Ain Ghazal Revisited
Rescue Excavations
October, 2011

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Introduction:

The Ministry of Education decided to start constructing a building for a school on the western side of the Neolithic site of ‘Ain Ghazal. For this purpose the Ministry purchased 4000 m² of the western part of the site. Unfortunately, and in June 2011 the contractor started bulldozing this area and four very long bulldozed cuts directing north-south were made, each measures approximately 50m long. Three of the cuts (Nos. 1-3) are ranging between 3-5 meters high, and one cut (No.4) measures about 1-2 m. high (Fig. 1).

As a matter of fact, and before this bulldozing operation started, the two co-directors of the project (Gary Rollefson and Zeidan Kafafi) revisited the site in March 2011 and figured out that it is in danger, and noticed that one the excavated Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (ca. 8200 – 7500BC) house, which was exposed in the area adjacent to the main Amman-az-Zarqa highway is bulldozed and the rest of the neighboring installations are threatened by demolishing (Fig. 2). Thus, a report describing the situation of the site was written by Gary Rollefson and handed over to the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.

In September the Department of Antiquities called for an urgent meeting for representatives of the Department of Antiquities, Yarmouk and ACOR. As a result several decisions were made, and one of them is to stop immediately the building operation at the site, and to start rescue excavations at the exposed bulldozer cuts.

Thus, and on October 1st a team consisted of Zeidan Kafafi (Director), Khaled Douglas and M.A. Students of The Hashimite University, and Ahmad Lash of the Department of Antiquities started a three weeks of rescue excavations at the site. The main aim of this urgent operation was to register and document the exposed sections made by the bulldozer, and to study the stratigraphical sequence of the settlement at the western part of the site. To achieve this goal the team decided to examine only three areas in two sections (1 and 3) in which architectural remains were visible in the
elevation. Nonetheless, it has agreed upon that the rescue excavation should be resumed in December, 2011.

**Field Work:**
Work started on October 1st, 2011 by trimming the Sections numbered 1:1, 3.1, and 3.2. This is due to the fact that there is a concentration of structures and plaster floors visible in those cuts.

As above mentioned the main aim of this rescue operation was to trim the cuts and register the exposed archaeological features and objects. To achieve this goal of the rescue excavations, the team split into three groups, first group consisted of MA students (Nevin + Muhammad Talal + Al-hiyari + Nihal) assigned for section 1, Ahmad Lash for Section 3.1, and group 2 of the MA students (Ghouson + Bilal + Hasan + Mu'tasem) were responsible for section 3.2.

Below we present information about the results of each section.

**Section 1.1:**
This section is located at the most eastern side of the bulldozed area and measures 4.5m in length and ranges between 3m and 2.5m in height, and the upper level is 715.41m and the lower level measures 712.33m asl. (Fig. 3). No virgin soil was reached at this area of the site, but 39 loci were registered (Locus 1 is Top Soil consists of modern accumulation, and Locus 27 which is a pebbly layer is the earliest level to be excavated at the section).

As a result of the trimming operations in this cut 18 architectural stages were recognized, divided into five strata. Strata I-III belonging to the Yarmoukian Culture and IV-V were identified as Pre-Pottery Neolithic C. This is based on the presence of the Yarmoukian pottery of those attributed to the Yaemoukian.

![Fig. 3: A General View of Section 1.1 (Photo by Khaled Douglas)](image)

The trimming operations in this section produced three walls built of unhewn boulders, and nine surface floors made of crude lime-plaster (Fig.4).

The main architectural feature of this section is a row of three upright stones built in the middle of the north façade of Wall1 going east-westward. The average height of these stones is ranging between 86cm and 70cm, and their widths from 36 to 33cm. They face the northern direction. However, the southern face of this wall (Wall 1) was built of medium sized boulders, which means it has been added in a later stage to the wall. Unfortunately, the eastern part of the wall has been completely bulldozed, meanwhile the western side continues in the cut made by the bulldozer. Nevertheless, the archaeological evidences explored in the area located in front and behind the wall may indicate that this wall was a part of an important structure.
This type of construction reminds us with a similar one which was visible in one of the walls of the LPPNB ritual buildings excavated at the Eastern Field of the site (Kafafi 2011).

In addition to the walls, several lime-plastered floors were exposed in this section belonging to several rooms dated to several sub-architectural phase date to the Pottery (Yarmoukian) and Pre-Pottery (PPNC) Neolithic periods.

**Section 3.1:**

Section 3.1 is located around thirty meters to the west of section (1) in front of it a 3m deep reservoir has been dug into the Terra-Rosa soil.

![Fig. 4: A General View of Section 3.1 (Looking West)](image)

The sections measures 6.75m long and ranging in height between 3.20m and 2.80m (Fig. 4). The trimming operation started by a trial trench measuring 6m North-South by 20cm East-West. The eastern elevation, including the archaeological deposition and the terra-rossa soil of the cut has been trimmed.

The results of the trial trench and the trimming of the Section were exposing two main walls built of un-hewn stones and connected with each other by a plaster floor. The area extending between the two walls measures 4.80m, and full of rubble of stones and plaster chunks probably belonging to a fallen ceiling of an upper construction. The way of construction and the nature of the fill and the plaster floor encouraged the excavators to date it to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic "C" period.

Another architectural feature was also visible in the strata overlying the PPNC ones. It is a small room constructed of medium size boulders and dated to the Yarmoukian Culture. This is due to the fact that Yarmoukian pottery sherds were excavated in these levels. In addition to these constructions, ashy layers and gravelly layers are obviously visible in all profiles of the cuts made by the bulldozers. Thus, more investigations are badly needed to understand these archaeological and perhaps natural features. To mention, Section 3.1 was extensively investigated during the followed rescue excavations in December 2012, and more results were obtained.

**Section 3.2:**
This section is located at the southern end of Section 3 and measures approximately 4.0m in length and its highest height reaches about 4.0m "at the northern side" (Fig. 5). Moreover, in addition to the archaeological deposits the bulldozers bulldozed the upper part of the terra-rossa soil. The archaeological investigations at this area of Ain Ghazal indicated to the following cultural periods, from top to bottom: Byzantine, Pottery Neolithic "Yarmoukian" and Pre-Pottery Neolithic. Moreover, C14 samples were taken from the section and sent for analysis.

As a result of the rescue archaeological activities, several architectural features such as walls and floors were found. One of the new archaeological amazing finds were two small rounded closed pits constructed just beneath a plaster floor. One of them was filled of ashes and the other of stones and pottery sherds. These pits will be thoroughly studied in the near future by the excavators.

More than one room was recognized, but the lowest one is different in its material of construction. The lowest levels were cut in the terra-rossa and the rest of the wall has been partially completed with mud-bricks. In addition to the architectures, deposits of ashes, stone layers, gravelly layers, Yarmoukian pottery sherds and flint debitage were found. What is also was remarkable is a very thin of fluvial deposits layer going all through the section. However, more studies still needed to explain the different archaeological and natural phenomena at the site.

Fig. 5: General View of Section 3.2 (looking west)

To conclude, the rescue excavations at the site revealed new information about the Neolithic village of Ain Ghazal. This indicates that more archaeological excavations must be undertaken in the future at the site before it will be destroyed for one reason or another.

We hope that the whole site will be protected, and upgraded for touristic purposes, since it represents the roots not only the Jordanian history, but the civilization of the world.

Acknowledgments:
Thanks are due to the following institutions for making these rescue excavations possible: Department of Antiquities of Jordan, the Hashmite University, Yarmouk University and ACOR.