

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE BISHRI REGION
— REPORT OF THE SIXTEENTH WORKING SEASON —

* This working report was expected to have been published in the previous volume of *Al-Rāfidān* (Volume XXXIII, 2012). Due to the mistake of the editor responsible for the report, however, only its first part “Archaeological survey around Tell Ghanem al-‘Ali (V)” by Yoshihiro NISHIAKI, Ahmad SULTAN, Seiji KADOWAKI, Shogo KUME and Kazuya SHIMOGAMA was published as an independent paper, and the second part “Fakat Bidewy 1 and 2: Archaeological Investigations around Bir Rahum, 2011 (Spring)” by Sumio FUJII, Takuro ADACHI and Masatoshi YAMAFUJI was not included. For the first part, therefore, please see pages 1 to 6 of *Al-Rāfidān* XXXIII (2012).

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Introduction

(by Katsuhiko OHNUMA and Ahmed SULTAN)

The Syria-Japan Archaeological Joint Research Project in the Bishri Region aims to contribute to better understanding of the development of prehistoric communities in this region, focusing particularly on the issues of the interaction between pastoral nomads and sedentary farmers. The project consists of multi-disciplinary research teams in archaeology, physical and cultural anthropology, history, biology, and geology, in an attempt to obtain a wide range of scientific evidence for past and present local communities and their surrounding environments. For this purpose, the project has conducted a series of fieldwork at several locations, concurrently with the analyses of collected materials.

The 16th working season of the Syria-Japan Archaeological Joint Mission to the Bishri Region was carried out from March 1 to April 5, 2011. The members of the joint mission from the Syrian and Japanese parties were as follows:

Syrian party: Ahmed Sultan (Director), Mohammad Sarhan, Mohamad Chechen, ‘Aid ‘Aisa, and



Map 1 Area including the sites researched by the 16th Syria-Japan Archaeological Joint Mission to the Bishri Region in February to March, 2010.

Ayham al-Fakhre.

Japanese party: Katsuhiko Ohnuma (Director), Sumio Fujii, Yoshihiro Nishiaki, Takuro Adachi, Seiji Kadowaki, Shogo Kume, Kazuya Shimogama, and Masatoshi Yamafuji.

The project was undertaken with generous supports from Dr. Bassam Jamous, the Director General of the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, and Dr. Michel Al-Maqdissi, the Director of Archaeological Excavations and Research at the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (the Syrian Supervising Adviser for this joint mission). Their warm-hearted cooperation, essential to the success of this field season, is deeply appreciated.

The research of this season comprised the following field and laboratory work: 1) the archaeological surveys around Tell Ghanem al-Ali, and 2) the excavations of a newly discovered Neolithic settlement around Bir Rahum.

***Archaeological survey around Tell Ghanem al-‘Ali (V)**

(Please see *Al-Rāfidān* (XXXIII: 1–6, 2012) for this working report)

Fakat Bidewy 1 and 2: Archaeological Investigations around Bir Rahum, 2011 (Spring)

(by Sumio FUJII, Takuro ADACHI and Masatoshi YAMAFUJI)

1. Research Objective

Our research project in the northwestern flank of Mt. Bishri started in May, 2007, in an effort to shed new light on the traditional issue of *Mar-tu/Amurru*, a palaeo-Semitic population referred to in Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform texts. A series of archaeological investigations revealed the existence of hundreds of burial cairns, which were dated to the Middle Bronze Age, especially its early phase, on the basis of several C-14 dates and comparative studies of small finds (Fujii and Adachi 2010). It follows that the extensive cairn field on the northwestern flank of Mt. Bishri represents a communal cemetery for pastoral *Martu-Amurru* who migrated around the Mari Kingdom in the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C.

The next issue is to place the unique cairn culture within a local chronological framework and assess its archaeological implications from the viewpoint of the history of pastoral nomadism. However, the Bishri region has been poorly investigated and little is known about its general land use history. Our new research project was organized to improve this situation. The first field season, conducted for about two weeks from May 13 through May 25 in 2010, was devoted to a brief excavation at Wadi al-Hajane 1 (Fujii and Adachi 2011). The investigation showed that the Bishri land use history in the early Holocene, though largely for sporadic flint exploitation, dates back to the Khiamian and the PPNB period. The second field season took place for about three weeks from March 19 to April 5, 2011, focusing on the two small sites of Fakat Bidewy 1 and 2. The investigations suggested that as with the other regions in the Levant, the Late Neolithic to Chalcolithic Bishri area also witnessed the beginning of pastoral nomadization probably on the basis of the foregoing sporadic land use. The following is a brief summary of our investigations in this field season.

