

FROM THE JORDAN VALLEY LOWLANDS TO THE TRANSJORDANIAN HIGHLANDS: PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE WĀDĪ SHU‘AYB ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY PROJECT AND EXCAVATIONS AT TALL BULAYBIL 2018 AND 2019

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Introduction

The Wādī SHu‘ayb Archaeological Survey Project (WSAS) was initiated in 2016 and focusses on a thorough survey and reevaluation of all archaeological and historical sites in the Wādī SHu‘ayb, ranging from the Neolithic Period to the Ottoman Period, starting from immediately south of the city of As Salt down to the city of Ash SHūnah Al Janūbiyyah (South Shuna) located at the mouth of the *wadi* in the Jordan Valley (see the previous reports with further literature on the project, its background and methodology in Ahrens 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2019a, 2019b and 2020a; Ahrens - Rokitta-Krumnow 2017; Rokitta-Krumnow and Ahrens 2019).

One main goal of the survey project during the third campaign of the WSAS in 2018 concentrated on a thorough survey of the vicinity of the site of Tall Bulaybil (WS-007) in the southern part of the Wādī SHu‘ayb, which itself was surveyed in detail during the survey campaigns 2016 and 2017. In 2019, due to the execution of the larger scale excavations conducted at Tall Bulaybil during this year presented in this report, no walkover survey was conducted in the Wādī SHu‘ayb.

The survey of the vicinity of Tall Bulaybil led to the discovery of four additional archaeological sites, all of which were hitherto unknown. Apart from this survey work, several test trenches at Tall Bulaybil were conducted in 2018 and 2019 in order to further substantiate the results obtained by soil sampling for

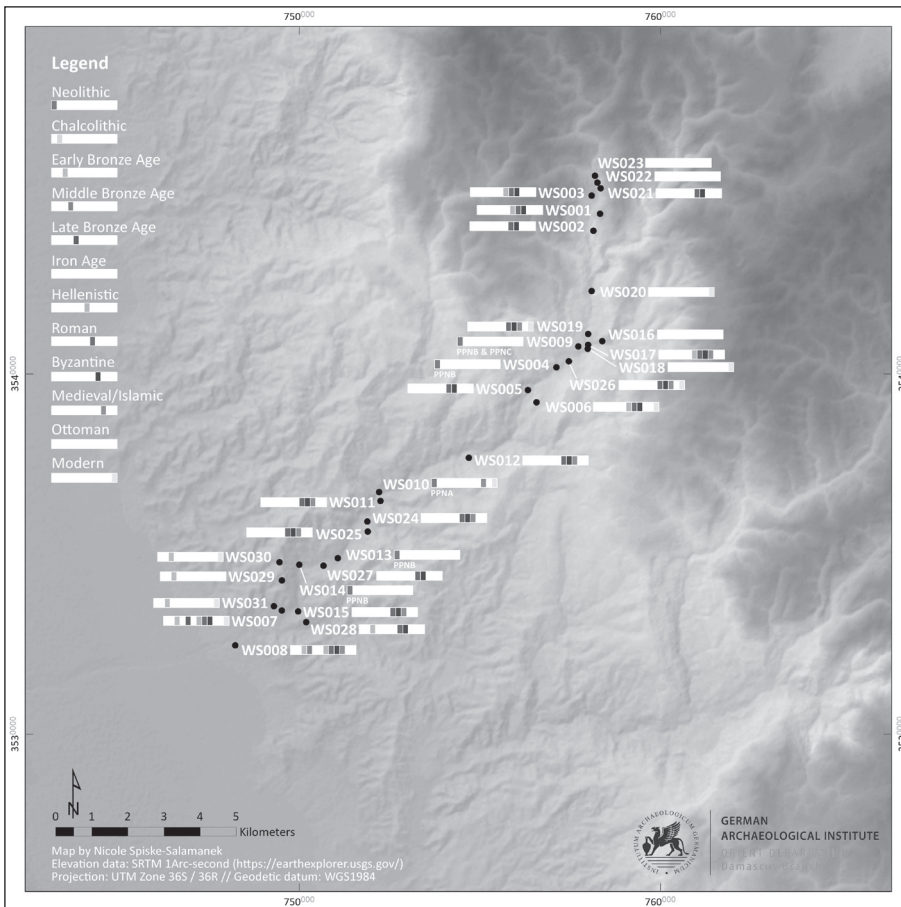
botanical analysis and radiocarbon dating in 2017. The excavations uncovered a massive stone foundation, which may have belonged to the settlement’s city wall as early as the second part of the Iron Age (Iron Age IIB/C).

The Wādī SHu‘ayb Archaeological Survey Project 2018

Altogether, a total number of four sites were surveyed in the third survey campaign of 2018, raising the number of sites prospected by the survey project to 31 now (see **Fig. 1** for the location and chronological distribution of all sites hitherto surveyed, *cf.* also the appendix of sites surveyed in 2018). A detailed photographic documentation and damage assessment of these sites was conducted, as well as technical descriptions of specific archaeological features, and the establishment of correct GPS coordinates. Diagnostic pottery was collected from all sites visited and were recorded and drawn. A description of each site surveyed in 2018 is given in the appendix below.

WS-028

The site sits on the southern mountain ridge of the Wādī SHu‘ayb, overlooking the Wādī SHu‘ayb and the Wādī Jari‘a, as well offering good views into the southern Jordan Valley. It probably once covered an area of about 1.5-2ha in total, with an outer wall made of larger stones of about 2m width having encircled the entire site, albeit now destroyed and dismantled in many parts (**Fig. 2**). The internal structure



1. Location and chronological distribution of sites hitherto surveyed by the WSAS in the years 2016-2019 (map compiled by N. Spiske-Salamanek; courtesy of WSAS, DAI).

