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IN THE FATIMID, AYYUBID
AND MAMLUK ERAS
VII

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Fatimids

BETWEEN *CASTRUM* AND *MEDINA*:
A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON SPATIAL ORGANISATION AND
URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN MEDIEVAL AQABA

The following presents the results of archaeological field work conducted between the 23rd of January and the 6th of March 2008 at the Early Islamic site of Aylah, located in Aqaba in southern Jordan. The excavations were part of a larger international scientific venture known as the *Islamic Aqaba Project* (henceforth IAP), which was directed by Prof. Dr. Johnny De Meulemeester (University of Gent), and included an international staff from Belgium, France, Spain, Canada, Jordan and Denmark.[1] The project grew out of the Belgian-British and later Belgian-French *Aqaba Castle Project* (ACP), whose groundbreaking work revealed that the castle site, and indeed Aqaba in general, had far more complex patterns of occupation than hitherto imagined, and that a reevaluation of the area's settlement history was crucial.[2] In order to establish a more comprehensive occupational framework, steps were taken to expand the scope of archaeological investigation to include the Early Islamic site of Aylah as well. These are the results of the first season of field work conducted here.

[1] The team at Aylah consisted of a field director (the author), post-graduate students Thomas Pieters and Thomas van der Velde (University of Gent) and undergraduate student Ayse Dudu Tepe (University of Copenhagen). This was complemented by supervisory visits by the project's director, Johnny De Meulemeester, co-director Reem al-Shqour (University of Gent) and representative of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, Sawsan al-Fakhri. The excavation team at Aqaba Castle consisted of Jean-Michel Poisson (Unité Mixte de Recherche 5648 du CNRS Lyon); Davy Herremans and Joris Angenon (University of Gent); Bart Bartholomieux, Helen Butler, Cateline Clement, Magalie Dartus (Archaeologia Medievalis); and Jorge Eiroa Rodriguez (University of Murcia). In addition to the two excavation teams, the project employed ceramologist Debra Foran (University of Toronto), archaeozoologist Bea De Cupere (The Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences) and surveyor Jacques Debie (Heritage Department of the Ministère de la Région Wallonne). Also employed were approximately 25 local workmen, of which 5 worked at Aylah.

[2] J. DE MEULEMEESTER & D. PRINGLE, "The 'Aqaba Castle Project 2003", *Newsletter of the Council for British Research in the Levant* (2004): 26-27; J. DE MEULEMEESTER & D. PRINGLE, "The 'Aqaba Castle Project 2004-5", *Newsletter of the Council for British Research in the Levant*, (2005): 42; J. DE MEULEMEESTER & R. AL-SHQOUR, "The 'Aqaba Castle Project 2006", *Bulletin of the Council for British Research in the Levant*, 1 (2006): 27-28; J. DE MEULEMEESTER & D. PRINGLE, "Die Burgen am Golf von 'Aqaba', in M. PIANA (ed.), *Burgen und Städte der Kreuzzugzeit*, Petersburg 2008, pp. 148-158.

Among the central scientific aims of the project is the mapping of Aqaba's various settlement profiles in the Islamic periods (650-1922). This is, in part, done by exploring the dialectic relationship between Aqaba's development as determined by organic growth and functional continuity (as port, administration, trade hub etc.), and conscious changes in organisation and planning as a result of the religious and social requirements of Islam. Analysing urban settlement patterns is particularly important because a central problem at other Early Islamic foundations (*e.g.* Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi, Madinat al-Far and Anjar) continues to be the definition of a site's nature based on demography.[3] Even though many sites have been explored with a specific focus on the monumental, the lack of living space afforded a settled population continues to be used to describe many of these foundations as isolated or unfinished elite hamlets, and not proper communal environments. The potential for grievous errors resulting from this kind of negative evidence has recently been demonstrated by Denis Genequand, and it is the ambition of the IAP to contribute with an analogous reassessment of Aqaba. Nevertheless, the aim of this article is much more modest. It merely presents and contextualises the first pieces of the puzzle that recently have been retrieved from Aylah.

Before discussing the results of the 2008 campaign, a brief statement should be as made as to the site's important historical background. Since Antiquity, the Gulf of Aqaba has been a nexus on the important trade and transport routes that connected the Mediterranean world to Arabia and Yemen. Furthermore, it was the major Levantine dock on the maritime trade routes to the Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean. Following the initial

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[3] O. GRABAR, R. HOLOD, J. KNUSTAD & W. TROUSDALE, *City in the Desert* (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs, vols. 23/24), Cambridge, MA 1978, pp. 148-73; rebuked by D. GENEQUAND, "From 'desert castle' to medieval town: Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi (Syria)", *Antiquity*, 79 (2005): 350-61; D. GENEQUAND, "Umayyad Castles; the Shift from Late Antique Military Architecture to Early Islamic Palatial Building", in H. KENNEDY (ed.), *Muslim Military Architecture in Greater Syria. From the Coming of Islam to the Ottoman Period*, Leiden/Boston 2006, pp. 3-25 (Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi); C.P. HAASE, "Madinat al-Far. The Regional Late Antique Tradition of an Early Islamic Foundation", in K. BARTL & S. R. HAUSER (eds.), *Continuity and Change in Northern Mesopotamia from the Hellenistic to the Early Islamic Period,* Berlin 1996, pp. 167-69 (Madinat al-Far); R. HILLENBRAND, "'Anjar and Early Islamic Urbanism", in G. P. BROGIOLO & B. WARD-PERKINS (eds.), *The Idea and Ideal of the Town Between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden 1999, pp. 70-75, 98 (Anjar); D. WHITCOMB, "The Misr of Ayla: Settlement at al-Aqaba in the Early Islamic Period", in G. R. D. KING & A. CAMERON (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East. II, Land use and settlement patterns*, Princeton, NJ 1994, pp. 156-68 (Aqaba).

success of Islam and the sanctification of Mecca and Madinah, this location became even more important, for with Islam the Hijaz attained a political and economic standing that it had never had before. This meant new commercial opportunities that prompted an efficient reorganisation of intra and interregional trade, and also involved a rising number of annual pilgrims travelling to and from the Peninsula. Such amplified activity demanded a material and social framework in which to unfold; one which was subjected to continual reassessment and adaptation. Yet how this was manifested in physical reality remains poorly understood.

Historical sources tell us that the local bishop, one Yuhanna b. Ruba, signed a treaty in 630 CE (9AH), in which the Byzantine town of Ailana was seceded to the Prophet Muhammad.[4] In addition to marking the first Muslim incursion into *Bilad al-Sham*, the treaty reciprocated the taxation/tribute by securing the right to worship freely and guaranteeing both the property and personal safety of its inhabitants. This was a circumstance that severely limited Muslim use of the city centre. Yet because of its key position on the lucrative trade and transport routes, establishing a seat of control was of major importance to the fledgling Muslim authority.

