

# EXCAVATIONS AND RESTORATIONS AT DAYR 'AYN 'ABĀTĀ 1995

by  
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## EXCAVATIONS

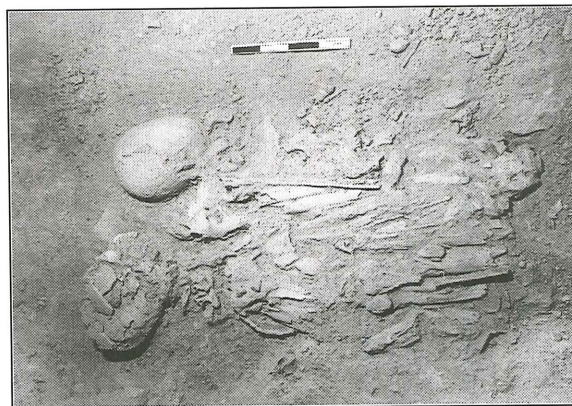
### Objectives

The sixth season of excavation at Dayr 'Ayn 'Abātā in the Ghawr aş-Şāfī was conducted from February to June 1995. It was planned to extend areas worked on in previous seasons in order to both answer academic questions about the ancient site and enhance its touristic potential.

The main archaeological objectives for the 1995 season were to conclude excavations in and around the basilical church (Areas F, K. II and H. II) in preparation for consolidation and restoration work, and at the Middle Bronze Age II cairn tombs (Area J). More burials in the cistern, reused as a communal burial chamber (Area K. II 29), also needed to be exhumed.

### Area F. III

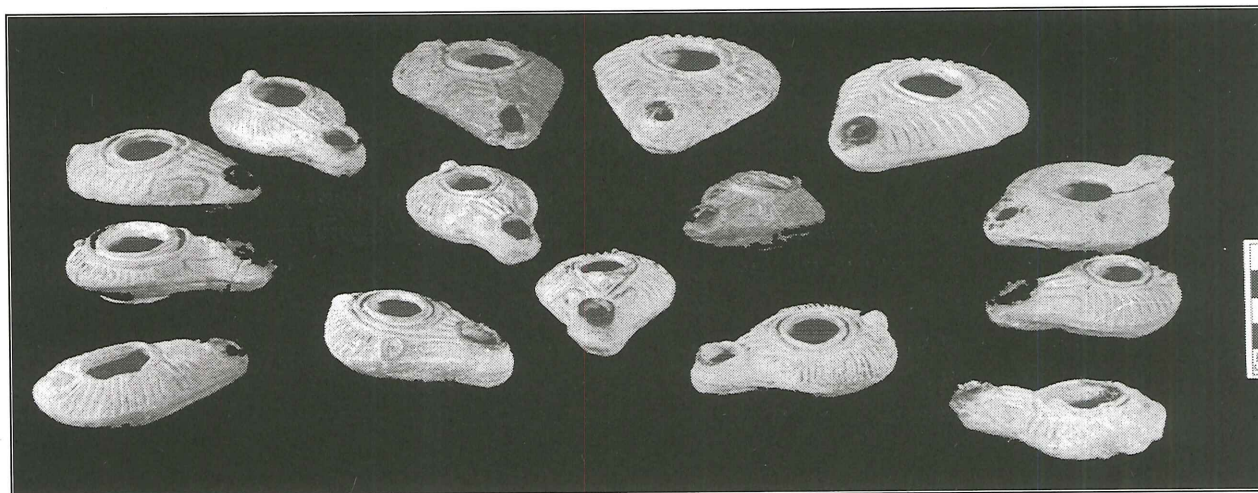
Excavations in F. III were extended to the eastern natural limit of the cave. The largely ruined eastern wall was totally removed, revealing two concealed secondary



1. Two disarticulated (secondary ?) Byzantine burials behind eastern wall of cave in F. III 25.2 (Photo T. Springett).

burials aligned east-west (Fig.1) with associated Byzantine ceramic oil lamps (Fig. 2). More lamps were discovered built into the eastern wall along with bronze coins and a glass vessel. This apparently intentional undertaking, may have had a ritual significance.

The subsequent layer, F. III 26.1, which was badly disturbed by Byzantine building activities contained some disarticulated human bones which may be associated with a



2. Byzantine moulded ceramic oil lamps from F. III and H. II (photo T. Springett).



complete Middle Bronze Age II ceramic chalice (Fig. 3).

With the eastern part of the cave substantially widened, it was possible to excavate a larger area deeper. Maintaining an east-west section line, a fairly articulated group of 10-15 skeletons lined by stones were uncovered. During the excavation it became apparent that the lower (earlier) burials were disturbed by later internments. This may indicate a continuous reuse of the grave, and may even suggest a family or clan group burial. Most of the associated pottery from this multiple burial belonged

to the Early Bronze Age I period. Over 28 complete and partial pots were represented by sherds (Fig. 4). A number of stone and shell beads were also recovered, mostly during sieving.

