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attn. Klaus Traulsen

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Bibliography


Ba'ja Neolithic Project 1999: Short Report on Architectural Findings

by Hans Georg K. Gebel1 and Bo Dahl Hermansen2
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2Carsten Niebuhr Institute, Copenhagen University

A second season of large-scale excavations was carried out in April-May 1999 for 5 weeks at Neolithic Ba'ja, southern Jordan, in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities, Amman. Under the directorship of Hans Georg K. Gebel, assisted by Bo Dahl Hermansen as deputy director, a team from Germany, Denmark and Finland explored more 200 m2 of Late PPNB architecture of this remote Neolithic village in the rugged sandstone mountains north of Petra. The project continues under the sole auspices of ex oriente at Free University of Berlin (for the previous season cf. Neo-Lithics 397), and maintains a collaboration with the Carsten Niebuhr Institute at Copenhagen University.

Ba'ja increasingly provokes discussion among Neolithic prehistorians about its unique setting (Fig. 1): it is the only early village found in such a protected setting difficult to access. Ba'ja continues to fuel arguments that already by the 7th millennium B.C. territorial conflicts might have caused raids in sensitive environments like those Early Holocene Greater Petra, and such conflicts affected settlement pattern organization and the choice of site location. Competition for restricted habitats, even those degraded by human impact in this period of dense population, is our explanation for the dramatic location of the site. But we certainly do not expect that Ba'ja is "unique": we anticipate more LPPNB villages like Ba'ja in the rugged Greater Petra area, and we will start this coming April to search for them.

Ba'ja also is a production centre for a widespread prestige good that was traded along the Rift Valley some 9000 years ago: sandstone rings are represented by broken finished products as well as by their production waste and as stored pre-forms. As in the flint industry, a division of labour can be seen in the production stages.

Angela von den Driesch (Munich) reports from the animal bone analysis that hunting for fur is in evidence (leopard, foxes, hyrax).

General Features of the Architecture

The groundplan of the settlement so far implies an "egalitarian" social structure: multi-roomed "courtyard" houses densely neighbour each other in a pueblo-type manner (Fig. 4), without evidence of special buildings within the 400m2 excavated so far. Access to most rooms was probably by ladders through openings in the ceilings and roofs, for only rarely were rooms connected by doorways and windows.

Outer walls were shared and appear to have had no doorways. The general house plan is organized around a large irregularly shaped central room or courtyard, which would have been the only room suitable for most household activities. (In two-storied houses this central space could have been roofed in the basement and open in the second floor). However, this space was surrounded on three or four sides by smaller rooms that could hardly have served any other function than storage (in the basements). The plans we have mostly represent the basements or cellars, whereas many social and productive/processing activities would have taken place on the second floor. There is some evidence that the plan of the second floor partly followed that of the ground floor. Some rooms within houses, both on the ground floor and the first floor, were connected by shallow doorways and other kinds of openings. In the case reported below (cf. 3), doorways at the ground floor and first floor were connected by a built staircase: otherwise houses are expected to have functioned with a system of ladders connecting storeys.

Fig. 1. Neolithic Ba'ja: bird's eye view of the central parts of the settlement, with excavation Areas C (edge) and D (summit area). (photo by B. Borowski)

Fig. 2. Neolithic Ba'ja: bird's eye view of Area D. (photo by B. Borowski)
All evidence so far allows us to expect extended families living in the houses. One of us (HGKG) calculates that 50-60 families lived in Ba'ja (provided that only half of the Ba'ja slopes were occupied by densely built houses, 0.6-0.7ha). Depending on child mortality, the proportion of family members herding outside, etc., this would result in some 400-500 people living in Ba'ja.

Special Results of Architecture

1) On the summit of the site, excavation (Figs. 2-4) in the newly opened Area D (220m²) exposed the basement of a building of more than 80m²; staircases in one of the northern rooms led to a second floor or onto the roof. A large room or courtyard of some 6 x 2.5-4.5m was situated in the lower part of the building that seems to have rested on two levels. Rooms surrounded this large room/courtyard on three sides. One of them contained the in situ remains of a workshop and/or storeroom of a sandstone ring manufacturer (mainly the raw disks). West of this building and partly founded on bedrock, parts of a neighbouring building were exposed. The outer walls of the building run downslope and are shared by the neighbour's property. Like Area C (Gebel et al. 1997), we did not find evidence for open spaces or lanes, and only domestic architecture with no evidence of special buildings was encountered. All communication, traffic and domestic and manufacturing activities must have taken place via the (terraced) roofs. A huge sandstone block (25-30 tons) at the southern edge of Area D fell on and sank into the ruin.

