

Middle Ḥaḍramawt Archaeological Survey, 2004: Report to the General Organization for Antiquities and Museums, San‘ā’, Republic of Yemen

Abstract

For two weeks in April, 2004, a brief study season of the Middle Ḥaḍramawt Archaeological Survey (MHAS) was conducted. The bulk of this work was devoted to documenting materials collected in previous seasons of this project and stored in Qasr Seiyun. In addition to the museum work, one day’s fieldwork was conducted in order to visit an Islamic site near the village of Jujah, and a Pre-Islamic site near the village of Khashamar, both of which are located in the main wadi to the west of Shibam. This report describes the results of the 2004 study season.

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1 Documentation of Previously-Collected Materials

Previous fieldwork for the MHAS project, during which sites were visited and surface collections were made, was conducted in 1997 and 1999. A brief study season was also conducted in 2001, though it involved no new fieldwork. Owing to the amount of pottery (in particular) that was collected in 1997 and 1999, full documentation of all collected materials could not be completed prior to this year. The primary goal of the current season (2004), then, was to complete the documentation of these materials. Upon conclusion of the study, all materials were re-labeled, re-bagged, and returned to storage in Qaṣr Say'ūn.

1.1 Photography

660 new photographs were taken. Of this number, most were new photographs of ceramic sherds which had not been previously photographed. A number of previously un-photographed lithics were also shot, and all ceramics which had previously only been photographed in group photos (by site) were re-shot individually. In the course of fieldwork (see below), 24 photographs of the sites or their features were also taken. All photographs were taken with a digital camera, and all have been entered into the project database.

1.2 Drawings

110 new drawings were made. Of these, 85 were new ceramic profiles. The remainder were object drawings, including inscribed objects. Upon return to the USA, these drawings will be scanned and entered into the project database.

1.3 Database Updates

In addition to the new photographs and drawings entered into the project database (mentioned above), re-examination of collected materials permitted updating of their records in the project database. Descriptions for 136 objects were updated; records for 263 ceramics were updated, and records for 8 inscriptions were updated. The rapidity with which these updates could be made was due to the creation of a new computer program for data entry, written during the first days of this year's season.

1.4 Numismatic Highlights

Object MHAS O-118, a bronze coin collected at the site of al-Ġuraf (الغرف; MHAS S-35; UTM Zone 39: 1766324 N, 284546 E) in 1999 was found to be readable. The obverse of the coin contains the letters) ǫ ǰ (šqr), the name of the royal palace of Shabwa, enclosed in a box. The reverse of this coin depicts a bull in profile, with the moon between his horns, and the letters 4 ǫ 4 (syn) over his back. Clearly, this is a representation of the Ḥaḍrami god Syn. These elements are well known on

Ḥaḍramī coinage (see Sedov and ‘Aydarus, 1995, p.32 fig.48 and p.35 fig.59). The coin, itself, was probably minted in Shabwa, and its discovery adds weight to the conclusion (Sedov and al Saqqaf, 1996, p.60) that al-Ġuraf, at least in part, dates to the first centuries, AD.

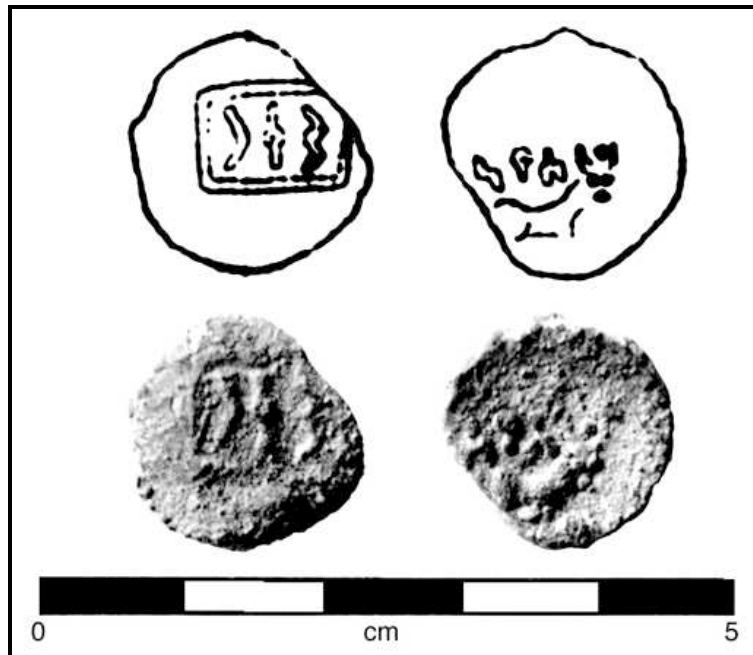


Figure 1: Coin MHAS O-118, obverse and reverse.

