

John Strange  
Department of Anthropology  
Iowa State University of  
Science and Technology  
319 Curtiss Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-1050  
USA

**John Strange**

## **Tall al-Fukhār 1990-93 and 2002**

Tall al-Fukhār (PG 2397.2219) is situated on a spur into Wādī ash-Shallāl (Shallala), which cuts its way from south to north between Irbid and ar-Ramthā. It is one of a cluster of talls: Tall al-Subba, Tall Umm al-Riglen, Khirbat az-Zaraqūn and Tall al-Fukhār, which together testify to occupation at least from the Chalcolithic to the Byzantine periods, undoubtedly due to the nearby copious water source of 'Ayn ash-Shallāla. The site lies at the junction of the north - south route from Mesopotamia to Jordan and the west - east route from Tiberias to Der'a. In the years 1990 - 93 a Scandinavian team under the direction of, first, Magnus Ottosson from Uppsala University and, later, John Strange from the University of Copenhagen conducted four campaigns at Tall al-Fukhār. A preliminary account of these campaigns was presented in 1995 at the Conference for the History and Archaeology of Jordan in Torino, by John Strange and Patrick E. McGovern (Strange 1997; McGovern 1997) (FIG. 1).

In subsequent years, while working on the material for publication, the necessity of a final campaign to clear up some problems was felt. This campaign was conducted in 2002. It was considered especially important to identify, if at all possible, the Early Bronze Age I settlement which was tentatively indicated by the presence of several EB I sherds in fills. It would also be important to find some Late Bronze Age buildings in addition to the palace and the wall system already located. As a 'dog leash survey' (Strange 1997: 400) had revealed a concentration of Early Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age sherds on the middle and lower part of the saddle, it was decided to excavate a trench from the top of the saddle down to the crest of the tall in an area (Area F) near to the wadi. The excavation produced a fine section showing all the layers in this part of the tall.

The site was initially chosen, partly at the instigation of Professor Mittmann who worked at Khirbat az-Zaraqūn on the other side of the wadi, and partly because Magnus Ottosson wished to find archaeological evidence of the Aramaeans who penetrated into the region after 1000BC. Magnus Ottosson concentrated on the fortifications at the north-west side of the tall (Area B) and tried to find the gate, while John Strange excavated a 10m. by 10m. trench at the highest part of the tall (Area C) from the modern ground surface to bedrock to determine the history of Tall al-Fukhār; this trench was widened considerably to the west and north (Areas D and A) in the upper layers. We identified stratified deposits dating — albeit with some breaks — from the Early Bronze Age II - III periods (possibly even from Early Bronze Age I) to the Hellenistic period. There was also some later activity, the most recent being a series of graves from 1932, when the local bedouin buried their dead on top of the hill after a battle with the inhabitants of Ramtha, and some shrapnel from 1971. The place is still visited by bedouin every year.

The earliest stratified deposits from the Early Bronze Age II were associated with a fine floor made of ashlar between two walls in Area C; however, our knowledge of it is limited by the size of the sounding, just 2 by 2m. square. Above it we found eight more EB II - III floors, testifying to a rich city culture contemporaneous with Khirbat az-Zaraqūn. However, because we found Early Bronze Age IB pottery in the fills, we believe that the town was founded in this earlier period and must be the 'mother tall' of Khirbat az-Zaraqūn, which was established when Tall al-Fukhār became too small for all of the activities undertaken there in the EB II period (FIG. 2).

