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# GOAM

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# Report to the Antiquities Service in Sana'a of the 2007 Field Season of the University of Heidelberg/GOAM Expedition to Zafar/Ibb Province<sup>1</sup>

Our programme contained different components:

- 1) Excavation of the so-called stone building, which we began in 2004, on the western flank of the Husn Raydan.
- 2) Completion of the map of the immediate area surrounding Zafar.
- 3) Cataloguing of the pottery from the excavation
- 4) Maintenance of the site museum.

This year's excavation season yielded a rich harvest of Himyarite reliefs, architecture and pottery. We continued excavation in the two trenches which we designated z400 and the adjacent z500 (Fig. 2). Zafar has served as a quarry over the decades, as our workers confirm. During the time of the Imam Ahmad 100 square stones were sold for two French riyals. This explains the nature and quantity of the finds which occur. Over the years Zafar has been characterised as destroyed and culturally decadent. Decadent means that the aesthetic and technical quality of Himyarite arts and crafts are usually considered to be on a par lower than those of the early Old South Arabian (OSA) kingdoms. Our project raises the question whether this value judgement is true or not, based on new material.

A major issue with regard to all excavations including ours is where to deposit the excavated debris. Since 2003 we have built six adjacent terraces each 60 m in length for this purpose. They lie just west of the excavation area, which showed little potential for the preservation of antiquities and find-contexts. Since these terraces contain the total excavated material and are readily identifiable, there can be no question about the lay of the topography and our influence on it.

This season's campaign succeeded in completing the south-eastern corner of the site map. It furthermore catalogued the known field-names in and around Zafar. Some 5% of these seem to be of antique origin. This complements the study of the dialect of Zafar, of which a component concentrates on fossil Himyarite words and grammatical forms.

## Pottery

The results of the pottery study are not yet complete. Two-thirds of the pottery is wheel-turned rough ware. The temper is largely mineral with some straw temper. The surface is mostly untreated. Several, however, are burnished. A large variety of shapes eludes classification owing to the small size of the sherds. The vessels range in size from small (breadth 15 cm) to large storage vessels. These are scattered throughout the debris and are not from undisturbed contexts. The dating of the pottery is uncertain and/or mixed.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants this season included K. Franke, M. Gruber, J. Hohenadel, J. Orrin (excavators), C. Ruppert (Arabist), I. Steuer-Siegmund, A. Ungelenk, H.-J. Welz (small finds specialists), P. Yule (leader). Our government inspectors included Xalid al-Ansi, Ali Abdul-Karim al-Hakim and Isa Ali al-Sheibani. Nabil Salih al-Ashwal served as a trainee in the field. Following our arrival on 09.02., we cleared formalities and began work on the 13.03. at Zafar. We departed on 26.03. for Sana'a and closed the season there on 30.03.2007. We submitted a report of the 2006 season to GOAM on leaving the country. All of the yearly excavation reports (1998-2006) are in press with the DAI. We are pleased to acknowledge a large number of visitors this year.

## Small finds

Owing to the robbed nature of the site, small finds are indeed rare. Notable finds include numerous glass and bronze fragments and broken stone lamps.

## Reliefs

As every year, a large variety of reliefs also occurred this year, the majority of which seem to belong to the early phase of Himyar, to judge from the context. These include first all manner of plant ornament and decoration, bucrania represented on plaques and in low relief, architectural ornament, small and life-size human representations, small and life-size animal sculpture. Among the most interesting sculptures includes representations of winged humans which find numerous parallels in various regions during the late antique period (Fig. 3). Human relief depictions show heavily stylized figures of men and women, which may represent mortal or godly beings. An antithetical composition of two cervids (Fig. 4) came to light in trench z400 which later proved to originate from the related complex in trench z500.

## Architecture

Generally speaking, the 'stone building' which we are investigating is a limestone-paved courtyard with surviving low walls also built of limestone. Toward the east of the complex the preservation is better. The entire complex rests on a layer of soil and on volcanic bed rock. At the time of writing the transition between the two trenches (z400 and z500) is visible by means of the northern wall. One reason for this difficulty is the robbed nature of the site which was not clear to us from the start. Furthermore, a heavy covering of slag covers much of the ruin. Extensive limestone burning took place in order to produce concrete, evidently in the late antique period. The stone exploitation continued into the recent period as we know from the descriptions of our workers and the nature of the excavated area: Boulders in disturbed position with hollow interstices are certain signs of recent (last c. 70 years) robbing. A further sign of the robbing are fragmentary dark and light limestone reliefs found in the slag and ash of the furnace charges. The absence of limestone in the debris means that this already was collected and fired, as expected for the limestone/ cement production. The closer the architecture of the 'stone building' lays to the surface, the poorer its preservation, as a result of stone robbing. The history of stone robbing is probably more complex than meets the eye. The 'stone building' was partly robbed of its pavement stones prior to a fire which left a layer of charcoal and ash on the extant pavement stones and in the places where they are missing. This same layer of charcoal appears to cover both z400 and z500.

The 'stone building' shows two main kinds of masonry: mostly finely hewn light yellow limestone and ones in dark grey basalt. The main complex consists of finely worked limestone blocks. At several points the coarser basalt masonry overlies those limestone stones. Little of this second building phase is preserved. A heavy step-like structure has survived only in a fragmentary condition.

