



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

**SAPIENZA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
REGION**

Agreements on Cultural and Scientific
Cooperation: Programs and Projects

SAPIENZA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION
Agreements on Cultural and Scientific
Cooperation: programs and projects

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THE CITY OF COPPER AXES: ARCHEOLOGICAL RESEARCH, RESTORATIONS AND TRAINING IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE SITE OF KHIRBET AL-BATRAWY

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Pilot Project: excavations, restorations and valorization, and training of local staff (2010-2012)

Introduction: The Discovery of the City of Batrawy

The city of Khirbet al-Batrawy represents a rare example of an early urban center arising in a peripheral area of the ancient Near East at the dawn of urban civilization in the third millennium BC. The discovery of Batrawy in 2004 by a Rome Sapienza Expedition, and the findings at the Royal Palace in 2009, opened up new perspectives on the inhabitation and settlement of these fringe regions, especially in the period before the domestication of the camel.

Exploration of the "Palace of Copper Axes" and of the City-Walls

The planning activities for exploration moved from the discovery in 2009 of the Royal Palace (the "Palace of copper axes"), a public building of the third millennium BC which has provided a wealth of data and findings in an extraordinary state of preservation. Field operations have focused on the completion of the excavation at the Western Pavilion of the Palace, where beside the finding of whole vessels and valuable objects, faunal and paleobotanical remains have also been sampled for chemical-physical analyses, which involves: C-14 dating, pollen analyses, isotope analysis for metal artifacts, thermoluminescence.

A second aim of the Expedition has been the exploration of the well-preserved great city-walls in Area B North, just north of the Royal Palace. The excavations have been carried out towards the west, exploring the triple line of fortifications with its projecting towers and bastions.

Training of Local Personnel

In cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, the project for training local personnel for possible tourism in the site is carried out, with the realization of paths and panels; while the formation of local restorers focuses on the restoration of ceramic materials and stone structures.

Local Museum

Activities for the creation of a future museum hosting a collection of all the objects which have been found has been established in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities, and has begun with a systematic restoration of the artifacts, in particular the findings from the "Palace of copper axes".

PROJECT PHASES

The project is being carried out with annual campaigns of six weeks during the months of May-June.

RESULTS

Until 2004, no one could have imagined that an ancient city (from the beginning of the third millennium BC) had risen on the hill of Batrawy, a rocky cliff now in the northern periphery of the modern city of Zarqa in north-central Jordan. In December

2004 the archaeological Expedition to Palestine and Jordan from Sapienza, during a survey along the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa Valley, discovered a human settlement on this hilltop. Since spring 2005, with the collaboration of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, systematic excavations began at the site and immediately revealed a fortified city with massive defensive structures. Researches have so far been able to define the main stages of development of the ancient city, founded at the beginning of the third millennium BC, as the pivotal center of the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa Valley, and in a strategic position to control the ford across the river, located in a hinge between the desert, a hilly plateau and irrigated valleys, capable of controlling commercial routes and a vast and rich territory, which integrated sedentary agricultural production, herding, trade. In previous campaigns (2005-2009) at Khirbet al-Batrawy, the EB II-III (3000-2300 BC) city-walls, the city-gate, the temple on the eastern terrace, and a series of houses and public buildings were all brought to light inside the city, which was destroyed by a fierce fire around 2300 BC, and reoccupied by a rural village in the last two centuries of the third millennium BC.

During the 2010-2012 campaigns a large building, which proved to be the EB IIIB Royal Palace (the "Palace of copper axes"), was discovered just inside the city-gate. It consisted of several pavilions and yielded a large amount of findings in an extraordinary state of preservation, due to the fierce fire which destroyed the city. So far, works have involved the excavation of the pillared hall, the rectangular storeroom, and the central hall of the Western Pavilion (maybe the audience hall of the Palace). More recently works have also moved to the western courtyard, which is still being excavated. Among the findings, it is worth mentioning the presence of ceremonial vessels (including two jars decorated with applied figures of snakes and scorpions), five copper axes, bone objects, potter's wheels, an Egyptian siltstone palette, and a four-string necklace of about 650 beads in amethyst, carnelian, rock crystal, frit, bone, shell and copper. Findings point to a flourishing center, able to import metal (copper) objects, and precious stones, at that time symbols of economic wealth and political power of the ruling class. The discovery of some Egyptian items (a "Lotus Vase" and the siltstone palette) also reinforced the image of an urban center capable of establishing long-distance contacts, up to the Egypt of the earliest Pharaonic dynasties.

