

Excavations at The Citadel, Amman, 1976 Second Preliminary Report

by

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A second season of excavations from the middle of May to the end of October, 1976, took place on the Citadel (el Qal'ah) (Plate XCVII, 1) in Amman, under the direction of Mrs. Crystal-M. Bennett². It was hoped that the Department of Antiquities and the University of Jordan would have participated, but this was not possible³. The senior personnel of the team were key members of the British excavations at Buseirah⁴.

As was mentioned in the previous and first Preliminary Report published in the *A.D.A.J.*, Vol XX, (1975), the immediate reason for the excavations on this highest part of the Citadel is the possibility of either a new Museum being erected or a vast expansion of the present one. In 1975, attention was concentrated on the area to the north of the present Museum, (Areas A and B on Fig.1.). In 1976, it was decided that a more suitable area for the Museum might be on the south west slope of the Citadel, our Area C on Fig. 1. The area is bounded to the North by a number of barrack buildings which house the remaining garrison of the Citadel and to the east, by the Museum and its associated ancillary buildings. To the west, the area is bounded by the defensive wall of the Citadel, (which we took the opportunity to examine,) and the steep slope of the hill. This area of the Citadel has never been excavated, though the site of the present Museum was the subject of a rescue excavation by G. Lankester Harding in 1949⁵.

The main result of these excavations was a series of fine Umayyad private houses, whose foundations were laid upon bedrock.

The long season of more than five months

was envisaged as sufficient time to allow us to get to bedrock and thus define the total history of this part of the Citadel. An area of approximately 660 square metres was subjected to investigation by means of two lines of 5 metre squares, running up eastwards from the Citadel wall towards the Department of Antiquities' store rooms. Bedrock was reached only in one area, C.VII (see Fig.2), in a cistern which was stone lined to a depth of 8.02 metres below ground level. As this cistern is more than two-thirds east of the present western limit of the excavations, it can readily be understood how much work has to be done if the line of the bedrock is to be traced over the area. Despite the fact that bedrock will rise as the summit is approached, it will deepen as the excavations move west-wards down the slope towards the Sharia es Salt. The deliberate infill of earlier buildings and the loose rubble so often encountered make digging a hazardous occupation, particularly as the trenches deepen. It is of the utmost importance, however, that bedrock be reached in strategic areas if the successive periods of occupation are to be brought to light.

Broadly, what we uncovered falls into three major phases, all of which produced structures and stratified pottery, while there is some fragmentary information from earlier periods. The latest period of occupation is an Islamic phase, whose precise dating remains uncertain, but which may be assigned tentatively to the 10th/11th Century. This covers about two-thirds of the area and overlies an Umayyad phase, which was found over most of the area, particularly in the east. This Umayyad phase is distinctly separated from the Byzantine structures underneath.

10/11th Century Phase.

The latest phase of occupation consists of a series of small buildings clearly distinct from the underlying Umayyad phase. (Fig. 2). In some cases Umayyad walls have been reused, but in others, the Umayyad plan has been ignored. The setting out of the buildings bears no relationship and it is clear that there is a gap in the occupation. These buildings are constructed of uncoursed rubble, with considerable reuse of earlier masonry, including Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad items, and there is either a one course foundation or none at all. The rooms often exhibit low internal subdivisions of one course: these may have been foundations for low mud walls, but apart from hearths, the rooms show little sign of specialised function.

The eastern limit of this occupation is the Umayyad street in trenches C.V. and XV (Fig.2.), although there is some undated evidence of post-Umayyad occupation in trench C.VI Room A (discussed below). In trenches C.V/IV, there is a roughly rectangular house resting on Umayyad walls in the Northeast corner, with a low cross-wall joining the two long sides, and a single doorway in the Northwest corner. To the North, in trenches C.XV/XIV, Umayyad walls were reused, adding new upper courses and new cross walls and doorways. The Umayyad floor level appears to have been reused, 1.20m below those of the adjacent house mentioned above, and it would be reasonable to assume that these rooms were sunk into the ground at this period. This structure extends as far West as a possible "alley" running North-South in C. III and XIII, and has a doorway on to it. The Umayyad wall continues to the West under the "alley" surface, which was otherwise mud.