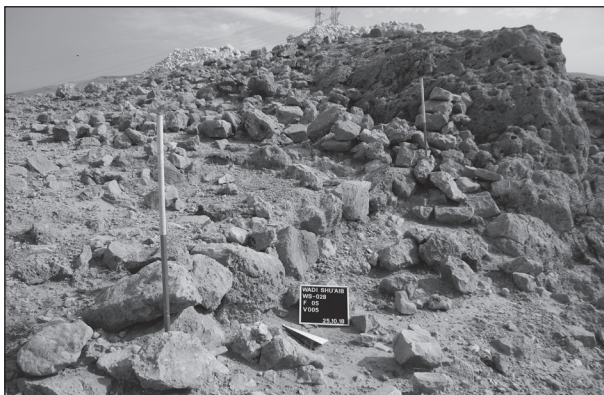
is difficult to discern, but several “tower-/or tomb-like” structures are found along the perimeter of the outer wall (Fig. 3). Additionally, the rock outcrop seems to have been artificially flattened in larger parts of the area in order to create a horizontal space for the foundations of buildings. The majority of the pottery dates to the late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age, but there is a small amount of pottery of later periods attested, presumably the Hellenistic, Roman or even Byzantine Period. The site has been partly bulldozed and destroyed to make space for two electric

power poles in the northernmost part of the site, thus destroying large parts of the site.

The site was apparently already visited by Ji and Lee in the year 2000 (Ji and Lee 2002: 187-188), *i.e.* prior to the bull-dozing and subsequent destruction of the site, and had been referred to as “KHirbat SHu‘ayb” by them.

WS-029 and WS-030

The two sites are found on the northern mountain ridge, just northeast of Tall Bulaybil (WSAS Site WS-007).



2. Site WS-028, remains of stone wall.



3. Site WS-028, tower overlooking the Jordan Valley.

Site WS-029 consists of three features (F 01-03), which seem to resemble the installations (“tower-/or tomb-like” structures) at nearby site WS-028 just across the *wadi* to the south. Their function and use is therefore undetermined, and all have been heavily looted and destroyed (**Fig. 4**).

Site WS-030 is located in the immediate vicinity of WS-029. It consists of a “tomb-like cavity,” which has also been plundered. The dating of this site is unclear, since no diagnostic pottery could be retrieved at the site.

As an interesting side note, one lead ball belonging to a WWI British shrapnel shell bomb was found in the area of the mountain ridge, albeit no other installations dating to the Ottoman period or WWI were detected here (**Fig. 5**). However, it is historically well known that heavy fighting between British and Ottoman/German troops took place in this area during the so-called “Transjordan attacks” on Shūnat Nimrīn and As Salt by the British in the year 1918. Notably, sites WS-014 and WS-027, surveyed in 2016 and 2017 by the WSAS (see **Fig. 1** for their locations), both seem to represent Ottoman garrisons featuring military installations, which must be seen in relating to the find, since British troops entered Transjordan via the Jordan River Valley, and Ottoman defense lines ran along the *wadi* and the mountain ridges in the vicinity (for this find and a summary of the history of the region of the southern Jordan Valley during World War I, see also Ahrens 2020b).

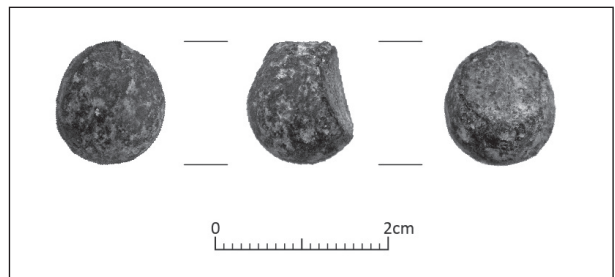
WS-031

The site is located north of Tall Bulaybil (WS-007). WS-031 is a rock-cut tomb, presumably Early Bronze Age in date, according to the pottery found (**Figs. 6, 7**). Scattered pottery fragments are found outside in front of the tomb’s entrance. The entrance giving access into the tomb consists of an opening measuring *ca.* 50×50cm, the bottom inside the tomb has been artificially flattened, while the remaining sides apparently have been left untouched. The inside cavity measures approximately 4×4m. The tomb is used as an animal shelter today, no pottery fragments were found inside the tomb. Modern dry walls have been placed alongside the tomb’s entrance.

The tomb clearly must have belonged to the site of Tall Bulaybil during its use in the Early Bronze Age, as this phase (*i.e.* the EB II-III) is also attested in the survey material found at Tall Bulaybil.



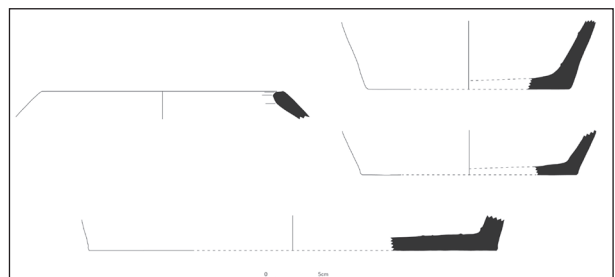
4. Site WS-029, remains of tower.



