

Was Saḥāb the First Ammonite Capital?

Introduction

For most of the of the second millennium BC (18th–12th century BC), Bilād Ash SHām, especially Palestine and Jordan, was under Egyptian domination. The Hyksos of non-Egyptian origin ruled Egypt during the 15th Dynasty (1785–1523 BC). They have a distinctive kind of architecture which consists of fortifications with glacis which was discovered in different parts of Palestine and Jordan including Saḥāb. This fort was discovered in the middle of the Saḥāb ruins. Two Middle Bronze Age (MB) tombs of the Hyksos period were also excavated in the northern part of Saḥāb. The Hyksos were defeated by the pharaohs of the New Kingdom (1550–1070 BC), who were more famous than previous rulers and who ruled Egypt during the 18th–20th dynasties and who completely controlled Palestine, Jordan, and other parts of Syria during the entire Late Bronze Age (LB).

The rulers in the LB towns of these regions were even appointed by the Egyptian rulers. This is attested in the many cuneiform tablets known as the Amarna Letters, which reflect correspondence between the Egyptian court and the rulers of these territories. Some Palestinian LB towns were governed by the Egyptian rulers. These include Ṭabaqat Faḥl (Pella), Dayr ‘Allā in the Jordan Valley, ‘Ammān, Umm Ad Danānīr, Irbid, and other sites on the highland. City-states under Egyptian control existed throughout Palestine and Jordan, especially under the rule of Thutmose III (1482 BC on), who carried out 16 military campaigns and created relative peace in the area, especially after military campaigns against the Mittanians and the Hittites. This relative peace led to flourishing contacts between the Mycenaean regions and Palestine/Jordan. Mycenaean painted pottery is well represented at Saḥāb

(Haddad 2016; Ibrahim 2016). During this peaceful period, many LB towns and public buildings (especially temples) were established. At Saḥāb, a town wall and part of a public building which may have served as a temple were partially excavated. Associated with the town wall a seal impression on the rim of a storage jar was found (see below).

Location

Saḥāb lies *ca.* 12km southeast of Amman on the modern and ancient road to the desert castles of the early Islamic period, including Al Muwaqqar, Al KHarrānah, Qusayr ‘Amrah, Al Azraq and others (FIG. 1). The location of Saḥāb in a transitional zone between the highland of Jordan and the desert was evidently a lucrative choice (Ibrahim et al. 1984: 2). The modern town of Saḥāb was founded on the ancient tall and spread from there to the surrounding area, destroying major parts of the ancient settlement in the process. Three major streets were cut through the occupation levels, leaving two large trenches which revealed the stratigraphy of the upper part of the mound. The ancient mound occupies an area *ca.* 500 dunums and is 873 masl. The highest point of the mound is *ca.* 22m above the western plains, but other areas of the site are much lower. The area around Saḥāb is well cultivated; the true desert begins *ca.* 15 to 20km to the east. Saḥāb is bounded by Az Zarqā’ to the north, ‘Ammān to the west, Qasr Mishāsh to the east, and Khān Az Zabīb to the south where the Alia International Airport is located. Saḥāb’s coordinates are latitude 31°45’–32°00’N, longitude 36°00’–36°15’E, and it covers *ca.* 600sq km (Fadda 1991: 1).

Occupational History

Saḥāb has a long history of occupa-

tion extending from the Late Neolithic/Chalcolithic (5th and 4th millennia BC) to the Late Iron Age. After the 6th century BC, the site was probably abandoned until the Medieval Arabic period (11th–13th century AD), evidenced by Ayyubid-Mamluk handmade sherds. Another occupational gap ran from the 13th to the 19th century, at which time the present inhabitants (Ahl Saḥāb) moved to the site.

The Neolithic/Chalcolithic Period

The greatest area of occupation at Saḥāb occurred during the earliest period of habitation; it supported itself with extensive agriculture and evidently produced an abundance of food. This agricultural abundance is demonstrated by the large number of storage facilities, both inside the houses and outside in courtyards. Saḥāb represents a typical village farming community during the 5th and 4th millennia BC.

The Transitional Period

The following period, towards the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (EB), appears to be transitional, and inhabitants were probably not permanent settlers. Several fragmentary walls were uncovered in Area E, overlying the Neolithic/Chalcolithic levels. These wall remains do not conform to a definite architectural plan and, judging from the one or two courses that are preserved, do not seem to have been raised to the height of an ordinary room. Inside the site’s caves, occupational floors on top of Neolithic/Chalcolithic levels yielded similar pottery; the series of floors indicate that the caves were used seasonally, rather than as permanent dwellings. Thus, the present evidence suggests that the site was a seasonal settlement towards the end of the 4th millennium BC, probably at the very beginning

of the Early Bronze Age (Kenyon's Proto-Urban).

Two burial jars with human skeletons and a reused pit with 7 to 9 animal burials, which were excavated in Area E, were related to this transitional period (Ibrahim 1984). The burial jars can be related to a continuation of the Ghasulian burial tradition; however, the animal burials are new to the area and deserve some comment.

The Early Bronze Age

The Early Bronze Age proper is represented at Saḥāb by a number of sherds found in a sounding in Area B; they were not associated with any structure. It is possible that they were washed down from the center of the site to the south of Area B, where a small EB settlement might be expected. EB sherds also appeared in the uppermost levels of the caves still being used for habitation. At this point, connections with other sites during the EB period cannot be drawn.

The Middle Bronze Age

The next major period of habitation in Saḥāb is related to the Middle Bronze Age. During the first and second seasons of the 1972–1973 excavations, two caves reused as burials in the MB were excavated in Areas A and B north of the site (Ibrahim 1974: Pls. 16, 17) (FIG. 2). The pottery found with the latter tomb is well preserved, and includes pin-form juglets with button bases, carinated bowls, and small and medium sized jars, all typical for the MB II Period. The evidence of MB II burials found at Saḥāb is similar to many other MB sites in Palestine. MB II B–C burials comparable to the Saḥāb tombs have been found in other locations of the 'Ammān region, with six tomb groups in various parts of 'Ammān itself (Harding et al. 1953; Ward 1966; Dornemann 1983: 15–19) (FIG. 3).

During the first four campaigns, MB sherds were found in several different squares on the site; however, a clear stratigraphic context could not be established. In the final excavation campaign of 1980, the situation of the MB settlement became clearer. In area G II, close to the center of the site, part of an MB fort connected to a typical glacis rampart was excavated; however, the excavated area is too limited for more definite information about the extent of the MB settlement. In another area (Area H III) a massive wall of the MB period was excavated. Unfortunately, this wall lies far from the rampart in Area G II, and the distance between them is covered with modern houses; no direct connection can yet be established (FIG. 4).

Saḥāb is probably the closest of these MB II forts to the desert area. Its position must have been important in defending the highlands from desert attack. Further archaeological surveys should be carried out with the intention of locating the limes, or series of fortifications, for this and following pre-Classical Periods along the desert border.

The Late Bronze Age

The next major period of habitation in Saḥāb is related to the Late Bronze Age. This period is well represented but, due to the overlying modern settlement, investigations were mainly restricted to the LB town wall. The LB town appears to have had a long occupation, from the 15th into the late 13th century BC. The earlier date is based on a seal impression from a typical LB storage jar handle found in association with the foundation trench of the town wall. The pottery associated with the town wall shows a range of types, including imports and imitations of Mycenaean pieces, as well as examples of local ware.

