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The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine

An Archaeological Approach

GIDEON AVNI



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For my parents—Esther and Haim

Preface

Ever since my first fieldwork experience in archaeological surveys and excavations in the Negev Highlands back in the early 1980s, I have been intrigued by the apparently unbridgeable gap between the traditional historical narratives on the Arab conquest of the Near East in the 630s, which influenced the accepted archaeological conventions on one hand, and the ‘facts on the ground’, which were being revealed by those of us working in this remote corner of the settled lands on the other. Documenting what was then believed to be settlement sites from the Byzantine period, we have realized that the Arab conquest left no trace in the archaeological record of many surveyed and excavated sites.

These early studies were followed by three decades of exhaustive research, during which I was privileged to conduct research and excavations in several major urban sites of the settled country, among which were the cities of Jerusalem and Ramla, and the necropolis of Beth Guvrin-Eleutheropolis. The results of our researches coincided with a plethora of data from excavated sites in neighbouring regions, many of which addressed questions on the political, religious, and cultural transformation in the Near East during the second half of the first millennium, enhancing the development of a new approach to the Byzantine–Islamic transformation. With the progress of pottery-dating methodologies, the *longue durée* approach for the existence of these settlements was inevitably adopted, and the seeds of a new insight on the transformation of settlement and society were planted, consequently treating the traditional historical narratives and archaeological conventions being viewed with a grain of salt.

Like a huge jigsaw puzzle, the archaeological data slowly began to produce a fascinating picture of a Mediterranean society gradually transformed. In contradiction of the harsh scenario of ‘smoke and fire’ that emphasizes a violent conquest followed by rapid change, archaeological findings paint a much milder picture, in which political and religious tolerance set the tone for the relationships between various ethnic communities in Palestine.

While addressing one of the most significant political and religious changes in the history of the Near East, in which a new reality was gradually created, one cannot avoid the analogy with recent events in this turbulent region, longing for political and religious tolerance that will replace the smoke and fire that has been spreading throughout it in modern times.

I would like to thank the Israel Antiquities Authority for providing me with its resources on surveys and excavations throughout the country. Part of this research was supported by a generous grant from the Israel Science Foundation, which enabled me to conduct, in partnership with Amikam Elad, Katia Cytryn-Silverman, and Ofer Efrati, a detailed study of the urban centres of

Palestine during the Early Islamic period. Large parts of this book were written during my 2008–9 fellowship at the Institute of Advanced Studies in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I am grateful to both institutions for allowing me the time and space to pursue the research in inspirational scholarly surroundings.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues and friends Ronnie Ellenblum, Amikam Elad, and Katia Cytryn-Silverman for their insights, and for discussing many topics that stimulated my research. I am also grateful to Donald Whitcomb, Alan Walmsley, Robert Schick, Jodi Magness, and Marlia Mango for sharing with me their vast knowledge on the period, its sites, and finds.

Many colleagues and friends provided me with details from their excavations and researches, and I am indebted to them all: Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, Alexander Onn, Eli Yannai, Uzi Dahari, Gabi Mazor, Walid Atrash, Rachel Bar-Nathan, Moshe Hartal, Jon Seligman, Miriam Avissar, Tali Erickson-Gini, Peter Fabian, Yigal Israel, Dov Nahlieli, Ofer Sion, Uzi 'Ad, Motti Haiman, Uzi Avner, Yuval Baruch, Amir Gorzalczany, Eli Haddad, Haim Barbe, Alla Nagorsky, Yehiel Zelinger, Yael Gorin-Rosen, Peter Gendelman, Edna Stern, Rina Avner, Danny Syon, David Amit, Shimon Gibson, Amos Kloner, Yitshak Magen, Haim Ben David, Yoram Tsafrir, Oren Gutfeld, Benny Arubas, Kenneth Holum, Vasilios Tzaferis, Alan Walmsley, Katia Cytryn-Silverman, Donald Whitcomb, Oren Tal, Ignacio Arce, Daniel Master, Tracy Hoffman, John Peter Oleson, and Rebecca Foote.

Many thanks are due to the librarians of the IAA library at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem for their most helpful assistance in my endless search for obscure bibliographical items, and to Natalia Zak, who patiently produced the maps for the book, as well as to Gila Brand for her meticulous editing of large sections of the manuscript.

This book is dedicated with love to my wife, Orli, my children, Yuval and Ya'ara, and especially to my parents, Haim and Esther Avni, who accompanied its creation with great interest and sound advice, from my early years in the field to the final stages of writing.

Gideon Avni
Israel Antiquities Authority and
the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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A Note on Terminology and Chronology

The definitions of the geographical zones discussed throughout the text, covering the territories of modern Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, are referred to by their administrative division in Byzantine and Early Islamic times, as presented in Maps 1.2 and 1.3. For the convenience of identification, places are generally indicated by their modern names or, in the case of the large and best-known sites, by their ancient name (e.g. Beth Shean for Scythopolis/Baysan, Jaffa for Yopa/Yaffa, Jarash for Gerasa, etc.).

Chronological definitions are framed within the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. In this terminology I have followed the conventions of several major publications and textbooks relating to the historical and archaeological chronology of the Near East (for example, the *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (NEAEHL)*, Gil 1992, and others), in which the Byzantine period covers the years 324–638 and the Early Islamic period covers the years 638–1099. The break between the periods is evidently the Arab conquest of Palestine and Jordan in 634–640. Within these well-defined general periods, specific dating is obviously required, and it is referred to throughout the text by calendar dating (usually centuries or specific dates), rather than by dynastic frameworks (Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid) or by numerical division (for example, Early Islamic I, II, III, as suggested by Whitcomb). Dynastic terms were used only when applicable for specific topics, such as coinage.

Abbreviations

AAAS	<i>Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes</i>
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAIAS	<i>Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the Society of Asian and African Studies</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
HA/ESI	<i>Hadashot Arkheologiot/Excavations and Surveys in Israel</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EI	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> , new edition, Leiden, 1954–2004
ESI	<i>Excavations and Surveys in Israel</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JFA	<i>Journal of Field Archaeology</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JMA	<i>Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
JPES	<i>Journal of the Palestine Exploration Society</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSAI	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
JSAH	<i>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
INJ	<i>Israel Numismatic Journal</i>
LA	<i>Liber Annuus</i>
MA	<i>Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	<i>New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i>

Prologue: Four Eyewitness Accounts versus 'Arguments in Stone'

The history of settlement and society in Palestine and Jordan during the Byzantine and Early Islamic period is illuminated by two sources: eyewitness accounts and archaeological findings. Sometimes they correspond, but not always. Both are available in abundance. Pilgrims and travellers who visited the Holy Land committed their first-hand impressions of the country and its inhabitants to writing, providing detailed accounts that were sometimes coloured by their own social and religious background. The archaeological findings help to provide a more balanced view. By studying both the travelogues and the archaeological remains, the complexity of the transition process from Christian to Islamic rule becomes apparent.

THE PIACENZA PILGRIM: 566–568 CE

An anonymous Christian pilgrim from Piacenza in northern Italy who travelled to the Holy Land at the height of Byzantine rule in the sixth century wrote a colourful narrative of his pilgrimage.¹ He spent close to three years travelling through Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, visiting the holy sites and documenting his vivid impressions of the land and people. He describes religious sites and monuments, but also towns and villages, and the diverse ethnic and religious populations he encountered along the way.

Travelling with a group of fellow Christians, the Piacenza Pilgrim followed the customary route of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. He sailed to Beirut and proceeded by land to northern Palestine, where he visited the Christian towns and villages of Sepphoris, Cana, Nazareth, Mount Tabor, and Capernaum.

¹ *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium*, 127–53; tr. Wilkinson 2002, 129–51. This anonymous pilgrim was erroneously identified as Antoninus of Piacenza. See Limor 1998, 209–46 for the dates of the tour and other versions of his itinerary.

From the Sea of Galilee, the group travelled southward to Gadara, Scythopolis, and the Jordan Valley, arriving at Christ's baptismal site in the River Jordan. Turning west, they climbed the hills of the Judaeen Desert, heading to the holy city of Jerusalem. After visiting Bethany and the churches on the Mount of Olives, they entered Jerusalem from the east. The Piacenza Pilgrim, awed by the splendour of the Christian monuments, seems to have spent nearly a year in Jerusalem. In his writings, he devoted special attention to the large churches, especially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the recently constructed New Church of Theotokos (Nea Church), and the Church of Holy Zion on Mount Zion. He said nothing about the Temple Mount esplanade, the site of the Jewish Temple, which was probably a large, deserted open space at the time. After their long stay in the Jerusalem area, the pilgrims headed south to Gaza and the desert of southern Palestine on their way to Mount Sinai. Travelling through the Negev and Sinai, they faced the dangers that came with venturing into remote areas of the Byzantine Empire. The narrative offers a lively description of their encounter with the Saracens, the nomads of the inner desert.

The exceptional importance of this sixth-century work lies in the fact that unlike other pilgrim itineraries, the author did not concentrate only on his pilgrimage route but addressed many other aspects of Palestine and its people. The country is depicted as densely populated, with large cities, monumental churches, and civic buildings, many agricultural villages, and a fertile countryside. The reader gains insight into the life of ordinary people and the interaction between foreign pilgrims and the local population. Apart from Christians and Christian holy places, which were naturally his prime interest, he wrote about other ethnic groups—Jews, Samaritans, and Saracens. In his description of the 'Cave of Machpela' in Hebron, for example, he noted that Jews and Christians shared possession of this holy site.

The Piacenza Pilgrim itinerary thus provides a valuable depiction of Palestine at the height of Byzantine rule. His impression was of a peaceful, densely settled land where Christians were in a majority and Christian holy places attracted thousands of pilgrims who contributed to the country's growing prosperity.

ARCULF: 676–680 CE

Arculf, a Christian bishop from Gaul, embarked on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, following a route similar to that of the Piacenza Pilgrim a century earlier. However, the political and religious milieu had changed dramatically in that time. Forty-five years before Arculf's arrival, Palestine had been conquered by the Arabs, and Islamic rule was established. Arculf described his experiences in three books: one about Jerusalem and its monuments, another about his travels to Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, the River Jordan, the Galilee,

Damascus, and Alexandria, and a third about Constantinople.² However, these writings did not come down to us directly. We learn about Arculf's pilgrimage from a secondary source: Adomnan, abbot of the monastery of Iona in western Scotland, who met the bishop after his voyage to the Holy Land and recorded his story.³ Adomnan transcribed Arculf's narrative in full, adding maps and sketches of important Christian monuments, most of them in Jerusalem.⁴

Arculf the man remains almost invisible, and it is not clear to what extent the descriptions reflect his views or those of the narrator.⁵ Nevertheless, the narrative, which describes holy sites, cities, towns, and villages, appears to reflect the realities of Palestine in the second half of the seventh century. Although it was a religious pilgrimage, Arculf dwells at length on various urban components of Jerusalem, such as the city wall and towers. While little is said about the political transition in Palestine, this account is one of the earliest Christian references to the Islamic presence in Jerusalem. Arculf briefly describes the large mosque that had been built on the formerly deserted Temple Mount, but says nothing about Jerusalem being a major Islamic religious centre. We do not know whether this omission was deliberate, or whether he was unaware of the profound religious changes sweeping Palestine, but we do know that his portrayal was typical of other Christian travellers in the eighth and ninth centuries, and contrasts sharply with the accounts of Islamic travellers and historians of the time.

AL-MUQADDASI: c.965 CE

Almost three hundred years later, the Arab geographer and historian al-Muqaddasi, named after his hometown, Jerusalem, wrote a detailed eyewitness account that depicts the urban landscape of Palestine around 965 CE.⁶ Al-Muqaddasi was the son of an architect commissioned to build the fortifications and new harbour of Acre. He spent many years travelling around the Near East, documenting the Islamic world from Afghanistan in the east to the Maghreb in the west.⁷ One section of his book is dedicated to

² *Adomnani, De locis sanctis*, 175–234. For recent evaluations, see O'Loughlin 1997. For the dates of the pilgrimage, see Limor 2003, 389.

³ For the circumstances of meeting between the two, see O'Loughlin 1997, Limor 2003, 386–91.

⁴ Wilkinson 2002, 167–201, 371–86.

⁵ O'Loughlin (2007) convincingly argued that Arculf was a literary creation of Adomnan, using various contemporary sources to describe the pilgrimage, but the detailed sketches of Christian monuments in Jerusalem seem to be those of an eyewitness.

⁶ al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-Taqāsīm fi Ma`rifat al-Aqālim*; tr. Collins 1994.

⁷ Collins 1994, p. xxiii.

al-Sham—Syria and Palestine.⁸ He paid special attention to Jerusalem, his hometown; Ramla, capital of Jund Filastin; and Tiberias, capital of Jund al-Urdunn. Many other towns in the region receive a brief mention, which provides a fairly good overview of the Palestinian countryside in the tenth century. Unlike other travellers to Palestine, al-Muqaddasi did not write from the standpoint of a pilgrim. As a geographer, he took an interest in settlement, economics, agriculture, climate, and daily life. His account of Jerusalem addressed the physical layout of the city, its walls and gates, streets and markets, public buildings, and major monuments, and dwelled especially on the Temple Mount compound, by then known as Haram al-Sharif, and its main religious buildings, the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque.⁹ He wrote little about churches, however, and lamented the preponderance of Christians in the city:

Few are the learned here, many are the Christians, and these make themselves distasteful in the public places . . . The Christians and the Jews are predominant here and the mosque devoid of congregations and assemblies.¹⁰

Openly negative towards the Christian and Jewish communities, he called Jerusalem a 'golden basin full of scorpions'.¹¹ Other cities in Palestine were portrayed as flourishing and economically stable. While Ramla and Tiberias received the most attention, Acre (Akka), Beth-Shean (Baysan), Beth Guvrin (Bayt Jibril), Ascalon, Jaffa, Arsuf, Caesarea, Amman, and Ayla were also mentioned.

Al-Muqaddasi's impressions of the country are surprisingly similar to those of the Piacenza Pilgrim and Arculf: Palestine and Jordan are presented as densely populated and affluent, with many cities, towns, and villages. While Western pilgrims emphasized the predominance of Christian settlements, al-Muqaddasi obviously paid more attention to the Muslim presence, but without denying the impact of the Christian communities, which was still strong.

NASIR-I KHUSRAW: 1047 CE

While touring the Near East eighty years after al-Muqaddasi, the Persian traveller Nasir-i Khusraw spent the spring and summer of 1047 in Palestine. His travelogue is one of the last accounts of Palestine before the Crusader

⁸ al-Muqaddasi, 151–92, tr. Collins 1994, 128–62.

⁹ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 3.

¹⁰ al-Muqaddasi, 167, tr. Collins 1994, 141.

¹¹ al-Muqaddasi, 167, tr. Collins 1994, 141. He states that this phrase is a quotation from Jewish texts.

conquest.¹² Originating from Khurasan in Persia, Khusraw was a philosopher-poet who embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1046, followed by extensive travels in the Muslim world. Like al-Muqaddasi, he praised the splendour of Palestine's cities and towns, dwelling on the major religious sites. Nasir-i Khusraw spent four months in Palestine. He arrived from the north, travelling from Tyre to Acre. Acre is described in great detail, with special attention to the harbour (restored by al-Muqaddasi's father more than a century earlier), and the villages and tombs on its outskirts. Tiberias landmarks mentioned are the city wall, the central mosque, the Jasmine Mosque on the western side of the city, the castle on the hill, and the tomb of Abu Hurairah, one of the prophet's companions, outside the city limits.

One of the Christian villages he saw in the Galilee was Cana, which had a fine hilltop monastery. Travelling southwards, Nasir-i Khusraw passed through Caesarea, which was surrounded by a wall with a mosque facing the sea. In Ramla, he noted the solid city walls built of stone and mortar, the White Mosque with its large underground cisterns, and the numerous rainwater reservoirs all over the city. Jerusalem, also ringed by fortified city walls, awed him with its beautiful buildings of local white limestone, stately streets, and clean bazaars. A whole section was devoted to Haram al-Sharif, with its monumental architecture, underground structures, and water cisterns.¹³

While Jerusalem's Islamic sites were his top priority, Nasir-i Khusraw did not ignore the Christian presence. Apart from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre,¹⁴ a vast building that could accommodate 8,000 people, he wrote that the city abounded in churches, all skillfully built.¹⁵ Jerusalem had a population of 20,000, according to his estimates, with an equal number of pilgrims. The water supply was derived from numerous private cisterns and a main aqueduct leading to the city from the south. Agricultural produce was brought in from villages and farms on the outskirts of Jerusalem, which grew olives, figs, wheat, and barley. Food was cheap and plentiful. 'There has never been a famine in the land of Syria,' he wrote.¹⁶

Nasir-i Khusraw's readers come away with the impression of a prosperous, populated region with a vigorous economy and an effective government, showing no signs of economic or political decline. On the eve of the Crusader era, which most historical sources describe as a period of decline, Khusraw depicts a land that is still vibrant and robust.

¹² Nasir-i Khusraw, *Sefer Nameh*, ed. and tr. Schefer 1881; for a new bilingual edition, see Thackston 2001.

¹³ Thackston 2001, 29–48; see also Grabar 1996, 145–60.

¹⁴ He uses the term *Bai'at al-Kumammah*—the Church of the Dunghill, a distortion of the term *Kayamah*, Resurrection. Thackston 2001, 47–8.

¹⁵ Thackston 2001, 47–8. ¹⁶ Thackston 2001, 27.

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTIONS VERSUS 'ARGUMENTS IN STONE'

These four eyewitness accounts of Palestine in the sixth to eleventh centuries tell their story from different personal perspectives—that of the Christian pilgrim (the Piacenza Pilgrim and Arculf), the Muslim pilgrim (Nasir-i Khusraw), and the geographer (al-Muqaddasi). Nevertheless, their views of Palestine are quite similar, and seem to show that the country underwent only minor changes over the course of hundreds of years.

The differences in perspective are not hard to see. The Christians regarded Palestine as the Holy Land and the cradle of Christianity. Even when the country was under Islamic rule, they hardly related to this fact during their travels. The Muslims, on the other hand, saw Palestine as a monolithic Islamic domain. The presence of a Christian population was mentioned only briefly, and the fact that the Christians remained a majority in Palestine long after the Arab conquest was ignored. Yet these narratives and many others have been used by modern historians to delineate the settlement map and ethno-religious composition of the region during Byzantine and Early Islamic times.

Palestine during the second half of the first millennium was a multicultural land inhabited by Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Samaritans, as well as nomads with pagan beliefs living on the fringes of settled areas. However, not all segments of society were represented in the written texts that have survived from this period. In consequence, the complex settlement patterns of late Byzantine and Early Islamic Palestine cannot be established in full through the use of these sources alone.

So how can this fragmentary picture be filled out? How can we track down the changes in the cities, towns, and countryside between the sixth and eleventh centuries? What were the effects of the political and religious transition from Christianity to Islam on the local populace? Did the country continue to flourish, or did it plunge into a process of decline from the Byzantine period until the Crusader era? To answer these fundamental questions, modern researchers need other sources of information. The subjective accounts of eyewitnesses and political histories of the region written at some later date are not sufficient.

It is precisely here that archaeological research can add a new dimension. These 'arguments in stone', to use a term coined by Martin Carver for the archaeology of European cities,¹⁷ provide a valuable source of insight into the historical process. The findings of archaeologists over the last thirty years help to map out the complex web of settlement patterns, population dispersal, religious transition, and economic trends that characterized this turbulent

¹⁷ Carver 1993.

period in the history of Palestine. The process of change, with all its complexity and regional differences, becomes more visible. In the following chapters, we will follow the changes that took place during the Byzantine–Islamic transition on the basis of the results of hundreds of archaeological excavations conducted in this small but history-packed region. I believe that archaeology can provide a reliable index of the process of transformation that Palestine and Jordan underwent during this time. In general, these findings sharpen the impressions conveyed by the eyewitness accounts, although occasionally they contradict them.

While historical texts often reflect the personal views of the author (in this case, their religious affiliation as Christians or Muslims), archaeological data are ostensibly unbiased evidence of material culture remaining after the abandonment and destruction of settlements. Yet in many cases, bias is introduced by archaeologists, sometimes through preconceptions in their approach to their research. Misguided research strategies, erroneous dating of finds, or lack of knowledge about certain periods can produce flawed interpretations. Often, the archaeologist becomes the ‘author’ of an excavated site rather than a ‘reader’ or ‘interpreter’.¹⁸ For example, classical archaeologists in several regions of the Mediterranean have ‘authored’ sites by concentrating on the excavation of monumental remains in large urban centres while ignoring residential quarters in cities, towns, and villages. ‘Time authoring’ has led to flawed views of the history of a site or a region. A preference for Roman remains at the expense of later periods at sites in the Mediterranean was widespread among archaeologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁹

This approach might stem from an academic interest in one period as opposed to another, financial constraints, or a political or nationalist agenda. In Italy, for example, archaeologists focused on the Roman Imperial period with the blessing and massive support of the Fascist regime, which chose this ‘glorious’ period in the country’s history as the one it most identified with.²⁰ The excavation strategy of archaeologists can thus play a major role in the interpretation and dating of a site.

Early excavations in a number of Roman and Byzantine sites in the Near East produced flawed conclusions on the mechanism and chronology of the Byzantine–Islamic transition that have only been revised in recent years in the wake of renewed excavations. The extensive early research at Gerasa–Jarash in 1928–34 is a case in point.²¹ Large sections of the Roman and Byzantine city were unearthed, featuring wide colonnaded streets, colossal Roman temples, and fourteen Byzantine churches. The first excavation report, published in 1938, ended with a description of the Byzantine remains, all but ignoring the

¹⁸ Dyson 1995, 35; and see Cameron 2003 for Late Antiquity, and Ellenblum 2007a for the Crusader period.

¹⁹ Dyson 1995, 36.

²⁰ Dyson 1995, 38.

²¹ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 2.

final years of this flourishing urban centre in the Early Islamic period.²² The Arab conquest was cited as the turning point in the history of Gerasa, implying the permanent decay and abandonment of large areas of the Byzantine metropolis. Early Islamic remains in Jarash were linked in the minds of archaeologists to the onset of a sharp decline in settlement and the presumed oppression of the small Christian community that still lived there. Early Islamic Jarash was called a 'little village' consisting of a 'confusing network of walls', 'wretched hovels', and 'crudely built houses'.²³ Only during the subsequent excavations at Jarash in the 1970s and 1980s did the continuity of settlement in Early Islamic times become obvious.²⁴ The full scale of the Islamic urban presence in Jarash was revealed with the discovery of a large congregational mosque in the city centre.²⁵ An archival study of the documentation of the first excavations shows that the upper layers of the site were hastily cleared in order to reach the Roman and Byzantine levels, and no attention was paid to the layers and finds of the Early Islamic period.²⁶

The ancient Tell of Beth Shean (Tell el-Husn), facing Jarash on the western side of the River Jordan, was excavated between 1921 and 1933 by the University of Pennsylvania Museum. As the archaeologists were mainly interested in the Bronze and Iron Age levels, the Byzantine and Early Islamic remains were mentioned only briefly. Very little was said about the upper levels of the Tell, which included the remains of a large, round Byzantine church, and the inhabitants of the phases of the Early Islamic period were regarded as 'squatters'.²⁷ Classical Scythopolis presumably fell into decay with the Arab conquest and any continuity of settlement beyond the seventh century was ignored. This misconception was only corrected when Beth Shean was extensively excavated in 1986–2000.²⁸ Large-scale excavations in the valley to the north of the Tell showed that the Byzantine city continued to flourish until the mid-eighth century. After the 749 earthquake, the hub of Early Islamic Baysan moved to the southern hill. Recent salvage excavations in the modern town of Beth Shean have shown continuity of settlement into the tenth and eleventh centuries.

In the 1950s and 1960s, excavations at Ramat Rahel, south of Jerusalem, also mistakenly concluded that a small village from the Byzantine period marked the end of a long sequence of settlement from the Iron Age through the Roman period. The abandonment stage was summarized in the following statement:

²² Kraeling 1938. ²³ Kraeling 1938, 105–15, quoted in Simpson 2008, 116.

²⁴ Zayadine 1986, 1989; and see references in Simpson 2008.

²⁵ Walmsley and Damgaard 2005, Walmsley 2007a, 84–7; Walmsley *et al.* 2008; Simpson 2008.

²⁶ Simpson 2008, 115–17. ²⁷ Fitzgerald 1931.

²⁸ For the main publications, see Tsafir and Foerster 1997; Mazar 2006; Mazar and Najjar 2008; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011; and see the detailed discussion in Ch. 2.

There descended in the seventh century the Arab invasion, which—on our Tell as everywhere else—brought to a swift end the life of the Christian communities. So there came to an end, for the Holy Land, a chapter of its history.²⁹

This conclusion was refuted when excavations at the site resumed in 2005–11 and found a clear sequence of continuity from Byzantine to Early Islamic times.³⁰ The previous view was not only a misreading of the finds, but was in line with the common notion that the Arab conquest was a violent rampage with catastrophic implications for local Christian settlement and society.