5. Site WS-030, lead ball belonging to a British Shrapnel shell bomb of World War I.



6. Site WS-031, burial cave.



7. Site WS-031, late Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age pottery from WS-031.

Addendum: WS-010 (KHirbat Jisr Al 'Irāqiyyīn)

Apart from these newly discovered sites, site WS-010 –already found and surveyed by the project in 2016 and visited subsequently in the survey campaigns 2017 and 2018– was revisited once more and found to date, on the basis of the lithic material, to the Epipaleolithic and PPNA periods, not only to the PPNB as previously assumed (for more details on this specific site, see Rokitta-Krumnow and Ahrens 2019).

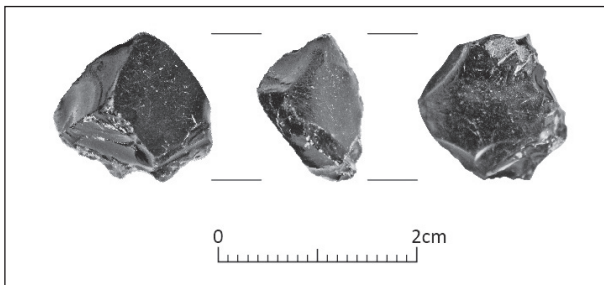
Apart from the lithic material retrieved, special small finds found at the site during the survey in 2018 include a fragment of obsidian (undiagnostic), presumably –but not analyzed scientifically yet– coming from the region of Cappadocia in modern Central Turkey (Fig. 8), as well as a basalt stone axe dating to the PPNA period (Fig. 9).

Excavations at Tall Bulaybil in 2018 and 2019

Apart from the survey work conducted in 2018, another main goal of the campaign was the inception of excavations at Tall Bulaybil. The site was already surveyed by the WSAS Project in the previous survey campaigns of 2016 and 2017 (see the project reports of 2016 and 2017 in Ahrens 2018a, 2020a). Since the entire northern site of the *tall* was found to be heavily destroyed by a modern bulldozer cut, it was decided that rescue excavations

would seem feasible here to see whether or not archaeological remains are to be found along the destroyed section of the *tall*. For this reason, the first trial trenches were excavated in the campaign of 2018. Altogether three test trenches were conducted (T1-T3), all three of them located in the area of the destroyed (bulldozed) northern section of the *tall* (Figs. 10-12).

Trench T2, located in the northwest of the bulldozed section, reached the bedrock on which the entire site was founded quickly. It is therefore clear that no archaeological remains were left *in situ* here, but had all been destroyed by the bulldozer cut. Trench T2 therefore was not continued to be excavated. Test trenches T1 and T3, however, located next to each other in the center of the bulldozed section, successfully exposed archaeological remains. The excavations uncovered a larger stone wall, which was hypothesized to be part of the city's fortification system. The excavations in 2019 therefore continued to excavate in the area of test trenches T1-T3 and were able to expose a part of the actual fortification system of the settlement, preserved to a height of almost four meters. Additionally, the southwestern corner of a bastion or tower protruding from the fortification wall was revealed. The exterior side was coated with a layer of yellow chaff tempered plaster which was still partly preserved *in situ*.



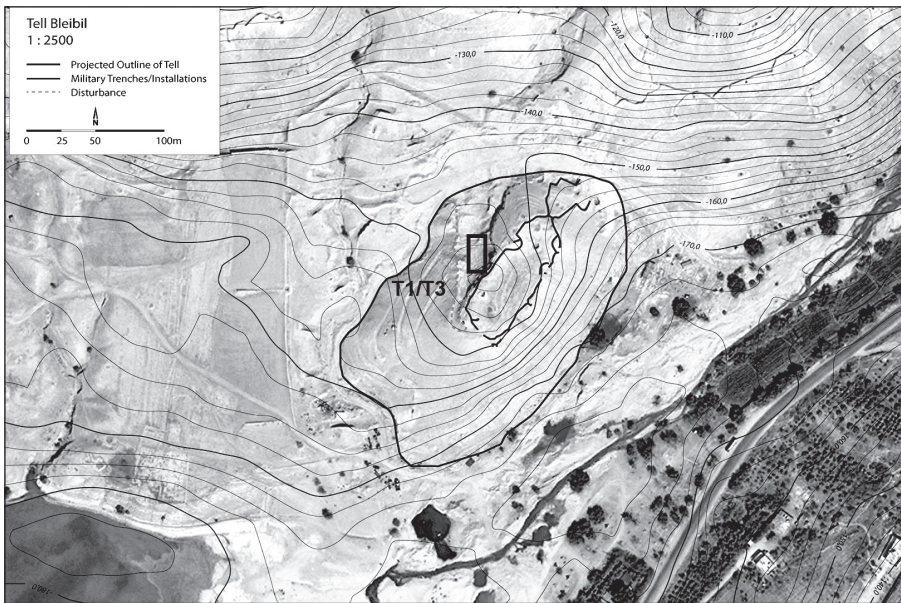
8. KHirbat Jisr Al 'Irāqiyyīn (Site WS-010), obsidian fragment.



9. KHirbat Jisr Al 'Irāqiyyīn (Site WS-010), basalt stone axe.

The Iron Age Fortification System

Already partly exposed in the first season in 2018, the 2019 excavation of the remains of what belongs to the settlement's city wall foundation in the northwestern part of the *tall* were continued, covering an area of approximately 50m² by the end of the field season. Given the general orientation and the location of the part of the foundations exposed, these seem to encircle the ancient settlement approximately along its outer perimeter, footed on the slope, arguing for an interpretation of a city wall and therefore as part of a defense system, rather than being a part of a larger monumental building of unknown orientation and proportions in this part of the *tall* (for general studies dealing with various aspects of ancient fortification systems, see Frederiksen *et al.* 2016; Muth *et al.* 2016; Ballmer *et al.* 2018). Due to the limited area of



10. Tall Bulaybil (WS-007), with location of trenches conducted in 2018 and 2019.

excavation, it must remain unclear for the time being if the exposed part of the fortification wall at Tall Bulaybil is a solid single wall, or actually part of a larger casemate wall system, with a second inner wall not yet attested.

