

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO KHIRBAT ISKANDAR AND ITS VICINITY, 1994

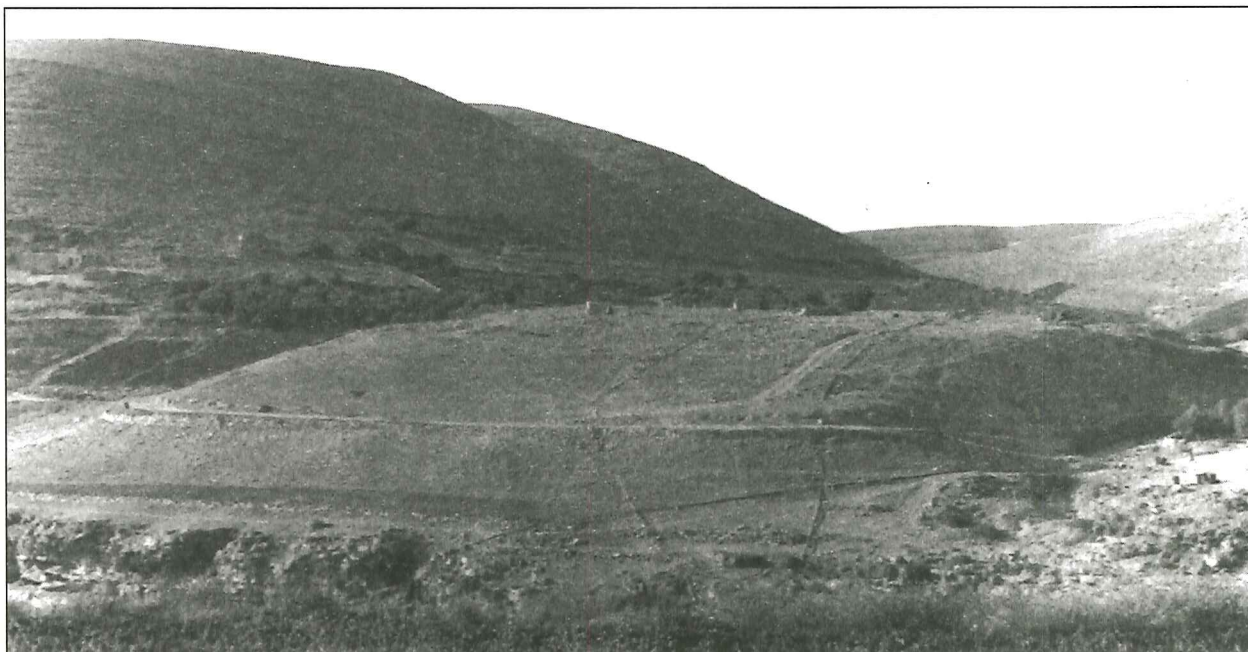
by
Suzanne Richard and Jesse C. Long, Jr.

Introduction

The fifth campaign of the Archaeological Expedition to Khirbat Iskandar and its vicinity was conducted from July 24 through August 8, 1994 (see Fig. 1). This campaign served both as a clarification of the stratigraphical profile in Area B and as a pilot season for renewed excavations at the site in Phase II. For this short season, work concentrated on the fortifications and the interior occupation at the northwest corner of the mound. Our objectives were two-fold:

1. to clarify the proposed phasing for the area, specifically to check the relationship of the interior phasing (Phases A-B) to the fortifications.
 2. to provide additional exposure to the Phase B public structure. We are pleased to report that both objectives were met.
- For the 1994 season the staff consisted of

Suzanne Richard, Director and Architect (Drew University); Jesse C. Long, Jr., Associate Director and Photographer (Lubbock Christian University); Marlin White, Manager; Sarah White, Pottery Registrar and Artist; Garry Hill and Paul Holdorf, square supervisors. This expedition was sponsored by Drew University, Madison, New Jersey and Lubbock Christian University, Lubbock, Texas and was affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research and the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in 'Ammān. Our representative from the Department of Antiquities was Hazem Jasser, Mādabā District Inspector. On behalf of the sponsoring institutions, the directors would like to thank the Department of Antiquities for continued cooperation, support and assistance in this project. A special note of thanks goes to Dr. Pierre Bikai and to Glen



1. The mound of Khirbat Iskandar cut on the south by the Wādī Wāla. Looking north (photograph by James D'Angelo).

Peterman, the director and assistant director of ACOR, for their invaluable help along the way. Funding for this season came from the sponsoring institutions, private donors and corporate matches, for all of which we are extremely grateful.

