

RECYCLING THE VALLEY PRELIMINARY REPORT: TALL DĀMIYAH EXCAVATIONS 2014

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1. Excavation work in 2014.

Abstract

The fifth excavation season at Tall Dāmiyah took place from the 18th of October until the 20th of November, 2014. It was a joint project between the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, represented by Lucas Petit, and Yarmouk University, represented by Zeidan Kafafi. Work was carried out in 6 squares on the south-eastern summit of the Tall. The main goal was to study the Late Iron Age levels, and to relate the findings to other Iron Age sites in the vicinity. Furthermore, attention was given to a cemetery on the summit, preliminarily dated to the Byzantine and Ottoman Period. The 2014 season uncovered further remains of a burned complex dated to the 7th century BC. Several objects, among them a clay bulla with cuneiform signs and Assyrian Palace Ware, which had been found in a previous season, point to a relationship with the Neo-Assyrian Empire; however, some Egyptian and Cypro-

Phoenician objects or ceramics were also encountered. The interior walls of the most northern rectangular building were plastered, as was a platform against the most western wall. Several figurines were discovered in and outside this building, hence cultic activities can be assumed. Persian/Hellenistic silos, together with the Byzantine and Ottoman cemetery, were the latest occupation remains at Tall Dāmiyah.

Introduction

General Objectives and Importance of the Project

Recent archaeological and associated research has discovered intriguing short-term occupation activity in the Central Jordan Valley during most of the first millennium BC. Previously unknown in Near Eastern archaeology and even beyond, this systematic sedentary occupation forces scientists to widen their geographical scope, in order to understand



2. *The Zor, close to Tall Dāmiyah.*

how these people interacted with the surrounding area. Inhabitants of the Central Jordan Valley during Iron Age II and the Persian Period were unequivocally engaged in a continuing cycle of migration, returning to previously settled sites; in other words, searching for preferred areas but leading a sedentary way of life. Due to a complete lack of research in the foothills and on the plateau east of the Central Jordan Valley, archaeologists can only guess where these people migrated to in times of difficulties.

The project recycling a valley intends to systematically investigate the role Central Jordan played in the region during Iron Age II and the Persian Period. It continues at a point where other projects stopped:

- 1) A detailed study of Tall Dāmiyah's role in the valley, as it seems to be one of the few sites which have been occupied almost continuously, without occupation breaks,
- 2) The investigation of settlements on the eastern plateau, to discover how their occupation system(s) relate to habitation in the Central Jordan Valley during the first millennium BC, and
- 3) Combining evidence from previous studies into one coherent picture. On one hand, this project will discover intriguing new information about first millennium BC sites, with evidence of destructive earthquakes, far distance trade and creative solutions to cope with severe climatological conditions; on the other, it will place ancient settlements which have already been investigated into a broader first millennium BC society. Recycling a Valley is a stimulating story about people with emotions, creativeness and a long-term

vision of how they could survive in a fertile but unpredictable environment. The project also re-defines terms such as sedentary and migration in terms of archaeology and as a consequence will make people aware of pre- and historical solutions to recycling.

