



## حولية الآثار اليمنية

العددان الثالث والرابع



الم الهيئة العامة لآثار والمخطوطات ومتاحف  
صنعاء

١٤٤٤ هـ - ٢٣٢٠ م



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العددان الثالث والرابع

المشرف العام

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## **Preliminary Report An Archaeological and Epigraphic Survey in Khawlan First Season 2009**

### **Holger Hitgen**

In the spring of 2009 the German Archaeological Institute began a mutual survey together with the University of Sana'a and the GOAM in the district of Khawlan. The aim of our work is to search for signs of the pre-Islamic settlement history of this area into which there has been practically no research so far. Up to now large parts of the extensive, eastern highlands have not been charted on the archaeological map of Yemen. Localised examinations by the Italian Archaeological Mission under the leadership of Alessandro de Maigret in the eighties of the last century have produced evidence at least in the south of Khawlan of a dense Bronze-age settlement dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia B.C and therefore were able to prove for the actual examined in the nineties by the University of Sana'a, but, as far as I know, have not been publicized so far.

Only very few sites of findings from the ancient South Arabian era are known up to now, as a look at the map of ancient Yemen charted by Christian Robin and Ueli Brunner clearly show. So, even during the survey by the Italian team, no Iron-age finding sites were discovered, although the examination of the forerunners and origins of the Ancient South Arabian kingdoms were defined as being important. Alessandro de Maigret wrote in 1990 in the foreword to his publication: "Prospecting at Khawlan at-Tiyal was originally planned to identify the cultural background and examine the historical conditions that gave rise to the great Southern Arabian states of Saba, Ma'in and Qataban in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. .." The publication – which is not only one of the most important books on South Arabian Archaeology but also proves the first time existence of a South Arabian Bronze Age at all – is, however dedicated explicitly to the results of the Bronze Age. According to this, one can presume that in this area no Sabaean, Himyaritic or other Iron-age findings were discovered. Before the beginning of our survey it was not clear from an archaeological point of

view whether the find in the south of Khawlan must be applied to the whole of the eastern highlands or whether at least parts of Khawlan bore witness to dense Iron-age settlement.

The epigraphic survey already carried out by Mohammed al-Salami, that served as a basis for his dissertation and also for our archaeological survey, painted quite a different picture of the settlement history thanks to a large number of Sabaean inscriptions.

The survey ,we carried out, is purposely both epigraphically and archaeologically orientated to a similar degree and is devoted in the first instance to the region between the two Sabaean centres Marib and Sana'a was integrated in the Sabaean kingdom. For this purpose, we had to examine, amongst other things, whether the findings that could be identified as being from the Iron Age were genuinely Sabaean or – as was suspected in the past in particular for the Dhamar region – whether we were dealing with an independent caravan culture that developed irrespectively of the caravan kingdoms. In this connection, it is of great significance to clarify when the settlement of this region began and to what extent continuities or interruptions in the history from pre-historic to epigraphic examinations, at a later point in time, geographical and pedagogical examinations will also form a focus of our work in order to answer the climatically and agriculturally relevant questions.

The emphases we set ourselves for our survey involve important questions for the Sabaean region that are being controversially discussed at present both in archaeology and also in epigraphy: our concern is for foreign influences or independent developments and for the definition of the Iron Age or Southern Sabaean cultures in the region Contrary to the American work being carried out in Dhamar, that is based on independent Iron Age cultures during 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C . in the middle highlands of yemen, we would not like to restrict ourselves to one single criterion as a guide fossil for defining a culture. For us a culture is therefore more than a sequence of ceramics and can be defined, among others things, from several material forms, architectural details, customs – such as, for instance, burial rites – and

– in the case of the Iron Age – also written information, historic, religious or linguistic.

Geographically speaking the region of Khawlan, covering an area of 5000 square kilometers, can be divided into two areas, namely the highlands with their mountain range that is more than 3000 m high in parts, and desert. These eastern sections of Khawlan are climatically influenced by those above-mentioned, desert-edge areas that were the seat of the South Arabian kingdoms during 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. The highland areas, that feature two rainy seasons, are again divided into a western and a south-eastern section separated by the mountain range of the Jabal al-Law. This mountain region forms the watershed of Khawlan. Almost all areas to the east and south of this drain into the Wadi Dahna towards Marib, whereas the western areas, on the other hand, drain in the direction of the high plateau of Sana'a.

During the first phase of our survey, the examinations extended to the last-mentioned area that today corresponds to the tribal territory of the Bani Buhlul. Several large wadis flow here in an east-westerly direction. They are separated by high mountain ranges that are only cut through by a few connecting routes running in a north-south direction. Both in Antiquity as well as today, these mountain ranges formed the border of the dominions of individual tribes. In this connection the areas of Tanim and Ghaiman, that both belong to the domain of Saba, deserve a particular mention.

During the site inspections, more than 60 finding places could be localized that on the time scale extend from the Bronze Age up to the South Arabian era. The majority of these are settlement sites, and only a few are water management buildings, burial sites and storage sites with rock inscriptions. It was very worrying to observe that in particular over the past few years the finding sites had suffered extensive destruction. The least of these cases were pilfering excavations, but rather stone robbery. The preservation of the Iron Age settlements is particularly endangered as they were originally built with partly top-quality building materials. As a result of this pilfering in many of these sites there is no longer even a single layout or part of walls recognizable today. The completely destroyed heaps can only be

functionally and chronologically allocated thanks to finding filling masonry, ceramics and fragments of building ornamentation and tools. The degree of destruction is so high that, despite the considerable number of newly documented inscriptions, with the exception, of course, of the rock inscriptions, they are no longer in their original place. The inscriptions that were kept in houses and mosques or in the majority of cases in private homes can therefore only be allocated to individual finding sites via the inexact statements of the finders or via the contexts of their contents.

