

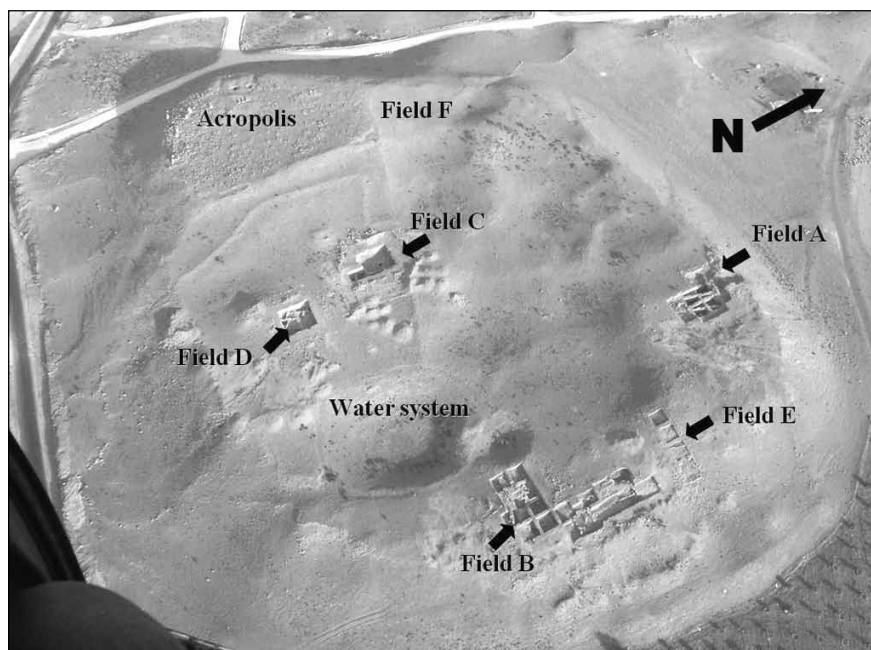
2008 EXCAVATIONS AT THE ISLAMIC VILLAGE AT TALL JALŪL¹

Reem al-Shqour

During the 2008 season, Andrews University conducted excavations at Tall Jalūl and initiated excavations at the Islamic village located immediately south of Tall Jalūl and 5km west of Mādabā, Jordan. The excavations on the tall were directed by Randall Younker and supervised by Jennifer Groves. The excavations at the Islamic village were directed by Reem al-Shqour, Research Associate at the Institute of Archaeology of Andrews University and doctoral student in Islamic archaeology at Ghent University, Belgium. Dr Paul Ray served as field archaeologist and assisted with the planning.

Site Location

Tall Jalūl, at 18 acres, is the largest tall site on the central Jordan plateau (**Fig. 1**). It also occupies the highest point in the immediate vicinity of Mādabā, making it an imposing feature on the western side of the Mādabā plain. It is located 5km due east of the town of Mādabā and due west of Queen ‘Alia International Airport. The site is almost square in plan with a high, flat acropolis occupying the south-west quadrant. A number of rocky hills on the tall are suggestive of badly eroded ruins of ancient buildings. Two broad depressions in the south-east quadrant of



1. Aerial image of Tall Jalūl from the east.

1. The staff this season consisted of Randall W. Younker (director of the Tall Jalūl excavations), Reem al-Shqour (director of the Jalūl Islamic village excavations), Paul Ray (field archaeologist), Jennifer Groves (supervisor of Field D), Sabal Zaben (field archaeologist) and

Owen Chestnut (GPS). Scottie Baker, Micah Johnson, Jody Washburn, Leo Abraham, Ledezma Sierra and Carrie Applebury served as square supervisors. Issa Syrianni was the Department of Antiquities representative.

the tall indicate the presence of ancient water systems. The occupation on the tall is dominated by Bronze and Iron Age ruins, although there is also some evidence of Islamic activity as indicated by both sherds and vaulted chambers on the acropolis.

In addition to the ruins on top of the tall, there is an extensive area of ruins on its southern slopes that date from the Roman, Byzantine and early, middle and late Islamic periods, with a considerable density of material from the Mamluk period. The ancient village to the south of the tall covers a surface area of about 30,000 square meters.