A careful evaluation of archaeological reports is thus imperative, particularly those written before the 1980s. In many studies, the problem seems to be a limited knowledge of the chronological markers and the automatic embrace of the traditional historical narrative of the Byzantine–Islamic transition.³¹ New research strategies and a refining of the chronological indicators over the last thirty years have introduced greater balance. More aware of the flawed interpretations of their predecessors, archaeologists have begun to adopt a more cautious—and ultimately more humble—approach to archaeological material. ‘Reading’ is now preferred to ‘authoring’ in the evaluation of excavations and surveys.

The following chapters address the transition of settlement and society in sixth- to eleventh-century Palestine from an archaeological perspective. On the basis of a careful study of findings from hundreds of excavated sites and regional surveys, my major argument is that archaeology provides a reliable picture of the Byzantine–Islamic transition. It was evidently a much slower and more gradual transformation, involving regional variability and affecting more locales, population sectors, and settlement configurations, than previously assumed. The cultural and religious shift from Christianity to Islam, one of the most significant transformations in human history, needs to be considered from the *longue durée* perspective. It took a different shape in large urban centres, medium-sized towns, agricultural hinterlands, and nomadic settlements on the fringe of the desert. This process of change, from a Christian majority to a multicultural dynamic society, will be explored in the course of the book.

On the basis of my own extensive research over the last three decades in the Negev, the Judean Lowlands, the Jerusalem area, and Ramla, and using the cumulative data of surveys and excavations in many regions of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean, I propose a new paradigm for the Byzantine–Islamic transition. There is a growing acknowledgement that archaeology can enhance our understanding of major historical issues,³² and I believe that

²⁹ Aharoni 1964, 91. Quoted in Walmsley 2007a, 22.

³⁰ Lipschits *et al.* 2009, 2011; and see the discussion in Ch. 3.

³¹ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 1.

³² This was formalized by Moses Finley and Peter Brown, and recently developed by Mark Whittow (1990), Brian Ward-Perkins (2000, 2005), Michael McCormick (2001), Chris Wickham (2005), Averil Cameron (2012), and other historians of the Late Antique and medieval periods.

archaeological findings can illuminate the historical processes that changed the Near East. Large-scale research throughout the region has allowed us to sketch a much clearer portrait of the evolving landscape of Palestine from the last century of Byzantine rule through the Arab conquest, the rise of an Islamic state, and four centuries of Muslim rule, ending in the 1099 Crusader conquest.

In what follows, I will present the 'arguments in stone' for the transition of settlement and society in Palestine and Jordan from Christian domination to Islamic rule.

1

Shifting Paradigms for the Byzantine–Islamic Transition

If we are to judge the importance of historical phenomena by the range and duration of their consequences, the appearance and rapid first expansion of Islam, a process that began in the early seventh century CE and that continued, in desultory fashion, well into the eighth century, must be reckoned among the most important chapters in all of world history. For, there can be no doubt that this process transformed much of the ancient world profoundly, and in some ways, apparently, with noteworthy swiftness.¹

With treasure hunting out of the academic fashion, one of the main tasks of archaeology is studying long-term change.²

The transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule in the Near East has been studied over the last century by scholars who have explored the process from a historical and literary perspective. These studies see an indivisible link between the Arab conquest and the onset of profound changes in Near Eastern settlement and society. Many historians subscribe to the traditional view of the Arab invasion and the spread of Islam as the impetus for rapid settlement decline and the cultural and religious transformation of local society. Large Roman cities dwindled into small medieval towns, and the wide colonnaded streets of the classical *polis* were replaced by the narrow alleyways of the Islamic *madina*. Villages and farms in the countryside were violently destroyed or fell into a state of decay that soon ended in their permanent abandonment. Broad stretches of the Near East went into stagnation, never to recover.

Proponents of this approach believe that the devastating impact of the Arab conquest went beyond the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean, and triggered major changes in Europe. As Henri Pirenne famously put it, ‘Without Mohammad, Charlemagne would have been inconceivable’. This has given way to a revisionist approach to European history that accentuates the Islamic

¹ Donner 2008, p. xii.

² Whittow 2003, 404.

influence on Europe.³ Many early studies of urban development in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages have incorporated this view, which was reinforced by Max Weber's conceptual work on ancient cities,⁴ and the input of scholars in North Africa and Syria. Le Tourneau and the Marçais brothers in North Africa, and Sauvaget and Tchalenko in Syria, set the tone in the first half of the twentieth century.⁵ Their research in these countries, then under French colonial rule, became part of a widely accepted narrative in which the rise of the 'Islamic city' and the abandonment of the countryside was seen as a product of political, cultural, and religious changes that turned the Christian Near East into a Muslim domain.⁶

A major premise in all these works was the linkage of settlement change and the coming of Islam, which was said to have had a direct impact on both the Near East and Europe. With the Arab conquest, a millennium of Hellenistic and Roman influence was effectively erased, and the region was plunged into the Dark Ages, which lasted another millennium. The canonic historical narrative was clear: the invading Arabs emerged from central Arabia in 634 after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and stormed the Near East over the period of a decade, forcing the Byzantine army to retreat as far as the Anatolian plateau. Cities and towns were conquered by force or surrender treaties, and a new political and religious Islamic order was soon established.

This widely held view of the Arab conquest and its traumatic effect on the local landscape was summarized by Moshe Gil in his comprehensive study of Palestine in the Early Islamic period:

One can assume that the local population suffered immensely during the course of the war and it is very likely that many villages were destroyed and uprooted in the frontier regions, and that the lot of these local populations was very bad indeed. It appears that the period of the conquest was also that of the destruction of synagogues and churches of the Byzantine era.⁷

Over the last thirty years, however, this narrative has been challenged on several counts. On the basis of a re-evaluation of the historical and epigraphic sources, a number of scholars have concluded that the process of change was gradual and much more nuanced.⁸ They claim that the consolidation of Islam and the Islamic state went on for decades after the conquest, and that

³ Pirenne 1939, 234. This paradigm was widely discussed and criticized by later scholars; see e.g. Havinghurst 1958; Ehrenkreutz 1972; Hodges and Whitehouse 1983; Barnish 1989; McCormick 2001; Brown 2002; Wickham 2003, 2005.

⁴ Weber 1960.

⁵ LeTourneau 1957; Marçais 1928; Sauvaget 1941*a*, 1949; Tchalenko 1953–8.

⁶ von Grunebaum 1955; de Planhol 1959; Hourani and Stern 1970; Lapidus 1969, 1973.

⁷ Gil 1992, 61.

⁸ See e.g. the revisionist approaches of Crone and Cook 1977; Wansbrough 1978. The radical views of Nevo and Koren (2003) are highly controversial. Donner 1981, 1986, 2008; Kennedy 1985*b*, 1992*a*, 1999; and Hoyland 1997*a*, *b*, 2006 support the traditional view.

Christianity continued to maintain the upper hand for quite a long time afterwards. Core issues such as the physical nature of the conquest, how the expansion of the Islamic state affected local populations, the rate of Islamization in conquered lands, and the long-term economic and social implications of the Byzantine–Islamic transition, have been the subject of lively discussion.⁹

New studies on the evolution of urban and rural societies in the Near East have been highly critical of the conventional narrative, in some cases associating it with colonialist thinking of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰ The validity of the ‘Pirenne thesis’, the paradigm linking the rise of Islam to political upheaval in Europe and the growing strength of the Carolingian kingdom, has also been challenged.¹¹

Until the 1980s, archaeology was almost non-existent in the debate, as most of the arguments were based on the evaluation of written sources. Only recently have archaeological findings been brought into the picture to assess the scope of the political, cultural, and religious transition in Europe and the eastern Mediterranean.¹²

As we shall see in the following chapters, archaeological research in various parts of the Near East, and particularly in modern Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories has turned up a wealth of valuable data that allow for a better reconstruction of this dynamic period. Hundreds of excavated settlements and thousands of surveyed sites reveal greater diversity than previously thought. Questions also begin to arise about the duration of the process. Was the cultural and religious transformation of the Near East really a direct outcome of the Arab conquest, as so much of the traditional scholarship assumes, or does the *longue durée* approach represent more accurately the cultural and religious transformation in the Near East?

Until now, conclusions have been reached on the basis of textual, rather than archaeological evidence, but it is this latter perspective that will be my guide in the following pages. Indeed, archaeology is playing an important role in questioning the old paradigms.¹³ In a reinterpretation based on new findings, I suggest that the coming of Islam did not affect material culture and local settlement patterns in one fell swoop. Urban and rural decline was not triggered by the Arab invasion, the rise of Islam, the Byzantine–Persian wars, or the bubonic plague. It was the result of a slow shift in the residential, cultural, and

⁹ For general summaries of these debates and updated discussions regarding Palestine and Jordan, see Donner 2008; Hoyland 1997*a, b*, 2006; Walmsley 2007*a*; Levy-Rubin 1998, 2000, 2011*a, b*; on the transformation of settlement and society, see Gil 1992; Schick 1995.

¹⁰ See e.g. Abu Lughod 1987; Reynolds 1994; Alsayyad 1991; Insoll 1999, 202–18.

¹¹ See e.g. Hodges and Whitehouse 1983; Hodges 2000.

¹² See esp. Hodges 2000; Liebeschuetz 2001; McCormick 2001; Brown 2002; Wickham 2005; Cameron 2012, 146–212.

¹³ e.g. those presented by Hitti 1951, Gil 1992, Donner 1981, Kennedy 1986, Kaegi 1992, and others.

religious affiliation of different population sectors—town dwellers, farmers, and nomads. The response to geopolitical changes took shape over time and stemmed more from internal developments than abrupt outside events. Settlement patterns changed gradually during the Early Islamic period, and decline in settlement became visible to the eye only in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The process of Islamization was even slower. On the eve of the Crusader period, Christians were still in an overwhelming majority in Palestine.

PARADIGMS FOR THE BYZANTINE–ISLAMIC TRANSITION

Three basic paradigms have been suggested for the Byzantine–Islamic transition and transformation of local societies in the Near East: the ‘thundering hordes’ model, the ‘decline and fall’ model, and the ‘intensification and abatement’ model.

‘Thundering hordes’

This traditional model, the product of nineteenth-century European scholarship, envisaged a swift Muslim invasion that led to the decline and abandonment of most Byzantine cities and towns. In his 1898 book, *The Caliphate: Its Rise and Fall*, Sir William Muir described the Arab conquest in this way:

Warrior after warrior, column after column, whole tribes in endless successions with their women and children, issued forth to fight . . . Onward and still onward, like swarms from the hive, or flights of locusts darkening the land, tribe after tribe issued forth and hastening northward, spread in great masses to the East and to the West.¹⁴

The Byzantine–Islamic transition was thus portrayed as a violent episode that led to an abrupt change in settlement and an end to Christian dominion in the Holy Land. To many Western scholars, it marked the beginning of the Dark Ages in the Middle East, and the contribution of Islamic architecture to the urban landscape was ignored. This widely accepted view of urban decline, desertion of villages, and mass conversion to Islam was based almost entirely on textual evidence.¹⁵ In his 1966 book, *The Holy Land from the Persian to Arab Conquests*, Michael Avi Yonah, a leading scholar of classical Palestine, devoted one short paragraph to the Byzantine–Islamic transition:

¹⁴ Muir 1898, 45.

¹⁵ See e.g. Constantelos 1972; and the extensive discussion in Hoyland 1997a.

The Byzantine system of administration received a serious blow during the Persian conquest of Palestine in 614. Laboriously re-established by Heraclius in 627, it went down permanently as the result of the Arab conquest of 636–640.¹⁶

This may explain the disregard of Islamic remains by so many archaeologists working in the Near East. Many published reports contain short, laconic references to the Early Islamic period and emphasize the neglect of the so-called 'later periods' in the archaeological record of the region. Archaeologists have basically clung to the narratives and conventions of historians writing in the 'Orientalist' spirit of the nineteenth century. The traditional view that classical civilization ended virtually overnight was not challenged until the latter part of the twentieth century.¹⁷

'Decline and fall'

This model, first suggested in the wake of excavations at Mount Nebo in Jordan in the 1940s,¹⁸ and re-embraced in the 1970s and 1980s with the resumption of digs at Jarash and Beth Shean, posits that the Christian Byzantine presence in the Holy Land did not fade out quickly but lingered for at least a hundred years after the Arab conquest. According to this scenario, the process of decline began with a largely non-violent invasion in the 630s and ended with the fall of the Umayyad dynasty, the rise of the Abbasids, and a shift in political power from Damascus to Baghdad in 750. As Yoram Tsafrir wrote in 1984, after excavating in the Negev:

Certainly the collapse of settlement did not occur during the Umayyad period (640–750), although the process of decline can already be discerned at that time . . . The picture that I see is one of decline beginning with the Muslim conquest.¹⁹

The dating of settlement decline to a century after the conquest gained credence as Byzantine and Islamic sites were excavated in Israel and Jordan, although the conquest continued to be perceived as a turning point in the history of settlement and society in Palestine.

In 1985, a radical new perspective on urban transformation in the Near East was introduced by Hugh Kennedy. In his influential article 'From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria',²⁰ he cited findings from excavated cities in Syria and Jordan, showing that signs of

¹⁶ Avi Yonah 1966, 125.

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that even recent studies describing the wider context of the Mediterranean and Europe in the second half of the first millennium maintain the concept of radical changes in the Near East in the 7th and 8th centuries as a direct consequence of the Arab conquest, e.g. Randsborg 1991.

¹⁸ Saller 1941, 1949.

¹⁹ Tsafrir 1984*b*, 70–1, tr. in Magness 2003, 3.

²⁰ Kennedy 1985*a*; see also Kennedy 1985*b*, 2000.

transition were already detectable as early as the sixth century. They were not triggered by the Arab conquest or conversion to Islam, as was previously believed. Unmistakable changes were evident even before the arrival of Islam, both physical—the disappearance of colonnaded boulevards and the privatization of public spaces, and political—the replacement of local authorities by a centralized government.²¹ Kennedy's article, widely publicized and debated, reshaped scholarly thinking on the metamorphosis of the classical city and became a standard reference for archaeological and historical studies of this transitional period. He based his arguments on the explorations of Antioch, Apamea, and Jarash, although no clear stratigraphic sequences had been published, as well as of towns and villages in Syria and northern Jordan. He also relied on data from the northern Syrian massif, where intensive surveys had been conducted in the first half of the twentieth century, albeit without adequate chronological observation.²² Even so, his work shed new light on the chronology of the decline and the emergence of Early Islamic cities, which had been previously based mainly on architecture, historical descriptions, and legal documents.²³

'Intensification and abatement'

This paradigm for the rise and fall of Mediterranean cultures was suggested by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell in their *Corrupting Sea* (2000), which cites the intensification and abatement of landscapes and settlements as a decisive factor in the history of the Mediterranean.²⁴ Adopting this model, Mark Whittow claimed that the process of change in the Roman East during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages consisted of relatively long periods of settlement expansion and brief interludes of decline.²⁵ The basic model was developed in the wake of an archaeological survey and excavations in Hesban, Jordan. An in-depth study of settlement patterns and food cycles revealed a course of intensification and abatement over the years.²⁶ Settlement intensification was linked to innovation, population growth, new opportunities, centralization, craft specialization, state formation, and delocalization of diet, while periods of abatement correlated with natural disasters, missed opportunities, hyper-integration, myopic policies, underdevelopment, food shortages, and epidemics.²⁷ An interesting comparison was made between 'stable systems' that are able to contain only a few disturbances of the food cycle but

²¹ Kennedy 1985*a*, 18–19. ²² Butler 1913–20; Tchalenko 1953–8.

²³ e.g. von Grunebaum 1955; Lapidus 1969, 1973; Hourani and Stern 1969.

²⁴ Horden and Purcell 2000, 263–70. ²⁵ Whittow 2003, 414–17.

²⁶ LaBianca 1990. ²⁷ LaBianca 1990, 14–18.

regain equilibrium quickly, and ‘resilient systems’ that are capable of withstanding larger disturbances but return more slowly to equilibrium.²⁸

The intensification and abatement model, adopting the *longue durée* approach, emphasized the role of internal processes and regional variability in the metamorphosis of urban settlement. It was not violent foreign invasion but developments stretching out over the second half of the first millennium CE that led to a profound cultural transformation, an economic shift from international to local trade, and a changing approach to construction and urbanism. As we shall see in the coming chapters, archaeological research over the last thirty years strongly supports this model of change. A continuous sequence of habitation was observed between the sixth and eleventh centuries, with many settlements evincing a pattern of intensification and abatement. The establishment of new urban centres created new seats of political and economic power. As the pace of change differed from one region to the next, with some areas showing expansion of settlements and others showing temporary or permanent decline, a case-by-case assessment is essential. Shifts of power can be observed throughout the Early Islamic period, while a significant across-the-board decline in settlement density is seen only in the eleventh century.

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

A random survey of textbooks on the archaeology of Palestine written before the 1980s reveals lengthy accounts of the ‘biblical’ and ‘New Testament’ periods, very limited attention to the Byzantine period, and total silence on the Byzantine–Islamic transition and the Early Islamic period. Kenyon’s book on the archaeology of Jerusalem, for example, devotes only a few pages to Byzantine, Muslim, and Crusader remains and states that throughout this long period ‘archaeology has only a small contribution to make to the history of the city’.²⁹ One is left with the impression that the rich archaeological heritage of the Holy Land ended with the Arab conquest of the seventh century, after which the country lay devastated and deserted.

With conventional archaeological research adopting the ‘thundering hordes’ model without question, material culture was deemed insignificant: the Arab conquest was seen as the sole impetus for cultural and religious change in the region. Field archaeologists working in the Near East took little if any interest in the excavation of the ‘later periods’, i.e. post-classical or Byzantine periods. Sites related to the Byzantine–Islamic transition were rarely explored, with earlier periods grabbing all the limelight. This neglect of Islamic

²⁸ LaBianca 1990, 20.

²⁹ Kenyon 1974, 265.

strata was already evident in the early stages of Holy Land archaeology. In his book summarizing a century of archaeological exploration, R. A. S. Macalister, one of the most active archaeologists in Palestine in the early twentieth century, described this common attitude:

It is only natural that the earlier periods should command the first consideration. But while we are digging the Tell, the later relics are apt to be neglected; the Herodian palaces and buildings of luxury, the Byzantine churches, the Crusader churches and palaces . . . all these demand attention.³⁰

Even so, his attitude towards Islamic relics was more lukewarm than enthusiastic:

The Arab remains of Palestine—castles, houses and mosques—can hardly be said to be available for excavation, though some of them would well repay an investigation of the kind [*sic*].³¹

Because of this lack of interest in the Early Islamic period, very few sites were excavated before the 1980s and finds were poorly documented. In many cases, pottery and glass artefacts were erroneously dated. Research focused mainly on the architecture and artistic features of surviving monuments.³² It was mainly architects and art historians who took an interest in the development of the so-called ‘Islamic city’.³³ Special attention was paid to the monumental ‘Umayyad palaces’ or ‘desert castles’, testimony to the luxurious life of the elite under the Umayyad dynasty. These buildings captured the imagination of scholars, who wrote about them in detail.³⁴

The Early Islamic ‘palaces’ in Khirbet Minya on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and Khirbet al-Mafjar near Jericho were the exception to the rule. Excavations at Khirbet Minya unearthed large sections of a magnificent palace in 1932–1939, before work was interrupted by the Second World War. Results were published only in preliminary form.³⁵ The dig at Khirbet al-Mafjar in 1935–1948, led by the director of the Palestine Department of Antiquities, discovered the remains of a splendid palatial complex featuring unique architecture and mosaics.³⁶ The large ceramic repertoire, one of the few assemblages that were adequately documented, became a milestone in the chronology of Early Islamic pottery of Palestine.³⁷ However, the excavations at these sites only emphasized the ‘black hole’ in the archaeological recognition of Early Islamic settlement. Incomplete excavation reports and the misdating of Early Islamic finds to

³⁰ Macalister 1925, 201.

³¹ Macalister 1925, 204.

³² See e.g. the comprehensive summaries of Creswell 1969 and Grabar 1973.

³³ e.g. the work of Sauvaget (1941*a*, 1949) in Aleppo and Damascus.

³⁴ See e.g. the works of Musil (1907); Jaussen and Savignac (1909–22). Most of these were summarized by Creswell (1969); also see Grabar 1973; Hillenbrand 1982; Walmsley 2007*a*, 16–19.

³⁵ Schneider and Puttrich-Reignard 1937; and see the discussion in Ch. 4.

³⁶ Hamilton 1959.

³⁷ Whitcomb 1988.

earlier periods only perpetuated the common view that most Byzantine settlements were destroyed in the Arab conquest.

Alan Walmsley lamented this state of affairs in his 1987 dissertation:

The archaeology of Islamic Palestine and Jordan remains the poor neglected cousin of biblical and Roman studies. For instance much of the essential groundwork on the historical geography of the period has yet to be done, and the material culture of the earlier Islamic periods is either largely ignored or misclassified. Little or no effort has been made to establish a soundly based understanding of the economic and social structure of the region from either written or archaeological sources.³⁸

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

This lacuna has been filled over the last thirty years. A host of excavations and regional surveys conducted in Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Jordan have revealed hundreds of Byzantine and Early Islamic sites laden with finds. The Byzantine–Islamic transition and Early Islamic settlements have become the focus of serious study and debate. The role of archaeology and material culture is no longer overlooked in the historic discourse. Scores of major sites have been excavated since the 1980s. This has refined the chronological picture and raised new questions about the nature and scope of settlement processes and their impact on religious and cultural change in the Early Islamic period. The excavations in Beth Shean, Tiberias, Jarash, Caesarea, Ramla, and Jerusalem have provided abundant archaeological data on the settlement sequence and chronology of the Byzantine and Islamic periods.

New excavations in Acre, Hippos-Sussita, Gadara, Abila, Pella, Umm el-Jimal, Madaba, Sepphoris, Yoqneam, Apollonia-Arsuf, Jaffa, Beth Guvrin, Ascalon-Ashkelon, Beersheba, and the settlements of the Negev Highlands have shown that life went on without interruption from Byzantine into Early Islamic times. In addition, many Byzantine churches and monasteries were excavated that demonstrate continuity of use at least into the eighth century. Numerous towns and villages had several churches, a testament to the affluence of the local Christian communities.³⁹ Michele Piccirillo, who has excavated numerous churches and monasteries in Jordan that survived into Early Islamic times, has made a particularly valuable contribution.⁴⁰

³⁸ Walmsley 1987, 12.

³⁹ See Schick 1995 for a comprehensive summary.

⁴⁰ Piccirillo 1993, Piccirillo and Alliata 1994.

Salvage excavations

Hundreds of salvage excavations have been carried out since the early 1990s in various regions of modern Israel. What makes this type of excavation unique is that the sites are selected randomly. Unlike ordinary archaeological expeditions, which are preplanned with the locations carefully preselected, salvage excavations are conducted wherever modern development projects are under way. Archaeologists do not pick and choose the site in keeping with personal preference or interest. In consequence, the number of excavations unearthing significant remains from the Early Islamic and later periods has increased dramatically, and these present an unbiased picture of the settlement pattern throughout the region. Salvage excavations have also contributed to a better understanding of the layout of settlements, as the dig is randomly located within the site, and not centred around the excavation of a monumental public or religious building. More domestic architecture has been unearthed than is generally found in preplanned excavations. Sometimes the remains of entire villages or farmsteads have been discovered, including agricultural and industrial installations in their vicinity.⁴¹ This large-scale exposure has enabled archaeologists to reconstruct the habitation stages more accurately and gather data on phases of expansion and decline.

On a larger scale, comprehensive regional projects combining surveys and excavations have yielded abundant data on settlements within a defined area and provided an opportunity to observe a broad stretch of agricultural hinterland dotted with small villages, farmsteads, and agricultural infrastructure.⁴²

The volume of salvage excavations in the rural sector is impressive: over 150 sites and approximately forty-five churches and monastic complexes have been excavated around the country in the last thirty years. In addition, thousands of agricultural installations have been documented in fields on the outskirts of rural settlements.⁴³ Large-scale rescue digs have also uncovered Byzantine and Early Islamic settlements hidden beneath modern cities and towns. In Jerusalem, Ramla, and Tiberias, where the present-day cities were built directly on top of the ancient ones, the number of digs that have yielded Byzantine and Early Islamic finds is astonishing. From 1990 to 2011, archaeologists conducted 240 such digs in Jerusalem alone. About 200 digs have been carried out in Ramla over the past two decades, all related to preparing land for modern construction. Tiberias was the site of around seventy-five salvage digs between 1962 and 2011, including major excavations in the old city centre.

⁴¹ See detailed examples in Ch. 4.

⁴² See e.g. Dagan 2010, 2011, for the Judaeen Lowlands area; the surveys and excavations in the hinterland of Jerusalem are discussed in Ch. 3.

⁴³ See Appendix II for a detailed list of the excavated sites and their chronology.

