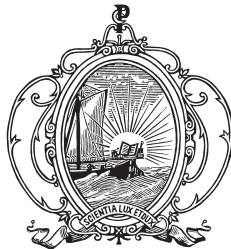


EGYPT AND SYRIA  
IN THE FATIMID, AYYUBID  
AND MAMLUK ERAS  
VII

Proceedings of the 16th, 17th and 18th International Colloquium  
Organized at Ghent University in  
May 2007, 2008 and 2009

U. VERMEULEN, K. D'HULSTER  
and  
J. VAN STEENBERGEN  
(eds.)



UITGEVERIJ PEETERS en DEPARTEMENT OOSTERSE STUDIES  
LEUVEN – PARIS – WALPOLE, MA  
2013

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface . . . . .	IX
Programme of the International Colloquia at Ghent University	
– Sixteenth Colloquium, May 9, 10 & 11, 2007 . . . . .	XI
– Seventeenth Colloquium, May 14, 15 & 16, 2008 . . . . .	XIII
– Eighteenth Colloquium, May 13, 14 & 15, 2009 . . . . .	XIV
<b>Fatimids</b>	
1. C.D. BAKER	
“Rebellion and the rise of the Fāṭimids: Fāṭimid foundational narratives and ‘Abbāsīd counter-narratives” . . . . .	1
2. M. BRETT	
“The Execution of Ibn Badūs” . . . . .	21
3. M. BRETT	
“Translation” . . . . .	31
4. K. DAMGAARD	
“Between <i>Castrum</i> and <i>Medina</i> : A preliminary note on spatial organisation and urban development in Medieval Aqaba”. . . . .	39
5. K. DAMGAARD	
“Finding Fatimid Jordan: A reinterpretation of Aylah’s ‘ <i>Fatimid Residence</i> ’” . . . . .	67
6. H. HALM	
“Mukarram und die Ṣulayḥīdische Restauration im Jemen” . . . . .	99
7. A.R. LALANI	
“A Philosophical Response from Fatimid Egypt on Leadership in Islam” . . . . .	115
8. L. RICHTER-BERNBURG	
“Ismaīlī <i>relectures</i> of Christianity: Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, al-Mu’ayyad al-Shīrāzī, Nāṣer-e Khosrow” . . . . .	131
9. A. SCHIPPERS	
“La poésie judéo-arabe de Mosheh Dar‘ī” . . . . .	143

10. J. YESHAYA  
 “A Bouquet of Arabic and Hebrew Flowers: The Judaeo-Arabic Poem Headings in Moses Dar‘ī’s *dīwān*” . . . . 165

### **Ayyubids, Crusaders (& Seljuqs)**

11. P.-V. CLAVERIE  
 “Pierre de Blois et la *Légende Dorée* de Renaud de Chatillon” 173
12. P.-V. CLAVERIE  
 “La politique orientale du Saint-Siège à l’avènement d’Honorius III (1216)” . . . . . 187
13. H. HANISCH  
 “Über das Wirken armenischer Bauhandwerker im frühen Mittelalter” . . . . . 201
14. H. HANISCH  
 “Über die Annäherungshindernisse im armenischen Wehrbau in Kilikien and seinen Randgebieten” . . . . . 287

### **Mamluks**

15. N. COUREAS  
 “Commercial Relations between Genoese Famagusta and the Mamluk Sultanate, 1374-1464” . . . . . 329
16. N. COUREAS  
 “Losing the War but winning the Peace: Cyprus and Mamluk Egypt in the Fifteenth Century” . . . . . 351
17. N. COUREAS  
 “The tribute paid to the Mamluk Sultanate, 1426-1517: The perspective from Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus” . . . . 363
18. J. DRORY  
 “Balawī’s Impressions of Palestine” . . . . . 381
19. J. DRORY  
 “Maqrīzī in *Durar al-‘Uqūd* with regard to Timur Leng” . . 393
20. J.-CH. DUCÈNE  
 “Prières, reliques et crue du Nil à l’époque mamelouke” . . 403

21. Y. FRENKEL	
“Narratives of Animals in Mamluk Sources” . . . . .	421
22. Y. FRENKEL	
“Tamīm al-Dārī and Hebron during the Mamluk Period” . .	435
23. S. LAOR-SIRAK	
“The folded cross vault in Mamluk Jerusalem and its Anato- lian origin” . . . . .	447
24. Y. LEV	
“Eliyahu Ashtor (1914-1984) and the History of the Mamlūk Sultanate” . . . . .	469
25. P. LEWICKA	
“On Hellenistic Medicine, Christian Fasting, and Nomadic Diet: Why the Medieval Cairenes Did Not Turn Vegetarian”	495
26. J.-M. MOUTON & B. DAYOUB	
“Les Qubbat al-Naṣr de Damas et de ses environs à l’époque mamlouke” . . . . .	507
27. A. STEWART	
“The Armenian Kingdom and the Near East: Het’um of Korykos and the <i>Flor des Estoires de la Terre d’Orient</i> ” . .	525
28. TH.M. WIJNTJES	
“The Sultan, the Duke and the Leopard: The Embassy of Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan to Sultan Barqūq” . . . .	549

FINDING FATIMID JORDAN:  
A REINTERPRETATION OF AYLAH'S  
'FATIMID RESIDENCE'

Fatimid rule in Bilad al-Sham is relatively well understood in regard to major events at important socio-political centres, however, ordinary life in its more peripheral parts remains poorly documented and only superficially examined. Southern Jordan, here defined as the area between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, is one such region (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> In the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE this area was known as al-Sharat. While military control over this area often depended on political circumstances elsewhere, it remained important as both a transit corridor between the Fatimid heartland in Egypt and the major urban centres of Syria-Palestine (e.g. Damascus, Ramlah or Jerusalem),<sup>2</sup> but also as a productive agricultural region.<sup>3</sup> Understanding the history of this region is thus highly desirable, as it on one hand will help illuminate the impact of Fatimid hegemony on local communities and, on the other, may assist in explaining the dynamics between Fatimid, Saljuq, Frankish and local political elites. Regrettably, relevant historical sources for Fatimid South Jordan prior to the first Crusader incursions around 1100 CE are scant, and this has led scholarship to perceive the region as culturally and economically secondary to Egypt and Palestine.

This article re-evaluates the state of our understanding by considering the contributions that have come from archaeology over the last decades.

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of historical and archaeological evidence pertaining to the Sharat region see R. SCHICK, "Southern Jordan in the Fatimid and Seljuq Periods", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 305 (1997): 73-85. The limited corpus of historical evidence is evident in the otherwise seminal studies of M. BRETT, *The Rise of the Fatimids. The World of the Mediterranean & the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE*, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2001, pp. 308-16; and TH. BIANQUIS, *Damas et la Syrie sous la Domination Fatimide (359-468/969-1076)*, Damascus 1986-1989, pp. 136-43.

<sup>2</sup> B. COLLINS (transl.), *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions. Ahsan al-Taqâsîmfi Ma'rifat al-Aqâlim by al-Muqaddasî*, Reading 2001; G. LE STRANGE, *Palestine under the Moslems*, London 1890, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> As reported by al-Idrisi (LE STRANGE, *Palestine*, p. 35). For archaeological evidence see U. AVNER & J. MAGNESS, "Early Islamic Settlement in the Southern Negev", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 310 (1998): 39-57; J. MAGNESS, "Khirbet Abu Suwwana and Ein 'Aneva: Two Early Islamic Settlements on Palestine's Desert Periphery", in D. WHITCOMB (ed.), *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam. Archaeological Perspectives*, Chicago 2004, pp. 11-23.

There are a number of aspects which differentiate historical studies from archaeological ones. While historical sources often provide solid information on the specific, archaeology is ill-suited to do so. Rather, archaeology is effective in addressing long-term social and economic processes, which are extrapolated as patterns and off-beats from relevant datasets. Although the archaeological evidence for the Sharat region remains limited for the period in question, it is a category of empirical data that is growing. A primary source of archaeological insights has come from the discovery and extensive excavations of the Early Islamic town of Aylah in modern Aqaba. This Red Sea port was an important emporium on the maritime trade networks to Asia and Africa, and also functioned as a major station on the Egyptian *hajj* route. These aspects characterised Aylah throughout the Early Islamic period (650-1100 CE), but appear to have been particularly relevant in the Tulunid and Fatimid periods.

#### REGIONAL HISTORY

The paucity of relevant historical sources on South Jordan during Fatimid rule was, at least in part, created by the fact that this was one of the most disputed and disrupted regions in the Fatimid empire; politically, economically and indeed militarily. The Fatimid armies invaded Palestine in 970, only a year after their conquest of Egypt, but their hegemony was loudly contested by local Arab tribes — in particular the *Banu Uqayl* of Syria and the *Banu Tayy* of Palestine.<sup>4</sup> The *Banu Tayy* were led by the Jarrahid clan, and even though they were but one stakeholder in a complex array of alliances and agendas, the Jarrahids offered the most organised and fierce resistance to Fatimid supremacy. On several occasions they proved to be an unpredictable and dangerous enemy for the Fatimids. At least twice they sacked and plundered Aylah, holding it briefly as bastion against Egypt. Historically, this is confirmed by numerous reports that the Egyptian *Darb al-Hajj* was closed for reasons of security. As a result, North African pilgrims would repeatedly be rerouted to Aydhab — a port on the Egyptian Red Sea coast — and then sailed across the Red Sea to Jiddah.<sup>5</sup> Pilgrims faced similar perils under Abbasid,

<sup>4</sup> SCHICK, “Southern Jordan”, pp. 76-81.