The excavations at the monumental northern fortifications have, instead, brought to light a complex defense system with a triple line of fortification, which reaches the overall thickness of about 20 m, with projecting towers and bastions built in large limestone blocks. This defense system protected the main city-gate.

The Expeditions have carried out systematic restorations on all the monuments brought to light, creating an Archaeological Park.

CONFERENCES, SEMINARS AND SYMPOSIUMS

- International conference 7ICAANE (London, 12-17 April 2010)
 - 11th International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan (Paris, 7-12 June 2010)
 - Conference "In the Palace of copper axes" (Rome, Sapienza, October 25, 2010)
- The copper axes, restored by the ISCR in Rome, were object of a temporary exhibition at the Musei Capitolini between February 24 - April 24, 2011, and are now placed on permanent exhibition in the National Museum of the Citadel of Amman.

- Conference at the Louvre Museum (Paris, May 9, 2011)
- International conference "Egypt and the Southern Levant in the Early Bronze Age" (Berlin, German Archaeological Institute, 14-16 September 2011).
- International conference "Copper and Trade in Southern-eastern Mediterranean" (Kraków, 5 to 7 May 2012)
- 12th International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan (Berlin, 5-10 May 2013)

SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS (2010-2012)

Nigro L., (2012), *Khirbet al-Batrāwī III. The EB II-III triple fortification line and the EB IIIB quarter inside the city-wall. Preliminary report of the fourth (2008) and fifth (2009) seasons of excavations* (Rome «La Sapienza» Studies on the Archaeology of Palestine & Transjordan, 8), Rome 2012.

Nigro L., (2012), *Khirbet al-Batrāwī*, American Journal of Archaeology 116/4, pp. 705-706.

Nigro L., Sala M., (2012), *Preliminary Report of the Sixth Season (2011) of Excavations by the University of Rome "La Sapienza" at Khirbat al-Batrāwī (Upper Wādī az-Zarqā')*, in Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan 56.

Nigro L. (2012), *Khirbet al-Batrāwī: Rise, Flourish and Collapse of an Early Bronze Age City in Jordan*, in R. Matthews - J. Curtis (eds), Proceedings of the 7th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East. 12 April – 16 April 2010, the British Museum and UCL, London, Wiesbaden 2012, Volume 1, pp. 609-628.

Nigro L. (2012), *An EB IIIB (2500-2300 BC) gemstones necklace from the Palace of the Copper Axes at Khirbet al-Batrāwī, Jordan*, in Vicino Oriente XVI (2012), pp. 227-243.

Nigro L., (2011), *Dominating the River: Khirbet al-Batrāwī, an EB II-III City in North-Central Jordan*, in Syria 88, pp. 59-74.

Nigro L., Sala M., (2011) *Preliminary Report of the Sixth Season (2010) of Excavations by the University of Rome "La Sapienza" at Khirbat al-Batrāwī (Upper Wādī az-Zarqā')*, in Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan 55 (2011), pp. 85-100.

Nigro L., (2010), *In the Palace of the Copper Axes/ Nel Palazzo delle Asce di Rame. Khirbet al-Batrāwī: the discovery of a forgotten city of the III millennium BC in Jordan/Khirbet al-Batrāwī: la scoperta di una città dimenticata del III millennio a.C. in Giordania* (Rome, Sapienza Studies on the Archaeology of Palestine & Transjordan, Colour Monographs I).

Nigro L., (2010), *Quattro asce di rame dal Palazzo B di Khirbet al-Batrāwī (Bronzo Antico IIIB, 2500-2300 a.C.)*, in Scienze dell'Antichità 16 (2010), pp. 561-572.

Website: www.lasapienzatojordan.it



Fig. 1 – Khirbet al-Batrāwī, "Palace of copper axes": the four-strings necklace found in the Hall L.II10.



Fig. 2 – Khirbet al-Batrawy: the EB II-III (3000-2300 BC) triple line of fortifications on the northern side of the site, from the north-west; from south to north: the Main City-Wall (in the background) with Tower T.830, Outer Wall W.155 and Scarp-Wall W.165, and Exterior Wall W.827.



Fig. 3 – Khirbet al-Batrawy: general view of the Royal Palace (the "Palace of copper axes"), from the north-west; in the foreground, Pillared Hall L.1040.

Fig. 4 – Khirbet al-Batrawy: vessels and luxury items gathered in Pillared Hall L.1040, in the "Palace of copper axes".

