

Saḥāb and its foreign relations*

Saḥāb lies about 12 km southeast of Amman on the modern and ancient road to the desert castles of early Islam, including Muwaqqar, Mshatta, Harraneh, Qseir Amra, Azraq and others. The location of Saḥāb in a transitional zone between the highlands and the desert was evidently a lucrative choice: it has a long history of occupation extending from the Late Neolithic/Chalcolithic (5th and 4th millennia BC) to the Late Iron Age. After the 6th century BC, the site was probably abandoned until the Medieval Arabic period (11th–13th century AD), evidenced by Ayyubid-Mamluk handmade sherds. Another occupational gap ran from the 13th to the 19th century, at which time the present inhabitants (Ahil Saḥāb) moved to the site.

The Neolithic/Chalcolithic period

Saḥāb was largest in area during its earliest period of habitation, when it supported itself with extensive agriculture and evidently produced an abundance of food. This agricultural abundance is demonstrated by the large number of storage facilities both inside the houses and outside, in courtyards. Some of the courtyard storage structures were huge, measuring around 4 m in diameter. These pit structures suggest that Saḥāb's inhabitants anticipated occasional periods of poor agricultural yield that could be offset by a long-term storage strategy. Furthermore, the way these storage pits are arranged within house units may suggest that large families were living in each quarter of the site. In fact, the arrangement of one of the architectural units itself supports such a proposal. This unit, excavated in Area E, consists of several rooms (built of mostly unhewn stone) surrounding a courtyard in which large storage pits were cut into virgin soil and lined with small stones. Such units developed out of individual rooms, one added after the other. The deposits of this phase could be easily recognized and separated from each other when they were not disturbed by later construction. The phase was attested to in almost every trench where virgin soil or bedrock

was reached. Although wide horizontal clearance of this period was not possible, similar structures and storage pits were uncovered both in the main excavation areas and in soundings.

It is interesting to note that these settlers coexisted with cave-dwellers: caves were found in Areas A, B, Cave C, and D. Some of these show a series of floors of which the upper ones date from the Early Bronze Age. It is quite possible that inhabitants continued to live in caves even after the main Neolithic/Chalcolithic settlement was deserted or destroyed.

A few other Neolithic/Chalcolithic settlements north and south of Saḥāb were identified during the 1984 survey (Ibrahim *et al.* 1986), but Saḥāb remains the largest one and was possibly the main center during this early period. There are no signs of an enclosure wall around Neolithic/Chalcolithic Saḥāb or any of the other settlements. Saḥāb represents a typical village farming community during the 5th and the 4th millennia BC.

