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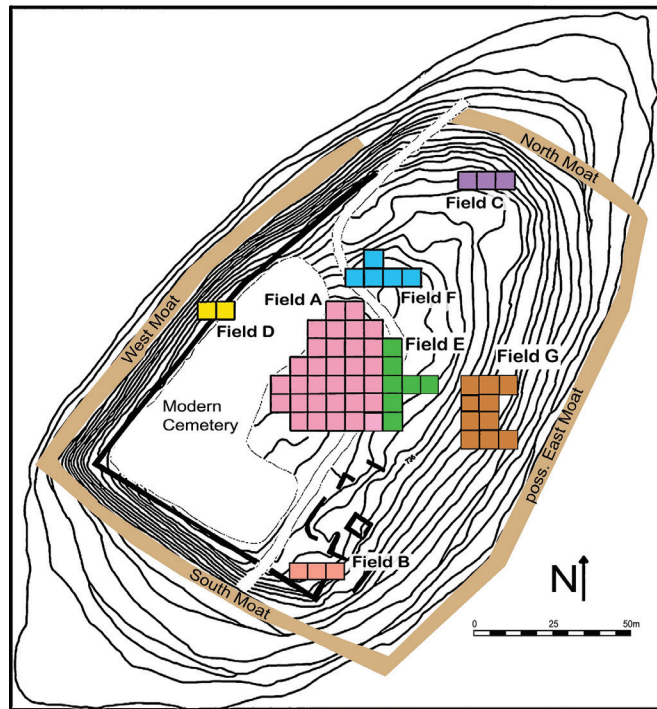
The Iron IIB Period at Khirbat ‘Atarūz

In the summer of 2000, a research team from La Sierra University initiated a multi-year excavation project at Khirbat ‘Atarūz and a survey of its surrounding areas. According to the results, the acropolis area of the site was intensely settled and used throughout most of the 9th c. BC (Late Iron IIA period), continuing into the subsequent centuries. Most of the architectural remains on the acropolis are associated with an Iron IIA temple complex, which was violently destroyed in the middle of the 9th c. BC (Ji 2011, 2012).

Based on the results of 2001–2009 fieldwork, the 2010–2019 excavations were expanded to the areas north and east of the acropolis, which yielded buildings dated to the Iron IIB period, covering the late 9th to the early 7th c. BC (Ji and Bates 2014, 2017, 2020; FIG. 1). In this paper, we attempt to summarize these later findings from ‘Atarūz. The Iron IIB period of ‘Atarūz so far comprises two phases. We will here

label them “Early” and “Late” Iron IIB for the convenience of discussion. The Early Iron IIB at ‘Atarūz corresponds to the transition from Iron IIA to Iron IIB with its suggested date of late 9th to early 8th c. BC. Late Iron IIB is attributed to the 8th c. BC even though it may extend to the early part of the 7th c. BC. The Early Iron IIB phase witnessed the erection of a Moabite shrine near the acropolis as well as the evolution of distinctive Moabite scripts at the site (Bean *et al.* 2018). Other noteworthy developments in the later phase include the prevalence of peculiar Moabite painted wares and the appearance of ashlar, single-row, and pillared walls, building techniques that were rarely used during the Iron IIA period at ‘Atarūz.

The prominent feature of Iron IIA at ‘Atarūz was that it was cultic and religious in nature, as best characterized by the large temple complex on the acropolis (Ji 2011, 2012). The situation for Iron IIB is



1. 'Atarūz contour map and excavated areas.



2. Moabite sanctuary in Field E.

different (*cf.* Schade 2017; Bean *et al.* 2018 for the historical context of the transitional period from Iron IIA to Iron IIB). It was predominantly domestic. To date, no unequivocal cultic architecture or installations, except for a small sanctuary in Field E, have been recognized as initially constructed in an Iron IIB context. None of the installations in the excavated areas could be definitively identified as cultic. Hence, this paper begins with a summary of the Moabite sanctuary before turning to the other Iron IIB remains. The accounts on the Moabite sanctuary were published in detail elsewhere (Ji 2018).

The Moabite Sanctuary

In 2010–2014, the excavations of Fields A and E, the latter being situated east of the acropolis area, revealed a small cultic building (FIG. 2) with a portable stone altar with inscriptions on the body. The building was defined as Moabite and assigned to the late 9th to the early 8th c. BC in light of stratigraphy, ceramic evidence, radiometric dating, and the script on the inscribed altar (Bean *et al.* 2018; Ji 2018). The interior of the building measured roughly 5 m x 5 m. The sanctuary was constructed directly above earlier architecture, which was part of the Iron IIA temple complex, with substantive renovation and modification.

This architectural development not only constituted the end of the Iron IIA impressive cultic and building activities on the acropolis, but also marked the beginning of the Iron IIB era at 'Atarūz, characterized by the arrival of new material culture and people, most likely the Moabites or local tribes allied with the Moabite Kingdom (*cf.* Routledge 2000, 2004 for the expansion of the Moabite kingdom during this period). Stratigraphic evidence inside the sanctuary was found for six primary field phases (FP E1–E6). The sanctuary was associated with Field Phase E4 (see below).