The foundation of the city wall (Wall SU 25) is still partly preserved as high as 3.5m in height, with an average width of 2.5-3.0m (Figs. 13-15). Due to erosional effects and also the destruction caused by the aforementioned bulldozer in more recent times, the northwestern side (exterior outer face) of the city wall foundation is heavily disturbed in the excavated area, and it appears to have been eroded away diagonally, thus creating a “sloping effect,” which virtually resembles a glacis or a rampart in many ways (Fig. 14). However, at the time of its construction, the wall foundation’s exterior side was, beyond doubt, built up vertically, since originally a mudbrick construction was

erected directly on top of this foundation. This mudbrick wall, albeit not preserved *in situ* in the area excavated, is protruding from the bulldozed section and still standing as high as approximately 2.5m immediately north of the



11. Tall Bulaybil, excavations in progress taking place in the northwestern part of the tall in 2019, view from southwest.



12. Tall Bulaybil, excavations in progress taking place in the northwestern part of the tall in 2019, view from northeast towards the Jordan Valley.

excavation area (Figs. 16, 17). The elevation of the lowest layer of mudbricks of this wall, as well as its general orientation, strikingly corresponds with the uppermost level of Wall SU 25. Therefore, it is very likely that the mudbrick wall once continued to the southwest, aligning with Wall SU 25 as its substructure and foundation. All remains of the mudbrick wall clearly have been destroyed due to the



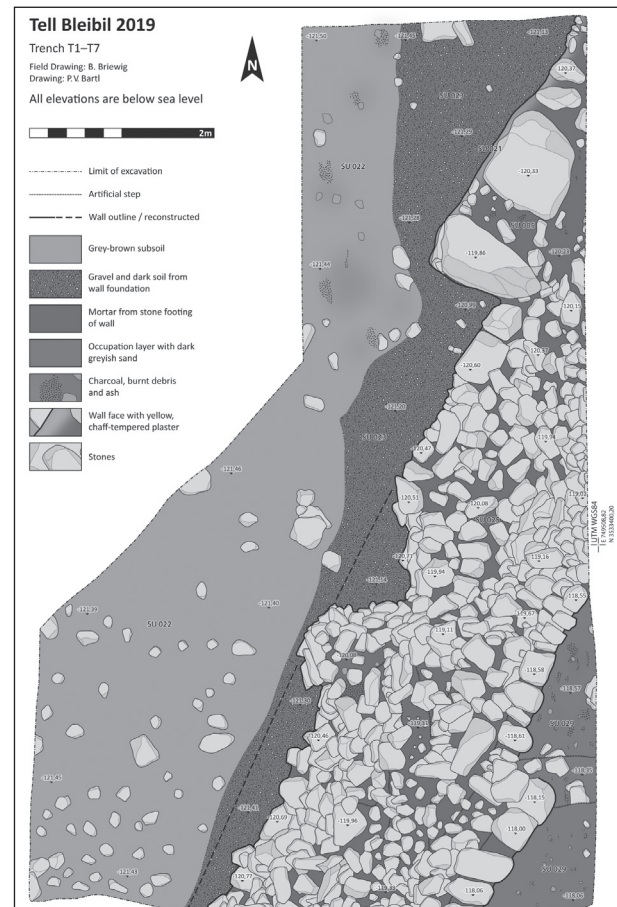
13. Tall Bulaibil, foundations of defensive system (Wall SU 25 and Bastion SU 05), seen from west.



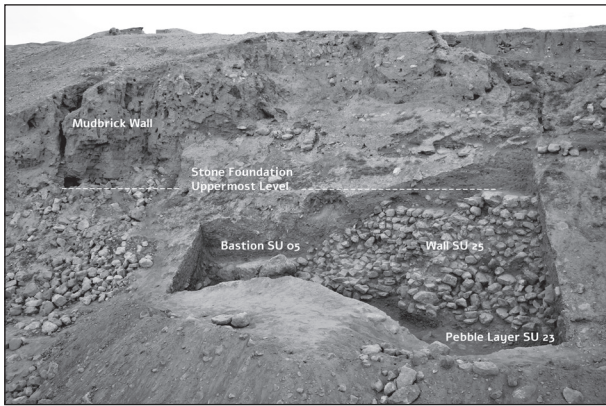
14. Tall Bulaibil, foundations of defensive system (Wall SU 25 and Bastion SU 05), seen from north.

bulldozing that took place here prior to the excavations. The many stones found in the collapse directly west of the wall during the excavations also point to the fact that at least half of the city wall's foundations collapsed or have been destroyed by either erosion or by bulldozing. Although the absolute height of the mudbrick wall is not known, due to the erosion of its upper parts, the standing height of the fortification system altogether (*i.e.* the stone foundation/substructure Wall SU 25 and the mudbrick wall only attested in the northern section) must have amounted to at least 7-8m in total.

