

*Bethsaida, 2003**

Rami Arav

Due to the political situation, the Bethsaida excavation season was shorter than usual, it began on July 1st and ended on July 18th 2003. Twenty seven people participated in the expedition and they include the following members: Dr. Rami Arav (Director of the excavations, University of Nebraska at Omaha), co-directors: Dr. Nicolae Roddy (coordinator for the 2003 season, Creighton University), Dr. Carl Savage (Drew University), Dr. Richard Freund (Hartford University), Dr. Mary Patrick (Drake University), Prof. Dr. H.-W. Kuhn and Dr. R. Franke (University of Munich Germany), Staff members were: Steve Reynolds (Archivist, University of Nebraska at Omaha), Christine Dalenta (Photography, Hartford University), Paul Bauman (Komex International, Calgary, Alberta, Canada), Morton Fine (Land Surveyor, Hartford CT), students and volunteers.

Excavations Results

The purpose of this season was to clarify and retrieve more information on several issues that were unsolved during past seasons and were needed for completing the final report on Stratum 5 for Bethsaida volume IV. This season of excavation took place only in Area A (the city gate area). The following issues were addressed:

- 1) The connection between the bastion, of Stratum 6, and the Four Chamber inner city gate of Stratum 5.
- 2) The wall that connects the Outer City Gate and the bastion (W855).
- 3) Sounding in Chamber 4 in order to check possible walls indicated by Ground Penetration Radar.
- 4) To retrieve more information about the occupation layer that dates to the Roman period.

The following is a detailed description and preliminary conclusions, on the excavations listed according to the points above:

- 1) **The Bastion**, The bastion is located at the southeast corner of the gate complex and protrudes to the east. It measures 6 x 6 meters and was built when the city was founded (Stratum 6) and served also during the next occupation level (Stratum 5). It was thoroughly destroyed during the Assyrian conquest in 732 BCE so that no remains of Stratum 5 were left of the bastion. The conquerors did not leave anything above the elevation of -169.70 which is the lowest spot of the preserved floor level of Stratum 5. Directly above the ruins of Stratum 6, there were the remains of Stratum 2, which date to the Roman period. In other words, the eastern section of the

* Cf. IEJ 51 (2001).

gate complex were all destroyed below Stratum 5 and the next occupation level – Stratum 2 – was found directly superimposed on it.

Locus 1525 – the Iron Age City Wall and the Roman Period City Wall. Since there were no remains left of the Stratum 5 bastion, and the eastern gate area was all removed, it was important to find out whether there are any remains preserved that connect the bastion to Stratum 5 structures, that would indicate that the bastion was also functioning during Stratum 5. The closest element of Stratum 5 to the bastion is the southern tower of the Four Chamber City Gate. In order to find the connection between the bastion and the southern tower of the Four Chamber city gate, the wall (W400) that connects the two elements, was excavated. Segments of this wall had been excavated in the past few years but no connection to the southern wall was established. The area selected for the excavation is located in square N56 and was designated as Locus 1525. The debris from the top of the W400 was removed and the northern face of W400 was cleaned. W400 was found to continue and connect the southern tower of the Four Chamber city gate and the bastion. This discovery is important because it shows that although constructed in Stratum 6, the bastion was part of the city gate complex during the existence of the gate in Stratum 5. What also became apparent in the excavation of this locus is that W336, which is situated on W400 and was thought to be Iron Age because it looks parallel to W328, (the western wing of the outer city gate of Stratum 5 located in square N53) is in fact the only remnant of W400 of Stratum 5. During the Roman period (Stratum 2) this wall was altered and was made into a narrow wall in a north-south direction, parallel to the city wall. During the excavation of Locus 1525, wall W856 emerged. It is a north-south wall that measures 1.5 meters and was overlapping W400. Its thickness and solid construction indicate that it is part of a Roman city wall, presumably built by Philip Herod in the first half of the first century CE. Segments of the Roman period city wall had been excavated already in the past. During the 1994 season a long segment of this wall was excavated on top of the Iron Age city wall in Area A south, in squares K 58, 59. The wall collapsed perhaps in the third century CE and debris of the collapse of W856 were found scattered over the area east of the wall in squares N,O 55,56. The layout of the debris indicates that it is a result of a severe earthquake.

