Scholars and explorers have known for some time about 18 towers along the western edge of Amman, the ancient Rabbath Amman, capital of the Ammonites. These towers have long been assumed to be Ammonite forts guarding the western boundary of the Ammonite Kingdom. The background is conveniently summarized in G M Landes, "The Material Civilization of the Ammonites."\(^1\)

Unfortunately, the surface pottery has not been dated more closely than the Iron Age, or to the Iron I (1200-900 B.C.) or Iron II (900-600) periods. What is more, until recently, no one has excavated any of the towers. It's a bit like Aristotle pronouncing on the number of women’s teeth without bothering to look into a woman's mouth and actually count them!

Finally, in 1969, Dr. Roger Boraas (Upsala College, U.S.A.) dug into the ruins of Rujm al-Malfouf. In older reports, this round tower was several miles west of Amman. The burgeoning city has now surrounded it so the tower is well within the city limits. To everyone’s surprise, Boraas found Roman pottery right down to bedrock. Within the tower, he found corbel arching—long thin

Photo: Jordan News Agency
Khirbet al-Hajjar from the west.

Looking north from Khirbet al-Hajjar. If they were all in existence at the same time, inhabitants of Kh. al-Hajjar could have seen three other Ammonite fortresses in this direction. Qasr. er-Ronag lies slightly to the right of centre near the back top road. Qasr es-Sar is at Wadi es-Sir village on the left, near the horizon. Kh.al-Kursi is on the horizon beyond the village.

slabs of rock laid across the partitions of narrow rooms to form ceilings (or floors for the rooms above). This seems to be distinctive of Roman and Byzantine architecture.

Now the question of dating has once more been tilted in favor of the Ammonites, and where before there were 18, there are now 19. Last Fall, a landowner began building himself a new house on a bedrock shelf on the edge of his wheatfield. When he dug his first foundation trench, he found two broken statues, c. 50 cm. high. The Department of Antiquities was duly notified and the area was investigated. More pieces were found and the statues put together to form a man and a woman, perhaps the king and queen or a god and goddess. Unfortunately, the thin soil cover did not yield any clear stratigraphy.

The writer was invited to visit the site, 10 km. (15 by road) west of Amman. A walking tour of the area yielded Iron I (11-12 centuries B.C.) and Iron II (6-7th centuries B.C.) pottery sherds.

The statues were found in a saddle between two hills. The higher hill yielded only Iron I. The smaller hill (c. 6 acres) had both periods. This smaller hill, 50 metres away from the statues, is known locally as Khirbet al-Hajjar, "The Ruin of the Stone-cutter." It has the symmetrical outline of an artificial tell, a mound occupied in ancient times, with a build-up of soil held in place by the remains of old walls. From the top of the hill there is a clear view to an old round tower 5 km. north, while the outskirts of Amman are visible to the east. An outpost on one or two hills immediately to the west would have put the inhabitants of Khirbet al-Hajjar in touch with three other towers guarding the headwaters of the Wadi Kefrein, a major valley to the Jordan River. Khirbet al-Hajjar is in a strategic location.

It was Khirbet al-Hajjar rather than the higher hill that attracted attention for its archaeological potential. In addition to Iron I and II pottery, scattered over the surface was an occasional slingstone, pieces of basalt bowls and grinding stones, while bits of wall were showing here and there. Preliminary discussions with the Department of Antiquities led to a joint campaign with the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, in the summer of 1972.

The five-week excavation involved opening five squares. Four of these were on the northeast side. A survey for making a contour map had begun with a Department of Lands and Survey benchmark on the higher hill. From the benchmark to the highest point on Khirbet al-Hajjar (953.43 m. above Mediterranean sea level), a straight line runs true southwest-northeast. The east balk of each of the four squares follows this line. Two of the squares were opened on the lower slope and the other two on the top. The fifth square is on the western slope where it was designed to explore two stubs of walls just showing above ground.

The last square is in some ways the simplest to describe while being the most complicated for interpretation. The walls probably represent a portion of a tower in the western defense wall of the fortress. A north-south wall curves and runs directly west at the northwest corner of the square. The curve itself is a merger with an east-west wall which just appears in the northern balk. The curving wall has a straight wall flush against it on the east side, and running between the northern east-west wall, and a second east-west wall which just barely appears in our south balk. If we are able to return to the excavations in another season (1974?), obviously this complex must be investigated further. On
the outside, the western side, of the curving wall, we reached bedrock. Just above it is an earlier wall, on a northwest-southeast angle to the later curving wall. It resembles a platform but on the eastern side, just above bedrock, is a curving wall, which may represent an earlier tower. The whole complex lies within the 6-7th century B.C. period, but it's a reminder that archaeology sometimes raises more questions than it answers!

