

The Roads to Ruins: accessing Islamic heritage in Jordan

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Introduction

Practical editing decisions about cultural heritage conservation are inevitable: it is a simple fact that for a wide variety of reasons not everything can be conserved. In best-case scenarios these decisions are based on policy that considers local, global and scholarly values along with the inevitable financial and logistical concerns. In southwest Asia heritage conservation is especially fraught with political implications. Joel Bauman (this volume) helped to illuminate the politics of national identity in the physical and ideological construction of archaeological parks in Israel/ Palestine. The present chapter will address the politics of heritage conservation in another part of the "holy land," the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

A relatively small country carved out by the Sykes-Picot Agreement and territorial mandates of the post-WWI era, Jordan has few natural resources, little industry, and one of the highest birthrates in the world. Since its inception as a nation-state, Jordan has also accepted refugees, especially Palestinians, after each major conflagration that displaced them – in 1948, 1967, and again when the Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait following the Gulf War. The economic burden of its growing population places increasing strain on the government and infrastructure – a burden which King Hussain and his son King `Abdullah have sought to lighten significantly through foreign aid. Jordan is among the highest per capita recipients of U.S. foreign aid. Under the circumstances tourism seems an obvious possibility for economic development.

Jordan is enormously rich in archaeological sites, boasting visually powerful remains from more than ten thousand years of vigorous human construction projects. While enormously valuable to the researcher, this historical record is perhaps more significant to Jordan, *qua* nation state, as a tourist attraction. There is a mutual relationship between foreign aid and the tourist market: Jordan's economic development is commonly thought to depend heavily on the success of its tourist industry. The success of the tourist trade thus brings money into Jordan directly, in the form tourism dollars, *per se*, and indirectly, as foreign assistance for tourism development and for other projects predicated on economic growth resulting from tourism.

It is thus in the interests of the state to shape in positive ways the impressions of tourists, who come to Jordan overwhelmingly to visit archaeological and biblical sites. The richest tourist market is of course the west, construed by Jordanians as primarily "Christians," who were expected to come in droves to the Holy Land in celebration of the millennium. In the effort to convey an image of Jordanian society as peaceful, inclusive and westernized the conservation of material remains in Jordan is increasingly pressed into diplomatic and economic service. These

interests are served at least in part by obscuring Jordan's dramatic Islamic remains and emphasizing the Christian past.

Marking Jordan's Past

As noted, there is more to cultural heritage in Jordan than Islamic and Christian remains. Apart from world-famous Petra and the decapolis city of Jerash, there are copious Roman, Byzantine, and prehistoric sites, and a less well-known body of Mameluke, Ottoman, and Jewish remains. Much of the argument following could be applied as easily to these sites (excepting Petra and Jerash) as to the early Islamic sites under discussion. While Jerash figures in the New Testament as Gerasa and features several elegant Byzantine churches with mosaic floors, it is most often billed as "the decapolis city of Jerash." We will not here consider it a specifically Christian site in the same way we will sites where the only or central structure of interest is a church, though it is listed as a Christian holy site in *The Holy Sites of Jordan* (130-31). There is also a tiny mosque on the antiquities site at Jerash, probably from the Umayyad period,¹ but it is overgrown, unmarked and it is not mentioned in the interpretive center. What makes Jordan's early Islamic remains a particularly pointed example of cultural "editing" is, first, that Jordan is 98% Muslim; second, the early Islamic remains in Jordan constitute one of the richest early records of Islam anywhere – the only comparable body of remains is in Syria, which has long been less accessible to researchers and tourists alike. While it is impossible to privilege one period of history over another, it is arguable that unique bodies of remains might be conserved with special vigor and attention. The reverse principle seems to be at work in Jordan.

It is important to keep in mind that by and large the struggles to be delineated in this chapter are not scholarly ones – they are political struggles aimed primarily toward shaping Jordan into an economically viable nation state, or at least a palatable vector of foreign aid to maintain the Hashemite regime. Thus a significant site is a site which draws tourists. Within the context of this paper sites will be viewed not through the lenses of historiography or anthropology, for example, but the way a tourist encounters them, and they way they are viewed by those who package them for market. In identifying the Christian or Islamic significance of a site we will follow the text of *The Holy Sites of Jordan* (henceforth *HSJ*), a glossy coffee-table book financed by USAID (*HSJ* 1) and produced largely under the patronage of Hashemite Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed, since these are the commonly held traditions about the holy sites. *HSJ* is also displayed prominently for sale at every tourist facility and hotel bookshop. The English spellings of site names used in this paper will follow those used most often on road signs, where the latter exist.

For the sake of conciseness we will use as a measure of government policy the development of signs and road access to sites. While there is foreign development aid, private development and scholarly research money involved in other aspects of site development, signs and access are predominantly Jordanian government inputs, and therefore reflect Jordanian policy more accurately. Signs and roads are inputs provided by the government to encourage

¹ The Umayyad caliphate was the first political dynasty of Islam, based in Damascus from AD 661-750. The Umayyad caliphs reigned over the expansion of the Islamic empire from a primarily Arabian phenomenon to a world power stretching from India to Spain and France to sub-Saharan Africa. The Marwanids, particularly, were also enthusiastic builders of monumental structures including, for example, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Over eighty percent of the surviving remains of the Umayyad period are located in Jordan and Syria. See, *inter alia*, Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Chicago, 1974 (187-279).

access to sites – they are the *sine qua non* of tourist infrastructure, and as such they indicate the value of a site as perceived by the state.

