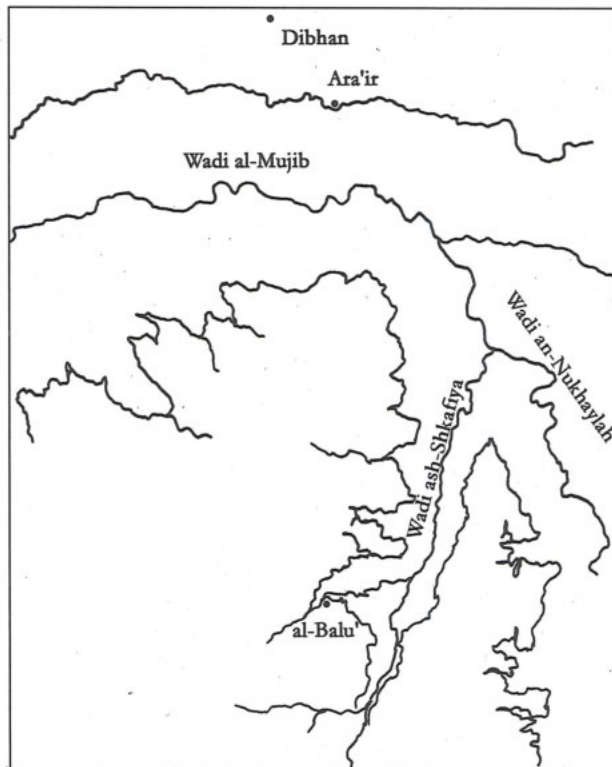


FIRST SOUNDINGS AT KHIRBAT AL-MU'MMARIYYA IN THE GREATER WĀDĪ AL-MŪJIB AREA

Friedbert Ninow

In the course of the Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt Survey Project which was established to collect archaeological data from one of the main tributary wadis of Wādī al-Mūjib east of the Dead Sea, a number of new sites were discovered (see Ninow 2002). Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt (وادي الشقيفات) is the major southern tributary that branches off Wādī Nukhaylah (وادي النخيلة), the southern branch of the main wadi system; from there Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt leads southward and cuts deep into the central Moabite Plateau (Arḍ al-Kerak; see Fig. 1). The survey showed that the various wadis that lead into Wādī al-Mūjib were widely frequented during ancient times. Especially in the wider vicinity of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt, a number of strong fortifications indicate that this wadi served as one of the major routes leading up to the Central Moabite plateau. A

