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Tall Jalul: Biblical Bezer, a City of Refuge?¹

Randall W. Younker

Tall Jalul, which at 18 acres (74 dunams or 74,000 sq meters) is the largest tell site in the central Jordan plateau, occupies the highest point in the immediate region around Madaba, making it a most imposing feature on the western side of the Madaba Plain. It is located 5 km due east of the town of Madaba and due west of the Queen Alia International Airport. The site is almost square in outline with a high, flat acropolis occupying the southwest quadrant. A number of rocky hills on the tell are suggestive of badly eroded ruins of ancient buildings. Two broad depressions in the southeast quadrant indicate the presence of elements of ancient water systems—a cistern on the north and a reservoir to the south. The ruins of a large Byzantine/Islamic settlement is located immediately to the south of the tell. Surface surveys and excavations of both the tell and the settlement to the south have revealed an occupational history of Jalul that runs (with a few interruptions) from the Early Bronze Age to the end of the Ottoman period in the early 20th century (see below).

¹ It is a pleasure to dedicate this study to my friend, colleague, and former teacher, Richard M. Davidson whose own enthusiasm for archaeology led to his tremendous support of our endeavors through the years.

Jalul's Identity in Antiquity

One of the challenges that scholars studying Jalul continue to face is the identity of Jalul in antiquity. Ibrahim Zabn, a Jordanian archaeologist who excavated in the Islamic Village at Jalul, suggested that the name Jalul comes from an Arabic word *Jaljul* which mean luck. He also suggested that *Jaljul* in Aramaic means the high slope. Unfortunately, he provided no references or support for his suggestions.²

Biblical scholars have suggested several possibilities for the identity of Jalul during Bronze and Iron Age times. These suggestions have included Heshbon (Num 21), Jahaz, and Bezer,³ one of the cities of refuge located in Transjordan (Josh 20:8).

Originally, I favored identifying Jalul with Sihon's Heshbon—following up on the suggestions by Horn and Geraty. Support for this identification seemed to come from the discovery of a water system on the tell which included a large reservoir and a water channel that seemed to run from the reservoir to a series of pools outside the city wall. We thought that the water reservoir and the extramural pools might be the pools of Heshbon mentioned in Song of Solomon. However, the channel seems to have been constructed in the 7th century BCE (too late for Solomon) and does not seem to connect with the earlier (10th–9th century BCE) reservoir as originally thought. There is also less certainty that the water channel carried fresh water as opposed to sewage. Thus, it seems unlikely that the Jalul water channel fed the pools of Heshbon. Moreover, recent re-evaluation of the reservoir at Tall Hesban suggests that the large square reservoir/ pool there does indeed date to the 10th century BCE, and thus remains a viable candidate for being at least one of the pools of Heshbon.⁴ These factors have led me to reconsider other options for the identity of Jalul.

Of the proposals that have been made, the equation of Jalul with Bezer seems to make the most sense to me at this point in time. As I will outline in

² Ibrahim Zabn, "The Excavation and Survey Jalul Village" (report filed at the Department of Antiquities, Jordan; The Excavation of Jalul Village, Munjazat 3, 2002), 74–75.

³ Andrew Dearman, "Levitical Cities of Reuben and Moabite Toponymy," *BASOR* 276 (1989): 55–66.; Burton MacDonald, *The Debate over the Chronology of the Iron Age in the Southern Levant: Its History, the Current Situation and a Suggested Resolution*. (Baltimore, MD: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000), 177–78.

⁴ James A. Sauer, "The Pottery at Hesban and Its Relationships to the History of Jordan: An Interim Hesban Pottery Report," in *Hesban After 25 Years*, ed. David Merling and L. T. Gearaty (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), 241–43; Paul Ray, *Tell Hesban and Vicinity in the Iron Age* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2001), 99, 107.

this article, there are three lines of evidence that seem to support Jalul's identity with ancient Bezer: (1) geographic considerations; (2) historical/archaeological correlations; (3) and finally, some linguistic considerations.

Which Bezer?

Before looking at the geographical evidence in the biblical text for the location of Bezer, it is important to note that there are actually *three* place names that appear in the Biblical text that are located in Jordan which have very similar names to Bezer—Bozrah of Moab/Bezer of Reuben, Bozrah of Edom and Bozrah/Bosor of Gilead (Haurān). Naturally, we are interested in the Bezer located in Moab—so, which of our biblical texts describes Bezer of Reuben/Moab?

There is no doubt that the Bozrah of Isa 34:6; 63:1; Amos 1:12; Micah 2:12; Jer 49:13, 22 is the name of the Edomite capital and properly equated with the ruins at Bouseira, Jordan, located 20 km south of Tafilah; the Arabic Bouseira, or course, still echoes the ancient Edomite name.

