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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE DISCOVERY OF AENON (SALEEM) NEAR SITE OF JESUS BAPTISM.

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Abstract

The place of Aenon near to Salem must have been so well known, that John states the name with great brevity, giving no further topographical reference. Recent survey and excavations on the eastern side of Jordan River in the area of Ain Salem located close to the lower parts of Wadi Hesban shed light on new archaeological evidences such as churches, water installations, hermits caves, and active springs still running in the area, related to activities of John the Baptist during his ministry in Perea during the Roman Age.

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Introduction:-

Aenon is the Aramaic plural of the word for “spring,” while Salim reflects the Semitic root for “peace.”¹ (John, 3.23; Alliata, 1999: 54; Waheeb, 1999a)

Ain Salem, with its nearby springs, the Mound, the Roman road (Esbus –Jericho) and its watchtowers lies, this site disappear from the pages of history, after the Arab conquest in 636 AD no more pilgrims visited this Aenon east of Jordan River adjacent to the southern bank of Wadi Hesban close to the lower part of the north edge of Roman Road.

These are a number of traditions for localizing Aenon and Salim. One of these locates Aenon in Transjordan; since we know from John 1.28 that John the Baptist was active in this region. Support for this comes from the Madaba mosaic map, which has an Aenon just northeast of the Dead Sea: “Aenon, where now is Sapsaphas,” which

identifies with Wadi-al- Kharrar, the place where recent archeological explorations have found extensive early Christian remains in Jordan Valley, eastern side of Jordan River dated to the period of John the Baptist .

Another tradition locates Aenon in the northern Jordan valley, on the west bank, and some eight miles south of scythopolis (Bethshan). Eusebius (265-340) fixes “ Aenon where John baptized” in the words: The place is pointed out still eight miles south of Scythopolis, near Salem and the Jordan (Onomasticon, 1904: 40). He lists various places in Palestine under the name Salem (Gen. 14:18). Only the first words of his text remain. According to

¹ “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Aalim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and where being baptized. While Jesus and his disciples are in the Judean countryside baptizing, John is at Aenon, which is said to be near Salim”.

Procopius, however, who quotes him, he knew of “another village called Salem in the plain of Scythopolis. It was called Salumias (Onomasticon, 1904: 152, Note 4)

