

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE WĀDĪ ASH-SHKĀFIYA SURVEY 2001

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Introduction

The area of the central Moabite plateau (Arḍ al-Karak (أرض الكرك)) has seen a number of archaeological reconnaissance-surveys during the past decades. Among the most comprehensive was the "Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau" in 1978-1982 under the direction of J. Maxwell Miller and Jack M. Pinkerton (see Kautz 1981; Miller 1991). This survey focused on the plateau area from the southern rim of Wādī al-Mūjib (وادي الموجب) to the northern rim of Wādī al-Ḥasā (وادي الحسا), from the edge of the Dead Sea escarpment in the west to Wādī an-Nukhaylah (وادي النخيلة) in the eastern desert. While concentrating on the plateau itself, Miller did not investigate the western slopes (except for a short visit to Wādī Ibn Ḥammād (وادي ابن حماد)). In 1983 Udo Worschech began a systematic survey of Wādī Ibn Ḥammād and expanded the scope of his investigations to the entire region of the escarpment between Wādī al-Mūjib and the al-Karak region (Worschech 1985; see also 1990). This led him to begin excavations at Khirbat al-Bālū' (خربة (البالوع)) in 1986 (see Worschech, Rosenthal and Zayadine 1986; Worschech 1989; 1992; Worschech and Ninow 1992; 1999). While all these investigations have been focusing on the Moabite plateau or the slopes to the Dead Sea, the Wādī al-Mūjib area has been left out.

Recently, an archaeological survey has been conducted in the area where the bridge along the King's Highway crosses the wadi. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation is building a new dam at this point. Since the planned reservoir will cover an estimated area of six square kilometers, it became necessary to assess all the archaeological sites which will be destroyed due to the dam construction (Abu Shmais and Waheeb 1999). Except for this survey no other archaeological investigation of this area has been conducted in recent years.

Ancient travelers who wanted to cross Wādī al-Mūjib with its various sub-wadi systems on the way from the northern Dhībān plateau (ذيبان) to the central Moabite plateau (or vice versa) had to find their way either on narrow paths winding up and down the deep slopes of the wadi or follow one of the tributary wadis that led upwards until they fi-

nally reached the plateau. If one considers the geomorphic picture of the Wādī al-Mūjib system and its tributaries it becomes clear that one of the major routes reaching the Moabite plateau is leading through Wādī ash-Shkāfiya (وادي الشكافية/ إشكافية). Near the plateau Wādī ash-Shkāfiya bifurcates into Wādī Abū al-Kibāsh (وادي أبو الكباش), southward and Wādī al-Bālū' (وادي البالوع), westward. Adding to the importance of this tributary wadi is the fact that this possible ascent is guarded by the major Iron Age site of Khirbat al-Bālū' on the edge of the Moabite plateau (see Fig. 1). Since previous surveys have bypassed these wadis, this research has been investigating the archaeological remains of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya.

This first season of the reconnaissance survey was carried out in August 2001. The project was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Bonn, Germany) and the Theologische Hochschule Friedensau (Friedensau, Germany). The members of the survey team were Bernina Ninow, Wernfried Rieckmann, and Friedbert Ninow. The representative of the Department of Antiquities was Ashraf Nayel al-Rawashdeh of Mu'ta.

