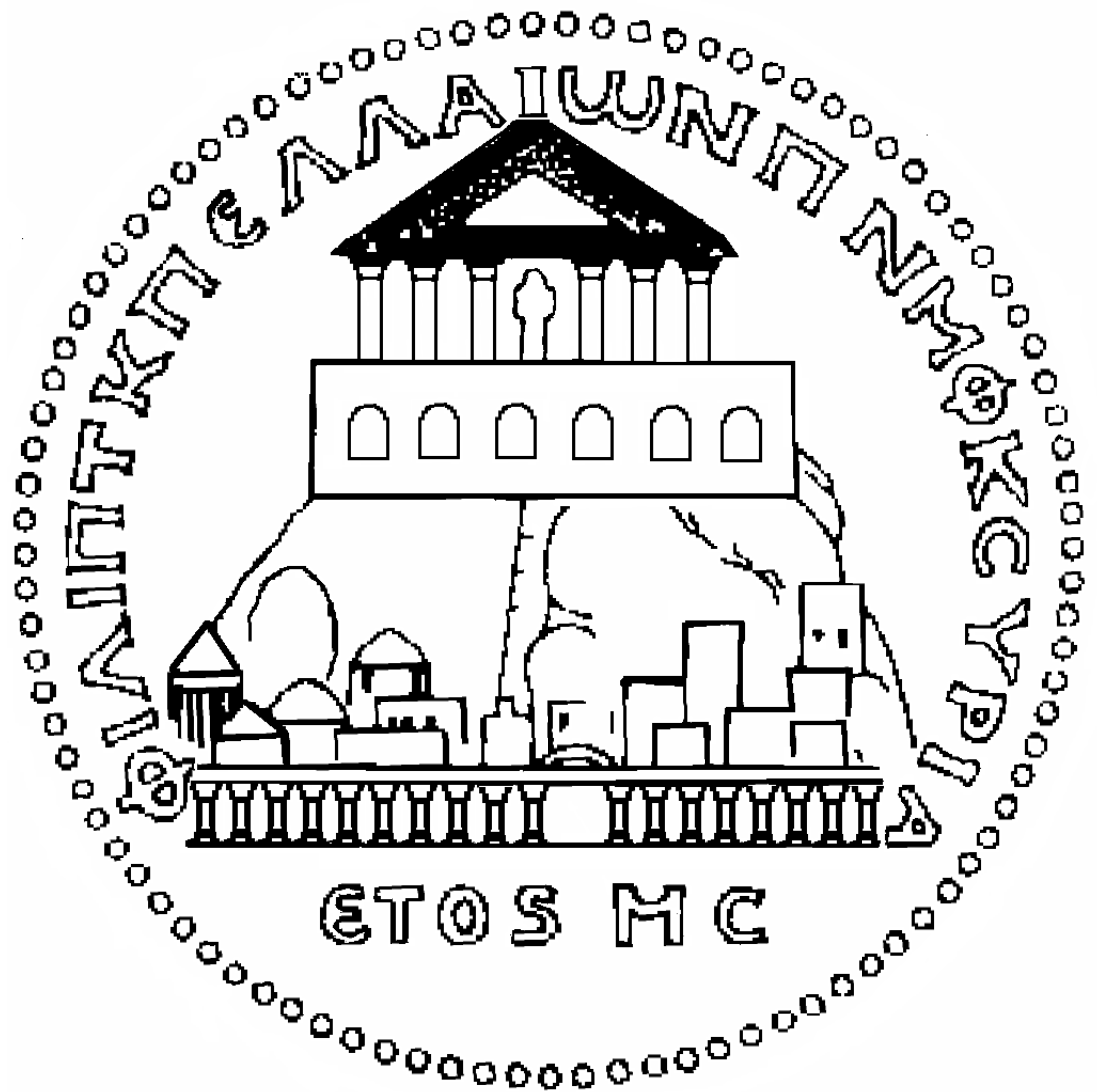


# PELLA IN JORDAN



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SITE

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With thanks to the Pella Project, University of Sydney

## EARLY EXPLORATION AT PELLA

For many centuries the exact location of Pella was lost to the western world until its 're-discovery' in March of 1818 when the ruins were visited by two Englishmen. These visitors, Charles Irby and James Mangles, noted the presence of a 'modern' village on top of the mound and the remarkable beauty of the region, although they neglected to attribute the ruins to a particular ancient site.

