

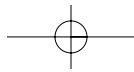
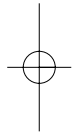
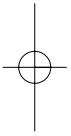
Crossing the River Jordan



مؤسسة نهر الأردن
JORDAN RIVER FOUNDATION

with the support of





Crossing the River Jordan

The Jordan River Foundation in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the Crossing the River Jordan Project to document the history and significance of the old King Hussein Bridge and the surrounding area.

The area of the River Jordan has a formidable history, and is well known both within and beyond the Middle East region. From prehistoric times to present day, many have crossed the River Jordan to reach lands on both sides of the River, or as a step on other major journeys.

The Jordan River Foundation is dedicated to facilitating social and economic programs to benefit local communities while addressing national initiatives promoting cultural and natural heritage. Through Crossing the River Jordan Project, the Foundation aims to promote and preserve the cultural and

natural heritage of the Bridge and the surrounding area.

The Famous River: Etymology of the word "Jordan"

According to the Indo-Aryan origin, the meaning of Jordan refers to perennial river "yor," for "year" and "don," for river, where the Semitic meaning of Jordan is derived from the root "to descend" and means "the stream that descends rapidly," a name that is aptly descriptive of the River Jordan, especially in the upper portion above the Sea of Galilee. Another term for Jordan in Arabic is Esh-Sheri'a, "the watering place" or Esh-Sheri'a El-



© Photo by: E. M. Newman

A peaceful vista on the River Jordan from the book, "Seeing Egypt and the Holy Land."

Kebireh, “the big water.” The oldest reference to the name “River Jordan” can be found in the Egyptian Records of the Nineteenth Dynasty, which documents the River as ya-ar-du-na, similar to the Canaanite “yardùn.”

Historical Background

The River Jordan, as a religious symbol through biblical references, appears in connection with boundaries and crossings that are often laden with symbolic and metaphoric connotations of a religious nature. Therefore, it is not surprising that the River Jordan has become a significant spiritual reality within Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The River Jordan owes its fame to its unique physical characteristics and to the historic and spiritual significance of its location. It is part of the Great Rift Valley that runs from Asia to Africa. Just before the Jordan flows into the Dead Sea, a number of bridges are found, the most important of which is the

King Hussein Bridge, the main crossing point between its two banks. And nearby, is the Jesus baptism site, “Bethany Beyond the Jordan.”

Biblical References to the River Jordan

For forty years, after coming down from Egypt, Moses and his followers wandered in the desert, and only a short time before his death, came upon the deep valley of the Jordan. It is believed that at the northern end of the Dead Sea, the word of the Lord came to Moses, saying, “Go thou up upon Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, and view the land.” But Moses and his followers did not cross the River at that time.

In the account of the conquest of Canaan, the Jordan was the last obstacle to be surmounted before the promise made by God could be fulfilled. The last wish of Moses was to be permitted to cross the River, when this was denied him, he entrusted the task to Joshua, who at the very beginning of his lead-

ership received the command to “go over this Jordan.” This is when he performed his miracle, ceasing the flow of water, and allowing his followers to cross near the village of Adam. The consequence of this unexpected breaching of the River was the rapid conquest of Jericho and the central part of west Palestine, which led, in successive stages, to the complete subjugation of the Canaanites.

In addition, the Jordan is featured in the miracles that are reported of Elijah and Elisha. Jericho is especially mentioned as the place where they and their disciples gathered; it was near there, that Elijah, just before his ascension to heaven, took off his cloak, and struck the water, which divided to let him and Elisha pass on dry ground.

Current References

Surveys and excavations have shown that historically, the east bank was more settled than the west because of numerous water sources. However, the

east and west banks were clearly linked by trade routes to the Mediterranean from centers in central Jordan and Damascus.

In the 19th Century, travelers to the area including the British and American navies reported valuable descriptions about environment, archeology and cultivation.

In 1975-76, a survey was conducted in the area between Tiberias and the Dead Sea by Mu’aweia Ibrahim, Khair Yassine, and James Sauer, which sought to provide a comprehensive examination of the area, to visit existent sites, and to locate new ones. The survey found a total of 224 sites and confirmed that most sites represented all periods from Neolithic Era to present day.

In 1985, an extensive survey of the east foothills between Sweimeh, near the Dead Sea, and Wadi Jirm, near Pella, was directed by Mujahed Al-Muheisen. This survey sought to locate Paleolithic settlements and cave shelters. The most important site recorded was Abu

Habil. Many surveys have revealed constant occupation in various regions of the valley from the Neolithic to modern periods. This evidence is supported by an increasing amount of excavation work being conducted in the valley.

Significant Eras

Through the Chalcolithic

Most sites, existent during these eras were concentrated along primary wadis near water sources, and appear to have been open agricultural settlements. After 6000 BC, domestic agriculture was established in the valley, with evidence from Jericho and Ghassul of wheat and barley cultivation, and sheep and goat domestication.

The Bronze Age

Bronze age sites, generally more defined than earlier Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites, seem to have been mostly fortified villages or cities. Bronze pottery and stone structures were found at sites throughout Nimrin and Iktanu valleys.

