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Preliminary notes on the development of Shabwa

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BRETON

Shabwa, the former capital of Ḥaḍramawt, is situated in the midst of a large triangle of hills. This triangle divides the Wādī 'Irmā' into two main branches, the Wādī Mi'shar in the west and the Wādī Mikhbad in the east. These hills, about 50 m high, are the result of a Jurassic dome and form a 900 m long triangle. In the south, al-[°]Aqab hill overlooking the Wādī Mi'shar, protects the whole city against floods and silt. In the west, the Qārat al-Ḥaḍīdah range reaches an altitude of 747 m above sea level [asl].

The centre of the triangle is a flat depression locally called al-Sabkha, at an altitude of 699 m asl, where four ancient salt mines remain in use today. This flat area is connected to the surrounding irrigated fields by passes (two in the north, one in the east) or lower passages (in the west and the south).

The aim of the 1970 excavations was to offer a historical outline of the development of Shabwa, but many factors were not taken into account. Firstly, the site was occupied by three villages, al-Hajar in the east, Mathnā, a village covering a large part of the central sector, and Mi'wān a part of the western district. Apart from its houses, each village had a mosque, a cemetery and a *walī* (tomb of a holy man, for example al-Burayk *walī* in al-Hajar, Salīm ibn Ibrahim *walī* in al-Mi'wān). On the whole, about 30% of the ancient site was covered with these settlements. The salt mines had also destroyed part of the city, and one of them, the Rabiḥ mine, had devastated the central sector close to the Main Temple (Fig. 1). Recent research makes it possible to outline the main stages of the city's development.

The Bronze Age city

It seems most probable that the earliest settlements in Shabwa were protected by the [°]Aqab hill. A range of four radiocarbon dates (Fig. 2) refers to Levels I and II, in the very early second millennium BC (Breton 1996: 88-91; Badre 1992: 229-315). Unfortunately the small area excavated in the "stratigraphic probe no. 1" of 1978-1980 did not provide much information about the buildings and the ceramic assemblage.

The second range of dates indicates continuous occupation down to the mid-second millennium BC (Fig. 3).

The altitude of this early settlement is about 705 m asl. During the second millennium BC occupation, its total height never exceeded 3-4 m. Later, at the beginning of the first millennium BC, the occupation levels (Levels IV and V) start at an altitude of *c.* 708 m. The contour of this early settlement follows the slope to a height of 3-4 m (705-710 m) and measures approximately 80-100 m wide (north-south) x 200 m long (east-west) (Fig. 4). Thus, the maximum area of occupation was roughly 20,000 m². It seems that there was no fortification around this settlement as no traces of a mud-brick wall have been found.

Iron Age or the early first millennium BC

New research proves that the city was occupied in the central eastern sector. At an average altitude of 708-709 m asl, houses associated with thick occupation and destruction layers were discovered during the excavations of 2000.¹ The sequence shows a marked evolution from small mud-brick houses (from the Bronze Age to the mid-first millennium BC) to later *intra-muros* stone basements with wooden upper frames.

These layers provided quantities of shallow or medium-shallow bowls or chalices with vertical or slightly flaring sides which curve upward from a sharp carination. They are typically covered with a red slip, and burnishing is frequent. In addition, one or more parallel horizontal incised lines occur on most of the sherds. Although no bases were found, it is highly probable that these bowls are similar to Type 1511 from the Hajar ibn Ḥumayd excavations in the Wādī Bayḥān. Most of these were found in Levels R-K, which were dated between the tenth and seventh centuries BC (Van Beek 196: 156-158). Similar bowls were also found in most of the settlements near the Wādī Bayḥān, and the most complete collection comes from al-Hajar Surbān village 1 in the Wādī Surbān (Arramond 1998: 195-202).

In Shabwa, no similar pottery was ever found in the

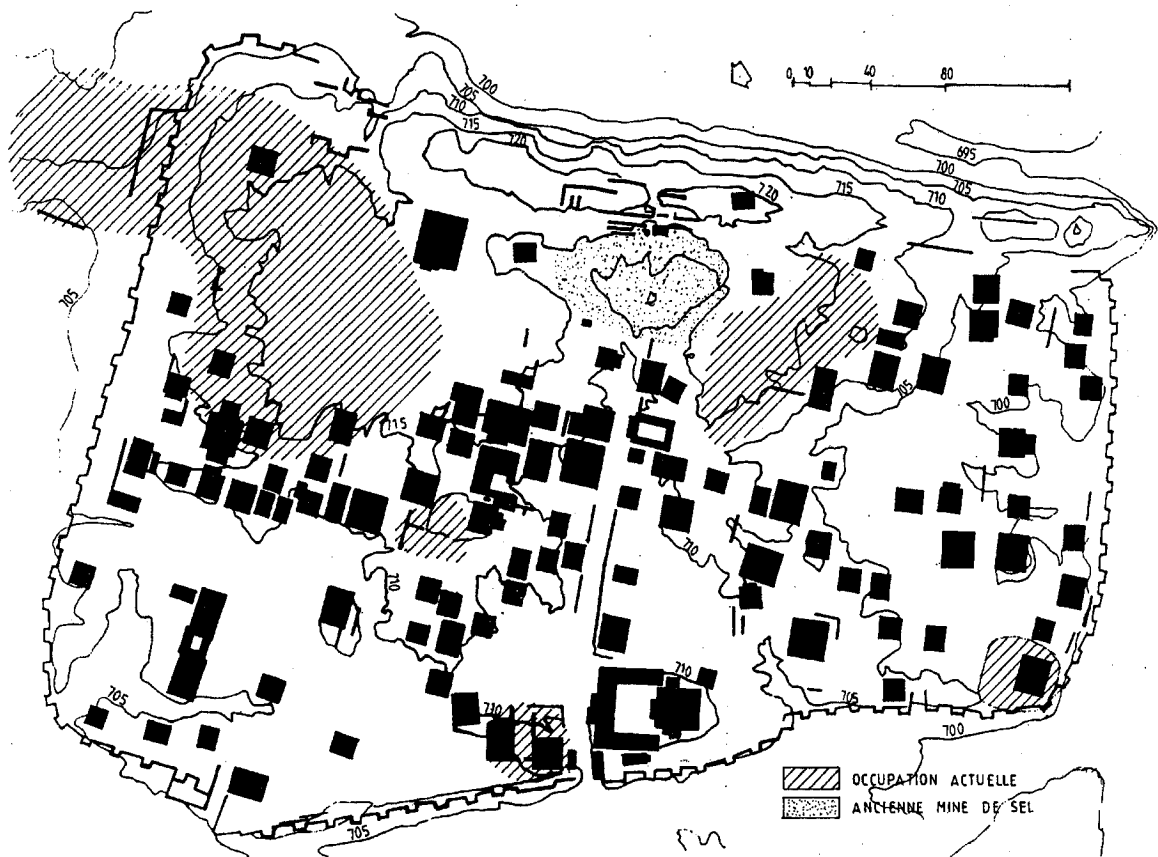


FIGURE 1. *Shabwa intra-muros: the buildings, the modern villages and the salt mines (after Darles 1998).*