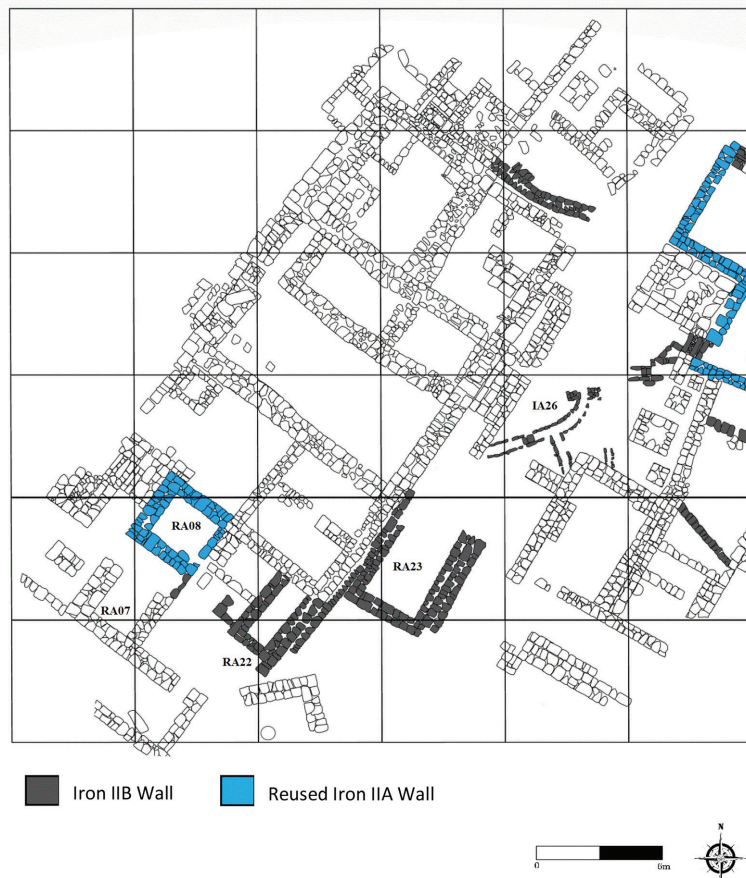
The Moabite sanctuary was distinctive in the way that it follows a square plan rather than the long-room design that was more or less standard for the majority of Iron II temples in the Levant (*cf.* Ji 2018 for a detailed treatment of this topic). A stone platform, offering tables, and a square altar were found inside the sanctuary. The finds from the sanctuary include a portable cuboid stone altar, a terracotta cup-and-saucer stand, and the aforementioned inscribed altar. The sanctuary now seems to be the earliest known example of Moabite cultic building from central Jordan (*cf.* Daviau 2017; Steiner 2019; Daviau and Steiner 2000 for the later Moabite cultic buildings in the region of Mudayna ath-Thamad).

Field A

Field A, composed of 32 squares (6 x 6 m), corresponds to the acropolis of the site and the area around it. The excavations yielded a large Iron IIA temple complex equipped with three sanctuary rooms, two high places, and a courtyard with multiple altars and cultic installations. A description of this temple complex is beyond the scope of the present paper, but its architectural and material finds were published in different venues over the years (Ji 2011, 2012; Ji and Bates 2014, 2017).

In Field A, the Iron IIB remains were unearthed above a thin layer of the Iron IIA debris that covered the temple's courtyard (FIG. 3). For example, a rectangular building (RA23; *ca.* 5 x 7 m) found in Square A7 is dated to the Iron IIB period. It abuts the eastern outer wall of the Hearth Room of the Iron IIA temple and has a preserved height of 70 cm. Approximately 3 m west of this building is another small rectangular room (RA 22) butting up against the southeast corner of the Hearth Room. It is 2 x 4 m in size. The room contained large quantities of neckless storage jar sherds from the Iron IIB–IIC period.

At the western entrance to the Iron IIA



3. Architectural remains in Field A.



4. Water channels in the temple courtyard (Field A).

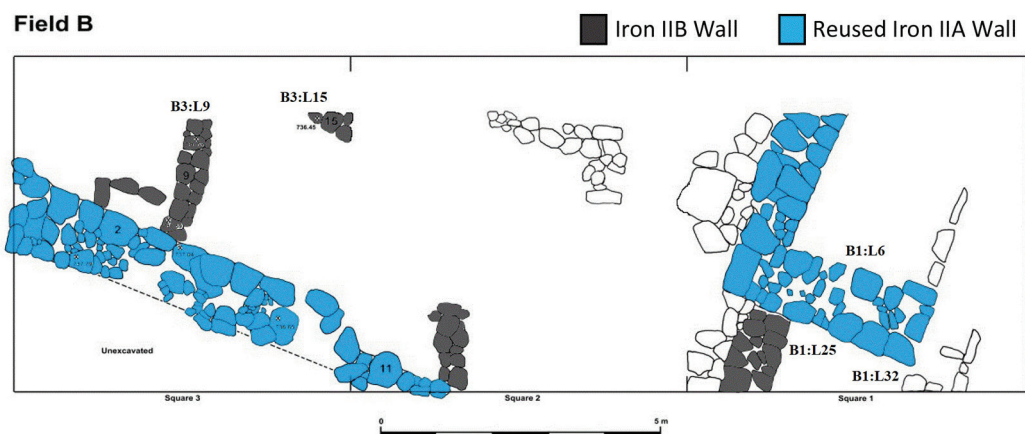
temple are two small rectangular rooms (RA07 and RA08). The overall plan suggests a gateway or path to the nearby Hearth Room and the Western High Place. These rooms were originally built during the Iron IIA period, one of which appears to have been reused during the Iron IIB period. The Iron IIB settlers cleaned the room and then placed a plaster floor after rebuilding some sections of the walls.

Further, the Iron IIB deposit from the temple courtyard area produced several sections of water channels (IA26) that still remain partially intact. The aqueduct was found best preserved in the temple courtyard in Field A (FIG. 4). It was about 8 m long, and the inner dimension of the channel was approximately 20 x 30 cm. The walls of the aqueduct were made of small flat slabs of stone with the inner side plastered. Certainly, the water channels were built to allow runoff rainwater from the surface to flow into the cisterns on the acropolis area, including the water cistern found in the western courtyard (Ji and Bates 2014: fig. 23). The aqueducts were ascertained in the soil layer over the temple courtyard surface and cultic architecture such as a large stone platform on the east end of the courtyard and the walls of the rectangular room that

produced the bull statue in 2010 (Ji 2012: pl. 46). The stratigraphy and pottery found in the water channels confirm its date of the 8th–7th c. BC.

