

A SURVEY AT THE EBIV SITE OF KHIRBAT UMM AL-GHUZLĀN

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From ninth to 16th of March 2009, a small team from the University of Sydney and the Department of Antiquities² surveyed and mapped the site of Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān near the village of Kufr Abil in Wādī ar-Rayyān, formerly Wādī al-Yābis (**Fig. 1**). The site was originally recorded as site WY28 by Jonathan Mabry and Gaetano Palumbo during their Wādī al-Yābis Survey (Mabry and Palumbo 1988) and, based on its surface pottery, Palumbo dated the site to the EBIV period and second to third centuries AD (Mabry and Palumbo 1988: Fig.1; Palumbo 1992: 48). In 2007, the North Jordan Tomb Project (hereafter NJTP) revisited Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān while surveying an extensive field of dolmens and cairns scattered along the adjacent ridgeline of Tall ar-Rās and around the site itself (Fraser *et al.*, this volume). Given the site's proximity to these megalithic structures, as well as its monumental walls and Bronze Age date, Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān may have been incorporated within the striking megalithic landscape of Tall ar-Rās. Consequently, the NJTP returned in 2009 to survey the site in detail, the results of which are presented here³.

Location

Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān is located mid-way up Wādī ar-Rayyān at UTM 749725E 3588460N at an elevation of 390 m.a.s.l.. The site sits on a small knoll that protrudes from the base of the Tall ar-Rās ridge into Wādī ar-Rayyān (**Figs. 1 and 2**), and has commanding views up the wadi to the 'Ajlūn highlands and down to the Jordan

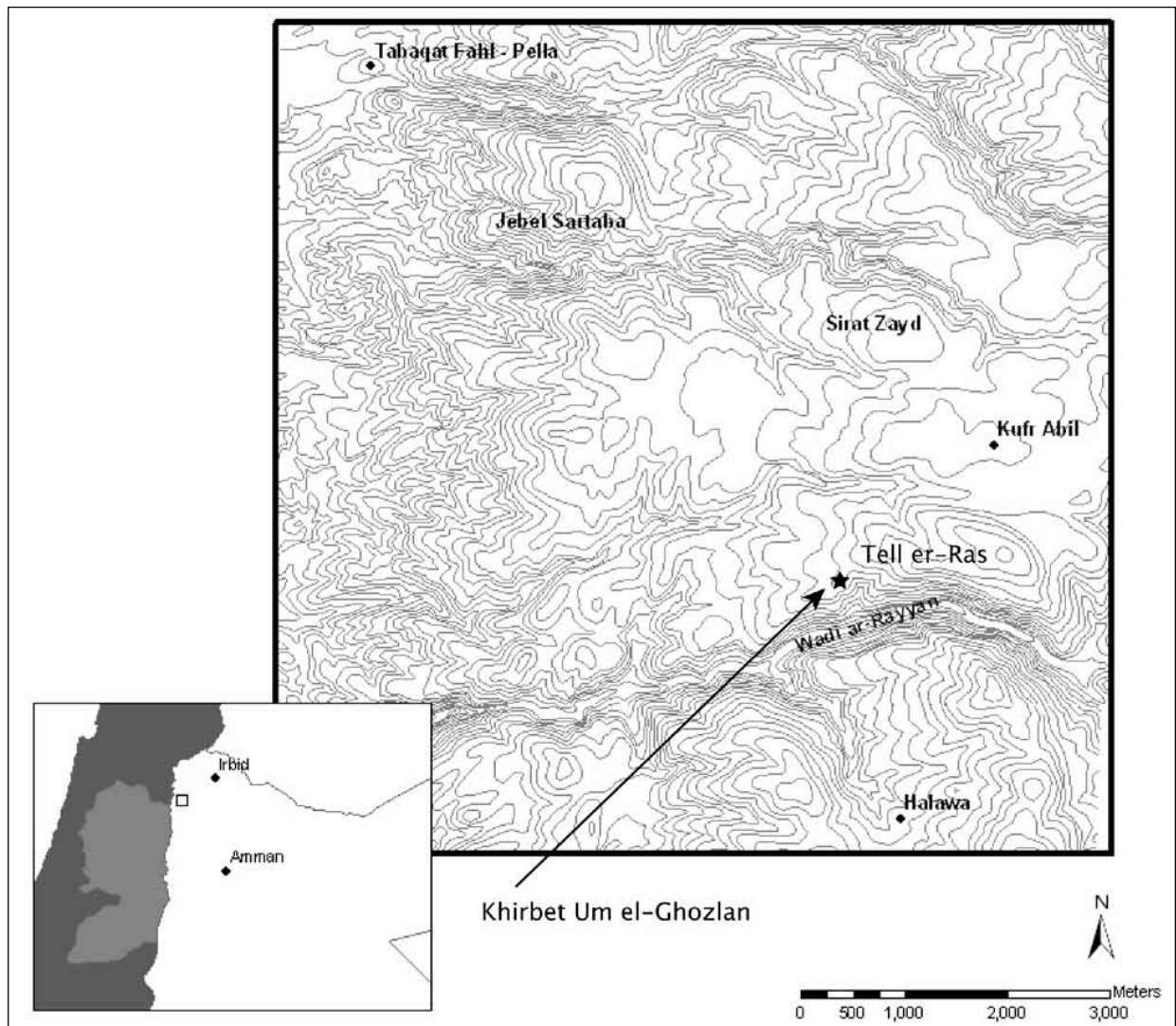
Valley. Several large, curved walls around the base of the knoll create an oval enclosure measuring approximately 100m north-south by 50m east-west (**Fig. 3**). Two rubble circles sit in the centre of the site, and several large, rubble piles fill the areas between these rings and the enclosure wall. In addition, two dolmens are found at the base of the knoll, immediately north-west of the site; one of these is the largest dolmen recorded in the area by either the NJTP or the Wādī al-Yābis Survey (Palumbo 1992: 48).