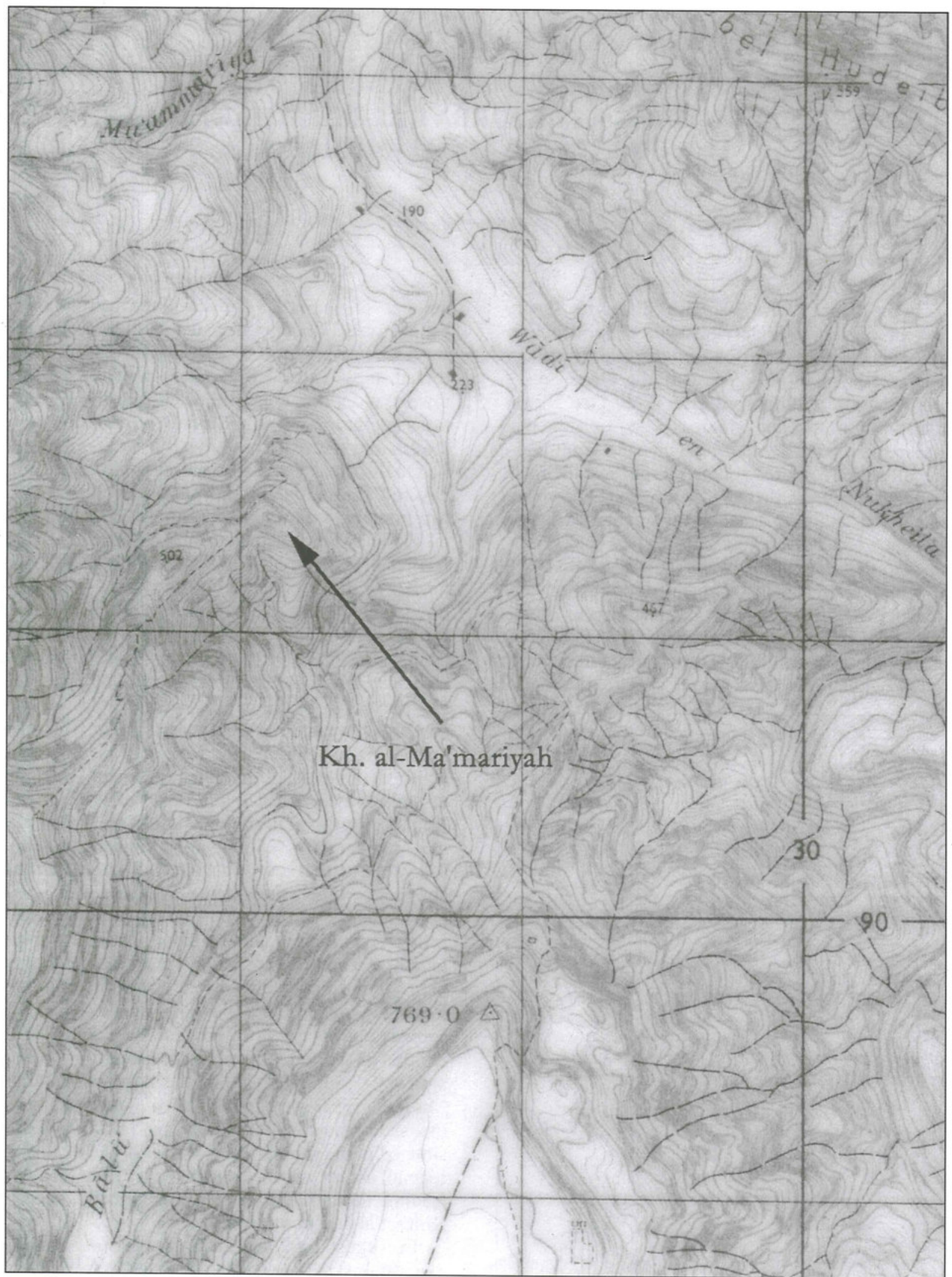


1. Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt and the Upper Wādī al-Mūjib Area.

number of important sites (more than 50 altogether) could be identified and studied during this survey, among them various larger and smaller ruined sites, cairns, wall lines, water reservoirs, towers, etc.), that could be dated to a range of periods beginning with the Early Bronze period up to the Islamic age.

One of the most important sites that were discovered during the initial survey is Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya (خربة الممرية) (Ninow 2002: 153; site no.9). This site is situated on a hillside that rises from the wide bed of Wādī al-Mūjib/Wādī Nukhaylah near the point of confluence of Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt and the main wadi (see Fig. 1 and 2; Position: GPS N 31 24' 41-46; E 35 49' 17-24; Palestine Grid: 28.2/91.4). Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya stretches from the summit plateau of Jabal al-Mu'mmariyya (جبل الممرية) downward along the eastern slopes in form of a huge triangle. The massive city walls formed by a casemate wall with a width of almost 5m are already visible from the distance. One can get a good overview of the site from the northern tip of the Khashm as-Sanʿna plateau southeast of Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya (Fig. 3). Whereas the southern city wall is still almost complete, some parts of the northern wall – especially in the lower part of the city – have eroded away. The northern and southern city walls have a length of about 300m, while the citadel and most parts of the upper city are situated on a slightly sloping plateau, the remaining area of the city spreads out over a steep descent. The approach to Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya leads through a western pathway winding its way up the slopes of Jabal al-Mu'mmariyya, surrounding the site and leading up to a saddle from which a small path leads to a gate situated in the southern city wall near the citadel. A second ascent approaches the city from the east leading through the steep slope directly beneath Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya.

In August 2002 and 2003 two seasons of small excavations were conducted by a team from Theologische Hochschule Friedensau (Germany), at



2. Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya above Wādi Nukhayla.



3. Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya as seen from the Khashm as-Sanina plateau.