Field B

Field B, on the southern side of the site, was opened in 2002 with one square (Square B1). During the 2015 season, we reopened Field B with two new squares: Squares B2 and B3 (FIG. 5). The excavations of Field B produced four architectural phases, one of which (Field Phase B3) is best attributed to the Iron IIB period (Ji, Bates, Hawkins, and Schade 2020). Central to Square B1 was a wall (Wall B1:L6) that was oriented toward the northwest. The early phase of this wall was built on bedrock and virgin soil, and the pottery from the associated loci pointed to the Iron IIA–IIB periods for its dating. This wall was abutted by two walls (Walls B1:L25 and B1:L32) from the south, both of which were erected on top of bedrock during the same period. There is a possibility that the first wall was part of the city wall or casemate system given its thickness and solidness (*ca.* 2.5 m thick and preserved up to 3.5 m high). This wall was perhaps originally built during Iron IIA but reused in the Iron IIB era. This second phase of use was associated



5. Architectural remains in Field B.



6. City Wall and Iron IIB deposit in Square B2 (2015).



7. City Wall and Iron IIB walls and floors in Square B3 (2015).

with a cobble floor covering the northern half of the square as well as running through the northern balk.

The city wall was visible above ground to the west of Square B1. Hence, Square B2 was laid out with a portion of this wall protruding above the soil in its southwestern corner. In 2015, a deep probe was dug along the city wall in the southern part of the square, which yielded a hard-packed clay floor (FIG. 6). This beaten earth floor included Iron IIA–IIB pottery. Square B3 was opened to the west of Square B2 (FIG. 7). The city wall, as in Square B2, was exposed transecting the square from its southeastern corner to its western side, where it continues to the west. Further, a smaller wall (Wall B3:L9) was discovered abutting the city wall and running north into the northern balk. The areas on the western and eastern sides of this wall were excavated down to what appeared to be an Iron IIB floor level. On the western side of the space, tabun fragments were found along with krater, jar, bowl, and cooking pot fragments, all dating to the Iron IIA–IIB period. On the eastern side, additional tabun fragments were located in the northern and southwestern corners of the locus, once again along with multiple Iron IIB pottery sherds. This area seems to have served as an area for preparing food. Additionally, another small wall (Wall B3:L15) was discovered transecting the floor in its northeastern corner, and the excavation of the floor revealed that the north-south wall was later than the city wall, probably dated to the Iron IIB period.

Field E

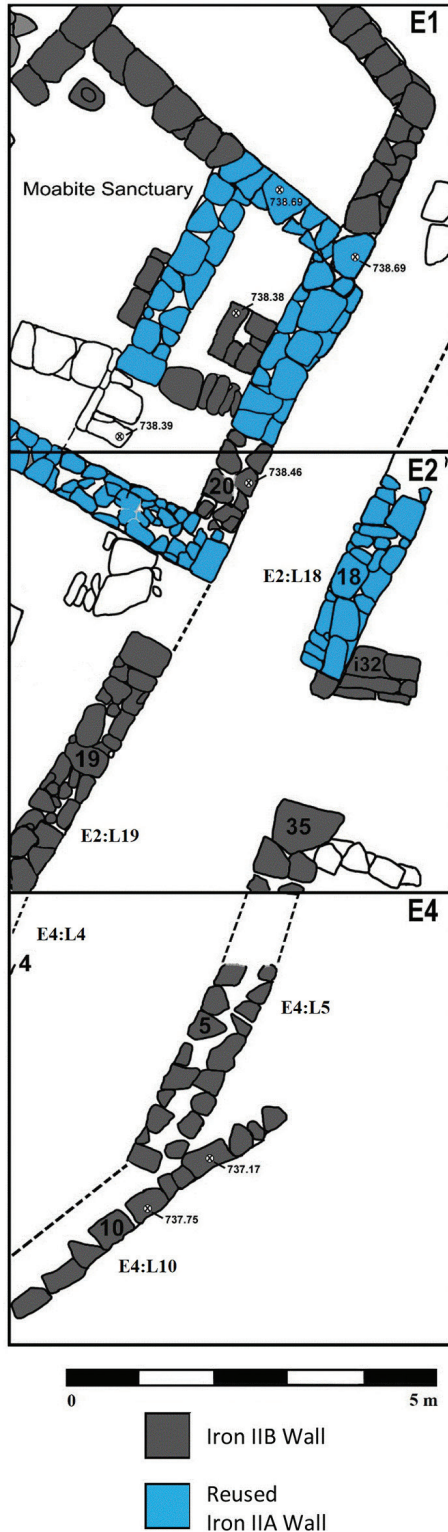
Field E is located in the eastern part of the acropolis. As said above, the compound that was exposed from Square E1 during the fieldwork of 2010–2014 has been identified as a Moabite shrine (Ji 2018). This result motivated the project team to extend the excavations southward and northward. A

total of 24 m represented by Squares E1–E5 were opened during the 2012–2017 field seasons. In 2019 the area was extended to the east by Squares E6–E7.

In relation to the Moabite shrine, Ji (2018) described the stratigraphy of Field E that was broken down into five phases spanning the modern period (Field Phase E1) to the Iron IIA period (Field Phase E5). Between these two phases were one mid-Islamic layer (Field Phase E2) and two Iron IIB phases (Field Phases E3 and E4). The Moabite shrine was attributed to Field Phase E4.