Time did not allow to excavate the 'stone building' in its entirety. It proved possible to lay free part of its northern portion. The most striking part of this structure are the reliefs on the eastern side (Fig. 5) which are preserved in situ. The bucranion images clearly date from polytheistic times. They suggest that the building is more likely a temple than a palace.

## Maintenance of the Site Museum

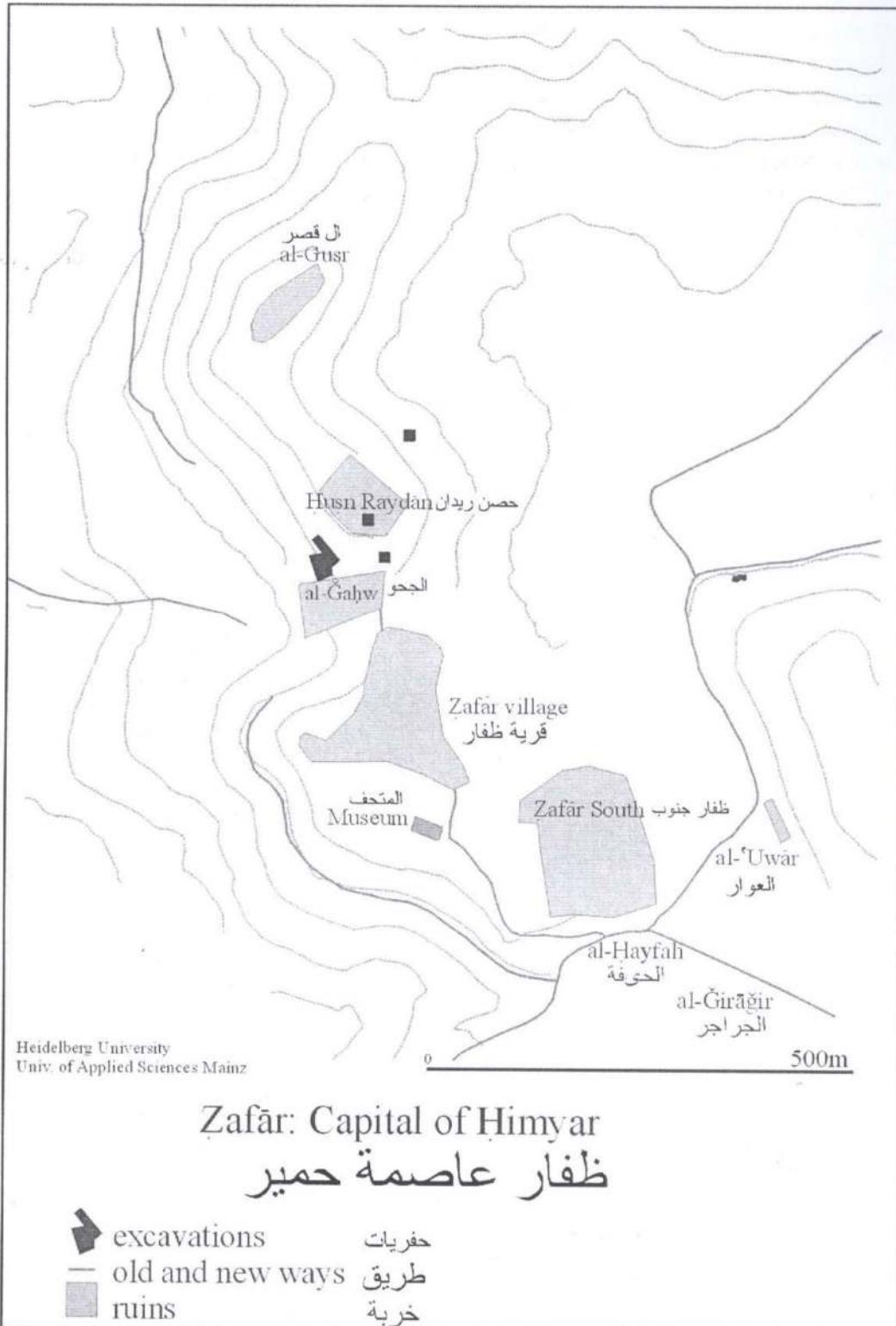
During the course of the campaign the team removed weeds which had grown on the roof of the museum. The museum watchman could also do this. The drainage of the toilet was also renewed. Shelving was purchased, in order to enable storage of the newly excavated finds. The undersigned made drawings of the museum and new vitrines for Xalid al-Ansi, which he used to raise funds for the purchase of the latter. Our request that the trash (old windows and vitrine fragments) be removed from the museum and its storeroom was ignored by GOAM. Room is needed to accommodate a constantly growing amount of new finds. On the whole, the cooperation with the GOAM representatives was satisfactory; Xalid al-Ansi is not helpful with our work.

Figures:

- 1 Zafar and the surrounding area.
- 2 Plan of the excavations z400 and z500.
- 3 Excavated winged human figure (no. 07~083).
- 4 Relief stone excavated from z400 (no. 07~126).
- 5 Relief wall z502 located on the eastern face of trench z500.

Professor Paul Yule

Tuesday, 24 April 2007



1 Zafar and the surrounding area.



4 excavated winged human figure (no. 07~083).



3 Relief stone excavated from trench z400 (no. 07~126).



2 Relief wall z502 on the eastern face of trench z500.