

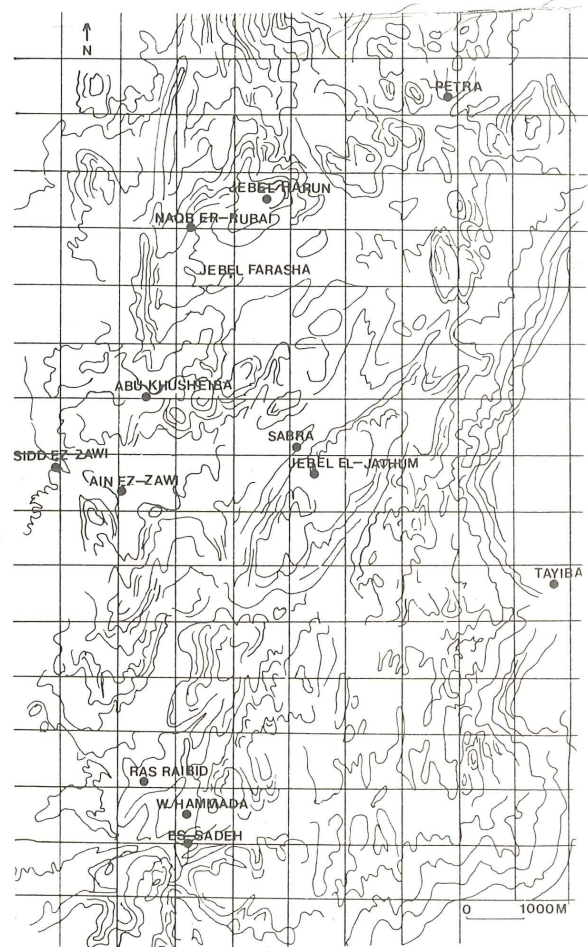
Abu Khusheiba — A Newly Described Nabataean Settlement and Caravan Station Between Wadi 'Arabah and Petra

Introduction

Abu Khusheiba is the traditional name of a relatively short (c. 1.5km) widening of the wadi of the same name, about 7.5km southwest of Petra as the crow flies (FIG. 1). The site was explored by small teams from the Naturhistorische Gesellschaft Nürnberg (NHG) under the author's direction in May 1986 and October 1987¹. Early visitors and explorers of Petra in the 19th and 20th centuries, e.g. L. de Laborde, Lord Lindsay, J. Wilson, W.H. Bartlett, H.C. Hart, T.E. Lawrence and C.S. Jarvis², used an ancient route from Wadi 'Arabah passing through Abu Khusheiba "with ruins" to Naqab ar-Ruba'i, and from there around the foot of Jabal Harun to Petra. Following the itinerary of Sultan Baibars of 1276, F. Zayadine³ reached Abu Khusheiba on foot from Petra in four hours. He chose the route across Naqab ar-Ruba'i which was also taken by the NHG team in October 1987. The descent from Naqab ar-Ruba'i to Abu Khusheiba is rather steep, but facilitated by a series of zig-zag bends usable for horses and camels. Another route taken in 1986 by the NHG team leads via Şabrah, aḍ-Ḍaman and Ain aḍ-Ḍaman to the site. The whole region shows evidence of agricultural use at different periods and traces of an ancient track with substructions in several sections⁴.

Description (FIG. 2)

The top of Abu Khusheiba is a spectacular cleft between igneous rocks, Cretaceous limestone and Cambrian sandstone. The valley runs roughly from east to west with a natural centre marked by an old *Acacia raddiana* at c. 720m asl. It narrows again at its lower end, and turns in an S-curve toward Wadi 'Arabah. The northern bank consists mostly of yellowish limestone, while the southern bank is



1. Sketch map showing the location of Abu Khusheiba.

¹The exploration of Abu Khusheiba was part of an archaeological programme of the Naturhistorische Gesellschaft Nürnberg, which under the author's direction has been going on since 1973. Beside excavations in Petra, it comprises explorations and surveys, e.g. of the ad-Deir plateau (Petra), the water supply system of Şabrah, the Edomite mountain stronghold of Ba'ja and the Lithic-Early Bronze-Iron II (Edomite) site of as-Sadeh, all of them published in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*.

