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Jordanian Officials Face Decision on Saving Ancient Baths in Amman

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A government committee in Jordan is facing a difficult question. How can it save the country's ancient past while planning for its future?

The committee, set up two weeks ago, is considering the issue after the discovery of ancient Roman baths. The ruins were found during a dig for a building project, an underground **canal** that will help control flood water that comes into Amman, Jordan's capital.

The ruins have the remains of **furnaces**, a sign of a complex heating system. Experts believe that the discovery is the first of its kind among the remains of the ancient city of Philadelphia on which Amman now stands.

Yazid Elayan is head of Jordan's Department of Antiquities. "We will balance the needs of the city - to protect it from flooding - to **preserving antiquities** under the streets," he said.

"Amman was one of the biggest Roman cities and it has one of the largest baths...Wherever one excavates in Amman, antiquities can be found," he told Reuters.

Excavate is a term that means to dig out and remove soil.

The work on the canal system has been suspended while the government committee makes its decision.

Amman is an old city where ancient Roman structures can still be seen. It has an Amphitheatre that seated around 6,000 people. It has the Nymphaeum **fountains** and the Temple of Hercules, too.

Building problems and irregular urban design have been important issues in the large city of four million people.

It is built on many levels of history, from the Ammonites, Moabites, Romans and Greeks to the Islamic period.

City officials have already expressed concern that delaying the canal project could raise water levels in central Amman. They say it could flood again during the winter.

The formerly quiet city now has one of the Middle East's largest city centers.

I'm John Russell.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi reported on this story for Reuters. John Russell adapted it for Learning English. Mario Ritter, Jr. was the editor.

Words in This Story

canal – *n.* a waterway for draining or irrigating land

furnace – *n.* an enclosed container in which heat is produced

preserve – *v.* to keep (something) in its original state or in good condition

antiquities – *n.* plural objects from ancient times

fountain – *n.* a structure or device that provides water which, in some cases, sends a stream of water into the air