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## Locating Tall el-Hammam on the Madaba Map

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### Abstract:

The Madaba Mosaic Map indicates a prominent but unnamed site near the upper-left edge, just above the Jordan River. Various attempts have been made to identify it with Tall Iktanu, Tall Kefrein, Tall Nimrin, Tall Rama, and Khirbet Sweimeh. This article demonstrates that the better candidate for this site is Tall el-Hammam which boasts superior size, perfect location, abundant water, and Early Roman/Byzantine remains.



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# Locating Tall el-Hammam on the Madaba Map<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

There are limited resources available to those wanting to link sites mentioned in ancient sources with modern tells/talls in the Levant. The Byzantine Madaba Map, a masterpiece of Near Eastern geography, is often cited to lend weight to certain identifications. For Oswald Dilke, the mosaic map at Madaba is “probably the best known example of Byzantine cartography.”<sup>2</sup> Discovered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the mosaic floor of the Byzantine church<sup>3</sup> in Madaba, Jordan (Fig. 1), it is the oldest extant map of the Holy Land. It no doubt preserves the location of sites from earlier eras; hence, it sheds light on the background of the biblical periods. The mosaic dates to the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD and highlights



Fig. 1—Portion of the Madaba Map north of the Dead Sea. Notice the Jordan River with the two fish swimming toward each other, one heading toward the Dead Sea and the other trying to escape the salt water of the Dead Sea. Above the Jordan River is the Baptism site of John, and to the left of the gazelle is the unnamed Site One. Just above the gazelle and to the right is Site Two which is believed to be Tall el-Hammam. The large city of Jericho is seen at the bottom of the photo. The unnamed Site Two is directly across from Jericho, suggesting its identification as the site of Tall el-Hammam. © David E. Graves.

<sup>1</sup> Previously published in *Bible and Spade* 20.2 (Spring 2007): 35–45. Reprinted with permission. Additional information has been included for this *BRB* version.

<sup>2</sup> Oswald Dilke, *The History of Cartography* (ed. J. B. Harley, and David Woodward; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 264.

<sup>3</sup> Today the Greek Orthodox parish church of St. George has been built over the Byzantine Church preserving the mosaic.

life in the region at the height of the Byzantine period (AD 325–638). Unfortunately, the outer edges of the map are missing, including one prominent site on the upper left edge above the Jordan River and Bethany beyond the Jordan.<sup>4</sup> There have been several attempts to identify this site, but, in our view, they have failed. The proper identification of this site is the focus of this article.

### **Unnamed Site**

On the Madaba Map each city is portrayed by a stylized vignette (Fig. 1)<sup>5</sup> and is accompanied by its name. However, for this city only the vignette remains.<sup>6</sup> Since the site is not labeled, the identification of this city has been open to question. The fact that various suggestions have been made with little support, other than personal preference and subjective arguments, merits further investigation and research.

### **Geographic Site Location Central**

The most important criterion for its identification is the location on the map. The unnamed site (hereafter referred to as Site Two) on the Madaba Map is tucked away in the upper right corner of the Jordan valley just northeast of the Dead Sea (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2—Tall Kefrein is dwarfed in the distance by the long-prominent site of Tall el-Hammam. It is over 100 ft. (30 m) high and .6 mi (1 km) long east to west, including both upper and lower talls. It is also the easternmost site in the Jordan Valley. This photo was taken from the Roman ruins that overlook the Jordan Valley, looking west. The remains of five Roman cisterns are visible in the foreground. They stand on top of the mountains rising up off the Jordan Valley. The water supply was connected to the site in Roman times by an aqueduct that ran across the modern road. There was also a Roman fortification on the tip of Hammam, likely as a defensive installation to guard the spring below and to keep watch over the Jordan plain. © David E. Graves.

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<sup>4</sup> The site of Christ's baptism and of the Israelites' entry into Canaan to begin the Conquest.

<sup>5</sup> There are two unnamed sites in the region; the one on the left with only two palm trees above the lion will be called Site One while the other on the right depicted with five palm trees above the gazelle will be called Site Two. Site Two is the site in dispute.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 5.

The site stands alone, with no other sites identified between it and the Wadi al-Zarqa Ma‘in on the right.<sup>7</sup> It is our opinion that this site is none other than Tall el-Hammam. Whatever the identity of the site, Tall el-Hammam (long. 31° 51’ N; lat. 35° 40’ E) was prominent in ancient and Byzantine times, and had religious significance.

