

# 1. Archaeology in Jordan: A Brief History

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The area known today as Jordan (formerly Transjordan) lies between Palestine (Cisjordan or modern Israel and the Palestinian Territories) and Mesopotamia, and is intimately connected to these surrounding regions of ancient Western Asia, in both geography and history. This survey of the development of archaeology in Jordan will outline the major phases of exploration in this region and highlight briefly some of the important developments in archaeology in Jordan.

## The Earliest Phase of Exploration (1805–1918)

Who that has ever travelled in Palestine has not longed to cross the Jordan-valley to those mysterious hills which close ever eastward view with their long horizontal outline, their overshadowing height, their deep purple shade?

With these words from his 1856 travel log, Arthur Stanley (1856), the Dean of Westminster summed up the relationship between Palestine and Transjordan for the earliest explorers of the Levant. At the time of his visit Transjordan was a place less travelled, largely unknown, and poorly explored, yet it remained of great interest largely due to the connections between the two regions from both historical and biblical accounts. By the mid-nineteenth century, interest in Transjordan was growing, and discoveries in both Palestine (Dever 2001a, 2001b); and Mesopotamia (Potts 2001) were leading scholars to explore the history of the region in the contexts of both the Biblical and classical texts.

Unlike Cisjordan or Palestine however, the exploration of Transjordan started somewhat late and received only the occasional interest of scholars and travellers during the earliest part of the nineteenth century. The earliest explorations in Transjordan were largely by antiquarians and biblical scholars intent upon recording sites of historical or biblical interest. Explorers such as the German, Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, who visited between 1805 and 1807, and the Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, who visited between 1810 and 1812, were amongst the first to record some the great sites of classical antiquity in Transjordan. Seetzen visited the sites of Jarash (Gerasa) and Amman (Philadelphia), while Burckhardt “rediscovered” Petra. Others followed, including brief visits by the Biblical scholar Edward Robinson and his missionary travelling companion Eli Smith, who are considered to be the fathers of historical geography in the Levant.

Their extensive work in Palestine (1837–38, 1851–52) identified many ancient sites and was published as *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petrea* (1841) and *Biblical Researches in Palestine and Adjacent Regions* (1853). Although Robinson and Smith made brief visits to Petra and Pella, their important work in Palestine was unfortunately not duplicated on the same scale east of the Jordan River.

In 1847 Lt. William Francis Lynch received orders from the U.S. Department of the Navy to lead an expedition to complete a survey and exploration of the Dead Sea. In orders to Lynch, the Secretary of the Navy gives the objectives of the expedition “to promote the cause of Science, and advance the character of the Naval Service” (Mason 1847), making this perhaps the first largely “scientific” exploration in the Levant. In reality commercial concerns were perhaps just as important, as the Navy was interested in the possibility of opening up an inland water route for trade. Lynch and his small team used three boats to sail down the Jordan River from its source to the Dead Sea, where they spent three weeks sketching, collecting specimens, taking soundings of the Dead Sea and looking for biblical evidence. In 1852, Lynch’s report entitled, *The Official Report of the US Expedition to Explore the Dead Sea and River Jordan* was published by the U.S. Navy (see also Rook 1998).

One of the reasons that comparatively little exploration was undertaken in Transjordan at this time, was due to the political instability of the region. Although under Ottoman Turkish rule, this meant very little outside the more densely populated areas. The region was populated with a combination of small settled villages and semi-nomadic Bedouin tribes with only a few larger towns. The activities of the Bedouin tribes, who were occasionally aggressive towards both villages and travellers made exploration difficult and often unpredictable and dangerous. In general the visits of these early explorers and travellers to Transjordan were therefore sporadic, and usually directed to specific known sites, since their primary interest remained the “Holy Land” (Cisjordan or Palestine), its historical geography and the classical sites of late antiquity.

By the mid-nineteenth century Ottoman control of Transjordan began to increase with eventual control of various regions with governors appointed at Irbid to oversee the district of Ajlun (1851) and at Salt to oversee the central district of Balqa (1868). One of the primary reasons for this increasing control of Transjordan by the

Ottoman Empire was due to the need to control the Hajj pilgrimage route between Damascus and the Hijaz. One of the outcomes of this control was increased exploration of the region by western scholars.