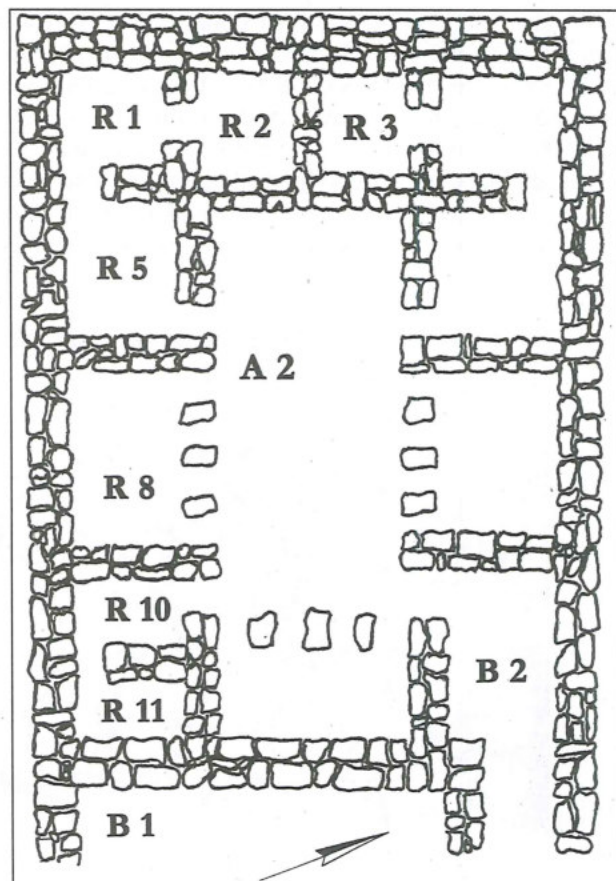
Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya. The work concentrated on the citadel which commands the site from the highest elevation of the site. The goal was to get a clearer picture of the outline of the site in general and the citadel in particular, and to get insights into the occupational history of the site.

The Citadel

The citadel is situated on the highest point of Jabal al-Ma'mariyeh. Its outline is almost symmetrical (see Fig. 4). It has a rectangular shape; the smaller sides between 17.00 and 18.00m, the longer sides between 24.00 and 25.00m in length. The entrance gateway is located in the area where the northern casemate wall connects with the citadel. The outer casemate wall continues as the outer wall of the citadel. The center of the citadel consists of a large courtyard that was surrounded at three sides by what appears to be pillars with attached rooms. The rooms in the rear of the citadel could be reached through two side-rooms that lead into two small chambers at the back of the citadel. The outer walls of the citadel were constructed with massive stones. The width of these walls is up to almost 2m.

In 2002 we opened two 5 x 5m squares within the citadel (leaving bulks of 1m at the northern respectively at the western side): Square A1 inside one of the small back rooms (room R1) and part of the courtyard; (Square A2) along the outer eastern casemate wall we opened a search trench (B1). In addition we opened one of the casemates of the southern wall situated about 35m from the citadel (C1). In 2003 three other rooms within the citadel were cleared: one adjacent to the first excavated

room (Square A3; room R2), and two others (B3 and B4; rooms R10 and R11). In addition, the entrance gateway to the citadel was excavated (B2). At the point where the citadel-plateau dips into a



4. Outline of Citadel.

somewhat steeper slope, yet another room was excavated (E1).

A1

This square concentrated on room R1, one of the four small rooms in the back of the citadel. It appeared that this room was full of stone debris of collapsed walls. Taking the great amount of the debris into consideration one could conclude that the citadel must have consisted – at least in this area – of two different floors, the upper of which had collapsed into the lower room. The walls are well constructed with larger stones (some of them very well hewn) and smaller stones that supported the larger ones and gave them the necessary steadiness. The walls stand up to almost 2.00m. The elevation of the walls is between 471.70m and 471.29m. The floor elevation in the middle of the room amounts to 469.93m. There are two doorways that lead into this room: the first one leads from room R5 into R1 (formed by wall W100 and W20); the other leads from room R1 into R2 (Fig. 5)

