











storeroom of the governor's residence.<sup>20</sup> In the fourteenth century Ḥisbān had been made administrative capital of the Balqā'.<sup>21</sup> The Ḥisbān examples offer extremely close parallels to Khirbat Fāris in terms of construction details. In earlier excavation reports there are references to "many low-ceilinged vaults" and a vaulted room with plastered *maṣṭabah* and window; this is mirrored at Khirbat Fāris<sup>22</sup> (fig. 7). The nature of the material found in the storeroom associated with this complex is remarkable, including "serving vessels monumental in size and bearing lengthy dedicatory inscriptions to unnamed amirs" and lamps, including fragments of a fine glass mosque lamp. This and the similarities of the plan to that of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's palace inside Karak castle have led the excavators to conclude that the barrel-vaulted complex was the residence of the governor of the Balqā'.<sup>23</sup> The architecture is strikingly similar to Khirbat Fāris; the difference lies in the location of the complex within the site, the nature of the associated material, and the general historical background.

Parallels for the smaller barrel-vaulted buildings also come from further afield. A thirteenth-fourteenth-century example from Horvat Berechot in the Hebron hills has been excavated.<sup>24</sup> Many of the houses surrounding the better-known town and churches of Umm al-Raṣaṣ on the Mādabāh Plains are of this type but are not arranged around courtyards. These are probably nineteenth century in date. A nearly complete barrel-vaulted structure containing late Ottoman artifacts was uncovered at Ra's al-Qabub in northern Jordan.<sup>25</sup> Such barrel-vaulted houses were a common sight in Jordanian and Palestinian villages of the recent past, when they were used as animal stables or oven-houses.<sup>26</sup> At the present state of knowledge it would appear that such barrel-vaulted houses fall within the late thirteenth–mid-twentieth-century date-range and are distributed throughout Jordan and the hills of Palestine. Needless to say, this distribution probably has more to do with our state of knowledge than past reality.

At Khirbat Fāris, this architecture is totally different from that of the preceding periods. At the beginning of the twelfth century new houses were built using but modifying the surviving structures of the sixth century. Where the stone roof-rafters

<sup>20</sup>Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Transjordan," 133.

<sup>21</sup>Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern Bilad al-Sham," 251.

<sup>22</sup>Phyllis A. Bird in *Heshbon 1968*, ed. Roger S. Boraas and Siegfried H. Horn (Berrien Springs, 1969), 200–2.

<sup>23</sup>Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Transjordan," 132.

<sup>24</sup>Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Palestinian Dwelling* (Jerusalem, 1995), 43–44.

<sup>25</sup>Edward B. Banning et al., "Wadi Ziqlab Project 1987: A Preliminary Report," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 33 (1989): 54.

<sup>26</sup>Ammar Khammash, *Notes on Village Architecture in Jordan* (Lafayette, LA, 1986), 43.



were missing, wooden beams were used to support the flat roof. However, these houses differed in detail from their antecedents. Here the newly-built arches spring from arch-walls, effectively acting as buttresses, or from the base of the house-wall rather than being bonded *into* the house-wall. The space between the arch-walls is used for *rawīyāt*/grain-bins<sup>27</sup> for storing the household's harvest. The *rawīyah* was filled through a hole in the roof and taken out through a hole at the base. Apart from the grain-bins there are generally few built-in features, mainly various shaped niches recessed into the thick walls. The entrance is almost always parallel to the arches. This, the so-called "Transverse-Arch House," was also the most common rural house throughout Jordan during the nineteenth and early twentieth century<sup>28</sup> (fig. 9).

As pointed out in the introduction, during the periods under discussion, twelfth–sixteenth centuries, the Karak Plateau was known as a fertile and arable land scattered with villages. The area was also well-known for its livestock, including sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and horses, that were raised by the Bedouin tribes and sold to the governments of the time for use by their armies. In particular, the Mamluk state prized the horses of the *bādiyah* tribes.<sup>29</sup> Within the time-frame under consideration there was a noticeable change in the type of architecture seen in one of these villages, Khirbat Fāris. What was the impetus behind these startlingly different types of construction? It is the direct interest of the Mamluk state that seems to coincide with the observed change in architecture.<sup>30</sup>

One possible effect of this that can be seen in the architecture is the changing provision for storage of agricultural produce.<sup>31</sup> In the earlier twelfth-century "Transverse-Arch House," agricultural storage seems to have been carried out at the household level within each dwelling-unit. By contrast, the later barrel-vaulted houses at Khirbat Fāris exhibited no provision for agricultural storage and were used simply for residence. Storage of crops may have occurred off-site in caves and cisterns as has been suggested for earlier periods and occurred later when produce was hidden from Ottoman tax-collectors.<sup>32</sup> Storage may have been centralized on a community level and have taken place in large barrel-vaulted

<sup>27</sup>*Rawīyah* is a vernacular term in use in Jordan and Palestine.