²L. de Laborde, *Voyage de l'Arabie Pétrée* (1830), p. 54; Lord Lindsay, *Lettres On Egypt, Edom and the Holy Land II* (1838), p. 31; J. Wilson, *The Lands of the Bible Visited and Described II* (1847), p. 139; W.H. Bartlett, *Forty Days in the Desert: On the Track of the Israelites* (1862), p. 109; H.C. Hart, *Some Account of the Fauna and Flora of Sinai, Petra and Wady Arabah* (1891); C.L. Wooley and T.E. Lawrence, *The Wilderness of Zin*, (1914), p. 14; C.S. Jarvis, *Antiquity* 14

(1940), p. 138-147. Jarvis' report is typical of most of the other travellers'. The journey was for him "something of a nightmare", and he has only "a very vague recollection" of what he saw on the road.

³F. Zayadine, 'Caravan Routes between Egypt and Nabataea and the Voyage of Sultan Baibars to Petra in 1276', *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan II*, A. Hadidi (ed), (Amman, 1985), pp. 159-174.

⁴See also M. Lindner et al., 'Abu Khusheiba - A Nabataean Caravan Station Between Wadi Arabah and Petra', ms on deposit at the Department of Antiquities Registration Centre; *idem*, 'Abu Khusheiba', *The Archaeology of Jordan II: Field Reports*, D. Homés-Fredericq and J.B. Hennesy (eds), (Leuven, 1989), pp. 114-117.

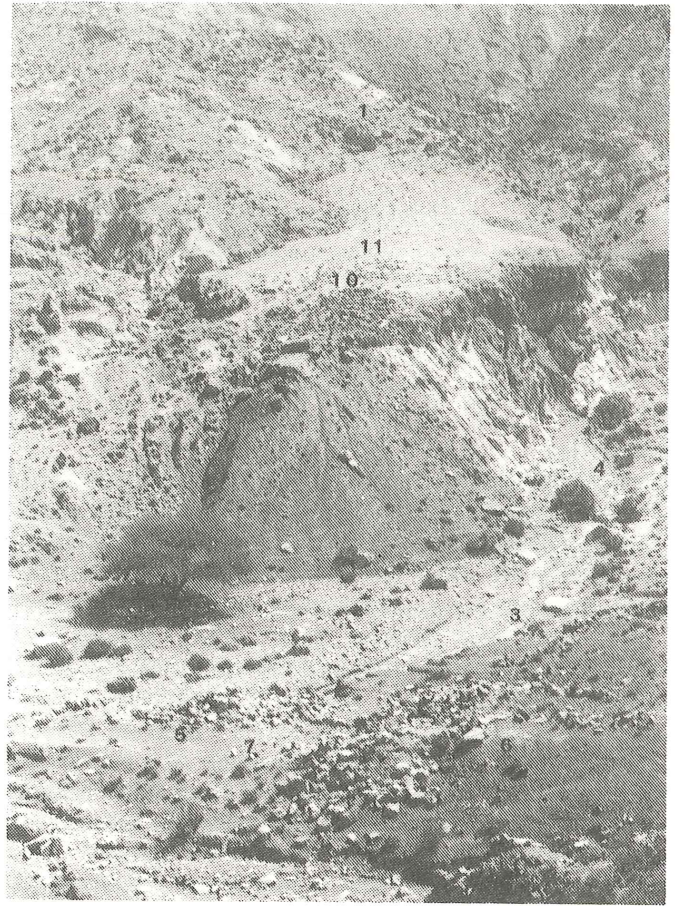
mostly of sandstone debris from the mountain range above. Igneous or eruptive material is best seen at the valley head, in the cliffs of the lower wadi section towards Wadi 'Arabah and in the divide leading to 'Ain ad-Ḍaman. Abu Khusheiba was dry in October 1987, but in May 1986 a little water had trickled out of the described cleft.

Buildings

Among the built structures at Abu Khusheiba (FIG. 3), Building 1 measures 6 × 6m and has stuccoed inner walls. It is situated near the zig-zag track (FIG. 4), overlooking almost the entire valley and may have been a watchtower. In my opinion, however, far too many buildings of the region are uncritically described as watch-towers.

