



# Domestic Houses in Iron Age II in the Northern Jordan Valley

## A Comparative Study<sup>1</sup>

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Several theoretical approaches have been discussed: the household archaeology, the functional ecological approach, the household practices and the community practices.<sup>2</sup> Frank Braemer's study (1982) might be considered to be the first of its type in which he presented a discussion focusing on the architecture and identifying the spatial analysis and the role of each domestic structure during the Iron Age in the southern Levant.

This study aims at throwing more light on the types of domestic houses dated to the Iron Age II period in the northern part of the Jordan Valley, and to enhance the concept of cultural relations between the sites located in this area and other surrounding regions. The region included in this study is situated between Yarmouk River to the north, Zerqa River to the south and the northern heights to the east of the Jordan Valley region (Fig. 1). In this study we are following the Iron chronological table proposed by Larry Herr:

- Iron Age IIA: represented by the tenth century BC
- Iron Age IIB: extending from the ninth century BC to the eighth century BC
- Iron Age IIC: extending from the end of the eighth century BC to the middle of the sixth century BC<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This study is abstracted from the masterthesis entitled »in Arabic«: »Al Biyut al Sakaniyyeh fi al-'Asr Al-Hadidi al-Thani (al Qarn al 'Asher – Muntasaf al Qarn al Sades Qabel al Milad fi Shamali Wadi al-Urdon«: Dirasah Muqaranah. Submitted in 1998 by Ra'eda Abdalla (d. 2013) under the supervision of Zeidan Kafafi to the Department of Archaeology of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of Yarmouk University (Irbid-Jordan).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vincent 2016, 4–23.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Herr 1997, 118.

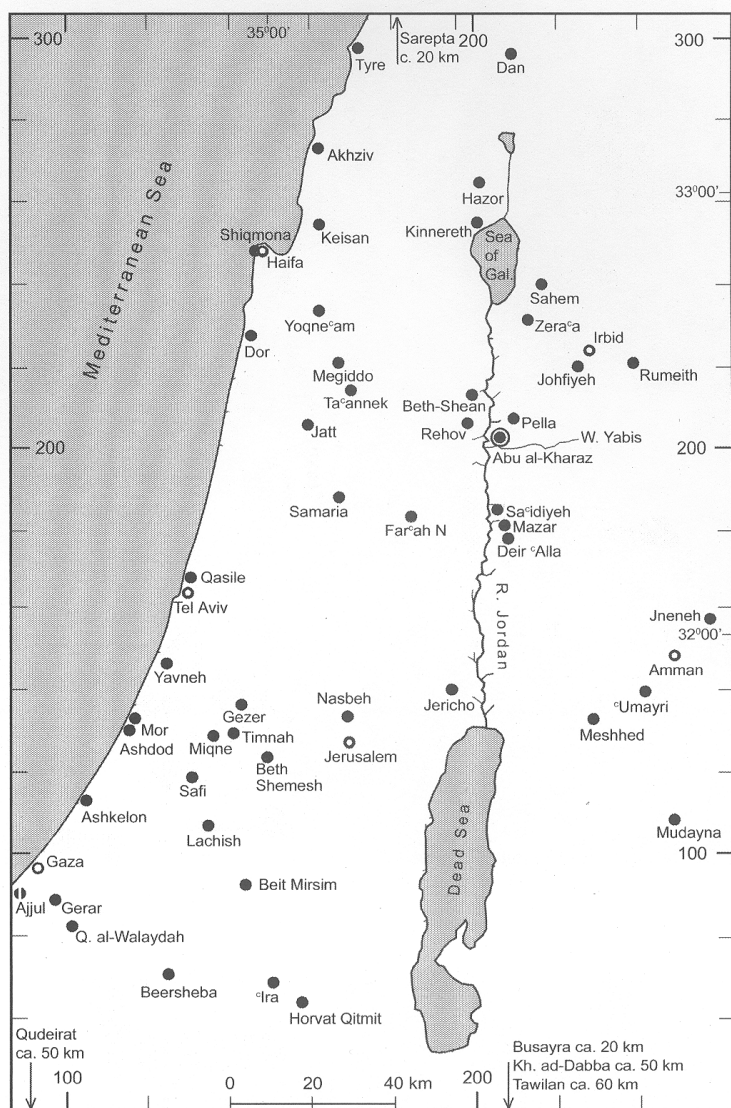


Fig. 1: Major Iron Age Sites (Fischer 2013, Fig. 1)

The reason for adopting Herr's chronological table is due to the following reason: It is not only based on historical events but also to the development in a wide range of the material culture which had appeared as a wide and relative development of other groups. Herr did not focus his study on a certain cultural group and, so he achieved a noticeable balance, contrary to most of other studies, which had focused on the archaeology of Palestine, considering other adjacent social groups as marginal and depriving them of their right of individual existence.<sup>4</sup> Later studies focused mainly on the history of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament.

The houses belonging to the Iron Age II (10<sup>th</sup> century BC to the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC) period and located in the northern part of the Jordan Valley have been classified in this study according to their chronological order and top-plans. Due to the fact that the uncovered Iron IIA (10<sup>th</sup> century BC) domestic structures are fragmentary and only exposed at very few sites in the northern part of the Jordan Valley (Fig. 1) such as at Tell Deir 'Alla<sup>5</sup> and Tell Abu al-Kharaz phases X (ca. 1050–930 BC) and XI (930–800 BC)<sup>6</sup>, we found ourselves obliged to study in detail only the Iron IIB and Iron IIC in this discussion.

The chronological order of the domestic houses uncovered at major Iron Age sites in the northern Jordan Valley and their plans were taken into consideration in presenting our study. Below we present a brief study of each sub-period starting from the earlier one.

## **1. The Domestic Houses of the Iron IIA (10<sup>th</sup> century BC)**

### **1.1. A Major Iron IIA Sites in the North of Jordan Valley**

At Pella it has been published that the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age did not witness a break in material culture. Architectural remains belonging to this period were found in the East Cut phases III–I at the site. It has been proposed that phase IB belongs to the earliest Iron Age 1 period.<sup>7</sup> It has already been mentioned that Pella attested a

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kafafi 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Van der Kooij/Ibrahim 1989, 80–82.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Fischer 2013, 516.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Smith/Potts 1992, 83.

strongest occupation during the 12<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, and during the later phase of the Iron Age II in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

Actually, at the beginning of their excavations at Pella the excavators mentioned that no Iron IIA architectural remains were registered at the site.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the followed seasons of excavation in Stratum 8 produced a small domestic courtyard having several post-holes containing charred wood. It has been assumed that the building had been seasonally occupied. The excavated ceramic pots in this stratum belong to the Iron Age 1 period.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in Area III at Pella a fragmentary structure and pits were found and assigned to the Iron I-Iron IIA period. The central room of it had an apse measuring 2.6 m wide at the western end (Fig. 2), and seems that it was left opened to the south where a pit lined with stones from the interior was dug into the floor.<sup>10</sup>

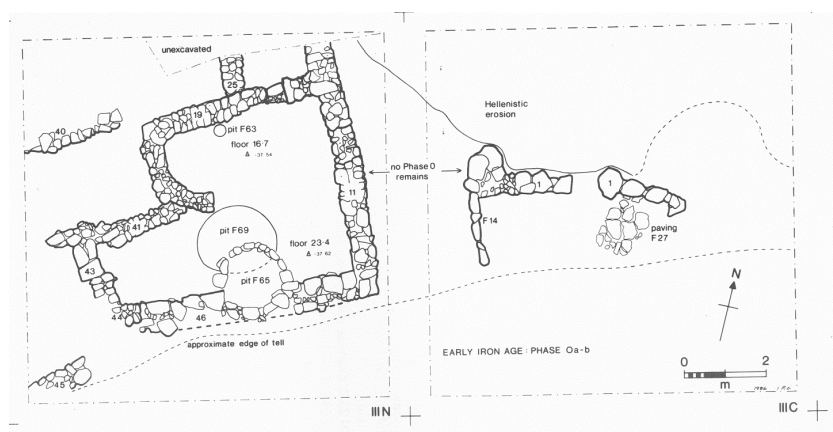


Fig. 2: Pella – East Cut, Plan of the Iron I-Iron IIA Structure  
(Smith/Potts 1992, Fig. 13)

At Tell Abu al-Kharaz at phase IX–XV several types of structural remains were yielded. Phases X (Iron IB/IIA 1050–930 BC) and Phase XI (Iron IIA

<sup>8</sup> Cf. McNicoll 1992, 55–60.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. McNicoll 1992, 85, Plate 54.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Smith/Potts 1992, 90.



