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Chapter 5

The 2000 Excavation at Baaz Rockshelter

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Introduction

The 2000 excavation at Baaz Rockshelter is part of the Tübinger Damaskus Ausgrabungs- und Survey Projekt (TDASP) and is a continuation of the work done at the site in 1999 (Chapter 4, this volume). The site was discovered in May 1999 and excavated for six weeks in October and November of the same year. This small rockshelter comprises an area of roughly 6 x 10 m and is well protected from rain and wind. It opens to the southwest, making it sunny and warm. The shelter stands 1529 m above sea level at the base of the Oligocene cliffs running between Ma'aloula and Jaba'deen, ca. 50 km north-northeast of Damascus. The site provides easy access to the highlands and lowlands and is located near springs in the Jaba'deen drainage that provide permanent water sources. This strategic location is immediately northeast of the Jaba'deen Pass, where it overlooks the surrounding lowlands (Photo 1).



Photo 1. *Rockshelter. View of the site and Wadi Jaba'deen looking to the southwest, September 2000 (Photo A. W. Kandel).*

The main goal of the five-week 2000 season, running from the middle of September to the middle of October, was to document the Epipaleolithic architecture encountered during the 1999 season. Additionally, further chronostratigraphic observations and as broad an array of artifacts and ecological data as possible were to be collected. Given the brevity of the field season and the small size of the

crew, which typically included five people in the field and two people in the field laboratory, considerable progress was made toward these goals.

Methods

The excavation at Baaz was carried out employing a Leica laser theodolite in combination with a Husky field computer to piece-plot all of the more significant finds. The excavation data were recovered using a modified version of H. Dibble and S. McPherron's EDM program, which was developed for use on Paleolithic sites. This system allows the efficient documentation of large numbers of finds. On a typical day, three excavators would plot 150-300 finds, while one crew member would operate the total station and one person would screen the excavated sediments through 15-, 5- and 2.5-mm mesh. Flotation samples were taken from most strata and were processed using a large basin to separate the light and the heavy fractions. The excavation day ran from 6 am to 2 pm, with additional lab work in the afternoon and evening.

In all, approximately 3400 objects and samples were piece-plotted. Flint artifacts and faunal and botanical remains represented the most common finds. Lesser quantities of pottery, shell beads, painted plaster, and ground stone tools were also recovered. Typically all lithics over 2 cm, all faunal remains over 5 cm and charcoal pieces larger than 1 cm³ were piece-plotted. Tools and identifiable fauna were plotted regardless of their size. Tables 1 and 2 present the combined finds from the 1999 and 2000 field seasons and give an impression of the piece-plotted materials recovered from Baaz Rockshelter.

GH	AH	Cores	Flakes & Blades	Angular Debris	Tools	TOTAL	% Burnt
Surf.	-	39	427	76	56	598	19
1	I	59	1409	291	285	2044	18
2	II	47	1180	136	180	1543	9
3	III	12	284	52	60	408	16
4	IV	-	17	1	5	23	22
5	V	1	44	1	5	51	0
6	VI	1	42	2	-	45	0
TOTAL		159	3403	559	591	4712	12

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

GH	AH	Bones	Teeth	Burnt Bones	Charcoal	Ceramics	Beads
Surf.	-	3	2	-	-	3	-
1	I	282	21	28	247	11	8
2	II	567	16	58	210	-	19
3	III	118	3	4	225	1	6
4	IV	-	-	1	5	-	1
5	V	12	-	1	-	-	-
6	VI	10	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL		992	42	92	687	15	34

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 and 2000 excavations (GH = geological horizon, AH = archaeological horizon).*

Stratigraphic Units

The stratigraphic units were excavated on the basis of visible strata rather than arbitrary levels. The main units are referred to as archaeological horizons, which are subdivided by using numbers and letters to define features or facies within the main units. Archaeological horizons, AH I-VI, have been defined at Baaz, with AH I-III being further divided into several sub-units. Generally, the stratigraphy is clear, except when digging anthropogenic, midden-like features with little stratification. Each bucket of sediment that was removed from the site was measured, which provided precise provenience for any material recovered while screening. In individual cases where stratigraphic assessments in the field have proved to be incorrect, corrections could easily be undertaken. While the dip of the surface sediments slopes downward in a southerly direction toward the entrance of the shelter, the bedding of the subsurface sediments at Baaz is roughly horizontal.

The best stratigraphic marker at the site is the packed earth living floor of AH IIIb. This floor appears to belong to a Natufian house. The deposits above the floor are typically gray or yellow-brown silts with much fine, medium and coarse limestone rubble. Ashy and charcoal-rich pockets are common, and in two cases, excavators encountered well-preserved hearths filled with dense accumulations of charcoal and burnt limestone pieces.

