

# ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

SUPPLEMENT 29

## STUDIES ON IRON AGE MOAB AND NEIGHBOURING AREAS IN HONOUR OF MICHÈLE DAVIAU

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Piotr BIENKOWSKI

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# 'THE LAND OF MĒDEBA' AND EARLY IRON AGE MĀDABĀ\*

Timothy P. HARRISON

## INTRODUCTION

Reconstructing the process by which the early Iron Age communities in the highlands of central Jordan coalesced into the culturally and politically defined polities referred to in later historical sources is not an easy undertaking. Scholars traditionally have interpreted the textual evidence to suggest that the region experienced widespread land-use and settlement during this period (c. 1200-900 BCE), and witnessed the emergence of the territorial states of Ammon and Moab. Contrastingly, syntheses of the archaeological record have generally characterized this period as one of limited sedentary activity, marked by a gradual process of consolidation, in which loosely organized regional communities became increasingly more integrated through expanding alliances and kinship networks. According to this perspective, state formation and flourishing urban development occurred in the central highlands only much later, during the era of Assyrian and Babylonian domination.

However, this prevailing archaeological view has suffered from a critical lack of detailed material cultural sequences, or 'local histories', at the key highland sites occupied during this period. The results of recent excavations on the west slope of the upper mound at Tall Mādabā offer an opportunity to correct this shortcoming for the Mādabā Plain region. First mentioned in the 'taunt song' of its northern neighbour Heshbon (cf. Nu. 21: 27-30), the documentary evidence suggests that Mādabā had emerged as an important regional centre well before the mid-ninth-century reign of Mesha the Dibonite, and his acknowledgement that much of the central highland plateau belonged to 'the Land of Mēdeba'. This paper will review the results of the ongoing Tall Mādabā Archaeological Project (TMAP) investigations, and explore the implications in light of current understandings about the incipient stages of Moabite state formation during the early Iron Age.

\* I offer this paper in acknowledgement of Michèle Daviau's extensive contributions to our knowledge of Iron Age Moab. The Tall Mādabā Archaeological Project (TMAP) excavations have been conducted in collaboration with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, which has provided labour and equipment support, for which we are grateful. The successful outcome of our field research would not have been possible without the dedicated help of many people, but in particular the leadership of the DOA. Over the years, TMAP has received research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the University of Toronto's Connaught Fund, the Harris Fund of the American Schools of Oriental Research, and the National Geographic Society. This funding support has been critical to the success of the project, which we gratefully acknowledge.

## MOABITE STATE FORMATION

Since its discovery in 1868, the Mesha Inscription has furnished historians of Iron Age Moab with their single most important source for understanding Moabite state formation. Until relatively recently, however, scholarly interest in this document had tended to focus on historical issues stemming from comparisons with the biblical account of the Israelite campaign against Moab in 2 Kings 3,<sup>1</sup> or the literary and linguistic character of the inscription.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, early understandings of the historical rise of the Moabite monarchy generally assumed a parallel, though slightly earlier, trajectory to that of Israel, as recounted in the biblical narratives, with the Moabite state emerging at the end of the Late Bronze Age, just prior to the arrival of the Israelite tribes.<sup>3</sup> The landmark surveys by N. Glueck in the 1930s provided convenient archaeological support for this view, prompting him to further enshrine it in his grand synthesis of the settlement history of the Transjordan.<sup>4</sup>

A more ahistorical approach was adopted by A. Alt, who proposed a gradual process of migration and settlement, not unlike the 'peaceful infiltration' model he envisioned for Israel, with transhumant Moabite tribes settling amidst older, sedentary communities comprised of the biblical Emim. A Moabite territorial state emerged out of this process in the early Iron Age.<sup>5</sup> M. Noth, Alt's student, followed with an important modification, inserting an intermediate stage of development marked by the emergence of localized, regional polities (his 'kleinkönigtümer'), as alluded to in a number of biblical narratives (e.g., the references to Balak, 'King of Moab,' in the story of Balaam; Numbers 22-24).<sup>6</sup> Advocates of the 'peasant revolt' model, which attributes the rise of Israel to the movement of disaffected Canaanite 'refugees' from the lowlands to the highlands in Cisjordan at the end of the Late Bronze Age, have also credited the creation of the Moabite monarchy to this eastward migratory process.<sup>7</sup>

