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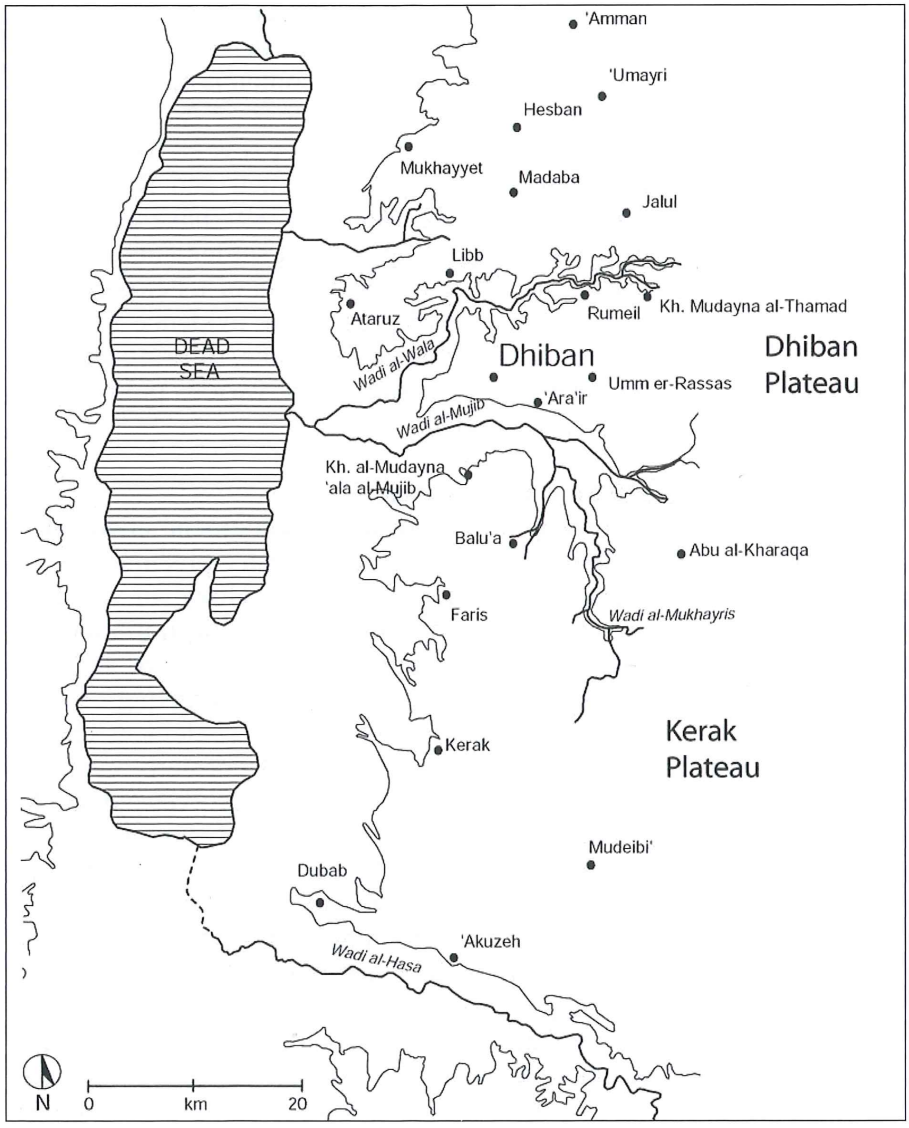
Long-Term Settlement Change at Dhībān

The Dhībān Excavation and Development Project (henceforth, DEDP) is a long-term archaeological research project that aims to understand Dhībān's changing role as a political and economic center within what was often an imperial periphery. Tall Dhībān is the largest settlement on the Dhībān Plateau, a narrow slice of west - central Jordan confined by Wādī al-Wāllā and Wādī al-Mūjib on the north and south, and the Jordan Valley and Arabian Desert on the west and east respectively (FIG. 1). As



1. Map of west- central Jordan featuring the Dhībān Plateau.

a result of these barriers, travel across the Dhībān Plateau is constrained and tends to follow similar routes connecting the same locations over time. Most famously, various iterations of the so called King's Highway ran past Dhībān, connecting Mādabā in the north with Karak to the south, thereby contributing to the continued importance of the town. Dhībān also sits on a significant precipitation isohyet that may partly explain its central position on the plateau. The region west of Dhībān receives between 250 and 400 millimeters of annual precipitation, making sustainable rain-fed agriculture just possible. Precipitation east of Dhībān is substantially less, making it primarily suited for pastoralist activities.

Over the millennia the Dhībān Plateau has been incorporated into a number of kingdoms and empires, and has been peripheral to the political and economic centers that ruled over it, be they Nineveh, Rome, Damascus, Istanbul, London or even 'Ammān. Indeed, the brief periods when the plateau was ruled independently, (e.g. before Moab was incorporated into the Assyrian Empire), or when the plateau marked an important geo-political boundary (e.g. between the Nabataeans and Hasmoneans, or the Ayyubids and Crusaders), are exceptions that prove the rule of the Dhībān Plateau's political marginality.

