

MADABA PLAINS PROJECT— TALL AL-^ʿUMAYRI, 2002

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Introduction

A ninth season of excavation by the Madaba Plains Project—^ʿUmayri occurred between June 18 and July 31, 2002, at Tall al-^ʿUmayri, located about 10 km south of Amman's Seventh Circle on the Queen Alia Airport Highway at the turnoff for Amman National Park (Figure 1). It was sponsored by La Sierra University in consortium with Canadian University College and Walla Walla College and in affiliation with Andrews University.¹ This season, a team of 20 Jordanians and 36 foreigners, mostly from the United States, took part in the interdisciplinary project.²

¹Previous reports in *AUSS* include Lawrence T. Geraty, "The Andrews University Madaba Plains Project: A Preliminary Report on the First Season at Tell el-^ʿUmeiri," *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-^ʿUmeiri 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-^ʿUmeiri (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-^ʿUmeiri (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-^ʿUmayri 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-^ʿUmayri 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-^ʿUmayri, 1998," *AUSS* 38 (2000): 29-44; Larry G. Herr, Douglas R. Clark, and Warren C. Trenchard, "Madaba Plains Project: Tall al-^ʿUmayri, 2000," *AUSS* 40 (2002): 105-123.

²The reduced foreign staff was due to perceived insecurities in the political and social system of the Middle East following the terrorist attack on New York of September 11, 2001. Our team found nothing but a peaceful situation. The authors of this report are especially indebted to Dr. Fawwaz el-Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities; Hanan Azar, Department of Antiquities representative; 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

During the 2002 season we worked in three fields of excavation, primarily at the western edge of the site (Fields B and H), but also at the southern lip (Field L) (Figure 2). Excavation centered on several periods of excavation: (1) We cleared two additional rooms of the major Late Bronze Age building in Field B from ca. 1400-1225 B.C. Two other rooms had been discovered in previous seasons. (2) We searched for the northern extent of the early Iron Age I (ca. 1200 B.C.) perimeter wall along the top of the northern slope. (3) We hoped to find more Iron I remains beneath a late Iron II (ca. 600 B.C.) house in the northeast section of Field B. (4) We sought to expand and deepen excavation in a sanctuary courtyard from the late Iron I period (ca. 1100 B.C.), nicely paved with cobblestones and plaster in Field H. (5) We hoped that excavations in the western part of Field H would throw some light on a possible gate into the city during the Iron I period. (6) We wanted to expand our exposure of the Hellenistic agricultural complex in Field L. Our results and interpretations follow.

Field B: The Late Bronze Age Public Building and Later Structures

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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 (Num

Bikai, 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. Saleh Naji, for making our stay a genuine pleasure. This time the computer lab, with a new server provided by MPP—^cUmayri, was put at our disposal. 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 supervisor for Field B was Kent Bramlett of the University of Toronto, assisted by Douglas Clark; square supervisors included Wendell Bowes, Howard Munson, John Raab, and Janelle Worthington; assistant supervisors were Gayle Broom, Carmen Clark, James Hanson, Candace Jorgensen, Michal Kurzyk, Nicole Murphey, Christy Robinson, and Pawel Surowka. The field supervisor for Field H was Julie Cormack of Mount Royal College; square supervisors included Dick Dorsett, Don Mook, and Dean Holloway; assistant supervisors were Marcin Czarnowicz, Jonathan Francisco, Denise Herr, Larry Murrin, and Caroline Riegel. The field supervisor for Field L was David C. Hopkins of Wesley Theological Seminary; square supervisors included Mary Boyd, Kate Dorsett, and Franke Zollman; assistant supervisors were Kathleen Geraty, Ruth Kent, Audrey Schaffer, Tony Sears, Caroline Waldron, and Ingrid Wang. Camp staff and specialists included Carmen Clark (object registrar), Denise Herr (pottery registrar), Larry Murrin (computers and photography), Elzbieta Dubis (artist), and Abu Faisal (cook). Iyad Sweileh again served as our camp agent. Laundry technicians at ATC washed our clothes once a week. Caroline Waldron served as camp nurse and Dean Holloway took care of first-aid needs.