Classification of Signs and Roads

Since the preparations for the Arab Economic Summit convened in Amman in October 1995, enormous progress has been made toward providing internationally interpretable road signs throughout Jordan. In 1995 signs of any kind were scarce, and usually in Arabic only. Over the intervening years a system of road signs has been established and most signs, especially on the major thoroughfares, are written in both Arabic and English. Many signs now have non-text icons meant to be interpretable internationally. There are three basic categories of signs:

<i>traffic signs</i>	white writing on blue background black writing & illustrations on white background white writing on red background
<i>pilgrimage signs</i>	white writing on green background
<i>tourist signs</i>	cream writing on brown background

In addition to the often whimsical depictions of traffic dangers (e.g., a car bouncing down a rocky hill into water, two cars colliding with rays of damage radiating around them, etc.) and the international signs for food, lodging, petrol and coffee, “icons” have been developed for some tourist and pilgrimage sites. Signs for Petra, for example, sport a drawing of the world-famous *khazneh*. The Dead Sea signs show a swimmer. Islamic pilgrimage sites, of which there are thirty-eight in Jordan, bear a symbol made up of a crescent, minaret, and dome (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1: green pilgrimage sign with icon for Muslim holy sites

Before 1995 there was no systematic attempt to distinguish signs for tourist attractions from any other signs. In many cases the old blue and white signs from the period prior to 1995 are still in place. These signs, present as traces of an earlier way of thinking about the sites they demarcate, afford some curious insights into the logic of the new system.

Because of the expense and effort required to construct physical communications, road quality is a concrete measure of the perceived value of access to a site. In the following discussion road quality is evaluated in terms of the width and number of lanes, quality of pavement, elevation above the surrounding terrain, the presence of reinforced culverts and safety

features such as raised guard-strips, reflectors and foglines, and whether or not curves are banked. Classification is as follows:

- first class: two or more lanes divided by median or painted lines; well-paved and maintained; raised; foglines, reflectors, guardrails and/or raised guard-strips; banked curves; reinforced culverts, bridges;
- second class: two-car width or two lanes separated by painted lines; raised; paved and reasonably well-maintained; reinforced culverts/ bridges; occasional reflectors, foglines, guardrails where necessary;
- third class: one lane; poorly maintained paved or graded gravel; not raised;
- fourth class: gravel or dirt track formed by truck traffic; little or no constructed drainage or passage through wadi beds (i.e., few or no culverts or bridges, tendency for track to wash out);
- “offroad:” no track at all, or a track so damaged that a four-wheel drive vehicle is mandatory.

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to give a detailed discussion of all the of the major and minor roadways in Jordan, so we will focus on the roads most used by tourists. Most tourists come to Jordan on one- to three-night stays as part of packages that include Israel/Palestine, and they stay in `Amman, the Petra area or `Aqaba. European tourists sometimes come directly to `Aqaba and are more likely to overnight at Wadi Rum or the Dead Sea, but the latter are by far secondary to `Amman, `Aqaba and Petra. The most popularly visited sites in Jordan are Petra and Jerash, making the road to Jerash and `Ajlun an important secondary tourist road. The Madaba area is another important tourist attraction found just to the west of the Desert Highway, and access to Madaba is a heavily traveled, first class road. We will therefore be considering the Desert Highway from `Amman to `Aqaba, the Madaba Road, and the `Amman-Jerash and Jerash-`Ajlun Road (**Figure 2**). The first three of these are the roads with the heaviest general traffic as well.

Signs

Of the roads outlined above the Desert Highway is far and away the most heavily traveled, a conduit for commercial traffic from Turkey and Syria to Saudi Arabia, as well as the primary connection between Jordan’s most economically important and populous cities – Irbid, `Amman, and the port city of `Aqaba. From `Amman one must travel the Desert Highway to reach the airport or any of the other main roads to be considered here. Its importance as a main

