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Brief notice on a possible early 4th-c. church at ^oAqaba, Jordan

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Introduction

The Roman Aqaba Project is examining the economy of ancient Aila, one of the international ports of the Roman empire. Four seasons have been conducted between 1994 and 1998. The ancient site of Aila (fig. 1) now lies within the modern city of ^oAqaba in Jordan on the Gulf of ^oAqaba, an arm of the Red Sea. The project consists of both a regional survey (Smith and Niemi 1994; Smith, Stevens and Niemi 1997) and an excavation (Parker 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1998).

During the first season in 1994, excavation began to reveal a monumental mudbrick structure in a vacant lot within the modern city. Further excavation in 1996 led to the suggestion that it might be a church. More of the structure was exposed in 1997 and 1998. By the end of the latter season a plan of the building had been largely delineated and dating evidence for construction had been obtained from two deep probes against primary walls. The evidence suggested that the structure was an early church, and this interpretation was reported to the news media. Although analysis of the results from this excavation is still at an early stage and further excavation is planned, the interest generated by this announcement resulted in a request by the editor of *JRA* for a brief interim report on the find. A more detailed description and analysis will be forthcoming.



Fig. 2. Aerial photograph of Areas A and J. The cemetery (Area A) lies in the foreground. Across the modern street is the church (Area J). To the right of the church is the Byzantine city wall with its projecting rectangular tower (now partly restored). Another long segment of the city wall is also visible in the lower right of the photo, to the right of the cemetery in Area A. View to east (Kim Cavanagh).