

Figure 12 - Entrance to the main tower, picture and plan.

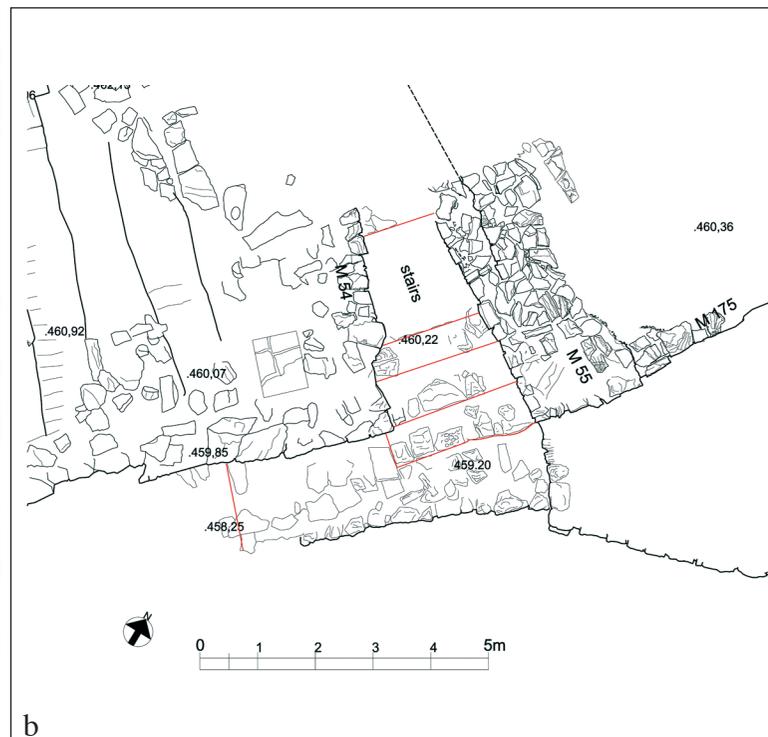


Figure 13 - a) stairway in the main tower; b) stone stairway entrance to the upper part of the site.



Figure 14 - *Main tower, view of the inside with the stairway's landing.*

One of the main indicators for the Iron III period is the appearance of Burnished Maroon Slipped ware (BMSW), a very distinct class of pottery which is clearly of Iranian inspiration. It seems very likely that initially BMSW pottery was imported from Iran. At Salut there are, however, examples of pots that are typically BMSW shapes but with fabrics comparable with those of other pots that are more clearly in the local tradition, thus suggesting that the BMSW was imitated.

Pottery and other finds

The definition of the major architectural phases at Salut divided into an earlier phase equivalent to the chronological span of Iron I and II (c.1300 to 600 BC) and a later phase equivalent to the chronological span of Iron III (c.600 to 30 BC) is clearly reflected in the presence/absence of certain types of pottery. The appearance of BMSW is a good example since none has been found in any primary contexts related to the earlier phase. It is, however, more difficult to say what pottery types typical of the earlier phase become absent in the later one. But the excavation of some

contexts is providing a very good indication of what the earliest pottery assemblage included. In addition to the large storage vessels typical of the Iron Age, there is a group of vessels that appear to be extremely abundant at Salut. This includes small carinated bowls (fig. 15), long-handled bowls (fig. 16) and spouted jars (fig. 17).



