

## AQABA-MA'AN SURVEY, JAN. - FEB. 1981

by  
W.J. Jobling

The Survey this year was funded by The Australian Research Grants Committee of the Australian Department of Science and Technology and was conducted under the auspices of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. The Survey was directed by Dr. W.J. Jobling, with the assistance of Dr. Eugene Stockton, Post Graduate Student in the Department of Semitic Studies, Sydney University and Mr. Sami Rabadi who was the Department Representative. The Bedouin guide was Abu Salem.

The Survey this year was designed to follow on the exploration and survey work conducted in 1980. Its success was due to the kindness and co-operation of the Director of Antiquities, Dr. Adnan Hadidi, the Minister for Tourism and Antiquities, His Excellency Maan Abu Nuar and the Minister of Agriculture, His Excellency Marwan Doudin, who kindly gave permission for the Survey team to use a house at the Agricultural project at Qa Disi. I particularly wish to thank Mrs. C.-M. Bennett O.B.E. who provided accommodation at the British Institute of Archaeology and History in Amman, and assistance with the planning and analysis of the survey. Mrs. Bennett was kind enough to spend a few days with the survey team in the field and very generously gave of her time and wide experience on this occasion. It was an honour and a privilege to have her with us in this advisory capacity.

Thanks must also be expressed to Dr. Kher Yassin of the Department of Archaeology and his colleague, Dr. Hassan Salameh, of the Department of Geography at the Jordan University, for their co-operation and assistance. It is hoped that this relationship with the Jordan University will be sustained in the exploration and survey work planned for future years in the Aqaba-Ma'an area.

This year the following sites were inspected:

1. Ed-Derreh
2. Far'at Mahliba
3. Tur el-Kharazah
4. Ain El Qattar II - South Wadi Rum
5. Ureikit Raman
6. Rewes el Kheil
7. Hedeib el Fala
8. Abu Silwan
9. Seyl Sabit
10. Khaz Ali
11. Wadi Rum
  - Temple
  - Spring Shrine
  - Abu Sid
  - Risqeh
  - Um Sabita
  - Um Jalidah
12. Wadi Rumman
  - Sid el Rumi
  - Khishan
  - Wadi el-Layyah
  - Wadi Eleligat
  - Seyl Rumman

Some of these sites (Nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9) were new sites; some had been inspected in the 1980 Aqaba-Ma'an Survey (Nos 6, 7, 10, 11, 12). These latter sites were visited again because of their significance in the light of subsequent study and research in the interim between the 1980 and 1981 Surveys (Fig. 1 - Map 1981 Aqaba-Ma'an Survey).

In particular, Khaz Ali was intensively studied and photographed because of its importance for the study of Southern Jordan Rock Art. It is proposed to produce a detailed and comparative study of the rock art of Khaz Ali. Sid El Rumi was studied again because of its significance as the place where last year's Thamudic Inscription (Reg. No. J14202) was found. No further inscriptions were found although this site became the point of departure for Far'at Mahliba (see below). Abu Sid was investigated again on several occasions because of its significance for Thamudic Inscriptions. Particular attention is drawn to the peculiar human figure (Pl. LVI No. 1) which displays an X-ray style of artistic execution. A more detailed and com-

