

TWO CAMPAIGNS OF EXCAVATIONS ON THE ANCIENT TELL OF JARASH

by
F. Braemer

In 1985 and 1986, the French Institute of Archaeology in the Near East (IFAPO) conducted two campaigns of soundings in Jarash, on the small hill now called "Museum Hill" (and formerly "Camp Hill" and "Rest House Hill"), south of the Roman city, in front of the Zeus temple.

The campaigns took place respectively from April 27th to May 23rd, 1985 and from May 1st to June 20th 1986. The team included M. al-'Audat, C. Cretaz, O. Dussard, P. Thevenin, M. Vallerin (archaeologists), J.P. Lange (draftsman), R. Villier de la Noue (architect), G. Humbert (registrar), under the direction of F. Braemer. The Department of Antiquities was represented in 1986 by M.M. Smadeh. We are very grateful to the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, particularly to Dr. A. Hadidi, General Director, and A. Nagawi, then Inspector of Antiquities of Jarash, for assistance (salary of four workers in 1985, tools' loan, housing) and welcome in Jarash.

The aim of this excavation was to test the existence of the pre-Roman settlement of Jarash, its chronology and extension. Already in 1930, Fisher (1932, p. 5-10) suspected that the ancient city extended on this small hill. Soundings made before the construction of the excavation house were inconclusive, reaching only Byzantine levels.

Successive finds in the 70's proved the existence of an Iron Age site in the south part of the city. Sherds were discovered during the excavations by Jordan University in 1975-77 (Barghouti, 1982, p. 224), and ceramics of an important Iron Age tomb were salvaged during the construction of the new rest house in 1979 (Zayadine, 1981). Later, excavations near the South Gate conducted in 1983-84 by the French team of the Jarash International Project, exposed patches of *in situ* floors with Iron Age pottery at the foot of the Zeus temple south wall (Seigne, 1986, p.

45). Systematic survey of the south part of the city followed by excavations confirmed the former hypothesis of the existence of a large pre-Roman settlement here.

The museum hill (alt. 580 m.) is an oval shaped rocky spur lying north-south between the south *decumanus* and the rampart (Fig. 1). Before the construction of the oval plaza, in Roman times, the hill (ca. 3 ha) had a sharper profile than now, overlooking Wadi Jarash, 50 m. lower to the east, and another wadi, ca. 20 m. lower to the west.

For practical reasons (location of sound and light installations, museum and trees) choice was made of the south slopes of the hill for soundings. Ten 4 x 4 m. excavation squares were opened. The 5 x 5 m. grid system used by the French team on the Zeus temple was extended to this area. Five soundings were grouped on the central terrace — AE-AF.80-82 — and five distributed around for exploration purposes — Y-Z.77, AA.78, AE.88, AI.80. Three of them, Y-Z.77 and AE.88 were inconclusive due to the depth of modern bulldozer dump. Archaeological features were exposed on some 125 sq.m. and pre-Roman levels reached only on 60 sq.m.

The general stratigraphic structure of deposits is now well established, being similar over the whole area. A huge domestic complex of Byzantine-Umayyad date (2-3 m. thick) was built after general levelling and terracing of the slope. This operation destroyed nearly all remains from late Hellenistic and Roman times, attested only by pits and small floors patches, and Iron Age layers were frequently reached by Byzantine wall foundations. Under Iron Age levels lay well preserved floors of Middle Bronze IIC and Late Bronze Age. Bedrock was reached in one point of the excavation in AF.80, proving that, in this part of the tell, there is no more ancient layers.

