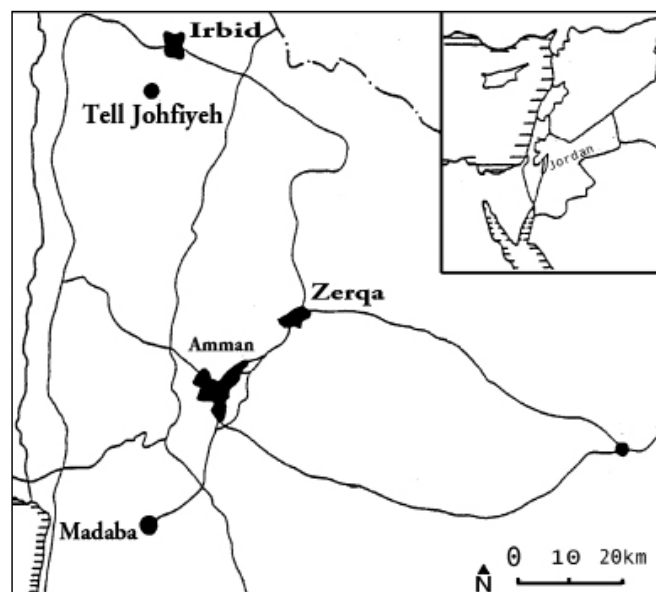


A Period of Peace and Prosperity in Gilead Tall Juḥfiyya and its Surrounding During the (late) Iron Age A Report on the 2002-2004 and 2007 Seasons¹

Introduction

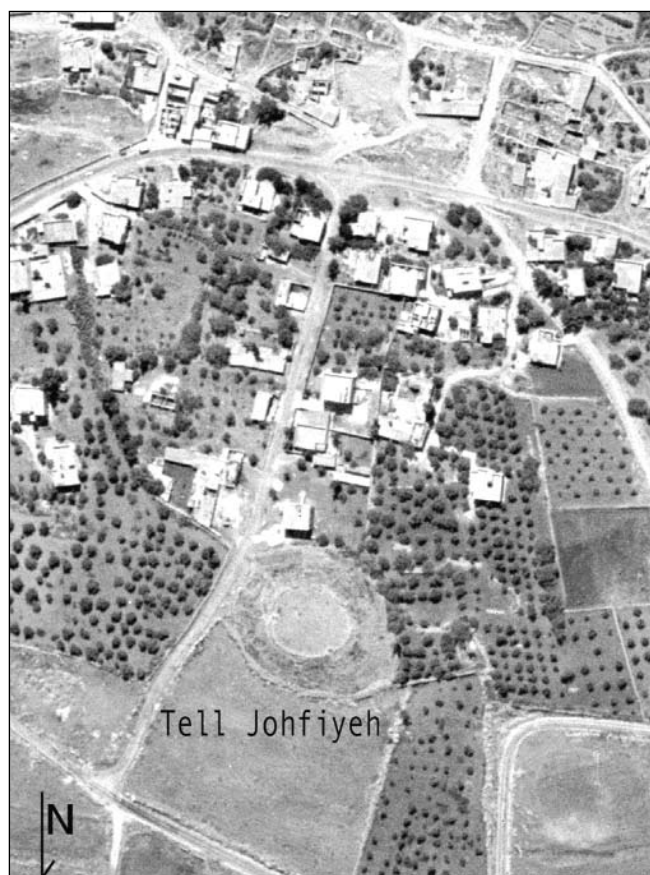
A few weekend trips to the surroundings of Irbid in northern Jordan made together with my dear friends and colleagues Ziad al-Sa'ad and Zeidan Kafafi during my time at Yarmouk University, Irbid, back in 1995 have been in some way the starting point of the joint German-Jordanian archaeological project at Tall Juḥfiyya (FIG. 1). The site is situated approximately 7.5km south-west of modern Irbid at the northern edge of the modern village of Juḥfiyya.² Its topographical location on the north Jordanian plateau is exposed. The site, 790m above sea level, is located within an agriculturally intensively used area where rainfed agriculture is possible (FIG. 2). It offers an excellent view in all directions. Nowadays the inhabitants of modern Juḥfiyya grow mostly grain and different kinds of fruit trees.