Lab number	Locus	Level	C ¹⁴ date	Conventional
GIF- 7134	?	Level 1	3580 ± 60 BP	2032 (2008-1923) 1833 BC
GIF- 7133	Layer 88	Level 1	3500 ± 60 BP	1920 (1878-1785) 1741 BC
GIF- 6051	Layer 83	Level II	3430 ± 60 BP	1878 (1739) 1643 BC
GIF- 6291	Layer 78	Level II	3590 ± 90 BP	2131 (2009-1925) 1783 BC

FIGURE 2. *Radiocarbon dates from Levels I and II at Shabwa.*

Lab number	Locus	Level	C ¹⁴ date	Conventional
GIF- 7135	Layer 72	Level III	3410 ± 60 BP	1858 (1731) 1638 BC
GIF- 5773	Layer 76	Level III	3220 ± 100 BP	679 (1496) 1412 BC

FIGURE 3. Radiocarbon dates indicating occupation at Shabwa down to the mid-second millennium BC.

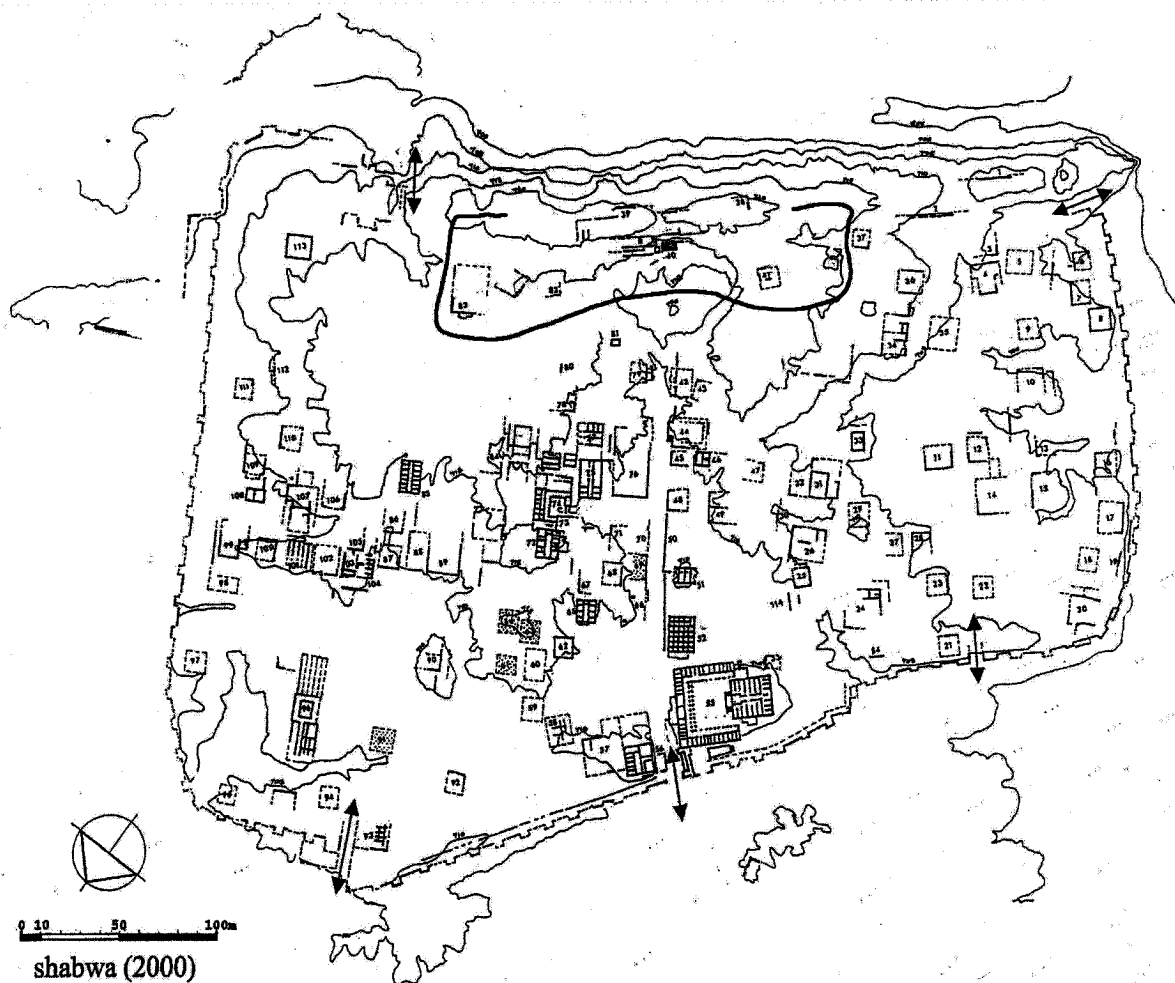


FIGURE 4. The possible limits of Shabwa during the Bronze Age.

Lab number	Location in Palace	C ¹⁴ date	Calibrated date
Beta- 142840	Western foundations	2800 ± 70 BP	cal 1130 to 815 BC

FIGURE 5. Radiocarbon date from the foundations of the "Royal Palace".

"stratigraphic probe no. 1", mentioned above. In Level V, red burnished pottery was found and compared with Syro-Palestinian Iron Age coastal material (Badre 1992: 240-242), but, oddly, this seems to be associated with black-gloss "East Greek pottery", and dated to the sixth century BC.

Near the central northern gate (Gate 3) lies the remains of a massive building (no. 55), later identified as the "Royal Palace". A radiocarbon date from its foundations seems to indicate a roughly tenth-ninth century BC date for a phase with a mud-brick building (Fig. 5).

Was this building a temple outside the city, as in many other cities such as those in the Jawf? Was the huge monolith (measuring 4.52 x 0.90 x 0.70 m) found inside the basement of the Royal Palace, on its northern side, part of the porch of a sanctuary? Such monoliths may be found in the 'Athtar Dhū Riṣāf temple of al-Sawdā' (ancient Nashshān), and in the Ma'in temples, in the Jawf valley.

Was this already the palace, mentioned later in the sixth century BC in the Shi'b al-Layl quarries inscription ("Ilyafa' Dhubyan, son of 'Amdhakhar, king of Ḥaḍramawt has extracted stones for his house Shab'an", Pirenne 1990: 49-50)? Unfortunately, no answer can yet be given, but in any case the presence of this building explains why the city-wall shows a 20 m-long salient to the north-west near this point (Darles, this volume). It seems obvious that this fortification angle was intended to include this building within the city limits.

