

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

The Ritual Landscape of Murayghat Project

1st Season

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Near Eastern Archaeology

ToRS



The Ritual Landscape of Murayghat

2014 report of 1. Season to the Department of Antiquities of Jordan

Research History

The site of Murayghat has been mentioned by many early travelers and other passers-by, the first western description (there might well be mentions in Arabic sources) came from Charles Irby and James Mangles who toured the region in 1817 and 1818 and already created the mental connection between the stone structures and “sepulchral monuments”, which has been repeated in literature since then. Claude Reignier Conder visited the site in 1881 and recorded the name of “El Mareighât ... ‘the things smeared,’ with oil, or blood, or other thick liquid”. Other translations given to us in 2014 were “site to picnic”, “the site to enjoy the view” and similar meanings to thick liquid as Conder reported. He described the site and its surrounding in some detail, estimating that 150 dolmens would have existed on the central knoll and the surrounding hills.

The Tuleilat Ghassul team from the Pontific Institute reported Chalcolithic pottery in the 1930ies, so did Harrison in the 1990ies, but stipulated that also EB ceramics were noticed. Between 1999 and 2001 Savage and his team visited the site, surveyed random squares and documented several structures on the central knoll. They interpreted the results as “several structures on the hill made up of outlines of megalithic rocks (probably columns or column bases), with cobblestone floors;” and “a series of concentric circles of standing stones”.

Present situation

The central knoll is limited by the Wadi Murayghat (that flows into the Wadi Main) to the NW and the street towards the Wadi Main to the SE (fig. 1). It is surrounded by low hills to the north, west and southwest, while southeast of the road a low field soon drops down to the steep sides of the Wadi Main. The north-eastern hill (area 3) is nearly eaten up by the northern quarry. The south-western hill (area 5) is also much affected by the southern quarry (the actual situation in 2014 and the aerial photos from 2011 show a much larger extent of the quarry in 2014). Along the road are some broken down dolmens, according to the information by the local population, these have been prepared to be blown up during the last decades.

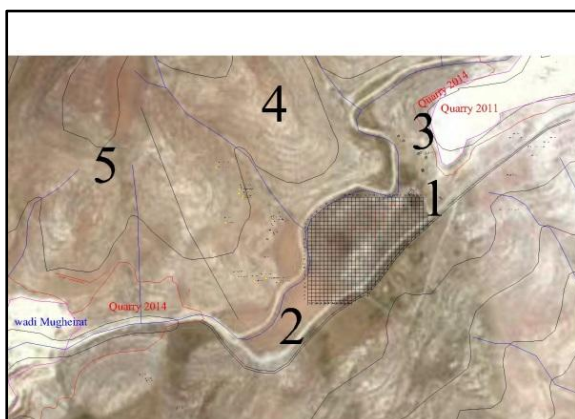


Figure 1 Plan (superimposed on satellite image) of central knoll (1), fields (2, unsurveyed), area 3 (towards northern quarry), area 4 (unsurveyed), area 5 (hill towards southern quarry), area 6 is SW of southern quarry.

The transport from the southern quarry passes along the site every day. There was no contact with the northern quarry, while the owner and manager of the southern quarry paid visits to the site and helped with heavy equipment, when the trenches were backfilled.

Project “Ritual Landscape” in 2014

The new project by the University of Copenhagen (Institute for Regional and Cross-Cultural Studies) directed by Susanne Kerner had the following plan: survey of the central knoll, begin of excavation on the central knoll, survey of the surrounding hills. The project took place between the 12.5. and 26.6. Between the 30.5. and 24.6. the annual field-school

of the University of Copenhagen (with 17 first year students) was part of the project. The other members of the team included, beside the director, Isabelle Ruben (vice-director) responsible for the excavation, Matthias Flender, responsible for the survey, and Hugh Barnes, responsible for the geophysical survey. Ann Anderson worked on the pottery. The supervisors from Copenhagen University included Salwa Amzourou (find-documentation), Pia Holme Thomassen (survey central site), Kristine Tophøj, Asma Bibi Younas, Tobias Terman Olsen (all three survey), Yukkin Pang and Nikoline Tyler (both excavation).