In Square F V, we excavated an installation situ-



1. Tall al-Fukhār.

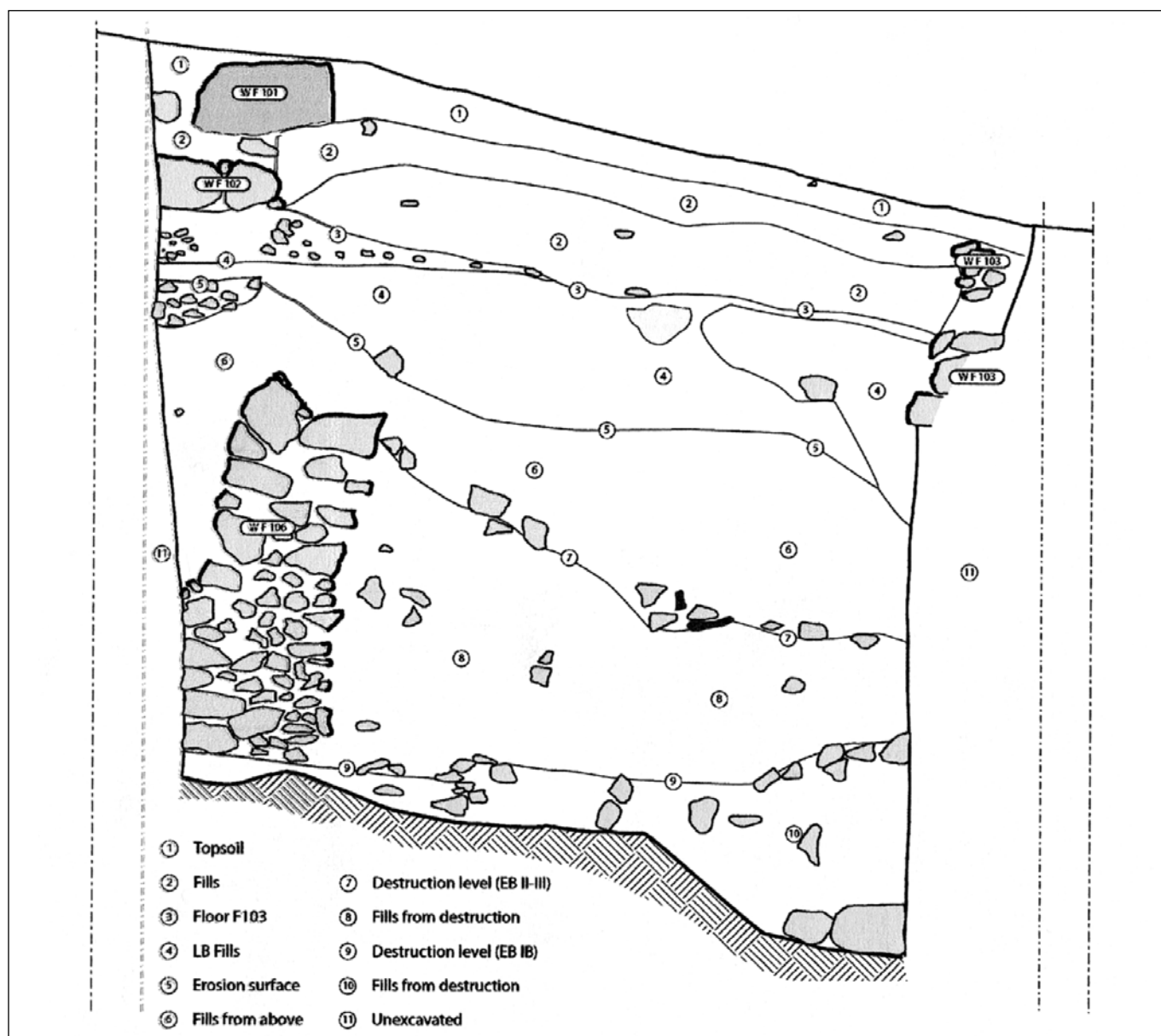
ated on bedrock — which must presumably be the earliest activity on the tall — comprising a wall of three stones and a floor, all lying under an EB II terrace wall (Wall F 106; the installation is not shown in the section). Although the pottery recovered there was too sparse to be dated, we presume that this installation was from the Early Bronze Age IB and corresponds with pottery found in fills elsewhere. Alternatively, it must date to the very beginning of the EB II - III period.

The abovementioned terrace wall was part of a series of parallel terrace walls built along the contours of the tall. These walls were constructed in preparation for building houses; we actually found

two houses, some walls and a fine floor made of ashlar akin to the floor in Area C. Apparently the whole tall was built-up in the Early Bronze Age II - III, at the same time that Khirbat az-Zaraqūn flourished on the other side of the wadi.

At the end of the Early Bronze Age the site was abandoned as a permanent settlement but, on the basis of intermediate Early - Middle Bronze Age pottery, may subsequently have been visited by squatters, although we found no traces of buildings as at Khirbat az-Zaraqūn (Ibrahim and Mittmann 1986: 3-6).

After the intermediate Early - Middle Bronze Age, in Area C we found a grave with two Mid-



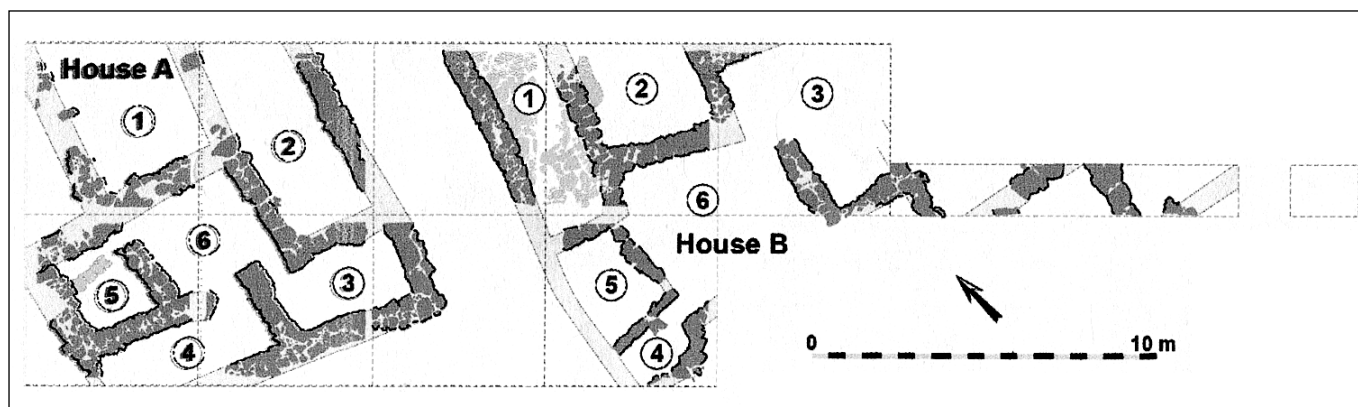
2. Section through Area F.

