

5-1977

## The 1976 Excavations at Biblical Heshbon (Part 2)

Lawrence T. Geraty  
*Andrews University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/hisban-excavations-1976-publications>



Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Geraty, Lawrence T., "The 1976 Excavations at Biblical Heshbon (Part 2)" (1977). *Publications*. 3.  
<http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/hisban-excavations-1976-publications/3>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by the 1976 Season at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).



**WORLD CONGRESS ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

(See page 5.)

# **The 1976 Excavations at Biblical Heshbon**

## **Part 2**

BESIDES THE stratigraphical and architectural goals for Areas A-D on the acropolis of the tell, the results of which were summarized in the March issue, there were a number of related objectives.

**Cemeteries.** Beginning with the 1971 season numerous Roman and Byzantine tombs have been excavated in Cemeteries E and F, to the west and southwest of the tell, respectively.

The artifacts and skeletons from a variety of rock-cut tombs have complemented nicely the data gleaned from contemporary strata on the tell. In 1976 it was hoped that the same objective could be achieved for the Iron Age or Biblical Period. Though a systematic search of the surrounding hillsides likely to conceal an Iron Age cemetery was undertaken, no earlier tombs were found. Realizing such an endeavor has more to do with chance than skill, we contented ourselves with the careful excavation of several new types of tombs for the Roman and Byzantine periods. In all, 18 tombs and caves were cleared on the western slope of the tell and 2 tombs in a newly discovered cemetery across the valley to the east.

Most of the important tombs originated in the Roman Period. The earliest was a typical loculus-type Early Roman tomb similar to the one in which Jesus must have been buried. A collapsed ceiling, due perhaps to the A.D. 365 earthquake, kept it from subsequent robbing (three Herodian lamps were found fallen immediately below a lamp niche in what looked like earthquake tumble). Primary, secondary, and cremation burials were all represented—

---

LAWRENCE T.  
GERATY

---

*Lawrence T. Geraty, Ph.D., is associate professor of archeology and the history of antiquity, Andrews University.*

more than 30 skeletons in all. One loculus alone produced about 30 objects, many of them distinctive (e.g., a four-handled Early Roman cooking pot, a scarab—obviously an heirloom and not a Roman imitation—a Nabatean painted, spouted juglet, and a footed alabaster bowl).

Another Roman tomb was mixed in type with 8 loculi and 3 sarcophagi containing some 17 burials. From a Roman loculus came an exquisite gold earring with settings containing both a pearl and a blue cameo-type relief of a woman's head, a fine incense burner, and several bone and ivory pines. Some of the tombs were typically Byzantine in form and contents—one producing an interesting bronze mascara bottle in the stylized shape of a female figure.

Two of the caves that were excavated were also used for burials; one of them had a vertically cut wall toward the back with 5 sarcophagi arranged along the edges around a fine flagstone pavement. Late Roman in construction, it had a disproportionate number of infant bones (35 fetuses out of 50 burials). Perhaps the scene of heathen rites, this installation was damaged (purposefully?) in the Christian Byzantine Period.

**Soundings.** After our second season of digging in 1971 we began to realize that the acropolis of Heshbon, where we had concentrated our work, was not yielding evidence early enough to correlate with the Amorite city of Heshbon, whose king was Sihon, and whom the Israelites defeated at the time of the conquest (dated to about 1400 B.C. by Biblical chronological statements). This puzzle led us in 1973 to begin a series of small soundings (collectively labeled Area G) around the edges of the tell and in the modern village, with the goal of testing the reliability of the main stratigraphical sequence obtained from the acropolis. By 1974 these soundings had reached the number of 10. In 1976 we continued one previous sounding and initiated 8 more. In addition to bringing to light some important complementary data (such as two more large early Christian churches with mosaic floors), their combined results appeared to confirm the accuracy and completeness of our more extensive work on the acropolis, especially in terms of occupation history. Certainly there was nothing earlier at Tell Heshbân than the twelfth century B.C. From the time of the Judges

on, all our evidence would seem to harmonize nicely with requirements for Biblical Heshbon.

