



1           **Ground penetrating radar inspection for Subsurface Historical Structures at**  
2                           **Baptism (El-Maghtas) site, Jordan**

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11       **Abstract**

12       The Baptism (El-Maghtas) site located north to the Dead Sea at the eastern bank of the  
13       Jordan River. There are many excavations in the surrounding area revealed different  
14       archaeological remains which indicates the location “John the Baptist”. He lived and  
15       preached in the early 1<sup>st</sup> Century C.E. who famous for John the Baptist baptized Jesus.  
16       The archaeological excavations reveals walls, antiquities, ancient water system includes  
17       such conduits, pools, and ancient pottery pipe. The Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)  
18       survey was carried out at selective locations along parallel profiles ~~at the study~~ using a  
19       Subsurface Interface Radar System (SIRvoyer-20) with either 400 MHz or 900 MHz  
20       mono-static shielded antennas manufactured by Geophysical Survey Systems Inc to  
21       delineate possible shallow archaeological material at shallow depth. The GPR ~~radar gram~~  
22       profiles revealed different subsurface anomalies across all sites. At John the Baptist  
23       Church site buried wall were detected along profiles, the GPR survey recognized shallow  
24       wall and shallow buried channel at the pools site. At Elijah's Hill site the GPR data  
25       confirmed the extension of an ancient pottery pipe. Basically the clear diffraction  
26       hyperbola anomaly related to the ancient pottery pipe could be discriminated from the  
27       two-dimension profiles. The GPR data was displaced using three-dimension imaging to  
28       define the horizontal and the vertical extent of the pipe.

29  
30       *Keywords:* Jordan River, Baptism, Archaeological remains, pottery pipe, Ground  
31       Penetrating Radar.



## 47 **1 Introduction**

48 Principally the Baptism Site is situated at about eight kilometers far away from the  
49 northern corner of the Dead Sea at the eastern bank of the Jordan River (Fig. 1).

50 Observing that the excavation of the buried archaeology, artifacts and antiquities has  
51 been carried out through old traditional random methods like coring, auguring and shovel  
52 testing; actually these are a time consuming and a labor acute procedure. The traditional  
53 way to identify the presences of any artifacts is to perform a lot of exploratory digging,  
54 adding an enormous waste of time and expense.

55 The site located at arid environments where is localized large number of archaeological  
56 remains of various age, origin and size in variable geological–archaeological media  
57 (Eppelbaum et al., 2010). The complex soils of the site are complicated associated with  
58 vegetation factors in some site complicates accessibility of ground penetrating radar  
59 survey (Eppelbaum and Khesin, 2001; Eppelbaum et al., 2010).

60 GPR is a high resolution instrument that sends electromagnetic (EM) waves and  
61 determines the location of reflected energy. GPR has become an accepted tool for various  
62 fields, including archaeological, engineering and construction, geological, glaciological,  
63 environmental, and forensic science (Neal, 2004). GPR is a high-resolution method uses  
64 EM waves in the frequency band of 10-1000 MHz to picture subsurface soil and  
65 structure; the advantage of using EM waves with relatively short wavelength signals  
66 spectrum is the ability to map small objects at shallow depths. The GPR methodology has  
67 been successfully utilized to locate antiquities in urban and arid settings (Vaughan, 1986;  
68 Sternberg and McGill, 1995; Cacione et al., 1996; and Basile et al., 2007). On the other  
69 hand the ground penetrating radar (GPR) approved to be a unique high-resolution tool to



70 offer a solution to these problems (Vaughan, 1986). The results could be used to identify  
71 anomalous areas for excavation, and that will direct the excavation operations to the  
72 highest potential areas (Cacione, 1996).

73 The main objective of this study is to carry out a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) as  
74 noninvasive nondestructive tool to obtain information about the existence of  
75 archaeological features in the shallow subsoil and to image the depth and extension of a  
76 buried ancient pottery pipe which apart of it has been already excavated.

77 In addition, the data presentations do play a significant role in the archaeological  
78 inspections since they assemble a view of the location, and fix on the size and the  
79 extension of the anomalies (Basile et al., 2000). The GPR survey was carried out at three  
80 different sites to indicate any shallow anomalies.

## 81 **2 Historical Background**

82 Baptism (El-Maghtas) site is a prehistoric area. Considerably it is one of the most  
83 important archaeological discoveries of the early Christianity; happened to be located in  
84 Jordan valley to the western part of Jordan. It located about 50 km far from the west of  
85 Amman (Capital of Jordan). Furthermore a settlement of Bethany in Jordan; where John  
86 the Baptist lived in the time of Christ; tends to be part of Baptism (El-Maghtas)  
87 prehistoric area.

88 However; John the Baptist's settlement is connected to several biblical incidents: the  
89 baptism of Jesus which took place in Bethany, Joshua's crossing of the Jordan River, the  
90 last days of Moss, and the Prophet Elijah's crossing of Jordan and been ascended to  
91 heaven in a whirlwind upon a chariot on horses of fire (two kings 2:5-14). Almost for  
92 2000 years, the local church tradition and the pilgrims used to identify the small hill at



93 the center of Bethany as the site from which Elijah was raised to paradise, and the site  
94 became famous of Elijah's Hill (or Tell Mar Elias, or Jabal Mar Elias), where the Jordan  
95 River located about 2 km far away to the west of the site.

96 The settlement of Bethany and the surrounding region in Jordan were also famous during  
97 different ancient periods as Ainon, Saphaphas, Bethanin and Bethabra (Beit el-Obour, or  
98 house of crossing); however the Arabic language bibles tend to call it Beit 'Anyā, thus,  
99 today the entire region between Bethany and the Jordan River is called El-Maghtas (the  
100 place of immersion or baptism).