(ca. 930–850 BC) and Phase XII (Iron Age IIA/B 850–800 BC) produced domestic buildings.<sup>11</sup>

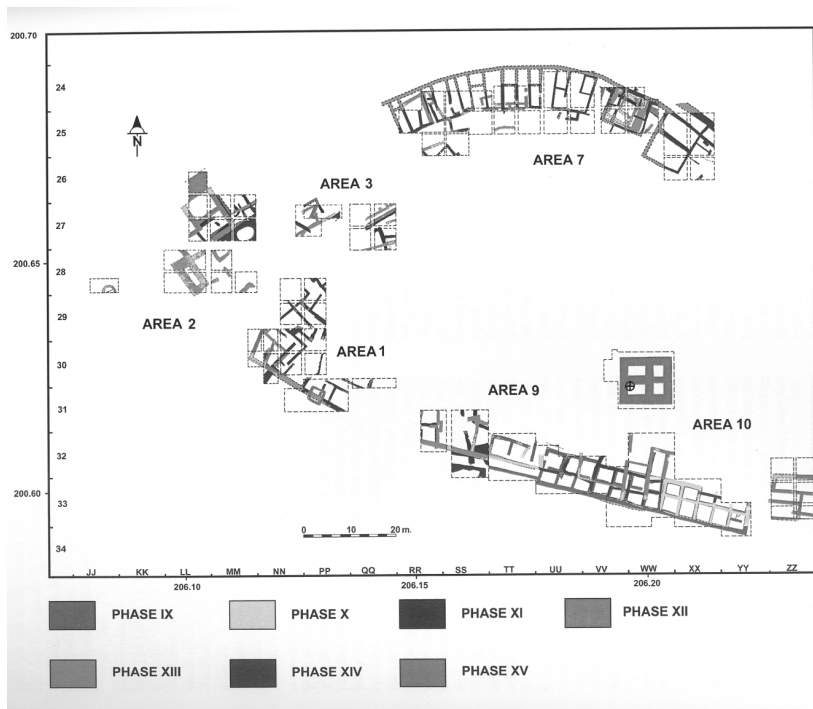


Fig. 3: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Schematic Overview of the Iron Age Structures of Phases IX–XV (Fischer 2013, Fig. 451)

In Area 2 North-West (Fig. 3) which is located close to the steep northern slope a 4.2m wide Early Bronze Age city-wall was excavated, and just below it an Iron Age rectangular structure measuring 10 m × 8 m, looking like a tower, was exposed. The excavator believes that the foundation of this Iron IIA building was originally built during the Late Bronze Age period.<sup>12</sup> A stone-paved passage-way with a *tabun* built on top of it (Fig. 4) that connected between the tower compound and a domestic structure was visible.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Fischer 2013, 516.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Fischer 2008.



excavations conducted at the site revealed that there was a great destruction by the end of the Late Bronze Age (roughly about 1300 BC).<sup>15</sup> At the southern slope of the Tell Deir 'Alla two major domestic buildings dated to the end of the Late Bronze and the beginning of the Iron Age were excavated. One is a complex consisting of many rooms and the second is a pilared house.<sup>16</sup> It has been assumed by the excavators that after the destruction by a very strong fire the inhabitants probably lived in tents seasonally during the winter and spring times. The finding of a furnace in Phase B with a meter thick wall chamber and a *tuyère* in one area of the site and three other ones built on top of each other (all with opening towards the north in other area of the site) invited the excavators to deduce that the site was used only for casting bronze during the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 5: Tell Deir 'Alla  
some of the 14 storage jars belonging to Phase X  
(Van der Kooij/Ibrahim 1989, Fig. 101)

Moreover, during the 1984 and 1987 seasons of excavations at the eastern side of the summit of the Tell a complex of a domestic buildings and a se-

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Van der Kooij/Ibrahim 1989, 80.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kafafi 2009, 589–594.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Van der Kooij/Ibrahim 1989, 81.

quence of a half meter thick deposit at some places belonging probably to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC were registered. The complex consisted of a storage room in which 14 large storage jars, 12 of them filled with liquids, were encountered (Fig. 5). The thick deposit consisted of dirt mixed with animal bones, large pottery sherds, mud brick fragments, chunks of bread ovens and two children skeletal remains.<sup>18</sup>

Tell el-Hammeh is located approximately 2.5 km to the east of the Tell Dayr 'Alla, and situated on the northern bank of the Wadi ez-Zarqa, in a distance of ca. 150–200 m from the water-bed of the Wadi. Tell el-Hammeh is situated in an area close to Mugharet el-Wardeh in the Ajlun mountain ranges which are considered being an extensive source of Iron ore.<sup>19</sup> The archaeological excavations conducted at the site indicated that it was occupied from the Pottery Neolithic through the end of the Persian periods, but witnessed few intervals of occupation in between.<sup>20</sup> Late Iron Age II period is represented by a huge pit (6–7 m in diameter) lined with mud-bricks, and with stones at the bottom, cutting through all phases. In addition, a large number of pottery sherds, loom-weights and two grinding stones were found in this phase. The Persian Period represents the final phase of occupation at Tell el-Hammeh. The main feature of this phase is a building built of dressed blocks, and a number of pits.<sup>21</sup>

The 2009 joint excavation of Tell Hammeh yielded a wealth of 10<sup>th</sup> century BC remains of iron smelting activities, and subsequently studied by Xander Veldhuijzen. The Iron IIA architectural remains uncovered at Tell el-Hammeh consisted of small rooms built of medium unhewn boulders (Fig. 6). Due to the small size of the excavated area no complete plan of a house could be retrieved.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Van der Kooij/Ibrahim 1989, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Al-Amri 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Van der Steen 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Kafafi 2013, 817–832.



*Fig. 6: Tell el-Hammeh – Iron Age IIA Structures excavated*

## 1.2. Types of the Iron Age IIA Houses

With regard to the Iron IIA types of houses, the above written information from the sites located in the northern part of the Jordan Valley indicates that most of the uncovered domestic architectural features were flimsy and very simple. For example, the only good example of real Iron IIA planned and constructed structures was registered at the site Deir 'Alla. Alas, we could not allocate any published top-plan of the Iron Age IIA structures from this site. Due to this fact, might be assumed that most of the sites of that part of the Jordan Valley, except Tell Deir 'Alla, had been seasonally occupied. In the meantime the buildings excavated at Tell Hammeh belonged to the artisans worked in smelting iron ores brought from Magharet Wardeh/Ajloun Mountains, but they lived at Tell Deir 'Alla.

To deduce, we still lack good published information regarding the Iron Age IIA domestic houses. What we have is only a one simple built room from Pella, a rectangular building, perhaps a fort from Abu al-Kharaz, artisans flimsy installations at Hammeh and built houses from Tel Deir

‘Alla. Thus, this sporadically published information cannot help to draw a clear conclusion relating to the types of domestic houses during the Iron Age IIA period.

## 2. The Domestic houses of the Iron IIB (9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

### 2.1. Iron Age IIB Sites

The houses that belong to the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and uncovered in the northern part of the Jordan Valley were excavated at several sites, such as: Tell Abu al-Kharaz (Phases XII, XIII and XIV) Tell Es-Sa’idiyeh in Strata (VII), (VI) and (V), Tell Al-Mazar in Stratum (V), and Tell Deir ‘Alla in phase (IX).