1.5 Ceramic Highlights

Site MHAS S-55 (UTM Zone 39: 1747255 N, 248925 E), when visited in 1999 was believed by me to be a recently-abandoned hamlet, parts of which were built upon the reused foundations of Pre-Islamic structures. One of the sherds collected at this site lends some credence to this idea. The sherd in question, MHAS C-60, a fragment of a large storage jar, was found to be inscribed on its interior. A partial Musnad letter 𐩮 (MHAS I-50) is visible, and clearly dates this sherd as Pre-Islamic. A similar example is known from Raybun, where it is assigned to the “Middle Raybun II” phase (see Sedov, 1998, MR-II, type 5.0, no.4), which is dated to the middle 1st Millennium BC.

Qal‘at al-Ḥabūḍī (قلعة الحبوضي; MHAS S-56; UTM Zone 39: 1768629 N, 264635 E), visited in 1999, seemed an unremarkable castle, similar to dozens of others in the Wādī Ḥaḍramawt. However, most of the ceramics collected at this site are rather unlike ceramics collected elsewhere—differing in ware, decoration, and perhaps form. I suspect that these ceramics are imports, the large numbers of

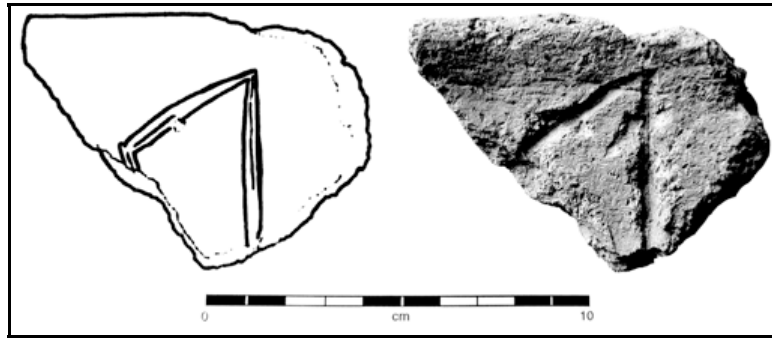


Figure 2: Interior of sherd MHAS C-60, with inscription MHAS I-50.



Figure 3: Structure MHAS A-21 on site MHAS S-55. The foundation stones of this Islamic house appear to be reused blocks from a Pre-Islamic structure.

which may suggest that the castle's inhabitants were foreigners. I currently cannot estimate the castle's age, but clearly its ceramics warrant additional study.

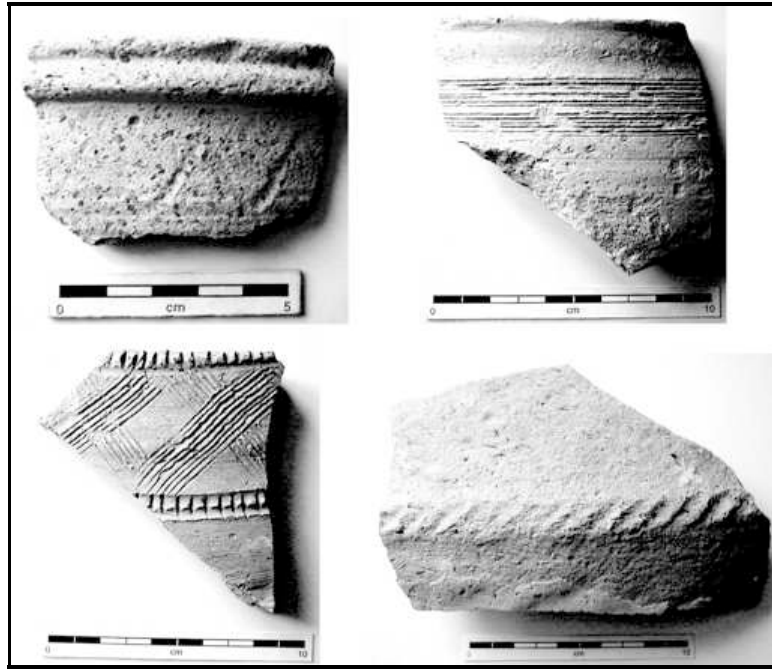


Figure 4: Some sherds of possible import ceramics from site MHAS S-56. Clockwise from upper left: C-121, C-111, C-108, C-119.

