

**MADABA PLAINS PROJECT—
TALL AL-‘UMAYRI, 2006**

LARRY G. HERR
Canadian University College
Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

DOUGLAS R. CLARK
La Sierra University
Riverside, California

Introduction

An eleventh season of excavation by the Madaba Plains Project—‘Umayri occurred between June 28 and August 2, 2006 at Tall al-‘Umayri, located approximately 10 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’s School of Architecture, Canadian University College, Mount Royal College, Pacific Union College, and Walla Walla University.¹ This season, a team of 27 Jordanians and 62 foreigners (15 of whom were present during the first or second half) participated in the fieldwork and camp activities of 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-‘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-Dreijat, 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.

²The authors of this report are especially indebted to Dr. Fawwaz el-Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities; Hanadi Taher and Sammer

During the 2006 season we 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 the northern rooms of the major Late Bronze Age building in Field B dating from ca. 1400-1250 B.C. We reached the floors and discovered a monumental entry into the building. We also uncovered a plastered altar immediately in front of the cultic niche discovered last season,³ as well as more of the northern perimeter wall dating to the early Iron Age 1 (ca. 1200 B.C.) along the top of the northern slope. The most complex activity occurred in Field A, where we cleared balks and debris from small areas as we exposed Iron 1 phases west of the Iron 2 Ammonite administrative complex. Also in Field A, we hoped that opening a new square at the southwestern extent of the field would shed light on a possible gate into the city during the Iron 1 period. In Field H, we sought to expand exposure of the open-air sanctuary from the late Iron 1 period (ca. 1100 B.C.) to the south and to probe beneath the cobble surface. Finally, in Field L we

Habahbeh, 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 Barbara Porter and assisted by Christopher Tuttle, provided invaluable assistance. The staff was housed in Muqabilayn 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. 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 D. Bates of La Sierra University (Field A), Kent Bramlett of the University of Toronto (Field B), David Berge of Portland, Oregon (Field H), and David Hopkins of Wesley Theological Seminary and Mary Boyd of Seattle, WA (Field L). Square Supervisors for Field A were Brenda Adams, Debra Haberman, Caroline Houghton, Audry Schaffer, and Tom Venner; they were assisted by Amy Bellinghausen, Aaron Davis, Erica Hufnagel, Heather Merizon, Tyler Mitchell, Steven Salcido, Kassie Skoretz, Myron Widmer, and Christina Widmer. Square Supervisors for Field B were Monique Acosta, Ellen Bedell, Carolyn Waldron, and Janelle Worthington; they were assisted by Boris Brajnikoff, Allison Hade, Lindsey Hill, Bethany Reising, Katie van Petten, Matt Vincent, and Anneliese Weiss. Square Supervisors for Field H were Julie Cormack, Marcin Czarnowicz, Jeanne DelColle, and Don Mook; they were assisted by Erin Carr, Russell Dedul, Stefanie Elkins, Sean Haskell, Larry Murrin, Agnieszka Ochal, Nikki Oakden, Jill Logee, and Barbara van Vierson Trip. Square Supervisors for Field L were Greg Kremer and Ruth Kent; they were assisted by Steven Barbery, Michael Dubbs, Charles Harris, Jennifer Harris, Henry Hopkins, Laura King, Thomas Tipton, Ferdinand Regalado, and Azadeh Vafadari. Camp staff and specialists included Carmen Clark (object registrar), Denise Herr (pottery registrar and notebook quality control), Larry Murrin (computers), Rhonda Root, Stefanie Elkins, and Elzbieta Dubis (artists), and Muhammad Ahmari (head cook). David Tashman served as our camp agent. Laundry technicians at ATC washed our clothes once a week. Carolyn Waldron was our nurse, and Nerida Bates served as physician while with us for two weeks.

³Herr and Clark, 2004, Fig. 4.

wanted to discover the eastern extent of the Hellenistic agricultural complex and fully excavate it to Iron 2 levels. We will describe our results and interpret the finds below field by field.