21). But Late Bronze Age remains at Tall Hisban (biblical Heshbon) were never found. Indeed, remains from the period are rare everywhere in Jordan, especially the central and southern parts of the country. Therefore, we were surprised when, in 1998, we began excavation of two rooms of a building that contained nothing later than Late Bronze Age pottery.³

The primary objective for Field B excavations this season involved the discovery of more of this Late Bronze Age building at the northern edge of the tell. With this in mind, we opened three new squares in an E-W row to the north of previous Field B excavations. Activity also took place within the two rooms already discovered, to complete excavation to their lowest floors and to reveal more clearly the western parts of the building. We particularly wanted to know if the building had more rooms to the north and to determine their functions.

The new excavations contributed considerably to the emerging plan of the building, called Building C (Figures 3 and 4). We can now tentatively outline two more rooms, C3 (north of C2) and C4 (north of C1). Both include walls that were constructed in a fashion similar to those in the first two rooms and preserved to nearly the same height (3-3.5 meters) (Figure 5). Passing through the doorway leading north out of Room C1 into C4, a doorway opening to the west into Room C3 is immediately encountered. Little more is known about Room C4, which awaits excavation beneath an Iron II house studied this season. The north-south walls that separate the two new rooms (broken by a doorway) are directly in line with the walls that divide Rooms C1 and C2. Exposure of the north wall of both rooms and the western wall of Room C3 awaits further excavation.

In Rooms C1 and C2 we were able to show that the building's walls and surfaces were built directly upon the inner slope of the Middle Bronze Age rampart as it descended toward the middle of the site. Unfortunately, no small finds were discovered on the floors.

Surrounding Building C was a Middle Bronze Age wall on the west and a major new wall with large stones on the east and south. These outer walls were very close to those of the building itself, except on the south side (Figure 6). An exterior wall on the north has not yet been located. Because of this perimeter wall, which isolates Building C inside a compound, and because of the thickness of its walls (over one meter thick), and its preserved height (ca. 3-3.5 meters; its original height must have been 8-10 meters high to judge by the brick destruction filling the structure), we have concluded that it served primarily as a small palace—perhaps belonging to a local governor—possibly of Amorite origin.

³Herr, Clark, and Trenchard, 2002, 118, Figs. 6-7.

Although separated from the rest of Building C by an unexcavated balk, the finds made in a new square next to the site perimeter wall may belong to the destruction of this building. They included a decorated goblet missing its pedestal base (Figure 7) and two juglets. The pottery in the brick debris belonged to the Late Bronze Age.

The early Iron I remains, so prominent in earlier seasons, saw little action this summer. However, we excavated more of the huge refuse pit associated with the four-room house and another house next to it,⁴ nearly doubling its size to more than 10 m long and nearly 3 m wide (Figure 6). This year's work produced a number of small finds, including several seals and a necklace pendant, as well as approximately ten thousand more bones from the edible portions of animals. There were also a large proportion of cooking pots within the pit, illustrating its association with food-producing activities.

At the bottom of the fortification system, the dry moat of the Middle Bronze defense system was excavated in 1994. Because of its depth (5 m), we cleared only a two-meter width of the moat to the bottom at that time. This year we cleared it to a five-meter width (Figure 8). In the process, we revealed a layer of naturally occurring clay still covering a portion of the moat bottom along the plane the ancient excavators appeared to be following. We discovered a source of raw materials for use in the construction of the rampart and perhaps for the making of ceramic vessels.

The last vestiges of a large, pillared house from the late Iron II period were finally cleared (Figure 9), bringing to light more walls from the Ammonite period. Although we had already discovered several large pithoi (storage jars) sunk into the floors, this season also produced two more. The walls of this building were not significant and probably stood no higher than one story. The small finds—jar stoppers, spindle whorls, basalt grinder fragments, pounders/ballistica—suggest a domestic function for the building. The building probably housed the families of the people who worked in the royal Ammonite administrative complex we found farther south in previous seasons.

Field H: Sanctuary Courtyard and Possible Gate

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Field H is located at the southwestern corner of the site and was originally laid out to unearth the southern part of the large Ammonite administrative complex from the end of the Iron II period in Field A. This was largely

⁴Ibid., 116-117, Figs. 3-5.

accomplished in previous seasons. The major research questions this season revolved around a series of well-laid cobble-plaster floors discovered in one corner of a large room bounded by walls of the late Iron II period (ca. 550 B.C.) that we suggest is part of a sanctuary (Figure 10).

