

THE 2007 SEASON OF THE WĀDĪ ASH-SHUQAYFĀT SURVEY IN THE GREATER WĀDĪ AL-MŪJIB AREA

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Introduction

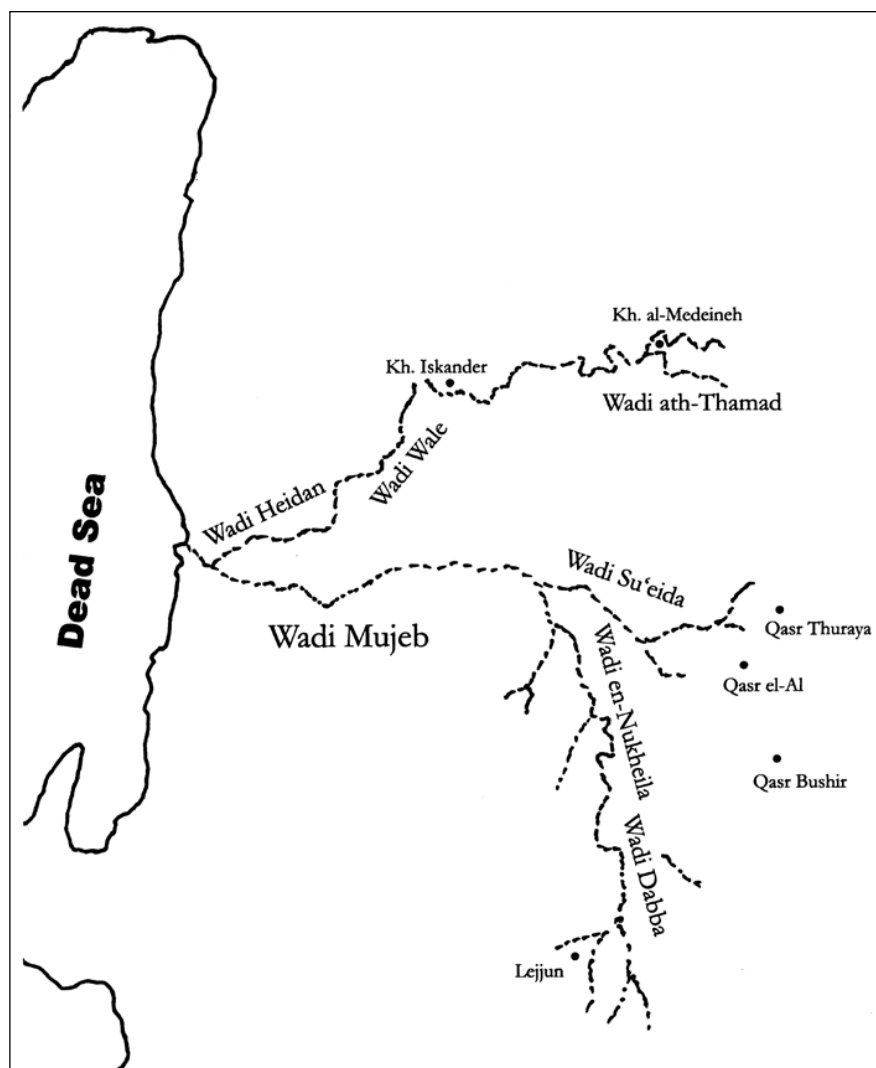
The Central Moabite plateau and the Dhibān plateau are separated by a deep gorge, the Wādī al-Mūjib, which forms an impressive canyon. Wādī al-Mūjib cuts deep into the plateau-landscape, which ranges between 750 to 900m above sea-level. At various points the slopes drop up to 700m into the depth. Wādī al-Mūjib empties into the Dead Sea at ca. 400m below sea-level. During the time of the Moabite King Mesha this wadi was called “Arnon”.

