JORDAN

Religion & Faith

Tracing Islam

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TRACING ISLAM IN JORDAN

The land that is today the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been constantly settled throughout every single period of history since 9500 BC. It has always been a critical bridge between Africa, Asia and Europe, and its neighbours, the great civilizations of the ancient world, have always sought to control it. The multitudes of nations that have passed through, or settled here, have each left their individual mark on the country - evidence of the rich heritage Jordan enjoys today.

For Muslims, Jordan is a country with a rich religious history that is also blessed with many important Holy shrines and tombs. Visiting these sites is approved behaviour in Islam. Here the faithful can study, enhance and strengthen their faith.

Located between Mecca, the holiest place on earth for Muslims, and Jerusalem, sacred to three great monotheistic religions, Jordan has played a central role in the history of Ahl-ul-Kitab (People of the Book). Many of the early Abrahamic prophets mentioned in the Old Testament, the Bible and the Holy Quran are associated with Jordan. They either lived or travelled through this land.

It is believed that the land of Jordan forms part of the 'blessed neighbourhood', mentioned in the Holy Quran (Sura 17, verse 1).

The land of Jordan has featured several times in the life of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ (Peace Be Upon Him). First around the time of his birth at Umm Rasas, which lies southeast of Madaba, when the Hanif Zeid bin 'Amr bin Nufayl from Mecca is said to have heard a prediction that a Prophet would arise amongst his people with the "religion of Abraham". Later, during Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ and his Uncle Abu Talib's رضي الله عنه caravan journeys between Mecca and Damascus, the famous childhood encounter with the monk Bahira occurred at the caravan stop, 'Bosra of Al-Sham'. It is also here that that the Prophet ﷺ, together with his venerable companion Maysarah رضي الله عنه, encountered the monk Nestor. On his journey to Syria, the Prophet ﷺ is also said to have taken shelter under a tree, which to this day is located near Safawi, in the Mafraq governorate.

Islam's first expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula was northwards into Jordan. It was here that the first contact between Islam and the non-Arab Byzantine world occurred, resulting in several strategic 7th century battles, including the battles of Mutah, Yarmouk and Fahl (Pella). Many of Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ companions and military leaders were martyred and buried in Jordan, and today their tombs and shrines are important destinations for pious Muslims.

AMMAN

Amman is both the modern and the ancient capital of Jordan. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and was known under the Ammonites as Rabbat-Ammon and in Graeco-Roman times as Philadelphia. The city originally spread over seven hills but now encompasses at least nineteen.

Towering over Amman is the Citadel. Here excavations reveal extensive remains dating from the Bronze Age through the Arab Islamic ages. On this hilltop overlooking the city are the ruins of the Temple of Hercules, an Umayyad Palace dating back to 720 AD., as well as a 6th century Byzantine church. At the foot of the Citadel is a 6000 seat Roman Theatre.

Just a short stroll from the Roman Theatre through downtown Amman is the Al-Hussein Mosque. This Ottoman-style mosque was rebuilt in 1924 by the founder of modern Jordan, His Majesty, the late King Abdullah bin Al-Husseini. It was constructed on the site of a much older mosque, built in 640 AD, by the second Caliph, Umar bin Al-Khattab رضي الله عنه .

Also in downtown Amman is the more modern King Abdullah Mosque, which is well worth a visit. Often known as the Blue Dome Mosque, because of its sky blue exterior, it was built in 1990 in memory of His Majesty, the late King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein.

A new beacon of Islam has been added to the landscape of Amman Inaugurated in April, 2006 the King Hussein

← The Al-Husseini Mosque situated in the heart of downtown Amman

bin Talal Mosque is an architectural marvel that fuses Umayyad-inspired structural design with functionality and ingenuity something non-existent in many modern-day houses of worship.

The mosque sits on top of the rolling hills that overlook the King Hussein Gardens, with marvelous vistas of the bustling city beyond.

In Amman's suburb of Jubeiha is the tomb of the venerable companion, Abdul-Rahman bin Awf Al-Zuhri رضي الله عنه , who took part in all the major battles and campaigns of Islam, including Uhud (in Al-Madina), Al-Khandaq (the Trench), and the Conquest of Mecca, Hunayn and Badr, where he was wounded. He was the signatory, on behalf of the Muslims, at the Treaty of Hudaybiyah (to the west of Mecca), a compromise reached between the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ and the leaders of Mecca, in which Mecca gave political and religious recognition to the growing Muslim community.

Amman's skyline with the King → Abdullah Mosque in the centre.

Amman is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

He was also a Muslim signatory at the Conquest of Jerusalem. Abdul-Rahman ﷺ was a successful businessman who shared his wealth. On one day he managed to free thirty-one slaves, and in another instance he gave a caravan of seven hundred camels loaded with food to charity. Upon his death he made a charitable will of one thousand horses and fifty thousand dinars. He was one of the 'Blessed Ten' to whom the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ promised paradise. Lined-up stones mark his burial place.

At the village of Bilal, in the Amman suburb of Wadi Seer, a modern building protects the tomb of the venerable companion, Bilal bin Rabah ﷺ , who embraced Islam whilst he was a slave. This brought about the wrath of his master, Umayyad bin Khalaf, who tried to force him to renounce his faith by placing a huge rock on his chest during the peak of the summer heat of Mecca. Bilal ﷺ fought bravely in the battles of Uhud and Badr, where he was able to avenge himself of his former master. Gifted with a beautiful voice, Bilal ﷺ became the Prophet's ﷺ personal muezzin.