Over these same millennia, settlement on the Dhībān Plateau, as elsewhere in central Jordan has been markedly unstable, with considerable differences over time in the number, size and visibility of sites. By the same token, settlement on the *tall* of Dhībān has also been markedly unstable, serving as something of a microcosm for the region as a whole. Whenever sedentary settlement has increased on the Dhībān Plateau, the site of Dhībān has re-emerged as the largest and most important site on the plateau. The only real exception to this pattern is the case of Umm ar-Raṣāṣ in the Byzantine period, when Dhībān ran a close second in terms of site size. One might credit settlement expansion at Dhībān to the presence of empires in the region, but this is not always that case, as illustrated by the Ottoman and New Kingdom Egyptian Empires. Furthermore, each of these empires (e.g. Assyria, Rome, Byzantium, Umayyad, Mamluk, Ottoman and British) was rather different in their internal organization and modes of domination and surplus extraction. Hence, this raises many questions in keeping with the themes of 'Continuity and Change' chosen for this volume of *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*. How and why did Dhībān continually re-emerge as an important center in what was often an imperial periphery? How did Dhībān's local position articulate with global economic and political forces and were these articulations always the same? Answering such questions is a long-term goal of the DEDP, one that requires us to track and define the nature and extent of settlement at Dhībān as it changes over time.

The DEDP is still at a relatively early stage in terms of analysis and interpretation. We have conducted three brief seasons focused on test excavations in 2004, 2005 and 2010, as well as a larger-scale season of excavation in 2009. Thus far, the bulk of our work has related to domestic architecture from the Middle Islamic (Mamluk) period on the western side of the *tall* (see Porter *et al.* 2005, 2011). However, aspects of our work, when combined with the results of contemporary fieldwork carried out by the Department of Antiquities and earlier fieldwork conducted by several foreign projects (MacKenzie 1913; Winnett and Reed 1964; Tushingham 1972; Morton 1989), have also begun to reveal an overall picture of settlement at Dhībān across the entire five millennia of its existence. In this paper, we will present the evidence for intra-site settlement change over time, offering tentative reconstructions of site size at various points in the history of Dhībān.

History of Research

Knowing how and when settlement changed at Dhībān is, of course, a necessary precursor to understanding why it changed. However, tracking on-site settlement can also provide important information for planning site development and conservation as well as the efficient targeting of areas for excavation. Reconstructing settlement change across Dhībān on the basis of currently available evidence is a difficult task that involves piecing together the results of a number of different archaeological projects besides our own. Hence, to begin, we will briefly review archaeological research at Dhībān in order to highlight what each tells us about the long-term history of the site.

Dhībān first became the focus of serious scholarly attention in 1868, when the missionary Fredrik Klein was shown the Mesha Inscription by members of the Banī Ḥamīda tribe camping at Dhībān.

This set off a sequence of events, at times comical and at times tragic, that resulted in the Mesha Inscription arriving in Paris broken into a large number of pieces (Graham 1989).

The site of Dhībān itself now became a point of interest to scholars, with Clermont-Ganneau providing the first sketch map of the site in 1871 based on information provided by Palmer and Drake (Clermont-Ganneau 1870-71: 160). While only a rough sketch, this map did emphasize the dual structure of Dhībān, depicting the northern *tall* surrounded by wadis, but linked by a saddle on the south-east to a ridge that also contained ancient remains and is now covered by the modern town of Dhībān. Systematic investigations began with the Palestine Exploration Fund mapping expedition in 1910, directed by Duncan MacKenzie (1913). MacKenzie was disparaging of the prospects for productive excavation at Dhībān, since for MacKenzie 'productive' was defined as uncovering the city of Mesha and the surface of Dhībān was covered with walls and arches of Byzantine and Middle Islamic origin on both the northern *tall* and the south-eastern ridge. Indeed, MacKenzie (1913: 59) confesses to "a feeling of disappointment if not of actual dismay at the discovery." Be this as it may, both his map and his brief description of this surface architecture is now a rather valuable document. This is because, over the next 40 years, much of this surface architecture would be removed. Initially it was removed as building stone for the modern town of Dhībān, which began to grow as a permanent settlement with the foundation of the Hashemite state. Subsequently, in 1950, G. Lankester Harding, then director of the Department of Antiquities, had many of the remaining arches and related structures removed from the surface of the northern *tall* in order to facilitate excavation, donating the stone to serve as bedding for the newly upgraded Madaba-Dhībān road (Winnett and Reed 1964: 11).

Excavation at Dhībān was first carried out by the American Schools of Oriental Research from 1950 to 1953. This work concentrated on the east and south-east portions of the site, where the Mesha Inscription was said to have been discovered and where the presence of large-scale features, such as fortification walls and the so-called Nabataean temple, was already indicated on the surface. These excavations were eventually published in Volumes 36, 37 and 40 of the Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research (Winnett and Reed 1964; Tushingham 1972).

Disappointed with the light shed on Iron Age Dhībān, team member William Morton shifted the ASOR excavations from the south-east to the summit and the north side of the *tall*, opening three major excavation areas that he labeled A-E, L and H in 1955, 1956 and 1965. These excavations uncovered substantial stratified deposits from the Middle Islamic, Byzantine-Early Islamic, Nabataean-Early Roman, Iron Age II and Early Bronze Age II-III periods. Unfortunately, chronic health problems prevented Morton from publishing his results. With the permission of Mrs Thelma Morton, and through the auspices of the White-Levy Fund for archaeological publication, one of us (Routledge) took on responsibility for publishing the results of Morton's excavations in 1998.

In 2002 the Department of Antiquities prioritized the development of Dhībān and began renewed excavation and consolidation work at the site under the direction of Basam al-Mahameed and Ali Khayyat of the Department's Madaba office (Mahameed 2003). As a result of working on the Morton material, we became interested in the renewed work at Dhībān and, with the permission and encouragement of the Department of Antiquities, began a parallel project adjacent to Morton's Area L in 2004. So far, the bulk of our attention has been dedicated to understanding a series of Middle Islamic domestic compounds that had been given insufficient attention in Morton's excavations, as well as clarifying the stratigraphic sequence in Area L (Porter *et al.* 2005, 2011). This work has proceeded by means of new excavations and by re-exposing and cleaning architectural features originally uncovered by Morton. In 2009, however, we began to branch out and initiated a program of surface sherd collection and test excavations in order to help us better understand the formation of the *tall* and the distribution of settlement across its surface at different points in time.

