

'AYN GHARANDAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

INHUMATION 5335 & LOCUS 5336

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Fig. 1: Overlooking the site of 'Ayn Gharandal, facing W

INTRODUCTION AND GOALS

The archaeological site at 'Ayn Gharandal lies to the W of the mouth of Wadi Gharandal on the E edge of Wadi Arabah, ca. 40 km SW of the ancient city of Petra and 70 km N of the Gulf of Aqaba (Fig. 1). The archaeological project began in 2009 with a survey of the area. Subsequent field seasons uncovered the *caldarium* and *tepidarium* of a Roman bathhouse along with water pipes, or *tubuli*. Charcoal graffiti was also found on the walls in the bathhouse. Additional excavations revealed cist graves, a *principia*, a dedicatory foundation inscription, and an early Christian church. Pottery and the inscription date the fort to the 4th century CE.

The objective of the 2019 field season was to excavate two rooms in the fort that were reused in the church complex – Squares A:5-5/6-5 and A:4-3/7-6. The primary goal in A:5-5/6-5 (Fig. 2) was to uncover the Roman occupation level, which lies ca. 3 m below the modern walking surface. Based on previous seasons, the project anticipated uncovering a number of inhumations in the upper 1 m of deposition, and one of these is the focus of this presentation (L5335 below).

LOCUS 5336

Locus 5336 (Fig. 3) was the soil layer into which **Inhumation 5335** was cut. L5336 consisted of wind-blown aeolian sand that, when exposed, was a very moist, thin, soft-yellow sand that quickly turned gray in color after exposure to the sun. **Locus 5336** produced several small finds, including two angular, bronze crumbs at elevation 226.38 m (1.29 g), one corroded coin, several organic small finds (including animal fur and burnt wood), worked stone, and several datable pottery sherds. The pottery consisted of one Nabatean type 5 bowl rim, one Nabatean type 2 jar rim, one Peacock Class 45 amphorae handle, and twenty sherds of non-datable pottery. Nabatean type 5 bowls have a deep flat base and a rounded rim, while Nabatean type 2 jars were large storage jars with a folded rim. The type 2 Nabatean jar rim dates from the 2nd to 4th centuries while the type 5 Nabatean bowl rim dates from the 3rd to 4th centuries CE respectively.

INHUMATION 5335

Inhumation, **L5335**, was located in the NW corner of square A: 5-5/6-5 (Fig. 4). The inhumation was oriented E to W and faced to the S (Fig. 5). The opening elevation was 226.746 m and the closing elevation was 226.50 m. The cist grave measured 167 X 54 cm. The cist grave was a normal, simple cut pit that cut through **L5336**. The soil surrounding the inhumation was compacted, a soil sample taken from within the cist consisted of an orange and tan colored silty sand. Two stones were found on the north boundary of the cist and constituted the back of the cist; another rock was found underneath the skull. The skeleton was positioned completely on its right side in an almost vertical placement. Both legs were found fully extended; the left arm extended outwards in front the body while the right arm was found in a flexed position between the skull and a large stone.

In general, the bones were well preserved apart from the skull, which was crushed, possibly post-burial and pre-excavation. The left femur had been moved from the original context; it was dislocated and had rolled forward which may have occurred during decomposition or excavation. The remains presented with a broken coccyx and moderate arthritis was present in most joints. A significant amount of human hair was preserved on and around the skeleton, along with decomposition tissue, a sample of which was collected for carbon dating. One small unidentified find was collected in association with this inhumation. Ceramic sherds were also collected in this locus, but these pieces do not appear to be associated with this burial and were likely deposited into the grave along with the fill within the cist cut.



Fig. 2: Photogrammetrical Orthomosaic of 'Ayn Gharandal, showing location of A:5-5/6-5

