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Where DHībān Meets ʻAtarūz: Bayaḏah, Ancient Roads and the Mesha Inscription

KHirbat ʻAtarūz is located at the center of Jabal Ḥamīdah in central Jordan, about (12km) southwest of Madaba. Its settlement history dates back to the early Iron II period, around 900 BC, when it was a major center of worship for the region (Ji 2011, 2012, 2018; Ji and Bates 2014, 2017; Ji, Bates, Hawkins, and Schade 2020; Ji and Schade 2021). The site is best known for a large Iron IIA temple complex that was in use in the early and mid-9th century BC. It was destroyed in the mid-9th century BC. ʻAtarūz was rebuilt without a hiatus and continued to thrive as a regional center through the 7th century BC after which it was abandoned (Ji and Schade 2022). The site was resettled in the late Hellenistic-early Roman and Islamic periods.

DHībān also has a long and diverse settlement history starting from prehistoric times (Tushingham 1972; Winnet and Reed 1964). Most importantly, it was the capital city of the ancient kingdom of Moab. King Mesha established the site, which included towers, buildings, and a massive city wall, as a political and economic center of the kingdom during the Iron IIB period (Routledge 2004; Tushingham and Pedrett 1995). The excavations also yielded a large palace-like public building dated to this period. The site was reportedly deserted in Iron IIC. There is evidence that it recovered during the Nabatean period and was used through the Roman-Islamic periods (Ji 2020, 2023).

This article explores the archaeological evidence found between the ʻAtarūz region and the DHībān Plateau and the ancient road that connected the towns of ʻAtarūz and DHībān. The two cities are 10km apart as the crow flies. For thousands of years, roads

played a pivotal and strategic role in Jordan's history and the development of human settlements. They facilitated the exchange and movement of people, goods, culture, and technology over distances and also allowed for the administration of the territories of ancient kingdoms. There should have been a road network that the residents of the two regions used for travel and commerce when ʿAtarūz and DHībān flourished as population centers, especially during the Iron II era. However, there is yet limited information about the route and geography of the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road and the archaeological sites along the thoroughfare. This paper fills that research gap.

The Al Qurayyāt-Sayl Al Hīdān Section

According to years of archaeological research in the region, several roads emanated from ʿAtarūz in antiquity. One road proceeded eastward from ʿAtarūz to Rujm ʿAtarūz and then to Libb along the eastern ridge of Jabal Hamidah (Ji 2016). Another highway led from ʿAtarūz to the north through Boz al-Mushelle and the ford of the Wadi Zarqā Māʿīn to Jericho and Madaba (Ji 2019). A separate road connected ʿAtarūz with the western region along the Jabal Hamidah ridge route through a series of small hills and flat fields. At the end of this road were multiple towns and cities, such as Marchaerus, Balutan, and Jarwan.

Besides these roads, one more highway branched from the ʿAtarūz-Machaerus road to the south at a point 2 km southwest of ʿAtarūz toward the DHībān Plateau (FIG. 1). From this junction, the road stretched *ca.* 3 km southeast to Al Qurayyāt. The antiquity of this highway that connected ʿAtarūz and DHībān is attested to by a series of significant ancient ruins along the path, such as Al Qurayyāt, Bayadah, and ʿAyn Shuqayq (see below).

This southern highway continued to run from Al Qurayyāt to the valley of Sayl Al Hīdān (FIG. 2). This section was about 8 km long and involved a sharp 600m descent. In more detail, the highway initially skirted north of the highest point of Al Qurayyāt and traversed the plateau at the foothill. It then continued southeast approximately 3km toward the western rim of the eminent headland east of Al Qurayyāt. The road next sharply turned back to the northwest and descended 30 m at about 30 degrees, merging with the route of the modern road connecting Al Qurayyāt to the Sayl Al Hīdān. This part of the ancient road (ʿAtarūz Survey Site [AS] 75) has been preserved, though in poor condition. It is safe to assume that the modern road primarily uses the routes from antiquity for almost its entire length to the Sayl Al Hīdān.

Subsequently, the road started its steep decline from the merge point and traveled about 900 m southwest straight along the western side of the ridge line to a small rocky knoll (530m) (FIG. 3). This mound provided a panoramic view of the Sayl Al Hīdān and the whole lower course of the Qairyat-Sayl Al Hīdān route. The road continued *ca.* 2 km, following a zig-zag pattern down a steep stretch of the same ridge. There is no doubt that ancient travelers resorted to scrambling diagonally up this section of the road for a more forgiving angle of ascent and descent. The alternating trajectories would also have come in handy for leading pack animals loaded with food, tools, wares, and other belongings. The road then arrived at a large flat area, which was part of a long stretch of the broad river plain developed on the northern bank of the Sayl

Al Hīdān. Ancient remains are sparse in this terrain except for one possible structure, perhaps a prehistoric tomb (AS-74). There is a small hill (310m) at the southern edge of this terrace area. Here, the road made a ninety-degree turn to the northeast and, after several bends, dropped steeply down to the (northern) ford of the Sayl Al Hīdān.

Al Qurayyāt and Its Vicinity

Al Qurayyāt (AS-2) is a modern town on the site of a large ancient settlement, roughly (4.5km) southeast of ʿAtarūz, as the crow flies (FIG. 4). The ruin on a high hill covers an area of *ca.* 100 x 400 m, offering a clear view of the southern ʿAtarūz region with 360-degree visibility. Glueck (1939: 131) described the site as follows: Al Qurayyāt "is a large, completely destroyed site on an eminence, with a few modern, rude buildings set among the ruins... The level stretch around the base of the hill, the slopes, and the top of the hill are covered with ruins, among which are numerous cisterns." Glueck found Nabatean, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic wares at the site; the Ataruz Regional Survey team collected Iron II sherds inside and outside of the ruins of Al Qurayyāt along with late Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic sherds (see below).

Al Qurayyāt is divided into "upper" and "lower" sections. The upper section (AS-2) includes the top of the hill and its slopes. The remains of numerous wall lines are visible here, especially on its eastern side. However, it is virtually impossible at this point to confidently trace the plans of the ancient town and buildings due to the Ottoman and modern structures on the site. The survey suggests intensive terrace farming on the eastern slope in antiquity. Ancient ruins extend to the east, as they are visible on the plateau area at the eastern base of the hill. In this lower section (named Lower Al Qurayyāt; AS-3), wall lines and rectangular rooms indicate a cluster of several building complexes separated from the principal ruin of Al Qurayyāt (FIG. 5). Some structures measure at least 10x10m and were constructed from rectangular limestone blocks.

The plateau southeast of Al Qurayyāt is relatively extensive in size (*ca.* 2.5sq km). In this area, the survey team documented six ancient sites. AS-97 represents a small round structure with a diameter of 6.5m. Its walls are one course wide and currently stand one course high. No interior chamber is visible. Approximately 30m north of AS-97 is a small cup-hole (AS-98) carved into large limestone bedrock in the middle of cultivated farming fields.