The fortification systems

It may be assumed that the erection of the city-wall started in the seventh-sixth centuries BC. The earliest walls are visible in the Dār al-Kāfir tower in the western corner, and in al-Hajar citadel in the eastern part of the city. As these two spots are rather distant from each other, it is probable that the whole defensive system was planned in advance. Shabwa is nevertheless very unusual in that its citadel² was at first separated from the city and only later connected with it.

In the western sector, the city-wall forms a trapezium. Its summit, the western sector, is only 240 m long and follows the course of the Wādī Mi'shar; while its base, which is 350 m long, lies in the east. Its 450 m long south side, the 'Aqab hill, is topped with a complete wall. This fortification has five gates, which are, from west to east, a narrow gate (Gate 1) down the 'Aqab range at the foot of Ḥuṣn al-Mā, with a second gate (Gate 2) about 80 m north-east of Dār al-Kāfir. The

main gate (Gate 3) is near the "Royal Palace"; an important gate (Gate 4) with a unique asymmetrical plan occupies the northern corner, and a narrow passage (Gate 5) stands in the eastern sector of the 'Aqab range.

Generally these gates give onto open spaces rather than regular "streets" and only Gate 3, with its north-south axis, was intended originally as a path leading to the main sanctuary. The case of Gate 2 is unclear but Gate 4 opens onto an irregular space measuring approximately 200 m east-west x 100 m north-south, an area of some 2 ha (Darles, this volume).

This early fortification was later enlarged with an indented wall topping the hills. It has two main gates (Gates 7 and 8). In the southern sector, additional walls later encircled the round silt projection south of al-Hajar (with Gate 10).

Late urbanization: problems of methodology

The western 0.15 km² *intra-muros* sector is covered by a large number of stone buildings. More than 120 have been recorded over less than 70% of the surface, the rest being covered by the village of Mathnā or destroyed by salt mines. The total number of buildings covering the whole surface is therefore estimated at 200-250. Dating these stone buildings is difficult and even after surveys and excavations, the results are inconclusive. From 1980 onwards, a complete database has been compiled to document systematically their dimensions, heights, types of masonry, use of mortar, wooden constructions, and associated ceramics, other objects and inscriptions on a Filemaker programme which is updated annually (Darles 1998: 23-24). There are four main inputs.

1. The masonry of the stone buildings

From 1979, a comprehensive masonry study was undertaken which was completed and partly published in 1992 (Darles 1992: 110) (Fig. 6). It consisted in measuring the modules of the blocks of the ashlar masonry of each visible stone basement wall.

The length of the stretchers can be classified as 0.60 m (or more), 0.40 m, 0.30 m, 0.20 m and 0.15 m. Massive ashlar masonry walls, with on average 1 m long stretchers, can be traced in certain areas of the city. Apart from the city-walls, massive masonry is well documented in buildings 24, 34, 36, 52, 56, 89, 92-93, 107 and 109. Heavy stone courses, supposedly the

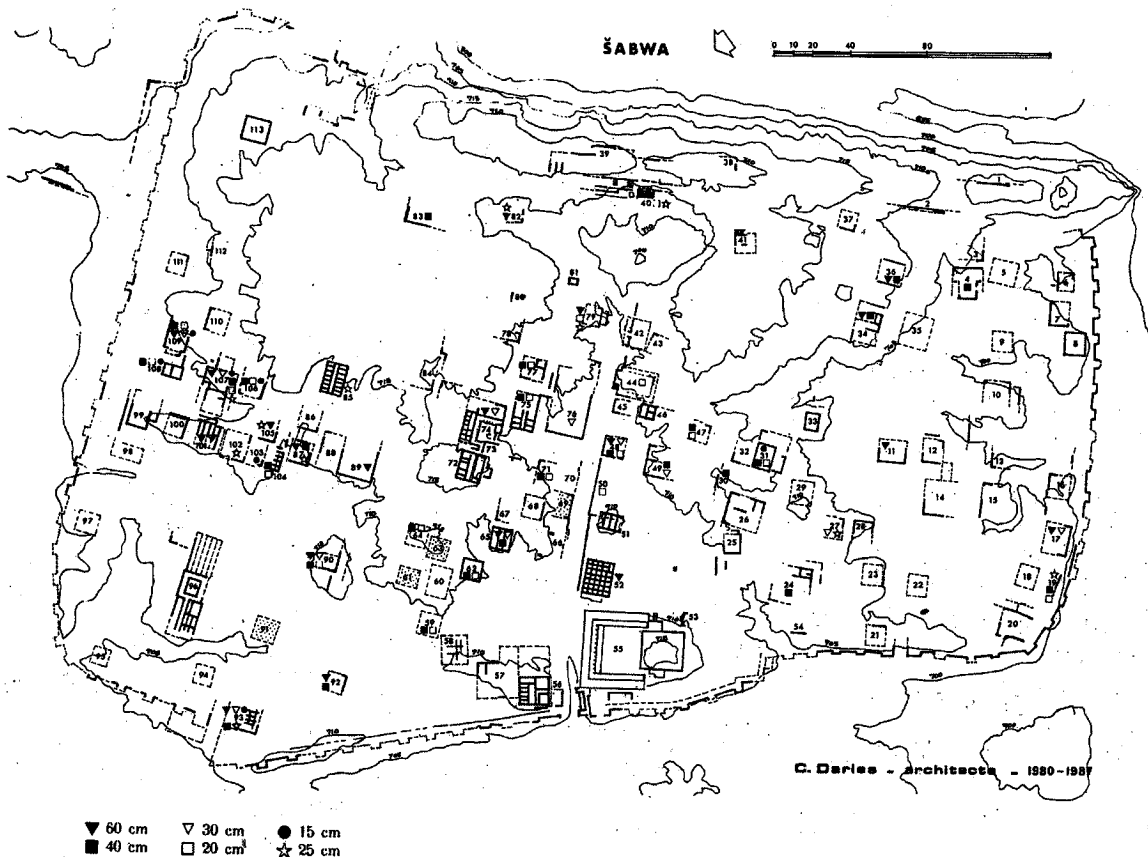


FIGURE 6. Plan of Shabwa with the measurement of the blocks (after Darles 1992).

earliest to be found, date between the seventh and fourth centuries BC. Middle-sized masonry walls measuring 0.40-0.80 m are documented in the city-wall, in al-Hajar wall and in building no. 55 (the Royal Palace).

Polyhedric or prismatic stone bondings with mortar are frequent from the first century AD onwards. Such masonry is well documented for instance in buildings 24, 28, 31-32, 41, 72 and 77.

2. The wooden superstructures of the buildings

All the stone basements were topped by a wooden frame. The long-beams, posts and cross-pieces were carefully linked, thus constructing a regular frame, about 1.50 m high and about 0.60-0.70 m wide. Two frames supported a floor at a height of 3.00 m, with additional frames added to provide an upper floor (Fig. 7).