Studies of Moabite culture and history largely continued to assume a Late Bronze or early Iron Age date for the emergence of the Moabite monarchy,<sup>8</sup> until the reactivation of archaeological surveys in the late 1970s and 1980s began to introduce new evidence and new perspectives. While some have continued to accept or argue for early state formation,<sup>9</sup> others have begun to question the premise that biblical

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Murphy 1953; Liver 1967; Rensburg 1981; and Bernhardt 1982.

<sup>2</sup> See, principally, Miller 1974; Auffret 1980; Drinkard 1989; Jackson 1989; Smelik 1992; Irsigler 1993; Müller 1994; and Niccacci 1994.

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful review, see Miller 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Glueck 1940; with some revision in the 1970 edition.

<sup>5</sup> Alt 1940.

<sup>6</sup> Noth 1944; 1951.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mendenhall 1973; Gottwald 1979, pp. 426-34.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Van Zyl 1960.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Boling 1988; Timm 1989; and Worschech 1990; 1997.

allusions to a Moabite political identity necessitated the existence of a Moabite state in the early Iron Age. Most notable among these has been M. Miller, director of the Kerak Plateau Survey,<sup>10</sup> who has adopted a minimalist stance regarding the early political development of Moab, expressing skepticism about the historical veracity of the relevant textual evidence, and criticizing the scholarly tendency to echo prevailing views and trends in the study of early Israelite history.<sup>11</sup>

Renewed interest in the linguistic and literary features of the Mesha Inscription has been matched by a greater appreciation of the broader political implications intimated in the text. Concurrent with Miller's skepticism of an early Moabite monarchy, other studies have begun to draw attention to the ideological agenda promoted in the inscription, emphasizing the historical significance of Mesha's political claims within the context of an emerging, nascent Moabite national identity. These studies generally have argued that external pressure, presumably from a more politically developed Kingdom of Israel (the 'House of Omri'), provided the stimulus for the political transformation that accompanied the military actions and building programme initiated by Mesha.<sup>12</sup>

More recently, attention has also begun to focus on the structural organization of Moabite society and statehood. While some perceive the creation of a tribal confederacy guided by kinship relations,<sup>13</sup> in a recent study involving a thorough analysis of the thematic and syntactic elements preserved in the Mesha Inscription, B. Routledge has argued convincingly for the primacy of territory as the organizing metaphor that gave meaning and order to the Moabite state.<sup>14</sup> As Routledge also observes,<sup>15</sup> the renewed interest in the literary and political dimensions of the Mesha Inscription has tended to occur in divergent scholarly disciplines, resulting in an under-appreciation of its broader historical significance. A closer reading of this important Iron Age document, therefore, together with the results emerging from ongoing archaeological exploration in the region of Iron Age Moab, offers an opportunity to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the construction and negotiation of Moabite national identity during this period.

<sup>10</sup> Miller 1991.

<sup>11</sup> See particularly Miller 1989; 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Varying articulations of this secondary state formation model can be found in Knauf 1992, pp. 49-50; LaBianca and Younker 1995; Younker 1997, p. 246; Na'aman 1997; and Finkelstein 1999, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., LaBianca and Younker 1995; Younker 1997; LaBianca 1999; Bienkowski 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Routledge 2000; see now also 2004, pp. 141-53. For critique of Routledge's hypothesis, see chapter by Bienkowski in this volume.

<sup>15</sup> Routledge 2000, p. 225.

## DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

*Egyptian references*

New Kingdom Egyptian sources provide the earliest textual references to ancient Moab. They consist primarily of brief enigmatic references to sites in the central highland region, including possibly Dibon, by Thutmose III (*ti-pu-n*, no. 98 in the List of Asiatic Toponyms erected at Karnak), following his victory at Megiddo,<sup>16</sup> and by Ramesses II in the context of campaigns he conducted against the nomadic Shasu in the 'land of Moab' (Dibon [*tbnu*] again appears to receive special mention).<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Ramesses II claims not only to have defeated the Shasu, but also to have plundered their 'tells' (i.e. settlements), indicating, it would seem, that some of the indigenous population was sedentary.<sup>18</sup> Additional textual evidence of Egyptian activity in the region includes further references to the Shasu, some occurring as early as the reign of Thutmose II,<sup>19</sup> and a possible reference to the Moab region in a topographical list dating to the reign of Amenhotep III.<sup>20</sup>

These New Kingdom references would appear to attest an active Egyptian interest in the central highlands of Jordan during the Late Bronze Age. However, they do not require the existence of a collective Moabite 'national' political identity at this early juncture, despite what some have suggested.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, they do confirm that the term 'Moab' already held a recognized territorial association with the highland plateau east of the Dead Sea by this early period.

*Biblical references*

As with ancient Israel's other neighbours, much of what we know about the early development of Iron Age Moab comes to us through the filter of the biblical narratives. We are told, for example, that the Moabites were the descendants of an incestuous union between Lot and one of his daughters (Genesis 19:37), that their land was originally inhabited by a race of giants, the Emim of Deuteronomy 2:10, and that

<sup>16</sup> Redford 1982a, pp. 59-60; and 1982b.

<sup>17</sup> Kitchen 1964, pp. 63-70; see also Ward and Martin 1964, pp. 20-21. There has been some dispute regarding the hieroglyphic readings for Moab and Dibon (see Ahituv 1972; idem 1984, p. 189). However, Ahituv's ideas have been soundly refuted by Kitchen (1976, pp. 313-14; 1988, pp. 105-06; and 1992, pp. 28-9, where the debate is aired in full), and there can be little doubt that the Ramesside texts do in fact refer to the Moab and Dibon in Transjordan (see now also Darnell and Jasnow 1993), this despite the fact that excavations at Dhiban have so far failed to produce stratified LB material (Tushingham 1989, p. 207).

<sup>18</sup> Kitchen 1964, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Giveon 1971, pp. 9-10; see also Ward 1972.

<sup>20</sup> Kitchen 1992, pp. 25-6.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kitchen 1992, pp. 27-9; Worschech 1997, pp. 230-31.

they were generally considered close kin of the Israelites (e.g., the story of Ruth). Of perhaps more immediate historical relevance are the possible references to early Moabite rulers in Genesis 36:31-39 (cf. 1 Chronicles 1:43-50; the so-called 'Edomite King List'),<sup>22</sup> the account of Sihon, Amorite King of Heshbon, and his defeat at the hands of the tribes of Israel (Numbers 21:10-35), and the stories of Balak and the prophet Balaam (Numbers 22-24), and Eglon (Judges 3:12-30).

While space does not permit a close examination of these and other relevant biblical texts, and the complex issues that surround their transmission and historiography,<sup>23</sup> even a brief review is sufficient to emphasize the adversarial nature of the relationships between the various polities that emerged as a result of the regional consolidation that marked the end of the Iron I. According to biblical tradition, the Mādabā Plain (the biblical *Mishor*) was initially allotted to the tribe of Reuben (Joshua 13:9 and 16-21), but later became part of the territory of the Gadites (cf. Joshua 21:38-39; and I Chronicles 6:81; note also Meshah's claim [line 10] that the 'men of Gad' had always lived there). Control of the strategic tableland would remain contested for the duration of the early Iron Age. In the period of the Judges, we are told that Moabite influence extended west across the Jordan Valley under the leadership of the warlord Eglon (Judges 3:13-14). Possession of the fertile tableland then reverted to Israelite control during the reign of David, following his defeat of an Aramaean-Ammonite coalition in the vicinity of 'Mēdeba' (I Chronicles 19:7-15). Following the breakup of the Davidic monarchy, the Mādabā Plain apparently was annexed to the northern kingdom of Israel, which continued to exact annual tribute from Moab until Meshah's rise to power, and his expulsion of the 'House of Omri' in the mid-ninth century BCE (2 Kings 3:4).