The 1994 season follows four previous campaigns to Khirbat Iskandar. The importance of Khirbat Iskandar for analyzing sedentary adaptation in Early Bronze IV (ca. 2350-2000 BC) became apparent during a short pilot season in 1981 (Richard 1982), when excavation uncovered multiphased domestic occupation with substantial building remains. Campaigns in 1982 (Richard 1983; Richard and Boraas 1984), 1984 (Richard 1986; Richard and Boraas 1986), and 1987 (Richard 1990; 1993) revealed considerable evidence for a well defended, permanently occupied, multiphased EB IV settlement (see Long 1988). Work accomplished at the site by the current expedition fills out a picture drawn long ago from Nelson Glueck's descriptions (1939: 125, 127-29), supplemented by Peter Parr's soundings (1960).

The Project

Phase I operations comprised a stratigraphical analysis of the *tall* site in concert with a limited regional survey as well as exploration of three cemetery areas. The overarching goal of the expedition has been to investigate the nature and extent of sedentism in a rural period often described as a "pastoral interlude" between the two urban eras of the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Ages. Though this period is termed "Intermediate EB-MB" by some, the weight of the evidence demonstrates that this period is but the end of a cycle that saw the rise and collapse of urbanization over the span of about a millennium and a half (Richard 1987). The evidence, especially that from Khirbat Iskandar, continues to mount in support of close affinities between

this last phase and earlier tradition. The terminology, Early Bronze IV, is consistent with these findings.

Phase II excavations will attempt to provide a better understanding of EB IV adaptation at the site with the aim of integrating Khirbat Iskandar into the larger framework of Early Bronze Age studies in Syria-Palestine.

Khirbat Iskandar continues to be unique to the period of decline at the end of the third millennium BC. It is the only excavated EB IV fortified site known (others have been noted in a survey; see Palumbo and Mabry 1988). But beyond the obvious link with EB defensive traditions, there is the level of complexity at the site, as inferred from the public structures: the bench-lined gateway and associated "guardrooms" in Area C, the administrative or "cultic" structure in Area B, the stores of vessels, particularly storage containers (some with grain still inside), distinct habitational patterning, craft specialization, etc.

Whether the major caravanserai or one of several regional centers along the King's Highway, Khirbat Iskandar demonstrates the high level of complexity sustainable in this period of decline. Its very presence suggests that sociopolitical hierarchies were to a degree maintained in Transjordan after the collapse of the EB III cities. Clearly, the EB IV period is not a "pastoral interlude". It is a non-urban period where towns, villages, and pastoral communities coexist in what appear to be clearly defined sociopolitical and cultural regions. Toward the end of the Early Bronze Age, specialized urban economies devolved to the despecialized milieu reflected in the EB IV material record, yet in strong continuity with earlier EB traditions (Long and Richard 1989). In addition, regionalism further defines the period. Overlapping regional styles point to contacts among the various EB IV regional "families" on both sides of

the Jordan (see Helms 1989; Long 1990; Palumbo and Peterman 1993).

Stratigraphic Profile of the Site

As mentioned above, the primary focus of this season's work was to clarify certain stratigraphical inferences made following the 1987 campaign regarding the overall phasing of Area B. The tentative phasing published after the 1987 campaign, where we set out the chronology of the site in seven phases, must be revised somewhat in light of the 1994 season. In broad outline, the sequence of habitation so far excavated at Khirbat Iskandar seems best understood now by six phases. From the bottom they are the following:

Phase F

An EB I stratum was uncovered in a deep probe in the Square B4 extension at the northwest corner of the mound. There were fragments of domestic walls with associated EB I pottery. Above this layer, everything dated to EB IV.

