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Results from the 2009–2016 excavation seasons in the historical centre of Dūmat al-Jandal, ancient Adummatu

ROMOLO LORETO

Summary

In 2011 a preliminary chronology of Dūmat al-Jandal was presented at the Seminar for Arabian Studies by the Saudi-Italian-French project. Based on two excavation seasons carried out at the eastern foot of the acropolis, the first archaeological data for the ancient Adummatu — quoted in the Assyrian annals as the capital of the northern Arab people — came to light. After eight archaeological campaigns in the historical centre of Dūmat al-Jandal, it is now possible to define a more complex picture of the ancient oasis, by defining the urban topography and trade contacts related to the centuries dated between the early Islamic and Nabataean eras. In addition, a first fragmentary inscription and artefacts related to the pre-Nabataean period, as well as ¹⁴C dates, could testify to an occupation during the second half of the first millennium BC, apparently a dark period from both textual and archaeological standpoints. The archaeological activities were carried out in the acropolis, where the Byzantine sixth- to seventh-century AD Mārid Castle stands; in the lower city, where the ancient Nabataean urbanization was identified and where pre-Nabataean artefacts were collected; and outside the western side of the early Islamic ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb mosque, where records from the Byzantine to the pre-Nabataean period were detected.

Keywords: Arabs in antiquity, Arabian archaeology, Saudi Arabia, Dūmat al-Jandal, al-Jawf

A historical and chronological outline

The University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’ has been conducting fieldwork in northern Saudi Arabia’s al-Jawf region since 2009, within the framework of the joint Saudi-Italian-French archaeological project at Dūmat al-Jandal (Loreto 2012: 165). Different objectives have been pursued during this period: prehistoric studies related to the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Ages were devoted to the palaeo-environment of the Jawf region and the emergence of the oases (Loreto 2013; 2016a; Hilbert et al. 2015); the excavation in the Western Enclosure area, the settlement dated to the Roman/Nabataean period (Charloux 2012; Charloux et al. 2016); and the identification of the ancient necropolis in the al-Sunaimiyāt area, located between the Western Enclosure and Mārid Castle (Charloux, Cotty & Thomas 2014). Nevertheless, the main effort has been the excavation of the historical centre of Dūmat al-Jandal, the only area in the oasis that provided stratigraphic evidence useful for the reconstruction of an absolute chronology of one of the main north Arabian oases (Fig. 1).

It is well known that the outline of the history of ancient Adummatu can be only partially traced on the basis of written sources, but the identification of Adummatu with Dūmat al-Jandal is generally admitted

(see Charloux & Loreto 2014: 38–41.) In contrast, the archaeological evidence can better define the chronology of the whole first millennium AD as well as shed light on the second half of the first millennium BC.

According to the Bible, Dūmah was one of the twelve sons of Ishmael at the head of his tribe, who was cast out into the desert (Gen. 21: 9–21; 25: 13–17). The settlement is mentioned several times in the Assyrian annals as the famous Arab city of Adummatu, the so-called ‘capital of the Arabs’, together with other major tribes — Qedar, Thamūd, Nebayot, and Massa’, all of which figure in the military reports as located in north-west Arabia (Eph’al 1982: 20–59, 74–165; Potts 2010; Charloux & Loreto 2014). In this list of people, Arabs are also named but it is not clear whether as a tribe or merely as an ethnic indication. What is clear is that between the ninth and seventh centuries BC, the Assyrian Empire tried to take control of the north Arabian commercial routes, which it finally succeeded in doing under Sennacherib in 688 BC, when the Assyrians reached Adummatu and took the city. The city was again on the rise under Esarhaddon (681–669 BC) and Ashurbanipal (668–627 BC), but later, between the reign of Nabonidus at Taymā’ and the advent of the Nabataeans, Adummatu disappears from the sources. It is not mentioned among the oases named by Nabonidus in the Ḥarrān stele (Schaudig 2001: 19). Beyond the key