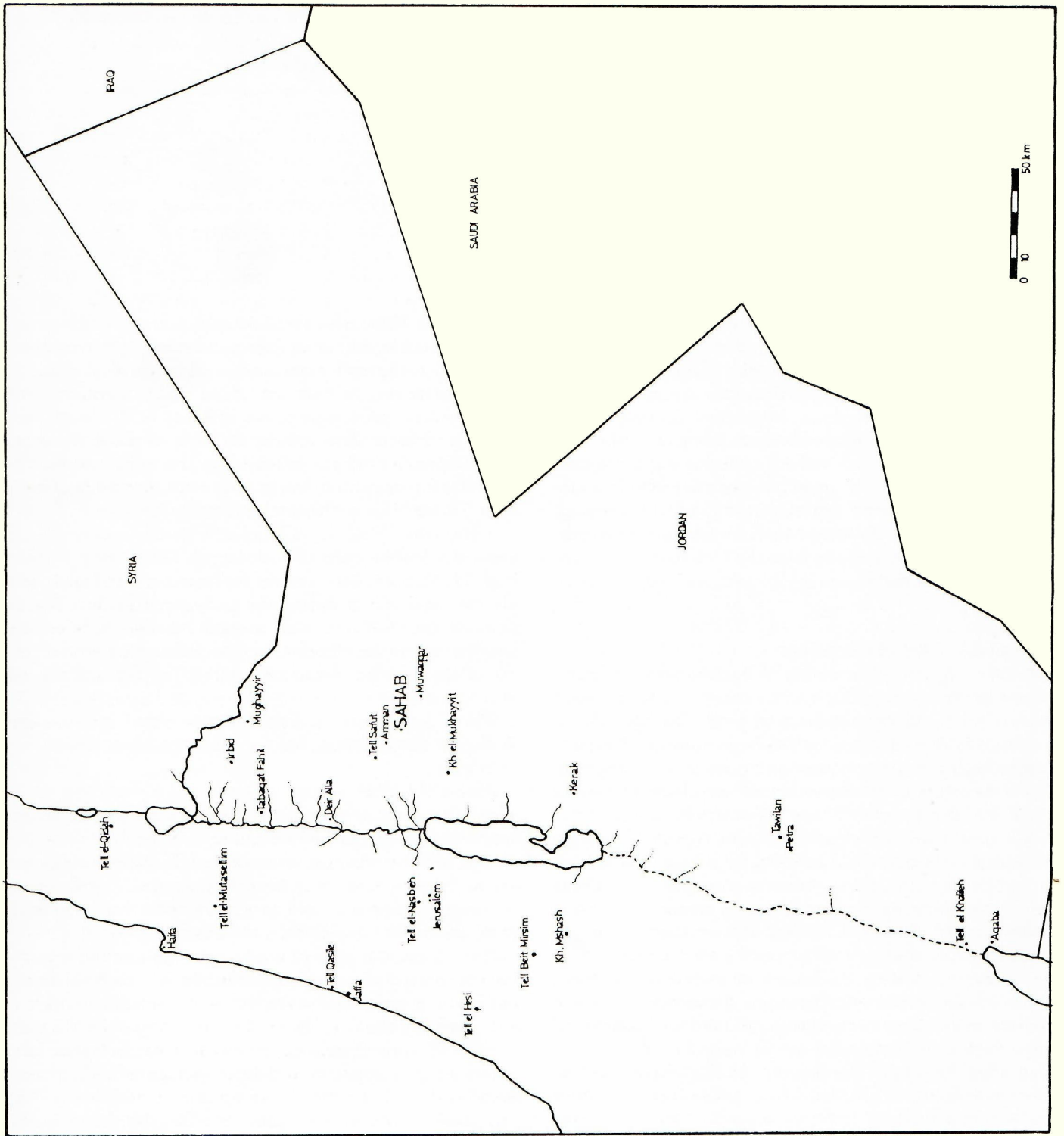
Where did the earliest Saḥābis come from? It is not easy to answer this question, but the following observations may be helpful.

During the 1984 survey, we could not identify any settlements that directly preceded Saḥāb. It does not, therefore, appear that its first inhabitants came from the immediate vicinity. It is clear, however, that the early Saḥābis were experienced farmers and must have had a good knowledge of building techniques, as well as of the manufacture of pottery, stone vessels, flint implements, and other stone tools.

Their distinctive pottery is easy to recognize and separate from the pottery of later periods at Saḥāb. All of it is handmade and much of it is coarse-ware, although painted and red burnished pottery are also well represented. Most often, the paint is red and applied in wide bands. Incised decoration also occurs. Large storage jars have flat bases or small uneven bases; thumb-indented clay bands are attached to the body. Plain and thumb-indented ledge handles were also found in this occupation phase.

The closest parallels to such finds appear at sites in the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea (Ibrahim, Sauer and Yassin, 1976; and forthcoming). There are clearly some Ghassulian types and techniques among the pottery from Saḥāb.

* This article focusses mainly on the fieldwork undertaken at Saḥāb between 1972 and 1980 under the supervision of the present author. The excavations were sponsored by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, in the later seasons jointly with Yarmouk University.



Sahab and neighbouring regions.

These include storage jars, bowls, thumb-indented bands, and wide painted bands. Parallels are also to be found in the flint, basalt and other stone tools and containers. In fact the builders of the houses at Saḥāb may have been familiar with the way houses at Ghassul were constructed.

From this phase we also found a seal fragment (S-75, D.D 18, Reg 207) made of clay, originally square in shape and measuring 4.5×3.5 cm across the preserved portion. The front side shows a net of incisions in which four horizontal lines are incised over a set of vertical ones. The seal is made of the same clay used in the pottery of this phase, and was therefore most likely of local manufacture. The shape and design indicate the object's function as a stamp seal; it certainly represents an early attempt at glyptic, at least for the Syria-Palestine region. The use of a seal to mark certain products probably indicates trade with distant areas (Ibrahim, 1983).

