

## Second Season of Excavation at Sahab, 1973\*

( Preliminary Report )

by

Moawiyah M. Ibrahim

The Department of Antiquities completed the second season of excavations at Sahab, 12 km. south-east of Amman (Pl. XII). The work continued through the months May and June of 1973, under the supervision of the author. The team members of the Department were: Sabri Abbadi, Lina es-Sa'di, Abdul-Sami' Abu Diyeh, Mohammad Murshed Khadijeh, Isma'il Hazaz, Kurt Langer de Polacky, and Omar Dawoud. Four volunteers of the Society of Friends of Archaeology: John Udeland, Barbara 'Atalla, Hazel Plummer and Dan Shak, in addition to two technical men trained at Tell es Sultan, provided the dig with a considerable assistance. 30-35 workers from Sahab and its vicinity were employed.

The members of the dig are thankful for the interest shown by the public in Jordan and abroad. Special thanks are due to HRH Ra'd bin Zeid, who assisted the dig, not only in visiting the site and explaining its importance to the authorities, but also in attending the excavations on a part-time basis.

We also appreciate the continuous support of Mr. G. Barakat, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Mr. Y. Oweis, Director General of Antiquities, and all colleagues of the Department as well as other archaeologists, who joined us in solving the stratigraphical and dating problems.

The work took place in four major areas (Pl. XIII), designated as: B, D, E,

F, which were chosen in different parts of Sahab. It was decided to excavate in some of these spots, as archaeological strata were partly exposed by modern constructions, such as houses, streets and drainage pits. To prevent further damage, any undertakings which may effect the ancient site require permission from the Department of Antiquities with the cooperation of the Municipality of Sahab.

Two excavation areas (E and F) were opened at the beginning of the 1973 season, whereas the work in Areas B and D is a continuation of the 1972 investigations. Because of the location of Areas A and C among modern houses, the work could not be extended in any direction. We hope in coming seasons to be able to make a few soundings in the courtyards of the surrounding houses.

### Area B

Two more squares (3 and 4) were laid out to the south of the area excavated in 1972. Clear evidence of three major periods was revealed. Debris of the three periods in Sq. 3 was disturbed by a large modern pit which extended to Squares 1 and 4.

The latest dates from the Early Iron Age. (Pl. XV) shows a ground plan of a house from this period. The major part of the house was excavated during the 1972 season and briefly described in the first preliminary report (*ADAJ XVII*, 23 ff). The rooms of the house were

\*See: Ibrahim, M. M., Excavations at Sahab, 1972, *ADAJ XVII* (1972) p. 23 ff.

paved with medium sized stones except that plastered floor around the cave opening. This floor was renewed several times as indicated by a series of thin layers of plaster. Part of the cave, under the plastered floor seemed to have been reused by the owners of the house as a store room; this is indicated by the stratigraphy and by a plastered wall built inside the cave by the users of the building. The foundation trench for this secondary wall was traced through the fill of the Chalco-EB cave habitation.

A more complete ground plan of the Iron I house can probably be achieved by extending the trenches to the west, which we hope to do in a coming season. Nevertheless this was the first house from the Early Iron Age, as far as the writer is aware, yet excavated in central East Jordan. The suggested date is based on the pottery types and wares, including collared-rims and cooking pots with ribbed rims, in addition to bowls with thickened rims.

A tunnel built of one row of small stones set upright and covered by a small stones layer horizontally (Pl. XIV) was uncovered in Sq. 4. The date of this tunnel, which was interrupted by a large modern pit, could not be determined during the 1973 season. Stratigraphically it is earlier than the Iron I walls, since the foundation trench of the southern wall was cut through the debris covering the tunnel.

The second period is represented by two 'Hocker' burials from the MB period (Pl. XVII, 1). Each burial was placed above a rounded stone-pavement, similar to the MB tomb of Area A. The pavements were accessible from a shaft (Pl. XV, 1) which was cut through the Chalco-EB debris. The shaft and the northern edges of the burials were disturbed by a

modern pit. It seems that the objects related to the burial were stolen by the people who dug this modern pit. A bronze needle and many sherds of the MB II period, including piriform juglets with button bases and carinated bowls, were found in association with the burials.

