

THE 1993 AND 1994 SEASONS AT UMM AL-JIMĀL UMM AL-JIMĀL AREA R 1994 FIELD SEASON

by
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Goals

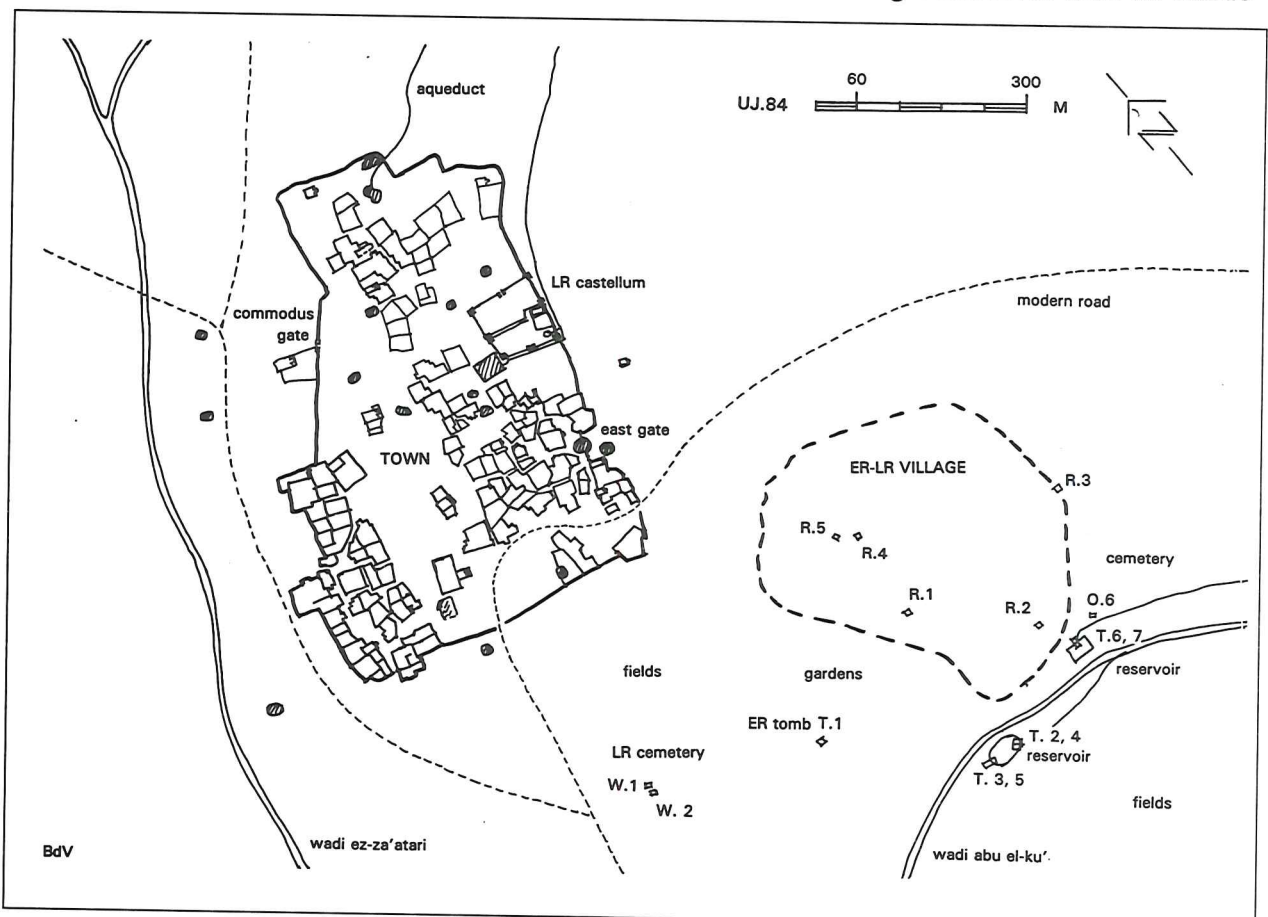
During the 1994 Umm al-Jimāl season excavation resumed at area R, al-Herri, a 300 m diameter basalt rubble-strewn area immediately southeast of the Umm al-Jimāl town wall (Fig. 1). The surface covering of random basalt stones give the impression of a natural deposit, but on closer examination numerous aligned rows are a clear indication of building activities.

