

Rujm Al - Malfuf South

by

Henry O. Thompson

On 21 Oct 72, several volunteers gathered under the writer's direction to begin excavation of Rujm (tower or heap) al-Malfuf (a round heap of stones) South (Plate XXVIII, 1). The excavation was sponsored by the Friends of Archaeology and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The equipment was supplied by the American Center for Oriental Research.¹ The volunteers worked for varying periods, some for an hour and some for many hours but the help of each was appreciated. Outstanding in her efforts was Ms Betty Elliott, who served as records keeper and opened her home for refreshments, medical aid, pottery washing and storage and recording. Her continual assistance is gratefully acknowledged.²

The tower is located on Jabel Amman between Abu Tammam and Mutanabi Streets, near Zahran Palace, on the southwestern side of Jabel Amman, one of the original seven (now 17) hills of Amman, the ancient Rabbat Ammon, capital of the Kingdom of the Ammonites, from the 13th to the 6th century B.C. On the northern side of Jabel Amman, is the larger (22m. diameter) Rujm al-

Malfuf excavated in 1969.³ The work there discovered Roman pottery down to bedrock both inside and outside the tower. This put into question the practice of calling the tower runis along the western border of Amman, "Ammonite", after the ancient Ammonite kingdom, following primarily the work of Nelson Glueck.⁴ There are 19 of these towers ranging from the Beqaa Valley in the north to Naur in the south. No. 19 is a recent addition to the list, discovered in the excavations at Khirbet al-Hajjar in 1972.⁵ The Hajjar tower was the second excavated but the first to give excavation evidence for an Iron Age date for the towers. Rujm al-Malfuf South is the second to yield an Iron Age date.⁶

Area A

Two trenches were opened against the outside of the tower (Fig. 1). The second of these, Square 2 (1.5 x 3 m.) had two strata. Locus 1, the surface layer, had a piece of Ayyubid-Mameluke pottery and several small bits of Byzantine ribbed ware, in addition to the 6-7th centuries B.C. Iron Age II sherds. This red crumbly soil lay over a dark brown, hard packed soil, Locus 2, over bedrock. The sherds

(1) The Friends of Archaeology are a group of Jordanians and others in Amman, Jordan, who are interested in the antiquities of Jordan. They sponsor lectures and tours relating to archaeology. They have sponsored three excavations, including Rujm al-Malfuf South and a tomb excavation at Khirbet Yajuz in February and March, 1972. Dr. Bastiaan Van Elderen Director of the ACOR graciously loaned the equipment for the dig. His assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

(2) Additional Volunteers were Hanna and Sabah abu Sir; Chris Alleman, Anthony and Jim and Mimi Amine, Andrea, Barbara and Fuad Attalah, L. Dean Brown, Lois, Mimi and Mo Brubeck, Mary Doherty, Laurie Ellis, Aubrey Elliot, Lillian Foster, Mildred and Nancy Halland, Jomha Kryem, Linda Lovegren, Aba and Lisa Majaj, Khalid al-Majali, Charles, Gwen, Kirsten, Michael and Urban Peachey,

David Peterson, Majda, Mickey and Zayd Ra'ad, Beth, JoNell and Timothy Smith, David and John Undeland, Carl Uzazi, Rinehart and Sjoerd Westra.

(3) Roger S. Boraas, "A Preliminary Sounding at Rujm al-Malfuf (North)," *ADAJ*, XVI (1971), p. 31-46.

(4) Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine," *AASOR*, XXV-XXVIII (1951). George M. Landes, "Ammon, Ammonites," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible I* (1962), and, "Material Remains of the Ammonites," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 24 (1961).

(5) Henry O. Thompson, "The 1972 Excavations of Khirbet al-Hajjar," *ADAJ*, XVII, (1972) p. 47-72.

(6) Dr. James Sauer has examined the pottery sherds from the excavation. His assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Dr. Bert De Vries drew the plans, as noted in (Fig. 1). His assistance is deeply appreciated.