Above the cave and church, the remnants of a protective wall and water channel which ran along the entire monastic complex were discovered while clearing loose stone and soil off the conglomerate mountain slope (Fig. 5). This structure was apparently built to compliment a more substantial protective stone wall higher up the slope.



3. Middle Bronze Age II chalice (obj. reg. no. 305) in F. III 26.1 (Photo T. Springett).

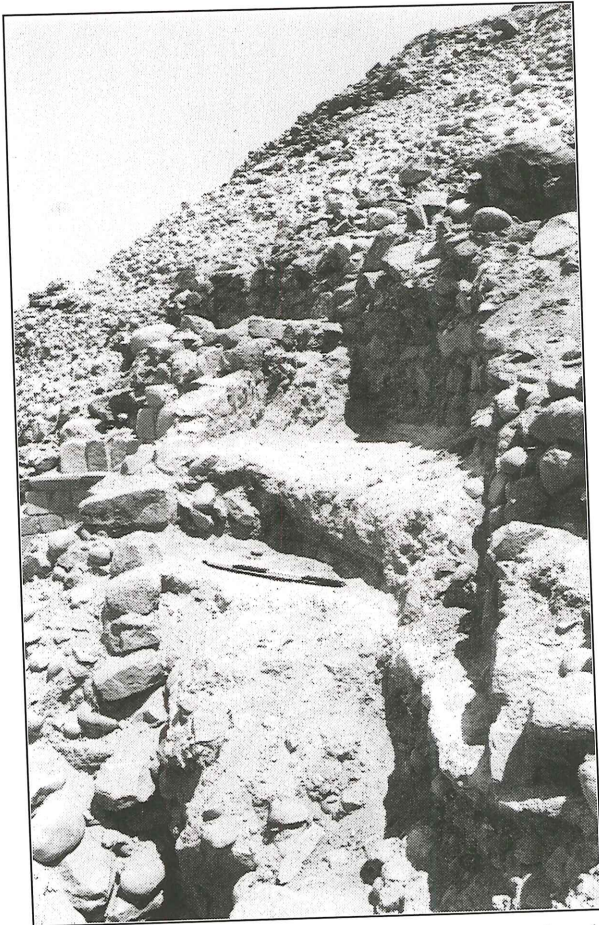
#### *Area K. II*

After the removal of all the cover slabs over the cistern, reused as a communal burial chamber, five more skeletons were exhumed. This helped us to understand that the mode of internment was apparently that of successive burials as the need arose. Each later internment slightly disturbed the earlier one(s). As a result, the deeper the skeletons were, the worse the disturbance and thus preservation became. At certain points in the use of the communal burial chamber, there appears to have been a deliberate filling, or covering of the internments, perhaps to prepare a base for the next layer. The presence of disarticulated bone may be related to the reuse of the cist graves around the cistern, each occupant being cleaned out and deposited into the cis-

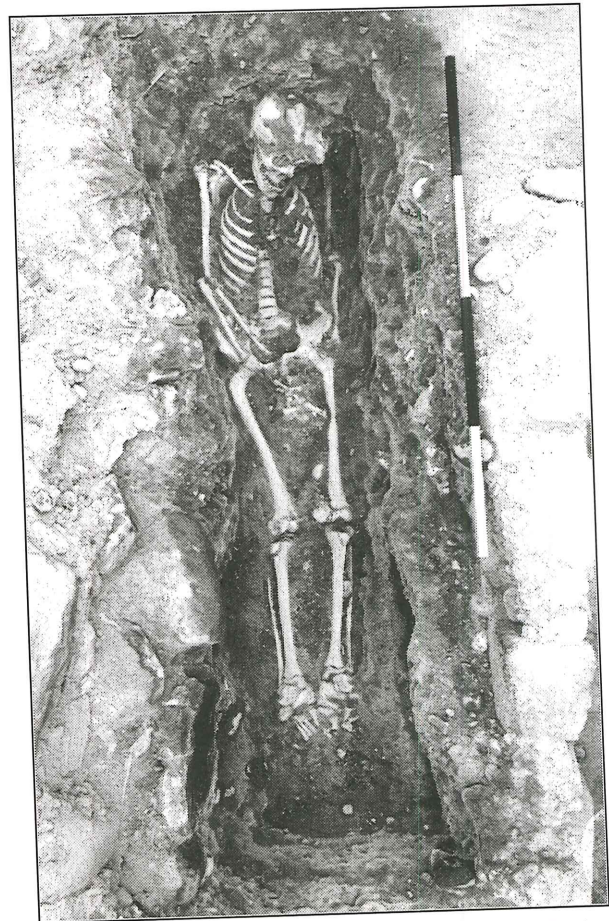


4. Early Bronze Age I pots in F. III 24.1 (Photo T. Springett).





5. Protective Wall and water channel above church (Photo T. Springett).



6. Byzantine cist burial, K.II 60.2 (Photo T. Springett).

tern as the grave was needed. Once more, work was incomplete by the end of the season, leaving more skeletons to be excavated in the cistern.