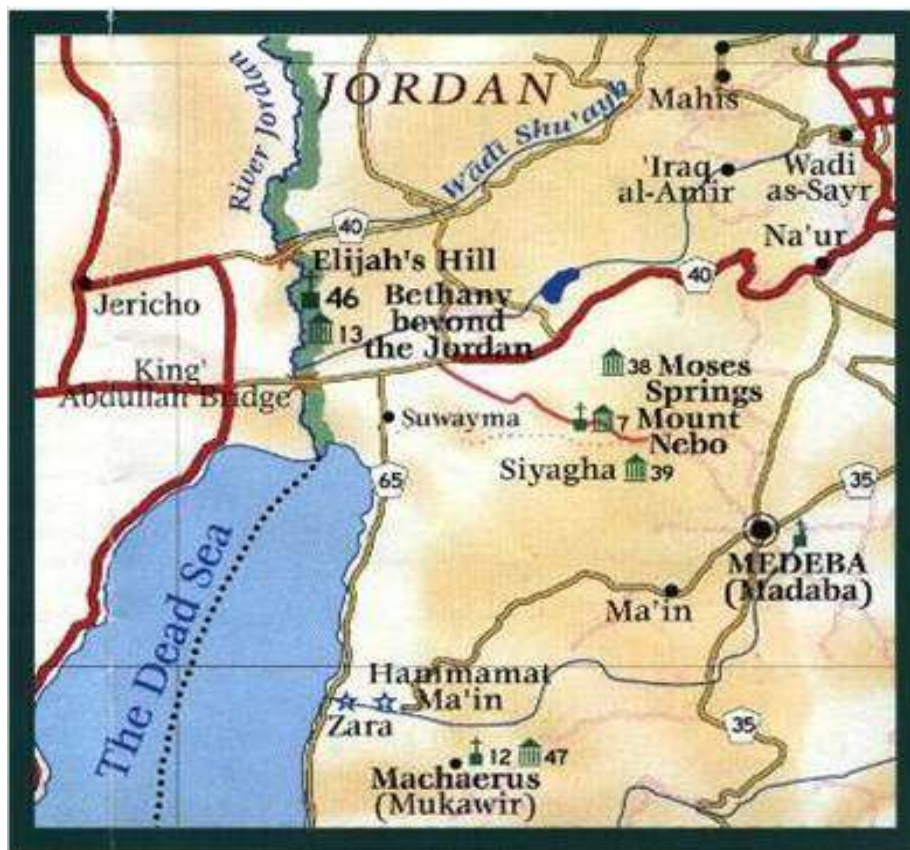


Fig1:- location map of holy sites east of Jordan River

Jerome translated Eusebius text concerning Salem literally into Latin. He translates the words missing from the Greek text we have, as Procopius does, but adds once more the distance from Scythopolis eight miles. About 390AD, he regarded Jerusalem as the Salem of Melchisedech. Then, in 398AD, he changed his mind and said: Salem is A town near Scythopolis and it is still called Salem. There they show you the palace of Melchisedech, the vast ruins of which indicate how splendid the old building must have been². In those days the place was called Salumias, and also Salem. Such double names are not uncommon. Many Christians, for example, regard the modern village of El Kubebeh as the Emmaus of the Bible. Thus they use this name as well as the official one for the village.

The evidence of the Chronica of 334AD is important because it is independent of Eusebius. According to this Scythopolis is situated “near the town of Salem where Melchisedech, priest of the most high God, reigned”. Aenon is not mentioned, but along with the nearby Salem, it was part of the territory of Scythopolis³.

This is the Aenon that Egeria appears to have visited:

(Then I remembered that according to the bible it was near salim that holy john baptized at aenon. So I asked if it was far away. “There it is”, said the holy presbyter, “two hundred yards away. If you like we can walk over there. It is from that spring that the village has this excellent supply of clean water you see. “Thanking him I asked him to take us, and we set off. He led us along a well-kept valley to a very neat apple-orchard, and there in the middle he

².Ep. 73: CSEL LV 20 f. Ep. 108, 9 CSEL LV 314. Here he thinks erroneously, in the year 404, that Jerusalem was at first called Jebus, and then later, Salem, This does not constitute a retreat to his former line of argument: he simply wishes to leave the city with this name, and he now takes the residence of Melchisedech to be Scythopolis.

showed us a good clean spring of water which flowed in a single stream. There was a kind of pool in front of the spring at which it appears holy John Baptist exercised his ministry of Baptism. "This garden," said the holy presbyter, "is still known in Greek as *cepostuagiulohanni*, or in your language, Latin, "holy John's garden". A great many brothers, holy monks from different parts, travel here to wash at this place. So once more we had a prayer and a reading at this spring as we did in the other places. We said a suitable psalm, and did everything which was usual when arriving at a holy place) (Wilkinson 1999:127;).

According to Antonius Martyr after his description of the eastern side of Jordan River in 570 A.D. (Waheeb, 1998a) He states: (and near there is a city which is named Salamaida where two tribes and a half of the children of God tarried before they crossed over Jordan". In this place are hot baths which are called the bath of Moses, where also lepers are cleansed. And there is a fountain of very sweet water which is drunk as a cathartic and heals many sicknesses) (Antonius, 1896: 9).

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

The hot baths (baths of Moses) was identified with the pool of hot sulphur water at Tell el-Hammam (Baths) in the same area north of Ain Salem east Kafrein village on the eastern side of Jordan River. The same place which Theodorus (chapter XIX) connect with Livias, the plains where the hot baths located well known as Livias or Julias. Also Theodorus fix the place of baths, the city Livias is Beyond the Jordan 12 miles from Jericho, in this Livias Moses struck the rock with his rod, and the waters flowed out. Thence, emerges a rather large stream which irrigates the whole Livias and there are the warm waters where Moses bathed and in these warm waters lepers are cleansed. The Chronicon paschale (631-41AD) makes Abraham cross the Jordan after conquering the kings of the east at Damascus (Gen. 14:15). Melchisedech greeted him there, for God had called him on account of his holiness "into the land beyond Jordan, to the town Salem, which I saw" (PG XCII 177). The "land beyond Jordan", means the west bank, because Abraham was coming from the east.

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

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

Albright suggest Umm el-Amdan to the south-east of Ain ed-Deir. Larange later found some ruins with marble pillar (Albright 1895: 509), but also no sufficient evidences in this site.