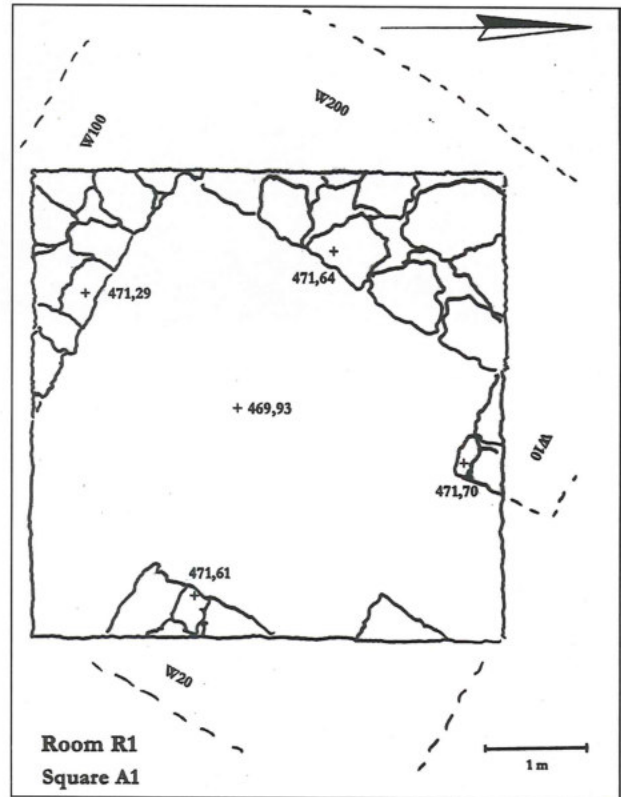
A2

This square concentrated on the courtyard of the citadel, in contrast to Square A1, this square did not have the same amount of debris. This is probably due to the fact that it was an open courtyard. Since we opened this square very late we could not yet reach the floor. In order to find out if the stones visible at the surface were part of pillars we extended our search outside the square parameters, from what we found so far it appears as if the courtyard was indeed surrounded by pillars.

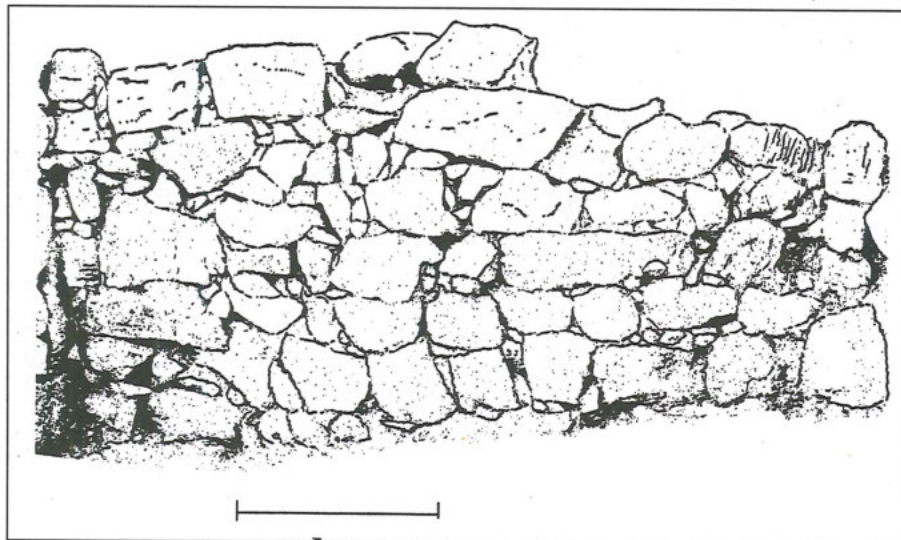
A3

This square is limited by the walls of room R2,

both rooms are connected by a doorway. Room R2 and room R3 were the most inner rooms of the back part of the citadel (see Fig. 4). They could only be entered by passing through the inner courtyard and two other rooms. The walls of this room as well as room R1 are well-constructed with larger and smaller stones that supported the larger stones and gave them the necessary steadiness sometimes forming horizontal layers (see Fig. 6,



5. Room R1.



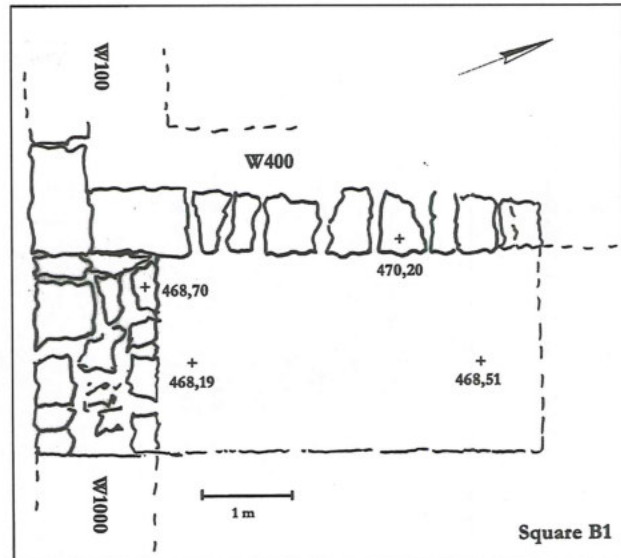
6. Wall separating room R2 and room R3.

