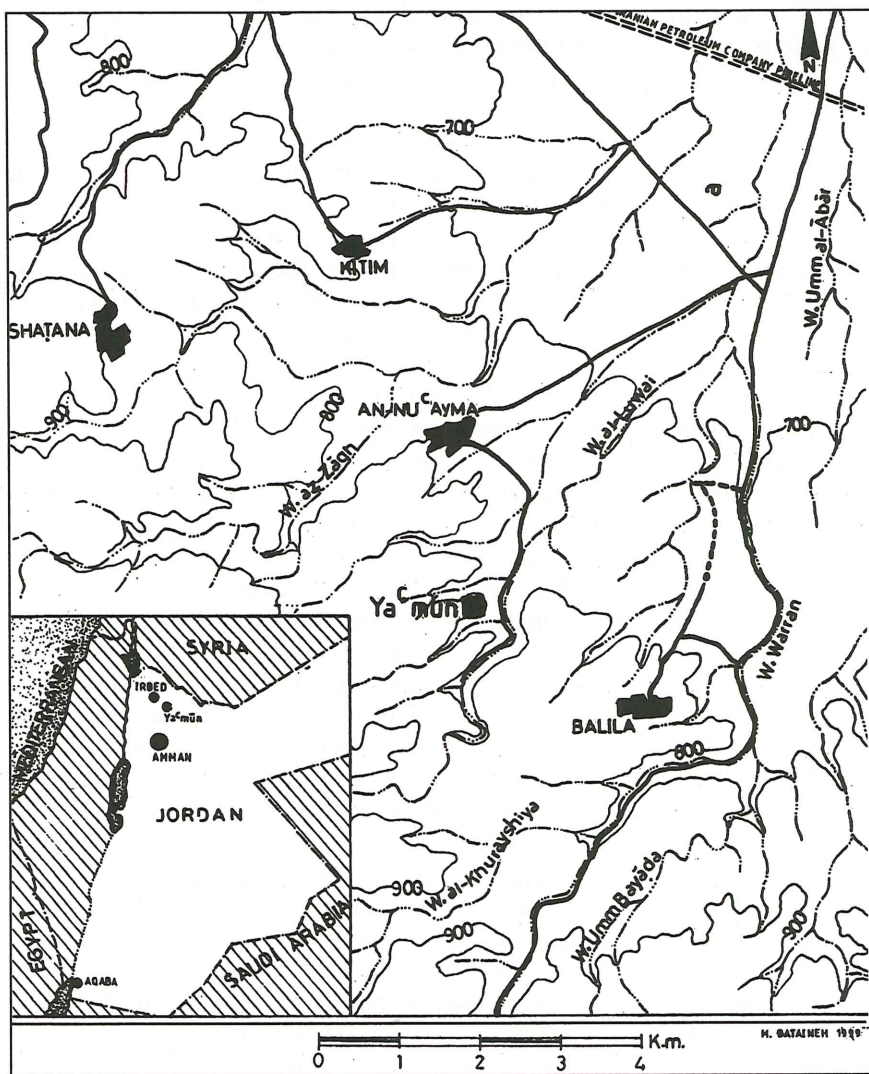


FIRST SEASON OF EXCAVATION AT YA'MŪN (1999)

*Mahmoud El-Najjar, Jerome C. Rose, Nabil Atallah, Nizar Turshan, Naser Khasawneh
and Dolores L. Burke*

The joint Yarmouk-Arkansas bioarchaeological field school, a cooperative effort of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of Yarmouk University and the King Fahd Middle East Studies Program of the University of Arkansas, was conducted

at the site of Ya'mūn (يعمون) from 19 June to 10 August 1999 (Department of Antiquities Permit No. 2320.019).¹ The site is located approximately 25km south of Irbid and some 3km southwest of the town of an-Nu'aymah النعيمة (Fig. 1). The



