

Tall Abū Şayyāḥ (Jabal aş-Şūr)

Geographic Location

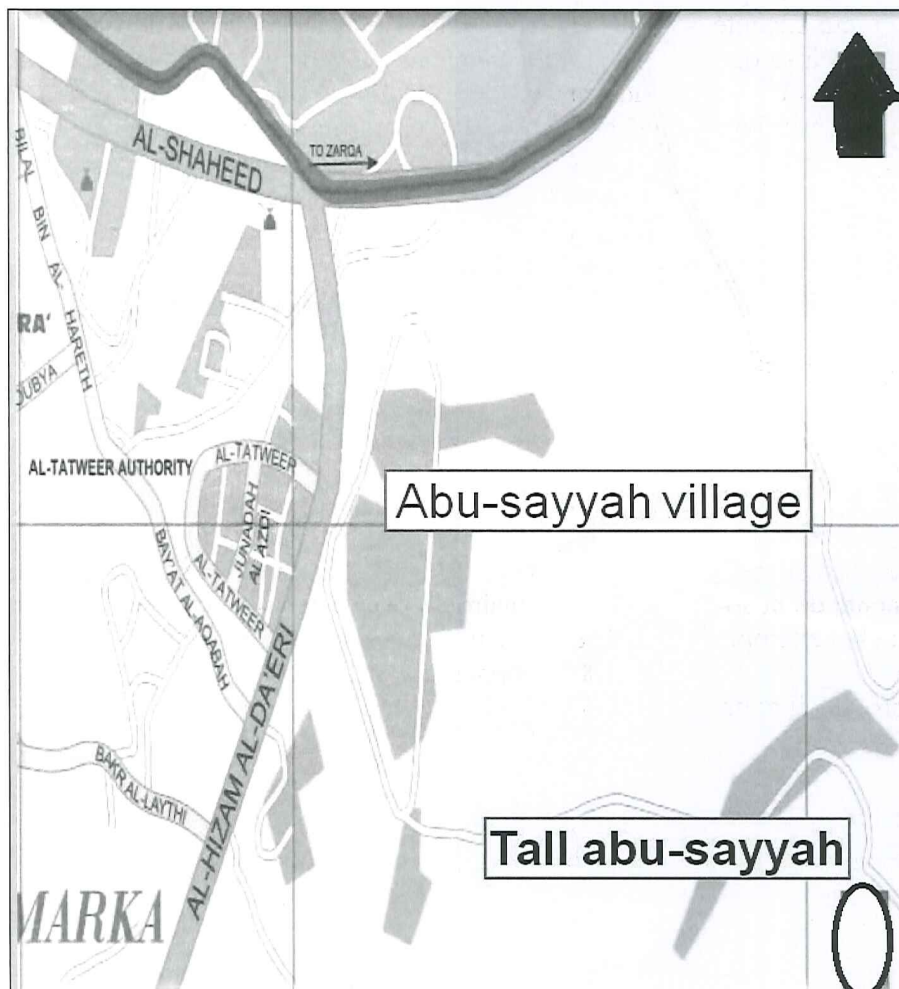
The village of Abū Şayyāḥ lies 11km from the center of 'Ammān, on the 'Ammān-az-Zarqā' highway, and is the site of an 'Ammān municipal dump (FIG. 1).

Geology and Topography of the Tall

fort occupies a strategic position in the southern

part of the village, with wide views in all directions. 'Ammān citadel can be seen to the west, Khirbat ar-Ruṣayfa to the north and the outskirts of az-Zarqā' to the east. This, together with the fact that the site controls the entrances to the main valleys of al-'Ish and al-Qaṭṭār, is considered one of the main reasons a fort was established on the site (FIG. 2).

The hill consists of steeply sloping limestone,



1. Plan of the site.

which in some places projects from the soil to a height of 2m; this was exploited by the builders of the fort. The site lies at an elevation of around 752m asl.

