

**THE 1988 EXCAVATIONS ON THE CITADEL OF
AMMAN
LOWER TERRACE, AREA A**

**Department of Antiquities — École Biblique et
Archéologique Française Joint Expedition**

by

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A joint expedition of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and the École Biblique et Archéologique Française of Jerusalem conducted from July 24 to October 15, 1988 a survey of the water system north of the Citadel and excavations on the Lower Terrace. The team included F. Zayadine and M. Najjar from the Department, J.-B. Humbert, J.-M. de Tarragon and A. Chambon from the École Biblique. F. Braemer of IFAPO in Amman cooperated in the project and Mrs. Eleni Papapetrou-Humbert, a graduate student in Archaeology, volunteered as a trench supervisor. Other volunteers from Amman and Paris participated to the season.

I. The Water System

The expedition started by the investigation and survey of the water system north of the Citadel, at the foot of the Roman City wall. These installations were first noticed a hundred years ago by Captain Conder¹ and by H. Vincent in 1912.² R. Dornemann³, during his work at the Citadel in 1969, reexamined the whole area where he conducted excavations and published a good plan of the water reservoir and the adjacent walls (Fig. 1). At that time, the water installations were not completely accessible because of accumulated debris and modern houses. Since 1985, the area has been converted by the Greater Amman Municipality into a public garden, a pioneer project which necessitated the purchase and demolition of previous modern constructions. Thus, it was

possible to prepare a new plan of the installations by architect A. Devillers (Fig. 2).

The water system can be entered from the main upper shaft 1 (Fig. 2), which is carved in the rock spur, north of the Roman wall. The opening of this shaft, about 4.50 x 1.80 m, is situated inside a group of walls dated by R. Dornemann to the Middle Bronze II and Iron Age periods. Walls B-C (in Fig. 1) may belong to a casemate defence system of the Iron Age II. There is no mention by Dornemann of Hellenistic fortifications, but it is possible, as is the case on the Lower Terrace (see below), that they overlaid the Iron Age walls.

Shaft 1 leads to a triple underground passage: segment A is 5.75 m long and meets with a shorter conduct B, about 2 m long, accessible from the irregularly carved entrance 2, at the height of 3.84 m from ground level. The third tunnel C1-C2, being the longest (17 m), descends by means of 14 steps cut in the solid rock (segment C1). The second section of the underground passage leads to entrance 4 which is 1.80 m high. The main entrance 3, situated at ground level, is vaulted and communicates with the water reservoir, a large cistern (16 x 6 m and about 7 m high), cut into the rock with a gabled roof. A thick layer of plaster covers the inner surface. There is no clear evidence of channels to feed the cistern with rain water and the existence of a spring cannot be demonstrated since the floor has been cemented in recent times.

1. *The Survey of Eastern Palestine*, London, 1889, p. 34.

2. *Jerusalem antique*, I, Paris, 1912, p. 149 and Fig.

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3. *The Archaeology of the Transjordan*, Milwaukee Public Museum, 1983, p. 90 and Fig. 5.