Phase E

This layer of domestic wall and surface fragments represents the earliest EB IV remains at the site. Excavation uncovered this layer under the fortifications, indicating that the first EB IV settlement was probably an open village.

Phase D

A stone and mudbrick defensive wall was subsequently erected. Excavation has not yet reached interior occupational levels contemporaneous with this fortification line, although in 1987 we thought we had discerned a "lower pottery storeroom". Until we excavate this level, we are assuming one period of occupation coincident with the founding of the wall. We believe an earthquake caused the destruction of this wall, since, wherever it has been found, its

mudbrick superstructure slants inward at about 30 degrees. A section of the wall with similar phasing (including the 30 degree slant of the inner wall) is visible in a recent road cut at the southeast corner of the mound.

Phase C

Phase D fortifications were destroyed. Since wherever we have excavated below Phase B we have uncovered the Phase C fortifications/destruction, we are able to assign it a phase separate from founding/occupation.

Phase B

Major reconstruction ensued immediately following the destruction. A new defensive line was built against the exterior face of the destroyed Phase C wall. Square towers were erected at the corners and intervals around the perimeter, as Nelson Glueck observed on his visit to the site.

Although we had designated a separate "founding" phase for the outer fortifications, we have revised that view. We now believe that coincident with the rebuilding of the town's defenses, there was leveling of the massive destruction debris on the interior to form a foundation for the Phase B public building. This building included at least two rooms, a bench (the "pottery storeroom") and a bin ("*favissa*") room.

Previously uncertain as to the relationship between the public building and the fortifications, it is now clear from the 1994 excavations that this structure was contemporaneous with the rebuilt defenses. This being the case, we have collapsed the two phases previously published.

Phase A

On top of the destroyed Phase B walls, the inhabitants constructed a series of interconnected houses. In 1987 we concluded that Phase A represented a final EB IV

post-fortification phase. Evidence from the 1994 season, however, suggests strongly that in the earlier phase (A2), the settlement remained fortified and that only the final phase (A1) should be termed a post-fortification phase.

Following Phase A, the site was abandoned. Only a smattering of sherds from the Late Bronze, Iron Age, and Roman-Byzantine period has come to light, and none in a stratified context on the mound.