Survey Methods

The primary aim of the fieldwork was to record all visible features at Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān in order to place the site within its immediate context in the Tall ar-Rās dolmen and cairn fields, and to produce a map of the site that would enable architectural comparisons between Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān and similar sites elsewhere in the Levant. The site was walked in 10m transects, then re-walked in transects at 45 degrees, during which architectural features were flagged and artifacts counted and retained. Although many sherds were recovered, few were diagnostic: this may be because of the soft, friable, sandy fabric of the EBIV pottery, which easily weathers and loses any clear edges or form; it may also be explained by pick-ups made by previous surveys. It is because of these earlier surveys and the pottery they published that Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān can be identified as an EBIV site (Mabry and Palumbo 1988: Figs. 7.34, 8.47; Palumbo 1992: 48).

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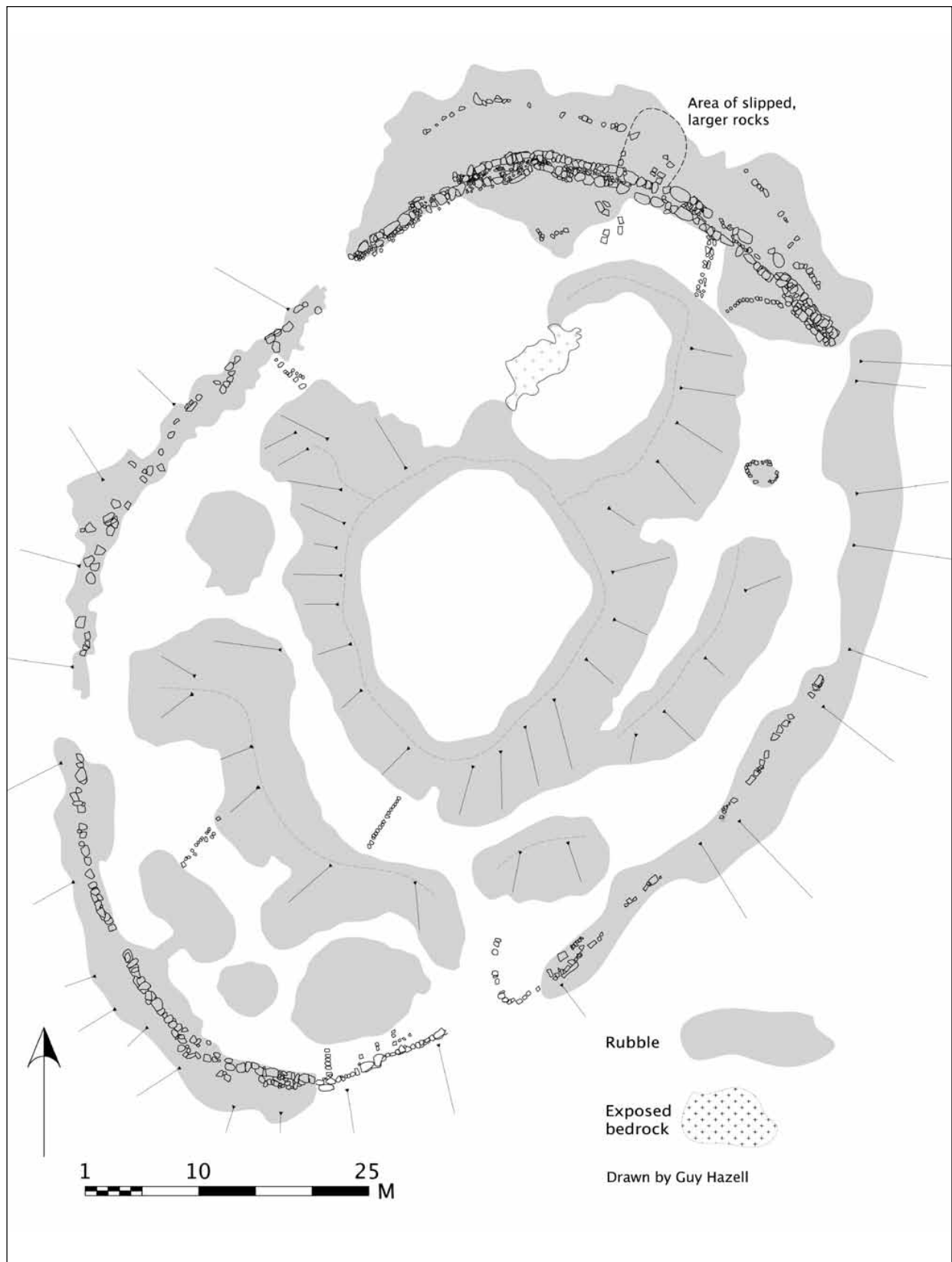