Site Identification

One of the challenges that scholars studying Jalūl continue to face concerns the actual identity of Jalūl in antiquity. Biblical scholars have suggested several possibilities for the identity of Jalūl during Bronze and Iron Age times. These suggestions have included Besor (Josh 20:8), Jahaz and even Heshbon (Nu 21). Unfortunately, no archaeological evidence has been produced to help settle this matter.

Zabn² suggested that the name Jalūl comes from the Arabic word *jaljul* which means luck. He also suggests that in Aramaic *jaljul* means the high slope. Unfortunately, he provides no supporting evidence for this suggestion.

Early Explorers of Jalūl

One of the earliest western travelers to mention Jalūl was the Swiss explorer Johann Burckhardt, who rode past the site in 1812³. He wrote (1822: 365):

“In order to see Medaba, I left the great road at Hesban, and proceeded in a more eastern direction. At six hours and three quarters, about one hour distant from the road, I saw the ruins of Djeloul, at a short distance to the east of which, are the ruined places called El Samek, El Mésouh, and Om el Aamed”.

Henry Baker Tristram visited the site in 1872, referring to it by the name Jeljul⁴. After visiting Azizah, Tristram rode west until he came to a site which he described as a “small ruin appar-

ently of a fort and a village”. He referred to the site as Jeljul and noted that it had previously been visited by Burckhardt and, later, by Irby and Mangles.

“Five minutes west of this was a small ruin, apparently of a fort and a village, which we visited, called Jeljul (Djellgood of Irby and Mangles, or Djeldjoun of Burckhardt)”.

Tristram’s reference to Burckhardt’s name for the site as Djeldjoun is puzzling because, as noted above, Burckhardt clearly transliterates the site as Djeloul, and his Arabic spelling is identical to the modern Arabic name for the site today. Irby and Mangles’ reference to Djellgood is found on p. 371 of their book⁵.

The next explorer to mention the site was the English traveler, Charles Montagu Doughty, who passed by the site in 1886. Doughty lists the names of some of the ruins he passed by including one called Jaljul⁶.

“The plots of khurbets are mostly small as hamlets; their rude dry building is fallen down in few heaps of the common stones. I was so idle as to write the names of some of them, Khurbet Enjahsah, Mehnwwara, el-Hahlih, Me-haineih, Meddain, Negaes, Libbun, Jeljul, Nelnockh, Mehrud, Howihih, Gamereyn (of the two moons), Harfa (where a Mohammedan shrine and mosque; anciently it was a church)”.

Unfortunately, Doughty does not provide any specific information about Jalūl proper.

William Foxwell Albright visited Jalūl during his Transjordan tour of 1933⁷. Albright (1933: 28) wrote the following:

“The large mound of Jalul, east of Madeba, with an estimated length of about 200 meters, yielded numerous sherds of Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, Early Iron I-II, Byzantine and early medieval Arabic. The Middle Bronze is particularly well represented on the slopes of the hill. The top is partly occupied by an Arab cemetery. The ancient name is unknown. It will be seen that the Middle Bronze occupation in the extreme east of Palestine was surprisingly dense”.

Nelson Glueck visited the site in 1933 and not only mentioned the importance of the tall in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, but also de-

2. (Zabn 2000: 74-75).

3. (Burckhardt 1822: 365).

4. (Tristram 1873: 118).

5. (Irby and Mangles 1823).

6. (Doughty 1888: 22).

7. (Albright 1933: 23-31).

scribed the later Byzantine and Islamic village to the south⁸ (1934: 5):

“At Jalul, five kilometers east of Madeba, is a large mound commanding the surrounding plains and visible for considerable distances around. On the top surface and slopes of the mound, particularly on the northwestern and western sides, quantities of sherds were found belonging for the most part to EI I-II, although some dated from MB and LB. Several Nabatean sherds were found, one large piece of sigillata ware, and numerous sherds belonging to the Byzantine and mediaeval Arabic periods. To the south of the mound lies the modern Arabic village, built over previous Byzantine and early Arabic settlements. An interesting stone molding was found built into the western wall of a large modern building in the village. On it were carved an altar, a rosette, and a wreath. The latter two are much like similar decorations which we found at Kh. Barzah and at Fiq. On the southern slope of the mound, inside a small ruined stone building, two fragments of a large stone plaque were found on which a worn floral design was visible”.

