

TALL ABŪ AL-KHARAZ - THE SWEDISH JORDAN EXPEDITION 2012: FIFTEENTH SEASON PRELIMINARY EXCAVATION REPORT

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Introduction

The fifteenth season of excavation at Tall Abu al-Kharaz was carried out with the kind support of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan between 23 September and 18 October 2012.

The 2012 season was devoted to the earliest Iron Age occupation of the site, which was discovered in 2009 in Area 9 and further exposed in 2010 and 2011 (Fischer and Feldbacher 2010, 2011; Fischer and Bürge 2012). A 46 m long two-storey compound with 22 rooms from the conventional Iron Age I period, *viz.* the local Phase IX, has partly been exposed. The study of the unique cell-plan architecture and new material for a refined stratigraphy¹, including the collection of first-class radiocarbon samples from primary floor contexts, were amongst the main objectives of the 2012 season of excavation. Numerous radiocarbon dates of short-lived samples from Phase IX point to a date around 1100 BC for the destruction of the compound.

The 2012 team consisted of 23 persons including P. M. Fischer (director), T. Bürge (assistant field director), H. Ta'ani (foreman, trench supervisor) and M. al-Bataineh (surveyor, draughtsperson). Trench supervisors were D. Blattner, J. van der Does, K. Heiss, S. al-Razzaz and K. Sauter. The representative of the Department of Antiquities was R. M. Odat. The expeditions were further backed up by the inspector of Pella, N. Khasawneh. Additional support was provided by S. Esbeihat (cook) and Y. Suleiman Musa (pottery washing). Ten local workers from Pella, Mashare' and Yabis were engaged in the excavations.

The Royal Court, represented by HRH Prince Raad Ibn Zaid and HRH Princess Majda Raad again showed interest in our work and provided support.

Results from the 2012 excavations in Area 9: Trenches LIXA – E (Fig. 1)

Background

The two-storey, cell-plan compound, which was exposed between 2009 and 2011, dates to the Iron Age I according to 15 radiocarbon dates from the floor of Phase IX which are all between roughly 1200 - 1000 BC. Fourteen rooms of this early Iron Age compound were exposed from 2009 to 2011, represented by Trenches LI – LV with a total length of 28 m. The rooms were covered by thick debris of burnt charcoal and mudbricks and were totally undisturbed after a severe conflagration that brought Phase IX to an end. Amongst the finds were around 180 intact or complete ceramic vessels, in addition to metal objects, textile production tools, faience vessels, stone tools, beads and scarabs and a *tannur*. Some of the vessels contained organic remains, for instance wheat, barley, millet, chickpeas, olives and the dried remains of olive oil, and even barley flour. The results from the previous season encouraged us to extend the 2012 excavations eastwards (Trenches LIXA - E). The Phase IX compound is now exposed for a length of 46 m (Fig. 2).

