

THE HISTORY OF HESHBON FROM LITERARY SOURCES *

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Heshbon (modern *Hesbân*) is located in Transjordan, about 20 miles east of the Jordan where it enters the Dead Sea. The remains of the old city are covered now by two hills, 2,930 and 2,954 feet above sea level respectively. ¹ According to the latest available statistics (from 1961), the village of *Hesbân* has 718 inhabitants. ²

Heshbon in OT Times

Heshbon appears for the first time in the Biblical record as the capital city of Sihon, the Amorite king defeated by Moses. ³ However, the region in which Heshbon was located is mentioned much earlier in the Bible. In Gn 14:5, Chedorlaomer and his confederates appear as smiting successively the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, ⁴ the Zuzim in Ham, ⁵ and the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim (*i.e.*, the plain of Kiriathaim). Kiriathaim has been identified with *el-Qereiyât*, about five miles northwest of *Dhibân*. ⁶ It appears together with Heshbon in Num 32:37 among the cities rebuilt by the

* This article is a condensation of a B.D. thesis covering the same subject, deposited in the James White Library of Andrews University.

¹ "Heshbon," *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, eds. T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black, II (London, 1901), col. 2044.

² Awni Dajani, director of the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Letter to the author, December 12, 1966.

³ Num 21:21 ff.

⁴ Siegfried H. Horn *et al.*, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington, D. C., 1960), p. 84.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 628.

tribe of Reuben.⁷ The Emim, who in an earlier time had lived in that region, belonged to the people known in the OT by the general name of **רַפְּאִים**. At the time of the Exodus, the Moabites, who had occupied part of their territory, called them **אֲמִים**,⁸ while the Ammonites called them **אֲמֹנִים**.⁹

In the fortieth year after the Exodus,¹⁰ Israel was about to cross the River Arnon. At that time the land north of the Arnon was ruled by Sihon, king of the Amorites, whose capital city was Heshbon.¹¹ Num 21:26-30 indicates that Sihon had only recently expelled the Moabites from Heshbon and driven them to the south of the Arnon River. It is not known how long the region had belonged to Moab before Sihon conquered it, but it is evident that the Moabites had been well established there because even after the defeat of Sihon by Moses it is said, (a) that the plain on the eastern side of the Jordan River, across from Jericho, was called "plains of Moab";¹² (b) that Balak's and Balaam's intervention took place in Sihon's former territory;¹³ (c) that "the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab"¹⁴ in the plains of Moab, across from Jericho; and (d) that Moses died and was buried "in the land of Moab."¹⁵

Sihon was the first king in Transjordan defeated by Moses.¹⁶ His territory was given to the tribes of Reuben and Gad,¹⁷ but the city of Heshbon was allotted to Reuben.¹⁸ However, it seems that the borders between the territories of Reuben

⁷ Cf. also Jos 13:15-19.

⁸ Dt 2:10, 11.

⁹ Dt 2:20, 21.

¹⁰ Cf. Num 20:23-29; 33:38.

¹¹ Num 21:26.

¹² Num 22:1; 31:12; 33:48; 36:13.

¹³ Num 22-24.

¹⁴ Num 25:1.

¹⁵ Dt 34:5, 6.

¹⁶ Num 21:21-26, 34; Dt 1:3, 4; 2:24; 3:2, 6; 29:7; Jos 9:10; 12:2, 5; 13:10, 21, 27; Neh 9:22; etc.

¹⁷ Num 32; Jos 13:15-28.

¹⁸ Jos 13:15, 17.

and Gad were not well defined.¹⁹ Reuben's territory is said to have reached as far south as the Arnon, and from the desert and the Ammonite border in the east, to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea in the west.²⁰

Num 32:37 states that "the children of Reuben built Heshbon, and Elealeh...and gave other names unto the cities which they builded." But against this statement is that of Num 32:34-36 which says that among the cities built by "the children of Gad" were Ataroth and Dibon, which were located in the southern half of the territory otherwise attributed to Reuben,²¹ and according to Jos 21:38, 39 Heshbon itself is said to have belonged to Gad.²²

¹⁹ Jos 13:26.

²⁰ F. M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine* (Paris, 1938), II, 69.

²¹ Even Mesha, king of Moab, in the "Moabite Stone," claims that the "men of Gad had long dwelt in the land of Ataroth" (line 10).