A succession of two MB IIC/LB I

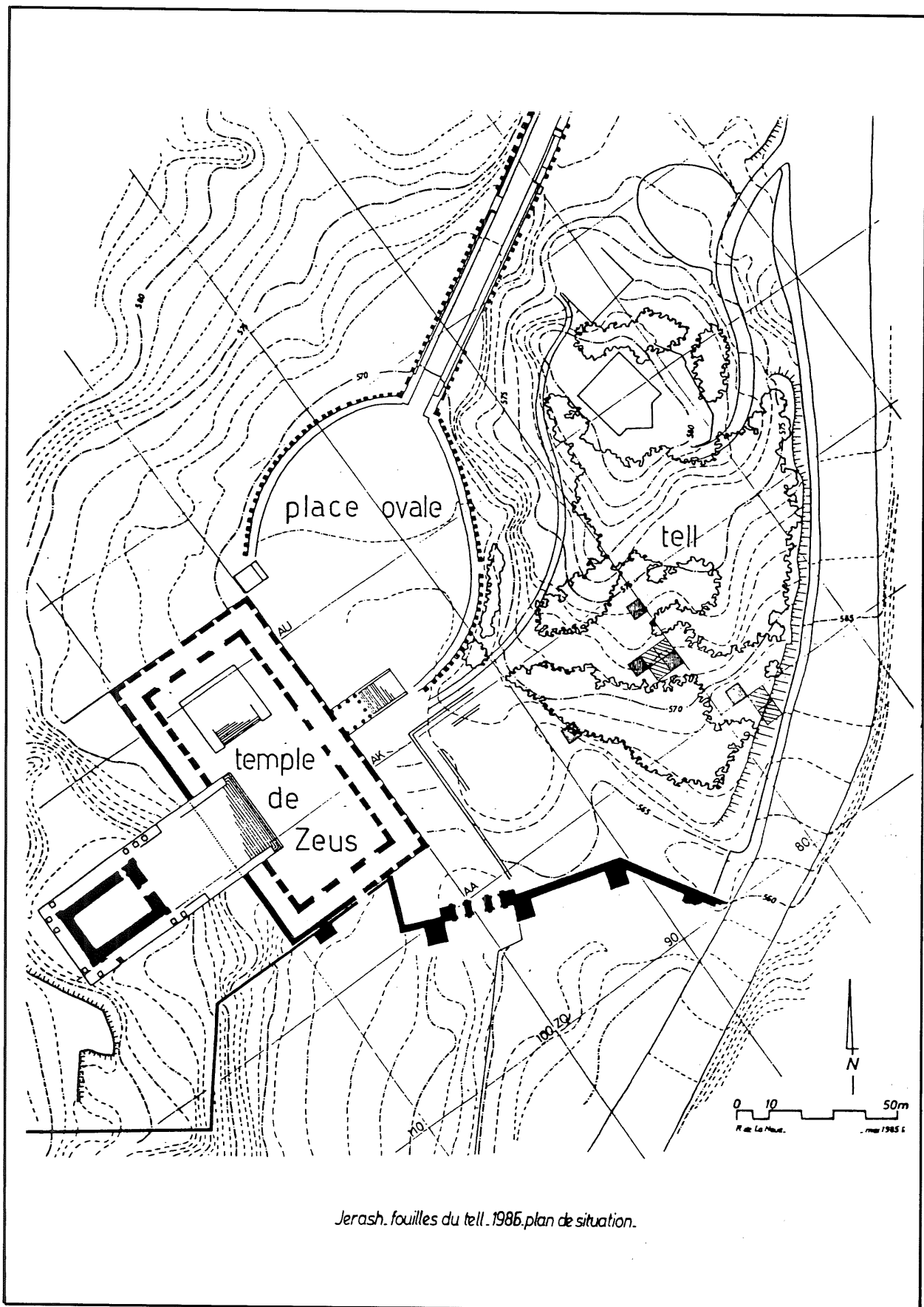


Fig. 1: Jarash, plan of the south area (R.V. de la Noue).

floors was exposed in soundings AA.78, AE.80 and AE.81, with a rich sample of associated ceramics: different types of "chocolate on white" and white slip cups (Fig. 2:3-4) and jugs, bowls with S sharp carination and flaring high rim, large red slip burnished round bowls (Fig. 2:2), and jars with thickened profiled rims (Fig. 2:1). The surface exposed is too small to identify architectural remains.

Four floors belonging to the end of the LB and Iron I were found in the central area of the excavations. Two of them are plastered and burnt. The more ancient one is associated with a wall, visible over one meter only, in AE.80. On the later floors a *tannur* and a curious structure of two small pits lined with pebbles were exposed. The close stratification indicates a continuity in the settlement during the whole period.

