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Interpretation and Presentation of a Multi-Period Site The Case of Tall Ḥisbān

Introduction

Tall Ḥisbān is located on the edge of the highland plateau overlooking the northern tip of the Dead Sea and the Lower Jordan Valley. It is an 'open window' on the history of Jordan. After nearly half a century of excavation and research several structures have been exposed. Amongst the structures, there are:

- A Bronze Age cave system;
- An Iron Age dry moat and reservoir;
- A market plaza and remains of monumental buildings belonging to the Roman period;
- Two Byzantine churches with mosaic floors;
- An Umayyad / Abbasid house;
- A Mediaeval village;
- A Governor's palace with bath-house belonging to Mamluk period;
- A 19th century farmhouse.

Its presentation to the general public requires a clear restoration strategy. The stratigraphic sequence must be made clear. Where it is possible to determine the typology and size of the settlement in each occupational phase, these should be presented to generate a real understanding of the site's history. Since it is not possible to expose each phase of occupation, owing to the multi-period nature of the tall, several display panels could be used to present an image of the site in each period. At the same time one or more restored structures could provide a more physical representation. Strategically located soundings could provide a good indication of the dimensions and, possibly, an impression of the settlement during each phase along with its architecture and its socio-political context.

2006 Campaign of Restoration

In 2005 the excavators of Tall Ḥisbān were selected for funding through the U.S. Department of State's Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. A co-operative venture between Andrews University, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and the former Municipality of Ḥisbān (now Directorate of Ḥisbān), the Tall Ḥisbān Restoration Project was conducted over one and a half years, with 24 weeks of fieldwork, and was executed in four phases.

The main aim of the project was the transformation of the site into an understandable place in the living history of the village rather than into a representation of its cultural heritage. Thus, the restoration should be part of the life of the site and not the beginning of its death. Archaeological sites are meaningful as places of life and not as merely as *mausolea* of particular interpretations.

With this in mind, the biggest challenge was the creation of a living collective memory to fill the widening gap between the scientific interpretation and public perception of the archaeological site.

The presence of a multi-cultural team on the site improved the quality of the work and the involvement of the local community. The investment of effort and funds had a tremendous impact on local public opinion and was effective in creating a sense of pride and ownership of the site on the part of the villagers. The exchange of technical knowledge and local traditions with the villagers helped close the gap between the scientists and general public.

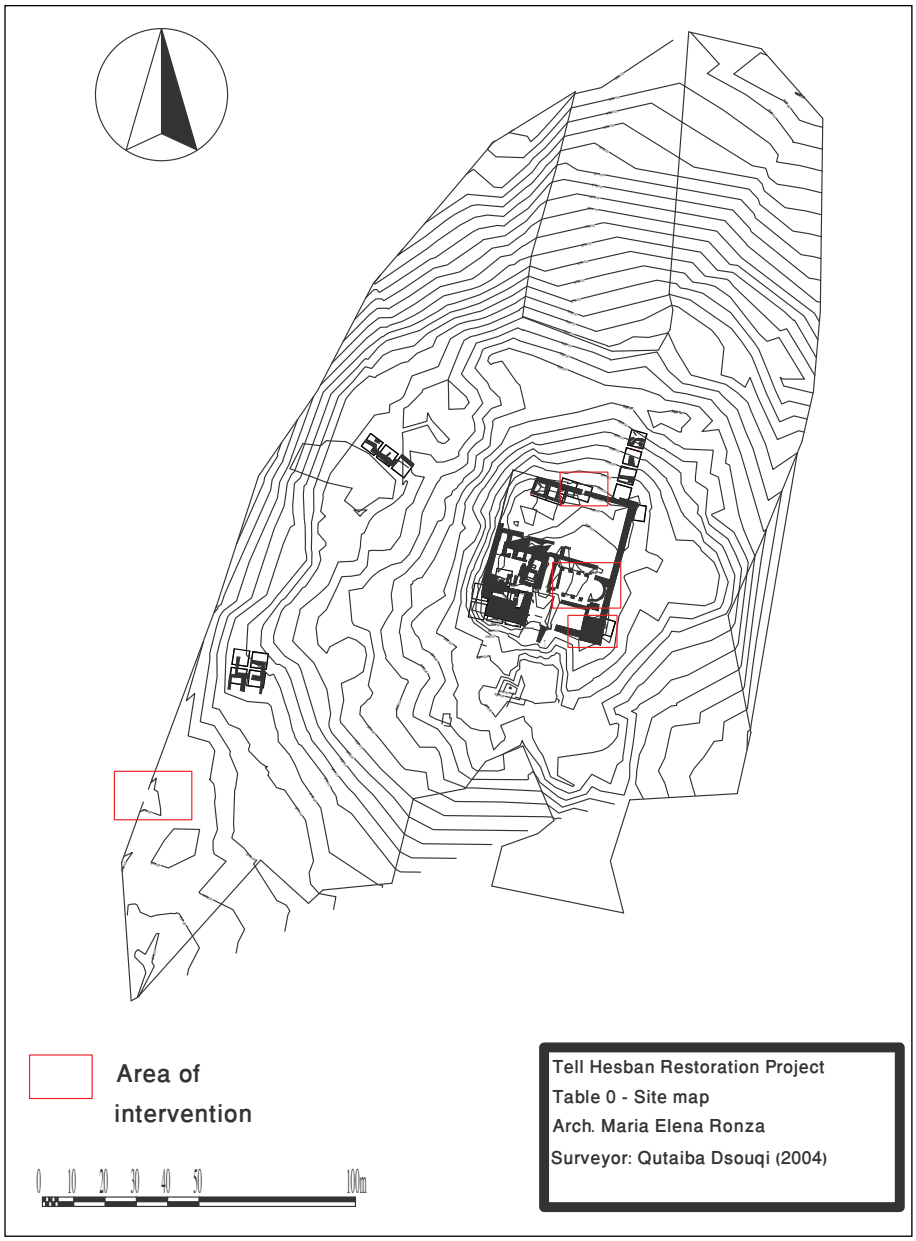
To that end, the Tall Ḥisbān Restoration Project was managed according to the following principles:

1) In the recruitment of professional staff and workers, preference was given to locals (wherever possible from Ḥisbān);
2) Supplies and building materials were purchased in the village;
3) Local craftsmen (metalwork, construction, carpentry etc.) were employed.