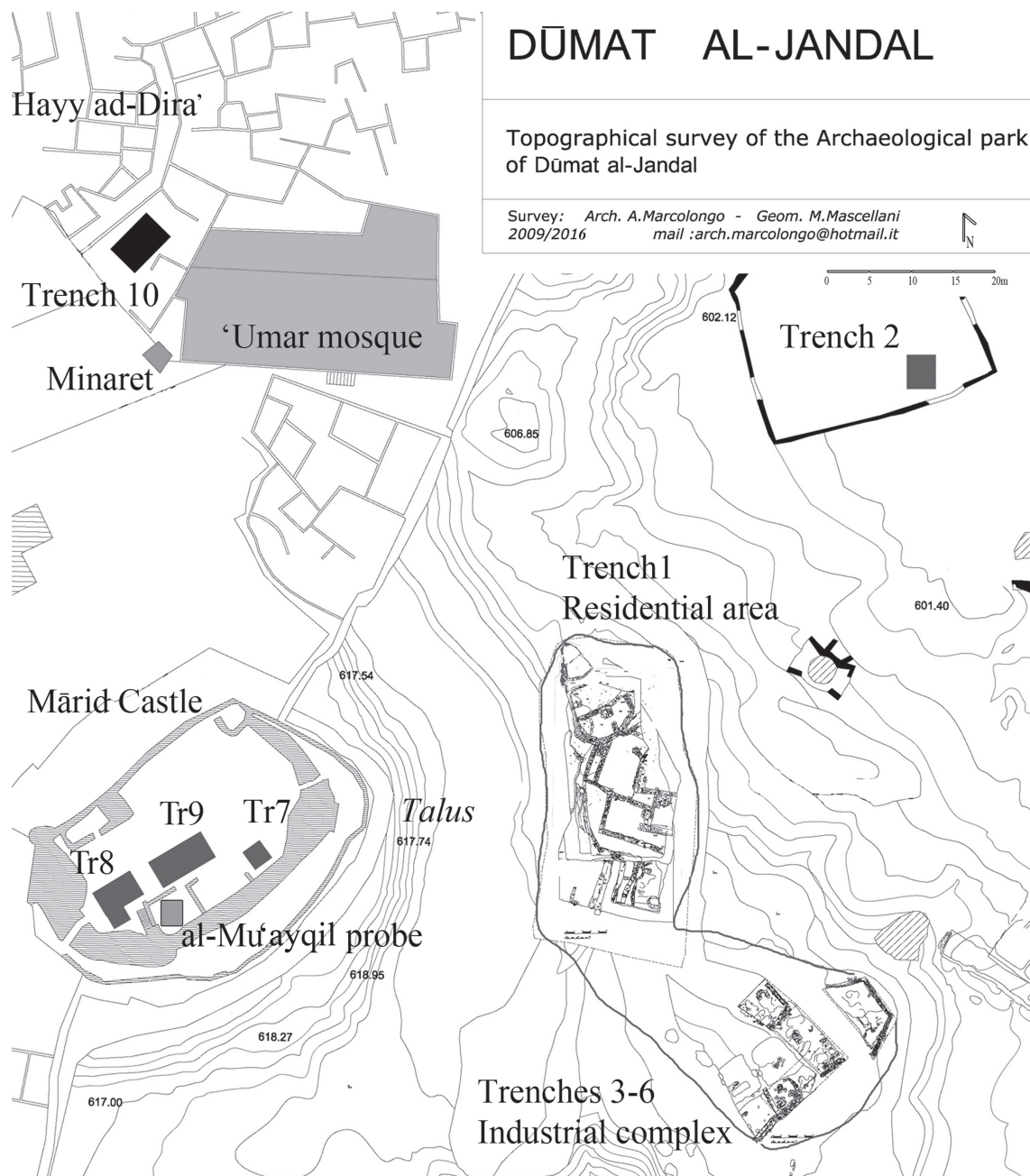


FIGURE 1. A topographical plan of the historical centre of Dūmat al-Jandal after the 2009–2016 campaigns.

role played by Taymā' as the capital of Nabonidus in Arabia, Dedān saw the growth of South Arabian peoples, the Minaeans, who from the fourth century BC assumed the role of chief commercial partner with north Arabia and the Mediterranean (Van den Branden 1957: 16;

Ryckmans 1961: 55–56). This probably means either that Adummatu suffered major destruction or that the relevant evidence is still to be found. In this regard, up to now very little material related to the first millennium BC has emerged from the excavations inside the oasis:

1. the only text is a fragmentary one classified under the Taymanitic language and dated to the period of Nabonidus (Loreto 2016b: 173–174, fig. 2), from the excavation in Trench 1, found in a stratigraphic level made of reused pre-Islamic and Islamic materials (level 3b) covering the Nabataean Building B;
2. the only relief, also from the same mixed stratigraphic level 3b, is a vulture decorating the small foot of an altar, whose stylistic schematic features recall the iconographic pattern of Taymā³ (see the stylized motif of the winged sun on the al-Ḥamrā³ cube and on the al-Ḥamrā³ stele; Hausleiter 2010: 254–255). It could also be considered as the representation of the god Nasr, ‘the vulture’, according to Hishām b. al-Kalbī, a Ḥimyarite god related to the hard and perilous deep desert environment (Faris 1952: 10) (Fig. 2/a);
3. rare carinated sherds (Fig. 3/a) and cuneiform decorated bowls (Fig. 3/b) of Assyrian or post-Assyrian tradition and locally made came from a level in the excavation outside the ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb mosque, which can be ¹⁴C dated to the fourth–second century BC (among many comparisons, see Kreppner 2008: fig. 5e; Anastasio 2011: fig. 4d);
4. a terracotta figurine of a *kourotrophos* deity dated to the third–second century BC, of local manufacture, judging by its poor style (Fig. 2/b). This small find from the foundation level of the first-century AD Nabataean Building A in Trench 1 seems to be very significant because it suggests that the female goddesses were still worshipped in Dūmah. The queens of Adummatu, in the Neo-Assyrian period, were already priestesses of Dilbat (Charloux & Loreto 2014: 38). Indeed, the *kourotrophos* relates to the Greek goddess Hera, linked to marriage and the birth of children (Price 1978: 144) or, in this Arabian context, to al-Lāt, mother goddess of fertility, or al-ʿUzzā, sometimes represented as a standing naked female figure (Brzozowska 2015: fig. 2);
5. finally, some Form 2 of Eastern Sigillata A sherds of the second–first century BC from the excavation inside the castle of Mārid came to light (Hayes 1985: table 1, fig. 8) (Fig. 3/c).

These few, but significant, first-millennium BC artefacts shine a very tenuous light on a long, silent period from the historical sources. Nonetheless, they contribute to an explanation of the important role held by the oasis starting from the Nabataean era and ending with the



FIGURE 2. a. The foot of a stone altar decorated with a vulture from the excavation of Building B in Trench 1, level 3b; b. a *kourotrophos* terracotta figurine from the foundation layer of Building A in Trench 1.