Just 10 kilometres outside Amman near the village of Al-Raqim, is the Kahlif Al-Raqim (the Cave of the Seven Sleepers). This popular site is mentioned in the Holy Quran in a Sura named Al-Kahf, or The Cave. Persecuted by the despotic rule of Trajan, a group of pious youths took refuge in this cave. To preserve them, God put them to sleep and when they awoke, 309 solar years later they believed they had only been asleep for a day or so. Christianity was widespread by then, and when they were discovered, God put them to sleep forever. At the cave, there are Roman and Byzantine ruins, as well as a mosque, which exactly fit the descriptions in the Holy Quran.

DID YOU KNOW?

The name "Hashem" is actually that of Qusayy's grandson, who was the great-grandfather of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ. The Hashemites are thus the direct descendants of the Prophet ﷺ through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali bin Abi Talib, who was also the Prophet's ﷺ paternal first cousin and the fourth caliph of Islam.

Image: The Coat of Arms of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

MADABA AND THE VICINITY

Madaba, the famous 'city of mosaics', is just 30 kilometers southwest of Amman. It is home to one of the world's largest collection of mosaics, most of which are at least 1,400 years old. The most famous of them all is the Map of the Holy Land (c.560 AD). It contains over two million pieces of stone tesserae and is believed to have taken six years to make. Clearly visible on the remarkably detailed map are Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River, Jericho, Nablus, Hebron, the Nile Delta in Egypt and southern Lebanon.

Just a ten-minute drive from Madaba is Mount Nebo, one of the most revered sites in Jordan. It is from the summit of Mount Nebo that the Prophet Moses (Musa) ﷺ looked down across the Dead Sea and the River Jordan to Palestine, after leading his people from Egypt across the Sinai Desert to the Promised Land.

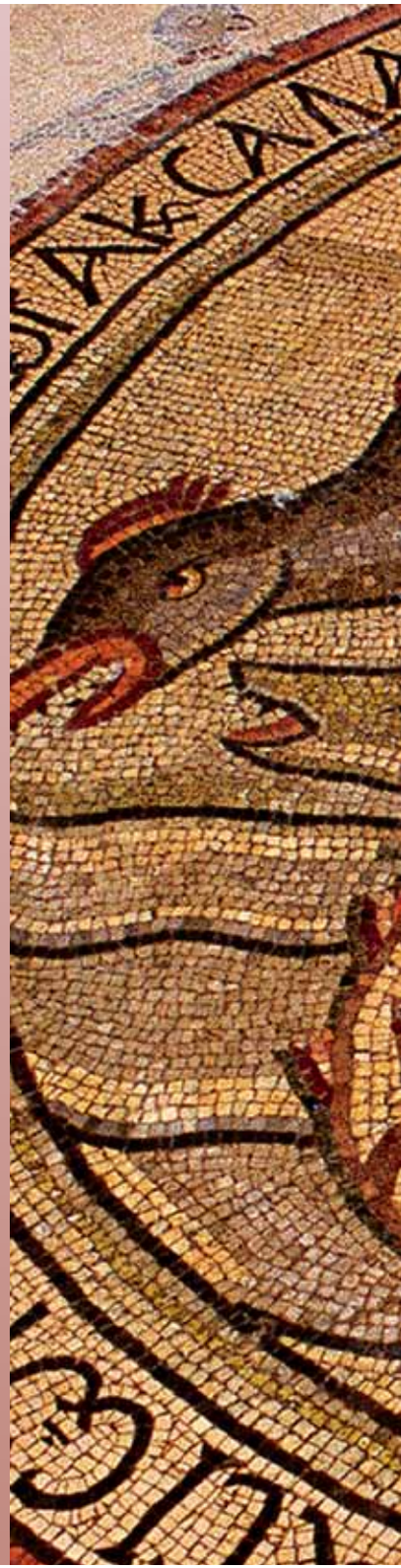
King Herod's hilltop stronghold at Mukawir. ↑

It is believed that Moses ﷺ died and was buried on or near Mount Nebo, although there is to actual tomb marking the spot. Moses ﷺ is the most mentioned prophet in the Holy Quran and it describes his life and mission in great detail.

Uyun Musa (Moses' Springs), near Madaba, is the place where Moses ﷺ, in need of water, is believed to have struck a rock with his staff and twelve springs emerged.

Also near Madaba, overlooking Wadi Al-Mujib, is the village of Shaqiq and the tomb of the venerable companion Abu Dharr Al Ghifari رضي الله عنه. Known for his veracity and generosity, Abu Dharr رضي الله عنه was among the first companions to follow Islam and was a firm advocate of wealth distribution. His tomb is marked by lined-up stones.

The Prophet John the Baptist (Yahya) ﷺ, continued the work of his father the Prophet Zakariyyah ﷺ, at Bethany Beyond the Jordan. It was here that the pious and virtuous John ﷺ lived, preached and baptized. Here too is where he baptized Jesus Christ (the Prophet Issa) ﷺ. John ﷺ was beheaded by Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, at King Herod's citadel, which is situated on a mountain top close to the village of Mukawir (Machaerus) just 32 kilometres southwest of Bethany. John the Baptist's ﷺ head was sent to Damascus but his body remained in Mukawir.



Mosaic detail from one of the many well-preserved → mosaics to be found in and around Madaba.

DID YOU KNOW?

In keeping with Jordan's commitment to restore and preserve its mosaic masterpieces, Madaba's extensive archaeological park and museum complex encompasses the remains of several Byzantine churches, including the outstanding mosaics of the Church of the Virgin and the Hyppolytus Hall, part of a 6th century mansion.

Image: Visitors admire the stunning mosaic map of the Holy Land at St. George's Church in Madaba.

