

EXCAVATIONS AT TALL USHAY‘IR A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 2021, 2022 AND 2023 SEASONS

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Introduction¹

The archaeological site of Tall Ushay‘ir (MEGA-J No: 2795) is located 3km west of Irbid in Northern Jordan, bordered by the two towns of Kufr Yūbā to the south and Zaḥar to the north (**Fig. 1**). This prominent, free-standing mound offers expansive views westwards across the Wādī Al Jurn valley and beyond to the Jordan Valley, with in clear weather distant views of the Mountains of Galilee, Golan Heights, Anti-Lebanon, and Lebanon.

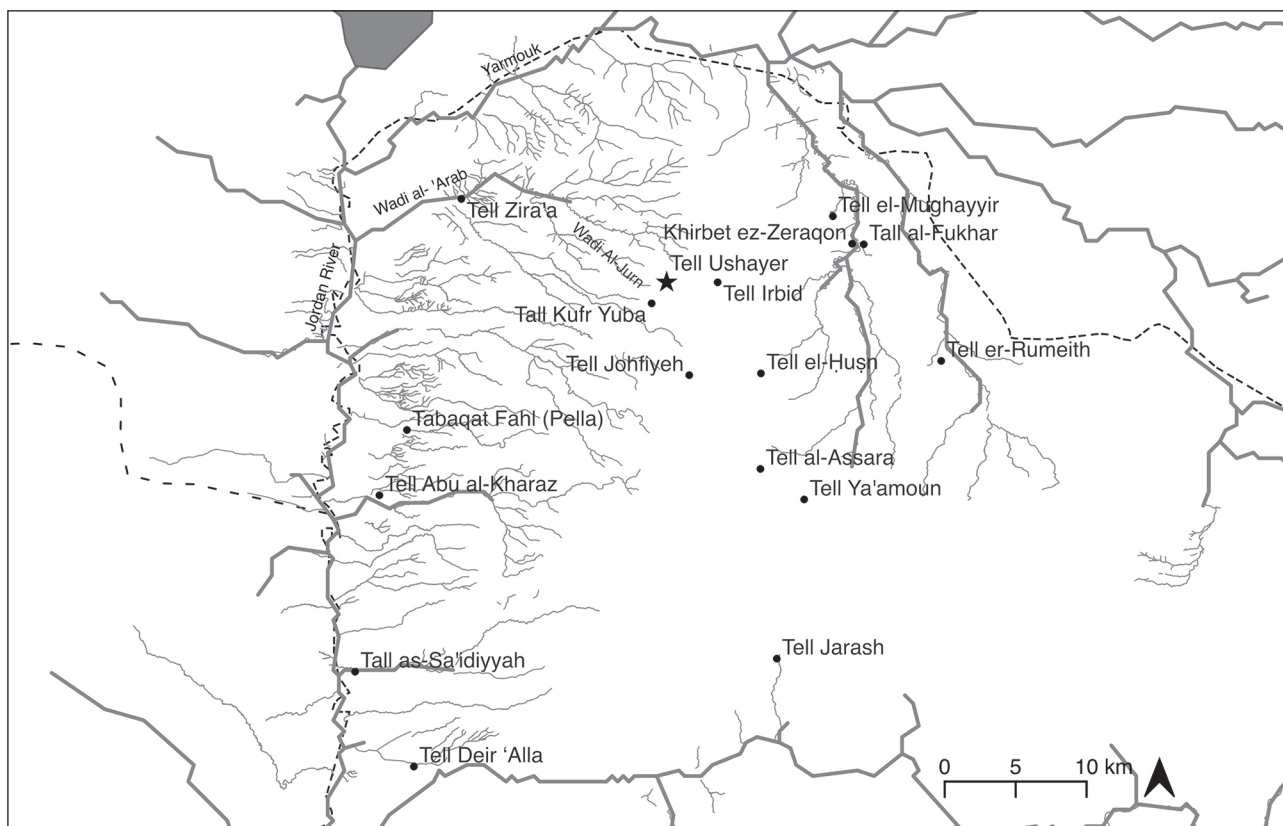
Tall Ushay‘ir is a distinctive, circular mound, free from modern constructions and landscaping. It rises 14 meters above its surrounding terrain, with a peak elevation of 548m above sea level (**Fig. 2**). The top of the mound is nearly flat, with a diameter of 85.70 meters, and the site’s total area is 5771 square meters. Remnants of a massive enclosing stone wall are still visible around the mound top.

Despite its visibility, Tall Ushay‘ir has received limited archaeological attention. It was first mentioned by G. Schumacher (1890: 190) and briefly listed in subsequent

surveys (Glueck 1951: site no. 80; Lenzen and McQuitty 1988: site 009; el-Khourī *et al.* 2006: 126, site 4). Pottery from the Early Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age I and II, and the Byzantine period has been identified, and a test excavation by the Jordanian Antiquities Service remains unpublished.

Largely unexplored, Tall Ushay‘ir stands out in the northern Jordanian plateau’s rich archaeological landscape. It offers an excellent opportunity to gain insights into a little-researched period of ancient North Jordanian history, especially regarding the region’s fate in the light of the socio-political developments that shaped the whole Near East at the beginning of the Iron Age. A project was launched by Prof. Dominik Bonatz from the Freie Universität Berlin in cooperation and under the supervision of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. In 2018 a preliminary investigation was conducted, which was followed in 2019 by a geomagnetic survey (see Bonatz 2020). Three excavation campaigns have been conducted so far, in 2021, 2022 and 2023. The project immediate aim is to determine the occupation sequence and nature of the site, by studying its architectural history, intramural layout and material culture. This work will shed light on the regional role of the site within a broader historical, political, and economic context. The results so far paint a unique picture of a fortification system much more formidable than initially imagined.

