

The Aqaba Khans and the Origin of Khans in Jordan

An Archaeological Approach

Reem Samed Al Shqour

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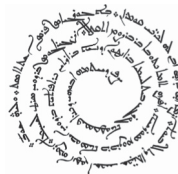
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In memory of my parents and brother

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PREFACE

I laid the foundation for my doctoral work at Ghent with my M.A. in Archaeology at Leuven University where I studied the structures of Khans in Jordan. I was then accepted into the PhD program at Ghent University where my professor Dr. Johnny De Meulemeester encouraged me to expand my study of Jordan's Khans by examining their origins and evolution. To lay the foundation for this research I co-directed several seasons (2005–2007) of excavation at Khan/Qal'at al-Aqaba with Prof. Dr. Johnny De Meulemeester. This was followed by two additional seasons of excavation (2008–2009) which I directed myself.

Excavations have been conducted at Khan/Qal'at al-Aqaba between 2000–2009 by Belgo-British and Franco-Belgium teams (2000–2003) under the direction of the late De Meulemeester and Pringle from Cardiff University. The principal institutions involved were the Heritage Department of the Walloon government (Belgium), the School of History and Archaeology at Cardiff University collaborating with the Palestine Exploration Fund, the Department of Archaeology (Ghent University, Belgium), the Unité Mixte de Recherche 4856 of the CNRS (Lyon, France), and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The 2009 season was funded by the last two organizations in addition to Andrews University, USA, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone, and myself.

The finds from this project, which revealed a typical Khan from the Middle Islamic period, formed the core of my research. In addition to this project, I directed excavations of the Jalul Islamic Village near Madaba, Jordan, which also provides important data from the Islamic period that supported my work at Aqaba (material culture parallels, etc.). I have since co-authored several papers with Prof. De Meulemeester and published additional articles on my own on the work at both Aqaba and Jalul. Through this work and publications, I discovered important information about the layout and function of Khans in the Middle Islamic period which I have been able to incorporate into my research.

To simplify reading the text no diacritical marks have been used. For transliterating the letters *aleph* and *ayin*, the modifier half-ring symbols (◌[◌]) are used. Arabic, Persian, and Turkish terms are written in italics. Their meaning is explained either within a footnote or within the text, itself. In addition, a glossary is provided. All Arabic inscriptions in architectural elements, in coins, or a stamp are written in Arabic to show the exact wording—this is followed by the English translation.

The translations of all the Arabic texts, including events and descriptions mentioned by pilgrims and travelers concerning khans, monuments, inscriptions, and coin readings that are referenced throughout the book were made by the author.

The term, *Qalʿat* / *qalʿa* (pl. *qilaʿ*) used to refer to a fort, and the terms in written sources that refer to a khan or a fort-like structure such as *qalʿa*, *manzil*, fortress, fort, *caravanserai* and castle, are kept as they are found in those sources. This is mainly because in many cases, the same writer apparently will use more than one term in describing the same structure. Rather, than risk distorting their original intent of meaning, we will stay with their terms, but comment on them in this book.

CHAPTER ONE.

PRE-ISLAMIC KHANS OF JORDAN

INTRODUCTION

In my earlier research on the origins of the Islamic khans, I focused on the historical periods that immediately preceded the Islamic takeover of Jordan—the Byzantine and Roman periods. Even a casual observation of some of the morphological aspects of Byzantine and Roman forts showed that many architectural elements of the later Islamic khans found their inspiration, or were directly borrowed from, these earlier structures. However, at that time, I had not looked into the possible antecedents to the layout of Roman fortifications in Jordan.¹ My subsequent work at various sites like Jalul, Tall Madaba, Wadi Themid, survey and excavations of Bronze Age (3200–1200 BC) settlements at Libb, Kharn Alkabsh, Mragatt, Khirbat al-Mukhayyat and Ayn Jadida in Jordan, and other pre-Classical sites elsewhere has given me the opportunity to study Bronze and Iron Age (1200–539 BC) structures. There are some basic, common features of these earlier structures that seem to anticipate the layout of both, the later Roman/Byzantine forts, and Islamic khans.² These features include the square plan, open courtyard and rooms built up against the perimeter wall. Mordechai Gichon who has studied courtyard fortification patterns in southern Palestine has already suggested that this architectural type represents an unbroken tradition going back to the 10th century BC (Iron Age IIA 1000–925 BC).³ Zbigniew Fiema supports Gichon's conclusions and suggests that new elements from Byzantine and Roman architecture probably were combined with older traditional elements from Nabataean and Hellenistic designs in military architecture.⁴ Finally, there are the observations of David Kennedy and Robert Bewley who note that in Jordan, the Romans found and utilized forts that were already

¹ Reem Al Shqour, *From Roman Fortress to Islamic Khan in Jordan. An Archaeological Look at Structural Continuity in Defence Systems*.

² It has been recently recognized that the courtyard fortification pattern in southern Palestine that is common in Roman and Byzantine forts is evident in both Hellenistic and Nabataean military architecture.

³ Mordechai Gichon, 'The Courtyard Pattern Castellum on the Limes Palaestinae. Strategic and Tactical Features', in: *Akten des 14. Internationalen Limeskongresses in Carnuntum*, p. 206.

⁴ Zbigniew Fiema, 'Military Architecture and the Defence "System" of Roman-Byzantine Southern Jordan', in: *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, p. 265.

there; specifically they point out that there is growing evidence that the Romans took over existing Nabataean forts, and in some cases, forts originally built in the Iron Age such as Khirbet Fityan.⁵ Again, these forts were typically square, open courtyard and rooms built up against the main fortification wall.

My own review of both the archaeological remains in Jordan suggest that this basic square, courtyard fortification pattern may go back even into the Bronze Age. However, as noted above, an understanding of the khan requires more than just a description and analysis of the physical aspects of the structure. There are the functional aspects—that is, the ways in which these structures were used. Certainly, the general understanding is that khans provided protection, provisions, supplies and water for merchants and travelers. However, they may have on occasion served in other capacities—as posts for moving mail, tax collection centers, and information stations for collecting intelligence and disseminating information on behalf of the government, and garrisoning military troops. Indeed, the multi-functional aspect of these structures has been recognized by many scholars e.g. Gichon and Fiema.⁶ As I will demonstrate below, these various functions can be traced in ancient literary sources going back as early as the Neo-Sumerian period (ca. 21st to 20th century BC).

ANCIENT ENVIRONMENT AND PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY IN JORDAN

Any understanding of the emergence and evolution of the Islamic Khan in Jordan requires an awareness of the physical geography and environment of ancient Palestine of which Jordan is a part. Modern Jordan (officially known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) is technically the eastern part of ancient Palestine; it is located east of the Jordan River and hence is sometimes referred to as “Transjordan.” Jordan shares its northern border with Syria, its northeast border with Iraq, its eastern and southern borders with Saudi Arabia. The Gulf of Aqaba delineates Jordan’s southeast border. Western Palestine (that area west of the Jordan River), which includes the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza, is sometimes called “Cisjordan”. Ancient Palestine included at times (especially during Roman times) what some scholars today refer to as Cisjordan (Western Palestine) and Transjordan (Eastern Palestine).⁷ These regions were not typically seen as separate

⁵ Kennedy *et al.*, *Ancient Jordan from the Air*, p. 171.

⁶ Gichon, “The Courtyard Pattern Castellum on the Limes Palaestinae. Strategic and Tactical Features,” pp. 205–06; Fiema, “Military Architecture and the Defence “System” of Roman-Byzantine Southern Jordan,” p. 264.

⁷ For use of these terms see Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (new and revised). Cis-Jordan (Arabic: الضفة الغربية, *al-Diffa al-Garbrya*) refers to the region west of the modern Jordan River, while Transjordan refers to the region east of the river. Today’s Jordan was originally part of an Ottoman territory that was incorporated into the British Mandate of Palestine in 1921 (formalized in 1922). When the latter region was officially established as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1942, it became more common to call Transjordan simply Jordan. Such a designation also recognizes and affirms modern Jordan’s emergent self-identity and independence within the Syro-Palestinian world. For discussions on these as-

in antiquity; indeed, they were often joined with what is now Syria—hence scholars sometimes refer to Syria, Cisjordan and Transjordan as “Syro-Palestine.” For the purposes of this study, we will refer to Cis- and Transjordan together as “Palestine” or “Ancient Palestine” and to Transjordan or Eastern Palestine, simply as “Jordan.”

Ancient Palestine occupies a unique and important geographic position. With the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the desert to the east, Palestine provides a natural land bridge connecting Syria and Mesopotamia in the north with Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the south.

There were actual five important roads in antiquity that traversed Palestine along its north-south axis:⁸ (1) the coastal road along the Mediterranean; (2) the central highland road of Cis-Jordan; (3) the Jordan Valley road that ran along the Jordan River and Dead Sea and through the Wadi ‘Arabah to Aqaba;⁹ (4) the Transjordan highland route, known popularly as the King’s Highway; (5) and the Desert Highway (Fig. 1). Of these five routes, the Desert Highway was especially popular, during the Islamic periods. This was because it was a shorter and more direct route from most destinations in Syria and Mesopotamia to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and it was an easier route to traverse. Its ease of travel was because it was located on relatively flat terrain immediately east of Jordan’s hilly central ridge and west of the desert. Its proximity to the central ridge also meant that there was relatively good access to water, since there were several springs along the edge of the hills, and the route is still far enough west to catch some of the occasional precipitation that falls east of the Jordan Valley rain shadow.¹⁰

pects of Jordan’s modern history. See Maan Abu Nowar, *The History of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*; Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Jordan*.

⁸ For a description of ancient roads in Jordan during the Byzantine and Roman periods in Jordan see Heini Yunila, *To Petra via Jabal Haroun: Nabatean-Roman Road Remains in the Finnish Jabal Haroun Project Survey Area*; David A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, which describes the Jordan Valley Road and the trunk roads that cross over into Jordan.

⁹ *Wadi* (Arabic: وادي *wadi*) is the Arabic term in general referring to a valley. For a discussion of Palestine’s ancient roads see Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquest (536 BC-640 AD): A Historical Geography*, Grand Rapids; Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*.

¹⁰ For a discussion of ancient rainfall patterns in Palestine see David A. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age*; Raouf Abu Jaber, provides a discussion of rainfall patterns in central Jordan, Abu Jaber, *Pioneers Over Jordan: The Frontier of Settlement in Transjordan, 1850–1914*.

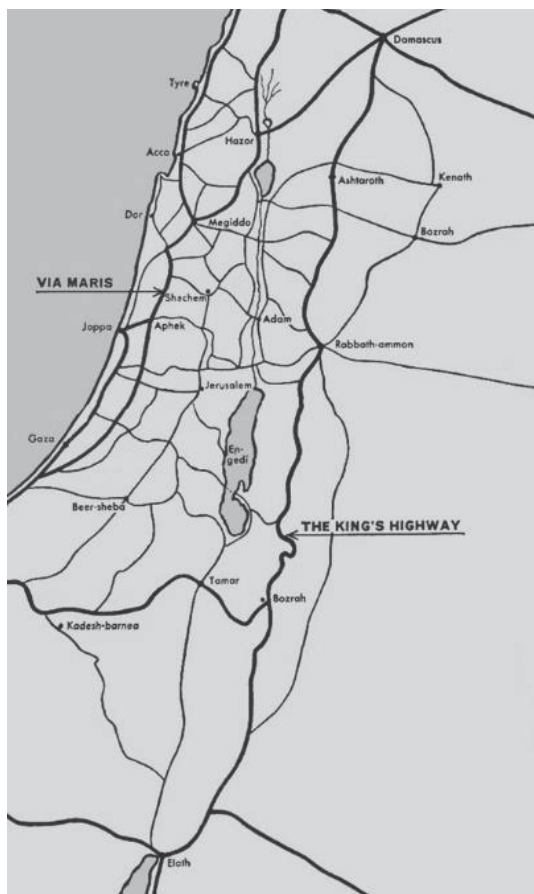


Fig. 1: Palestine road map: roads in antiquity

The lack of significant and sustainable rainfall east of the Desert Highway meant that the highway served as the eastern most boundary of significant sedentary occupation in Jordan.¹¹ It also defined the limits of effective control for the various kingdoms and empires that ruled over Jordan through the ages. While there were no major settlements and few water sources east of the highway, it was not uninhabited. Indeed, there were numerous nomadic tribes that occupied the Arabian Peninsula. However, the tribal peoples were naturally attracted to the resources produced by the well-watered lands of the Fertile Crescent, and had long been moving towards this western region. Some of the nomads occupied the fringes of the settled areas and eventually became absorbed into the sedentary population, a process that was

¹¹ For a discussion of Jordan's ancient climate see Randall Younker, *Ancient Climate in Madaba Plains Project: The 1984 Season at Tell El-Umeiri and Vicinity and Subsequent Studies*, in: *Madaba Plains Project Series*.

regularly repeated through time.¹² However, there were always some tribes that remained outside the control and/or influence of the settled sphere and would mount raiding expeditions against the settled areas, leading the local authorities to provide security for their people.¹³ This security included the establishment of fortifications along the eastern frontier of Jordan.¹⁴

REFERENCES TO KHAN/CARAVANSERAI IN ANCIENT SOURCES

While the focus of this research will be on the emergence and development of the Islamic Khan, it must be admitted that the idea of the fortified khan is an old one that can be traced back to the earliest times in the Near East. Undoubtedly, some of the concepts that were embedded in these earliest institutions and structures were continued down through the millennia and eventually made their way into the construction of the Islamic khan.