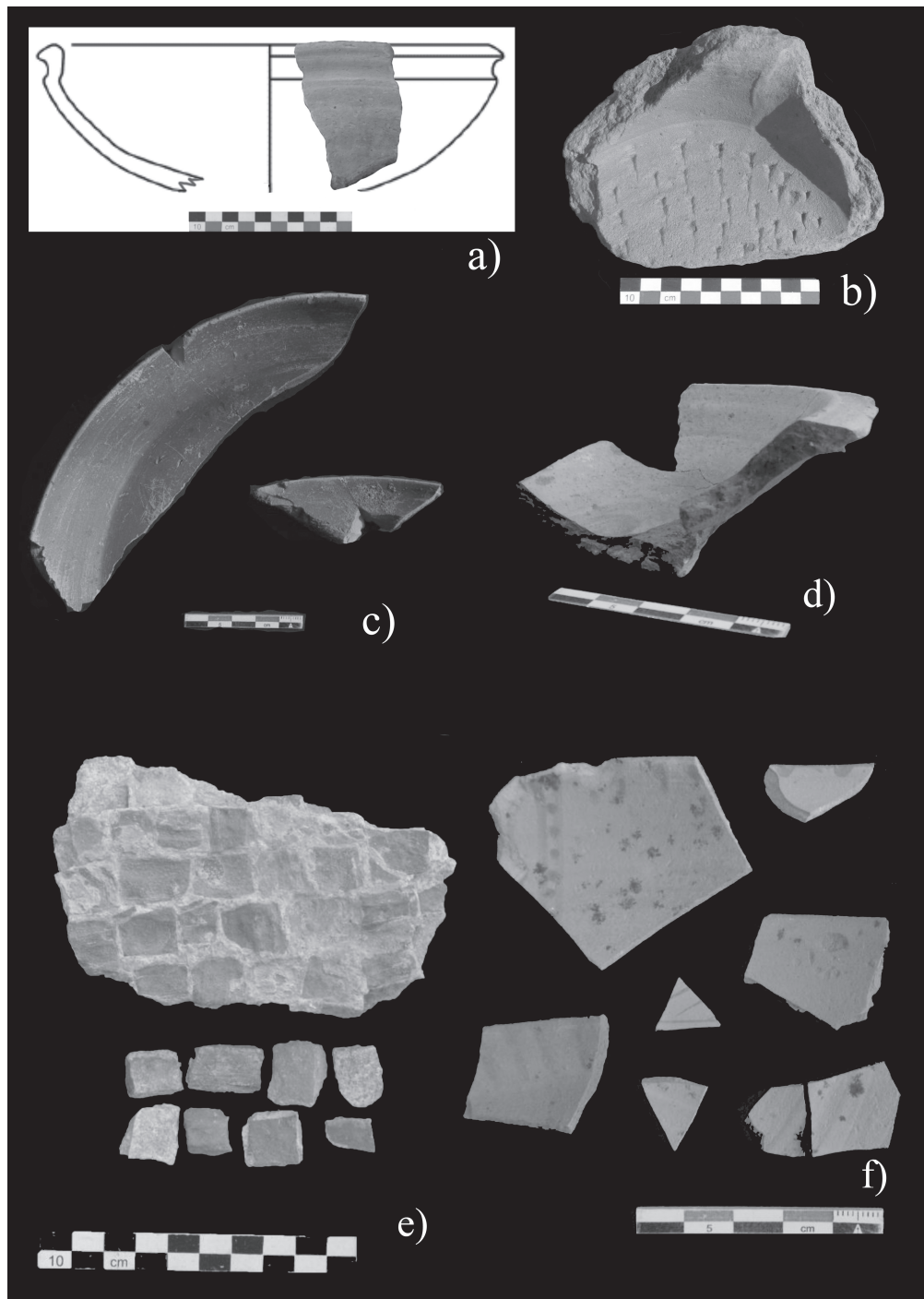


FIGURE 3. From the excavation outside the western flank of the ʿUmar mosque, Trench 10: **a.** a carinated bowl; **b.** a cuneiform decorated bowl. From the excavation inside Mārid Castle: **c.** fragments of a Form 2 Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) bowl; **d.** a Nabataean tableware bowl; **e.** red and white tessellatum; **f.** Nabataean 'eggshell' luxury ware.

Umayyads. At that time the name Dūmah, or Dumata, an oasis never fully abandoned, appears in the historical sources referring to a settlement that is not only the most eastern Nabataean and Roman outpost in Arabia, but also a fundamental crossroads in the commercial routes between central Arabia and the Levant.

Seven centuries after the last Assyrian mention, with the advent of the Nabataeans, the oasis is quoted again, this time as Dūmah, in a Nabataean dedicatory text from al-Jawf dated to the reign of Malichos II in AD 45 (see Savignac & Starcky 1957). Other Nabataean funerary texts from the oasis are well known (see e.g. the most recent one published by Alzoubi & Smadi 2016). Furthermore, Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 6.2.824) and Claudius Ptolemy (*Geographia* 5.18) named the Latin toponym Dumata as a major city in the new *adquisita Provincia Arabia* (Rinaldi Tufi 2012: 319–356).

The material culture that emerged during the excavation seasons from the core of the oasis fully confirms the assumption that Dūmah or Dumata was deeply involved in the trade system of north Arabia and the Levant, from the Nabataean era up to the arrival of Islam (Loreto 2012). From the epigraphic point of view, the only traces of the Roman presence in Dumata came from an undated stone stele found in the oasis, apparently from the third century AD, dedicated to the god Sulmus by the centurion of the Legio III Cyrenaica, Flavius Dionysius (Charloux & Loreto 2014: 44). In addition, the active role of the oasis during the Nabataean and, especially, the Roman period is testified by the Western Enclosure complex, the new military fortified settlement built at the entrance of the valley, 3 km north-west of the ancient centre, along the caravan trail. The sector has been investigated by the French team from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique led by Guillaume Charloux as part of the joint project (Charloux 2012; Charloux et al. 2016).

As Dumata was once again a commercial crossroads in the northern routes, it seems plausible that the Romans took control of Wādī al-Sirḥān, the main route between the Levant and north Arabia. The inscriptions from the north Arabian oases mention *equites*, an *ala Gaetulorum* at Hegra (al-Ḥijr/Madā'in Šāliḥ) and an *ala dromedariorum* at Dedān as mobile parts of the *limes Arabicus*, integrated with permanent structures such as forts, towers, or *castra*, as well as the *stationari* (military supervisors of the caravan routes), located in a *statio*, a structure for the control of the commercial routes also attested at Hegra (Graf 1978; Bowersock 1983: 90–109; al-Talhi & al-Daire 2005; Villeneuve 2015). Thus, we

could consider Dumata as a caravan station under the control of *stationari* (perhaps located in the Western Enclosure) at the most eastern limit of the *limes Arabicus*.

After the breaking up of Provincia Arabia, around the mid-fourth century AD, the historical sources related to Dumata seem to be silent once again. The active role of Dūmah or Dumata in these centuries, however, is confirmed by the amount of material collected including the early Islamic pottery, displaying a variety of traditions from the Syro-Palestinian region to Iraq and Iran (Loreto 2012). Finally, for the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century AD medieval Arabic sources mention the Christian Kinda rulers of Dūmat al-Jandal, allied to the Ghassān confederation (al-Sudairī 1995: 36–37, 57), as well as Christian ʿIbādīs, who moved into the oasis from al-Ḥīrah (Veccia Vaglieri 1991: 625).

The archaeological evidence after the 2009–2016 seasons in the historical centre

The archaeological evidence related to the Iron Age and from the Roman to the Islamic eras revolves around Mārid Castle. Evidence emerged from: 1) the main excavation area, the extensive Trench 1 (the urban area), and Trenches 3–6 (the industrial compounds); 2) the probes in the courtyard of Mārid Castle (Trenches 7–9); and 3) the more recent excavation (Trench 10), outside the western flank of the ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb mosque (Fig. 1).

The ancient urban area along the western flank of the acropolis (Trenches 1, 3–6)

The first excavation area is Trench 1, enlarged after Trenches 3–6 for the definition of the ancient urban area that comprises both residential buildings and industrial compounds located along the eastern foot of the acropolis. Trench 1 was opened in 2009 by the late Alessandro de Maigret, and a preliminary result was presented to the Seminar for Arabian Studies in 2011 (Loreto 2012); Trenches 3 to 6 were opened in 2014 (Loreto 2015).

