

This collection of essays provides convenient access to some pertinent articles written by Collins during the past fifteen years and has been skillfully selected from his large body of work to create, together with his three never-before-published essays, an invaluable resource for biblical scholars, especially those in the field of early Judaism.

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Collins, S., C. Kobs, and M. Luddenit. *The Tall al-Hammam Excavations, Volume 1: An Introduction to Tall al-Hammam, with Seven Seasons (2005–2011) of Ceramics and Eight Seasons (2005–2012) of Artifacts*. Tall al-Hammam Excavations 1. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015. xxxvii + 362 pp. Hardcover. USD 89.50.

First in a series of volumes on the excavations at Tall al-Hammam, this is an overview of the first seven seasons (2005–2011) of excavations (and includes artifacts from an additional eighth season, 2012). Tall al-Hammam is located in the southern Jordan Valley, twelve kilometers northeast of the Dead Sea. The site consists of an upper and lower city extending over a substantial thirty-six hectare, as well as an adjacent “Megalithic Field and Necropolis.” Excavations were carried out by Steven Collins, along with Gary Byers and Dr. Carroll Kobs, and were sponsored by Trinity Southwest University.

The volume consists of four parts: “Orientation and Methodology,” “Ceramics,” “Objects,” and “Bibliography.” It begins with a “Director’s Introduction,” which lays out the overall ethos of the excavation team as well as explains the multiple ways the site is “remarkable” (xxiii). Part one begins with an introduction to the site through the lens of historical geography, in this case, consisting of geography, historical exploration of the site, biblical connections, and history of the excavation project. I would have enjoyed a discussion on the origins of the Arabic name of the tell in this section, but otherwise this chapter is very complete, especially compared with other excavation reports that minimize the importance of historical geography. One should also note that all the graphics in this volume are in color and the authors take ample advantage of this with pictures, maps, and other graphics. Chapter two is a discussion of archaeological methodology, laying out the history of methodology along with the methods used at Tall al-Hammam. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the new terminology being used for the stratigraphy of the site. Instead of using the word “stratum” and Roman numerals, the team uses the time period, along with a lower-case letter for phasing within the period (so EB3a instead of Stratum IV) (17). This idea is interesting, but could easily lead to confusion when discussing stratigraphical subphases, such as the Iron Age IIA, or other historical periods where the dating is debated. The author claims this will be less confusing when comparing sites, which again, is a good idea in theory. However, when there is no consensus on how to subdivide time periods between scholars at sites in the same area, using this terminology becomes almost impossible—

let alone when there are greater regional differences due to historical events. Also, over time, with more information, the dating of strata changes insignificantly sometimes, but in major ways at other times.

The section on ceramics begins with a discussion of the ceramic procedures and analysis at the site. The most important part of this chapter, in my view, is the discussion of how the pottery is drawn. The excavation uses a partially digital process where the potsherds are cut, as usual, but then they are photographed and a photorealistic drawing is made digitally. The authors prefer this method, as it preserves the imperfect quality of the sherds. However, this method is insufficient because, while it preserves the destructive action of cutting the sherds, it does not take into account the overall appearance of the vessel. It is true that the imperfections of the actual sherd are preserved, but many vessels look different as a whole form. An imperfection in part of a sherd might not reflect the overall vessel and can lead to looking for incorrect parallels. The bigger issue is the appearance of the pottery drawings in this volume. While it is quite beneficial to include color photographs of some of the vessels, perhaps pictures of the color profiles could have been included as well (see 24). The other issue with the appearance is easily correctable. Only the sherd itself and not its mirror outline is drawn. Depicting this mirror image is standard for published pottery, as it gives a clearer visual of the vessel. This problem could easily be fixed digitally by doing two or three more steps in Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator. In my view, the best option for drawing pottery today involves using a 3D laser scanner and a computer program to draw pottery (Karasik, A., and U. Smilansky. "3D Scanning Technology as a Standard Archaeological Tool for Pottery Analysis: Practice and Theory." *Journal of Archaeological Science* 35 [2008]: 1148–1168). By using the 3D model, the sherd does not have to be damaged in any way and the calculations within the program allow the most accurate approximation of the vessel or sherd to be drawn, combining the concept behind hand drawings and the photorealism the al-Hammam team uses.

The following nine chapters give summaries of the excavations dating to the Chalcolithic Period, Early Bronze Age, Intermediate Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age II–III, and the material excavated from the Necropolis and Megalithic Field. Each of these chapters has a period synopsis and generalizations, a regional perspective, and discussion of the architecture (if any was found) and pottery, ending with pottery plates and pictures. Unfortunately, no whole vessels were drawn for this volume, although there are small pictures of them in the artifacts section. I will review the Iron Age chapter in depth to provide an idea of these chapters as a whole.

The Iron Age II–III chapter begins with a historical and archaeological synopsis, tying in the history of Tall al-Hammam with the Southern Levant. This summary is well constructed and helps place the occupation at Tall al-Hammam in a broader context. However, a statement like the following: "Tall el-Hammam's [*sic*] first occupation in seven hundred years begins at the beginning of IA2A, and was, no doubt, related in some way to the kingdoms of David and Solomon" is hard to swallow without some kind of evidence.

What does the quoted statement mean? How is it related? Is there any textual or archaeological evidence for this? Perhaps this statement is an inefficiency of the format. It would have been helpful if the architecture discussed had been more clearly dated, IA2a, b, or c rather than IA2. Finally, I would have preferred that this and the other pottery chapters have tables or charts showing the percentage of different vessel types. This should at least be done in the following volumes.

The final section consists of one chapter on the objects from the site. After an explanation of terminology and classification systems, the following object categories are addressed: architectural objects, beads, ceramics, coins, cooking/food preparation items, cosmetic utensils, cultic objects, figurines, flints, game pieces/tokens, Roman glass, horns, jewelry, metals, roulette, scarabs, seals/stamps, shells, specialty objects, textile-related objects, tools, trade/imports, weapons, and weights. After a brief description of the object type, there is a small picture of each object accompanied by a number, designation, and chart showing where the object was found. This chapter is essentially an appendix, very handy for getting a thorough idea of finds from the site, with the anticipation of a small finds volume to come (or specialist studies of these finds incorporated into the reports on the different periods).

For anyone looking for an introduction to the site of Tall al-Hammam, this volume has value. The color illustrations, maps, and photographs are outstanding. The abundance of pottery drawings for a site so important for the Early and Intermediate Bronze Ages also has value, despite the reservations about the quality of the drawings mentioned above. However, for the site to truly have a “remarkable” impact in scholarship, archaeologists and other experts must wait for the coming volumes to see what the stratigraphy of the site actually looks like, and how the pottery published here ties in with those strata.

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Edwards, Ruth B. *Discovering John: Content, Interpretation, Reception*.  
Discovering Biblical Texts. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. xiv + 258 pp.  
Softcover. USD 22.00.

Ruth B. Edwards, an honorary senior lecturer at the University of Aberdeen and priest of the Scottish Episcopal Church, updates her previous edition of the book, *Discovering John* (London: SPCK, 2003), by taking under consideration the developments and emphases in Johannine studies over the last decade. The *Discovering Biblical Texts* series claims to provide readers with “comprehensive, up-to-date and student-friendly introductions to the books of the Bible” (ii), a task that Edwards fulfills with class. She provides the reader with a summary of the different responses that the book of John has received throughout Christianity, and covers issues ranging from authorship and historical setting to theological and sociological concerns raised by the Gospel. Her interaction with scholarship is eloquent and polished, and her ability to succinctly and thoroughly portray different views of a particular topic is remarkable. She follows the historical-critical method, demonstrates