

NOTES AND NEWS ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT GHAWR AN-NUMAYRA

by

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The Ministry of Public Works and Housing (MPWH) is constructing a new road parallel to the existing highway from Ghawr Ḥaditha to Ghawr aṣ-Ṣāfī in order to improve the existing road.

Following a series of discussions, the MPWH provided financial help to the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DAJ) in order to conduct an emergency survey and excavations along the road alignment, and prepare a final report with the results of the survey excavations and recommendations.

For a preliminary cultural resources impact assessment, the site was visited on December 4, 1995 by CRM Archaeologist Mohammad Waheeb, and engineers of the MPWH staff. Several solutions were discussed and appropriate measures for protection of the archaeological sites were adopted.

Assessment

Two main sites were located as a result of a visit to Rujum an-Numayra and Tall an-Numayra, but the presence of more archaeological remains can be inferred by some alluvial terraces which may hide some small and medium sized sites like site no.4 which was discovered later during the survey of the area.

The damage to the sites had already occurred and has continued over the last years at the same rate.

1. Alluvial debris resulted from running water partly covering and cutting the cultural layers. The extent of the disturbed cultural layers cut by the water is difficult to determine especially at the northern part of the site.
2. A bulldozer cut of the existing road at the central area of the site resulted in separ-

ating the archaeological deposits into two parts (east and west of the existing road) and exposing cultural layers in section up to 2m high. The length of this cut is 50m. Several Byzantine tombs were exposed as a result of this bulldozing.

3. Modern bulldozer terracing below the Main Section revealed stone walls, tombs and other installations.
4. Pits dug by robbers in the central settlement area: the pits were dug by local people and it is reported that several small pottery vessels were sold in the nearby towns.

Recently, the Ghawr an-Numayra highway has been planned to be widened, endangering the upper and lower parts of the site by digging into its cultural layers over a considerable length (estimate: 5-10m) as well as covering large parts to the west of the existing road. The Director-General of the Department of Antiquities, Dr Ghazi Bisheh, quickly organized an excavation team to protect the site, without delaying or interfering with the construction work.

Such a rescue excavation requires one month. It was strongly suggested, then, that fieldwork at an-Numayra should start before construction, in order to conduct excavation with adequate time, and to avoid delays for the construction project. The MPWH agreed to allocate the sum required by the DAJ to conduct the archaeological rescue project.

Several factors have been considered in a work plan for an-Numayra:

1. The size of the area to be examined (possibly over 150m).
2. The depth of the archaeological deposit (up to 3m).
3. The complexity of the architectural remains which may be found.

4. The fact that the site was surveyed and investigated by Glueck (1935) and Rast and Schaub (1974).
5. The limited time available before construction.

Excavation Results

Rujum an-Numayra (Fig.1)

The team of the DAJ tried to salvage the site and to study all remains along the road alignment in the an-Numayra Area. The Rujum an-Numayra was located beside the main road, so the eastern edge of the site was totally excavated. The material recovered from the excavation was analysed and studied.

One architectural unit was uncovered consisting of several walls and representing small rooms which were built on a flat area. A system of terraces was established at the site to raise the level of the ground and to avoid any erosion in the Wādi an-Numayra area. According to our preliminary assessment, the structure possibly represented a watch-tower overlooking the eastern part of the Dead Sea shore during the Nabataean period. This date is based on two lamps and one juglet of Nabataean type mixed with several pottery sherds. The site was re-inhabited during the Byzantine era. Quantities of pottery sherds and traces of foundation walls were discovered on the surface of the site, showing that a large Byzantine set-



1. The south-east part of Rujum an-Numayra.

tlement occupied the area during the sixth century AD (Fig.2).

A large Byzantine cemetery was noticed surrounding the site in the east and west; part of the tombs are disturbed by robbers.

Excavations should continue to cover the western parts of the site to contribute to the study of the whole area.

Tall an-Numayra

The site is located on a sandy hill to the left of the road alignment. Four squares were opened at the site to assess the archaeological deposits and to check whether there was any relation with the nearby sites like Rujum an-Namayra and an-Numayra "4".

The field results revealed interesting features of stratification and architecture which date to the Bronze Age, especially EBI-III (Fig.3).