Tall Dāmiyah

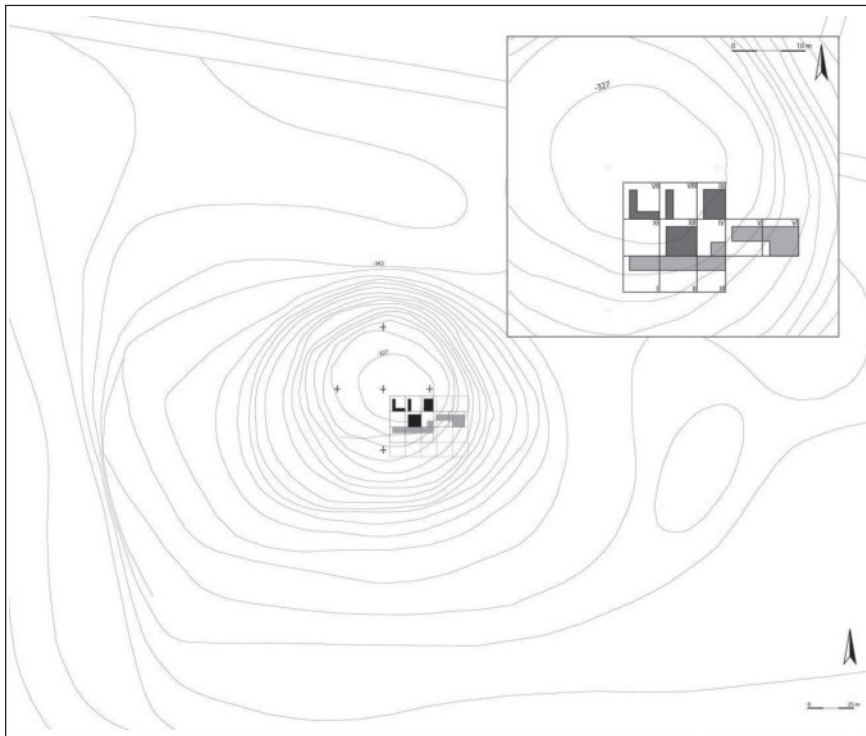
The archaeological site of Tall Dāmiyah is situated in the Zor, directly south of the confluence of the Zarqa and the Jordan Rivers (Lat. 32.1040000915527; Lon. 35.5466003417969). The site is surrounded from three sides by Katar-hills (the Ras Zaqqum, the Sha'sha'a and the Damiyah Katar), and is 500 meters east of the Jordan River. Across the river, on the western side, are the Jiftik and the Marj en-Na'jah, which belong to the Nablus district of Palestine. Tall Dāmiyah is considered to be the most southern settlement which has Iron Age occupation in the Jordan Valley, other than tells (or talls) which are situated in oases (e.g. Jericho, Tall Nimrin and Tall Hammam). The site covers an area of approximately 3 hectares at the base, and has relatively steep slopes all around, rising approximately 17 meters above today's ground level. It consists of two parts; an upper tell and a lower terrace which occupies the western and southern sides. The upper tell in particular occupies a strategic position, and today overlooks the Prince Muhammad (General Al-Linbi) Bridge across the Jordan River. In addition, it dominates the N-S road through the Jordan Valley and the E-W road which connects ancient Ammon with the Wādī Far'ah. This area is very fertile and currently irrigated for intensive farming.



3. Tall Dāmiyah (MEGA number: 2750, DAAHL Site number: 353200251).

Tall Dāmiyah is one of the few sites which was continuously occupied during the Iron Ages (Petit *et al.* 2006; Petit 2008; Petit 2009: 103-49). This fact is remarkable when viewed in relation to the discontinuity of other Iron Age sites in the area (*e.g.* Yassine 1988; Van der Kooij 2001; Petit 2009). Small soundings at this settlement mound in 2004 and 2005 (Excavation permits 59/2004 and 59/2005) by Dr. Lucas Petit and Dr. Omar al-Ghul (Yarmouk University), and in 2012 and 2013 by Dr. Lucas Petit (Excavation permit 23/2012 and 56/2013) had intriguing results regarding late Iron Age occupation and the Neo-Assyrian presence along the river Jordan (Kaptijn *et*

al. 2005; Petit *et al.* 2006; Petit 2009), and also about the Byzantine Period (Petit 2013). In 2012, it was decided to begin an in-depth study of the site of Tall Dāmiyah, in order to understand the role of the central Jordan Valley. Under the auspices of the National Museum of Antiquities in the Netherlands, an international team of archaeologists and specialists opened four squares along a former bulldozer cut (see site evaluation). The excavations continued in 2013, with work resuming in the same squares. Preliminary results of the 2012 and 2013 seasons will be published soon in the Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (Petit 2013; Petit in prep).



