

REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT WĀDĪ AL-KUFRAYN SOUTHERN GHORS (AL-AGHWĀR)

by
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Introduction

The Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) is planning a development of the area and the al-Kufrayn Dam project in Wādī al-Kufrayn. This requires a careful impact assessment before the project is started and limited archaeological investigations have been conducted in the area.

The purpose of the project is threefold: to control the run-off from the Wādī al-Kufrayn; to establish a reliable gravity irrigation supply and to improve the ground-water balance within the present irrigated area.

In addition the Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MPWH) is about to construct a new road to link al-Hamdiyyeh village west of Irāq al-'Amīr with al-Kufrayn village, passing and reaching the eastern edge of the al-Kufrayn Dam.

A series of visits was organized by the CRM team in cooperation with engineers of MPWH and JVA. in order to prepare a more precise assessment about the presence of previously unrecognized archaeological remains in the area, to coordinate with the contractors several solutions to protect the discovered sites.

Sites Assessment

The archaeological surveys made in the area of the dam and its vicinity revealed several types of archaeological sites (Fig.1):

1. Chalcolithic Period (ca 4500-3200 BC) such as site No (5) Umm Hadder; UTM coordinates 214.550 141.900.
2. Early Bronze Age (ca 3200-2000 BC ca) such as site No (11) Tall as-Sad al-Gharbi; UTM coordinates 213.600 / 140.100.

3. Iron Age I (1200-1000 BC) such as site No (6) Tall aş-Şuwān; UTM coordinates 215.250 142.300.
4. Iron Age II (1000-539 BC) such as site No (16) Tall al-Maṭāb' ; UTM coordinates 214.800 138.900.
5. Hellenistic Period (332-63 BC) such as site No (1) Umm Hadder; UTM coordinates 214.010 141.190.