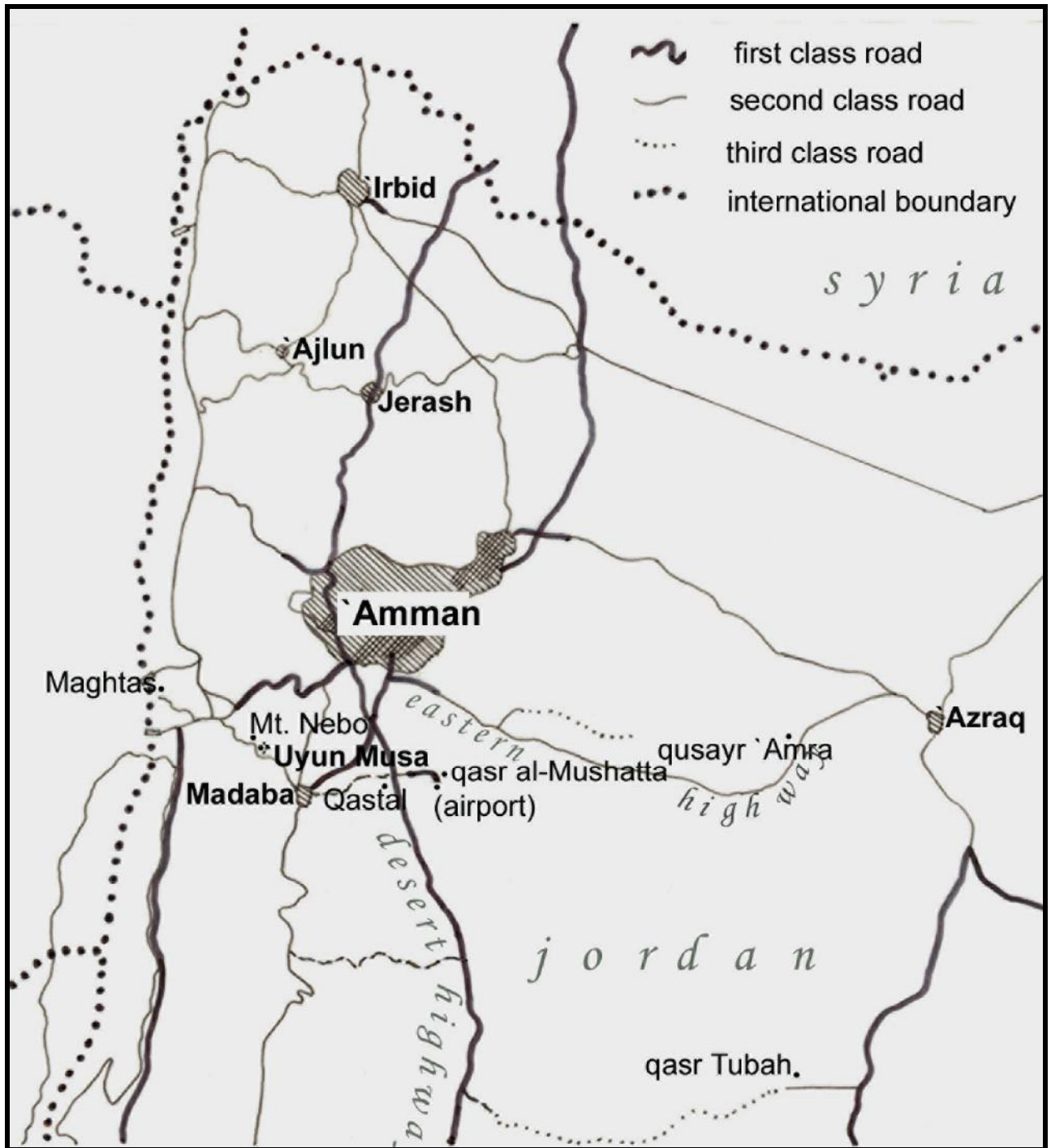


Figure 2: map of roads and sites discussed

artery for local and international traffic is evident from the fact that it is signed continuously along its entire length, some 500 km, by privately owned businesses, even along extensive stretches of highway with no population or cross traffic. The King's Highway and Eastern Highway are much less densely signed, except in the area between `Amman and Madaba. By way of contrast the Desert Highway has in some places as many as 22 *private sector* signs per kilometer, whereas the Jafr Road – 250km of first class highway – sports not a single private sector sign.

Traveling southbound on the Desert Highway between `Amman and Qatrania there are eighteen brown tourist signs, including signs for such attractions as the Queen `Alia International Airport and a Little League stadium, Petra and the Dead Sea, *inter alia*. Of the eighteen, there are six for Christian sites, none for Islamic sites. Qasr al-`Amman, Deir al-Kahf, Qastal and al-Mushatta – all significant, visually impressive Islamic sites on or within a few kilometers of the highway – are unsigned. There is no sign to direct the traveler even to the turnoff for Qusayr `Amra, one of only two UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Jordan (along with Petra).

On the northbound side there are four brown tourist signs. Three signal Christian sites and one directs the northbound traveler to the turnoff for Qusayr `Amra, only twenty km south of `Amman. It remains unclear why the single sign for this UNESCO site is placed on the northbound side when the vast majority of travelers would more logically be heading southbound onto the “Desert Castle Loop” from `Amman, rather than departing from the northbound exit on the long drive back from Petra or `Aqaba. This question is underscored by the fact that density of private-sector signs is much heavier on the southbound side than the northbound: a business which has to pay for its sign places it where it will be most visible. Interestingly, five of the old blue signs remain on this section of highway. Three are for Islamic sites (one for Khan az-Zabib and two for Qasr Tubah), two are for Umm ar-Rasas, a Christian site. Only the Umm ar-Rasas signs have been replaced with new brown iconic signs.

Between `Amman and Jerash there are seventeen brown tourist signs, none for either specifically Christian or specifically Islamic sites. Once one turns onto the Jerash Road, however, there are twenty-eight signs between the turnoff and `Ajlun. Seven signs indicate Christian sites, and six direct the traveler to Salah ad-Din's fortress at `Ajlun. It is worth pausing to consider these more closely. The seven “Christian” signs represent four different sites (Our Lady of the Mountain, Mar Elias, St. George's Church, and a “Byzantine Icon Shop”). Only Mar Elias is of even marginal historical interest (see below); the other three are very recent structures – two are specifically pilgrimage sites and the “Byzantine Icon Shop” is a private business! Even Mar Elias is a pilgrimage site. Yet there are also three important Islamic pilgrimage sites in the same area – one is actually on the way to Mar Elias – as well as an historically significant Mameluke mosque in `Ajlun itself, but not a single sign of any kind is apparent on any of the roads in question. Green iconic signs for Islamic holy sites appear only on ancillary, third class roads.