101 Apparently the current work in the area was able to identify numerous structures,  
102 monastic complexes, churches, caves, a system of water pipes and channels to carry  
103 water and other facilities from Roman and Byzantine era (4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries C.A.)  
104 (Waheeb, 2001). Effectively the archaeological dig has revealed a settlement from the  
105 time of Jesus and John the Baptist (early 1<sup>st</sup> century C.A.).

106 In brief, the existing of the excavated water constructions like (aqueducts, pools, cisterns,  
107 and pottery pipe) is a fact witness of the complexity of the water system at the area.  
108 Where, the settlers in the past were limited to depend upon the rainwater collection and  
109 springs. Consequently, the Roman and Byzantine used to divert the water from nearby  
110 Wadi using conduit and pottery pipes to fill the pools and cisterns as reservoirs (Waheeb,  
111 2003).

### 112 **3 GPR concepts**

113 Ground penetrating radar (GPR) is a high-resolution method of picturing subsurface  
114 structures using electromagnetic (EM) waves in the frequency band from 10 MHz to one  
115 GHz. The benefit of using (EM) waves is that signals of relatively short wavelength can



116 be generated and directed to the subsurface to map anomalous vary in there electrical  
117 properties, in many aspects.

118 Discriminatory feature of GPR is that the method is simple to use and is neither invasive  
119 nor destructive; this makes it appropriate for use also in urban areas and archaeological  
120 sites.

121 The propagation of EM energy in the medium is mainly controlled by dielectric  
122 permittivity ( $\epsilon$ ), electrical conductivity ( $\sigma$ ) and magnetic permeability ( $\mu$ ). At high  
123 frequencies the electric polarization properties control the conductive properties for many  
124 earth materials. Dielectric permittivity depends on the applied frequency and altering  
125 electric field.

126 In this region the velocity of propagation keeps constant and the radar signal is not  
127 scattered by frequency-dependant velocity. In low-loss earth materials the radar signal  
128 velocities are related to relative permittivity.

129  $V = C/\sqrt{\epsilon_r \mu_r}$  where  $\epsilon_r = \epsilon/\epsilon_0$  is the ratio of the dielectric permittivity of the medium to the  
130 dielectric permittivity of free space.

131  $\mu_r = \mu/\mu_0$  is the relative magnetic permeability of the medium, and  $C = 3 \times 10^8$  m/sec is  
132 the velocity of EM in the free space.

133 Since the  $\mu_r$  is close to unity for most row materials, radar velocity is primarily controlled  
134 by  $\epsilon_r$  and the dielectric constant. Dielectric constant across an interface cause part of an  
135 impinging radar pulse to be reflected the radar signal amplitude is decreased at the  
136 reflecting borders relying on the contrast and the thickness of the layer. The reflection-  
137 coefficient ( $K$ ) at a half-space for a normal incident signal is given by

$$138 \quad K = (V_{\epsilon r2} - V_{\epsilon r1}) / (V_{\epsilon r2} + V_{\epsilon r1})$$



139 Where  $\epsilon_{r1}$  and  $\epsilon_{r2}$  are the relative permittivity of the two media across the interface.  
140 The attenuation of a radar wave and its depth of penetration depend on the electrical  
141 conductivity and dielectric constant of the media through which the wave propagates can  
142 be reduced for the case of low-loss media  $\sigma / \epsilon_w \ll 1$  to a simple form  $\alpha = (\sigma / 2) \times (\mu / \epsilon_r)^{0.5}$   
143 .

144 Where  $\alpha$  donates the attenuation constant and  $\sigma$  merges both the D.C. conductivity and  
145 dielectric losses. The horizontal resolution links to the ability to detect reflector location  
146 in space or time, which is a function of the pulse width. The vertical resolution increases  
147 with an increase in the frequency. The vertical resolution is also controlled by wavelength  
148 ( $\lambda$ ) (Knapp, 1990) which is a function of velocity and frequency:

$$149 \lambda = v / f$$

150 The best vertical resolution can be obtained by using one-quarter of the dominant  
151 wavelength (Sheriff and Geldart, 1995).

## 152 **4 GPR Survey**

### 153 **4.1 Data Acquisition**

154 Continuous GPR survey was conducted utilizing SIRvoyer-20 produced by Geophysical  
155 Survey System (GSSI). The 900 MHz and 400 MHz frequency antennas were used in this  
156 study. A total of 88 meters of GPR survey were collected along 11 profiles at three  
157 different sites. The first survey was carried out at the site located north of John the  
158 Baptist Church, the second one located south of the pools, and the third one located at  
159 South Elijah's Hill. Five profiles were carried out at the last site (Fig. 1). At the second  
160 and third sites, the survey was carried out by using 900 MHz antenna.

161



## 162 **4.2 Data processing**

163 Minimum data processing was applied utilizing GSSI RADAN V software package from  
164 GSSI. Horizontal and vertical high pass and low pass filters were used to enhance the  
165 radar cross section. Additional processing to convert two-way travel times along the  
166 section to depth in meter applying average radar wave velocity. Data were stacked in  
167 horizontal direction along long profiles.

168 Furthermore, the 900 MHz antenna has been used throughout the survey with data  
169 parameters:

- 170 • Range: 15 and 50 ns, IIR filter  $f/4$  to  $2f$ ; where ( $f$ ) is the antenna center frequency.
- 171 • Gain function automatic, transmit rate of 50 scan/s, 512 samples and 16 A/D  
172 conversion.
- 173 • In processing of the exhibited waveforms, horizontal and vertical high and low pass  
174 filters that have been applied to eliminate the surplus noise off the GPR signal. Then  
175 the Data were showed, edited, while both of the horizontal and vertical scales were  
176 attuned before processing (Abueladas, 2005).
- 177 • Time-zero correction was adjusted to the raw GPR data which were then managed by  
178 using range and display gain, filtering, color conversion, and migration procedures  
179 (Aqeel et al., 2014).
- 180 • The obtained GPR data were processed and presented as 2-D depth cross sections  
181 providing a logical vertical/horizontal resolution for the upper 2 m of the inspected site  
182 (Odah et al., 2013)
- 183 • Attenuation generally reduces the radar signal with increased travel time. Therefore,  
184 it is important to increase the weaker signals at greater receiver arrivals. The gain or



185 the strength of the signal is based on time-variant scaling. Gains are applied to  
186 preserve relative amplitudes and for advanced data processing.

