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Social Systems in Central Jordan: Moving Toward the First Millennium BC and the Earliest Iron Age Polities

Introduction

Numerous surveys and excavations west of the Jordan River have produced a relatively coherent picture of the settlement of the highlands of Cisjordan during the Iron I period. It seems that many small villages sprouted up during the 12th century BC in the regions north of the Jerusalem area. Settlement spread to the south and west in the highlands during the 11th century (Finkelstein 1988). In Jordan those of us working on the Iron Age are just beginning to reap results which allow us to make similarly broad conclusions. We are slowly beginning to put the pieces of the puzzle together which will let us suggest models for the sedentary process of central Jordan during the Iron I period. The economy intensified throughout the Iron Age, ending with the well defined "national" groups we know today as Ammon, Moab, etc.

This paper will first summarize the results from Tall al-'Umayrī and the Mādabā Plains region and then compare them with those of other regions on the highlands of Transjordan and Cisjordan to help us understand sedentarization and the geopolitics of the region as it moved toward the first millennium.

Archaeological Results at Tall al-'Umayrī

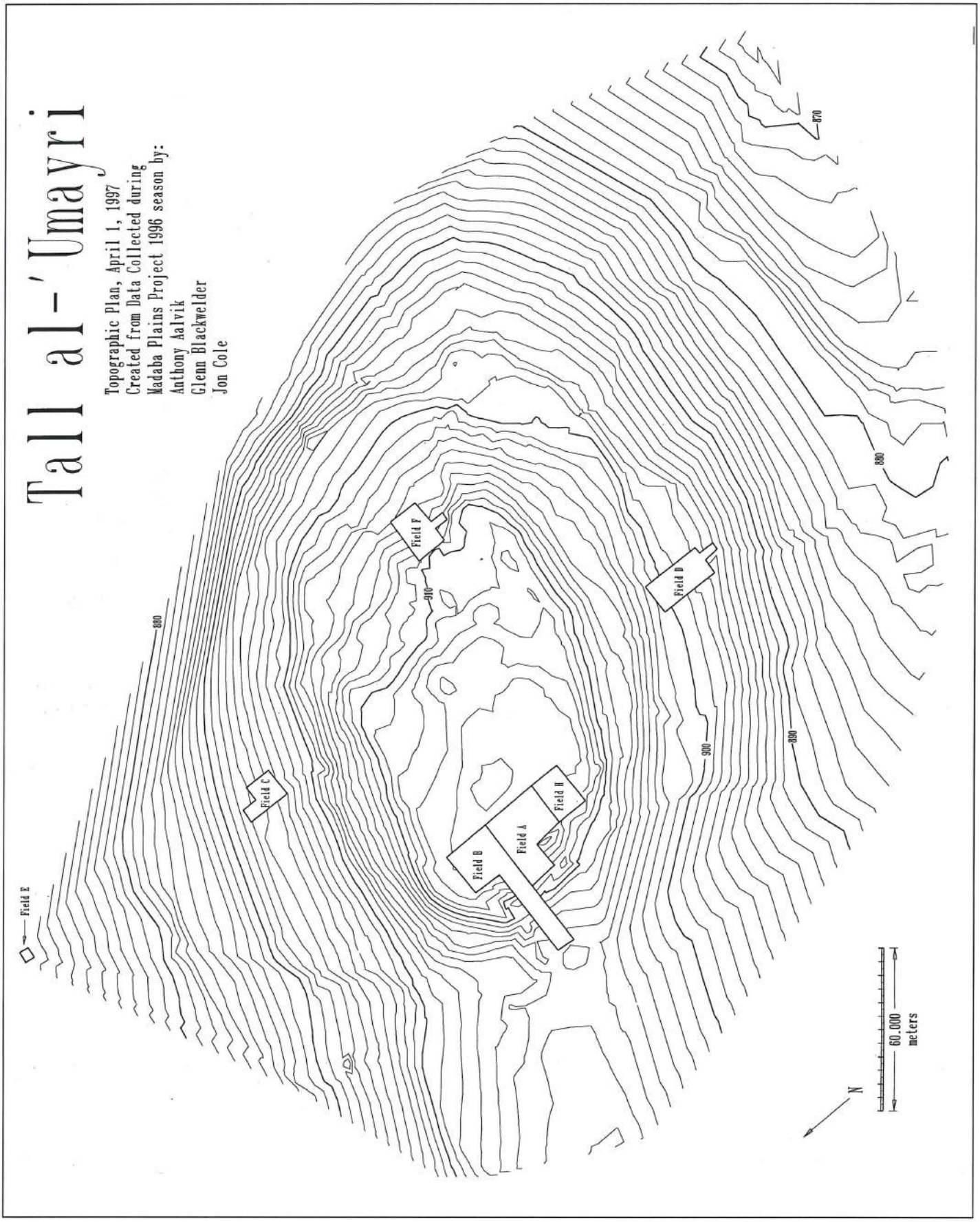
Tall al-'Umayrī was occupied during the 13th and 12th centuries BC for a period of time represented by four phases of occupation. The pottery from the first phase comes from the end of the Late Bronze Age (LB IIB--13th century BC), while that of the next three phases comes mostly from Iron Age I, although some LB characteristics still occur in the cooking pots and biconical jugs of the middle two phases (both phases, therefore, seem to straddle the 13th to 12th centuries). The last phase seems to date to the late 12th or 11th centuries. The first two phases are poorly or indirectly represented, but we have retrieved enough in controlled situations to be certain about their existence and to describe their size and material culture in a limited fashion. While the third phase is spectacularly preserved, only a storeroom containing collared pithoi has been found from the last phase.