²² Cf. I Chr 6:81. F. de Saulcy, *Voyage en Terre Sainte* (Paris, 1865), I, 287, mistakenly contends that the name Gad, in Jos 21:38, 39, applies only to Ramoth of Gilead and Mahanaim. The fact that Heshbon appears in Num 32:37 and Jos 13:17 in the territory of Reuben, and then in Jos 21:39 in the territory of Gad, has been variously explained by commentators: C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch state simply that the Reubenites "relinquished" or "ceded" Heshbon to the Gadites (*The Pentateuch*, III, 238; *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 140). A. G. Butzer, commenting on Num 32:34-38, remarks that the "towns ascribed to Reuben seem to form a group inside the Gadite territory" (*The Interpreters Bible*, II, 293). J. R. Sizoo considers that the assigning of Heshbon to Gad in Jos 21:39 "reflects the fact that Reuben, like Simeon, early lost separate tribal identity and began to be absorbed into Gad" (*ibid.*, p. 654). G. B. Gray makes the obvious observation that "there is little to control the biblical data on these matters" (*The International Critical Commentary on Numbers*, p. 433). He also points out that the situation of Heshbon is reversed in the case of Dibon, which appears under Gad in Num 32:34 and under Reuben in Jos 13:17. He sees in Num 32, following the documentary theory, sources J, E and P, but admits that "a strict analysis of the chapter as between JE and P cannot be satisfactorily carried through" (*ibid.*, p. 426). Jos 13:15-38 is attributed to P (*ibid.*, p. 433). O. Eissfeldt coincides with Gray in attributing Num 32 to J, E and P. He sees the P source in Jos 13:15-33 and also in Jos 21 (*The Old Testament* [Oxford, 1965], pp. 189, 200, 201, 251). R. H. Pfeiffer goes a little farther when he states that Jos 13:15-33 "has really no place in Joshua." It belongs before Num 34:13-15 "together with the parallel JE account in ch. 32, containing

Later on, the territory of Gad was further expanded to the north and to the south.²³

During the early period of the judges, Eglon, king of Moab, allied with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, "sent and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees."²⁴ If he was in possession of Jericho on the west bank, it is safe to assume that Heshbon and its surrounding country were also occupied by him. When Ehud killed Eglon, the residence of the Moabite king seems to have been "not far across the Jordan from Gilgal." The result of Eglon's victory over the Moabites must have been the reoccupation of Heshbon and the surrounding country. Otherwise Jephthah's statement, made at a later time, that "Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns . . . three hundred years"²⁵ would not be very meaningful.

Then the situation changed. The Ammonites occupied this area. The judge Jephthah, called by the distressed Israelites, tried to negotiate a peaceful settlement with "the king of the children of Ammon"²⁶ about the territory which had been taken from Israel. Since (a) Chemosh, the national god

P interpolations" (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [New York, 1941], p. 308). Then he adds that Jos 21:1-43 is really an appendix to source P written by a Levite of the 3rd century B.C. as a protest "against the ancient practice (officially sanctioned by P in Num. 18:20 f., 24) depriving priests and Levites of territorial possessions. He assigned on paper thirteen cities to the priests and thirty-five to the Levites . . . as a fitting supplement to P's provision for asylum cities in Josh. 20" (*ibid.*, pp. 308, 309). J. Simons believes that the lists of cities in Num 32:34-38 "point to a stage, in which the respective territories of these tribes were not sharply marked off from each other . . . though Gad is credited preponderantly with northern and Reuben exclusively with southern places" (*The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* [Leiden, 1959], p. 132). Later the division became sharper. "In this case Nu. xxxii 34-38 would reflect a situation in Transjordan somewhat similar to that suggested by Judg. i for the other side of the river" (*ibid.*, p. 133).

²³ 1 Chr 5:11, 16.

²⁴ Jugs 3:13.

²⁵ Jugs 11:26.

²⁶ Jugs 11:13 ff.

of the Moabites, is mentioned as "thy god,"²⁷ (*i.e.*, the god of the king of the Ammonites), and (b) the disputed territory extended, according to the Ammonite king, "from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan,"²⁸ it can be assumed that the Ammonites and Moabites were united, or that the latter were subjects of the former at this time.²⁹

In the war that followed, the Ammonites were defeated. Although the places mentioned in Jugs 11:33 cannot be located with certainty, it is probable that Heshbon was liberated. Minnith, mentioned here, is thought to have been in the neighborhood of Heshbon,³⁰ and "the plain of the vineyards" (or, Abel-keramin) has been identified with two possible sites, both lying close to modern 'Ammân.³¹

During the time of the United Kingdom, Saul fought successful wars against the Moabites and the Ammonites.³² But during his reign the border between Moab and Israel seems to have been rather ill defined, and it is thought that Heshbon lay in the disputed territory.³³ Also David "smote Moab" and subdued it. It seems that he pushed the southern border of Israel just as far as the Arnon, as can be concluded from a report dealing with the census which says that the census takers started their work at that river and from there proceeded to the north.³⁴ It is of interest to note that the Arnon is mentioned in our text as "the river of Gad." In Canticles, said to come from Solomon, "the fishpools of Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim" (7:4) are mentioned. Heshbon appears here as a city with some splendor. It was located in the last district in the list of twelve provinces that "pro-

²⁷ Jugs 11:24.

²⁸ Jugs 11:13.

²⁹ Jugs 11:15; cf. v. 13, and also v. 33.

³⁰ G. M. Landes in *The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*, IV, 393.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, 5.

³² 1 Sa 14:47.

³³ Emil Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas* (Chicago, 1956), p. 237.