Trench 1 had been gradually enlarged until the 2016 season; it covers an area 60 x 30 m, with a stratigraphy up to 7 m deep (Fig. 4) (Loreto 2016b; 2015). It was a systematic excavation that has provided a chronology covering a time span between the middle of the first millennium BC and the sixteenth century AD; this is enough to define a socio-economic framework that allows us to observe how over time the ancient caravan city of Dūmah or Dumata has undergone economic-productive changes. We can distinguish a rich period related to the

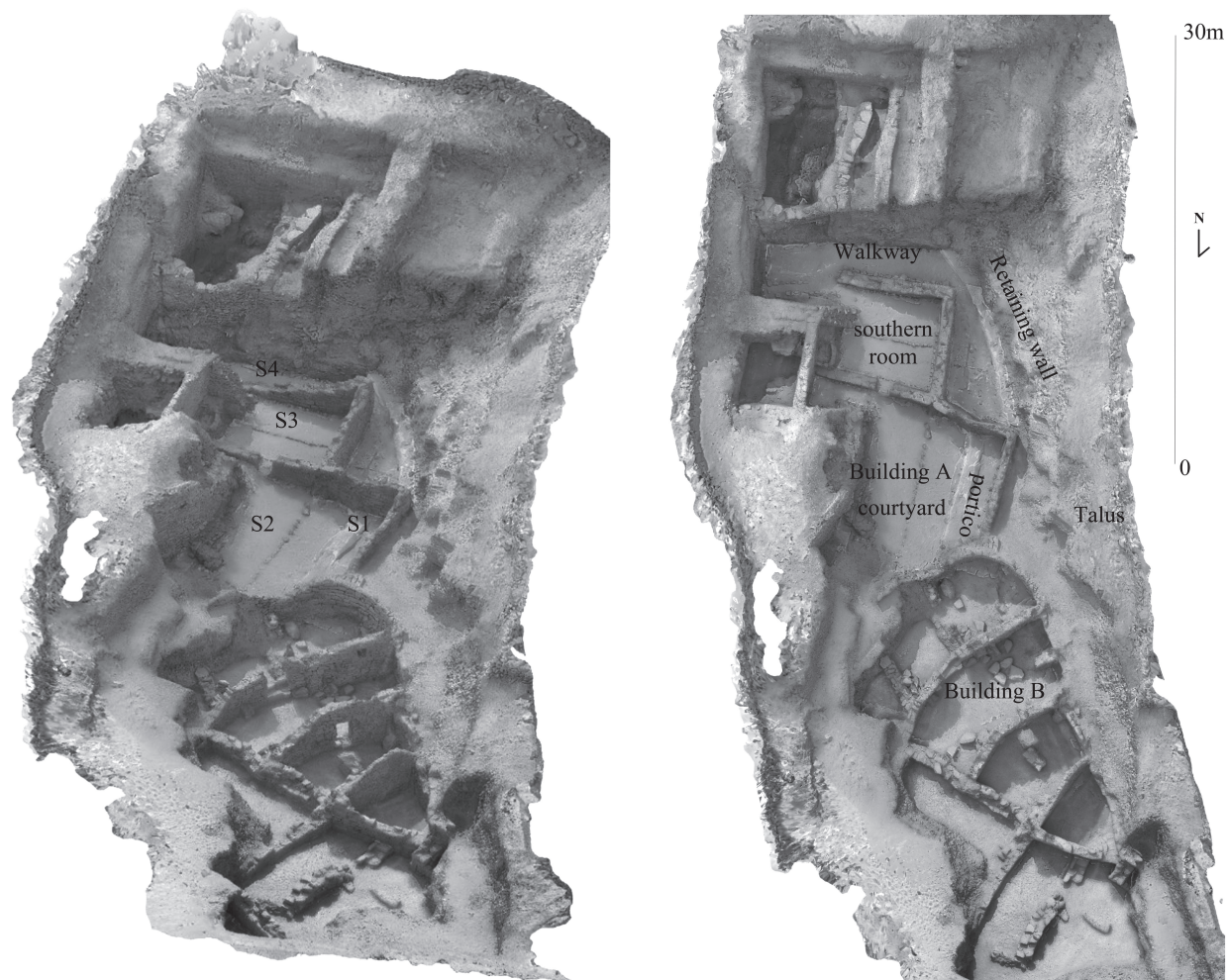


FIGURE 4. *A 3D model of Trench 1: the residential area along the western foot of the acropolis (left, aerial view from the north; right, orthorectified plan).*

Nabataean-Roman-Byzantine and early Islamic and a poor period of occupation, related to the Abbasid era and the development of the Darb Zubaydah, which shifted the trade routes further south, isolating Dūmat al-Jandal (al-Rashid 2010). This difference can be seen in the architecture. The period of wealth corresponds to the occupational phases of two main buildings, Building A and Building B, built during the Nabataean era and still in use up to the Byzantine phase. The period of economic depression of the oasis is demonstrated by the collapse of Buildings A and B and the emergence of new structures with cruder construction and differing completely from the previous buildings (for a synthesis of the Islamic levels, see Loreto 2012: 169–171).

Our main interest is in the pre-Islamic layers, represented by the two main identified structures, Building A and Building B. The first is a 17 x 11 m open courtyard building whose western half was in a fairly good state of preservation (Fig. 5). The first archaeological phase that can be observed corresponds to the structures and levels covered by Building A's foundations and was revealed by four soundings carried out inside and outside the building (S1–S4, Figs 4–5). The first two soundings were opened in the western porticoes and the courtyard. From here, first/second-century AD Nabataean luxury ware was collected both from the foundation layer and the compacted clay floor of Building A (Loreto 2012: 176). A third sounding was opened in the southern room of

