

Andrews University

## Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Faculty Publications

---

7-14-1977

### Five Seasons at Heshbon Part 3: Results of the 1976 "Dig"

Lawrence T. Geraty  
*Andrews University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Geraty, Lawrence T., "Five Seasons at Heshbon Part 3: Results of the 1976 "Dig"" (1977). *Faculty Publications*. 4166.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/4166>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

# Results of the 1976 "Dig"

---

The 1976 season proved to be the most rewarding thus far.

---

By LAWRENCE T. GERATY

REGULAR READERS OF THE REVIEW will be familiar with the progress, since 1968, of Andrews University's archeological excavation in Jordan at *Tell Heshban* (traditionally associated with Biblical Heshbon). First came the beginning of digging on the acropolis of the site. Then followed the addition of work in the ancient Roman and Byzantine period cemeteries in 1971. The third season, in 1973, saw the initiation of a thorough surface survey of the entire area within a six-mile radius of Heshbon. The attempt to test the validity of previously obtained occupation results on the acropolis by opening up trenches on the site's lower slopes was extended in 1974. The question, Of what value was a further season of work in 1976? may naturally arise.

The primary purpose of the fifth and probably final season of digging in 1976 was to complete adequately the work that had been started in earlier seasons. This meant an attempt to reach down through the debris accumulation of centuries to bedrock in all of the trenches previously opened on the acropolis, and in the process to expose more fully some of the important architectural remains that had been found. At the same time, we planned further work in the cemeteries (to look for tombs from Old Testament times), on the lower slopes (to see whether occupational evidence earlier than the acropolis' earliest—the period of the Judges—could be found), and in the archeological survey of the area surrounding Heshbon (to see whether there might be an alternate location for the capital city of Sihon the Amorite, which we have not found at *Tell Heshban*).

It is with a great deal of satisfaction that we can now look back at the concluding season's results, since, in terms of our objectives, they are the most important ever. We now know that there were altogether some 23 cities or strata superimposed one upon the other at Heshbon, covering a 2,700-year time span from the Biblical period of the Judges, about 1200 B.C., down to the Arab Mameluke period, about A.D. 1500.

In the very earliest period arrested at the site, about

---

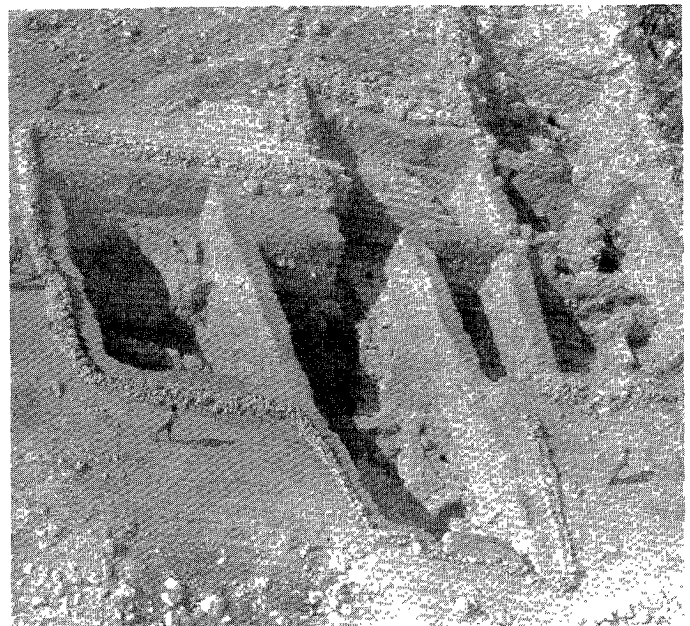
*Lawrence T. Geraty, Ph.D., is associate professor of Old Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

1200-1000 B.C. (which would, in Biblical terms, be during the period of the Judges), our evidence includes an installation that may be a reservoir, a plastered cistern, an abundance of pottery, ceramic loomweights, and an uninscribed seal with a typical Iron Age design. Though it may not seem like very much, it is enough to correlate with the Biblical evidence for the Reubenites or Gadites being in this area at that time.

