

Excavations at Tor Ghuwayr 1 and Jabal Juhayra, 2014

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Introduction

After the five-year investigation on the Neolithic water-use history, our long-term research project (JBPP: Jafr Basin Prehistoric Project) has shifted to Phase 4. The research objective of this phase is to explore the socio-cultural correlation between sedentary farming communities to the west and pastoral societies to the east. This season dealt with the following two sites: 1) Tor Ghuwayr 1, a supposedly EBA burial field in the northeastern part of the basin; and 2) Jabal Juhayra, a small Neolithic settlement at the northwestern corner of the basin (**Fig. 1**). The following is a brief summary of the excavation at the two sites.

Tor Ghuwayr 1

Tor Ghuwayr 1 is an elongated burial field that extends for c. 13 km along the escarpment fringing the northeastern edge of the Jafr Basin. Our preliminary survey, taken place in March 2014, registered a total of 16 cairn-like features (Fujii 2014). This season was devoted to the excavation of one of them, TT-11 (Tower Tomb No. 11). As a result, it proved to consist of the following two components: a round tower tomb c. 2.4-2.6 m in diameter and ca. 0.9 m in preserved height, and a total of eight small stone circles c. 1 m in diameter (**Fig. 2**). The latter stretched in a straight way from the southeastern corner of the former, forming, as a whole, an elongated complex c. 16 m in total length.

Every component was constructed with limestone boulders either undressed or coarsely halved, which were probably procured from the exposed bedrock layer in and around the site. Though seriously disturbed by illicit digging, the tower tomb proved to have been covered with a semi-corbelled roof supported by a central pillar c. 1 m long. However, no clear evidence for an entrance was recognized on the sidewall. Both the tower tomb and the stone circles were empty, and nothing was found. Thus it is difficult to date the complex. All we can say is that it resembles the EBA tower tomb in the northern Arabia and the Sinai Peninsula and, therefore, can probably be dated to the same horizon.

An additional survey, taken place in the intervals of excavation, showed that another

several dozen tailed tombs were dotted along the eastern escarpment and formed two burial fields, Tor Ghuwayr 2 and 3. It is our present perspective that the tower tomb culture spread throughout the eastern half of the Jafr Basin and confronted the cist-type cairn tomb culture in its western half.

Jabal Juhayra

Jabal Juhayra is an isolated volcanic hill c. 12 km SW of Jurf Darwish, a traditional village along the Hejaz Railway. We located a small Neolithic settlement during the 2001-2002 winter season survey and tentatively registered it as JF-0116 (Fujii and Abe 2008). After a dozen years interval, we have finally embarked on the full-fledged investigation at this site.

This season focused on a test sounding to understand the general site stratigraphy (**Fig. 3**). Trench excavation in Area 1 revealed that the site includes two stratified cultural entities: Layer 2 culture represented by intermittent wall alignments using basalt cobbles, and the Layer 3 culture represented by rectangular structures using flint slabs (**Fig. 4**). Although the former is yet to be clearly dated due to the scarcity of small finds, the latter can be assigned to the PPNB on the basis of the occurrence of a characteristic flint assemblage including naviform cores and the Byblos and Amuq types of points (**Fig. 5**). Small finds other than flint artifacts were extremely scarce and, therefore, the small settlement is thought to have been used as a flint factory bridging the production area of raw material to the east and its consuming area to the west. However, the excavation has just started. Further investigation is necessitated to understand the overall picture of the unique site.

Concluding Remarks

This season has produced the following two results: the discovery of the tailed tomb culture at Tor Ghuwayr 1, and the identification of a PPNB flint factory at Jabal Juhayra. Both sites are highly significant and require further research. The next season, scheduled in spring 2015, is to address a continuous excavation at the latter site.

References

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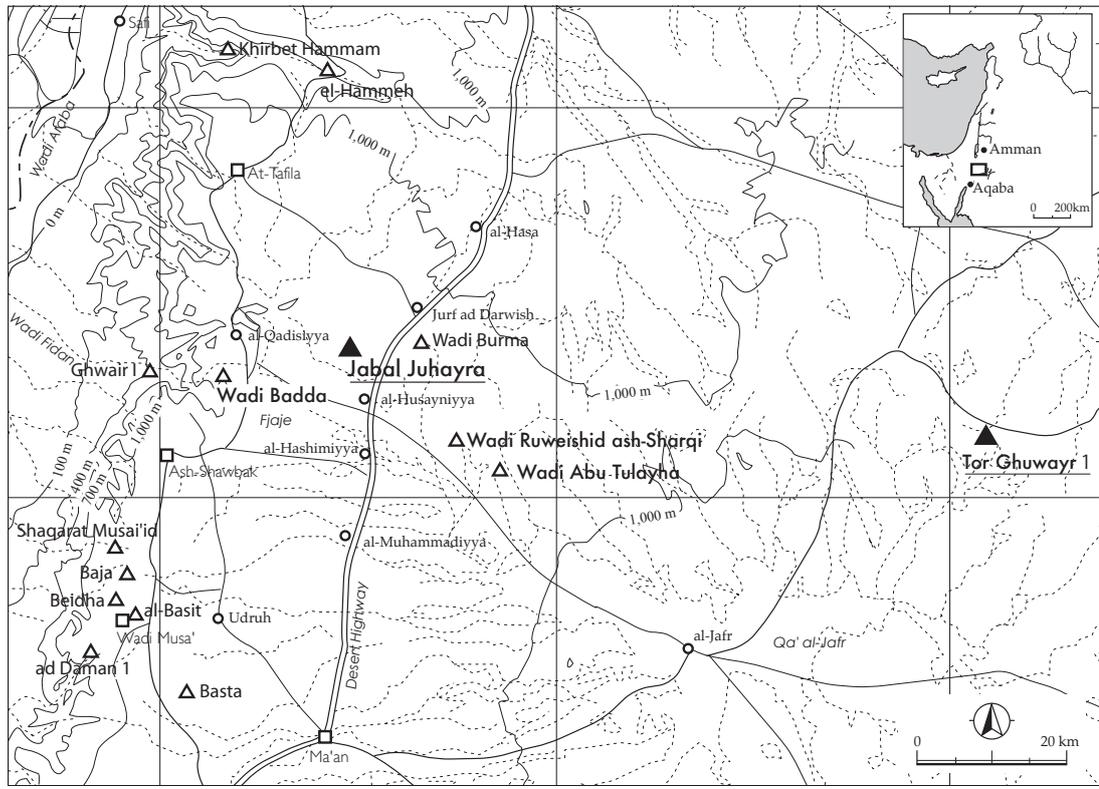


Fig. 1 Location of Tor Ghuwayr 1 and Jabal Juhayra.



Fig. 2 Tor Ghuwayr 1: general view of TT-11 (looking E).



Fig. 3 Jabal Juhayra: general view of the site (looking SE).



Fig. 4 Jabal Juhayra: structural remain of Layer 3 (PPNB).



Fig. 5 Jabal Juhayra: selected flint artifacts from Area 1.