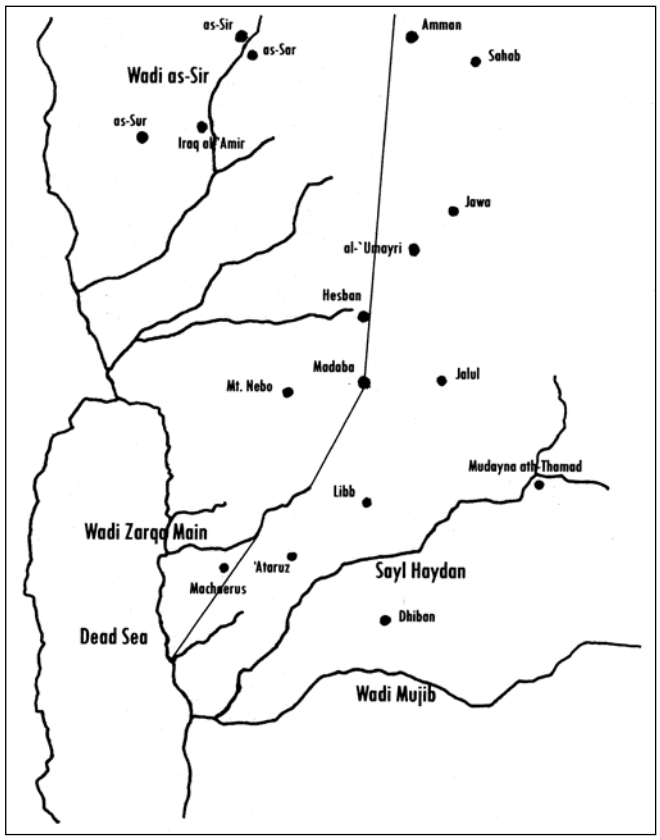
Chang-Ho C. Ji
La Sierra University
Riverside, CA 92515
U. S. A.

Chang-Ho C. Ji

Drawing the Borderline: the Nabatean, Hasmonean and Herodian Kingdoms in Central Jordan

In the analysis that followed his extensive Transjordan survey, Glueck (1939; 1970) suggested that the border of the Nabatean kingdom ran from the north end of the Dead Sea to Mādabā, roughly along the course of the Wādī Zarqā' Mā'īn, and continued eastward to the desert. Examining the distribution of pottery in Transjordan, Glueck noticed the "complete" absence of Nabatean pottery in the region north of this east-west line. This observation, as illustrated in Figure 1, led to the thesis of "the Madaba line," which set the northern limit of the Nabatean realm at Mādabā. Once the Mādabā line was set up, Glueck (1939, 1970) proposed another thesis that the northern part of the Nabatean kingdom in Hauran and southern Syria was reached, not through northern Jordan, but through the desert route via the Wādī as-Sarḥān. This thesis later led to the view that the area north of the east-west Mādabā line constituted Hasmonean-Herodian Parea and the confederation of cities called the Decapolis, and that this confederation served as a buffer zone between the Hasmonean-Herodian state and the Nabatean kingdom (Abel 1938; Freyne 1980; Smith 1966; Spijkerman 1978; Will 1985).

Needless to say, Glueck's thesis of the Mādabā line provided a foundation for the subsequent debate over the northern limit of the Nabatean state. According to recent scholarship, contrary to Glueck's proposal, the Nabateans were present in the region north of 'Ammān, and Nabatean communities in the Decapolis cities provided the basis for a direct route to the Hauran from southern Jordan (Gatier 1986; Graf 1986). In a similar fashion, scholars suspect the credibility of the buffer-zone thesis on the basis of the Jewish settlements in the Decapolis and the continuous Jewish-Nabatean conflicts in the region (Graf 1986; cf. Avi-Yonah 1977; Tcherikover 1966).



1. Nelson Glueck's Madaba line.

The purpose of the present study is to revisit the enduring and intense controversy surrounding the limit of the Nabatean kingdom in central Jordan, centering on Glueck's thesis of the Madaba line, i.e. the border between the Nabatean kingdom and Hasmonean-Herodian Parea. Although there have been a large number of studies devoted to the questions of whether or not the Nabateans were present north of 'Ammān and what kind of relationships they maintained with the Decapolis cities, researchers have generally avoided examining the issues of where the boundary line lay between the

Nabatean and Hasmonean-Herodian kingdoms and how it changed during the course of Hellenistic and Roman periods[1].

This article proceeds in three parts in order to amend this research *lacuna*. The first section begins with a discussion of historical and textual evidence related to the north-western border of the Nabateans in central Jordan and thus the eastern limit of Hasmonean-Herodian Parea. The second section provides a review of archaeological findings related to the Nabatean, Hasmonean and Herodian kingdoms in central Jordan. The third section presents a comparison and discussion of historical and archaeological evidence. In the process, we promote an alternative to Glueck's "one-size-fits-all" thesis for the whole late Hellenistic and early Roman period. The discussion involves a historical division of the period into four stages and, in turn, describes how the borders between the Nabatean, Hasmonean and Herodian kingdoms changed during these stages[2].

Historical Evidence

The Mādabā Plains Region

According to historical evidence, in 129BC the Hasmonean king Hyrcanus I captured Seleucid holdings at Mādabā and Samaga in an effort to expand his kingdom to the east and gain commercial and military footholds along the King's Highway (Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* [hereinafter *Ant*] 13.9.1)[3]. The six-month siege of Mādabā clearly indicates that the city was situated outside of the Hasmonean control prior to this battle, despite their earlier victory over "sons of Jambri", probably members of a nomadic Arab tribe from Mādabā (1 *Maccabees* [hereinafter *Macc*] 9:35-42; *Ant* 13.1.2 and 4; for the Jambrites see Milik 1980; Harrison 1996a; Bowersock 1983). Mādabā appears again in the list of cities of Moab held by Alexander Jannaeus during his reign (*Ant* 13.15.4). In 76 / 75BC, however, Hyrcanus II offered Mādabā and Libb, along with ten other Hasmonean-held cities, to the Nabatean king Aretas III in return for his help in the civil war between Hyrcanus II and his brother Aristobulus II (*Ant* 14.1.4). Later, two funerary *stelae*, both of which are dated to the reign of Aretas IV, were erected at Mādabā and Umm ar-Raṣāṣ by a Nabatean military commander to commemorate his father and son (Claremont-Ganneau 1897; Harrison 1996a; Milik 1958).

The political history of Tall Ḥisbān appears to differ slightly from that of Mādabā. Ḥisbān seems to have been captured by the Hasmoneans during the reign of Hyrcanus I and remained under Has-

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[1] Having laid out the background and purpose of this study, it is timely to consider the potential meaning and nature of boundary in the ancient world taking into account both similarities and differences between ancient and modern times. Like modern states, Grosby (2002: 23) correctly points out, ancient kingdoms probably presupposed a conception of a territory that is not only bounded but also perceived to be somewhat contiguous within those boundaries. Besides, the ancient kingdoms presumably valued their territory as highly as do modern states and attempted to either preserve or expand it as much as possible.

Nevertheless, this boundary is likely to have been more ambiguous and fluid than is generally acknowledged in modern times. The principal contrast is a different level of transhumance across the political and geographical border; the ancient state borders did not serve to keep out general population as strictly as do the modern borders and thus, in antiquities, people could move from one state to another for various social and economic activities without much regulation or restriction (cf. Parker 1986). A consequence of such demographic fluidity is the possible existence of a compact territory, city, or fortress owned by one nation in the middle of the territory belonging to other states (cf. Ji 2002; Wahlin 1993). Presumably, the ownership of these "territorial islands" outside of the regular political and geographical territory was jealously preserved and protected by the state so that they could be inherited through the state political lineage.