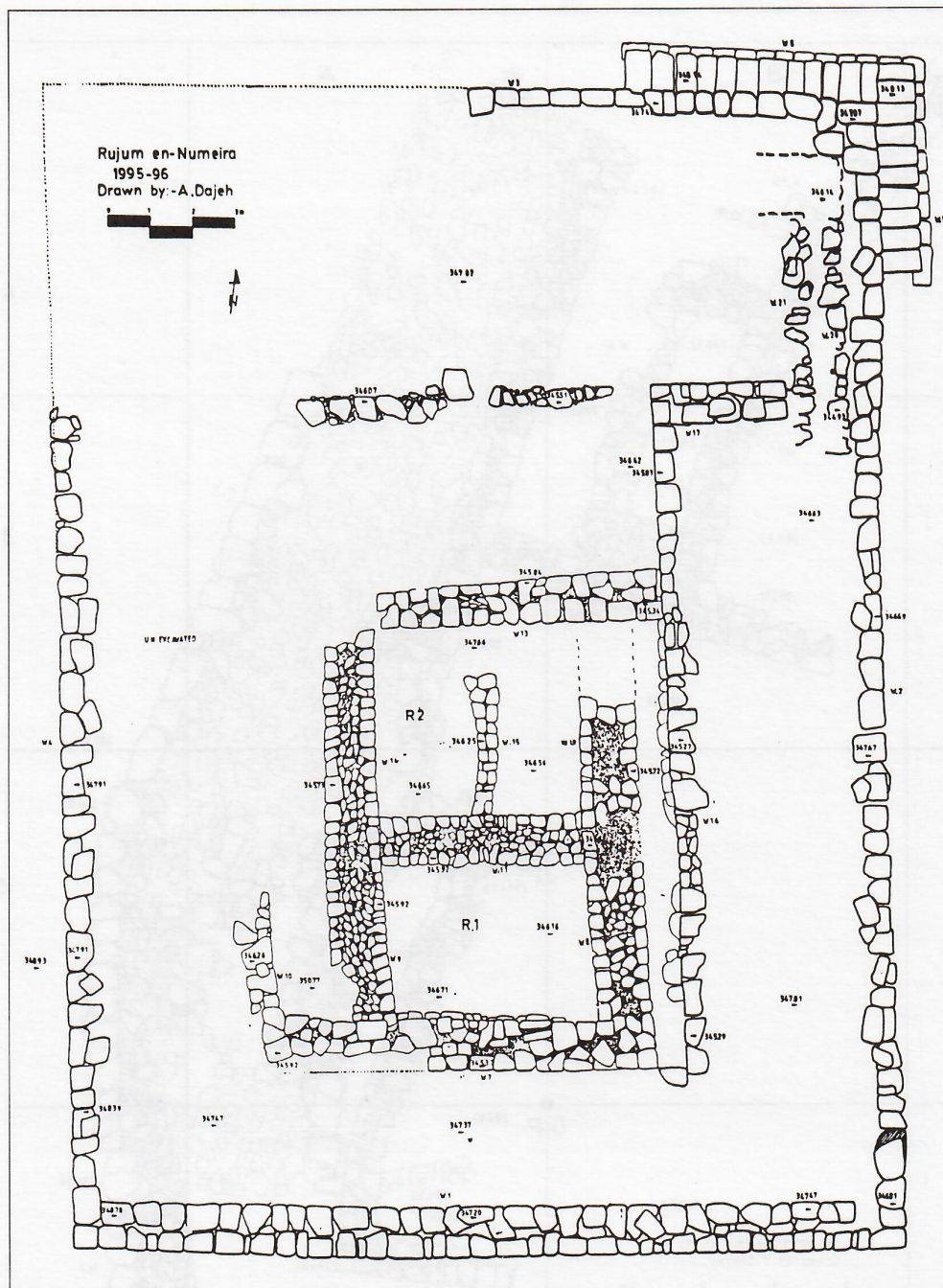
Part of the defensive wall at the north-western corner was uncovered and some other related walls of different directions were investigated. Through our limited work at the site we were unable to follow a full architectural unit. What distinguishes the site is the layer of destruction which was noticed everywhere in the excavated sections. The material recovered from the site revealed different kinds of material among them pottery, bones, seeds, bronze lumps, charcoal mud brick fragments, etc.

More work is needed, due to the importance of the site and also building a fence is urgently needed to protect the deposits.

An-Numayra "4"

Survey of the area along the road alignment north-west of the Rujum an-Numayra site revealed the presence of an important site called an-Numayra "4".

The site was covered by small and medium stones mixed with pebbles and sand—the result of seasonal erosion in the Wādi an-Numayra area. The team tried to salvage the site and reduce the immediate threats which affect the site. Excavations revealed archi-