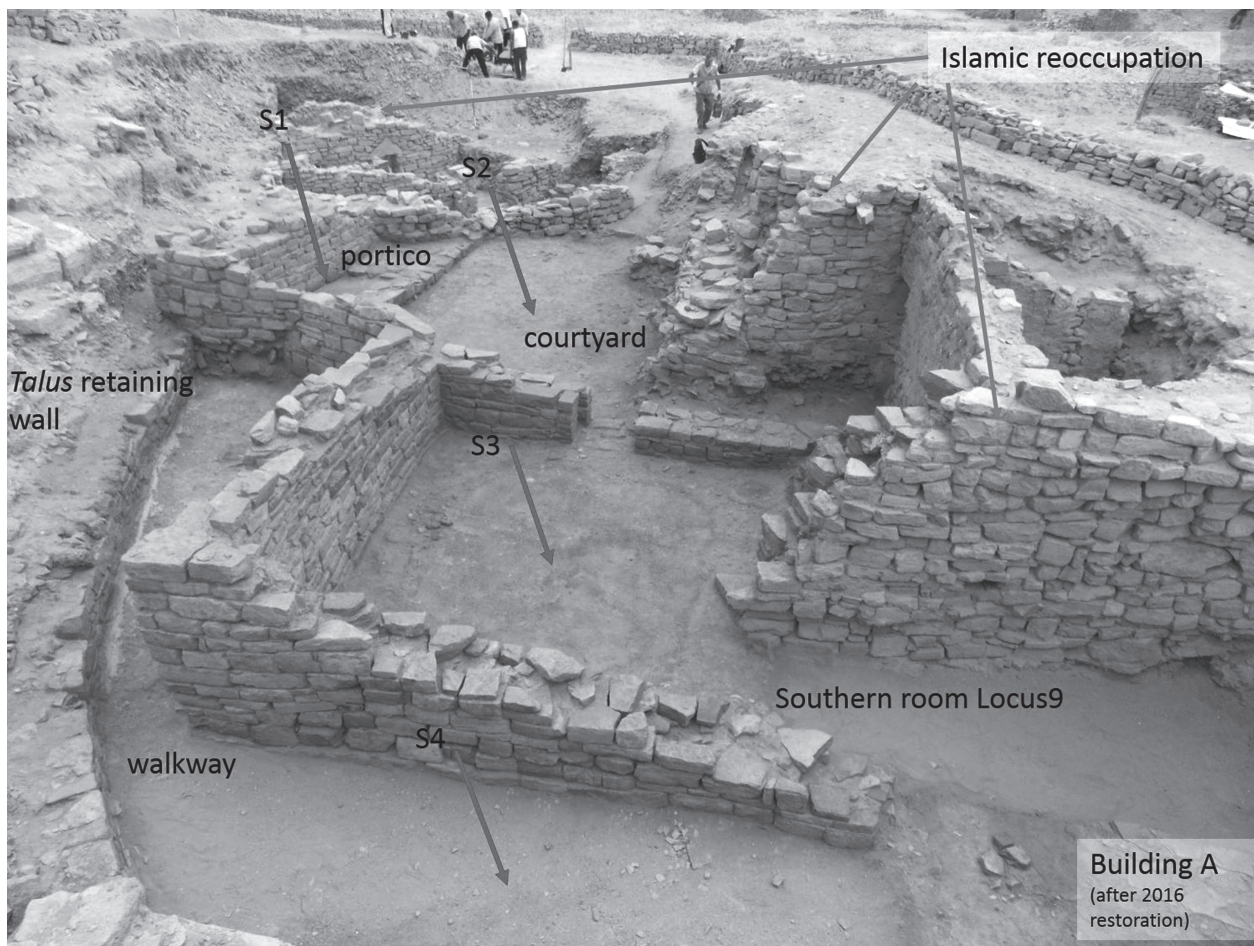


FIGURE 5. Building A after the 2016 restoration season in Trench 1, view from the south.

Building A, from where most of the evidence came. The building presents a peculiar foundation system that covers a previous building that was found collapsed. As the first/second-century AD Nabataean ware came from both the foundation layer and the floor in Building A, it is possible that both buildings belong to the Nabataean or early Roman period. The last sounding was opened outside Building A, along the southern walkway. Nabataean luxury ware was also discovered here, together with a first cultic terracotta figurine of a *kourotrophos* deity that can be dated to the Hellenistic era (Fig. 2/b).

Building B is in a very poor state of preservation because of the almost complete reuse of its structures. The Nabataean date of Building B can be proposed thanks to the pseudo-isodomonic wall sectors still covered with white mortar, according to the same wall techniques

of Building A. Based on the shape of the only clear room identified, enclosed with no entrance, Building B seems to be a functional structure reserved for storage purposes. It should be emphasized that from a stratigraphic point of view very little can be said of Building B. All the northern half of Trench 1 is covered by a huge level of discarded stone fragments from the construction of the most recent structures in the medieval village (level 3b). From this level, a mixture of pre-Islamic and Islamic materials arose; between them, the two above-mentioned artefacts: the Taymanitic inscription (Loreto 2016b: 173–174, fig. 2) and the altar foot with vulture (Fig. 2/a).

The evidence from Trench 1 confirms that the Nabataean Dūmah and Roman Dumata was quite a rich economic trade centre. Despite the poor condition of the structures, the material culture, mostly the pottery

from Building A, testifies to a wealthy house where at least 3000 Nabataean sherds (c.125 vessels) were found together with red painted orange ware imported from Petra. The study of the Nabataean pottery is ongoing; for more detailed comparisons, see Loreto 2012.

On the southern edge of the residential area, an industrial complex has been identified (Trenches 3–6 in Fig. 1). It was partially excavated by al-Dāyil and al-Shadūkhī in 1985 (al-Dāyil & al-Shadūkhī 1986). This previous excavation brought to light a series of very late Islamic burial structures, built above the ancient layers. It is a complex consisting of multiple square units used for food processing and storage. A date can be proposed thanks to the mud bricks used in the partition walls, very similar to those used in the Nabataean residential area as retaining walls protecting the houses from the acropolis *talus* (Loreto 2015).

The agricultural area, of course, is the main feature in the oasis. Apart from the cultivation itself, the hydraulic technology that allows the survival of the oasis is of paramount importance. At least forty wells were detected all along the industrial area, the urban areas at the foot of the acropolis, and in the palm grove, with a series of underground *qanawāt* (sing. *qanāt*) mapped by a team from the French Federation of Speleology (Thomas, Testa & Courbon 2013). There is no doubt that, according to the construction technique, the wells can be dated at least to the Nabataean period, while the *qanawāt* could be dated later, to the early Islamic period (not a single sherd or other datable item was collected inside the *qanawāt*).