Wādī al-Mūjib has various tributary systems. A major one is the northern one coming from the Dhibān plateau, which unites with the main arm ca. 2.5km east of the Dead Sea. Its lower section is called Wādī Hidān; its central section with its main site Khirbat Iskandar is called Wādī al-Wāla, and its upper segment Wādī ath-Thamad with Khirbat al-Mudayna as one of the major sites in this vicinity. Just east to the point where a modern dam holds back the winter rains, Wādī al-Mūjib bifurcates into an eastern and southern major tributary. The eastern arm, Wādī as-Su‘aydah and Wādī as-Sāliyah, climbs up the eastern plateau, collecting various smaller tributaries in the area of Qaṣr Bashīr, Qaṣr al-‘Āl, and Qaṣr ath-Thurayya. The southern arm is called Wādī an-Nukhaylah, further to the south it is called Wādī ad-Dabba and Wādī al-Lajjūn (see **Fig. 1**). Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt is part of the southern tributaries that empties into Wādī an-Nukhaylah ca. 5km south-east of the modern dam. Near the plateau Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt bifurcates into Wādī Abū al-Kibāsh (southward) and Wādī al-Bālū‘ (westward; see **Fig. 2**).

The first season of the reconnaissance survey of this area was carried out in August 2001. During this campaign, various sites, especially at the mouth of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt were reg-

istered (where Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt empties into Wādī an-Nukhaylah, the southern arm of Wādī al-Mūjib; see Ninow 2002a, 2002b). Among the most important of these sites is a large Early Bronze site (31°24’50.37”N; 35°49’51.50”E), which has been partially destroyed by modern intrusion. Opposite, across Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt on a slope towards the north, is an Early Iron Age site, Khirbat al-Mu‘mmariyya (31°24’46.00”N; 35°49’17.03”E). Khirbat al-Mu‘mmariyya stretches from the summit of Jabal al-Mu‘mmariyya downward along the eastern slopes in form of a huge triangle. The massive city walls formed by a casemate wall with a width of almost 5m are already visible from the distance. One can get a good overview of the site from the northern tip of the Khashm as-Sanīna plateau southeast of Khirbat al-Mu‘mmariyya (see **Fig. 3**). The northern and southern city walls have a length of about 300m.

In the years 2002 to 2005 a couple of small sondages were conducted by a team from Theologische Hochschule Friedensau (Germany) at Khirbat al-Mu‘mmariyya (see Ninow 2004, 2005, 2006). The results show, that Khirbat al-Mu‘mmariyya was occupied exclusively during the Early Iron Age. From this period a number of sites are known at the northern edge of the Central Moabite plateau: Mudayna al-‘Āliyah al-Mūjib (31°25’45.86”N; 35°44’1.77”E), al-Bālū‘a (31°21’35.97”N; 35°46’56.31”E), Mudayna al-Mu‘arrajah (31°19’21.55”N; 35°51’47.33”E) and Mudayna al-‘Āliyah (31°16’55.58”N; 35°52’17.27”E; see **Fig. 4**). Khirbat al-Mu‘mmariyya shares a number of similarities with these other sites: occupation during the early part of the Iron Age, extensive and massive fortification systems, and similar