A third period (Pl. XIV) in this area dates from the late IVth millennium B.C. and designated as Chalco-EB. This designation is preliminary. A detailed study of the pottery and its relations is necessary. Material from this early period was found in all open areas, and in Areas A, B, C, and D in association with cave habitation. In Area E, evidence of walls and floors of domestic buildings was uncovered. The pottery is hand-made coarse ware. Thumb indented bands and ledge handles are common. Painted bands of red and brown appear. Hole-mouth jars and bowls with flat bases and plain rims are common forms.

The chronological situation is not very clear yet. The pottery repertoire shows characteristics of Late Chalcolithic and the very beginning of the Early Bronze Age. Some types and wares correspond with Kenyon's Proto Urban. Thumb indentations and thick coarse pottery may well be compared with the late Ghassul Culture, though the typical Ghassul shapes do not occur in Sahab.

The situation in Area B (Pl. XIV) is interesting. The excavated part of this period shows that people lived in a large cave-complex, which was divided by well built stone-walls, possibly indicating that it was inhabited by a large family. But a complete plan of this complex needs further excavation. A hard packed floor mixed with pebbles (Pl. XVII, 2) with thin stone-walls above were found overlying the cave. Pottery from this level is the same as that from inside the cave. The same material was found in Area

A, which indicates that people lived above as well as inside the cave. The cave has rounded corners, and opens to the south-east direction. The cave, although not deep, was enlarged by the building of walls extending from it. The author has no doubt that these caves were at least seasonally inhabited, and not merely temporary shelters.

A wall, five courses high, stretches to the SW, meeting the cave in its SW corner. It appears to be separated from another wall extending towards the NW, forming an entrance(?). The first wall meets a third wall in the SW corner, forming a 90 degree angle. This third wall overlies the cave. A fourth wall in poor condition apparently rebuilt, was found south of the Iron Age wall within the cave. A floor of hard packed dark soil, and a fire place lying above, were found in association with the inner cave and related walls. Sherds of 2 - 3 hole-mouth jars, tabun fragments, flint tools, and animal bones were found directly above the floor of the cave. This floor was partially disturbed by the pavements of the MB burials.

#### Area D (Pl. XVIII)

About 30 m. north of Cave 1, referred to in the 1972 report (*ADAJ* XVII, p. 34), the shaft of another cave (Pl. XIX) was accidentally found. Discovering the nature of the cave constituted the first phase of the work. For this purpose a square (Sq. 1), 4x4 m, was laid out above the shaft. A corner of a stone room appeared in the north-eastern part of the square, about 40 cm. below the surface. Three other squares (2, 3, 4) were opened thereby allowing us to determine the dimensions of this unexpected structure.

The rounded shaft was cut through virgin soil and bed-rock and covered with two stone slabs, the spaces being filled

with small stones. Directly above the slabs, a large number of small stones were set down, forming a circle, probably to mark the shaft. Another cave entrance was found on bedrock in the baulk between Squares 1 and 2 towards the western section, through which the cave became filled in. This entrance seemed to have been known to the builders of the structure, at least during its early phase.

The cave itself became cluttered with fill to a height of over two meters, which made it difficult to trace its limits and to complete investigations within it. The foundation of a modern house to the south were to be seen from inside the cave. However a trial trench, 2 x 2 m, was cut down into the cave fill to a depth of about two meters, to an uneven lime layer, covering a black layer of ash and charcoal. Under these two layers, a layer of packed red soil mixed with 'huwwar, chips was uncovered above bed rock. The ashy layer seemed to be an occupation level, but no dating evidence was found. The shaft and its cover remind one of the Iron Age rock tombs found in Sahab and elsewhere, though no bones were found.