2. Fakat Bidewy 1

Site and site-setting

The site of Fakat Bidewy 1 is located ca. 5 km SSW of Bir Rahum, a small village along a local paved road traversing the northwestern flank of Mt. Bishri (Fig. 1). It occupies a narrow saddle in an elongated foothill that extends along the western ridgeline of Mt. Bishri (Figs. 2, 3). This saddle has long served as a shortcut to cross the foothill ca. 600 m in elevation and local nomads still take advantage of it as a migration route. The site name of Fakat Bidewy also derives from a personal name of an itinerant merchant who shuttled between el-Kowm and Bir Rahum about fifty years ago. Being located on the saddle ca. 570 m in elevation, the site commands a distant view of a gentle hilly terrain around Bir Rahum to the north and the western ridgeline of Mt. Bishri to the south.

The site was found for the first time during our general survey in 2009 and tentatively registered as BS-0953. The survey confirmed several wall alignments constructed with two rows of upright limestone slabs, which appeared to form multi-roomed rectangular structures. We also found that a few cairn-like features were attached to the walls. Although no diagnostic surface finds were collected, the combination of the two-rowed upright slab walls and cairn-like features reminded us of Qa’

Abu Tulayha, a Late Neolithic site in southern Jordan (Fujii 2002, 2003). It is for this reason that we decided to embark on a brief investigation in this season.

Structural remains

The excavation uncovered an elongated structural complex ca. 36 m in total length and ca. 9–12 m in depth (Figs. 4, 5). The complex consisted of five or six rectangular units ca. 4.5–7 m in frontage, which were laterally connected to form a long continuum extending in the NE-SW direction. Every unit was constructed only with undressed limestone slabs put in two rows on the ground surface, and no clear evidence for upper structure was confirmed. Likewise, no special floor treatment was recognized and stony ground surface of those days was used as a natural floor.

In terms of typology, every unit was tripartite in basic composition and divided into fifteen rectangular or square compartments (Figs. 6, 7). Neither entrance nor small features such as hearths were incorporated, but a small cairn ca. 1.2–3 m in diameter and ca. 0.06–0.45 m in height was attached to the anterior wall of every unit. The unique combination of two-rowed upright slab walls and a small cairn (attached to the anterior walls) was reminiscent of a unique structural complex at Qa' Abu Tulayha West, a Late Neolithic site in southern Jordan.

Two of the five cairns was examined (Fig. 8). As a result, it turned out that both of them are a ground type feature and contain no inner structure. Neither human skeletal remains nor burial gifts occurred, but several flint artifacts were recovered from the very low cobble mound and floor deposits.

Small finds

Flint artifacts accounted for the vast majority of small finds (98.6%). The predominance of flint artifacts makes sense, considering that a number of flint outcrops are dotted along the escarpment of the Mt. Bishri. The other finds were very scarce in both quantity and variety, being limited to a dozen wheel-made pottery sherds (including several glazed pottery sherds), several iron nails, two bone fragments, and a glass fragment. It seems that these sporadic finds have nothing to do with the structural remains described above.

The flint artifacts were produced using gray to black, less lustrous, fine-textured flint. The frequency of core and debitage class samples is suggestive of their on-site production, but the absence of large nodules implies that the initial core preparation took place elsewhere, probably near the outcrops. Overall, the artifacts derived from a flake-oriented industry and included retouched flakes as a predominant tool class (Fig. 9). The tool kit also included endscrapers, sidescrapers, denticulates, notches, scaled and splintered pieces, and retouched blades in small quantities. Close examination is needed to date the assemblage, but a post-PPNB date seems likely in view of the predominance of small, non-descript flake tools and the substantial absence of Naviform core-and blade components.

3. Fakat Bidewy 2

The site of Fakat Bidewy 2 is located on the westerly ridgeline of a small foothill ca. 1 km NW of Fakat Bidewy 1, and contained several combinations of a two-rowed upright slab wall and a small cairn (Figs. 10, 11). We briefly examined one of them (BC-01), which proved to be a semi-circular cairn accompanied with a short wall. The cairn measured ca. 3.5–4.8 m in diameter and ca. 0.1–0.25 m in wall height (from the contemporary ground surface); the two-rowed upright slab wall was ca. 5.8 m long and ca. 0.3 m in maximum height (Figs. 12, 13). This type of cairn has also similar examples at Qa' Abu Tulayha West (Fujii 2003) and falls into the BC-600s type. Neither human bones nor burial gifts were included despite the fact that the core part of the cairn was completely intact. Small finds in and around the cairn consisted only of several dozens flint artifacts and a glazed pottery sherd. The flint assemblage is further oriented to a flake industry than that of Fakat Bidewy 1, and the tool kit was almost occupied by irregular retouched flakes.