Regional surveys

The first comprehensive survey of Palestine and Jordan, conducted in 1872–8 by the Palestine Exploration Fund, was aimed at identifying biblical sites.⁴⁴ This survey provided the first accurate maps of the region, drew up a list of ancient settlements, and became the basic reference point for archaeological sites. It was supplemented by further regional surveys in the first half of the twentieth century. Fieldwork in Israel resumed with the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of Israel in 1964. Large parts of the country were methodically surveyed and regional settlement maps were drawn up for different periods. Particularly notable were the surveys in the vicinity of Jerusalem, the Galilee, Samaria, and the Judean Lowlands.⁴⁵ Surveys of the Negev in 1979–89 in the wake of the Israeli–Egyptian peace accord and the redeployment of the Israeli army in the Negev shed important light on settlement patterns and identified a large number of sites from Byzantine and Early Islamic times.⁴⁶ A similar picture of settlement distribution and density was seen in other regions, with settlement expansion reaching a peak in the Byzantine period.⁴⁷

The regional surveys conducted in Jordan over the last forty years back up this finding. These surveys, a continuation of the pioneering work by Nelson Glueck in the first half of the twentieth century, are particularly notable for their methodological approach. Most have focused on a specific settlement or region and paint a fairly consistent picture of settlement expansion throughout the first millennium CE.⁴⁸ Surveys were conducted in the Hesban region, the Jordan Valley, Kerak Plateau, Ras an-Naqab region, the southern Ghawr and northern ‘Arabah, Wadi Ziqlab, Wadi Fainan, and the southern ‘Arabah.⁴⁹ Particularly noteworthy for the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods were the Kerak Plateau survey⁵⁰ and the survey of Byzantine and Islamic sites in Jordan devoted to identifying and dating specific sites.⁵¹

The data from these surveyed sites were important for assessing settlement chronology and distribution, but they also demonstrated the diversity of settlement patterns in various regions in Palestine and Jordan. Maps drawn up on the basis of these surveys clearly showed a preponderance of Byzantine

⁴⁴ Wilson and Conder 1890.

⁴⁵ Some 23,000 sites were surveyed. Fifty-one reports have been published to date, each covering an area of 100 sq. km (see Appendix III for references and a summary of Byzantine and Early Islamic sites in these reports). On the methodology adopted by the Archaeological Survey of Israel, see Rosen 1987; Bar 2008, 19–23; Dagan 2011, 21–46.

⁴⁶ For summaries of the Byzantine and Early Islamic data from the Negev Highlands, see Haiman 1995; Avni 1996; Tsafirir 1996.

⁴⁷ See Appendix III for the distribution of Byzantine and Early Islamic sites.

⁴⁸ MacDonald *et al.* 2001; MacDonald 2007.

⁴⁹ See MacDonald 2007 for detailed references of particular surveys.

⁵⁰ Miller 1991. ⁵¹ King 1982, 1983b, 1989.

sites.⁵² However, the dating of sites was problematic because of an erroneous reading of the pottery finds. Many surveyors identified pottery types that continued to prevail in the Early Islamic period as Byzantine only.⁵³

The accurate dating of pottery has special relevance for establishing the abandonment phase of these sites. Most surveys before the 1990s indicated a dramatic decline in the number of sites after the Byzantine period. A survey of the Mount Tabor area in the Lower Galilee recorded forty-five Byzantine sites compared with two classified as Early Islamic,⁵⁴ and the Wadi el-Hasa survey identified 125 sites as Byzantine and only six as Early Islamic.⁵⁵

This discrepancy points to a problem in identifying the continuity of Byzantine and Early Islamic sites. In most of the surveys, an Early Islamic presence was determined primarily by the appearance of ceramic types such as Buff Ware, glazed bowls, and channel nozzle lamps. In the early days of archaeological research, these were used as indicators for the Byzantine–Islamic transition, but today it is well established that these forms date from the ninth century onwards.⁵⁶ Therefore sites defined in these surveys as ‘Early Islamic’ actually belong to the later stages of the period, and not the seventh–eighth centuries. Sites inhabited in the eighth century were frequently labelled Byzantine rather than Early Islamic.

The refining of dating criteria for pottery types has paved the way for a major redating of survey finds and a correction of the flawed picture of settlement density in Early Islamic times. A re-examination of the survey of the Yattir region in the northern Negev, for example, showed that many sites previously dated to the Byzantine period contained pottery testifying to continuous settlement into the Early Islamic period.⁵⁷ One of the first regions in which a clear continuum was documented between Byzantine and Early Islamic sites was the Negev Highlands, where a cluster of sites founded in the sixth or early seventh centuries remained inhabited without a break until the ninth century.⁵⁸

In the light of these studies, the dating in other published surveys should be reassessed. Identifying settlements as Byzantine or Early Islamic on the basis of pottery types is problematic, and the methodology employed in the Negev Highlands surveys for defining a ‘Byzantine–Early Islamic’ stage should be applied to other regions as well.⁵⁹ In conclusion, despite the great importance

⁵² Tsafirir 1996; Watson 2001.

⁵³ See e.g. the results of the surveys in the upper Galilee (Frankel *et al.* 2001), Samaria (Zertal 2004, 2008; Finkelstein 1988–1989; Finkelstein and Magen 1993), and the Judaeian Lowlands (Dagan 2011). An excellent re-evaluation of the survey in Yattir region (Govrin 1991) is presented in Magness 2003, 9–74.

⁵⁴ Gal 1998; see also Appendix III for other surveyed areas.

⁵⁵ MacDonald 1988; see also Appendix III for the detailed list of regions and sites.

⁵⁶ Walmsley 2007a, 49–59; see also below on pottery as a chronological indicator.

⁵⁷ Magness 2003, 9–74.

⁵⁸ Haiman 1995; Avni 1996; see also the discussion in Ch. 4.

⁵⁹ See Appendix III.

of archaeological surveys for establishing a comprehensive picture of settlement distribution and density, the findings need to be embraced with caution because of problems of accuracy in the periodization of sites.

A 'road map'

The large volume of data from surveyed and excavated sites (Fig. 1.1) provides a solid foundation for evaluating the Byzantine–Islamic transition and its effect on regional settlement patterns. The first crop of studies making use of this material has already been published. Robert Schick's monograph, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (1995), a detailed look at sites containing Byzantine and Islamic remains, traces the continuity of Christianity in the Holy Land during the Early Islamic period. Clive Foss's article, 'Syria in Transition, A.D. 550–750: An Archaeological Approach' (1997), provides a comprehensive and detailed study of the transitional period in Syria. Jodi Magness's *The Archaeology of Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine* (2003) is a valuable contribution based on the re-evaluation of pottery assemblages from selected sites. Andrew Petersen's *The Towns of Palestine under Muslim Rule AD 600–1600* (2005) contains condensed, though sometimes outdated information on the main settlements of Palestine in the medieval period. Alan Walmsley's *Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Assessment* (2007) is an excellent general summary of the research to date. Of much value is the recent publication of three edited volumes which present papers delivered at conferences in Maryland (2005), Damascus (2006), and Paris (2007).⁶⁰ However, none of these valuable studies systematically assesses a study of sites and regions, looking particularly at the transformation in settlement and society. The present study attempts to evaluate the *longue durée* transformation of Palestine and Jordan between the sixth and eleventh centuries on the basis of the results of hundreds of excavated and surveyed sites throughout the region. A plethora of archaeological data accumulated over the last thirty years provides the basis for this comprehensive evaluation. These data suggest that the Byzantine–Islamic transition in Palestine was a slow process characterized by regional and demographic diversity that impacted differently on large cities, towns, villages, agricultural hinterlands, and nomadic settlement. Through an in-depth discussion of the finds and the settings in which they were discovered, we will trace the way each region changed, from the remote corners of the Negev desert and southern Jordan to the heart of Palestine and its urban centres.

The chronological framework of the discussion covers more than 500 years, from the height of Byzantine rule over Palestine in the mid-sixth century to

⁶⁰ Holum and Lapin 2011; Bartl and Moaz 2008; Borrut *et al.* 2011.



Fig. 1.1 Map of sites mentioned in the text.

the eve of the Crusader conquest in the late eleventh century. Within this period of time, the country and the local populace underwent a series of profound changes. From a thriving hub of Christianity and a major destination for Christian pilgrims, with settlements stretching to the remote corners of the desert, Palestine in the eleventh century became a land in crisis. Many sites were deserted or reduced to rubble and the population declined. While scholars are in agreement about the beginning and the end of the process, the precise chronology and the reasons for the change have been the subject of debate. In the following chapters, we will explore the light shed on these issues by archaeological exploration.

The periodization terminology in this book is based on calendar years and centuries rather than the standard dynastic classifications or numerical division of the Early Islamic period.⁶¹ The use of centuries and calendar years to define specific periods is preferred in keeping with my argument that the transition in settlement and society at this time was not the direct outcome of political or dynastic shifts. Settlement changes in Palestine and Jordan were derived more from internal processes than geopolitical connections to the government centres in Damascus (Umayyad), Baghdad (Abbasid), and Fustat/Cairo (Fatimid).

Geographically, the scope of the book is the administrative division of the region in Byzantine and Early Islamic times, which includes territories that are now part of modern Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan.⁶² This division, already formalized in the fourth century, consisted of five provinces:⁶³ Palaestina Prima, with Caesarea Maritima as its capital and administrative centre; Palaestina Secunda with Beth Shean-Scythopolis, the largest city of northern Palestine, as its capital; Palaestina Tertia, encompassing the Negev, the 'Arabah Valley, Moab, Edom, and Sinai, with Petra as its capital;⁶⁴ Provincia Arabia, with Bostra as its capital; and Phoenice Maritima, located north of Palaestina Secunda, with Tyre as its capital and Acre (Ptolemais) as a major seaport (Fig. 1.2).

A major source for the settlement layout of Palestine and Jordan in the late Byzantine period is the Madaba Map, which probably dates from the second half of the sixth century.⁶⁵ This unique map, following the main pilgrimage routes in the Holy Land, contains elaborate representations of cities, towns, important pilgrimage sites, and topographical features between Lebanon and

⁶¹ As proposed by Whitcomb 1995a. For other periodizations in the second half of the first millennium, see e.g. Walmsley 2007a; McQuitty 2005.

⁶² The term 'Palestine and Jordan' used throughout the book refers to the administrative division of the Early Islamic period, and not to modern political boundaries.

⁶³ Tsafirir *et al.* 1994, 16, and fig. 4.

⁶⁴ Elusa was also suggested as the capital of the province. See Mayerson 1983.

⁶⁵ Avi Yonah 1954; Donner 1992.

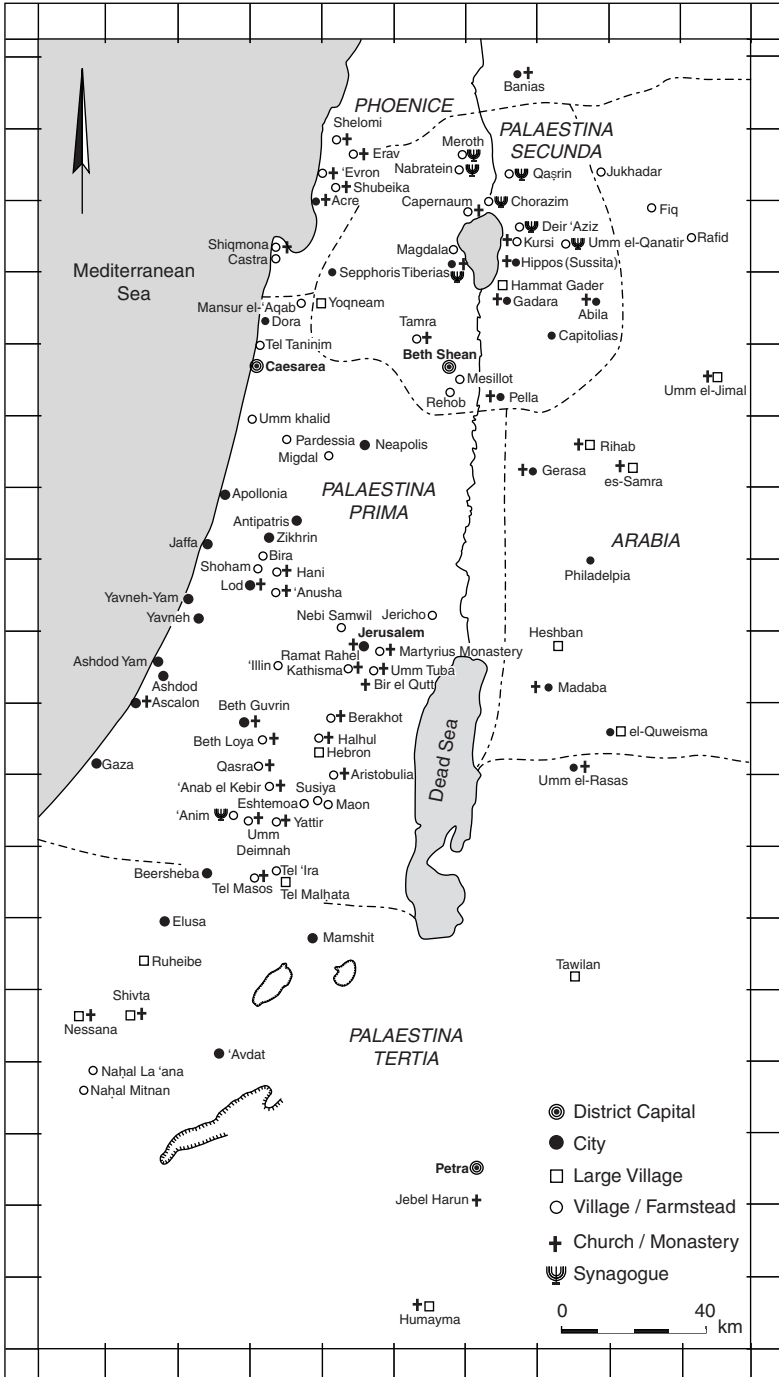


Fig. 1.2 Map of settlements in Palestine in the sixth century.

Egypt. Another valuable source for sixth-century Palestine and Jordan is the lists of cities compiled by Byzantine-era geographers.⁶⁶

With the consolidation of Early Islamic rule in Palestine, the region was redivided into three provinces: Filastin, al-Urdunn, and Dimashq (Fig. 1.3).⁶⁷ Jund Filastin, which encompassed most of Palaestina Prima and Palaestina Tertia, included the newly established city of Ramla as its capital and eleven administrative districts (*kura*), each ruled from a central town. The area of each district was defined by the land owned by the towns and villages within its purview. Other cities and towns included Caesarea-Qaysariyah, the former capital of Palaestina Prima, Jaffa-Yafa, Ascalon-ʿAsqalan, Gaza-Ghazzah, Sabastiah, Nablus, Emmaus-ʿAmwas, and Beth Guvrin-Beit Jibrin. Jerusalem-Iliya was a district centre, but also enjoyed special status as the most important Islamic religious centre.

Large tracts of land in Transjordan were transferred to Jund Dimashq, and the Negev, formerly under Palaestina Tertia, was incorporated into Jund Filastin. Jund al-Urdunn replaced Palaestina Secunda, and its jurisdiction extended northwards to areas that were formerly part of Phoenice Maritima and eastwards to areas that were formerly part of Provincia Arabia. Tiberias replaced Scythopolis (renamed Baysan) as the capital of Jund al-Urdunn, a decision that affected the urban development of both cities, and Tyre, the former capital of Phoenice Maritima, was also incorporated into Jund al-Urdunn. Other towns in the province were Acre-ʿAkka, Sepphoris-Saffuriyah, Hippos-Susita, Kedesh-Qadas, Pella-Fihl, Gadara-Jadar, Abila-Abil, Capitolias-Beit Ras, and Gerasa-Jarash.⁶⁸

Hundreds of sites containing Byzantine and Early Islamic remains have been discovered within the boundaries of this geographical region, many of which will be discussed in the following chapters. Chapter 2 evaluates the findings from the large cities, concentrating on Caesarea, Beth Shean, Tiberias, and Jarash, which were extensively excavated. Chapter 3 focuses on two major case studies: Jerusalem and Ramla. Chapter 4 discusses the settlement of the countryside according to specific regions, encompassing cities, towns, villages, farmsteads, churches and monastic compounds, and the nomadic encampments of the deserts. On the basis of archaeological evidence from the major urban centres as well as towns and villages in the rural sector, Chapter 5 explores potential agents of change—military land and sea raids, earthquakes, and plagues—and their possible impact on settlement and society. Also considered are long-term changes in the religious affiliation of the local

⁶⁶ See e.g. Hierocles' *Synecdemus*; Georgius Cyprius, and the discussion in Jones 1971, 502–10.

⁶⁷ Walmsley 1987, 51–60; and see Haldon 1995, Shahid 2011 for the Byzantine and Early Islamic administrative divisions.

⁶⁸ For different accounts of Early Islamic historians on Jund al-Urdunn, see Walmsley 1987, 88–95.



Fig. 1.3 Map of settlements in Palestine in the eighth–ninth centuries.

populations and the impact of economic factors on the process of change between the sixth and eleventh centuries. Chapter 6 assesses the changes as reflected in the material culture.

As we evaluate the archaeological data, questions are asked. Do the findings show continuity of populations, settlement patterns, material culture, and ethno-religious affiliation? Was the society on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean in the eleventh century much different from the Byzantine community that resided there in the sixth century? Was the cultural change regional? Does the archaeological record show tangible evidence of Arabization and Islamization?

The contribution of archaeology to historical debates

Previous scholarship, based mainly on textual sources, attributed the pace and character of the Byzantine–Islamic transition to war and conquest or natural catastrophes such as earthquakes and epidemics. The bubonic plague of 542, the Persian conquest of 614, and the Arab conquest of 634–40, together with a series of devastating earthquakes in the seventh and eighth centuries, were believed to be the direct causes for the loss of resilience and subsequent decline of the societies in this region. This view of the Arab conquest and the emergence of the Islamic state was the standard one adopted by historians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁹ A comprehensive synthesis of the historical sources appears in several research studies published since the 1970s.⁷⁰ Some focus specifically on the Arab conquest and the history of the region in the Early Islamic period.⁷¹ None, interestingly, addresses the material culture. Around the same time, the traditional interpretation began to be challenged and a heated debate erupted over the reliability of the historical sources. Among several revisionist studies of the rise of Islam in the Near East, the most intriguing was *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977) by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook. Together with John Wansbrough in his *Sectarian Milieu* published the following year, Crone and Cook sought an alternative explanation for the spread of Islam. They cast doubt on the credibility of the historical sources and suggested a different narrative for the religious and cultural transition.⁷²

⁶⁹ e.g. Caetani 1905–26; de Goeje 1900; Ostrogorsky 1980 (first published in 1940 in German), 110–40; Vasiliev 1961 (first published in 1932 in French), 264–88.

⁷⁰ e.g. Shaban 1971; Hawting 1987; Donner 1986; Kennedy 1986; Gil 1992; Hoyland 1997a; Howard-Johnson 2010.

⁷¹ See mainly Gil 1992, 11–75 [12–87]; Donner 1981; Kaegi 1992.

⁷² See Crone and Cook 1977, Wansbrough 1978. A detailed discussion of their approach is beyond the scope of this book. Both Crone and Cook later backtracked from their own revisionist theory in later studies. For a recent updated evaluation, see Hoyland 1997a, 545–59; Donner 2008.

This approach was supported by other scholars who argued in favour of a gradual transition process and less emphasis on the Arab conquest.⁷³

A common denominator in all these studies was the absence of any discussion of archaeological remains as indicators of political, cultural, and religious change. Scholarly interaction between historians and archaeologists of the Early Islamic period seems to have been non-existent. As we noted earlier, until the 1980s archaeologists accepted the traditional historical paradigms without question and went along with the theory that most settlements in Palestine were destroyed or went into decline during the Arab conquest or shortly afterwards. This was partly rooted in the age-old separation between classical archaeology and Islamic and medieval archaeology. While the classicists were not experts in Islamic cultures, the Islamists focused on societies with a solid Islamic identity rather than those in flux. Therefore, the transitional period between Byzantine and Islamic rule was completely neglected in traditional archaeological research.

Awareness of the importance of an interdisciplinary approach for understanding the social and religious transformations in the Near East emerged only recently. The dialogue between archaeologists and historians has gained momentum as large-scale excavations, especially in the large urban centres, have turned up findings that either support or contradict the evidence of historical texts, many of which were written long after the events described.⁷⁴ One example of the potential contribution of archaeology is what the findings tell us about the ethnicity of local populations in Early Islamic Palestine and the pace and timing of their conversion to Islam. In the following chapters, the ethnic affiliation of urban and rural inhabitants will be viewed through the prism of material culture.⁷⁵

The input of archaeology on the nature of the Byzantine–Islamic transition, the consolidation of the Islamic state, and the fate of Christians, Jews, and Samaritans under Islamic rule becomes increasingly significant as more excavations yield reliably datable finds. The large corpus of excavated sites that forms the core of the present study fleshes out the picture provided by the historical sources, although in some cases it adds contradictions. By virtue of the deeper insights that archaeology brings, we can reconstruct settlement processes and population changes not only in the main cities mentioned in the literature, but also in the fringe areas for which no historical documentation exists. Utilizing archaeological finds as a primary tool for the evaluation of settlement processes in Palestine and Jordan produces measurable data that can serve as a basis for comparison with other regions of the Near East.

⁷³ e.g. Sharon 1988, 2001; Bashear 1997.

⁷⁴ The problematic aspects and reliability of the Arab historical sources have been debated at length over the last thirty years. A comprehensive summary of the state of research is provided in Donner 2008.

⁷⁵ See discussion in Ch. 5.

ESTABLISHING AN ACCURATE CHRONOLOGY

The growing number of excavations of Byzantine and Early Islamic sites has yielded abundant finds—pottery, glass, metal objects, coins, and other small artefacts. These finds and their stratigraphical contexts have paved the way for a more accurate chronology. However, unlike earlier periods in the archaeological sequence of the Near East (such as the Iron Age and the Roman era), where decades of research and publication have helped to refine the chronological markers, the chronology for the second half of the first millennium is not yet satisfactory. At many sites, the dating of settlement phases is still based on historical narratives and regional context rather than a comparative analysis of excavated finds. The publication of pottery, glass, metal artefacts, and coins has been selective, with a focus on precious finds of unknown provenance in museums and private collections. Only a few sites have been excavated in a way that preserves the stratigraphic sequences and allows a reliable chronology to be drawn up. Even at these sites one finds an occasional chronological contradiction brought to light by pottery and glass finds.⁷⁶ However, several recent studies of pottery sequences have helped to create a more accurate timeline.⁷⁷

Poor knowledge of pottery types from the late Byzantine and Early Islamic period led to the flawed dating of habitation sequences in many excavated sites. Fine Byzantine Ware (FBW), for example, unearthed in abundance at these sites, was first defined as typical only of the Byzantine period. Recent studies of pottery from stratified contexts showed that it continued into the ninth century and beyond.⁷⁸ Red Painted Ware and Cream Ware (also known as Mafjar Ware) were initially dated to the seventh and early eighth centuries but actually prevailed from the second half of the eighth century to the tenth century.⁷⁹ Walmsley is very clear about the consequences of this misdating:

The compression of important diagnostic ceramic groups into earlier periods, and especially the failure to recognize post-Umayyad sequences, has had a deleterious and long-lasting impact on accurately understanding the social history of early Islamic Syria-Palestine from an archaeological perspective. Because of these chronological errors, the Abbasid and Fatimid periods have been almost entirely written out of the archaeology of southern Syria-Palestine, thereby creating a false 'dark age' that has been difficult to dispel.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ This issue has not been widely discussed. Such contradictory evidence was published in Ramla, where pottery and glass from the same stratigraphic sequences were dated differently. See the discussions in Gutfeld 2010.

⁷⁷ See mainly Whitcomb 1988, 1989; Magness 1993, 2003; Arnon 2008*a, b*; Cytryn-Silverman 2010*a*; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011.

⁷⁸ Magness 1993, 166–71; Walmsley 2007*a*, 52–3.

⁷⁹ Whitcomb 1988; Walmsley 2001*a*; Falkner 1993–1994.

⁸⁰ Walmsley 2007*a*, 55.

Another obstacle to obtaining an accurate chronology based on archaeological findings is inadequate publication. Scores of large excavations have been conducted over the last thirty years, but few have seen their results fully published and many have submitted only preliminary reports. This book uses as much of the published archaeological material as possible, but to ensure a comprehensive picture, an effort was made to gather information from archives and incorporate reliable oral communications.

Pottery

The study of Early Islamic pottery has been sorely neglected for years. Scholars have paid more attention to unique artefacts in museums and private collections than to rough pottery shards unearthed in excavations. The few Early Islamic sites that yielded pottery from stratified contexts were often misdated in the absence of clear typological and chronological pottery sequences.⁸¹ In other sites, the dating of ceramic sequences was biased by typologies that followed historical or dynastic divisions with no correlation to the development of pottery types. Traditional dating of pottery sequences was based on the erroneous belief that a major change in the material culture was set in motion by the Arab conquest in the seventh century and the Umayyad–Abbasid transition in the mid-eighth century. This flawed dating of ceramic sequences created the false impression of a settlement gap between the eighth and eleventh centuries.⁸²

A methodological classification of pottery types and chronologies was introduced only in the late 1980s and 1990s, on the basis of finds from major excavated sites and the re-evaluation of previous finds.⁸³ The sites in question provided well-stratified sequences that enabled the establishment of a clearer pottery typology and chronology. Particularly significant were the sequences from Jerusalem,⁸⁴ Caesarea,⁸⁵ Ramla,⁸⁶ Pella,⁸⁷ Yoqneam,⁸⁸ and Ayla.⁸⁹ In addition, a re-evaluation of pottery previously dated to the Byzantine period pointed to continuity into the later stages of the Early Islamic period.⁹⁰ These studies proved that the transition in pottery types from the Byzantine forms to

⁸¹ E. g. see The pottery from early excavations in Ramla which were first dated to the 8th century. (Rosen Ayalon and Eitan 1970), but actually consisted of types prevailing in the 9th and 10th centuries (Gutfeld 2010, Tal and Taxel 2008).