The Early Iron Age

The Early Iron Age settlement is well represented and, at least on the west and north sides, appears to extend beyond the LB town. There was evidence for domestic architecture from this period in most of areas of the excavation (A, B, D, E, E/W, H, and G), although it is fragmentary and does not give a clear picture of the situation in the Iron I period. Two houses have almost complete ground plans. In general, the houses (chiefly in Area B) seem to follow a certain pattern of rectangular rooms which, in most cases, exhibited interior plastered stone walls. In one of these plastered rooms in Area A, a large number of storage jars (pithoi) were excavated.

Some of these 12th-century BC storage jars bear seal impressions or fingerprints (Ibrahim 1978, 1983: 48–50). A strong Egyptian influence seems to continue into the Early Iron Age, as is shown by a number of objects found in an Iron I cave burial in Area C on the western slope of Tall Saḥāb (Ibrahim 1972). The transition between the end of the LB and the beginning of the Iron Age is still not clear (Dornemann 1982). This is the case not only at Saḥāb, but also at other sites where excavations of LB/Iron I sites took place, including ‘Ammān, Al Baq‘ah, Ṭabaqat Faḥl, Tall Dayr ‘Allā, and Tall Irbid.

The Iron II Period

The Iron II Period is attested mainly in Area B019, where a large architectural complex and a piece of the town wall have been uncovered. During the Iron II Period, the walled town became smaller but was better planned than it was during the Iron I Period. The pottery and the stone implements from Saḥāb are typical for the Iron II period (8th–7th century BC) and are demonstrably similar to ware material spread over

the central highlands, the entire Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea, Marj Ibn ‘Āmir, and central and northern Palestine. The preliminary study of the Saḥāb material in general corresponds with the conclusions made by Dornemann (1983: 170–184), Sauer (1986), and Pritchard (1985: 50–56) that the region east of the Jordan River was prosperous during the first half of the 1st millennium BC, and there is sufficient evidence to confirm close contacts with Palestine and Syria, including the on the coast. Assyrian influence is also present in both the objects and the architecture (Bennett 1982b).

Late Bronze Age Town

The major occupation period related to the Late Bronze Age. The period is well represented but, due to the location of the modern settlement, investigations were mainly restricted to the LB town wall. The major excavated portion is in the west part of the LB settlement (Areas G II, G III, and G IV), where nearly 75m of wall were uncovered. Soundings made in other areas of the tell to the south and southeast (Areas H III and H IV), to the east (Area H II), and to the north (Area H II and B019) allow the reconstruction of the town wall; the inner part of the LB settlement remains largely unexcavated. What is left from the LB wall are, in effect, its foundations, sunk in earlier deposits in the form of a deep trench which was lined on both sides with large and medium-sized stones and which most probably served as a secret corridor. The complete enclosure appears to have been a symmetrical oval with rounded angles oriented north-south along its long axis (FIGS. 5–7).

The LB town seems to have had a long occupation, from the 15th into the late 13th century BC. The earlier date is based on a seal impression on a typical

LB storage jar handle found in association with the foundation trench of the town wall (FIG. 8). The scene as a whole is typical of the period around the time of Thutmosis III of the 18th Dynasty. It combines the three signs of seated sphinx, uraeus-snake, and god-beard. In front of the sphinx (at the left of the scene) is an 'Ankh-sign. Over the sphinx's back are two other signs: the sled and the basket. The combination of the first three signs is probably a cryptogram of the god-name Amun (Ibrahim 1983: 46–47). This seal impression could be compared with a seal found before our excavations in a tomb at Saḥāb by Rafik Dajani (1970: pl. XXIII) and published by S. Horn (1971, fig. 1: C–E). The base of this seal shows the throne-name of Thutmosis III, *Mn-Ḥpr-R'*, beside an unidentifiable deity (Ibrahim 1983: 47).

The pottery associated with the town wall shows a range of types, including imports and imitations of Mycenaean pieces as well as examples of local ware. It appears that the types represented cover the major span of the Late Bronze Age up to the late 13th century BC.

The main evidence for the inner structure of the LB town comes from an important public building partially uncovered in Area E south of the main mound. This structure consists mainly of a long, massive wall (over 17m long) with a projecting tower-like room. The inner parts of this building appeared to be located under a high accumulation of Iron Age deposits and modern structures, which have made it difficult to excavate (Ibrahim 1974, 1975).

The material found at Saḥāb from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, taken together with MB–LB finds from sites spread over the whole country—especially in the center and in the north where field investigations are more frequent—should put an end to Glueck's

view concerning a gap in occupation in east Jordan during the major part of the 2nd millennium BC (Glueck 1970). Saḥāb played an important role in these periods, and a historical identification of the site can now be considered, although no direct evidence was found to support any one particular identification (Knauf 1984; Redford 1982: 72).

The evidence from Saḥāb itself throws more light on connections with Bilād Ash SHām, Egypt, and the Aegean world during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. The buildings, pottery, and other artifacts from Saḥāb are in many ways similar to those found in other parts of Bilād Ash SHām and should be thought of as an extension of the same culture, although local affinities are well represented and will be discussed in a final study of the material (FIGS. 9–11).

There is some evidence for Egyptian and north Syrian influence on local products. A scarab-like seal made of black steatite, a surface find, is an early example in the Egyptian tradition. The center of this seal depicts a god with a falcon head carrying two uraei and bearing an Asiatic Wickelgewand. The style and scene of the scarab are comparable to several other examples, especially those from south Palestinian sites; the closest parallels date from the beginnings of the 18th Dynasty (Ibrahim 1983: 45). Another example of strong Egyptian influence is found in the seal impression with the cryptogram of the god-name Amun (Ibrahim 1983: 46) on a handle of an LB storage jar, most probably a product of the 18th Dynasty. A similar seal was found in an LB burial at Saḥāb and published by Siegfried Horn (1971: 103–105, fig. 1: C–E). The fact that this seal reflects the throne-name of Thutmosis III, *Mn-Ḥpr-R'*, indicates that native craftsmen were capable of imitating Egyptian originals.

This Egyptian influence is understandable in the light of the Egyptian political and economic domination of the major parts of Bilād Ash SHām, including east Jordan, during the Late Bronze Age.

The evidence obtained from Saḥāb and other sites shows that ties with Cyprus and Mycenae, especially in trade, were not restricted to coastal Syria or areas west of the Jordan River but were also well represented at many sites in the Jordan Valley and the central and northern highlands throughout the Late Bronze Age. The ceramic material from Saḥāb includes both Mycenaean imports and imitations. Notable are the Bichrome specimens of simple and carinated bowls, jugs, kraters, goblets, and pyxides. The decoration is applied mainly on the body, rims, and handles. Geometric patterns are most common, but other designs include what is probably part of a chariot (Ibrahim 1975: pl. 34:3) and a lotus-like flower.

Seals and Seal Impressions with Egyptian Influence

The following seals and seal impressions came to light during excavations carried out at Saḥāb in 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, and 1980, which clarified the basic stages of the site's occupational history (Ibrahim 1972, 1974, 1975, 1978).

