

## Identification of Some Archaeological Nabataean Sites in North-West Saudi Arabia

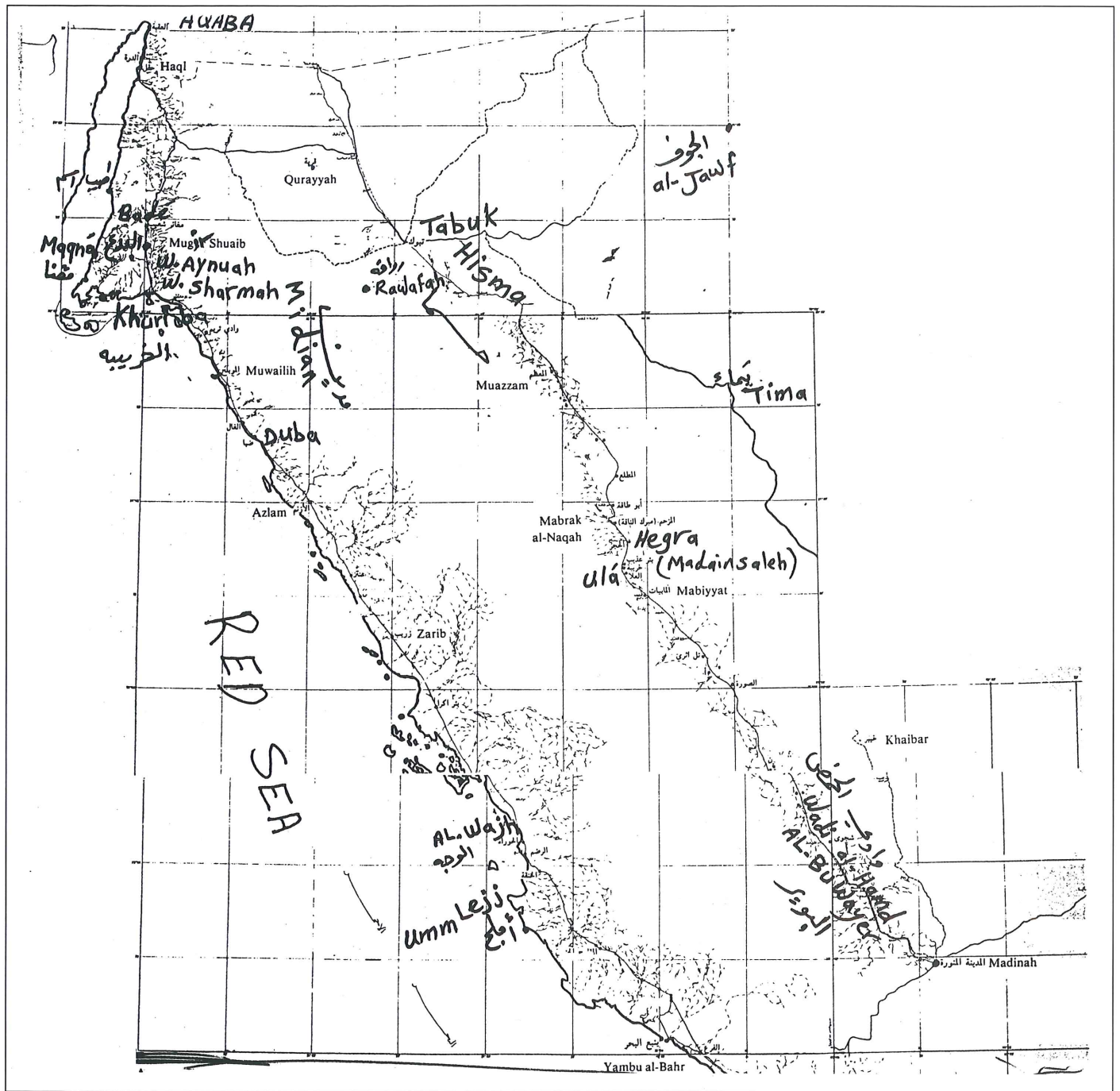
The subject of this paper are several Nabataean sites, discovered during the archaeological survey conducted by the Department of Antiquities in Saudi-Arabia, in the years 1980-1981, which included the exploration of ancient mining sites. In this survey, more than 188 sites were registered out of which 28 were Nabataeans. The evidence was provided from Nabataean pottery as well as Nabataean inscriptions. Out of 45 ancient mining sites, 15 belonged to the pre-Islamic period. The survey covered the followings areas (Ingrahan *et al.* 1981: 59-84)

