

# Archaeological Excavations At Sahab, 1972

by

Dr. Moawiyah M. Ibrahim

On the fourth of March 1972 the Sahab Police Station reported to the Department of Antiquities that a tomb had been accidentally found. The Inspector of Antiquities Ali Sa'idi went to the site and on the basis of his report Dr. Fawzi Zayadin of the Department and the writer visited the place. Ali Hashim, the owner of a house in Sahab, explained the discovery of the tomb as follows : « I was digging a drainage pit and reached rock after about two meters. I told the workers to cut through the rock. After 40 cms. we broke into a hollow space and saw some bones and few pots. Then I decided to inform the Department of Antiquities through the local police station.» The Department thanked Ali for his cooperation and decided to dig the tomb area properly.

Financial and other problems, such as the location among occupied houses, made it difficult to project the extent of the work. Then the Director of Antiquities, Mr. Mansour Bataineh when informed of the discovery, raised some money to begin excavating the site. Unfortunately this was insufficient to undertake a dig on a large scale. Later, additional funds became available and the work continued for six months. As a result eight squares in two different areas were excavated and three large tombs investigated.

Staff members of the dig were all from the Department of Antiquities. The writer served as director of the excavations with Mohammad Murshid Khadijeh and Abdul-Sami' Abu Diyyeh as supervisors. Dr.

Fawzi Zayadin, Ibrahim Haj Hassan and Nazmieh Rida Tawfiq worked successively two months each. Ismail Hazaz was the draftman. The photographers were Sarkis Labajian and Abdul-Fattah el-Attar and Rafiq Sarraf served as Surveyor. Yousef Tahboub mended the major part of the pottery. The work of Ali Abdul-Rasoul and Khamis Fahd, technical men trained at Jericho delineated clear stratification.

## *LOCATION AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE*

Sahab lies about 12 Kms. south-east of Amman on the present and old road to the Islamic Desert Castles : Muwaqqar, Mshatta, Mshash, Harraneh and Qseir Amra. Sahab is one of the last major settlements on the road to Saudi Arabia; Numerous archaeological sites are found in the vicinity of Sahab, but only Salbud, two Kms. to the south was examined by the team. Judged by surface sharding and observations, Salbud shows Iron Age, Roman, Byzantine and Arab occupation. This material will be discussed elsewhere with information about other sites surrounding Sahab.

Sahab is probably the largest pre-Roman site on the borders of the desert on East Jordan. Its height above sea level is 873 m. For the present it is hard to find the exact limits of the ancient mound because the new town was founded on top of it and spread from there to the surrounding area, destroying parts of the old settlement in the process. According to a contour map prepared by the Ministry of

Municipalities and Rural Affairs, the ancient mound is a large one, occupying an area of about 250 dunums. The highest point of the tell is about 22 meters above the western plains (see pl. IX). On the other sides its elevation above the surrounding area is much less. In 1973 the Dept. of Antiquities plans to undertake a complete contour survey. The area around Sahab is well cultivated. The real desert starts about 15 kms. to the east of it.

From the topography and surface architectural remains it is clear that there was a fortified acropolis within a walled city. The cutting of two modern streets through the ancient mound revealed two large trenches with balks, one directed north-south and the other east-west, which revealed the stratigraphy of the upper part of the mound.

A thick ashy layer is evident in visible sections, especially in the southern part of the mound. The pottery which has been taken out of it suggests the seventh or the eighth century B.C. Therefore, the ashy layer indicates a major destruction in the first half of the first millennium B.C.

Huge, partly worked stones are scattered on the middle of the tell. These appear to be the stones from which the acropolis was constructed. The length of some of these stones is over two meters. Some of the stones were reused in the new buildings of the town. In the eastern section of the street cut north-south and in the northern part of the acropolis there is a well built and well preserved structure of a large important building.

There are few houses with vaulted rooms which probably date from Medieval Arabic period. The typical painted and glazed pottery of this period has been found.

There is also a large number of cisterns, some of which were reused by the present

inhabitants. Some people mentioned the existence of two springs in the vicinity of Sahab, but these dried up some years ago. On the south-east edge of the mound there is a large depression which may have served as a reservoir.

There are several caves in and near Sahab. Some of these were either destroyed or reused as stores by the people. Some of the artifacts from them fell into the hands of antiquities dealers, others were processed by the Department of Antiquities.

A small artificial mound is situated just beyond the northeastern part of the supposed city wall.

On the basis of excavation and investigation it is clear that Sahab played an important role in the history of central East Jordan from the fourth to the first millennium B.C. Evidence for occupation from the end of the Iron Age to the Arabic period seems to be lacking. This, however, should be substantiated through further research.

Six main periods have been recognized. The earliest evidence came from caves. These caves were inhabited during the Chalcolithic Age, about 4000 B.C. Similar caves of the same period are known in Palestine, but these are the first examples yet known in the eastern part of Jordan. Related to this period are floors, pottery, flint tools, and primitive stone structures. A quantity of seeds was also gathered from Chalcolithic floors. Most of these caves were re-used as tombs in later periods during the Middle Bronze Age (1800-1600 B.C.), Late Bronze Age (1400 B.C.), and Early Iron Age (1200 B.C.).