Thus, the evidence at this stage suggests that the closest parallels for the artifacts of the Neolithic/Chalcolithic period at Saḥāb come from sites further to the north and northwest, including sites in the Jordan Valley and the Damascus (Tell Ramad) area (Kafafi, 1982). Although no final conclusions can be drawn now, it therefore seems possible that the earliest inhabitants of Saḥāb came themselves from the north or northwest. Contemporary sites throughout the entire region need to be investigated before this suggestion is taken seriously.

The Transitional period

The following period, towards the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, seems to be a transitional one and its people appear not to have been permanent settlers at the site. In Area E, on top of Neolithic/Chalcolithic levels, several fragmentary walls were uncovered. These wall remains do not conform to a definite architectural plan and, judging from the one or two courses that are preserved, do not seem to have been raised to the height of an ordinary room. Inside the site's caves, occupational floors on top of Neolithic/Chalcolithic levels yielded similar pottery; the series of floors indicate that seasonal use of the caves took place. The present evidence thus suggests that the site was a seasonal settlement towards the end of the 4th millennium, probably at the very beginning of the Early Bronze Age (Kenyon's Proto-Urban).

Related to this transitional period were two burial jars with human skeletons and a reused pit with 7 to 9 animal burials which were excavated in Area E (Ibrahim 1984). The burial jars can be seen as the continuation of the Ghassulian burial tradition, while the animal burials are new to the area and deserve some comment.

Goats have been found buried together with human bodies at the coastal site of Dhahret el Humraiya, c. 13 km south of Jaffa, in Middle Bronze context. According to the excavator, 'in the earliest burials, it appears to have been customary to enter the pet animal of the deceased in the same grave. In Grave 11 the animal was buried at the feet of the deceased. This seems to have been the commonest practice. In every one of these cases a bronze knife was found placed beside

the animal skeleton and we may infer that the animal was slaughtered on the grave. No. 9 represents a solitary animal grave, the deposit consisting of a single jar' (Ory 1948, 77).

We know of a cemetery for dogs found at Išan Baḥrīyāt (Isin) in South Mesopotamia. According to the excavator, B. Hrouda, this cemetery dates from the first quarter of the first millennium BC (Hrouda 1977, 18–19). In Mesopotamia, at least in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC, the dog played a certain cultic role (Fuhr 1977). According to Fuhr, this discovery at Isin would represent the first ritual animal burial in a cultic area to be found in the Sumerian heartland (Fuhr 1977, 136).

Late 4th and 3rd millennia skeletons of horses or asses have been found together with wheeled chariots at the Y Cemetery at Kish (Watelin 1934, 30–34, Pl. xxiii), and oxen skeletons were found in a similar context in the Royal Cemetery at Ur (Woolley 1934, 64–65, Pls. 30, 35).

In Bahrain, skeletons of sheep and goats, either complete or partial, were found in many of the 3rd and early 2nd millennium burial mounds as part of the food offerings of the deceased human beings (Ibrahim, 1982).

These references to animal burials from southern Mesopotamia and the Gulf are not meant to suggest a direct connection with Mesopotamia, but rather to raise the possibility of indirect influence of a more general nature.

The Early Bronze Age

The Early Bronze Age proper is represented at Saḥāb by a number of sherds found in a sounding in Area B; they were not associated with any structure. It is possible that they were washed down from the center of the site to the south of Area B where a small EB settlement might be expected. EB sherds also appeared in the uppermost levels of the caves still being used for habitation. At this point, connections with other sites during the EB period cannot be drawn.

The Middle Bronze Age

The following main period is related to the Middle Bronze Age. During the first and second seasons of the 1972–1973 excavations, two caves reused as burials in the MB were excavated in Areas A and B north of the site. Each of the graves has a deep shaft dug into earlier deposits. The shaft leads to a pavement on which the skeletons and objects have been placed. The orientation of the bodies is not uniform, but in each case, the knees are flexed. Two burials, each on an isolated, roughly circular, pavement, were found in the cave of Area B (Ibrahim 1974, Pls. 16, 17). The case of the MB tomb in Area A is very similar except that it has only one large pavement with at least two skeletons lying on it. The pottery found with the latter tomb is well preserved and includes piri-form juglets with button bases, carinated bowls, and small and medium sized jars, all typical for MB II period. Only sherds of these types and a bronze needle were found in the Area B tomb. The evidence of MB II burials found at Saḥāb is similar to many other MB sites in Palestine. MB II B-C burials comparable to the Saḥāb tombs have been found in

other locations of the Amman region with six tomb groups in various parts of Amman itself (Harding *et al.* 1953; Ward 1966; Dornemann 1983, 15–19). Others come from the Mount Nebo area west of Madeba (Saller and Bagatti 1949; Dornemann 1983, 17). MB II accidental tomb discoveries were also made at Tell Irbid, at Mughayyir and Fo'arah north of Irbid (Dornemann 1983, 15–17).