On the lower northeast slope, our squares cut perpendicularly across a series of walls. The outer east-west wall still stands 3.5 m. high, with its top stones c. 25 cm. below the present surface. The large amount of tumble of large boulders (0.50-1.00 m. across) in very loose fill made excavation difficult on the outside (northeast) of the wall. The excavated area narrowed rapidly, to avoid collapse of the loose stones onto the workmen, so we were down to about two square metres before excavation stopped. We had clearly reached the bottom of the wall, which was founded on hardpacked soil with large boulders on the base, and no discernible foundation trench. The top of this wall is 1.5 m. across and the wall is surely the outer defense wall of the fort.

This interpretation in turn suggests that a corner of a wall barely showing in the north corner of the square may be a tower in the defensive system. Four stones are bonded into the outside
of the big wall. In turn, inside the big wall, the stub of an east-west wall was found c. 1.00 m. below the present surface. This may be a backing wall to the outer defense wall. This would give the base of the wall a thickness of almost 4 m., an effective defense against sappers trying to tunnel their way into the fortress. This second wall has a clear foundation trench cutting into earlier soil layers. The lowest of which bore only Iron I potsherds.

The next square up the hill cleared a wall of smaller stones, c. 1 m. wide but preserved to only 1 m. in height. No foundation trench was found and it seems to have been founded on the surface of the day. The wall is too large for an ordinary house and might best be interpreted as a secondary defense system. However, we only cleared 5 m. of it, and a large public building remains a possibility. Below this wall lay a full metre of soil fills, all Iron II (6-7th century B.C.) in date. A hard-packed surface at a depth of 2.5 m. from the surface, also yielded Iron II sherds but Iron I layers lay immediately below this surface. A 2.00 m. square probe indicated that this Iron I fill is 1.25 m. deep over bedrock.

The two upper squares yielded the greatest surprise of the excavation. Within a few centimetres of the surface, a curving wall appeared. As clearance proceeded, it could be seen as a
round tower of the so-called Ammonite type such as Rujm al-Malfouf. Its megalithic limestone boulders range from 0.50-1.50 m. long with each of four preserved courses c. 0.50 m. high. About 1.00 m. below the surface we found the remains of a foundation trench cut into earlier occupation layers. The trench itself is almost 1.00 m. deep. The potsherds from it are clear 6-7th century B.C. in date. This gives us the first tower securely dated to the Ammonite period. And where there were 18 forts, there are now 19.

The tower walls are 1.80 m. thick and form a circle 11.70 m. across from outside edge to outside edge.4 The interior is marked by several crosswalls, two of which appear to form a right angle though the angle is hidden under the balk between the two squares. At least one doorway, and possibly two more, appear in the crosswalls. The builders dug down to bedrock in most of the area to found their tower. The bedrock in turn served as the floor of the interior. In one of the larger rooms, it's a bit rough and slopes slightly to the southwest. On the lower corner, the

4. Other round towers range from 9 (Rujm el Hawi) to 20 (Rujm el-Malfouf) meters across.
slope is built up a bit with flat stones. One room has such a smooth floor, it has been called the Commander's bedroom!

Outside, the builders cut through two Iron II occupation layers, and a number of Iron I layers. In one corner of the lower square, two pits had been dug into bedrock. These yielded 11-12th century B.C. storage jar fragments. We reached bedrock in four of the five squares. The western square had continuous Iron II occupation to bedrock while the four northeastern squares had Iron I in the lowest reaches which for three of the squares was on bedrock. However, we did not expose enough of the Iron I occupation to say much beyond its date and to suggest that the storage jars, two oven installations and some wheat preserved in the ashes of one, indicate a village which did not extend as far west as the later fort.

If funds can be found for a continuation of the excavation, it is hoped that more of the Iron I village can be found as well as the fortress gate and possible domesticate architecture of this later period. It is hoped that a detailed analysis of the pottery from this Iron Age site will add to our knowledge of the Ammonite period in Jordan.

One final note is of interest. We found very few objects. Four seals (a scarab, a flat seal, a conical seal and a bronze seal), several fibulas, one arrowhead, 20 slingstones, and odds and ends of metal and stone and pottery. There is no evidence of a general destruction. While the evidence could have washed away with remains so close to the surface, one would expect to find some traces of a general conflagration. The few objects and the lack of destruction evidence may point to abandonment rather than conquest. Historically, we know that the Ammonite kingdom came to an end about 580 B.C. as the Babylonians (Chaldeans) swept down from the north to avenge the slaying of Gedaliah and put down the ensuing revolts (II Kings 25:22-6; Jeremiah 40f). Could it be that the men guarding their little fort at Khirbet al-Hajjar saw the smoke of Rabbath Ammon 10 km. to the east when it fell to the Babylonians? Perhaps they gathered up their belongings, leaving behind only a few broken bowls and lamps and a small item that dropped here and there, and fled to the south or the Jordan Valley. When the capital fell, their task of guarding the capital was over, so better to flee and live to fight another day than to defend their little hill against overwhelming odds. Who knows? We can only speculate over the silent evidence before us. But we can be sure that at least one of the 19 towers along the western borders of the old Ammonite kingdom was actually there in its last days.