However, the Bozrah mentioned in Jer 48:24 appears to be Bezer of Reuben; it is listed as a city of refuge in the wilderness (*midbar*) on the plateau (*mishor*) within the territory of the Reubenites (Deut 4:43; Jos 20:8) as well as a Levitical city within the same tribal territory (Jos 21:36; 1 Chr 6:78). Most interesting is that it seems to be the same town as *Bezer* mentioned in the Mesha Inscription (MI)⁵ as a ruined city that Mesha had rebuilt. Bezer of Reuben continued to be occupied during the Talmudic period, since queries originate during this time as to whether Bezer belonged to Israel—an important question inasmuch as the answer affected whether or not Jewish occupants of Bezer were obligated to pay tithe on their agricultural produce

Bezer of Reuben is sometimes confused with Bosra in the land of Gilead (the Haurān, located in what is now southwestern Syria and northwestern Jordan). That site today, located in southwestern Syria, is known in Arabic as بصرى or *Buṣrā/Bosra* (although Frants Buhl identified the ancient site with a site known in his time as Buṣr el-Bariri;⁶ historically, it has also sometimes been called **Bostra**, **Busrana**, **Bozrah**, **Bozra**, **Busra ash-Sham** and **Nova Trajana Bostra**). This city is mentioned in 1 Maccabees 5:26, 36 as a

⁵ MI Line 27; ANET, 320–21.

⁶ See Frants Buhl, *Geographie des Alten Palästina*, Grundriß der Theologischen Wissenschaften II, 4, (Freiburg im Breisgau: J. C. B. Mohr, 1896), 253)

place conquered by Judas Maccabeus. Josephus also made reference to this battle.⁷ The confusion of Bosrah in Gilead with the more southern towns of the same name is noted in Lightfoot's *The Talmud and Hebraica*. "In the Jews we read, 'Trachon, which is bounded at Bozra'. Not Bozrah of Edom, Isaiah 63:1; nor Bezer of the Reubenites, Joshua 20:8; but another, to wit, Bosorra, or Bosor, in the land of Gilead. Concerning which, see Josephus, and the First Book of Maccabees, 5:26."⁸

Beyond their clarification of the three Bozrahs, the references in the Talmud are important in that they seem to suggest that Bezer in Moab (Reubenite Bezer) was still occupied between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE. This point can be helpful in identifying Reubenite Bezer with the appropriate archaeological site (below).

Reubenite Bezer's Geographic Location

Having identified those texts that are talking about Reubenite/Moabite Bezer, we can now consider identifying archaeological sites that best fit the biblical description. Probably the best study in attempting to locate Reubenite Bezer is that of Andrew Dearman.⁹ After a brief review of text critical analysis of those passages that refer to Reubenite and Levitical cities in Transjordan, Dearman proceeded to the question of the geographical location of these sites. Dearman first noted that both Kedemoth and Jahaz are said to be located in the *midbar*—the wilderness or open steppe land of the Moabite plateau—north of the Arnon River and east of the King's Highway. He then directed us to the description of Israel's battle with Sihon (Deut 2:26–32) which shows that Jahaz must be located south or southeast of Heshbon and Kedemoth is located south or southeast of both of them.

Next, Dearman discussed the locations Bezer and Mephaath. Like Kedemoth and Jahaz, Bezer is also said to be located on the *midbar*. Mephaath has been reliably identified with Umm er-Rasas via inscriptional and ceramic evidence—placing it also on the *midbar*.¹⁰ Thus, all four of these Levitical cities are located on the *midbar*—the eastern section of the Transjordanian plateau and east of the main settlement line along the King's

⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.8.3.

⁸ John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament From the Talmud and Hebraica* (orig. publ., 1658; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), Chapter 91. Perea

⁹ ANET, 320–21; Dearman, "Levitical Cities."

¹⁰ R. W. Younker and P. M. Michele Daviau, "Is Mefa'at to be found at Tell Jawa (South)?" *IEJ* 43 (1993): 249–251.

Highway. Various prophetic references also indicate that Bezer, Jahaz, and Mephaath eventually became Moabite cities, suggesting that they could not be north of the Madaba Plains region and likely towards its southern end.

Dearman then turned to the Mesha inscription and noted that Bezer was mentioned there as well—as one of the cities that Mesha rebuilt. Dearman also pointed out that *none* of the settlements mentioned by Mesha was located north of Madaba. For example, Heshbon or Elealah are not mentioned in the Mesha Inscription. Since Bezer is said to be in the *midbar*, and it is not north of Madaba, near Heshbon or Elealah, it must be located in the steppe lands east or southeast of Madaba.

