

TELL HESBAN AND VICINITY IN THE IRON AGE

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Problem

Tell Hesban is a major archaeological ruin in central Transjordan, excavated from 1968-1976 by Andrews University. However, almost twenty-five years after the termination of this endeavor, a final report dealing with the Iron Age remains has not yet appeared. Although relatively little remains from the Iron Age, which is the earliest period represented on the tell, an understanding of what is left is nevertheless important for comprehending the role the site played in the region at this time.

Method

A historical research design has been used in this study. The excavated architectural and soil/debris layers were analyzed in order to isolate distinct strata. Their exact temporal parameters were arrived at by comparing representative samples of the ceramic remains gathered on the tell with those of the wider region. A reconstruction of the everyday life of the inhabitants of the tell and its environs was made by the integration of the available lines of evidence, some of which were obtained from the research of the scientific specialists who participated in this multidisciplinary effort. In addition, a study of the evolution of the excavation methodology was undertaken in order to understand the unique niche of the Heshbon Expedition within the development of "Processual Archaeology."

Conclusion

Six strata were isolated. The first and third settlements (Strata 21 and 19) of Iron Age I Hesban appear to have been small unfortified Reubenite villages, while Stratum 20 seems to have been a large fortified village. These villages appear to have relied upon a medium-intensity food-production regime of mixed agro-pastoralism, dependent on cereal cultivation and animal products. Cottage industries played a major role among the economic activities. Stratum 18 became a small town with a high intensity food-production regime extending its repertoire into olive, fruit, and wine production.

During Iron Age II, the site seems first to have been severely reduced in size as it became a Moabite squatter settlement of pastoralists (Stratum 17), and then to have blossomed under the Ammonites (Stratus 16) into a small but prosperous town based on a market economy.