### *The Meshah Inscription*

The Meshah Inscription (hereafter MI), dated paleographically to the mid-ninth century BCE, presents an unparalleled indigenous Moabite, or perhaps more accurately, 'Dibonite' perspective on the political struggle for control of the central highland region. In this remarkably detailed account, still the longest Iron Age inscription discovered in the Levant to date, Meshah describes Moab's lengthy oppression by Omri, 'King of Israel', and his unnamed son (presumably Ahab), followed by his successful liberation of the towns and lands of the northern plateau, as commanded by Kemosh. After successfully repossessing the plateau, Meshah proudly embarked on an ambitious building program, further consolidating the political gains he had achieved.

<sup>22</sup> See Bartlett 1965.

<sup>23</sup> For a survey of the relevant sources, see Dornemann 1983, pp. 25-9, Vyhmeister 1989, pp. 7-10, and Ahlström 1993, pp. 405-16; 639-64.

As a royal inscription memorializing the principal accomplishments of Mesha's reign, the political and propagandistic character of the stela is undisputed. Nevertheless, the historically specific nature of the events described, together with the open acknowledgement of foreign domination, argue against viewing the inscription as little more than a transparent rhetorical exercise in the legitimization of Mesha's royal authority. Indeed, as Routledge has convincingly proposed,<sup>24</sup> the MI represents a surprisingly sophisticated attempt to project a new political reality. By invoking an older, collective image, the 'land of Moab', Mesha was attempting to shift the locus of political allegiance from the local to the 'national' level. The result, as commemorated on his memorial stela, was the forging of a territorial nation-state that subsumed (but did not necessarily suppress) existing regional polities within a nested political hierarchy, with Mesha positioned as the paramount ruler (or king), and Dibon, his ancestral home, as the political centre (or capital).<sup>25</sup>

If indeed the basic syntactic and thematic structure of the MI preserves patterns that reflect the existing social and political realities of the day, then we might speculate that the various territorial units mentioned in the inscription (e.g., 'the land of 'Atarot' [line 10b] and 'all of Dibon' [line 28]) represent meaningful social or political entities, and that the various sites associated with these territorial units represent secondary settlements within them, inferring a regionalized nested settlement hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> Correspondingly, in the Mādabā Plain region, the sites of Ba'al Ma'on (probably modern Ma'in) and Qiryaten (possibly Quraya, located west of Mādabā) might be inferred to have functioned as secondary settlements within 'the land of Mēdeba' territorial unit (lines 7b-10a), with Mēdeba the region's central settlement.

#### THE MĀDABĀ PLAIN REGION IN THE EARLY IRON AGE

Though admittedly speculative, the regionalized political landscape implicit in the syntactic structure of the Mesha Inscription offers an opportunity to determine the extent to which the political claims articulated by Mesha were realized in the physical landscape of early Iron Age Moab. More specifically, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that the site of Tall Mādabā should preserve significant remains from the early Iron Age (c. 1200-900 BCE), or at least from the period that immediately preceded Mesha's 'reforms' (i.e. Iron IIA, c. tenth-early ninth centuries BCE), reflecting its status as an important regional centre at the time of his rise to power in the mid-ninth century BCE. Furthermore, based on the nested hierarchy of sites inferred from the text, we might

<sup>24</sup> Routledge 2000, pp. 226-7; 2004, pp. 139-41.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the broader historical implications of the MI, see Harrison and Barlow 2005, pp. 180-83.

<sup>26</sup> See similarly, Dearman 1989, pp. 189-210; 1992, pp. 73; Routledge 2000, pp. 230-39; 2004, pp. 141-7, see especially fig. 7.3.



anticipate survey data from this 'pre-Mesha' period to reflect a distributed settlement pattern, comprised of discrete site clusters anchored by their putative regional centres, in particular 'Atarot (probably Khirbat 'Ataruz), Dibon/Dhiban, and Mēdeba/Mādabā.

