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Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates River

Jebel Khalid is located on the west bank of the Euphrates River in northern Syria. This section of the Euphrates River, known as the 'Great Bend', has been strategically important for millennia. It was here, as related in the Egyptian chronicles, that the Pharaoh Thutmose III campaigned in the Late Bronze Age and it was here, in the early Hellenistic period that a garrison town was laid out to protect and control a section of the Euphrates where the river was hemmed in by steep cliffs. Importantly, the site of Jebel Khalid was unoccupied prior to the Hellenistic building program and it was largely abandoned during the Hellenistic period giving archaeologists a perfect opportunity to investigate a purely Hellenistic settlement. Since the 1980s the task of slowly uncovering the remains of Jebel Khalid has fallen to an Australian team led by Professor Graeme Clarke, Dr Heather Jackson and NEAF's President, Dr John Tidmarsh. In April/May of this year excavations continued at the site and the team were joined briefly by members of NEAF's tour to Syria when the site's directors kindly gave the NEAF members an in-depth tour of the site (along with a great lunch in the local village where the team stays). What follows is an abbreviated report by the excavation directors as they take us through the results of their 2008 field season.

AREA C (?Palaestra)

Professor Graeme Clarke

Work in the 2000 season (Meditarch 13, 2000, p.123) and the 2006 season (see Jebel Khalid 2006 Fieldwork Report, Meditarch 21, 2008, forthcoming) had together revealed the presence of a colonnaded building, on an alignment with the Jebel Khalid Temple but some 125m to its north, in a very central location within the



A view from the acropolis area of Jebel Khalid across the Euphrates River (artificially enlarged by modern dams).



The Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation was established at the University of Sydney in 1986 to promote research into the archaeology of the Middle East and North Africa. Activities include educational programmes, study tours, residential weekends, and an annual dinner. Support for research is through travel grants, fellowships, publication subsidies, and field programme finance.

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Professor Graeme Clarke shows NEAF members around the site of Jebel Khalid in early 2008.

settlement of Jebel Khalid. Previous excavation had revealed a north/south stylobate, 17.5m in length, with foundations for 8 columns, the corners consisting of massive cordiform (“heart-shaped”) columns. A short length of stylobate had also been cleared on the adjoining north E/W arm in the 2000 season and in the 2006 season on the adjoining south E/W arm the supporting piers for two columns were cleared to bedrock.

It was decided that in the 2008 season the full length of the south arm should be cleared: this should clarify both the length of the colonnade on the south side (and therefore probably on the north side as well) of this public building and determine whether the building was a pi-shaped Stoa (as Clarke wishfully maintained) or whether it was peristylar (as the sage Tidmarsh insisted that it was going to prove to be). Accordingly four trenches were opened in 2008 with the following results:

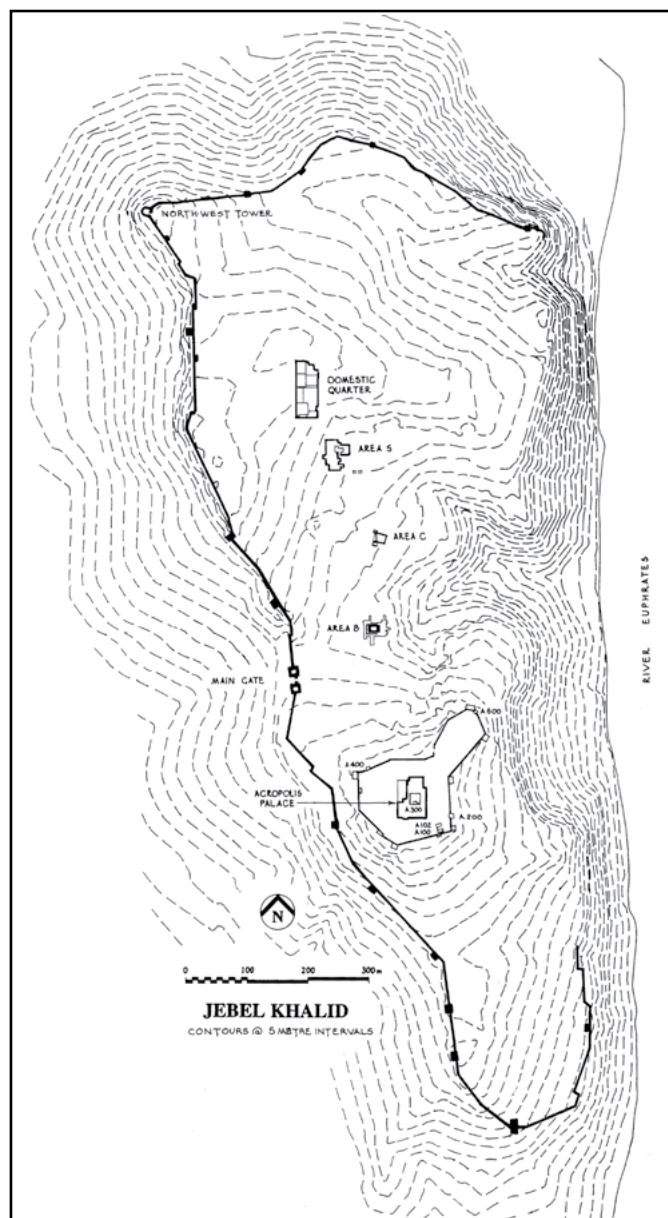
Like the north/south stylobate, this southern east/west stylobate is also 17.5m in length and also consisted of eight columns, each 2.35m apart (measured interaxially). Residual column bases were found in situ for all but one of the columns, sitting on square plinths, and with massive supporting piers going down in most cases some 2.5m~3m to bedrock. The plain residual column bases imply that the order was Doric. The bedrock cuttings clearly showed that the site had first served as a quarry and then had been subsequently built up with layer upon layer of limestone chippings from the quarrying operations to create the floor level. The final column along this stylobate at its western end (uncovered on the very last day of the dig, of course, in the very middle of the present road on the site!) consisted of two heart-shaped column drums still sitting on their square plinth identical in dimensions with the corner cordiform drums on the north/south stylobate. The implication is clear – and Tidmarsh was right! The building must be peristylar rather than pi-shaped. As Dr Nixon remarked: “The Life of Pi was short-lived at Jebel Khalid”.

Whilst the fill below the floor of the colonnade consisted

largely of sterile limestone chippings, Three diagnostic black-gloss sherds were recovered this season right on the bedrock. Dr. John Tidmarsh reports on their dating: “Two of the fragments (rim, floor) are part of same Attic vessel - a bowl with outturned rim. Shape and glaze and stamped palmettes are consistent with a date in first quarter of 3rd century BCE (probably c.290-275). The third fragment base is non-Attic (Antioch fabric) but its date is consistent with the above.” This accords with the five Attic sherds recovered in the 2006 excavations in a parallel context and further confirms a third-century BCE construction date for the building.

The courtyard floor consists of levelled bedrock with a very hard packed clay overlay. Embedded in this overlay was coin 08.312, identified as dating to Seleucos II [246-225 BCE], and helping to confirm the third-century construction period.

Secondary use of the building was everywhere apparent, with massive architrave blocks, c. 2.5m in length, re-used in secondary walling, likewise column drums (of a variable



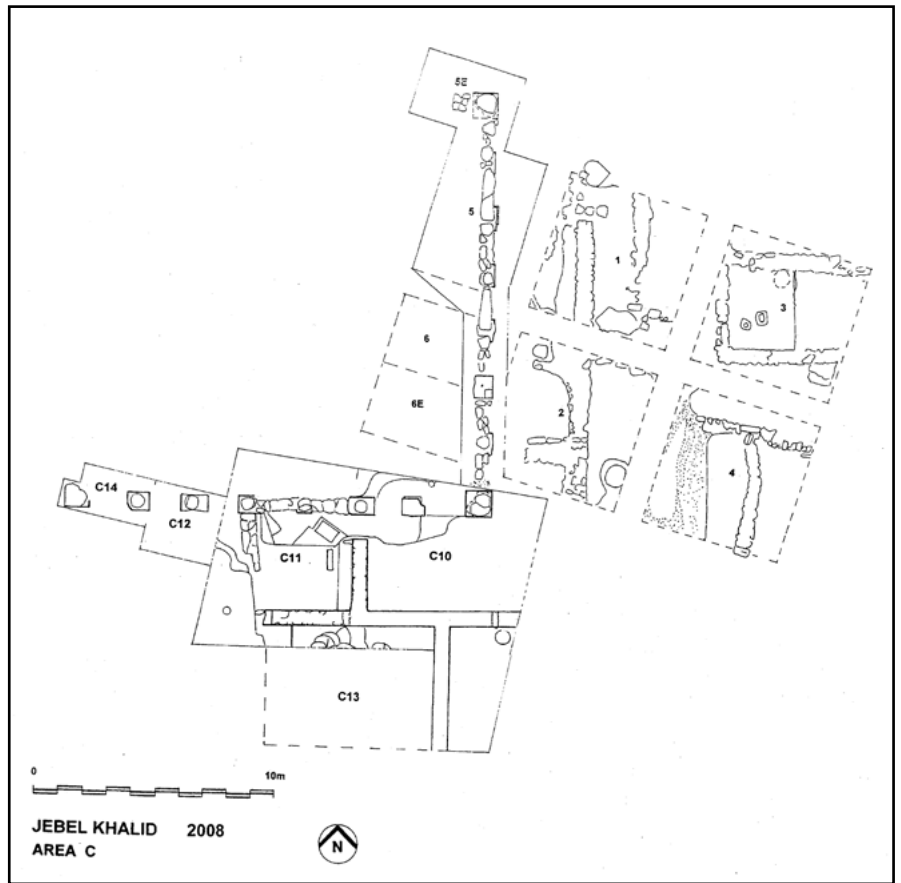
diameter of c. 65~75cm) – a further 11 unfluted drums, with chamfered edges, were recovered this season (showing some traces of plastering): a series of weak secondary fieldstone walls, running north/south, sitting on soil, subdivided the original colonnade on its south side.

