

Excavations At The Citadel, Amman, 1975

by

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In 1881, an Englishman named Claud Reignier Conder, an officer in the Royal Engineers, was seconded to the Palestine Exploration Fund to complete their general survey, embracing all matters of a physical, archaeological and social nature relating to Palestine. The Survey of Western Palestine had been accomplished. Thus in 1881 he spent ten weeks in Transjordan. Volume 1 was published in 1889 and referred specifically to that part of Jordan, which embraced the Adwan territory, but also included Amman.¹ (Some interesting material however is to be found in the Survey of Western Palestine, Special Papers Part 1.)

As the Survey of Eastern Palestine has long been out of print, the writer quotes from it, because Conder's comments are of particular interest regarding the Qalah or Castle of Rabboth-Amon, present day Amman.

"The Kalah, or castle of Amman occupies the long tongue which runs out south and east on the north side of the stream. It is divided from the hill of which it is naturally the continuation by a saddle on the north side of the fortifications, which seems probably to have been artificially cut down. The fortress is L-

shaped: the short line north and south measuring 1,200 feet and the long line running east for 2,700 feet... the western or upper terrace of the Kalah includes the remains of a temple on the South, an Arab building near the middle with a large well to the east of it, a court of the Roman period further north and additions of the Arab period... The whole area of the Kalah plateau is 1,295,000 sq. feet, or about 29 acres". (Plate XLVIII taken from Conder's Report, illustrates these remarks.)

Sixty years after Conder's work was published, an area was cleared in November 1949, on the Qalah, to build the present Museum.² "The area cleared was restricted to that on which the Museum was to be built and was roughly cruciform in shape. A courtyard and several rooms of a large house and the beginnings of other houses, all of the early Umayyad period, were revealed, the walls of the main building still standing to a height of 2.5 metres in the highest part. The houses were cleared to floor level, and pits,³ sunk down to bedrock, the depth of which varied tremendously, revealed only a jumbled, comparatively sterile level." In his report⁴ Mr. Harding makes the comment that "the material

(1) C. R. Conder: The Survey of Eastern Palestine Vol. I The Adwan Country: P.E.F. 1889 (An interesting adjunct to this is his work "Heth and Moab" (Explorations in Syria in 1881 and 1882, A. P. Watt London 1892 3rd edition).

(2) G. L. Harding: Excavations on the Citadel, Amman, pps. 7-16, Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Vol. I. 1951.

(3) op. cit. p. 7.

(4) op. cit. p. 7.

is important inasmuch as it is one of the rare occasions when we have Umayyad buildings and objects of the ordinary man. It would appear that Amman was quite a flourishing Umayyad village, if not town, for the style of house and the quality of the objects found in it are not the style and quality associated with squatters."

Twenty six years later, in 1975, the Jordanian Government decided that it needed a new Museum. In case the Qalah. or the Citadel, as it is now commonly called among foreigners, should be chosen, it was agreed that excavations should be commenced north of the present Museum in the area which had previously been closed to the public as it housed the Military Police. The total area under investigation is approximately 11,600 square meters of which, in Area B, approximately 30M north-south by 22M e—w (660 sq. meters) is being excavated. (Fig. 1.).

Additionally a massive clearance operation began, once the Military Police had abandoned much of the area, behind and to the north of the Umayyad Building (Pl. XLIX).

As the area was so large, it was intended that there should be three main teams at work, the Department of Antiquities, the University of Jordan and the British School of Archaeology, each independent, but under the overall supervision of the writer for the archaeological

results. Various circumstances prevented the University from participating, but it is hoped very much to have their co-operation in the forthcoming season. The Department of Antiquities concentrated, therefore, on Area A under the general supervision of Dr. Fawzi Zayadine⁵ with the writer on Area B.

Area B was chosen, because at some time past, the Jordanian Military Police had bulldozed an area of about 250 square meters, with the intention, so it is related, of building a Headquarters. Their plans changed and the area became a rubbish tip. Thus, our first month's work, which began on June 15th, consisted of removing 20th C. rubbish, which in some cases, went down to a depth of more than 2 meters.⁶

As work of clearance continued, it became apparent that the bulldozer had done a very efficient job of slashing through buildings, not only from the hundreds of building stones that had to be removed, but from the stubs of walls that emerged in both the north and south sections (Pl. L. 1). At one time, it was thought that the walls visible in the south side linked up with those on the north, but subsequent planning showed them to belong to two completely different complexes of buildings.