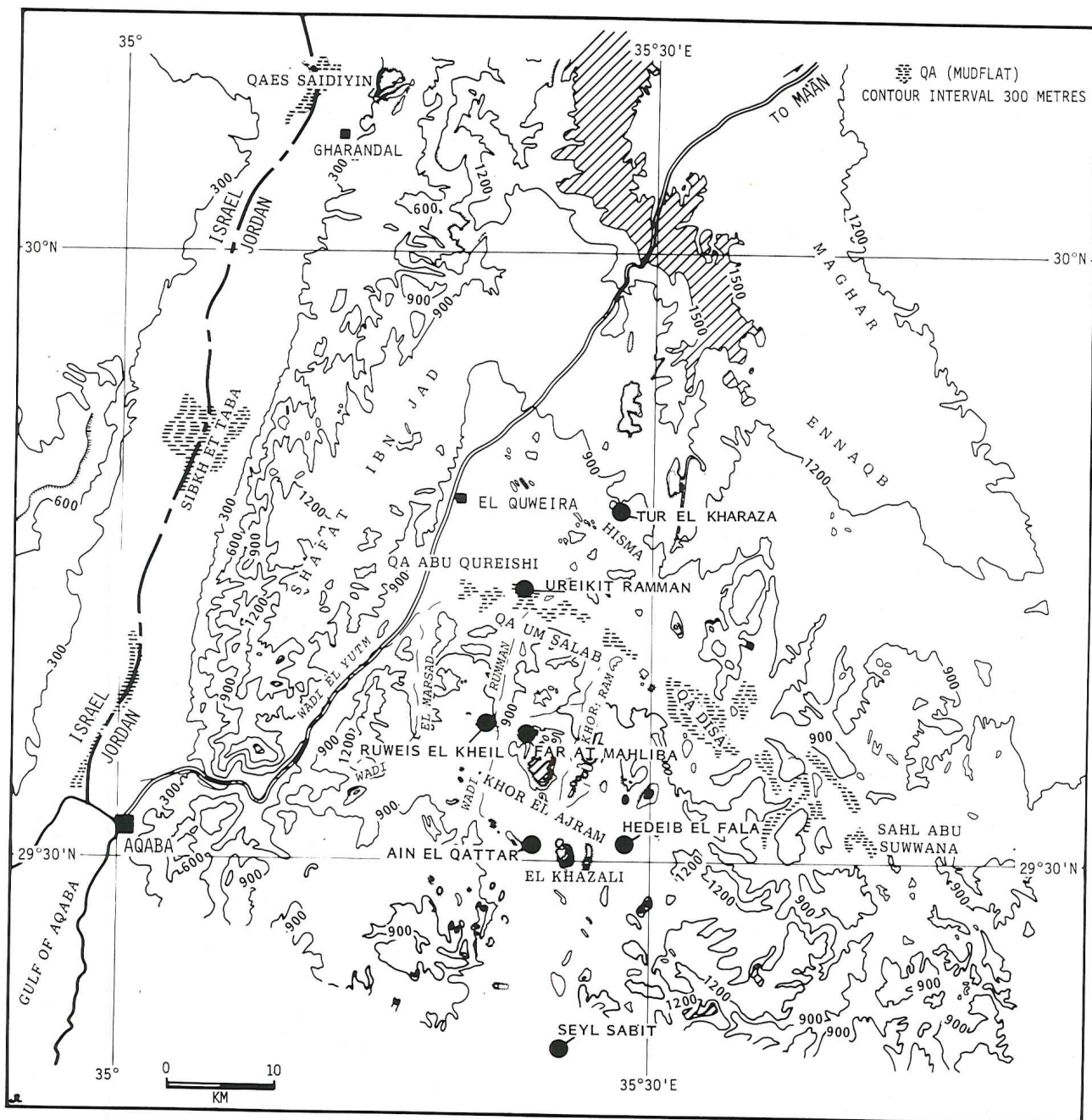


Fig. 1: Map 1981 Aqaba - Ma'an Survey



parative study of this particular rock engraving and a discussion of its significance is in preparation.

Particular attention was given to the following sites which reflect some of the more important archaeological and epigraphic aspects of the 1981 Survey:

### 1. Hebeib el Fala Grid Ref: 196.881\*

Towards the end of the 1981 season's survey, the site of Hedeib el Fala was identified. This site which is situated to the East of Wadi Rum is a significant site of considerable dimensions (Pl. LVI No. 2).

This year a more intensive exploration and survey of the site and its environs were conducted. On the first occasion of the exploration and survey of this site, it was a privilege to have the experienced company of Mrs. C-M. Bennett O.B.E., Director of the British Institute of Archaeology and History in Amman. Not only did Mrs. Bennett lend her considerable experience to the description and evaluation of this site, she also succeeded in identifying a cluster of Thamudic, and one Nabataean, inscriptions located in the overhang of the Eastern side of Hedeib el Fala. Dr. Jobling has copied these inscriptions along with other material noticed in last year's survey, and these will be presented for publication as part of a forthcoming study of the inscriptions and rock art of Hedeib el Fala.

The site may provide an interesting parallel to Jawa in that the organisation of stone circles and wall foundations reflect characteristics of Jawa site types 4 and 8.<sup>1</sup> Further to this the pattern of stone circles here and at Seyl Sabit is similar to the plan on the Wadi Ghadaf stone.<sup>2</sup> Helms has suggested that at Jawa such larger campsites 'are better candidates for permanent settlement, but there is still little proof of this and they would have to be excavated'.<sup>3</sup>

Helms also posits that such stone circle structures are best understood in terms of the modern bedouin tents, their superstructure having been of fabric or skin.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Rewes el-Kheil Grid Ref: 184.892

This is the site where, in the 1980 Aqaba-Ma'an Survey, a large pot was found. South west of Qleyb Rumman this site and its environs were again studied and a significant collection of flints and pottery sherds were found. The apparent absence of such evidence in 1980 may have been due to the fact that the site had then recently been occupied by Beduin. Since 1980, deflation has exposed a considerable area around the site.