Archaeological Activity

The documentation project described here was carried out in response to illegal house-construction on the western part of the tall. The work consisted of three phases: (1) drawing and survey; (2) archae-

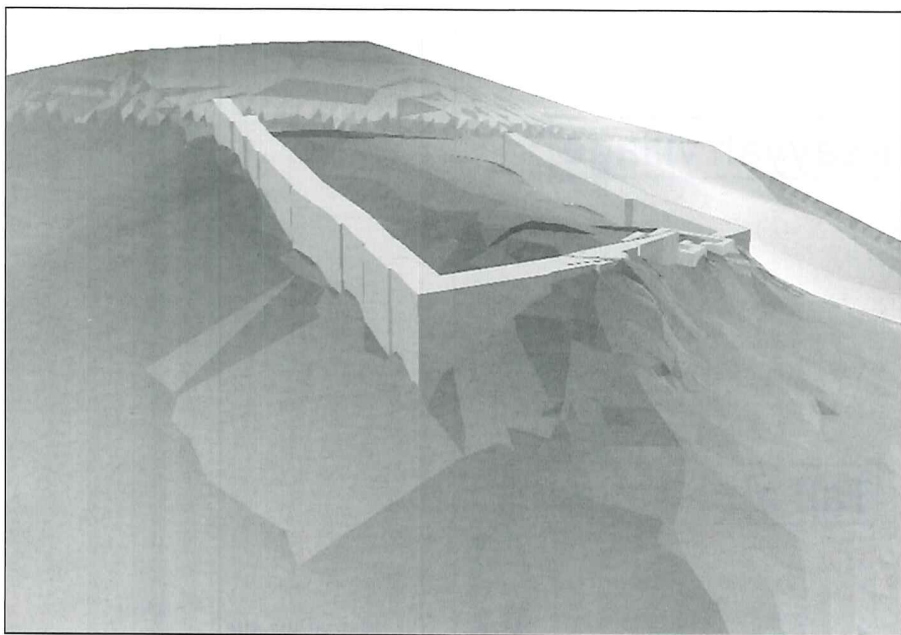
ological excavations in Area D and (3) survey of the tall.

Archaeological Excavations in Area D

This area was thought to be the site of a gate. Three squares (B1, B2 and A2) were excavated to define its architectural plan and facilitate future work at the site by removing large piles of rubble. This work exposed a four-chambered gate constructed using the casemate wall technique (FIG. 3).



2. Aerial photo of the site.



3. 3D plan of the site.

Architecture

The site turned out to be a rectangular fort with a substantial casemate wall. A solid wall encircled the tall, using the offset-inset technique on its outer face, with parallel minor walls joined by cross walls between them. The offset-inset technique helped provide additional strength to the wall, which was needed because of its length and the geological formation of the site.

Casemate wall

The outer wall was constructed of unhewn boulders resting on bedrock; it was built without mortar, but in some areas had a fill of small stones. Most parts of the wall still exist, although the western part of the site has been demolished by the landowner (FIG. 4). In the north, the wall was 49m long and 1.65m high, with a total width of 5m, of which

1.7m consisted of the outer wall. The southern wall was 94m long and of similar width and height. The eastern wall was 62m long, 1.7m high and had a gate and tower.

Main Gate

The four-chambered gate (FIG. 5) discovered at Tall Abū Şayyāḥ is of a form known from Iron Age II; three architectural phases were identified:

Phase I: As first constructed, the gate was 5.5m wide, 2.5m high and had four chambers at the entrance. There were traces of a tower to one side of the gate, but this has yet to be fully exposed. The gate was constructed on cut bedrock.

Phase II: The entrance was reduced in width to 1.2m whilst having a length of 1.65m. A threshold was added, with white plaster decorated with small circular shapes on the exterior walls. The plaster



4. General view of the southern part of the site.



5. Gate after excavation.

consists of two layers: the first is a mixture of lime, pebbles, charcoal and smashed pottery; the second is very fine and smooth, consisting of fine lime.

Phase III: An exterior bench 2.4m long was constructed, abutting the plaster wall to one side of the gate (FIG. 6).