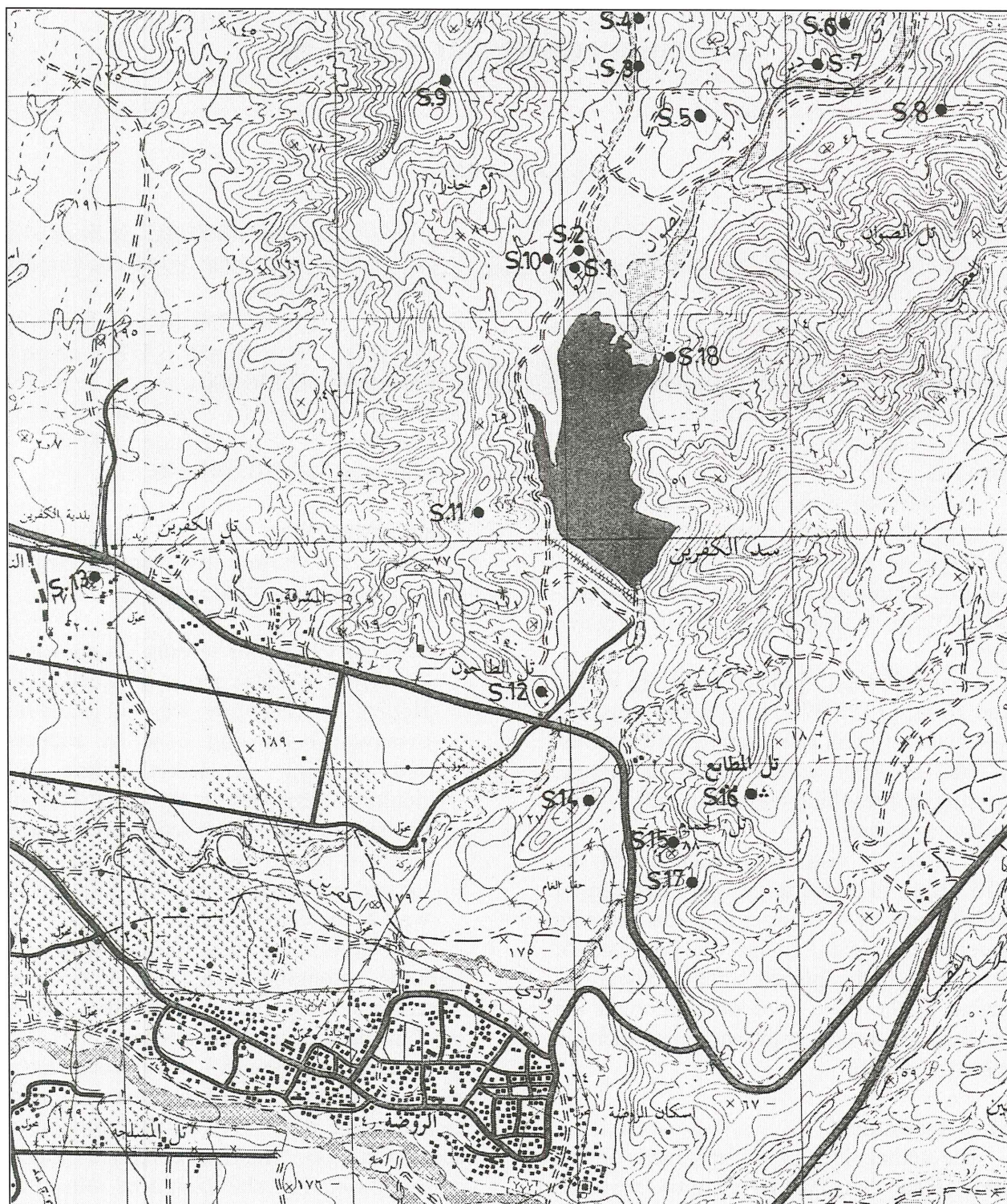
Endangered Sites

The survey showed that there are 3 sites directly threatened by the project:

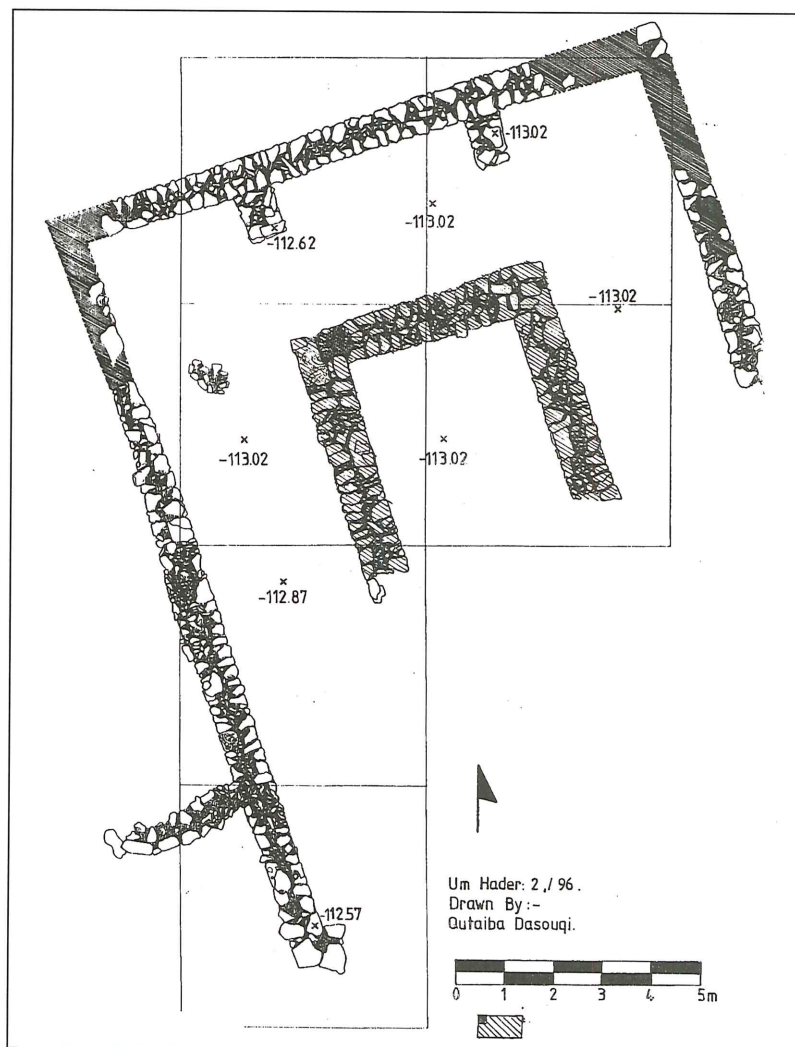
1. Site No (2) Umm Hadder, coordinates 214.010 / 141.280; period of occupation: Hellenistic. This site was subjected to extensive bulldozing done by robbers and dumping of debris during agricultural activities in the area. Part of the site is still preserved especially the northern part to the east of the dirt road located on a white sandy saddle to the west of the dam (Fig.2).