Dhībān's Slopes and Terraces

Aerial photographs, satellite imagery and surface mapping indicate the existence of hundreds of architectural features and at least 67 cisterns on Dhībān's surface. These visible features are particularly notable on the western and north-western side of the site, which has received much less attention than the eastern and south-eastern sides of the *tall*. In fact, topographic survey incorporating the

full extent of the site on its west and north shows that, at just over 12 hectares in area and 41 meters in height, the *tall* is much larger than suggested in the published reports of the ASOR expedition, which cite figures between *ca.* 2.5 and 7.5 hectares based primarily on the surface area of the top of the mound (Winnett and Reed 1964: 5, 39n.2). This restricted view of the *tall* is misleading because the slopes of the *tall* are characterized in many places by large, habitable terraces. Evidence from other *tall* sites suggests that such terracing can be the result of shifts in the size and location of settlement on the mound over time (e.g. Portugali 1982). Alternatively, because the bedrock underlying Dhībān has proven to be stepped everywhere that excavation has occurred, it is possible that these terraces are the result of the underlying bedrock topography. With these options in mind we set out to explore the terraces in 2009 and 2010. What follows is a preliminary synthesis of the results of this fieldwork and its relation to the results of earlier excavations at the site. More detailed reports on the fieldwork will be published in forthcoming issues of *Annual of the Department of Antiquities*, while a more comprehensive synthesis of the settlement history of Dhībān is currently being prepared by the DEDP.

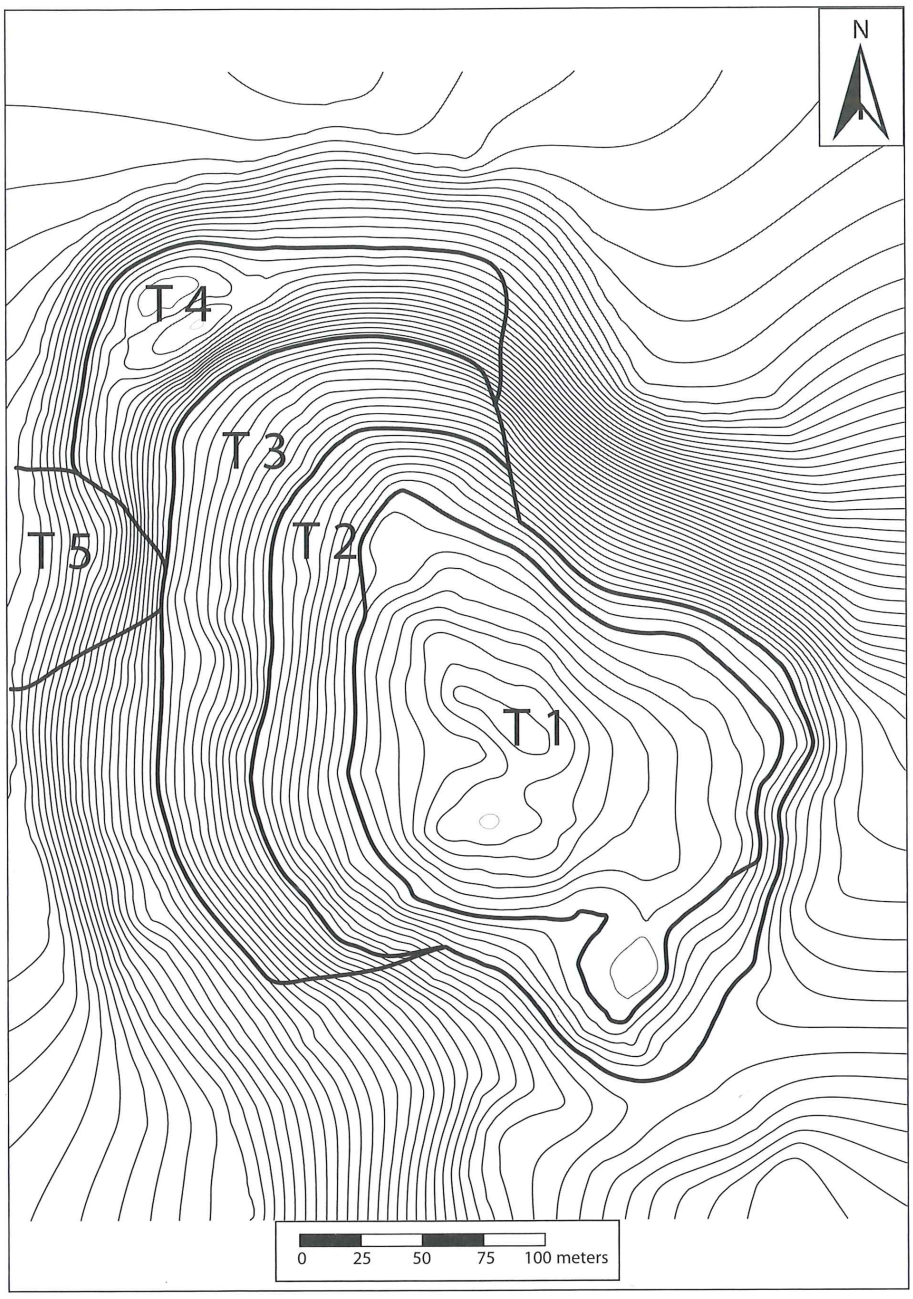
Our topographic survey indicated the existence of three major terraces on the slopes of the *tall*, with additional terracing on the lower slopes on the western side of the *tall* (FIG. 2). The uppermost terrace constitutes the summit of the *tall*, extending on the east to incorporate the published ASOR excavations and those of the Department of Antiquities, and on the west incorporating both Morton's and the DEDP excavations. The second terrace extends beyond the first on all sides, although along the northern side of the *tall* the slope is really too steep to justify the use of the term terrace. The second terrace appears to be retained in places by the remains of a fortification wall. This wall can still be traced along the south side of the *tall*, running west from the prominent mound immediately west of the Nabataean temple that has been the recent focus of excavations by the Department of Antiquities. This wall is likely to be an extension of the fortification wall excavated by the ASOR team and the Department of Antiquities on the eastern side of the *tall*. A third terrace extends beyond the visible remains of the fortification wall on the west and north-west sides of the *tall*, with a fourth and fifth terrace discernable on the lower western slopes.