Farther to the southeast, the team found AS-99, a circular structure with a diameter of 6m. Its walls are three courses wide and have survived one course high. Multiple field walls crisscross the vicinity. According to a local farmer, they are from the early 20th century AD, which marked land division between private property owners. Approximately 1 km south of AS-99 is a rectangular building (AS-102), possibly the ruin of a farmstead house. It is oriented northeast-southwest and measures 5x7m. It used well-dressed bricks for construction and presently stands two courses high above the ground. The southeastern corner of the plateau region includes AS-100 and AS-101. AS-100 is characteristic of a circular structure. The site commands an excellent view over the Sayl Al Hīdān and the road down to the gorge from Al Qurayyāt. The building is 6m in diameter, 1.5m thick, and 40cm high. Lastly, AS-101 is a round structure in the middle of a grain field overlooking

the Sayl Al Hīdān. The structure measures 7m in diameter. It stands about 30–40cm high above the ground today.

The rocky promontory south of Al Qurayyāt contains two ancient sites. AS-103 represents a square oil press vat carved into the bedrock. The oil was possibly extracted on a natural dip in the nearby bedrock, then flowed into this vat. The oil vat is square, measuring 1.5x1.5m. There is a cistern in the vicinity; the water level was shallow because of the dry winter when the survey occurred. Further, there is a circular structure (AS-104) near the southeastern edge of the promontory, overlooking the road from Qariyah to the Sayl Al Hīdān. The surrounding area is barren and unlikely to have been used for farming in ancient times. The structure is estimated to be 7m in diameter with three to four courses of walls. It is one course high at present.

In sum, ancient remains are relatively sparse in the Al Qurayyāt region compared to the size of the land. The plateau area was primarily used for agriculture and animal husbandry. Part of its terrain could function as a breadbasket area for the village of Al Qurayyāt, given its relatively fertile soil, suitable enough for farming. Perhaps the round structures that dominated the area were private watchtowers for farmers to watch over farmland during the harvest period, allowing the storage of crops and personal belongings. One exception would be AS-104, potentially military in nature granted its location on the edge of a rugged promontory with visibility over the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road.

KHirbat Bayad̲ah

The southern section of the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road proceeded southward from DHībān and crossed a small branch of Wādī DHībān. After the wadi crossing, the route headed almost straight northwest to the ancient ruin of Bayad̲ah (DHībān Plateau Survey Site [DS] 362). This section was long but easy to travel as it passed through the flat terrain and gentle hills of the western DHībān Plateau.

Bayad̲ah was an extensive site situated strategically on the edge of the plateau about 4.5km northwest of DHībān by a direct route. The place was first discovered in 1999 by the DHībān Plateau Survey team and then visited multiple times for surveys and salvation excavations. Local villagers completely bulldozed the ruin of Bayad̲ah for stones and building materials in 2003.

According to the DHībān Plateau Survey, Bayad̲ah contained numerous building remains and wall lines, suggesting that the settlers constructed many houses inside the site (FIG. 6). The town was constructed directly above the bedrock. The total perimeter of its external wall system was estimated at roughly 500m (FIG. 7); thus, the dimensions of Bayad̲ah were about 150m north-south and an average of 100m east-west (FIG. 8). In the northern part was a possible gate system associated with guard rooms (FIG. 9). The site might also have included towers built as part of its casemate defense system. Notwithstanding the overall plan of the buildings in the center of the site was difficult to discern, most structures looked rectangular with multiple interior rooms. In general, the walls of these buildings were two to three courses wide (*ca.* 1.2m) and preserved up to 50 cm above the ground.

A salvage sounding took place along the western city wall that survived the 2003 bulldozer demolition. The aim was to uncover potsherds for the date of the Bayad̲ah fortress. The preserved section in the area was only 5m long, and the surviving wall was two courses

high and wide. The wall measured 80 cm thick and was constructed from medium basalt and limestone blocks. After removing the surface dirt, the team identified two soil layers, the upper layer being about 30cm deep and the lower about 10cm deep. The pottery sherds from the two layers were contemporaneous.

An extensive water catchment system comprised of two large pools is another prominent feature of Bayadah (FIG. 10). Located about 50m north of the fortress, the reservoirs were dug into bedrock and lined with plaster to prevent seepage. The first pool is roundish in form, and its size is estimated to be 10x11m and 8 to 9m deep. The second pool is situated roughly 20m north of the first one. It is more prominent in dimension, estimated to be 35m in diameter. About 20m east of the second pool is a small bell-shaped ancient cistern currently in use. The pools were used to collect and conserve rainwater, even though the research team could not identify channels and aqueducts on the surface associated with the reservoirs during the survey.

Bayadah overlooks the Sayl Al Hīdān, providing a commanding view of the hills and slopes in the region of ʿAtarūz. Both Al Qurayyāt and ʿAtarūz are visible from Bayadah. The diagnostic sherds from the site are dated to the Iron I, Iron II, early Roman, and Byzantine periods (Ji and Lee 2000: 500). Iron IIA and IIB were dominant, however. The sherds from the sounding are also securely assignable to the 9th–7th centuries BC (see below for the pottery). This fact implies that Bayadah was occupied during the peak days of the Moabite kingdom, and its establishment could coincide with King Mesha's reign and his conquest of ʿAtarūz.

In this sense, it is reasonable to date the water system of Bayadah to the same period as well, granted the abundance of Iron II pottery sherds around the pools. Early Roman and Byzantine pots from Bayadah might be too sparse to associate such an extensive underground water system with those periods. The water system, which provided water to the residents at Bayadah and travelers along the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road, should have been an essential part of Bayadah's economy and infrastructure in antiquity.

Up to now, Bayadah is the only fortified Moabite city found in the region west of DHībān (Ji and Lee 2003). Its importance is further suggested by its geographical proximity to DHībān, positing that it was a central military facility protecting the kingdom's capital city and its western border from potential attack from the ʿAtarūz region. Bayadah supposedly constituted part of the greater Moabite defense system built around the DHībān Plateau along with ʿArāʿir, Al Lāhūn, Al Mudaynah Ath THamad, Ar Rumayl, and ʿUlayyān. This fact possibly points to an advanced Moabite statehood with central political power, a network of fortified cities and watchtowers, and a sophisticated road system.

The Bayadah-Sayl Al Hīdān Section

The Bayadah-Sayl Al Hīdān section of the road system started at an elevation of 725m and descended roughly 550m over 7km (FIG. 11). Approximately 700m south of Bayadah, the road went down the side of a basalt cliff towards the Sayl Al Hīdān. The descent began amidst a series of rock cliffs of rectangular basalt and limestone blocks with checkerboard patterns, a rock formation that ancient settlers could utilize for defense purposes (FIG. 12 and FIG. 13). Here, the road initially descended about 30m to a large flat area

(*ca.* 100x250m) formed by erosion and other geological processes on the slope's side near the cliff's bottom. The road then changed direction to the north to avoid the steep slopes and deep wadis south of the terrace. Between the flat area and the top of the road were multiple field walls (DS-422) constructed at an angle to the slopes, obviously built for defense purposes. Some wall lines have been preserved and remain visible today. They are *ca.* 1m thick and run about 100 to 150m east or southwest, depending on the slope angle.