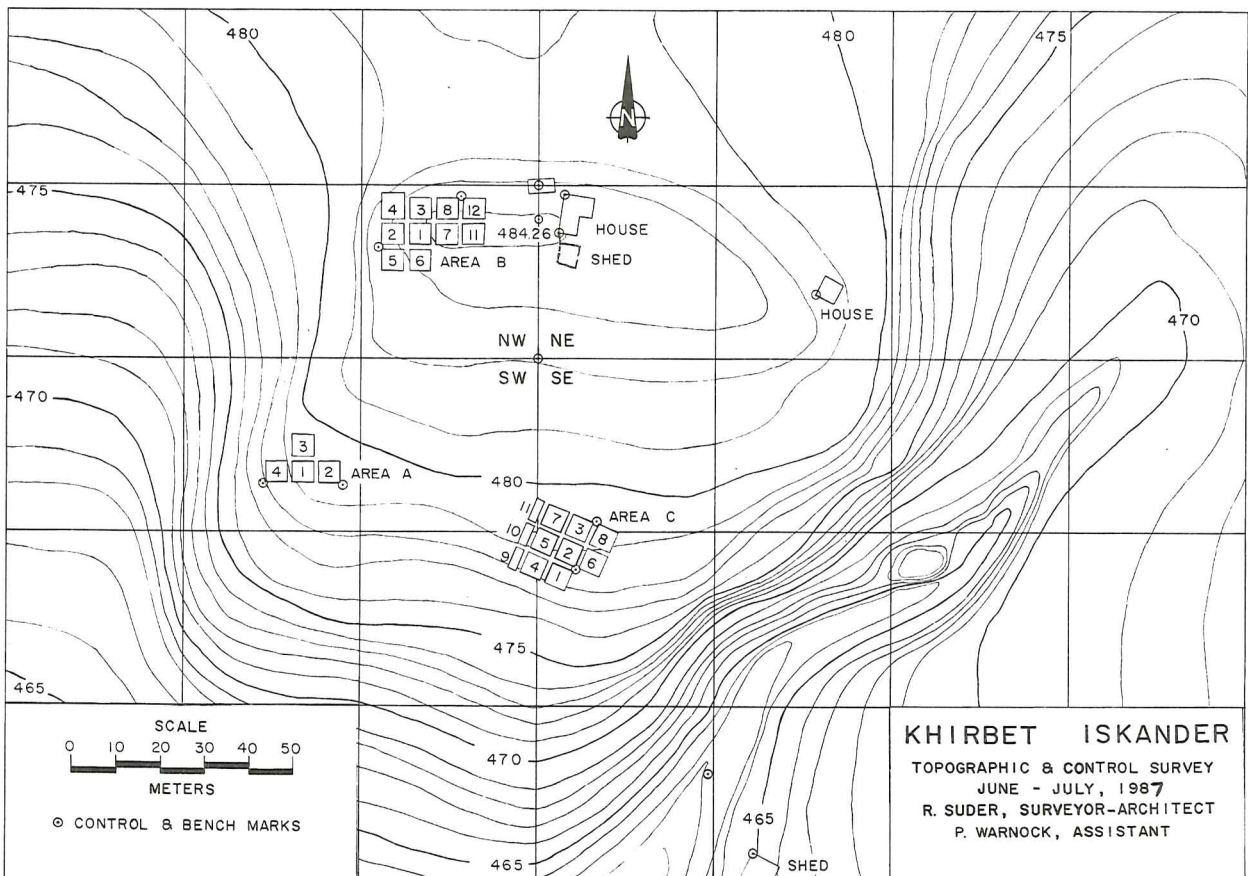
1994 Field Work

To meet our objectives, work concentrated on Phases A-B in Squares B11 and B12 at the easternmost extension of Area B (Fig.2). In this manner, we could a) articulate the relationship of Phases A and B to the fortifications and b) expose more of the Phase B public building, clarifying the layer(s) of pottery in the destruction debris.

Phase A

Since a series of interconnected houses in Phase A replaced the Phase B public building, it was originally thought that a transition from a public to a domestic use had occurred in this part of the site. The houses did indeed contain all manner of typical domestic equipment not found in Phase B, for example, grinders and querns, pestles, mortars, and *ṭawābin* (Richard and Boraas 1986: Fig. 10). This season's excavations, however, have provided a much better understanding of the transition to the Phase A settlement and also its subphasing.

At the end of 1987, B11 was a 5.0 x 5.0 m square consisting of a building that included three pillars, bench-like features, two sunken installations - mortar and a table with center depression - along with two enigmatic stone features. This building was similar but not identical to the house in B7 to



2. Plan of the mound and its three areas. The 1994 season concentrated work in Squares 11-12 in Area B.



3. Phase A. In the foreground is Wall 12003. In the background on the right is the B7 pillar building; to the left is the B11 house. Looking southwest (photograph by Dirk Hermann).

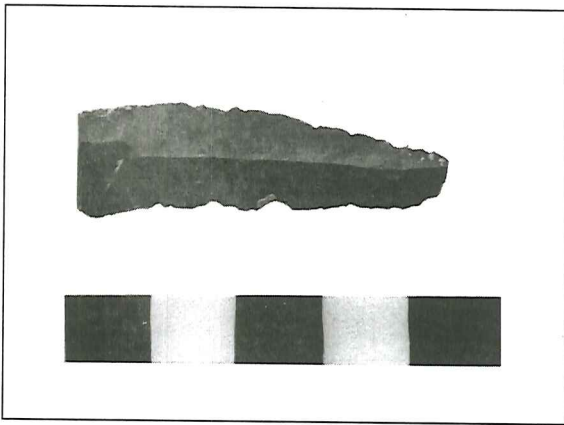
the west, which included a row of five pillars (Fig. 3 and see Richard 1990: Fig. 6).