The excavators also uncovered part of an Early Iron Age settlement in two areas in the northern part of the Tell. The location of these remains indicates that the



city found its largest size during the Early Iron Age.

There is a number of tombs which were found at Sahab before the 1972 excavations, but unfortunately none of them has been excavated properly.

The first tomb reported to the Department of Antiquities in 1929 was published by W.F. Albright(1). A second tomb was discovered in 1948 on the north-western edge of the town and published by Lankester Harding(2) Both of these tombs date from the Iron II (ninth to seventh century B.C.) period. Two other tombs were cleared by the Dept. of Antiquities, and one of them has been published by R. Dajani(3) It seems that this tomb had been used in the Late Bronze Age and reused in the Iron Age and probably, in Iron II period as well.

The above mentioned scholars did not undertake investigations on the mound itself. Even the surface sherding and observations were not representative of the physical remains, history and importance of the site. It seems that Nelson Glueck and others, who made surface explorations for major parts of the country did not examine the site and its surrounding(4)

We could not find any historical records which refer to the place and its name, though one would expect to find references, judging from the importance of the site. Further research is badly needed to clarify the historical identification, ascertain the full range of the archaeological

periods represented, and to throw more light on the history and foreign relations of the area. The Department of Antiquities is aware of these aspects and plans to continue investigation and excavation of the site.

### THE EXCAVATIONS

As we have shown, there were no prior plans for the excavations. The investigations undertaken in 1972 were a kind of reaction to accidental finds as a result of construction which occurred before and during our setting of the first Area A. The designations Area A, B, C and D were given one after the other. Therefore these opened areas do not represent key positions of the site, as one would plan to excavate sequentially at the beginning of a dig. Such systematic treatment of accidental discoveries already made will be a major procedure for our next season. We also hope to open new areas of excavation in a systematic search for such features as the fortifications.

The Department of Antiquities has also been able to stop further new construction except by prior consultation so as to prevent further damage to the site. An Antiquities office was opened in Sahab during the excavations for this purpose. This will facilitate more investigations in Sahab and the surrounding region.

### AREA A

The work started in a tomb on the northern part of the mound (see above).

madan. Many caves and cisterns. Below Sahab es Sarboud, a quarter of a mile west, is a very large cistern, with four mouths, and good water». R.E. Brünow and A. V. Domaszewski, Die Provincia Arabia, Zweiter Band, Strassburg (1905), (1905), p. 195. Musil mentioned: hirbet Sahhab, while Brünow and Domaszewski : es-Sahhab, op. cit., p. 195.

- 1) W. Albright, *AJA* 36 (1936), p. 295ff.
- 2) G.L. Harding An Iron Age Tomb at Sahab, *QDAP* 13 (1948), p. 92ff.
- 3) R.W. Dajani, A Late Bronze — Iron Age Tomb Excavated at Sahab, 1968, *ADAJ* 15 (1970), p. 29ff.
- 4) The site was visited by Gray Hill, who mentioned it as : «Sahab es-Sarboud. — Top of hill. — Two smaller square ruins similar to Ra-

We entered the tomb through the hole which was cut by the land owner and not through the original entrance. The location of the tomb under a 4 m x 4 m modern room and among other occupied houses (see Pl. I Fig. 1) in addition to financial difficulties did not allow us to open squares above the tomb, so as to clarify the situation from the top surface until we reached the bedrock and the entrance. Part of the tomb was excavated from inside. Later we were able to remove the overhead room and opened a 4 m x 4 m square (square 1) above the expected entrance of the cave (tomb), on its northern side. Three other squares were excavated almost to bedrock (see Pl. 1).

Six occupation phases were identified with a total of 20 levels. A good picture of these phases could be obtained from square 1, especially in the eastern section. In fact, only the uppermost occupation phase was followed in all squares, while phases 2-6 are associated with the use of the cave. The pottery of phases 5 & 6 was found both on the floor of the cave and on the bedrock above the cave.

#### *PHASE I (levels 1-5)*

All these levels have been disturbed at least in three sides by modern pits. It seems that the local people had been looking for stones to be used in their houses and taking soil to make mud-bricks. Two modern pits cut into bedrock were also found in the south-east corner of sq. 5.

The uppermost level is a modern cement floor which is followed by another layer, about 20-50 cms thick, containing soft brown dusty earth and ashes. Under this top soil there is level 1 which is formed by hard patches of soil with small pieces of huwwar mixed with ash and bricks of reddish brown colour. Some of these brick pieces were burnt. The pottery which came out of this level is mixed. There is Iron I & II sherds. MB, probably

EB and Chalcolithic pieces may come from the surface. A piece of basalt plate of the Iron II period and a few flint tools were also found. Level 2 is soft loose soil and ashes mixed with huwwar fragments and brick pieces. Under 2, there is a thin level 3, only 5-8 cms of hard brownish and sandy packed soil with small pieces of brick material. This was followed by a large number of almost complete though broken storage jars (Pl. II). It seems that these jars were broken as a result of destruction.

