

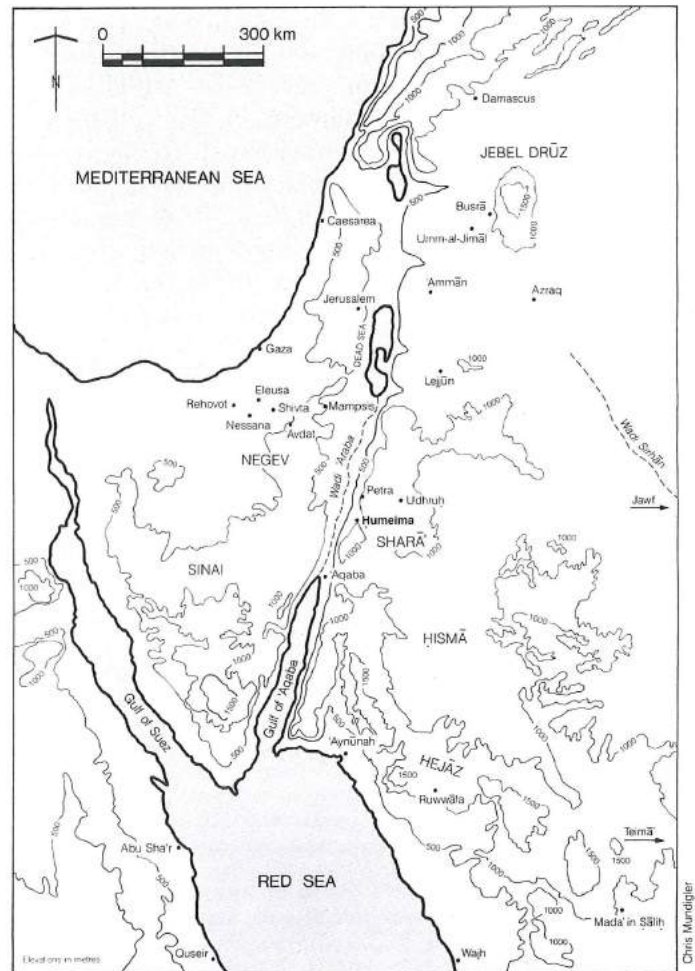
## King, Emperor, Priest and Caliph: Cultural Change at Ḥawar (Ancient al-Ḥumayma) in the First Millennium AD

### Introduction

Ancient Ḥawar, now called al-Ḥumayma (or Humeima), was a settlement centre in Edom, the desert region of southern Jordan (FIG. 1). According to Greek historical tradition, the Nabataean King Aretas III founded Ḥawar in the 80s BC. The historical context suggests that King Aretas hoped Ḥawar would serve as a centre for sedentarization of the nomadic Nabataean pastoralists who occupied the area. Through careful management of the meager spring water and precipitation, the resulting community was able to enjoy a settled existence based on agriculture, stock-raising, and servicing caravans. A modest prosperity continued through the Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic periods, until the site was essentially abandoned around AD 750.<sup>1</sup> In deference to the conference theme of "Jordan by the Millennia," this paper examines the changes in the cultural foci of the settlement across the 800 years of its existence, as seen in the organization of the site and its structures. Since excavation of the settlement centre is incomplete, many of these observations remain tentative.

Four main cultural foci or cultural "flavours" stand out at Ḥawar during the 800 years of most intense occupation: recently and partly sedentarized Nabataean pastoralists, farmers, and traders (first century BC to first century AD), Roman military administrators (second to fourth century), Byzantine clergy and congregations (fifth to seventh century), and the farmers, traders, and revolutionaries of the Abbasid family (AD 690-750). Each group or cultural period left its own special mark on the architecture, the artifacts, and the ecofacts of al-Ḥumayma.

What does "cultural flavour" mean? The phrase is not entirely satisfactory, but I hope it may help get my point across. Obviously, the terms "Nabataean," "Roman," "Byzantine," and "Abbasid" should not be used as simple



1. Location of al-Ḥumayma.

chronological indicators. Nevertheless, at certain periods the elite individuals who controlled Ḥawar belonged to these cultural groups, and their ideals and goals affected the direction of development in the settlement. To be sure,

<sup>1</sup> The author has directed six seasons of excavation at al-Ḥumayma since 1991. Funding has been provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, The Taggart Foundation, the Van Berchem Foundation, and The American Schools of Orient-

tal Research. I am very grateful to my co-directors K. 'Amr, R. Foote, and R. Schick for their assistance and advice during the project, and during the composition of this article. For recent reports, see Oleson 1995, 1996, 1997a, and Oleson *et al.* 1995, 1998.

individuals of Nabataean heritage, more or less indistinguishable from their independent ancestors, very likely continued to form the bulk of the population of Ḥawar long after the Roman conquest and the formation of the Provincia Arabia—probably until the abandonment of the site. First of all, there are no obvious major disruptions in the archaeological record across the whole site. In addition, the Nabataean ceramic tradition continued to evolve throughout the “Roman” and “Byzantine” periods at Ḥawar (personal communication: K. ‘Amr). Finally, the family and place names in the sixth-century Petra papyrus archive document the continuity of the Nabataean culture around Petra, the cultural capital of the region, well into the Byzantine period (Koenen 1996). The racial background and/or the cultural education of the elite, however, changed along with the political situation. In succession, Roman or Byzantine military administrators, Orthodox or heterodox clergy, and the ambitious descendants of ‘Abd-Allāh ibn al-‘Abbās shaped the function and appearance of the settlement to suit their own new and very different priorities. The restrictions of the desert environment remained, although they were tempered by Nabataean and Roman hydraulic skill, but the appearance of Ḥawar and the patterns of life in it were shaped by each new cultural step.

#### Nabataean Ḥawar or Auara

According to a fragment of Uranios’ *Arabica* preserved in Stephanus Byzantinus (s.v. *Αὔρα*) the Nabataean King Aretas III (ruled 85-62 BC) founded Ḥawar in response to an oracle given to his father Obodas I: “Seek a place *Αὔρα*.”<sup>2</sup> As Uranios notes, *auara* means “white” in the “Arabian and Syrian languages.” It would consequently

also be possible to translate the oracle as “Seek a white place” or “Seek a place called ‘White’.” The original Semitic word was probably HWR (perhaps vocalized as *hawar*).<sup>3</sup> Obodas seems to have been king when the oracle was given, but it is not clear whether or not Aretas had succeeded him by the time he followed the instructions. Aretas went into the desert, followed a vision of a man clad in white riding on a white camel, and founded the town below a hill where the vision disappeared.