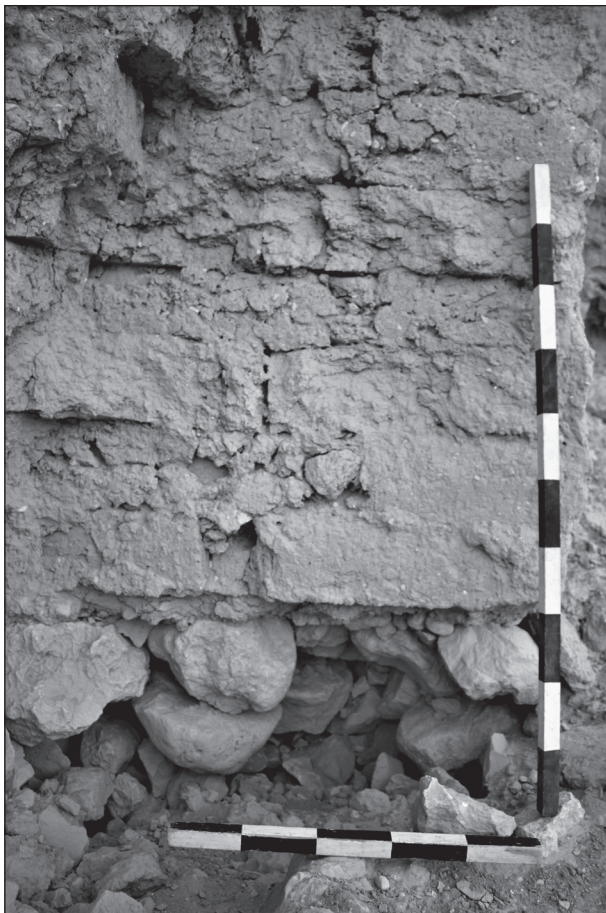
Wall SU 25 itself is formed of small to larger unhewn and semi-hewn limestone boulders (*ca.* 40cm) that were dry laid. The original topography of the site –with uneven levels of bedrock varying in height– may presumably have necessitated the construction of the fill layers of soil mixed with hard-packed, compressed pebbles, gravel and smaller cobbles in order to create an even surface for



15. Tall Bulaibil, ground plan of foundations of defensive system (Wall SU 25 and Bastion SU 05).



16. Tall Bulaybil, foundations of defensive system (Wall SU 25 and Bastion SU 05) with mudbrick wall protruding from bulldozed section in the upper left and pebble layers SU 23 in the lower right, seen from west.



17. Tall Bulaybil, detail of mudbrick wall protruding from bulldozed section.

the stones of the wall to be erected on (Fig. 16). Interestingly, this layer of soil mixed with pebbles also contained lithic material dating to the Neolithic period, but unfortunately no pottery, which then possibly must have come from somewhere at the site or its immediate vicinity when the city's fortification system

was established at a later period, presumably the Iron Age. The first stage in the creation of the city wall therefore consisted of the build-up of soil layers mixed with pebbles and cobbles in the depressions and the original escarpment of bedrock existing in this specific area of the site (SU 23). This preparation phase is clear in the stratigraphy, since the fill layers are located under the first row of stones belonging to the foundation walls (*i.e.* Bastion SU 05, see below, and Wall SU 25). The fill layers (SU 23) thus serve to support walls, as is also visible in the top plan, where the orientation of the fill layers also seems to follow the general orientation of Bastion SU 05 and Wall SU 25 (see Fig. 15). The preparation phase then was followed by the construction of both the Bastion SU 05 and the foundation wall SU 25. The overall height of these fill layers is hitherto unknown, since the bedrock could not yet be reached in the excavated areas.

Yet to be exposed is also the area immediately east of the SU 05 and 25, *i.e.* levels inside the actual settlement abutting the city wall. Here, due to the destruction caused by the bulldozer, excavations could not be executed for safety reasons.

Although the wall's construction cannot yet be dated precisely since no diagnostic pottery or other datable material was found within the wall or the bastion, it probably continued to be used until at least the late Iron Age (Iron Age IIC) according to finds made in the debris of the wall that had accumulated to the west of it and which was not cut by the bulldozer (see below, small finds). A chronological hint as to when the fortification system was first constructed may perhaps be seen by the construction method described above: artificial fill layers to even out crevices within the bedrock prior to erecting walls are also amply attested at Iron Age II sites on the Transjordanian Plateau, *e.g.* at KHirbat Al Mudaynah - Ath THamad (Daviau *et al.* 2012: 276-277), the wayside shrine WT-13 in the Wādī Ath THamad (Daviau and Steiner 2017: 50-51, fig. 3.18), Al Lāhūn (Homès-Fredericq 2009: 175), and at Tall Jāwā (Daviau *et al.* 2003: 59-60). The debris of the Wall SU 25 also shows evidence for a conflagration event, with ashy soil lenses, charcoal pieces and burnt mudbrick fragments found mixed together. A

destruction event of the fortification system during the later Iron Age (Iron Age IIC) can therefore perhaps be surmised, but this is subject to further confirmation.

The Bastion

Bastion SU 05 –which due to safety reasons could only its southwestern corner could be excavated– consists of a single, massive stone-built unit, the walls of which are formed of small to larger unhewn and semi-hewn limestone boulders that were dry laid and apparently directly connected with the foundation wall SU 25 (see Figs. 14, 15 and 18). The southwestern corner is also formed by two large boulders measuring 1.4m each in length. The exterior of the bastion was covered by a layer of yellow chaff tempered plaster (SU 21; 10 YR 8/2), some of which was still partly preserved *in situ* (Figs. 18, 19). Unfortunately, but for reasons of work security, the excavations could not expose more of the bastion in the 2019 campaign. As also mentioned above, the bastion was directly erected upon the fill layers of SU 23, therefore it clearly dates to the first construction phase of the overall foundations, as does the actual wall foundation SU 25. Again, as with the fill layers, the existence of a yellowish chaff tempered plaster is also attested KHirbat Al Mudaynah - Ath THamad in the Iron Age II period (Chadwick *et al.* 2000; Daviau *et al.* 2012: 277), at Iron Age Al Lāhūn (Homès-Fredericq 2009: 169-170), and at Tall Jāwā (Daviau *et al.* 2003: 59-60).