The way they lay on the floor (see Pl. II) and the way material from the roof such as burnt beams, brick and medium stones were found inside and around them is probably evidence for such a destruction. Some of these jars were stamped in different ways. Description and Iron Age I dating is discussed below. Large dark burnt brick was found next to the jars, between sq. 1 and sq. 5. A hole for three fingers to fit in was made in the middle of this brick. The use of it is not known. Some medium stones were found beneath the jars. They were probably used as supports. Under all these jars was a layer (level ) of pink plaster. Major parts were preserved and nicely polished. This plaster covered a stone pavement built of medium rough stones (Pl. II Fig. 2). Two larger stones were uncovered in the southern part of the pavement. No walls were found in association with it. They were probably robbed by the people who disturbed it. This made it difficult to find the limits of the pavement. No definite evidence has been found concerning its function. Judging by the jars found above it, the pavement was probably a storage area. The uncovered part of the pavement is too large for one room. Two stones situated above the floor-pavement in the eastern side of sq. 6 may indicate that the area was divided by stone columns. A large cistern, on the eastern edge of sq. 6, still re-used by the local people is probably associated with this pavement. The



original function of this cistern is not clear (there is another entrance 15 m. to the east). Directly below the Iron Age I pavement and between the individual stones of it is a layer (level 5) of a soft mortar presumably forming the foundation of the pavement. Level 5 is followed by a soft loose dusty layer (level 5a) which served to level the area before setting the pavement stones.

Levels 1-5 are to be seen with the latest occupation phase in Area A. This was the first architectural remains with dating evidence to be excavated at Sahab. Phase I is contemporary with the main upper levels of Area B. The location of these two areas on the northern edge of the artificial mound indicates that Sahab found its widest extent during the Iron Age I.

The Iron I pavement in Area A was built above a natural cave which had been re-used as a tomb in the middle Bronze Age (see below). It appears from the stratigraphy that the builder of the pavement did not notice the cave. There is a gap of 400-500 years between the latest use of the cave and the stone pavement.

Level 6 contained hard packed soil with a few little stones in some places. It sloped to the north and thickened from 10 cms to 35 cms. The pottery out of it is mixed. Some of the types may date from the MB and few even earlier. This is probably a wash level which separates the tomb phase from the Iron I occupation. It was only noticed in the major part of sq. 1 and in the northern part of sq. 6.

#### PHASE II (LEVEL 7)

This phase represents the following period, namely the re-use of the cave as a tomb during the Middle Bronze Age. The relationship of this phase to earlier and later strata was taken into consideration. The shaft of the tomb (Pl. II Fig. 2) was excavated and followed vertically after the removal of the upper levels. The tomb it-

self was treated independently from the earlier levels inside and outside the cave. This is designated as Area A Tomb 1.

#### Area A Tomb 1

Level 7 is associated with the shaft of the tomb which was cut into the debris underneath. The tomb itself is located in a natural cave which is irregular in shape but its limits in the bottom are rather rounded. The mouth of the cave is in the north and it is a large one, but the shaft which served to get into the tomb, was cut in the north-eastern side through the fill and earlier levels. Two small separated walls were built in the bottom of the shaft. One was the outer side of the shaft and the other (Pl. III Fig. 5) was directly in the mouth of the cave (eastern side only). The gap between the two walls was filled with medium and small rough stones up to the roof the cave (see pl. II Fig. 2) The latter wall was probably built to seal the tomb. The shaft sloped steeply to the west (1.40 m deep). There were three rough steps.

From the shaft one could get on to a stone pavement, (see Pl. III Fig. 2) (partly destroyed in the northern part of the cave). About nine skeletons were found in association with this pavement. Rows of stones were built around some of the skeletons which were very fragile and difficult to preserve. A thick layer of muddy brown soil with some stones were removed from above the pavement. Above this layer there was another thin layer, 5-10 cms, of soft damp silt, a brown soil, probably washed in after sealing. There was a shallow space of 30-50 cms between the wash layer and the ceiling of the cave. However there was no space alongside the mouth of the cave, which was completely filled with light brown dirt mixed with little stones.

Two phases were noticed in the tomb within the Middle Bronze Age. Judged from the pottery, the first dates from the MB II A and the later from MB II B.C. The



best evidence of the two phases was noticed in the eastern part of the pavement, where a row of stones was built above a skeleton with a MB II A juglet of black burnished ware with a double handle. The destroyed part of the pavement is most probably due to the re-use of the tomb. The furnishing of the tomb was restricted to a number of pots (see Pl. IV Fig. 1) and some sherds.

### PHASE III (LEVELS 8-12)

This is the latest phase in the occupation of the cave. There was a gap of about 1300 years between this phase and the previous one. An occupation floor composed of thick huwwar (level 12) mixed with little stones was found. It goes in a slope, high in the north outside the cave and low inside the cave below the MB pavement. Its highest point is about 1 meter above the lowest point. No wall construction was found with this floor. Another ashy layer with dark soil (level 11) was uncovered, most clearly inside the cave. Such construction is not usual and it seems that the users of the cave just cleared part of it to a certain level and left the dump outside and covered it with a huwwar mixture which served as plaster. The floor was partly cut (see Pl. IV Fig. 2) when the shaft was dug up by the later MB people. This probably also destroyed most of levels 8-10 which were followed to a short extent in the eastern part of sq. 1. Level 8 was a packed sandy brown soil with a few fragments of limestone. Level 9 was a dark brown soil. Level 10 was a thick yellowish soil mixed with little stones. The remains of these layers served as the steps of the shaft. One could speculate that the three layers represent debris that accumulated between the occupation (levels 11 and 12) of the cave and its re-use as a tomb (level 7).