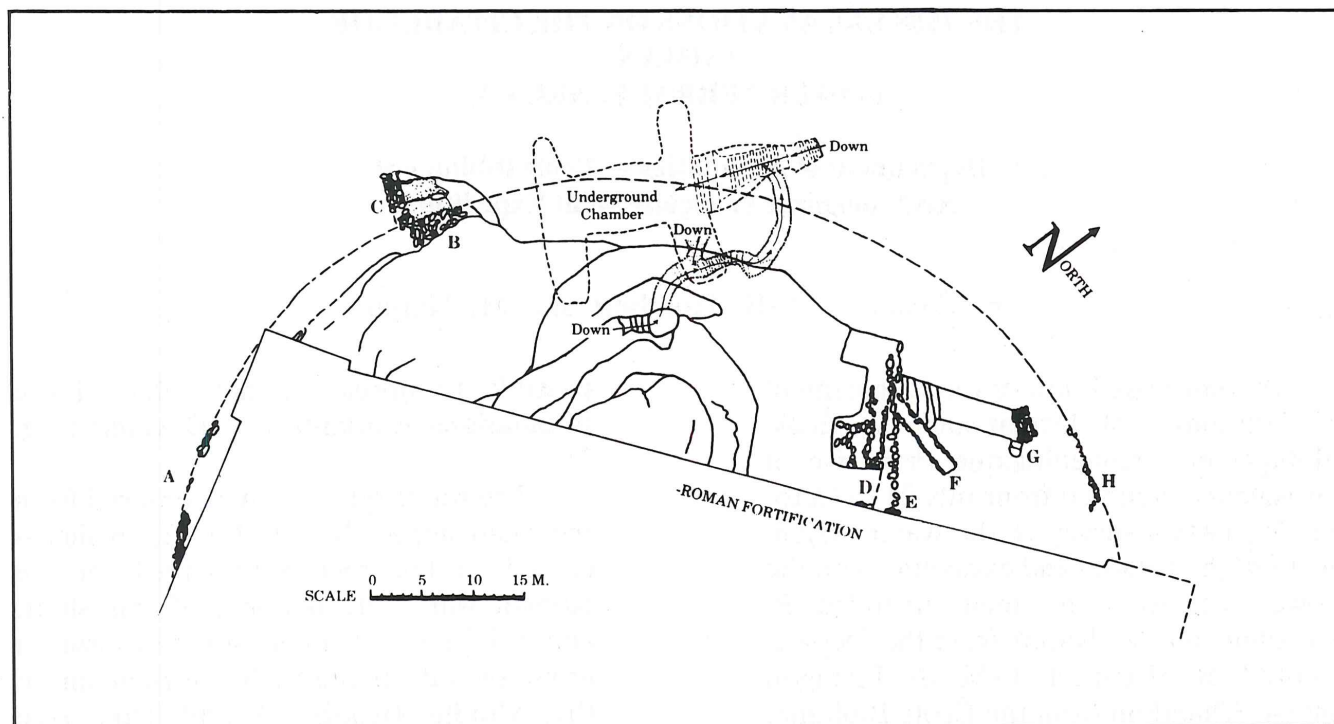


Fig. 1. Plan of the water system and adjacent walls (after R. Dornemann).