Neo-Sumerian Period

The idea of a khan or caravanserai can probably be traced back to the roadside *inns*, way stations, or forts of the Neo-Sumerian period (ca. 21st to 20th century BC) in Mesopotamia.¹⁵ During this time, *inns* and way stations were spaced at regular intervals to accommodate travelers as they moved throughout Mesopotamia. A document from the time of Shulgi, king of Ur (2095 BC–2047 BC),¹⁶ describes the construction of one of these stations,

I ... built there [along the highways] “big houses,”
Planted gardens alongside of them, established resting-places,
Settled there friendly folk,
(So that) who comes from below, who comes from above,

¹² Thomas Parker, *Romans and Saracens: a history of the Arabian frontier*, p. 115.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁴ The definition of a “nomad” that we use in this book is defined as “a member of a people that travels from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and has no permanent home,” while “tribe” is defined as “a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect, typically having a recognized leader.” The Nomadic Arab peoples have historically inhabited the desert regions in Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and the North Africa. Many of the Bedouin tribes of present times were not settled until the 1970’s. Tribal entities in Jordan were territorial and fiercely protected their territories. For self-preservation and for improving the economic situation of their tribe, tribal leaders entered into a number of relationships—defense alliances, economic alliances, etc. See Angus Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd edn, pp. 1205, 1897; Walter Dostal, *Die Beduinen in Südarabien*; Ghazi bin Muhammad, *The tribes of Jordan at the beginning of the twenty-first century*.

¹⁵ Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, pp. 43–44.

¹⁶ For the dates for Shulgi see Joan Oates, *Babylon*, p. 43; E. Porada *et al.*, *The chronology of Mesopotamia in: Chronologies in Old World Archaeology*, p. 117.

Might refresh themselves in its cool (shade)
 The wayfarer who travels the highway at night,
 Might find refuge there like in a well-built city.¹⁷

Beyond this text, points out that there were other ancient documents with Sumerian words that evoke the idea of an inn or tavern—*es-dam*, *astammu*, *bit sabitim*. However, these terms seem to refer to *inns*, taverns or ale houses that were located inside a city where drink and prostitutes could be obtained, and not to accommodations stationed out along the highways.

There is another term—*bit marditi*, literally, “house of the course,”¹⁸ seems to fit the nature of a khan. However, since this term dates later to the Neo-Assyrian period, its discussion will be deferred to the Assyrian period, below.

Neo-Assyrian Period (911 and 609 BC)

The Hebrew Bible also contains a few references to way stations or caravanserais in Palestine during the Iron Age. The Hebrew word, *malon*, occurring eight times in the Hebrew Bible, is translated “lodging place, inn, khan” by Francis Brown, C. Driver, S. Briggs.¹⁹ Of these eight occurrences, three (Joshua 4: 3, 8; Isaiah 10: 29) appear to refer simply to “lodging-place.” However, in Genesis 42: 27; 43: 31; Exodus 4: 24; and 2 Kings 19: 23, the term’s context suggests reference to a caravanserai or khan. This seems especially likely in the latter passage, where the Assyrian king, boasting of the remote places to which he has marched, states concerning Lebanon, “I have entered its farthest way station;” the text, however, is not certain here. More certain is Jeremiah’s wish (Jer 9: 1): “O that I had in the wilderness a travelers’ way station that I might leave my people, and go away from them.”

One final allusion to an inn in the Hebrew Bible is in Proverbs (8: 2–3), where Wisdom call out her invitation:

“On the height alongside the road, at the inn [literally, house, (bet) of the roads] she stands. Next to the gates at the entrance of the city, at the entrance of the portals, she calls out.”

As David A. Dorsey points out, *bet* here is usually understood to mean “between” but from the analogy of Akkadian *bit marditi*, literally, “house of the course/stage,” it is possible that the term in Proverbs designates some type of inn, which would be a fitting place for Wisdom, in competition with the loose woman and the prostitute, to make her appeal to men.²⁰ The evidence, however, is not certain, and any conclusion must be tentative. It is quite possible that a few *inns* and caravanserais did exist

¹⁷ This translation is by Samuel Noah Kramer. See James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 585.

¹⁸ The term *marditi* means a course or way, but not “road,” contra CAD M, II: 278. See Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, p. 44.

¹⁹ Francis Brown *et al.*, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 533.

²⁰ See Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*.

in Palestine during the Iron Age, the latter perhaps mainly in the wilderness and less populated regions; Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, for example, may have served as such a way station. These probably were not prevalent in the heartland of Palestine since they were so rarely mentioned (Fig. 2). Travellers in the Biblical period generally found accommodations with friend or kin along the way or else depended on the sometimes dubious hospitality of local town’s people. It is a well-established pattern in the ancient Near East that a nation strengthened its borders by establishing forts along the approach roads leading into its territory. This was true, for example in Egypt, Assyria, Ammon, and later Roman Palestine (see below), with the well-known *limes*.

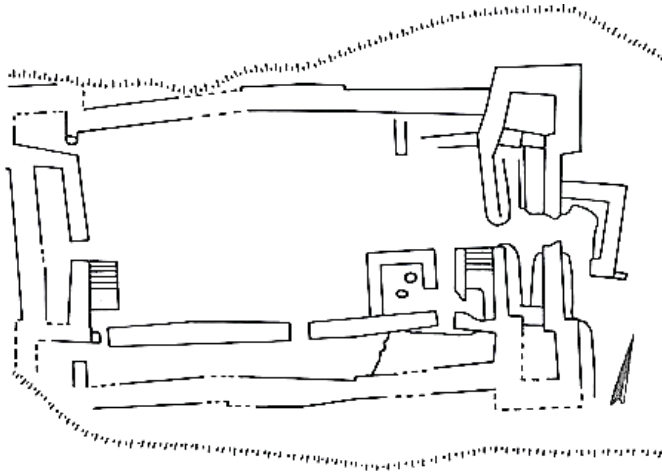
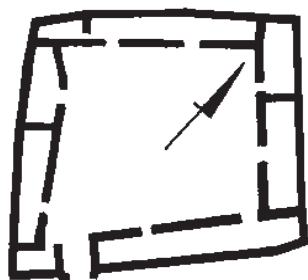


Fig. 2: Kuntillet ‘Ajrud plan. After Meshel 1978: 52

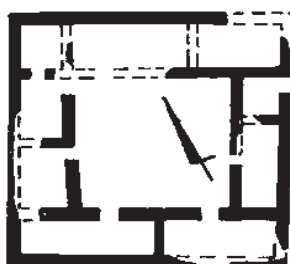
The same is attested for Iron Age Palestine. The Egyptian pharaoh Shishak²¹ encountered a line of forts when he invaded Palestine’s Negev, and according to 2 Chronicles 11: 5–12 King Rehoboam built a network of fortified towns which guarded the southern and western approaches to Jerusalem. King Uzziah “built towers in the wilderness” (2 Chron 26: 10), perhaps a reference to the construction of the forts that have been found in the Negev and the wilderness to the south, dating from the 8th century BC. Har Raviv and Mesora would be examples of such forts (Fig. 3). Ain el-Qudeirat (Kadesh Barnea) in the Wadi el-Ain of the northern Sinai, also gives us a sample from the Iron Age of a square fort with a casemate wall that has rooms surrounding an inner courtyard and with eight projecting towers—

²¹ For Shishak’s invasion of Judah see 1 Kings 14: 25; 2 Chronicles 12: 1–1. Shishak is usually identified with the Egyptian Pharaoh Sheshonk (943–922 BC).

the fortified open courtyard pattern discussed by Gichon.²² The plan is similar to that of Arad. Inside this fort there were traces of a large public building, which probably served as a storehouse; there were also dwelling units, which could have been used by state officials and merchants in transit.²³



Har Raviv fortress



Mesora fortress

Fig. 3: Har Raviv & Mesora fortresses. After Meshel 1992: 298

These forts, as well as others, such as Ain el-Qudeirat (Kadesh Barnea),²⁴ variously date from the 10th to 6th centuries BC and guarded key Negev routes and approach roads to Judah, particularly at the main junctions (Fig. 4). In addition to fortifying Judah against military incursions, these Negev fortresses²⁵ also would have estab-

²² See 'The Courtyard Pattern Castellum on the Limes Palaestinae – Strategical and Tactical Features, in: *Akten des 14. Internationalen Limeskongresses in Carnuntum*.

²³ Zeev Meshel, 'The Architecture of the Israelite Fortresses in the Negev', *The Architecture of Ancient Israel From Prehistoric to the Persian Periods*, pp. 294–301.

²⁴ Rudolf Cohen, 'Kadesh-Barnea', in: *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 3, pp. 841–847.

²⁵ The Negev "fortresses" are a group of about sixty enclosed compounds that have been discovered in the Negev highlands during the last few decades. The "fortress" phenomenon comprises some sixty sites in the Negev highlands, stretching from Dimona in the northeast to Kadesh Barnea in the southwest. Each compound consists of a perimeter construction of casemate rooms that enclose an open yard. This seems to be the primary common characteristic of the compounds. Most "fortresses" are oval, and only a few are rectan-

lished Judean control over the entire region of the Negev, an area plagued by nomadic unrest and attacks, and would have provided safety for the caravans and traders that passed along these routes. While evidence for such forts in Jordan is currently lacking for Iron Age I 1200–1000 BC (few sites from these periods have been excavated so far), it would not be surprising that similar sites existed in Jordan.

During the Neo-Assyrian period, the key term that might refer to a way station, county inn or caravanserai is *bit marditi*, literally, house of = the course (highway). The term *marditu* means a course, a way (not road), a stage, or a distance between stopping places; *bit marditi*, therefore, might designate a house or establishment located along a route.

The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary defines *bit marditi* as “road station.” The word has thus far been found only in Neo-Assyrian literature.

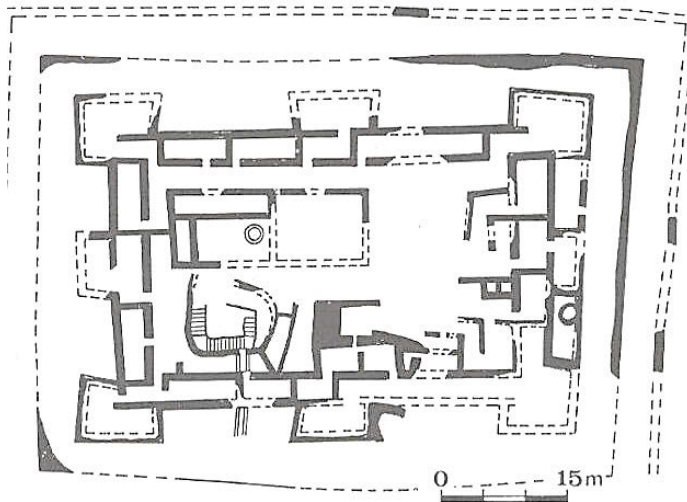


Fig. 4: Kadesh Barnea plan. After Meshel 1992: 298

The most informative reference to a *bit marditi* occurs in a letter (Known as ABL 414)²⁶ to the Assyrian king from Bel-liqbi, an official who lived in the city of Sub/pite (possibly biblical Zobah, an Aramaic city in southern Syria). He writes,

gular. The shape of most of the forts seems to be dictated by the local topography. However, the rectangular and square forts seem to reflect older traditions as pointed out in this study. For more discussion on the Negev forts see Avraham Faust, “Fortresses” in Context: Reexamining the “Fortress” Phenomenon in Light of General Settlement Processes of the Eleventh-Tenth Centuries, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*.

²⁶ This letter is part of the Nimrud letters found at Calah. They were originally published by Henry W. F. Saggs in 1952. See Saggs, *The Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud V: The Nim-*

“To the king, my Lord, your servant Bel-liqbi. May it be well with the king my lord. The city of Hesa is (only) a road station (*bit marditi*). No *nis biti* personnel are stationed there and post station and escort officers are not on watch there. Now, I would like to have 30 houses built there. There was no engineer there during the days of *Nabu salla* the *saknu*. They should bring out every soldier living in Hesa. Settle them in the city of Argite and give them houses and gardens. Neither a commander of messengers nor a commander of riding troops ... keeps watch there.”

Hesa or *He-e-sa* has been identified with the modern village of Hasiyyeh (Hisyah) which is located about 40 km south of Homs at the Damascus-Homs/Qaryatein-Qussier crossroads.²⁷ Significantly, the ruins of a Mamluk khan are still located at this junction, showing the continuing importance of this location on ancient highways. Another Assyrian letter says that officials of a series of road stations were transferring the letters of an individual from station to station (sort of like the America Pony Express).²⁸

This document, along with others found in the Nimrud corpus, illustrate how the Assyrians controlled routes through southern Syria with a network of sentry stations, check-posts (*massarati*) at strategic points, fortresses (*birati*) and caravanserai to supplement government and administrative centers in the regional cities. More specifically, these documents suggest that the *bit marditi* was a government operated or supervised caravanserai or way station with at least three responsibilities: (1) to provide safe lodging for travellers; (2) to carry (official) correspondence (mail); (3) and to create an institution of government stations, strategically placed throughout the kingdom, that were loyal to the Assyrian king. In this sense, the Assyrian *bit marditi* were similar to the road stations established by Shulgi during the earlier Neo-Sumerian period (21st–20th centuries BC).