About twelve stone basements still contain the wooden frames of their floors (Darles 1992: 110, fig.

26) and radiocarbon dates provide a great deal of information concerning their destruction.

3. The pottery

A large number of buildings provided late surface pottery, not necessarily dating their construction, but at least its last occupation. From these surface collections, we can draw a precise map of all the types of pottery found in each building.

Let us consider one single type of pottery, namely the late imported wares. Apart from the "stratigraphic probe no. 1" (Badre 1992: 304, sherd nos 295-299) a number of stone buildings provided Roman *sigillata* and amphorae. Bifid handles of Italian amphorae were found, for instance near the western city-wall (excavation area no. SH/VI/1976), east of the temple (in area XV/2000/locus or US 8), in the Royal Palace (building no. 55). In the palace, the handle of an Egyp-

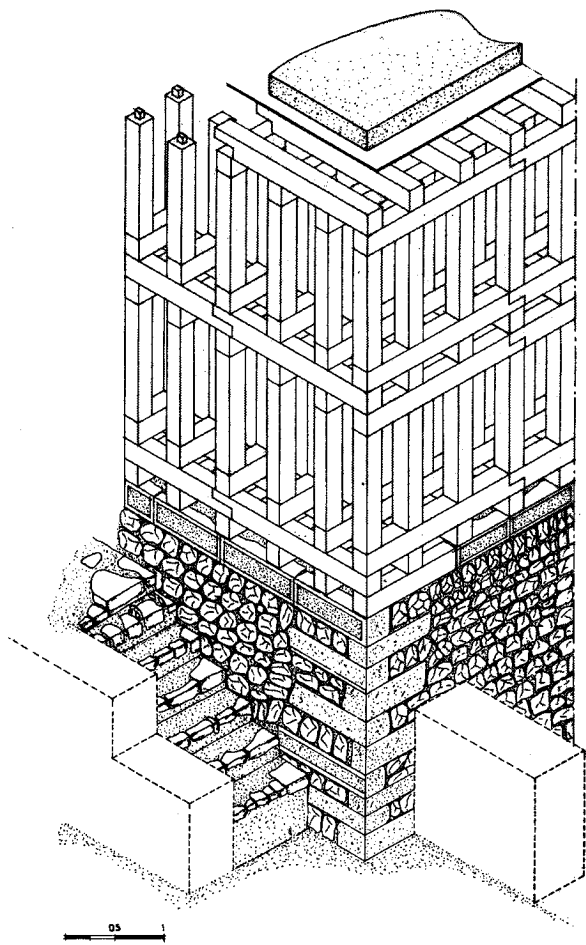


FIGURE 7. A reconstruction of Building no. 41 (after Darles 1998).

tian amphora (from V/US 85/100) may date to the first two centuries AD and a Late Roman amphora 3 (from V/US84/305) probably imported from Asia Minor, may be attributed to the second-third centuries AD. A fragment of what was probably an Aegean amphora and another amphora possibly imported from Mareotide in Egypt have been found on the top of buildings 72-73; while building 105 also provided an Aegean fragment of a Dressel type no. 2/4 amphora (Ballet and Lemaître, forthcoming).

Now, if we consider the green or blue glazed pottery as imports from Lower Mesopotamia, they also provide valuable data. Glazed sherds have been found in extensive numbers in the cave-tomb no. 1, near the western Gate 10, and in the "Main temple" (nos 74, 78 and 81-82). In addition, building 55 (the "Royal Palace") pro-

vided about 20 sherds of glazed ware, out of which only three were brown glazed, the rest being blue or green in colour (Fig. 8). The origin of the brown-glazed ware is still unclear, but we can suggest it comes from Lower Mesopotamia, possibly Charax³. Small quantities have also been found at Susa and ed-Dur and date between the first century BC and first century AD.

4. The inscriptions

As few inscriptions were found, they are not sufficient to build up a chronology of the buildings in Shabwa. Most of the texts describing buildings belong to the second and third centuries AD. The most complete text, no. SH/77/Mahdi, mentioning the "Yafad" house, belongs to the third century AD (Pirenne 1990: 72). The inscription Hamilton 1, discovered in house 72, may belong to the fourth or fifth centuries AD (Breton 1998a: 42).

The general outlines of late town development

These data make it possible to outline a very preliminary history of the occupation of the city and its development from the seventh century BC to the fourth century AD.

The oldest stone buildings are mainly located in the western and northern sectors of the *intra-muros* city. In the western sectors, buildings 17, 34 and 36 contain stone blocks measuring over 0.60 m long. A similar situation is found in the northern sector where buildings 90, 92, 93 and 104 are located. No Roman or glazed pottery has been discovered in the northern sector of the city.

The construction of the fortification was planned as a geometric framework which the city never fully occupied. Large parts of the land were never densely populated or even occupied at all. Several explanations might be suggested. Firstly, the lowlands, at an altitude of less than 700 m asl, were subject to flooding following heavy rains, and to the upwelling of salt. Other historical explanations range from a slowing down of the economy from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC to a downward trend in demography.

Little information is available about the occupation of Shabwa from the fourth-second centuries BC. Recent excavations in the central district indicate that these layers, situated about 709-710 m asl, are not thick.

By the third or second centuries BC, one building, probably a small temple, north-west of the Main Temple (building 44), was destroyed by fire (Breton 1998b:

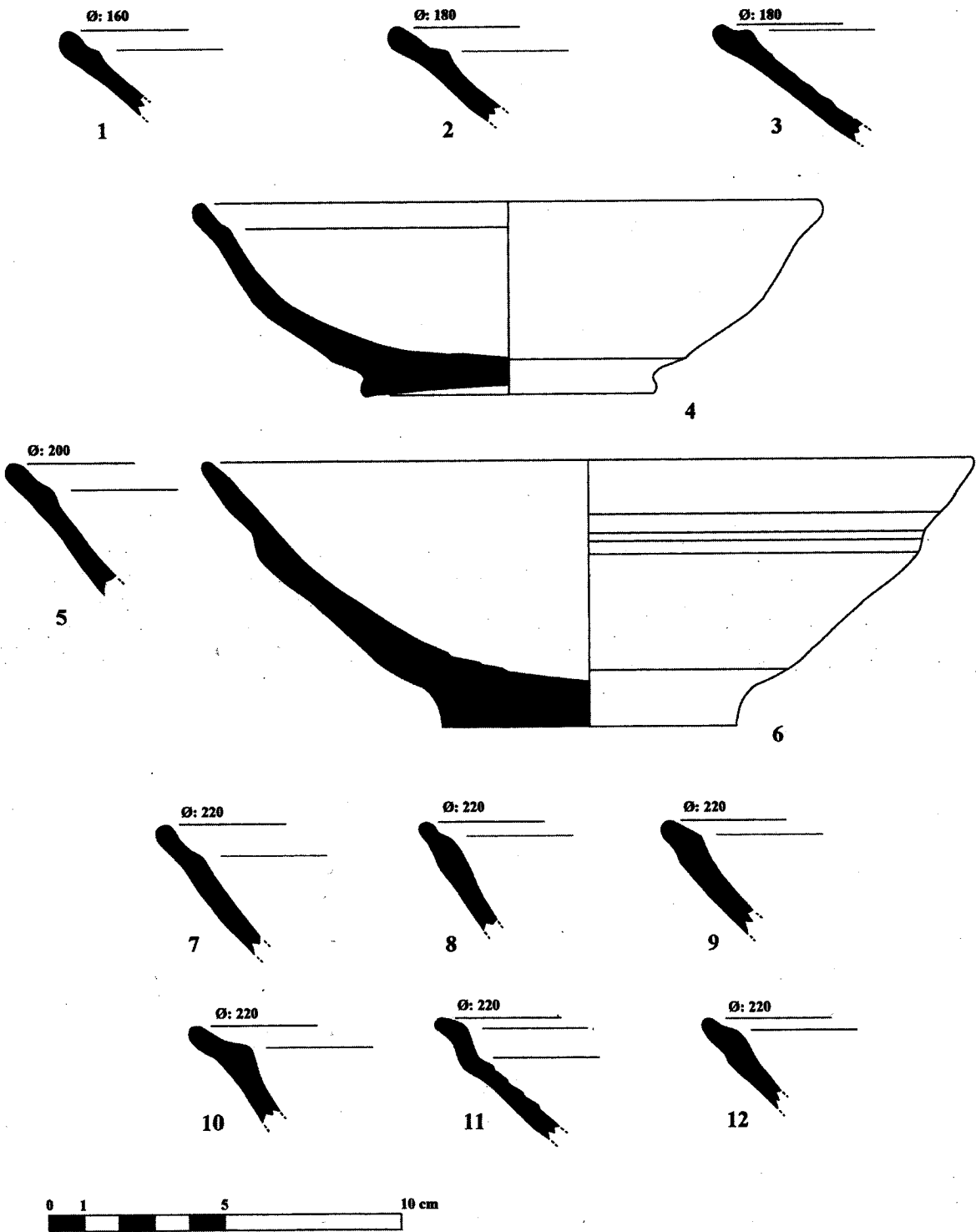


FIGURE 8. *Glazed ware from the "Royal Palace" (J.-F. Breton).*

Lab number	Building no.	C ¹⁴ date	Calibrated date
Beta- 145200	no. 44	2330 ± 60 BP	Cal BC 520 to 350 Cal 300 to 220 BC

FIGURE 9. Radiocarbon date from building 44.

Lab number	Place/Locus	C ¹⁴ date	Calibrated date
Beta-159843	Building 77	1950 ± BP	Cal 60 BC to AD 220
Beta- 142839	XV/US 29	2160 ± 60 BP	Cal 380 to 45 BC
Beta- 145201	Building 74	2090 ± 60 BP	Cal 350 to 30 BC Cal 220 BC to Cal AD 40

FIGURE 10. Radiocarbon dates from buildings destroyed by fire.

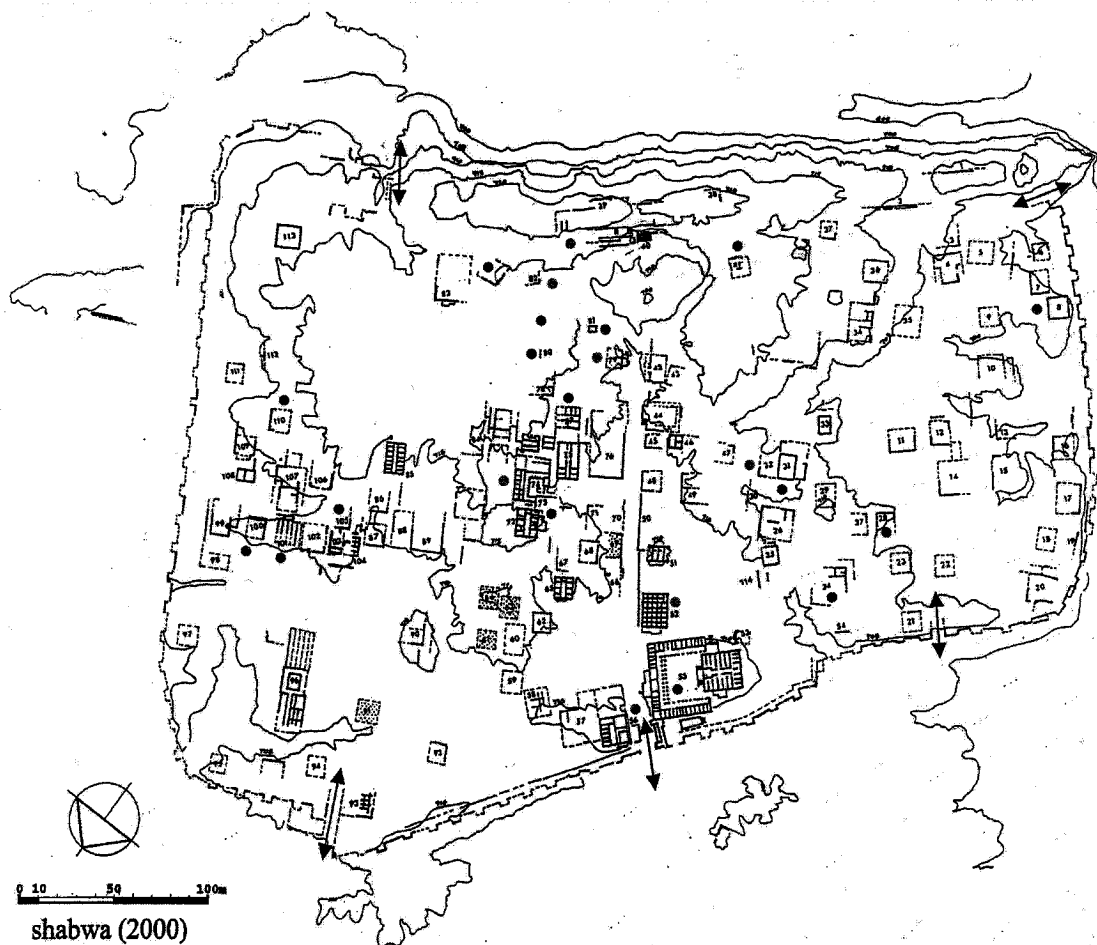


FIGURE 11. Plan of Shabwa showing the location of the imported ware (sigillata and Roman amphorae) (J.-F. Breton and R. Bierry).