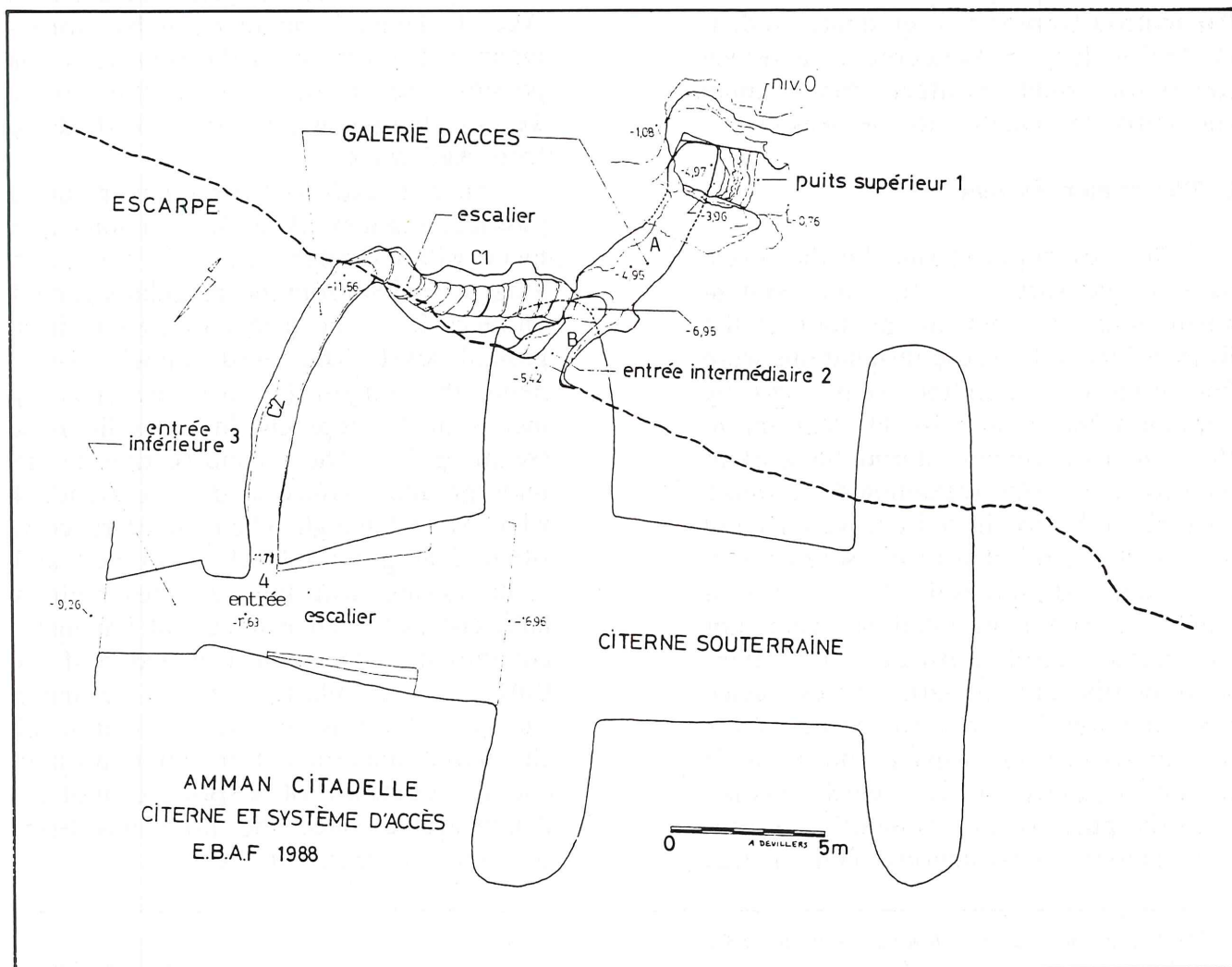


Fig. 2. Plan of the water system (after A. Devillers).

The cistern was most probably in use during the Ammonite Iron Age period or earlier, because of the above mentioned walls. In 1949, four Ammonite sculptures, including the Yerah'azar statuette were found near entrance 3. Another limestone bust with traces of red paint was discovered in 1985, during the work of the Amman Municipality, at the north-eastern corner of the City Wall (PLI,I). It represents a standing figure, draped in a fringed shawl. The long curled hair on the back (Pl. LI,2) and the stiff arm along the right side can be compared to the Ammonite sculptures and to the Assyrian *ronde-bosse* of Fort Shalmanassar in Iraq,⁴ dated to the 8th century B.C.

The water system north of the Citadel was also in use in the Early Hellenistic period.⁵ If we follow Polybius' account, *Histories*, V,71: in 218 B.C., Antiochus III the Great besieged Rabbatamana (Amman-Philadelphia). After an inspection of the Citadel Hill, he installed his siege machines at two points, most probably to the north and east. His generals competed to destroy the City walls, but the enemy resisted the repeated assaults, until a prisoner indicated to the Seleucid army the underground passage to the water. It was "burst into" and blocked "with wood, stone and all such kind of things" (*His* V, 71,9). The besieged garrison was obliged to surrender for the want of water. To our knowledge, there is no other water system on the Citadel that better fits the accounts of Polybius.

II. Excavation of the Lower Terrace, Area A

This part of the Citadel, situated east of the Hercules Temple, is a large platform of 300 x 120 m, overlooking the theatre and the Forum area from the south. After the demolition of the Philadelphia hotel, the Forum and its surroundings were also developed into a public park.

The work plan included 1) the investigation of the City walls and 2) the reopening of the 1968/73 trench.

1. The City Walls (Figs. 3-4)

To the south, facing the Lower City, a solid wall (2001), built with heterogeneous undressed boulders is 3.60 m to 4 m in width. It is reinforced in places by rectangular bastions of large drafted blocks. To set this wall, a large foundation trench, about 1.60 m wide was dug through the Hellenistic and Iron Age layers. The 1968 excavation was not able to date it precisely and an Early Islamic date was assumed on the evidence of coins. But the Joint Expedition excavated the outer and inner faces and uncovered Late Roman cooking-pots at the base of this wall. It is possible, in this case, to attribute it to the 3rd-4th centuries A.D., during the reorganisation of the *limes arabicus*. Architectural elements carved in a soft limestone, dating to the 1st-2nd centuries A.D. were reused in the southern face and were probably robbed from an earlier building. In Sq. 06, this Late Roman defense wall is founded on Iron Age II structures, most probably a defense system.

The most unexpected discovery of the 1988 campaign were two walls on the southern slope in Sq. 20. Here an artificial saddle was prepared with a thick layer of dump (1.50 m) covered by another layer of chipped flint (0.30 m). The accumulated material contained Chalcolithic and EB II-III sherds. The lowest wall (2015) is about 1.60 m wide and preserved to a height of 1.40 m. The second upper wall (2005) is massive and averages 2 m in width, with a preserved height of 1.85 m. The sherds indicate a date in the MB II period for the two walls while the slope in between is covered with a glacis of head sized rubble fixed with a grayish clay (Fig. 4; Pl. LII,1).

