

Wadi Shu'aib: Tell Bleibil

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The year 2020 marked an abrupt halt to research in the field for the Wadi Shu'aib Archaeological Survey Project (WSAS). This time gained was profitably used, however, to work on the material and data retrieved since the inception of the project in 2016 and to prepare this material for publication.

In the fall of 2021, after the pandemic-related break in excavations in 2020, we were finally able to carry out a field season again at Tell Bleibil, which is located in the southern Jordan Valley, at the southern end of the Wadi Shu'aib. Comprising an area of almost 50 m², several new test trenches were created on the northern flank of the tell, exposing part of an exceptionally well-preserved Iron Age IIC (7th–6th century BCE) casemate wall (termed “building A”), of which two rooms have been exposed so far. The structures can be architecturally and functionally assigned to belong to the massive stone foundations of the Iron Age fortification wall already exposed in the 2019 campaign on the northwestern flank of the tell (for these results, see Ahrens 2020). Of particular interest was the collapsed material filling found within room 1 of building A, which consisted entirely of the debris of a massive destruction context. The debris still had large portions of an intermediate floor or ceiling construction that had fallen into this room, allowing for a detailed reconstruction of the rising masonry. The standing walls of the rooms within the casemate wall are preserved up to a height of almost 1.5 m in parts, making this find context unique and exceptional (Figs. 1–2). The pottery assemblage found within the debris typologically dates to the Iron Age IIC period, notably with painted pottery fragments featuring red and black horizontal bands sometimes referred to as “Ammonite” additionally supporting the general date of the assemblage. A fragment of a deep, rounded carinated-rim bowl from outside the structure can possibly be interpreted as an emulation of Neo-Assyrian prototypes. The date of the destruction of the entire complex therefore seems very likely to fall within the timespan of the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian periods. Given the results of the 2021 field season, Tell Bleibil appears to be a heavily fortified settlement belonging to the realm of the kingdom of Ammon in the Iron Age IIB/C period, clearly monitoring the southern Jordan Valley and the regions lying to the west, and at the same time guarding the entrance into the Wadi Shu'aib and ultimately the passage towards the Transjordanian Plateau with its capital, Rabbat Ammon.

Immediately above this building complex a part of a building dating to the last phase of the Iron Age (Persian period, ca. 5th–4th centuries BCE) was uncovered (termed “building B”). Here, several larger pithoi were found in situ;





Fig. 1. Room within the Iron Age casemate wall with destruction debris still visible in the southwestern section (building A, room 1), 7th–6th century BCE. (Photo by Alexander Ahrens, DAI.)

one of the vessels among this group also bears a short Aramaic inscription, which mentions the owner of the vessel. This part of the exposed building may thus tentatively be interpreted as a part of a storeroom.

In addition, the entire settlement mound was recorded by photogrammetry for the first time during the 2021 field campaign; the data generated were used not only to create a topographic plan of the tell but also to map recent disturbances. Excavations at the site are planned to continue in 2022.

Reference

Ahrens, Alexander. 2020. "Wadi Shu'aib: Tell Bleibil." *Archaeology in Jordan* 2: 55–56.



Fig. 2. Iron Age casemate rooms (building A), 7th-6th century BCE.
(Photo by Alexander Ahrens, DAI.)