Since Jordan came under the control of the Assyrian empire towards the end of the 8th century BC,²⁹ it would be expected that the Assyrian *bit marditi* system extended into Jordan as well. Khilda Fortress A (west Amman), Lahun on the Wadi Mujib, as well as at Tell es-Sa‘idiyeh (Jordan Valley), Tell el-Kheleifeh (Aqaba), and Buserich (southeast of the Dead Sea) might be examples of such sites from this pe-

rud Letters. For a discussion of this letter see Eph’al Israel, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 19th to 5 centuries BC*, p. 97. Israel concludes that ABL 414 (also known as Rm. 77 because it was originally sent to the British Museum by Hormuzd Rassam, who was one of the directors of the excavations at Nimrud) came from Calah (Nimrud) and dates to the last third of the 8th century BC.

²⁷ Israel, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 19th to 5 centuries BC*, p. 97.

²⁸ Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, p. 43.

²⁹ Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible (Vol. II): The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods*, p. 237.

riod. We will explore the possibility of physical remains of Assyrian khans, (see below).

Roadside way stations were certainly well established in the Persian Period (539–331 BC)³⁰ where they were well-known to function as posts for the royal mail system. The Greek historian Xenophon (ca. 430–354 BC) attributes the invention of a postal system using khans to the Persian King Cyrus the Great (550 BC),³¹ while other writers credit his successor Darius I of Persia (521 BC). As we have seen above, however, other sources point to much earlier dates into the Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods, with credit given to Hammurabi (1700 BC) and Sargon II (722 BC). Mail may not have been the primary mission of this postal service, however. The role of the system as an intelligence gathering apparatus is well documented, and the service was (later) called *angariae*, a term that in time turned to indicate a tax system. The Hebrew Bible (Esther, Chapter 8) makes mention of this system: Ahasuerus, king of Medes, used couriers for communicating his decisions throughout the empire.

The Persian system was organized with stations along the main roads; the stations were called *Chapar-Khaneh*—literally the khan of the horse rider. The horse riding message carrier (*Chapar*) would ride from one khan or station to the next, whereupon he would change his horse with a new one, for maximum performance and delivery speed. Herodotus describes the system in this way: “It is said that as many days as there are in the whole journey, so many are the men and horses that stand along the road, each horse and man at the interval of a day’s journey; and these are stayed neither by snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness from accomplishing their appointed course with all speed.”³² The *Chaper-khaneh* continued in use in Iran into the 19th century where they functioned as small caravansary.³³ It is significant that the use of khans for postal and tax systems continued to be practiced even in the Islamic periods (see discussion below).

³⁰ Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, conquered Babylon in 539 BC, thus putting an end to the Neo-Babylonian period, turning it into a colony of Achaemenid Persia. Moreover, he extended his conquest to the Mediterranean, taking possession of the Levant, including the Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom, Palestine and Egypt. The Persian period lasted approximately 200 years until the death of Darius III in 330 BC, following his defeat by Alexander the Great. For more details, see Stern Ephraim, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period*.

³¹ The Greek historian Xenophon, who wrote a biography of Cyrus in the early 4th century BC called the *Cyropedia*, believed that Cyrus invented and instituted the first postal system, many historians are divided on whether or not *Cyrus* really did institute the first postal system, or if it was *Darius*. The *Cyropaedia*, it should be noted, is considered a “partly fictional biography.” The Latinized title *Cyropedia* derives from Greek *Kírou paideía* (Κύρου παιδεία), meaning “The Education of Cyrus.” See Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, 8.6.17–18.

³² Herodotus, *Herodotus*, 8. 98.

³³ Edwin Lord Weeks, *From the Black Sea through Persian and India*, p.98.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR PRE-ROMAN CARAVANSERAI

The literary references described above show that caravanserais, way stations, and roadside *inns* were a part of the Near Eastern landscape from the end of the Bronze Age, throughout the Iron Age (1200–539 BC) and to the end of the Persian period (539–331 BC). During these periods, the various Mesopotamian and Persian empires were especially single minded in creating and maintaining such stations to facilitate trade, governmental control, and the passage of information throughout their domains. Since Jordan was either directly under the control of these empires or part of their extended trading network, it would be expected that the caravanserai system extended through this region. As we shall see, structures of the “courtyard fortification pattern”³⁴ appear throughout Jordan (and southern Palestine) from at least the Middle Bronze Age down through the Persian, Hellenistic and Nabataean periods.

Possible Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BC). /Iron Age I (1200–1000 BC) Caravanseraï

Current archaeological evidence suggests that there were not many cities or villages in Jordan during the Late Bronze Age. An earlier generation of scholarship thought that the land was virtually devoid of people.³⁵ More recent analysis, however, has argued that this position is inaccurate. While no one will argue that the population was dense during late Bronze Age Jordan, the land was populated. However, it appears that a significant amount of the population consisted of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribal peoples. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of sedentary activity.³⁶

More important is the possible evidence of trade that ran through Jordan. Indeed, long distance trade is well attested between Mesopotamia, Syria and Hatti.³⁷ It would seem possible, if not probable, that trade routes ran through Jordan to connect these trade centers. There is indeed evidence of “international” routes that ran through Jordan at this very time. Egyptian itineraries describe such routes.³⁸ Of interest, is the fact that these itineraries describe specific places (toponyms), but there is little evidence of settlement along the route. The nature and precise location of these waypoints on the itineraries has been subjected to debate. Were they geo-

³⁴ Gichon, “The Courtyard Pattern Castellum on the Limes Palaestinae. Strategic and Tactical Features,” p. 206.

³⁵ Steven E. Falconer et al., Life at the Foundation of Bronze Age Civilization: Agrarian Villages in the Jordan Valley, in: *Crossing Jordan: North American Contributions to the Archaeology of Jordan*, pp. 261–268.

³⁶ See Younker, The Emergence of Ammon: A View of the Rise of Iron Age Politics from the other Side of the Jordan, in: *The Near East in the Southwest*, pp. 167–68.

³⁷ See Klaas R. Veenhof, Modern Features in Old Assyrian Trade, in: *Journal of Economic and Social History Orient*, 40, pp. 336–366.

³⁸ See Donald Redford, A Bronze Age Itinerary in Transjordan, in: *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*; Kenneth Kitchen, The Egyptian Evidence in Ancient Jordan, in: *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan*, pp. 23–28.

graphical features (mountains, valleys, water sources) that would be obvious and important to travellers? Or were they small settlements of some sort? Probably they were a mixture of various types of waypoints. But the question can also be asked—did these itineraries follow ancient trade routes, and were some of the waypoints, caravanserais that would permit rest, news and restocking of provisions?

Some of the waypoints have been identified with well-known towns from later periods, such as Kerak and Dhiban.³⁹ However, archaeological exploration of these sites has failed to find any evidence of substantial towns during the Late Bronze Age.⁴⁰ However, in the possible absence of a large settlement, the question can still be asked if these sites might have been occupied by more modestly sized caravanserais? So far, archaeological excavations have provided only a hint of Late Bronze activity, but it is not totally absent. One of the sites on the list is “bitari” which a couple of scholars have identified with Jalul (5 km west of Madaba).⁴¹ Ongoing excavations there have not yet found Late Bronze age structures, but there is solid evidence of Late Bronze activity through the ceramics. There is also evidence that copious underground springs were located at Jalul, making it a desirable waypoint on any north-south route through Jordan.⁴²

Beyond the sites identified in the Egyptian itineraries, there are other archaeological sites that are dated to the latter part of the Late Bronze Age in Jordan. Besides the presence of a few small cities or towns, there are a number of enigmatic, isolated structures scattered across the landscape. The precise function of these structures and the identity of the builders have been heavily debated and the solution remains elusive. The structures, themselves, are solidly built of roughly hewn “megalithic” limestone blocks. They are square or rectangular in shape with a central courtyard that is surrounded on each side by small chambers or rooms. They are sometimes described as the middle courtyard building or *Quadratban* and are thought to derive from Assyria, although they are found in Palestine as early (3200–2100 BC) as the Middle Bronze Age (1900–1550 BC) at Megiddo.⁴³ They vary in size from 15 by 15 m. to over 20 m. per side. Examples of such Late Bronze Age structures would be those in the Bekah Valley (Rujm al-Henu East and West,⁴⁴ the Amman

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kitchen, Kitchen, “The Egyptian Evidence in Ancient Jordan,” p. 28.

⁴¹ See Redford, “A Bronze Age Itinerary in Transjordan,” Ernst Axel Knauf, Abel Keramim, in: *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*.

⁴² See C. E. Gane *et al.*, Madaba Plains Project: Tall Jalul 2009, in: *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 48, pp. 210–211.

⁴³ Khair Yassine, *Domestic Architecture in the Second Millennium in Palestine*; Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ Patrick McGovern, Test Soundings of Archaeological and Resistivity Survey Results at Rujm al-Henu, in: *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*; McGovern, *The Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Ages of Central Transjordan: The Baq’ah Valley Project, 1977–1981*, pp. 11–13.

Airport Structure⁴⁵ and Mabrak east of Amman (Fig. 5).⁴⁶ These open courtyard buildings are in the same tradition as the courtyard fortified pattern that Gichon and Fiema have noted in military structures from the Iron Age down through the Byzantine period.⁴⁷ As I will show below, this tradition will be carried on in the Islamic khan.

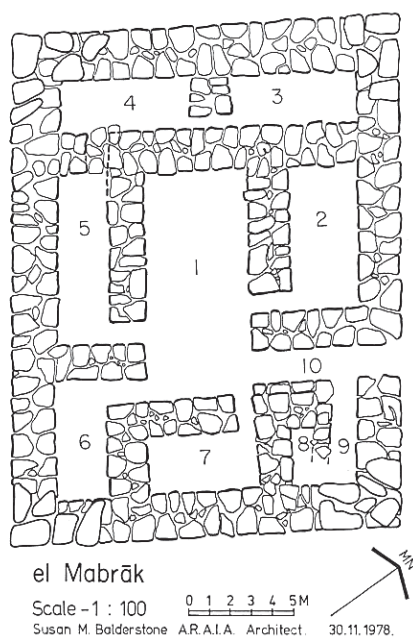


Fig. 5: Mabrak plan. After Yassine 1988: 62

Iron Age II (1000–539 BC) (Assyrian Caravanserai)

Physical evidence of a flourishing trade through Jordan (and hence trade routes and caravanserai) is seen in the material culture prosperity in the Jordanian kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom. The Neo-Assyrian period (911 and 609 BC) in Jordan was a time of prosperity.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, there were local tensions between the various people groups and the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites, even under Assyrian sovereignty, main-

⁴⁵ See Larry Herr, *The Amman Airport Structure and the Geopolitics of Ancient Transjordan*, in: *The Biblical Archaeologist*.

⁴⁶ Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ See Gichon, "The Courtyard Pattern Castellum on the Limes Palaestinae. Strategic and Tactical Features;" and Fiema, "Military Architecture and the Defence "System" of Roman-Byzantine Southern Jordan."

⁴⁸ Younker, *The Ammonites*, in: *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, pp. 312–313.

tained a variety of fortified complexes both along the borders and throughout the interior of their kingdoms. While these structures have been viewed primarily as either fortified farmsteads or military watchtowers, the idea that some may have functioned as wayside stations for caravans cannot be precluded.

There is a small amount of archaeological evidence for a trade route running through Jordan that connected South Arabia with Syria and Mesopotamia (Assyria). Specifically, in 1938 Nelson Glueck found a possible South Arabian monogram inscribed on the shoulder of a jar at Tell el-Kheleifeh, just north of the Gulf of Aqaba.⁴⁹

The jar was from Stratum IV and dates to the 6th century BC (Fig. 6).⁵⁰ The presence of similar South Arabian inscriptions at other sites in Palestine⁵¹ point to cultural and trade relations between Jordan and other parts of the ancient Near East (including Mesopotamia and other South Arabian regions).

Beyond the evidence for material prosperity, there are actual Iron Age structures that might be considered as caravanserais. To be sure, archaeologists who have excavated these structures have not identified them as khans. However, I would suggest that this identification be suggested for at least some of the structures that have been reported as dispersed across the landscape of Assyrian dominated Jordan.

⁴⁹ Nelson Glueck, The First Campaign at Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion Geber), in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 65, p. 16; Glueck, Some Edomite Pottery from Tell el-Kheleifeh, Parts I and II, in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 188: pp. 23–24; Glueck, Tell el-Kheleifeh Inscriptions, in: *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, pp. 236–37; Robert A. Divito, The Tell el-Kheleifeh Inscriptions, *Nelson Glueck's 1938–1940 Excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh: A Reappraisal*, p. 62.

⁵⁰ According to Divito (p. 62), there has been some debate on this inscription. Glueck argued that the characters were a South Semitic Script. Ryckmans argues that the two characters are composite Minaean signs or monograms and refer to the jar's maker. G. Ryckmans, Un fragment de jarre avec caractères minéens à Tell el-Kheleifeh, in: *Revue Biblique* 48, pp. 247–49, pl. 6; P. Boneschi argues that the letters refer to the contents of the jar. Boneschi, Les Monogrammes Sud-Arabes de la grande jarre de Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion Geber), *Rivista degli studi orientali* 36: pp. 213–23; Albright William argued that the characters were not Minaean but rather proto-Dedanite. Albright, The Chaldaean Inscriptions in Proto-Arabic Script, in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 128: pp. 43–44.