³⁴ 2 Sa 8:2, 11, 12; 1 Chr 18:2; 2 Sa 24:5 (cf. Jos 13:16); Abel *op. cit.*, II, 77; Simons, *op. cit.*, pp. 116, 117, n. 78.

vided victuals for the king and his household" during Solomon's reign.³⁵

After the breakup of the united kingdom Heshbon belonged to the northern kingdom of Israel. How it later reverted to Moab is unknown, but it is certain that it belonged to Moab from the latter part of the 8th century, at least, until the reign of Ashurbanipal.³⁶

Isaiah's prophecy against Moab in chapters 15 and 16 was delivered undoubtedly during the early period of the Moabite domination of this region. Together with Heshbon,³⁷ other important cities north of the Arnon are attributed to Moab: Dibon, Medeba, Elealeh, etc. Heshbon appears here as an agricultural center which had formerly been rather prosperous. Mention is made of its "fields," "summer fruits," and "harvest." Sibmah, from which a fine wine came, was connected with it.³⁸

When Nebuchadnezzar campaigned in Palestine for the first time (605 B.C.), the Moabites apparently paid him tribute, and they continued to be friendly to him for several years. They appear sometimes between 602 and 598 B.C., together with the Chaldeans, Syrians and Ammonites, harassing Jehoiakim, who was in rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.³⁹ It seems certain that the Moabites were pro-Babylonian at that time. But the situation was going to change, as can be learned from Jeremiah's prophecy against Moab (Jer 48), which can tentatively be dated between 605 and 594. Here a number of Moabite cities are listed that were going to fall under the scourge of the Babylonians. Of the 21 places named that can be identified with reasonable certainty, all but four

³⁵ 1 Ki 4:7-19.

³⁶ Assyrian royal inscriptions and Jer 48 testify to the fact that in the second half of the 7th century Moab still possessed the region north of the Arnon (A. H. Van Zyl, *The Moabites* [Leiden, 1960], p. 154).

³⁷ Is 15:4; 16:8, 9.

³⁸ E. D. Grohman, *The Interpreter's Bible Dictionary*, IV, 342, 343.

³⁹ 2 Ki 24:1, 2.

were found north of the Arnon. Heshbon occupies a prominent place in this prophecy. ⁴⁰

But in Jer 49:3 Heshbon appears as an Ammonite city. This prophecy was written probably shortly after Jer 48, indicating that Heshbon had changed hands. How and when this happened remains uncertain. Eze 25:9, 10, which can probably be dated *ca.* 588 B.C., refers to an invasion of Moab by "men of the east" with the Ammonites. ⁴¹ This invasion may have been the beginning of Ammonite control of Heshbon.

From this time on, the information about Heshbon and the surrounding country becomes very fragmentary and is for some periods non-existent. The only Biblical mention of Heshbon after Jeremiah's time is found in Neh 9:22, where only a historical allusion to its conquest under Moses is made.

Esbus ⁴² in Hellenistic and Maccabean Times

After 301 B.C. Syria and Palestine were firmly in the hands of the Ptolemies. During this period the establishment of Greek colonies found a favorable soil east of the Jordan. The Zenon papyri ⁴³ of the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246) give a prominent place to the Tobiads, particularly to one Tobiah who appears as an autonomous ruler of his land, which

⁴⁰ Jer 48:2, 34, 45.

⁴¹ Simons, *op. cit.*, p. 454. Cf. Abel, *op. cit.*, II, 123.

⁴² The name of the city of Heshbon was variously spelled from Hellenistic times through the Byzantine period. To avoid confusion, only one spelling will be used in this paper for this period: *Esbus*. Different MSS of the LXX, dating from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, contain at least ten variant spellings. See A. Brooke and N. McLean, eds., *The Old Testament in Greek* (London, 1906-1935); H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge, 1902), pp. 148-154. The Vulgate presents the spelling *Esebon*, although different Vulgate MSS provide at least 18 variant spellings from the seventh to the twelfth centuries. See *Biblia Sacra, Iuxta Latinam Vulgatam Versionem*, A. Gasquet, ed. (Rome, 1926-1953), 10 vols. *Esbus* is one of the spellings given by Eusebius, as transliterated by Jerome in his Latin translation of the *Onomastikon*.

⁴³ B. Mazar, "The Tobiads," *IEJ*, VII (1957), 139 (P. Zenon 59003, 59005, 59075, 59076.)

in another document is called ἐν τῇ Τουβίου,⁴⁴ that is, the land of Tobiah. A contract was written in 259 B.C. in Βίρτα τῆς Ἀμμωνίτιδος,⁴⁵ "Birta of the Ammonitis." This is undoubtedly the Τύρος (Aram. *Bîrthâ*), the stronghold of the Tobiads, mentioned by Josephus.⁴⁶ He says that in the second century B.C. this Tyre of the Tobiads was located "between Arabia and Judea, beyond Jordan, not far from the country of Heshbon."⁴⁷ Here Esbus appears to be the center of a district, but a little later Josephus lists it among the cities of the Moabitis.⁴⁸ Since Esbus is the first city mentioned as part of the Moabitis, it is possible that it was the capital. Sometimes its name was applied to the whole district. The Moabitis and the Gabalitis (or Gamalitis), both districts lying south of the Ammonitis, were areas of dispute between the Ptolemies and the Nabateans.⁴⁹

I Macc 5:25, 26, 36 indicates that Transjordan had a strong Jewish population in the middle of the 2nd century B.C. This may have been the chief reason why the Maccabeans extended their territory in that direction. First Peraea was annexed by Jonathan *ca.* 147 B.C.⁵⁰ Later, John Hyrcanus captured the cities of Madeba and Samaga (129 B.C.).⁵¹ It is surprising that Esbus is not mentioned in this connection, but it must have become a possession of John Hyrcanus at that time, because it is listed among the cities of Moab that were in Jewish hands during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76/75 B.C.), although its name does not appear among the cities captured by Jannaeus.⁵²

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140 (P. Lond. Inv. 2358).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, (P. Zenon 59003).