Building 2 at 745m asl consists of the remains of two structures with tumbled drums of plain columns, cornice (?) fragments and ashlars bearing diagonal tool marks. The pottery washed downslope from the ruin is fine Nabataean pottery of the first to second centuries A.D. Finds and locality indicate a cultic structure, perhaps a temple.

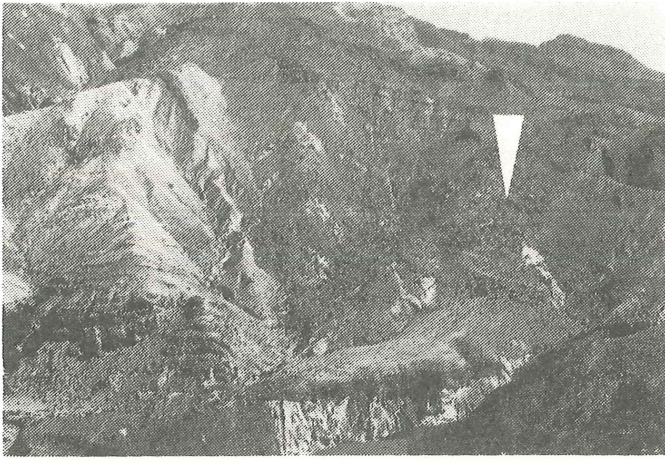
A partly destroyed built channel was discovered on the south bank. It conducted water from the valley head into a vaulted cistern (Building 4) measuring c. 7 × 7m. Of the other ruined structures on the southern bank, Building 5 is most conspicuous (FIG. 5). Its wall of large limestone boulders above the wadi bed, now 7m long, originally measured at least 10m. Ash and charcoal layers laid bare by winter torrents were seen under the massive foundations (FIG. 6). Building 7 has a side entrance (FIG. 7), and Building 9, higher up the southern slope has a well built



2. Abu Khusheiba, looking N. The numbers correspond to those in FIG. 3.



3. Sketch drawing of the Abu Khusheiba valley (Ingrid Künne).



4. Zig-zag track from Naqab ar-Ruba'i down to the valley. Just above the horizon the summit of Jabal Harun can be seen.

wall of ashlars with diagonal tool marks. More houses are buried in the debris of the slope above.

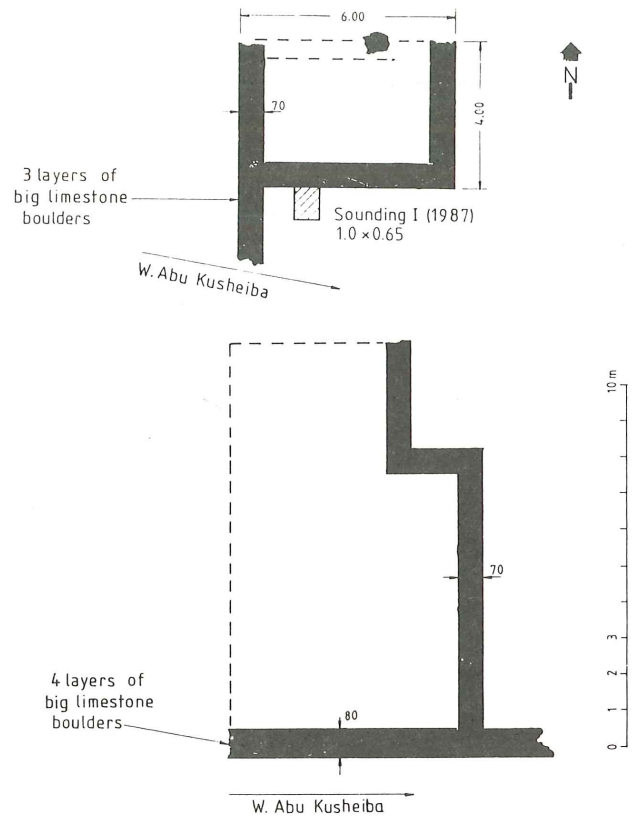
The ruins of two noteworthy buildings are situated at the lower end of a ramp of alluvian deposits along the zig-zag track from Naqab ar-Ruba'i (FIG. 8). Building 10, of the impressive dimensions of 9×8 m, crowns a knoll on the bank not far from the valley centre. A column base that could not have come from the supposed temple was found below. Building 11 further north and higher up measures 10×8 m and contains a quadrangle of 2×2 m of finely cut stones. There is no indication of its original purpose.