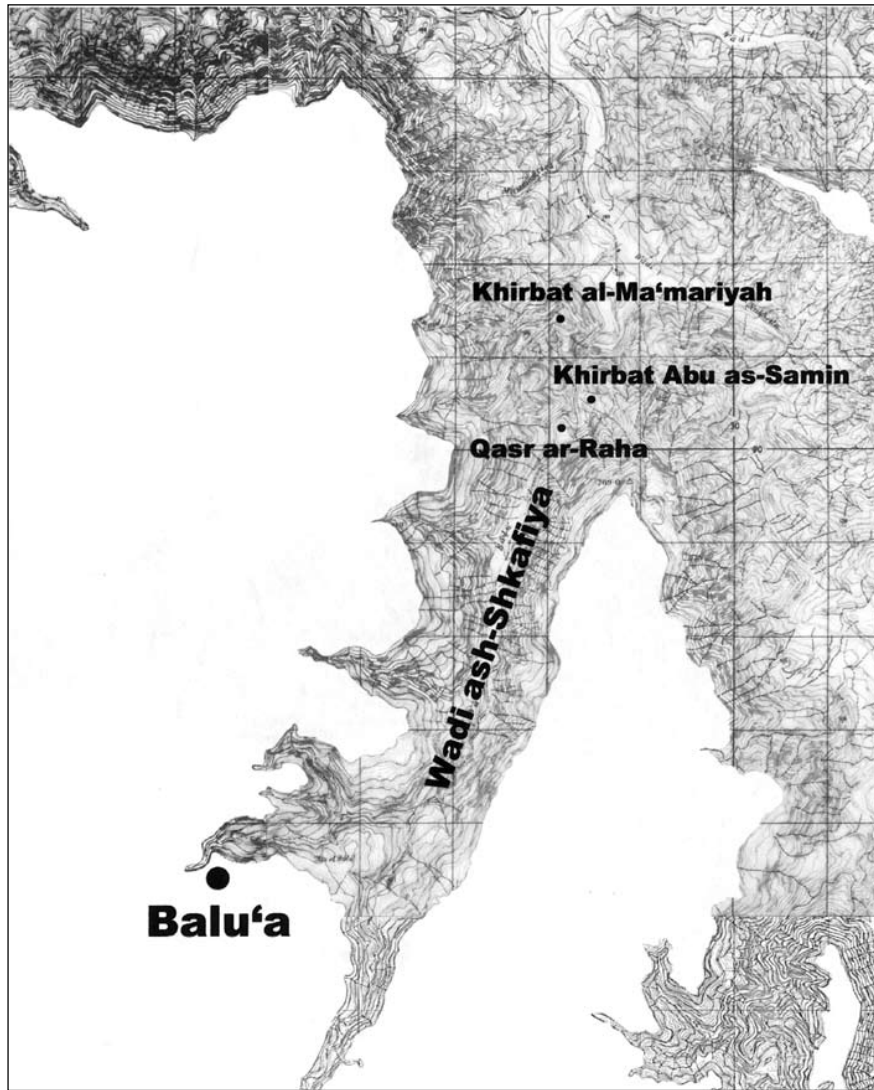
1. Greater Wādī al-Mūjib with its tributaries.

pottery and architecture. All sites are situated in close proximity to the edge of the plateau. Khirbat al-Mu‘mmariyya is the only site that did not command its surroundings from the top/edge of the plateau, but rather controlled the wadi bed itself (i.e., Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt and part of Wādī al-Mūjib). During the 2001 season various other sites could be located: among these are Khirbat Abū as-Samin (31°24’17.00”N; 35°49’28.00”E), a site that had been occupied mainly during the Iron Age and the Nabatean-Roman period; Qasr ar-Raḥa (31°24’8.72”N; 35°49’19.71”E), an impressive fortification that also yielded pottery from the Iron Age into the Nabatean-Roman period.

During the 2007 season of the Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt Survey the area under investigation stretched from the plateau edge where the mod-

ern road coming from al-Karak plunges into the depth of Wādī al-Mūjib, covering the slopes toward the east down into the bed of Wādī an-Nukhaylah, and southward alongside the rim of the plateau edge and its slopes following Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt towards the south (see **Fig. 5**). Due to the very difficult terrain we could not cover every square inch of the area; we investigated those areas that we could reach by foot without mountain gear.

During the 2007 survey season around 150 more sites were discovered and registered, bringing the total site count of both surveys up to almost 200. The survey shows that the wadi was more densely and more frequently occupied than previously thought. The newly registered sites include occupation from the lithic periods, Early Bronze, Iron Age, Roman-Nabataean, and



2. Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt.

Islamic periods. The following list represents a selection that shows the variety of sites that have been registered. The position of each site has been registered by Global Positioning System (GPS).