Unlike Field Phase E4, the Phase-E3 stratum in Field E is characterized by domestic activities with small rooms and wall lines. In detail, in Square E2, the excavations revealed two wall lines (Walls E2:L18 and E2:L19; FIG. 8). During the 2012–2015 seasons, five beaten earth floors or hard surfaces were found east of Wall E2:L19, the area corresponding to the southern section of the square (FIG. 9). The presence of a similar floor/hard surface sequence was noted in the northern section of the square as well, concurring with the alley area between Wall E2:L18 and the Moabite sanctuary. Below the earliest floor/hard surfaces were bedrock and a layer of terra rosa soil.

Wall E2:L18 was a long solid wall (3 m long and 70 cm wide) extending to Square E1. Large boulders under Wall E2:L18 served as foundation stones that were placed directly on bedrock. The construction of this wall, along with the earliest floor/hard surface layer, was assigned to Field Phase E5. However, it was continuously used throughout Field Phases E3 and E4. Differently from Wall E2:L18, the construction of Wall E2:L19 associates with Field Phase E4. It is a long wall that divides the square into the eastern and western sections. The wall, oriented northwest for a length of 3 m, ranges from 40 to 60 cm wide and currently stands 40 to 60 cm high.



8. Architectural remains in Squares E1, E2, and E4.

For Wall E2:L19, the builders first dug a foundation trench into the Phase-E5 floors and then erected the wall on bedrock in a northeast-southwest direction. Further, at the southeastern corner of the square was a stack of stone blocks, assignable to Iron IIB, that poked out from the balks. It can be part of a wall or a certain stone installation. Its function and date await future excavations.

Concerning Square E4, the excavations revealed three wall lines. First, Wall E4:L5 was exposed in the northern part of the square and measured 2.5 m long, 80 cm wide, and 50 cm high. It was oriented north-south and continued north into Square E2. Wall E4:L5 was stratigraphically connected with Wall E2:L19 in Square E2. Thus, we provisionally assign Wall E4:L5 to Field Phase E4. Probably to be attributed to Field Phase E3, Wall E4:L10 was the second wall in Square E4, a wall we encountered directly south of Wall E4:L5. This wall extends the full length of the square in the direction of southwest-northeast, and six courses are exposed on its south side. Iron Age II pottery was found near the wall and in earth layers associated with the wall, but excavations ended before the floor could be identified. Lastly, evidence for another wall (Wall E4:L4) came from the northeast corner of the square. It was a two-row, three-course wall with a 20-degree orientation that appeared to be the continuation of Wall E2:L19.

Based on stratigraphy it is now possible to provisionally sequence the building episodes of the Iron IIB walls in Field E. It is apparent that Wall E4:L10 (Field Phase E3) was found on the earth layers sealed against Wall E4:L5 (Field Phase E4) that was contemporaneous with Wall E2:L19 and probably Wall E4:L4. On the other hand, Wall E2:L19 was built on the bedrock, cutting the surface layer on which Wall E2:L18 was constructed. Thus, it is clear that Wall E2:L18 predates Wall E2:L19 and would be attributed to Iron IIA (Field



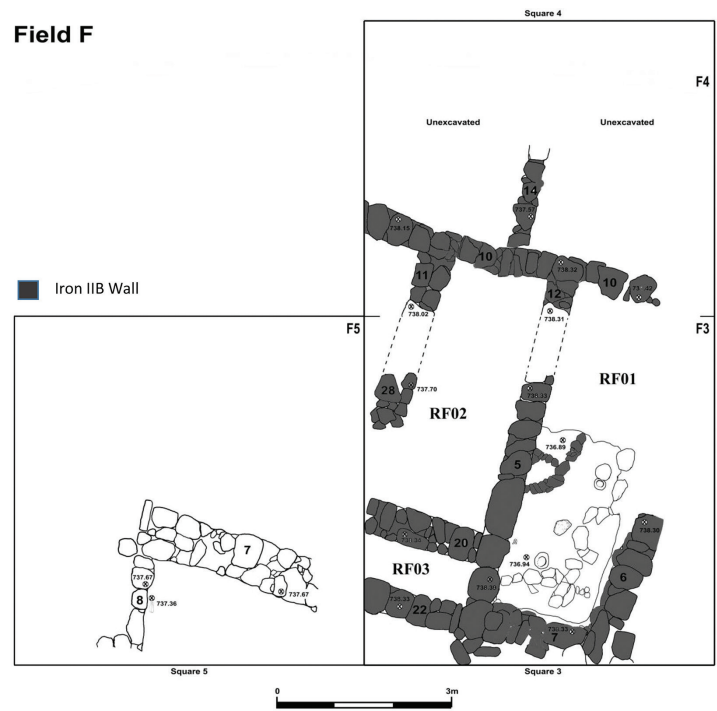
9. Iron IIB walls and floors in Square E2 (2012).

Phase E5). At the northwestern corner of Square E2 are the eastern and western walls of the Moabite shrine in Square E1. These sanctuary walls consist of the lower and upper sections (Ji 2018). The upper section of the shrine walls must be assigned to Early Iron IIB (Field Phase E4), while the lower section is dated to Iron IIA (Field Phase E5).