- 1- The Red Sea Coast and the Wadis which cut through it form Yanbū' al-Baḥr in the south to Amlajj and al-Wajh, Ḍubā, al-Muwayliḥ, Sharmah, 'Aynūna, al-Bad', Maghāyir Shu'ayb, Maqnā, Ṭayyib al-'Ism, and Ḥaql on the Gulf of 'Aqaba to the north (FIG. 1).
- 2- The interior of Al-Ḥijāz from al-Buwayr located 92km north west of al-Madinah to Wādī al-Ḥamḍ and Wādī al-Jizl and to al-'Ulā to the east.
- 3- Area of Midian, Ḥismā, and Tabūk region north west of the Arabian peninsula, which was the home to a number of ancient kingdoms such as the Dedanite, the Lihyanite and the Nabataean. This area was famous for the trade of spices, for the mining of precious stones, such as turquoise, as well as gold, silver and copper. The capital of Midian, al-Qurayyah, is located in this region 79km northwest of Tabūk, al-Khuraybah, the capital of Dedan and Lihyan lies in al-'Ulā, near Madā'in Ṣālīḥ (FIG. 2), the southern Nabataean trade station (al-Ansari 2001; Farés-Drapeau 1999). In the area of al-Bad', there are the site of Maghāyir Shu'ayb, 'Aynūna and Maqnā. Some important Nabataean sites in Wādī 'Aynūna (FIG. 3).
- a) The Nabataean seaport of al-Khuraybah (FIG. 4), which are situated directly on the Red Sea coast, near the confluence of Wādī 'Aynūna and 'Afāl which empty into Red Sea, about 290km west of Tabūk. The architectural remains of this site consist of wall foundations and ruined structures built of coral limestone.

The ruins are spread out in the form of a few low mounds, covering a site of about one Kilometer long. The pottery sherds scattered all over the floor are mostly Nabataean.

- b) Al-Qubaybah to the east of al-Khyrayab which has the remains of a water channel, built with stone and about 2.5km long, that carried water from 'Aynūna spring to the small seaport of al-Khuraybah, on the sea coast.
- c) Imsiq (FIG. 5) the large Nabataean site in Wādī 'Aynūna located 3km east of al-Khuraybah, spreads on top of 60m high hill, and has over 130 buildings including towers, passageways and courtyards, which cover the upper and lower terraces. In the mining survey of 1982, an ancient copper mine in this Nabataean settlement was registered, along with scattered heaps of copper slags. Smelting furnaces were also recognized in the site (FIG. 6).
- d) The mountain on Jabal 'Aynūna which is carved with rock cut tombs of the Nabataean period. Directly to the west of the Imsiq settlement, there are remains of a large Nabataean necropolis with over hundred and thirty tombs, divided into 30-35 units. Above them, are built limestone structures similar to the cemetery of aṣ-Ṣadaqa, south of Petra (Kurdi 1972: 85-87). Another cemetery is located to the north of Jabal 'Aynūna. At the foot of the mountain gashes a perennial spring. An important agricultural settlement is situated at the site of 'Urayq al-Kafara.