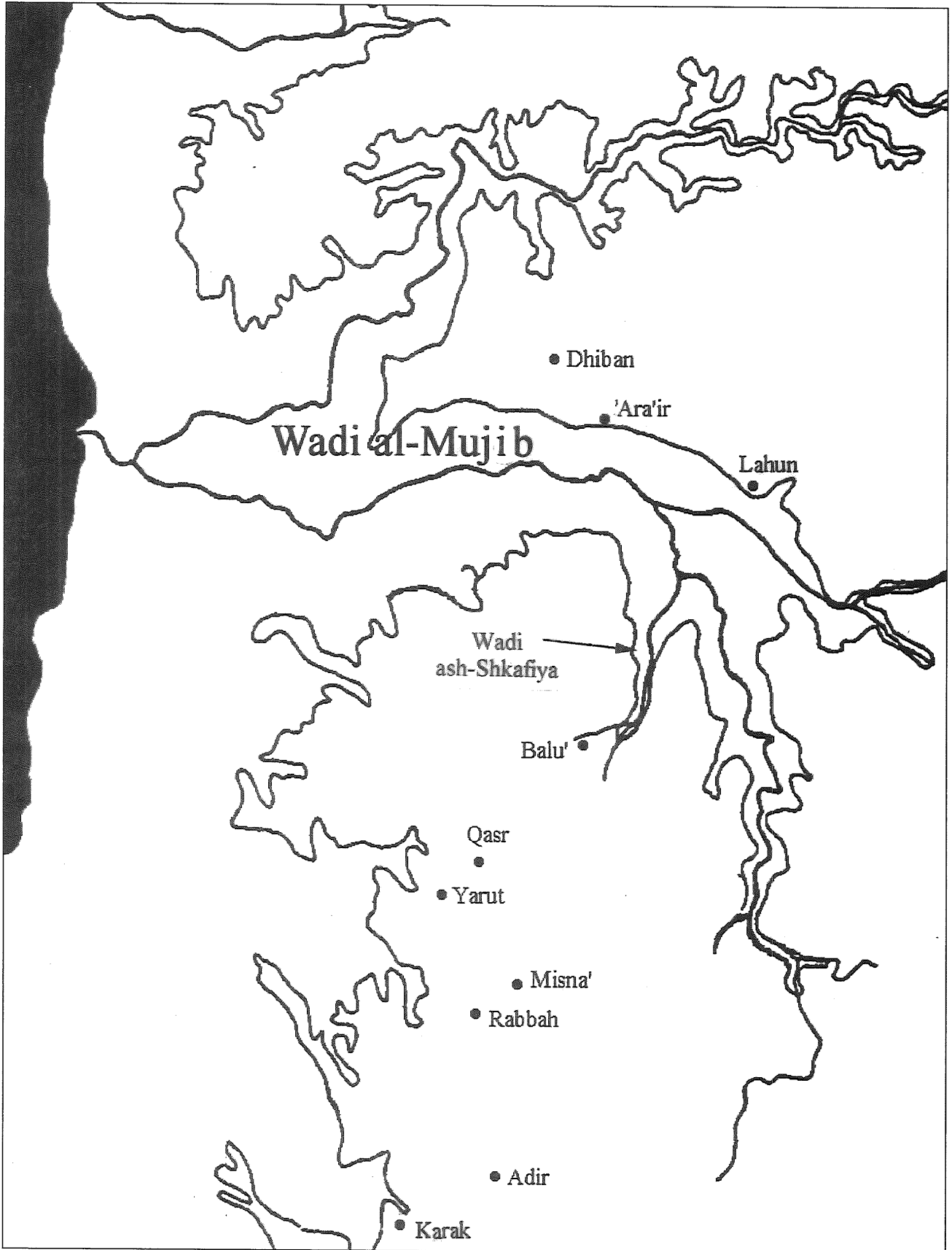
Catalogue of Sites

During the 2001 survey, more than 50 different sites were located. Besides a couple of larger sites a great number of smaller sites (cairns, wall lines, water reservoir, etc.) were discovered. The survey started out in the area where Wādī ash-Shkāfiya enters into Wādī al-Mūjib and followed Wādī ash-Shkāfiya in a southerly direction towards Khirbat al-Bālū'. The following catalogue of sites is a selection and represents the various kinds of sites that were discovered. The position of each site has been registered by Global Positioning System (GPS).

Site #1 - Khirbah

Position: N 31 24' 55.7; E 35 50' 01.9

Due to heavy agricultural activity at the mouth of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya, an ancient site has been bulldozed in order to create a field. In the slopes of this newly created field one finds remains of walls and large quantities of pottery fragments. A modern



1. Wādī al-Mūjib with Wādī ash-Shkāfiya.

rough road that leads eastward passes the site.
Pottery: Iron.

Site #3 - Khirbah

Position: N 31 24' 49.0; E 35 49' 28.0

The agricultural areas — which the local farmers call “al-Ma‘mariyah المعمرية” — stretch from the actual bed of Wādī al-Mūjib southward up to the slopes that are cut by Wādī ash-Shkāfiya. Behind a water channel that forms the limit of the plantation an ancient site stretches out on an area of 300 x 50m. No name could be associated with this site. It is covered with several wall lines; some remains have the character of fortifications. This site probably represents a larger Roman fortification, which guarded the entrance of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya. It is, however, not comparable to the Roman fort at al-Lajjūn (اللاجون).