The building (Pl. XX, 1), which was partially uncovered, was not expected in this relatively flat part of the site. The pottery associated with it suggest an Iron I dating and shows the widest variations from stratified context yet found in Sahab. It is not yet clear whether this building was constructed before or after the major Iron I settlement on the mound. Some of the pottery types suggest an eleventh century date. The pots and cooking facilities indicate a domestic building.

There are two architectural phases to be identified. The first and earlier one

is represented by a large rectangular room (1) with a stone pavement, covered by an ashy occupation layer, and walls of large stones. The room seems to have been reused during the second phase. The entrance of the room was on the long side, to the west. The southern continuation of the western wall seems to have been destroyed by a modern pit. The height of the southern wall was preserved to about 80 cm. (4 - 6 courses). Another entrance on the long side, to the east, leads to another small Room 2 which was rebuilt during the later phase of the building. The northern part of Room 1 is not yet excavated. Further excavations will hopefully provide a clear ground plan. Some of the floors belonging to the earlier phase were identified below the walls of the second phase.

The second and later architectural phase also dates from the Iron I period. The two phases can not as yet be divided in terms of the pottery, but they can be recognized stratigraphically, as well as by the use of different stone materials. The stones used in the walls of the second phase are much smaller than those of the earlier phase. Two walls built of such small stones form, together with the southern wall of Room 1, a small rectangular Room 3. The long wall runs W-E, meeting a shorter N-S wall, and thus forming the south-eastern corner of Room 3. The height of the long wall measures to about 80 cm. above the room floor. 8 courses (80 cm. high) of the short wall were preserved. A bench, 50 cm. wide, consisting of a single course of small stones, was built against the long wall, directly above the floor of Room 3. The bench begins at the western edge of the long wall, ending about 60 cm. before hitting the short wall. The floor itself was of hard packed dark brown soil covered by a thin ashy layer of occupation. The short wall of Room 3 meets another, poorly preserved wall,

which is an extent of the southern wall of Room 1.

The walls of the second phase were partly built above the floors of the earlier phase and partly on virgin soil (Pl. XXI, 1). The E-W wall of Room 3 was partly cut into the virgin soil. The virgin soil outside the wall was left undisturbed, providing support for the wall.

Room 2 is narrow and seems to have been poorly rebuilt during the second phase. An irregular line of larger stones separates Room 2 from the 'tabun' group in Sq. 3. One large 'tabun' (Pl. XX, 2) is situated in the southern part of the room, while the other part was paved with small stones.

Several 'tabuns' and one ash-pit, causing a heavy ashy burnt level, were excavated in Sq. 3. The 'tabuns' were set above a hard packed red plastered floor, into which the ash-pit was sunk. Another ash-pit was partly uncovered in Sq. 4. The 'tabuns' may indicate a collective cooking area.

#### Area E

During the 1973 season, the work in Area E was carried out in a deep and complicated bulldozer-cut in the southern edge of the moundcentre. This cut, which is surrounded on the west and east by modern houses, was made by the owner of the land in preparation for building a house. On the top of its north face, to the west, there are remains of a building, probably dating to the medieval or late Arab period. Several years ago, a street was opened to the south of the bulldozer-cut, joining the main street in the middle of the settlement. As a result, the Iron Age strata on this side of the mound were further disturbed. The three faces exposed by the bulldozer measure approximately 9 m. (west), 21 m (north)

and 10 m (east). The maximum height of the cut towards the north-west corner is about 6 m. The archaeological strata and structures (stone and brick) were easily recognizable on all faces.

It was decided to first clear the floor of debris and then trim back the north face of the cut for drawing and general interpretation. However, several problems were encountered: the large size of the cut; protruding stone and brick structures which were in some cases undermined by the bulldozer; the possibility that the medieval ruins, on the north face and the loose walls inside the exceedingly dry and crumbly section, would fall; and the difficult task of separating debris from the preserved material. In addition, the bulldozer had cut more deeply into the centre of the north face than at either end, thus making it impossible to trim back the cut to the same depth across its length, without destroying even more material.