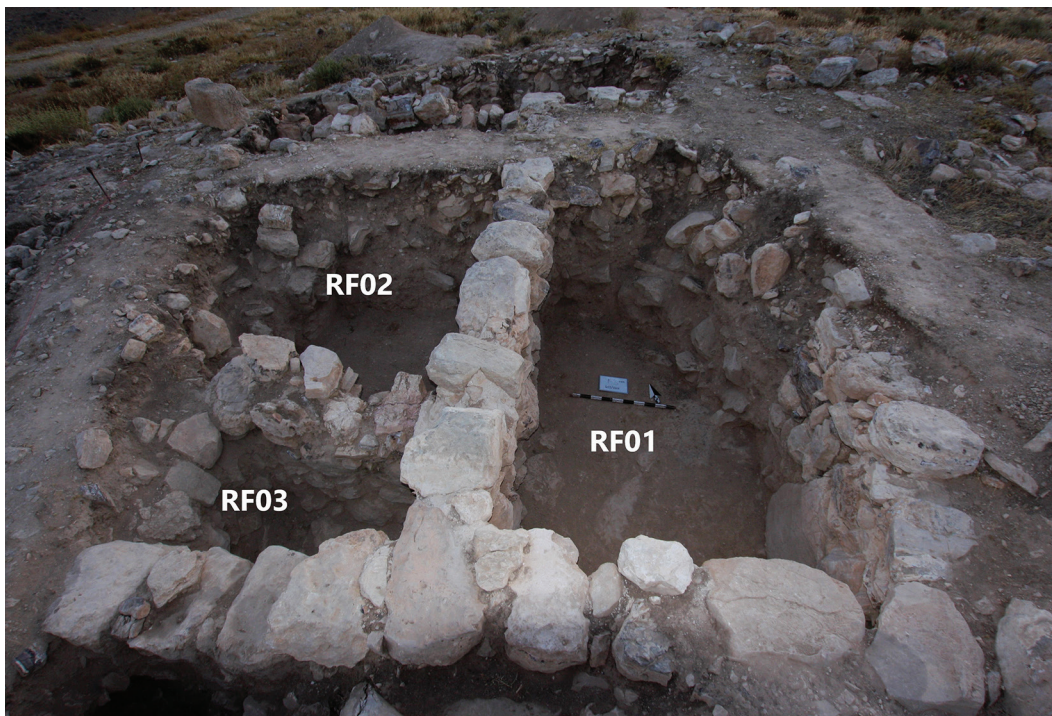
Field F

Field F is situated on a natural terrace north of the acropolis. Noteworthy from this field is an Iron IIB building with a couple of small rectangular rooms (RF01–RF03) that were exposed in Squares F3 and F4 (Ji and Bates 2014, 2017; FIG. 10). Specifically, in Square F3, the remains of a single-row stone wall are still standing to a height of about 2 m (FIG. 11). The rooms contained two layers of Iron IIB beaten earth floors placed on top of the Iron IIA floor. This Iron IIA floor represents the earliest period

in Field F (Field Phase F5), one seemingly contemporaneous with the Iron IIA temple on the acropolis. The Iron IIB floors contained a large number of diagnostic Iron IIB potsherds dated to the 8th–7th c. BC. The Early Iron IIB floor (Field Phase F4) was associated with the building's walls that were comprised of large unhewn boulders. It is as yet unclear, due to limited exposure of the area, whether this early wall was dated to Iron IIA and reused by the subsequent Iron IIB settlers or built concurrently alongside with the Early Iron IIB floor. Meanwhile, the Late Iron IIB period (Field Phase F3) typically produced flimsy walls made up of small to medium-sized stone blocks. A small rectangular platform (IF01) was carefully constructed in the south end of the room (RF03; cf. Ji and Bates 2014: fig. 14). It was most likely used as a storage bin, on which a complete Iron IIB collared-rim storage jar was found *in situ* in 2012 (Ji and Bates 2014:



10. Architectural remains in Field F.



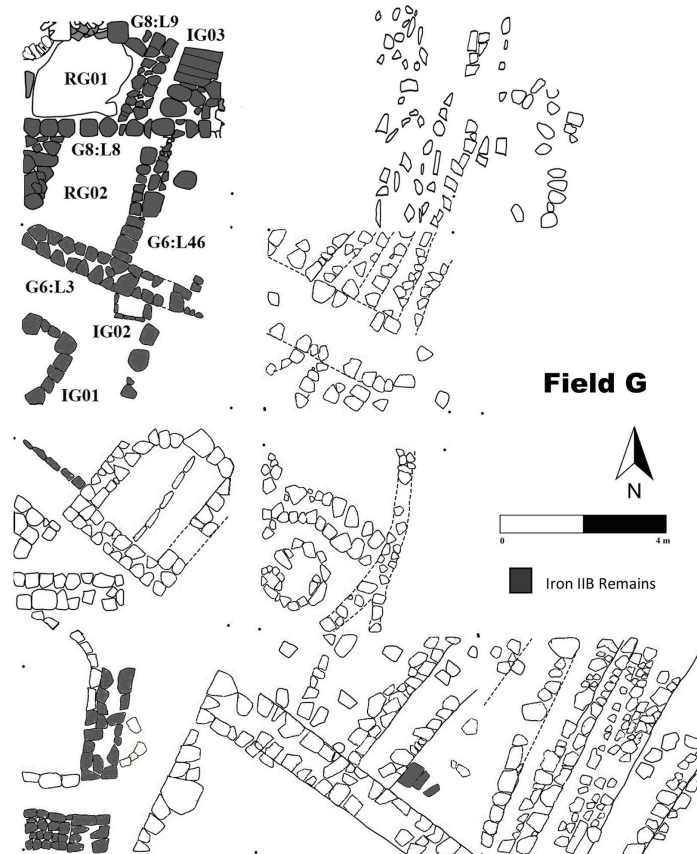
11. Iron IIB walls and floors in Square F3 (2015).

fig. 18). Stratigraphically, this installation is linked with the Late Iron IIB phase floor.

Directly to the north of Square F3 is Square F4, in which another Iron IIB building was unearthed in 2012–2015. Its 30 cm wide walls suggest that it adopted the same building technique that was observed during the late-floor phase in Square F3. Central to this building was a small rectangular room without any installations. But, as in Square F3, the excavations of the room provide the evidence of two Iron IIB usage phases, both represented by beaten earth floors and associated pottery sherds. Excavations of Square F4 has not yet reached the Iron IIA floor level found in Square F3.