### *Settlement patterns*

While the textual and inscriptional evidence suggest extensive political activity, and infer active land-use and settlement in the Mādabā Plain region during the early Iron Age, and in particular the tenth and ninth centuries BCE, archaeological syntheses generally have described this latter period as characterized by limited sedentary activity.<sup>27</sup> A quick glance at the archaeological evidence appears to support this view. The Hesban Survey, for example, succeeded in identifying only 16 sites with early Iron II pottery, in contrast to the 30 sites that were dated to the Iron I, and 63 sites more broadly to the Iron II.<sup>28</sup> Similar settlement trends have also been observed in the survey evidence from neighbouring regions, including the Dhiban<sup>29</sup> and Karak<sup>30</sup> plateaus to the south. As numerous scholars have noted,<sup>31</sup> a pronounced settlement expansion occurred in the central highlands at the outset of the Iron Age, though in contrast to Cisjordan the transition from the Late Bronze to the early Iron Age does not appear to have witnessed a corresponding shift from urban to rural society.

Less clear is the character of the transition from Iron I to Iron II. The lack of stratified sequences has created uncertainty over what constitutes early Iron II (or Iron IIA) pottery, effectively obscuring the broader archaeological picture for this period, and prompting the predictable assumption that this transitional era witnessed limited activity, even widespread settlement abandonment and collapse.<sup>32</sup> Yet, a surprisingly large number of early Iron II tomb assemblages have been reported from the Mādabā Plain region, including at the settlement sites of Sahab,<sup>33</sup> Khirbat al-Mukhayyat (probably biblical Nebo)<sup>34</sup> and Mādabā itself.<sup>35</sup> In addition, excavations at Tall al-'Umayri,<sup>36</sup> Jawa,<sup>37</sup> Hisban,<sup>38</sup> Jalūl,<sup>39</sup> Nitl,<sup>40</sup> Khirbat al-Mudayna on the Wadi

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Sauer 1986; Herr 1997; Herr and Najjar 2001, pp. 329-31; Routledge 2004, pp. 191-2.

<sup>28</sup> Ibach 1987, p. 163.

<sup>29</sup> See Ji and 'Attiya 1997; Ji and Lee 1998; 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Miller 1991.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Boling 1988; Herr 1992; Herr and Najjar 2001, pp. 323-8; Ji 1995; McGovern 1992; Routledge 1997, pp. 132-5; 2004, pp. 90-93.

<sup>32</sup> For example, see Ji 1995, pp. 131-6.

<sup>33</sup> Harding 1948; and Dajani 1970.

<sup>34</sup> Saller 1966.

<sup>35</sup> Piccirillo 1975; Thompson 1984; 1986.

<sup>36</sup> Herr *et al.* 1994, pp. 149-50.

<sup>37</sup> Daviau 1996, pp. 84-90.

<sup>38</sup> Ray 2001, pp. 53-7, 121-6.

<sup>39</sup> Herr *et al.* 1996, pp. 71-4; 1997, pp. 154-7.

<sup>40</sup> Hamarneh *et al.* 1999, p. 489.



ath-Thamad (possibly biblical Jahaz),<sup>41</sup> and Dhiban<sup>42</sup> have all produced early Iron II material. Consequently, it seems more likely that this period remains under-represented in the archaeological record documented to date.

Despite the difficulty of sub-phasing the Iron II sequence, spatial analysis of the available survey evidence appears to delineate meaningful patterns in the regional Iron Age settlement record. In a recent study of 88 Iron II sites from the northern Moab region (delimited by the Amman foothills to the north and the Wadi Mujib to the south), five settlement clusters were identified using K-means analysis.<sup>43</sup> Although uneven survey coverage and intensity likely skewed the positioning of each cluster to some degree, the results nevertheless corresponded remarkably with the hypothesized territorial units inferred from the Mesha Inscription. Discrete site clusters were associated with Dhiban, Khirbat 'Ataruz and Tall Mādabā, and a fourth site cluster was associated with Khirbat al-Mudayna (on the Wadi ath-Thamad), which some scholars<sup>44</sup> have identified with the Jahaz mentioned in the Mesha Inscription (lines 19-20). The K-means analysis identified a fifth cluster south-east of Dhiban, possibly signaling the presence of a second settlement cluster on the plateau to the east of Dhiban. Furthermore, when individual sites were classified by type (e.g., settlements, farmsteads, fortified towers and fortresses), and then plotted spatially, a striking settlement pattern emerged, with settlement sites generally concentrated in the centre of a cluster and fortified towers and fortresses distributed along the boundary zones between each cluster.

