

### MCNAIR TOOK ME TO THE WADI

by Anthony Arias



I remember when I first heard that I had been accepted into the McNair Program. I was excited enough just to be participating in my first serious research project, but when I learned that I could travel to the Middle East, I was just plain giddy. Most of my peers in the Anthropology Department at UCSD were joining Dr. Tom Levy's Jabal Hamrat Fidan Archaeological Field School in southern Jordan, and I had no means to accompany them. The McNair Program involved a lot of work,

but to be given the chance to have this experience made all that sweat well worth it. Not only was I involved in a major research project, but one that tested my stamina and totally immersed me in a new culture.

Well, I thought that I was sweating here in beautiful San Diego, but when I went to Jordan, I found out that I didn't know what hot was. We would get up by 4:00 am, enjoy a bumpy "Bedouin taxi" ride out to the site, get to work by 5:00 am, and by 10:00 am it was about 90 degrees. By 12:00 pm, it was roughly 110 degrees. One day, one of my fellow students took a thermometer out to our site and measured the air temperature to be over 130 degrees! To add to this, on some days, we had no water for taking showers. One might think that we were being prepared for the hardships of this kind of research. Well, we were, because despite the amount of high-tech computer data processing we were doing, we still had to get down and dirty and excavate as was done long before the invention of the computer chip. Excavating was the best part of my research experience. Our site supervisors, John Moreno and Dr. Mohammad Najjar were two of the best in my book. They showed us how to do everything from structure identification to using an Electronic Distance Measurer. We even enjoyed a daily 9:00 am (sometimes) breakfast together; consisting of pita, hummus, tomato, cucumber, and laughing cow cheese.

Digging ended about 12:30 pm, and off we went in the "taxis" to lunch (same as above with lentils and rice added). After lunch came a brief respite, then a spot of tea and (everyone's favorite!) pottery washing. This was done in the "dirty lab," where the bulk artifacts were labeled and weighed. If one was lucky enough to have some computer savvy, then one also got to go to the "clean lab" located at the school of the Bedouin village of Quiqura. Here, I was assigned to the making of daily top plans using AutoCAD 2000 architectural software. Typically, I got back to camp about 9-10 pm because it took a while for these to be made.

Then, there were the camel spiders and scorpions that occasionally made their way through our happy little camp. Ah, the sound of a terrified shriek when someone discovered one in their tent. After a while, though, the paranoia wore off and people got their rest. What a rest it was, too!

Those desert nights brilliant with shooting stars (and the occasional braying donkey) made the Wadi Fidan a truly magical place. Yes, the McNair Program really taught me what it means to be "sweating the load." It was well worth it, though. Between getting hands-on archaeological field experience and learning Arabic from the local Bedouins, not to mention the travels to places like Petra and Jerusalem, I had a truly unforgettable summer.



Tony Taking EDM readings