On May 15, 1852 the site was visited by Eli Smith and Edward Robinson. While this visit only lasted fifteen minutes, Robinson was the first to identify the ruins of Fahl as ancient Pella. This attribution had been first suggested in a German map of 1842 by the geographer H. Kiepert, but it was Robinson's visit of 1852 and the publication of his findings in 1856 which confirmed Kiepert's suggestion.

The next western visitor to the site was the French geographer Victor Guerin, who arrived at Pella on July 2, 1875. Guerin was to publish the more obvious features of the site — notably the large “christian basilica” now referred to as The West Church. He makes no mention of the village of Tabaqat Fahl and states that the only inhabitants of the deserted city were wild boars and jackals which prowled close to his tent at night.

The next summer, the United States consul in Jerusalem, Selah Merrill, visited Pella and noted many recently excavated tombs — presumably those to the south of Tell Husn. These tombs dated to the Byzantine Empire and Merrill took careful note of any detail overlooked by the tomb robbers. Merrill was also to spend time tracing the ancient road from Pella to Jerash, and the route he mapped out for this road has been largely confirmed by more modern surveys.

The first extensive survey of the ruins of Pella began in early 1887 with the visit of the German scholar Gottlieb Schumacher. His book, *Pella*, published the following year, contains a valuable map of the environs of Pella which describes the topography and antiquities of the region. Detailed plans and sketches in Schumacher's book emphasised the richness and long history of the site.

The early twentieth century saw visits by W. F. Albright, John Richmond and Nelson Glueck, all of whom added to our knowledge of the site without actually carrying out excavations. Now the surveys were becoming more detailed but the vast wealth of information relating to Pella had to wait until teams were assembled which were prepared to excavate.

## EXCAVATIONS BEGIN

The first actual attempt to excavate at Pella was in 1958 when Robert Funk and H. Neil Richardson opened a small sounding under the auspices of the American Schools of Oriental Research. This first archaeological season was to last for only nine days and was conducted in two small squares at widely separated locations on the main mound.

These early soundings reached the early Iron Age and some Hellenistic deposits were investigated, although due to the limited scope of the season, few definite conclusions could be reached.

In 1964, Sami Rashid of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, in a bid to save what remained of the tombs of Pella from tomb-robbers, excavated eleven rich tombs. Several of these tombs dated to the late Bronze/early Iron Age occupation of Pella and proved to be a treasure trove of artefacts. Among the tomb contents were imported Egyptian, Cypriot and Mycenaean wares — some of which are the finest examples yet excavated at Pella.

In the summer of 1966, the first major archaeological team to work at Pella began operations. This team, under the directorship of Dr. Robert Smith of the College of Wooster, Ohio, USA, was to excavate for two seasons until the Arab/Israeli war of 1967 stopped work at the site. The Americans concentrated their efforts on the excavation of the Byzantine basilicas, on accurately mapping the site, and recording meteorological information.

Due to unrest in the region, it was not safe for foreign teams to return to Pella until 1979, when the excavations re-commenced as a joint project between the College of Wooster and the University of Sydney, Australia. Dr. Robert Smith continued to lead the American contingent while the directorship of the University of Sydney's

excavations rested with Professor Basil Hennessy and the late Dr. Tony McNicoll.

Since 1979, the Australian team has excavated at Pella each year: the only exception being the winter of 1990—1991 when operations were postponed due to the Gulf War. The College of Wooster ceased active field work at Pella in 1985 although the excavation continues to be a joint project.

With only a fraction of the available deposits having been excavated during this time, it is reasonable to assume that the excavation of Pella is still in its infancy.

## **TABAQAT FAHL**

Early travellers to Pella at the end of last century noted the presence of a village on top of the main mound. This village, known as Tabaqat Fahl, is the inheritor of the vast sweep of history which has unfolded at the site of Pella.

The Arabic ‘Fahl’ can be roughly translated as a virile male animal, possibly a horse or camel or its derivation could also refer to a date palm. ‘Tabaqat’, in Arabic, is a level area of ground, possibly a reference to the flat plains to the north of Pella. More likely, today’s name represents an Arabic equivalent to what the town had always been called. In ancient Semitic texts the city is referred to as ‘Pahil’ or ‘Pihilum’. This, in turn, prompted later Greek administrators to name the city ‘Pella’. With the Islamic conquest, the new name of ‘Fahl’ was a further adaptation of this ancient tradition.