During the first four campaigns, MB sherds were found in several different squares of the site but without clear stratigraphic context. In the last excavation campaign of 1980, the situation of the MB settlement became clearer. In area G II, close to the center of the site, part of an MB fort connected to a typical glacis rampart was excavated. The excavated area is too limited for more definite information about the extent of the MB settlement. In another area (Area H III) a massive wall of the MB period has been excavated. Unfortunately this wall lies far from the rampart in Area G II, and the distance between them is covered with modern houses; no direct connection can yet be established.

The type of MB settlement found at Saḥāb has been uncovered at a large number of Palestinian and North Syrian sites. There is a general agreement that these sites were established within the Hyksos Period of the Middle Bronze Age. The situation of the MB II in East Jordan is not clear yet. Evidence of MB II occupation with fortifications has been identified at several sites including Khirbet el-Mukhayyit (Saller and Bagatti, 1949), Amman Citadel (Dornemann 1983), Tell Šāfūt (?) (Ma'ayeh, 1960), Tell Irbid (Lenzen and Gordon 1985), Tell Deir 'Alla (Franken and Ibrahim 1977–78), and Tabqat Faḥil (Pella) (McNicoll, Smith and Hennessy, 1982). These and other sites known from surface exploration have been referred to by James Sauer in a recent article (Sauer, 1986). The most recent investigations at Tell Irbid show that the site was occupied from at least the late 4th millennium until the Iron II period with good indications of glacis fortifications in the MB II period (Lenzen and Gordon, 1985).

Comparable material was found in several Middle Bronze II Palestinian sites including Tell es-Sulṭān (Jericho), Tell el-Mutasallim (Megiddo) and others (parallels cited by Dornemann 1983, 16–19). Dornemann also recognized similarities between Khabūr ware and MB II vessels from Amman (Dornemann 1983, 16).

Saḥāb is probably the closest of these MB II forts to the desert area. Its position must have been important in defending the highland from desert attack. Archaeological survey should be carried out with an eye to locating a *limes*, or series of fortifications, for this and the following pre-Classical periods along the desert border.

It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the problems encountered with the MB II period. Such problems have already been treated by a number of scholars. It should be emphasized that Saḥāb belongs to the same cultural unit found throughout the Bilād esh-Shām (Greater Syria). A change of settlement function must have taken place at Saḥāb. During the earlier periods the site served as an important agricultural

center, while during the MB period it became a military settlement built on an area much smaller than the 4th and 5th millennia BC settlement.

Both the burials and the distribution of settlements show that there was an increase in population in the MB II Period. This increase of settled life does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that there were large waves of newcomers entering the area. An increased number of sites might have resulted from settling nomadic or semi-nomadic groups. The Hyksos themselves might have entered as small groups without adding much to the population of the region.

The Late Bronze Age

The next major period at Saḥāb is related to the Late Bronze Age. The period is well represented but, due to the location of the modern settlement, investigations were mainly restricted to the LB town wall. The major excavated portion is in the west part of the LB settlement (Areas G II, G III, G IV), where nearly 75 m of wall were uncovered. Soundings made in other areas of the tell to the south and southeast (Areas H III and H IV), to the east (Area H II), and to the north (Area H II and B019) allow the reconstruction of the town wall; the inner part of the LB settlement remains largely unexcavated. What is left from the LB wall are, in effect, its foundations, sunk in earlier deposits in the form of a deep trench which was lined on both sides with large and medium-sized stones and which most probably served as a secret corridor. The complete enclosure appears to have been symmetrical, oval in shape with rounded angles, and oriented north–south along its long axis.

The LB town seems to have had a long occupation, from the 15th into the late 13th century BC. The earlier date is based on a seal impression on a typical LB storage jar handle found in association with the foundation trench of the town wall. The scene as a whole is typical of the period around the time of Thutmose III of the 18th Dynasty. It combines the three signs of seated sphinx, Uraeus-snake and god-beard. In front of the sphinx (at the left of the scene) is an 'ank-sign. Over the sphinx's back are two other signs: the sled and the basket. The combination of the first three signs is probably a cryptogram of the god-name Amun (Ibrahim 1983, 46–47). This seal impression could be compared with a seal found before our excavations in a tomb at Saḥāb by Rafik Dajani (Dajani 1970, Pl. xxiii) and published by S. Horn (Horn 1971, Fig. 1: C–E). The base of this seal shows the throne-name of Thutmose III—Mn-Hpr-R'—beside an unidentifiable deity (Ibrahim 1983, 47).