1. Map of Jordan showing Tall Juḥfiyya.

The Project

During the mentioned weekend trips to the surroundings of Irbid our attention was drawn to some small, until then almost unnoticed sites west and south-west of Irbid. A first analysis of surface pottery from Tall Juḥfiyya, Tall ash-Shiqāq, Dhahrat as-Sūq, Tall Bayt Yāfā and Tall Kufr Yūbā suggested, that most of these sites were founded and



2. Tall Juḥfiyya and the modern village of Juḥfiyya (Royal Geographic Society).

¹ Concerning the 2002-2004 seasons the article is following a lecture given and published already in the context of the Rencontre Assy-

riologique Internationale (RAI) 52, Muenster/Germany 2006.
² UTM-Zone 36, UTME 7652, UTMN 35986.

occupied mainly during the Iron Age (Lamprichs 1996a, b). Byzantine and Early Islamic pottery furthermore hints to a later resettlement.

Further analysis showed that none of these small sites have been a subject of systematic archaeological investigation so far. The information available comes almost only from early travel reports (Schumacher 1893; Steuernagel 1926; Abel 1967), the reports of Nelson Glueck (1951a, b), different site compilations (Zwickel 1990; Palumbo 1994) and thematic maps (Höhne 1981; TAVO B IV 6). There was almost no information available about the structure and function as well as the regional, historical and political settings of the sites. In addition the Iron Age on the north Jordanian plateau in general is still widely unexplored (Bartl *et al.* 2002: 95, 114-115; Herr and Najjar 2001: 323-330, 332, 334-335; Bienkowski 2001a: 349-352; Kamalah 2000: 145-148). Good evidence of the material culture, function and regional status of the Iron Age sites in the close vicinity of Irbid were not available. New studies and in particular new excavations were badly needed.

Based on this and on several visits to the area under discussion between 1995 and 2000 (Lamprichs 1997a, b, 1998a, b; Lamprichs and Kafafi 2000; Lamprichs and Bastert 2004) Ziad al Sa'ad from the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropol-

ogy of Yarmouk University and myself started a joint archaeological project at Tall Juḥfiyya in 2002 which was continued in 2003 and 2004 (Lamprichs 2002a, b, c, 2003a, b, c, 2004a, b; Lamprichs and al-Sa'ad 2002, 2003, 2004a, b, 2005).³ A hitherto last campaign was conducted in spring 2007.⁴

Tall Juḥfiyya

The archaeological site of Tall Juḥfiyya which is slightly adjusted to the east-west at its base, covers only a total area of about 4000sqm. The leveled, almost round surface of the approximately 7,00m high tall covers even only an area of about 950sqm (FIG. 3). Traces of ploughing found there prior to 2002 did indicate an agricultural use of the tall's surface until recently. The slopes of the tall and its immediate surroundings were covered with many big and medium sized lime- and flintstones. Unlike similar sites in the neighbourhood, for example Tall Bayt Yāfā and Tall ash-Shiqāq, the general preservation of Tall Juḥfiyya was still very good. Smaller destructions and a few "illicit diggings" were found on the slopes and the top surface. Natural erosion was only of minor importance at Tall Juḥfiyya and has barely affected the site (Lamprichs 1996a: 325-342, 1996b: 10). A perimeter wall enclosing the almost round hilltop was still visible at the surface.



3. Tall Juḥfiyya (from west): situation 2004 (photo by H. Debajah).

³ A final report on the 2002-2004 seasons is in print (Lamprichs n.d.) and will be released by the end of 2007.

⁴ The 2002-2004 and 2007 seasons have been conducted under the joint directorship of Dr. Ziad al-Sa'ad and Dr. Roland Lamprichs. The excavations were carried out with the constant support of the

Department of Antiquities of Jordan and I would like to express my gratitude to its director general, Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh. My thanks are also due to Dr. Ziad Talafeh, the inhabitants of the village of Juḥfiyya, our excellent workmen and team members.