KARAK

The most significant battle fought during the Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ lifetime was the Battle of Mutah in 629 AD. It took the lives of his closest companions who died fighting the combined Byzantine and Ghassanid Arab armies. Today, the tombs of the venerable companions, Zaid bin Harithah رضي الله عنه, Ja'far bin Abi Talib رضي الله عنه and Abdullah bin Ruwahah رضي الله عنه can be visited in the town of Al-Mazar Al-Janubi, near Karak.

It was the Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ adopted son, the venerable companion Zaid bin Harithah رضي الله عنه, who led Muslim army during the battle of Mutah. After fighting bravely, he was fatally stabbed. He is the only companion mentioned in the Holy Quran by name.

It was the deputy commander of the army, the venerable companion Ja'far bin Abi Talib رضي الله عنه, cousin of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ, who took up the banner after Zaid fell. He is often known as 'the flying Ja'far' because he lost his hands during the battle but somehow continued to hold up the banner. Ja'far is known to resemble the Prophet ﷺ, both in features and character. He was renowned for his kindness and generosity towards the needy, as well as for narrating the hadiths directly from the Prophet ﷺ. He was given the task of leading a group of Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). When a delegation, headed by Amr bin Al-As was sent to bring the Muslims back to Mecca, a debate took place in the presence of the King of Abyssinia in which Ja'far successfully argued the case of the Muslims. When asked by the king about the Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ opinion of Jesus عليه السلام, the son of Mary, he found himself in a delicate situation – any fault in his reply would seriously jeopardize the safety of those he was charged to protect. He answered wisely and the king allowed the Muslims to stay.

The Prophet's poet, the venerable companion Abdullah bin Ruwahah رضي الله عنه took command of the army after Zaid رضي الله عنه and Ja'far رضي الله عنه. He was known for his piety, obedience and patience, and was a faithful and dedicated soldier.

↑ The shrine of the venerable companion Zaid bin Harithah رضي الله عنه at Al-Mazar Al-Janubi near the town of Karak.

In and around Karak are other shrines of Islamic significance including the shrine of the Prophet Noah (Nuh) عليه السلام. God sent Noah to warn His people of divine punishment if they continued to worship idols. Holy Quran (Sura 71, verses 1-3).

"Warn thy people before it comes to them a grievous chastisement." He said, "O my people, I am to you a warner, clear and open: That ye should worship Allah, fear Him and obey me."

The shrine of the Prophet Solomon (Sulayman) عليه السلام, King of Israel, is in Sarfah near Karak. Known for his wisdom and piety, Solomon is also believed to have had great powers including control over the winds and an understanding of the language of birds and animals.

In and around Karak are other shrines of Islamic significance.

Also in Karak is the shrine of Zaid bin Ali bin Al-Hussein ﷺ. The great-great, grandson of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ, he was a religious leader known for his righteous, majestic and knowledgeable ways.

No visit to Karak would be complete without a look at the castle. It was built by the Frankish knights during the Crusader period. When Baldwin II, who had signed a peace treaty with Saladin (Salahuddin), died in the early 1180s, he was succeeded by the notoriously treacherous and brutal Reynald de Chatillion. Reynald broke the truce, which prompted Saladin to attack and defeat the crusader armies and to take control of Jerusalem.

In the town of Shawbak, not far from Karak, is another crusader castle that is well worth visiting. Once called Mont Real, its exterior is impressive with encircling exterior walls, three layers thick. Despite its formidable structure, the castle fell to Saladin only seventy five years after it was built.

↑ The shrine of the venerable companion Zaid bin Harithah ﷺ at Al-Mazar Al-Janubi near the town of Karak.

← Inside the passageways of Karak's crusader castle.

DID YOU KNOW?

Noah ﷺ is a prophet in the Qur'an. References to N , the Arabic form of Noah ﷺ, are scattered throughout the Qur'an, but no single narrative account of the great flood is given. The references in the Qur'an are consistent with Genesis, and Islamic tradition generally follows the Genesis account, emphasizing Noah's ﷺ preaching of the monotheism of God, and the ridicule heaped on him by idolators.

Image: The shrine of the Prophet Nuh ﷺ near Karak.

THE DEAD SEA

At just over 400 metres below sea level, the Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth. The sea is fed by many streams, as well as the River Jordan, but it has no outlet and the only way for the water to escape is by evaporation. Through this evaporation process, the water has become rich in salts and minerals that have been known to have curative powers, since the time of Herod the Great over 2000 years ago. Because of the high salt content of the water, the sea is devoid of life.

On the south east coast of the Dead Sea, near a place called Safi, is Lot's Cave. The Prophet Lot (Lut) عليه السلام, was a nephew of the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) عليه السلام. He settled in the area at a town called Sodom, which was destroyed by God because of the immoral practices of the inhabitants. Because he was a righteous man, Lot عليه السلام and his family were told by God to leave the town but not to look back.

↑ Salt crystal formations on the Dead Sea's coastline.

A rock formation near the Dead Sea - →
Believed to be Lot's wife as a pillar of salt.

the water has become rich in salts and minerals that have been known to have curative powers, since the time of Herod the Great over 2000 years ago.

Lot's wife disobeyed God's command and was turned into a pillar of salt. Lot and his two daughters settled in the cave at Safi.

There are several 6th century ruins and mosaics near Lot's Cave and the topography of which corresponds exactly with the Islamic and Biblical accounts.

Lot's cave, where he took shelter from the destruction of the Biblical city of Sodom. ↑

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the most spectacular natural and spiritual landscapes in the world, the Jordanian east coast of the Dead Sea has evolved into a major hub of both religious and health & fitness tourism in the region. A series of good roads, excellent hotels with spa and fitness facilities, as well as archaeological and spiritual discoveries make this region as enticing to today's international visitors as it was to kings, emperors, traders, prophets and pilgrims in antiquity.