1. This article is based on invaluable and numerous discussions with all listed authors, as well as field notes and area reports by Laith Alshboul, Stefano Aprà, Valery Schlegel, Giampiero Tursi, and Marina Weiss. The text itself was compiled by Nathalie Kallas. The proposed stratigraphic sequence is the result of an analysis of the excavation documentation conducted by Nathalie Kallas. The pottery analysis included in this study was conducted by Yvonne Helmholz. The collaboration and contributions of each of the authors were instrumental to the research and conclusions drawn in this paper.



1. Location of Tall Ushay'ir and other Late Bronze Age and Iron Age sites in the North Jordanian Plateau.

Preliminary Work at the Site

In 2018, an initial investigation at Tall Ushay'ir included a systematic collection of surface pottery sherds and a small excavation on the northern slope to date the city-wall and its relation to other features. Additionally, two segments of the city-wall were cleaned and documented. The analysis of pottery sherds from the collection of surface material identified specimens from Late Bronze Age II, Iron Age I and II, Iron Age III (Persian Period), and Hellenistic periods, with earlier and later pottery being rare (Alshboul 2019).

A magnetometry survey was conducted in 2019, covering approximately 7100m² of the Tall's top and slopes. Despite interference from modern activities, the survey clearly revealed the course of the fortification wall and potential gate locations. It also identified various building structures, pits, and ditches on the mound's top, as well as substantial stone structures in the southeastern corner and the western half. These findings suggested complex fortifications and internal structures that require further excavation to fully understand their layout, function, and dates.

Project Organization and Work Conducted

Before presenting the scientific results, some remarks on the project's organization so far are warranted. In 2021, the foundation of flexible and comprehensive documentation methodology and system was developed. The site's topography was surveyed in detail in 2021 using a JAVAD GNSS device (Triumph LS / Triumph-2 / Radio). It covered the mound itself and the surrounding plateau, where accessible (**Fig. 3**). The final surveyed area covers approximately 8.42 hectares with an elevation difference of about 26.5 meters (530.62-557.13m UTM). The excavation grid system was aligned with UTM coordinates, dividing the area into 10×10 meter squares. Using UTM localization also allows us to incorporate other publicly available data and seamlessly integrate the geomagnetic survey results into our analysis.

The documentation system is a blend of analog and digital methods. The hub for all our digitized data and topographical information is a server-based MySQL database. A variety of filled forms, field journals, material analysis, plans, section drawings, and ceramic drawings

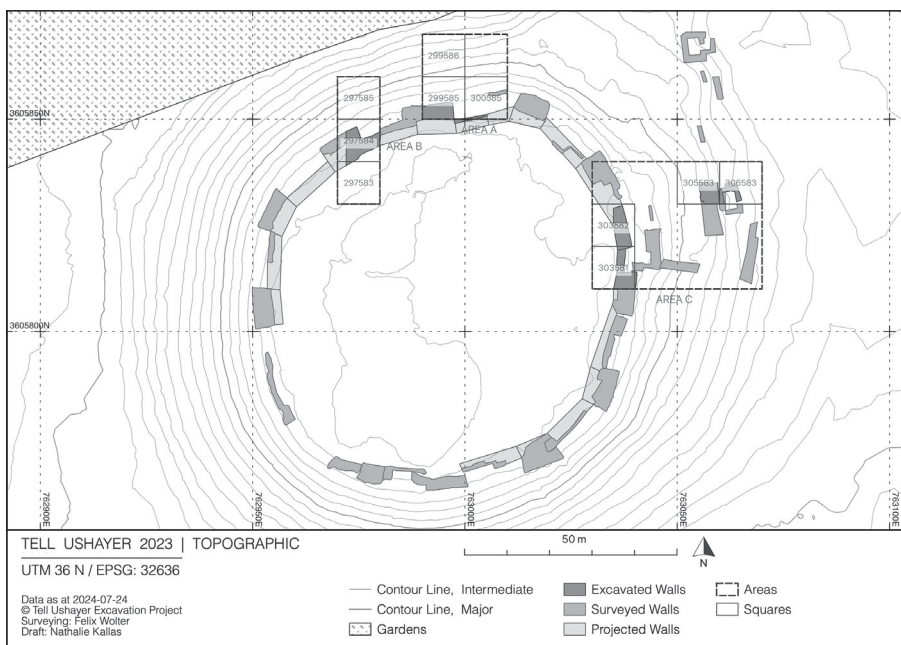
are digitized using various software and uploaded to the database. All excavated contexts are described, photographed, captured with photogrammetry, and linked with topographical data. Descriptive data and relational information are combined with topographical data and processed in GIS and a 3D computer graphics software (Blender) to enable a relatively quick understanding of the stratigraphy. This is then combined with ceramic analysis to supplement phase division and dating. The database and documentation system are continually refined

and optimized.

The team conducted three regular excavation campaigns so far, the duration of the field campaigns varied depending on the season's goals: in 2021 between September 4th and October 13th, in 2022 from July 25th and September 8th and in 2023 from August 15th and September 11th. The three areas chosen for excavation were determined based on the project's research questions and guided by the preliminary work conducted at the site (**Fig. 3**). In addition, two ceramic study campaigns



2. The mound of Tall Ushay'ir seen from the east.



3. Topographic map of Tall Ushay'ir, with excavation areas and traced remains of the fortification system.

took place. These campaigns offered students from the Freie Universität Berlin and Yarmouk University in Irbid the opportunity for international exchange and practical training in various aspects.

Area A

Excavations began in 2018 and continued through all three campaigns. The excavated trench, extending from the *Tall* summit down the northern slope, is located in squares 299585, 299586, and 300585 (see **Figs. 3, 5**). This trench aimed to investigate the relationship between an above surface large cobble/pebble accumulation, a nearby row of stones, and the fortification wall. Findings revealed the massive scale and construction techniques of the fortification system. Additionally, extramural zones exposed remains of various activities, and a deep trench provided insights into the stratigraphy of the *Tall*. In this Area, 138 *loci* were recorded and excavated over 4 years, including the preliminary work in 2018.