The Iron Age

Iron Age I sites were usually located in developed areas, and continued to be occupied into the Iron Age II Period, such as the Kafrein site. However, most sites were abandoned until the Roman-Byzantine and Islamic periods.

Hellenistic Through Byzantine Periods

Hellenistic settlements are found across the valley from the foothills to the Zor. Later, the Roman-Nabataean Era saw the formation of the Decapolis, which included the valley sites of Pella and Beth-shan. Roman sites are well represented throughout the valley, usually on the ruins of an earlier occupation. Most were continuously occupied, but some were temporarily abandoned until later Byzantine and Islamic periods such as the Roman road between Jericho and Tel Hesban. The Byzantine Era shows major expansion into the barren area with evidence of churches, prayer halls, water installations and pilgrim stations.

The Umayyad and Abbasid Periods

The Umayyad Period reveals a less extensive occupation with settlements declining sharply, probably reflecting the move of the capital from Damascus to Baghdad during the Abbasid Period. Irrigation systems and agricultural settlements were obvious from the large reservoirs and connected canal systems and settlements in sites such as Pella. The importance of the River was evident during the Fatimi, Ayyoubi-Mamluk and Ottoman Periods.

Topography

The River Jordan runs through 200 kilometers of the Great Rift Valley, which is a 644-kilometer-long tectonic fault zone stretching from Asia to Africa. Twenty million years ago, a shift began in the earth's surface, where two faults in the earth's crust ran parallel from Mozambique and Lake Nyasa north through Ethiopia, the Red Sea, Aqaba, Wadi Araba, the Dead Sea and the River Jordan. The edges of the two continual

plates are clearly visible on maps on both sides of the Red Sea and the Jordan Valley.

The Lower Jordan Valley portion of the Great Rift was formed by a fourth fault over 2 million years ago. It is the lowest spot on earth, reaching about 783 meters below sea level at the bottom of the Dead Sea. The area from Galilee to the Dead Sea was a single body of water, which was called the Lisan Lake. In the following post-pluvial period, the Lisan Lake dried up, leaving the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.



Land of the Bible - The Great Rift from the book, "Atlas of the Bible."

The River Jordan is unlike all other rivers on the earth, though it rises somewhat above sea level, its entire course is below sea level, and it sinks down about 396 meters below sea level until it flows into the Dead Sea.



© Photo by: Robert Rook

Source of the River Jordan from the book. "The 150th Anniversary of the United States' Expedition to Explore the Dead Sea and the River Jordan."

The Sources of the River Jordan

The River Jordan, born from the melting snow atop Mount Hermon in Lebanon, is fed by four upstream rivers. With the junction of these four sources, the River Jordan begins its flow southward:

* Nahr Leddan, the major source west of Mount Hermon.

* Nahr Baniyas rises in Syria and joins the Nahr Leddan at Huleh Lake. Its main spring, "Ain Leddan" is at the site of Dan in Palestine.

* Nahr Hasbani, the chief winter source that rises in Lebanon on the western portion of Mount Hermon, flows parallel with the Litani River.

* Nahr Bareighit, is a short stream that comes from the western part of the Hermon Lebanon Valley and empties into the Nahr Hasbani.

Natural Environment

Climate

The Lower River Jordan differs from the Upper in that the Lower Jordan has a steppe climate while the central and southern portions have a desert climate.

The hot climate conditions, together with the vast erosion that sinks and spreads of the

banks of the Jordan, allow for the growth of dense forests.

The earliest inhabitants of the Jordan Valley existed at an age when the climate was still tropical, and animals such as elephants and rhinoceros were plentiful. Their skeletons together with flint and basalt axes have been found on the north bank of the River Jordan near the "Bridge of the Daughters of Jacob" (Jisr Banat Ya'aqub).

Plants

In Biblical times, the "Zor" was called the jungle "gaon" of the River Jordan, meaning "pride." Cotton, rice, sugar, indigo and other tropical plants grew there to sustain human needs. The Jordan Valley was overgrown with thick vegetation such as willows, Acacia, Oleander thistles, reeds, broom plants and underbrush.

Fauna

This area was the home of lions, which became extinct in the 19th Century, leopards, jackals, foxes, wild boars and hyenas. There were 100 species of birds, 23 that were present in



Caracal
(Photo courtesy of RSCN)

the Zor, and 45 that used the migration route.

Also present were desert rats, wild ducks, herons, snipes, gulls, pigeons, partridges, hawks, storks and swallows. Deer, gazelles and roebucks all came to the River Jordan as the area's main watering hole.



Egyptian Mongoose
(Photo courtesy of RSCN)

Other animals that later inhabited the area include Caracal,

Jungle Cat, Egyptian Mangoose and others.

Fords on the River Jordan

The River Jordan served as a border that was easily bridged owing to the 45 naturally created fords. Many secondary streams descended into the River Jordan from the eastern and western mountains of Transjordan, causing much eroded soil to settle in the River, forming the fords.



Madaba Mosaic Map
(Photo courtesy of Morale Guidance Directorate)

Most of the fords mentioned in the Bible are those of the River Jordan. It was only by means of the fords that man and beast could cross the River on dry land.