*Field A: Iron 1 Structures, Fortifications,
and the Emerging City Gate*

ROBERT D. BATES
La Sierra University
Riverside, California

Beneath and to the west of the royal Ammonite administrative complex,⁴ dating to the end of the Iron 2 and the subsequent Persian periods, previous excavations found limited remains of several Iron 1 phases (ca. 1200-1000 B.C.), with the most notable structures coming from the transition from the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550-1200 B.C.) to the following Iron 1 period. They thus date to slightly before and after 1200 B.C. These earlier buildings were also located to the north and west of the later administrative complex. This season, we removed all impediments covering the Iron 1 phases, thereby exposing several phases of the Iron 1 period throughout several squares. The ultimate goal is to excavate the later Iron 1 phases and uncover the transitional Late Bronze/Iron 1 remains, which are remarkably preserved at the northern edge of Field A and in the southern portion of Field B. Two well-preserved houses from this period have been excavated, producing a wealth of finds that help us understand the biblical period of the judges.⁵

Excavators in Field A found more of the site's perimeter wall in what we are now calling the city gate area. The perimeter wall ran north-south along the western edge of the site and then curved sharply east by 90°, running into the city (Map 3). However, more of the city lies to the south of the wall. We have thus tentatively suggested in past reports that this turn of the wall may signal the presence of a gate into the city. The eastward-running portion of the wall would be the northern wall of the gate passageway, while a similar wall, four meters to the south and parallel to it, would be the southern wall. From this southern wall, another wall ran to the south, which we suggested was the southern perimeter wall around the southern part of the city.

Along with discovering more of the northern gate wall, we were also able to clear a large portion of the southern parallel wall and to find its monumental termination, signaling the exterior entrance to what we can now with confidence call a "gateway." One of the stones in this wall measured 2.4 x 1.2 x 1.0 m (Figure 1). This is the largest stone we have found in a wall so far at the site. Although we have not yet discovered the founding levels of the gate walls or any of the original passageway surfaces (we anticipate finding them in the 2008 season), apparently one or two small piers have emerged, jutting out into the gateway from the parallel walls. Such piers are normal features of ancient gates, allowing small rooms and activity areas within the gate (Ruth 4:1). Some ancient gates had as many as six of

⁴Yunker, Herr, Geraty, and LaBianca, 1993, Plate 14.

⁵Herr, Clark, and Trenchard, 2002, Figs. 3-5.

them. However, the piers in our gate are short to allow a sufficiently wide passageway between them. Our gate is one of the earliest Iron Age gateways in the highland culture of ancient Aram, Israel, Ammon, Moab, and Edom.

Inside the curve of the northern perimeter wall, we dismantled several balks (the standing earth left between excavation units) and removed later walls to expose the top of the Iron 1 layers dating to the eleventh century B.C. There are at least three and possibly four of these layers, each representing a city or town from the time of the judges. It was a time of tribal societies among all the small emerging nations of the region. Tent-dwelling nomads seem to have been settling down in villages, towns, and cities. Tall al-'Umayri was one of the first of these towns to appear, probably because it was near a good water supply and on a major north-south trade route running the length of what today is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The first occupants built the perimeter wall and gate mentioned above, as well as a rampart to protect them from invaders. They also built houses and shrines inside the walls. The later Iron 1 levels of the city, however, were not constructed as well as the first one. Apparently, whatever made the first city so prosperous diminished through time during the period. We have discovered only minor wall fragments and fill layers of earth and, although there are a few rooms, doorways, and floors, there are not full coherent houses such as found in the earliest city. However, it is interesting that, during a period of about 200 years, there were at least three distinct cities built one on top of the other.

The abatement process of the city seems to have continued into the tenth century, the time of the United Monarchy in the Bible. We have very little from that time period. Use of the earlier gate seems to have stopped, because material from the middle of the Iron 2 period (ca. 900-700 B.C.) was dumped into it. Then one or two small rooms with a plaster floor in one of them and a couple of bins were built in the gate passageway. Although this does not represent a prospering town, we are still pleased with the discovery because it is the first from this time period at the site. Indeed, other sites in Jordan have likewise produced few finds from the middle of the Iron 2 period.

