

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE ḤESBÂN REGION

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For the first three weeks of the 1974 season a team of four members¹ undertook to complete the archaeological survey of the region surrounding Tell Ḥesbân begun in 1973.² In the 1973 season 103 sites had been identified and most of the territory within a 10 km. radius of Tell Ḥesbân had been examined. However, there were several sectors that required additional attention with the result that 22 more sites were identified in 1974.³

For purposes of the survey, any significant artifact or group of artifacts in close proximity to one another would be designated a site. Thus a site could be as small as a single, fragmented milestone, or as large as a major *tell*. These sites have been designated with Arabic numerals consecutively through the 1973 and 1974 seasons and have been located on the map of Jordan by means of an eight-digit grid reference.⁴ All of the pottery collected at these sites was washed, read by Dr. James A. Sauer, registered, and disposed of along with the pottery from Tell Ḥesbân.

¹ The survey team was composed of Robert Ibach, Jr., supervisor, Theodore Chamberlain, Patricia Derbeck, and Richard Mannell. Occasional assistance was also rendered by Abdel Samia' Abu-Dayya, Omar Daud, and Mogahed Mohaisin.

² See S. Douglas Waterhouse and Robert Ibach, Jr., "Heshbon 1973: The Topographical Survey," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 217-233.

³ Rather than being confined to a strict 10 km. radius around Tell Ḥesbân, the survey region was bounded by obvious landmarks—modern roads for the most part (see map, Fig. 19). There were several points at which the survey was carried beyond these boundaries, and one sector east-northeast of Tell Ikhtanū could not be examined because of military restrictions. As in 1973, the survey employed the 1:25,000 map of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

⁴ There were seven sites (62, 75, 76, 77, 78, 81, 90) for which grid references cannot be given. These references had been established by their relationship to 'Ain Sumiya before it was discovered that the 1:25,000 map had mislocated 'Ain Sumiya at 2206.1356; the correct reference is 2230.1362.

With over 20,000 sherds gathered from 125 ancient sites, one could begin to sketch the patterns of occupation in the region of Tell Ḥesbân. To provide a simple overview, Table 2 shows the number of sites where pottery of each period was attested.

<i>Period</i>	<i>No. of Sites Occupied</i>
Modern	30
Ottoman	13
Ayyūbid/Mamlūk	49
‘Abbāsīd	2
Umayyad	17
Byzantine	108
Roman	79
Hellenistic	14
Iron Age	91
Late Bronze	2
Late Bronze/Middle Bronze	1
Middle Bronze	9
Early Bronze	46
Chalcolithic	9

Table 2. Distribution of 125 sites surveyed according to periods attested by pottery.

Islamic Periods

Pottery of the Modern era was found at 30 sites and from the Ottoman period at 13 sites (but only one sherd each at four of those sites). Ayyūbid/Mamlūk pottery appeared at 49 sites and was the dominant ware at six of those sites. At many of the sites yielding large quantities of Ayyūbid/Mamlūk pottery there was noticed a common characteristic—the sharply undulating surface of the sites. Small mounds were interspersed with depressions, apparently the result of arches, vaulted buildings, semi-subterranean rooms and caves—architecture characteristic of the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period. The collapse of many vaulted or arched roofs is responsible for sharp depressions in the surface of a site.⁵

⁵ The excavations at Tell Ḥesbân have shown that vaulting and arching were common in Ayyūbid/Mamlūk times. Vaulted buildings found in both Areas C and D have been dated to this period, as has an arched building in G.6. The use of vaulting appeared to have affected the contours of Tell Ḥesbân.