Image: A 5-star hotel at the Dead Sea.

THE JORDAN VALLEY

Many pilgrims come to the Jordan Valley to visit the tombs of the Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ venerable companions and military leaders who either fell in battle or died during the Great Plague (Amwas Plague) in the 18th year after the Hijra.

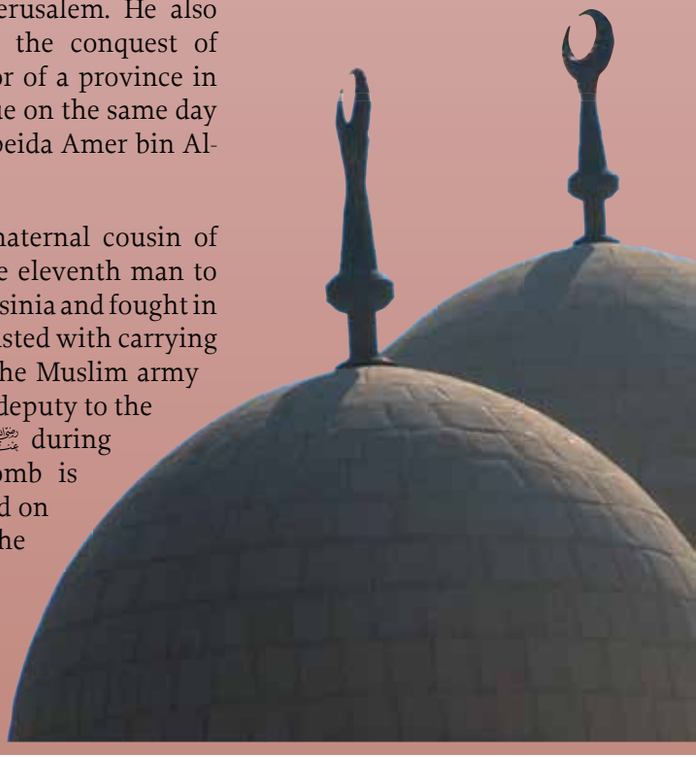
Abu Ubeida Amer Bin Al-Jarrah ﷺ was a relative of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ and one of the first converts to Islam. He participated in all major events and was one of the 'Blessed Ten', to whom the Prophet ﷺ promised paradise. As supreme commander of the Northern Muslim Army, he successfully conquered Syria and was dubbed by the Prophet ﷺ as 'The Trustee of the Nation'. At the age of 58 he fell victim to the Great Plague that spread through Greater Syria. His tomb, in the Central Jordan Valley, is a major Islamic centre with a mosque, library and cultural centre.

Above and far right: The Mosque of Abu Ubeida. ﷺ ↑

Mo'ath Bin Jabal ﷺ was a venerable companion and one of the six charged with the task of compiling the Holy Quran during the life of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ. He was sent by the Prophet ﷺ as counselor to the people of Yemen and also took part in the Aqaba Allegiance Convention between the Prophet ﷺ and his supporters from Medina. He died at the age of 38 in the Jordan Valley, having spent his short life teaching faith and the Holy Quran. A modern building with five domes houses his tomb.

Shurhabil Bin Hasanah ﷺ was a venerable companion and one of the early Muslims who fled to Abyssinia. Known for his strong faith, intelligence, bravery and administrative abilities, he participated in the Battle of Yarmouk and the conquest of Jerusalem. He also commanded the army assigned to the conquest of Jordan. He later became the governor of a province in Greater Syria. He died from the plague on the same day as the venerable companion, Abu Ubeida Amer bin Al-Jarrah. ﷺ

Amir Bin Abi Waqqas ﷺ was a maternal cousin of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ and the eleventh man to convert to Islam. He migrated to Abyssinia and fought in the battle of Uhud. He was later entrusted with carrying messages from the commanders of the Muslim army to the Caliph in Medina and became deputy to the venerable companion, Abu Ubeida ﷺ during his governorship in Syria. His tomb is located within a new building erected on vaults, in the village of Waqqas in the Northern Jordan Valley.



Many pilgrims come to the Jordan Valley to visit the tombs of the Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ venerable companions and military leaders.

Derar Bin Al-Azwar رضي الله عنه was a venerable companion of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ. He was a poet and fierce warrior, who fought in the wars of Apostasy and took part in the conquest of Greater Syria, alongside his distinguished sister, Khawlah bint Al-Azwar. A victim of the Great Plague, he died in the 18th year after the Hijra. His tomb is located in a mosque superimposed by a dome, in the town of Deir 'Alla.

↑ The tomb of Abu Ubeida Amer Bin Al-Jarrah رضي الله عنه.

AS-SALT

The ancient town of As-Salt is just a 30-minute drive northwest of the capital, Amman.

During Ottoman rule, As-Salt was the chief administrative centre for the region. In and around the town are several tombs of prominent figures of Islam and of others mentioned in the Holy Quran.

The Prophet Jethro (Shu'ayb) ﷺ was the Midianite father-in-law of the Prophet Moses ﷺ. Jethro repeatedly preached to the people about monotheism and urged them to abandon their corrupt practices such as underweighing and under-measuring the commodities they sold. His shrine lies within a modern mosque in Wadi Shu'ayb.

The Prophet Joshua (Yusha) ﷺ was the apprentice of the Prophet Moses ﷺ and later became his successor. He led the army of the tribes of Israel in the conquest of the land of Palestine. His shrine lies within a mosque on a hill bearing his name, to the west of As-Salt.