But the earliest remains we worked on this season in Field H may help us to understand the possible city gate of the early Iron I period, the biblical time of the early Judges, dating slightly earlier than 1200 B.C. We excavated more of an east-west wall we found last season (2000). It is parallel to the city perimeter wall found in Field A after it curved into the city (Figure 11). The wall in Field A may be the northern wall of a gate, while our wall, 4.5 m to the south, may be the southern wall. We need to further excavate both walls as well as the intervening space to see if we can relate them to each other. If our wall is indeed part of the gate complex, it probably extends slightly farther west before curving to the south and proceeding around the southern part of the site. Not many gates from this early part of the Iron I period are known elsewhere with which we can compare our example.

Remains from the end of Iron I (ca. 1100 B.C.) were also found in Field H. In 2000, we excavated a pitted portion of a large room paved with a thick plaster floor.⁵ Several more surfaces made of plaster, beaten earth, and cobbles lay below.⁶ Upon some of the layers were deposits of broken pottery and at least one model shrine.⁷ The latter was put together after returning from the field and reflects a relatively complete model with figurines guarding the door (Figure 12). It was also determined that the long east-west walls of the room were later than the surfaces and, therefore, the northern and southern extent of the surfaces was not known.

This season we removed the surfaces limited by the present walls down to the level that was reached in 2000 (Figure 10). We were able to show that some of the “surfaces” actually made up a “suite” of surfaces constructed at one time. First, a layer of cobbles was laid. Then, the builders spread a layer of plaster, over which several other beaten-earth and plaster patches were laid. We found a basin within the “suite” of layers that was used to mix the plaster (Figure 13). The final plaster surface covered it, putting it out of use and showing that it was used in constructing the surfaces, not in their use. On one of the surfaces, we discovered a missing piece from the model shrine found in 2000, as well as other pieces from other shrines (Figure 14). These shrines were mixed with pottery dating to

⁵Herr, Clark, Geraty, and LaBianca, 2000, 44, Fig. 10.

⁶Herr, Clark, and Trenchard, 2002, 110-111.

⁷Ibid., 122, Fig. 13.

the end of the Iron I period or the eleventh century B.C.

Because the extent of the plastered and cobbled floors was so large, we interpret the area as an exterior space that, taking into account the presence of the model shrines, was used for religious activities. We therefore understand the space as a courtyard for a sanctuary or shrine. The present eastern and western walls of the courtyard seem to have been used by the sanctuary, but the northern and southern walls were later additions. We must, therefore, envision the space extending both to the north and the south. If the gate or entryway from the earlier period continued into this one, the present northern extent of the courtyard is very close to its ancient extent.

Several architectural features appeared on the lowest cobble surface and were probably foundations for features at a slightly higher elevation. Roughly in the center of the exposed room two flat boulders probably served as pillar bases, perhaps associated in some way with the line of five boulders farther to the north. Another boulder was discovered on the cobbles in the northeast corner of the excavation area. Opposite the five boulders in the southern part of the exposed courtyard is a line of smaller stones immediately beneath a later wall. We have not yet interpreted the use of these stones. Other large boulders were incorporated into later walls. Future excavations to the south may help us understand this space better.

No small finds were located immediately above the cobbles, but some were found in great numbers on some of the subsurfaces above. They included large numbers of pithos fragments and a few examples of model shrines. Other small figurine fragments found in Field H during earlier seasons may belong to similar models. A concentration of ash surrounded the small finds and was heaviest in the northern parts of the courtyard around the five boulders. No remarkable concentrations of bones were found anywhere in the courtyard.

The sanctuary seems to have been used throughout the Iron II period when subsequent surfaces were laid. It was put out of use, probably in the Persian period, by the long east-west walls (Figure 10).

Field L: The Southern Edge

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Ever since the beginning of excavations at ^cUmayri in 1984, one of our goals was to examine a shallow topographic depression near the center of the southern edge of the site (Figure 2). On either side of the dip, the wall line of the apparent fortifications is clearly visible with large

boulders to the west and a wide line of smaller stones to the east. Ground-penetrating radar produced anomalies that seemed to suggest the presence of a casemate wall to the west of the dip. We began excavations here in 1998 with three squares and discovered remains of a Hellenistic structure on top of the late Iron II/Persian buildings and surfaces. This season we opened two new squares and deepened one begun in 1998 in hopes of delineating the Hellenistic structure more fully. Excavated Hellenistic structures are relatively rare in Jordan.

The most extensive Iron I remains emerged 5 m downslope (south) and parallel to the lip of the site. Builders erected a narrow (.63-.73 meters) two-row wall preserved to a height of 1.15 meters. The stones were neatly laid in a "tight" masonry style. Artifact-poor fill behind the wall contained nothing later than late Iron I ceramics. The absence of living surfaces associated with the wall suggests that it functioned as a terrace.

