

TELL MADABA EXCAVATIONS, 1999

PRESS RELEASE

Timothy P. Harrison
Department of Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto
4 Bancroft Avenue
Toronto, ON, M5S 1C1
CANADA
tim.harrison@utoronto.ca
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The Tell Madaba Archaeological Project (TMAP) represents part of a larger, ongoing multidisciplinary regional research effort that is investigating the range of adaptive strategies and social institutions developed by human communities in the semi-arid Highlands of central Jordan, a geographical area distinguished by its climatic variability and environmental diversity. TMAP was initiated for the primary purpose of gathering archaeological data from the presumed urban center of a regional settlement network for comparison with existing data sets from rural village sites in order to test prevailing theories about the development of centralized urban institutions and the rise of early state-ordered societies in the region. A preliminary field season, funded by the National Geographic Society, was conducted in 1996 to define the extent of the tell, and assess the feasibility of carrying out long-term excavations at the site. The effort succeeded in identifying specific areas of the site that were accessible to archaeological exploration. Excavations focused on the southeastern slope of the site (Field A), and resulted in an 8 m vertical profile of the existing stratigraphy spanning the Early Bronze through Iron Ages.

The 1998 field season marked the start of the second phase of excavations, and aimed at clarifying the archaeological history of the western slope of the tell acropolis (Field B). These excavations were continued and expanded during the 1999 field season, which was held between June 2nd and July 15th. Specifically, the project goals for this phase of TMAP are to (1) assemble extensive, quantifiable collections of botanical, faunal, ceramic, and lithic materials for each of the principal phases of occupation at the site, (2) map and record associated architectural remains, (3) conduct the preliminary processing and laboratory analysis of the material evidence recovered, and (4) integrate the architectural and artifact records in a relational database that will permit the reconstruction of a detailed history of the region.

By the end of the 1999 season, excavations had succeeded in uncovering a six-phase stratified sequence that spanned four broad cultural horizons tentatively dated to the Late Ottoman, Early Roman/Nabataean (1st Cent. B.C. to 1st Cent. A.D.), Late Hellenistic (2nd-1st Cent. B.C.), and Iron IIB (9th-8th Cent. B.C.) periods. The results to date of the Field B excavations include the discovery of: (1) a massive 5-7 m thick Iron Age wall (in use until the 8th or early 7th Cent. B.C.), preserved to a height of 4-6 m, and exposed for more than 25 m; (2) a series of superimposed structures and associated surfaces dating to the Late Hellenistic-Early Roman/Nabataean periods; (3) several Late Byzantine/Early Islamic (6th-7th/early 8th Cent. A.D.) rooms (possibly shops), paved with mosaics and preserved to a second story, that backed on to the outer face of the Iron Age wall; and (4) the foundations of a building constructed during the resettlement of Madaba in the late 19th-early 20th Century.