

RECYCLING THE VALLEY TALL DĀMIYAH EXCAVATIONS 2019

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Abstract

The ninth excavation season at Tall Dāmiyah took place from the 29th of September until the 31st of October, 2019. It was a joint project between the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, represented by Lucas Petit, and the Yarmouk University, represented by Zeidan Kafafi. Work was carried out in 5 squares on the summit of the *tall*. The main goal was to study the late 8th and 7th century BC levels and to relate the findings to other Iron Age sites in the vicinity. During the 2019 season adjacent rooms of the sanctuary were excavated resulting in the discovery of the main storage area of the complex. The team encountered numerous restorable vessels that were used to store mainly organic material such as barley and wheat. In the most northern squares late Iron Age layers were investigated, suggesting that after the destructive conflagration in the early 7th century BC, people remained at the site. During the 2019 season also some Persian-Hellenistic silos and Byzantine and Ottoman period graves were investigated.

Introduction

General Objectives and Importance of the Project

Recent archaeological and associated research has discovered intriguing short-term occupation activity in the Central Jordan Valley during most of the first millennium BC. Unknown in Near Eastern archaeology and even beyond, this form of sedentary occupation system forces scientists to widen their geographical scope in order to understand



1. Tall Dāmiyah in 2018, seen from the south (photograph by Yousef Al-Zu'bi).



2. The Zūr, close to Tall Dāmiyah.

how those people have interacted with the surrounding areas. Inhabitants of the Central Jordan Valley during Iron Age II and the Persian Period were avowedly involved in a continuing process of migration and return migration to search for the most favorite areas but with a sedentary way of life. Due to a complete lack of research in the foothills and on the plateau east of the Central Jordan Valley, archaeologist can only guess where the migrating people went to in times of difficulties.

The project Recycling the Valley intends to systematically investigate the role of the Central Jordan for the region during Iron Age II and the Persian Period. It continues at the point where other projects stopped: 1) the study in detail of the role of the site of Tall Dāmiyah in the valley that seems as one of the only site have been occupied almost without occupation breaks, 2) the investigation of settlements on the eastern plateau to see how their occupation system relates to the habitation of the Central Jordan Valley during the first millennium BC, and 3) the bounding of previous studies into one coherent picture. On one hand this project will come up with intriguing new information about first millennium BC sites, with evidence of destructive earthquakes, far distance trade and creative solutions against severe climatologic conditions, and on the other hand it will place investigated ancient settlements into the broader

first millennium BC society. Recycling the Valley is a stimulating story about people with emotions, creativeness and a long term vision of how to survive in a fertile but unpredictable environment. The project will re-define terms like sedentary and migration archaeologically and as a consequence will make people aware of pre- and historical solutions to recycle lands.

Tall Dāmiyah

The archaeological site of Tall Dāmiyah is situated in the Zūr, directly south of the confluence of the Az Zarqā' and the Jordan River (Lat. 32.1040000915527, Lon. 35.5466003417969). The site is surrounded from three sides by Katar-hills (the Rās Zaqqūm, the Sha'sha'ah and the Dāmiyah Katar) and is 500m east of the Jordan River. Across this river, at the western side, situates the Jiftik and the Marj An Na'jah belonging to the Nablus district in Palestine. Tall Dāmiyah is considered the most southern settlement with Iron Age occupation in the Jordan Valley, beside *talls* situated in oases (e.g. Jericho, Tall Nimrīn and Tall Al Hammām). The site covers an area of approximately 3 hectares at the bottom and has relatively steep slopes all around, rising approximately 17m above the recent ground surface. It consists of two parts, the upper *tall* and a lower terrace that occupies the western and southern sides. Especially the



3. Tall Dāmiyah (MEGA number: 2750, DAAHL Site number: 353200251).

upper *tall* has a strategic position and today commands the Prince Muhammad Bridge over the Jordan River. In addition, it dominates the N-S road through the Jordan Valley and the E-W road connecting ancient Ammon with the Wādī Al Fāri‘ah. The area in which the site is situated is very fertile and today well irrigated.