Phase 1. Evidence for the LB occupation comes from shallow fill layers behind two terrace walls, one on the eastern slope in Field F (Low 1997: 191) and the other on the northern slope in Field C (Battenfield 1991: 82, 85) (FIG. 1). Both were most likely outside the settlement. We interpret them as terrace fill deposits brought from the settlement farther up the slope. There is no sign of a break between the Late Bronze Age settlement and the subsequent early Iron I phases. Indeed, the LB pottery is late in the period, while the Iron I pottery of the next two phases is so early some of it may be considered LB, as well. At present we hypothesize continued occupation of the site by the same inhabitants from LB IIB to Iron IA.

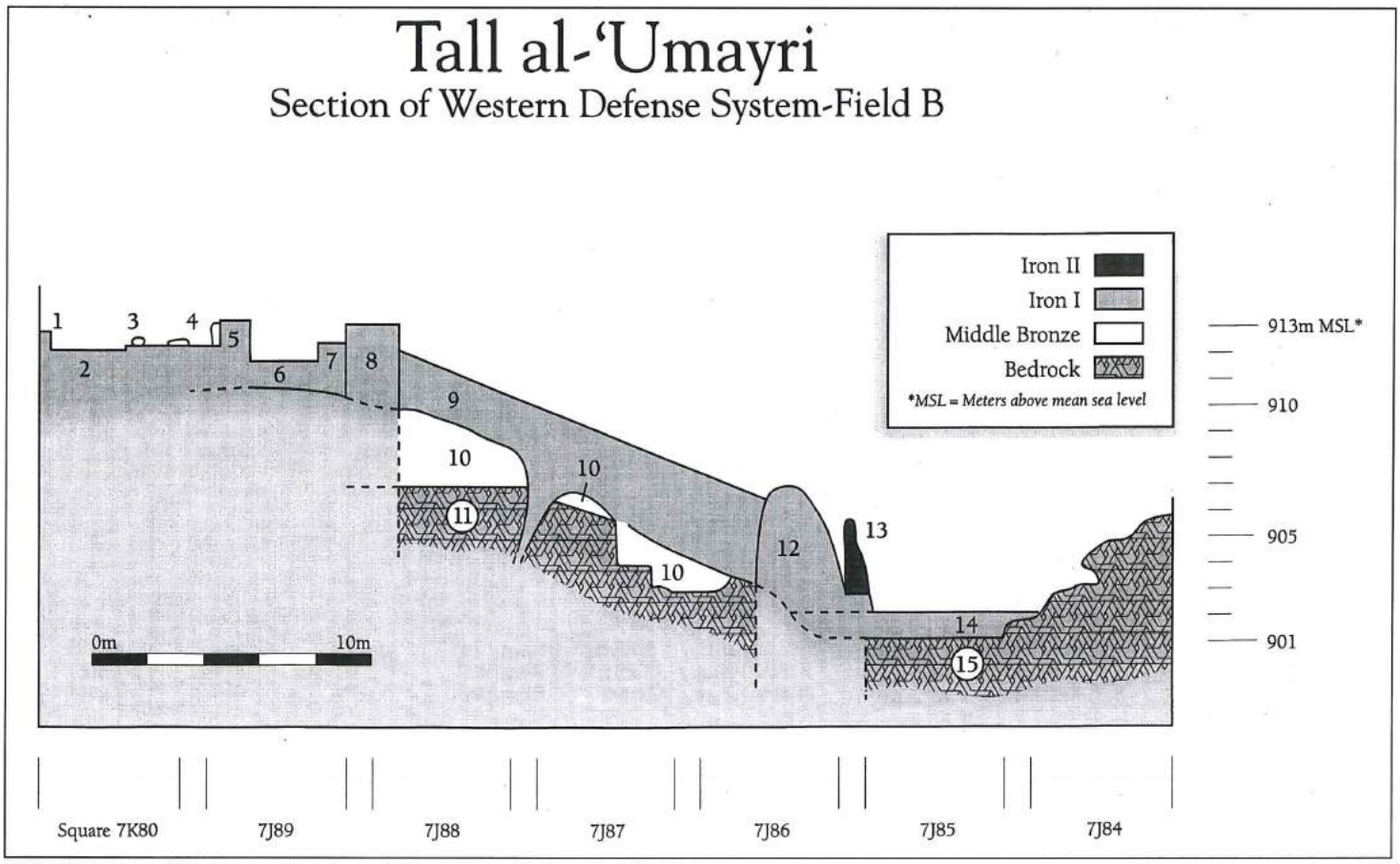
Phase 2. The primary evidence for the first Iron IA phase comes from a new rampart (FIG. 2:9) built after an earthquake that collapsed the earlier MB IIC rampart (FIG. 2:10). Within the rampart was debris that included Iron IA pottery which must have come from a settlement at the site before the rampart was built.