The emphasis on “white,” still suggested by the name al-Ḥumayma that appeared in the early Islamic period, most likely refers to the pillowy hills of pure white sandstone of the Disi Formation, to the east and north of the site.<sup>4</sup> No pre-existing settlement is mentioned by Uranios, and indeed no sherds clearly earlier than the first century BC have appeared in six seasons of excavation.<sup>5</sup> Stone tools from the Upper Pleistocene through Chalcolithic periods carpet the hills around the site (see Henry 1992; Henry and Hietala 1997), and there are traces of an Iron Age Edomite tower several kilometres to the northwest (unpublished), but only wandering Bedouin—like the mysterious camel rider Aretas saw—occupied the region. The King’s Highway must have passed close by or even across the site, since its successor the Via Nova Traiana passed through it too, but apparently there was nothing to attract early travelers.<sup>6</sup>

Why did Aretas found this settlement, and why at this lonely spot? What oracle did his father consult, and for what sort of problem? Identification of the oracular sanctuary—assuming the oracle was delivered at a sanctuary—is a difficult problem for which I have as yet no solution, but Nabataean remains have been found at many sites that are associated with oracles: Palmyra, Baalbeck,

<sup>2</sup> Jacoby 1958: 340. West 1974 dates Uranios to the second half of the fourth century, but von Wißmann (1968: 1291) puts his work somewhere in the first century AD. On the dates of the Nabataean kings, esp. Obodas II, see now Fiema and Jones 1990. Both Aretas III and Aretas IV were preceded by kings named Obodas, but only Aretas III seems to have been the offspring of his predecessor, Obodas I. Aretas IV was a man named Aineias, who took over the kingdom from Obodas III after a struggle with Syllaes and only then assumed the royal family name Aretas (Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.294-99). Uranios’ account of the founding of Auara makes no mention of Syllaes, who more or less ruled for the aged and weak Obodas III (Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.220, 279-80, 286-92), and no hint of the subsequent struggle with Aineias. Furthermore, the presence of significant amounts of ceramics of the mid-first century BC and some coins of Aretas II and III found at the site strongly suggest Aretas III as the founder.

<sup>3</sup> Graf 1992a. It is also possible that the city name was vocalized as Ḥawara. Ḥawar is closer to the Arabic root, but the final “a” sound of Auara and Hauarra may indicate that a final “a” was involved. Musil (1926: 59 n. 20) notes that during his visit the Bedouin referred to the site as both al-Ḥumayma and Ḥawara. I started off transliterating the site’s Arabic name as “Ḥumayma,” in accordance with local practice, then switched to “Humeima” on the advice of the editorial board of *ADAJ*. The official spelling, however, has now returned to “Ḥumayma,” which I have re-adopted.

<sup>4</sup> One meaning of the Arabic root ḤMM is “white.” I am grateful to R.

Schick for advice on this matter. See also Bowersock 1983: 173-74.

<sup>5</sup> Graf 1992b: 255 mentions finding a bowl rim and amphora handle of the second century BC during his survey at al-Ḥumayma in 1980, but nothing similar has turned up in the tens of thousands of excavation sherds processed since 1991. If correctly identified, these Hellenistic sherds may result from occasional loss by a traveler or travelers.

<sup>6</sup> For a full discussion, see Graf 1992b, 1995: 250-58. The *Via Nova* follows the line of the Nabataean aqueduct for much of its route from the ‘Ayn al-Qanāh spring down to the valley floor, where it cuts directly across the rolling badlands towards the settlement centre, while the aqueduct swings east to join up with the ‘Ayn Jamām aqueduct branch. Surviving stretches of paving show that the road and aqueduct were reunited approximately 6 km north of Ḥawar, the road coming in from the west. No further traces of the road can be identified at present between al-Ḥumayma and al-Quwayra, other than a possible milestone on the west side of the Wādī Qalkha about halfway between the two sites (personal observation by Oleson, 1989). The *Via Nova* must have crossed over the aqueduct channel at some point just north or immediately west of the fort, allowing access to the fort and continued passage down the sloping ridge towards Ḥawar. It would not have made sense for either the *Via Nova* or its predecessor to cross the Wādī al-Qanāh east of Ḥawar on its way toward the fort at al-Quwayra, or the soft, sandy plain southeast of Ḥawar. The most stable and direct route lay and still lies along the edge of the rocky slopes that rise from the west side of the plain, immediately south of Ḥawar.

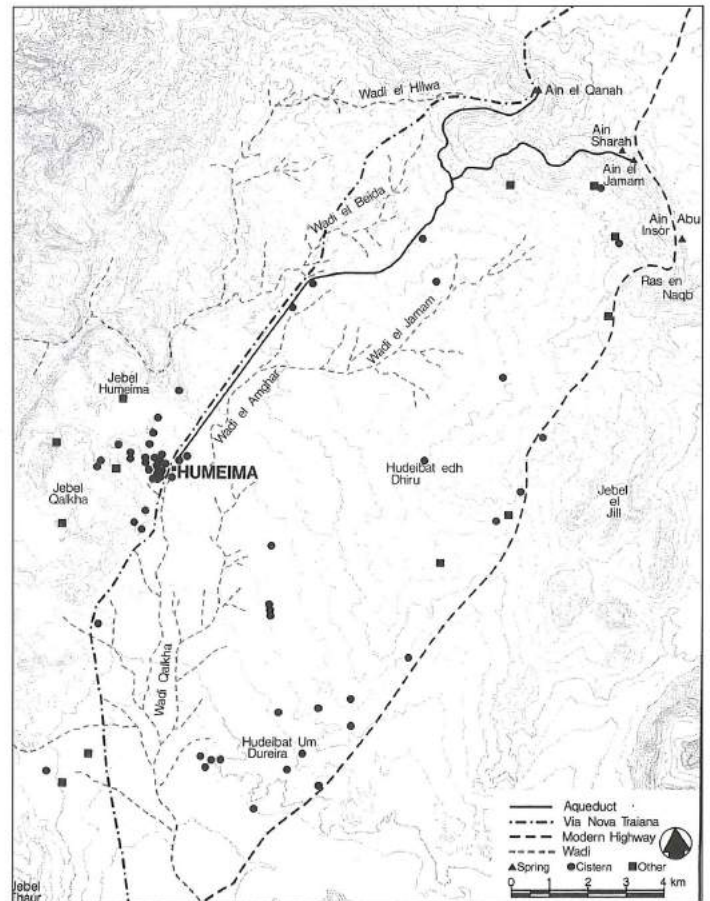
Sidon, Kos, and Delos.<sup>7</sup> In any case, oracular guidance is a *topos* of Greek city foundation stories (Fontenrose 1978: 137-44), and Uranios or some other source may simply have made this story up to justify the punning name. The camel rider, however, is an appropriate symbol of the fiercely independent, desert dwelling Nabataeans who supported themselves through pastoralism and the caravan trade.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have frequently noted the contrast between the image of the Nabataeans provided by the mid-fourth-century BC historian Hieronymos of Kardia (Diodorus 19.94.2-10) and that presented in the late first century BC by Strabo (16.4.26). The former were nomads who lived in the desert and eschewed agriculture, wine, and permanent houses. The latter were great wine-bibbers who lived in magnificent stone houses filled with local and imported luxuries (e.g. Bowersock 1983: 12-13). The foundation of Ḥawar in the first century BC was an expression of this dramatic process of sedentarization.<sup>9</sup>

This particular site was selected for settlement because the topography was suited to an extensive and reliable water-supply system based on local run-off, and because it forced the King's Highway to pass close by. There is also relatively easy passage westward through deep valleys into Wādī 'Arabah. In addition, the adjacent loessal plains are fertile and can readily be watered by run-off. It may not be a coincidence that the settlement is located at the most southerly point that could be reached by an aqueduct fed by springs on the ash-Sharāh escarpment—at least without very extensive engineering projects.