A similar view may be posed about the late Hellenistic and early Roman period in central Jordan. Along with the preceding discussion, the author assumes that the geographical divide between the Nabatean and Hasmonean-Herodian kingdoms was perceived as important to both the Nabateans and the Jews in general and played a crucial role in the emergence and development of their kingdoms, although the across-border transhumance was relatively common in the ancient period, and the division along the border was much less conspicuous as measured by modern political and economic criteria.

[2] The author's sincere gratitude goes to Drs. Khairieh 'Amr and Jong Keun Lee who read and commented on the earlier drafts of this paper. They also brought some additional related literature to the author's attention. Yet, any errors or shortcomings in this article belong solely to the author.

[3] There is some dispute over the identification of Samaga with as-Sāmik. Most scholars identify it with as-Sāmik (Avi-Yonah 1977; Vyhmeister 1989). Yet, the Ḥisbān survey team visited as-Sāmik and collected sherds at the site three times in two different seasons, but failed to find any Hellenistic sherds. Hellenistic sherds were also absent at the sites in the immediate vicinity of as-Samik, which can be called "neighboring places." This fact raised the question of the identification of Hellenistic Samaga. As a result, Ibach (1987: 170) rules out as-Sāmik as a candidate for Hasmonean Samaga. However, recall that as-Sāmik includes early Roman pottery that is often hard to distinguish from late Hellenistic pottery. Furthermore, "neighboring places" do not have to be located in the immediate vicinity of the site. Notice that al-'Āl and Umm Sirab, two major Hellenistic sites in the region, are situated only 2 to 3km northwest of as-Sāmik. Accordingly, the author still considers as-Samik a good candidate for Samaga, although it is not improbable that it may be found at al-'Āl and Umm Sirab.

monean rule at least until the death of Herod the Great. The site was probably added to the Hasmonean territory in 129BC when Hyrcanus I captured Samaga and Mādabā (*Ant* 13.9.1; Vyhmeister 1989). Ḥisbān is also noted alongside Mādabā in the list of the cities of Moab that belonged to the Hasmoneans at the beginning of the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (*Ant* 13.15.4; Avi-Yonah 1977). However, the similarity between the two cities ends here. Unlike Mādabā, Ḥisbān is absent in the list of twelve cities that Hyrcanus II delivered to Arates III (*Ant* 14.1.4). This absence likely indicates that the city remained under the control of the Hasmonean rulers throughout the last days of the Hasmonean kingdom and into the beginning of the Roman period. This does not mean that Ḥisbān remained the same all the way through to the end of the early Roman period. Well after the death of Herod the Great, it is possible that Ḥisbān fell temporarily into the hands of either the Nabateans or of other Arab tribes since, during the early days of the first Jewish revolt, insurgent Jews sacked and attempted to capture the city of Ḥisbān and its district (Josephus *The Wars of the Jews* [hereinafter *Wars*] 2.18.1). This view differs from Avi-Yonah's alternative view (Avi-Yonah 1977: 77) that Ḥisbān was ceded by Hyrcanus II and retaken by Herod the Great after his victory over the Nabateans.

A couple of other facts also support this argument. First, during the early Roman period, Ḥisbān appears to have been a military colony of Herod the Great. In Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (15.8.5), we are told that Herod selected some horse-men from his armies and settled them at Ḥisbān / Esbus. Second, this view is in accordance with the geographical division of the Mādabā plains into northern hilly and southern plateau regions. Both geographically and topographically, the Mādabā plains is clearly divided into a northern hilly and southern plateau area, and this sub-division is related to the settlement and political history of the region during the Iron Age and the Roman-Byzantine period (Ji 1998a). Traditionally, the southern plateau is a pastoral zone and thus has been inhabited primarily by nomadic tribes. In contrast, the northern hilly area constitutes an agricultural heartland with cities, small villages and farmsteads. This sub-regional division may also be applicable to the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods, during which the nomadic Nabateans may have controlled the southern plateau region, whereas sedentary Hasmonean-Herodian farmers settled in the hilly area of Ḥisbān and al-'Umayrī.

The 'Ammān-Wādī as-Sīr Region

The historical accounts of 'Ammān are quite different from those of Mādabā and Ḥisbān. First, in about 170BC, Jason — the Hellenizing Jewish high priest — was deposed and forced to flee twice into "the region of Ammanitis". According to *The Book of Maccabees* (2 *Macc* 4:26-27, 5:8-9), charges against him were laid before "Aretas, tyrant of the Arabs" and he fled again, this time to Egypt. MacAdam (1992: 31) identifies Aretas the tyrant as Aretas I, the Nabatean king. If this identification is correct, the implication is clear that the 'Ammān region was under the control of the Nabateans during the mid-second century BC. Second, two additional accounts in *The Book of Maccabees* (1 *Macc* 5:6-8; 2 *Macc* 12:17-19) also attest to the presence of Nabateans in the region. According to these accounts, Judas Maccabees attacked and captured Jazer and Charax, two cities in Ammanitis, both of which were under the command of Timotheus. Although the identity of Timotheus remains ambiguous, MacAdam and others suggest that he was a Greek *strategos* of Ammanitis in the pay of the Nabatean king (Bar-Kochva 1989; Goldstein 1976; MacAdam 1992). In addition, it should be recalled that Jazer and Charax are usually identified as Khirbat as-Sīr and Khirbat as-Sūr respectively (Avi-Yonah 1977; Goldstein 1983; MacAdam 1992). Given that this identification is plausible, the entire region of the Wādī as-Sīr and 'Irāq al-Amīr is likely to have been Nabatean during the early second century BC, after the death of the Tobiad Hyrcanus, but was soon turned over to the Hasmoneans during the early days of the Maccabean revolt. However, there is nothing to indicate that 'Ammān fell into the hands of the Hasmoneans; it appears to have remained firmly under Nabatean control throughout the period under discussion.

In addition to the Maccabean account there is Josephus, who in the year 135BC says that the 'Ammān region was under the control of Zenon Cotylas and his son Theodorus, "tyrants of Philadelphia" (*Ant* 13.13.3; *Wars* 1.4.2). MacAdam (1992: 31) suggests that they may have been Nabatean military commanders with Hellenized names. Once again, Josephus attests to Alexander Jannaeus' siege of Philadelphia, however the Nabateans withstood these attacks by the Hasmonean king (*Ant*

13.13.3; *Wars* 1.4.3). There is further textual evidence for the contention that Philadelphia and its vicinity were part of the Nabatean territory during the transition from late Hellenistic to early Roman periods. According to Josephus, in 65BC Aretax III besieged Jerusalem in order to intervene in the family quarrel about succession between Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II. Pompey threatened a Roman invasion of the Nabatean kingdom unless the king withdrew his forces from Jerusalem. Arates III was terrified and retired from Judea to Philadelphia (*Wars* 1.6.3). This account suggests that Philadelphia was under the control of the Nabateans during the period from the mid-second century BC until the Roman invasion (MacAdam 1992).

This seems also to be the case during the early Roman period. According to Josephus' account (*Ant* 20.1.1-3), in 44 – 45AD the Judean procurator Cuspius Fadus had to settle a dispute between the Jews in Parea and the Nabateans in the city of Philadelphia regarding the boundaries of the village called Zia. Zia is commonly identified with modern Zay, several kilometers west of the city of as-Salṭ (MacAdam 1992: 33). At this point, it is worth mentioning Tall al-Jādūr, the best candidate for ancient Gadar, one of four capital cities of the Parea with its own toparchy. Tall al-Jādūr is located near the modern city of as-Salṭ, just a few kilometers south-west of the village of Zay. This fact, added to the previous observation, indicates that the as-Salṭ region was probably settled by Jewish residents and that the boundary between them and the Nabateans at ʻAmmān was located somewhere between ʻAmmān and as-Salṭ.