The pottery associated with the town wall shows a range of types, including imports and imitations of Mycenaean pieces as well as examples of local ware. Although the final pottery analysis is not yet complete, it appears that the types represented cover the major part of the Late Bronze Age up to the late 13th century BC. Because of modern disturbance of the site, especially on the western and southwestern sides where the largest piece of the town wall appeared, a number

of questions remain concerning the height of the wall, the location of the town gates, the nature of the town's layout, and how and why the LB settlement at Saḥāb came to an end.

In spite of so many unanswered questions and unsolved problems, Saḥāb is so far the first LB walled town to be excavated east of the Jordan River. Over 20 dunums in area, it was certainly much larger than the MB II glacis fort at the site. Saḥāb's importance lies also in an apparently unbroken occupational history from the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age down to the latter part of Iron Age II, with massive fortifications during all these major periods. The single exception may be the beginning of the Iron Age where an extensive occupation was identified but no enclosure was found.

The main piece of information about the inner structure of the LB town comes from an important public building partially uncovered in Area E south of the main mound. This part consists mainly of a long massive wall (over 17 m long) with a projecting tower-like room. The inner parts of this building seemed to be located under a high accumulation of Iron Age deposits and modern structures which have made it difficult to excavate (Ibrahim, 1974; 1975).

Apart from a rich LB-Iron Age tomb excavated by Rafik Dajani in 1968 (Dajani 1970; Horn 1971), no other LB tombs were found in the course of our excavations between 1972 and 1980.

The material found at Saḥāb from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, taken together with MB-LB finds from sites spread over the whole country—especially in the center and in the north where field investigations are more frequent—should put an end to Glueck's view concerning a gap in occupation in East Jordan during the major part of the 2nd millennium BC (Glueck 1970). Quite the contrary, it points to a dense population in all kinds of settlement types, including political and religious centers. These centers established strong international relations with the rest of the Near Eastern world, including the entire region of Bilād esh-Shām along with Anatolia, Egypt, and the Aegean. Most of the LB sites in East Jordan and their connections with outside countries were reviewed recently by Dornemann (Dornemann 1983, 20–24), Sauer (Sauer, 1986), and McGovern (McGovern 1980; 1986). More recent discoveries were made at Tell Irbid (Lenzen and Gordon, 1985), and more LB sites were recorded in the 1985 survey of Jabal Abu eth-Thawwāb north of the Baq'ah Valley (Knauf and Gordon, 1985).

Because of the lack of modern site-names that can be recognized as etymologically derivable from ancient ones and controversies over the dating of sites, only recently have major parts of East Jordan been included in the historical analyses of Egyptian records from the Middle and New Kingdoms (Ward, 1964; 1966; 1973; Redford, 1982a; 1982b; Kitchen, 1964; Weinstein, 1981). Saḥāb played an important role in these periods and a historical identification of the site can now be considered, although no direct evidence was found to support any one particular identification (Knauf 1984; Redford 1982b, 72).

The evidence from Saḥāb itself throws more light on connections with Bilād esh-Shām, Egypt and the Aegean world during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. The buildings, pottery, and other artifacts from Saḥāb are in many ways similar to those found in other parts of Bilād esh-Shām and should be thought of as an extension of the same culture, although local affinities are well represented and will be discussed in a final study of the material.

There is some evidence for Egyptian and North Syrian influence on local products. A scarab-like seal made of black steatite, a surface find, is an early example in the Egyptian tradition. The centre of this seal depicts a god with falcon head carrying two Urae and bearing an Asiatic *Wickelgewand*. The style and scene of the scarab are comparable to several other examples, especially those from South Palestinian sites; the closest parallels date from the beginnings of the 18th Dynasty (Ibrahim 1983, 45). Another example of strong Egyptian influence is found in the seal impression with the cryptogram of the god-name Amun (Ibrahim 1983, 46) on a handle of an LB storage jar referred to earlier in this article. This piece is most probably a product of the 18th Dynasty. A similar seal was found in an LB burial at Saḥāb and published by Siegfried Horn (Horn 1971, 103–105, Fig. 1: C–E). The fact that this seal reflects the throne-name of Thutmose III, Mn-Hpr-R', indicates that native craftsmen were capable of imitating Egyptian originals. This Egyptian influence is understandable in the light of the Egyptian political and economic domination of the major parts of Bilad esh-Sham, including East Jordan, during the Late Bronze Age.