Phase 3. This is the phase that built the rampart in which was the pottery from Phase 2. The Middle Bronze Age moat (FIG. 2:15) at the bottom was mostly cleaned out, leaving about one meter of eroded MB rampart debris in the bottom (FIG. 2:14). A retaining wall (FIG. 2:12) supported the rampart (FIG. 2:9), which filled in the earthquake crack and raised the top of the MB rampart about 1.5-2.0 m. At the top of the rampart was what appears to be an outer wall of a partial casemate wall structure (FIG. 2:8; the inner wall is FIG. 2:5).

The partial casemate wall has been traced over a length of about 27 m and so far comprises three casemate rooms and three (or four) crosswalls (FIG. 3). Although the outer wall (1.6-2.0 m wide) is a continuous wall line, it was built in at least three parts, suggested by changes in masonry style and a slight offset at one point. Near its south-



1. Topographic map of Tall al-'Umayri with fields of Excavation through the 1996 season.



2. South section of the excavation through the western defenses in Field B.

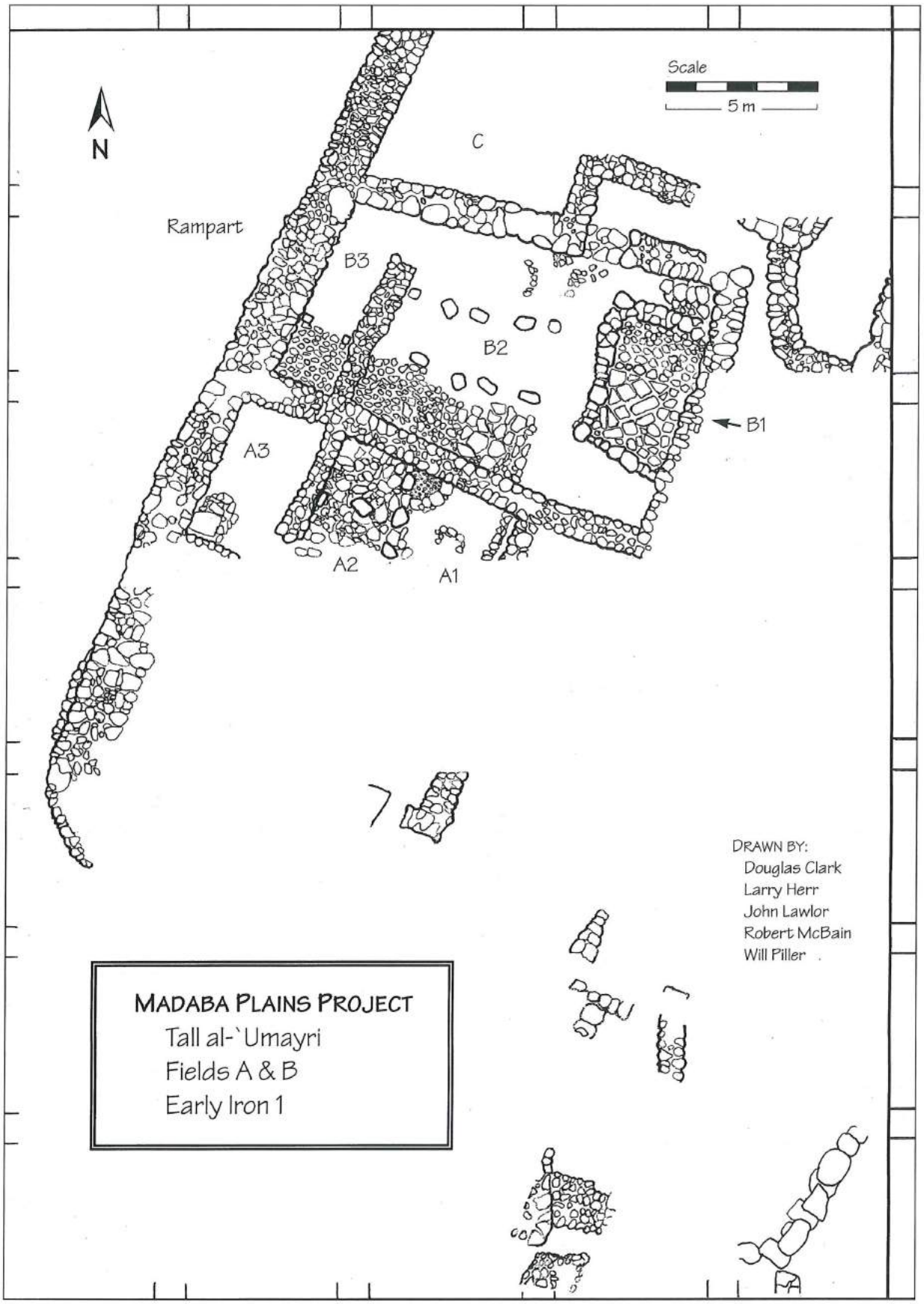
ern end the wall curves into the site beneath later walls; the curve may be part of a gate structure.