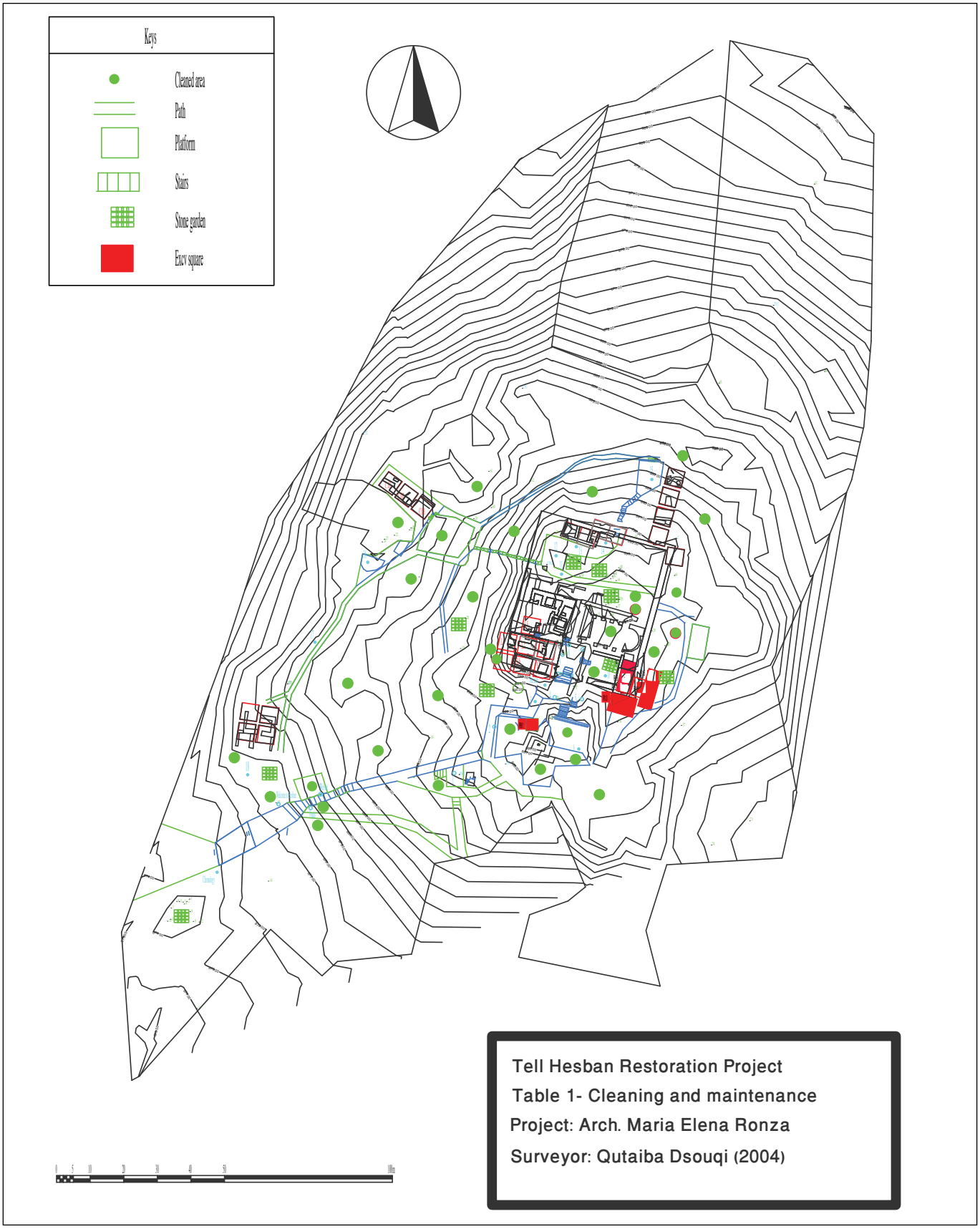
Additionally, an Andrews University team developed curricula in co-operation with local school-teachers for the schoolchildren of the village. Work on a virtual internet tour of the site is also in progress, with clear links to the information signs on the site, so that tourists and locals can obtain updated information on the progress of excavation and restoration, whilst enjoying a guided tour of the site on their mobile phones.

The 2006 campaign was the first season of restoration and consisted of a series of small interventions aimed at general site maintenance, the restoration of four previously excavated monuments and improvements to site accessibility.

Much work was done on general site maintenance (FIGS. 1-2). This included cleaning the entire site and improving a previously developed system of pathways and platforms designed to facilitate visitor circulation (FIGS. 3-5). A major objective of the project is the reintegration of the site in the daily life of the village: Tall Ḥisbān has to become a living, inviting, accessible and understandable place. To that end, maintenance activities during the Tall Ḥisbān Restoration Project also included the clean-up of existing stone gardens, the creation of new stone gardens and the repainting and, in some cases, rewriting of information signs around the site (FIG. 6). The stone gardens at Tall Ḥisbān



1. Site map.



2. Cleaning and maintenance.

3. A viewing platform.

are collections of architectural remains arranged in close proximity to each excavation square for the purpose of accurately documenting architectural elements removed during excavation and to aid in future restorations. The various information signs are strategically placed in order to explain the history and stratigraphy of the site.

Four monuments located on the summit of the tall were selected for restoration during this campaign:

- The so-called Roman “plaza”;
- The Byzantine church;

4. The area of the reservoir at the beginning of the season.

5. The area of the reservoir after cleaning.

6. The system of signage.

- The north gate and wall;
- The south-east tower.

The restoration strategy is to clear the excavated structures to clarify stratigraphic relationships, without giving preference to any specific phase over another. Reconstruction has been restricted to structures in imminent danger of collapse, or to cases where a scientific and well-documented historical reconstruction of the building is possible.