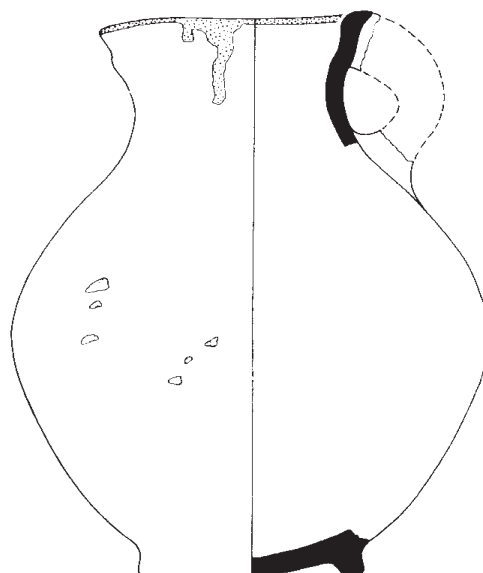
The village of Tabaqat Fahl was once on top of the main mound at Pella. However, in the early 1970s the Jordanian government purchased the main mound to preserve it for archaeological research and moved the village from the mound to its present location just to the west of its ancient site.

Prior to this move, the village was a small one of perhaps a hundred inhabitants. The houses were typical of rural Jordanian dwellings of the time — flat roofed, mud-plastered walls and many enclosures — some for cooking activities and others for the protection of animals.

Now the village is growing. In the past ten years, electricity and piped water have been brought to Tabaqat Fahl, the roads have been asphalted, a junior school built, and a air of prosperity is reflected in the large homes now being constructed.

Unlike many Jordanian towns of the valley, Tabaqat Fahl has not had to assimilate many refugees from the three Arab/Israeli wars, as have places such as Masharia — situated on the valley floor just to the west of Pella. Thus Tabaqat Fahl remains a closely knit community of several families who have lived in the vicinity for many generations.

These people are farmers and small scale herders and many supplement their income through work on the archaeological site. Indeed, a little of the prosperity that the village now enjoys is attributable to the influx of archaeologists and visitors who travel to the site to examine the village and its long history.



## THE NATUFIAN PERIOD

Three kilometres to the north of the main mound at Pella lies Wadi Hammeh. Here, since 1983, Australian archaeologists have excavated a series of sites which date to the Natufian period. ‘The Natufians’ is a modern term used to describe the culture of the people who inhabited the Jordan Valley around twelve thousand years ago.

At the main site of Wadi Hammeh, archaeologists excavated a group of circular houses which were once part of an ancient village. As the Natufian period represents the first phase of humanity’s long progression from the culture of the nomadic hunter/gatherer to that of the urban dweller, this village is one of the oldest in Jordan.

This era is characterised as the first period of settled life and early agriculture. While much of the villagers’ food still came from hunting, these early village dwellers were coming to rely more and more on the wild grains of the region for their food — a reliance which was to lead eventually to agriculture.

This major revolution of human society was at a time before the invention of pottery and metal smelting and even before the domestication of food animals. Although remote in time, the archaeologists working at Wadi Hammeh found ample evidence of the lifestyles of these early pioneers.

Two complete houses were excavated. Each was roughly circular and over ten metres in diameter. Stone had been used as a foundation course of the walls although the upper part of the walls and the roof were constructed of wood. Thousands of tiny flint tools were scattered across the floors of these houses, along with basalt mortars and pestles, grinding stones, limestone carvings, bone sickles and incised mud-stone slabs.

Beneath the floors were burials. Each skeleton lay on its side with its knees tucked up against the chest. Around their heads were strings of tiny marine shells and each skeleton had a large stone placed on it — to keep it in the grave.

No evidence has come to light which explains why the village at Wadi Hammeh was abandoned, although it appears that it was sudden. Pestles still rested inside mortars and a complete sickle lay abandoned in the centre of a house. For whatever reason, Wadi Hammeh had been a sealed time capsule for over twelve thousand years — until the spades of the archaeologists began their careful work.