Ḥakmah (حكمة; MHAS S-46; UTM Zone 39: 1748796 N, 283446 E), visited in 1999, is an isolated house on the alluvium in Wādī ʿIdm. Upon initial visit, it was notable for the large amount of obsidian debitage found there and for the possibility that it was built atop an earlier structure (as is supposed for the structure capping al-Ġuraf). This year's examination of its ceramics poses a number of interesting questions about it. Two sherds found here (MHAS C-344 and C-345), probably from the same vessel, are of a dense red ware with a yellowish-brown glaze on their exterior. I have not found this ware at any other site, and suspect that it's an import. Two other sherds (MHAS C-355 and C-356), perhaps fragments of the same storage jar, have deeply incised crosshatching on their interior surfaces. I suspect that this treatment is functional, but do not know the function, and have not seen parallels in Ḥadramawt. Other sherds from this site are clearly Islamic, but some—in particular, a pedestal base (MHAS C-357)—are possibly Pre-Islamic. It is quite possible, then, that this site was in use (though not necessarily continuously) for centuries.

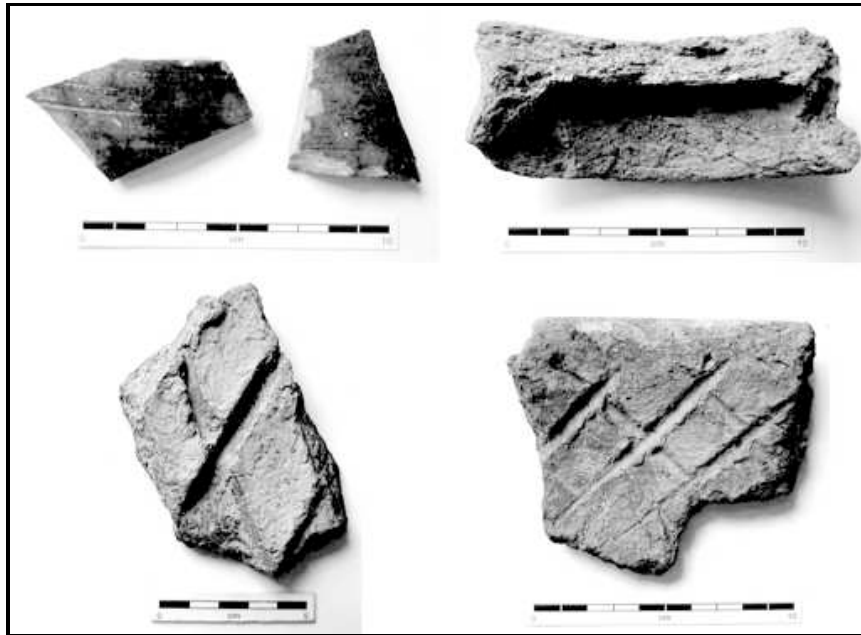


Figure 5: Noteworthy sherds from site MHAS S-46. Clockwise from upper left: C-344 and C-345, C-357, C-355, C-356.

2 Archaeological Reconnaissance

In hopes of improving the quality of this survey, additional fieldwork was undertaken. Lack of time, however, prevented me from visiting all the sites for which I had requested permission—and I was limited to one day’s fieldwork. I nevertheless did manage to re-visit one old site and two new sites, accompanied by GOAM representative Ahmad Ba-Raja, from the Say^ūn Museum.

2.1 Site MHAS S-23: Ḥašāmar 1 (خشامر ١) UTM Zone 39: 1760147 N, 242404 E

When visited in 1997, this site was remarkable for the suggestion, inferred from the large number of dressed and inscribed limestone wall plaques found on the slope at its eastern end, that a Pre-Islamic hillside temple was located here. The aim of this year’s visit was to search again for the foundations of that structure and to re-examine the adjacent Pre-Islamic village. After much searching, however, no new evidence was uncovered to reveal the exact location of the temple. It is nearly certain that one existed, but all traces of it (except for the aforementioned limestone fragments scattered on the scree slope) have vanished. Likewise, little new was learned of the village, as it has been largely destroyed by earth-moving equipment. This destruction happened prior to 1997, but is regretful nevertheless. Currently, the site is marked by great quantities of Pre-Islamic ceramics scattered

across its surface—and though it is unlikely that much of the site’s architecture can be recovered, careful sampling of its surface remains might yield clues about its layout.



Figure 6: Overview of site MHAS S-23, as seen from the probable temple location on the slopes to the west of the Pre-Islamic village. Note that most of the site has been cleared with heavy machinery for two field plots.

2.2 Site MHAS S-83: Jūjah 3 (جوجه ۳) UTM Zone 39: 1763351 N, 242817 E

This site was known from the NYU excavation at Jūjah 1 (MHAS S-24) in 1994, when it was used as a temporary control point for tying the sites of Jūjah 2 (MHAS S-26) and Jūjah 5 (MHAS S-27) into the Jūjah 1 grid (Hansen, 1994, p.10). This site has a Pre-Islamic component, one or two Islamic components, and some modern intrusions.