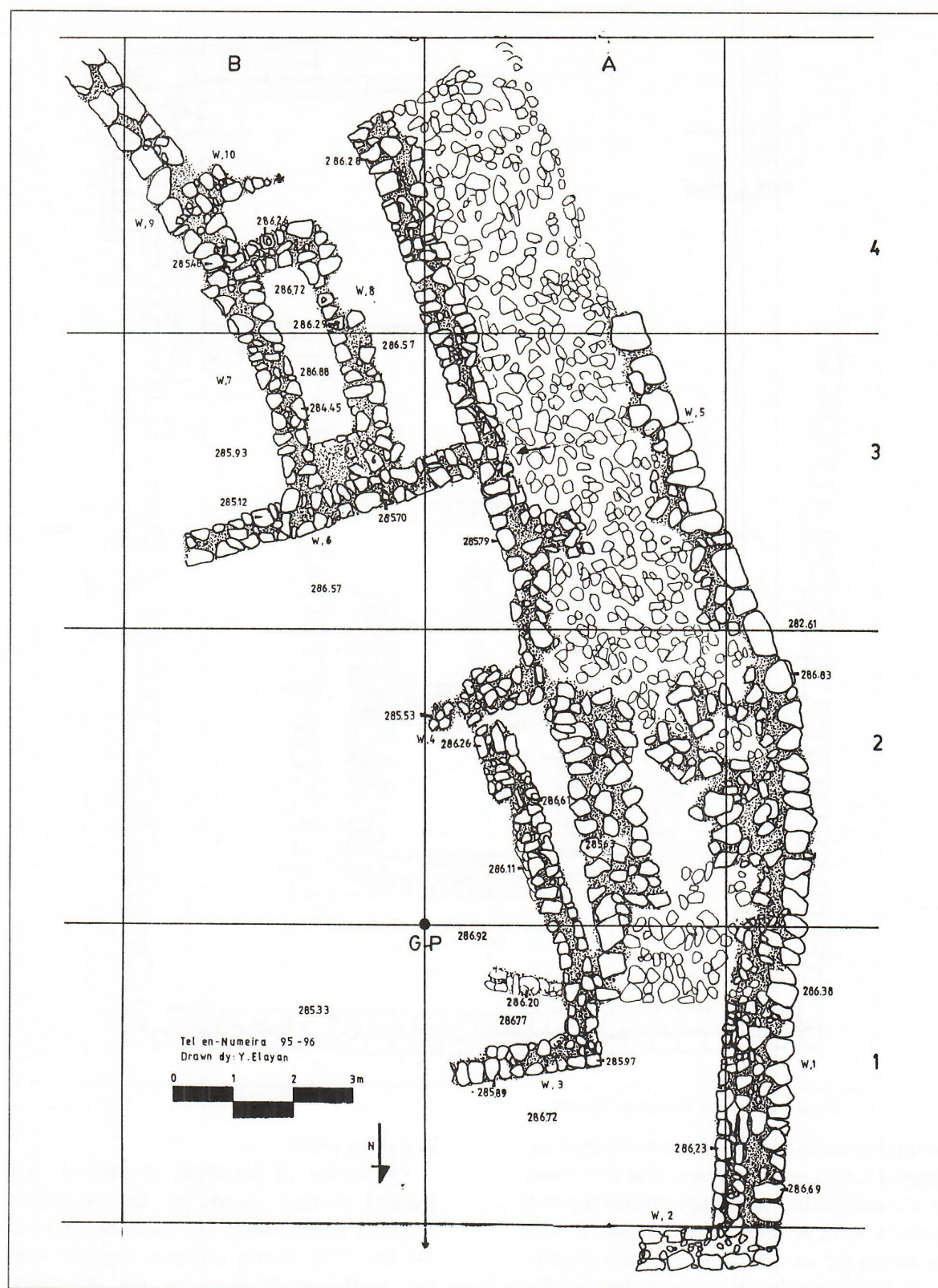


2. Excavated area at Rujum an-Numayra.

tectural remains of several rooms built of undressed sand - and limestone. The site is that of a considerable workshop consisting of a basin, a well, waterducts and a pottery kiln located at the western side of the site. Analysis and studying the recovered material at the site showed that the workshop could be part

of a sugar press.

Quantities of sugarpot fragments and painted pottery sherds of the Ayyubid-Mamluk period were the common finds at the site. This strong evidence suggests that the workshop belongs to the Ayyubid-Mamluk period. A survey of the western part



3. Top plan of the discovered walls at Tall an-Numayra.

along the Dead Sea shore showed some collapsed walls and arches in the modern quarry area of the Potash Company. Pottery fragments of Byzantine and Ayyubid-Mamluk date were recovered in the area indicating a relationship with the sugar press. More investigations are suggested for further studies so as to assess the early history of Wādī an-Numayra.

All these activities show the need for an even better organized system of intensive surveying of the southern Ghawr which can provide immediate information on the presence of archaeological sites in areas of possible modern constructions. This informa-

tion, properly evaluated, can allow the DAJ to coordinate with the development agency the appropriate type of intervention necessary for these sites. The understanding is that while it is not always possible to save archaeological sites from destruction, their study and recording is an important contribution of the DAJ in the study of the ancient heritage of Jordan, and, of the continuing effort to actively contribute in the development of Jordanian society.

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