There is still dispute about why sedentarization of his subjects was a priority for Aretas, but the scope of his vision and the mechanism for its realization are clear.<sup>10</sup> If Obodas did in fact consult an oracle, he may have been seeking solutions to economic and social problems resulting from changes to Near Eastern trade routes that affected his kingdom. Additionally, this act, along with the foundation of other towns, may have been part of a strategy of state formation, an attempt to subdue the nomadic, fiercely independent Bedouin by attracting them to population centres near good agricultural land—thereby reinforcing the King's office and social control. Whatever the problem was, sedentarization and involvement in a mixed agricultural, pastoral, and commercial economy were felt to constitute the solution.

The provision of water drew wandering Nabataeans to the site, particularly an aqueduct that brought water from

'Ayn al-Qanāh, 17 km away on the ash-Sharāh escarpment (FIG. 2). Two large reservoirs were built in the settlement centre as well, positioned so they filled reliably with run-off water from the large natural catchment to the north. These hydraulic projects were regal in scale and probably somehow funded by the King. In addition, eight cisterns were soon built nearby by individuals for private use. Logic and some ethnographic parallels suggest that a water system and tents came first; stone houses later. This reconstruction has recently found support in the excavation of the Nabataean house at az-Zanṭūr at Petra.<sup>11</sup> In 1996 a first-century AD campground was found on the edge of Ḥawar as well, adjacent to a first-century AD or BC cistern (FIG. 3, Field C124). The evidence consists of extensive surface deposits of largely intact ceramics, mostly small bowls. There are no other structures nearby. In contrast, the nearly identical cisterns scattered through-



2. Map of the al-Ḥumayma region, with aqueduct.

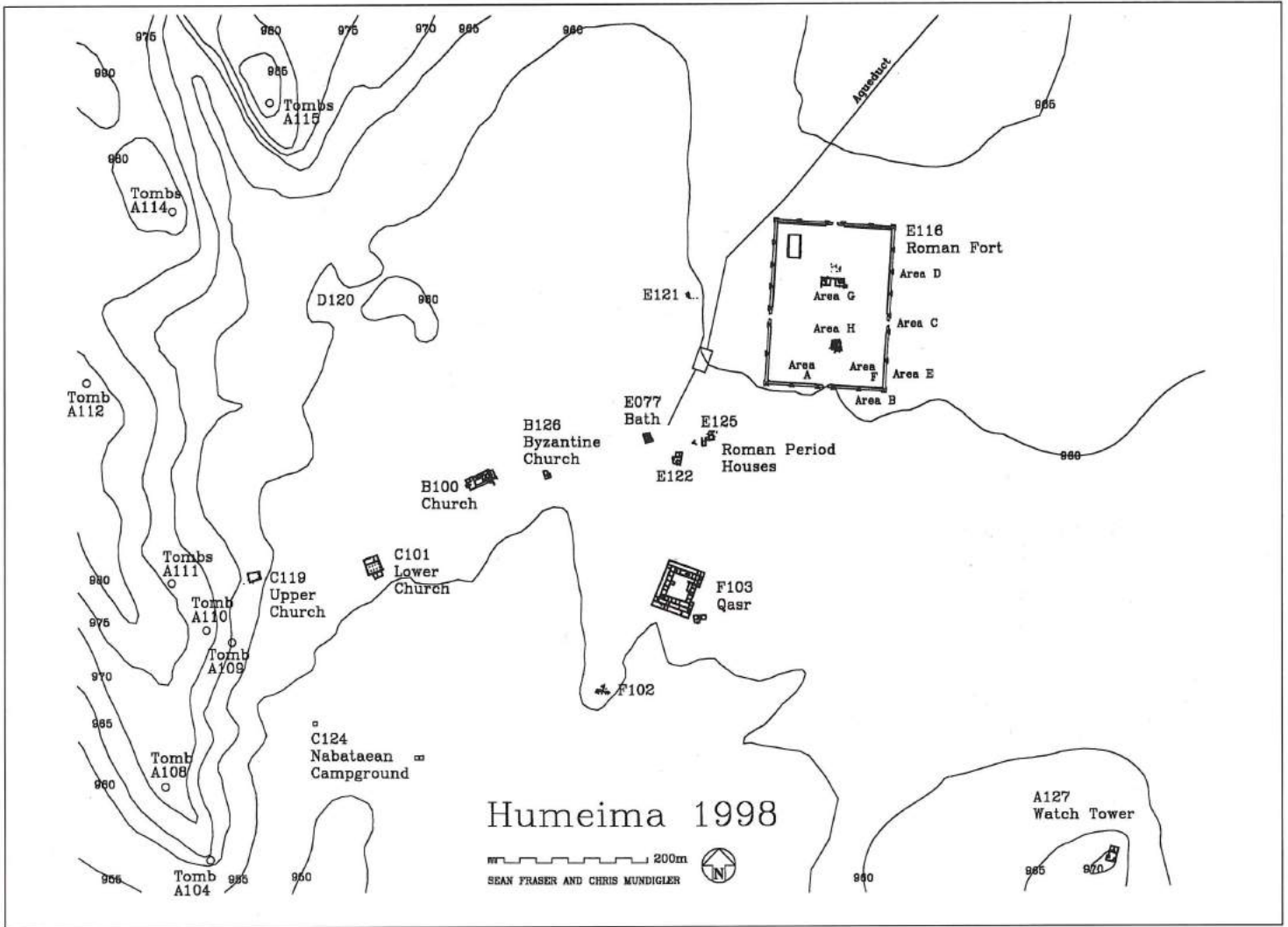
<sup>7</sup> Wenning 1987: 22-24. The design of the traditional type of Nabataean cistern with roof slabs supported on transverse arches most likely was picked up by Nabataean visitors to Delos in the second century BC; see Oleson 1995: 717-78.

<sup>8</sup> Note the denarius struck by Scaurus in 58 BC to commemorate his campaign against the Nabataeans in 62 BC. The coin depicts King Aretas III kneeling next to a camel, added most likely as a geographical and cultural definer. There is a full discussion in Bowersock 1983: 34-35.

<sup>9</sup> Bowersock 1983: 64.

<sup>10</sup> There is an excellent discussion of the processes and reasons for sedentarization in Finkelstein and Perevolotsky 1990. On first-century BC Nabataean ceramics as an expression of an urbanizing culture, see Parr 1978, 1990; cf. Graf 1992b on Nabataean urban development in the first century BC.

<sup>11</sup> Parr's analysis of the transition from tents to stone houses at Petra in the first century BC has now been reconfirmed by the Swiss excavations at az-Zanṭūr; Parr 1990: 15-16; Stucky *et al.* 1996.