In contrast, the fate of the Wādī as-Sīr region — south of Tall al-Jādūr — remains somewhat vague during the early Roman period. In 31 BC, Herod waged a war in the ʻAmmān region against the Nabateans and took possession of a fort belonging to the Nabateans (*Wars* 1.19.5). MacAdam (1992) identifies this fort with Khirbat as-Sūr. However, in the author's view this identification is not without problem, since as-Sūr is situated within the boundaries of Parea, far to the west of Tall al-Jādūr and ʻAmmān. A better candidate might be Khirbat Sār near the modern city of Wādī as-Sīr, where the ʻIrāq al-Amīr survey team found copious early Roman pottery (Ji and Lee 2002). In this vein, it should be recalled that the historical sources are silent concerning Jazer, which was captured by Judas Maccabees in the mid-second century BC. This could mean that Jazer remained securely under the control of the Jews during the transition from the Hasmonean dynasty to the Herodian kingdom.

If Jazer and the unknown fort were respectively located at Khirbat as-Sīr and Khirbat Sār, an intriguing question arises: could it be that the upper stream of the Wādī as-Sīr was the boundary between Hasmonean-Herodian Parea and Nabatean Ammanitis during the period between the Maccabean conquest of Jazer and Herod's victory over Malichus I in 31BC? In light of the historical summary above, it is certainly possible. Indeed, it is more likely in view of the fact that Tall al-Jādūr, identified with Parean Gadar, is located north of the upper stream of the Wādī as-Sīr.

The Libb-Machaerus Region

The literary evidence that comments on the region of Machaerus and the Wādī al-Mūjib is also relatively abundant and clear (Piccirillo 1979; Strobel 1974). According to Josephus (*Wars* 7.6.2), Alexander Jannaeus founded a fort at Machaerus after stabilizing his control of the Wādī Zarqā' Māʻīn region. In 57BC, the citadel was demolished for the first time by Gabinius when Pompey waged a punitive war against Aristobulus II. Herod the Great rebuilt a strong fort at the site in 30BC, soon after he became king of Judea. Ancient historians and geographers are silent about what happened to Machaerus during the period of 57-30BC. However, in view of the fact that the Nabateans were most likely aiming for the territory west of the modern King's Highway during this period, it is not impossible that they extended their control into the Machaerus region after the Gabinius' victory over the Hasmoneans at Machaerus.

Upon the death of Herod the Great in 4BC, his kingdom was divided into three parts. Herod Antipas inherited the Machaerus region as part of Parea. Machaerus came under direct Roman administration following the death of Herod's nephew Agrippa (44AD) and was dismantled once again in 72AD, during the Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire (*Wars* 7.6.1-4). In the meantime, Herod Antipas fell in love with his cousin Herodias and had to divorce his legitimate wife, a Nabatean princess. Upon discovering her fate, the Nabatean princess went to Machaerus without informing Herod Antipas of any of her intentions and from there fled to her farther, Aretas IV, via Herodian fortresses in the Sayl Hīdān (*Ant* 18.5.1; Strobel 1997). Concomi-

tantly, we should not discount the possibility that Machaerus fell temporarily into the hands of the Nabatean ruler during the rule of Herod Antipas (Vyhmeister 1989: 12).

Two suggestions emerge from this textual exploration. The first point we can deduce is that the region of Machaerus was annexed into the Hasmonean realm no later than the reign of Alexander Jannaeus and to all intents and purposes remained part of Herodian Parea until the first Jewish revolt broke out. Nevertheless, this Hasmonean-Herodian occupation of the site was interrupted, possibly twice, by the Nabateans — once during the period 58-30BC and then again at some time before the first Jewish revolt in the first century AD. The second point is that the historical accounts strongly imply that the region of Hasmonean-Herodian Parea had a common border with the Nabateans somewhere near the gorges of Sayl Hīdān and Wādī al-Mūjib. This notion is based on the identification of Machaerus with Qal'at al-Mishnaqa and the location of Herodian fortresses in Sayl Hīdān and Wādī al-Mūjib (Piccirillo 1979; Strobel 1974, 1997).

What is unclear from the texts is whether or not Herod the Great ever recaptured the cities east of Machaerus, such as 'Aṭarūz and Libb, when he rebuilt the Hasmonean fort at Machaerus and fortified the surrounding area. We have no textual reference to what happened to the areas of 'Aṭarūz and Libb after Hyrcanus II handed Libb over to Aretas III. One scenario is that the 'Aṭarūz-Libb area was again incorporated within Herodian Parea late in the first century BC when Machaerus was rebuilt. Another scenario is that these cities remained within the bounds of Nabatean territory despite the Herodian advance toward Machaerus and Wādī al-Mūjib.

Archaeological Evidence

The Mādabā Plains Region

Having explored the historical record, we now turn to archaeological evidence. In 1993, Harrison (1996b) conducted a collection of surface sherds covering 166 squares, each measuring 50 x 50m., in order to understand changes in settlement patterns at Mādabā. Nabatean pottery was present in 22 squares and early Roman in 23 squares. The strong representation of Nabatean pottery in the survey posits that the early Roman settlement at Mādabā took place under the auspices of the Nabateans and that their occupation was both widespread and intensive. This view accords with the results from subsequent excavations that produced a wealth of Nabatean material evidence.

Additionally, we now have stratified evidence for the late Hellenistic settlement at Mādabā: a series of walls, at least two towers, various cooking installations and large quantities of pottery and coins (Harrison *et al*. 2000; van Elderen 1972). Ferguson (2002), based on his analysis of the archaeological evidence, credibly suggests that Mādabā was occupied during the late-second and early-first centuries BC and had "clear connections with the Hasmoneans" during the late Hellenistic period.

The relatively strong representation of Nabatean activity in Mādabā stands in contrast with the archaeological evidence from nearby Mount Nebo. Despite decades of excavation, there is no conclusive evidence for Nabatean settlement and activity in the Mount Nebo area (cf. Piccirillo and Alliata 1998). In similar vein, Gitler (1998) studied 157 coins recovered between 1969 and 1996, but his catalogue lacks Nabatean coins. In contrast, coins minted in the time of Alexander Jannaeus are common in the Mount Nebo area, indicating a Hasmonean presence in the area during the first century BC (Ji and Lee 2004).

On the other hand, excavations at Ḥisbān have discovered two settlement phases dated to the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Stratum 15 appears to have been a late Hellenistic military fort with a small number of buildings at the foot of the fortress. Mitchel (1992) relates this stratum to the Hasmoneans and dates it to the period of 198-63BC. According to a new interpretation, however, Stratum 15 is more likely to have been inhabited from the late-second century to the mid-first century BC, and the fort at the site appears to be associated with Alexander Jannaeus rather than his Hasmonean predecessors (Ji and Lee 2004). In conytrast, Stratum 14 appears to represent the early Roman period. Mitchel (1992, 1994) suggests that early Roman Ḥisbān was a small village around the Hasmonean fort on the summit of the site that was occupied by Herod's veterans. A further observation that supports the hypothesis of continuous Jewish settlement at Ḥisbān is the smooth and gradual transition from Stratum 15 to Stratum 14.