Catalogue of Sites

Site #53 – Rujum

- Position: N 31 25' 46.6; E 35 49' 00.7
- Elevation: 317m
- Due to the recently constructed dam a new road leading southeastward into Wādī an-Nukhaylah had to be built on a higher elevation. This road passes by a heap of black basalt stones mixed with light brown limestone slabs. Since the pottery discovered can be dated exclusively to the Roman period, it appears as

if the Roman had built a large watch tower at this point to have quick access to the Wādī al-Mūjib bridge that crossed the stream just north of the Rujum.

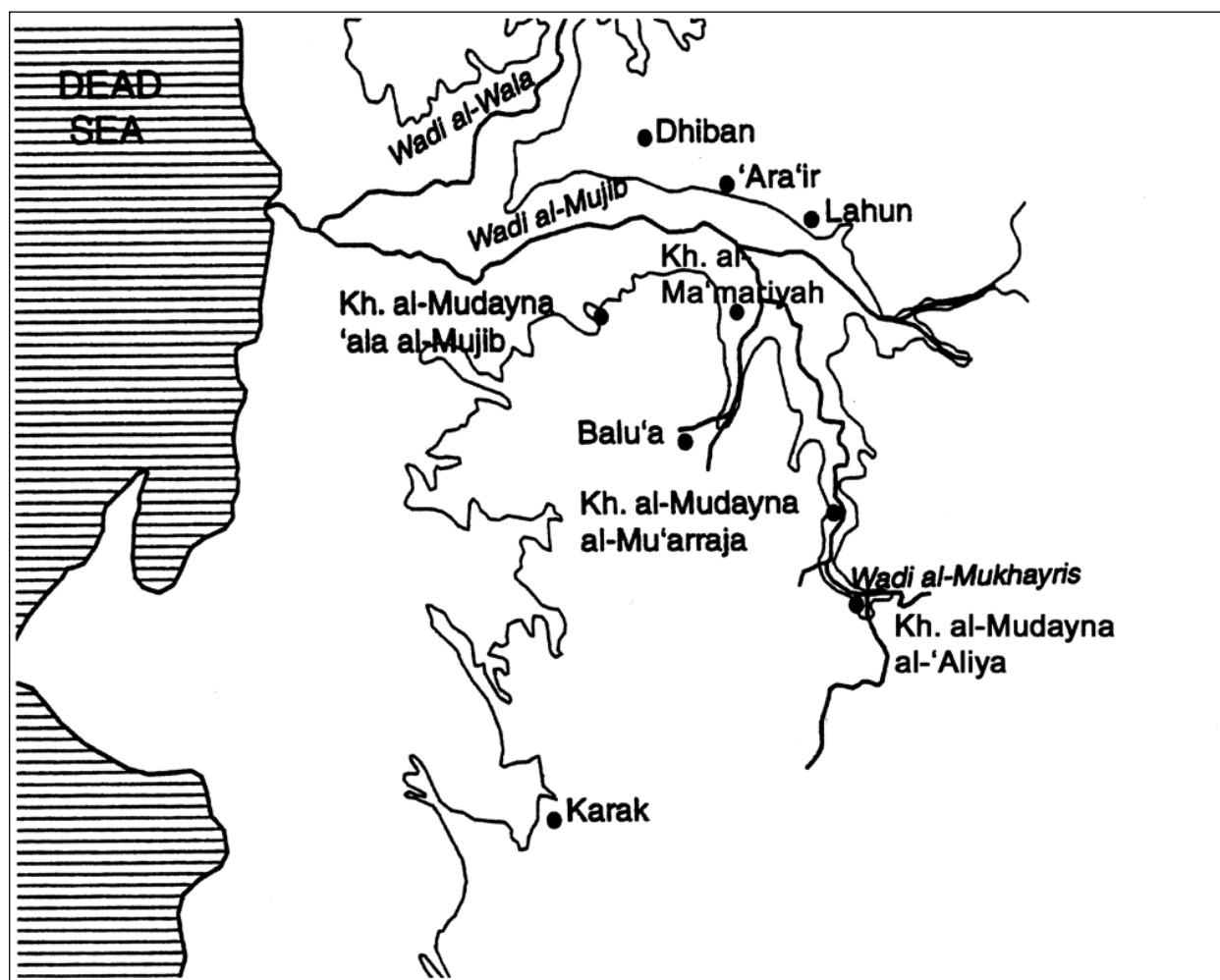
- Pottery: Roman.

