

## The Holy Triangular Along the Christian Pilgrims Road, East of Jordan River ( Baptism Site, Aenon Near to Saleem, and Tyre Cave)

Mohammed Waheeb<sup>1</sup>, Abdulaziz Mahmoud<sup>2</sup>

1-Professor at Hashemite University, Queen Rania's Institute of Tourism & Cultural Heritage, Zarqa – Jordan .

2-Associated Prof at Al-Bayit University, Mafraq-Jordan .

### Abstract

Since 1996 the systematic excavations started on the eastern part of Jordan River, archaeological works have uncovered the ruins of a dozen ancient churches and monasteries - some with splendid mosaic floors - scattered over small hills and barren terraces in an area located between Wadi Iraq Al Ameer, and Wadi Hesban where both water of the two Wadies joins together in the lower area of Livias; recently called Rama & Kafrein. There were also wells, baptism pools and elaborate water system built by the first converts to Christianity. The article will focus on the important discoveries made in these three locations Bethany Beyond the Jordan, Aenon Near to Saleem & Tyre Cave near Jordan River and analyze the importance of this area during the Classical Period .

**Keywords:** Archaeology, Anthropology, history, Holy Sites, Church, Tourism, artifacts.

### Introduction

There are three places of worship of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ found on the eastern side of Jordan river, first the baptism site (Bethany beyond the Jordan) (John 1:28) in Wadi Al- Kharrar, second Aenon Near to Saleem (John 3:23) in Wadi Hesban and third in Tyre in Iraq Al Ameer in Wadi Seir down to Wadi Kafrein ( John 1:35, Barnabas 99:1).

The three Wadies are connected to each other through the running water along several slopes of what so called Perea and descended down to Livias Plains on the eastern bank of Jordan River. Both the water of Wadi Hesban and Wadi Kafrein join together at a spot close to Gharaba caravansaries, and from there a recently discovered water ceramic pipe of 1 km long transport part of this water to third place of Wadi Kharrar (Bethany beyond Jordan), Baptism site. fig:1.

In 1996 onward a complex of architectures – Jesus & John the Baptist's home - and other Roman artifacts were uncovered not elsewhere but in Perea, is where Jesus was lived on the eastern bank of Jordan River in Jordan Valley. Spectacular new archaeological finds, including a cave that was said to be the rock-hewn home of Jesus & John the Baptist; could boost Jordan's drive for a larger stake in one of the region's most competitive industries: religious tourism. It has long been dominated by west bank of Jordan River, which predictably challenged the significance given to the discoveries

Field excavations on the eastern bank of Jordan River revealed archaeological remains extending back to Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods. But what about the recently discovered three sacred sites related to John and Jesus as well as disciples on the eastern side of Jordan River?

The archaeological materials, the pilgrims and travelers descriptions and biblical references found at these sites prove it to be first Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan, second Aenon

Near to Saleem & third Tyru Cave the places where the gospel of St. John says Jesus and John as well as Disciples was lived and baptized.

It was apparently because of the contradictions that were perceived by early Christians, while reading the gospels, with a reference in one place to John baptizing in Bethany and beyond the Jordan location in wadi al\_kharrar opposite Jericho, and in another place to John baptizing in, location in wadi Hesban not far away from the first place (John 3:23) and in a third place in Tyru in wadi es\_Seir/Iraq Al Ameer (connected with wadi kafrein) in a fortified area with numerous caves cut in the cliffs.