To the west of the "alley", a complex of rooms runs as far as the defensive wall of the Citadel. The four rooms in C.II and XII all belong to one house, (Plate XCVI,2) which is similar in construction to the C.IV/V house, though it is more complex. The three rooms abutting the Defensive wall in trenches C.I/XI

also belong to one house, which is the most elaborate and the most interesting of this period (Plate XCVII,1). In the first place, the northernmost room in C.XI/XII is larger (5.7 metres wide) and utilises a reused column drum of 40.cm. diameter. The walling is a finer form of snecked rubble construction with a carefully built up raised threshold. This leads into a room with a stone-paved floor- the only non-earth floor in this phase. Beyond this lies a further room with a hard clay floor and access by an opening 1 metre high, which we have described as an animal door (See Fig.2).

Clearly, this phase represents domestic occupation of a fairly simple unwarlike community.^{5b} The western walls of the rooms in C.I/XI are built on top of the defensive wall, and, in the case of the northernmost room, the defensive wall line is no longer used and the room is built into the rubble of the wall core. Thus it seems that the site was unwallled in this period. There was no certain occupation east of C.V/XV, and with large spaces between buildings, a sparsity of population is indicated.

The dating of this phase may be put tentatively in the late 10th/early 11th Century. The build up of deposits from the Umayyad floor levels is limited to a maximum of 1.20 metres and is often less. There is one securely associated coin from the floor of the C.IV/V house, an unfortunately illegible dirham with an inscription in a developed Kufic and best placed in the 10th/11th Centuries.