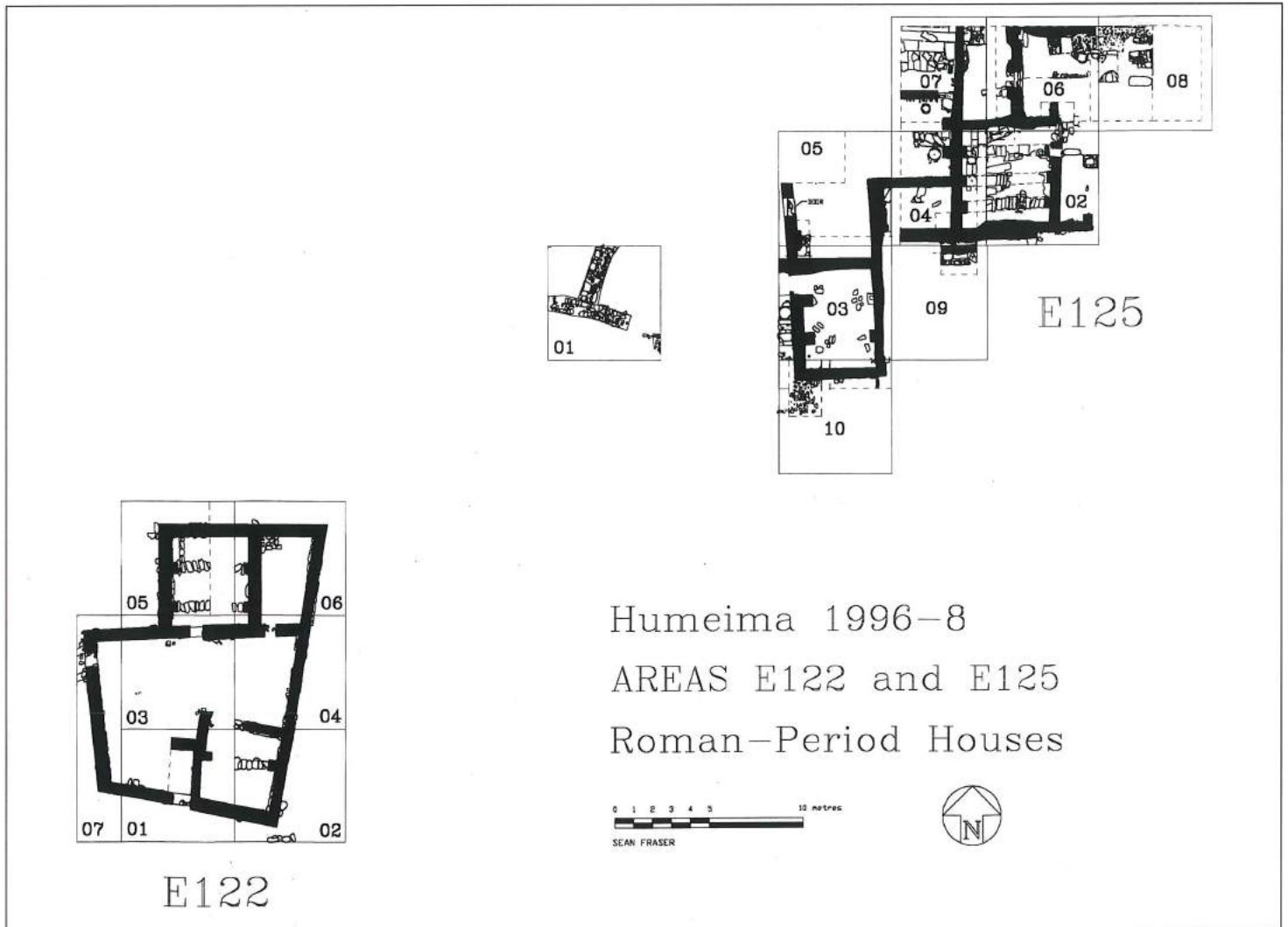
3. Al-Ḥumayma: Site plan with structures.

out the centre are always surrounded by substantial domestic structures. The campground supports our hypothesis that a public water-supply attracted semi-nomadic, tent dwellers, who then built run-off cisterns for exclusive clan or family use, which ultimately were incorporated into stone houses occupied by sedentary clan members.

After several years of searching, evidence also appeared in 1996 for Nabataean domestic architecture of the first and second century AD at Ḥawar (FIG. 3, Field E122, E125; FIG. 4). The houses were built of finely-cut stone blocks, or of mudbrick on a stone foundation, with frescoed walls and stone arches to hold up the wattle and daub roof. Although only small portions of these houses have been excavated so far, the artifacts recovered indicate the luxurious taste and the international contacts of the inhabitants. Water-supply systems and domestic architecture constitute the cultural “flavour” of Nabataean Ḥawar, quite appropriately for a pioneering settlement in the virgin desert.

**Roman Ḥawar or Ḥauarra**

Excavation has shown conclusively that Roman forces arrived in Ḥawar soon after the emperor Trajan annexed the Nabataean kingdom as the *Provincia Arabia* in AD 106. They built a large fort on slightly higher ground just outside the settlement centre of al-Ḥumayma—separated from the civilian activities, but close enough for surveillance of the population (FIG. 3, E116; FIG. 5). Water-supply naturally remained an important consideration, even though the Nabataeans had already solved the major problems. The topography of the ridge—selected for purposes of surveillance and defence—was not suitable for run-off water-supply systems. In consequence, the fort was placed close to the Nabataean reservoir at the end of the aqueduct, and the aqueduct itself was tapped to fill a reservoir inside the fort walls. The Romans also found new uses for the original Nabataean aqueduct system, diverting some of the water to a heated bath building outside the fort (Oleson 1990; Reeves 1996; Reeves and Ole-



4. Al-Ḥumayma: Plan of Roman period houses E122 and E125.

son 1997). Although associated with leisure rather than soldiering, this typically Roman structure was frequently found in or near Roman forts<sup>12</sup> (FIG. 3, E077, FIG. 6). Unlike the fort, the bath was located in the midst of some Nabataean houses.

The Roman way of life was appealing to most peoples along the frontiers of the Empire, and it was a way of life that could be learned.<sup>13</sup> The bath building at Ḥawar remained in use into the Byzantine and possibly into the early Islamic period, and the early fifth-century *Notitia Dignitatum* reports that (at some point in the Late Roman or Early Byzantine period) cavalry of local origin (*equites*

*sagittarii indigenae*) were stationed in the fort—mobile archers possibly mounted on camels.<sup>14</sup> Although still in touch with their Arab roots, the inhabitants of Ḥawar were becoming Romanized.

What was the purpose of the fort? Protection of an immediately adjacent frontier threatened by un-assimilated nomads? Reinforcement for a wide band of varied frontier defences? Administration and supervision of the settlement, the roads, and the surrounding desert area? Each of these objectives has been proposed, but in my opinion the administrative, supervisory function is the most logical.<sup>15</sup> During the first half of the second century, Roman forces