The Prophet Job (Ayyoub) ﷺ is mentioned in the Holy Quran four times. His legendary patience and faith gave him the strength to endure great hardships and he was rewarded with blessings as stated in the Holy Quran (Sura 21, verses 83-84). His shrine is in an area known as Khirbet Ayyoub, southwest of As-Salt.

Maysarah bin Masrouq Al-'Abssi ﷺ was a venerable companion who witnessed the Prophet's ﷺ Farewell Pilgrimage. He took part in the Battle of Yamamah and the conquest of Greater Syria. In the 20th year after the Hijra he became the commander of the first Muslim army to enter Byzantine lands after successfully attacking the Byzantine forces. He was buried west of As-Salt, in the town of 'Arda.

The tomb and shrine of the Prophet Yusha ﷺ. ↑

The shrine of the Prophet Shu'ayb ﷺ. ↑

The Ottoman houses of the town of As-Salt. →

DID YOU KNOW?

Wadi Shu'ayb (Valley of Shu'ayb) is one of the largest agricultural sites in As-Salt city, its a large valley with large agricultural areas. It is named after one of the prophets in Islam, prophet Shu'ayb عليه السلام, who was the father in law of Moses عليه السلام and one of the descendants of Ibrahim عليه السلام .

Image: The modern mosque housing the shrine of The Prophet Shu'ayb عليه السلام .

AJLUN

The mediaeval town of Ajlun is just a short journey northwest from Amman. Here, perched high on a hilltop, surrounded by pine forests and olive groves is Ajlun Castle. The castle was built in the 12th century by Usama bin Munqith, the nephew of Saladin. A fine example of Islamic architecture, it served as a military fort to protect the region from invading crusader forces. The castle is beautifully preserved and is a popular attraction for both Jordanians and visitors.

Not far from Ajlun is the tomb of the venerable companion, 'Ikrimah bin Abi Jahl ﵁, who was one of the Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ bitterest enemies until he embraced Islam. He later distinguished himself by contributing to the spread of Islam. He also took part in the wars of Apostasy and was martyred in the Battle of Yarmouk. His tomb is close to Ajlun and is marked by a collection of stones.

Also in Ajlun is a shrine for St. George (Al-Khadir) ﵁. Although not a prophet, St. George was one of God's righteous worshippers, servants and a favourite saint, and a number of miracles were revealed through him. He has many shrines in Jordan including those at As-Salt, Mahis, Karak and Irbid (Bayt Ras).

Arabic inscriptions in Ajlun Castle. ↑

Ajlun Castle affords it's visitors stunning → views of the surrounding countryside.

IRBID

The town of Irbid is located just a short drive north of Ajlun. There are several places of interest in the region including the site of the famous Battle of Yarmouk.

In the face of Muslim expansion, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius gathered a large army, led by his brother Theodorus, which fought the Muslim army at Yarmouk in August 639 AD. Although the Muslims were greatly outnumbered, their commander, Khalid bin Al-Walid ﵁, led them to victory and ultimately control over Greater Syria. The site of the battle lies on the banks of the Yarmouk River, on the northern tip of Jordan.

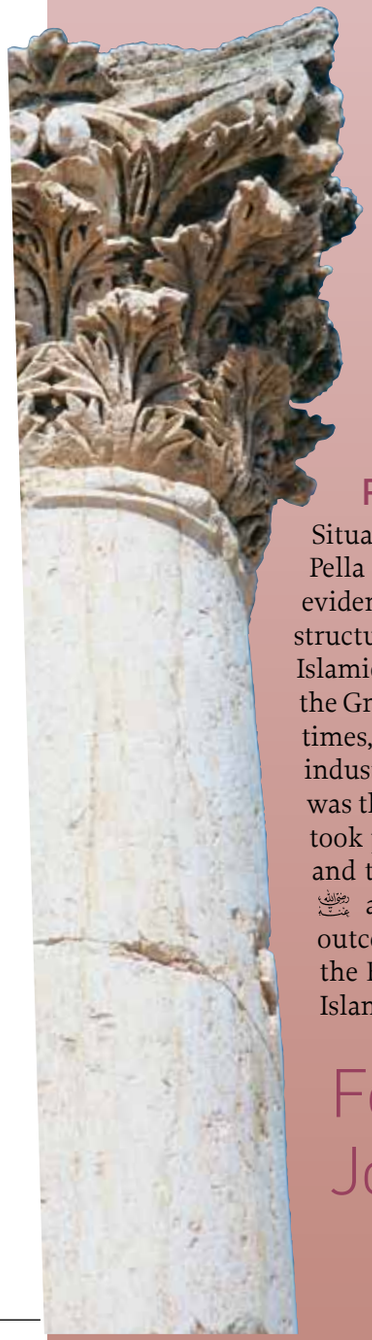
Close to Irbid, in Mazar Al-Shamali, is a shrine for the Prophet David (Dawud) ﵇. As a child, David slew the mighty Goliath with a stone from his slingshot. He later became the second King of Israel after Saul and was one of the apostles to whom heavenly scriptures were revealed. David spent some time in Jordan while at odds with Saul, as well as later while on campaign.

The tomb of the venerable companion Abul-Darda' ﵁ is located in a modern building in the village of Soam Al-Shunnaq near Irbid. One of the most devoted and pious companions, he is best known for surpassing everyone in memorizing, narrating and transmitting the Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ hadith. He participated in military campaigns and was later appointed governor of the Bahrain province.

Columns in nearby Pella (tabaqat Fahl) . →

DID YOU KNOW?