The fact that Tall el-Hammam is the largest site<sup>8</sup> in the southern Jordan valley argues for it as a leading candidate. We believe that the location of this site is precisely where the Madaba Map locates Site Two. One proof of this is that when one stands on Tall el-Hammam and looks across the Jordan valley, Jericho is found right where it is on the Madaba Map (Fig. 1). Is this merely a coincidence?

### Process of Elimination

Over the past few years we have read and analyzed everything we could get our hands on regarding the archaeological sites on the east side of the Jordan River between the Dead Sea and the Jabbok River. Furthermore, we have walked, sherded, and photographed them, and in the case of Tall el-Hammam, even excavated for two seasons with the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project, directed by Dr. Steven Collins (Trinity Southwest University). I think it is safe to say that we have a strong grasp on the size and occupational histories of these sites. By the process of elimination, we should be able to find, with a high degree of probability, what the Madaba Mosaicist had in mind for the site in question. Here is the list of candidate sites, fourteen altogether:

Teleilet Ghassul – <i>Chalcolithic Period</i>	Khirbet Kefrein – <i>too small</i>
Tall Ghrubba – <i>Chalcolithic Period</i>	Tall Kefrein – <i>too small</i>
Tall Sahl es-Sarabet – <i>Islamic remains</i>	Tall Rama – <i>too small</i>
Tall el-Azemiah – <i>too small</i>	Khirbet Sweimeh – <i>too small</i>
Tall Bleibel – <i>too small</i>	Tall Iktanu – <i>no Roman/Byzantine</i>
Tall Mustah – <i>too small</i>	Tall Nimrin – <i>smaller site</i>
Tall Ghannam – <i>too small</i>	Tall el-Hammam – <i>largest site</i>

Teleilet Ghassul (a large and well-known site) and Tall Ghrubba were only occupied during the Chalcolithic Period, and Tall Sahl es-Sarabet has only Islamic remains. That leaves eleven candidates. Eight of the remaining sites are very small; hence, they are not serious contenders to be the unnamed site on the Madaba Map. The three remaining sites are Tall el-Hammam (Fig. 2), Tall Iktanu, and Tall Nimrin. Tall Iktanu is larger than the small sites eliminated already, but it is not nearly the size of Tall el-Hammam and Tall Nimrin.

Also, Tall Iktanu is closer to the Dead Sea than the other sites and would not fit proportionally on the map. Tall Iktanu simply does not make the cut. Further, Kay Prag, the

<sup>7</sup> J. Manfredi, “Callirhoé et Baarou dans la mosaïque géographique de Madaba,” *RB* 12.2 (1903): 166–71; Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map with Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1954), 37.

<sup>8</sup> To date, the occupation levels of Tall el-Hammam include Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Late Iron I and Iron II [R. K. Harrison, “Shittim,” in *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (eds. Edward M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 413], Roman and Byzantine [Steven Collins, Gary A. Byers, Michael Luddeni, and John W. Moore, *The Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project End of Season Activity Report Season Two: 2006/2007 Excavation and Exploration*. As submitted to the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (5 February 2007), 15]. This is according to the identified pottery on the site from season 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 (Collins, et. al., *Tall el-Hammam Activity Report 2007*, 15).

excavator of Tall Iktanu, states there was no Roman or Byzantine occupation there.<sup>9</sup> That leaves Tall el-Hammam and Tall Nimrin. Since there only are two unnamed sites on the Madaba Map (due to damage), it seems clear that the northern site is Tall Nimrin, and that the southern site is Tall el-Hammam. The two sites are about 5 mi (8 km) apart. If there is a flaw in our reasoning, we welcome further input. James Flanagan, the excavator of Tall Nimrin, has, in fact, recognized that Tall Nimrin is likely the northern site on the Madaba map.<sup>10</sup> Avi-Yonah and Eugenio Alliata also identify Site One as Tall Nimrin.<sup>11</sup> By a process of elimination, it seems clear that the southern site, Site Two, is Tall el-Hammam.



Fig. 3—Roman Building (Tall el-Hammam, Jordan). This Roman building has not yet been excavated, but the massive Roman stones and concrete along with Roman pottery indicate that this was a Roman site not far from the lower spring, which resides on the Early Bronze Age level of the tall. David Graves is seen holding a large piece of Byzantine pottery. © Michael Luddeni.