On the Madaba Road and within Madaba on the four main traffic circles there are seventeen signs, eleven for Christian sites and none for Islamic sites. Once again in Madaba as in `Ajlun there are signs for Christian sites over an hour away (e.g., Mukawir), when there are considerably more significant and impressive Islamic sites (Qastal, Mushatta) within fifteen minutes – but no signs. Madaba Visitors Center is noted here as a Christian site, since there is not a single reference to Islam in the “Information Center,” which concentrates overwhelmingly on the historic Christian community at Madaba. One of the old photos on display depicts a mosque, but there is no identifying information about it – not even a name. It is also intriguing

that one of the very few display objects at the Center is a large, striking Umayyad period jar – again with no identifying information offered. The attendant said that it came from Umm ar-Rasas.

While this totting-up of road signs is tedious, it provides a quantifiable indicator of government inputs into tourist sites. On these main arteries there are eighty-four brown tourist signs: twenty-seven direct the traveler to nine specifically Christian historical and pilgrimage sites; nine point to two Islamic historical sites. In the immediate vicinity of these same roads (less than twenty kilometers from the main road), however, there are three monumental early Islamic sites (Qasr `Amman, Qasr al-Mushatta, Qasr al-Qastal), several more historically important and visually interesting sites (e.g., Umm al-Walid) and thirteen Islamic holy sites² which are unsigned. There is also some indication that Islamic sites which were once signed are no longer to be so.

One might be tempted to think this is all just absent-minded until we begin to examine in detail the placement and distribution of signs in relation to the quality and significance of the sites they denote. This is a delicate matter, but for our purposes sheer visual power is useful as a measure – for indeed it is spectacle, visual “wow,” that attracts tourists. It is, for example, well-known amongst archaeologists and conservationists in Jordan that the presence of mosaics on a site elicits unusually rapid response and support from the Department of Antiquities. At Qastal there was an appropriate example: when the oldest standing minaret in the world³ was badly vandalized in the summer of 1998 it took six weeks of pleading to get a security person (*haris*) assigned to the site. Vandalism continues all around the site and the *haris* is rarely in evidence. When, however, spectacular mosaics were discovered nearby in February, 2000, a *haris* was appointed within twenty-four hours and the land was purchased by the Ministry of Tourism within a few months. Thus the power of the “wow factor.” Let us compare the signs devoted to two extremely powerful Islamic sites – Qusayr `Amra and Qastal – to two Christian sites with less “wow.”

Both of the Islamic sites have been recognized by western-identified organizations as worthy of note: Qusayr `Amra as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, both `Amra and Qastal by Museum With No Frontiers (MWNF), a cultural tourism concern promoted by the European Commission. Qusayr `Amra is a triple-vaulted Umayyad period reception hall and bathhouse with notable mosaics and world-reknowned frescoed walls. In 1999 a small visitors' center was added to the complex, and fitted with excellent reconstructions of the frescoes and the structure itself, as well as well-edited, scholarly text in English, French and Arabic. Qastal is a less polished site, but over forty rooms of the 70m² palace have been cleared since 1998, several notable mosaics exposed, and the site contains the oldest extant minaret in the world (Addison 2000: 489). 400 meters northwest of the minaret are mosaics which rival any in southwest Asia (Addison 2001: 1). In 2002 a visiting official from the United Nations Development Programme said of the site, “once you're inside it, it's completely fantastic.”

² In the `Ajlun area are Maqam Shurhabil bin Husnah, Maqam `Ikrimah bin Abi Jahl, Maqam Nebi Allah Hud around `Amman are Maqam Nebi Allah Khidr Elias, Maqam `Abd al-Rahman bin `Auf, Maqam Nebi Allah Shu`ayb, Maqam Bilal bin Rabah, Deir al-Kahf (a.k.a. “The Cave of the Seven Sleepers”), and Gadur near Madaba are Siyagha (Maqam Nebi Allah Musa), `Uyun Musa, Maqam Nebi Allah Yahya (Mukawir), and Maqam Abu Dharr al-Ghifari.

³ Addison, Erin. “The Mosque at al-Qastal: Report from al-Qastal Conservation and Development Project, 1999-2000.” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan XLIV: 2000* (489).

As mentioned earlier, the signing for `Amra is oddly placed on the major thoroughfares. The Eastern Highway actually departs from deep inside the industrial outskirts of `Amman, at the *midan sharq al-'awsat*. This traffic circle is difficult even for most Jordanians to find if they don't use the artery regularly, yet placed there is a brown tourist sign – in English – for Qusayr `Amra. The easier way to access the Eastern Highway is to exit the Desert Highway at the Madaba interchange, but head east toward Yadoudah until one intersects the highway. One might expect a sign for `Amra at this Desert Highway exit, where there are signs for Madaba and Mount Nebo in both directions. The single sign for `Amra noted above is, however, at the next exit traveling north, the Na`ur exit which leads (after half an hour or more) to *midan sharq al-'awsat*. Even on the Yadoudah road it is necessary to travel through ten kilometers of depressed urban sprawl and heavy traffic before encountering a sign for Qusayr `Amra just at the exit for the Eastern Highway. In short, unless one already knows, it is hard to find and the signs are likely to hinder rather than help.

Qastal is actually *on* the frontage road for the Desert Highway, visible from the highway, three kilometers north of the airport exit (twenty-five kilometers south of `Amman). There are no signs whatsoever for Qastal.

In contrast to the visitors center at `Amra, the Madaba Visitors Center is not associated with any historic site. No text beyond the simplest labeling of the photographs is available for the few exhibits offered. At the Yadoudah/Madaba road and for the fifteen southbound kilometers preceding it there are signs – seven brown tourist signs as well as blue directional signs – for Madaba and Christian sites in Madaba. In the fifteen kilometers of first class road between the highway and the town, there are seven more – three of them for the Madaba Visitors Center. It is virtually impossible *not* to find it, even if one is not looking for it.

