

Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 51, No. 1, 89-119.
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MADABA PLAINS PROJECT— TALL AL-‘UMAYRI, 2008

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Introduction

A twelfth season of excavation by the Madaba Plains Project occurred between June 25 and July 30, 2008 at Tall al-‘Umayri, located about 12 km south of Amman’s Seventh Circle on the Queen Alia Airport Highway at the turnoff for Amman National Park (**Map 1**). It was sponsored by La Sierra University in consortium with Andrews University School of Architecture, Canadian University College, Mount Royal College, and Walla Walla University.¹ This season, a team of 34 Jordanians and 96 foreigners (18 of whom were present

¹Previous reports in *AUSS* include Lawrence T. Geraty, “The Andrews University Madaba Plains Project: A Preliminary Report on the First Season at Tell el-‘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-‘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-Dreijjat, Tell Jawa, and Tell el-‘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-‘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-‘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-‘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-‘Umayri, 1998,” *AUSS* 38 (2000): 29-44; Larry G. Herr, Douglas R. Clark, and Warren C. Trenchard, “Madaba Plains Project: Tall al-‘Umayri, 2000,” *AUSS* 40 (2002): 105-123; Larry G. Herr and Douglas R. Clark, “Madaba Plains Project—Tall al-‘Umayri, 2002,” *AUSS* 42 (2004): 113-128; Larry G. Herr and Douglas R. Clark, “Madaba Plains Project—Tall al-‘Umayri, 2004,” *AUSS* 43: 229-246; Larry G. Herr and Douglas R. Clark, “Madaba Plains Project—Tall al-‘Umayri, 2006,” *AUSS* 46: 65-81.

during the first or second half) participated in the fieldwork and camp activities of the interdisciplinary project.²

²The authors of this report are especially indebted to Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities; Romel Gharid and Husam Hejazeen, Department of Antiquities representatives and other members of the Department of Antiquities and the Madaba Museum who facilitated our project at several junctures. The American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, directed by Barbara Porter and assisted by Christopher Tuttle, provided invaluable assistance. The staff was housed in Muqabalayn at the Amman Training College, an UNWRA vocational college for Palestinians. We give special thanks to its Principal, Dr. Khalid Abu-Alhayja, for making our safe and secure stay a genuine pleasure, to Vice Principal Hussam Shahroor, and to our cook, Muhammad Ahmaru. Vickie Khano of Guiding Star Travel Agency helped with many logistical concerns. 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 Robert Bates of La Sierra University (Field A), Kent Bramlett of the University of Toronto (Fields B and N), Monique Vincent of the University of Chicago (Field H), Elzbieta Dubis of Krakow, Poland (Field K), David Hopkins of Wesley Theological Seminary and Mary Boyd of Seattle, Washington (Field L), and Aren S. LaBianca of Andrews University (Field M). Square Supervisors for Field A were Brenda Adams, Stephanie Brown, Aaron Davis, Steve Salcido and Anneliese Weiss; they were assisted by Kemi Adedokun, Kasey Brandt, Megan Channer, Teagen Johnson, Jessica Logan, Amanda Marquez, Natasha Plantak, Audrey Shaffer, Faith Stevens, Eli Te, and Christa Watson. Square Supervisors for Fields B and N were Ellen Bedell, Gary Huffaker, Lindsey Hill, Bethany Reiswig, Matt Vincent, and Carolyn Waldron; they were assisted by Leyna Ely, Jim Fisher, Kari Friestad, Garrick Herr, Stephanie Herr, Darren Heslop, Erich Huffaker, Steven Huffaker, Danielle Huffaker, Rachelle Mutch, and Janelle Worthington. Square Supervisors for Field H were Julie Cormack, Jeanne DelColle, Ivan LaBianca, and Rob Saley; they were assisted by Talea Anderson, Jennifer Bernhardt, Stefanie Elkins, Rebekah Gauthier, Alice Holinger, Kaitlyn Kramer, Don Mook, Larry Murrin, and Bethany Melendy. Square Supervisor for Field K was Marzena Daszevska; she was assisted by Ewa Daszevska, Grazyna Svoboda-Wilk, and Remigiusz Wilk; Square Supervisors for Field L were Patricia Abell, Billy Fitzhugh, Ruth Kent, and Martha Rose; they were assisted by Slava Bouz, Heather Hartman, William Hawkins, Julia Piper, Frankie Revell, Kerry Revell, Rebecca Richards, Ciro Sepulveda, and Gloria Sepulveda. Square Supervisors for Field M were Elizabeth Brown, Sean Haskell, Autumn Whiteway, and Lloyd Willis; they were assisted by Jimmy Arsenault, Jennifer Ayles, Lynn Fulton, Jenna Hurtubise, Evelyn Laurie, Elinor Matthews, Merle Otto-Steenbergen, and Dana Waters. Camp staff and specialists included Suha Huffaker (object registrar), Denise Herr (pottery registrar and notebook quality control), Gloria London (ceramic technology), Larry Murrin (computers), Rhonda Root, Stefanie Elkins, and Kari Friestad (artists), Gary Huffaker (physician), Carolyn Waldron (nurse), Darren Heslop (object photography), David Sherwin, Marc Ullam, and Sharon Ullam (photography), Jason Daub and Jonathan Betz (videography), Muhammad Ahmaru (head cook), Christina Daltoso, and, during the last two weeks, Angela von den Driesch and Nadja Pölath. Laundry technicians at ATC washed our clothes once a week.

During the 2008 season, the team worked in five fields that had been dug previously (Fields A, B, H, K, and L). Two other fields were newly opened (Fields M and N) (**Map 2**). Field M is a major new field to the east of Field H. Its ultimate goal is to connect Field H with Field L at the southern edge of the site. Field N was a small square immediately east of Field B in front of the entrance to the Late Bronze Age building of Stratum 14.

After twelve seasons of excavation twenty-one settlements or strata were discovered, their time periods stretching from the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3000 B.C.) to modern times, though the major periods are the Bronze and Iron Ages (about 3000 to 500 B.C.). The stratigraphy chart (**Chart 1**) illustrates these levels of settlements with periods of nonoccupation (a hiatus) at times between occupation levels.

Excavation centered on several time periods. First, after several years of no work in Field K, the Early Bronze Age dolmen from ca. 3000 B.C., located near the bottom of the southeastern slope of the site, once again saw action.

Second, the excavation of the major Late Bronze Age building (a palace or a temple dating from ca. 1400-1250 B.C.) was completed. The floors in all rooms were reached and the complete monumental entry into the building on the eastern side in Field N was uncovered.