<sup>28</sup>McQuitty, "The Rural Landscape of Jordan."

<sup>29</sup>Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: the Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (Beckenham, 1986), 115.

<sup>30</sup>See Walker for detailing of this investment.

<sup>31</sup>For further discussion of this topic see Ruba Kana'an and Alison McQuitty, "The Architecture of al-Qasr on the Kerak Plateau: an Essay in the Chronology of Vernacular Architecture," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 126 (1994): 127–51.

<sup>32</sup>Øystein LaBianca, *Sedentarization and Nomadization* (Berrien Springs, 1990), 194.



structures like the one still buried at Khirbat Fāris or excavated as the “governor’s storeroom” at Ḥisbān. Alternatively taxation was direct and was taken in kind at the threshing-floor: there was little need for large-scale storage.

Various reasons for this architectural change can be suggested. It is tempting to assume that as in the case of early twentieth-century Ḥumūd, these barrel-vaulted houses represent the process of sedentarization. More state investment was put into agriculture in the atmosphere of increased security that the Mamluks offered after the turmoil of the Crusader interregnum. Communities were encouraged “to settle down” in villages. However, as both historical records and archaeology have shown, there were rural settlements on the Karak Plateau in the centuries immediately before the Mamluks stamped their authority on the region. A more nuanced interpretation may be that a change in the agricultural administration of the landscape resulted in a change in the control of the surplus produce. What had once been for the family and tribe was now for the state.