The inner wall is not a continuous line. Instead, the crosswalls continue inside the settlement as house walls and no inner wall has so far been discerned at the northern end of excavation where the outer wall also changes in style of construction. Parts of the crosswalls and inner casemate wall segments are preserved over 2.0 m high. Because the crosswalls are also house walls, it is possible to suggest that the casemate rooms should be understood as rooms in houses rather than part of a fortification system. More of the wall system will be excavated to the north and south in future seasons. That the casemate construction could be local to the western edge of the site and does not continue around the complete settlement is not known for certain, but Ground Penetrating Radar studies of the southern lip of the site show the distinct presence of two parallel lines (including crossing lines) with similar dimensions to those of our suggested casemate wall. There does not appear to have been a fortification wall in later periods.

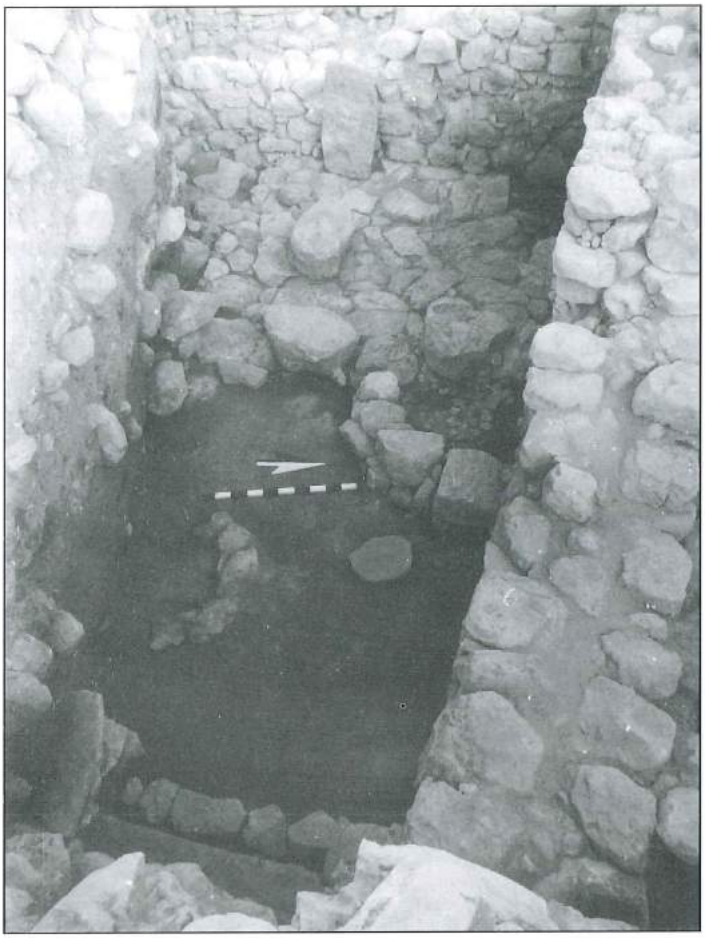
We have been able to expose portions of at least three buildings, probably domestic dwellings. In the eastern room of Building A (FIG. 3: Room A1) domestic artifacts and a hearth were found on a beaten earth floor. But west of a row of post bases and upon a flagstone floor (FIG. 3: Room A2) was an oval rock of naturally smooth limestone in front of a standing stone of the same type of limestone as the oval stone. The unique limestone (very different than the stones in the walls) and their positioning suggest a special function for the ensemble, perhaps a cultic corner (FIG. 4). However, no cultic artifacts of any kind were discovered. Indeed, no artifacts at all were found immediately on the flagstones. Mounds of burned barley were in the destruction debris above the floor suggesting grain was kept on the upper story or roof (the base of a collared pithos, still containing barley grains, was found in this destruction).

A door to the south of the standing stone led into one of the casemate rooms (FIG. 3: Room A3) where approximately 7 collared pithoi stood in the northern half of the room (FIG. 5) and a platform reached by small steps appeared in the southern half. The latter was possibly used as a base for a ladder that provided access to the second floor.

