

**Series Editor: Brian H Edwards**

Day One



### 3 Ammon—enclave of Lot’s sons

One of Lot’s sons has given his name to the area around Amman, a significant Iron Age city-state that was especially active in David’s day. Through visits to its fortified cities and the main museum in the area we can learn more about a significant Old Testament people

In the Bible, the River Jabbok was described as the boundary of the Ammonites (Deuteronomy 3:16). This river, which started very near modern day Amman, formed the kingdom’s boundary to the North. Madaba was the boundary to the south, the desert on the east and the river Jordan on the west.

#### Amman citadel

The Amman citadel consists of four terraces, one of which is now completely covered in modern housing. The upper two terraces, oriented north-south, contain the Umayyad (early Islamic) complex built on earlier Romano-Byzantine foundations and the buildings around the museum. Below the walls of the far north end of the upper terrace is one of the oldest sections of the citadel complex and it includes the covered cistern through which the attacking Seleucids were able to gain entry during the Hellenistic era. The remaining lower citadel is oriented east-west and includes Ammonite, Romano-Byzantine and Islamic remains .

A 9th century BC Ammonite inscription found elsewhere appears to be a dedication by

an unknown Ammonite king of a temple to their god Milkom. This reminds us of Solomon’s word ‘I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in for ever’ (1 Kings 8:13). On an alternative reading of the Ammonite text the god Milkom orders the building of the temple, which in turn reminds us of 1 Chronicles 22:10 where God reveals to David that Solomon ‘shall build a house for my name.’ The inscription can be seen in the Amman museum.



*Above:* This drawing shows Amman one hundred and fifty years ago. Notice the arch over the river Jabbok at the far left of the picture. In Roman times a section of river lay under a series of such arches

*Facing page:* A small restored section of the temple of Hercules on the Amman citadel





**Above:** A section of the Ammonite casemate walls on the lower citadel. Against such a wall Uriah the Hittite died fighting for the king who twice betrayed him (2 Samuel 11:14–25)

**Right:** On the lower citadel there are the excavated remains of an Ammonite palace. The courtyard of the palace is 10m by 15m. Part of the remains were two storeys high

A bastion dating to the Iron Age was discovered near the palace; a bastion is a five-sided fortification allowing arrows to fire in many directions.

On the upper citadel, the 2nd century AD temple of Hercules has been partially restored to give an impression of the whole. Notice it is constructed on a platform and the whole would have been surrounded by a colonnaded area, the temenos, of which a few columns remain today. In the 19th century the propylaeon, the gate that marked the entrance to the sacred processional way leading up to the temple, was still in existence. Like the temple of Artemis complex at Jerash, the temple



of Hercules represented more than just a central 'sanctuary' in which an image of the god was placed.

To the north of the temple is an early 4th century church, above a cave whose use goes back before the time of Abraham. Fifty metres away, a later and better preserved church complex is visible to the north-east of the temple. In the area outside the museum are some fine coffins, wheat grinders and two parts of what is presumed to have been an eight times life-size 13m (43ft) high marble statue of a female goddess, of which a finger and part of a shoulder are on display.

The visitor can then move on to the domed early Islamic reception hall, thought to have been built over an earlier Byzantine structure, partly because of its cruciform shape. Notice some of the fine decoration inside, which

### Who were the Ammonites?

The Ammonites were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot, through an incestuous union with his daughter (Genesis 19:38). They were separated from the rest of Gilead by the river Jabbok, and their capital was in Rabbath-Amman. By the time of the monarchy, they comprised one of Israel's neighbouring city-states. Their relationship to the people of Israel was that of a relative (Deuteronomy 2:19), a snare both to king and people (Nehemiah 13:23–27), executors of judgement (2 Kings 24:2), a threat (Nehemiah 4) and perpetrators of cruelty (Amos 1:13). At times Israel was victorious over the Ammonites (Judges 11:33, 2 Samuel 12:29–31) and they brought Israel tribute (2 Chronicles 27:5). They fared well under the Assyrians, to whom they paid tribute, but

may well have been done by Christians at the behest of their Muslim rulers. Next to the hall is an early Islamic bath complex, but one that was very similar to the earlier Roman baths. A large Islamic cistern was almost certainly reused from a Romano-Byzantine one.

