Keywords: Southern Jordan, agriculture, *longue durée*, small finds, architecture, sugar production

The volumes under review here have much in common. Both are the first in series of much-anticipated final reports of important sites in central/southern Jordan. Both take a *longue durée* approach to landscapes and settlements, although *Ancient Landscapes of Zoara I* (henceforth *Zoara I*), beginning in the Neolithic period, takes a longer view, and *Khirbat Faris* (henceforth *Fāris I*, as two additional volumes are planned) takes a more explicitly Braudelian approach, opening with a brief discussion of the influence of *The Mediterranean* on the project’s initial design. While excellent initial final report volumes, both are also hindered by omissions of key analyses, as discussed below.

**Fāris I**

*Fāris I* opens with a preface laying out the scope and limitations of the volume. Volume I is a report of the stratigraphy and non-ceramic small finds, ethnographic and environmental reports will appear in Volume II, and the ceramics will be published in Volume III. It is unfortunate that it was not possible to publish this material in the same volume, particularly the ceramic material, since, as noted in several places below, there are uncertainties in the phasing presented in the volume that could have been addressed if final analysis of the ceramics were available. Likewise, the preface notes that most of the volume “was complete by 2004 and the bibliography reflects this” (p. x). The choice to publish the volume rather than delay it with additional research is commendable, but this does mean that some relevant research is omitted, particularly in the finds chapters.

Part I (“Introduction”) contains two chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the site and the project. The historical overview, necessarily somewhat regional, as “Khirbat Faris is an
a-historical site” (p. 7), is particularly useful, especially for readers less familiar with the region, and situates some of the key findings discussed in later chapters in a broader framework. Chapter 2 presents the excavation methodology, but it is also a very useful reference for the presentation of the material in the volume. During excavation, the site was divided into areas numbered Far I-V and Houses 1-2, but the presentation of the stratigraphy in the volume does not follow these divisions exactly, instead preferring descriptive area names (e.g. “the Highest Point”), some of which combine multiple excavation areas. As such, it can be helpful when reading the chapters in Part II (“Excavations and Stratigraphy”) to consult the overview map of the site (fig. 2.1) and maps of each of the areas as presented in the volume (figs. 2.13–2.16), which also map the locations of figures presented in each stratigraphy chapter. The concordance of phases (tab. 2.1) is also a very useful reference, as no sitewide stratigraphic designations were established, and comparing the phasing of difference areas can occasionally be confusing. For example, Western Edge Phase 4.1 is equivalent to Central Area Phase 4.2, but Western Edge Phase 4.2 has no direct equivalent in the Central Area and postdates Central Area Phase 5. The chapter also contains a short but useful section titled “Signposts for use of volume” (p. 27) explaining which of the volume’s seven appendices the reader should consult to find specific types of information.

Part II (“Excavation and Stratigraphy”) is divided into four chapters, each corresponding to a specific area of the site. Chapter 3 presents the results of excavations in the Western Edge, or Far I, Chapter 4 the results of excavations in the Central Area, including Far II, Far IV (“the Khan”), and House 2, Chapter 5 the results of excavations at the Highest Point, or Far V, and Chapter 6 the excavations in House 1, an Arch-and-Grain Bin house built during the late 19th or early 20th century for Fāris al-Majālī, after whom the site was named. A full summary of the contents of each chapter is unnecessary here, beyond noting that each chapter contains a detailed report of the stratigraphy and architecture of a given area of the site, together providing a rich picture of the uneven rhythms of construction, use, abandonment, and reuse across the site. To briefly synthesize, the stratigraphy covers the Bronze and Iron Ages (the poorly-defined Western Edge Phase 1) to use of the area after 1988, as the excavations were being conducted (Central Area Phase 8), with the focus being on the Islamic periods, especially the Middle–Late Islamic period, which was best represented in most areas. It is unfortunate that the ceramic analysis was not yet complete for the interpretation of these phases, as it would have been useful to have fuller descriptions of some of the types used for dating, but preliminary reports of ceramics from the Western Edge and Central Area have been published, primarily from the later phases (J. Johns, McQuitty, and Falkner 1989, 86–92; McQuitty and Falkner 1993; McQuitty et al. 1997). While the numbering used in the preliminary reports does not always match that in Fāris I, the context information presented there can be matched to the concordance in Appendix I, allowing interested readers to consult the preliminary ceramic report alongside the final stratigraphic report.