187 • Calculation of the subsurface radar-wave velocity is essential to convert the TWT of  
188 the reflected signal to the true depth of the reflector (Annan, 2003; Fisher et al.,  
189 1992). However, this study calibrated the velocity according to the known depth  
190 aligned with the top of excavated pipe near the study area.

191 The dielectric permittivity of the various areas is obtained using an approximation of the  
192 reflection delay formula, which connects wave velocity ( $v$ ), to measured depth ( $x$ ), the  
193 recorded two-way travel time ( $t$ ), the relative permittivity ( $\epsilon_r$ ), and the free-space velocity  
194 ( $c$ ) (Gracia et.al., 2008)

$$\epsilon_r = \left(\frac{c}{v}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{ct}{2x}\right)^2$$


195 The computed near surface average velocity was 0.12 m/ns (Fig. 2). 

## 196 **5 Results and discussions**

197 A total of three continuous parallel profiles up to 12 m long were recorded at site 1. The  
198 separation between the north-south adjacent profiles was a constant 1 m (Fig. 1).

199 The 400 MHz antenna radar gram along profile 4001 shows a clear large discontinuous  
200 anomaly is pictured along the profile with approximately depth 1.2 m, which interpreted  
201 as a discontinuous buried wall (Fig. 3).

202 Along profile 4002 which is located to the north, the same anomaly but at shallower  
203 depth was detected (Fig. 4).

204 These anomalies ed by dissimilarities in wave velocity at the point of contact  
205 between dissimilar materials, their depths, and extensions indicate possible buried wall  
206 which direction south-north. No other anomalies were detected within profile 4003.





207 A 900 MHz antenna profile 9001 was acquired along a W-E and located at site 2 (Fig. 1)



208 ~~Radar gram~~ shows one main anomaly at a depth of 0.25 m located at a distance between 1  
209 and 3 m, which interpreted as a shallow buried wall (Fig. 5). The 3 meter wide depression  
210 at the end of the profile may be correlates to shallow buried channel.

211 Profile 9002 is 10 m long and runs parallel to profile 9001, approximately 1 m to the  
212 north of profile 9001 (Fig. 1). The same anomaly and depression were detected along this  
213 profile located to the north (Fig. 6).

214 The 12 m length profile 9003 is located to the north of profile 9002 closer to the pool  
215 (Fig. 1). The radar profile shows anomaly between markers 2 and 5 m at an approximate  
216 depth of 0.25 m, which interpreted as a buried wall (Fig. 7). The bottom of the depression  
217 along this profile is deeper and the width is lesser than the southern profiles.

218 Site 3 was a rectangle of 2 by 5 m applied to a flat area near Elijah's Hill. The uni-  
219 directional survey was conducted along five profiles oriented approximately N-S with  
220 spaced 0.5 m apart using 900 MHz to the east of the excavated pottery pipe (Fig. 1). The

221 purpose of the survey is to trace the depth and extension of an ancient buried pottery  
222 pipe, which was one of water constructions of the ancient water system. The most parts  
223 of the ancient pipe were destroyed by human activities, while other sections were  
224 excavated at parts of the study area.



225 A GPR profile 1 was collected perpendicular to the trend of the excavated pottery pipe  
226 just east of the excavation using a 900 MHz antenna (Fig. 1). The hyperbolic-shaped  
227 anomaly appears at mark 2.5 and about 0.55 m deep represents the location of the buried  
228 pipe (Fig. 8).





229 Actually, the main anomalies appeared as diffraction hyperbolas shape with high  
230 amplitudes observed at distance 2.5 m and 0.55 m deep along all the 2D ground  
231 penetrating radar cross section.

232 Generally targets of interest are generally easier to identify. On three-dimensional data  
233 than on conventional the two dimensional profile lines. The 3D GPR data were generated  
234 from 2D and displayed using 3D-visualisation techniques, which is primary importance  
235 in archaeological applications.



236 The 3D perspective view of processed profiles via high pass and low pass vertical and  
237 horizontal filters together with the migration technique that illustrates the location of the  
238 pottery pipe (Fig. 9) (Whiting, 2001; Fisher et al., 1992a).

239 The depth slices with different depths (0, 0.25, 0.55, 0.75 m) generated from 3D plot are  
240 presented in figure 10. The main anomaly observed with W-E direction at depth slice  
241 0.55 mbs (meter below surface) correspond to the anomaly of the pottery pipe. Thus, the  
242 depth slices provide good information about the exact location and extension of the pipe.

243 The multiple slices view along the y direction at distances (0, 1 and 2 m) determines the  
244 extension of the pipe anomaly along the y direction (Fig. 11).

245 The 3D section (chair view) applying that the  $X= 2.5$  m,  $Y= 0.85$  m, and  $Z= 0.55$  shows  
246 clearly the depth and the E-W extension of the pipe perpendicular to the X position and  
247 the depth of the top of pipe detect by the Z position (Fig. 12). The results of this study  
248 showed that many of the subsurface structures were recognized by using the GPR.  
249 Subsurface walls were determined. Different subsurface channels were found. The  
250 locations of these channels were determined. The flow directions also of these channels



251 were identified from west to east of the study area. Fig. 13 shows the location map of  
252 GPR anomalies and their interpretation.