The problem of lacking space was resolved at an early stage by placing a transitory encampment (*misr*) immediately outside the city. This camp would function both as a local administration and as a regional control point that monitored the flow of goods and people between the Hijaz on the one hand and Egypt and *Bilad al-Sham* on the other. Although the original camp may have been transitory, Muslim political authority was not, and gradually the settlement evolved into a permanent community. There exists no archaeological evidence for this early camp, but it is attested in historical sources[5] and generally corresponds to regional trends (*e.g.* Qinnasrin and Tabariyyah in *Bilad al-Sham*, Fustat and Kairouan in Africa, and Kufa and Istakhr in the *Mashreq*).[6]

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[4] L. CAETANI, *Annali dell'Islam*, Hildesheim/New York 1972, 253-55; P.K. HITTI (trans.), *The Origins of the Islamic State. Being a Translation of Kitâb Futûh al-Buldân of Abu l-Abbas Ahmad ibn Jabir al-Baladhuri*, Piscataway, NJ 2002, p. 92.

[5] D. WHITCOMB, "Evidence of the Umayyad Period from the Aqaba Excavations", in M. A. BAKHIT & R. SCHICK (eds.), *The Fourth International Conference On The History Of Bilâd al-Shâm During The Umayyad Period*, Amman 1989, p. 173.

[6] See for example C.E. BOSWORTH, "Miṣr. B", *EI²*, VII: 146, Leiden 1993; T.P. HARRISON, "The Early Umayyad Settlement at Tabariyah: A Case of yet Another Misr?", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 51 (1992): 51-59; A. NORTHEDGE, "Archaeology and new urban settlement in Early Islamic Syria and Iraq", in G. R. D. KING & A. CAMERON (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East. II, Land use and settlement patterns*, Princeton, NJ 1994, pp. 231-65; WHITCOMB, "The Misr of Ayla: Settlement at al-Aqaba in the Early Islamic Period"; D. WHITCOMB, "The Misr of Ayla: New Evidence for the

The site of Aylah was originally identified in 1985 by Donald Whitcomb of the University of Chicago, and he has made the bold, yet substantiated inference that the walled city was constructed as early as 650 CE.[7] So far, this early dating has only been superficially challenged,[8] and from a geo-chronological point of view, Ailana would indeed have been one of the first garrisoned settlements that the Muslims would have encountered. However, the planned and walled city seems more consistent with the Umayyad architectural programmes of the early 8th century than with the initial Muslim expansion into Syria. A more comprehensive publication of the OI excavations would perhaps lend support to Whitcomb's theory, yet in a broader context of Umayyad urbanism, Aylah's planned layout and spatial organisation is clearly more in line with Marwanid constructions, than Sufyanid ones.[9] It is, nonetheless, a distinct possibility that Uthman did found an encampment here, without it constituting a walled and orthogonally planned city. The pre-Islamic population of Ailana consisted of a considerable amount of Judeo-Christian Arabs from the Arabian Judham tribe.[10] This tribe fought on the Byzantine side at the battles of Tabuk (630 CE) and Yarmuk (632 CE), but later converted to Islam and became loyal supporters of the Marwanid branch of the Umayyads — another indication of an Umayyad patronage for the city proper.[11]

Whatever the case, even if the construction of Aylah is pushed into the late 7th or early 8th century as suggested, we are still left with one of the earliest planned Islamic urban foundation in the world. The prototypical nature of this site, combined with its long history, geographical placement

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Early Islamic City", in A. HADIDI (ed.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan 5*, Amman 1995, pp. 277-288; D. WHITCOMB, "Notes on Qinnasrîn and Aleppo in the Early Islamic Period", *Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 43 (1999): 203-209.

[7] WHITCOMB, "Evidence of the Umayyad Period from the Aqaba Excavations", pp. 173-75.

[8] NORTHEDGE, "Archaeology and new urban settlement", p. 239; A. WALMSLEY, *Early Islamic Syria. An Archaeological Assessment*, London 2007, p. 95.

[9] R.M. FOOTE, "Commerce, Industrial Expansion, and Orthogonal Planning: Mutually Compatible Terms in Settlements of Bilad al-Sham during the Umayyad Period", *Mediterranean Archaeology*, 13 (2000): 28-33. It should, however, be noted that the first 70 years of Islamic history is a period about which archaeologists have been able to prove very little (J. JOHNS, "Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 46 (2003): 411-436).

[10] If we are to believe Baladhuri, Ailana had a population of approximately 300 adult males (HITTI, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, pp. 92-93).

[11] C.E. BOSWORTH, "Djudhām", *EI²*, II: 573, Leiden 1965.

and the rather unusual fact that large parts of the urban core are available for excavation, make Aqaba the ideal site to conduct a study of urban morphology and the development of urban concepts in an Islamic context.

Whitcomb worked nine seasons at the site between 1986 and 1995, during which time a substantial portion of the city was uncovered. Understandably, focus was on the city's most monumental components such as the congregational mosque, main streets, gates and city walls. Also excavated, however, was large mansion (presumably the gubernatorial residence),[12] a number of domestic units and an *extra muros* beach front *suq*. The results from these excavations have so far not served to illuminate the impact of ideological systems on urban environments, nor the more long-term socio-economic effects of the Islamic expansion on the organisation of communal space. By combining clearly defined research objectives and new focused excavations with a re-examination of the large body of data from Chicago, the IAP plans to establish a sound empirical base from which to extrapolate crucial trends, and thus make an important contribution to the ongoing debate on the materiality of Muslim identity creation.[13]

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE 2008 CAMPAIGN

Whitcomb's effort to secure the walled city came at the expense of the suburbs. This has meant that our knowledge, and perhaps more importantly our expectation of *extra muros* settlement has been both ambiguous and amorphous. However, the *Aqaba Castle Project* proved that the geographic scope of cultural transforms dating to the Early Islamic period was not limited to the walled town exclusively, and that the *intra* and *extra muros* communities cannot simply be distinguished as urban and rural. An excavation unit was therefore placed both inside an outside the city walls of Aylah, and the areas termed IM (*intra muros*) and EM (*extra muros*) accordingly (Fig. 1). Due to this season's preliminary nature, our main objective was to lay out two diagnostic trenches that could give us a tentative stratigraphic overview of the areas coming under excavation. Before proceeding, a quick note should be made regarding orientation.

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[12] See K. DAMGAARD, "Finding Fatimid Jordan: A Reinterpretation of Aylah's '*Fatimid Residence*'", this volume, pp. 67-97.

[13] Following the untimely death of Prof. De Meulemeester in early 2009, the IAP was halted. Since then, the author has continued excavations in the southwest quadrant as director of the independent *Aylah Archaeological Project*.

As seen from the plan, the city itself, and thus the excavations units, have a northeast — southwest alignment. However, for purposes of clarity, the features will be described as if the city was oriented to the cardinal points. This means that the southwestern baulk is perceived as south, whereas the southern corner of the unit is described as southeast.

