



Fig. 1. Tell Bleibil, Iron Age fortification system exposed in the northern part of the tell.  
(Photo by B. Briewig, WSAS Project.)

Initiated in 2016, the Wadi Shu‘aib Archaeological Survey Project (WSAS) continued with its third and fourth seasons in 2018 and 2019. In these last two seasons, the survey was able to continue to detect a number of hitherto unknown sites spanning different time periods. Of specific interest, for example, is a newly found Pre-Pottery Neolithic A site located in the southern part of the wadi, as well as the actual remains of combat operations between British and Ottoman forces during the final year of World War I. An apparent absence of Chalcolithic and Bronze Age sites within the wadi system seems feasible on the basis of the material collected for the time being, but this warrants further investigation. An Iron Age II occupation in the wadi is attested, but it is much sparser compared to the Hellenistic, Roman-Byzantine, and Medieval Islamic periods, for which a considerable increase in population and settlement is evident.

A second focus of the project in these two seasons was on the site of Tell Bleibil (Tall Bulaybil), located at the mouth of the Wadi Shu‘eib (Shu‘aib) in the eastern part of the southern Jordan Valley, where, for the first time ever, targeted excavations commenced in 2018 in order to gain insight into the site’s settlement structure and its chronology, as well as its strategic function. To this aim, trenches in the northwestern part of the tell were excavated in 2018 and 2019, exposing a larger part of the settlement’s fortification system dating to Iron Age II. The fortifications consist of a massive stone foundation formed of small to larger unhewn and semi-hewn limestone boulders, in parts still preserved to a height of almost 4 m, on top of which a mudbrick wall—albeit not preserved in the excavated area—then

## Wadi Shu‘aib: Tell Bleibil

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Fig. 2. Tell Bleibil, bastion or tower within the fortification system, with yellow chaff-tempered plaster still partially preserved in situ. (Photo by A. Ahrens, WSAS Project, DAI.)

was erected (Fig. 1). Additionally, in the northeastern part of the fortification wall excavated, a corner of what is probably to be identified as a protruding bastion or tower was partly exposed. This feature, built in direct connection with the fortification wall, consists of at least two large stone boulders measuring approximately 1.4 m in length each. The exterior side of this bastion was coated with a layer of yellow chaff-tempered plaster, which was partially preserved in situ (Fig. 2). The original topography of the site, with uneven levels of bedrock varying in height, presumably necessitated the construction of the fill layers of soil mixed with hard-packed, compressed pebbles, gravel, and smaller cobbles in order to create an even surface for the stones of the fortification wall to be erected on. Interestingly, this layer of soil mixed with pebbles also contained lithic material probably dating to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, which possibly came originally from somewhere at the site itself or in its immediate vicinity. A fragment of a so-called Cypro-Phoenician bichrome ware juglet decorated with bands of alternating black and red color pigments came from the fill above the fortification wall. The survey and the excavations at Tell Bleibil will continue in the coming years.

## References

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