## THE NEOLITHIC PERIOD

The Neolithic, or New Stone Age, was the period of the first occupation on the main mound at Pella. The Neolithic period begins around ten thousand years ago and was to last for four thousand years. Now agriculture was firmly part of the human experience and wild sheep, goat, and cattle had been domesticated as food animals and beasts of burden. For the first portion of the Neolithic, pottery was unknown although its invention around 7000 BC, was a major innovation of the Neolithic people.

At this time the mound at Pella was a low hill overlooking the spring. The hill gave these first inhabitants a degree of security, but probably far more importantly, it gave the village dwellers a chance to catch the southerly breezes which would have made life more bearable during the high temperatures of summer.

The site of Pella provided these early settlers with a rich environment. Firstly, the spring, as it does today, gushed forth a steady stream of water — good for both man and beast. Secondly, surrounding Pella is some of the richest agricultural land in the Jordan Valley — land which still produces high yields. The combination of these factors was ideal for an early agricultural community.

Traces of the Neolithic period on the main mound of Pella, have to date, been scant. Many factors could account for this. Neolithic deposits may have been removed by the building activities of later societies or, more likely, the Australian archaeologists have not yet had the good fortune to place a trench in the correct position to uncover substantial Neolithic remains. What has come to light are the flint tools of these people and a few sherds of very early pottery which date to the Neolithic. Tantalising clues but ones without real substance.

More has survived of the next period — the Chalcolithic — the Copper/Stone Age when, around 4000 BC, people learnt to smelt copper and the metal age was born.

During the Chalcolithic period, the settlement at Pella grew larger and more specialised. These early moves toward specialisation are seen in the excavation of an olive oil processing centre on the slope of Jebal Sartaba and the discovery of large grain storage bins on the main mound. This evidence suggests that the Chalcolithic people of Pella had central organisation and a surplus of food. The stage was being set for the next major revolution of human society — the urban revolution of the Bronze Age.

## THE BRONZE AGE

The use of bronze — a mixture of copper and tin — began to become more widely used around 3000 BC and this innovation introduces the Bronze Age to the Middle East – a period which was to last for the next two thousand years.

One of the enduring characteristics of the Bronze Age was the development of the city. During the early Bronze Age (ca. 3000 BC), the main mound of Pella was surrounded by a city wall of stone and mud-brick. Although this wall now only stands at a height of one metre, it is evidence that the town of Pella had progressed from a village to a settlement of some size. Further, the wall indicates a strong centralised power — possibly a royal family — able to marshal the resources necessary for such an undertaking.

We may never know what threat induced these early inhabitants of Pella to protect themselves in such a way — but defence was certainly of a high priority. On top of Tell Husn — the natural hill just to the south of Pella — there is a massive stone platform also dating to the Early Bronze Age. This platform, a mighty task of construction, was probably the foundation of a fortress wall. The wall itself was possibly of mud-brick or of wood and has long since disappeared leaving us with the footings, many metres thick. It indicates the rapid development of social organisation and of urbanism at this remote time.

During the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1900 BC), Pella reached a peak of wealth and size. The mud-brick city wall of Pella during the Middle Bronze age still stands, in places to a height of seven metres. On the slope of Tell Husn, just one lavish Middle Bronze age tomb has yielded over two thousand objects ranging from gold earrings and copper bracelets to pottery and alabaster vessels.

In the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500 BC), Pella continued to flourish. On the south side of the main mound, a magnificent residence — fit for king — has been excavated. This house had plastered floors and walls constructed from massive stones. Again, on the north slope of Tell Husn, a rich Late Bronze Age tomb has been excavated which may have once been the final resting place for the king of Pella; perhaps King Mut-ba'lu who

Found in 1887 amid the ruins of Akhenaten's capital of Amarna, Egypt, the Amarna Letters are cuneiform texts inscribed on clay tablets dating to the period 1380–1370 BC.

In the example below, the King of Pella, Mut-ba'lu (man of Ba'al) writes to the Egyptian pharaoh stating his innocence in the Ayab affair. He tells the pharaoh's commissioner, Yanhumu, that the wanted Ayab has not been concealed at Pella and that his loyalty to the Egyptian throne is unquestionable.

To Yanhumu, my lord, say: Thus Mut-ba'lu, thy servant. At the feet of my lord I fall. How is it said before thee, “Mut-ba'lu has fled, Ayab has hidden himself”? How can the ruler of Pella flee from the face of your royal commissioner, his lord? As the king my lord lives, Ayab is not in Pella. Behold, he has not been here for two months.