dle Bronze Age skeletons — a man and a woman — and possibly also some walls testifying to the presence of settlement in this period. At this time the lower part of the tall was probably used for agricultural purposes; we found no stratified deposits there, despite the presence of a fair number of sherds from this period. At the end of the Middle Bronze Age or in the transition to Late Bronze Age IA, new houses — part of a residential quarter — were built in Area F (FIG. 3).

The houses, *viz.* House A and House B, were found on each side of a street running along the contours of the tall. They were dated by the presence of

a considerable amount of chocolate-on-white pottery, including a whole vessel, together with other LB I pottery. Even though we only found datable floors from the end of the Bronze Age onwards, the houses were all probably in use throughout the Late Bronze Age to judge from the pottery in the fills. That the houses were residential is indicated by the presence of querns, mortars, *ṭābūn*(s) and other utensils.

The presence of a few collared-rim jars used as *ṭābūn*, a characteristic marker of the Late Bronze and Iron Ages — including Iron Age IA and IB on the top of the tall — could be used to argue for



3. Houses from the Late Bronze Age.

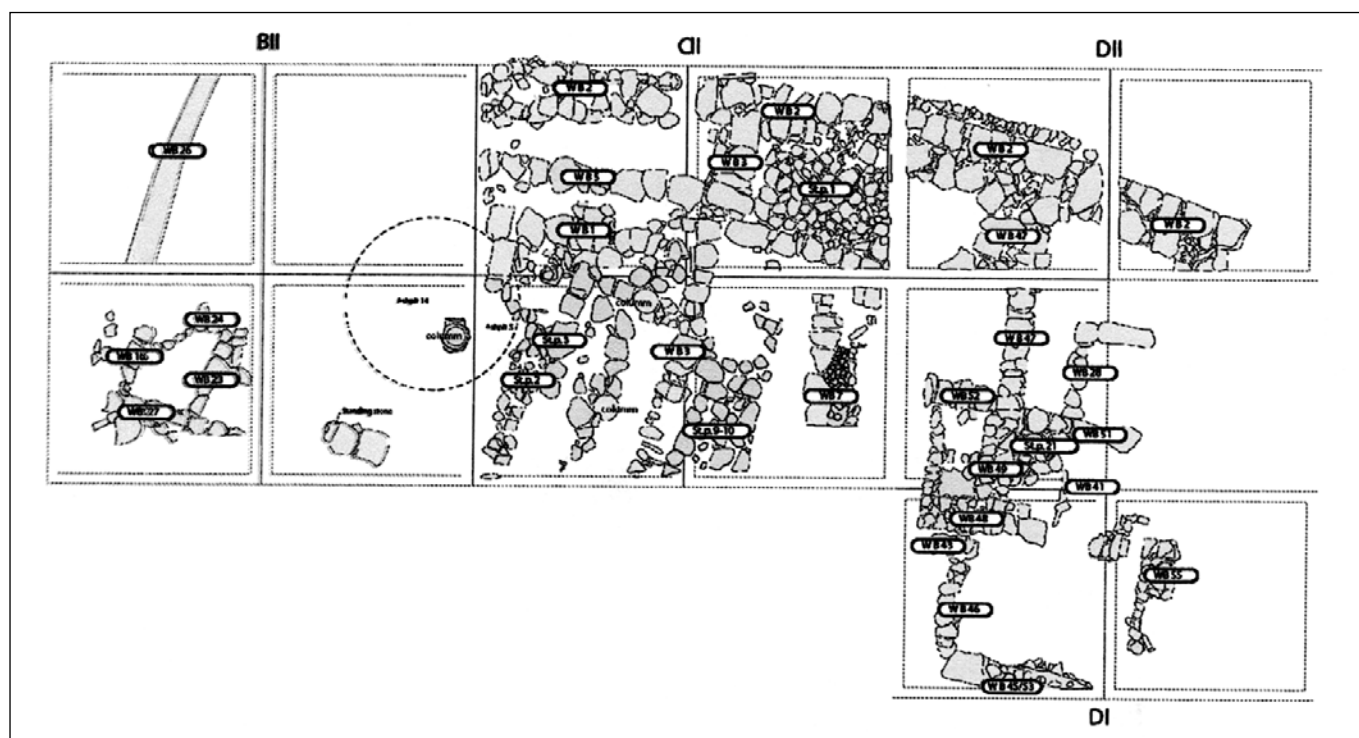
an extension of occupation into the Iron Age in this area, but more probably reflects the presence of squatters in the ruins of the buildings after the Bronze Age, when the slopes of the tall was used for agriculture by the inhabitants of villages on its top.