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3. The 2009 season of the NJTP focused on the excavation of a field of large, rubble, rujum cairn monuments on Jabal Sartaba near Pella (Ṭabaqat Faḥl). The results of these excavations will be published in a later report.



1. Map of Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān in Wādī ar-Rayyān.



2. View of Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān from the Tall ar-Rās ridge (looking southwest).



3. Site plan of Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān.

Standing Architecture

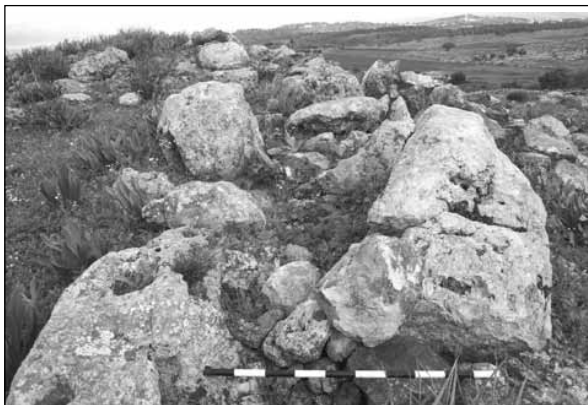
The outer wall

As shown in **Fig. 3**, the perimeter of the site is defined by a series of discontinuous wall-lines that together form an oval enclosure referred to here as the “outer wall”. The northern wall-line in the outer wall is the most substantially constructed, longest and best-preserved wall in the entire site. It runs for 30m in two rows across the flat, northern end of the site then, in a single row, follows the contour of the knoll for another 12m to the south-west (**Figs. 4 and 5**). The wall is built of large and megalithic fieldstones of the local limestone and flint, some of which measure over 1.5 by 1.0 by 0.8m in size. Although the wall stands up to four courses high, dispersed medium and large rocks on either side of it suggest that it once stood significantly higher.