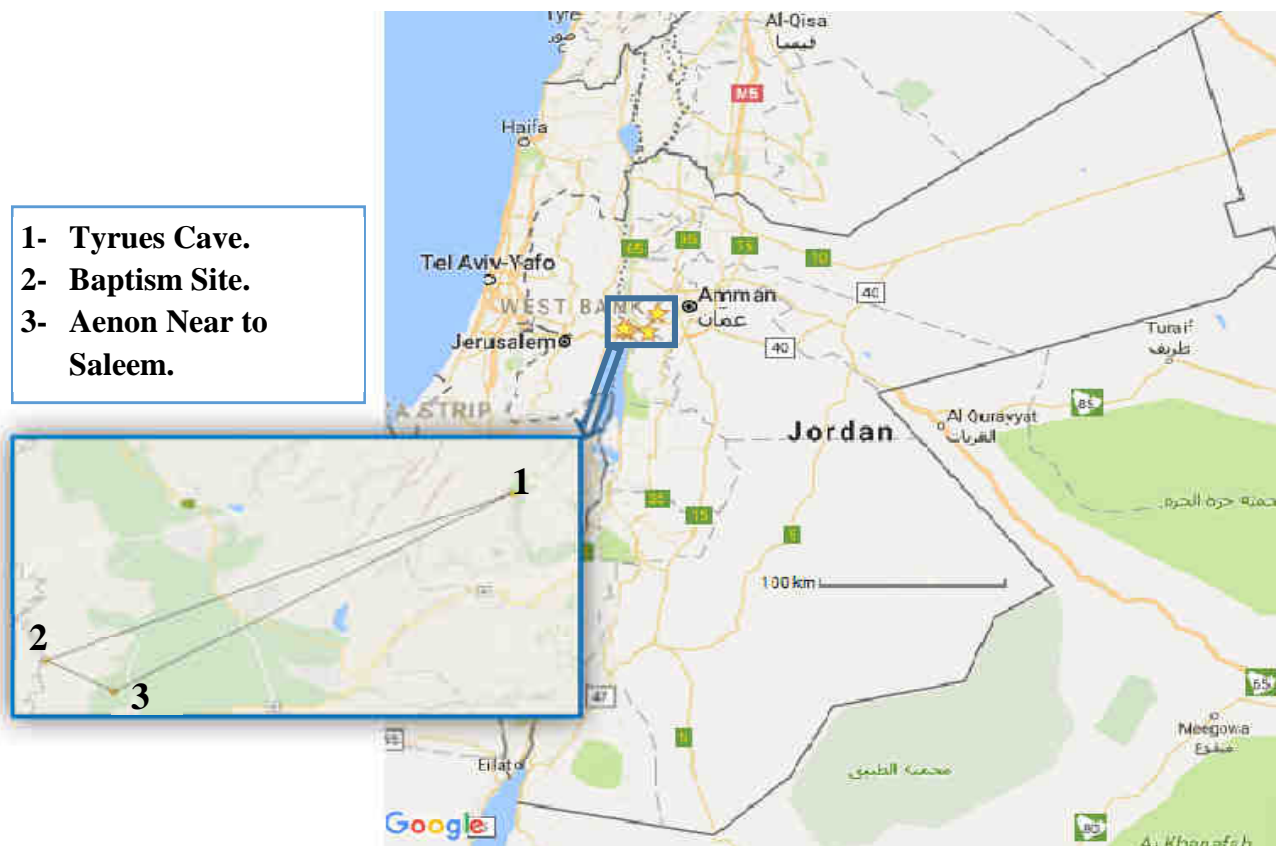


Fig:1 A map showing the location of the three places east of Jordan River in Perea .

### **Bethany Beyond the Jordan / Baptism Site**

The first site baptism place is located about 50 km. to the west of Amman and 8 km. north of the Dead Sea fig:2. For the past years during 1996-1997, the Jordanian Department of Antiquities has systematically surveyed and partially excavated a series of ancient sites that collectively represent one of the most important archaeological discoveries in modern Jordan, the settlement and region of Bethany Beyond the Jordan (or Bethabra), where John the Baptist lived and baptized. The Bethany area sites formed part of the early Christian pilgrimage route between Jerusalem, the Jordan River, and Mt. Nebo. The area is also

associated with the biblical account of how the Prophet Elijah (Mar Elias in Arabic) ascended to heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire, after having parted the waters of the Jordan River and walked across it with his anointed successor the Prophet Elijah. (Kopp:1963)

The site of this Bethany east of the Jordan River is not to be confused with the Bethany near Jerusalem, which was the home town of Lazarus.( John 1:28) Explicitly mentions Bethany east of the river as the place where John the Baptist lived and baptized "Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing" while John 10:40 mentions an incident when Jesus escaped from hostile Jews in Jerusalem and "went away again across the Jordan to the place where John at first baptized..." between 1997-2002 the team identified nearly 20 related sites within an area stretching some four kilometers east of the Jordan River. More sites remain to be discovered through systematic surveying. After completion of excavations and conservation work, the region becomes a target for tourist and pilgrimage trips, including visits to the Jordan River itself and the spot where tradition believes that Jesus was baptized and the Jordan River was crossed by Joshua, Elijah and Elisha. The site of Bethany, as mentioned in the book of John, is also known by other names. It is called Beth-Abara or Bethabara (Beit el-'Obour in Arabic) meaning 'house of the crossing', referring to the Joshua and Elijah crossings of the river, and Arabic Bible translations call it Beit 'Anyā ( Waheeb 2016). Some Greek Bible texts call it Bethania .The Bethany area was known as Bethennabris in the Roman period. The 6th Century AD Byzantine Madaba mosaic map of the Holy Land labels it as 'Ainon where now is Saphsaphas'. The name Saphsaphas ('the place of willows') (also, Saphsas or Sapsas), comes from the Arabic word for willow tree. The Madaba map depicts a ferry crossing Just north of the Bethany area (one of two such ferries on the map), corresponding to the location of the current King Hussein Bridge (also known as the Allenby Bridge). Bethany/Bethabara may also have referred to a region, rather than only a specific settlement. Western travelers to the region at the turn of the century reported that the Greek Orthodox Clerics and Monks who lived in the south Jordan Valley, and the native Ghoranis themselves, referred to the whole area around the river and east to the start of Wadi Kharrar as Bethabara, It seems that the original settlement in the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD was known as Bethany. but in the 3rd Century AD it was more commonly known as Bethabara, and by the 6th Century AD it had become known as Aenon and Saphsapha (or Sapsas, Sapsafas). John the Baptist's town(Donner 1963,1982 ).

The main complex being investigated comprises structures on and around a small natural hill located two kilometres east of the Jordan River, adjacent to the spring, and small oasis at the head of the Wadi Kharrar. The hill has long been known as Elijah's Hill or Jabal Mar Elias or Tell Mar Elias in Arabic. The current excavations have identified a settlement that was inhabited from the time of Christ and John the Baptist (early Roman era), throughout most of the Byzantine period, into the early Islamic era, and again in Ottoman centuries (Waheeb: 1999). The site was also visited by scholars earlier last century; the late director of antiquities Lankester Harding identified Byzantine remains on the surface, and the survey team of James Saner, Khair Yassine and Moliawiyah Ibrahim in the 1980s collected pottery there dating from the early Roman through the late Byzantine periods( Ibrahim, Sauer & Yassein, 1996 )