This point can be established more firmly once we take two additional findings into consideration. First, note the discovery of early Roman tombs with a rolling-stone door and interior individual loculi

at Tall Ḥisbān (Waterhouse 1994, 1998). This type of tomb is not only unusual in Jordan, but is also geographically associated with the Jerusalem area (Kritzeck and Nitowski 1980). To date, there is no hint that tombs with rolling-stone doors are found elsewhere in Jordan, especially in the Nabatean heartland of southern Jordan. This indicates that the early Roman settlers at Ḥisbān were closely associated with the Herodian Jews in the Jerusalem area, rather than the Arab and Nabatean tribes east of the Jordan River. Second, the ceramic corpus also points to the existence of a Herodian population at Ḥisbān during the early Roman period. According to Sauer (1994), early Roman pottery from Ḥisbān contrasts with contemporary ceramic assemblages from other sites in Jordan. The best parallels come from Qumrān, Masada, Machaerus, Khirbat al-Mukhayyaṭ and ʻIrāq al-Amīr. It is noteworthy that all these sites were part of the Herodian kingdom or Parea. The distinctive nature of the Ḥisbān pottery led Sauer to conclude that Ḥisbān was part of Herodian Parea, not Nabatea, during the early Roman period.

At Tall Ḥisbān, the 1968-74 excavations yielded more than 250 coins, including five Hasmonean and 19 Nabatean coins (Terian 1971, 1974, 1976). All of the Hasmonean coins, except for one from the time of Antigonus Mattathias, were minted during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus. All the Nabatean coins are assigned to either Aretas IV or Rabbel II. Of particular interest to us is the discovery of an Alexander Jannaeus coin from the bedrock surface associated with the late Hellenistic fortress (Mitchel 1992: 161; Terian 1976: 134), which gives a clue to the construction date of the late Hellenistic fortress and its relationship to the Hasmonean kingdom. Given the discovery of this coin, the early years of the first century BC could be regarded as a *terminus post quem* for the construction of this fortress, with Alexander Jannaeus as its builder. Equally interesting to us is the stratigraphic distribution of Nabatean coins; three coins came from Stratum 14 and seven from Stratum 13. No Nabatean coins were found in Stratum 15 and Stratum 12 (see Mitchel 1992: 161-163). One may argue that this relatively narrow distribution of Nabatean coins indicates the Nabatean connection with Strata 13-14. The virtual absence of ceramic and other artifactual evidence for Nabatean activity at Ḥisbān, however, still imposes limitations on the validity of such an interpretation for Strata 13-14 (Mitchel 1992: 64).

A potential analogy exists at Tall al-ʻUmayrī. During the late Hellenistic and Roman periods, Tall al-ʻUmayrī was a farming village with domestic buildings, semi-circular bins and several pits (Herr *et al*. 1999). The ethnic identification of this village stands out all the more clearly once the plaster-lined bath of Field A is taken into consideration. This bath is a typical example of the ceremonial bath known as *miqveh*, which was associated with the Jewish population during the late Hellenistic and Roman periods (cf. Reich 1990)[4]. The question of the exact date of the ritual bath at Tall al-ʻUmayrī remains unresolved. Originally, the excavators dated it to the early Roman period on the basis of the latest pottery associated with the installation (Herr *et al*. 2000; Lawlor 1991; personal communication with Douglas Clark 2001). A more probable explanation is that this installation belongs to the late Hellenistic occupation on the southern summit of the site (cf. Herr *et al*. 1999). The late Hellenistic remains cluster on the central and south sides of the summit, including Fields A, H, and L. Note that the bath was located in Field A. Similarly, it is noticeable that no early Roman architecture has as yet been uncovered at Tall al-ʻUmayrī, although Roman sherds are sporadically found on the surface. In any case, a Hellenistic date for the ritual bath is not easily dismissed as no definitive evidence is available; on the basis of its presence at the site, Tall al-ʻUmayrī appears to have been Hasmonean and Herodian in the late Hellenistic — early Roman period.

The Ḥisbān survey team visited 148 sites within a 10km. radius of Tall Ḥisbān (Ibach 1987). Sherds of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods were found at 21 and 57 sites respectively, with a heavy concentration in the region between al-ʻUmayrī and Ḥisbān. Nabatean evidence is noticeably absent in the survey area. Only two Nabatean sherds were found during the three seasons of surface exploration, both of which came from Tall Jalūl on the desert fringe (Ibach 1987). Equally noteworthy is the absence of Nabatean evidence at Tall al-ʻUmayrī and its surroundings. Despite years of extensive excavation, distinctive Nabatean pottery sherds were

[4] The author would like to thank Nachum Sagiv, who originally led his attention to the ritual bath at Khirbat ʻAṭarūz, and its historical and archaeological importance to the study of the Hasmonean and Herodian periods in Jordan.

not found anywhere in the al-'Umayrī survey region (cf. Herr *et al*. 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000). The al-'Umayrī survey team visited 140 sites within a 5km. radius of the site and documented 19 early Roman sites (Boling 1989; Christopherson *et al*. 2002; Younker 1991). This number is larger than the seven attributed to the Hellenistic period. This relative abundance of early Roman evidence stands in stark contrast to the total absence of Nabatean evidence within a 5km. radius of al-'Umayrī. In the author's view, these oddities in the survey data — combined with the presence of a ritual bath at Tall al-'Umayrī — tilts the balance of probability in favor of Hasmonean and Herodian control of the Ḥisbān and al-'Umayrī region during the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods.

Given that Tall Jalūl is the only solid evidence for a Nabatean presence that has come out of the Ḥisbān-al-'Umayrī survey, we continue to examine the results of the ongoing excavations and intensive surveys at this site. The excavation team have recovered abundant evidence for Iron Age I and II settlements, but no data — except for a small amount of post-Persian debris in Field B — for Hasmonean and Nabatean settlement at the site (Herr *et al*. 1996; Younker and Merling 2000; Younker *et al*. 1996). In 1976 and 2000, the Ḥisbān survey team conducted intensive surface surveys at Jalūl, which yielded approximately 4,800 diagnostic sherds (Groves, Borstad, and Christopherson 1995; Ibach 1978). Two hypotheses arise from this result. First, the scarcity of Hellenistic pottery points to a potential gap in occupation at Jalūl during the Hellenistic period, despite the discovery of a few Hellenistic sherds from the pit in Field B (personal communication with Gary L. Christopherson 2002). Second, in contrast to the Hellenistic period, Jalūl was clearly occupied during the early Roman period; the discovery of Nabatean pottery during the 1976 survey could indicate that this Roman settlement was connected with Nabatean activity at the site at this time (Ibach 1978). Third, we turn to the results of the survey around Jalūl. According to the Jalūl regional survey, there are only four archaeological sites within a 5km. radius of the site, one of which yielded Hellenistic and Nabatean sherds. This result clearly suggests that the Jalūl region, like Tall Jalūl itself, was sparsely settled during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. In all likelihood, the Nabatean presence at Jalūl and its surroundings was connected with nomadic or commercial activities rather than permanent settlement.

The 'Ammān-Wādī as-Sīr Region

One of the most noteworthy results of the series of excavations at 'Ammān Citadel is the extensive late Hellenistic — early Roman occupation revealed on both the lower and upper terraces. Furthermore, this occupation appears to be linked to the Nabateans (Bennett 1979; Russell *et al*. 1997; Zayadine 1973, 1977; Zayadine, Najjar and Greene 1987). Specifically, excavations on the lower terrace revealed the remains of early Roman architecture with a floor upon which Nabatean coins of Aretas IV were found (Zayadine 1973), thereby suggesting that the area was used by the Nabateans during the first half of the first century AD. The early Roman settlement was built upon the late Hellenistic one. There are no traces of violent destruction between the late Hellenistic phase and the early Roman one. This is somewhat surprising given the Hasmonean attack on the city at about 100BC; perhaps it remained intact despite the war. When excavations progressed to the upper terrace of the citadel, Zayadine (1977) again uncovered the remains of a late Hellenistic — early Roman settlement and reservoir, followed by another early Roman phase. A Nabatean date for the reservoir is possible, given the discovery of decorated Nabatean ware in the foundation trench of its walls. A bronze coin of Aretas IV found on the floor of the reservoir is further evidence for a Nabatean link with this feature.

