

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 1985
SEASON OF EXCAVATION* AT
EL-MAQAŞŞ-‘AQABA

by
Lutfi Khalil

The site was first reported in 1967 by Mr. Tom Raikes, a British engineer with a special interest in archaeology, during the construction work of the Wadi ‘Arabah road. At that time, the western half of the tell was almost totally destroyed. The total depth of the exposed section of the tell is about six meters, it shows occupation debris and ancient cultural artefacts. Different objects were collected, such as worked flints, pottery sherds, sea shells, tools and ornaments made of sea shell. In addition, fragments of copper and slag were found.¹

The site is located about four kilometres northwest of ‘Aqaba and about one kilometre from el-Maqaşş junction towards ‘Aqaba airport. The name Maqaşş comes from the nearby former train-siding in the local dialect.

In April 1985², the site was first visited by the author, accompanied with the M.A. students from the Department of Archaeology — University of Jordan.

A local team; ‘Aish Abu Hilal, Saeda Afaneh, Moḥamad Waheb Ali, Sawsan Fakhiri, Nizar Turshan and the author worked for one month between 22 August-22 September.³

Two squares, A.1 and B.1, each measuring 4x5 meters were excavated in the undisturbed part of the tell. The first square lies in the east sector at the foot of the tell. Meanwhile, the second square was placed on the north side in order to excavate a deep sounding of stratigraphy on the tell (Fig. 1 and Pl. LXXVI,1).

Square A.1

The top soil of the square was a layer of sand, the deposit in the east part of the square was about 1.5 meters deep, the result of either depositing from the nearby Wadi el-Yutum, or the constant wind-blowing activity in the area.

Structures: Beneath the sandy layer, digging revealed a number of walls, forming part of a building made of undressed stones, particularly heavy because of their rich mineral content. The standing walls had rounded corners, and a gap which was closed with loose soil and stone. This gap may have been an entrance of a building (Pl. LXXVI,2). The inside and outside faces of the entrance and parts of the walls were covered in straw-reinforced mud plaster. A small pottery bowl or cup was found near the possible entrance of the building.

In the south-west corner of the square, considerable charcoal fragments, burnt bricks, ash and metallurgical remains were discovered with the layers; this could be interpreted as a possible furnace for copper metallurgy. However, unless further digging occurs, this theory must remain uncertain.

Surfaces and Installations: The digging outside the walls towards the east through soil layers came upon a mud plaster surface, without any trace of painting. There is a pit cut into the surface and lined with the same material of the surface. The function of this installation cannot yet be determined from the available evidence.

* The excavation was sponsored and funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research — University of Jordan, in co-operation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.

1. Raikes, T.D. (ND), *Ancient Sites in the Wadi ‘Araba and Nearby*, Unpublished typescript. Also, Raikes, T.D. (1980), ‘Notes on some

Neolithic and later sites in Wadi Araba and the Dead Sea Valley’, *Levant*, (12), p. 40-60.
2. In May, Dr. J. Hanbury-Tenison also consulted the author on some metallurgical remains collected from the site.
3. A complete study of stratigraphy, architecture, artefacts and their comparative studies will be published in *Dirasat*.