1. Map showing the location of Ya'mūn.

1. Funding for the 1999 season at Ya'mūn was provided by the King Fahd Middle East Studies Program of the University of Arkansas, the Institute of Archaeology and An-

thropology of Yarmouk University, and the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The second season at Ya'mūn commenced on 19 June 2000.

excavation was conducted by the 24 students of the field school, under the direction of Professor Mahmoud El-Najjar of Yarmouk University and Professor Jerome C. Rose of the University of Arkansas, in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities represented by Mr. Naser Khasawneh. A survey of inscriptions was carried out by Dr. Nabil Atallah and Dr. Nizar Turshan of Yarmouk University.

The main purpose of the project was to recover human skeletal remains in order to examine burial customs, including tomb architecture and grave goods, and ancient diet and disease during the Late Roman-Early Byzantine periods. A second purpose was to reconstruct the settlement patterns at the site.

During the excavation, it was determined through the analysis of pottery fragments that the site extended beyond the Late Roman-Early Byzantine period, and in fact covered at least a span from the Early Bronze to the Islamic periods.

Work took place in three major areas — the *Tall* and adjacent cemetery, the first main cemetery, and the second main cemetery. A brief summary is presented below.

1. The *Tall* and Adjacent Cemetery

The *Tall* is situated at approximately 828m above sea level and includes a number of caves that were used both for living spaces and storage of olive oil and wine. A complete wine-press was discovered but not excavated this season. A church was uncovered that contained an inscription dating to the seventh century AD. Floor mosaics show various types of inscriptions and representations of humans, animals, and plants. Other fragments of Greek inscriptions that were found on stones throughout the site could represent parts of names on tombstones.

The Tombs

Two tombs were excavated in this area. On the west slope of the *Tall*, Tomb 25 was excavated. It is a chamber tomb with 44 loculi, dated to the Late Roman-Early Byzantine period. This tomb showed signs of having been robbed several times (even during this excavation), but although the skeletal remains recovered were badly fragmented, the tomb produced some of the most important skeletal material excavated at the site this year. In addition, the tomb produced a number of glass, metal, and ceramic materials, including a gold earring. In front of the tomb entrance a deep, small pit was uncovered that could have been used as a secondary burial location.

On the east slope of the *Tall*, Tomb 41 was ex-

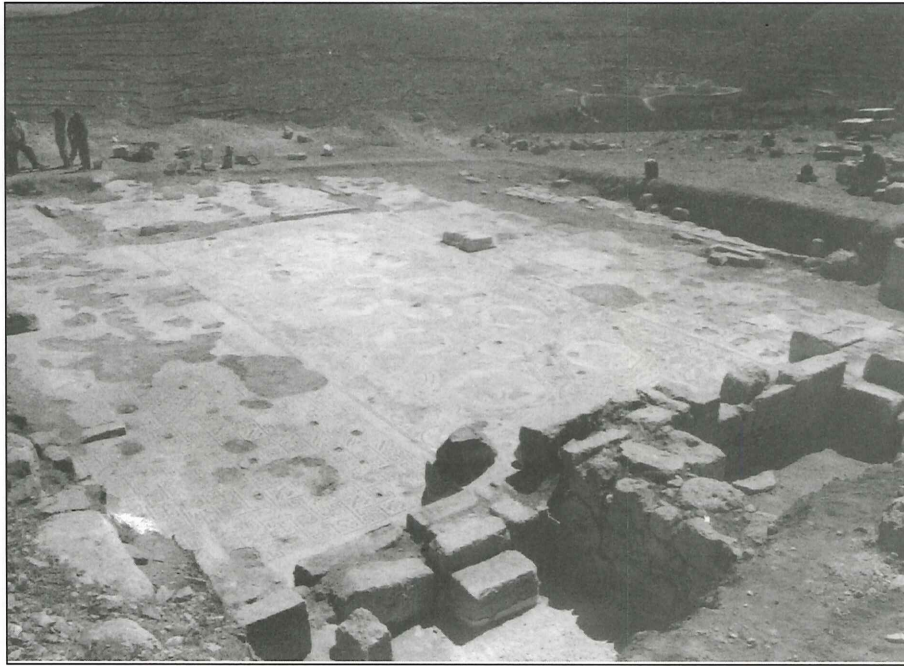
cavated. It is a chamber tomb with arcosolia and trough graves, also dated to Late Roman-Early Byzantine period. Little skeletal material or artifacts were found, and the amount of modern refuse in the tomb attested to recent robbing. This tomb also featured a small pit at the entrance, similar to Tomb 25.