In Wādī Sharmah, south of 'Aynūna (FIG. 7), three sites situated on top of the mountains towering the Red Sea coast were registered. Structures were built with shaped limestones. The site consists of rooms where plenty of Midianite and Nabataean sherds were recovered. To the south of al-Khuraybah seaport, another port called aṣ-Ṣawrah is located that has remains of coral limestone structures spreading over the sand with a lot of pottery sherds. The Nabataean sites in Wādī 'Aynūna and Wādī Sharmah with the two seaports of al-Khuraybah and aṣ-Ṣawrah are evidence of an extensive Nabataean occupa-



1: Nabataen sites in northwest Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

tion of the whole area. These discoveries may offer an answer to the location of the site of Leuke-Kome, mentioned by Strabo (Geography, 16. 4. 23). In 24BC, Augustus Caesar ordered Aelius Gallus to mount an expedition to the land of aromatics, e.g. frankincense and myrrh in Yemen. Obodas III (30-9BC) promised to provide the expedition with a guide, his minister Syllaes. One thousand soldiers joined also the 10.000 troops of Alius Gallus, but

the expedition was a failure. Caskel (1954: 39ff) assumed that Leuke-Kome belonged originally to the Lihyanites but the Nabataeans defeated them and occupied Leuke-Kome in 65BC.

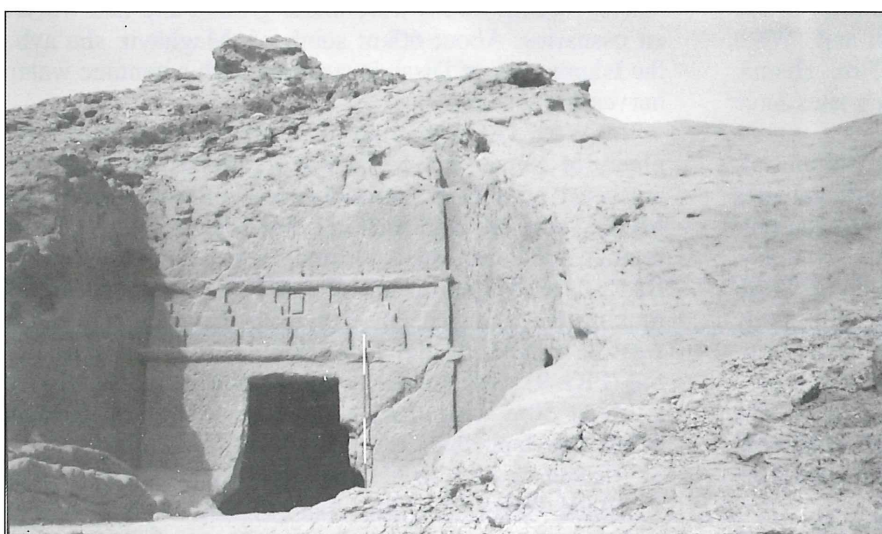
The Nabataeans established the caravan station of Hebra/Madā'in Šāliḥ and cut off the route to Taymā' and the Lihyanite access to the Red Sea from 24BC until 106AD, when the Romans occupied the Nabataean kingdom by



IDENTIFICATION OF SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL NABATAEAN SITES IN NORTH-WEST SAUDI ARABIA



2. Madā'in Šaliḥ "al-Hijr".



3. Al-Bad', Maghāyir Shu'aib Nabataean tombs.



4. Al-Kuraybah, Wādī 'Aynūna Nabataean coastal port.





5. Insiwiq, the big Nabataean settlement in Wādi 'Aynūna.

the troops of Trajan during the reign of Rabel II (76-106AD). The extensive Nabataean presence in Wādi 'Aynūna and Wādi Sharma and the concentration of the Nabataean sites east and north of Khuraybah and Wādi 'Aynūna such as al-Bad', Miqnā, Ṭayyb al-'Ism, Ḥismā, Disah and Tabūk is noticeable, while no such sites have been registered at al-Wajih and Amlajj.