The Pottery and Other Finds⁵ (FIG. 9)

The pottery at Abu Khusheiba was collected according to four different methods: a) unsystematically; b) all sherds from 1×1 m; c) topographically from Buildings 1, 2 and 4;

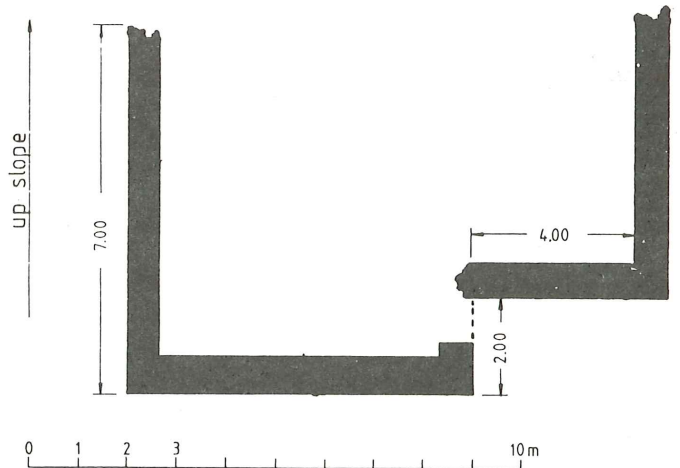


6. Ash layers under Building 5 at Abu Khusheiba.



5. Buildings 3 and 5 at Abu Khusheiba.

and d) from excavations in four soundings. The results of the analysis provisionally indicate an occupation of Abu Khusheiba as a Nabataean settlement since the beginning of the Christian era till the third century A.D. There are no traces so far of earlier or later use. Significantly, no Iron II



7. Building 7 at Abu Khusheiba.

⁵For analysing and dating the pottery. I am indebted to Drs. Zeidan Kafafi, Moawiyah Ibrahim, Nabil Khairy, M. Mackensen, Mr. Sulciman Farajat and J.P. Zeitler. In this paper, only a small

sample of the pottery of Abu Khusheiba is shown. A publication of the whole pottery is in preparation by the author and J.P. Zeitler.

(Edomite) sherds were found in the settlement area. Among other surface finds, there were the fragment of a stone lattice, fragments of polished white marble, the torso of a terracotta figurine and a coin of Rabel II.