The likely Pre-Islamic component of this site consists of one or two mud brick structures at its southern end. This structure (or structures) has been largely cleared with earth-moving equipment for a modern field. Nevertheless, surface ceramics and two soil mounds suggest the location and date of the structure(s).

Approximately 100 meters north of the field are the remains of an Islamic house and outbuilding (MHAS A-31). About 100 meters northeast of A-31 are the remains of another Islamic house, immediately to the east of large sand dunes. To the north of the sand dunes, stretching to approximately 350 meters north of A-31, is a cluster of five houses and one well-preserved mosque (MHAS A-32) with a

heavily plastered interior. It is not entirely certain whether A-31 and this village are contemporary, but based on their proximity and comparable states of preservation, I assume that they are. Aside from the aforementioned field, a large recently-abandoned well intrudes upon the eastern edge of the site, and some additional earth moving bounds the northern end of the site.



Figure 7: Western wall of structure MHAS A-31, at site MHAS S-83.



Figure 8: Northern end of mosque MHAS A-31, at site MHAS S-83.

2.3 Site MHAS S-84: Ḥašāmar 2 (خشامر ٢) UTM Zone 39: 1760135 N, 242224 E

These are the remains of a mud brick castle or fortress (MHAS A-33) on the scree slope just to the west of site S-23. It was noted, but not visited, in 1997. The structure sits atop cobblestone foundations, and plastered surfaces poke out of the mud brick rubble in places. Ceramics from the immediate vicinity of the structure include sherds that are clearly Islamic. However, as one descends toward S-23, a number of possible Pre-Islamic types are visible. These are most likely intrusions from S-23, as the construction and preservation of A-33 show it to be later than S-23. Further analysis of the collections are needed to better understand the site's age.



Figure 9: Western wall of structure MHAS A-33, at site MHAS S-84.

2.4 GPS Control Points

Though both previous fieldwork seasons of MHAS utilized GPS, this year is the first time that GPS readings could be made without the inhibiting effects of “Selective Availability” (SA), which was imposed by the US military to deliberately reduce the accuracy of GPS readings. The GPS coordinates taken on S-83 and S-84, therefore, are more accurate than GPS coordinates of other sites in this survey. Because of the increased accuracy now available, the 1997 GPS coordinates of S-23 were discarded in favor of new readings. Furthermore, a point was taken at the intersection of the main Wādī Ḥaḍramawt trunk road and the side road to the village of Jūjah, to be used as a control point for improving the geo-rectification of the project's GIS base map.

3 Concluding Remarks

Though the 2004 season of the Middle Ḥaḍramawt Archaeological Survey was brief, a substantial amount was accomplished. This season's work has demonstrably improved the quality of the project's data and will, in turn, improve the quality of the analyses. Since MHAS was conceived of as the fieldwork component of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, and since the dissertation is to be submitted at the end of this calendar year, it is unlikely that there will be any future seasons of MHAS. However, it is hoped that the groundwork has been laid for future archaeological research in the region. I would like to thank the staff of GOAM, and the staff of Qaṣr Say'ūn in particular, for their assistance thus far.

Paul C. Zimmerman
5 May, 2004

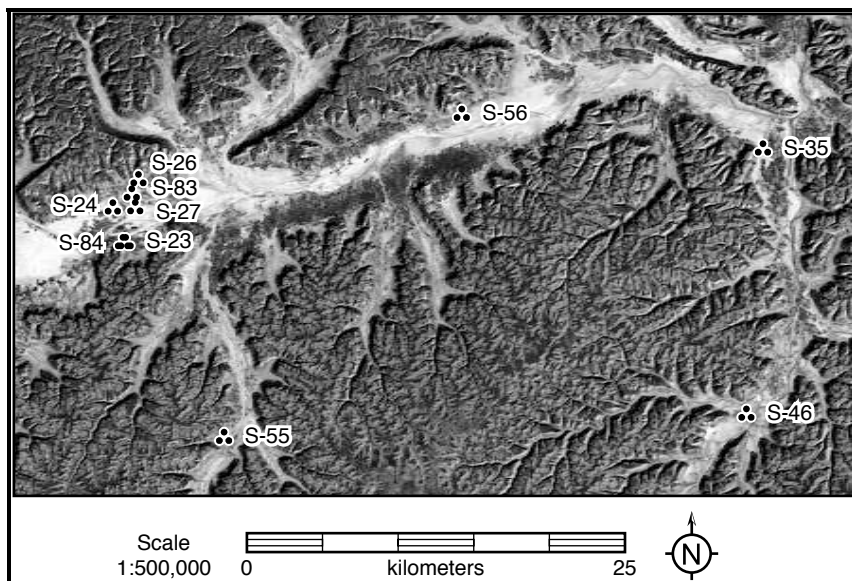


Figure 10: Map of sites mentioned in the text of this report.

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