This season, two additional pillar bases came to light in the B11 structure. They aligned exactly with the two northernmost pillars in B7. One was set on top of the southern boundary (east-west Wall 7051-11031) of the Phase B public building, as was its parallel to the west in B7; the other lay 1.5 m to the north (Fig 4). In Phase A2, then, there were two contiguous buildings whose rows of pillars distinguished them from more traditional domestic structures found elsewhere in Area B. Additionally, further excavation showed that these pillar houses superseded a room with pillar bases in the Phase B public building (see below).

In the later phase (A1), the B7 row of pillars had been completely blocked to form a solid wall; blockages were also uncovered in the B11 room (Richard and Boraas 1984: Fig. 3, Wall 7003). Thus, there were two major construction phases in Phase A: an earlier pillar house phase and a later phase



4. Two new pillar bases in the Phase A Square B11 house. Looking south (photograph by Jesse C. Long, Jr.).



5. Canaanite blade. One of five found in Phase A, Square B11 (photograph by Sarkis Lapadjeian, University of Jordan).

of blockages.

At the end of 1987, the team found that a plaster surface (11029), which ran under the walls and installations associated with the Phase A building in B11, appeared to be its first 'use surface'. In 1994, we were able to trace this surface into and link up with B12 Surface 12012/12031. As we excavated through the surface makeup, we discovered five complete Canaanite blades. They were not in a cache, but were dispersed within a 1.0 m area. These blades belong to the Phase A building (Fig. 5).

In B12, we extended the square by 2.0 m (to a 4.0 x 5.0 m square). This extension allowed us to carefully reinvestigate Phase A occupational levels near the fortifications. The materials in this extension were extremely significant for our understanding of the overall phasing of the site. From the top, a compacted mud layer (Surface 12024) covered the house walls, representing the final abandonment of the site at the end of EB IV. Next, as expected, the last living surface (12026), associated with the Phase A Wall 12003, covered the fortifications. This is the post-fortification phase (A1) noted previously.

Two earlier use surfaces (12028 and 12031), however, were discovered to run up to the outer fortification line. This new evidence has clarified stratigraphy encountered

in 1987 and is the basis for the revision to the Phase A phasing discussed above. We now believe that in Phase A2 (the pillar house phase), the fortifications were still in use. In Phase A1 (blockages phase), Surface 12026 (the last use surface with Wall 12003) covered the fortifications.

Phase B

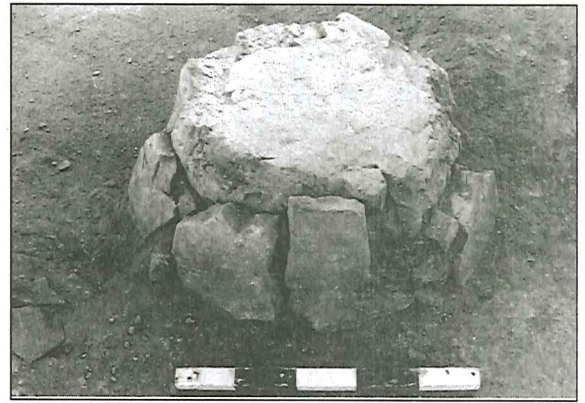
At the end of 1987, Square B12 was in the phase with the "bin" and "bench" rooms to the west in Squares B7/B8. In the latter, numerous whole and restorable vessels lay encased within destruction debris. Of particular significance was the discovery in B12 of two installations or pits in which whole vessels had been set. One of these installations also included a goat horn (a second one had been found immediately to the west in B8); in a contiguous stone-rimmed pit, there was a decorated bowl, looking very much like an offering plate, in which lay the hoof of a bovine (Richard 1990: Figs. 12-13).

In 1994, excavation removed Phase A plaster Surface 12031 in order to bring the eastern half of the square down to Phase B. Immediately, workers encountered a stone installation (12033) built against the fortifications. It contained much mudbrick debris and plaster as well as the remains of mudbricks. It appeared to be a simple above-ground bin. What was especially significant about this bin was that it had been built atop the Phase C inner fortification line (Wall 12020); it lay against the outer defensive line from Phase B (Wall 12011; Fig. 6).

