

Notes on the Archaeology of Amman

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The Kingdom of Ammon, with its capital Rabbat Ammon came into existence during the Iron Age about 1300 B.C. From the termination of the Bronze Age culture around 1800 B.C. little is known of the history of this site. As long as we are dealing with the value of Amman in the world of Archaeology, I believe that the historical evidence should be seen rather than be talked or heard about.

I'll explain and discuss some notes on the archaeology of Amman by explaining certain aspects of the ancient monuments which have been discussed by various scholars. I would rather avoid the various speculations and theories concerned with this site.

Our historical records concerning the history of Amman eventually begin with the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. Before this date most of the history of Amman comes through very slight archaeological evidence. Fifteen years ago, a small Late Bronze Age Temple was discovered when Amman airport was being enlarged. During the excavation in this Temple, many important objects like cylindrical seals, scarabs and pottery objects were discovered. Imported or locally imitated Mycenaean and Palestinian imitations of Egyptian stone vessels were also found. The objects from this Temple are almost equal to those discovered in the ancient cities east of the Mediterranean. Our objects prove beyond doubt that Amman was firmly in the main stream of international affairs at that time.

Another discovery of Middle Bronze Age tomb at Jabel el Jofeh el Garbi has a particular interest. The discovery of a Middle Bronze Age habitation in Amman brings its relation to Dr. N. Glueck's often repeated statement, which indicates that Trans-Jordan was not inhabited between the year 1900-1200 B.C.

Around Amman and on the tops of many hills, there are ruins of squared and round-shaped towers. These ruins are mostly of Iron Age, and seem to represent watch towers from which warning could be given in the event of an armed conflict.

Rabbat Ammon, The Royal City, The Capital, The City of Waters, Philadelphia, and later Amman, all these are the names given to the city. The first four names indicating the city which fought against the Biblical Kings, came from the Old Testament. The comprehensive change which affected the city began with the victorious arrival of Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt, in the year 263 - 265 B.C. Philadelphus built or rebuilt this city and named it Philadelphia. The Seleucids were the next conquerors in 218 B.C. The Romans arrived in Amman about 63 B.C. when Pompeius captured Syria. After this happened, Amman became a member of the Decapolis, which consisted of Greco-Roman cities north of Jordan.

The Archaeological plan of Amman : (See pL. XXI)

The Citadel Hill is undoubtedly the site of ancient Amman. Many scholars claimed that the Romans swept away the ancient monuments when they began building on the site. In fact, the Citadel still have a lot of antique remains but they are covered with earth. Few feet below the surface, the Antiquities Department's excavations represent different layers consisting of mosaics, plaster, pottery, walls and pavements. The Citadel or al-Qala is a site of great importance and its excavation is very necessary. This site, I believe, consists of antiquities related to Bronze, Iron, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic Ages.

The Acropolis surmounting the top of the Citadel, and being surrounded by a heavy wall, appears to have been reconstructed in certain parts during the Middle Ages. The entire northern section of the wall, including the northern end of the west wall constitutes one of the finest examples of ancient fortification.

There are no walls of this type in the Roman times, and it is difficult to know if the Romans ever built such defence walls. A similar wall to this type can be found some kilometers to the west of Amman at Arak al-Amir, which certainly belongs to the time of the Seleucid period. On the other hand, the original wall of Amman Citadel may date back to the days of ancient Rabbat Ammon. The Roman monuments in Amman represent the same type adopted in the other Roman provinces. City planning, architecture, sculpture and other types of masonry are employed in Syria during the Roman period. Jerash, Jadara (Um Qais), Sebaste, Petra, Damascus, Palmayra, Baalbak etc. are cities of typical and traditional Roman construction, which dominated the second and third century A.D.

The antiquities that appear on the top of the Citadel Hill are the following: The Temple, Byzantine and Muslem buildings; in the lower city, Theater, Odion Forum, Nymphaeum, two colonnaded streets, Bath, Propelaea, Gates and many masonic Tombs. It is necessary to make a brief summary on some of the important constructions.

The Temple :

On the top of the Citadel Hill, and close to the south wall, the Temple is occupying a strategic yard. The Temple was visible from the lower city. The height of the Temple from the base of the **Podium** to the top of the **Pediment** (acrotterion) was about 18.75 m.