wall separating room R2 and room R3). The elevation of the floor is somewhat higher than the floor level of room R1 due to the elevation and form of the bedrock underneath. The entrance way connecting room R1 with room R2 is also very well constructed, especially the *Laibung* (reveal; see Fig. 7). We also found this room filled with enormous debris. The floor consisted of a mud-layer that had been partially destroyed by the falling blocks of the debris.

Once we had reached the floor we removed it and found that, where necessary, it was carefully leveled with flat stones. The varying levels of the bedrock needed to be taken into consideration, whilst the citadel was being constructed. The floor of room R1 in square A1 was also removed and the bedrock reached.

B1

In Area B1 we opened a search trench along the eastern wall W400 where the outer casemate wall (W1000) runs against the citadel (Fig. 8). This trench was 5.5m x 2.2m which includes wall W1000. The fill consisted of sand and smaller stones together with a few larger blocks. After 0.80m an ash-layer appeared throughout the entire search trench. This ash-layer was about 0.25m thick (Fig. 9). The elevation stretched from 468.51 in the northern part to 468.19 in the southern part near wall W1000. This sloping is due to the natural surface. Immediately underneath the ash-layer was the floor. Near wall W1000 a huge rock that is part of the natural surface penetrates the floor. Further digging revealed that the rough surface of the natural rock floor was filled with small stones and



8. Search trench B1.

earth to form a relatively even surface for the floor of this first casemate. No sherds were found in the fill underneath the floor. Wall W1000 was built against the citadel, since no remains of the inner casemate wall W2000 were found it appears as if this wall did not run against wall W400 but ended outside the trench to give room for an entrance into the casemate.

B2

The citadel was to be entered by an entrance at the SE corner. This gateway was incorporated in the wall system of the northern casemate wall that runs from the citadel down to the SE corner of Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya. The main outer wall of the gateway and the citadel is formed by the outer



7. Entrance way to room R2.



9. Ash-layer in search trench B1.

casemate wall W4000 (Fig. 10). This wall has a width of about 1.30 to 1.40m. The breadth of the outer entrance is about 1.65m. The gateway broadens after ca. 2.5m to a width of almost 3m. After 4m the entrance way takes a 90o turn to open into the inner part of the citadel. The floor ascends slightly up to the inner gateway.

Similar to the various rooms of the citadel we could detect no more than one level of occupation. The entrance way was not filled by huge amounts of debris, instead it was filled by a well packed

layer of sand (HUE 2.5Y 8/4; pale yellow). The inner gateway was formed by a step that led into the inner citadel (Fig. 11).