Site #54 – Fort

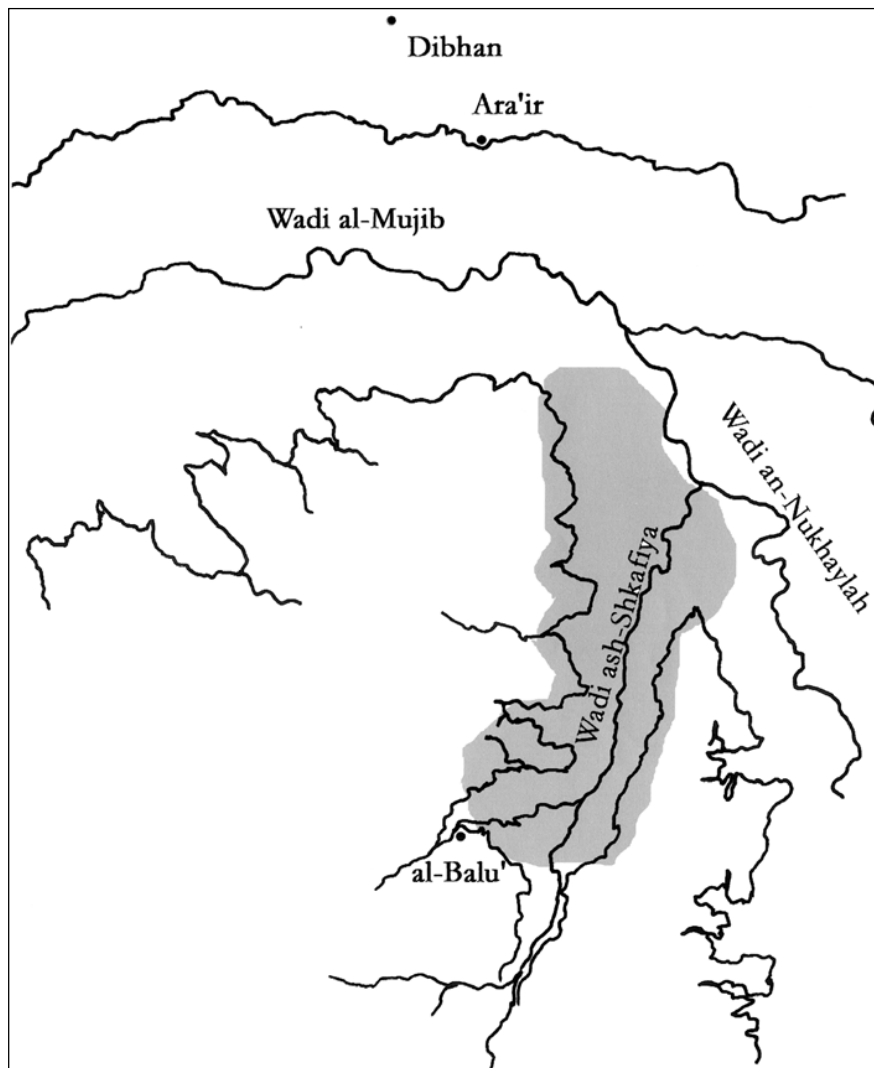
- Position: N 31 25' 46.6; E 35 49' 15.3
- Elevation: 292m
- Just further to the SE of the Rujum across a small wadi there is Roman fort built mainly from basalt stones that seems to be the main fortification in the lower part of Wādī an-Nukhaylah. Its size is ca. 25 x 17m. The architecture of the southern part of the fort is not as clear as the remaining sections. It appears as if there was a tower in the southern part of the



3. Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya.