Inside the walls an arbitrary 10 by 10 meter grid was established in the southwest quadrant of the city and an excavation unit defined in its center. This part of the site was originally selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, no archaeological exploration has been undertaken in this quadrant of the city before. Secondly, although the topography generally slopes downwards towards the beach, this quadrant, though closest to the sea, is the highest part of the mound. And thirdly, Whitcomb's identification of an Abbasid *suq* against the exterior of the south wall indicated that this may have constituted part of an expanding market, and that the southwest quadrant potentially could have been the core of such a commercial district.[14]

Outside the walls, a 5 by 2 meter trench was extended from the Egypt Gate's south tower along the reconstructed city wall. This area was selected because previous excavations have shown that the Egypt Gate seems to have had particular significance for the city. The gate was the city's welcoming face to pilgrims and traders coming from Egypt, North Africa and Spain — areas we know brought a significant amount of people and wealth to Aylah.[15] The gate's importance is emphasised by the presence of an inscription carved into the exterior lintel. This inscription — the *Ayat al-Kursi* or Throne verse — is one of the earliest known Qur'anic inscriptions in the world (Fig. 2 & 3).[16] Considering the ample archaeological evidence in conjunction with the political situation in the 10th–11th centuries, it is likely that if *extra muros* expansion indeed was

[14] D. WHITCOMB, "A Street and the Beach at Ayla: The Fall Season of Excavations at 'Aqaba, 1992", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 39 (1995): 499-507; this is further indicated by the alteration of the city wall and towers in this area (D. WHITCOMB, "The Walls of Early Islamic Ayla: Defence or Symbol?", in H. KENNEDY (ed.), *Muslim Military Architecture in Greater Syria. From the Coming of Islam to the Ottoman Period*, Leiden/Boston 2006, pp. 61-74).

[15] As indicated for example by the numismatic evidence (D. WHITCOMB, *Ayla. Art and Industry in the Islamic Port of Aqaba* (Oriental Institute Museum Publications), Chicago 1994, p. 18).

[16] The Throne verse has been discovered at several 8th century settlements in the Hijaz, including Rabadhah, al-Jar and al-Hawra (K. DAMGAARD, *Modelling Mercantilism: An Archaeological Analysis of Red Sea Trade in the Early Islamic Period (650-1100 CE)*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Copenhagen, 2011).

tolerated by the authorities, the area by the Egypt Gate would have been particularly susceptible to such a process.

From the outset, excavation confirmed that Aylah has a long and complex depositional history, including numerous periods of destruction, rebuilding, cutting and in-filling. Practically all the architecture was constructed of uncut stone — mostly local limestone and highly salinised granite. These were set in a mud-slurry that served as bonding agent. In a few places cut blocks do appear, but these consistently appear to be spolia. Although not universal, the earlier phases of construction appear to be the sturdier and generally apply a larger size of building stones. In some areas of the IM unit a good and clearly defined stratigraphy was identified, but due to the many disturbances stratigraphic unity could not be established throughout the excavation unit. From a perspective of occupational history, we were nonetheless able to distinguish five distinct phases of construction. Of those, the latest one (Phase 1) was not only the best represented, but will also be the focus of this paper, as this is what we have termed the Fatimid city. However, a brief presentation of the earlier phases is appropriate in order to give the reader an idea of what Fatimid urban planners could have drawn upon. The 5 phases are defined as follows:

PHASE 1 – FATIMID (MID-10TH – 11TH CENTURY CE)

This phase consists of three main clusters of architecture and the open spaces between them (Fig. 4). In the excavation unit's southern end, the corners of two individual building units were identified. In the southeast corner, a north-south running wall was butted on its east side by a lower return running into the eastern baulk. These are the earlier structures of the southeast cluster. Whatever they constituted, they were at some later date enhanced by two smaller walls in the same L-shape that were built directly against the east face of their predecessors, yet on roughly the same level. At an even later stage, the original wall was prolonged with about 1 meter to the north, but it remains unclear whether this was an actual expansion of space, or a reinforcement of the extant structure (perhaps following seismic activity). In the southwest quadrant of the square the corner of a similar square unit was identified. From the exterior it seems that the walls were constructed as a single phase, but excavation inside the building showed that the two upper courses are a later addition, as they extend 30 cm beyond the original line of the wall.

It is noteworthy, that even at this late stage of occupation, these two structures and the passage or piazza between them, adhere to the orthogonality of the original grid. From the surfaces associated with this space, a rich and varied artefactual yield was retrieved. Worth mentioning was the presence of many sherds belonging to small and miniature amphorae, as well as basalt grinding tools and a polished agate pendant (Fig. 5). A number of shattered but quite thick glass vessels were also discovered. The accessibility of this space may indicate that it was an at least semi-public domain, whereas the artefact yield might suggest that it was associated with some kind of manufacture, or the treatment and packing of goods. However, this requires further study and remains conjecture for now.

The most prominent set of structures of this phase is found in the northern part of the excavation unit. The basic line of these structures is an east-west running wall, the north face of which constituted the southern border of a substantial street. The wall is breached by a well-built drain gutter, which originally had a superstructure of fired brick of which only two examples remained *in situ*. The drain runs along the west side of a large installation, the nature of which seems to have a water related function. It is a stone-lined feature with an earth fill topped with large stones. Whatever its exact function was, the feature was constructed to give the impression of a solid installation while allowing liquid to seep between the top course and into the earth fill below. The feature is not intact, and the section on its fractured side shows a clear micro-stratigraphy, indicating that the in-filling was gradual (*e.g.* a cess pit).

Although it generally slopes to the north, upon nearing the actual street the drain breaks into a steep decline so that once in the street it was subterranean and covered by stone blocks. Excess liquids culminated in a large cesspit that remains unexcavated for now. Access to this sewage system was granted through a circular opening sealed with a large basalt lid — possibly a reused quern-stone. Extending from the covered drain in the street was a second covered drain canal, which ran east to a re-used well of an older date.[17]

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[17] The construction of complex water systems in urban for a is well known from the early Islamic period. For example at al-Ramla (A. PETERSEN, "Ramla", in *id*., *The Towns of Palestine under Muslim Rule AD 600-1600*, Oxford 2005, pp. 95-102) and Tinnis (A.L. GASCOIGNE, "The water supply of Tinnîs: public amenities and private investments", in A. K. BENNISON & A. L. GASCOIGNE (eds.), *Cities in the Pre-Modern Islamic World: The Urban Impact of Religion, State and Society* (SOAS/Routledge Studies on the Middle East, vol. 6), New York/London 2007, pp. 161-176).