4. Site Plan with Location of Squares.

Excavation work at the site of Tall Dāmiyah resumed again in 2014, this time as a joint Jordanian- Dutch project under the directorship of Zeidan Kafafi of Yarmouk University and Lucas Petit of the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities. With the cooperation of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DoA), represented by Ziad Ghunaimat, the team worked between the 18th of October and the 20th of November 2014. The aim of this season was to determine a more substantial view of the site's history, with excavations again continuing in the squares opened in 2004, 2005, 2012 and 2013. Tall Dāmiyah is one of the few sites in the southern Levant with Neo-Assyrian objects, including cuneiform writing. Furthermore, the spectacular discovery of a Byzantine cemetery on the summit of Tall Dāmiyah is a valuable asset, which has provided significant information, enabling researchers to better understand the late-Antiquity in the Jordan Valley. Furthermore, erosion processes on the southern summit as a result of a bulldozer's cut have made archaeological research extremely urgent.

The 2014 Team

The team members were Zeidan Kafafi (co-director), Lucas Petit (co-director), Zeyad Ghunaimat (DoA Representative), Yotti van

Deun (archaeobotanist), Jeroen Rensen (area supervisor and physical anthropologist), Hendrik Ulensers (area supervisor), Mariette Grimbergen (house manager), Mina Taheri, Gaelle Rochtus, Ali Al Amrat, and Salam Al Waked (square supervisors).

Previous Studies and Reports

Victor Guérin was the first to recognize the importance of Tall Dāmiyah (Guérin 1869:238-40), although others, such as Irby and Mangles in 1818, William Lynch in 1848 and Charles van de Velde in 1851 must have directly passed the site during their travels (Irby and Mangles 1823: 325-26; Lynch 1855: 249-50; Van de Velde 1854: 321). John William McGarvey, who visited the site in 1879, mentioned the ruins of a building on its summit near the eastern end (1881:350). He was also one of the first scholars to equate Tall Dāmiyah with Adam(ah), a city mentioned several times in the Old Testament (e.g. Joshua 3:16, I Kings 7:46, II Chr. 4:17) and on the victory stele of Shoshenq I in Karnak. From 1880 onwards, the site was visited and surveyed many times (e.g. Albright 1926: 47; Glueck 1951: 329-31; Yassine *et al.* 1988: 191). The survey teams found pottery from the following major periods: LB II, Iron I, Iron II, Persian, Early Roman, Byzantine and Islamic.



5. One of the Oldest Photographs of Tall Dāmiyah (©American Colony, ca. 1920-1933).

Archaeological excavations were undertaken by Petit in 2004 and 2005 (Kaptijn *et al.* 2005; Petit *et al.* 2006; Petit 2009). During these first two seasons, the main objective was to rescue and document the archaeological remains uncovered by the bulldozer cut (Squares I-III). Archaeological research has continued from 2012 onwards.

Methodology

Fieldwork

The excavation methodology follows the same practices as those executed by the joint Dayr ‘Alla project. Small excavation units (max. 5x5m) divided by baulks will guarantee a good stratigraphic overview of the site. Documentation will include top plan- and section- drawings as well as digital photographs. Most drawings are scaled at 1:20, apart from the human remains, which were drawn at 1:10. In 2012 and 2013, a decision was made to rebury all the human remains uncovered at Tall Dāmiyah (from both the Byzantine and Ottoman Periods) immediately after a short study at the excavation house. All special finds were measured with x, y and z coordinates. Archaeobotanical, archaeozoological and soil samples were taken from ‘clean’ contexts.

A custom built database, designed specifically for the Tall Dāmiyah excavation, was used by all team members. Data (including photographs and drawings) of previous excavations are stored in the excavation house and are available for study.