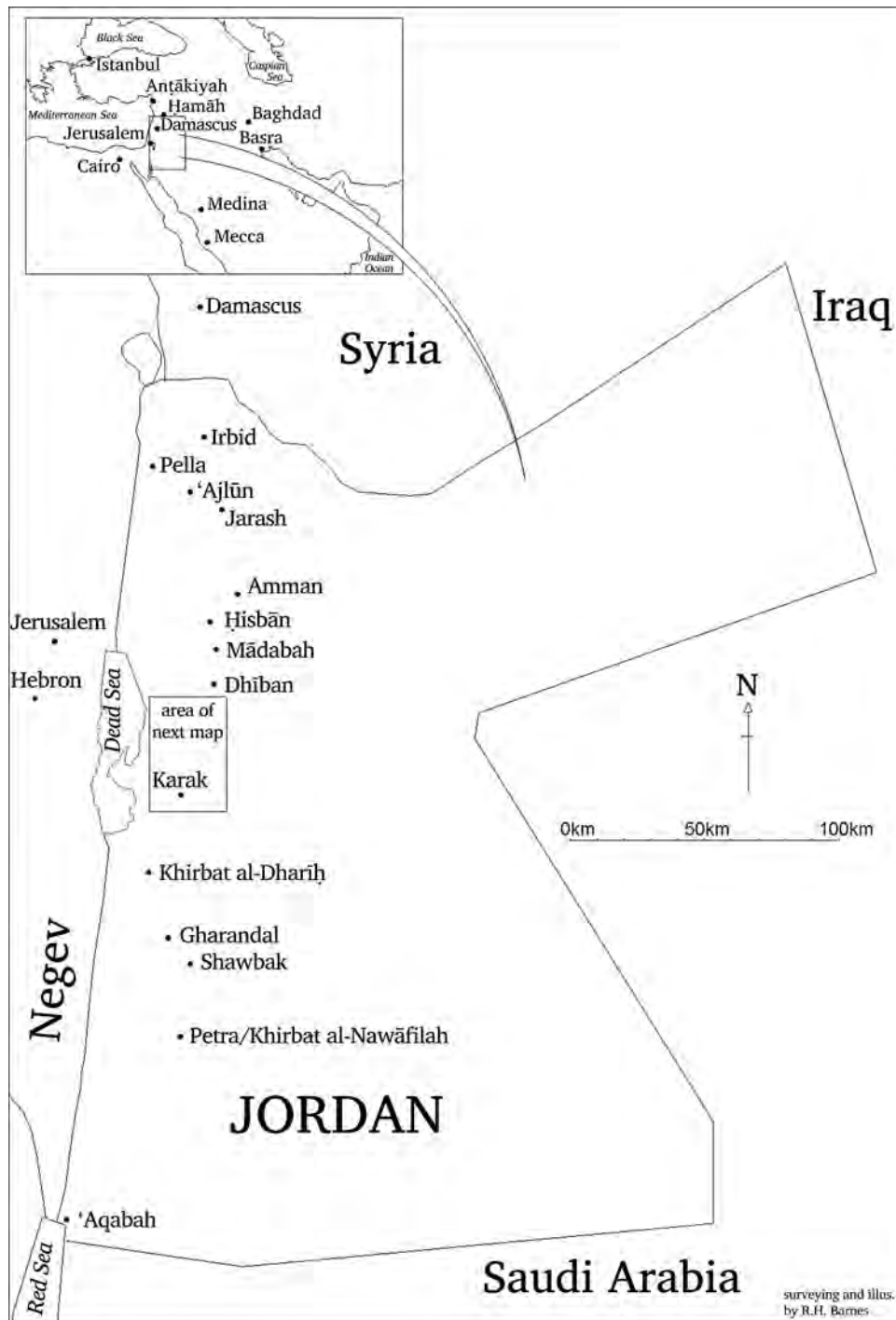


Fig. 1a. Map to show location of Khirbat Fāris



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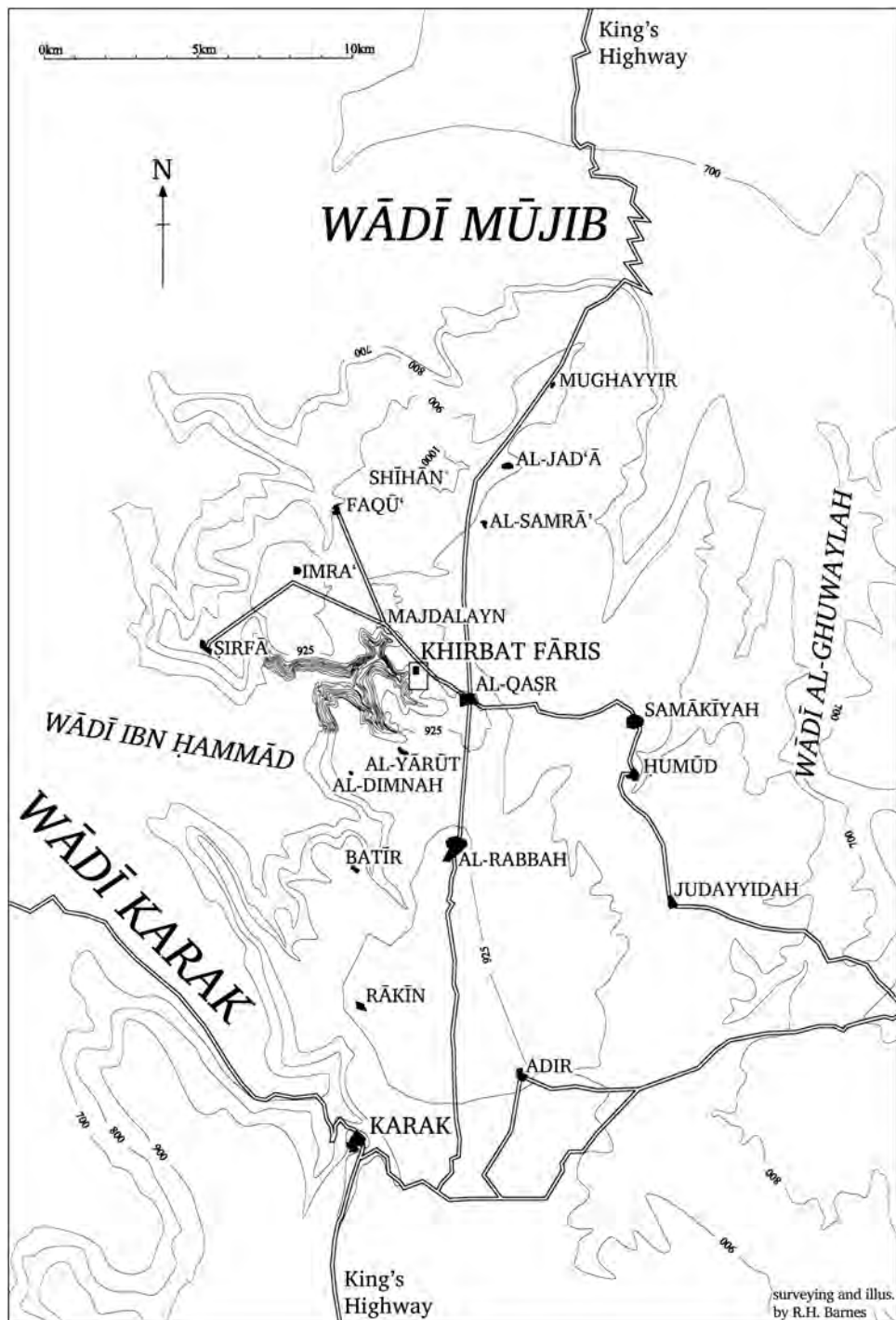