Robert Ibach surveyed Jalūl in 1976 for the Hesban survey⁹ (1987: 3, 13-14). He describes the site as:

“... a major site ... on the plain east of Madeba, covering about 17 acres. The mound is oblong, measuring about 300 meters east-west and 240 meters north-south. On the south and south-east sides of the tell, just off the lower slopes, is abundant ruined architecture including walls preserved above the door lintels and arches still intact. Fragments of mud brick may be found on the surface of the tell; three fragments of human figurines were found by the survey team”.

Excavations at Jalūl Village

While this was the first excavation in the Islamic village conducted by Andrews University, there have been at least two previous projects undertaken by the Department of Antiquities. The first was a survey and excavation directed by Ibrahim Zabn in 2002.

In his survey of the Islamic village, Zabn reported a number of old structures dating to the beginning of the last century. Several of the

buildings had large arches that supported a roof made of mud, wood and hay -- a technique that was commonly used throughout Jordan during the 19th century. The people often constructed these houses by reusing ancient stones from archaeological sites, making it difficult to understand the plans and functions of the buildings.

Zabn also reported the presence of a mosque made of well dressed stones, which also dated to the beginning of the last century, located on the south side of the village. Zabn described a *mihṛāb* built in the south wall, facing Mecca; the roof and floor were made of concrete, and an external staircase in the north corner was used by the *imām* for the call to prayer.

Zabn described what he thought to be a Roman mausoleum on the north-east side of the village, being a square structure built of large ashlar.

The remains of what was thought to be an older mosque, located just south-east of the Roman mausoleum, was also described. Zabn noted the presence of a semi-circular curve in the south wall, which made him think that this structure might be a mosque. The remains of the compound included walls between 0.9 and 1m wide; the length of the north and south walls was about 17.5m, that of the east wall about 9.1m, and that of the west wall about 9m.

Finally, Zabn reported the remains of a Byzantine church located east of the mosque.

The Zabn Excavation in 2002

The excavations of the 2002 season were concentrated on the north-west side of the village. They were divided into Areas A, B, C and D, in which 40 squares were opened. Excavations were conducted between first September and 30th December 2002.

The Results

Zabn was able to clarify the layout of two residential units. The first consists of six rooms of different sizes and shapes. Each room had a door, and the floors were made of compact soil or bedrock. Some floors also served as a ceiling for lower chambers, creating two storey structures. The lower levels sometimes consisted of natural caves or vaulted rooms. The author dated

8. (Glueck 1934: 1-115).

9. (Ibach 1987).

the upper rooms of the first residential unit to the Ayyubid/Mamluk period and the lower levels to the early Islamic or Byzantine periods.

The second residential unit, located east of the first, also consisted of six rooms of different sizes and shapes. The doorways were made of well dressed stone; the floors were of compacted soil and sometimes *huwwar* or bedrock. This unit consists of one storey, at the same level as the upper part of the first unit. A roadway or path along the south side of the residential units separated them from other residential units on the opposite side. The roadway was made of compacted soil. The town plan suggests that the government in that period had the power to organize and establish a well planned city. Indeed, Jalūl in the Ayyubid/Mamluk period was probably more important than Mādabā.

The Excavations of 2004¹⁰

A second season of excavation was conducted by Ali Khayyat, director of the Mādabā office of the Department of Antiquities. The aim the 2004 season was to clarify the nature of the structure described by Ibrahim Zabn in his survey as a mosque, located on the east side of the village with dimensions of about 17.5 x 9m.