Turning again to the eastern side of Jordan River where two seasons of survey and excavations conducted between 2002-2011 and more recent analysis of the excavated materials have shown architectural remains in several locations in Ain Salem area just 6km east of the traditional Baptism site of Jordan River in Jordan Valley. The discovered remains dated earlier to 900 B.C-7th A.D⁴. It had close links with the major site of Jesus Baptism near Wadi Al Kharrar.

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

⁴ The excavations conducted by Department of Antiquities of Jordan and headed by the author of this article. The survey covered the spring of Ain Salem and the surrounding area, approximately 6 square km, which includes the lower parts of Wadi Hesban and Esbus-Jericho Roman Road and Livias plains (recently Rama, Towns and Kafrein).

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

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

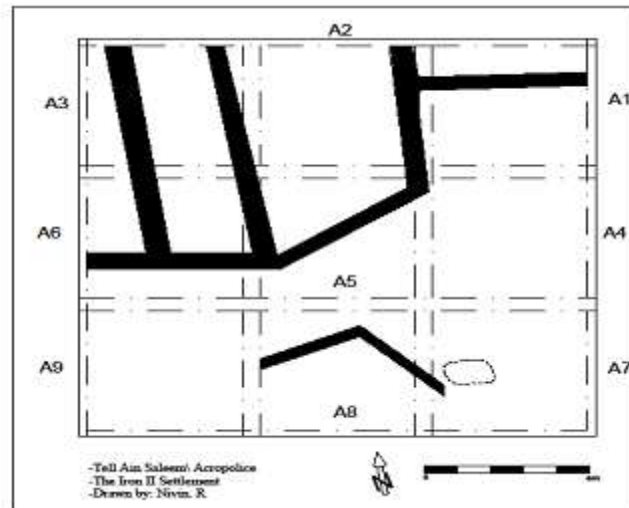


Fig2:- Top plan of excavation results at Tell Ain Salem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Salem now disappears from the pages of history, after the Muslims conquest no more pilgrims visited Aenon (Ain Salem). This Aenon may have been the center of the Baptist's community for some time (Kundsion, 1925; Gottingen, 1925: 26). After John had been executed they must have lived in fear of being apprehended by Herod Antipas or the Jewish authorities in the region of Jordan Valley in Bethany Beyond the Jordan and the western side of Jordan River. In Aenon near to Salem on the eastern side of Jordan River they were safe and could carry on their tradition. And we may assume that John 3:23, with its "Aenon near the Salem", is pointed to some local tradition, which even then claimed Melchisedech as its own.

This gurgling and splashing beneath the green leaves provides an idyllic and yet appropriate setting for John's baptisms. Four other springs rise in the vicinity, so that the name Aenon, which is in the plural, also fits (Conder, 1881).

Can we determine the position of Salem? According to John 3:23 and to tradition, the place was a neighbors of Aenon. Aetheria separates it from the spring by a mere two hundred paces. But so far they do not lead to the goal (Holscher, 1910). Aetheria's indication of distance did not argue, it is true, but very often a pilgrim does not count steps exactly, or else tries to form an estimate from memory, Ruins were noticed there, even if there was nothing at the foot of the tell to indicate the important remains of Melchisedech's palace, described by Aetheria and Jerome. Albright said "it is wrong to identify tell er-ridra with the Salumias of Eusebius or the Salem of St. John". He thinks that Salem is more likely to be at umm el-amdan, about a quarter of an hour's journey to the south-east of 'ained-der. M.-J. Lagrange had considered this possibility in 1895. "The ground would be rich in ruins. (By merely scratching the surface, the Bedouin brought to light a pillar and two beautiful unsculptured sarcophagi)"⁵. As elsewhere on the plain, prospecting and excavating have not been carried out here either. Hence Salem continues to remain in obscurity. We do not know how the name was originally pronounced. Salem was the religious name it acquired after Melchisedech had been placed there. Presumably its original name lived on alongside the religious one. From what root are Salamida derived? Salamida could have come from Salem⁶. Salim and Amatha, too, may well be a popular variant of this name, transmitted orally and Grecized.