**Right:** The small statue of an 8th century Ammonite king, Yerah Azar, at the Amman citadel museum.

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The latest Ammonite royal statue was found in April 2010

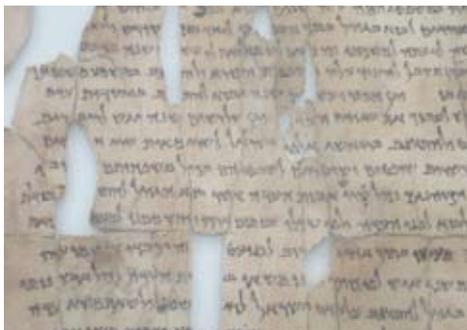
were subjugated by the Babylonians and subsequently became a province of the Persian Empire. They continued as a people until a century or two before Christ when, according to the Apocrypha (a collection of non-biblical books written between the Old and New Testaments), the Hasmoneans fought against them.

From Scripture and inscriptions, we know the names of 17 or 18 Ammonite kings. Their language was close to Hebrew and their god was Milkom or Molech (1 Kings 11:5). Alone among the peoples of Israel and Jordan, they were gifted sculptors of stone statues and their pottery differed



from that of Moab and Judah. Like the Philistines they also used coffins with faces. Decades of excavation in the Amman area have meant we can visit Ammonite cities like Umayri and also enjoy seeing their craftsmanship in Jordanian museums, but lack of unambiguous religious texts means conclusions about their exact beliefs remain conjectural. Through his mother Maacah, Solomon's son Rehoboam was half-Ammonite and thus the Ammonites entered into the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1).

Continuing through the reception hall there is an open area that contains what was originally a section of a Roman street which leads on to the governor's residence. His actual throne room is relatively small reflecting the Eastern concept of glory (hidden away) rather than



*Left: A section of the Dead Sea Scrolls on display at the Amman citadel museum.*  
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the Western (huge magnificence). Compare this with the relatively small size of the Holy of Holies in the temple of Solomon. One estimate puts Solomon's Holy of Holies at 10 by 10m (32 by 32ft) out of a total size for the temple of around 30 by 100m (96 by 330ft).

### **Amman Citadel Museum**

In the Citadel Museum, there are a number of pieces the visitor must not miss. The 9,000 year old Ain Ghazal statues are reckoned to be among the world's oldest representations of the human form. The 6,000 year old painting from Tuleilat Ghassul is interesting in that it represents some kind of religious ceremony. From Pella, there is a fine reconstructed ivory box with themes showing Egyptian influence. Also from Pella is a two-horned small incense altar with two representations of Astarte or Ashtaroth, a goddess that Solomon worshipped in his old age (1 Kings 11:4-5,33) and one that represented a perpetual snare to the people of Israel (1 Samuel 7:3 for example). From Safut is the so-called laughing god, a tiny figure whose identity is unknown.

Here also is the visually dull Balaam inscription whose importance cannot be underestimated in that it represents an extra-biblical reference to a significant Bible character who was not a king or ruler. The Balu stela (see page 67) sadly has a worn text that no-one has been able to read. An impressively large goddess figure from Khirbet Tannur makes an appearance. This must be the world's biggest collection of Ammonite statues, of which two 'two-faced' women and kings (one possibly a god) with Egyptian headdress are significant. There is an excellent collection of Nabataean pottery, including a charming group of three small musicians.

Because they were discovered in what was then Jordan, the museum contains some of the Dead Sea Scrolls including the famous copper scroll which contains instructions for finding buried treasure.

