



Fig. 20. General view of the Khirbet Fahl tell, looking NW. The Area XXXII South Field is center left on the tell edge, and the Area XXIII Central Field is center-right on the top of the tell.

## PELLA

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Excavations at Pella (Tabaqat Fahl) took place in January and February 2017, the twenty-ninth season of Sydney University work at the site, and concentrated on three main areas, all previously worked (Fig. 20).

**South Field (Area XXXII):** In the deep sounding (Trench XXXIIBB) west of the Fortress Temple, excavations explored the Late Middle Bronze I period (ca. 1800 B.C.) foundational deposits of what seems likely to be a “Courtyard Palace” form of public structure, the exact function of which remains a matter of continued debate. In deep soundings below constructional surfaces, Early Bronze II (ca. 3000 B.C.) building remains of some grandeur were excavated, and in smaller soundings below these, deposits containing later prehistoric (ca. 5000–4000 B.C.) materials were encountered before excavations concluded.

In a long (10 x 2 m) exploratory probe (Trench XXXIIF) into the northern face of the deep sounding northwest of the Fortress Temple, the northern monumental entranceway to the Iron Age Civic Building (see Fig. 21a for related object) was finally discovered some 7 m north of 2015 baulks. Structural remains include a long north–south border wall, flanked by rough stone paving and plaster flooring on its exterior (west) side, accompanied by a line of field-stone column bases positioned against the inner (east) face. These structural remains are likely to be part of the east end of a monumental entranceway into the Civic Building (Fig. 21b for related object), lying perhaps 5 m further to the northwest.

**Central Field (Area XXIII):** In the central mound area (Trench XXIIID), work continued on the Late Hellenistic town house excavations, removing the last Late Roman deposits before exposing another 5 x 5 m area of the Late Hellenistic phase of the very large town house, under excavation since 2011. Further evidence for the

extensive Hasmonean period (ca. 83/80 B.C.) destruction of the site was recovered. A deep sounding sampled two earlier phases of Seleucid (2nd–1st century B.C.) occupation, but no trace of Ptolemaic (3rd Century B.C.) occupation.

A new 5 x 7 m exposure (Trench XXIIIF) was opened about 15 m south of the main Hellenistic period exposure, to examine a large complex of buildings, long suspected of being related to the Mamluk-era mosque (Area XVII) excavated in 1982. This first exploratory trench aimed to date the outer south wall of the complex (visible on the surface), and to begin exploring the nature and sequence of the buildings within the complex. This season three walls (and two rooms) of one major structure (featuring collapsed arches) were examined, displaying three phases of construction and rebuilding, all dating to the Mamluk period, probably stretching over the 13th–15th centuries A.D. Finds included two decorated bronze spoons (Fig. 21c) and a pair of tweezers, and a complete small bronze “incantation” bowl, which together might be characterized as a “medical” toolkit. The complex might be seen as a hospice, dedicated to the welfare of travelers and the local populace.

Tell Husn East Summit (Area XXXIV): On the northeast corner of the Husn summit (Trench XXXIVF), work continued south of the 3.6 m thick mudbrick circuit wall explored in 2013 and 2015, concentrating on the lower two phases of Early Bronze I (EB I) architecture (ca. 3800–3400 B.C.), both pre-dating the circuit wall and associated rubble-stone platforms. The penultimate EB I phase of rectilinear architecture was built upon a huge east–west terrace wall, supporting a substantial multi-roomed dwelling. The earliest architectural phase proved to be apsidal (“sausage-shaped”) in form. While much of the interior of this dwelling remains under the standing west baulk, associated exterior work surfaces, pits, postholes, channels and clay features were exposed, many seemingly involved in olive processing. Below the EB IA deposits, traces of earlier Chalcolithic period occupation (ca. 4000 B.C.) were detected in deep pits cut into the bedrock.

The 2017 excavations on Husn extend the EB occupational sequence back to 3800 B.C., suggesting more than a millennium of EB occupation on the Husn east summit, much of it associated with massive stone architecture. Further work in the Middle and Late Bronze Age Palatial Residence, and in the Iron Age II Civic Building above it, illustrates both the longevity and sophistication of Pella during the Bronze and Iron Ages. The Hellenistic “town-house” excavations on the central tell underline the intensity of the Seleucid re-urbanization process in the Decapolis cities, and the sophistication of urban life during this period. Finally, the strength and importance of the Mamluk-era resettlement of Pella is underlined by the discovery of a hospice-complex, associated with the previously known mosque.

Fig. 21a (top). Gray-green steatite bowl fragment, featuring carved palmettes. From Iron II Civic Building destruction phase, ca. 850 B.C.

Fig. 21b (right). Rhodian amphora. From Hellenistic destruction, ca. 80 B.C.

Fig. 21c (bottom). Bronze Spatulae, featuring molded geometric decoration on handle. From Mamluk Building destruction, ca. 1350 A.D.