Tall Dāmiyah is one of the few sites with a continuing occupation during the Iron Ages (Petit *et al.* 2006; Petit 2008; Petit 2009: 103-149). This fact is remarkable when recounting the parallel discontinuity of the other Iron Age sites in the area (*e.g.* Yassine 1988; Van der Kooij 2001; Petit 2009). Small soundings at this settlement mound in 2004 and 2005 by Dr. Lucas Petit and Dr. Omar al-Ghul (Yarmouk University) have resulted in intriguing information about late Iron Age occupation and Neo-Assyrian presence along the river Jordan (Kaptijn *et al.* 2005; Petit *et al.* 2006; Petit 2009b) and about the Byzantine Period (Petit 2015). In 2012 it was decided to start an in-depth study of the site of Tall Dāmiyah in order to understanding the role of the Middle Jordan Valley. Under the auspices of the National Museum of Antiquities in the Netherlands and a little later the Yarmouk University, an international team of archaeologists and specialists opened squares on the summit. Preliminary results of the 2012 up to the 2018 seasons are, or will be, published in the Annual of the Department of Antiquities (Petit 2015; Petit *et al.* in press; Kafafi and Petit 2018; Petit and Kafafi 2018) and are published in Near Eastern Archaeology (Petit and Kafafi 2016) and AJA online (Kafafi and Petit 2016).

Excavation work in 2019 was resumed at the site of Tall Dāmiyah as a joint Jordanian-Dutch project under the directorship of Zeidan Kafafi of the Yarmouk University and Lucas Petit of the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities. With the cooperation of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan represented by Rami Fraihat the team worked between the 29th of September until the 31st of October 2019. The aim of this season was to get a more substantial view of late Iron Age levels, especially the occupation relating to the sanctuary found in previous seasons. In order to investigate adjacent rooms, we opened 4 new squares on the summit (X, XVII, XVIII and XIX) and continued in one older square

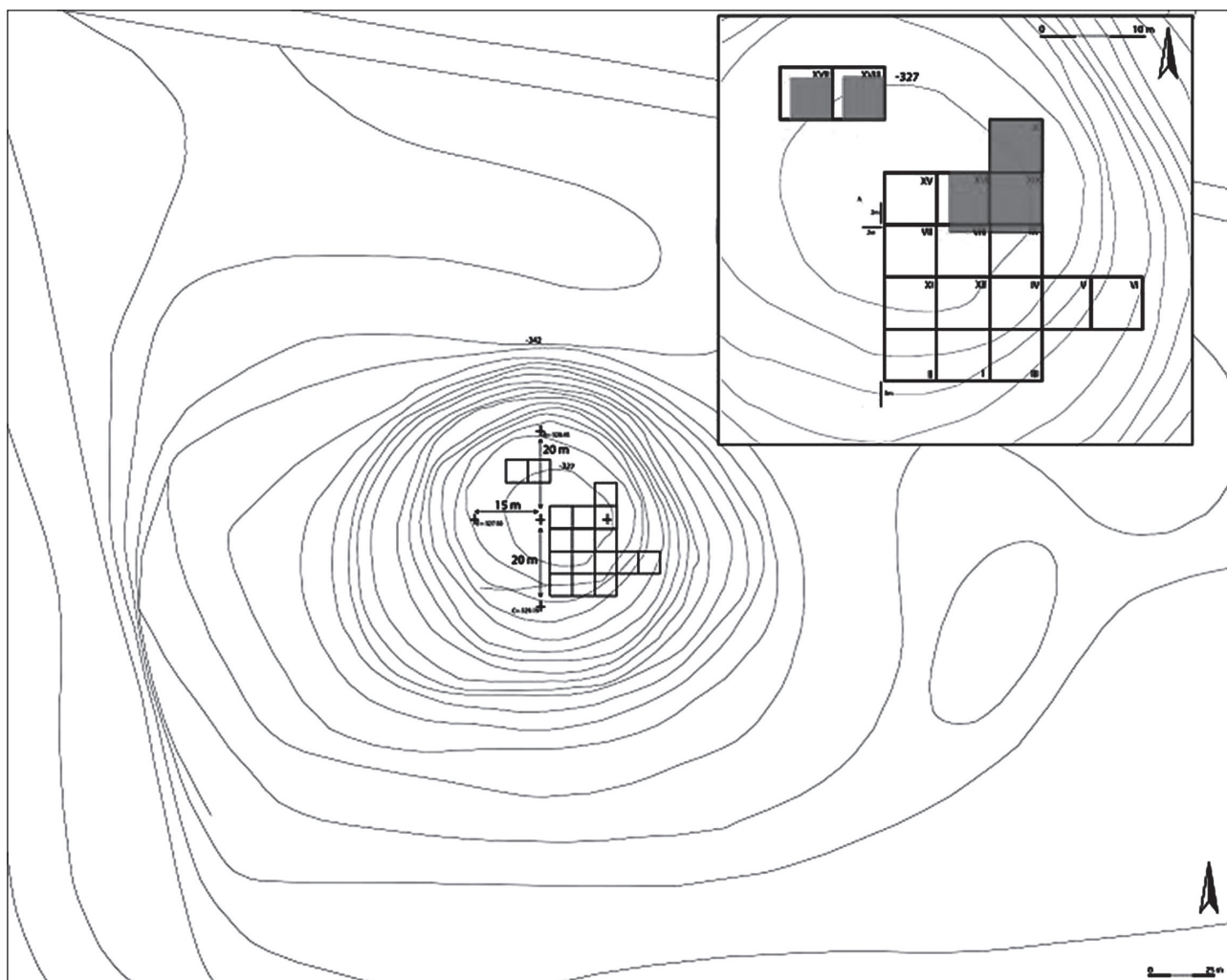
(XVI). Tall Dāmiyah is one of the few sites in the Southern Levant with Neo-Assyrian objects, including cuneiform writings. Furthermore, the spectacular discovery of a Byzantine cemetery on top of Tall Dāmiyah is valuable to understand the late-Antiquity in the Jordan Valley. Erosion processes on the southern summit created by a bulldozer’s cut make archaeological research urgent and one looting pit was identified on the southwestern slope (see Site Evaluation and Challenges).

