

RJ Hall

Subject: FW: TeHEP UPDATE 4 JANUARY 2010

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

4 January 2010

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]

Tomb Explorers

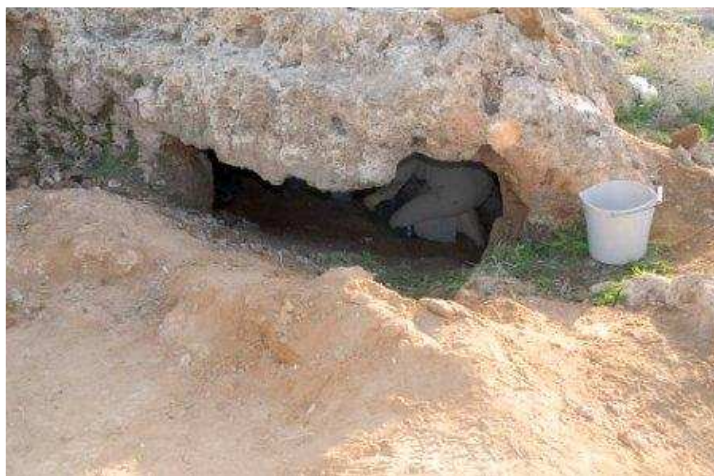
by Dr. Steve McAllister, TeHEP Field Archaeologist

Since the occupational history of the massive city state of Tall el-Hammam is so lengthy, likely from the Chalcolithic to Middle Bronze periods (4300 - 1550 BC), there must be thousands of tombs in the surrounding area. In the first few seasons we looked for them in extensive surveys of the nearby hills. The whole pieces of pottery and other articles found in tombs provide invaluable information on the ancient inhabitants.

The Middle Bronze Age people created shaft tombs which were hidden below ground and are therefore very hard to find. But the Early Bronze Age people buried their dead in caves carved out of the native stone cliffs, and sealed the entrance with dry-stacked stone walls. Through the millennia the stone weathers and the sealing walls fall down, exposing the burial caves high on the cliff faces. We documented 54 of them last year.

In the previous season we had our eye on one particular Early Bronze Age tomb which seemed intact and promising at least some pottery sherds. We had the chance to explore that cave. Located on a cliff face, the carved

entrance is about 24" in diameter and the tomb seemed to extend about 12 feet into the solid rock. We began excavating the 8" of accumulated debris on the cave floor and found it had the consistency of very fine dry sand.

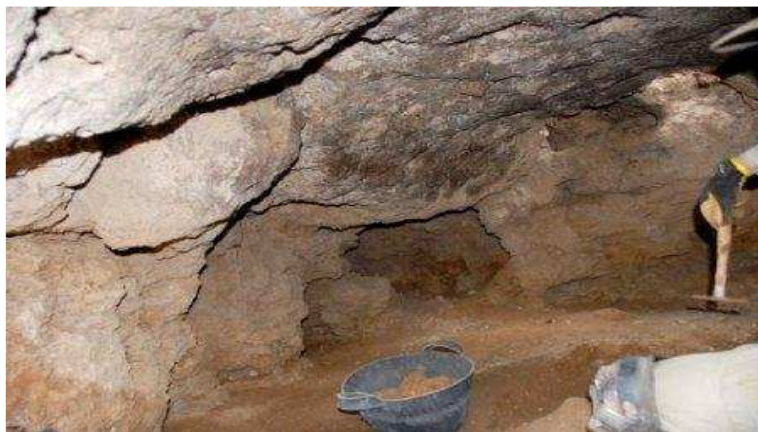


HAMMAN TOMB 55

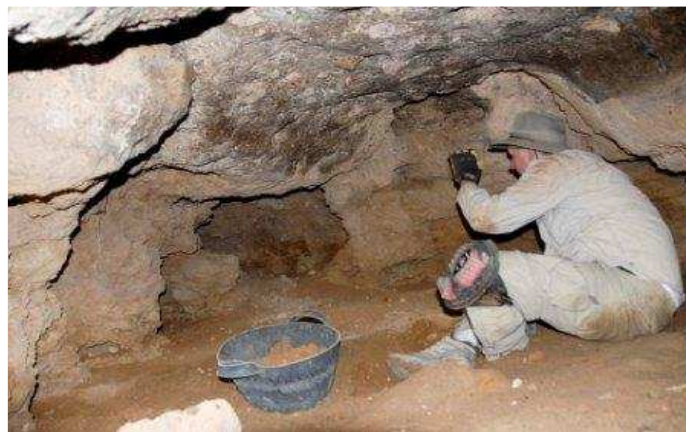


CLEANING THE CAST UP AT TOMB 55

Thank God, there were no creepy crawly things inside, as I have no desire to battle snakes with dustpan and guffah. We just had to confront dust storms of our own making. We braved the very warm confines with headlamps and dust masks, scooping the dirt into guffahs which were passed out of the cave and then screened outside.



NICE AND CLEAN INSIDE THE TOMB



KEN INSIDE TOMB 55

As we crawled into the cave we found it is much larger than we thought, extending at least twice as far back with chambers extending to either side for 6 to 12 feet. I think there is enough room to bury 20 people in this cave. But after a days' work, we determined that the cave had been robbed out, so we continued to clean up and to document the interior. As we cleaned up the last area, a piece of bone stuck out of our balk, and we found it to be a nearly-intact humerus (upper arm bone) that is likely human. So, we got 4 potsherds and an arm bone datable by C14 testing. A good day's work.



SIFTING AT TOMB 55



MASKS ARE PREFERRED BY SOME



LOOKING FOR SMALL THINGS LIKE BEADS IN THE SIFT



VISITORS!

Today we explored another tomb complex very close to Hammam which had clearly been robbed out. We dug through the robber's dirt pile and found a wonderful assortment of Bronze Age pottery. The thieves tossed out the pottery and all the bones onto the hillside. We skinned into the largest tomb and found a well-carved ceiling and lots of modern trash. After most of the trash was removed there was a visitor, a medium brown scorpion – with an attitude. My trowel made fast work of him. No other unwanted visitors appeared.

It seemed that this MBA shaft tomb might have an intact blocking stone in the entrance up hill, but after some excavation it appears that so much erosion and cracking of the rock made identification impossible. The whole original entrance area fell in as we dug into the decomposing rock. We finally hit the bottom of the tomb and found modern trash there, too. We got some great pottery, and we had a spectacular day. Time for a much needed shower.

Every season we learn more about the ancient cemeteries of Tall el-Hammam, and there always seems to be more questions generated with every answer. But that's the way archaeology works.

Steve McAllister, Field Archaeologist

P.S. Please forward this to whomever you like!

You can make donations to TeHEP at the TSU shopping website: www.shop.tsu-edu.us.

Donations can be mailed to: TSU; 5600 Eubank NE, Suite 130; Albuquerque, NM USA 87111.

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