

RJ Hall

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# 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

2 January 2010

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

**GLOSSARY 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]

## Holidays at Hammam

by Gary Byers, TeHEP Field Archaeologist

Working all week at the site, we approached Christmas with great anticipation here in Jordan. We had been listening on the news to know how much of a white Christmas our families and friends were having back in the US, and most of us decided we were really willing to miss the snow and cold this year. And after all, we were experiencing much more the real weather of the first Christmas in Bethlehem!

So, on the morning of December 24<sup>th</sup>, my wife announced for anybody to hear that we should only have to work a half day on Christmas Eve. The chorus grew, and Dr. Collins relented. We started as usual, on the bus by 7am and in the field digging by 7:30am. But that day we stopped at 11:30am (normally lunchtime) and we boarded the bus to visit the local restaurant which sends us our shawarma lunch every day at the site. Dig photographer Mike Luddeni bought everybody's lunch that day (we still ate shawarma – and loved it!), and we headed back to the hotel for a very early pottery washing and a couple of extra hours of relaxation. I went to the fitness room for a little workout, in anticipation of a pretty spectacular Christmas Eve buffet at the restaurant. I was not disappointed!

The restaurant was specially decked out in Christmas colors in soft light with very special table settings, and Christmas music played in the background. The food presentation at the restaurant is always spectacular. People regularly walk in and actually take photographs of the spread. But the restaurant staff outdid themselves that night. Admittedly, I don't remember much of what was on the menu, but I do remember the chocolate fondue on the dessert table. I ate much more chocolate than a man of God should have on

## Christmas Eve!

But the night was just beginning. After dinner, I took the group on a special one hour outdoor field trip, dubbed by somebody “Gary’s Christmas Eve Magical Mystery Tour.” I took them to the far edge of the hotel’s swimming pool above the shore of the Dead Sea and, looking across at the lights of Bethlehem, I retold to them the Christmas story – from an archaeological point of view. In fact, my version of the Christmas story was recently published in Bible Study Magazine and you can probably still find it online.

Then we returned to the restaurant where dinner was now in full swing, and ate a special birthday cake prepared by the kitchen staff for Hal Bonnette, who is one of those unfortunate folks with a December 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. And just to stay in the Christmas spirit, I hit the dessert table one last time.

Thankfully, this year Christmas fell on a Friday, the Moslem holy day in Jordan. If Christmas had actually occurred on a Tuesday, I don’t know if Dr. Collins would have made us go and work or not! But this year I went to sleep on Christmas Eve with visions of chocolate fondu dancing in my head and got to sleep in until 7:30. After another typically wonderful Movenpick breakfast, we all headed out to Madaba to attend Christmas services in Jordan’s best-known Christian town. Only about 30 minutes away, we arrived too late for services at the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George (where the ancient and famous Madaba Map is the basis of the modern church floor).

So we took a 10 minute walk and arrived just in time for the Christmas service at the Catholic Saint John the Baptist Church. It was all in Arabic, and I only recognized the Lord’s Prayer and two Christmas songs. But it was a nice experience being at church on Christmas in the Holy Land.

While we were not home with family to exchange gifts, gifts were still a part of our Christmas here in Jordan. So, to finish off our Christmas Day experience, we went to the super Safeway in Amman and bought gifts – for ourselves! The store is a real Safeway, the same one I have grown up with in Maryland, but this one is really unique. The first floor is larger than any grocery store I have ever seen, including a café. The second floor, complete with an escalator that I took my grocery cart up, with all the other items you would find in any department store, topped off with a fancy restaurant. Gayle and I spent most of our time at the nutbar (surprising?) where we purchased half a kilogram of shelled and roasted peanuts. Might as well finish by telling you about Christmas dinner at the Movenpick – another special event. The theme was an Arabian Christmas meal with a host of special dishes that I could not pronounce or explain what was in them. But again, for me, the real hit was the dessert bar. They had a chocolate Christmas tree that I decided was eatable, so I took a branch and ate it. It was so good, I got more for everybody at my table. On my scale of chocolate, it even surpassed the Christmas Eve fondu!

Having my wife here to enjoy it all with me, of course, made it all really special and we did get to call our children and my parents to end the evening. So Merry Christmas to me! And I just couldn’t wait for the New Year’s Eve dessert table!

New Year’s Eve was a true event at the Movenpick Dead Sea Resort and Spa. No one could even book a room in the hotel that night without purchasing a ticket to the Nabatean New Year’s Eve Grand Party. Since we were already here, I guess they just decided to let us eat, too. The Nabateans were a nomadic (“bedouin” is the Arabic term) tribe who migrated into the southern Jordan region by the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. They were the people who literally carved out the mysterious ancient city of Petra – recently (7/7/07) voted onto the international list of the Seven New Wonders of the World.

The New Year’s Eve buffet was filled with traditional Middle Eastern foods and contemporary

European cuisine. Live entertainment included a traditional Jordanian dance troupe. Gayle, Joanne (our friend from Maryland) and I stayed (and ate) right through till midnight. Gayle enjoyed the Movenpick's own brand of ice cream (their specialty) but I loved the chocolate fondue on the buffet! By the way, there was a full moon (and partial eclipse) on New Year's Eve and we went outside for a romantic look in the shirtsleeve weather we are having here. Since it is our weekend, we slept in New Year's Day, and I got a good start on the New Year with a workout in the fitness room and some important research time. Gayle and Joanne did a workout and sat beside the pool. I must admit that it all feels a bit like paradise to me. But we had a real downer that afternoon. Tim, in our group and a member of the Canadian military, got word of a friend being killed in the New Year's Eve suicide attack at Kandahar, Afghanistan. We talked it out, and will just have to trust God for that peace which passes all understanding.

I think we all recognize that we have a wonderful opportunity being here and doing what we do. We also understand our responsibility to be a blessing to each other and everyone else God brings into our lives each day. Wherever you are and whatever has been going on in your life, I hope you have a sense of God's presence and plan in your life. He has a wonderful plan for 2010 and that includes what He is going to do for you.

Happy New Year from Jordan.

Pastor and Field Archaeologist Gary Byers

**For detailed information about the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project, visit the official TeHEP website: [www.tallelhammam.com](http://www.tallelhammam.com).**