

THE CAIRN OF HĀNĪ: SIGNIFICANCE, PRESENT CONDITION AND CONTEXT

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“Are we not the people of a black, dark land and the folk of a stony desert with rock barriers and expanses of sand?” (*Carmina Hudsailitarum*, ed. Kosegarten 1854: 160, l. 7, quoted by Littmann, *Thamud und Safa* 1940: 98).

Harrat ash-Shām, the Basalt Desert of north-eastern Jordan, is strewn with thousands of stone structures; cairns are the most common but few have ever been systematically investigated. The Cairn of Hānī, identified some 60 years ago, is a rare example of a ‘Safaitic’ cairn with an intact burial which was then systematically excavated and published. Very few other cairns have been excavated since then and the Cairn of Hānī remains by far the most important and informative. Sadly it is now being damaged and may soon be destroyed. The aims of this article are to review the significance of this important cairn, to report on its parlous present condition and to place it in the context of both the handful of other excavated cairns in the region and of the numerous other ancient stone-built structures visible from the air within its immediate orbit.

Introduction

The Jordanian ‘panhandle’ is thickly strewn with ancient stone-built structures, especially in the great lava field known as Ḥarrat ash-Shām which sprawls across the region from southern Syria to northern Saudi Arabia. Ever since RAF pilots began overflying this so-called Basalt or Black Desert in the 1920s, scholars have been aware of the extent and considerable number of the most striking of these structures: the so-called kites (Maitland 1927; Rees 1929; cf. Kennedy 2011). There are, of course, many more site types (below): wheels, pendants, ‘camps’,

long meandering walls of unknown purpose and thousands of cairns. These last are often overlooked (cf. Betts 1982: 32-3); alongside the kites and wheels they seem modest in size and character – often being no more than a heap of collapsed stones. Some RAF pilots thought they were watchtowers on the Roman roads of the region (Rees 1929: 391-92), but it is unlikely that was the case except in a very few instances. For many years it was debated whether or not they were burial cairns; it now seems clear that some were and some were not.

At their best these cairns can be impressive, i.e. substantial structures, constructed of stone slabs raised in a circular tower-like form. (In some parts of ‘Arabia’ they are called tower tombs or turret tombs [De Maigret 2009: ch. 18], hence the supposition they may in some instances have been watchtowers [above]). The result is a carefully built chamber in which human remains were deposited. Most are conical mounds of field stones several metres in diameter. Other cairns are components of the pendants that are now being recorded in large numbers across Ḥarrat ash-Shām and more widely throughout interior ‘Arabia’. In this case, the large burial cairn has a ‘tail’ of small cairns attached. The tail comprises anything from a handful to several dozen cairns and their construction ranges from a simple heap of stones to more carefully built rectangular ‘pillars’ of stones, *viz.* box cairns.

Cairns and pendants with intact burials are seldom found. It is usual to find that the chamber has been breached, though in a few cases there may still be some bones scattered nearby if the robbing is recent. A relatively common feature is the presence of ancient graffiti scratched on to one or more of the stones of a cairn or on stones

or outcrops nearby. The latter are commonly dated to the period *ca.* 1st century BC to 4th century AD (Macdonald 2005a: 70), but there are numerous clear examples of burial cairns around Bronze Age settlements in the wider Ḥarrat ash-Shām (e.g. Braemer *et al.* 2004), a reminder that these structures belong to many periods.

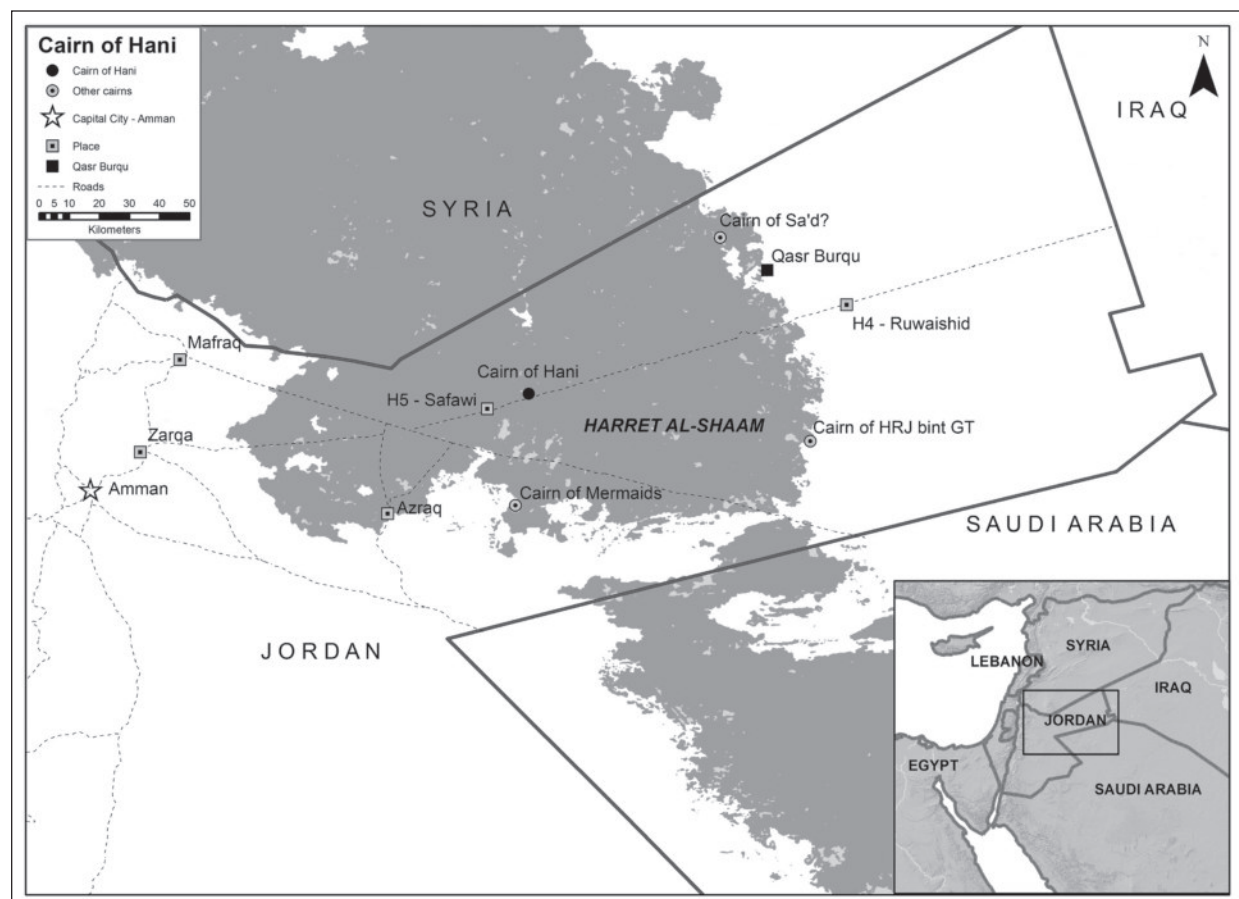
The profoundly inhospitable nature of the Basalt Desert has proven no protection to these sites. Alongside damage caused by the bulldozing of tracks, those sites thought to be possible sources of antiquities are being attacked and their archaeological importance damaged or lost. This is also true of the Cairn of Hānī.

The Cairn of Hānī

The Cairn of Hānī is located *ca.* 12.5km from aṣ-Ṣafāwī town centre, east along Route 10 (aṣ-Ṣafāwī to ar-Ruwayshid) and approximately 340 metres north of the highway (**Fig. 1**) (see Appendix). Excavated in 1951, it is a rare ex-

ample of a cairn excavation and, in this case, one that had not been robbed. A notable feature is that the internal structure is rectilinear rather than circular. As we shall see, it had a number of other unexpected and exciting features, and remains a rich source of information. As the excavator observed (Harding 1953a: 9): “This is the first Safaitic cairn to be excavated, and the results make it desirable that more should be done.”

Stones in, on or very close to the cairn included 174 inscriptions: 172 in Safaitic text, one Latin and one modern Polish. Further inscriptions, apparently practice texts, were found just to the north-west and eight of those were published (#174 - #181). Several more texts were published by Harding in this article which do not belong to the Cairn of Hānī: #182 - #191 and #194 come from a cairn *ca.* 1.5km south-west of that of Hānī, #192 - #193 were included in error and are actually from the Baghdad Museum,



1. Map locating the ‘panhandle’, Ḥarrat ash-Shām, Pumping Stations H4 and H5, Baghdad highway and the cairn sites discussed (drawing Rebecca Banks).

#195 - #197 are from a third cairn south of H5 / aṣ-Ṣafāwī and #198 - #200 are from yet another cairn, this time located south of the old highway (republished as Winnett 1957: #995, #1002 and #998). (For clarification I am grateful to Michael Macdonald [pers. comm. 20110416]). A handful of stones (16+) have drawings, including those from the practice group and two omitted by Harding but published later (Macdonald 1980: 192, pls CXX-CXXI). Popular are simple motifs found widely on Safaitic rock art, such as the series of seven parallel lines or seven dots and the circular sun or sunburst. The seven lines or dots in a row often occur next to Safaitic inscriptions, especially when enclosed by a cartouche where the seven lines are drawn across the border. The dots are often arranged in patterns with an accompanying little stick figure. Because there is no known meaning, they are generally labelled as ‘apotropaic’ (cf. Winnett and Harding 1978: 25-27). A few drawings depict various animals, most notably on the much-discussed engraving apparently showing a kite in use during a hunt (below), which is now housed at the museum in al-Mafraq.

Most of the inscriptions describe a familial relationship and then say that the person either helped to build the cairn or that they “grieved for Hānī”. The excavators therefore anticipated a male burial but were surprised to find a female too.