The Temple, as most of the temples, faces the East. In the **Pronaos**, only six Corinthian columns exist; four of them are on the short side. The four columns create three entrances between the stairs and the **Cella** building. The stairs which extended along the eastern short side of the Temple is completely vanished.

The foundation, as in the **Podium**, walls are built of limestone in **header** and **stretcher** method. The long side of the Temple appeared to have no columns, in fact, there was a portico of columns consisting of 7 or 9 columns. Since we observe the **Cella** wall is occupying the interior section of the Temple, definitely a portico of columns was employed to hold the roof of the Temple. A comprehensive excavation is necessary to prove the plan of this Temple and its complexity.

Blocks of the architrave are dropped on the surface. Three of them bear inscriptions indicating that the Temple was built or rebuilt in the time of Emperor Marcus Aurelius 161-180 A.D.

There was a claim that this building was a library. I think that there is no need for such claim especially when we perceive the following facts:-

- 1 - This building is located on the top of the Citadel, where a person expects a temple on the Acropolis. If there was a library in Amman, one expects to find it downtown in the lower city, where the public buildings are accumulated and facilities for living are offered.
- 2 - This building is suitable for a Temple not a library considering its size.
- 3 - The first report submitted by the Italian expedition on this building indicated that canals for blood were carved in the bed rock, definitely used for sacrificing animals. Then the Romans built a Temple on this sacred place.
- 4 - Inscription was found on architrave translated as the following :-

“For the safety of our Lords and Emperors Marcus Aurelius Antonius and Lucius Verus Rumethom donated ”

Since we have an inscription quite similar to this writing and found in Zeus Temple at Jerash, we understand the close relation of types of dedication. The inscription of Zeus Temple translated to: “For the safety and eternal power of the Emperors Antoninus and Verus and their entire house (this temple) was consecrated under Geminius Marcianus”. This is the way of writing adopted in Temples’ dedications. Most of Temples were donated to Emperors by their cities or vice-versa.

- 5 - During the excavation activities in the Temple, two marble fragments of a huge statue were discovered. It is not strange to find huge statues inside a temple. Some scholars identified those fragments as a part of a statue of Hercules, and some said of Zeus.
- 6 - An altar with inscription was discovered near the east slope of the Citadel and close to the Sayl. The inscription is translated as follows:- “To Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the preserver, (this altar was dedicated by) Lucius Aemilius Carus, Legatus Augusti Propaetore.” This altar may have been brought from the complex of the Temple, probably Zeus Temple.
- 7 - If there was a library in this city, we would expect to hear about it from literary documents. None of classical or later resources mentioned a library in the ancient city of Amman.

The Lower City :

As we see in the archaeological map, the city is divided into two major sections, the Citadel, and the lower city. The Acropolis was surrounded by a wall, therefore we may look for a link joining the two sections together. On the northern and southern sides of the colonnaded street a huge building was erected to bring the two sections, by wide stairs, together. This building is the **Propylaea**.

The axis of this building is on the same degree with the Gate built up in the city wall. People in the lower city are not protected in case of a sudden attack, because the lower city has no defence walls. It seem that the **Propelaea** was open to the public in ceremonial occasions as it was opened in emergency cases when the lower city was exposed to sudden attacks.

The lower city is arranged in a typical Roman planning. There are two colonnaded streets lying in the basin of the several valleys of the city. The streets are 8.40 m. wide, paved with limestone blocks. The first street starts from Raghaden Bridge, east of Philadelphia Hotel and extends to the west, passing by the Municipality building and continuing to Great Hussein Mosque and ending near Ras el-Ain quarters. The second street starts from a point on the first street near the mosque passes by King Hussein Street up to the building of the Central Bank.

The two colonnaded streets are completely buried under the tarred streets. It is very unfortunate that the two colonnaded streets and the **Propelaea** building are completely vanished or still buried under the modern streets, and modern buildings.

THE PROPELAEA :

Propelaea is the great gate or the entrance gateway to an enclosure. It is usually built as an entrance for a temple complex. The best examples of such construction are found in the Acropolis of Athens, and in the complex of Artemis Temple at Jerash.