Four squares were opened along the east wall, as were four squares along the west side, two squares by the south wall (to clarify the nature of the possible *mihrāb*), and two squares on the north side where one might expect to find the *ṣahn* or nave of the mosque. During the excavation a lot of walls appeared inside the structure, forming many rooms. Khayyat concluded that if this structure had ever been a mosque it must have been reused in later periods as residential building. Further excavations revealed the presence of natural caves below several of the interior rooms. Some of these rooms had a hole in the floor leading to the caves below. The excavations led Khayyat to change his opinion about the function of the structure; he suspected that it may have been a *khān*¹¹, with the upper rooms being used for accommodation and the lower caves being used for storage or livestock. Khayyat thought that the presence of the *khān* suggested that Jalūl may have been one of the stations on the pilgrimage routes. The pottery

sherds collected above the floors of the rooms were typical Ayyubid/Mamluk, mixed with a few sherds from the earlier Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic periods.

Results of the 2008 Season

The goals of the 2008 season were modest, in view of the fact that the team had only a couple of weeks to conduct excavations. As noted above, Ali Khayyat had suggested that there may have been a *khān* located immediately east of the oldest free-standing square building in the center of the east quadrant of the site (it has been suggested that the freestanding building dates to the Roman or Byzantine periods, although no definitive archaeological evidence has been produced to confirm the actual date). It was therefore decided to open a couple of squares across what appeared, at least from the surface, to be a couple of vaulted rooms that opened into an open area to the west (**Fig. 2**). The architectural layout was suggestive of a *khān*. The south-west corner of Square A1 was located by GPS at N125134.00 E 231292.00. The south-west corner of Square A2 was located by GPS at N 125126.00 E231292.00. Each square measured approximately 5 x 10m, although excavation was concentrated on the inside of the two rooms. The north room was the largest at 7.5 x 4m. The doorway was 0.75m wide. It was not possible to measure the length of the southern room, but it was nearly 3m wide; the door was approximately 0.75m wide.

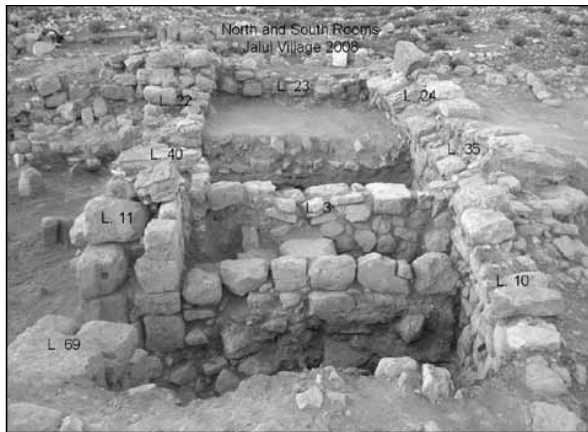
The excavations in the two squares (A1 and A2) exposed parts of two vaulted rooms (**Fig. 2**) – the ‘north room’ and the ‘south room’. The team only managed to reach bedrock in the north room. The fill of the north room consisted of roof collapse.

Phase 1 - Initial Construction

The north room was built on bedrock in most places, as far as can presently be discerned. The walls from this phase include the west (L.40, L.22) and east walls (L.24, L.35) of the north room (**Fig. 2**). These walls are all about 1.20m thick and are built mostly of relatively large shaped stones. The size and shaping of the stones represents a considerable investment by

10. (Al-Khayyat 2004)

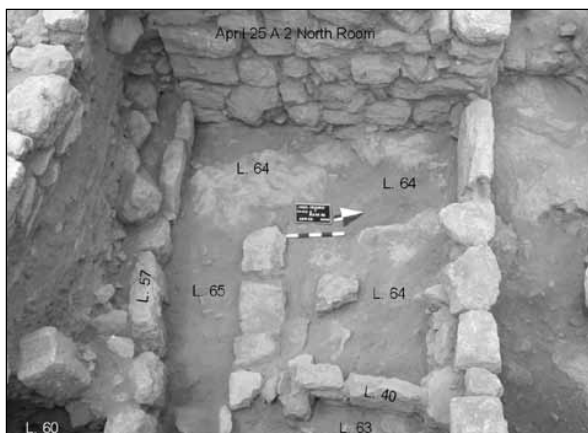
11. (Al-Khayyat 2004: 52).