4. Iron I sites at the northern edge of the Central Moabite plateau.



5. Survey Area 2001 and 2007.

fort (see **Fig. 5**).
- Pottery: Roman.

tions added
- No Pottery.

Site #55 – Ascent

- Position: N 31 25' 59.8; E 35 48' 18.7
- Elevation: 583m
- Just beneath the first major bend of the modern road that turns again to the west, a small track leads down into the wadi in small serpentines. Roman pottery can be found in the vicinity of the track.
- Pottery: Roman.

Site #58 - Cairns

- Position: N 31 26' 00.2; E 35 48' 25.2
- Elevation: 507m
- Two cairns; a larger one and a smaller one; the larger one has a main circle with larger stones; further outside circles with smaller stones.
- No Pottery.

Site #57 - Petroglyphs

- Position: N 31 26' 01.3; E 35 48' 18.9
- Elevation: 566m
- A huge slab covered with petroglyphs; mainly ibexes; possible letters; modern Arabic inscrip-

Site #66 - Khirbat

- Position: N 31 25' 54.2; E 35 48' 34.7
- Elevation: 455m
- Various wall lines made of black basalt stones; the site is situated on a ridge overlooking the wadi; adjacent to the side (further up the slope) a modern Bedouin cemetery is located.

- Pottery: IR I and Roman.

Site #68 - Cairns

- Position: N 31 24' 47.8; E 35 50' 06.8
- Elevation: 288m
- Group of cairns on a narrow shoulder; much erosion; various Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age lithics.
- No Pottery.

Site #70 - Quarry

- Position: N 31 24' 47.0; E 35 50' 02.5
- Elevation: 315m
- This quarry either provides the building material for the cairns nearby or/and for a major Early Bronze site which is just around the corner; possibly in use during the Early Bronze period and/or during the Roman period.
- No Pottery.

Site #73 - Tower

- Position: N 31 24' 51.0; E 35 50' 12.0
- Elevation: 236m
- A guarding station; just above the wadi bed of Wādī an-An-Nukhaylah; 5.3 x 4.7m; a small entrance is located at the southern side of the building; the site is used by modern Bedouins.
- Pottery: Roman; scattered Neolithic flints.

Site #75 – Flint Site

- Position: N 31 24' 51.8; E 35 49' 55.2
- Elevation: 262m
- Slope covered with Neolithic flints.
- No Pottery.

Site #85 – Ascent

- Position: N 31 26' 09.5; E 35 47' 50.7
- Elevation: 790m
- Ascent that reaches the plateau north-east of Upper Maḥaṭat al-Ḥajj the main fort guarding the *Via Nova Traiana* reaching the Central Moabite plateau at this point.
- Pottery: Roman; however, it is not clear whether this ascent had been in use prior to the Roman period.

Site #87 – Site

- Position: N 31 25' 58.5; E 35 48' 04.0
- Elevation: 794m
- At this point the surface is covered with lots of Roman pottery; there are no clear wall lines;

from this point one has a very good overview of Wādī an-Nukhaylah; modern construction work has added possible damage to the site.

- Pottery: Roman.

Site #90 - Khirbat

- Position: N 31 25' 37.7; E 35 48' 14.9
- Elevation: 775m
- This site is located on a lower plateau; various scattered wall lines.
- Pottery: IR, Roman and Early Islamic.

Site #95 - Cairns

- Position: N 31 24' 33.5; E 35 49' 43.5
- Elevation: 362m
- Various cairns along a ridge.
- No Pottery.