Part III of the volume (“Finds”) includes three chapters corresponding to different materials, with the first, Chapter 7, focusing on bone, glass, and “miscellaneous finds.” The logic of focusing on bone, glass, metal, and stone over ceramics in this volume is laid out in the first paragraph of Chapter 7, where the authors argue that these “provide a greater insight into the daily life of individuals” than ceramics, which “provide useful information on trade, manufacture and dating” (p. 125). Ceramicists will perhaps object to the idea that pottery provides
less useful insight into quotidian concerns, and one suspects that the ceramics were omitted from this volume for more prosaic reasons, but these chapters do, nonetheless, provide some insight into the lives of the people who lived at Khirbat Fāris. These insights are not always clear, however, and there are places where more discussion of specific objects and types of materials would be welcome. For example, a mother-of-pearl cross from the Central Area is described in Chapter 7 as “coming from an abandonment level” (p. 127), but no date is provided. To determine this, the reader must cross-reference the registration number (SF 2140) with the Small Finds Catalogue in Appendix 6 to find that it is from Phase P2-5, and then return either to Chapter 4 or Table 2.1 to determine that this is the 12th–13th century phase. This fits with the form of the cross, which has parallels in medieval levels at ‘Atlīt (C. N. Johns 1934, 149, Pl. LX, fig. 2, upper left), for example, but potential discussions of religious continuity and change are glossed over (a suggestion that mother-of-pearl objects might have been produced at the site is made, and this interesting, but on the basis of six objects it is difficult to evaluate). The glass finds, in contrast, are considered chronologically. The discussion of glass bracelets is quite thorough, based primarily on Spaer’s (1992) study and more recent work by Boulogne (2008). Unfortunately, Shindo’s (2001) study of the glass bracelets from al-Ṭūr in southwestern Sinai is not consulted, and this might have helped address some of the chronological uncertainties raised in this section, particularly those concerning the Type 005 bracelets with band and prunt decoration (Shindo’s Type D3), which were primarily surface finds at Khirbat Fāris. The discussion of the glass vessels is, likewise, quite thorough, and certainly relevant to issues of trade earlier ascribed primarily to ceramics. In summarizing the glass assemblage, Khoury and McQuitty note with some surprise “that while Khirbat Faris seems to have been a small rural site, the corpus itself is sizable and its parallels come from urban centers.” While, at 15 km to the north, Khirbat Fāris is outside of the 11 km radius Brown (2000) identified as being most connected to al-Karak, the presence of glazed and unglazed wheel-made pottery, glass, and other objects that would have been sourced from al-Karak should not necessarily be surprising, and certainly Khoury and McQuitty are right to point out the lower “contrast between urban and rural in the Early/Middle Islamic period” (p. 140) (leaving aside the issue of how “urban” al-Karak or any site in Jordan really would have been).