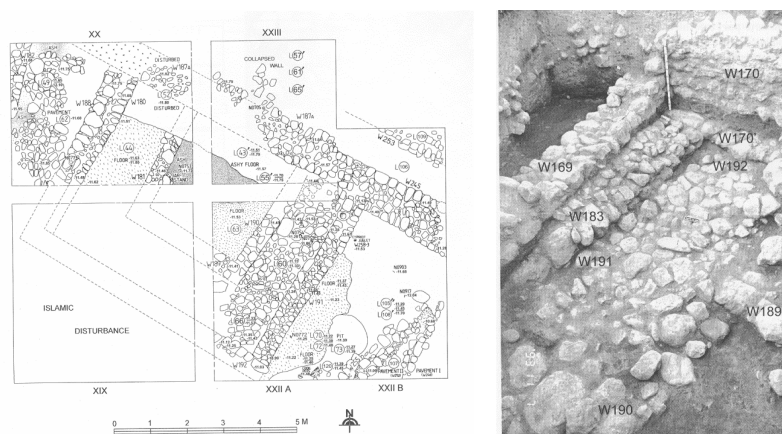


Fig. 7: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Phase XII (Fischer 2013, Figs. 146, 148)

At Tell Abu al-Kharaz and in Phase XII (850–800 BC) Trenches XII and XLIII yielded a stone-paved structure and an oblong room measuring 3 m wide and at least 5 m long. The room has a door-way with a threshold and 1-meter-high of accumulated debris was found on top of the floor of this

room. The floor was paved with stones embedded in clay.<sup>23</sup> Several pottery pots, a ring made of bronze and a carved bone were excavated from the house complex. It has been argued by the excavator that the compound suffered from a severe conflagration.<sup>24</sup> In Area 7, East and West two structures belonging to Phase XII separated by a four-room house of Phase XIV were excavated (Fig. 7). In the eastern complex, a building described as a tower was also damaged by a very strong fire. However, during the Phase XIII and on top the destructed building a new tower was built.

Phase XIII (800–770 BC) of Tell Abu al-Kharaz yielded well preserved and well-constructed structures, which unfortunately were destroyed by violence. Two architectural complexes were excavated, a tower and a domestic building. Actually, many of these features were reused during the next phase (XIV, ca. 770–732 BC). A rectangular structure, a tower, was built in Area 7 East above the collapsed tower of Phase XII, it measures 8 m × 8 m and has a mud-brick threshold at one of its entrances.

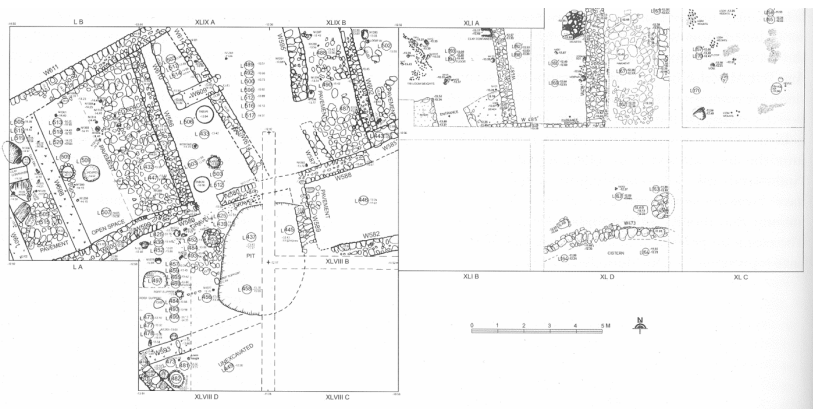


Fig. 8: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Area 7 West. Plan of Phase XIII structures (Fischer 2013, Fig. 158)

In Area 7 West two structures belonging to Phase XIII were exposed (Fig. 8). Most of them are of four-room house except one which measures 10 m

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Fischer 2013, Fig. 124.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 133.

east-west by 7.2 m north-south and surrounded by a wall.<sup>25</sup> The complex consisted of three rooms built of mud-brick walls with stones foundation. Those rooms produced pottery vessels, including large storage jars, small iron arrow-heads, a large millstone, spindle whorls, working tools of limestone and basalt, a tripod made of basalt, loom weights, jewelry and a cosmetic palette of alabaster. A *Tabun* and a hearth were also encountered built inside the building. In the backyard of this compound three stone pillars were built to support the roof. In this backyard a large amount of intact pottery pots, a millstone, a fibula and a large pit were dug in the eastern side of it. Another paved space was visible to the east of this courtyard.<sup>26</sup>

The excavated architectural remains and objects in Phase XIV (ca. 770–732 BC) at Tell Abu al-Kharaz indicated that it was inhabited by a prosperous society: new towers, four-room houses, more than one story buildings, metal workshops were built (Fig. 9). In addition, trade contacts with Cyprus, Phoenicia, and New-Assyria were established. It has been argued that the site was destroyed during one of the Assyrian invasions.<sup>27</sup>

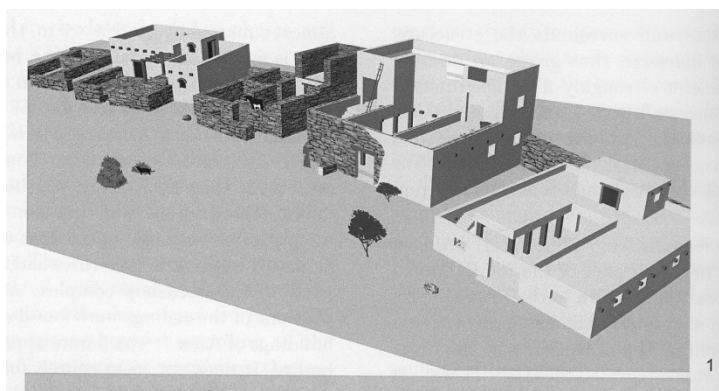


Fig. 9: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Reconstruction of Phase XIV, 8th century BC  
(Fischer 2013, Fig. 452/1)

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fischer 2013, 161, Fig. 158.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 161–190.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 516.



In Area I, two structural compounds were excavated. One of them is a square compound measuring 9 m × 9 m was found, it has a bench built against the south-eastern outer face of the city wall. To the north of this compound is an irregular stone pavement and a room measuring 7m long and 5m wide which can be interred by either a corridor from the south or an entrance from the east. Several other rooms belonging to his compound were also excavated (Fig. 10). The second compound located to the east of the first one was only partially exposed. The two compounds were separated from each other by a zig-zag alley. A stone paved room, *tabuns*, millstones, and a textile production courtyard were identified in those two compounds.<sup>28</sup>

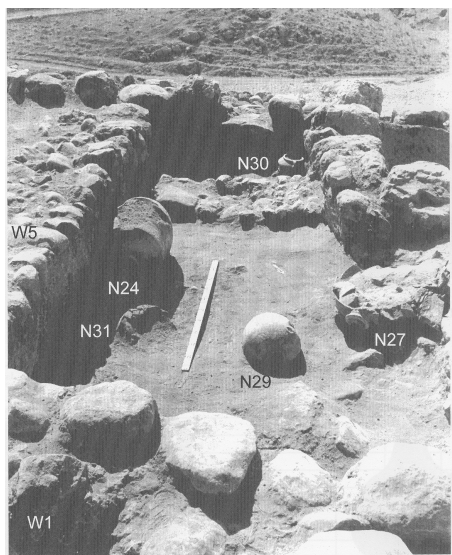


Fig. 10: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Phase XIV Room in Area I (Fischer 2013, Fig. 27)

Five domestic houses and a workshop for the production of iron and bronze objects were encountered in Area 7 at Tell Abu al-Kharaz. Due to the fact that we cannot discuss all those houses in detail, we present an ex-

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 41–43, Fig. 26A.

ample of one of them, that is House 2: It is trapezoidal in plan (Fig. 11), consists of a pair of rooms at the western side of it and the northern one measures 2 m × 3.5 m.<sup>29</sup> It has a door-way opening to a courtyard. The south-western room measures 2 m × 4 m and is stoned-paved.