Roman 'Plaza'

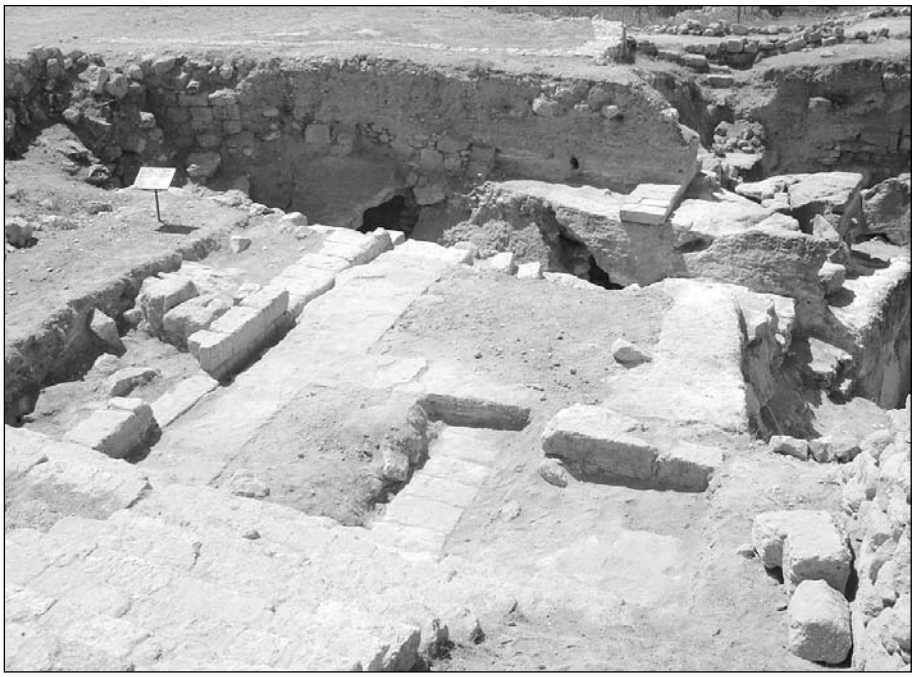
Excavation and Clearance

The Roman 'plaza' area was cleaned (FIGS. 7-8), exposing the Roman structures revealed in the 1968-1976 excavation seasons (Boraas and Horn 1969: 165-217; Boraas and Horn 1973: 35-71, 89-112; Boraas and Horn 1975: 133-167, 183-202; Boraas and Geraty 1976: 29-62, 79-99; Boraas and Geraty 1978: 31-49, 109-128).

In an unexcavated area measuring approximately 3 x 4m at the foot of the staircase leading to the acropolis, one square (R9.1) was opened. In terms of stratigraphy, Square R9.1 confirmed the results of the 1968-1976 excavation seasons with a series of *ḥuwwar* layers interspersed with layers of soil.

The exposed structures include a complex of rooms with a line of curb-stones running north-south on the east side, another line of north-south

7. The area of the Roman 'plaza'.



8. The Roman 'plaza' after clearance.

curb-stones and a paved area of *ḥuwwar* layers on the west side and a monumental stairway to the north.

Restorations

The re-exposed complex of structures from this area was in use for a long period of time — Strata 11-13 cover the period from ca. 130AD to 363AD — and consists of several architectural phases (Mitchel 1992: 75-124). According to Mitchel, this complex of rooms, with several transformations and restorations, was in use during the periods represented by Strata 12 and 13 (ca. 130-284AD), falling out of use in the period represented by Stratum 11 (ca. 284-363AD). The lines of curb-stones in squares D4 and B7 belong to Stratum 13 (ca. 130-193AD) and the monumental stairway belongs to Stratum 11 (ca. 284-363AD).

During this season, the team exposed and cleaned up part of the complex of rooms and paved area, in addition to the western line of curb-stones and its associated *ḥuwwar* layer. These curb-stones continue to the south. Two of the curb-stones, which were *in situ* in 2001, had collapsed sometime between 2001 and 2004. These were restored to their original positions.

The Byzantine Church

Introduction

The apse and eight bases of the main nave, along with the walls of the side naves were exposed during previous seasons of excavation (Boraas and Horn 1969: 142-165; Boraas and Horn 1973: 17-34; Boraas and Horn 1975: 117-132; Boraas and Geraty 1976: 17-28; Boraas and Geraty 1978: 19-30). Bases on the north side of the structure are *in situ*, whereas the bases on the south side were replaced during previous excavation seasons (FIG. 9). By comparing photographs from previous excavation seasons with a catalogue of architectural elements scattered within the site fence that was prepared during the 2001 and 2004 field seasons, our team was able to determine the position of two of the columns lying on the summit. One column was located on the second base (starting from the apse) of the north side and consists of three drums. The second column was located on the third base (again starting from the apse) of the south side. This column should have had at least a second drum, but this has not yet been identified.

Project and Execution

The bases on the south side of the church were moved into alignment with those on the north. The two columns whose positions had been identified were re-erected in their original locations, following the levelling of their bases (FIGS. 10-11). For safety reasons, a titanium bar (diameter 20mm x length 200mm) was inserted inside each column drum. A hole (diameter 20mm x depth 100mm)

9. The church before restoration.

10. Placing the second drum of the northern column.

was drilled in the centre of each drum in which to insert the titanium bar. Additionally, a lead sheet (2mm thick) was set on the base of each column to improve levelling.

Clearance of the Underground Structure North of the Church

An underground installation in the area north of the church, which was investigated during 1968-1973 seasons of excavation (Boraas and Horn 1969: 142-165; Boraas and Horn 1973: 17-34; Boraas and Horn 1975: 117-132; Boraas and Geraty 1976: 17-28; Boraas and Geraty 1978: 19-30), was cleared and the stones resulting from this operation were placed in stone gardens.

The North Wall and Gate

Introduction

The north wall is free standing with two / three courses preserved above ground on the west side and one / two courses preserved on the east side. The east jamb of the gate leans northward. Analysis of the building materials and architectural stratigraphy reveals limestone construction in at least four phases:

1) Includes the east corner, made of very large unshaped dry-laid boulders;
2) Includes the gate and first two courses of the

11. The church after intervention.

western part of the wall; this phase of the wall has a rubble core and is composed of dry-laid boulders;

3) Includes the third course of the western and the entire eastern part of the wall; this phase is a later restoration belonging to the Late Byzantine / Early Islamic period and is constructed in a chink and boulder style (including at least one re-used architectural element on the east side);

4) Includes an Abbasid house abutting the west wall; this phase is constructed in a chink and boulder style.

At the beginning of the season, several blocks belonging to the wall were found scattered downhill (FIGS. 12-15).