This year, a cluster of house or wall foundations was visible, quite close to where the pot was found. It is hoped that this year's contextual evidence, along with a closer and scientific analysis of the pot by Dr. Kher Yassin, will enable a final article to be written about this site, and the significance of the pottery sherds and pottery. Dr. Stockton's flint analysis will also contribute to this report.

### Tur El-Kharaza Grid Ref: 194.912

This site is situated with a west south west aspect under a large overhang or shelter at Tur el-Kharaza. (Pl. LVII No. 3)

Although considerable deflation has reduced the area under the rock overhang to bed rock, there is still an almost perfectly preserved stratification of occupation against the rock wall. Sondages at this site should provide a clearer picture of the character of occupation. At present, it is tentatively thought that there is flint evidence stretching back to the Paleolithic period. Pottery, bones and later flint evidence,

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\* All Grid references are to The Hashemite Kingdom of The Jordan, Sheet 3, 1:250,000, Department of Lands and Surveys of the Jordan 1949.

1. Helms, S.W., *Jawa, Lost City of the Black Desert*, London 1981, p48, Fig. 24.

2. *Op cit*, Fig. 25.

3. *Op cit*.

4. At Timna in Southern Palestine similar structures have been identified in areas more clo-

sely parallel to the Aqaba-Ma'an area. Beno Rothenberg has also posited such a possible fabric roof structure. This would certainly seem to accommodate the climatic demands of these semi-arid and arid areas and create an important contrast with the village and urban centre dwellings in the north. Cf. Rothenberg, *Timna: Valley of the Biblical Copper Miner*, London 1972, p152.



however, suggest that the site was of considerable significance in the later history of human occupation in this area.

This site has been used as a stock pen, the dung of animals having sealed the surface.

#### 4. Far'at Mahliba Grid Ref: 180.899

Far'at Mahliba is situated not far from Sad al-Rumi in the Wadi Rumman where the 1980 Thamudic Inscription (Reg. No. J14202 - Amman Museum) was found. Good water supplies and a series of quite negotiable tracks provide Far'at Mahliba with a congenial and yet well protected environment relatively high up in the Wadi complex.

It is suggested that Far'at Mahliba provides evidence of a good example of a micro-environment which would repay closer study. In particular the area around the overhang-cave, which provided evidence of flints and pottery, could be a valuable site which may elucidate the Man - Land relationships, particularly with regard to the introduction of domesticates.

It would appear that Far'at Mahliba is a small pocket of land in which the availability of good water (two springs) and a benign protected environment may allow the investigation of the paradigm of change from a possible hunting economy to domestication of animals which then engendered the severe soil erosion now observable.

Rock art and Thamudic inscriptions were also noticed in the Wadi ascent.

It is suggested that Far'at Mahliba and Kharaza may provide two important desert sequences which could profitably be compared with the work at Beidha.

#### 5. Seyl Sabit Grid Ref: 190.862

Situated to the east of the Wadi Dhiqa (see 1980 Survey Report), this site is the most south easterly of the sites surveyed and represents a large area which still needs

thorough investigations.

Occupation evidence around the entire Seyl Sabit complex suggests that from early antiquity, this site has been in regular, if not constant, use. The main occupation area appears to be that still in use by Beduin and has a south westerly aspect.

The Wadi Sabit runs parallel to the Wadi Dhiqa and both Wadis join up with the Wadi Yutim.

Survey work in 1980 and 1981 again raises the issue of the degree of contact (in terms of general habitation situations as well as trade) of these southern desert areas and the coast. It is proposed that in future survey work a more thorough exploration of these possible links with the coast be explored.

The Thamudic inscriptions and the rock art so frequently associated with these inscriptions are part of a much wider ranging dialectal circle.<sup>5</sup> The epigraphic and pictorial evidence of the Aqaba-Ma'an area has contributed greatly to our understanding of the nature of the human society sustained in these semi-arid and desert areas.

While a separate and more detailed study of the Thamudic inscriptions will be published once the survey has been completed *in toto* it is pertinent to the 1980 and 1981 seasons to draw attention to the firmness and clarity of execution in the great majority of these inscriptions and rock drawings. As can be seen from the example from Wadi Rumman the definition of the script suggests a degree of primary literacy which bespeaks an artistic and literary ability which in turn raises important questions about the type of linguistic and literary community which may have generated such epigraphic skills which appear to have been current throughout the area (Pl. LVII No. 4).<sup>6</sup>

As well as Thamudic inscriptions the Aqaba-Ma'an area also harbours extensive epigraphic evidence of Nabataean occupation.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the Nabataean

5. (i) Harding, G.L. and E. Littman, *Some Thamudic Inscriptions from the Hashemite Kingdom of The Jordan*, Leiden 1952.