One of the most interesting settlements is situated in the wadi al-¾unib. It almost completely covers the crest of a hill, is about 80 m × 50 m in size, and protrudes to a height of 30 m at the most above the wadi. Here one can find the remains of more than a dozen randomly distributed buildings. These are mostly single-room buildings as one rarely finds side rooms added on to them. The walls, that are usually round- or oval- shaped buildings in the layouts, are mostly built of quarystones. Only seldom does one find any details that indicate doors or other construction elements.

Particularly remarkable about the settlement is the fact that it manifests two different phases. In some sections there are the remains of more solid rectangular superstructures above the simple circular ones. These buildings, also made of assembled quarystones, often have several rooms, have double walls and altogether larger dimensions. This phase appears to include a type of fortification system that in parts where the mound has not slipped away, is still easy to recognise. As the survey has now been interrupted for the summer break, the finding materials and, in this case particularly, the ceramics, could not yet be examined. Therefore it has not been finally possible to date to say whether the two building phases represent two periods of the Bronze Age or whether the younger settlement was already built at the beginning of the Iron Age that so far was only unsatisfactorily recorded in Yemen. During the survey we were at least able to localize a few other small finding sites with similar architecture and partly identical ceramic material which, due to other findings, probably falls chronologically in the Iron Age. Whether these settlements, however, are a

direct continuity of the Bronze Age, cannot be concluded for sure at this stage.

About two-thirds of the finding sites recorded during the survey can be clearly allocated to the Iron Age. As far as their size is concerned, these range from small farms to large town sites surrounded by walls. Whereas the small, Iron Age complexes were built on low rises along the wadis, the larger villages and towns take up key positions within they are protected against water and attackers; from there they can survey the surrounding area and the network of routes.

In the following let me very briefly introduce to you two town complexes known from the inscriptions and ask a few questions; Was Khawlan Sabaean in this region? Despite recent overlying constructions and presumably continuous settlement, the towns of Ghaiman and Tanim have had enormous archaeological potential since ancient times. Tanim lies at the end of the Wadi same called and is protected from behind by steeply rising rock faces. The other parts of the town that extends on both sides of the Wadi, are surrounded by a town wall that is partially still well preserved today and up to 3 m in height. In its layout rectangular towers are visible at regular intervals along the wall. To build these functional buildings the people used stone that was available locally and was only coarsely processed before building. Remarkable is the fact that, in the central parts of the town wall and at the town gate, cyclopean, large stones were used for building them – presumably in order to achieve an overall representative and monumental appearance. On the other hand, for the sections further away from the town gate, stone material distinctly smaller in size was used for the masonry. Construction and building style can be compared with other town walls in the highlands and presumably date back to the middle Sabaean period. From a building technology point of view, a monumental construction that was partially revealed by the local population over the last few years, gives quite a different impression. Both the layout and the processing of the stone as well as the architectural ornamentation speak in favour of a genuine Sabaean building. presumably a temple dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Inscriptions integrated in the nearby mosque,

provide evidence of this theory as they report about an Almaqah temple. If one desists from this building and some few inscriptions, all other findings and architectural remains that can be seen at present in Tanim, fall in the period as from 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and bear no typically Sabaean features.

Even more distinct is this find in Ghaiman, from a political aspect can also be allocated to the Sabaean kingdom. Here, there is not one single inscription to be found that on the one hand dates back earlier than 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and on the other hand mentions the Sabaean god Almaqah, but only the local deity Augrum. Even the extremely rich archaeological findings have no relation to Saba and Marib. The partly well-preserved fortification consisting of several circular walls, shows elements that are comparable with other town walls in the highland. Even the architectural ornamentation and decorative elements tend to remind us of the Himyaritic culture rather than that of Saba. But integrated in the recent village there are remains of a monumental complex of buildings that from an architectural aspect can again be ascribed more strongly to the caravan kingdoms and Marib than to well-known walls remains in the highlands. The complex includes several buildings and a paved courtyard. Both the imported stone material and their workmanship and assembly have their clear parallels in Marib but not in the highlands. Even the Himyaritic capital, Zafar possesses no comparable masonry.

But how should such findings be interpreted? In both towns – and by the way also in other Iron Age finding sites in the region – both local and Sabaean characteristics are reflected in the architecture and in the materials. Were these remains of an independent Iron Age culture that was conquered by the Sabaeans and endowed with Sabaean monumental architecture? The latter would mean that cultural differences from the settlement areas on the periphery of the desert developed because of different geographical, climatic conditions. The diverse environmental conditions were expressed, for example, in another architectural language and other characteristics of the material of the findings.

The first season took place between March and April 2009. It was carried out by the German Archaeological Institute (Holger Hitgen), GOAM

(Mohanned al-Seiani, Hamid al-Hanisch) and the University of Sana'a (Dr. Bawazir – President and Mohammed al-Asbahi) and the governor of Sana'a.