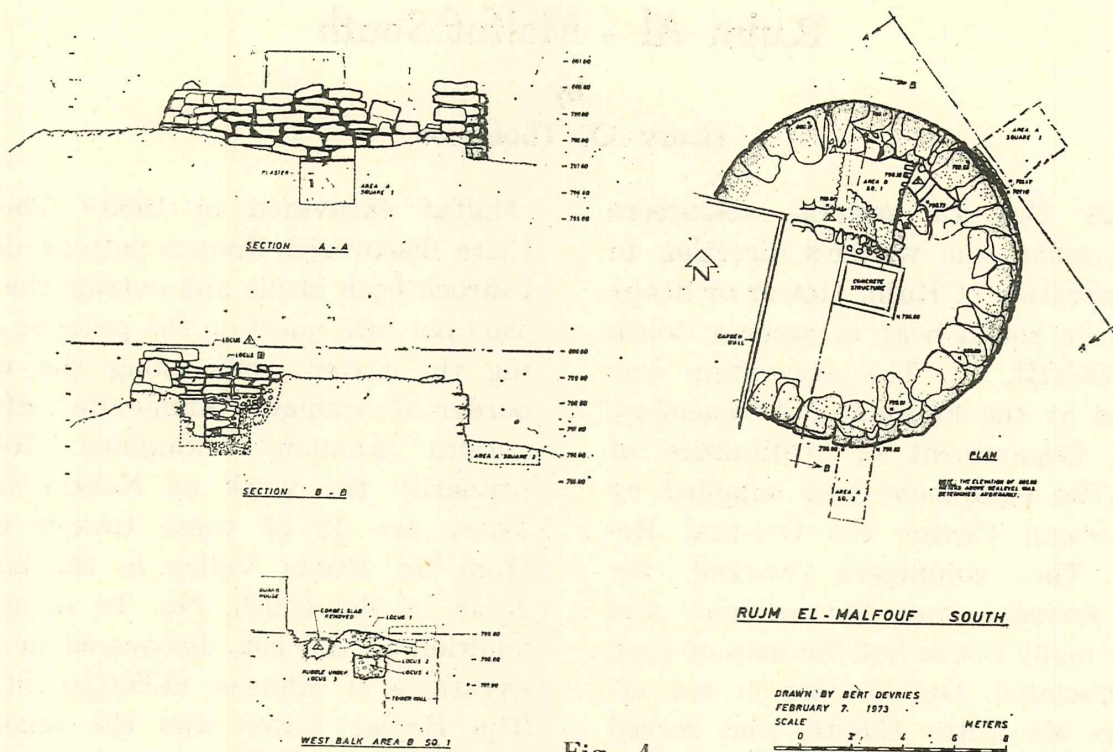


Fig. 1

were 6-7th centuries Iron Age. In both loci, the sherds were few and small, suggesting casual fall rather than occupation, in contrast to Square 1. Square 2 is on the south side of the tower which of course would be hot in the summer. Square 1, on the northeast side, would be a cooler area and closer to what might have been a door in the tower.

Square A.1 had six loci. The square was plotted as 1 x 3 m. but the side along the face of the tower was expanded to 2 m. Locus 1 was a gray dusty soil with much rock tumble, with rocks ranging from 0.02-45 m. However, these rocks, and those encountered later, do not appear to be tumble from the tower, the unhewn slabs of which range up to 1.5 m. in length and 0.50 m. in thickness. Locus 1 potsherds included one Ayyubid-Mamluk and several bits of Byzantine ware, while the balance was 6-7th century Iron Age. Locus 2 was a red crumbly soil similar to Locus 1 in Square A.2. It was under Locus 1 and over Loci 3 and 4. The red crumbly soil had 1 piece of Ayyubid-Mamluk pottery several Byzantine fragments; Iron II and UD (un-

distinguished) pottery plus about half of a basalt grinder. Locus 3 was a heavy dark brown soil in the outer half (northeast) of the trench. A slingstone, two Byzantine sherds, Iron II and Iron I sherds were found in this layer. Since Locus 4 seems to be an occupation layer, this Locus 3 may have been the first wash layer laid down after the tower went out of use.

Locus 4 was a gray soil filled with bits of plaster and a great many 6-7th century B.C. sherds. The plaster presumably came from the outer wall of the tower where a number of rocks were still covered with it (Plate XXVIII, 2). This may suggest that there was a brush lean-to or tent pitched against the tower. The tower wall may have been plastered to keep out lizards and scorpions. Present interpretation for Locus 4 is that it represents 6-7th century occupation, perhaps by a family of a soldier or by off-duty troops. It is possible, however, that the presence of the plaster fragments in the soil of Locus 4 means that this locus accumulated after the abandonment, i.e., when the plaster on the tower wall was no longer maintained and so fell off. The

large number of sherds, however, argue for use of the area and the plaster was probably normal fall.

Locus 5 was a very hard heavy brown rocky layer over bedrock. It was nearly sterile but the few sherds found were 6-7th century material. Pockets of red clay over portions of bedrock, and sticking up into the brown soil, were collectively labelled Locus 6.

Area B

On top of the tower is a small concrete structure dating from ca. 1958, used as a guard house by the Jordanian army. It is of interest to note this continuing use of what was probably an ancient Ammonite watchtower! A single trench, 1.5 x 3 m., was plotted as Square 1, between the concrete structure and the north wall of the tower. Several tower wall stones were toppled off here. We were not able to determine if this was done in 1958, or at some more ancient time. Square B.1 was later expanded to the east when numerous boulders made the 1.5 m. trench too narrow to work in. This expansion to 2.00 m. wide, uncovered Wall 6, on which more below. In February, 1973 some additional cleaning expanded Square B.1 to the west and uncovered Wall 7. Thus Square B.1 cut through a small room formed inside the tower. One assumes that a cross wall lies still buried under the concrete structure.

