

Jafr Basin Prehistoric Project

Sumio Fujii
Kanazawa University
fujii@staff.kanazawa-u.ac.jp

Like many other projects, our fieldwork in the al-Jafr Basin, southern Jordan, was completely frozen during these two pandemic years, so we spent this unexpected sabbatical reorganizing research data from the Harrat Juhayra Sites recently investigated and redating two Neolithic sites previously excavated. The former task has come to fruition as two reports (“Harrat Juhayra 2: Excavations at a Chalcolithic Settlement in the al-Jafr Basin, Southern Jordan” and “Harrat Juhayra 1–3: Excavations at Chalcolithic Ritual Fields in the al-Jafr Basin, Southern Jordan”; see also Fujii 2020), both of which are due to be published in the next volume of *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*.

This paper briefly introduces the results of the second task. Our operation focused on two Neolithic sites devoid of ^{14}C dates: a Pre-Pottery Neolithic B desert outpost of Wadi Ghuwayr 17 and a Late Neolithic open sanctuary of ‘Awja 1. A total of seven ^{14}C dates, six from the former site and one from the latter, were obtained by Takao Matsui of Shirakawa Radiometric Laboratory (IAAA) from charcoal remains excavated in earlier seasons and housed in our laboratory at Kanazawa University (Table 1).

Wadi Ghuwayr 17 was excavated in the 2010 summer field season (Fujii et al. 2012). The excavation revealed a small structural complex composed of five large and small semi-subterranean masonry structures, tentatively dated to the Middle/Late PPNB transitional period on the basis of typological similarity to complex I at Wadi Abu Tulayha, a type site of the Jafr outpost PPNB (Fig. 1). Five of the six ^{14}C dates converge on the middle of the 8th millennium calBCE, corroborating the validity of the typological comparison. This finding has ensured anew the existence of the Jafr outpost PPNB supposedly derived from farming communities that dotted the intermountain basins of southern Jordan.

Meanwhile, ‘Awja 1 was excavated in 2011 and 2012, together with the other four analogous sites (i.e., ‘Awja 2–5) (Fujii et al. 2013). What attracted our attention was that this open sanctuary isolated in the desert near the border with Saudi Arabia was associated with slab-lined feline depictions similar to those found at Biqat ‘Uvda 5 in the Negev Highlands and Jebel Khazm et-Tarif in the northeastern corner of the Sinai Peninsula (Fig. 2), which enabled us to tentatively date the site to the second half of the Late Neolithic. However, only one date, the ^{14}C date from unit C of complex I (immediately behind the feline depictions), provides further support for that Late Neolithic date. This finding has demonstrated that the unique artistic expression (and some group ritual represented by it) was shared in common between the east and west of the Lower Jordan Valley during the Late Neolithic.

Both new findings have not only eliminated ambiguities





Fig. 1. Wadi Ghuwayr 17: General view as of September 21, 2010 (looking north-eastward). (Photo by Sumio Fujii.)

left in the chronology of the Jafr Basin, but they have also contributed to a better tracing of the Jafr Neolithic that holds a key to the issue of understanding pastoral nomadization in the southern Levant. These two years were never meaningless. We do hope that our fieldwork in Jordan will be resumed before long.

References

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- Fujii, S., T. Adachi, H. Endo, and M. Yamafuji. 2013. "Awja Sites: Supplementary Investigations of Neolithic Open Sanctuaries in Southernmost Jordan." *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 57: 337-357.

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Table 1. ^{14}C dates from WGW-17 (Wadi Ghwayr 17) and 'Awja 1.

Site	Structure	Locus	IAAA No.	Material	yrBP	calBCE 2 σ (%)
WGW-16	1	509.sfl	202219	Charcoal	8493 \pm 34	7591-7513 (95.4)
	1	509.sfl	202220	Charcoal	8647 \pm 34	7733-7590 (95.4)
	2	515.sfl	202221	Charcoal	8465 \pm 32	7585-7491 (95.4)
	2	511.sfl	202222	Charcoal	8464 \pm 34	7585-7488 (95.7)
	3	503.sfl	202223	Charcoal	8374 \pm 33	7531-7346 (95.4)
	4	507.sfl	202224	Charcoal	8177 \pm 33	7199-7066 (67.0)
Awja 1	C	102.hfl	210234	Charcoal	6209 \pm 30	5188-5050 (76.2)

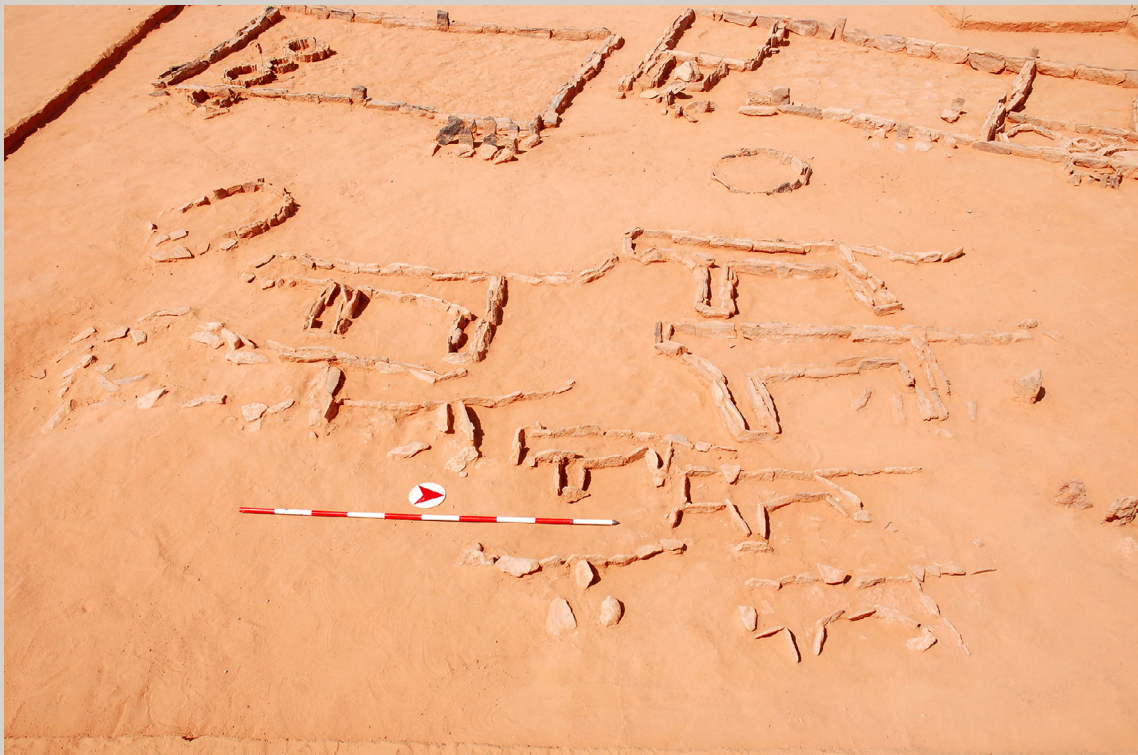


Fig. 2. 'Awja 1: Close-up view of the feline depictions as of September 27, 2012 (looking westward). (Photo by Sumio Fujii.)