In Area C we found a large palace dating to the Late Bronze Age IIB, with some chocolate-on-white sherds and imports from the north in the destruction layer demonstrating that it had a Late Bronze Age I - IIA predecessor (Strange 1997: 403). The palace was at least 25m. long and was situated along the southern crest of the tall, with a courtyard in front of it. It was built on massive foundations of large stones with walls of mud-brick; it had an upper storey, which crashed down when the building was destroyed around 1200BC. The entrance to the palace was slightly set back from the facade, with a finely made staircase and strong 'tower', perhaps a kind of primitive Bit Hilani. It was not, like so many other buildings in Jordan, an Egyptian-style governor's residence; still it is tempting to associate the palace with the re-assertation of Egyptian power in the Rameside period, which is testified to by the Egyptian stelae found nearby (Strange 2001: 295) and the possible identification of the site with Zarqu from the Amarna letters proposed by Jens Kamlah (Kamlah 1993). Apart from its sheer size, the finds in the debris of the palace were also interesting and included imported wares from Mycenae and Cyprus and heirlooms from an earlier period, among them a small female figurine pendant of glass showing a nude pregnant goddess of the Hathor-type, together with other imports from Mesopotamia. The palace was contemporary with the massive city wall and a possible gate at the northern side of the tall.

In its last phase, the palace was inhabited by squatters and was finally destroyed, probably as a result of earthquake. Immediately above it, with foundation trenches cut into the palace walls, we found a village dating to the transitional Late Bronze - Iron Ages, with another village of different layout on top of it; both villages shed light on this period. In the gate and wall area of Area B, the walls were overbuilt over by floors made of large stones and houses, which re-used Bronze Age building components. This village was abandoned in the 11th century BC (FIG. 4).

After a hiatus of more than 400 years, the tall was occupied again, this time in connection with a possible Persian government installation with some buildings and a great number of stone-lined silos. Unfortunately these were all empty so the purpose of the complex remains obscure. The lower part of Tall al-Fukhār was used for agriculture; this is demonstrated by terrace walls being built partly on Late Bronze Age house walls along the contours of the tell, probably during the period when the possible Persian government building occupied the top.

In the Hellenistic period, Tall al-Fukhār was dominated by a large Hellenistic villa with 16 rooms, some of which had fine floors made of cobbles covered with mud-plaster, or even ashlar, all set around a courtyard and built on the walls of an earlier Hellenistic settlement (Strange 1997: 406). In connection with the villa, we found two dumps where locally-produced Hellenistic pottery — derived from the Iron Age / Persian pottery — was mixed with fine Hellenistic tableware from the third century BC. This may give us a better date for the local Iron Age IIC and Hellenistic pottery and result in a better understanding of the Ptolemaic period in Jordan as a whole (TABLE 1).



4. Area B; building elements from the Early Iron Age (pl. 2,4,1).

**TABLE 1.** Main occupational phases at Tall al-Fukhār.

I	Early Bronze Age IB	3600-3050 B.C.
II	Early Bronze Age II - III	3050-2350 B.C.
II B	Intermediate EB - MB	2350-2000 B.C.
III	Middle Bronze Age IIA	1800-1500 B.C.
IV	Late Bronze Age I - IIA	1500-1400 B.C.
V	Late Bronze Age IIB	1400-1150 B.C.
VI	Transition LB - Iron Age (Iron IA and IB)	1150-900 B.C.
VII	Iron Age IIC / Persian Period	600 - 350 B.C.
VIII	Hellenistic Period	300 - 150 B.C.
IX	Post-Hellenistic Period (Roman - Byzantine)	150 B.C.-650 A.D.
X	Topsoil with graves from 1932	650 A.D.- Present

## Area F

A - I	Early Bronze IB
B - II	Early Bronze II - III
C - II B	Intermediate EB - MB

D - III Middle Bronze IIA

E - IV Late Bronze I - IIA

F - V Late Bronze IIB

G - VI Transition LB - Iron Age (Iron IA and IB)

H - VII Iron IIC / Persian Period

I - X Topsoil

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JOHN STRANGE