

## MADABA PLAINS PROJECT—TALL AL-<sup>c</sup>UMAYRI, 2004

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### *Introduction*

A tenth season of excavation by the Madaba Plains Project—<sup>c</sup>Umayri occurred between June 23 and August 4, 2004 at Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri, located about 10 km south of Amman's Seventh Circle on the Queen Alia Airport Highway at the turnoff for Amman National Park (Map 1). The project was sponsored by La Sierra University, in consortium with Andrews University School of Architecture, Canadian University College, Mount Royal College, Pacific Union College, and Walla Walla College.<sup>1</sup> This season, a team of twenty-six Jordanians and forty-four foreigners, primarily from the United States, took part in the interdisciplinary project.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Previous reports in *AUSS* include Lawrence T. Geraty, "The Andrews University Madaba Plains Project: A Preliminary Report on the First Season at Tell el-<sup>c</sup>Umeiri," *AUSS* 23 (1985): 85-110; Lawrence T. Geraty, Larry G. Herr, and Øystein S. LaBianca, "The Joint Madaba Plains Project: A Preliminary Report on the Second Season at Tell el-<sup>c</sup>Umeiri and Vicinity (June 18 to August 6, 1987)," *AUSS* 26 (1988): 217-252; Randall W. Younker, Lawrence T. Geraty, Larry G. Herr, and Øystein S. LaBianca, "The Joint Madaba Plains Project: A Preliminary Report of the 1989 Season, Including the Regional Survey and Excavations at El-Dreijat, Tell Jawa, and Tell el-<sup>c</sup>Umeiri (June 19 to August 8, 1989)," *AUSS* 28 (1990): 5-52; Randall W. Younker, Lawrence T. Geraty, Larry G. Herr, and Øystein S. LaBianca, "The Joint Madaba Plains Project: A Preliminary Report of the 1992 Season, Including the Regional Survey and Excavations at Tell Jalul and Tell El-<sup>c</sup>Umeiri (June 16 to July 31, 1992)," *AUSS* 31 (1993): 205-238; Randall W. Younker, Lawrence T. Geraty, Larry G. Herr, Øystein S. LaBianca, and Douglas R. Clark, "Preliminary Report of the 1994 Season of the Madaba Plains Project: Regional Survey, Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri and Tall Jalul Excavations (June 15 to July 30, 1994)," *AUSS* 34 (1996): 65-92; Randall W. Younker, Lawrence T. Geraty, Larry G. Herr, Øystein S. LaBianca, and Douglas R. Clark, "Preliminary Report of the 1996 Season of the Madaba Plains Project: Regional Survey, Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri and Tall Jalul Excavations," *AUSS* 35 (1997): 227-240; Larry G. Herr, Douglas R. Clark, Lawrence T. Geraty, and Øystein S. LaBianca, "Madaba Plains Project: Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri, 1998," *AUSS* 38 (2000): 29-44; Larry G. Herr, Douglas R. Clark, and Warren C. Trenchard, "Madaba Plains Project: Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri, 2000," *AUSS* 40 (2002): 105-123; Larry G. Herr and Douglas R. Clark, "Madaba Plains Project—Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri, 2002," *AUSS* 42 (2004): 113-128.

<sup>2</sup>The authors of this report are especially indebted to Dr. Fawwaz el-Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities; Aktham Oweidi and Samia Khouri, Department of Antiquities representatives; and other members of the Department of Antiquities, who facilitated our project at several junctures. The American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, directed by Pierre Bikai and assisted by Patricia Bikai, provided invaluable assistance. The staff was housed in Muqabilayn at the Amman

During the 2004 season, the team worked in four fields of excavation, primarily at the western edge of the site (Fields A, B, and H), but also at the southern lip (Field L) (Map 2). Excavation centered on several time periods. First, we continued to clear three rooms of the major Late Bronze Age building in Field B dating from ca. 1400-1225 B.C.; however, because the walls were so high we did not reach the floor of the building. In previous seasons, we were able to fully excavate the two southern rooms of the structure. This season, we discovered a unique cultic niche in one of the walls. Second, we discovered what appears to be the northern perimeter wall of the early Iron Age 1 (ca. 1200 B.C.) along the top of the northern slope. Third, we cleared Iron 2 remains (ca. 600 B.C.) in order to reach the Iron 1 buildings in Field A, located west of the Iron 2 Ammonite administrative complex. Fourth, we hoped that excavations in the southern part of Field A would discover a possible gate into the city at the Iron I level. Fifth, we sought to expand our view of the open-air sanctuary courtyard, complete with cobblestones and plaster, which is located in Field H and dates from the late Iron I period (ca. 1100 B.C.). Sixth, we wanted to expand our exposure of the Hellenistic agricultural complex in Field L and fully excavate it to Iron 2 levels. This report will describe the results of this season's dig and interpret the finds from each field.