The Fortification System at Tall Bulaybil: One or Many?

Exceptional is the fact that a mudbrick superstructure can be clearly linked with the stone foundations excavated (*i.e.* its substructure) at Tall Bulaybil, giving potential new information concerning the general construction of Iron Age defense systems in Transjordan.

Additionally, as previous surveys of the site have already noticed before, stone foundations are also visible along the entire eastern side of the *tall* which faces the *wadi*, also consisting of semi-hewn and hewn limestone boulders protruding from the slopes of the *tall* (Glueck 1951: 370; Ji and Lee 2002: 187). Ji and Lee, reporting on the results of their survey and visit



18. Tall Bulaybil, Bastion SU 05, with the exterior still partly covered by yellow chaff tempered plaster *in situ*, seen from northwest.



19. Tall Bulaybil, detail of yellow chaff tempered plaster.

to the site in the year 2000 (2002: 187), mention that:

“(t)he survey team identified two or three defense walls on the eastern slope, which probably indicate that Tall Bulaybil was fortified at least twice in different periods.”

For the time being, it is not possible to say with certainty whether or not these stone foundations, which clearly were once part of a fortification system (or systems) encircling the site, belong to the same fortification system that was partly exposed in the northwestern part of the *tall*, as there is no clear archaeological connection between these two installations as yet. However, the general orientation, the height measurements, and also the building techniques of the foundations in the eastern and northwestern part of the *tall* seem to differ, making it more likely at the moment to conclude that these fortification systems date to different periods. This, however, needs further study.

Iron Age Fortification Systems: Parallels in the Southern Jordan Valley

Although only a small part of the Tall Bulaybil's fortification system has been exposed yet, and many details concerning its construction and dating are still unclear, general parallels for fortification walls and defense systems can be found at various sites in Transjordan. Most of the settlements during the Iron Age in Transjordan apparently were fortified with a casemate wall construction, where two parallel walls encircle the settlement with the space in between these walls subdivided into casemate rooms (see the compilation in Routledge 2018: 145-146). However, solid walls featuring protruding towers or bastions are also amply attested as defense systems at Transjordanian sites during the Iron Age.

In the region of the southern Jordan Valley, an Iron Age fortification wall consisting of a solid wall (width: *ca.* 3m) is attested at the site of Tall Al Hammām, located approximately 20km south of Tall Bulaybil (Collins *et al.* 2015: 234-236, figs. 8.4-8.5). This defense system apparently was built during the Iron Age IIA and continued to be used in the later parts of the Iron Age (at least until the Iron Age IIB). Close to Tall Al Hammām, the excavations at the site of Tall Al Kafrayn also revealed a small part of what can be interpreted as a solid Iron Age (Iron Age II) fortification wall with a width of 2.9m (Papadopoulos and Kontorli-Papadopoulou 2012: 367-369, figs. 8a-b).

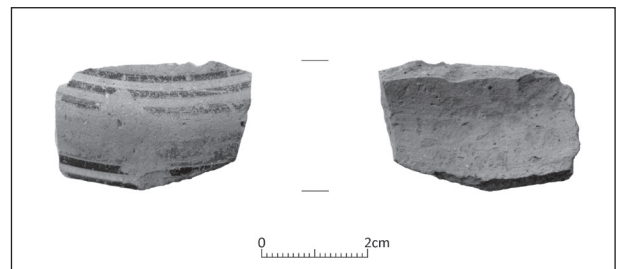
Small Finds from the Debris

With no datable material found within Wall SU 25, the bastion SU 05, and also the fill layers SU 23, the dating of the fortification system's construction is still not secured, although a date within the Iron Age II period is most likely based on the comparisons of the construction techniques with other sites in the Transjordanian Plateau given above. Within the debris of the wall that had accumulated in front of it (to the west), but which was also heavily disturbed by the aforementioned bulldozing of this area of the *tall*, several small finds were retrieved that for the time being can at least give a rough date for the last use of the fortification system and help to chronologically frame the date of the system at Tall Bulaybil.

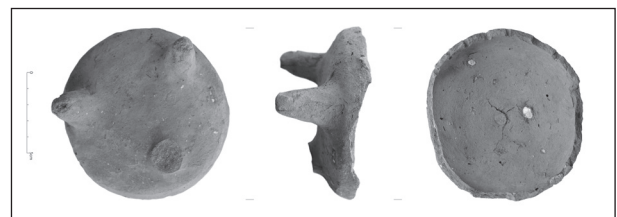
One of the most peculiar finds made in the 2019 field season is the fragment of the shoulder part of a small amphoriskos/juglet belonging to the so-called "Cypro-Phoenician Bichrome Ware" dating to the Iron Age II, which features several lines of black and red concentric circles running around the shoulder of the vessel horizontally (Fig. 20). Parallels for this unique type of pottery are attested at archaeological sites covering the entire Iron Age Levant (Gilboa 1999; 2015: 485-487, 503, pl. 4.2.7; Schreiber 2003). In Transjordan, specimens of this pottery are found, among other sites, at Tall Al Hammām in the southern Jordan Valley just north of the Dead Sea (Collins *et al.* 2015: 235, fig. 8.9), the site of KHirbat Al Mudaynah Ath THamad (Chadwick 2016: 312-313, fig. 14:2-3), the wayside shrine at Wādī Ath THamad (Site WT-13) in northern Mo'ab (Daviau and Steiner 2017: 185-189, 188-189: fig. 7.1, esp. 7.1:12), and also in several tombs at DHībān (Tushingham 1972: 86-115).