Team of 2019

Zeidan Kafafi (co-director), Lucas Petit (co-director), Rami Fraihat (DoA representative), Yousef al-Zu’bi (photographer), Muwaffaq Bataineh (area supervisor, surveyor and draughtsman), Jeroen Rensen (square supervisor), Luc Amkreutz (square supervisor), Diederik Halbertsma (square supervisor), Sanaa Azaizeh (square supervisor), Laith Alshboul (square supervisor), Raghad Khalayleh (square supervisor), Amarah Abu Zaitoun (square supervisor), Erwin Kanters (3D specialist), Martijn Kanters (3D specialist), Anna Hofmann (archaeozoologist), and Mariette Grimbergen (housekeeper).

Previous Studies and Reports

Victor Guérin was the first who recognized the importance of Tall Dāmiyah (Guérin 1869: 238-240), although others like Irby and Mangles in 1818, William Lynch in 1848 and Charles van de Velde in 1851 must have directly passed the site during their travels (Irby and Mangles 1823: 325-326; Lynch 1855: 249-250; Van de Velde 1854: 321). John William McGarvey, who visited the site in 1879, mentioned the ruins of a building on its top and near the eastern end (1881: 350). He also was one of the first scholars who equate Tall Dāmiyah with Adam(ah), a city mentioned several times in the Old Testament (*e.g.* Joshua 3:16, Kings I 7:46, II Chr. 4:17) and on the victory stele of Shoshenq I in Karnak. From 1880 onwards the site was visited and surveyed many times (*e.g.* Albright 1926: 47; Glueck 1951: 329-31; Yassine *et al.* 1988: 191). The survey teams found pottery from the following main periods: LB II, Iron I, Iron II, Persian, Early Roman, Byzantine and Islamic.



4. Site plan with location of squares in red (based on drawing by M. Bataineh).

Archaeological excavations were undertaken by Petit in 2004 and 2005 (Kaptijn *et al.* 2005; Petit *et al.* 2006; Petit 2009b). During these first two seasons the main objective was to rescue and document the uncovered archaeological remains in the bulldozer cut (Squares I-III). Archaeological research was continued from 2012 onwards.

Methodology

Fieldwork

The excavation methods equal the methods executed and worked out by the joint Dayr ‘Allā project. Small excavation units (max. 5×5m) with baulks in between will guarantee a good stratigraphic overview of the site. Information will be saved by top plan- and section-drawings as well as digital photographs. Most drawings were made with a scale of 1:20, except for the human remains, which were drawn at 1:10. In

2012 and 2013 it was agreed upon to rebury all human remains at Tall Dāmiyah (Byzantine and Ottoman Period cemetery) after a short study at the excavation house. All special finds were measured in (x, y and z). Archaeobotanic, Archaeozoological and soil samples were taken from “clean” contexts. A database, exclusively designed for the Tall Dāmiyah excavation, was facilitating all team members in the excavation house. Data, including photographs and drawings, of past-excavations are stored and available in the excavation house.