DS-423 pertains to a building ruin located on the western edge of the flat area, near where the road made a sharp turn. It represents a single circular structure with a diameter of 7m. The walls are 1m thick and were constructed with limestone blocks. The building was bonded to one of the defense field walls, and the road extended through this wall (FIG. 14). It is still being determined whether a door, tunnel, or culvert built through or under the wall allowed pedestrians and animals to pass through without disturbing the wall. If the wall were relatively low, it is also possible that a small ramp, slope, or staircase was constructed to help travelers and local people cross it. The circular building was solidly built and offered a clear view of the entire road course across the Sayl Al Hīdān. It appears to have been a watchtower that controlled the traffic along the road and protected the gateway area from potential invasions.

The road made many tight switchbacks as it descended from the flat area toward the Sayl Al Hīdān. It first cut sharply from north to south while going down a steep slope to the ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq junction (DS-424), where a branch road from ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq (DS-398) converged with the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road. The ancient ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq road remains largely intact (FIG. 15). It first climbed straight up about 100m from the junction to a small wadi that drained rainfall from a prominent headland and its vicinity between Bayaḏah and ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq. From the *wadi*, the road ascended about 300m into a small natural terrace at the foot of the ancient ruin of ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq. Here, visitors can still see a stretch of well-preserved ancient retaining walls constructed to maintain the stability of the road and enhance its safety. Retaining walls seem to have existed along the entire section of the ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq road; the remains of dry stone walls used to support the lower section of the road can be found today as well in the area right above the junction.

From the ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq junction, the road descended west roughly 2.5km into an open terrace or floodplain created by the gradual erosion of the upper slope of the Sayl Al Hīdān's southern bank. Broken pieces of ancient pottery are scattered over the ground in this area currently under cultivation for seasonal dry farming (DS-425). The survey team collected Iron II and Hellenistic-Roman potsherds at this site. Approximately 200m north of the sherd scatter area were two structures, one circular (DS-426) and the other rectangular (DS-427). No diagnostic sherds came from either of these two sites. The road subsequently took a couple of sharp turns down steep terrain where it arrived at another open terrace area. There the team found a cluster of at least three circular structures (DS-428, DS-429, and DS-430), possibly ancient tombs or watchtowers. They are spread over an area of 30x100 square meters. The main road continued to descend 2km to the (northern) ford of Sayl Al Hīdān, after making several bends through barren hills and ridges.

A branch road, in all likelihood, veered to the west from the midpoint between DS-425 and DS-428, *ca.* 300 m northwest from the DS-426 and DS-427 sites. This secondary road followed the rim of a river terrace for almost its entire length (*ca.* 500m) to circumvent the lower part of a deep wadi that drains rainwater from the area of ʿAyn Ash SHuqayq into the Sayl Al Hīdān. After crossing the wadi, the road went down *ca.* 600m to the southern ford of the Sayl Al Hīdān that was used by those who wanted to travel to Tall Ar Rāyah (AS-7), the largest Early Bronze, Iron Age, Hellenistic-Roman, Byzantine, and Middle Islamic site in the lower Sayl Al Hīdān valley. It was linked with Machaerus through an ancient road that passed through the western ʿAtarūz region.

Dating and Pottery from Bayadah and Al Qurayyāt

The earliest use of the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road may go back to prehistoric times. As for other regional routes, several circular structures exist along the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road. Many of these round structures are likely to be the remains of ancient tombs used by nomadic people (Abu-Azizeh *et al.* 2014; Haiman 1992). The peak period of the road appears to be Iron II, however. The Iron II date of the road is indicated by its sherd scatter at Bayadah and Al Qurayyāt, the two most important sites on the highway. Also, ʿAtarūz and DHībān were prospering urban centers during the early Iron II period, which aligns very well with the evidence from Bayadah and Al Qurayyāt.

The pottery shown in FIG. 16 came from the sounding made along the surviving portion of Bayadah's western city wall (TABLE 1). As noted earlier, the sounding revealed two soil layers. To begin with the upper stratum, FIGS. 16.1 and 16.4 illustrate holemouth krater rims, those folded in horizontal oblong sections with side walls outwardly inclined from the rim. They are typical of late Iron I and early Iron II. Kraters with a rim mode similar to (FIGS. 16:1 and 16:4) are ubiquitous in ʿAtarūz E5–E4 (Ji 2018: figs. 9:1–3; 10:8), Sa'idiyeh VII–VI (Pritchard 1985: figs. 1:14; 8:4, 6–9), and Wādī Ath THamad Survey Site 13 (henceforth WT-13) II (Daviau 2017: figs. 3.14:8–10, 14–15; 3.23:5–6; 3.34:17). The platter bowl in (FIG. 16.5) has a simple rounded rim and knife-cut top with its sides angled outwards at roughly 45 degrees. Parallels come from ʿAtarūz E4 (Ji 2018: fig. 9:7–8), Al Mudaynah Ath THamad (Daviau and Steiner 2000: fig. 13:1), Ar Rumayth VII–VI (Barako 2015: fig. 3.10:1–3), As Sa'īdiyyah VII (Pritchard 1985: figs. 2:22, 24), and WT-13 II (Daviau 2017: figs. 3.13:1–3; 3.22:15; 3.27:2–3).

(FIG. 16.2) depicts an inverted, flanged cooking pot rim, a form assignable to early Iron II. Parallels are commonplace in ʿAtarūz E4 (Ji 2018: fig. 8:6, 8–10), As Sa'īdiyyah VII (Pritchard 1985: fig. 3:20), Ar Rumayth VII–VI (Barako 2015: figs. 3.13:2–7; 3.14: 8–10), Hisbān 17 (Herr 2012: fig. 2.25:7–8), WT-13 II (Daviau 2017: figs. 3.5:9; 3.9:1–13; 3.15:8–21; 3.24:1–9), and DHībān (Tushingham 1972: fig. 1:17–23). FIGS. 16.3 and 16.6 also represent early Iron II cooking pots. They are characteristic of an inwardly inclined, round-shaped rim with its exterior face slightly grooved. Similar pots come from ʿAtarūz E4 (Ji 2018: fig. 8:12), Abū Al KHaraz XIII (Fischer 2013: fig. 439:3–4), As Sa'īdiyyah VII (Pritchard 1985: fig. 3:27), and WT-13 II (Daviau 2017: figs. 3.9:15–16; 3.15:3–6).

For the samples from the lower stratum, (FIG. 16.7) is from a round-sided

TABLE 1. Description of potsherds in FIGS. 16–18.