## 253 **6 Conclusions**

254 Ground penetrating radar (GPR) is a powerful, nondestructive, noninvasive geophysical  
255 near surface tool for archaeological surveying. GPR has been used successfully to detect  
256 the several shallow anomalies in El-Maghtas Site. The flat topography the absence of  
257 archaeological remains at the surface at survey sites allow to image good quality GPR  
258 profiles. The high frequency 900 MHz antenna can be used for small size of the  
259 archaeological objects located at shallow depth. It is clear that the 3D measurements give  
260 better results than the 2D ones, as can be seen from the results. Generally, the survey  
261 objects include the identification and mapping of covered walls, channel, and the  
262 extension of ancient pottery pipe.

263 However, the vertical sections, depth slices, 3D images, were used to locate the  
264 anomalies using spatial extent 3D survey allow precise detection of the anomaly  
265 throughout the entire data that constructed after advanced processing include migration.  
266 Using three-dimensional GPR imaging successfully detect the 0.55 m depth and the E-W  
267 extension direction of the pottery pipe in El-Maghtas Site.

268 The clear displacement in the buried wall and the buried channel in site 2 may be caused  
269 by shallow fault.

270 The outcome results can be used to lead any future excavations.

271

272

273




274 **Acknowledgements**

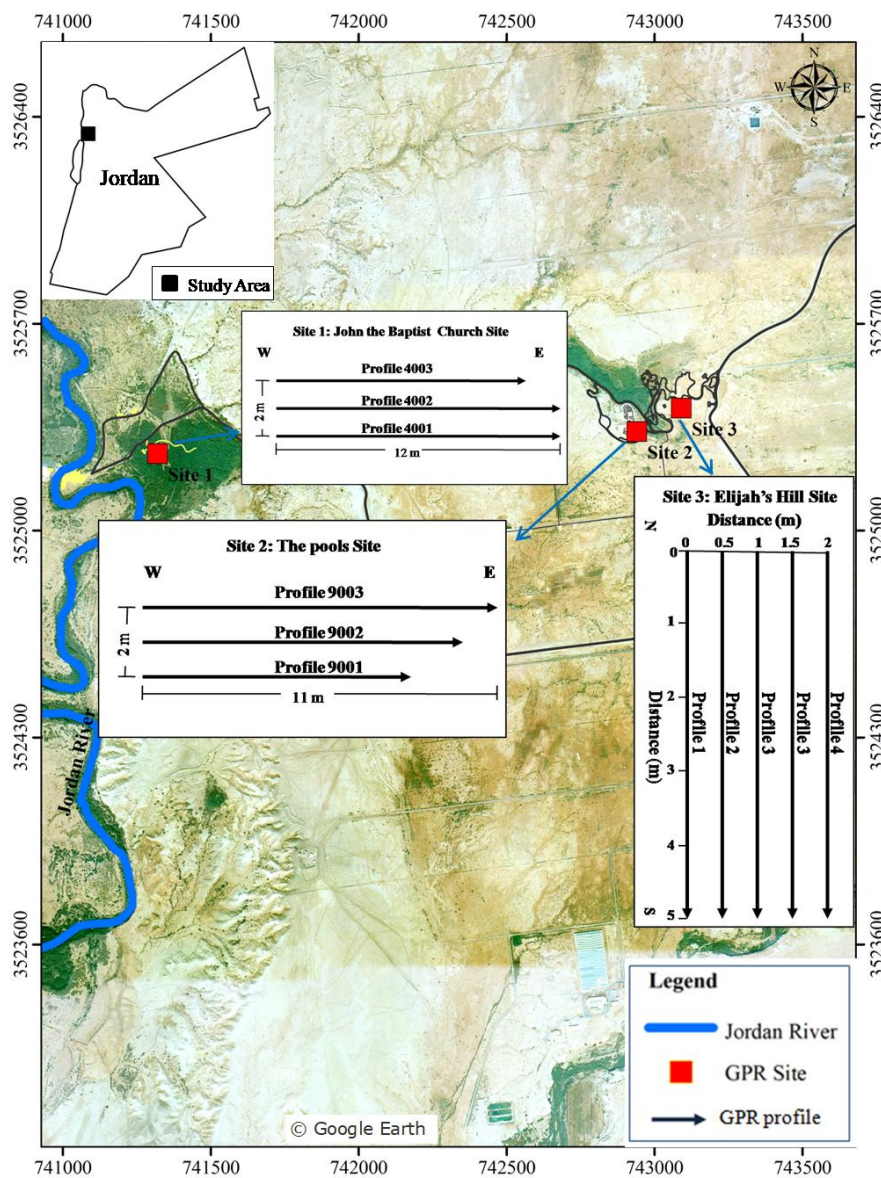
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282 **References**

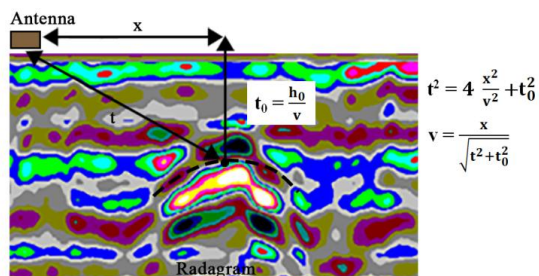
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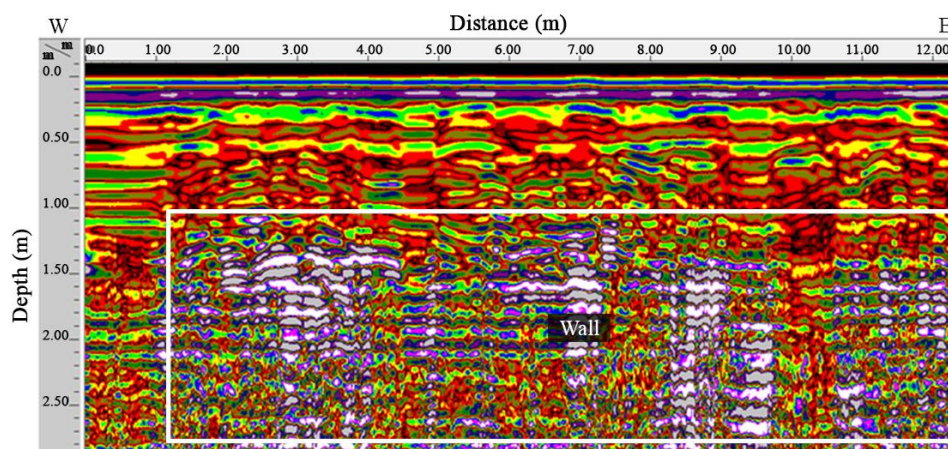