Pottery: mostly Roman, some Iron sherds.

Site #4 - Cairn

Position: N 31 24' 56.9; E 35 49' 21.4

Probable tomb installation in the form of three stone circles partly consisting of massive blocks. A large stone stands in the center of the inner circle. No pottery.

Site #8 - Dolmen

Position: N 31 24' 53.0; E 35 49' 17.1

The remains of a dolmen that is no longer intact. Due to possible earthquake activity the headstone of the dolmen has collapsed.

No pottery.

Site #9 - Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah (خربة المعمرية)

Position: N 31 24' 41-46; E 35 49' 24-17

The site of Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah stretches from the summit plateau of Jabal al-Ma‘mariyah (جبل المعمرية) downward along the eastern slopes. The massive city walls are already visible from a distance. The site has the shape of a gigantic triangle. The top of the triangle forms a citadel (Position: N 31 24' 46.8; E 35 49' 16.0). The city wall consists of a massive casemate wall with a width of almost 5m. The outer wall alone has a width of 1.2m. Whereas the southern city wall is still almost complete, some parts of the northern wall — especially in the lower part of the city — have disappeared. Both sides of the city wall have a length of about 300m. While the citadel and most parts of the upper city are situated on a slightly sloping plateau, the remaining area of the city spreads out over a steep descent. Upper city and lower city are separated by special fortifications. At both sides of the outer city walls semicircular installations extend at

that point. There was probably a clear line within the city that separated both parts of the city. The eastern city wall has almost completely disappeared due to erosion. The difference in elevation between the eastern city wall at the bottom of the city and the citadel on top of the plateau amounts to ca. 80m. The citadel dominates the highest point of Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah. It has a width of ca. 14m and a length of ca. 24m. Massive walls of up to 1.6m underline the defensive character of this fortification. The northern casemate is integrated into the citadel and runs parallel to it. The entrance appears to be at the northern side in the area of the casemate wall and leads into a spacious courtyard. There are a couple of smaller rooms in the western part of the citadel. The pottery shows that Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah was mainly occupied during the Iron Age. Due to the massive fortifications and the size of the site, Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah is one of the most important Iron Age sites between Wādī al-Mūjib and Wādī al-Ḥasā. At the point where the northern wall meets the eastern wall the remains of a massive tower could be located. In this area predominantly Roman pottery was found. The approach to Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah leads through a western pathway winding its way up the slopes of Jabal al-Ma‘mariyah, surrounding the site and leading up to a saddle from which a small path leads to a gate situated in the southern city wall near the citadel. A second ascent approaches the city from the east leading through the steep slope directly beneath Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah.

Pottery: some Late Bronze, Iron, Roman, some Islamic.

Site #11 - Tower

Position: N 31 24' 36.7; E 35 49' 18.3

A passage leads from Khirbat al-Ma‘mariyah in a southerly direction down to Wādī ash-Shkāfiya. On a small elevation overlooking the wadi are the remains of a round tower. The inner room has a diameter of 5.5m; the walls have a thickness of 1.2m. Just a few pieces of pottery could be found. This fortification probably guarded the access to the water of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya or a well nearby.

Pottery: Iron.

Site #13 - Rock Drawings

Position: N 31 24' 14.8; E 35 50' 11.3

Thamudic rock drawings, predominantly ibex; some Thamudic letters.

No pottery.

Site #14 - Cairn + Tower

Position: N 31 24' 28.5; E 35 49' 33.6

Two stone circles formed by massive blocks. The diameter of the outer circle is ca. 7m. The inner space of the circles is separated by a small wall of huge stones forming two inner rooms. At one side of the cairn a large wall extends. It appears that one of the inner rooms had been reused as a tomb during the Iron Age. This tomb has been opened recently. Various Iron Age pottery fragments and bone fragments are scattered throughout the immediate vicinity of this installation. A short distance further down the slope are the remains of a tower (3.2 x 4.0m) with scattered Iron Age pottery. The tower is situated just opposite of Khirbat al-Ma'mariyah.