Mar Elias, near `Ajlun, is the site of a small Byzantine church. The remains consist of foundation courses and some badly damaged, naive tri-color mosaics. There has recently, however, been an effort by the Department of Antiquities to create a more significant site there by constructing a large, semi-circular stone terrace and seating to showcase the beautiful view to the north, as well as cutting new blocks to rebuild walls and steps. Interestingly, the holy place devoted to Saint (*mar*) Elias by Arab pilgrims – both Christian and Muslim – is located elsewhere, to the south near the village of Mahas, but there are no signs for that site located on first or second class roads. The third class road leading to the northern Mar Elias site, however, has been re-paved and there are three well-placed signs on the important Jerash-`Ajlun road and leading from `Ajlun to the site itself.

It is hard to find the logic for this sign distribution: on the roads carrying the most tourist traffic in Jordan there is one sign for one Islamic site, Qusayr `Amra, and none for Qastal, though both are recognized as noteworthy by prestigious international organizations. For the Madaba Visitors' Center and Mar Elias, largely “fabricated” sites, i.e., with no historic remains or very little, respectively, there are six brown tourist signs, judiciously placed. Neither the Madaba Visitors Center (nor any other Christian site in or around Madaba) nor Mar Elias has been recognized by UNESCO or MWNF. There is evidently a heuristic at work here other than pure touristic value (the previously mentioned “wow factor”).

It is worth remarking too on the iconography of the new brown sign system. Not every site has been assigned an “icon,” a symbol which represents specifically that site and no other. The only Islamic site which has an icon is Qusayr `Amra and there the icon is, appropriately, a triple-vaulted building. The icon for `Amman is a Roman amphitheatre, though a recent multi-million dollar project has restored the dramatic palace of Caliph Yazid II on the acropolis, next

to the antiquities museum. For Madaba and Umm ar-Rasas the icons are recognizably cruciform mosaic patterns. For Mount Nebo the icon is actually a cross – the image represents the large cross-*cum*-sculpture that stands in the church courtyard. While there are recognizably Christian forms placed frequently on the major highways, no brown tourist signs carry a recognizably Muslim symbol (Figure 3).

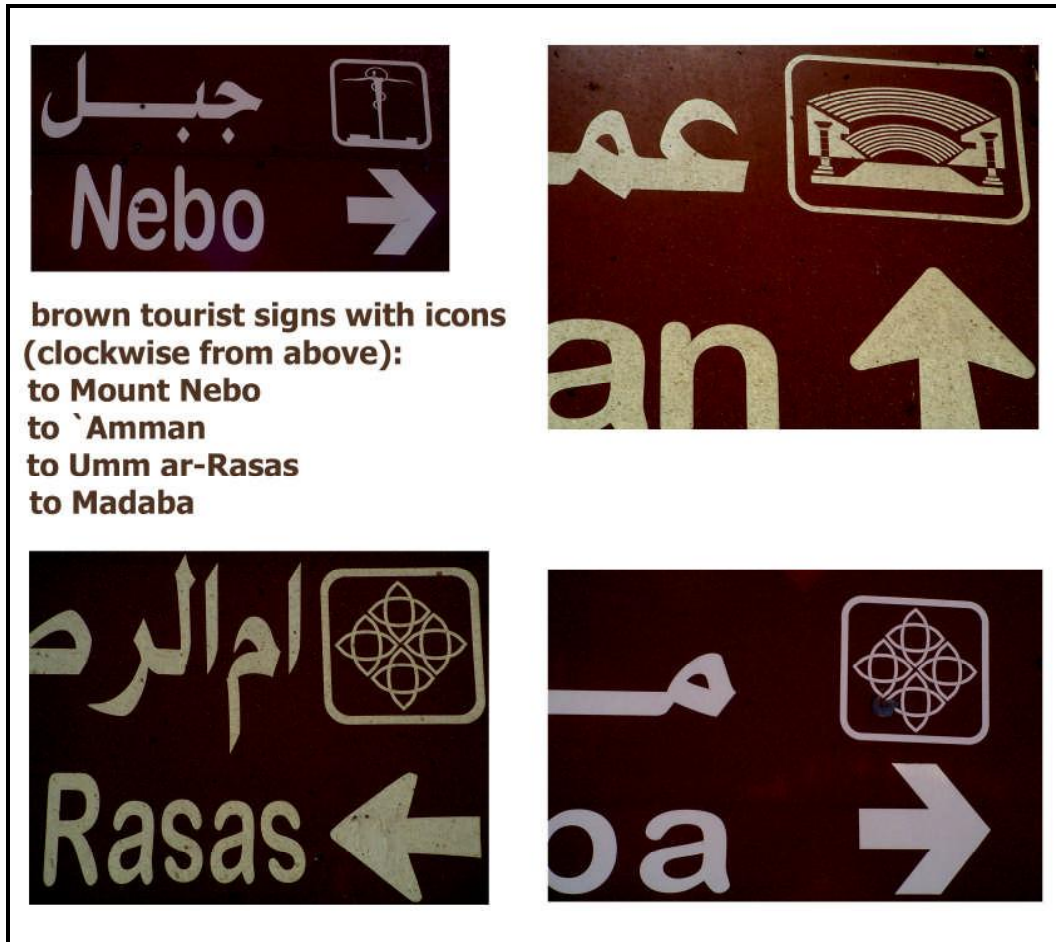


Figure 3: brown and white tourist signs with icons

This theme is continued with the signs for holy sites, or “pilgrimage signs.” While signs for Mar Elias, Our Lady of the Mountain and other Christian holy sites are frequently seen on the heavily traveled roads under discussion, not a single sign for any of the thirty-eight Muslim holy sites is visible on these highways.