During the survey of routes between al-'Ulā and al-Wajih on the coast, about 190km long, no significant sites were registered or located with Nabataean or Roman pottery and roads were difficult to pass. On the contrary, Nabataean sites were registered and located along Wādi 'Aynūna and Wādi Sharma, across an accessible sandy route with available water. Some geologists have demonstrated that the Khuraybah seaport is considered as a good harbour because of the absence of coral reefs. The assumption that Leuke-Kome is the seaport of al-Ḥawrā' 9km north of al-Wajih can be refuted by the following arguments

- 1) The distance between al-Ḥawrā' and al-'Ulā Hegra is around 350km, through rugged mountain routes. Besides, most of the pottery sherds collected in al-Ḥawrā' belong to the Islamic period. Al-Maqdisi (10th century AD) reports that al-Ḥawrā' was protected by a fort which was adjoined with a prosperous settlement (1975: 305). It was reputed for the production of the steatite vessels, which were exported to many other countries (Ghaban 1992: 25). But the city was abandoned at the end of the twelfth century AD (Hamawi II: 316).
- 2) The Nabataean sites in al-Bad' Maghāyir shu'ayb Miqnā and Ṭayyb al-'Ism (FIG. 8).

In Maghāyir Shu'ayb there exist about 50 Nabataean tombs cut in the whitish sandstone. The architectural decoration of the facades are very simple, consisting of one or two friezes of crow steps. Some tombs are provided with benches at their entrance. In the area of al-Bad', seven Nabataean sites were registered. In the al-Malayḥa an

important settlement of limestone structures is about one Kilometer long, most of them buried by the sand. Nabataean rockcut tombs were under ground and had wooden ossuaries. About 60km south of Maghāyir shu'ayb, the Islamic site of Disah is supplied with a genuine water harvesting system.

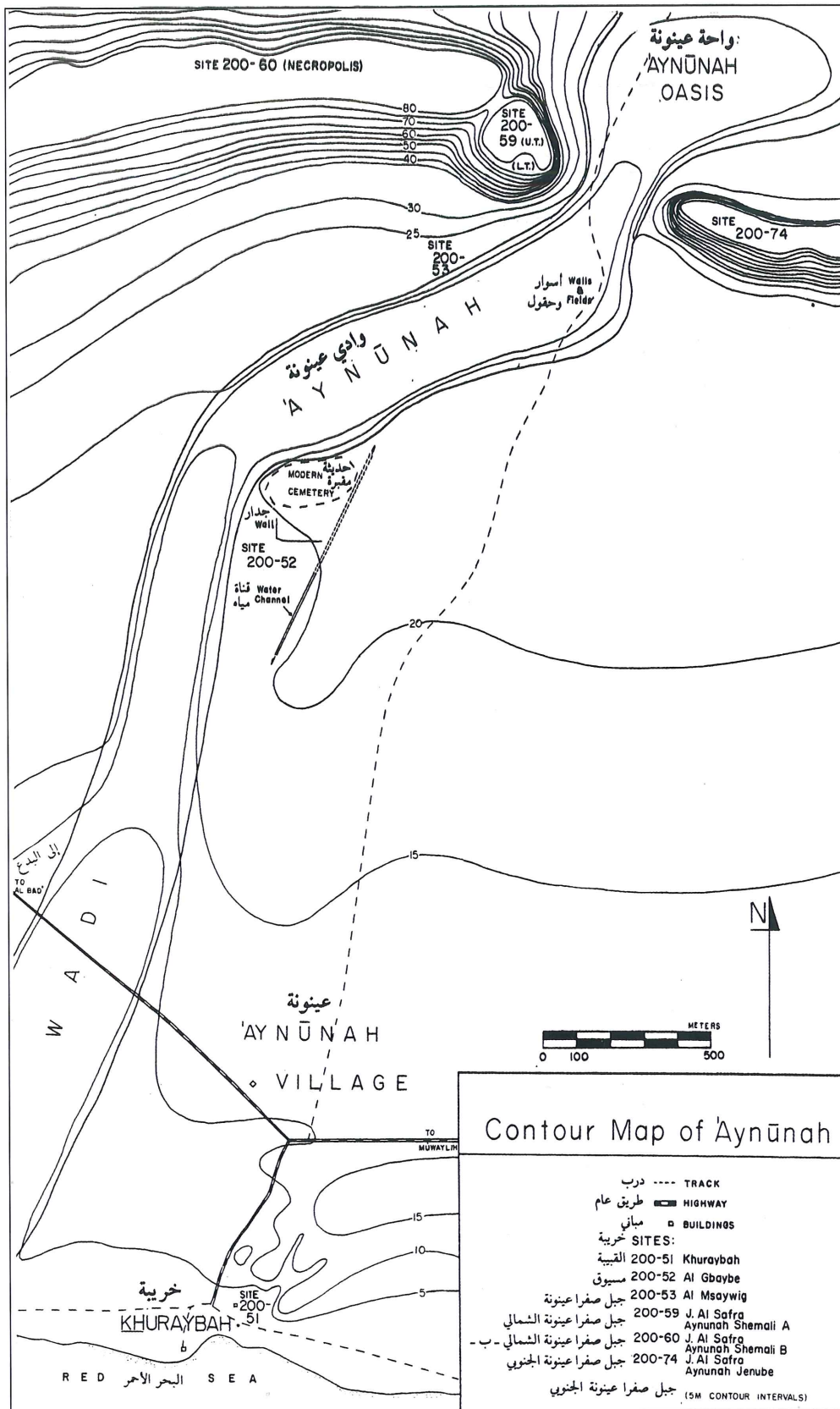
In Wādi 'Afāl, the ruins of a mining installation with plenty of Nabataean sherds was registered. About 45km northeast of al-Bad', turquoise was mined at Jabal al-Myth. There are also rock cut drawings of ibex. An important Nabataean site is located 53km south - west of al-Bad', near Miqnā on top of Jabal al-'Awaysah, overlooking the Red Sea. In Ṭayyib al-'Ism, 25km south - west of miqnā, on the coast, there exists 3km long as-Siq (FIG. 9), very similar to as-Siq of Petra except that it is about 50m wide. Five sites were registered through Wādi Ṭayyb al-'Ism.