Material Culture

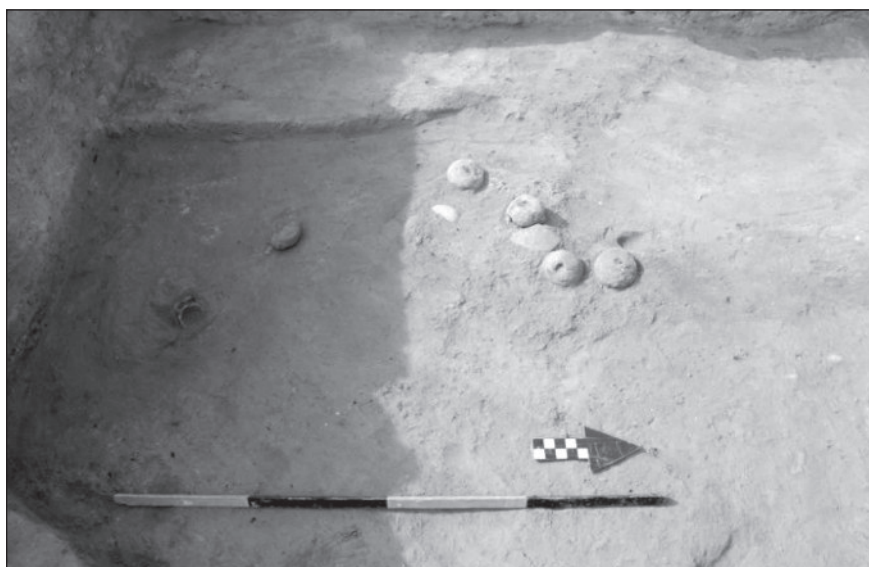
Portable finds were moved to the excavation house, washed (depending on the fabric of the object), drawn and photographed. They were numbered, packed and stored in boxes. Broken pottery was mended if possible.

Results (Stratigraphy and Finds)

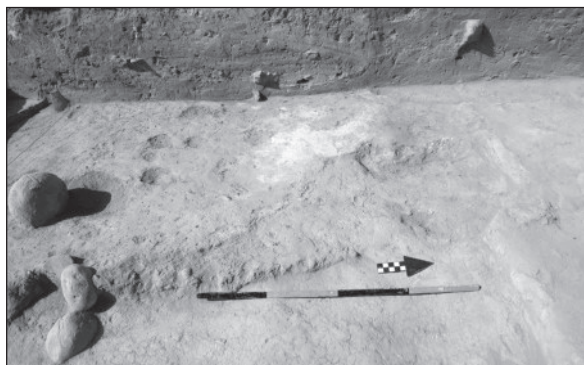
Excavations

Excavation work was carried out in 6 squares, numbered I, III, IV, VII, VIII and XII (**Fig. 4**). The preliminary results provided here are based on all excavation seasons (hence including data from the 2004, 2005, 2012 and 2013 seasons), although the 2014 season provided substantially more information, and solved several stratigraphic problems. The results are presented chronologically, commencing with the oldest occupation phase excavated so far. The excavators recognized several archaeological strata, which are all included in this report.

The oldest occupation remains were encountered in Squares I and III. They consist of thick deposits of occupation layers, with some complete pottery objects, and others which are restorable. The layers contain mud brick fragments, similar to some structures on the summit. The pottery, such as a complete bowl and small black juglet, can be dated to Iron Age IIC, somewhere around 700 BC. The presence of large clay loom weights suggest some textile production on the site (**Fig. 6**). One special find was a bone seal which depicted a lion.



6. Juglet and Loom Weight in One of the Oldest Layers Excavated in 2014.



7. Courtyard Layers in Square IV.

The next occupation level, also from Squares I and III, encompasses the remains of several mud brick walls, oriented NW-SE which are extant in numerous occupation layers. The pottery, all fragmentary, can be dated exclusively to the 7th century BC. A possible oven associated with this level was found in Square III. Either contemporaneous or immediately on top of this phase was a thick deposit of courtyard layers; in 2014, most of the excavation in this area took place in Square IV (Fig. 7). Successive greyish floors, some of which were plastered, were interrupted by a number of stones.

These stones range in size, from medium to small unhewn, and are all river stones, sourced from the basins of both the Zarqa and Jordan Rivers. Fireplaces and post holes were identified in these layers. Possible associated remains of a mud brick structure, destroyed by a heavy conflagration, were discovered in 2012 (Square VII) and 2014 (Square VIII). However, this level was only reached in two small spots, and the shape of this building cannot be determined. At least two ovens “tabuns” were in use during this phase in Square XII. The pottery is consistent and clearly Iron Age IIC, including a number of Assyrian Palace Ware and Ammonite sherds.