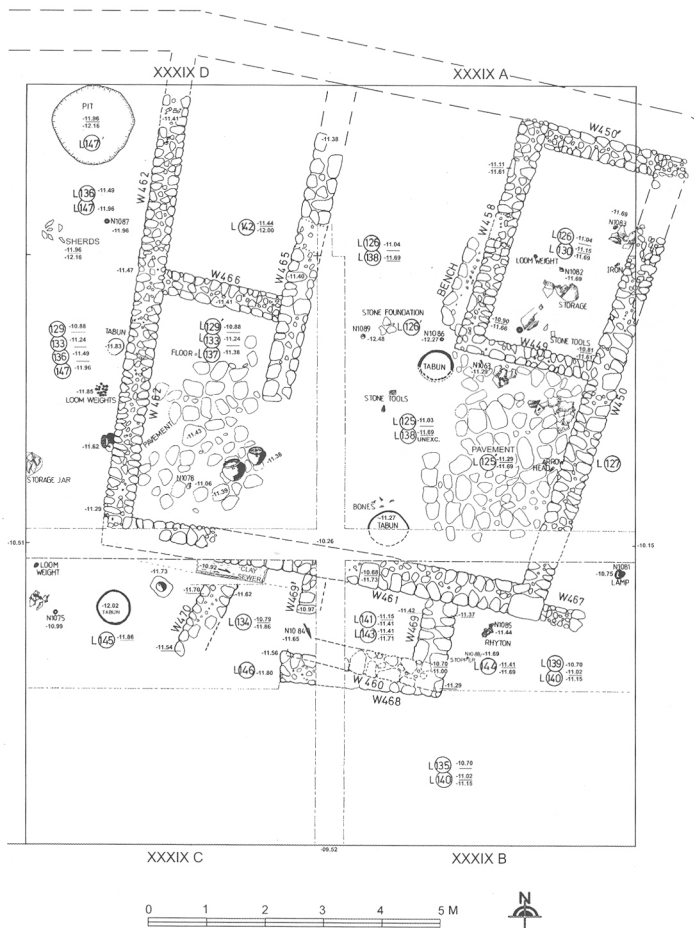


Fig. 11: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Phase XIV, Area 7 House 2  
(Fischer 2013, Fig. 182D)

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Fischer 2013, 206.

The two eastern rooms are built of stones, one of them measures 2 m × 3.3 m with an entrance from the courtyard; the second one measures 2.3 m × 3.8 m with a flag stone floor and it is opened on the courtyard. These two rooms yielded pottery vessels, stone tools and an arrow-head. The courtyard has a beaten earth floor, a bench and two tabouns two meter apart from each other.

At the site Tell es-Sa'diyeh several domestic structures attributed to the Iron Age IIB were encountered in the following strata as follows:

- a. Stratum VII produced the earliest Iron Age building on the tell and is dated to a period ranging from the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC to the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.
- b. Stratum (VI) belongs to a period extending from the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC to the middle of the 8th century BC.
- c. Stratum (V) dated to a period ranging between the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC to the end of the 8th century BC. A cluster of C14 calibrated dates was published from Stratum V an ranging from 825 to 400 BC.<sup>30</sup>

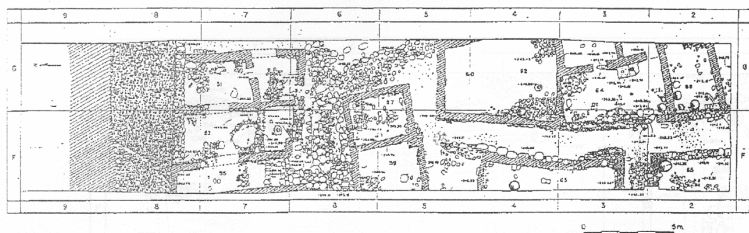
The houses excavated in Stratum (VII) at Tell Es-Saidiyeh (Fig. 12) were found in Area (23-F/G); a group of them has complete plans, which have assisted in deciding their accurate measurement.<sup>31</sup> The excavator could identify several types of domestic houses belonging to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Several types of houses were registered, some consisted of one room and others of either two or three rooms. The houses were constructed of mud-brick walls upon a stone foundation. Stratum VII produced nine housing units in addition to paved east-west street. The excavator argued that the Stratum VII city was abandoned and not destructed by a fire.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Pritchard 1985, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 4–15.80.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 4.



*Fig. 12: Tell es Sa'idiyeh – Domestic Houses Excavated in Stratum VII  
(Pritchard 1985, Fig. 177)*

House 51 is a two-room house built directly on the east-west paved street. The beaten-earth floor of the front room slopes in the direction of the north wall in which a door-way leads into a larger room (Fig. 13). A pit plastered with a marl dirt with a line of stones built at its bottom was dug into the floor of the back room at the south-west corner measuring 80 cm in diameter and 35–40 cm deep. Two grinding stones and a clay oven (50–54 cm in diameter) were uncovered inside the structure. This approved its domestic use.



*Fig. 13: Tell es-Sa'idiyeh – Stratum VII, House 51  
(Pritchard 1985, Fig. 29)*

In addition, Stratum (VI, Area 23) yielded six domestic houses; some of them consist of one and others of two rooms (Fig. 14). They were constructed on top of the Stratum VII destruction, but are larger than those of the earlier stratum. All the houses consist of one room except one (house 37–39) which had two.

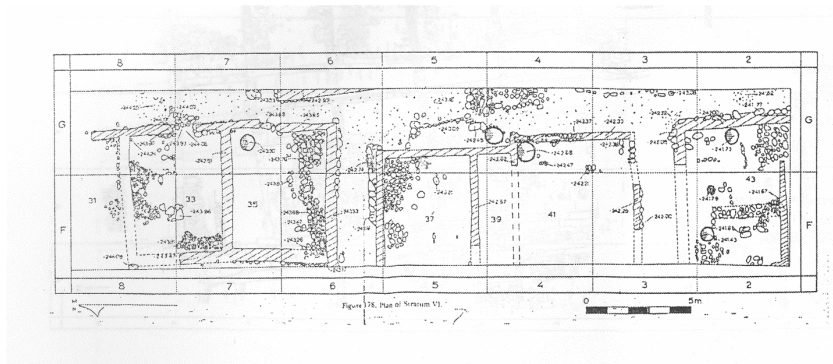


Fig. 14: Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, Stratum V Houses (Pritchard 1985, Fig 178)

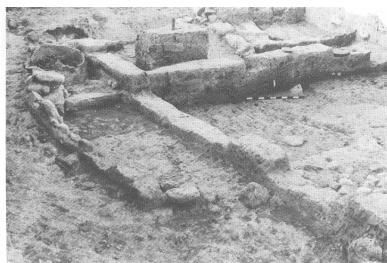


Fig. 15: Tell es-Sa'idiyeh – a) House 37–39 and a Kitchen Area;  
b) Pottery Vessels inside House 39 (Pritchard 1985, Figs. 48–49).

House 37–39 consisted of an oblong room and a long narrow one (Fig. 15a and b). In room 37 two patches of pavements were excavated one at the northeast corner and the other to the west of it. In addition, in an enclosed area, which perhaps was used for daily use, an oven measuring

72 cm in diameter surrounded by burnt ashes was visible. Inside of the two rooms a large amount of pottery vessels such as jugs, juglets, storage jars, chalices, decanters, kraters, carnelian beads, a bronze ring, spindle whorl, faience cup with lid, iron chisel, iron spear and a bone spatula were encountered.<sup>33</sup>

The houses of Stratum V at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh were built on top of the accumulated destruction of Stratum VI. The structures related to this phase were larger in area rather than those from the earlier phases, more homogenous in plan, and built on a different orientation.

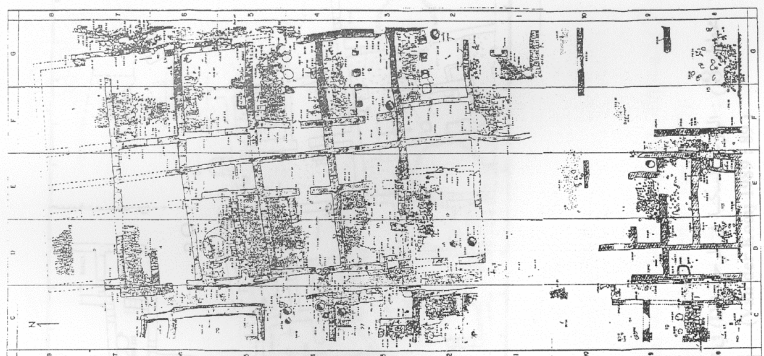


Fig. 16: Tell es-Sa'idiyeh – Stratum V Houses (Pritchard 1985, Fig. 179)

Most of the houses of Stratum V (Fig. 16) were built according to one unified plan (Houses 3–12), which made them organized side by side, back to back, on two rows, overlooking corresponding streets. Furthermore, each one of them consists of three rooms: a rear room and two front rooms separated by a row of pillars.<sup>34</sup> However, the houses of Stratum V were destroyed by a sudden fire. This was attested by the layer of ashes accumulated on the floors and was a result of burnt beams of the ceiling and other roof plant material.