Several walls from the late Iron II/Persian period were in line with walls of the same date found in 1998. They were also reused when the builders of the Hellenistic period constructed their buildings. These walls were not excavated this season.

The Hellenistic structure was our primary goal this season and we succeeded in exposing a large room or courtyard, measuring about 5 m wide by at least 12 m long (the northern wall has not yet been found). Two surfaces were used with the room, one on top of the other. The lower floor produced many ceramic objects, including several handmade juglets. The upper surface seems to have converted the western wall of the room into a support wall for a portico facing west, because around one of the pillar bases four Hellenistic lamps were found. Other features, such as possible bins, existed to the east of the room, but more needs to be excavated before they are understood clearly. This building seems to have been part of an isolated farmstead, whose inhabitants cultivated the area. Elsewhere in our region, especially at Hisban, the ruling group seems to have been the Hasmonean dynasty in Jerusalem (Vyhmeister 1989). Future seasons will see further clearing of the building.

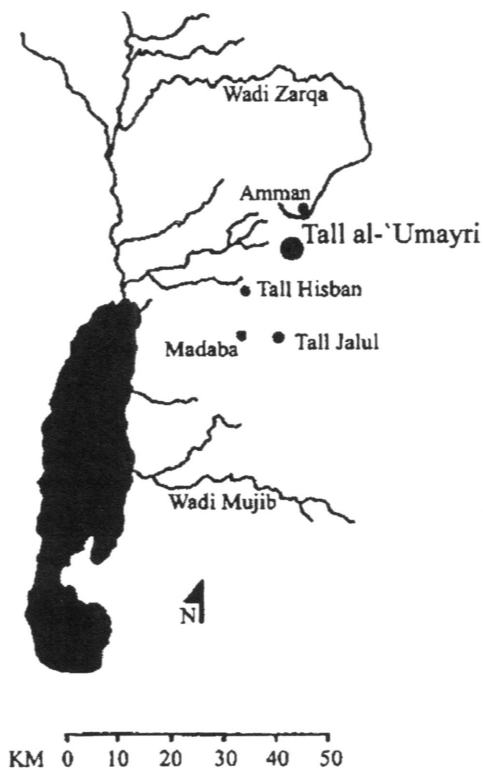


Figure 1. Regional map of the Madaba Plains Project.