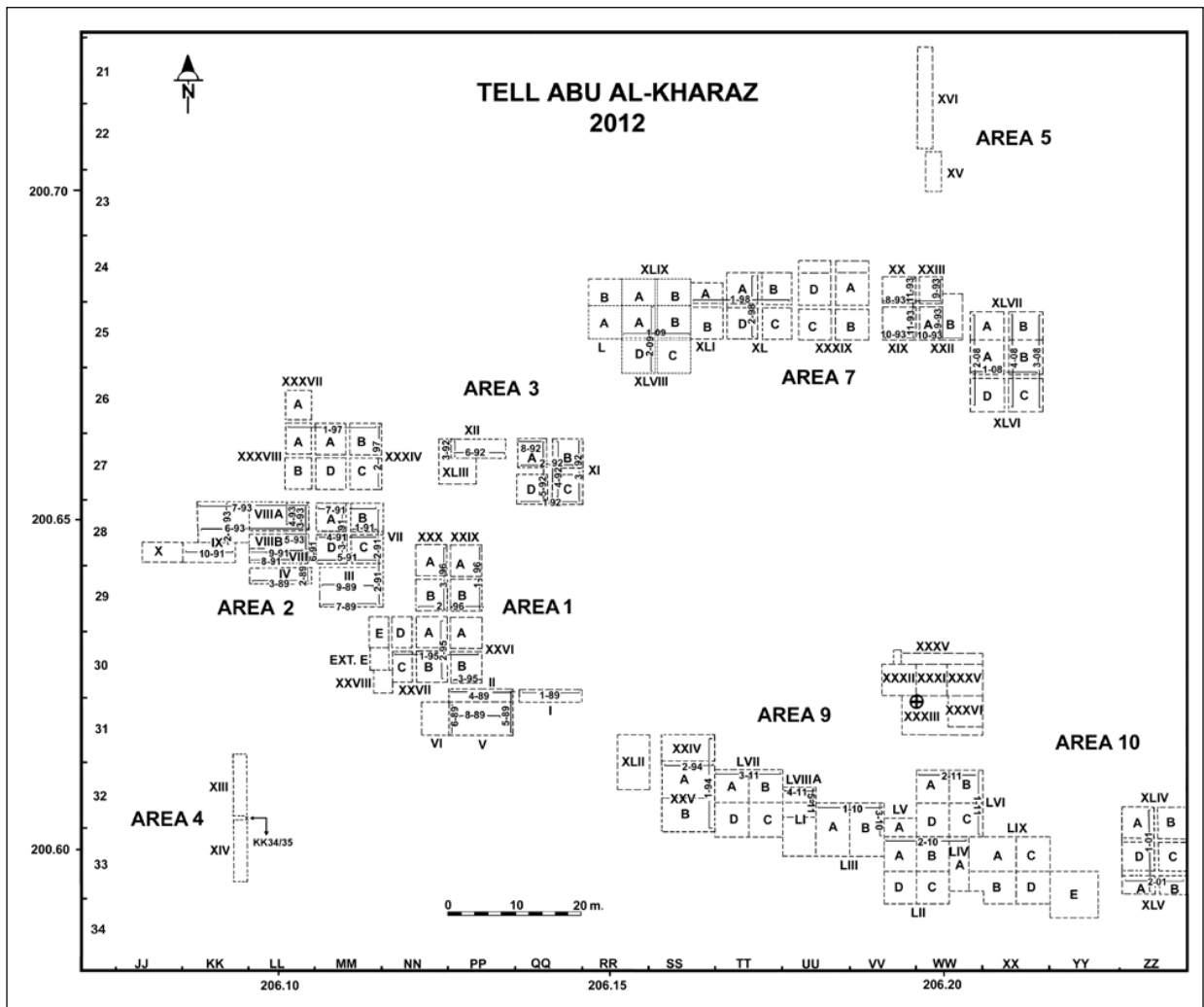
Iron Age II (early)