Site #96 - Track

- Position: N 31 24' 23.6; E 35 49' 55.2
- Elevation: 472m
- A track that leads up to the tip of the Khashm as-Sanina plateau; partially cut into the rock.
- No Pottery.

Site # 098 – Tower

- Position: N 31 25' 12.4; E 35 48' 14.8
- Elevation: 820m
- Possible tower.
- Pottery: Roman.

Site #100 – Wall Lines

- Position: N 31 25' 07.1; E 35 48' 23.3
- Elevation: 793m
- Wall lines on a lower plateau beneath the edge of the main plateau.
- Pottery: EB and Roman.

Site #110 - Petroglyphs

- Positions: N 31 24' 13.5; E 35 48' 29.1
- Elevation: 706m
- Ibexes and another animal with big horns.
- No Pottery.

Site #112 - Cairns

- Position: N 31 24' 20.3; E 35 48' 54.2
- Elevation: 645m
- No Pottery.

Site #119 - Ascent

- Position: N 31 22' 23.6; E 35 49' 06.6

- Elevation: 784m
- Ascent leading from the upper Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt up onto the Khashm as-Sanīna plateau.
- No Pottery.

Site #134 – Petroglyphs

- Position: N 31 22' 04.2; E 35 48' 01.3
- Elevation: 687m
- Hunting scene.
- No Pottery.

Site #138 – Small Fortress

- Position: N 31 22' 12.0; E 35 47' 53.2
- Elevation: 778m
- Just beneath the edge of the main plateau a small fortress is located; its size is 22 x 11m; the outline of the fort is formed by walls of rubble; there are no structures inside of the fort; the location just beneath the plateau guards the fortress from the winds that blow across the plateau; just below the fortress a rounded area (cleared from the black basalt rubble) served possibly as a shelter for animals.
- Pottery: Roman.

Site #139 - Tower

- Position: N 31 22' 14.0; E 35 47' 52.3
- Elevation: 791m
- Just above the small fortress, right at the edge of the plateau, a round watch tower is located; it appears as if this tower was guarding the fortress; the tower has a diameter of 4.5m with a wall width of 1.0 to 1.2m; its location allowed a good view above the fortress into the wadi, but also a good view to the north across the plateau and toward a major route that crosses to the north.
- Pottery: Roman.

Site #148 - Terraces

- Position: N 31 21' 52.8; E 35 48' 11.9
- Elevation: 610m
- Above the point where Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt bifurcates into Wādī Abū al-Kibāsh and Wādī al-Bālū', traces of wall lines can be seen; they are possible remains of ancient terraces or foundations of a road that led upwards from the wadi bed.
- No Pottery.

Site #160 - Field of Tumuli

- Position: N 31 25' 11.4; E 35 49' 08.6
- Elevation: 379m

Site # 169 - Dam

- Position: N 31 25' 48.8; E 35 49' 06.4
- Elevation: 272m
- Remains of several dams built into one of the small wadi cuts.
- No Pottery.

Site # 180 - Stone Circle

- Position: N 31 25' 56.9; E 35 48' 51.4
- Elevation: 356m
- The diameter of this stone circle is about 10m.
- No Pottery.

Site # 185 - Building

- Position: N 31 25' 57.4; E 35 49' 09.8
- Elevation: 285m
- Remains of a big building; 11 x 18m; possible later addition/extension at the northern side of the building by 5m.
- Pottery: Roman.

Site # 189 - Cairns

- Position: N 31 23' 39.2; E 35 49' 24.9
- Elevation: 723m
- A number of cairns on a lower plateau near the tip of the Khashm as-Sanīna plateau.
- No Pottery.