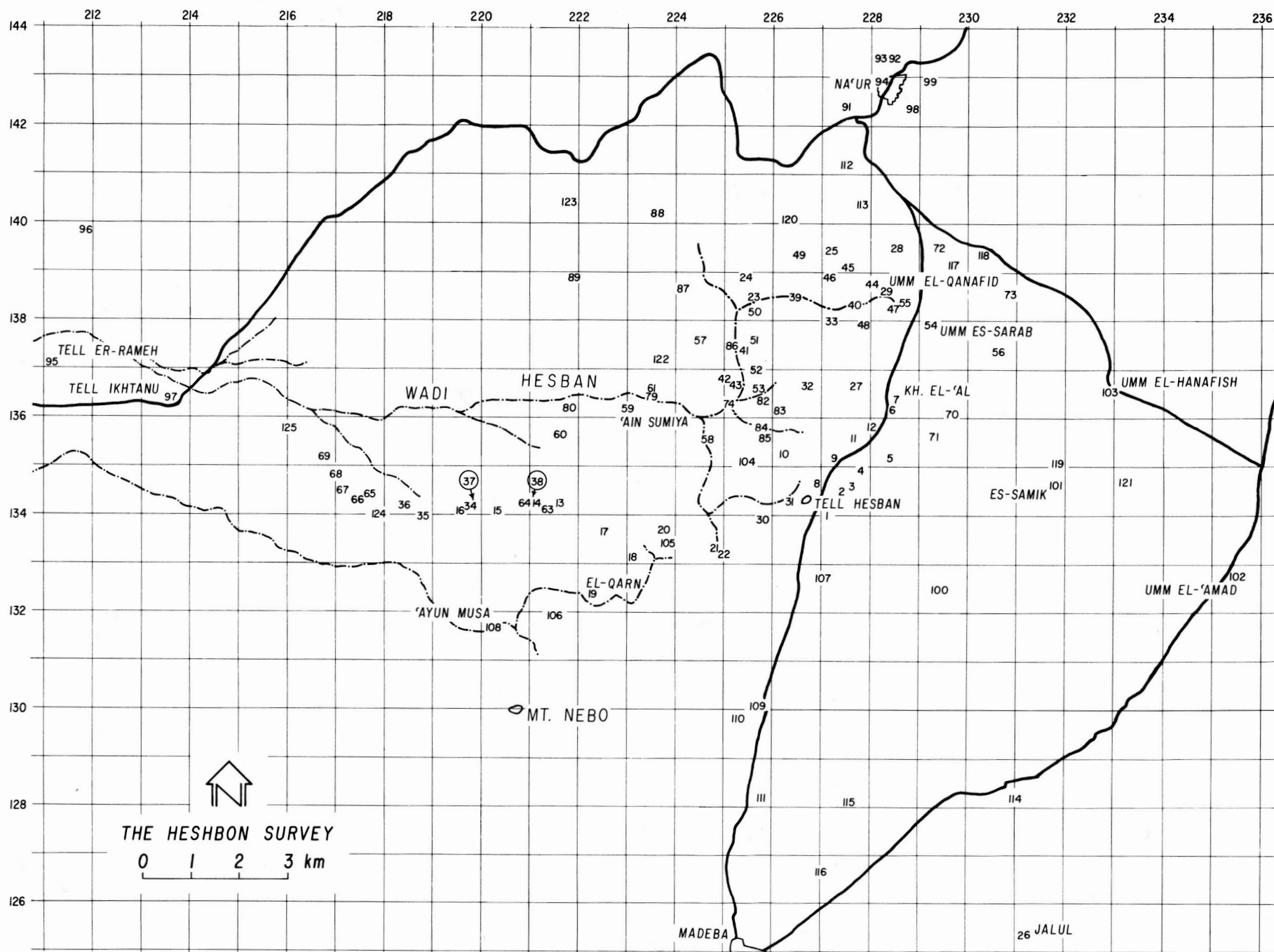


Fig. 19. Location of the 125 archaeological sites within a 10 km. radius of Tell Heshbân, surveyed in 1973 and 1974. Cartographer: Robert Ibach, Jr.

Pottery of the 'Abbāsīd period is virtually absent in the region of Ḥesbân, appearing only at Sites 95 and 97, both in the Jordan Valley. Umayyad sherds were found in very small quantities at 17 widely-scattered sites.

Byzantine Period

Results of the 1973-1974 survey have re-confirmed the observations of many scholars that Transjordan was very heavily occupied in the Byzantine period. Of the 125 sites identified around Ḥesbân, 108, or 86%, yielded pottery of this period. In fact, at 21 of those sites Byzantine was the dominant ware.

