

## Shifts in Settlement Patterns of Late Bronze and Iron Age Ammon

The issues to be addressed in this paper include the geopolitical and ethnic boundaries of ancient Ammon through time and space, as well as the type of material culture held in common by the various parts of the region and how that material culture reflects the larger processes of cultural, economic and social change. Most of the discussion is based on the results of the Madaba Plains Project.

The terms "Ammon" and "Ammonite" may be applied to an ethnic entity of central Transjordan that is best defined during the late Iron II period. At this time aspects of the material culture and epigraphy suggest a coherent, unified ethnic consciousness, separate from other groups nearby. Primarily beginning with the work of Lugenbeal and Sauer (1972), a growing awareness of the distinctive late Iron II pottery forms of this region has taken place. At the same time epigraphists have isolated a script and language that can be called "Ammonite" (Cross 1975; Herr 1978: 55-78; Aufrecht forthcoming).

Distinctive elements of this culture are found almost exclusively north of Madaba and south of Wadi az-Zarqa. Sites outside this region have produced very few of the typical "Ammonite" late Iron II pottery forms found, for example, at Tell Hesban (Lugenbeal and Sauer 1972). Likewise, the script which epigraphists call "Ammonite" has been found in this same area (Cross 1975).

The precise southern boundary of the culture was probably the Madaba-Jalul region. Iron Age tombs at Mount Nebo, just a few kilometers from Hesban, did not produce typical Ammonite pottery (Saller 1966). The probable northern boundary was Wadi az-Zarqa, because, while the Ammonite corpus of late Iron II pottery is apparently represented at Deir 'Alla and Tell al-Mazar (Yassine 1988), very little was found at Tell as-Sa'idiyeh just a few kilometers to the north (Pritchard 1985). In the east, it apparently extended unbroken to the desert, while it did not occur at Jericho in the west. These seem to be the borders of the region of Ammon in contemporary Assyrian and biblical texts.

The chronological boundaries of Ammon are somewhat more difficult to define clearly. The Ammonite script seems to last at least until the middle of the sixth century B.C. in its cursive form on the Hesban ostraca (Cross 1975). At that time scribes replaced it with the Aramaic script which seems to have lasted to the end of the sixth

century B.C., again on the Hesban ostraca (Cross 1975). The distinctive corpus of pottery seems to have also lasted at least through the sixth century and possibly into the fifth. An Attic sherd and other early Persian forms were discovered with Ammonite forms in fill beneath the floor of the latest Ammonite citadel at Tell al-'Umeiri.

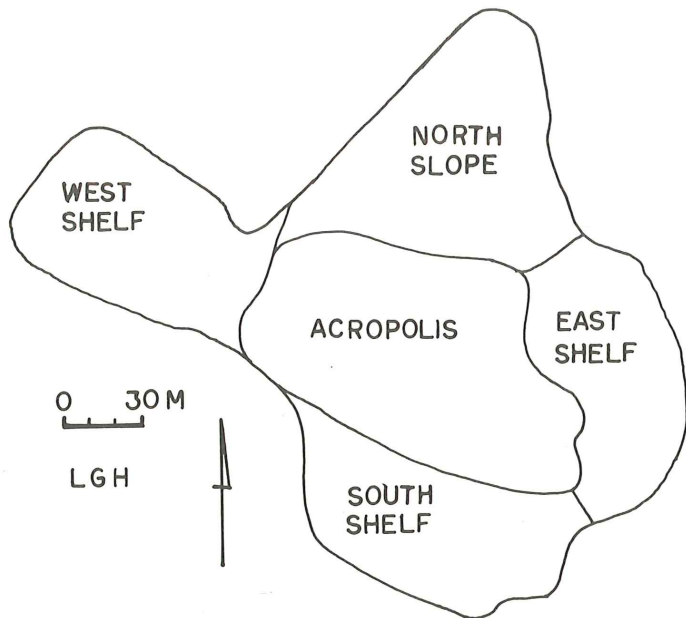
To trace this culture in the earlier Iron Age centuries is, however, more difficult. The Amman Citadel Inscription of the ninth century may be considered Ammonite (Cross 1969), but a distinctive local ceramic corpus of early Iron II and Iron I has not yet been isolated. However, it would seem reasonable to infer that the "Ammonite" culture of late Iron II was the product of the growth of a coherent ethnic group from earlier periods.

The ethnicity of the region, or indeed the demography and the subsistence patterns of its inhabitants, in the Late Bronze Age is almost completely unknown. At present, we should probably not speak in terms of "Ammon" and "Ammonites", though it is equally difficult to suggest they materialized out of nowhere.

Five seasons of excavation at Tell Hesban in the 1960s and 1970s and three at Tell al-'Umeiri by the Madaba Plains Project have shown that a series of five broad cycles of settlement intensification and abatement took place in the frontier region of central Transjordan, especially on the plateau. The processes of intensification and abatement refer not only to quantities and sizes of sites, but also changes in sophistication and specialization in economics, society, and culture. The second cycle included a long, gradual intensification during the Iron Age with a somewhat more rapid abatement during the early Persian period.

