Small Finds with Big Potential: Final Preparation for the Publication of the Military Camp Wall Paintings and a Fourth Century Purse Hoard from Humayma, Jordan

Report for the Roman Society by Craig A. Harvey, University of Michigan

I wish to begin this report by thanking the Roman Society for the grant from the Donald Atkinson Fund, which made my research project not only possible but also extremely successful. My research project involved the preparation of both a corpus of frescoes and a small hoard of bronze coins for publication and required travel to Jordan and lodging at the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in Amman. Thanks to the generosity of the Roman Society, I was able to use the funds from the Donald Atkinson Fund grant to cover my two-week accommodation at ACOR, during which time I accomplished all necessary documentation and analysis of these materials.

The first part of my study was the description and drawing of a corpus of frescoes that come from the site of Humayma in southern Jordan. These frescoes are very fragmentary; however, they appear to depict faux marble veneering in the “Block Style”, which was typical throughout the East in the Roman period. During this summer, I was finally able to settle upon a proposed reconstruction of the wall paintings, which I believe depicted garlands and panels of coloured marble between columns. To assist in my presentation of this proposed reconstruction, I spent much of my time at ACOR drawing the fresco fragments on a 1:1 scale by hand, using clear plastic sheets. I have scanned these drawings and will be digitally inking them. These drawings, as well as my description, photographs, and analysis of these frescoes will be published in the third volume of the Humayma Excavation Project’s final report, currently in preparation.

Fig. 1 Drawing the frescoes by hand, at the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman.

The second part of my study season was the documentation and photography of a small hoard of bronze coins. These coins, which date to the 4th century AD, also come from the site of Humayma, although they were found outside the fort in the neighbouring vicus. Despite being initially described and noted in a publication following their discovery in 1995, there has yet to be a full description and publication of this hoard, which should provide useful information about the site of Humayma in the Late Roman period. Since their excavation, these coins have been stored in the Aqaba Museum, and my
original plan therefore called for a visit to Aqaba for their study. Recently, however, these coins were transferred to the main storage facility of the Department of Antiquities in Amman, and I therefore sought and received permission to study these coins there. Over the course of three days, I fully described the coins according to current numismatic standards and took publication quality photographs using a DSLR camera. I intend to publish these coins in a peer-reviewed journal once I have fully identified all the coins.

Fig. 2 Examining the bronze coins with Department of Antiquities staff, Omar Al-Smadi and Yaser Salem.

Fig. 3 Setup for coin photography at the Department of Antiquities’ storage facility in Amman.

I wish to thank the Roman Society once again for generously providing me with a grant from the Donald Atkinson Fund. It is thanks to this grant that I was able to complete my study of these two important corpora and prepare them for their eventual publication. Thank you!