Sites 1 to 4, on the hills just to the east of Tell Ḥesbân, were dominated by Byzantine pottery, and these may be regarded as having been suburbs of Byzantine Esbus. Of the many robbed-out tombs noted at Site 1, at least 17 were of a type which seemed to belong to the Byzantine or Roman period, namely, vertical shaft with burial recesses at the base and ledges halfway down the shaft to receive covering slabs.⁶ Site 117 (Beddih, map ref. 2297.1392) is another cemetery with 75 robbed-out tombs visible from the ground surface. The style of these tombs was the same as that at Site 1. Only 33 sherds were found at Site 117, but Byzantine material was dominant, with a few possible Roman body sherds and a few Iron Age sherds. Byzantine ware was also dominant at neighboring Sites 72, 73, and 118.

The church uncovered at Tell Ḥesbân is just one of numerous churches known from this period in Transjordan. Site 73 (Jumeian, ref. 2309.1386) gave evidence of a possible Byzantine church at the summit of the hill. Six column bases were found *in situ*, 12 tesserae were collected, and the pottery was dominantly Byzantine. Since the bases are only 0.60 m. square, they cannot have supported a very large building; there was no evidence of an apse.

⁶ S. Douglas Waterhouse, "Heshbon 1971: Areas E and F," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 114, 123-125.

Roman Period

There appeared to have been heavy occupation in the Roman period, although not as extensive as in the Byzantine era. Roman pottery was found at 79, or 63%, of the 125 sites. At 43 of these sites Early Roman pottery was distinguished, while Late Roman was distinguished at 35 sites.

Two important roads in the Ḥesbân region dated to this period, the *via nova* (of Trajan) running north-south, and the Esbus-Livias road extending westward from Ḥesbân. This latter was traced in 1973 for over 11 km. from Tell Ḥesbân toward Tell er-Rameh.⁷ In 1974 this road was traced for an additional kilometer ending at Site 125 where two *rujms* or circular watchtowers were found.⁸ Nothing of the *via nova* has been found within the survey region.

Hellenistic Period

Pottery of the Hellenistic period was gathered at 14, or 11%, of the 125 sites surveyed. It should be noted, however, that only one sherd was found at Site 31, "few" at Site 29, and three sites (36, 59, and 109) had "possible" Hellenistic pottery. This meager representation corresponded to Tell Ḥesbân where occupation in the Hellenistic period was rather light.

Iron Age

Of the 125 sites examined 91, or 73%, were occupied in the Iron I and/or Iron II/Persian periods. Where distinctions were possible 22 sites yielded Iron I, four produced Iron II, and 42 sites produced Iron II/Persian pottery.

Among the sites that appeared to have been significant in the

⁷ Waterhouse and Ibach, "Topographical Survey," pp. 217-228.

⁸ These circular foundations cannot, at present, be dated with certainty to the Roman period (Byzantine pottery as well as Roman is usually associated with them). Twelve of these *rujms* have been found along the Esbus-Livias

Iron Age are: Site 5, el-Mudwara (ref. 2284.1352);⁹ Site 7, Khirbet el-'Al (2285.1364);¹⁰ Site 29, Umm el-Qanafid (2284-1386);¹¹ Site 102, Umm el-'Amad (2355.1328);¹² Site 103, Umm el-Hanafish (2329.1366);¹³ Site 108, 'Ayūn Mūsā (2202.1317);¹⁴ and Site 26, Jalul (2312.1254).¹⁵

road, but it is only assumed they are related to the road. Similar structures have been found at places that are distant from any possible road (e.g., Site 106, where six *rujms* were found scattered over a low hill).

⁹ This is a prominent, dome-shaped natural hill with Iron II/Persian pottery dominant. It was referred to as *Madowerat el-'Al* by C. R. Condor (*Survey of Eastern Palestine* [London, 1889], p. 183).

¹⁰ Pottery at *Khirbet el-'Al* suggested occupation in the following periods: Ayyūbid/Mamlūk, Byzantine, Roman, Hellenistic, Iron II/Persian, and Iron I. The occupational history was thus very similar to that of Tell Ḥesbān, strengthening the long-held identification of these sites as the sister cities of Elealeh and Heshbon of the Old Testament.