<sup>5</sup> Exemplified by Ibn al-Jubayr’s description of his pilgrimage. See R.J.C. BROADHURST (transl.), *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr, being the chronicle of a medieval Spanish Moor concerning his journey to the Egypt of Saladin, the holy cities of Arabia, Baghdad the City*

Tulunid and Ikhshidid rule, but not in as consistent, organised and targeted a manner as under the Fatimids. It was not until the Fatimid army achieved a decisive victory at the battle of Uqhuwana in 1029 that a period of stability ensued, and the old pilgrim route was re-opened.<sup>6</sup>

The military headquarters of the Jarrahids was at Karak, while their tribal origins were associated with a desert stronghold at Jabal Tayy in the northern Hijaz.<sup>7</sup> Other than this, we know very little about their governing structure. In Fatimid administrative matters, we are slightly better informed. The overarching authority for Palestine was in Ramlah, whereas Syria was governed from Damascus.<sup>8</sup> These metropolitan centres dominated the administrative hierarchy, but the system was de-centralised, and responsibilities were often delegated to local agents operating under the authority of the central government. Officials of this kind were still found mostly in the larger provincial centres, and it is quite unlikely that they, or the political hubs at Ramlah, Damascus or Cairo, exercised direct influence or effective control over more remote rural areas. Local semi-nomadic pastoralists were seemingly afforded the highest degree of political autonomy. Beyond the immediate hinterland of the larger administrative centres, Southern Jordan appears to have fallen into this category, and contemporaneous chroniclers refer to it as an area under the control of local tribes.<sup>9</sup>

For descriptive data we have several Arab geographers to draw on, but these end with Muqaddasi in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century. After Muqaddasi's descriptions, Fatimid south Jordan becomes an area marked by historical obscurity. In all likelihood this is the result of a combination of the region's provincial nature, and the fact that continual conflicts between local Bedouin groups and the political rulers seems to have found some expression here.<sup>10</sup> The geographic tradition is taken up again by al-Idrisi,

*of the Caliphs, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, London 1952.

<sup>6</sup> SCHICK, "Southern Jordan", p. 76.

<sup>7</sup> BIANQUIS, *Damas et la Syrie*, pp. 141-42, 238; SCHICK, "Southern Jordan", p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> BRETT, *The Rise of the Fatimids*, pp. 317-63.

<sup>9</sup> SCHICK, "Southern Jordan", pp. 76-78.

<sup>10</sup> A growing number of archaeological studies are continually building upon our knowledge of the region. In addition to the afore cited see: KH. 'AMR, A. AL-MOMANI, N. AL-NAWAFLEH & S. AL NAWAFLEH, "Summary Results of the Archaeological Project at Khirbat an-Nawaafila/ Wadi Musa", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 44 (2000): 231-55; KH. AMR & R. SCHICK, "The Pottery of Humeima: The Closed Corpus from the Lower Church", in E. VILLENEUVE & P.M. WATSON (eds.), *La Céramique Byzantine et Proto-Islamique en Syrie-Jordanie (IV<sup>e</sup>-VIII<sup>e</sup> Siècles apr. J.-C.)*. *Actes du Colloque tenu à Amman les 3, 4 et 5 Décembre 1994*, Beirut 2001, pp. 305-313; M. SINIBALDI,

but his descriptions postdate the Saljuq occupation of 1070 by almost a century (c. 1154 CE). In spite of this hiatus, a comparison of the available texts suggests that the region generally was one of mainly agricultural value, with an annual yield large enough to supply the more densely populated or less fertile regions of Syria-Palestine, Arabia and Egypt. One of the most encompassing sources of historical knowledge about the Fatimid period comes, of course, from the Cairo Geniza. This huge corpus makes hardly any mention of South Jordan, and when it does, it is restricted to the district capital of Ghor al-Safi (Zughar). In many ways, this is to be expected, for it was in such provincial hubs that the administrative and logistical framework for the economy of agricultural zones was in place. Another important hub was Aylah, which was among the provincial centres that had a form of representative authorities residing within town. Most tantalising is a Fatimid decree from 1134, in which the caliph al-Hafiz orders the governor of Aylah to observe the treaties with the Christians.<sup>11</sup> Robert Schick suggests this is a forgery committed by the monks at St. Catherine's monastery in the Sinai. This is not an unreasonable assumption, but even if this is the case, it still suggests that such an authority existed, as the forged document otherwise would have little bearing. Nevertheless, the lack of an official mint tends to suggest that even if Aylah was the seat of a centrally appointed governor, the position may not have been much more than titular.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the decree, there are records of at least two Shi'ite judges at Aylah,<sup>13</sup> and Paul Cobb has demonstrated that Aylah also was the base of a vivacious scholastic community of *hadith* specialists from the

"A Preliminary Report on the Pottery Assemblages of Al-Bayda and Wadi Farasa", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 53 (2009): 449-64; K.D. POLITIS, A. KELLY, D. HULL & R. FOOTE, "Survey and Excavations in the Ghawr as-Safi 2004", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 49 (2005): 313-37; K.D. POLITIS, M. O'HEA & G.A. PAPAIOANNOU, "Ghawr as-Safi Survey and Excavations 2006-2007", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 51 (2007): 199-210; K.D. POLITIS, A. SAMPSON & M. O'HEA, "Ghawr as-Safi Survey and Excavations 2000-2009", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 53 (2009): 297-309.

<sup>11</sup> S.M. STERN, *Fatimid Decrees* (All Souls Studies, vol. III), London 1964, p.46.

<sup>12</sup> It has been suggested that Aylah did mint copper issues (M. GILL, *A History of Palestine 634-1099*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 258-59), but I must concur with Robert Schick ("Southern Jordan", p. 78) that the evidence currently is highly dubious. For the coin in question see H. LAVOIX, *Catalogue des Monnaies Musulmanes de la Bibliothèque Nationale, Egypte et Syrie*, vol. III, Paris 1896, pp. 161-62.

<sup>13</sup> GILL, *A History of Palestine*, p. 426; SCHICK, "Southern Jordan", p. 77; for an assessment of the role of the *qadi* in medieval urban societies see Y. LEV, "The Cadi and the Urban Society: The Case of Medieval Egypt, 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Centuries", in *id.* (ed.), *Towns and Material culture in the medieval Middle East*, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2002, pp. 89-102.



8<sup>th</sup> century on.<sup>14</sup> While the first must have been Fatimid appointments, the latter appears to have been an established school that was sustained into the Fatimid period. Aylah was also important for other reasons; its nodal position on trade and transportation networks being paramount. From other trade hubs, such as Tinnis in Egypt or Ramlah in Palestine, we know that the Fatimid royal family sometimes retained private representatives out of commercial interest.<sup>15</sup> The power and influence that these offices exerted over the general populace is difficult to discern, but they appear to have functioned independent of, and parallel to, whatever local state authorities were active.

Islamic geographers subdivide the region into the districts of al-Ma'ab, al-Sharat and al-Jibal (using terms like *kura*, *balad* and *nahiya*). Various 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century sources place the districts either within the *jund* of Dimashq (Yaqubi/891) or Filastin (Ibn al-Faqih/903 and al-Istakhri/978), mentioning Gharandal, Zughar, Udruh, Ruwatha and Humaymah as the main towns. Aylah on the other hand, is often allocated to Egypt. Muqaddasi refers to the entire region as al-Sharat and lists it as a separate province that extends well into northern Arabia. In regard to Aylah, he seems a little hesitant as to its geographic allocation, confirming that the administrative structure of the region at this stage was somewhat fluid. Yet he associates it with Syria-Palestine, because its weights and measures are Syrian, and refers to it as the *port of Palestine* and the *storehouse of the Hijaz*, emphasizing the important role that Aylah played in the economic systems of southern Jordan.<sup>16</sup>

Located at each their edge of the region in question, Zughar and Aylah were both collection and redistribution nodes in the trans-regional trade networks. Zughar appears to have been the administrative centre of the region, whereas Aylah retains a set of characteristics that generally make it suitable for occupation. The two most important factors in this regard are its geographic location at the nexus of Egypt, Syria and Arabia, three important regions in the Islamic world; and an easy access to fresh water due to a subterranean aquifer that runs under the Wadi Arabah and turns east at the head of the Gulf.<sup>17</sup> These factors allowed Aylah to function

<sup>14</sup> P.M. COBB, "Scholars and Society at Early Islamic Ayla", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 38 (1995) 417-28.

<sup>15</sup> Y. LEV, "Tinnis: An Industrial Medieval Town", in M. BARRUCAND (ed.), *L'Égypte Fatimide son Art et son Histoire*, Paris 1999, pp. 83-96.

<sup>16</sup> Collins (transl.) 2001: 149

<sup>17</sup> U.K. CIMIOTTI, "On the Geomorphology of the Gulf of Elat-Aqaba and Its Borderlands", in B. HOFMEISTER & A. STEINECKE (eds.), *Beiträge zur Geomorphologie und Länderkunde* (Berliner Geographische Studien, vol. VII), Berlin 1980, pp. 155-175.

as a gateway not only for the commodities of al-Sharat, but for markets and merchandise much further away.

#### AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROFILE OF SOUTH JORDAN

Leaving the historical overview, the purpose of this paper is to use Aylah as an example of how significantly archaeology can complement the historical understanding. The site was discovered in 1985 by Donald Whitcomb, and over the next decade he directed large-scale excavations here, causing a significant part of the city-scape to have been excavated (Fig. 2).<sup>18</sup> Archaeological exploration was taken up again in 2008 under the Belgian *Islamic Aqaba Project* (IAP),<sup>19</sup> and more recently by the Danish *Aylah Archaeological Project* (AAP).<sup>20</sup>

Surveying an open tract of Aqaba's beach in 1985, Whitcomb collected an assemblage of ceramics that had such a diversified provenance that it was clear that the area once had seen extensive trans-regional trade. The ceramics included local and regional wares, with Levantine and Egyptian sub-types being the most common imports. However, it also contained a dimension that is best described as "proto-global". Among the assemblage was both containers that once held imported substances, but also fragments of wares that were desired in and of themselves; subsidiary evidence of inter-regional trade. Many of these wares were produced in Egypt, Iraq and the Persian Gulf (Fig. 3); but there was also a representative assemblage of Chinese ceramics, including green glazed

<sup>18</sup> The results have been published in a plethora of articles and reports. For the most recent contributions see 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; *id.*, "An Urban Structure for the Early Islamic City: An Archaeological Hypothesis", in A.K. BENNISON & A.L. GASCOIGNE (eds.), *Cities in the Pre-Modern Islamic World. The Urban Impact of Religion, State and Society*, Abingdon/New York 2007, pp. 15-26; *id.*, "Ayla at the Millenium: Archaeology and History", in F. AL-KHRAYSHEH (ed.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan X*, Amman 2009, pp. 123-32.