The Roman Forum has additional evidence for late Hellenistic — early Roman — Nabatean activity in the 'Ammān area (Hadidi 1974). The stratigraphy of the excavated area shows a mixture of late Hellenistic and early Roman sherds, coins and artifacts. What is particularly interesting for the present study is the fill underneath the second century Roman building phase. This foundation fill includes Hellenistic sherds and Seluecid coins, all of which date to the second century BC. Also note the discovery of one Sidonian and two Nabatean coins from the same fill. The Sidonian coin dates to 60/59BC; one Nabatean coin is of Aretas IV and the other of Rabbel II. The complete absence of early Hellenistic and Ptolemaic sherds and coins is striking. This suggests that the settlement around the Roman Forum was founded in the Seleucid period and continued in use into the first century AD, very likely under the auspices of the Nabatean kings. Analysis of the coins from the 1964-67 excavations

provides supporting numismatic evidence (Hadidi 1973). The coin catalogue includes three Seleucid coins, dated to the second and early-first centuries BC, and four Nabatean coins of Aretas II, Aretas IV and Rabbel II [5].

Turning to the area south of ʻAmmān, we see no evidence of later Hellenistic and early Roman settlement at Saḥāb (Ibrahim 1972, 1974, 1975). The Saḥāb regional survey documented more than 130 sites (Ibrahim *et al*. 1984). Of these, only two sites yielded Nabatean sherds, whereas five and seven sites yielded late Hellenistic — early Roman and early Roman pottery respectively. Much the same can be said for Tall Jāwā. Several seasons of excavation at Jāwā have uncovered no Hellenistic or early Roman occupation phases (cf. Daviau 1992; 1993; 1994; 1996). Given these results, the Jāwā-Saḥāb region appears to have been sparsely occupied during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods.

As stated above, the Wādī as-Sīr region is thought by most scholars to be related to the early Hasmonean expansion east of the Jordan and their wars against the Nabateans. Excavations at ʻIrāq al-Amīr uncovered a late Hellenistic — early Roman settlement phase comprising two sub-phases, with a short period of abandonment between the two (Lapp 1962, 1963). In addition, the Wādī as-Sīr region has been the subject of intensive surveys which show that the area around ʻIrāq al-Amīr generally experienced a relatively high level of human activity during the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods (Ji 1998b, 2001; Ji and Lee 1999, 2002; Villeneuve 1988). For the moment, we are especially concerned with the evidence from Khirbat as-Sūr, Khirbat as-Sīr and Khirbat Sār. Different survey teams have visited Khirbat Sār and collected Hellenistic and early Roman material, indicating that it was resettled at this time (Glueck 1939; Ji and Lee 1999, 2002). The survey data from Khirbat as-Sīr and Khirbat as-Sūr also suggest that they were in use during the Hellenistic — early Roman periods.

There is also numismatic evidence for the Hasmonean connection with the late Hellenistic — early Roman settlements in the ʻIrāq al-Amīr area. The excavations at ʻIrāq al-Amīr yielded one Hasmonean coin of Alexander Jannaeus and three Nabatean coins of Aretas IV (Lapp 1983). Another Hasmonean coin was recovered in the area of the monumental gateway to the Qaṣr al-Abd and was dated to the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (Dentzer, Villeneuve and Larché 1983). At Khirbet as-Sūr, the ʻIrāq al-Amīr survey team conducted a coin survey, which yielded six Hellenistic and early Roman coins, including one Hasmonean coin of Hyracanus I and one Nabatean coin dated to Malichus II (Ji and Lee 2004). The Hasmonean and Nabatean coins from Khirbat as-Sūr, along with those from ʻIrāq al-Amīr, are important to our discussion of the late Hellenistic history of the region; they may point to Hasmonean and Nabatean activity during this period. Until now, however, there is no architectural or ceramic evidence for specific Nabatean settlements in the region to support the late Nabatean numismatic evidence from the village of ʻIrāq al-Amīr. What is also noteworthy is the absence of distinctive Nabatean sherds at and around Khirbat as-Sūr, Khirbat as-Sīr and Khirbat Sār.

The Libb-Machaerus Region

Excavation of the Hellenistic-Roman remains at Machaerus has demonstrated that a Hasmonean fort was built there during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus and subsequently underwent substantial transformation under the auspices of Herodian rulers during the early Roman period (Bianchi and Faggella 1993; Corbo 1980; Corbo and Loffreda 1981; Loffreda 1980; Piccirillo 1979, 1980). The author's ongoing excavations at nearby Khirbat ʻAṭarūz have also uncovered late Hellenistic — early Roman ceramic fills and building remains linked with the Hasmonean-Herodian settlements. A case in point is another example of the underground ritual bath known as *miqveh*, this time located on the eastern slope of Khirbat ʻAṭarūz. As mentioned above, this type of bath was associated with the Hasmonean-Herodian population.

Far more difficult to determine is the extent of the

[5] In the late 1980s, a systematic archaeological survey was mounted in the north Greater Amman region (Abu Dayyah *et al*. 1991). The survey team visited 222 archaeological sites and found Hellenistic and early Roman evidence at 14 and 61 sites, in the order given. This result indicates a moderate level of Hellenistic settlement in the region and a subsequent sharp increase in population during the early Roman period. In contrast, the ʻAyn Ghazāl survey shows a total lack of Hellenistic evidence and a very poor representation of early Roman in the northeast area of the Amman region (Simmons and Kafafi 1988). Unfortunately, however, in both surveys, the early Roman pottery was not further specified into Nabatean and general early Roman pottery, and hence, is not of great help for our purposes.

evidence for Nabatean occupation in the ʻAṭarūz-Machaerus region. Gleuck's survey of the Libb-Machaerus area indicated that Nabatean sherds are common at ʻAṭarūz, Machaerus and in the region between Wādī Zarqāʾ Māʻīn and Sayl Hīdān (Gleuck 1939: 131-136). At ʻAṭarūz, however, ongoing excavations have so far failed to recover any Nabatean evidence, which is in conflict with Glueck's survey report, although further excavations at the site may yet provide a definitive answer.

Not far from ʻAṭarūz is Khirbat Libb, a place mentioned several times in Glueck's survey report. Much of our current knowledge of the history of Khirbat Libb comes from the efforts of three separate archeological surveys, conducted by Glueck, Elder and the author. The results are however contradictory or, at best, inconsistent regarding the Nabatean period. Gleuck (1939) visited Khirbat Libb during his Transjordan survey and, as he claimed to have collected Nabatean sherds, asserted that it was occupied by the Nabateans. Libb was revisited by the author in summer 2001 as part of the ʻAṭarūz-Machaerus area survey. Although the entire area of ancient occupation has suffered from modern development, the survey team still managed to collect more than 400 diagnostic sherds at the site. Notwithstanding the presence of early Roman sherds, no distinctive Nabatean pottery was found on the surface. In one sense, this *caveat* is partially reconciled as Elder (2001) found two Nabatean sherds during his surveys of Khirbat Libb in 2000-01. Nevertheless, the dearth of Nabatean sherds at Khirbat Libb remains problematic in view of the quantitative analysis made by the surveyor, which demonstrated that Nabatean sherds constitute a near-zero percentage of the hundreds of diagnostic early Roman sherds gathered from the surface of Khirbat Libb and in its immediate vicinity.