The pottery from Locus 1525 contains Iron age pottery and Roman first and second century CE pottery among which are Roman casseroles, globular cooking pots with triple ridged rims usually dating to the first half of the first century CE, Galilean bowls of the early type and Roman glass dating from the end of the first century CE to the early second century CE.

- 2) **Bastion - Outer City Gate connections.** The distance between the Bastion and the Outer City Gate is fifteen meters. Past excavations had shown that a wall connects the bastion and the Outer City Gate. Segments of this wall were found in squares O 54, 56 and were numbered as W855. This wall, of undetermined width, was built with large boulders and perhaps extends over the entire length. Thus far only a meter and a half of its width has been excavated. The area west of this wall constituted the Inner Courtyard which is situated between the Outer City Gate and the Inner City Gate. Since Stratum 5 was not preserved in O squares (53-57), all the remains belong to Stratum 6. It consists of the followings elements: 1) the eastern part of the Outer City Gate. 2) the Inner Courtyard built of paved floor with cobble stones of small and medium size stones covered with a layer of white plaster. 3) A debris layer of about 30 cm separates this floor and an upper clay floor, and about one meter of debris separates this from the floor of Stratum 5. Excavation in this courtyard was divided into several loci. **Locus 1508** (square O, 54) revealed mixed pottery of Roman and Iron Age and testifies an occupation from the Roman period in this locus. **Locus 1526** (square O, 54) has a similar mixture of Iron Age and Roman period shards. **Locus 1527** (square O, 54) is a probe to determine whether there is a postern stairway leading out of the city, presumably to the spring located at the bottom of the ravine approximately 50 meters southeast of the city gate. The fill above the Iron Age wall was all made of Roman period material including shards of pottery and glass. At the bottom of this locus the excavation encountered a well built blocking of a possible postern. This blocking dates from the Iron Age and perhaps was added not long before the city was conquered. Wall W855 seemed to end about 1.25 away from the Outer City Gate (W403) and continues east. Next season excavations will check this area to reveal more details on this possibility. Alongside the western face of W855 there was found a bench incorporated in the wall. It was set to about 25 cm. off the wall. The significance of this discovery should not be underestimated. This bench is undoubtedly identified with the seats of the elders of the city mentioned very often in the Bible (Example: Proverbs 31:23). Philistine shards of pottery found on the floor of this stratum indicate that the date of the construction of Stratum 6 is no later than the mid 10th century BCE. It is noteworthy, therefore that the date of this establishment goes back to at least to this period.
- 3) **Locus 1528 – Chamber 4 probe.** Sounding in Chamber 4 began on July 7th 2003, previous years Ground Penetrating Radar indicated a possible wall running in east-west direction about 2 meters below the floor of the chamber. Since the ground plan of Stratum 6 in this area is not yet clear, a probe of 2.5 by 3.6 meters, was carried out in this area. The probe revealed two compact dirt floors. The upper one contained red slip and burnished ware, clear Early Iron Age II shards and scattered stones from some debris