Since the first terrace had already been explored by excavation, we decided to begin by investigating the second terrace, using a two step methodology of controlled surface collection of pottery followed by the excavation of selected test squares. Surface collection was used in order to acquire a spatially continuous sample of the terrace, whereas test excavation was used to test the relationship between surface and sub-surface remains. Owing to time constraints, we focused on identifying the latest *in situ* occupational deposits that constituted the second terrace, rather than exposing its complete stratigraphic sequence. As we knew that the first terrace was covered by extensive Middle Islamic remains, knowing the latest period of occupation on the second terrace would tell us whether or not this terrace represented an earlier settlement extending beyond the limits of the Middle Islamic town.

For the surface collection, we divided the second terrace into three sampling units, a north-western, a western and a south-western, in order to ensure even spatial coverage. We then randomly chose 10 percent of the 5mx5m grid squares on the second terrace, distributing them between the three sampling units in direct proportion to the surface area of each unit. For example, the south-western unit makes up *ca* 50% of the surface area of the second terrace, hence 50% of the grid squares chosen were located in the southern unit. In each of the selected grid squares a team of four recorded the slope and surface visibility, and then collected materials for six minutes. While finds consisted predominantly of ceramic vessels, we also collected glass, worked stone and the occasional shoe. In most units, identified ceramic vessels were predominantly either Roman/ Byzantine (FIG. 3) or Middle Islamic (FIG. 4) in date.

In order to discover whether surface collection predicted sub-surface habitation features, we selected ten units, with various surface pottery readings, to excavate. To expedite our work, we excavated only a quarter of the grid unit, that is, a 2.5m x 2.5m square. We excavated two such text squares in 2009 and a further five in 2010, including one on Terrace Three.

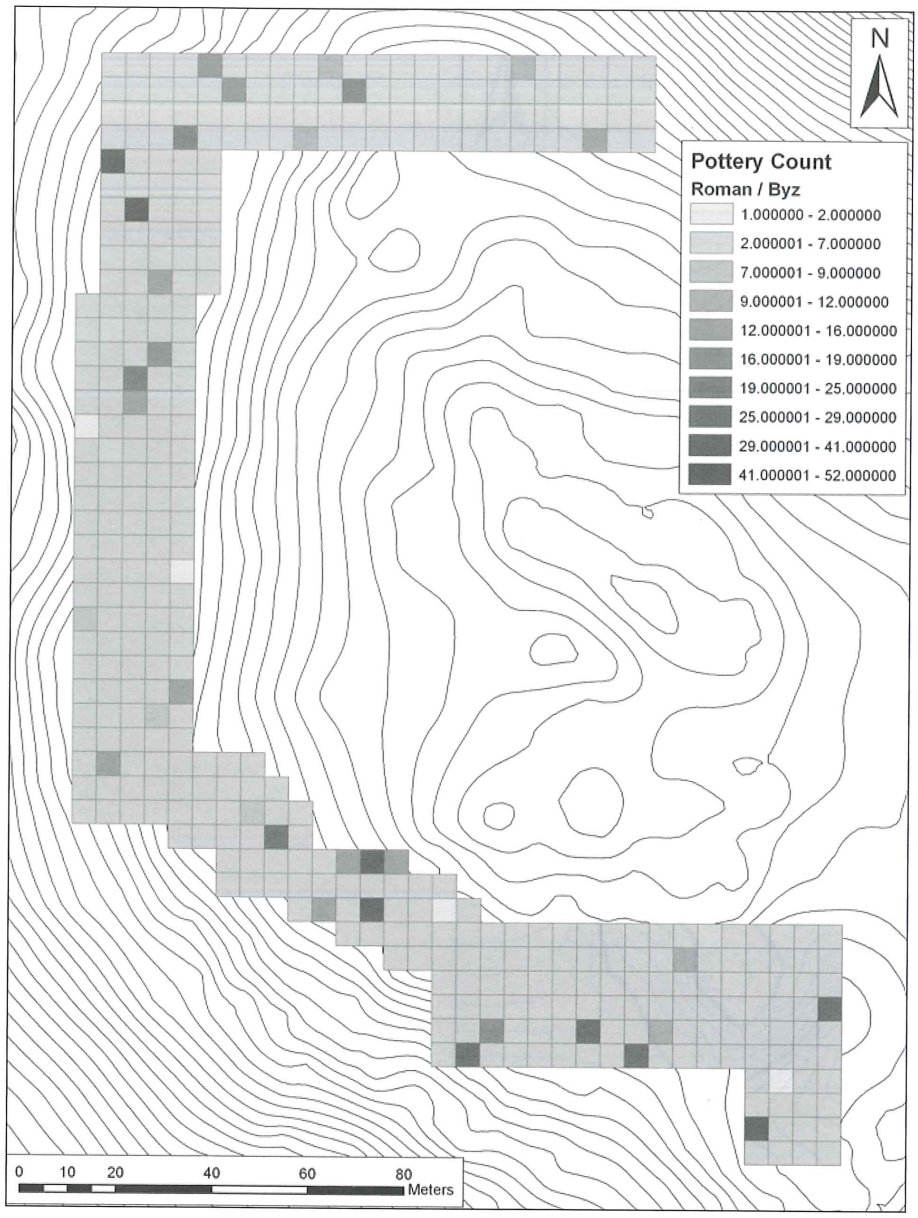
Summarizing our results, both the surface collection and test excavation units agree that on the western side of the *tall*, Middle Islamic settlement extended over Terrace Two and down-slope over