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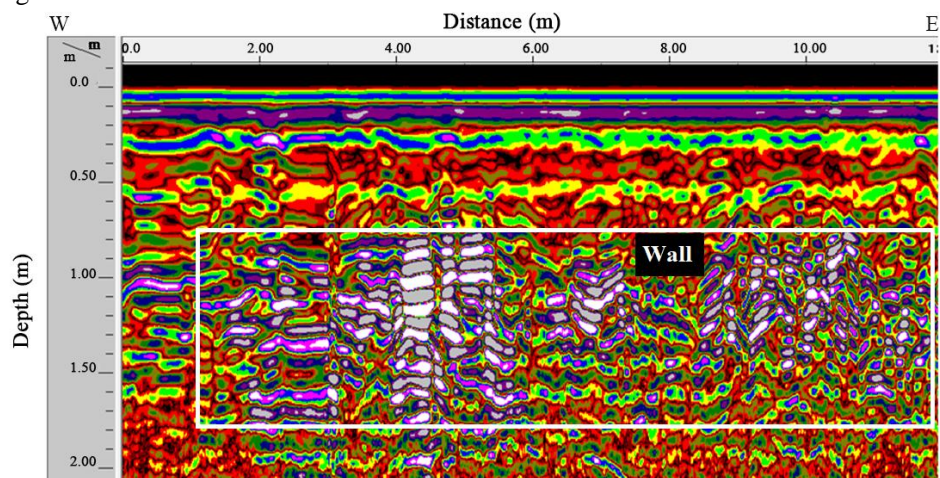
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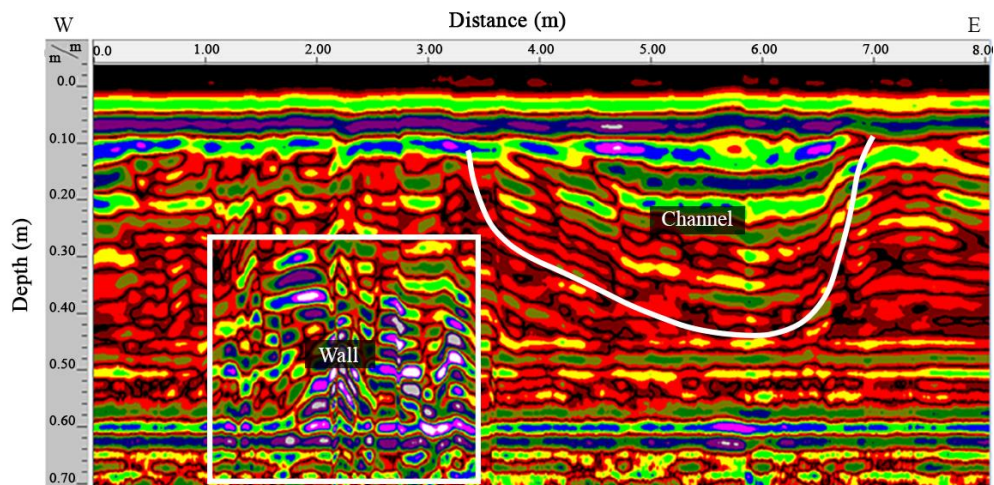
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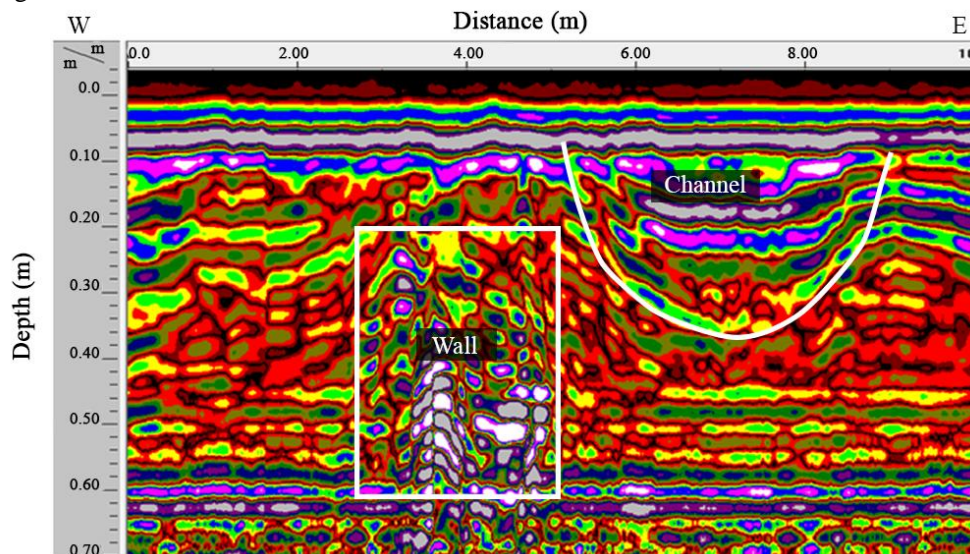