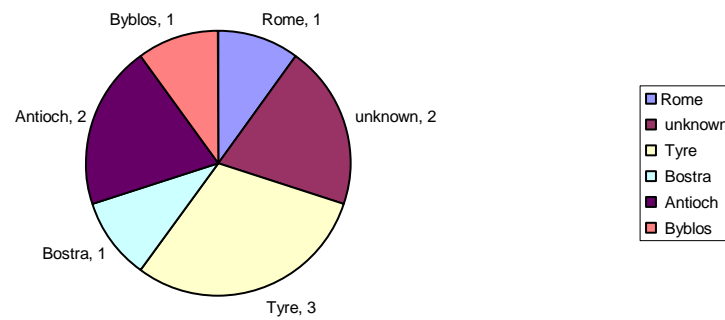
in this area. Philistine or painted shards were found on these floors indicating that the construction of the floors was no later than the middle of the tenth century BCE. Two foundation trenches of the two Stratum 5 walls were reached and were found filled with small stones. The foundation trenches of these walls cut the two floors which indicate that the 4 Chamber gate was built after the floors went out of use, meaning that the 4 Chamber city gate was a late construction. Noteworthy are the two floors (elevations -169.73 and 170.15), which are about two meters above the floor of Stratum 6 of the Inner Courtyard.

Probe in Chamber 4

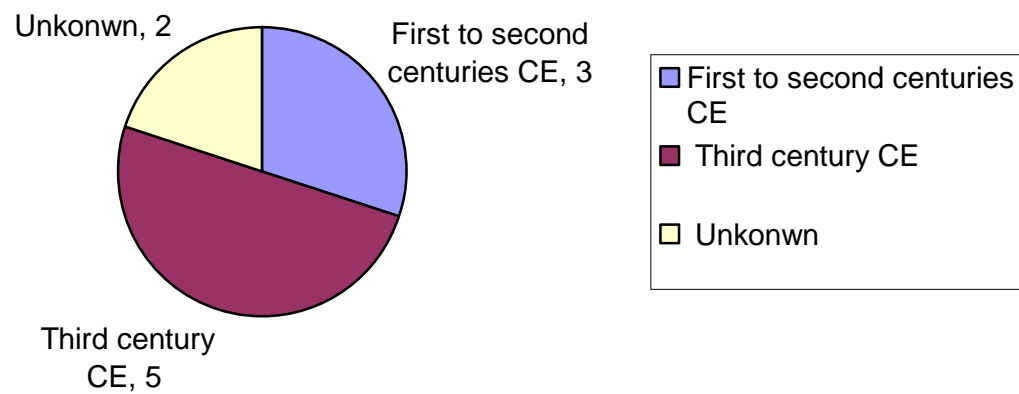
- 4) **Area A, Loci 1529-35, Stratum 2, The Roman period occupation.**
These loci are located in the west of the Iron Age city gate, in squares: H, 54, 53. In general, the occupation in this area is rather poor, built of stones of various sizes, probably mostly reused from the Iron Age occupation layers. The walls are not even in their construction, some are built of one course in width, some in two and some perhaps more. No defined architecture could be observed although it seems that the walls were built on remains of older walls. Two parallel walls were observed in east west direction. Among the finds there were a few metal objects, one a bronze bell, basalt grinding square grinding stone, pottery shards, glass and coins.
- 5) **Pottery** - Pottery shards include casseroles with everted rims, globular cooking pots with triple ridge rims, Galilean bowls and fine ware of the Eastern Terra Sigillata type together with one sample of North African Red Ware. These finds date from the first to the third centuries CE.
- 6) **Coins** - Ten coins were discovered in Area A with clear distinct locations and dates. The area west of the city gate yielded third century coins and the loci on the road to Bethsaida yielded first and second century coins. Only one silver coin was found and all the rest are bronze. The silver coin is a provincial Tetradrachma minted in Antioch at the time of Philippus Senior (244-249 CE). Two coins date to the end of the first century CE and beginning of the second, and all the others are third century coins, which would perhaps indicate the date of this occupation layer. A rare coin of the Emperor Gordianus III (238-244) minted in Tyre was also found. All coins are from northern or northwestern mints which indicate ties of Bethsaida to Provincia Arabia with its capital city at Bostra or to Antioch. No coins are coming from any southern or southwestern mints to Bethsaida.

Statistics of 2003 Coins

Mints



Dates



Rulers

