



Fig. 1. Section of bulldozed area, trimmed and refined to show the archaeological stratigraphy.

Located to the northeast of the city of Amman on the main road that connects Amman to Zarqa, the site of 'Ayn Ghazal is considered one of the largest sites from the Neolithic period in the ancient Near East. The site, which spanned both sides of the Zarqa River and covered an area of 150 dunams (150,000 sq m), was discovered by chance in 1974 during work to open the highway between Amman and Zarqa, which also led to the destruction and loss of large parts of the site. The initial archaeological excavations in the 1980s and 1990s revealed the remains of a Neolithic agricultural village that dates back to the second half of the 9th millennium BC and remained populated until the middle of the 6th millennium BC.

In August 2019, the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MoPWH) informed the Department of Antiquities (DoA) of implementation of the Bus Rapid Transit Route (BRT) Project in cooperation with the Greater Amman Municipality, which would take place on the western side of the current Amman-Zarqa highway through the archaeological site of 'Ayn Ghazal. To establish this BRT route, parts of the site would be destroyed by bulldozers clearing the land to expand the current highway. In response, the DoA partnered with the ACOR Sustainable Cultural Heritage Through Engagement of Local Communities Project (USAID SCHEP) and the MoPWH to conduct rescue excavations at the site. These were led by the DoA, with technical and financial support from the USAID SCHEP. Prof. Gary Rollefson, who led earlier excavations at the site, served as the key expert to support the DoA during this process. The MoPWH also provided financial support to facilitate the work.

The 2019 excavations at 'Ayn Ghazal started in the northern area of the site, which is the steepest, and aimed to investigate the relationship between the street level and

Amman: The Rescue Excavation Project of 'Ayn Ghazal

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the archaeological site, as well as the impact of the road extension on the site and the depth of archaeological accumulations in that area. Initial excavations uncovered a sizeable layer of modern waste caused by agricultural activities and by construction of the fence around the site. In order to study the archaeological stratigraphy and collect archaeological samples, it was necessary to trim and refine the cuts that bulldozers had made during their expansion of the highway (Fig. 1). A 2 cm thick layer of white lime was recorded in the cut section at a depth of 1.5 m, as was a layer of flint mixed with ash below it, suggesting that this was a domestic area associated with the manufacturing of flint tools. Below this layer, a human skeleton and skull were found buried in an irregular way. In addition, excavation was carried out adjacent to the site entrance, as recommended by project experts Dr. Gary Rollefson and Dr. Zeidan Kafafi, due to the richness of archaeological accumulations, which reached more than 2.5 m in thickness and could be seen through the bulldozed section. Traces of red-painted lime plaster floors were uncovered dating back to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period, and it can be observed that a tool similar to a paint brush was used to paint these floors (Fig. 2).

As part of the rescue excavations, a series of applied training sessions were organized by USAID SCHEP and the DoA at ACOR for DoA employees, recent graduates, and young researchers. The training covered topics relevant to 'Ayn Ghazal, such as field documentation and surveying techniques, excavation methods in endangered sites, field techniques in objects during excavations, research studies and reporting, and site presentation and interpretation.

Excavations and site rehabilitation will be continued in the project's second phase in May 2020 in cooperation with all partners: DoA, USAID SCHEP, and MoPWH.



Fig. 2. Traces of colored stucco floors, dating back to the PPNB (SQ. 3072 from site entrance area).