Tell al-'Umeiri was primarily occupied from the Early Bronze Age to the early Persian period. After a random surface survey and three seasons of excavation, we suggest a steadily shrinking settlement through time. From a maximum size in EBIII, when all parts of the site were occupied (FIG. 1), each subsequent settlement gradually diminished in size to a minimum during the early Persian period. However, the economic and social strategies of the inhabitants do not seem to reflect the same linear pattern of degeneration. Indeed, the greatest prosperity and highest degree of job specialization probably occurred while the site was near its smallest size during late Iron II. The





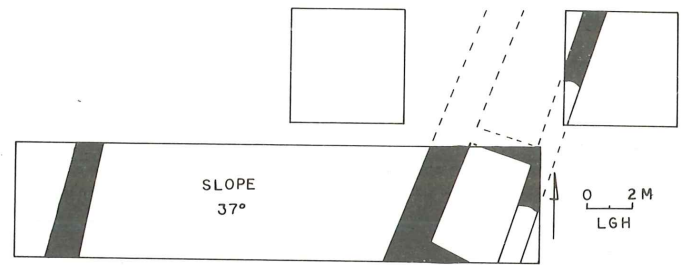
1. Sketch map of the sectors of settlement at Tell al-'Umeiri.

settlement history which follows is tentative, pending future excavation.

During the Late Bronze Age, Tell al-'Umeiri was an exception to general regional settlement patterns. The late MBII occupation, with its earthen rampart, continued into early LB, although the size of the settlement seems to have been reduced by about half (c. 1.17 hectares). No LB architecture has been found outside the acropolis (FIG. 1). However, extra-urban activities, such as terracing, were suggested by remains on the north slope and east shelf. It would seem that, compared to the MBII city, the LB remains reflect an abating settlement, both in terms of size and sophistication of social and economic forces. While evidences of trade have been found in MBII deposits, no imported LB material has so far been found, except one probable example of base-ring ware.

In the central plateau, occupation was in an abated state. There is no doubt that town settlements, such as al-'Umeiri, Saḥab, and Umm ad-Dananir occurred, but they were relatively rare and small in size. Little activity seems to have occurred in rural areas. However, this was not the case in the Jordan Valley where LB sites are more frequent.

During Iron Age I the settlement again seems to have been no larger than the acropolis (c. 1.17 hectares). However, economic and social intensification is suggested by the construction of a casemate fortification system (FIG. 2). Excavations have uncovered both the outer and inner walls, as well as two crosswalls. Stacked inside the casemate room were at least 13 storejars, almost all of the collar-rim variety. Running up to the outer wall was a beaten-earth rampart (*glacis*), the upper levels of which were laid in layers corresponding to the stone courses in the outer wall, strongly suggesting that the primary purpose of the rampart was to support the wall. The latest pottery in



2. Sketch map of the Iron I casemate fortification system at Tell al-'Umeiri.

the rampart from top to bottom was Iron I. At the base of the rampart a dry moat c. 3.5m deep was excavated out of the bedrock.

Such a strong fortification system would suggest significant civic or governmental involvement, which infers extensive job specialization and regional economic interaction. In mid to late Iron I a massive destruction laid the town waste. Two meters of debris, including wooden beams, covered the casemate room and, even in other areas of the site, an ash layer separates Iron I from Iron II.

At nearby Ḥesban occupation began in the Iron I period. However, virtually all of the remains were destroyed by later occupation. What remains suggests that the settlement was an unfortified village. Elsewhere in the region, surveys have shown that many small settlements were founded. It would seem that this period of intensification represents the settlement of the groups that would become the various nations known from Assyrian and biblical literary texts in the Iron II (eg. Ammonites, Moabites, Israelites).

