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THE IASA BULLETIN



The Latest News and Research in the Arabian Peninsula



IASA
International Association
for the Study of Arabia
الرابطة الدولية لدراسة الجزيرة العربية

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formerly the British Foundation for the Study of Arabia

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The Bulletin depends on the good will of IASA members and correspondents to provide contributions. News, items of general interest, details of completed postgraduate research, forthcoming conferences, meetings and special events are welcome.

Please email: current_research@theiasa.com

Grants in aid of research

The grants scheme has been reformulated and details including deadlines are announced on the IASA website

www.theiasa.com/research/grants/

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On the cover: Excavations at Hili 14, located in Al Ain, UAE, this is one of the largest known Iron Age fortified settlements in SE Arabia.

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WELCOME

Over the last few months the world has changed dramatically as we all try and limit the spread of COVID 19. My thoughts are with all those battling this virus and I hope you, your families and your communities remain safe. The response to this crisis means we are unable to currently produce the Bulletin in hard copy, but we hope it will be available later in the year. The crisis also means this year's Beatrice de Cardi lecture and the next IASA AGM have been postponed until later in 2020. We will keep our members informed of these events via email and our website. This year's Seminar for Arabian studies has been postponed and will now take place in Casa Arabe, Cordoba, from 14th to 17th July 2021.

As always this edition of the Bulletin contains information on all of the IASA's work over the last year as well as information on current research and events, publications, fieldwork and conferences relating to the Arabian Peninsula. Other resources in the Bulletin include details of grants and awards available to researchers working in Arabia as well as

information on societies and journals that may be of interest.

In the Research Notices section Michael Macdonald discusses the varied indigenous alphabets used by both settled and nomadic groups in North-West Arabia between c. 500 BC and AD 300. In the same section Harriet Nash introduces us to the fascinating star knowledge traditionally used in Oman to allocate water shares. The Last Word section this year features the work of the Socotra Heritage Project as they map and record the island's fascinating and much neglected cultural heritage.

Thank you to the contributors to the Bulletin, and to all our members for their support of the IASA. Thank you also to the MBI Al Jaber Foundation for supporting the Bulletin. If you have anything to contribute to next year's Bulletin please email: current_research@theiasa.com.

Daniel Eddisford (Editor)

and Dot-and-Circle Ware (DCW).

All the local vessels have the same characteristics: they are hand-made (wheel production has never been used), they are unglazed and they were fired using an open-firing technique, which involved setting vessels and fuel together in a heap, in large pits or simple kiln-like structures.

Fabrics GW and SW are attested in all the three settlements with rather high percentages (around 40-50%). The closed shapes are mostly globular with, at times, perforated handles. Some simple decorations, made with red paint or incised motifs in the form of rice grains, may occur. Fabric MW is present only in HAS1 and HAS2 with shapes similar to the ones made in fabrics GW and SW. It is completely missing from the al-Balīd corpus, where mica is only sporadically attested among the inclusions. This type of fabric does not appear in association with specific surface treatments. Fabric RW, numerically consistent at al-Balīd, has been found only sporadically in HAS2 and it is completely absent in HAS1. It is a tableware item with purified mixture, sometimes covered with a purple-red thick slip. Traces of burnishing are not uncommon.

Fabric DCW is attested only at al-Balīd where it was commonly used until the 14th/15th century. Its name derives from the principal motif on the vessels, stamped or rouletted on the still-wet clay. In the RW and DCW fabrics, there are often decorations made with red paint, similar but more complex than those present in the GW fabric. Incised and



Figure 3. Diagnostic sherds and complete forms of local pottery from the mentioned sites. (Office of the Adviser to H.M. the Sultan for Cultural Affairs)

stamped decorations are common and the motifs are almost exclusively geometric, including crosses and large painted dots at the centre of the bases.

This on-going study, although still at a preliminary level, does nevertheless corroborate that the characteristics of the discussed productions present a temporal continuity which reaches, in some cases, the current era. In fact there is clear evidence of an increase of local ceramic production during the Islamic period, in line with the results that are emerging from the very recent research projects focused on the Iron Age/Classical period in Dhofar. In ancient times, as in modern traditional ceramics, the most attested forms were the closed ones. An evolution in the decorative motifs has been noted: at the beginning decorations, rarely attested, were simple, with a clearly evident increase in RW and DCW fabrics where the decorations became complex, made of geometric, cruciform signs and incisions. This continuity in the ceramic tradition makes it possible to highlight a stable cultural facies which, even if it sometimes absorbed foreign characters, has never lost its own identity.

Today, a number of small local centres adopt systems similar to the ancient ones to produce ceramic objects destined for the tourist market or for internal use.

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SAUDI ARABIA

A new perspective on the site plan of al-Ḥawrā', a medieval port on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast

By So Hasegawa, Risa Tokunaga, Shin-ichi Nishimoto & Abdulaziz Alorini

Since 2018, a Saudi–Japanese joint archaeological mission has been conducting an archaeological survey at the al-Ḥawrā' site on the Red Sea coast, about 10 km north of Umluj, in Tabūk Province (Fig. 1). Although the site was surveyed by Ingraham (Ingraham et al. 1981), partially

excavated by al-Ghabbān in the 1980s and yielded many artefacts and structures dating to the 9th–12th centuries (Al-Ghabbān 2011), the majority of the site remains unexcavated. Before the discovery of the Nabataean port of ‘Aynūnah, this site was regarded as one of the most likely candidates for Leuke Kome, a Nabataean port mentioned by Strabo and others. In addition to the al-Ḥawrā’ site surveys, our team is conducting epigraphic surveys in the site’s hinterland to understand how people and commodities from the port city related to the inland towns and holy cities.