⁵¹ South Arabian inscriptions have been found at Bethel and Jerusalem as well as in Mesopotamia at sites such as Ur and Uruk. See Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, pp. 297–299; Eric Burrows, A New Kind of Old Writing from Ur, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*; Albright, "The Chaldaean Inscriptions in Proto-Arabic Script," Terence Mitchell, A South Arabian Tripod Offering Saucer Said to be from Ur, in: *Iraq*.



Fig. 6: Tell el-Khelcifeh ostrakon. After Pratico 1993: 219

Khilda is an Iron Age II (7th century BC) settlement located west of Amman.⁵² The most significant structure of the settlement is known as Khilda Fortress (Fig. 7). It is located on a rocky hill overlooking the main settlement. The rectangular structure measures 45 by 35 meters. Rooms or cells are built up against the enclosure wall on all four sides. The center of the structure is vacant, creating an open central courtyard. A single gate opens into the compound from the west side. Entrance rooms on either side of the gate seemed to have served as the lower part of a tower, inferred by the relative large size of the stones and the thickness of the walls, compared to the other inner room walls. A well was cut into the bedrock outside the southwest corner of the fortress.

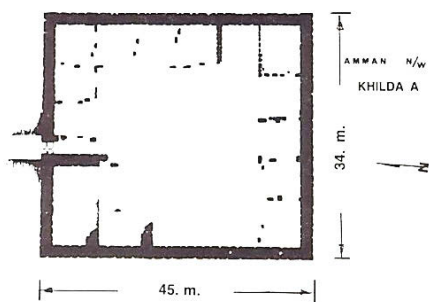


Fig. 7: Khilda fortress plan. After Yassine 1988: 15

The plan of the structure is similar to one found at Lehun on the Wadi Mujib, as well as at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh in the Jordan Valley, although the latter is smaller (Fig.

⁵² See Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports*.

8).⁵³ Khair Yassine notes that this type of middle courtyard building is common throughout the ancient Near East and is known from various periods.⁵⁴ This is essentially the fortified courtyard pattern of the ancient courtyard building of the Iron Age.⁵⁵ The building at es-Sa'idiyeh actually dates to the Persian period.

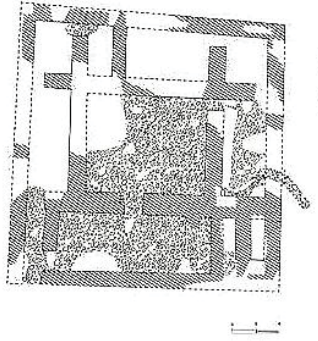


Fig. 8: Fortified building at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. After Stern 1982: 54

Yassine has suggested that Khilda Fortress A served as a seat for a military garrison and its commanders—probably for local Ammonites.⁵⁶ Such an interpretation would not preclude this structure serving also as a caravanserai whether under direct Assyrian control or local Ammonite authority. The agricultural activities etc., in the immediate vicinity are perfectly in harmony with Assyrian descriptions of what goes on at and/or near such an institution (see above). The Khilda structure oversees major north south routes in western Amman as well as a road that heads down towards the Jordan Valley to the west, so it could well have served as a khan or way-side inn.

Late Iron II/Persian (539–331 BC)

Turning to Jordan in the Iron Age/Persian, an interesting candidate for a caravanserai is the ancient site known as Tell el-Kheleifeh at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba.⁵⁷ Tell el-Kheleifeh was identified with Biblical Ezion-Geber by the German

⁵³ James Pritchard, The Palace of Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, in: *Expedition X*, pp. 20–22.

⁵⁴ See Yassine, *Domestic Architecture in the Second Millennium in Palestine*; Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports*, p. 18. For a discussion of similarly planned buildings in western Palestine during the Assyrian period (Iron Age II). See Ronny Reich, Palaces and Residences in the Iron Age, in: *The Architecture of Ancient Israel*, p. 214.

⁵⁵ Gichon, “The Courtyard Pattern Castellum on the Limes Palaestinae. Strategic and Tactical Features,” p. 260.

⁵⁶ Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports*, p. 18.

⁵⁷ The small low mound is located approximately in the center of the north shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, midway between Jordanian Aqaba at its east end and Israeli Eilat at its

explorer Fritz Frank in 1933 and later excavated by Nelson Glueck who thought he had confirmed the identification.⁵⁸ However, later re-evaluation dates the ruins of el-Kheleifeh to a period between the 8th and 6th centuries BC (too late for Solomon) with occupation continuing possibly into the 4th century BC (Persian Period).⁵⁹ What is interesting about el-Kheleifeh is that it is a small, isolated, but well-fortified site on the terminus of the main route that ran down the Wadi ‘Arabah. Moreover, its square structure seems to anticipate the later Islamic khans.

Two architectural phases dating to the Iron Age II were discerned by Gary Pratico: a casemate⁶⁰ fortress and fortified settlement (Fig. 9). The casemate fortress was the earlier phase. It consisted of two elements: a square of casemate rooms, which created a fortress about 45 m on each side, and a large building that was constructed in the middle of the otherwise open courtyard. This mud brick building, measuring 12.3 m wide on the north side and 13.2 m on the south side was constructed on the four-room house plan—a plan that is common in the Iron Age. This courtyard building is usually interpreted as a fortified stronghold or keep in the center of the fortress.⁶¹

The second phase has been described as a “fortified settlement.” The second compound was also square but much larger than the first. The square compound was enclosed on all four sides by a solid inset/offset wall. The walls measured 56 m (north) by 59 m (east) by 59 m (south) by 63 m (west). There are no protruding towers, although it is not impossible that the roof of the corner rooms functioned as corner towers. A four-chambered gateway on the south side permitted access into the compound.⁶²

west end. It is about 500 meters from the actual shoreline today and may have been some 300 meters or more several millennia ago.

⁵⁸ See Frank Fritz, *Aus der ‘Araba I: Reiseberichte*, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palestina-Vereins*, p. 244; Glueck, “The First Campaign at Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion Geber), pp. 8–29;” Glueck, *The Topography and History of Ezion Geber and Eliat*, in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 72, pp. 2–13.

⁵⁹ Pratico, *Nelson Glueck’s 1938–1940 Excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh: A Reappraisal*, in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 259; Pratico, “Tell el-Kheleifeh,” in: *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*.

⁶⁰ A casemate wall is a wall with chambers in it—they are similar in appearance and function as the cells in later khans that were built against the exterior wall that enclosed the courtyard.

⁶¹ Pratico, “Nelson Glueck’s 1938–1940 Excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh: A Reappraisal.” PP. 1–32.

⁶² *Ibid.*

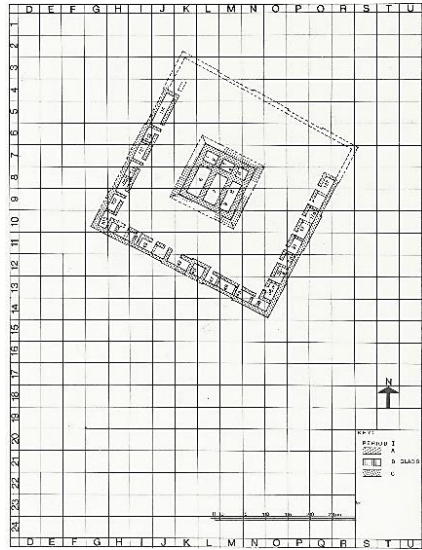


Fig. 9: El-Kheleifeh Iron Age II plan. After Yassine 1994: 158

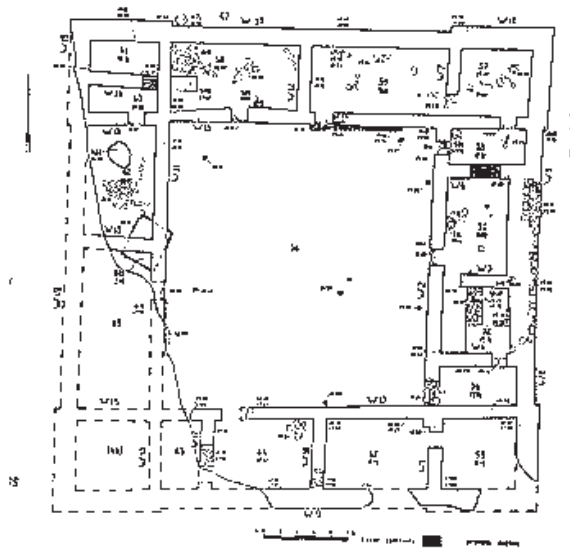


Fig. 10: Ashdod fort plan. After Stern 1982: 54

There can be no doubt that Kheleifeh played a role in the mining industry. However, its location, structure and evidence of trade led the excavators to argue that it

must have also served as a granary and “a strongly fortified caravanserai.”⁶³ Evidence for some trade is found in ostraca that make mention of trading commodities.

Tell el-Kheliefeh, is not the only possible Persian period fort that served as a caravanserai or khan. Smaller structures of a similar plan—an open courtyard with room built against the inside of the perimeter wall of a square structure—such as that found at Tell es-Saidiyeh in the Jordan Valley and, perhaps, Ashdod, are located on important travel routes and could easily have served a similar function (Fig. 10).

FORTS ALONG THE NABATAEAN-ROMAN-BYZANTINE CARAVAN/PILGRIM ROUTES

Rise of the Nabataeans and their Caravan Routes

As can be seen from the discussions above, interactions and conflicts between the settled and the nomad were common in both Jordan and the broader region throughout antiquity (above);⁶⁴ the first large scale attempt at protecting this frontier region probably dates to the time of the Nabataean Kingdom. Originally, a nomadic tribal people themselves, the Nabataeans initially migrated into southern Jordan sometime around the 4th century BC.⁶⁵ Over the next three centuries the Nabataeans sedentarized, established and expanded their kingdom until it included most of Transjordan, the Negev, the Sinai, the southern Hauran, the Hisma, and the north-

⁶³ Pratico, “Tell el-Kheleifeh,” p. 31.

⁶⁴ Such conflict can be traced back to at least the time of Assyrian and Babylonian domination of Jordan in the 8th to 5th centuries BC. For later periods, Parker notes that conflicts with the neighboring nomadic tribes were occasional and in general there may have been peaceful relations. Parker, *The Roman frontier in Jordan: An overview*, in: *Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Amman, Jordan (September 2000)*, vol. 1, p. 78.

⁶⁵ The origins of the Nabataeans are obscure. Some have claimed that they are referred to by name in an inscription dated to 647 BC among a list of the enemies of the last great Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (688–633 BC)—Nabataeans of Arabia. See Jane Taylor, *Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans*. However, the Semitic name of Nabateans *nbtw* has different consonants from Nabateans *nbyr*. The first authentic reference is from the 1st century BC Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (Diodorus of Sicily)—who quotes a 310 BC eye-witness account from Hieronymus of Cardia, one of Alexander the Great’s officers—“One tribe” the Nabateans, with only 10,000 men, are famous for their riches. They sell incense, myrrh and other spices to the Mediterranean countries, and get these merchandise from Arabia Felix in the south. Their country, without water, is impenetrable to enemies, but the Nabateans possess cisterns to collect rainwater, the place of which is known only to the inhabitants of the country. Their animals are watered every three days to accustom them to a flight throughout a waterless country. They eat meat, drink milk, also pepper and raisins diluted with water. Diodorus Siculus added the following: Just as the Seleucids had tried to subdue them, so the Romans made several attempts to get their hands on that lucrative trade, *Diodorus Siculus* XIX: pp. 97–98.

ern Hejaz, along the eastern side of the Red Sea at least as far as Medain Saleh. Nabataean power was founded on the control of the commercial routes between the Empire and southern Arabia, India, and East Africa: luxury products travelled through Nabataea, with some goods arriving by ship in their Red Sea port of *Leuke Kome*.⁶⁶

At the time the Nabataeans were sedentarizing, Palestine was alternately under the rule of the Hellenistic Ptolemies of Egypt (301–198 BC) and the Seleucids of Syria (198–63 BC). The Ptolemies attempted to subdue the Nabataeans several times, but without success. However, the latter did, temporarily lose their port at Elath, which became Ptolemaic Berenice.⁶⁷ Likewise, the Nabataean capital of Petra was attacked twice by the Seleucids, first by king Antigonos and then by prince Demetrius. Again, however, the Nabataeans managed both times to drive the Macedonian troops back. As the Seleucid Empire declined in the 2nd century BC the Nabataeans took advantage and moved north and west into the former Greek territory. Aretas II, King of the Arabs, gained control over Gaza. Obodas, his successor, attacked the Hasmonaean Alexander Jannaeus in the Gaulan or the Gilead (90 BC). Aretas III took over Coele-Syria including its capital Damascus.⁶⁸

In addition to dealing with the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, the Nabataeans had to deal with their own pressures from tribal nomads.⁶⁹ This led the Nabataeans to develop a defensive system to guard their caravan routes and protect their settlements. Policing the caravan network required the development of an extensive system of water stations, watchtowers and forts, as well as an army to garrison them.