<sup>19</sup> Directed by the late Johnny De Meulemeester (University of Gent). For the results from Aylah see K. DAMGAARD & M. JENNINGS, "Once More unto the Beach: A Report on Renewed Archaeological Investigations at Aylah", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan*, 54 (2010); K. DAMGAARD, "Between Castrum and Medina: A Preliminary Note on Spatial Organisation and Urban Development in Medieval Aqaba", this volume, pp. 39-65.

<sup>20</sup> K. DAMGAARD, A. ABU-LABAN, M. JENNINGS, P. LORIEN & C. SEYE, "Jordan's Port on the China Sea: A Preliminary Report on the 2010 Field Campaign of the Aylah Archaeological Project" (unpublished report of 2010 available at <http://miri.ku.dk/projekts/aap/>).

stoneware or celadon from the late 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century, as well as early types of porcelain from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup>

Whitcomb excavated the site between 1986 and 1995, during which time a substantial portion of the city was uncovered. Understandably, focus was on the most monumental components such as the congregational mosque, main streets, gates and city walls. Whitcomb also excavated a number of domestic units and several well-built structures against the south wall's exterior, which were interpreted as a *suq* or 'beach-front mall'.<sup>22</sup>

Considering that most of the excavated areas did not penetrate deeper than the uppermost level of occupation, one would expect the Fatimid town to be the best understood and most comprehensively explained phenomena, yet this is not the case. From the publications, one often gets a more detailed understanding of the 8<sup>th</sup> century strata than of the 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century deposits.<sup>23</sup> What is clear, however, is that the Fatimid town displays considerable continuity from the Umayyad and Abbasid urban forms. An example of this is seen in the maintenance of a significant portion of the orthogonal plan in spite of multiple phases of levelling and rebuilding. Other aspects of the Fatimid town are more puzzling: while the imported artefact assemblage from these strata is extremely luxurious, local production seems to have deteriorated significantly in quality (Fig. 4). This goes for everything from the production of ceramics, which are bulky hand-made vessels dubbed tupperware by Whitcomb; to architecture, which applies chunks of uncut and highly porphyritic granite set in a mud-slurry.

The *Roman Aqaba Project* conducted extensive excavations of the Byzantine city northwest of the walled enceinte of Aylah, and these demonstrated that the pre-Islamic town continued to flourish until at the least the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> This duality of settlement is mirrored in the Fatimid

<sup>21</sup> Similar types have been discovered on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century merchant vessels wrecked in the Java and South China Sea. See M. FLECKER, "A Ninth-Century Arab or Indian Shipwreck in Indonesia: First Evidence for Direct Trade with China", *World Archaeology*, 32 (2001): 335-54; *id.*, *The Archaeological Excavation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century Intan Shipwreck, Java Sea, Indonesia*, Oxford 2002.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> See for example 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 Bilād Al-Shām During the Umayyad Period*, Amman 1989, pp. 164-184.

<sup>24</sup> S.T. PARKER, "The Roman 'Aqaba Project: The 1996 Campaign", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 42 (1998): 375-94; *id.*, "The Roman 'Aqaba Project: The 1997 and 1998 Campaigns", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 44

capital, where the walled city of al-Qahira was the political and ceremonial heart of the city, while Fustat was the city's international trade hub and economic dynamo.<sup>25</sup> The relationship between Fustat and al-Qahira was indeed an interdependent one: an amalgamation of multiple settlements functioning in symphony. The process of integrating the old settlement with the new was familiar at Aylah, and in spite of continual Jarrahid raids and Fatimid retaliations, the overflow of settlement outside the city walls was clearly not seen as undermining a city's monumentality or defensive capabilities.

There are other parallels between Cairo and Aylah. While not orthogonally planned, the walled Fatimid city of al-Qahira was constructed using a major north-south thoroughfare, reminiscent of the Roman *cardo*, as its main traffic artery (Fig. 5). The street culminated in the central *bayn al-qasrayn*, a large ceremonial space at the heart of the city and flanked by the caliph's magnificent palaces.<sup>26</sup> This prominence of centrality in the urban landscape is echoed at Aylah, for although we expect most ceremony to have taken place in the great mosque, Whitcomb has suggested that at least from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, political power radiated from the centre of this settlement as well.<sup>27</sup>

In 1987, Whitcomb's team excavated large parts of a large structure located at the junction of its main thoroughfares and in the town's exact centre. The original appearance of this area was described as having been dominated by an intersectional monument that Whitcomb interpreted as a Persianate version of the classical *tetrapylon*. However, although its position within the cityscape is consistent with the classical *tetrakoinia* model, the archaeological evidence suggests a structure more reminiscent of the Umayyad reception hall of Amman Citadel or the Abbasid palace of Ukhaydir in Iraq, than any Classical emblem of urbanity. The structure was first noted during the site survey of 1985, because the cut profiles of walls were observed in the section of a small wadi traversing the site. After the 1987 campaign, the presence of a major multi-phased structure

(2000): 373-94; *id.*, "The Roman 'Aqaba Project: The 2000 Campaign", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 46 (2002): 409-29; *id.*, "The Roman 'Aqaba Project: The 2002 Campaign", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 47 (2003): 321-33.

<sup>25</sup> P. SHEEHAN, *Babylon of Egypt. The Archaeology of Old Cairo and the Origins of the City*, Cairo/New York 2010, pp. 77-96.

<sup>26</sup> NEZAR ALSAYYAD, "Bayn al-Qasrayn: The Street between Two Palaces", in Z. CELIK, D. FAVRO & R. INGERSOLL (eds.), *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1994, pp. 71-82.

<sup>27</sup> WHITCOMB, "An Urban Structure for the Early Islamic City", pp. 18-24.

had been confirmed, and a preliminary report on the structure was published the following year.<sup>28</sup>

The original building appeared to be a pavilion of sorts, with at least three large arches seemingly allowing public access to the building. At some stage, these arches were blocked, and the original pavilion converted into a closed structure that resembles a private domicile. Due to its antecedent foundation, the structure was termed 'the pavilion building', but the majority of what was actually excavated came from the closed domicile and was dated to the latest phase of occupation and use. Based on the retrieved ceramic horizon, the preliminary excavation report presented the building as a wealthy 'Fatimid residence'; an interpretation that has never been challenged. However, as shall be argued here, it seems that what is currently understood as an Umayyad monument remodelled to become a Fatimid residence, is in fact a mainly Abbasid concept that presumably was reused "as is" in the Fatimid period.

Whitcomb stressed that the exposed level of the building's interior constituted the latest occupation surface only, which had been buried under 1.5 metres of post-use debris and collapse. It was only in Room 2 that excavation penetrated below this level; though still not deep enough to provide a full and reliable chronology based on stratified artefact content. The building's nature can therefore not be successfully projected backwards without having serious reservations about the speculative nature of the outcome. Moreover, crucial aspects such as interior phasing, the chronology of constructions and rebuilds, or indeed a more precise definition of its function and use, have not been systematically explored and remain open questions. A revision based on the excavation data from this building is thus long overdue.<sup>29</sup>

Revising and synthesising large amounts of archaeological data is painstaking, time-consuming and consists of joining as many pieces of the puzzle as one can, in order to get an incomplete yet identifiable image of the whole. The pavilion-building may thus be seen as an exemplification of the proverbial puzzle that is Fatimid South Jordan. In addition to

<sup>28</sup> D. WHITCOMB, "A Fatimid Residence at Aqaba, Jordan", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan*, 32 (1988): 207-24.

<sup>29</sup> A detailed analysis and presentation of the excavation records stored in the archaeological archives of the Oriental Institute in Chicago has been presented in 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.

the importance of centralised placement already mentioned, being the largest single domicile in town insinuates that if a Fatimid or Jarrahid administration indeed resided at Aylah, then this is perhaps a likely location for an administrative complex.

The pavilion-building has a familiar layout of triple partitioned rooms around a central open court. When the site was abandoned in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it had been this way for at least a century. Although the structure has a distinct internal morphology, the published plan simply shows a tripartite division of the building's northern and southern tiers (Fig. 6). The building centres on a courtyard, which is flanked on its east side by a stairwell leading to an upper storey or roof area. To the west is a latrine fronted by a series of vestibules between the central court and the front door of the house. The excavation records make it clear that the building had a long history, and that multiple construction phases and chronologically varied deposits were identified. Based on these, the building's history can be divided into five distinct architectural phases, preceded by a hitherto unidentified phase. As this paper deals with the Fatimid town, and thus the latest period of occupation, focus will be on this. However, in order to cement my proposal that this is in fact an Abbasid structure, I will present a revision of the building's full morphology and a representative selection of the retrieved artefact content. It should be noted that while archaeological analyses normally perceive chronological phasing in the opposite order of its deposition (*i.e.* as it is excavated), this analysis uses architectural morphology and follows a chronological order.

Architecturally, Phase 1 consists of a square structure with large arched entranceways in at least three of the four outer walls (Fig. 7). At some stage, this was converted to a closed domicile, which entailed blocking the arches and raising the level of the operating surfaces. However, even in its latest stage of occupation, the walls of the original pavilion continue to form the hull of the structure. The presence of arches was initially noted in 1986, when test trenches exposed a section of the building's southeast wall that contained several *in situ* voussoirs (Fig. 8). Similar features were discovered in the northwest and southwest facades the following year. The arches rested on massive L-shaped piers standing more than twelve courses high, and with a four to five course foundation. The voussoirs of the arches lined a fill of rubble and small boulders, and based on their curvature, the arches had once spanned openings roughly 3 metres in width. Most of the original building was built from hewn sandstone blocks that have been linked to quarries west and north of the

city.<sup>30</sup> As building material, these blocks are superior to most of the later architecture, but very similar to other early monumental components such the city wall or congregational mosque.

