

RJ Hall

Subject: FW: TeHEP UPDATE 16 DECEMBER 2009

Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project

Trinity Southwest University,
Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

in a Joint Scientific Project with the

Department of Antiquities,
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

TeHEP UPDATE

16 December 2009

An Exclusive Report for TeHEP Alumni, Financial Supporters, and Friends

IGLOSSARY OF CHRONOLOGICAL TERMS FREQUENTLY USED IN TeHEP UPDATES:

Chalcolithic Period = Copper/Stone Age, 4400-3300 BCE; EBA = Early Bronze Age, 3300-2350 BCE; IBA = Intermediate Bronze Age, 2350-2000 BCE; MBA = Middle Bronze Age, 2000-1550 BCE; LBA = Late Bronze Age, 1550-1200 BCE; IA1 = Iron Age 1, 1200-1000 BCE; IA2 = Iron Age 2, 1000-586 BCE; IA3 = Iron Age 3/Persian Period, 586-332 BCE; HP = Hellenistic/Greek Period, 332-63 BCE; ERP = Early Roman Period, 63 BCE-168 CE]

Hello All:

About 11am yesterday (Tuesday) morning, as Abu Musa (aka Mohammad; age 45 years) approached our probe trench (= sounding) in one of his recently-cleared banana fields on lower Tall el-Hammam, he was snorting mad. After all, it was his land. As TeHEP staff members, Hussien and Khalil from the Department of Antiquities, intercepted him, the situation wasn't pretty, and negotiations didn't seem to be in the offing. Waving a new and rather large Turkish-made shotgun, with recently-dispatched doves dangling from his belt, Abu Musa threatened to bring in a bulldozer and cover up all our excavations from last and this season.

[Actually, we'd been anticipating this moment since day-one of the Project. We knew that eventually the owners of the land including Tall el-Hammam would emerge to challenge our presence there. We'd already had wonderful success with Abu Ahmed who's road-frontage property we cross going to the site every day. We're now the best of friends, and we store our equipment at his mosque, where we also park our bus. Now we had the opportunity to befriend another local landowner (and an extremely important one), hopefully to the advantage of TeHEP.]

Thankfully, Hussein knows just about everybody who's anybody in the area, including Abu Musa's father. Hussien's day-job as Regional Director

of Archaeology for the Kafrayn District (where Tall el-Hammam is located) routinely puts him in contact with local government officials and the self-perceived-high-muckity-mucks of local clans who, not infrequently, don't care too much for each other, but co-exist on the basis of shared blood. Simply put, the whole lower Jordan Valley is controlled by "the Family," if you catch my drift.

Fortunately, within a few minutes, Abu Musa's temper was quelled sufficiently for some of Hussien's diplomatic acuity to kick into gear. After all, the practicalities of diplomacy were certainly apropos before a man wielding an elephant gun with a left hip still warmed by recent life. It worked. Momentarily I saw Hussien's name on the screen of my mobile phone. "Dr. Collins, please come to talk with Abu Musa," he said from a distance of all of about 30 yards.

"Sabaah al-khair." "Fursa sa'eeda." Abu Musa and I exchanged greetings. Having come almost instantly to the end of my Arabic appropriate for the moment, Hussien interceded to translate. By now smiles were coming all-round. The brief conversation ended with an invitation to Abu Musa's house at 9am the following morning (this morning, the time of writing).

This morning (Wednesday), having gotten things underway on the dig, Gary Byers and I left Steve McAllister in charge, then proceeded to make our way through the fields and across the Wadi Kafrayn toward Abu Musa's house, accompanied by Hussien and Khalil. From the outside we knew the large, impressive house quite well, but, until now, not the owner. Gary and I had 'sherded' around it a couple of years ago, thinking that the prominent knoll upon which two or three houses were built might contain ancient ruins (it didn't).

Obviously Abu Musa was a man of some means (a successful farmer and who-knows-what-else). Parked in front of the house was an older Land Rover, with a relatively new black Ford Explorer in the driveway right in front of the main entry. He stood on the front porch to greet us. "Ma'as-salaama," we all offered, either by word or gesture.