(ii) Winnett, F.V. and W.C. Reed, "An Archaeological-Epigraphical Survey of the Hail

Area of Northern Saudi Arabia", *Berytus* XXII, 1973:53-114.

6. This inscription may be transliterated: *Ird bn tm*

7. Harding, G.L., *The Antiquities of Jordan*, London 1967.



epigraphic evidence located in previous surveys has been mainly confined to the well known Wadi Ramm. However, during the 1981 survey, at Hedeibeh el Fala, a Nabataean inscription was found by Mrs. C-M. Bennett, Director of the British Institute for Archaeology and History (Pl. LVIII No. 5):

*slm zynwn br qymt klyrk btb l'lm*

Although the text is badly weathered in parts it reflects several points of epigraphic and socio-linguistic importance which will be the subject of a more extensive article which is forthcoming. Particular attention is drawn to the Greek title Chiliarchos which occurs in this inscription which is tentatively dated to the first century AD.<sup>8</sup> This name and title shed further light on the penetration of Greek (probably as the socially superior donor language) into the linguistic strata of Nabataean culture. Together with the Thamudic inscriptions of the Aqaba-Ma'an area, as well as the bulk of similar epigraphic evidence known to us from the Sinai, Southern Palestine and Saudi Arabia, this epigraphic material raises important questions concerning multilingualism in the area.<sup>9</sup>

While a considerable degree of time during the 1981 survey was denoted to locating and recording the rock art of the general area special attention was focussed on the gallery at Khaz 'Ali.<sup>10</sup> In particular attention is drawn to the carvings of human feet (Pl. LVIII No. 6). The gallery itself provides a challenge in terms of its position. The relationship of the style of the carefully worked petroglyphs and their triangular symmetry to other rock art of the general area suggests a preoccupation with the presentation of human feet and presents an

interesting challenge to our understanding of this semiotic dimension. Ancient literary traditions about the significance of feet and a variety of visual representations in the Ancient Near East are paralleled elsewhere in the world.<sup>11</sup> An interesting example of the general Semitic provenance of this symbol is found in the Old Testament where the prophet Ezekiel (43:7) refers to the Temple in Jerusalem as the place of the soles of Yahweh's feet and hence provides a synonym for the direct presence of the deity.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Ali Abu Assaf of the Damascus National Museum has reported that in the excavation of the tenth century BC Aramaean temple at Ein Dara in northern Syria four distinct human footprints each about 100 cms in length embedded in the temple floor have been found. Whether a specifically cultic function can be attributed to the feet in the Khaz 'Ali gallery remains unclear.

### Lithic Industries of the Hisma<sup>13</sup>.

Research into the prehistory of Jordan is still relatively undeveloped, with numerous reports of surface sites but few excavations, and those limited in sequence. Investigation has concentrated on the Jordan Valley and the adjacent plateau, where parallels have been readily drawn from the archaeologically better known areas of Palestine and Syria. Even less is known of Southern Jordan, where there have been two excavations of Late Stone Age and numerous surface finds of indeterminate age, and where parallels can be less readily drawn from the better known north and West, since the region's geology, ecology and climate link it to the largely *terra incognita* of the Arabian Peninsula.

Earlier researchers variously des-

8. I am most grateful to the Abbe Jean Starky who has kindly assisted me with the transliteration and dating of this Nabataean inscription.

9. These and other sociolinguistic issues are discussed in a forthcoming article, "Recent Exploration and Survey in Southern Jordan: Rock Art, Inscriptions and History", Berytus, based on a paper given by the Director at a conference at the American University of Beirut in May 1981.

10. Harding, G.L., *op cit*, pp12-13.

11. (i) Cirlot, V.E., *A dictionary of symbols*, New York 1962, pp106-107.

(ii) Walker, B. *Body Magic. An Encyclopaedia of Esoteric Man*, London 1979, pp220-221.

