

IRANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY: PARTHIAN

Parthian Temple from Tell-e Tuneinir, Syria

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Photographic Credit: Professor David Hanlon, SLCC-MC

Introduction:

Report on the 1987-2004 campaigns at Tell Tuneinir, Syria. Rescue excavations have been conducted in twelve different areas of the site. Research objectives include the definition of the city's Islamic Period commercial structures, identification of features related to the church and monastery used by a Syriac speaking congregation, and investigation of various pre-Islamic strata.



A pre-Islamic destruction episode was discovered by Mark Hartmann (now Dr. Hartmann at the University of Arkansas) during the first excavation season in 1987.

Additional walls and floor surfaces associated with this episode were investigated during 1995 and 1996. Fragments of a blue glazed Parthian style jug with twisted handle were found in the destruction fill as well as sherds decorated with the distinctive Parthian motif, a zigzag pattern, incised around the shoulder of an unglazed jar. One inscription consists of 3 letters written in the

Parthian script typical of the second and third century A.D.



Hadar Seeloo, foreman of the Syrian workmen in Area 1, carefully exposed the a Parthian altar that was attached to the north wall of the temple. Several pottery jars and a bowl were discovered in front of the altar; we interpret the pottery jars and bowl as ritual offerings. A half dozen inscriptions on the shoulder of the jars refer to measures of volume. Our assumption, based on the high temperature fire that burnt in the temple, is that the jars contained olive oil.



Rian Thum supervised the excavation of a mudbrick temple constructed during the Parthian Period.



Liza Alesi and Rian Thum draw the mudbricks in the Parthian wall



The identification of the mudbrick temple with the Parthian culture is based upon the distinctively decorated unglazed and glazed Parthian pottery wares found inside the structure. Rocker pattern storage jar sherds were found in the fill within the temple



Bodysherds with fragments of Parthian letters written with tar on the exterior of tar-lined storage jars. Found in loci 126006 and 126015 by Dr. Michael Fuller. The Parthian loci were excavated by Michael Fuller (in 1995), Rian Thum (in 1996), and Chip Clatto and Louis Naes (in 1997).



Aramaic script was used by the Parthians at Tell Tuneinir to label the tar-lined storage jars in loci 126006 and 126015



Parthian Altar in final photograph.



Patera (offering bowl) in situ on the Parthian altar



Chip Clatto supervised the dismantling of the Parthian temple structure. It was necessary to explore the building beneath the temple.

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