Scarab of Steatite

The seal (FIG. 12), a surface find, is made of black steatite and based on the form of a scarab with a smooth back shape. The ca. 2.3x1.7cm base is heavily ground down through erosion and probably long use; as a consequence, its decoration is no longer preserved completely and in full sharpness. In the middle stands a falcon-headed god, clothed in an ankle-length winding garment. The winding and throw of the folds are indicated by fields of paral-

lel and concentric scratched lines. Up to half the height, the figure is flanked by two upright cobras with fish-scale-formed hatching on the wide swollen upper bodies. Above the left hand, the back arm of the figure hangs down; the front one, now missing, probably was in a bent position above the right cobra. The piece appears to stem from local production but certainly goes back to Egyptian models. Egyptian gods appear in the New Kingdom and indeed already in the early part of the 18th Dynasty in Asian garments, as here in the winding dress¹. Accordingly, our piece also can be assigned to that time frame.

Jar Handle with Seal Impression

A handle fragment from Area EW (FIGS. 13 and 14), has on the head end a deeply impressed seal impression of rectangular outline. A lying sphinx with scarf(?), uraeus, and god-beard dominates the device. The surface over the wide, extended front paws includes a degenerate 'anh-sign. Sledge and basket hieroglyphs placed above each other fill the corner between the head and the back. The combination of these three signs is with high probability a cryptographic trigram of the god's name Amun with the sound values *j* ('nh-loop)—*m* (sledge)—*n* (basket). The lying sphinx can also be brought into the legend with the reading *nb* "Lord."

Of the seven parallels that Jaeger (1982: 322, notes 600, 601) collected, six come from the 18th Dynasty, from the period from Thutmose III to Amenophis IV, and one from the period of Ramses II. Our seal impression should rather be placed at the beginning of this time period, because the flat form of the handle and the yellow

¹ See Hornung and Staehelin 1976: Basler Sammlungen, 204 under No. 6-8). For the winding dress see Weippert, 1977: 185-188, 186f.

coloring of the clay are typical for the beginning phase of the Late Bronze Age. The handle was found in the immediate vicinity of the Late Bronze Age city wall, in a stratigraphic context that contained many finds from that phase.

Intensive excavations in 'Ammān and its surroundings including sites in the eastern Jordan Valley have uncovered much material (archaeological and epigraphic) that throws light on the nature of this kingdom. Much of the work took place in 'Ammān itself (downtown and on the 'Ammān citadel) and its immediate surroundings. Most of the material culture from these excavations was dated to a later period of the Iron Age, with much less evidence of the Late Bronze and Iron I periods, which raises the question of where the Ammonite's capital was before the 9th century BC. Saḥāb was probably the largest Iron I settlement to be found within the Ammonite region, which suggests that the site was first a major center during the first phases of the Ammonites.

Iron Age I

The Early Iron Age settlement is well represented and—at least on the west and north sides—seems to extend beyond the LB town. Domestic architecture from this period appeared in most of the areas (A, B, D, E, E/W, H, and G) (FIG. 15). The evidence, though, is fragmentary and does not give a clear picture of the situation in the Iron I period. Two houses have almost complete ground plans. In general, the houses (especially in Area B) seem to follow a certain pattern of rectangular rooms which were, in most cases, plastered with stones. In one of these plastered rooms in Area A, a large number of storage jars (pithoi) were excavated (FIG. 16). Since their excavation at Tall Bayt Mirsīm, these jars

have been designated as collared-rim jars and were considered by William Albright and others as evidence for the presence of early Israelite settlers in Palestine. However, this type of jar has been discussed more recently by the present author in the Kenyon Festschrift (Ibrahim 1978). The article emphasizes that the makers of such jars cannot be ethnically identified, although this kind of jar was produced on a large scale in central workshops and played an important role in storing products and in the trade of various parts of Bilād Ash SHām during the Early Iron Age.

Some of these 12th-century storage jars (FIGS. 17 and 18) bear seal impressions or fingerprints (Ibrahim 1978, 1983: 48-SO). One seal impression, which was identified on the rims of two jars, shows an animal with long horns followed by a human being raising his hands. Another impression of a roughly circular seal, repeated three times on a single jar, depicts two seated animals: an ibex on top and a lioness below. The same impression, arranged in a similar manner, was found on another jar of the same type. A third example has an impression of a rosette design and a fourth depicts two impressions next to each other; a scorpion in attacking position and a spider-like(?) design. It is rather difficult to find close parallels to these impressions, especially from an Early Iron Age context. Seal impressions on jars are much more common in the Iron II period (Welten 1969). The scenes and the style of the Saḥāb impressions might reflect North Syrian and Assyrian influence (Keel 1977: 194–216).

A strong Egyptian influence seems to continue during the Early Iron Age period as is shown by a number of objects found in an Iron I cave burial of Area C on the west slope of Tall Saḥāb (Ibrahim 1972). The cave was inhab-

ited during the 4th millennium BC and reused for burial purposes around the 12th century BC. Among the finds with Egyptian influence were two scarabs, a bead-like seal, and a figurine head, all made of faience (Ibrahim 1983: 50–52), along with alabaster gypsum vases.

The transition between the end of the LB and the beginning of the Iron Age is still not clear (Dornemann 1982). This is the case not only at Saḥāb, but also at other sites where excavations of LB/Iron I sites took place, including ‘Ammān, Al Baq‘ah, Tabaqat Faḥl, Tall Dayr ‘Allā, and more recently Tall Irbid. It is not clear whether within each of these sites the LB settlement was reused in the Iron I period or whether, as is more likely, there was a shift in the location of the settlements. The evidence from Saḥāb and the Al Baq‘ah Valley (McGovern 1986), Tall Dayr ‘Allā (Franken 1969), and Tall Irbid (Lenzen and Gordon 1985) shows there is no gap in occupation between the two periods. Although changes in the pottery, metal work, and other artifacts can be seen in the Bilād Ash SHām in general, cultural continuity in terms of burial practices and continuity of occupation can be demonstrated in most of the East Jordanian LB/Iron I sites mentioned above.

It is not obvious to what extent LB structures were reused in the Iron I period, but in Area G II (Squares 15–17) it was evident that part of the LB town wall was reused in the Iron I for domestic housing. This continuity can also be observed in the continuous reuse of the tomb excavated by Rafik Dajani in 1968 (Dajani 1970), which was apparently in use from LB I(?)–II until the Iron I–II periods. Continuing LB pottery traditions can also be observed in the Early Iron Age tombs found at Jabal An Nuzhah in the northern part of ‘Ammān (Dajani 1966). Certain LB bronze weapons and

pottery types, including bowls, small kraters, jugs, dipper juglets, and flasks continue to exist in the Iron I tomb of Area C which we excavated in 1972 (Ibrahim 1972) (FIGS. 19–24).

Iron II

The Iron II period was attested to mainly in Area B019 where a large architectural complex and a piece of the town wall have been uncovered. It could also be found in Area G II and in two soundings in the center of the site and in the deep bulldozer cut at the north edge of the excavated part in Area E. During the Iron II period, the walled town became smaller but better planned than it was in the Iron I period. The eastern border is defined by the town wall on that side of the site. A small piece in the center to the south, probably of the same wall, was visible in line with the excavated part in Area B019. This wall cannot extend much farther to the north, since no Iron II material remains in Areas A and B less than 20m from this wall. In Area G II in the west the Iron II settlement goes beyond the LB town wall. The excavated evidence shows that the walled settlement was planned in advance.