Area B

Excavated in 2021 and 2022, this area focused on a gap in the defensive wall identified during the geomagnetic survey. The trench,

within squares 297583, 297584, and 297585, aimed to explore the wall's relation to a visible buttress and the intramural occupation (see **Figs. 3, 6**). While no gate was found, the area provided valuable insights into the defensive system and uncovered remains from the last phases of intramural occupation. In Area B, 162 *loci* were recorded and excavated.

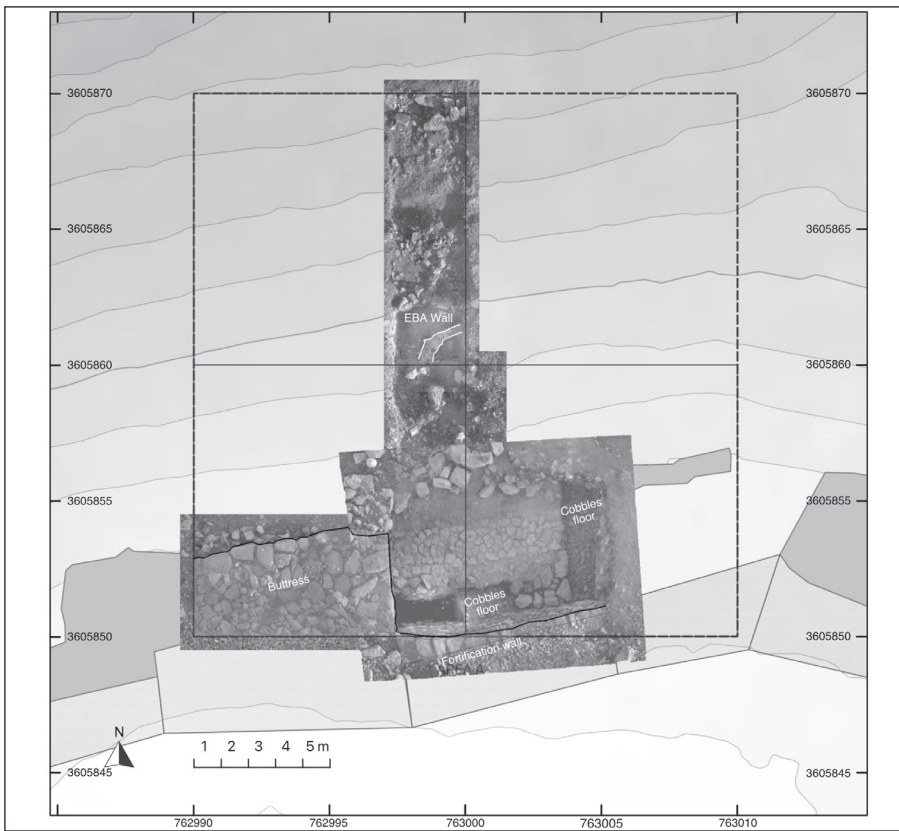
Area C

Excavated in 2022 and 2023, this area targeted the gate location, the adjacent ramp, and the fortification system on the slope. Trenches spanned squares 305583, 306583, 303581, and 304382 (see **Figs. 3, 7 and 8**). These excavations enhanced our understanding of the fortification system's construction, collapse, and occupation phases. In Area C, 94 *loci* were recorded and excavated.

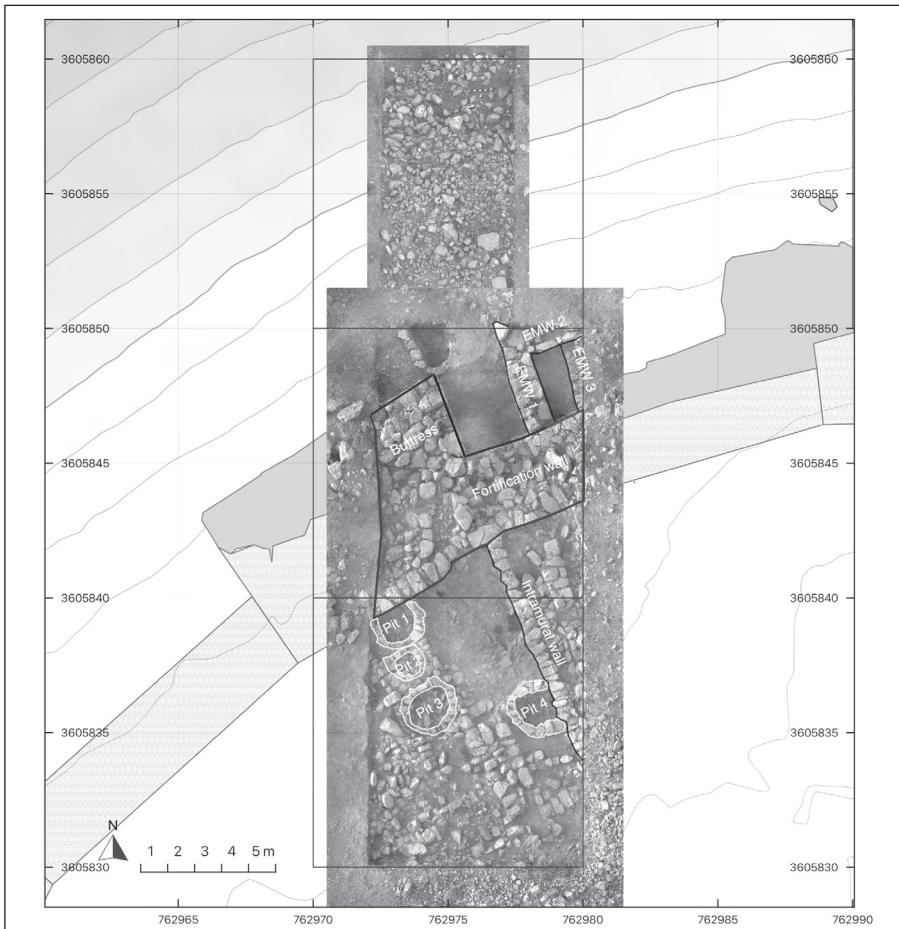
Overall, the excavations contributed significantly to our understanding of the fortification system and the stratigraphic sequence of Tall Ushay'ir. The earliest remains date back to the Early Bronze Age. Evidence of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages is sparse in our excavation areas, indicating that either the site was abandoned during this period or that it was reduced in size. During the early Iron