On the other hand, the further we proceed from Libb to the east, the stronger the evidence for a Nabatean presence in the south-eastern part of the Mādabā plains becomes. This arid, desert fringe area includes several early Roman and Nabatean sites, plus the extensive Nabatean settlement and caravansary at Umm al-Walīd (Glueck 1934: 10-13, 1939: 137-139). The Limes Arabicus project also brought to light a cluster of Nabatean sites along the desert fringe in the south-eastern part of the Mādabā plains. In this area, according to Parker (1976; 1986), the Nabateans constructed a system of forts and watchtowers in order to defend their settlements and caravan routes, either building new structures or repairing earlier Iron Age II fortifications. The Nabatean period also witnessed an impressive settlement intensification at Mudayna ath-Thamad (Daviau, Mulder-Hymans and Foley 2000). The excavations at Mudayna ath-Thamad have revealed a major Nabatean settlement at this site, consisting of at least two settlement phases dated to the early Roman period.

Finally, remains of the Nabatean period are prominant on the Dhībān plateau. The Dhībān Plateau Survey demonstrated that 27 of the 421 survey sites in the region had fine Nabatean painted ware (Ji and Lee in press). Tushingham (1972, 1989) distinguished two periods of Nabatean settlement at Dhībān, both dated to the first century AD. Al-Lāhūn was also inhabited during the Nabatean period, as indicated by a small square temple built on bedrock in Area B2 and a large building complex in Area A1 (Homes-Fredericq 1986, 1989; Homes-Fredericq and Naster 1979). Also, three seasons of excavation at ʻArāʻir have revealed Hellenistic and Nabatean remains dated to the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods (Olavarri 1965). No interruption of settlement seems to have occurred between the Hellenistic and Nabatean periods.

Discussion

Textual Reconstruction of the Border Line

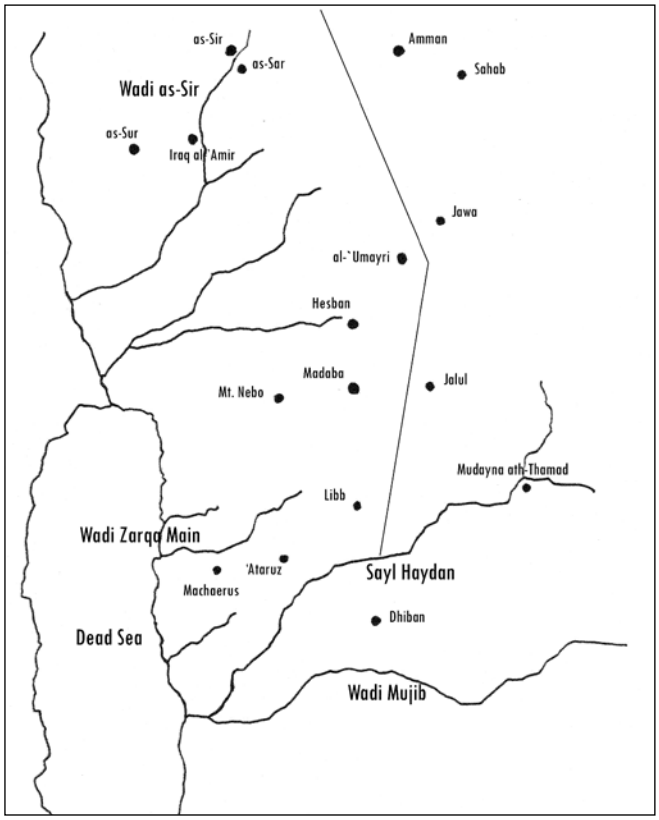
In light of the historical survey above, the late Hellenistic to early Roman period upon which we are concentrating can conveniently be divided into four eras, according to the history and chronology of the Nabatean, Hasmonean and Herodian kingdoms. The first period may be designated the Hasmonean expansion era, the second and early-first centuries BC. The second period would be the first Nabatean expansion era, the mid-first century BC, while the third period may be described as the era of Herodian expansion, the late-first century BC. The fourth period corresponds to the first century AD and is characterized by the revival of Nabatean fortunes in the area. Looking back over the early-second century BC, we can suggest that the region between ʻAmmān and the Dhībān plateau was largely under the control of Arab tribes and nomads (cf. *Ant* 12.4.11). These tribes possibly advanced westward to the as-Sūr region following the death of Tobiad Hyrcanus in the mid-second century BC.

The first stage of this historical sequence started during the mid- and late-second century BC, when

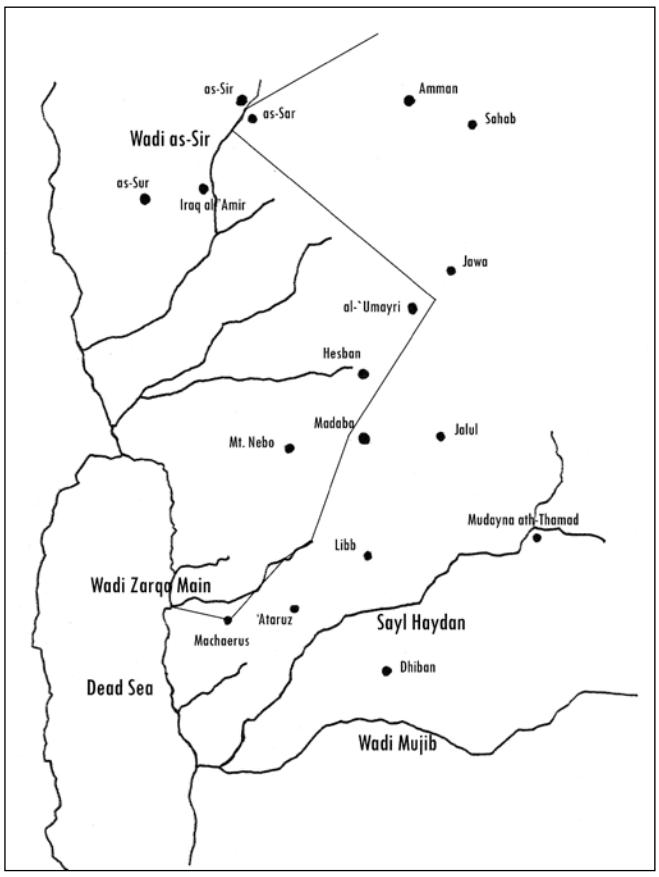
Maccabean leaders attacked and captured Jazer and Charax in the ‘Irāq al-Amīr region and the cities of Mādabā and Samaga on the Mādabā plains. The Hasmonean territory continued to expand southward to Sayl Hīdān during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus, who built a fort at Machaerus and possibly other smaller defensive structures in the region. Ḥisbān and Libb are not mentioned in the list of the cities captured by the Hasmoneans, but very likely they were also incorporated around this time, as they are mentioned later as being among the cities of Moab that were in the Hasmonean hands during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus. Further expansion of Hasmonean territory appears to have been blocked by Obodas I and Arates III, both of who defeated Alexander Jannaeus in their wars in Transjordan which occurred about 20 years apart. Be that as it may, in the mid-second and early-first century BC, the eastern limit of the Hasmonean kingdom seems to have run through al-‘Umayrī, Ḥisbān, Mādabā and Libb, from Tall al-Jādūr and as-Sīr in the north to Sayl Hīdān in the south (see FIG. 2). The western boundary of the Nabatean realm seems to have run along a line connecting ‘Ammān and Mudayna ath-Thamad via Jalūl.