2002 Season⁵

In the frame of our first three week excavation campaign in early summer 2002, a topographical map of the site was drawn up and an artificial grid orientated to the north (10,00m x 10,00m) was laid over the Tall (FIG. 4). Two main phases of settlement could be separated then: Iron Age and Umayyad era. Remains of the latter were found exclusively on the southwestern slope of the tall and at the eastern fringe. Remains of the Iron Age, however, were found all over the site and belong mainly to domestic activities within an agricultural world. Numerous fire places, grinding stones, mortars, basalt pestles and scrapers, weaving weights, spindle whorls, a three footed basalt bowl with tools, numerous stone vessels, several arrowheads made of iron and a few beads made of carnelian were found.

In addition more than 17000 potterysherds were registered during our first campaign at Tall Juḥfiyya. 1500 pieces were classified as diagnostics. Altogether 20 different wares were separated and classified into two main groups. Group 1 consists of wares 1-5 and has a share of almost 82% in our pottery assemblage. They are all dating to the Iron Age, mainly the late Iron Age. Their texture extends from fine to coarse. The temper usually exists of small white, grey and brown mineral grits. The colour varies from a light beige up to a reddish brown. Larger jars are often characterized by

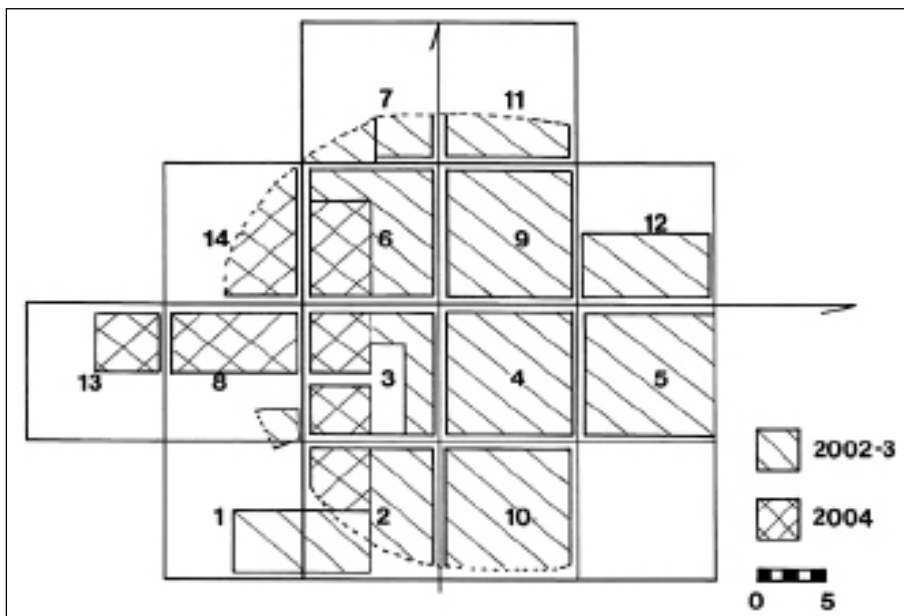
a greyish core. In addition to cooking pots, storage jars, jugs and juglets some cups, bowls, bottoms, handles, lids, spouts, decorated body sherds and lamps were registered. Group 2 consists of wares 6-20 and has a share of only 18% in the entire assemblage. They are of a non Iron Age date. Most of them probably belongs to the Early Islamic era.

2003 Season⁶

At the end of the 2003 season more than 600sqm have been opened and investigated within 12 squares. 200sqm in 2002 and more than 400sqm in 2003 (FIG. 4). In addition a deep sounding has been started and our knowledge of the site was considerably increased. Besides some poor remains of the Umayyad era the material was again mainly dating back to the late Iron Age.

The architectural remains and several in situ finds gave a first clue concerning the structure and function of the site. Following this, Tall Juḥfiyya, as well as the other mentioned sites in its vicinity, was most probably a family ran farmstead during the late Iron Age consisting of two different main units:

- a. A storage and processing unit for agricultural goods situated in the southern and eastern parts of the tall, connected by a semicircular passage-way (FIG. 5). This area consists of small rooms containing among other things silos, *ṭābūns* and



4. Area of excavation 2004.

⁵ The 2002 season was jointly funded by the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology.