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Training College, an UNWRA vocational college for Palestinians. We give special thanks to its Principal, Dr. Saleh Naji for making our stay a genuine pleasure. Mabada Plains Project—<sup>c</sup>Umayri provided a new high-speed internet server for the computer lab. The Committee on Archaeological Policy of the American Schools of Oriental Research approved the scientific goals and procedures of the project.

The authors wish to thank each member of the staff. The field supervisors included John Lawlor of Grand Rapids Theological Seminary (Field A), Kent Bramlett of Walla Walla College (Field B), David Berge of Portland, Oregon (Field H), and David Hopkins of Wesley Theological Seminary and Mary Boyd of Coupeville Methodist Church (Field L). Square Supervisors for Field A were Brenda Adams, Gary Arbino, Christine Shaw, and John McDowell, who were assisted by Andrew Curtis, Audrey Shafer, Myron Widmer, Myken McDowell, and Ralph Kneller. Square Supervisors for Field B were Ellen Bedell, Shawne Hansen, John Raab, Carolyn Waldron, and Janelle Worthington, who were assisted by Matt Vincent, Monique Acosta, Janelle Lacey, Daniel Hantman, and Juliette Syamando. Square Supervisors for Field H were Marcin Czarnowicz, Andrea DeGagne, and Don Mook, who were assisted by Larry Murrin, Kristy Huber, and Magdalena Kamionka. Square Supervisors for Field L were Ruth Kent and Megan Owens, who were assisted by Tony Sears, Greg Kremer, Noni Zachri, and William Fitzhugh. Camp staff and specialists included Karen Borstad (object registrar), Denise Herr (pottery registrar), Larry Murrin (computers), Myron Widmer and John McDowell (photography), Elzbieta Dubis (artist), and Muhammad Ahmari (head cook). Iyad Sweileh again served as our camp agent. Laundry technicians at ATC washed our clothes once a week. Andrew Curtis was our emergency-medical person, assisted by Nurse Caroline Waldron.

*Field A: West of the Administrative Complex*

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Previous seasons of excavation in Field A on the western side of the site have uncovered an impressive administrative complex<sup>3</sup> belonging to the Ammonite kingdom during the end of the Iron 2 period and the beginning of the Persian period, when it was incorporated into the Persian Empire (ca. 600-400 B.C.). Scores of seals and seal impressions give evidence of the administrative/bureaucratic nature of the structures. Associated private houses to the north and south of the administrative complex probably housed the officials who seem to have administered a series of rural farms for the production of wine.<sup>4</sup>

Field A also produced several phases of Iron 1 remains (ca. 1200-1000 B.C.) beneath the ruins of the administrative complex, with the most notable structures dating from the earliest decades of the Iron 1 period, ca 1200 B.C. These earlier buildings were located to the north and west of the later administrative complex. This season, the team removed the westernmost walls of the administrative complex (the least important and most ephemeral parts) to expose the Iron 1 phases. The ultimate goal is to uncover a larger portion of the early Iron 1 remains, which are so remarkable farther to the north in Field B. Two well-preserved houses from this time period were excavated, which produced a wealth of finds that contribute to our understanding of the biblical period of the judges.<sup>5</sup>

The area where more Iron 1 remains will be excavated in the future is north of the curving perimeter wall as it curves into the city, possibly forming the northern side of a gate or entryway into the city (Map 3). Excavation of this area will double our present exposure of the early Iron 1 period. We began the process of excavation this season by exposing parts of three phases of Iron 1. But the earliest phase has so far eluded us and must await further excavation next season. However, typical Iron 1 domestic architecture, characterized by flagstone pavements and pillar bases, was encountered (Figure 1). Parts of two houses abutted the curving perimeter wall, but no finds were made on the surfaces and not enough was excavated to be certain of the overall plan of the two buildings. Entryways seem to have led into the houses from a street running along the north side of the houses. A large broken store jar called a *pitthos*, dating from the end of the Iron 1 period, was found on a floor, which was similar to eighteen others found in a nearby storeroom during an earlier season.<sup>6</sup>

The Iron 1 walls were partially reused and readapted throughout the Iron 2

<sup>3</sup>Younker, Herr, Geraty, and LaBianca, 1993, Plate 14.