For the sake of clarity, it is perhaps better initially to describe those buildings in the bull-dozed basin. As will be seen from the plan Fig. 2 and (Pl. L. 2) there

(5) Dr. Fawzi Zayadine will publish independently a preliminary Report on Area A.

(6) We were grateful to Colonel Ajadin for warning us that there was a cistern to the

east under the debris, thus enabling us to avoid what might have been an unpleasant accident. We were also grateful to him for allowing us to encroach on the Parade Ground.

is a wall running west across Rooms 3 and 2. At its westernmost edge it was built on bedrock and formed a rightangle to join up with the wall north-south going into the section. The earliest floor in Rooms 3 and 2 could have been bedrock, but there were a series of other floors in clay above, all very close to each other. There was a gap which had been deliberately filled with stones, mortars etc. of the Roman period (Fig. 2), before the laying down of the foundations of the wall going west-east. The earliest building structure, therefore, must be Roman or later, and judging from the mortaring in the wall, it seems likely that it is late Byzantine, an hypothesis which will be borne out by the pottery which came from the associated floor levels⁷ (see below).

This possible late Byzantine building went through several phases in construction: this was very apparent in the southern east-west wall where a definite levelling off of the courses can be seen (Pl. L. 2), to enable a later wall to be superimposed. This early building must have been of large proportions, because as will be seen from the plan (Fig. 2) the northern wall runs right out under the present eastern baulk.

Any later construction on the northern wall had been completely removed either anciently or recently, but we were fortunate to find definite evidence of a later building in the form of a wall going north-south sitting on the latest floor of the earlier building. The pottery associated

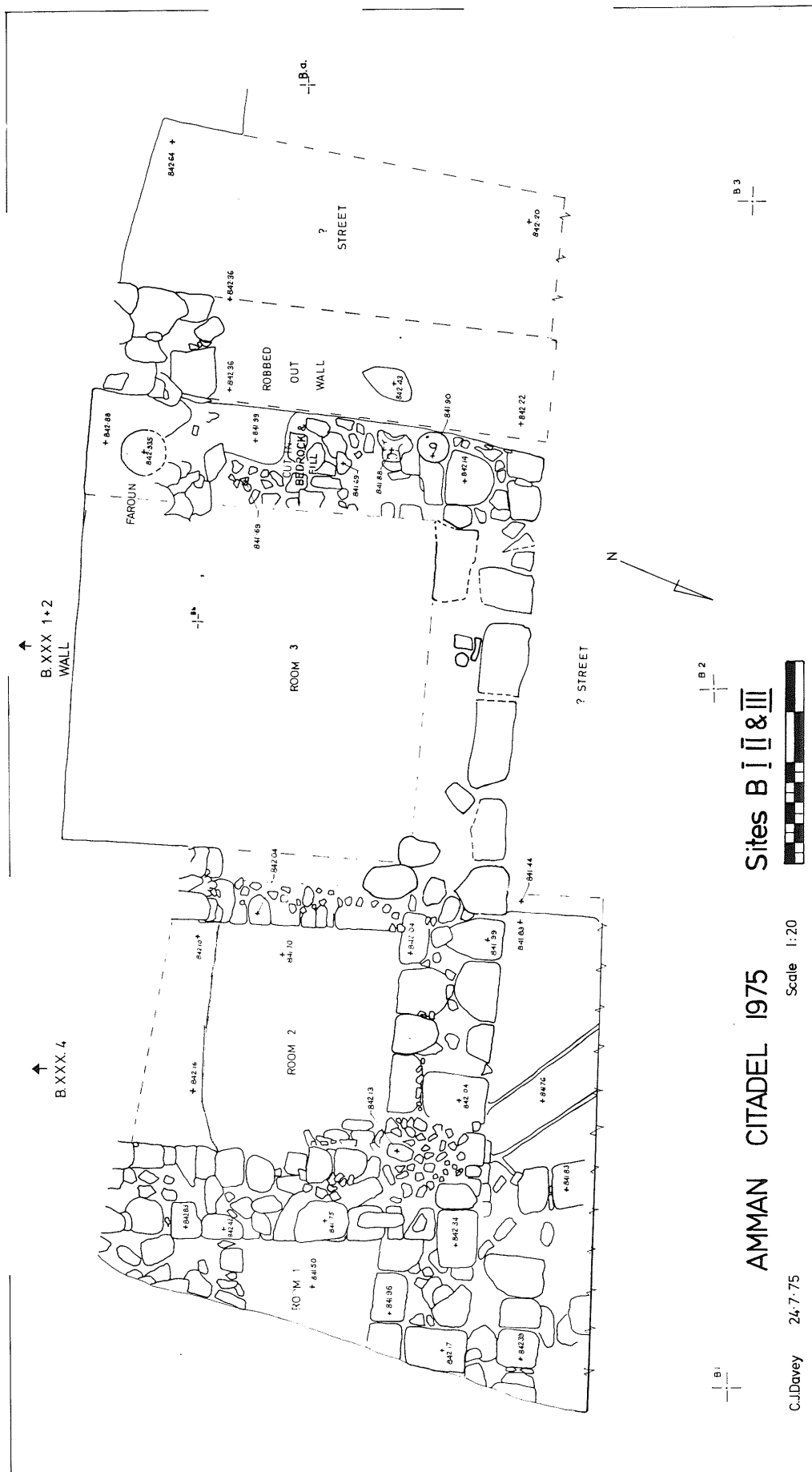
with this earliest building was Byzantine. After a period of disuse, in which was found Umayyad pottery, squatters had come in though no walls can be associated with their occupation, but that there was occupation was evident from the heavy smoking of the east-west wall and the farun (oven) which had been built up against the wall. This must have happened before the wall went into its second major period mentioned above, because there is no evidence of fire above the deliberate levelling off of the wall.