2. Topographic map of Dhībān with occupational terraces demarcated.

Terrace Three as well. As on the summit of the *tall*, Middle Islamic deposits on Terrace Two were deep and consisted of multiple phases. The Middle Islamic deposit on Terrace Three was shallower, consisting of a single phase that cut directly into Byzantine/ Early Islamic deposits. The apparent difference between Middle Islamic settlement on Terrace Three and on Terraces One and Two may have been the result of settlement expansion and/ or contraction within the Middle Islamic period. However, given our limited exploration of Terrace Three, all such generalizations remain speculative.

On the south-western side of the *tall*, surface collection and test excavations also agree in indicating that Middle Islamic occupation is largely absent from Terrace Two in this part of the site. Instead, we found deep deposits dating from the sixth-seventh centuries AD that began immediately beneath topsoil. This suggests that the Byzantine/ Early Islamic settlement of Dhībān extended further south than the Middle Islamic settlement. It also suggests that the foundation for the terraced structure of the *tall* goes back to at least the Byzantine period, if not to the underlying bedrock itself.

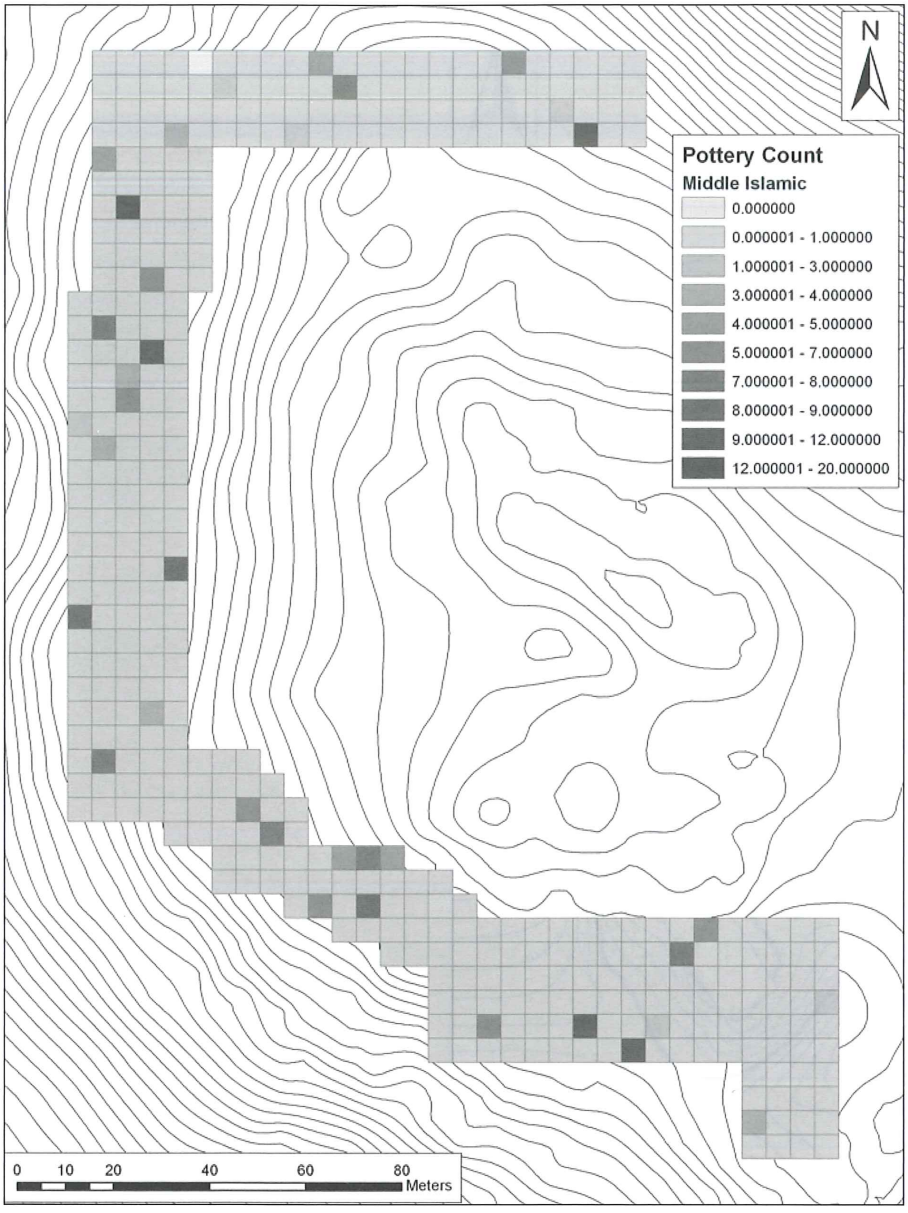


3. Map of Terrace Two showing density of Roman-Byzantine sherds by surface collection unit.

On the north-western side of the *tall* our results were more ambiguous. Surface collections on Terrace Two were dominated by Roman-Byzantine, rather than Middle Islamic, ceramic vessels. However, test excavations indicated that the latest occupation on Terrace Two on the north-west side of the *tall* was still Middle Islamic. The architecture visible on the surface of Terrace Three also suggests that Middle Islamic occupation continues on