4. M.E.L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains*, London, 1966, p. 490 ff and figs. 388-391.

5. See F. Zayadine, 'La campagne d'Antiochos III le Grand en 219-217 et le siège de Rabbatamana' in *RB*, forthcoming.

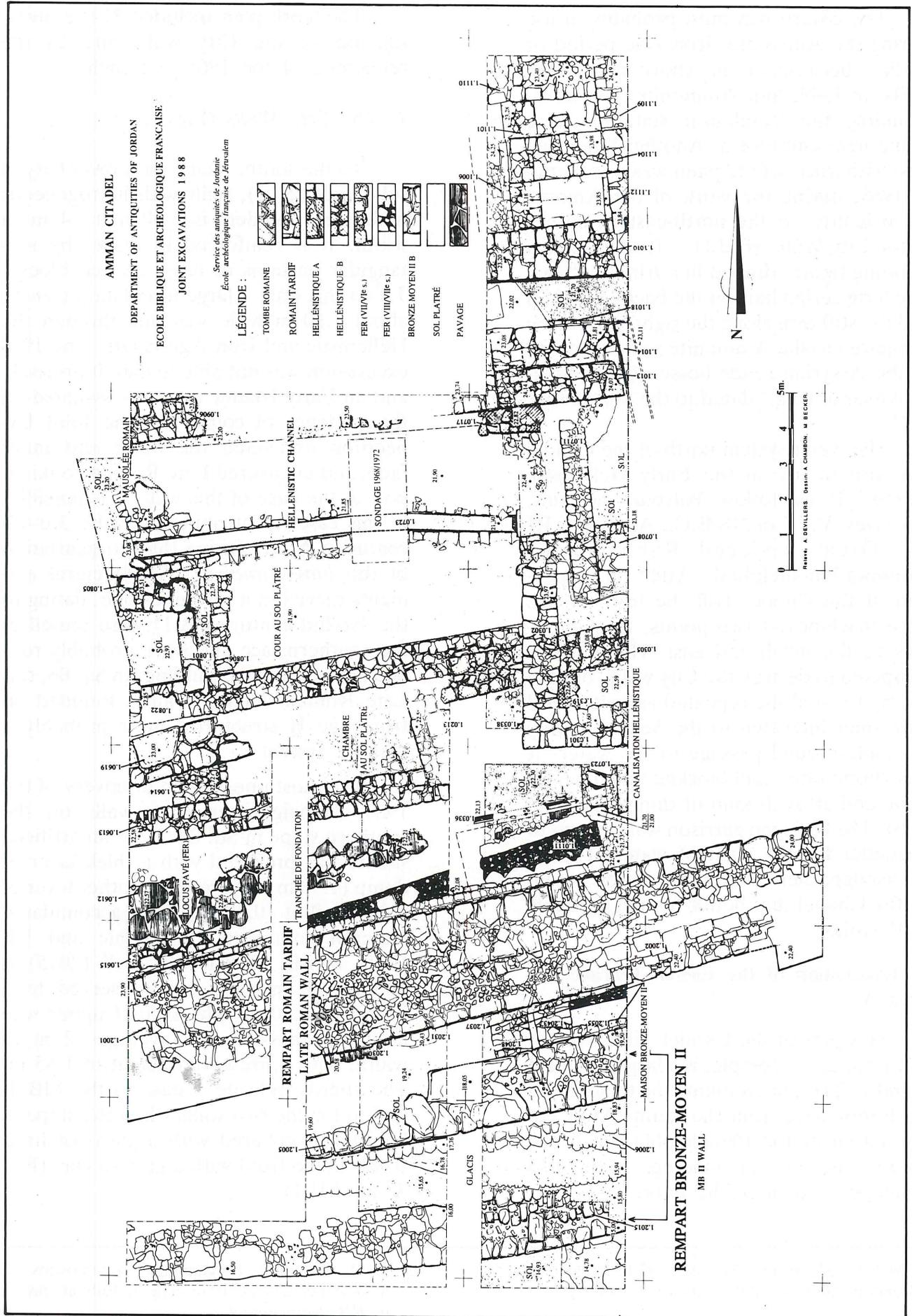


Fig. 3. Ground plan of the excavations in Area A.