By spanning the entire northern side of the

site, this monumental wall emphasises the topographic distinction between the knoll on which Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān sits and the low saddle that connects it to the Tall ar-Rās ridge. This saddle serves as the main route into the site, and the scattered rubble suggests that the entrance was more substantial in antiquity than today. As shown in **Fig. 3**, a small wall runs parallel to the exterior face of the larger north wall and there may be more such walls beneath the dispersed rubble. In addition, a dense concentration of large slabs appears to have slipped or fallen in rough alignment from the outer wall (**Fig. 3**), suggesting that an adjacent structure, or even a large superstructure such as a gate-way, existed at this point. This ‘gate-way’ area corresponds with several megalithic slabs that are lower and flatter than any other in the outer wall, and which may have acted as steps or pavers associated with an entrance-way into the site. These hypotheses can, of course, only be demonstrated through excavation.

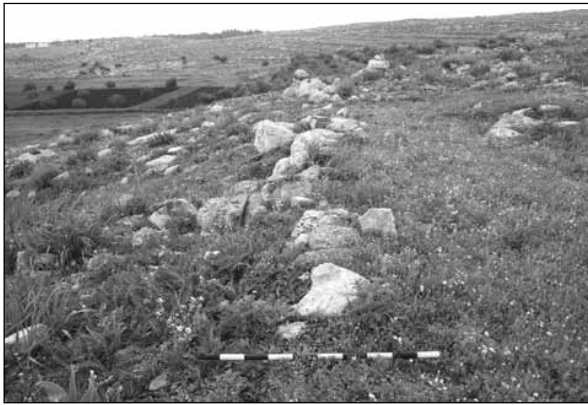
The rest of the outer wall is not as substantial as the northern wall. On the western side of the knoll, the outer wall can be traced as an alignment of large slabs that are only one row wide and, at most, two courses high (**Fig. 6**). However, piles of stone cleared from adjacent fields obscure parts of this wall-line. In contrast, the southern end of the site has, in places, a double row of large rocks similar to the north wall, although the rocks are not as large with fewer extant courses (**Fig. 7**). The wall continues around



4. North wall (looking south-west).



5. North wall (looking east).



6. West wall (looking north-east).



7. South wall (looking south-east).

the sharper, eastern side of the knoll, but here it is built of smaller rocks and even incorporates patches of exposed bedrock.

It is unlikely that the entire knoll was once enclosed by a monumental wall of which only the northern wall-line remains. The lowest courses of the eastern and western walls are much smaller than the large slabs on which the northern wall is built, implying that these walls

were never meant to be as high or as substantial as the northern wall. Moreover, there is significantly more rubble around the north wall than around any other stretch of wall on the site. The northern wall was therefore probably the largest and most impressive wall-line on the site in antiquity, just as it is today. Consequently, it is unlikely that the outer wall was part of a fortification system: the eastern, western and southern wall-lines define the boundary of the site, but they would not have been substantial enough to defend it. The monumental architecture of the northern wall may have instead emphasised the site's location on the knoll as distinct from the Tall ar-Rās ridge, from which the wall is visible.

The Inner Rings and Tumuli

Two rubble circles sit on the highest point of the knoll within the outer enclosure (**Fig. 3**). The larger of the circles, located in the centre of the site, encloses an area ca 22 by 24m; the smaller circle sits between this central ring and the northern outer wall, enclosing an area ca. 16 by 11m, although it incorporates bedrock on its western side (**Fig. 8**). Both rings are built of medium and large field stones piled up to 70cm high. There are traces of wall-lines with deliberate coursing within these circular piles, although these are un-faced and, if continuous, are now obscured by the rubble (**Fig. 9**). Both rings enclose flat ground covered by shallow soil and exposed bedrock, and the lack of any visible architectural remains suggests that these areas were also empty in antiquity.

Several large, rubble mounds are found between the central ring and the outer wall. Some of the smaller examples contain deliberately placed kerbing stones, while depressions in others suggest they have been robbed (**Fig. 10**). These features are similar to the rujm cairn 'tombs' found along the Tall ar-Rās ridge (Fraser *et al.*, this volume). The larger mounds show no architectural structure and, given their size and irregular shape, may have been created to emphasise the rubble rings on the top of the knoll, or are simply piles of field-clearance. Several small, linear walls link the inner rubble rings and tumuli to the outer wall, like spokes on a wheel (**Fig. 3**). These radial walls stand only one course high, and many are only one row wide (**Fig. 11**).