Field G

Field G is pertinent to the southeastern slope of the mound. So far, clear Iron IIB evidence (Field Phases G4–G5) has been uncovered from two squares of the field: Square G6 and Square G8 (FIG. 12). Square G6 is characteristic of a major wall (Wall G6:L3) that spans the length of the square, running in a roughly east to west orientation (FIG. 13). It is a two-row wall (*ca.* 1.2 m) with a current height of 1.5 m on average, solidly constructed of medium to large boulders. To the south of this wall, and comprising the majority of the square, a sequence of possible hard surfaces emerged with Iron IIB pottery sherds along with grinding



12. Architectural remains in Field G.



13. Iron IIB installations and walls in Square G6 (2017).

stones on the surfaces.

Excavations at the southwestern corner of the square revealed a rectangular platform (IG01; *ca.* 1.5 x 2.5 m), possibly a storage bin, built using field stones in boulder-and-chink formation with walls that included stone pillars. The platform was raised about 1 m above the Early Iron IIB beaten earth floor (Field Phase G5). In the central section of the square, another rectangular stone installation (IG02) was unearthed. It was formed by three deliberately constructed stone sides, forming a rectangular enclosure (65 x 180 cm). The installation included a flat, rectangular basalt stone partially covering its compacted surface. The southeast corner of this installation was flanked by what appeared to be a possible large lintel, although this could have been part of a series of large monoliths that were intermittently used to construct Iron IIB walls or roofs.

As in Square G6, the remains found in Square G8 are almost exclusively of an Iron

IIB date (FIG. 14). This square is mostly characterized by a small room (RG01) that is neatly and well preserved. The northern wall of this room includes two large, vertical ashlar stones creating a doorway into the room. There are two or three stone courses underneath the threshold of the entryway before bedrock is reached. The initial floor is attributed to the Early Iron IIB period (Field Phase G5). It used larger and smaller stones, as well as earth to create a compact surface atop the bedrock. Immediately to the east of this room, there was an impressive staircase (IG03) consisting of at least five large, rectangular flat stones. These stairs are situated within an encasement on their eastern and western sides. We are currently unable to date this installation precisely, but future seasons may attribute it to the Iron IIB period along with the buildings in Square G8.

Along the southern side of Square G8 is Wall G8:L8 (*ca.* 70 cm wide and 2



14. Iron IIB buildings and staircase in Square G8 (2019).

m long) that traverses the entirety of the square. It is perpendicular to Wall G8:L9 and runs in a precisely east-west direction. Further excavations revealed another wall that joins Wall G8:L8 at a right angle. This wall is the continuation of Wall G6:L46 that we uncovered in Square G6 in the 2017 season. A large ashlar stone helped form the foundation of Wall G6:L46. West of this wall is a square room (RG02; *ca.* 2.5 m x 2.5 m) accessed through a door in the wall. Massive amounts of pottery were discovered here on both sides of this wall. The assemblage included Iron IIB kraters, bowls, storage jars, jugs, and a lamp beside a couple of cooking pots attributed to Iron IIA. This area appears to have been used for storage or food preparation and consumption throughout the Early and Late Iron IIB periods.

To summarize, the Iron IIB period is very well represented at 'Atarūz. It is comprised of two phases. The early phase

is dated to the late 9th to the early 8th c. BC. It is certified so far in the Moabite shrine in Field E, the walls and buildings in Fields B, E, and F, and the multiple-room buildings in Field G. The architectural works in Fields B, E, F, and G, except for the sanctuary in Field E, were in continual use during the late phase of Iron IIB without any interruption. Moreover, this phase observed the construction of new walls, buildings, and water channels in the acropolis area. In other words, the evidence unearthed from Fields A and E suggest a steadily expanding settlement from Early Iron IIB to Late Iron IIB at the site.

The end of Iron IIB at 'Atarūz is as yet obscure in terms of cause and dating, but its ceramic assemblage is broadly dated to the 9th/8th to early 7th c. BC with the appearance of some late forms, usually dated to the Iron IIC period. But these late forms are rather limited in quantity at 'Atarūz. Further, their debut in the ceramic horizon probably took

place as early as the 8th c. BC. The absence or sparseness of some typical Iron IIC forms like offset-rim bowls and black-burnished wares at 'Atarūz further prevents us from assigning the end of the Iron II settlement to the late 7th–6th c. BC (Ji 2018; see below for the presence of these wares at Mudayna ath-Thamad). At this point, our interim suggestion is that the Iron II occupation at 'Atarūz terminated during the transition between Iron IIB and IIC or soon after the onset of the Iron IIC period, perhaps in the early 7th c. BC.

Regional Perspective

The following discussion is a brief synthesis of the Iron IIB remains in the regions of 'Atarūz, the Mādabā Plains, and the Dhībān Plateau. This exploration can help us understand the Iron IIB occupation of 'Atarūz in a regional context. From the succeeding discussion, we learn that the Iron IIB occupation at 'Atarūz was one example of many settlements that were widespread in central Jordan during the period. Indeed, it was part of a great settlement intensification in the region, most likely inaugurated by and maintained under the auspices of King Mesha, later kings, and the people of the Moabite kingdom.

To begin with the Mādabā Plains, the ruin of Mādabā contains a large Iron II fortification wall and several associated architectural remains (Harrison *et al.* 2000, 2003; Harrison 2009). The original phase of the fortification (Field B, western Mādabā) was constructed immediately upon bedrock, even though the date of the original wall is unknown. The wall appears to have been rebuilt and reinforced at least once, if not twice, during the Iron II period, bringing the wall to 5 m in width in some areas. A limited probe against the expansion wall reached Iron II levels, which produced a large volume of Iron II pottery. The combination of this pottery corpus and those from the southeastern section of the

city (Field A) suggests the presence of a fortified city at Mādabā during the Iron IIB period.