Heartly thanks are sincerely offered to HE Dr Monther Dahash, Director-General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, for his full and unreserved backing of the project. In addition, Aktham Oweidi and his staff of the Department of Antiquities office in Amman made sure that the work could start in time and good order. It was, furthermore, a pleasure to have first Mr. Isa Seryani and then Mr. Bassim Mohammed, head of the Madaba office, as our DOA representative, who were most helpful. Abu Ibrahim and Abu Bilal both worked as guides and provided lots of very helpful information about the recent history of the site.

Support in Denmark was equally as enthusiastic, especially from Professor Ingolf Thuesen of the Carsten Niebuhr Institute, the Danish Institute in Damascus and the H. P. Hjerl-Hansen Mindefondet for Dansk Palæstinaforskning.

Intensive, systematic survey and documentation of the central site

The central site was documented completely in sketch plans and in detail with a total station (fig. 2). Parts of the large stone structures have been documented with exact 1:20 stone plans. The archaeological survey was carried out between 1.6. and 23.6. and included a complete collection of surface material in 10 x 10 m squares. If clear sub-divisions of a square were recognizable (surface walls) the squares were further subdivided (in different loci). 34 of the 10 x 10 m squares have been finished (fig. 3).

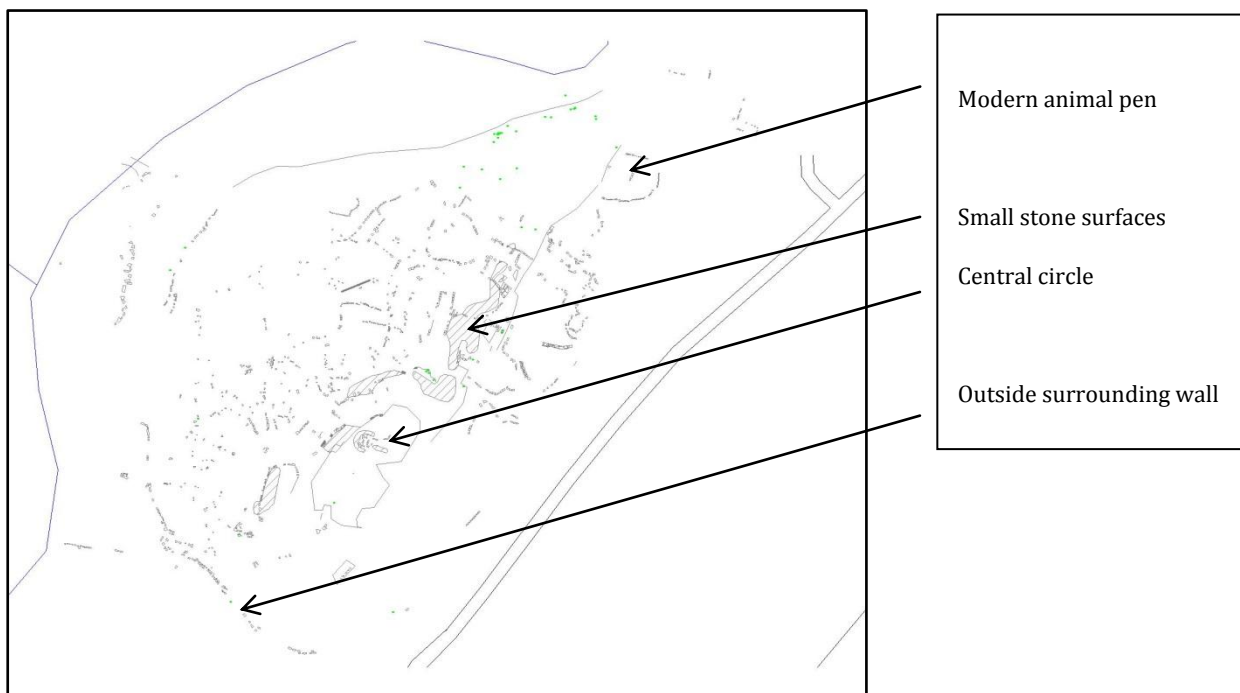


Figure 2 Plan of the central site. Visible are the horse-shoe shaped, circular and rectangular structures.