this terrace as well. This said, our explorations in 2010 did show that Terrace Two narrows, and its slopes steepen, as it approaches the northern side of the *tall*. Satellite imagery and surface reconnaissance indicate that Terrace Three ends abruptly at the north-west corner of the *tall*; indeed it appears to be framed by a boundary wall running diagonally down slope from Terrace Two. On the north side of the *tall* the slope becomes steep and continuous, with Terrace Two disappearing soon after turning the north-west corner of the *tall*. In light of these results, it would appear that the dominance of Roman-Byzantine sherds in our surface collections from the north-west of Terrace Two reflects underlying slope erosion, rather than the absence of *in situ* Middle Islamic occupation.

Results of Earlier Excavation Projects

Given our conclusions regarding the north-west corner of the *tall*, it is instructive to look at William Morton's Trench A-E, which effectively formed

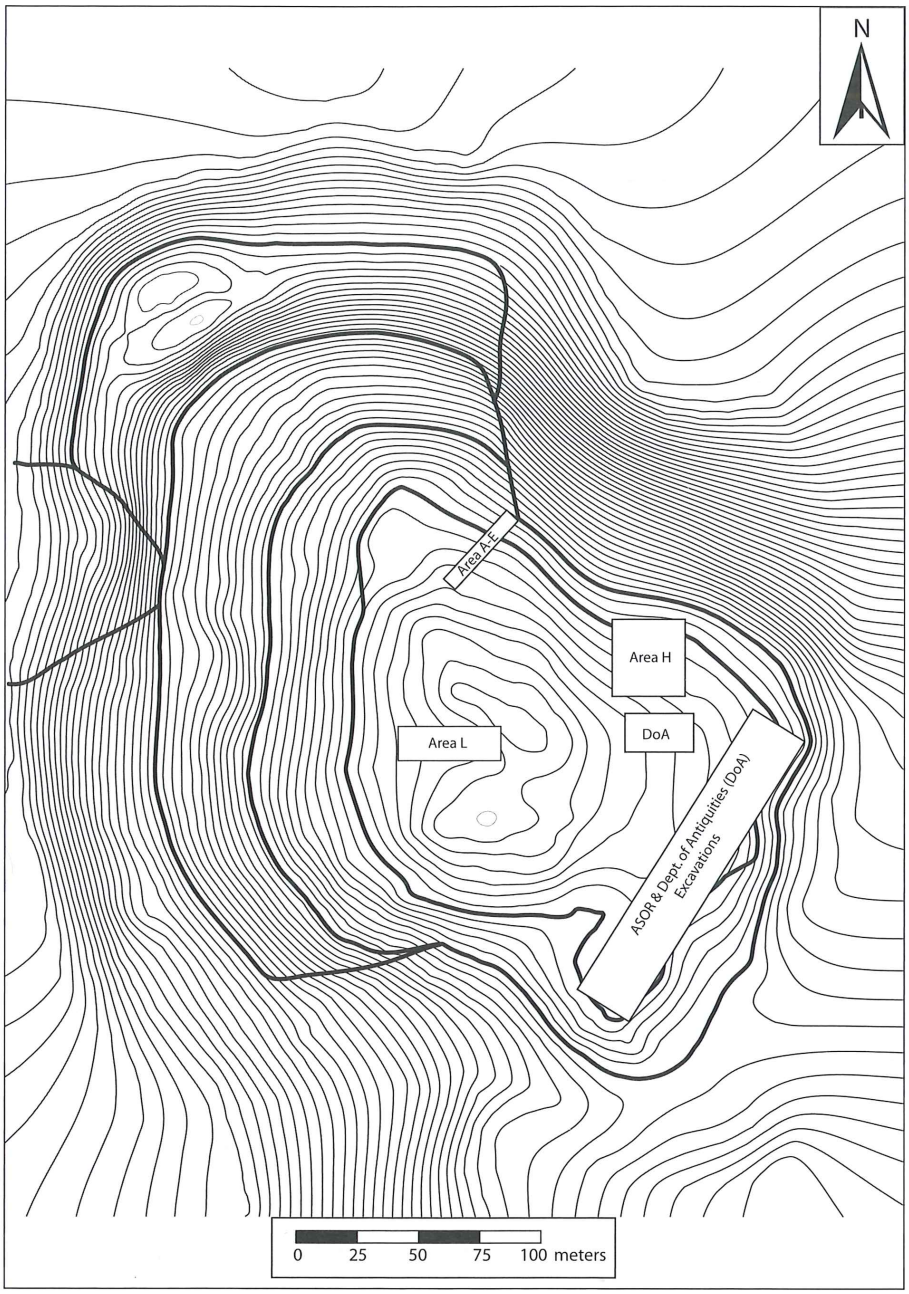


4. Map of Terrace Two showing density of Middle Islamic sherds by surface collection unit.

the northern limit of our investigations in 2009 and 2010 (FIG. 5). Trench A-E ran south to north for *ca.* 50 meters, straddling the transition from Terrace One to Terrace Two. In this trench three broad periods were identified; Middle Islamic, Byzantine and Iron Age II. The Iron Age II remains are preserved in only a few places on bedrock towards the southern end of the trench on the first terrace. Byzantine remains are substantial and extend all along the trench. Middle Islamic deposits are substantial in the southern end of the trench, but decline markedly as one reaches the second terrace to the north, suggesting a continued narrowing of Middle Islamic occupation on Terrace Two towards its northern limits.