The published ceramic assemblage from Mādabā includes Moabite square cooking pots and painted wares along with several late Iron IIA cooking pots and a variety of Iron II storage jars such as ridged-neck, collared-rim, and neckless forms (*cf.* Harrison *et al.* 2000: fig. 9; Harrison *et al.* 2003: figs. 4–5). The corpus is strikingly similar in typology to those from the Moabite shrine and post-shrine occupation at 'Atarūz (*cf.* Ji 2018: figs. 8–9, 11). The Mādabā assemblage may include a limited number of later forms datable to Iron IIC, but they already made their debut during the Iron IIB period, which leaves us on shaky ground for convincingly arguing that there was a settlement at Mādabā in the Iron IIC period. Overall, the excavations at Mādabā support the existence of a fortified settlement during the Iron IIB period.

The remains at Jalūl also provide evidence for Iron IIB occupation (Yunker *et al.* 2007, 2009; Gregor *et al.* 2011, 2012). It is well represented by buildings in Fields A and F and a paved approach ramp in Field B (de Prestes, 2014). The Iron IIB city was abandoned or destroyed shortly after the 8th c. BC. Iron IIC presents a picture of a flourishing Ammonite town equipped with a large tripartite building (Field A) and an extensive water channel system (Fields G and W), both dated to the 7th c. BC. In addition, as was the case with Jalūl, ample remains of the Iron IIB period were found at Tall Jawa, which continued into the Iron IIC period (Daviau 2003). The flourish of the Jawa settlement is seemingly dated to the late 9th–7th centuries BC.

Rujm 'Atarūz is a fortress site, roughly 3.5 km east of Khirbat 'Atarūz, on a medium-sized rocky hill by the road between Libb and Machaerus (Ji 2016). According to the investigations, the fortress was built based on a single plan, enjoying the natural

protection provided by the height of the hillock. Its exterior walls were roughly 1.5 m thick. The fortress is estimated to have been *ca.* 17.5 x 18.0 m in size and stood up to at least 3.6 m above the ground. Given the current evidence available, Rujm 'Atarūz was seemingly constructed as a military outpost in the 9th c. BC and was in continuous use in the 8th–7th centuries BC. During these Iron II eras, the northern part of the fortress might have been utilized as a look-out podium or watchtower, whereas the southern side of the building was used for residence and domestic activities.

Turning to the south, we notice that Dhībān presents a similar version of Iron IIB stratigraphy to that of 'Atarūz, comprised of two major Iron IIB building phases. Particularly eminent is the discovery of a large palace-like public building at the summit (Area L; Morton 1955, 1989; Routledge 2004). This building, with multiple interior rooms, was built in the mid–late 9th c. BC. It measures larger than 21 x 43 m in size with important walls of up to 1.25 m in thickness. The building witnessed a renovation sometime in the 8th c. BC, which included the construction of a plastered water cistern and drain/conduit. Above the second building phase are the earth deposits with pottery sherds dated to the late 7th c. BC. Once again, as for Mādabā, the published pottery assemblage from the summit area is reminiscent of the Iron IIB corpus from 'Atarūz (*cf.* Routledge 2004: figs. 8.6–7).

Iron IIB evidence also prevails at Mudayna ath-Thamad in the northeastern Dhībān Plateau. Excavations at the site revealed a small Moabite sanctuary, a well-preserved six-chambered gate, a casemate wall, several pillared buildings, and a textile-related industrial complex along with many incense burners, stone basins, clay loom weights, and hundreds of astragali (Daviau *et al.* 2006, 2008, 2012). A clear illustration of Iron II stratigraphical sequences of

Mudayna ath-Thamad is not yet available in the literature, but it is very likely that the city was fortified at the beginning of the 8th (or end of the 9th) c. BC and thrived through the Iron IIB period until it came to an end near the end of the 7th c. BC when the town was attacked. Steiner (2013, 2019) dates the Moabite sanctuary to the 7th c. BC (*cf.* Daviau and Steiner 2000); similarly, she assigns the termination of the settlement to around 600 BC. This dating seems to be in line with the published pottery assemblage (Steiner 2009: figs. 3, 5, 7) that contains typical Moabite square cooking pots, grooved-rim cooking pots, and offset-rimmed black ware normally dated to the 7th–6th c. BC (Ray 2001: 144; Herr 2006; Daviau and Graham 2009; Tappy 2015: pl. 3.2.3:2).

Roughly 3 km west of Mudayna ath-Thamad is an open-air cultic site, Site WT-13 of the Wādī ath-Thamad survey, represented by a perimeter-wall enclosure covering an area of 7 x 14 m (Daviau 2017). The finds include a great number of ceramic statuettes, figurines, architectural models, amulets, miniature vessels, marine shells, and exotic geological samples, including fossils. The WT-13 site is dated to the 8th–7th c. BC.

In addition, Iron IIB saw the erection of a new fort on top of the abandoned Iron I settlement at Aroer (Dearman 1989: 185). The fort is a single unit occupying the area of 50 square meters (Olavarri 1965, 1969). It was circumvallated with a casemate wall that formed a defense structure of great strength. Inside the exterior wall was a residential structure comprised of multiple passages, walls, and rooms. A reservoir was dug in front of the northwest of the fort to store rainwater. Aroer experienced abandonment during the transition from Iron IIB to Iron IIC, probably early in the 7th c. BC (Olavarri 1993).

Finally, Balua was a flourishing town during the Iron IIB–IIC periods (Worschech 1989; Worschech and Ninow

1992). The recent excavations revealed a large Iron IIB house with multiple rooms (Selover 2019). The doors of the house were found preserved with door lintels, which is reminiscent of the large lintel stones found from the Iron IIB houses at 'Atarūz. The casemate fortification system appears to have been built in the Late Iron I/Early Iron IIA period (Acevedo 2019). But a renovation of the casemate room, adding a partition wall and beaten earth floor, took place during the Iron IIB era. The room was destroyed in a fire. To the west of the casemate wall was a hard-packed earth surface full of Iron IIB pottery. On top of this surface were large amounts of boulder tumble. The fire and rock tumble seem to be associated with the end of the Iron II settlement at Balua. Overall, Balua seems to have been a thriving town during the Iron IIB period, that came to an end during the Iron IIB–IIC transition or the early part of the Iron IIC period.