There was considerable academic interest in the Levant developing in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Following the founding of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1865, a survey of western Palestine was undertaken between 1872–1878, under the direction of Lt. Claude R. Conder and assisted by Horatio H. Kitchener. The work by Conder and Kitchener west of the Jordan produced the first modern maps of the Levant and were published in 1884 as *The Survey of Western Palestine*. An attempt to continue this work east of the Jordan in the Hauran and Golan in 1881 was halted after only a 1000 square kms had been surveyed due to political difficulties between the English and Turkish governments.

In 1870, The American Palestine Exploration Society was formed as a privately funded society for archaeological and geographic exploration of the Holy Land. Its first expedition in 1873, led by E.Z. Steever was only moderately successful as they were only able to survey a small area of the Moab region of Transjordan, south of Hisban. In 1874, however, the American Palestine Exploration Society appointed Selah Merrill a clergyman and archaeologist to lead its second expedition. During three excursions through Palestine and Transjordan Merrill collected numerous archaeological, ethnological and geographical specimens. He also produced maps of ancient sites in Ammon and Moab, and published the results in *East of the Jordan* in 1881. Unfortunately the American Palestine Exploration Society was disbanded in 1884 largely due to infighting and lack of funding.

Following the abrupt end to Conder's explorations for the Palestine Exploration Fund in Transjordan, archaeological survey there were continued by the American born engineer Gottlieb Schumacher. Schumacher became interested in the ancient sites of the region while conducting a geographic survey of the Golan in preparation to build a railway line from Damascus to Haifa. Schumacher's pioneering work in the region, undertaken independently of a sponsoring organization, was prolific. In addition to drawing the map of Transjordan (in 10 sheets), he also published a number of monographs on the archaeology of the region in quick succession which include: *Across the Jordan: Being an Exploration and Survey of Part of the Hauran and Jaulan* (1886); *The Jaulan* (1888); *Pella* (1888); *Abila of the Decapolis* (1889); and *Northern Ajlun, "within the Decapolis"* (1890).

Schumacher also published numerous articles in the journal of the newly formed (1877) Der Deutsche Verein zur Erforschung Palästinas (German Society for the Exploration of Palestine). At this time numerous other foreign societies were also being formed in the region, including the French École Biblique et Archéologique

(1892) and the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900). American Schools of Oriental Research was the successor to the American Palestine Exploration Society, but instead of being privately funded, it was founded as a consortium of institutions of higher education, each of which paid an annual subscription. The expansion of these new institutes paralleled the competition between colonial powers for a stake in the exploration of the Levant and wider Near East.

The closing years of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw an expansion of expeditions sponsored by these national schools. In Transjordan the École Biblique sponsored the expeditions of Rudolf Ernst Brünnow and Alfred von Domaszewski which documented the Nabataean and Roman ruins of Central Moab, the Roman road system and associated fortifications, as well as the rock-cut tombs of Petra (1904–9). Following his success at Tell Hesi, the American Frederick Jones Bliss continued the work of the Palestine Exploration Fund excavating at Jerusalem from 1894–1897. While there Bliss made a brief exploratory trip to explore Central Transjordan where he was able to chart the upper branches of the Wadi Mujib (Bliss 1895).

Representatives of National schools were not the only active explorers of the region. Independent travelers also made important contributions to the exploration of Transjordan. The independent Czech scholar Alois Musil made several excursions in the region during the years 1896–1902. One of his key discoveries was the Umayyad site of Qusayr Amra and its famous frescoes in 1898. Musil was not just an explorer but an early ethnographer and his work *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (1928) was an important contribution to early anthropology and Oriental Studies. He published the results of his travels in the region as *Arabia Petraea* (1907–8).

### **The Development of Jordanian Archaeology During the British Mandate (1918–1946)**

In 1918, following the First World War, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent Sykes-Picot agreement, a British Mandate was established for the region of Palestine and Transjordan which came under the control of the British Empire. The British authorities established a Department of Antiquities in Palestine in 1920 under John Garstang, and subsequently a Department of Antiquities was established in Amman in 1923 to oversee the region of Transjordan.

As a result of the establishment of British control, archaeologists found the region increasingly accessible (and safe) and during this period established some of the major groundwork for understanding the archaeology and history of the region. Research was not however restricted to British interests, but rather several international schools, including the French, German and American, carried out significant research in the southern Levant during this period.