A visit to the area by Father Michele Piccirillo of the Franciscan Archaeological Institute also confirmed the presence of much early Roman pottery on the plateau immediately south of Bethany, pointing to the existence of a Roman era village at the time of Christ (Piccirillo, 1987). The later settlement from the Byzantine era continued to use these pools, and comprised new structures such as churches and other buildings with plain white and colored

mosaic floors, some with crosses in the mosaics. The early Roman era cisterns were modified during the Byzantine period, with internal walls added and the steps removed in places. Several 5th-6th Century AD Byzantine churches have been excavated, one with an inscription mentioning ROTORIUS as the "head of the monastery", though this person is not known from any other ancient sources. (Waheeb :2000) The hill at the heart of Bethany was already revered in antiquity as a holy site marking the spot from which Elijah ascended to heaven (2 Kings 2:5-14); perhaps that is why John the Baptist lived and baptized there, for the personalities, lifestyles, and missions of John and Elijah are frequently associated in the New Testament. The Byzantine writers Jerome and Eusebius mentioned 'Bethabara beyond the Jordan' in the 4th Century as a pilgrimage destination where people went to be baptized in the same waters that John the Baptist used for his mission. Pilgrims' accounts as early as the 4th and 6th Century' AD mention the hill at Bethany east of the river where Elijah ascended to heaven. In the late 3rd or early 4th Century' AD, according to much later sources from the 11th and 14th Centuries. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, is said to have crossed the Jordan River and visited Elijah's Hill and the cave where John the Baptist lived, and built a church there to commemorate John the Baptist. Byzantine era writers also called the hill 'Hermon Hill'. (PPTS, 1889; Wilkinson, 1977).

Stone and mud structures on the summit of Elijah's Hill and on adjacent hills to the south and east date from the mid-to-late Ottoman period (16th-18th Centuries), when Greek Orthodox monks established a monastery' at the site comprising different structures for worship, residence, and accommodating visiting pilgrims. The Madaba map depicts two concentric circles at the site, which have variously been interpreted as symbols for the hill itself, the nearby caves, or the spring (Donner 1963). Pilgrim's route The 20 sites identified from the Jordan River to Wadi Kharrar and eastwards to Wadi Gharahah formed stations along the pilgrim's route from Jerusalem to the Jordan River and finally to Mount Nebo. That itinerary commemorated places associated with the lives of some of the greatest prophets, including Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. When the French priest-scholar Denis Buzy visited the area in 1930 he reported seeing white mosaic cubes along most of the route from the river to the start of Wadi Kharrar at Bethany see (Koop: 1963). The biblical texts refers to the locations of several holy events. Some scholars even question whether Jesus was baptized in the river itself. The river in antiquity was often not easily accessible, due to flooding and its setting down within a deep gorge, so John routinely baptized at his place of residence at Bethany. John the Baptist's settlement at Bethany is now well identified, as a string of associated sites marking the sacred nature of the area east of the river. It is generally assumed that the steps leading down to the river from the west bank of the river reflected the fact that most Byzantine and more recent pilgrims arrived at the river from Jerusalem, and entered the water from the west bank, as the Madaba map indicates. The primary evidence for Roman and Byzantine era sacred and secular structures associated with the baptism of Jesus and the mission of John the Baptist now appear to be clustered mostly on the east bank. The evidence from Byzantine and medieval days; also indicates that this tradition was the dominant one throughout most of recorded history since the days of the Baptist. The remains of a large church immediately adjacent to and east of the river include fine colored stone pavements and mosaics, Corinthian capitals, and column drums and bases, all from the late Byzantine period. This church may have been built in the Byzantine period to mark the exact spot where people believed that Jesus was baptized; and where John lived and preached his baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. This site also has Islamic era pottery from the 8th-9th Centuries AD, indicating the continued use of the pilgrim's route, or



merely the crossing of the river at these fords, in early Islamic centuries see ( Waheeb 1997,1998,1999,2002 )

### Aenon Near to Saleem

These are a number of traditions for localizing the second site, Aenon and Salim. One of these locates Aenon in Transjordan; since we know from John 1.28 that John, the Baptist was active in this region, support for this comes from the Madaba mosaic map, which has an Aenon just northeast of the Dead Sea: “Aenon, where now is Sapsaphas,” which identifies with Wadi al-Kharrar, the place where recent archaeological explorations have found extensive early Christian remains in Jordan Valley, eastern side of Jordan River dated to the period of John the Baptist.

Another tradition locates Aenon in the northern Jordan valley, on the west bank, and some eight miles south of Scythopolis (Bethshan). Eusebius ( Onomasticon 40) (265-340) fixes “ Aenon where John baptized” in the words: The place is pointed out still eight miles south of Scythopolis, near Saleem and the Jordan. He lists various places in Palestine under the name Saleem. Only the first words of his text remain. According to Procopius, however, who quotes him, he knew of “another village called Saleem in the plain of Scythopolis. It was called Salumias.