In 1984 test excavations involved the sinking of five small sounding trenches (Fig.1; de Vries 1993)¹ that provided the preliminary information for the 1994 ex-

cavation strategy.

Thus the 1994 work focused on one of eight roughly circular and distinctly darker mounds, which consist of an ashy black soil, basalt chips, and thousands of early Roman and later pottery sherds (Fig. 2).

The goals were to distinguish and date the architectural and occupational phases of this mound, and to test the hypothesis that already existed for these mounds, *viz.* that they were areas where masons finished the basalt blocks robbed from Early Roman buildings surrounding them, so that the wall lines visible at ground level were all that re-



1. Map showing area R in relation to Byzantine town of Umm al-Jimāl. (Drawing by B. de Vries)

1. See B. de Vries, The Umm el-Jimal Project, 1981-1992. *ADAJ* 37 (1993) : 436-8, 443-4, 450-1.



2. Pre-excavation photo showing the ashy soil of R.8 in the foreground and the rubble-strewn expanse of al-Herri in the background. (Photo by G. Hammink).

mained at al-Herri. (The assumption was that these redressed blocks were the reused masonry evident in the construction of the *castellum* and later buildings at the neighboring town site.)

1984 probes

The five trenches dug in the UJ84 season were scattered throughout al-Herri in an effort to gain a rough understanding of the region, and each trench was placed in relation to an architectural feature visible above ground. R.1 transected a wall in the southwest sector of Area R. The probe uncovered two walls with a well-dressed threshold block bonded into a wall. R.2 transected what was thought to be a perimeter wall along the southeastern border, where the tumbled debris of al-Herri ended at this point and an area of terraced fields began.

The lack of pottery on the southern (outer) side of this wall seemed to support the the-

ory that this was the village enclosure wall. R.3 sought to identify a village entry gate in the northeast of area R. Three walls were found in the probe before bedrock was reached, but no gate was uncovered. R.5, in the northwest quadrant, identified a roadway edged by two walls built directly on top of each other with the upper wall's much poorer manufacture. R.4 was laid out on top of one of the black mounds in the northwest quarter of the area and intersected two walls showing on the surface.

The probe uncovered three bonded walls and a *ṭābūn* in the area they enclosed in a stratified context of four possible phases of occupation ranging from Early Roman/Late Roman occupations to a Late Roman III-IV/Early Byzantine I-II abandonment. Because of R.4's accessible location and the evident domestic architecture under the mound, the probe served as the starting point for the 1994 excavation.