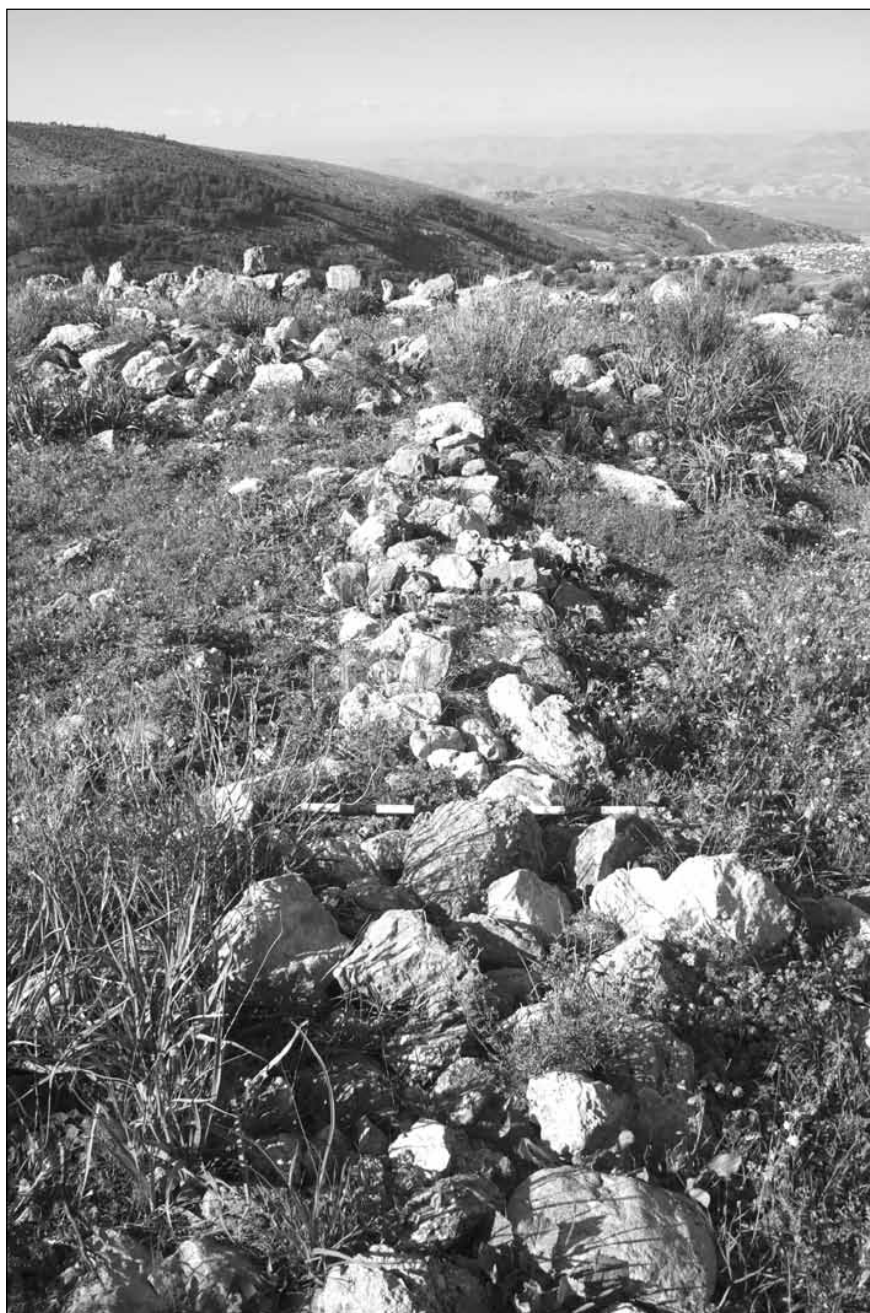
8. Northern stone circle (looking south-west).



9. Coursed stones in the northern stone circle (looking north-east).



10. Small cairn 'tomb' (looking south-east).



11. Radial wall between tumuli (looking south-west).

Chronology

As Palumbo identified both EBIV and second to third century AD surface pottery (Palumbo 1992: 48), it is possible that the different architectural components of the site represent different phases of use. We must bear in mind, however, that Classical-period pottery was found in almost every transect of every square surveyed on the Tall ar-Rās ridge during the 2007 NJTP season (Fraser *et al.*, this volume);

its presence on Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān does not necessarily signal Classical occupation. In contrast, the site yielded the only EBIV pottery found in the entire survey area and, although most sherds were undiagnostic, they testify that the site was a focus of activity in the late Early Bronze Age. Nevertheless, without excavation the chronological relationship between the well-constructed outer wall and the inner rubble rings remains elusive.