⁶ The 2003 season was funded jointly by the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology and the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University.

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storage jars.

- b. The second unit consists of a “main building” situated in the northern part of the tall containing several rooms and a courtyard (FIG. 6). This area is characterized by larger rooms, domestic installations and many so called “luxury goods”.

Almost 80% of the more than 23000 sherds registered in 2003 date back to the late Iron Age. The remaining pieces date mainly to the Umayyad period. In addition some pieces of the early Iron Age

and Persian period have been recorded.

The otherwise excavated remains of the Iron Age belong again mainly to domestic activities within an agricultural world. The assemblage is dominated by pieces used for transportation, processing and storage of agricultural products. Apart from numerous fire places, *ṭābūns* and pottery vessels, a great variety of querns, pestles (round, cornered, conical), scrapers, mortars, bowls (round, cornered) and rubbers made of basalt as well as a



5. Storage and processing units (from southeast).



6. Main building (from northeast).

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few weaving weights, spindle whorls, stone lids and stone vessels were found.

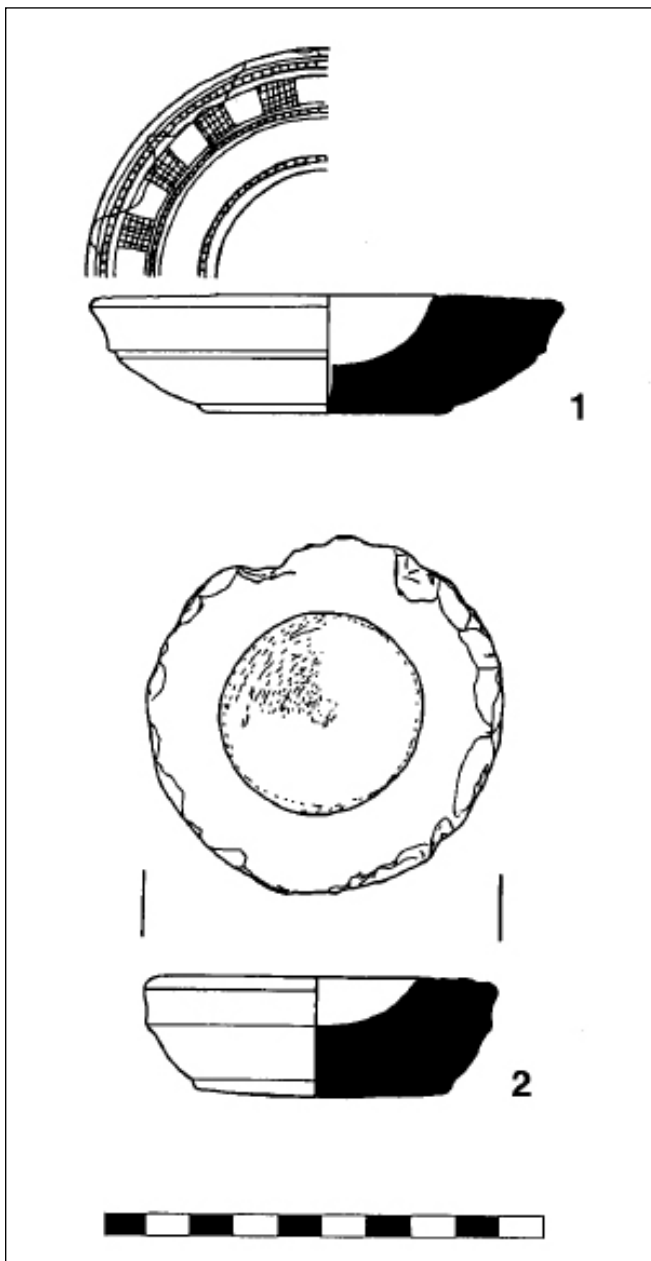
Furthermore the activities of 2003 at Tall Juḥfiyya produced for the first time some objects, so called “luxury goods”, which were not exclusively used for farming activities. These are remains of jewellery made of carnelian and lapis beads, pierced stone discs and shells as well as a fibula made of bronze, two decorated cosmetic bowls made of polished limestone (FIG. 7), a small complete basalt bowl (tripod) for the preparation of cosmetics or spices (FIG. 8) and some arrowheads and a chisel

made of iron. These finds, mainly made within and around the “main building” of the farm, indicate that the family who was in charge of the structure most probably belong to a local or regional elite who lived a prosperous and peaceful life during the late Iron Age.