At Tell Al-Mazar, the remains of the houses dated to 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century BC are concentrated in the middle of the Tell summit within Stratum (V)

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pritchard 1985, 12f., Fig. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 15.

dated to the 8th and 7th centuries BC.<sup>35</sup> House No. (500) (Fig. 17) is located in Areas (G) and (L). It consists of a square courtyard surrounded by a group of rooms, and has a floor paved with flagstones. One of the rooms contained loom weights and jars filled with wheat grain.<sup>36</sup>

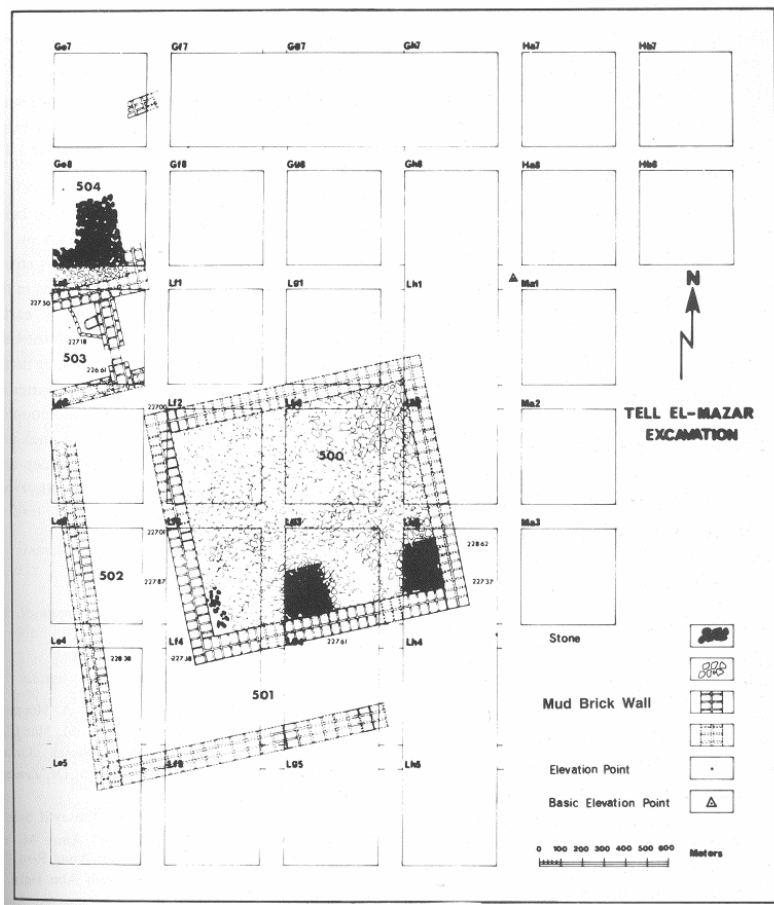


Fig. 17: Tell al-Mazar – Stratum V Domestic Houses (Yassine 1988, Fig. 9)

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Yassine 1988, 90–92.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 91.

The houses which have been uncovered at Tell Deir 'Alla are dated to the Iron Age IIB period. They are excavated in the north-eastern part in Area (B) and in the south-eastern part in Area (D) (Fig. 18) of the summit of the Tell. They are found within Phase IX ca. 800 BC.<sup>37</sup> Some of the houses are consisting of a number of rooms and a courtyard, similar to those found in Area (B). Others consist of two adjacent rooms as found in Area (D).

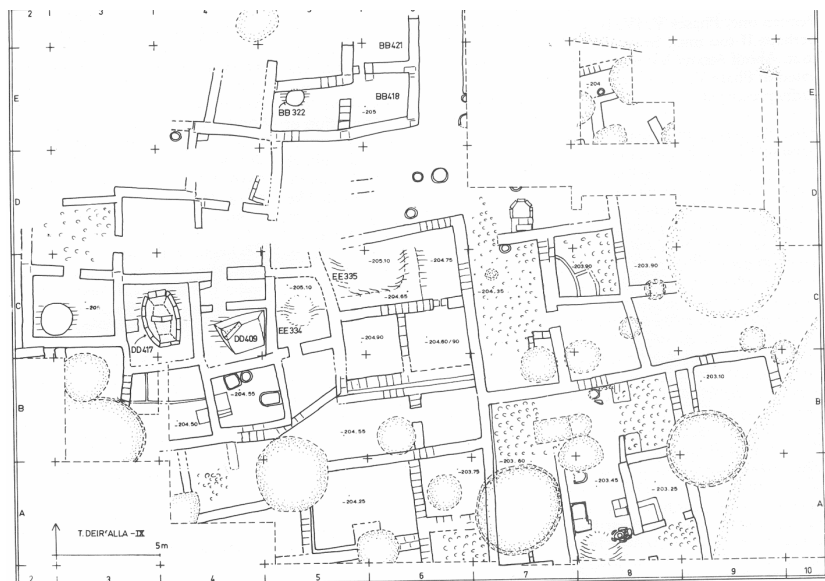


Fig. 18: Deir Tell 'Alla – Plan of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC (Phase IX) Domestic Structures

To sum up, it is very obvious that the northern part of the Jordan Valley was well inhabited and had a prosperous life during the Iron Age IIB period. The inhabitants built themselves several types of houses, in addition to strongholds and mostly enclosed their cities with enclosures especially that of the case-mate walls type. The excavated objects indicated a far distances relation between this part of the Jordan Valley and other regions. Below, we present a brief study of the types of the Iron IIB houses.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Van der Kooij/Kafafi 1989, 82.



## 2.2. Types of the Iron Age IIB Houses

### 2.2.1. The one-room houses

The most important feature of these houses is that they consist of one room. This room was used for all household purposes as well as a living room. It had an entrance onto a main street that connected it with other exterior facilities within the settlement. Examples of these houses are No. 60–62 (Figs. 18–19) in Stratum (VIIA) at Tell Es-Saidiyeh which has an oblong shape with an area of 24.5 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>38</sup> Among these houses that have been dated to the Iron Age II Period in the sites surrounding the Northern Area no examples have been found that could be compared with these one-room houses.

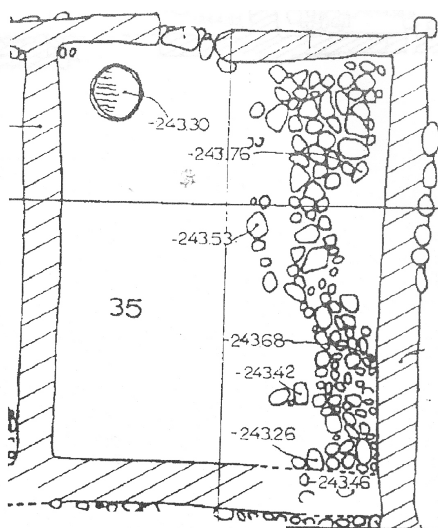


Fig. 19: Tell es-Sa'idiyeh – One Room House  
(Abdallah 1998, Plan 10)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Pritchard 1985, Fig. 177/178.

### 2.2.2. The two-room Houses

Two types of two room houses can be distinguished. In one, the house consists of a wide rear room and a long front room which represents the courtyard of the house in most cases. An example is house No. 51 in Stratum (VII) at Tell Es-Saidiyeh. It is an oblong house with an area of (14.5 m<sup>2</sup>) set on a main street orienting east-west, with its entrance in the wall of the front room.<sup>39</sup> The other type of house consists of two adjacent rooms. An example is the house in phase IX in Area D at Tell Deir 'Alla. This house (Fig. 20) consists of two adjacent rooms orienting east-west. The western part of these rooms is not completely excavated yet. No contemporary houses have been uncovered in the northern Jordan Valley sites or in other adjacent sites similar to these.

