

THE BAQ'AH VALLEY PROJECT

Report from Patrik Mc Govern

The third season of the Baq'ah Valley Project was carried out between May 15 and June 30, 1980, again sponsored by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, the National Geographic Society, the Museum of Applied Science Center for Archaeology (MASCA) and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania under the Direction of Dr Patrick McGovern. The Project is affiliated with ACOR/ASOR. This season proved to be an excellent follow-up to the 1978 geophysical survey.

From a priority list of thirty-one significant magnetic anomalies of various intensities and areal dimensions, a 5 x 5 m, 20 nanotesla high was chosen for the initial test excavation. It was in the vicinity of the cave excavated in 1977 as well as other robbed-out caves and theoretical calculations had indicated that the anomaly most likely represented a completely filled-in and hopefully undisturbed burial cave. Theory was borne out by excavation and a completely undisturbed Iron IA (ca 1200-1050 BC) burial cave was discovered in the area of the magnetic anomaly. The elliptically shaped cave, ca 5 x 4m in area, was completely silted up and the entrance, which faced due east on to a cobble-floored court, was blocked off by six large boulders (ca 1.5 m in length). Into this small space over 270 secondary burials had been deposited in two heaps, with women and children to the south and men to the north. With the burials was an excellent, and possibly unique, assemblage of Iron IA whole vessels (total 78, including bowls, lamps, jugs, kraters, juglets, beer-strainers, chalices and basalt mor-

tars) together with mild steel and bronze anklets/bracelets, earrings and rings, beads, toggle-pins, buttons and one example each of a pendant, scarab, stamp seal and cylinder seal. The anklets/bracelets (which appear to retain substantial amounts of uncorroded metal, are some of the earliest dated steel artifacts from Transjordan. In general, this tightly dated burial cave promises to shed important light on the cultural development and ecological conditions of a critical transitional period.

In an attempt to locate the settlement site (s) to go with the LBA and Iron IA cemetery, soundings were made at Rujm al-Henü (east and west) and Hirbet Umm ad-Dananir. The eastern building of Rujm al-Henü, which has a ground plan similar to the Amman Airport Building, unfortunately had only 30 cm of a mixed fill above bedrock. The presence of some LBA sherds, however, suggests that it may have been constructed during this period and cleared and used by later peoples. The western building had a clear Iron IIC (600-500 BC) destruction level, with smashed storage jars found under the "megalithic" stones (ca 1.5m in length) from the upper courses of the wall, of which five courses had remained and been buried under the fall. The main LBA-Iron IA settlement site now appears to be located at Hirbet Umm ad-Danänir, which is strategically located at the head of the Wadi Umm ad-Dananir and above the perennial spring of the same name. The small sounding opened here produced mixed deposits dating to the LBII, Iron IA, Iron IIC and Early Roman III periods, as well as a 3m

high outer wall of a house probably dating to the Early Roman III period. It is hoped that remains of the LBA Iron Age settlement will be found here in future seasons.

MASCA will now conduct an extensive programme of scientific analyses using the artifacts and ceramic material. The Baq'ah Valley region is especially rich in clay deposits and the LBA and Iron Age wares must be tested against these sources. The iron and bronze will be exhaustively examined and related to the known me-

tallurgical resources of the region. In addition to radiocarbon and thermoluminescent dating of the carbon samples, bone and pottery, the cave will provide a check on the traditional pottery chronology and soil samples from vessels will be examined for palaeobotanical remains.

An intensive aerial survey of the region was also carried out and was very successful since it coincided with the drying out of the abundant winter/spring vegetation.