In a Spiderweb of Tracks

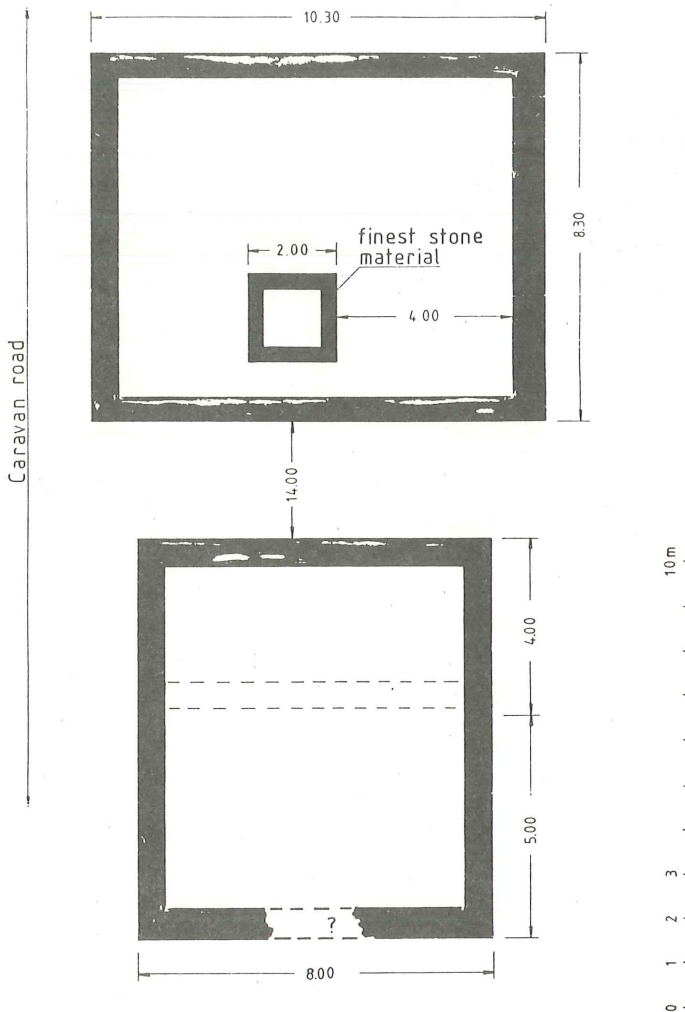
Abu Khusheiba is located within a spiderweb of caravan tracks. As explicitly as can be discussed here, it seems to have been a sort of junction between Wadi 'Arabah, Naqab ar-Ruba'i, Bir Madhkur, Qaşr Umm ar-Ratam, Şabra and 'Ain adh-Dhawi. The routes were most probably chosen according to weather, beasts of burden and necessity of speed. Where it was not possible to build a single road for all purposes, a multitude of tracks for different purposes at different times had to be devised and kept usable between Petra and Egypt. Some of them are used to the present day.

A Part of Greater Petra

Abu Khusheiba was definitely not "in the desert" as travellers are wont to say when they are in the region. Ancient fields and the ruins of dwellings — not all of them "watchtowers" — between Petra and Abu Khusheiba⁶ demonstrate that the site was an important part of a "Greater Petra", stretching in a radius of at least 20 km, e.g. to Şabra, 'Ain Braq, Beida, 'Ain ađ-Daman, 'Ain adh-Dhawi, as-Sadeh⁷, Wadi 'Adlaya, Naqab ar-Ruba'i and Ba'ja⁸ in the north. When the Nabataean kings enlarged their realm, Abu Khusheiba was founded according to plan and order of the "court" as a more or less permanent settlement and as a caravan station. With the decline of caravan traffic in the two centuries after the annexation of Nabataea by the Romans, the settlement lost its importance. Later, severe earthquakes destroyed the buildings and the water-supply installations. Further destruction was and is due to winter torrents, solifluction and consecutive earthquakes.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Dr. Adnan Hadidi, former Director-General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, for granting the permission to explore and survey the region, Dr. Fawzi Zayadine for friendly support, his companions E. Gunsam, I. Just, I. Künne, H. Hübl, A.