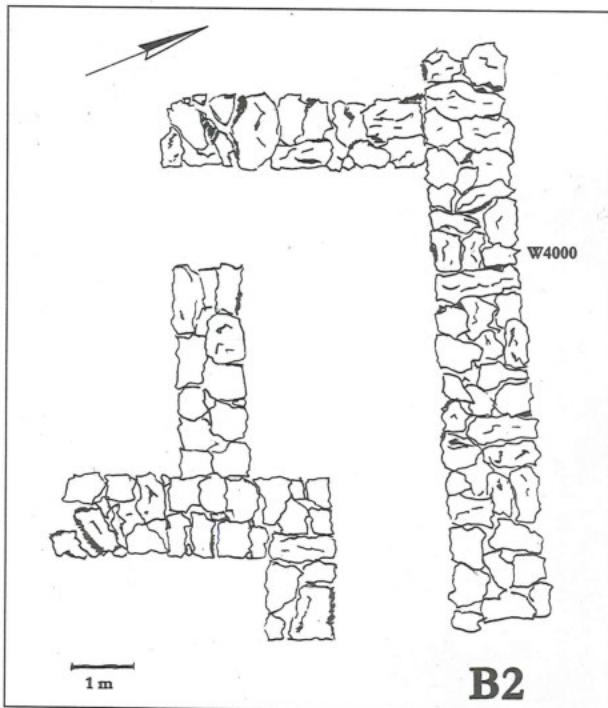
B3 and B4

The excavation of room R10 and room R11 brought new insights into the overall outline of the citadel. Whereas we previously thought that the southern part of the citadel had a somewhat similar outline (i.e., the entrance way matches another room at the opposite site), now we discovered, that the alleged one room is in reality two smaller rooms (Fig. 12). When one wanted to enter room R11 from room R10 one had to pass a step. While the floor of room R10 has an elevation of 469.56m the floor of room R11 has an elevation of 469.23m. The entrance to room R11 is situated between wall W1000 and the end of wall W111.

Further excavation revealed that wall W110 did not reach wall W1000 but instead ended (similar to wall W111) to leave an entrance from room R10 into room R8. The entrance was also formed by a step to take the different floor level elevation into account.

C1

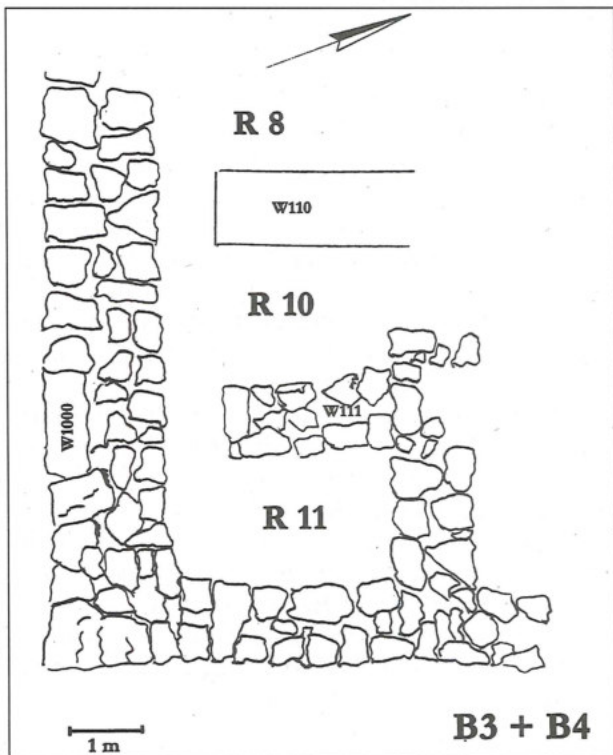
Following the southern casemate wall W1000/W2000 we chose a casemate in a distance of ca. 35m from the citadel. The fill was cleared working from the separation wall W1010 towards the other separation wall that we did not reach. The casemate is formed of huge blocks (Fig. 13). The entrance of the casemate is almost in the corner of the separation wall W1010 and the inner casemate wall W2000; it has a width of about 1.00m. The case-