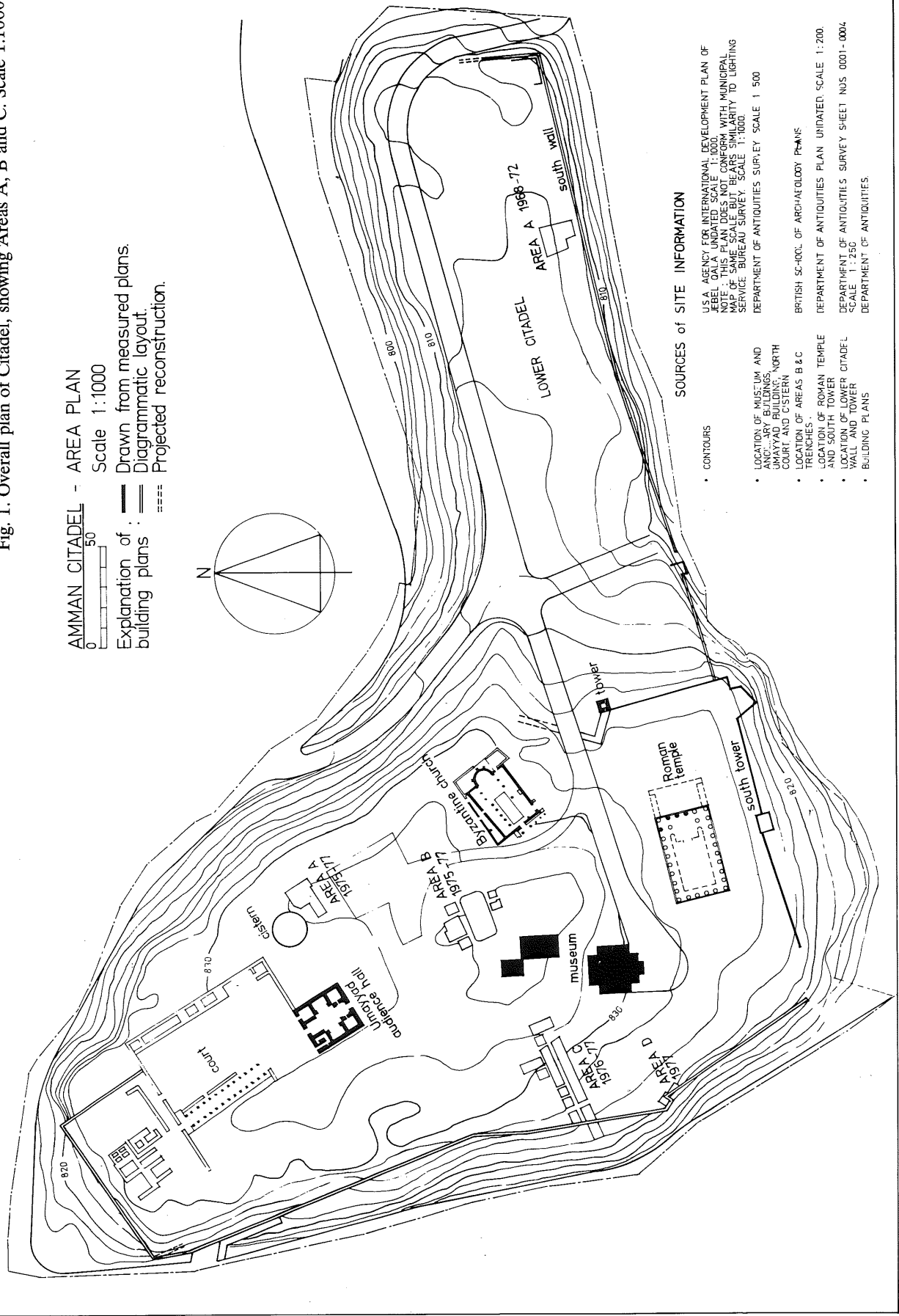
Umayyad Phase

Underneath the 10th century phase, there is Umayyad construction over much of the area of excavations. Adjacent to the defensive wall in C.I/XI (plate XCVII,1 and to the east of the street in C.V./XV, Umayyad buildings and levels are well preserved (Plate XCVIII,1)

Defensive Wall. (Plates XCVII,1) and (XCVIII,2)

The section of the Citadel wall adjacent to the trench line was examined by excavation on

Fig. 1. Overall plan of Citadel, showing Areas A, B and C. Scale 1:1000.



AMMAN CITADEL - AREA PLAN
 Scale 1:1000

Explanation of:
 — Drawn from measured plans.
 - - - Diagrammatic layout.
 - - - - - Projected reconstruction.

SOURCES of SITE INFORMATION

- CONTOURS
 - LOCATION OF MUSLIM AND ANCILLARY BUILDINGS, NORTH UMAYYAD BUILDING, NORTH COURT AND CISTERN
 - LOCATION OF AREAS B & C TRENCHES
 - LOCATION OF ROMAN TEMPLE AND SOUTH TOWER
 - LOCATION OF LOWER CITADEL WALL AND TOWER
 - BUILDING PLANS
- USA AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF REBEL DAM, UNDATED SCALE 1:1000. THIS MAP BEARS SIMILARITY TO LIGHTING SERVICE BUREAU SURVEY, SCALE 1:1000.
 DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES SURVEY, SCALE 1:500
- BRITISH SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGY PLANS
 DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES PLAN UNDATED, SCALE 1:200.
 DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES SURVEY SHEET NUS 0001-0004, SCALE 1:250
 DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES

both sides of the wall and some removal of the fill. The outer face consists of ashlar blocks of very soft limestone, of which six courses have survived at the point of excavation. Below this there is a foundation of snecked rubble construction. The ashlar blocks are a facade for a rubble core set in red clay, and the inside face of the wall is again snecked rubble with an unusually large number of snecking stones, giving a total width of 4 metres. The foundation on the inside is rubble set in red clay. The inner face has a ledge 0.30 metres wide and between 0.80 and 0.50 metres above the associated floor level. On both faces of the wall there are traces of lime plaster with an ash content and inset with a sprinkling of limestone chips.