The site is characterized by remains of a building belonging to a small Hellenistic structure. It is a rectangular structure (16.50 x 13 m) built of undressed local stones. No post holes were found – they would have been unnecessary considering the pillars attached to the inner walls of the structure to support the roof. The floor consisted of hard compact soil. The site should be related to the nearby main site to the south and possibly functioned for some secondary usages. Few pottery sherds and no other material culture were recovered during excavation.

2. Site No (19) Khirbat as-Sur; period of occupation : Hellenistic.



1. Wādī al-Kufrayn 1996 sites plan.



2. Top plan of site No.2.

A major Hellenistic site (fortified structure) located on a rocky hill. It was built in an excellent position overlooking the nearby valleys and plateaus. The site was effected by several factors which resulted in the destruction of several parts of the internal and external walls.

The excavations revealed a structure surrounded by a defensive wall with towers located at regular distance attached to the external face. Several architectural remains are still at the northern part of the site; a test trench in this part revealed the stratification of more successive walls. Due to the road construction in the south-western part of the site which threatens part of the defensive wall and a tower, the team decided to excavate this part to get more information

about the construction. The excavation recovered a tower of 9 x 10 m. It was built of not well-dressed limestone blocks. Possible arrow-slits were located in the section of the three walls of the tower so as to defend the site against the external threats. It's clear that the structure served as a large fortress overlooking the nearby area and provided an excellent vantage point to observe traffic moving along the route between Umm Hader and this site.

3. Site No (3) Umm Hader; UTM coordinates 214.400E 192.100N; Chalcolithic period .

On the western side of the dirt road a small accumulation of sand and stones were tested. The site was partly bulldozed during

the past few years. Two test trenches revealed a half enclosure built of undressed limestone ashlar with some pottery sherds and flints scattered around the wall. The structure and the recovered material indicate that it was used for agricultural activities in the Umm Hadder plains. The quantities of pottery sherds date the structure broadly to the Chalcolithic period.

4. Site No (4) Umm Hadder; UTM coordinates 214.300E 142.300N, Chalcolithic period.

To the north of site No (3) west of the proposed road on a small sand hill, a small building was recovered. Four squares were opened to clarify the function of this structure. The excavations revealed a squared-shaped structure, 6 x 6 m, in bad condition built of undressed limestone of one row. The structure severely suffered from destruction caused by bulldozing, and later a modern tomb was located in the center of the structure.

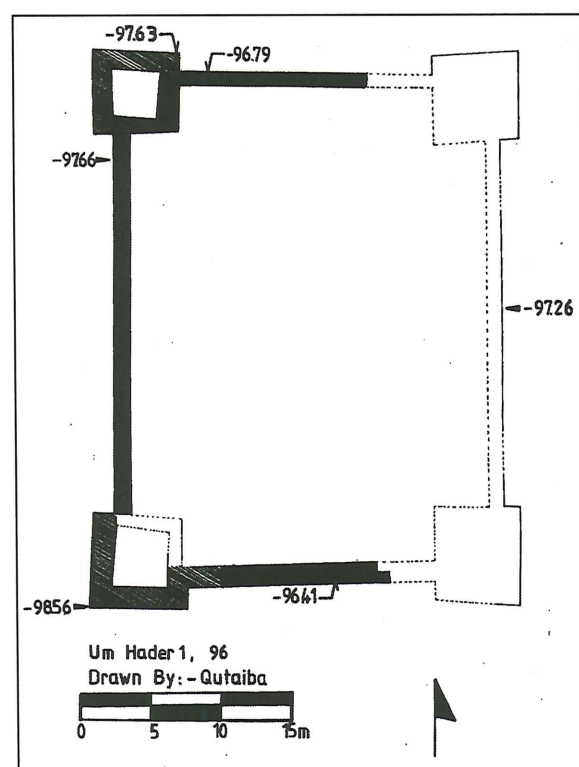
The flints and pottery sherds which were discovered through the excavation, suggest a Chalcolithic date for the site. Our preliminary assessment and investigations suggest a strong relation between this site and sites Nos (3) and (5).