### Identifiable Features

The identifiable features of the portion of the Madaba Map in question include date palm trees,<sup>12</sup> hot springs, and its proximity to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. The indication of date palms is significant because, according to Diodorus Siculus (*Bibl. Hist.* 2.48–49), around the Dead Sea “the land is good for growing palms, wherever it happens to be crossed by rivers with usable water, or to be endowed with springs that can irrigate it” (cf. Theophrastus *Pot. Hist.* 2.5; Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 5.9, 17; Tacitus *Hist.* 5.6). Such a supply of fresh water exists at Tall el-Hammam. The Madaba Map identifies two thermal springs at *Baaras* (Josephus *Jewish War* 7:180, 189; Eusebius *Onomasticon* 44:22ff; 112:17)<sup>13</sup> and *Kallirrhoë* (Josephus *Antiquity* 17:171; *Jewish*

*War* 1:657; Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 5:16) on the opposite (south) side of the *Wadi Zarqa Ma'in*.<sup>14</sup> From the five date palms in the mosaic it would be reasonable to expect springs, and thermal springs around Site Two. Tall el-Hammam has two springs, and the name *Hammam* in Arabic actually means “spring” or “watersource.” One is found around the base of the upper tall in the Early Bronze Age area, among Roman ruins. The second spring location is across the modern road at the foot of a Roman fortification, on a hill where at least five cisterns are

<sup>9</sup> Kay Prag, *The Shu'aib/Hisban Project, Jordan: A Regional Survey and Excavations Undertaken Since 1965*. Cited 25 January 2007. Online: <http://www.cbri.org.uk/shuaib.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Flanagan, James W. and David W. McCreery. *Virtual Nimrin: Occupational Sequence and Historical Overview*. 2004. Cited 24 January, 2007. Online: <http://www.case.edu/affil/nimrin/menu/nimrin.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Avi-Yonah, *Madaba Mosaic Map*, 37; Eugenio Alliata, “The Legends of the Madaba Map,” in *The Madaba Map Centenary: Travelling Through the Byzantine Umayyad Period. Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Amman 7–9 April 1997* (eds. Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata; Collectio Maior 40; Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1998), 54.

<sup>12</sup> “Date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*) are shown on the Madaba mosaic map as being grown around Scythopolis (barely shown on far left), Phasaelis, Jericho, Bethagla, Bethnambris, Livias, Calliroe, and Zoara.” N. F. Hepper, and Taylor J. E. “Date Palms and Opobalsam in the Madaba Mosaic Map,” *PEQ* 136.1 (2004): 35.

<sup>13</sup> Joan E. Taylor, *Palestine in the Fourth Century A.D.: The Onomasticon by Eusebius of Caesarea* (trans. by G. S. P. Freedman-Grenville; Jerusalem: Carta, 2003), 117.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba. An Introductory Guide* (Palaestina antiqua 7; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 39.

identified.<sup>15</sup> The Roman ruins have been surveyed but not excavated. The Madaba Map identifies five palm trees on Site Two with two trees on the right and three on the left (Fig. 1). This would indicate a well-watered region consistent with the two springs and the proximity of the Wadi Kefrein.<sup>16</sup>

### **Byzantine Prominence of Site Two**

The vignette on the map represents two towers that appear to frame a “church” or other major structure with a roof and series of windows. There appears to have been Byzantine or Early Roman ruins on this site during the construction of the Mosaic. Obviously Site Two was known to the mosaicist during the Byzantine period. This being the case, it would be reasonable to assume that one should find some significant presence of occupation during or immediately preceding the Byzantine period.

To date, no remnants of major Byzantine structures have been found at Tall el-Hammam,<sup>17</sup> but during the 2007 excavations a small amount of Byzantine pottery was discovered near the first spring, in the region of the lower tall around the Roman ruins and massive Early Bronze Age remains (Fig. 3).<sup>18</sup>

Further excavations may reveal a significant Byzantine and/or Late Roman presence. If so, this would confirm the presence of Byzantine/Roman structures consistent with the Madaba Map.<sup>19</sup> We hope to execute a probe of this area in the 2008 excavation season.