Phase XI

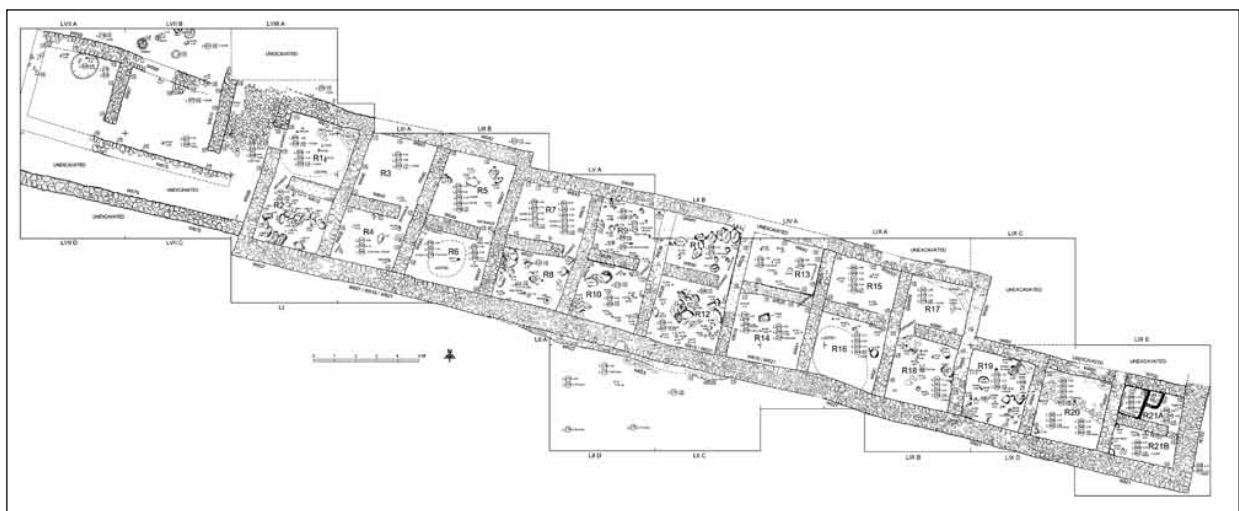
Only a few loci and some walls were exposed

1. This information is published in the third volume on Tall Abu al-Kharaz, *viz.* The Iron Age (Fischer in press). The first two volumes are on the Early Bronze

Age (Fischer 2008) and on the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (Fischer 2006).



1. Overview of exposed areas, trenches and sections (drawn by M. al-Bataineh).



2. Iron Age I Phase IX: the two-storey cell-plan compound (drawn by M. al-Bataineh).

before the excavations came to a halt. These are W683 and 684 in the northern part (TLIXC) of the exposed area where parts of a *tabun* north of W683 were also exposed. An interesting find from this area was a jar with red decoration on the rim and shoulder (L355-3). Instead of the usual and very regular 'framed wavy-line' decoration, the wavy line is irregular and almost resembles the imitation of a script (cf. the jar found in Phase X [see Fischer and Feldbacher 2011: 379, FIG. 2:1]). According to the pottery and radiocarbon determinations, this stratum belongs to the end of Iron Age I or possibly the beginning of Iron Age II.

Iron Age I Phase X (Fig. 3)

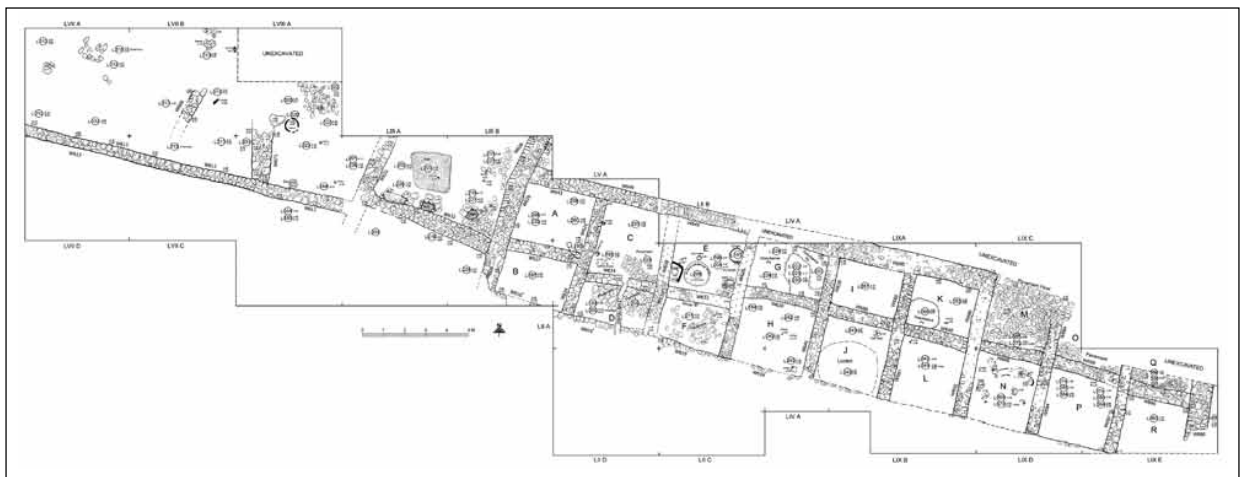
The architecture of this phase is located in the eastern part of the exposed area (TLIVA and TLIXA - E) and is characterised by the reuse of virtually all Phase IX walls. However, it is clear from various sections that the Phase X walls are slightly wider and built of stone and mudbrick.