That the open space north of these installations was in fact a street is not only revealed by the presence of a sewer system, but also by the wall's well-built north façade. Furthermore, the north baulk of the excavation unit displayed numerous hard stamped horizontal strata of varying thicknesses, indicating that the street indeed was used as such throughout a large part of the city's history. This situation is very similar to what Whitcomb found while excavating the main thoroughfares.[18] Nevertheless, in order to unequivocally confirm the presence of a street here, the excavated area was expanded between 1.5 and 3.5 meters north. This revealed a parallel wall on the opposite side of the thoroughfare, which had the same fine outward facing. Remarkably, the short section of street excavated this season has the same width as the central and northern *decumani*. Furthermore, it creates an axis that runs perpendicular to the city wall. Thus, there is once again an indication that even in the city's latest phase of occupation, a certain degree of loyalty to the original plan was maintained.

PHASE 2 – LATE ABBASID (LATE 9TH – 10TH CENTURY CE)

The only structures associated with this phase are a fragmented crushed limestone floor surface, an earlier wall that maintains the axis of the street façade of Phase 1 but extends further east and is separated from the later walls by a sand fill roughly 50 cm thick, and an area of plastered paving around a stone-lined well. The latter is the installation which in Phase 1 was reused as the secondary pit for the overflow of excess sewage. This feature was only partially excavated as it extends into the north baulk, and its original context remains unclear for now. It is, however, located in street and may have been a public source of water, the likes of which can still be seen in many Islamic metropolises today.

PHASE 3 – ABBASID (MID 8TH TO LATE 9TH CENTURY CE)

Phase 3 is another substantial period of construction, which, based on its artefact yield, is considered Abbasid in date. The surfaces and features of this phase were easy to identify since most of the area at some stage

[18] D. WHITCOMB, "The Fourth Gate at Ayla: A Report on the 1992 Excavations at 'Aqaba", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 37 (1993): 535; WHITCOMB, "A Street and the Beach at Ayla", p. 502.

was subjected to substantial infilling and subsequent levelling using the coarse and pebbly pink sand native to Aqaba. This levelling is associated with widespread reconstruction following a significant collapse — probably due to either the 749 CE or 873 CE earthquake.[19]

The structures of Phase 3 are more closely bound together as a single, perhaps private, space (Fig. 6). The north-south axis created by the standing walls is met by an east-west running wall, of which only the negative profile or robber's trench remains (Fig. 7). This wall is particularly interesting for although nothing of its stone foundation remains, the negative profile created a clear delineation, which divides the Fatimid "piazza" in two. That the negative was in fact the remnants of a wall was confirmed by a patterned mud-brick collapse, including a carbonised wooden beam, on its south side (Fig. 8). The collapse contained numerous air pockets under and between the individual bricks, divulging that its destruction was sudden and unintentional. Further confirming this interpretation is the fact that although much of the architecture consists entirely of uncut stone, constructing walls using a foundation of 3-4 courses of stone topped by a mud brick superstructure is entirely consistent with both previous and subsequent building techniques in Aqaba (Fig. 9). The wall negative runs across the open area and aligns with a small stone buttress protruding eastwards from the corner and in line with the negative. The negative profile does not extend all the way to this buttress, and a preliminary suggestion is that some sort of doorway originally existed here.

North of the wall negative a well-built well was found. Excavation took place inside the well until we reached the current water table, after which it was abandoned for safety reasons. The bottom of the well had at that stage not yet been struck, and regrettably the effort yielded no ceramic material to indicate its date of use. When excavation was halted, we had reached a depth of 2.70 m below the top course of the well and 7.50 m below the pre-excavation surface.

PHASE 4 – EARLY ABBASID (LATE 8TH CENTURY CE)

This early phase is only represented by a few features since not much of the excavated surface was penetrated to sufficient depth. It has been termed Umayyad both because it predates the presumed 749 destruction

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[19] N.N. AMBRASEYS & C.P. MELVILLE, "Evidence for Interplate Earthquakes in Northwest Arabia", *Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America,* 79 (1989): 1279-1281; Y. TSAFRIR & G. FOERSTER, "The Dating of the 'Earthquake of the Sabbatical Year' of 749 C.E. in Palestine", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 55 (1992): 231-235.

layer, and because the ceramic material associated with it increasingly takes on characteristic Umayyad traits. Prominent were especially fine red-orange wares, thin grey ribbed wares and thicker grey-green wares with painted or incised wavy line decorations. Also noticeable is the complete cessation of glazed wares. The structures dating to this period consist of a single phase of walling following the wall lines of Phase 3. It was constructed using larger blocks than in the later periods, but the stones continue to be either uncut or spolia.

PHASE 5 – UMAYYAD (MID 7TH – MID 8TH CENTURY CE)

The earliest architectural phase identified this season consists of a single east-west running wall with a small north-south return. The main part of this wall runs exactly under the wall of Phase 4, but is separated from it by a fill of 40 cm. Surfaces and their interfaces were difficult to make out due to the limited area of excavation and the high level of moisture in the soil. However, at least one distinct deposit was identified, which contained an extremely high density of ceramic remains that tentatively were dated to the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule. They included clearly Umayyad types, but also burnished Byzantine wares and even Late Roman types such as black burnished ware. Also characteristic was a considerable presence of ceramic discs — the characteristic lids for the Early Islamic Aqaba amphora (Fig. 10).

EXTRA MUROS

Outside the city wall a 5 by 2 meter trench was laid out. This extended from the Egypt Gate's south tower alongside the city wall. The occupational phases of IM were not as clear here, but at least two phases of construction and several operating surfaces were identified. Most distinct was a seemingly Fatimid construction phase and the associated walking surfaces (Fig. 11). The structure currently consists of a single wall built perpendicularly against the city wall and extending westwards beyond the limit of our excavation unit. Based on its contextual artefact yield, it has been tentatively allocated to Phase 1 in our chronology.

One aspect that currently prompts us to question the preliminary dating is that the wall was constructed using the same building technique as Phase 3 *intra muros*. Although highly disintegrated, the profiles of mud-bricks were clearly identifiable in the deposits on top of the low stone

foundation. Another indication is the fact that the dimensions of this wall are reminiscent of the Abbasid *suq* built against the south side of the city. However, directly below the Fatimid wall, but separated from it by approximately 50 cm of fill, an earlier phase of walling was discovered. The material yield from the surfaces associated with this phase was predominantly Abbasid (especially Coptic glazed wares and splash wares),[20] and the wall has tentatively been allocated to occupation Phase 4. Further excavation is, however, necessary; not only to establish an unequivocal date, but also to clarify the function and extent of these structures.

A quick note should be made regarding the city wall itself. The EM trench revealed that the section of wall that we uncovered had been significantly offset from its original axis (as indicated by the reconstruction). This is most likely due to the violent seismic activity of the 1068 earthquake. The full segment of the wall, excavated to under its foundation, also showed that this monumental structure has multiple construction phases, and that the original wall was subjected to both damage and repair before settlement at Aylah was abandoned.