Figure 1 Location of al-Ḥawrā’ (Saudi Japanese Archaeological Mission at al-Ḥawrā’)

Al-Ḥawrā’ appears in early Islamic sources by Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 819), Ya‘qūbī (d. 897/898), al-Ḥarbī (d. 898/899), al-Hamdānī (d. 945), al-Muqaddasī (d. 1000), al-Idrīsī (d. 1164), al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d.1199), and Yāqūt (d.1229). We know from their accounts that al-Ḥawrā’ flourished as a waypoint for pilgrims from Egypt and a port for the towns of Wādī al-Qurā and Khaybar. In 578 AH/1183, the crusaders who plundered the ports of Ḥijāz reached al-Ḥawrā’, and were then captured by the army sent by al-ʿĀdil, brother of Salāḥ al-Dīn (La Viere Leiser 1977). The account of 1228/1229 by Yāqūt describes al-Ḥawrā’ as a deserted town with a ruined fortress, but it is uncertain whether this abandonment was related to the crusader attack. After the 15th century, al-Ḥawrā’ was mentioned frequently in Ḥajj literature by pilgrims from Maghrib.

The al-Ḥawrā’ site extends 2 km from north to south and 0.5–1.0 km from east to west. The site is divided by a modern roadway and protected by wire fences. Artifacts are spread throughout the area along the seashore, where modern villas and farms stand. The distribution of structural remains and objects, observations of topography, and spatial information analysis indicate that the site can be divided into a port area and settlement areas. The medieval port seems to have been located in a recess south of the early modern port. In the port area, we found five wells and some sherds of 16th–17th century Chinese blue and white porcelain and

Ottoman pipes, as well as medieval pottery and glassware concentrations. The settlement areas were located on hills to avoid wādī streams. The largest settlement area is located at the southernmost part of the site west of the roadway, where remains of buildings are concentrated within a 0.3-km expanse from east to west. In general, buildings at this site are made of coral and volcanic rock blocks. Outer walls are approximately 70 cm thick, and inner walls approximately 40 cm. The buildings’ upper parts have collapsed, and most of the remains are either foundations or the traces of furnaces at ground level. They do not seem to be disturbed, so careful excavations may reveal an early Islamic cityscape.

The southern settlement area appears to consist of several residential complexes. During the excavation in the 1980s, a mosque with a lintel decorated with part of a Qur’ānic verse was found in this area. Most of the artefacts collected from the surface—such as earthenware, glazed pottery, a stone lamp, tools, and ornaments—are related to daily life. The Islamic glazed pottery includes ‘Abbāsīd green-glazed pottery, lusterware, and pottery with yellow glaze on painted geometric designs that is indigenous to al-Ḥijāz

The survey of the southern settlement area yielded a square-shaped landmark structure on a mound commanding the port. The structure measures 35m on each side, and its walls are approximately 1.5m thick, indicating its defensive nature (Fig. 2). This structure may be the fortress mentioned in al-Muqaddāsī’s 10th-century account: “it [al-Ḥawrā’] has a fortress, and the suburbs are densely inhabited” (al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, translation by B. Collins).

In the hinterland survey, we registered graffiti and petroglyphs at 14 sites with the help of the locals. Rock conditions in the wādīs behind al-Ḥawrā’ are not suitable for writing, and graffiti distribution was confirmed from approximately 20 km inland. In total, we found 39 Ancient North Arabian (ANA) (Fig. 3), one Ancient South Arabian



Figure 2 Aerial photo of the “fortress” after cleaning. (Saudi Japanese Archaeological Mission at al-Ḥawrā’)

(ASA), and 24 Islamic Arabic graffiti, as well as several petroglyphs from various periods (e.g., ibexes chased by hunting dogs, camels, and humans). We found no Nabatean graffiti in the surveyed sites. Most of the ANA graffiti sites were distributed near seasonal creeks. The ASA graffiti, discovered at al-Quşbah in the al-‘Īş area, is fragmentary, but the word “the Minaean” is discernible at the end of the personal name in the text. Also, it is noteworthy that a petroglyph of a Bactrian camel was discovered in al-Ghawţ located between Umluj and al-‘Īş. Although it has no accompanying graffiti, it cannot be a modern work judging from the patination of the curved surface (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: Petroglyph of a Bactrian camel of al-Ghawţ (Saudi Japanese Archaeological Mission at al-Ḥawrā’)



Figure 3 ANA inscriptions of al-Sahlah (Saudi Japanese Archaeological Mission at al-Ḥawrā’)

Based on our present survey results, al-Ḥawrā’ was inhabited from at least the 9th to the 12th centuries, as indicated by the previous surveys and the historical sources. Also, the early modern artifacts suggest that al-Ḥawrā’ functioned as a port in the later period. However, we found neither evidence which suggests the occupation of this port city in the ancient

period, nor the traces of Nabataeans from its hinterland. While the ANA graffiti have been incised by the ancient local inhabitants, the ASA graffiti and the petroglyph of a Bactrian camel might be related to the inland distant trade routes, although the sites where they were discovered are not on the previously known major caravan routes. Our survey of al-Ḥawrā’ and its hinterland has just begun. The excavations, which will start from February 2020, will reveal the origin and function of this port city.

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