The main feature of the exterior of this section of the wall is a series of buttresses, on average 14.5 metres apart and 6 metres long. The buttress in trench C.C,2 projects 0.70 metres. These buttresses are not related to strengthening the rubble fill of the wall, nor do they function as towers, for they do not project sufficiently to give a protected field of fire along the length of the wall. Rather they appear to be decorative, patterned on a section of walling, which is undoubtedly Roman, on the south side of the Citadel.

Pottery from the rubble fill and the associated floor level on the inside, dates the visible construction to the Umayyad period. On the inside, the wall line runs over a Byzantine building and from the evidence of the foundations on both sides of the wall, it is clear that this wall is the first wall on this line and is not a rebuild. There is no evidence, so far, as to where an earlier wall line might have been on the Western slope of the Citadel. The Umayyad construction on this side extends from a gate opposite the Umayyad "Palace" to the Southwest corner of the Citadel and is extensive elsewhere on the Citadel.⁶

There is some evidence of refacing with rubble stones on the outside face, but as a whole this Umayyad wall was never rebuilt, and in the

10th Century phase, domestic structures were built over the inside face (see above, page 174). Later, a battered revetment was added, whose date is uncertain; it is not contemporary with the main wall, neither is it a modern buttressing wall. We hope, on the basis of this excavation, to survey the western wall of the Citadel in the 1977 season.

Umayyad Buildings.

At both ends of the trench line, the Umayyad levels are clear; adjacent to the Citadel wall and associated with it, is a fine Umayyad plaster floor (trench C.I) with a pier of uncertain date in the south-east corner of the trench. No building walls have been uncovered and the floor fades out to the east. The floor is laid on a thin layer of red clay and the whole covers 2-2.5 metres of loose rubble, in which is interred three walls of a Byzantine building.

In the area east of the street in C.V. and XVI (Fig 2) a series of rooms was uncovered, almost identical in architecture and finds to the Umayyad houses excavated by G.L. Harding in 1949, 40 metres away to the east under the present Museum. (See n. 5). Almost certainly, the rooms constitute a single large building of which the limits are not yet known. A frontage of 18 metres on the western side has so far been uncovered, but including partially excavated rooms, the building must measure a minimum of 25 metres in the North-South direction. The walls are rubble-built with a large number of snecking stones, to provide a smooth surface for plastering,⁷ though the wall construction deteriorates in rooms intended for storage. The foundations are 2 metres deep, set in a levelling fill intended to compensate for the slope of the hill.

The foundation work varies between rubble walling without snecking and carefully finished walling similar to the upper walls. All the floors are earth except for one fine mud plaster, (Room D)⁸, and one thin lime plaster floor (Room A).

The building does not appear to be an

architectural entity, but to be constructed of units: one unit is the foundation, all of which line up square. The second basic unit is Room E, which seems to have been constructed before Rooms A,B, and C, although there is no evidence of a major time gap. The upper walls are not built straight on the foundations, but rather diverge at a small angle.

Of the rooms extensively excavated, Rooms A,B,D and F. were clearly dwelling rooms, while C was a store room with three stone bins. A is the only room with signs of a lengthy period of use, with a second floor level of earth above the original lime plaster floor. After the destruction of the building, it was the only room to be used later with a third, higher floor level, a buttressing wall added on to the side facing the street, and a later tomb containing the skeletons of two children in the north-east corner. The second floor had two smashed pots which covered up by the later floor. Room B contained six pots, a lamp and a small hearth. Room F in trench C. VIII provided the best evidence of a dwelling room. In the south-west corner there was a rectangular stone pan, and, on the west side, the remains of a bread oven. Arranged around the walls of the room F were nine cooking pots, water jars and cups (Plate XCIX,1). Room E contained a pair of interconnected basins faced with an ashy plaster that was cut with herringbone keying impressions. (Pl. XCIX, 2).