Furthermore the huge amount of pottery sherds and grinding tools found within the so called storage and processing unit fits well with the general association of farmsteads with periods of high intensity land use, demand for specialized economic goods and heightened security conditions. In addition the remains and finds may also represent the penetration of Tall Juḥfiyya and its surroundings by an arm of a regional or central based administration. A close link of Tall Juḥfiyya and the other farmsteads of the north Jordanian plateau to one of the regional centers, most probably Tall al-Ḥuṣn and Tall Irbid, is very likely.

2004 Season⁷

A third season of archaeological excavations at



7. Tall Juḥfiyya: Two (decorated) cosmetic-bowls made of polished limestone.



8. Small mortar on three legs (basalt).

Tall Juhfiyya was conducted in 2004. Within six trenches more than 175sqm were newly opened: Four trenches, including a deep sounding, within the perimeter wall and two trenches on the slope of the tall (FIGS. 3, 4).

Again almost 92% of the more than 22000 pottery sherds registered in 2004, date back to the late Iron Age. The remaining pieces date to the early Iron Age, Persian and Umayyad periods. In addition the lower layers of the deep sounding brought to light pottery sherds of a late Bronze Age date for the first time at Tall Juhfiyya.

Furthermore new information concerning stratigraphy, dating, structure, function and socio-economic setting of the site were obtained. Within the already mentioned deep sounding which was dug for more than 6.50m below surface level seven different stratigraphic units could be separated. They are representing altogether three main phases of occupation, which could be summarized as follows:

1. The first phase of “occupation” is characterized by a huge circular structure of still unknown function. It consist of several concentric walls made of huge stones. The space in between was partly filled with small stones and pebbles. Pottery found within this structure belongs mainly to the late Bronze Age “chocolate on white” ty-pus. By the end of this period the surface of the

megalithic structure was partly levelled and be-side other activities a perimeter wall, surroundig the plateau area, was built.

2. The following subphase 1 of the second phase of occupation at Tall Juhfiyya was characterized by small domestic structures dating to the early Iron Age (FIG. 9). They were built within the perimeter wall using some of the architectural remains of the late Bronze Age structure. Re-mains and objects like pestles, rubbers, mortars and clay vessels relating to these structures be-long mostly to domestic and farming activities.

Subphase 2 is closely connected to the already mentioned structures excavated in 2002 and 2003. More storage jars, grinding stones, pestles and other objects related to farming activities as well as in 2004 newly discovered bronze fibulae (FIG. 10), decorated stone vessels, beads, finger rings and more so called “luxury goods” confirmed the already given interpretation of the site as a quite prosperous farmstead consisting of a main building in the north and a storage and processing unit in the southern part of the tall.

A first stratigraphic and chronological analysis of the excavated pottery and objects furthermore showed that the farmstead was most probably set up by the end of the eighth or the beginning of the seventh century B.C. According to our archaeo-



9. Small domestic structure in the northwestern part of the tall.

⁷ The 2004 season was jointly funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung,

Düsseldorf and Yarmouk University, Irbid.



10. Tall Juḥfiyya: Three bronze fibulae.

logical records it was in use at least until the end of the fifth century BC. It was only then, within the Persian period, probably connected to the death of Darius II, that the main building of the farmstead was abandoned by its inhabitants.

During the following subphase 3, which is covering the remaining part of the Persian period, that is mainly the fourth century BC as shown by a complete attic saltcellar, only the so called storage and processing units in the southern part of the tall have been rebuilt and reused. A quantitative rise in open fire places, silos and garbage pits in the northern area does even not exclude a temporary use of Tall Juḥfiyya during harvest times only. By the end of the Persian period Tall Juḥfiyya as a whole was temporarily abandoned.