Project and Execution

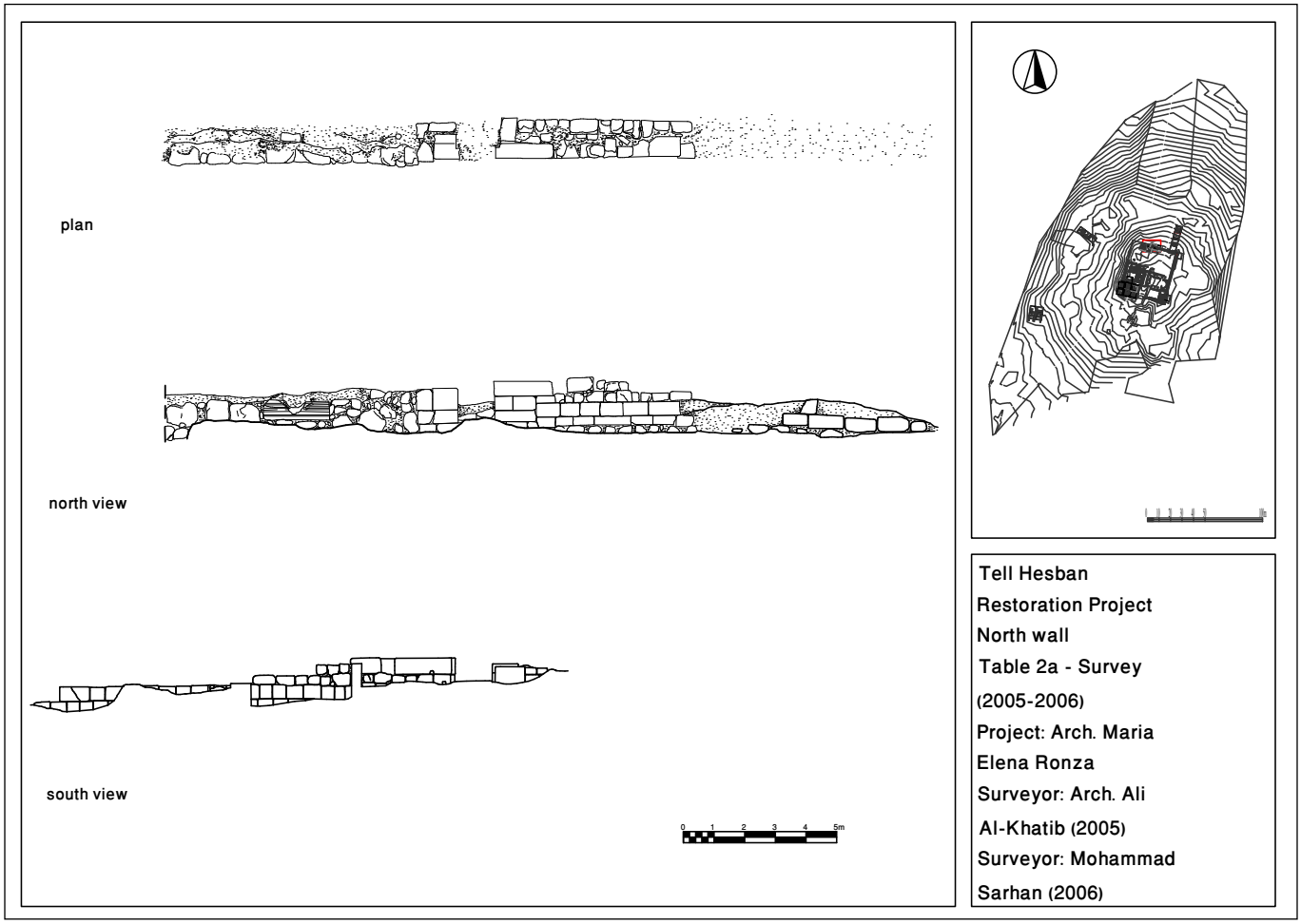
During the course of the Tall Ḥisbān Restoration Project, several operations were conducted towards the restoration of the north wall and gate. The standing structures of the wall and gate were cleaned, with all accumulated soil and grass removed. The eastern jamb was restored to its original position, with the inside faces of the blocks being cleaned and put back in place. A freshly cut block was placed to support the upper block of the western door-jamb, which was found downhill from the wall. The western part of the wall was restored, with the scattered blocks being placed back in their original positions wherever possible. In some cases, missing blocks were replaced with blocks that clearly belonged to the wall but whose original position was unknown. The year of intervention was carved into these blocks to distinguish them from the originals. The core of the wall was constructed of limestone pebbles and lime mortar. No original blocks were moved (FIG. 16).

The South-East Tower

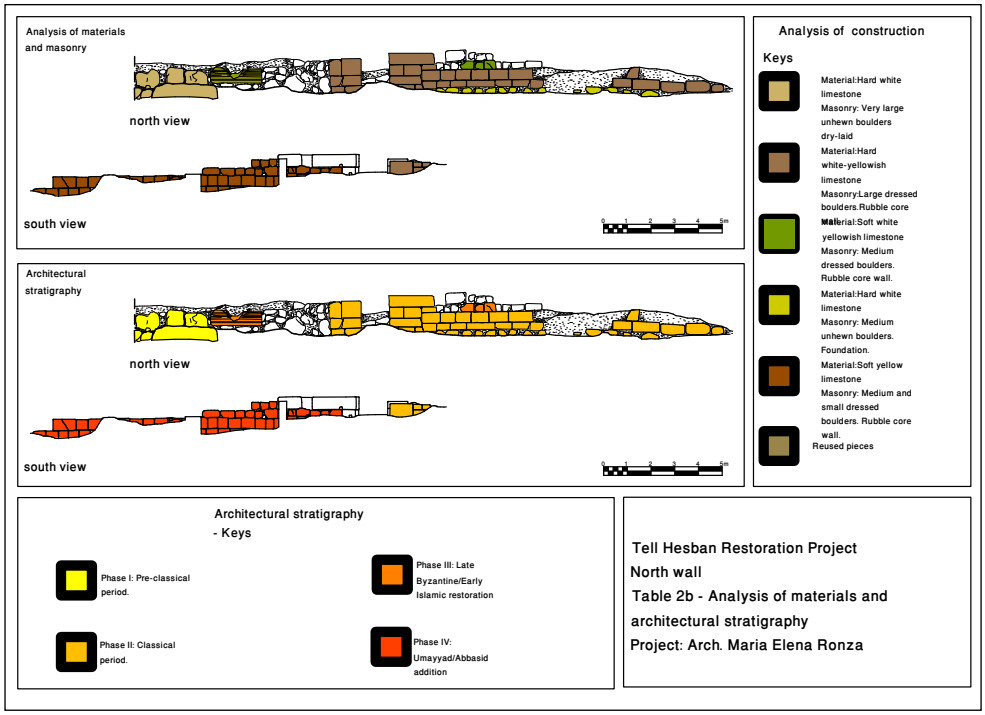
Introduction and Excavation

Prior to the start of this project, a small rectangular building measuring approximately 4 x 8m, consisting of one room with an entrance, was visible above ground. A modern restoration added two courses on the south and west walls of the tower. The blocks used did not belong to the original wall and some decorated architectural elements belonging to another building were used. Between 2004 and 2006, six squares (R1.1, R1.2, R1.3, R1.4, R1.5, and R1.6) were opened to investigate this structure's perimeter (FIGS. 17-19).