Material Culture

Portable finds were taken to the excavation house, washed (if the condition allowed it), drawn and photographed. They were numbered, packed and stored in boxes. Broken pottery was mended if possible.



5. One of the oldest Photograph of Tall Dāmiyah (©American Colony, ca. 1920-1933).

Results (Stratigraphy and Finds)

Excavations

Excavation operations in 2019 were carried out in area A on the summit of the *tall* in five squares, the aim of which was to gather more information of the Late Iron Age (8th-6th centuries BC), the Persian/Hellenistic Period (5th-3rd centuries BC) and the two graveyards dated to the Byzantine and Ottoman periods. The results will be compared with material culture from other contemporaneous sites located in the Jordan Valley.

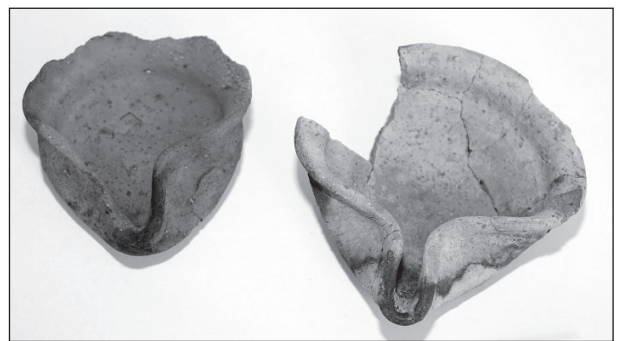
Preliminary Results

The latest dated remains in area A discovered during previous seasons were numerous graves from the Ottoman and Byzantine periods. In 2019 a number of new graves were excavated, especially due to the opening of two new squares in the north (XVII and XVIII), and square XVI also revealed several new graves. Those graves as well as several large Persian and Hellenistic storage pits filled with animal fodder, did cut the uppermost Iron Age layers. During the previous seasons, the remains of a large rectangular public building from those late Iron Age layers, measuring approximately 14×5m, were revealed. It was burnt down completely, probably at the beginning of the 7th century BC. The interior walls were plastered with a lime-plaster, as was a platform

constructed against the most western wall. Several pottery stands and figurines, both of horses and females, were discovered in and outside this room and cultic activities can be assumed. Especially the excellent condition of those figurines and the remains of two anthropomorphic statues are unique objects



6. Excavation work in 2019 (photo Yousef al-Zu'bi).



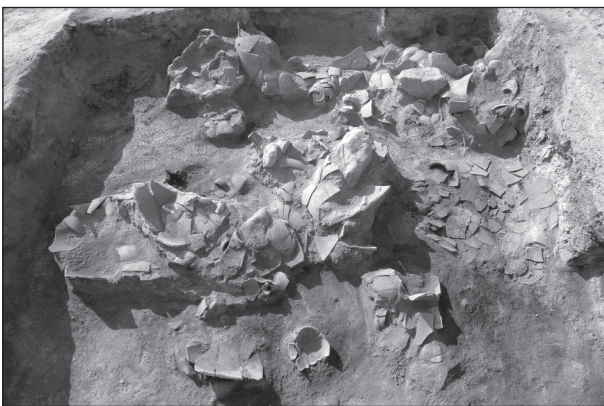
7. Two lamps (photo Yousef al-Zu'bi).

that have only a few parallels. Moreover, a clay bulla with cuneiform signs (found in 2004), Assyrian Palace Ware, and a few Egyptian objects and Cypro-Phoenician and Ammonite pottery sherds indicate relationships with the Jordanian Highland, Lebanon, Mesopotamia and Egypt. After revealing evidence that this building was part of a larger complex, the main goal of the 2019 season was to uncover adjacent rooms north of the cultic room.

In Square XVI we continued the work. In a small trench where in 2018 we reached the floor of a room of which the dimensions and function remained obscure. In 2019 we reached the floor in the rest of the square. It turned out to be a large room, around 6×5.5m large with a walking surface sloping towards the south. On top of the floor that was unfortunately severely damaged by Persian-Hellenistic pits and graves, we uncovered some restorable vessels. A funnel, a few bowls, a lamp, a holemouth jar and a bottle, the last completely filled with burned wheat, were encountered along the walls of the room.