Pottery: Iron.

Site #16 - Tower

Position: N 31 24' 33.2; E 35 49' 28.0

Remains of a massive tower (5.0 x 5.0m); mostly Nabataean-Roman pottery with some Iron Age (could have originated from a possible tomb underneath the tower). Nearby are the remains of a small water collection basin (2.0 x 1.5m) and a couple of water channels leading to this basin.

Pottery: some Iron; Nabataean-Roman.

Site #17 - Tower

Position: N 31 24' 27.5; E 35 49' 27.5

Remains of a Roman watch-tower.

Pottery: Nabataean-Roman.

Site #18 - Dam

Position: N 31 24' 26.6; E 35 49' 28.3

Remains of a possible dam that closed off a small wadi on the eastern slope of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya. The wall line of the dam can be traced over 25m. This water collection system is probably connected with Site #20 (see below).

No pottery.

Site #20 - Khirbat Abū as-Samin (خربة أبو السمن)

Position: N 31 24' 17.0; E 35 49' 28.0

Remains of a huge Nabataean-Roman fort. The fort is surrounded by a fortified wall on all sides (35 x 35m). Within the fort several wall lines and structures can be identified. Most of the walls consist of black basalt stones. Among the predominantly Nabataean-Roman pottery, some Iron Age sherds were found (among those we found a piece of painted Moabite ware). The fort is situated almost at the bottom of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya. Nearby is a well that springs up directly within the actual river bed of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya.

Pottery: Iron, Nabataean-Roman.

Site #24 - Qaṣr ar-Rahā (قصر الرها)

Position: N 31 24' 08.7; E 35 49' 19.3

At this point Wādī ash-Shkāfiya forms a natural loop creating an almost circular plain in the middle of the wadi. The plain is used today for agricultural purposes. At the northern edge of this loop rise the remains of a *qaṣr* with massive walls. The structure reminds one of the *qaṣr* at Khirbat al-Bālū'. The size of the *qaṣr* is 16 x 23m. At some places the walls reach up to 2m, built of massive basalt blocks. Various rooms and wall lines can be identified in the interior of the *qaṣr*. It appears as if this fortification had been surrounded by a protective wall. During the course of various settlement periods the *qaṣr* had experienced various building and rebuilding phases.

Pottery: Iron, Nabataean-Roman.

Site #25 - Fortification

Position: N 31 23' 11.9; E 35 48' 20.5

At the edge of the al-Karak plateau, where a modern rough road leads down to Wādī ash-Shkāfiya, a fortification is found that guarded a passage from the wadi up to the plateau. This ascent is still clearly visible from the edge of the plateau winding down through a field of basalt. Further down the slope the passage disappears and is no longer traceable.

Pottery: Iron, Roman.

Site #28 - Inscription

Position: N 31 22' 53.4; E 35 48' 27.6

Two lines of a Thamudic inscription.

No pottery.

Site #29 - Two Mills

Position: First mill N 31 23' 48.9; E 35 49' 05.4.

Second mill N 31 23' 52.8; E 35 49' 05.9

A little further to the south of Qaṣr ar-Rahā, another area of cultivated land stretches out in the bottom of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya. Among vineyards and fig trees remains of two ancient mills are located. They are of a similar type of mill to that already known from the mill remains in the Wādī al-Mūjib area. The ones in Wādī ash-Shkāfiya, however, are in a much better condition.

No pottery.

Site #32 - Cairns

Position: N 31 22' 34.2; E 35 48' 41.3

No pottery.

Site #34 - Tower + Cairn

Position: N 31 22' 33.2; E 35 48' 34.9

Roman watchtower (3.0 x 3.0m.) that is situated at

the edge of the plateau. It guards another passage leading from the wadi up to the plateau. This ascent is also traceable over a good distance. Roman Pottery can be found in the immediate context of the watchtower and the ascent.

Pottery: Roman.

Site #36 - Field of Cairns

Position: N 31 22' 27.7; E 35 48' 12.3

At the edge of the plateau there is a huge area covered with cairns. These cairns are made of black basalt stones. Some of the cairns have a megalithic character. There are about 50 cairns, possibly far more.