Field B: The Late Bronze Age Cultic Building

KENT V. BRAMLETT
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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 Num 21. However, 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 six seasons, we have been working on a large building from that period that comprises five rooms and walls preserved up to 3 m (10 ft) high (Figure 2).⁶

⁶Ibid., 118, Figs. 6-7.

The primary objective for Field B this season was to excavate the surface of the two primary northern rooms and, we hoped, discover the entrance into the building. We also hoped to confirm that the northern wall of the building was also the northern perimeter wall of the site at that time. The majority of the season's work was in the northern two rooms (Figures 2-3), with two teams working in them. The plan of the building is now complete. Remaining work will focus on exposing the floor(s) and a few earth deposits in corners here and there.

The Late Bronze Age destruction layer filling the main room sealed against all the walls of the room. We uncovered a stone bench along the eastern wall and a mud-brick altar in front of the cultic niche (Figure 3, the room is near the top of the picture). The thickness of the destruction debris in this "cult room" ranged between .75 and 1.4 m and corresponded to the height of the mud plaster preserved on the eastern and southern walls. It was also the height of the mud-brick wall between the room and a small room at the back. The destruction layer consisted primarily of fallen mud bricks from the upper-wall levels, which were mixed with numerous ashy and burned inclusions. The tumbled mud bricks interlaced vertically throughout and provided certainty that the entire destruction layer derived from a single destructive event. The southern third of the cult room showed the most evidence of burning and on or just above the floor were several burned beams, especially near the altar and between the altar and the southern wall. Samples of the beams were taken for species identification, 14C dating, and dendro-chronology analysis. The pottery in the destruction level derived primarily from the mud bricks and dated best to the Late Bronze 2A to early Late Bronze 2B periods (ca. 1400 to 1250 B.C.).

Directly beneath the destruction layer was the latest surface of the cult room, which was exposed across the entire room. A lower surface was found in probes along the eastern wall and in a meter strip along the northern wall. The upper floor was made of compacted earth and nari with some plaster and bricky material included. The surface sealed against the brick-and-plaster altar (Figure 4), which was constructed of stacked mud bricks of the same dimension as those found in the destruction layer and measured .56 x .38-.39 x .10-.12 m. The upper part of the altar was coated with a thick white plaster similar to that used on the bottom of the cultic niche and around the standing stones. The altar flared out along its north and south edges, evoking a semblance of horns. The flares, though partially broken and incomplete, appeared to be constructed primarily of plaster and increased the length dimension to .69 m. The preserved height of the altar ranged from .55 m to a maximum of .63 m above the surface. A small table of flat stones, possibly analogous to stone libation tables, was placed in front of the altar and was not plastered.

A probable bench, 2.3 m x .48-.54 m x .18-.20 m, was formed by stones lying against the eastern wall of the room. Several of the stones were plastered against the wall. Similar benches are commonly found in Late Bronze Age temples and cult rooms. The northern exterior wall of the building was further clarified. It was exposed to a height of five courses and was confirmed to measure 1.5-1.6 m wide. A worshiper entering the room would have had a view like that in Figure 5.

Excavation in the eastern room also clarified several problems from previous seasons. As in the cult room, the destruction layer is now clear. It sealed against the walls of the room and the newly discovered entry and stairs (Figure 3). Removal of the destruction layer exposed the surface of the room, which has so far been uncovered only in the southern third of the room. An earlier surface was also exposed in a probe in the eastern side of the room (adjacent to the entry stairs).