2. North and south vaulted rooms of the Mamluk khān in the Islamic village of Jalūl.

the constructors and is indicative of the importance of Jalūl at the time that this and adjacent buildings were constructed. While there were early Islamic sherds in cracks in the bedrock, most of the sherds in the north room fills were Mamluk, suggesting that this was the predominant period of use.

Only the southern part of the north room was excavated this season. In this southern section, a number of wall lines were revealed, founded upon bedrock and creating at least three small rooms (Rooms 63, 64, 65) (Fig. 3). It is uncertain at this point whether these wall lines were established during the initial construction or represent a later addition or sub-phase. Some of the smaller wall lines seem to create stone bins, possibly mangers. Indeed, these and the presence of small rooms with low walls suggest that animals may have been kept in the southern part of the north room.



3. South half of the north vaulted room (A2), from east to west.

Phase 2 - Dismantling and Destruction of North and South Rooms

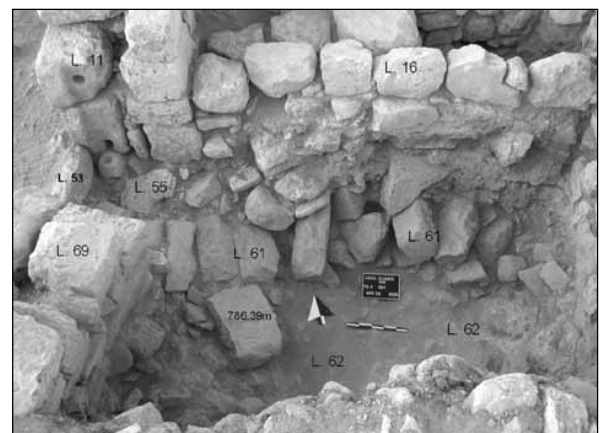
At some point during the Mamluk period, the southern half of the north room was systematically dismantled (Fig. 4), apparently to facilitate the reconstruction of the south room, which for some reason, had been completely destroyed. Nicely shaped stones from the destruction of the south room were seen covering its floor (L.61) (Fig. 5). The destruction in the south room proper looks more random and haphazard, but the original south end of the north room was clearly taken apart carefully by hand.

Phase 3 - Remodeling

South Room: During the remodeling phase, a new partition wall (L.3) was constructed to separate the north room from the south room (Fig. 6). Wall L.3 is not as substantial as the external walls (L.40, L.22) of the north room. Rather, L.3 was built with a narrower width. While the



4. Point where south wall of the north room (A2 L.40) was dismantled and a later wall inserted.



5. South room (A1) looking north towards its north wall; note fallen stones on the floor.



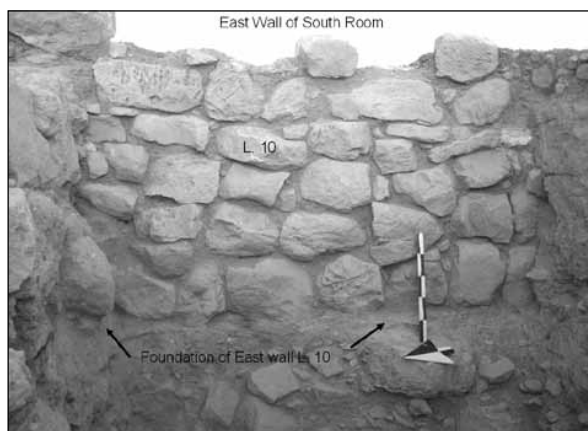
6. South room (A1) and north room (A2) after excavation, from south to north.

height of partition wall L.3 is uncertain, it does not seem to have been founded on bedrock like the exterior walls. This can be surmised from the fact that in the south balk of the north room, there is a pile of collapsed rock below wall L.3 that protrudes from the balk and seems to run under wall L.3. Also, the view of wall L.3 inside the bin (L.16) seems to indicate that the base of wall L.3 had been reached (however, this is not 100 % certain and must be checked next season).