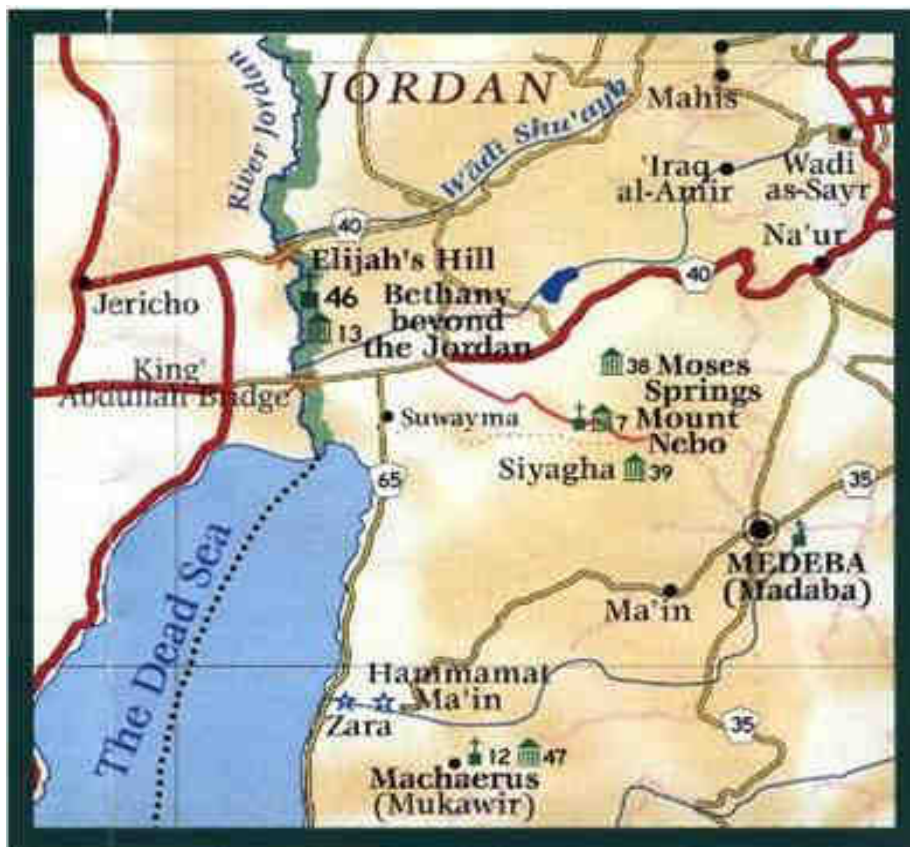


Fig2: location map of holy sites east of Jordan River

Jerome translated Eusebius text concerning Saleem literally into Latin. He translates the words missing from the Greek text we have, as Procopius does, but adds once more the distance from Scythopolis eight miles. About 390AD, he regarded Jerusalem as the Saleem of

Melchisedech. See ( Onomasticon 152. Note 4 , Lib.Hebr.Ouaest , in Gernesim : PL XXIII 959).

. Then, in 398AD, he changed his mind and said: Salem is a town near Scythopolis and it is still called Salem. There they show you the palace of Melchisedech, the vast ruins of which indicate how splendid the old building must have been<sup>1</sup>

In those days the place was called Salumias, and also Salem. Such double names are not uncommon. Many Christians, for example, regard the modern village of El Kubeibeh as the Emmaus of the Bible. Thus they use this name as well as the official one for the village.

The evidence of the Chronica of 334AD is important because it is independent of Eusebius. According to this Scythopolis is situated “near the town of Salem where Melchisedech, priest of the most high God, reigned”. Aenon is not mentioned, but along with the nearby Salem, it was part of the territory of Scythopolis ( Wilkinson 1981).

This is the Aenon that Egeria appears to have visited:

(Then I remembered that according to the bible it was near Salim that holy john baptized at aenon. So I asked if it was far away. “There it is”, said the holy presbyter, “two hundred yards away. If you like we can walk over there. It is from that spring that the village has this excellent supply of clean water you see. “Thanking him I asked him to take us, and we set off. He led us along a well-kept valley to a very neat apple-orchard, and there in the middle he showed us a good clean spring of water, which flowed in a single stream. There was a kind of pool in front of the spring at which it appears holy john Baptist exercised his ministry of Baptism. “This garden,” said the holy presbyter, “is still known in Greek as copouts Agiulohanni, or in your language, Latin, “holy john’s garden”. A great many brothers, holy monks from different parts, travel here to wash at this place. So once more, we had a prayer and a reading at this spring as we did in the other places. We said a suitable psalm, and did everything, which was usual when arriving at a holy place) (Travels 15.1-4; Wilkinson, 1999: 127 ).

According to Antonius Martyr after his description of the eastern side of Jordan River in 570 A.D.

He states: (and near there is a city which is named Salamaida where two tribes and a half of the children of God tarried before they crossed over Jordan”. In this place are hot baths which are called the bath of Moses, where also lepers are cleansed. And there is a fountain of very sweet water which is drunk as a cathartic and heals many sicknesses). (Antonius Maryr, The Holy Place visited by Antonius Maryr, PPTS: 9. Translated by Aubrey Stewart, London, Hanove) fig : 6 .

Antonius describes the holy places near the eastern side of Jordan so much more fully than any of the earlier pilgrims. The city of Salamaida was located at Kafrein, which is around 500 meters to the north of Ain Salem on the eastern side of Jordan River, this location also was known as Abel Shittim, the last resting place of the children of God before they crossed the Jordan (Num, XXXIII, 49), while Tobler suggests the identification of Salamaida which he takes to be a compound of Salim and Amatha, with Salim near Enon.

The hot baths (baths of Moses) was identified with the pool of hot sulphurus water at Tell el-Hammam (Baths) in the same area north of Ain Salem east Kafrein village on the eastern side of Jordan River. The same place which Theodorus (chapter XIX) connect with Livias, the plains where the hot baths located well known as Livias or Julias. Also Theodorus fixe the

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<sup>1</sup> See (.Ep. 73: CSEL LV 20 f. Ep. 108, 9 CSEL LV 314. Here he thinks erroneously, in the year 404, that Jerusalem was at first called Jebus, and then later, Salem, This does not constitute a retreat to his former line of argument: he simply wishes to leave the city with this name, and he now takes the residence of Melchisedech to be Scythopolis).

place of baths, the city Livias is Beyond the Jordan 12 miles from Jericho, in this Livias Moses struck the rock with his rod, and the waters flowed out. Thence, emerges a rather large stream which irrigates the whole Livias and there are the warm waters where Moses bathed and in these warm waters lepers are cleansed.

The Chronicon paschale (631- 41AD) makes Abraham cross the Jordan after conquering the kings of the east at Damascus (Gen.14: 15). Melchisedech greeted him there, for God had called him on account of his holiness “into the land beyond Jordan, to the town Salem, which I saw” ( PG XCII 177 )The “land beyond Jordan”, means the west bank, because Abraham was coming from the east ( Jakoby: Madabakarte 91 erroneously, therefore, makes the expression apply to the east bank.