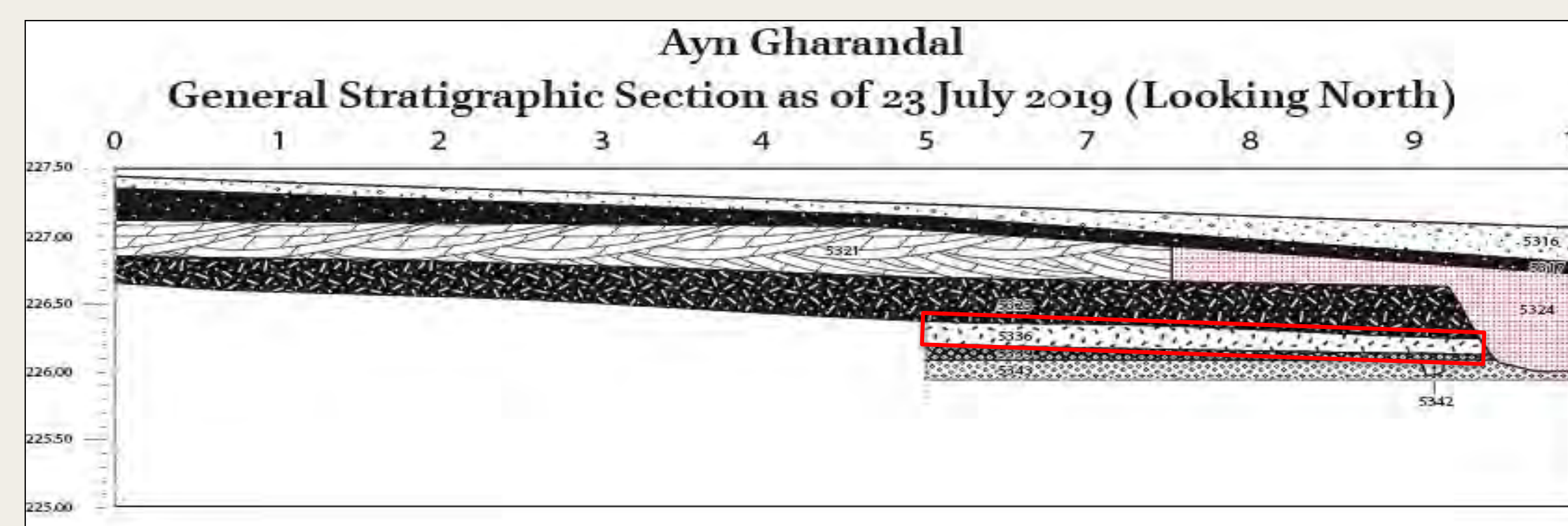


Fig. 3: Stratigraphic Section of A:5-5/6-5, showing the location of L5336

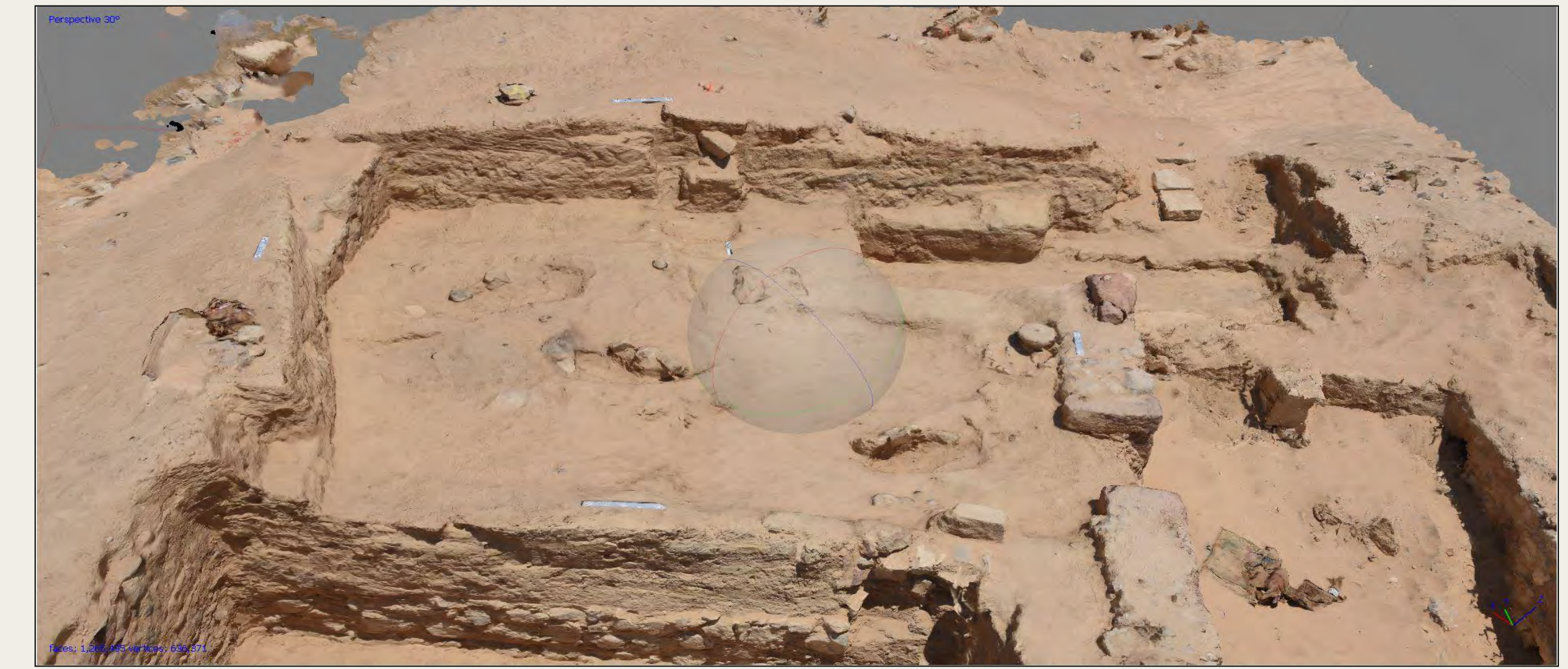


Fig. 4: In-progress Photogrammetrical Orthomosaic of A:5-5/6-5, facing N

RESULTS

Based on osteological analysis the skeletal remains in **L5335** likely represent a female that was twenty to twenty-nine years of age at the time of death. Further analysis of skeletal dentition showed evidence of nutritional stress, likely from nutritional challenges in childhood. Several skeletal remains found during previous seasons were carbon tested and returned a date range between 1190 and 1340 CE. Based on the C14 dates and the similarities found in **Inhumation 5335** it is likely that the individual interred in **L5335** also was buried during the Middle Islamic period.



Fig. 5: Photograph of Inhumation 5335, post-articulation, facing N

REPATRIATION OF REMAINS

Once the remains had been articulated they were photo documented and drawn before the remains were respectfully collected. The team used opaque collection bags that helped protect the remains from the sun and to allow for a measure of privacy before they were placed into buckets filled with protective sand. After the remains arrived at the lab in Aqaba, they underwent non-destructive analysis by our physical anthropologist. The remains were then wrapped in new cloth and buried in the designated repatriation areas on the site, less than 1 km from the original location.