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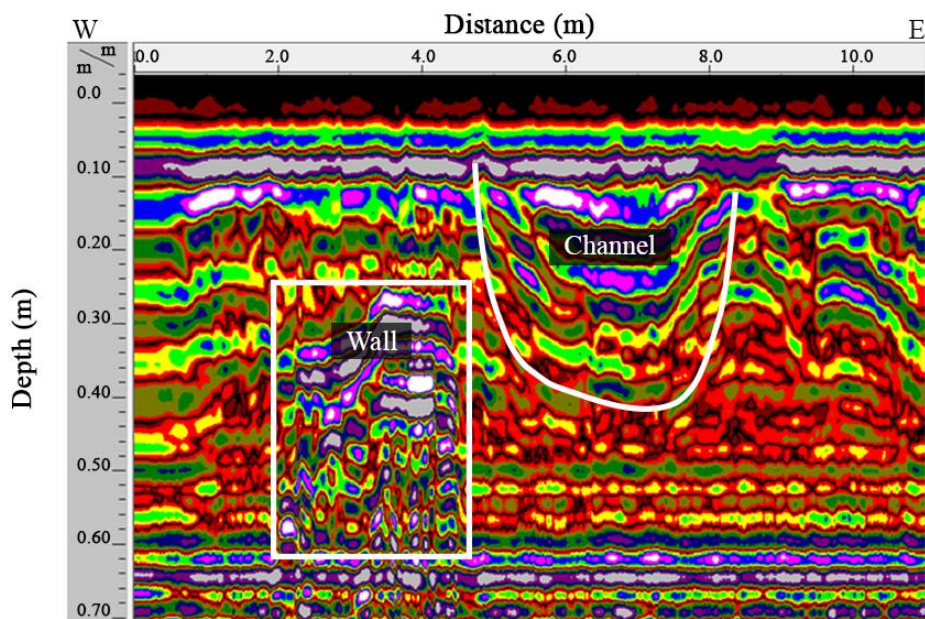


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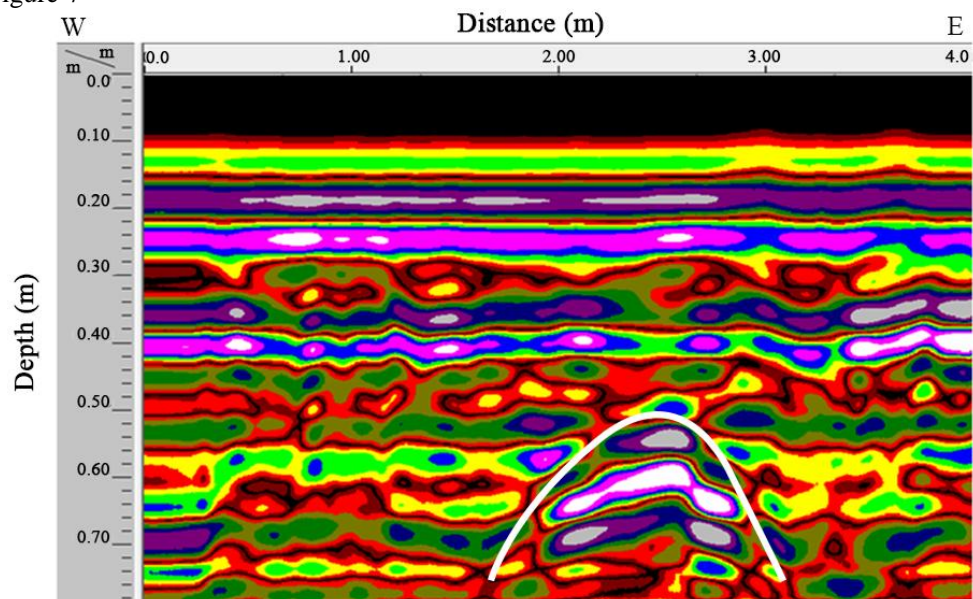
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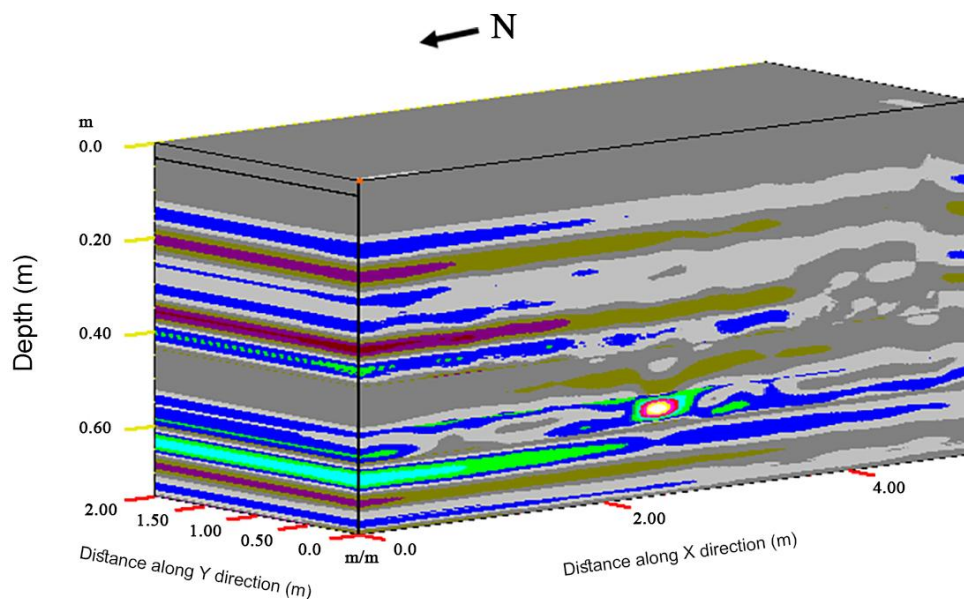
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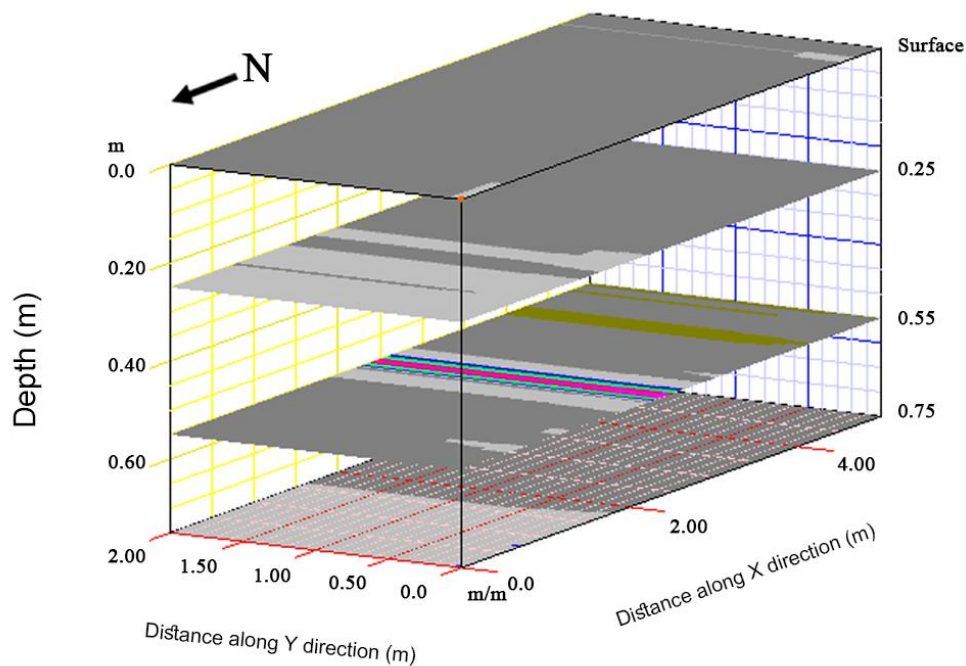