Pottery from this phase III is all hand made of reddish, cream and pink coarse ware. A few sherds were with red shiny

burnishing. Some of the pottery shows the characteristics of the beginning of the Early Bronze and other pieces represent the Chalcolithic period.

### PHASE IV LEVELS 13-17)

This phase consists of a series of floors (levels 15-17) about 5-15 cms thick each against which a wall (Pl. V Fig. 1) was built (wall A). These floors, seen in the eastern section of sq. 1, are built of pink and reddish hard packed soil mixed with little stones. Ashy remains were found on them. Level 14 contains fallen stones from wall A, where as level 13 was formed when the cave was not in use. Wall A was built of medium and big rough stones at the mouth of the cave, while wall B of phase V and wall C (pl. V Fig. 1) of phase VI were built from 70 — 150 cms further north. It appears that walls B and C were also built at the mouth of the cave but the edge of the roof (mouth) had broken off. This is very clear on the eastern side of the entrance. At any rate, a roughly square stone from the eastern side of the uncovered wall A is situated exactly below the present edge of the cave roof. There is a ridge (curve) in the middle of the wall where it follows the irregular contour of the edge of the cave. The wall reaches from one side of the entrance to the other side. The actual entrance of the cave during the earliest three phases is supposed to be in the eastern side where wall A turns to form a corridor with the side of the cave.

During this phase the area connected with the cave had been partly leveled and cleaned. Part of the dump of phase V had been cut to put wall A.

A door socket, partly missing, was found more to the eastern side among the fallen stones of the upper floor (level 15). The location of the socket suggests also that the entrance was in the eastern side.



A good number of Chalcolithic sherds were brought to light from this phase. Whether some of the sherds show types of the beginning of the Early Bronze Age remains open for discussion. Animal bones and flint implements also need further study.

#### PHASE V (LEVEL 18)

Under level 17 and similar to it another floor, 5-10 cms thick, was uncovered. This floor runs below wall A of phase IV and it is also connected with the earlier wall B (pl. V) which had also been built at the opening of the cave. It seems that the cave was larger during this phase than it was in phase IV, as noted above. Earlier debris was cut to put up wall B and the contemporary floor (level 18) was built above part of the fallen stones and debris of level 19. In fact the fallen material seemed to be mixed up and especially in the north eastern side it was not clear what belonged to phase IV and to phase V.

The major part of the pottery is similar to that of phase IV. Brown, reddish and cream coarse wares are common. Slightly concave rims of open mouth jars and thumb indented ledge handles are also well represented. The later red, brown and yellowish burnishing does not appear here. Animal bones and flint tools are roughly the same as in phase IV.

#### PHASE VI (LEVELS 19-20)

The major part of level 19 which is a fill of soft brown soil mixed with fallen stones, served as foundation for the floor of level 18 and wall B. A third wall C (pl. V Fig. 2) was uncovered, against which had been laid a floor of hard packed reddish sandy soil (level 20). Level 20 is in fact the occupation floor of phase VI which was partly covered with a heavy ashy layer, some of which is from the remains of a hearth. Next to this supposed hearth, some blackened animal bones were

uncovered. Above this floor (level 20) and covering a major part of it, were a good number of broken pots including hole mouth jars, three of which we were able to restore. A nicely worked grinding stone, stone polisher and some flint implements were found in association with this floor and its pottery. Judged from the way the finds lay on the floor, it seems that the cave was deserted suddenly at the end of phase VI.

Wall C (Pl. V Fig. 2) was built of huge stones, probably of the same rock as the cave, chinked and dressed with smaller ones. Whether the cave found its largest size during this period could not be recognized, since further excavations in the northern and eastern sides were not possible because of modern constructions. But the floor of level 20 and wall C were built directly on bedrock which may indicate the earliest date of this inhabited cave and the area excavated. A foundation trench for wall C was cut through dump on the north (outside the wall) which contained a thick ashy layer. Unfortunately this could be followed to only a very short extent because of the construction just noted. The major part of the bedrock inside and outside the cave has been uncovered. There were no clear cutting impressions, which suggest it was originally a natural cave. The rock is of soft huwwar with flint strata which makes it difficult to notice any artificial cuttings. Natural holes of bedrock were filled with soil and little stones on which the whole floor area was founded.

In association with the floor (level 20) and partly under the eastern section was a small rounded cemented pit nicely cut into bedrock. It is about 12-15 cms deep with an upper diameter about 60 cms, while the bottom was 10 cms. The mixture of the cement was ash, huwwar and ground stones which was very hard. This, besides its shape and location, suggests the possibility of its use as a door socket.