This new evidence a) reaffirmed the stratigraphic link between the Phase B public building and the fortifications, but more importantly, b) demonstrated that the public building was contemporaneous with the later (outer), not the earlier (inner), fortification line. The new evidence confirmed our earlier speculation that the outer defensive



6. Above ground Bin 12033, Phase B installation lying against outer Wall 12011 (Phase B). Looking northeast (photograph by Jesse C. Long, Jr.).



7. "Offering Table." Round chert Feature 12042, sitting on Surface 11034. Looking south (photograph by Jesse C. Long, Jr.).

wall served as a back wall for the Phase B building.

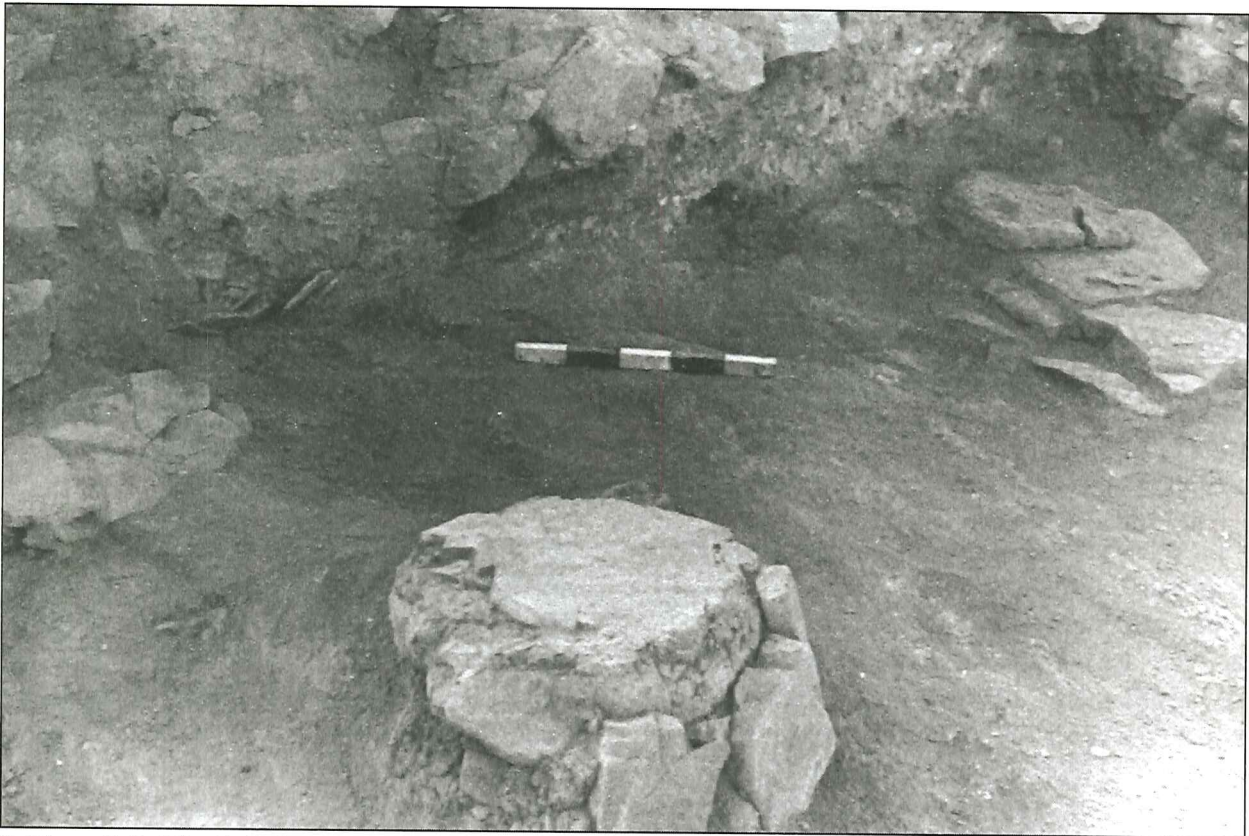
Having met objective number one, we devoted the remaining time to delineating the continuation of east-west Wall 7051 into Square B11, thus exposing more of the public building (Richard 1990: Fig. 9).