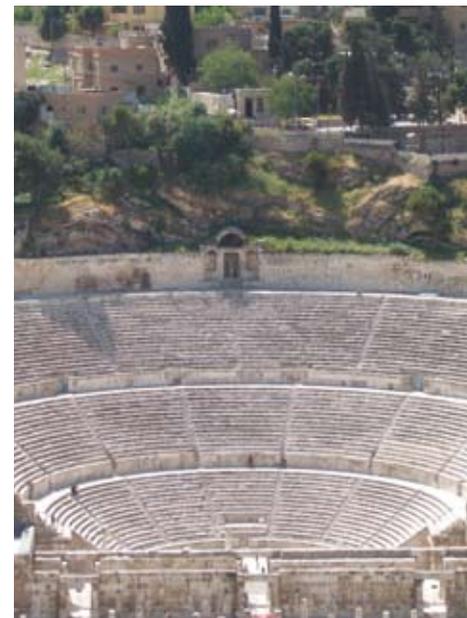
Beautiful Hellenistic pottery, a good collection of Roman glass, some Romano-Byzantine gold jewellery and some fine Byzantine pieces including a red glass 'fish' figure, help to make up a worthwhile visit. Last but

not least, is the figure of Tuche, a possible city goddess with the city of Amman on her head. A new archaeological and historical museum in downtown Amman is expected to open in 2010/2011. However, it is likely that the Citadel Museum will stay much as it is.

### **Roman Amman**

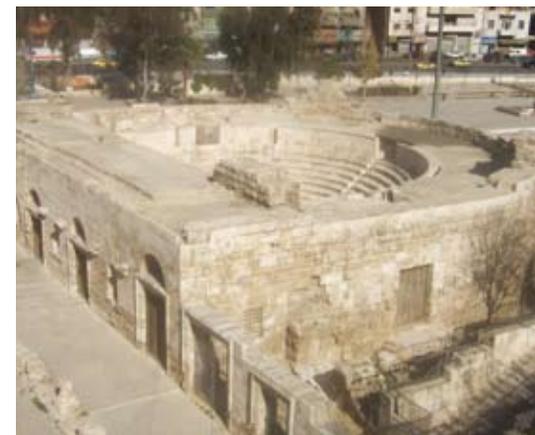
Amman was the southernmost of the Decapolis cities and was re-founded as Philadelphia in the Hellenistic period (not to be confused with the Philadelphia of Revelation 3). While it had most of the trappings of a Roman city of the time of Christ, the demanding topography presented a challenge to the city planners and much of Roman Amman dates to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD and is either on the citadel or in the valley below.

There were two theatres and the odeum. This smaller theatre (1200 individuals), was probably used for poetry readings and council meetings and, like the main theatre, has been well restored. The two theatres adjoined a trapezoidal forum of 7620 sq. m (25,000 sq. ft) which made it among the biggest of Roman fora and was situated at the widest part of the



*Above: The main theatre at Roman Amman could hold 6,000 spectators*

*Below: The small theatre possibly also a council chamber*



east-west valley in which central Amman is placed. Immediately in front of the main theatre is part of the Decumanus Maximus (the east-west street) which unusually had no pavement. Further to the west is the Nymphaeum which would have been a grand marble



**Above:** A section of the Nymphaeum at Amman which would have been a magnificent structure in its day

**Below:** Restored Ammonite watchtower outside the Department of Antiquities office at Rujm ilMalfouf near Third Circle



covered place of relaxation in its heyday. It was in the shape of a half octagon and contained pools being built over a tributary that flowed into the river Jabbok. This river flowed through the downtown area and was covered by a vaulted arch parts of which remained to the 19th century. The vaulted covering was something of an engineering achievement in that it made more space available in the central city, helped communication and was also designed in such a way to minimise flooding. It is reckoned that the area of Roman Amman (including the citadel) could have been around

84,146 sq. m (276,000 sq. ft).

### Rujm ilMalfouf

There are a several Iron Age Ammonite watchtowers in the Amman area, a number of them surrounded and almost engulfed by modern houses. Rujm ilMalfouf is 'safe' being next to the Department of Antiquities office.

### Iraq El-Emir

If its identification with Ramoth-Mizpeh is correct the tribe of Gad probably occupied this site (Joshua 13:26). It seems that the Ammonites occupied the site for a time.

The exact nature of the unfinished building, the Qasr, has been in doubt but it is likely to have been a fortified residence and it definitely dates back to the Hellenistic period. It thus shares some features with buildings built by Herod the Great and with those found at Petra. Josephus wrote about the Qasr and the estate surrounding it. Its owner was at odds with the Seleucid rulers of the period and ended up committing suicide. It is not clear whether the two 'Tobias' inscriptions on the caves on the right just as you make your final descent to the Qasr (or palace) refer to the same person Josephus writes about or to one of the Ammonite Tobiads.