Finally, Dearman discussed the other two Israelite sites mentioned by Mesha—Ataroth and Jahaz (which also appear in the conquest account—noted above). Both of these sites are described as *bnh*—built up towns—during the time of Mesha. This would be an appropriate and expected description for fortified Israelite towns along the Moabite/Israelite border. Ataroth has been securely identified with *Khirbet 'Atarus* on the Wadi Heidan—a northern tributary of the Mujib—the traditional northern border of Moab. This would mean Ataroth was the southwest most border city of Israel on the plateau, facing Moab. Due east of Ataroth, on the *Wadi eth Themed*—also on a tributary of the Mujib—is another fortified site known today as *Khirbet Medeiniyeh*. This site is located in the eastern steppe country or *midbar* and thus makes a suitable candidate for the Israelite site of Jahaz.¹¹ Since Jahaz is on the southeastern-most border of the Israelite Transjordan plateau—the Israelite *midbar*—then Bezer must be located *north* of this location.

Hence one should look for ancient Bezer east or southeast of Madaba and north of Jahaz, Mephaath, and Artaroth. The only significant ancient site in that area is Tall Jalul.

Historical/Biblical Considerations

In addition to the geographical information that can be found in the ancient texts (Bible, Mesha, and Talmud) about Bezer, there is also significant historical information that can also assist in determining whether Bezer can be equated with the archaeology of Jalul.

¹¹ Dearman, “Levitical Cities,” 57; Andrew Dearman, *Studies in Moab and the Mesha Inscription*. Baltimore: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1989), 181–182.

Ancient references to Bezer can be found in the following sources: the Hebrew Bible, the Mesha Inscription, possibly in the Transjordanian (Moab) itinerary of Ramses II, and the Talmud. When literary references to Bezer are brought together, the following reconstruction of Bezer's history emerges:

A Levitical City within the Territory of Reuben. Bezer appears in the Hebrew text as an early Israelite settlement town within the territory of the tribe of Reuben; it is designated by lot as a **Levitical city** (one of 48 such cities), a place of residence to the children of **Merari** of the Levite tribe (Josh 21:36; 1 Chr 6:63, 78); it is also designated as one of three cities of refuge in Transjordan (Deut 4:43; Josh 20:8; Josh 21:36; 1 Chr 6:78; 1 Chr 7:37). These cities of refuge in Transjordan—north to south—were Golan (land of Manasseh), Ramoth Gilead (land of Gad), and Bezer (Land of Reuben) (Josh 20:1–9).

As a city of refuge and a Levitical city, it would have been occupied by Levites (see above; in this case the Merarites). It possibly had a sanctuary of some sort (1 Kgs 12:31)¹² and would have had good roads leading to it for easy access (Deut 19:3). It was likely strategically located—again for easy access. It served as a provincial administrative center,¹³ and was also likely well-fortified since its function included not only protecting its inhabitants, but also protected the eastern frontier of the Transjordan tribes.¹⁴

A Levitical City within the Territory of Gad. During the time of Saul, it appears likely that the Reubenites abandoned their territorial holdings in the Madaba Plains region for better lands in eastern Gilead—apparently leaving their former territory to their sister tribe, Gad. Specifically, 1 Chr 5:18–22, recounts an event during the time of King Saul in which the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half of the tribe of Manasseh in Gilead formed an allied army of 44,760 to battle with the Hagrites in east Gilead. The **Hagrites** (also spelled **Hagarite**) were an offshoot of the Ishmaelites mentioned in the Bible, and were the inhabitants of the regions of Jetur, Naphish and Nodab lying east of Gilead. Their name is understood to be derived from Hagar (Ps 83:7 [6]). The Transjordan tribes successfully defeated the Hagarites. As a result of the battle, the Reubenites captured the Hagarite land as well as 50,000 camels, 250,000 sheep, and 2,000 donkeys.

¹² Benjamin Mazar, *Biblical Israel: State and People* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 140.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 142–144; Edward Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan in the Iron Age: Historical and Topographical Researches* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 327.

Finally, the Reubenites captured 100,000 Hagriles, men, women and children, and held them as captives. Reuben is then said to have occupied the Hagrite tents, suggesting they abandoned their holdings in the Madaba Plains region (not too dissimilar to the migration of the tribe of Dan).