On the east side of the *tall*, Middle Islamic remains have been found by both the ASOR and the Department of Antiquities excavations, from the newly excavated tower immediately west of the Nabataean temple across to near the north-east corner of the *tall*. Morton also found substantial Middle Islamic architecture in his Area H, on the north side of the *tall* just west of the northern limits of the Department of Antiquities and ASOR excavations.

Linking all this together leads us to suggest very tentatively that the Middle Islamic village covered *ca* 6 hectares of the *tall*. This said, it should be remembered that early descriptions of Dhībān make it clear that Middle Islamic occupation also covered 1-2 hectares on the south-eastern ridge, under



5. Map of Dhībān showing location of past and present excavation areas.

what is now the modern town of Dhībān (MacKenzie 1913).

Substantial Byzantine/ Early Islamic remains were found in all of the areas that have yielded Middle Islamic remains, as well as on the southwestern portion of Terrace Two where Middle Islamic settlement was absent. Hence, it appears that Dhībān reached its maximum extent in the late Byzantine period, probably extending into the Early Islamic period, as indicated in the ASOR excavations on the eastern side of the *tall*. In all excavation areas, multiple phases of Byzantine/ early Islamic occupation have been uncovered - the sole exception being Morton's Area L. Here clean Byzantine/ Early Islamic deposits, consisting of very small sherds, are only found immediately beneath the floors of Middle Islamic buildings. This suggests to us that, as in the ASOR excavations on the eastern side of the *tall* (see Winnett and Reed 1964: 41; Tushingham 1972: 83-84), Middle Islamic-era builders re-used many Byzantine and early Islamic buildings, effectively stripping them down to their foundations in Area L. Again, being speculative, we would estimate the size of Byzantine/ early

Islamic Dhībān at between 7 and 12 hectares, depending upon the degree to which the steep slopes on the north side of the site were occupied. In addition, one needs to account for the possibility that the south-eastern ridge was also occupied during the Byzantine period.

The extent of settlement prior to the sixth century AD is somewhat more difficult to determine. Substantial Nabataean deposits were found in the vicinity of the so-called Nabataean Temple and in Morton's Area L, but were not present in Morton's Trench A-E and were minimally present in his Area H. We found a possible first or second century AD deposit in one of our test squares, near the transition from Terrace One to Terrace Two on the southwest side of the *tall*, but we have no idea how far south or west this phase of habitation may have extended. What we can say is that Nabataean/ Early Roman Dhībān appears to have been considerably smaller than both Byzantine/ Early Islamic Dhībān and Middle Islamic Dhībān.

In contrast, the Iron IIB period has been found in all of Morton's excavation areas, as well in the ASOR excavations on the eastern side of the *tall*. Whether or not it is to be found throughout Terraces Two and Three is an open question. As part of our paleolandscape survey of Dhībān, we have identified walls at the base of the *tall*, running along the edges of Wādī Sakrān and retaining the lowest of the western terraces, designated as Terrace Five. These walls retain colluvial deposits from multiple erosional events; indeed, they were reconstructed several times as a result of accumulating colluvium. While investigation is still on-going, stratigraphic evidence suggests these episodes of wall construction, colluvial deposition and wall reconstruction go back to at least the Byzantine era, if not earlier.

On this same terrace we noted a topographic depression with an area of at least 625m^2, framed by a cliff face on the east and south, and a stone-built, thickly plastered wall on the west (the north side is obscured by Terrace Four- see below). These features suggest that the topographic depression may have been used as a water reservoir at some point in the past. We do not yet know exactly when this 'reservoir' was built and utilized. However, the plastered wall associated with this topographic feature has been buried at its northern end by the colluvial deposits of Terrace Four that appear to predate the Middle Islamic period (only the A and B Horizon [*ca.* 20cm in depth] of Terrace Four contained Middle Islamic pottery). Hence, it would appear that the primary use phase of this 'reservoir' also predates the Middle Islamic period. Surface sherds from the interior of the 'reservoir' are predominantly Roman/ Byzantine in date, although they are also few in number and uniformly small in size.

In between the 'reservoir' and the sequence of retaining walls on the edge of the wadi are ephemeral walls lines and heavy concentrations of pottery. This pottery assemblage is dominated in both number and weight by large Iron Age sherds from both the Iron Age II and, most especially, Iron Age I periods. Also present are large Early Bronze Age sherds and generally smaller Roman and Byzantine sherds. The large size and relatively unabraded nature of the Iron Age sherds suggests that they were originally deposited on this terrace, rather than re-deposited as a result of slope erosion. Hence, it would appear that Terrace Five was occupied during the Iron Age. Whether this occupation at the western base of the *tall* was continuous with, or distinct from, occupation on the summit (Terrace One) is as yet unclear.

On the summit, Iron I and Iron IIA sherds occur residually in Iron IIB contexts while later Iron IIC remains, so prominent elsewhere in central Jordan and present in the tombs at Dhībān, are not well represented. For example, in Area L, Morton uncovered a large Iron IIB building measuring at least 21x25 meters, and perhaps as much as 21x43 meters, in area. The building was founded on bedrock with 'built up' foundations of rubble and fill containing Iron I and Early Bronze II- III sherds pottery (see Morton 1989; Routledge 2004: 164, fig. 8.5). In Area H, William Morton exposed the monumental corner of what he interpreted as a gateway built in the Iron IIB period on land intentionally cleared to bedrock (Morton 1989).