At the lowest exposed level, the excavators discovered a substantial stone paving, which they attributed to the initial phase of this building. A closer examination of the archived section drawing of this feature argues against this interpretation (Fig. 9). The drawing makes two things evident: 1) The original pavilion was built directly on a stone pavement of large stone slabs. This suggests that this paving was used as a solid 'bedrock' for the foundations of what was to become a monumental construction. Such a building neither could nor would have been constructed directly on a functional surface; and 2) that the courses below the plastered threshold clearly constitute foundation courses, since these are larger, not fully dressed and unevenly placed compared to the ashlar above the threshold level. We may thus conclude that Phase 1 of the pavilion is consistent with the plastered threshold and the associated surface, whereas the massive stone paving belongs to an even earlier phase (0). Phase 0 is part of the Aylah original appearance, but from the limited area that was exposed, it is impossible to ascertain what it constituted.

The few excavated deposits associated with the initial phase of construction and use of the pavilion corroborate this explanation. These were described as 'Umayyad' in their artefact profile,<sup>31</sup> but the excavation records show that the 'Umayyad' profile perhaps is not as consistent as initially suggested. The fill between the Phase 0 paving and the initial pavilion threshold, consists of a thin layer of pinkish gravel followed by horizontal fill, roughly 1 metre in depth and composed of coarse brown sand with bits of sand- and limestone (H11a/15-16). The ceramic horizon from this fill is clearly quite early, and contained no glazed wares at all. However, even though the predominant wares and types appear to be Umayyad, there was a consistent presence of ordinary vessels of a distinct yellowish to off-white colour, thinly thrown and tempered with crushed limestone to soften the fabric. More precisely, this presence

<sup>30</sup> F. FRANK, "Aus der 'Araba. I. Reiseberichte", *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 57 (1934): 191-280 (especially 260-61); Z. MESHEL, "Horvat Bodedah", *Hadashot Arkheologiyot*, 51-52 (1974): 39; D. WHITCOMB, "Land Behind Aqaba: The Wadi Arabah During the Early Islamic Period", in P. BIENKOWSKI & K. GALOR (eds.), *Crossing the Rift. Resources, Routes, Settlement Patterns and Interaction in the Wadi Arabah*, Oxford 2006, pp. 239-242.

<sup>31</sup> WHITCOMB, "A Fatimid Residence at Aqaba, Jordan", pp. 222-23; WHITCOMB, "Evidence of the Umayyad Period", p. 167.



consists of 18.3% of the collected assemblage. Often referred to as Islamic Cream Ware (ICW), this type is generally associated with Iraqi traditions, and used as a ceramic marker for Abbasid period occupation.<sup>32</sup> The consistent presence of ICW and complete lack of glazed wares suggests that these fills were deposited in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and provide a firm *terminus post quem* to label the pavilion as an early Abbasid structure. The building should be seen as an addition to the original urban plan; purposefully constructed in the heart of the town, and presumably part of an extensive urban overhaul taking place in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the archaeological evidence, redefining the arched pavilion as an Abbasid structure also makes sense from a stylistic and functional point of view. The pavilion at Aylah is architecturally comparable to the Umayyad reception hall on Amman citadel, and the quadripartite layout seen in both may have been inspired by Persian traditions. Furthermore, the palatial complex in Amman is late Umayyad; probably dating to the second quarter of the eighth century,<sup>34</sup> and is administratively far more important than Aylah. It is thus more plausible that the less politically and economically enfranchised elite of Aylah would have drawn inspiration from the Amman complex, than vice versa. Functionally, these complexes appear to be comparable as well. Considering its monumentality and centralised placement in a limited and carefully planned urban environment, the pavilion probably served a similar purpose to its counterpart in Amman; that is as a receptional venue for the local administration, and as the architectural marker of transition between the public domain of the streets, and a seemingly more private area to the north.<sup>35</sup> This would explain the lack of an arch in the north wall, which negates

<sup>32</sup> A. WALMSLEY, "Turning East. The Appearance of Islamic Cream Ware in Jordan: The End of Antiquity?", in E. VILLENEUVE & P.M. WATSON (eds.), *La céramique byzantine et proto-islamique en Syrie-Jordanie (IV<sup>e</sup>-VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles apr. J.-C.). Actes du Colloque tenu à Amman les 3, 4 et 5 Décembre 1994*, Beirut 2001, pp. 305-313; D. WHITCOMB, "Mahesh Ware: Evidence of Early Abbasid Occupation from Southern Jordan", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 33 (1989): 269-85.

<sup>33</sup> This process of reconceptualising urban space at Aylah in the early Abbasid period has been extensively explored and discussed in Chapter 2 of my PhD dissertation (DAMGAARD, "Modelling Mercantilism").

<sup>34</sup> It may even be from the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and thus Abbasid. See D. WHITCOMB, "The Umayyad and Abbasid Periods", in R.B. ADAMS (ed.), *Jordan. An Archaeological Reader*, London 2008, pp. 483-493; K. DAMGAARD "Access Granted: The Phenomenology of Approach in Early Islamic Palatial Architecture", *International Journal for Islamic Architecture*, 2 (2012): forthcoming.

<sup>35</sup> This area remains unexcavated, but is to be archaeologically probed to test this hypothesis in the coming seasons of the AAP.



the possibility that the pavilion was a *tetrakioinial* marker. However, if the foundation of this building is postponed to an Abbasid context, then the inferred function as a type of reception hall explains the omission of an arch in the north wall. Rather, this wall would have been supplied with smaller private passage to a gubernatorial or administrative compound located between the pavilion and the mosque, which also is early Abbasid in date. This pattern is generally consistent with ceremonial elements in early Abbasid palatial architecture.<sup>36</sup>

Phase 2 is another important stage in the life of the building, for this consists of the initial transformation from an open 'pavilion' to the more introvert and private 'pavilion-building' (Fig. 7). Sealing off the structure to the exterior is the most decisive visual alteration of this building, and indicates that the concept and function of the building changed as well. In the published plan of the pavilion-building (Fig. 6), the internal division of the house is tripartite. The building is divided laterally into three tiers of roughly equal size, and these are then further subdivided into three individual spaces; creating a total of nine roughly equal-sized spaces. Although limited to the northern tier of the building, the walls identified as belonging to Phase 2 indicate that this division of interior space was planned from the outset, as the two dividing walls in the northern tier (Walls N & Q) initiate this compartmentalisation.

Wall G and features Ba to Bc may date to this phase as well, though their exact allocation is tentative due to limited archaeological exposure. The first was not excavated very deeply and was clearly refurbished in later times, yet its allocation to this initial phase is due to a seeming bond with the outer wall and a distinctly deeper foundation than the other two interior walls of Room 3. Wall G interlaces with the exterior wall at exactly the southern limit of the *in situ* voussoir identified in the west arch, thus maintaining the arch's axis. Furthermore, the cruciform layout that the original pavilion seems to have applied is visually maintained by the axial alignment of Walls N and Q with the blocked southern arch. Features Ba to Bc are either very tall benches or a type of buttresses built against the interior of the northwest wall. The southernmost of these features (Ba) was covered in the same thick layer of plaster as some of the walls and is another indicator of an early date. This plaster coating is part of a distinctive decorative regime that characterises Room 2.

<sup>36</sup> DAMGAARD, "Access Granted"; WHITCOMB, "An Urban Structure for the Early Islamic City"; WHITCOMB, "The Umayyad and Abbasid Periods".

In the course of excavating the pavilion-building, the fragmentary remains of a polychrome fresco were discovered in a layer of burnt architectural debris in the building's southwest corner (Room 2). The debris rested on a stamped earth surface that was the floor level at the time of the fiery collapse, but the fresco continued beneath this surface. A trench was therefore laid out along Wall D to uncover and record as much of this feature as possible. The fresco sondage revealed a large intact portion of the lower bands of the mural (Fig. 10). The motifs were two geometric patterns separated by a thick red band: an upper pattern of crenelated diamonds, each with a central circle; and a lower pattern of diagonal lines forming a row of expanding V-shapes. Higher up, most of the fresco was destroyed — presumably by the fire; but the small patches that were discovered both *in situ* and in the excavated fill, contained an intricate floral pattern. The fresco was painted on a thick coat of white plaster set directly on the interior façade of Wall D. Although the colours faded rapidly following exposure, the excavators noted the presence of red, black and yellow paint. Intermittent patches of plain white plaster revealed that the mural had been repaired repeatedly in medieval times, and at some stage prior to the deposition of the stamped earth floor, most of the lower part of the fresco was marred by Kufic inscriptions, carved into the plaster like graffiti.

Based on a combination of the associated artefact horizon and the epigraphic style of the graffiti, Whitcomb has tentatively dated use of the fresco room to the late Abbasid period, but has not elaborated on this interpretation since, and upon closer inspection, the proposed dating does not match up. The trench was excavated to a depth of 47 centimetres and then halted arbitrarily. At its cessation, the bottom of the fresco had not yet been reached. The excavation records reveal that the artefact horizon displays a mixed provenance of seemingly broad chronological range. Of the 282 sherds retrieved, only 11 were glazed. The non-glazed corpus contained twenty identifiable types, all of which were relatively common domestic wares at Aylah. Among them were several sherds of an early Abbasid date, including an incised beaker and a ribbed juglet of ICW, as well as fragments from several large bowls, fired in an oxidising kiln and decorated with incised combing patterns, which appear to be elaborations of an Umayyad tradition (Fig. 4).