The Battle of Yarmouk took place from the 15th-20th of August, 636 A.D. After years of raids, skirmishes, counterattacks, and negotiations the assembled armies of the East Roman Empire and the Islamic Caliphate met on the field of battle and a 6 day battle ensued with a victorious outcome for the Islamic Caliphate that would ultimately ensure control over Greater Syria.



THE DECAPOLIS

The Romans established The Decapolis, a league of ten cities in northern Jordan, Syria and Palestine, to facilitate the area's commerce and to protect the far flung regions of their empire. Four of the cities of The Decapolis are in Jordan: Philadelphia (now Amman), Jerash (the best-preserved and most complete city of The Decapolis), Pella (Tabaqet Fahl) and Umm Qays (Gadara).

Pella

Situated in the northern part of the Jordan Valley, Pella is a popular attraction. There is ample evidence of early human habitation, with visible structures dating from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods. Pella really prospered throughout the Graeco-Roman period a well as during Byzantine times, when trade routes strengthened and local industries developed. Known in Arabic as Fahl, Pella was the site of the famous Battle of Fahl. The battle took place in January 635, between the Byzantines and the Muslim army, led by Khalid bin Al-Walid ﷺ and Abu Ubeida Amer bin Al-Jarrah ﷺ. The outcome was a Muslim victory and liberation from the Byzantines. Pella continued to prosper under Islamic Ummayad rule.

The Shrine of the Prophet Hud ﷺ near Jerash. ↑

Umm Qays

Formerly known as Gadara, Umm Qays was also an important Decapolis city. Known as a cultural centre, it was home to several poets and philosophers including Theodoros, who described the city as "the new Athens". Perched on a hilltop overlooking the Jordan Valley, the Sea of Galilee and the Golan Heights, Umm Qays boasts an impressive colonnaded terrace and the remains of two theatres. It is also the place where Jesus Christ ﷺ performed his famous miracle of the Gadarene swine.

Four of the cities of the Decapolis are situated in Jordan: Amman, Jerash, Pella and Umm Qays.

Jerash is the largest and best-preserved Roman city outside Italy.

Jerash

The Graeco-Roman city of Jerash, formerly Gerasa, is situated in a fertile valley, less than one hour's drive north from Amman. Known as the 'Pompeii of the East' for its extraordinary state of preservation, Jerash is the largest and best-preserved Roman city outside Italy. The imposing triple-arched gateway (see image below) seen as you approach the city, was built to honour the Emperor Hadrian on his arrival at Jerash in 129 AD. Within the remaining city walls are colonnaded streets, hilltop temples, spectacular theatres, plazas, baths and public squares. Every year, during July, this ancient city comes to life when the annual Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts takes place, attracting thousands of visitors from Jordan and all over the world.

On a hilltop not far from Jerash, is a modern Mosque built over a cave where the Prophet Hud (عليه السلام) is believed to be buried. He preached to the people of 'Ad, urging them to worship the One God instead of their many idols. The eleventh Sura in the Holy Quran is named after him.

DID YOU KNOW?

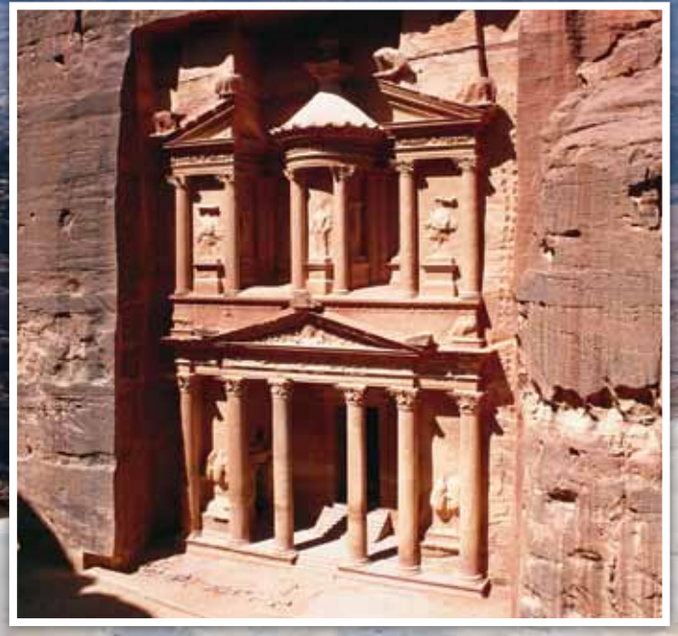
The discovery of a centuries-old mosque in the heart of the Roman ruins of Jerash is shedding new light on the city's history and the early relations between Muslims and Christians following the 7th century Islamic conquest.

The discovery of the mosque indicates that the city continued to thrive after the arrival of Islam. What's more, Muslims and Christians lived side by side in relative harmony in a society that adapted to accommodate both faiths.

PETRA

The unique Nabataean city of Petra is a UNESCO World Heritage site, which attracts visitors from all over the world. To enter Petra you must pass through the Siq, a very narrow gorge, about 1 kilometre in length, which is flanked on both sides by towering rock walls that reach a height of 70 metres. At the end of the Siq is the Treasury (the Khaznah) with its massive façade carved into the solid rock face. As you leave the Treasury you enter into the amazing rose-red city of Petra, with its endless tombs and temples, its huge theatre and fascinating high places.

Perched on the top of a mountain called Jabal Al-Nabi Harun, in Petra, is the shrine of the Prophet Aaron (Harun) عليه السلام, the brother of Moses عليه السلام. Moses left Aaron to look after his people when he went to Mount Sinai. Aaron predeceased his brother and his shrine's location at Petra corresponds exactly with both the Islamic and Biblical accounts of his burial.