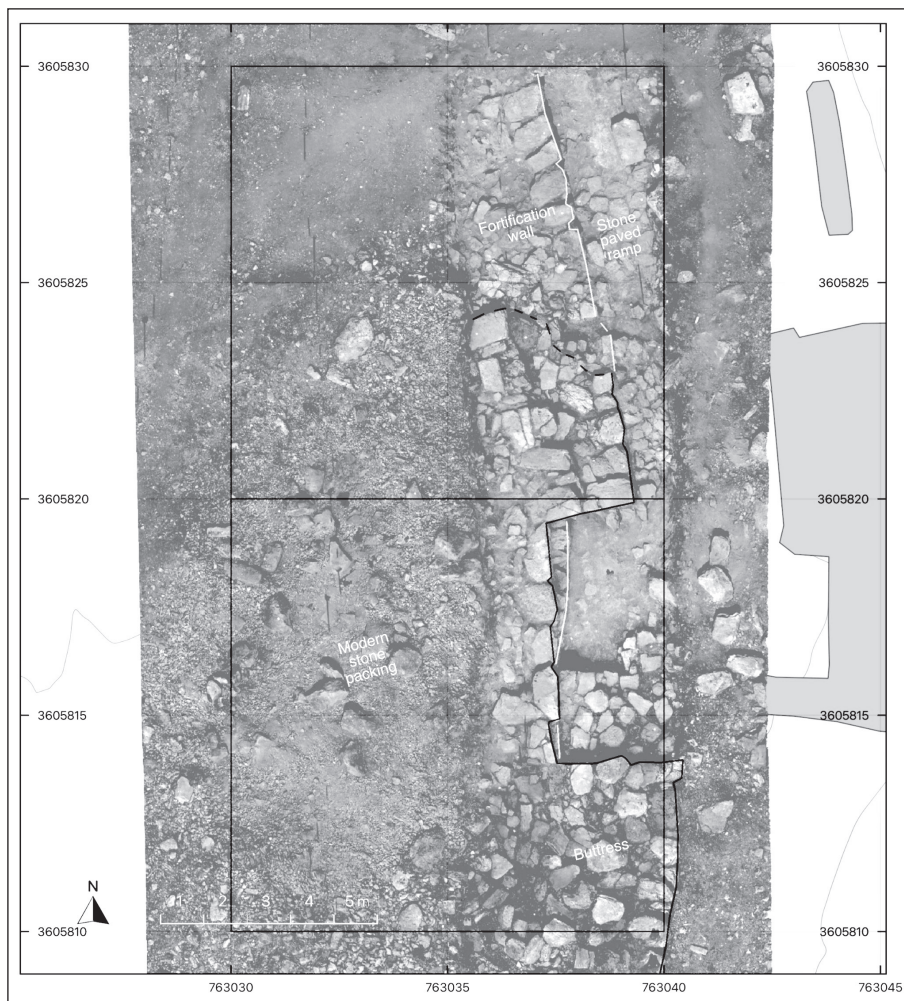
4. The EBA remains: the curvilinear wall found in Area A and a sample of grain wash sherds.



5. Combined orthophotos of Area A showing the final excavation situation.



6. Combined orthophotos of Area B showing the final excavation situation.



7. Combined orthophotos of the trench on the edge of the mound in Area C showing the

Age, a massive fortification system was erected which gave the mound its final shape. Our investigation of the intramural and extramural areas indicates that the site remained in use until the end of the Iron Age. The collected evidence indicates a limited usage during later periods, as indicated by the scarce pottery sherds and a small Roman-era structure uncovered in Area C in 2023.

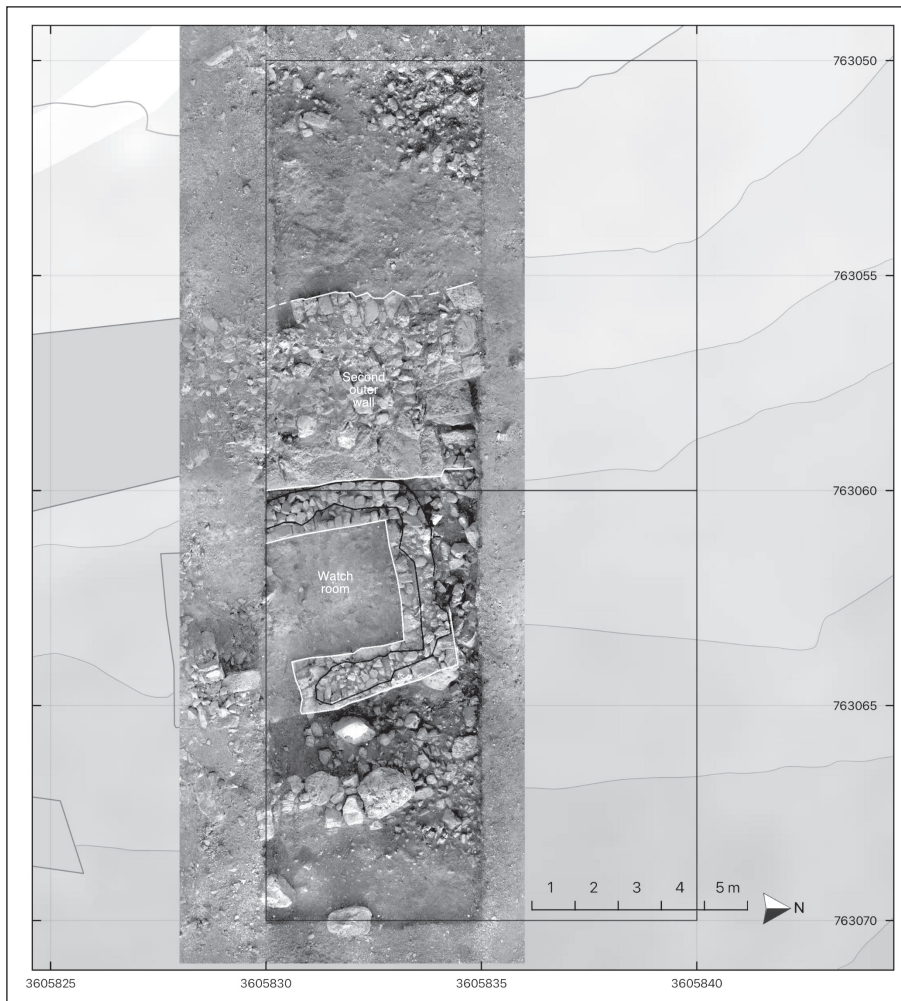
Evidence of an Early Bronze Age Occupation