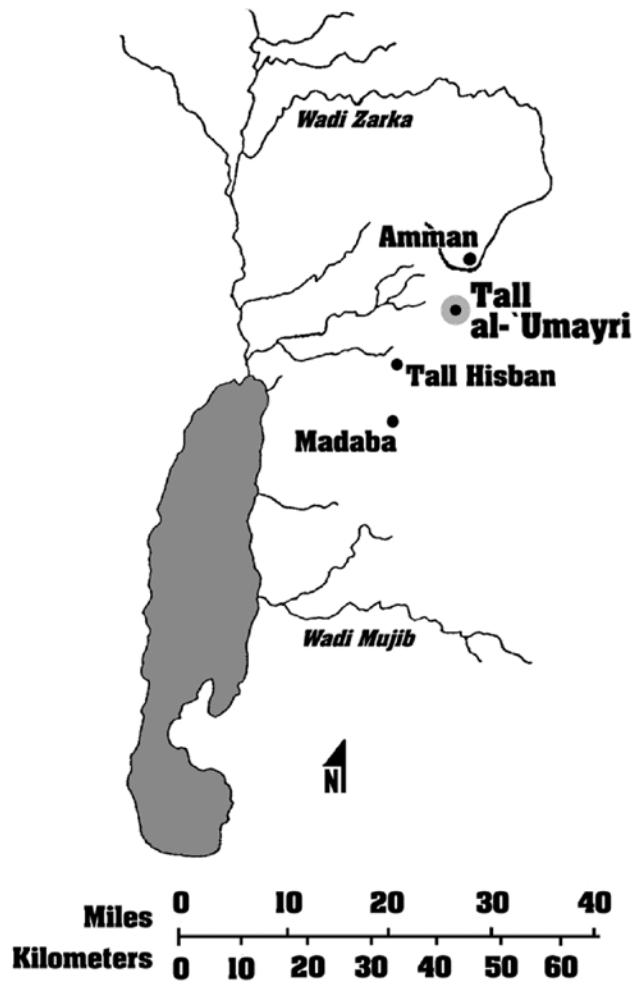
Third, the Late Bronze/Iron 1 transitional period was once again the focus of activity in Field A, as excavation began on a third house dated from the very beginning of the period (ca. 1200 B.C.). As was true of the two houses unearthed previously, hundreds of broken pottery sherds suggesting the presence of scores of large store jars in the house. In Field H, the team also sought to expose Late Bronze/Iron 1 levels, as the late Iron 1 destruction debris (ca. eleventh century B.C.) was removed. We are poised to uncover a large area of early Iron 1 finds in this location of the southwestern corner of the site. In Field L, we were able to confirm the tentative Iron 1 date of the large walls made of huge boulders that were found in previous seasons.

Fourth, Field A produced the first architectural remains of a house from the Iron 2B period (ninth and eighth centuries B.C.). Several rooms of the house were uncovered, but we are as yet uncertain of the complete plan of the house. However, the floors produced a significant amount of pottery and we can begin to tell the story of the period at the site for the first time.

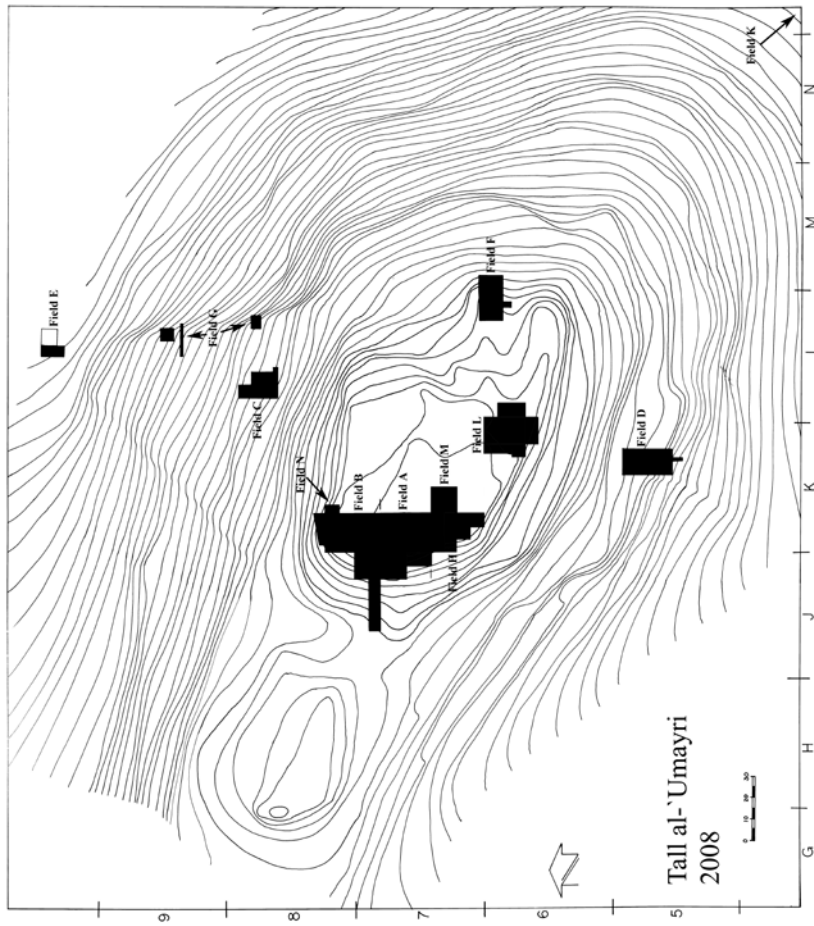
Fifth, walls from the end of the Iron 2 and Persian periods (the late seventh or early sixth to fifth centuries B.C.) began to emerge in Field M. They were probably related to the Ammonite administrative complex discovered in previous seasons in Fields A and H to the west, but the initial finds suggest domestic occupation rather than official government activities. However, the eastern part of the field produced few finds from this period and seems to proceed straight to fill layers of the Iron 2B period. Domestic wall fragments from the late Iron 2/Persian periods also were found in Field L.

Sixth, in Field L, finds from the Hellenistic farmstead discovered in earlier seasons seem to have slowed down as we progressed both east and west this season. We thus seem to have discovered the extent of this farmstead. This period is not represented significantly in other parts of the site.

We will describe our results and interpret the finds below field by field using our new stratification system to describe the site-wide levels of settlement (**Chart 1**).



Map 1. Regional map of the Madaba Plains Project. (Unless other noted, all drawings and photographs are property of the Madaba Plains Project—Umayri).



Map 2. Topographic map of Tall al-'Umayri through the 2008 season.

Chat 1. The Stratigraphy of Tall al-'Umayri After Twelve Seasons of Excavation

| Stratum | Date | Fields | Findings |
|---------|---------------|-------------|---|
| | Neolithic | E&W slopes | Flint scatters |
| | Chalcolithic? | East valley | Sherds on surface |
| Hiatus | EB 1A | | No remains so far |
| 21 | EB 1B | K | Dolmen and associated surfaces |
| 20 | EB 2 | D | Wall fragments above bedrock |
| 19 | EB 3 | CDG | Houses & streets on terraces on S & N slopes |
| 18 | EB 4 | D | Ephemeral one-room houses widely separated |
| 17 | EB 4 | D | Small walls of cobbles, perhaps animal pens |
| Hiatus | EB 4-MB 2A-B | | No remains so far; cemetery east of the airport highway |
| 16 | MB 2C | BC | Sherds in Field B rampart; wall frags & floors in Field C |
| 15 | MB 2C | BCK | Moat, rampart & wall frags in Field B; wall frags & floors in Field C; cave tomb in Field K |
| Hiatus? | LB 1 | | No clear remains so far |
| 14 | LB 2 | BF | Palace/temple in Field B; terrace wall in Field F |
| 13 | LB/Iron 1 | B | Sherds in Field B rampart |

