Fig. 7. Location of three structures identified in the Early Epipalaeolithic deposits of Kharaneh IV (image from 2013 excavation season)

KHARANEH IV

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In 2016, the Epipalaeolithic Foragers in Azraq Project (EFAP) conducted excavations at Kharaneh IV, located approximately 1 km south of Qasr Kharaneh in the Azraq Basin. The archaeological sequence at Kharaneh IV spans the Early and Middle Epipalaeolithic (approx. 20,000–18,600 B.P.), and contains dense deposits of lithic and faunal material. The site is approximately 21,000 m^2, making it the largest Epipalaeolithic site in the Levant. Kharaneh IV was originally surveyed by Andrew Garrard and Nicholas Stanley-Price and subsequently excavated by Mujahed Muheisen in the 1980s. Research by EFAP at Kharaneh IV set out to further explore the deposits reported by Muheisen and continue the analysis of this site. Excavations at Kharaneh IV in 2008–2010, 2013, and 2015 were the first stages of work by EFAP to reconstruct the nature of prehistoric (Late Pleistocene) occupation of the site and reconstruct the local palaeoenvironment (Maher, et al. 2016). At the end of the 2010 season we discovered two hut structures, which are among the oldest evidence of habitation structures in the Levant. In 2013, we returned to the site to map and excavate one of these hut features, Structure 1, and discovered a potential third structure during the course of these excavations (Fig. 7). Excavations from 2015 to 2016 focused on exposing, mapping, and initial excavation of Structure 2.

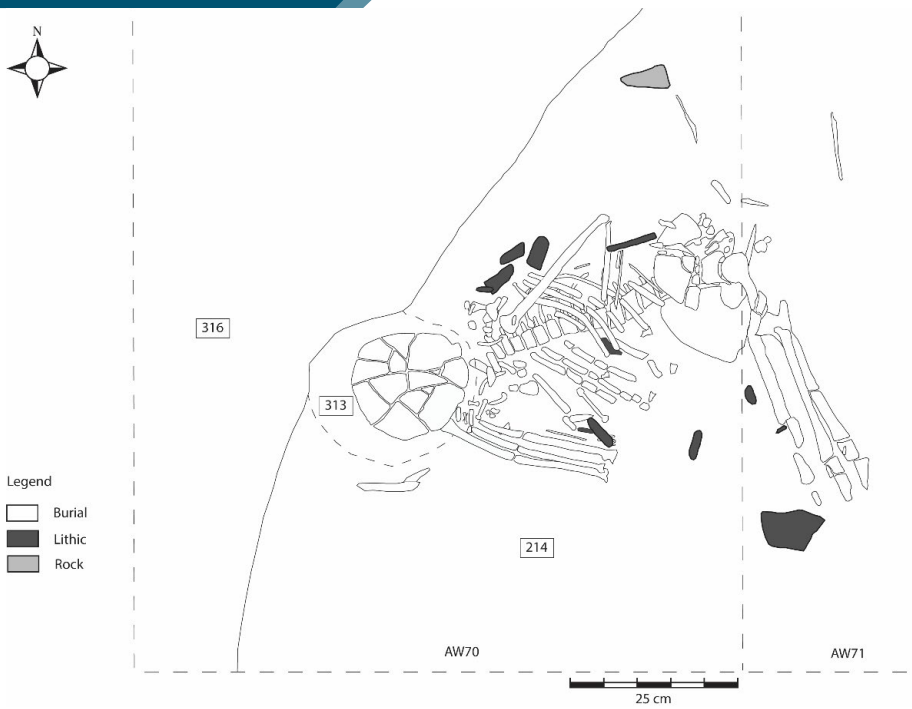

Fig. 8. Female burial within Structure 2 at Kharaneh IV

Excavations during the 2016 field season uncovered the western boundary of Structure 2, exposing the complete structure (minus the southern boundary, which is disturbed by rodent activity). The deposits associated with the structure show that it was burned after abandonment and was subsequently capped with a sandy yellow/orange sediment with a low artifact density. Deposits with a low artifact density are rare for the site, suggesting that these deposits are not part of an occupation area but represent sediment that cap or close the hut structure, intentionally brought to the site. Underneath the orange sandy deposit is an organic-rich, burnt dark brown sediment. These burnt deposits are similar to the ones discovered at the top of Structure 1 and are thought to represent the burnt superstructure of the hut.

While excavating, a human burial was discovered in association with Structure 2 (Fig. 8). The burial was found just under the organic-rich deposits of the burnt superstructure, suggesting that the body was placed on the floor of the structure prior to burning. The interred individual is an adult woman, placed in a flexed position, oriented with her head to the west. The position of the burial within the structure suggests a meaningful connection between the inhabitants of Kharaneh IV and the built environment.

The unique site of Kharaneh IV raises numerous interesting questions for future research, particularly regarding the intensity of occupation of large Epipalaeolithic sites prior to the Natufian period. The excavation of Kharaneh IV will help us understand how the changing landscape during the Late Pleistocene affected land-use and settlement patterns during the Epipalaeolithic period (c. 20,000–16,000 B.P.). The massive size of the site, as well as the presence of huts and human burials suggests that Kharaneh IV was a significant place within the landscape during the Early Epipalaeolithic. Future excavations will continue to explore the use of indoor and outside spaces, the nature of habitation at the site, and how Kharaneh IV fits into broader patterns of social interaction across the Levant.

REFERENCE:

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Project website: www.kharaneh.com