Evidence of an Early Bronze Age occupation was attested in two deep trenches in Area A (see **Figs. 4, 5**). The first trench located on the northern slope in square 299586 was excavated in 2021. The 2-meter-wide trench reached a depth of about 2.30 meters from the original surface and revealed a thick layer of compact sandy soil mixed with stone fragments and few pottery sherds, likely an artificial deposit. Underneath the deposit, layers containing mixed pottery were found, leading to the discovery of a

curvilinear wall segment slanted southeast with three courses exposed. The layers delimited by the wall, yielded exclusively fragments of Early Bronze Age (EBA) pottery. The wall segment is curved, and although only partially exposed, indicate the site might have had curvilinear vernacular architecture, a type of architecture that spread in a vast area of the Levant during the EBA I. The architecture of this wall is similar to that of the structures found at Tall Jāwā in central Jordan, Jabal Al Muṭawwaq located along the Middle Wādī Az Zarqā' valley and *Al Basātīn*, in Wādī Zīqlāb, Northern Jordan, or the non-excavated sausage-shaped houses in Leja (Betts and Helms 1991; Fernández-Tresguerres Velasco 2005; Gibbs *et al.* 2009; Braun 2021).

Further up the slope a deep trench was excavated in 2022 and 2023 and the deepest layer reached contained 60% EBA pottery². The pottery collected from both deep trenches

2. This deep trench is located in the corner of the main fortification wall and one of its buttresses in square 299585.



8. Combined orthophotos of the trench on the slope of the mound in Area C showing the final excavation situation.

show quite a substantial occurrence of sherds with Grain Wash decoration. The painted body sherds with reddish and brownish bands above a whitish washed surface might have belonged to large storage jars or pithoi. This pottery group is dated to the Early Bronze Age I–III (Genz 2000: 279–285). Other EBA markers such as ledge handles, or rim fragments of hole mouth jars decorated with bands of finger imprints or incisions were also found. The EBA occupation of Tall Ushay'ir is still identified only in very limited area. Further investigation and an expansion of the area towards the south and east will shed more light on this phase of the occupation of the *tall*.

The Layout of Tall Ushay'ir's Fortification System: Insights from the 2021 Mapping and Geomagnetic Prospection

As mentioned in the introduction, remnants of the fortification wall and other structures are visible all over the site's surface. During

the 2021 campaign, an extensive mapping of visible remains at Tall Ushay'ir was conducted using a GPS device. Combined with the results of the magnetometry, these results significantly enhanced our understanding of the site's fortification system (see Fig. 3).

A circular wall surrounds the mound's top. It consists of wall stretches alternating with substantial protruding buttresses. These buttresses are the most prominent of the surface remains, ranging from 7.50 to 10 meters in length and protruding between 2.50 to 3.50 meters from the wall's facade. The intervals between the buttresses, closed by the main fortification wall, vary between 10 and 15 meters.

To the east, the fortification system features an outward projecting structure, indicating the location of the gate and a parallel ramp course along the mound slope. This is complemented by a perpendicular wall and a second outer wall, identified through geomagnetic prospection and surface remains mapping. At the foot of

the mound, two rectangular watch rooms were traced, likely serving to safeguard and monitor the settlement entrance. The walls of these units seem to have been well-preserved, with one still in use by shepherds.