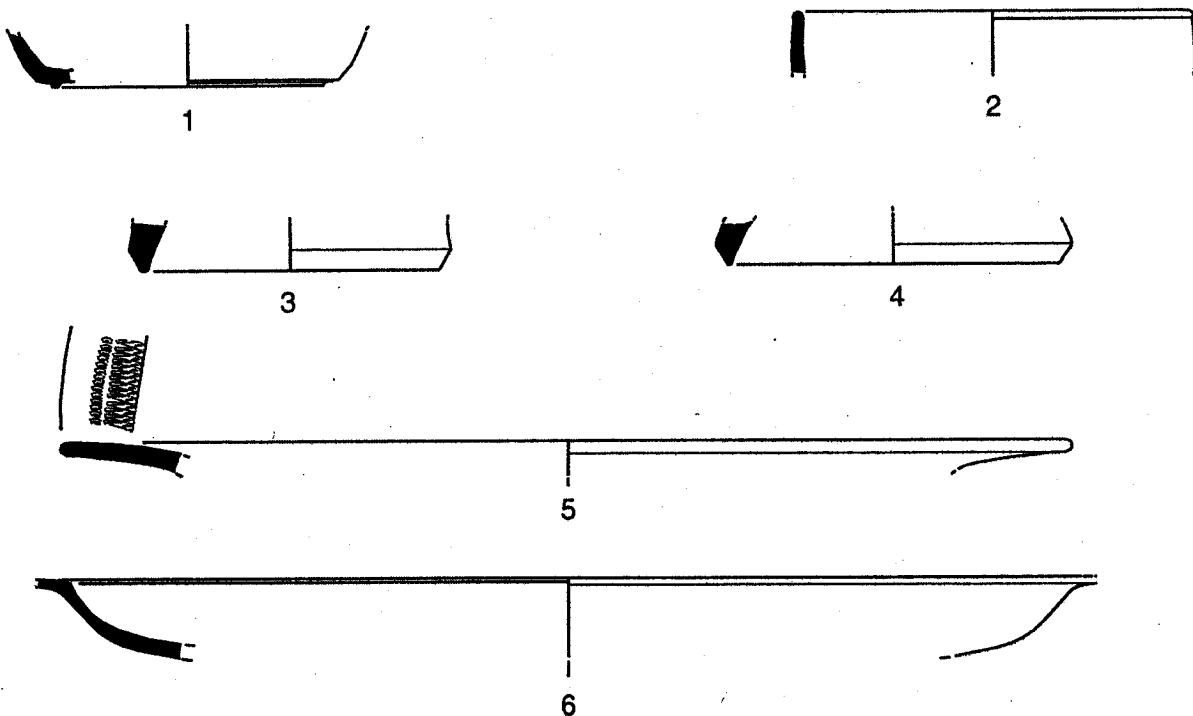


FIGURE 12. Imported fine ware from the "Royal Palace" (nos 5 and 6) and from the no. XV excavation (nos 2, 3, and 4) (Ballet-Lemaître).

153-156) (Fig. 9).

As this sanctuary stands in the "main street", it seems rather odd that it was never rebuilt during the following centuries.

For reasons which remain unclear, by the first century BC and the first century AD certain buildings had been destroyed by fire (XV/00/US 29 and also some houses such as nos 74 and 77). Were they all destroyed in the same historical event? There is more than a gap of a century between all these fires (Fig. 10).

Anyway it is difficult to connect these fires with the destruction of the Raybūn settlement in the first century BC by the Qatabanians, which is probably recorded in the text *Wādī Ḥaḍramawt Raybūn* 1978/no. 6 which mentions "the war with Qataban".

Few inscriptions dating from the first and second centuries AD were discovered in buildings in Shabwa, and indeed there are few inscriptions from this period at all in the Ḥaḍramawt. One explanation may be that many houses with stone basements and wooden floors above were built or continued to be occupied in Shabwa.

During these two centuries, those buildings associated with Roman wares were mostly located in the

highest southern sector at about 710-715 m altitude. Buildings 72-73, 81-83, 101 and 105 provided large quantities of this type of pottery (Fig. 11). Two parallel rows of high buildings were occupied at this period. Firstly, in the north, row 1 comprised buildings 71-72, 88-89, 99-104. In the south, row 2 consisted of buildings 74, 85, 106-112. It is worth noting that buildings 71-73, 100, 104-105, 108 and 110 were built with prismatic stone masonry which was mainly used in Shabwa between the first and third centuries AD. To the north of that line, in the central sector, to the east of the Main Temple, XV/US 03, about 2.00 m thick (from 711.60-713.70 m high), produced many imported sherds.

One of these belongs to a *sigillata* bowl or goblet, probably imported from Antioch-on-the-Orontes in Syria, and dating to the first century AD (no. 03/29). In US XV/US 05, there is a *sigillata* foot-rim belonging to an Italian series (no. 05-05), in XV/US 07 there is the foot-rim of an Italian plate of the first century AD (no. 07-01), and in XV/US 08 another fragment of an orange/red paste amphora with bifid handles from Campania (no. 08-05). In the lower XV/US 09, a fragment of an amphora (Dressel 1 C?) was discovered which probably belongs to the first century AD (Ballet and

Lemaître forthcoming) (Fig. 12).

It is still uncertain as to when building 52 was constructed. The excavation of its deep underground stone basement produced a fragmentary Greek black-gloss plate (dated 400 BC; inv. no. 75.II.1.PY) and a Greek amphora handle (dated fourth-third century BC; inv. no. 75.II.47) but these two sherds provide only a *terminus post quem*. The locally-made wavy-rim bowls (inv. nos II.152 and 357) point to the possibility of dating the construction between the first and second centuries AD (Breton 1998c: 30), but similar earthenwares were also in use during the third century AD in Wādī Dura^c. A bronze plaque was found, but as its exact find-spot is unknown and it was not possible to restore it, it is unfortunately of no use in dating the building.

From the first to the third centuries AD, urban housing was concentrated in the central and eastern parts of the city. The western district seems to have been less occupied than the eastern one, and none of its buildings provided any imported Roman or glazed pottery, or any late bronze coins. The population of Shabwa seems to have concentrated more and more in the central and eastern districts, above the projection line at an altitude of 710-713 m. But, the Royal Palace (no. 55) and the neighbouring buildings (nos 52-53, 56-57) still remained the living core of the city. So the occupation map of Shabwa seems fairly clear, with the central and eastern sectors densely populated, whereas the western area seems to have been under-occupied (see Fig. 11). In total, about 60-70 buildings were built east of the "main street" and only 45-50 west of it.

The Main Temple (no. 40) extending on the northern high slopes of the 'Aqab range, dominates the whole

city. Its monumental statue, perhaps of a king, in the middle of the sanctuary, and its bronze horses, or more probably horsemen (Breton and Darles 1998: 116-117, 147) on the lower terrace, emphasize the wealth of the city and the skill of its metal-workers. This building is unique in the Ḥaḍramawt, where no other temple displays similar iconography. In the Parthian world, it could be compared with the High Terraces of south-west Iran, for instance Masjid-i Sulayman with its monumental statue of Herakles (Ghirshman 1979: 119, pl. 23). Since no epigraphic or archaeological data are available, it is not certain when this temple was destroyed.

