

*Figure 1 - The Jawan tomb as photographed from helicopter by Sgt. W. Seto, USAF, in May 1952*

## The Jawan Chamber Tomb

Adapted from a report by F.S. Vidal, Dammam, December 1953

### I. Description of work and remains:

On March 22, 1952, an unidentified building, buried inside a mound of earth, was accidentally discovered at the Jawan quarry, which is operated by Aramco and lies 6 kilometers north of Safwa . The find was reported on the following morning. On the afternoon of the same day I made a preliminary investigation.

March 25th, Mr. T.C. Barger and I reported on this to His Highness Amir Saud Ibn Jiluwi, and, as the building was within a lease area for which the company was responsible, His Highness asked the Company to undertake a complete archaeological investigation and report to him on the results. This is being done in this memorandum, after completion of the main portion of the work, which required four and half months of excavation, and one and a half years of laboratory studies. Further laboratory and museum consultation work is needed in order to fill in the less important details, and this work is being continued.

The Jawan building studied is a large chamber tomb (roughly 25' by 70'), with the rectangular central chamber, entered into through a long passage coming in from the west. Out of the central chamber open 5 alcoves: one to the east, and two each to the south and north. The north and south alcoves have one burial pit each, while the east alcove has two, one behind the other.

On the outside of the building (see figs 1 and 3) were four additional burial boxes, built against the wall of the main structure: at the northeast, southeast, south and southwest. The entire tomb is constructed of the local limestone. The walls are of limestone rubble and have been faced with *juss* (the local gypsum mortar) on the outside. The inside walls are also of limestone, but cut in very fine rectangular blocks, fitted together with very little mortar (see fig.4).

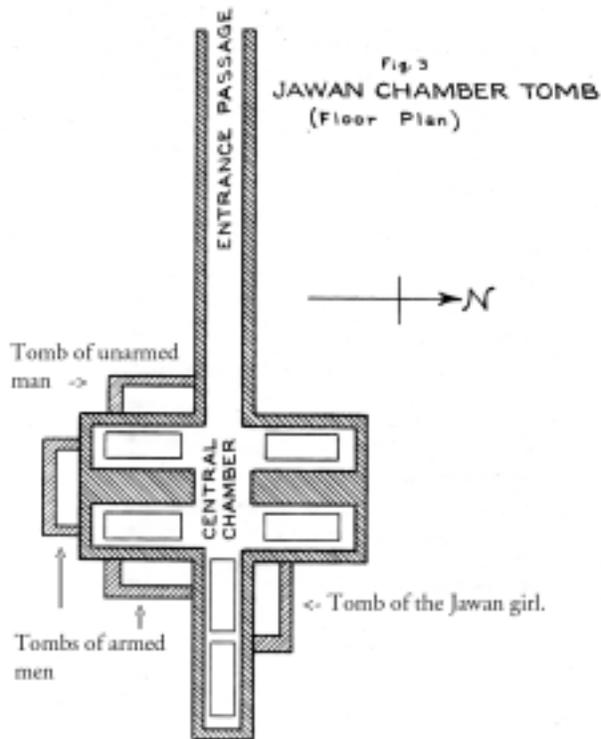


Figure 3 - Tomb Floor Plan



Figure 4 - Detail of cut limestone blocks

After the dead had been put into the inside pits, these were covered with large limestone slabs and then coated with *juss*. Additional alternating layers of rubble and *juss* were piled on top of the cover in order to seal the tomb. The outside boxes had simply a cover of limestone slabs covered with *juss*.

When I first visited the tomb on March 23, I saw that the interior, central chamber as well as all the alcoves, had been entered into a long time ago, and the contents of bones, limestone, cement, and sand thrown about. Furthermore between March 23 and March 26, when we started working, a crowd of people from a nearby village had destroyed the end of the east alcove, possibly in search of ancient treasures.

The first part of the excavation was extremely discouraging. The entire interior was disturbed. The only remains found included, next to the bones of perhaps as many as eighty skeletons, a few fragments of glass, one thin, small bronze spatula, several glass and carnelian beads, and a few pieces of both glazed and plain pottery.

The interior of the tomb proved that, although it had been designed for only six people, it had been robbed of its contents perhaps a short time after it was built, and later had been used as a burial place for the bones of other people. Some of the later dead put into the Jawan tomb had been cremated together with their belongings. Since Jawan is close to the sea and under the influence of heavy tides, and its limestone is porous, the remains in the tomb were extremely wet and had to be dug out very slowly. In many cases I had to wait several weeks until the surface was dry, and then remove a block of dirt to let it dry outside for another several months. It may be interesting to record here that although the excavation work itself was finished in September 1952, some of the blocks of clay were allowed to dry until December 1953, that is approximately fifteen months. Nothing found inside the tomb gave any help in dating it.