In order to establish as sound a chronological framework for the fresco as possible, it is, however, the later and more distinguishable glazed wares that are most diagnostic. Both in regard to glazing technology, stylistic form and provenance, these can be dated no later than the middle

Abbasid period, or late 9<sup>th</sup> to early 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. The most common glazed sherds (8/11) come from bowls with out-turned rims, produced from an orange-red fabric, and decorated with a white or clear splash paint, interspersed with green and sometimes turquoise (Fig. 3). The bowls are strongly influenced by Coptic traditions of painted ceramics in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and have hence been dubbed 'Coptic Glazed Ware' (CGW).<sup>37</sup> Whitcomb notes that CGW are the earliest glazed wares found at Aylah, where they derive mainly from late 8<sup>th</sup> to early 9<sup>th</sup> century contexts. Although a majority of the glazed sherds are of this type, this is not conclusive evidence for dating the fill covering the damaged fresco. However, the occurrence of CGW in a fill that post-dates the graffiti does indicate a rough timeframe for the fresco itself. Considering the monumentality of the building and the largesse of the original mural, as well as the presence of both graffiti and repairs/re-plastering, it may be inferred that the process which was initiated with the fresco being painted, and ended with it being partially concealed, was of considerable duration — a generation or two at least. If that is acceptable, the mural could possibly be part of the original pavilion, but is certainly among the earliest elements in the pavilion-building.

Phase 3 is the stage in which most of the pavilion-building's remaining internal features were constructed. It is also the earliest period of occupation from which there is ample archaeological evidence to support an interpretation of the pavilion-building as a private household. The tripartite division of the northern tier in Phase 2 is now repeated in the central and southern tier. The main insertions from this period are Walls E and F, which emphasise the old axis of the southern arch and replicate the pattern of the northern tier very closely. However, Walls E and F are longer than Walls N and Q, making the rooms of the southern tier larger and more oblong than their northern counterparts. Both new walls had doors inserted as part of the construction. Walls E and F define the central compartment of the southern tier (Room 1). This has no northern wall, but is delineated by a stone threshold including a large central flagstone, and a slightly elevated interior surface. This is the exact opposite scenario from the central room of northern tier (Room 9), which shows no evidence of an access point from the courtyard. The oblong dimensions, the demarcated yet open transition, and the constructed doorways from Room 1 to its flanking rooms, have lead Whitcomb to interpret this

<sup>37</sup> D. WHITCOMB, "Coptic Glazed Ceramics from the Excavations at Aqaba, Jordan", *Journal of the American Research Centre in Egypt*, 26 (1989): 167-182.

feature as an *iwan*. That this indeed was an area spanned by an elevated brick vault was confirmed by a compact layer of brick detritus almost five times as thick as the courtyard deposit.

Important additions were also made to the central tier. In the western end, the blocked arch was pierced by what becomes the pavilion-building's front door. Outside, a three-step staircase was constructed against the blocked arch. From the house, the stairs lead into a small public piazza created by the junction of the town's main traffic arteries from the Egypt and Syria gate respectively. The bent-axis approach of the step design creates a double approach to the building, and suggests that it may have opened onto a bustling public area, and that some of this traffic presumably entered and exited the structure in question. This element of public life is further corroborated by the insertion of a bench in the first room, and by the division of the central tier's western compartment into several distinct rooms. Organising the transitional space between street and house in this manner created a double bent-axis approach and prevented even the nosiest passers-by from peering into the house. This could indicate that the front door was open much of the day. The bench also resonates with this interpretation, as this may have served a guard or clerk of some description.

The western compartment of the northern tier is also further subdivided in this period: entering Room 4, one makes a double right to enter an inner vestibule in the eastern half of Room 3. From here, there is a direct line of sight to the central courtyard fronting the *iwan*, yet not into the *iwan* itself. As if to secure the visual effect of this final transition between caller and host, Wall E extends slightly beyond its junction with Wall G. The transition from street to the vestibule fronting the court thus entailed no less than five 90 degree turns, securing the building's inner privacy during working hours. Similarly, the lack of openings from the northern tier and into the court probably reflects that these were the more domestic quarters of the occupant and his family.

Phase 4 is the last period of occupation prior to the fire that destroyed at least part of the building. It is also the latest period in which the building is fully operational. Although there is evidence of another phase of activity following this, it is in Phase 4 that we may potentially speak of a 'Fatimid residence' at Aylah. The internal division of the house into three tripartite tiers, as established in the previous phases, was maintained in the Fatimid period, and Phase 4 consists mainly of the addition of new cellular building units against the southeast wall. This was termed 'the yards' by the excavators, and constitutes an augmentation of the build-

ing's operational space that was clearly connected to, yet physically separated from the house proper. In this light, it is tempting to interpret the new complex as a service unit that could accommodate the staff employed in the household, and the archaeological evidence supports this notion.

In spite of the strong element of morphological continuity, Phase 4 does include a few new features inside the house proper. In the excavation records, these additions are mainly distinguished from Phase 3 by having shallower foundations, poorer quality masonry and a higher degree of weathering. The level of modern disturbance in these occupation layers was extensive, and only in rare case is an observable stratigraphic relationship to other features reported. The stump of wall that extends from the join of Walls G and E is one of these later insertions. In its preserved state, it can hardly be dubbed a wall. However, the line created by the remaining stub does demarcate the boundary between the western and central compartment of the middle tier, and could be the remains of a wall that once separated the forecourt from the central court.

In any case, it seems that the spatial hierarchy was elaborated in the Fatimid period by adding this architectural mechanism of transition. A similar demarcation was added to the eastern edge of the central court. Again it appears that it was constructed to block vision and divide space, as it was set directly on the floor surface and is constructed of poor quality granite and sandstone cobbles. Room 4 also contained sporadic remains of a mud-brick bench the north face of Wall K. It may have complemented the bench already in place or could have been for guests in waiting, but the remains were poorly preserved and its exact function remains unclear.

In general, Phase 4 is the best represented occupation phase. This is due to three important factors:

- 1) Excavation only penetrated beneath this level in very few locations inside the house.
- 2) The continued use of the house would have promoted the removal of "old" inventory, refuse and general accumulation.
- 3) Phase 4 ends with the destruction and collapse of substantial parts of the structure due to fire, thus preserving this phase more immaculately than the others.

The identified collapse layers are extremely rich in artefactual content compared to the underlying deposits, and their artefactual profile reflect the most recent stage of the building's complete use. Actual evidence of

serious conflagration was limited to Rooms 2 and 4, but evidence of collapse was also identified in the *iwan*, central courtyard and outer vestibule. In Room 2, a compact deposit of burned and disintegrated mud-brick contained a high density of finds with an impressive range of both imports and local products. The ceramic assemblage was divided into glazed (67 pcs.) and non-glazed wares (517 pcs.), and had a horizon consistent with a Fatimid date. Among the corpus was a significant concentration of the local coarse hand-made ware (22% of non-glazed sherds), which Whitcomb dubbed 'tupperware', because of some of the vessels' capacity to fit one within the other (Fig. 4). Included among these were the remains of a large water jug, as well as the more common quadratic storage vessels. In general, the majority of the unglazed ceramics came from vessels intended for regular daily use, and included fragments of storage jars, jugs, cups, plates and ration bowls.

The glazed wares consisted of splash- and sgraffiato decorated plates, bowls and basins, as well as yellow glazed types presumed to originate from the Fayyum (Fig. 3). Also found were a number of large glazed storage jars. The glazed corpus generally shows a diversified provenance, but one that is consistently oriented to the east. Most remarkable were six conjoining pieces of a massive celadon jar from China (Fig. 3). This impressive vessel occurs elsewhere throughout the site in earlier deposits, and may have come to Aylah as early as the late 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup> However, due to its durability and exotic origin, its presence in a late 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century context is quite common. Another established category was the blue-green glazed barbotine storage jars with moulded decoration, which were produced in Iraq in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Finally, there was a fragment of an elaborately decorated lustre jar. Although the origin of lustre wares at Aylah is difficult to determine unequivocally, this sherd's Iraqi origin is corroborated by the lavishness of its decoration and the application of red in addition to the traditional gold and brown.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to ceramics, the collapse deposits contained basalt grinding tools of various descriptions, glass and coral beads, and numerous fragments of metal objects; especially iron nails and copper pins, but also a bronze sift and a buckle. The single most impressive find from this locus was, nonetheless, a finely decorated steatite lamp with no less than eighteen nozzles. This probably derived from the Hijaz, which contained sev-

<sup>38</sup> WHITCOMB, "A Fatimid Residence at Aqaba, Jordan", pp. 211-22.

<sup>39</sup> Personal comment T. HOFFMAN & D. WHITCOMB (2008).

eral active chlorite mines at this time,<sup>40</sup> but considering its fine craftsmanship, it may also have come from the specialist workshops in Yemen.<sup>41</sup> In either case, it is likely to have come to Aylah by the same mercantile systems as the other imported objects.

The upper deposits in the courtyard and *iwan* also consisted of collapse, but did not contain the charring and ash evident in Rooms 2 and 4. There is little doubt as to the contemporaneity and relation of these deposits to the burned ones, as they all rest on the same occupation surface throughout the house. The similarities in the artefact profiles of the collapse layers in all four rooms corroborate this notion further. In the courtyard, the operating surface was buried beneath a layer of sandy soil full of brick detritus and tiles. The courtyard deposit is not as deep as the other areas of collapse, but this is most likely because it was an unroofed area. Among the identified ceramic types found in the shallow collapse were five sherds of early Chinese porcelain. These constitute the latest established import category from Aylah and are usually dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Also present were twelve sherds with a dark turquoise glaze, that are reminiscent of the types known from the ceramic production centres at Tell Minis or Raqqa in the late 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>42</sup> The combination of these late wares at the top of the collapse, and the earlier ceramic horizon below it, could indicate that the vault survived the fire, but collapsed subsequently due to structural damage, lack of maintenance or the seismic tremors that are relatively common in Aqaba.