The main architectural complex in Area B019 consists of rectangular rooms oriented north-south. The largest is a spacious rectangular pillared room located in the center of the excavated area. Four pillars of large stones were built in a row along the central length of the room. There are at least two other rooms on the west side that join with this one to form a house or unit separated from another unit in the west by a corridor.

Another pillared room was also excavated in Area G II. This room is similar to the one mentioned above, but smaller in size. It is clear that these columns supported the roof of large rooms that

probably had a special function within the architectural unit (FIGS. 25–27).

Parallels from an Iron Age context are common mainly in western Palestine, but a few examples have also appeared in east Jordanian sites in addition to Saḥāb: Tall As Saʿīdiyyah (Pritchard 1985) and Tall Dayr ʿAllā (Ibrahim and van der Kooij 1983, 1986) in the Jordan Valley, Tuwaylān (Bennett 1969, 1970, 1982a) near Petra, and Tall KHalifah (Glueck 1965) near Al ʿAqabah. The closest parallels are probably from Tall Bīr As Sabʿ (Aharoni 1973), Ajo Shems (Grant 1931, 1932), Tall Bayt Mirsīm (Albright 1943), Tall Al Fariʿah (de Vaux 1955), Tall Al Qadah (Hazor) (Yadin *et al.* 1958), and Tall Al Mutasallim (Megiddo) (Guy 1931).

The builders of these structures are difficult if not impossible to identify. The term “Israelite,” which is adopted mainly by Israeli excavators and biblical researchers, cannot be accepted on the existing evidence. The presence of such houses goes far beyond the distribution map drawn by the users of that term (Aharoni 1982: 220; Shiloh 1970). G. E. Wright (1978: 149–154) discusses Shiloh’s article on “The Four-room House” and rightly rejects applying the title “as a proper term for all of the structures because the space can be, and was, divided in different ways” and while attributing this type of house to the “North Israelites,” he excludes its presence in other parts of Palestine and Jordan. Wright concludes that “the house-form in question has not been found south of Tall An Naṣbah, except for major adaptations for public buildings at Tall Bayt Mirsīm and probably at Tall Al Hīsī and Tall Jammah. Consequently, it is suggested that this is a (North) Israelite type of house, probably borrowed during the 10th century from Phoenicia, though our lack of Phoeni-

cian or Syrian domestic architecture in the Iron Age makes the place of origin impossible to prove” (Wright 1978: 154).

It is clear that the pillared house was not a sudden invention of a certain ethnic or religious group. In Palestinian archaeology, there have been continuous attempts to associate material culture with ethnic identification alone, disregarding its role in a wider social and economic context. Their explanation of the “pillared house” owes more to the influence of the Biblical text than to the factual interpretation of the archaeological evidence. This approach, for example, has led to the identification of the first of three houses found at Tall An Naṣbah as a “temple” (Bade 1929; Wright 1978) and those at Tall Al Mutasallim as “stables of Solomon” (Guy 1931). This latter term was supported by Wright (1978) and rejected by Pritchard (1970). Aharoni (1982) and Herzog (1973), among others, prefer to call them “storehouses.” With the exception of the Tall Al Mutasallim houses, Wright likes to interpret them as “governmental structures, mostly granaries for the collection of taxes in kind” (Wright 1978: 151), while Fritz suggests army barracks. The evidence found at Saḥāb may well correspond with Kenyon’s explanation of Tall Bayt Mirsīm houses as textile workshops in the light of the many loom weights found all over the area (Kenyon 1979: 274). This might also be the case at Tall As Saʿīdiyyah, where many loom weights have been found, especially in House 6 of Stratum Y, although the excavator states “there is no evidence to suggest that the houses within this section of the city were used for purposes other than living quarters” (Pritchard 1985: 33, 36–38, figs. 73–75).

Based on the finds from Area B019, the pillared house at Saḥāb most probably served as an industrial and perhaps

a business and guest facility. These finds include many loom weights of two main types (conical and round), weights in at least three units, and various tools and pots made of stone and basalt, used mainly for grinding and polishing. The pottery included storage jars and red- and black-burnished pottery with bowls and platters of ten slip-painted in bands inside and outside. Some of the bowls and small jars were painted with dark thin bands. One of these jars was a waster.

The pillared house, typical for the Iron Age in Bilād Ash SHām, appears most commonly in the southern part, including Palestine, the coast and east Jordan. The fact that there are no close parallels from north Syrian sites is due to the small number of excavated sites from this area compared to the southern part. As the house type cannot be attributed to a particular ethnic group, the explanation of its function cannot be generalized, although a few cases do suggest that they were used for industrial purposes—mainly textile workshops.

The pillared house seems to have prototypes in the LB/Iron I periods. An Early Iron Age pillared house was found at Al Mudaynah, northeast of Al Karak (Olavarri 1977–1978, 1983: 165–178, fig. 3, 4), at Tall Qasili Stratum X (Mazar 1980: HG. 12), at Tall Abū Al Hawwām early Stratum IV (Hamilton 1935: pls. iv, ix), at At Tall (‘Ayy) (Callaway 1970: fig. 5), and at KHirbat Mishāsh Stratum II (Fritz 1977: 43). Fritz suggests that this type of house developed from the pillared “Breitraumhaus” which is represented in all Early Iron Age strata at KHirbat Mishāsh (Fritz 1977: 44) and which can be followed—also in the form of a temple—into the Middle and Early Bronze periods as G.R.H. Wright has demonstrated (1985: 423–434, figs. 170–181).

In brief, the pottery and the stone implements from Saḥāb are typical for the Iron II period (8th–7th century BC) and are the kind of material that spreads over the central highland, the entire Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea, Marj Ibn ‘Āmir, and central and northern Palestine. The preliminary study of the Saḥāb material in general corresponds with the conclusions made by Dornemann (1983: 170–184), Sauer (1986), and Pritchard (1985: 50–56) that east Jordan was prosperous during the first half of the 1st millennium BC, and there is sufficient evidence to confirm close contacts with Palestine and Syria including on the coast. Assyrian influence is also present in both the objects and the architecture (Bennett 1982b), but that is another dimension that needs a chapter of its own (FIGS. 28–30).

Saḥāb Survey 1983

In 1983, a survey of the area surrounding Saḥāb took place (Ibrahim et al. 1984). The survey staff included the current author, Zeidan Kafafi, Carrie Gaube, and Heinz Gaube. Other members were Nabil Qadi (archaeologist), Fayez Tarawneh (surveyor and draftsman), Mohammad Darwish el-Ghoj (representative of the Department of Antiquities), Robert Erskine (draftsman and photographer), and Mousa Shrouf (assistant surveyor). The main target of this survey was to study the sites represented in the area surrounding Saḥāb and to draw conclusions about the occupational history and function of each single site in correlation with other sites, as well as settlement patterns in the fringes of the eastern desert. Another goal of the survey was to have a detailed record of the area before rapid modern development caused further damage to the archaeological sites. Modern agricultural projects, modern villages, and

scattered houses were being constructed almost everywhere in the area (FIG. 31). This survey was meant to draw attention to sites that had potential for future excavations and more detailed study, as well as to study climatic conditions, hydrology, agriculture, and land use in the area. A significant aim was to throw light on the correlation between the various periods revealed during the excavations at Saḥāb and other sites in the vicinity.

