أزال

حولية الآثار اليمنية

العددان الثالث والرابع

الهيئة العامة للآثار والمخطوطات والمتاحف
صنعاء
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

المحتـويـات

Canadian Archaeological Mission in Yemen

Report on field season December 2007 – January 2008

in Zabid, al-Ghulayfiqah (Hudaydah province) and al-Jabin (Raymah province).

1. Continuing overall objectives of the Canadian Archaeological Mission in Yemen

1. 1 Archaeological Fieldwork

The study area, as originally defined by the first Agreement signed with GOAMM in 1987, is centred on Zabid in the central Tihamah. The area covered by the Mission's interests ranges (from west to east) from the Red Sea coast to the western edge of the Yemeni highlands (Wasab and Jebel Raymah) and (from north to south) from al-Mansouriyah to Hays. Survey and excavations are aimed at understanding all aspects of human history within the Study Area from the time period of the Holocene, from 10,000 BC to the present.

Part of the objective is to understand what made Zabid an important city in the history of Yemen. But also, what was life like in the Tihamah before the prosperous era began in Zabid around 1000 years ago? What impact was there when foreign armies such as the Ottoman Turks occupied Yemen? We must look in many different areas for clues. We have made a lot of progress in this regard, and other researchers have benefited from the pioneering work of the Canadian Mission. When the Canadian Mission began its first survey in 1982, no other archaeological team had ever worked before in the Tihamah. At the moment, as a result of our long-term involvement, we are able to identify cultural material from the time of the Imam, medieval and early Islam, the Iron and Bronze ages, the Neolithic, and the Late Stone Age. The Citadel Granary Museum was developed to tell this story to the public.

A new initiative was started in 2007 with a prospection survey of the town and district of al-Jabin. The main focus was on the cistern situated at the south side of the town, called Birkat al-'Atif. The main source of water is run-off from the hillside and the rooftops of the castle that is currently occupied by a garrison of the Yemeni army. It is hoped that an extended study season will allow for the full understanding of the history of the cistern, and its traditional use by the people of the town. It is hoped that a restoration programme may make it possible to put back the cistern into use.

1.2 Heritage Preservation

Restoration of the ruined structures in the eastern half of the Zabid Citadel began in 1987 as a way of providing a permanent base for the Canadian Mission in Zabid. The work resulted by chance in encouraging the traditional building industry to survive, which was to be an important element in the initiative made by UNESCO to designate Zabid as a Heritage City in 1994. Through the collaboration of GOAM and the Social Fund, further restoration work was conducted in the western half of the Citadel. Maintaining the walls is a continuing obligation because of the need for repairs to be made, because of the constant deterioration of the brickwork and noura plaster.

An important component of the Heritage Program is the maintenance of the Botanical Garden for both educational purposes, and for visitor comfort. This has been difficult because of the high cost of supplying water to the garden. Every effort is being made to encourage the growth of native plants that do not need large amounts of water, as opposed to foreign plants with high water requirements. An educational program to explain these conditions is envisaged. Unfortunately, the terrible abuse of water in the Tihamah, as elsewhere in all of Yemen, is making it impossible to deliver water using the traditional methods. The level of water in the area of Zabid has dropped more than twenty metres in the past few years, and this makes it impossible to plan on delivering water to the Zabid Citadel garden from

the old well. The solution must be found in conjunction with the planning of water delivery to the entire city of Zabid.

2. Results of the work in the December 2007– January 2008

2.1 Prospection Survey of al–Jabin

The town of al-Jabin is positioned on the western escarpment of the Yemeni highlands (altitude: approximately 2400 m). Since the town is perched at the edge of the mountain ridge, the only source of water is surface run-off collected during the rainy seasons in open cisterns. Al-Jabin has two large public cisterns, one on the north side and one on the south side of the town. The southern one, situated below the military fort, is named Birkat ʻAtif. It cracked years ago and has been derelict – and therefore empty – since then, That is why it formed the focus of our study.

2.1.a) Technical documentation

The cistern collects surface run-off from the surrounding terrain. Natural fissures in the rock and artificially created diversion devices feed the run-off into channels leading into the cistern (see site plan, figure 1). The cistern is roughly round in shape and has 9 rows of high ledges and a broad staircase of 20 steps leading down to the bottom. A ground plan of the cistern was drawn using a theodolite (see figure 2). Two sections through the cistern show the profile of both the ledges and the steps (see figures 3 and 4). Elevations were taken with a theodolite, which also allowed long distances (more than 10 m) to be measured. Short distances were measured by tape. The dimensions of the cistern at its top are roughly 27 m by 20 m, and 7 m in depth. These measurements were also used to determine the volume of the cistern, which is approximately 1375 cubic meters.