A study of the pottery will appear elsewhere. But a few words can be said about this. Phases 3 to 6 provided a good number of sherds representing types of hand-made vessels, fire-blackened, gritty coarse wares. Some are decorated with thumb-indentations, others have broad bands of reddish brown paint. Hole-mouth jars with thickened concave rims and flat bases are rather common. A large spout with a plain rim of a hole-mouth jar is typical of Ghassul IV A and IV B. In fact all these types appear in the latest phases of Tulleilat Ghassul and probably 'Bir es-Sab' (Beersheba) and should be seen within these cultures. The same types and wares were also found in major Chalcolithic sites in Palestine, such as : Megiddo (Stratum XIX), Affulah, Beisan — Bethshean — (Stratum XVIII and Pits) Tell el-Far'ah (N) and a number of sites in the Jordan Valley. The gritty coarse ware, broad bands of paint, red and yellow burnished examples have their best parallels from Tell Umm Hammad ash-Sharqi and Tell ash-Shunah in the central and northern Jordan Valley. Similar types and wares were also found in several caves alongside the wadis in the hills west of the Dead Sea.

This cave and other caves found at Sahab were probably inhabited at the same time of the late Ghassulian settlements. They are probably contemporary with the Chalcolithic inhabited caves just noted. Massive, though primitive, wall-structures of large and medium sized rough stones and the floors show that this cave and that of Area C (see below) were inhabited not just for a short period but for long seasons. Seeds from Area C (Cave 1) and other artifacts indicate a kind of agriculture which was practiced by the inhabi-

tants of the caves. The study of such caves on both banks of the Jordan will make a contribution to the social economic structure of this period. The earliest pottery found at Sahab will throw more light on the chronology of the Late Chalcolithic and beginning of Early Bronze Age of the area. Evidence from the EB II & III in Area A is lacking, but further investigations on the mound are needed.

MB deposits have been found in the tomb (Phase II) and in Area B, below Iron I levels mixed up with Chalcolithic and EB sherds.

The Iron I (Phase I) is mainly demonstrated by the large number of pithoi. These are two-handled large jars marked by the elliptical shape, collared rim and a plastic ridge separating neck from shoulder. Some of them bear seal impressions or thumb indents, either on rim or handle. The lower and upper part were made separately. This is suggested by (2-4) between shoulder and the rest of the body. The ware is either dark grey or reddish brown with huwwar and black grits, often with flakery white slip.

The seal impressions are under study. An impression found on two jars represents a man following an animal. Another shows two animals above each other (an ibex and a lion or a bull). Others were scorbions and a rosette. Similar impressions are to be found on seals and cylinders of the «Second Syrian Group».(5)

These pithoi were also present in Area B (Phase I). The burial jars with removed mouths from Area C (Cave 1) are of the same type (see below). They have been found in several East Jordanian and Palestinian sites, such as Megiddo (VII A

5) Good parallels are illustrated by G.A. Eisen, *Ancient Oriental Cylinder and other seals, OIP 47* (1940), Nos. 73, 153, 168 (rosettes); 185, 189,

191, 196 (human with animal figures); 171, 181, 183, 188 (show similar animal figures above each other).



& B) (6) Hazor (Stratum XII) (7) Tell en-Nasbeh (collared zir rims) (8) and Beth Zur.(9) Such pithoi from Tell Beit Mirsim (B 1 & 2), Tell el-Ful and Beth El were considered by Albright as evidence for the «Early Israelite Settlers» in Palestine.(10) This proposal, which has been supported by Aharoni and Amiran,(10a) seems to be without firm basis. However, this pithos has proto-types in the Late Bronze Age and even earlier. East Jordanian parallels (probably not known to Albright and those who agreed with him) were recently distinguished in Khirbet el-Hajjar, 7 kms south-west of Amman,(11) and other places (see below). Iron I levels (phases A-L) of Deir Alla(12) and Tell el-Mazar (surface) (13) provided the same type of pithos.

#### AREA C Cave (Tomb) 1

While the work continued in Areas A and B, on the 4th of June the discovery of another tomb was reported. Hamid Masri, the owner of a house on the western slope of the mound, was digging foundations of two new rooms, when the workers hit a shallow space which opened into a cave. They entered the cave, but fortunately we were on the find spot half an hour later and the damage was very slight. The construction work was stopped.

This is a large natural cave with the entrance from the west. The entrance is narrow and at one time it had been closed by corbelling stones which at the top

formed a chimney like opening. This opening was sealed by a rounded small slab of stone. It seems that this construction, similar to other examples found at Sahab, dates from the later use of the cave.

The general shape of the cave (Pl. VI Fig. 1) is irregular, but tends to be rounded in the southern part. It measures about 14 m long and 6.50-2 m wide. In the north and in the middle the cave becomes narrower. The height ranges from 2 m to 0.50 m. There are a number of holes on the sides and benches inside it. The benches appear to be natural portions of the floor rather than man made. The holes on the southern side were filled with small and medium stones.

The first significant things noticed inside the cave were eight large burial jars with the mouths removed and every two jars facing each other in such a way as to form an M shape. A number of skeletons were also visible in the south eastern corner and in the northern part. Various objects made of pottery, bronze and iron were seen in association with these skeletons.

When construction opened the mouth of the cave, a quantity of debris fell into the cave. This was removed. Then for excavation purposes, the cave was divided into 2 x 2 meter squares. Each square was excavated stratigraphically to bedrock. The work started in two squares opposite the entrance, so as to facilitate excavating the cave from a central location.