*The Amarna Letters*

In the following example Mut-ba'lu, rather unconvincingly, declares that he is not interfering with Egyptian trade caravans travelling through the region.

To the king, my lord, my Sun-god, say: Thus Mut-ba'lu (King of Pella), thy servant, the dust beneath thy feet, the soil upon which thou dost tread. At the feet of the king, my lord, I fall seven times, seven times down. The king (the Pharaoh Akhenaten), my lord, sent Haia (a royal commissioner) to me to say, “Caravans have been sent to Hanikalbat (the Mitanni in northern Syria); so send them on farther.” Who am I, that I would not send farther the caravans of the king, my lord? Send caravans to Karaduniash (Babylonia), O king, my lord. I shall get them there with all dispatch.

*The Amarna Letters*

is mentioned in the Amarna Letters. At the door of this tomb an unfortunate servant, his legs bound by a huge bronze shackle, had been slaughtered to accompany his master into the afterlife.

In recent years, the focus of the Australian excavations at Pella has been the discovery of a large Bronze Age temple that was constructed in the Middle Bronze Age (1650 BC). After many years of careful work this Canaanite temple has been revealed to be one of the largest of its type in Jordan. The temple undergoes a major re-build in the Late Bronze Age due to earthquake damage and a range of cult objects have enabled the archaeologists to attribute the temple to the chief Canaanite god, El.

The Bronze Age was one of urbanism, innovation and richness at Pella and will be remembered as one of the city's most fascinating periods.

## **THE IRON AGE**

The use of iron was already known in the Middle East during the Late Bronze Age, but it was scarce and very valuable. Gradually iron became more freely available until eventually it was cheap enough to be used for agricultural tools. With the spread of this latest innovation of metal technology, the next major period — the Iron Age — came into being.

At the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1100 BC), great upheavals occurred throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The Mycenaean civilisation of Greece collapsed as did the Hittite Empire centred in present day Turkey. Egypt survived, but had to face wave after wave of attacks from sea borne warriors seeking new lands and the riches of Egypt. A little later, sites to the west of the Jordan River indicate the arrival of the Israelite tribes. It was a period of dislocation and relative poverty.

Iron age Pella did not escape the wider movements of the period. As the Israelites established themselves across the Jordan, Pella remained loyal to the local gods of the Canaanite people who inhabited the region. Several fine cult stands of the Canaanites have been excavated at Pella although the temple in which they were used has escaped detection. These stands are made of ceramic with a flat top on which incense would have been burnt as an offering to the gods. The sides of the stands are decorated with religious motifs, palm fronds and the goddess of animals and fertility — Astarte.

Luck still plays a part in the science of archaeology. In a large site such as Pella, trenches placed to examine one period may miss another altogether — so it was with Iron Age Pella. For sixteen years the Australians had excavated Iron Age levels with little reward. It seemed that the Iron age settlement at Pella was extremely poor with meagre architecture and few fine artefacts. Unexpectedly, a trench placed to examine Bronze Age deposits at the very west of the main Australian excavations was to uncover a precinct of religious and administrative buildings that show that Iron Age Pella was alive and well — the Australians had simply been digging in the wrong spot.

Excavations in this precinct have revealed an Iron Age temple built on the same spot as the earlier Middle Bronze Age temple, but more remarkably, adjacent to the temple a complex containing over 20 rooms dating to the Iron Age has been revealed. In these rooms the archaeologists found evidence of storage (many rooms with complete vessels for holding liquids such as oil or wine and others with baskets still containing the remains of that Middle-eastern favourite — chick-peas) along with rooms devoted to cloth weaving — a major economic activity of the time. This building complex was probably the temple workshops and it shows that Iron Age Pella was a thriving community.

## **THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD**

With the conquest of the Middle East by Alexander the Great in 333—332 BC, the Iron age comes to an end in Jordan. The arrival of Alexander bought the Pella region under strong influence from Greek, or Hellenistic, culture for the first time.