The reception (living) room was one of the most impressive I've seen in a local house. Fancy, really. The hand of an interior designer was immediately apparent in the pillow-couches, tables, and drapes custom fit to the octagon-shaped room. On the center 'tea table' were arranged a dozen or so pottery vessels probably taken from one or more of the hundreds of ancient tombs in the vicinity. Gary was immediately drawn to them, as I was. He affirmed my comment that he looked like a kid in a toy store as he handled and examined each one of them. And then again. (Of course, tea for all!)

"I've never had the chance to hold so many vessels like this," Gary said, motioning to Hussien to proffer a translation in Abu Musa's direction. "I'm very thankful for this!" he told Abu Musa in a tone of sincere gratitude. Indeed. At that moment, Abu Musa disappeared into an adjacent room.

He soon returned with what were surely two of his prides-and-joy: the shotgun (of yesterday's encounter) and a new Russian-made 9mm semi-automatic pistol still in the case, wrapped in a plastic sleeve. With a good bit of clowning everybody was now feeling

the energy of true male-bonding! This was the perfect moment to interject a serious note.

In what anthropologists call a “shame-based culture” (I’ve called it an “honor-based culture”), it’s obligatory for the head-of-household to grant his hospitality and protection to an invited guest under his roof (= anywhere on his property). And “saving face” is paramount. I’ve enjoyed interacting with many Arab friends and their families (both Muslim and Christian) for over two decades, and, through these long-term relationships, I’ve learned some of the nuances and inner-workings of friendship on this side of the cultural divide.

Amidst the surface-casualty of our laughter, I perceived from several piercing eye-to eye glances in my direction by Abu Musa that a window of opportunity had opened. It was now time for a little “face-saving,” and this was Abu Musa’s chance to shine as a wise and gracious host. Mind you, this wasn’t to be accomplished at Abu Musa’s expense (that’s much too simplistic), but it was certainly going to accrue to my advantage. I fully admit that it was wholly calculated on my part. But, to be sure, it was equally calculated on his. It was all about mutual respect, regardless of who was manipulating whom. It was the dance of friendship and trust, choreographed by southern Jordan Valley Arab culture over many centuries. And the dance continued...

The laughter quieted as I turned to Hussien and requested aloud that he translate my heart to Abu Musa. While saying this, I placed my open right palm on my chest, then extended it in Abu Musa’s direction while locking as firm a look into his eyes as I could from my position on the couch opposite him. Then I spoke: “Abu Musa, I have dug on your land without your permission. If by doing this I have offended you in any way, I am truly sorry. I am sad if I have made you angry!”

As I’d anticipated (but nonetheless thankfully so) Abu Musa responded directly in his broken-but-best English: “You are my guest; you are my friend. Do not say you are sorry or sad. This is not for you, because you are my friend. Whatever I have is yours. You can dig wherever you want. Whatever you say, you have from me.”

With right hand on my heart once again, I nodded deeply in Abu Musa’s direction. “Thank you, my friend. Shukran. Al-hamdu lel Allah.” With that, we concluded the dance, and departed with a friendship embrace.

Two hours later, when, after a walkabout, Gary and I arrived back at our trench LA.28, Abu Musa was waiting to show me the location of what he thinks is an ancient cistern (he’s probably right). It was smack in the middle of one of his many now-cleared banana fields. It was an open invitation to dig. A gift of friendship.

It’s this kind of experience, repeated with a variety of personalities over a wide range of circumstances, that reinforces my love of this place and its people. In many ways, we are foreigners. But in many ways, we are family.

Blessings to you all.

Steven Collins, TeHEP Director

Dean, College of Archaeology, Trinity Southwest University



**CRAWLING THROUGH THORNY
ACACIA TRESS**



DR C. ABU MUSA AND GARY



ANCIENT POTS ON THE TEA TABLE



GARY PLAYING WITH POTS



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For detailed information about the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project, visit the official TeHEP website: www.tallelhammam.com.