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Chapter 6 The 2004 Excavation at Baaz Rockshelter

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Introduction

The excavation of Baaz Rockshelter is part of the Tübinger Damaskus Ausgrabungs- und Survey Projekt (TDASP). The rockshelter is located on the Oligocene limestone cuesta near the village of Jaba'deen (Fig. 1). A. W. Kandel and N. J. Conard discovered the site in May 1999. The TDASP team conducted excavation at the site in the autumn of 1999 and 2000. Background to the work done at Baaz can be found in published reports (Conard 2002) and in two master's theses from the University of Tübingen (Barth 2002, Wahl-Gross 2004). Finds from Baaz Rockshelter are on display at the Deir Atieh Museum and in the new exhibit on prehistory at the National Museum in Damascus.

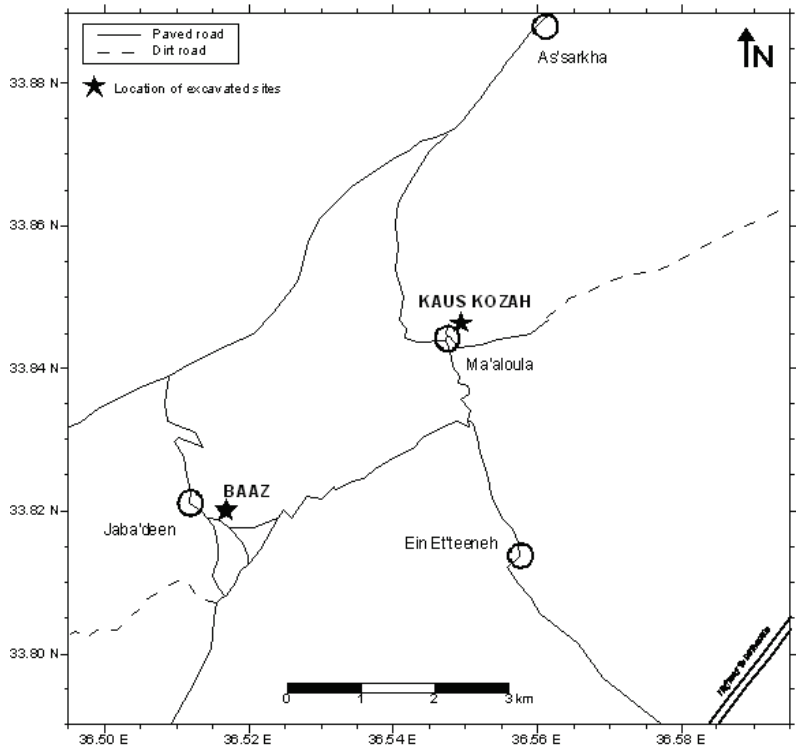

Figure 1. *Locations of Baaz Rockshelter and Kaus Kozah Cave.*

The main goal of the 2004 season of excavation was to complete the fieldwork at the site. More specifically, we hoped to expose more of the Natufian house (Photo 1) at the site and to dig to bedrock to determine the full history of use of the site. We achieved both of these goals.

Photo 1. *Baaz Rockshelter. View looking east with Natufian packed clay floor, limestone hearth and E 22 profile in background (27 October 2004, Photo N. J. Conard).*

Results

Between 17 September and 27 October archaeologists from the Department of Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology of the University of Tübingen and the Department of Antiquities of the Damascus Province conducted 28 days of fieldwork at the site. This work led to the recovery of large collections of materials from the seven major stratigraphic deposits at the site, Archaeological Horizons (AH) I–VII (Tabs. 1 & 2).

GH	AH	Cores	Flakes & Blades	Angular Debris	Tools	TOTAL	Unchipped stones
Surf.	**-**	40	438	76	59	**613**	2
1	**I**	65	1531	298	311	**2205**	11
2	**II**	50	1293	137	202	**1682**	30
3	**III**	25	397	57	87	**566**	17
4	**IV**	8	435	1	35	**479**	2
5	**V**	52	1831	5	61	**1949**	1
6	**VI**	2	58	2	-	**62**	-
7	**VII**	5	289	-	9	**303**	1
TOTAL		**247**	**6272**	**576**	**764**	**7859**	**64**

Table 1. *Baaz Rockshelter. Summary of total number of piece-plotted lithic artifacts from the main stratigraphic units found during the 1999, 2000 and 2004 excavations (GH = geological horizon, AH = archaeological horizon).*

GH	AH	Fauna	Burnt Fauna	Charcoal	Ceramics	Beads
Surf.	**-**	5	-	-	3	-
1	**I**	319	28	259	12	10
2	**II**	604	60	253	1	19
3	**III**	196	14	355	3	9
4	**IV**	42	1	20	-	1
5	**V**	327	6	17	-	-
6	**VI**	11	-	-	-	-
7	**VII**	2	-	33	-	-
TOTAL		**1506**	**109**	**937**	**19**	**39**