East of the walled spaces (Rooms A - H) already excavated, ten more were exposed in 2012 (Rooms I - R). The four rooms in the west (Rooms I - L) are arranged in pairs and have beaten earth floors. The southern of the three pairs of the eastern rooms (Rooms N, P and R) have earth floors. The northern rooms (Rooms M, O and Q) are only partly excavated and show

stone pavements most likely representing courtyards. The easternmost wall of the compound is noticeably wider than the others and seems to represent the eastern limits of the compound.

Room J was affected by looting in 2009 and only a few *in situ* finds were recovered. In Room K, a pit 0.6 m deep did not yield any finds. An arrowhead of bronze (N1433) was found next to the pit and a spindle whorl / loom weight of stone was found in Room L (N1428)². Room N, which was covered by a layer of broken mudbrick debris from the roof construction, and charcoal and ash, contained two skeletons. These individuals obviously died in the collapsed building as their bones were blackened by fire. According to the preserved skeletal remains and teeth one skeleton is male, around 30 years old, the other is female, around 25 - 30 years old. Other finds from this room are a *tabun*, a pestle of basalt (N1440), a Philistine-style jug with white slip (L370-1), a cooking jug (L370-2) and several jars and storage jars (one of them is L370-4). Room P contained a spool-shaped, Aegean-type, loom weight of unfired clay (N1447). It should be highlighted that unfired pottery was found in several rooms, which demonstrates local production of pottery.

It can be concluded from the thick layer of destruction debris that, as previously suggested (Fischer and Feldbacher 2011: 380), the Phase X settlement was destroyed in a severe catastrophe.



3. Iron Age I Phase X compound (drawn by M. al-Bataineh).

2. This spindle whorl is of Early Bronze Age date but was reused in Phase X.

Phase IX (Fig. 2)

Seven more rooms were exposed in the eastern part of the compound (R15 - 21). During the excavations it became clear that Rooms 15 and 17 are built directly on or against the bedrock, which slopes upwards to the east and north. Therefore the easternmost three rooms to the south (R19 - 21) are single rooms with no counterparts to the north. They are also built directly on and against the bedrock.