- 6) W. Albright, AJA 41 (1937), p. 147; see also Megiddo II, pl. 83:1.
- 7) Hazor III-IV, pl. CLXVII : 1-7.
- 8) Tell en-Nasbeh II, pl. 2.
- 9) Ovid R. Seller and others, The 1957 Excavations at Beth-Zur, AASOR 38 (1968), p. 44ff; pl. 21, 22: 21-29.
- 10) W. Albright, BASOR 56 (1934), p. 9ff.
- 10a) R. Amiran, Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land (1969), p. 232f.
- 11) The writer found exact parallels on surface, while

- investigating the site (1971). See Moawiyah Ibrahim, Two Ammonite Statuettes from Khirbet el-Hajjar, ADAJ XVI (1971). Quantities were found in Iron I levels of the 1972 excavations led by Henry O. Thompson. A study on this will appear in the near future.
- 12) H. Franken, Deir 'Alla I (1969), p. 33ff., fig. 47:1,2.
- 13) Collared rims of greenish ware with ridge on the shoulder have been recently found by the writer at Tell el-Mazar north of Deir 'Alla.

The above mentioned burial jars represent the latest use of the cave. Another smaller broken burial jar of an infant was found in the middle of the large ones. Skeletons of males, females and infants were found in the jars. Some of the skeletons were placed in facing jars. A few objects, such as bracelets, rings made of bronze and iron and a large bronze dagger were found in association with the jars, though some of them had no objects. Fragmentary pieces of carbonised beams probably caused the burnt effect of the bones. This may suggest cremation but the material is still under study. There were two fragile carbonised wooden coffins, one for an infant, and another for a warrior with a dagger and an anklet made of bronze and an iron bracelet. These coffins were put inside the tomb before the jars.

Three other burial levels were identified below the niveau of the burial jars. Only one clear burial level has been noticed in the southern part of the tomb.

The nature of the above levels can be summarized as follows :

- Level 1 is represented by the burial jars.
- Level 2 was directly below the burial jars, with dry fragmentary bones mixed with soft loose brown white-huw-war soil.
- Level 3 was dark soil mixed with fragmentary bones and small pieces of carbonized beams which gave a black colour to the soil.
- Level 4 was directly above bedrock in the major part of the cave, with reddish brown soil. Most of the intact skeletons belong to this level. It is probably the same burial level above the Chalcolithic floors in the depression (see below).

A large number of skeletons with a wide variety of furnishing objects including oil lamps (some of these lamps had been

put on bedrock benches in the north western part of the cave), small bowls and handled jugs, Egyptian decorated alabaster vases, daggers, arrow-heads, anklets bracelets, rings (for fingers, ears and nose), needles & nails, all made of bronze or iron. Two nose rings and a disk were made of gold. An Egyptian scarab and a small figurine head made of steatite were also found. Beads of different sizes and colours were found in large quantities. All these tomb furnishings date from the Early Iron Age (1200-1100 B.C.).

Because of different burial uses of the tomb, only a few skeletons could be uncovered in their original situation. It is interesting to note that a stone was found below every skull of the preserved skeletons. A skeleton of an infant laid on the right arm of a female deceased (sq. 11).

Two intact skeletons were uncovered in a depression in the bedrock in the southern part. This depression provided the earliest evidence of the use of the cave. Five occupation floors from the Chalcolithic period were revealed. Judged from the series of floors and contemporary finds, the cave was inhabited for a rather long time during the Chalcolithic period. Two typical Chalcolithic pots and a good number of sherds representing examples of the Ghassul — Bir es-Sab' (Beersheba) culture plus flint implements and bones were found. A collection of seeds (now under study) was also gathered from these floors. The common pottery wares, the red burnishing and the thumb-indented ledge handles are similar to those from Area A Phases IV - VI.

It seems that the depression was used for cooking and daily life purposes by the inhabitants of the cave. This is suggested by heavy ashy layers, fire places and the above mentioned artifacts. Apart from the earliest floor (level 9) above bedrock, all other floors (levels 6-8) are contemporary with an installation which probably had served as storage shelf. A bench or shelf



of the rock wall of the cave was artificially extended by building it out into the depression with a curved wall of medium sized rocks. What appeared to be a robber trench suggests that the upper stones of this supposed shelf were removed by the Early Iron Age people and set up in the southern holes of the cave. Some of the stones from the Chalcolithic construction had been re-used to support the burial jars while others were placed around or below some of the skeletons.

Two bowl-like holes cut into bedrock in the eastern edge of the depression must be dated from this early period. There were smoke remains on the ceiling in different parts of the cave, but there was no evidence of fire-places apart from the depression, nor was there clear stratigraphic evidence of Chalcolithic occupation outside the depression except for few scattered sherds. This suggests that the first Iron Age users of the tomb had cleared most of it before making their burials.

The Chalcolithic levels can be summarized as follows :

- Level 5 Separated the skeletons (level 4) from the lower levels. It was a thin yellowish brown soil which disappeared in certain spots.
- Level 6 Was a thin ashy black layer with a few animal bones. A few sherds from this level were nicely red burnished and others coarse and blackened. With it a fire-place was found.
- Level 6 a Was a polished hard packed reddish brown (pink) floor which had been disturbed by later use of the cave.

Level 7 Was another heavy ashy layer mixed with seeds, animal bones, some coarse sherds and flint tools. Apparently the fire place (of the later level 6) was also used here.