Whilst it is clear that rooms opened off the colonnade (it is 4m deep) on this south arm the full dimensions of these rooms are yet to be determined - and whether any further rooms possibly opened beyond.

Little in the way of artefactual objects was recovered though a fragmentary strigil and a stone ball (limestone) are noteworthy (five lamp fragments recovered all belong to the course of the second century BCE). The pottery produced few fine wares or domestic wares (not one figurine fragment) and largely consisted of jugs, jars (at least 72), deep bowls (24), amphoras (17) - for the provision of oil?- and a noticeable collection of large water jars with pitched interior, a number of which were left in situ within the colonnade, still sitting in circular stands cut into the bedrock. The users of this area got very thirsty. This is not a domestic assemblage. The only feature uncovered is a large circular limestone basin set into the floor in one of the interior rooms opening off the southern arm of the colonnade (a *loutron*?).

Further work is required to verify the full lay-out of this important public building, especially on the north side of the court where traditionally a deeper (more sheltered) wing is to be found (cf. Vitruv. 5.11.1f.), but the most plausible conclusion is that Area C has produced a palaestra, with a central courtyard 17.5m square surrounded by a colonnade of 28 columns. So far as I am aware this is the first Hellenistic palaestra so far discovered in Hellenistic Syria – and illustrates, once more, the early high ambitions for the site entertained by the founders of Jebel Khalid, with the provision of a Greek-style combined physical training (especially for the contact sports of boxing and wrestling) and educational facility.

Finally, on behalf of the Excavation Directors I would like to thank all who helped make the 2008 season such a success. In particular we give our appreciation to the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, to its Director General, Dr Bassam Jamous, to the Director of Excavations, Dr Michel el Maqdissi, and to our Representative, Mr Hikmat Awad (Homs). Thanks to Dr. C. E. V. Nixon for the analysis of the coins. Area C plan by Barry Rowney.



Plan of the 2008 trenches in Area C, Jebel Khalid.

THE ACROPOLIS

Dr John Tidmarsh

In 2006, three plots were laid out on the southern extremity of the Acropolis (to the south of the Governor's Palace) to investigate a series of long, narrow structures, visible on the surface, which ran north-south and seemed to abut the south wall of the Acropolis. These structures appear to have been associated with the Acropolis fortifications and thus were possibly arsenals, storerooms, or barracks.

By the end of the 2008 season the structures in all three plots had been substantially delineated although further exploration to the east of the current plots is necessary for completion.

The 2008 excavations have confirmed the existence of four main phases of occupation. Phase II was represented by two large rooms (Rooms II.1 and II.2), constructed on bedrock and with floors of tamped earth, along with an adjacent courtyard (II.3). Room II.1 did not extend to the southern wall of the Acropolis but opened into an east-west corridor (c.2m wide) to its south. Although very little pottery or other artefacts were recovered from the corridor, its tamped earth and thin plaster surfaces were clearly earlier than Rooms II.1 and II.2; thus the corridor, which may have been in use from the time of the construction of the Acropolis wall in the 3rd century BCE, should be assigned to Phase I.

The second room, Room II.2, lay to the north of Room II.1; east of Room II.2 was a courtyard (II.3) with a thick plaster floor, tannur, two small plaster-lined storage bins and, in the south-west corner, the remains of a larger stone-lined