The eastern wall of the room was divided by an entry way that is 1.5 m wide. It consisted of stairs descending into the room (which we can now call the "entry room") from a threshold midpoint in the entryway (Figure 3). We do not yet know the external features of the entry; nor do we know whether additional stairs descended from the entryway outside or if the approach was level (except for one known step up to the threshold). The interior stairway comprised several parts. A landing just inside the building offered the choice of turning right to descend to the floor of the entry room or turning left to ascend toward the south (probably to a second floor). One could also descend to the floor of the entry room by going downstairs straight ahead. Flat orthostatic stones lined the entryway and portions of the stairway. The treads of the stairway, consisting each of two flat stones placed side-by-side, had been splayed apart in apparent earthquake damage. Also, a large hewn stone forming the doorjamb had been split in two and splayed wide apart. This earthquake damage may help to date the destruction of the building, if the burning can be attributed to the aftermath of an earthquake. Generally, earthquake damage evincing this much movement is not considered possible in deeply buried structures, which are inadvertently reinforced by the surrounding earth matrix. There appears to be no reason why this same earthquake could not be accountable for the damage to the rampart.

There is at present some debate about the function of this building. Some of the current archaeological team believe that the building was primarily a cultic or temple structure with associated rooms. Others believe that it was a palatial building that included a major shrine room. In any case, the cultural affinity of the finds is similar to that found in the city-state systems of Canaan found throughout the southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age.

Field H: Courtyard Sanctuary and Possible Gate

DAVID R. BERGE
Portland, Oregon

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 2 period in Field A. This was largely accomplished in previous seasons. The major research questions this season revolved around the southern extent of 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.) that we have suggested was an open-air sanctuary or shrine.

This season we removed several later walls to expose the southern area of the cobble/plaster floor of the eleventh-century B.C. courtyard. We also probed beneath the cobble floor, hoping to discover earlier floors of the sanctuary courtyard dating to early Iron 1. But instead parts of two domestic dwellings were uncovered, containing an oven, a bin, and a large jar or pithos tipped upside down, possibly reused as another oven (Figure 6). Both rooms bordered on a large wall to their north that probably separated this domestic area from the gate passageway. The gate of the town was also discovered this season in Field A just to the north of Field H.

The large courtyard sanctuary was too large to be roofed. In the earliest phase, it contained a pillar base or an altar in the middle of the area, but no finds were discovered on the lowest floor that would indicate how the courtyard was used. But upper floors produced several examples of model shrines and figurines, suggesting that the area was used as a sanctuary in some manner. Alternating floors of cobbles and plaster produced pottery from the late Iron 1 period on the lowest floor, while the upper surface included potsherds from the late Iron 2/Persian period. The courtyard thus functioned for approximately 400 years, with periods of time interspersed when no activity seems to have taken place.

Excavation of the southern area of the courtyard revealed a small room, possibly a storeroom for the sacred area during the end of its tenure in the late Iron 2 period. Such rooms are frequently associated with structures where religious activities occur. The Bible, for instance, describes storerooms that were part of the Jerusalem temple (1 Kgs 6:5) and the temple compound discovered at Dan included rooms surrounding the courtyard that contained temple furnishings.⁷

Field L: The Southern Edge

DAVID C. HOPKINS
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, D.C.

MARY PETRINA BOYD
University Temple United
Methodist Church
Seattle, Washington

We began excavations on the southern edge of the site in 1998 with three squares and discovered remains of a Hellenistic farmstead on top of Iron Age buildings and surfaces, the only location on the site where architectural remains from this pre-NT time have so far been found. We had also found large walls built of massive stones (some 1.5 m long) that dated to the Iron 1 period. For the Hellenistic period, the wall remains suggest a building of at least two rooms.