As a result of the Saḥāb excavations, several occupational phases were attested. The earliest evidence is connected to a large village farming community settlement belonging to the Neolithic/Chalcolithic period (*ca.* 5th–4th millennium BC). Saḥāb was largest during this early period of habitation with architectural units including large and medium-sized storage pits, an indication of a self-supporting community.

A good number of similar, but smaller, settlements were identified during the survey, such as: Tall Aṣ Suwwān (no. 25), Salbūt, (no. 27), Wādī Al Qattār (no. 104), and Huwaytān Abū Sunaysilah West (no. 125). It should be noted that sites of earlier periods were recorded during the survey, but so far no evidence of this period has been revealed at Saḥāb itself. Almost half of the 131 visited sites are related to the different stages of the Paleolithic period. Eight sites date from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. In subsequent archaeological periods, the site of Saḥāb settlement decreased in size, although the village area was more efficiently used by the inhabitants through more tidily clustered building units.

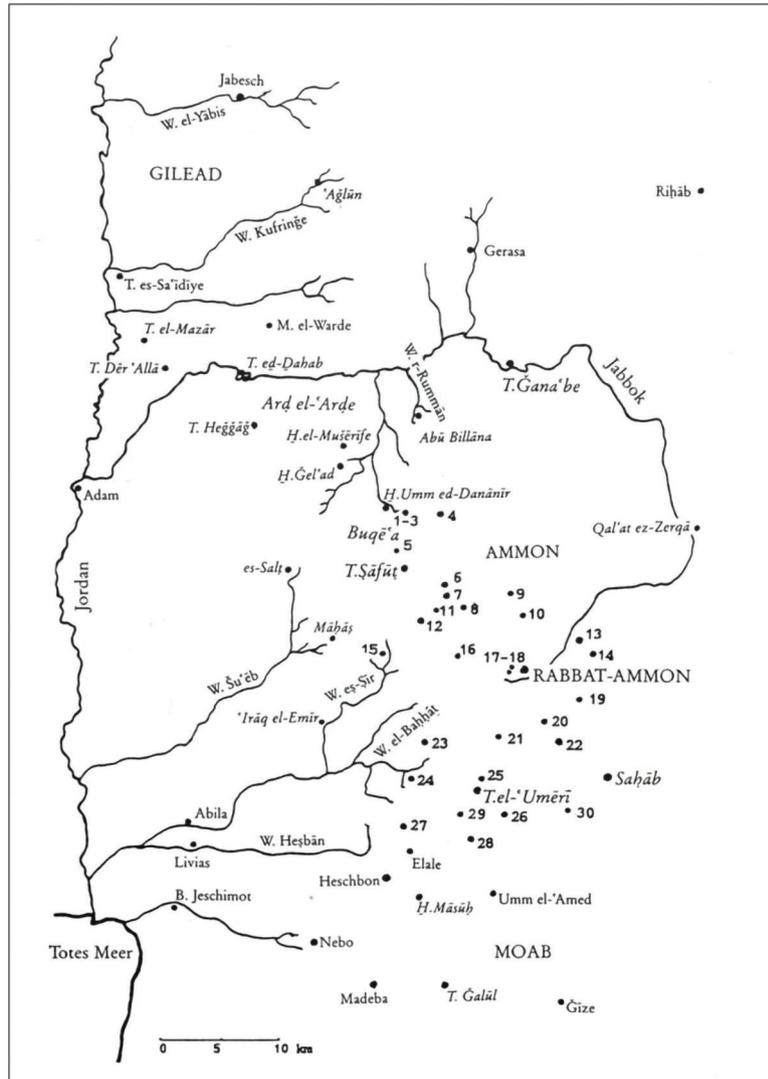
The next major occupation at Saḥāb dates from the Middle Bronze Age (*ca.* 1700 BC). During this period the site was fortified as were many MB II C sites of Palestine and north Syria. The survey field work showed 12 sites of the Middle

Bronze Age. The site of Al Qattār (no. 118) should be singled out based on a large number of pottery sherds dating from this period. So far, Saḥāb is the major walled town of the Late Bronze Age (*ca.* 1450 BC). Although five other sites were recognized by the surveyors, none of these sites shows extensive occupation. Evidence of the Iron Ages I–II (1200–600 BC) is well demonstrated at Saḥāb and the surveyed area. Some 45 Iron Age sites were identified around Saḥāb and many of them were either fortified or considered to be watch towers. Most of these defensive sites are located on hill-tops and served as protection for Saḥāb settlement.

State of Preservation of Saḥāb and Its Surroundings: Recommendations

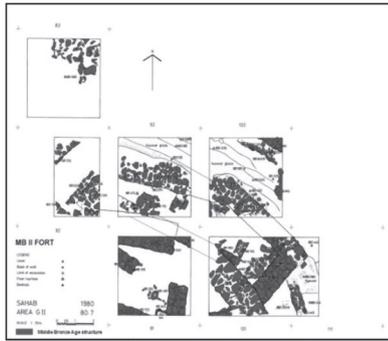
In 2022, the current author checked the state of preservation of some of these sites jointly with Zeidan Kafafi, Katharina Schmidt, and Yazan Juper. A number of these sites were heavily damaged, destroyed, or surrounded by modern houses. Some are open but without protection, which may lead to rapid deterioration and destruction (FIGS. 32 and 33). Rujm Rumaydān is better preserved, but further investigation and soundings for precise dating purposes are needed.

After the excavation of Saḥāb, much of the excavated area has been destroyed as a result of modern construction. It is highly recommended that scholars who are interested in the Bronze and Iron Ages in this region use this good opportunity to uncover more evidence of several occupational phases. The core of Saḥāb's old settlement at its highest elevation is still relatively well preserved. Further excavations might throw more light on the history of the site, especially on the Ammonite material culture.

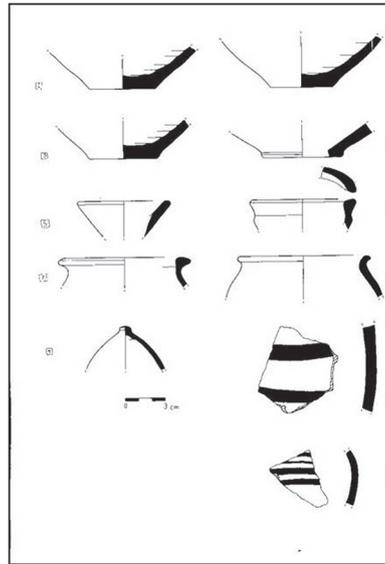


1. Ammonites sites surrounding Saḥāb: 1–3. Rujm Al Ḥāwī; Rujm Al Ḥinū East and West. 4. Abū Nuṣayr. 5. Ayn Al Bāshā. 6. Al Jubayhah. 7. Tall Sīrān. 8. 'Arjān. 9. Umm Ar Rujūm. 10. KHirbat Al Baydar. 11. KHirbat Salāmah. 12. KHirbat Khaldā. 13. Mārkā. 14. Rujm Al Mukhayzin. 15. Rujm Al Kursī. 16. Umm Udhaynah. 17–18. Rujm Al Malfūf North and South. 19. Al Mabrak. 20. Al Quwaysimah. 21. Al Muqabalayn. 22. Abū 'Alandā. 23. KHirbat Al Ḥajjār. 24. Nā'ūr. 25. Rujm Sālīm. 26. Al Yādūdah. 27. Umm Al Qanāfidh. 28. KHirbat Ḥamzah / Umm Al Basātīn. 29. Ad Durayjāt. 30. Tall Jāwah. (After Hubner 1992.)