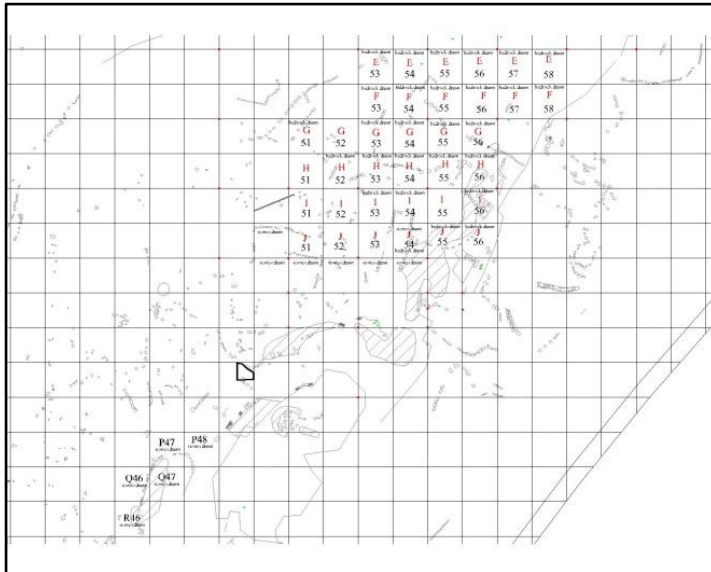


Figure 3 Marked squares have been surveyed.

The documentation of the standing stones and other architectural remains on the central site show one possible circle on the highest point on the bedrock. Most other structures are more horse-shoe shaped than circular (fig. 2*) and vary between 7 and 12 m in diameter. These structures appear mostly, but not exclusively, to the northwest and southwest of the highest point of the central knoll. Several rectangular structures (usually built from slightly smaller stones) have also been documented. To the south and west of the central site runs a wall which has an interior and exterior face, which has been destroyed towards the

center of the western edge (the stones, possibly removed by a bulldozer according to a local informant, can be seen along the wadi slope, fig. 4). On the eastern slope of the central knoll are two other double walls visible forming an entrance-like structure.



Figure 4 Large stones fallen down from the outside wall at the western side of the central site (arrow).



Figure 5 Bulldozer created artificial wall to the left (E on top, slight distortion). Fields further left.

Several modern stone lines have also been documented, they include animal pens (see fig. 2), tent structures and long lines directing the water flow towards the modern cistern at the edge of the wadi. The most obvious modern disturbance has been created during the last decade, when the entire northern part of the site (north of the actual bedrock area) has been bulldozed, creating an artificial border between the bedrock and the agriculturally used area (fig. 5). Numerous cup-holes have been documented (fig. 6), there is a concentration of

them along the wadi's edge, where in some cases groups of four and six have been found. All over the central site single cup-holes can be found.

The archaeological material collected on the central site consisted of ceramics, lithic and basalt. Nearly all of the basalt fragments were just undefined, and not identifiable artefacts, the only exception was a basalt bowl fragment found on an unknown spot on the surface and presented to us. The pottery (very small and fragmented) included Islamic and Roman fragments, but consisted mostly of Late Chalcolithic, Early Bronze and possibly Middle Bronze age material.



Figure 6 Cup-holes

Excavation

The first two small trenches were laid out towards the middle of the central knoll in order to get information about the conspicuous stone surfaces (fig. 7a), formed by fist-sized stones, and the rows of standing stones.

Trench 1 (O49) and **trench 2** (N49) were each ca. 30 square meter. Regrettably work on those trenches had to be stopped after only seven days, as the land owner of this part of the site forbade us any further excavation. In trench 1 only 3 loci were defined: the modern surface 1100 including the cobbled stone layer, the heavily disturbed soil 1101, and a second layer of cobbled stones 1102. In trench 2 only 4 locus numbers were assigned: the modern surface 1000, topsoil 1001, lower topsoil 1002 and potential wall 1003 (fig. 7b).