Tall al-‘Umayri

Anthony Aalvik
Glenn Blackwelder
Jon Cole
Larry Herr
2002

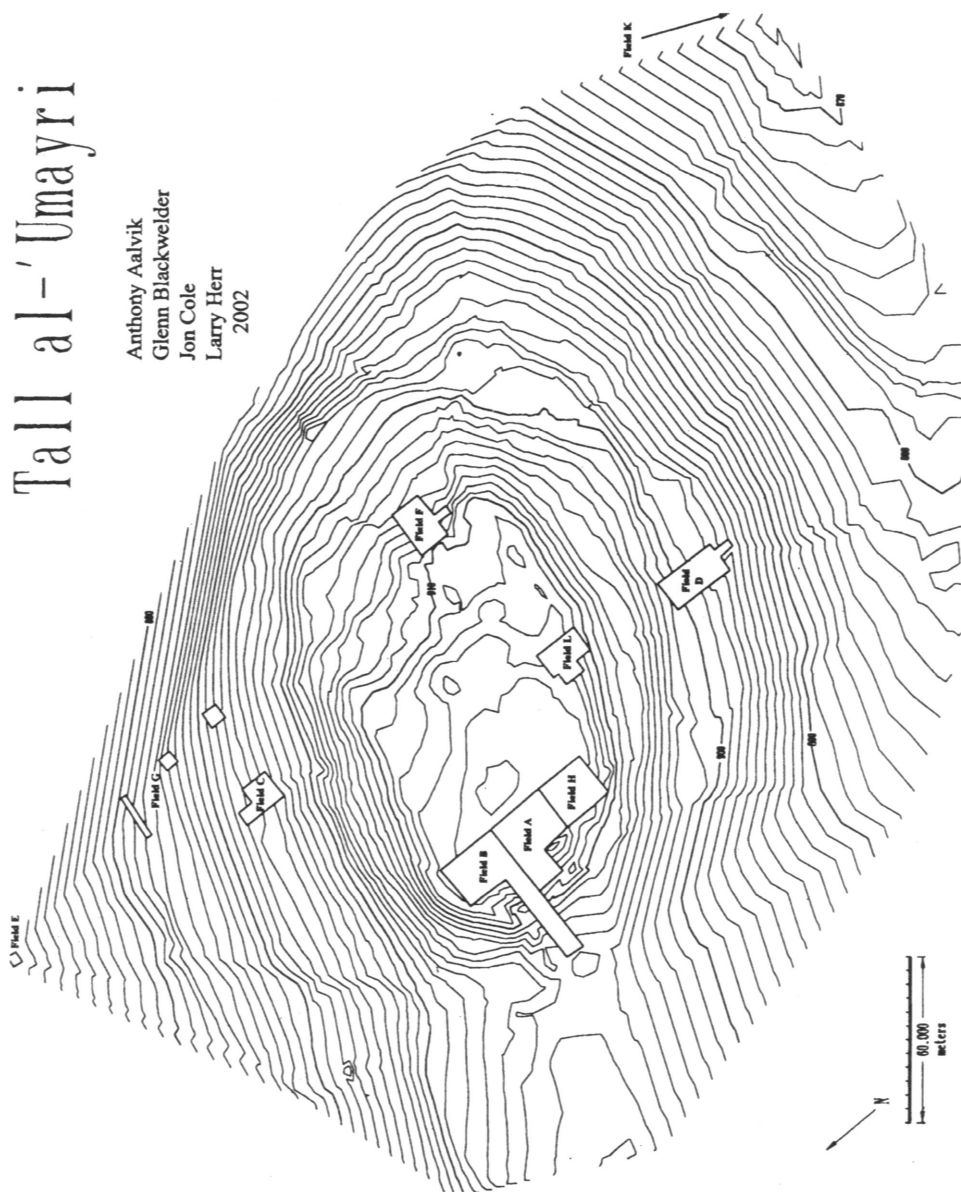


Figure 2. Topographic map of Tall al-‘Umayri.

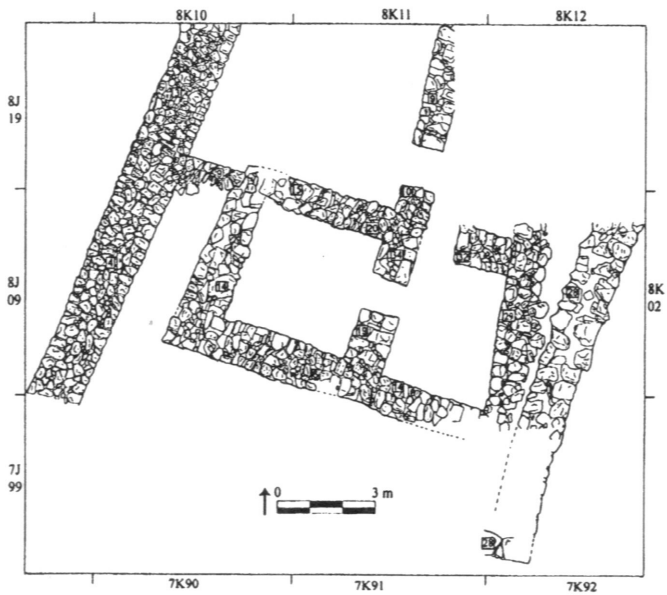


Figure 3. Plan of the LB "palace."



Figure 4. LB "palace" from the southwest.



Figure 5. New walls of the LB "palace."



Figure 6. Eastern portion of the LB "palace" and the refuse pit (with people).



Figure 7. Goblet with painted decoration in LB destruction.



Figure 8. MB and early Iron I defensive system.

