ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE IN THE JERICHO OASIS

A systematic catalogue of archaeological sites for the sake of their protection and cultural valorisation

Edited by LORENZO NIGRO - MAURA SALA - HAMDAN TAHA

ROME 2011
«LA SAPIENZA» EXPEDITION TO PALESTINE & JORDAN
[PADI S I]

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with contributions by

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0. Premise: protection of archaeological sites in the Jericho Oasis [by Lorenzo Nigro]

Since the Oslo (1993) and Madrid (1994) Peace Agreements, the area of the district of Ariha was handed back to the Palestinian National Authority. Monuments, antiquities and other pieces of Cultural Heritage of the Jericho area, thus, fell under the responsibility and administration of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, and, more precisely, of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (MOTA-DACH) of the PNA. However, since the land passed under the administration of Palestinians, territory was classified in three areas (A, B, C), and the almost full control of it was possible only in Area A. Not only safeguard, protection and rehabilitation, but even ordinary administration of archaeological and cultural sites were made very difficult by basic problems such as the topographic unity of the sites on the field, their availability and necessary documentation, as well as the contemporary development of the city of Ariha (after decades of occupation), with building activities invading – sometimes cancelling or drastically modifying – cultural and archaeological areas. The absence of a dedicated law, notwithstanding the adhesion to UNESCO rules, also hampered a direct safeguard of this conspicuous cultural patrimony.

This difficult situation followed twenty-five years (1967-1993) of almost complete abandonment of archaeological sites. In fact, Tell es-Sultan/Jericho (site cat. n. 85) was, for obvious reasons, included in the sites under the administration of the Israeli National Park Authority (with interventions which aimed at the tourist exploitation of the site, but caused severe damages to monuments on it), while other major sites, like Qasr Hisham (site cat. n. 50) and the northern part of Hasmonean and Herod’s palatial complex (site cat. n. 1), remained as like as they were under Jordanian administration or even before the Second World War. Only the ancient Synagogue of Shahwan (site cat. n. 53) was restored, albeit in a very inadequate way.

A dramatic moment coincided with the political hiatus in 1993-1994, when Israeli authorities virtually abandoned territorial control, and the absence of any law and authority caused tragic damages to archaeological sites (for example, a large part of the Middle Bronze I-II Lower Town of the ancient city of Tell es-Sultan was cleared off by bulldozers for the realization of a parking, etc.). Especially the main necropolis of Tell es-Sultan suffered one of its most radical cyclic systematic plundering.

When in 1997 the Pilot Project of rehabilitation of Tell es-Sultan started, there were many issues still threatening antiquities and cultural sites in the Jericho Oasis, and the MOTA-DACH, as well as the local office of the
Ministry of Tourism, could hardly face such threaten, notwithstanding an heroic commitment to protect so many sites. For this reason, Rome “La Sapienza” Expedition to Palestine, which had the privilege of collaborate with the MOTA-DACH on the site of Tell es-Sultan/ancient Jericho, one of the few sites completely falling within Area A, has felt as extremely urgent to rewrite\textsuperscript{1} a comprehensive list of archaeological and historic-cultural sites in the Jericho Oasis, in order to preserve and safeguard them.

There were several degrees of threatening: the immediate one is that involving the direct protection of sites; another is the preservation of scientific information – including its objectivity – in a very complex political context. These challenges made it very hard to achieve the task.

For all these reasons, we decided to entrust our catalogue of sites to a real book, even if a web site with maps perhaps would be today more convenient. However, a solid book give us the impression to survive longer than a web page. Moreover, during the collection of scientific data we found many basic information on books of the past, and this influenced our choice. The on-line version of this book, in the web site of the Jericho Expedition (www.lasapienzatojericho.it/PADIS) will be further updated, but what we consider available reliable data are fully illustrated in this volume. Their aim is to indicate what needs to be protected for the sake of preservation of cultural Heritage of Humankind.

\textbf{0.1. General framework of the Project}

A comprehensive catalogue of historical and archaeological sites in the Jericho Oasis was the aim of a joint effort of the Italian-Palestinian Expedition to Tell es-Sultan (fig. 0.1). The vast majority of scrutinized sites were already known in geographic and archaeological literature, as well as in ancient accounts of pilgrims and voyagers (see §§ 2.1.-2.3.), so that the work consisted in a systematic collection of such references, and in careful check of the situation on the ground. Many sites unfortunately disappeared.