The **Propelaea** of Amman is represented by ruins on the slope below the south wall of the Acropolis, standing on higher ground than any other of the lower city buildings. The ruins of the **Propelaea** consisted of a wall 2m. thick and about 25m. long, oriented north east and south east, with two short walls projected from its end toward the south east. This building has three entrances, a wide portal between two narrow ones. The two facades of this construction are richly ornamented with orders of pilaster and niches with small pediments above them. The **Propelaea** here is very similar to that one in Jerash. Both are located on the main street of the city and following by stairs leading up to the top of the hill where the Temple is located.

THE THEATER :

The Great Theater of Philadelphia is situated south of the colonnaded street in a sloping of a huge mountain. The **Cavea** of the Theater consisted of three horizontal divisions of seats, all are built in the bed rock. Meanwhile, the two ends of the Theater are built on retaining walls. None of the seats was cut in the natural rock but all are built of slightly different quality of quarried limestone. The artificial wings of the **Cavea** were built upon masses of masonry supported with vaults that followed the curve of the **Cavea** to about a third of its perimeter on either side. The lowest vaults, on either side, served as an exite, a sort of a covered **Parados**, under the lower seats. The **Scaena** with all the stage buildings are completely destroyed. Only the foundation of the **Scaena** is still standng. The lower

and middle sections each is comprised of sixteen rows of seats, divided by six **Scalarias** into seven **Cuneis**. When this Theater was discovered only the edge **Cuneis** were destroyed. The Antiquities Department now almost finished from its preservation. The Theater accomodates 6000 persons. Excavations began few years ago in the **Forum** located to the north side of the Theater. Three porticos of Corinthian coloumns could be observed. This Forum seems to be a central Plaza used for economic and political advantages. It is located between the Theater and the colonnaded street.

THE NYMPHAEUM :

Nymph is the young maiden who lives beside rivers, streams and springs. She is the inferior divinity of Nature. In the early Roman times, beautiful buildings of their own, called **Nymphaea**, were built to them inside the cities. The **Nymphaea** or the **Nymphaeum** eventually became a very magnificent building, in which it was customary to celebrate marriages.

The **Nymphaeum** of Amman is located about 200 m. to the west of the Theater. The building stands directly upon the edge of the stream, and its rear wall upon the edge of the water. The facade of this building is facing the colonnaded street. It has been described by some travellers, in the last century, as Basilica, Palace, or as Baths. Mr. Butlar and Captain Conder discussed this building and identified its factual function. However the **Nymphaeum** has a complicated structure; it has two stories, upper and lower. The upper part suffers a great damage. One may suggest that niches were standing on the upper story. By comparing this building with the **Nymphaeum** of Jerash we understand that both almost have the same system. Water falls from holes in the niches. In the back side of the building reservoir or tank of water was standing, and water ran from it by pipes, directly to the niches. Definitely, as a part of decoration, water falls from mouths of statues erected in the niches. Water falls down to the basin where people gather to drink and then the water of the basin finds its way to the stream again though underground drains.

The clearance of the **Nymphaeum** area is very necessary today. A general plan has to be adopted by all those who are concerned about the archaeology of Amman or its beautification.

Among the ruins on the Citadel, Al-Kasr (the palace) is lain out in the form of a square. This palace has arched windows, rich carvings, and beautiful details indicating that it was built in the 6th century by Persians, and rebuilt and beautifully decorated by later Omayyads.

Amman was mentioned by several Moslem historians and geographers. The most interesting notes describing Amman are of **Makdesi**, in 985, he wrote : "Amman, lying on the border of the desert, has around it many villages and corn fields. The Balka district of which it is the Capital, is rich in grain and flocks; it also has many streams, the waters of which work the mills. In the city near the market place stands a fine mosque the court of which is ornamented with mosaic. Living in Amman is cheap, and fruit is plentiful. On the other hand, the

people of the place are Bedwins. The city is even as a harbour of the desert, and a place of refuge for the Bedwins”.

Yakut wrote: “Amman is the city of Dakianus (Decius), the Emperor under whose reign the seven sleepers entered the cave of Arrakim”.

Abu'l Fida, in the year 1321, wrote: “It is a very ancient town, and was ruined before the days of Islam. There are great ruins here, and the river As-Zarka flows through them, which (later on) crosses the Pilgrim Road from Damascus to Mekka. At Amman there are many great trees of terebinth (Buttum). The town all rounded by fields and trees, and the soil is very fertile; according to tradition it was Lot who built Amman”.

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