The Church

The church at the site is built in the basilica style, with a nave and two aisles, covering an area of about 20.5 x 13.5m. Preliminary excavations show that the roof had collapsed directly over the pavement, as can be seen from the large number of roof tile fragments. Some wall remains, especially from the west wall of the building, are still present, but only the foundations of the other walls remain. In particular the apse and east walls had collapsed. Only one pillar base still stands, but traces of the other pillars were found. A basin for baptizing was discovered in the south aisle of the church. Another smaller basin was discovered at the narthex of the church. It appears that the church was reused during the Umayyad period as a living area, as all the western entrances were closed off and a large amount of Umayyad pottery sherds were recovered, spread all over the mosaic pavement, and damage to the mosaic floor had been repaired in Umayyad style (Fig. 2).

Mosaic Patterns: Preliminary examination of the mosaic pavement shows that it contains a variety of decorative elements, including Greek inscriptions; geometric designs; human, animal, and other designs; as well as evidence of Iconoclastic modifications.

- a) Inscriptions: The dedicatory main inscription, which consists of six lines written in Greek, gives the names of saints, martyrs, donors, and the people who participated in the building of the church. The proper names include Daniel, Azria, Hananyus and Isaac. A fragmentary inscription in the north aisle consists of a number of Greek letters and is not yet interpreted.
- b) Geometric designs: Various types of geometric designs appear on the mosaic, such as squares, rectangles, swastikas, crosses, lozenges, curved and straight lines, scrolls and arches with radiated lines. There are also octagonal designs whose internal panels of human and animal designs were destroyed by Iconoclasts (Fig. 3).
- c) Floral patterns: A number of plant designs also occur, the most prominent of which are vine designs containing leaves and grapes. Pomegranates are shown in red (Fig. 4).



2. View of the church excavation, with the western wall in the foreground.



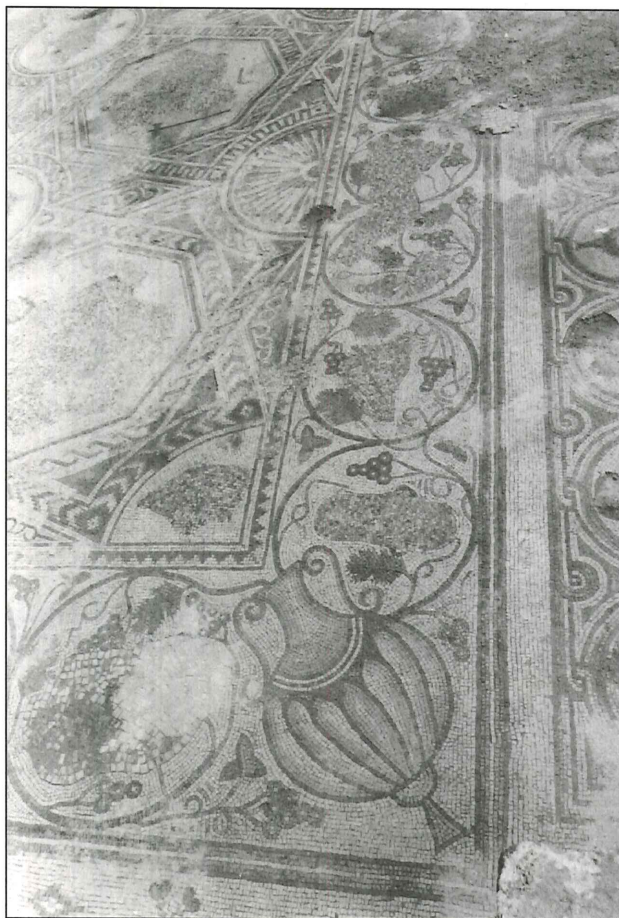
3. The church floor, showing geometric designs and Iconoclastic destruction.