Fig. 1b. Map to show location of Khirbat Fāris



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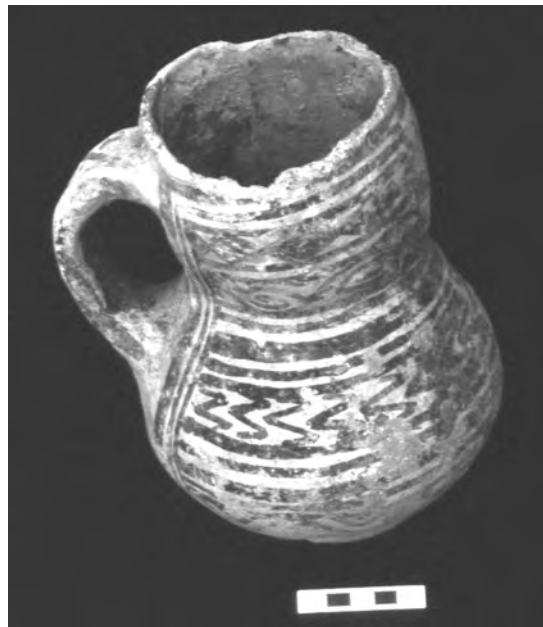


Fig. 2. Fourteenth-century hand-made pottery from Khirbat Fāris



Fig. 3. Nineteenth-century “barn” at Khirbat Fāris



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Fig. 4. View to show possible shrine on right on which Fāris' tomb, the small tower, is constructed. The tomb on the left belongs to Shilash, Fāris' son.



Fig. 5. View of complex of barrel-vaulted houses at Khirbat Fāris



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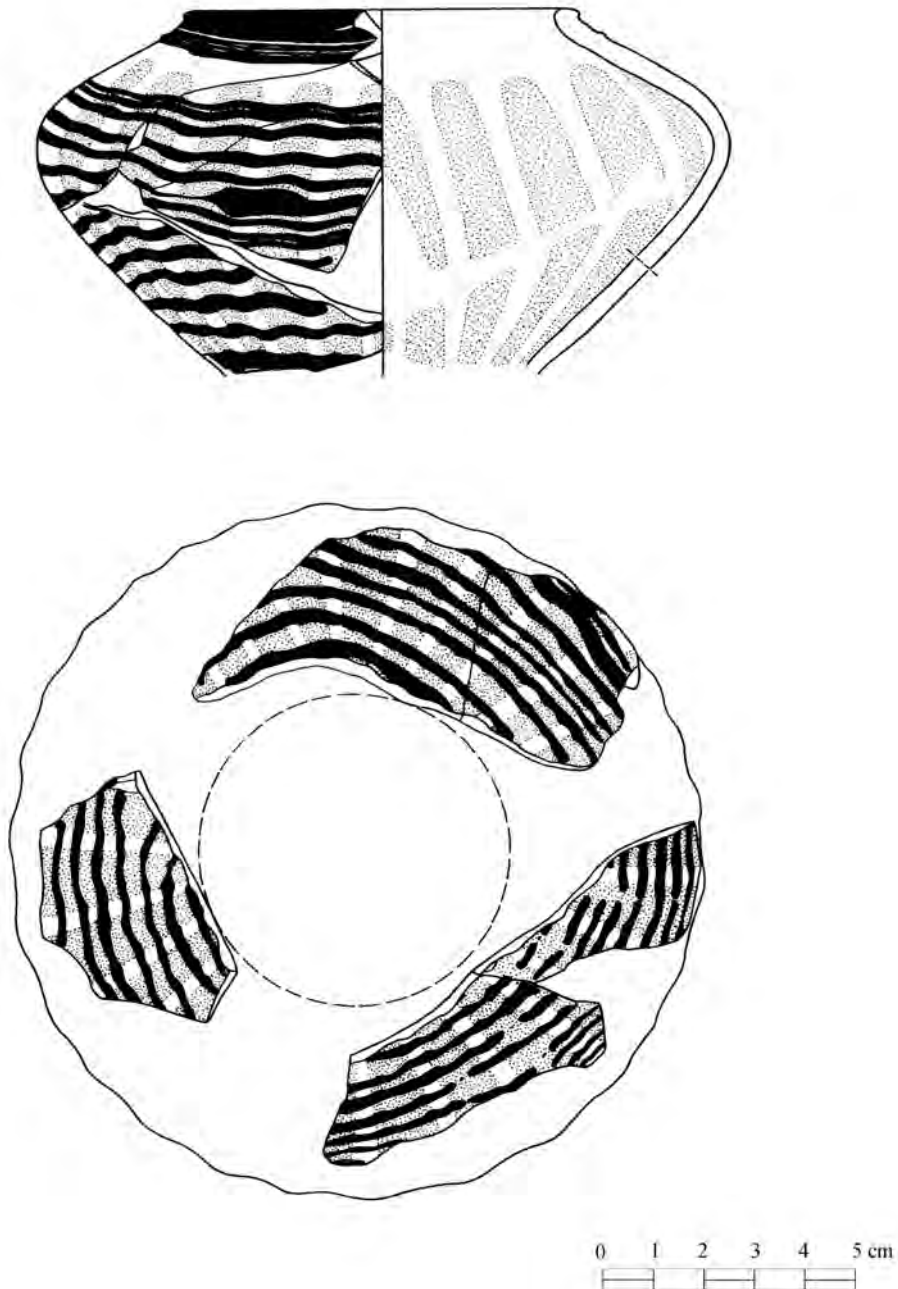