Just north of the communal chamber were three cist burials whose capstones were discovered during the previous season but were not lifted. These were excavated in 1995 and found each to contain an individual: a 2-3 year old toddler; an adult male (Fig. 6) and an older juvenile male. The graves showed evidence of reuse which would concur with the disarticulated bones found in the cistern, as mentioned above.

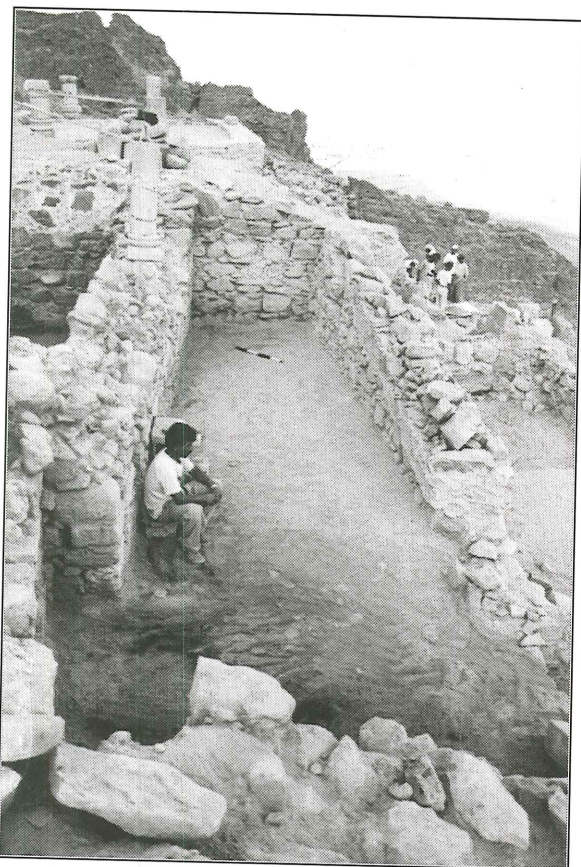
In order to clarify the west side of Area K. II and stabilise it for a future access to the church in Area F, further excavations had to be conducted. A rectangular room measuring roughly 5.5 x 2m was unearthed exposing three *in situ* supporting arches and

a number of fallen architectural pieces, including column drums, collapsed within it (Fig. 7). The surface on which they lay (K. II 61.1) also had several ambo fragments and Abbasid period pottery sherds (some of which actually belonged to a vessel found in 1992 on the mosaic floor of the church in Area F. III !). Quite unexpectedly, this area helped elucidate the construction of the basilical church with its adjacent buildings, as well as the final period of occupation on the site.

#### *Area H. II*

In an effort to understand the structure of the front part of the basilical church and whether a narthex existed, the down-slope western side of the building was excavated (Fig. 8). The basements and supporting arches beneath the church floors were con-





7. Area K. II 61.2 from north (Photo K. D. Politis).

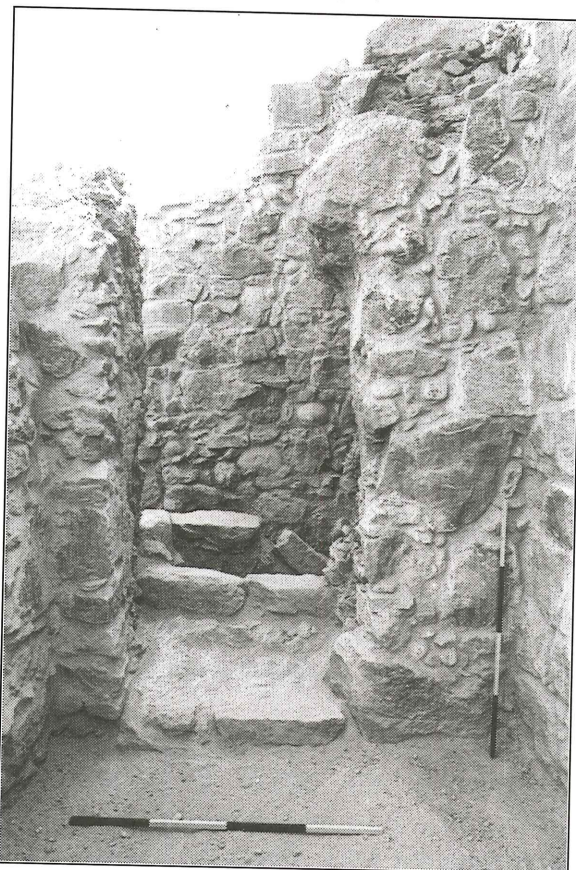


8. Area H. II (locus 14, wall 9 and 11) from north (Photo T. Springett).

sequently exposed (Figs. 9 and 10). All these structures were immediately consolidated with lime mortar in order to protect them from further ruin and make them safe to work under. Although most of the walls had collapsed down-slope, there were enough remaining foundations to calculate the western extent of the church. The existence of a narthex and the position of the front entrance of the church though, could



9. Supporting arch under north aisle of church, F. I 4.1/H. II 7 (Photo T. Springett).



10. Basements under west side of church, H. II 3 (Photo T. Springett).

not be confirmed.