Egeria Separates Salem from the springs by a mere two hundred paces. At the top of the hill she found a church, at the foot of the hill she saw the ruins of Melchisedech’s Palace, and in the plain, the village of Sedima (Salem) (Wilkinson, 1999: 127), but these indications are not sufficient to draw a clear picture of John’s activities in er-Ridra near Ain ed-Deir. Atheria’s indication of distance did not agree. (Holscher, 1910: 24).

Later Albright investigated the hill near Salem and reached the following, the absence concluded of Roman Pottery proves that it is wrong to identify Tell er- Ridra with Salumias of Eusebius or the Salem of John’s (Albright 1895: 509 )

Albright suggest Umm el- Amdan to the south- east of Ain ed- Deir. Larange later found some ruins with marble pillar, but also no sufficient evidences in this site.

Turning again to the eastern side of Jordan River where two seasons of survey and excavations conducted between 2002-2011 and more recent analysis of the excavated materials have shown architectural remains in several locations in Ain Salem area just 6km east of the traditional Baptism site of Jordan River in Jordan Valley. The Discovered remains dated earlier to 900 B.C-7<sup>th</sup> A. D. It had close links with the major site of Jesus Baptism near Wadi al Kharrar.<sup>1</sup>

Nowdays the most visible site in this area east of Jordan River is Tell Ain Salem which stands immediately south of lower part of Wadi Hesban, close to the highway on the stretch of land leading westward to the Dead Sea shoreline. At the point where Wadi Hesban enters the floor of the valley, the area was been a military zone till 2002, after signing peace treaty the area subjected to extensive survey and excavation.

Excavations were concentrated in the Tell (site No.4) and the watchtowers Nos. 7,10, and 11. The results reveals the presence of Iron Age II period remains ,a large settlement appeared and reused during the Roman and Byzantine Periods, these discovered buildings were located between Ain Salem and Ain Salem al-Fawara just on the northern edge of Roman Esbus -Jericho Road.

The Iron Age remains occupies the acropolis area of the Tell which consist of square and rectangular shape rooms, built of undressed limestone blocks, while the Roman and Byzantine remains occupied an area approximately 4 acre (village site), several water channels were found in the surrounding plains which drains the water of the springs to several gardens ,agricultural fields ,and locations here and there near the Roman Road, in addition to that architectural remains occupied the flat area on the eastern and northern slopes of the Tell between the above mentioned two springs.

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<sup>1</sup> The excavations conducted by Department of Antiquities of Jordan and headed by the author of this article. The survey covered the spring of Ain Salem and the surrounding area, approximately 6 square km, which includes the lower parts of Wadi Hesban and Esbus-Jericho Roman Road and Livias plains (recently Rama, Towns and kafrein).

Depending on the recovered artifacts and way of construction, the channels and water installations are dated back to early Roman Period and continued to be used up to late Byzantine era.

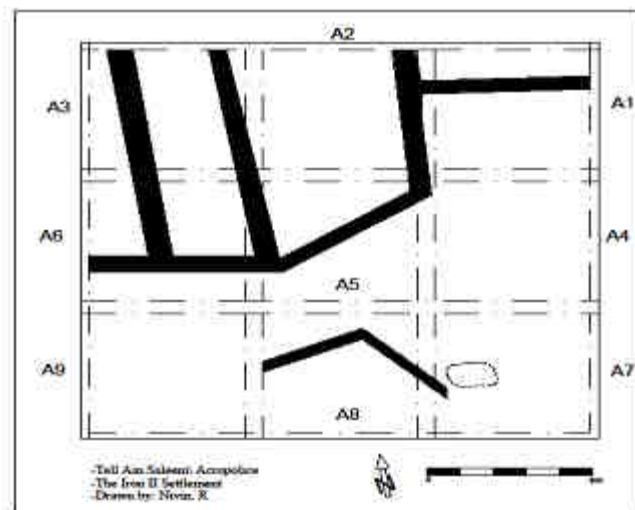


Fig 3: Top plan of excavation results at Tell Ain Salem. (Abu-Shawish , 2016)

The excavations in the adjacent sites of 7, 10, 11 (see figure 3, 5, and 7 ) yield quantities of Roman Period pottery sherds mixed with strong late Byzantine sherds. The discovered small sites located on both alignment of the rout were served as a watchtowers to control the Roman Road and safeguard the pilgrims caravan, and has close connection with Tell Salem which might be used as a pilgrims station during the Byzantine periods, in addition to that we should take into consideration the well-known site Mahatat Al Hujaj (Pilgrims Station) which is still existed till nowadays situated on the top of high mountain close to Mount Nebo and Moses springs just 3km to the east of this location.

The question arise here after assessing the recent discoveries , dose the place of Ain Salem and the nearby Livias plain fulfill the requirements of John 3:23 and of tradition.

The whole area included the Tell which is overlooking Livias plain is well watered and the description of Antonious bring us in fact to springs lying some 6-7km east of site of Jesus Baptism(Bethany Beyond the Jordan ).

Two major Wadies runs in this area are, Wadi Hesban, and Wadi Kafrein both represent the northern extension of Ain Salem, while Wadi Ayoun Moses (Moses Springs) runs to the south, in between dozens of springs still active providing fresh water till nowadays such as Ain Salem, Ain Salem al-Fawara, Ain Um Jrees, Ain Arus, Ain Sara, ... etc. Remains of several Roman water channels still visible on the surface extended for hundred meters in different directions as mentioned before, in order to collect the coming water from the active springs in a different shapes pools designed for this purpose to serve the people or pilgrims during Byzantine period.