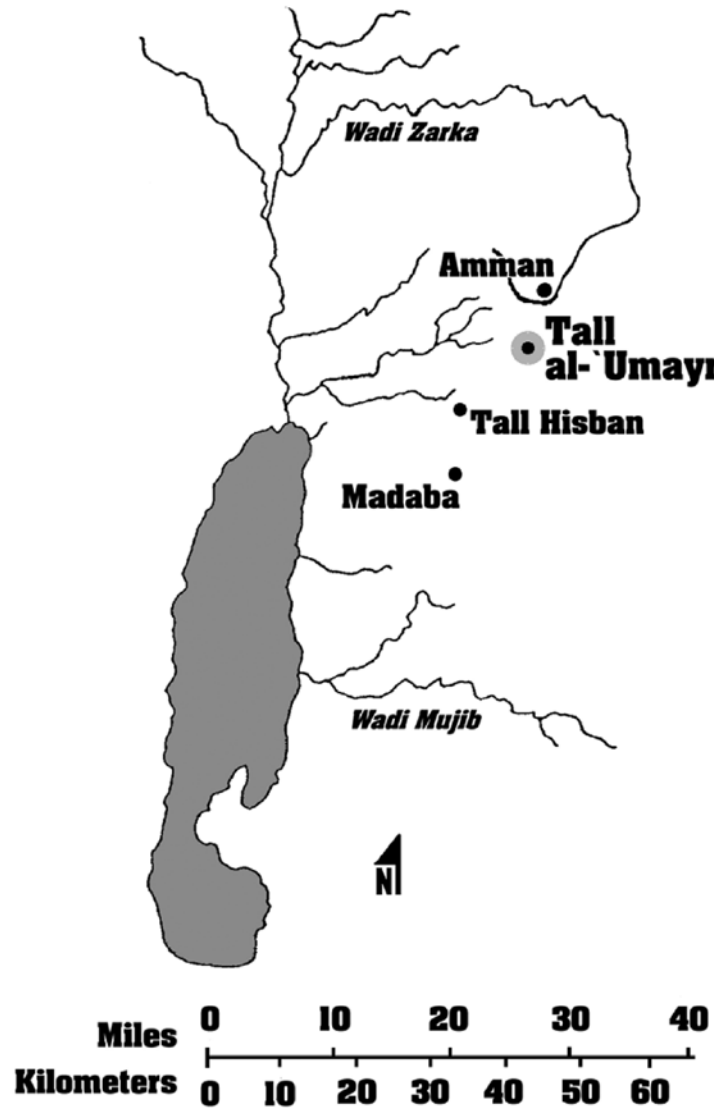
This season we opened two new squares and expanded another in the search for the northern and eastern limits of the Hellenistic farmstead. We also wanted to understand how that structure related to the Iron 2 structures below.

One of the most interesting aspects of this field is the massive walls, 1.3 to 1.5 meters thick, which are constructed of large boulders, some well over a

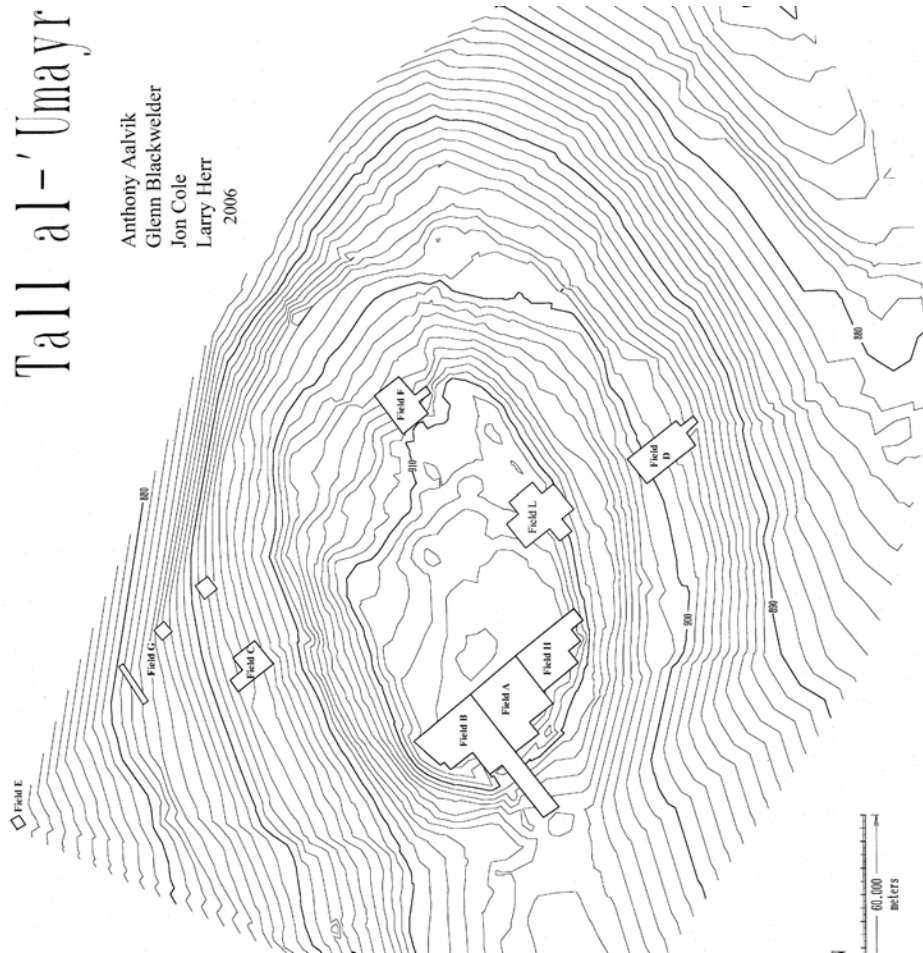
⁷A. Biran, *Biblical Dan* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994).