⁸² Falkner 1993–1994; Walmsley 2007a, 55.

⁸³ Accurate typologies and chronologies have been established mainly in the works of Whitcomb (1988) and Magness (1993). See Sauer and Magness 1997 for a summary.

⁸⁴ Magness 1993.

⁸⁵ Arnon 2008a, b.

⁸⁶ Tal and Taxel 2008; Cytryn-Silverman 2010a.

⁸⁷ Walmsley 2007a, 55–8.

⁸⁸ Avissar 2005.

⁸⁹ Whitcomb 1989, 1994.

⁹⁰ See particularly the studies of Magness on Capernaum, Nabratein, Hammat Gader, and Khirbet Abu Suwwana (Magness 1997, 2003, 2004, 2010a, b).

the new Islamic forms occurred gradually in the second half of the eighth century and continued in the ninth century, representing a delayed response to the rise of the Abbasid dynasty and the penetration of eastern influences into the ceramic repertoire of Palestine and Jordan.⁹¹ Khirbet al-Mafjar, the magnificent Early Islamic palace near Jericho, is one of the best examples: Hamilton dated the palace to the first half of the eighth century and concluded that it was abandoned after the 749 earthquake.⁹² Thirty years later, a careful re-evaluation of the pottery finds by Whitcomb produced a new chronology for 'Mafjar Ware': he post-dated its appearance to the second half of the eighth century and revised the dates of site use and abandonment.⁹³

Pottery dating from stratified sequences has thus proven to be one of the major tools for re-evaluating the settlement map of Palestine between the eighth and eleventh centuries. On the basis of these new pottery chronologies, it is clear that there was no habitation gap: life continued without interruption in the major cities and many towns and villages in the countryside, so that the previous theory of the demise of settlements during this period is effectively overturned.

Glass

A systematic classification of glass vessels from the Early Islamic period evolved in a manner similar to pottery. Early studies focused on the artistic aspects of individual pieces, with methodical research of stratified excavations beginning around twenty years ago.⁹⁴ Finds from Beth Shean,⁹⁵ Tiberias,⁹⁶ Yoqneam,⁹⁷ and above all Ramla⁹⁸ have provided invaluable data for the classification and chronological typology of Early Islamic glass. Assemblages from Nishapur in Iran and Fustat in Egypt have also served as coordinates.⁹⁹ The glass vessels of the seventh and eighth centuries show significant Byzantine influence. Vessels found in Beth Shean, particularly in the area of Hisham Market, which was built in 738 and destroyed in the 749 earthquake, are especially important for this classification stage.¹⁰⁰ As in pottery types, the major transition in Early Islamic glass vessels occurred in the second half of the eighth century with the emergence of new styles and technology.¹⁰¹ The glass of the seventh and eighth centuries developed from the Byzantine types, while that of the ninth and tenth centuries showed increasing Eastern influence. The new Islamic style, seen by some as a delayed response to the

⁹¹ Sauer and Magness 1997; Walmsley 2007a, 56–7.

⁹³ Whitcomb 1988.

⁹⁴ Walmsley 2007a, 64–6.

⁹² Hamilton 1959.

⁹⁵ Hadad 2005; Winter 2011.

⁹⁶ Lester 2004a, b; Hadad 2008.

⁹⁷ Lester 1996.

⁹⁸ Pollak 2007; Gorin-Rosen 2008, 2010.

⁹⁹ See Gorin-Rosen 2010, 216, for detailed references.

¹⁰⁰ Hadad 2005.

¹⁰¹ Walmsley 2007a, 64–6; Gorin-Rosen 2010.

Umayyad–Abbasid political change, differed in form, colour and ornamentation, surface texture and raw materials. The main types continued to be used in the tenth and even eleventh centuries, as attested to by the rich glass finds from the Serçe Limani shipwreck in southern Turkey dated to the early eleventh century.¹⁰²

The Eastern influence on glassware seems to have been part of a general trend in the material culture of the region in the second half of the eighth century, when Mediterranean dominance took a back seat to influences from Iraq and Iran. A dramatic change was also evident in the technological aspects of glass production, with the abandonment of the natron glass process and the adoption of plant ash as a substitute flux in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.¹⁰³ This clear change in style and technology provides another useful tool for dating settlements from the later stages of the Early Islamic period.

Coins

The consolidation of Islamic rule over Palestine and Jordan brought with it new fiscal systems, most notably after the massive reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik in the 690s. One of the first steps taken by the new administration was the establishment of mints in various locations in Palestine and Jordan.¹⁰⁴ The copper coinage of Syria and Palestine in the seventh and eighth centuries has been viewed as a major indicator of Early Islamic rule. This coinage is composed of two main groups: the ‘Arab-Byzantine’ or ‘pre-reform Islamic’ coins introduced shortly after the Arab conquest, used into the second half of the seventh century, and coins minted after the monetary reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik in the late seventh century.¹⁰⁵ Certain coins were abruptly removed from circulation at this time and were replaced by three standard denominations in gold (*dinar*), silver (*dirham*), and copper (*fals*). All had Arabic inscriptions arranged in central panels with encircling text. The gold and silver coins were marked with the place of manufacture.¹⁰⁶ Seven towns in Jund Filastin and six in Jund al-Urdunn were permitted to mint their own copper coins (*fulus*). Mints were established at Ramla, Jerusalem, Ludd, Yubna, Ascalon, Gaza, and Beth Guvrin in Jund Filastin, and at Tiberias, Tyre, Acre, Sepphoris, Beth Shean, and Jarash in Jund al-Urdunn.¹⁰⁷ However, the productivity of some mints is questionable. While Ramla and Tiberias

¹⁰² Bass *et al.* 2009. ¹⁰³ Henderson *et al.* 2004.

¹⁰⁴ Berman (1976, 19) dated the Early Islamic coins from Beth Shean to the period of the Rashidun Caliphate, while Walmsley (1987, 87) concluded that the establishment of the new administrative system had already taken place during the Caliphate of ‘Umar, as part of his provincial reorganization in 639.

¹⁰⁵ Goodwin 2005; see also the summary in Walmsley 2007a, 59–64.

¹⁰⁶ Walker 1956; Grierson 1960; Walmsley 2007a, 62.

¹⁰⁷ See also Walmsley 1987, 139–51 for a detailed discussion of the mints.

issued large quantities of coins which were found in many distant sites, the evidence of coins from mints from several smaller cities is meagre.

While the local coinage of the seventh and eighth centuries is clearly categorized and dated, this is not so for the coins of the ninth and tenth centuries. It seems that regular copper coins ceased to be struck in the ninth century, and by the end of the century fragments of gold and silver coins were used as small change.¹⁰⁸ The reason for this phenomenon is not clear but it does not appear to be related to an economic or social decline.¹⁰⁹ A number of hoards from the tenth and eleventh centuries containing cut silver dirhams were discovered in Palestine, which indicates that this method of paying small sums was widespread.¹¹⁰ Because of the halt in production, copper coins dating to the ninth to eleventh centuries were rarely found. This has led archaeologists to conclude that the sites in question had been abandoned after the eighth century. However, coin frequencies do not appear to be reliable criteria for settlement continuity: a site cannot be presumed to be abandoned just because certain coins are absent.¹¹¹

In conclusion, the use of pottery, glass, and coins as chronological indicators of the Early Islamic period still needs considerable refining. At the present time, there are still too many uncertainties for these types of data to be used with any degree of certainty, although current studies of finds from clearly stratified complexes are providing fresh insights. As the corpus of dated assemblages grows, the chronology of development and change of individual sites will become more accurate.

RISE AND FALL: PALESTINE IN THE SIXTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

Sixth-century prosperity

Palestine and Arabia were among the most prosperous provinces of the eastern Roman Empire during the Byzantine period. The sixth century, in particular, was marked by a zenith in settlement and commercial growth.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Heidemann 2008, 504–5.

¹⁰⁹ Noonan 1986; I thank Robert Kool for this reference.

¹¹⁰ Kool *et al.* 2011; see also the detailed discussion in Ch. 5.

¹¹¹ Similar monetary changes in the Byzantine period raised the question of settlement continuity in the 5th cent. See Safrai 1998, where conclusions on assumed decline during the 5th cent. were based on coin frequencies in excavated sites, versus Bijovsky 2000–2002, 2011, who proved that this is not an indicative criterion.

¹¹² Avi Yonah 1958; Tsafirir 1996; Wickham 2005, 450–9; Ward Perkins 2000; Cameron 2012, 168–90.

Public and private construction flourished, and settlements expanded into the fringes of the desert. With the spread of Christianity, many ecclesiastical and monastic buildings were built and the Holy Land became a magnet for masses of pilgrims, which provided an unprecedented boost to the economy.¹¹³

A comprehensive map of settlement in the Byzantine period can be drawn up on the basis of Eusebius's *Onomasticon*, compiled in the fourth century, and the Madaba Map, which depicts Palestine in the second half of the sixth century. The *Onomasticon* lists a total of 229 inhabited sites, among them 34 cities, 5 towns, 35 large villages, and 155 small villages.¹¹⁴ The Madaba Map shows a network of towns and villages, each represented by a single building. The big cities are marked with a cluster of buildings.¹¹⁵ The detailed depictions of Jerusalem and its environs and the large number of villages located east of Gaza and Ascalon are particularly worthy of note.

While population estimates for Palestine in the sixth century range from one to four million people,¹¹⁶ scholars agree that the Byzantine period marked a demographic peak unparalleled until the twentieth century.¹¹⁷ According to historical sources, there were 209 large settlements at this time.¹¹⁸ Archaeological surveys have added another 400 sites that are not mentioned in the sources.¹¹⁹

Epigraphic evidence points to an increase in private and public building throughout Palestine and Arabia.¹²⁰ A flurry of construction was evident in cities, towns, and villages all over the country.¹²¹ The principal cities expanded dramatically between the fourth and the seventh centuries, reaching their maximal size and population.¹²² Almost all of the seventy-six cities and towns in the provinces of Palestine and Arabia documented in the texts have been located by archaeologists.¹²³ Twenty-two towns measured over 30 hectares, with six of them ranging in size from 80 to 100 hectares. Three cities—Jerusalem, Beth Shean, and Caesarea—covered more than 100 hectares.¹²⁴ Many towns and cities expanded beyond their city walls. The growth

¹¹³ Tsafirir 1996, 269–70; Kingsley 2001.

¹¹⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Onomasticon*; Hirschfeld 1997a, 37.

¹¹⁵ Avi Yonah 1954; Piccirillo and Alliata 1999.

¹¹⁶ Broshi 1979, 8–10; Tsafirir 1996, 269–70. Both Tsafirir and Broshi suggest a figure of about 1 million people, while Avi Yonah (1964) estimated the total population at c.4 million people.

¹¹⁷ For general references to Byzantine Palestine, see Tsafirir 1996. A comprehensive survey of settlement patterns was compiled by Dauphin 1998.

¹¹⁸ Tsafirir *et al.* 1994, 18.

¹¹⁹ This number is based on a general evaluation of the Archaeological Survey of Israel Records, and the numerous references for surveys in Jordan.

¹²⁰ Di Segni 1999.

¹²¹ See Tsafirir 1984a, 221–347; 1996; Di Segni 1999, 163 for the rate of public construction in cities and villages as evidenced in inscriptions.

¹²² Broshi 1979; Tsafirir 1996, 275; Walmsley 1996.

¹²³ Jones 1971, 534–5; Walmsley 1996, 126.

¹²⁴ Broshi 1979; the numbers given by Broshi were slightly modified in the light of recent research.

of settlements was particularly notable in the countryside, as small towns thrived and new villages were built. A vast network of Christian churches and monasteries dotted the landscape.¹²⁵

The construction of city walls in the fifth and sixth centuries was a further reflection of the country's prosperity. The walls of Jerusalem were extended southwards in the fifth century.¹²⁶ A new 2.5 km wall was built in Caesarea that expanded the city limits to the east and south, increasing its urban area to 120 hectares.¹²⁷ In the sixth century, a 2.8 km wall was erected around Tiberias, incorporating the new church and monastery at the summit of Mount Berenice within the city limits.¹²⁸ The 4.8 km circuit wall of Scythopolis-Beth Shean was reconstructed in the early sixth century.¹²⁹ The wide colonnaded streets in Caesarea, Scythopolis, and Jerusalem were also expanded at this time. Massive construction in Jerusalem in the days of Justinian included the renovation of the *Cardo*, a colonnaded street that crossed the city from north to south and connected the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the newly built Nea Church, the largest in the city.¹³⁰ Expansion continued beyond the walls to the north, east, and south.¹³¹

Villages and farms in the hinterlands of the major cities also showed signs of prosperity.¹³² Agricultural estates flourished around Caesarea and Ascalon,¹³³ and churches and monasteries sprouted on the outskirts of Jerusalem and the Judean Desert.¹³⁴ The penetration of permanent settlements based on agriculture into the arid zones of the Negev attests to the demographic pressure that spurred settlement in Byzantine Palestine.¹³⁵

Another parameter for the expansion of settlements is the development of farmland, particularly in the central hills region and the Negev Highlands. Millions of agricultural terraces were constructed in these areas, most of them attributed to the Byzantine period. An extensive system of fields was particularly evident in excavations in the countryside.¹³⁶ A detailed analysis of agricultural terraces in the Negev Highlands established that they were constructed in the third and fourth centuries and in use until the tenth or eleventh centuries.¹³⁷

¹²⁵ Tsafirir 1996; Tsafirir *et al.* 1994, 18–19; Patrich 1995.

¹²⁶ Tsafirir 1999, 285–300.

¹²⁷ Patrich, 2001*b*; for a minimalist estimate, see Walmsley 1996.

¹²⁸ Hirschfeld 2004*a*; Byzantine Tiberias thus reached an area of 75 ha.

¹²⁹ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 99–106; Mazor 2008, 1633–4. ¹³⁰ Gutfeld 2012.

¹³¹ Tsafirir 1999, 330–42; Avni 2005. ¹³² Hirschfeld 1997*a*; see also Ch. 4.

¹³³ See e.g. Hirschfeld 2000 for the agricultural estate at Ramat Hanadiv; Israel 2013 for agricultural estates near Ashkelon.

¹³⁴ Hirschfeld 1992.

¹³⁵ Rubin 1990; Haiman 1995; Avni 2008; see Ch. 4 for a detailed discussion.

¹³⁶ Hirschfeld 1997*a*; Magen 2008; and see Mayerson 1960, Rubin 1990 for the Negev Highlands.

¹³⁷ Avni *et al.* 2013.

Eleventh-century collapse

Four centuries later, this dense and prosperous settlement was gone. Archaeological excavations and surveys show a dramatic decline. Cities became a pale shadow of their glorious past. Jerusalem was reduced to a small town. The great metropoleis of Caesarea and Beth Shean, already diminished since the Arab conquest, shrank further. Tiberias and Ramla, the provincial capitals, were on the verge of collapse, strewn with ruins and empty homes. Farms and monasteries that had engaged in agriculture were deserted. Settlements on the fringe of the desert, especially in the Negev and eastern Jordan, were abandoned permanently and not returned to until modern times. With the coming of the Crusaders in 1099, the prosperity of Palestine and Jordan became a thing of the past.

The contraction and decline of cities in the eleventh century has been seen as a consequence of political instability and two severe earthquakes in 1033 and 1068. Historical and archaeological evidence of these quakes shows that they left wide destruction in their wake. The harsh living conditions in eleventh-century Palestine were exacerbated by incessant Bedouin raids and foreign military campaigns. Political tensions between the Abbasids in Iraq and Fatimids in Egypt increased instability and left the inhabitants of Palestine vulnerable to attack. Infiltrations by Bedouin marauders accelerated in the eleventh century, turning the country into a military battleground. Ramla was invaded time and again, with a raid in 1024–5 wreaking major havoc. The distress of the population is articulated in letters discovered in the Cairo Geniza.¹³⁸ The hinterlands of Ramla and Jerusalem suffered greatly, and there were food shortages in these cities. The Fatimid army tried to suppress the Bedouin but without great success. The earthquake destruction in 1033 further weakened the resilience of Palestine's large cities and agricultural hinterland. Recently, it was suggested that a succession of droughts in the Near East in the second half of the eleventh century sped up the deterioration of settlements.¹³⁹ The abundant coin, metal, and jewellery hoards discovered by archaeologists in Ramla and Tiberias are a critical link in determining what befell this region in the eleventh century.¹⁴⁰

Archaeological evidence shows that most of the settlements that prospered in the sixth century and continued to exist in the Early Islamic period were abandoned some time during the eleventh century, especially towards the end of the century. Only the larger cities and towns survived, but again, diminished in size and population. This picture of settlement continuity until the eleventh century recurs in other parts of the Near East. Archaeological surveys and

¹³⁸ See the discussion in Ch. 3.

¹³⁹ Ellenblum 2012.

¹⁴⁰ See the discussion in Ch. 5.

excavations in northern Syria, for example, show a similar pattern, especially in Raqqa, the Tigris Valley, and the Khabur-Balikh watershed.¹⁴¹ The villages of northern Syria were probably not deserted in the seventh century as has been previously claimed, but continued well into the Early Islamic period, and perhaps until the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁴² The excavations at Dehes, a village in the north Syrian massif, proved a continuity of settlement at least until the ninth century,¹⁴³ and abandonment only in the tenth century.¹⁴⁴

In the following chapters, we will explore archaeological data for the three main settlement types in Palestine: large, multicultural cities; mid-size towns or large villages; and farmsteads and nomadic encampments on the fringes of settled territory.

¹⁴¹ Heidemann 2006, 2008; Decker 2007. ¹⁴² See the discussion in Ch. 5.

¹⁴³ Sodini *et al.* 1980. ¹⁴⁴ Magness 2003, 196–205.

From *Polis* to *Madina*: The Evolution of Large Urban Communities

The development and change of urban topography is one of the main indicators of the Byzantine–Islamic transformation in Palestine. There is a wide consensus among scholars that the monumentality of urban centres, which was one of the landmarks of the Roman period in the Near East,¹ underwent major modifications during Byzantine times.² The large public monuments—triumphal gates, colonnaded streets, agoras, civic basilicas, temples, theatres, and amphitheatres—were gradually abandoned and replaced with utilitarian structures. The principle of ‘comfortable disorder’ became a leading phenomenon in urban planning, and in many cities the rigid and schematic urban grid was changed into a more organic pattern.³ The last century of the Byzantine period and the beginning of the Early Islamic period were marked by increased changes of urban structures and the confrontation of new cultural and religious challenges. Assessments vary from rapid decline and deterioration of the public spaces to a more gradual change, which inevitably led to decline.⁴

One of the main issues in the evaluation of the transformation of cities is the chronological framework of urban change: did it start in the second half of the sixth century, as was suggested by Kennedy⁵ and followed by other scholars,⁶ or was it a much delayed change which involved a long-term and regionally variable process?

While the nature and chronology of changes is being debated among scholars, there is no question about the sharp differences in settlement

¹ See e.g. Segal 1997; MacDonald 1986.

² Saradi 2006; Tsafirir 1984*a*, 317–32; Mango 2011*b*; Cameron 2012, 151–62. For a slightly different view, see Ward-Perkins 2005, 123–37.

³ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 121 and references there.

⁴ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 140. For other areas in the Mediterranean during late antiquity see Lavan 2001; Kennedy 1992*b* (Antioch); Alston 2002 (Egypt); Zavagno 2009 (Byzantium). And see Lavan 2009; Mango 2011*b*; Cameron 2012, 151–60 for updated discussions.

⁵ Kennedy 1985*a*.

⁶ e.g. Tsafirir and Foerster 1997; Tsafirir 2009; Saradi 2006, 149–209.

patterns and density between the sixth and the eleventh centuries.⁷ The former represents a zenith of settlement expansion and population growth at the height of the Byzantine period, while the latter evidenced a dramatic deterioration, expressed in the contraction and abandonment of many sites and in a considerable decrease in the population.

What were the circumstances of these profound changes in settlement patterns? Al-Muqaddasi, in his tenth-century detailed description of Palestinian cities and towns emphasized that Jund Filastin and Jund al-Urdunn were populous and wealthy. He especially singled out Ramla, Tiberias, and Jerusalem as the major urban centres of the country, and described their public buildings and monuments. He mentioned twelve other major cities and eight secondary towns with their adjacent rural areas. Recent archaeological findings show a compatible picture of considerable prosperity in tenth-century Palestine, though a gradual decline in comparison with previous periods is evident. As will be argued below, the pace and timing of the decline present a more complicated picture of urban change than the one suggested in previous research: it varies from one region to the other, and sometimes even between neighbouring settlements in the same region.

This chapter will discuss in detail the finds from four major urban centres and their hinterlands, each presenting a different case for the Byzantine–Islamic transition: Caesarea Maritima, the capital of Byzantine period Palaestina Prima, Beth Shean, capital of Palaestina Secunda, Tiberias, which replaced Beth Shean and became the capital of Jund al-Urdunn, and Jarash–Gerasa, one of the largest cities of Byzantine and Early Islamic Jordan, which was extensively excavated.

CAESAREA MARITIMA

Caesarea developed in the Roman and Byzantine periods as the capital of Palaestina Prima and a major administrative and commercial centre of the eastern Mediterranean. In the fifth and sixth centuries the city was much affected by the Samaritan Revolts but resumed its leading position when emperor Justinian promoted it and gave it jurisdiction over the three provinces of Palestine.⁸ It was a thriving city with a major seaport, serving as the main gateway to Palestine and covering an area of c.120 ha encircled by walls erected at the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century.⁹ The major landmark in Caesarea was its monumental octagonal martyr church, constructed in c.490 over the former pagan temple on the elevated platform facing the harbour. This large church continued to function until the middle of

⁷ See Ch. 1.

⁸ Levine 1975; Raban and Holum 1996.

⁹ Patrich 2001*b*.

the eighth century.¹⁰ In the southern part of the city the Roman *praetorium* became the residence of the Byzantine governor. It contained vast courtyards and elaborate bathhouses. Other palatial mansions were constructed in this area, which was the most praised quarter of Byzantine Caesarea.¹¹

In the sixth century the city expanded further, beyond its walls, creating extramural quarters with spectacular residences.¹² A large and wealthy agricultural hinterland expanded beyond the urban limits of Caesarea.¹³ This urban expansion reflects the constant growth of the urban population, which made Caesarea the largest city in Palestine.¹⁴

Caesarea has been extensively excavated by a number of large expeditions since the 1960s.¹⁵ Especially notable for their Byzantine and Early Islamic layers were the excavations of the Joint Expedition of Caesarea Maritima (JECM), the Combined Caesarea Expeditions (CCE), and the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) expedition. The archaeological findings present different processes in the various areas of the city: while the southern areas of Caesarea were abandoned in the seventh century, the Temple Platform and inner harbour areas revealed a continuous sequence of habitation between the seventh and the eleventh centuries (Figs. 2.1, 2.2).

Urban change in the seventh century

It was suggested that urban change in Caesarea commenced in the second half of the sixth century, when the wealthy residential southern quarter of the city suffered from neglect, and the urban thoroughfares were narrowed.¹⁶ Patrich pointed to a number of features that indicated urban decay: the deterioration of the public water system and the replacement of the major aqueducts of Caesarea with small cisterns installed in the courtyards of buildings; the covering of the decorated mosaic floors of the *praetorium* with crude stone pavements; and the introduction of industrial installations.¹⁷ Holum and

¹⁰ The church was excavated by the Combined Caesarea Expeditions (CCE—Area TP). For a general description of the church and its excavation, see Holum 2004, Holum *et al.* 2008a. For the dating of its construction and abandonment, see Horton 1999.

¹¹ Patrich 2001b, 90–2.

¹² An exceptionally large villa was discovered west of the city, built on top of a ridge facing the walls of Caesarea. See Porath 2006.

¹³ See e.g. Hirschfeld and Birger-Calderon 1991; Hirschfeld 2000. For the archaeological map of Caesarea's hinterland, see Olami *et al.* 2005.

¹⁴ Estimations of the population of Caesarea range between 35,000 and 100,000: Patrich 2001b, 80.

¹⁵ For the history of excavations, see Raban and Holum 1996, xxvii–xliv.

¹⁶ Patrich 2001b; Levine 1975, 136–9.

¹⁷ Patrich (2011a) dates some of the changes in the public buildings of the southern quarter to the time of the Persian conquest (614–628). His chronology is based mainly on an earlier dating of the buildings (see Toombs 1978). However, these dates were rejected by Lenzen, Holum, and Horton, on the basis of the re-evaluation of the ceramic sequences from the JECM excavation. See Horton 1999, 386 for a summary of different views.



Fig. 2.1 Byzantine Caesarea: map of the city limits c.600 (courtesy of the Combined Caesarea Expeditions, drawn by Anna Yamim).