¹¹ The area of Umm el-Qanafid was heavily occupied in the Iron Age. Not only were Iron II/Persian and Iron I well attested at Site 29, but Iron I was also dominant at neighboring Sites 47, 40, 44, and 45. The only attempted biblical identification of this site is with Minnith (Jgs 11:33; Eze 27:17) (cf. F.-M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine* [Paris, 1938], 2:388). But on the basis of Eusebius (*Onomastikon*, ed. Erich Klostermann [Hildesheim, 1904], 132: 1-2), Umm el-Hanafish (Site 103) would be a better candidate for Minnith; Iron II/Persian and Iron I sherds were found there also.

¹² At this large site on a natural hill were found Ottoman, Ayyūbid/Mamlūk, Byzantine, Late Roman, Early Roman, Iron II/Persian, and Iron I sherds. Umm el-'Amad has frequently been identified with the Levitical city of Beser (cf., e.g., A. H. Van Zyl, *The Moabites* [Leiden, 1960], pp. 91-92; J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* [Leiden, 1959], p. 207; and Nelson Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* [AASOR 14; Philadelphia, 1934], 1: 33).

¹³ This site yielded Ottoman, Ayyūbid/Mamlūk, Byzantine, Late Roman, Early Roman, Iron II/Persian, and Iron I pottery. Cf. above, n. 11.

¹⁴ Iron I pottery was dominant at 'Ayūn Mūsā along with Byzantine, Roman, and Iron II/Persian. A building with heavy walls surviving to two or three courses measured about 10 x 15 m. This may have been the building inside the "Moabite fortress" sketched by Nelson Glueck (*Explorations in Eastern Palestine* [AASOR 15; New Haven, 1935], 2: 110 and pl. 22).

¹⁵ Jalul is a large and probably significant tell 5.5 km. east of Madaba. All six pails of pottery produced both Iron II/Persian and Iron I sherds while the later periods (Ayyūbid/Mamlūk, Byzantine, Roman) and the earlier periods (Late Bronze, Middle Bronze, Early Bronze) were all represented by "few" sherds. Since 1,248 sherds were collected from all parts of the tell one concluded that an extensive Iron Age city is to be found at Jalul.

The presence of some Iron II/Persian pottery at Site 59, 'Ain Sumiya (2230.1362), may lend a little weight to the identification of this site with biblical Sibmah (note also the similarity of name and the presence of lush vineyards, cf. Jer 48:32) as opposed to identifying el-Qarn as Sibmah.¹⁶ Another identification that has been strengthened was Tell er-Rameh (Site 95) with Livias/Beth-haram. In spite of Glueck's failure to find "a single sherd that can be ascribed to any period earlier than Roman,"¹⁷ the 1973 survey team found Iron II/Persian, Iron II, and Iron I pottery.¹⁸ A repeat visit in 1974 produced additional Iron II/Persian ware plus some Early Bronze pottery.

Middle and Late Bronze Ages

The survey showed that a very small population must have occupied the region during most of the Middle and Late Bronze ages. Of the 125 sites examined only nine bear evidence of MB/LB occupation.¹⁹ Such a situation corresponded not only to the data from Tell H̄esb̄ân, that is, absence of Bronze Age material, but also to the general conclusions of Nelson Glueck concerning MB/LB in Transjordan.²⁰

One of the sites from which Glueck acknowledged MB/LB pottery was Jalul (Site 26).²¹ Among the 1,248 sherds collected there by the H̄esb̄ân survey team, two were possible Late Bronze and one was possible Middle Bronze. Tell Ikhtanū (Site

¹⁶ Simons (*Geographical and Topographical Texts*, p. 118) placed Sibmah at el-Qarn on his map IIIa and says of Sibmah "H̄irbet qarn el-qibsh is at any rate archaeologically possible." The evidence, however, shows el-Qarn to have been occupied exclusively in the Early Bronze period. Glueck's findings confirmed this although some of his remarks have, perhaps, been misconstrued (*Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, 2: 111).

¹⁷ *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* (AASOR 25-28; New Haven, 1951), 4: 391.

¹⁸ Cf. Waterhouse and Ibach, "Topographical Survey," p. 227.

¹⁹ Three of these nine, 82, 85, and 91, were specifically Middle Bronze I and two, 26 and 97, were specifically Late Bronze.