Traces of defensive structures have been found throughout the Nabataean kingdom. However, a lack of detailed excavation limits our knowledge. What can be discerned, however, again fits the fortified courtyard pattern described by Gichon, Fiema and illustrated by Kennedy and Bewley (2004).⁷⁰ In addition to protecting caravans and cultic centres, the Nabataean defensive system also guarded the thickly settled areas of Edom, Moab, and the Hauran. Petra was probably the largest of the rather modest urban centres that had emerged, reaching its height of prosperity in the first half of the 1st century AD. Other major cities of the kingdom included the Red Sea port of Aila, Elusa in the Negev, and Umm el-Jimal and Bostra in the Hauran.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 116.

⁶⁷ Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquest (536 BC-640 AD): A Historical Geography*, p. 41.

⁶⁸ Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquest (536 BC-640 AD): A Historical Geography*, p. 60; Stephan G. Schmid, The Nabataeans: Travellers between Life-styles, in: *The Archaeology of Jordan*, p. 370.

⁶⁹ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 115.

⁷⁰ See Gichon, "The Courtyard Pattern Castellum on the Limes Palaestinae. Strategic and Tactical Features;" Fiema, "Military Architecture and the Defence "System" of Roman-Byzantine Southern Jordan."

⁷¹ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 116; Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, p. 37.

Roman Annexation of Nabataean Jordan

Roman control of Jordan came in the wake of the collapse of the Seleucid (Hellenistic) kingdom of Syria. In the mid Between the 80's and the 60's BC the Hellenistic Kingdom of Syria collapsed into chaos and civil war. Taking advantage of this situation, the Nabataean king Aretas III was able to gain control of Damascus in 85 BC. Aretas attempted to rule Damascus as a Greek city; he assumed the name himself Aretas III Philhellenos (friend of the Greeks), and he ordered the Damascus mints to press the first silver Nabataean coins in a Hellenic style using the Greek language. The Syrians, frustrated by the continual infighting of their Seleucid rulers, determined to call in an outsider to reign. So, after some deliberation they sent ambassadors to Tigranes, more commonly known as Tigranes the Great. He agreed and accepted the crown and the kingdom in 83 BC. After a siege of Damascus in 72 BC, Tigranes was able to force the Nabataeans out and assume control. His control of the city lasted only until 69 BC when he was forced to withdraw his troops to confront the new Roman threat from the west.⁷²

After Pompey defeated Tigranes in 66 BC, the Nabataeans turned Damascus over to the Romans and in 64 BC Rome annexed western Syria including Damascus. At this time, the Romans incorporated Damascus into a league of ten cities located in southern Syria and northern Jordan; they were known as the Decapolis.⁷³ Damascus remained under Roman control until the year 37 BC, when the Roman Emperor Caligula transferred the city back to Nabataean control by decree.⁷⁴

In the late 1st century BC, part of Jordan, the Peraea, belonged to the Jewish kingdom of Herod the Great. When Armenian troops withdrew, the Peraea extended from the Jordan River eastwards up to the boundaries of the southernmost Decapolis cities. In the first century AD, the elimination of the descendants of Herod the Great from their rule over his former territories brought the Peraea under direct Roman administration.⁷⁵

Roman Arabia was a frontier province that protected the south-eastern frontier of the Empire for more than half a millennium. The military history of Roman Arabia, in part, was involved more with undertaking various diplomatic relations with

⁷² Georges Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 26.

⁷³ Pliny the Elder, *The natural history of Pliny*, vol. 1: pp. 431–433. This league initially consisted of Scythopolis (Beisan), Pella (Tabaqat Fahil), Damascus, Dion (Beit Ras), Kanatha (Kanawat), Gerasa (Jerash), Philadelphia (Amman), Gadara (Umm Qais) Hippos (Al Huson), and Raphana (Abila). The Decapolis, a Greek word meaning “ten cities,” refers to a group of ten independent city-states located on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire in the southeastern Levant (mostly in Jordan); they shared a common history and culture—while the number literally means 10, the actual number of cities in southeastern Levant varied through time according to which geographer was making the list, e.g. Josephus refers to only nine Decapolis cities. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 3: 446.

⁷⁴ Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 27.

⁷⁵ Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, p. 36.

the indigenous tribes rather than dealing with any (major) invasions.⁷⁶ For example, there was the contact with the Nabataeans. The Romans inherited from them a security problem that had plagued them for centuries. Various nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, responding to demographic pressures, had long been moving towards the well-watered lands of the Fertile Crescent. Some of the nomads occupied the fringes of the settled areas and became absorbed into the sedentary population, a process that was regularly repeated.⁷⁷

The Nabataeans⁷⁸ probably evolved in this same way. They had migrated into Transjordan by the 4th century B.C. and originally led a nomadic existence. Yet by the time of the Roman annexation some 400 years later, the Nabataeans had become thoroughly sedentary. They in turn were faced by pressures from other tribes and had to control their desert frontier.⁷⁹

Although a client-state of the Roman Empire, the Nabataean kings were far away from the main centre of Roman power in north-western Syria; this fact, together with the difficulty of attacking the heart of their kingdom and its capital Petra in the southern mountains of Jordan, allowed them a considerable degree of autonomy.

Nabataean autonomy was threatened by the arrival of the Romans in Palestine in 63 BC under General Pompey. During the reign of Augustus, tensions grew between Rome and Nabataea. It is said that Augustus wanted to give the Nabataean kingdom to Herod. Additional tensions emerged during the Julio-Claudian period between the Roman sponsored Herodian dynasty and its Nabataean neighbours. On the other hand, in 67 the Nabataean king, Malichus II, sent troops to assist Titus in ending the Jewish War.⁸⁰

The policy of the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors was to gradually annex their client states on the eastern border and by 106, Trajan did precisely that with the Nabataean Kingdom,⁸¹ including it with the southern group of the Decapolis cities—Adraha, Dium, Gerasa and Philadelphia, and the Hejaz to create a new Roman province. This large, new Roman province was given the name of *Arabia Petraea*.⁸²

Apart from the general policy, both security and commercial considerations, together with some regional and local factors, formed the basis for the Trajanic annexation of the Nabataeans. The annexation of Nabataea must also be viewed as

⁷⁶ Parker, "The Roman frontier in Jordan: An overview," pp. 77–78.

⁷⁷ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 115.

⁷⁸ The Nabataeans first appear in history in 312 BC, when Antigonus Monophthalmos led an expedition against them. See Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 115. On the Nabataeans see also Schmid, "The Nabataeans: Travellers between Lifestyles."

⁷⁹ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 115.

⁸⁰ Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, pp. 36–37.

⁸¹ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, pp. 120–121.

⁸² Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, pp. 38–39.

one component of Trajan's overall policy of expansion.⁸³ Nabataea's absorption into the Empire provided a much broader zone of security for the Palestinian land bridge that connected Egypt and Syria. Nabataea, "civilized and pacified by its enlightened monarchs, was ripe for annexation."⁸⁴

Following the annexation of 106, the Romans had the task of maintaining this broader security zone in the east, since tribal incursions were still a threat. Initially, the Nabataean defensive network provided the framework for the Roman security in Jordan, although the Romans did not utilize all the Nabataean forts. The Romans expanded the original Nabataean framework by initiating work on the *Via Nova Traiana* which ran from Bostra⁸⁵ near the border with the province of Syria, through the steppe east of the Decapolis to link up with the ancient King's Highway at Philadelphia (Amman). From there it ran south crossing the great Wadi el-Mujib and the Wadi al-Hasa, diverting through Petra then running down the Shera'a escarpment to cross the Hisma Desert and route to Aila (Aqaba) on the Red Sea. Numerous milestones enable us to date its construction between 111 and 114 and scores of other records document repairs and reconstruction through to the 4th century.⁸⁶

The new province flourished. A substantial number of troops provided security and created a basis for prosperity to the areas around the garrisons. Excavations in the south at Rabbath moab/Areopolis (Rabbah), Petra and Hauara (Humayma) and in the Negev towns reveal a picture of gradual development. The majority of the provincial army was based in the cities, probably to control the population and to facilitate supply.

In Transjordan the study of the Arabian frontier in the 2nd century lacks relevant literary and epigraphic evidence; it is not until the Severan era that the sources become more abundant. Fortunately, excavations of military sites have increased during the last 20 years.⁸⁷ Similar security and economic concerns were faced by both Nabataeans and Romans in Arabia. The withdrawal of the Nabataean army from Arabia—much of the Nabataean army was incorporated into the Roman *auxilia* and transferred out of the province⁸⁸—perhaps led to reoccupation of Nabataean fortifications by Roman soldiers, but Thomas Parker provided evidence for this process and some evidence to the contrary.⁸⁹ First, the surveys and some excavations suggest that a significant number of Nabataean posts were not garrisoned by

⁸³ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 123.

⁸⁴ Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 82.

⁸⁵ Bosra (Arabic: بصرى, also *Bostra*, *Busrana*, *Bozrah*, *Bozra*, *Busra Eski Şam*, *Busra ash-Sham*, *Nova Trajana Bostra*) is an ancient city administratively belonging to the Dar'aa Governorate in southern Syria.

⁸⁶ David Graf, *The Via Nova Traiana in Arabia Petraea*, in: *The Roman and Byzantine Near East*; Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, p. 40.

⁸⁷ With excavations in legionary forts as el-Lejjun, Udruh, Da'ajanya, Humayma and several smaller forts (see references for the section dealing with sites, above).

⁸⁸ Parker, "The Roman frontier in Jordan: An overview," p. 78.

⁸⁹ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 125.

the Romans immediately after the annexation. Second, the Romans may have built some new forts, such as Udruh.

These new fortifications, together with certain Nabataean posts, formed the initial Arabian frontier system. For the period from the ascension of Diocletian in 284 through the 5th century, documentation on the Arabian frontier is significant. Amongst literary sources the *Notitia Dignitatum* (ca. 400)—the only complete list of the army units and garrison posts for any period of the Roman occupation—is of paramount importance.⁹⁰ Other major literary sources are the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius and Ammianus Marcellinus. Most known military building inscriptions date to the 4th and 5th centuries. Finally, crucial new evidence is appearing from the excavation of several fortifications from this period. The 3rd century saw a decline of security for Arabia that was to reoccur with great frequency thereafter. The Tetrarchic period in particular was to be one of extensive construction of military installations and the repair or construction of roads. All these sources confirm the picture that the fortified frontier was at its height in this period. The *limes* recovered fully from the 3rd century crisis. It had already started under Aurelian, but above all Diocletian⁹¹ rebuilt and reorganized the frontiers of the Asian provinces, his own region of responsibility within the Tetrarchy.⁹²

The Persians remained the major opponent in the East. However, in 298 the Caesar Galerius dealt the Sassanids a decisive defeat in Mesopotamia. The Romans regained all Mesopotamia west of the Khabur plus significant territory east of the Tigris. This extension of the Empire, combined with firm Roman control over the client state of Armenia to the north of Mesopotamia, marked the apogee of Roman power in the East.⁹³

In Arabia, nomadic raiding continued; the Arab tribes were now called *Saraceni* “Saracens” for the first time.⁹⁴ These raids and Diocletian’s policy of strengthening virtually all imperial frontiers explains the important military build-up along the Arabian frontier in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. Around 295 Diocletian partitioned the former province of Arabia. The area south of the Wadi al-Hasa was combined with Sinai and Negev to form the new province of *Palaestina Salutaris*, later called *Palaestina Tertia* with Petra as capital of the new province. The region north of the Wadi al-Hasa remained known as the province of *Arabia*.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, pp. 53–54.

⁹¹ On Diocletian and the frontier see also Ariel Lewin, Diocletian: Politics and *limes* in the Near East, in: *Limes XVIII. Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Amman, Jordan (September 2000)*.

⁹² Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 135.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ The term appears first with Ptolemy in the early 2nd century, but Diocletian is credited with a war against them in 290 and they appear regularly thereafter. See Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, p. 41.

⁹⁵ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 136; Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, p. 41.

Significant new evidence proves that new fortifications were part of the Diocletianic program. Some building inscriptions, ceramic samples and subsequent excavation of several forts clearly support the picture of a substantial military buildup. For example, in the central sector, the construction of the legionary fortress of Lejjun (ancient Betthorus) was of the greatest significance. A date under Diocletian, probably ca. 290–300 is suggested by the surface pottery, the architectural plan and by the excavations of the fort.⁹⁶

Towards the end of the late 3rd century most of the Roman fortresses in Transjordan are located either directly adjacent to the *Via Nova Traiana* or 20 to 30 km east of the road. Both legionary bases in more westerly Palestine, for example, were abandoned by their respective legions in the late 3rd century for more eastern locales. Two legionary garrisons were stationed in Arabia in the 4th century, *III Cyrenaica* at Bostra and the new *legio IIII Martia* at Betthorus (el-Lejjun). The latter is, with Palmyra, one of the two best-known legionary bases on the eastern frontier thanks to excavations. The importance of el-Lejjun for understanding this period cannot be overemphasized, for it represents one of the very few legionary fortresses in the East built *de novo* on a virgin site and not complicated by significant later occupation.⁹⁷

It seems that several different types of forts were built in the same period and even in the same region. Presumably, this variety suggests different local conditions or purposes for such divergent yet contemporary military structures.⁹⁸ These Roman forts that were built along the eastern frontier during this time can be grouped into six categories as outlined by Parker.⁹⁹ He established a typology with six categories,¹⁰⁰ based on architectural and chronological evidence:

Quadriburgia: They are usually (nearly) square in plan, defended by four projecting rectangular corner towers with few or no interval towers, entered by a single main gate, and contain rooms built against the curtain wall around a central courtyard. This type may be called a *quadriburgium* or “four-towered fort” and date to the 3rd and 4th centuries. The best examples are *Qasr Bshir*, *Qasr al-Hallabat*, *Qasr ath-Thuraiya*, *al-Quwayra*, and *Khirbat al-Khaldi* (Fig. 11).