THE 1994 EXCAVATION

A. The Excavation Grid

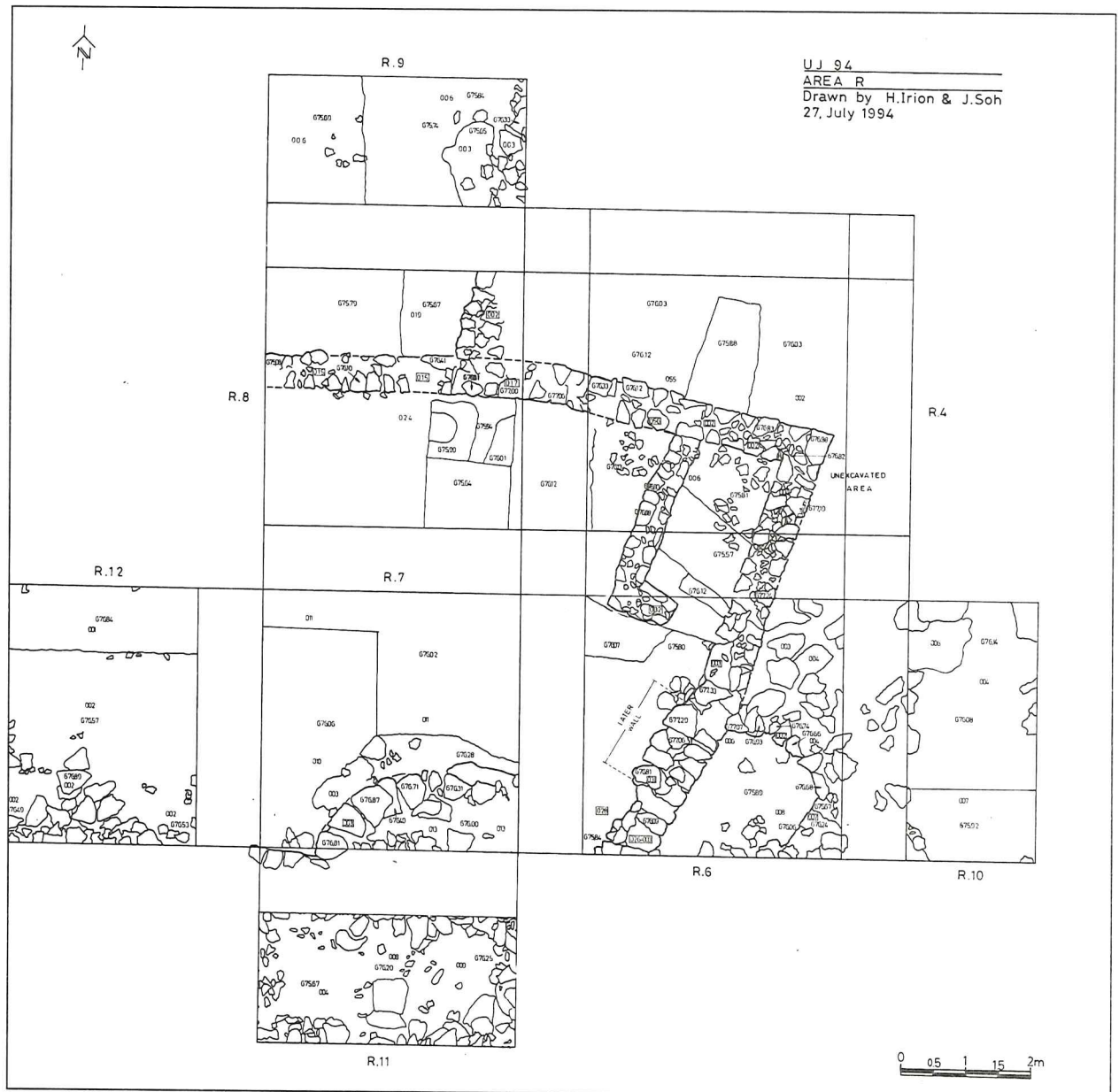
Initially a 10 x 10 m area was laid out (Fig. 3) and divided into four 5 x 5 m squares: R.4, R.6, R.7 and R.8. One meter on the north and east sides of each square was left as a balk. Three weeks into the excavation it became necessary to expand the operation by adding four more squares in the hopes of uncovering the entire structure. The squares R.9 through R.12 were added

along the edges of the excavation area, with a 1m balk separating each of the new trenches from the old.

B. Architecture Exposed

At the end of the 1994 season virgin soil was reached in only one square, R.4, while the others remained in stratified context.

During the excavation the walls discovered in 1984 were fully exposed and numerous other features were uncovered in the other squares (Fig. 3). By the end of the



3. Area R 1994 excavation grid showing extent of architecture exposed. (Drawing by Hervé Irion and John Soh).

season it became clear that these new walls combined together to form a building complex of three rooms, possibly with a courtyard.

The first room, located in the southern half of R.6, proved to be a complex feature made up of numerous additions from different building phases (R.6:031, 002 and 007). Starting at this point, one of the major walls in the complex runs northeastward into square R.4, where it turns to the northwest and forms the corner of the second room of the complex (R.4:002, 004, 006 and R.6:003, 032). This same wall continues into R.8, where it finally ends.

The second room consists of three different walls and an entrance at the southwest corner. Two of the walls of this second room had either partially collapsed or had been robbed to a much lower level than the large, northeastward running wall starting in R.6.

In R.8 two walls were partially uncovered that probably form the third room along the northern half of that square (R.8:015 and 002, which may extend in the east balk of R.9 as R.9:003 wall collapse). The northern face of a small section of a final wall was uncovered at the end of the season in the western quarter of the southern balk of R.7. Because it parallels the east-west running wall in R.8 and seems to form an external wall of the complex, it is possible that a central courtyard for the building complex was contained by these two walls (the open area of R.6, 7 and 8).