All these springs gushes out from a thicket of palm, tamarisk and fig trees...etc which reflects a unique beautiful environment surrounding Ain Salem.fig:4

According to Kopp (Aenon near to Salem as a second place of baptism may have taken place not far from the old place of baptism on the east bank of Jordan River ) (Kopp 1963:141)

Salem now disappears from the pages of history, after the Muslims conquest no more pilgrims visited Aenon ( Ain Salem ). This Aenon may have been the center of the Baptist's community for some time<sup>1</sup>. After John had been executed they must have lived in fear of

<sup>1</sup> This is assumed by K. Kundsinn: Topologiest Uberlieferungsstoffe im Johannesevangelium, (Gottingen, 1925: 26).



being apprehended by Herod Antipas or the Jewish authorities in the region of Jordan Valley in Bethany Beyond the Jordan and the western side of Jordan River. In Aenon near to Salem on the eastern side of Jordan River they were safe and could carry on their tradition. And we may assume that John 3:23, with its “Aenon near the Salem”, is pointed to some local tradition, which even then claimed Melchisedech as its own.



Fig 4: Ain salem spring empties in a natural pond (Waheeb, 2016)

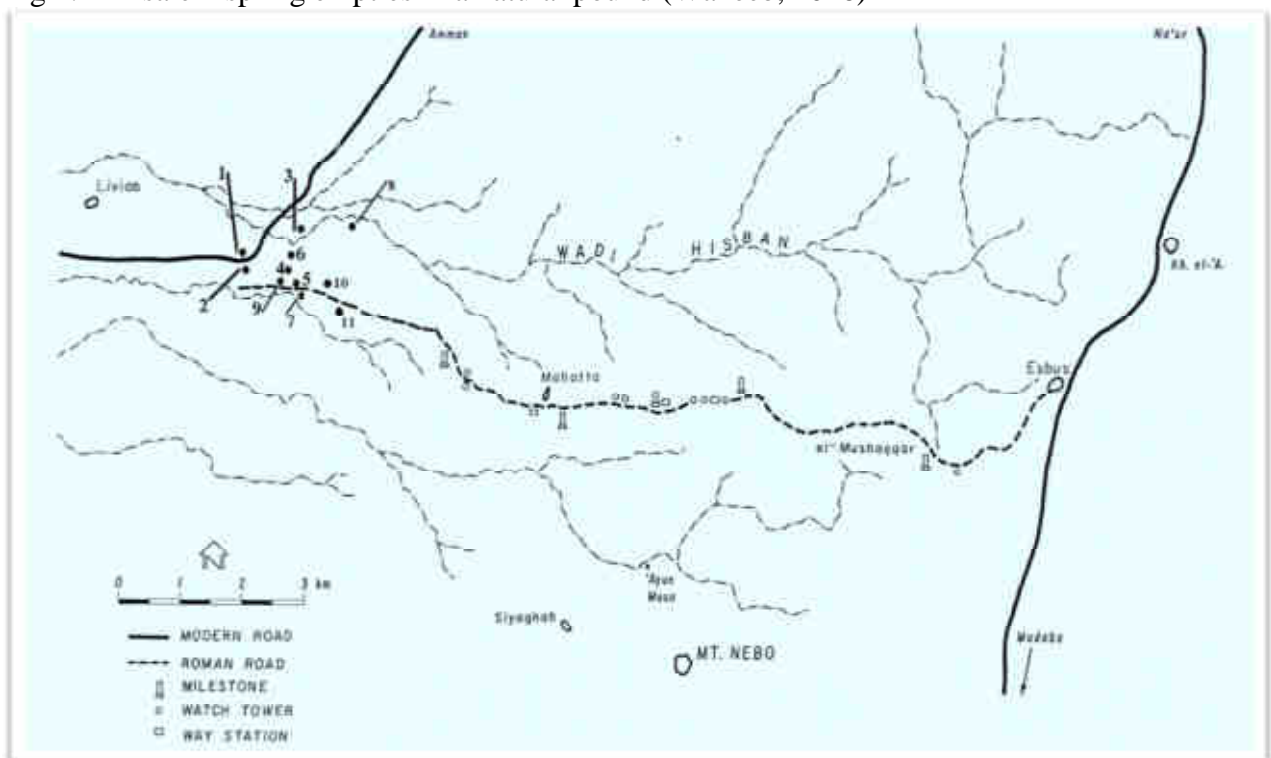


Fig 5: A map showing Ain Salem and the surrounding zone (1.Tell Iktano, 2. Tell EL-Husan, 3.Dolmen field, 4.Tell Ain Salem, 5.Ain Salem, 6.Ain Salem Fawara, 7.Watch Tower, 8.Walls and Canals, 9.Caves, 10. Watch Tower, 11. Watch tower5



Fig 6: Amilestone near Jericho- Esbus road close to Aenon near to Salem (Waheeb, 2014)



Fig 7: Systematic Excavations in Tell Ain Salem (Waheeb, 2002)

### **Jesus Cave in Tyrue**

Iraq el-emir is located on a nearly direct line between Jerusalem and Amman – Jordan – 17 km ( 10.5 mi ) west of Amman ( map reference 221.147 ) the site (Khirbet Iraq al-Amir ) includes a partly inhabited mound on which of the architectural fragments of the ancient site

are being reused. Situated on the heights above the west bank of Wadi Es-Sir , it commands a view of the spectacular plunge of that valley southward into the wadi kafrein; two hundred meters northwest of the mound are cliffs with natural and hewn caves. Down a fairly steep slope, some 500 m southwest of the mound, is the megalithic Qasr el-abd (fortress of the servant) with retaining walls and gates. Between the Qasr and the cliffs lies the square building, near which, in antiquity, the area was irrigated by a canal. The canal can be traced northward to the base of the cliffs and toward a source beyond the source ensures a year – long flow of water through the site.