Early tradition then briefly and clearly refers to the Aenon and Salem of John 3:23 in the region of springs. At this place, the voice of one crying in the wilderness must have gone on sounding for a long time in the memories of the people, perpetuated at first no doubt, by a vigorous band of disciples. Hence, the evidence from the fourth century rests, we may say, upon an old local tradition. Unfortunately, this has received such meager literary expression, that we can be sure only of the region of the springs, and not of the exact place of baptism or of Salem beside it. That Aenon lay in Livias plain is also in complete accord with the biblical indications. The Jordan brought the Baptist and his activities within its territory;⁷. When threatened by the suspicion of Antipas and of the Sanhedrin, he could continue to work by the Jordan and beside this, many Jews went past the place where he was baptizing, on their way from Jericho to Mount Nebo. For some time, Jesus and his disciples, too, worked parallel to him. This account, therefore, interwoven with that of the ministry of baptism, agrees well with an Aenon near to Salem. Other suggestions seem already to be obsolete. Aenon and Salem have been sought even in south Judaea.⁸

⁵RB 4 (1895) 509. The spring of ed-der is only five minutes' walk from the spring of el-fatur. There Lagrange found another "considerable ruin" with marble pillar, but no signs of a church: Ibid.

⁶ Abel: RB 10 (1913) 223 and Geographie 441: "Salim became Sedima, just as Arbela became Irbid."

⁷ This clear information is sufficient to warrant the somewhat acceptance of Mommert's suggestion in Aenon 57-177, that Aenon was on the eastern side of Jordan River, but not what so recently called ain-Jirm near WadiYabis and Salem, the hill sharabil, both east of Jordan near the mouth of the wadiyabis.

⁸ This wadi lies two hours north-east of Jerusalem. The springs there are so abundant that for some years now the water from them has been piped into the Arab sector of Jerusalem, J.T. Barclay: The City of the Great King, Philadelphia 1858, 559 was the first to stimulate interest in these springs as Aenon. More recently, K. Furrer: ZNW 3(1902) 258, added to this suggestion, the thesis that there was also a Salem fitting the biblical requirements, in this place. "the ravine from whose rocky sides the springs of fara rise, is called, further up, wadisalam or senam, 'n' and 'l' are often interchanged.

These sites, however, lack any support either from Scripture or tradition. Either we must adopt a sceptical attitude⁹ or follow the evidence of the fifth century, which leads us into the plain of Livias. The madaba mosaic map has a second aenon south of scythopolis “aenon near Salem ,” which alliaata locates at khirbetkhisas al-dayr (While Aenon Sapsaphas identified with Wadi Kharrar in addition to that Aenon near Salem was identified 6km to the east of Sapsaphas.

On the basis of the biblical texts and the traditions relatives to the place of john’s baptizing, it would appear that john carried out his activities both at “Bethany across the Jordan” (john 1.28) and at “aenon near salim” (john 3.23)¹⁰ onthe eastern Jordan valley, east of the river. However, as we will see, it is “Bethany beyond the Jordan” that because a place of pilgrimage and the location of monasteries and churches in the Byzantine period.



⁹Buchsel: Johannes 58 ,“Ainon and Salem are unknown places, and there is not even a tradition concerning them”. They came to john and said to him, “rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and all are going to him”

This text deals with john’s disciples coming to him and informing him of the baptizing activity of Jesus. The disciples identify Jesus as “the one who was with you across the Jordan.”

4- Alliaata 1999: 50-5; see also kopp 1963:129-37.

¹⁰ Unlike the gospel according to john, the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not specify where john was baptizing other than at the Jordan River. In Matthew we read: “then Jesus came from Galilee to john at the Jordan, to be baptized by him” (3.13). Likewise, mark reads: “in those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by john in the Jordan” (1.9). Mark adds “from Nazareth” to the information provided by Matthew. Luke, however, is more general as far as the geography of the place of john’s baptism is concerned. He states, “he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (3.3); of Jesus’ baptism, Luke states: “now all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened” (3.21). Luke depicts john as an itinerant desert preacher, addressing his message to all who would come to listen to him in the Jordan valley.

Specific references are made in Matthew, mark, and Luke to the Jordan River where the baptism took place. However, early rabbinic tradition explicitly disqualifies the river Jordan for purification. Only Josephus (antiquities 18.5.2) associates john’s baptism with purification (cf. john 3:25), but he makes no reference to the Jordan.