From the succeeding Iron Age period, about 800-500 B.C., we have found (in addition to other remains) another reservoir, which appears to be the largest so far found on Jordan's East Bank. It has a capacity of 300,000 gallons! If our site is Biblical Heshbon, it is tempting to identify one or both of these reservoirs with the "pools . . . by the gate of Bath-rabbim" in Song of Solomon 7:4.

After a gap of some time, resulting undoubtedly from forces associated with the Babylonian exile, Heshbon was rebuilt, perhaps by the Maccabees. So between 250 and 63 B.C. the reservoirs were filled in and at least two defensive walls were built to protect the acropolis. More Hellenistic-period finds turned up in numerous rock-cut, dry-storage silos in which were discovered chaff and pyramid-shaped weights.

During New Testament times and the period of the early church (about 63 B.C.-A.D. 324), when Roman cul-



It is likely that the Iron Age reservoir unearthed at *Tell Heshban* is what was mentioned as the "fishpools in Heshbon" in Song of Solomon 7:4.

ture dominated Palestine, Heshbon was rebuilt several times, one rebuilding necessitated by a major earthquake in 31 B.C. Not only do we have finds from several domestic caves and at least two public buildings (one of them a Roman temple on the acropolis, with a monumental stairway leading up to it from the lower town), but also from several tombs in the Roman cemetery. Two of these tombs were closed with rolling stones similar to Jesus' tomb described in the Gospels. Scores of whole pots, glass vessels, coins, and pieces of jewelry came out of the Roman cemetery; coupled with the finds in the town, they illustrate well daily life in the time of Jesus and the apostles.

The most impressive architecture discovered from the Byzantine period (A.D. 324-661), the time when this region was dominated by a "Christian" empire, belonged to three Christian churches—one in the east, one to the north, and one on the summit of the acropolis. The latter was excavated down to its foundations; it contained several interior mosaic floors and was surrounded by a fine flagstone floor at one stage. A kiln located nearby was used apparently for the slaking of lime to plaster this church. On the stairway leading up to the church was found the prize artistic find of the final season: a finely executed ivory plaque depicting Prometheus bound. True to the ancient myth, he stands with wrists bound to the rocks above him while a vulture eats out his entrails—a punishment for his having given man the secret of fire. Another unique find was a four-spouted lamp whose handle ends in the eye and beak of a bird.

Though the earliest Arabic periods (the Umayyad and Abbasid, A.D. 661-969) succeeded the Byzantine at Heshbon, leaving evidence of domestic occupation primarily, there then appears to be a gap in occupation of about 200 years before the city was rebuilt in the Ayyubid/Mameluke period (A.D. 1200-1456), experiencing a renaissance just after the Crusades. Evidence of this Arab building activity was ubiquitous. Above the ground were a series of vaulted rooms surrounding a courtyard, and a large complex of domestic buildings with well-preserved walls, intact floors and thresholds, and numerous artifacts, as well as a practically intact bath complex associated with another flagstone courtyard and its surrounding rooms. Below the ground were numerous cisterns—many of them interconnected—and several caves used for habitation. The largest of these was some 300 feet in extent and in some places two stories high.

### New Types of Scientific Data

One of the most important aspects of our work in 1976 was the collection and analysis of new types of scientific data that have not been traditionally emphasized in Palestinian digs. This included environmental and ethnographic fieldwork among sheep- and goat-keeping households, along with studies of the local geological, zoological, botanical, and meteorological environment. An attempt to trace the subsistence practices at Heshbon throughout its occupational history was aided by the