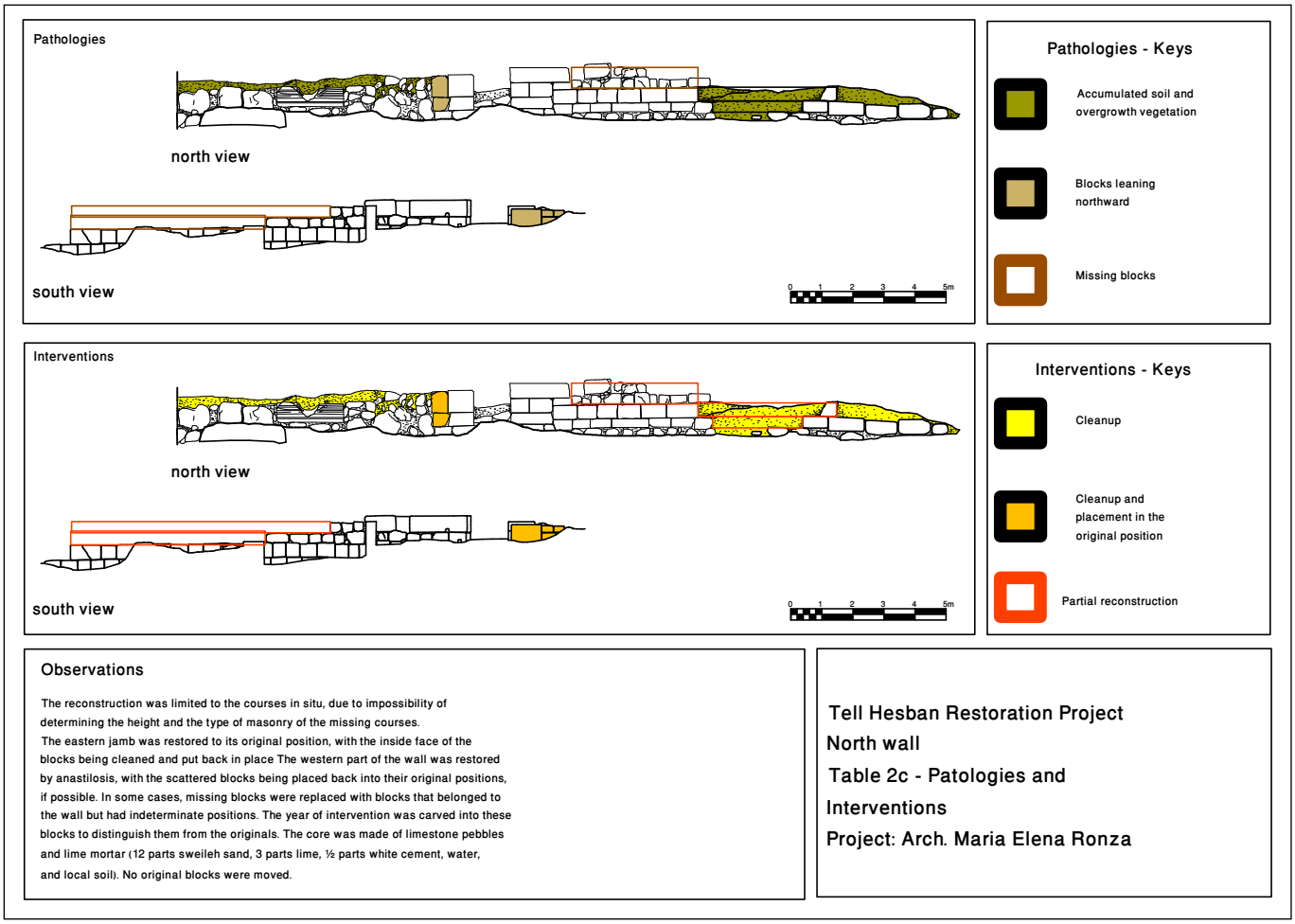
The rectangular room has a mosaic pavement made of large, white, irregular *tesserae* (FIGS. 20-22). It appears to be part of a larger structure that was in use over a long period of time. On the south side of this building, another structure was discovered abutting the tower. It is paved with a thin layer of beaten *ḥuwwar*. This building extends further to the east and its perimeter in this direction was not completely excavated. The walls are free- stand-



12. North gate – Survey.



13. North gate – Analysis.



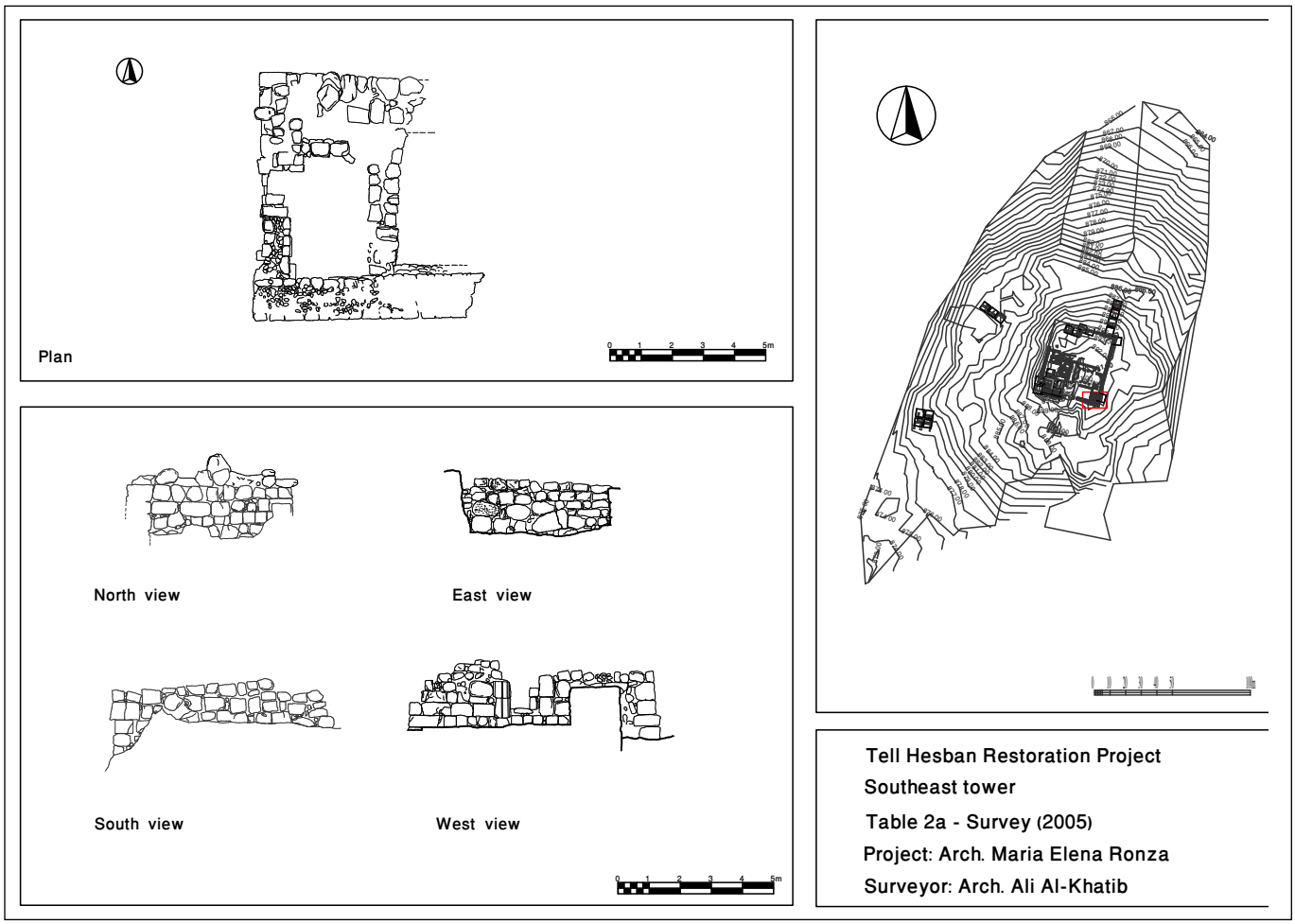
14. North gate – Interventions.

