

Excavation at Jabal Juhayra, March 2015

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Abstract

Jabal Jhayra is a small Neolithic site in the northwestern part of the al-Jafr Basin, southern Jordan. This field season focused on the Late Neolithic layer, where several rockshelters associated with a frontal wall and amorphous open-air features were found. Small finds were limited to flint artifacts, grinding tools, and animal bones. It is our tentative interpretation that the small settlement was used as a seasonal station for initial pastoral nomads who migrated in the basin.

1. Introduction

The Jafr Basin Prehistoric Project (JBPP) started in 1997 with a view to tracing the process of pastoral nomadization in southern Jordan. For this objective, we have investigated more than a dozen archaeological sites varying in both date and character. Phase 5 of the long-term research project aims to develop the details of the Jafr Chronology (Fujii 2013) and, in so doing, provide further insights into the socio-cultural correlation between sedentary farming communities to the west and pastoral societies to the east. This field season addressed a full-fledged excavation at Jabal Juhayra that we test-sounded in summer 2014.

2. The Site and Excavation

Jabal Juhayra is located in the hilly terrain in the northwestern corner of the Jafr Basin (**Fig. 1**). The site occupies the eastern flank of an isolated volcanic hill of the same name, commanding a small gully flowing down eastward from the hilltop (**Figs. 2, 3**). The site was found for the first time during the 2001-2002 winter season survey and tentatively registered as JF-0116 (Fujii 2002; Fujii and Abe 2008). The test-sounding, taken place in August 2014, suggested that the site contains a Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (hereafter PPNB) layer and a Late Neolithic (hereafter LN) layer (Fujii 2014). This season focused on the former, leaving the latter to the subsequent season.

4. Investigation results

Structural remains: The layer 2 contained two kinds of structural remains: natural rockshelters and open-air features. The former were aligned along a terrace halfway up the volcanic hill and opened to the northeast. They measured *c.* 3-5 m wide, *c.* 2-5 m deep, and *c.* 1-2 m high, being associated with a rude masonry wall *c.* 0.5-1 m high at their opening

(**Fig. 4**). No small features such as hearths were found inside the room, and small finds were limited to flint artifacts and animal bones only.

The open-air features, on the other hand, occupied the steep slope in front of the rockshelter alignment and extended along the counter lines. They were amorphous in general plan, measuring *c.* 3-5 m wide, *c.* 1-2 m deep, and up to *c.* 0.1-0.3 m in preserved height (**Fig. 5**). Several querns and grinding slabs, as well as flint artifacts, were found *in situ* on their floor.

Small finds: Small finds were monotonous in content, being limited to flake-oriented flint artifacts (**Fig. 6**), groundstone implements made of limestone and sandstone (**Fig. 7**), and animal bones. Neither pottery sherds nor adornments were included. The scarcity in artifact variety is suggestive of the involvement of a high-mobility population such as pastoral nomads. Faunal analysis by Dr. Hitomi Hongo, now in progress, suggests that they include a certain number of domestic sheep and goats' bones.

5. Discussion

Although no C-14 data is available yet, the flake-oriented flint assemblage including a few tile knives is suggestive of a LN date for the excavated layer. The combination of rockshelters (probably as living space) and open-air features (presumably for various domestic activities) indicates that the small settlement was used as a seasonal station of initial pastoral nomads who migrated in the Jafr Basin. Lithic study and faunal analysis, now in progress, are expected to provide further specific information on the key period thus far poorly understood.

6. Conclusions

The excavation has shed new light on the real picture of initial pastoral nomads less visible in an archaeological sense. The combination of rockshelters and amorphous open-air features is unique to pastoral nomads, suggesting that the site was used for their seasonal encampment. Jabal Juhayra is the only stratified Neolithic site known to date in the Jafr Basin and highly important in tracing the process of pastoral nomadization in southern Jordan. The next field season, scheduled in Summer 2015, will examine the PPNB layer.