One of the best preserved references about the fords is the Madaba Byzantine mosaic map, found on the floor of a sixth century church in 1884. The map illustrates two pillars on each bank of the River, joined by a horizontal line and a boat below it.

Old photos show people in ferries pulling themselves across the River by rope.



A Jordan Ferry
from the book, "Pictorial Palestine: Ancient and Modern."

Bridges

Walls are usually built to separate two or more entities physically, mentally and even

spiritually, and to create obstacles. They are built because they represent the idea of defense, protection or separation. Some walls have acquired fame because of that nature such as the walls of Jerusalem, the Great Wall of China and the Berlin Wall.

Bridges are the opposite of walls. Bridges are built to bring together, to join two or more entities and to create unity. They are built to overcome obstacles. The term is also used in languages to express the idea of reunion or unity as in “to bridge the gap” or to “bridge differences.”

The Romans were the first to build bridges over the River Jordan between the first and third centuries AD. Remains of bridges are found in several places below Galilee, around eight kilometers to the south near Wadi Yarmuk, and at Damiyah.

The main Roman bridges over the Lower River Jordan, some of which are replaced by modern structures, include:

- * Degania Bridge
- * Jisr Al Majami'
- * Sheikh Hussein Bridge
- * Damiyah Bridge (currently known as the Prince Mohammed Bridge)
- * Jisr Al Mindasseh
- * Allenby Bridge (currently known as the King Hussein Bridge)
- * King Abdullah Bridge

Important modern crossings are the King Hussein Bridge, which connects Amman and Jerusalem, the Sheikh Hussein Bridge, and Jisr Banat Ya'aqub (Al Majami,) on the Damascus Highway.



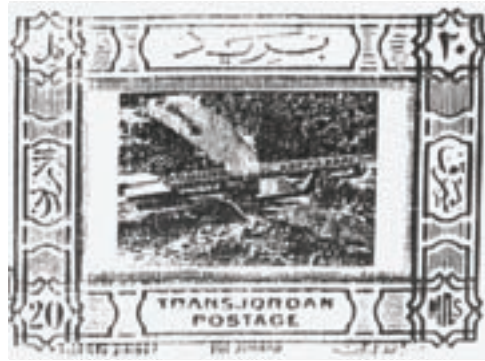
Ruined bridge on the Jordan near the mouth of Jabbok.
(Photo courtesy of Ammar Khammash)

Why the King Hussein/Allenby Bridge?

This bridge was the most utilized crossing due to its relationship and proximity to the ancient pilgrimage route from Jerusalem to Amman through Jericho. Jericho is one of the oldest settlements in the world, dating back to 9000 BC.

Facts:

- The Ottomans built a wooden bridge on the River connecting Amman and Jericho, which they destroyed in 1917 to deter the British occupation of Jordan.
 - During the British Mandate (1918-1953), three bridges were built to facilitate the crossing of the British Army into Jordan to fight the Ottomans in 1918. One of the bridges was a metal structure, built by General Allenby, over the old Ottoman bridge.
 - For decades, the bridge linked the two sides of the
- River facilitating daily travel to work or to visit relatives.
 - When Transjordan was established, the first postage stamp featured the old structure of the Allenby Bridge.



Transjordan Postage
from the book, "Philatelic History of Jordan, 1922-1953."

© Photo by: R. T. Ledger

- Jordanian troops headed by Clubb Pasha during the 1948 War, on their way to assist their fellow Palestinians, crossed over this bridge. The Iraqi troops passed the Majami' Bridge and the Allenby Bridge.
- In Early 1968, Al Karama War took place on the River Jordan, a focal point of the war as it was the closest to Amman.



© Photo by: John Murray

June, 1967, Arab refugees flee the eastwards across the River Jordan from the book, "The Evasive Peace."

- During the 1967 War, thousands of Palestinians crossed the Allenby Bridge fleeing the West Bank, and even after being destroyed by the ravages of war, people continued to use the Bridge as a gateway from war.
- The King Hussein Bridge was built in 1968, as a temporary construction to replace the destroyed Allenby Bridge.
- Known to Jordanians as the King Hussein Bridge, this crossing point is the most accessible being located just 40 Kilometers north of Jerusalem, and 40 Kilometers

west of Amman.

- The King Hussein Bridge is only 6 Kilometers from Jericho and 2 Kilometers west of South Shouneh.
- On a yearly basis, approximately 9,000 pilgrims or Hajjis return from Mecca to Palestine via the King Hussein Bridge.
- The bridge was described in a poem by Jordanian poet Mrs. Fadwa Toukan.
- More than thirty years later, a new modern 4-lane structure has been constructed as an alternative crossing to the old King Hussein Bridge.
- A commemorative postage stamp has been issued to promote the new King Hussein Bridge.
- Today, the Allenby Bridge, and both the old and new King Hussein Bridges stand side-by-side, illustrating the evolution of the "Crossing of the River Jordan."

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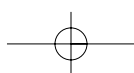
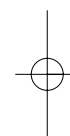
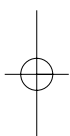
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Allenby Bridge



Old King Hussein Bridge



New King Hussein Bridge