Figure 7a Trench 1 with fist-sized stone surface (before excavation). Figure 7b Trench 2 at the end of excavation (looking S). In both photos are the two large standing stones recognizable that form an entrance-like structure to the top of the knoll.

After the enforced end of the excavation in the middle of the central site, it was decided to put three small trenches into the agricultural area north of the bedrock area (owned by a different land-owner). All three new trenches were laid into the area (fig. 8) that had been cleared of surface stones by bulldozer (several years ago) and had been used for goat herding and grain fields (see fig.5). Trench 3 and 4 were carried out for 20 days, trench 5 for 16 days.

Trench 3 measured 5 x 5 m and included a relatively large number of loci, as it proved to be quite complex under the topsoil layers: 1400 surface, 1401 Topsoil, 1402 line of stones, 1403 fill below topsoil, 1404 stone layer, 1405 fill of "Room"1, 1406 fill of room no. 2, 1407 wall 1, 1408 wall 2, 1409 wall 3, 1410 wall 4, 1411 fill (eastern part of the trench), 1412 fill (southern part of the trench), 1413 fill (northwestern part of the trench), 1414 rubble fill, 1415 fill (Room 1), 1416 floor, 1417 rubble fill, 1418 rubble wall, 1419 rubble wall, 1420 pile of stones (wall debris?), 1421 stone lined pit,

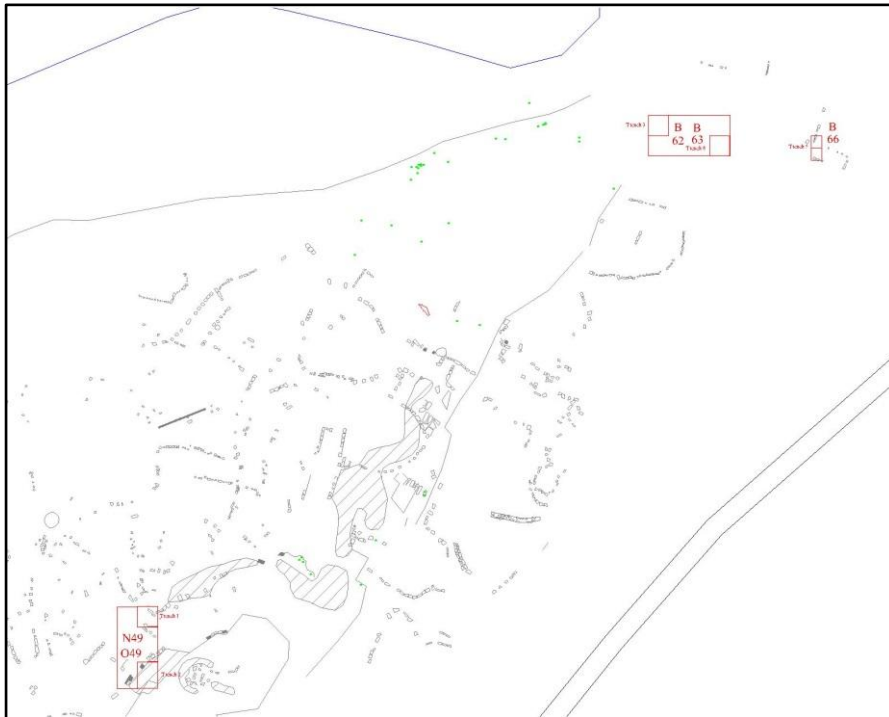


Figure 8 Plan of central site with trenches 1-2 (N49, O49 in SW corner), trenches 3-5 (B62, B63, B66) in the NE.

1422 fill of pit, 1423 fill of pit, 1425 fill (after removal of L.1410), 1426 fill (eastern part of the trench), 1427 rubble fill (possible stone foundation of locus 1419). The trench showed a succession of wall-like structures, which consisted of fist-sized stones, but in case of the largest walls also of much larger limestones, set in a single line (fig. 9a). The two main walls, made from large stones, formed a right angle and had different stone layers at the eastern

side, which formed a wall or platform by themselves. At the end of the excavation a circular, very well made, stone-lined pit was excavated (fig. 9b).