8. Figurine found in square XVI (photo Yousef al-Zu'bi).



9. Restorable pottery in square XIX (photo Yousef al-Zu'bi).

The center of the room seems to have been empty of finds. At least one mudbrick feature in the center appears to be a column-base for roof support. Burned roof debris was found on the floor, assuming this room to be roofed. Against the southern wall some plastered clay installations were discovered. It might have been used as storage facilities, although no evidence was found to state that function. All the material culture can be safely dated to the late 8th or early 7th century BC. A special find was a fragment of a female figurine (**Fig. 8**), that was found in between some pottery sherds, stones and two pendants.

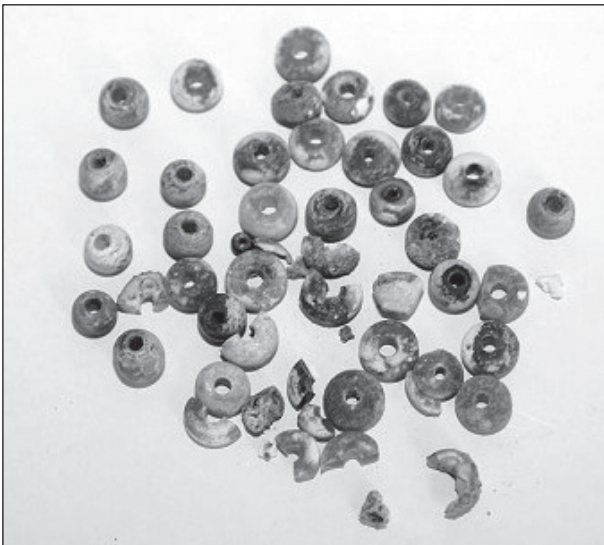
In Squares XIX and X two rooms were uncovered that had a direct connection to the room found in square XVI. These two rooms were very similar in size (2.60×2.60m) and their mudbrick walls were clay-plastered. A few graves had cut through the Iron Age II mudbrick tumble, but most of the content of these rooms were undisturbed. Most remarkable was the discovery of a large quantity of restorable storage jars and pots, most of them filled with burnt organic material, preliminary identified as barley and wheat. Also two cooking pots, a funnel and bowls were found in this room. Two jars were found inside the wall and roof debris, suggesting that these were originally standing on the roof. The two rooms that can be stratigraphically associated with the cultic building encountered in previous seasons, were used as storage rooms. In square X, that was excavated only a short period, the corner of the complex was found. It seems that the storage rooms and the large room in square XVI were the most northern units of the complex, at least in this part of the summit.

On the northern summit we opened two new squares, named XVII and XVIII. Last year after heavy rain, we identified a few burned mudbrick walls on the surface. The two new squares were started to understand and investigate these remains, especially in order to see the maximum size of the complex with the sanctuary. Since the identified walls were already on the northern slope and we did not want to break the surface cover of the *tall* (avoiding extra erosion in the future) we opened the square on the inside of the walls. During the first three weeks, we had to deal with the Ottoman and Byzan-

tine graveyard that covered most of the summit. Those graves were almost all oriented east-west with the head facing south. There are a few exceptions. Beads, bracelets and rings were uncovered in the graves. The last two weeks we reached Iron Age layers, however, due to the disturbances of the graves it was hard to present a coherent picture. It seems, stated by material culture, the orientation of the walls and the absence of red burned mudbrick debris, those layers belong to the late 7th and 6th century BC. The pottery is all late Iron Age, but without the Assyrian Palace ware or red slip. Preliminary, we suggest that the intended goal of the season, the late 8th and early 7th century BC layers, were not reached in these squares.

Discussion

The excavation results of 2019 at Tall Dāmiyah have resulted in a better picture of the occupation during the late 8th and 7th century BC. Although heavily disturbed by Persian and Hellenistic pits as well as later burials, it became clear that the sanctuary was part of a large complex, including well equipped storage facilities. There is a clear relation with the Neo-Assyrian empire as well with Ammon. But what the exact role of Tall Dāmiyah in this period is needs further research. Very preliminary, the authors suggest that this building was a kind of caravanserai with a central and important sanctuary. Travelers and traders could stay at Tall Dāmiyah and use the sanctuary for offerings. Finds, such as figurines, statues and altars in



10. Beads from the graveyard (photo Yousef al-Zu'bi).

this and previous seasons, suggest that the site had played an important cultic role for locals as well as foreigners. But in contemporary layers, cooking pots, loom weights, weaving utensils and grinding stones were found, implying that Tall Dāmiyah was around 700 BC much more than just a sanctuary or a trading post. Some people were living on the site, hunting, farming, producing textiles and possible trading.