5. Site No (10) Umm Hadder; UTM coordinates 213.900 / 141.200, Hellenistic period.

To the west of the Hellenistic site No (1), approximately 100 m distant in the plateau area, several stone traces and pottery scatters were noticed. One test trench was put down which indicated a possible reservoir built beside the run-off water drainage. The pottery indicates a Hellenistic and Byzantine date.

Sites Not In Immediate Danger Of Destruction

Site No (1) Umm Hadder; UTM coordinates 214.010 141.190, Hellenistic period (Fig. 3).



3. Top plan of site No.1.

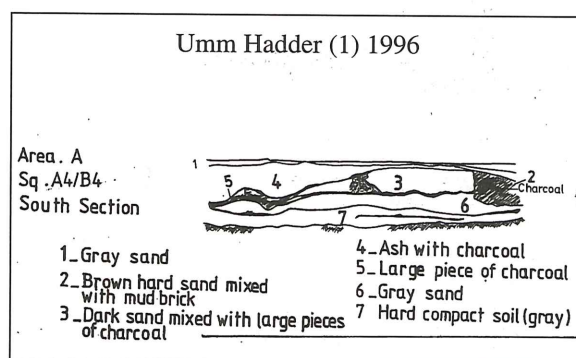
The site is located on top of a hill north-west of the dam-lake at approximately m bsl. It covers an area of about 2000 m. The north-east and west slopes are relatively steep. To the south is a shallow saddle. The entire area of the site is terraced and not cultivated. Modern bedouin camps were established in the wadi along the stream which is drained from the Irāq al-'Amir area below.

The main goals of the excavation at the site were to protect the site from threats of destruction and to study various types of structures and installations (e.g. rooms, walls, gates, water system, etc.). The site suffered from destruction by considerable bulldozing and robbing activities.

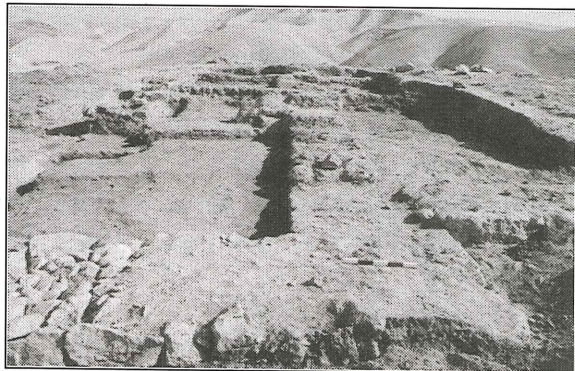
Excavation conducted in the northern and southern parts of the site revealed the remains of a structure approximately 40.7 x 30.8 m built of not well-dressed limestone blocks with squared-shaped buttresses located at the four corners of the structure, each measuring between 6-6.9 x to 6-7 m.

The limited excavation inside the struc-

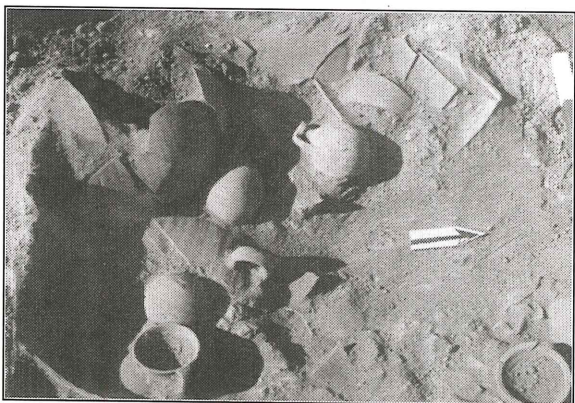
ture revealed foundation walls built of small and medium stones, a large cistern located in the center of the site possibly to collect the run-off water from the roof during winter season. Judging from the discovered architectural remains it is difficult (at this moment) to determine the nature and extent of the internal division of the structure. What distinguishes the site is the layer of destruction which was noticed everywhere in the excavated squares. It is not clear whether the site was destroyed by an earthquake or other events (Figs. 4-6).