When the people who had built the tomb had finished their job, they covered the entire building with a mound of earth and sand, rather firmly packed. In order to study the construction of this mound, and to find out if any remains in it would give any indication of the date of the tomb, as well as to investigate the

construction of the external wall of the building, I decided to dig a trench (visible in fig.1), all around the outside. During this work the four exterior boxes mentioned above appeared. These four burials had not been touched since the day they had been covered. The first robbers had not thought of anything but the main part of the tomb. The villagers had missed one of the burial boxes by less than 12 inches, where their destruction of the eastern alcove stopped. The burial cists were not touched until the trench had been completed to bedrock, and all of them had been completely photographed and measured. The southern box, as an example, is given in fig. 5. The other three were similar, the northeast one only being somewhat lower.



*Figure 5 - View of the southern burial cist before evacuation*

The northeast box was occupied by a girl, approximately six years old; the three boxes in the south were each occupied by an adult male, their ages ranging from 21 to 50 years. The four people in these tombs had been buried inside palm wood coffins, with their personal belongs. The only remains of garments showed that these people used cotton clothing. The coffins had been closed with the help of iron nails.

The four occupants of the outside burials had not died a natural death, but had been murdered by being hit on the head with a heavy weapon, and at least also in one case stabbed on the left side of the head, right above the ear.

The remains found in these four tombs were as follows:

Southwest: The skeleton was laid out with its head pointing south. The wood of the coffin was in recognizable shape, but the bones were badly damaged. The only artifact was a small gold hair ring.

South: The skeleton was laid out with the head pointing west. The wood of the coffin showed that its upper part was curved. The artifacts found were two gold hair rings of the same size, and an iron sword in very poor state of preservation. This sword was short, and of the broad, leaf shaped type, and was along the left side of the skeleton. The scabbard was made of wood, and had a cover of leather. The handle was of ivory. The shape of the remains was so poor, that all identifications had to be made with the help of the microscope. The sword is shown in fig. 6.



*Figure 6 - The sword found in the southern cist*

Southeast: The head of this skeleton was pointing north. In this tomb one of the cover slabs had become detached from the *juss*, and had fallen on the skeleton, completely destroying a large portion of it. Of all the three people in the southern burials, this skeleton was in the worst shape. The only artifact was an iron sword of the long narrow type, also laid along the left side of the skeleton, and broken in eight pieces. Age effects have given the sword a marked curve to the front, which it did not have at the time of manufacture. The scabbard was of wood, with a cover of leather. The handle appears to have been made of wood also. The wood and the leather of the scabbard were held together at the top by a ring of bronze. A number of small, unreconstructible fragments of iron appear to have been the edges of the scabbard.

Northeast: The head of the skeleton was pointing to the west. The cover slabs had remained in place, but this tomb suffered a great deal from the humidity and infiltrations of clay. When we uncovered it, the entire remains were covered by a layer of about 12 centimeters of wet, heavy clay. The remains of the wood coffin could barely be identified. This six-year old girl had also been killed and then buried with her possessions.

The artifacts in this tomb were as follows: Two small statuettes, of about 20 centimeters height, shown in figs. 7 and 8; the first, of gypsum, resembles some known Middle Eastern types, the other is made of alabaster and is of the "Venus" type common in the Greek and Hellenistic worlds. In this tomb were also one bronze bowl, shown in fig. 9, and a bronze mirror, shown in fig. 10. Microscopic study revealed that the mirror had been originally provided with an ivory handle. Both bronze objects had suffered a great deal from the humid conditions of the tomb, and had a very heavy green patination. There was also a small ivory figurine, possibly a doll, in very poor state of preservation, and a number of unidentifiable ivory fragments.