Two texts name the dedicant and the cairn (“For Hānī son of ‘Aqrab son of Hānī son of Hayār, and the cairn” [Harding 1953a: 15, #1-#2]); Hānī is also named in no less than 95 further inscriptions. 18 were set up by close relatives (brother, cousin, nephew – but no son) and 77 (or 79) by friends (This seems the correct count to be derived from Harding’s confusing reports of numbers). The texts were inscribed by members of 21 different lineages (translating the Safaitic word *ʿ* more accurately as lineage rather than tribe [Michael Macdonald, pers. comm. 20110416]) – an unparalleled ‘gathering of the clans’.

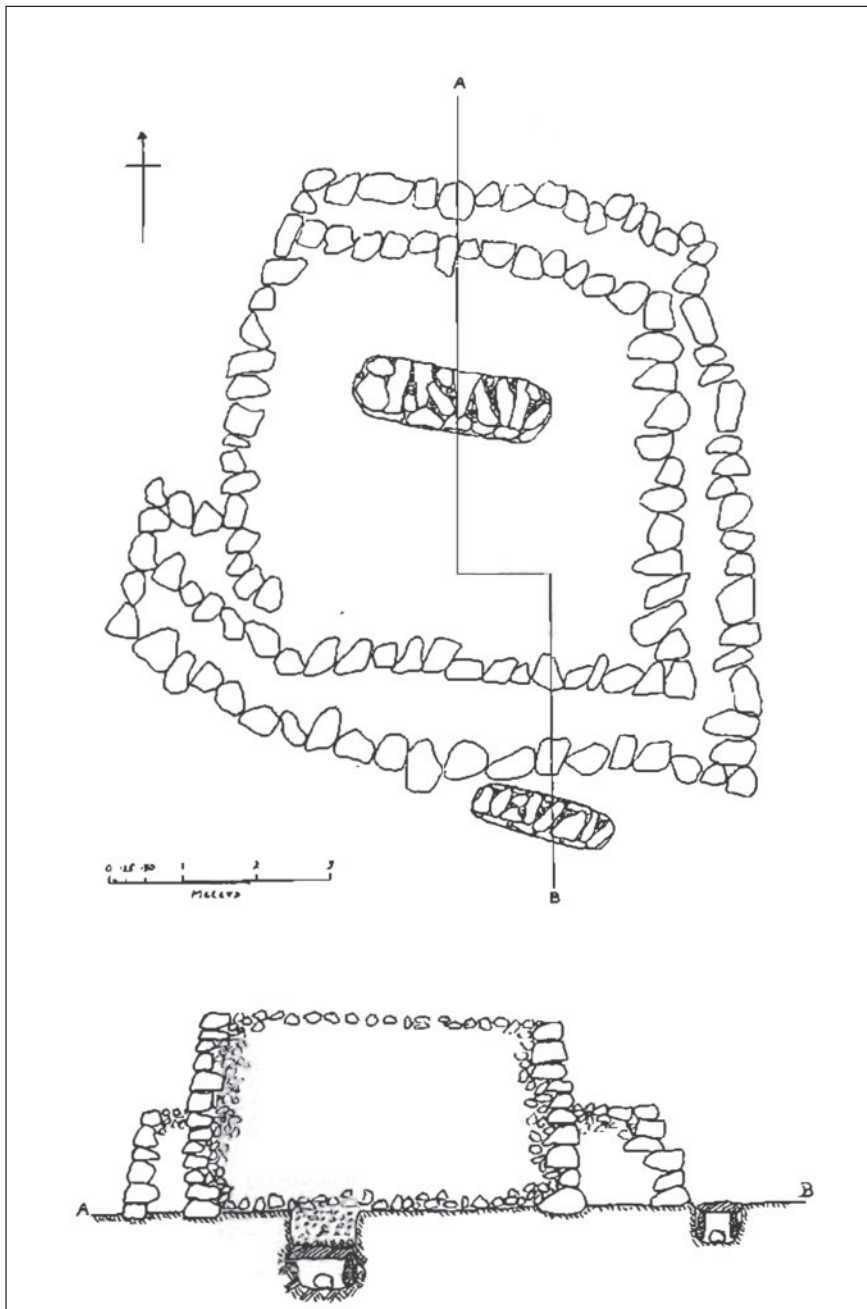
Excavation revealed the likely sequence of construction. First a rectilinear structure – roughly aligned with the points of the compass – was built from field stones, creating a courtyard. A second circuit was then constructed outside the north, east and south faces, seemingly

as a buttress but less high (**Fig. 2**). Finally, the courtyard and the space between the two walls were filled with stones to create a low conical cairn covering the entire structure. It is thought the raising of the cairn was carried out over a lengthy period. In honour of Hānī, filler stones would have been placed by visitors; many had been incised with a message or picture and one of these was built into the south-east corner of the rectilinear structure itself.

Two graves were found: the male (Hānī) under the courtyard of the inner rectilinear structure and the female to the south, outside the supporting wall (**Fig. 2**).

The woman, presumed to be an intimate relation of Hānī, was found in a small, shallow, stone-lined grave cut into the desert soil. It was oriented roughly east-west. The body was laid supine with the head to the west (280°) and the face looking south. The left arm was crossed over to the opposite shoulder, the right arm stretched out down the side of the body. It was apparently not clothed or wrapped. Finds included a few poor blue beads and one mother-of-pearl bead around the neck, a bundle of cloth containing what appeared to be eye paint, a wooden comb and, on the front of the skull, the remains of a leather band. The grave was covered with stones, 19 of which were inscribed (Harding 1953a: 11). There is no clear pattern in what these say: eight refer to Hānī but the remainder have varied messages and, collectively, these stones may represent no more than a random group of rocks in the vicinity which visitors placed over the woman’s grave.

The grave of Hānī was cut deep into the courtyard of the cairn, through the soil and into the underlying bedrock. It was covered in stone slabs, then a layer of mud and larger stones with a fill of loose soil, small stones and rock chippings lying approximately 55cm deep above that. The body was well preserved, with black hair on the skull and the remains of a beard. Like the female, it was supine, with the head to the west (280°), face turned south, the left hand across to the opposite shoulder and the right arm extended by the side. A deliberately broken wooden bowl, a staff (which looked as if it had been deliberately sawn into five pieces before burial), a water skin and a seemingly incomplete iron ladle were buried with him. Unlike the female grave, there



2. Cairn of Hānī; Harding's excavation plan (Harding 1953a: 10, fig. 1).

were no inscriptions on any of the rocks in or immediately over the burial.

The pathologists' report estimated the woman as standing 1.52m (just under 5 feet) tall. Hānī they measured as 1.67m (5 feet 6 inches). They estimated both at 35-50 years of age (Shanklin and Dark 1953: 59). Ages are notoriously difficult to estimate, though the survival of complete sets of teeth supports the supposition that both were younger adults at the time of death.

No cause of death is offered for the female.

On the other hand, Harding twice gives the cause of death for the male as an arrow wound (1953a: 8: "...Hānī was apparently killed by an arrow..."; cf. 32). He offers no reference but is presumably basing this on the pathologists' report, which was published independently in the same periodical. What that says, however, is: "There is a conspicuous sagittal scar 30mm long above the right eye. It is seen as a linear depression of the outer table of the frontal bone. The wound was likely caused by a sharp instrument



3. Rock drawing showing what seems to be a battle scene (Harding 1953a: #77).

and sustained in life, for it is healed and there are no ragged edges” (Shanklin and Dark 1953: 59).

Although Hānī had apparently received a wound caused by a ‘sharp instrument’, it was explicitly said not to have been the cause of death. He may have been killed in battle – there are several references in the texts from the cairn to killing and violent death (#71, #72, #76, #103, #154; cf. #194) and #77 seems to be a battle scene in which two of the warriors have bows (Fig. 3), but that is speculation. Harding’s belief in a fatal arrow wound appears to be based on a misunderstanding of the medical term ‘sagittal scar’ (*sagitta* [Latin] = “arrow”): “‘Sagittal’ in the context of the pathologists’ report means in the sagittal plane, i.e. the anatomical position of the wound” (Dr Paul Bannan, pers. comm. 20110408) and has nothing to do with the shape or cause of the wound.

The pathologists concluded: “A study of these bones and the dentition suggests that this is the skeleton of a large, relatively tall, very muscular male between the ages of thirty-five and fifty years” (Shanklin and Dark 1953: 59).

Significance of the Cairn of Hānī

The Cairn of Hānī was and is of considerable historical interest. It was the first Safaitic cairn to be excavated and is still one of only six to have been excavated in Jordan’s Basalt Desert. Even at the time, the excavation, its rich

findings and Hānī’s identification as some sort of “holy man or *darwīsh*” (Harding 1953a: 9) were unexpected and caught the attention of a wider audience than usual (Harding 1953b).

Notable were the structure at the core of the cairn, the cutting of graves, their parallel orientation, the carefully laid out bodies, the grave-goods and the survival of some organic material.

The inscriptions were not just numerous but highly informative. Harding was able to construct a family tree for Hānī with 32 family members (1953a: 21). Hānī received tributes not just from a wide range of named relatives, but also from many others; the stones collectively name no less 21 different tribes (or clans). A particularly interesting feature is the suggestion, based on 19th and 20th century practice, for continued visits and commemoration for perhaps years after initial interment, *viz.* a nomadic people returning to the same area on a seasonal basis.

Although the broad dating of Safaitic texts has been arrived at from research over a wide area and large numbers of inscriptions, the presence of a Latin inscription is a useful reminder that Hānī and the many people named in the texts, and thousands more like them, were the nomads who lived on or beyond the limits of the Roman provinces, in this case the provinces of Arabia and Syria. Here we not only confront the usually faceless and nameless nomads, but also find them to have a complex societal structure

(cf. Macdonald 1993).