Locus 1 was a loose red soil with many stones, covering the square. Another slingstone was found here. Among the potsherds were several Ayyubid-Mamluk and Byzantine pieces along with quantities of 6-7th century and Iron I. Locus 2 was a loose reddish brown soil, a shade grayer than Locus 1, and difficult to distinguish from Locus 1. It probably covered the excavated area except for Locus 3. This Locus 2 contained a slingstone, a round stone disc (possibly some kind of rubbing tool), 3 Byzantine sherds and quantities of 6-7th century pottery. An unusual piece of pink clay

may represent some kind of plaster with one side very smooth and the other rough, as though it had been against a stone surface. Loci 1 and 2 lay against a rebuild of Wall 6, which appears to continue under the modern guard house. This upper section of the wall was formed of large flint boulders presumably taken from the outer tower wall. In a niche below the top course of these large rocks, was a lime encrusted Byzantine juglet (Plate XXX, 1, 2). It seems to have had a slip, now partially flaked off. The slip and tiny mouth, suggest a perfume juglet. Perhaps the rebuild in Wall 6 represents an early 5th century family living in the tower remains. Locus 2 did not seem to be an occupation layer as such, however, and may simply represent washed in fill after the original 6th century abandonment of the tower.

Locus 3 is a curious construction of undetermined function. Several thin flat slabs of rock formed a corbel roof over a cavity 0.70 m. wide (N-S) x 0.55 m. deep x ca. 1.85 m. long (Plate XXIX, 1). It looks very much like a grave but no bones or artifacts were found except for a few sherds in the fill at the bottom. Of the latter, a few were Byzantine but most were 6-7th century B.C. As can be seen in the section drawing of the west balk, the sides were constructed of 3 or 4 courses with the top course drawn in from each side to support the corbel slabs. Since the latter were rather loosely fitted, it is not clear whether the Byzantine sherds fell in after construction or if the construction itself is Byzantine. For the moment, we must assume the latter although the stratigraphic lines of Loci 1 and 2 were lost in the rocky debris before reaching Locus 3. The east end was unclear in the debris in front of the modern guard's house, while the west end had been destroyed by the garden wall shown in the top plan of the tower. Locus 3 seems

to lie over and possibly in the debris of Locus 4 although the area under Locus 3 was not excavated.

Locus 4 was a hard brown soil with many stones, 2.25 m. deep. under Locus 2 and going down to bedrock, which served as the floor of the original tower. Near the top of the locus was a single sherd of Attic black glazed ware while the balance of the fabrics were Iron I (11-12th century) and Iron II (6-7th). These fabrics, plus the 6-7th century materials from Area A, are interpreted as dating the original tower to the 6-7th centuries B.C. However, the Iron I material was in sufficient quantity to provide evidence for an Iron I presence in the area. It is possible that the tower originated in the earlier period and was reused in the later, but this would have involved a very careful cleaning down to bedrock, at least in the limited area of our excavation. The digging at this point, benefitted from the help of Ali Abd el-Rassul, one of the best technical men available. There was no additional stratification visible in the lower portions of Locus 4.

Locus 5 is a stairway of three steps inside the tower wall, (Plate XXIX, 2) on the east edge of Area B. Surface soil over the steps contained Byzantine sherds as well as Iron I and II. The soil is assumed to be equivalent to Locus 1 over the rest of the square. Small quantities of soil from behind the first step and from under the lowest step, contained only 6-7th pottery. It is possible that the Byzantines built the stair in conjunction with their rebuild of Wall 6, so that the steps were set directly on fill from the earlier use of the tower. However, the bottom step forms a corbel type of arch over the doorway in the north end of Wall 6. This arch was at the bottom of Locus 2 and at the top of Locus 4, as well as being at the top of what is presumably the Iron Age portion of Wall 6. Thus one could argue that the

stair is original to the tower. If this is true, we have here the first definite stairway of the Ammonite towers. One could assume a ladder from the bedrock floor to the top of the doorway in Wall 6, and thence the stairs led to the top of the tower.

Wall 6, as indicated earlier, was rebuilt in early Byzantine times, with slab boulders from the tower wall. The earlier phase of the wall (2.25 m. high), dates to the 6-7th century, judging by the fill of Locus 4 against Wall 6. The section B — B (see Fig. 1) shows the doorway between Wall 6 and the outer tower wall. It also shows several large rocks helping to form the inner jamb of the door while Wall 6 as a whole was built of rather small rocks (7 courses) in the Iron Age phase. These smaller rocks, 0.10-.25 m., also characterize Wall 7.

Summary

Rujm al-Malfuf South is one of 19 towers along the western border of ancient Ammon. It has a diameter of 13 m., about average for the towers which range from 8 — 22 m. The large flint blocks are roughly coursed so that course numbering is irregular. However, up to 8 courses remain above ground with another 3 below ground, at least in Square A.1. The extant remains stand 2 — 5 m. high on a small knoll. Area A, Square 1, suggests occupation on the outside of the tower in the 6-7th century B.C. Excavation inside the tower indicates the use of the bedrock as a floor for the tower which was probably built in the 6-7th century though the presence of Iron I potsherds suggests some type of Iron I presence in the area. The reuse of Wall 6 in the Byzantine period suggests a domestic rather than military use. The few Ayyubid-Mamluk sherds found in the area probably represent a casual visit rather than occupation.

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