The migration of Reuben from the Madaba Plains region to eastern Gilead is not particularly significant in historical terms except for the interesting fact that later, in the Mesha inscription, Mesha (line 10) mentions confronting only Gadites (at Ataroth, southwest of Madaba)—not Reubenites—as the Moabites moved across the Arnon (Mujib) River north into the Madaba Plains. It is likely that as a result of the Reubenite migration, Bezer also fell within Gadite territory. However, the migration does raise the question as to whether it would have had any effect on Bezer's material culture. My own assumption would be that there would be little if any effect. For example, if Bezer was a Levitical city, how would their material culture differ (if at all) from that of Reubenites and Gadites? And if Bezer was occupied by Levites, would they not likely have continued to occupy Bezer and not have participated in the Reubenite migration north? This would suggest that the material culture of Bezer would have continued uninterrupted (apart from normal gradual evolutionary changes) from its initial settlement by the Israelites until its takeover by the Moabites during the latter part of the 9th century BCE (below).

A Moabite City. Line 27 of the Mesha Inscription describes the acquisition of Bezer, which was in ruins (presumably by the Dibonites) and its rebuilding. The acquisition and rebuilding of Bezer by the Moabites would have happened towards the latter part of the 9th century BCE, sometime between 840 and 820 BCE.

An Ammonite City. During the late 8th century BCE, Bezer came under Ammonite control. While the biblical text does not specifically mention Ammon's conquest of Bezer, there are a couple of texts that indicate that during the time of Assyrian domination, Ammon was able to expand north into Gilead (Amos 1) and south to Heshbon and the lands of Gad (Jer 49)—which would have conceivably included Bezer.

A Byzantine Settlement in Talmudic Times. As noted above, Bezer appears in later Talmudic sources in the context of clarifying where Bezer/Bosrah of the Reubenites was located during Talmudic times. Additional references in the Talmud concerning Bezer deal with its function as a city of refuge and the obligation of paying taxes on territory tied to Bezer. Also, as noted, these references in the Talmud are significant because they

seem to suggest that Bezer in Moab (Reubenite Bezer) was still occupied between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE.¹⁵ If so, we would expect archaeological evidence for occupation during these centuries (which seems to be the case at Jalul, as shown below).

Excavation Results at Jalul

After tentatively identifying Bezer with Jalul based on geographic and historic references in the ancient texts, we will now turn to Jalul's archaeological findings to see if such an identification is plausible.

Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Ages

The earliest materials that have been recovered from Jalul include an Early Bronze Age wall in Field W2, as well as some Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age sherds that have appeared in fills beneath the Iron Age II buildings in Field A. Forms include various MB/LB White slip wares, Chocolate-on-White wares, Late Bronze Bichrome Ware, biconical jugs, and triangular rimmed cooking pots. No architecture has as yet been found in association with these fills or ceramics. Possibly these fills are outside the city wall of the MB and LB periods.

Early Iron Age IA Thirteenth–Twelfth Centuries (1250–1100) BCE

Remains from the Early Iron Age IA have now been recovered and identified from Fields A, B, C, D, E, and G at Jalul.

In Field A, no architectural remains survived, apparently having been robbed for the construction of later Iron Age buildings. However, several fills with Iron IA pottery were found stratigraphically beneath the Iron IB, Iron IIA, and Iron IIB layers. The ceramics found in these fills contained significant quantities of Iron I pottery, including carinated bowls, so-called Manasseh bowls, cooking pots with elongated triangular rim, and collared rimmed store jars. Some LB forms are present as well such as Chocolate on White, triangular rimmed cooking pots, etc. Some pots exhibit Iron I painted designs. A preliminary comparison with similar materials found at nearby Tall al-'Umayri, suggests the two corpi are the same. Herr has dated the Umayri materials to the late 13th century BCE making Umayri one of the

¹⁵ See Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan*, 327.

earliest Iron I settlements in Cis- and Transjordan.¹⁶ Tall Jalul would seem to have been occupied during the same period. Iron IA Bowls at Umayri,¹⁷ Hesban¹⁸ and Jalul seem identical to the so-called Manasseh bowls on the west side of the Jordan. Herr¹⁹ has suggested these early forms may reflect a Reubenite presence in this region at the beginning of the Iron Age.

In Field B (as in Field A), no Iron IA architectural remains have yet been found in the east gate area, apparently having been robbed for the construction of later gate systems. However, fills containing Iron IA ceramics were found stratigraphically beneath (earlier than) the Iron IIA approach road and gatehouse. The ceramics included collar rimmed store jars, Manasseh bowls, etc.