With this plan in mind, it would seem that the inhabitants of Umm al-Jimāl at al-Herri built this building without an advance plan. This can be seen from the numerous unbonded walls spread throughout the complex.

In R.8, where the corner of the third room is formed by the two main walls, the third wall seems to be built against the corner in order to form the room. R.6 has a

similar third wall, though it is unclear at this time if it is built against or bonded with the main wall. This piecemeal construction could indicate that the building was constructed in separate units and expanded as the people's needs changed.

All walls are constructed of the basalt stone blocks typical of Umm al-Jimāl using techniques common to the area with two rows of aligned basalt field stones with rubble fill between. This rubble serves as a core to the wall while small chips and cobbles are used as chinking stones in the wall facing itself to keep the courses even.

There is also evidence for use of a very pale brown mudbrick material as a mortar in R.4 and R.8, and as fill between the rocks in R.9.

By the end of the season five occupational phases could be distinguished in area R. 1) The original Early Roman structure built above virgin soil; 2) Late Roman reuse and construction of new walls with the addition of the *ṭābūn* in R.4; 3) Late Roman reuse and a second *ṭābūn* in R.4; 4) Early Byzantine reuse of the earlier building and the construction of a new wall, in addition to a period of abandonment with robbing out or collapse; 5) dump activities and the deposition of the topsoil layer.

C. Stratigraphy

Phase I (Stratum 7, Early Roman) :

This phase represents the earliest building activities conducted by the people of Umm al-Jimāl in area R. The two bonded walls forming the northeast corner of the complex (Fig. 3) are clearly related to this phase. The eastern wall, R.4:004, is preserved seven courses high to a height of approximately 1.45 m while the northern wall, R.4:002, varies from four to five courses in height, approximately 0.95-1.20 m high. Wall R.4:002 extends to the west as R.4:056 and R.8:017; wall R.4:004 extends south as R.6:003.

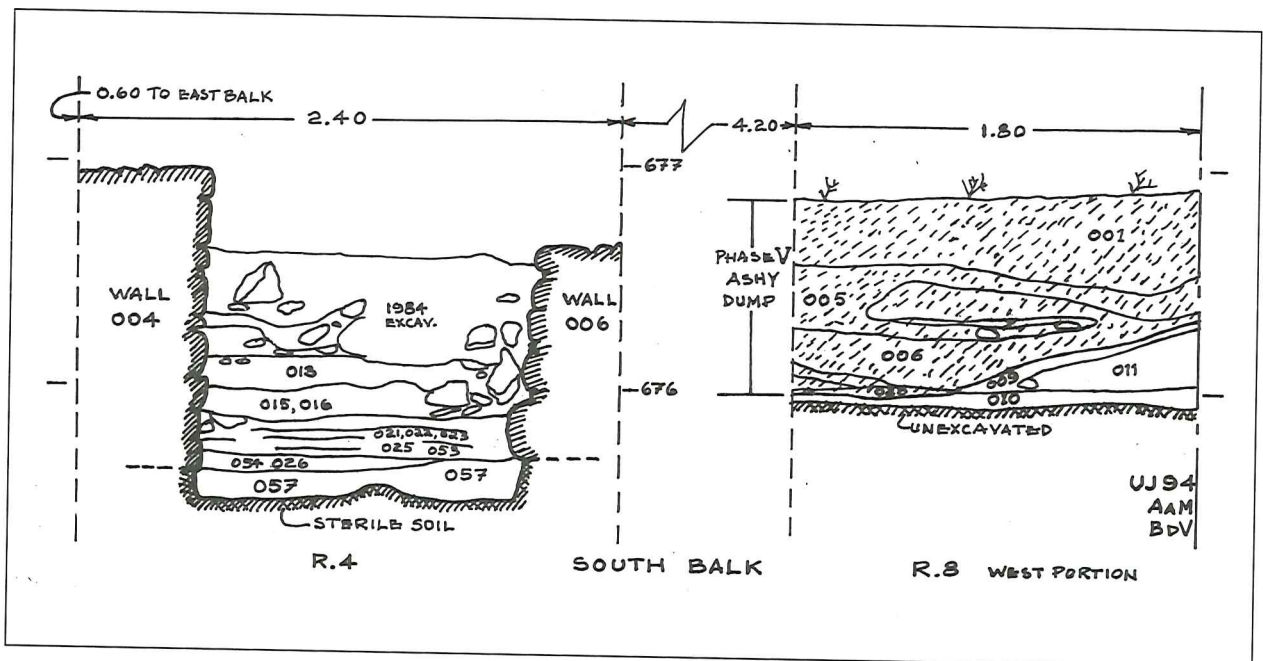
Also, as appears in the R.4/R.8 south balk drawing (Fig. 4), the walls to the east (R.4:004) and west (R.4:006) of the second room are built above a very compact coarse brownish soil, R.4:057, devoid of artifacts and considered to be virgin soil. The lowest soil above virgin soil, R.4:054=026, a thin brown, ashy layer, included a few scattered pottery sherds (Early Roman/second century AD) and appears to be associated with the eastern wall as the sherds were mostly laid against the wall. On the basis of this wall R.4:004 and the wall sections bonded with it this level can be dated to phase I. Thus the L-shaped wall complex running E-W through R.8 and R.4 and N-S through R.4 and R.6 belong to the basic early second century structure that was embellished through remodelling in later phases.