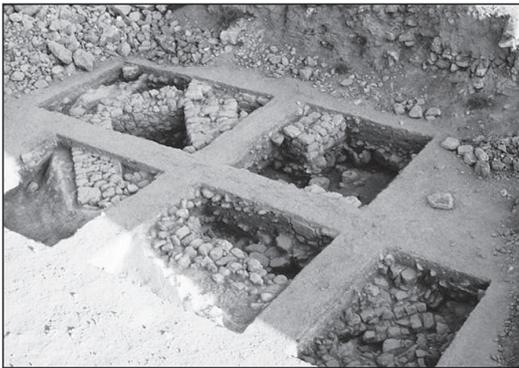
WAS SAḤĀB THE FIRST AMMONITE CAPITAL?



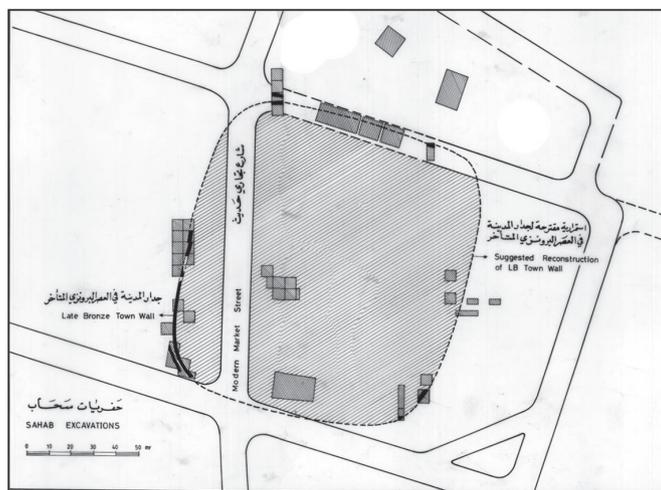
2. MB II fort/Area GII (after Ibrahim 2016).



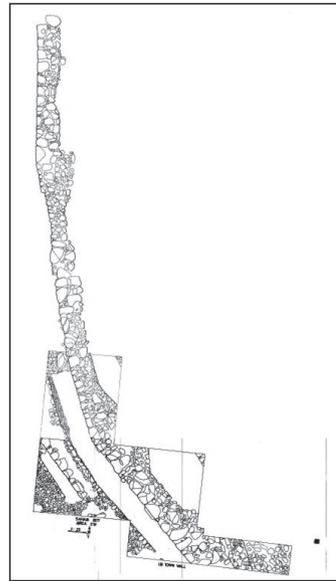
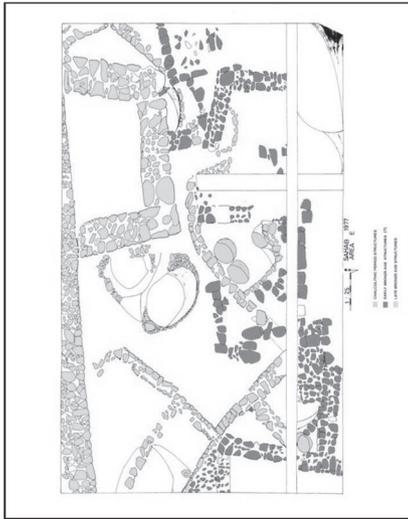
3. MB pottery from Area (after Ibrahim 2016).



4. MB construction with glaciis system/Area GII (after Ibrahim 2016).

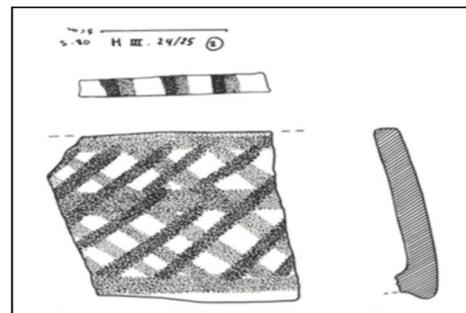


5. Late Bronze walled town (after Ibrahim 2016).



6. Area E, 1977 season. Chalcolithic-LB structure (after Ibrahim 2016).

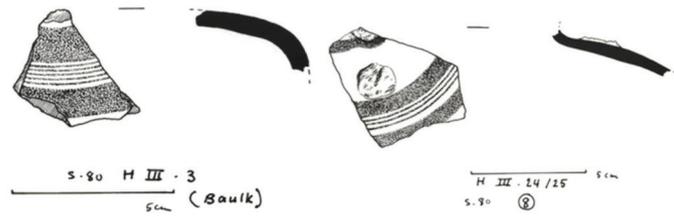
7. Top plan for area EW (after Ibrahim 2016).



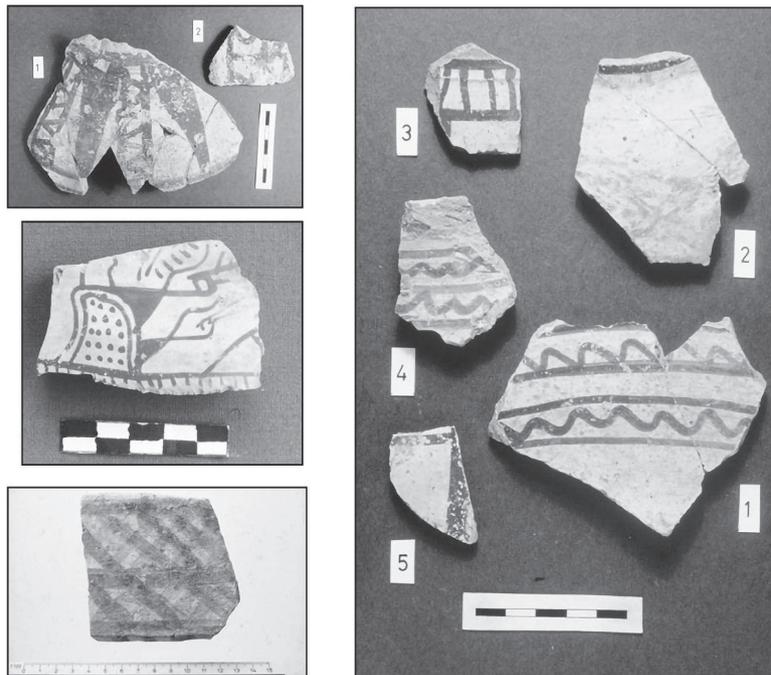
8. LB town wall surrounded by modern buildings (in 1977) (after Ibrahim 2016).

9. LB pottery/ Area HIII (after Ibrahim 2016).

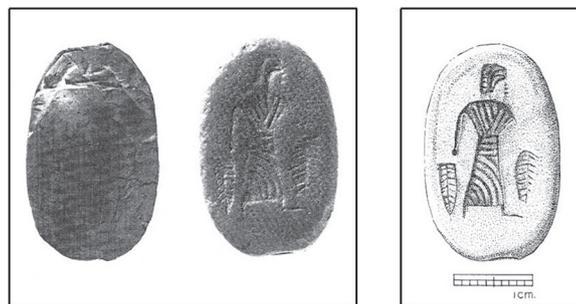
WAS SAḤĀB THE FIRST AMMONITE CAPITAL?