#### *Early Iron Age Mādabā*

The remains of Iron Age Mādabā presently form a visible rise in the downtown core of the modern town, located 30 km. south-west of Amman. Substantial Iron Age remains have been encountered in each of the fields investigated by the Tall Mādabā Archaeological Project (hereafter TMAP), which has conducted excavations at the site since 1996. The most extensive Iron Age remains have been uncovered in Field B (Figure 1), and include a monumental fortification wall preserved to a height of 5 m. and a width of 7 m. at its greatest extent; its circumference has been traced for more than 30 m. (Figure 2). The wall separates Fields B and C, and represents the earliest structure uncovered thus far along the western slope of the upper mound. Its external face had been exposed prior to the TMAP excavations, and in its original phase was constructed directly on bedrock. Our excavations suggest a complex construction history that included at least two separate efforts to reinforce the original wall, which

<sup>41</sup> Chadwick *et al.* 2000, pp. 260-61.

<sup>42</sup> Morton 1989; Tushingham 1990; Routledge 2004, pp. 164-8.

<sup>43</sup> The study was conducted by C. Barlow in conjunction with her doctoral research on the Iron Age sequence at Tall Mādabā.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Dearman 1984; 1989, pp. 181-4; MacDonald 2000, pp. 103-06.

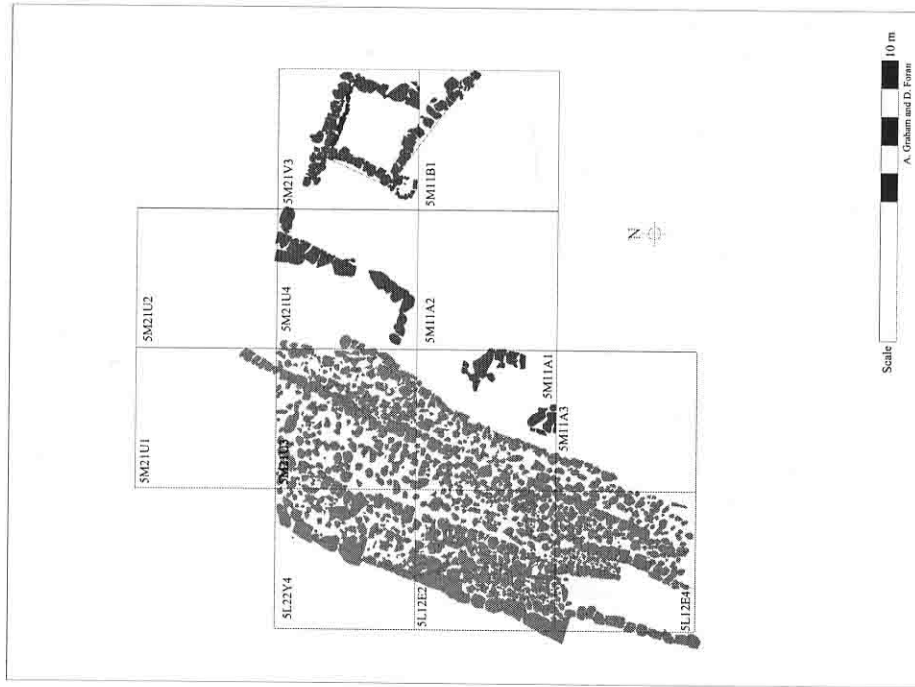


Fig. 2 Plan of the fortification wall and Field Phase 7 architecture in Field B (created by A. Graham and D. Foran).