Table 2. *Baaz Rockshelter. Summary of total number of piece-plotted faunal, botanical and ceramic finds and beads from the main stratigraphic units found during the 1999, 2000 and 2004 excavations (GH = geological horizon, AH = archaeological horizon).*

Despite some mixing in the gray, ashy cultural deposits of AH I-III overlying the Natufian house floor, the archaeological sequence of the site provides a unique record of cultural development from the Epipaleolithic and Neolithic. The stratigraphic sequence of the site is remarkably intact, as shown in the profile projection depicted in Fig. 2 and the stratigraphic profile of Photo 2. We were particularly pleased with the deep excavations below the house floor. This work produced useful assemblages from horizons IV, V, and VII. Horizons V and VII are separated by a largely sterile unit of limestone rubble defined as Geological Horizon (GH) 6. Prior to this season very little material had been recovered from the small excavations beneath the Natufian floor.

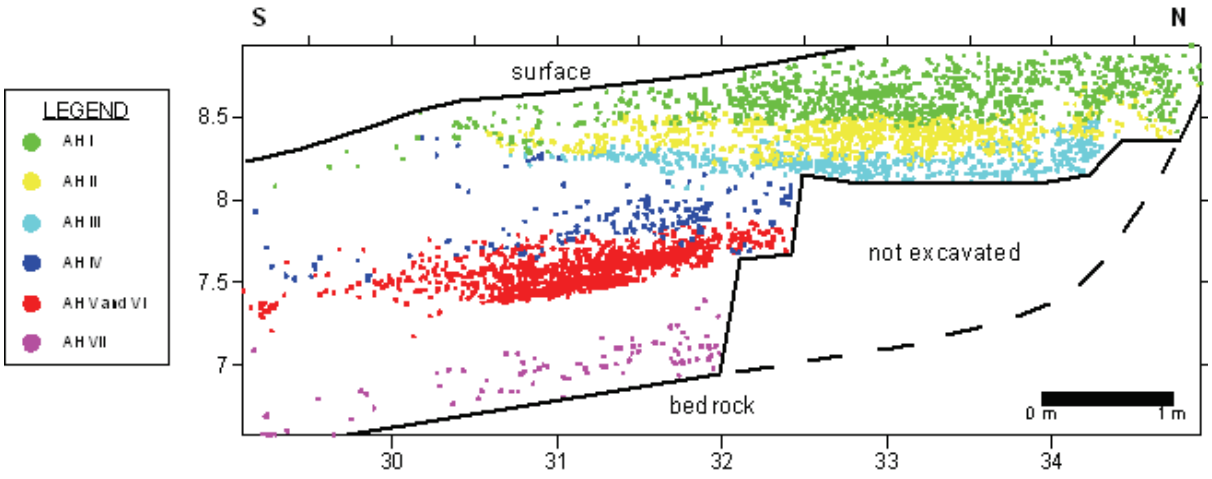

Figure 2. *Baaz Rockshelter. North-south profile projection on the E20 m line.*

This year we reached bedrock in nine square meters in the southern part of the 6 x 3 meter excavation. The depth of the deposits are roughly 2 meters thick in most areas. Below the gray, ashy cultural deposits of the upper stratigraphic units, the lower strata are characterized by geological deposits of mostly fine limestone rubble that presumably results from the thermal weathering of the walls of the rockshelter. The deposits generally follow a constant geometric orientation with a gentle to medium slope downward from northeast to southwest. The yellow-brown silt and rubble deposits of stratigraphic units IV–VII are punctuated by fine gray layers reflecting apparently brief periods of Epipaleolithic and perhaps Upper Paleolithic occupation. Prime examples of this situation are seen in the well-

defined archaeological layers of AH IV.1 and V.1. In these deposits hundreds of piece-plotted finds could be recorded over tightly defined stratigraphic units. In addition to the numerous piece-plotted finds, many thousands of finds with good stratigraphic provenience were recovered during the screening of 1494 ten-liter buckets of sediment and 53 flotation samples.

Photo 2. *Baaz Rockshelter. A. E. Dodonov in front of E 22 profile during geologic and palynological sampling (12 October 2004, Photo N. J. Conard.).*

Fauna was generally poorly represented in the lower stratigraphic units. The exception is the cultural deposit V.1 that contained a rich faunal assemblage. Ceramics are completely lacking beneath the house floor and indicate that no mixing has occurred between the gray, ashy upper stratigraphic units and the yellow-brown lower units of AH IV-VII.

At the end of the excavation, we closed the site with multiple layers of carefully placed burlap sheets and sand-filled burlap bags. Photo 1 & 2 reflect conditions immediately prior to closing the site. The Natufian house floor and hearth are still intact and considerable deposits remain intact for later generations of archaeologists.

Conclusions

With the end of the 2004 season, we have completed the excavation of Baaz Rockshelter. There is no doubt that careful study of the site will provide important new information on the late phases of the Paleolithic and on the Neolithic. Combined with the ongoing research in connection with the TDASP survey and excavations at Kaus Kozah, this region promises to provide useful results to help us better understand the social and economic patterns that characterized the transition from Paleolithic to Neolithic lifeways.

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