15. The North gate at the beginning of the season.

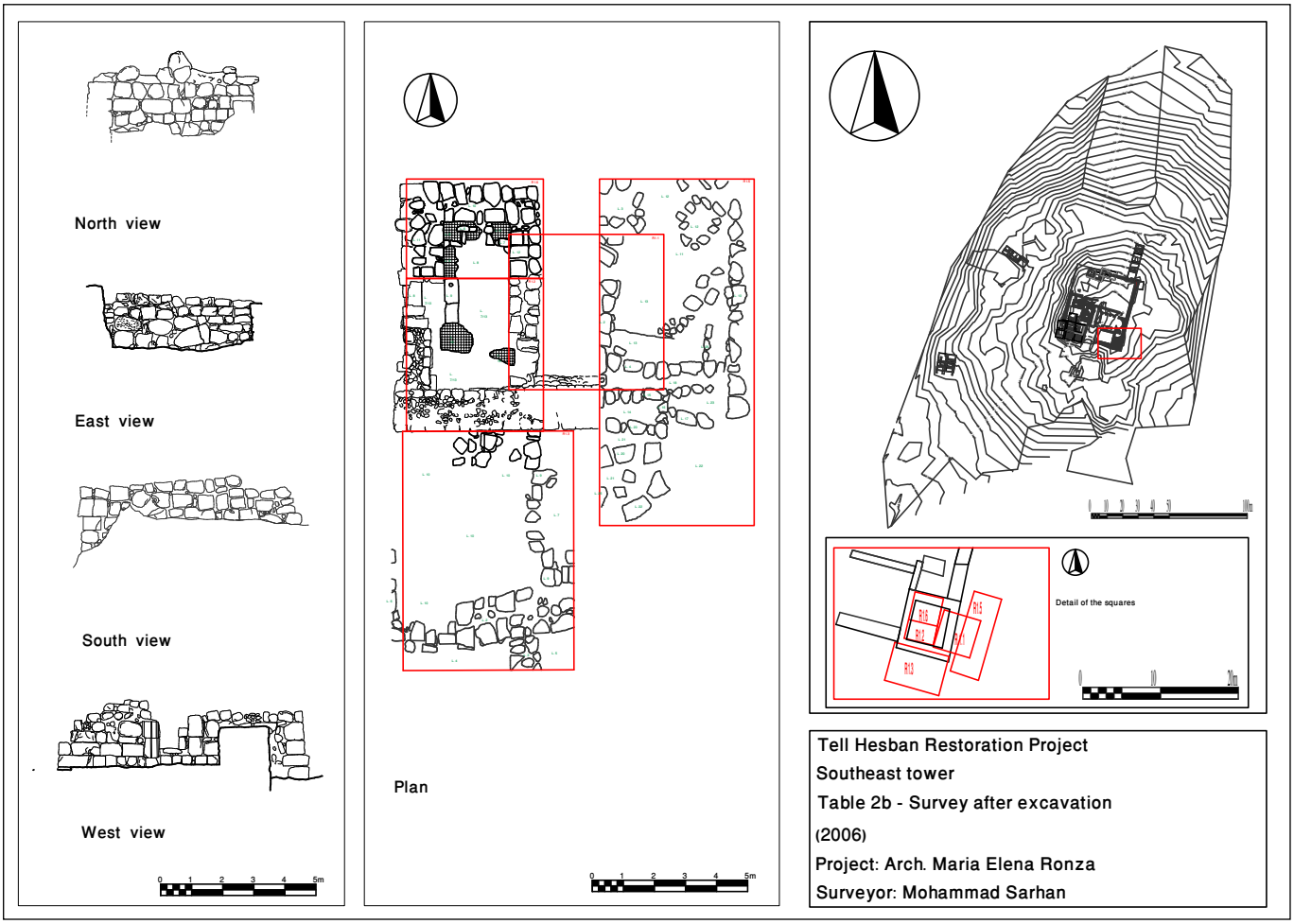
ing, preserved in good condition to a height of 3-4 courses and are constructed of limestone blocks in — mostly — boulder and chink construction. None of these walls are in imminent danger of collapse.

In analysing the architectural stratigraphy of this structure, we can make several assumptions about its use. The earlier part of the exposed structures is a square building (approximately 8m on one side)

16. The wall during the work.



17 . South-east tower – Survey.



18. South-east tower – Survey.

formed by the west and north walls of the 'tower' and loci R1.5,20 on the south and R1.5,10 on the east. The south-east and north-east corners of this structure have not been exposed. In this early phase, the structure was divided by wall R1.5, 2, which runs from north to south and had a barrel vaulted ceiling. In a later phase, the **size** of the room on the west side of wall R1.5,2 was minimised with the construction of walls R1.5,15, R1.5,16 and R1.5,17, while wall R1.5,4 was built to lend support to wall R1.5,15. In a subsequent phase, a room with mosaic pavement R1.2,16 and R1.6,9 occupied the internal area of the 'tower', extending to the east (FIGS. 23-25).