3. It was only after a gap of more than 800 years that the fringes of the site were resettled during Umayyad times. Characteristic remains of the third phase of occupation at Tall Juḥfiyya are a cistern and several small rooms excavated mainly in 2002. By the end of the Umayyad period the site was finally abandoned.

2007 Season⁸

A fourth and hitherto last season of excavation was conducted at Tall Juḥfiyya in 2007 (FIGS. 11, 12). The work was mainly aimed at studying the archaeology of the early phases of the site, documenting its remains and increasing our general knowledge and understanding of the late Bronze Age on the north

Jordanian plateau.

New and conclusive information on the stratigraphy and pottery-sequence of the early phases as well as the structure of the site's lower levels, considered to be a circular megalithic structure, have been obtained. As shown by the pottery, mainly "chocolate on white", the site was definitely founded on natural bedrock during the late Bronze Age. The affiliated architectural remains consist of several concentric walls (FIG. 13), forming a circular structure measuring more than 50.00m in diameter. The walls are "put inside one another" at a distance of approximately 2.00m each (FIG. 14). Their state of preservation is good and the excavated ones still have a height of up to 4.72m. The spaces in between these concentric walls have been intentionally filled with medium sized lime- and flintstones. A layer of lime covered and "sealed" this fill (FIG. 15). Its function, however, is still uncertain and convincing parallels are hardly known.

Only the central(!) part of Rujm al-Hir (Kochavi 1989; Zohar 1989; Mizrahi *et al.* 1996), a site situated in the southern Golan area, has some features in common with the structure excavated in the lower levels at Tall Juḥfiyya. Based on this, an interpretation of Tall Juḥfiyya during the first phase of "occupation" as a late Bronze Age cairn seems possible. Further investigations and excavations, however, are necessary.

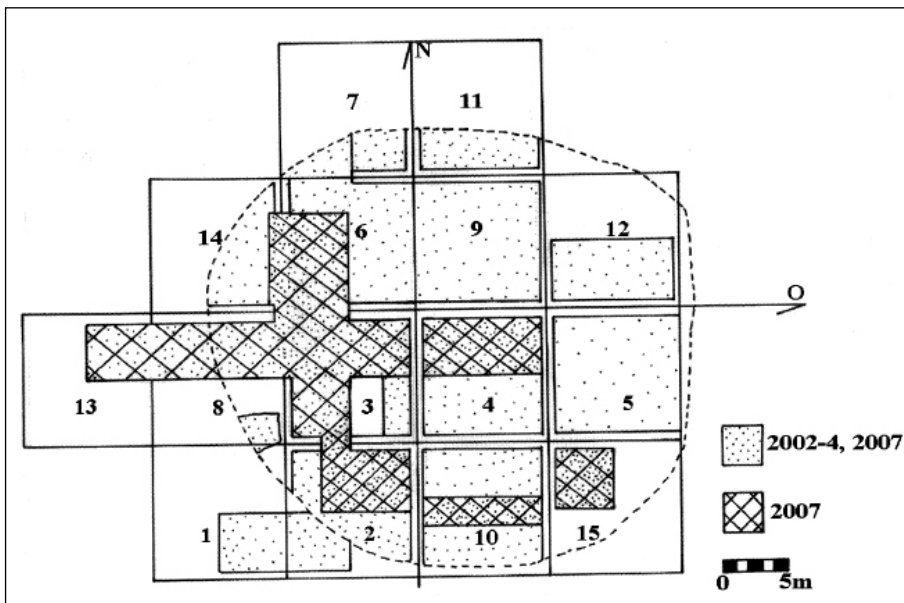
During Iron Age times the function of the site changed. The huge circular stone structure was lev-

⁸ The 2007 season was again jointly funded by the Gerda Henkel

Stiftung, Duesseldorf and Yarmouk University, Irbid.



11. Tall Juḥfiyya (from north): situation 2007 (photo by H. Debajah).



12. Area of excavation 2007.

eled and most of the the late Bronze Age walls were reused as foundations for a “fortified farmstead” already excavated in the 2002-2004 campaigns.