12. Eichrodt, W., *Ezekiel*, S.C.M. Old Testament Library, London 1970, p555.

13. The commentary on the flints is a synopsis of a report by Dr. Eugene Stockton. The drawings are by Ann Searight.



ignated their sites by cultural phases from the Upper Paleolithic to the Chalcolithic, and they did so tentatively because of the lack of clearly diagnostic tool types, apart from arrowheads. Where some description of whole assemblages is provided it is patent that they are similar to the surface assemblages found during the 1981 survey. Isolated cases of cultural markers were noted, e.g. Mousterian core at Retama or Natufian crescent at Ramm, just as they have been noted by this survey. However, single items are notoriously unreliable for dating a whole assemblage, especially where severe deflation may have resulted in mixing old and new assemblages, or where an older flint may have been re-used in a later industry or where a craftsman may have accidentally duplicated an older technique or tool type. The salient recurring feature on all sites is an industry of small flakes and blades with incidental edge retouch. The size of the blades, in particular, has evoked comparison with the microlithic industries of the Epipalaeolithic (though the diagnostic microlithic backed blades have been rare or lacking), but blade size may be rather a function of distance from sources of suitable flint than of cultural tendency. Hence the comment of Stanley Price and Garrard for their site is applicable to most, if not all, in the Hisma: 'Although far from conclusive, a neolithic/chalcolithic date would appear to be most consistent with the material recovered'<sup>14</sup>.

If such were the case, these widespread assemblages would be co-eval with Beidha and stand in contrast to it and similar Late Stone Age sites in the lack of tools associated with agriculture and specialised manufacture. The lack of cereal polish on the denticulates is perhaps also eloquent witness to the absence of agriculture. The economy at this time would therefore appear to be that of hunter-gatherers and/or herdsman, and such would be consistent with occupation of short duration at most sites (characterised by *ad hoc* tools) or slightly

longer at the rockshelter sites (allowing enough leisure to fashion finer tools). However, the numerous sites exhibiting such an assemblage might be considered more or less temporary stop-overs for nomads, and the tool kit might be designated a nomadic facies of some Late Stone Age phase, which is known from excavation of better-endowed sites to the west and north by a wider suite of tools<sup>15</sup>.

However, this widespread assemblage does not represent the only time of man's exploitation of this desert environment. Palaeolithic flints are numerous on the heavily deflated surfaces of the limestone plateau to the north and at Tur el Kharaza there are signs of a sequence beginning back as far as the Lower Palaeolithic. Hence older assemblages can be presumed to be present and even common in the Hisma, but to be buried beneath the generally aggrading *sahel* sands of the valley floors, only to be revealed under localised conditions of very severe deflation. The limited collection at Tur el Kharaza may hint that from the Upper Palaeolithic until the end of the Stone Age there has been little change in tool kit, except perhaps in size of material, as there was little change in arid zone economy. It remains an open question whether herding in the desert had begun before the advent of history. (See Table I and Figs. 2, 3 and 4.)

The growth in knowledge of the area as a result of the 1980-1981 surveys has been significant. Particularly, the following issues have emerged:

- a) The Man - Land relationships and the understanding of the history of the Aqaba-Ma'an area in these terms. These relationships cover the pre-history and later periods of human occupation. It is thought necessary to continue a flint analysis along the lines suggested by Dr. Stockton.

14. Stanley Price, N. and A. Garrard, "A Pre-historic Site in the Rum Area of the Hisma", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities, Jordan* 20, 1975:91-3 (site 20).

15. Cf. Juli, H.D., *Ancient Herders of the Negev: A Study in Pastoral Archaeology*, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, U.S.A., 1978.

Table 1. Analysis of assemblages, 1982 Survey

Site No.	21	22	30	9	31	32
Site	<i>Tur el</i> <i>Kharaza</i>	<i>Far'at</i> <i>Mahliba</i>	<i>Ruweis</i> <i>el Kheil</i>	<i>Ain el</i> <i>Qatter</i>	<i>Hedeib</i> <i>el Fala</i>	<i>Seyl</i> <i>Sabit</i>
Total worked stone collected	420	927	98	426	353	220
Cores - large 5 cm	22	3	—	—	—	—
small 5 cm	47	55	2	15	10	8
Cores - irregular	52	38	1	9	10	6
- blade	6	16	1	6	—	1
- common platform	8	—	—	—	—	—
- alternately flanked	3	—	—	—	—	—
Blades - large 5 cm	3	2	3	—	—	—
- small 5 cm	15	173	9	140	64	9
Flakes (small, nondescript)	118	495	41	190	197	133
FLAKING RECHNIQUES						
Bipolar/scaler piece	4	4	5	2	5	4
Faceted butt	8	1	1	3	5	—
Burin spalling	4	7	—	—	3	—
Redirecting flake	3	—	—	1	4	—
Back blunting	—	4	1	2	3	—
TOOL TYPES						
Hammerstone	6	5	—	—	—	—
Anvil stone	1	—	—	—	—	—
Biface	1	—	—	—	—	—
Cleaver	2	—	—	—	—	—
Knife	2	—	—	—	—	—
Edge-ground axe	—	—	1	—	—	—
Arrowhead	1	1	—	—	1	—
Awl	1	3	1	—	1	2
Edge-retouched flakes and blades						
Retouched margin denticulate	21	26	5	8	19	5
Continuous - steep-edged	45	13	1	6	24	8
- acute edged	23	32	5	6	10	8
Retouched notch	22	24	10	16	13	6
Retouched nose	—	9	1	4	9	—
Retouched distal	1	1	—	6	—	3

b) The nature of the relationship of the Nabataean and Thamudic inhabitants of the area. The extent of links (ethnic, cultural and linguistic) between these two groups. Especially, attention is drawn to the importance of a renewed interest in Thamudic and Nabataean language studies. It is hoped that the