After removing the debris from above the floor of the cut, it was decided to trim at 80 degree angle and to leave ledges below phase B 'lime kiln complex' to prevent its caving in and to avoid undermining the structure above.

To draw and describe such a long section without excavating stratigraphically was a toilsome job. A description of the phases and the related features follows:

Four main building phases (Pl. XXIII) were identified below the top-surface, which begins to slope downward to the east, where it was tilled by the present day inhabitants. The maximum height of this dark brown surface in the western side of the north face ranges from 50 - 150 cm. A modern floor, cemented with concrete, was preserved on the surface in the middle of the section. Above the walls of Phase A (W1, W2) there is a deserted building with vaults, designated

as 'medieval and late Arabic' probably from the 14 - 18th century. Part of the foundations of this building are sitting above Iron Age walls.

#### Phase A

This is the latest phase to be identified in the section; related to Phase A are two walls (W1, W2). The walls are at the same level, and built of large partially hewn stones, which were preserved to a height of approximately 1.50 m. At the west end of the face we have several fill loci above wash and drift layers. Against the bottom of the walls is a long horizontal floor which could be traced, although occasionally with interruptions, not only here but also in the east and west faces. A line of paved stones belonging to this floor could clearly be seen against W2, but it is disturbed at both ends of the section. The space between the two walls had been plastered.

#### Phase B

Below Phase A is what we have called the 'lime kiln complex', which presumably indicates the function of this structure. The entire complex appears to be cut into a thick series of wash levels and parts of the earlier Phase C. The foundation trench (W4T, W12T) can be easily recognized at both ends of the complex, alongside walls (W4 and W12), cutting through the wash levels. An occupation floor, running against walls W4, W6, W8, W10, W11, and W12, could be partly traced. Fallen roof structure, immediately above ash and black charcoal, shows heavy burning. This evidence, in addition to burnt, 'huw-war' and bricks within the debris, is an indication for its function as a lime-kiln. Soil analysis of these strata ought to be made. The extension of the walls and the interior arrangement of the complex remain to be investigated. There are two standing large stones (W6, W8) in the

middle of the complex which may have served as an entrance. One wall (W11), partly built above the wall (W16) of an earlier Phase C, appears horizontally alongside the section and meets walls W10, W12 in two corners.

Between walls W13 -W14 and W3 - W4, the accumulation of the wash levels, cut by the intrusive kiln complex, must be earlier than Phase B and later than C. It seems from the stratigraphy that these levels, appearing right and left of the kiln, were formed when the buildings of Phase C were no longer in use.

#### Phase C

(Walls W3, W13, W14, W15, K16, W17, W18).

All structures appear to have been constructed in a similar way. The stratigraphy shows several walls, W3, W13. One was able to identify occupation floors abutting against them. It was difficult to trace these floors in the middle of the section. It appears difficult to relate walls W18, W15 to the rest of the structure, since they could not be traced in the ledges below the lime-kiln. The time relationship between Phase C and D is not clear.

#### Phase D

It was only identified below walls W16, W17. The extension of wall W19 could not be clarified. Its relation to the LB building is also uncertain.

The dates of these phases and various related architectural features, visible in the north face of the cut, cannot be established until further evidence is available from Area E-N and other sections. They must be later than the LB building in front of the trimmed cut (north face). The pottery from the upper levels of Area E-N (Sq. 1) and the meager evidence picked up from the loci of the cut indicate that they belong to the Iron Age. There were no typical Iron

II sherds among the small pottery collection, and the time relationship between these phases is as yet unsettled.

#### Square 1 - 3

After trimming back the north face of the bulldozer-cut, it was decided to sink a trench (4 x 4 m.) in the new floor of the cut, right against the north face. Later two other squares (6 x 6) were laid out to the east of Sq. 1. As a result two main phases could be identified.