It is not that the sites are unsigned. Every one of the Islamic holy sites, even in the most remote villages, is signed; but the signs are never visible from the heavily traveled tourist roads we are considering. Let us consider Mount Nebo, known to most Arabic speakers as *siyagha*. Nebo is a holy site to both Christians and Muslims, to whom it is *maqam nabi allah musa*, “The Holy Site of the Prophet of God Moses.” According to tradition Mount Nebo is the site of Moses’ death. Though there is another site so claimed on the west side of the Jordan river near Ariha/ Jericho, Mount Nebo is one of the best-known and most-visited sites in Jordan, and

except for Petra the most heavily signed, as well: on the Desert Highway, Jerash Road, Madaba Road, Maghtas Road, and the Rawda-Madaba Road there are an impressive 18 brown tourist signs for Mount Nebo.

The top of Mount Siyagha is now dominated by a Franciscan church and monastery, and since 1933 the Franciscans have pursued archaeological research there. In the forecourt of the Church there is a huge, 20th century metal cross visible for miles around. The site is walled and gated, and there is no trace of Islamic heritage evident.

It is odd that there is no indication that this is a Muslim holy site; also that there is no sign for `Uyun Musa, another holy site which lies on a tiny, steep third-class road halfway down the hill crowned by the church. This road dips down through the wadi that creates the falls at `Uyun Musa, turns into a fourth class road and then dead-ends at some small farms after another kilometer. There is no longer any sign at all for `Uyun Musa, though there was one at least as recently as 1996. At the top of the hill on the return to the main road, however, there is a pilgrimage sign for *maqam nabi allah musa* – a.k.a. Mount Nebo – facing downhill, away from the main road. The sign is firmly placed – it was intended to be where it is, however inexplicably. In the three hours I spent hiking around `Uyun Musa in the spring of 2002, the only person I encountered was a bedouin woman collecting water at the springs. No cars used the road.

On the opposite side of the Madaba-Nebo Road another third-class track takes off to the northwest to Khirbet Mukhayyet, a small Byzantine church with a brilliant mosaic floor. The track quickly deteriorates, and for a third of each year it is difficult to make it to the church without four-wheel drive. The road dead-ends at the church. On the return to the main road, however, there is another pilgrimage sign for *maqam nabi allah musa* – again facing away from the main road. The signs for the Muslim holy site seem deliberately positioned so that they are invisible to the normal flow of traffic to and from the site.

As if this weren't peculiar enough, a comparison of the old blue and white signs with the new brown tourist signs offers us another piece of information to consider. There are no longer any references to *siyagha*, the traditional Arabic name for the site, on government signs, though there is one restaurant whose sign refers to it. Approaching Mount Nebo from the Jordan Valley the road takes a sharp turn, and there is a new brown sign for "Madaba" and "Nebo," with *jabal nibu* provided in Arabic – "Mount Nebo." Just after the new sign, however, there remains an old blue and white sign that reads, in Arabic, *maqam nabi musa*, and below that in English, "Mount



Figure 4: old blue and white tourist sign (Arabic reads *maqam nebi Musa*, "holy site of the Prophet Moses")

Nebo" (**Figure 4**). This indicates that until very recently the old Muslim name was used at least in Arabic. This is no longer so. Now all of the eighteen brown signs use the Christianized name for the site *even in Arabic*.

It is unavoidable that the impression forming in the tourist's mind is that of a landscape heavy with Christian history, and virtually void of Islamic remains. The roadsides, busy with signs for Christian sites and showcases for the presence of Christians on the landscape, remain silent about the huge and varied Islamic remains.

Road Access

At this point let us turn from the major thoroughfares to consider sites where considerable resources have been invested in road access. The three sites to be considered are Qasr at-Tubah and Qasr al-Mushatta, both monumental Islamic sites, and Maghtas, traditionally claimed by some as the scene of Jesus' baptism.

One of the more acute problems for the Jordanian tourist industry is competition with holy land tourism to Israel. At conference after conference discussion turns to the question of how to get tourists to come to Jordan not as a day trip (literally) or a weekend "add-on," but as a primary destination. Thus it is no surprise that just before the anticipated deluge of millenium tourism, "the sites of John the Baptist were rediscovered by His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed and the Franciscan Archaeologist of Mount Nebo" (*HSJ* 103). In *The Holy Sites of Jordan* Father Michele Piccarillo writes further, "plans are being developed to renovate (sic) this sacred site," and "a new project for the protection and renovation of this holy site is envisaged (sic)" (103). Bethabara, as the baptism site is called in *HSJ*, is now the fifth site where Jesus is claimed to have been baptized – the other four are in Israel and the West Bank. The site is now more commonly referred to as Maghtas, or simply as The Baptism Site.