Both building and site appear to have been completely abandoned by the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. However, prior to this, the heart of Aylah enjoyed a long and complex occupation history. It is impossible to say what was here initially, but by the late 8<sup>th</sup> century a monumental complex, presumably elaborately decorated and of considerable ceremonial importance, had been erected here. I have argued elsewhere that this was part of an

<sup>40</sup> A. KISNAWI, P.S. DE JESUS & B. RIHANI, "Preliminary Report on the Mining Survey, Northwest Hijaz, 1982", *ATLAL. The Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology*, 7 (1983): 76-83.

<sup>41</sup> J. HALLETT, "The Early Islamic Soft-Stone Industry", unpublished MA thesis, University of Oxford 1990.

<sup>42</sup> V. PORTER & O. WATSON, "Tell Minis Wares", in J. ALLEN & C. ROBERTS (eds.), *Syria and Iran. Three Studies in Medieval Ceramics* (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, vol. IV), Oxford 1987, pp. 175-248. Alternatively, these could have originated in Yemen, where a turquoise glazed ware known Blue Tihamah occurs in 19<sup>th</sup> century contexts at Zabīd (C. CIUK & E. KEALL, *Zabid Project Pottery Manual 1995. Pre-Islamic and Islamic Ceramics from the Zabid Area, North Yemen*, Oxford 1996).

extensive overhaul of the urban environment that also reflected a significant change in the way the urban landscape was conceptualised and used.<sup>43</sup>

At some stage, probably in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, but perhaps following political reorganisation in the wake of Ahmad ibn Tulun's break with Baghdad, the urban landscape of Aylah changed again. For the pavilion, this meant another decisive change in both appearance and concept. From the arched pavilion, the building was transformed into a closed domicile. Based on the lay-out, features and excavated materials of the interior, it is quite likely that this building served an at least semi-public function. Add to this the pavilion-buildings prominent centralised position within the cityscape and the historical indications of a Fatimid administration, then it seems a reasonable hypothesis that this building would have constituted its venue.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is dedicated to the memory of Johnny De Meulemeester, Director of the *Islamic Aqaba Project* and Professor of medieval archaeology at the University of Gent until his death in 2009. An accomplished archaeologist, inspiring mentor and good friend, it is my hope that the fruits of our work at Aqaba will live up to his standards.

Donald Whitcomb, Professor of Islamic archaeology at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, has graciously allowed me unlimited access to the records and materials from his excavations at Aylah, and generally supported me in every way possible. Considering my expressed intention of revising and continuing the work on t/his iconic site, Don's consistent and effortless encouragement is the mark of a true scholar.

Alan Walmsley, Professor of Islamic Archaeology and Art and Director of the *Materiality in Islam research Initiative* at the University of Copenhagen, has been a mentor to me since I was an undergraduate student. It is no small feat that he has managed to turn me into something that resembles an academic.

Heartfelt gratitude is also extended to the many colleagues and friends who, some inadvertently, have inspired, influenced and helped me in different ways. There are too many to name them all here, but Michael Jennings, Stephen McPhillips, Louise Blanke, Ulrich Nehmzow and Josef

<sup>43</sup> DAMGAARD, "Modelling Mercantilism".



Birch have been particularly important to me. A warm thanks also goes out to the entire crew of the *Aylah Archaeological Project*, who are a great team that make even the hardest work fun!

A final note of appreciation is extended to a number of funding bodies. *C.L. David's Foundation*, *Julie von Müllens Fond*, *Elisabeth Munksgaard Fonden*, *The Danish Institute in Damascus* and *Christian og Otilia Brorsons Rejselegat for yngre videnskabsmænd og kvinder* have over the years provided invaluable financial assistance for which I am most grateful.

KRISTOFFER DAMGAARD

University of Copenhagen

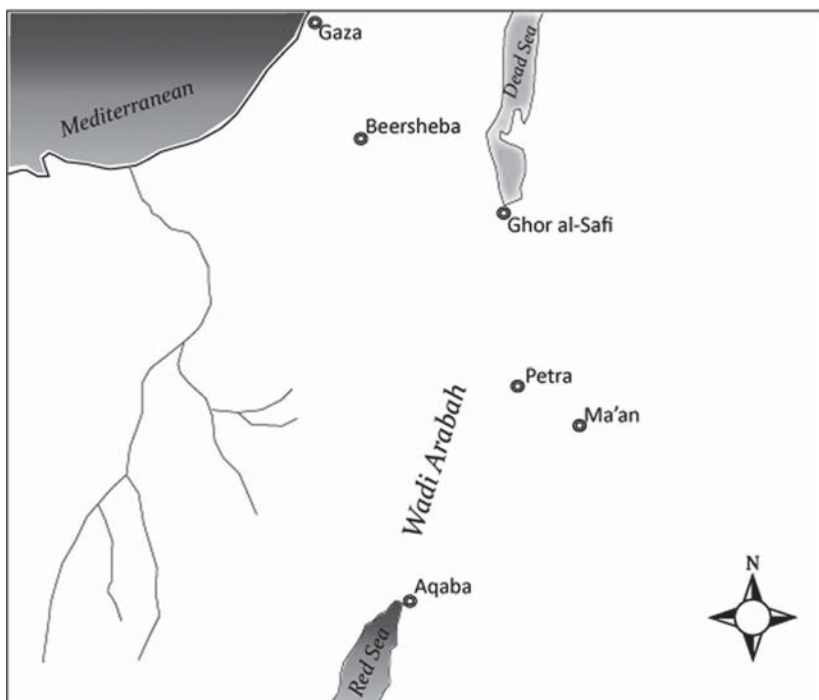


Fig. 1: Map of South Jordan in the Early Islamic period.

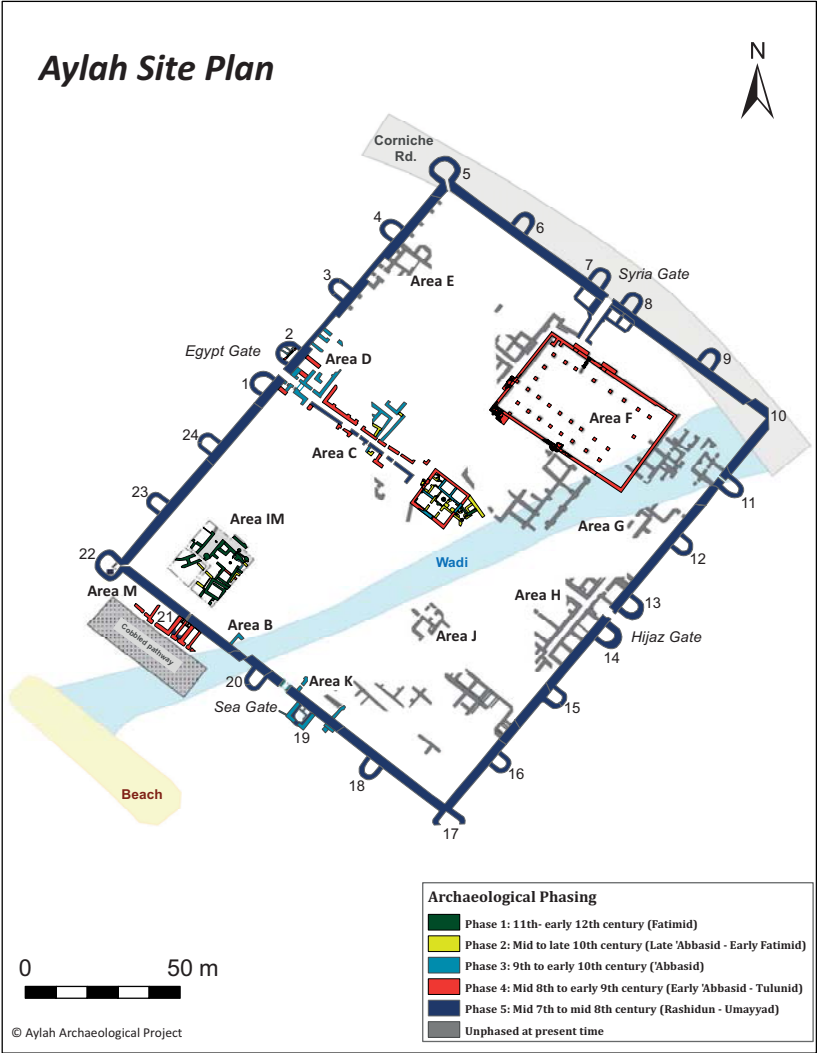


Fig. 2: GIS-based plan of Aylah, including the features exposed by the IAP and AAP (© AAP).