The east wall (L.10) of the south room was also built at this time; likewise, it was not founded on bedrock (Fig. 7). In summary, it would seem that walls L.11, L.3 and L.10 of the south

room were built as a unit at the same time. The original floor of this room was made of hard packed *nari* (L.51). It runs right up to the base of the east wall L.10 (Fig. 8).

North Room: That the bin and wall lines were part of the remodeling and not part of the original architectural layout is supported by the fact that the bin in the north room cuts into the area where the wall was cut. The silo was not founded on bedrock; rather, it seems to have been established at about the same level as the walls in the south room. Its floor (L.45) was hard packed *nari* (Fig. 9). Under the *nari*, the silo was built of smaller stones. This probably does not represent an earlier phase of the silo; rather, it is the foundation for the silo above L.45.



7. East wall of south room (A1).

Phase 4 - South Room Remodeling

At this point, there was an additional phase of remodeling that seems limited to the south room. A bin (L.16) was constructed along the north partition wall (Fig. 6). The base of the bin and, indeed, the floor of the south room are at a higher level, suggesting some time had gone by since the original remodeling. The precise date is impossible to determine at present; most of the ceramics are Mamluk, although it is possible that this room continued in use into Ottoman times. It is also possible that the north room also remained in use during this time (e.g. the silo



8. Original nari floor of south room (A1 L.51), from south to north.

etc). Some pits were dug into earlier levels during this period, e.g. in the south-west corner of the south room.



9. Fragment of nari floor at base of silo in south-east corner of north room (A2).

Phase 5 - Destruction and Abandonment

Eventually, both the north and south rooms fell out of use. Both rooms were later filled with fallen stones and earth up to the ground surface, but whether from sudden destruction or gradual abandonment is hard to say at this point. In the north balk of the north room, there is a layer of ash below the layer of fallen stones, which suggests that there was a fire in part of the north room. However, the fire does not seem to have spread throughout the entire room (e.g. there is no evidence for this in the south part of the north room) and was probably localized. Rather, it seems the final collapse was part of a gradual period of abandonment (see Fig. 11).

Significant Finds

Significant small finds included two Arabic *ostraca*, numerous pieces of glass, glass bracelet fragments, an iron 'spoon', a metal ring, a faience bead, jar stoppers and worked bone.

Another important find was a limestone slab, measuring 72 by 40cm, which displayed a cross within a circle, with Greek letters both inside and below the circle. The 'Greek Cross', which is basically a 'plus' sign in a circle, displays in the first quarter to the left a Greek letter Δ. Below the circle is one line of letters: "Λ π Ι Δ Ι θ". Below the Greek letters the stone is bisected by a line.

The team also sherded the eastern part of the site, around the free standing building and *khān*. The surface sherds indicate activity during the Roman/Nabatean, Byzantine, Umayyad, Fatimid, Mamluk and possible Ottoman periods.

Summary

While more work is necessary to fully understand the date and function of the north and south rooms in the eastern sector of Jalūl, everything found during the 2008 season is consistent with a residential unit or even a *khān*. Not only were there pens and bins, tethering ‘holes’ for animals, and facilities for grain storage, but also ceramics representing the full range of functions associated with a residential unit, e.g. food preparation and consumption (plates, cups, kraters, storage jars, cooking pots, imported wares etc). In addition, there were ground stone tools associated with food preparation, such as millstones, grinding stones, pounders etc, plus some possible weaving tools (loom weights, bone awl). There were also a couple of Arabic *ostraca*, again, something more likely associated with a residential area. As for the question of the ‘mosque’, time did not permit excavation of the so-called *mihṛāb*, but a visual inspection did not reveal anything indicative of such a structure. Dr Ghazi Bishah, who visited the site during the season, came to a similar conclusion following a visual assessment of the feature. Thus, the structures in the eastern sector of the

Jalūl village seem unlikely to have served as a mosque, but are not incompatible with those of a *khān*. Further work will hopefully shed more light on the issue.