In Field C, the remains of a four-room pillared house were recovered—the same tradition that is seen in Cis-jordan and often associated with early Israelite settlement. The pillared building in Field C was pretty much in tact except for the western wall which had been robbed in the subsequent Iron Age phase. The robber's trench was evident in association with the four-room pillared house. Also in Field C, a small section of a collapsed mudbrick wall that appears to date to the Iron IA period was found south of the four-room pillared house and was apparently part of the superstructure of the south wall of the building. Two lamps, a chalice and triangular-rimmed cooking pots from the Iron Age IA were found in association with this wall collapse pointing to the early Iron IA date of this house. A necklace containing a variety of glass and semi-precious stones was also found in the collapse.

In Field D, sections of walls stratigraphically beneath the Iron II “courtyard” building were dated to the Iron IA by associated ceramics.

In Field E, just below the surface in Square 4, in an area that had been heavily disturbed by 19th century Bedouin graves, an Egyptian seal was found. According to Field E supervisor Robert Bates, the hieroglyphics read

¹⁶ L. G. Herr, “The Settlement and Fortification of Tell al-‘Umayri in Jordan during the LB/Iron I Transition,” in *The Archaeology of Jordan and Beyond: Essays in Honor of James A. Sauer*, ed. Joseph A. Greene, Michael D. Coogan, and Lawrence E. Stager (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 167–179.

¹⁷ L. G. Herr, “The Iron Age,” in *Hesban 11, Ceramic Finds: Typological and Technological Studies of the Pottery Remains from Tell Hesban and Vicinity*, ed. James A. Sauer and Larry G. Herr (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 9–172.

¹⁸ Paul Ray, *Tell Hesban and Vicinity in the Iron Age* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2001), 47, fig 3.3:3, 5–6.

¹⁹ L. G. Herr, “Tall al-‘Umayri and the Reubenite Hypothesis,” *Eretz Israel* 26 (1999): 64–77.

“Amun-Re, Re of the Two Lands.” It possibly dates to the time of Ramesses III of the 20th Dynasty (ca. 1187 to 1156 BCE).

In Field G, fills beneath the foundation of the Iron IIA wall (below) contained Iron IA ceramics including collar-rimmed jars and Iron IA bowls.

Iron Age IB Twelfth–Tenth Centuries (1100–980) BCE

Some of the fills in Field A contain pottery from the later Iron I—possibly as late as the 10th century BCE. Again, the pottery forms include typical cooking pots and collar-rimmed jars. The fact that the fills are full of ashy lenses suggests that Jalul was destroyed by fire towards the end of the Iron Age I.

Field B. Some ceramics that may date to this period come from fills immediately under the Iron IIA approach road.

Field C. The four-room pillared building appears to have continued in use.

Iron Age IIA Tenth–Ninth Centuries (980–840/830) BCE

Several strata from the Iron IIA have been excavated at Jalul. The earliest has been provisionally dated to the 10th–9th centuries BCE (Iron IIA).

Field A. No architectural remains from this phase have been recovered from the excavations in Field A. Rather, it appears that the building stones from this phase (at least in the areas excavated in this field so far) were completely robbed out for later construction. Nevertheless, several fills were exposed stratigraphically *beneath* (earlier than) the 9th–8th century BCE (Iron Age IIB) building remains that contain ceramics from the Iron IIA. Ceramics of the Iron IIA include collared pithoi, but they now have short vertical necks. Cooking pots include a unique form—high-ridged cooking pots, but with a vertical neck (later in the Iron IIB, the neck appears inverted).

Field B. Architectural remains from this phase include an approach ramp or road to the city gate complex, including the outer gatehouse. The approach ramp was paved with flagstones in a manner similar to that seen at Cisjordan sites such as Dan and Beersheba. A patch of paving stones within the inner gatehouse as well as the pylons for the inner gatehouse also date from this period. The interior of the outer gatehouse was surfaced with small

pebbles. In the area of the outer gatehouse was found an Iron II stamp seal with a stylized depiction of an ibex.

Field C. During the beginning of the Iron IIA, the pillared building of the Iron I was modified. The western wall was moved more than 1 meter to the east, essentially reducing the size of the pillared building.

Field D. The early phases of the courtyard house appear in this period.

Field G. The earliest phase of a pillared house appears in this phase.

Iron IIB Ninth–Eighth Centuries (840/830–732/701) BCE

Field A. The corner of a building that appears in the east side of Field A dates to this period. The building is stratigraphically above the Iron I and Iron IIA fills, yet below the Iron IIC tripartite building that occupied most of Field A during the 8th–6th centuries BCE (discussed below).

Field B. The approach road to the gatehouse was completely rebuilt, about one meter higher than the Iron IIA road (discussed above). The outer gate house was also rebuilt, but most of it was robbed out in later periods (below).