- 3) Nabataean sites in Midian, Ḥismā and Tabūk region (Atlal 1981: 75). More than ten sites were found in this area and a Nabataean facade was found on the sandstone cliff of a mountain, near Disah, located 75km north-east of Ḍubā and 180km southwest of Tabūk. This isolated facade is decorated with the typical Nabataean crow step together with pilasters, topped by a cornice. This facade is comparable to the Madā'in Šāliḥ and Maghāyir shu'ayb rock architecture (FIG. 10).

Around Disah and 36km west of Tabūk, Wādi al-'Ašāfir is carved with several Nabataean inscriptions, together with rock cut drawings of horsemen, cameleers with the representation of a women with long curly hair, representing probably the goddess Astarte.

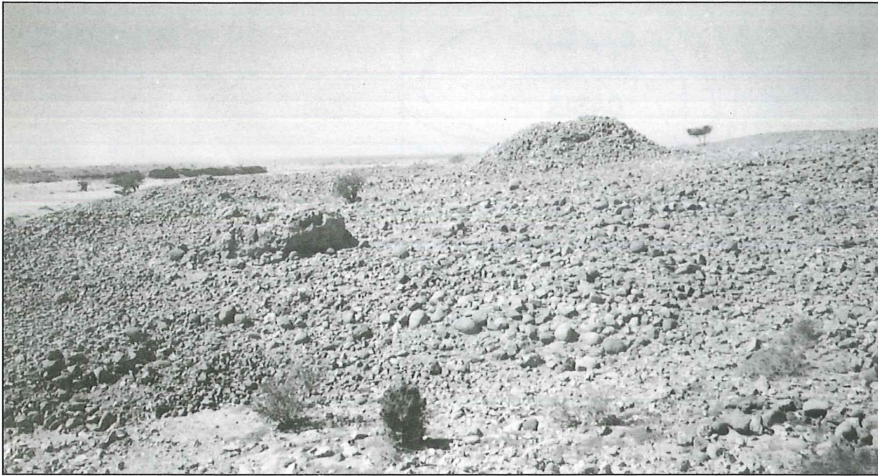
- 4) In the Hijaz mountains, from al-Buwayr, 92km north west of al-Madinah to Wādi al-Ḥamḍ and Wādi al-Jizl four Nabataean sites were surveyed: a) Tatad 17km south of al-Buwayr, it includes ruins of built structures; b) al-Liq 9km east of al-Buwayr is a huge dam built with basalt blocks to collect rain water; c)