Measurements of the catchment area were taken using a GPS instrument. The catchment area on the south side is relatively short with water draining through culvets from both sides of a small cemetery. The main source of

water is from the roofs and courtyard of the military fort, which runs approximately 105 m towards the cistern by way of an open culvert. The culverts feed into two settling tanks to reduce the amount of solid particles entering the cistern. An overflow chute allows for water to be directed away from the cistern once maximum storage capacity has been reached. At the top of the cistern three small water troughs were designed to water animals.

2.1.b) Date of the cistern

As mentioned already, the cistern cracked some years ago and was ineffectively mended with cement. It retains water only up to a height of about 2.5 m and then the water slowly disappears through the cracks. In the broken areas it is possible to see that the cistern was repaired at least twice in the past using the appropriate qadad plaster, with the last finish coat preserved in most places. It is characteristic of the well-built structures in al-Jabin that this finish coat is done by making a swirling design on the surface. (For instance, the cistern of the Grand Mosque has exactly the same kind of design.) An inscription on this last finish coat documents its last major repair. The most plausible reading of the year numbers gives a date of 1085 Hijra. There is a local tradition that the cistern was built in the pre-Islamic era.

2.1.c) Possible restoration

The Canadian Archaeological Mission is interested in restoring the use of this cistern, but it can only be done in conjunction with a health education programme for the entire town of al-Jabin. Unfortunately, due to the breakdown of social values and the expectation that Government provides for all public needs, there is a complete negligence of keeping the place clean. Al-Jabin has a major problem with both garbage and sewage. Therefore restoring the cistern in the expectation of collecting surface run-off is a health hazard under present conditions. The first conversation concerning a restoration programme, to be supported by the Social Fund, took place in Sanaa on January 7th 2008. To meet these requirements, a

study needs to be presented concerning the number of people who will be able to benefit from the water supply. Accurate cost estimates must also be presented.

2.2 Study of the archaeological site of al-Ghulayfiqah

The survey of the archaeological site of the port of al-Ghulayfiqah was aimed at determining whether this site has any excavation potential, and whether it should be protected from development. The danger is imminent because of the engineering of the new road from al-Hudaydah to al-Mukha. The place was the first port of entry into Yemen for people coming to Zabid from Jiddah. Broken pieces of pottery can be seen lying on the ground over an area measuring at least 400 metres north-south and 200 metres east-west (see figure 5). This pottery dates from a very short period of time (only two centuries), and can be dated by reference to the small but important number of pieces of pottery imported from Iraq, India and China. Ghulayfiqah was chosen as a port site because of the sheltered water making it possible to keep boats safe. The sea has moved away from the area since that time, and so the settlement site was abandoned. There is still a memory of the port from the past, because the place is known as "al-Sharma." We know from the study of other sites like al-Fazzah that because of the movement of the sand in the sea, safe places for boats change their location, and so the people move as well to a new place. So far we have not found another place in the area from either before the 10th century, or from later than the 12th century.

Most of the pottery from the site of al-Ghulayfiqah is from manufacture in the Tihamah, of types we know from production in the pottery workshop of Zabid. Some of the best quality types were actually made in Zabid, which we know from the type of clay used to make the pottery. However, some of the pottery found was also made in Ghulayfiqah. We can tell this because the clay that has been used is much more filled with sand than the

better quality pottery made in Zabid. Some examples of the Zabid pottery of this time are illustrated in figure 6.

Two small test trenches were dug to estimate the nature of the settlement (see figure 7). Some large pieces of pottery were found, of the usual type, but it clear that the houses of the people were made only of palm-tree leaves (wasif), and not from solid bricks. So there is little to be found through excavation. The site, however, is an important memory in the life of Yemen and should be protected from damage through road construction.

2.3 Zabid Citadel Heritage Preservation

2.3a Building Repairs

Due to their broken nature, from water damage, it was necessary to replace six roof beams inside the Citadel. Also it was necessary to mend several damaged areas along the outside walls of the Citadel. This damage is simply due to the old age of the walls and deteriorating quality of the lime mortar (noura), which decays with time. There will need to be a constant programme of building restoration in the future, to mend small places of damage before major collapse occurs.

2. 3b Visitor Information

In order to make it possible for visitors to understand what they are looking at when they visit the excavation of the large trench ZSE 36sw – 35ne inside the Zabid Citadel, consolidation of some of the excavated walls was completed, and ways found to reduce damage from rain. Also, painted signs giving the date of the each of the excavated levels were placed in the trench (see figure 8). It is planned to provide more information both inside and outside the Granary Museum in the future.