Perhaps, we thought, Sihon's city was nearby, and when it was destroyed or abandoned around 1400 B.C. its name moved to the newly-built Israelite city at the more favorable location at Tell Heshbân (historians know that place names often move from one site to another, Jericho being only one example). This idea, coupled with the desire to learn more about the region attached to Heshbon, led us to a yet further extension of our work.

**Regional Archeological Survey.** In 1973 and 1974 a team completed an archeological survey of the region within the approximate radius of 6 miles of Tell Heshbân (from Na'ur in the north to Madaba in the south, and from the Jordan Valley in the west to the Amman-Madaba Road in the east). This concentrated effort mapped 125 sites, enabling the expedition to sketch the patterns of occupation in the Heshbon region and how the tell proper fitted into them. Of these 125 sites two or three were occupied in the Late Bronze Age and thus are possible candidates for the city of Sihon.

In 1976 it was decided to extend the successful work of the archeological survey team to the triangular region between the Amman-Na'ur Road and the Amman-Madaba Road, with the hope that previous results could be tied in to the region's ancient and (rapidly expanding) modern capital before most of the relevant data were destroyed. This danger can be illustrated by the team's frustration in trying to locate within the target region at Khirbet es-Suk a milestone of the Roman *Via Nova*, identified by Peter Thomsen about 1917. Apparently the new settlement in the region has destroyed it, for no trace of the *Via Nova* could be found. The team was successful, however, in mapping 30 sites in this extension of their previous radius; most of them were

***Since most of the goals of the Heshbon expedition have been achieved, the fifth season is probably the last.***

occupied in the Iron Age and Byzantine Period, about half of them in the Roman and Umayyad Periods, and less than a quarter of them in the Chalcolithic and Bronze Ages and later Arabic Period.

The two most impressive tells in the region were Tell el-'Umeiri (with its spring, surface architectural remains, and evidence of occupation in every major period between Early Bronze and Iron II, plus some later periods) and Jalul. For the latter, perhaps the most likely site of Sihon's capital, a detailed contour map was prepared, and an experimental procedure was tried by surface sharding 101 randomly selected 10-by-10-meter squares on a grid. This effort produced 27,000 sherds from the Neolithic Period (?) to modern times, but with the Bronze and Iron Ages especially well represented. Portions of at least 5 figurines were also found, along with an inscription—an Iron Age 'aleph incised on a Late Bronze Age sherd. Obviously Jalul must be excavated as funds and time permit.

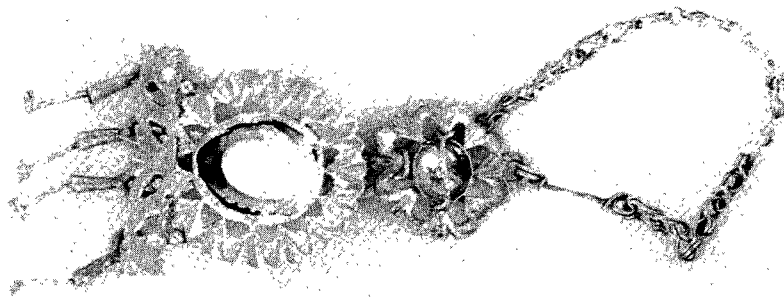
**Other Scientific Data.** Provision was made in 1976 for increased collection and analysis of the types of scientific data that have become so important for a fuller understanding of an ancient site. Thus a team of more than 20 scientists and their assistants were on hand to provide the archeological staff with in-field identifications of human (more than 200 skeletons) and animal bones, soils, rocks, and snails. In addition, this team sought to assemble diverse environmental and cultural data pertinent to the diachronic study of human adaptation at Heshbon. Emphasis was upon gathering data that could help to explain the continuity in the subsistence practices of the people of Heshbon from the earliest period down to the present—i.e., a continuous dependence upon animal exploitation, particularly sheep and goats.