An earlier traveller reported that a lake stood in front of the Qasr on which you could float ships; the present writer saw something similar when the area was temporarily flooded during a severe winter in the early nineties—although no ships! Notice on the Qasr itself animals, some defaced, which would have originally encircled the top storey. Also notice the two leopard fountains to the left and right of the main entrance. If the caretaker is there, it is possible to enter the



**Above:** The main interest of the site at Iraq El-Emir is the Qasr, whose interior is shown here and whose exact nature nobody knows and which seems never to have been finished

**Below:** One of the two leopards guarding the temple; water would have come out of his mouth



**Right:** Discovered in Tell Safut was the tiny laughing god, found in a cultic area. Now in the Amman citadel museum. © DoA. Jordan

building and walk up one of the staircases. Notice the huge blocks of stone used, some of the largest in the Middle East.

### Tell Safut

Tell Safut is a very accessible Ammonite city. As the visitor descends into the Baq'ah valley on the way to Jerash it is on the right with the main road cutting through part of it. During the earlier period occupation was limited to the summit, but was expanded during the Ammonite period and the lower wall shows how much of the tell was occupied. Discovered here was the tiny laughing god, found in a cultic area on the site. Like Heshbon, Safut was another gatekeeper city guarding the King's Highway as it entered the rich agricultural land of



*Above: There are the remains of a substantial house in the south of Tell Jawa roughly halfway between the east and west ends of the tell. Notice the pillars and the stairway*

the Baq'ah valley which can be appreciated from the sweeping views obtainable from the top of the tell.

### Baq'ah valley sites

If the visitor turns off left from the Jerash road as you descend into the valley after Suweilih and follow the signs for Umm ad-Dananir, you will go through two probable Ammonite frontier posts, one to the left of the road and one to the right: Rujm il-Hawi and Rujm il-Henu East. They are the mirror image of each other and could have been used as farm buildings or villas as well as watchtowers or small fortresses. If you continue on the road for around half a kilometre and take the road left up a hill you will arrive at Umm ad-Dananir.

Although there is little to see here, you can walk from here up the hill to Jebel el-Qusair, where there was a significant Early Bronze pre-Abrahamic settlement.

### Tell Jawa

Tell Jawa is a 2 hectare (5 acre) fortified Ammonite town impressively towering above the Amman suburbs. Over 90 m (98 yds) of its casemate wall have been uncovered, as well as the foundations of some fine Ammonite houses. It mostly dates from the later Iron Age although it was occupied in the earlier Iron Age. Tell Jawa was not used during the Persian period although there was some Romano-Byzantine occupation. Because of its



*Above: The fortification of Tell IlUmayri with the four-room house on the wall behind it*

proximity to Amman, with its fine views, walls and house foundations, this little-visited site is well worth making the effort to see.

### Tell IlUmayri

Tell IlUmayri is one of the most important and most accessible sites in Jordan for understanding the world of the Ammonites. 'Tell' means a ruin mound in Arabic. Umayri was a thriving town at the time of Abraham. It is reckoned it might have had a population of 1,600 and is one of the relatively few flourishing cities of the conquest period in the time of Joshua. It is possible that it was occupied for a time by the tribe of Reuben and it may have been captured by David's troops at the time of the war against the Ammonites

(2 Samuel 11:1). Situated near springs, notice the excellent defensive position on three sides and the section of superb wall uncovered on the 'easy' side of the tell. The fortification, which extends at least round that side of the tell, consists of a dry moat then a wall followed by a glacis and another wall. A glacis is a steep incline, in this case thirty-five degrees, which here was covered in charcoal ash and clay



*Above: Because of objects found, it is thought that this area was some kind of cultic area; notice the thickness of the walls*

making it very hard to negotiate. Then came a final casemate wall; a casemate wall is in effect two parallel walls with rooms in between them.