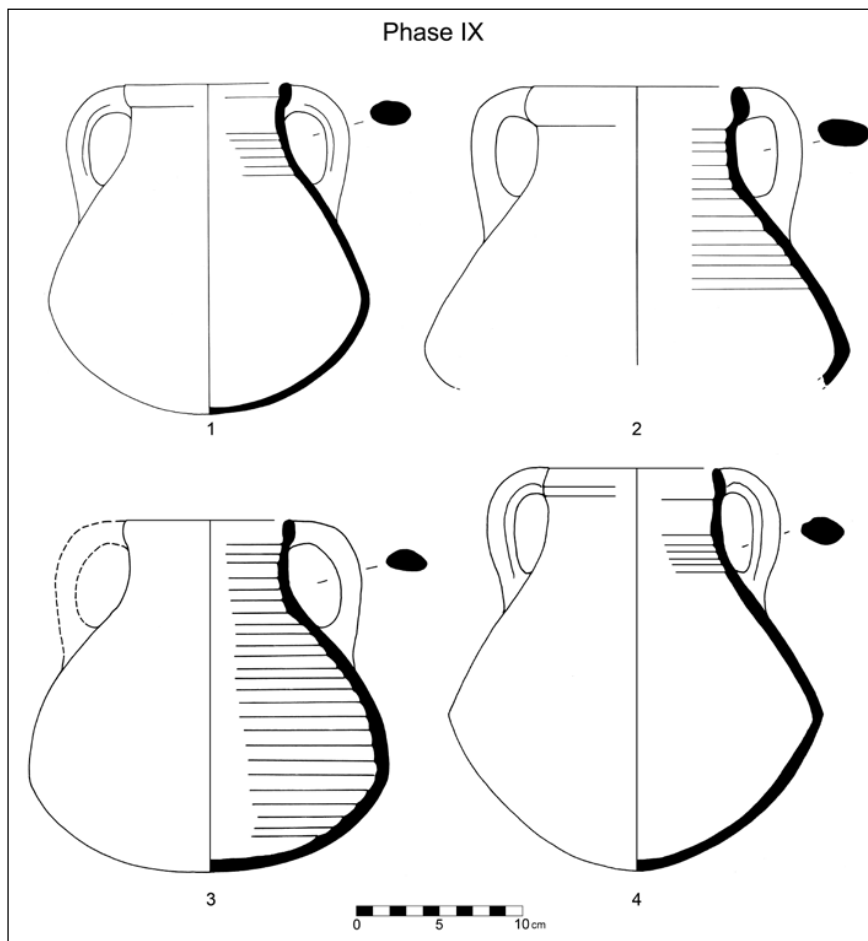
Room 15 contained a small weight of haematite (N1441), a pyxis of clay (N1442), a spindle whorl of calcite (N1443), an almost complete cooking jug (L369-1; see the cooking jugs from Phase IX in Fig. 4), several cooking pots and a pyxis of elongated shape (L369-6; see the pyxides from Phase IX in Fig. 5).

Room 16 was connected with Room 15 but the doorway was blocked with stones. Room 16 was partly looted and only its northernmost part was still intact. In this room a small hand-made

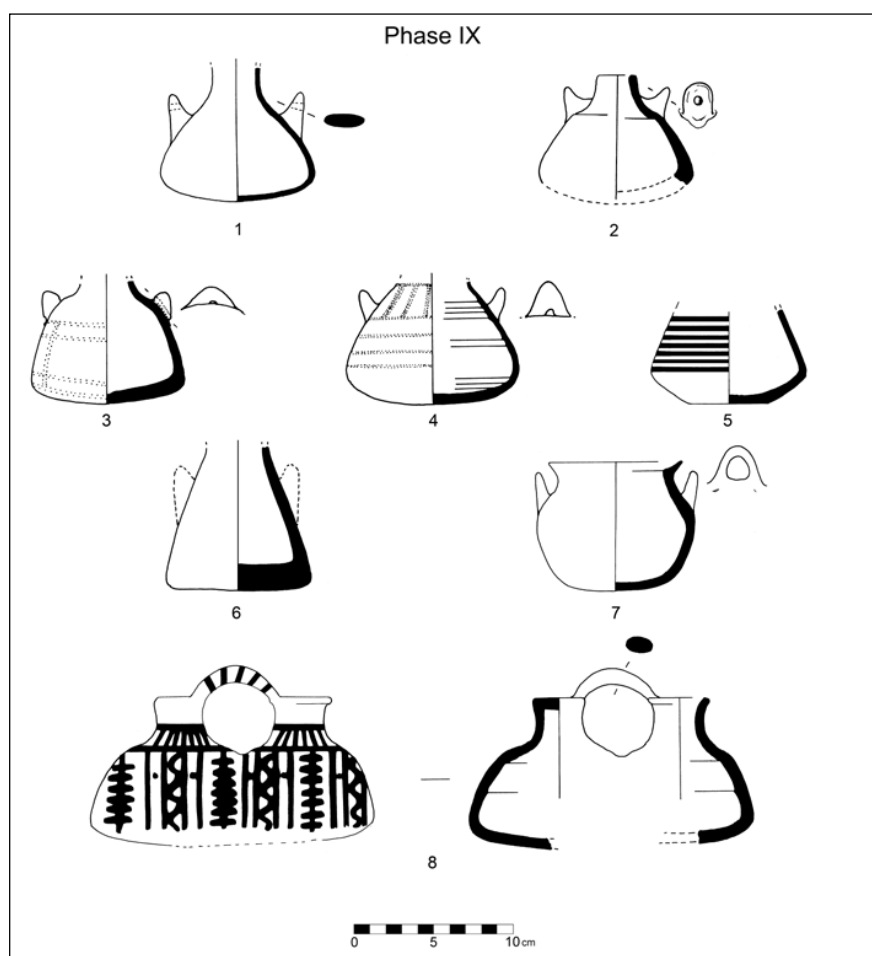
juglet of unfired or very soft-fired clay (N1432) and a tube of polished bone, maybe a spindle handle (N1439), were found. A collapsed *tabun* with a chimney was exposed on the floor of the basement of this room.