Director, with the kind co-operation of the Department of Antiquities and Mr. Michael Macdonald, will be able to spearhead this aspect of research. A collection of the Thamudic Inscriptions from the 1980 and 1981 surveys will be published separately.

c) The trade and habitation links between



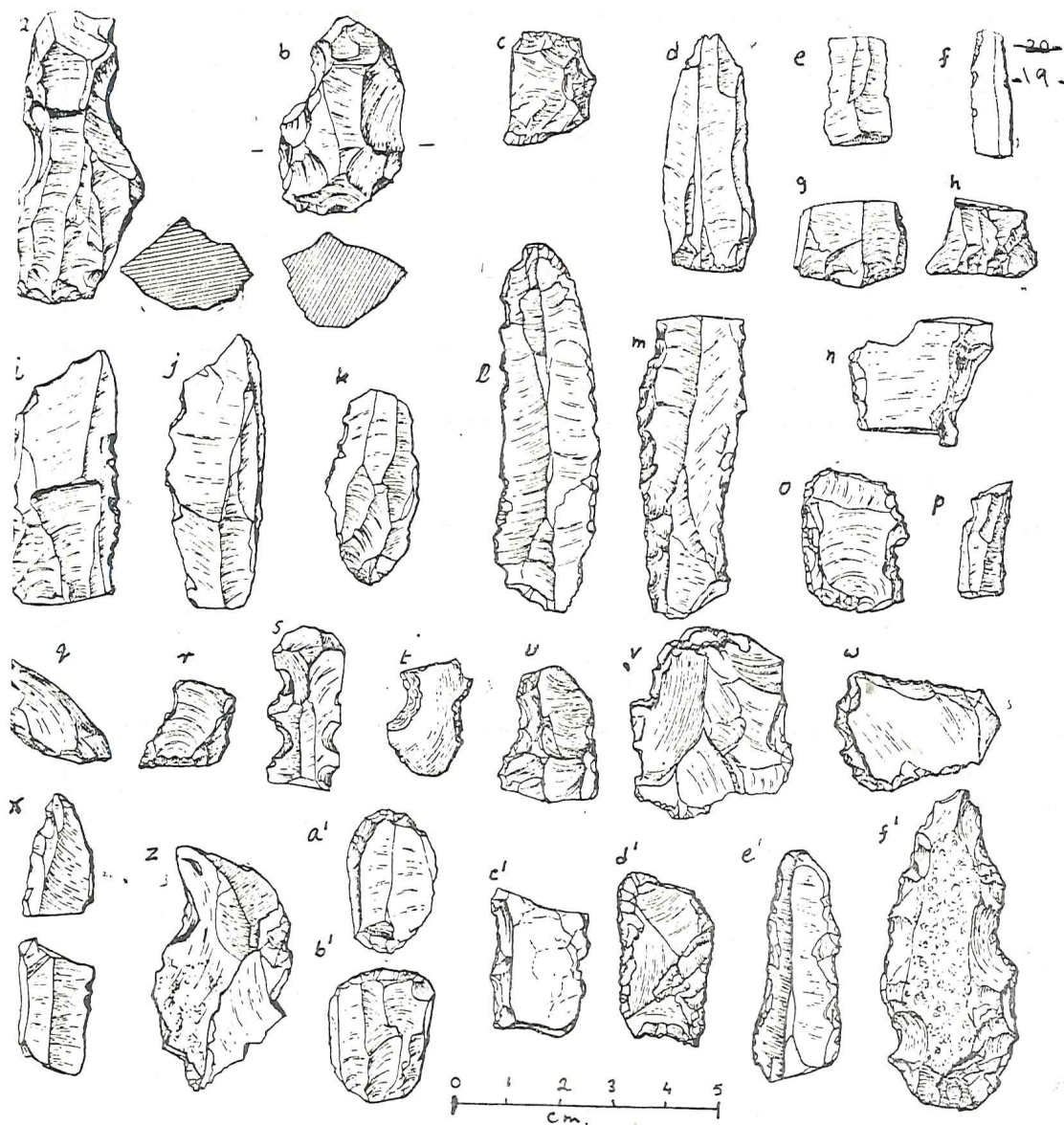


Fig. 2: Sites 23-20, 1980 collection: a blade core; b flake core; c scalar piece d-h blades (e-h snapped ends); i-z-a'-f' variously retouched edges.