The civil strife between Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II led to a substantial reduction of Hasmonean territory in central Jordan. The cities of Libb and Mādabā were delivered to Aretas III. Possibly, the area of ‘Aṭarūz and Machaerus also fell into Nabatean hands after the destruction of Machaerus by the Roman army in 57BC. At the same time, the Nabateans seem to have advanced westward in the Wādī as-Sīr region and built some fortresses, as implied by the statement that Herod the Great later took a fort possessed by the Nabateans. The hilly region of al-‘Umayrī and Ḥisbān, however, appears to have stayed in Hasmonean and Jewish hands. This being the case, we may suggest that the advancing Nabatean people stopped along the line of Wādī as-Sīr, ‘Ammān, Saḥāb, Mādabā and the Wādī Zarqā’ Mā‘īn (see FIG. 3).

The third phase of border dispute began with the emergence of the Herodian kingdom. The early reign of Herod the Great was characterised by successive wars, but Herod decisively defeated Malichus I in the ‘Ammān region in 32-31BC. In all likelihood, the Nabateans had to give up towns and fortresses in the region of Wādī as-Sīr. After Machaerus fell under Herodian control, Herod rebuilt the Hasmonean fort at the site. He also stationed some of



2. The Hasmonean expansion period.



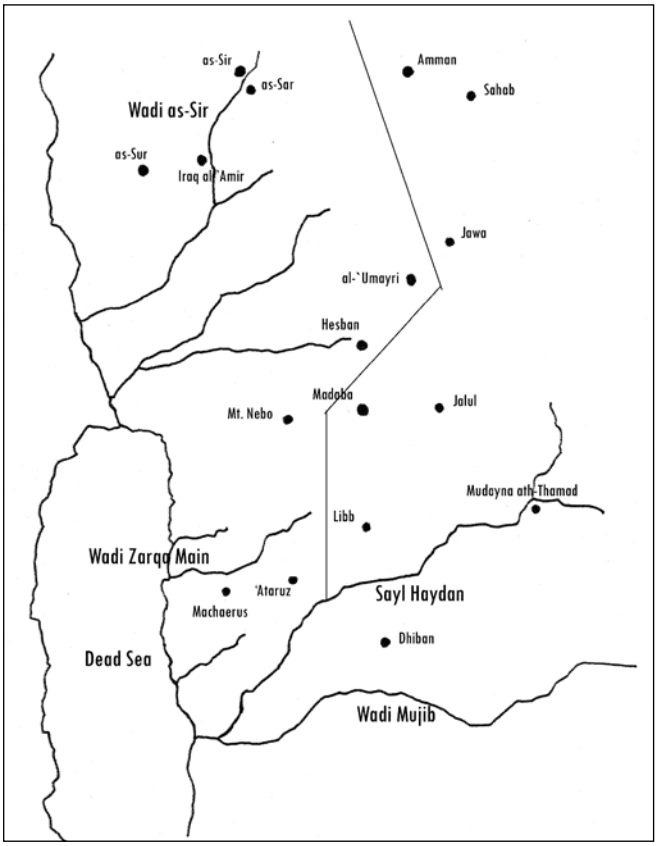
3. The first Nabatean expansion period.

his army veterans at Ḥisbān to protect the area from his enemies. It is uncertain whether or not Libb and Mādabā became part of Herodian Parea. It is possible that the Herodian expansion failed to reach Libb and Mādabā at this time, given the absence of textual evidence. This view would concur with the written record that a Nabatean *strategoi* ruled in Mādabā during the first century AD. If so, in the second half of the first century BC the eastern limit of the kingdom of Herod — and thus the western border of the Nabateans — would have been represented by the eastern and western extent of the Hasmonean and Nabatean kingdoms in the late-second and early-first centuries BC, although the Nabateans continuously maintained control over the regions of Libb and Mādabā (see FIG. 4).

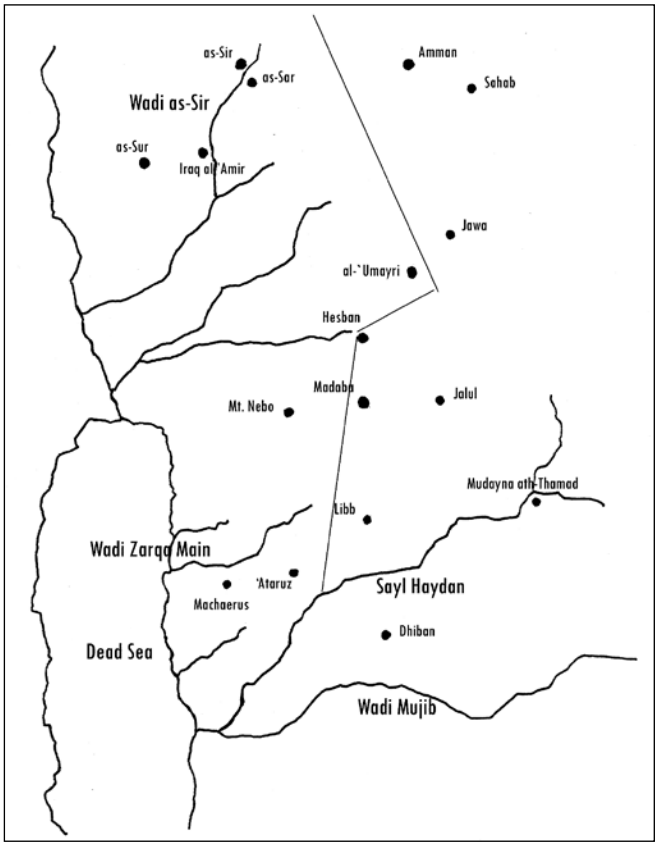
After the death of Herod the Great, Ḥisbān was probably taken over by a non-Jewish population, in view of the fact that that insurgent Jews sacked Ḥisbān and its vicinity at the outbreak of the Jewish war. These new inhabitants could have been Nabateans from the area of Mādabā, or else they were other Arab tribes from east of the Mādabā plains. Looking at the archaeological evidence from Ḥisbān, they are more likely to have been non-Nabatean Arab tribes, although the possibility of a Nabatean connection cannot entirely be ruled out. In any event, the new inhabitants probably had close economic ties with the Nabateans given the use of Nabatean coins at Ḥisbān. On the other hand, according to Josephus' *Antiquities* 18.5.1 — which describes the political history of Herod Antipas — the Machaerus region may temporarily have fallen under the influence of the Nabateans. Except for this possible interruption, the 'Aṭarūz-Machaerus region seems to have remained part of the kingdom of Herod Antipas during the first century AD. Thus, the western boundary of the Nabatean kingdom at that time can be drawn along the line of 'Ammān, Saḥāb and Mādabā (see FIG. 5). The historical records are again silent about whether or not Libb constituted part of the Nabatean kingdom, but the absence of textual evidence suggests that this may have been the case. The remaining southern part of the Nabatean boundary is therefore likely to have run along the line Mādabā-Libb-Sayl Hīdān.

Comparison to Archaeological Evidence

The archaeological data, to our dismay, do not entirely support the textual reconstruction of border



4. The Herodian expansion period.



5. The second Nabatean expansion period.

changes in the Nabateans and the Hasmonean-Herodian kingdoms outlined above. The historical description of the Wādī as-Sīr region is susceptible to change as research is ongoing in that region. The same is also true for the extent of Hasmonean-Herodian control in the Libb-Machaerus region during the mid-first centuries BC and AD In particular Gleuck's report of Nabatean pottery at and around Libb and Machaerus presents a special problem for the hypothesis of Hasmonean-Herodian dominance over that region. Responding to this dilemma, Gleuck (1939: 146) focused on the marriage of Herod Antipas to the daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV. This, in turn, led him to relate the appearance of Nabatean pottery in the region to the short-lived *detente* between Herod Antipas and Aretas IV. In keeping with this view, one may point to potential trade between the Nabateans and the inhabitants of the Hasmonean-Herodian kingdoms. Another tenable answer can be found in the aforementioned interruptions in Jewish control of the region. Thus, the Nabatean pottery found by Glueck in the Libb-Machaerus region may have been associated with one of these two waves of Nabatean expansion into the area north of Sayl Hīdān. In short, the questions of whether or not and, if so, when the Nabateans controlled the regions of Wādī as-Sīr, Libb and Machaerus warrants further fieldwork and studies of archaeological data.