Another small find from the 2019 campaign was the fragment of a perforated tripod cup in the lower part of the wall debris (Fig. 21); these vessels are often also functionally referred to as "incense burners," although often no traces of soot can be detected inside these vessels, as was the case with the object from Tall Bulaybil. A more functional use of these vessels as sieves is more likely (Daviau and Steiner 2017: 179-185, fig. 7.1).

A fragmentary stone vessel (alabastron)



20. Tall Bulaybil, fragment of Cypro-Phoenician Bichrome Ware (TB19-SF18).



21. Tall Bulaybil, fragment of a perforated tripod cup (TB19-SF31).

made of soapstone is without exact parallels (**Fig. 22**). Its local manufacture is certain, but its date yet elusive. While the production technique –the interior has been chiseled out, with vertical chisel marks clearly visible inside the vessel– would fit with an Iron Age date, its form is without parallels for this period, arguing perhaps for an even later date.

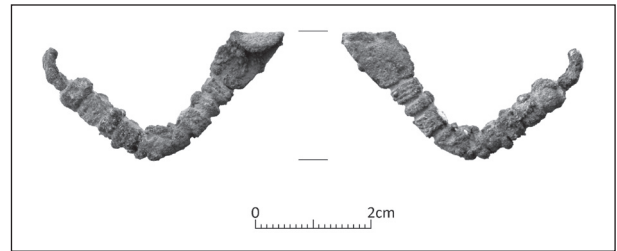
The body of a fibula made of bronze (*i.e.* found without the pin), which can be typologically dated to the second half of the Iron Age (**Fig. 23**), was also found. Good typological comparisons can be found within the corpus of fibulae found at Cemetery A at Tall Al Mazār in the central Jordan Valley, dating to the late Iron Age (Iron Age IIC), but apparently also continuing into the Persian period (see the parallels in Yassine 1984: 97-100, fig. 55, 153-165). Dating to the late Iron Age and the Persian period is also a fragment of a typical deep rounded carinated bowl with a simple rim (**Fig. 24**), a type which presumably emulates the shape of metal vessels (*e.g.* Yassine and van der Steen 2012: 35-37, type 5, Cat. P076; Stern 2015: 567, 581, pl. 5.1.1, 12-16; for the metal vessels, see Yassine 1984: 76, fig. 50, 48-50, fig. 7: 5), which unfortunately stems from a disturbed find context within the upper layers of the debris above the fortification wall, but attests to occupation levels dating to this period at the site (which was already noted during earlier surveys at the site, see Ibrahim *et al.* 1988: 199; Ji and Lee 2002: 187).

A fragment of basalt bar-handled bowl type with a stepped profile, which dates to the later part of the Iron Age (Iron Age IIC) was found within the debris above Wall SU 25 (**Figs. 25, 26**). Interestingly, the exact same shape is also attested at Tall Bulaybil within the pottery repertoire, with one rim fragment coming from the very debris above Wall SU 25 (**Fig. 27**). Typologically, both seem to date to the same period, it being unclear which of the two forms appeared first, and which emulated the other (for this specific type, see Squitieri 2017: 60-61, 65, fig. 5.11:a-c). Find contexts at other sites in the Levant seem to suggest that the vessel were primarily used for food processing. Parallels for the type on the Transjordanian Plateau are attested at Iron Age Tall Jāwā and Saḥāb (Squitieri 2017: 135, fig. 7.7).

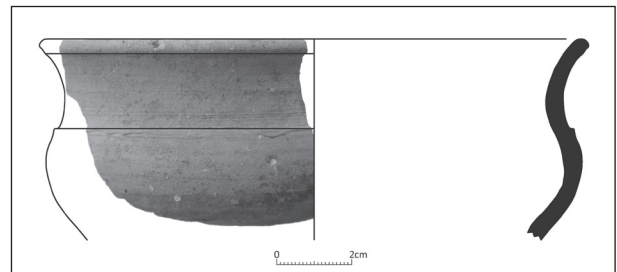
Curiously, a unique fragment of red painted gypsum plaster was found within the upper levels of the debris of Wall SU 25, but it is not clear yet, where this hitherto singular find originates from (**Fig. 28**). While an Iron Age date cannot be totally excluded, a later



22. Tall Bulaybil, fragment of alabastron made of soapstone (TB19-SF15).



23. Tall Bulaybil, body of fibula made of bronze (TB19-SF02).



24. Tall Bulaybil, late Iron Age to Persian period pottery bowl fragment (TB19-SF24).



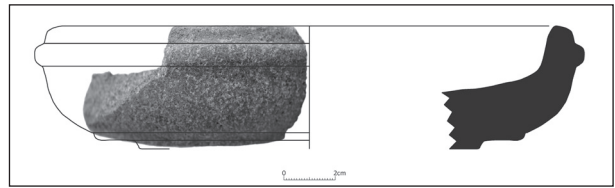
25. Tall Bulaybil, fragment of basalt bar-handled bowl (TB19-SF21).

date –since Hellenistic to Byzantine levels are also attested at Tall Bulaybil– would also seem possible. It could well be that due to the bulldozing, material from later levels was mixed with the debris of Wall SU 25. Perhaps future excavations can shed more light on this matter.