| | | | |
|---------|--------------|-----------|--|
| 12 | LB/Iron 1 | ABFH(L?) | Perimeter wall, gate & houses in Fields A, B, & H; walls frags in Field F; large stone walls in Field L? |
| Hiatus | Iron 1A | | Significant typological difference between pottery of Strata 12 and 11 |
| 11 | Iron 1B | AH | Wall frags above Str 12 destruction in Field A; wall frags in Fields H |
| 10 | Iron 1B | AH | House with rooms & floors in Field A; lowest courtyard sanctuary in Field H |
| 9 | Iron 2A | ABH | Few red-slipped, hand-burnished sherds; poss continuation of courtyard sanctuary in Field H |
| 8 | Iron 2B | A | House in Field A with pottery of the late 9th to 8th centuries |
| 7 | L Iron 2/Per | ABCFHHL | Administrative complex & houses in Fields A, B, C, F, & L; well in Field E; sanctuary in Field H |
| 6 | L Iron 2/Per | AH | Major changes to administrative complex in Field A; houses in Field B; sanctuary in Field H |
| 5 | Per | AH | Prob domestic wall frags in Field A; poss continuation of sanctuary in Field H; Persian provincial seals |
| Hiatus | Late Per | | No remains so far; poss also very early Hel |
| 4 | Hel | HCLK | Pits in Field H; farmstead in Field L; tomb with Greek inscription in Field K |
| 3 | ER | AB | Ritual pool was prob part of a farmstead or villa |
| Hiatus? | LR | H | One pot found outside the settlement |
| 2 | Byz | F | Farmstead wall fragments and pottery |
| 1 | Islamic | ABCDEFHHL | A few sherds in topsoil represent agricultural activity: Early Islamic, Middle Islamic, Late Islamic, Modern |

Field A: Fortifications and Houses

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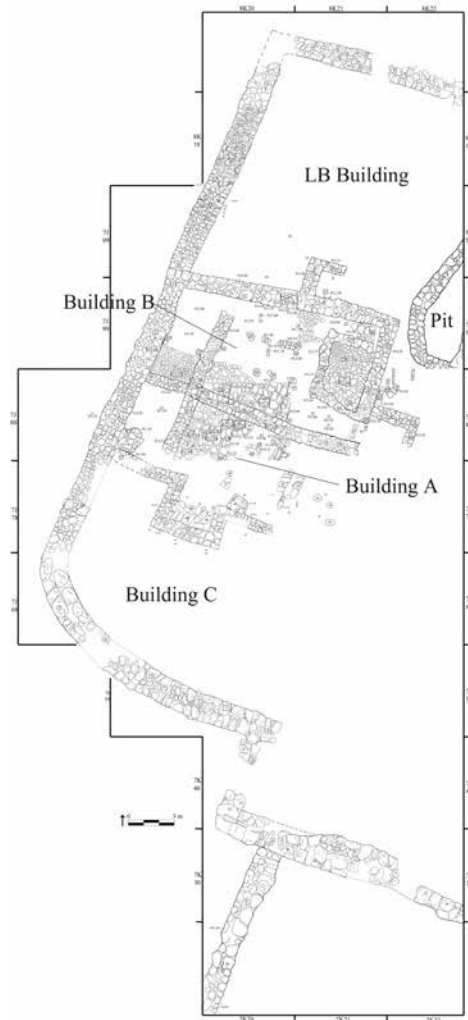
Field A is located at the central western edge of the site (**Map 2**). Ten previous seasons in Field A (the field was not excavated during the 2002 season) had discovered a large administrative complex dating from the end of the Iron 2 period to the Persian period (ca. 600-450 B.C.). Domestic dwellings, perhaps belonging to the officials who worked in the administrative complex, were built to the north and, perhaps, to the south of the complex. To the north and west, outside the area of this complex, were multiple phases of Late Bronze/Iron 1 transitional remains (about 1200 B.C.—earlier this period was identified as the early Iron I period, but is now determined to belong to the Late Bronze/Iron 1 period to emphasize the significant Late Bronze features) as well as later settlements from the late Iron 1 period. These were found primarily in Field B to the north in earlier seasons, but some were also discovered in the northwestern parts of Field A.

This season, we began to expose the top of the destruction layer of the Late Bronze/Iron 1 stratum (Stratum 12) in all areas of the field, but not enough has been excavated to suggest a coherent plan of the third house from this period that seems to be in this area, just south of two other houses in Field B and in the northern part of Field A (**Map 3**). We were also able to disprove our earlier suggestions about the presence of a gate where the Stratum 12 perimeter wall turns into the city, but were able to establish the southern extension of the perimeter wall to the south of that curve. We also discovered parts of a house from the Iron 2B period (Stratum 8, dating from the ninth to eighth centuries B.C.) that produced significant amounts of broken pottery on the surfaces. This is the first time we have found architectural remains from that period.

Stratum 12: Late Bronze/Iron 1 Transition
(ca. 1200-1150 B.C.), Field A Phase 13

In the 1998 season, we discovered that the north-south perimeter wall curved into the city in an east-west orientation.³ This season, we traced the wall as it continued into the city where it seems to have been robbed by the late Iron 2/Persian administrative basement structures. We thus have no idea how far it ran originally toward the east. As early as the 2002 season, we had wondered if a large parallel east-west wall, about 4 m to the south, could be the southern side of an entrance way into the city. Did the two walls constitute a gate? We could discern no gate-tower structures or piers flanking the entrance (as is frequently the case for gates from this time), but posited a simple entrance

³Herr, Clark, Geraty, and LaBianca, 1999, 102.



Map 3. The Stratum 12 remains from the western side of the site.

between two parallel walls. We further suggested that a large north-south wall at the western edge of Field H, whose founding level had not yet been reached, could be the continuation of the perimeter wall around the southern part of the site.

In 2006, we discovered the monumental end of the southern wall, complete with one stone measuring 2.4 x 1.2 x 1 m. We even discovered the tops of walls that appeared, at first sight, to be small piers jutting into the

entryway, dividing it into very shallow chambers. We thus hoped to find more of this gate or entrance during this season's excavations.

Our finds this season seem to have laid to rest any talk of a gate. Extending south of the perimeter wall just after its curve to the east was a large north-south wall that crossed the expected "entrance way" and passed under the south wall of the expected gate (**Figure 1**). Indeed, it continued south and became the large north-south wall we had already suggested was the perimeter wall around the southern part of the town. At least this part of our hypothesis was correct. The extent of the perimeter wall is thus clear: it stretches south from Field B, curves eastward into the town for about 7 m, where it apparently ends; another north-south wall then was built to defend the southwestern portion of the site. The east-west wall we had originally hypothesized would be the southern side of the gate area turns out to be a later wall (it was constructed *over* the southern perimeter wall), but its precise function is unclear, although we can suggest that it may have been associated with the Iron 1 open courtyard sanctuary found just to the south in Field H, where it extended beyond (west) of the perimeter wall. It may have been an addition to the earlier fortification system.



Figure 1. Field A: Stratum 12: The newly discovered portion of the perimeter wall as it runs beneath a later Iron 1 wall.

