



A view over the domestic quarter at Jebel Khalid with the Euphrates River in the background.

JEBEL KHALID: A SELEUCID GARRISON ON THE EUPHRATES

In the course of his 11 year conquest of the Persian empire, Alexander the Great was said to have founded some 70 cities; subsequently his general and founder of the vast Seleucid empire, Selucus Nicator, settled a further 60 or more. Whilst it is probable that these numbers are exaggerated, there is no doubt that during Alexander's campaigns and the period that followed them a large number of Macedonians and other Greeks came to settle (voluntarily or otherwise) in the lands which stretched from the shores of the Mediterranean to the Hindu Kush. It remains a striking paradox, therefore, that despite this large influx of Greeks into the Levant and beyond our knowledge of Hellenistic cities in the East (particularly of their earliest phases) is so meagre. Even Alexandria, the greatest of Alexander's foundations, has revealed very few traces of its Hellenistic remains which lie largely hidden beneath the modern city.

Far to the east, in modern Afghanistan, a chance find near the modern village of Ai Khanoum in 1964 led to the discovery of what must have been a military outpost established on the left bank of the Amu Darya river (the ancient Oxus) during Alexander's campaigns or by Seleucus soon after. Its ancient name is still uncertain but, uniquely, it was founded on a virgin site and not re-occupied after

its inhabitants had been driven out by nomads around the mid-2nd century B.C. Thus, for the first time, archaeologists had the opportunity to investigate a purely Hellenistic settlement lying close to the surface and not subjected to destructive over-building. Subsequent excavations by the French uncovered a large palace and a gymnasium, as well as two temples, several private houses and a heroön. From this early work it became apparent that the settlement represented an intriguing amalgam of Greek and Eastern influence; however, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 brought work to a premature close and, tragically, the site has now been all but destroyed by some 30 years of constant looting.

On a rocky outcrop towering some 100m over the right bank of Euphrates River in northern Syria, Jebel Khalid bears a number of similarities to Ai Khanoum, not least being the fact that it too was founded on a virgin site and, with the exception of a very small Late Roman encampment, was not re-occupied following its (seemingly peaceful) abandonment around 70 B.C. Furthermore, as with Ai Khanoum, its ancient name is still uncertain. The lower courses of its beautifully constructed header-and-stretcher fortification wall (some 3.4 kms. on the landward side) are still in place whilst, when the light is right, the outlines

of the city lying just beneath the modern surface and arranged on a Hippodamian grid can easily be discerned - a tantalizing prospect for any archaeologist!

Under the direction of Emeritus Professor Graeme Clarke (ANU) and Dr. Heather Jackson (University of Melbourne), excavations have been in progress since 1987. Over this time an impressive Governor's Palace, perched high on the Acropolis and protected by its own fortification wall, a rather squat Doric temple (surrounded in its latest phase by a ring of sacrificial altars) and a complete housing *insula* have been uncovered whilst numerous graves (unfortunately mostly robbed) outside the walls to the west of the city have been investigated. At present, numismatic and ceramic evidence suggests that Jebel Khalid was founded not by Alexander but by Seleucus Nicator, no doubt to guard this strategic crossing point on the Euphrates.

I first visited Jebel Khalid in 1987 but, due to other commitments, was unable to become part of the team until some 10 years later. Along with publishing the imported wares from the site, I have been involved in the excavations themselves and this season (April-May 2006) began to investigate one of a series of rectangular

structures which would appear to be associated with the fortification wall in the southern sector of the Acropolis. It is still too early to determine whether these structures served as arsenals (similar to those on the Acropolis at Pergamon), storehouses or living quarters, but the evidence suggests a construction date in the 3rd century with further modifications during the second half of the 2nd century B.C.

Whilst the team at Jebel Khalid is much smaller than that at Pella, comprising some 15 excavators and specialists, the local work force is of similar size. Of the 60 or so workers (in contrast to Pella) a good proportion are women, often accompanied by their young babies - in fact, on some days the work site can resemble a giant crèche!

Although part of its 50 hectare area seems to have been unoccupied - a good proportion of the site seems to have served as a quarry for the stone utilized in its fortifications and buildings - there is no doubt that many important buildings still await investigation. Work over the ensuing seasons should thus give us a very clear indication as to how the earliest Hellenistic settlements in the East were planned and organised.

Dr. John Tidmarsh

PERSIAN GARDENS

Flying from Dubai to Tehran the land below looked mountainous and inhospitable. It turned out, however, that Iran is certainly mountainous but it is a most hospitable country. Travelling with the NEAF/ Continuing Education tour, Iran; the Magnificence of Persia, led so expertly by Ben Churcher, I was here to visit the ancient sites of Persepolis and Pasargadae and to further my research into the Persian garden and its antecedents - to see first hand these fabled gardens. Many of the eighteen people on the trip had travelled or dug together in the past. The members of the group brought various interest and experience to the tour but all shared a great interest in the archaeology and history of this ancient land.

Any anticipated angst from a security perspective disappeared before we left the airport as a result of the welcome from the immigration officers and the confidence instilled in us by our guide, Mahmoud. The perception that I had of a country that, while it had magnificent sites, was not intrinsically beautiful was blown away by the physical beauty of the country from the snow-capped mountains and shimmering rice paddies in the north to the extraordinary geological escarpments and turquoise rivers further south.

Travelling over 6000 km from Tehran to the Caspian Sea and south through the Zagros Mountains to the edge of the Gulf and then back through the Persian Gates to the high steppe and on to Shiraz and Isfahan we experienced just part of what this country had to offer. From the bazaars with their selection of magnificent carpets and edible wonders, to the stunning architecture and tile-work of the mosques of Isfahan to the jewel in the crown of ancient Persia, Persepolis, we were constantly surprised by what else Iran had to offer.

The surprises started with the first afternoon in Tehran and a visit to the Museum of Contemporary Art. Set in a wonderful modern building with the galleries spiralling down to a black pool of opalescent oil it displayed a



Ancient traditions linger on in the magnificent gardens of the Abbasi Hotel at Isfahan.