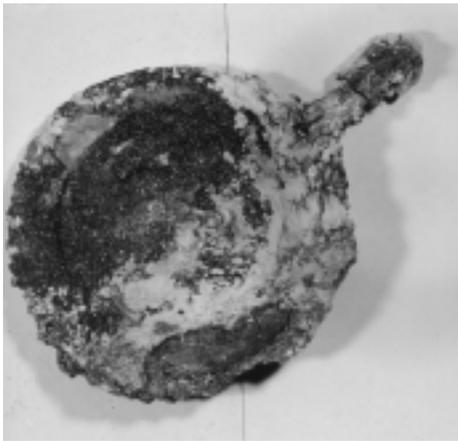


*Figure 7 - Gypsum statuette from the tomb of the Jawan girl*



*Figure 8 - The Alabaster "Venus of Jawan"*

The girl in this tomb had been wearing a garment, which was not preserved, held together at the right shoulder with two gold rings, and her hair was done up with another four gold rings, two to a side. In addition she was wearing a gold neck ring, from which hung a flat, round, gold pendant with inlaid garnets, and an elaborate ear-ring set consisting of the ear-rings proper, with a dangling pendant of gold and pearls, and linked with a narrow, flexible gold chain passing under her chin. Near the attachment the chain was provided with two tear-shaped ornaments with inlaid garnets. The pearls of the earring set were identified on the basis of the decomposed white powder.



*Left, figure 10 - Bronze mirror. Above, figure 9 - Bronze bowl, both found in the tomb of the Jawan girl*

The position of the beads found showed that the girl was wearing around her neck a necklace made of a variety of stones, garnets, carnelian, amethyst, onyx, and pearls, as well as a few gold beads of various shapes: bulbar, annular, mace-shaped, and two representing cowry shells. With the exception of one, all other pearls had been destroyed, but the remaining whitish powder could be identified. I have reconstructed both the ear-ring set and the necklace on the basis of the relative position of the beads, and with the help of artificial pearls, and where the garnets had been destroyed by the effects of time, I have replaced them with red plastic.

In addition to these ornaments the tomb contained an unidentified piece of animal bone. The clay over the central part of the skeleton was in some places stained purple. I suspected that these purple stains might be silver chloride, and subsequent laboratory analyses proved this to be the fact. We must therefore conclude that this girl was also provided with some silver ornaments, of which nothing but the purple stains had remained. Small pieces of purple colored metal could be fragments of finger rings. Near the head of the skeleton was a small (5 centimeters) bottle of paper-thin glass, of the familiar shape usually called tear-bottle, which was completely devitrified and broke upon drying.

## II. Conclusions

The facts now known, and the presence in Jawan of what appears to be a large village mound, seem to indicate that this was the site of an old settlement, perhaps of people engaged in trading and seafaring, possibly also in pearling and agriculture. We know nothing of their religion, but the presence of the statuettes, and of some of the animal bones probably used as amulets, suggest that they were pagans. Their trading seems to have brought them in contact with places as far as the Hellenistic west, and perhaps also Southwest Africa, India and Ceylon, as is shown by the beads and the ivory. The gold may or may not have been of Arab origin. The people of Jawan were closely allied in culture with the Parthian world, in which both Hellenistic and Roman elements were strong. It is possible that they were allied with, or in contact with the kingdom of Kharax Spasinou at the head of the Persian Gulf.

Considering the size and the beauty of the tomb building, it is very probable that this tomb contained the lords of the Jawan settlement. It is reasonable to believe that the interior of the tomb contained six members of the lord's family, and that, when the tomb was completed and the last member of the family buried, four attendants were killed and buried in the same place in order to accompany the lord's family in the after life. I believe that the two people buried with their swords were probably members of the chief's escort; the other male was probably a servant or a slave.

As for the girl, the fact that she too was killed seems to indicate that she was also a slave or servant, but the circumstance that she had been provided with so many ornaments leads me to believe that she was perhaps a favorite slave, the daughter of a slave and of a member of the chief's family, or perhaps the playmate of the chief's daughter. In any case she was probably quite a favorite in the lord's household.

Comparisons carried out with remains found elsewhere in the Middle East indicate that this tomb was probably built in the second century AD, that is, very roughly about 500 years before the beginning of Islam. It is of course to be regretted that the grave robbers of antiquity, as they have done in so many tombs throughout the Middle East, destroying and removing the entire contents of the main building, have prevented us from getting a more accurate date. To judge from the contents of the servants' tombs, the interior must have been provided with a great deal of tomb furniture that would have been better datable. Subsequent archaeological work in this area will probably give us a more exact date for this tomb as well as a reliable chronology for the history of this part of Arabia in the centuries before Islam.

### III. Conservation

After completion of the fieldwork the entire mound surrounding the tomb was removed, and the building was enclosed with a steel fence provided with a door at the western end. The key to this door is submitted with this report. The material uncovered has all been measured, treated for preservation, photographed, and classified. It is ready for disposition as the Saudi Arab Government may direct.



*The Jawan Chamber Tomb after complete removal of the mound, which gives a fair idea of what the site looked like when it was originally constructed.*