Building B was made up of a courtyard in front of a four-room house: three long rooms separated by narrowly spaced post bases (FIG. 3: Room B2) abutted a broad-room, one of the "casemates" (FIG. 3: Room B3). The outer two long rooms were paved with flagstones, but no items of material culture were found on any of the long-



3. Composite plan of the early Iron I architecture in Fields A (bottom) and B (top).



4. Standing stone and small "altar" in Room A2.

5. Collared pithoi in Room A3.

room floors. The courtyard (FIG. 3: Room B1) contained a paved area surrounded by a series of post bases with narrow stone walls between them; it possibly functioned as an animal pen. In the destruction layer above the southern long room were several reconstructable collared pithoi which probably came from the roof or upper story.

The broadroom of Building B was extremely rich in finds. Separating the southern third of the room, which was paved with flagstones, from the northern portion, with a floor of beaten earth, were two post bases along the side walls, suggesting a curtained division at one stage in the function of the room. But, ignoring this division, approximately 20 collared pithoi lined all the walls. Unfortunately, nothing was found in the pithoi. The destruction layer, representing debris from the second story or roof, was also rich in material culture: another approximately 20 collared pithoi were smashed and scattered atop those lining the walls of the lower room; a portion of an alabaster vessel suggests trade; five bronze weapons (arrowheads, javelins, and a spear) and a few stone ballistic missiles indicate that the destruction of the site was caused by military attack; and the burned bones of at least two individuals, most likely defenders, were found splattered around the room when they fell from the second story or roof after burning.

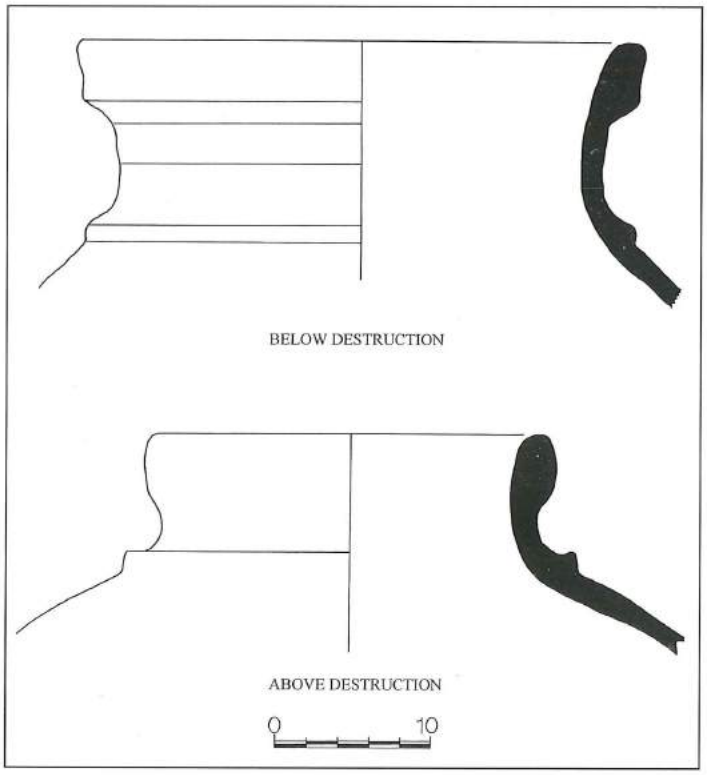
The main entry to the house was a well constructed door and anteroom in the eastern portion of the north wall. Building C (FIG. 3) has not yet been clearly exposed; its excavation awaits next season. Exactly how these three buildings relate to one another is not clearly known. No signs of a street have been found. To the east of Building B a deep pit full of organic debris, suggesting garbage, was found.

The destruction of this small city (ca. 1.5 hectares) was swift and violent. The violence is suggested by the 1.5-2.5 m of destruction debris in the rooms, the ubiquitous signs of burning including burned beams, bricks and stones (some turned to lime), as well as the weapons in the northern casemate room. That the destruction was swift is clear from the masses of food (mounds of barley and two shanks of butchered large mammals) still uneaten, and the two individuals caught in the conflagration. The pottery from the floors and the destruction layer (made up of the second story and ceilings of the houses) was virtually identical to that found in the rampart which came from the earlier phase, dating to around 1200 BCE (Clark 1997). The depth of the destruction debris was greatest over the broadrooms of the houses. The 2.0 m of brick debris above walls still standing to that height suggest a second story for at least that part of the house. In contrast, the destruction above the animal pen in Room B1 was only about .40 m, suggesting very little architecture here.

Other fragments of architecture have been excavated from this phase south of the houses discussed above (FIG. 3).