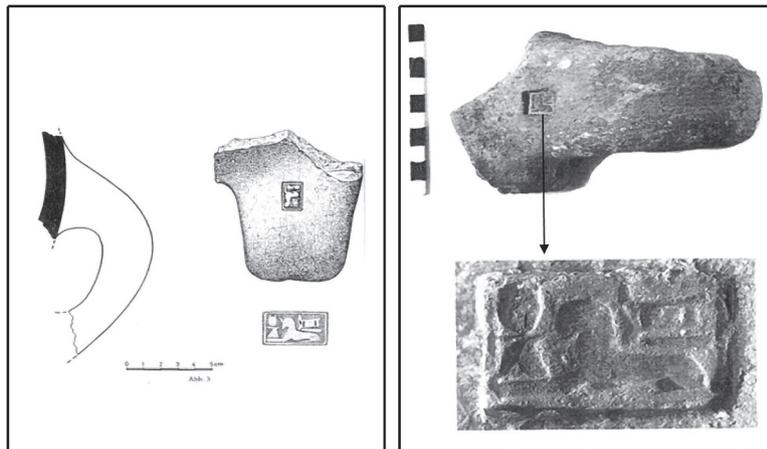
10. Mycenaean sherds from Saḥāb, Area HIII (after Ibrahim 2016).



11. LB painted pottery (after Ibrahim 2016).



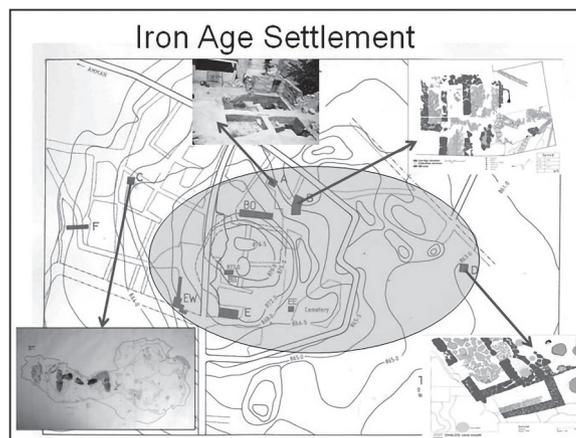
12. Scarab of steatite (after Ibrahim 2016).



13. Jar handle with seal impression (after Ibrahim 2016).



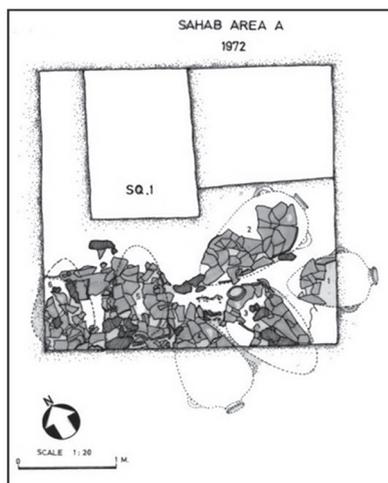
14. Scene combining the three signs of seated sphinx, uraeus (snake), and god-beard. In front of the sphinx (at the left of the scene) is an ankh (after Ibrahim 2016).



15. Iron Age settlements (after Ibrahim 2016).



16. Iron I storage area in Area A (after Ibrahim 2016).



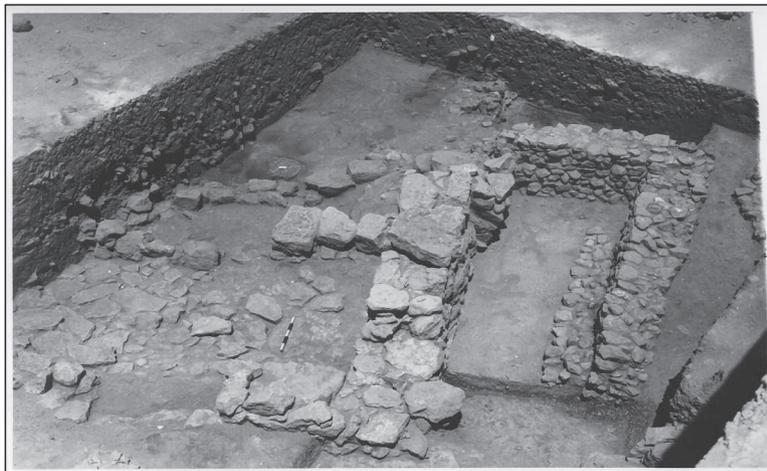
17. Storage area/ Iron I (Area A) (after Ibrahim 2016).



18. Iron I collared-rim jars *in situ*, Area A (after Ibrahim 2016).

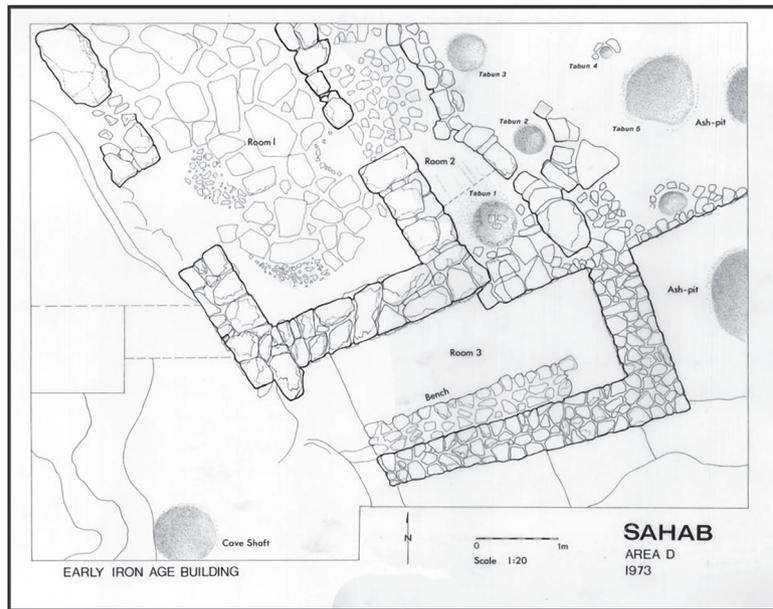


19. Area B (after Ibrahim 2016).



20. Iron I house/Area D (after Ibrahim 2016).

WAS SAḤĀB THE FIRST AMMONITE CAPITAL?