The ceramic finds and associated architectural modifications in this area indicate a renovating phase of the foundations related to the late seventh century A D (corresponding to the May 691 mosaic pavement).

#### *Area J*

Work amongst the Middle Bronze Age II cairn tombs in Area J was concluded after



further surface collections were conducted and the excavation of six cairn tombs. The map of Area J was also updated and revised.

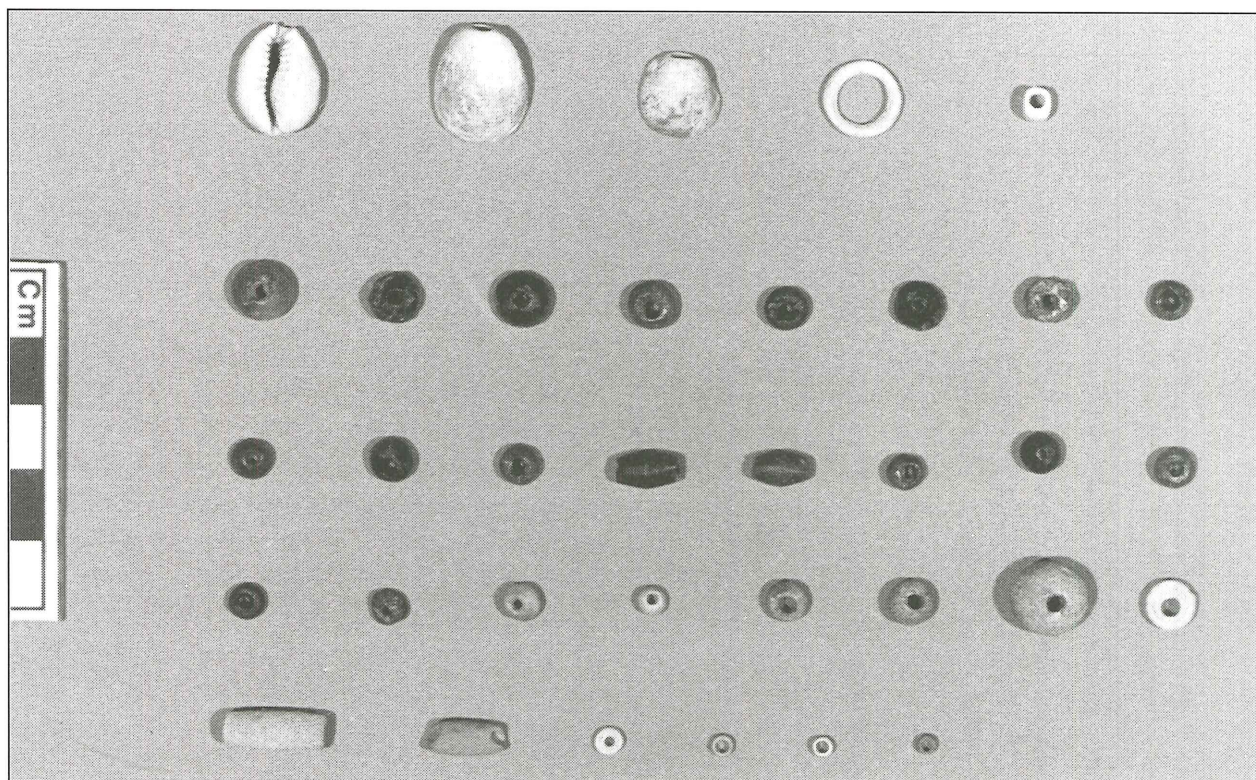
J. II was a circular cairn tomb 56 m. in diameter. Excavation of the burial chamber revealed a badly disturbed and disarticulated skeleton but did contain pottery sherds representing eight vessels, approximately 200 beads made of shell, carnelian, agate, glass and faience, and some copper alloy earrings.

J. VII had been investigated several times during previous seasons and although it had been robbed, seemed promising. Unfortunately though, the disturbance was worse than was imagined, and there were less finds than expected. Fragments of about 15 pottery vessels could be identified as well as two copper alloy rings and one earring. A relatively small amount of beads were found; 35, including shell, stone, carnelian, glass and faience (Fig. 11). The most interesting information gained from

excavating J. VII was architectural. Like J. XI and J. XV, J. VII had been constructed with the tomb chamber positioned roughly centrally, within a 9.5 x 3.5 m rectangular enclosure resembling a platform.