Fig 3:- Ain Salem Spring(Waheeb, 2016)

About 550, the Map of Madaba shows Corea on the west bank of the Jordan. This is the modern Kerāwa at the mouth of the wadi el-fār'ah on the route linking Neapolis (Nablus) with the plain of Jordan¹¹. It is possible that the name of Aenon near Salem is placed to the east of Jordan River but the madaba map is destroyed at this place. In those days, this was one of the important towns directly connected to Jerusalem. Consequently this small free state could have attracted the Baptist when he wanted to Herod Antipas' clutches. Nor was this Aenon off the beaten track, for the road to Hesban and Mount Nebo ran through this fertile plain. Moreover, by a picture of a boat with a rope, the map indicates a ferry across the Jordan at this Aenon too. At both the places called Aenon the idea is expressed that the Baptist's activity centered on Jordan and that he dwelt near the river beside a spring where he also baptized. According to the map, This Aenon was on the east bank, between the Wadi Hesban and Jordan River older tradition provides more exact references.

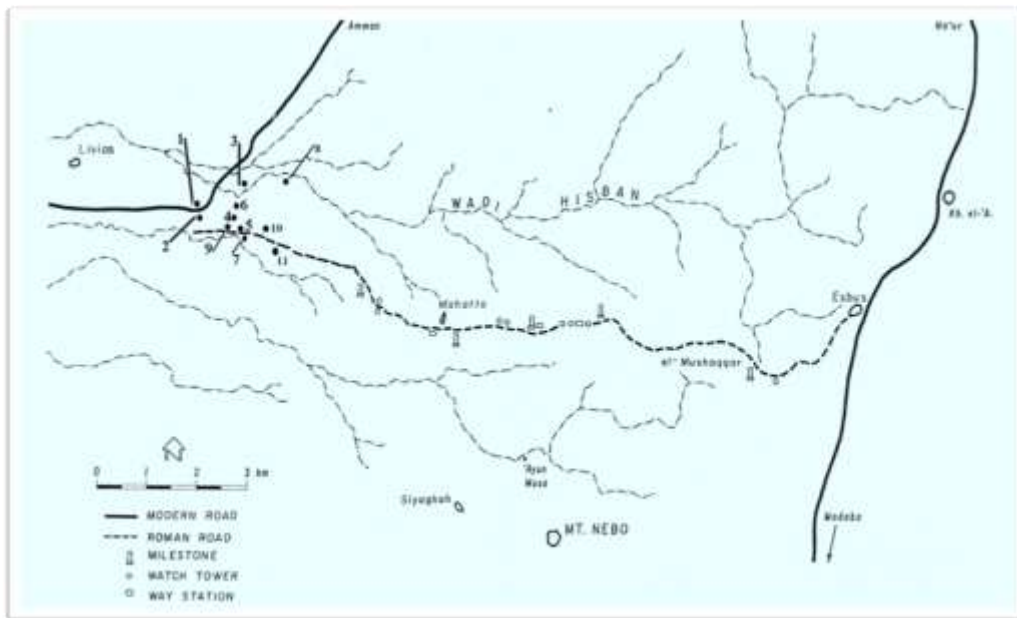


Fig 4:- A map showing Ain Salem and the surrounding zone: 1. Tell Iktano, 2. Tell EL-Husan, 3. Dolmen Field, 4. Tell Ain Salem, 5. Ain Salem, 6. Ain Salem Fawara, 7. Watch tower, 8. Walls and Canals, 9. Caves, 10. Watch Tower, and 11. Watch Tower

Old Traditions of Livias (Aenon near Salem) and the surrounding zone:-

In the Onomasticon, Eusebius identified Betharam with Livias, a city “near the Jordan” (Tayloret at el, 2003:33). Jerome, in the Book on the Site and Names of Places, adds that Herod, that is, Antipas (reigned 4 BC-AD 39) changed the name of the place to Livias in honor of the wife of the Emperor Augustus (Tayloret at el, 2003:33, Josephus, 1955, Antiquities 18.2.1). The site is now generally identified with Tall ar-Ramh (UTM: 0750394E: 3524325N/ elev 221m), and appears on the Madaba Mosaic Map as “Bethramphtha” now Livias (Alliata 1999: 51-54).

It was on the main road that led from Jericho across the Jordan and on to Eshbus/Heshbon, where it would have met the Via Nova Traiana (Trajan's New Road), which connect Bosra in southern Syria to Aqaba/Ayla on the Red Sea. Its religious significance derived from its position in the “plains of Moab”, where Moses bade the children of God farewell before his death (Numbers 33: 48-50, Deuteronomy 1-33). It also became identified as the place where Moses struck the rock, and sweet water with curative properties came forth.