10. Gateway B2.



11. Step of inner gateway B2.

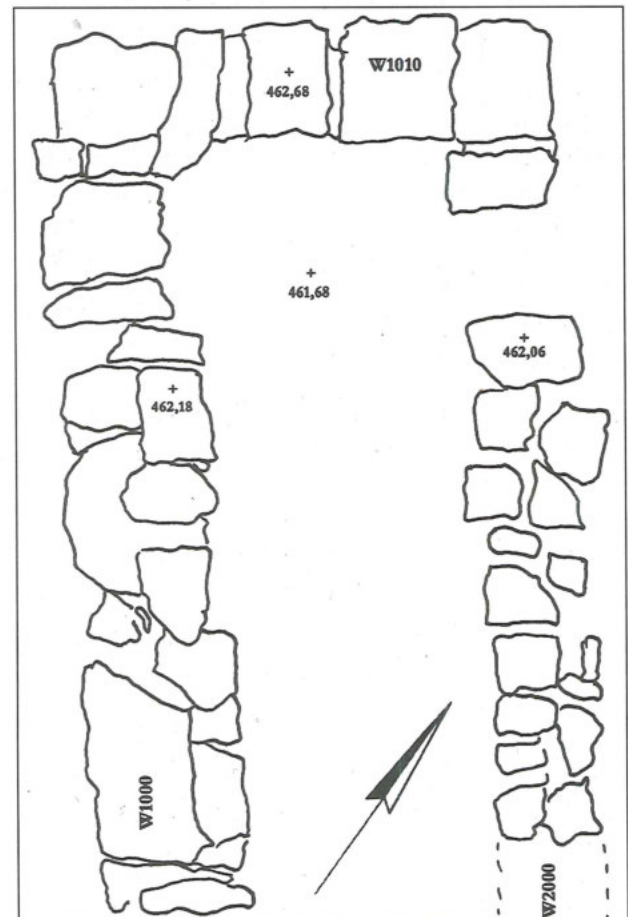


12. Room R10 and room R11.

mate itself has a width of almost 5.00m. The length of the excavated part is almost 7.00m (wall W1010 included).

E1

The point where the plateau dips into a somewhat steeper slope marks a kind of demarcation that separates the upper from the lower site. This area is protected by a strong fortification. We started to excavate a room whose two upper corners

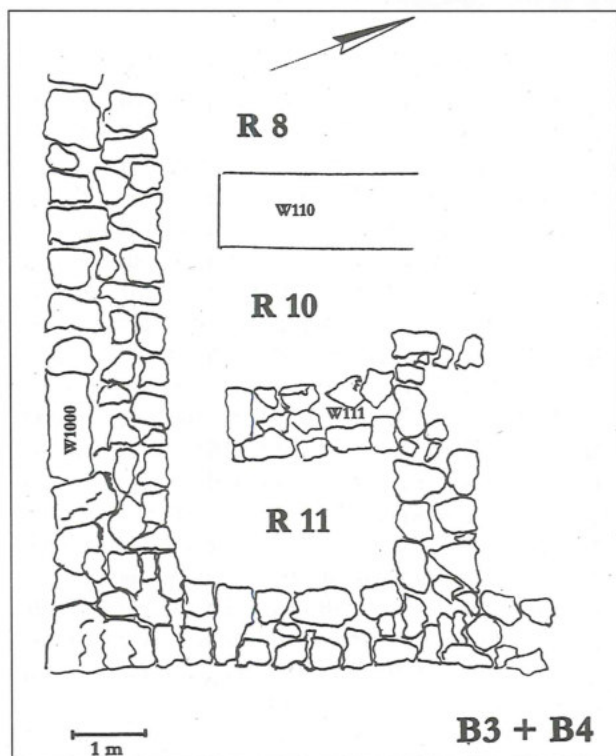


13. Casemate C1.

were formed by walls that have the width of ca. 1.80m. During the process of the excavation it became clear that we dug an elongated room with a breadth of ca. 3m, up to now we opened this room along wall W5100 (Fig. 14) and wall W5102 ex-