The western wall (north-south) of B. II marks the end of the earliest building, which probably abutted onto a street which ran the entire length of the bulldozed area. In the later phase or period of the building, there was a vaulted roof, the springing of which is just visible in the extent section of Room II (Pl. LI. 1), but there is nothing at the moment to suggest that this particular complex of buildings ran beyond the western wall of B. II.

That there was another building to the west, perhaps separated from the one under discussion by a street going north-south, seems very likely in that there has been a deliberately laid pavement of footings (Pl. LI. 2 top off centre and Fig. 3). These are much in character with those found on the northern side of the bulldozed basin, and at the same time could be tied up with Harding's buildings. We cannot, however, be certain of the street or explain the footings until we have cut through to the south, all the

(7) The writer is most grateful to the Very Reverend Père Ch. Couasnon of the Ecole Biblique who made a special visit to Amman to examine the mortaring of the various

buildings. (Incidentally, he inspected the walls of the building to the north of the Umayyad building and said they were undoubtedly Roman).



accumulated overlying debris of some 2 meters. An interesting feature in this area was the appearance of sherds of the E.B./M.B. period, found in pockets cut into the bedrock but, so far, apparently unrelated to any buildings.⁸ One of the most irritating features of the whole Citadel complex is the vagary of the bedrock outline as Harding noted in his report p. 1. in Vol. I A.D.A.J.

As has been pointed out earlier, the walls emerging from this southern cut did not run on the same axis as those jutting out from the Northern section, but before moving to the surfaces, both south and north, it is advisable to finish off the trough or bulldozed basin as far as we can, though the whole complex of BXIX can only be described in the broadest outline because all the answers lie under the eastern baulk (Fig. 4). However, large paved slabs, very well laid, dated by the pottery found to the mid-5th C. A.D. and the remains of walls indicate a very substantial building of the Byzantine period. 20 cms. above this this paving and to the north was another paved floor of smaller slabs (Pl. LII. 1). These went out under the northern section. The foundations of the buildings so far revealed bear no relation to the earliest buildings south of the main street. The building was subjected to several modifications over the years; these included the installation of a fine plastered drain (Pl. LII. 1) some 20 cms. in width, which lead directly to the cistern mentioned above see note 6 (Fig. 4). In fact, in the street (the bedrock) separating the

buildings on the south from those running out under the eastern section, a series of channels had been cut which lead into this cistern.

Our phasing, for the moment, then, in the basin is as follows, excluding the isolated pockets of EB/MB sherds: Earliest Phase A — the bedrock cut, perhaps for quarrying; followed by two phases B + C of Byzantine buildings, which lie north and south of the main street; Phase D — a period of abandonment and squatting between the end of the Byzantine period and the beginning of the Umayyad occupation as represented by the fire and the farun in B. II; Phase E — a rebuilding upon the latest clay floor of the Byzantine house to the south of the courtyard (which was the earliest floor in the Umayyad period), roughly on the same axis as the earlier building (Phase B and C) and going out under the eastern baulk; Phase F the plastered drain, probably Umayyad — the pottery between the two periods is not well stratified because the upper levels were somewhat ruthlessly removed to get some kind of section. (This, however, will be followed through in the subsequent season.) Finally Phase G — the covering of the Umayyad house with debris from the houses to the south, some of which belonged to the later Mamluk period (see *infra*).

