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Nicholas J. Conard

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Chapter 7

The 2004 Excavation at Kaus Kozah Cave

N. J. Conard & M. Masri

Introduction

The excavation at Kaus Kozah Cave is part of the Tübinger Damaskus Ausgrabungs- und Survey Projekt (TDASP). The project began in 1999, and the members of the project have succeeded in locating 319 archaeological localities (Chapter 16, this volume). Parallel to the survey, the team conducted excavations at Baaz Rockshelter near Jaba'deen in 1999, 2000 and 2004 (Conard 2002 & Chapter 6, this volume). In the fall of 2004 the TDASP team directed its attention toward the excavation of Kaus Kozah Cave on the back side of the Oligocene limestone cuesta near Ma'aloula (Fig. 1 & Photo 1).



Photo 1. *Kaus Kozah Cave. View looking south with limestone cliffline of Ma'aloula in background (25 October 2004, Photo N. J. Conard).*

The site of Kaus Kozah Cave was discovered on 13 October 2000 by N. J. Conard on the last day of that year's survey (Fig. 1). The great abundance of lithic artifacts on the main terrace of the cave, in the entrance and on the slopes below the cave suggested that the site warranted excavation. The surface collections suggested that the site would contain Epipaleolithic material. On 8 September 2003 M. Masri and N. J. Conard re-examined the cave and again concluded that an excavation would be desirable, particularly since large numbers of sites in the Ma'aloula region have been destroyed by people in recent decades, and the site showed signs of damage.

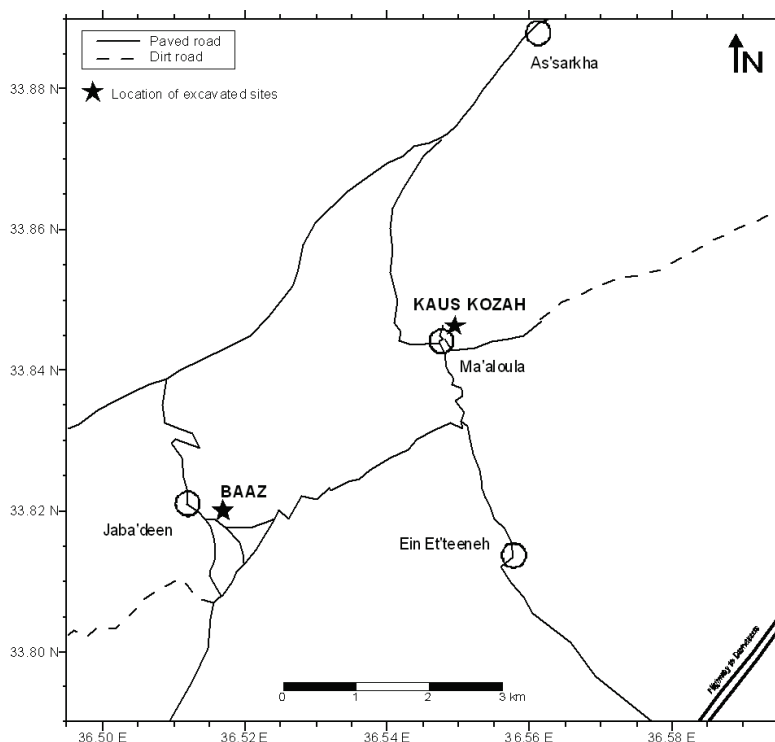


Figure 2. Locations of Baaz Rockshelter and Kaus Kozah Cave

In September 2004 the Syrian Department General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) granted the TDASP team permission for excavation at Kaus Kozah Cave. Work at the site was conducted from 15-26 October 2004. The crew consisted of students from the Department of Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology of the University of Tübingen, two workmen from Jaba'deen and a colleague from the DGAM.

Methods

As with the earlier work at Baaz Rockshelter, the excavation team used the well-established methods for excavating Paleolithic sites that have been developed over the decades in the Department of Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology of the University of Tübingen. Excavators piece-plotted artifacts and ecofacts using a total station for measuring and the EDM computer program developed by H. Dibble and S. McPherson for recording the data. Excavation proceeded via natural strata and all sediments were screened through a fine (2 mm) mesh using standard ten-liter buckets.