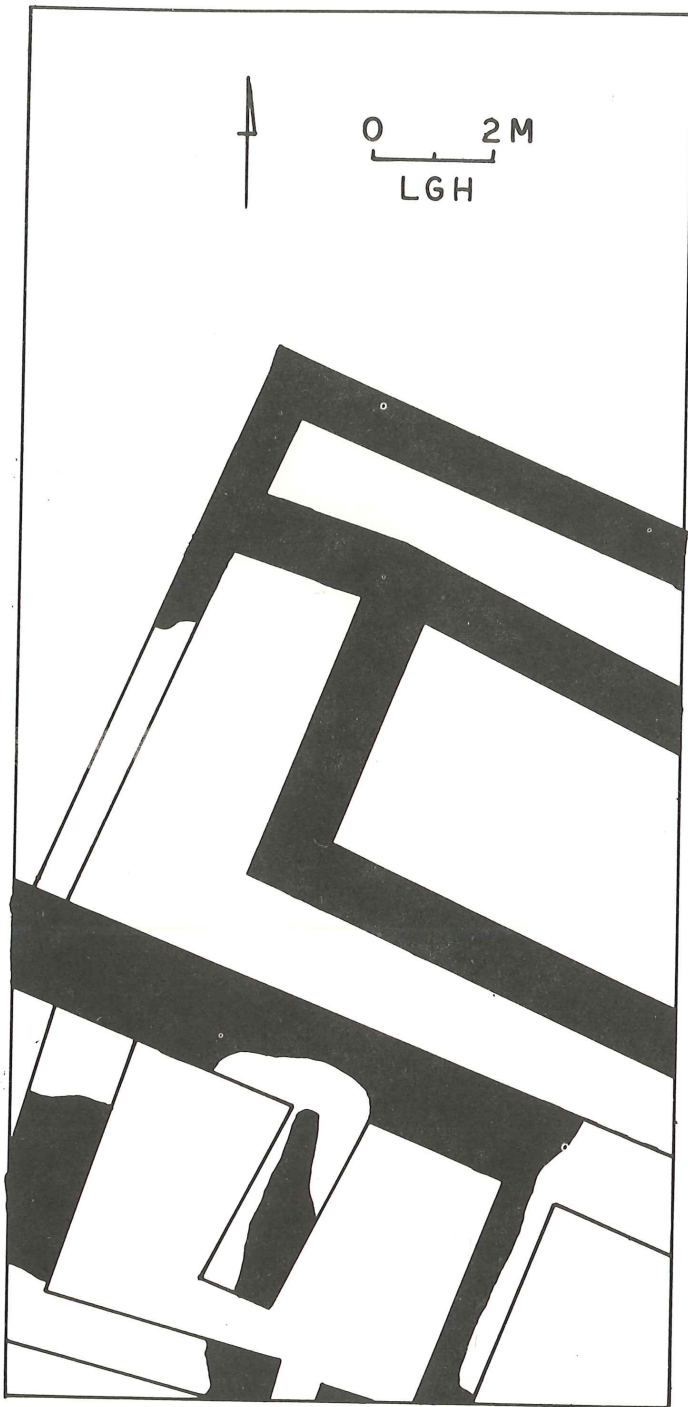
During early Iron II at Tell al-'Umeiri, the settlement did not grow outside the LB and Iron I limits of the acropolis (FIG. 1). Indeed, the inner wall of the casemate fortification system went out of use, giving way to a domestic storeroom. The outer wall and the rampart, however, continued in use. It would thus seem that the site experienced a slight abatement, at least as far as maintenance of infrastructure is concerned.

At Ḥesban, however, significant intensification is implied by the construction of a large reservoir near the top of the mound, perhaps as early as the ninth century B.C. Such a large structure suggests either a great deal of civic energy or the involvement of a central government.

With the seventh century B.C. the process of change at Tell al-'Umeiri took a significant turn toward intensification, although the settlement became smaller. Excavation on the eastern shelf produced a possible gate complex, though the foundations for the structure were very shallow. Fortification lines are traceable only around the acropolis.

Although the small size of the site would appear to belie the assertion that intensification was taking place at the time, a major construction project occurred at the western edge of the acropolis that can only be interpreted as indicating economic and social intensification. Two seasons of excavation have uncovered large foundations for what we have called the "Ammonite Citadel" (FIG. 3). The builders first excavated a large area through early Iron II and Iron I strata for the basement foundations of the





3. Sketch map of the late Iron II Ammonite citadel at Tell al-'Umeiri.

structure. They then laid the basement walls for a large, thick-walled structure. A seal impression of the servant of

the Ammonite king Ba'alyasha' was found here in 1984, suggesting the area was used to house governmental officials and their activities. The settlement seems to have taken on a highly specialized social function reflecting the activities of a centralized government.

Nearby, domestic occupation was indicated by a four room house and a second, larger house which included many domestic objects. The great quantities and high quality of small finds from this period suggest that, in spite of its small size, this was the most prosperous settlement so far encountered at the site.

Along with the decrease in site size was an apparent decrease in concern for security. The city wall in the west was not thick and the walls for the "gate" on the eastern shelf were not founded very deep. Moreover, at the same time, the region around 'Umeiri was apparently secure enough for small rural settlements to proliferate. Surveys have found the region dotted with agricultural complexes of all sizes.

The Hesban and 'Umeiri surveys, among others, have located scores of late Iron II sites, from large urban settlements to small agricultural complexes and field watchtowers. Job specialization and capital investment in large-scale projects, probably by a central government, is evidenced everywhere.

The Ammonite Citadel was rebuilt, with a reduction in both size and quality of construction, in the early Persian period (a small Attic sherd was found beneath the floor of the rebuild). On the eastern shelf the possible gate went out of use and was replaced by a series of pits and ephemeral terrace walls representing a less intensive pattern of use. The abatement leading to the abandonment of the settlement at Tell al-'Umeiri was therefore more gradual than sudden.

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