MEDIEVAL AYLA IN CONTEXT

There has been an ongoing debate as to the origins and initial source of inspiration for Aylah's orthogonal layout. But why even mention the Early Islamic lay-out in a discussion of the Fatimid city? Well, it appears that even in the Fatimid period, construction generally adhered to the original grid. Seemingly, the question then becomes why this 'antiquated' planning was maintained, and to what degree changing concepts of urbanism in the broader Islamic world caused Aylah to evolve at all? However, rather than seeing Aylah's inhabitants as potentially idle recipients of foreign influences, they should be viewed as respondents to a combination of local needs and circumstances that blended with new urban trends and concepts — many of which probably were coming from Egypt. And rather than expecting fundamental changes in urban planning, archaeology has revealed a fine blend of both continuity and change. Change, however, is not necessarily the replacement of old concepts with new ones, but the manner in which new trends and ideas are integrated within the old.

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[20] D. WHITCOMB, "Glazed ceramics of the Abbasid period from the Aqaba excavations", *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society*, 55 (1991): 43-65.

Returning to Aylah's orthogonal plan, one possible source that continues to surface in the literature is the idea that there is a causal relationship between the abandoned and most likely reused Roman *castrum* that housed the *Legio X Fretensis* in the 3rd to 4th century CE.[21] However, in addition to sustained archaeological rejections of any direct relationship,[22] a quick comparison also negates this option. Geographically, the closest *castrum* parallels are the forts at Udhruh and Lajjun in Jordan, and Luxor in Egypt, yet all three are almost double the size of Aylah, and differ significantly in interior organisation.[23] That *castra* may have been a source of inspiration in the planning and conceptualisation of Aylah is nonetheless quite possible. There are indeed many potential sources of inspiration. Diocletian's palatial cities in Split and Antioch not only augmented the cities they were built in, but could function both in conjunction and completely independent of their urban surroundings.[24] This notion was clearly adopted and adapted by various Muslim dynasties, and is repeated from Umayyad Amman to Nasrid Granada. Indeed the very essence of Roman city planning rests on the orthogonal grid and recent research shows that at least in the east, this tradition is maintained well into the 8th century.[25]

The fortified city was, however, not a concept familiar to late antique Arabian culture.[26] This may help explain why the original appearance of Aylah's walls was abandoned so soon after their construction. By the mid 8th century the inhabitants had reinterpreted the symbolic significance of the walled enceinte, and many of the towers had been subjected to various forms of reuse, either as dumps, production facilities or perhaps domiciles.[27] In the southern end of the city this re-conceptualisation is

[21] P. WHEATLEY, *The Places Where Men Pray Together. Cities in Islamic lands seventh through tenth centuries*, Chicago/London 2001, p. 290.

[22] See especially S.T. PARKER, "The Roman Aqaba Project: The 2000 Campaign", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 46 (2002): 421.

[23] GENEQUAND, "Umayyad Castles"; WHITCOMB, "The Walls of Early Islamic Ayla", pp. 68-71.

[24] S. CURCIC, "Late Antique Palaces: The Meaning of Urban Context", *Ars Orientalis,* 23 (1993): 76-90.

[25] I.R. SIMPSON, "Market Buildings at Jarash: Commercial Transformation at the South Tetrakionion in the 6th to 9th Centuries C.E.", in K. BARTL (ed.), *Residences, Castles, Settlements. Transformation Processes from Late Antiquity to Early Islam in Bilad al-Sham (Proceedings of a Colloquium on Late Antique and Early Islamic Archaeology in Bilâd al-Shâm. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Damascus, 5-9 November 2006)* (Orient-Archäologie, vol. 24), Rahden 2008.

[26] D. WHITCOMB, "Urbanism in Arabia. *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy*, 7 (1996): 38-51.

[27] Especially towers 3 and 13 (WHITCOMB, "The Walls of Early Islamic Ayla", p. 62).

particularly clear. Here small markets and workshops sprang up, comple-
menting the external *suq* and gradually effacing the otherwise clear
demarcation that was the city wall.[28] Some of these shops cut new doors
into the tower walls facing outwards, indicating this is where one found
business rather than threat. Our work this season shows that this was a
trend that was sustained and possibly augmented in the Fatimid period,
and that a similar process is likely to have taken place outside the western
wall.

From the early 8th century, Aylah seems to have been subject to an
accelerated growth — both geographically and demographically. In
addition to the Umayyad and Abbasid features discovered by the ACP
under Aqaba Castle (which included walling, wells and irrigation canals
set in a prefixed orientation),[29] the *Roman Aqaba Project* (directed by
Dr Thomas Parker) exposed numerous 7th to 9th century houses in their
areas A, K and L.[30] Located south and northwest of the walled city
respectively, these four examples are clear archaeological evidence for
extra muros occupation in the early Islamic period. Furthermore, based
on the distribution of this material, it would appear that Aylah's "sub-
urbs" extended up to a kilometer in radius from the city walls. That
these settlements were not dissociated with the urban core is supported
by the fact that when the Mövenpick Hotel expanded its facilities down
to the beach, salvage excavations lead by the Jordanian Department of
Antiquities recorded a large and organised early Islamic suburb that
included houses, workshops and streets.[31] The Mövenpick compound
stretches along Aylah's western flank and is separated from it by no more
than 5-10 meters. There is thus a clear linkage between the urban core
and Parker's areas A, K and L. At the castle the link to Aylah is also

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[28] WHITCOMB, "The Walls of Early Islamic Ayla", pp. 62-67.

[29] DE MEULEMEESTER & PRINGLE, "The 'Aqaba Castle Project 2003"; DE MEULE-
MEESTER & PRINGLE, "The 'Aqaba Castle Project 2004-5"; DE MEULEMEESTER & AL-SHQOUR,
"The 'Aqaba Castle Project 2006".

[30] S.T. PARKER, "The Roman Aqaba Project: The 1996 Campaign", *Annual of the
Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 42 (1998): 375-394; S.T. PARKER, "The Roman
'Aqaba Project: The 1997 and 1998 Campaigns", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities
of Jordan*, 44 (2000): 373-394; PARKER, "The Roman Aqaba Project: The 2000 Campaign
Parker"; K. DAMGAARD, "A Palestinian Red Sea Port on the Egyptian Road to Arabia:
Early Islamic Aqaba and Its Many Hinterlands", in L. BLUE, J. COOPER, R. THOMAS &
J. WHITEWRIGHT (eds.), *Connected Hinterlands: Proceedings of the Red Sea Project IV
Held at the University of Southampton, September 2008*, Oxford 2009, pp. 85-97.

[31] Unfortunately these excavations remain unpublished and I am indebted to Dr Sawsan
al-Fakhri, the director of the Aqaba Archaeological Museum and the DoA's chief repre-
sentative in Aqaba, for sharing this information.

evident, as no pre-Islamic settlement was found here despite reaching sterile soil. The notion that the walls created some kind of dichotomy between Islamic and non-Islamic space is therefore not just erroneous, but indeed irrelevant, and the 'sprawling' of urban settlement irreverent of walling corresponds to trends seen throughout the Mediterranean in this period.[32] In the case of Aylah, it seems prudent to conclude for now that the merging of the Byzantine and Islamic cities was both a rapid and fluid process.