⁹⁶ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 137.

⁹⁷ Parker, Roman Legionary Fortresses in the East, in: *Roman Fortresses and their Legions*, pp. 125–128.

⁹⁸ Parker, The Typology of Roman and Byzantine Forts and Fortresses in Jordan, in: *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, p. 258.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 251–260.

¹⁰⁰ Pamela Watson, The Byzantine Period, in: *The Archaeology of Jordan*, p. 485, opts for three categories; in fact, she puts together Parkers categories 3 to 5.

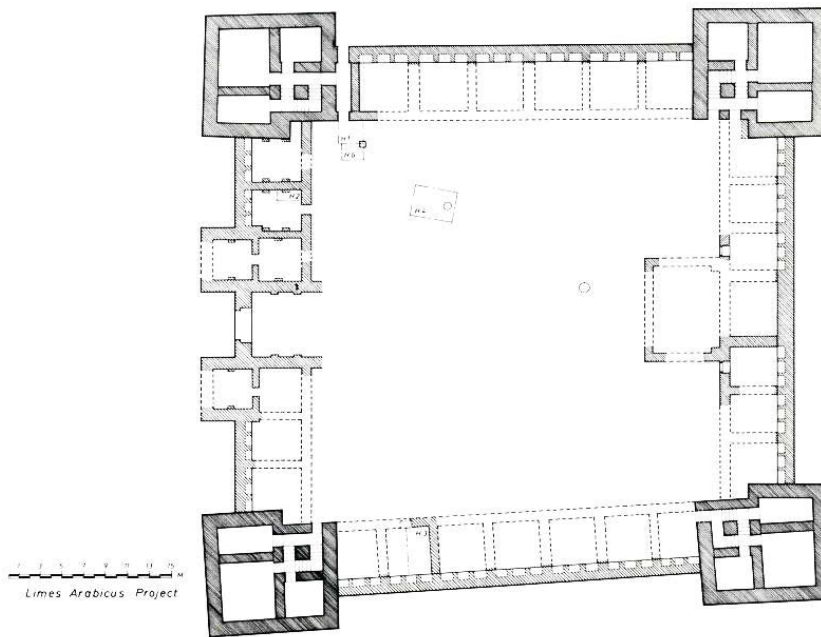


Fig. 11: *Qasr Bshir* plan. After Parker 1995: 252

Forts with External Interval and Corner Towers: While the *quadriburgia* average only 0.16 ha in size, these eleven forts average 0.9 ha, more than five times the size of the average *quadriburgium*. These forts can be divided into three subcategories: small (0.30 ha), medium (0.60 ha), and large (two forts are c. 1.0 ha, another is 3.0 ha). Most of these forts are also (nearly) square in plan. However, in addition to projecting rectangular corner towers, these forts also have projecting rectangular interval towers, generally of similar size to the corner towers. The presence of interval towers must be explained by the greater length of the wall circuits to be defended. Most have rooms built against the curtain wall. The larger forts have rooms both built against the curtain wall and detached structures within the interior.

Small subtype examples include (c. 0.3 ha): Dayr al-Kahf, Khirbat as-Samra, Mahattat, Khirbat az-Zuna, and Khirbat al-Qirāna. Of these forts, Khirbet az-Zuna was recently excavated (2006–07).¹⁰¹ Michele Daviau's plan shows that the square castellum has a protruding tower at each corner and three protruding interval towers—one each on the north east, south east and south west walls. Two towers also protect the only gate on the northwest side. The curtain walls measure c. 35 m. on each side, excluding the corner towers. Khirbet az-Zuna provides an excellent ex-

¹⁰¹ Michele Daviau *et al.*, preliminary Report of Excavation and Survey at Khirbat Al-Mudayna Athamad and in Its Surrounding (2004, 2006, and 2007), in: *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Amman*, pp. 362–365.

ample of Parker's sub-type of the small forts with corner and external interval towers (Fig. 12).

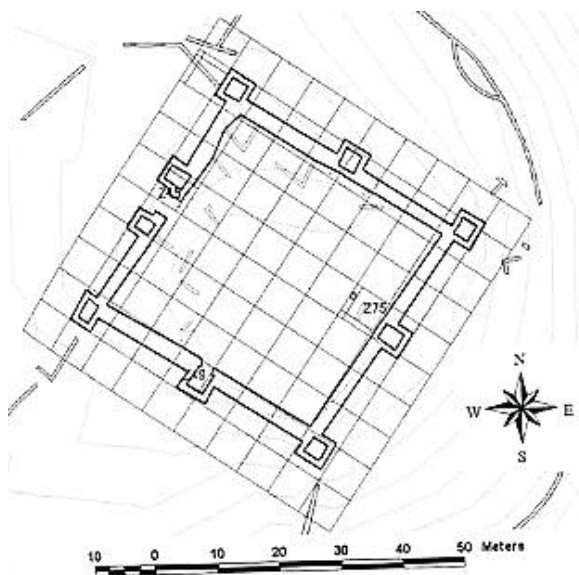


Fig. 12: Khirbat az-Zuna plan. After Daviau 2008: 363

Medium sized examples include (c. 0.6 ha): Khirbat al-Fityan (beginning of the 4th century, dated c. AD 300) and *Qasr* al-Azraq (dated early 4th century), the latter rebuilt in the medieval period (Fig. 13).

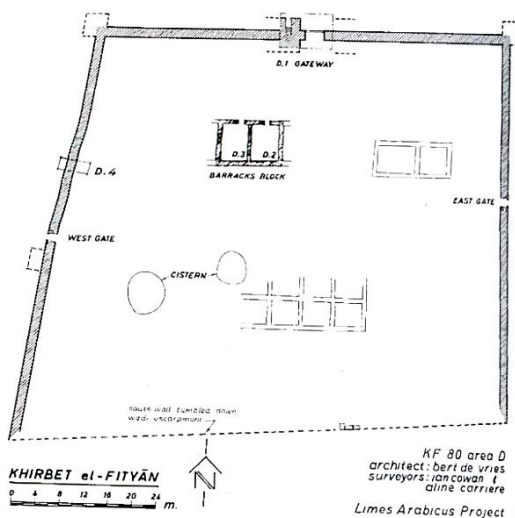


Fig. 13: Khirbat al-Fityan plan. After Parker 1995: 254

Large sized examples include Humayma, the *castellum* of D'ajaniya (dated in the late 3rd early 4th century) and Umm al-Jima1 (constructed in the early fourth century) (Fig. 14).¹⁰²

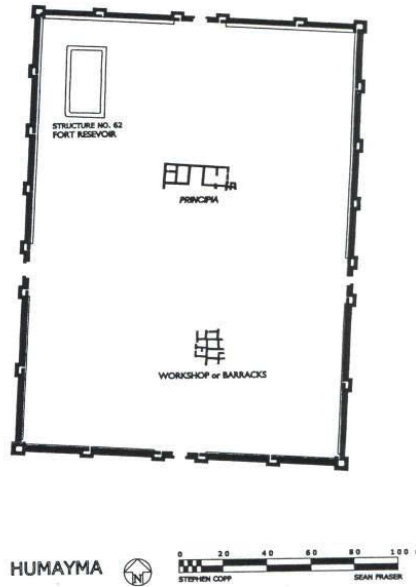


Fig. 14: Humayma. Roman fort plan. After Oleson *et al.* 1999: 414

Small Forts Without External Towers: These small forts are limited to an average of c. 0.22 ha. Examples are: *Qasr* al-‘Uwaynid (dated epigraphically to c. 200–202), *Qasr* al-Ba‘iq (dated precisely by a once *in situ* building inscription of 411), Umm el-Jimal (dated in the late 4th or early 5th century) (Fig. 15).¹⁰³

Large Forts Without External Towers: There are only two examples of these larger forts (no secure dates): Umm al-Quttayn in the north of Jordan and Umm Ubtulah on Wadi al-Hasa.

Large Forts With Rounded Corners: These forts are rectangular with rounded corners and without projecting towers. Traces of only two such forts have been reported from Jordan—Tall Abara and al-Azraq. Neither has been excavated and no dating evidence is yet available.

¹⁰² Parker, “The Typology of Roman and Byzantine Forts and Fortresses in Jordan,” pp. 253–255.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 255–256.

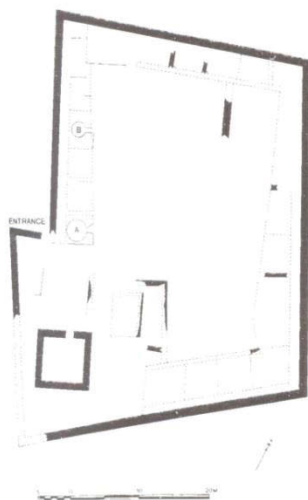


Fig. 15: *Qasr al-Uwaynid* plan. After Parker 1995: 257

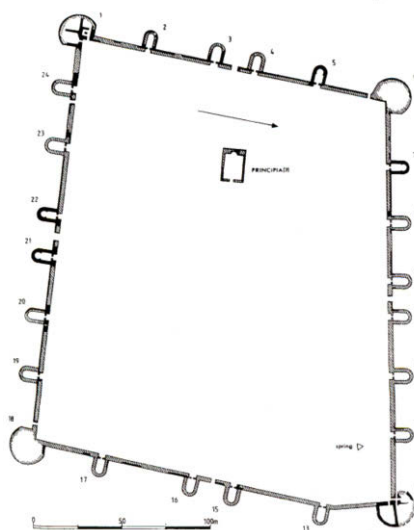


Fig. 17.4: *Adrou/Adroa (Udhruh)*: plan (from Gregory 3: F30.1).

Fig. 16: Udhruh the legionary fortress plan. After Kennedy 2004: 179

Fortresses With U-Shaped and Semi-Circular External Towers: Both well-known examples in this category have been extensively excavated: the fortresses of el-Lejjun and Udhruh.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 256–258.

Most of the forts in Jordan were built in the late 3rd or 4th century and continued in use through the early Byzantine period.¹⁰⁵ There is only one securely dated fort of the 2nd century, probably because many of the military units may have been based in towns or cities or some units occupied old Nabataean forts or these earlier forts may simply have been dismantled by later Roman military construction (Fig. 16, see also Fig. 17).



Fig. 17: Roman sites mentioned in Chapter One

THE RISE OF THE BYZANTINE OR EASTERN ROMAN EMPIRE IN JORDAN

The emergence of the Byzantine Empire, alternately known as the Eastern Roman Empire, from the ancient Roman Empire, is often dated from the time of Emperor Constantine I's transfer of the Eastern Roman capital from Nicomedia (in Anatolia)

¹⁰⁵ Watson, "The Byzantine Period;" Parker, "The Typology of Roman and Byzantine Forts and Fortresses in Jordan," p. 258.

to Byzantium¹⁰⁶ on the Bosphorus, which became known as Constantinople, alternatively “second Rome” or “New Rome.”

The conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity in 331 was an event that marked a distinctive transformation of many elements of the material culture of the Eastern Roman Empire. Perhaps the most obvious transformation was the introduction of a new element in public construction—Christian churches.¹⁰⁷ Both, the growing number of churches, as well as their size, ornate architectural elements and elaborate mosaic floors, testify to the rising power, influence and wealth of the new state religion.¹⁰⁸ This growing power and wealth was enabled and protected in Jordan by the *Limes Arabicus*, which underwent its most heavy fortification during the 4th and 5th centuries under Diocletian and Constantine.¹⁰⁹

The first couple of centuries of the Byzantine period also mark the period of the greatest growth and development for the cities, towns and villages of Jordan.¹¹⁰ The archaeological evidence of intensified settlement that now extended right up to the edge of the desert shows the effectiveness of Diocletian’s original defensive system built in the 3rd century, continued to be effective well into the 4th and the 5th centuries. This defensive system was extended to Aila on the southern *terminus* of the *limes*. Aila was a major crossroad of several commercial routes from the Red Sea and the Hejaz, and therefore was important to the Romans. The construction of the city wall at Aila ca 400 AD thus helped secure this southern terminus against Arab raids.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Byzantium (Greek: Βυζάντιον, Latin: BYZANTIVM, Byzantium) was an ancient Greek city, which was founded by colonists from Megara in 667 BC. It was named after their king Byzas or Byzantas (Βύζας or Βύζαντας in Greek). The name “Byzantium” is a Latinization of the original name Byzantion. See Alexander Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 324–453.

¹⁰⁷ Parker, “Roman Legionary Fortresses in the East,” p. 379.

¹⁰⁸ The most famous mosaic is still the Madaba Map in the St. George church of the 6th century, but now we have additional remarkable examples in the church of Mt. Nebo and in the churches of Umm ar-Rasas. See Michele Piccirillo, Umm er-Rasas, in: *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*; Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*. Many of the mosaics bear texts with precise internal dates that suggest that the 6th century was a time when such works greatly flourished. See Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ Although there are clear indications of serious Saracen incursions in this period, these attacks were repelled.

¹¹⁰ In general, it appears that the population of the region recovered from the chaos and invasions of the 3rd century. Indeed, much of Transjordan may have been more heavily occupied in the 4th and 5th centuries than in any other era until the 20th century. The dense population of the Byzantine period was in no small way the result of the increased economic prosperity, which in turn, was possible because of the improved defensive system.