Figure 9a Trench 3 with walls and stone-lined pit to the left. Figure 9b Detail of trench 3 with stone lined pit.

The only complete ceramic profile of the season has been found in trench 4 and shows one of the typical EBA pots with thumb-decorated application below the rim (fig. 19a). An arrow-head from the Neolithic period has also been found in this trench.

Trench 4 (B63) measured 5 x 5 m and included loci: 1300 (surface), 1301 (topsoil), 1302 (sandy, contaminated layer), 1303 (fill layer containing a lot of hand fist sized stones), 1304 (fill layer located on top of wall L.1307), 1305 (fill layer located around the double sided wall L.1307), 1306 (fill layer located on top of clay surface L.1308), 1307 (double sided wall located in the west half of the trench, running from south to north), 1308 (clay surface). The clay surface (not a floor inside a building, more an open air surface) covered nearly the entire 25 square meter of the trench and ran, at least partly, over the wall, which was two stones wide with some fill material in the center (fig. 10).



Figure 10 Trench 4 with wall L.1307 left and the clay-surface right.

Trench 5 (B66) measured first 3 x 2.5 m and was later enlarged to 6 x 2.5 m. The stratigraphy was complex and the loci consisted of: 1600 (surface), 1601 (topsoil), 1602 (fill below plough soil), 1603 (wall made of large upright stones), 1604 (wall made of large stones, continuing outside the trench), 1605 (thick layer of fill), 1606 (foundation trench for L.1603 E), 1607 (fill of foundation trench L.1606), 1608 (foundation trench fill N), 1609 (fill), 1610 (wall south of L.1604), 1611 (thick layer of fill = L.1605, arbitrarily separated), 1612 (fill), 1613 (small wall), 1614 (fill), 1615 (unexcavated layer of small stones and soil), 1616 (wall large of blocks), 1617 (mudbrick lumps in fill), 1618 (mudbrick mixed fill). The walls 1603, 1604, 1610 clearly continued several meters outside the trench (fig. 11).



Figure 12 Trench 5 showing different loci. Continuation of walls (outside trench) marked with arrows.

After the initial mixed layers (including Late Antique material), most ceramics from the lower levels point towards a Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age I (possibly also later EBA periods).

All trenches had several contexts sieved.

Survey

The systematic survey of the surrounding areas was carried out from 24.5. to 23.6. The large areas 3 and 5 were

divided into fields (loci) where the whole surface was systematically surveyed. Other loci included single structures (such as dolmens, standing stones, tombs, unclear structures). **Area 3** is positioned north of the central knoll and the modern concrete house, limited by the wadi in the S and W, the quarry in the N and the street in the E (see fig. 1). The area contains standing stones (fig. 12), several tombs, unclear stone structures, one broken down dolmen, (fig. 13) and numerous cup holes. Surface material such as ceramics was mostly found at the lower fields towards the wadi (and the house of Abu Ibrahim) and not on the higher slopes. The pottery was mostly of Classic or Late Antique date.



Figure 11 Standing stone in area 3



Figure 13 Broken dolmen in area 3

Area 5 is to the west of the central site. It is limited by the wadi (E), a small wadi cut dividing area 4 and 5 (N) and the quarry (S). Nearly all features found in area 5 are situated on the eastern side of the hill, so that the central site (area 1) is visible from all these features. 20 caves of which at least some might have been used as tombs have been documented, they are formed by either a square or an arched entrance into the rock (fig.14). A superficial analysis of the pottery found in the



Figure 14 a and b Arched and straight roofed tombs in area 5.

surrounding of these possible tombs indicates a Classic or Late Antique dating. Eight dolmen in different stages of decay (some still complete), consisting of either one or two monolithic stones forming the side walls, have been found (fig 15). Another 23 stone structures might have been dolmen (and have completely fallen apart), but might also have been other stone structures including standing stones. Terracing walls and cisterns have also been documented. A map with a detailed compendium is under work.

Area 6, which is south of the southern quarry, was not part of this year's work-plan, but the frightening speed of the quarry's progress led to a photographic documentation of another five dolmens in that area and a number of immediately endangered tombs (fig. 16). Similarly the area around the northern quarry has been studied, where a standing stone similar to the Hadjar al-Mansub has been noticed.