The evidence obtained from Saḥāb and other sites shows that ties with Cyprus and Mycenae, especially in trade, were not restricted to coastal Syria or areas west of the Jordan River, but were also well represented at many sites in the Jordan Valley and the central and northern highlands throughout the Late Bronze Age. The ceramic material from Saḥāb includes both Mycenaean imports and imitations. Notable are the Bichrome specimens of simple and carinated bowls, jugs, kraters, goblets and pyxides. The decoration is applied mainly on the body, rims, and handles. Geometric patterns are most common, but other designs include what is probably part of a chariot (Ibrahim 1975, Pl. 34:3), and a lotus-like flower.

The Early Iron Age

The Early Iron Age settlement is well represented and—at least on the west and north sides—seems to extend beyond the LB town. Domestic architecture from this period appeared in most of the areas (A, B, D, E, E/W, H and G). The evidence, though, is fragmentary and does not give a clear picture of the situation in the Iron I period. Two houses have almost complete ground plans. In general the houses (especially in Area B) seem to follow a certain pattern of rectangular rooms which were, in most cases, plastered with stones. On one of these plastered rooms in Area A, a large number of storage jars (pithoi) were excavated. Since their excavation at Tell Beit Mirsim, these jars have been designated as collared-rim jars and were consi-

dered by William Albright and others as evidence for the presence of early Israelite settlers in Palestine. However, this type of jar has been discussed more recently by the present author in the Kenyon Festschrift (Ibrahim 1978). The article emphasizes that the makers of such jars cannot be ethnically identified, although this kind of jar was produced on a large scale in central workshops and played an important role in storing products and in the trade of various parts of Bilād esh-Shām during the Early Iron Age.

Some of these 12th century storage jars bear seal impressions or fingerprints (Ibrahim 1978; 1983, 48–50). One seal impression, which was identified on the rims of two jars, shows an animal with long horns followed by a human being raising his hands. Another impression of a roughly circular seal, repeated three times on a single jar, depicts two seated animals: an ibex on top and a lioness below. The same impression, arranged in a similar manner, was found on another jar of the same type. A third example has an impression of a rosette design and a fourth depicts two impressions next to each other; a scorpion in attacking position and a spider-like (?) design.

It is rather difficult to find close parallels to these impressions, especially from an early Iron Age context. Seal impressions on jars are much more common in the Iron II period (Welten 1969). The scenes and the style of the Saḥāb impressions might reflect North Syrian and Assyrian influence (Keel 1977, 194–216).

A strong Egyptian influence seems to continue during the Early Iron Age period as is shown by a number of objects found in an Iron I cave burial of Area C on the west slope of Tell Saḥāb (Ibrahim 1972). The cave was inhabited during the 4th millennium BC and reused for burial purposes around the 12th century BC. Among the finds with Egyptian influence were two scarabs, a bead-like seal, and a figurine head, all made of faience (Ibrahim 1983, 50–52), along with alabaster-gypsum vases.

The transition between the end of LB and the beginning of the Iron Age is still not clear (Dornemann 1982). This is the case not only at Saḥāb, but also at other sites where excavations of LB/Iron I sites took place, including Amman, Baq'ah, Tabaqat Faḥil, Tell Deir 'Alla, and more recently Tell Irbid.

It is not clear whether within each of these sites the LB settlement was reused in the Iron I period or whether, as is more likely, there was a shift in the location of the settlements. The evidence from Saḥāb and the Baq'ah Valley (McGovern 1986), Tell Deir 'Alla (Franken 1969), and Tell Irbid (Lenzen and Gordon 1985, unpublished) shows there is no gap in occupation between the two periods. Although changes in the pottery, metalwork, and other artifacts can be seen in the Bilād esh-Shām in general, cultural continuity in terms of burial practices and continuity of occupation can be demonstrated in most of the East Jordanian LB/Iron I sites mentioned above.