2) The architecture of Area D (Figs. 2-4) is more spacious than the groundplans in Area C (Gebel et al. 1997), and it shows different principles of spatial order. The major walls, including the outer walls of the building(s), run downslope, thus providing better stability than walls that follow contour lines (cf. the terrace walls in Area C). Probably the inhabitants experienced during their occupation of the steep slopes of Ba'ja that walls running perpendicular to the contour lines remained stable longer, and that the (anyhow instable) room walls set between them allowed for more flexible groundplans. Area D has a main or original building phase with two events of groundplan changes or repairs that did not occur throughout the building. Below the main phase an earlier building appears, most likely having a different groundplan and that deliberately was cut to create a new building level.

3) Continued excavations in Square C20(-21) exposed part of a stairwell (Figs. 5-6). The walls associated with this room reach a height of 4.16m. The preserved remains include an earlier Phase I and a later Phase II. One wall (Wall 13) was founded directly on the soft virgin soil. A stone layer served as a platform for the foundation of neighbouring Wall 6; the lowest area framed by the two walls was covered by a red-stained plaster-floor (Locus 45). Only the lower courses of the walls were connected by bridging stones, and from the 9th course Wall 13 leans on Wall 6. A considerable quantity of fragments of red painted plaster have been found in the collapse material, suggesting that the exposed face of the walls was originally coated by a ca. 2-3 cm thick layer of coarse plaster-bedding with a ca. 2-5 mm thick layer of fine red stained plaster. Thus, it may be suggested that the stairwell to which the walls belong possessed red painted walls.

After an unknown interval of abandonment of this part of the building, the walls were leveled and reused as a foundation for the later Phase II. Again, only the lower parts of the wall were connected by bridging stones. Ca. 1.80 m above floor level Wall 6 becomes narrower, leaving a shelf which is interpreted as support for the beams of an upper floor. A buttress (Locus 21), leaning on Wall 6, is also understood as a support for beams. Additionally, a staircase (Locus 41) occupied the space between this buttress and Wall 19. This staircase was founded at floor level and preserved three steps high. However, spaces in Wall 6 and Wall 19 indicate that additional steps must have been included in the
We thank Ghazi Bisheh, former Director Ge-
et al.

Investigations of the southern gorge's topography: can we find
soundings in Area B ("The Saddle"): Will we find here the ex-
pected communal space of the settlement?

We found four finished but unused celts (and one that was un-
finished) built into a house wall in Area D. Their sizes are among
the largest ever found in the southern Levant. This finding leads
to the question of possible magic practices using walls as depots.

Since we normally do not remove walls in archaeological excava-
tions, such evidence appears only when preserved tops of ruined
walls are exposed.

Next Season
During our next season in coming April/May we plan to con-
centrate on the following questions:

• Excavation of the lower stratigraphy in Area D: Will we find
evidence for the earliest settlement history in this upslope situa-
tion that differs from the latest occupation?

• Will we find in Area D the burials suggested by the human
remains and ornaments found in a sediment trap in the gorge be-
low?

• More exposure of architecture: Will the structures give evidence
for buildings that served other than domestic functions?

• Soundings in Area B ("The Saddle"): Will we find here the ex-
pected communal space of the settlement?

• How were the extreme parts of the Ba'ja slopes used? Can we
identify more traces of architecture that slid down the slopes?

• Investigations of the southern gorge's topography: can we find
evidence to test our hypothesis on water storage by damming the
gorge?

• Can we locate a "second" Ba'ja in the Petra area?

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of the excavation, as well as Muhammad Ismael al-Salameen, the
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failure management.

We welcomed as visitors on the dig: Karin Bartl, Charlott
Hoffmann Jensen, Lea Kalsz Rehholz, Bernd Müller-Neuhoff,
Ingolf Thuesen, Gary O. Rollefson, Muhammad Shobaki, and
the team and directors of the Utah University project digging near
al-Bedul Housing.
We acknowledge with deep appreciation and sincerity the warmth of the hospitality and friendship of our workmen from the al-Amareen, al-Bedul, and al-Seyi'din for their great efforts in the excavation. Respectfully, we dedicate our work to the Jordanian people and their heritage.