The next occupation phase, still dated to the 7th century BC, can be associated with an Assyrian presence. The discovery in 2004 of a clay bulla with Akkadian writing, and numerous Assyrian Palace Ware-sherds (in this and previous seasons) indicates increasing contact with the Neo-Assyrian Empire. But there was definitely contact with the Cypro-Phoenician coast and Egypt also.

At least two rectangular buildings separated by a small alley are located on the south-eastern summit of Tall Dāmiyah; unfortunately,



8. White Plastered Wall and the Roof Roller from the 7th Century BC.

very little of the southern building has been preserved due to the bulldozer cut. The other building is rectangular, with a doorway in the SE-corner. The interior of the walls were white lime-plastered (Fig. 8), and a type of platform was situated against the western wall, which was also covered with plaster. It was difficult to get a complete plan of this building due to several later pits and burials. The pottery is clearly Iron Age IIC, some of which could be restored (in 2012 and 2013). A large stone roof roller was found on top of debris in the most northern building. The most important and intriguing finds were, however, several figurines and anthropomorphic jars.

North of the platform, near the western wall, four animal figurines (cf. Fig. 9) and a possible anthropomorphic jar statue was found. Two similar statues were found in Square IV in 2005 and 2012 (e.g. Petit 2009). In that same area, which is situated southeast of the plastered building, several other animal and human



9. Animal Figurine Found in Square VII.



10. One of the Persian-Hellenistic Silos in Square XII.

figurines were discovered. The courtyard layers may be contemporaneous with these finds. If this is the case, it can be assumed that the white plastered building had a cultic function. Further analyses on the objects and the stratigraphic situation must be carried out before this can be determined conclusively. However, it could be determined that both structures had been destroyed by fire, and a thick, burnt mud brick debris covered the floors of the rooms.

Some scattered occupation remains (pits and hearths) were found in the destroyed remains, after which the site was abandoned. Some Neo-Babylonian finds, for example seals, indicate the presence of people during the late 7th and 6th century BC. The seals from Square IV reminded the excavators of the objects found at the Tall Mazar Cemetery, approximately 30 km to the north of the site (Yassine 1988). It is unclear if those finds could be associated with mud brick wall fragments at the summit, as their dating remained obscure.



11. Sherd Depicting a Cow with a Plough?

The only remains from the 5th to the 2nd century BC were numerous large pits (see Petit 2014 for a possible explanation). These rounded architectural features were of two types: silos which were simply dug into settlement mound layers, and pits lined with mud bricks (**Fig. 10**) They are almost all rounded in shape. The content of these installations consisted of dumped sediment debris, including mud brick chunks, on top of a decayed layer of organic material, possibly straw. This may indicate that the producers were either nomadic or semi-nomadic, and using the summit of the Tall as a storage facility, perhaps to store animal fodder during the summer. Beside the organic remains, some household equipment (*e.g.* grinding stones) and textile production tools (loom weights and spatulas) were also encountered. This year a large pottery sherd, which possibly depicted an animal dragging a plough, was found (**Fig. 11**). Other sites in similar environments, such as Tall Dayr ‘Alla, Tall Mazār and Tall as-Sa’idiyah have revealed similar silos, with dates varying from very late Iron Age II until the Hellenistic Period. The exact date of the pits found at Tall Dāmiyah, as well as the period in which they were used, requires further study.

The presence of a large quantity of Late Roman and even more Byzantine pottery on the surface indicates a human presence during these times (**Fig. 12**). The site was probably used as a cemetery during the 6th and 7th centuries AD. Numerous burials were encountered, particularly on the summit. The human remains were placed in elongated pits dug into the layers of the settlement mound. Depth differs tremendously; some were buried almost 1.5 meters deep, others only 30 cm. Many of the



12. Grave (with an Older Wall in the Background).

remains were of children, but adult bones were also found. Funeral objects such as beads and a glass vessel date at least a few of the graves to the Byzantine Period, although it remains difficult to date individual graves precisely. Many of the graves cut other graves; hence, the cemetery was probably in use for several centuries. Many of the individuals were lying east-west, with their heads pointing to the west and looking south, but they did not all follow this pattern (NE-SW, or W-E). Furthermore, the position of the body differed remarkably in individual cases; on their back, on the sides, with legs crossed, with one hand under the skull, etc.