Figure 15 - *Painted carinated cup.*

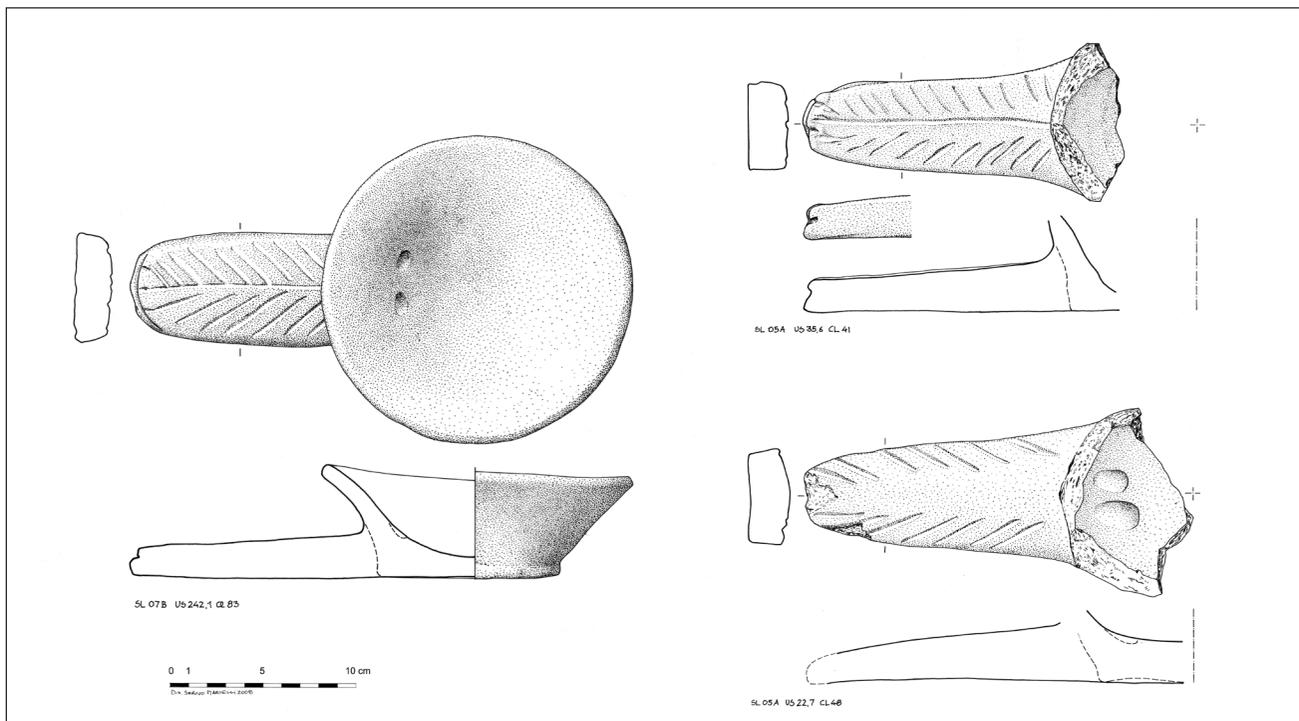


Figure 16 - Long-handled bowls, drawings and picture.