The northern portions of a third house (House C) were excavated this season. The northernmost house in Field B (House B) was the well-known "four-room house" that was fully excavated in 1996 and has been partially reconstructed. The second house (House A) was in both Fields B and A and was fully excavated in 2000. As was true with the other two houses, House C shows signs of producing copious amounts of pottery on the floors. At least this is true of the two rooms we have excavated. Especially frequent is the early form of a very large storage vessel, a "collared pithos," virtually similar in form to those found in the other two houses. We estimate that portions of another 12-15 pithoi were excavated last summer. But this time they contained

many more potters' marks on the handles, sometimes on both handles. We are in the process of trying to determine if there is a correspondence between the ways the vessels were formed and the individual potters as identified by their marks. These finds allow us to reconstruct life at the time of the biblical judges. Indeed, 'Umayri is turning out to be one of the most important sites for the time of the judges in the entire Holy Land.

The destruction layer was much shallower here than in the other two houses and this one may have contained only the ground floor, although later Iron 1 structures were built on top, possibly destroying the upper courses and the upper portions of the destruction in this area. In one of the rooms of this house was a small grinding installation. The lower millstone was found *in situ* and the upper millstone was discovered lying nearby (**Figure 2**). Other parts of the destruction were found in three other locations in probes, but none of them reached the floors. There is room for only one other house between House A and the inside curve of the perimeter wall. We thus suggest that all remains from Stratum 12 found this year in Field A belong to House C. The plan is to complete excavation of this house during the next season.



Figure 2. Field A: Stratum 12: The grinding installation with the lower millstone still *in situ*.

*Strata 11-10: Iron 1 (ca. 1100-1000 B.C.),
Field A Phases 12-11*

Above the destruction of Stratum 12 were small wall fragments discovered in earlier seasons that were so fragmentary it could not be determined precisely to which stratum they belonged. This season, a few more very small wall fragments were added to the list, as well as a few thin fill layers that seem to go with them. That is, they appeared above the Stratum 12 destruction, but were under the walls of Stratum 10 (as discovered in earlier seasons).

South of the perimeter wall, after its eastern curve, the parallel wall, earlier thought to be the southern side of a gate complex, must belong to this

stratum, although its function at present is unclear. As suggested above, it may be related to the courtyard sanctuary in Field H or to the fortification system.

*Stratum 8: Iron 2B (ca. 850-700 B.C.),
Field A Phase 8B*

Although we began to find earth layers in 2004 and 2006 for this phase, it was not until this season that we established clear architectural evidence for the Iron 2B period at the site. Previously, we had collected only potsherds. This time three to four rooms of a stone building with cobbled and beaten-earth surfaces covered with pottery were discovered (**Figures 3-4**). The western wall of the structure is still preserved almost 1.5 m high. We had mistakenly ascribed the wall to the Iron 1 period in previous publications. It was shown in the 2006 excavations that the pillared room farther to the west with no entryway visible was actually also from this period. Therefore, our previous Iron 1 phase must now be redated to the Iron 2B period.

The pottery gathered from the floors comprised primarily bowls and some cooking pots. Relatively few vessels were storejars. Separating the rooms were stone walls, as well as large solitary stones that must have been bases for wooden pillars. A fragmentary staircase was found at one side of the structure. The eastern portion of the building is not clear because the Stratum 7 Ammonite administrative complex seems to have destroyed it. The northern entrance to the structure, with the door jambs still standing over 1 m high, may have been the primary entrance to the house, but the southern limits of the house are not yet well understood. There was a wide opening between two stubby piers that led from the northeastern room into the room to its south. Perhaps it was hung with a blanket or carpet.



Figure 3. Field A: Stratum 8: Iron 2B house.

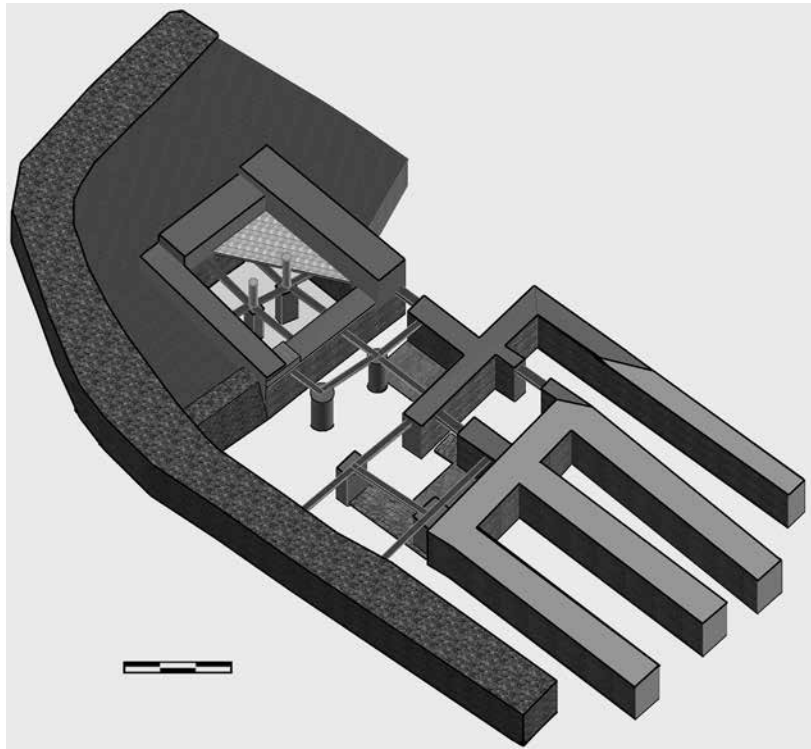


Figure 4. Field A: Stratum 8: A schematic computerized isometric drawing of the Iron 2B house. Drawing by Robert D. Bates.

Field B: The Late Bronze Age Cultic Building

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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. For the last seven seasons, we have been working on a spectacularly preserved building from that period (Stratum 14) that comprises five rooms; the walls are preserved up to 3 m high (**Figure 5**).⁴

⁴Herr, Clark, and Trenchard, 2002, 118, Figs. 6-7.



Figure 5. Field B: Stratum 14: The Late Bronze building seen from the east.

*Stratum 14: Late Bronze Age 2 (ca. 1400-1250 B.C.),
Field B Phase 14*

The primary objective for Field B this season was to complete the excavation of the Late Bronze Building to its original floor levels and to remove fragments of later walls over some of the corners of the structure. This was accomplished and we can now describe the building in considerable detail, as well as suggest ideas for human activities associated with the rooms. The

discussion and explanation of findings will proceed clockwise around the building, following the sequence of room numbers in **Figure 6**.