⁴⁶ Flavius Josephus, *Ant.*, xii 4.11.

⁴⁷ Ἐσσεβωνίτις. He also uses Ἐσσεβωνίτις (*Wars*, ii.18.1; iii.3.3) and Ἐσσεβών (*Ant.*, xii.15.4).

⁴⁸ Josephus, *Ant.*, xiii. 15.4.

⁴⁹ Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1966), p. 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵¹ Josephus, *Ant.*, xiii.9.1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xiii.15.5. See also Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

Esbus in Roman and Byzantine Times

Nothing is known of the status of Esbus during the time between the reign of Aristobulus II (67-63 B.C.) and the accession of Herod the Great (37 B.C.). It may have been in the hands of the Nabateans during this period. However, it certainly belonged to Herod, because Josephus mentions it among several fortresses and fortified cities which Herod built to strengthen his kingdom. The text says that Ἐσεβίων was "built in Perea."⁵³ It is not clear what the exact meaning of "built" is in this context. It may simply mean that Herod fortified the city.⁵⁴ He is said to have populated it with veterans, probably to protect his border with the Nabateans, and to have made it part of Peraea, although it seems to have enjoyed a semi-autonomous status, due to its military importance.⁵⁵

After Herod's death, his son Antipas (4 B.C.-A.D. 39) with the title of tetrarch ruled over Galilee and Peraea. But Esbus apparently did not belong to his territory since Ἐσεβίων appears later on, according to Josephus, to the east of Peraea, together with Arabia, Philadelphia and Gerasa.⁵⁶ It was a district, distinct from Peraea and also from Arabia, although it may have been subject to the Arabians (Nabateans).⁵⁷

At the beginning of the Jewish war (A.D. 66) the Jews sacked Esbus.⁵⁸ Perhaps more than the city of Esbus is meant here, because the name appears as Ἐσεβίων which

⁵³ Josephus, *Ant.*, xv.8.5.

⁵⁴ Emil Schürer thinks that Herod rebuilt "Esbon in Perea." *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York, [n. d.]), First Div. vol. I, pp. 436, 437. The key word in the Greek is συνέκτισεν, clearly derived from κτίζω, which can mean: "to build houses and cities," "to found a city," "to build up a country."

⁵⁵ See Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, p. 99; cf. also p. 94.

⁵⁶ Josephus, *Wars*, iii.3.3. On "the south it is bounded by the land of Moab, on the east by Arabia, Heshbonitis, Philadelphia, and Gerasa." Cf. *Ant.*, xv.8.5, where under Herod the Great, Esbus is part of Peraea.

⁵⁷ Schürer, *op. cit.*, Second Div., vol. I, pp. 129, 130.

⁵⁸ Josephus, *Wars*, ii.18.1.

gives the impression that the district of Esbus is referred to.

In A.D. 105 the legate of Syria, under orders from the Emperor Trajan, occupied Nabataea, and a year later the Nabatean kingdom became a Roman province named "Arabia," which was administered by a praetorian legate.⁵⁹ The capital was Petra, and the *Legio III Cyrenaica* was stationed as garrison at Bozrah.⁶⁰ In Ptolemy's *Geography*,⁶¹ which reflects the political conditions of ca. 130-ca. 160, Ἐσβοῦς appears as part of Arabia Petraea, of which the exact location is described as being $68 \frac{1}{2} \frac{1}{3}$ degrees longitude and 31 degrees latitude. It can be assumed that Esbus formed part of the Roman province Arabia Petraea from its creation in A.D. 106.

Around 129-130,⁶² in preparation for the visit of the Emperor Hadrian, a road was built to connect Esbus with Livias, Jericho and Jerusalem. Milestones 5-7 from Esbus have been found.⁶³ The first two have several inscriptions each, mentioning several Roman emperors. The inscriptions on Milestone 5 have been dated to the years 219, 307 and 364-375(?). Those of Milestone 6 have been dated to the years 162, 236 and 288. On the inscribed milestones the name of the city appears in the Greek phrase ἀπὸ Ἐσβοῦντος four times, and in the Latin *Esb[unte]* once. The fact that the miles were counted from Esbus is evidence of the relative importance of that city at that time.

According to Avi-Yonah, Elagabalus (218-222) raised the cities of Characmoba (*Kerak*) and Esbus to a municipal status.⁶⁴ Bronze coins from Esbus, probably all from this

⁵⁹ Abel, *op. cit.*, II, 165.

⁶⁰ Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, p. 113; Abel, *op. cit.*, II, 165 (Abel gives as his sources Dio Cassius, lxxviii.14; and Ammian, xiv. 8.13). Certain coins of Trajan bear the inscription *Arabia adquisita* (Abel, *op. cit.*, II, 165).

⁶¹ Claudius Ptolemaeus, *Geographia* (Amsterdam, 1966), v. 17.