Fig.	Type*	Origin#	Description (E: External; I: Internal)
16.1	krater	BDSL 1.1	pink (5YR8/4), no core, white inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/3) E
16.2	CP	BDSL 1.2	weak red (7.5R 5/4), gray core, small gray inclusions, no slip
16.3	CP	BDSL 1.3	reddish yellow (5YR6/6), no core, white inclusions, no slip
16.4	krater	BDSL 1.4	pink (7.5YR8/4), no core, no inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/4)
16.5	bowl	BDSL 1.5	pink (7.5YR7/3), no core, no inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/3) E/I
16.6	CP	BDSL 1.6	reddish brown (5YR5/6), no core, no inclusion, no slip
16.7	bowl	BDSL 2.3	pink (7.5YR7/3), gray core, white inclusions, E/I pink slip (7.5YR7/3)
16.8	CP	BDSL 2.1	very pale brown (10YR7/3), no core, gray inclusions, no slip
16.9	bowl	BDSL 2.2	light reddish brown (2.5YR7/3), gray core, no inclusion, very pale brown slip (10YR8/2) E/I
17.1	CP	DS 362-1	weak red (7.5YR4/3), gray core, white inclusions, no slip+
17.2	CP	DS 362-2	weak red (10R4/4), no core, gray and white inclusions, no slip+
17.3	bowl	BDSF-1	pink (5YR8/3), no core, many white and gray inclusions, no slip
17.4	krater	BDSF-2	pink (5YR7/3), gray core, white inclusions, E/I pink slip (7.5YR7/4)
17.5	bowl	BDSF-4	light red (2.5YR6/6), light gray core, white inclusions, E/I pink slip (7.5YR8/3)
17.6	bowl	BDSF-5	light red (2.5YR 6/6), gray core, white inclusions, E/I pink slip (7.5YR8/4)
17.7	SJ	BDSF-6	light red (10R7/6), gray core, white inclusions, reddish gray slip (10R6/1) E/I
17.8	bowl	BDSF-7	pink (7.5YR7/3), no core, white inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/2) E/I
17.9	SJ	BDSF-8	light red (2.5YR7/6), large gray core, white inclusions, pinkish gray slip (7.5YR6/2) E
17.10	bowl	BDSF-9	pale red (10R7/4), no core, gray inclusions, no slip
17.11	CP	BDSF-10	red (2.5YR), no core, no inclusion, no slip
17.12	krater	BDSF-11	light gray (10YR7/1), no core, white inclusions, pale brown slip (10YR8/3) E
17.13	CP	BDSF-12	light red (2.5YR7/6), gray core, many large white inclusions, E/I very pale brown slip (10YR8/3)
17.14	SJ	BDSF-13	pink (5YR7/4), large gray core, many white inclusions, pink slip (5YR7/4) E/I
17.15	bowl	BDSF-14	pink (7.5YR7/4), no core, white inclusions, pink slip (7.5YR7/4) E/I
17.16	krater	BDSF-15	pink (5YR7/4), large light gray core, white inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/3) E/I
17.17	CP	BDSF-16	red (7.5YR4/8), no core, white inclusions, no slip
17.18	krater	BDSF-17	pink (7.5YR7/4), no core, white inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/2) E
17.19	krater	BDSF-18	pink (7.5YR7/4), light gray core, few white inclusions, pink slip (7.5YR8/4) E
17.20	krater	BDSF-19	very pale brown (10YR8/2), no core, white inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/2) E/I
17.21	SJ	BDSF-20	pink (7.5YR8/4), gray core, white inclusions, very pale brown slip (10YR8/3) E
17.22	krater	BDSF-21	pink (5YR7/4), light gray core, no inclusions, pink slip (5YR7/4) E/I
18.1	krater	AS 2-1	pink (7.5YR7/4), no core, gray inclusions, light red slip (10R7/6) E
18.2	bowl	AS 2-2	light reddish brown (2.5YR7/4), no core, no inclusion, red slip (10R5/8) E
18.3	bowl	AS 2-S2	light reddish brown (2.5YR7/4), gray core, white inclusions, pink slip (7.5YR8/3) E
18.4	krater	AS 3-6	light red (2.5YR6/6), gray core, no inclusion, no slip
18.5	bowl	AS 3-5	pink (5YR7/4), no core, gray inclusions, light red slip (10R6/8) E/I
18.6	bowl	AS 3-7	pink (5YR7/4), light gray core, no inclusion, pink slip (5YR7/4)

*CP: cooking pot; SJ: storage jar; #origin; BDSL: Bayadah Sounding; DS & BDSF: Bayadah Surface; AS: Al Qurayyāt

bowl with a rim formed as an extension of the side in an inwards curve and tapered off at the end. It is mainly dated to late Iron I and early Iron II, as shown by ʿAtarūz E4 (Ji 2018: fig. 9:13), Abu al-Kharaz XII (Fischer 2013: figs. 393:1), and As Saʾīdiyyah VII–VI (Pritchard 1985: figs. 2:12; 6:4; Tubb 1988: fig. 11:32). (FIG. 16.8) is suggestive of early Iron II cooking pots with a short, square rim vertical or slightly inverted. Parallels are found in ʿAtarūz E4 (Ji 2018: figs. 8:1–2), As Saʾīdiyyah VII (Pritchard 1985: fig. 3:30), and WT-13 II (Daviau 2017; figs. 3.15:1; 3.24:15–16). The main feature of FIG. 16.9 is its simple rim, slightly extended neck, and possibly carinated side wall. It would pertain to an Iron Age krater or large bowl possibly used from late Iron I to early Iron II (Gitin 1990: pl. 4:8–9).

The pottery from the sounding at Bayaḏah would lead us to ascribe the site to early Iron II. More precisely, the site seems to have been erected in the 9th century BC and continued to be used during the 8th and 7th centuries BC. Its ceramic assemblage closely resembles the corpus from ʿAtarūz E5–E4 and other Iron II strata in Jordan, such as Saʾidiyeh VII–VI and WT-13 II. This suggestion finds additional support from the surface pottery from the site. Iron II sherds dominate the corpus, apart from several early Roman and Byzantine vessels and a few sherds that can be dated to the broad period from Late Bronze to early Iron II. Selected samples from the Bayaḏah survey are illustrated in FIG. 17, which dovetail nicely in typology and chronology with those in (FIG. 16).

The pottery corpus from Al Qurayyāt also confirms its use during the Iron II period. (FIG. 18) presents some selected sherds from the surface of Al Qurayyāt. (FIG. 18.3) is similar in form to (FIG. 16.9); the sample in (FIG. 18.1) would be a variant or late form of (FIG. 18.3) (*cf*. Gitin 1990: pl. 8:16, 19). (FIG. 18.4) is a holemouth rim akin to (FIGS. 16.1)and 16.4. The early Iron II bowl in (FIG. 18.2) has an internally thickened and slightly tapered rim with its outer face being rounded in line with the sides. Similar examples appear in ʿAtarūz E5 (Ji 2018: fig. 10:18–19), Hesban 18 (Herr 2012: fig. 2.21:7), and WT-13 III (Daviau 2017: figs. 3.7:23–25). FIG. 18.6 depicts an everted bulge rim nearly perpendicular to the side wall, shaped by rounding the endpoint and rolling it outwards. This type of bowl frequently appears in ʿAtarūz E4 (Ji 2018: fig. 9:16), Mādabā (Foran *et al.* 2004: fig. 3:9); Ar Rumayth VII–VI (Barako 2015: fig. 3.3:14–16; 3.4:26, 34–41), As Saʾīdiyyah VII (Pritchard 1985: fig. 2:3–4), and WT-13 II (Daviau 2017: fig. 3.13:22–23). FIG. 18.5 shows a bowl with a simple, rounded rim. Bowls with a simple rim are well-known in the Iron I–II periods (Mazar 2006: 327; Gitin 1990: pls. 7:10; 8:11–12).