The destruction of Shabwa by the Sabaeans, described in detail in the inscription al-Iryānī 13 from Mārib, is clearly visible in the Royal Palace. "... Shaṛ Awtar rushed with his troops after he had defeated the troops of Ḥaḍramawt in the area of Dhāt Gaylūm. He entered, freed them and destroyed and burned to the ground the town of Shabwa, where he found his sister *Mikhlik* uninjured and unharmed inside the castle of Shaqar ..." (al-Iryānī 13, see Ryckmans 1974: 249).

A range of radiocarbon dates from the Royal Palace confirms that it was burnt to the ground (Fig. 13).

After the burning of the Royal Palace, the Mārib inscription relates the destruction of Shabwa by fire. Traces of this important event seem to be confirmed in one of the main ash layers XV/US 02, found in the central district of Shabwa, east of the Main Temple. It is about 0.20-0.40 m thick (altitude: 713 m) and extends over a large area and has recently provided a radiocarbon date (Fig. 14).

In the middle of the third century, the reconstruction

Lab number	Palace buildings	Phase	C ¹⁴ date	Calibrated date
GIF-6287	B, NW side	3	1750 ± 100 BP	cal AD 256-316 (AD 249-321)
GIF- 6289	C, East angle	3	1840 ± 100 BP	cal AD 133-207 (AD 140)

FIGURE 13. Radiocarbon dates confirming the destruction of the Royal Palace (building 55).

Lab number	Location/Locus	C ¹⁴ date	Calibrated date
Beta- 159842	XV02/US 02	± 60 BP	10 BC to AD 250

FIGURE 14. Radiocarbon dates from the main ash layer XV/US 02 found in the central district of Shabwa, east of the main temple.

of Shabwa was under way following the earlier sack of the city. The inscription Ja 949 (RES 4912) from al-^oUqlā temple, west of Shabwa, mentions the rebuilding of the Royal Palace "Shaḡar" and the temple.

The Palace was entirely rebuilt over its huge stone foundations, in buildings A or B (phase 4) (Breton 1992a: 216-219). In rebuilding A, in the south, new wooden storeys were erected on top of the old stone base, and a wooden porch was constructed on the northern side. The northern building B was rebuilt with an additional storey. On the ground floor, octagonal wooden pillars supported large porticoes decorated with frescoes. On the first floor, stone pillars, about 2.05 m high and crowned by double capitals, were decorated with griffins. The wooden ceiling of that storey was coffered.

This "Royal Palace" was occupied all through the third century AD, undergoing only minor changes, and was supposed to be the local residence of Himyarite princes, who ruled over Ḥaḍramawt (phase 5). Small mud-brick structures occupied parts of the palace grounds. In the courtyard, a *tannūr* ("oven") about 0.70 m in diameter (V/US 1-50) was set up, associated with an amphora probably imported from ^oAqaba (no. V/83/195) (Ballet and Lemaître, forthcoming), as well as a large jar (no. V/83/196).

In 1980, in the western area of the Royal Palace, four alabaster stelae were discovered — nos V/80/116; V/80/117; V/80/118 and V/80/122 — in level US 4-99 (phase 5). These were all funerary stelae (*ṣlwt*) (Pirenne 1990: 141, pl. 82). In this monument, two short graffiti were also uncovered (SH/V/76/47 and SH/V/76/75) directly carved on the northern stone façade. They were published and identified as "traces of the Himyaritic inhabitants" of the building, belonging to the fifth century AD (Pirenne 1990: 84-85).

The monument was then abandoned during the late fourth century or the early fifth century AD. In the central courtyard, close to the western portico, a layer (V/US 1-49) consisting of black earth provided the following radiocarbon date (Fig. 15).⁴

During this period, several buildings in Shabwa were constructed or reconstructed, for instance, building 72 (Breton 1998a: 39-48) (Fig. 16). While excavating it in 1938, R.A.B. Hamilton found an inscription recording that "xxx built...his house Yafa'n" (Hamilton 1) — which J. Pirenne thought probably dated to between the fourth and fifth centuries AD (Pirenne 1990: 72-73) — but its exact find-spot remains uncertain. W.L. Brown added: "The records of the precise parts of the building at which the other fragments were found have unfortunately been lost in the vicissitudes of war-time"

Lab number	Locus	Location	Phase	C ¹⁴ date	Calibrated date
GIF 6949	1-49	Courtyard	5	1590 ± 50 BP	Cal AD 429-441

FIGURE 15. Radiocarbon date from layer V/1-49 in the central courtyard of the Royal Palace.