Iraq el-emir is probably to be identified with the birtha (stronghold ) of the ammonites in the land of Tobiah mentioned in the Zenon Papyri ( Pedgar 59003 – 59004 ). It is certainly the Tyrue fortress build by the Tobiad Hyrcanus in the early second century BCE ( Josephus, antiq. 12 , 230 – 233 ) only Iraq el-emir has both a geographically satisfactory position and evidence an Iron Age II occupation. The two " Tobiah " inscriptions on the facades of the two large halls carved in the cliffs and the name fortress of the servant ( Abvious reference to " Tobiah the servant , the Ammonite " mentioned it Neh , 2:10 ) stamp the site as a Tobiad center. The family and land of Tobia have been traced in biblical and other sources to the eighth century BCE however, the archaeological evidence available so far indicates that there was no substantial occupation at the site between the seventh century until about 200 BCE.

This situation was probably best explained by considering the site as the country estate from which the land of Tobiah was administered birtha perhaps consisted of a manor at or near the mound, with the nearby caves offering a defensive stronghold. a few coins and sherds from the early northeastern corner of the qasr el-abd .

Third century BCE may be associated with the estate, it seems obvious, however , that Iraq el-emir had been the center of the Tobiad dominions since the eighth century BCE .

Josephus description of the building of Tyrue may be of construction on a previously unimportant site. There are so many links between Josephus description of Hyrcanus Tyrue and Iraq el-emir that the identification has never been seriously contested.

The name Tyrue itself is still preserved in the name wadi es-si. the qaser el-abd can hardly be dissociated from the " strong fortress " Hyrcanus " constructed entirely of white marble up to the very roof , and had beasts of gigantic size carved on it , and he enclosed it with a wide and deep moat " ( Josephus . antiq . 12, 230).

The major discovery in Iraq al-Amir is the unique cave not far away from the Khirbeh site, located near Al-Basa Village, said to date from the 1st century, was unearthed under a 4th-century Byzantine church just east of the Jordan River at Wadi Iraq Al Amir, on the way from Amman to Wady Seir and Jordan Valley .fig:8.

The team discovered a church inside the cave and another one built directly in front of the cave doorway. There is pottery and coins and a lot of datable material dating back to the Roman Byzantine and Islamic period ( Safar, 1974)



Whether or not the cave was the precise site, there can be no doubt the archaeologists have the sounder claim, and now after these excavations the site becomes a focal point west of Amman.



Fig8: The main entrance of the cave after excavations (Safar, 1974)

16 years ago, I gazed out at the green hills east of the Jordan River here in Iraq Al Amir and spotted the footsteps of Jesus where others saw only the Hellenistic white palace of Iraq Al Ameer called Qaser Al-abed.

Using the gospels as our guidebook, I began field survey and digging in what until 2017 had been a famous fruitful gardens of figs grape and promognancy trees as well as running sweet water . What was found here in this resort area moonscape, as we expected is the likely the lost site of Jesus's Cave .

This area's ruins of early Christian monasteries, churches, prayer halls, pools that may have been used for monastic and probably baptism and-most improbable-a network of still-active springs flowing into the Wadi Seir area, , "Jesus Cave "the spot pinpointed by the Gospel According to John for Jesus's cave in Perea .

This is a holy place, according to biblical references ,pilgrims' description, and recent archaeological discoveries .

Scholars say the answers to many questions, including where Jesus was live or hide, are possible to know for sure. Archaeology in the Holy Land is obscured by centuries of



earthquakes, conquests and competing myths and traditions. Yet no recent site or controversy has excited more attention and attracted more investment-than that of Jesus's cave.

The archaeologists is convinced that Jesus was far more likely to have been lived in a Cave close to fresh spring water in addition to the Jordan, which these days is a murky, pea-green stream. Some biblical historians agree that the river may not have been considered sufficiently pure at that time.

Biblical scholars, including some in Arab World, are not dismissing the teams arguments out of hand.

The Book of John specifically says that Jesus was lived in a cave baptized east of the Jordan," "We have a very plausible claim that during the Byzantine era that site was.

### **Discussion:**

Christian traditions also had to accommodate the where about of a place of refuge for John, Jesus and believers, while hiding from Herod's soldiers, as well as taking on board the nation that in the heart of these sites there was a wilderness in which John grew up (Luke 1:80).

Hence the three places were tied in strong relations in geographically and spirituality. It would appear, however that in the Byzantine period there was official adoption of these sites as places of worship and associated with prophets Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Elijah, John and Jesus.

Numerous holy structures were discovered in these places in the past years such as monasteries, churches, caves, water installations and roads.

In addition to these centers of worship on the eastern bank of Jordan river there were a number of secondary cult places surrounding these places, but some did not have had churches or chapels attached to them due to severe damage caused in locality, for example at Aenon near to Saleim mosaic tesserae were scattered all over the bulldozed site as a result of military activities and movements, but other churches were recently discovered close to the site. These places also associated with monks as a hermitage site in Bethany several caves were documented (Waheeb :2000) in Ain Saleem caves were investigated on the northern cliffs of Wadi Hesban and also near the spring (Ain Tarabeel) in Wadi Seir a lot of hermitage sites were recently documented along Wadi Iraq al\_Amir close to the cave. Judging by the representation of the cave on Madaba Mosaic Map, the discovered cave consisted of a hewn rocky cave with steps and crosses engraved on the external facade with two churches one inside the cave & the other one built in front of the cave entrance.

The discovery of Roman, Byzantine remains at Tyre cave confirms what the gospel show, this cave and the surrounding zone down to the Baptism site was an integral part of the history of Christianity. The cave and the nearby hermitage sites from all directions, the discovered churches and its related outpost down the western valley toward Kafrein, Rama & Ain Saleem played a vital role in the events recorded. What supports our idea is that the area of Tyre was at a point near the Esbus- Jericho road and not far away from Jordan River to which old roads came down.