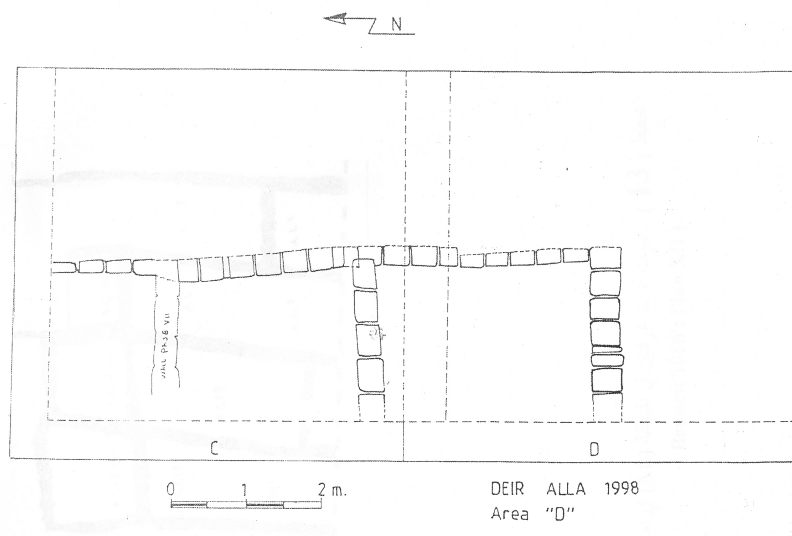


Fig. 20: Deir 'Alla – Area D, Top Plan of a Two-Room House  
(Abdallah 1998, Plan 12)

As for the two-room houses resembled by Tell Es-Saidiyeh Stratum (VII) no houses corresponding to them have been uncovered in other compara-

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Pritchard 1985, Fig. 177.

ble sites in the northern part of the Jordan Valley. But in southern Jordan, houses like these have been found, with plans that are similar to these two-room houses despite a later date. For the southern sites Bennett's excavations in Umm Al-Biyara site in Area (AL) revealed three houses distinguished by the signs (AL), (AL2), (AL3). Each one of them consists of two rooms: a rear room and a front room. The excavator dated these houses to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>40</sup>

In Palestine, these two-room houses are present at many sites dated to the Iron Age II period. They appeared at Tell Al-Qedah within the houses of Stratum (IX) dated to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century BC,<sup>41</sup> at Tell Al-Far'ah within the houses of Stratum (VIIb),<sup>42</sup> at Tell Abu Hawwam within the Houses of Stratum (III) dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC,<sup>43</sup> at Tell Beit Mersim within the houses of Stratum (A1) dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC,<sup>44</sup> at Tell Be'r Al-Seba' within the houses of Stratum (II).<sup>45</sup>

### 2.2.3. The three-room houses

The most important distinguishing feature of these houses is that they basically consist of one wide rear room and two front rooms, with wall or a row of pillars built in the front area to divide it into two rooms. Each of those houses has a main entrance to link them with exterior facilities in the settlement. Among the examples of these houses is house No. 64 in Stratum (VII) in Area (23) and house No. 6 in Stratum (V) in area (32) at Tell Es-Sa'idiyeh (Fig. 21). The excavated part of house No. 64 indicates that it is oblong in shape and consists of three rooms. There is a rear room with the measurements (5.5 m × 2.80 m.) and two front rooms separated by a wall built of mud-brick. This house overlooks a north-south street and has two entrances in the eastern wall.<sup>46</sup> House No. 6 in Stratum (V) is oblong and has a complete plan its area is ca. 42.5 m<sup>2</sup>. The two front

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Bennett 1966, 378–383, Plate XIV.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Yadin et al. 1958, 154; Breamer 1982, 44.224.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Breamer 1982, 44.213; Chambon 1984, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Hamilton 1934, 5–8; Breamer 1982, 44.164.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Albright 1834, 64f.; Breamer 1982, 44.149.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Aharoni 1973, Plate 4.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Pritchard 1985, 8, Fig.177.



Beit Mersim, dated to the Iron Age II period,<sup>49</sup> and house No. 27 in Stratum (V) at Tell Al-Qedah, dated to the Iron Age II period,<sup>50</sup> could be compared with house No. 64 in Stratum VII at Tell Es-Saidiyeh, as each of them consists of three rooms with a wall separating the two front rooms. No houses resembling the three-room houses with a row of pillars separating the two front rooms, at Tell Es-Sa'idiyeh houses in Stratum V have been uncovered in contemporary sites of the northern Jordan Valley. But in other Areas in Jordan, such as at Sahab, a house in Area (BO19) has been uncovered and dated to the Iron Age II period. The two front rooms of the house have been revealed with a row of pillars separating them, while the rear room has not been uncovered yet. This house is distinguished by architectural attachments in the western side.<sup>51</sup> In Palestine houses similar to these have been uncovered at Tell Beit Mersim in Stratum (A),<sup>52</sup> at Tell Al-Qedah in Strata (V) and (IV)<sup>53</sup> at Tell Al-Fa'ah North in Stratum VIIA.<sup>54</sup>

The three-room houses with a wall of a row of pillars separating the two front rooms can be compared with four room-houses with two walls, a wall and a row of pillars, or two rows of pillars separating them. This comes from the notion that the three-room house is the early form from which the four-room house. It can be compared with those of Tell Jalul (5 km to the east of Madaba) as excavations have revealed a house within phase (IX) which is dated to the Iron Age II (B–C) period,<sup>55</sup> and the house in Area (A) in Ghrareh, dated to the period of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. This later house basically consists of a four-room house and is characterized by architectural supplements to its original plan.<sup>56</sup> In Palestine, the four-room houses have been uncovered in various sites dated to the Iron Age II period such as at Tell Al-Far'ah North, Strata (VIIB)<sup>57</sup> and Tell Qedah in Strata (V) and (VI).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Albright 1943, Plate 3; Bremer 1982, 66.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Yadin 1958, 19, Plate CLXXIV; Bremer 1982, 23.66.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Ibrahim 1975, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Albright 1943, Plate 6.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Yadin 1958, 19, Plate CLXXIV; Bremer 1982, 66.231.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Beit Arie 1973, 32–34; Braemer 1982, 61.177.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Gregor 1996, 71f.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Hart 1988, 89–94.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Bremer 1982, 78.216; Chambon 1984, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Yadin 1985, 17f.; Bremer 1982, 71.228f.

### 2.2.4. The Courtyard houses

The courtyard houses are characterized by their square or rectangular shape. Each house consists of a central courtyard surrounded by a group of rooms on one side or various sides. An example of this type is house (or building) No. 500 in Stratum (V) at Tell Al-Mazar. This house consists of a square courtyard in its center, surrounded by a group of rooms.<sup>59</sup> Another example is the house in phase IX in Area (B) in Deir 'Alla (Fig. 22): A group of rooms which have been uncovered are associated together to form a unified unit (house).<sup>60</sup> The comparative study indicates that no houses resemble in their plans the houses of Tell Al-Mazar in Stratum (V) and the houses of Tell Duweir in phase IX in Area (B).

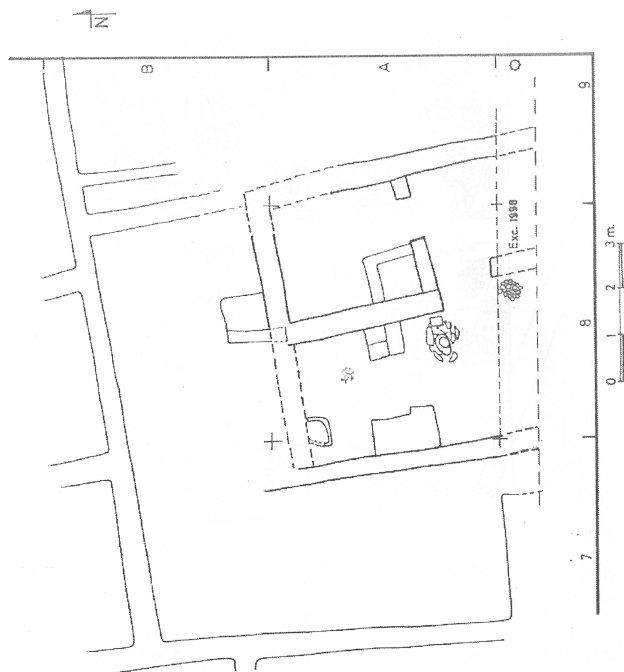


Fig. 22: Tell Deir 'Alla – Area B, Phase IX, Plan of a Courtyard House (Abdallah 1998, Plan 34)

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Yassine 1988, 90–92.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Van der Kooij 1989, 83–85.