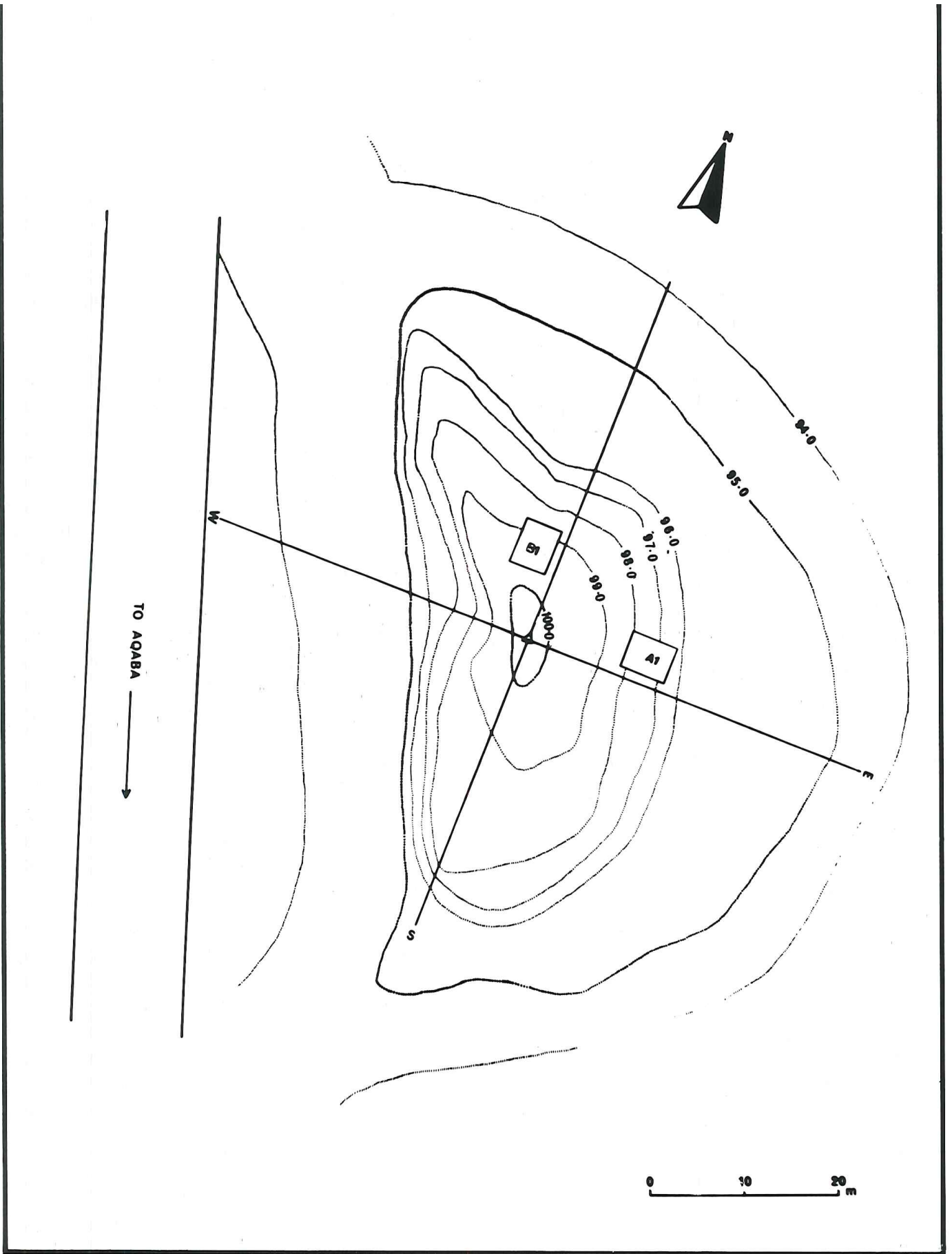


Fig. 1: Contour map of el-Maqass — 'Aqaba, showing the location of Squares A.1 and B.1 of the 1985 excavation.

Square B.1

In the second trench on the summit, on the north part of the tell, excavations revealed a deposit of sand layers, the thickness of which is less than the sand layers in Square A.1.

Structures: Beneath the sand layers, the excavator came down upon part of the remains of a building. The walls joined together forming an L-shape building (Pl. LXXVII,1). The excavated layers inside this building were very rich in the number of pottery sherds and other artefacts. In the corner of the building, a medium sized jar was discovered standing in a small pit. The jar has two pierced lug handles with applied puncturing decoration. The same type of decoration was used on an applied cordon at the point where a short neck joins the body of the vessel. It is handmade and has a flat base (Pl. LXXVII,2).

Installations: Outside the building, to the north, was an installation composed of at least two pits, the insides of the pits were excavated separately until their floors were reached. They were found empty, but their floors and sides were lined with straw-reinforced mud plaster. They were related to domestic purposes rather than industrial; perhaps they were used as shelters.

Objects

The excavated area at el-Maqass is very small, but various artefacts were revealed which could help reconstruct the dating of the site. The pottery is typical Chalcolithic period ware; it is handmade and unevenly fired. There are no traces of either burnishing or painting on the surface. Incising, puncturing or finger-impression are the only decoration shown on the surfaces of either the open-form or closed-form vessels.

Flint artefacts and waste flakes have been found, particularly sickle-blades, blades and tabular scrapers. Stone tools and vessels were discovered such as mace-heads, pestles and querns. The excavation produced many shell-made objects such as beads and unworked shells from the nearby Gulf of Aqaba. There is also evidence of worked bone e.g. pins and awls.

The site also produced evidence of ancient metallurgy in the form of raw copper ore, slag, copper pellets, an ingot-like piece of copper and finished simple shaped copper objects such as awls. Those artefacts indicate that at least secondary metallurgical processing took place at the site.

Conclusion

The tell seems to be a single-period site that was occupied only during the late Chalcolithic period. Unless more excavations occur at el-Maqass, this must remain a preliminary result. Also, a few soundings at the nearby site of Hūjeirat el-Ghuzlan are essential to determine the relationships between both sites.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the General Director of the Department of Antiquities, Dr. A. Hadidi for his help and cooperation. I gratefully acknowledge the help and assistance of the Director and members of the 'Aqaba Regional Authority. Many thanks go to the employees of the 'Aqaba Marine Station, where we were accommodated during the period of the excavation.

Lutfi Khalil
University of Jordan