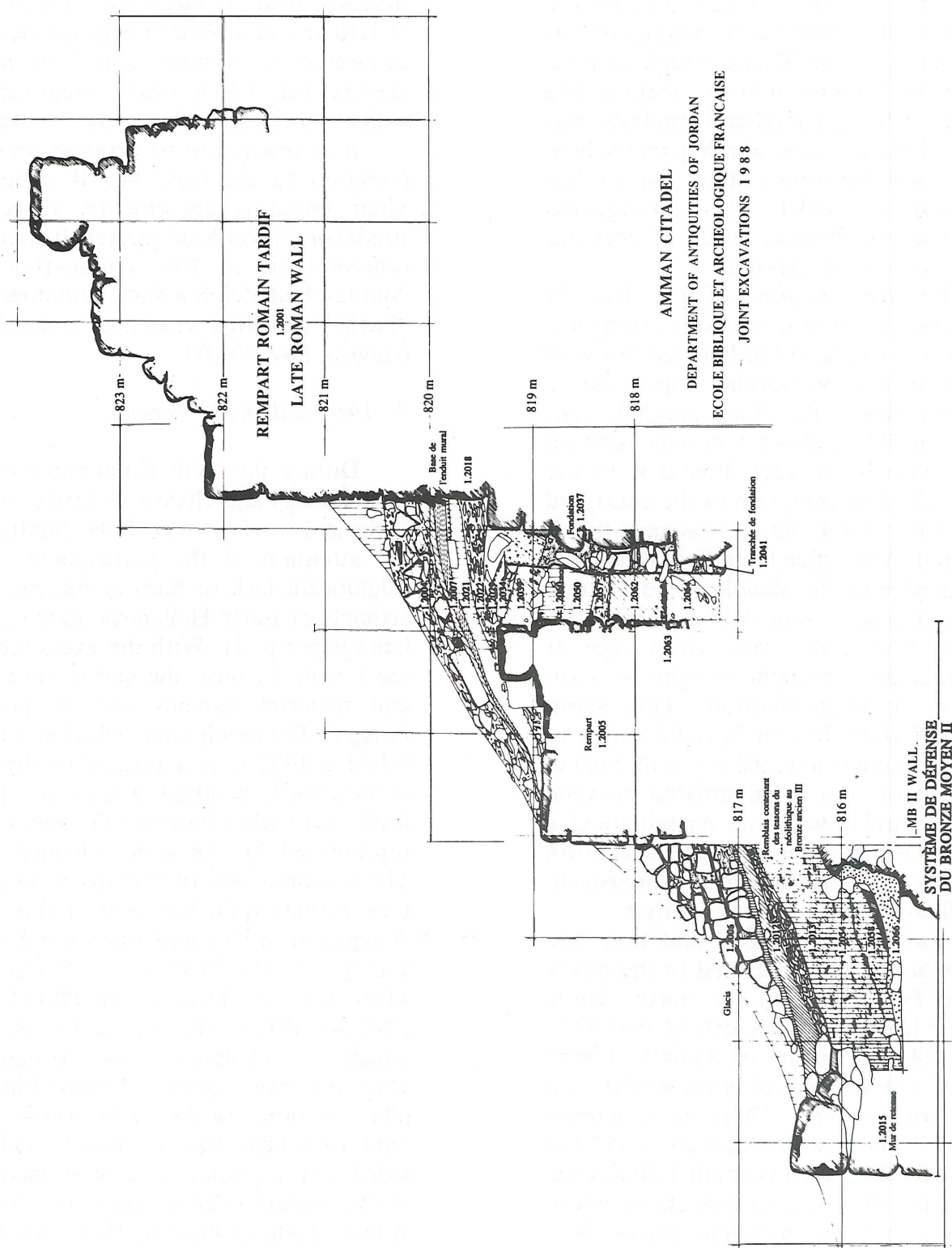


Fig. 4. Section through the MB II defense system.

2. *The Ammonite Iron Age Period* (Pl. LII,2 and Fig. 3)

The reopening of the 1968/73 trench was a long and slow process because the area was filled with recent dump, consisting of large cement blocks brought in from demolished constructions around the Citadel. The accumulated rubbish was removed in about one month, with the help of a crane borrowed from the French Company ALCATEL. The Iron Age and Hellenistic occupation levels of previous excavations were exposed.

The main feature of the Iron II Ammonite stratum was a large courtyard, 7 metres in width, of hard beaten *huwwar*. Traces of ash and burning appear on its southern side only. Two parallel walls (0613 and 0822) about 1 m wide with an open space in between bound it to the south. The interpretation of the courtyard is still conjectural, but it is assumed that it belonged to an official building, which was decorated with the double faced Hatoric heads.⁶ Between wall 0613 and the Late Roman wall 2001, more Iron Age II structures were brought to light: A pavement of brownish limestone slabs, about 1.90 m in width (loc. 0612) could belong to a street running along the city wall. On the plaster floor of a room situated between the two parallel walls, an Ammonite clay figurine, bearing the pointed 'atef' crown and with a painted beared and moustach, was discovered by Dr. M. Najjar.