### 3. Domestic Houses of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (The Iron Age IIC)

#### 3.1. Major Iron Age IIC Sites

The houses which have been uncovered and dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC were registered at several sites in the northern part of the Jordan Valley, although the best examples are at the sites of Pella, Tell Abu Al-Kharaz, Tel Mazar, Deir 'Alla and Tell Damiya. The architectural remains encountered at Pella and belonging to the latest period of the Iron Age Iron IIC were excavated under the Hellenistic levels and were very poor in construction and consisted of fragmentary walls and occasional rooms (Fig. 23).

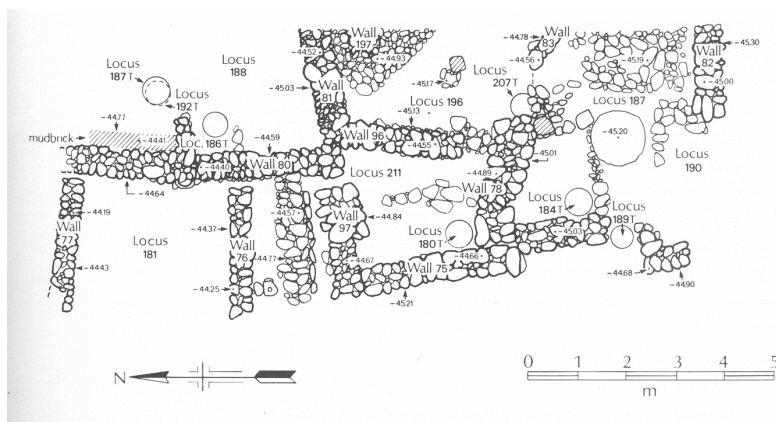


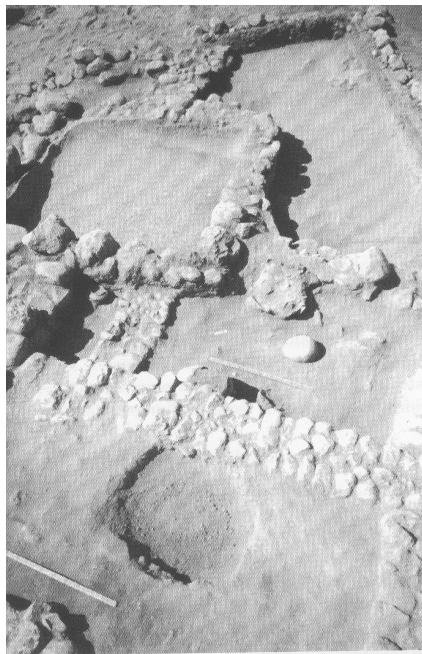
Fig. 23: Pella – Area VIII, Late Iron Age II Structures (McNicol 1982, 55)

In his preliminary Peter Fischer<sup>61</sup> mentioned that he excavated two domestic houses in Strata I and II dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. More of these and contemporaneous structures were excavated during the following seasons.<sup>62</sup> Sub-Phases XV/1 and XV/2 in Area 1 yielded several houses, one of them which a square installation measuring 2.5 m × 2.5 m

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Fischer 1995, 100.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Fischer 2013.

(Fig. 24) and surrounded by a supporting wall which had been coated from the interior face by a lime-mortar.<sup>63</sup>



*Fig. 24: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Phase XV/2  
Area 1 (Fischer 2013, Fig. 45)*

Another distinguished Iron Age IIB/C (Phase XIV/XV) building is that one excavated in Area (10) West, measuring 10.60 m × 11.7 m, the walls ranging between 1.5 m and 2 m wide. The exposed stony foundation is still preserved to a height of approximately 2m. The exteriors of the walls are covered with a white lime-plaster and sand. The building has four small rooms (Fig. 25). The excavated pottery sherds from inside the rooms pointed to the latest phase of the Iron Age, probable Iron IIC. The excavators believe that this structure served as a fortress.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Fischer 2013, 65.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. ibdi., 375, Fig. 376.





Fig. 25: Area 10 West, Phase XIV/XV »White Building« (Fisher 2013, Fig. 376)

At Tell Mazar Strata III and IV (7<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century BC) yielded unique buildings. A very large building constructed on the summit of the Tell (Fig. 26). It was identified by the excavator as the »Palace Fort« and claimed that it

was the residence of the Governor of the city that time.<sup>65</sup> One of its unit has a large rectangular podium measuring 10 m × 15 m encircled by a mud-brick wall. A large stone paved open courtyard was built to the north of the raised unit, and attached to the eastern side of the podium a number of rooms were built attached to the east wall of the podium. During the last phase of use of this building was served as a store-room, kitchen, weaving and other domestic purposes.

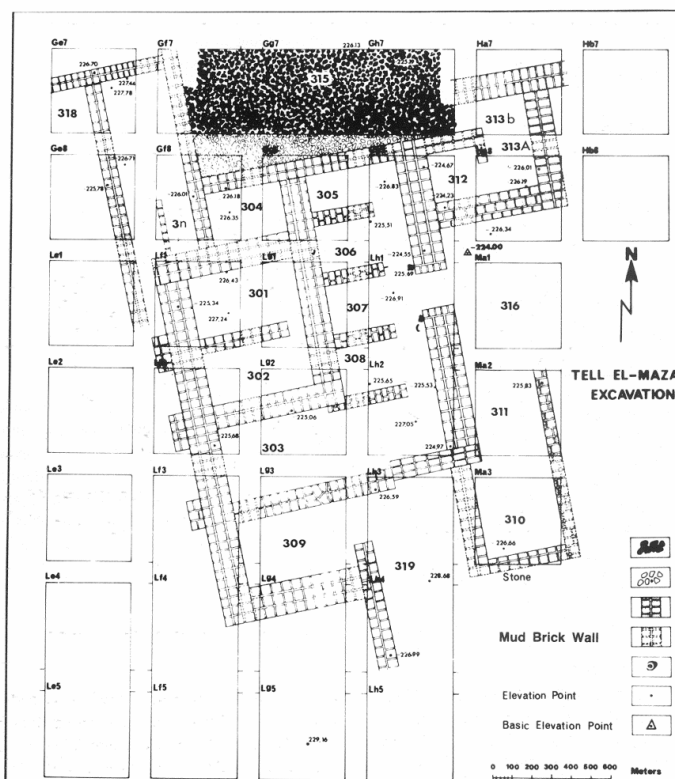


Fig. 26: Tell Mazar – »Palace Fort« Building, 7th/6th Century BC  
(Yassine 1988, Fig. 6)

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Yassine 1988, 85.

The entrance to the building was built in the area between the podium unit and the other units of the Palace Fort. The middle courtyard (hall) was not roofed and had a floor made of compacted clay mixed with chunks of lime-plaster. The plan and the architectural characteristics of the building indicate the Assyrian character. Thus, the excavator argued that this Palace Fort installation served as a garrison or an Ammonite administration center rather than a large settlement.<sup>66</sup>

The Tell Mazar excavator argued that the Stratum III building is an earlier stage of the Stratum IV the »Palace Fort«. However, several building's alterations and changings were made during the later stage (Stratum III). However, the lay-out (plan) of the Stratum III building is very much like of those of the Stratum IV construction.<sup>67</sup>

At Tell Deir 'Alla Phase VI Iron Age IIC architectural remains were found at the north-east summit of the Tell and in a trial trench excavated to the south of this area. During this period and at the highest point the inhabitants of the site started a large scalp of leveling before constructing their houses. The buildings were constructed of mud-brick put on stone foundations walls (1 m thick).<sup>68</sup> Moreover, and during the New Babylonian Period (ca. 586–539 BC) and the Persian Period (ca. 536–332 BC) Phases V, IV, III, and perhaps II an accumulation of courtyards indicated the new set of inhabitants arriving to the site who built themselves houses of large size mud-bricks (each measures 40 cm × 40 cm). There were pear-shaped pits dug into the floors of the courtyards of the houses and bread ovens in some cases. No architectures belonging to Phase IV were found yet, and the remains of Phase III were only encountered in a very small area located on the eastern slope of the Tell.<sup>69</sup>

## 3.2. Types of the Iron Age IIC Houses

### 3.2.1. The courtyard houses

At Tell Abu Al-Kharaz, the Strata (I), (II) and (IA) are dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and two houses which are similar in their plans and fea-

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 85–88.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 89f.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Van der Kooij/Ibrahim 1989, 88f.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 90.

tures are uncovered in these strata. Each one of these houses consists of a courtyard surrounded by four rooms built on two opposite sides of the courtyard.<sup>70</sup> The house with the courtyard in Strata (I) and (II) is an example of these houses; it is square in its plan, with an area of ca. 81 m<sup>2</sup> and consists of a partially roofed courtyard surrounded by four rooms.