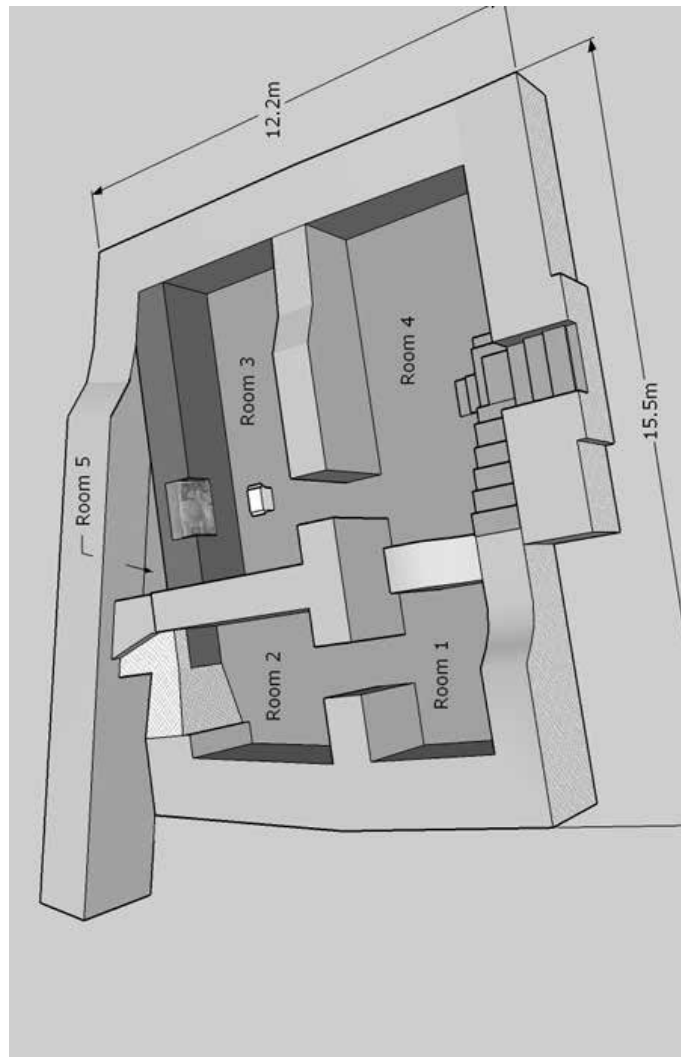


Figure 6. Field B: Stratum 14: A schematic computerized isometric drawing of the Late Bronze building. Drawing by Kent V. Bramlett.

Although Room 1 was excavated several seasons ago, its southern wall and southeastern corner had remained obscured by Stratum 7 walls (late Iron 2/Persian). Removal of those later remains this season revealed the full 1.50 m width of the eastern half of the southern wall.

Work along the western wall of Room 2, also excavated in previous seasons, clarified what had been a confusing mass of tumbled stones,

compacted debris, and mud brick where we expected the wall of the room to be. When the loose debris was removed, we found that the western wall was laid against and over a preexisting mud-brick wall. We were able to prove that the Late Bronze builders had cut into older ruins and battered their wall against the older brick wall.

Final work this season in Room 3, the room with the cultic niche and the building's most important room, resolved our understanding of some aspects of the entire building.⁵ The original floor of the room contained a surface buildup about 7 cm thick that was full of bones. Ashy deposits occurred in the vicinity of the altar and niche and may partially account for the greater depth of build-up in this area. However, the ceramics removed with its excavation are important (two bases were shaped and reused as offering stands, according to ceramic technologist G. London), and may be combined with the partial bowls and bones removed just above (that is, found resting on) the last-used surface in the 2006 season. Removal of the laminated layers of the surface buildup in Room 3, where it sealed against the altar at the base of the niche, showed that the altar had been plastered all the way to the base, where it was smoothed out and sealed onto the surface, showing that it was installed before the surface buildup began to accumulate.

It seems that the perimeter wall of the site (also the northern wall of the Late Bronze building), antedates the building. A 1 m² probe in the northwest corner of Room 3 revealed the relationship between the perimeter wall and the interior walls of the building. We found that the perimeter wall continued four courses below the original floor of Room 3, while the interior wall was founded no deeper than the surface with no evidence of a foundation trench. The probe also revealed that the building was founded upon and into the Stratum 15 (Middle Bronze Age era) rampart as it descended into the city.

Excavation in Room 4, the entry room, identified a more complicated series of surfaces with two across the entire room and a third intermediate surface identified only in a limited area against the western wall. The blocking stones that fill the blocked northern door between Rooms 3 and 4 were laid on the earliest surface and the full depth of the second one sealed against them with no foundation trench evident. Thus that doorway was blocked before accumulation on the surface could begin.

Several other features of Room 4 contribute to the interpretation of room function. Near the north end of the room, two flat stones were positioned end-to-end on the floor, seemingly used as offering tables or perhaps the larger was a standing stone that had fallen from its position at some earlier date. Behind the larger flat-lying stone, two vessel bases, repurposed as little offering tables, according to G. London, were found in the surface against the northern wall of the room. Unfired clay figurine fragments were found throughout Room 4.

⁵Herr and Clark 2008, 68-70, Figs. 2-5.

Adding to the cultic association of the room were three miniature cultic vessels and partial chalices. A mud-brick-and-plaster table measuring about 0.48 x 0.40 m stood near the base of the entry stairs. This table was badly damaged in the destruction of the building and its original height could not be determined. Its extant height was 0.13 m. A juglet was found on this table among the broken plaster and brick debris just above the preserved portion. Lying above the surface near the table was another fallen standing stone.

The problem of the eastern walls and the entrance to the building are now quite well understood. Excavation of the new Field N provided the eastward accessibility needed to clear through the entry door of the building and define the east faces of the outside walls north and south of the entrance gate. Excavation there reached the elevation of the entrance and showed more of the extensive earthquake damage that destroyed various walls of the building. The eastern front of the building showed more damage than any other part.

We also now understand the curious use of double walls back-to-back across much of the eastern side of the building. The outer eastern wall was the building wall against which an inner wall was constructed as support for internal stairs ascending to the second floor over Rooms 1 and 2. Thus the stair wall began at the entrance level in Room 4 and continued southward at increasing height across the east end of Room 1 (**Figure 7**).

There is a friendly debate going on among the excavators about the function of this building. Some believe that the building was primarily a cultic building, or temple, with associated rooms (Bramlett and Clark). Others believe that it was a palatial building that included a major shrine room (Herr). In any case, there is no doubt about the major cultic function of at least part of the building; nor is there any doubt that the cultural affinity of the finds is similar to that found in the city-state systems of Canaan throughout the southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age.

*Stratum 7: Late Iron 2/Persian (ca. 600-550 B.C.),
Field B Phase 7*

Immediately above the Late Bronze building were late Iron 2/Persian wall fragments built directly on top of some of the Late Bronze walls in Stratum 7. These had been found in previous seasons, but we finally completed their removal this season.⁶ They were very small fragments, but must go with many of the other wall fragments found in Field B throughout the seasons. They probably represent domestic structures in use with the Ammonite administrative complex farther to the south in Field A.⁷ There are probably up to three different phases of wall fragments here.

⁶The reports for the excavations since 1996 in n. 1 have all reported fragmentary remains from this period.

⁷Also reported in several earlier publications from the 1984 to 1992 seasons.



Figure 7. Field B: Stratum 14: Cut-away painting showing a reconstruction of the LB building as suggested by the remains. Rhonda Root, artist.