In trench C.VII and adjacent to the east wall of Room A (C.VI) was a plastered basin leading into a cistern. (Plate C,1). This cistern has a shaft 0.42-0.65 metres in diameter, which bells out after 6.80 metres to a diameter of 2.80 metres. The cistern is stone-lined to the point where it begins to bell out, and below that it is plastered bedrock. The cistern seems to have been constructed originally in the Byzantine period, for it has a second ring-shaped stone for a mouth, 2.25 metres below the present mouth. The surround to the mouth has two phases: in the first, the Byzantine cistern is rebuilt with an extended shaft to suit the new ground level,

which has been raised by a fill to level the surface for the Umayyad building; it was built into the East wall of Room A and a channel from the adjacent plastered basin fed into it. In the second phase, the channel from the basin was blocked off and a new surround to the cistern head was built.

This building was destroyed suddenly, from the evidence of pottery on the floors of Room A, B and F, and the skeleton of a young adult found curled up on the threshold of the eastern doorway to Room B. Cracks and leaning (Plate C,2) walls indicate an earthquake at that time, for the west wall of Room A was buttressed later. The evidence of these excavations coincides with that of the 1949 excavations⁹, but no evidence of earthquake destruction at this period has yet been found elsewhere on the Citadel. The destruction level of this building includes pottery and coins datable to the Umayyad period, while the building shows no signs of long use.¹⁰ Therefore, the building may be assigned to the Umayyad period, that is, the first half of the 8th Century A.D.¹¹ and its destruction to within a few years of the end of the dynasty, possibly the severe earthquake of 747 A.D.

To the west of this building was uncovered the north-south street, Plate XCVII,2 approximately 3 metres wide, and with an earth surface, to which there are three levels, the lowest of which is Umayyad and the latest certainly post-Umayyad. The street lines up with the pattern of Islamic buildings in the Roman temenos at the North end of the Citadel, thus suggesting the possibility that there may have been at least a partial chessboard pattern of streets in the Umayyad period.

To the west of the street in trenches C.X-III,XIV,XV and V, are a series of walls, which we have assigned to the Umayyad period, partly because of their construction with a mortar containing ash, and partly because, in some places, they immediately overlay Byzantine levels, with