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Figure-8



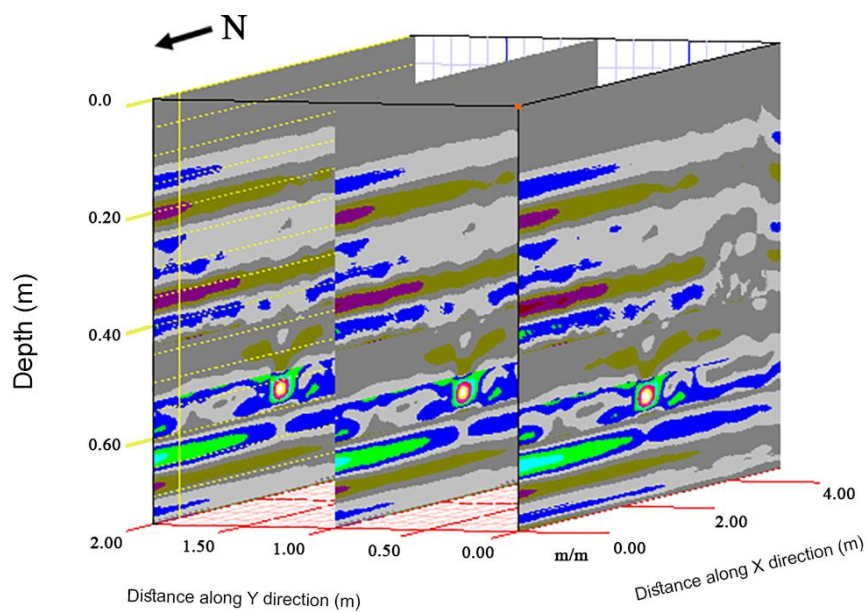
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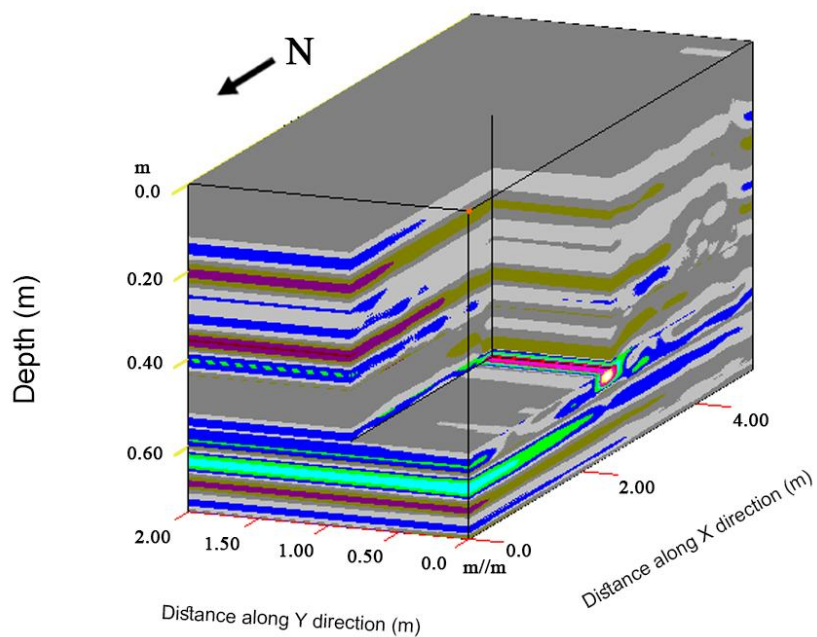
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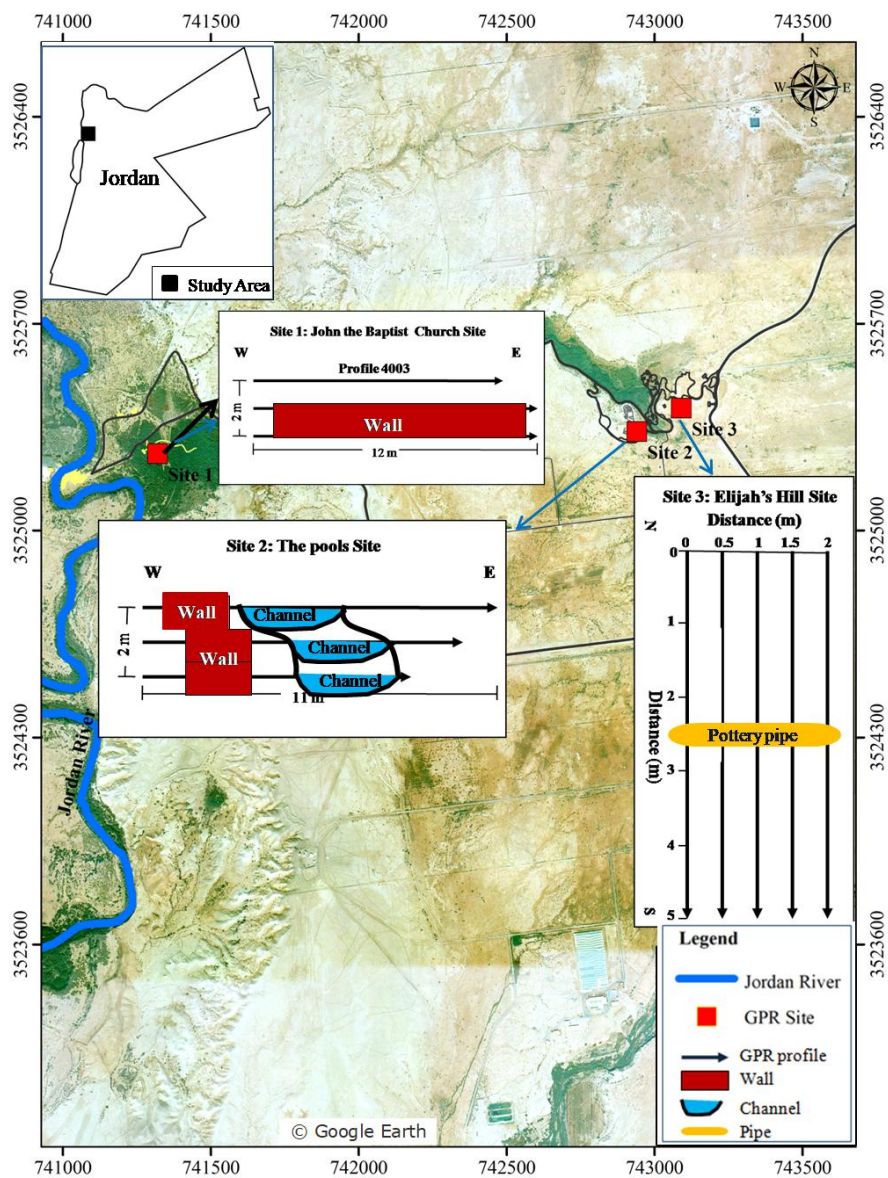
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366 Figure-11  
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369 Figure-12  
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372 Figure-13