4. Summary

The brief investigations at Fakat Bidewy 1 and 2 revealed the unique structures characterized by a combination of a two-rowed upright slab wall and a small cairn. In view of the remarkable affinities with the structural complex at Qa' Abu Tulayha West in southern Jordan, there is little doubt that the two sites in the Bishri region fall into a pseudo-settlement (i.e. a continuum of burial cairns accompanied with a pseudo-house) and a pseudo-wall burial cairn field (i.e. an aggregation of burial cairns accompanied with a pseudo-wall), respectively. Both the total absence of traces of domestic life and the extreme scarcity of small finds (other than the flint artifacts scattered in fill layers) also support the assumption that the complexes are of a non-domestic nature.

Typological comparisons with Qa' Abu Tulayha West allow us to tentatively date Fakat Bidewy 1 and 2 to the Late Neolithic and the Chalcolithic period, respectively. Seeing that no contemporary settlements have been located in the research area, both cemeteries were probably constructed by prehistoric pastoral nomads who were based on the Bishri region. Given this, it follows that the two sites represent the onset of pastoral nomadization in central Syria. Of interest is the fact that while the pseudo-settlement and the pseudo-wall cairn at Qa' Abu Tulayha West derived typologically from domestic structures of Jordanian PPNB settlements such as Beidha and Shuqarat Musaid, those at Fakat Bidewy sites appear to have something to do with Syrian PPNB settlements such as Bouqras and el-Kowm 2. This contrast suggests that pastoral nomadization in the Levant took place synchronically, yet within the local PPNB context. The next field season, scheduled in the fall of 2011, is to trace the pastoral land use history in the Bishri region further down to the Early Bronze Age.

Acknowledgements

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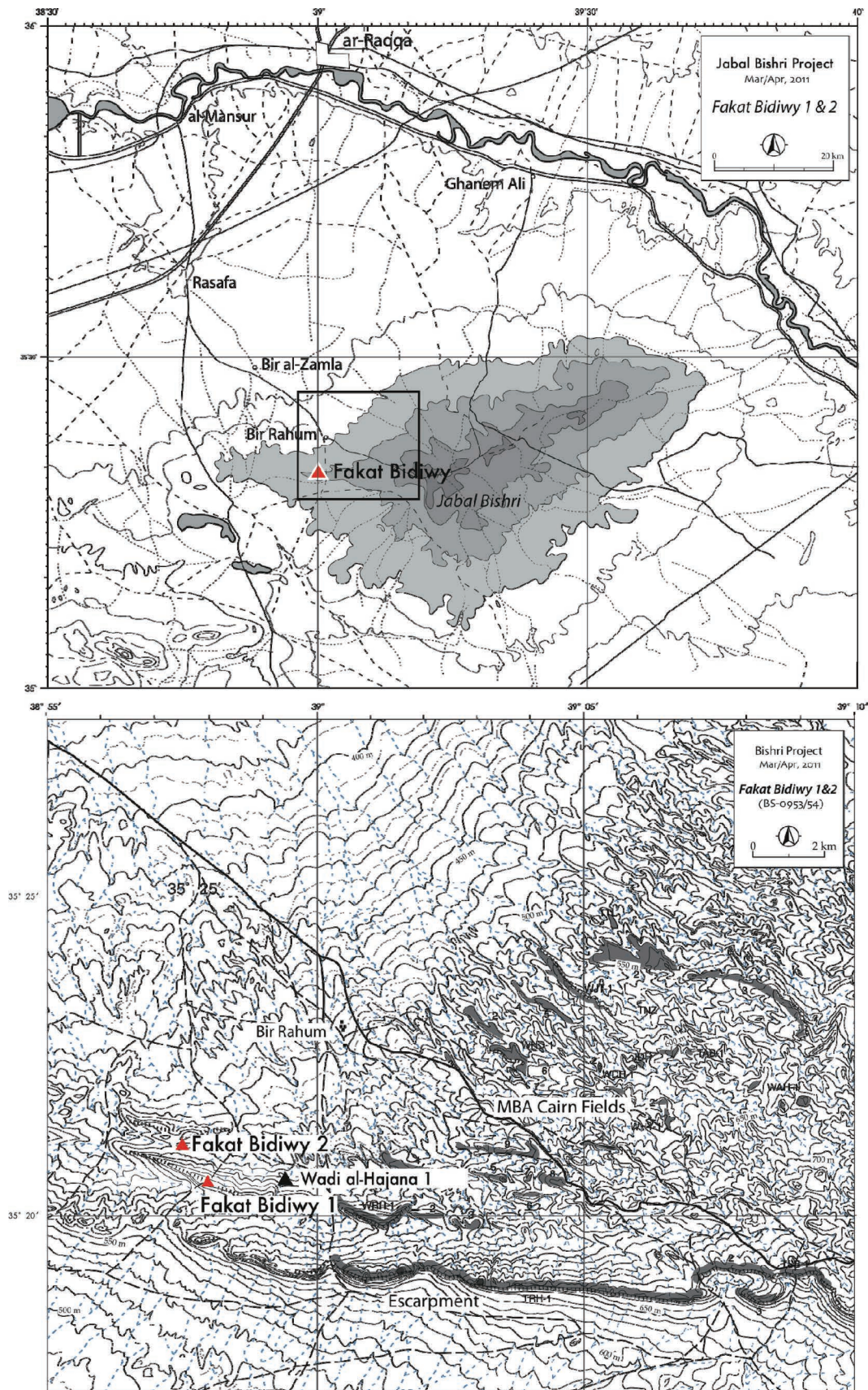