²⁰ *Other Side of the Jordan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 140-142; *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, 4: 423.

²¹ *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, 1: 5.

97, ref. 2137.1364) yielded possible Late Bronze, probable Middle Bronze I, Early Bronze, and Chalcolithic.²² At Umm es-Sarab (Site 54, ref. 2292.1379) there appeared a small quantity of sherds identified as "possible Middle Bronze/Late Bronze."

Es-Samik (Site 101, ref. 2318.1346) is a small but rather unusual site, primarily because of a tower-like structure at the summit. Measuring 14 x 14 m. and constructed of large, undressed boulders, it survived to at least three courses. Other architecture was evident nearby. The date of these structures is unknown at present; sherds collected there have been read as: Modern, Ayyūbid/Mamlūk, Byzantine, possible Early Roman, Iron II/Persian body sherds, Iron I, Middle Bronze, Early Bronze, and undistinguishable.

William L. Reed made minor excavations at Khirbet el-'Al (Site 7) in 1962 and found Early and Middle Bronze sherds in mixed contexts.²³ The Ḥesbân survey team, however, collected 803 sherds at Khirbet el-'Al with nothing earlier than Iron I.

Early Bronze Age

Quite unlike the Middle and Late Bronze Ages there seems to have been a substantial population in central and southern Transjordan during the Early Bronze Age. Pottery of this period was found at 46, or 37%, of the 125 sites, and was dominant at eight of those sites.

The 1973 survey had found large quantities of Early Bronze pottery at Site 19, el-Qarn (ref. 2223.1324),²⁴ yet some scholars have proposed this site as the Old Testament Sibmah (Num 32:3,

²² Limited excavations at this site by Kay Prag have revealed stratified materials of the period she terms Intermediate EB-MB ("The Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze Age: An Interpretation of the Evidence from Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon," *Levant* 6 [1974]: 69-116).

²³ "The Archaeological History of Elealeh in Moab," in *Studies on the Ancient Palestinian World, Presented to Professor F. W. Winnett*, ed. J. W. Wevers and D. B. Redford (Toronto Semitic Texts and Studies, no. 2; Toronto, 1972), p. 27.

²⁴ See Waterhouse and Ibach, "Topographical Survey," p. 232, n. 54, where it is spelled el-Garin.

38; Jos 13:19; Isa 16:8, 9; Jer 48:32).²⁵ A return visit in 1974 produced predominantly Early Bronze pottery plus one Early Roman sherd and a few Byzantine body sherds. The identification with Sibmah thus seemed to be ruled out.

Early Bronze pottery was more abundant in the wadies and low-lying sectors than on the plateau (i.e., east of the Na'ur-Madaba road). Only a handful of Early Bronze sherds has turned up at Tell Ḥesbân.²⁶

Chalcolithic Period

The Chalcolithic period is very lightly represented in the Ḥesbân region. Nine sites of the 125 had evidence of Chalcolithic occupation. Sherds of this period appeared at Tell Ikhtanū (Site 97), a site also occupied in EB and MB I. Tell Ikhtanū is about 6.5 km. east-northeast of the Chalcolithic site Teleilat Ghassul.

Site 122 (ref. 2237.1372) was the most notable Chalcolithic site to be found. Occupational debris—sherds, flints, and burial chambers (?) carved in boulders—was scattered among small bluffs in the Wadi Ḥesbân opposite 'Ain Sumiya. The sherds were dominantly Chalcolithic with one possible Early Bronze and a few Byzantine pieces. This was the site identified by C. R. Conder as el-Kalûâ.²⁷

²⁵ See n. 16 above. Cf. also Abel, *Géographie*, 2:458.

²⁶ This situation may be in keeping with the observation of Van Zyl: "We must draw attention to the fact that the majority of Iron Age cities were not built on sites, [sic] at which Bronze Age settlements had been" (*The Moabites*, p. 96; cf. also Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* [AASOR, 18, 19; New Haven, 1939], 3: 179-181).

²⁷ *Survey of Eastern Palestine*, p. 125. Conder gives location, measurements, and sketches of dolmens near el-Kalûâ (pp. 126-133), but the Ḥesbân survey team was unable to find any of them.