

THE FIRST SEASON OF THE AN-NAQ' PROJECT, GHAWR AŞ-ŞAFĪ

by
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The first field season of the an-Naq' Project was conducted between April 1st and May 2nd, 1995, by a team from the Department of Antiquities with the participation of Hamza Mahasneh from the Department of Archaeology at Mu'ta University.

The main objective of the project was to excavate and study the cemetery area at an-Naq', with comparison to the other cemeteries at Bāb adh-Dhrā', Skayn ash-Shamālī, Shu'b Ḥanish and Fayfa in the Southern Ghawr. Field work also included soundings at nearby sites and an intensive survey of the area surrounding the cemetery.

The cemetery at an-Naq' occupies an area of about 200 dunums, at an elevation of 194 m below sea level (Palestine grid coordinates 195.6 E, 1048.1 N, being to the south of an-Naq' village). The excavation of the cemetery was given high priority by the team because of the recent robbing and bulldozing of many parts of the cemetery. These illicit activities revealed an extensive cemetery rather than a few isolated tombs. Local villagers also reported finding pottery vessels mixed with bone fragments during their agricultural activities at the edges of the site.

Artifacts on the surface of the cemetery were collected during the survey and datable potsherds indicated the use of the cemetery during the Early Bronze, Byzantine and late Islamic periods.

Excavation areas were chosen at the top, middle, and lower parts of the mound in the centre of the site. Additionally, several tombs located on slopes of other mounds were excavated. Sediments of possible organic material remains, particularly in the

bedding layers, and in the lime covering the walls and slabs of the tombs were sampled in order to identify details of materials used in the construction of the tombs.

Preliminary investigations of the tomb materials suggested an EBI date. The EBI pottery assemblage is easily assimilated to Jordan Valley types, which included jugs, plates, cups, mugs and lamps. Painted pottery was common. Other artifacts comprised of basalt vessels, shell, maceheads, bracelets, ostraca and different kinds of beads which were buried with the dead. A few bronze objects were retrieved from the excavated tombs.

The team identified a wide variety of tomb types in the area (Fig. 1). The general shape of the discovered tombs is of elongated stone-lined cist tombs of varying sizes. What distinguishes the cemetery is the type of prepared rectangular chamber tomb, represented by No. 109 and 125. Tomb No. 109 was well sealed with large slabs blocking the entrance, which is accessible by a staircase in front (Fig. 2). The material recovered from this tomb is important for understanding the typological development of the tombs in the cemetery. Regarding tomb No. 125, the entrance was not well sealed, a staircase, also situated in front of the entrance, leads down to the chamber. The interior of the tomb was completely silted and water had moved vessels inside the tomb to various locations and levels so that the grave goods were embedded in sterile silt and the vessels were severely damaged from the effect of humidity. This resulted from the seepage of water through the chamber entrance. Traces of white plaster were noticed on the internal slabs of the



1. One of the excavated areas at an-Naq' (including Tomb No. 125).



2. Tomb No. 109.

tomb, very little of which still adhered to the walls, while fragments of this plaster were found among the silty deposits over the stone pavement. The preliminary investigations showed that the tomb was robbed during the EBI period, and then reused at the same time. More than 15 skulls were discovered in the tomb in fragmentary condition with different bone fragments.

Quantities of human skeletal material were recovered from articulated and disarticulated burials. In general, the preservation of the material was not satisfactory. The seepage of water had reduced all bones to fragments, also 90% of the discovered tombs were silted and not well sealed.

In conclusion, the preliminary assessment showed that more than two thousand tombs were robbed and damaged at an-Naq'. The cemetery also suffered severely from seasonal erosion and the construction of a housing project for the J.V.A., which resulted in further destruction of the cemetery.

One week of survey and test soundings was carried out at al-Mashnaqa, to the north of the cemetery. Traces of aqueducts and ancient mills are still visible at the surface there.

A trial trench measuring 20m long and 4m wide was made at the site of Tall ash-Shaykh 'Īsā. It revealed a wall built of well

dressed stones with square buttresses projecting from its middle. A large number of late Islamic, Byzantine, and Nabataean sherds were collected from this site.

The survey extended eastward into the hills dominating the whole area of the an-Naq' cemetery. The resemblance of the stones covering the tombs and the stones of the rocky hills suggested an ancient quarry could be found there. Several small round, oval and square structures were noticed over these hills. Surface pottery collection indicated Nabataean, Byzantine, Abbasid, and late Islamic occupations.

The team also investigated the cemetery at Skayn ash-Shamāli in Ghawr al-Mazra'a, and the cemetery at Shu'b Ḥanīsh in Ghawr Ḥaditha. Both of them were totally robbed during the beginning of this century.

The main questions that arise from this season are the place, extent and type of the EBI settlement in the area; the existence of occupation earlier than the EBI; and the nature of the Byzantine and Islamic occupations. More soundings and long term excavations are necessary to answer these questions.

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