Field D on the Tall

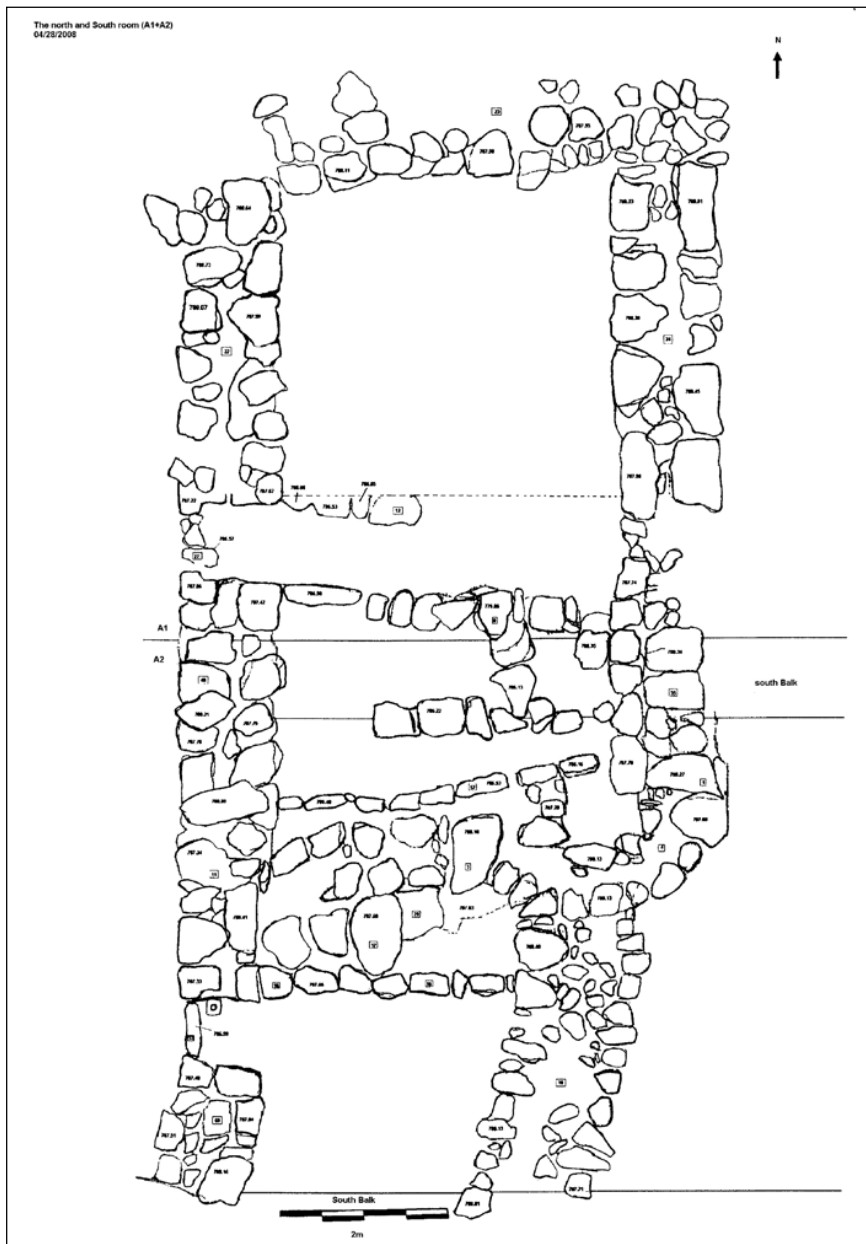
Excavations in Field D on the tall concentrated on two rooms in squares D1 and D2 (Fig. 10). The objective of this work was to date the walls of these rooms. The excavation team succeeded in reaching the base of the walls and established that the building was founded in the Late Iron II period (seventh to sixth centuries BC) and continued in use into the Late Iron II/Persian period (fifth and possibly fourth centuries BC). Of interest was the fact that in the south-eastern room, walls were found below the Late Iron II walls. The earlier walls were built on a different axis and plan. While no firm dates could be established for these earlier wall lines, pottery from the Late Bronze IIB/Iron I transition was recovered -- including a carinated bowl and a jar with a slightly everted rim.

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10. Two rooms in the south-west corner of the Persian period building in Field D at Tall Jalūl.



1. Plan of rooms A1 and A2 of the Mamluk khān at Jalūl Islamic village.

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