The roughly oval 5m in diameter cairn of J. VIII had also been previously explored and found to be substantially disturbed. The abundant variety of pottery sherds though, made it attractive for excavation. The result was the recovery of 25 different types of ceramic vessels, many of which were reconstructable. Other interesting finds included bone fragments with incised designs, a worked sea urchin fossil, two copper alloy earrings and the head of a decorative pin.

The excavation of J. XV, begun in 1994, was completed this season with the clarification of the architecture and the discovery of some more human bones and a few beads. The platform, on which three burial areas were built, was indeed the largest, measuring 16 x 5 m. Considering its size and prominent position, it is understandable

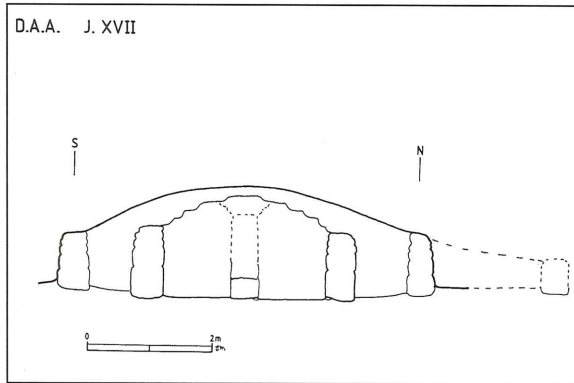


11. Middle Bronze Age II beads (obj. reg. no. DAA 253) from J. VII (Photo T. Springett).



why it was robbed long ago (disturbance was not evident prior to excavation).

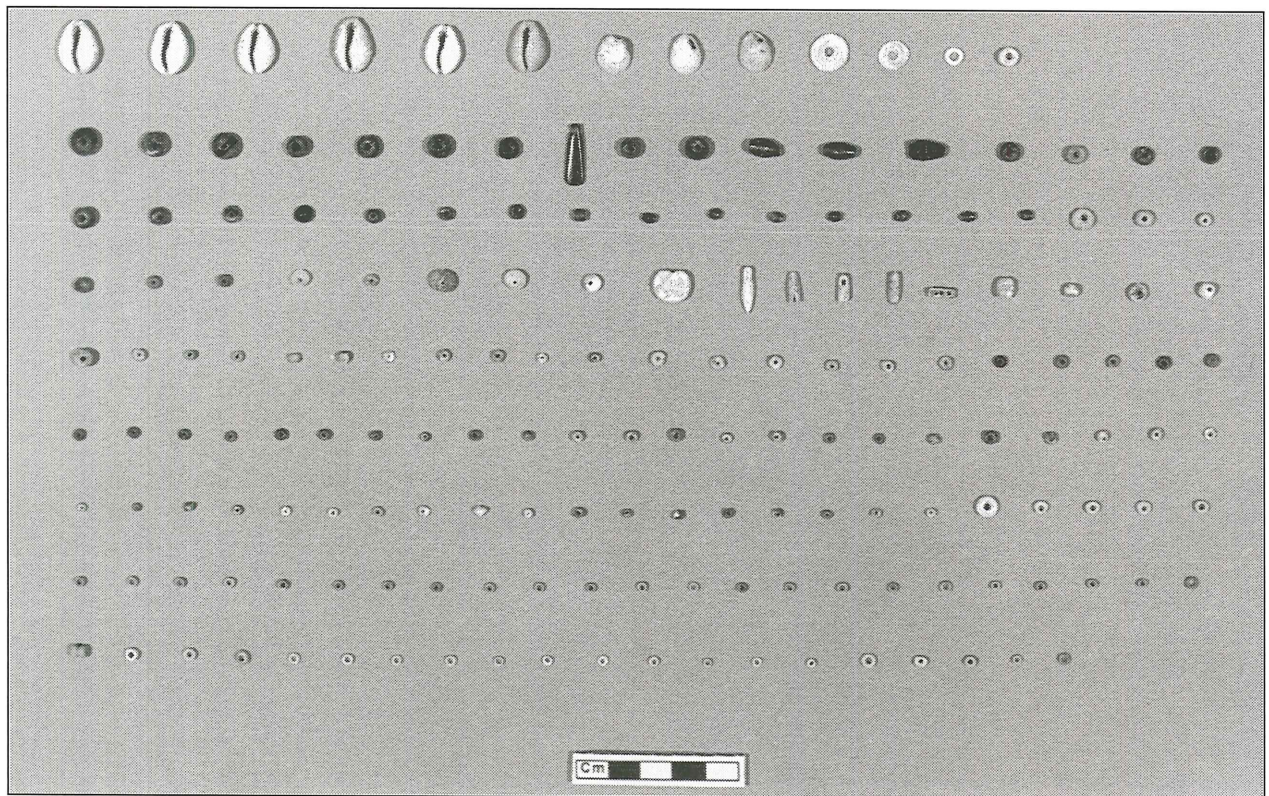
J. XVII represents the richest cairn tomb which was excavated. Unfortunately it was badly disturbed since it was first recorded. Originally it was thought that the burial chamber may have been divided into two sections, but excavations could not verify this (Fig. 12). There was some evidence though for a roof structure. This 6m in di-



12. Reconstruction of Middle Bronze Age II cairn tomb in J. XVII showing possible division of burial chamber ( after W.E. Moth ).