Both the circumstances of John's and Jesus' work and the recent archaeological discoveries emphasize that most of their activities were on the eastern side of Jordan River in Perea as well in (John 1:28, 10: 40) here is clear reference to John's and Jesus' work where it is stated that he was lived beyond the Jordan. The unique and rather exciting ecology of the cave may here play a role in giving it a spiritual dimension in Roman- Byzantine periods.

Jesus began His journey, which was to end in Jerusalem. The expression "into the coasts of Judaea beyond the Jordan" means the region beyond Judea to the east of the Jordan River. By taking this route, Christ avoided Samaria, where He had ministered before and passed through territory that was new to His public ministry. As He went, others joined crowds following Him from Galilee.

The fourth gospel says that after the visit to Jerusalem at the feast of Dedication Jesus withdrew beyond Jordan to the place where John at the first was baptizing (John10:40). Matthew and Mark also say that at the close of the ministry of Galilee Jesus departed and came into the borders of Judea and beyond Jordan and that in this new region the multitudes again flocked to him, and he resumed his ministry of teaching (Matt. xix.1f.; Mark x.1). What he did and taught at this time is not shown at all by John, and only in scant fashion by the other two. They tell of a discussion with the Pharisees concerning divorce (Mark 10.2-12); of the welcome extended by Jesus to certain little children (Mark 10.13-16); of the disappointment of a rich young ruler, who wished to learn from Jesus the way of life, but loved better his great possessions (Mark 10.17-31); of a further manifestation of the unlovely spirit of rivalry among the disciples in the request of James and John for the best places in the kingdom (Mark 10.35-45), a request following in the records directly after another prediction by Jesus of his death and resurrection (Mark 10.32-34). Then, after a visit to Jericho (Luke 18.35 to 19.28), these records come into coincidence with John in the account of the Messianic entry into Jerusalem just before the last Passover .

According to John:1: 35-40(( The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!. The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon)) Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.

In ( John1 :41) The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Cephas).

In brief, while John was in Bethany beyond the Jordan, there had been sent to him from Jerusalem a delegation from the leaders of the nation to ask whether he was the Messiah, Elijah, the promised Prophet. It was there that John presented Jesus as the Lamb of God, to the crowd and to his disciples, two of whom became disciples of Jesus. One of them was Andrew, as specifically indicated by the evangelist, who presents his brother Simon to Jesus who in turn receives Simon giving him the nickname Cephas, Rock (John: 1). .here we find the archaeologist Paul Lapp who excavated in Iraq Al-Amir refers to a distinguished rock located within Iraq Al Amir caves , saying that this rock represents Jesus (Lapp1989)

Also, a reference in the gospel of (John : 6 ) saying that Jesus went to a mountain with his disciples ( After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near ).

NT commentators speak of Christ's Perea ministry. It began with His departure from Galilee (Matt 19:1; Mark 10:1) and ended with the anointing by Mary in Bethany east Jerusalem. Very few of the incidents recorded for that period of our Lord's ministry actually

took place beyond the Jordan, so the designation "Perean ministry" is somewhat of a misnomer.

The Bethany of John 1:28 where Jesus was baptized is described as "beyond the Jordan." Jesus certainly passed through Perea on his many journeys from Nazareth to Jerusalem in the years before His public ministry. According to Gospels Christ. Movements in Perea was mentioned in ( Matthew 4:25 and Mark 3:8) crowds came from Perea to be healed by Christ.

John was tied to several places beyond the river , such as Aenon Near to saleem near wadi Hesban , Livias , and Wadi Shetta in Tyroe , so he could wonder up and down the lonely Jordan valley and nearby tributaries like a local inhabitant. At these areas , wadies , springs , caves and small towns he found an audience and away down the steep banks and slopes to the water's edge. The water of wadi Hesban and wadi es – Seir did not flow so fast and deep in these places as to make immersion impracticable He may have lived from time to time with his disciples in caves near the water sources , Jesus too , may have hurriedly lived in one of these caves, winter, rain and floods often make passage across the softy marl bottom impossibl .

John like Jesus moved from place to another where there was running water , either in wadi es-seir (Tyroe) to Kafrein or to Hesban ( Aenon Near to Saleem ) but where preaching and Baptism would not have to be abandoned during winter and bad weather . Here in Tyroe the skies are blue and the ground is green while the water running smoothly, this may took him up to the slope where the crowds of Philadelphia and other nearby towns had gathered for him and for Jesus.

In this place john and Jesus was beyond the river in Bethany in Perea and in Aenon near to saleem and in Tyroe, territory under Herod Antipas rule, in these places they were beyond the Jurisdiction of Sanhedrin.

Their movements from Bethany to new places nearer to new towns and villages considered as increasing threats by Antipas the ruler of the country.

In view of their challenge of the ruler john at least departed from Bethany in Perea. They did not go to Judaea, but to the east where is abundant of water.

Therefore, John and Jesus are able to continue their Baptismal Activity, with their disciples, away from the river and the Pharisees and Sanhedrin in the west bank who are watching him suspiciously.

Tyroe in Perea was under Antipas rule who at this time was becoming a menace to John and Jesus. We must then conjecture that their living in this area almost in cave in Tyroe.

This name Tyroe is derived from strong or fortified place, a major fortified sites Known Khribet Sur and series of caves was discovered here west of Tyroe cave.

Jesus lived in Perea for unknown period, and used to baptize and (all men come to him) (John 3:25).

The two groups, John's disciples and Jesus disciples indicates the spread of Christianity in Perea and implies proximity.

The distance between Tyroe, Aenon and Bethany are not great enough to minder direct and indirect contact between the two groups of disciples.

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