It seems, as has been said, that a long strip of bedrock formed the street between the houses lying to its south and north. An interesting feature was that

(8) Dr. F. Zayadine has reported finding similar sherds in one of his trenches in Area

A under a sterile earth deposit and lying on bedrock.

the level of the bedrock in the "B" basin was 841.86M and in the area to the north, the B. XX (see Fig. 1) complex, was generally about 841.83M — there were variations of course, but it is interesting that in one of the most important trenches B. XX, the plastered floor which lies immediately on the bedrock should be only 3 cms. different from that in the basin. This fairly flat expanse of bedrock may then have accounted for the density of building in that area.

In the area B. XX, as has been said earlier (Pl. L. 1) it was thought that the walls obtruding in the northern section of the basin might be in alignment with those projecting from the southern section. They bear absolutely no relation to each other and belong to a completely different plan and, in some cases, are of different architecture.

Several periods are represented, the earliest being a Byzantine house complex, the most striking remains of which, being the column of 5 drums (Pl. LII. 2), very weathered and the doorway equally weathered. Incidentally, this column must have been one of several, because a study of Conder's map (Pl. XLVIII) has columns marked just over half way between the Temple of Hercules and the Umayyad Palace. Related to this column and doorway was a plastered floor into which had been let a basin, also plastered, measuring approx. 80 x 60 cms. in the north-west corner. This floor runs over the plinth of the column which suggests that the column is earlier than the plaster floor. Also a Byzantine coin was found on the plaster floor which suggests that the building is Byzantine; the weathering

of the stone further suggests that the building may have been abandoned for quite a long period of time before being brought into reuse. That the columns were still visible in Conder's time is borne out by the fact that in order to get down to the plaster floor, we went through debris, which in an adjoining trench, included a razor blade used in Jordan only up until the departure of General Glubb. This area was open and visible then until 1957.

Retainment of water played a great part in the building programme throughout the various periods represented. In Trench BXXI (Pl. LIII, 1) at a depth of 1 m. from the surface and under the debris which had been thrown in to level off the area for the present parade ground, we came across a paving of rough uncut stones, but deliberately laid; these had been laid directly on top of an earlier paving of smaller stones. This paving surrounded a shaft, which had been stone built at the top and then ran off westwards. This has not yet been excavated, but could well prove to be either a cistern or a passage down to the water of the Ain or the Seil Amman. No diagnostic pottery was found between the two pavings and as the earth overlying it, which had obviously been brought from elsewhere for the levelling up process, contained pottery from the Mamluk to Iron Age, it is impossible, for the present, to give a date to this structure.

Until more work has been done in this area, it is equally impossible to give any plan of the structures which were either built into the Byzantine buildings or superimposed upon them. Certainly the

post Byzantine house complex was oriented s.e. — n.w. and the building superimposed on that had a mortaring quite distinct from the earlier mortaring; this was of a very drak grey colour and similar to that found in the later buildings above the walls in the southern section of the "Basin".

Two major building phases were noted, with alterations within the phases, such as blocking of doorways (Pl. LIII, 2 and obvious patching of walls. The buildings are shoddy compared with those of the earlier periods and there is a frequent use of stone from these periods⁹ (Pl. LIV, 1).

An odd feature was the arch in XXIV (Pl. LIV, 2) which spanned a cistern, only partially excavated, which had a thick lime plaster lining. In this connection, it would be well to remember Gerald Harding's find of similar arches in the excavations prior to the building of the present Museum (A.D.A.J. Vol. 1. Fig. 1). What is very evident is that this construction was built into the ruins of an earlier wall. All the stones surrounding this cistern are of much greater dimensions than the earlier wall and are an obvious re-use of stones from an earlier building elsewhere in the vicinity. (Pl. LV, 1).