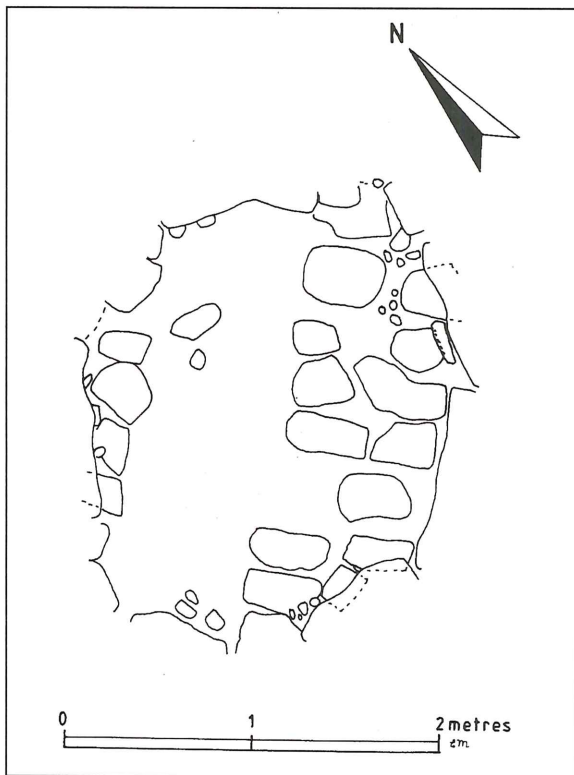
ameter circular cairn not only was one of the more impressive architecturally, but also in terms of finds. Excavations yielded a lot of disarticulated human bone and pottery sherds representing 25-30 vessels, some of which are reconstructable. Complete beads numbered 768 and were made of shell, glass, copper alloy, carnelian, quartz, agate and other types of stone. Other finds included a copper alloy arrowhead, six earrings, six rings, several pin fragments and a stone palette or wrist-guard (?).

The internal burial chamber of cairn tomb J. XXX was virtually cleaned out by tomb robbers. Perhaps this is why our excavations produced relatively few pottery sherds, mostly belonging to a single jar, and 185 beads retrieved from sieving (Fig. 13). The most interesting find though was the actual floor of the burial chamber which was paved by oval and rectangular flat stones laid in rows (Fig. 14). This was the only excavated cairn tomb which displayed such a feature.



13. Middle Bronze Age II beads (obj. reg. no. DAA 261) from J. XXX (Photo T. Springett).





14. Top plan of floor of burial chamber paved by flat stones of Middle Bronze Age II cairn tomb in J. XXX ( S. M. Collins and W. E. Moth ).

**Summary and Conclusions**

The dismantling of the plastered wall at the back side of the grotto in Area F. III revealed the full eastern extent of the natural cave which concealed Byzantine period burials related to the monastic community. The removal of these skeletons and the consequent excavations below them, exposed Middle Bronze Age II and Early Bronze Age I levels. Much of the pottery which

came from these periods was complete and probably was associated to burials.

During Area K. II excavations in the cistern which was reused as a communal burial chamber, as well as in the cist graves nearby, there was evidence that skeletons were periodically exhumed from the graves and interred in the cistern. This practice would concur with burial customs of early Christian monastic orders.

The western limit of Area K. II revealed more evidence alluding to an abandonment of the monastery in the early Abbasid period. A series of foundation arches which were discovered in K. II, continued into Area H. II where basements were also uncovered. These helped elucidate the construction of the church and even indicated a renovation of the building in 691 A.D.

Final surveying, surface collections and excavations of six more cairn tombs in Area J, not only added to our knowledge of these structures but also confirmed their Middle Bronze Age II date ( ca. 1700-1550 B. C. ) on the basis of the ceramics (Fig. 15).

**RESTORATIONS**

The original priorities of the restoration project, to protect the ancient structures and make the site more accessible to visitors, were maintained in 1995. Restoration work was undertaken during excavations and continued until the end of the year. The project



15. A selection of Middle Bronze Age II pottery from Area J.



was closely supervised by the director during the entire operation.

During the early part of the year restoration work concentrated on consolidating all ancient walls which were exposed by the excavations with a tested mixture of lime mortar. This was undertaken by the same locally trained workers who carried out the task in previous seasons, and was closely monitored by the site conservators.