With the influx of Greek culture, our knowledge of Pella is again based on firmer ground. Across the main mound and on top of Tell Husn, many examples of the artefacts which characterise this period are found. Lamps from

### **Antiochus III's conquest of Pella 218 BC.**

Mustering his army, Antiochus III went to Sidon and encamped. He refrained from making a show of force against the city, since it had been abundantly provisioned beforehand and contained a multitude of inhabitants and able-bodied refugees. Breaking camp, he moved on to Philoteria (near the Sea of Gallille). When he had sealed his domination over these parts with a treaty, he felt optimistic about his coming undertakings, for the territory subject to these cities was easily able to furnish provender for his army and provide ample supplies for the expeditions needs. Having secured these places with garrisons, he crossed the hilly country and reached Atabyrium, situated on a conical crest. And when he had established a garrison at Atabyrium, he advanced and took Pella, Camus and Gephros. When he had successfully completed these operations, the inhabitants of adjacent Arabia, impelled by mutual encouragement, with the one accord aligned themselves with him.

*Polybius*

### **Pella captured by Alexander Jannaeus 83–82 BC.**

Having spent three full years in military activities, he (Alexander Jannaeus) returned to his home territory, where the Jews welcomed him enthusiastically on account of his successes. At that time the Jews already held these cities of Syria, Idumaea and Phoenicia ... Zoara, the valley of the Cilicians, and Pella - this last destroyed because the inhabitants did not promise to change to the national customs of the Jews - and others among the leading cities of Syria which had been subdued.

*Josephus*

Athens, beautiful moulded bowls, coins, glass and statue fragments are associated with domestic architecture indicating that under Hellenistic rule Pella again became prosperous.

It was from this period that the city received its name 'Pella' after the birthplace of Alexander the Great — Pella in Macedonia. It is likely that when the ancient name of Pella — Pihilum — was heard by the Greek administrators that it reminded them, in sound, to Pella — thus prompting a name change.

With the death of Alexander the Great in Babylon in 323 BC, the Pella region fell under the control of his general Ptolemy who also ruled southern Syria and Egypt. The Ptolemy dynasty continued to rule Pella until 198 BC when another of the great Hellenistic dynasties, the Seleucids, annexed the Pella region.

Because Pella refused to follow Jewish religious practices, it was conquered by the Hasmonaean Alexander Jannaeus who crossed the Jordan River from the west in 83/82 BC. The destruction of the city by Jannaeus is witnessed in the many thick layers of ashy deposits dating to this period uncovered by archaeologists at Pella.

After this destruction, the city recovered. One of the major reasons for the continued existence of the city was its geographic location astride some of the major trade routes of the Middle East. With trade flourishing throughout the Hellenistic empires, Pella not only had access to the trade moving north/south along the Jordan valley but also the trade which moved east/west from the Mediterranean, along the Jezreel valley and on into the foothills of the Jordan valley towards the city of Jerash.

The strategic importance of Pella to her Hellenistic masters is emphasised by a string of stone built forts along a line of hills to the east of Pella. These forts, acting as watch posts, protected the Jordan valley and the prosperous city of Pella. The best example of the Hellenistic forts in the region is at the top of Jabal Sartaba.

## **THE ROMAN PERIOD**

In 64/3 BC, Jordan was conquered by the Roman general Pompey and Pella had a new master. Now began a period of unrivalled prosperity and peace for Pella as the city found herself under the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace).

The importance of Pella during the Roman period is seen in its incorporation as one of ten cities of Jordan and southern Syria known as the Decapolis. The reasons for this grouping are unclear but it shows Pella as a thriving centre.

The Roman remains at Pella are not as extensive as one would imagine. The major reason for this is that many of the Roman deposits were removed by the massive building programmes of the succeeding period - the Byzantine.

While much has gone, a little remains. At the head of the spring is a small Odeon, or small covered theatre, and the remains of a bath house. Both of these date to the Roman period and are all that remain of the once extensive Roman constructions in this area. Indeed, these only survived because they were incorporated into the building of the large Byzantine Basilica which still stands at the head of the spring.

The strongest evidence for the richness of Roman Pella comes from a solitary coin minted at Pella in 183/84 AD. It shows a massive colonnaded temple on top of Tell Husn, and in terraces, buildings covering the northern face of the hill. In the valley, where the spring now peacefully flows, the coin depicts a typical colonnaded Roman street which presumably had rows of shops down both sides, with the water of the spring piped underground. The narrow valley would have then presented a very different scene from the tranquil landscape of today.

To the south of Tell Husn, Roman milestones have been found which once stood beside the Pella/Jerash road as it wound its way into the hills. This road is very difficult to trace today, but its general route has been mapped in some detail. Beside this road, near Pella, are numerous tombs from the Roman period. These tombs yielded delicate glass flasks, hundreds of lamps and storerooms of pottery.