It is difficult to obtain absolute historical dating of the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road. However, as noted above, the chain of Iron II sites located along the road attributes the establishment or at least the zenith of the road system to early Iron II. ʿAtarūz lacks archaeological evidence earlier than the early Iron II period. This fact may also hold for Bayaḏah. DHībān was the capital city of the Moabite kingdom during the same period. Al Qurayyāt contains Iron II evidence. Equally germane, the Iron Age settlement ended at ʿAtarūz sometime around the transition from Iron IIB to Iron IIC (Ji and Schade 2022). A long occupational gap followed until it was resettled in the late Hellenistic period. There is no evidence at Bayaḏah

that it was occupied between Iron IIB and the early Roman period. The small sites along the Bayadah-Sayl Al Hīdān road contain some late Hellenistic and Roman sherds. Still, no ceramic finds indicate an elevated road use between Iron IIC and the late Hellenistic period.

In light of the DHībān Plateau Survey, ʿAyn Ash Shuqayq (DS-398) emerged as the central city of the western DHībān Plateau after Bayadah was deserted late in Iron II (Ji and Lee 2000: 502). It was the largest town in the region from the Hellenistic to the Middle Islamic period. Around this time, the main course of the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road probably shifted from Bayadah to ʿAyn Ash Shuqayq, *ca.* 1.7 km to the south. This new route, as described earlier, remains undisturbed between ʿAyn Ash Shuqayq and the DS-424 junction.

Historical Consideration

King Mesha conquered the city of ʿAtarūz according to the Mesha Stele, a Moabite inscription from the mid-9th century BC. The details of his operation against ʿAtarūz are not known, but it is reasonable to guess that King Mesha used an existing trade route that was used for travel and commerce between ʿAtarūz and DHībān. The direction from which Mesha attacked ʿAtarūz was likely to have been from the DHībān Plateau where his capital city and main military bases were located. One candidate could be the King's Highway, which connected DHībān with Mādabā. But this road ran far to the east of Moab and required a rather long trip that traversed the lands of non-Moabite towns such as Al Lubb and Rujm ʿAtarūz. Instead, King Mesha would have used the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road, which offered him a shorter and more direct path from DHībān to ʿAtarūz.

This scenario being tenable, the Bayadah fortress could provide King Mesha a secure foothold on his territory, from which the Moabite army planned its operations and launched attacks against the ʿAtarūz region. Such military bases are crucial for any army when advancing into enemy territory. Al Qurayyāt was probably the first target of Mesha's campaign in the ʿAtarūz region. The border between the DHībān Plateau and its northern neighbors was generally defined by the deep valleys of Sayl Al Hīdān and Wādī Al Wāllah in antiquity (Ji 2009). Attacking Al Qurayyāt and ʿAtarūz in sequence was not only an effective tactic to secure the region far away from the border but mandatory to a large extent because Al Qurayyāt was located between ʿAtarūz and the Sayl Al Hīdān. It also had a clear view of ʿAtarūz, as it was situated on a higher hill near ʿAtarūz. This strategy could allow the Moabite force to consolidate its initial gain and establish their control over Al Qurayyāt as their bridgehead in the enemy's territory. This approach was also useful granted the seemingly limited resources that Mesha mobilized for his military operations. For instance, according to the Mesha Stele, the king took "two hundred" men from DHībān for the battle at Yahas (Line 20). The standard unit of Mesha's standing army presumably consisted of two hundred or so armed men. As for ʿAtarūz, Yahas was a crucial fortified location, mentioned as one of the major cities that the king conquered and took control of during his reign.

From a defender's perspective, it was common for ancient states to build towns and small fortresses along their borders to defend their territories (Goldsworthy 2004; Yoffee 2005). These defense posts were constructed in strategic locations

and served as early warning systems and initial defense lines against incoming invasions. Border fortresses were especially ordinary in regions where borders were contested or vulnerable to attack, including along major trade routes (Morris 2014).

Likewise, during the Iron Age, the defense of the ʿAtarūz region consisted of fortified towns and auxiliary defensive barriers such as watchtowers and signal towers located along the roads to ʿAtarūz. Those towns oversaw human movements along the highways and kept safe the neighboring areas from external threats. Rujm ʿAtarūz, for instance, guarded the eastern route from a prominent geographical bottleneck on the road system east of ʿAtarūz (Ji 2016). Būz Al Mushallah is another typical example (Ji 2019). It was a fortified habitation site north of ʿAtarūz, which served as the primary defense facility that protected the northern road system.

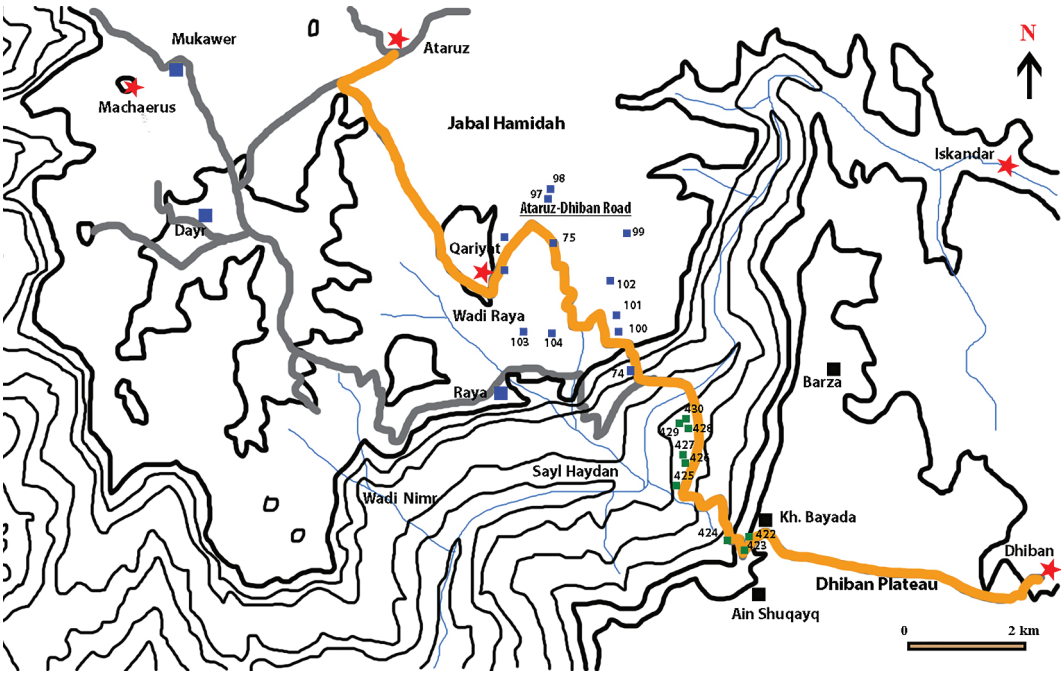
Al Qurayyāt, in all likelihood, was a hilltop settlement built for the same purposes. It was a town located at the highest point in south Jabal Hamidah, and the ʿAtarūz-DHībān road virtually went through it. The hill is 795m high, dominating the lower landscape of the southern ʿAtarūz region. Iron Age settlers most likely built an enclosure wall around Al Qurayyāt, although the survey has not yet found the remains of the city walls. City walls were the standard defensive structure for other ancient towns and cities, especially during the Iron Age, in the ʿAtarūz and DHībān Plateau regions (Ji and Lee 2003). Besides the enclosure wall, the town's eastern side was possibly equipped with artificial ramparts or terrace walls built on its steep slopes. The remains of the ancient terraces or field walls can still be seen on this side, following the hill's contours, albeit heavily damaged by Ottoman buildings and modern farming activities.