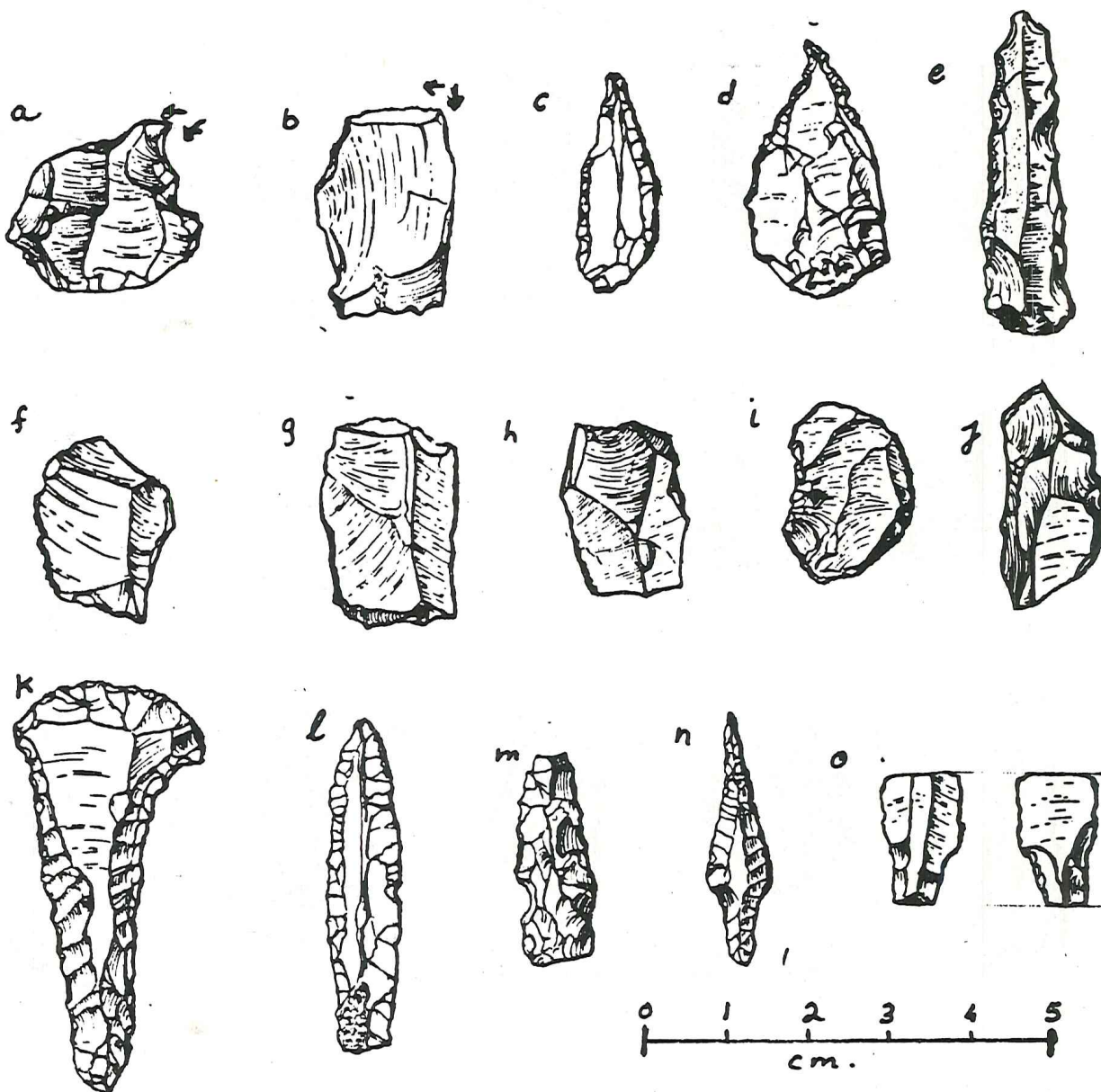


Fig. 3: Sites 23-29, 1980 collection tooltypes: a-b burins; c-e awls; f-j possible adze flakes; k-o projectile points.