The acropolis (Trenches 7–9)

The second area of excavation is inside Mārid Castle. A previous excavation was conducted by al-Muʿayqil in 1986 — a small test probe carried out in the courtyard (al-Muʿayqil 1994: 81–84). According to the author, it revealed a series of mud floors, and two major features emerged: a floor decorated with a red and white tessera mosaic and a collection of Nabataean sherds in the levels beneath the mosaic floor. Based on historical sources, al-Muʿayqil identified the mosaic as belonging to the historical phase of king Ukaydir b. ʿAbd al-Malīk (al-Sudairī 1995: 37), as Ukaydir apparently brought artisans from Byzantium. During the fifth century AD, Byzantine artisans reached Yemen to decorate the Abraha church in Ṣanʿāʿ, so it is probably correct to assume that there was a diffusion of mosaic styles in northern Arabia (Evetts 1895: 300–301; Serjeant-Lewcock 1983: 47). The presence of Nabataean sherds suggests that the acropolis

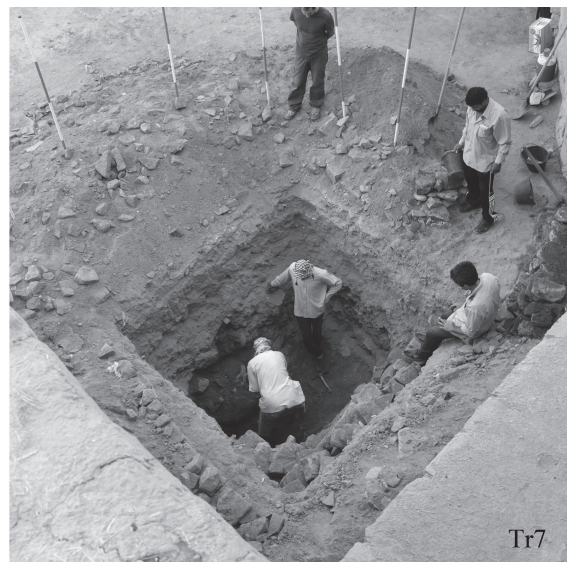
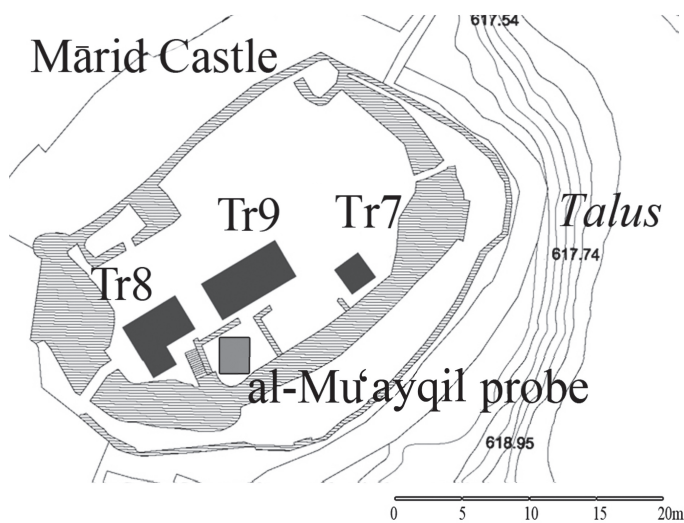
was already in use during the Nabataean period, but what kind of settlement or building was on top of it?

In 2014 and 2015 three trenches were opened. Trench 7 is located close to the north-eastern entrance of the courtyard. Apart from the upper levels related to the last restoration works carried out by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, it reveals a huge level of collapse (level 5) made by the same blocks of the two ancient walls still preserved and probably related to the last pre-Islamic phase (Byzantine; Fig. 6). The collected pottery confirms the sequence identified in Trench 1 (Loreto 2012; 2014a; 2014b), which stretches from the Nabataean to the early Islamic period: Sasanian ware (first–third century AD); Nabataean bowls (first–fourth century AD) (Fig. 3/d); Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) (first–seventh century AD).

The last two trenches were opened in the middle of the court. In Trench 8, the most interesting feature is fragments of a late Roman/Byzantine widespread common white and red *opus tessellatum* (very coarse mosaic), most probably the same observed by al-Muʿayqil (Fig. 3/e). In Trench 9, finally, a pre-Byzantine structure was identified. The architectonic evidence is part of a huge room defined by three impressive walls 0.65 m thick. The room, as well as the walls, was covered by white mortar, in the same fashion as the Nabataean buildings A and B at the foot of the acropolis. The floor preserved a rich amount of Nabataean pottery to be compared to the Building A assemblage (Loreto 2012; 2014a; 2014b) as well as Nabataean ‘eggshell’ pottery of luxury trade from Petra (Fig. 3/f), dated to the first century AD and Eastern Sigillata A (ESA), dated to the second century BC of Syrian tradition (Fig. 3/c). Thus, the excavations brought to light the very first Nabataean structure inside the castle, which can now be better defined as the ancient acropolis, as well as materials related to the Roman period (the third to the middle of the fourth century AD), during which Dumata was also linked to the Levant.

The ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb mosque excavation (Trench 10)

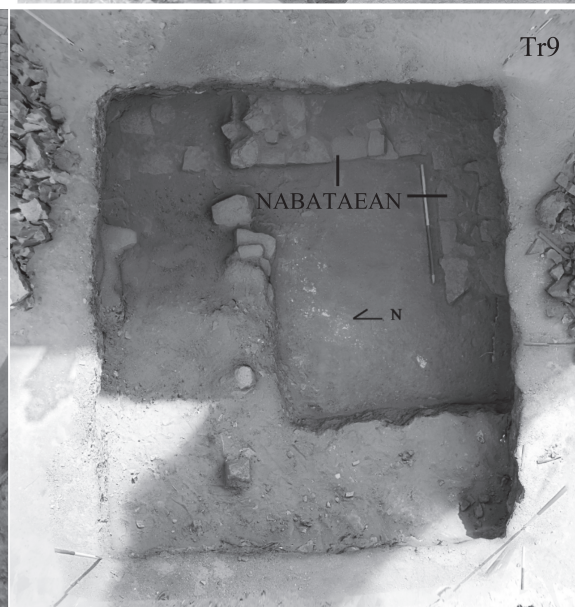
The last archaeological area in the historical centre of the oasis is close to the ʿUmar mosque (Fig. 7). An excavation devoted to the study of the ancient sacred area took place just outside its western side, a few metres from the perimeter wall and the minaret, in a very complex urban context: the medieval urban area of the al-Darʿ quarter spread along the northern and eastern flanks of the acropolis. Two main excavation units have been analysed:



Tr7



Tr8



Tr9

FIGURE 6. Trenches 7–9 inside the open courtyard of Mārid Castle.

Locus b2 (Figs 8–9), a room in a private house, and two cross alleys between Lb2 and the western side of the mosque (Fig. 9). Although we can date the stratigraphic units, the buildings are difficult to date. According to the sources it is plausible that the structures that we see today still preserved in the archaeological area should be dated at least to the Byzantine period (al-Sudairī 1995: 46), evidenced by a good masonry wall technique and reused up to the nineteenth century AD.