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## 376 **Figures Captures**

- 377 Fig.1. Location map of the GPR profiles study area (After Google map).  
378 Fig.2. Hyperbolic reflections caused by pottery pipe is used to obtain the wave velocity  
379 with the equation of hyperbola.  
380 Fig.3. A 400 MHz antenna radargram along Profile4001. The white rectangle along the  
381 radargram at approximate depth of 1.2 m may correspond to buried wall.  
382 Fig.4. A 400 MHz antenna radargram along Profile4002. The white rectangle along the  
383 radargram at approximate depth of 0.6 m may correspond to buried wall.  
384 Fig.5. A 900 MHz antenna radargram along Profile9001. The white rectangle along the  
385 radargram represents anomaly located between horizontal distance 1 and 3 m with  
386 approximate depth 0.25 m which may correspond to an ancient buried wall. The 4 m  
387 wide depression at end of the profile may be correlated to buried channel.  
388 Fig.6. A 900 MHz antenna radargram along Profile9002. The white rectangle along the  
389 radargram at approximate depth of 0.20 m may correspond to buried wall. The 4 m wide  
390 depression at end of the profile may be correlated to buried channel.  
391 Fig.7. A 900 MHz antenna radargram along Profile9003. The white rectangle along the  
392 radargram at approximate depth of 0.20 m may correspond to buried wall. The 4 m wide  
393 depression at end of the profile may be correlated to buried channel.  
394 Fig. 8 A part of 900 MHz antennae radargram along profile 1 immediately adjacent to  
395 excavated pottery pipe. The hyperbolic- shaped anomaly at distance 2.5 m and 0.55 m  
396 deep shows the extension location of the buried pottery pipe.  
397 Fig. 9 The 3D GPR data view constructed from 2D profile lines. The 3D perspective  
398 view of processed profiles using high pass and low pass vertical and horizontal filters  
399 together with migration technique that show the location of the pottery pipe.  
400 Fig.10. Depth slices with different depths (0, 0.25, 0.55, 0.75 m) generated from 3D plot.  
401 The main anomaly observed with W-E direction at depth slice 0.55 mbs (meter below  
402 surface).  
403 Fig.11. The multiple slices view along y direction at distance (0, 1 and 2 m) determines  
404 the depth and extension of the pipe.  
405 Fig.12. The 3D section (cutout cube) using X=2.5 m, Y=0.85 m, and Z=0.55 m shows  
406 clearly the depth and extension of the pipe perpendicular to the X position and the depth  
407 of the top of pipe detect by the Z position.  
408 Fig.13. Location map of the inferred archaeological material (after Google map)

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