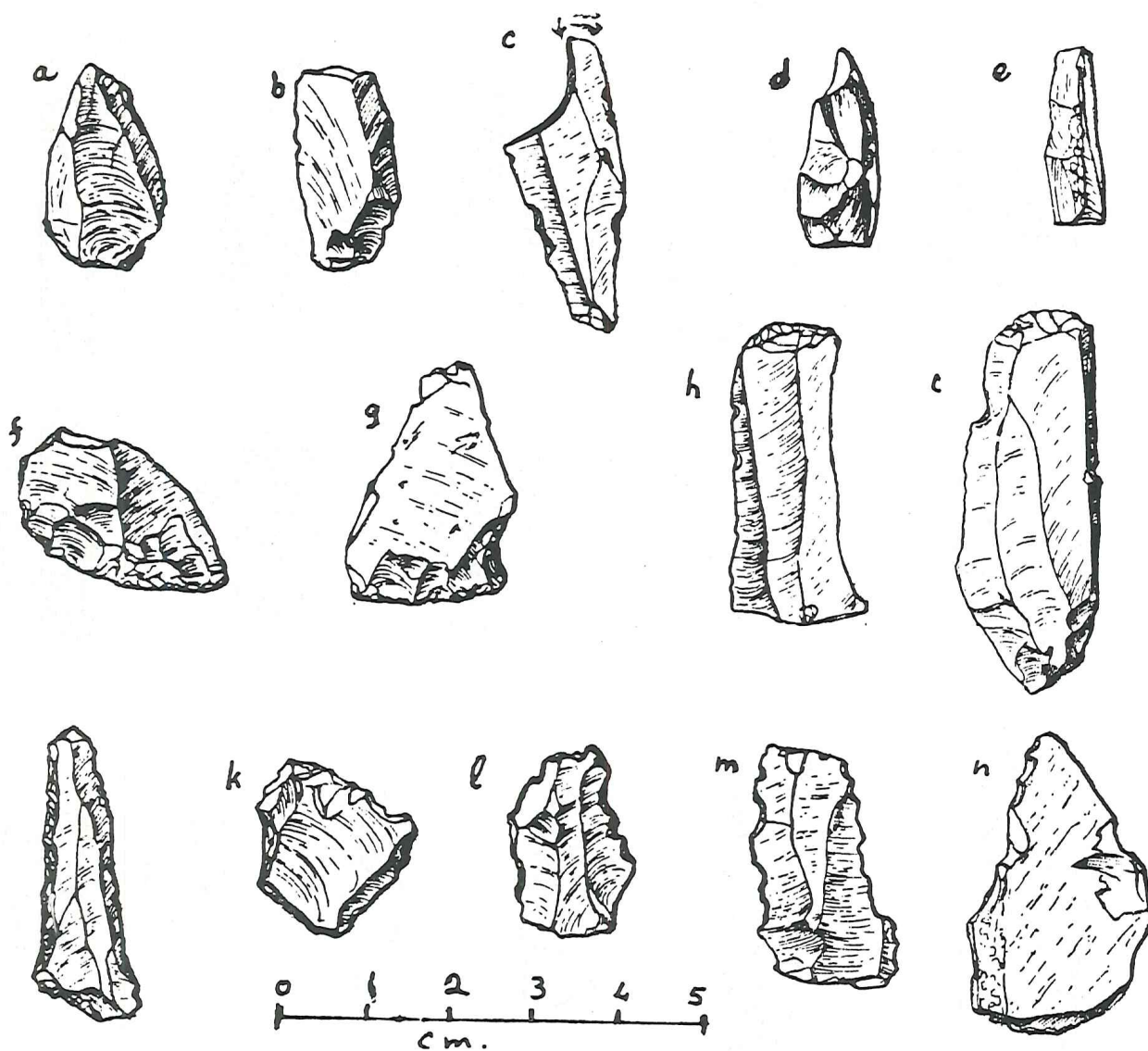


Fig. 4: Hedeib el Fala (first visit 1980): a scalar piece; b snapped blade (or adze flake); d-e redirecting flakes; f-j steep-edged marginal retouch (side view); h-i distal retouch; j-k abrupt retouch of acute margin; l-n denticulates.



the Aqaba-Red Sea coastal areas and the hinterland extending as far north as Ma'an, and following the Eastern Jordan-Saudi Border. Attention is particularly drawn to the important supply of flint and other tool-manufacturing equipment and the relationship this may have had to the prominence of the later trade routes which crossed through the area. It is proposed to survey the later Classical and Arab Historians and Geographers for further light on these issues, which have been raised by the Survey.

- d) Southern Jordan rock art remains something of a fascination, in that its frequency and great variety suggests that, along with the inscriptions which occur in this area, it may be a valuable index to important aspects of understanding of the area to which its inhabitants gave expression. In particular, attention is focussed on the re-examination of the important site of Khaz Ali and it is hoped that a separate comparative study of this site and its art will be produced by the Director of this survey.

W.J. Jobling