¹¹¹ Parker, “The Roman frontier in Jordan: An overview,” p. 80; Parker, *Romans and Saracens: a history of the Arabian frontier*, p. 143.

The primary threat, against which the defensive system was supposed to protect, was posed by the Saracens who were noted for launching lightning raids for booty. Their likely targets in the provinces of Arabia and Palestine were agricultural settlements, unfortified towns, and caravans. Besides the material booty, the human captives could be sold as slaves or held for ransom. The best defense the Romans could deploy against these raids was a dispersal of forces in depth within numerous fortifications.¹¹²

Yet in spite of this growth, there is not much evidence for the construction of new forts *de novo*. Most of the Roman forts in Jordan were built in the late third or fourth century and continued in use through the early Byzantine period.¹¹³ Few forts were actually constructed during the Byzantine period, proper, so most of the forts reflect the organization and fortification philosophy of the 3rd and 4th century Roman army.

The two exceptions that are well dated to this period include the Barracks at Umm el-Jimal and the *castellum* at *Qasr al-Ba'iq*, reveal that by the early 5th century forts without projecting towers were again being built. However, both these forts were protected by internal towers.¹¹⁴

In the Byzantine period, Transjordan formed the south-eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire and beyond lay the desert. We already mentioned that security was more concerned with controlling the nomadic Arab tribes or *saraceni* from the desert than with war with Persia.

As noted, most of the forts of the Byzantine period were built in the late 3rd or 4th century. We already mentioned that after the Diocletian and Constantinian reorganization of the military structure, a system of forts, fortlets, watchtowers and roads was consolidated into a chain of military installations stretching from Egypt to the Euphrates. As part of this system, legionary bases were established or strengthened in the Transjordan at Udhruh, el-Lejjun (Betthoro) and perhaps at Aila. Apart from el-Lejjun, these were all situated in towns on the major north-south road, the *Via Nova Traiana*. El-Lejjun was sited to the east, at the primary water source for the area. With its associated watchtowers and fortlets, this fort covered the access routes from the east into Wadi al-Mujib.

Most auxiliary units were stationed in forts or towns between the legionary bases. The pattern is visible in the plateau area east of the Dead Sea where the hinterland of el-Lejjun has been extensively surveyed. A chain of forts spreads north and south of the legionary fortress, typically 10–15 km apart. From their size they must have held garrisons of approximately 150 troops. The legion at el-Lejjun is estimated to have numbered 1000–2000 men. 4th century legions were smaller than their pre-

¹¹² Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 144.

¹¹³ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," p. 485; Parker, "The Typology of Roman and Byzantine Forts and Fortresses in Jordan," p. 258.

¹¹⁴ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," p. 486; Parker, "The Typology of Roman and Byzantine Forts and Fortresses in Jordan," p. 258.

decessors, which, in the second century, numbered around 6000 men. Numerous watchtowers were placed between the forts. Towers and forts cluster around the shallow eastern entrances to the *Wadis*, which were the preferred routes of travel for the nomadic tribes. Within this secure system, settlement expanded significantly in the marginal areas.¹¹⁵

The presently known Byzantine sites in Jordan include the following, (listed by their geographical occurrence from north to south within Kennedy's regional division of Jordan): 1. Umm ar-Rasas (Dhiban Plateau region); 2. *Qasr Bshir* (Wadi Mujib region); 3. El-Lejjun (Kerak Plateau region); 4. Da'ajaniya (el-Jibal region); 5. Udruh (Petraea region); 6. Al-Humayma (Hisma region).¹¹⁶

The frontier of the 4th and 5th centuries remained essentially the system of Diocletian—a broad fortified outer zone in Transjordan from Bostra to Aila and a secondary zone of defense in southern Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea. The entire region formed a formidable barrier to enemies, but the peace on the Arabian frontier did not last and there were several incursions from the Saracen tribes into Palestine and Syria. The region was still far from being free of endemic nomadic raids.¹¹⁷ A number of Saracen attacks in the late 4th century underlined the continued need for this system of security (e.g. in 378 by queen Mavia and around 383).¹¹⁸

A major document for the early 5th century is the Beersheba Tax Edict. This proclamation is connected with special tax regulations on agricultural lands for military settlers within the zone of the *limes* in southern Palestine. The text may be evidence for a supposed conversion of the frontier forces from full-time soldiers to a peasant militia.¹¹⁹

In the 4th and 5th centuries, there were two basic categories of Roman troops: the mobile field army or *comitatenses*, elite troops under the direct command of the emperor or the *magistri militum*, and the regional garrisons or *limitanei*, under the command of the regional *duces limitis*. The *limitanei* were given tax-free land for their own cultivation and profit and received a salary. It should not be assumed that they were militarily less competent, being 'soldier-farmers', given that land ownership does not require farming in person.¹²⁰

Early Byzantine occupation of the larger military sites in Wadi 'Arabah continued and the abandonment of smaller posts in this period may be due to the added security provided by the tenth *Fretensis Legion* in Aila. The route from Aila up Wadi 'Arabah continued to be fully functional at this time, branching west and northwest across the Negev to the Mediterranean and the rest of Palestine. Like eastern

¹¹⁵ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," p. 489.

¹¹⁶ See Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*.

¹¹⁷ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, pp. 145–146.

¹¹⁸ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," p. 489.

¹¹⁹ Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, pp. 145–146.

¹²⁰ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," p. 489.

Transjordan, the Negev was a monitored zone studded with forts and garrisons (Fig. 18).

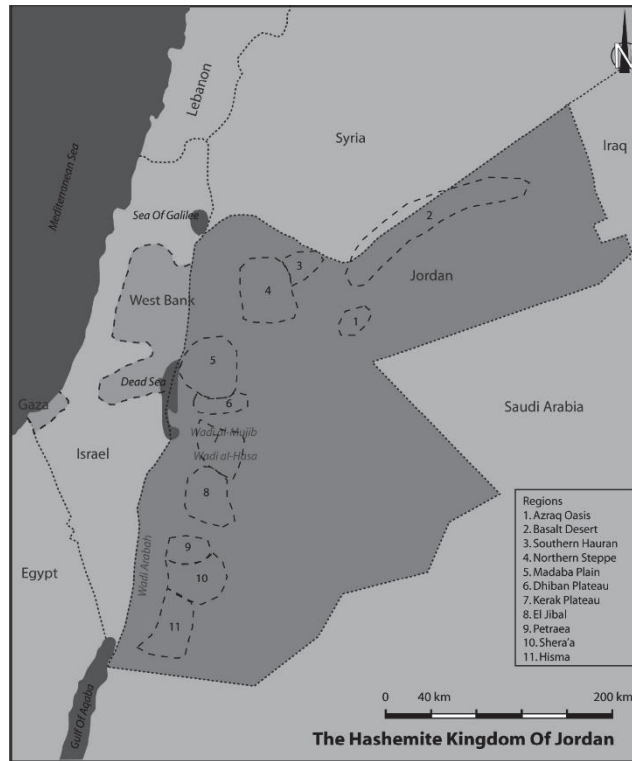


Fig. 18: Area division of Jordan

Byzantine Military Buildup

The reason for the late Roman/early Byzantine build up has been the focus of some scholarly debate. Parker has argued that the ramping up was motivated by the external threat of raiding tribes people. David Graf and Benjamin Isaac on the other hand, have argued that the threat was internal—the result of a rebellious population who felt oppressed by their Roman overlords.¹²¹ Parker has countered the objections of Graf and Isaac by noting that (1) the fortified sites are not located in population centers—which one might assume to be the case if the problem was a rebellious local population (one thing of the fortress Antonia that the Romans maintained in Jerusalem to exert control over the rebellious Jewish population).¹²² Pamela

¹²¹ See Graf, “Rome and the Saracens: Reassessing the Nomadic Menace,” Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire. The Roman Army in the East*.

¹²² Parker, *The Defense of Palestine and Transjordan from Diocletian to Heraclius*, in: *The Archaeology of Jordan and Beyond: Essays in Honor of James A.*, pp. 374–379.

Watson and others seem to be following Parker at this point.¹²³ Be that as it may—whether the threat was internal or external—a strong fortification was deemed necessary by the Roman leaders.

Byzantine Fortifications

The late Roman/early Byzantine military reorganization included the establishment of a system of forts, fortlets, watchtowers and roads that comprised part of a larger chain of military installations stretching from Egypt to the Euphrates.¹²⁴ The anchor points of this system in Jordan were the legionary bases established or strengthened at the large forts at Udruh, el-Lejjun (Betthoro) and probably Aila.¹²⁵ Apart from el-Lejjun, these bases were all situated in towns on the major north-south road, the *Via Nova Traiana*. El-Lejjun was sited to the east, at the primary water source for the area. With its associated watchtowers and fortlets, this fort covered the access routes from the east into Wadi al-Mujib.

The plans of the late Roman/early Byzantine forts of the late 3rd or 4th century which have been found in Jordan have, themselves, been divided into three main types by Watson:¹²⁶ (1) *large forts* with U-shaped and semi-circular external towers (el-Lejjun and probably Udruh); (2) *forts* with projecting square interval and angle towers (Dayr al-Kahf, *Qasr* al-Azraq, Khirbat az-Zuna, Khirbet al-Fityan, Da'ajaniya, Umm el-Jimal, Khirbat as-Samra), and (3) the *quadriburgia* (small forts with four projecting corner towers such as *Qasr* Bshir, *Qasr* ath-Thuraiya). Internal rooms were sometimes built against the curtain wall, but in the larger forts internal structures tended to be independent, free-standing buildings within the enclosure. Apparently, few forts were actually constructed in the Byzantine period proper. The two well dated examples, are the *castellum* at *Qasr* al-Ba'iq (412 AD), (Fig. 19) and the Barracks at Umm al-Jimal (412–14 AD).¹²⁷ Both of these Byzantine forts show that by the early 5th century forts without projecting towers were again being built. These two forts were protected by internal towers.¹²⁸ However, more recent work at the site of *Qasr* al-Ba'iq, which lays 20 km southwest of Bostra, and 12 km northeast of al-Mafraq in the Hauran region of Jordan (and which included survey, excavation

¹²³ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," pp. 488–890.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 488.

¹²⁵ Parker, The Roman Aqaba Project: The 1994 Campaign, in: *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 40, pp. 247–49; Parker, Preliminary Report on the 1994 Season of the Roman Aqaba Project, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 305, pp. 34–37; Parker, The Roman Aqaba Project: The 1996 Campaign, in: *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, Parker, "The Defense of Palestine and Transjordan from Diocletian to Heraclius," p. 381.

¹²⁶ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," pp. 485.

¹²⁷ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," 489; Howard Crosby Butler, *Ancient Architecture in Syria*.

¹²⁸ Parker, "The Typology of Roman and Byzantine Forts and Fortresses in Jordan," p. 260; Watson, "The Byzantine Period," pp. 486.

and careful architectural analysis by Al al-Bayt University/ Jordan), has refined the history of the site.¹²⁹ It still appears that the original fort was founded in the late Roman period/and early Byzantine and continued in use until the Umayyad period (Fig. 20).

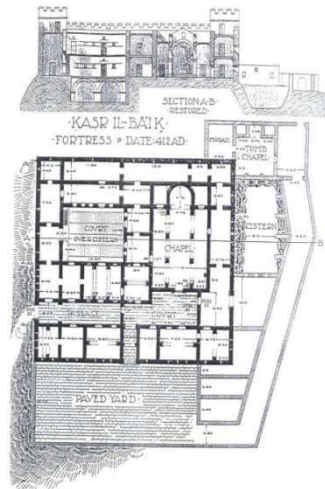


Fig. 19: *Qasr al-Ba'iq* plan. After Butler 1909: 61

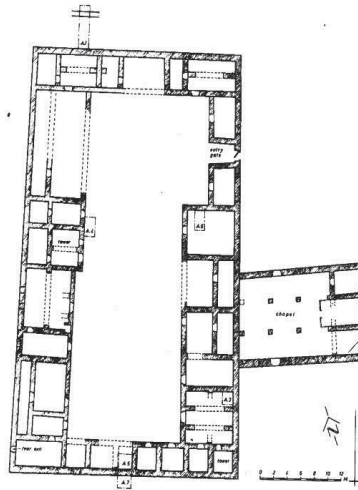


Fig. 20: Umm el-Jimal. The barracks. After Parker 1995: 258

¹²⁹ See Daifallah Obaidat, al-Ba'iq at the Northern Jordanian Badiyah: Architectural and Archaeological Study, in: *Abbat Al-Yarmuk: Humanities and Social Sciences Series*.

Large forts. The two largest forts of the early Byzantine period, according to Watson, were el-Lejjun, and Udruh. As noted above (in the Roman section), both of these forts were initially built in the late Roman period towards the end of the 3rd century AD and were used as Legionary bases. They typically exhibit U-shaped and semi-circular external towers. Based on ancient literary references as well as Parker's recent work at Aila, wherein he found part of the Byzantine city wall with tower, it is possible that a similar large fort existed at Aila.¹³⁰

However, more work needs to be done at Aila before anything definitive can be said about the Byzantine fort there. In the case of Udruh, although it was originally built at the beginning of the 4th century, it was destroyed by an earthquake in 363 and rebuilt immediately thereafter. While Udruh (Adrou; Adroa) is referred to in many Byzantine documents, there are no direct references to a fort or garrison, although it appears that its Roman fort continued to exist in the Byzantine period.¹³¹ Its precise nature in the Byzantine period awaits publication of the recent excavations.