Elsewhere on the main mound, rubbish pits — many metres deep — contained a wealth of archaeological evidence for the Roman period. While unassuming to the lay person, these pits are extremely valuable to the archaeologist as they were used over a relatively short period of time and enable the chronology of Roman pottery types to be studied in detail.

#### **Pompey's march past Pella 63 BC.**

Pompey set out after Aristobulus, taking the Roman army and many auxiliaries from Syria. After marching past Pella and Scythopolis (Beth-shan) he reached Corea, from which point the territory of Judaea begins as one ascends through the interior.

*Josephus*

#### **The migration of Jerusalem's Christians to Pella to avoid the Roman siege of Jerusalem 70 AD.**

When the people of the church in Jerusalem were instructed by oracular revelation delivered to worthy men there to move away from the city and to live in a city of Peraea called Pella, the believers in Christ migrated from Jerusalem to that place.

*Eusebius*

#### **The Christians return from Pella ca. 130 AD.**

While living in Jerusalem, Aquila (Emperor Hadrian's envoy) saw the disciples of the apostles flourishing in faith and performing great signs of healing and other marvels, for they had returned from the city of Pella to Jerusalem and were teaching. For when the city was about to be captured by the Romans, all the disciples were forewarned by an angel to migrate from the city, which was about to be utterly destroyed; so they became wanderers and took up residence in Pella beyond the Jordan, which is in the region called the Decapolis. After the destruction of Jerusalem they returned, as I said, and accomplished great signs.

*Epiphanius*

## **THE BYZANTINE PERIOD**

By far the best represented period at Pella is that of the Byzantine Empire. On the main mound, on Tell Husn, and in the surrounding country, Byzantine monuments dominate. For a visitor to the site, a wall protruding from the grass, a fallen column or the crunch of pottery sherds underfoot indicate the substantial Byzantine presence at Pella.

In 330 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine, having made Christianity the State religion of the Romans, moved the capital from Rome to the city of Byzantium, soon to be renamed Constantinople. With this move, came the



founding of one of the world's great empires — the Byzantine.

As time passed, the eastern portions of the Roman Empire fell to the incursions of Germanic and Hunish tribes while the eastern portions of the Empire, based on Constantinople, remained secure. Jordan was to remain under the Christian empire of Byzantium until the seventh century AD.

During this time, Pella continued its role as one of the ten administrative cities of Jordan and southern Syria known as the Decapolis, and it also became the seat of a Bishop. The importance of Pella during the Byzantine period encouraged a building boom. The activities of the Byzantine builders scoured deep into the main mound disturbing or removing completely the deposits of earlier civilisations. The city was adorned with three Basilicas or Cathedrals - the largest at the head of the spring, another on a hill to the east of the city and another now surrounded by the village of Tabaqat Fahl.

The English translation of Tell Husn is 'Mound of the Fortress' — a name which probably derives from the Byzantine period when a mighty fortress was constructed on the summit of this hill. The first floor, being constructed of stone, is remarkably well preserved although the upper storey of mud-brick has collapsed and decayed. It is possible that this fortress was a cavalry outpost as many of the rooms appear to be designed for the stabling of horses.

From surveys of the site it appears that Pella reached its greatest extent during the Byzantine period. To visualise the city at this time, we must imagine well built homes and public buildings crowding the slopes of Tell Husn, the main mound, and the surrounding hills. Further out, well appointed farmsteads provided the city with produce, and from the large number of presses found — ample wine.

## THE ISLAMIC PERIOD

On January 23, 635 AD, the Byzantine forces were defeated by the Muslim armies at the Battle of Fihl on the plains below Pella. This victory by the Muslims was to change the spiritual and economic base of the city of Pella.