On the other hand, the arguments for an Iron IIB settlement intensification of the northwestern area of the Mādabā Plains do not all apply. Ḥisbān provides scanty evidence of Iron IIA and Early Iron IIB; the Late Iron IIB period was inhabited, at best, lightly, perhaps by some squatter settlement with no permanent architecture (Ray 2001). The modest Iron IIB era stands in sharp contrast with the Iron IIC occupation (Stratum 16), which was a prosperous town with clear Ammonite signatures. As in Ḥisbān, very little evidence for Iron IIA exists at Umayri (Herr 2018). Iron IIB is slightly better evidenced than Iron IIA as it is represented by pottery sherds and one wall line in Field L. Notwithstanding these finds, Iron IIB is overall very poorly represented at Umayri. Further, Herr (2018) denotes a complete settlement hiatus from the early 7th to late 7th c. BC at the site, after which a new settlement process began to reach its zenith in the 6th c. BC. This Iron IIC occupation should be attributed to the Ammonites.

The disparity of Iron IIB evidence between the Aaruz-Dhībān area and the northern Mādabā Plains gives credence to the view that the Iron IIB settlement intensification in central Jordan was related to the Moabites. The peak of the Moabite dominance would be designated to the late 9th and 8th c. BC. This view is not foreign to the archaeologists working in the region. Harrison and his colleagues (2003: 135), for instance, associated the Iron IIB settlement at Mādabā with Mesha and the Moabites. 'Atarūz was under the control of the Moabites during the Iron IIB period as well (Ji 2018). According to Ray (2001: 125), the Moabites inhabited Ḥisbān during the Iron IIB period. Olavarri (1993: 93) contended that Mesha was behind the construction of the impressive Iron IIB fort at Aroer. The nature of the Iron IIC settlements at Ḥisbān, Umayri, Jalūl, and Jawa is markedly different from that of the Iron IIB occupations in the region. They were Ammonite (*cf.* Daviau 1997). Ray (2001: 146) dates the transition from Iron IIB to Iron IIC at Ḥisbān to 712–11 BC after Moab defied Sargon II. This would seem to imply the decline of the Moabite hegemony in the region began near the end of the 8th c. BC or no later than the beginning of the 7th c. BC. 'Atarūz seems to fit this picture well.

Some Moabite towns along the trade route in the east, for example Mudayna ath-Thamad and Balua, would have survived longer, lasting to the end of the 7th c. BC (*cf.* Steiner 2013). The advance of the Ammonites to the northern and eastern Mādabā Plains and their prosperity and trade activities during the 7th–6th c. BC might have contributed to the greater longevity of these eastern towns compared with 'Atarūz in the west. The sudden emergence of a fortress at Lahun during the Iron IIC period after a long occupational gap at the site can be explained in the same context (*cf.* Homes-Fredericq 1989, 2002). These Iron IIC remains form a rough north-to-

south trade line along the desert fringe to the east of Moab's capital and the heartland of the kingdom. 'Atarūz was far from this region; thus its Iron II settlement perhaps came to an end, along with the decline of the Moabite power in the region, somewhat earlier than those of its counterpart cities in the east or near the Ammonite territory. This perspective also explains the seemingly relative sparsity of Iron IIC evidence at Dhībān and Mādabā. Rujm 'Atarūz ceased to function around the same time, as well.

Conclusion

The evidence from 'Atarūz suggests a continuous occupation at the site during Iron IIB, despite the extensive destruction of the city at the end of the Iron IIA period, ca. the mid/late 9th c. BC. A high density of material debris accumulated over about two centuries during the period of Iron IIB. A small sanctuary was present on the acropolis area during the Iron IIA–IIB transition. It was identified as a Moabite shrine that was used for about one century or less from the late 9th to the early 8th c. BC. Notwithstanding this discovery, overall, the cultic feature is tenuous, or at least decreasing in association with Iron IIB 'Atarūz. Other evidence for cultic activities, except for a couple of female figurines from the surface, have not yet been identified. Instead, the Iron IIB period at 'Atarūz is typical of a residential town whose occupants invested great time and effort in constructing domestic houses and water channels, which implies that they planned to occupy the site for an extended period. For defense, they seem to have largely reused the fortification walls from the Iron IIA period. Their assemblage of material culture, such as new architectural features and Moabite painted ware, can be contended to point to the Iron IIB residents' connection with the Moabites from the south. The finding of an inscribed Moabite altar from the shrine lends additional support to a high degree of association of the Iron IIB inhabitants with

the Moabite Kingdom.

The present conclusions concerning the Iron IIB period of 'Atarūz are derived from the ongoing excavations of rather limited areas in Fields B, F, and G. The continuation of excavations in these areas and their vicinity will enhance our comprehension of the Iron IIB settlement of the site, even possibly correcting some of our views professed in this paper. Further, we are not as yet entirely sure of when the Iron II settlement came to an end at 'Atarūz. The lack of typical Iron IIC and early Persian pottery found from the Mādabā Plains may posit the early 7th c. BC as the finish/end of the Iron II settlement at 'Atarūz. Yet, the Iron IIB–IIC ceramic typology and chronology south of the Mādabā Plains are not firmly established. At this point, it might be precarious to date the terminus of the Iron Age II of the 'Atarūz region based on the data from the north. The land mostly belonged to the Ammonites during this period. We will revisit this issue as excavations continue at 'Atarūz and other Iron II sites in the region of ancient Moab.

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