Summary

Ancient travelers who wanted to cross Wādī al-Mūjib with its various sub-wadi systems from North to South (or vice versa) had to find their way on winding tracks traversing the steep slopes of the wadi, or follow one of the tributary wadis that led upwards until they finally reached the plateau. Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt seems to be a natural approach to the southern Central Moabite plateau since it cuts deep into the plateau and reaches the major site of Khirbat al-Bālū'. The numerous sites and installations of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt — many of them well fortified — indicate that this route through the wadi was frequently in use throughout the centuries. At various points the course of this route can be traced (see **Fig. 6**). From this main route that led through the wadi many smaller tracks branched off and ascended to the edge of the plateau. The



6. Ancient route through Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt.

western edge and slopes of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt seemed to be more frequently and densely occupied than the eastern part (this is due to the geomorphic situation of the eastern slopes; and furthermore, the area west of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt provides better economic possibilities).

The Nabataean and Roman presence in this wadi system is surprisingly well attested. In 64BC the Roman general Pompey had formed the province of Syria thus establishing Roman power and control in this region. However, at this time he had not been able to crush the Nabatean forces; they remained a power to reckon with. In the following decades the Nabatean kings became dependents of the Roman Empire; yet with considerable autonomy. By the time of the annexation of the Nabatean kingdom in 106AD, the area of its domain had become very extensive, covering also the Central Moabite Plateau. When the Roman army became the ruling power in this area, its territory was incorporated into the new province with the name Arabia. In order to maintain an effective administration in the area east of the River Jordan, the Romans

built new roads to connect the various areas of the new province. The most important one that run the length of the province was the *Via Nova Traiana* that had its one end at Bosra near the border with the province of Syria and its other end at Ayla (‘Aqaba). It connected the area east of the Decapolis, Philadelphia (‘Ammān), ancient Moab and Edom. The date of its construction according to various milestones has been established between 111 and 114AD.

While it seems that the Nabateans did not consider alternative routes climbing down into Wādī al-Mūjib while travelling northward (i.e., passing through Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt), the Romans did not use the geomorphic advantage of natural wadi descends but crossed directly Wādī al-Mūjib climbing up the steep slopes, often in narrow serpentines. Even today the point is visible where the *Via Nova Traiana* reaches the Central Moabite Plateau at almost the same point where the modern asphalt road climbs the plateau (at the site of the Upper Maḥaṭat al-Ḥajj).

However, the survey shows that the Romans did not neglect the old access to the Central Moabite Plateau; Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt remained an alternative option for them. Various installations such as watchtowers, forts, tracks, and other architectural remains point to the presence of the Romans in this area and to the fact that they considered this an important area that they had to guard. It appears that various secondary roads extended eastward from the *Via Nova Traiana* connecting this major highway with the Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt approach and further with the Roman road that crosses Wādī an-Nukhaylah and climbs up to the small fort of Maḥaṭat al-Ḥajj (this road probably continues further toward the east, connecting with one of the major fort scattered throughout the eastern desert — possibly Qaṣr Bashīr which is one of the best preserved Roman forts in Jordan). While it is known that there are major roads branching off the *Via Nova Traiana* towards the east, the Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt Survey Project has confirmed that there existed also such roads between the *Via Nova Traiana* extending towards Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt to the east.

Besides the prevalent Roman presence in the survey area, other remains from various periods were attested. While lithic material was scarce-

ly scattered throughout the slopes, the edge of the plateau (especially the plateau east of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt) yielded numerous stone tools. Several sites with substantial Early Bronze occupation were added to the list of EB-sites in this area.

With the completion of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt Survey Project 2007 a small but important part of the greater Wādī al-Mūjib area has been archaeologically surveyed. While one of the most prominent sites within the survey area, the Early Iron age fortification of Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya (31°24'46.19"N; 35°49'16.44"O) has been studied during the past years, several other sites could be recommend for further study: Site #52 (31°24'49.86"N; 35°49'52.31"O), a mid-size EB site overlooking the mouth of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt; Qaşr ar-Raḥa (31°24'8.53"N; 35°49'19.42"O), a fort that has a long occupational history; or Khirbat Abū as-Samin (31°24'16.57"N; 35°49'28.38"O) with mainly Iron Age and Nabatean/Roman occupation.

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