The Moabites, in all probability, staged attacks on Al Qurayyāt from the east after they completed the ascent using the Al Qurayyāt-Sayl Al Hīdān road. The battle was victorious, as implied in the Mesha Stele, which cites Al Qurayyāt as a Moabite place to where King Mesha dragged an altar hearth from ʿAtarūz (Line 13). Al Qurayyāt is regularly identified as Kerioth in the stele (Dearman 1989: 179). He would have established a foothold at Al Qurayyāt after driving the residents from the site. It was the first victory in the region, which gave him a secure base for succeeding campaigns and tactical advantages against the forces at ʿAtarūz.

In antiquity, the first victory was often considered a momentous event and had significant cultic weight, as shown in the Akkadian Stele of Naram-Sin (Winter 2010: 85–149), the Victory Stele of King Esarhaddon of Assyria (Spalinger 1974), and the Hebrew Bible (*e.g.,* Exodus 17:15–16; Judges 6:24). It was a sign of divine favor and interpreted as a manifestation of the god's will. The triumphant army would often make sacrifices to the gods to thank them for their victory and to seek their continued protection and success for the rest of the war. This notion may explain the ritual Mesha performed at Al Qurayyāt following his capture of ʿAtarūz. The Moabites viewed their victory at ʿAtarūz as a milestone incident with crucial cultic importance. They celebrated it with the erection of a memorial, perhaps an altar, at the first triumph place, which would serve as a lasting reminder of their achievement, reinforcing Moabite authority and legitimizing the king's rule over the ʿAtarūz region.

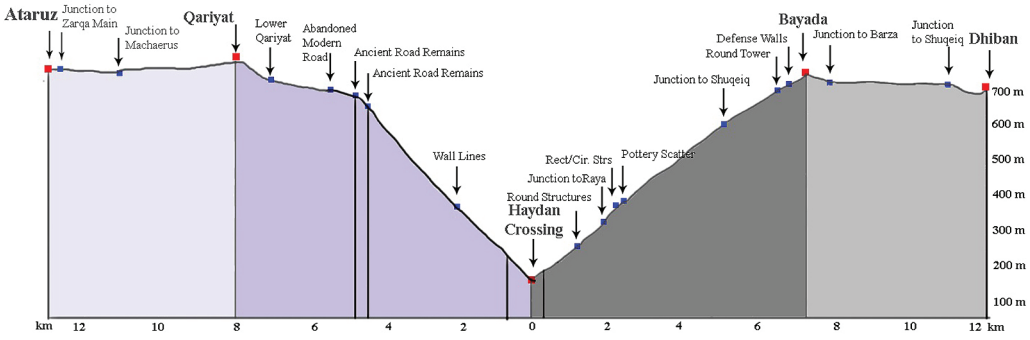
Conclusion

ʿAtarūz and DHībān histories and archaeological evidence date back to the Iron II period. They were important centers of culture, trade, commerce, and political influence in the ʿAtarūz and DHībān Plateau regions during the era. The present study has brought together multiple lines of archaeological evidence to improve our understanding of the settlement history of the regions and provide significant insights into the area between ʿAtarūz and DHībān. According to the research, the two cities were connected via a north-south thoroughfare, which advanced the transportation of goods and people between the ʿAtarūz and DHībān Plateau regions. Also, the road was probably used for King Mesha's war against ʿAtarūz in the 9th century BC and played an essential role in the subsequent expansion and maintenance of the Moabite kingdom throughout the early Iron II era. Bayadah and Al Qurayyāt were founded or grew up at two strategic points along this highway. This road system seemingly largely fell out of use with the decline of Moabite power in late Iron II until its renewed use by the Nabateans, the Hasmoneans, and the Roman Empire during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.



1. Map of the ancient road between ʿAtarūz and DHībān (image by C. Ji).

2. KHirbat Al Qurayyāt upper section (looking north) (photo by C. Ji).



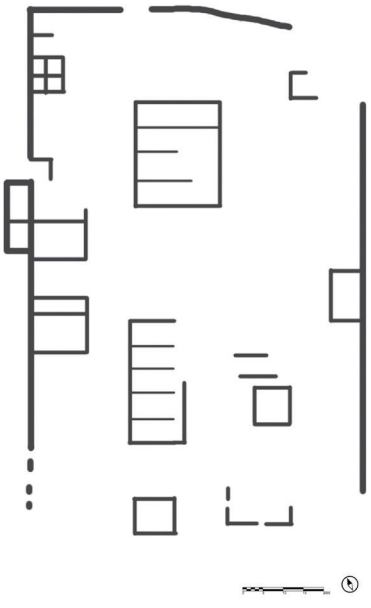
3. Profile of the road between ʿAtarūz and DHībān (image by C. Ji).

4. KHirbat Al Qurayyāt (looking west) (photo by C. Ji).

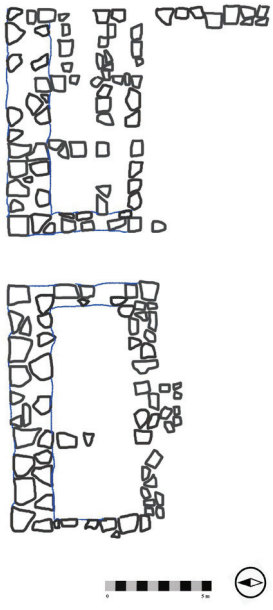
5. Lower Al Qurayyāt and the plateau east of KHirbat Al Qurayyāt (looking east) (photo by C. Ji).