8. Buildings 10 and 11 at Abu Khusheiba.

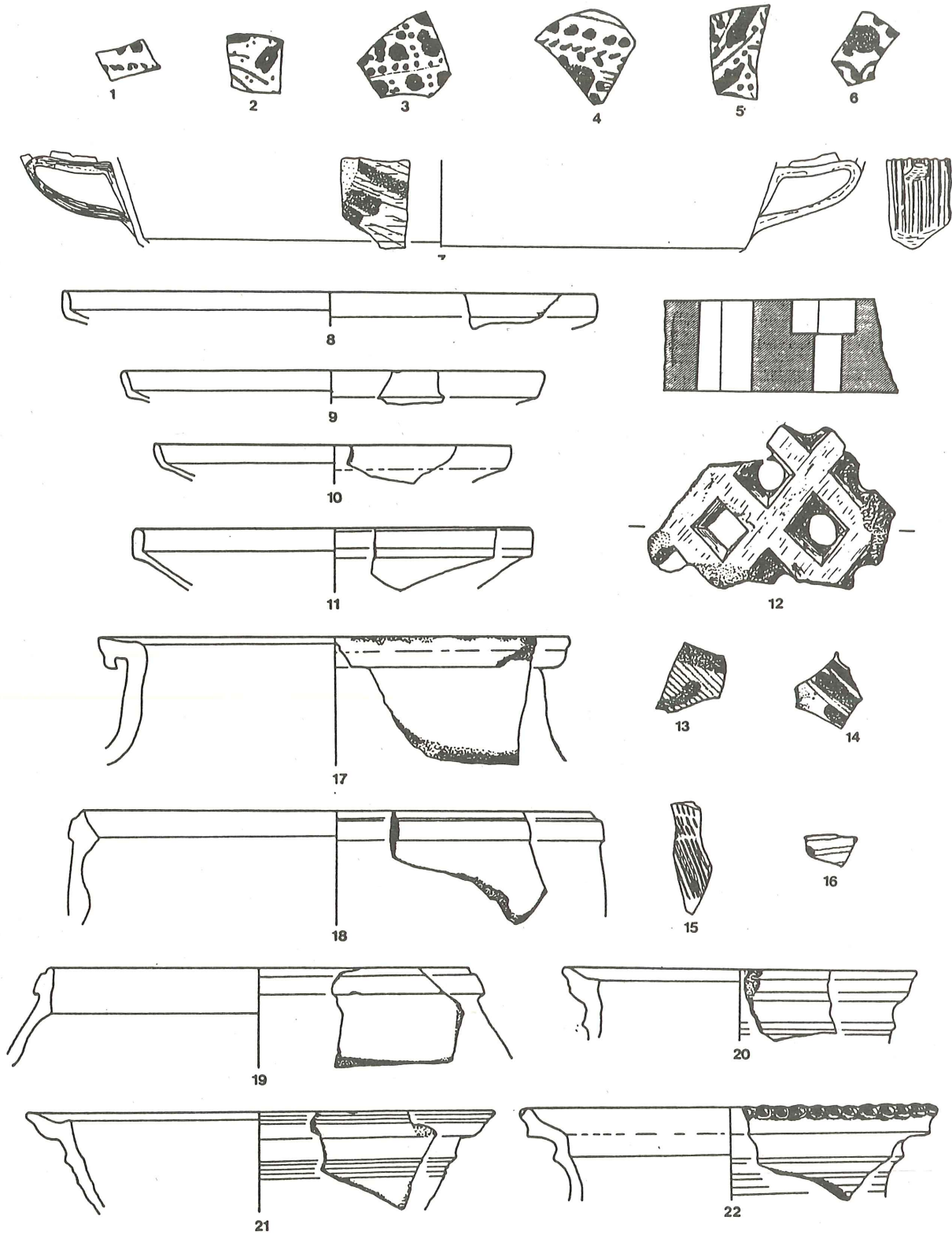
Schmid, E. Schreyer and others for excellent cooperation and H.G. Gebel who suggested the visit to Abu Khusheiba in the first place. Without the guidance of my friend Dakhilallah Qublan some discoveries would not have been made. Ms. Edna Ehrhardt made sure that the English text became readable.

⁶See M. Lindner et al., 'An Edom Survey 1987', ms on deposit at the Department of Antiquities Registration Centre; *idem*, 'Southern Jordan Survey', *The Archaeology of Jordan II: Field Reports*, D. Homés-Fredericq and J.B. Hennessy (eds), (Leuven, 1989), pp. 84-90.

⁷M. Lindner, S. Farajat and J.P. Zeitler, 'Es-Sadeh - An Important Edomite-Nabataean Site in Southern Jordan. Preliminary Report', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 32 (1988), pp. 75-99; M. Lindner, S. Farajat, E.A. Knauf and J.P. Zeitler, 'Es-Sadeh — A Lithic - Early

Bronze - Iron II (Edomite) - Nabataean Site in Southern Jordan. Report on the Second Exploratory Campaign, 1988', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 34 (1990), pp. 193-237.

⁸M. Lindner and S. Farajat, 'An Edomite Mountain Stronghold North of Petra (Ba'ja III)', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 31 (1987), pp. 175-185.



9. Finds from Abu Khusheiba: 1-7: Nabataean pottery, first century A.D.; 8-11, 13-16: Nabataean pottery, late first and second centuries A.D.; 12, small architectural fragment (stone lattice); 17-22: Late Roman (?) pottery.