Summary

Summarizing our results, we may say that the north Jordanian plateau during the late Iron Age was characterized by small, quite homogenous and prosperous sites like Tall Juḥfiyya, Tall Bayt Yāfā, Tall ash-Shiqāq, Dhahrat as-Sūq and Tall Kufr Yūbā. Each of these sites most probably represent a farmstead consisting of a main building and a storage and processing unit. A close link of these farmsteads and its inhabitants to one of the region-

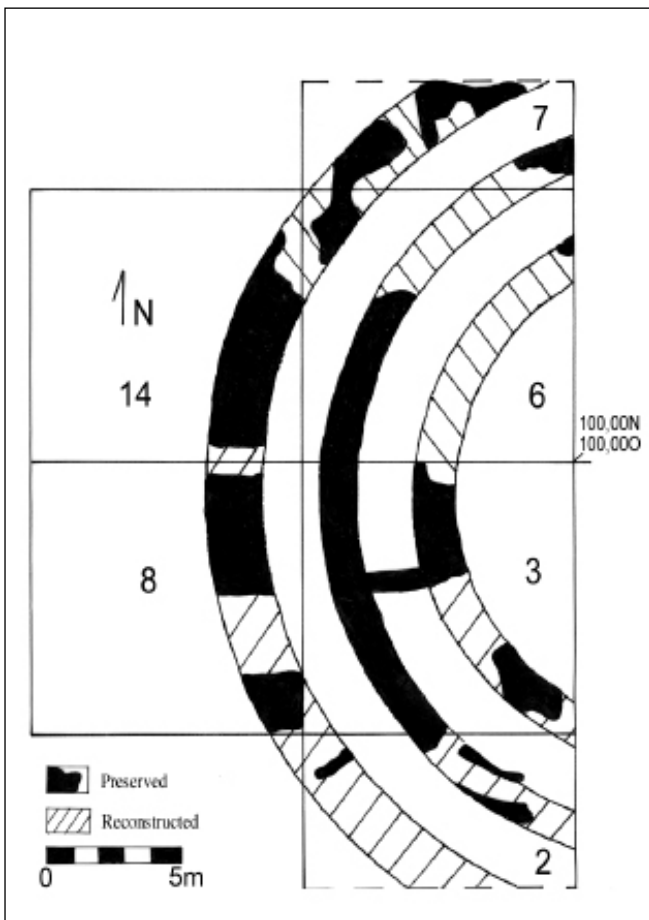
al centers, Tall al-Ḥuṣn or Tall Irbid, is very likely. The finds, especially the so called “luxury goods”, made within and around the main building at Tall Juḥfiyya suggest that the local families in charge belong to some kind of social or political elite who lived a quite peaceful and prosperous life during the late Iron Age.

Seen in the historic and archaeological context this phenomena, known as “pax assyriaca” in other regions (Ahlström 1993: 741), might be due to changes implemented in northern Jordan by the assyrians since the end of the eighth century BC (see Ahlström 1993: 642; Lamprichs 1995: 112-129).⁹ A great demand for specialized economic goods

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13. Excavated walls (1 – 3): a detail view from north.



14. Circular structures.

and highend security conditions, both guaranteed by the main power of the region offered excellent conditions for the development of flourishing farmsteads. In return the small farmsteads of the north Jordanian plateau like Tall Juḥfiyya and the families in charge had to make their contributions to the food supply of the respective central or regional power. In addition a political behaviour in favour of the latter was surely taken for granted. As shown by the archaeological record of Tall Juḥfiyya the assumed reorganizing of farming activities in northern Jordan by the assyrians, proved to be very successful and was therefore most probably carried on by the following powers of the region, the Babylonians and Persians (see Ahlström 1993: 805; Worschech 1991: 204; Bienkowski 2001: 270, 2001a: 347-349).