Room 17 contained pieces of unfired pottery, which again point to local pottery production. An open doorway connected this room with Room 18 (in W690).

In Room 18 three *tananir* were exposed. One of them was complete (L354-7) leaning against W692. It has a handle, which is the first ever found on a *tannur* at Tell Abu al-Kharaz (Fig. 6). Other finds in this room included a hand-made juglet of unfired clay (N1429), two small hand-made bowls of soft-fired clay (N1431, 1436), a lamp (L351-1), a spindle whorl of clay (N1434), a complete jug (N1430), a juglet (L351-3), a decorated pyxis of clay (L358-2), another pyxis (N1435) and a bowl (L358-1) (the last two examples were made of alabaster with incised



4. Iron I Phase IX: cooking jugs (drawn by M. al-Battineh).



5. Iron Age I Phase IX: pyxides and a double-pyxis (drawn by M. al-Bataineh).



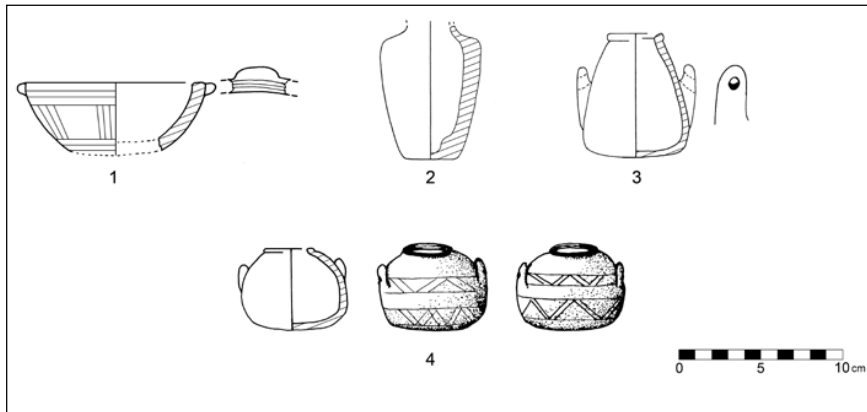
6. Iron Age I Phase IX: tannur with preserved handle (photograph by T. Bürge).

decoration [see the Phase IX alabaster vessels in Fig. 7)], plus a lid of unfired clay (N1438).