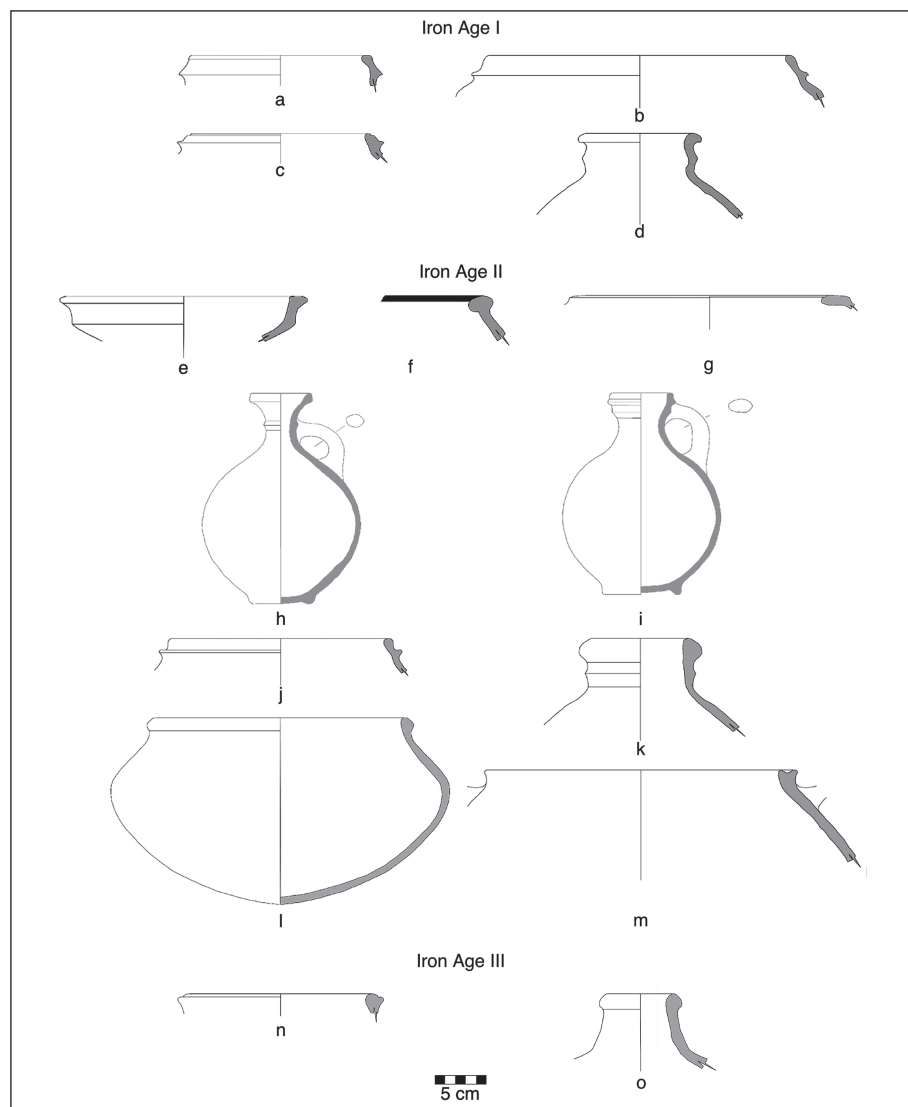
Visible sections of stone walls in the west and south require further investigation to determine their connection to an outer fortification or retaining wall. These features underscore the complexity and strategic design of Tall Ushay'ir's fortification system, reflecting its historical significance and defensive capabilities.

The Fortification System: its Construction and Dating

The two deep trenches in Area A mentioned earlier, revealed that the *tall* was raised during the construction of the fortification wall surrounding the mound's top. The EBA remains

down the slope were covered with an artificial deposit that contained mixed pottery, probably added to raise or stabilize the slope, or to even out its surface. In the deep trench excavated at the edge of the slope, in the corner of the wall stretch and one of the buttresses, a uniform artificial deposit was excavated for more than 3,5 meters without any change in consistency. The collected pottery from throughout this context included besides the EBA material mentioned above, Late Bronze Age, transitional and Iron Age I sherds, with very few indications of MBA material so far. Neither the bottom of the wall nor of the buttress were reached. The elevation reached was *ca.* 1m below the elevation of the EBA remains further north.

Our current preliminary interpretation is that after a probable hiatus following the EBA occupation (at least in this part of the mound),



9. Pottery.

the builders of the fortification wall dug deep trenches into the EBA levels and started elevating the wall / buttress and heaping soil to artificially elevate the level of the mound. The artificial raising of the mound seem to have progressed hand in hand with the erection of the massive fortification wall. As mentioned above the main wall surrounding the *tall* consists of an alternation of twelve wall stretches and protruding buttresses. The whole, as traced from surface remains, has a total length of *ca.* 275m (see **Fig. 3**). We exposed in our trenches three segments of this wall and adjoining buttress, together with the buttress cleared in 2018, a total of 55m. From the excavation in Areas A and B it was clear that the stones of the wall stretches and the buttresses were interlocking and that these were erected together. In Area B, the trench extended from the intra mural to the extra mural area crossing the wall width, which turned out to be 3m wide, and a total of 6,5m with the buttress (see **Fig. 6**). The wall itself, as observed in Areas B and C, was constructed of large and only roughly worked boulders following the so-called double-faced method, with the inner and outer façades built of tightly-packed regularly laid stones and the space in between filled with loosely deposited stones, even boulders. The four exposed and documented buttresses are built according to the drystone method, from large stones without any traceable mortar to bind them together. It should be highlighted that some of the single stones used in the buttresses reach 2m in width. From the deep trench in Area A we so far have 3,5m sub-floor elevation of the wall and buttress and 2,8 height above the earliest identified floor.

This impressive wall is moreover a part of a much more complex fortification system. The location of the gate is supposed to be in the east, based on the magnetometry and the surface remains tracing. Its location is further protected by a series of defenses that develop on the eastern slope. The upper trench in Area C was placed to probe into the location of the gate as well as the adjacent intra – and extra mural areas (**Fig. 7**). Work started here in 2022, it required the removal of a massive modern stone packing, *ca.* 200 m². It revealed a stretch of the wall and to the outside a ramp partially stone

paved and partially plastered on which massive blocks from the wall collapsed. Further south, towards the supposed location of the gate, the wall turns westwards then southwards again until it meets the buttress. The wall here shows structural modification that indicate at least three phases of alterations (see black and white lines on (**Fig. 7**) for the two earlier phases). Unfortunately, the continuation of the ramp at the gate opening was disturbed by a minor Roman structure, the only Roman structure found in the excavation so far. Understanding the development of the gate is still preliminary and requires further expansion of the area eastwards and westwards.

The trench running down the eastern slope was also excavated in 2021 and has revealed a massive second outer wall (**Fig. 8**). It is *ca.* 6,5 m wide, and consists of a substructure constructed of massive stones, up to 2 meters long, and a superstructure of smaller stones. The foundation has not been reached yet, so the construction date is not secure, but from the construction technique it seems to belong to the fortification system. One half of one of the watch rooms leaning against this wall from the outside was investigated. The structure had been reused in modern times, its walls were rebuilt, its floor and door opening covered with cement, and was subsequently used as a dumb afterwards (on (**Fig. 8**) the white and black lines indicate the original and rebuilt walls of the watch room). Understanding the earlier history of this structure still requires further excavation. Nonetheless, we noted that the original walls have a similar building technique as the intra-mural ones in Area B, and we would at the moment preliminary assume a similar date.