Late Bronze Age pottery is illustrated by small biconical painted jugs, and carinated bowls with high vertical rim (Fig. 2:5-6). It seems that cooking pots with profiled rims, often characteristic of the Iron Age I, appear in this period (Fig. 2:7). For the Iron Age I, collar rim pithoi (Fig. 2:8), S shaped bowls, large coarse plates and cooking pots are significant.

Iron Age II floors were often destroyed by Byzantine walls. Pottery *in situ* was exposed in AA.78 and AI.80, but the main part of the sherds is mixed with more recent material. Characteristic are cooking pots with the late evolution of profiled rims, large globular bowls (Fig. 2:8), hole mouth jars and some fragments of red slip burnished ware.

The Iron Age period was certainly a time of great extension of the settlement: It hill seems totally settled as far as the "Agora" area on the *Cardo Maximus*, floors of this period were exposed on the Zeus temple hill slope, and sherds were also found on the east side of Wadi Jarash, in front of the Museum Hill.

After the 7th cent. B.C. the tell was apparently deserted until the middle of the 2nd cent. B.C. Two large pits contained a large pottery sample of the end of the 2nd cent. and 1st cent., and in soundings Z.77-AA.78, a floor of the 1st cent. B.C. was exposed. Pottery is quite similar to

finds in the area of the Zeus temple (Braemer, 1986, p. 63-66), characterized mainly by oriental sigillata and its regional imitations. These regional imitations quickly became an autonomous fabric with its own shape evolution: predilection for carinated cups and rounded goblets, often rouletted. But all the repertoire of late Hellenistic and 1st cent. shapes is represented (rounded bowls, fish plates, moulded grey ware, rouletted "Nabataean" ware, common ware, moulded lamps with radial decoration etc...). All the hill was certainly the habitation quarters of the city in front of the sacred area of the Zeus temple during one and half centuries.

Of the Roman period (3rd-4th cent.), only 2 sq. m. of floor are preserved, around the mouth of a large pithos set in the ground. During the 7th cent. A.D., the area's topography was remodelled to settle an habitation quarter. This urbanistic operation seems quite similar to one identified near the south *decumanus* (Gawlikowski, 1986, p. 107ff): houses are grouped in *insulae* with internal bent alleys. In central soundings, a narrow angle alley divides two complexes. A large part of the northern one was excavated. It is composed of two houses delimited by well built, deeply founded walls, the interior walls being cruder. All walls were plastered. Two major occupation phases belonging to the 7th and 8th cent. A.D. were recognized. An earthquake (in the middle of the 7th cent. ?) destroyed the whole area. Collapse of superstructures preserved walls 2 m. high, and in one room a complete collection of domestic pottery was *in situ*.

The northern and eastern soundings illustrate a similar history of the area. A poor resettlement in the last part of the 8th cent. used tops of ancient walls. But recent bulldozer levelling erased a major part of the later structures. Finally, just under the surface, a presumably medieval cist tomb with a beheaded body was found.

This preliminary stratigraphic exploration of the ancient tell of Jarash gives us a totally new picture of the city's history. As elsewhere in the Wadi Jarash valley (Khir-