A great deal of this work was concentrated in Palestine, but some work was carried out at major sites of classical antiquity in Transjordan, including Amman, Gerasa (Jarash), and Petra. At Petra the first systematic excavations were undertaken in 1929 by George Horsfield, the first chief officer (curator) of the Transjordan Department of Antiquities. Horsfield, a student of John Garstang, carried out work on several of the major tombs of Petra, including the Palace tomb, al-Kazneh, the Urn Tomb, and the Tomb of the Roman Soldier. In 1924, Horsfield also initiated the first work at Gerasa (Jarash), where he directed considerable energy to the clearing and reconstruction of several of the major monuments at the site, including the south and north theatres, the propylaeum of the Temple of Artemis and the Nymphaeum. He was later joined in 1928 by an Anglo-American expedition from the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and Yale University led by John Crowfoot, and later in 1930 by a team from the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) initially under the direction of Clarence Fisher and later by Nelson Glueck (1933–34). At Amman work on the citadel was carried out by the Italian Archaeological Mission beginning in 1927 and concluding in the 1930s, and from 1936 in other parts of the city by the then Director of the Transjordan Department of Antiquities, Gerald Lancaster Harding. The overall result of these excavations was the revelation of the exceptional state of preservation of many of these sites of classical antiquity, and an attempt to begin to preserve them from both destruction and development threatened by the expanding populations in the region.

Other notable work during this period included the discovery of the site of Tulaylat Ghassul, one of the key sites of the Chalcolithic period in the southern Levant, near the shores of the Dead Sea. Work at this site by Mallon, Koepfel and Neuville of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (PBI) in Jerusalem between 1929–38 revealed, perhaps for the first time, the extent of the richness of the prehistoric archaeology of Jordan.

Last of all, the work of Nelson Glueck during his periods as Director of American Schools of Oriental Research Institute in Jerusalem (1932–33, 1936–40, 1942–47), were to have a lasting impact upon Transjordan. Glueck, a student of W.F. Albright, was one of the pioneers of archaeological survey in Transjordan, and in the period between 1932 and 1947 surveyed more than a thousand sites, including many previously unknown. In particular, Glueck, as a student of Biblical history, focused upon the Biblical kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom. Glueck's extensive survey work included mapping, photography and site collections, and set the precedent for all subsequent archaeological survey work in the region. His four volume report, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* (1934–51) and *The Other Side of Jordan* (1940) are still consulted extensively by those working in Jordan, and al-

though some errors were made, Glueck's work has proven to be remarkably accurate. Glueck also undertook two excavations in Transjordan, first (1937–38) at Khirbat Tanur a Nabatean temple site in the Wadi Hasa, and later (1938–40) at the site of Tall Khalayfi which he believed to be King Solomon's seaport Ezion Geber. These two periods of the Iron Age and the Nabateans were to be the main focus of Glueck's career, which was inspirational to a generation of archaeologists who followed.

### **Archaeology in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (1946–67)**

During the period from 1946, when the region of Transjordan became an independent Kingdom under the rule of the Hashemites, the area underwent a period of steady growth in development of a national archaeology. The retreat of British sovereignty in the region, did not mean an immediate withdrawal of British interests or support, and G.L. Harding continued on as Director of the now Department of Antiquities of Jordan until 1956. In total Harding served as director of the Department of Antiquities for twenty years (1936–56) and was instrumental in the formation of archaeological policies which helped to form the national school of archaeology in Jordan. In 1951 he founded the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* which reported on the yearly archaeological work in the country, and later he wrote the first major popularisation of the archaeology of Jordan in his volume *The Antiquities of Jordan* (1959).

During this period, and following the partition of Palestine and the formation of the State of Israel (1948), The Department of Antiquities of Jordan found itself also responsible for the archaeology of a portion of Palestine which came to be known as the West Bank. This region included many of the major Biblical sites including Jerusalem, and in this period many of the international schools preferred to continue to work in this region, and major excavations in the former Transjordan were not as frequent as one might expect.

Some of the best known include the excavations of Kathleen Kenyon, who carried out a series of excavations first at Jericho (1952–58) as Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (BSAJ), and later in Jerusalem at the "City of David" (Ophel), with a multi-national team under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund (1961–68). American fieldwork (1956–68) under the direction of G.E. Wright at Tall Balatah (ancient Shechem) sponsored by Drew University and McCormick Theological Seminary (also later Harvard University) and affiliated with ASOR was the principal American excavation during this period. The École Biblique et Archéologique Française excavated the site of Tall Farah North (thought to be Biblical Tirzah) under the direction of Roland De Vaux from 1946–1960, and later at Qumran (see below).