So, when did this ancient mega building project take place? The answer is in the pottery from two key contexts. The first is the excavated fill of the trench in the corner of the wall and buttress in Area A. In this fill the youngest sherds are dated to the Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age, for instance cooking pots with an elongated ridge in the outside (**Fig. 9a-c**). Parallels could be found at Tall Al Juhfiyyah (Lamprichs 2007: 433, Pl. 49:3; 439, Pl. 55: 2; 443, Pl. 59: 4), Tall Zar‘ā (Schwermer 2014, 42, Pl. SB E 3: 2), Tall Ya‘mūn (Hindawi 2006: 369, Pl. 75:1) and Pella (Mc Nicoll 1992: Pl. 50:6). The date

of these sherds indicate that when the fill was deposited there was no later material neither in the reused soil from the mound itself nor from nearby areas where the soil of the foundation could have been sourced. This fill was sealed with a cobbles floor on which, in the corner between the wall and the buttress, evidence of a temporary fireplace was found. The stone circle with charred material indicates most probably a single firing event limited in time that serves as a *terminus ante quem* for the floor. The closest parallels to the ceramic assemblage associated with this fireplace, especially to a jar with an s-shaped profile and an everted rim (Fig. 9d), are found in Tall Al Juhfiyyah in the south (Lamprichs 2007: 425, Pl. 41:1) and are dated to the Iron Age I.

The Extra- and Intramural Remains

Extramural remains were excavated in both area A and B, while intramural remains have been exposed so far only in Area A (see Figs. 5, 6). In Area A, outside the fortification wall, the cobbles floor was succeeded by a series of deposits and later floors. During the Iron Age II, parts of the wall collapsed outwards directly on a floor / walking surface and down the slope. The pottery from contexts immediately under the collapse and from the collapse itself indicate it took place in the Iron Age IIC. Fragments of a carinated bowl with an everted rim a burnished finishing, and of a jar with a red slip on top of the rim lip were found on the floor on which the wall collapsed (Fig. 9e-f). These two vessels are common during the Iron Age II A-B with parallels in Kabri in the northern coastal plain and Hazor تل وقاص in the upper Galilee (Lehmann 2015: 127, Pl. 2.1.5: 21 + 22; Ben-Tor and Zarzecki-Peleg 2015: 150, Pl. 2.2.2: 3 + 13). A fragment of a holmouth jar or krater, with a unique groove very close to the lip (Fig. 9g), was discovered in the collapse above that floor level, and is dated by parallels in Samaria السامرة (Tappy 2015b: 335, Pl. 3.2.2:12), Lachish تل الدوير (Tappy 2015b: 335, Pl. 3.2.5:14) and Tall Al 'Umayrī (Bienkowski 2015: 427, Pl. 3.6.2:1) to the Iron Age IIC.

The stones of the collapse were subsequently adjusted and reused to erect a wall that closed of the extramural area. In this part of the *tall*, this phase marks the end of the usage of

this area. Unfortunately, no floors or immediate collapse could be associated with this later wall to provide an exact dating. Nonetheless, preliminary observation indicates that the pottery from associated contexts is predominately Iron Age.

In Area B evidence of building activities in the extra mural area was also identified. The excavations exposed a wall abutting the outer face of the fortification wall and a second perpendicular wall (see Fig. 6 – EMW 1 and EMW 2). These enclosed a small area within our trench, in which we excavated from top to bottom several layers of deposit, a stone collapse and a floor. Underneath this floor, we have started exposing the top course of an earlier stone wall also abutting the fortification wall (see Fig. 6 – EMW 3). Unfortunately, the pottery in these contexts was scarce and inconclusive.

The focus of the excavation in Area B was on the intramural occupation. Under the topsoil, the trench was mostly covered by a stone collapse or scattered stones. From the last occupation phase, four stone-lined pits were identified (see Fig. 6 – Pits 1 to 4). Such structures are believed to have had a storage function, most commonly for grain (Itkin 2022; Pucci 2023). This function is corroborated by the impressive number of grinding tools and large proportion of food processing and consumption pottery shapes from the associated assemblages. Unfortunately, the rarity of diagnostic pottery sherds from the fills of the stone lined pits does not allow us to provide a *terminus ante quem* for the usage of these pits. A tentative dating of this material (Fig. 9n-o), based on few parallels in Tall Al Juhfiyyah, is in the late Iron Age III (Lamprichs 2007: 444, Pl. 60:1; 429, Pl. 45:1).

Under the stone collapse, not associated directly with the pits, two almost complete jugs were found. One jug was almost intact missing only small parts, it has an everted rim, a narrow neck, a ring base, and a globular body (Fig. 9h). Its handle was attached above a ridge on the neck. Parallels were found in Iron Age II A-B Megiddo and Tannach (Ben-Tor and Zarzecki-Peleg 2015: pl. 2.2.16: 7 + 8) and Iron Age IIC Tall Al Fukhkhār (Andersen *et al.*: 300; Strange 2015: Pl.170,15). The second jug was smashed by the stones and is slightly smaller (Fig. 9i).

It has a thicker and more rounded rim and its handle is attached closer to the ridge on the neck. Its form resembles the juglet with white slip and red decoration found in the Early Iron Age building complex in Tall Abū Al KHaraz (Bürge 2015: 81, see **Fig. 6**).