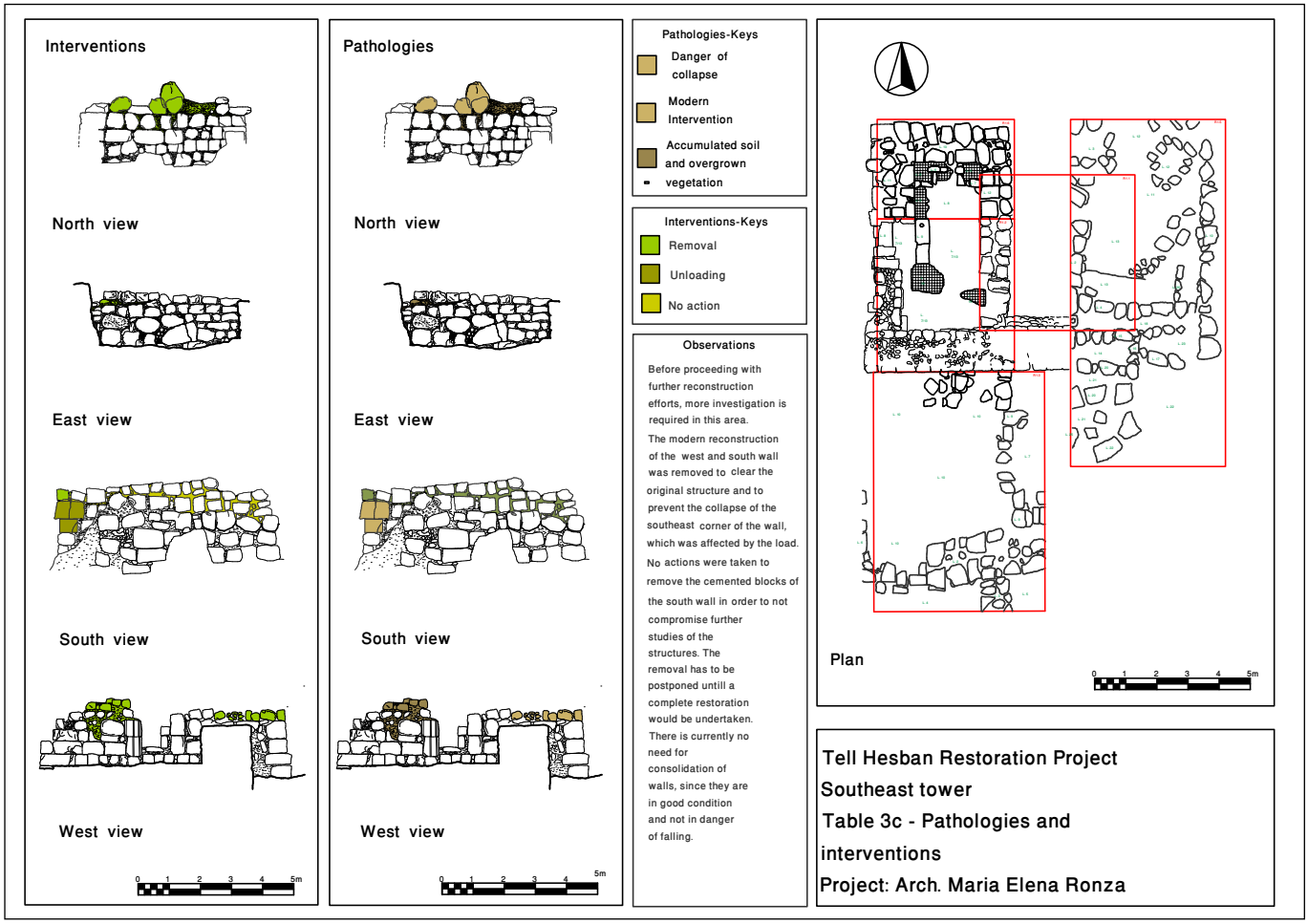
According to an initial analysis of the pottery, the pavement can be dated to the Umayyad / Abbasid period. The room with the mosaic floor was still in use during the Mamluk period. Subsequently, this room was divided by the eastern wall of the 'tower'; two bins were found lying above the mosaic pavement. The complex of walls on the south side of the 'tower' (square R1.3) is tentatively dated to the Ayyubid / Mamluk period (FIG. 26).

Project

Before proceeding with further reconstruction work, more archaeological investigation is required in this area. The recent reconstructions of the west and south walls were removed to expose the original structure; there is currently no need for consolidation of walls, which are in good condition and in no imminent danger of collapse (FIG. 27).

Parking Lot and Gate

In order to facilitate access by large tourist buses, the gate area was enlarged. Now located 5m east of the former gate, the new gate has access for both buses and, through a newly constructed smaller gate, pedestrians. The area to the north-east side was levelled to create a car park and several columns that were previously scattered across the summit area have been relocated and arranged at



19. South-east tower – Interventions.

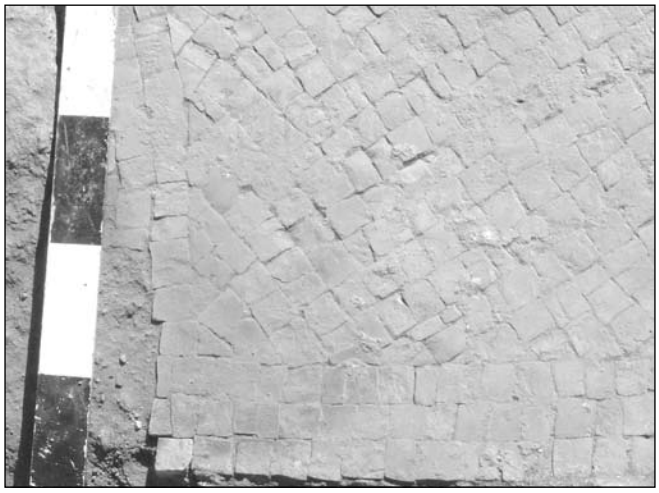
20. Collapse over the mosaic floor in square R1.2.

21. Mosaic floor in square R1.2.

the entrance of the site (FIGS. 28-29).