Meanwhile the trench made in the church by the removal of the nave mosaic floor and its bedding was refilled by tightly packed layers of stones and soil which was trod down and periodically sprayed with water. A similar procedure was carried out in the subsided part of the chancel where the mosaic floor was missing. The well in the chancel was also consolidated and the upper parts were reconstructed.

The surviving foundation walls and supporting arches in the nave were consolidated and the western sections which had been destroyed were rebuilt to create a level surface on which the mosaic and its bedding could be laid out in future. The subsided stone steps on which the chancel screen had been erected were methodically removed, consolidated and evenly replaced. The south aisle chancel wall, paving stones and steps leading into the south-eastern corner of the chancel were also reset.

In the course of excavating Areas H. II and K. II, all exposed structures were immediately consolidated with lime mortar in order to protect them from further ruin and make them safe to work under.

Emergency *in situ* stabilisation was carried out on recently damaged areas of the mosaic floor pavement in the chancel, as well as conservation on sections which had been lifted in 1992 and were in storage.

The construction of the stone stairway leading up to the monastery from the car park was continued and an additional 58 steps were completed. A protective wall and water channel were also made above the stairway

to prevent soil from washing down on it.

The building of a long protective wall and water channel above the entire monastic complex was begun. This was the most ambitious building work undertaken so far, but was deemed indispensable for the safeguarding of the ancient site and its visitors below.

Finally, a master plan was made for the touristic development of the whole site. This included the monastic complex with a shelter for the church mosaics, a visitors's centre, car park, picnic area, pathways to the Bronze Age cairn field and an environmental park at the 'Ayn 'Abātā spring (Fig. 16).

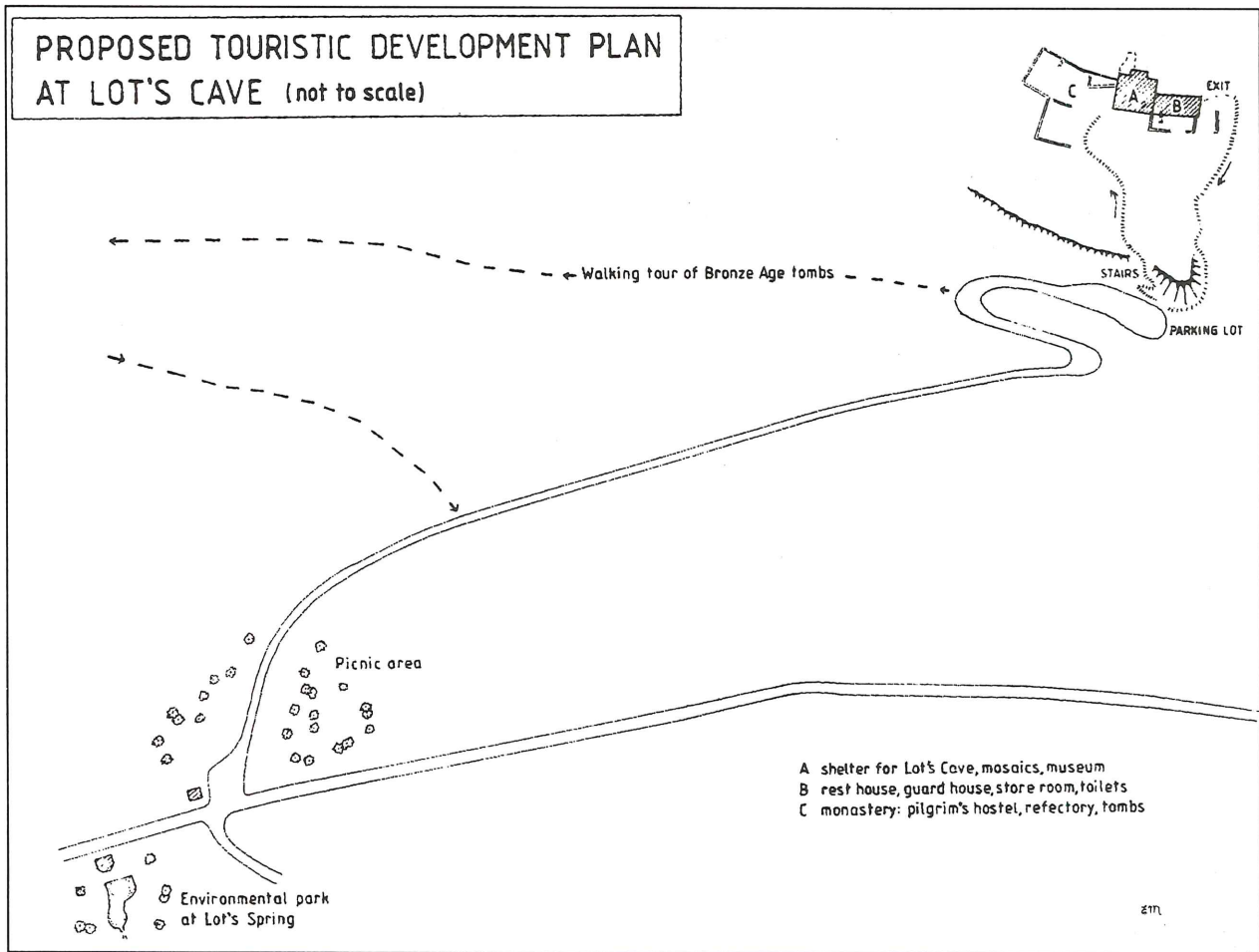
After a visit in April 1995 HRH Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed, HM King Hussein's Cultural Affairs Secretary, secured Royal protection of the site as an official Holy Place in the Kingdom.