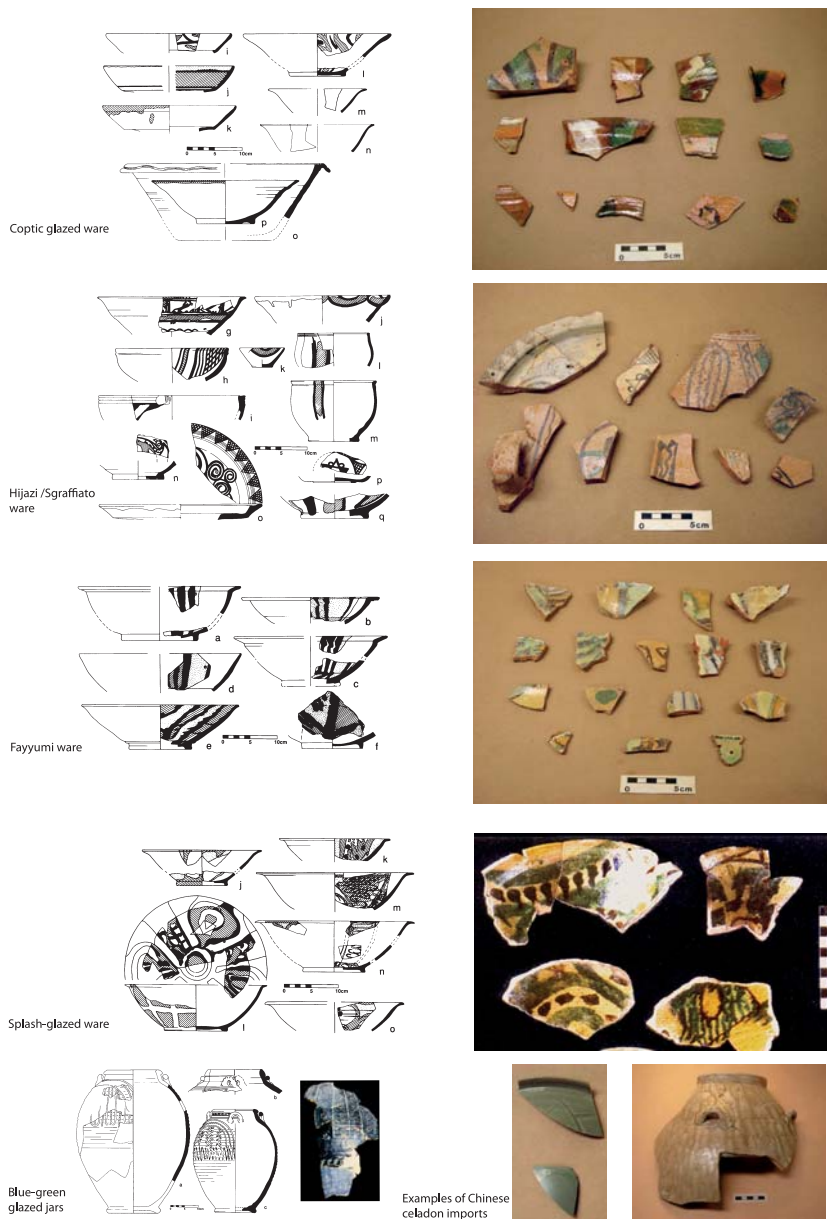
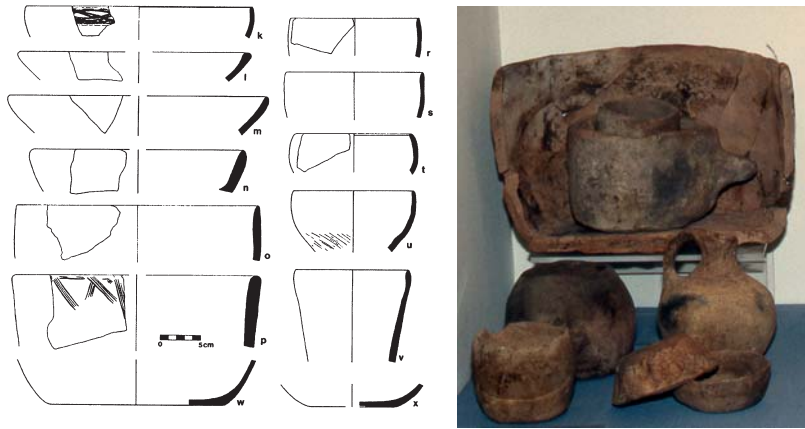


Fig. 3: Examples of glazed ceramics from the pavilion-building at Aylah include bowls with out-turned rims, produced from an orange-red fabric, and decorated with splash paint in white, green yellow, black and sometimes turquoise; Hijazi ware and sgraffiato decorated plates; bowls and basins produced in the Fayyum region; barbotine glazed storage jars with applied moulding from Iraq; Chinese celadons (© Whitcomb/OI; Damgaard/AAP).



Fatimid hand-made ceramics (a.k.a. tupperware)

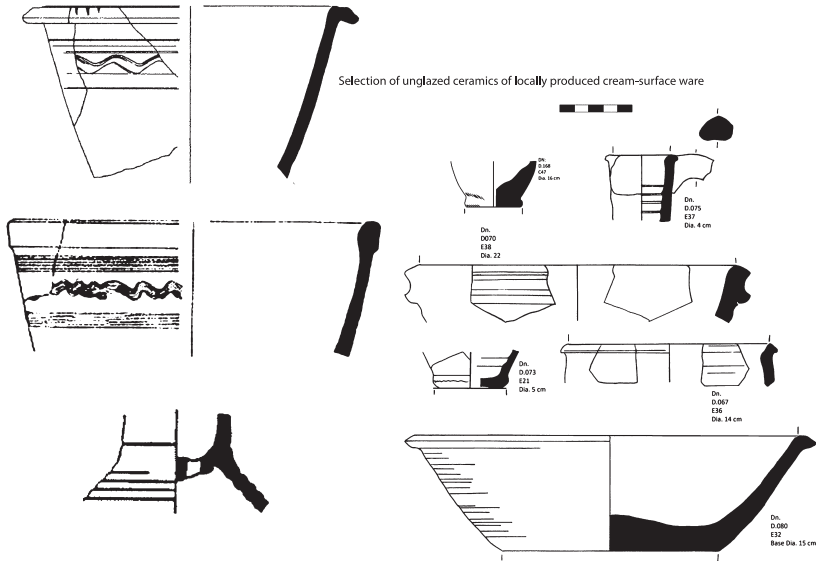
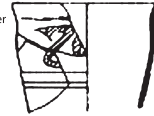
Thinly thrown Abbasid beaker  
of ICW with Kufic inscription

Fig. 4: Examples of non-glazed ceramic discussed in the article include 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century hand-made ceramics, also known as 'tupperware'; a thinly thrown *Islamic Cream Ware* beaker with incised Kufic epigraphy; a ribbed cream-surface ware juglet and fragments from several large cream-surface ware bowls. These were locally produced in an oxidising kiln and often decorated with incised combing (© Whitcomb/OI; Damgaard/AAP).

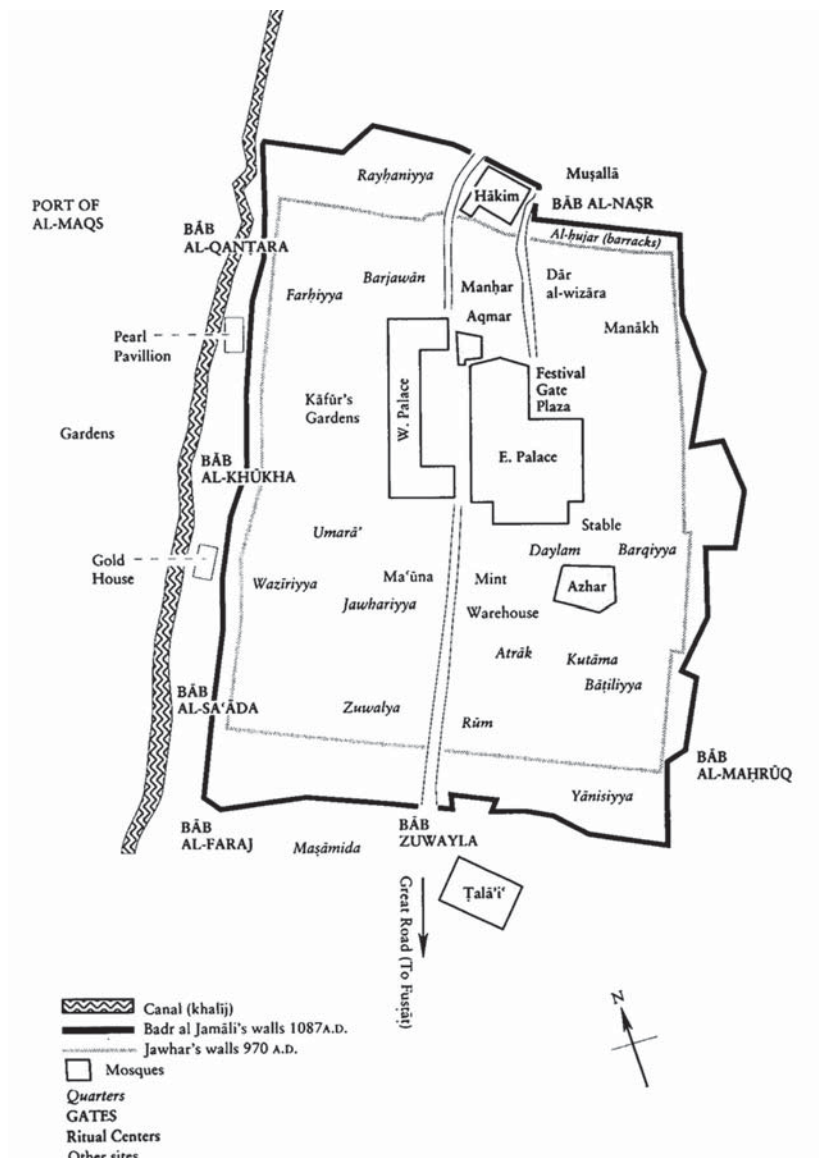


Fig. 5: Plan of Fatimid Cairo (AL-SAYYAD, "Bayn al-Qasrayn").