- d) Human and animal designs: Four human designs were found in the north aisle near the apse, with names of persons written on top of them. Unfortunately, only the upper half of the head of one remains intact. A number of animal and bird designs were found on the mosaic floor, including a snake wrapping itself around the neck of a bird. Also, parts of animals such as legs, necks and tails are present in the church floor, having been left by the Iconoclasts (Fig. 5).
- e) Other designs such as knives, axes, and bird-houses were also found, although it is un-

fortunate that many of these designs were destroyed during the Iconoclastic movement.

2. Necropolis 1

This cemetery is situated at about 830m above sea level and consists of two types of burials — single and group. The single type comprises horizontal shaft tombs, and the group type burials are graves in natural caves. The roofs of the group-burial caves had fallen onto the floors, probably as a result of past earthquakes, causing great damage to skeletal remains as well as cultural materials.



4. Vine designs on the church floor.



5. Human, animal and bird designs on the church floor.

Tomb 1 is a large cave tomb with diagnostic Middle to Late Bronze Age ceramics. Although it had been robbed, the tomb produced 199 identifiable artifacts.

Tombs 2, 3 and 4, also robbed, produced no artifacts. These were the same tomb type as *Tomb 1* and are tentatively dated to the Middle to Late Bronze Age.

Tomb 8 is a cave tomb with complete Early Bronze Age II ceramics.

Also excavated were six horizontal shaft tombs and two vertical shaft tombs for a single individual, dated to the Late Roman-Early Byzantine period.

Tomb 31 is a chamber tomb with arcosolia and 12 cut trough graves, dated to the Late Roman period.

Tomb architecture was recorded on 7 horizontal shaft tombs for single individuals, robbed; 4 caves used as tombs, robbed; and 10 tombs of unknown tomb type, robbed.

3. Necropolis 4

This cemetery is located in a forest of Pon-

derosa pines to the south of the Tall, at about 815m above sea level. This area comprises two groups of single and group burial tombs, carved in the rock in systematic rows. These tombs are dated to the Late Roman-Early Byzantine period.

Tombs 39, 44, 46, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 56 and 78 are horizontal shaft tombs for single individuals. *Tomb 54* is similar but contains a sarcophagus. All of these tombs had been robbed.

The chamber tombs excavated (also robbed) were *Tombs 45, 47, 48, 53, 107, 108, 109 and 113*. *Tombs 48, 107 and 108* contained one sarcophagus each; *Tomb 45* contained two sarcophagi; *Tomb 53* contained four sarcophagi. In addition, *Tomb 47* contained an arcosolium and two trough graves; *Tomb 48* had three loculi and four trough graves; *Tomb 53* had three loculi; *Tomb 107* had four loculi; and *Tomb 113* had one loculi. All of the sarcophagi were limestone. *Tomb 45* was a "king burial" where two crowns facing each other were inscribed over the entrance to the tomb, and the chamber contained two sarcophagi.

There were also five tombs of undetermined type — *Tombs 103, 104, 105, 106 and 110*.

A survey of the necropolis indicated an additional 47 robbed horizontal shaft tombs, on which architectural data were recorded.

M. El-Najjar
N. Atallah
N. Turshan
Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology
Yarmouk University
Irbid - Jordan

J.C. Rose
D.L. Burke
Department of Anthropology
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA

N. Khasawneh
Department of Antiquities
Ramtha - Jordan