The ASOR excavations showed that on the east and south-east side of the *tall*, both Nabataean and Byzantine structures cut into deep artificial fills ranging from less than 2 meters in depth towards the interior of the site, to a maximum of over 11 meters against the fortification walls on the eastern side. According to Douglas Tushingham's interpretation, these fills are retained by the earliest two or three fortification walls in the sequence of five walls built against and on top of one another on the eastern side of the *tall* (Tushingham 1990;

Tushingham and Pedrette 1995). Most of this fill seems to date to the Iron IIB period. While difficult to confirm on published evidence, if correctly interpreted, it would appear that the entire eastern portion of the *tall* was artificially raised by several meters and leveled in the Iron IIB period, at which time this portion of the site was also fortified.

In the Mesha Inscription it is claimed that Mesha built the wall of the wood lot and the acropolis, as well as the gates, towers and water reservoir of a place named Qarḥoh, which many scholars interpret as either a part of Dhībān or an alternate name for the site. Hence, it is rather tempting to relate this evidence for large-scale construction at Dhībān in the Iron IIB period with the reign of Mesha, as indeed Douglas Tushingham did in *SHAJ* V (Tushingham and Pedrette 1995). While this is not impossible, there are a number of chronological problems to consider. Recent analysis would lower the beginning of Iron IIB to around 840/830 BC on the basis of calibrated radiocarbon dates (Mazar 2005; see Finkelstein and Piasetsky 2010 for a transition as late as 785-748 BC). This means that Mesha's reign probably straddled the Iron IIA-IIB transition, with his building programme being associated with the very earliest phases of Iron IIB. At present, it is very difficult to identify these earliest phases anywhere in the southern Levant, and it is particularly difficult at Dhībān where occupation clearly occurred on a large scale throughout the Iron IIB period. Hence, at present, it is best to say that at some point after 840/830 BC, either during the reign of Mesha or one of his successors, the site of Dhībān was significantly transformed through a number of major building projects. This remodeled Iron IIB Dhībān was probably at least as large as Middle Islamic Dhībān, that is to say, at least 6 hectares in area.

Prior to the Iron Age, evidence for occupation has only been recovered for the Early Bronze II-III periods. Early Bronze Age sherds and a few Canaanean blades have been found as residual deposits in the ASOR excavations and in Morton's Area L and Trench A-E. Only in Morton's Area H have *in situ* Early Bronze Age deposits been found, including a fragment of a curvilinear wall. Although hardly informative on its own, the position of the Area H deposits on the very edge of the *tall* suggests that Early Bronze Age occupation was either quite extensive, or unusually situated on the slope, rather than summit, of the site. While the residual Early Bronze Age sherds found in fills on various parts of the *tall* could have been transported from anywhere on the site; when combined with the location of the *in situ* deposits in Area H, their wide distribution across the *tall* favours viewing Dhībān as a medium-sized Early Bronze II-III settlement, again maybe even as large as the Middle Islamic settlement at 6 hectares in area.

So far in this paper we have addressed the primary periods of occupation at the site. More problematic are those periods for which our various categories of evidence seem to suggest contradictory conclusions. The problem of Late Bronze Age Dhībān is well-known and we have little to add to the debate (see Na'aman 2006; Kitchen 2007). Whether or not the toponym *Tpn* in New Kingdom Egyptian itineraries and campaign records is best interpreted as Dhībān, no Late Bronze Age material has been found at the site. One can put this problem into perspective by considering the Middle Roman period. The ASOR excavations recovered coins and two inscriptions datable to the second and third centuries AD and yet, with the possible exception of an empty tomb to the east of the site, no deposits from these centuries have been identified anywhere on the *tall* (Tushingham 1972: 56-58).

To conclude, it is clear that Dhībān is a complex site with a long history of shifting settlement. In this paper we have done little more than tentatively document evidence for change, leaving the question of why these changes occurred for future research. Yet, documenting settlement change with some accuracy is important in and of itself for at least two reasons. First, the timing and nature of settlement growth and contraction at Dhībān is important for understanding the relationship between local developments and large-scale global developments. For example, excavations in Area L have shown that Middle Islamic buildings in this part of the site were abandoned gradually, with a long period of secondary use. We have been able to date this secondary use relatively closely using radiocarbon dating and it would appear that it fell in the first half of the 15th century AD, coincident with a major fiscal crisis in the Mamluk Empire. It would be very interesting to test if this sequence of gradual abandonment was a similarly dated elsewhere on the site, or if different neighborhoods in Dhībān experienced economic decline differently. This would be a first step to tracking exactly how economic problems in Cairo may have trickled down to have

such a devastating impact on the Jordanian plateau.

A second benefit to documenting settlement change relates to site development and conservation. We share with the Department of Antiquities and the residents of Dhībān the long-term goal of conserving and developing Tall Dhībān as an important cultural and economic resource for the local community. This will involve the carefully planned excavation and consolidation of archaeological remains from different time periods in order to enhance the interpretability of the site for visitors. At the same time, development for visitors also means conservation in terms of planning pathways and identifying sensitive areas that need to be monitored and protected. In both cases, having an overall view of what is likely to be located where is essential to working efficiently and effectively on such a large and complex site.

Dhībān is certainly not an easy site to either excavate or to understand. However, it is a site that rewards patience and hard work. We hope that a few of these rewards have been made evident in this paper, and we hope many more will be on offer in the near future.

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