The fieldwork carried out by this team included environmental and ethnographic research aimed at illuminating our understanding of the existing ecological situation at Heshbon. Forthcoming as a result of these activities is a cultural-ecological analysis of existing subsistence arrangements involving sheep and goats at Heshbon, a geological map of the Heshbon vicinity, up-to-date faunal and floral lists (nearly 100 plants), and a climatic sequence for Heshbon during the past 10 years.

Beyond this, certain zooarcheological and other environmental fieldwork is



***An Iron Age seal from the time of the judges.***



*A gold earring from Late Roman Tomb F.27, inset with a pearl and a blue cameo-type relief of a woman's head.*

aimed at strengthening the data necessary to establish the specific character of the subsistence practices at Heshbon during all of its occupational history. To this end, more than 50,000 animal bones have been identified and described individually, and all of this data is currently being prepared for computer-aided analysis. Of special interest are certain rare species that have now been identified, including at least 50 bones of wild boar, several bones of the Mesopotamian fallow deer, bones of a lion (from the Roman Period) and of red deer, and possible remains of Indian humped-back cattle. It is of interest that most of these species require lush vegetation than now exists around Heshbon. Other environmental data were collected, using dry and wet sieving techniques. The hundreds of land snails, mollusks, carbonized seeds, and other organic material yielded by these procedures will serve as independent lines of evidence in the attempt to reconstruct the natural environment of each of the occupational periods at Heshbon.

In addition to the thousands of bones and hundreds of scientific samples already mentioned, the stratigraphic work on the tell and in the soundings and cemeteries yielded 800 registered small finds (among them 57 legible coins and 37 whole pots), 36,000 registered sherds, and thousands of glass fragments—all now undergoing further study. A full preliminary report of the 1976 season's results is scheduled for publication in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* during the winter of 1977-1978.

### Staff

The foregoing accomplishments of the past season at Heshbon are due primarily to the dedicated and persistent efforts of a large, qualified, and varied volunteer staff. Key staff members remained the same as in 1974. Lawrence T. Geraty, of Andrews University, was director; Roger S. Boraas, of Upsala

College (East Orange, New Jersey), chief stratigrapher and coordinator of specialists; James A. Sauer, of ACOR, project advisor and chief ceramic typologist; Siegfried H. Horn (former director), of Andrews, project advisor and object registrar. For the first time he was assisted by Abraham Terian, of Andrews, who promptly identified all coin finds in the field—a major aid in maintaining stratigraphic control.

Continuing as area supervisors were Bastiaan Van Elderen, of Calvin, Larry G. Herr, of Harvard, W. Harold Mare, of Covenant, and Robert D. Ibach, Jr., of Grace Theological Seminary (Winona Lake, Indiana). New in 1976 were S. Thomas Parker, of UCLA, John J. Davis, of Grace, B. Michael Blaine, of Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, California), Robyn M. Brown, of the University of Michigan, John I. Lawlor, of Baptist Bible Seminary (Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania), and Donald H. Wimmer, of Seton Hall University (South Orange, New Jersey).

Back for the fifth time were chief architect-surveyor Bert DeVries, of Calvin, and pottery registrar Hester B. Thomsen, of Greater New York Academy. Other returning specialists included chief zooarcheologist Øystein S. LaBianca, of Brandeis (who also organized and supervised the 3-week post-session bone analysis, at which Joachim Boessneck and Angela von den Driesch, of Munich's Institute für Palaeo-anatomie, served as consultants), physical anthropologists Robert M. Little, of Andrews, and James H. Stirling, of Johns Hopkins, and chief photographer Paul H. Denton, of Andrews. New in 1976 were director of education Robert A. Coughenour, of Western Theological Seminary (Holland, Michigan), geologists P. Edgar Hare, of the Carnegie Geophysical Institute (Washington D.C.), and camp physician Ronald D. Geraty, of New England Memorial Hospital (Stoneham, Massachusetts).