No pottery.

Site #37 - Fortification with Passageway

Position: N 31 22' 18.6; E 35 48' 39.8

At this point the wadi drops due to a natural basalt barrier. At the northwestern edge of this barrier the remains of a fortification and a passageway that leads further down into the wadi are visible. No pottery that can be clearly identified could be found.

Pottery: Iron?

Site #38 - Khirbat al-Mishshadah (خربة المشّده)

Position: N 31 22' 08.9; E 35 48' 33.0

Further to the south of the mills the remains of a fort can be identified. It is situated at the edge of a geological ridge that was formed by the wadi. Since the fort was built right at the edge, parts of the fort have been eroded away by running water. The remaining structures run parallel to the edge of the ridge.

Pottery: Iron, Nabataean-Roman.

Site #39 - Fortification

Position: N 31 21' 54.2; E 35 48' 24.1

In the area where Wādī al-Bālū' and Wādī Abū al-Kibāsh meet to form Wādī ash-Shkāfiya, a Roman fortification can be found. From here one has a good view at the area between Wādī al-Bālū' and Wādī Abū al-Kibāsh that leads up to Khirbat al-Bālū'. Thus this fortification occupies an important strategic position in regard to the main ascent up to the Moabite plateau.

Pottery: Nabataean-Roman.

Site #40 - Rock Drawing

Position: N 31 21' 37.4; E 35 47' 54.2

In the lower part of the area between Wādī al-Bālū' and Wādī Abū al-Kibāsh there are a number of Thamudic rock drawings. The predominant motifs are ibexes, but there are also lizards and oxen.

No pottery.

Site #41 - Inscription

Position: N 31 21' 46.6; E 35 48' 01.1

One line of a Thamudic inscription; various ibexes.

No pottery.

Site #42 - Rock Drawing

Position: N 31 21' 46.7; E 35 48' 02.7

Thamudic rock drawing; a bird, snake and human figure.

No pottery.

Site #43 - Fort

Position: N 31 23' 58.7; E 35 49' 50.8

East of Wādī ash-Shkāfiya and Wādī Abū al-Kibāsh a plateau stretches out which is called Khashm as-Sanīna (خشم السنينه). From the northern tip of this plateau an old passage leads down into Wādī al-Mūjib which is called Darb as-Sanīna (درب السنينه). About 130m below the point where this passage descends into the wadi a small Roman fort is situated. The outer walls have a length of about 25m. Various wall lines can be identified within the fort.

Pottery: Roman.

Site #47 - Khirbah

Position: N 31 22' 37.5; E 35 49' 16.0

At the edge of the Khashm as-Sanīna plateau there are the remains of a larger Roman settlement (ca. 50 x 100m). Several wall lines and installations can be identified.

Pottery: Roman.

Summary

This survey shows that the various wadis that lead into Wādī al-Mūjib were widely frequented during ancient times. Wādī ash-Shkāfiya, in particular, has a number of strong fortifications indicating that this wadi served as one of the major routes leading up to the Arḍ al-Karak plateau. A number of important sites could be identified and studied during this survey. Khirbat al-Ma'mariyah (Site #9) and Qaṣr ar-Rahā (Site #24) are particularly essential for the understanding of the occupational history of the plateau and the various routes that were accessing the Arḍ al-Karak plateau in ancient times. While Qaṣr ar-Rahā seems to have been occupied and used over quite some time (Iron - Roman), Khirbat al-Ma'mariyah stands out as a major Iron Age site that played a major role in guarding the ascent to the Moabite plateau from the north. As a tributary to Wādī al-Mūjib, Wādī ash-Shkāfiya seems to have been the main route con-

necting the northern Dhībān plateau with the southern Moabite plateau during the Iron Age. During later times the Romans used a new route that ran directly through Wādī al-Mūjib. However, the alternative access via the route through Wādī ash-Shkāfiya obviously remained an option for them since the wadi system was guarded by a chain of forts and watchtowers. Various ascents branched off the main route through Wādī ash-Shkāfiya and reached the plateau at various points that were also protected by fortifications. From there routes extended to the *Via Nova Trajana* which intersected the Moabite plateau further to the west.

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