Field C. The modified pillared building continued in use during this period.

Field D. The courtyard building continues in use with some modifications.

Field G. The walls of the pillared house was modified somewhat. Several floor layers date to the Iron IIB. A room to the south of the pillared house contained a large pottery cache of Iron IIB pottery—distinctive Moabite forms appear for the first time, including square-rimmed cooking pots and a light-colored slip on many forms. Some distinctive Moabite painted designs also occur on some decanters and bowls.

Iron IIC Eighth–Early Sixth Centuries (732/701–605/586) BCE

Based on parallels for the ceramics of this stratum, as well as on a number of inscriptional finds, we have provisionally dated this phase to the 7th–6th centuries BCE—specifically to the years 732/701 BCE to 605/586 BCE following Mazar’s modified chronology.²⁰ The ceramics are typical Ammonite

²⁰ Amihai Mazar, “The Debate over the Chronology of the Iron Age in the Southern Levant: Its History, the Current Situation and a Suggested Resolution,” in *The Bible and Radiocarbon*

forms, including some with distinctive painted designs. Several distinctive Ammonite Inscriptions were also found in these occupational layers. This points to an expansion of Ammon into formerly Moabite territory. The presence of an Assyrian bowl provides support to literary sources that Ammon was under Assyrian hegemony during this time of expansion.

Field A. The tripartite building in Field A was rebuilt along the same lines in the late 8th century BCE and continued in use throughout the 7th century BCE. As is typical of many of these buildings, the side rooms were paved while the central room was dirt. Two parallel rows of pillars founded on a stylobate separated the side rooms from the central room. To the west of the tripartite building, patches of pavement and the remnant of a small room were found. Under the floor of this room was typical late Iron II pottery, including a fragment of an Assyrian bowl. The exact purpose or function of the room is unknown at present. A pit was found north of the tripartite building that contained late Iron II pottery including typical burnished wares, several bone spatulae, a bone pendant shaped like a hammer, and a ceramic figurine shaped like a horse—probably part of a horse and rider figurine—well-known in this region during the Ammonite period. Other fragments of horse and rider figurines were also found. Other small finds from this period included a crowned male figurine similar to the crowned busts found in the Ammon region, the upper portion of a typical female figurine with hands held below exposed breasts, a lion figurine, and a human figurine wearing an Egyptian styled headdress.

In Field B, the inner gatehouse area was repaved with flagstones. No evidence of this repaving appeared in the outer gatehouse or the approach road, so it is assumed the 9th–8th century pavement continued in use in these areas.

In Field C, the pillared house continued in use with some modifications. A seal from this room was found in the sift pile (Fig. 3). It was carved out of a red-brown limestone and was divided into three registers—the middle depicted a winged griffin, while the upper and lower registers contained an inscription, “Belonging to ‘Aynadab son of Zedek ‘il.” The paleography is typical of late 7th century Ammonite.²¹

Dating: Archaeology, Text and Science, ed. T. E. Levy and T. Higham (London: Equinox, 2005), 15–30.

²¹ R. W. Younker, “An Ammonite Seal from Tall Jalul, Jordan: The Seal of ‘Aynadab son of Zedek ‘il,” in *Eretz Israel*, ed. B. Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1999), 221–24.

Of special interest was the discovery of an opening in the middle of the central courtyard of the house that dropped into a cave directly below. Initially, it was thought to be a cistern, but the sides of the cave were faulted and there was no evidence of plaster to seal the sides and make it watertight. The cave had been filled with dirt and large boulders when the house was destroyed. As the boulders were removed, the skeletons of some 20 individuals were discovered—mostly women and children. The manner in which the bodies were unceremoniously dumped into the cave would suggest they were either thrown there by an enemy who had destroyed the house and killed the occupants, or were hastily thrown into the cave because the individuals had died of a plague. Ceramics and figurines found in the debris along with the skeletons dated to the Iron II—8th–7th centuries BCE. The figurines included a fragment of a horse and rider figurine.