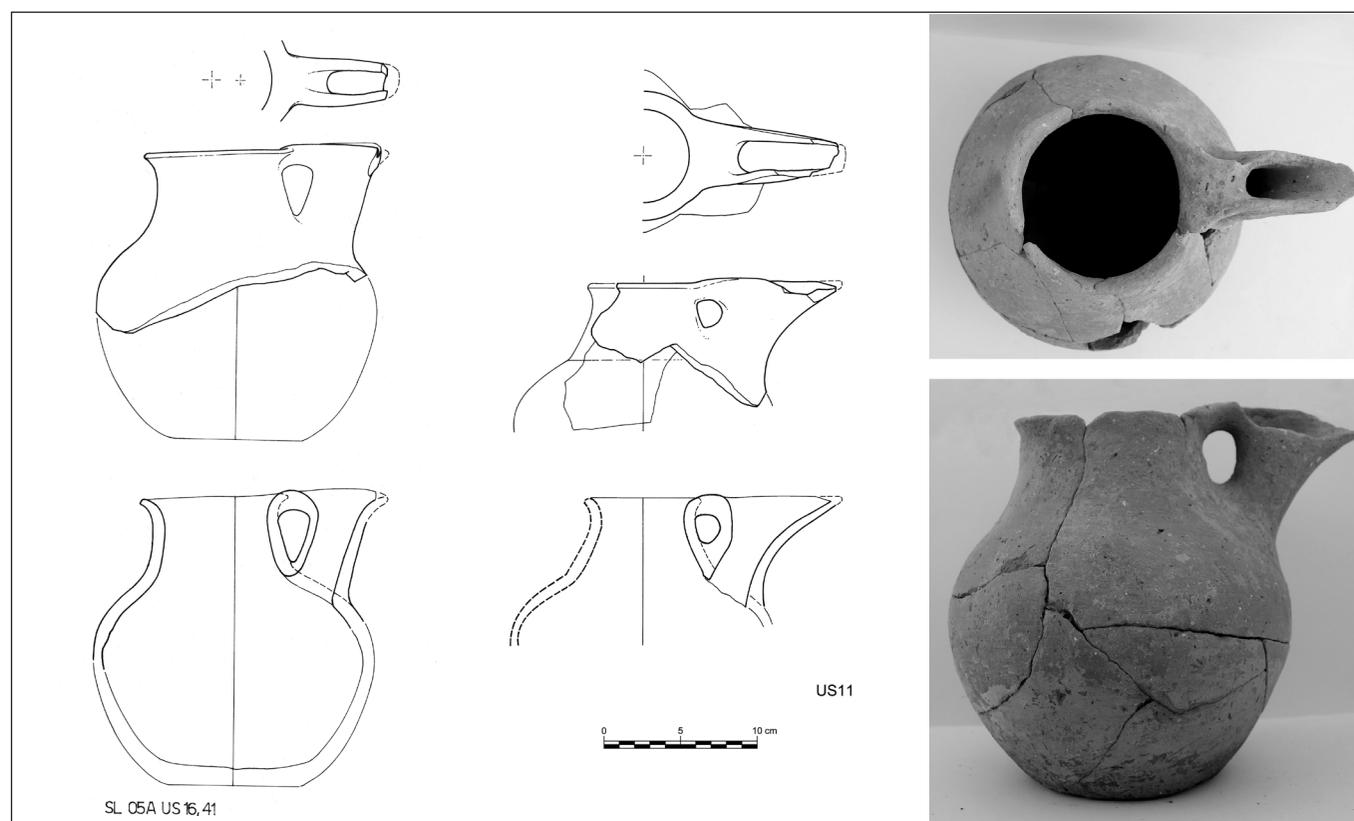


Figure 17 - Spouted jars, drawing and picture.

The presence of all three vessel types is indicated from the earliest excavated levels of the site. The carinated cups are well known from most Iron Age sites and as at other sites many of the cups from Salut are painted whilst others have incised signs on them. “Long-handled bowls” is the term adopted to describe a type of vessel exactly as it sounds – a bowl with a long handle. In most cases the bowl shows evidence of burning inside and they could therefore be censers or lamps. Often the handles are decorated with simple incised chevrons but others are decorated with applied depictions of snakes. The snake is the most common snake found on the long-handled bowls but examples of fish, a bull and a ram have also been found. The spouted jars found at Salut are also comparable with those known from other Iron Age sites in south east Arabia and are made in a variety of fabrics. Some of the spouted jars are painted and often the designs are the same as those found on the carinated bowls and other local vessel types. It must be emphasised that at Salut this type of vessel is unquestionably present in the earliest levels of the site – levels that appear clearly to

predate 1000BC and possibly 1100 BC. The ancestry of this vessel type which has already been the subject of some debate (refs to Magee and Muscarella) will clearly need to be reconsidered and it is hoped that the data from Salut will play a key role in this.

Amongst the rest of the pottery found at Salut are numerous examples of vessels with depictions of snakes (fig. 18), sometimes incised but often with applied decoration. Models of snakes have also been found made of bronze (fig. 19). Of the bronze snakes from Salut, those that have been found in primary contexts all come from the early phase and pottery with snake decorations is also dominant in the earlier phase. Whether the depiction of snakes continued into the Iron III period is, therefore, debateable.

The representations of snakes on pottery vessels or formed in bronze are obviously analogous to the discoveries made in other sites of the same period, with al-Qusais, Saruq-al-Hadid and Masafi being the most significant. There is, however, a more interesting par-