11. Step of inner gateway B2.

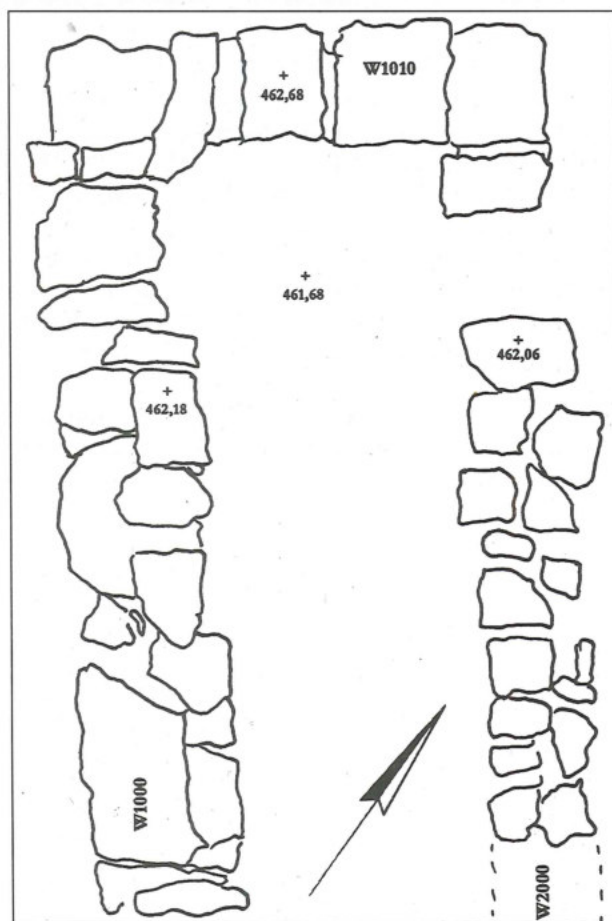


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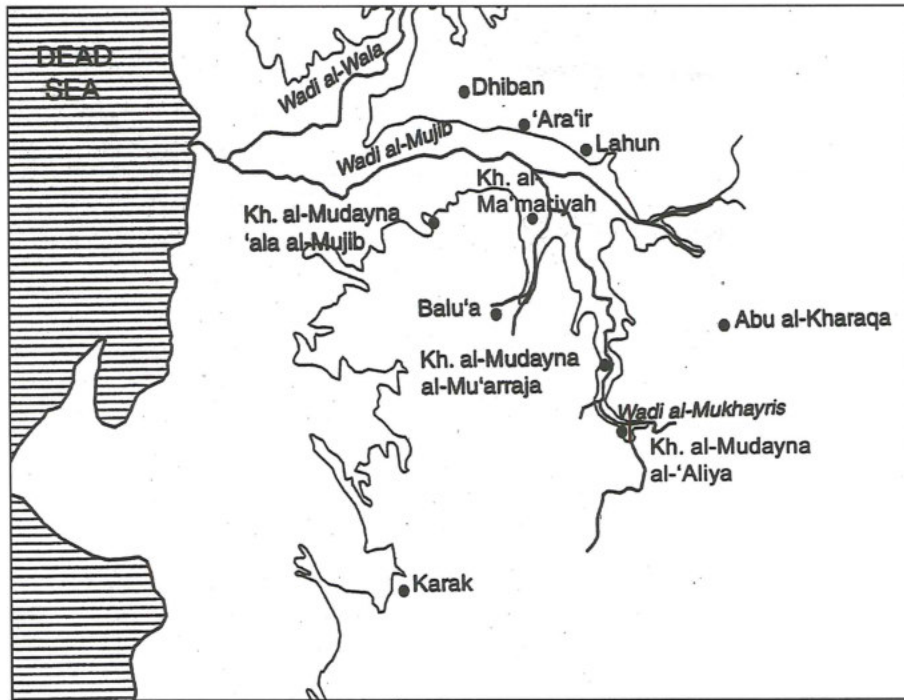
E1

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16. Northern Karak plateau.

468.3; Palestine Grid: 232.2/081.3), and "Khirbat al-Mudayna South" or Khirbat al-Mudayna al-'Ulyā (UTMG: 773.4/464.5; Palestine Grid: 233.0/076.8). Both sites are located 5km apart. Khirbat al-Mudayna al-'Ulyā measures 275 x 110m and is guarded by a substantial city wall with a tower-gate complex and a moat. The pottery of this site suggests that the site experienced a single occupational phase towards the end of Iron Age I. Investigation pertaining to the architecture of the site is under way under the direction of Bruce Routledge (see Routledge 2000). Khirbat al-Mudayna al-Mu'arraja further to the north on the west bank of Wādī Nukhaylah has been excavated during two brief seasons by E. Olávarri (Olávarri 1977-78; 1983). This site is also heavily fortified with a huge double wall on its western side along with a tower-gate complex. The results of the excavation showed that this site also was essentially a one-period site and dates to the Iron Age I period.

Thus, Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya fits into this category of sites that display a number of similarities: occupation during the latter part of Iron I ("Khirbat al-Mudayna on the Mugib" is the only site that has a longer occupation history), extensive and massive fortification systems, and similar pottery and architecture; the plan view of the citadel of Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya shows a significant parallel to the plan view of Building 100 of Khirbat al-Mudayna al-'Ulyā (Routledge 2000: 41, 50). All sites are situated in close proximity to the border of the Central Moabite plateau. Khirbat al-

Mu'mmariyya is the only site that did not command its surroundings from the top/edge of the plateau, but rather controlled the wadi bed itself (i.e., Wādī ash-Shuqayfāt and part of Wādī al-Mūjib). Whereas all the other Iron I sites are found in rather remote areas. Khirbat al-Mu'mmariyya is situated on the crossways of important routes that connected the northern Dhibān plateau with the southern Moabite plateau. Most of the traffic had to pass by this site. Further research has to clarify the socio-economic context and the site's function within the concert of its neighboring sites during the Iron Age I period.

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