Another item that adds to the importance of the Cairn of Hānī is a depiction of what appears to be a kite, one of the hunting traps that abound in the Basalt Desert. The drawing shows an enclosure, animals and hunters with an associated inscription in Safaitic (Harding 1953a: 30-31, #73 and pl. VI). The drawing and text have been discussed and cited extensively in the context of the lengthy debate about the purpose and date of kites. The drawing is one of a handful – and by far the most detailed – apparently depicting kites and their use for hunting, though the matter remains controversial (Harding 1956; Betts and Helms 1986; Betts and Helms 1987: 55-6, 61-2; Echallier and Braemer 1995: 57-58; Fowden 1999: 127-129; Betts and Yagodin 2000: 33; Macdonald 2005: 333-339). This is not the place to survey the extensive literature and varying interpretations, other than to bring out that the date implied by the drawing and Safaitic text (*ca.* 1st century BC to 4th century AD) is much later – perhaps by several thousand years – than when kites are thought to have been first constructed. As such, it represents crucial evidence for their continued if not continuous use over a long period.

Present Condition

As Harding noted (1953a: 8), it was surprising (even in 1951) that the cairn had not been robbed, as it was so close to the highway and had a track leading to it. In the 1950s the walls were in a fairly good state of preservation and the inscriptions most likely largely *in situ*. The removal during the excavation of the covering rocks undoubtedly made it more vulnerable, but as

late as the 1970s it was seemingly little changed (Michael Macdonald, pers. comm. 20090905).

Today the cairn is very much changed. In comparison to the photographs taken by Harding, its current state is disappointing (**Fig. 4**). Indeed, Harding explicitly notes that the natural desert covering of boulders came right up to the edge of the cairn. Now bulldozer tracks come up to the structure and some of the surrounding landscape boulders are heaped against it, so that it is not immediately recognizable. This is particularly evident in the aerial photographs in which swathes of boulders have been pushed right up to the edge, and some of them are piled onto the south side of the cairn with complete disregard for the original structure (**Fig. 5**). Despite its significance, the Cairn of Hānī seems never to have been included in the database of archaeological sites for Jordan, JADIS, and the submission offered for inclusion in the new database, MEGA-J, has not been used.

Many of the inscriptions were removed by Harding and by a more recent Director-General, Dr Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, for display in museums. At least 28 are still present in a group just to the south-east of the structure, on the edge of a bulldozed track (**Figs. 5 and 6**). In short, barely a sixth of the 181 inscriptions recovered from the cairn itself are still to be seen on site.

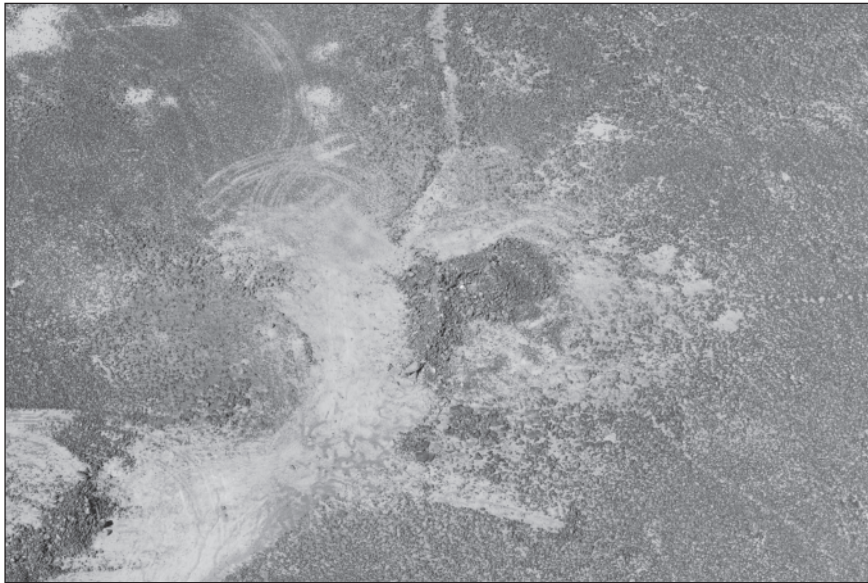
The cairn's location so close to a busy highway and the clear evidence both there and all along this road for road-working and seemingly casual bulldozing pose a serious threat.

Other Excavated Cairns

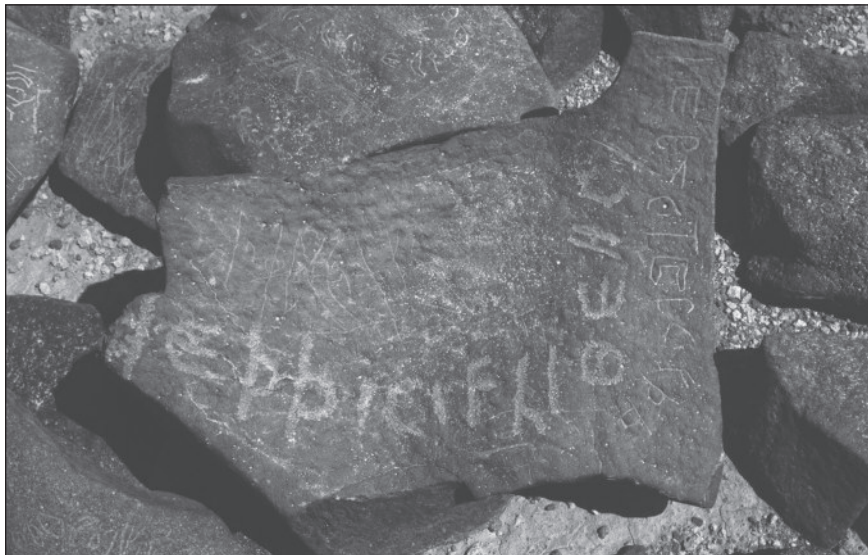
Many cairns are marked by inscriptions



4. Cairn of Hānī in (a) 1951 (from Harding 1953b: fig. 4) and (b) 2009 (photo Karen Henderson).



5. Aerial view of the Cairn of Hānī looking west-north-west; the inscriptions remaining on the site are largely at left foreground (APAAME_20090928_DLK-0537C).



6. Inscribed rocks lying south-east of the cairn (#135, #136 and #161) (APAAMEG_20091014_DLK-21).

found in them, on them or nearby; these often include the words *bana* (“build”) and *wajama* (“grieved for”). Neither term specifically implies a tomb or burial; one might just be an expression of grief, while the other does not mean that a tomb has been built – possibly just a monument to the deceased. However, as it yielded two burials, the excavation of the Cairn of Hānī gave powerful support to the belief that the larger cairns at least were burial sites. Nevertheless, even now only a few more cairns have been fully excavated in Jordan, with varied results.

The Cairn of Saʿīd

The Winnett and Harding expedition to Ḥarrat ash-Shām in 1958 - 1959 recorded 50

large cairns in the area north-west and south-west of Pumping Station H4 (modern ar-Ruwayshid) on the Baghdad highway from Mafraq to Iraq (**Fig. 1**). 4,567 Safaitic inscriptions were recorded in and around these cairns (Winnett and Harding 1978: 6), of which 480 were subsequently published by Oxtoby (1968), for whom this was #9.

Two adjacent cairns just north-west of Qaṣr Burquʿ were excavated by Harding in 1959 (**Fig. 1**). These were selected as it was thought one might be the grave of a named individual whose name, Saʿīd son of Saḥāb, was found in inscriptions on a stone nearby (Harding 1978: 243) (see Appendix).

Cairn A was closest to the inscriptions men-

tioning Sa'īd. It had a few further inscriptions on its surface but there were none in its make-up. Contrary to expectations, no burial was revealed in the excavation.

Cairn B, which may be thought of as the Cairn of Sa'īd, did include a burial and further inscriptions. However, Harding's hopes that the site would produce a wealth of information like that of Hānī were disappointed. Writing in 1978 (243), many years after his excavations of the Cairns of Hānī (1951) and Sa'īd (1959), he explained this difference by noting that the Cairn of Sa'īd was built on a rocky ridge of basalt so that the body had to be laid on a constructed platform, while Hānī had been buried on an open flat plain which had relatively soft soil. However, this is incorrect; as noted above, the female grave beside Hānī was certainly cut into the soft soil, but that of Hānī was cut through the soil and he was buried in a rock-cut grave covered by stone slabs. Moreover, Harding goes on (1978: 243) to explain that beneath Sa'īd Cairn A there was "native soil ... undisturbed and filled with very large basalt boulders" and that his team excavated between the latter to a depth of a metre. In short, there seems no reason to suppose that those who buried Sa'īd could not have dug a grave into the soil had they so wished, or cut into rock if they preferred a rocky location. They evidently chose not to do so.

Nevertheless, Cairn B / Cairn of Sa'īd did have parallels with the Cairn of Hānī. Two more texts dedicated to Sa'īd were found almost immediately the excavation began, bolstering the belief that the body of a young man interred there was that of Sa'īd. The burial chamber consisted of a circular platform surrounded by a wall of field boulders. A second concentric wall surrounded this and it seems the inner chamber and the space between the two concentric walls was gradually filled with stones over a period of time to create the low cone-shaped cairn. The body was laid on the platform within an outline of stones to create something akin to a cist grave. The head was to the west (250°).

Of the positioning of the body, Harding (1978: 246) notes that "the only thing it has in common with that of Hānī is that the body was laid on its right side, head west." This is a puzzle: his description of the remains at the Cairn of Hānī clearly state they were both laid on their

backs, i.e. supine. The head of Sa'īd was separated from the body and moved and the face was missing. The back of the skull seemed to have been struck by a sharp instrument. No textiles or any grave goods were reported, with the exception of an iron ferule found in the debris above the remains. No pathology report seems to have been commissioned.

Whereas 97 of the 198 Safaitic texts at the Cairn of Hānī referred to him by name, only 11 of 500 recorded texts at and around both Cairns A and B referred to Sa'īd. The familial and tribal connections between those who left the inscriptions were also less evident (Harding 1978: 246).

Cairn of KhRJ bnt GhTh (Khārij bint Ghawth).