Eusebius Pamphili, the bishop of Caesarea in Palestine (AD 275–339), wrote a four-part geographical work called *Onomasticon* (AD 330). Eusebius’ Greek text introduces the *Onomasticon* with the words “On the Names of Places in Sacred Scripture.”<sup>20</sup> In short, it is a geographical dictionary of the Holy Land. The localization of wadies, mountains, and other geographical features makes this a valuable asset when determining ancient locations. Some argue as well that the Madaba Map was strongly dependent on the *Onomasticon*. However, C. Umhau Wolf points out that there is no direct correlation between the terminology used in the *Onomasticon* and the size of the locations.

All the large walled cities with towers behind on the Madaba Map are called “city,” “large city,” “famous city,” “metropolis” by Eusebius. For the smaller cities with only a front wall and four or five towers and for the larger villages with three or four towers connected by a wall, there is no consistent correlation with the *Onomasticon*’s terminology. (Nor is there any consistency in the various strata of the *Onomasticon* that can be checked out in the present state of textual criticism and archaeological research.) Both Beersheba and Ekron are called “large

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<sup>15</sup> While it is probably a coincidence that there are five palm trees on the Mosaic and five cisterns have been found, it is nonetheless an interesting parallel.

<sup>16</sup> The modern Kefrein dam indicates that this was a well-watered region in ancient, as well as modern, times.

<sup>17</sup> Since the site appears to have been last occupied in the Byzantine Era, any Byzantine ruins on the surface probably suffered significantly from erosion, scavenging for nearby structures, and modern bulldozing. This is a common problem at Levantine tells/tells.

<sup>18</sup> Collins, et al. *Tall el-Hammam Activity Report 2007*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Rast citing Abel states, “Also important for the Dead Sea Byzantine traditions about Lot and Sodom is the reference by Stephen the Byzantine to a Bishop Severos of Sodom who attended the Nicaean Council.” Walter E. Rast, “Sodom and its Environs: Can Recent Archaeology Offer a Perspective?” *NEASB* 51(2006): 21; F. M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine 2* (Paris: Etudes Bibliques, 1967), 468. Rast uses this information, that the Bishop of Sodom was present at the Second Council of Nicaea (AD 787), to argue for Byzantine Sodom being included in the area of Zoar on the Madaba Map; however, the Map doesn’t have any other cities of the plain marked anywhere on the Map let alone in the south. What this does indicate, however, is that Sodom existed in the Byzantine period. Is it possible that the name over Site Two read Sodom and that Bishop Severos of Sodom came from Hammam?

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *Onomasticon*, 5.

town” but are different as depicted on the map. Does this imply Ekron had declined in the intervening centuries? Bethzur and Bethel are both simply villages in Eusebius, but Bethzur is a large town on the map while Bethel is small, having only two towers and the connecting wall. Does this accurately record the changed fortunes?<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, the correlation between Eusebius and the Madaba Map may not be as helpful as first thought. Just because Livias (see below) is mentioned repeatedly in the *Onomasticon*<sup>22</sup> does not automatically mean that it may be found on the Madaba Map.

### **Tall Nimrin’s Byzantine Occupation**

The Tall Nimrin<sup>23</sup> excavation report indicates that there was a small Byzantine occupation there, evident by some walls and plastered floors.

Few ceramics were recovered from the Hellenistic era and no associated architecture. Likewise, no architectural remains can be dated to the Roman period. This may be explained by modern bulldozing and development which have destroyed or removed the remains. Some Roman and Byzantine ceramics were found in several fill layers, but they were mixed with Persian and Iron materials because Roman/Byzantine pits had been dug into the earlier levels. A few walls and plastered floors can be dated to the Byzantine period.<sup>24</sup>

The mosaic floor of a Byzantine church was discovered in 1980 during the construction of a house on the northwestern slope of the tall. The mosaic pavement was excavated by Michele Piccirillo.

In his 1982 report, Piccirillo reported a Byzantine church with a central and two side naves which together measured 18.45 m x 13.52 m. The church had been in use for more than two centuries from the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. through the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and into the Umayyad Period.<sup>25</sup>

Also, during the 1993 season, a horde of Byzantine coins was discovered from the reigns of emperors Valens, Valentinianus I, Leo, Zeno, Basciliscus, and Anastasius, from the middle of the fourth century to the early sixth century AD.<sup>26</sup> Schick, Flanagan, and McCreery identify Tall Nimrin on the Madaba Map as the other unnamed Site One, beside the unnamed Site Two, which we are identifying as Tall el-Hammam.<sup>27</sup> In our opinion, they are correct in their evaluation.