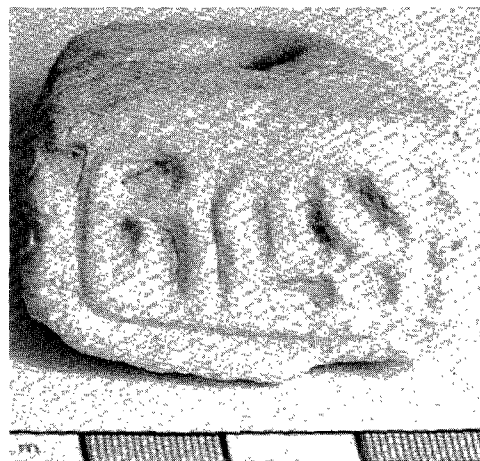
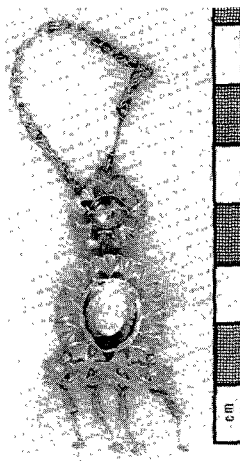
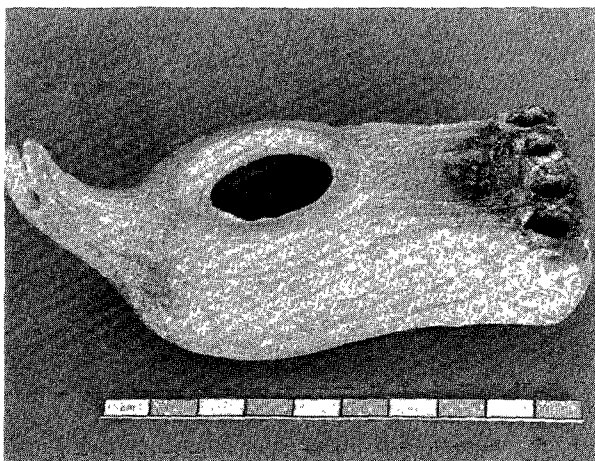
identification and individual description of more than 50,000 animal bones. Certain rare species represented in the inventory included wild boar, Mesopotamian fallow deer, lion (from the Roman period), red deer, and possibly Indian humped-back cattle. It is of interest that most of these species required lush vegetation than now exists around Heshbon. The hundreds of land snails, mollusks, carbonized seeds, and other organic material yielded by dry and wet sieving will furnish additional evidence for reconstructing the natural environment of each of the occupational periods at Heshbon and reaching conclusions about human adaptation and about the development of the animals themselves at Heshbon, based upon the cumulative evidence of zooarcheological analysis of human (200 skeletons) and animal remains and of other environmental, archeological, and ethnographic data.

During further search in the town's cemeteries, no tombs earlier than the Roman period were found, though several Roman and Byzantine tombs of new types were excavated.

In summary, then, we can now look back at our five seasons of work at Heshbon and see them as successful in terms of producing a representative cross section of the occupation history of the site from its apparent beginning, at about 1200 B.C., to its ending, at about A.D. 1500. And we can do more than describe simply the architecture of the successive towns at the site; we can often also reconstruct what daily life was like and suggest the kind of environment in which the inhabitants did their work. If our site is indeed Biblical Heshbon, as has



About five miles southeast of *Tell Hesban* is *Jalul*, its ancient name unknown. It was possibly the capital of *Sihon*, king of the Amorites.



Among the various items archeologists found in the 23 cities or strata superimposed one upon the other at Heshbon were a Byzantine four-spouted lamp whose handle ends in the eye and beak of a bird, a delicate golden earring from a Roman tomb, and a stone seal from Old Testament times.

always been thought, then our archeological evidence can be correlated well with the Biblical and other literary requirements from the period of the Judges on.

But the one big question that our work leaves unresolved is the location of the Amorite capital of Sihon from the time of Moses. Numbers 21 states that Heshbon was the first city to be destroyed in the Israelite settlement of Canaan. As already mentioned, the earliest town at the site of *Tell Hesban* appears to date from about 1200 B.C.—the time of the Judges—about 200 years after the Biblical date for Sihon (see 1 Kings 6:1). Since this conclusion was apparent as early as 1971, in the third season of work, we began to put in test trenches in areas of the ancient city where we had not yet dug, hoping to find at least some evidence for an earlier occupation. Though we continued this effort during the fourth and fifth seasons, nothing that could be dated earlier than 1200 B.C. was discovered.