6. Building remains at KHirbat Bayadah, photo from 1999 (looking northwest) (photo by C. Ji).

7. West city wall of KHirbat Bayadah, photo from 1999 (looking south) (photo by C. Ji).



8. Site sketch of KHirbat Bayadah, 1999 (drawing by C. Ji).



9. Drawing of the KHirbat Bayadah northern gate, 1999 (drawing by C. Ji).

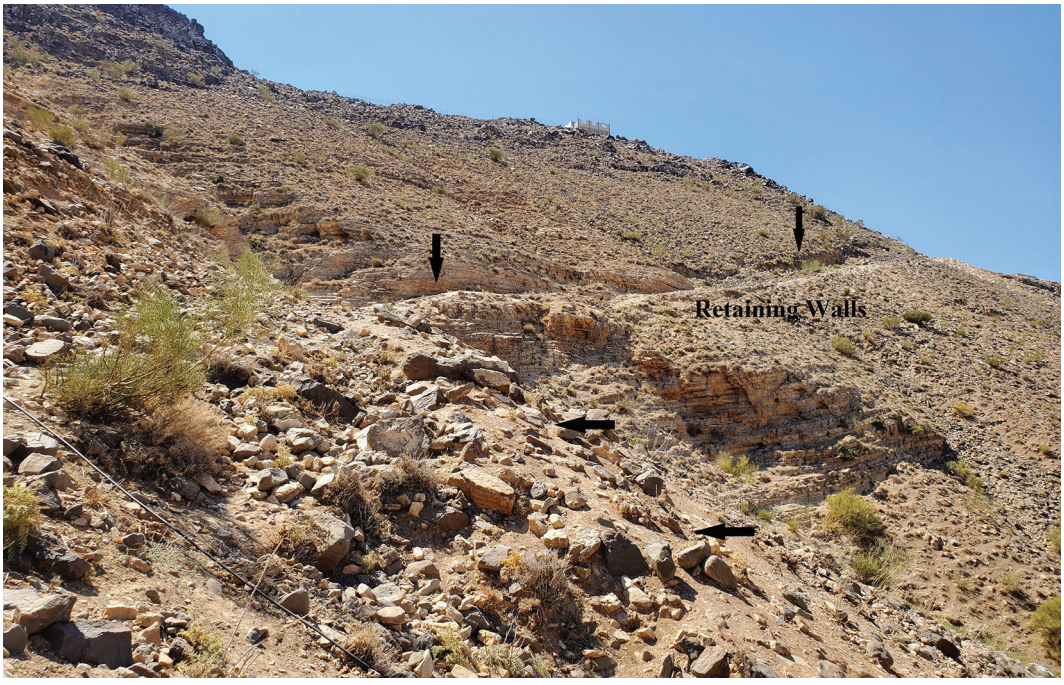
10. Ancient reservoirs at Bayadah (looking north) (photo by C. Ji).

11. Proposed route of the Bayadah-Sayl Al Hīdān Road and location of Sayl Al Hīdān Ford (north) (looking east) (photo by C. Ji

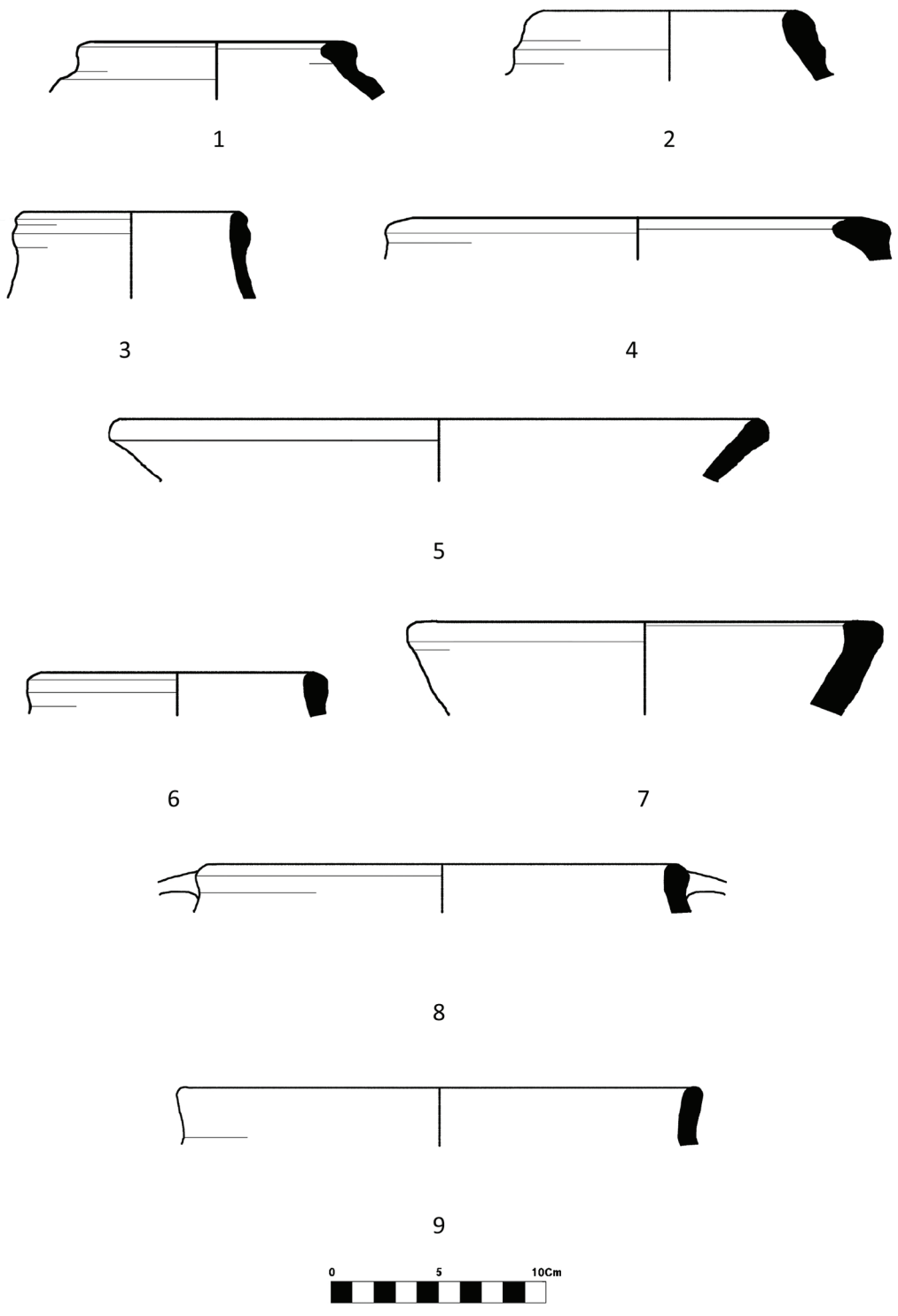
12. Defense wall at the start of the Bayaḏah-Sayl Al Hīdān Road, incorporating natural cliff (looking northeast) (photo by C. Ji).