Chapter 8 presents the metal finds from the site and begins with a discussion of the coins. As with the previous chapter, the analysis is very thorough, but the discussion is occasionally somewhat frustrating. It must be noted at the outset that the coin assemblage is very small (n=29), and this makes discussion of economic shifts rather difficult. As a result, some of the conclusions presented in this section seem like overinterpretations of limited evidence. The primary example concerns the Byzantine–Early Islamic transition. The assemblage includes three coins of the 6th century, none of the 7th or 8th centuries, and one of the 9th century, a dirham of al-Maʾmūn. The three 6th century coins (all copper alloy) are taken as evidence of a “Byzantine boom,” while the lack of Umayyad coinage is taken as evidence that the Islamic conquest “isolate[d] Khirbat Faris from urban centres and markets where Umayyad coinage is relatively common” and the Abbasid dirham is dismissed as “unexpected but probably not significant” (p. 153). All of this is possible, of course, but a safer conclusion from the fact that the period spanning the late 5th–11th century is represented by only four coins would seem to be that Khirbat Fāris’s economy was not particularly monetarized at any point during the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. Indeed, Alan Walmsley (2010) has suggested that,
rather than being generally common, coin finds in the southern Levant are concentrated in several regional clusters, none of which contained Khirbat Fāris, during the 7th and 8th centuries, and that the regional economy became increasingly less monetarized beginning in the late 8th century. He cautions, however, that this is not necessarily indicative of economic decline or isolation (Walmsley 2010, 39–40), and with this in mind it is worth considering that the evidence from the glass and ceramic finds at Khirbat Fāris seems to speak against isolation during the Early Islamic period, as the authors note. In the summary of coin finds on p. 154, the authors do note that the economy of Khirbat Fāris was probably only monetarized “to any significant extent” during the 12th–14th century and, considering that 11 of the 29 coins found at the site date to this period, this is perhaps the safest conclusion that can be drawn. The discussion of the other metal finds is detailed and useful. One point of minor confusion arises in the discussion of metal finger rings, where Parton draws parallels for a group of primarily Middle Islamic rings to a number of objects from Corinth, “all Byzantine in date” (p. 172). This is confusing, first, because “Byzantine” has been used throughout the volume in its southern Levantine sense, referring to the 4th through 7th centuries AD, but the objects from Corinth are primarily 10th–12th century (Davidson 1952, 241–242), which would make them Middle Byzantine at Corinth, but Early–Middle Islamic in the terminology used elsewhere in Fāris I. Second, although most of these objects from Corinth date to the 10th–12th century, one (no. 1914) was found in a 4th century context (Davidson 1952, 241), which would make it Early Byzantine at Khirbat Fāris but Late Roman at Corinth.

Chapter 9, the last of Part III, focuses on the stone finds. The bulk of the chapter consists of discussions of architectural stone, pierced stones, stone vessels, stoppers, lids, “miscellaneous objects,” and ground stone tools by Parton, with two short additional contributions: one by Dominique Collon on two Late Bronze Age cylinder seals and another by Douglas Baird on three flint artifacts of uncertain age. As with the other chapters in Part III, the presentation of finds is generally thorough and connected to interpretations of the site. As an example, Parton on p. 177 draws the reader’s attention to the lack of spindle whorls at the site (one definite and two possible examples), arguing that, rather than indicating a lack of spinning at the site, this absence probably reflects these objects being taken by their owners during abandonments. The only notable omission in this chapter concerns the dating of schist (referred to as “Steatite/Soft Stone”) vessels. The presentation of these finds is quite good, but the discussion is rather out of date, with the most recent citation dating to 1992. Two of these vessels are dated to the 7th–8th century based on both their context and parallels from Mount Nebo, Pella, and the Amman Citadel. Magness (1994, 201–204), however, has argued compellingly that these vessels (including the parallels cited in Fāris I) first appear in the southern Levant in the late Umayyad period, or the 8th century. This is a minor point that does not really change the interpretations presented in the volume, especially given that most of the schist vessel fragments at the site were residual finds in Middle–Late Islamic period contexts, but it does, nonetheless, reflect some relevant literature having been overlooked.

Part IV of the volume (“Conclusions”) includes three concluding chapters, although Chapter 10, by McQuitty, on “Building Materials, Architecture and Settlement Morphology” could perhaps have been equally at home in Part III, as it includes detailed presentations of the building material and oven fragments. The core of the chapter, however, consists of an architectural typology and synthesis of shifts in the settlement morphology of Khirbat Fāris, building sub-
stantially on previous publications (e.g., McQuitty 2005, 2007). An argument could perhaps be made for separating these two components, given that a reader might expect to find a discussion of oven fragments under “Finds,” but discussing the building material alongside the architecture and the oven fragments in the context of oven-houses is equally reasonable (the defining feature of an oven-house, after all, is that it houses an oven). One might also wish that the architectural typology had been placed earlier, as the types defined in this chapter (“The Classical Vault,” “The Late-Antique House,” “The Transverse-Arch House,” “The Barrel-Vaulted House,” and “The Arch-and-Grain-Bin House”) have already been used throughout the volume. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that a final report volume will be read in a linear fashion, and it also makes sense to include this discussion in the synthesis of settlement morphology. These very minor points aside, this chapter represents one of the most important contributions of the volume and will without doubt be a critical resource in discussions of Islamic period rural settlement.