Two cairns were excavated in 1980 at a location 40 kilometres south-south-west of Pumping Station H4 / ar-Ruwayshid, on the eastern edge of the Ḥarrat ash-Shām lava field (Clark 1981). The location can be identified as being at the northern edge of Qā' Abū al-Ḥuṣayn (cf. Clark 1976: 113 and 116, figs 1 and 3; cf. Clark 1979). The cairns were identified during a 1976 survey for Safaitic inscriptions which recorded 176 texts at this location. These particular cairns, situated *ca.* 50m apart, were chosen for excavation because a nearby inscription referring to a woman implied she might be buried in one of them; the prospect of a female burial and epigraphic evidence was enticing.

Cairn 1 seems to have been built from stones collected right beside it – unlike the Cairn of Hānī (above). 56 inscriptions were discovered around it but none seem to refer to the cairn or its occupants.

Excavation yielded two male burials. Unlike Hānī and Sa'īd, both were disarticulated and disturbed; it appears that the bodies had simply been laid on the desert surface and were then covered with rocks to protect them from animals. Later still, the long bones of both had been gathered and stacked between the two burials. Burial 1 was supine and seemingly oriented north-south. Burial 2 was also supine but no orientation was recorded. Although the cairn is on a ridge, excavation continued in the soil beneath to a depth (calculated from figures on pp. 237, 239) of about 25cm, but no pit or further burial was located. Finds were few and undated.

Cairn 2 was apparently formed by creating a

crude circle of boulders on the ground and heaping stones up outside it. After the burials were placed inside, more stones were heaped on top inside this ring, gradually raising it to form a cairn which still stood 1.6m high at the time of excavation.

Cairn 2 contained the bones of seven individuals, mostly in a state of disarticulation and in highly disturbed stratigraphy. Three were found amongst the heaped stones and are explained as later intrusions. At the heart of the cairn, inside the ring (above), a rough irregular platform of stones was found set on the ground, upon which were found the remains of a young female, an infant and a male aged 40-55 (Burials 1-3). Next to the platform, however, was what seemed to be the principle burial (Burial 4) in a shallow pit, *ca.* 25cm deep, of a female of ‘middle age’ whom the excavators tentatively identified as the woman of the inscription: *KhRJ bnt GhTh*. Michael Macdonald (pers. comm. 20110331) notes: “Given that vocalizations of names in Ancient North Arabian inscriptions are entirely speculative and are usually based on using the vowels in Arab names with the same consonants, one could vocalize (the name) as Khārij bint Ghawth”.

Burial 1 (the young female on the platform) was disarticulated, but lay supine with an apparent north-south orientation. The male (Burial 2) and infant (Burial 3) remains were jumbled. Burial 4, the ‘middle aged’ woman in the shallow pit, was also disarticulated but the excavators thought it was oriented north-west-south-east.

Numerous objects including bronze, iron, beads, glass and shell were discovered, including an ‘eye make-up applicator’, a bracelet and spatulas. Dating largely pointed to the Roman-Byzantine period.

101 inscriptions were found, six on or in Cairn 2 and a dozen that may refer to the cairn or its occupant(s). Three explicitly refer to *KhRJ bnt GhTh*, e.g. CNSIJ 620: “For Khārij daughter of Ghawth she of the tribe of TM, and this is the (her) cairn.”

Clark (1981: 254) suggests the burial of *KhRJ* probably post-dates that of the two adults on the platform.

Cairn of the Mermaids

The most recently explored cairn is this one

situated on Jabal al-Muqalla (Majalla), overlooking the broad expanse of the mudflat known as Qā’ al-Muqalla / Majalla on Wādī Rājil (Fig. 1). The area had previously been surveyed by Betts (1982), but this specific cairn was only explored and published recently (Bikai 2009). The latter recorded 77 stones with 125 inscriptions, but no burials were found. Bikai concluded that the cairn was used as a meeting place and possibly a ‘notice-board’ or gathering place for religious ceremonies. He identified “206 different persons, 85 of them belonging to one family consisting of 13 generations” (Bikai 2009: 226). The largest group of named people are those associated with Basa. Once again tribes (or perhaps just clans or families) are named.

Distinctive is the frequency with which the 37 drawings include nude women with long hair and arms raised at shoulder height and forearms bend upwards – dancers or worshippers rather than the misleading ‘mermaids’ as none of these figures has a fish tail (Table 1).

Discussion

Although only six individual cairns have been excavated – and two of these had no burials – it is apparent that there is no particular pattern to the burials. The shape and size of the cairns vary. For example, that of Hānī has a rectangular chamber; bodies can be oriented differently, but the two at the Cairn of Hānī are closely aligned with each other and lie very nearly east-west. Bodies can be laid out on soil, on benches or pavements, or are buried in small cists. Although it is somewhat reliant on the ability of the environment to preserve artefacts, there is no particular pattern to the number or type of grave goods that are found with the bodies.

Amongst the inscriptions there is a consistency of repeated words *rujum* (“cairn”), *bana* (“built for”) and *wajam* (“grieve / mourn for”). The total number of texts in each case is very considerable, though they may be the outcome of repeated visits over a number of years. Certainly the presence of inscribed stones amongst the boulders of the cairn suggests that we should be cautious. The three intrusive burials encountered by Clark in his Cairn 2 (above) is a reminder that nomads / *bedouin* frequently buried their dead in existing cairns, as well as in the towers of abandoned Roman forts and other such convenient

Table 1: Details of graves and burials excavated in the Jordanian Ḥarrat ash-Shām.

Cairn	Cairn and Chamber	Inscriptions	Grave	Burials	Body position	Orien- tation	Age	Cause of Death	Grave Goods
Hani	Circular and conical mound Rectilinear chamber within secondary partial rectangle	198 (97 naming Hani)	Rock-cut shaft	Male	Both supine with left arm across body to right elbow; face turned south	280°	35-50	Unknown	Extensive - including organic material (textile, leather, wood)
			Grave cut into soil	Female		280°	35-50	Unknown	
Sa'd Cairn A	Circular and conical mound No chamber	500 (11 naming Sa'd)		0					
Sa'd Cairn B	Circular and conical mound Circular chamber within secondary ring Platform		On platform, body surrounded by rocks	1	"Body was laid on its right side, head west"; head removed	250°	Unknown	Back of skull struck by a sharp instrument	Iron ferule
Khārij Cairn 1	Circular and conical mound	56	Laid on desert surface	Male 1	Both supine but disarticulated; long bones later moved	N-S --	Unknown Unknown	Unknown Unknown	Very few
				Male 2					
Khārij Cairn 2	Circular and conical mound Circular chamber Crude platform	101 (three referring to Khārij bint Ghawth)	Irregular platform of stones on the ground	Female 1	Supine; disarticulated Jumbled Jumbled	N-S	'Young' 40-55 --	Unknown Unknown	bronze, iron, beads, glass and shell and included an 'eye make-up applicator', bracelet and spatulas. 'Roman- Byzantine'
				Male Infant					
			Shallow pit	Female 2 (Khārij?)	Disarticulated	NS- EW?	'Middle age'	Unknown	
				3 later (recent?) intrusions					
Mermaids	Circular and conical mound	77 stones with 125 inscriptions		0					

structures (Parker 2006: ch. 23).

The Cairn of Hānī is still hugely significant, not least because of the state of preservation of the two burials and the information on the cairn that allowed for the identification of one of the bodies as Hānī. Added to this is that from many hours flying over this region, the impression gained is that cairns seldom exist that have not been looted, damaged or destroyed. Thus, the chance to excavate one is rare indeed. The architecture of the cairn is also significant: it clearly shows forethought in the shape, position of the burials and orientation of the cairn itself. Furthermore, it is the only one that is rectangular rather than round. This is the only burial where the grave was neither laid on the surface nor dug into the desert soil, but was cut through the soil and the underlying basalt. The rock-cut chamber was then shaped and a flanged rim provided around part to accommodate the covering slabs. This is surely an indicator of the very high status of the deceased. It may also be worth noting that where other cairns had later inclusions and burials, the Cairn of Hānī remained undisturbed.

We may add that the female burial outside the enclosure of the Cairn of Hānī suggests this burial is later, after Hānī had been interred and his cairn had begun to grow from added stones and inscriptions.

The treatment of the bodies is interesting. Despite differences in the way they were encountered by the excavators, it is clear that some formality was present for the original burial, *viz.* platforms, ring of stones and cist-form, cut into the soil or even rock. Outstanding, of course, is the treatment of the two bodies at the Cairn of Hānī: head almost due west, supine, face turned to the south and left arm across body to rest on right arm. Even if the two bodies were interred simultaneously, it suggests that a deliberate pose was selected, which presumably had some significance.

Although a small textile wrap and some leather survive in the female grave at the Cairn of Hānī, there is no trace of clothing as such there or at any of the other cairns discussed here. This may well be simply a matter of unsuitable preservation conditions.

Hānī's hair survived, black and extending 'well down below the neck'. Harding suggests this is unusual, but in the associated rock art at the Cairn of Hānī there are two examples of male figures with long hair (Harding 1953a: #78, #80). There was no hair surviving on Hānī's female companion, nor on any other skeleton excavated. We may note, however, that female figures in the contemporary rock art generally have very obvious long and thick hair, often standing

out thickly to the sides (Harding 1953a: #79; Bikai 2009: figs 5, 7, 10, 11, 15, 21).

Harding observes (1953a: 12) that: “It is surprising to find a naked woman depicted in (Cairn of Hānī) no. 79”. However, the rock art around the Cairn of the Mermaids now includes many examples and it is common elsewhere (Nayeem 2000: 337, figs 339, 344-7, 349-56, 386, 388-90; Macdonald 2012: *passim*). The standing style with raised arms is familiar. There are many parallels in Arabian rock art for both male and female figures with arms upraised in this same position (Macdonald 2012: *passim*; cf. Nayeem 2000: 335-7, figs 339, 344-7, 349-56, 386, 388-90). It is highly unlikely these are goddesses, but whether we are dealing with dancers, ‘cheerleaders’ or even mourners is unclear (Macdonald 2012).