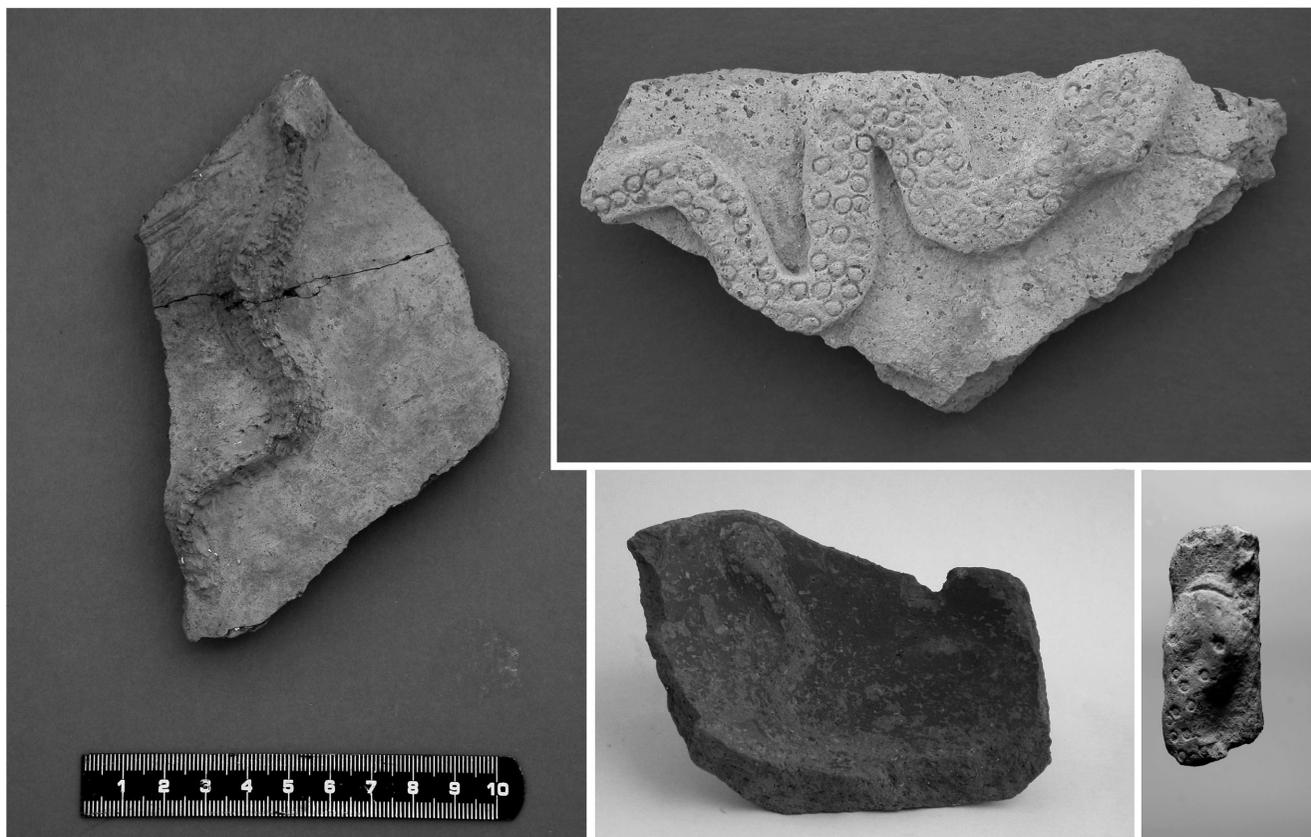


Figure 18 - *Applied snake decoration on pottery sherds (same scale).*



Figure 19 - *Bronze snakes.*



allel and it is between the site of Saruq al-Hadid and Bithnah-44, where snakes appear to be part of a cult connected to metal working. While there is abundant evidence of local working at Saruq al-Hadid there are only votive deposits of slag and bronze drippings in Bithnah with no sign of a production workshop. This situation can perhaps be linked to Salut where bronze ingots have been found but no production facilities yet identified.

Apart from snakes, several more bronze objects have been found at Salut some of which might be considered luxury or prestige items. Amongst these are two bronze ladles (fig. 20) which were found in the burnt building and date to the earliest phase. A bronze cauldron has also been found and this may date to the later Iron III phase. Bronze arrowheads are quite common and comparable with those from other Iron Age sites and more recently a dagger, spearhead and axe have also been found (fig. 21).

Many softstone vessels have been retrieved from the site, with typical Iron Age shapes and decorations

(fig. 22). A seal made of soft stone (fig. 23) is also comparable with examples known from elsewhere, for example at Rumeilah. Whether such seals formed part of an administrative system is difficult to say and alternatively they may have served as amulets or been simply decorative.

