Hisham's Palace at **[Khirbat Al Mafjar](http://www.ancient.eu/Khirbat_Al_Mafjar/)** (the ruins of Mafjar) is an Umayyad structure that is listed among the last of the surviving antiquities of Romans and Byzantines. It was built by Walid Ibn Yazid in 734 CE near Jericho in the Jordan Valley during the reign of Caliph Hisham Ibn Abdelmalik between 724-743 CE. This palace is among the last of the very sophisticated desert palaces in the region and is renowned for its elaborate mosaics, stucco carvings and overall sculptural magnificence. It is famous for the decorations that represent illustrations belonging to early Islamic classical art. It was built mostly from sandstone and baked brick.

**Hisham's Palace** ([Arabic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): خربة المفجر‎‎ *Khirbat al-Mafjar* or [Arabic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): قصر هشام‎‎ *Qaṣr Hishām*) is an [important](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hisham's_Palace#58925408) early Islamic archaeological site five km north of the town of [Jericho](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jericho), at Khirbat al-Mafjar in the [West Bank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank). Spreading over 60 hectares (150 acres) it consists of three main parts: a palace, an ornate bath complex, and an agricultural estate. Also associated with the site is a large park or agricultural enclosure (*ḥayr*) which extends east of the palace. An elaborate irrigation system provided the complex with water from nearby springs.

History of Study

The site was discovered in 1873. The northern area of the site was noted, but not excavated, in 1894 by [F.J Bliss](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_J._Bliss), but the major source of archaeological information comes from the excavations of Palestinian archaeologist, D.C. Baramki between 1934 and 1948. In 1959 Baramki's colleague, colonial administrator for the British Mandate government [Robert W. Hamilton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Hamilton_(archaeologist)), published the major work on Hisham's Palace, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordanian Valley.* Baramki's archaeological research is unfortunately absent from this volume, and as such, Hamilton's analysis is exclusively art historical. Baramki's research on the archaeological aspects of the site, particularly the ceramics, was published in various preliminary reports and articles in the Quarterly of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities. Many of the finds from Baramki and Hamilton's excavations are now held in the [Rockefeller Museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller_Museum) in Jerusalem.

In 2006, new excavations were carried out under the direction of Dr. Hamdan Taha of the Palestinian National Authority Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Current research is being conducted by the Jericho Mafjar Project, a collaboration between the ministry and archaeologists from the University of Chicago.

In 2015, an agreement was signed between the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the [Japan International Cooperation Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_International_Cooperation_Agency) to enable the 825 square meter mosaic in the palace, one of the largest in the world, to be uncovered and readied for display.

Architecture

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hishams_Palace_site_view_Author_MDarter.jpg)

**The palace**

The largest building at the site is the palace, a roughly square building with round towers at the corners. It originally had two stories. Entrance was through a gate on the center of the east side. The inner rooms were aligned around a central paved portico, which featured an underground cellar or [sirdab](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sirdab&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Sirdab (page does not exist)), for refuge from the heat. The room to the south of the portico was a mosque with a [mihrab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihrab" \o "Mihrab) built into the outer wall. East of the palace entrance was a pavilion and fountain. Another larger mosque was located to the northeast of the palace entrance.

The bath complex is located just north of the palace across an open area. This free-standing structure is approximately thirty meters square, and three of its sides feature round excedrae which project out from the building. The east face of the bath had an ornate entrance in its center, flanked by excedrae. Inside the main square hall was a pool. The entire interior floor surface of the bath complex was paved with spectacular mosaic decoration. A special reception room, or *diwan*, was entered from the northwest corner. The floor of this room was paved with the famous "tree of life" mosaic, depicting lions and gazelles at the foot of a tree. The actual bathing rooms were attached to the northern wall of the complex, and were heated from below the floor by [hypocausts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypocaust).

The palace, bath complex, and external mosque are enclosed by a retaining wall. The southern gate was knownfrom Baramki's excavations, but the recent discovery of a northern gate in alignment indicates that the development of Hisham's Palace was conceived of as a complete unit to be constructed at once.

To the north of the bath complex are the ruins of a large square structure which has clearly gone through many phases of reuse and reconstruction. This part of the site was initially assumed to be a *khan* or [caravanserai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caravanserai), but recent excavations have indicated that the northern area had an agricultural function connected to the hayr during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods.