Level 7 a Was similar to 6 a. This series of levels are mixed up in certain places.

Level 8 (Under level 7 a) was a thick hard packed floor of brown soil mixed with huwwar and stones (small and medium). A very thin ashy layer connected with this floor was also found.

Level 9 Was a reddish brown soil above bedrock. This floor ran under the stone shelf.

The entrance of the cave during the Chalcolithic period must have been the same as the present and Early Iron Age entrance. The stone roofing of the entrance ought to be dated in the Iron Age, but what it looked like in the Chalcolithic period is not clear.

The users of this tomb are probably the Iron I settlers demonstrated in Phase I of Areas A & B. There are two tombs of Iron I which are similar to this tomb from Sahab. The first one was found at Madaba and published by G. L. Harding<sup>(14)</sup> Apart from the typical Late Bronze objects, the inventory (pottery, scarabs, and metal objects) of the Madaba tomb has strong similarities with that from Sahab. The second (unpublished) was excavated in 1968 by the Department of Antiquities at Jabal el-Qusur north-east of Amman. This tomb contained, beside similar small finds, pithoi (large burial jars) with removed mouths as in Area C (tomb 1) of Sahab.

14) G.L. Harding, *An Early Iron Age Tomb at Madaba*, PEFA VI (1953), p. 27ff.

This indicates the same burial customs which had been practiced by a certain group of people.

These tombs are contemporary with certain pottery types of Jabal an-Nuzhah tomb in the northern part of Amman, Deir Alla (Phases A — L), Beisan VI, Megiddo (VII A & B), Tell Beit Mirsim (B 1 & 2), Tell el-Ful and other sites. The evidence from this period as being represented at Sahab, Madaba, Amman and Palestinian sites show strong Egyptian<sup>(15)</sup> and even Syrian influences. An Egyptian scarab and a small figurine made of steatite, in addition to alabaster vases, are typical of the XIX & XX dynasties. Seal impressions on some of the jars from Area A (Phase I), as noted above, have similar motifs to Syrian cylinder seals (Second Syrian Group). The period which the tomb furnishings cover within the twelfth century B.C. is still an open question.

A comparative study with the classification of the pottery will be discussed elsewhere. But again this tomb indicates the importance of the site during the Early Iron Age.

#### AREA D Cave 1

Hashim Amir, the owner of a house next to Area A brought our attention to another cave which was accidentally found while the people were digging a drainage pit in the eastern part of the town, when they hit the stone roofing of the cave. It was cleaned before we started our excavations at Sahab. The debris and the bones from the cave were put on the edge of the pit. Sherds from the debris and inside the cave suggest Iron II and Chalcolithic use. We cleaned the cave of rubbish then it was

drawn and photographed, but no digging was undertaken. Hopefully two corners in the eastern side of the cave, which may provide further evidence, will be investigated in 1973.

The cave is roughly rectangular in the bottom (4.50 x 3.40m) with small depressions and pockets in the wall. The highest point of the ceiling from bottom is about 1.60 m. The rock ceiling of the cave was continued by small and medium sized rough stones and stone slabs. These fairly large slabs were used as key stones. The stone roofing was supported by two columns (about 1.60 high) built of medium and large stones (see plate VI Fig. 2), one had been situated in the middle and the other was adjacent to the eastern wall of the cave. This construction seems to be unusual, though it fits with the nature of the cave. A shaft had been cut in the western part of the ceiling and sealed by a rounded slab chinked with small stones (see plate VI Fig. 3).

A red burnished Iron II juglet, delivered to us by the cutters of the drainage pit, was reported to be from this cave. Though stratified evidence is needed for definite dates of its use, it was occupied in the Chalcolithic period and re-used as a tomb in the Iron Age. The stone roofing date from the later use.

Another cave (not yet excavated) was reported, about 30 m north of the above mentioned one. These two indicate the existence of other caves in the area.

#### AREA B

(M. Murshed Khadija)

On the 29th of May 1972, while digging

15) R. H. Dornemann, The Cultural and Archaeological History of the Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages, Vol. I (dissertation), Chicago (1970), p. 122f.



in Area A, the discovery of a new cave, 50 m. east of Area A was reported. This happened while people were cutting a foundation trench for a new house. A trial trench, 2 x 3 m. (sq. 1) was opened. Later two additional squares were opened to the south 2 x 3 m. (sq. 2) and to the north, 5 x 6,50 m. (sqs. 10, 11, 16). A bulldozer removed the major part of the upper surface of sq. 10 and a further area to the north and east, before the cave was reported.

On the basis of excavations in this area, three main phases were identified :-

#### Phase 1 :-

This is represented by a thick layer (60-90 cms) of broken burnt bricks and a few small stones mixed with light brown loose soil and pockets of ash coming from the surface. A few complete bricks were found above the stone pavement (sq. 10 level 6). This brick layer covered the whole area, as in Area A, except in certain pits and a disturbed area in the southern part (sq. 2).