The Treasury (Khazneh) at Petra. ↑

Aaron's tomb on Jebel Haroun. ↑

TAFILAH

There are several shrines of interest to be visited in Tafilah, which can be reached via the Kings' Highway just north of Shawbak and close to the Dana Nature Reserve.

Jabir bin Abdullah Al-Ansari ﷺ was a much-loved venerable companion. He participated in nineteen military campaigns and was beside the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ during the conquest of Mecca. He narrated many of the hadiths and witnessed several of the Prophet's ﷺ miracles. His last days were spent lecturing students at the Prophet's ﷺ mosque in Medina. His shrine is in Tafilah.

The Prophet Seeth ﷺ was the third son of Adam ﷺ and credited with inventing the arts and crafts. His shrine is near Tafilah.

Farwah bin Amr Al-Judhami ﷺ was the Roman-Byzantine governor of Ma'an district who was crucified by the Byzantines when he converted to Islam. His shrine is in Tafilah close to the Afra Water Springs.

Al-Harith bin Umayr Al-Azdi ﷺ was the venerable companion sent by the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ to carry a message to the ruler of Busra in Syria inviting him to adopt Islam. When he arrived in Tafilah, the governor of Mutah captured and beheaded him. This act was one of the causes that led to the Muslim military campaign and the famous battle of Mutah. Al-Harith was the only messenger of the Prophet ﷺ who was martyred whilst on a mission. His shrine is in a modern building 20 kilometres south of Tafilah.

SOUTHERN JORDAN

Hamayma, in southern Jordan near Ras Al-Naqab, was the base of the Abbasid Dynasty and the place from which they planned their seizure of the Islamic Caliphate from the Umayyads.

Ka'b bin Umayr Al-Ghifari ﷺ was the venerable companion sent by the Prophet ﷺ to the tribe of Quda'ah in southern Jordan, to ask the people there to embrace Islam but unfortunately, they murdered him and his companions. His shrine is located at Salmani in the Tafilah province.

Midway between Hijaz and Syria, at Udruh between Ma'an and Shawbak, is Jabal Al-Tahkim (the Hill of Judication). Following the Battle of Siffin, both sides agreed on arbitration to decide the outcome of their conflict. It was here that Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari ﷺ, the representative of Caliph Ali bin Abi Talib ﷺ, met with 'Amr bin Al-Ash'ari ﷺ, who represented Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan, before a court of judgement. The shrine of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari ﷺ can be found north of the town of Ma'an at a hill named Jabal Al-Ashari.

DID YOU KNOW?

Petra is sometimes called the 'Lost City'. In spite of its being such an important city in antiquity, after the 14th century AD, Petra was completely lost to the western world. It was rediscovered in 1812 by the Swiss traveller, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, who tricked his way into the fiercely guarded site by pretending to be an Arab from India wishing to make a sacrifice at the tomb of the Prophet Aaron ﷺ.

Image: The Swiss traveller Johann Ludwig Burckhardt.

AQABA

Jordan's only outlet to the sea, the Red Sea port of Aqaba, is a delightful resort with clean beaches, clear warm water and an abundance of marine life that makes it an exceptional scuba diving destination. There are several place of Islamic interest in and around Aqaba including, the 'Uthman bin 'Affan ﷺ Mosque at Ayla. At the southeast end of the corniche is the Mamluk Fort – the Hashemite coat of arms that can be seen over the entrance was added after the Turks were ousted from the town during World War I.

After the crusaders had taken the port from the Muslims in the 12th century, they built a fortress on Far'un Island, 7 kilometres of the coast. When Saladin launched his counter attack, he captured the island and the fort and it became known as Saladin's Castle. Shortly after, in 1182, the infamous crusader Reynald de Chatillon recaptured the castle, only to lose it again to Muslim forces just a year later.

The Mameluke fort at Aqaba. →

DESERT CASTLES

In 661-750 AD, the first Caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan, moved the capital of the Muslim empire from Medina to Damascus, from where the empire expanded.