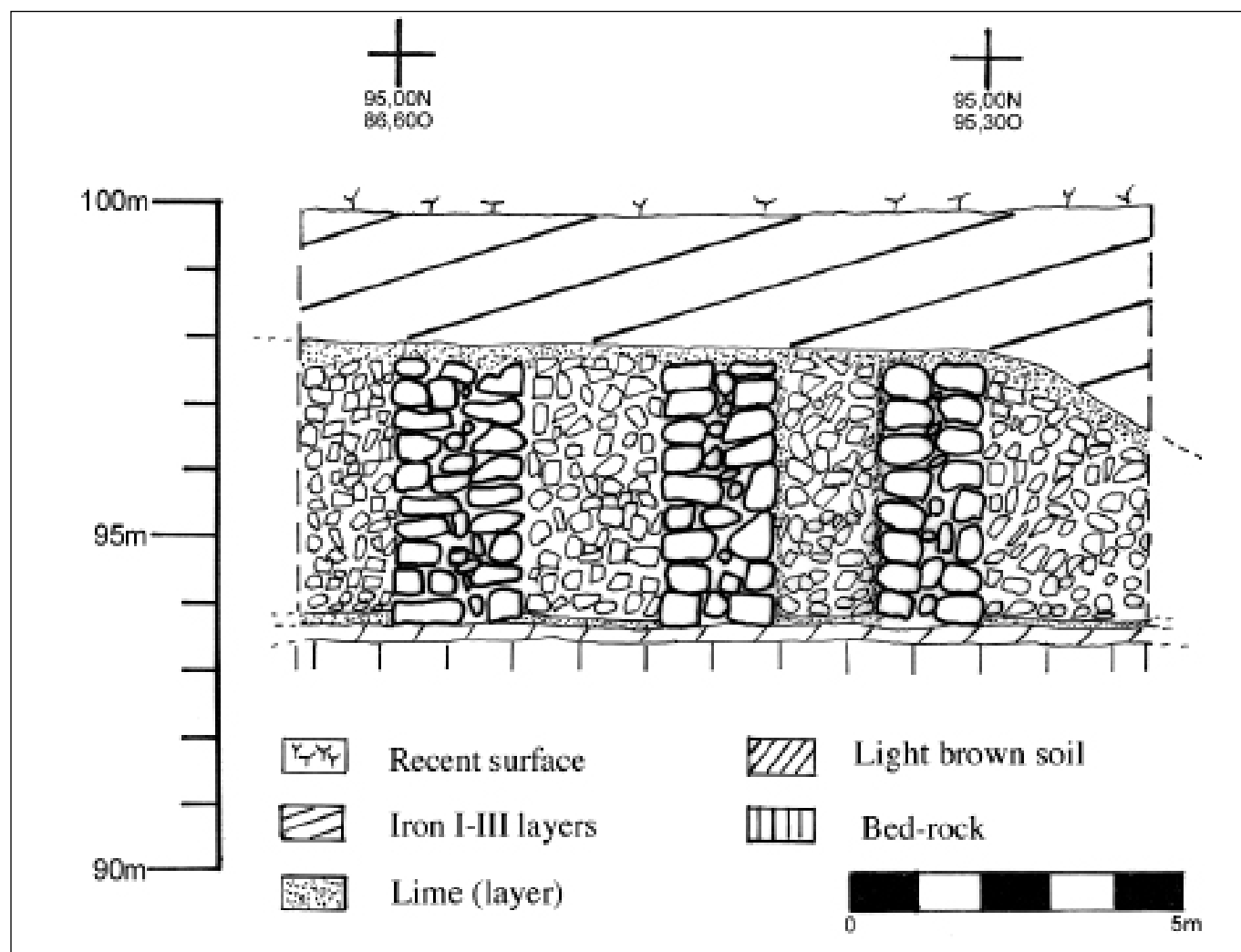
Following the archaeological record of Tall Juḥfiyya and its surrounding one may assume, that the assyrians, often labeled as cruel, barbarian and merciless, brought a period of peace and prosperity to northern Jordan that lasted for almost 300 years from the beginning of the seventh until the end of the fifth century BC.

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⁹ Concerning the status of northern Jordan (Gilead) within the assyr-

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15. Artificial section (showing the structure of the “circular remains”).

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