The ancient sources tell us, that the city of Pella surrendered to the Muslims without bloodshed and that the city remained secure. However, with the establishment of Islam as the dominant religion of the area, the fortunes of Pella began to decline. While the city had maintained her prosperity in the past due to her proximity to major trade routes, the Muslim victory changed this forever. Now the city no longer controlled access to the

### **The Battle of Fihl January 23 635 AD.**

After the Muslims had finished at Ajnadin, they advanced toward Fihl (Pella) in the land of Jordan, where the Greeks were assembled. The Muslims had the same commanders they had previously, and Khalid was in the vanguard. While encamped at Baysan, the Greeks broke the dikes of the canals so that the terrain became muddy, and then camped at Fihl. Now, Baysan is between Palestine and Jordan. When the Muslims reached it, they were not aware of what the Greeks had done, and their horses got stuck in the mud, so that they had a difficult time there. Then God saved them, and they called Baysan "the muddy terrain" because of what they had encountered there. Then they advanced to the Greeks who were at Fihl, and engaged them in battle. Then the Greeks were defeated and the Muslims entered Fihl, while the heathen Greeks retreated to Damascus.

*Account of Ibn Ishaq*

### **The Battle of Fihl January 23 635 AD.**

They (the Greeks) met the Muslims at Fihl (Pella) of Jordan, and they fought with them very fiercely, until God gave the Muslims victory. The Greek commander and nearly ten thousand soldiers were killed, and the survivors scattered to the towns of Syria and some of them rejoined (the Byzantine Emperor) Heraclius. And the people of Fihl took refuge in their fortress, where the Muslims besieged them until they sued for peace, the conditions being a head-tax and a land-tax. And the Muslims, on their part, agreed not to harm them or their property, and guaranteed not to demolish their walled groves.

*Account of Yahya al-Baladhuri*

major trade routes of the Islamic world and as the revenue from trade declined, so did the material culture of the city's inhabitants.

During the Umayyad period (661—750 AD) the eastern portion of the main mound was used as an extensive housing quarter. This area allows today's visitor to easily picture the narrow lanes and ground floor plan of the town. Most of the houses were two storied — with stables for animals on the ground floor while the family slept in rooms on the upper floor.

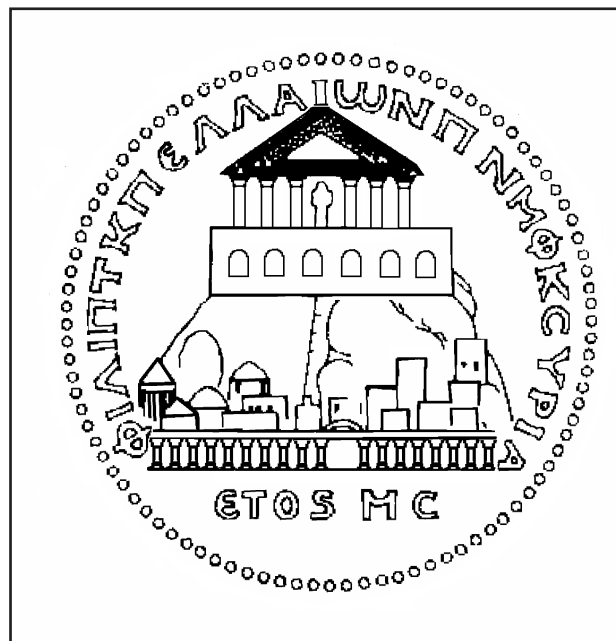
As the faith of Pella's inhabitants changed from Christianity to Islam, the Byzantine churches suffered a reversal of fate. The East church went out of use by 700 AD and the West church was converted to be used as stables. The main church at the head of the spring may have continued to function as a place of worship for Pella's small Christian community, although a portion of it was also used as a camel stable.

In 747 AD, a severe earthquake destroyed Pella - toppling the churches and crushing the houses of the Umayyad complex. Ample evidence of the destructive power of this earthquake was uncovered by the archaeologists; even skeletons of cats — too slow to escape the collapsing buildings — were excavated.

After this disaster, the main centre of Pella moved to an area to the north of the main mound although a small village probably continued to exist on the ancient site of the city. For the next one thousand two hundred years, Pella continued to be occupied. However, it was now becoming a productive but rural backwater. Abbasid pottery, a Mamluke Mosque and Ottoman sugar mills chronicle occupational continuity and the life of a now minor town, albeit with a rich past.



An Iron Age cult-stand on which incense and offerings would have been placed by worshippers at one of Pella's Iron Age temples.



A Roman coin minted at Pella showing a large temple on top of either the main mound, or neighbouring Tell Husn. To date the location of this temple has not been determined. Interestingly the coin also shows a colonnaded street and buildings in the valley at the bottom of the tell at Pella: monuments of which not a trace survive to this day.