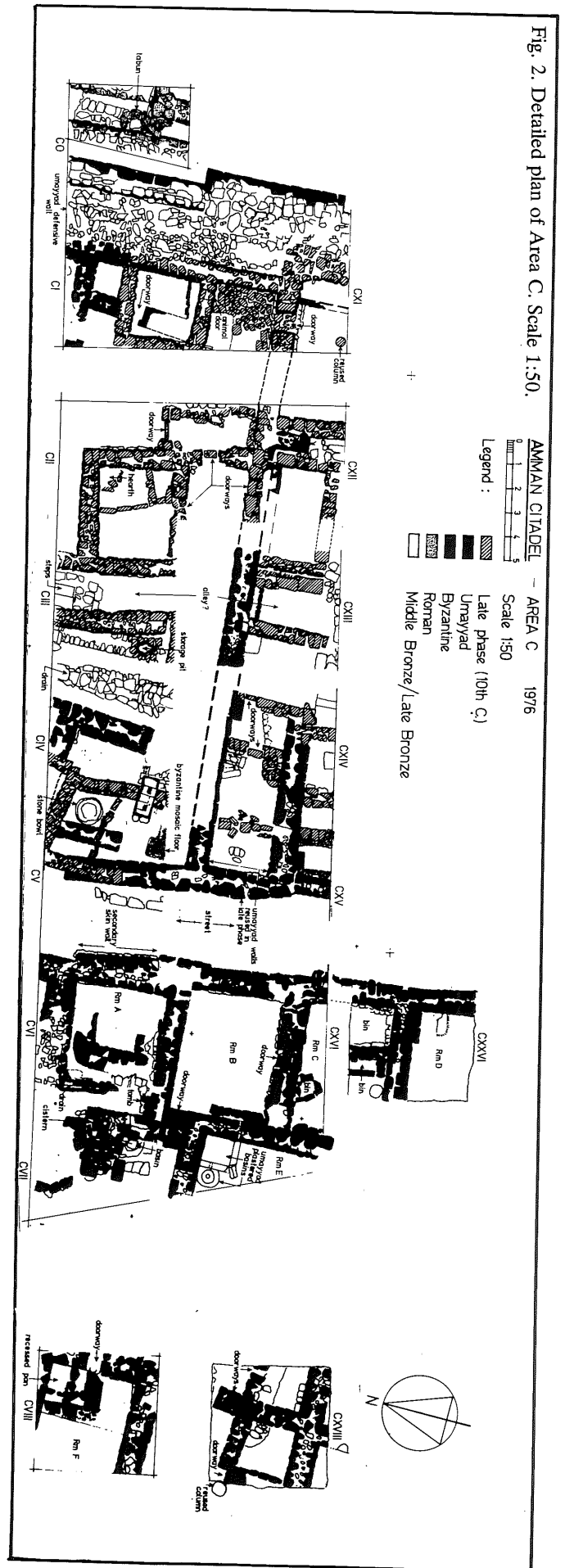
a Byzantine and Umayyad pottery mix in between. However, they have been rebuilt and reused in our last phase, apparently utilising the same floor levels. Nevertheless what has survived indicates a substantial building, at least 19 metres in a west-east direction, and which included two probable store rooms in C.XIV and XV.

Thus there are two large buildings, one at least 25 metres and the other 19 metres in length, a street and a new defensive wall in the Umayyad period. The whole is laid on a fill, which was intended to level the site. This fill varies in thickness between 0.5 and 2.5 metres with the building to the west of the street stepping down the slope from the building to the east. Adjacent to the Citadel wall the fill encloses remains of a Byzantine building, near the floor of which was found a complete Umayyad jar. (Plate CI,1) Thus we may suggest that the Umayyad period saw a complete reconstruction of this part of the Citadel. Although the plan of the Umayyad building has not been worked out completely, and some of the evidence has been destroyed by later structures, there is enough material to suggest a similarity to Umayyad rectangular block buildings found at Anjar¹² and adjacent to the Haram al Sharif in Jerusalem¹³. This phase of construction is almost certainly contemporary with the 'Umayyad Palace', which may be dated to the first half of the 8th Century on architectural grounds, which cannot be discussed here.

Byzantine, Roman and Pre-Roman Material

Material relating to pre-Islamic levels was somewhat fragmentary as areas of penetration through the Umayyad fill levels were necessarily limited. However, in three main areas, structures of the Byzantine period were found.

Removal of part of the Umayyad floor in trench C.VIII uncovered a group of roughly constructed walls, one of which included a column capital. The associated floors were beaten earth and the pottery, including a lamp, was Byzantine.



In trenches C.IV and III, the Umayyad floor levels had disappeared and the first structures encountered under the 10th/11th Century levels were associated with Byzantine pottery. In C.IV, there is a square structure on a diverging alignment from the Umayyad walls. This building was destroyed down to and below floor level. On the north side four blocks remain, which may have formed a threshold and to the north is a small mosaic floor of medium-sized white tesserae laid diagonally and three rows of edging stones laid straight. In the rubble of these levels is the lower half of a wine press. To the west of this building is the line of a drain and a staircase, which may be dated to either the Byzantine or Umayyad periods, but this area has lost any precise stratigraphic relationships. (See Fig. 2.)