4.



5. Excavated area of site No.1.



6. Pottery vessels from site No.1.

Excavated trenches have produced an enormous amount of pottery sherds and some intact vessels especially lamps, jugs, juglets, etc. In addition to that a large quantity of charcoal-mudbrick fragments, grinding stones and iron fragments were discovered on the site.

It is evident that the architect used stones for the lower courses of the structure then mudbrick was added for the upper courses.

The structure was roofed by wood and other organic materials. It is still not clear whether the whole structure was roofed or some parts only. Traces of post holes were noticed in the hard compact floor of the structure. Barley, wheat, plain seeds, olive, etc. were among the discoveries, this reflecting the strong reliance on plant resources. More work is needed on this important site, to understand the relations with the Hellenistic site of western Iraq al-Amir.

Site No 5 Umm Hadder; UTM coordinates 214. 550 E 141.900 N; Chalcolithic period .

The site located on the northern edge of the dam-lake and occupying several medium sandy hills, has numerous walls of different directions noticed on the surface of the site. A salvage excavation was conducted in the area of the site for a stratigraphic record to study the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze occupations, to investigate the reason behind the selection of settlement locations and to study the spatial organisation of settlements and their rural counterparts.

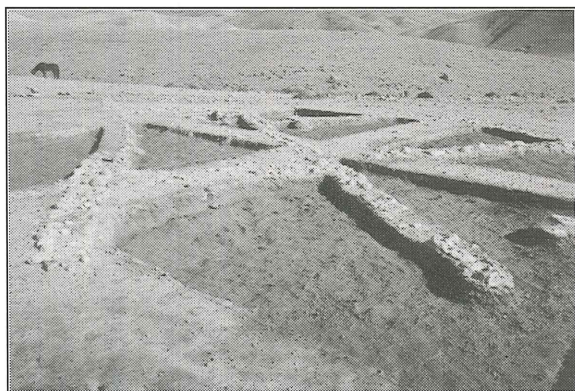
The Chalcolithic occupation on the site seems to be represented by extensive, numerous walls of squared and rectangular rooms built of two rows of undressed limestone, unfortunately only the foundations were found *in situ* and in very poor condition. It is too early at this moment to decide whether these architectural remains could represent part of a village or an isolated structure beside the water source in Wādi Umm Hadder (Fig. 7). Similar aspects of architecture and material culture discovered at

this site were identical with the nearby site Tulaylāt al-Ghassūl in the south-west.

The site may contain a late fourth millennium BC context, but only more excavations will help in establishing a stratigraphic sequence for the transition between Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age sites in Wādī al - Kufrayn. Only one EB site called Tall as-Sad has been investigated throughout our operations in the area. A test trench was put down on the site along the eastern escarpment which, revealed the presence of a foundation wall built of two rows of limestone ashlar. It is suggested that the site represents a seasonal camp for the nearby settlement.

General Assessment

The team surveyed and registered all the archaeological sites and monuments located in and along the projected dam. Structures were mapped and artefacts were collected in order to date these sites: sites found for the first time, as well as sites already known



7. Site No. 5 Umm Hadder.

from previous explorations and mainly located around the lake of the dam, especially in the northern and western directions.

Most of the sites identified are not directly threatened by construction, while four of them required various degrees of archaeological work and excavations before the construction phase. Protection measures are recommended for all sites listed in this report.

The surveys, test soundings and excavations conducted in the Wādī al-Kufrayn during February 1997 have revealed a long sequence of occupation along the wadi. While more work is needed in order to fully understand human and environmental relationships during different periods, the results of the field work in the Wādī al-Kufrayn fill some gaps in the archaeological record of the area.

The presence of Hellenistic sites in Wādī al-Kufrayn are new additions to the early history of the southern al-Ghawr.

The Chalcolithic site No. 5 is an enormous one and will help in the study of the area as a whole during this period.

All these activities show the need for an intensive survey of the area located between Irāq al-'Amīr and Wādī al-Kufrayn so as to assess the importance of these sites and to save archaeological heritage from destruction .

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