Field H: Courtyard Sanctuary and Lower Remains

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University of Chicago

Field H is located at the southwestern corner of the flat top of the site (**Map 2**). Excavations here began in 1994 for the initial purpose of exploring the southern extension of the Ammonite administrative complex in Field A directly to the north, but instead excavation revealed a large courtyard

sanctuary paved by alternating floors of cobbles and plaster. Its religious function is based on the presence of figurines and model shrines found on the surfaces.⁸ This season, we excavated several squares beneath the lowest cobble floor of the late Iron 1 open-air sanctuary in order to reach the Iron 1 levels encountered last season in one square. Excavation ceased with Iron 1 destruction levels in all squares. We also were able to show that the southern perimeter wall dates to the Late Bronze/Iron 1 transitional period (Stratum 12), the same date as the northern parts of the perimeter wall.

Strata 13 to 12: Late Bronze/Iron 1 Transition
(ca. 1250 to 1150 B.C.), Field H
Phases 13-12

Earlier excavations in the western part of the field had uncovered a large north-south wall at the western edge of the site. We had speculated that it might be the southern extension of the Late Bronze/Iron 1 perimeter wall, but small amounts of Iron 2 pottery persisted in most layers running up to the western side of the wall, while Iron 1 layers sealed against it on its eastern side. This season, we widened the exposure because the sediment, due to the presence of extensive rubble, was unstable for safe working conditions. While we were unable this season to reach the bottom of the probable perimeter wall (Wall 46), after excavating a further 2 m down its western face, we did find the bottom of a major east-west wall (Wall 49) that may have formed a tower (our earlier suggestion that it was part of a gate is now less likely; see the discussion for Field A in Stratum 12) with the perimeter wall.

Although we cannot make a stratigraphic connection because the sounding against the perimeter wall (Stratum 13) was on the exterior face, domestic structures inside the wall (Stratum 12) most likely belong to this stratum on the basis of the pottery assemblage. This season, the tops of walls continuing these structures were discovered to the south under a thick destruction layer. No surfaces have yet been discovered, but a probable oven with ash deposits may suggest that the surface is near. Next season, we anticipate uncovering the floors of at least one large structure in this area.

Stratum 11: Iron 1B (ca. 1100 to 1050 B.C.),
Field H Phase 11

Although this stratum became clearer this season, it was still fragmentary in nature, but seemed to reflect domestic structures that sometimes incorporated earlier walls. Surfaces included cobble and beaten-earth surfaces, along with one exterior exposure surface (an outside surface that was not used heavily).

⁸Herr and Clark 2004, 126-127.

*Stratum 10: Iron 1B (ca. 1050 to 1000 B.C.),
Field H Phase 10B*

It was in this stratum that the courtyard sanctuary, with its cobbled and plastered floors and central pillar base or altar, was first established.⁹ This season, we excavated the cobble floor and some of the walls of the courtyard sanctuary to reach earlier Iron 1 levels below. The southern portion of the complex, however, still needed to be exposed this season. Unfortunately, it appears that later construction inside the southern room has so greatly disturbed the stratigraphy that it is difficult to assign any particular earth layers or interior structures to this stratum. The room's function is, therefore, uncertain, and there is no clear threshold connecting the southern room and the courtyard.

*Stratum 7: Late Iron 2/Persian (ca. 600 to 550 B.C.),
Field H Phase 8*

Excavated remains in the southern room of the courtyard sanctuary which date to this phase are the first since Stratum 11 that present a clear picture of usage. What took place in this southern area during the previous two strata remains a mystery, and part of this confusion is due to the construction that took place during this and the following stratum. At this time, the occupants divided the large southern room in two, constructing a wall about a third of the way across. In the new room, sandwiched between smaller rooms on the east and west, a cobble floor was laid. As noted in earlier seasons, this also seems to have been the phase in which the old walls defining the southern area were reconsolidated and had new courses constructed upon them, establishing the integral importance of the southern rooms to the entire courtyard complex. Unfortunately, much of this stratum was, in its turn, disturbed by construction carried out in the following phase, and only remnants of the one floor and the fill layers remain to testify to its existence in the south. Beaten-earth floors and fill layers were in all these rooms.

*Stratum 6: Late Iron 2/Persian (ca. 550 to 475 B.C.),
Field H Phase 7*

While most of the architecture previously defining the southern three rooms in Stratum 7 continued in use during this stratum, the three previous rooms were reduced back to two, as a dividing wall was now covered at last after several periods of reuse by a cobble floor. This season, we finished removing one cobble surface, discovering the previous stratum's cobble-floor fragment immediately beneath. On the western edge of the field (and of the tell), a pit was in use during this period. A mix of pottery ranged from Hellenistic to a few Early Bronze Age sherds.

⁹See the discussion in previous reports for photos.

*Stratum 2: Byzantine (ca. A.D. 330 to 650),
Field H Phase 2*

Earlier seasons in Field H had noted a large layer made up almost completely of large pebble stones, pieces of worn, chunky pottery (such as handles), and numbers of figurines, and virtually no soil. This season, we excavated more of the layer along the western side of the field in order to provide room for safer excavation. A number of interesting objects from earlier time periods showed up in this layer (most were from the late Iron 2/Persian period), including a particularly nice female figurine, whose head, shoulders, and abundance of hair were preserved (Object number B080011; **Figure 8**). Although the stones date to the Byzantine era, most of the finds were from the late Iron 2/Persian period. It is common to find earlier remains in later deposits, especially if the deposits were agricultural and not the product of a settlement.



Figure 8. Field H: Stratum 2: Late Iron 2/Persian female figurine head.

Field K: The Dolmen

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After a hiatus of eight years, a small team returned to the dolmen in Field K on the lower southeastern slopes of the tell. It dates to the Early Bronze 1B period (about 3000 B.C.). All finds were from Stratum 21.

Earlier excavations around the dolmen uncovered a series of surfaces and a few small features embedded in them. No walls were found in the immediate area before the surfaces petered out. The most interesting of those features

was a small stone table made of a large stone slab, surrounded by supporting cobbles and located about 5 m from the western side of the dolmen.¹⁰

This season, when we removed the balk to the north of the stone table, we discovered four wall fragments that formed part of the walls of a stone shelter. The walls were poorly constructed and probably were never much more than 1 m high. The shelter was probably used during ceremonial activities, perhaps to protect users from winter storms that could make feasting at the site uncomfortable (**Figure 9**). An east-west wall formed the northern wall of the structure and may have been the primary windbreak. Extending south from that wall were three other short fragments, dividing the space into two “rooms.” They may have been open on the southern side, which faced the stone table.

Along with the several surfaces surrounding the structure, which probably reflect ritual circumnavigation of the dolmen, the newly discovered feature, along with the previously discovered stone table, suggests that ritual feasting also took place. There may have been a small cult of the dead (or a dead person who was remembered as important) at the site. Because there were several surfaces on top of each other, these ritual activities apparently lasted for a long time, perhaps for a century or more.

Field L: The South-central Edge

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Field L is located at the southern edge of the flat top of Tall al-‘Umayri, roughly in its middle (**Map 2**). Excavations in this field began in 1998 for the purpose of exploring the transition of the top of the site to the southern slope, where several surface architectural features were visible or had appeared in ground-penetrating radar images. This season we opened two new units in the western part of the field and deepened three others, primarily in the east. The goals of excavation were to ascertain the eastern and western limits of the Hellenistic farmstead, uncover Iron 2 remains below the Hellenistic level, and probe to the bottom of at least one of the large walls constructed of massive boulders found in several locations during earlier excavations. With regard to result, we seem to have confirmed last season’s interpretation that we were nearing the eastern limit of the farmstead. We also found no *in situ* Hellenistic remains in the two squares opened at the western limits of the field. Finally, we managed to reach the founding level of one massive wall.