### **Tall Iktanu’s Byzantine Occupation**

Kay Prag gives the history of the excavations at Tall Iktanu from the first exploration by Selah Merrill in 1871 through the 1920’s and 30’s by A. Mallon. She notes that it was

included in field surveys by Nelson Glueck in 1943, by Kay Wright (Prag) in 1965,

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<sup>21</sup> C. Umhau Wolf, *The Onomasticon of Eusebius Pamphili Compared with the Version of Jerome and Annotated*, 1971. Cited 23 January, 2007. Online: [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius\\_onomasticon\\_01\\_intro.htm#The%20Onomasticon](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_onomasticon_01_intro.htm#The%20Onomasticon).

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *Onomasticon*, 16, 18, 32, 33, 142.

<sup>23</sup> Beth-Nimrah (“house of abundant waters”) is mentioned in Numbers 32:26.

<sup>24</sup> Flanagan and McCreery, *Virtual Nimrin*, n.p.; See also Taylor, *Onomasticon*, 121.

<sup>25</sup> Flanagan and McCreery, *Virtual Nimrin*, n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Flanagan and McCreery, *Virtual Nimrin*, n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Flanagan and McCreery, *Virtual Nimrin*, n.p.; Robert Schick, “Northern Jordan: What Might Have Been in the Madaba Mosaic Map,” in *The Madaba Map Centenary* (eds. Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata; Jerusalem: Studium Biblical Franciscan, 1999), 228.

and by M. Ibrahim, K. Yassine and J. Sauer in 1976. Excavations were directed by Kay Prag in 1966 on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and in 1987, 1989 and 1990 on behalf of the British Institute at Amman for Archaeology and History. The north hill was occupied in the Early Bronze IB, Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze, Iron Age and Persian periods. The south hill was partly occupied in the Early Bronze IB and very extensively in the Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze Age. There are occasional Roman, Byzantine, medieval, Ottoman and modern sherds on the site, but no evidence for occupation at these periods (1965).<sup>28</sup>

So while some Roman or Byzantine pottery has been found on the site, Prag maintains that there was no Roman or Byzantine settlement. Therefore, as previously mentioned, Tall Iktanu is not a viable candidate. Besides, it is far too small for the site on the Madaba map.

Taylor also comments on the occupation at Tall Iktanu. She states that

Tell Iktanu is an excavated site at which a single occupation, and extensive and well planned settlement of the Middle Bronze I (EB-MB, EB IV) culture was revealed. Aharoni's identification [of Tall Iktanu as Livias] is, therefore, extremely unlikely.<sup>29</sup>

She is clear that there is no Roman or Byzantine occupation.

### **Not Consistently Identified**

The prominent works on the Madaba Map, identify the unnamed Site Two with various possibilities. In 1954 Michael Avi-Yonah, in his book *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, identified the Site Two as Beth-jeshimoth (Khirbet Suweima) and Site One as Khirbet el Kefrein<sup>30</sup> or Tall Rama<sup>31</sup>:

Across the Jordan and opposite Galgala we notice above the gazelle the fragmentary representation of a locality, with the trunks of two palm trees to the right [Site One]. To judge from its position on the map this might refer either to Abel (Khirbet el Kafrein) or to Livias-Bethramtha (Tell Rama). Another equally nameless village [Site Two] is situated between this place and the Dead Sea. If the latter is meant to represent Beth-jeshimoth (*Onomasticon* 48:7), then the northern village would be Beth-ramtha, and Abel might have been located in the lost part of the pavement further to the north-east. Possibly, however, Abel was not represented at all. Eusebius mentioned Beth-ramtha (Livias) seven times (*Onomasticon* 48:13–15), while he mentions Abel but does not locate it.<sup>32</sup>

Later Avi-Yonah states “Above it ([Aenon-Sapsaphas and another shrub] i.e. eastwards) stands a biggish village surrounded by palm trees; as suggested above its most likely

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<sup>28</sup> Kay Prag, *The Shu'aib/Hisban Project, Jordan: A Regional Survey and Excavations Undertaken Since 1965*. Cited 25 January 2007. Online: <http://www.cbrl.org.uk/shuaib.html>. Since there is little evidence of LB occupation in the entire eastern Jordan valley (*kikkar*), we believe that the evidence for such cited by Prag merits re-examination. It appears that Iktanu's only Bronze Age occupation represented by architectural remains is the Intermediate Bronze Age (formerly EB IV through MB I).