**Top:** The four-room house at Umayri. Notice the room at the back; the family would have lived on the first floor with the animals below

**Above:** A main area of interest for our period is the lower section of Tell Hisban where there is a two million litre reservoir. A strange feature of this reservoir is that it was in the highest point of the tell, meaning that all water had to be brought up there, presumably by donkey

Here there is also a restored house on the wall, reminding us of a similar house belonging to Rahab the prostitute (Joshua 2:15). Notice the nature of this four-room house with a rectangular back room and then three rooms with a courtyard in front of them. One estimate reckoned that it needed 470 tons of material to build the four-room house: a mixture of stone, mud brick, mortar and plaster, branches, charcoal, ash,

wooden posts. The house next to this has a 'sacred stone'—a large vertical boulder that was thought to represent a 'god' dwelling in the household. The people of Israel were warned against such practices (Deuteronomy 29:17). Another building that is thought to have been some kind of temple or worship place is in the area immediately to the north of the four-roomed house. Notice the high and very thick walls here. Several items connecting this building with worship of pagan gods were found.

The most important inscription to be found at Umayri was 'belonging to Mikom-'ur, servant of Ba'alyasha [Baalis]'. For the first time a name bearing the name of the Ammonite god had been found and also here was a clear reference to Baalis, king of the Ammonites, mentioned in Jeremiah 40:14. He was the

instigator of the successful assassination of the Jewish administrator, Gedaliah.

In the Iron Age, the city was attacked and the resulting conflagration was so severe that some of the stones in the wall turned to lime. The city was occupied in the Persian period when it seems to have been an administrative centre. In the time after Christ it was occupied by the Jews as was evidenced by the discovery of some Jewish purification pools.

### Tell Hisban

Tell Hisban is an imposing tell emerging out of the modern day village of Hisban. The first archaeologists to dig there concluded that Tell Hisban could not possibly be Heshbon of the Bible because of the lack of material evidence from the Late Bronze period. In other words, if this was the capital of Sihon, king of the Amorites (Deuteronomy 3:6), why was there no, or virtually no, evidence from before 1200 BC? Currently many consider that this probably *was* Heshbon because of the powerful association of the name. Also the lack of archaeological evidence could point to the nomadic nature of the Amorites. Tell Hisban stands in rich agricultural land and 'guards' a section of the King's Highway which passes nearby. A spring and stream would have been one of its water sources.

It is thought that the tribe of Reuben may have settled here, but in any case, there are Ammonite remains from the later

Iron Age and Persian periods. It was occupied by the Seleucids and later by the Jewish rebels before being re-fortified under the auspices of Herod the Great. In Roman times there seems to have been an inn on the site. Christianity came here early and it was another of the few Jordanian cities to send a bishop to the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. There are the well restored foundations of a church on the tell and a larger one lower down in the village. Also on the north of the tell is a fine section of a Hellenistic-Roman wall with a gateway.

### Tell Jalul

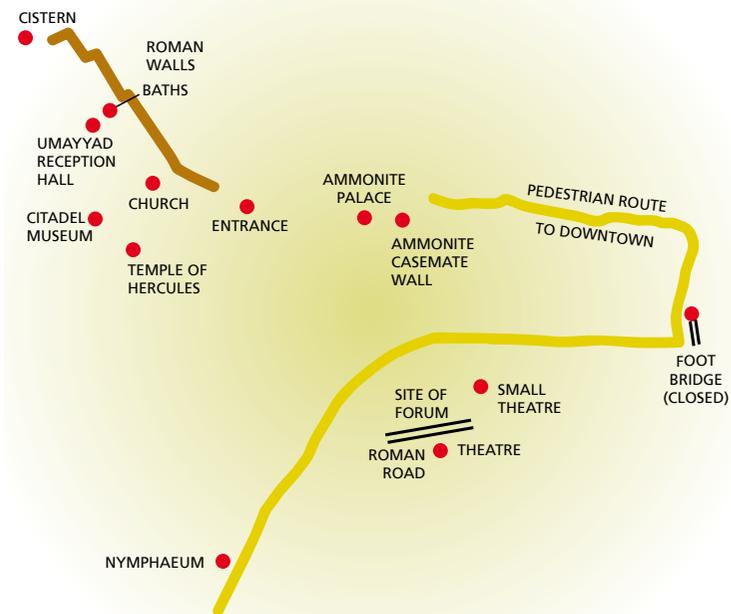
Tell Jalul is a large 7.3 hectare (18 acre) site with clear evidence of Ammonite occupation. It may also have been occupied by the Reubenites and it has been suggested as a strong candidate for the Levitical city of refuge, Bezer. Deuteronomy 4:43 describes Bezer as 'in the desert plateau' which would fit its situation. It is also a possible candidate for Heshbon!

