

THE AZRAQ PROJECT, 1984

by
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The Azraq Project was begun in 1975 in order to learn more of the history of environment, settlement, culture and subsistence in the presently arid zone of South-West Asia at the time that farming and settled village life was developing around the Fertile Crescent.

In 1975, the author and Stanley Price¹ made a survey of fifteen localities around the Azraq Basin and found the region to be rich in sites of late Acheulian to Pottery Neolithic date. Evidence was also found for a large Pleistocene lake at the centre of the depression.

In 1982, the author and a small team² returned for a second season to make a geomorphological survey of the former lake and of two of its tributary *awdiyah* to obtain more information on settlement patterns and to try to locate stratified late Glacial and early Holocene sites. In the western *awdiyah*, sedimentary evidence was found for alternating wet and dry phases and a number of Upper Palaeolithic, Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic sites were found intercalated in these deposits. In the Azraq region sediments indicated that the last major lake rose to cover ca. 700 sq. km. (fig. 1) and Epipalaeolithic sites were found stratified beneath and above these deposits. Neolithic sites were also found by the present lake side. If prehistoric nomadic movements had any similarity to those of today, it is possible that the two areas were used seasonally by the same populations.

In order to obtain dates for the environmental sequence and in order to begin a reconstruction of the region's prehistory, a programme of soundings was begun in autumn 1984. In this first season, five Upper Palaeolithic to Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites were sounded in a tributary of the former Azraq lake, 55 km. to its south-west (Wadi el-Jilat - fig. 1). For maximum retrieval, all the material from *in situ* deposits was coarse sieved, floated and wet sieved through a 1.5 mm. mesh. Soil/pollen and carbon samples were also collected from each deposit.³

One of the sites excavated contained late Upper Palaeolithic material (W.J. 9) whilst three others date to the late Epipalaeolithic (W.J. 6, 8, 10). One of the latter (W.J.6) had three phases of occupation separated by semi-sterile levels. In the uppermost phase were three prepared floors, two of which were covered in a red pigment. The latest site sounded (W.J. 7) appeared to be a Pre-Pottery Neolithic B hunter's village. A circular semi-subterranean hut with walls built from single slabs of limestone placed on end, was partially excavated. Although domestic sheep and goat were being kept at contemporary settlements in more fertile areas to the west, the subsistence at W.J. 7 appeared to be based on the local fauna: gazelle, ass, fox, hare and tortoise.

In autumn 1985 the author hopes to sound a probable Pottery Neolithic site in Wadi el-Jilat to see if there is any evidence

¹ A. N. Garrard, and Stanley Price, N.P., A survey of prehistoric sites in the 'Azraq Desert National Park' in eastern Jordan, *ADAJ*, XX (1975) p. 83-90.

A. N. Garrard, Stanley Price, N.P. and L. Copeland, A survey of prehistoric sites in the Azraq Basin of Eastern Jordan, *Paléorient*, 3, (1977) p. 109-126.

² A. N. Garrard P. Harvey, F. Hivernel, and B. Byrd, The environmental history of the Azraq Basin, in A. Hadidi (ed.) *Studies in the history and*

archaeology of Jordan Vol. 2 Amman, Department of Antiquities, 1985.

A. N. Garrard, B. Byrd, P. Harvey and F. Hivernel, Prehistoric environment and settlement in the Azraq Basin, A report on the 1982 survey season, *Levant*, 17 (1985) p. 1-28.

³ The artefacts are being studied by Brian Byrd and Alison Betts, the animal remains by Andrew Garrard, the plant remains by Susan College, the soil/pollen samples by Christopher Hunt and the C14 samples by the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit.