\textsuperscript{1} List of sites in the Jericho Oasis are given by some of the pioneeristic topographers of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, as like as E. Robinson, V.H. Guérin and C. Clermont-Ganneau, and then by C.R. Conder and H.H. Kitchener (1883), who firstly systematically survey ancient Palestine, reordering around 9000 Arab toponyms (see § 2.3.3.). An extensive exploration and registration of the monasteries in the plain south and east of Jericho was carried out by Father J.L. Féderlin at the end of 19\textsuperscript{th} century, but the most complete list of sites in the Jericho Oasis is, nonetheless, that compiled in the 1950ies by Father Augustin Augustinović in his work \textit{Gerico e Dintorni} (see § 2.5.).
under modern edification or due to infrastructures and building activities; many other are simply concealed under modern layers of debris. Only a few sites are still visible and, even less, are safe under the MOTA-DACH control. All of them have been included in the catalogue, intended as a scientific complete data bank concerning human occupation in the Jericho Oasis from prehistoric up modern times.

Since the aim of the PADIS²/Jericho Oasis was to contribute to cultural Heritage safeguard and to offer a valid scientific tool to archaeologists and historians, a specific attention was devoted to site dating, re-examining when possible material and remains available. This means, of course, that sites were enlisted using a unique periodization (see tab. 1.1), which is based upon the stratigraphy and chronology of major key sites in the oasis (pl. II).

As regards toponomastic, modern names in Arabic were privileged, usually with a simplified writing due to Latin characters; the correspondence with ancient names is always indicated, when supported by epigraphic evidence or suggested by sources or scholars (the range of availability of these identifications is specified in each single case).

0.1.1. The method and the database
A study group including PhD, PhD students and MA students was constituted and research was carried on in archaeological, epigraphic and literary sources, successively checked directly on the field, in at least ten years of surveys investigations, made possible by the cooperation of the personnel of the MOTA-DACH and local Authorities. During this work we came across several unknown data, which were included into the databank. Data were filed in a database, who subsequently worked as basis for the catalogue of sites listed in this book. Moreover, in years 1997-1998 the MOTA-DACH carried out a survey of the Jericho Oasis in cooperation with the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Jerusalem.

0.1.2. Articulation of the present volume
The structure of the present volume is very simple. After a general introduction (Chapter 1), which indicates conventions used in site classification and study, Chapter 2 illustrates all sources available on human historical interest and archaeological activities in the Jericho Oasis, since earliest pilgrims’ accounts and travellers’, up too more recent archaeological explorations. This chapter also shows which were the main sources of information for the volume.

² The Palestine Archaeological Databank and Information System.
Chapter 3 is the systematic catalogue of sites, organized in alphabetic order, and following a well defined record. First, a complete list of sites is presented (§ 3.1.), followed by the detailed catalogue of all of them (§ 3.2.). For the sake of a fast reading bibliographic references of each site are provided in Chapter 4. Appendix A, by H. Taha, provides an invaluable report on recent excavations and discoveries by the MOTA-DACH in the Jericho Oasis; Appendix B is an overall presentation of Hellenistic and Roman Periods in the Oasis by W. Hamamrah.

0.1.3. Site records
Sites are indicated with their name in Arabic and English transliteration (§ 3.1.). In the catalogue (§ 3.2.), they are given an absolute PADIS number, followed by the site ancient name (when present), geographic coordinates and elevation of their location, site extension, registered modern disturbance, and recorded occupational periods.

For each recorded occupational period, a detailed catalogue of relative archaeological evidence is listed: site typology, public architecture, domestic architecture, funerary architecture, and material culture, arranged according to main categories of finds. A thorough list of bibliographic references follows each occupational period.

Fig. 0.1 - General view of the Jericho Oasis from Jebel Quruntul.

3 It was not possible to check the exact location of each site with GPS (due to the location of sites and the presence of inaccessible areas), so that in some cases coordinates were derived from geo-referenced satellite maps.
Acknowledgements

The PADIS Project (= “The Palestine Archaeological Databank and Information System”) was made possible by the strict cooperation with the MOTA-DACH, and especially a group of Palestinian archaeologists who contributed to the description and monitoring of sites in the Jericho Oasis: Iyad Hamdan (responsible of Jericho Office, MOTA-DACH), Jehad Yasin (archaeologist, MOTA-DACH), Mohammed Ghayyada (archaeologist, MOTA-DACH) and Wael Hamamreh (archaeologist, MOTA-DACH).

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The Palestinian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Dr. Khouloud Daibes-Abu Dayyeh, followed the work of the Expedition to Tell es-Sultan and supported the present effort of extending the safeguard of archaeological sites to the whole Oasis of Jericho. She also deserves our deepest thank.

A special thank is addressed to the population of the modern city of Ariha, who were attracted and sometimes participated into the surveys, showing a high sensitivity towards the identification and protection of archaeological monuments inside the “oldest city of the world”.

Lorenzo Nigro

Rome, 20\textsuperscript{th} December 2010