Features of everyday life are present in the inscriptions, most of which have been noted and discussed before. Whether or not Hānī was killed violently, other skulls show traces of violent blows and the inscriptions and rock art attest to regular fighting.

Harding reports that he took particular note of the fact that the surrounding basalt boulders still came right up to the cairn itself; his Palestinian colleague, Hasan Awad, told him that stones are customarily bought from some distance away to be placed on the cairn (Harding 1953a: 8). This is not borne out at the other cairns.

Harding (1953a: 8) mentions that Winnett pointed out that most inscriptions are found on the eastern side of cairns. We may add, too, that at the Cairn of Hānī there was no outer wall on the west side, where the form of the walls suggests an entrance at the south-west corner. Clark’s excavation of his Cairn 1 found an apparent entrance on the south-west side. At the Cairn of Hānī, both bodies had their heads to the west (280°) and the head of Sa‘īd was also to the west (250°). The apparent precision in the orientation of the bodies (280°, 280° and 250°) should not be pressed; ‘west’ is probably the intention, facing the setting sun.

Finally, we should reiterate the points made by Clark (1981: 254):

“In the case of many of the Safaitic inscriptions sites, despite the presence of the texts near a cairn, the absence of any references in these which might relate to a burial at the site would

suggest that not all of the cairns do cover burials, or that not all of the cairns are to be attributed to the Safaitic peoples. Of course it should be remembered that the practice of erecting cairns over the dead was not unique to these people nor to any one period of time. Thus some of the cairns may be earlier and some later than the Safaites, or they may have reused earlier cairns or had their own reused in turn.”

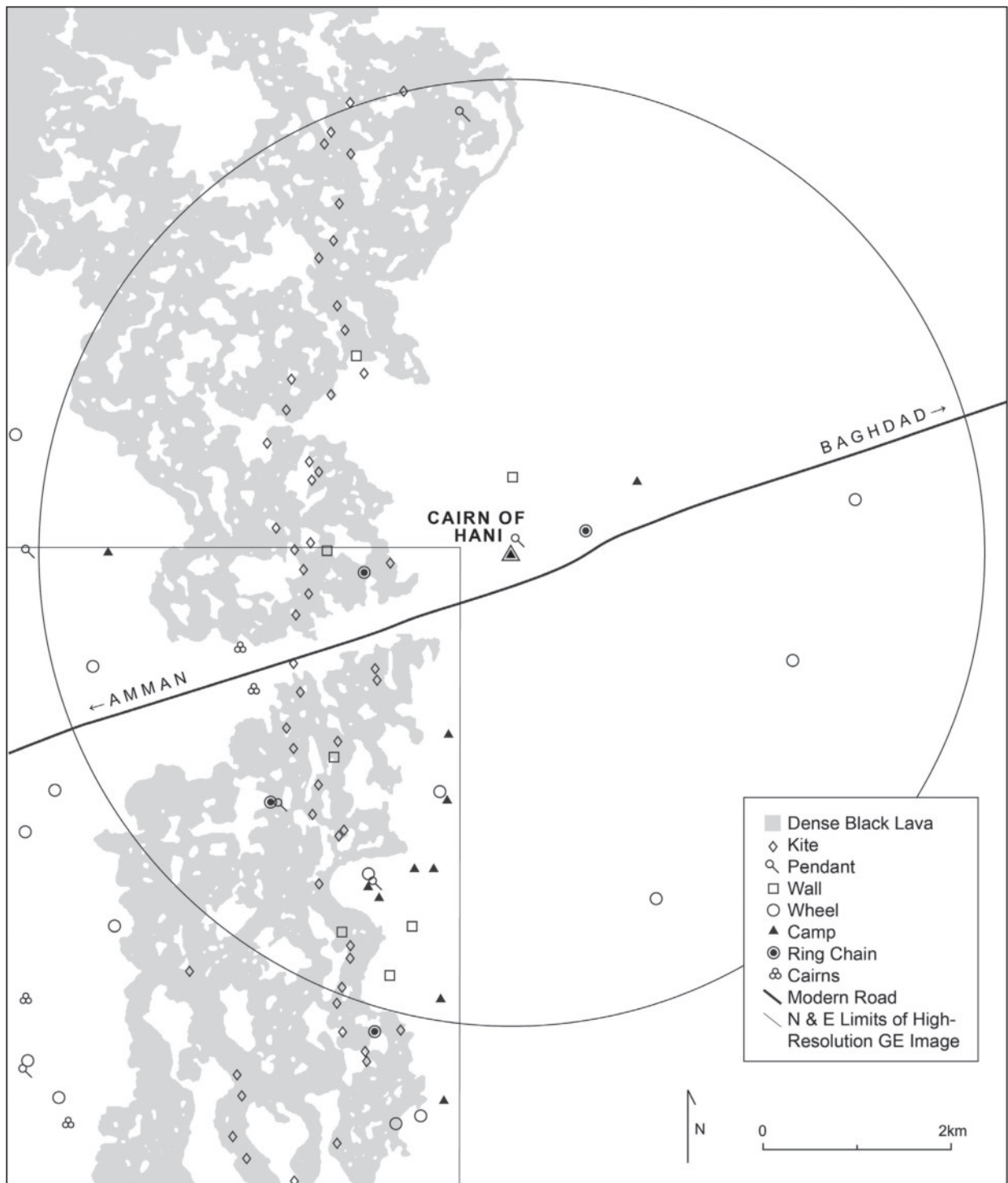
In short, many cairns may never have been for burials and many may belong to periods before or after the relatively brief centuries when inscriptions were being cut. Multiple burial and commemorative practices are probably included in the thousands of cairns in Ḥarrat ash-Shām.

The Context of the Cairn of Hānī

Within a 5km radius of the Cairn of Hānī, three-quarters is generally of too poor quality on Google Earth (GE) to complete a comprehensive survey. Although intensive recent aerial reconnaissance in the immediate vicinity of the cairn is still in progress, it has already revealed a considerable number of structures. 72 ‘sites’ have been identified, mainly on the west side where there is a thick north-south belt of dense lava (**Fig. 7**). They can be divided into seven categories: kites, pendants, ring chain walls, cairn fields, wheels, camps and meandering walls.

First – and entirely in this western half – are 36 (perhaps 38) kites. Indeed, the Cairn of Hānī falls near the centre of four adjacent map sheets (aṣ-Ṣafāwī, al-‘Awsajī, Shubayka and ‘Abid) which collectively have one of the highest concentration of kites in the Jordanian part of Ḥarrat ash-Shām, *viz.* 187, 67, 128, 55 respectively – a total of 437 to date (**Fig. 8**).

All of the kites within the 5km radius are situated in the belt of dense basalt rather than in the thinner cover found more widely. Moreover, the kites in this area are large and highly complex (**Fig. 9**). Many have been built over or rebuilt, with the ghosts of previous walls visible beneath or nearby (**Fig. 10**). Many have massive enclosures (‘heads’) and a relatively unusual feature in this area is to have three or more ‘hides’ side-by-side along one wall. Seen from above one is also struck by the immense tangle of guide walls (‘tails’); each kite seems to have multiple tails and these often intersect both with others of the same kite and its neighbours. As is well