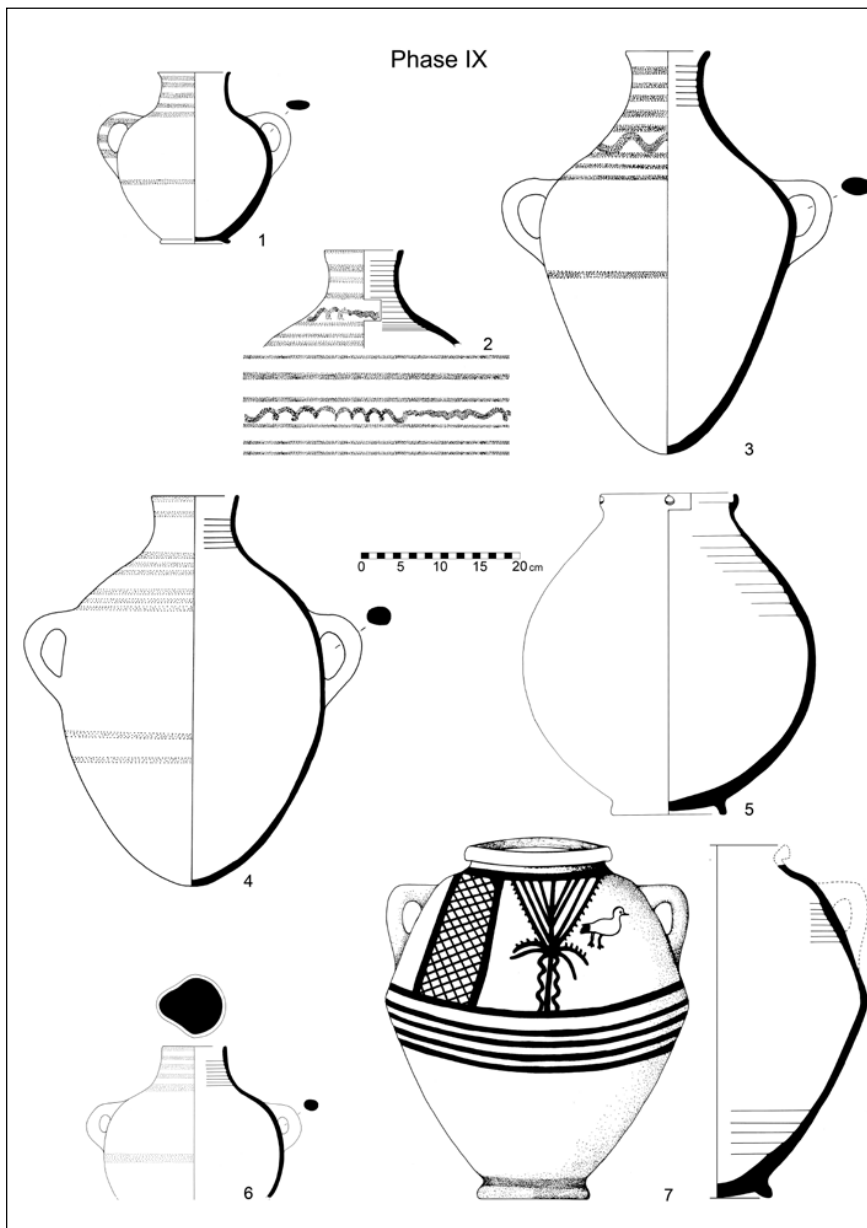
Like Room 18, the next room to the east, Room 19, had no adjacent room to the north. It also contained several installations for heating:

a part of a *tabun*, a *tannur* (L377-4) and an intact small heater (L377-5)³. Other finds included two hand-made bowls (N1446 and L377-7) and a hand-made jug (L377-8), an oval object of unfired clay, maybe a frying pan (L377-6), two spindle whorls of clay (N1445 and 1451), a spindle whorl of sandstone (N1444) and one of stone (N1452), a polished bone-tube with incised decoration (N1448), and a ring-shaped basalt tool with red pigment (N1449) which was possibly used during the pottery-manufacturing process. Other ceramic finds included a small, decorated pilgrim flask of high quality (N1453) and a jug with red decoration (L377-2). The shape of the latter recalls Late Bronze Age shapes (Fig. 8: 1). Around one kilogram of barley and wheat seeds was spread on the floor and numerous olive pits were collected in the western part of the room. The barley may have