Field D. The courtyard house continued in use with some minor modifications. A fragment of a seal found during a balk removal from Field D dates to the early part of this phase. It reads, “Belonging to Maneh/Mehah.” Interestingly, paleographic analysis suggests that the script is Hebrew and dates to the 8th–7th centuries BCE. King Jotham of Judah is said to have conquered the Ammonites and subjected them to tribute in the 8th century BCE (2 Chr 27:5). While the seal does not represent tribute, its presence in Ammon at this time may reflect, in some manner, the Judahite domination that is recorded in the Hebrew text. An Ammonite ostrakon with 8 lines of text was also found in a later fill, but undoubtedly dates to the latter part of this phase. A clay bulla found during balk removal probably comes from this phase. The writing is Ammonite and dates to the late 7th –early 6th century BCE. It reads, “Belonging to ‘Amasa’ son of Yenahem.” An ostrakon fragment “son of . . .” was found in the east balk of Field D. It appears to be Ammonite but the script is Aramaic—not uncommon in Ammon during this period.²²

Field G. The pillared building underwent some major modifications, probably to accommodate the new water channel built immediately west and south of the pillared building. Pottery is now Ammonite in style—this is reflected in the various forms, finish, and painted decoration.

²² C. J. Goulet and Roy E. Gane, “Three Epigraphic Finds from Tall Jalul,” *BASOR* 365 (2012): 27–32.

Iron IIC/Persian. Early Sixth–Fifth Centuries (605/586–331) BCE

Field A. In the western portion of Field A, a semicircular wall of uncertain purpose appears to date to the Persian period. North of this structure, running in an east-west direction, was a well-built wall of what appeared to be a separate building dating to the same period.

Field B. In Field B, a patch of pavement in the inner Gatehouse dated to the Persian period.

Field C. In Field C, there were three major phases of occupation. The pillared house ceased to exist. There were two large buildings—one to the east of where the pillared house used to stand and another to the south. The southern-most building seems to have been part of a large courtyard building that is also found in Field D and may have served as an administration building based on its large size and layout. In the latter two phases of the Persian period, a street separated the north and south buildings. Pottery from this phase included Attic ware. A small stone incense stand was also found in this building.

Field D. The most significant remains of the Iron IIC/Persian period were found in Field D where a large domestic structure with several rooms was uncovered. A considerable amount of pottery was found in the rooms. The roof had collapsed over several of the rooms—when the roof debris was removed numerous whole forms were found smashed on the floor. Several figurines were also found. Jalul Ostrakon I, An Ammonite inscription to or from certain individuals, dates to this period (6th century BCE. It contains six lines of texts and deals with distributions of some commodity (probably grain).

Byzantine Occupation

Finally, it should be noted that immediately to the south of the tell in the area we refer to as the “Islamic Village,” remains have been found from the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. This is possibly significant because of Talmudic references to Bezer—the Talmudic period can be dated to between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE.²³ The extent of the Byzantine settlement at Jalul (Bezer?) is not yet fully known. Ceramics have been recovered during surface surveys; a Christian gravestone was found in Field JIV A as was part

²³ Noted above; Gottfried Reeg, *Die Ortsnamen Israels nach der rabbinischen Literatur*, *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients* B/51 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1989): 134–35.

of a wall of a building. In Field JIV C, part of a mosaic floor and various architectural elements (such as column drums) of a Christian church were found under the ruins of an Ottoman period house.

Linguistic Considerations: Bezer

An interesting discussion that equates Bezer with Jalul is found in a recent study by Lipiński.²⁴ He noted that the Hebrew word *בְּצֻרָה* (*bezer*) means “fortress.” The adjectival form (*btrt*—*qal* imperfect feminine plural) is usually translated as a “fenced” or “fortified” city (e.g. *בְּצֻרֹת* Ezek 36:35; *בְּצֻרֹת* Num 13:28; *בְּצֻרֹת* Deut 1:28, Neh 9:25; *בְּצֻרָה* Deut 3:5, 9:1). Similarly, the name *bozrah* means a fortified place²⁵ Lipiński noted that the Arabic *bzr* means “to be inaccessible” and thus, similarly reflects the meaning of a fortified place.²⁶ Therefore, while not absolutely determinative, it is not unreasonable to assume that Bezer’s name had something to do with the fact that it was a well-fortified site.

Lipiński also argued that Bezer may appear in the itinerary of the Egyptian pharaoh, Ramses II. The relevant inscription appears in the Upper Egyptian Temple of Luxor, at the north end of the east wall of Ramses II’s court. The inscription dates to the 9th year of the pharaoh’s reign, ca. 1270 BCE. It is a topographical list with a section describing Moab as well as some key cities there, including *Ti-bu-nu* and a place called *Bu-tá-r-tá*:

“A city which the mighty arm of Pharaoh, blessed be he, conquered in the land of Moab (*Mú-’a-bu*), Butarta (*Bu-tá-r-tá*).

A city which the mighty arm of Pharaoh, blessed be he, [captured], of Dibon (*Ti-bu-nu*).