<sup>4</sup>L. G. Herr, "Wine Production in the Hills of Southern Ammon and the Founding of Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri in the Sixth Century B.C.," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 39 (1995): 121-125.

<sup>5</sup>Herr, Clark, and Trenchard, 2002, Figures 3-5.

<sup>6</sup>Younker, Geraty, Herr, LaBianca, and Clark, 240.

history of the site as the Ammonite administrative complex was built and rebuilt. The reuse of the administrative structure during its last phases, dating to the Persian period, was most likely domestic. Many of the doors were blocked and new walls were constructed, but without the sense of strength and care used in the initial construction. The need for the administrative function of the site seems to have slowly abated until the site was abandoned around 400 B.C. Only limited occupation existed at the site after the Persian period.

*Field B: The Late Bronze Age Cultic  
Building and Later Structures*

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Walla Walla College

One of the initial aims of the Andrews University Expedition to Heshbon in the 1960s and 1970s was to discover the Amorite city of Sihon, mentioned in Numbers 21. But Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550-1200 B.C.) remains at Tall Hisban (biblical Heshbon) were never found. Indeed, remains from the period are rare everywhere in Jordan, especially in the central and southern parts of the country. Therefore, we were surprised in 1998 to discover two rooms of a monumental building that contained nothing later than Late Bronze pottery in Field B, the area at the northwestern corner of the site.<sup>7</sup>

The primary objective for Field B excavations this season focused on deepening excavation in the northern parts of this Late Bronze building and to discover the northern limits of the building and the site. The team opened two new squares north of our previous excavations and reopened three other squares. We already knew the building was an important structure: its thick walls, large rooms, and tall walls (more than 3 m in places) suggested it was an ancient palace—typical structures of society in the Late Bronze Age (Map 4).

The building remains are now mostly clear, with two previously excavated rooms in the south and three new ones in the north (Figures 2-3). The northern wall of the structure has also been discovered. The central room of the northern part of the building is the largest (3.5 x 8 m), with two broad rooms flanking it on the east and west. A doorway leads into the central room from the eastern room. Because no exterior doorways have so far been discovered, the northeastern corner of the eastern room must be where the main entrance to the building is located.

Behind the central room to the west there is another narrow room, but a doorway to it has not yet been discovered. The floor in this western room is higher than in the other rooms in the building, probably because the Middle Bronze Age rampart was high at this location. In this room, we found objects related to religious practices, including a painted goblet<sup>8</sup> and crude, unfired clay figurines. The room may have functioned as a *favissa*, a place to store votive

<sup>7</sup>Herr, Clark, and Trenchard, 118, Figures 6-7.

<sup>8</sup>Herr and Clark, 2004, 124, Figure 7.

objects. We have not yet discovered the floors of the central and eastern rooms.

The discovery of a cultic niche in the western wall of the central room was the prize find of the season (Figure 4). Cut out of the brick wall and coated with thin plaster or whitewash, the niche contained five natural limestone standing stones securely set into a stepped layer of thick plaster. The stones were, most likely, chosen for their natural oval or circular shapes and interesting solution deposits. The center stone was the largest, with a unique “domed” top. It was flanked by four smaller stones, two on each side, with the smaller stone toward the edge of the group. The stone at the far right was a chert nodule with solution deposits in interesting shapes (Figure 5). Standing stones usually represent deities, but no indication has been discovered thus far to identify the gods in this particular group. Of interest is the height of the niche above the floor. Because we have not yet discovered the floor, we do not know its exact height, but based on our present level of excavation it is located at least a meter above the floor. Most groups of standing stones are at ground or floor level. Was this niche placed higher in the wall to raise the sight line of the worshiper? Ancient depictions of people praying usually show them with eyes open and uplifted heads.

Several pieces of pottery were stacked on top of the stones at the right of the niche, probably laid there as votive gifts (Figure 6). The assemblage consisted of parts of four lamps, a complete small carinated bowl; a chalice with a broken, flared rim; and on the lower step, a large carinated bowl. There was no sign of a sacrificial altar and the niche may only have functioned as a votive shrine. Although earlier dig reports used the word “temple” to describe this building,<sup>9</sup> we should probably see the building as a palace, with a room dedicated to cultic use. However, as the niche is located in the largest room, it does seem to be the focal point of the building. Finds on the floor of the room, to be discovered next season, may provide more clarification.