From an earlier phase a preserved floor and associated *tannur* were identified. The *tannur* was unfortunately looted in the night after we exposed it and before we could properly excavate it. The material that was dumped within the trench after the looting was carefully collected, and could help us date its fill. Vessel types that were collected from the *tannur* and scattered immediately above the associated floor are for food preparation, consumption and storing. Common among the material are cooking pots and jars of various types, as well as kraters (**Fig. 9j-m**). This phase is dated to the Iron Age II based on the parallels found at Tall Zar'ā (Schwermer 2014, 59, Pl. KtEZ2b.4:1), Tall Al Juhfiyyah (Lamprichs 2007: 419, Pl. 35:1, 450, Pl. 66), Dor (Lehmann 2015: 119, Pl. 2.1.7:3), Samaria (Tappy 2015a: 203, Pl. 2.3.5:4), and Hazor (Ben-Tor and Zarzecki-Peleg 2015: 155, Pl. 2.2.5:5).

These intramural remains were excavated to the west of a massive intramural wall that we exposed for a length of 8 m without yet finding a corner (see **Fig. 6** – Intramural wall). This wall abuts the inner face of the fortification wall. It still remains to be understood whether this intramural wall was erected together with the fortification and what was the main use of the intramural area of the settlement that warranted the construction of a such a massive defensive system. Noteworthy is that there is a *ca.* 2,3m difference between the latest floor excavated in the intramural area in Area B and the oldest extramural floor, indicating that the two phases we identified so far were the latest two phases of quite a long occupation sequence.

The evidence from the excavation in the intra and extra mural areas in Areas A and B indicate that the wall remained in use until the Iron Age IIC. A dating of its collapse will have to await the study of the pottery collected from the two collapse contexts excavated on the slope both in area A and B. The latter is quite massive, extending for *ca.* 10m down the slope, and will be the focus of the 2024 excavation campaign.

Monitoring and Looting

Many modern looting pits were observed during the topographic recording of the *Tall* in 2021 and 2022. To record the current state and provide a base for future monitoring activities, all pits with diameters above 50cm were surveyed and measured in 2021 and newer ones were added in 2022 (so far 43 have been recorded).

Many of the looting pits date back to several years / decades ago, such as the large looting pit excavated in Area B underneath a more recent looting pit, and which contained in its fill plastic refuse, packaging and textile from the 1990s. Other looting pits are of more recent date, for instance those dug between the excavation campaigns. Especially problematic for the excavation process and the project results is the looting and disturbance activities that took place during the excavation season, as happened several times in 2018 and three times in 2021. The most serious was the destruction and almost complete removal of an important excavation context in the Iron Age building in Area B, the discovered *in situ tannur* and pottery vessels were destroyed and discarded by the looters. As these activities were taking place during our absence from the site (*e.g.* evening, night, weekend), we decided to place guards during the 2022 and 2023 seasons. This deterred most of the disturbance during the excavation, with one minor exception. Unfortunately, during the months after the excavation has ended in 2022 all excavated areas were the subject of major intentional disturbance, as observed by one visitor to the site and reported by some of our local team members. Despite our efforts to cover the excavated trenches with a protective resistant fabric and backfilling the trenches with stones and soil, walls of large stones were toppled in areas A and B, and the whole backfill, and fabric was removed from Area C.

During the spring of 2020, as part of the preventive maintenance measures for archaeological sites of the Department of Antiquities, a much-appreciated weeding and cleaning operation took place at the site of Tall Ushay'ir. During this limited procedure, some of the stones scattered on the site surface were collected in heaps all over the mound. Unfortunately, this might have caused some

unintentional damage to few of the ancient sub-surface structures, as could be seen in 2021 from the still-visible stone imprints. As some of the heaps might collapse or be re-scattered over the years, causing some misinterpretation of their origins, we started their systematic recoding in 2022. So far 56 heaps were recorded, parts of eastern, northern and western slopes are still not completely surveyed, which will be continued in future seasons.

The plan of the site with the recorded looting pits have been submitted to the DoA for their monitoring records. The vandalism and looting activities that took place during the excavation campaigns have been noted by the representatives present and in one case was reported to the police. However, this is just a minor reaction in the face of looting and illegal excavations of archeological sites, which cause irreparable damage to the ancient layers and the loss of valuable data. Monitoring and the recording of looting and vandalism are essential to combat looting and address the looting problem more effectively. In the meantime, empowering the local inspectors to monitor the various sites under their jurisdiction and the continuous presence of site guards would certainly help alleviate the consequences.

Conclusion and Prospects

The archaeological project of Tall Ushay‘ir, has significantly advanced our understanding of this previously unexplored site in Northern Jordan. Its strategic location and extensive fortification system underscore its historical significance, particularly during the Iron Age.

Our work so far indicates an early occupation phase during the Early Bronze Age, followed by intermittent periods of reduced activity or abandonment. The discovered Early Bronze Age pottery and architectural elements suggests potential links to broader architectural traditions in the central and southern Levant.

The 2019 geomagnetic survey and subsequent excavation campaigns have mapped and partially excavated the site’s formidable fortification system, featuring massive walls, buttresses, and a sophisticated gate complex. These fortifications and the presence of secondary defensive structures indicates a well-planned and multi-phased construction effort, during the Iron Age I.

Intramural excavations have uncovered various phases of occupation. The presence of stone-lined pits for food storage dated probably to the Iron Age III, and the evidence of a previous occupation phase dated to the Iron Age II indicate a shift in the function of the site and a change in its socio-economic structures during the last occupation phases. The extramural excavations have revealed that the site remained actively in use from the construction of the fortification in the Iron Age I well into the Iron Age IIC, as indicated by the numerous floors, collapses and subsequent reconstructions.

The preliminary findings from Tall Ushay‘ir highlight its potential to shed light on the socio-political and economic developments of the North Jordanian Plateau. Future excavation campaigns, particularly those focusing on the extensive collapse layers, further investigation of the fortification system, the intramural occupation and the earlier occupation phases promise to provide deeper insights into the site’s long-term historical trajectory and its role within the broader regional context.

Acknowledgment

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