Material

Most of the archaeological material collected consists of bags of lithic and ceramic (and bones to a smaller amount). The material is mostly from the surface or from the upper, often still disturbed,

layers in the trenches, from the survey on the central knoll and to differing degrees from the survey loci in area 3 and 5. The fragments are thus usually quite small and often eroded. The lithic material consists of many blades (and flakes), often backed, and retouched on one or both sides (fig. 17). As far as tool categories can be recognized sickle-blades, scrapers, borers and one possible arrow-head were found. Two cortex tools (fan-scrapers) were also in the collections (fig. 18).

The ceramics have undergone an initial analysis, but only the material from the trenches could be studied, while the survey material has only been looked at cursorily and will be studied during the



Figure 15 Dolmen in area 5



coming year. The main pottery material consisted of both relatively coarse wares, which were mostly used for large pots (fig. 19a), but also finer wares used for jars (fig. 19b). Many of the EBA vessels had ledge handles and applied decorations. From area 3 and several loci in area 5 came later material that most likely dates to the Classic, Late Antique and Islamic period.

One basalt vessel has been found, most other basalt fragments seem to be waste. Other finds include hammerstones, and one metal item.

Soil samples have been taken from several contexts in the different trenches, but have not been analysed further.



Figure 16 Endangered tombs close to the southern quarry.

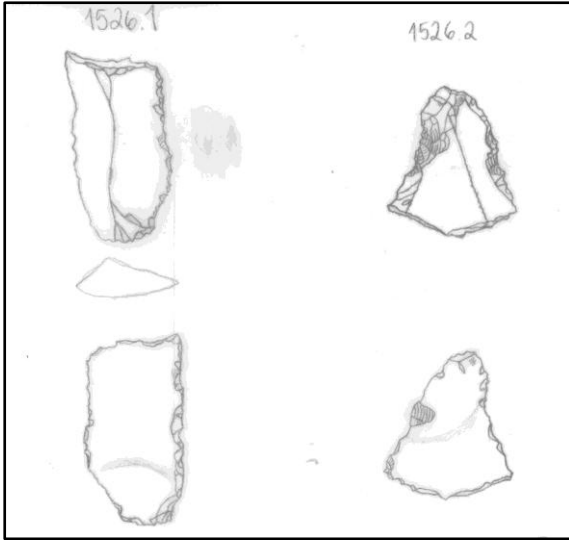


Figure 17 Retouched blade and flake (pencil drawing)

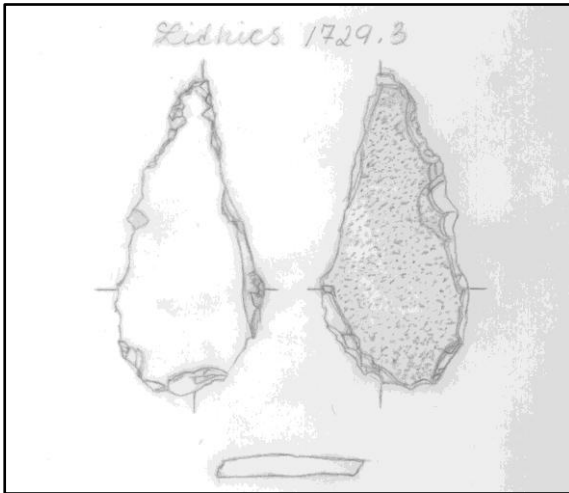


Figure 18 Fragment of Cortex Tool (fan-scraper). Pencil drawing.

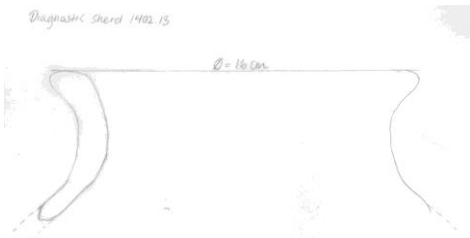


Figure 19a Ceramic pot with hole and thumb-impressed applied band. Figure 19b Finer ware jar.