Archaeological horizons IV, V and VI are very different from the cultural deposits above the house floor. Here the sediments are markedly less anthropogenic in nature and are usually yellow-brown deposits including various sizes of limestone rubble in layers showing a range of sorting and compaction. Although the area of excavation is much smaller than in the higher horizons, hearths or other features have yet to be documented below AH IIIb. Profiles have been drawn at intervals of every one or two meters, and consolidated sediment samples have been collected for micromorphological study.

Archaeological Results

While only preliminary results are available, adequate samples of all of the key categories of finds have been recovered. The 2000 season provided just under half of the sample. Lithic artifacts include over 4700 measured finds and several times that number of screened finds. Nearly 600 tools and 160 cores have been recorded along with numerous flakes, blades and angular debris. While the nature of the lithic artifacts varies among the upper three layers, the find density of these layers is of a similar magnitude. Beneath the living floor (AH IIIb), the find density drops significantly.

Examples of the flints from the 2000 excavation are depicted in Fig. 1. Khiamian points and Neolithic transverse arrowheads are most numerous in AH I, while lunates are present in AH I, II and III in relatively high numbers. Many of the lunates and some of the transverse arrowheads are of very small dimensions. Diverse end scrapers are also present in horizons I, II and III. The deeper deposits have thus far yielded only very small laminar assemblages with backed bladelets. These layers appear to date to earlier phases of the Epipaleolithic.

The preservation of organic material at Baaz is outstanding, and a large assemblage of charcoal has been recovered. Over 1000 faunal remains have been recorded with sheep, goat, gazelle, fox, cattle, ass, fallow deer, hare and tortoise represented. Fifteen ceramic fragments have been recovered, mainly from the surface and AH I. Marine shell beads are present in AH I, II and III. Two portable limestone mortars and one pestle have been recovered. From AH II and III, an example of which is documented in Photo 2.

While the 12 m² excavation is still too small to fully document the architecture of the house associated with the floor of AH IIIb, many architectural details are beginning to emerge. The floor covers parts of 8 m², and appears to be surrounded by a circular wall constructed of large limestone pieces. In square 19/33, the floor clearly abuts against a large limestone piece that forms part of the wall. Similarly, the earth floor abuts against limestone hearth stones that surround the fireplace in the north-central part of the house (Photo 3). About 50 cm south of the hearth, a deep limestone mortar has

been built into the floor. Three small fragments of plaster with red-brown pigment were recovered from AH I, but given the higher stratigraphic position of these finds, there is no reason to assume that they belong to the Natufian house of AH IIIb.

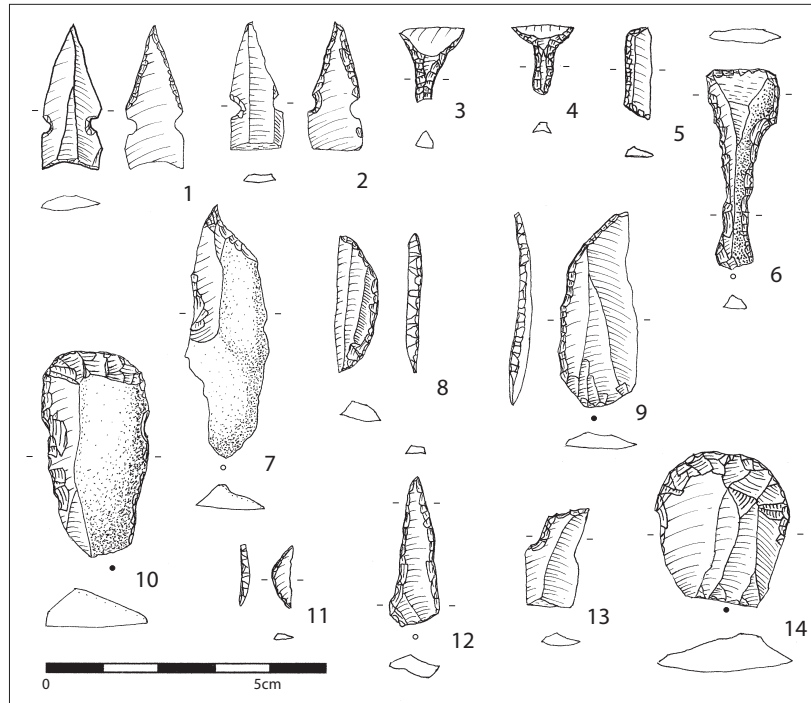


Figure 1. *Baaz Rockshelter. 1-7, flint artifacts from AH I; 8-10, flint artifacts from AH II; and 11-14, flint artifacts from AH III.*