Outside of the West Bank and in Jordan proper, excava-

tions began at the site of ancient Dhiban/Dibon, under F. Winnett, W. Reed and D. Tushingham (1950–56), and at Tall Dayr Alla under H.J. Franken, who led a Dutch team from Leiden University (1960–67). The German Evangelical Institute also began work at Umm Qays, the Decapolis city of Gadara in 1966. Other notable work included British (Peter Parr) and American (Philip Hammond) led teams at Petra between 1954 and 1968, as well as renewed work at Tulaylat Ghassul by R. North on behalf of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (1960), and later Basil Hennessey under the auspices of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (1967). American work under ASOR affiliation was also undertaken at Iraq al-Amir (1961–62) and later Bab adh-Dhra (1965–67) under Paul Lapp, then Director of the American School in Jerusalem.

Perhaps the most spectacular archaeological discovery in this period was the finding of the “Dead Sea Scrolls.” This group of Biblical and extra-Biblical texts dating to the first and second centuries AD, were discovered by local Bedouin in caves along the north-western shore of the Dead Sea. The finding of these scrolls, led to a series of concentrated excavations of the various caves, and later at Khirbat Qumran under the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, the Palestine Archaeological Museum and The École Biblique et Archéologique Française under the direction of Roland De Vaux (1951, 1953–56). The finds from both the caves and also the nearby site at Qumran (thought to be the complex associated with the writers of many of the scrolls, the Essenes) have been critical to modern Biblical research, allowing a glimpse into the early biblical communities in the region.

In general this period of archaeological research in Jordan, both in the West Bank and in Jordan itself, established a pattern of archaeological fieldwork by “schools” of most of the major western powers, and which produced (to that time) the longest period of uninterrupted and continuous research in the region. The effect of this period are still being felt, with many of the principal researchers (only now retiring) in the field of Levantine archaeology having “cut their teeth” in this period on many of these projects, and who in turn have been instrumental in establishing the study of Levantine Archaeology in many countries. This period also established the practice of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan as the partner of these international schools in the documentation, publication and preservation of the rich archaeological heritage of Jordan.

#### **Archaeology in Jordan 1967 to the present**

After Jordan’s loss of the West Bank following the Six-Day War in 1967, the focus of Jordanian archaeology was once again focused upon lands east of the Jordan River. Many of the International Schools (British, American, German) set up “temporary” offices in Jordan (Amman) at this time, so as to continue archaeological research but to avoid ex-

cavation in the occupied territories which was in breach of United Nations rules. The American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem was the first to set up a branch office in support of research in Jordan in 1968 and was soon followed by the British. Within a few years the American Center for Oriental Research (ACOR) was founded (1971) and somewhat later the establishment of the British Institute at Amman for Archaeology and History (now the Council for British Research in the Levant) under the direction of Crystal Bennett (1978) formalized the shift from Jerusalem to Amman for British researchers.

The establishment of headquarters in Amman for many of the international schools at this time marks a transition or break in archaeological research and direction in Jordan and in Israel/West Bank. From this period forward, archaeological work in Israel and Jordan developed along independent lines, with increasingly little contact between scholars working in both countries. This situation was true of both the indigenous archaeologists (Israeli and Jordanian), as well as the international schools. In particular, many of those formally working in Jordan were reluctant to jeopardise this situation by contacts and active research west of the Jordan Rift. In this situation archaeology in Israel developed on an independent trajectory, and along specific national lines (see Dever 2001) in a way which was quite distinctly different from archaeology in Jordan.

Unlike the development of the national school in Israel, which sought its roots in the archaeology of Ancient Israel and Judah and Jewish history in general, archaeology in Jordan was less politicized. The populations in Jordan being largely Bedouin and Palestinian were not particularly interested in developing a history of occupation for the region along the lines of Israeli “Biblical archaeologists,” and claimed no distinctly historical links with either the Nabataeans or the Iron Age Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom. As a result, archaeological research in Jordan has to some degree been more diverse, and one in which a number of specific sub-fields of archaeology were free to develop without the constraints of ideology.