Site Evaluation

General Condition

The condition of Tall Dāmiyah is relatively good, especially if compared to the other settlement mounds in the Jordan Valley. This is mainly ascribed to its position within military area, prohibiting people from entering without a permit. The main destruction to the site was carried out by the military itself. Beside some trenches made during the war in 1967, a bulldozer had cut a deep trench in the southern summit in 2003. This trench, almost three meters wide caused massive erosion on its site, especially before we could partly stabilise the profiles. The trench was cut from the bottom of the *tall* to the top. A military watchtower on the summit of the site was taken away in 2008 or 2009. Some concrete blocks are still remaining. In 2019, a small looting hole was identified on the southwestern slope and later filled.

Conservation Works and Maintenance

After the 2004 and 2005 excavation season we stabilized the section of the bulldozer and our excavation trenches with plastic, stones and sediments. The result, seen seven years later in 2012, was relatively good. The profiles were in a relatively good condition and it was decided to repeat the same procedure in the years after. In 2019 we filled the squares to protect the sections and archaeological features.

Challenges

Ownership

The site is owned by three brothers of the Ramadneh family of the Abbad Tribe. Contact with the owners is excellent and they are very interested in the work. They visit the excavation regularly. An undated written permit, signed by the owners, is in the possession of the Department of Antiquities.

Looting and Destruction

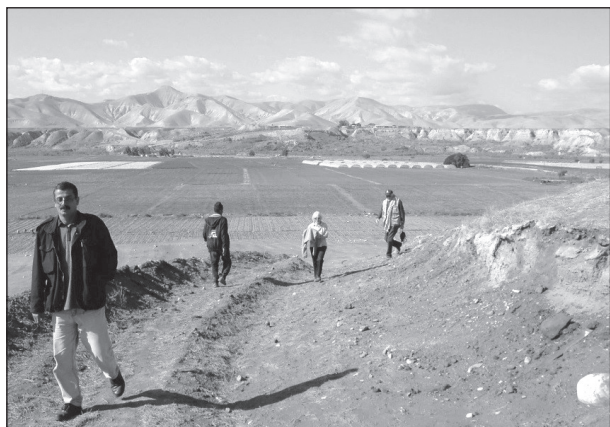
There is virtually no looting at the site, although a small looting hole was identified in 2019. Fields are ploughed around the site. Especially the slightly elevated area southwest of the site might contain archaeological remains and might thus be damaged by agricultural activities. A military bulldozer has created a trench in the southern summit.

Recommendations and Conclusions

At present the excavators cannot come to final conclusions about the function of the site. Nevertheless, the results of the present archaeological excavations indicate that the site played a major role in the area especially during the Iron Age periods. Several objects proved both close and distant relationships with surrounding regions. In many ways, the site of Tall Dāmiyah is different from the other *talls* in the area. Its position along the Jordan River close to one of the few fords, makes it a very likely place for travellers in the past to visit and camp. The excavators are intending to publish



11. Erwin and Martijn Kanters scanning the pottery on the floor in one of the storage rooms (photo Yousef al-Zu'bi).



12. Bulldozer trench in 2004.

the results in a monograph in the years to come. In this publication all data will be finalized from the earliest excavated levels up to the recent use of the site and its environment.

Acknowledgements

The co-directors of the project would like to thank the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, represented by His Excellency the director general Mr. Yazid Olayyan for his continuous support and facilitating all difficulties to achieve the main goals of the project. Thanks are due to the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities and the Yarmouk University who financed the project. The co-directors were privileged to have an excellent team with students and specialists and appreciated the work of all locals who helped on the excavation and in the excavation house. We also thank Erwin Kanters and Martijn Kanters of 3D Scanning Solutions for carrying out 3D scanning research. As always, it was a pleasure to stay in the Station for Archaeological Studies in Dayr 'Allā and we would express much gratitude to the Yarmouk University for housing us.

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