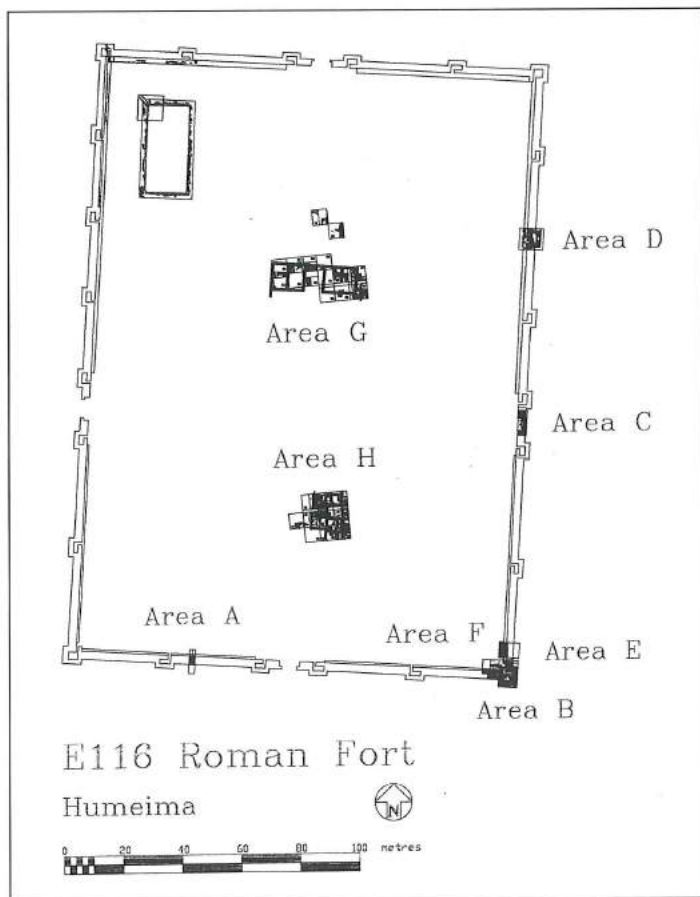
<sup>12</sup> Reeves (1996) catalogues over 170 baths associated with Roman forts.

<sup>13</sup> See Millar 1993 and Shahid 1984a on the accommodations made between the local and Roman cultures.

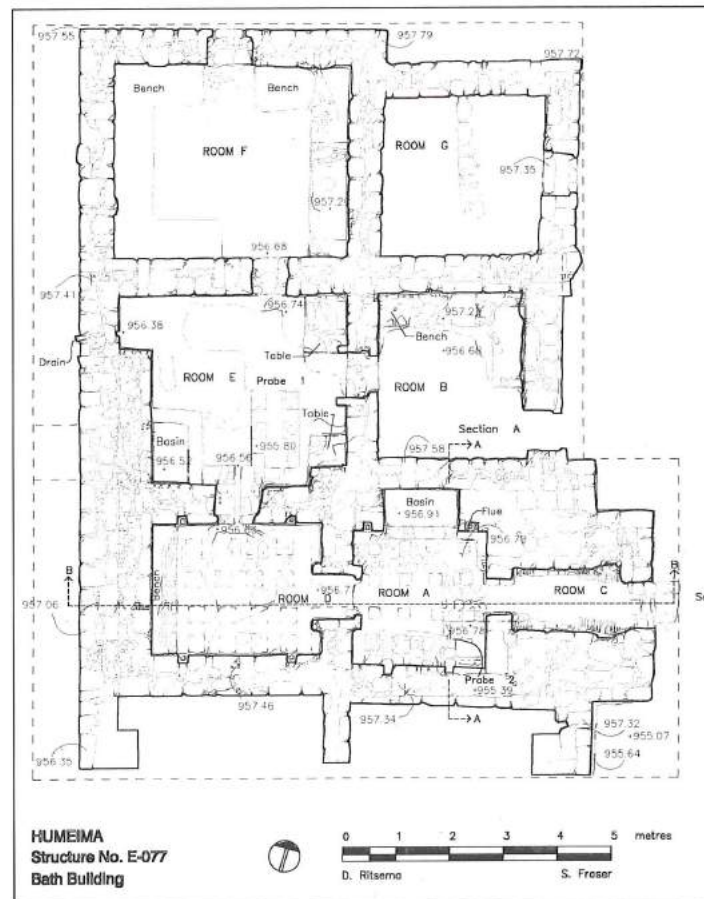
<sup>14</sup> Or 34.25. Although the *Notitia Dignitatum* appears to differentiate between *equites* and *dromedarii* (see also *CIL* III.93) no bones of horses have yet been found at al-Ḥumayma. The climate and footing would be very difficult for horses, and it is not inconceivable that the term *equites* in the *Notitia* may have been applied to cavalry

mounted on camels as well as on horses. See also Dixon and Southern 1992: 32; Shahid 1989: 461, 468.

<sup>15</sup> The bibliography concerning the controversy over the character and purpose of the limes in the *Provincia Arabia* is enormous and still growing. For a recent summary of the issues see Graf 1997 and Parker 1997. Most scholars now accept in some form the proposal (stated most fully by Isaac 1990) that the army had a largely administrative role in this region.



5. Al-Ḥumayma: Plan of Roman fort E116.



6. Al-Ḥumayma: Plan of Roman Bath E077.

occupying the Ḥismā had little reason to fear significant interference from northern Arabia, and the possible invasion routes from Persia lay farther north. Furthermore, the only source of potable water within the fort was provided by the long Nabataean aqueduct, which even a single saboteur could cut with ease. The large reservoir fed by the aqueduct was not roofed, and the water it contained consequently would have been of very poor quality—probably suitable only for the camel mounts. If security had been a major consideration, another site more suitable for a run-off water supply could have been found for the fort, or roofed cisterns built inside it to hold aqueduct water. Finally, our excavations seem to show that the fort was abandoned for a time at the end of the third century AD, just when Diocletian was building or re-building forts farther north along or close to the *Via Nova Traiana*. Diocletian's strategy can be more convincingly associated with protection against outside invasion.<sup>16</sup>

Why did Trajan or one of his immediate successors consider a large fort an appropriate response to the problem of administering Ḥawar, now also called Haurra. Since the fortifications were far more extensive than nec-

essary to fend off even large groups of marauding Bedouin, the symbolic value of the walls may have been as important as their strategic value to a Roman governor intent on avoiding trouble. As they drew water from their public reservoirs, the Nabataean shepherds could look up and see the battlements looming over the settlement, an instructive image of Roman urbanism and imperial administration. The soldiers, in turn, could supervise traffic moving along the *Via Nova* and down the steep valleys westward to Wādī 'Arabah, while maintaining a watch over a nexus of water-supply systems critical to social and economic stability in the immediate vicinity. In the early years of the new *Provincia Arabia*, it must have been particularly important to maintain a visible and impressive presence at this nomadic crossroads and watering station. In the second century, the fort seems to have been the largest structure by far along the 150 km of road from al-'Aqaba to Petra, a beacon of Romanness in a desert seemingly empty but constantly scanned by the inquisitive eyes of its inhabitants.

Another aspect of Roman culture at Ḥawar was what has been called the "epigraphic habit" (see Meyer 1990,

<sup>16</sup> Parker 1986: 131-33. Graf 1989 makes the intriguing proposal that Zenobia's revolt caused significant disruption in Arabia in the third century.

Woolf 1996). All the inscriptions so far found at al-Ḥumayma that date prior to the fifth century and consisted originally of more than a few words or letters, have appeared in the fort: one Latin inscription on a monumental statue base, and two altars inscribed in Greek.<sup>17</sup> Two fragmentary Greek *dipinti* have also turned up on ceramics found in the fort. Inscriptions so far are almost non-existent in the rest of the habitation area: sections of the marble chancel screen from the fifth-century Lower Church are inscribed in Greek, and a Muse is named on a fourth-century fresco in the E125 houses. Three small grave stelai from the western necropolis carry one fragmentary Greek and two fragmentary Nabataean inscriptions.<sup>18</sup> This corpus is not extensive, but the absence of monumental Nabataean inscriptions or of ceramic graffiti is notable. Nabataean graffiti of undetermined date were pecked into the rock around a Dhushara relief several kilometres south of the settlement centre (see Graf 1992a), and Nabataean and Thamudic graffiti can be seen at a first or second-century dam and associated Dhushara image several kilometres further on behind the Jabal Qalkha (Oleson 1991). These graffiti, however, and the occasional Nabataean graffiti pecked on exposed bedrock elsewhere around the al-Ḥumayma catchment, consist of the laconic greeting and personal name typical of the genre. There is one exception far up the escarpment at 'Ayn Abū Insūr, 20 km to the north.<sup>19</sup> Although the sample is still small, literacy among the individuals in the Roman fort, or at least among the elite in the Roman fort, seems to have been more developed than elsewhere at pre-Byzantine Ḥawar. It is instructive of their social mores that Nabataean individuals in and around Ḥawar preferred rural inscriptions asserting their individuality, rather than public, collective messages. The Roman epigraphic habit is part of a society that focussed on more complex relationships and assertions (Woolf 1996).

