

Excavations at PPNB 'Ain Ghazal

Report from
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During January-April of 1982, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan conducted the first of a multi-year series of excavations at 'Ain Ghazal, a PPNB village on the northern outskirts of Amman in the municipality of 'Alya. Measuring at least 600 by 200 metres in extent, the 12 hectares of area at 'Ain Ghazal rank the village with Tell Abu Hureyra in northern Syria, approximately three times the size of contemporary Jericho. The site is situated along the banks of the Zarqa River in an ecotone between the high jebels and deep wadis of Amman and the lower hills and rolling landscape towards Zarqa.

The efforts of the 1982 season, co-directed by Dr. Gary O. Rollefson of ACOR and Dr. Albert Leonard, Jr., of U. Missouri-Columbia, were, in part, salvage-oriented to recover as much information as possible in areas threatened by erosion along road cuts and commercial construction which had severely damaged the eastern and southern sectors of the site. Mr. Khaled Abu Ghuneima and Mr. Emusaytef Suleiman were Assistant Directors of the project.

Although analysis of the season's work was not completed by press time for the current volume of the *Annual*, several preliminary observations are appropriate here. More than 40 individual structures were identified in the road cuts this season, and along the 600 m. exposure it appears that at least three major clusters of buildings are included in the site. The houses are multi-roomed rectangular structures, ranging from ca. 5.0 to more than 6.5 m. in length for the domestic dwellings. One building, or building complex of "apartments" sharing party walls, is 15 meters in length. (Fig. 1). Walls are constructed of stone (at least for the lower portion) set in mud mortar, covered with mud plaster, and finished with fine white plaster that bears traces of red ochre in several instances. Floors are made

of fine, hard white plaster, and the use of red ochre on extensive areas is evident in some instances, while rectilinear and "polka dot" designs occur on some floors. Three postholes were located along the western wall of two superimposed floors, attesting in some degree to the manner of supporting roof beams. In one trench, it can be seen that at least six major phases of occupation exist at 'Ain Ghazal.

Sunken plastered hearths are characteristic of the houses, and a direct correlation of these domestic features with sub-floor burials immediately to the south is an intriguing aspect of cultural/ritual regularity at 'Ain Ghazal. A minimum of 19 individuals from 15 burial pits was recovered, and infant mortality appears to be high. No plastered skulls were found this season.

A mixed economy is indicated by the samples from this season. Sickle blades are moderately represented, and domestic wheat, barley, pea, lentil, and possibly chickpea were harvested; fig pips attest to another item of the diet. Domestic sheep and goat are present, although spear points (arrowheads are rare) reveal a reliance on hunting as well; in fact, the predominant faunal element is gazelle ("Spring of the Gazelle"), and wild bovinds and equids also occur at 'Ain Ghazal. Bone awls and spatulae form a small part of the tool kit, yet burins constitute an amazing 40% of the chipped stone inventory.

Fourteen animal figurines of clay (four of them baked) were recovered. Of the unbaked specimens, one bears traces of red ochre. One small plaster figurine is anthropomorphic and highly stylized. (Fig. 2). Small clay cones and balls appear to be gaming pieces. Stone bowls, mortars, and querns of limestone occur, as well as a bowl of basalt. Basalt was also used for pulverizing red ochre and for grinding grain. The use of plaster for bowls, platters, and