Magness, on the other hand, proposed an increased prosperity for Caesarea in the second half of the sixth century, which was expressed in the intensification of commerce and the growing evidence of private construction all over the city.¹⁸ Magness even suggested that the city continued to prosper until the second half of the seventh century.

¹⁸ Holum 1992, 2004, 2005, 90–2; 2011a, b; Magness 2003, 210–13 and references there.

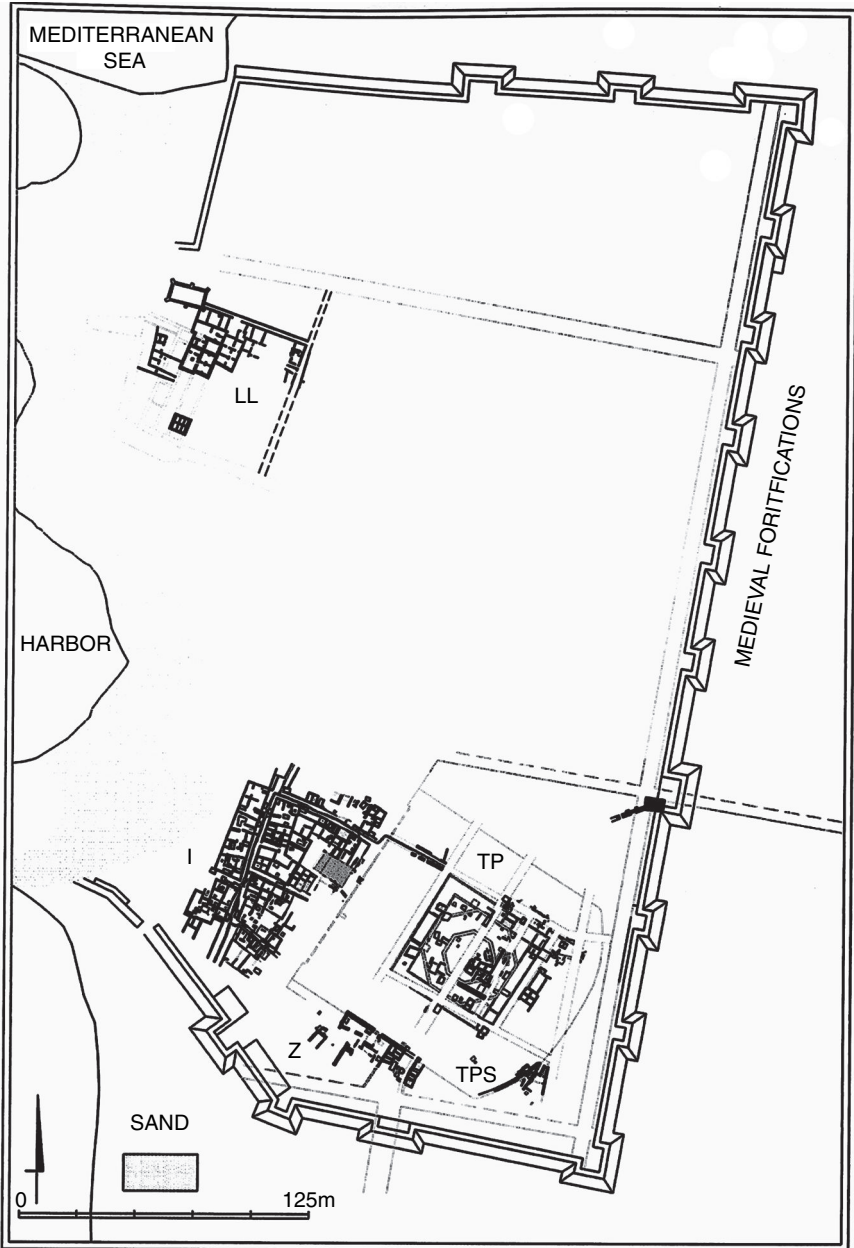


Fig. 2.2 Early Islamic Caesarea: map of the walled town with excavated areas (courtesy of the Combined Caesarea Expeditions, drawn by Anna Yamim).

The impact of the Persian and Arab conquests on Caesarea is also debated. While several scholars suggested that these military raids severely affected the city and its population, causing the migration of large segments of the Christian and Samaritan communities,¹⁹ others argued that they had only minor effects on the city's infrastructure and the local population.²⁰

The archaeological excavations in Caesarea provided a good opportunity to compare the detailed historical descriptions with the archaeological findings.²¹ Unlike the relatively clear historical narrative of the Arab conquest, the archaeological record suggests a complicated picture, with no direct evidence of damage to, or destruction of, the city's buildings during the siege and conquest. In consequence, several alternative interpretations were suggested for the process of transformation from Byzantine to Islamic rule in Caesarea.

The excavations of the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima (JECM) conducted to the east of the Crusader walls (Field A) revealed two destruction layers which were attributed by Toombs to the Persian and Arab conquests.²² His conclusions were strongly rejected by Lenzen who, after a careful study of pottery and stratigraphy, dismissed the evidence of violent destruction and suggested a continuous habitation in this area during the seventh and eighth centuries.²³ Holum also criticized Toombs's conclusions, and suggested a prolonged transitional stage, with no evidence of destruction by the Arab conquest.²⁴

In Field B, south of the Byzantine esplanade, thick layers of ash were related to the Persian and Arab conquests. According to this interpretation, the remains of the last Byzantine occupation phase were robbed and dismantled following the conquest.²⁵

The analysis of the pottery finds by Lenzen showed that this layer contained glazed pottery of the tenth and eleventh centuries and proved that the destruction and abandonment of this area is not connected to the seventh-century military events.²⁶

Magness discussed in detail several ceramic assemblages from Caesarea, and concluded that the city did not decline in the second half of the sixth century, and was not damaged by the Arab conquest. She adopted Holum's conclusions on the continuity of classical urbanism in Caesarea until the seventh century, reviewing selected excavations where ceramic evidence of continuity was found.²⁷

¹⁹ e.g. Patrich 2011a; Toombs 1978.

²⁰ Magness 2003, 215. For a revised view of the impact of the Persian conquest on Caesarea, see Foss 2003, 160–2. See also the detailed discussion in Ch. 5.

²¹ e.g. Raban and Holum 1996; Holum *et al.* 1999, 2008b.

²² Toombs 1978, 224.

²³ Lenzen 1983, 214.

²⁴ Holum 1992.

²⁵ Toombs 1978, 223–2.

²⁶ Lenzen 1983, 410; Horton 1999, 382.

²⁷ Magness 2003, 209–13. This evidence contradicts Kennedy's opinion that the urban change and decline in the Near East started in the middle of the 6th century. See Kennedy 1985a, b, and the discussion below.

A large building located on the coast north-west of the Temple Platform provided further evidence of continuity of settlement in this area during the time of the conquest. The building, which contained a number of rooms paved with mosaic floors, revealed a clear sequence of pottery from the seventh century.²⁸ It seems that this building was in use for only a few decades, between 630 and 660.²⁹ The rich deposits of imported pottery, including large amphora fragments, pointed to the flourishing of international trade in Caesarea during this period. No evidence of damage or violent destruction was found in this building, and it seems that it continued to function uninterrupted during the first half of the seventh century.

A similar conclusion is reached from the excavations at the octagonal church on the Temple Platform, which dominated the skyline of the city in the Byzantine period (Fig. 2.3). The large church, constructed in the early sixth century, survived both the Persian invasion and the Arab conquest, and was destroyed only by the 749 earthquake.³⁰ It has been suggested that during the last century of its use the church may also have served as a mosque, but there is no archaeological evidence to support this suggestion.³¹ Following the collapse of the building in 749, the site was reoccupied towards the end of the eighth century, with residential units built around open courtyards. A large cistern located underneath the western entrance to the church continued to function in the ninth–eleventh centuries.³²

Further support for the continuity of urban life in Caesarea in the years of the siege and conquest was found in the excavations of an elaborate private bathhouse that was part of a suburban villa located about 1 km north of the Byzantine city walls.³³ This bathhouse was in use during the sixth century but no clear evidence of the date of its abandonment was found. It was not destroyed intentionally, although most of its marble facing and flooring had been removed. The pottery found beneath and above the floors showed that the bathhouse survived both the Persian and the Arab conquests. The damage to the structure may have been caused by an eighth-century earthquake, rather than by a violent invasion. The continuity of such a structure outside the walls of Caesarea at the times of the Arab siege and conquest does not correlate with the historical narratives of violent destruction at Caesarea.

²⁸ Levine and Netzer 1986. For the pottery analysis, see Adan-Bayewitz 1986.

²⁹ Adan-Bayewitz 1986, 121.

³⁰ The church was excavated by the Combined Caesarea Expeditions (CCE—Area TP). For a general description of the church and its excavation, see Holum 2004, 2008, 1660–7. For references for the dating of its construction and abandonment, see Horton 1999, 384.

³¹ Holum 2004, 196–7, 2011b, 182–3. In the Kathisma church near Jerusalem, a monumental octagonal church with similar dimensions to those of the Caesarea church, a small mosque was constructed and functioned together with the Christian church. See Avner 2003, 2006–7, and see Ch. 3 for a detailed description.

³² Horton 1999, 385.

³³ The structure was partly excavated in the 1960s by the Italian Archaeological Mission and the excavation was extended by JECM (field E). See Horton 1999, 383 and references there.

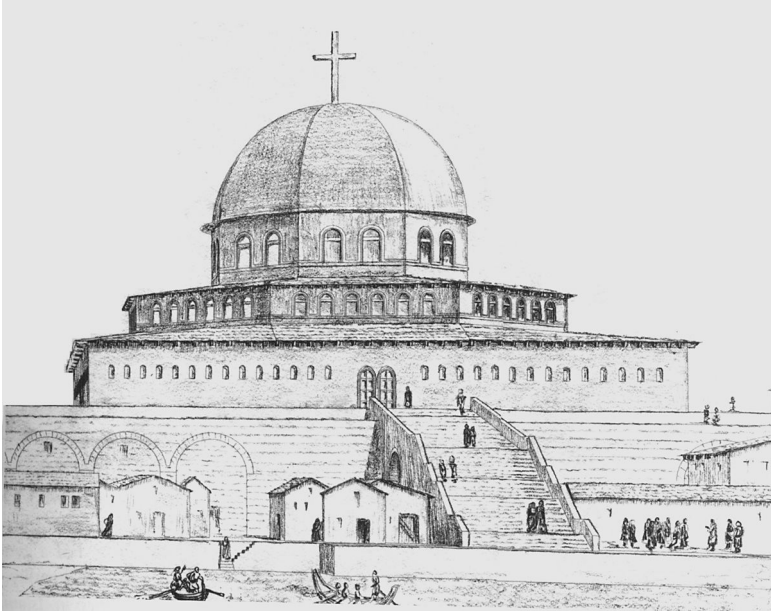


Fig. 2.3 Caesarea: the church on the Temple Platform (courtesy of the Combined Caesarea Expeditions, drawn by Anna Yamim).

On the basis of the excavations at the south-western quarter of the city, Patrich argued for possible archaeological evidence of the seven years of siege and conquest, between 634 and 640.³⁴ The large-scale excavations in this section of the city, extending over an elongated area of $c.80 \times 400$ m, exposed elaborate public and private buildings that were in use through the Roman and Byzantine periods. Three main buildings were excavated: the *praetorium*, or the palace of the Byzantine governor of Caesarea, which extended to the south of the Temple Platform, a large complex of storerooms to the south of the *praetorium*, and a large mansion farther to the south.³⁵ Patrich suggested that the abandonment of this section of Caesarea was associated with the Arab conquest. According to his reconstruction the urban decline had started by the second half of the sixth century, and was dramatically augmented by the Arab siege and conquest. One of its aspects was the deterioration of the public water system during the second half of the sixth century. Water was not supplied any more from the aqueducts leading to Caesarea from the north, and alternative water cisterns of inferior quality were installed in the courtyards of buildings. Some of the mosaic floors of the *praetorium* were covered with crude stone pavements, and industrial installations were introduced into the city. Patrich dated these changes in the public buildings to the time of the Persian

³⁴ Patrich 2011a.

³⁵ For a description of these complexes, see Patrich 2001b.

conquest,³⁶ mainly using the dates suggested by Toombs.³⁷ But these dates were rejected by Lenzen, Holum, and Horton, on the basis of their re-evaluation of the ceramic sequences from the JECM excavation.³⁸

As shown above, historical sources suggest that the Byzantine *praetorium* was used by the Persian governor of Caesarea.³⁹ Thus, the dating of specific changes within the building to the Persian occupation of 614–628 seems reasonable. However, the overall deterioration and abandonment of the complex should not be associated with the time of the Arab conquest as was suggested by Patrich. It seems more reasonable to relate it to a later time in the seventh century. It was a long-term consequence of the conquest, rather than its immediate result.

An alternative reconstruction of the stages of decline and abandonment of the south-western section of Caesarea proposes a very prolonged process, which was indeed triggered by the conquest. There is no doubt that the south-western part of the city was deserted and partially covered with silt by the second half of the seventh century. This section of the city was not inhabited in the later stages of the Early Islamic period and it turned into a Muslim cemetery containing plain cist tombs.⁴⁰ However, archaeological findings cannot prove a direct connection between this abandonment and the Arab conquest. Large-scale excavations by various expeditions and the meticulous study of the finds show no evidence of a sudden destruction and burning of buildings in this part of the city.⁴¹ The seven years of the Arab siege of Caesarea seems too short a period for the process of both the abandonment of the large buildings and the installation of the agricultural terraces on top of the deserted buildings. The conversion of this densely built area into agricultural plots involved the filling of buildings with earth, the partial dismantling of the walls, the terracing of the whole area, and the installation of an irrigation system.⁴² It is hard to imagine how all this could have been done in such a short time. Even if the monumental buildings were abandoned on the eve of the Arab siege, it seems more likely that the remaining population of Caesarea converted this area into agricultural plots only after the conquest.⁴³ Patrich's proposal to date the abandonment of the buildings and the installation of the agricultural terraces to the time of the conquest is supported mainly by coins from the fill that was used to level the ground above the deserted buildings, in which the latest coin dates from the time of Heraclius. But as the source of this fill is probably from nearby areas which were inhabited in late Byzantine times, it does not represent the actual time of the deposit and the use of the agricultural plots, which may date to several decades later.

³⁶ Patrich 2001*b*, 152.

³⁷ Toombs 1978, 223–6.

³⁸ See Horton 1999, 386 for a summary. See also the dating suggested by Magness (2003, 210–12), who proposed continuity to the second half of the 7th cent.

³⁹ Kaegi 1978, 180.

⁴⁰ Toombs 1978; Patrich 1999, 82–3, 2011*a*, 52.

⁴¹ Patrich 2011*a*, 43–50.

⁴² Patrich 2011*a*, 43–7.

⁴³ Holum 2011*b*, 181.

A prosperous medium-sized town between the eighth and eleventh centuries

While the immediate effects of the Arab siege and conquest of Caesarea are debated, there is a consensus that the second half of the seventh century witnessed a major decline in population, and that the urban area dramatically decreased in size.⁴⁴ It seems that the decline of Caesarea was connected mainly with the administrative changes introduced by the new Islamic regime, and with the transfer of the political and administrative power to other locations. These changes, together with its abandonment by a significant part of its Christian and Samaritan populations, triggered the process of urban decline. The establishment of Ramla in *c.*715 as the new capital of Jund Filastin further affected Caesarea, and after the 749 earthquake its transformation from the largest city in Palestine to a medium-sized town was complete. Nevertheless, Caesarea continued to prosper between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, when the town centre was concentrated around the inner harbour and was surrounded by a modest city wall.

The descriptions of al-Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khusraw present a fairly prosperous town, thanks to commerce and agriculture.

There is not in the Romaeen Sea a city more beautiful or with more bounty. It is a wellspring of prosperity, and useful products gush from it. The soil is excellent, the fruits delicious, and the town is also a source of buffalo milk and white bread.⁴⁵

... a nice place with running waters, palm groves, orange and citron groves, and a fortified rampart with an iron gate. There are springs inside the town and a Friday mosque so situated that when seated inside one can look over the sea.⁴⁶

In addition to the historical sources, a number of excavated areas in Caesarea provide further data on the alterations to urban structures during the Early Islamic period. It seems that settlement concentrated around the inner harbour and the Temple Platform. The overall area of Early Islamic Caesarea is not clear. The city was refortified in the ninth century, and the town limits were defined to the south and to the east.⁴⁷ Its northern limit is unknown, as no proper excavations were conducted in this area. Recent probes to the east of the city wall bear evidence of modest construction here as well, and it seems that the Early Islamic town expanded beyond its walls. While it was indeed much smaller than the Byzantine metropolis (the urban area was reduced by around 80 per cent), it was still a flourishing medium-sized town.

⁴⁴ Holum 2011*b*, 183. ⁴⁵ al-Muqaddasi, 174; tr. Collins 1994, 146.

⁴⁶ Nasir-i Khusraw, 14; tr. Thackston 2001, 25.

⁴⁷ The line of this wall was recently discovered in the course of excavations conducted in 2008–2010 by N. Fauscher and H. Barbe. I thank them for providing me with this information.

The excavations around the inner harbour

This is perhaps the only area of Caesarea in which the process of urban transformation has been presented in detail.⁴⁸ A number of areas located within the Crusader walls were excavated, and in most of them a continuous habitation sequence between the seventh and eleventh centuries was revealed (Fig. 2.2, area I). Large residential units were exposed to present a developing sequence of *insulae* bordered with intersecting streets. The limits of the Early Islamic town were not clearly defined, but it is evident that it extended beyond the Crusader walls to a considerable distance to the east and to the north.⁴⁹

The southern area (area I) is the largest with published results to date, and a detailed stratigraphic sequence has been revealed: stratum VIIIa, dated to the late seventh century and the first half of the eighth century, shows a continuity of use of existing Byzantine structures. Some of the old warehouses were reconstructed, several lime kilns were introduced into the vaults supporting the Temple Platform, and small commercial structures were installed in front of the platform. The sandy area by the vaults may have been used as an open market.⁵⁰

The excavations in this area show that, from the second half of the sixth century and the early seventh century, it functioned as a mixture of workshops, dwellings, and a market place, with no evidence of abandonment or decline. Towards the end of the seventh century the inner harbour fell into disuse, and a paved street was laid on top of the eastern part of the silted harbour basin.

This area of Caesarea was heavily damaged by the 749 earthquake, which caused the destruction of the octagonal church and extensive damage to its supporting vaults. Following the earthquake a major dredging of the harbour was conducted, marking the first signs of the renewed prosperity of Caesarea. The silt removed from the harbour was used to cover previous Byzantine structures in the north-eastern area of the inner harbour. Parts of the vaults supporting the Temple Platform were filled with earth containing pottery from the eighth and ninth centuries. Other vaults were used as limekilns, with various industrial installations introduced into this area, using recycled building material from nearby abandoned Byzantine structures. The area above the southern vaults was levelled, maybe as a preparation for the construction of the main congregational mosque that replaced the octagonal church. This mosque is mentioned by al-Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khusraw but its remains have not been found to date.

⁴⁸ Raban and Arnon 2007; Holum et al. 2008*b*; Arnon 2008*a*, 1–18.

⁴⁹ Early Islamic remains were also discovered in excavations at the north-eastern amphitheatre in Caesarea conducted in 2010. I thank P. Gendelman for this information.

⁵⁰ Arnon 2008*a*, 17–18.

An entire new urban layout consisting of well-planned *insulae* and grid-pattern streets (stratum VII) was established by the late eighth century, with only minimal adaptations of the former street pattern. This stage represents an innovation in the urban plan of Caesarea. The area covered by the silt removed from the inner harbour created a level surface on which a dense residential area was constructed.

Several buildings in this quarter were excavated, all of them consisting of rectangular rooms facing a central courtyard. The buildings were flanked by streets or lanes intersecting in a roughly north–south grid pattern. On some streets small shops were built in front of the houses. The orientation of streets and buildings at this stage shows a slight deviation to the east, perhaps in accordance with the orientation of a mosque located nearby, which was not identified.⁵¹ A sophisticated system of drainage and water-supply channels was installed along the streets and buildings. Water supply for the dwellings was based on wells dug in the central courtyards, and at least one cesspit was constructed in each building.⁵² This massive construction, which probably included the fortification of the town with the support of the Abbasid government, has been dated to the second half of the eighth century and the early ninth century.⁵³

The prosperity of Caesarea increased during the late ninth and early tenth centuries (Stratum VI). Most of the residential units were enlarged and the streets were repaved. At least part of the built area was protected by a fortification wall with three gates to the east, south and north. The discovery of an inscription from the times of Ibn Tulun (835–884) which refers to the construction of a fortified tower (*burj*) or a ‘coastal fortress’ (*thughr*) might relate to the fortification of Caesarea with a new city wall, or to the reinforcement of the fortress south of the town.⁵⁴ A considerable increase of imported ceramics (mainly from Egypt) observed in this stage points to a flourishing commercial activity.

The last decades of the tenth century (Stratum V) saw the zenith of Early Islamic Caesarea, which was expressed in further expansion and improvement of the residential quarters. Water supply from cisterns and local pipes predominated, together with a number of subterranean storage rooms paved with rough mosaics or stone slabs (similar storage rooms were found in Ramla and Acre), probably designed to store large quantities of wheat or other dry goods.

Stagnation started towards the middle of the eleventh century (Stratum IV), with some decline in the urban structures noticeable. Almost all storage rooms fell into disuse and were transformed into rubbish pits, and the sophisticated

⁵¹ See below and in Ch. 3 for a similar deviation in Ramla and other cities of Early Islamic Palestine.

⁵² Arnon 2008a, 19–20.

⁵³ See below for similar public construction in Beth Shean.

⁵⁴ Sharon 1999, 275–6; Holm 2011b, 175.

water and drainage system was neglected and silted up. The spacious residential units suffered from neglect. Several hoards found in the excavations attest to years of public disorder and political unrest, which led to a deterioration in urban life.⁵⁵

Stratum III, dated to the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, represents the transition to the Crusader period. Unlike Tiberias and Ramla, it seems that the urban core of Caesarea was not abandoned before the Crusader conquest. There even seems to be some renewed construction activity in the town in the late eleventh or early twelfth century.⁵⁶

Excavations at the Temple Platform revealed no clear indication of continuity of use of the church or its replacement by a central mosque, as Nasir-i Khusraw described. The church was damaged in the 749 earthquake, and the later stages of the building have not been well established. Construction stones were looted on a massive scale in later medieval and modern times for the construction of the 19th century Bosnian village at Caesarea, and earlier remains were obliterated. A hint of a continuous settlement in this area during the eighth–eleventh centuries was provided by the excavations at the south-eastern corner of the Temple Platform, where a small Byzantine bathhouse was found, preserved up to its second storey. At the beginning of the eighth century the bathhouse was converted into a fish-processing factory, with shallow basins and a quantity of jars for fish. This structure was destroyed by the 749 earthquake, and replaced with domestic dwellings that were in use between the ninth and eleventh centuries.⁵⁷

The latest phase of domestic use was marked by a large hoard of metal, glass, and ceramic vessels,⁵⁸ probably hidden by a local shop owner in the early 1060s.

The southern part of the city

On the basis of their excavations in southern Caesarea, Porath and Patrich concluded that this section of the city was deserted at the time of the Arab siege and conquest (634–640), when the south-western quarter was converted into agricultural plots.⁵⁹ They suggested that the abandonment reflected a total collapse of the municipal networks: major buildings were destroyed, the aqueducts leading to the city were neglected, and large segments of the local population escaped from the ruined city.

⁵⁵ Arnon *et al.* 2008; Holum 2011*b*, 186; see also the discussion of hoards and their significance in Ch. 5.

⁵⁶ Arnon 2008*a*, 26.

⁵⁷ Raban and Yankelevitz 2008.

⁵⁸ Arnon *et al.* 2008.

⁵⁹ Patrich 2011*a*; Porath 1996.

The stratigraphic sequence proposed for these areas included the last phase of use of the monumental buildings (phase IVB), which ended with the Arab siege. During the siege the buildings were abandoned and filled with debris (phase IIIIB), and within this short period the area was converted into agricultural fields (phase IIIA), and then totally abandoned and covered with the silt taken from the dredging of the inner harbour.⁶⁰ As shown above, the date of the formation of these agricultural plots is vague, and can be established only roughly as the middle or the second half of the seventh century. In any case, it is clear that these plots were neglected during the eighth century, when the whole area was covered with a thick layer of sand (phase II). This accumulation was probably the debris taken from the harbour, evidence of its dredging in the second half of the eighth century. A large Muslim cemetery was laid out above this layer (phase I), containing numerous burial inscriptions from the ninth and tenth centuries.⁶¹

The Roman theatre in southern Caesarea was already deserted in the late Byzantine period, and a solid fortress was constructed between the theatre and the coast, perhaps in the early seventh century.⁶² Another possibility is to date the construction of the fortress to the end of the seventh century, in the framework of 'Abd al-Malik's fortification of the coastal plain and the construction of the *Ribatat*.⁶³ The connection between the Early Islamic town and the fortress was not clarified, as it stood outside the town's limits. It was probably still in use in the tenth century, as al-Muqaddasi indicated.⁶⁴

The hinterland of Caesarea

The hinterland of Caesarea provides a good example of the changing of settlement density between the Byzantine and Early Islamic times. A number of agricultural estates that flourished in the Byzantine period declined dramatically after the seventh century. Of particular note is the estate at **Mansur el-'Aqab**, which was extensively excavated and the subject of comprehensive publication.⁶⁵ The excavations show that the site was abandoned in the seventh or early eighth century. Similar evidence of decline was found in other villages and farms around Caesarea. A large village from the Byzantine period, spreading over 2 ha, was explored and partially excavated at **Tell Tananim**, on the coastline north of Caesarea.⁶⁶ It contained an apsidal church, a large residential area with two bathhouses, and an industrial section

⁶⁰ Patrich 2011a, 39–40.