Visitors to the site are given a guided tour through a carefully groomed and framed series of cisterns, simple tricolor geometric mosaic fragments, a few foundation courses for an otherwise vanished church, and some reconstructed arches intended to represent another tiny church site. By far the most conspicuous structure is a brand new, polished marble terrace surrounding immersion pools complete with handrails for the unsteady. This intervention no doubt anticipated droves of Christian pilgrims who might want to be baptised/ immersed at the "historic" site. That the grandiose historical claims for this site are rather inflated is irrelevant – from a scholarly perspective the same is true for most of the traditional holy sites. There was, in fact, a Byzantine church at Maghtas and there were, in fact, cisterns (though it is difficult to demonstrate that they were immersion pools). What is so striking about Maghtas is that there is so little there at all, even compared to sites like Mar Elias and Lot's Cave, another Byzantine church site and a pilgrimage site shared by Muslims and Christians alike.

What makes Maghtas interesting for our purposes is that a JD 400,000 (US\$560,000) road was constructed to connect Maghtas to Mount Nebo for the purposes of pilgrimage tourism.⁴ The "Maghtas Road," as it is commonly called, winds over ten stark, scenic kilometers through the barren hills overlooking the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley, connecting to the Jerusalem Road just east of the turnoff to the border town of South Shouneh. Except for the gas station at this intersection, the good (second class) Maghtas Road does not serve a single business or community. It is strictly a tourist road.

⁴ "Jordan, Israel tourism leaders to meet." *The Jordan Times*, Wednesday, September 8, 1999 (no byline). www.jordanembassyus.org/090899004.html (September 15, 2002).

Compare the Maghtas Road to what is known to a very few people in Jordan as *tariq an-nifayat al-khatirah* – “the Hazardous Waste Road.” The Hazardous Waste Road is a second class road of even better quality than the Maghtas Road, and departs from what is arguably the best road in Jordan – the nearly deserted Jafr Road. There are no signs at all at the turn (**Figure 5**). After fourteen kilometers one encounters a large, well-built, unmarked installation which is



Figure 5: intersection of Jafr Road and the "hazardous waste road"

the new hazardous waste plant under construction at Wadi Ghadaf. The paved road continues for 1.3 kilometers before ending at the east edge of the wadi bed, where the plant wall turns south. A very rough track continues west on the other side of the wadi. If one turns back, then, toward the Jafr Road, one might — if the light is right and you’re looking for it – see on the north side of the road, close to the ground, a tiny (20 x 30 inch), rusted, blue and white sign that reads “Qasr Tubah.” There is no structure visible, however, and apparently no road (**Figure 6**).

Qasr Tubah is indeed four kilometers northeast of the sign. There is, in fact, a track which begins just beyond the area disturbed for the hazmat road construction. A four-wheel drive vehicle is necessary to negotiate it. Following the east edge of the wadi the palace is impossible to miss: a gigantic, vaulted structure built of slender mudbrick, standing in splendid isolation. Qasr Tubah is internationally known and revered by the local bedouin as a landmark and source of pride. It is also melting away, literally, out of neglect, and badly in need of conservation.

There is, it may be recalled, another way to get to Qasr Tubah. On the Desert Highway there remain two of the old blue and white signs, one facing northbound, one southbound, which read in Arabic and in English:

Qasr Tuba
an Umayyad Palace 67 km
Department of Antiquities



Figure 6: sign for Qasr Tubah on the "hazardous waste road"

A fourth class road then departs to the east. Within a few kilometers it diminishes to a faint dirt track. At the eighth kilometer the track forks, and there is a small white sign with black Arabic lettering which reads

tariq makab al-nifayat al-khatirah
("hazardous waste dump road")

and points to the southerly fork. The hazardous waste management folk apparently felt that the track was ambiguous enough to post a sign. There is, however, no sign at all for Qasr Tubah. While documenting this article in May, 2002, I was approached at this fork by two truckloads of soldiers who expressed their concern about my continuing down the track in my rental car. They assured me that it was not possible to get to Tubah from there, and that I should turn back; but an adventurous and skilled driver with six or eight hours to spare, someone who already knows where the road is going and where Tubah is, can in fact get there on this track. After 66 km one crosses Wadi Ghadaf from the west and meets the west end of the Hazardous Waste Road, and the little rusted blue and white sign for Qasr Tubah.

There are visually powerful historic remains at Tubah in a striking scenic context. There is a good road already in place to access it, if the four-kilometer track were merely re-graded from the hazmat plant. Yet there is not one sign on the Eastern Highway or the Jafr Road to indicate that the Islamic site is there. It seems unlikely that many tourists will negotiate the sixty-six kilometer track from the Desert Highway, and it would seem that those in charge of such matters have tacitly agreed on this point, since the old blue and white signs have never been replaced with brown tourist signs to alert the adventurous.

A final example is Qasr al-Mushatta, less than thirty kilometers from `Amman and adjacent to the Queen Alia International Airport. Qasr al-Mushatta is another MWNF site, another eighth-century Umayyad palace with soaring vaults and an impressive surrounding wall buttressed by turrets. Within the walls is also an unfinished mosque cleared and partially reconstructed in the 1960's. What remains of Mushatta's famous facade (most of which

presently resides in a museum in Berlin) is ornately carved into diamond and rosette patterns. A colonnade of gray marble columns leads into a clover-leaf reception hall, and huge pieces of carved marble lintel lie lined up along the entryway.

Until at least 1998 al-Mushatta was accessible from the airport ring road itself. At the intersection of the freeway exit and the ring road there was a brown and white tourist sign pointing the way clearly. The sign has since been removed. The intersection has been re-signed, and al-Mushatta is not included on it.