Phase 4. In 1996 a storeroom with 18 destroyed collared pithoi was found above the destruction layer (FIG. 6). These pithoi represent a distinct typological development from those below the destruction (FIG. 7). Note the more vertical rim, shorter neck, and higher collar on the example from above the destruction. These late Iron I pithoi were associated with a distinct upright cooking pot rim

6. Collared pithoi in situ above the early Iron I destruction. In the upper left corner is the top of the outer wall of Room A3.



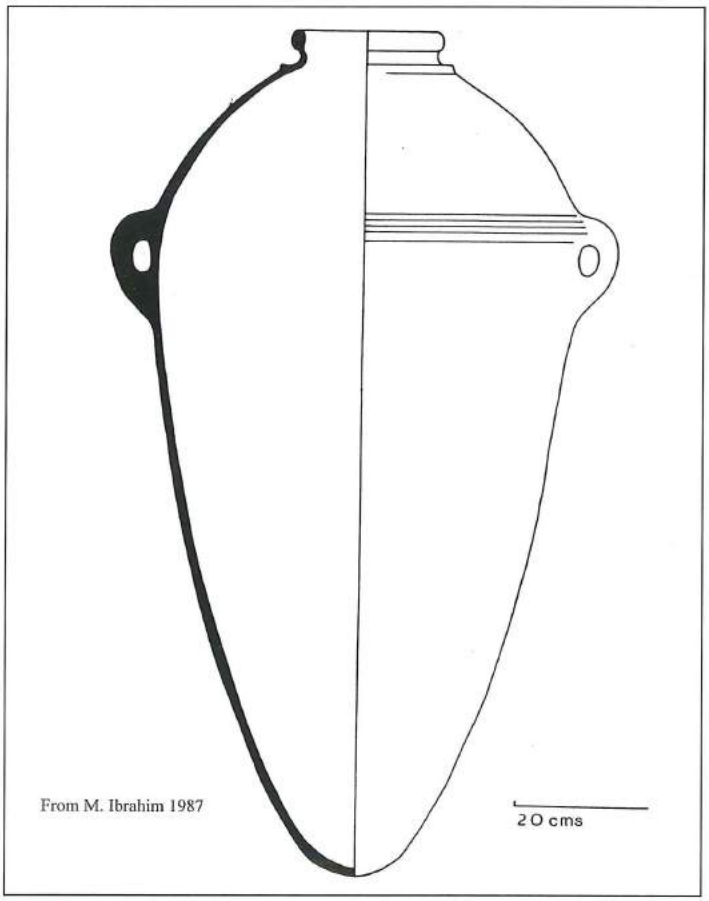
7. A comparison of two typical collared pithoi, one from below the early Iron I destruction (top) and another from above the destruction (bottom).

with two grooves in the thickened rim. This storeroom was not far beneath the surface of the site and was not well preserved.

Discussion

Although significant LB/Iron I sites have been excavated in the eastern portions of the Jordan Valley (Dayr 'Alla [Franken 1992; Franken and Kalsbeek 1969], Pella [McNicoll, *et al.* 1982; McNicoll, *et al.* 1992], and Tall as-Sa'idiyyah [Tubb 1988]), very little evidence has appeared on the plateau of Transjordan. The pottery from Saḥāb is typologically more advanced than the 'Umayrī assemblage of Phase 3 and must date no earlier than the late 12th century (personal observation confirmed by Ibrahim, personal communication, July, 1994). Indeed the collared pithos published by Ibrahim (FIG. 8) is very similar to those from our Phase 4 above the destruction (compare FIGS. 7 and 8). Saḥāb should therefore not be related to the earliest settlement process which is witnessed in Phases 2 and 3 of 'Umayrī. However, finds contemporary with our Phase 3 come from cave or tomb deposits at Mādabā (Harding and Isserlin 1953), the al-Baq'ah Valley north of 'Ammān (McGovern 1986), a small deposit in a rock-cut trench at Ḥisbān (personal observation), and secondary deposits at Jāwa (Daviau, personal communication) and Jalūl (Younker, personal communication). The finds from 'Umayrī are thus the first extensively excavated remains from the LB/Iron I transition in this area. Iron I sites in Moāb seem to be later than this period. However, a site farther away with similar finds is Tall al-Fukhār east of Irbid (P. McGovern and J. Strange, personal communication).

Although much more is known of early Iron I hill



8. One of the collared pithoi from Saḥāb (from Ibrahim 1978).

country sites in Cisjordan, they are primarily small, unfortified agricultural villages perhaps limited to a single extended family or clan social structure (Stager 1985). But 'Umayrī is very strongly fortified and larger than most (if not all) of the highland villages in Cisjordan. In terms of the sedentarization process of sites in highland areas, the settlement at 'Umayrī must be seen as richer and more advanced than contemporary sites in Cisjordan.