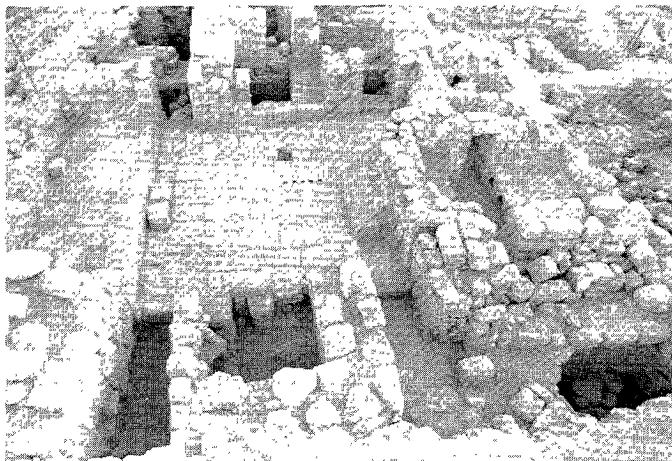
### Still Looking for Biblical Heshbon

We wondered also whether the name of Heshbon had moved to *Tell Hesban* from a nearby site that had been the original capital of Sihon. (This phenomenon was common in the ancient world—Jericho being only one obvious example.) To check out that suggestion, we began also in our third season the systematic surface survey of all the territory within a six- to ten-mile radius of *Tell Hesban*. Altogether, some 155 archeological sites were mapped during the three seasons of the survey, but only one seemed to meet the requirements for an alternate site for Amorite Heshbon. About five miles southeast of *Tell Hesban* is Jalul, one of central Jordan's major mounds, its ancient name unknown. From its location, size, impressive remains, and surface potsherds (including quantities from the late Bronze Age, the time of the Amorites), it is a likely candidate and deserves to be excavated.

In the near future, Andrews University may decide to begin work at Jalul. In the meantime, however, the excavation staff is committed to publishing adequately in final form the wealth of archeological data that has emerged from five seasons of digging at *Tell Hesban*.

Next week we will conclude by focusing on the lasting influences for which the dig is responsible. □

*To be concluded*



One of the discoveries from the Mameluke period was a courtyard complex of buildings associated with a well-preserved bathhouse on the right.

## For the Younger Set

### Gran-1's Lesson



By DOROTHY SIMMS

THE BANG against the house brought grandma out of her chair just in time to see Barry pick up a rock.

"No, Barry!"

"But Gran-1—" sputtered her grandson as he walked toward her.

"Barry, what did I tell you this morning about throwing rocks?"

"You said I might break a window or hurt someone."

"I also said you would have to sit on a chair the next time, didn't I?"

"Y-y-yes."

A few minutes later grandma heard a very soft "Gran-1?"

She had been so deep in thought that only when she heard the soft voice saying "Gran-1" did she realize Barry had been trying to tell her something. He had called her Gran-1 instead of Grandma ever since he started talking. Now, seeing his tear-filled eyes, she felt her heart go soft.

"Yes, Barry?" she asked gently as she knelt beside him, taking his small hand in hers.

"Gran-1, those girls were throwing rocks at me. I was only throwing them back."

"Were you angry when you threw the rocks?"

"No, but those girls were!"

"Why were they angry?" grandma persisted.

"'Cause I wanted to play

with them, but they said I couldn't. Then they threw rocks at me. I threw the rocks back so they would throw them at me again."

"But why?"

"Well—at least they were playing with me."

"I doubt whether that was what they had in mind. Since they are girls, they probably wanted to play dolls."

"Do you think Jesus would want me to throw the rocks back?"

"No, Barry, He wouldn't."

"How do you know, Gran-1?"

"Do you remember what Jesus said to His Father before He died on the cross?"

"Uh-uh."

"He said, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'"

"You mean I should forgive them for throwing rocks at me?"

"Yes, dear, you should. And the girls should forgive you too."

"You mean they thought I was angry when I threw the rocks back?"

"It's possible. To go to heaven we need to be more like Jesus."

"Gran-1? May I go tell them I'm sorry and that I forgive them?"

"Yes, you may. I know that would make you feel better and please Jesus too."

Soon grandma heard squeals of laughter as Barry and the girls played ball.