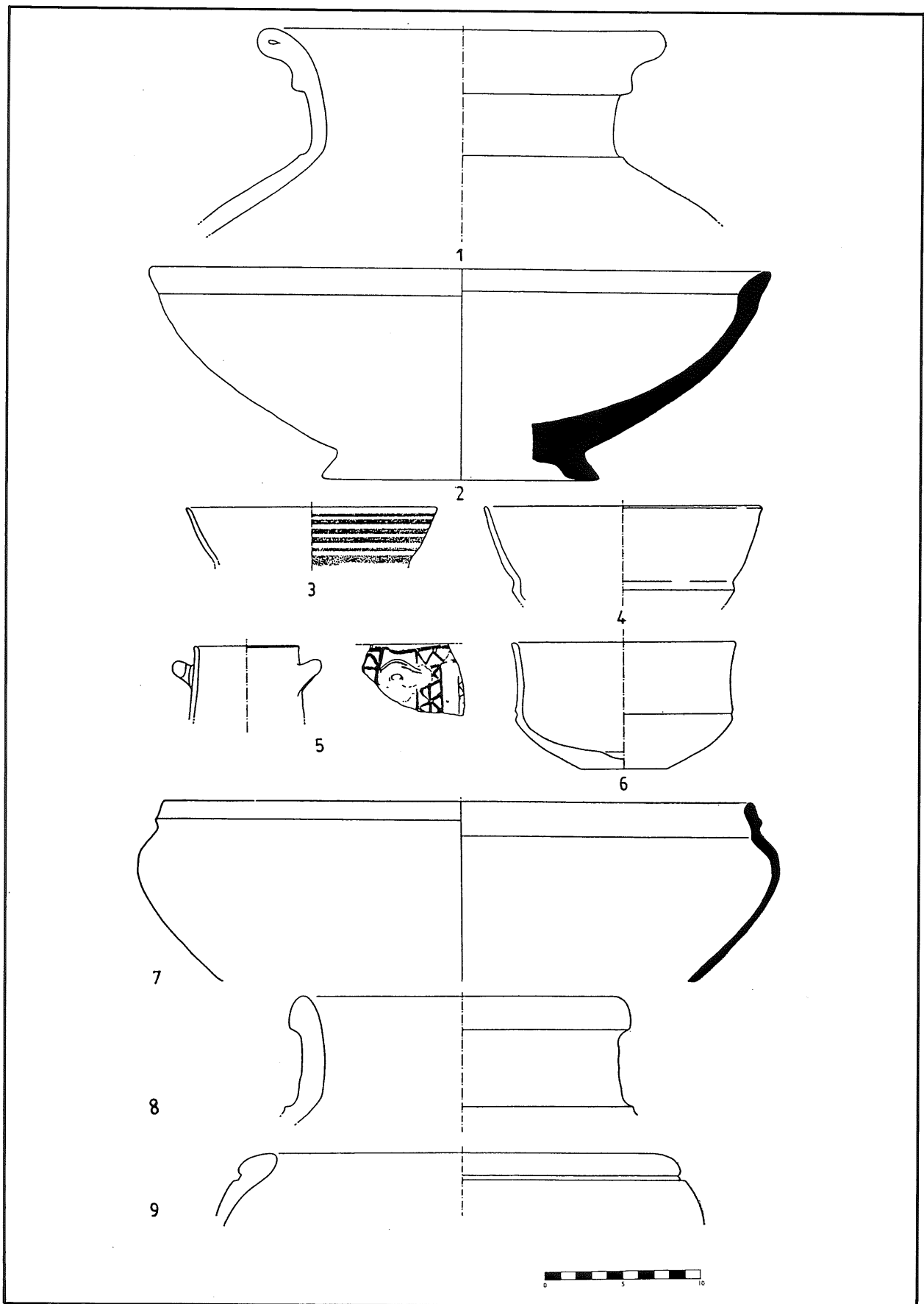


Fig. 2: Jarash, pottery from the ancient tell (JP. Lange, P. Thévenin).

bet Ras el-Medineh, and probably Suf, surveyed by J. Sapin) a major settlement phase on new sites took place in the middle of the second millenium B.C. Ceramics finds attest close relations with the Jordan Valley. Human occupation continued, apparently without major breaks, until the 8th-7th cent. B.C. Large regional relations attested in the beginning of the Late Bronze Age disappeared in the Iron Age, the ceramic repertoire of this period being less diverse, fitting well with that of the Amman-Irbid area. Jarash in the Iron Age is certainly the most extensive settlement in the valley.

The occupational gap between the 7th and the second part of the 2nd cent. B.C. raises once more the question of the Hellenistic foundation date of the city. On the tell, as in the Zeus temple area, no sherds can be dated before the middle of the 2nd cent. B.C. Till now, an early 3rd cent. B.C. city foundation by general

Perdiccas and veterans of Alexander's army is not sustained by archaeological data. This allows two hypothesis: either that the location of the Hellenistic settlement (perhaps a small garrison camp) lies in another place in the vicinity, or that the literary sources, all late, illustrate a glorious but legendary tale of the foundation of Gerasa. The recent discovery of the ancient tell of Jarash leads us to be cautious and to enlarge again ground research in the archaeological area. As usual in Jarash, a major part of Roman domestic remains are destroyed by Byzantine-Umayyad constructions. The importance of urban remodelling of the city in this period is once more attested by excavations on the tell.

One millenium and a half can now be added to the long history of Jarash.

F. Braemer
IFAPO

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