



Fig. 61. General view of the tailed ossuary of HJH-204, looking southwest (photos by S. Fujii)

HARRAT JUHAYRA 2

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Harrat Juhayra is a collective term for the basalt foothills around Jabal Juhayra, an isolated (extinct) volcanic hill at the northwestern corner of the al-Jafr Basin, southern Jordan. General surveys undertaken following the excavations at the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B to Late Neolithic rock-shelter settlement at Jabal Juhayra located four extensive Chalcolithic burial fields on the eastern foothill. We designated them Harrat Juhayra 1–4 respectively and registered exposed stone-built features one-by-one as HJH-123 (i.e., Feature/Locality 23 in Harrat Juhayra 1).

The highlights of the continued excavation since June 2016 are tailed ossuaries (i.e., ossuaries equipped with an elongated, tail-like feature) found at the southern part of HJH-2. We excavated four of the five registered examples, where several radiocarbon dates corresponding to the Middle Chalcolithic were obtained together with a small number of grave goods, suggestive again of a Chalcolithic date. What follows is a brief introduction of HJH-204, the most well-preserved tailed ossuary.

The excavation revealed an L-shaped composite structure (that connects a trapezoidal rock ossuary and a tail-like feature at a right angle) under a low cobble mound (Fig. 61). The ossuary, measuring approximately 2.5–3.4 m wide by 7.4 m deep, and up to 0.8 m in preserved wall height, used upright basalt boulders for the foundation course and applied a stretcher bond, drywalling

masonry technique for the upper courses. A narrow entrance was incorporated into the middle of the eastern, gable-side wall, from which a corridor around 0.5 m wide stretched westwards. In addition, a total of 17 square to rectangular compartments were arranged roughly symmetrically on both sides of the corridor. Most compartments contained earth fill and were capped with stone slabs, under which a large amount of human skeletal remains were found in situ. Seeing that the cobble mound was only 1 m high, and that fallen stones around the masonry walls were unexpectedly scarce, this ossuary is thought to have been constructed as a low-walled, unroofed structure from the beginning. Meanwhile, the tail measured around 6.7 m long and was hooked at its distal end. Unlike the adjacent ossuary, this feature included neither interments nor grave goods. Thus, it can be interpreted as a symbolic attachment of the key structure, but its specific function is still unknown.

A preliminary anthropological analysis suggests that the minimum population of buried individuals is 19, and that they include five infants and/or juveniles, two young male adults, one young female adult, two mature male adults, two mature female adults, and one elderly person (Sakaue et al. 2017). Thus, the ossuary was probably used as an extended family tomb. Each compartment included interments, with the exception of the rear north one. The number of buried bodies varied depending on the loci from one to six. Most of the remains were disarticulated. Of interest is the occurrence of several metatarsals with clear evidence of kneeling facets, which probably means that these individuals were engaged in flour milling during their lifetime. In addition, a few skulls with traces of intentional piercing were also attested. Anthropological analysis now in progress is expected to shed light on the overall picture of the interment.

Meanwhile, grave goods were scarce considering the good state of preservation of the ossuary and the number of interments, being limited to a shell bracelet and one basalt pestle. The scarcity of grave goods is common to the other three ossuaries and, therefore, can be regarded as the norm of Chalcolithic burial practice in the Jafr Basin. In addition, although outside the ossuary, a figurine-like artifact 30 cm high was found beside the tail, sealed under the cobble mound. This unique limestone product was associated with a pair of headband-like bands in relief and a small, nose-like protrusion in its upper half. It bears some resemblance to a basalt torso found at Qulban Beni-Murra, a Chalcolithic burial field near the border of Saudi Arabia, suggesting some relationship between the two contemporary Badia sites.

Although badly disturbed by illicit digging, the other three ossuaries were very similar to HJH-204. Before excavation, we never imagined that such full-scale burial facilities were concealed under the seemingly barren basalt desert. The finding of the tailed ossuaries, coupled with that of the adjacent contemporary settlement, is expected to provide valuable insights into the Chalcolithic culture in the Jafr Basin which is thus far poorly understood due to the deficiency of basic information. We would like to pursue our studies toward a better understanding of this key site that bridges the Jafr outpost of the PPNB and the Jafr cairn of the EBA.

REFERENCE:

Sakaue, K., T. Gakuhari, S. Fujii, and T. Adachi. 2017. "Preliminary analysis of human skeletal remains from Harrat Juhayra 2, a Chalcolithic burial field in southern Jordan." Presentation at the 71th Annual Meeting of the Anthropological Society of Nippon, University of Tokyo.