It is not obvious to what extent LB structures were reused in the Iron I period, but in Area G II (Squares 15–17) it was evident that part of the LB town wall was reused in the Iron I for domestic housing. This continuity can also be observed

in the continuous reuse of the tomb excavated by Rafik Dajani in 1968 (Dajani 1970) which was apparently in use from LB I(?)–II until the Iron I–II periods. Continuing LB pottery traditions can also be observed in the Early Iron Age tombs found at Jabal en-Nuzhah in the northern part of Amman (Dajani 1966c). Certain LB bronze weapons and pottery types, including bowls, small kraters, jugs, dipper juglets, and flasks, continue to exist in the Iron I tomb of Area C which we excavated in 1972 (Ibrahim 1972).

The Iron II period

The Iron II period was attested to mainly in Area B019 where a large architectural complex and a piece of the town wall have been uncovered. It could also be found in Area G II and in two soundings in the center of the site and in the deep bulldozer cut at the north edge of the excavated part in Area E. During the Iron II period, the walled town became smaller but better planned than it was in the Iron I period. The eastern border is defined by the town wall on that side of the site. A small piece in the center to the south, probably of the same wall, was visible on line with the excavated part in Area B019. This wall cannot extend much further to the north, since no Iron II material remains in Areas A, B less than 20 m from this wall. In Area G II in the west the Iron II settlement goes beyond the LB town wall. The excavated evidence shows that the walled settlement was planned in advance.

The main architectural complex in Area B019 consists of rectangular rooms oriented north–south. The largest is a spacious rectangular pillared room located in the center of the excavated area. Four pillars of large stones were built in a row along the central length of the room. There are at least two other rooms on the west side that join with this one to form a house or unit separated from another unit in the west by a corridor.

Another pillared room was also excavated in Area G II. This room is similar to the one mentioned above, but smaller in size. It is clear that these columns supported the roof of large rooms which probably had a special function within the architectural unit.

Parallels from an Iron Age context are common mainly in western Palestine, but a few examples have also appeared in East Jordanian sites in addition to Saḥāb: Tell es-Sa'idiyyeh (Pritchard 1985) and Tell Deir 'Alla (Ibrahim and van der Kooij 1984, unpublished) in the Jordan Valley, Tawilan (Bennett 1969; 1979; 1928a) near Petra, and Tell el-Khalifah (Glueck 1965) near Aqaba. The closest parallels are probably from Tell Bir es-Sab' (Aharoni 1973), Ain Shems (Grant 1931; 1932), Tell Beit Mirsim (Albright 1943), Tell el-Far'ah (de Vaux 1955), Tell el-Qidah (Hazor) (Yadin *et al.* 1958), and Tell el-Mutasallim (Megiddo) (Guy 1931).

The builders of these structures are difficult if not impossible to identify. The term 'Israelite', which is adopted mainly by Israeli excavators and Biblical researchers, cannot be accepted on the existing evidence. The presence of such houses goes far beyond the distribution map drawn by the users of that

term (Aharoni 1982, 220; Shiloh 1970). G. E. Wright (Wright 1978, 149–154) discusses Shiloh's article on 'The Four-room House' and rightly rejects applying the title 'as a proper term for all of the structures because the space can be, and was, divided in different ways', and while attributing this type of house to the 'North Israelites', he excludes its presence in other parts of Palestine and Jordan. Wright concludes that 'the house-form in question has not been found south of Tell en-Nasbeh, except for major adaptations for public buildings at Tell Beit Mirsim and probably at Tell el-Hesi and Tell Jemmeh. Consequently, it is suggested that this is a (North) Israelite type of house, probably borrowed during the 10th century from Phoenicia, though our lack of Phoenician or Syrian domestic architecture in the Iron Age makes the place of origin impossible to prove' (Wright 1978, 154). It is clear that the pillared house was not a sudden invention of a certain ethnic or religious group. In Palestinian archaeology, there have been continuous attempts to associate material culture with ethnic identification alone, disregarding its role in a wider social and economic context. Their explanation of the 'pillared house' owes more to the influence of the Biblical text than to the factual interpretation of the archaeological evidence.