Phase II (Stratum 6, Late Roman, phase I) :

Phase II represents the reuse of the phase I architectural features (the eastern and northern walls) along with the addition of two new walls, which lie in R.6 and R.4.

The first, R.4:006, was added to construct the second room, and the second, R.6:032, adds an entrance to the first room where *tābūn* activities were concentrated during this phase. The phase I eastern and northern walls, R.4:002 and 004, served as the walls for this new *tābūn* room. R.4:006, the western wall of the *tābūn* room, is constructed against the northern wall in R.4 without any bonding between the two, and runs southwestward for about 2.25 m, paralleling the eastern wall. R.6:032, bonded at a right angle with R.4:006, runs southeasterly for about 1.00 m, so that a space of about 0.70 m for a doorway is left between it and wall R.6:003=R.4:004 for access to the *tābūn* room.

The western wall of the *tābūn* room, R.4:006, is architecturally later because it is butted against R.4:002, and because it is much more poorly constructed than the phase I walls. The wall belongs to phase II because of the association with R.4:053, an occupation layer deposited on phase I layer R.4:054 (Fig. 4) and consisting of slightly



4. South balks of R.4 and R.8. R.4:0057 is founding level for walls R.4:004 and 006; in R.008, the loci above 009 and 010 on the right comprise the ca. 0.75 m deep phase V ashy dump layers. (Drawing by A. Momani and B. de Vries).

compact ash with small cobbles, bone, glass, and charcoal pieces and pottery dated to Early and Late Roman as well as Early Byzantine period. Thus the addition could be dated somewhere in the Late Roman and possibly even into the Early Byzantine period.

The clearest representative of this period comes inside the *tābūn* room, a 2.25 x 1.35 m space where two successive *tābūns* were built during the building's life. The first (lower) *tābūn* consists of a ring of fired clay (0.85 m dia.) protected and/or supported by a ring of medium to large stones encased in unfired brick. Surrounding the *tābūn* structure are numerous layers of ashy soil, some with straw and decayed brick inclusions. These layers could be considered contemporary with the *tābūn*, or they could be post occupational debris layers related to this later *tābūn*.

Pottery finds date this first *tābūn* to the Late Roman period. The second *tābūn* was constructed in the northeast corner of the room, directly above the first, and also dated to the Late Roman period. Its 0.85 m dia. 0.04-5 m thick clay wall was preserved to 0.63 m high and also had a supporting structure of basalt stones and clay built around the first *tābūn*.

Phase III (Stratum 6, Late Roman, phase 2) :

This phase is only represented in the second (*tābūn*) room. It is nothing more than an accumulation of layers around the second *tābūn* of phase II. It consists of a clay rich orange layer with some ash that extends over the southern half of R.4. A fine, windblown loess layer that contains many *tābūn* fragments also covers the same area in R.4.

It would seem that this phase represents collapse of the *tābūn* and an accumulation of abandonment layers. All layers from this phase relate to the Late Roman IV period.

Phase IV (Stratum 5, Early Byzantine) :

This phase includes the reuse of the phase I walls in R.8 (002 and 015) to form room three in the NW corner of the square. A surface associated with the two walls, a hard packed ashy layer, contains Late Roman and Early Byzantine sherds. In addition, a high probability of association between this layer and the hard plaster-like material found in R.9, just to the north, exists, and it would also seem that the eastern wall of room three extends to the north into R.9, where it appears as a collapsed segment of the wall.