In addition to baths and inscriptions, the Romans brought new dietary habits to Ḥawar. Frying pans are found in the fort alongside the stewpots more typical of the region, and pigs begin to appear in the faunal remains. Oyster shells are found in the fort in large quantities as

well, indicating that fresh oysters were imported by fast camel from al-'Aqaba.<sup>20</sup> They are very rare elsewhere on the site. It is striking, however, that we have found only one sherd from a Mediterranean wine amphora anywhere around the site, from a third or fourth century Aegean type (Peacock and Williams 1986: 193, Class 47). Why fresh oysters but not wine amphoras? Both are awkward to transport. Either the wine arrived in leather wine sacks, or the soldiers and the rest of the population drank locally brewed beer or just made do with water.

The cultural flavour of Roman Ḥawar involves administrative intrusion backed by a monumental but essentially symbolic fortification, the luxurious elaboration of the act of washing embodied in a heated bath, and the introduction of two new languages and a heightened, collective role for literacy. Ḥawar was very much a provincial Roman settlement.

### Byzantine al-Ḥumayma

The Arabs were early, enthusiastic adherents of Christianity, particularly in the *Provincia Arabia*, and by the mid-third century they provided what may have been Rome's first Christian emperor—Philip the Arab (244-249).<sup>21</sup> The population of Ḥawar was no exception to this tradition of spirituality, and at least five large churches were built in the fifth and sixth centuries, dramatically changing the appearance of the small settlement.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, the fort was abandoned early in the fifth century, as the Byzantine emperors turned their eyes elsewhere and changed the strategy of imperial administration and defence. At Ḥawar, religious interests supplanted military assertion.

Although none of the churches so far identified was embellished with the mosaic floors seen, for example, in the contemporary church at Petra (Peterman 1994: 549-50), even the smallest incorporated fine marble columns or chancel screens carved with crosses and tendril motifs. The marble, visually identical with that found at Petra, has been attributed by source analysis to quarries at Proconnesus and Thasos.<sup>23</sup> Importation through some port such as Gaza must have involved enormous effort and expense.

<sup>17</sup> H95.0599.01, CQTHP...ΠΙΡΩΤΟΝ.../ΤΗΝ ΑΝΕΘΗΚΕΝ... H95.0596.01, ΔΗ ΜΕΤΙCΤΩ / ΚΑΠΕΤΩ[ΛΙΝΩ] / ΗΛ[ΙΟ-ΠΟΛΙΤΑΝΩ?]/... Unfortunately, the large, two-line Latin inscription was in poor condition from weathering, and only the middle portion of the second line could be partly deciphered. The legible characters seem to read ]PRAESENEMP[. Another conjecture is ]PRAESEDE.....RAT[. Although neither conjecture makes sense on its own, it might be that praeses lies hidden in the text, or mention of a dedication or structure (*prae sede*). The final letter should be a verb, which would accord well with ]RAT..

<sup>18</sup> The Muse is Clio (κλέω), appropriately enough the Muse of History. One Muse implies the original presence of six more in the now fragmentary fresco.

<sup>19</sup> This inscription was removed in 1998 in preparation for road work.

Graf intends to publish it as part of his study of graffiti in the region.

<sup>20</sup> Seafood, particularly oysters, was a favoured delicacy in the Roman military diet (Davies 1989: 193).

<sup>21</sup> This is a controversial, but appealing, suggestion; for a full discussion, see Shahid 1984a: 65-93. On the pre-Islamic Arab enthusiasm for Christianity, see Shahid 1984b: 16-19 and *passim*.

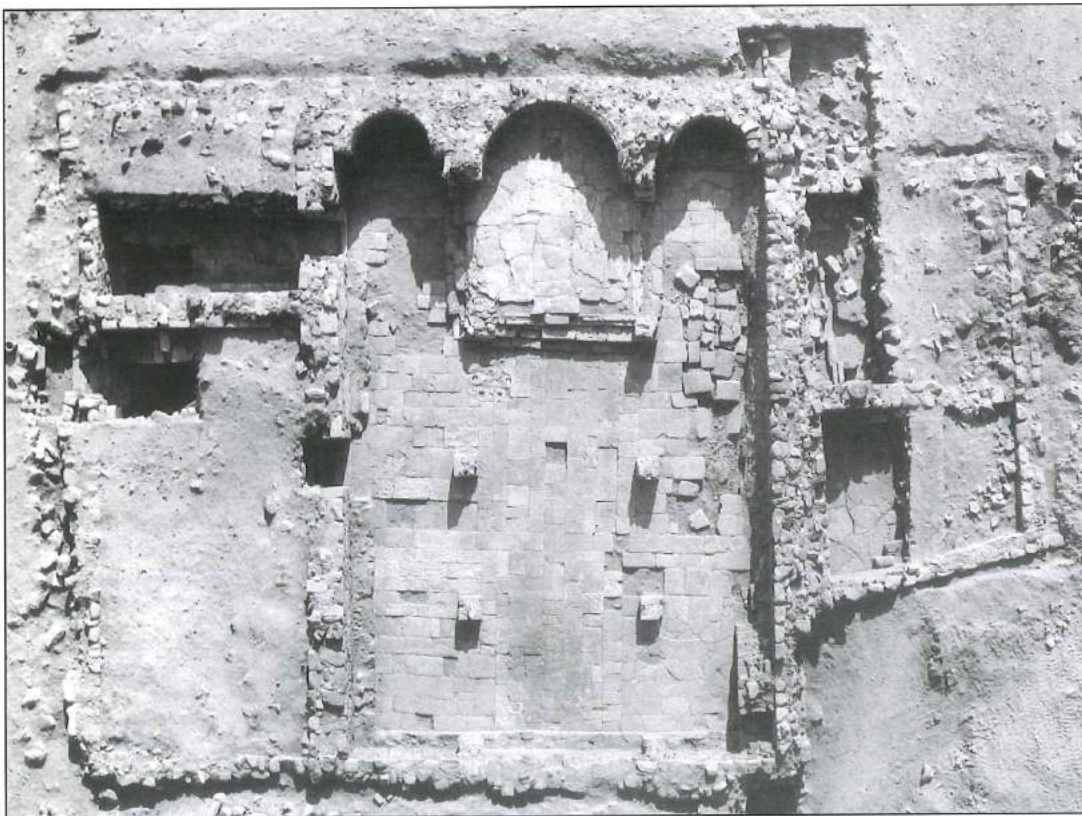
<sup>22</sup> C101 (Lower Church), C119 (Upper Church), B126, B100, and F102; the last two were reused for habitation in the early Islamic period. See Schick 1995b. Sporadic finds of marble chancel screen fragments and a block with a cross suggest that the large, unexcavated structure just north of the early Islamic Qaṣr (F103) may be a church as well (E128).