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *Onomasticon*, 142.

<sup>30</sup> Harrison states that “the area of this site [Tall el-Hammam] was nearly a hundred times bigger than that of Tall el-Kefrein.” Harrison, “Shittim,” *NIDBA*, 414. Therefore, Tall Kefrein can be reasonably eliminated on the basis of it being too small compared with Tall el-Hammam. The site is presently being excavated by a Greek team, but it is unknown at this time if they have uncovered any Early Roman or Byzantine pottery or ruins.

<sup>31</sup> Beth-Ramtha, Betharam (Josh 13:27), a city of the tribe of Gad, near the Jordan, called Bethramphtha by the Syrians.

<sup>32</sup> Avi-Yonah, *Madaba Mosaic Map*, 37.

identification is with Beth-jeshimoth (Khirbet Suweime).”<sup>33</sup>

In Herbert Donner’s 1992 book *The Mosaic Map of Madaba*, he identifies Site Two with Livias, Tall Iktanu, or Tall Rama:

The Old Testament town was called Beth-Haram, later on, under the Roman emperor Augustus, it was called Livias or Julius.<sup>34</sup> It is identical with Tall Iktanu and the small but remarkable Tall ar-Rama.<sup>35</sup> It appears to be situated at the upper course of *Wadi Zarqa Ma’in* which runs into the Dead Sea after its turn.”<sup>36</sup>

Alliata, in an article on the identification of the sites in *The Madaba Map Centenary*, identifies Site Two with Betharam (Josh 13:27) or Bethramphtha, now Livias or Tall Rama.<sup>37</sup>

Robert Schick, in an article on northern Jordan in *The Madaba Map Centenary*, proposes Beth Jeshimoth (Suweima) as Site Two:

Small portions of two other unlabelled city vignettes survive. A variety of suggestions have been made for their identification. The city vignette above the gazelle to the left [Site One] could be Abel (Khirbat al-Kafrein) or Livias/Beth-Ramtha (Tell Rama), or perhaps Beth Nimrin (Tell Nimrin), while the city vignette above the gazelle to the right [Site Two] could be Beth Jeshimoth (Suweima).<sup>38</sup>

As we have proven earlier, only Tall Nimrin and Tall el-Hammam are logical candidates for these sites.

## Livias

Donner identifies Site Two as Livias or Tall Rama.<sup>39</sup> The name of the site was changed by Herod to honor Augustus.<sup>40</sup> However, there is no evidence directly linking the unnamed Madaba Map site and Livias, other than general speculation and the fact that Eusebius mentioned Livias in his writings seven times. While

it is the commonly accepted view among scholars that the Madaba Map depends heavily on Eusebius’ gazetteer of biblical places, the *Onomastikon*. . . it is al (*sic*; at) least conceivable that, rather than the Madaba Map mechanically depending on the *Onomastikon*, both the *Onomastikon* and the prototype of the map may have derived from a common cultural lore.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, just because Eusebius is aware of Livias, it does not mean that this site is Livias. However, if Tall el-Hammam were proven to be Livias, this would not hurt our

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<sup>33</sup> Also known as Bethasimouth. Taylor, *Onomasticon*, 121; cf. Eusebius *Onomasticon* 48:7; Nelson Glueck, “Some Ancient Towns in the Plains of Moab,” *BASOR* 91 (1943): 13–18.

<sup>34</sup> Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 48:14-15 (ca. AD 330); Avi-Yonah, *Madaba Mosaic Map*, 37; Donner, *Mosaic Map of Madaba*, 39; Schick, “Northern Jordan,” 228.

<sup>35</sup> Donner’s use of the term *remarkable* is an interesting descriptor as there is nothing remarkable about Ramma either archaeologically or in size.

<sup>36</sup> Donner, *Mosaic Map of Madaba*, 39.

<sup>37</sup> Alliata, “Legends of the Madaba Map,” 54; cf. Eusebius *Onomasticon* 48:14–15.

<sup>38</sup> Schick, “Northern Jordan,” 228.

<sup>39</sup> Beth-Ramtha, Betharam, (Josh 13:27), a city of the tribe of Gad near the Jordan, known to the Syrians as Bethramphtha.