Note 1: The Carsten Niebuhr-Institute now has established -in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities, Amman- a new excavation at Shaqarat Mazayd [directed by Ingolf Thuesen, field directors: Lea Kehhoff Kaliszski & Charlott Hoffmann Jensen, Bo Dahl Hermansen (survey)], a small Middle PPNB settlement found by D. Kirkbride (Gebel 1988) endangered by road building some 4 km north of Ba'ja, where the remains of round houses and rich layers of organic material were uncovered August 1999.

References

Gebel H.G.K.


Notes and News

Note on the Department of Mediterranean Studies in Rhodes

Adamantios Sampson (Dept. of Mediterranean Studies, Rhodes)

The Department of Mediterranean Studies was founded in Rhodes in 1997 and began its function in the academic year 1999-2000, when it received its first 150 students. The principal purpose of the Department is to promote and co-ordinate comparative and national studies on the society, politics and history of the Mediterranean countries. Particular attention is given to the study of:

a) the ancient civilizations through the sciences of archaeology and archeometry; b) the structure, development and interchange of the languages, especially in the south-eastern part of the Mediterranean (Greek, Arabic, Turkish and Hebrew); and c) the modern economic, social and technological development of the Mediterranean countries, the relations among them and with Greece and the other countries of the European Community. The department develops special institutional links with universities and institutions in Greece and other Mediterranean countries.

It is to the Department of Mediterranean Studies that the recently established Archaeological Sciences Institute of the Aegean of Alexandria (A.S.I.A.A.) belongs. The official presence of ASI/AA in Alexandria will be that of a scientific mission. The aims of the AS/IAA will be the following: a) to undertake joint archeological excavation and surface survey activities with appropriate authorities in Egypt and the large Arab world in the Middle East; b) to apply archaeological sciences (new methods of dating, analysis of finds, archaeoastronomy etc); c) to undertake ethnoarchaeological research in the Greek area and seek of ways and means of communication and interaction of peoples; d) the organization, coordination and realization of post-graduate studies in collaboration with universities in Middle East and Europe; e) the organization of seminars and educational and research character, as well as the occasional realization of symposia and international conferences in the above themes.

Announcements

The Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI) has established a new page on its web site. This page will list exhibits of Cypriot artifacts, lectures on Cypriot archaeology and conferences with sessions or papers devoted to Cypriot archaeology. Any knowledge of exhibits, lectures or conferences related to Cypriot archaeology would be welcome. Please send any information to ddetr@aol.com.

The URL of the CAARI site is: http://www.caari.org

The URL of the new page is :http://www.caari.org/conferences.html from: David Detrich, CAARI web editor

Upcoming Conferences

Magic Practices in the Near Eastern Neolithic


Addresses of the Mini-Symposium:

Charlott Hoffmann Jensen, Carsten Niebuhr-Institute, University of Copenhagen, Sørensengade 17-19, DK-2300 Copenhagen, tel. +45 35 32 89 08, fax +45 35 32 89 26, email: charlott@hun.ku.dk
Hans Georg K. Gebel, Institut für Vorderasiatische Altertumskunde, Free University of Berlin, Hüttenerweg 7, D-14197 Berlin, tel. +49 30 83565747 or 7955997, fax +49 30 7955997, email: hgegbel@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Address of the 2nd International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (Copenhagen, 23-27 May, 2000):

2ICAANE, Carsten Niebuhr-Institute, University of Copenhagen, Sørensengade 17-19, DK-2300 Copenhagen, fax +45 35 32 89 26, email: 2icaane@coco.ihl.ku.dk

ex oriente assists publications and projects in early Near and Middle Eastern technological and subsistence research in their sociocultural and palaeoenvironmental contexts.

The Studies in Early Near Eastern Production, Subsistence, and Environment (SENEPSE) are a new series devoted to monograph publications on the palaeo-economy of the prehistoric Near and Middle East (technologies, production and subsistence modes, palaeoenvironmental studies, human palaeoecology). The series promotes interdisciplinary approaches, especially with earth and palaeoenvironmental sciences as well as ethnological contributions to the understanding of early man phenomena. General editors of the Studies are Hans Georg K. Gebel and Reinder Neef. From Volume 5 onwards SENEPSE is a refereed series.

Enquiries on / applications for an Associated Membership in ex oriente can be made to the address below.

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