<sup>23</sup> Marble analysis carried out by Norman Herz; CAS# 94118-94125.

The aqueduct, cisterns, reservoirs, and houses constructed by the Nabataeans during the pre-Roman and Roman administrative periods remained in use, of course, during the Byzantine period, along with the Roman bath. The substantial, stone-built houses that spread westward up the hill, out of the original settlement centre, seem to date at least in part to this period. To judge from the enormous deposits of ceramics throughout the site, and the number of new domestic structures, the civilian population of Ḥawar expanded significantly during this period. Although the site no longer had any military significance, or at least no longer required the presence of military administrators, its inhabitants continued to flourish in a mixed pastoral, agricultural, and trading economy. The withdrawal or discharge of the soldiers in the fort may have been more or less exactly balanced by the expansion of the civilian population. It is even possible that many of the soldiers simply moved from their barracks to a town house. It is uncertain what specific effect, if any, the fourth-century re-arrangement of provincial administration had on Ḥawar, which became part of Palaestina Salutaris, then of Palaestina Tertia. In the late fifth or early

sixth-century Beersheva Edict, Ḥawar (called Auaron), ranked second in the region (after Udhrūḥ) in the amount of tax money due (Alt 1921: 8-10; Mayerson 1986: 143).

In social terms, the churches, which towered over the houses scattered around them and surpassed the height of the battlements around the Roman fort on the hill above, represent the first significant local investment in major structures intended for public use since the construction of the water-supply system 400 years previously (FIG.7). The people who used the churches clearly felt that the "living water" (John 4: 6-15) they drew from this source was as important as the cistern and aqueduct water that sustained their bodies. But why were so many churches necessary for such a small population? Analysis of the local and regional water resources suggests an absolute maximum population of 650 people for Ḥawar. A more realistic total would be only half that (Oleson 1997a). In general, Christians of Arab background followed Orthodox belief (Shahid 1984b *passim*). It is possible, however, that the multiplication of churches at Ḥawar resulted from competition among Orthodox and heterodox believers in the settlement.<sup>24</sup> It is also possible—although not

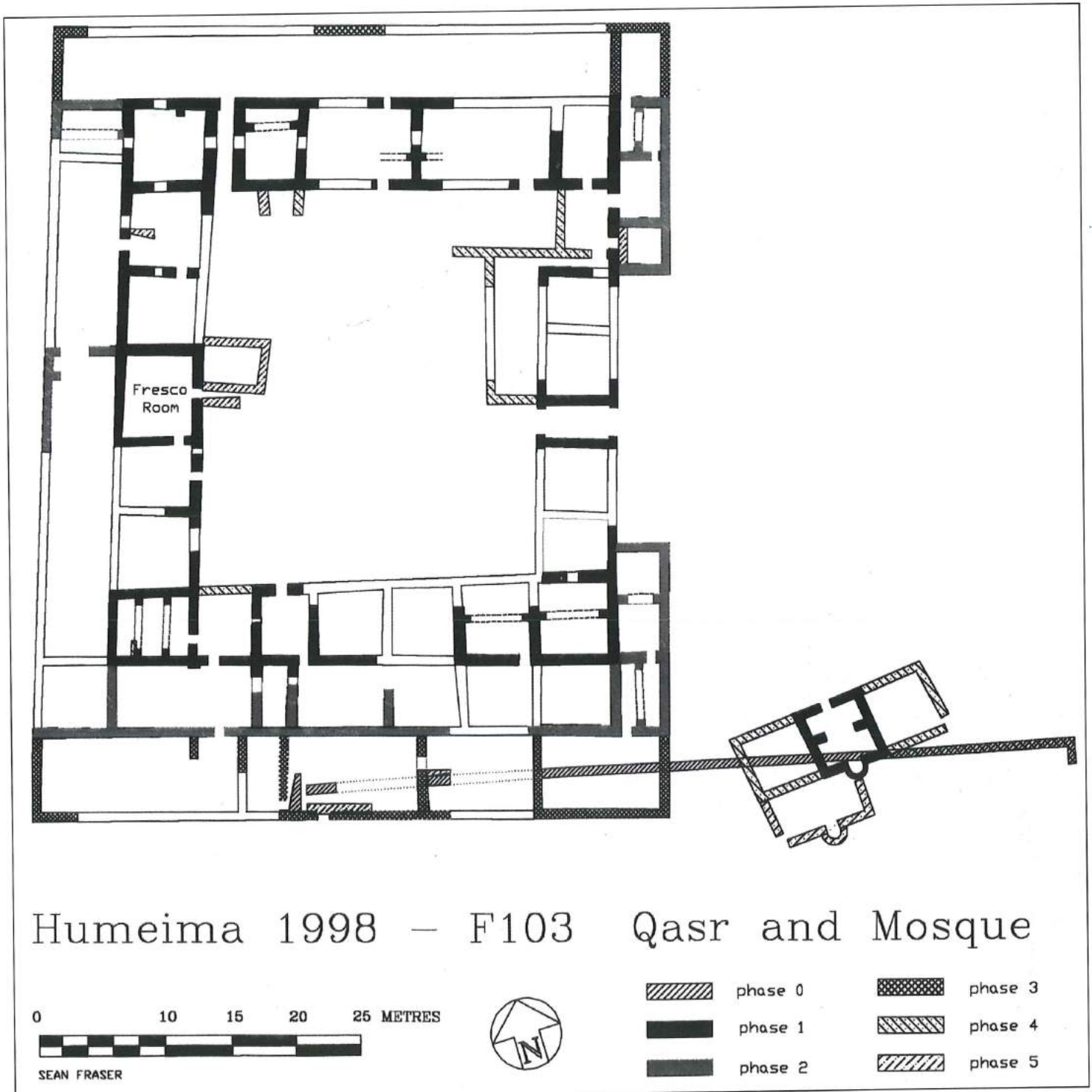


7. Al-Ḥumayma: Byzantine Church C101, aerial. (Photo: W. and E. Myers).

<sup>24</sup> In this regard, it is possibly significant that crosses were carved on the floor of the Lower Church (C101) to mark graves, despite the prohibition of this practice by an edict of Theodosius and Valentinian in 427: "Cum sit nobis cura diligens per omnia superni numinis religionem tueri, signum salvatoris Christi nemini licere vel in solo vel in silice vel in marmoribus humi positus insculpere vel pingere,

seb quodcumque reperitur tolli." (*Codex Iustinianus* I.8). So far from Constantinople, some individuals might easily have fallen into heresy or laxity, which the Bishop at Petra (or of al-'Aqaba, or the Metropolitan of Palaestina Tertia; Schick 1995b: 320-21) may have been unable or unwilling to suppress. Crosses are, however, also found on the pavements of churches in the Negev.





8. Al-Ḥumayma: Plan of Abbasid *qasr* and mosque.

yet suggested by the archaeological record—that some of the churches cycled into and out of use. Negev (1991: 228) suggests that the Byzantine towns in the Negev seem oversupplied with churches simply because a large portion of the population was nomadic and lived out of the town centre or in tents, which are difficult to document archaeologically. On its own small scale, Ḥawar continued

to mirror developments in the larger, Mediterranean world.

