



Fig. 1. One of the storage rooms in the east part of the late Iron Age complex.

Tall Damiyah

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Tall Damiyah, a small settlement mound on the east bank of the Jordan River, reveals continuous occupation during the Iron Age, in contrast to the broken histories at major neighboring sites, such as Tall Mazar and Tall Deir ‘Alla. During previous excavation work at Tall Damiyah, a Jordanian-Dutch team uncovered the remains of an Iron Age IIC sanctuary with a well-preserved inventory in situ (Petit and Kafafi 2016).

Excavations at Tall Damiyah were resumed during the falls of 2018 and 2019. These field seasons had two aims: to investigate the role of Tall Damiyah during earlier phases and to determine the extent of the Iron Age IIC sanctuary. In order to reach the second goal, the Jordanian-Dutch team opened several squares north of the main sanctuary building. First considered to be a freestanding construction, this turned out to be part of an extensive complex that had covered large parts of the summit. Not only was the main cultic room with the two altars destroyed by fire, the newly discovered rooms also showed traces of burning.

Unfortunately, many graves and Persian-Hellenistic pits had wreaked havoc on these Iron Age layers, destroying much of the original floor deposits. Nevertheless, the team was able to uncover three additional rooms and a possible courtyard. Two of the rooms were in use for storage (Fig. 1). Numerous large kraters filled with burnt organic material, such as barley, were found in these rooms, preserved considerably well under a thick burnt debris layer. Other items, such as metal sickles and knives, suggest that the few occupants of Tall Damiyah were not only storing food but also harvesting. It is to be investigated whether this surplus was a donation of worshippers, was used for feeding visitors, or was a stockpile for the inhabitants to overcome arid periods. Much of the evidence point to a function as a caravanserai, where traders and travelers could eat, sleep, and worship.

During the 2018 season, the main aim was to investigate the role of Tall Damiyah during the Iron Age IIB and early IIC. Earlier evidence of cultic behavior was expected, following the assumption that the place had a religious significance over a longer period. Under the previously mentioned sanctuary, a freestanding building with thick, mud-brick walls was encountered. Although not burnt, collapse debris suggest some sort of destruction, although the team could not exclude deliberate dismantling. On the floor of this building,



Fig. 2. Fragments of a painted pithos on the floor of a rectangular freestanding building.

sherds of a large pithos were found, painted with a “tree of life” and two bulls or zebus (Fig. 2). A series of block-shaped pyramids forms the lower scene. Heavily fragmented and cut by a later pit, only part of the vessel was preserved. The closest parallel seems to be the pithos found in a temple context at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. East of the building at Tall Damiyah stands a burnt mud-brick platform surrounded by ash lenses, and, farther to the south, several female figurines, most of them complete, were discarded in street levels. It seems at this stage safe to suggest that this earlier building also had a cultic function. Intriguing for the team is the clear distinction between the figurines found in this occupation phase (females) and those found in the later sanctuary (equids). It is proposed here that those figurines resemble the worshippers and not a deity. During the later phase, the Jordan Valley suffered a major arid period and the main group that visited Tall Damiyah were traders and travelers, those people associated with equids. In the earlier period the site was also used by sedentary occupants from nearby settlements with other intentions and thus other types of offerings.

Reference

Petit, L. P. and Kafafi, Z. 2016. “Beyond the River Jordan: A Late Iron Age Sanctuary at Tell Damiyah.” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 79 (1): 18–26.