Despite these *caveats*, however, the general credibility of the above historical reconstruction is bolstered by some impressive consistency between archaeological and textual data. First of all, the excavations at ʻAmmān Citadel and the Roman Forum are indicative of a Nabatean connection with early Roman settlement in the ʻAmmān region, which is in harmony with the historical records. The excavation reports for the ʻAmmān Citadel do not offer up any definitive insights into the relationship between the Nabatean settlers and their late Hellenistic predecessors. However, it is likely that — as in the early Roman period — the late Hellenistic settlement was also associated with the Nabateans in view of the smooth and peaceful transition into the early Roman period.

For Mādabā, the archaeological evidence also seems to be fairly consistent with the ancient texts. On the basis of archaeological evidence currently available, it can be suggested that Mādabā was settled by or associated with the Nabateans in the early Roman period. There is also material evidence to show that Mādabā could have been occupied by the Hasmoneans at some point during the late Hellenistic period, even though the exact nature of this Hasmonean occupation remains somewhat elusive and awaits further excavation and publication.

In addition, the settlements to the south-east of Mādabā have convincing evidence of Nabatean activity; examples include Umm al-Walīd and Mudayna ath-Thamad. Similarly, there are also large numbers of early Roman Nabatean sites on the Dhībān plateau. The author has ascertained through surface survey that many of the early Roman Nabatean sites on the Dhībān plateau also include a number of sherds dated to either the late Hellenistic period or the transition to the early Roman period (Ji and Lee in press). This fact may posit that, as in the ʻAmmān region, the earliest Nabatean activity on the Dhībān plateau occurred prior to the early Roman period. Related to these findings is the general infrequency of Nabatean settlements in the Jalūl-Saḥāb region. This suggests that, during the Nabatean period, the eastern Mādabā plains region probably served as a corridor for trade and traffic, rather than a settlement zone, that connected the Nabatean settlements in the ʻAmmān region with those on the Dhībān plateau and south-eastern Mādabā plains.

In contrast, Hasmonean-Herodian evidence abounds in the areas of ʻIrāq al-Amīr, Mount Nebo and the north-western Mādabā plains. This supports the historical accounts of Hasmonean and Herodian occupation of these areas. However, distinctive Nabatean pottery is absent or, at best, scarce in these regions. The area of Ḥisbān and al-ʻUmayrī has been systematically surveyed and excavated by various research teams, yet no trace of Nabatean settlement has so far been located in this area. The absence of Nabatean ceramic evidence is just as apparent in the Nebo and ʻIrāq al-Amīr areas. What is however clear is the relative abundance of Hasmonean coins in these areas, compared with ʻAmmān, Jalūl and the Dhībān plateau. Moreover, all the Nabatean coins so far found in the areas of Ḥisbān and ʻIrāq al-Amīr belong to the first century AD. Quantitative analysis has shown that at Ḥisbān and ʻIrāq al-Amīr, the entire Nabatean numismatic assemblages is made up of this late corpus of coins. Related to this finding is the discovery of a ritual bath at al-ʻUmayrī, which should be attributed to either Hasmonean or Herodian settlers at the site. Of course, casual use of material evidence to reconstruct the ethnic identity of the inhabitants of a

given region can be problematic (Graf 1986: 792). Nevertheless, we should not ignore potential affinities between material culture and ethnic identity (cf. Parr 1970, 1978; Schmid 1995).

Be that as it may, the combination of various findings gives weight on the thesis that the late Hellenistic occupation of the areas north of the Mādabā line occurred under the auspices of Jewish rulers rather than Nabatean kings. The same may also be true of the early Roman period, given the virtual absence of Nabatean sherds and non-numismatic artifacts at the sites under consideration. The early Roman tombs at Ḥisbān with a rolling-stone door, like those in the Jerusalem area, are also indicative of a Herodian occupation of Ḥisbān during the first centuries BC and AD. This suggests that most of the cities and towns in Wādī as-Sīr and the Ḥisbān-al-'Umayrī area were probably inhabited by Hasmonean and Herodian citizens alongside, most probably, a much smaller number of non-Jews.

Conclusion

This study helps us to re-evaluate Glueck's original thesis that the boundary of the Nabatean state should be drawn eastward from the Dead Sea to Mādabā, roughly along the line of Wādī Zarqā' Mā'īn. In view of the findings of the present study, Glueck may have misunderstood the nature of the northern border of the kingdom of Nabateans when he viewed it as fixed and permanent boundary along the Machaerus-Mādabā line during the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods. This study has shown that the border probably far more flexible than Glueck allowed. Put another way, the extent of the kingdom of the Nabateans in central Jordan now appears to fluctuate during the period in question, and these changes were closely tied with the vicissitudes of Hasmonean, Herodian and Nabatean fortunes east of the Jordan.

Despite frequent shifts in the border, the present study supports the idea that Glueck's original thesis was in some respects correct about the identification of the border of the Nabatean kingdom. For almost all of the period under consideration, the hilly region of Ḥisbān, al-'Umayrī and Nebo seems to have remained in the hands of the Hasmonean-Herodian state, although Ḥisbān may very briefly have come under the control of a non-Jewish population some time in the first century AD. In contrast, the 'Ammān region and the desert fringe of Saḥāb, Jalūl and the Dhībān plateau lay securely behind the Nabatean frontier. The east-west stretch of Wādī al-Wāla and Sayl Hīdān formed the southern boundary between the Nabatean and Jewish kingdoms, even though Herod built a couple of military fortresses in the middle of Wādī al-Mūjib and Sayl Hīdān during the early Roman period (Strobel 1997).

Finally, the present study has shown that, in central Jordan, the struggle between the Nabatean and Hasmonean-Herodian kingdoms centered on three areas: Wādī as-Sīr, Mādabā and Libb-Machaerus. The Hasmoneans took possession of the forts and towns in the Wādī as-Sīr region in the mid-second century BC. This area probably remained under Hasmonean and Herodian control for the rest of the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods, despite intermittent wars in the 'Ammān region between these rulers and the Nabatean kings and a potentially short-lived Nabatean expansion into the area prior to the rule of Herod the Great. The Hasmoneans extended their territory to Ḥisbān, Mādabā, Libb and Machaerus during the second century BC. However, Hasmonean control of Libb and Mādabā did not last long as they fell into the hands of Nabateans after the civil war between Hyrcanus II and his brother Aristobulus II. Ḥisbān also seems to have been incorporated, albeit for a short period and in a *de facto* manner, within the Nabatean state in the first century BC when a non-Jewish population group occupied the site.

In similar fashion, the question of who controlled the 'Aṭarūz-Machaerus area can be answered differently at different times. As noted above, Hasmonean influence reached this area during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus. Machaerus was destroyed by the Roman army in 57BC, after which the Nabateans likely expanded northwards across Sayl Hīdān and into the Machaerus area. Only after the establishment of the rule of Herod the Great did Machaerus once more come under Herodian control; the city was subsequently given to Herod Antipas after the death of Herod the Great. The clash with the Nabateans during the reign of Herod Antipas may however have resulted in a temporary setback for the Herodians in the 'Aṭarūz-Machaerus area.

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