References

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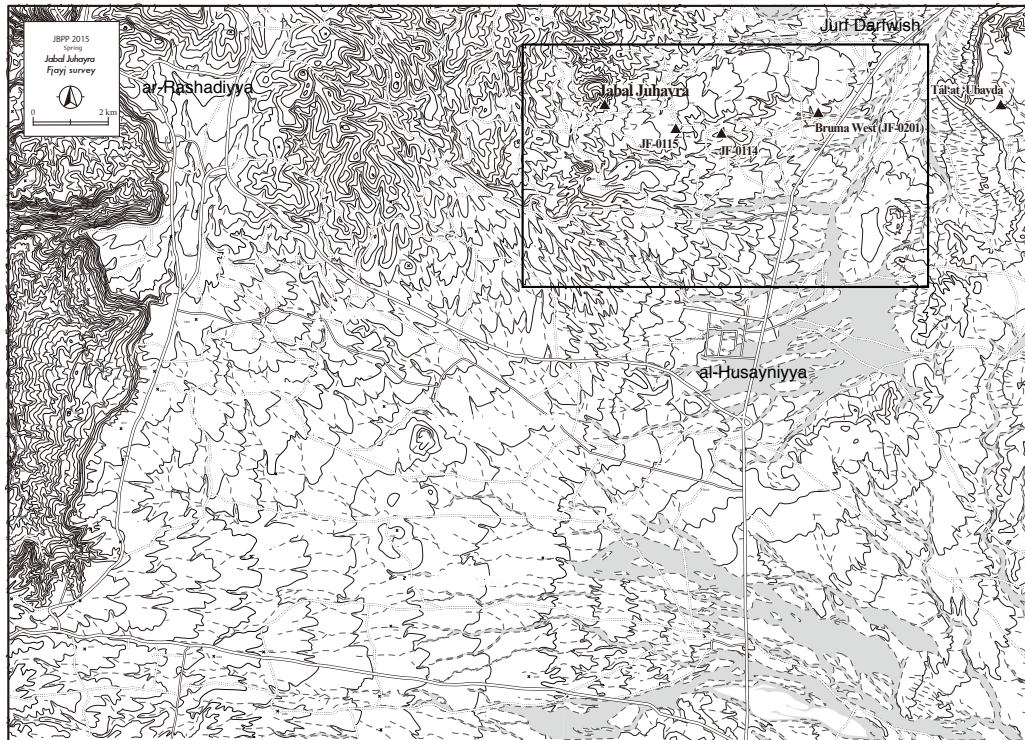


Fig. 1 Jabal Juhayra: site location.



Fig. 2 Jabal Juhayra: general view (looking SW).

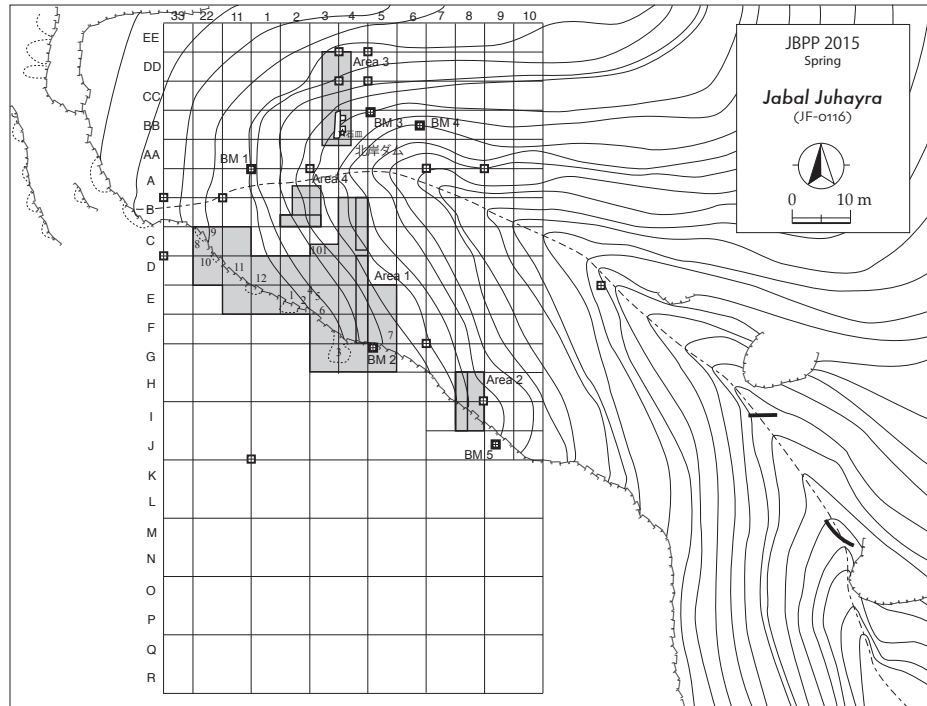


Fig. 3 Jabal Juhayra: site plan (as of April, 2015).



Fig. 4 Jabal Juhayra: rockshelters (looking SW).



Fig. 5 Jabal Juhayra: open-air features of Layer 2 (looking SE).



Fig. 6 Jabal Juhayra: chipped flint tools from Layer 2.



Fig. 7 Jabal Juhayra: groundstone artifact from Layer 2.



Fig. 8 Jabal Juhayra: site endangered by looming scoria mines.