IN A BALK

If there had been an occupational gap of any length (even a year or less), there would be signs of erosion deposits in the layering (stratigraphy). This kind of gravitational, water-borne deposition happens mainly during the winter rainy season, and it doesn't take much. In fact, the two days of rain we just had caused a significant amount of material to erode from one place to another, depositing sorted layers of silt, sand, and small pebbles in low places in our excavation squares. The squares just up the hill that we excavated last season (but haven't touched this season) were clean-cut and beautiful at the end of last season, but this season they're badly eroded away in places, and the lower features like walls and fallen mudbricks are no longer visible. In less than one year, they're covered in several inches of erosional material.

What I'm saying is that even a minute layer of water-deposited material is visible in a balk section (cut). But this LA.28P W balk section has none of that (neither does the E balk for that matter). Every bit of the many different kinds of materials (like ash, plain dirt, pebbly clay, broken mudbricks, etc.) deposited in this area was put there purposefully by city builders in various periods in order to fill or level-up areas for the expansion or alteration of the various fortification systems. Since the superstructures of the architecture, from small domestic walls to massive city walls, were all built of mudbrick, any length of inoccupation would result in the decomposition and erosion of significant amounts of that material, particularly during the rainy season, but also as a result of winds, natural deterioration, even earthquakes.

We see none of these 'natural' features in the balks associated with our city walls. As far as I can tell, this is almost unprecedented. The absence of occupational gaps also helps to explain why we can trace over 2,000 years of Tall el-Hammam's history in a balk only 1.5m high! This also explains why most of our pottery reads for any given excavation locus are a blur, without clearly defined period-breaks. When you have a city that was continuously occupied for a vast amount of time, with the folks often living in the same houses built by their ancestors centuries earlier, there are no clean lines between occupational sequences, because there isn't any 'between'!



DR. RITMEYER EXPLAINING A BALK SKETCH

I'm working on a little PowerPoint piece that will show this wonderful balk with some explanations. If it isn't too many megabites, I'll try to send it along as an attachment in a coming TeHEP Update.

Please help us with your financial support and prayers as we head into our final 10 days of Season Five.

God bless you all.

Digging the Bible,

Steven Collins, TeHEP Director
Dean, College of Archaeology, Trinity Southwest University

P.S. Please forward this to whomever you like!

You can make donations to TeHEP at the TSU shopping website: www.shop.tsu-edu.us.

Donations can be mailed to: TSU; 5600 Eubank NE, Suite 130; Albuquerque, NM USA 87111.

For detailed information about the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project, visit the official TeHEP website: www.tallelhammam.com.