⁶² Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, pp. 183, 184.

⁶³ Peter Thomsen, "Die römischen Meilensteine der Provinzen Syria, Arabia und Palaestina," *ZDPV*, XL (1917), 67, 68.

⁶⁴ Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

period, indicate that the city was then called *Aurelia Esbus*. The name appears in Greek on the reverse of six coins in the British Museum collection in the following forms: (1) AV... (left); °VC (right); (2) AVPE (left) ... (right); (3) AV (above) [E]CBOV[C] ... (below); (4) [AV] (above) ECB°VC (below); (5) AV (above)... (below); (6) AVPECB (left) OVS (right).⁶⁵ It is a fact that "we learn of the existence of these cities almost exclusively from the coins struck by them in the exercise of their municipal rights."⁶⁶

At the time of the Council of Nicea (325), Esbus appears for the first time as an episcopal seat. It belonged to the province of Arabia and its superior was the metropolitan of Bozrah.⁶⁷ The bishop of Esbus, *Gennadius*, is mentioned twice in the acts of the Council of Nicea. His full name and title are given first as *Gennadius Jabrodorum Ybutensis Provinciae Arabiae*,⁶⁸ and then as *Gennadius Bunnorum*⁶⁹ *Arabiae*.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 275-ca. 340), in his *Onomastikon* mentions Ἐσσεβών... καλεῖται δὲ νῦν Ἐσβοῦς, as ἐπίσμος πόλις τῆς Ἀραβίας.⁷⁰ He locates it 20 miles from the Jordan in the mountains in front of Jericho.⁷¹ In locating several towns or villages in that area he gives their distances in

⁶⁵ G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia* (London, 1922), pp. xxxiii, 29, 30; Plate; V, 1-3. Some of the coins have been dated to the reign of Caracalla (211-217) by Heidet, "Hésebon," *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. F. G. Vigouroux, III (Paris, 1903), col. 663. Also I. Benzinger, "Esbus," *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertums-Wissenschaft*, ed. G. Wissowa, XI (Stuttgart, 1907), col. 612. This dating, however, is not generally accepted today. Besides Esbus, the following cities of Arabia minted their own money: Edrei, Bozrah, Philippopolis, Canatha, Dion, Gerasa, Philadelphia and Madeba (Abel, *op. cit.*, II, 187).

⁶⁶ Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁶⁷ Adrian Fortescue, *The Orthodox Eastern Church* (London, 1907), p. 16.

⁶⁸ J. D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum. Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (Graz, 1960-1961), II, col. 694.

⁶⁹ Marginal reading: *Esbundon* (*ibid.*, II, col. 699).

⁷⁰ Eusebius, *Onomastikon*, 84:1-6. Jerome translates this phrase: "urbs insignis Arabiae" (85:1-6).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 84:1-6; cf. also 12:20-24; 16:24-26.

Roman miles from Esbus. This suggests that Esbus was the capital of a provincial district at that time. The towns mentioned, on the other hand, help to determine the geographical limits of the district of Esbus.⁷²

Among the bishops who attended the Council of Ephesus (431) was Ζῳσος Ἐσβουῦντος.⁷³ Apparently the same bishop is mentioned in the acts of the Council of Chalcedon (451) as Ζωσίλου πόλεως Ἐσβουντων.⁷⁴ It would seem that the bishop of Esbus was subject to the patriarchate of Antioch, for the *Notitia Antiochena* (about 570) mentions *Essmos* (Esbos) as an episcopal seat, suffragan of Bozrah, under Antioch, in *Bitira Arabiae*.⁷⁵

During the excavations conducted at *Râs es-Siâghah* in 1933, a stone capital was found at the east end of the north aisle of the basilica. The capital is decorated with crosses, one of which has letters attached to the extremities of its arms. When read in the correct sequence, the letters spell ECBOY.⁷⁶ According to Abel, the basilica at *Râs es-Siâghah* was built in the fifth century, then destroyed in the last quarter of the sixth century, probably by an earthquake, and rebuilt by 597. It was used during the seventh century and perhaps "not entirely abandoned before the eighth."⁷⁷ Undoubtedly the capital was part of the rebuilt basilica. "It is not improbable that the people of Esbos presented this capital to the sanctuary of Moses on Mount Nebo,"⁷⁸ perhaps toward the end of the sixth century.

⁷² Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁷³ Marginal note: Ἐσβουῦντος. The Latin Version is *Zosys* (margin, *Zosius*) *Isbuntis* (Mansi, *op. cit.*, IV, cols. 1269 [Greek], 1270 [Latin]).

⁷⁴ In Latin, *Zosio civitatis Esbuntorum* (with variant spellings in different MSS) (Mansi, *op. cit.*, cols. 167 [Latin], 168 [Greek]).

⁷⁵ *MPL*, CCI, col. 1067. See also R. de Vaux, "Chronique," *RB*, XLVII (1938), p. 254.

⁷⁶ Sylvester Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo* (Jerusalem, 1941), I, 265; II, Plate 42, 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 45, 46.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 266.

*Esbu from the Arab Conquest to the end of the
Eighteenth Century*

A mosaic and some papal letters are the only witnesses to Esbu coming from the early period of Arab domination of Palestine.