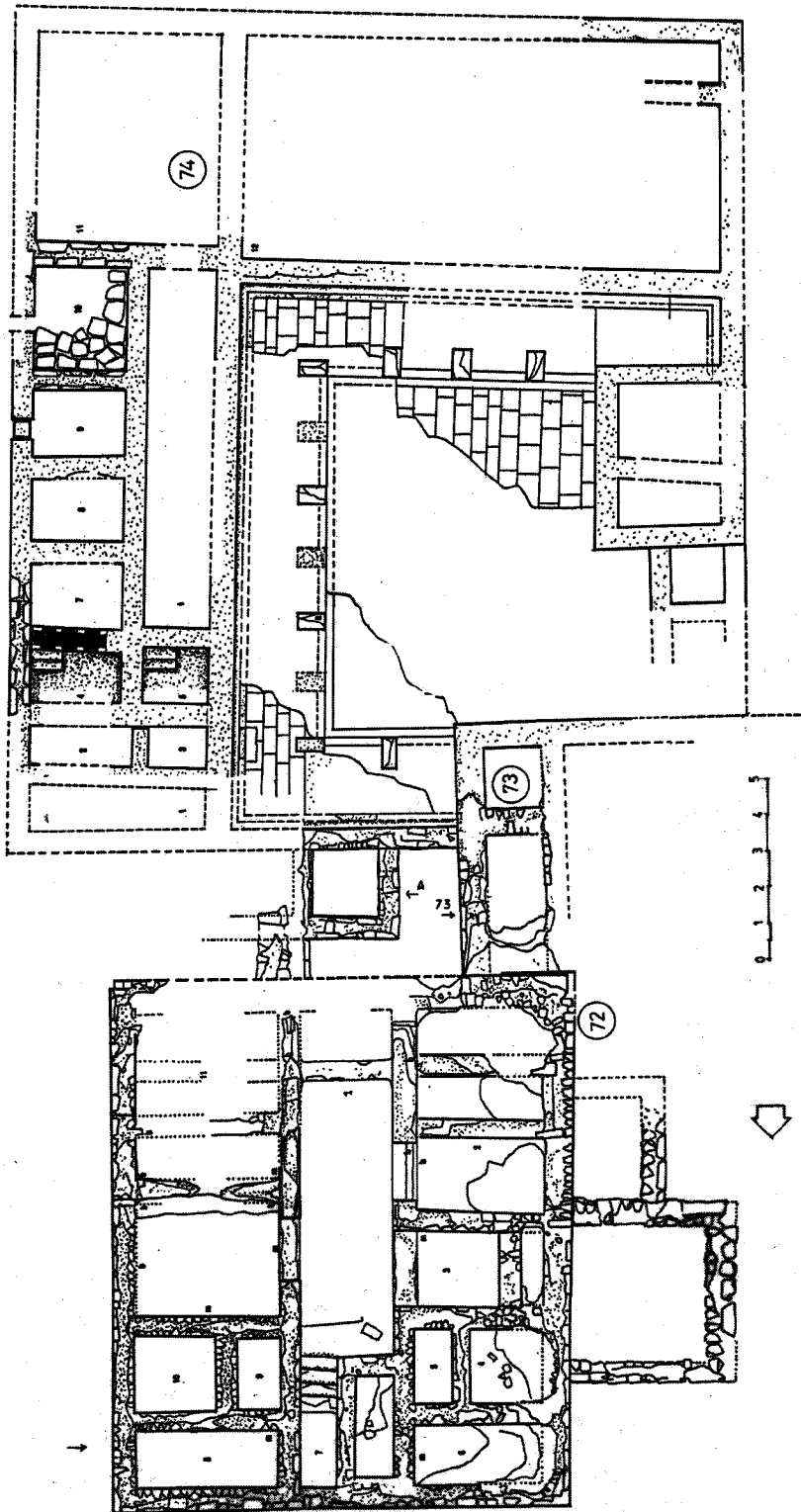


FIGURE 16. Plan of buildings 72, 73 and 74.

Lab number	Palace buildings	Phase	C ¹⁴ date	Calibrated date
Beta-48909	A, south side	6	1920 ±70 BP	uncalibrated
GIF-6938	A Building	6	1670±80 BP	AD 359-383 (AD 381-398)

FIGURE 17. Radiocarbon dates from the destruction (Phase 6) of the Royal Palace.

(Brown and Beeston 1942:45). The "considerable quantities of plaster moulding of grape-vine pattern" (Hamilton 1942: 115) had probably been removed from the nearby Royal Palace, where many fragments of stone pillars in Building B were decorated with grapes (see above). The small graffiti, found in room no. 2, provide a late date for the building (Breton 1998a: 42-43). Unlike the contemporary houses, building 72 has stone, rather than wooden walls on some floors.

The final destruction (phase 6) of the Royal Palace had probably taken place by the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century AD (Fig. 17). The palace was never re-occupied and nearby buildings provide no traces of later reconstruction.

Some hypotheses about the urban development of Shabwa

How did the population settle in Shabwa? We can assume, as far back as the Iron Age (and possibly earlier), that tribal groups or families gradually settled there, sharing the main parts of the city between them. Possibly by mutual agreement or by force, they delimited plots of land to set up their homes. These plots were probably large enough to allow for the growth of each family within its boundaries. The urban centre became progressively denser, and large plots of land were divided up by passages between buildings, short lanes and dead ends, for instance near buildings 72-84. It is not yet known if these plots formed "family-districts" with their own rules, institutions or even their own temples⁵ although this type of urban development, known also in Palmyra and Petra, has been identified in Bronze Age cities in the Levant. In Shabwa, however, the inscriptions are still too scarce to confirm such a hypothesis. It is possible also that foreign merchants, such as Minaeans, settled in certain districts, as at Tamna^c.

This raises the question of the possible absence of a central market-place. Could the plain of al-Sabkha have been used as an *extra-muros* market-place with specific

rules? If this large plain near Shabwa was used mainly by caravans, merchants and people, was the *extra-muros* Temple on the southern slope of the Qarāt al-Ḥadīdah range reserved for them? Could the large space east of the main road, near the Royal Palace, which measures 50 x 50 m across and is delimited by buildings 56-57, 59-60, 62 and 65, be considered an *intra-muros* "market place"? In this case, a parallel might be drawn with the *S²mr* central market of Tamna^c.

Were there small *intra-muros* markets in different districts inside the city? All this is still unknown.

In a later phase, and probably not earlier than the first century AD, the city's wealth and the power of its kings, transformed the urban landscape. The earlier north-south "path" changed into a central "main street" connecting the northern gate (Gate 3) with the main Temple. The existing buildings were then combined with terraces in order to bring about minimal alignment, in front of building 52, for instance. But even in the later periods, the "main street" varied in width from 8.60 m (between buildings 51 and 69) to 11.40 m (between buildings 48 and 76). At the end of this street, the "Main Temple" was transformed by magnificent décor, enabling it to stand out in the city and rise pre-eminently above the other temples.

A chart measuring the population of Shabwa seems to show that it decreased in the central districts, to the east or the west of the "Main Temple". To the east, the first and second century AD layers which contain imported pottery, attest the density of population in these districts. It is hoped that future campaigns in this area will provide more information.

Notes

¹ In the excavation of site no. XV, near the "Main Temple", the lowest locus (US no. 39) to provide carinated red slip ware is roughly situated at an altitude of 708 m; the highest locus (US no. 35) providing the same ware is situated roughly at an altitude of

709 m.

² See Breton 1994. In Qanā/Bi'r ʿAlī, the citadel, locally named Ḥuṣn al-Ghurāb, is connected with the lower city by a fortification and a steep path, but it is uncertain whether the citadel is the older settlement.

³ Petrographic analysis of selected glazed wares is in progress.

⁴ However, this radiocarbon date should be treated with caution as it is later than the period of the final destruction levels.

⁵ In addition to the main Siyīn Dhū ʿAlīm temple, at least three other temples in Shabwa are known from inscriptions. These were dedicated to Shams (VII/81/no. 2), Dhāt Zahrān (Hamilton no. 8), Almaḡah (Hamilton no. 4) and possibly ʿAthtar Dhū Qabdūm (SH/S/75/27), though this last is a dedication which does not necessarily imply the existence of a temple. After the sack of Shabwa, no new sanctuary was built.

al-Iryānī
Hamilton

Ja 949
Raybūn: 1978/no.

RES

SH/VII/81/no. 2

SH/S/75/27

SH/77/Mahdi

Sigla

Inscriptions in al-Iryānī 1990.
Inscriptions from Shabwa discovered by R.A.B. Hamilton and published in Brown & Beeston 1954.

Inscription in Jamme 1963.
6 Inscriptions published in Breton *et al.* 1978: 104, pl. 11.
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