In September a figure meant to portray Lot's wife was made by Nuha Radi out of local stones, lime and salt brought from the Dead Sea (Fig. 17).

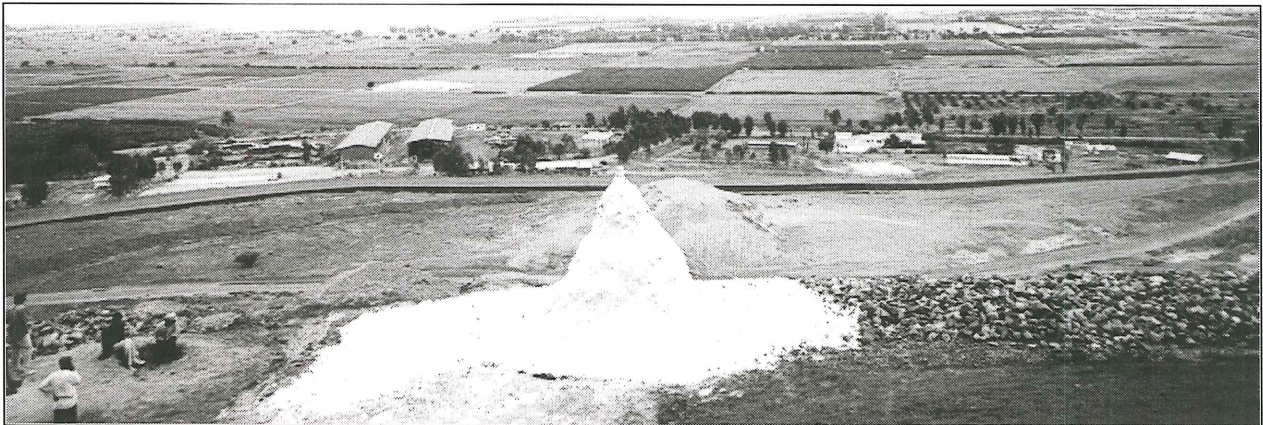
### The Staff

The excavation team consisted of Khalil Hamdan, Department of Antiquities representative; W. Eddie Moth, archaeological surveyor; Kathy Gruspier, human osteologist and Area K. II supervisor; Sarah Collins, Area J supervisor; Hariclia Brecoulaki, Area F. III supervisor; Trevor Springett, photographer; Jim Farrant, illustrator; Dean Sully, objects conservator; Stefania Chlouveraki, mosaics conservator; Val Mundy, mosaics conservator; Mark Beech, archaeozoologist; Chantelle Hoppe, palaeobotanist; Tony Grey, ceramicist; Yannis Meimaris, epigraphist; Ghassan Nasser, Carol Vogler and Robert Schick, part-time supervisors of Area H. II and ceramic assistants; Amani Malhas and Taisir Kefaya, civil engineers; and Joe Efremidis, consultant architect. Most of the 38 locally hired men from Ghawr aş-Şāfi had participated in previous seasons of work on the site. The pro-





16. Proposed Touristic Development Plan at *Lot's Cave*.



17. *Lot's Wife* by Nuha Radi.

ject was directed by the author.

**Acknowledgements**

The sixth season of excavations at Dayr 'Ayn 'Abāṭā was sponsored by the British Museum in London with additional support

coming from the Palestine Exploration Fund and Suchard/Pavledes/Kraft/General Foods.

The third season of restorations at Dayr 'Ayn 'Abāṭā was sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan with additional support from the Overseas De-



velopment Agency (Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom) to rebuild the church foundations, protective walls and consolidate all ancient structures, and from the United States Agency for International Development to design and supervise the rebuilding of the protective wall and water channel above the entire monastic complex.

Thanks are also due to the Jordan Valley Authority for the use of the Sekine rest house, to ARAMEX International Couriers for logistic support and to the Arab Potash

Company for road maintenance and for providing water supply on the site.

The author of this report is grateful to Dr Ghazi Bisheh, Director-General of the Department of Antiquities, for granting permission to continue work at Dayr 'Ayn 'Abāṭā.

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