Fig. 1 Fakat Bidiwy 1 & 2: site location.



Fig. 2 Fakat Bidewy 1: distant view (looking S).



Fig. 3 Fakat Bidewy 1: general view (looking E).



Fig. 4 Fakat Bidewy 1: structural complex (looking N).



Fig. 5 Fakat Bidewy 1: structural complex (looking SE).



Fig. 6 Fakat Bidewy 1: Unit 1 and 2 (looking W).



Fig. 7 Fakat Bidewy 1: Unit 4-6 (looking NW).



Fig. 8 Fakat Bidewy 1: Caim of Unit 5 (looking N).



Fig. 9 Fakat Bidewy 1: small finds.



Fig. 10 Fakat Bidewy 2: distant view.



Fig. 11 Fakat Bidewy 2: general view (looking NW).



Fig. 12 Fakat Bidewy 2: BC-01 (looking NW).

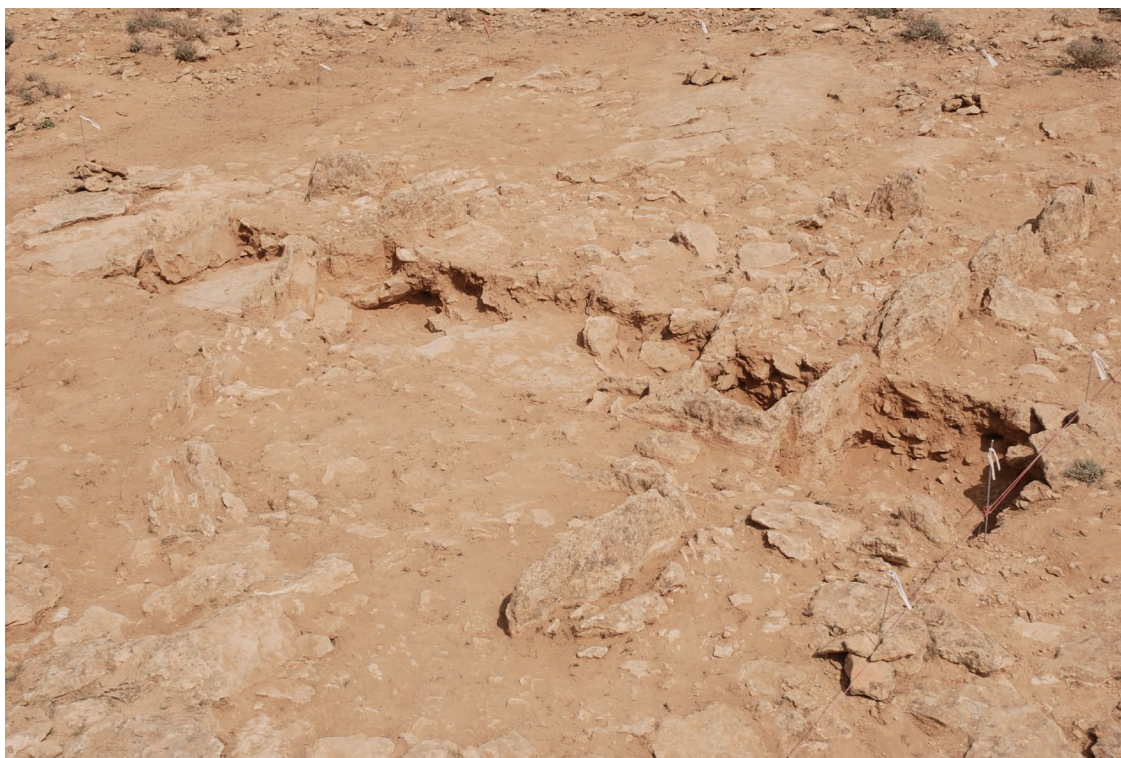


Fig. 13 Fakat Bidewy 2: BC-01 (looking NW).