Another object found at Salut is part of a cuboid incense burner (fig. 24), made of clay with a fabric similar to some of the pottery. The decoration is made by deep incisions and impressions which together produce a sharp, excised pattern.

Usually it is necessary to be cautious when inferring the function of an object based only on its shape but in this case the object is comparable with many similar objects found throughout the Near East (Shea 1983). Their distribution includes southern Mesopotamia, the Levant and South Arabia. In eastern Arabia several examples are known from the Qalat al-Bahrain excavations where they are found in periods IVb to IVd which would date them to the 6th-4th centuries BC. In south east Arabia a similar object was found at Rumeilah in a period II context and three more examples are



Figure 20 - *Bronze ladles.*

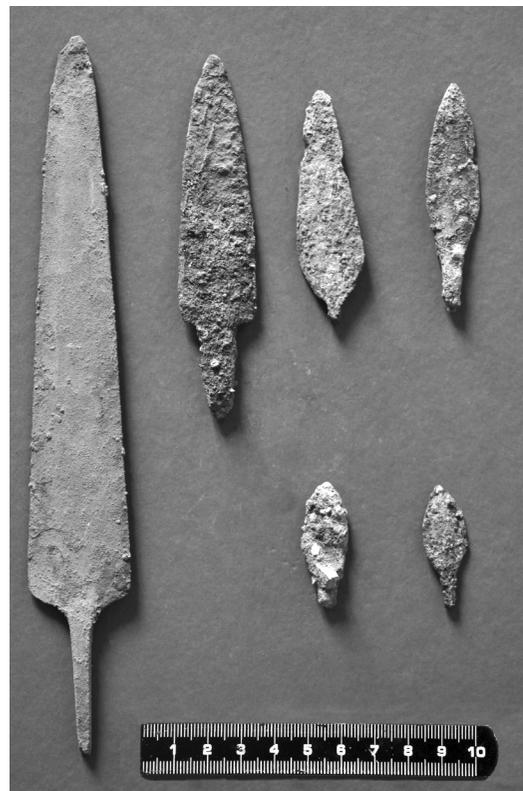


Figure 21 - *Bronze spear and harrowheads.*



Figure 22 - Complete soft-stone vessel.

known from Rafaq 2 in the Wadi al-Qawr. Both Rumeilah II and Rafaq 2 are dated to the Iron III period, 600-300 BC and it is probable that the example from Salut also dates from this time.

Summary

As can be seen from this summary about Salut, the site is providing important new data for the study of the Iron Age in south east Arabia. The presence of both an early (Iron I and II) and a late Iron Age (Iron III) phase should enable a clearer definition of the pottery assemblages that go with these two main periods as well as other associated artefacts. The two main architectural phases, as revealed so far, also appear to show some major differences despite both having to adapt to the limitations imposed by the hill-top location. Partly because of the location of the site, on the top of a hill where it was necessary to extend the available building and activity space by creating platforms and terraces it would seem likely that the building works were somehow co-ordinated. That is to say, the site does not appear to be one that grew organically, but rather one that involved a degree of planning. How this was achieved necessarily begs the question what was Salut for? It appears that it could have fulfilled a number of functions; it clearly is a fortified site, and was probably a cult site as indicated by the various representations of snakes. Whether the site was also a seat of authority is difficult to say. Some of the bronze objects, such as the ladles have sometimes been taken as indicative of elites. It seems premature, however, to make such suggestions until more is known about the specific contexts of these finds and what other things they are associated with. An aspect of Salut which still

remains to be studied in detail is its economy. Faunal and botanical remains have been retrieved and await detailed study. Regarding agriculture it is clear that date cultivation was prevalent and large deposits of charred dates, still inside baskets, have been recovered. Presumably cultivation took place on the plain below and until recently this area was irrigated by a number of *aflaj*. The history of the *falaj* is an important subject and so far all that can be said is that there is some tentative evidence to suggest that there was *falaj* irrigation near Salut during the Iron Age. If this is so, then defining the wider territory of the site and discovering the distribution of neighbouring Iron Age sites will form an important aspect of any future work.



Figure 23 - Soft-stone seal.



Figure 24 - Fragment of cuboid incense burner.

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