¹¹ This place is named in accounts of the campaigns of Pompey and Vespasian. On its location, see J. Gildemeister: ZDPV 4 (1881) 245 f.: E.Nestle: ZDPV 34 (1911) 105 f.

Here Egeria states: After crossing the river, we came to the city of Livias (Deut. 34.8)¹², in the plain where the children of God encamped in those days.

It is a vast plain stretching from the foot of the Arabian mountains to the Jordan, where the Bible says “the children of God wept for Moses in Araboth Moab at Jordan over against Jericho (Deut. 34.9) forty days”. It is where Joshua the son of Nun “was filled with the spirit of wisdom” when Moses died, “for Moses had laid his hands upon him”, as it is written. It is where Moses wrote the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 31.24), and where he “spoke the words of this song until they were finished, in the ears of all the Assembly of God” (Deut 31.30), the song written in the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 32. 1-43). And it is where holy Moses the man of God blessed each of the children in order before his death (Deut. 33.1). When we reached this plain, we went on to the very spot, and there we had a prayer, and from Deuteronomy we read not only the song, but also the blessings he pronounced over the children of God. At the end of the reading, we had another prayer, and set off again, with thanksgiving to God. (Wilkinson, 1999:119, Travels 10.4)

It was to the hot springs of Livias that Peter the Iberian came as an old man in ca. AD 481 o seek a cure from his illness(es). However, Peter found the springs too cold and found no cure there. It was also on this occasion that he visited Mount Nebo for a second time and then went on to Madaba and the hot springs at Ba’ar/ Baaru (Hammam at Ma’in), along the northeastern shore of the Dead Sea (Horn 2006: 241; Chapter 9, Appendix).

Theodosius the pilgrim 518AD does not seem to have visited Mount Nebo but only came as far as Livias at the foot of the mountain in the Jordan Valley, just to the northeast of the Dead Sea. He states:
(The city of Livias is across the Jordan, twelve miles from Jericho. This Livias is where Moses struck the rock with his staff, and the water flowed, and from that place flows a large stream which waters the whole of Livias. Livias contains the large Nicolaitan date-palm. There too Moses passed away from his world, and there also are some hot spring in which Moses washed. Lepers are healed in them) (Wilkinson 2002: 111-12).

The Piacenza Pilgrim 570 AD testifies to the hot springs called the Baths of Moses at Livias. He also relates that occasionally lepers receive a cure there:

Nearby is a city called Livias, where the two half-tribes of Israel remained before crossing the Jordan, and in that place are natural hot springs which are called the Baths of Moses. In these also lepers are cleansed. A spring there has very sweet water which they drink as a cathartic, and it heals many diseases. This is not far from the Salt Sea, into which the Jordan flows, below Sodom and Gomorrah. Sulphur and pitch are collected on that shore. Lepers lie in the sea there all through the day in July, August and the early part of September. In the evening they wash in these Baths of Moses. From time to time by the will of God one of them is cleansed, but for most of them it brings some relief (Wilkinson 2002: 135-36).

The Jordan River meanders in the Jordan Valley and runs into the Dead Sea. Even of the Dead Sea and its shore, being somewhat too large, we see the threefold dislocation of the mountain range towards the rift valley. We note the following tributaries of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea from the east: the mouth of River Jabbok (Nahraz-Zarqa) near the northern ferry, scarcely visible on the spot of an ancient repair; Wadi Zarqa Ma’in with its characteristic change of direction from north-south to east-west; river Arnon (Wadi Mujib); river Zared (Wadi Hasa) wrongly represented as if running directly into the Dead Sea. Three fish swim in the Jordan River; remains of a fourth can be seen on the left. The fish on the right side is well advised to swim against the stream, by that he is kept alive. East of the Jordan River, a lion whose destroyed body has been scantily repaired, is pursuing a graceful little gazelle. Gazelles exist in Palestine even now, though less than in former times. Lions, well attested in the Bible and in other literary sources, have retired to inner Africa; the last ones were mentioned in the Lives of Saints and Monks from the Middle Ages, e.g. in the Pratum Spirituale by John Moschus. Here and there we see palm trees in the Jordan Valley and on the sea shore, indicating the presence of fresh water, mostly near villages, thorn bushes or the so-called apple of Sodom (*Calotropisprocera*). The Jordan River is crossed by two ferries passing along ropes across the river. It is difficult to determine their exact places, because the Jordan River often changed its bed and flow in the soft marly soil. We may, however, start from the assumption that the ferries were at the most employed crosswalks between the east and the west bank. If this is true, the northern one might have been in the area of