In R.6 a new wall segment, R.6:031, seems quite strange compared to the rest of the walls uncovered in area R. It is roughly built with large field stones in the upper courses and smaller ones in the lower, though much of this part is missing. This could be due to animal presence, since the occupational layers associated with this phase seem to be badly disturbed.

As many as three uneven, multicolored layers containing ash and charcoal, mixed with Early/Late Roman and Early Byzantine sherds are associated with the wall. These layers also seem to correlate with other, similar layers from R.7, R.8, and R.4. Thus phase IV represents a period of Early Byzantine occupation, most likely for only a short time. This was followed by a time of abandonment and robbing out or collapse of some of the walls.

Phase V (stratum 5, Early Byzantine [?]) :

This phase consists of a complex and confusing series of soil layers that are stratigraphically consistent throughout most of area R. In addition to these soil layers, a section of collapse from the east-west running phase I wall between R.4 and R.8 can be included.

In the shared balk of R.4 and R.8, a section of large, collapsed basalt stones with a loose, fine ashy soil throughout was un-

covered. This tumble is associated with the E-W phase I wall. Throughout the soil and tumble, a mix of Late Roman sherds along with a handful of green-glazed sherds of unknown (Mamluk?) date were found.

The multiple soil layers from this phase include varying amounts of ash and charcoal (Fig. 5), with large amounts of mudbrick and *tābūn* fragment inclusions.

Altogether, more than four distinct layers of loose, ashy soil lie across the whole of area R (Fig. 4). The layers also contain huge amounts of pottery sherds, most dating to Late Roman and Early Byzantine, with the occasional Early Roman and rare occurrences of green-glazed sherds.

This phase is composed of large scale dumping activities of somewhat undetermined date due to the presence of the occasional green-glazed sherds. That these sherds should be dated Mamluk is unlikely, for they occur without the more common Mamluk painted sherds, and they occur in an otherwise exclusively Late Roman / Early Byzantine context.

The topsoil layer at area R consisted of a very fine, loose, ashy soil with vegetation roots, small stones, a few rocks, mudbrick chunks, *tābūn* fragments, bone, glass and large amounts of pottery sherds from Late Roman and Byzantine periods. However, in the east of R.6 the soil does not contain such large amounts of pottery sherds but instead contains basalt blocks of all sizes that are either tumble from the walls in R.6, or the remnants of dumping during a later period.

The few pottery sherds from this area also date to Late Roman and Early Byzantine times. The topsoil in R.11 and R.12 also shows a difference from the rest of area R. The soil in these regions is much looser with small rocks and only a few weathered sherds.

Conclusions

The 1994 excavation season in area R at al-Herri uncovered a large building complex of three rooms and a possible courtyard. In the first phase (Early Roman) of



5. R.9 looking east; The balk on the left shows the ca. 0.75 m accumulation of phase V ashy dump that overlay the earlier occupation loci (bottom of the trench and collapsed wall in far balk). (Photo by G. Hammink).

the complex the first walls were constructed, as can be seen in the northeast corner of the complex. The second phase (Late Roman) saw the reuse of the phase I walls and the addition of two new walls found in R.6 and R.4. Two successive *tābūns* were also constructed in the northeast corner of the second room during this period. The third phase (Late Roman) is an abandonment period seen only in the second room. Phase IV (Early Byzantine), the final period of occupation, again saw reuse of the original phase I walls and, again, added another wall as seen in R.6. The third room, in R.8, also saw some use during this phase. The fifth and final phase is a period of area-wide abandonment and dumping across the complex. The date of this phase is unclear, but could be Early Byzantine unless the green-glazed sherds prove otherwise.

Though the season was an ultimate success, further excavations are needed in area R in order to clarify the occupational and

stratigraphic sequence of the al-Herri area.

More trenches are also needed to solidify the dating and identify the source of the phase V dump layers. This can be done by further excavations of area R. More information must also be gathered on the Early Roman/Nabataean occupation of al-Herri by completing the excavation of all squares to the earliest stratum and possibly, excavating another complex not covered by the thick layers of ashy dump.

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