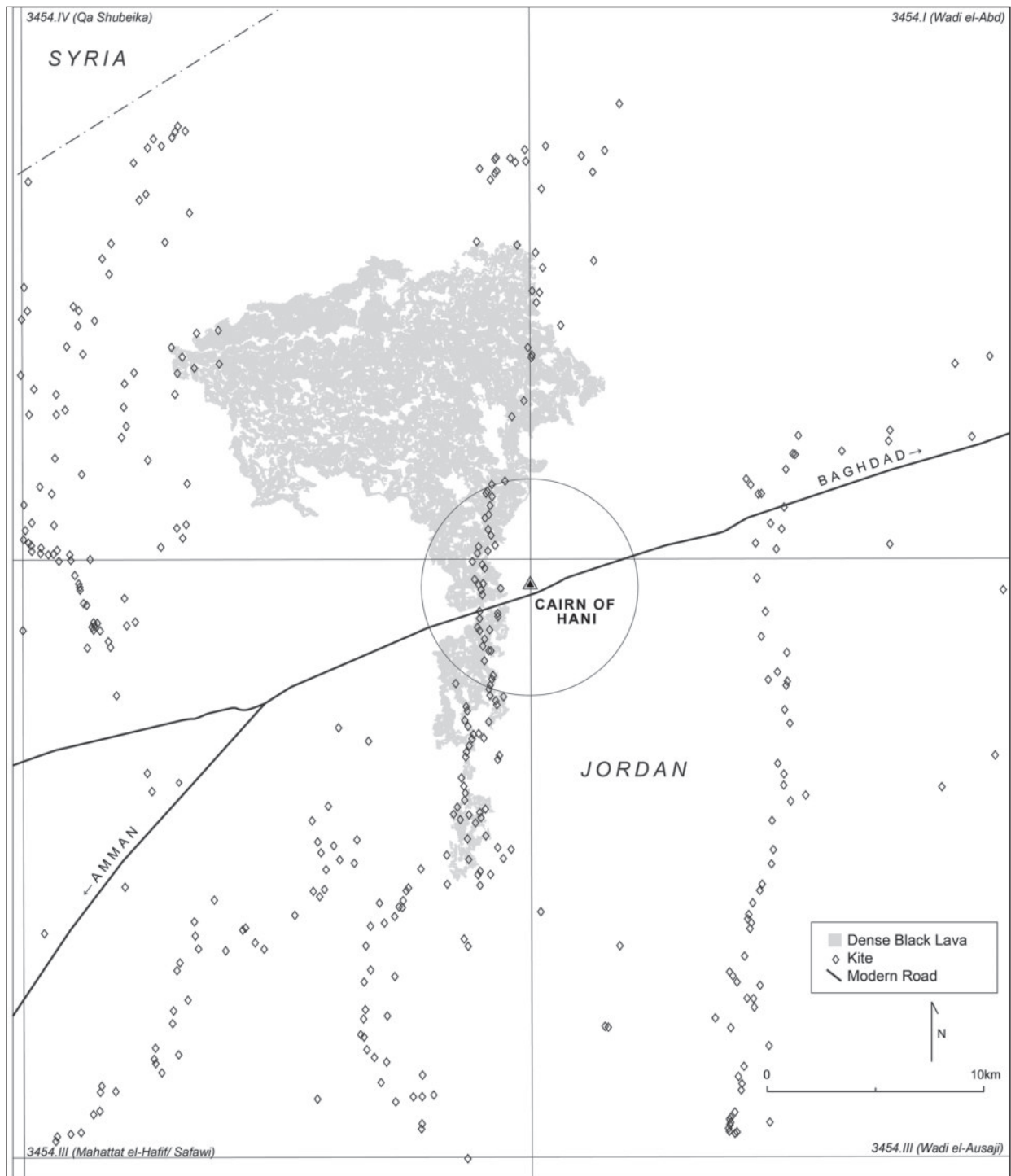


7. Ancient stone structures within a 5 km radius of the Cairn of Hani (drawing Matthew Dalton).

known, the dating of kites is highly problematic. However, a recent survey of evidence seems to confirm a Pre-Pottery Neolithic date for the beginnings of kite use, with ethnographic evidence suggesting that some may have been in use right up until the early 20th century (Helms and Betts

1987: 54-5; Betts 1998: 195-200; Betts and Yagodin 2000: 32-3; cf. Betts 1982: 32; Helms and Betts 1986; Echallier and Braemer 1995: 54; Nadel *et al.* 2010).

Second are the pendants, al-‘Awsajī Pendant 3, located 150m north of the cairn (**Fig. 11a**),



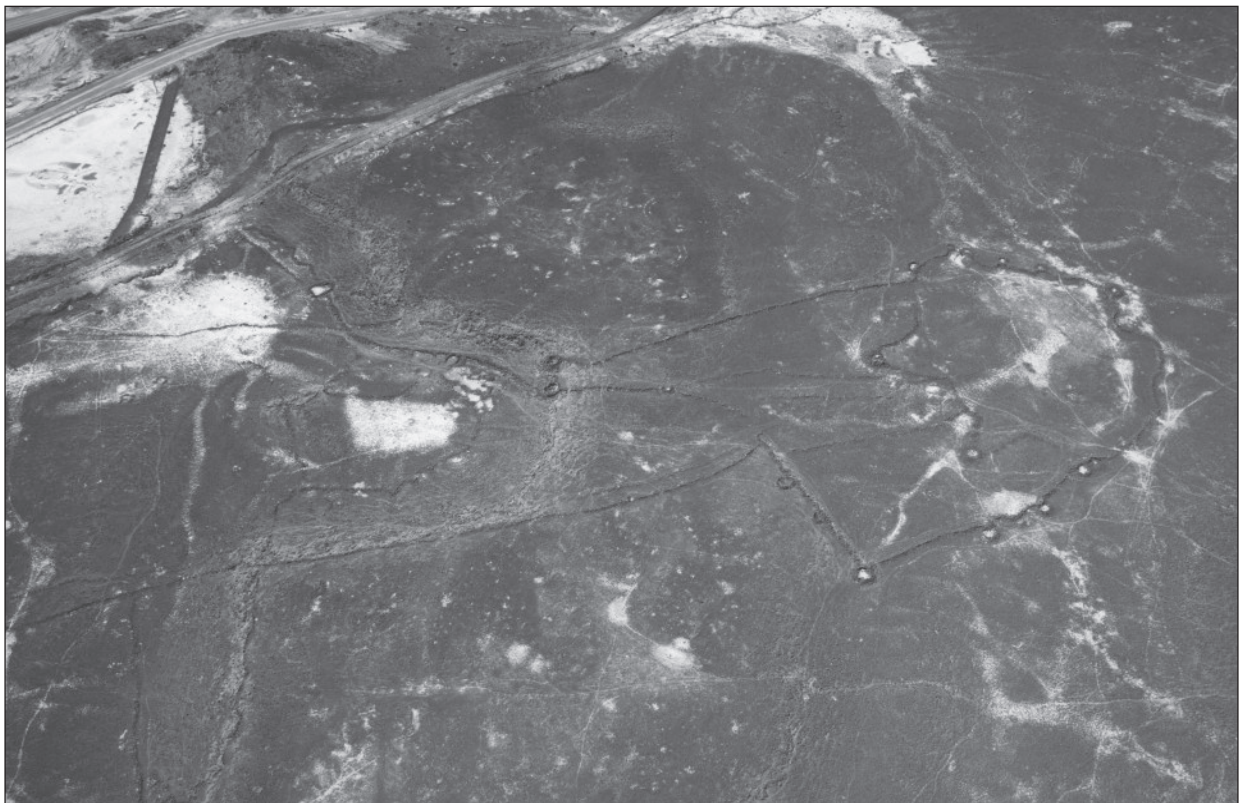
8. Distribution of kites within the 2,600 km² of four adjoining map sheets (*aṣ-Ṣafāwī*, *al-‘Awsajī*, *Shubayka* and *‘Abid*). The circle represents a 5 km radius of the Cairn of Hānī (cf. Fig. 7) (drawing Matthew Dalton).

is relatively small, with eight clearly separate small cairns in a tail leading to the larger ‘head’. Although the Cairn of Hānī does not have a tail, the proximity of a pendant with a tail of small cairns, each presumably commemorating subse-

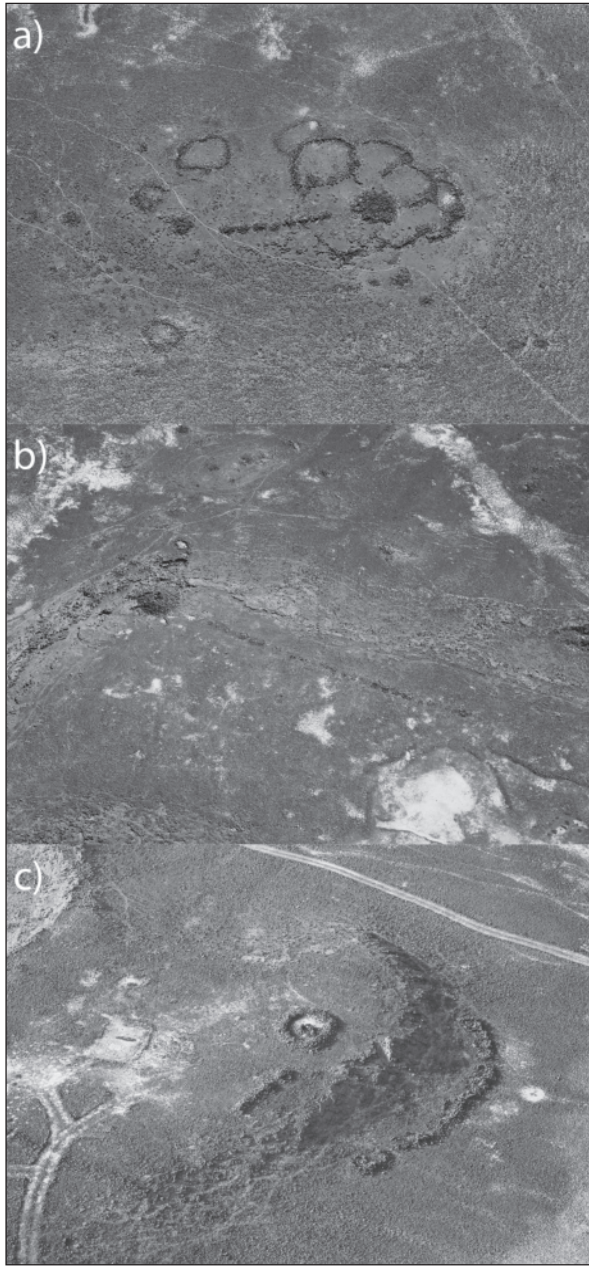
quent visits to the area, is notable. Only three other pendants have been noted within this 5 km radius. Shubayka Pendant 5, *ca.* 5km to the north (Fig. 11b), has a very long tail of small, well-defined cairns and is placed along a promi-



9. *Aş-Şafāwī Kite 118, a highly complex kite 3km south-west of the Cairn of Hānī (APAAME_20100601_DLK-0043).*



10. *Aş-Şafāwī Kite 35, showing traces of earlier kite beneath (APAAME_20090928_RHB-0492).*



11. *Pendants near the Cairn of Hānī: (a) al-‘Awsajī Pendant 3 (APAAME_20090928_DLK-0531C), (b) Shubayka Pendant 5 (APAAME_20090928_RHB-0579C), (c) aṣ-Ṣafāwī Pendant 30 and aṣ-Ṣafāwī Ring Chain 12 (APAAME_20100601_DLK-0041C).*

nent ridge. Aṣ-Ṣafāwī Pendant 30, 35km to the south-west (**Fig. 11c**), is most interesting as a wall encloses the ‘head’ of this shorter pendant, thereby creating a bull’s eye cairn; it also sits on a ridge above a ring chain site (below). Aṣ-Ṣafāwī Pendant 21 lies next to a wheel discussed below (**Fig. 17**).

Ring chain walls are rare, but most of the 31 now recorded by the Aerial Archaeology in Jordan project are found in this same area: 13 of them in the aṣ-Ṣafāwī map area alone and three within 5km radius of the Cairn of Hānī. They consist of small adjoining and often overlapping semi-circular or ring walls. Two sub-types are found within the 5 km radius, which are related in character but hugely different in scale. Aṣ-Ṣafāwī Ring Chain 12 (**Fig. 11c**) has been noted already (above); aṣ-Ṣafāwī Ring Chain 13 (**Fig. 12**) is 1.6km east of the Cairn of Hānī. There is a large (obviously looted) circular cairn at one end and it sits on a high ridge above the rest of the landscape.