Although on a larger scale, this duality of settlement is mirrored in the Fatimid capital. The relationship between Fustat and al-Qahira was an interdependent one, with Fustat, at least prior to the various catastrophes of the 12th century, functioning as the city's international trade hub and economic dynamo.[33] The walled city of al-Qahira on the other hand, was the political and ceremonial heart of the city. Unlike many medieval Egyptian cities, Fatimid Cairo was provided with walls from the beginning. However, the original Fatimid wall was not the monumental construction of vizier Badr al-Jamali that still strikes awe into the hearts of its viewers today. Its original walling consisted of a substantial mud-brick installation of which nothing remains today. The disintegration of this wall — or certainly of its defensive function — was already lost by the mid 11th century, when the Persian traveler Nasir-i Khusraw reported that the Cairene walls were buried underneath the houses of ordinary people.[34]

Cairo is a particular case, however, for it is an amalgamation of multiple settlements which by the 11th century function in symphony. Yet it does show that the settlement of 'occupational overflow' outside the city walls would not have been perceived as undermining a city's defensive capabilities. Even in Cairo, it was a problem that could be resolved with just a little ruthlessness. Thus, when Amalric I of Jerusalem attacked Fatimid Egypt in 1164, and Fustat potentially posed a defensive problem to the capital, the vizier Shawâr simply ordered it burned to the ground.[35]

Looking for other links between Aylah and the Fatimid capital, one cannot help but notice certain similarities in urban planning. While not

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[32] H. KENNEDY, "From *Polis* to *Madina*: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria", *Past & Present*, 106 (1985): 3-27; B. KEMP, N. MOELLER, K. SPENCE & A. L. GASCOIGNE, "Egypt's Invisible Walls", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 14 (2004): 279-83.

[33] D. BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF, *Islamic architecture in Cairo. An introduction*, Cairo 1989, pp. 3-7; WHEATLEY, *The Places Where Men Pray Together*, pp. 191-200.

[34] KEMP, MOELLER, SPENCE & GASCOIGNE, "Egypt's Invisible Walls", p. 282.

[35] BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF, *Islamic architecture in Cairo*, p. 7.

orthogonally designed, the walled Fatimid city was constructed using a single main north-south thoroughfare, reminiscent of the Roman *cardo,* as it main traffic artery. The street culminated in the *Bayna l-qasrayn*, a large ceremonial space at the heart of the city surrounded by the caliph's palaces. This prominence of centrality is echoed at Aylah, for although we expect most ceremony to have taken place in the great mosque, excavations of the converted tetrapylon indicate that during Fatimid rule, political power radiated from the centre of this settlement as well.[36] From other Fatimid trade hubs, such as Tinnis in Egypt or al-Ramlah in Palestine, we know that the Fatimid family often kept their own representations out of commercial interest. The power and influence that these offices exerted is difficult to ascertain, but they appear to have functioned independent of, and parallel to, local state authorities.[37] It can therefore come as no surprise that excavations so far have failed to discern whether the central pavilion house at Aylah belonged to a local state official, or a private enterprise of the Fatimid family.

A more interesting comparison to Fatimid Aylah is perhaps the Egyptian port of Tinnis, which was famous for its production of high quality textiles — including those destined to drape the Kaaba in Mecca. Conceptually, it must be said to be closer related to Aylah than Cairo was, for it is of a similar provincial nature and was known as an important centre for production and trade in Fatimid period. The structural remains of the city are buried on an island in the middle of modern Lake Manzala, roughly 7 kilometers southwest of Port Said. The city is mentioned in historical sources as early as the 4th century and was, like Aylah, an Episcopal seat. However, the city flourishes following the Islamic expansion, and reaches its apex under Abbasid, Tulunid, Ikshidid and Fatimid hegemony. Not much archaeological work has been conducted here due to difficult working conditions (especially flooding, looting and highly salinised soil), and we are not able to deduce much about the city's medieval organization based on archaeological remains.[38] Excavations and archaeological reconnaissance

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[36] D. WHITCOMB, "A Fatimid Residence at Aqaba, Jordan", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan*, 32 (1988): 207-224, DAMGAARD, "Finding Fatimid Jordan".

[37] Y. LEV, "Tinnîs: An Industrial Medieval Town", in M. BARRUCAND (ed.), *L'Egypte Fatimide son art et son histoire*, Paris 1999, pp. 84-87.

[38] Excavation of roughly 3500 m² (corresponding to ca 0.4 % of the site) has been conducted by Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. This has been supplemented by survey work by Dr Alison Gascoigne (University of Cambridge/ University of Southampton). See A.L. GASCOIGNE, "The medieval city of Tinnis", *Egyptian Archaeology*, 22 (2003): 25-27; GASCOIGNE, "The water supply of Tinnîs"; KEMP, MOELLER, SPENCE & GASCOIGNE, "Egypt's Invisible Walls", pp. 276-84.

on the island have, nonetheless, lent glimpses into a wealthy and internationally oriented population with economic ties as far away as China.

In spite of the archaeological limitations, Tinnis remains an important comparative context for Fatimid Aylah because of decisive historical source material. Some time between the 11th and 13th centuries a local scholar, Ibn Bassam al-Tininisi, who held a state office supervising and regulating market activities, compiles an elaborate description of the city, including its administrative organisation and civic and fiscal institutions. Particularly noticeable was that the city core was divided into 5 zones (*rabad*), which even though Tinnis did not necessarily have the same orthogonal plan as Aylah,[39] broke down into 4 quadrants surrounding a nucleus. It is unknown whether these zones had particular traits or responsibilities, and Ibn Bassam merely refers to them as the west zone, the east zone etc.[40] The domiciles of the local governor and administration were placed centrally within the town, whereas state officials in charge of something specific often were placed in the precinct they managed. Consequently, the office responsible for levying taxes on fishermen was located in the fishing harbour, whereas the taxator of goods and merchandise was associated with two large hypaethral enclosures near the commercial port. No such structures have been found at Aylah, and the location of what must be a substantial commercial harbour remains a mystery. But looking at how other Fatimid port cities were organised and perceived by its population, rulers and visitors may give us the first vital clues to interpreting the strategies and results of coming campaigns.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[39] This is certainly unlikely for the Fatimid period, for Ibn Bassam reports that the city has no less than 19 gates in the circuit walls (LEV, "Tinnîs: An Industrial Medieval Town", p. 90). Gradiometer surveys have yielded some idea as to the size and appearance of the city walls (KEMP, MOELLER, SPENCE & GASCOIGNE, "Egypt's Invisible Walls", Fig 10).

[40] LEV, "Tinnîs: An Industrial Medieval Town", pp. 90-91.