Fig. 1 Topographic map of Madaba showing the location of Field B (created by A. Graham).

measured approximately 2 m. in width. The earlier of these two events expanded the width of the wall to 7 m., while the superimposed later renovation narrowed it to 5 m. To date, three distinct architectural phases (identified as Field Phases [FP] in the project's working stratigraphic sequence chart), each with associated occupational surfaces, have been dated to the Iron Age in Field B, with a fourth FP marking the LB II/Iron I transition. They will be described in reverse stratigraphic order, beginning with the latest phase and proceeding to the earliest.<sup>45</sup>

*Field Phase 7.*<sup>46</sup> First encountered during the 2002 TMAP field season, FP 7 represents a 'squatter' phase that followed the destruction/abandonment of the earlier FP 8 settlement. The TMAP excavations identified four discrete occupational sub-phases associated with a modest 'lean-to' structure that sealed the destruction debris from the terminal phase of the preceding FP 8 complex (Figure 2).

*Field Phase 8.* A large pillared building formed the primary structure associated with FP 8. It stood approximately 1.5 m. to the east of the enclosing fortification wall, and ran roughly parallel to it, in a NE-SW orientation. The TMAP excavations succeeded in uncovering two of the building's exterior walls, and a row of pillars that provided interior support (Figure 3). At least two distinct sub-phases were identified, including a terminal phase initially attributed to a destruction event, though subsequent excavation yielded limited cultural remains, including conspicuously low quantities of pottery, more suggestive of an abandonment or active clearing/reuse by the subsequent FP 7 inhabitants. Two monolithic 'columns' (visible in the upper left hand of Figure 3) may have formed part of an entrance to the structure.

*Field Phase 9.* The 2006 season succeeded in uncovering a series of large walls that lay directly under the FP 8 pillared building (Figure 4). Though only partially exposed, they clearly formed part of a 'monumental' complex, preserved in part because the FP 8 builders had reused them as foundation support for the later structure. The associated surface contained significant quantities of collared rim storage jar fragments.

*Field Phase 10.* In 2006 and 2007, a sondage was excavated between the FPs 8 and 9 walls and the inner face of the fortification wall, resulting in a stratified sequence down to bedrock. During the 2007 field season, it became clear that the earliest

<sup>45</sup> Preliminary reports have appeared for the 1996-2002 seasons; see Foran *et al.* 2004, Harrison *et al.* 2000, and Harrison *et al.* 2003. The 2006 and 2007 seasons were directed by D. Foran, with reports forthcoming.

<sup>46</sup> The discovery of Late Byzantine remains during the 2007 season necessitated the renumbering of the Field Phase sequence in Field B. For the Iron Age sequence, the changes are as follows: the previous FP 6=FP 7, FP 7=FP 8, and FP 8=FP 9.



Fig. 4 Photograph showing the Field Phase 9 architecture in Field B (created by A. Graham).



Fig. 3 Photograph showing the Field Phase 8 architecture in Field B (created by A. Graham).

depositional remains in the probe, which included a Mycenaean IIIB stirrup jar, formed part of a coherent occupational phase dating to Late Bronze II/Early Iron I. These remains accordingly were assigned to FP 10. The earliest deposits consisted of fill covered by a plaster surface that sealed against the fortification wall, which itself was founded directly on bedrock. Sandwiched between the plaster surface and the primary surface of the FP 9 complex (with its collared rim storage jars) were the remains of a single row wall, made of boulder and chink stonework, which extended in an E-W line from the fortification wall. Although the excavations in Field B are not yet complete, this wall and plaster surface appear to represent the earliest occupational phase preserved in Field B.<sup>47</sup>

In summary, the TMAP excavations in Field B have identified four Field Phases (7-10) spanning the Late Bronze II through Iron IIB periods. The earliest occupational phase (FP 10) dates to the Late Bronze II/early Iron I transition, as attested by the presence of Mycenaean IIIB pottery, among other diagnostic material. This period witnessed the use, if not the construction, of the massive fortification wall, and appears to have been contemporary with the life of a tomb uncovered to the east of the tell acropolis in the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> FP 9, and the 'monumental' remains associated with this phase, appear to date to the Iron I/early Iron II, based largely on the presence of late Iron I collared rim storage jars and associated pottery. The FP 9 complex, in turn, was replaced in succession by the pillared building of FP 8, and then finally by the modest structures of FP 7. A thick deposit of thinly laminated layers of ashy sheet wash sealed the FP 7 remains. Micromorphological analyses of this material indicate that these layers probably represent post-abandonment debris accumulation,<sup>49</sup> and clearly mark the end of the Iron Age settlement at the site, at least as preserved in Field B. A substantial Late Hellenistic complex (FP 6) was eventually erected directly over this sheet wash layer. As detailed elsewhere, the pottery associated with FPs 8 and 7 finds its best parallels in the Iron IIB,<sup>50</sup> which the radiocarbon evidence has further corroborated.<sup>51</sup>

#### SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Thus, although not yet complete, the TMAP excavations in Field B have documented the existence of a substantial settled presence at Mādabā during the early Iron

<sup>47</sup> Isolated Early Bronze Age sherds have been uncovered in Field B, suggesting the possibility of an earlier occupational phase dating to this period. An Early Bronze Age settlement is further supported by the excavation results in Field A (see Harrison *et al.* 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Harding and Isserlin 1953.

<sup>49</sup> Harrison *et al.* 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Harrison *et al.* 2003; Foran *et al.* 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Harrison and Barlow 2005, pp. 185-8.



Age and, more specifically, during the formative late Iron I/early Iron II period in particular. Not only was the town surrounded by a massive fortification wall, but its inhabitants appear to have constructed 'monumental' buildings as well. The existence of a necropolis during this period, as indicated by the presence of a late Iron I/early Iron II tomb in the Mukhayyam District to the south of the tell, as noted earlier,<sup>52</sup> provides further confirmation. As previously noted, the 1993 survey of Mādabā also supports this view of a flourishing early Iron II settlement, with surface sherd distributions indicating a site size between 13 and 16 ha., easily rendering Mādabā one of the largest Iron II sites in Jordan.<sup>53</sup> The existence of Iron II remains in Fields A and B, as well as adjacent to the Church of the Prophet Elijah in the Archaeological Park to the north of the upper mound, provides further stratified evidence substantiating the spatial extent of the Iron II town. At the very least, these findings indicate that current perceptions of the modest nature of the early Iron Age settlement at Mādabā are in need of revision.

Perhaps more importantly, the excavations in Field B give greater credence to the historical inferences drawn from the extant textual record. As I have argued, the documentary evidence suggests the emergence of a regionalized political landscape in the early Iron II period comprised of small, autonomous polities anchored by central settlements. In particular, the territorial units implicit in the syntactic structure of the Mesha Inscription infer an incipient phase of state formation that anticipates the 'nation-building' efforts initiated later by Mesha. Regional settlement patterns, structured in the form of discrete site clusters, appear to corroborate this picture, corresponding remarkably well with the territorial units denoted in the Mesha Inscription, while Tall Mādabā, as the central settlement for one of these putative polities, has now furnished the physical remains we might expect to find at an important regional centre during this period. It should also be noted that Noth's early proposal,<sup>54</sup> based on his reading of the biblical evidence, of an intermediate developmental phase comprised of 'kleinkönigtümer', or small kingships, accords well with this archaeological evidence.

The distributed, heterarchical character of the political landscape reflected in the textual and archaeological records of early Iron Age Moab is consistent with the long trajectory of historical experience in the region, and therefore perhaps should not come as too much of a surprise. As has become increasingly clear,<sup>55</sup> highland communities historically have maintained a tenacious adherence to subsistence strategies that favour flexibility and autonomy, while resisting hierarchical relationships that

<sup>52</sup> Piccirillo 1975; Thompson 1984; 1986.

<sup>53</sup> Harrison 1996; 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Noth 1944; 1951.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. LaBianca 1990; Harrison 1995; Harrison and Savage 2003.

facilitate integration and large-scale production. When maintained, this deeply rooted tendency has ensured survival, and has resulted in the remarkable resilience and longevity these communities have enjoyed in the uncertain environment of the highland region. As the study of the culture and history of Iron Age Moab continues, we would do well to recognize this fundamental principle, and focus our research strategies and efforts accordingly.

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