



**Eshmoun Valley preliminary report after the third season of the Polish-Lebanese survey**

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# ESHMOUN VALLEY PRELIMINARY REPORT AFTER THE THIRD SEASON OF THE POLISH-LEBANESE SURVEY

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**Abstract:** The survey in the 2008 season took place in the lower part of the Auali (Eshmoun) Valley. There were 29 different possible archaeological sites discovered during our research, mostly the remains of settlements (15), quarries (12) and necropolises (9). A few ancient olive presses and wells were also recognized. Among the remains of settlements, sites no 83 and 91 are of particular interest. Some of the investigated quarries proved to be used as necropolises after abandonment. Rock-cut tombs and pit graves were distinguished, among other structures, on the cemeteries.

**Keywords:** Lebanon, survey, Eshmoun Valley, quarries, rock-cut tombs

The Eshmoun Valley (Wadi Bisri) Project entered its final stage thanks to the personal involvement of Mr. Frederic Hussein, Director General of the Direction Générale des Antiquités (DGA). The survey focused now on the lower part of the valley, but due to conditions set down by the DGA, a full-scale thorough investigation of the whole area could not be carried out. Instead, the team concentrated on places with favorable conditions for human settlement and activity, moving from one spot to another and avoiding areas that were mainly private property or military zones.

The surveyed area stretched from Joun almost to the seashore near Saida. A deep gorge between the Deir el-Saida convent and the western limits of Joun (approx.

3 km<sup>2</sup>) was bypassed because of a ban from the military authorities. The vicinity of the Deir el-Saida convent had been surveyed in 2006, revealing several interesting features and sites. The number of newly recognized sites discovered during the 2008 season reached 29. The number of all registered sites from different periods and of various sizes totaled 106 (for previous work, see Jakubiak, Neska 2007). The last season of fieldwork brought to light the following features: traces of settlements on 15 sites, nine cemetery sites, two sites with modern stone houses (four dwelling structures in all), remnants of quarries at 12 sites, remains of oil presses at three sites, two pastoral shelters, four water cisterns, an olive crusher and an unidentified feature.

## CEMETERIES

Two general categories of tombs were distinguished in the survey: rock-cut tombs and rectangular pits hewn in bedrock.

### ROCK-CUT TOMBS

Tombs of this type were recognized on sites 79, 80, 90, 91, 96, 97 and 101.



*Fig. 1. Entrance to rock-cut tomb at site 97  
(All photos K. Jakubiak)*

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### Team

*Dates of work:* 30 July–10 September 2008

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Site 79 is situated several hundred meters east of the Dheir Moukhallys convent in Joun. The tomb discovered there must have belonged to a nearby settlement. The square entrance faced north and the interior was subrectangular in plan with at least one burial place; the shape of the interior does not exclude another burial.

On site 80 two simple single-chamber tombs were found. One was accessible, while the entrance to the other was obscured, making any inspection of its interior impossible.

A tomb discovered at site 97 is of special interest. Three relatively well preserved burial places with traces of arcosolia above the niches were present in the chamber [Figs 1, 2]. The interest of the tomb lies however in the structures hewn directly above it. These comprised several square or rectangular features on the relatively flat rock surface. They could reflect the Greek burial custom of places for gifts for the dead ancestors and liquid offerings. The structures have survived in relatively good condition, and were used, even recently, as small water tanks. This interpretation is based on traces of concrete in several of the structures.

#### PIT GRAVES

Pit graves were found only on site 101 [Fig. 3], where two such structures were noted. A tomb found on site 100 may have been originally a shaft tomb hewn in bedrock, but its shape is unidentifiable without excavation. Missing any archaeological material from the shaft, it is impossible to date this tomb.

#### OTHER TOMBS

A dolmen-like stone structure was found on site 82 next to some ruins of stone

rural houses and traces of settlement on the slopes (N 33°34'25.2"; E 35°26'08.9"; 223 m a.s.l.). Should it prove to be antique, it would be very rare and untypical in this part of Lebanon. It could very well be modern, even recently constructed during some military operations.

#### DAMAGED TOMBS

Several structures were observed to have been looted quite recently, possibly just months before the survey, e.g. the necropolis associated with the settlement on site 90 (N 33°35'02.8"; E 35°25'38.3"; 155 m a.s.l.) and on site 101 (N 33°34'49.9"; E 35°25'38.2"; 122 m a.s.l.).

On site 90, serious damage had been done to at least two or three burial structures. Square or rectangular robber



Fig. 2. Interior of rock-cut tomb at site 97

shafts were hewn from above into the central parts of the burial chambers, destroying the interior form beyond recognition. Traces of another rectangular shaft were found west of the destroyed tombs. Assuming this tomb had not been disturbed, its exploration could shed light also on neighboring graves.