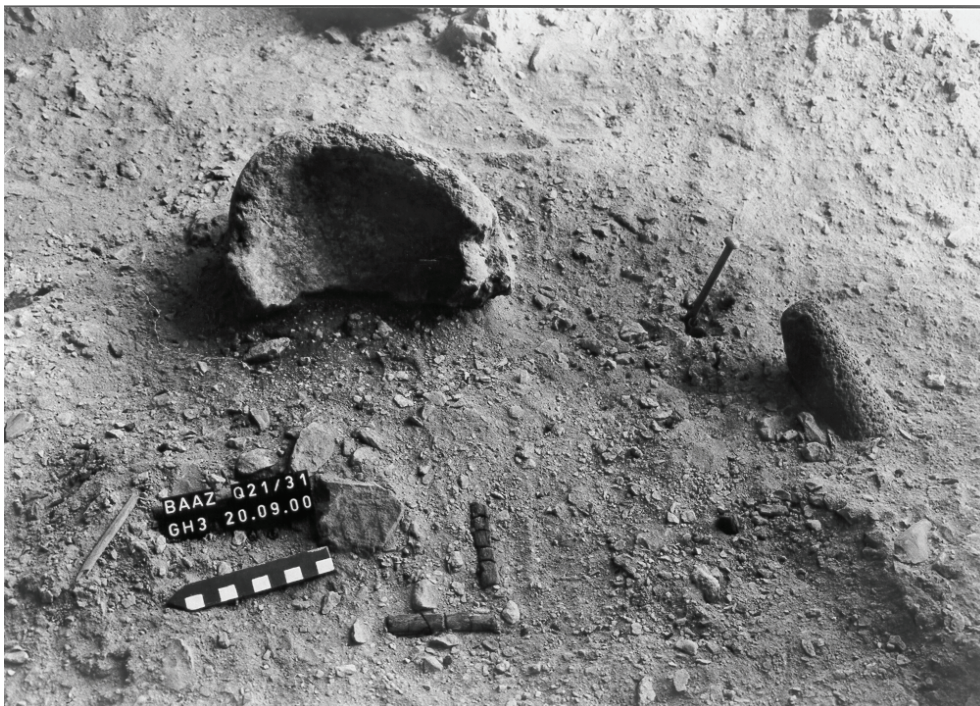


Photo 2. *Baaz Rockshelter. Portable limestone mortar and basalt pestle resting above the floor of AH IIIb, September 2000 (Photo A. W. Kandel).*

Future Research

No excavations are planned for 2001 to allow time for the research team to study the materials recovered during the first two seasons of excavation. A new phase of fieldwork is scheduled to start in 2002. These excavations will focus on Baaz Rockshelter, as well as other sites identified during the Ma'aloula Paleolithic Survey. Results from these excavations and the survey of the area should allow the first attempt to synthesize key aspects of Paleolithic history in the Ma'aloula region.

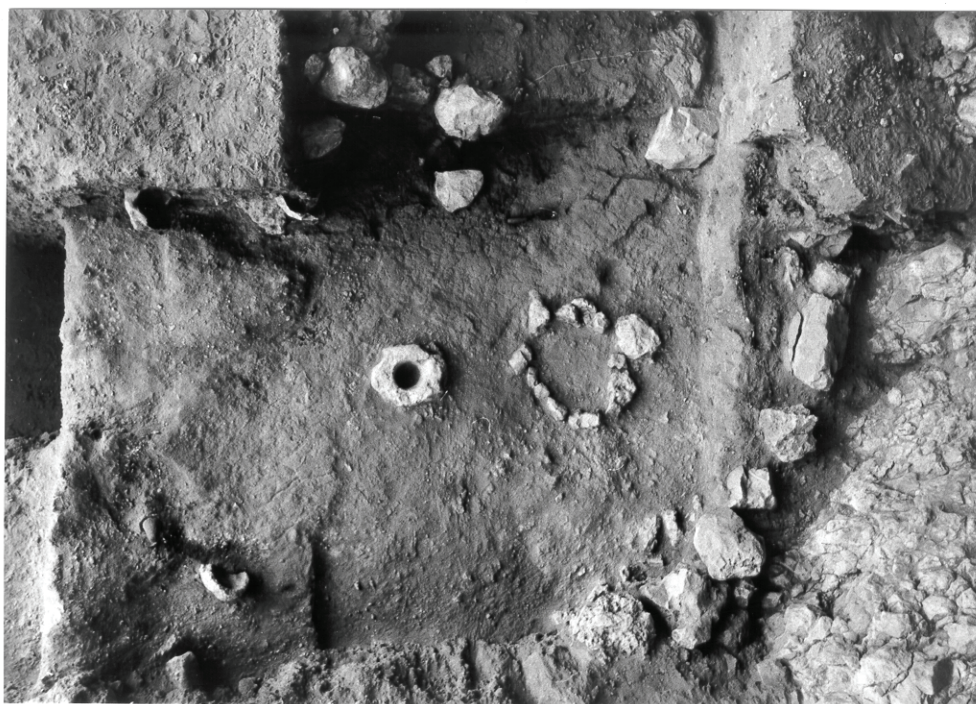


Photo 3. Baaz Rockshelter. Natufian floor with deep limestone mortar, hearth and round limestone walls, October 2000 (Photo N. J. Conard).

Concluding Remarks

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