The most coherent structure is Locus b2, in which a long chronological sequence has been identified. The most recent level is level b5, in which the room is arranged with two benches and a fireplace above a partially paved floor. No indication of abandonment was found. Levels of activity related to an earlier floor, a second Islamic floor, follows. In this case, we were able to collect charcoal samples for ^{14}C analyses that show an occupation between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries AD



FIGURE 7. Trench 10 along the western side of the ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb mosque in the medieval historical area, view from the east (photograph Thomas Sagory, www.du-ciel.com).

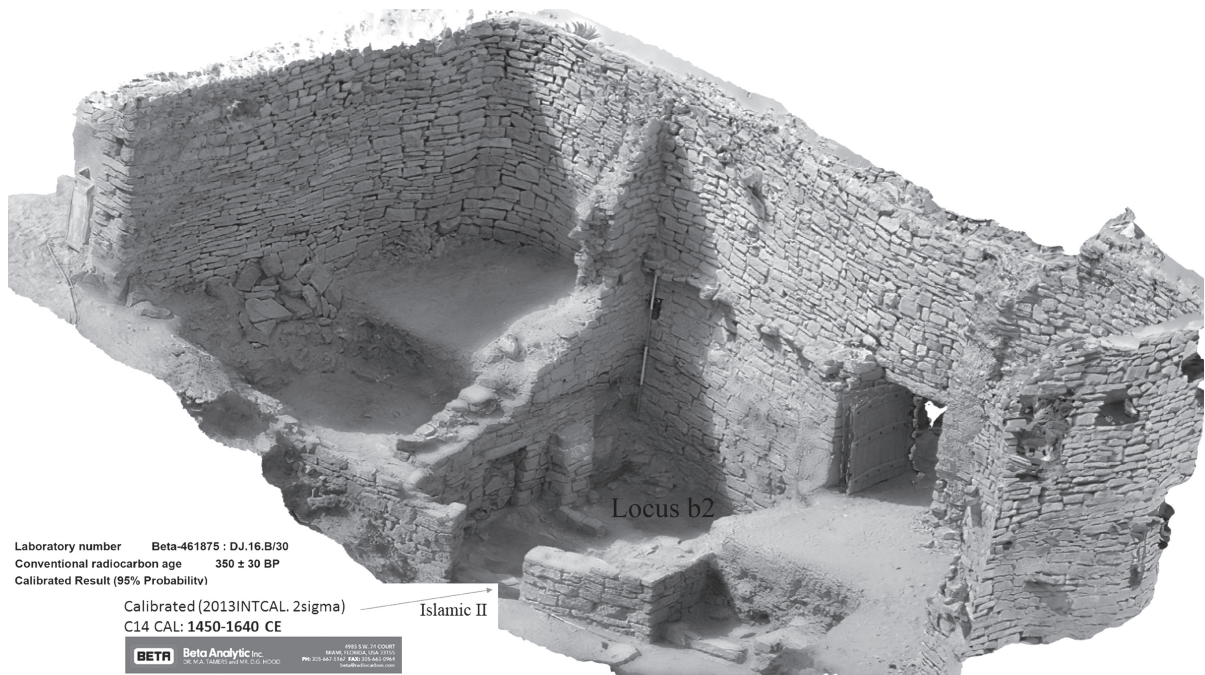


FIGURE 8. A 3D model of Trench 10: detail of the Islamic II level inside Locus b2.

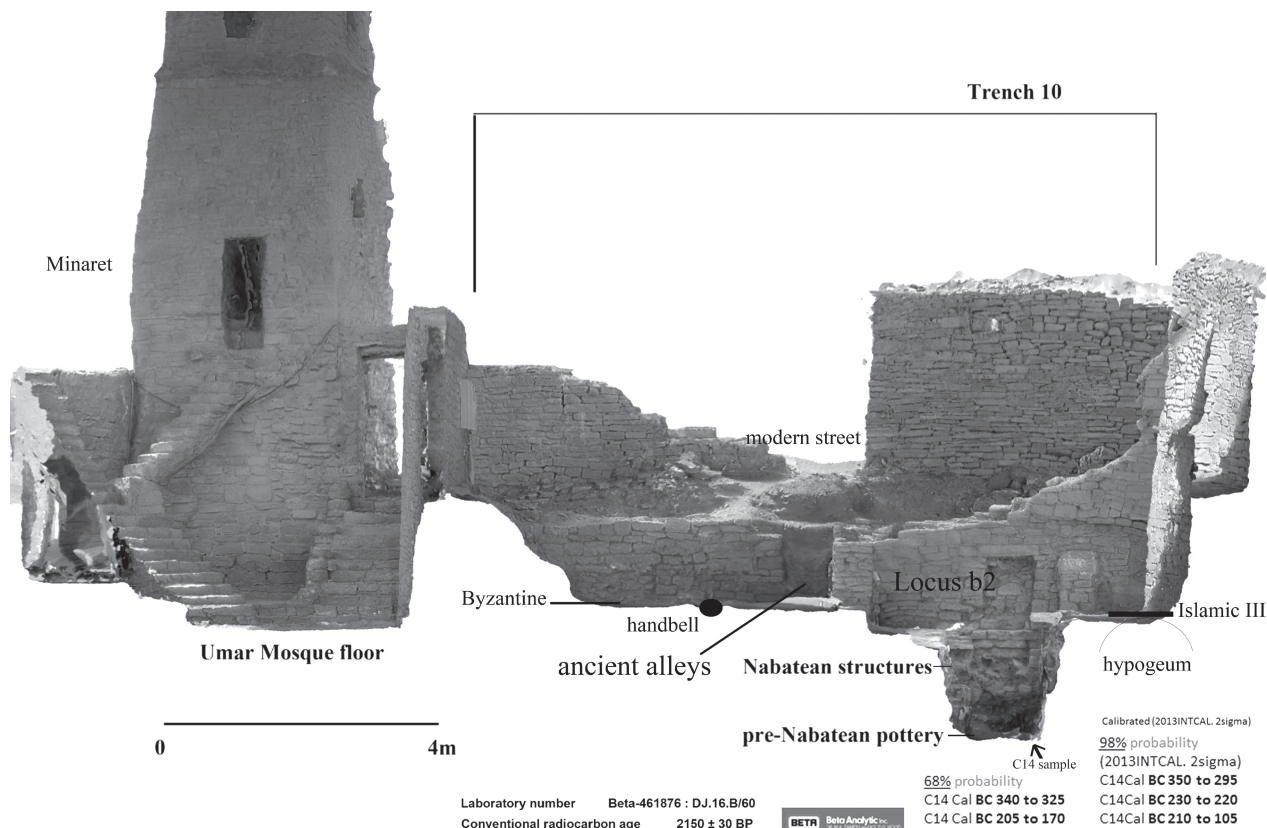


FIGURE 9. Orthorectified west–east section of Trench 10 along the western side of the ‘Umar mosque.

