Pella (Tabaqat Fahl): the Decapolis city that was already 4,000 years old when the Romans arrived

On the eastern foothills of the Jordan Valley, a tell with continuous occupation from 6,000 BCE to the Mamluk period — Bronze Age temple, Roman theatre, Byzantine basilica, Mamluk mosque, all on one site.

Anas Hu · May 5, 2026

On the eastern foothills of the Jordan Valley, north of the Sea of Galilee and west of Irbid, sits a low tell that has been continuously occupied since the Neolithic — roughly 6,000 BCE. Egyptian texts from the 19th century BCE name it. The Greeks renamed it Pella after the Macedonian capital. Pompey brought it into the Roman Decapolis. The Byzantines built three churches on it. The Mamluks built a mosque. All of these layers are still here, in the same square kilometre, and the spring flowers come up through them.

Pella is one of the most layered archaeological sites in the Levant — and one of the least visited.

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1Why visit Pella

Most archaeology in Jordan is single-period — Petra is Nabataean, Jerash is Greco-Roman, Karak is Crusader. Pella is the rare site where eight successive cultures are stacked on the same hill, and you can walk between them in 30

minutes. It was consistently a 'Decapolis' city, and the city in the northernmost bounds of the region known as Perea.[1]

2What you can walk to

The site is open and largely unrestricted; signage is sparse but the major monuments are obvious from the access road:

- **The Migdol-type Bronze Age temple.** First built in the Middle Bronze Age, destroyed and rebuilt repeatedly through the Iron Age. The foundation walls are striking in their thickness — 4-metre-thick stone courses for a religious structure.
- **The Roman theatre, baths, and nymphaeum (ca. 150 CE).** Mid-slope, partly excavated.
- **The Byzantine basilica with episcopal structures (ca. 450–550 CE).** The most complete church on the site — apse, nave, side aisles all readable from the foundations.
- **The Civic Complex Church.** A second Byzantine church in the central valley.
- **The Mamluk mosque (ca. 1350 CE)** with a surviving stone minbar — the latest occupation layer on the site.

3The eight periods of Pella

For the archaeology-curious, the layered sequence:

1. Neolithic (ca. 6000 BCE)
2. Early/Middle Bronze Age (3000–1500 BCE) — Egyptian written references
3. Late Bronze / Iron Age (1500–600 BCE) — Migdol temple period
4. Hellenistic (4th c. BCE) — renamed Pella
5. Roman (63 BCE onwards under Pompey) — Decapolis membership
6. Byzantine (4th–7th c. CE) — three churches built
7. Umayyad / early Islamic — adaptive reuse
8. Mamluk (ca. 1350 CE) — final occupation, mosque + minbar

> Eight cultures stacked on one hill. The spring flowers come up through all of them.

4Getting there

Pella (Tabaqat Fahl in Arabic) is roughly 130 km north of Amman, about 2 hours by car. The site is accessible from the Jordan Valley Highway.

- **Self-drive.** 2 hours each way. Good combination as a stop on a north-Jordan loop with Umm Qais (60 km north) or Jerash + Ajloun (back south).
- **Day trip from Amman.** Long. Plan a full day. JETT bus to Irbid + taxi onward is possible but tedious.
- **Best season.** Spring (March–April) for the wildflowers. Avoid July–August: the valley is unbearably hot.

> **For solo travellers**
>
> The site is large and quiet — bring a paperback and plan to spend 2–3 hours. The view across the Jordan Valley from the upper tell is the spot.

5Practical tips

- **Tickets.** A few JD; covered by the Jordan Pass.[2]
- **How long.** 2–3 hours for a thorough walk.
- **Footwear.** Trail shoes — the site is uneven and sometimes muddy in winter.
- **Water.** 2 litres per person. No facilities on-site; the village has small shops.
- **Photography.** Best in late afternoon — the limestone glows in the slanting light.

References

1. Wikipedia — Pella, Jordan
2. Jordan Pass — official site

Verified by locals: TBD — this article will be reviewed by a Department of Antiquities-affiliated archaeologist before final publication. Drafted from Wikipedia.