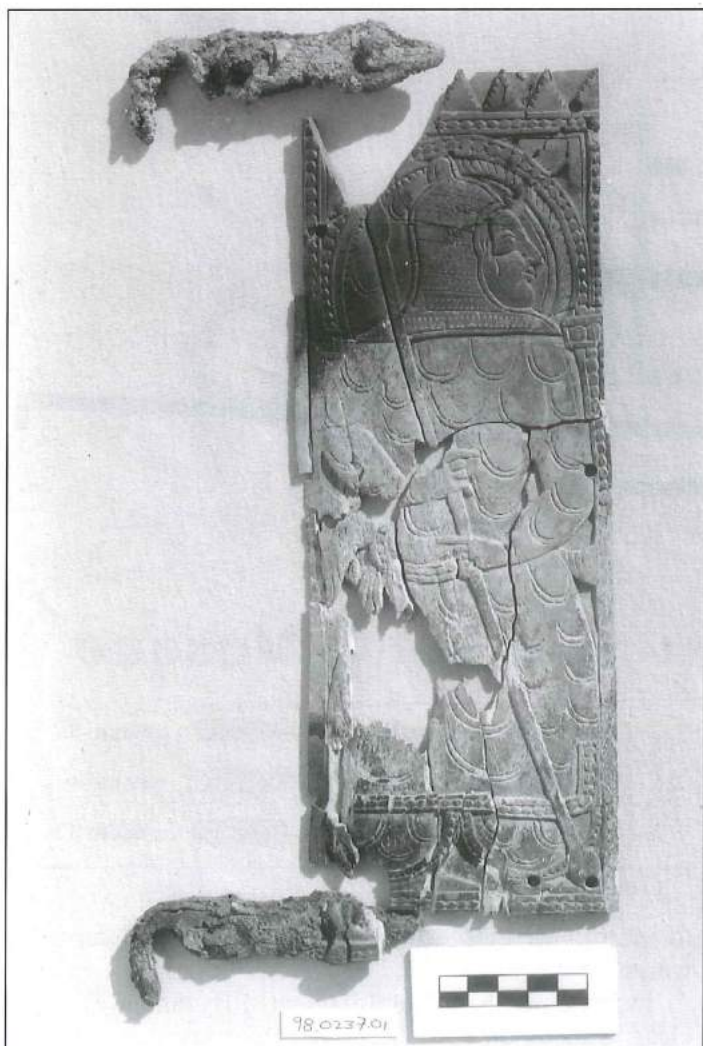
In any case, the cultural flavour of Byzantine Ḥawar is clear: a focus on and substantial investment in domestic and religious structures, and a lifting of the military occupation. Despite the departure or dismissal of the soldiers, security seems to have been adequate, until the ar-

rival of the army of Muḥammad in the seventh century.

### Al-Ḥumayma of the Abbasids

A new wave of Arabism poured over and past al-Ḥumayma in the mid-seventh century, with the arrival of the armies and the religion of Islam (Schick 1992). The churches gradually were abandoned (C101, C119, E122) or renovated for housing (B100, F102) as many Christians either left or converted (Schick 1995a: 311-13). According to an early Islamic historian, ‘Alī, son of ‘Abd-Allāh ibn al-‘Abbās, purchased al-Ḥumayma, as it was now called, soon after 687/688 (AH 68) and built a house with a mosque on the site. His son Muḥammad created a garden that included a grove of 500 olive trees.<sup>25</sup>

The olive trees have disappeared without trace (although a new grove was planted 15 years ago and is flourishing), but the house and mosque have been found (FIG. 3, F103; FIG. 8). The house “*qaṣr*” has a roughly square



9. Al-Ḥumayma: Ivory furniture plaque with warrior. (Photo: J.P. Oleson).

plan, approximately 61 by 50 m, with a recessed entrance facing east, and a large central court. At least one room was decorated with bright frescoes of flowers and tendrils and contained carved ivory furniture. The small family mosque was built just outside the southeast corner, adjacent to a second, outline mosque of uncertain date (Foote and Oleson 1996).

The rest of the settlement seems to have flourished under Abbasid ownership. Trade and booty resulting from the conquests moved down the *Via Nova* towards Arabia. Much of the surface debris now covering the site belongs to the walls of substantial homes built of stone blocks and associated with Early Islamic ceramics.

Like King Aretas, however, some members of the Abbasid family had great political ambitions. ‘Alī’s son Muḥammad, who died in 741/2 (AH 12) asserted his ambition for the caliphate, and a plot was hatched against the Umayyads in the family mosque at al-Ḥumayma in the 730s (al-Duri and al-Mutallabi 1971: 107-8, 149, 154, 195; al-Tabari 1985: 84, 148-50, 158; Foote and Oleson 1996). Location of the site near the pilgrimage route allowed both some trading activity and the passing of fresh political information. The Abbasid revolt in 749 succeeded, the family moved the capital of the caliphate to Baghdad, and al-Ḥumayma withered away. A silver *dirham* struck at al-Wāsiṭ near Baghdad in 733-34 (AH 115) was found in the *qaṣr* entrance and reflects the movement of people and resources that preceded the revolt (Foote and Oleson 1996). The style of the carved ivory panels found in the fresco room, particularly the human faces, also is congruent with provenance east of the Euphrates—in Central Asia, Persia, or India (FIG. 9). Since the eastern power base for the Abbasid Revolution was located in Khurasan, the Eastern stylistic flavour and military iconography suggest that the carved ivory panels were produced in NE Iran. They may well have been brought to al-Ḥumayma, like the coin, as a by-product of the growing revolutionary conspiracy.<sup>26</sup>

What was the cultural flavour of Early Islamic al-Ḥumayma? As before, the water-supply system, pastoralism, and agriculture, supplemented by commerce, supported the inhabitants. The aqueduct, however, soon fell out of use—if it did not in fact cease to function in the Byzantine period—and thus the bath. ‘Alī’s concentration on olive cultivation, however, suggests a more sophisticated agricultural regime than the subsistence agriculture apparently typical of the earlier periods. But it is the continued political potency of the site that is particularly striking. Al-Ḥumayma was founded by one of the most active and successful of the Nabataean kings. It was quickly occupied and fortified by the dynamic Romans as they shaped a new province that dramatically altered the

<sup>25</sup> Schick 1995a: 312-13, 1995b: 320.

<sup>26</sup> I owe this information and interpretation to R. Foote.

balance of power in the Near East. Finally, al-Ḥumayma served as the springboard for the Abbasid ascent to the caliphate.

Why did such a small, isolated, and lightly populated site exert such an attraction or such influence over such a long period of time? The settlement lacks any natural strategic advantage and was never surrounded by a wall. Was it the marvel of the spring-fed Nabataean aqueduct and the durable run-off water-supply system? Was it the agricultural land? Was it simply the sheer emptiness of the desert all around, within which this one site shown like a bright planet in the desert sky at dawn? Or was there real magic in the oracle that spoke to Obodas? Whatever the causes, history came full circle with the Abbasids, following central themes of Arab culture, but in constant interplay with outside cultural influences.

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