Pottery

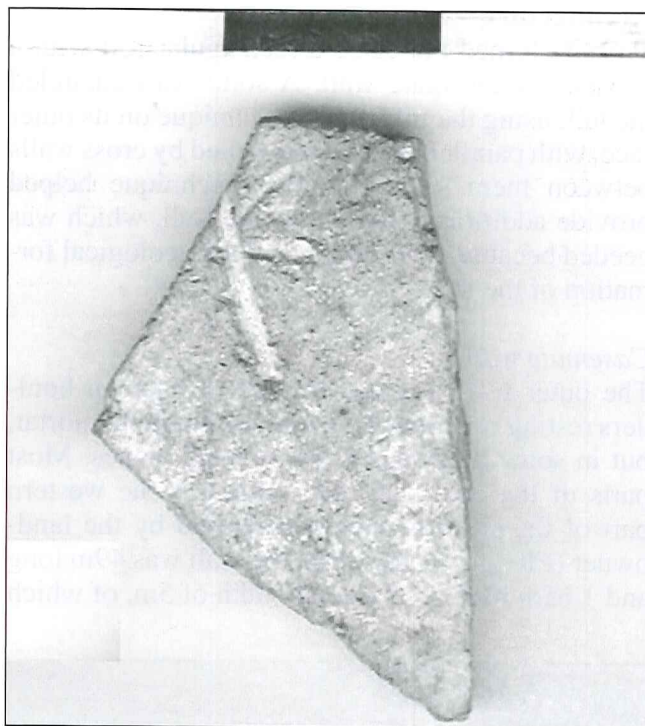
Pottery recovered from the site is indicative of the following periods: Iron Age IIC / Persian (predominant), Hellenistic, and Early Roman (scarce).

Other Finds

In addition to the pottery summarised above, an ostraca consisting of two Aramaic letters incised on a pottery body-sherd was also recovered; the letter *aleph* was identified. A comparable example is known from Tall Sirān, which is thought to date to Iron Age II (Thompson and Zayadine 1973) (FIG. 7).

Comparative Examples and Dating

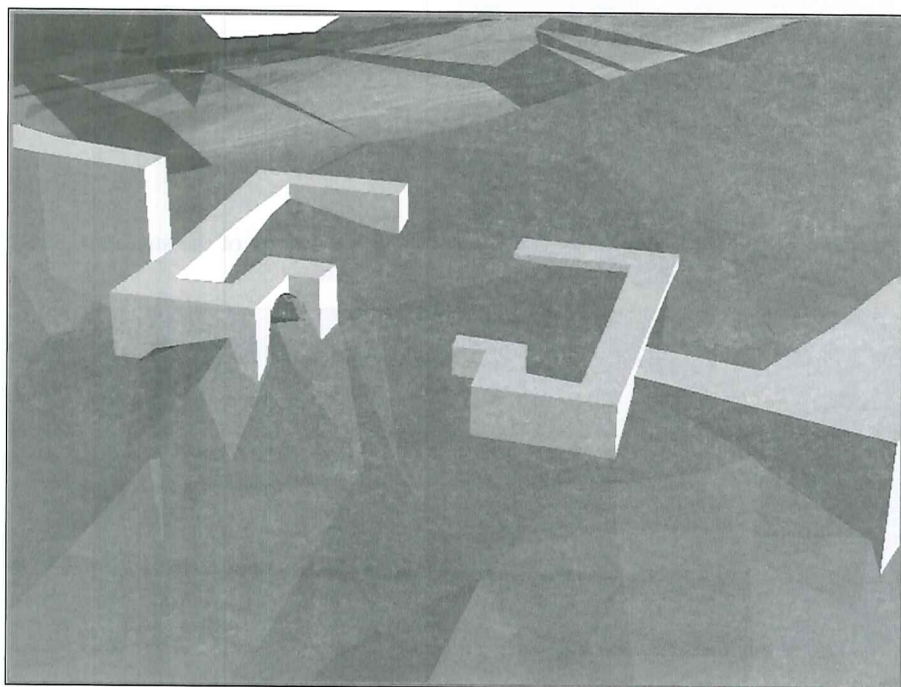
Through comparison of the architectural plan of the fort and its pottery with other examples, e.g. Tall Jāwā (Daviau 1993, 2003), Tall al-‘Umayrī (Herr 1992) and Khirbat Abū Nuṣayr / al-Marbaṭ (Abu Shmais 2005), its initial construction can be dated to Iron Age II, a highpoint in Ammonite history (see also Chadwick 2000; Wright 1985). Future excavation will hopefully shed light on other parts of the site.



7. Ostraca.

Bibliography

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6. 3D plan of the gate.

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