The 13th/12th century date of Phases 2 and 3 makes 'Umayrī one of the earliest highland Iron I sites in Palestine, contemporary with or slightly earlier than Mount Ebal (Zertal 1987) and Giloh (Mazar 1981; 1990). The ceramic assemblages from other Iron I sites, such as Ai (Callaway 1980), Raddana (personal observation thanks to Zvi Lederman), Shiloh (Finkelstein *et al.* 1993), and Izbet Sartah (Finkelstein 1986) seem to be later in date. It thus seems that there were relatively few highland sites contemporary with ours in Cisjordan, except perhaps for the eastern fringes of the hill country north of Jerusalem (Zertal 1992).

The types of pottery vessels and other finds classify 'Umayrī as a highland site. Following are the percentages (with sherd counts) of vessel types within the total assemblage of pottery published and unpublished (3883 pieces): collared pithoi: 19.19% (745); jars: 11.41% (443); jugs: 21.43% (832); juglets: 0.67% (26); kraters: 5.79% (225); bowls: 22.56% (876); cooking pots: 15.92% (618); pyxides: 0.15% (6); lamps: 2.60% (101); flasks: 0.10% (4); chalice: 0.03% (1); stand: 0.03% (1). The high percentages of utilitarian types, such as collared pithoi, jugs, cooking pots, and bowls make up approximately 75% of the total, connecting the assemblage with simple highland sites rather than the more complex coastal and valley sites (Mazar 1981:31; Zertal 1987:138; Finkelstein 1988:177-204). Moreover, 'Umayrī's location in the hilly terrain south of 'Ammān and its small size (about 1.5 hectares) make it hard to associate with the larger coastal and valley sites.

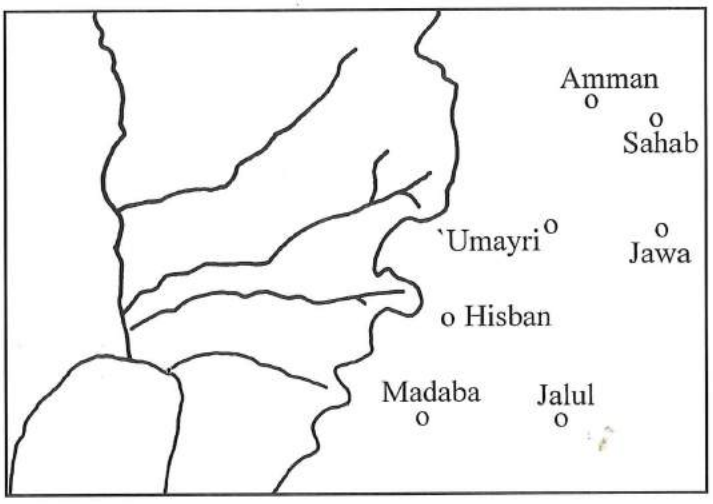
The closest parallels to the material culture of 'Umayrī come from the highlands north of Jerusalem, especially in the region of Nablus (Mount Ebal Stratum II and, to a lesser extent, Stratum I). Zertal's "Manasseh bowl" (Zertal 1987: 139, Figs. 11:1, 3, 5, 7; 14:5) is the most frequent type of bowl at 'Umayrī, as well (Clark 1991: Fig. 4.7:24, 27; 1997: Fig. 4.25:20; many more are unpublished). On a jar rim from Mount Ebal is a potter's mark in the shape of an upside-down "V" (Zertal 1987: 147) identical to the marks on two collared pithos handles from 'Umayrī. A crude trapezoidal seal from Mount Ebal (Brandl 1987: 167) is similar to several seals from 'Umayrī.

We thus have an early Iron I fortified town with a highland material culture, but which seems to date slightly earlier and is more advanced in terms of sedentarization and defensive infrastructure than highland sites in Cisjordan.

Regional Analysis

So far, we have very few excavation results from early Iron I on the central plateau of Transjordan (from the east-west section of Wādī az-Zarqā' in the north to Wādī al-Mūjib in the south). Aside from those sites mentioned above, Dornemann's Iron I pottery from 'Ammān is difficult to sort out, and there are very few similarities to ours (Dornemann 1983: Figs. 53-60). Virtually all of the published Ammān pottery is Iron II. As mentioned above, the corpus of pottery from the al-Baq'ah Valley (McGovern 1986: 151-163) seems to be roughly contemporary to ours (jugs and lamps), but frequent forms at 'Umayrī, such as cooking pots and collared pithoi, do not seem to have been found, making it difficult to connect the al-Baq'ah site with ours. A tomb at Mādabā contains some similar pottery forms as 'Umayrī, but many key forms are lacking as one would expect from a tomb (Harding and Isserlin 1953). The other Iron I tombs from Mādabā are considerably later (Piccirillo 1975; Thompson 1986). Out of these Iron I sites only the Baq'ah Valley and one Mādabā tomb may be considered contemporary with 'Umayrī. It should be noted that the finds at Tall al-Fukhār are similar to those from 'Umayrī, as well (McGovern and Strange, personal communication).