Starting just 500m east of the Cairn of Hānī, however, is a site very different in scale though similar in concept. Al-‘Awsajī Ring Chain Wall 1 is unique in scale and complexity (**Fig. 13**). Despite its twists and turns, and the loss of part to the modern highway on the south, it is possible to calculate that the ‘chain’ runs for over 4km (**Fig. 14**). The enclosed area is highly irregular but covers some 490 ha. There is even less evidence with which to date this or any other ring chain wall. As noted above, Ṣafāwī Ring Chain 13 is overlain by a large cairn which might suggest a pre-Roman date. Overlying the present example is what is identified as a nomad camp (**Fig. 13**). A brief visit on the ground noted pottery identified as 4th-6th century AD from photographs (Kehrberg, pers. comm. 20100525). More usefully in terms of possible dating evidence, al-‘Awsajī Ring Chain Wall 1 overlies what appears to be a kite tail. This last point can be supported: *ca.* 21km south-south-east of the Cairn of Hānī, another example – al-‘Awsajī Ring Chain Wall 2 – overlies the head of al-‘Awsajī Kite 21. In short, al-‘Awsajī Ring Chain Wall 1 may date somewhere between the Pre-Pottery Neolithic and the Roman period.

Fourth, there is the huge cairn field – aṣ-Ṣafāwī Cairns 12 – situated 3km west-south-west of the Cairn of Hānī (**Fig. 15**). This cairn field is now in three separate parts, interrupted by the old highway, modern bulldozing and now the new highway. The original undamaged field would have extended over an area of *ca.* 3.75km². Some cairns have certainly been destroyed by the two parallel highways and bulldozing on both sides. Still visible are *ca.* 1,300



12. Aş-Şafāwī Ring Chain 13 (APAAME_20100601_DDB-0074C).

small cairns; the original total may have run to nearly two thousand. These cannot be burial cairns; they are very simple, cone-shaped piles of stones (**Fig. 16**). Although an intensive survey has not been undertaken, there do not seem to be any inscriptions associated with them, nor can they be attributed to any particular period. Their large numbers in close proximity is surely significant. There is a possibility that they are commemorative – lapidation – but the huge number is daunting.

Next are a handful of wheels. Only seven have been noted so far but there are almost certainly more in the unexplored part of the 5km radius around Hānī's Cairn. The most common form in this instance is that of a crude circle with spokes, around the outside of which is a circle of small cairns, *viz.* a wheel with cairn ring. While the distribution of kites is exclusively on the belt

of thick basalt to the west of the Cairn of Hānī, almost all the wheels lie in the east, within the thinner basalt-covered area. The most likely explanation for wheels is that they served a funerary purpose. In the wider area wheels abound, with almost 100 in the aş-Şafāwī area alone.

Nine sites defined as 'camps' lie within the 5km radius. These have been provisionally identified as the seasonal camp sites of nomads and were probably little different in the 20th century compared to 1,000 or 5,000 years ago. al-'Awsajī Camp 1 appears in **Fig. 13**. The distribution pattern of camps is interesting: none lies on the dense basalt belt occupied by the kites, but they are found close by on the thinner basalt surface. As noted above, al-'Awsajī Camp 1 has pottery of the 4th-6th centuries AD. Seasonal camps are implied by some of the inscriptions found around the Cairn of Hānī (Harding 1953a:



13. Al-'Awsajī Chain Wall 1 looking south; al-'Awsajī Camp 1 is left of centre (X) and overlying the tail of a possible kite (APAAME_20100601_SES-0051).

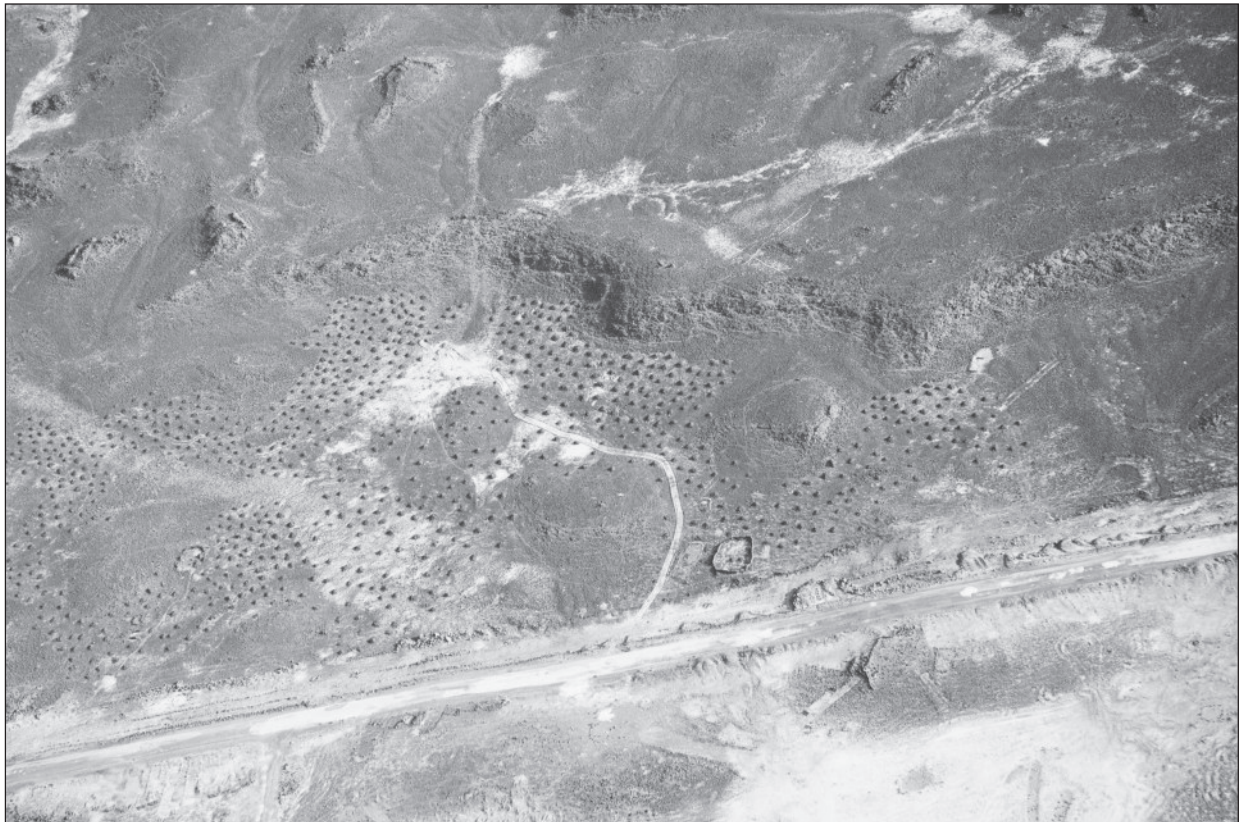


14. Al-'Awsajī Chain Wall 1 (drawing Rebecca Banks).

#102 - “And he kept watch for his brother [who was] following his camels ... And he encamped here the year in which Rabib’el escaped” [cf. Macdonald 1992]).

Finally, there are long sections of meandering wall which, though intersecting with kites, do

not seem to be part of them. Indeed, by cutting across their tails the walls block entry to the trap. There is no obvious explanation for these walls here or anywhere else in Ḥarrat ash-Shām where they are common. Perhaps they can be thought of as landscape art – except that the form is only



15. *As-Şafāwī Cairns 12 (APAAME_20100601_SES-0043).*

visible from above (**Fig. 18**).

Although the Cairn of Hānī can be dated reasonably closely, many of the other structures are much harder to date and most seem older. In short, the Cairn of Hānī was built in a landscape already extensively littered with stone structures, some of which may still have been in use.

Although this section is primarily concerned with the context of the Cairn of Hānī, it is worth noting that aerial photography and Google Earth (**Fig. 19**) show similarly rich contexts for the other sites, especially the Cairn of the Mermaids.

The latter lies on the left bank of the broad Wādī Rājil, marked at that point by lava outcrops, *viz.* Jabal al-Muqalla / Majalla, upon one of which the cairn lies. Within a 5 km radius lie 13 kites, 10 wheels, five pendants and eight walls. In addition to the inscriptions and rock art published by Bikai, a recent visit noted scores of further inscriptions and rock art drawings of people and animals (including two of aurochs).

Conclusion

Despite the richness of the archaeological

landscape in the Jordanian Harrat ash-Shām and the immense numbers of Safaitic inscriptions and items of rock art, relatively little excavation has been undertaken both to investigate the nature of the numerous cairns, to record and interpret the burials, and to attempt to relate them to the inscriptions and art. That is surely a desideratum. The nomads of the region were the people within, on and beyond the porous borders of the Roman Empire. They appear infrequently in literature and in occasional Greek and Latin inscriptions. Later still, they emerge as powerful military allies to be courted and employed. Archaeology offers the opportunity to balance the one-sided and often misleading image of these people, both by investigating what they have to say of themselves in word and art and through the physical remains of the people and their structures.