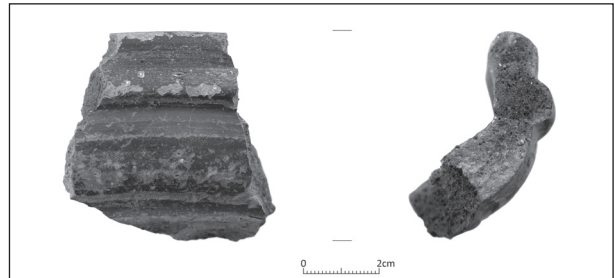
Three round discs made of pottery that show evidence of secondary burning are without good parallels. The objects seem to have been fired in their initial production and thus are not reworked sherds, but were clearly produced for a yet unclear purpose (Figs. 29, 30). All feature a concave depression along their narrow sides, its exact function unknown. Since the objects stem from the within debris above of Wall SU 25, their original context of use is not known, nor is their specific date. Perhaps these discs are to be seen in relation to weaving activities and textile production, serving as spacers or spreaders for threads. However, a function as gaming pieces or stoppers/lids for pottery vessels cannot be excluded (Daviau *et al.* 2002: 165-166, 177-179).

Conclusions

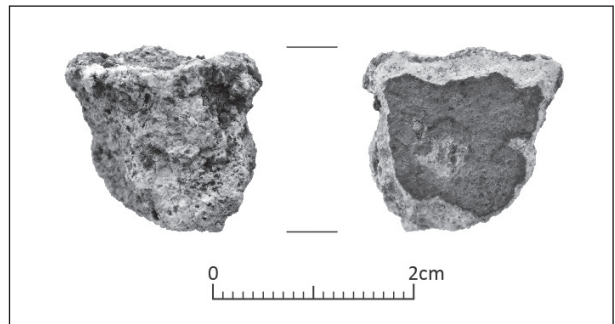
The third and fourth campaigns of the Wādī SHu‘ayb Regional Archaeological Survey Project in 2018 and 2019 concentrated on the region in the vicinity of the site of Tall Bulaybil in the southern part of the Wādī SHu‘ayb and the excavations at the site of Tall Bulaybil itself. Four sites in the vicinity of Tall Bulaybil were surveyed. First trial excavations at the collapsed northern flank at Tall Bulaybil (WS-007) in 2018 and 2019 possibly exposed a part of the settlement’s city wall dating to the Iron Age. Exceptional is the fact that a mudbrick superstructure can be clearly linked with the stone foundations excavated (its substructure), giving potential new information concerning the general construction of Iron Age defense systems in Transjordan. The results obtained clearly allow for larger scale excavations, which are planned for the coming years. Future campaigns should also try to clarify why and to what extent the relatively modest size of the ancient settlement at Tall Bulaybil (<2ha) corresponds with such a comparatively massive defense system. This does not only hold true for Tall Bulaybil, but also for the other Iron Age



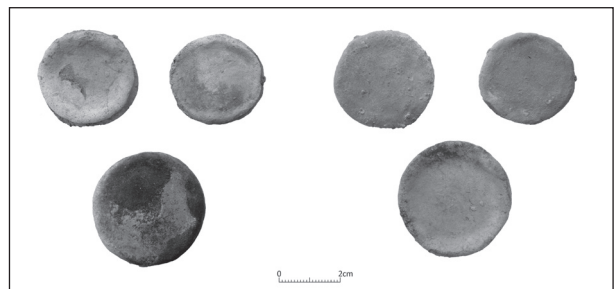
26. Tall Bulaybil, fragment of basalt bar-handled bowl, profile (TB19-SF21).



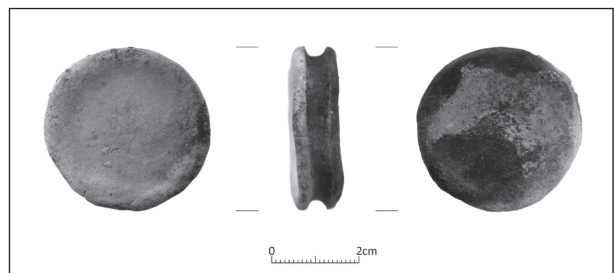
27. Tall Bulaybil, rim fragment of pottery vessel with similar shape to basalt bar-handled bowl (TB19-SF30).



28. Tall Bulaybil, fragment of gypsum plaster with red color pigments (TB18-SF08).



29. Tall Bulaybil, three round disks made of pottery (TB19-SF07+25+26).



30. Tall Bulaybil, detail of round pottery disk (TB19-SF25).

sites in the southern Jordan Valley mentioned above. For the time being, it could perhaps be hypothetically assumed that the apparent and at the same time striking defensive character of the settlement can best be explained by the strategic role it had controlling and guarding access into the Wādī SHu‘ayb or from the *wadi* to the Jordan Valley. In this function, the settlement probably served as a stronghold of one of the Iron Age kingdoms attested in the historical sources.

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Appendix of Sites Surveyed in 2018

(GPS Coordinates were taken, but will not be published here; Site numbers are listed according to the WSAS Project, see Ahrens 2018a).

| WSAS Site No./Name | Site/Feature | Altitude MSL |
|--------------------|--|--------------|
| WS-028 | Occupational Site | -9m |
| WS-029 | Occupational Site | +45m |
| WS-030 | Occupational Site? - Lithic Scatters | +70m |
| WS-031 | Burial Cave (late Chalcolithic, EBA, modern) | -141m |

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