Fig. 6. A fourteenth-century marvered glass bowl



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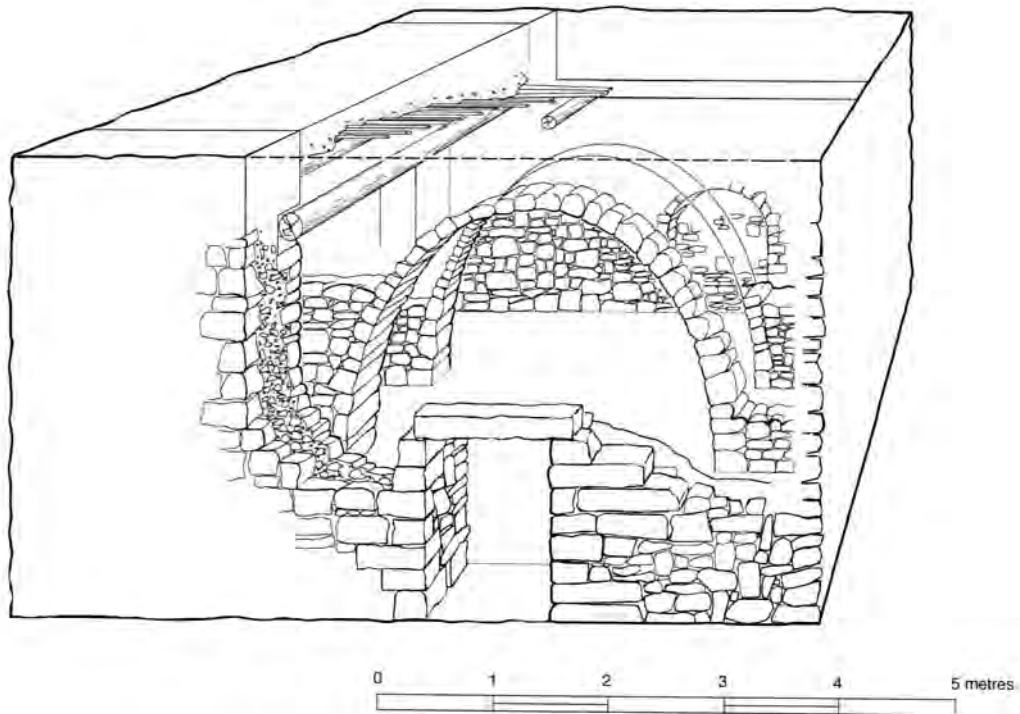


Fig. 9. A reconstruction drawing of a "Transverse-Arch House"



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