In trench C.I, removal of the Umayyad overall floor uncovered a Byzantine building in the rubble fill with a doorway in the middle of the trench with two well-cut door jambs. The nature of the Byzantine occupation remains unclear.

The trench C.0 laid outside the defensive wall produced the only evidence of pre-Byzantine occupation. Here Islamic occupation is missing and the first walls discovered were late Roman/Byzantine. The nature of the building remains unclear, but there was at least a *tabun* in the corner and next to it a cooking pot set in the floor. Immediately below the Roman levels was a crushed but substantially whole late MB/early LB jug painted in red on white and with a snake handle. (Plate CI,2) Close to this were structures possibly relating to this period.

Summary.

Although excavation to Byzantine levels was limited, it is clear from the nature of the building construction that the western slope of the Citadel had domestic occupation, but that the buildings are small and not finely constructed. In the early 8th century, the area was cleared and rebuilt as a single entity, with buildings related to the Umayyad 'Palace' to the

north. These were destroyed or collapsed about the end of the Umayyad period and after that, there was a gap in the occupation until houses were rebuilt over the ruins of the Umayyad town in the late 10th/early 11th Century. This period of occupation does not seem to have been long, and after that the area was not occupied, though Mamluk sherds have been found in the topsoil.

Crystal-M. Bennett
Alastair Northedge
13 th August, 1977

Footnotes

1. The bulk of this Report has been written by Mr. Northedge in consultation with the Director and represents their joint conclusions.
2. In Mrs. Bennett's unavoidable absences, initially, Mr. H. Houghton-Russell and subsequently Mr. A. Northedge assumed responsibility for the excavations.
3. Unfortunately, Dr. F. Zayadine, who had been in charge of Area A for the Department of Antiquities in 1975, could not continue in 1976 because of very serious injuries sustained in a car crash, from which he has now happily recovered. The University of Jordan, because of other outstanding commitments, could not join the excavations.
4. These included; Miss Naomi Assinder as Draughtswoman, Mr. Alastair Northedge as Deputy Director and Miss Rosalind Wade as Senior Field Supervisor. Mr. Michael Upton joined the excavations as a qualified architect and Mr. Ghassan Ramahi represented the Department. Volunteers included Mr. Robert Killick, Mr. Simon Khano, Fr. Florentino Diez, Miss Juliet Dearbergh and Miss L. Johnston. We were most grateful to Mr. Michael McDonald for his help in so many spheres and to Professor Kalayan for coming to our rescue with the planning when our architect was incapacitated.
5. G. Lankester Harding, Excavations on the

- Citadel, Amman, **A.D.A.J.**, Vol.1., 1951, pp. 7-16
- 5b. There is a contemporary description of Amman, c 985 A.D. in Muqaddasi, **Ahsan at-Taqasim**, ed. de Goeje, BGA iii, pp.175, 179.
 6. cf.f. Zayadine, Recent Excavations on the Citadel of Amman, **A.D.A.J.**, XVIII,(1973) pp.17-35, see p.22 and pl.XI for another excavated section; but also visible on the surface in many places.
 7. Quantities of ashy plaster were found in the fill of the rooms but only a little on the walls. This wall plaster is similar to that on the Defensive wall and on walls in the B XXX. complex.
 8. The Room letters are provisional.
 9. Harding, op.cit., pl.1-3 inclusive, where similar wall collapse may be seen.
 10. cf. **Fr. S.J. Saller**; The Memorial of Moses on Mt. Nebo, Jerusalem 1950, for a range of pottery in the destruction level, indicating a similar destruction date, but Byzantine buildings.
 11. All Umayyad buildings for which a precise dating is known postdate the Dome of the Rock 691/2 A.D.
 12. Kindly pointed out by Professor H. Kalayan; see also **M. Chehab**, The Umayyad Palace at Anjar in **Ars Orientalis**, V, 1963, pp. 17-27.
 13. **M. Ben-Dov**; The Umayyad Structures near the Temple Mount Jerusalem, 1971.