There were still those researchers who were interested in “Biblical Archaeology” and tended towards research in the Bronze and Iron Age, such as the excavations of Crystal Bennett in Edom at sites such as Tawilan and the ancient Edomite capital at Busayrah (1968–74, 1980). There were, however, just as many scholars who focused upon the world of Classical and late Antiquity up to and including the Islamic periods. The wealth of extremely well preserved and important sites from these periods in Jordan (often due to lack of continuous occupation at the site in modern times) was no doubt a contributor to this tendency. Sites such as Petra, Jarash, Gadara and Philadelphia (Amman) were an obvious attraction to researchers, but there were also smaller sites which were also of great appeal, such as Umm Jimal a Roman-Byzantine city on

the desert fringe (excavated since 1973 by Calvin College) and the Roman Legionary Fort at Lajjun a spectacularly preserved fortress of the Roman *limes* or frontier (excavated by S. Thomas Parker), both of which have contributed to our understanding of life on the fringes of the Roman and Byzantine empires.

Perhaps the least expected direction of archaeological work in Jordan since 1967 has come with the advances of the “New Archaeology” in the 1970s and early 1980s, which saw the expansion of anthropological archaeology in Jordan, and in particular an expansion in research on the earliest prehistory of the region from the Palaeolithic up to the end of the Neolithic period. As rich as Jordan is in its many well preserved sites of Classical Antiquity and the Bronze and Iron Ages, no one could have predicted the wealth of prehistoric sites in Jordan, nor that they would be so spectacularly well preserved. The expansion of a scientific and specific anthropological approach to prehistoric archaeology in Jordan has been one of the most significant advances over the last twenty years. This has also often been undertaken with a distinctly environmental approach which has sought to understand the development of the region in the late Pleistocene and Holocene, the adaptation of early modern humans to the region and the development of Neolithic societies and the transition to settled life and agricultural societies.

Projects which have contributed to this research are numerous, but a few of the key projects are worthy of special mention. These include work of Diana Kirkbride-Helbaek at Bayda and more recently the pioneering work of Andrew Garrard while Assistant and then Director of the British Institute at Amman at sites in the Azraq Basin and at Wadi Jilat (1982–89) which trained a generation of British prehistorians and environmental archaeologists. Also the work of Gary Rollefson and others at the now famous site at Ayn Ghazal, perhaps one of the most spectacular (and largest) Neolithic sites in the Levant, which has produced such spectacular finds including two groups of near life-size anthropomorphic figurines. Still further sites in the vicinity of Petra such as Basta excavated by Hans Nissan, Nans Georg Gebel and Zeidan Kafafi, and in the Black Desert investigated by Alison Betts, have shown the wealth and extent of prehistoric occupation of Jordan in virtually every environmental and geographic zone, from the Mediterranean to the steppe and desert.

Complimentary to the part that excavation has played in revealing the archaeology of Jordan, has been the extensive role of survey in recent years. Extensive surveys have now covered many of the regions of Jordan, including the Black Desert, the Kerak Plateau, the Wadi Hasa, and Wadi Arabah and many, many others. All of these surveys have been instrumental in helping to piece together the many thousands of archaeological sites in Jordan from all periods, which are in turn recorded in JADIS: Jordanian Antiquities Database and Information System—which

is a compiled database of all archaeological sites in Jordan. This cultural resource management tool allows for the preservation and conservation of Jordan’s rich cultural heritage.

One of the most significant aspects of contemporary Jordanian archaeology is the diversity of researchers who have taken an interest in the history, archaeology, geography and environment of Jordan. These researchers come from a wide variety of academic disciplines and traditions and from many different countries, only a few of which are represented in this volume. The extensive number of foreign research teams working in Jordan also pays testimony to the generosity of both the government and people of Jordan in hosting and supporting this research.

Last of all, a significant part in the development of archaeology in Jordan has been played by Jordanians in both the Jordan Department of Antiquities and Departments of Archaeology at Jordan’s universities. The hospitality and partnership of Jordanians in the ongoing development of archaeology and cultural resource management of archaeological sites in the country has been one of the keys to the vast amount of archaeology undertaken since 1946. In this regard the Department of Antiquities has been fortunate to have had directors of both vision and energy who carried on the work of Horsfield and Harding, including Adnan Hadidi, Ghazi Bisheh, Safwan Tell and Fawaz al-Khrayshah.

The future of archaeology in Jordan is a bright one, with many Jordanians taking an active interest in the history and archaeology of their country, as evidenced by the thriving departments of archaeology at the University of Jordan (Amman), Yarmuk University (Irbid) and Mutah University (near Karak). Many of the graduates of these departments are employed in the Department of Antiquities and other aspects of Jordanian heritage and in partnership with international research are now creating a distinctive Jordanian archaeology.

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