¹⁰Herr et al. 2000, 31; see p. 39 for a photo.



Figure 9. Field K: Stratum 21: The poorly constructed wall fragments of a small shelter near the dolmen.

*Stratum 12? (Late Bronze/Iron 1 Transition
(ca. 1200-1150 B.C.), Field L Phase 7*

In the northern portions of the field, earlier seasons produced the tops of massive stone walls constructed of large boulders, some approximating 2 m long and more than 1 m wide.¹¹ The tops of similar walls have been found in Field H. This season, we continued a probe begun in 2006 and reached the bottom of one of these massive walls; the pottery was indeed Iron 1.

However, it was not clear to which part of the period the sherds dated. There were no signs of the massive destruction of Stratum 12 found in Fields A, B, and H. There were also no signs of a clear surface in the limited probe. Nor did the probe reach deep enough to determine that the next stratum below dated to the Late Bronze Age (Stratum 13). We tentatively ascribed the walls to Stratum 12, primarily because the walls are so huge that they seem to fit the major structures of Stratum 12 better than either of the later, more ephemeral Iron 1 Strata 11 and 10. If so, we must note that there are two fundamental architectural construction methods for Stratum 12. There are the well-preserved but domestic structures in Fields A, B, and H, built with small to medium boulders in the walls, and these structures in parts of Field H and in Field L are truly massive.

Perhaps the large walls represent structures from a more public part of the settlement. If so, the walls combine with the impressive Stratum 12 fortification system to represent a much more prosperous settlement than most highland settlements tended to be in the Iron 1 period. If these

¹¹Herr and Clark, 2008, 80, Fig. 7; the somewhat darker stones under the top level form one of these walls.

walls were built in the same settlement as the four-room house (Stratum 12), they cannot be seen as “Canaanite,” but should be seen as belonging to one of the tribal groups settling down in the region. We have, at times identified this group with Reubenites or, somewhat less likely, Ammonites. However, if the impressive architecture at ‘Umayri is any indication, this “tribal group” was able to do considerably more economically than other tribal groups in the Holy Land.

*Stratum 7: Late Iron 2/Persian (ca. 600-550 B.C.),
Field L Phase 6*

In the eastern and western edges of the field, in the areas where the Hellenistic farmstead remains seem to be dwindling, we discovered late Iron 2/Persian remains beneath shallow layers and features of the Hellenistic period.

The most interesting find was a large, well-preserved tabun (or beehive-shaped oven used to bake flat bread), constructed of a thin clay wall (ca. 3-4 cm thick) with large potsherds and stones lining the exterior of the structure (**Figure 10**). The tabun sat upon a beaten-earth surface, which stretched north to two large boulders that probably functioned as pillar bases. Part of the floor may have been cobbled; a fragment of such a floor was still extant between the two pillar bases. These features undoubtedly made up the courtyard and northern room of a domestic dwelling.

On the western edge of the field, two new squares, open only for two weeks, produced stone walls forming two partial rooms (**Figure 11**) immediately beneath Byzantine sub-topsoil. Excavations stopped at a beaten-earth surface in both rooms.



Figure 10. Field L: Stratum 7: Well-preserved circular tabun (bread oven).



Figure 11. Field L: Stratum 7: Parts of walls and surface of a room at the western side of the field.

*Stratum 4: Hellenistic (ca. 300-50 B.C.),
Field L Phases 4-3*

Excavation in Field L is nearing the end of its Hellenistic structures. In the northeastern part of the field were a few wall fragments preserved from the farmstead, most of which was discovered farther west in earlier seasons. Evidence for both Hellenistic phases was found here with two walls, one built on top of the other. But the fragmentary nature of the remains was emphasized by the lack of discernible surfaces of any kind.

*Stratum 2: Byzantine (ca. A.D. 330-650),
Field L Phase 2*

A few Byzantine potsherds are almost always present in sub-topsoil layers of every square, but only one small stone wall was discovered here this year. It was most likely a terrace wall for the Stratum 2 farmstead found in Field F, farther to the east in previous seasons.

*Stratum 1: Islamic (ca. A.D. 650-Present),
Field L Phase 1*

Topsoil from the site contains pottery primarily from the late Iron 2/Persian period, but a few more recent vessels are also included, a few of which could be Early Islamic. One stone wall appeared on the surface that was probably a field wall, part of the agricultural activity going on at the site during the Islamic periods. Its construction and layout were similar to other walls found elsewhere around the rim of the site.

Field M: Central Area

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This season, a new field, Field M, was opened on the summit. It was located directly east of Field H (**Map 2**). The goals for Field M were to find the continuation of the Iron II and Iron I architecture found in Field H, and to begin moving eastward with the ultimate intention of connecting Field H with Field L. Four squares were opened in a square-grid pattern, creating a 12 m² field.

*Stratum 12: Late Bronze/Iron 1 Transition
(ca. 1200-1150 B.C.), Field M Phase 6*

From this period, one of the most significant at Tall al-'Umayri during the time of the biblical judges, we discovered the top two courses of a wall that had the same construction features and was in line with a wall from this period found earlier in Field H to the west (**Figure 12**). There is little doubt that the removal of the balk between Fields H and M will show that they are indeed the same wall. Until more of the wall is excavated, however, the purpose and full context will remain unknown.



Figure 12. Field M: Stratum 12: Stone wall fragment; it is the lower north-south wall near the right edge of the photo.

*Stratum 8: Iron 2B (ca. 850 to 700 B.C.),
Field M Phase 5*

Only one large earth layer and some 800 potsherds could be dated to this stratum, the time of the biblical kings. Even though no architecture was found, the presence of this material suggests significant remains may be found

below in subsequent seasons. It is, moreover, surprising that the late Iron 2/Persian strata were so thin at this point. It may also suggest that the basement structures of the Ammonite Administrative Complex, found in Field A to the northwest and the northern squares of Field H to the west, ended before reaching the eastern reaches of our area. Perhaps the Stratum 12 wall was the separation. Only five of the more-than-800 potsherds were from the late Iron 2 period and they were most likely intrusive. They were all very small and we have significant amounts of bioturbation (burrowing animal holes made by small rodents).

*Stratum 7: Iron 2C/Persian (ca. 600 to 550 B.C.),
Field M Phase 4C*

This was the earliest phase reached in the western part of the field. Much of the architecture may have been reused from an earlier period. For now, however, all architecture that we have not fully exposed will be tentatively dated to the earliest fill layer excavated thus far, sealing against that particular wall or installation.