Construction of Guard-House and Toilet Facilities

Owing to episodes of vandalism that occurred in

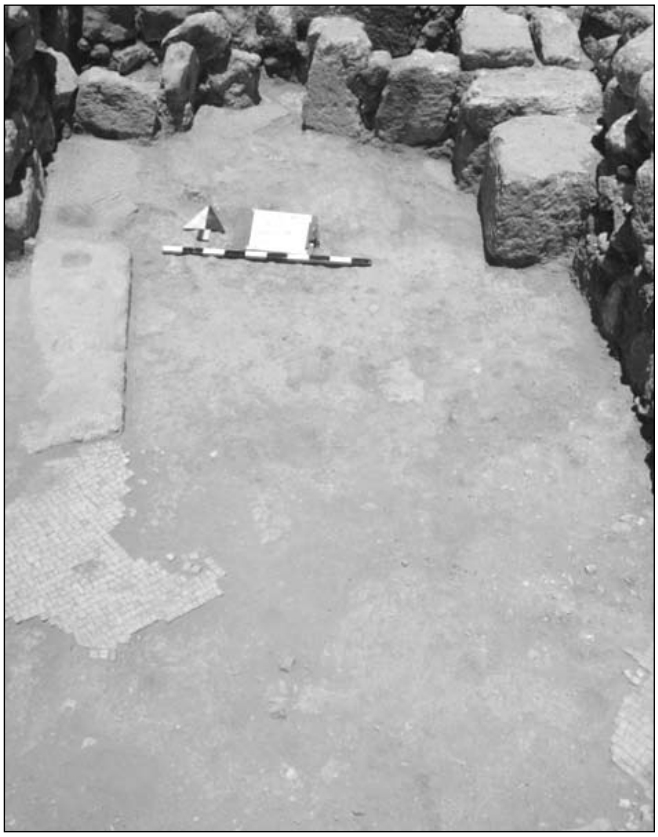


22. Detail of the mosaic floor.

23. The dump in square R1.5.

24. Square R1.5 – Locus 2 on the right, also Loci 10 and 21.

between the various phases of this project, it was deemed necessary to provide the site with a guard-house in order to prevent damage to the newly restored structures. This building was built on the north side of the gate, where no archaeological structures have been identified. The design of this building is simple, with neutral paint to ensure a low visual impact. The pillars of the gate are decorated with pottery sherds set in mortar and the Madaba Mosaic School provided a mosaic of the site's logo for the main entrance (FIG. 30).



25. General view of square R1.6 at the end of the season.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

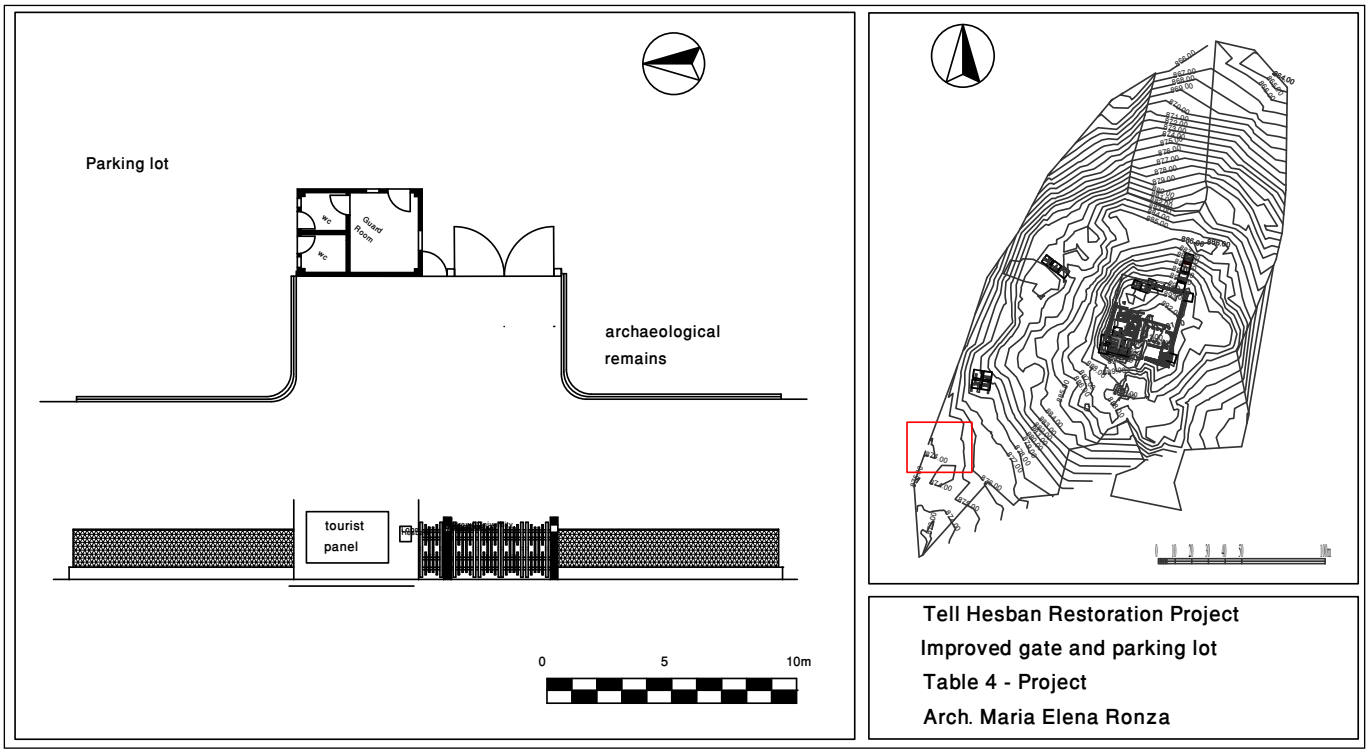
The Tall Ḥisbān Restoration Project was a fruitful co-operation of international, national and local institutions that has brought great benefits to the site, the economy of the village of Ḥisbān and to tourism in Jordan. I would take this opportunity to thank Dr Fawwaz al-Khraysheh and his staff, especially Mr Faisal Qudah, Miss Rula al-Qussous and Mr Ali al-Khayyat, for the great support given to the project.

We are now working towards a new project aimed at ensuring on-going maintenance and restoration at Tall Ḥisbān. This project would help to strengthen existing partnerships, such as those between the site's excavators, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and the Municipality of Hisban, and would help to reduce the threat of vandalism owing to a more continuous presence on the site.

26. Square R1.3 with the south-east tower in the background.

27. The modern intervention on the south wall.

29. Column drums arranged at the entrance before the construction of the new gate.



28. Improved gate.

30. General view of the new gate.

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