Chapter 11 presents a general synthesis by Johns of the place of the excavations at Khirbat Fāris in Islamic archaeology. Johns begins by noting that the Khirbat Fāris project was a reaction to the “urban bias” of Islamic archaeology. It is interesting to note, however, that the examples he cites as exceptions to this rule, e.g., Bethany Walker’s work at Tall Ḥisbān, do not seem like outliers in Islamic archaeology today, but rather key components of the discipline, almost certainly a reflection of the ongoing influence of the Khirbat Fāris excavations. It is perhaps unfortunate that the first section of this chapter focuses on environmental change, as the environmental reports do not appear in Fāris I and are instead slated to appear in Fāris II. Johns is certainly right, however, to emphasize the importance of environmental factors in understanding life in an agricultural village, and the division of the chapter into “environmental change” and “human factors” is easy to follow. One of the most intriguing suggestions in this chapter is found in Johns’ discussion of religion (p. 231). He notes this is “[o]ne of the most enigmatic features” of the site, and suggests that the Middle and Late Islamic period inhabitants were “nominally Muslim” but practiced what Grehan (2014) calls “agrarian religion.” While he speculates only briefly on what this might mean for religious practice at Khirbat Fāris, the concept deserves more widespread discussion by Islamic archaeologists and offers a less binary alternative to Redfield’s “Great and Little Traditions” model, which has framed many recent discussions in Jordanian archaeology in particular (see, e.g., LaBianca and Walker 2007). Again, however, there are some omissions here worth noting. The discussion of earthquakes on pp. 227–228, for example, leaves out the late 6th century Areopolis earthquake—known from an inscription found ca. 6 km to the south at al-Rabba (Zayadine 1971)—even though the presentation of “Earthquakes which had an effect on southern Jordan” in table 11.1 is drawn from Ambraseys (2009), who does discuss this earthquake. In a discussion of climate change, he cites Kuhnen’s (2016) discussion of changes in the level of the Sea of Galilee, speculating that similar changes would have occurred in the Dead Sea, but without citing similar published work on Dead Sea levels (e.g., Migowski et al. 2006). Likewise, in discussing drought, he summarizes King’s (2017) recent work on 12th century North Africa, but not recent work published in the same year on drought in the southern Levant during the Byzantine period (Fuks et al. 2017), more directly relevant to Khirbat Fāris. There are also points in the chapter that might be debated. In discussing sugarcane, for example, Johns notes that there are “no sugar related plant materials” at Khirbat Fāris, Dhībān, or Tall Ḥisbān (p. 230).
This is, strictly speaking, correct, but sugarcane is notoriously difficult to identify archaeobotanically, and the only certain examples in the region are the remarkable stem fragments found at Qusayr al-Qadim on Egypt’s Red Sea coast (van der Veen 2011, 90–93). It cannot, however, be concluded from the absence of archaeobotanical evidence for sugar that “there is no evidence for its presence in highland rural sites” (p. 230). There is, indeed, substantial evidence that Tall Ḥisbān (Walker 2010, 123) was involved in the distribution of sugar, and sugar pot sherds have also been found at Dhibān (Porter et al. 2005, 207). Any discussion of the lack of sugar pots at Khirbat Fāris must, therefore, take into account the differences between these sites rather than suggesting a general absence at highland “rural” sites.

The “Concluding Remarks” by McQuitty succinctly summarize the primary conclusions of the volume and situate these in the Braudelian framework introduced earlier in the volume. This is followed by seven appendices, primarily describing contexts and finds, which, as noted earlier, are often critical for readers interested in the details of the stratigraphy described in the main text.

Despite the minor complaints raised above, the volume is generally very good, and the authors should be commended for bringing this important project to publication. One additional problem must be noted, however. The volume is very generously illustrated, containing 271 figures in total. Many of these figures are reproduced quite well, but, unfortunately, many are not. In some cases, e.g., figs. 7.13–14 (bar charts of glass fragment distributions by phase), the figures can still be easily interpreted, even though they are blurry, but in other cases, e.g., fig. 3.34 (the plan of the Western Edge Phase 5), context numbers are illegible, severely limiting the use of the plans. In most cases, the figures can still be read, but this does make the volume somewhat difficult to use in places.