13. Close view of the defense wall at the start of the Bayaḏah-Sayl Al Hīdān Road (looking east) (photo by C. Ji).

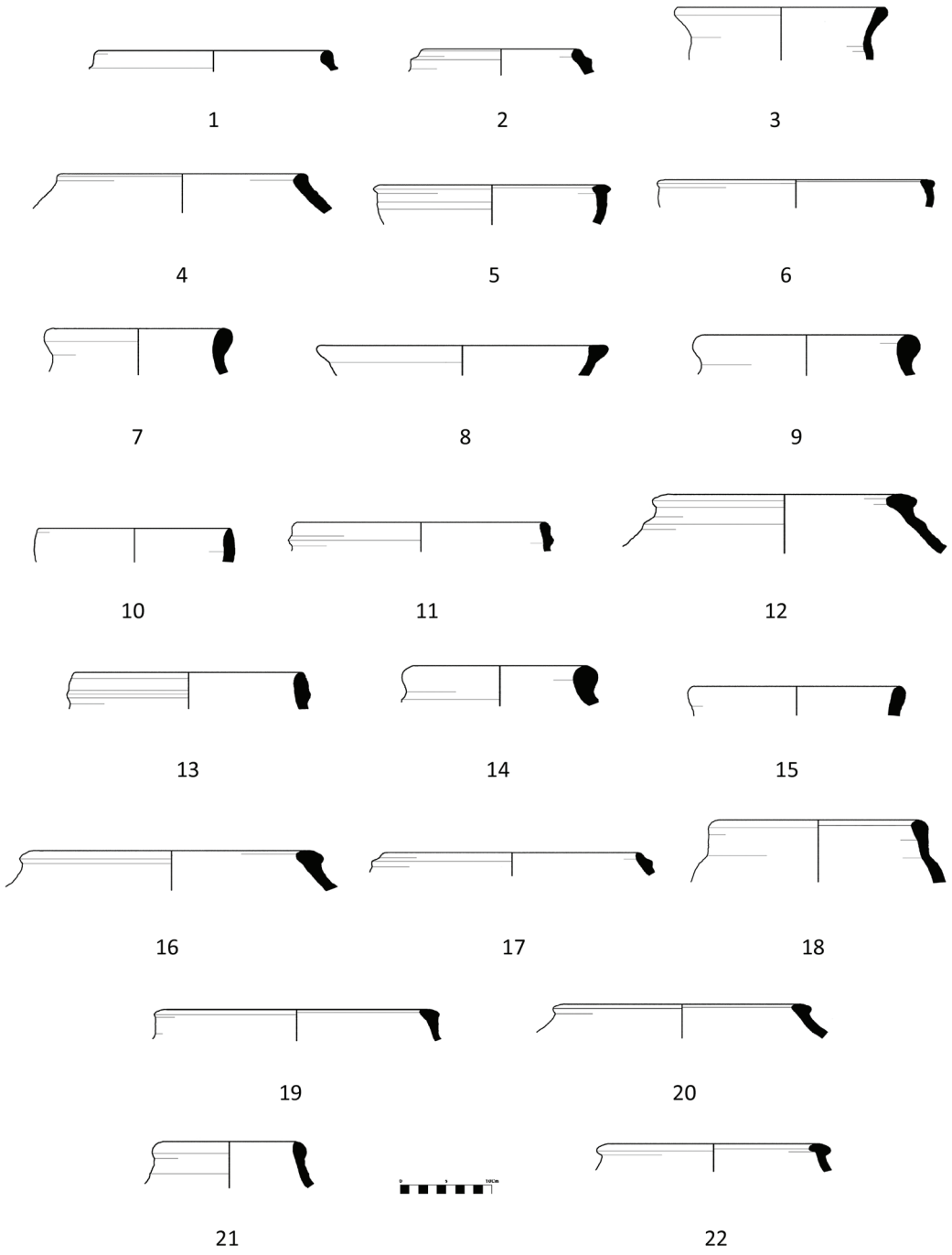
14. Part of the field defense wall near the start of the Bayaḍah-Sayl Al Hīdān Road (looking northeast) (photo by C. Ji).



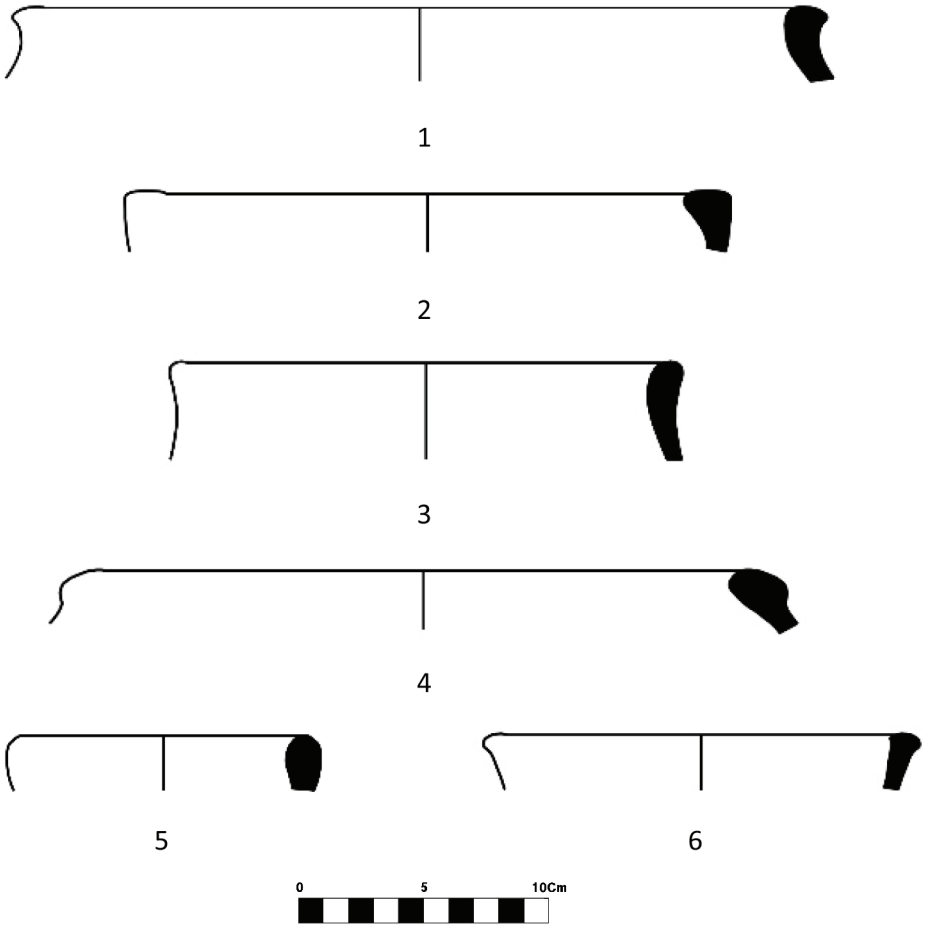
15. Remains of the ʿAyn Shuqayq Road (looking south) (photo by C. Ji).



16. Pottery from the sounding at KHirbat Bayadah city wall (drawing by C. Ji).



17. Pottery from the surface of KHirbat Bayadah (drawing by C. Ji).



18. Iron Age pottery from the surface of KHirbat Al Qurayyāt (drawing by C. Ji).

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