3. It is unlikely that this object was a *tabun*.



7. Iron Age I Phase IX: alabaster vessels (drawn by M. al-Bataineh).



8. Iron Age I Phase IX: jug and jars (drawn by M. al-Bataineh).

been stored in an organic container. A wooden structure of indistinct shape was exposed close to the seeds. Another wooden construction was found around the *tannur*: it possibly served as support. The northern part of this room was built directly on the bedrock, which has a steep slope towards the south. The southern part of the floor of Room 19 was built on a loose fill, which was covered by large sherds and contained a mixture of different seeds, such as lentils, barley and olive pits. A juglet (N1454) was found next to the sherds within the foundation of the floor. Therefore, we conclude that there are two floors present in Room 19.

Room 20 was disturbed by a large animal hole in the southern part. Finds from this room included a spool-shaped, Aegean-type loom weight of unfired clay (N1458), a storage jar (L390-1), a lamp (L397-1) and two hand-made bowls of unfired clay (L391-1, L397-2). Bedrock and a section of the Middle / Late Bronze Age city wall appeared to the north.

The easternmost room of the compound, Room 21, is somewhat different from all the other rooms (Fig. 9). It is divided into a northern (R21A) and a southern (R21B) part by W701 with an entrance in the east. As the floor level of Room 21A is some 0.1 – 0.2 m higher than that of Room 21B, a threshold made of mudbrick was found in the doorway. There is a quite unique feature in Room 21A, namely two 0.8 m deep basins made of unfired clay. The walls around them are covered with a fine layer of clay plaster. Remains of barley / wheat seeds show that at least one of the basins was used for the storage of grain. Two metal finds were recovered in Room 21A, a toggle pin of bronze and a bead of pierced lead (N1450) resembling a sling bullet. Room 21B was obviously used as a storeroom. It contained two intact vessels, a cooking jug (N1457) and a jar (N1456). Other finds are seven plain storage jars, two small jars, a jug with red decoration on the shoulder resembling a script (L395-5; Fig. 8: 2), a jug with a trefoil mouth (L395-4), a small krater and two bowls (L395-1, 3). Of special interest is a large biconical krater depicting palm trees, a bird and geometric elements in the metope style (L395-2; Fig. 8: 7). This is one more Early Iron Age product that recalls Late Bronze Age prototypes. Another exceptional find is part of a



9. Iron Age I Phase IX: Rooms 21A with silos and 21B (photograph by P. M. Fischer).

small bronze wheel, which originally had eight spokes. Parallels from Philistine Tel Miqne-Ekron are interpreted as parts of four-wheeled cult stands (Dothan 2002: 4–8). Other finds from this room include a basalt mortar, again with traces of red pigment (N1455), a ring-shaped weight (N1461) and a small pendant of stone (N1460). Numerous carbonized chickpeas were found in one vessel.

The eastern wall at the end of the compound, W702, is with its 1.0 m width noticeably wider than all the other walls belonging to the compound. Its width corresponds exactly to that of the Iron Age city wall, W621. On the very last day of excavation, a test trench was opened east of the compound and it became clear that the city wall does not continue east of W702. A preliminary theory is that this opening in the city wall was one of the early Iron Age city gates. The position of the suggested gate is on a more moderate slope of the *tall* facing the Wādī al-Yābis. It would make sense to assume that the main street leading from Wādī al-Yābis to the fortified city centre was here.

Future Objectives

Consolidation of the exposed structures of this unique compound was carried out by the Swedish team after the excavation in autumn 2012. In the future, however, it will be important to ensure an adequate level of preservation through supplementary work. Guarding of the site was undertaken by the Department of Antiquities in 2010 and 2011, but in 2012 no guard was employed by the Department. An application for future guarding has been forwarded to

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the Department by the director of the Tall Abu al-Kharaz project and will hopefully be benevolently considered. Further investigations east of the compound where the city gate is suspected are planned to take place in 2013.

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