Among the most interesting remains are sections of Iron Age paving at the east of the site. There is a large depression in the south of the tell from which a water channel ran; there are many cisterns around the site. On the north of the tell a three section pillared building with an intact wall was uncovered, the first in Jordan. Little of this can now be seen. In the centre of the tell are some excavated buildings from the Persian period.





## DOWNTOWN AMMAN



## AMMAN CITADEL

### TRAVEL INFORMATION

For an averagely fit visitor, the main sites of **central Amman** are all within walking distance of each other. Starting on the Citadel, it is possible then

to walk down to the two theatres and the forum and, by continuing on the line of the Roman street westwards, to reach the Nymphaeum on the right after half a kilometre. The Nymphaeum is

not officially open to the public but a good impression of the whole site can be obtained by looking through the fence on the main street and from the side road behind. Rujm ilMalfuf



*Left: The paved road at the site of Tell Jalul*

left; take the turn for Um Dananir.

**Tell Jawa.** Go down the desert highway towards

the airport and take the exit which ends in you going left at the sign marked 'Saudi border and Amman east', which is before the airport turn-off. Carry on this road east for 5.5km and you will see a green street sign saying 'Jawa street'. Go up this street and you will see the tell on the summit of the ridge. By public transport, take a bus from Mahatta bus station to Middle East Circle (duar issharq ilawsat) and a bus from there to Jawa.

**Tell il Umayyri** is hard to reach by public transport although it is on the desert highway and you could take a bus from Tababor to Madaba and alight there. Getting back might be harder, but you could probably flag down a bus. By car, go down the airport highway for 11.5km after Seventh Circle and turn right at a cluster of signs, one of which is for

Iraq il Emir is accessible by taking a Wadi Siir bus from Mahatta or Muhajarin station and a second Iraq il Emir bus from Wadi Siir.

**Tell Safut.** At Suweilih take the Jerash road and after roughly a kilometre you will see the tell on your right. There is parking space there. It is an easy walk from Suweilih.

**The Baqah valley sites** are further on to the

the airport and take the exit which ends in you going left at the sign marked 'Saudi border and Amman east', which is before the airport turn-off. Carry on this road east for 5.5km and you will see a green street sign saying 'Jawa street'. Go up this street and you will see the tell on the summit of the ridge. By public transport, take a bus from Mahatta bus station to Middle East Circle (duar issharq ilawsat) and a bus from there to Jawa.

**Tell il Umayyri** is hard to reach by public transport although it is on the desert highway and you could take a bus from Tababor to Madaba and alight there. Getting back might be harder, but you could probably flag down a bus. By car, go down the airport highway for 11.5km after Seventh Circle and turn right at a cluster of signs, one of which is for

Aref il Faiz wood. You will see the tell on your right before the turn-off which is just after a petrol station.

**Tell Hisban.** Take the Desert Highway, turn off at the Dead Sea Road and take the turn-off for Madaba from the Dead Sea road, after a few kilometres. Hisban is a prominent village and hill on your right which you will come to a few kilometres before Madaba. The tell is signposted. **Do not** follow the signs for Madaba on the desert highway. There are buses to Hisban from Wihdat bus station.

**Tell Jalul.** Take the main road from Amman to Madaba and go straight into the city. Turn left at the police kiosk by the side of the road (just past a petrol station) and keep going for around 5km and you will see the large tell in front of you.

For the Umayyri, Hisban and Jalul excavation sites see the website [www.madabaplains.org](http://www.madabaplains.org)

*Right: The area in front of the theatre where the large forum was situated*