There has long been another route to Mushatta as well. Until 2000 it was a small, third-class road which departed from the industrial area of North Qastal, passed Mushatta and ended when it intersected with the airport ring road. In 2000-2001 this road was refurbished into a seven and a half km first-class road to serve the new customs installation for the airport. Where the old road had climbed up a hill and made a sharp turn to the south to pass Mushatta, the new road actually ends at the qasr parking lot. At the time of writing the site was so neglected that this parking lot had for many months been used as a storage lot for heavy construction equipment. Traffic from the customs road here makes a right turn into the first security gate for the airport.

Every sign for the qasr which was once visible on either the airport road or from the old road is gone. It's hard to miss the qasr itself, but unless one gets out and walks up to the front entrance of the building, there is nothing to identify it. Clear and efficient new signs guide traffic to the new customs road: there is a sign and arrow at every turn from the Desert Highway to the security gate, five coming southbound and two northbound. There is, however, not a single sign for Qasr al-Mushatta.

One might dismiss the whole matter by reasoning that these sites are too inaccessible to warrant the expense of road access and signs, but this is hardly the case with al-Mushatta. It is only ten kilometers from the exit on the Desert Highway to the qasr itself. Overall it is less than thirty kilometers from `Amman. Like Qastal, it is an easy stop on any bus tour to Madaba, Petra or `Aqaba. There is a fine new road and government signposts with plenty of room for additional signs (elsewhere different ministries share signposts). The road leads directly to the parking area at the qasr. But there isn't a sign in all Jordan that hints at its existence.

Conclusions

What emerges from this survey goes beyond policy which favors devoting resources to Christian sites over Islamic sites because the former are what tourists want to see. That would be troubling enough, but understandable. More disturbing is the evident concomitant policy by which Islamic heritage – history, religion, pilgrimage and Muslims themselves – are deliberately obscured from both western visitors who use the signs in English *and* from Arabic-language tourists. Islamic pilgrimage signs are distributed and oriented away from first and second class roads. Those responsible fail to sign important and visually spectacular Islamic heritage sites – even Qusayr `Amra, chosen as a World Heritage Site. Names for sites such as Siyagha have been shifted away from the traditional Arabic designations in favor of the use of western Christian epithets even in Arabic. Visitors are steered away from Muslim Jordanians as much as possible, as evidenced in the construction of the Maghtas Road and the shift of the Mar Elias pilgrimage stop from the site near `Amman, actually used by both Muslims and Christians, to an isolated site in the north.

In a bizarre final twist to this story, the very westerners who are supposedly being courted appear to disagree with Jordanian government on the matter of what is worth conserving *even in the interests of tourism*. UNESCO has protected only Petra and Qusayr `Amra, an Islamic site.

When the EuroMed partnership inaugurated the exhibition trail for Museum with No Frontiers, it chose to showcase the fabulous palaces of the Umayyad dynasty. `Amra, Qastal, Mushatta, Tubah, `Amman, Deir al-Kahf, and Umm al-Walid were all selected as primary sites for the catalogue; of Maghtas, Mount Nebo, Mukawir, Mar Elias, Madaba Visitors Center, Our Lady of the Mountain, St. George's Church, the Byzantine Icon Shop – none. UNESCO is recognized as one of the premiere arbiters of international cultural heritage management. EuroMed is specifically a promoter of cultural tourism, linking Europe with twelve southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. It seems odd that their preferences are so signally ignored.

It is in this disjuncture that we see why it is important for Jordan to promote a particular tourism that distances the state from things Islamic and from the particular fragrance of danger they seem to carry. In September, 2002, the *Jordan Times* announced that “a JD 6 million (US\$ 8.4 million) joint government-USAID project” will augment the tourist infrastructure at Maghtas (Dajani 2002: 1). The same article reports that in the first eight months of 2002 31,368 visitors have toured Maghtas, a decrease from 2001. If even 50,000 tourists pay admission fees of JD5 each in 2002, the Ministry of Tourism will bring in JD 250,000 (US\$350,000) over the course of a year – a pittance compared to the millions the United States will hand out in aid for tourism *development*. Ultimately the educated opinions of organizations such as UNESCO or MWNF matter as little as the less rarified tastes of the Christian tourists: cultural heritage management policy is being shaped by the big money that passes from state to state in the context of global politics.

As Baram and Rowan point out so forcefully in the introduction to this volume, “the bundle of processes involved in globalization is subsuming nationalism.” Baram and Rowan continue by saying that an examination of the global context presents a shift in cultural heritage management: whereas “twentieth century states employed archaeology to foster national identity,” Jordan began to do the opposite precisely in anticipation of the dawning twenty-first. The preparations for the eagerly awaited influx of millennium-minded Christian tourists appear to turn on a policy deliberately *effacing* Jordan's own national identity and in particular its Islamic heritage.

Due to worldwide economic recession and perceived terrorist threats, the flood of millennium tourists never materialized. The second Palestinian *intifada* and events of September 11, 2001 have subsequently decimated the tourist trade in Jordan, even though Jordan continues at the time of this writing to be a stable and easy place to travel. It thus becomes ever more important for the Jordanian state to identify itself with the interests of the United States and to sustain the sense that tourism development is a worthwhile investment of foreign aid. Subtly, then, tourism serves as a barometer of perceived stability in “the middle east,” and any Euramerican *perception* of Jordan as Muslim-identified, militant, or hazardous is costly on many levels. Since it is not the dollars they spend, *per se*, but the sense of economic possibility that they represent, tourists must be courted into a landscape as free as possible of any hint of threat or discomfort. As countries worldwide scramble to identify themselves with American interests, the Hashemite regime in particular has worked overtime to configure itself as a secular, western-identified state.

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