This approach, for example, has led to the identification of the first of three houses found at Tell en-Nasbeh as a 'temple' (Bade 1928; Wright 1978), and those at Tell el-Mutasallim as 'stables of Solomon' (Guy 1931). This latter term was supported by Wright (Wright 1978) and rejected by Pritchard (Pritchard 1970). Aharoni (Aharoni 1982) and Herzog (Herzog 1973), among others, prefer to call them 'storehouses'. With the exception of the Tell el-Mutasallim houses, Wright likes to interpret them as 'governmental structures, mostly granaries for the collection of taxes in kind' (Wright 1978, 151), while Fritz suggests army barracks. The evidence found at Saḥāb may well correspond with Kenyon's explanation of Tell Beit Mirsim houses as textile workshops in the light of the many loom-weights found all over the area (Kenyon 1979, 274). This might also be the case at Tell es-Sa'īdiyyeh, where many loom weights have been found, especially in House 6 of Stratum V, although the excavator states '... there is no evidence to suggest that the houses within this section of the city were used for purposes other than living quarters' (Pritchard 1985, 33, 36–38, FIGS 73–75).

On the basis of the finds from Area B019, the pillared house at Saḥāb most probably served as an industrial and perhaps a business and guest facility. These finds include a large number of loom weights of two main types (conical and round), weights in at least three units, and various tools and pots made of stone and basalt, used mainly for grinding and polishing. The pottery included storage jars and red- and black-burnished pottery with bowls and platters often slip-painted in bands inside and outside. Some of the bowls and small jars were painted with dark thin bands. One of these jars was a waster.

The pillared house, typical for the Iron Age in Bilād esh-Shām, appears most commonly in the southern part, including

Palestine, the Coast and East Jordan. The fact that there are no close parallels from North Syrian sites is due to the small number of excavated sites from this area compared to the southern part. As the house type cannot be attributed to a particular ethnic group, the explanation of its function cannot be generalized, although a few cases do suggest that they were used for industrial purposes—mainly textile workshops.

The pillared house seems to have prototypes in the LB/Iron I periods. An Early Iron Age pillared house was found at Medeinah, northeast of Kerak (Olavarri 1977–78; 1983, 165–178, FIG. 3, 4), at Tell Qasile Stratum x (Mazar 1980, FIG. 12), at Tell Abu Hawām early Stratum IV (Hamilton 1935, Pls IV, IX) at et-Tell (Ai) (Callaway 1970, FIG. 5), and at Khirbet Mshash Stratum II (Fritz 1977, 43). Fritz suggests that this type of house developed from the pillared 'Breitraumhaus' which is represented in all Early Iron Age strata at Khirbet Mshash (Fritz 1977, 44) and which can be followed—also in the form of a temple—into the Middle and Early Bronze periods as G. R. H. Wright has demonstrated in his recent publication (Wright 1985, 423–434, FIGS 170–181).

In brief, the pottery and the stone implements from Saḥāb are typical for the Iron II period (8th–7th century BC) and are the kind of material that spreads over the central highland, the entire Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea, Marj bin 'Amīr, and Central and Northern Palestine. The preliminary study of the Saḥāb material in general corresponds with the conclusions made by Dornemann (Dornemann 1983, 170–184), Sauer (Sauer 1986), and Pritchard (Pritchard 1985, 50–56) that East Jordan was prosperous during the first half of the 1st millennium BC, and there is sufficient evidence to confirm close contacts with Palestine and Syria including the Coast. Assyrian influence is also present in both the objects and the architecture (Bennett 1982b), but that is another dimension that needs a chapter of its own.

Saḥāb today

After the 6th century BC, Saḥāb was probably abandoned until the Medieval Arabic period (11th–13th century AD). The modern history of Saḥāb is also of interest. The present inhabitants moved to the site about a century ago. Their houses were built of stone and clay, and ancient caves were reused as living quarters and storage areas. As did the ancient inhabitants, the modern residents still maintain ties with outside countries, including Egypt, and especially Saudi Arabia. During its long occupational history, Saḥāb has never been more dependent on outside societies than it is now. At least during the time we were digging there, Saḥāb was a smuggling center. Untaxed goods were brought into Jordan from Saudi Arabia, so that for a few years in the seventies, a check point had to be set up by the Jordanian Department of Customs between Saḥāb and Amman to prevent or limit the entry of untaxed goods. The situation now has changed; Saḥābis are no longer dependent on illegal income, and some of them have developed large businesses in Saḥāb or Amman. The land around Saḥāb is becoming very expensive and is sold to businessmen from

Amman for the establishment of small factories. In fact, the Government of Jordan has already started an industrial town to the south and southeast of Saḥāb. Saḥābis today receive a good education, and some of them enjoy good governmental positions.

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