We chose ten square meters for excavation that lie on the north-south axis of the site. These squares looked promising for providing a composite longitudinal section through the cave and the main terrace of the cave on the east 50-meter line. These excavation units are on line with the eastern entrance to the cave. Time constraints did not allow for excavations in the western entrance of the cave. In this area, we carefully studied the surface of the deposits and exposed limestone.

Results

The excavations on the main terrace and in the western entrance and hall of Kaus Kozah led to the definition of four stratigraphic units. These included: 1) a loose deposit of small limestone rubble on the surface; 2) a gray-brown silty sediment with limestone rubble and many finds of flints and fauna named Archaeological Horizon (AH) I; 3) a gray-brown silty sediment with lesser amounts of limestone debris and fewer finds (AH II); and, 4) a red-brown, hard-packed silt with low densities of finds (AH III). The excavations units in the more northerly square meters on the main terrace of the cave continued to a depth of nearly one meter before we hit bedrock. We usually reached bedrock at about 30 cm below the surface inside the dripline in the entrance passage. Inside the cave, the sediments were generally dusty gray-brown silts.

The artifacts from Kaus Kozah have yet to be studied in detail, but an overview of the material recovered can be found in Tabs. 1 & 2. Preliminary results indicate that the bulk of the deposits date to the Epipaleolithic and Neolithic. Pottery is present in the cave and on the surface, but in relatively low densities relative to lithic artifacts. The pottery has not yet been studied. Diagnostic lithic artifacts include Epipaleolithic lunates, backed blades and points, end scrapers, a Khiamian point, a pre-pottery Neolithic point, and a point and blade with fine parallel surface retouch. In addition to the chipped lithic artifacts, we recovered a fragment of a basalt grinding stone on the surface in the eastern entrance of the cave.

| GH | AH | Cores | Flakes & Blades | Angular Debris | Tools | TOTAL | Unchipped stones |
|--------------|-----|-----------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
| Surf. | - | 15 | 340 | 6 | 19 | 380 | 3 |
| 1 | I | 33 | 444 | 9 | 47 | 533 | 1 |
| 2 | II | 6 | 27 | 2 | 8 | 43 | 1 |
| 3 | III | 3 | 16 | - | 2 | 21 | - |
| TOTAL | | 57 | 827 | 17 | 76 | 977 | 5 |

Table 1. Kaus Kozah Cave. Summary of total number of piece-plotted lithic artifacts from the main stratigraphic units found during the 2004 excavation (GH = geological horizon, AH = archaeological horizon).

| GH | AH | Fauna | Burnt Fauna | Charcoal | Ceramics | Beads |
|--------------|-----|------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Surf. | - | 45 | - | - | 20 | - |
| 1 | I | 323 | 14 | 14 | 43 | 2 |
| 2 | II | 20 | - | 5 | 4 | - |
| 3 | III | 21 | - | 2 | - | - |
| TOTAL | | 409 | 14 | 21 | 67 | 2 |

Table 2. Kaus Kozah Cave. Summary of total number of piece-plotted faunal, botanical and ceramic finds and beads from the main stratigraphic units found during the 2004 excavation (GH = geological horizon, AH = archaeological horizon).

Although the assemblage of other classes of artifacts is very small, it is consistent with the evidence presented by the chipped stone. Excavators recovered two ornaments, one complete shell of *Dentalium* sp. and a perforated shell of the taxon *Columbella rustica*. Both of these finds come from AH I and have also been recovered from the Natufian deposits at Baaz, 4 km to the southwest near Jaba'deen. While examining the exposed bedrock in the western entrance to the cave, we identified two clear examples of bedrock mortars (Photo 2). These features are known from Natufian sites in Palestine and, although difficult to date directly, are often viewed as being diagnostic for this period.



Photo 2. *Kaus Kozah Cave. Bedrock mortars in west entrance (25 October 2004, Photo K. Bretzke).*

Conclusions

The 2004 excavation at Kaus Kozah exceeded our expectations. Although the rich cultural deposits in AH I are partially mixed, they provide abundant evidence for Epipaleolithic and Neolithic occupation at the cave. Similar to what we found at Baaz, the presence of Natufian and Khiamian artifacts indicates that the site spans the key period when the earlier phases of agriculture developed in the Levant. Unlike Baaz, the site preserves pre-pottery Neolithic artifacts that they may help us to better understand the processes that led to the rise of new social and economic forms following the close of the Paleolithic. The results from Kaus Kozah Cave point to the promise that the Damascus Province holds for the study of the late hunting and gathering and early agricultural societies.

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