The eastern extension of the building (east-west Wall 7051/11031) proved to be a well constructed wall containing a bench-like feature that protruded about 30 cm beyond the line of the wall. It was slightly rounded. As we exposed more of the area and removed the balk between B11-B7, it became clear that the "bin room" was the major, central room in the building. The plan of the room was unique to anything previously excavated at the site. Opposite the bench/niche lay the round chert Feature 12042 (Fig. 7). Although at first glance this block appeared to be a pillar base, the discovery of two pillar bases to the east negated that hypothesis. It is likely, rather, that it served as an offering table, positioned as it was exactly opposite the bench/niche and equidistant between the latter and the outer edge of the fortifications. It was perfectly level on top.

As we cleared more of the room, two flat pillar bases came to light in the eastern sector (Fig. 8). The southernmost base was built upon a foundation stone and was in as-

sociation with a type of pavement. The northern base had no foundation. Notably, the fifth stone pillar recently discovered in Phase A was aligned vertically with the northern pillar base of Phase B. Along with other considerations, this alignment suggests continuity of a tradition of pillars between Phases B-A in Squares B7/B11, although each phase is distinct. Paralleling the north-south axis of the two pillar bases was a line of ash in which chunks of wood were found and taken for C14 samples. There was clear indication of the remains of a beam on the east in association with these pillar bases. Much carbonized material was found to the west as well.

Excavation to the west of the bench/niche did not turn up the expected matching pillar base. Instead, measurements showed that equidistant from the bench/niche were the southern pillar base on the east and in the west the large flat stone that originally lay alongside the edge of the stone-slab bin in B7. The expected fourth base at the northwest was not found; however, in 1987 a socket had been uncovered in approximately the correct position. One thing is clear: the line of carbonized remains on the east and west align perfectly with the two proposed rows of pillars and attest to the fact that wooden beams held up the roof of this building.



8. Phase B Public Building. "Offering Table"(12042) in foreground and two pillar bases in background. Note roof collapse in balk, ash layer, and pottery *in situ* on Surface 11034. Looking southwest (photograph by Jesse C. Long, Jr.).

This summer, excavation in the area of the bin uncovered a second miniature jug; it had a knob or unpierced lug handle at the neck (Fig. 9). In 1987, in the same area, a miniature jug with pierced lug handle came to light, along with a miniature spouted vessel (Richard 1990: Fig. 11). Aside from the miniature, numerous restorable vessels were found in this "pillared" room, although not as extensively as in the "bench room." In large part because of fewer vessels, we were able to determine definitively this season that the tumble of pottery within the thick (30-50 cm) destruction layer was all contemporaneous and was associated with Surface 11034, the only occupational layer within the public building.

Below this floor, we encountered mudbrick debris. This debris links up with the massive mudbrick debris we found in earlier seasons; it is the collapse of the mud-



9. Miniature Jug with unpierced lug at neck. Found in Phase B public building (photograph by Sarkis Lapadjeian, University of Jordan).

brick superstructure of the inner fortification line (12020, Phase C).

This season's work demonstrates definitively that there is only one occupation phase associated with the public building in Phase B. What had originally been considered to be a second phase of pottery was in reality a level of pottery found in pits. In particular, it is clear now that the locus below the floor of the bench room was a pit, as suggested in 1987 by the supervisor, Diane Rowan, of the British Museum. The great quantity of pottery and the amount of destruction debris in the bench room tended to obscure stratigraphical relationships. Fortunately, we found much less pottery this year in the central bin room and could easily discern one layer of pottery within the destruction debris.

We believe that the bench-room pit and the stone-slab bin served identical pur-

poses: they were *favissae*, one for food offerings, the other for vessels. In this context, the two stone-lined pits found in B12 must likewise be *favissae*, especially given their unusual contents: whole vessels, goat horn, and offering plate with bovine hoof. Adjacent to the B12 pits, we recovered stone Bin 12033, whose purpose is unknown owing to its poor state of preservation. The three features in Square B12 were erected on top of the inner stone fortification line and built against the outer defensive line. Given the context of this pretty remarkable EB IV building, it is difficult to interpret the four sunken features as anything but *favissae*.