¹² Which has “Araboth” but “thirty”, not forty days.

present Gisir ad-Damya (Conder, 1889: 200-167)¹³, and the southern one at modern King Hussein Bridge (Conder, 1889: 201-142). Near the southern ferry we see a watchtower built upon an arch with a ladder leading up to it, probably constructed so because of the floods. This watchtower was used by a military garrison to protect and control the crosswalk. Military posts of that kind are attested in the so-called *Notitiadignitatum* (74:47f): *cohorsprimasalutaria inter Aeliam at Heirichunta* the first cohort *salutaria* between Jerusalem and Jericho (Coord, 1988 184,136), and *conorssecunda CretensisiuxtaI* or *danomfluum* the second Cretian cohort near the Jordan River. The Dead Sea, strangely enough without any indication of the peninsula al-Lisan, shows blue-greyish waves and seems to be lashed about by wind blowing from north to south as is clear from the two ships on the Dead Sea. The left one is being rowed, with its sail folded. It has a crew of two, almost completely destroyed and roughly repaired: the left one is rowing, and the right one seems to be the commander. This ship is carrying some sort of whitish material –perhaps salt-, and is heading north. The other on the right with two standing sailors is moving southward with an open sail. The yellowish stuff might be wheat.

There was, indeed, trading navigation on the Dead Sea in antiquity. Remains of harbor have been found near al-Zara, (Conder, 1889, 201-077; Waheeb, 1998: 575) in the northern part of al-Lisan, and at the northern end of the Dead Sea. The commercial products were salt, perhaps potash, and wheat from the highland of Moab which was transported through Wadi al-Karak down to the Dead Sea.

Northeast of the Dead Sea, in the southern Jordan Valley, two medium sized cities are represented, the northern one fragmentarily, the southern one almost completely preserved. The inscriptions belonging to them are lost. The identity of these cities, however, is undisputable clear, for there were only two cities in this area¹⁴.

other places surrounding Ain Salem are the hot springs or thermal springs, continuously used since antiquity, are identical with modern Hammumtaz- Zarqa, situated in the gorge (lower course) of Wadi Zarqa Ma'in, reachable from Madabaabd Ma'in on a road whose traces can probably be seen left of Wadi Zarqa Ma'in between the palm tree and the Wadi¹⁵. (Donner, 1982: 175-180; Josephus, 1987: 178-189) The hot springs of Kallirrhoe, situated at Ayn az-Zara on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, became famous because King Herod the Great (37-4 B.C) stayed there before his death at Jericho and his entombment at Herdeion near Bethlehem (Gabal Furedis or Fardes). The mosaicist represented three of the constructions there (from left to right): a round pool from which water flows into the Dead Sea: a square reservoir with an apse (a so-called *Nymphaeum*), also with a water course to the sea; a building bisected by a wall or dam to which water flows from the foot of the mountain and from which water runs into the sea, probably a bathing reservoir with flowing hot water which could be mixed, when required, with cooler water or minerals. Remains of these constructions can be seen there even now (Donner, 1963: 59-89, Josephus, 1814: 656-658, *Antiquities XVII: 16: 5*). The bathing reservoir mentioned in the third place might be identical with that people call al-Madash. Two palm tree indicate the abundance of water and the fecundity of this area.

After this assessment of the area around Ain Salem it is worthey to note that Aion where now is Sapsaphas according to Madaba map is different from Aenon near to salem:

This Aion (Bethany Beyond the Jordan) is another place where St. John the Baptist was said to have baptized. It was situated in the Wadi al-Kharrar, on the east bank of River Jordan¹⁶ (Donner, 1965:26-28; 55). The name Sapsaphas derived from the Semitic word for willow (Arab *Safsaf*). The symbol underneath shows an enclosed spring and something shaped like a conch. Neither the church nor the monastery, both built by the patriarch Elias of

¹³ Although it is represented north of the mouth of river Jabbok which could have changed its bed as well.