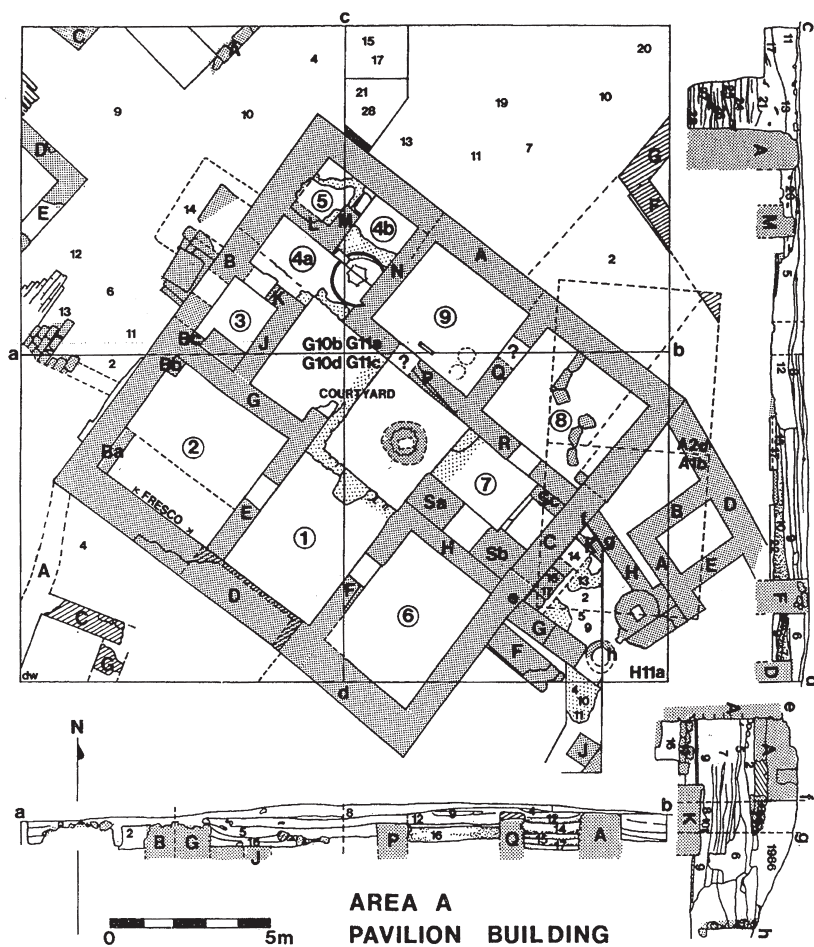


Fig. 6: Whitcomb's published plan of the pavilion-building  
(WHITCOMB, "A Fatimid Residence at Aqaba, Jordan", p. 208)

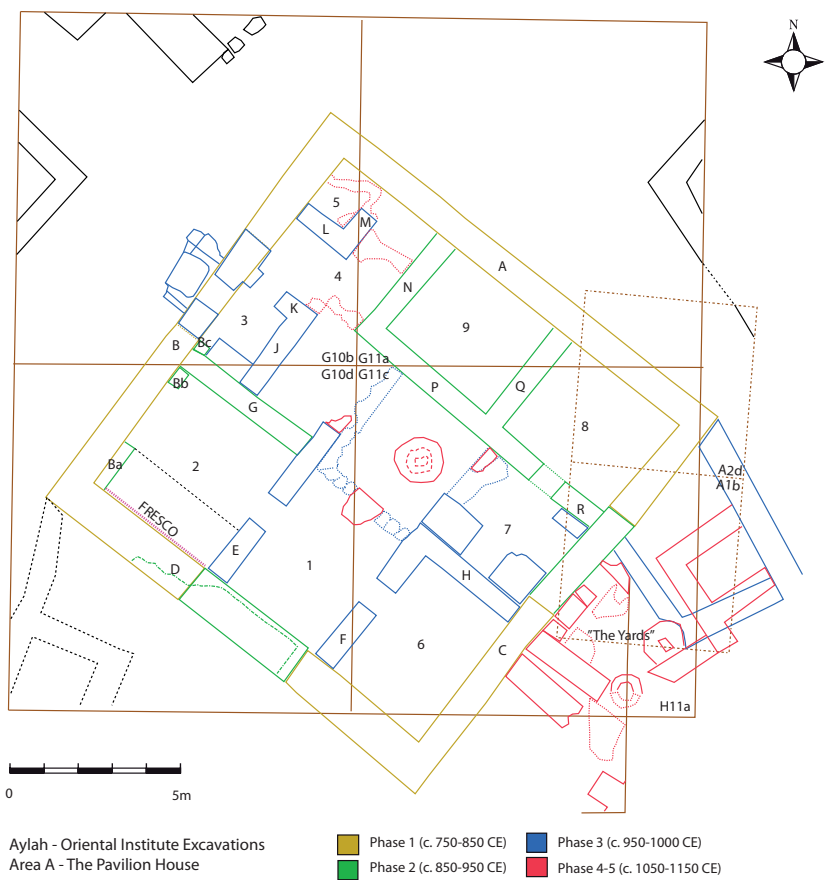


Fig. 7: Revised and phased plan of the pavilion-building (© Damgaard).





Fig. 8: Photo of the southeast arch of the pavilion as exposed in 1986. Note the plastered surface at the bottom of the trench, which here is proposed to be the original walking surface of the pavilion (©Whitcomb/OI).

Excavation Unit H11a  
 Section accross southeast arch exterior  
 Drawn by R. Brown; Digitised by K. Damgaard

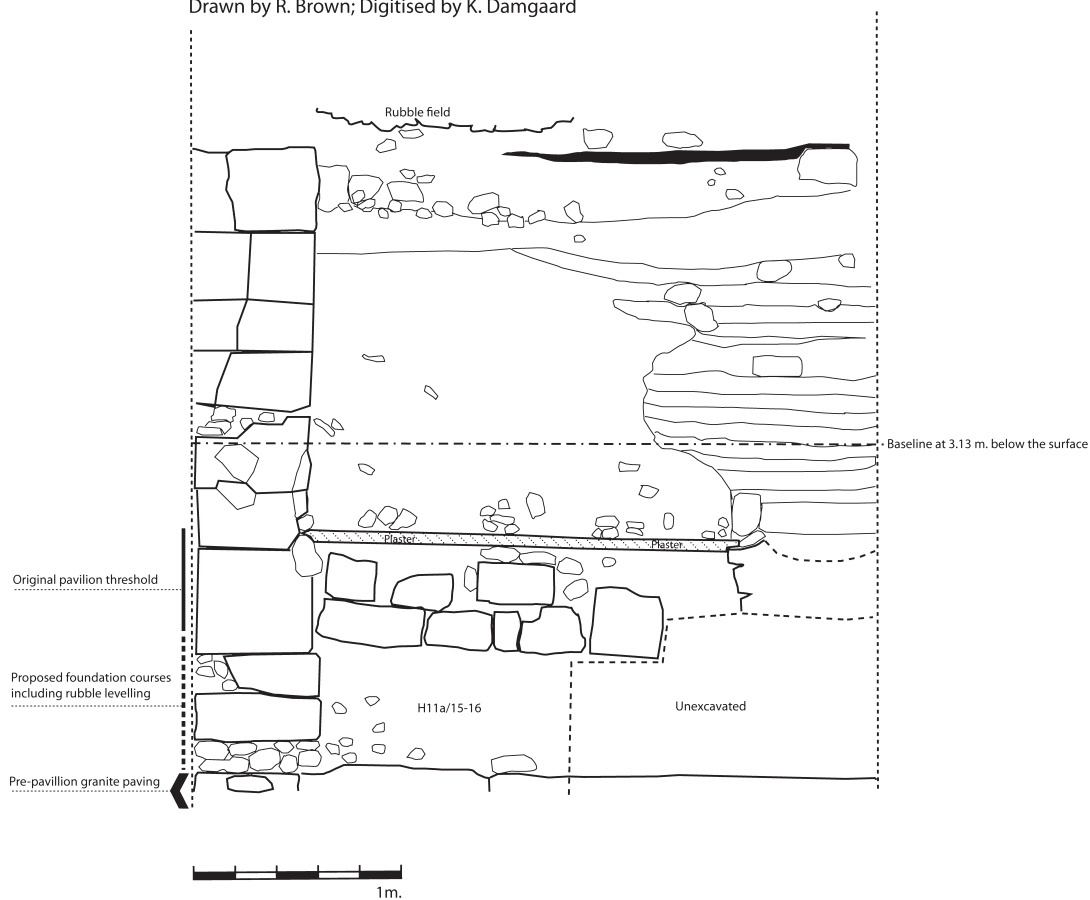


Fig. 9: Digitised section drawing from the archives of the Oriental Institute in Chicago  
 (© Whitcomb/OI; Digitised by Damgaard).

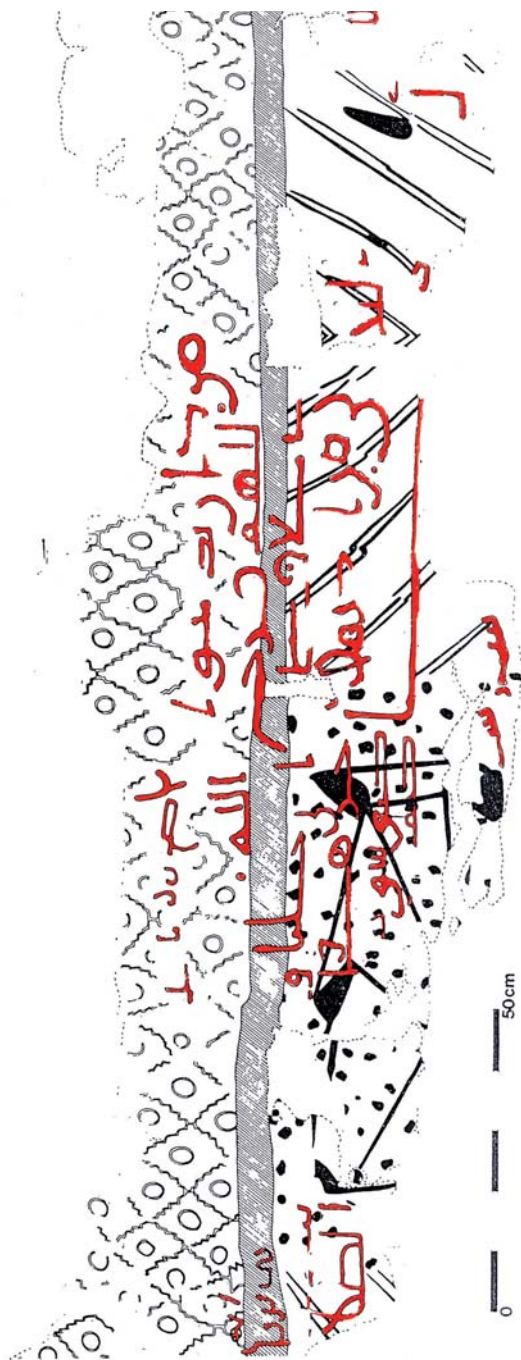


Fig. 10: Drawing of the remaining wall fresco in Room 2. The graffiti has been highlighted in red by the author (WHITCOMB, "A Fatimid Residence at Aqaba, Jordan", p. 210).