⁶¹ Sharon 1999, 258, 264–90. The earliest inscription is from 895 and the latest from 980.

⁶² This area was excavated in the 1960s but the results were not published adequately. See Frova 1965, 57–65, 159–64, for the excavation report, and Holm 2011b, 172–8, for an evaluation.

⁶³ See the discussion in Ch. 4.

⁶⁴ Whitcomb 2011b, 74–7.

⁶⁵ Hirschfeld 2000; see also the description in Ch. 4.

⁶⁶ Stieglitz 2006.

with evidence of a fish-processing industry. Although the abandonment of the settlement was dated to the seventh century, after the Arab conquest and the decline of Caesarea, pottery and oil lamps found in the upper strata clearly suggest a later date in the eighth century.⁶⁷

Surveys around Caesarea also pointed to abatement of the hinterland, where only 15–20 per cent of the Byzantine-period sites continued into the Early Islamic period.⁶⁸ It seems that the abandonment of settlements was caused directly by the decline of the metropolis of Caesarea, which affected its immediate surroundings. This abatement might have been associated also with the raising of the water table in the northern coastal plain and the redevelopment of swamp areas, which prevented the development of large-scale agriculture in the plains.⁶⁹

The only area in the hinterland of Caesarea in which extensive agricultural fields from the Early Islamic period have been identified is the sand dunes along the coast to the south of the city. The sand was removed from shallow valleys within the dunes and rectangular cultivated plots were created. The abundance of pottery and a number of small structures dated the use of these plots to the eighth–eleventh centuries. It is interesting to note that these areas employed a new irrigation system previously not known in Palestine.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The common view based on historical sources and archaeological research was that the collapse of Caesarea occurred with the Arab conquest and that settlement was re-established under Abbasid rule, with the dredging of the harbour and the construction of a modest town. The large-scale excavations of the central sections of Caesarea support a more complex scenario, in which a temporary abatement in the second half of the seventh century was followed by an intensification of settlement around the inner harbour between the eighth and eleventh centuries. This settlement further expanded in the later stages of the Early Islamic period to the east and north, spreading outside the Early Islamic walls.

The detailed excavations in the inner harbour, the northern sections of the walled town, and the Temple Platform provide a fairly good picture of the settlement process between the late sixth and the eleventh centuries. It seems that the archaeological evidence points towards the continuous prosperity of

⁶⁷ Stieglitz 2006, 198–200, fig. 15.

⁶⁸ Holum 2011a, 19; see also Appendix III. However, these numbers should be viewed with caution, as in most of the surveys the dating of pottery was based on traditional conventions and not on recent knowledge of pottery dating.

⁶⁹ Stieglitz 2006, 4–7.

⁷⁰ Porath 1975.

the city during the fifth and sixth centuries, accompanied by a gradual change in the concept of urbanism.⁷¹ While the question of the decline of Caesarea in the second half of the sixth century is disputed, there is no doubt over its abatement following the Arab conquest. However, this process is not necessarily connected with Kennedy's paradigm of an urban change in the east starting in the middle of the sixth century.⁷² It is more likely that the decline of Caesarea was an outcome of local circumstances in the seventh and eighth centuries: the change in the political and administrative status of the city, together with its abandonment by large sections of its Christian and Samaritan population. Various patterns of development and change are observed in Caesarea between the eighth and eleventh centuries. While the southern areas were abandoned and remained outside the urban limits, the inner harbour and its surroundings were developed as a prosperous residential quarter of a medium-sized town after the middle of the eighth century, and Caesarea developed as a local commercial centre until the Crusader conquest of Palestine.

BETH SHEAN-SCYTHOPOLIS-BAYSAN

Beth Shean-Scythopolis gradually developed in Hellenistic and Roman times to become the capital of Palaestina Secunda and the major urban centre of northern Palestine during the Byzantine period. As with other cities in Palestine and Arabia, the sixth century was the period of maximal urban expansion. The walled area of Beth Shean reached 134 ha and the extramural built areas added at least another 20 ha. Its population was estimated at 30,000–38,000 people, making Scythopolis the third largest city in Palestine and Arabia after Jerusalem and Caesarea.⁷³ Beth Shean was a multicultural city, in which Christians and pagans predominated, with smaller Jewish and Samaritan communities. The city was located at a crossroads in northern Palestine, from which major roads led west to Caesarea, east to Pella and Gerasa, south to Jerusalem, and north to Tiberias and Damascus.

The site was the target of extensive excavations between 1921 and 1933, when the biblical Tell and other areas were explored by the University of Pennsylvania expedition. Large-scale excavations were renewed between 1986 and 2000 by two expeditions working simultaneously in the civic centre of the Roman and Byzantine city.⁷⁴ The main goal of this extensive work was the

⁷¹ Holum 2011*a*, *b*. ⁷² Kennedy 1985*a*.

⁷³ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 100, 117; Mazor and Najjar 2007, xiii–xiv.

⁷⁴ The Israel Antiquities Authority expedition was directed by G. Mazor and R. Bar Nathan, and the Hebrew University expedition by Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster. The results of these large-scale

exposure of the monumental buildings in the city centre, lying in the large valley south-west of Tell Beth Shean. Additional excavations were conducted at the amphitheatre located on the southern plateau of Beth Shean, and along the northern city wall in Tell Iztaba. A Crusader fortress and adjacent buildings south of the Roman and Byzantine civic centre were also explored.⁷⁵

The transformation of the large city of Scythopolis into the Early Islamic town of Baysan is considered as one of the best examples of urban change in Palestine during late antiquity.⁷⁶ However, it seems that this was a long and slow process that started during the fifth and sixth centuries, rather than being the outcome of the Arab conquest or the 659–60 and 749 earthquakes (see below).

Constructed in the Roman imperial style of the second and third centuries CE, the city centre of Scythopolis consisted of monumental colonnaded streets that connected the large theatre, two spacious bathhouses, a number of temples, a *nymphaeum*, and other public monuments, with the monumental city gates to the north and west (Figs. 2.4, 2.5).

A main colonnaded street ('Palladius Street') was laid between the theatre and the central crossroads of the city at the bottom of Tell Beth Shean. To the west of this street the spacious western bathhouse was located, and in between a semicircular piazza (the *Sigma*) with a small attached odeon was constructed. A large colonnaded enclosure and basilica were located west of North-Western Street, which led to the Western Gate of Scythopolis.⁷⁷ The Agora and the eastern bathhouse, with an adjacent public latrine, were located east of Palladius Street. At the southern part of this street were a Roman temple, the *nymphaeum*, and a monumental entrance leading to the Agora. Two additional colonnaded streets extended from this point to the north-east ('Valley Street') and to the south-east ('Silvanus Street'). At the top of Tell Beth Shean a round church was constructed in the Byzantine period, and additional churches and monasteries were established in Tell Iztaba, to the north of Nahal Harod and along the northern city wall.⁷⁸ The hippodrome in the southern part of the city was converted into a monumental amphitheatre, in which c.7,000 people could be accommodated.⁷⁹

excavations have been only partially published to date. See Tsafirir and Foerster 1997; Tsafirir 2009; Mazor and Najjar 2007; Mazor 2008; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011; Mazor and Atrash forthcoming.

⁷⁵ Seligman 1994; Gertwagen 1992.

⁷⁶ See esp. Tsafirir and Foerster 1994, 1997, Tsafirir 2009, for the evaluation of the process of transformation.

⁷⁷ This structure was identified by Mazor as *Caesareum*. See Mazor and Najjar 2007.

⁷⁸ The round church at the Tell and the Monastery of Lady Mary at Tell Iztaba were excavated in the 1920s; see Fitzgerald 1931, 1939. See also Mazor 2008, 1634 for the churches and monasteries at Tell Iztaba.

⁷⁹ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 99, 134.



Fig. 2.4 Beth Shean: aerial view of the Roman and Byzantine city centre (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

It should be noticed, though, that, while attention concentrated on the public monumental architecture of the city centre, the residential areas of the Roman and Byzantine city on the hills to the south and west of the central valley were only occasionally excavated, mainly in the course of small-scale rescue excavations conducted under the modern town of Beth Shean.⁸⁰ Large areas in the southern plateau are hidden beneath the modern town and are not available for research. The boundaries of the urban area were defined by the Byzantine city walls. Their course was traced by surveys and small probes, and by systematic excavations conducted near the northern gate of the city.⁸¹

The multicultural character of Beth Shean during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods is demonstrated by religious structures in the residential areas. Remains of a synagogue and an adjacent building (the 'Leontis House') were excavated in the western part of the city, which was possibly the Jewish quarter of Beth Shean.⁸² Another synagogue, probably Samaritan, was partly excavated to the north of the city walls.⁸³ In the northern part of the city, north of Nahal Harod, the remains of the large monastery of Our Lady Mary and a

⁸⁰ e.g. Tzori 1966; Bahat 1981; Peleg 1994.

⁸² Tzori 1966.

⁸³ Tzori 1967.

⁸¹ Mazor 2008.

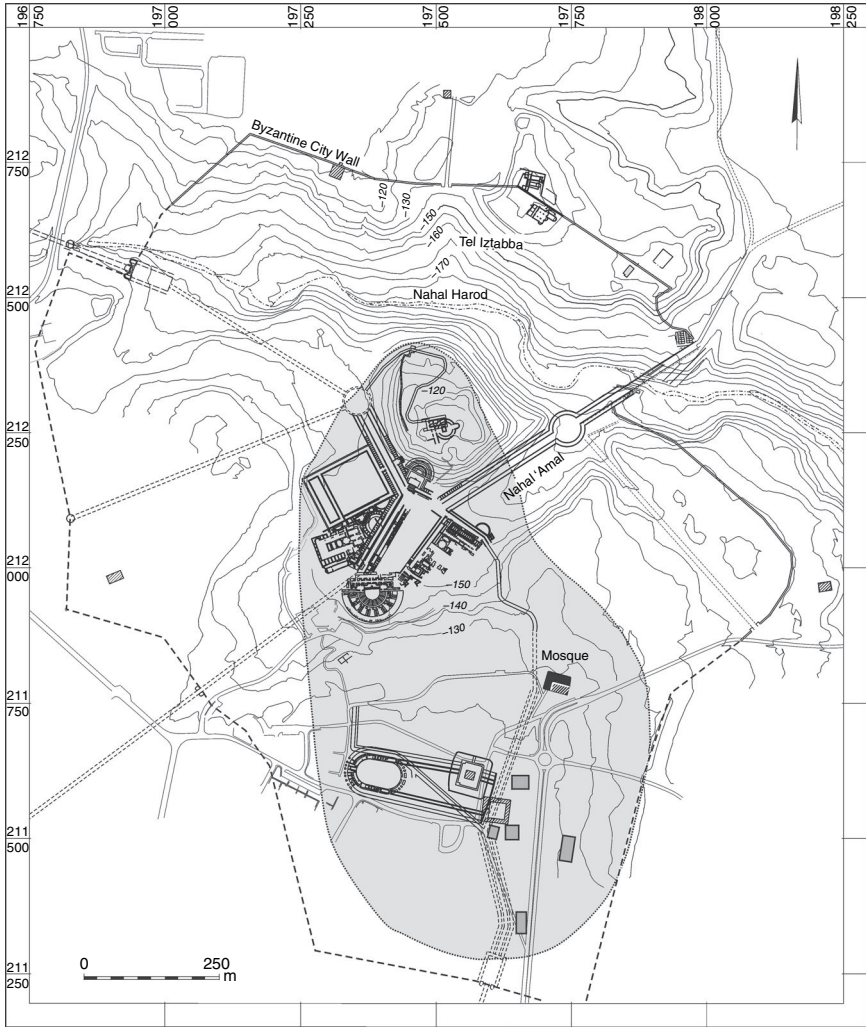


Fig. 2.5 Beth Shean: map of the Byzantine and Early Islamic city with the city limits in the 9th–11th centuries indicated by the shaded area (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

number of churches that were recently excavated point to a predominantly Christian population in this quarter.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, there is no clear evidence of ethnic segregation in the residential areas of Beth Shean, and it seems that until Early Islamic times there was no strict separation between the residential areas of the various communities.

⁸⁴ Fitzgerald 1931; Mazor 2008, 1634.

The changing city: Beth Shean in the fourth–eighth centuries

The city centre of Beth Shean was heavily damaged by earthquake in 363, but gradually recovered. With the new administrative division of Palestine, Scythopolis became the capital of Palaestina Secunda. In the fifth century the city was surrounded by a 4.8 km wall and in the early sixth century the civic centre was richly renovated and Beth Shean reached its zenith, expanding beyond its city walls, which were also reinforced in the early sixth century.⁸⁵

The process of urban change in Beth Shean has been traced through the large-scale excavations in the civic centre. Following Kennedy's paradigm, Tsafir and Foerster suggested that it started in the second half of the sixth century, and was evident in the seventh century. Monumental construction ceased, existing buildings were not maintained properly, major colonnaded streets were narrowed, and private shops penetrated into the spacious public walkways.⁸⁶ It was suggested that the city's prosperity had come to an end by this period.⁸⁷

However, it seems that the seeds of change in the concept of urbanism were sown as early as the late fourth century. Following the 363 earthquake, which destroyed a considerable number of major monuments in the civic centre, large-scale restoration was undertaken. While some monuments, like the eastern bathhouse, were preserved or restored in their original Roman form, others were deserted or used for different purposes. For example, the hippodrome on the southern hill was damaged and converted into an amphitheatre, as is typical of other hippodromes in Palestine and Jordan.⁸⁸ This change occurred in the fifth century, only a few decades after its construction. The hippodrome lost its monumental appearance, the area around it was occupied by private dwellings, and its entrances were narrowed by additional buildings.

Several new monuments were built throughout Beth Shean in the fifth and early sixth centuries, which reflected new trends in the development of the city.⁸⁹ Some of these new constructions, like the civic basilica, the Agora, the western bathhouse, and Palladius Street (which was built over an existing Roman street), show continuity with the Roman concept. Other areas of the city centre changed their function. The *propylaeum* that connected the temple with the acropolis, which was probably used for pagan religious purposes, lost its importance and was converted for industrial use.⁹⁰ The large theatre of Scythopolis fell into disuse in the course of the sixth century, and was replaced by a residential quarter and a pottery workshop constructed in the late seventh century.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Mazor 2008, 1633–4.

⁸⁶ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 137–40; Agady *et al.* 2002, 445.

⁸⁷ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 118, 125–6.

⁸⁸ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 134 and references there.

⁸⁹ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 112–16. ⁹⁰ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 115.

⁹¹ Mazor and Atrash forthcoming; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011.

The introduction of commercial areas into the city, which characterized Beth Shean in the sixth and seventh centuries, was noticeable already in the late fourth century, when economic activities were gradually diverted into the city centre.⁹² The Roman basilica, which was the centre of social and economic life in the Roman city, was not restored following the 363 earthquake and was left in ruins until the mid- or late fifth century. The Byzantine agora, containing an open square surrounded by shops and porticoes, was established in the same place sometime before 515, as a dedication inscription shows.⁹³ Commercial activity was also concentrated in the new row of shops built along Palladius Street, while public meetings and social gatherings were moved to the newly established churches in the northern section of the city.⁹⁴ It should be noted, though, that while commercial activities were mainly confined to the city centre, heavy industry was not introduced into this area until the middle of the seventh century.⁹⁵

Dated inscriptions attest to extensive construction in the fifth and early sixth centuries.⁹⁶ This included the establishment of the semicircular plaza (the *Sigma*) in the northern section of Palladius Street in 506/7, and the construction of Silvanus Street and an adjacent colonnaded hall (the Byzantine basilica) in 515/16. The city wall was also renovated during this period, as is shown by inscriptions of 524–526. As Tsafir concluded, these public buildings still maintained monumental and aesthetic qualities, even if they were inferior to those of the Roman period.⁹⁷

The inscriptions suggest that monumental construction was somewhat reduced during the second quarter of the sixth century, although the monastery on Tell Iztaba was founded in this period. Tsafir associated the decline in construction with the Samaritan Revolt of 529 and the bubonic plague of 541/2, which led to stagnation in the city's expansion.⁹⁸ However, the direct effect of these events, particularly the plague, is debatable, as no mass burials have been uncovered in the major cities of Palestine and Jordan.⁹⁹

A possible consequence of the Samaritan Revolt and the plague may be represented in the reduction of new public buildings constructed, as Di Segni has suggested,¹⁰⁰ but it seems rather that this should be considered in the light of long-term changes in local attitudes towards monumental civic construction.

Possible reasons for the low volume of civic public construction from the mid-sixth century onwards may lie in the sources of funding. Unlike the Roman period, when private individuals gave donations for the construction of civic buildings, in Byzantine times most private donations went towards the

⁹² Tsafir 2009, 69–73. ⁹³ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 122.

⁹⁴ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 116; Mazor 2008, 1634.

⁹⁵ Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011. ⁹⁶ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 116.

⁹⁷ Tsafir 2009, 69–70. ⁹⁸ Tsafir and Foerster 1997, 118, 125–6; Tsafir 2009, 74.

⁹⁹ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 5. ¹⁰⁰ Di Segni 1999, 2009, 362–5.

construction of churches and monasteries on the outskirts of the city, and almost no funds were given to civic public construction. The responsibility for such construction was in the hands of the local governor and the provincial administration, and the funding was provided by the imperial treasury.¹⁰¹ With less money dedicated by the central government to civic construction in Beth Shean, it was not possible to renew many of the existing buildings or to construct new ones.

The evidence from the civic centre reveals a change in priorities and in style of construction. Meeting utilitarian needs became the leading concept, replacing the strict principles of monumental Roman construction. Streets were designed in keeping with the local topography and their width varied according to neighbouring buildings. Silvanus Street, for example, which climbed gradually from the central valley to the southern hill and the amphitheatre, curved gently along its route, representing the loose, comfortable approach of the 'practical disorder' typical of Byzantine times.¹⁰²

The impact of the Samaritan Revolts on Beth Shean is not entirely clear.¹⁰³ While historical sources emphasized the large-scale damage to buildings, no archaeological evidence was found of violent destruction. Such damage, if it occurred, might have been repaired shortly afterwards with the support of governmental funding.¹⁰⁴

The bubonic plague of 542 left no trace in the archaeological record of Beth Shean; nor did the Persian invasion of 614 or the Arab conquest of 635. It seems that the city's vitality continued uninterrupted throughout the sixth century and in the first half of the seventh century, although many public buildings suffered from neglect. The civic centre continued to function, but a slow penetration of private dwellings into the monumental buildings and public streets was noticeable. The occasional abandonment or renovation of public and private buildings was recorded during this period.

One of the manifestations of the urban change in Beth Shean was the process of encroachment into the wide colonnaded arteries of the city, which created much narrower streets. The colonnaded streets included a main thoroughfare and colonnaded walkways on both sides, forming a *c.*24-metre-wide artery. They were dramatically narrowed into *c.*5-metre-wide streets flanked by shops and industrial installations. In Silvanus Street, for example, a row of twenty shops was built on the pavement of the former Byzantine street, which narrowed it to a 4.5-metre-wide street flanked by poorly constructed shops which used the flagstones of the original street as floors.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Di Segni 1995; see also Liebeschuetz 2001, 104–56; Whittow 1990.

¹⁰² Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 121; see also Claude 1969, Liebeschuetz 2000, 2001, and Saradi 2006 for other cities in the 6th cent.

¹⁰³ Di Segni 1988.

¹⁰⁴ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 126; Tsafirir 2009, 74.

¹⁰⁵ Tsafirir 2009, 78.

Rare evidence of the abandonment of commercial activities in the main streets of Beth Shean by the mid-sixth century was provided by the excavation of several shops along the northern side of the 'Street of the Monuments' opposite the *nymphaeum*, on the south-western slopes of Tell Beth Shean (Fig. 2.6, a–b). This row of shops functioned from the late fourth century to the first half of the sixth century, when it was destroyed by a fire in c.540 and not repaired again.¹⁰⁶ The shops were deserted until the second half of the eighth century, when a residential complex was constructed on top of the debris that covered the destroyed shops.¹⁰⁷ It is not yet clear whether this picture of early abandonment is typical of other areas of Beth Shean as well. In any case, the area in front of these abandoned shops was rebuilt in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, and narrowed the former Street of the Monuments into a c.5-metre-wide street.¹⁰⁸

It has been suggested that the process of decline in Beth Shean was much intensified following the 659/660 earthquake. Urban infrastructures were severely damaged by the earthquake, when large parts of the civic centre were destroyed and abandoned. The Agora, Palladius Street, and the *Sigma* were also abandoned.¹⁰⁹ This space was converted in the second half of the seventh century into a large open-air cemetery in which c.350 simple cist graves were found.¹¹⁰ Other public buildings were left to decay and some were replaced by humble private dwellings, which also filled the porticoes of the colonnaded streets. Some sections of the colonnaded streets were covered with debris.¹¹¹

Several areas of the civic centre were gradually restored following the earthquake, but organized according to a different pattern and concept. The penetration of industrial installations into the urban area was evident throughout the city, particularly in its former public areas. A large pottery workshop was constructed on top of the eastern bathhouse,¹¹² and other workshops were constructed in the Agora, at the edge of the theatre, at the top of Palladius Street, and extending into the arena of the amphitheatre.¹¹³ Another industrial area, probably connected with the linen industry, was found by the western bathhouse, and a luxurious residence was constructed nearby, perhaps to accommodate the workshop owners.¹¹⁴

During the first half of the eighth century Beth Shean had witnessed new commercial activities along its main streets, probably divided according to the different commodities. Most notable is the monumental construction of a

¹⁰⁶ Agady *et al.* 2002; Tsafirir 2009, 70–2.

¹⁰⁷ Agady *et al.* 2002, 444–5.

¹⁰⁸ Tsafirir 2009, figs. 5.4 and 5.9.

¹⁰⁹ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 137–8; Arubas 2005, 1–2; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 7–9.

¹¹⁰ Mazor 2008, 1635–6; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 13.

¹¹¹ Mazor 2008, 1635–6; Arubas 2005; I thank R. Bar Nathan for sharing with me her as yet unpublished information from the excavations in the *Sigma* area.

¹¹² Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011.

¹¹³ Tsafirir 2009, 75–9; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 191–8.

¹¹⁴ Mazor 2008, 1635.