During this period, what appeared to have been some sort of domestic complex (Building A; **Figure 13**) was constructed in the southern half of the field. There were several possible rooms in Building A, but only one room (Room A1) had four walls within the squares of Field M (**Figure 12**; the deeply excavated room in the top square). The room (**Figure 14**) was a rectangle with a floor space of approximately 4.5 x 2.5 m. Other rooms were only partially exposed in our excavations, but they seem to have been part of the same domestic complex. In the southwestern corner of Room A1, two possible bins were found, one nested inside the other (**Figure 15**). A mendable pot (thought to be *in situ*), dating to late Iron 2/Persian, was found inside the inner bin. Although the bins suggest domestic activities, the proximity to the Ammonite Administrative Complex also may indicate a public function.

*Stratum 6: Iron 2C/Persian (ca. 550 to 475 B.C.),
Field M Phase 4B*

The complex in Stratum 7 appears to have been reused later as Stratum 6, but in a slightly different manner. The amount of time between the two strata was not ascertainable. What is clear is that, during Stratum 6, Room A1 was used as a basement. Not enough excavation was done to show whether or not the other rooms in Building A, as described above with Stratum 7, could have been in use in Stratum 6 as well, so for this report they have been treated as if they went out of use at the same time as Room A1, namely, at the end of Stratum 6. A new beaten-earth surface was laid directly above the Stratum 7 surface, sealing against the walls of the structure.

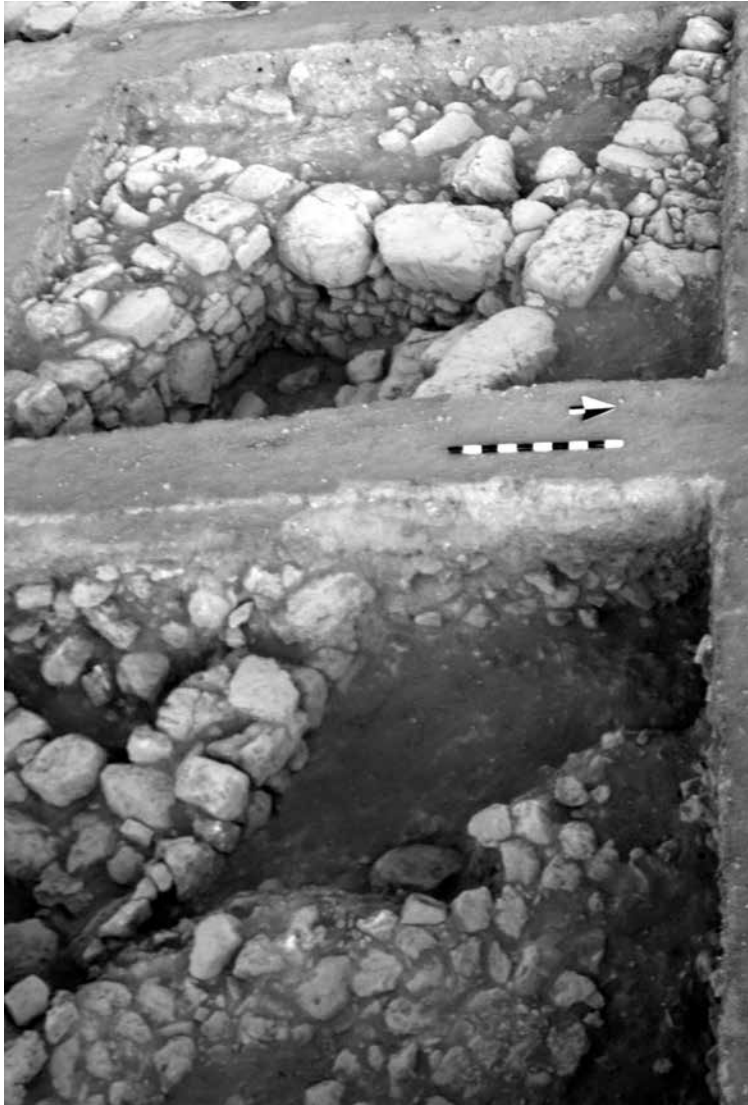


Figure 13. Field M: Stratum 7: Building A seen from the east [full res 1395].



Figure 14. Field M: Stratum 7: Room A1 with a set of stairs [full res 1380 or 1382].



Figure 15. Field M: Stratum 7: Two bins within Room A1 [08M23392].

*Stratum 5: Early Persian (ca. 475 to 400 B.C.),
Field M Phase 4A*

During this stratum, Building A went out of use and Room A1 with its bins was filled with various earth layers. What appears to have been a temporary wall was built more or less over the top of a wall of Strata 7-6. There was, however, more than 0.5 m of earth between the top of the old wall and

the bottom of the new one. The two strata were thus well separated. An extensive cobble and sometimes plaster surface was laid during this phase. It covered most of the eastern half of the field. The structure seems to be domestic in nature.

*Stratum 4: Hellenistic (ca. 300 to 50 B.C.),
Field M Phase 3*

During this phase three new, most likely temporary, walls were built. They had an approximate average width of 1 m (although they were quite irregular in construction); bonded together, they formed the shape of a Z. The dating evidence for these walls is primarily stratigraphic; that is, they are above the Persian architecture. One wall seemed to continue into Field H, where that segment of the wall was stratigraphically dated to the Persian/Hellenistic period in an earlier season. The remains are too fragmentary and too near the surface to suggest a function.

*Strata 2-1: Byzantine-Islamic (ca. A.D. 330 to Present),
Field M Phase 2*

During Phase 2, no construction took place, but there was an accumulation of topsoil and sub-topsoil layers. Byzantine and Islamic sherds showed up repeatedly. Objects and artifacts from earlier periods (mostly late Iron 2/Persian) were discovered, including many grindstones and pounders, two uninscribed iconographic seals, a metal arrowhead, and three ceramic figurine fragments. The figurines included a horse head, a human head (**Figure 16**), and an unidentified fragment.



Figure 16. Field M: Stratum 2: Late Iron 2/Persian human figurine head [Object 24].

An articulated burial was discovered in Stratum 1 (**Figure 17**). The body of a young postadolescent male, which, physical anthropologist Julie Cormack notes, was laid into a pit grave and then the same earth was used to cover it.



Figure 17. Field M: Stratum 1. Articulated skeleton from a pit burial [08M33451].

Conclusions and Prospectus

The remarkably well-preserved remains of the Late Bronze building in Field B were completely unexpected when we began excavations in 1984. But it gives an excellent representation of a Canaanite (sometimes called Amorite in the Bible) structure in the highlands of Jordan where so few remains from this period have so far been found. The building may have been a temple or a palace with a shrine.

The Late Bronze/Iron 1 transitional period was again well represented in Field A. This was perhaps the most important settlement of the site. Certainly, in terms of understanding the biblical period of the judges, the discoveries have been significant, providing typical house plans and insights into functions (including religious behaviors). More large storejars or *pitboi* (more than 100 in all) have been discovered at ‘Umayri than at almost all other site in the Holy Land combined. The lab housing them has recently moved to La Sierra University, where they are being restored.

The new discovery of the Iron 2B house in Field A was another important find for the site.

This twelfth season marks the end of the Phase 1 portion of the Tall al-‘Umayri excavations. With the complete excavation of the Late Bronze building in Field B, that field is finished. One more season will finish Field A. Field H is on the cusp of more Stratum 12 structures in a wide area of exposure. Field M is beginning the connection between Fields H and L.