It is quite possible that the site was again used as a burial ground during the Ottoman Period. At least two stone graves (Squares VII and VIII) yielded the remains of objects from this period, including an Ottoman pipe. One had already been excavated in 2012 (Square VII), which had revealed bronze objects, some beads and a mirror.

Archaeobotanical Research

(by Yotti van Deun)

Archaeobotanical research was carried out as part of the project ‘Recycling a Valley’, conducted in Jordan by the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities and Yarmouk University. This study was supported by the DoA, the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, Yarmouk University in Irbid, and the University of Groningen. To provide additional evidence for the study on migration patterns for the Iron Age inhabitants of Tall Dāmiyah, and

to examine their natural resources and trade connections, several accurate flotation and soil samples from different contexts have been taken during all excavation seasons since 2012. The aims of this archaeobotanical research are to reconstruct the species which were present in Tall Dāmiyah, and additionally, to investigate which crops may have been either cultivated locally or imported across a range of periods, and compare results with other Jordanian tells.

The archaeobotanical samples are obtained by judgmental sampling from contexts such as ash layers, pits, graves, ovens and pottery. Random samples are also taken from surface levels, to establish the true predominant crop on the site. Various volumes are taken from both samples. The samples are floated using 2mm, 1mm and 0.5mm mesh sieves, and analysed using a stereo-microscope. The microscopic study consists of an initial scan in the excavation house at Dayr ‘Allā, with the purpose of establishing an idea of the abundance of archaeobotanical remains, specifically the primary domesticated cereals and legumes, within each trench of the tell. Samples which contain botanical remains which cannot be determined by species on site, are taken to the archaeobotanical laboratory at the University of Groningen for further analysis, using the archaeobotanical reference collection.

In addition to shells and charcoal, which appear in almost all samples, cereals such as barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and wheat (*Triticum aestivum/durum*) have been noticed in several samples. Other food crops such as lentils (*Lens*



13. Beads and Objects from One of the Graves.



14. Archaeobotanical Remains.

culinaris), grapes (*Vitis vinifera*), chickpeas (*Cicer arietinum*) and sesame (*sesamum*) have been present in some samples. One of the samples contained half an almond (*Prunus dulcis*). The nut was probably not eaten because of a sudden fire in the building. Wild species of *Malvaceae*, *Poaceae*, *Fabaceae* and *Caryophyllaceae* (namely *Gypsophila* or ‘baby’s breath’) were noticed in most of the samples, which can be related to the open character of the Iron Age building.

The plant species encountered so far cannot be used as definitive evidence for storage units or general food patterns, nor can they be used as comparisons with archaeobotanical remains from other layers or other sites. A final report on the archaeobotanical remains of Tall Dāmiyah, containing a list of all species encountered, will be written as part of a literature study, after the microscopic study is finished.

¹⁴C Dates (export permission granted: October 2013)

A carbon sample was taken to the Netherlands for ¹⁴C analyses in 2013; it was studied by Dr. Rene Cappere from the University of Groningen. The sample contained *Triticum Aestivum/Dureum*, *Hordeum vulgare* ssp *vulgare* and grape. The sample was then dated by the ¹⁴C laboratory in Groningen (by Dr. Hans van der Plicht) to the end of the 8th century BC (calibrated).