The identity of the people who built the structure and worshiped at the cultic niche is still uncertain, although we believe that the Amorites are the best possibility. But so far there is no archaeological indication for this conclusion. Is it possible that the occupants could have been the people whom the Bible mentions as being ruled by Sihon of Heshbon (Numbers 21)? The pottery found within the fills of the building probably originated from the bricks of the destroyed upper parts of the building and most likely dates to the Late Bronze 2 period (ca. 1400-1200 B.C.). This ceramic evidence thus dates the construction of the palace.

On top of this building remains complete with pillars and beaten-earth floors were found, that date from the late Iron 2/Persian periods (the seventh to sixth centuries B.C.). Many of these remains were found in previous seasons<sup>10</sup> and probably belonged to at least one house. The culture at that time was Ammonite.

<sup>9</sup>Christine Shaw, “Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri,” *Jordan Times Weekender* (September 17, 2004): 4.

<sup>10</sup>Herr and Clark, 2004, 125, Figure 9.

*Field H: Courtyard Sanctuary and Possible Gate*

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Field H, located at the southwestern corner of the site, was originally laid out to unearth the southern part of the large Ammonite administrative complex from the end of the Iron 2 period in Field A. This was largely accomplished in previous seasons. The major research questions this season revolved around a high-quality cobble-and-plaster floor discovered in a large room, dating to the late Iron 1 and early Iron 2 periods (ca. 1100-800 B.C.) (Figure 7).

This season, the team removed several later walls to expose the full extent of the well-laid cobble-and-plaster floor of an eleventh-century courtyard, which measured 6.5 x 10.5 m in size. Because of later deep construction farther north in the Ammonite administrative complex (at the far right of the photo in Figure 7), we are not certain that we have found the northern limit of the full structure. But it does appear that we have uncovered the northern limit of the courtyard. There are no signs of doorways into other rooms to the north.

Although no cultic objects were found on this floor, later floors in the same space have produced several model shrines,<sup>11</sup> figurines, statue fragments, and pottery forms usually associated with shrines. There were also heavy concentrations of burning, which suggest that the space functioned as an open-air sanctuary or shrine. It should be noted, however, that we have found no evidence of an altar for burning sacrifices nor burned animal bones. The sanctuary may have functioned more for the presentation of gifts that were not burned, saving burning activities for sacrificial sites outside the settlement, such as the high places known from the Bible (1 Sam 9). In the middle of the pavement, a large stone was found, which was laid before the cobbles were installed. It is possible that this stone was an altar of presentation for votive gifts. It is too far from the walls to have functioned as a pillar base.

Two annexed rooms were located on the south of the courtyard (left in Figure 7). No remains were found on the floors, but they may have held stores or offerings associated with the courtyard sanctuary.

A later phase, probably dating from the tenth century B.C., saw a slight reduction in the dimensions of the north section of the courtyard and an enlargement in the southwest, where a beaten-earth surface rose over the cobbles into an annexed area. An extra wall, comprised of five large stones was added to the northern wall of the courtyard (Figure 8). On the floors of this version of the courtyard sanctuary, fragments of model shrines were found in the 2000 and 2002 seasons.

As we discovered in earlier seasons, after a hiatus in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., the space was again used during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., possibly in a similar fashion to the earlier phases, but no indication of cultic use was found. The space was paved with a series of plaster floors, one on top of the other as repairs to the floor were made. In the later Persian-period phase,

<sup>11</sup>Herr and Clark, 2002, Figures 12 and 14.

a large *pithos* was embedded into the floors in the middle of the courtyard, perhaps to receive offerings.

*Field L: The Southern Edge*

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*The Hellenistic Farmstead*

We continued work at the southern edge of the site, exploring the Hellenistic farmstead and the remains below it (Map 2). Excavations began here in 1998, with three squares and the remains of a Hellenistic structure on top of Iron Age buildings and surfaces. The farmstead's only location on the site where architectural remains from this time period have thus far been found. This season, we opened one new square, deepened three others, and removed several balks between squares. Our specific goals were to discover the limits of the Hellenistic structure, and to clarify and positively date massive wall fragments under the Hellenistic structure that seemed to be Iron 1. We also wanted to understand the Late Iron 2 structures.

Previously, the most extensive Iron 1 remains in Field L emerged 5 m downslope (south) and parallel to the lip of the site. This season, we were able to confirm that the large walls, built of massive stones (some 1.5 m long), did indeed date to the Iron 1 period, although we are not certain of a specific date within that period. The wall remains suggest a building of at least two rooms (Figure 9—note that the walls with smaller stones in the photo belong to the Hellenistic period). Surprisingly, walls of this size and masonry have not been found elsewhere on the site, even though large exposures of excellently preserved Iron 1 remains were discovered in Fields A, B, F, and H. Only one Iron 1 wall fragment in Field A approaches this construction style.