It is reasonable to assume, however, that the outer wall was built during the EBIV period. Its monumental architecture and limestone slabs are more consistent with the nearby Bronze Age dolmens and megalithic wall alignments than with the regular, Classical field-walls found on the adjacent ridge. The rubble rings are more ambiguous. Although stone circles are often associated with dolmen and cairn fields elsewhere in Jordan (Scheltema 2008: 21-23), the later pottery at Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān suggests that they may be corrals or field-markers built during the Classical period when the area was exploited for its agricultural potential (Fraser *et al.*, this volume). The problem with this suggestion is that the central circle has no entranceway for animals to access the corral and, if the rings defined circular fields, the amount of rubble cleared from these small areas seems excessive. Occasional traces of coursed walling beneath the rubble suggest that the rings may have been originally constructed at the same time as the outer wall, but were obscured by rubble cleared during later agricultural activity. These issues can only be resolved through a programme of targeted excavations.

The significance of Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān

Based on the present survey, we can assume that the knoll at Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān was enclosed by an oval structure sometime in the EBIV period. We can also infer that a monumental wall defined the northern end of the site, where the knoll could be seen and accessed from the Tall ar-Rās ridge. It is unclear, however, why this enclosure was built. Despite the shallow depth of deposit, evidenced by the patches of exposed bedrock, there are no smaller wall-lines visible within the enclosure to suggest that the knoll was occupied by a settlement if, indeed, the site was built to be occupied at all. If the tumuli and rubble rings post-date the outer wall, the enclosure may have contained empty space, so the purpose of the enclosure may have been to define the knoll itself. If the rubble circles were contemporary with the outer wall, then the site presents us with an example of a complex network of curved structures and tumuli reminiscent of other monumental sites such as Condor's Circle (Thuesen 2004) and Rujum al-Hir (Mizrachi *et al.* 1996).

Regardless of which scenario is closer to the truth, we must consider Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān from the perspective of the topographic and cultural contexts in which it is located. The distinct knoll on which the site sits is emphasised by the walls that enclose it, particularly the northern wall that demarcates the knoll from the adjacent saddle and ridge. Furthermore, the monumentality of the north wall may have referenced the other megalithic monuments scattered along the ridge, from which the wall can be seen. These visual references suggest that the site was integrated within the megalithic landscape at Tall ar-Rās, even if we do not know the role it played.

In this respect, the similar site of Condor's Circle may be germane. Although built during the EBI-II period (Thuesen 2004: 113), Condor's Circle is also a monumental, circular site that sits atop a knoll on a wadi-edge and is overlooked by an extensive field of dolmens, cairns and other megalithic structures (Thuesen 2004). Thuesen argues that the site was integrated within a complex mosaic of megalithic monuments, settlements and topography that together may reflect "some basic socio-ideological structures of the society" (Thuesen 2004: 114). Similarly, the concentric circles at Rujum al-Hir in the Jaulan are reminiscent of the rubble rings found inside Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān, albeit on a more complex scale; this site is also surrounded by an extensive field of dolmens and cairns (Mizrachi *et al.* 1996). Like Condor's Circle and Rujum al-Hir, Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān may also have derived significance from its location within a striking, megalithic landscape, although the chronology and function of the site must be established before its role in this landscape can be assessed.

Conclusion

We are becoming increasingly aware of the number and importance of megalithic landscapes in Bronze Age Jordan. Although small, the site of Khirbat Umm al-Ghuzlān adds an important dimension to our knowledge of the megalithic landscapes in Wādī ar-Rayyān during a critical period of change in the southern Levant. Without excavation, the chronology, re-use and purpose of the site suggested here will remain hypothetical. This is urgent work,

as the site's survival is precarious. When Palumbo surveyed the area over 20 years ago he noted a "rapid pace of destruction" (Palumbo, Mabry and Kuijt 1990: 111); several dolmens and cairns have since been bulldozed to make way for encroaching agricultural development. Areas close to the site are newly ploughed and, critically, recent bulldozer activity has cut into olive groves on the immediate western side of the site. It is hoped that the small survey presented here will contribute to our understanding of this intriguing but threatened site.

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