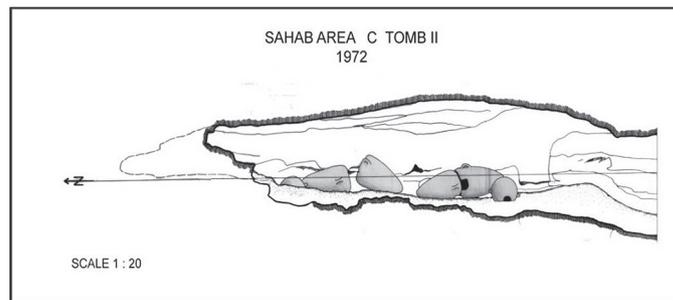


21. Area D plan of Early Iron Age building (after Ibrahim 2016).



22. Area D/Iron I cooking pots (after Ibrahim 2016).

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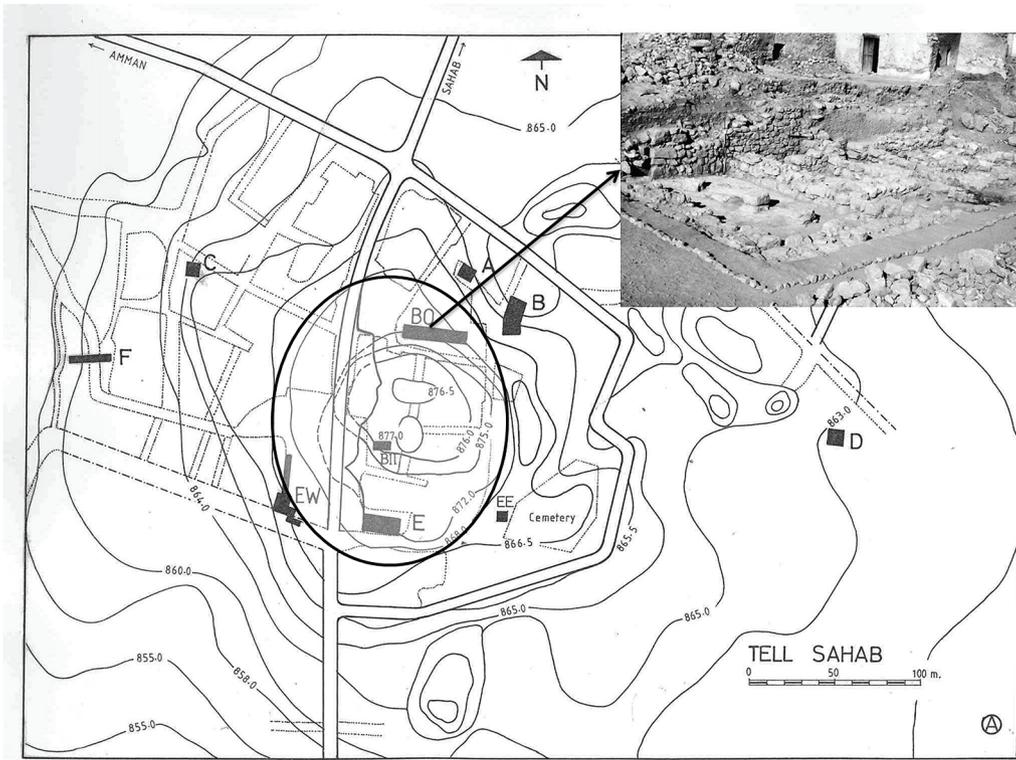


23. Area C/Iron Age (after Ibrahim 2016).



24. Iron I burial jars/Area C (after Ibrahim 2016).

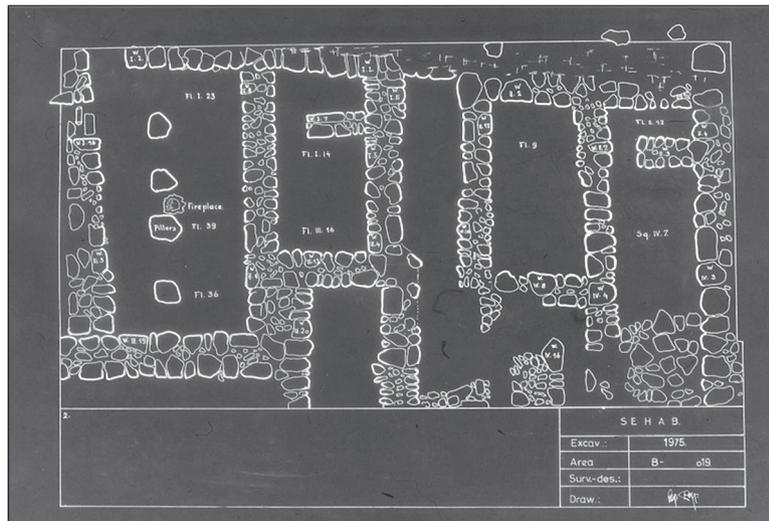
WAS SAḤĀB THE FIRST AMMONITE CAPITAL?



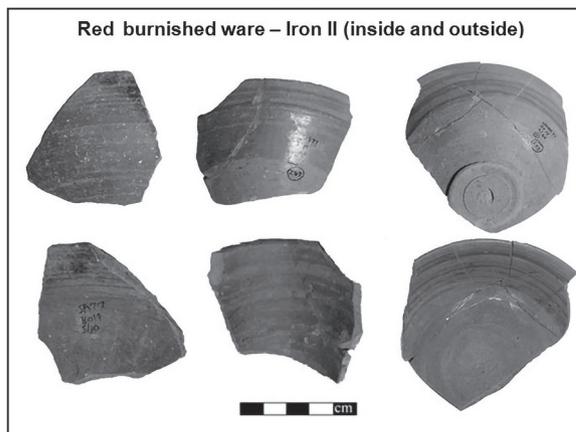
25. Iron II settlements (after Ibrahim 2016).



26. Iron II pillared house in Area BO19 (after Ibrahim 2016).



27. Ground plan of Iron II pillared house in Area BO19 (after Ibrahim 2016).



28. Red burnished ware, Iron II (inside and outside) (after Ibrahim 2016).

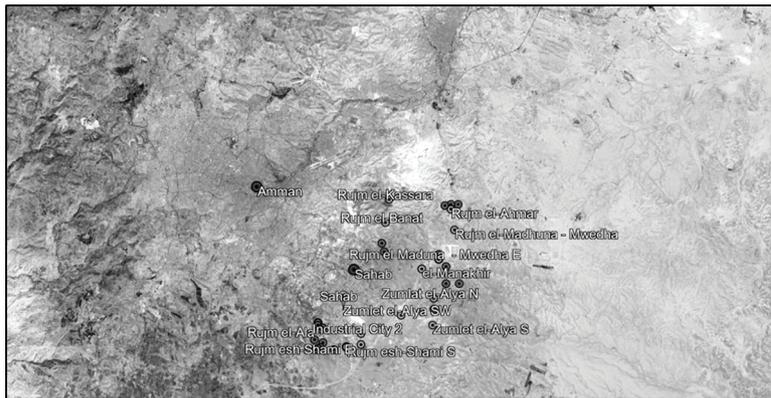


29. Iron II cooking pots (after Ibrahim 2016).

WAS SAḤĀB THE FIRST AMMONITE CAPITAL?



30. Ammonite painted ware, Iron II/Area BO19 (after Ibrahim 2016).



31. A satellite image for the surveyed area surrounding Saḥāb, 1983, showing the distribution of the Ammonite towers in the eastern part of Saḥāb Town, which may be the first Ammonite capital (photo from Google Earth Pro, 7.3.6.10201 [64-bit]).



32. Rujm Ash SHāmī is one of the main watch towers to the east of Saḥāb; there is no protection of the tower and no buffer zone surrounding it (photo by M. Ibrahim).



33. Rujm Rumaydān, one of the main watch towers to the northeast of Saḥāb (photo by M. Ibrahim).

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