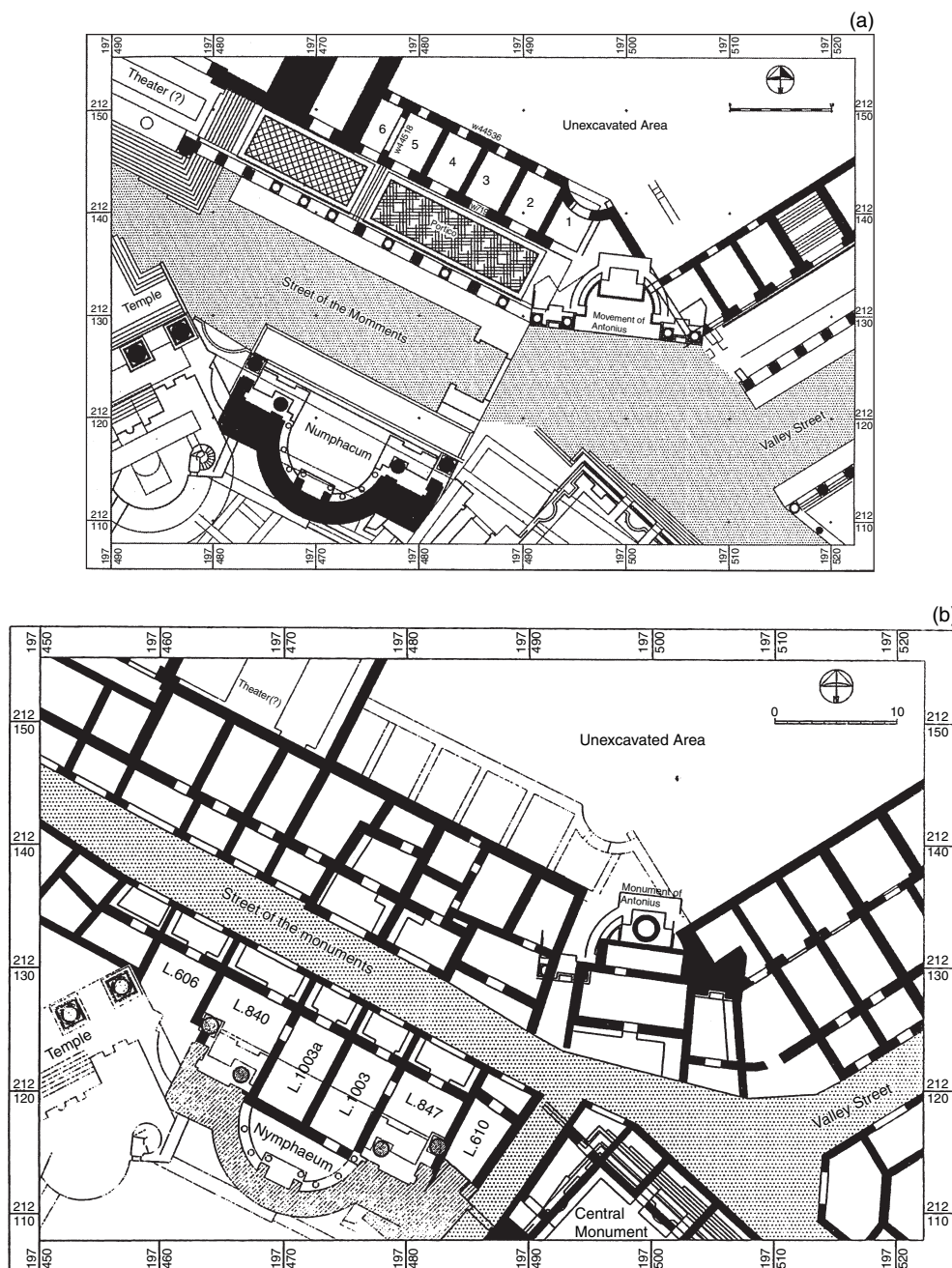


Fig. 2.6 Beth Shean: a. plan of the Street of the Monuments with the shops destroyed c.540; b. the street with the shops constructed in the late seventh or early eighth centuries (courtesy of Yoram Tsafrir and Benjamin Arubas, Beth Shean Excavations, the Hebrew University).

market complex in 738, during the time of caliph Hisham b. ‘Abd al-Malik (724–743). This new planned market was built on the ruins of the basilica of Silvanus. It contained rows of shops on two levels, and a monumental entrance gate flanked by a wall mosaic with two framed Arabic inscriptions.¹¹⁵ The market was in use for no more than a decade, when it was destroyed by the devastating earthquake of 18 January 749.¹¹⁶

The transformation of urban space in Beth Shean between the sixth and eighth centuries was marked by a conceptual change from a monumental ‘clean’ construction, a legacy of the Roman architecture, to a lively crowded area with mixed functions of commerce, small industries, and private constructions. While the public constructions in the civic centre in the late fifth and early sixth centuries displayed clear monumental and aesthetic values, the decay of some structures in the following decades is noticeable. A good example is the destruction and abandonment, in the mid-sixth century, of the row of shops along the ‘Street of the Monuments’, described above. Although located in the most central crowded area of the city, the shops were not restored, and were left in ruins for more than a century. This area was rearranged with the construction of additional buildings along the street in the late seventh or early eighth century. Nevertheless, it seems that this episode should be considered along the lines of ‘practical disorder’ common in the Byzantine period, and not as an indication of urban decline, as the vitality of Beth Shean continued into the seventh and eighth centuries.

The construction of industrial installations and commercial buildings within the former civic centre of Byzantine Beth Shean supports Kennedy’s paradigm that urban change in late antiquity included the abandonment of the concept of strict separation between the monumental and functional, public and private zones.¹¹⁷ Thus, commercial and industrial activities were introduced on a large scale into the city centre.¹¹⁸ In their assessment of Byzantine and Early Islamic Beth Shean, Tsafirir and Foerster suggested that urban change had already started by the middle of the sixth century, and that between the second half of the sixth century and the 749 earthquake Beth Shean had witnessed a constant decline in its urban infrastructures. The short period of prosperity under caliph Hisham was the final flourish of the splendour of Beth Shean, and the city declined permanently following its devastating destruction by the earthquake.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Khamis 2001; Tsafirir 2009, 79–82.

¹¹⁶ Some sources mention the year 747 for the earthquake. On the 749 date, see Tsafirir and Foerster 1992. On the possibility of two seismic events, one in 747 and the other in 749, see Karcz and Elad 1992; Karcz 2004.

¹¹⁷ Kennedy 1985a, 16–20.

¹¹⁸ See also Mazor 2008, 1634–5 for a suggestion that following the 660 earthquake the city centre of Baysan shifted from the central valley to the top of the Tell.

¹¹⁹ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 135–46. Mazor adopts this view: Mazor and Najjar 2007, p. xiv.

However, it seems that the *longue durée* processes of urban change in Beth Shean show that the conceptual change in attitude to public constructions had already been triggered in the fifth century, with the abandonment of the Roman concepts of monumental construction in favour of Byzantine 'comfortable disorder'.¹²⁰ The sixth and seventh centuries had witnessed the intensification of urban change and the abandonment of previous concepts. Nevertheless, the interpretation of this process as a 'decline' is not justified, as will be argued below.

A flourishing town: Beth Shean in the eighth–eleventh centuries

The impact of the earthquake of 749 was indeed devastating, and the civic centre in the valley was almost completely destroyed. But in contradiction of previous reconstructions, it seems that Beth Shean quickly recovered from this serious blow. The urban focus of the city shifted to the southern plateau. Recent rescue excavations in the southern areas of modern Beth Shean revealed extensive remains from the eighth to eleventh centuries, showing that Early Islamic Baysan continued to flourish as a medium-sized town following the 749 earthquake.

Major public constructions were undertaken to the south of the central valley shortly after the earthquake. An inscription dated to 753 mentions the construction of a public building in Baysan by the newly established Abbasid government.¹²¹ A congregational mosque was established on the top of the southern ridge, as is indicated by a dedication inscription that dated its construction or renovation to 794–795.¹²² The relocation of the civic centre to the southern plateau probably included the construction of additional public buildings besides the congregational mosque. An Abbasid fortress may have been located underneath the Crusader fortress to the south of the mosque, to judge from the large *spolia* used in the construction of the Crusader fortress.¹²³ In addition, excavations south and east of the mosque revealed the remains of several large residential buildings, containing massive walls.¹²⁴ The dwellings were constructed in the second half of the eighth century and were continuously inhabited until the second half of the eleventh century, which shows that this area of Baysan was densely populated.

The accumulated data from additional rescue excavations in the southern areas of modern Beth Shean show that the residential areas of the ninth–eleventh centuries in Baysan were spread to the south of the new civic and

¹²⁰ See Saradi 2006 for a similar process in other cities of the eastern Mediterranean, but also the critical reviews by Foss 2008*b* and Lavan 2009.

¹²¹ Elad 1998. ¹²² Sharon 1999, 221–2.

¹²³ Arubas 2005, 5; J. Seligman, personal communication.

¹²⁴ For the preliminary results of these excavations, see Syon 2004; Atrash 2009.

religious centre of the town. The new congregational mosque marked the focus of the town, which extended farther to the south (Fig. 2.5). Particularly noteworthy is an excavation conducted in the south-eastern section of Beth Shean, near the Byzantine city wall.¹²⁵ A rectangular well-planned building was revealed here, consisting of a number of rooms adjacent to an open courtyard, which faced another large building. It seems that the main building was constructed at the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century. A large coin hoard was found within the building, consisting of Byzantine coins, the latest of which was minted in 674–681.¹²⁶ Although the preliminary excavation report dated the destruction of the main building to the 749 earthquake, it seems that the inner plan of the building was altered during the eighth century, probably following the earthquake, and it was continuously inhabited until the tenth century.¹²⁷

The central valley area, formerly the monumental Roman and Byzantine city centre, was completely demolished by the 749 earthquake. A new residential quarter was constructed above the ruined monumental streets and buildings, only loosely following the previous urban layout. It contained a number of large central courtyard buildings, which were exposed particularly in the areas north and east of Tell Beth Shean.¹²⁸ All were oriented to a network of narrow lanes, forming a loose street grid. The remains of two small mosques were found in between the buildings,¹²⁹ and another mosque was constructed above the southern section of the destroyed Palladius Street, using *spolia* from the theatre and the western *propylea*.¹³⁰

The northern residential quarter of Early Islamic Baysan was established on top of the Tell (Fig. 2.7). A careful reading of the published reports of the 1923–1933 excavations at the upper levels of the Tell reveals evidence of a crowded residential quarter that continued from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period.¹³¹ A unique round church was excavated at the centre of the Tell.¹³² It has been suggested that this church was destroyed in the 659/660 earthquake,¹³³ but no clear archaeological evidence has been found to support this dating. The church may have continued to function after the 749 earthquake, as it contained Arabic inscriptions from the late eighth or ninth century scratched on its floor and columns.¹³⁴ A well-planned Early Islamic residential

¹²⁵ Sion and el-Salam 2002. ¹²⁶ Bijovsky 2002.

¹²⁷ This late date is attested to by the glass and ceramic repertoires. I thank N. Katsenelson for showing me the forthcoming report on the glass finds.

¹²⁸ Agady and Arubas 2009, fig. 1.

¹²⁹ Arubas 2005, 2; Agady and Arubas 2009, 82*–85*.

¹³⁰ Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 13.

¹³¹ Fitzgerald 1931. Excavations in Tell Beth Shean were renewed by the Hebrew University expedition: see Mazar 2006.

¹³² Fitzgerald 1931, 14–27. ¹³³ Mazar 2008, 1635; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 8.

¹³⁴ Fitzgerald 1931, 48; Schick 1995, 270–2; one of the inscriptions was dated to 784 or 806. See Sharon 1999, 223–5; Elad 1998, 11–12 n. 10.



Fig. 2.7 Beth Shean: plan of the Byzantine round church and Early Islamic quarter on the Tell (after Fitzgerald 1931).

quarter was located around the church, and it seems that it was constructed following the 749 earthquake.¹³⁵ The renewed excavations at the Tell exposed additional segments of this quarter, which was designed in accordance with a new concept of town planning.¹³⁶ It included two intersecting streets that created a large *insula* in which several central courtyard houses were built.¹³⁷ A large room in one of the buildings above the round church might have functioned as an indoor mosque.¹³⁸

The compilation of data from early excavations in Beth Shean and the results of recent rescue excavations show that following the 749 earthquake the new town was developed in the southern part of the former Byzantine city, over the

¹³⁵ Unfortunately no adequate data have been published for this area. The excavation has only been described in brief. See Fitzgerald 1931, 11–17.

¹³⁶ Mazar 2006, 42–3.

¹³⁷ This was the typical court house of the Early Islamic period in the Near East, found also in Fustat, Ramla, Caesarea, Yokneam, and other sites.

¹³⁸ Fitzgerald 1931, 17; Agady and Arubas 2009, 82*.

ruined civic centre in the valley, and at the top of the Tell. The Early Islamic town continued to flourish until the tenth or eleventh century. This new evaluation calls for a revision of previously suggested reconstructions of Early Islamic Baysan as a small town or village with a concentration of humble dwellings.¹³⁹

Ethnic composition

While Byzantine Scythopolis was known for its mixed population, which contained Christians, pagans, Jews, and Samaritans, the Early Islamic town was composed mainly of Christians and Muslims, with possibly a small Jewish minority. Churches and synagogues continued to function in Beth Shean at least until the 749 earthquake and perhaps even later. It seems that no physical segregation existed between the communities, apart from the tendency to cluster around their respective religious centres. Christian occupation seems to have been concentrated in the northern part of Beth Shean and around Tell Iztaba, where several churches and monasteries were constructed. Residential units in this area showed clear evidence of Christian population.¹⁴⁰ The Samaritan synagogue found nearby may indicate a close proximity between Christians and Samaritans.¹⁴¹ A segregated Jewish quarter was probably located in the western section of the city, near the house of Kyrios Leontis and the adjacent synagogue.¹⁴²

Confrontations between Christians and Samaritans were mentioned in historical descriptions of violent struggles between the two communities, which triggered the 529 Samaritan Revolt. Riots started when young Christians went from their churches and marched to the residential areas of the Samaritans, stoning their houses. After one such incident the Samaritans came out of their houses, chased the Christians with swords into their churches, and slaughtered many of them.¹⁴³

The Early Islamic period saw a gradual change with the penetration of new Muslim elements into the local populations. According to the historical sources the conquest of Beth Shean, following the battle of Fihl (Pella), ended with its peaceful surrender. The local population paid tributes to the conquering army, including the transfer of half of their houses to the newly arrived Arabs.¹⁴⁴ However, there is no archaeological evidence of such a process, which, if indeed it occurred, must have been reflected in the material culture. Nevertheless, later sources mention Muslim notables who settled in

¹³⁹ See e.g. in Tsafirir and Foerster 1994.

¹⁴⁰ Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 14.

¹⁴¹ Tzori 1967.

¹⁴² Tzori 1966.

¹⁴³ Malalas, *Fragmentum*, 44, 171. See Di Segni 1988, 221–2.

¹⁴⁴ Donner 1981, 246–8; see also Levy-Rubin 2011a, 161 for a similar process in Tiberias.

Beth Shean, perhaps following the conquest, among them at least two well-known families from the Kinda tribe.¹⁴⁵

The fate of the Samaritans after the Arab conquest is not clear, as there is no archaeological evidence of their presence in Baysan during the Early Islamic period. They might have emigrated after the conquest, as did the Samaritan population of Caesarea. A recent excavation of an agricultural estate on the southern outskirts of modern Beth Shean may provide a hint as to the fate of the Samaritan community. This large mansion included a network of rooms, halls, and domestic installations constructed around a central courtyard. A rectangular structure was found nearby, facing Mount Gerizim, and contained a Samaritan inscription. The latest finds in the buildings and its surroundings show that it was abandoned during the second quarter of the seventh century, and this may indicate the abandonment by the Samaritan population of Beth Shean immediately after the Arab conquest.¹⁴⁶

Beth Shean and its hinterland as a regional economic hub

The increased importance of local agricultural production in Beth Shean and its hinterland is emphasized in a number of historical sources, which praise the Byzantine city for its fabrics and linen cloth.¹⁴⁷ It seems that this tradition continued in the Early Islamic period. In addition, evidence of an extensive pottery industry was found in the former civic centre in the central valley, where a number of large kilns from the seventh and eighth centuries were discovered.¹⁴⁸ The prosperity of Early Islamic Baysan is further emphasized by the description by al-Muqaddasi from the second half of the tenth century, which depicts Baysan as a medium-sized town, a local commercial hub, and a regional centre producing agricultural commodities. Its main products were dates and rope thanks to the many palm trees in the vicinity.¹⁴⁹ It seems that the town continued to flourish until the eleventh century, and did not diminish into an insignificant village as previously suggested. Al-Muqaddasi described the rice crops and rope industry as a major branch of the local economy. It seems that, as in other cities and towns in the region, in Early Islamic Beth Shean industrial workshops were penetrating into urban areas.

The hinterland of Beth Shean was surveyed in some detail, and a dense settlement pattern of Byzantine villages and farms was revealed which continued into the Early Islamic period. The pottery finds show that some

¹⁴⁵ Elad 1998, 32–4.

¹⁴⁶ This site was excavated in 2010. I thank W. Atrash for providing me with this as yet unpublished information.

¹⁴⁷ Dan 1984, 196.

¹⁴⁸ Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011.

¹⁴⁹ al-Muqaddasi, 162. tr. Collins 1994, 138.

settlements were established in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁵⁰ A number of agricultural estates were located in the immediate vicinity of Beth Shean. A typical farmhouse was revealed at **Messilot**, 2 km east of the city wall. A large square building of $c.33 \times 33$ m was excavated here, consisting of a network of square and rectangular rooms surrounding a central courtyard.¹⁵¹ This building was part of a larger site with additional buildings to the south of it. It was constructed in the Byzantine period and its latest stage of use was dated to the eighth century. However, the presence of Buff Ware among the finds of this phase suggests that it was not abandoned until the ninth or tenth century.¹⁵²

Possible evidence of the penetration of new population into the hinterland of Beth Shean was found in a large village (*c.*6 ha) discovered at **Neve 'Ur**, 10 km north of the city and close to the River Jordan. Unlike other villages that show continuous habitation from Roman and Byzantine times, this one was established *ex nihilo* following the Arab conquest, and might represent a rare case of the penetration of a new population into northern Palestine from outside the region.

Salvage excavations at the site revealed the remains of several buildings, all of them north–south oriented with a small deviation to the east, which indicates a preplanned scheme of construction.¹⁵³ The quadrangular buildings were relatively large (*c.*6–7 \times 12–16 m), and their walls consisted of stone bases topped by brick courses. This settlement was founded at the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century, and was abandoned in the course of the ninth century or perhaps even later.¹⁵⁴ It seems that this chronological framework, together with the shape of the buildings and the combination of stone and brick in their construction, which is not common in the region, support the hypothesis that this village was founded and inhabited by a non-local population. The fact that no evidence of Christian artefacts or decorations was found in the excavated section of the village raises the possibility that it was inhabited by Muslim newcomers.

The presence of both Jewish and Christian populations in the agricultural hinterland of Beth Shean is indicated by the synagogues revealed at Beth Alpha, Ma'oz Haim, Rehov, and Tirat Zvi, and the churches and monasteries at Beth Ha-Shita and Sede Nahum.¹⁵⁵ As most of these sites have only received preliminary publications, it is not clear whether they continued to be inhabited after the 749 earthquake.

¹⁵⁰ Tzori 1962, 135–6; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 14.

¹⁵¹ Porat 2006.

¹⁵² The absence of glazed pottery from the finds was used as an indicator for an 8th-cent. abandonment (see Porat 2006), 191–2, but it seems that other finds support a later date.

¹⁵³ Shalem 2002.

¹⁵⁴ Shalem 2002, 173–5. Several pottery types found might indicate continuity into the 10th and 11th centuries.

¹⁵⁵ For brief descriptions of, and references for, these sites, see Tzori 1962; Tsafirir *et al.* 1994.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the archaeological findings from Beth Shean points to a complicated process of urban change that started in the fifth and sixth centuries, and was intensified in the seventh and eighth centuries. It involved the change of previous concepts of urban landscape, with the introduction of commercial and industrial installations into the former civic centre. Colonnaded streets were encroached upon and public buildings were not properly maintained. However, it seems that this was not an indication of decline, but rather a manifestation of profound changes in the values and priorities of the local population, expressed in the reduction of public monumental building and the intensification of industrial and commercial activities within the city. One of the consequences of this process was the weakening of the municipal authorities, but not the decline of the city.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, the traditional scenario of a long and constant decline between the sixth and eighth centuries should be reconsidered. The impact of the new commercial and industrial installations within the civic centre of Beth Shean, and especially the establishment of the monumental market in the time of Hisham, should not be underestimated. Early Islamic Baysan developed as a lively commercial town that manifested a conceptual change in its urban landscape. The devastating effects of the 749 earthquake had only a short-lived impact on the city, which was reconstructed immediately after the quake with the relocation of the civic centre to the southern plateau. Baysan continued to prosper at least until the tenth century, when al-Muqaddasi described it as a lively middle-sized town and a regional centre of agricultural production and commerce.

Urban change in Beth Shean should also be viewed in its regional context. The city's decline from its leading position in the Byzantine period was much influenced by the increasing prosperity of Tiberias as the capital of Jund al-Urdunn. While in Byzantine times Tiberias was much overshadowed by Beth Shean, the roles were reversed in Early Islamic times, when it became the major city of northern Palestine and Beth Shean was transformed into a medium-sized town.

TIBERIAS/TABBARIYYA

Tiberias was founded *c.*20 CE by Herod Antipas and flourished in the Roman period, when several large public structures—a theatre, stadium, and civic

¹⁵⁶ Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 135–43. For other aspects of this process, see Kennedy 1985a, 17–19; Whittow 1990.

centre, all built in the classical style—dominated its urban area. In the Byzantine period Tiberias was a multicultural regional centre with a mixed Christian and Jewish population, the seat of the Sanhedrin, and a leading centre of scholarship. The flourishing town contained colonnaded streets, a number of churches and synagogues (Jewish sources mention thirteen synagogues and a number of other schools of learning), and a civic centre with a basilica and a bathhouse. A broad pillared building was identified as a covered market, but recently proved to be a large congregational mosque from the Early Islamic period. In the sixth century Tiberias was surrounded by a long city wall, including within it a new pilgrims' church and an adjacent monastery constructed on the top of Mount Berenice¹⁵⁷ (Fig. 2.8). Although a significant regional centre, Tiberias was not a major city, and it seems that considerable areas within its sixth-century wall were not built on and remained empty.¹⁵⁸

Tiberias was taken peacefully by Shurahbil b. Hasanah in 636 and with the establishment of the new Islamic administration it replaced Scythopolis and became the capital of Jund al-Urdunn.¹⁵⁹ This modest Byzantine town became a major administrative centre, with impressive 'palaces' or estates built in its vicinity, at Khirbet Minya¹⁶⁰ and Sinnabra.¹⁶¹ It has been suggested that Early Islamic Tiberias was founded as a *misr*, similar in design to other newly established Early Islamic administrative centres,¹⁶² but no archaeological evidence has been found to support this assumption, and it seems that the city of the seventh and eighth centuries followed its former layout (see the discussion below). Tiberias flourished between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, expanding farther to the south beyond its former city wall, and reaching its zenith in area and population. Al-Muqaddasi described it as a large city along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, about one *farsakh* long (about 6 km), but lacking width because of the steep local topography. According to his description the city was surrounded by a wall with two main gates to the north and south, and its eastern side lay open to the Sea of Galilee. A congregational mosque was established in the city centre, and the city's markets extended all the way from the northern to the southern gate.¹⁶³

The city plan of Early Islamic Tiberias follows the layout established in the Byzantine period. It is interesting to note that all the public buildings and private residences were built with the same north–south orientation, with a slight (*c.*15 degrees) deviation to the east. This planning pattern originated in Roman and Byzantine times,¹⁶⁴ and was mainly influenced by the local topography and its relation to the Sea of Galilee. The orientation of the Early Islamic congregational mosque was adjusted precisely to the existing direction of the

¹⁵⁷ Hirschfeld 2004a; Hirschfeld and Galor 2007.

¹⁵⁸ Stacey 2004, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Gil 1992, 58; Laverne 2004. ¹⁶⁰ Grabar *et al.* 1960; Rosen-Ayalon *et al.* 2005.

¹⁶¹ Whitcomb 2002. ¹⁶² Harrison 1992.

¹⁶³ al-Muqaddasi, 161, tr. Collins 1994, 137.

¹⁶⁴ Hirschfeld 2004a, 219.

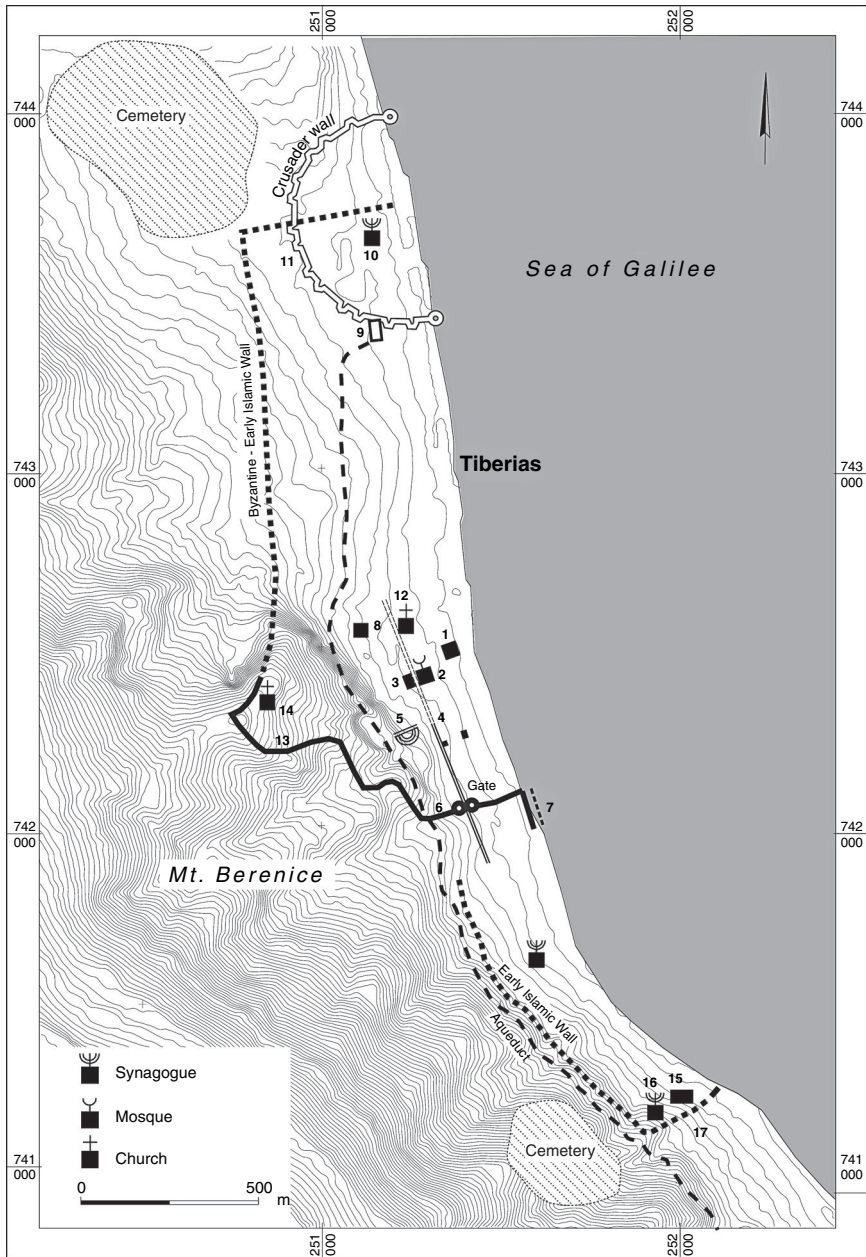


Fig. 2.8 Tiberias: map of the Byzantine and Early Islamic city.

cardo. The construction of the mosque along the main *cardo* did not involve an adaptation to a different orientation system, as this is also the right orientation of the direction of the *qibla* wall of the mosque.¹⁶⁵ Similar orientation of houses was found also in the residential quarters in the northern and southern sections of the city.