Zoara I

Unlike Fāris I, which reports excavations at a single site, Zoara I reports excavations at many sites in Ghawr al-Ṣāfī, and the sections and chapters are divided by both site and period. Many of these are beyond the scope of my expertise, and likely outside the primary interests of readers of this journal. As such I will describe the chapters focusing on the pre-Islamic periods only briefly, focusing instead on those relevant to the Islamic period.

Part I, “Introduction,” includes five short chapters, mostly by Politis, introducing the region and project. The first chapter, by Politis, introduces the “Location, topography, and climate” of Ghawr al-Ṣāfī, while the second, by Robert Munro, provides an overview of the region’s geology. Although not directly stated, one suspects that, as with Fāris I, some of these chapters have been complete for some time and the bibliographies not comprehensively updated, as the discussion of earthquakes in this chapter is drawn primarily from Russell’s (1985) catalog, with no reference to more recent work by Ambraseys and others. Chapter 3, also by Politis, provides a useful historical overview of the region from references in the Hebrew Bible to the 16th century AD, although the focus is primarily on the Byzantine and Early–Middle Islamic periods. Chapter 4 provides a very brief overview of archaeological research in the region. The end of the chapter notes the possibility of a second volume, and happily Zoara II is in press and will fill in many of the gaps in this volume, including publication of the small finds, ceramics, glass, and archaeobotanical remains. Chapter 5 reports the results of archaeological surveys and describes the project’s excavation strategies.
Part II, containing Chapters 6–8, focuses on the excavations of a Pre-Pottery Neolithic A site in Wādī Sharāra (Chapter 7) and Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites in Wādī Hamrash (Chapter 8). Part III focuses on the Early and Middle Bronze Age and contains Chapter 9, an overview by Politis of research on these periods in Ghawr al-Ṣāfi, and Chapter 10, a discussion by Eliot Braun of the Early Bronze Age I cemetery at al-Naqʿa. Part IV contains three chapters (11, by Politis, 12, by Politis and Giorgios Papaioannou, and 13, by Josephine Verducci) on the Iron Age II site of Tulaylāt Qaṣr Mūsā al-Ḥamid, suggested in the volume to be the biblical site of Zoar. Part V, “The Late Hellenistic and Nabataean Period,” includes an introductory chapter (14) by Politis and a report by Alexandra Ariotti on the excavations at the Nabataean site of Umm al-Ṭawābīn (Chapter 15). Part VI focuses on the “Early Byzantine” period, and it includes a chapter (16) by Politis on a church complex at Khirbat al-Shaykh Šāmā (the city of Zoara) and burials at al-Naqʿa and another (Chapter 17) by Politis and Papaioannou on a site identified as a hermitage in Wādī al-Ḥasā. It is not entirely clear why the material presented in these chapters has been designated Early Byzantine, as the term is used here to mean the 5th-early 7th century AD, spanning all but the first century of the Byzantine period as the term is commonly used in the southern Levant, but the discussion is detailed and easy to follow.