Discussion

The Tall Dāmiyah excavation results from 2014 have resulted in a more complete understanding of occupation during the late 8th and 7th centuries BC. Although heavily disturbed by Persian and Hellenistic pits, as well as by later burials and the bulldozer cut, the remains of two rectangular buildings, dated to the early 7th century BC, could be discerned. A clear relationship with the Neo-Assyrian Empire has been substantiated. However, Tall Dāmiyah’s precise role in this period has not been determined yet, hence further research is required. Was this building a type of trading post, or an Assyrian fort, as was previously thought? Alternatively, was Tall Dāmiyah a religious center, with the white-plastered building functioning as a temple? That the

site had some cultic role is highly likely, as evidenced by the discoveries in the layer directly underneath the mud brick buildings; figurines and statues are reasonable arguments for assuming religious activity. Nevertheless, cook pots and loom weights were found in essentially contemporary layers, implying that, around 700 BC, Tall Dāmiyah was not merely either a temple or a trading colony. People were living on the site, hunting, farming, producing textiles and possibly trading.

Site Evaluation

General Condition

The condition of Tall Dāmiyah is relatively good, particularly when compared to the condition of other settlement mounds in the Jordan Valley. This can be attributed for the most part to its position within a military zone, which prohibits people from entering without a permit. The main destruction to the site has been carried out by the military itself. In addition to some trenches which were dug during the 1967 War, a bulldozer cut a deep trench from the bottom of the tall to the top of the southern summit in 2003. This trench, which is almost three meters wide, has caused massive erosion, mainly in the period before the profiles were stabilised. A military watchtower which had been constructed on the summit was removed in 2008 or 2009, although some concrete blocks still remain.

Conservation Works and Maintenance

The section of the bulldozer cut, together with our excavation trenches were stabilised with plastic, stones and sediment at the end of the 2004 and 2005 excavation seasons; the result, seen seven years later in 2012, was relatively good. The profiles were in a relatively good condition, and it was decided to repeat the same procedure in 2013. In 2014 the profiles were also covered with plastic. We have to wait for time to tell if this method will further reduce the loss of archaeological deposits.

Challenges

Ownership

The site is owned by three brothers of the Ramadneh family from the Abbad Tribe. Communication with the owners is excellent; they are very interested in the work and



15. *The Bulldozer Cut in 2004.*

regularly visit the excavation site. An undated written permit, signed by the owners, is in the possession of the DoA.

Looting and Destruction

No looting is evident at the site, although fields around it are ploughed; this means that any archaeological remains in this area, particularly in the slightly elevated area southwest of the site, may possibly be damaged by agricultural activities in the future. As noted above, a military bulldozer has already created a cut to the southern summit.

Recommendations and Conclusions

It has to be admitted that so far, final conclusions remain undetermined. Nevertheless, results of the archaeological excavations to date indicate that this site played a major role in the region, but was particularly important throughout the Iron Age. Several find objects proved it had relationships with other surrounding regions, not only with close neighbours, but also with others at a considerable distance. To determine this more accurately, further horizontal and vertical operations are required, to broaden our understanding of the site within the Bronze, Iron and Persian periods. Understanding the Iron Age occupation in the Jordan Valley is not sufficient it is necessary to comprehend how the site functioned through its lifespan, including unravelling the meaning of the scarce remains of Byzantine occupation of the valley.

In many ways, the site of Tall Dāmiyah is different from the other tells in the region. Its position on the Jordan River, close to one of the few fords, makes it a very likely place for

ancient travellers to have visited and camped. Only further excavations can unravel the mysteries of the late Iron Age, the role of the Assyrians in this area, and probably much more.

Acknowledgments

The co-directors of the project would like to thank the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, represented by His Excellency the Director General Dr. Munther Jamhawi, for his continuous support and facilitation of all difficulties, thus enabling us to achieve the main goals of the project. Thanks are also due to the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, for carrying the heavy burden of financial costs for the project. The directors would also like to thank Yarmouk University for signing the agreement with the Dutch Museum, which made this joint project possible. We were privileged to have an excellent team, and appreciated the work of all the local people who helped during the excavation and in the house. As always, it was a pleasure to stay in the Station for Archaeological Studies in Dayr ‘Allā, and we would like to express our gratitude to Yarmouk University for housing us. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Dutch company SOB Research, who granted permission for Hendrik Uleners to join our team.

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