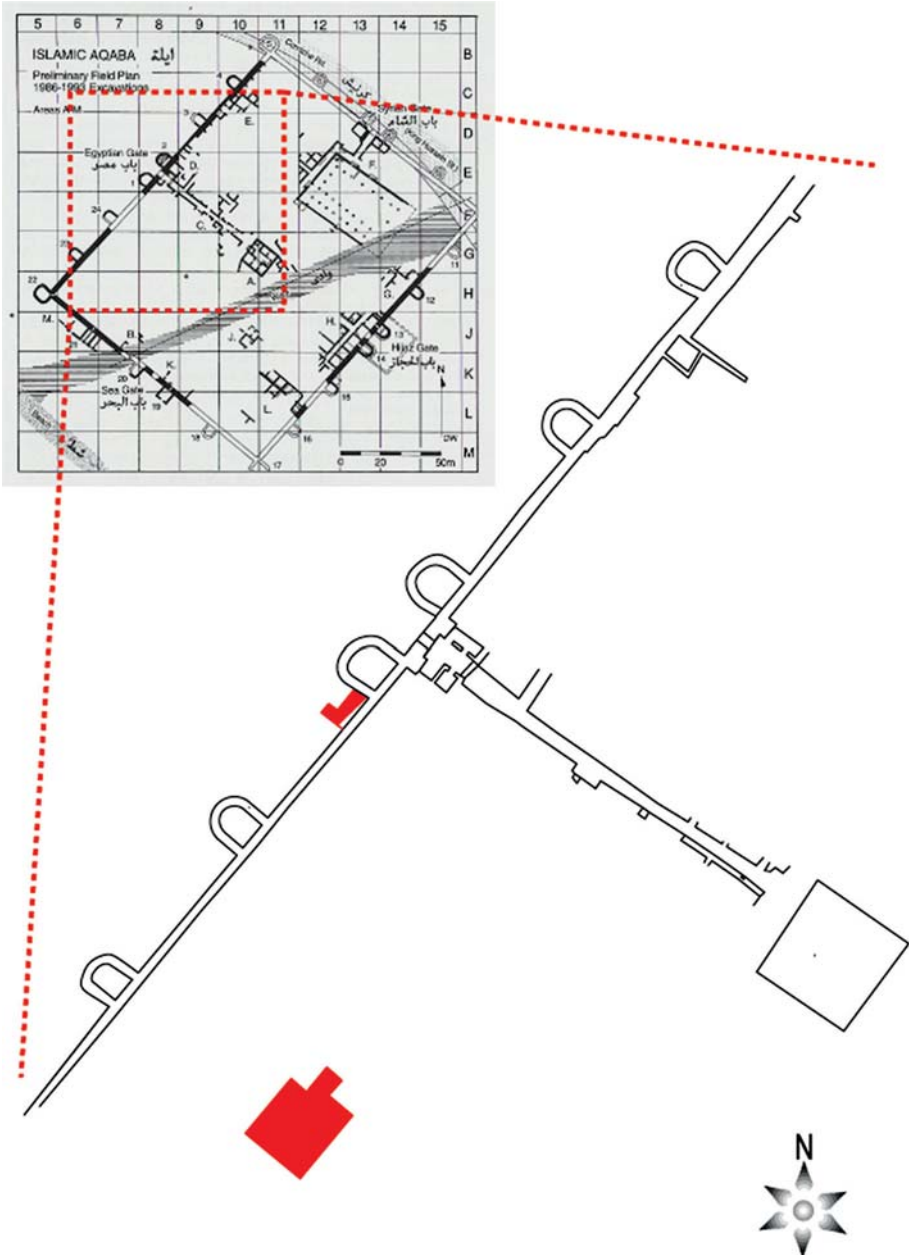KRISTOFFER DAMGAARD
University of Copenhagen

Fig. 1: Site plan showing the placement of IAP's excavation units in accordance with Whitcomb's general plan (© IAP 2008).

Fig. 2: Image of the *Ayat al-Kursi* inscription as presently exhibited in the
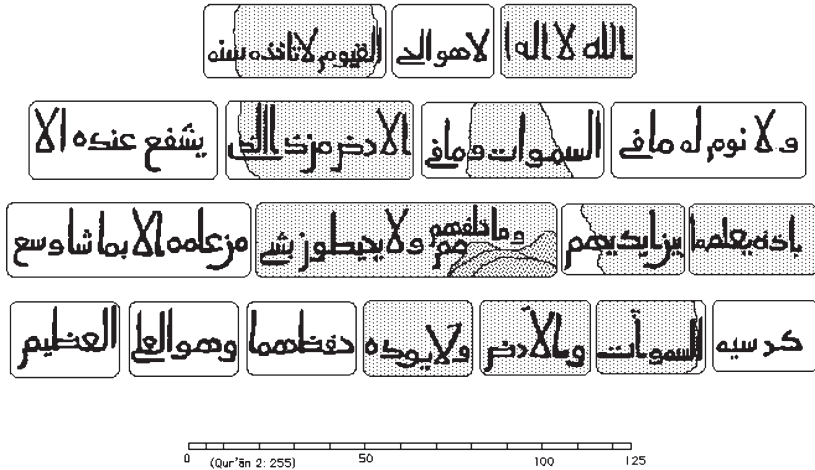Aqaba Archaeological Museum (photo by K. Damgaard).