In 1934, Mufaḍḍi Ibn el-Ḥaddâdin, while carrying out excavations at *Ma'in* (8 km. southwest of Madeba) to lay the foundations for his house, came across a mosaic. In 1937, while trying to remodel one of the rooms of his house, he uncovered some further fragments of it. From October 14-22 of the same year, Savignac and de Vaux of the "École Archéologique Française" uncovered the extant parts of the mosaic under the house and in the court-yard.⁷⁹

The mosaic, according to de Vaux, comes from the last quarter of the sixth century or the first half of the seventh, more probably from the end of this period.⁸⁰ It had belonged to the floor of a church of which almost all traces have disappeared.⁸¹ The central part of the mosaic was surrounded by a 70 cm. wide mosaic border. It contained representations of various buildings, separated by trees. Originally there must have been 24 such buildings. They were evidently churches, each one accompanied by a name. Unfortunately, only about half of them have survived. These are: ΝΗΚΩΠΟΛΕΙΣ, [. .] ΠΟΛΕΙΣ, ΑΣΚΑΛΟΝ, ΜΑΗΟΥΜΑC, ΓΑΙΖΑ, ΩΔ- [ΡΟΑ], [ΧΕΡΑΧΜΟΥΒΑ, ΑΡΕΩΠΟΛΕΙC, ΓΑΔΟΡΟΝ, ΕCΙΒΟΥC], ΒΕΛΕΜΟΥΝΙΜ.⁸²

A modern wall, built right through the mosaic, has left only the two first letters of the name Ἐσβουῶς, and no traces of the representation of its church building.

In 649 Pope Martin I convened the Lateran Synod that

⁷⁹ De Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 240, 241.

rejected Monotheletism.⁸³ Shortly thereafter, he wrote letters to several bishops regarding this problem. One of these addressed to John, bishop of Philadelphia (in the Province of Arabia), includes the synodal Acts and the Encyclica and also the assurance of the support of Theodore of Ebus, Anthony of Bacatha, and others, to whom he had also written.⁸⁴ From the letters to Theodore of Ebus and Anthony of Bacatha it is known "that the two bishops had been on the side of the heresy, but had sent to the Pope an orthodox declaration of faith, and thereby had obtained his confirmation."⁸⁵ This correspondence of Martin I shows that Ebus was an important bishopric in the middle of the 7th century. This conclusion is supported by the mosaic of *Ma'in*. However, nothing is known of the city itself.

After this correspondence, the name Ebus disappears from the literary sources, reappearing only centuries later in its Arabic form *Ḥesbân*.

During the Abbasid period, 'Abū-Dja'far Muhammad at-Ṭabari' (839-923) mentions *Gabal Ḥesbân*, known by him to be located near the city of the same name (*Ḥesbân*).⁸⁶ But his mention of Heshbon refers to Israelite history.⁸⁷ However, if Tabari's statement means that a town by the name *Ḥesbân* existed in his time, it is possible that the *Gabal Ḥesbân* refers to the *tell* of old Heshbon-Ebus. It may have been destroyed in the war which was waged in that area *ca.* 790. When *Ḥesbân* appears again in a clear historical context, in 1184, it is merely a village.⁸⁸

⁸³ K. von Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents*, V (Edinburgh, 1896), 97, 98, 109-114.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 117.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Information received from Fritz Steppat, Director of the Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, by letter of January 2, 1967, from Beirut; and from Andrew Bowling, of Haigazian College, Beirut, by letter of March, 1967. Steppat gives the names as *Gabal Ḥusbân* and refers to Tabari's work (ed. de Goeje), I, 509. Bowling makes reference to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

⁸⁷ Steppat, *loc. cit.*

⁸⁸ Behâ Ed-Din, *The Life of Saladin* (London, 1897), p. 97.

This mention appears in relation with Saladin's attempts to take the fortress of Kerak in 1184. Ed-Dîn, contemporary and biographer of Saladin, writes about this:

As the Franks had halted at el-Wâleh, he took up a position opposite to them, close to a village called Hesbân, but afterwards marched on to a place called M'âin (*sic.*); the Franks remained in their position at el-Wâleh until the 26th of Jomada I (September 4, 1184), when they moved their camp nearer to el-Kerak. ⁸⁹

This, then, is the first clear, known reference to *Hesbân* as an inhabited place after the letters of Pope Martin I (649) to John of Philadelphia and Theodore of Ebus. From all available evidences it seems that the Crusaders never occupied *Hesbân*. ⁹⁰

Some time before 1321 Sanuto, a nobleman from Venice, wrote the book *Secrets for True Crusaders to Help Them to Recover the Holy Land*. Although he evidently never visited Palestine and was clearly dependent on information provided by others, he produced a map of Palestine, in which Heshbon appears. ⁹¹ But the map, as Conder says, "is a rude sketch, quite out of scale and very incorrect." ⁹²

The Jewish scholar ha-Parchi, from Provence, who visited Egypt and Palestine in 1314 and the following years, placed *Hesbân* two days' journey southeast of Bethshan, east of the Jordan, north of 'Ar'abah and the Arnon, and south of the Jabbok. ⁹³

In the Arabic geographical literature originating from before the time of the Mamelukes (1250-1516/17) *Hesbân* is not mentioned. It seems that it was of little importance, while 'Ammân was considered the main city of the *Belqâ*. Later,

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Heidet, *op. cit.*, col. 663; S. Salaville, "Hesebon," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1910), VII, p. 298.