A similar situation was observed on site 101, where a partly looted tomb was drawn and measured during the survey. Two long barrel-vaulted places for sarcophagi were found in the northern part of the tomb.

The southern part of the tomb chamber could also have held several sarcophagi or lead coffins. Some traces of the interior arrangement were partly visible, such as a wall of stone blocks closing off the burial places from the north. Late Roman pottery material (3rd–4th century AD) was found inside the tomb along with some metal objects, such as nails and fragments of handles. It seems that most of the grave goods from this grave had been plundered.

Cleaning is needed on tombs located on site 97 (N 33°34'41"; E 35°24'32.3";



*Fig. 3. Pit graves from site 101, view from the east*

84 m a.s.l.) and, particularly, on a shaft tomb from site 100 (N 33°34'45.8"; E 35°24'29.3"; 61 m a.s.l.). In both instances,

the form of the tomb might be identifiable and there is some chance that it could be dated, even if it has been plundered.

## QUARRIES

Several of the cemeteries discovered last season were found in disused quarries (sites 90, 91, 97 and 101). It seems likely that the quarries were abandoned before they were turned into cemeteries. Therefore the necropoleis, which are dated to the Roman period, would provide a *terminus ante quem* for stone-working operations.

Eight other sites were used apparently as sources of stone blocks (sites 84, 87, 89, 98, 99, 102, 105 and 106). The number of quarries clearly shows the importance of this part of the valley as a source of stone building material in the economic hinterland of ancient city of Sidon. All of the quarries were found no farther

than 3 km east of the Eshmoun Temple in Bostan el-Sheiq. Consequently, it seems plausible that some of the material used for the construction of the temple and accompanying structures had been brought from one or more of the quarries discovered this season. A comparative study of the size of quarried blocks and those used in the temple structure should answer this question. Quarry locations were surely not accidental and it can be assumed that places with the best quality of stone were chosen. This factor was mitigated by the distance along which blocks had to be carried; obviously in the case of the Eshmoun Temple a distance of 3 km was still optimal.

## SETTLEMENTS

Most of settlement sites registered during the survey manifested themselves on the surface as simple concentrations of pottery material; evidence of dwelling structures was virtually non-existent. Two sites, 83 and 91, exemplify well the situation of the archaeological sites encountered in the valley. Site 83 was found on a relatively steep slope of the valley just below the modern Joun-Saida road (N 33°34'48.0"; E 35°26'41.1"; 341 m a.s.l.). Pottery material from the slope, including fine black-glazed tableware, possibly imported from Antioch or Pergamon, and a fragment of Megarian bowl, identified the site as dating from the Hellenistic and Early Roman age. No traces of settlement were noted,

probably because modern rural architecture and a paved road devastated all ancient remains.

Traces of settlement were observed at site 90 (N 33°35'02.8"; E 35°25'38.3"; 155 m a.s.l.) in the form of big stone blocks and some architectural features visible on the surface. Among these there was a fragment carved in marble, found among potsherds and stone blocks. One of the latter had been a weight used in an oil press. Shaped as a cube, it had a T-shaped hole (round in section) for fixing the block to a beam of the press. A similarly drilled block was also found at site 101. These blocks highlight with their presence the existence of oil presses at the sites in

antiquity (although they could also have been manufactured but never transported to their final destination). At the moment, the most serious problem with site 91 is the ongoing process of devastation because of slope remodeling at the site and in the vicinity.

Further traces of settlements were discovered at sites 78, 79, 81, 82, 84, 85, 88, 89, 94, 95, 96 and 98. Most of the sites

have been seriously devastated by modern agricultural activity. Consequently, it is even difficult to say how large these settlements could have been originally. On two of the sites in the Bostan Tahta area, 84 and 85, relatively well-preserved pear-shaped cisterns hewn in bedrock were found along with pottery. They could have effectively improved water collection and distribution in the settlement.

## OTHER SITES

Among other features registered in the survey were four rural stone houses from the 19th or 20th centuries AD (sites 82 and

89), two pastoral shelters (sites 87 and 88), three stone-hewn bottoms of oil presses (sites 86, 89 and 104) [*Fig. 4*], a recently



*Fig. 4. Oil-press on site 100, view from the south*

abandoned olive mill or crusher (site 100), and an unidentified structure (site 103). The latter is a shaft hewn in bedrock. Its interior is partly damaged, which suggests that it might have originally been a rock-

cut tomb, which was completely looted and destroyed by robbers. But, as no pottery material was found inside or around the structure, equally well it could have been prepared recently for military purposes.

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