The brick Layer was followed by a number of partly preserved which served as foundations for mud-brick structures and a series of floors. These walls in Area B are the first to be excavated from the Iron Age I during the 1972 excavations and previous investigations. They show a complex of a large building with few rooms and corridors. The rooms were built of mud bricks sitting on rough stone foundations. Some of the large stones were worked to fit in corners making a good support for the construction. Approximate width of the walls (see Pl. VII Fig. 1) ranges from 60-80 cms. Among these walls were four different types of floors. They were almost at the same level but they differ in color and mixture. Those floors are :-

#### Floor sq. 2 : 5 :-

This floor appears in south west corner

of the area, it is similar to the paved floor in Area A phase I. This was uncovered to a short extent (80 x 50). It was built of small and medium stones with pink mortar between and above the stones.

#### Floors sq. 1: 8 and sq. 2 : 8 :-

These floors (5-10 cms thick) belong to each other and cover most of sq. 1 and sq. 2. They consist of yellowish earth and huwwar. Walls in sq. 2: 3, sq. 1 : 9 and sq. 1, 11 are related to this floor. On top of it, two other thin floors (Levels 6, 7) of brown soil and ashes have been found. These floors are probably associated with a room in sq. 1, of which two fragmentary walls were uncovered.

#### Floor : sq. 1 : 12 :-

Was found only in the eastern half of sq. 1 under floor 8. This floor is of Huwwar with fine stones and grits. No walls related to it were found.

#### Floor : sq. 10 : 6

It is a pavement of medium sized rough stones chinked with a far smaller ones. This is considered as the main floor in the area and covers the major part of sq. 10, 11. Many walls are related to it.

The sherds which come out from these floors suggest Iron I dating. The construction of these series of floors indicate several uses within the Iron Age I. This has to be substantiated in the 1973 season.

#### Phase 2

This phase is related to a cave (sq. 1) 3 x 2 m. and 2 meters in height. It was almost full of soft earth washed by water through the upper stones. The mouth of the cave is located in the southern part. A wall at this mouth was built of large stones which were plastered by mud and hay covering the inside face of the wall. It seems that the cave was used in the Chalcolithic period and in a later time, just be-

fore the earliest Iron I plaster floor was laid (sq. 1: 12). At least the upper part of this wall belong to the later use. The thick ashy levels. (Sq. 2 : 9 and sq. 10 : 17) below the Iron I floors (sq. 1 : 11, 12) were cut at the mouth of the cave to put this part of the wall. A foundation trench was followed beyond this wall through sq. 2 : 10 and 11. It seems that this foundation trench does not continue to the bottom of the wall. This may suggest that the lower part was built in an earlier stage. The location and deposits indicate that the cave was used as shelter in its later use. The cave has semi-circular opening (Pl. VII Fig. 2) which was sealed by four large stones of which one was used to block the entrance in the south west corner. The upper surface of the wall was used as foundation for the plastered floor of Iron I. It is not clear yet whether the structure (sq. 2. 23 ;24) beyond this wall was put at the earliest stage of the cave or not. However, the western and eastern walls continue to run below the northern section of sq. 2. The pottery from the gap between the walls of the cave show Chalcolithic characteristics.

### Phase 3 :-

This is represented by an ashy soil with an indefinite stone-structure and walls in both of sq. 2 levels 18-25, and in sq. 16 levels 4-6. All of these levels are below the Iron I occupation levels. The work stopped before we were able to clarify the nature of this installation. The work has to be extended to the northern side. Whether this is associated with occupation levels or not is still open. No clear floors have been identified. Pottery sherds from the deposits are mixed up. LB MB, E B I and Chalcolithic examples.

### CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Quantities of Iron II sherds and tombs found in earlier days give clear evidence of Iron II occupation, though not excavated during 1972 season. The excavations sug-

gest that the Iron I settlement found a wider extent than the Iron II. There are indications of at least two destructions around 1200 - 1100 B.C. and in the first half of the first millenium B.C. There was a strong Egyptian influence during Iron I. The «collared rim» jars cannot be seen as evidence of a certain ethnic group, as proposed by Albright, Aharoni and Amiran. Seal impressions on the jars indicate contacts with North-Syria.

Late Bronze materials have been found in tombs during earlier excavations of the Department of Antiquities. The MB tomb in Area A is the first stratified evidence to be found at Sahab. Further investigations will hopefully clarify the LB and MB occupation on the mound.

Evidence from the later phases of the Early Bronze Age has not been found yet. Some of the pottery types from the caves show characteristics of the beginning of the EB period. Inhabited caves during the Chalcolithic Age and probably of the EB are the first examples to be known in East Jordan. These caves can not be considered only as shelters, as some of the caves in western hills of the Dead Sea have been explained, for people were practicing a kind of agricultural life while they lived in these caves. This was probably in a time when the Ghassulian and Bir es-Sab' cultures were spread over major parts of the area. The writer thinks that caves and camp-like sites were inhabited at a time when Chalcolithic settlements of constructed houses were being built. Some people continued to live in caves at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (Kenyon's Proto-Urban and de Vaux's Late Chalcolithic). The pottery repertoire of Tell Umm Hamad ash-Sharqi, Tell es-Sa'diyeh (Chalc. & EB I) and Tell ash-Shunah (north), all in the Jordan Valley, provide the closest parallels to the Chalcolithic - Early Bronze wares and types found at Sahab.

*Dr. Moawiyah Ibrahim  
Department of Antiquities  
Amman*