⁹¹ Marino Sanuto, *Secrets for True Crusaders to Help Them Recover the Holy Land* (London, 1896), pp. 2, 3.

⁹² Conder's "Note on the Maps," *ibid.*, p. ix.

⁹³ According to Heidet, *op. cit.*, col. 658.

however, *Hesbân* appears to have gained in importance.⁹⁴ Abu el-Feda (died 1331)⁹⁵ in his *Tabula Syriae* writes:

And the Belka, one of the districts of the Sherat, is fertile. The capital of the Belka is Husban. This is a little town. Husban has a valley of trees, and gardens and planted fields; and this valley is joined to the Ghor of Zoar. The Belka is a [day's] journey from Jericho.⁹⁶

Other Arabic writers who mention *Hesbân* as an existing town are Dimišqî (died 1327), Ibn Fadl Allâh al-'Umarî (1301-1348), Qalqašandî and Halil az-Zâhirî.⁹⁷

In Eubel's *Hierarchia Catholica Medii Aevi*, there appear two men, in the 15th century, Albertinus do Tridento and Georgius Vink, called bishops of *Esben* (*Hesebon*).⁹⁸ However, it seems that these men resided in Trent, Italy, and merely carried an archaic title.⁹⁹

Hesbân in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Several western travelers and explorers visited *Hesbân* during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and recorded what they saw. The most important ones were Ulrich Seetzen (1806),¹⁰⁰ John Silk Buckingham (1816),¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Steppat, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁵ Titus Tobler, *Bibliographia Geographica Palaestinae* (Leipzig, 1867), p. 34.

⁹⁶ As quoted by Selah Merrill, *East of the Jordan* (London, 1881), p. 238. He quotes from Köhler's edition (Leipzig, 1786).

⁹⁷ Steppat, *loc. cit.*, and Bowling, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁸ C. Eubel *et al.*, *Hierarchia Catholica Medii Aevi* (Regensburg, 1913-1952), II, 151.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen's Reisen durch Syrien, Palästina, Phönicien, die Transjordan-länder, Arabia Petraea und Unter-Aegypten* (Berlin, 1854-1859), I, 406, 407.

¹⁰¹ J. S. Buckingham, *Travels in Palestine Through the Countries of Bashan and Gilead, East of the River Jordan: Including a Visit to the Countries of Geraza and Gamala* (London, 1821). The information is taken from John McClintock and James Strong, "Heshbon," *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, IV (New York, 1894), 220.

Charles Leonard Irby and James Mangles (1816-1817),¹⁰² Edward Robinson (1838),¹⁰³ J. L. Porter (1854, 1857),¹⁰⁴ H. B. Tristram (1864),¹⁰⁵ F. de Saulcy (1863),¹⁰⁶ Claude Conder (1881),¹⁰⁷ William Thomson (before 1885),¹⁰⁸ George Post (1886),¹⁰⁹ Paul-M. Sejourné (1892),¹¹⁰ and Alois Musil (beginning of the 20th century).¹¹¹

John Garstang, who visited *Hesbân* before 1931, refers to the *tell* as follows:

This is a large mound. . . . partly under cultivation, so that without excavation it is not possible to determine the outline of the city, nor to affirm that it was walled. None the less, the traces of occupation of M[iddle] B[ronze] A[ge] and L[ate] B[ronze] A[ge] are plentiful all over its slopes, and the superficial potsherds bear a marked resemblance to the local types of Jericho, which is just visible from its summit. . . . In the vicinity are other, smaller Bronze Age sites, doubtless its dependencies.¹¹²

Nelson Glueck visited *Hesbân* in connection with his surface exploration of Eastern Palestine. He writes:

¹⁰² Ch. L. Irby and J. Mangles, *Travels*, p. 472, as quoted by McClintock and Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

¹⁰³ Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea* (Boston, 1841), II, 278, 279.

¹⁰⁴ J. L. Porter, *A Handbook for Travellers in Syria and Palestine* (London, 1858), p. 298, as referred to by McClintock and Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁵ H. B. Tristram, *The Land of Israel; A Journal of Travels in Palestine* (London, 1865), pp. 539, 540.

¹⁰⁶ F. de Saulcy, *Voyage en Terre Sainte* (Paris, 1865), I, 279-288.

¹⁰⁷ C. Conder, "Lieutenant Conder's Report No. IX. Heshbon and its Cromlechs," *Quarterly Statement, Palestine Exploration Fund*, XIV (1882), 8, and Conder, *Heth and Moab* (London, 1892), p. 142.

¹⁰⁸ William Thomson, *The Land and the Book* (New York, 1885), pp. 660, 661.

¹⁰⁹ George Post, "Narrative of a Scientific Expedition in the Transjordanian Region in the Spring of 1886," *Quarterly Statement, Palestine Exploration Fund*, XX (1888), 190.

¹¹⁰ Paul-M. Sejourné, "Chronique," *RB*, II (1893), 136, 137.