The place name *tpn/tbn* is generally identified with Dibon (modern Dhiban)—capital of the Moabites²⁷

As for locating and identifying B[w]trt, Kenneth A. Kitchen argued that this site should likely be equated with the south Transjordanian toponym

²⁴ Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan*.

²⁵ G. B. Gray, “Place Names,” in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* vol. 3, ed. T. K. Cheyne and J. S. Black (London: Macmillan, 1902), 3317; Wilhelm Borée, “Die alien Ortsnamen,” in *Palästinas*. 2. (1968): 51, 108.

²⁶ Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan*, 327.

²⁷ Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Some New Light on the Asiatic Wars of Ramesses II,” *JEA* 50 (1964): 47–70; “The Egyptian Evidence on Ancient Jordan,” in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan*, ed. Piotr Bienkowski (Sheffield: Collins, 1992), 21–34.

Raba Batora which appears in the Byzantine gazetteer *Tauble Peutingeriana* (Peutinger Table);²⁸ Kitchen further equated Raba Batora with the modern site of ar-Rabba (Areopolis/Rabbat Mo'ab), south of the Wadi Mujib. However, other scholars believe that Raba Batora is better identified with the Betthoro of the *Notitia Dignitat*,²⁹ the latter of which is indisputably equated with the modern site of Lajjun.³⁰ If so, this leaves the identification of B[w]trt open.

However, Lipiński has recently proposed a linguistic connection between the Hebrew Bezer and the Egyptian toponym *b[w]trt* in the Ramses II Moabite itinerary.³¹ First of all, Lipiński noted that in Hebrew *bzr* is typically translated as a “fortification” while the Arabic cognate, *bzr*, means to be inaccessible—which reflects a similar sense as the Hebrew. Based on this, Lipiński proposed that *btrt* (apparently referring to the Hebrew *bezer* in its adjectival form and which means “fortified”) is reflected in the Egyptian *B-t-r-t* (*B-w-t-i-r-t-i*) from the topographical list of Ramesses II.³² Lipiński also noted that another form of the word בְּצֶרֶה (*bṣrḥ*) as seen in Jer 48:24, is reflected in later Rabbinic (Talmudic) texts which discuss the town of Bosrah.³³ Based on this, Lipiński argued that Ramses II's *b[w]trt* is none other than Biblical Bezer! Elsewhere, he argued that Jalul is the best candidate for this site (*ibid.*).

Routledge has conveniently summarized some important aspects of this text.³⁴ First, he noted that Moab is written with the determinative sign for a foreign land or hilly country. Following Gardner,³⁵ Routledge went on to say that this sign marks a spatial totality—a geographical or political entity, rather than a regional subdivision or a group of people. Routledge further pointed out (following Kitchen) that the settlement *b[w]trt* is described as a *dmi* (town), the largest type of settlement the Egyptian would recognize in

²⁸ Kitchen, “The Egyptian Evidence.”

²⁹ Or. 37 (1968): 22.

³⁰ Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan*, 319.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 327.

³² *Ibid.*, 327; cf. Kenneth Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969–70), 180.2.

³³ Reeg, *Die Ortsnamen Israels*, 134–135.

³⁴ Bruce Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 59)

³⁵ Gardner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957),

foreign countries—a true city (*niwt*) was reserved for Egypt only.³⁶ The *dmi* was typically understood to be a central settlement (actual scale relative to its territorial context), while a *whywt* (village/hamlet) would be a smaller, dependent settlement.

In view of the above observations, Routledge summarized the Ramses II inscription concerning *b[w]trt* as follows:³⁷

Ramses II campaigns against a Levantine walled town (as opposed to a village or a Nubian settlement), inhabited by “Syrians” (as opposed to “Shasu nomads,” “Hitties,” or “Libyans”), ruled by a *wr* (as opposed to an ‘3) in a territory (as opposed to an *ethné*, or province) named Moab.

This all points to *b[w]trt* as a rather significant city in terms of the Transjordanian context. In terms of sheer size, Jalul is the largest site in central Jordan beyond Dhiban—it would not be at all surprising that these two sites were the very ones that would have attracted Ramses II’s attention on his foray into northern Moab. Equating Jalul with *b[w]trt* based on this criterion alone would make sense. If Lipiński’s linguistic arguments are viable, then the case that Jalul is ancient Bezer is even stronger. Ramses II’s relief of this site would also provide us with an actual (albeit stylized) picture of Jalul!

³⁶ See Donald Redford, “The Ancient ‘City’: Figment or Reality?” in *Aspects of Urbanism in Antiquity: From Mesopotamia to Crete*, ed. Walter Aufrecht, Niel Mirau, and Steven Gauley, JSOTSup 244 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1997), 211n5.

³⁷ Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 60.