(Fig. 8) (charcoal sample; laboratory number: DJ.16.B/30; conventional radiocarbon age: 350 ± 50 ; calibrated 2013 INTCAL, 2 sigma; calibrated result: 95% probability, ^{14}C CAL: AD 1450–1640). Some Ottoman pipes came from this paved floor level (for comparisons and chronology see Loreto 2012: 174–175). After the removal of the paved floor a third coherent layer emerged, consisting of basins or fireplaces close to each other in a new floor paved stone slabs (Fig. 9). After the removal of the basins, new structures emerged in association with pre-Islamic pottery consisting of Nabataean sherds already known from Trench 1. At the same depth as the Nabataean finds and structures, an interesting feature was identified along the western half of Lb2: a hypogeum with a cupola and circular plan, which were not excavated for safety reasons (a safe excavation will be carried out next season) (Fig. 9). Finally, without reaching virgin soil, the excavation went 1.50 m down the ‘Umar mosque’s floor to what seems to be a pre-Nabataean level. A collection of charcoal samples gave ^{14}C dates of between the fourth and

second centuries BC (Fig. 9) (charcoal sample; laboratory number: DJ.16.B/60; conventional radiocarbon age: 2150 ± 30 ; calibrated 2013 INTCAL, 2 sigma; calibrated results: 68% probability, ^{14}C CAL: 340–325 BC, 205–170 BC; calibrated results: 98% probability, ^{14}C CAL: 350–295 BC, 230–220 BC, 210–105 BC). From this last stratigraphic unit, new pottery items came to light, a type not identified in the previous excavations. The shapes are new but most of the fabrics seem local. A detailed study will be carried out next season. Nevertheless, as previously said, one can recognize some items, such as carinated bowls and cuneiform decorated bowls that recall the Assyrian or post-Assyrian tradition (Fig. 3/a–b) (Kreppner 2008: fig. 5e; Anastasio 2011: fig. 4d).

The second excavation unit is an intersection between two alleys (Fig. 9). The most interesting feature has been the identification of a paved floor made of stone slabs and compacted mud that we can date to the Byzantine period because of a particular small find: a small silver liturgical hand bell with a clapper. In Islamic tradition, bells are

forbidden (Hadith 2645, ‘Of Bells and Chimes’, vol. 4, book 52, no. 249, narrated by Abū Bashīr al-Anṣārī). The Covenant of ʿUmar, a collection of laws probably dating from the eighth century AD, describes the attempts to suppress Christianity by the public exclusion of cult objects, including bells (Arnold & Goodson 2012: 113). Moreover, there is no textual evidence of a Christian community at Dūmat al-Jandal after the *ridda* (rebellion) wars that took place after the death of Prophet Muḥammad (al-Muʿayyil 1994: 37–39). The first written evidence of hand bells used in a Christian liturgical context can be found in a letter written in AD 535. In this, Ferrandus, from Carthage, writes to Eugippius, the African abbot who founded the monastery of San Severino at Castello Lucullano (near Naples) about bells to be used to beckon monks to the canonical hours (Arnold & Goodson 2012: 106). It is logical to suppose that a silver bell would not be used for sheep and goats, and there is no evidence for the use of this type of bell as ornaments for horses or dromedaries in Arabia: although tenuous, it could be the first material evidence of a Christian community of Dūmat al-Jandal and could suggest that the previous role of the ʿUmar mosque was a church, at least in the early seventh century AD just before the Islamic conquest. As previously stated, Arabic medieval sources refer to the Christian Kinda rulers of Dūmat al-Jandal and, according to al-Balādhurī, several Christian ʿIbādīs of al-Ḥīrah moved to the oasis (al-Sudairī 1995: 37; Veccia Vaglieri 1991: 625). Thus, it can be assumed (as previously stated in al-Muʿayyil 1994: 109) that a church was built in Dūmat

al-Jandal. Perhaps the hypostyle hall that represents the ancient core of the mosque architectonic complex was the church where the minaret acted as the tower bell, in view of its position along the qibla wall and not on the opposite side, along the courtyard wall, as in the earlier mosque.

Conclusion

After eight seasons of extensive excavation, one question remains: why has no indisputable evidence relating to the period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire been found at the site? Apart from a few elements, we are still far from clearly identifying first-millennium BC traces. One would think that the representation in the north palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh of the Assyrians burning tents when they attacked Adummatu could represent the truth, a so-called city totally or partially made of tent encampments. Architectural features are much more significant than a few cultural remains but in this case it will be difficult to reach a definitive conclusion. Certainly, the Assyrian perception of other people was determined by their own imperialistic way of seeing others: what was called the capital of the Arabs, the great city of Adummatu, whose conquest was a celebrated and glorious victory for the Assyrian kings, could have been a minor caravan station or an encampment of riders whose daily life was devoted to attacking the Assyrians’ western frontiers. Still, the Assyrians were well aware what was the land of the Arabs: it is usually stated that they are entering in the *māt a-ri-bi* or they are dealing with *šar māt A-ri-bi* or *šarrat māt A-ri-bi* (the administrative idea of the ‘land of the Arabs’ ruled by kings or queens is clear), and when they talk about the Arabs they clearly separate *ʿa-du-um-ma-tu* (the city of Adummatu) from encampments and tents (Ephʿal 1982). Apart from the few mid- and late first-millennium BC artefacts found in the mixed level 3b of Trench 1, however, the ¹⁴C dates and stratified materials from the Trench 10 excavation give us room for further research on this topic.

Subsequently, from the Nabataean era (first century BC to second century AD) and the Roman occupation (third to mid-fourth century AD), the oasis seems to have played a crucial role in the north Arabian socio-economic network. Evidence, including 750 small finds and more than 100,000 sherds from the historical centre can be only dated to the Nabataean and late Islamic periods, and thus clearly indicate the real historical potential of the ancient oasis as part of a Nabataean and Roman province.

A further element of interest is the evidence related to a Christian community in Dūmat al-Jandal. In addition,



FIGURE 10. A silver cast hand bell (clapper type) from the Byzantine level in Trench 10.

the quantity of materials from the early Islamic period should help in defining the role of the oasis at the advent of Islam, as well as the presence of Kindah in northern Arabia.

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