We have not yet been able to determine if these large structures infer a social context different from that in the other fields. But structures like this do not seem to fit the relatively primitive social structures most highland Iron 1 sites seem to suggest. However, it fits with the significant labor and care that inhabitants at the site invested in the Field B fortification system—the most heavily fortified highland site from the Iron 1 period in all of the Holy Land. Apparently, Tall al-<sup>c</sup>Umayri was an important site during the period of the biblical judges.

Our work this season reduced the importance of the late Iron 2/Persian period in our field. Previously, we stated that many of the Hellenistic walls were founded on walls originally built during the late Iron 2/Persian period.<sup>12</sup> However, our work this season discovered unequivocal evidence that these walls are Hellenistic in origin. Few structural remains are left of the Iron 2 period. Field L seems to have been weakly settled at this time, while other parts of the site (Fields A, B, H, and F) contain important construction.

<sup>12</sup>Herr and Clark, 2004, 119.

We must now divide the Hellenistic phasing into Phase 3A and 3B. The later phase saw the addition of bins, the blocking of doorways, and the construction of secondary phases of walls. It also means that our farmstead probably existed for most of the Hellenistic period.

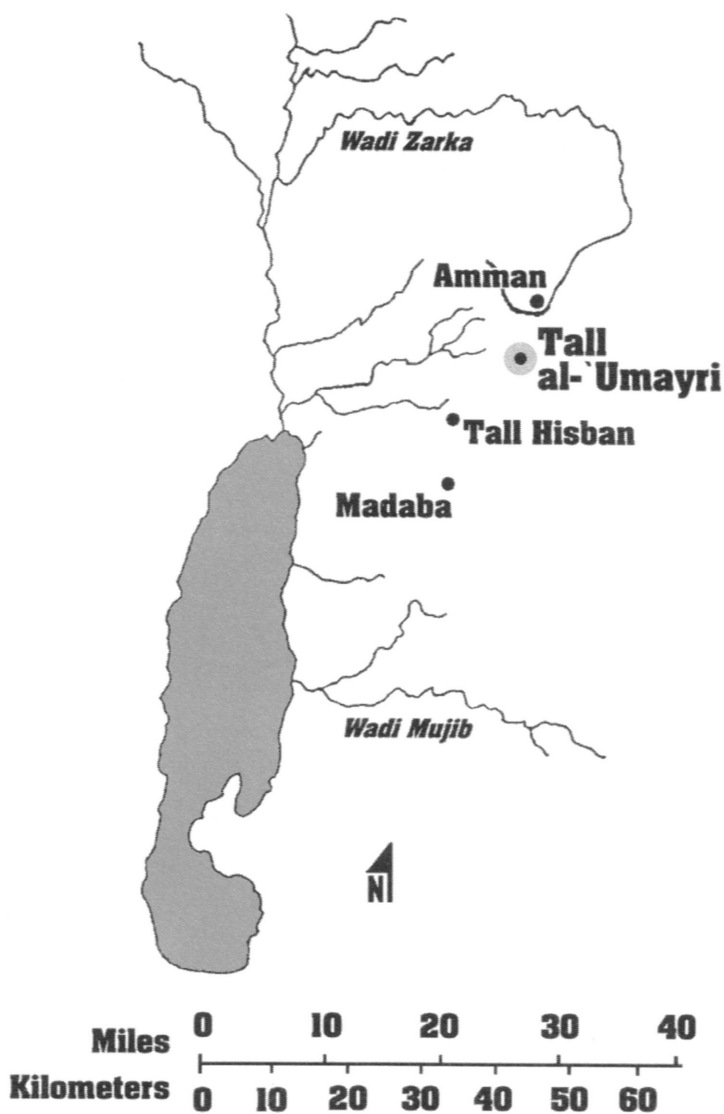
We have now uncovered most of the Hellenistic structure along with an extensive plaster surface and finds on the surface (Figure 10), including many handmade juglets that reflect a rather limited, poor, and rural settlement. The few simple coins that have been found do not change this overall assessment. The building itself was divided into two major parts, divided by a north-south wall (Figure 9).