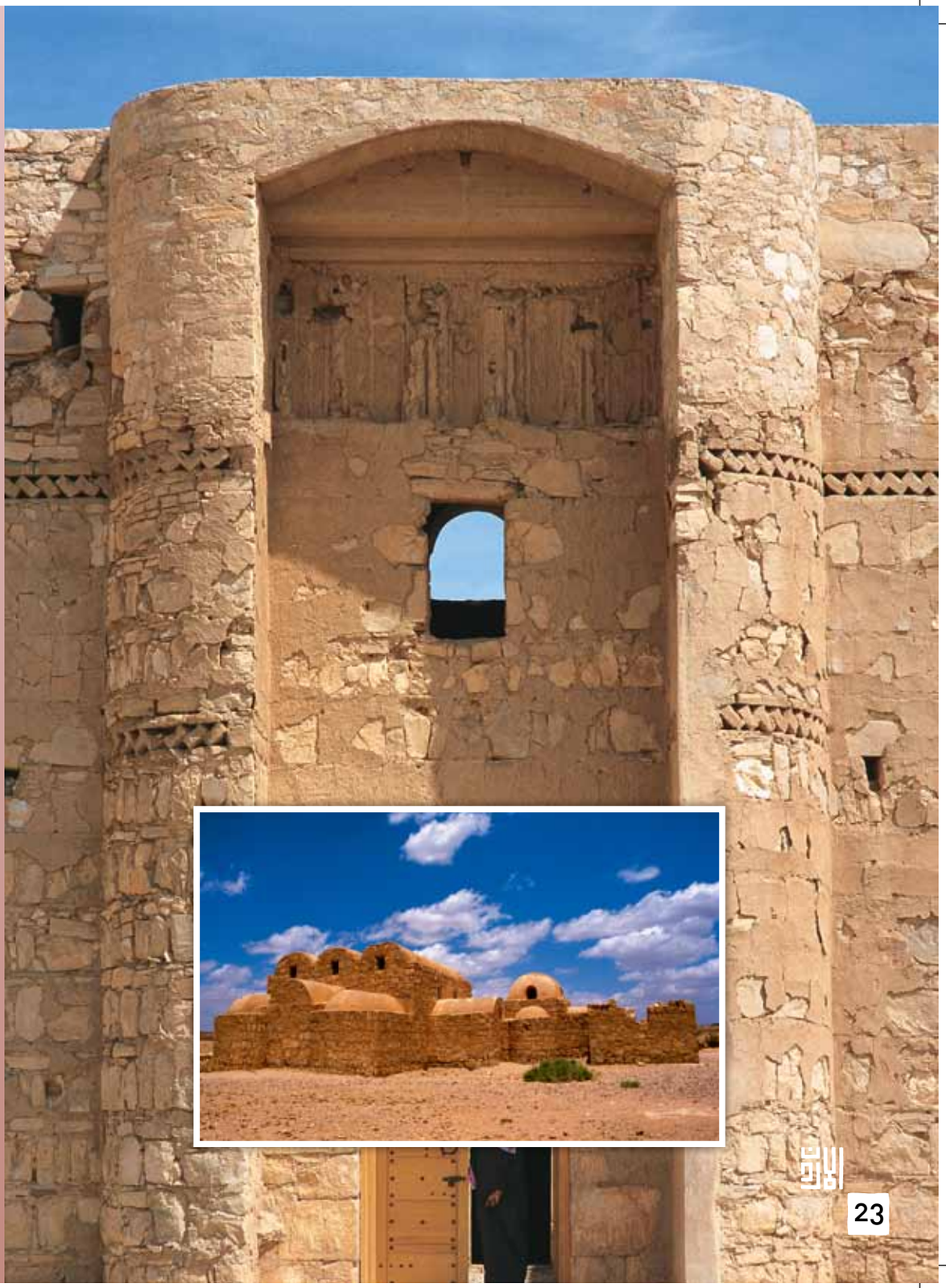
The Umayyads gave the world gave the world a great number of architectural legacies, including the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque in Damascus. In the Jordanian desert they built pavilions, caravan stations, secluded baths and hunting lodges, known today as Desert Castles. Filled with mosaic floors and carved stucco decorations depicting people, animals, events and patterns, these desert castles stand as monuments to the spectacular and original early Islamic art.

Far away from the hectic city life of Damascus, these castles not only served as retreats for the Umayyad rulers, but also helped them stay in touch with the tribes whose support they needed. The buildings were located on extensive and elaborately irrigated farmlands, as evidenced by the various hydraulic systems that can still be seen today. Some of the buildings also served as resting places for travellers on their way to and from Hijaz.

The desert castles of Kharaneh, Mushatta, Qastal, Tuba, Hallabat, Muwaqqar, Hammam Al-Sarh and Qusayr Amra (a UNESCO World Heritage site), can be visited in a one-day drive visit from Amman.

Kharaneh Castle in the Jordan's eastern desert. →

Inset - Qusayr Amra. →



GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS

ﷺ — Stands for "Salla Allahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam", it is an expression that is said when the name of Prophet Mohammad ﷺ is mentioned.

عليه السلام — Stands for "'Alaihi as-Sallam", it is an expression that is said when the name of a Prophet is mentioned.

رضي الله عنه — Stands for "Radiya Allah Anho", it is an expression that is said when the name of Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ companions are mentioned.

Adhan — The call to prayer in Islam.

Caliph — Early in Islam, the leader of the believers acting in Prophet Mohammad's ﷺ place after his death.

Companion — Someone who met Prophet Mohammad ﷺ as a Muslim and is often referred to as a "Sahabi".

Hadith — The spoken traditions attributed to the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ which are revered and received in Islam as a major source of religious law and moral guidance.

Hanif — People who during the time of Jahiliyyah (the pre-Islamic era) rejected the idolatory in their society and were in search of the true religion of Prophet Abraham.

Hijaz — The region and province in western Saudi Arabia, comprising the cities of Mecca, Medina, Jeddah and At-Ta'if.

Hijra — The migration of Prophet Mohammad ﷺ from Mecca to Medina in 622A.D. to escape persecution; the date represents the starting point of the Muslim calendar.

The Holy Quran — The Holy book of Islam revealed to the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ, which is divided into 114 suras.

Imam — The head of public worship in Islam, usually a dignifed leader in society.

Islam — The word Islam describes the "submission" to the will of God and stems from the Arabic word 'aslama', which means submitted.

Mecca — In Islam the holiest city which lies in Saudi Arabia. It is the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ and where Prophet Abraham عليه السلام together with his son Isma'il, built the Ka'ba.

Medina — Is located in Saudi Arabia and is the second most holy city in Islam. Referred to as the "city of the Prophet" it is where Prophet Mohammad ﷺ found refuge after being driven out of Mecca in 622 A.D.

Muezzin — In Islam, the person calling five times a day for daily prayer, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall.

Muslim — A person belonging to Islam and who "submits" to the will of God.

Monotheism — Belief in one and only one God.

Sura — A chapter in the Holy Quran. Each of the 114 suras, which vary in length from several pages to several words, encompasses one or more revelations received by Prophet Mohammad ﷺ from God.

Torah — The Revelation that God sent down to Prophet Mohammad ﷺ and forms the Jewish Holy Book.

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