Fig. 27: Tell Abu al-Kharaz – Iron Age IIC Courtyard House (Abdallah 1998, Plan 35)

Comparing the courtyard houses at Tell Abu Al-Kharaz (Fig. 27) with others in the northern part of the Jordan Valley sites, no houses which resem-

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Fischer 1995, 100.

ble them have been uncovered. But in central Jordan such a house has been uncovered. At Jawa house No. 800 in the western field (C) dated to the Iron Age II can be compared with the houses of Tell Abu Al-Kharaz. This house consists of a central courtyard surrounded by rooms on two opposite sides.<sup>71</sup> This house is different from those of Tell Abu Al-Kharaz in its large size and the number of its rooms which are more than four. This led the excavator to assume that this house was the residence of an important person, maybe the ruler. In Palestine, the house at Tell Al-Qedah in Stratum VII in Area (B) dated to the Iron Age II period<sup>72</sup> and house No. 13/12 in Stratum (A) at Tell Beit Mersim<sup>73</sup> are two houses with courtyard surrounded by rooms on two opposite sides, these houses can be compared with those of Tell Abu Al-Kharaz.

### 3.2.2. Large houses with multi courtyards (palaces)

At Tell Al-Mazar, Stratum (IV) is dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, and a large domestic building (No.400; Figs. 26, 28) has been uncovered in Areas (G) and (L). This house consists of various rooms and more than one courtyard. The excavator named it »The Palace« and assumed that its plan is similar to those of the Assyrian-Babylonian buildings.<sup>74</sup> Stratum (III) dates to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and a large domestic building (No. 300) is uncovered in this Strata. This building is a continuation of the domestic building »The Palace« in Stratum (IV), the excavator named it »The Palace Fort« because of its large size and the defense fortifications system represented by increasing the thickness of its walls which have been added to it. Furthermore, this building consists of a number of rooms and more than one courtyard. The excavator assumed that it also is similar in its plan to those of the Assyrian-Babylonian buildings.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Daviau 1996, 91f.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Vadin 1985, Plate CCIV.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Albright 1943, Plate 3.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Yassin 1988, 89f.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Yassine 1988, 84–88.

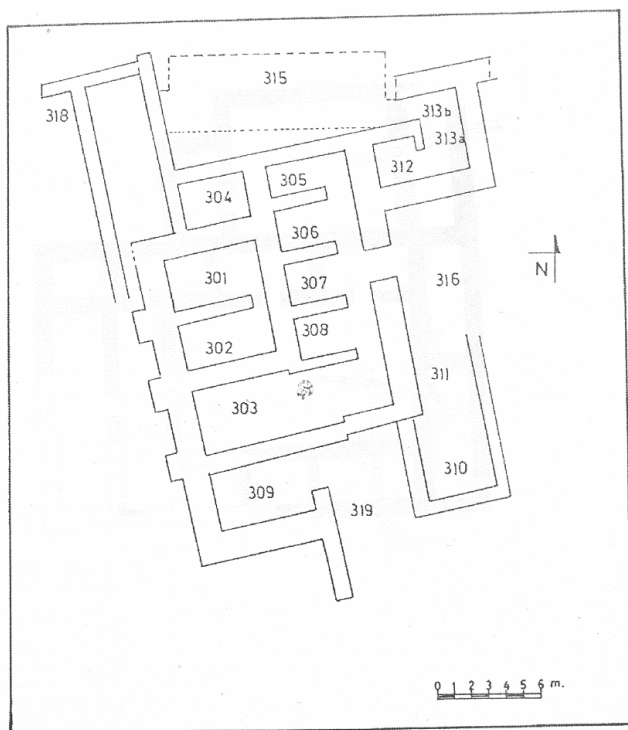


Fig. 28: Tell Al-Mazar – »The Palace Fort«  
(Abdallah 1998, Plan 43)

The comparative study indicates that no domestic building resembling those of Tell Al-Mazar Strata (III) and (IV) in the northern Jordan Valley sites has been uncovered yet. As for other contemporary sites in Jordan, Bennett's excavations in Area (A) at Buseirah revealed two domestic buildings, and those buildings bear an Assyrian influence<sup>76</sup> adds that these two buildings are two palaces and agrees with Bennett that they are influenced by the plans of the Assyrian buildings.<sup>77</sup> In Palestine, buildings like these

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Bennett 1977, 1–6; Bienkowski 1995.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Bienkowski 1995, 141.

had been uncovered and assigned to »Palaces«, such as at Tell Al-Muteselim in Area (B) in Stratum (III) dated to the Iron Age II period<sup>78</sup> and at Tell Al-Qedah in Area (B) in Stratum (III) dated to the Iron Age II period.<sup>79</sup> They are influenced by the plans of the Assyrian-Babylonian buildings. This leads to the conclusion that these buildings have been spread over Jordan and Palestine as a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian presence. In this regard, Weippert raises a worthy question about who had lived in these palaces. She answers the same question by saying that they were local rulers who had lived in these houses (The Palaces) in Jordan.<sup>80</sup> Since there are no indications in the Assyrian Annals to changes in the ruling dynasties of Jordan kingdoms carried out by the Assyrians,<sup>81</sup> the notion that the residents of who these palaces in Jordan were local rulers, in given credibility.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, it has been revealed that there are various types of houses in the Iron Age II period in the northern Jordan Valley. There were one-room houses, two-room house, three-room houses, courtyard houses and large houses with multiple courtyards (palaces). It is clear that some sites share the presence of a certain type of house, that is the houses with courtyards, despite the difference in the design of these houses in regard of the arrangement of rooms around the courtyard. At Tell Al-Mazar, the organization at arrangement of the rooms was around one or more courtyard. At Tell Deir 'Alla, the rooms were arranged on one side of the courtyard. This leads to the conclusion that on the one hand the sites in the northern Jordan Valley had maintained a cultural continuation and on the other hand a similar continuation during various periods. The type of houses with courtyards is a cultural continuation of the building tradition of houses in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. The usage of this tradition had been continued in the Iron Age period in Jordan and Palestine altogether.

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Lamon/Shipton 1939, Fig. 89.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Yadin 1985, 45.54, Plan CLXXVII.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Weippert 1988, 603.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Ahlstrom 1993, 664.

Through the study of the houses of Tell Al-Saidiyeh, it is clear that this site was unique in the presence of various patterns of houses. The presence of these houses in one period of settlement proved variety and development in the patterns of houses at this site. As well as the presence of three-room houses, the early type of the four-room houses, which were not found at the site but at other sites in Jordan and Palestine prove that Tell Al-Saidiyeh in that period had been maintaining its own architectural characteristic culture, which had continued through the ages. The comparison of this type of house with the four-room house which has been found at other sites in Jordan and Palestine leads to the conclusion that the presence of four-room houses was not limited to a certain ethnic group or a certain region in Jordan or in Palestine.

Furthermore, we conclude from the presence of the large houses with multiple courtyards (palaces) at Tell Al-Mazar, which show Assyrian-Babylonian influence in the type of architecture (which it had shared with some sites in Palestine) that the Assyrian-Babylonian domain and influence had been great in Jordan and Palestine.

If we try to link the historical material i.e. what is mentioned in the *Annals* concerned with the Assyrian and Babylonian Kings which hint at gathering huge tributes from the kingdoms of Jordan with these influences on the architecture of houses at Tell al-Mazar in particular and in other sites in Jordan in general, we conclude that Jordan was an Assyrian province during that time, and it was not governed by Assyrian rulers but by local rulers.<sup>82</sup>

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