Unpublished, fragmentary, or partial evidence from sites in the 'Umayrī region is beginning to surface which may suggest a coherent series of settlements (FIG. 9). The early Iron I pottery from Tall Ḥisbān, especially the collared pithoi and cooking pots, are closely similar to those from 'Umayrī (personal observation). Similar collared pithoi have been found in secondary deposits at Tall Jāwa, about 4 km east of 'Umayrī (Daviau, personal communication, November, 1994), and Tall Jalūl (Younker, personal communication, November, 1994). Although I



9. Sketch map of the Mādabā Plains region in the early Iron I period.

must stress that these observations warrant no firm conclusion, one may entertain the possibility that the finds from these four sites (and possibly Mādabā) represent a contemporaneous regional cultural entity. The sites are within about 15 km of each other (Mādabā to Jāwa), seem to carry a similar material culture, and each site is within sight of at least one other (from Jalūl one can see Jāwa, Mādabā, and Ḥisbān, as well as the hill immediately to the south of 'Umayrī).

Historical Observations

Even if we do not insist on the early Iron I contemporaneity of 'Umayrī with Ḥisbān, Jalūl, Mādabā, and Jāwa, the significance of the finds at 'Umayrī alone demands a broadened model of the emergence of the small tribal and, later, national entities that populated Iron Age Palestine than has hitherto been presented.

I do not wish to debate the ethnicity of the groups involved with this sedentary process. I believe that, during the 13th and 12th centuries, we should speak of "tribal entities" rather than "national" ones. Tribal relationships consist of fluid coalitions or alliances that rise, fall, swap loyalties, and come and go (LaBianca and Younker 1994). A similar situation probably existed throughout Iron I. At the risk of making an extremely complex picture overly simple, I would suggest that, as tribal relationships and loyalties became more consistent and less fluid, groups of allied tribes could have developed supra-tribal structures which slowly grew into nations. Thus, there would be no "national" groups called Ammon, Moāb, or Israel in early Iron I. Instead, there were tribes and tribal alliances. The biblical remembrances of these tribes as "nations" in premonarchic times are anachronisms, placing the Iron II concepts of monarchy and nationhood onto the earlier tribal entities.

It is at the beginning of this process, characterized by fluid tribal allegiances, that the settlements at 'Umayrī and its neighboring contemporary sites should be placed. Their presence must be accounted for by models which seek to understand the emergence of the tribal relationships which later became the national groups of the first millennium (Bienkowski 1992; Knauf 1992; Miller 1992). Indeed, the biblical remembrances of erstwhile kinship between Israel, Ammon, Moab, and Edom may reflect temporary tribal alliances that dissolved prior to nation formation. If so, the tribes in Transjordan that later became part of Israel (Reuben, Gad, Gilead, and Machir) may have been, at some point in Iron I, allied with Ammon, Moab, and/or Edom and may not have always been part of the tribal confederacy known as Israel on the Merneptah Stele. For some reason, these alliances broke down prior to nation formation and some of the tribes of Transjordan moved their associations westward, taking with them, however, the remembrances of old relationships expressed in terms of kinship in the Bible.

But unfortunately, because archaeology does not usually provide evidence for finely tuned tribal distinctions in the finds that we make, we cannot be certain which tribal group settled at 'Umayrī. There are three possibilities which come most easily to mind. First, 'Umayrī could represent the settling process of the tribe or tribal alliance that became Ammon. But there is no literary hint that this was so other than the textual evidence that 'Umayrī was in Ammonite territory in Iron II. Moreover, the Iron I finds from the 'Ammān region itself seem to be somewhat later than ours (Saḥāb); are extremely fragmentary (Ammān Citadel); or come from sites whose finds are, while contemporary, completely different than ours (al-Baq'ah). Other possibilities include the tribe of Reuben which would ultimately become part of the Israelite confederacy (Cross 1988; Herr 1997) The presence of highland material culture, however, does not identify a site with a specific tribal alliance, but, as London has pointed out (1989), reflects a highland tribal lifestyle or culture rather than specific tribal allegiances.

Conclusion

The question of who these people were cannot be known for certain, though I have made tentative suggestions elsewhere (Herr 1997). Instead, we should identify them as partakers in a process of tribal settlement that was similar to many other groups in the highlands of both Transjordan and Cisjordan. 'Umayrī and its neighboring sites were most likely part of a coherent group that began the settlement process in the late 13th century BC in the region along the Kings' Highway south of 'Ammān. They prospered because of trade on that route and may have been violently destroyed because of it, as well. The similar finds from Tall al-Fukhār in the north may also indicate the active movement of goods along this route.

Following the destruction, 'Umayrī was reduced in size and importance, but continued on, as did Ḥisbān and most likely the other sites of the region.

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