Remaining staff members (mostly teachers, ministers, and students) supervised and recorded the progress of digging or served in supporting roles both in the field and at headquarters. Among these were: Ray Bankes, of Oregon, Kaye Barton, of North Dakota, Esther Benton, of the Voice of Prophecy, Kerry Brandstater, of Loma Linda University, Douglas Clark, of Southwestern Union College, Adelma Downing and Theresa Fuentes, of Atlantic Union College, Henry Kuhlman, of Southern

Missionary College, Ken and Lorrie Knutsen, of the Wisconsin Conference, Asta LaBianca, of British Columbia, Paul Perkins, of Massachusetts, Daniel Salzmann, of Switzerland, Marilyn Stickle, of New York, Mitchell and Pat Tyner, of the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference, Paul Vance, of Pacific Union College, Nathaniel Yen, of Drew University, and Merling Alomia, Loren Calvert, Don and Mary Casebolt, Robin Cox, Scott Longacre, Frank Lounsberry, Larry Mitchel, Julia Neuffer, Doug Robertson, Bjornar Storfjell, and Margit Süring—all of Andrews.

Altogether there was a staff of about 100 from the United States, Jordan, Canada, Australia, Norway, West Germany, Finland, Switzerland, Peru, and Taiwan. This unusually large international and ecumenical group (which was assisted at the tell and at camp by about 140 hired workmen) was comfortably housed about 6 miles south of the tell at the UNWRA Girls' School for Palestinian Refugees in Madaba. The facilities were adequate for makeshift bone and geology laboratories, a drafting room, a darkroom, and rooms for the processing of pottery, glass, and small finds. Despite the large staff, some of whom were overseas for the first time, we are thankful to report that there were no hospitalizations or serious accidents or illnesses during the two-month expedition.

Persons in Amman whose assistance greatly facilitated our work included His Majesty King Hussein, Their Royal Highnesses Crown Prince Hassan, Crown Princess Tharwat, and Prince Raad, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, the U.S. ambassador, and, of course, as always, the officials of the Department of Antiquities, without whose cooperation none of the expedition's work would have been possible.

### Future Plans

Though no further expeditions to carry out new work at Tell Hesbân are planned, it is probable that after manuscripts for a final synthetic report are well under way it will seem advisable to return to the field once more, perhaps in 1978, to check or clarify certain conclusions. In the meantime the expedition has already prepared a detailed proposal for reconstruction and preservation of the excavated areas of Tell Hesbân (with plans and sections), which the Department of Antiquities has adopted and has already begun to implement.

# “Preacher,

IN A former pastorate I took some news copy to the local daily newspaper. The editor of the society and church pages was a member of one of the leading churches of the town. Giving my story a quick once-over look, she remarked, “Oh, how I wish our pastor would hand in copy like this! He writes out his news stories with a pencil and on scraps of paper, and he uses atrocious English!” After a significant pause, she added, “But he is the best pastor we have ever had!”

That last statement set me to wondering. Can one be a really “good pastor” and yet fail to communicate adequately with the public? Shouldn't a minister be an all round man as well as be trained in theology? As titular head of a congregation, shouldn't he worthily represent his church through the printed page as well as in other ways?

My maternal grandfather used to tell us boys, “Anything that is worth doing at all is worth doing right!” By the same token, every church news story that is worth telling should be told well.

Any communication submitted to a newspaper or magazine should be clearly typed, double-spaced, on good typewriter paper, size 8 1/2-by-11 inches, on one side only, with ample margins at the top and bottom of the page.

### Here's How I Try to Do It

1. *Always take plenty of time to be accurate.* Make a thorough check of each piece of information submitted. After you have done your best to create a worthy story have someone else go over it. It is hard for one to see his own mistakes. It is trite but true that the best writing is rewriting, and even a church newsstory should be polished again and again.

2. *Be as brief as a full presentation of the story will permit.* Direct, simple language is always more effective than “fine” writing.

One popular Pentecostal minister tells a story he attributes to a Catholic professor. Purportedly, a group of Christian ministers met in a church to consult with one another as to what is wrong with the church. While they were discussing the subject, Jesus Himself appeared and asked them, “Who do you