#### LB building (Pl. XXII,2)

Part of a large stone building was uncovered in Sq. 1, and continued to appear alongside all squares. There are three excavated walls to be seen in association with this building. One of the walls runs East-West and measures approximately 17 meters in the trenches; the western end of the wall was not found, which seems to continue below a large modern house. The excavated width of this wall is over 1 m, and runs below the deposit of the north face. Its height was preserved to about 1.20 m. (5 - 7 courses) in the west. This wall meets two other walls running north-south. The eastern wall is wider and built of larger stones than the inner one. The massive construction of the first one may indicate that it was an outer wall (Pl. XXII, 1) of the building.

All the walls were similarly constructed of fairly large hewnstones, wedged with smaller ones. They seem to have been plastered from the inside with a red brick-like material. The same material covered the walls and their interior faces. The foundation trenches are very sharply slanted close to the walls and are filled at the bottom with loose rubble. The Chalco-EB deposits were cut by the foundation trenches. Quantities of stratified LB sherds were obtained from the foundation trenches and above the floor between the two sidewalls, as well as other loci in

association with the building. A few MB sherds were found in the fill among the walls.

The occupation floor of the building could be traced, although disturbed to the west of the interior wall. The floor itself is of hard packed reddish soil covered by an ashy layer of occupation. The loci to the east of the outer side-wall, including a part of a wall and a related stone-pavement, seem to be earlier than the LB building, since the foundation trench of the latter wall was cut through these loci. All these features seem to extend beyond the southern baulk. No definite date can be given to these features, which were uncovered during the last days of the excavation. It is too early to come to a conclusion about the nature and extent of the LB building. Further excavations will hopefully throw more light on the associated walls and their relationship to the other structures.

#### Chalco.-EB Phase

These are the first walls of domestic poor houses excavated in the Chalco-EB period at Sahab. The walls were found only east of the LB interior wall. These were interrupted by the LB building. Hard packed pebbly floors and hearths were related to these walls. One floor seemed to continue below the walls. A good number of sherds of a handmade coarse gritty ware, sherds with red-painted bands, and hole-mouth jars very similar to those from cave dwellings excavated in Area A, B, and C, were found. All these areas yielded red-burnished pottery, thumb-indented bands and ledge-handles. The range of this early phase and its pottery repertoire in relation to other sites will be discussed at a later time.

#### Area F

A long trial trench (30 x 2 m.) was sunk in the western slope of the mound,

seeking the outer limits of the settlement and a fortification structure. The western edge of the trench reached the foot of the tell, but no signs of fortifications were found.

Wash loci (3 major levels), ranging from 1.50 - 2.00 m, lies on bed-rock. Sherds from the upper two levels were mixed and show specimens of the Chalco-EB, MB, Iron I - II periods. The lowest floor-like level yielded typical sherds of the Chalco-EB period.

#### Summary

During this season more evidence from the Chalco-EB period was found, in association with cave-dwellings (Area B) and probably with poor domestic houses, of which walls and floors were uncovered in Area E (Sq. 1-2). In Area B, two MB burials were excavated, each above a rounded stone-pavement. MB sherds were also found in fill loci. This may indicate the presence of a settlement from this period. The LB building in Area E seemed to have been a large one and it does not look like an ordinary domestic dwelling. Sherds of painted craters, jugs and bowls may go back to the 14 - 13th centuries, but a more definite date must await a study of the pottery and further stratigraphical information. The site seems to have been extensively populated during the Early Iron Age. Evidence of domestic structures dating to this period was found in various excavated areas (A, B, D). Two houses with paved stone-rooms were partially uncovered in Areas B and D. Bricks seem to have been used in the upper courses and roofs of the rooms, as for example in Area B. The pottery suggests a 12-11th century dating. Four architectural phases in Area E appear to belong to Iron I, insofar as could be identified from the meager pottery evidence. A definite answer must await further work.

M. M. Ibrahim

The Department of Antiquities