Part VII, “The Abbasid and Ayyubid-Mamluk periods,” contains a single chapter (18) by Politis reporting on excavations at Khirbat al-Shaykh Šāmā (the Islamic period city of Zughar), Mašnaʿ al-Sukkar (generally called Ṭawāḥīn al-Sukkar; Politis notes that the term “factory” is more accurate, which is certainly the case, although “mill” is the commonly used term in both Arabic and English), and al-ʿAmarī (called al-Rujūm in previous publications, e.g., MacDonald [1992]; probably also part of Zughar). For readers of this journal, this is perhaps the most important chapter in the volume, and the report is very informative, particularly for Mašnaʿ al-Sukkar, which receives the most detailed discussion in the chapter. There are, however, some points that should be raised here. The chapter opens by repeating the trope that the shift of the capital to Baghdad under the Abbasids led to the decline of the cities of Bilād al-Shām, which is used to explain the “scanty” evidence for Fatimid and Crusader occupation of the sites (p. 223). Whitcomb (1992) has already demonstrated that this view is inaccurate, but it is also at odds with the history of Zughar, which continues to appear as a commercial center in Cairo Geniza letters dating to the mid-11th century (Gil 1992, 203). This discrepancy may be due to the difficulty of dating 11th century pottery in southern Jordan, any resolution of which will have to wait until the publication of the pottery in Zoara II, or perhaps simply to the specific parts of the site that have been excavated. On pp. 229, Politis argues that shifts to a simpler architectural style and reuse of “luxurious architectural members ... in modest walls” represent clear evidence of “cultural discontinuity from the seventh to the ninth centuries.” While this is a common view, echoing, e.g., Figueras’s (2004, 47) interpretation of Early Islamic reuse of marble at Horvat Karkur Illit in the Negev, this view may well be too simplistic. Tchekhanovets (2016, 287–288) has noted that the use of marble spolia in rather mundane contexts can be observed in Jerusalem already in the Byzantine period and probably does not require a “dramatic” explanation. This does not rule out a discontinuity, but it should nonetheless prompt caution in the interpretation of this evidence. Moving to the end of the chapter, the discussion of al-ʿAmarī is unfortunately quite brief and raises questions about the occupation of the site that are not fully addressed in the volume. Notably, the site is described as dating to the 14th–15th century, making it essentially the site of late Mamluk Zughar, but the material
from previous surveys included late 12th–13th century imported ceramics (e.g., MacDonald 1992, 241, Pl. 35.c), indicating a longer period of occupation and complicating the view of a clean shift from one site to the other in the 14th century. Again, this question will hopefully be resolved with the publication of the ceramics in *Zoara II*. 

Part VIII, “The Ottoman period to modern times,” contains three chapters. Despite the title, apart from a brief discussion in Chapter 19 of Ghawr al-Ṣāfī in the well-known 1596–1597 Ottoman tax registers (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977), this section deals almost exclusively with the 19th and 20th centuries. Chapter 19, by Politis, focuses primarily on the remains of a late Ottoman military post called al-Mashnaqa revealed during the excavations of Maṣnaʿ al-Sukkar, with shorter discussions of nearby flour mills and an Ottoman military post to the north in Ghawr al-Ḥaditha. Chapter 20, by Penelope Edwell, focuses on the Great Arab Revolt, and consists of a summary of ammunition likely dating to this period found in the excavations at Khirbat al-Shaykh Ṭṣā and Maṣnaʿ al-Sukkar, followed by a short historical account of Ghawr al-Ṣāfī’s role in this event. Chapter 21, by Politis, on the Mandatory and Hashemite periods, includes a summary of early research, building on Chapter 4, as well as useful discussions of traditional architecture and the impact of recent development.

The final section, Part IX, consists of a single chapter (22) by Politis. Rather than synthesizing the results of the excavations, this chapter discusses the conservation and management of the excavated sites and the planning and construction of the Museum at the Lowest Place on Earth. This work is a model for conservation and heritage development in the region and is a fitting conclusion to the volume.

The volume as a whole is an excellent beginning to the *Zoara* publication series, although, again, some minor complaints can be raised. Notably, the decision to present season-by-season results in some chapters/parts (e.g., Chapter 5 and Part IV) but to synthesize the results in others leaves the volume feeling somewhat disjointed, more of a “final” report in some sections and more “preliminary” in others.