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 48:14-15 [ca. AD 330]; Jerome 49:12-13 [ca. AD 390]; Avi-Yonah, *Madaba Mosaic Map*, 37; Schick, “Northern Jordan,” 228; Donner, *Mosaic Map of Madaba*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Leah Di Segni, *The Onomastikon of Eusebius and the Madaba Map*. Cited 23 January, 2007. Online: <http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/mad/articles/DiSegniOnomasticon.html>.

argument in the least.<sup>42</sup>

### **Beth Jeshimoth (Suweima)**

Both Avi-Yonah and Schick identify Site Two with Beth Jeshimoth (Suweima or Suwaymah). Number 33:49 tells us that “There on the plains of Moab they camped along the Jordan from Beth Jeshimoth to Abel Shittim” (NIV). This was one of the borders for Sihon king of the Amorites (Jos 12:2-3) and is described as a Moabite frontier town in Ezekiel 25:9. The modern town of Suwaymah is on the other side of the Wadi al-Zarqa Ma’in, much too far south on the Dead Sea to be identified with Site Two. If Beth Jeshimoth is identified with modern day Suweima or Suwaymah,<sup>43</sup> which appears likely to us, then it is certainly not Site Two.

### **Conclusion**

Tall el-Hammam has flourished throughout history because of its defensibility, abundant water, and proximity to the Kings’ Highway, a major trade route linking Egypt and Mesopotamia. Tall el-Hammam is likely the Shittim of the Late Bronze Age,<sup>44</sup> where the Israelites encamped before entering Canaan (Num 33:49; Jos 2:1; 3:1). Furthermore, the Middle Bronze Age city on the upper tall is likely the Sodom<sup>45</sup> of Genesis 13-19,<sup>46</sup> while the huge Iron II city at Tall el-Hammam may prove to be one of Solomon’s twelve administrative centers. Perhaps it was also the Livias of New Testament times. If our argument is valid, that Tall el-Hammam is the unidentified Site Two on the Madaba Map, then we just placed several important cities and sites on the Map—the Madaba Map.

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<sup>42</sup> Egeria, the fourth century Spanish pilgrim who traveled the Holy Land between AD 381-384, describes traveling to Livias and seeing the city directly across from Jericho from the top of Mount Nebo. She describes that the Sodomites lived to the left of Livias with Zoar (Segor) also visible from Mount Nebo. Egeria, *The Pilgrimage of Etheria* (trans. and eds. M.L. McClure and C. L. Feltoe; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), 19, 23. From Mount Nebo Tall el-Hammam is also visible.

<sup>43</sup> Also known as Bethasimouth. Taylor, *Onomasticon*, 121.

<sup>44</sup> Willis J. Beecher, “Abel-Shittim,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia 1* (ed. James Orr; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 7; Harrison, “Shittim,” *NIDBA*, 413.

<sup>45</sup> Dr. Steven Collins from Trinity Southwest University seems to be in the process of supplanting the view that Sodom and the other Cities of the Plain were located at the southern end of the Dead Sea, demonstrating, in fact, that Sodom was in the north at Tall el-Hammam. Collins, et al. *Tall el-Hammam Activity Report 2007*; S. Collins, *The Search for Sodom and Gomorrah* (Albuquerque: TSU Press, 2006); “The Geography of the Cities of the Plain,” *BRB* 2.1 (2002): 1–17; “A Chronology for the Cities of the Plain,” *BRB* 2.8 (2002): 1–9; “The Architecture of Sodom,” *BRB* 2.14 (2002): 1–9; “Terms of Destruction for the Cities of the Plain,” *BRB* 2.16 (2002): 1–8; “Explorations on the Eastern Jordan Disk,” *BRB* 2.18 (2002): 1–28; “Rethinking the Location of Zoar: An Exercise in Biblical Geography,” *BRB* 6.3 (2006): 1–5; “Forty Salient Points on the Geography of the Cities of the *Kikkar*,” *BRB* 7.1 (2007): 1–7; “Reassessing the Term *hakikkar* in Nehemiah as Bearing on the Location of the Cities of the Plain,” *BRB* 7.3 (2007): 1–4; “If You Thought You Knew the Location of Sodom and Gomorrah...Think Again,” *BRB* 7.4 (2007): 1–6. See also William M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book: Southern Palestine and Jerusalem* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882), 371–76.

<sup>46</sup> The Koran also mentions Sodom (Surah 11:74–83). In the Koran the name of Lot is Lut and the name of Abraham is Ibrahim. Also, the Koran does not record that Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt but that she ended in a terrible fate and was left behind.

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