Substantial Hellenistic and Iron Age II structures were excavated in the newly plotted Sqs. 10-11, to the north. Three massive Iron Age walls extend east-west: Wall 1014 which stands on a plinth of large roughly dressed blocks is preserved to a height of 1.40 m. There is a narrow corridor 1.50 m wide between it and the next wall 1011 which is about 1.40 m wide and stands on a large footing. Its southern face is covered by thick lime plaster. It is noticeable that huge limestone blocks with a smoothed surface were deposited in the

corridor, between walls 1011 and 1014. Their function is not clear, unless they were set in the Hellenistic period as a base to the N-S wall 1006 (see below). The third Iron Age wall 1110 with a preserved width of 1.10 m was robbed in later periods. It is connected by a poor wall 1101 to the massive wall 1010 to form a room supplied with a nicely smoothed *huwwar* floor.

It is premature to propose an interpretation to the Iron Age II structures. Their imposing construction suggests a citadel or a royal headquarter. It should be remembered in this connection that Amman-Philadelphia was mentioned as a "birtha" (fortified residence) in the Zenon papyrus PSZ.59.009.

3. *The Hellenistic Period*

During the IVth Conference on the Archaeology and History of Jordan held in Lyon in June 1989, Dr. R.H. Smith drew the attention of the participants to the "significant lack of both architecture and artifacts of Early Hellenistic date" (circulated paper p. 1). With the excavations of the Lower Terrace, the gap of settlement and material remains can be partially bridged. The stratigraphy which was established in 1968/73 is confirmed by the work of the Joint Expedition. The earliest Hellenistic occupation (Stratum IV, Phase II) is represented by the water channel 0723. The southern end of this drain, near the Late Roman wall, was excavated in 1988. A segment of its foundation trench which averages 1.10-1.20 m in width yielded a silver coin of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.) who refounded Rabbat-amana as a Hellenistic city and named it after his sister-spouse Arsinoë-Philadelphia. A room (walls 0619, 0805, 0806) built with huge squared blocks and provided with a plaster floor, was uncovered at the western edge of the water channel. A bronze coin of Ptolemy II that was found on the floor dates this room to the early 3rd century B.C. It is noticeable that the

6. ADAJ, 18 (1973), p. 27-29 and Pls. XII-XXII.

Hellenistic structures are built directly over the Iron Age II walls. This phenomenon can easily be demonstrated by walls 1006 and 1013 which overlap the earlier buildings. When the first wall was partly dismantled, stamped Rhodian jar-handles together with fragmentary painted plaster in red, yellow and black were retrieved in a dark soil, underneath the wall. Two other Hellenistic walls in Sqs. 10 and 11 (1014 and 1104) are directly laid over Iron Age structures and should belong to the Early Hellenistic phase. Ptolemaic Philadelphia which lasted for a hundred years but was heavily demolished by the Seleucid attack of 218 B.C. and by the Late Roman stone robbers is well documented in the excavation.

A second century B.C. phase (IV,I), associated with architecture and well smoothed gray plaster floors was also recognised. There is a room to the east, limited by walls 0301, 0302 and 0708 (Fig. 3) with a plaster floor set on a heavy bedding.

The latest architectural phase can be dated by a large amount of *terra sigillata*, coins and other artifacts to the early

Roman period (phase III). It is represented by walls 0711 and 1006 which superimpose the Early Hellenistic buildings.

In conclusion, the 1988 campaign was successful in revealing a sofar unique defensive system of the MB II period. Iron Age II Rabbath Ammon was a thriving city with impressive buildings and a good amount of material cultural remains, represented mainly by nicely red burnished pottery, figurines and blue glass vessels of the Phoenician type. Philadelphia of the Ptolemaic flourishing era is the best witness of a sofar missing period in the Transjordan. The Byzantine and Umayyad periods are not yet architecturally represented in the excavated area, but the work of the Department of Antiquities in cooperation with USAID Cultural Resources Management Project revealed an important complex of the 6-7th centuries A.D. on the Lower Terrace about 100 m to the west of Area A.⁷

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7. ADAJ, 31 (1987), p. 299-310.