meter long (Figure 7). Although we have discovered four of these walls and have excavated down to Iron 1 levels along one of them, we have not yet reached the founding level for any of them. Based on similar architecture in the gate area of Field H, we suggest the walls date to the early Iron 1 period, but this conclusion must remain tentative until we have reached the founding levels of the walls. At any rate, such large walls, reflecting public structures, are strange to find in the center of a site where one would expect domestic architecture. Moreover, the Iron 1 period is normally not a period when massive architecture appears. This will continue to be a major research question in future seasons.

No certain remains from the Iron 2 period were discovered this season, but a possible courtyard belonging to the Hellenistic farmstead was found in two new squares opened to the east (Figure 8). A long east-west wall was the northern limit of the suggested courtyard and a parallel fragment to the south may have been the southern wall. Between the walls was a fragment of a plaster surface similar to those found to the west in previous seasons. Upon the surface were the bases of large storage jars and a few installation features that may have been related to local industries. The boulders with holes through them may have been weights for olive-oil presses.



Map 1. Regional Map of the Madaba Plains Project.



Map 2. Topographic map of Tall al-'Umayri through the 2006 season.



Map 3. Plan of Field A during the transitional Late Bronze/Iron 1 period. Some of the walls in the gate area and to its north are late Iron 1 or Iron 2.



Figure 1. Photo of the western terminus of the southern wall of the gateway complex. Note the very large stone.