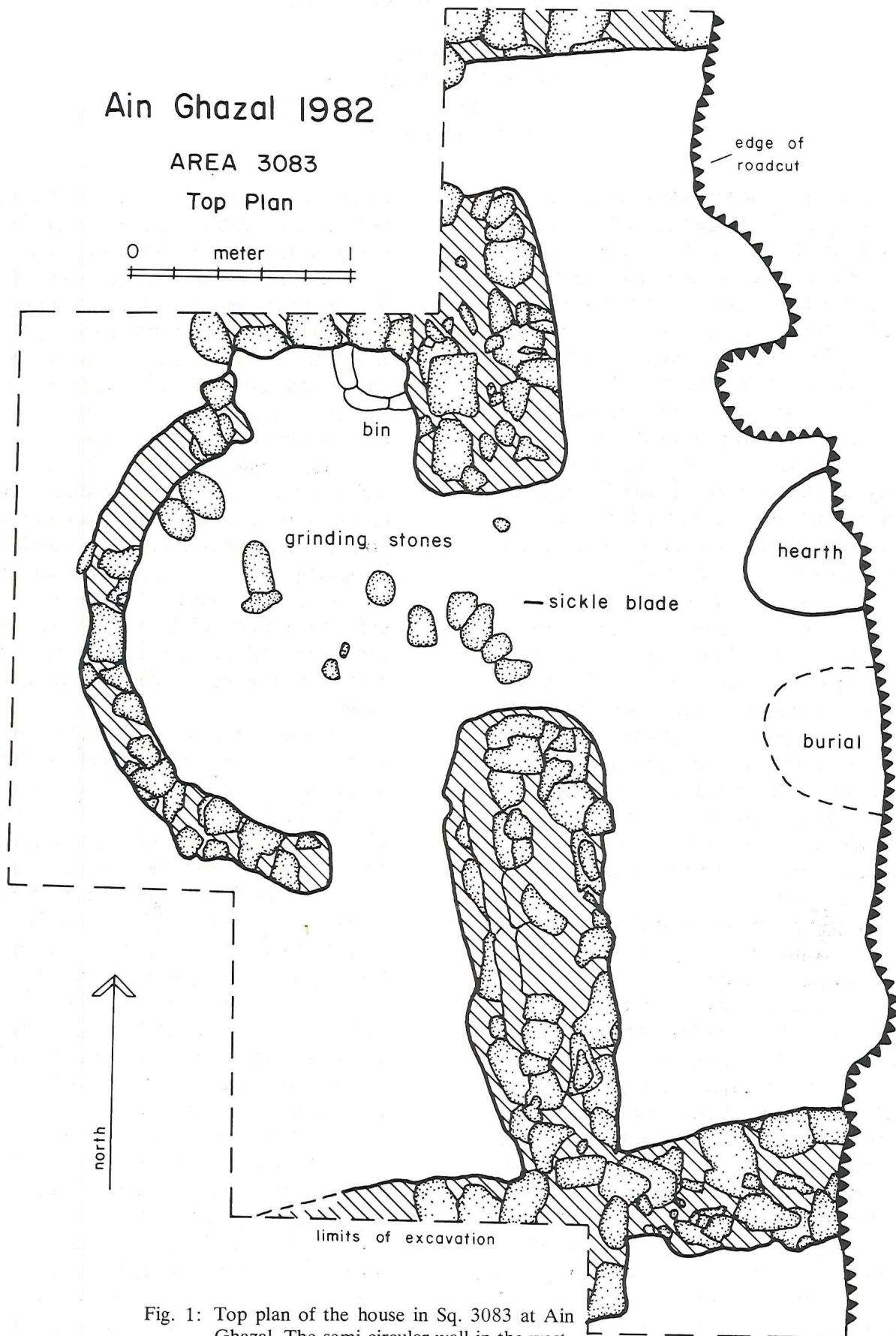


Fig. 1: Top plan of the house in Sq. 3083 at Ain Ghazal. The semi-circular wall in the western room is constructed on top of the floor and appears to be a bench on which to rest domestic utensils.



Fig. 2: Stylized human figurine made of plaster.
Height: 59 mm. (photo courtesy of Dr.
Denise Homes).

troughs ("white ware") is also indicated by a number of fragments.

Contacts with areas outside the immediate vicinity are demonstrated by a knife of Anatolian (?) obsidian, two dentalium shells from the Mediterranean (as well as several perforated cockle shells), two cowrie shells from the Red Sea, and stones stained with asphalt (?) from the

Dead Sea.

Additional work will be conducted by the Department of Antiquities at 'Ain Ghazal during the remainder of 1982, and it is hoped that large-scale efforts can begin in the summer of 1983.

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