Although we have not completed the exposure of the Phase B monumental structure, its plan is becoming clear (Fig. 10). Built against the outer fortifications, the building consisted of a unique central room



10. Phase B public building. In the background is Wall 7051/11031 with bench/niche in the center. Directly opposite is the offering table (12042). To the east is a row of two pillar bases. Looking south (photograph by Jesse C. Long, Jr.).

with two rows of pillar bases set up on a north-south axis in order to hold up the roof. A niche/bench in the south wall lined up with stone Feature 12041, presumably an offering table. A doorway opened on the west to another room that included a bench on three sides. In the past we have commented on the extensive amount of pottery in the latter ("pottery storeroom"), as well as the high quality of many of the vessels. The public building currently is exposed to the dimensions of 10.5 x 5.0 m. We consider it likely that the building was used for the cult.

With regard to the two defensive systems uncovered at the site, the constructional history of both is becoming clearer. Squares B4/B3 are to be distinguished from B8/B12 along the northern perimeter of Area B. At the northwest corner there is a massive outer tower in Square B4. In contiguous Square B3, there appeared a 2.5 m wall which only after sectioning proved to be a cap covering the inner (1.2 m Phase C) wall, and the outer (1.2 m Phase B) wall, and a rubble layer in between. Thus we had assumed that a combined inner/outer 2.5 m wall probably surrounded the site in Phase B. However, the evidence from contiguous squares B8/B12 does not bear this out. It now appears that there is a heavily fortified northwest corner "bastion," as represented by the evidence from Squares B4/B3, and that beyond that point, only the outer wall served as a defense around the site. Indeed, it appears to have served as the back wall of the public building. In previous seasons, the vast amounts of pottery in destruction debris and the massive tumble from the fortifications, tended to obscure relationships.

This season in B12 we have additional evidence that the Phase B public building was not only built on top of the mudbrick debris of the destroyed Phase C wall, but on top of the stone socle itself. Thanks to these new pieces of evidence, it is possible to

comprehend the observation made in 1984 that some of the whole vessels appeared to rest against the fortifications (Richard and Boraas 1986: Figs. 8-9).

It is now evident that construction of the fortifications varied around the perimeter. Thus our earlier view which maintained that a 2.5 m "cap" described the latest fortification system across the mound is in need of revision. This "cap" may only be connected with the more massively constructed towers at the corners and intervals that Glueck noted when he visited the site in 1936.

Conclusions

This short two-week season was extremely successful. We met the objectives set forth above, regarding the clarification of the interior occupation to the fortifications as well as the phasing of the Phase B public building.

These new data complement the stratigraphy encountered in Area C at the southeast corner, where there was a gateway constructed in the latest phase. Although it was assumed that this gateway was somehow connected with a perimeter line of defenses, until this season, there was no stratigraphical evidence to support that view. In 1987 we had traced across the width of the mound the east-west boundary wall (the "Glueck Wall") that bisects the site and interconnects a line of structures. In 1987 the staff excavated several probes in order to search for a link to the fortifications. Although the north - south line of the fortifications appeared to line up precisely where the "Glueck Wall" would join, erosion rendered a clear stratigraphic link impossible. The new evidence recovered this season from Area B (Phase A) provides a context for the Area C Gateway. This new evidence substantiates Nelson Glueck's observation in 1936: "There was a major defensive wall circling the site with an inter-

mediary wall bisecting the site in the middle" (1939: 125).

Additionally, the Phase A2 (pillar buildings) and Phase A1 (blockages) occupation in Area B correlates well with the last phase in Area C, the Gateway. In the Gateway, two subphases in the latest occupation there show a sequence of pillared structures evolving into blocked walls. The Area C Gateway was a cut into an east-west line of interconnected structures that gave entry to the upper settlement.

In Phase II operations at the site, we

hope to correlate the three major areas of excavation to the fortifications in order to develop an overall comprehensive stratigraphy of the site.

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