¹¹¹ Alois Musil, *Arabia Petraea: I Moab* (Wien, 1907), p. 388, referred to in S. Saller and B. Bagatti, *The Town of Nebo* (Jerusalem, 1949), p. 226.

¹¹² John Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History; Joshua, Judges* (London, 1931), p. 384.

The top of the hill is covered primarily with Roman ruins, over and next to which some later Arabic ruins are visible. Although the site was carefully examined for pottery remains indicative of the early history of Heshbôn, only one sherd was found belonging to E[arly] I[ron] I. A few nondescript sherds were picked up which may have been Nabatean and Roman, and a number of pieces of sigillata ware were found. There were large quantities of mediaeval Arabic glazed and painted sherds. We remained only long enough to scour the slopes and tops of the hills for sherds.¹¹³

Thirty years after Glueck's visit, Bernhard W. Anderson visited *Hesbân* and reports:

...At Hesban, which is only a short distance south of William Reed's sounding at Tell el-'Al, we were in for a big surprise. Nelson Glueck reported finding only one Iron Age sherd on the tell, but our surface finds, analyzed by the School's Director Paul Lapp, disclosed no less than nine items from Iron I, including a figurine head....¹¹⁴

Glueck's findings and conclusions are thus weakened by Anderson's more recent findings.

It is hoped that the planned excavations of *Hesbân* will provide an answer not only with regard to the Iron-Age occupation of ancient Heshbon, but also will shed light on the much debated question of human settlement in Eastern Palestine between 1800-1300 B.C.

It is surprising that in not one of the descriptions of *Hesbân* coming from the 19th and early 20th centuries reference is made to the modern village of *Hesbân*. It seems that it had disappeared during the Middle Ages, and that the present settlement is of recent origin.

Based on the descriptions made by the above-mentioned travelers and explorers, the following composite picture of the ruins of *Hesbân* can be obtained.

The ruins are found mainly on two hills of which the

¹¹³ Nelson Glueck, "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, I," *AASOR*, XIV (1933-1934), 6. Plate 27:26 shows a piece of "fine rouletted Nabatean" ware from *Hesbân*; Plate 26b has a fragment of sigillata ware found at *Hesbân*, attributed to the Nabatean period; and Plate 28 contains another piece of rouletted sigillata.

¹¹⁴ B. W. Anderson, "Newsletter No. 3, 1963-64," *American Schools of Oriental Research* (Jerusalem, Jordan, January 4, 1964), pp. 1, 2.

summits lie about 200 feet above the surrounding plain. These hills stretch from the northeast to the southwest for about 1800 feet. The perimeter of the old city may thus have been about one mile. The two hills are flanked by wadies on the northwest and the southeast. The *tells* are partly under cultivation, making it impossible without excavations to determine the exact outline and size of the city. Some portions of walls have been reported as still standing. The *tells* contain piles of columns, capitals, broken entablatures, old walls, massive foundations, and debris. Among the ruins several structures can be distinguished.

The northeastern hill is about 250 meters long and 100 meters wide. Its summit is flat. In the center stands a rectangular enclosure 40 meters long by 30 meters wide, oriented north to south. It is built of large rows of masonry and is apparently of Arabic origin. The remains of a building thought by some travelers to have been a temple are inside the enclosure. Part of a fine stone pavement in a good state of preservation is visible there. Three or four column bases of cubical shape rise from the pavement. They belong to the Hellenistic-Roman period. Broken columns lie on the ground. This structure is approached by a stairway from the north, where some steps, partially covered by dirt, can be seen. At the southwestern end of this hill, near its foot, lie the foundations of a building, 15 meters long by 8 meters wide, oriented from east to west. The walls are "almost entire." The building exhibits massive arches, sculptured cornices, columns, all strangely mixed. The rest of the northeastern hill is covered by heaps of debris. It has numerous bottle-shaped cisterns and subterranean vaulted chambers, especially on the southwestern side.

The southwestern hill is about 250 meters long by 50 meters wide. Its summit is about 8 meters lower than that of the northeastern hill. It also has several cisterns. The extant ruins are located here mainly in its northeastern part. At the center of its flattened summit are the remains of a building 20 meters

long by 15 meters wide, oriented from east to west. About 50 meters to the west of this structure the remains of a square tower are visible. At the southwestern end is a quarry, and piles of debris (which also abound in the northeastern, higher part of this hill). Ascending from the valley to the northwestern corner of the southwestern hill a steep path leads through a sort of cutting, or "gate," 8 to 10 feet high and 3 to 4 yards wide.

The northern side of the valley contains several rock-cut tombs. In this same area, a few hundred yards to the east of the tombs (and to the northeast of the first hill), there are several cisterns or rock-cut silos, and a small enclosure made of great stones. The neighboring slopes are full of caves.

On the south-southeast side of the northeastern hill, and a few hundred yards from it, there is a large reservoir in the bottom of the valley. It is 30 meters long and 20 meters wide, similar in size to the "Pools of Solomon" near Bethlehem. It is encased by stones of good masonry. There are also remains of watercourses in the vicinity.

It is reported that pottery from the Middle Bronze Age, the Late Bronze Age, Early Iron I, Nabatean, Roman, and Mediaeval Arabic times has been picked up from the surface. Some coins have also been found among the ruins.