¹⁴ Betharam or Bethramphtha (now Livias or Julias): Num 32: 36; Josh 13: 27; Eus. On. 48: 13-15. The Old Testament town was called Beth-Haram, later on, under the Roman Emperor Augustus, it was called Livias or Julias. It is identical with Tall Iktanu and the small but remarkable Tall ar-Rama

¹⁵ Eus. On. 44:21-46:2.

¹⁶ It is mentioned by some Christian pilgrims and monks (e.g. Pilgrim of Piacenza 9; Epiphanius Monachus Hagiopolita IX: 18-X: 2; John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* [PG 87, 2851].



Fig 5:- Amilestone near Jericho-Esbus road close to Aenon near to Salem (Waheeb, 2014)

Jerusalem and mentioned by John Moschus, are represented on the map. Several other springs still active in this area among of them Ain Salem with its holy zone where several monk cells still visible



Fig 6:- Excavations in Tell Ain Salem (Waheeb, 2001)

Conclusion:-

The new signs for habitation in Bethany Beyond the Jordan in the time of Christ have been discovered. This is the serious archaeological evidence where the Baptist base and consequently the rise of Bethany of John 1:28, where he preach and baptized in the wilderness.

The principal traffic even in these days would already use the Roman Road Ebus-Jericho or they called Ebus-Livias Road very close to Wadi Kharrar 5km south of Allen by Bridge.

The gospel stress that the Baptist wanted to act in the spirit of Elias, for this reason he even imitated his dress, and probably felt himself obliged to connect his spiritual imitation with an imitation of his locality also.

The circumstances that Elijah the Prophet crossed the river there on the last stage before his ascertain, may well have impelled him to live in the shadow of the area and to follow his calling near the Jordan in the footstep of his model.

The crowds could easily reach him in this area near the lower part of Wadi Hesban coming from the core site (Bethany Beyond the Jordan) through the well-known Roman Road and from the upper hills through the same road down to Jordan valley.

His coming here near Salem possible across a local tradition in Jordan Valley. At this place John had stirred the crowds and that was a contributory case of this violent death, of which we are reminded by Machaerus not far away. So Ain Salem where he had last worked could have a living memory until it was recorded in literature, so this sequestered spring with its surrounding zone has an historical claim along with its core site Bethany Beyond the Jordan to rank as a well-established site in the history of religions.

Beneath the green leaves provides in idyllic and yet appropriate setting close to the Roman road for John's Baptisms. Several other springs rise in the vicinity, so that the name Aenon, which is in the plural, also fit.

The place is close to Mount Nebo and Moses springs, while Mukawer is no so far from the location where John was beheaded according to the gospels.

Also taking into consideration the recently discovered Albasah cave known as Jesus Cave was dug in the natural limestone rock in Wadi Iraq al –Amir opposite Wadi Hesban with two churches built during Byzantine periods and has strong evidences with the act of John and Jesus during their ministries in the wilderness during Roman period. The recovered Iron Age II materials and architecture in Tell Ain Salem, gives clear indication and strong connection with nearby hills in the same area such as Tell Habasah and Matabba where pray identifies the same date in the region.

According to Antonious "On that side of Jordan is the fountain where John used to baptized, from it to the Jordan is two miles. In the valley itself Heilas (Elijah) was found, when the raven used to bring him bread and meat. On the side of the valley live a multitude of hermits".

Antonious among the earlier pilgrims, mentions the spot, and in placing it opposite Jericho, he is more in accordance with Josephus, who says that Elijah travelled towards the south, then with Jewish tradition (Antonious:40). The name of Salamida is mentioned only by him, but later it was changed to Livias.

As elsewhere on the plain of Livias, prospecting, surveys and excavations have been carried out here. After leaving Bethany Beyond the Jordan, Ain Salem becomes the center of the Baptist community for some time. We do not know the name was originally pronounced. Salem was the religious name it acquired after the Romans built the road there. Its original name lived on alongside the religious one. From what root are Salamaida derived, Salamaida could have come from Salem. Salamaida may well be a popular variant of this name, transmitted orally and Grecized.

Early tradition clearly mentioned Aenon and Salem of John 3: 23, in the region of springs laying close o Bethany the Jordan John1: 28. At this place the voice of one crying in the wildness must gone on sounding for a long time in the memories of the people.

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