The latest phases in this area are represented by two features (latest omitting, of course the 20th C. infill for levelling off for the present day Parade Ground); one is the drain running right

across XXII into XX and which has no connection at all with the plastered basin in XX mentioned on Page 139; conceivably it might have connected with the cistern in XXI. Only the removal of the intervening baulk between XXIII, XX and XXI will elucidate this problem: two, the incredibly hard concrete floor, which was found in the north east corner of XXIV, with a total thickness of 26 cms. The dark grey cement suggested to some people that it might be the roofing for the building which started over the top of the column in XX. As, however, the level readings for the lower part of the "roofing" and the lowest part of the wall showing the same cementing or mortaring are exactly the same, this theory can be dismissed.

To get the full plan of these buildings and to interpret them correctly, it will be necessary to cut right through the northern edge of the "Basin" where, it will be seen from Plate III, the walls are still standing to probably their original height. If the writer is correct in her assumption that there was a street between the walls to the south of the "Basin" and those to the north, then, we should have here some very fine house plans dating from the late Byzantine period through to Mamluk in this northern area.

We come finally to the excavations to the south of the "Basin" — Trenches XXX etc. (Fig. 1). This was an even worse problem to tackle than the "Basin" itself. It was impossible to lay out not

(9) Some of the re-used rectangular blocks in Roman pilasters in situ.

are exactly the same as those found in Area A

only a decent grid, but even a respectable trench because of the mass of shifting loose rubble (a dump from previous excavations into which had also been thrown well cut building stone). A further complication was the Army's slit trenches, which had been put alongside, very naturally, existing walls, thus from an archaeological standpoint removing all hope of relating floors to walls. We did the best we could, but what was a straight sided trench at the beginning of the day looked like a 19th C. Englishman's burrowing into a barrow by the end of the day's work! This area, however, brings us into close contact with that excavated for the present Museum, and, for our knowledge of the later (i.e. Umayyad, Ayubbid to and including Mamluk) periods of occupation, may well prove to be the most rewarding.

The latest occupation is represented for the present by the uppermost walls encircling XXX. 2 and XXX. 3. These are probably Turkish, but there are no associated floor levels. They rested on a layer of dark brown earth, a beaten tamped floor going with an earlier building. (Pl. L. 2). Underneath this was a thick plaster floor, 20 cms. in depth, which ran right across east—west and under the tamped floor in XXX. 1 and XXX. 2, linked up to an earlier wall and was decisively cut through for the installation of the latest wall. (Pl. L. 2). The fill below this floor, which had no pottery, either on or in it, was Umayyad down to late Roman. The back of the south wall of the buildings overlooking the "Basin" roadway had been reinforced to make a good strong outer northern wall for the Umayyad building.

No doubt the easternmost (north-south) wall of this building lies under our somewhat tenuous baulk dividing XXX. 1 from XXX. 4.

To our surprise at 3 meters below the southern wall of this building complex, a much earlier wall appeared which was associated with Iron Age II pottery. It would be premature, however, to ascribe this wall to the Iron Age, but it seems likely. Under the western wall which had been built on bedrock another surprising discovery was made of a cave full of animal bones, which had almost solidified—there must have been thousands. The extent of the cave was not established because of the danger of burrowing under the wall. (Pl. LV. 2). The area XXX. 4 was one of the most interesting. The north wall (west-east) of XXX. 1 continued into this trench with one remaining course of a later wall on top. The wall was bonded with another going north-south in which there was evidence of springing. The eastern wall (north-south) did not emerge in the section. The fill was enormous and covered every period. At some time, in the Mamluk period, the room had been used for cooking; a taboun (Pl. LVI. 1) with associated clay floor was found. In the north west corner was a rectangular limestone trough (Pl. LVI. 2) and compare Pl. 1.4 in Harding's article). This block had been carefully placed on stones to keep it off the floor. Behind this trough were some very well cut ashlar blocks. Under the clay floor was a plaster floor on which lay pottery of the Umayyad period. Excavation stopped at this point.

It will be seen from the foregoing that the Byzantine period has not yet appeared in this area and that the Phasing at the end of the excavation should read Earliest A — Iron Age (in XXX. 1), B. Umayyad, C. Squatters, D. Mamluk and E. Ottoman. No attempt has been made yet to correlate the phasing in the several areas. This will be done at a later date when certain problems of stratigraphy

have been settled to the writer's satisfaction.

To sum up therefore: the excavations have produced evidence of domestic architecture forming 2 main complexes either side of a broad street and covering the Mamluk through to Byzantine and perhaps earlier periods. Additionally some of the other buildings emerging in the S.W. corner of the basin may be related to those excavated by Mr. G. L. Harding.

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