We may now go further thanks to aerial imagery. The cairns, often unimpressive at ground level, can be put in the context of a larger archaeological landscape. Although much of this is undated, it is often clearly older than the cairns be-



16. *Aş-Şafāwī Cairns 12* (APAAMEG_20090922_DLK-78).

ing discussed here. To the nomads of the Roman period, the traces would have been clear enough, being part of the “altered earth” (Bradley 1993), a feature of their world and the ‘works’ of their distant predecessors. Just how much was already old is unknown. Certainly the kites are likely to be much older, but the drawing alongside inscription #73 (above; Harding 1953a: 30-31 and pl. VI) implies that some kites at least were still being used as animal traps. It is notable, too, that there is a growing corpus of Safaitic rock art from this period that depicts what seem to be kites in use (Betts and Helms 1986; Macdonald 2005b; Van Berg 2004; LeMaitre *et al.* 2008; cf. Bar-Oz 2011). Both pendants and wheels can regularly be seen in this area overlying kites; pendants seem to overlie wheels implying they are younger still. As for the ring chain walls, little can be said beyond noting that they seem to be contemporary with or earlier than the Roman period. They have no obvious practical purpose and may – like the walls that abound in the basalt desert – be thought of as some kind of landscape art. Further mapping and detailed analysis

of both site types across the entire Ḥarrat ash-Shām may help clarify the situation.

Appendix: Locating the Cairns

Cairn of Hānī

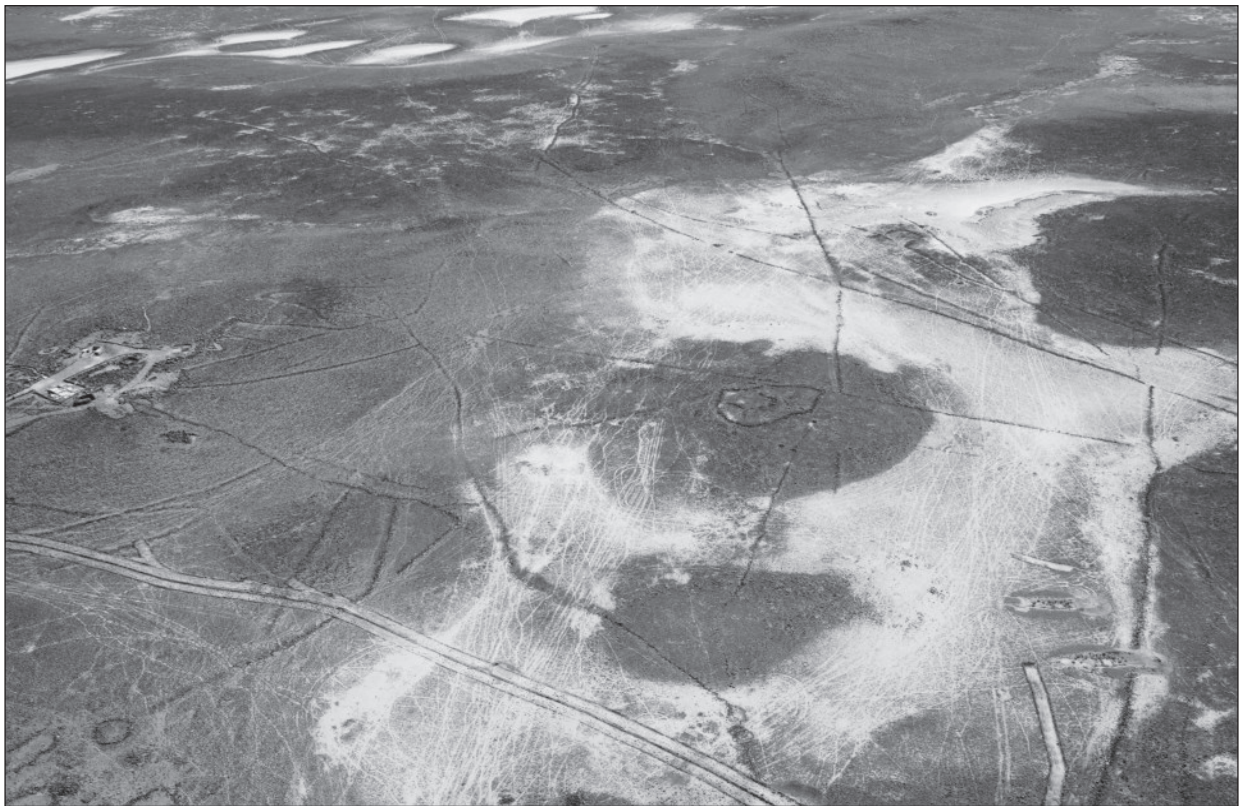
Inevitably, given the availability and reliability of maps in 1950, Harding’s location is difficult to pinpoint. Moreover the landmarks of that period, especially the highway, have changed and confused the issue. Thanks to Michael Macdonald (pers. comm. 20090905) it was possible to refine the search area and, as a result of a flight over the area and a ground visit, locate the cairn at 32°14’17.932” N 37°14’57.535” E; lat. = 32.2383143675 lon. = 37.2493152899; 37S 335056.47m E 3568196.04m N; CR684351 (Maḥaṭṭat al-Ḥafīf [aş-Şafāwī]).

Cairn of Sa‘īd

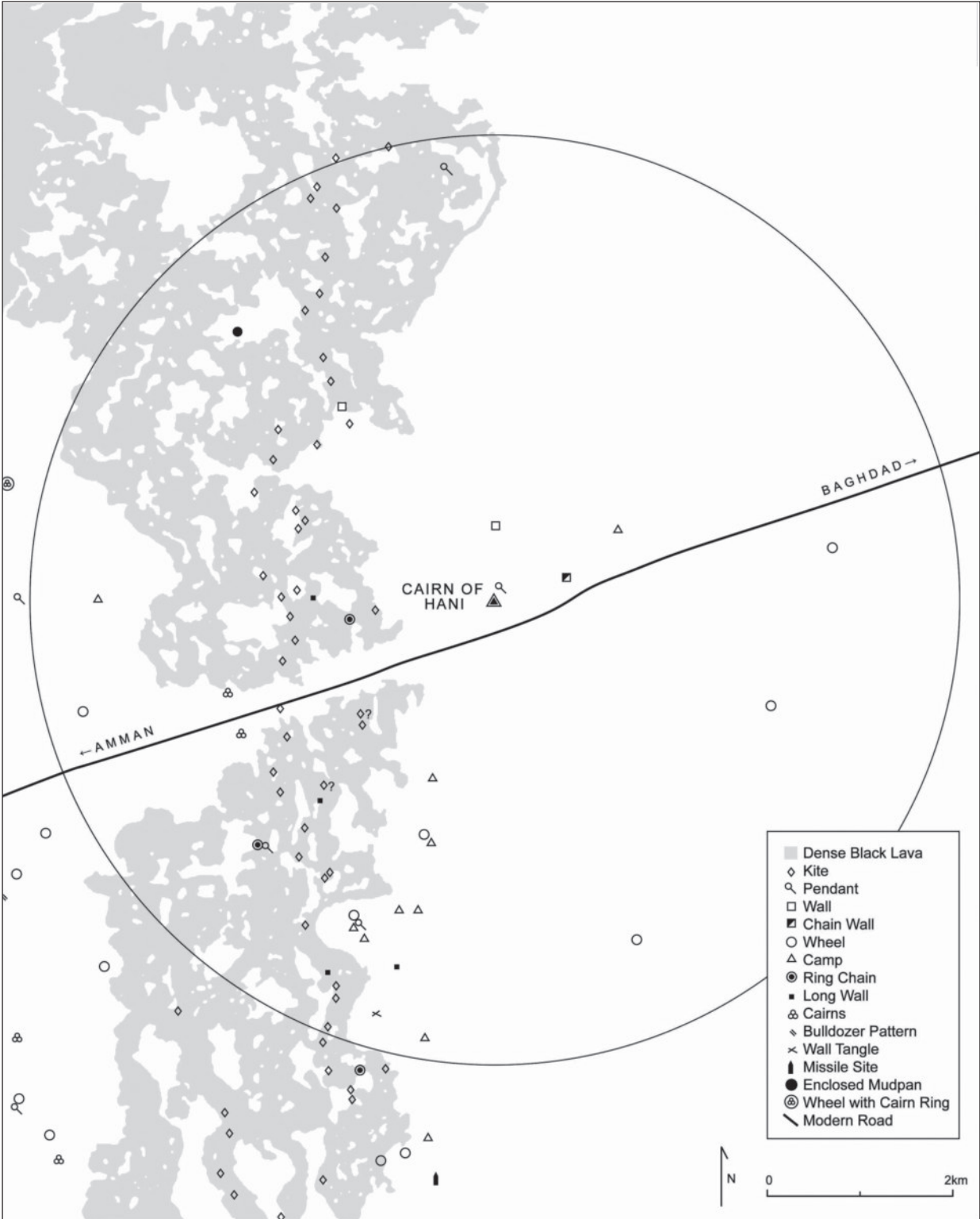
The cairns lie at approximately 32°42’50.00” N 37°49’40.00” E; lat. = 32.7138888889 lon. = 37.8277777778; 37 S 390140.61m E 3620176.78m N; CS202901 (Qaşr Burqu‘). Inferred from Harding’s (1959 n. 2) location:



17. *Aş-Şafāwī* Wheel 70 and *aş-Şafāwī* Pendant 21 (APAAME_20090928_RHB-0425).



18. *Al-'Awsajī* Walls 6; this tangle lies 8km south-south-west of the Cairn of *Hānī* (APAAME_20090928_DLK-0294).



19. Map showing distribution of the principal site types discussed within 5km of the Cairn of Hānī; the area delineated in the south-west quadrant is that of highest resolution on Google Earth (drawing Matthew Dalton).

“Map reference approx. CS 9020 on Damascus Sheet of 1: 500,000 World Map.”

Cairn of KhRJ bint GhTh

Approximate position 32°5'47.74"N 38°5'27.84"E; lat. = 32.0965954093 lon. = 38.0910675911; 37 S 414235.03m E 3551504.03m N; DR515142 (Qā' Abū al-Ḥuṣayn).

Cairn of Mermaids

Approximate position 31°54'16.07" N 37°12'33.14" E; lat. = 31.9044628456 lon. = 37.2092046278; 37 R 330662.39m E 3531245.09m N; CR312316 (Wādī Rājil).

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