**Synthetic discussion**

This raises a point relevant to both volumes under review here. In both cases, an argument could be made that breaking the series up into complete publications of specific sites/areas would have been preferable. There are, however, prosaic reasons for adopting a thematic organization, notably the inevitable scheduling problems that come with compiling a multi-author publication. This was undoubtedly the correct choice in both cases, but the drawbacks are quite apparent. The lack of ceramic reports means that the dating in both volumes is not yet final and leaves some stratigraphic questions unanswered, and the lack of archaeobotanical reports is a major omission for places whose economic underpinnings were fundamentally agricultural. This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of the economics of academia, but it must be noted that the increasing contingency of much academic employment, the erosion of higher education especially in the United States and United Kingdom, and especially the historical marginality of Islamic archaeology as a discipline (although this is, at least, arguably improving) inevitably negatively impact our ability to publish “ideal” volumes. Many scholars, particularly “specialists,” are unable to remain in academic archaeology; fewer remain to complete the work left behind. The authors of both volumes must be commended for overcoming these challenges.
One of the most promising comparative aspects of both projects is that they provide a window into very different aspects of the agricultural economy of central/southern Jordan during the Islamic period. Although separated by only ca. 40 km as the crow flies, the two are ecologically distinct, with Khirbat Fāris at the western edge of the semi-arid highland Karak Plateau and Ghawr al-Ṣāfi in the hot, arid Dead Sea aghwār, although watered by Wādī al-Ḥasā. The two were, likewise, engaged in very different kinds of agriculture, with Zughar producing cash crops (indigo during the Early Islamic period and sugar during the Middle Islamic) and Khirbat Fāris likely primarily cereal crops (wheat and barley), as well as legumes and fruit. As such, it seems serendipitous that both volumes were published within a year of each other, as together they provide a comparative view of two different agricultural systems that, particularly during the Middle Islamic period, would both have fallen within the administrative orbit of al-Karak. It is, therefore, disappointing that the archaeobotanical reports for both projects do not appear in these volumes. These would have provided valuable insight into the intensification of agricultural production and particularly whether peaks of intensification were contemporary in both systems. Laparidou and Rosen (2015) have recently argued that Middle Islamic period sugar production disrupted the “small-scale agro-pastoral economy” of Zughar, and specifically cereal agriculture, but it is not entirely clear how reliant Early Islamic Zughar would have been on grain markets rather than local production. While the stratigraphic and architectural reports in Fāris I and Zoara I provide some proxy evidence for intensification, archaeobotanical reports would allow for much more direct consideration of the agricultural economy of Early Islamic Zughar and the degree to which cereal production at Khirbat Fāris might have intensified during the Middle Islamic period to provision commercial centers like Zughar. Walker et al. (2017, 199–200) have argued that identification of specific types of cereal crops is informative here, as a shift from emmer and bread wheat to durum wheat may indicate a shift from subsistence to market-oriented cultivation. The archaeobotanical analyses will, therefore, provide a useful supplement to numismatic and other artifactual data in assessing Khirbat Fāris’s integration into regional markets. For researchers interested in questions related to the Islamic period agricultural economy, the upcoming volumes of both series will likely be of more interest than the volumes reviewed here.

Nonetheless, there is much of comparative interest in these two initial volumes. Both provide detailed accounts of long-term patterns of settlement and land use in their respective regions, with Fāris I covering the 1st and 2nd millennia AD and Zoara I essentially the entire Holocene. Without detailed publication of the dating evidence, the picture of trends during the Islamic period is necessarily painted with a broad brush but comparing the two is informative. Although Fāris I contains a much more detailed discussion of architecture, both provide details of the reuse and remodeling of earlier structures that will certainly contribute to ongoing discussions in Islamic archaeology and help address questions of when and why ad hoc reuse, renovation, modification, integration of old structures into new complexes, or new construction were seen as the most appropriate solution by residents of a given site. In a broader sense, they also provide a comparative view of how regional political-economic shifts affected commercial centers and agricultural villages differently, providing a critical scaffolding for further work in the region. Finally, given their long-term focus, both volumes should also be praised for the detailed attention they give to the Late Islamic period, especially the 19th and 20th centuries, often seen as being too late to be properly “archaeological.” Indeed, both volumes
are models of how to integrate the archaeology of the recent past into long-term accounts of regional settlement.

In summary, both volumes have weaknesses, but these are outweighed by their strengths. As with the first volumes in any multi-volume series, they are incomplete, and the omissions limit their utility for some readers. Nonetheless, as reports of innovative and highly influential projects, their publication now, when Islamic archaeology is arguably at its most vibrant, is timely, and both are important contributions to the field. Islamic archaeologists working in the southern Levant will find much of interest in both volumes, and reading both together will surely prove thought-provoking.

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