IDENTIFICATION OF SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL NABATAEAN SITES IN NORTH-WEST SAUDI ARABIA



6. Contour map of 'Aynūnah area.

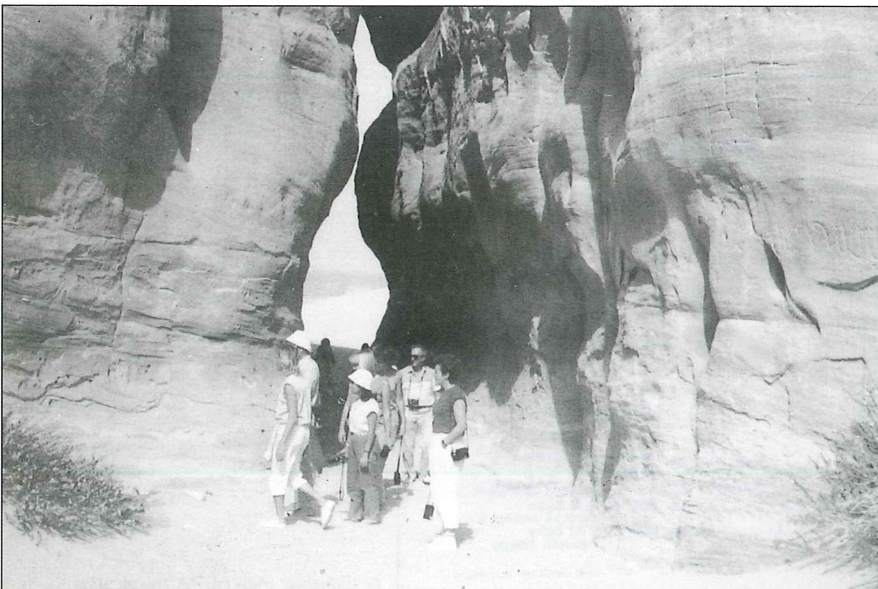




7. Jabal 'Aynūna, a large Nabataean Cemetery or Necropolis.



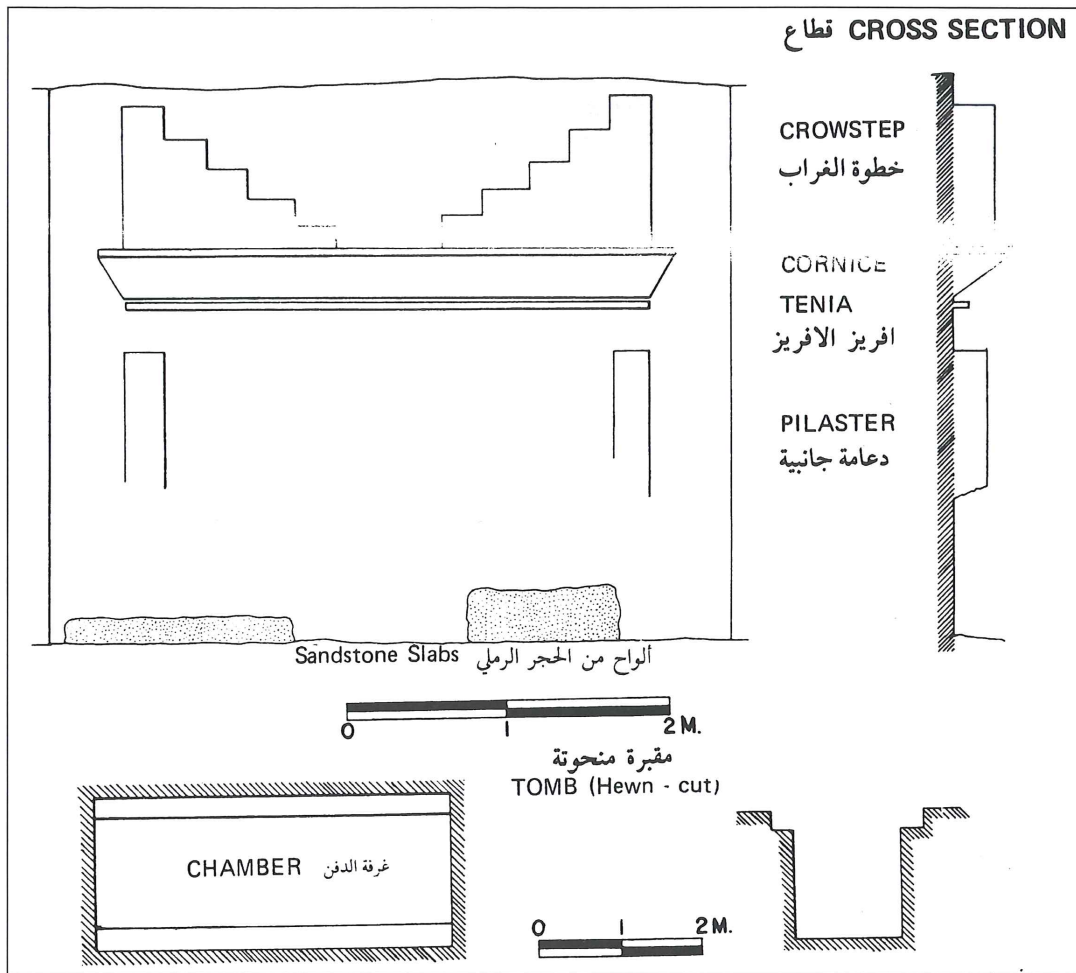
8. Miqnā city.



9. As-Siq at Tayyib al-'Ism.

al-Mamrah, 6.5km east of al-Buwayr is an important Nabataean site, about 1km<sup>2</sup>. It consists of structures built with basalt blocks, supported by pilasters. Many

Nabataean pottery sherds are scattered around; d) al-Jeder, 11.5km north of al-Buwayr is an agricultural settlement and is similar to al-Ḥamrah ruins (FIG. 11).



10. Nabataean Façade elevation and hewn-cut tomb.



11. al-Ḥamra Nabataean site situated in al-Buwayr area in Wādi al-Ḥamḍ.

The sites in Wādī al-Ḥamḍ were part of a large caravan complex, including stations on the ancient trade route which extended from al-Madina across Wādī al-Ḥamḍ and Wādī al-Jizl toward Hegra-Madā'in Ṣāliḥ and Dedan.

### Bibliography

- Al-Ansari, A.R., Abu Al- Hassan, H. 2001. *Al-Ula and Mada, in salin*. Riyadh: Dar al-Qawafil.
- Atlal 1981. The Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology Vol 5.
- Atlal 1983. the Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology Vol 7.
- Caskel, W. 1954. *Lihyan and Lihyanis*, Koln.
- Farés-Drapeau, S. 1999. *Dedan et ses inscriptions*, I-II. Doctorate Thesis. University Aix-Marseille I.
- Ghabban, A.I.H. 1992. Northwestern Saudi Arabia. *SHAJ* 5.
- Hamawi, Y. 1957. *Mu'jam al-Buldan*. Lebanon.
- Ingraham, M. L., Johnson, T., Rihani M., Shatla, I. 1981. Preliminary Report on a Reconnaissance Survey of the Northwestern province (With a brief survey of the northern province). *Atlat* 5: 59-84.
- Masry, A.H. 1975. *An Introduction to Saudi Arabian Antiquities*. Riyadh: Department of Antiquities and Museums, Ministry of Education.
- Winnet, F.V. 1970. *A study of the Lihyanis and Thamudic Inscription*. Toronto.