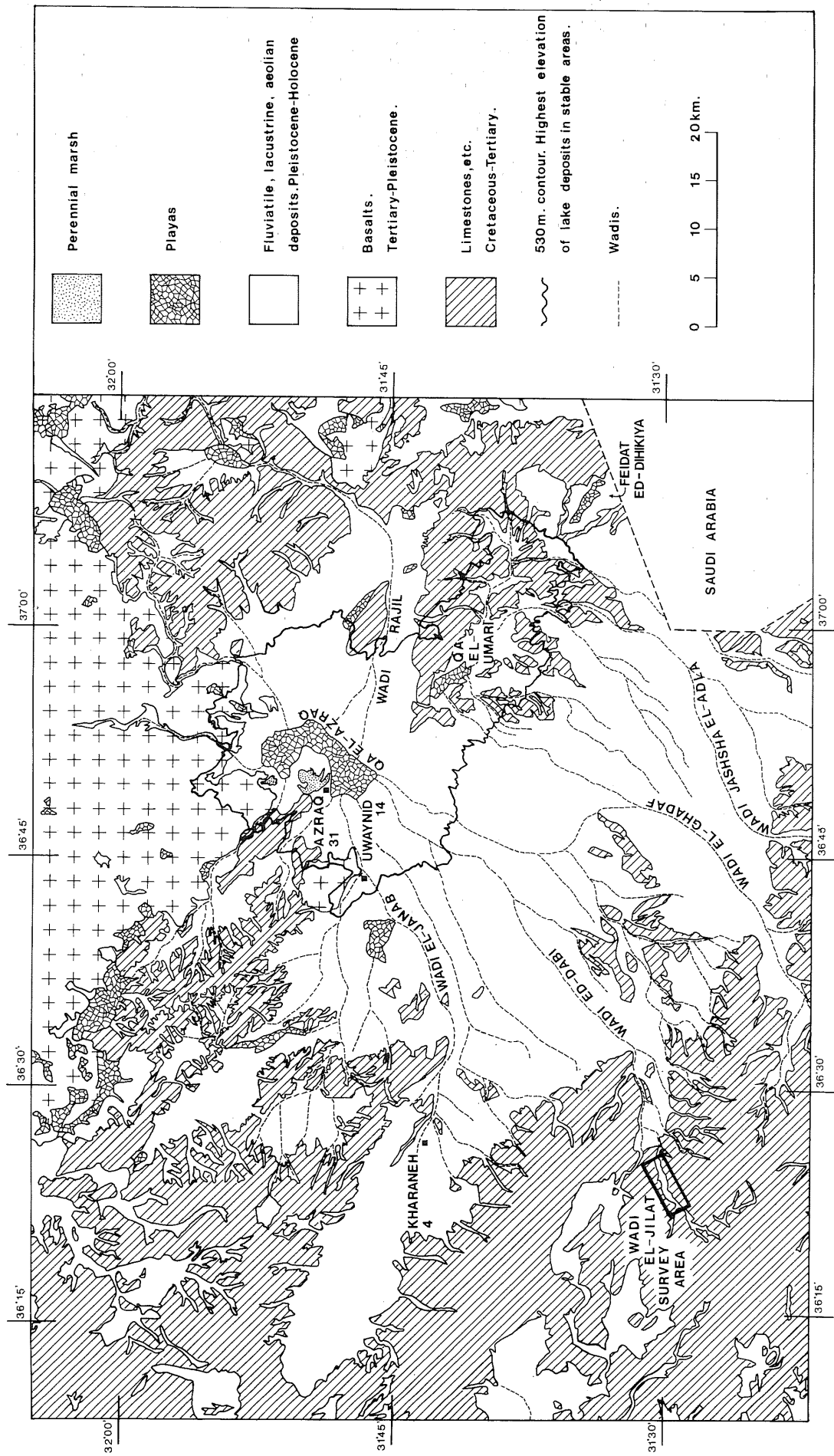


Fig. 1

for pastoralist activity in the desert region by the sixth millennium. The intention is also to sound a series of sites related to the former lake at Azraq, in order to establish a chronology for the last major pluvial period in the region, and to see if there is any evidence for seasonal complementarity

with contemporary sites in the Wadi el Jilat.

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