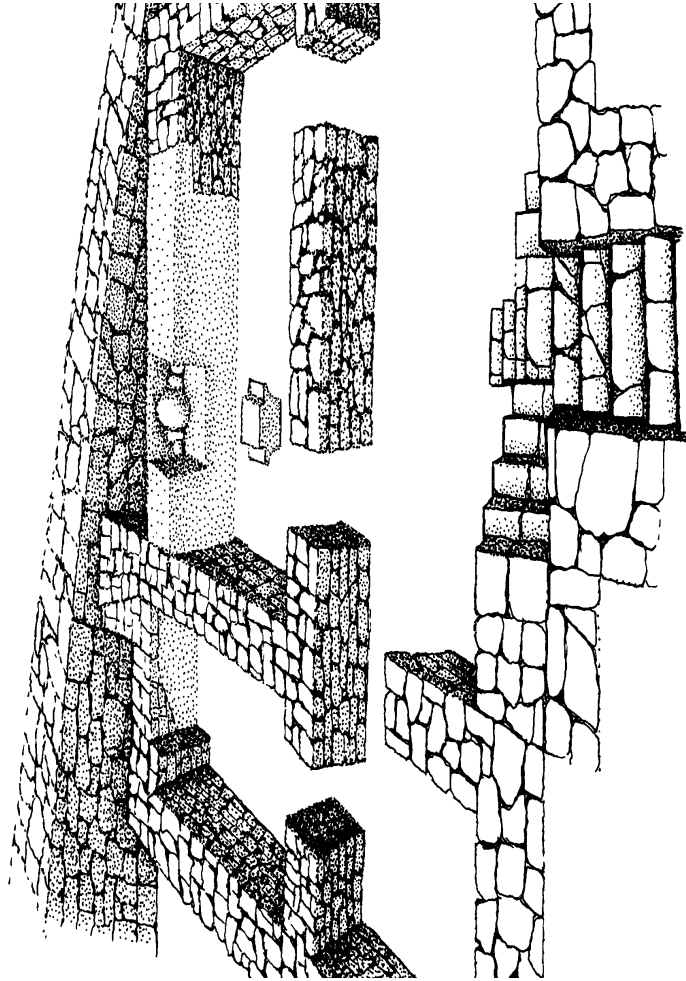


Figure 2. Isometric drawing of the Late Bronze building from the east (drawing by Rhonda Root).



Figure 3. The Late Bronze building from the east; the entrance and stepped descent into the building are at the bottom; the cultic installation is at the top.



Figure 4. The cultic niche of the Late Bronze building with a small plastered brick altar on the floor in front.

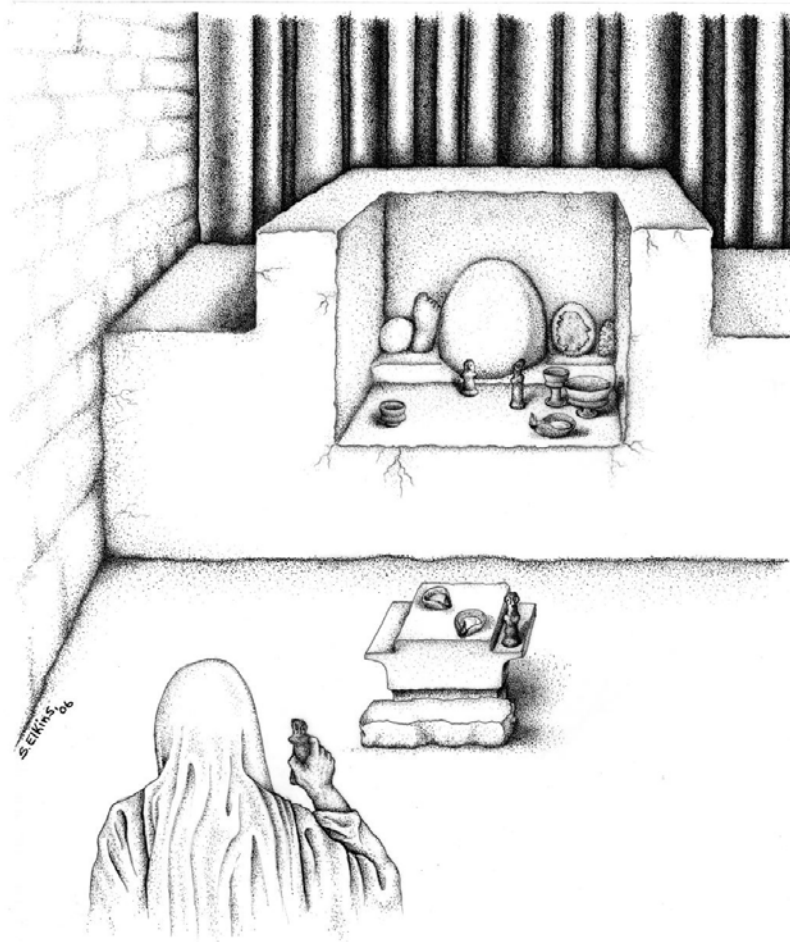


Figure 5. Domestic architecture of Phase 12 below the lowest cobble floor of the courtyard sanctuary.



Figure 6. The tops of large walls made of very large boulders are visible under the later, Hellenistic architecture (they are also slightly darker in color); they may date to the Iron 1 period.



Figure 7. Features between two parallel walls that may have been part of a courtyard associated with the Hellenistic farmstead found in earlier seasons in the top part of the photo.



Figure 8. Another view of features between two parallel walls that may have been part of a courtyard associated with the Hellenistic farmstead in Figure 7.