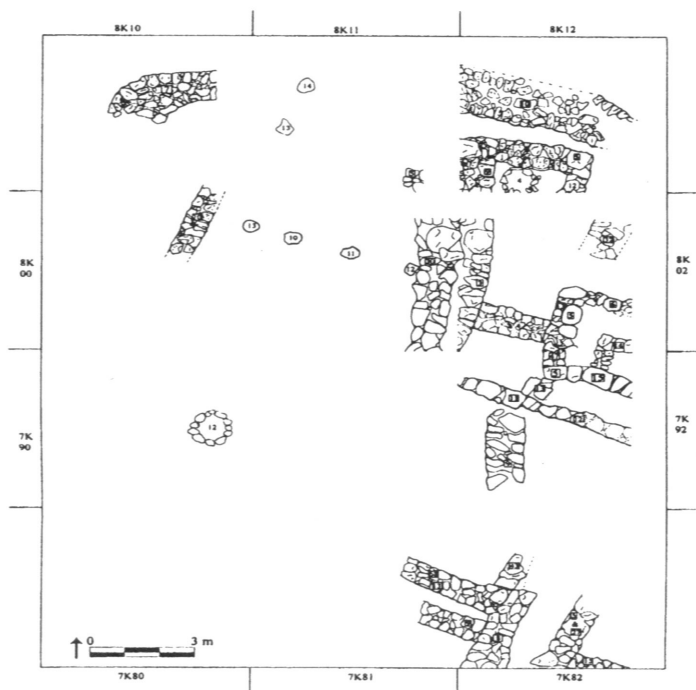


Figure 9. Plan of Iron II/Persian domestic building with pillars.



Figure 10. Lower cobble pavement of sanctuary courtyard (long walls at right and left are later).

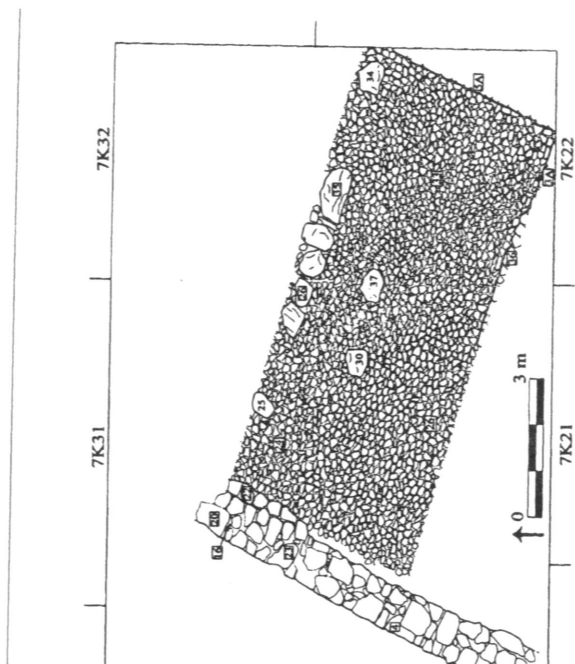


Figure 11. Plan of early Iron I remains (field H is at bottom).

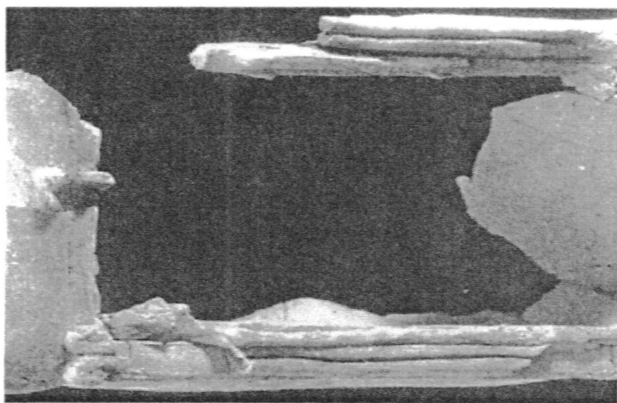


Figure 12. Reconstructed model shrine found in 2000.

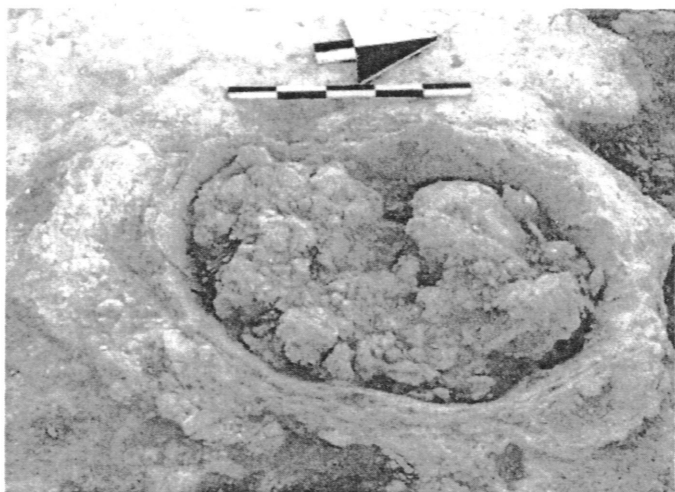


Figure 13. Plaster-mixing basin.



Figure 14. Fragments of figurines from a second model shrine.