Fig. 3: Reconstruction drawing of the *Ayat al-Kursi* inscription
(from WHITCOMB *Ayla. Art and Industry in the Islamic Port of Aqaba*, p. 12).
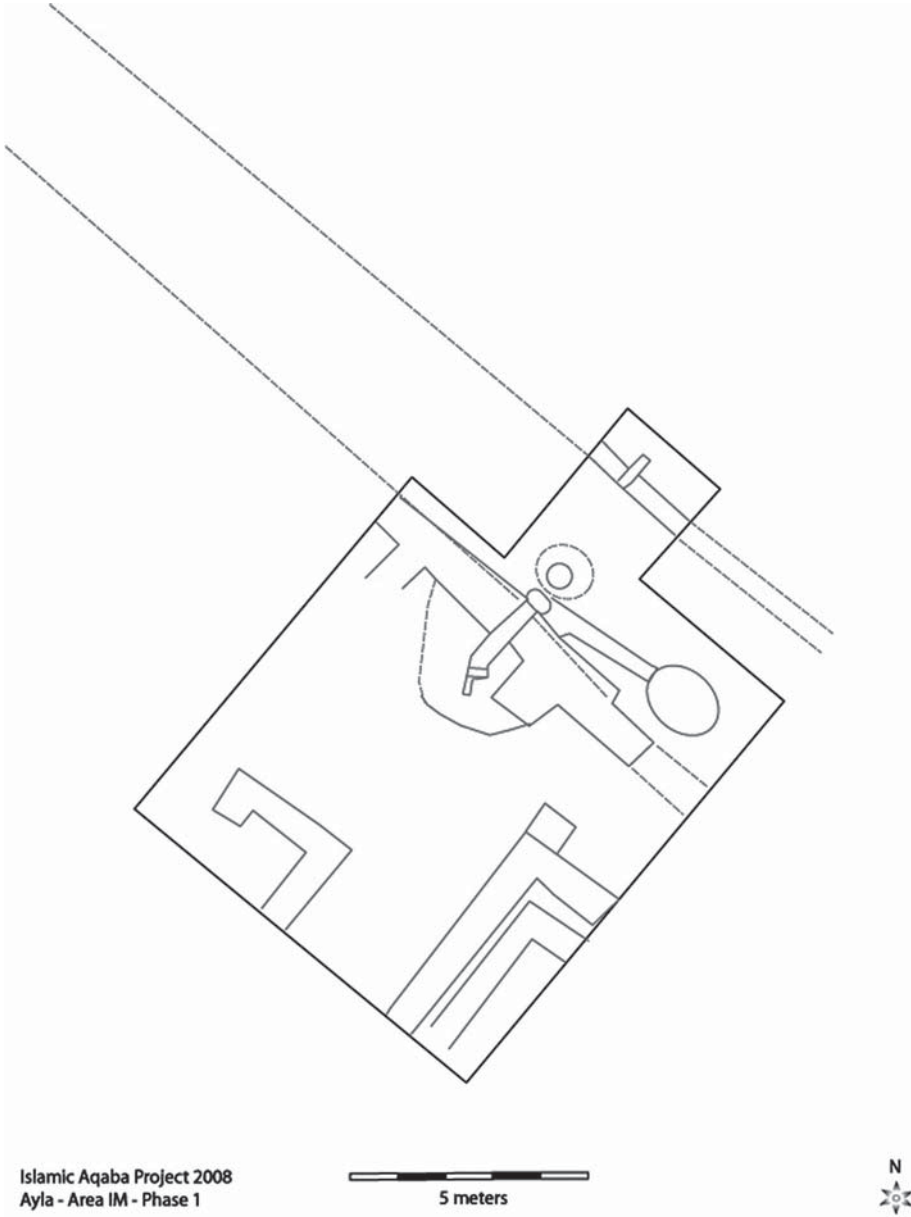
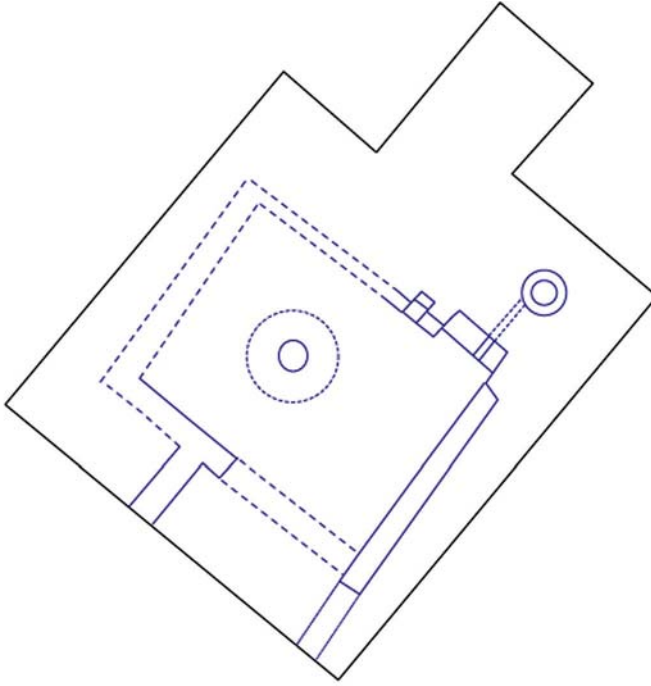Islamic Aqaba Project 2008
Ayla - Area IM - Phase 1

5 meters

N

Fig. 4: Preliminary plan of the architecture of Phase 1
(Fatimid mid-10th – 11th century CE) in our stratigraphy. This corresponds
roughly to Whitcomb's Phase E. The dashed lines are conjectural
(© IAP 2008).

Fig. 5: Polished agate pendant (photo by R. al-Shqour)

Islamic Aqaba Project 2008
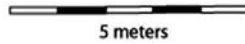Ayla - Area IM - Phase 3

5 meters

N

Fig. 6: Preliminary plan of the architecture of Phase 3
(Abbasid mid-9th – 10th century CE) in our stratigraphy. This corresponds
roughly to Whitcomb's Phase C. The dashed lines are conjectural
(© IAP 2008).

Fig. 7: Wall negative (photo by T. van der Velde).

Fig. 8: Mud brick collapse — presumably from the earthquake of either
748 CE or 873 CE (photo by T. van der Velde).

Fig. 9: Architecture from Byzantine Ailana. Note use of a few foundation
courses in stone, which were topped by a mud brick superstructure
(photo by K. Damgaard).

Fig. 10: Examples of the characteristic discs used to seal the large Aqaba
amphora in the Early Islamic period (photo by K. Damgaard)
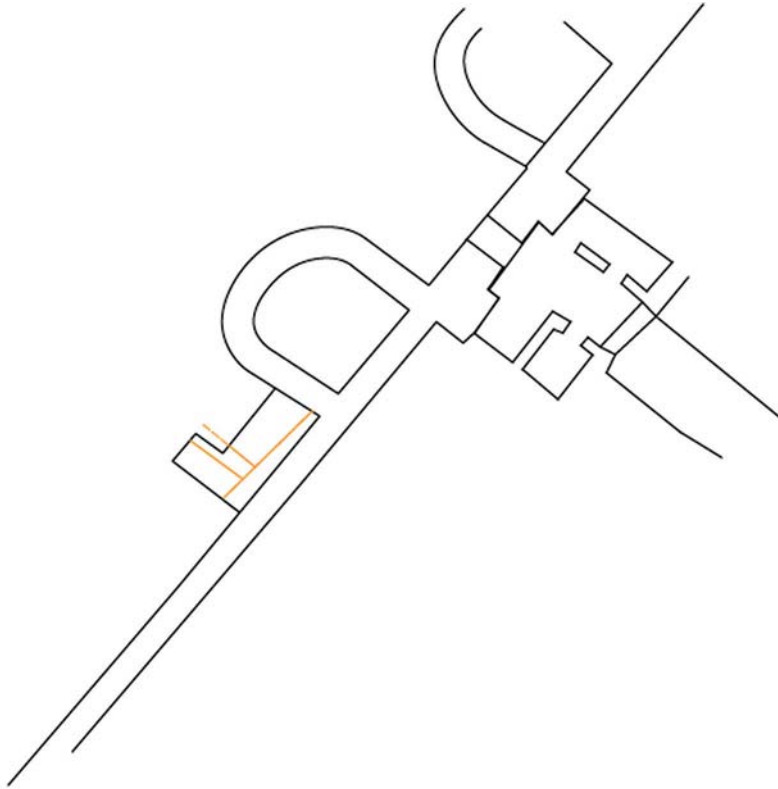
Islamic Aqaba Project 2008
Ayla - Area EM - Phase 1

10 meters

N

Fig. 11: Plan of EM (© IAP 2008).