#### *Persian-Period <sup>c</sup>Ammon Seal Impression*

We discovered the fifth Persian-period <sup>c</sup>Ammon seal impression this season in Field B, Square 8K10, Locus 2 (sub-topsoil) (Figure 11). It was on the upper part of a jar handle. As with the four earlier seals,<sup>13</sup> it contained a personal name in one of the registers and the word <sup>c</sup>Ammon in the other. In this impression, the top line carries the Ammonite personal name <sup>ʔ</sup>ʕr, but the script is an Aramaic type that is best dated to approximately the sixth to fifth centuries B.C. These seal impressions were part of the economic world of the Province of Ammon during the Persian Empire. The personal name could have belonged to the chancellor or the governor.

<sup>13</sup>Herr and Clark, 253, 263, 265, 275.

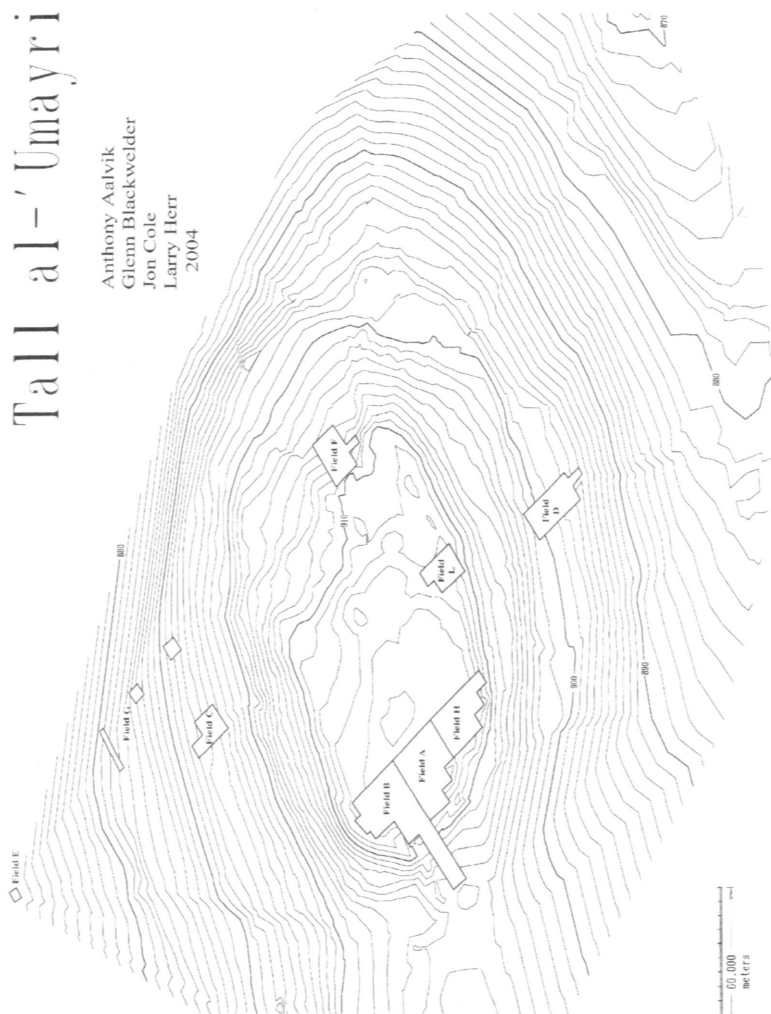




Map 1. Regional map of the Madaba Plains Project.

# Tall al-'Umayri

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2004



Map 2. Topographic map of Tall al-'Umayri through the 2004 season.



**Map 3.** Field A: Plan of the Iron 1 perimeter wall and associated houses of early Iron 1 in Phase 11.



Map 4. Field B: Plan of the Late Bronze Age palace.



Figure 1. Field A: Iron 1 flagstone floor with a pillar base near a doorway.



Figure 2. Field B: View of the Late Bronze Age palace from the east.



Figure 3. Field B: View of the Late Bronze Age palace from the north.



Figure 4. Field B: The cultic niche in Room 3 of the Late Bronze Age palace.



Figure 5. Field B: Closeup of the chert nodule with natural solution deposits.



Figure 6. Field B: The cultic niche with pottery vessels *in situ*.



**Figure 7.** The cobbled courtyard sanctuary from the east with the earliest pavement thus far discovered.



**Figure 8.** Field H: The cobbled courtyard sanctuary in its second phase.





Figure 9. Field L: Overview of Field L at the end of the season.



Figure 10. Field L: Fragment of a fine plaster surface from the Hellenistic period.



**Figure 11.** Field B: Person-period seal of the Province of Ammon with a personal name.