Aila also appears in Byzantine sources, but in its case, there is no doubt that a fortress was present.¹³² The *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or. 34.30) indicates that *Legion X Fretensis* was based at Aila, although the actual fort has not yet been discovered. Rather, a north stretch of the Byzantine city wall, dated to the late 4th/early 5th century has been uncovered.¹³³ This wall went out of use by the 6th century.¹³⁴

More is known about the third large Byzantine fort, el-Lejjun (Betthoro). It was original built c. 300 AD.¹³⁵ However, the site was severely damaged in the earthquake of 363 AD, and underwent a major rebuilding shortly thereafter—this was early in the Byzantine period likely under the emperor Flavius Julius Valens (363–378 AD). The major change of the Byzantine rebuild was a reduction of the number of barracks from eight to four. The new barracks were built in slightly different positions and had a different internal layout. The smaller number of barracks has been interpreted as reflecting a Byzantine policy of a reduction of Roman troops along the *limes*. In the case of el-Lejjun, it is estimated that the draw down went from 2000 men during Phase 1 (late Roman) to 1000 men during Phase 2 (Byzantine). The *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or. 37.22; cf 12) indicates that the Roman legion that was based here c. 400 was the Legion IV Martia. In addition to the new barracks, three blocks were built on the west side of the enclosure just south of the *Principia*. The open space on

¹³⁰ See Parker, "The Defense of Palestine and Transjordan from Diocletian to Heraclius," p. 381.

¹³¹ Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, pp. 178–180.

¹³² Ibid, p. 208.

¹³³ Parker, "The Roman Aqaba Project: The 1994 Campaign," pp. 247–49; Parker, "Preliminary Report on the 1994 Season of the Roman Aqaba Project," pp. 34–37.

¹³⁴ The Legion may have been garrisoned in private housing. However, in view of the length of time the Legion was stationed there, it seems more likely that the fort and barracks has not yet been discovered.

¹³⁵ Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, pp. 154–59.

the west side of the fort is thought to have been used for keeping animals. Around 500 AD the churches were added to the compound (Fig. 21).

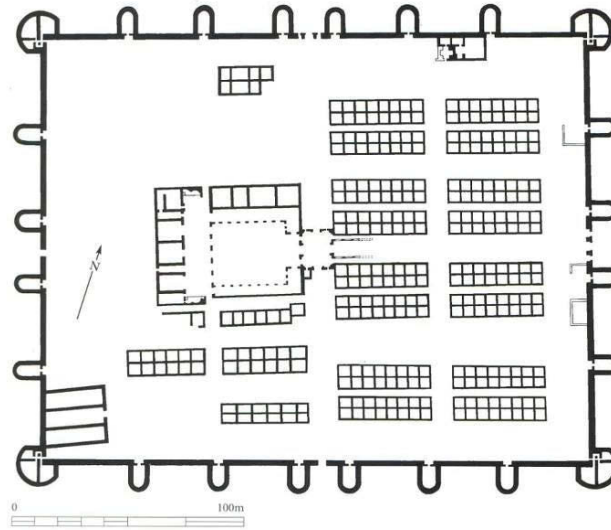


Fig. 21: El-Lejjun fortress plan. After Parker 2000: 128

Medium sized Forts. Watson's second category of Byzantine forts can be characterized medium sized forts with projecting square interval and angle towers and include sites such as Dayr al-Kahf, *Qasr al-Azraq*, Khirbat az-Zona, Khirbet al-Fityan, Da'janiya, Umm el-Jimal, Khirbat as-Samra.¹³⁶ All of these sites have already been noted and/or illustrated in the Roman section above, since they were initially built during that period. A note should be made about Umm ar-Rasas which might fall into Watson's category of Medium sized forts. Some scholars have thought the fort was Byzantine—there are certainly Byzantine period references to a military presence.¹³⁷ In addition, there are, of course, the well-known Byzantine churches at the site—two are within the fortified enclosure. However, Jacques Bujard and his Swiss team proved the fort to be Roman. They were able to demonstrate that the churches were later than the fortification, since parts of the enclosure had been dismantled to insert the apses of the churches.¹³⁸

Quadriburgia. Watson's third Byzantine fort category was the *quadriburgia* (small forts with four projecting corner towers). Watson lists two such sites for the Byzantine period—*Qasr Bshir*, *Qasr ath-Thuraiya*—both of which were founded in the Roman period. In addition to these two sites can be added *Qasr al-Hallabat*,

¹³⁶ Watson, "The Byzantine Period," p. 485.

¹³⁷ See Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, pp. 137–139.

¹³⁸ See Jacques Bujard, La fortification de kastron Mayfa'a/Umm ar-Rasas, *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*.

thanks to the recent work at this site by Ignacio Arce.¹³⁹ We have already illustrated the basic layout of *Qasr* Bshir, above, so will summarize *ath-Thuraiya* and *al-Hallabat* in this section.

Qasr ath-Thuraiya is located on a hill overlooking a tributary of the Wadi Mujib; it apparently guarded a Roman road from Umm ar-Rasas to *Qasr el-Al*.¹⁴⁰ *Thuraiya* is a small fort measuring 37.5 m x 34.5 m; its north and south walls are 1.7 m thick while its east and west walls are 2 m thick. Rectangular projecting towers of varying size guard each of the four corners. The only tower that was preserved enough to measure was the north-east tower which was 8.2 m x 7.4 m. A close parallel for this fort is found at Quweira in the Hisma (Fig. 22). The date for the fort has been determined only by pottery sherding; the chronological range runs from the late 3rd to the middle of the 5th centuries.¹⁴¹

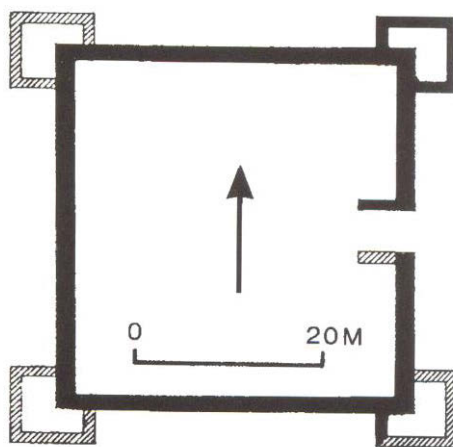


Fig. 22: *Qasr ath-Thuraiya* plan. After Kennedy 2004: 132

Qasr al-Hallabat is located 60 km northeast of Amman and 12 km east of the ancient *Via Nova Trajana*. Various surveys and excavations of the site had concluded that it

¹³⁹ See Ignacio Arce, *Qasr Hallabat (Jordan) Revisited: Reassessment of the Material Evidence*, in: *Muslim military architecture in greater Syria: from the coming of Islam to the Ottoman Period*, pp. 26–44; Arce, *Qasr al-Hallabat: Continuity and Change from the Roman-Byzantine to the Umayyad Period*, in: *Studies on the History and the Archaeology of Jordan*, pp. 325–344; Arce, *Hallabat: Castellum, Coenobium, Praetorium, Qasr. The Construction of a Palatine Architecture under the Umayyads*, in: *Residences, Castles, Settlements*, pp. 153–182; Arce, *Coenobium Palatium and Hira: Palatium: The Ghassanid Complex at Hallabat*, in: *Studies on the History and the Archaeology of Jordan X*, pp. 937–966.

¹⁴⁰ Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, p. 140.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

was initially founded in the Nabatean/Roman times, expanded in the Byzantine period and rebuilt along the Byzantine pattern in the Umayyad period (Fig. 23).¹⁴²

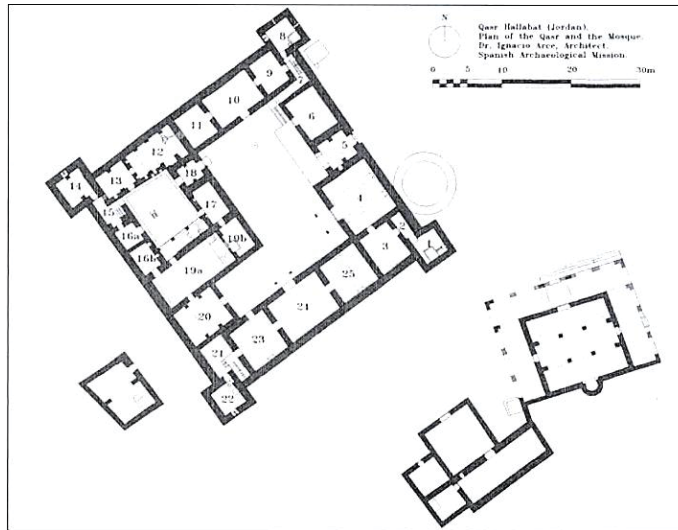


Fig. 23: *Qasr al-Hallabat* plan. After Arce 2009: 46

However, more recent work at the site (which included both excavation and careful architectural analysis) has refined the history of the site.¹⁴³ It still appears that the original small fort was founded in the Nabataean/early Roman period. This small fort was a 17.5 m square structure built with roughly hewn, irregularly sized limestone blocks. Later, rooms divided with partition walls were built up against the perimeter wall. The second major construction of Hallabat probably occurred in the late 3rd/early 4th century. This dating is based on architectural similarities with *Qasr Bashir* (which was built c. 309 according to inscriptional evidence). Arce refers to this second structure as *Quadriburigum* I. This second square structure, which was now a 38 m square structure, incorporated the entire original 17.5 m small fort into its construction of the northeast corner. Again, roughly hewn limestone blocks were used in its construction, with better cut limestone blocks used at the corners. Arce notes that this fort exhibited strong defensive elements, reflecting the military needs of the region during the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods (4th–5th centuries).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² For summary see Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, pp. 96–102.

¹⁴³ Arce, “*Qasr Hallabat* (Jordan) Revisited: Reassessment of the Material Evidence,” pp. 26–44; Arce, “Hallabat: Castellum, Coenobium, Praetorium, *Qasr*. The Construction of a Palatine Architecture under the Umayyads,” pp. 153–182.

¹⁴⁴ Arce, “Hallabat: Castellum, Coenobium, Praetorium, *Qasr*. The Construction of a Palatine Architecture under the Umayyads,” pp. 153–182.

The third major construction of Hallabat (called *Quadriburgium II* by Arce), probably took place in the Late Byzantine period (6th century), shortly after the great c. 551 earthquake, which apparently caused heavy damage to *Quadriburgium I*. After being abandoned and destroyed by the earthquake, the Roman fort was refurbished into a monastery and a palatine structure by the Ghassanid phylarchs.¹⁴⁵ The post-earthquake rebuild included the use of basalt ashlar, which were apparently brought from elsewhere. The external facing of the internal rooms that were built against the perimeter wall were made of limestone stretchers, interrupted near the top by a course of basalt—apparently for aesthetic purposes. This facing would be visible from the courtyard. Special decorative elements—a mosaic floor and marble siding—were also found in room 24. Inside the original old fort (which now forms a large room in the NW corner of the *quadriburgium*) a three-arched portico was added to the southern side. The ceiling of the portico was built of basalt beams and covered with plaster and mural paintings. The presence of crosses in the keystones of the three arches, indicates that this portico (and the contemporary architectural elements of *Quadriburgium II*) was still built in the Byzantine period—before the Umayyad.¹⁴⁶ Arce notes that there is a distinct shift in *Quadriburgium II* from a military structure to a civic one. Defensive elements are diminished or removed, while aesthetic elements (that would project wealth and power) are enhanced.¹⁴⁷ This is in line with a general “demilitarization” that seems to have occurred through Syria and Jordan during the latter part of the Byzantine period.

Finally, there was a final refurbishing of Hallabat that took place in the Umayyad period. This did not involve a major architectural reconstruction, but did involve a major “re-decoration” of the existing facility.¹⁴⁸ The continuing civic function of the building is evident, both by the elaborate decorations and a de-emphasis of military elements in the architecture (this will be discussed more below).

As already noted above, most of the Byzantine forts, appear to have been originally constructed in Roman times. Hence, it is not surprising that they maintain the Roman layout and construction techniques. The layout is square or rectangular with open space in the middle; sometimes this space is occupied by freestanding build-

¹⁴⁵ Arce, Qasr al-Hallabat (Jordan): Transformation of a Limes Arabicus Fort into a Monastic Palatine Complex, in: *Limes XX Congreso Internacional de Estudios sobre la Frontera Romana*, pp. 155–180; Arce, Qasr Hallabat, Qasr Bashir and Deir el Kahf. Building Techniques, Architectural Typology and Change of Use of Three Quadriburgia from the Limes Arabicus Interpretation and Significance, in: *Arqueología de la construcción II: Los procesos constructivos en el mundo romano: Italia y las provincias orientales*, pp. 455–484.

¹⁴⁶ Contra Ghazi Bisheh, Excavations at Qasr Hallabat 1979, in: *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, pp. 69–77.

¹⁴⁷ Acre, “Hallabat: Castellum, Coenobium, Praetorium, Qasr. The Construction of a Palatine Architecture under the Umayyads.” pp. 153–182; Arce, Coenobium Palatium and Hira: Palatium: The Ghassanid Complex at Hallabat, pp. 937–966.

¹⁴⁸ Acre, “Qasr al-Hallabat: Continuity and Change from the Roman-Byzantine to the Umayyad Period,” p. 343.