The urban limits of Tiberias were much expanded to the south in the ninth and tenth centuries, incorporating the town of Hammat Tiberias. The city reached its maximal expansion during this period, measuring c.4.5 km in length, slightly less than the extent (about one *farsakh*) cited by al-Muqaddasi. It was now the largest city in northern Palestine, with a planned layout of residential areas built along several main north–south arteries and east–west intersecting alleys spreading from the shores of the Sea of Galilee to the steep slopes of Mount Berenice.

The prosperity of Early Islamic Tiberias was due in part to its administrative position as the capital of Jund al-Urdunn. The city was also a centre of industrial production (pottery, metal, mats, and cottons), and a consumer centre for the rural areas of the Galilee. Thus, in the tenth century Tiberias was a much larger city in area and population in comparison with its size in the Byzantine period. The multireligious character of the city during this period is evident from the descriptions of pilgrims and travellers. Willibald found ‘a large number of churches and Jewish synagogues’ in the city,¹⁶⁶ and the *Commemoratorium* of the early ninth century lists five churches and a nunnery.¹⁶⁷ A number of Jewish sources from the Early Islamic period praise Tiberias as a centre of learning and scholarship for both Jews and Muslims.¹⁶⁸

Archaeological exploration in Tiberias began in 1921 with the discovery of an ancient synagogue at Hammat Tiberias, south of the walled city.¹⁶⁹ Large-scale excavations were conducted in the civic centre of ancient Tiberias between 1954 and 1968, but unfortunately the results of these remain unpublished.¹⁷⁰ Further excavations were undertaken at the southern part of the city, revealing the monumental southern gate,¹⁷¹ and a number of small rescue excavations have been conducted in different sections of the modern city.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ This is different from the adaptation of the direction of the mosque that was found e.g. in Jarash, where the builders of the mosque had to adapt it to the existing north–south Roman *cardo*. See Walmsley *et al.* 2008, Walmsley and Damgaard 2005, and the discussion below.

¹⁶⁶ Wilkinson 2002, 128.

¹⁶⁷ Wilkinson 2002, 138.

¹⁶⁸ Gil 1992, [436–8].

¹⁶⁹ Slouschz 1921.

¹⁷⁰ Large areas were excavated by B. Rabani in 1954–1956, and by A. Druks in 1964–1968. For a short summary of these excavations, see Hirschfeld and Galor 2007.

¹⁷¹ This area was excavated by G. Foerster in 1973–1974 but only preliminarily published, except for the Early Islamic levels, which were extensively discussed in Stacey 2004.

¹⁷² For summaries of these excavations, see Stepansky 2008, 2048–53 and references there.

The exploration of ancient Tiberias was intensified between 1994 and 2011. Large-scale excavations exposed further sections of the civic centre and a number of residential quarters in the northern and southern parts of the city. The Roman theatre was exposed on the slopes of Mount Berenice. It had been covered by another Early Islamic residential quarter built on top of its ruins (Fig. 2.9). Additional Early Islamic residential areas were located outside the city wall to the south, and a large church and monastery from Byzantine and Early Islamic times were excavated on the top of Mount Berenice¹⁷³ (Fig. 2.10).

As in Beth Shean, the colonnaded *cardo* of Tiberias was encroached upon and shops were installed on its pavements, but the date of this change has not yet been clarified, and it could post-date the sixth century. A new, modest main street was constructed in the civic centre during the eighth or ninth century, with shops and small workshops along it.¹⁷⁴ At the southern end of this street, close to the city gate, several stages of construction were defined along the former colonnaded street.

The Arab conquest of Tiberias left no trace in its archaeological record. It seems that after a short period of stagnation the city flourished again and expanded beyond its limits in the Byzantine period. Early Islamic Tiberias is notable especially for its large congregational mosque and the number of its extensive residential areas, all consisting of spacious houses of the central-court type. The pattern of residential areas followed a well-planned urban system, dictated by the orientation of the congregational mosque, in which all main arteries faced north–south with a slight deviation to the east. Especially significant is the urban expansion of the Early Islamic city to the south, with the city limits extending far beyond the southern walls. This massive expansion reached the neighbouring town of Hammath Tiberias, creating one large city.

The urban expansion of Early Islamic Tiberias, particularly to the south, contradicts the process revealed at Beth Shean, which declined from its major position in Byzantine Palestine. It seems that in both cities the process of change was triggered by external powers. Beth Shean declined as a consequence of the administrative changes introduced by the new Islamic government, and was further weakened following the devastating earthquakes of 659/660 and 749. Tiberias was probably also affected by these earthquakes, but as the new district's capital enjoyed increased economic prosperity. The churches

¹⁷³ For the main publications and preliminary results of the excavations, see Hirschfeld 2004a, Hirschfeld and Galor 2007. The results of the most recent excavations at the theatre and southern areas are still unpublished. I thank M. Hartal and W. Atrash for providing me with the information about these sites.

¹⁷⁴ Hirschfeld and Galor 2007, 217–18.

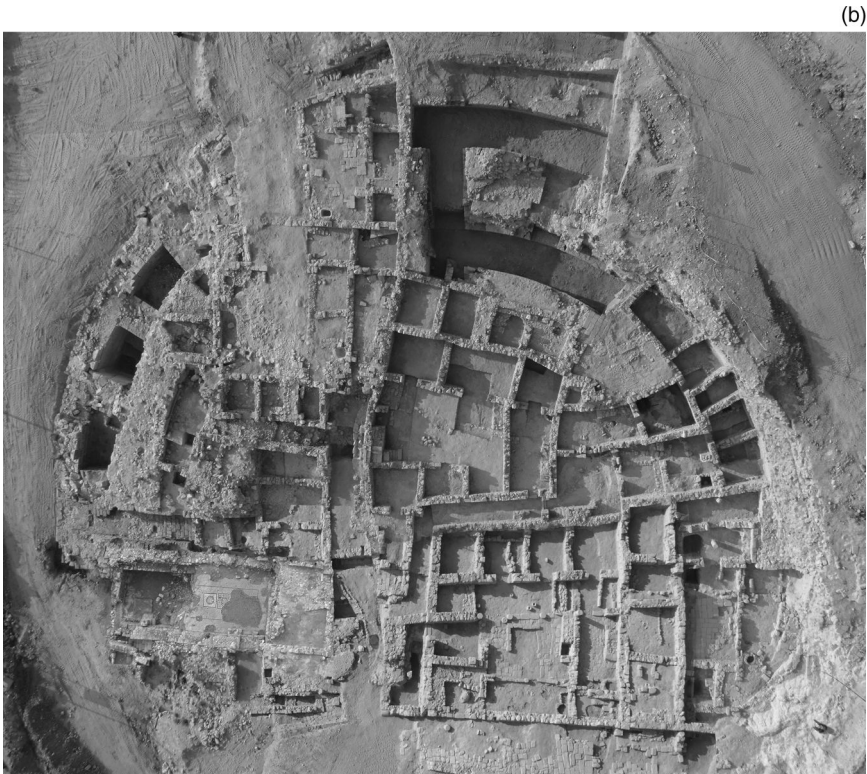
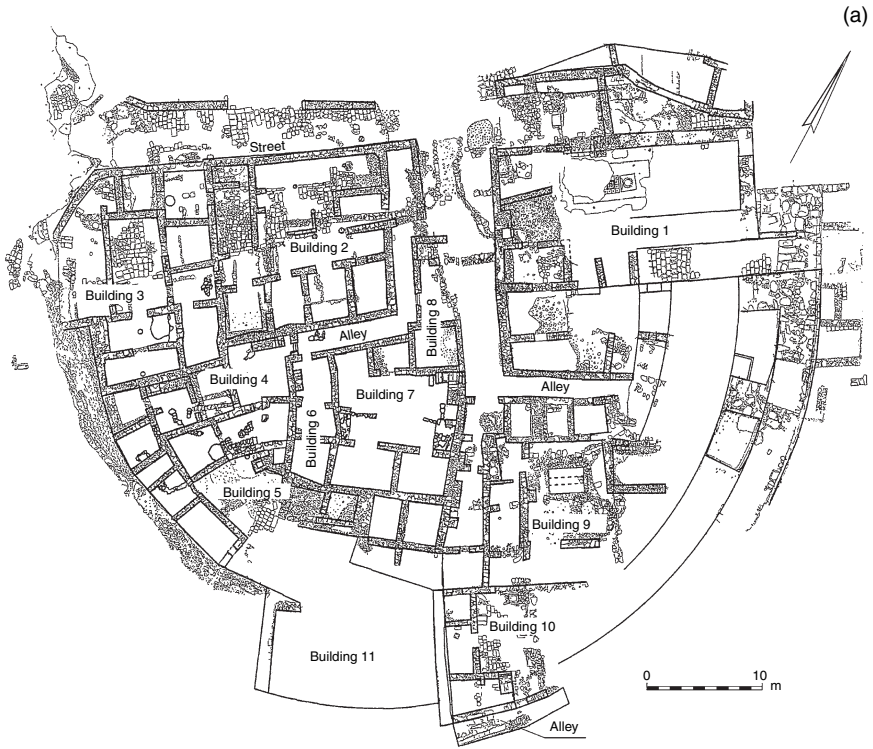


Fig. 2.9 Tiberias: the Early Islamic quarter above the Roman theatre: a. plan; b. aerial view; c. details of an open-court building (Atrash 2010, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

(c)



Fig. 2.9 continued.

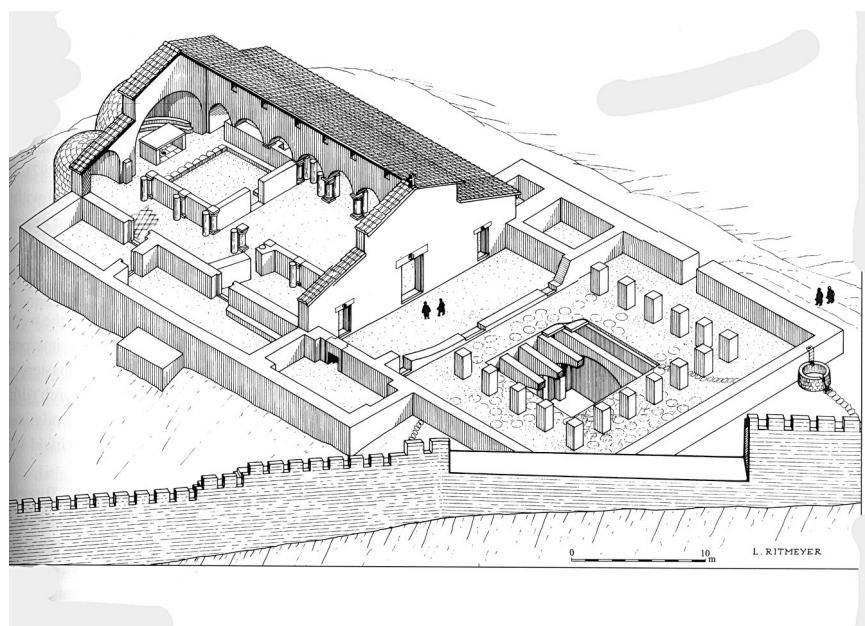


Fig. 2.10 Tiberias: the Byzantine and Early Islamic church at Mount Berenice, an isometric reconstruction (Hirschfeld 2004a, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

and synagogues, together with the large congregational mosque, point to the multicultural character of the local urban society, and to the fact that both the Jewish and the Christian communities of Tiberias thrived during the Early Islamic period.

The city centre and the congregational mosque

The city centre of Byzantine Tiberias was located between the cliffs of Mount Berenice to the west and the shores of the Sea of Galilee to the east. It consisted of a long north–south collonaded *cardo* with public buildings and residential areas extending mainly to its eastern side.¹⁷⁵ A number of monumental buildings were constructed in the city centre, among them a bathhouse and large basilica.¹⁷⁶ A large pillared structure was first identified as a covered market (*macellum*),¹⁷⁷ but recently proved to be the main congregational mosque of Early Islamic Tabbariyya.¹⁷⁸

The large public buildings previously excavated in this area did not have their results published properly, and the reconstruction of their chronological development is not certain. It seems that the colonnaded *cardo* and the large buildings along it were constructed in the Late Roman period, and continued to develop in Byzantine times. The introduction of a small mosque in the seventh century, which was replaced by the large congregational mosque in the eighth century, reshaped the area. This mosque became the focal point of the civic centre, influencing the urban planning around it.

The mosque, which formed a large rectangle of $c.90 \times 60$ m, was built according to the same planning scheme as the congregational mosque in Damascus and followed the design of other known mosques in Palestine and Jordan.¹⁷⁹ It contained a large pillared hall facing to the south and an open courtyard to its north. The bases of the pillars, exposed in previous excavations, were constructed of *spolia* consisting of basalt doors from Jewish burial caves, probably taken from the necropolis of the Roman and Byzantine town. The interpretation of this monumental building as a congregational mosque was further reinforced by the discovery of two large metal chains that supported large

¹⁷⁵ See Hirschfeld and Galor 2007, 224 and fig. 14 for a suggested reconstruction of the Byzantine town.

¹⁷⁶ Hirschfeld and Galor 2007, 221–9.

¹⁷⁷ Hirschfeld and Galor 2007, 216.

¹⁷⁸ Cytryn-Silverman 2009.

¹⁷⁹ See Cytryn-Silverman 2009, fig. 20 for a suggested reconstruction of the mosque and its surroundings. The 2010–2012 excavations in the mosque compound show that it was much larger than previously concluded. See Cytryn-Silverman 2010*b* for a preliminary report. I thank K. Cytryn-Silverman for sharing with me this as yet unpublished information.

lamps illuminating its large pillared hall.¹⁸⁰ The construction of the mosque involved significant changes to the adjacent buildings. The building to its east, for example, was modified after the 749 earthquake by the addition of a new section to its west, facing the *cardo*. This building might have changed its function, becoming the governor's house (*Dar al-Imara*). The bathhouse located near the south-western part of the mosque, originally constructed in the Byzantine period, seems to have been considerably expanded in the Early Islamic period.¹⁸¹

The remains of an apsidal church located to the north of the mosque were partially excavated. It contained an inscription dated to the Byzantine period, but it is not clear whether the church fell into disuse in the latter part of the Byzantine period or continued to function together with the mosque in later times.¹⁸²

The Roman theatre, lying on the slopes of Mount Berenice to the west of the civic centre, was deserted by the end of the Byzantine period and partially covered with debris. This area was extensively rebuilt following the 749 earthquake. Recent excavations revealed impressive remains of a well-planned residential quarter with buildings extending high up the steep slopes above the theatre, providing excellent views of the town below and the Sea of Galilee. More than ten spacious buildings were exposed, each containing a central court with rooms around it (Fig. 2.9). The residential quarter was built on the steep slope of the mountain, with each cluster of buildings on a different level. Some of the houses contained water fountains in their inner courtyards, and each house had at least one large water cistern. A north-south oriented street crossed this area, from which a few narrow lanes led to the houses to its east and west. The western section of the road ended at the cliffs of Mount Berenice. Several artefacts decorated with crosses may suggest that this elaborate quarter housed the Christian population of Tiberias.¹⁸³

It is worth noting that the main aqueduct leading to Tiberias from the south was cut through by the construction of this residential quarter. Perhaps it was damaged in the 749 earthquake and never repaired.

The residential quarter was abandoned in the second half of the eleventh century, and evidence from the excavations points to a pre-planned departure. Some openings to houses were carefully sealed as if the owners planned to return within short time, and there was no evidence of hasty abandonment or destruction of buildings. A number of hoards containing coins and metal objects were discovered in the buildings, all of them dating to the time of

¹⁸⁰ Lester and Hirschfeld 2006. The lamps were published as part of the Byzantine market findings, but proved to belong to the Early Islamic mosque; see Cytryn-Silverman 2009, 50–1.

¹⁸¹ Cytryn-Silverman 2009, 55–6.

¹⁸² I thank M. Hartal and K. Cytryn-Silverman for this information. The excavations in this area are still in progress.

¹⁸³ Atrash 2010. I thank W. Atrash for providing me the details for this excavation.

abandonment. This indicates that the owners intended to come back to their properties.

Additional sections of this residential quarter were exposed farther to the north, where evidence of a continuous settlement from the sixth to the tenth and eleventh centuries was found.¹⁸⁴ The northern part of this quarter included a large building, originally from the Roman period, which was renovated in the sixth century and used until the 749 earthquake. Following the earthquake a new building was constructed at the site and it continued in use until the eleventh century.¹⁸⁵

The southern excavation area contained a network of buildings with central courtyards.¹⁸⁶ The Early Islamic remains here consisted of several buildings built in the second half of the eighth century on top of a thick layer of debris, probably the result of the 749 earthquake. The upper phase of the buildings was dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries. Several buildings flanking a narrow street oriented north–south with a slight deviation to the east were excavated. A square tower in the northern part of the excavation was identified as a water tower, from which a number of clay pipes extended to the houses. Two houses were partly excavated east of the street. In the southern one, the ‘House of the Bronzes’, two rooms and parts of a courtyard were uncovered. Three large storage jars were discovered hidden in the ground here, containing a large hoard of almost 1,000 bronze artefacts. Scores of coins were found with the hoard, dating to the years 976–1078. Most of the coins were of the type known as ‘anonymous folles’, bearing the image of Jesus as emperor and inscribed with the phrase ‘Jesus Christ the king of kings’.¹⁸⁷ The coin finds suggest that the hoard was concealed around 1080. The Christian Byzantine coins might hint as to the origin of the owner or to his close connection with the local Christian community. This spectacular find is the largest hoard from this period discovered in Palestine, and it seems that it was the property of a local metal merchant.¹⁸⁸

The excavations of the residential area near the city centre provide evidence of a wealthy population that inhabited this part of the city, and the finds suggest that most or all of them were Christians. The abandonment of both the residential area and the congregational mosque and adjacent buildings has been dated to the second half of the eleventh century.

The northern areas of Early Islamic Tiberias

This section of the city was recently revealed through large-scale rescue excavations conducted at the centre of the modern town. A residential quarter,

¹⁸⁴ Hirschfeld 2004a; Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 2008.

¹⁸⁵ Hirschfeld 2004a, 13–18.

¹⁸⁶ Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 2008.

¹⁸⁷ Bijovsky and Berman 2008.

¹⁸⁸ See Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 2008.

divided into several *insulae*, was discovered here and dated to the ninth and tenth centuries. The houses were relatively small and of poor quality compared with the central areas of the Early Islamic city: each unit consisted of small square rooms facing a central courtyard.¹⁸⁹ As this area was not inhabited before the ninth century, it seems that the urban limits of Tiberias were extended to the north relatively late in the Early Islamic period. This quarter was heavily damaged and partially destroyed by floods during the tenth century, and was abandoned in the eleventh century.

Further evidence of the northern perimeter of the Early Islamic city was found in earlier excavations conducted in this area.¹⁹⁰ The remains of a paved street dated to the eighth or ninth centuries were discovered here, with no earlier construction revealed.¹⁹¹ It seems that the northern areas of Tiberias were not settled during the Byzantine period. This section of the city was developed only at a later stage of its expansion, perhaps after the southern extramural quarters were established in the Early Islamic period. North of this residential area there is a sharp decline in architectural remains, and it seems that the areas farther to the north were not inhabited, as they were part of the urban necropolis.

Remains of the northern section of the sixth-century city wall were found to the south of the Early Islamic northern residential quarter, yielding further evidence that Byzantine Tiberias was smaller than the Early Islamic city. It is noteworthy that no evidence of the first stages of the Early Islamic period was found in this area, and the expansion of the city northwards was dated as late as the ninth and tenth centuries. These finds refute the proposed reconstruction of an Umayyad *misr* in the northern part of Tiberias.¹⁹²

Additional excavations south of the northern Byzantine city wall revealed the remains of a synagogue surrounded by a number of residential units. The square building (c.20 × 20 m), paved with mosaics containing dedication inscriptions in Greek, was constructed either in the sixth century or in the second half of the seventh century.¹⁹³ The synagogue was partly destroyed by the 749 earthquake, then renovated, and continued in use until the eleventh century. A nearby house contained a Jewish ritual bathhouse (*miqve*), which suggests that this area of Early Islamic Tiberias was inhabited by Jews.

¹⁸⁹ This area was excavated by M. Hartal in 2007–2008 (Hartal 2008a). I thank him for sharing with me his insights on the excavation.

¹⁹⁰ The excavations in the market of modern Tiberias were conducted by F. Vitto in 1972 but the results have not yet been published.

¹⁹¹ Cytryn-Silverman 2009, 41.

¹⁹² See Harrison 1992 for the discussion of a potential *misr*. See also Cytryn-Silverman 2009, 38.

¹⁹³ Stepansky 2008, 2051. While A. Berman, who conducted the excavation at the site, dated the first construction to the second half of the 7th cent., Hirschfeld suggested the 6th cent. as the date of construction.

The eastern and western sections

The waterfront of Early Islamic Tiberias contained a number of buildings and installations facing the Sea of Galilee. Excavations in the north-eastern areas of the modern town revealed five strata, the earliest dated to the seventh or eighth century. Several long and massive walls from the Early Islamic period were found close to the sea, one of them *c.*40 m long, and it was suggested that this was part of an Early Islamic pier.¹⁹⁴ Additional remains of buildings and coastal installations were revealed in recent excavations conducted to the south along the lake shore. The monumental remains of a Roman stadium, which was in use until the third century, were revealed here. A long hall was constructed in the Byzantine period above the deserted stadium, and it lasted into the Early Islamic period. Two large buildings were added to this structure in the seventh or eighth century, and a large pool located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee next to it was probably used for the storage of live fish before they were sold. The lower courses of this pool were built of reused column drums which were planted in the water.¹⁹⁵ The excavation revealed evidence of destruction in the 749 earthquake, but this complex was rapidly renovated and continued to be used until the eleventh century. Nasir-i Khusraw, while visiting Tiberias in 1047, noted that there were many buildings on the waterfront, including a belvedere built on top of marble columns in the water.¹⁹⁶

The western perimeter of Early Islamic Tiberias extended to the slopes of Mount Berenice. The expansion of the city to the west was intensified between the eighth and tenth centuries, as the recent excavations of the residential quarter that covered the Roman theatre have revealed (see above). Earlier excavations in this part of the city discovered evidence of an extensive settlement on the slopes of Mount Berenice. In 1934, when a run-off channel was dug in Wadi Ghazal, leading to the Sea of Galilee, remains of dwellings from the sixth to the tenth and eleventh centuries were uncovered. Further salvage excavations in the western neighbourhoods of modern Tiberias unearthed additional remains from this period, but because of their limited scope no complete buildings were revealed here.¹⁹⁷

The expansion of Tiberias to the west during the Early Islamic period is attested by the continued presence of the Byzantine church at the top of Mount Berenice.¹⁹⁸ The church and monastery were constructed in the sixth century and incorporated within the urban limits with the construction of the city wall. The large church complex (48 × 28 m) included an atrium and a three-aisled

¹⁹⁴ The excavations were conducted by A. Druks in 1972 but the results have not been published to date.

¹⁹⁵ Hartal 2008*b*.

¹⁹⁶ Nasir-i Khusraw 14, tr. Thackston 2001, 23.

¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately the results of most of these excavations have not been published. For short summaries, see Hirschfeld 2004*a*, 19–21; Stepansky 2008; Cytryn-Silverman 2009, 42.

¹⁹⁸ Hirschfeld 2004*a*, 76–134.

basilica paved with mosaics (Fig. 2.10). The earliest Byzantine church was demolished by the 749 earthquake and replaced by a new church constructed in the second half of the eighth century. The reconstruction of a large church at the site provides additional indication of the affluent status of the local Christian community and of the tolerance of the Muslim authorities towards it. This church continued in use until the end of the Crusader period.¹⁹⁹

The southern section

This area of the city has been better explored, and contained the monumental Roman and Byzantine city gate, as well as several Early Islamic buildings in its inner part.²⁰⁰

The excavations to the north of the gate showed that the Byzantine *cardo* was slightly encroached upon during the late seventh and early eighth century, and was further narrowed in the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁰¹ The previous monumental southern gate was narrowed, and a new wooden gate was introduced here, apparently during the early tenth century. Several residential buildings were constructed during the second half of the eighth century to the east and west of the gate, inside the city wall, and were further expanded and developed between the ninth and eleventh centuries. At least one of them contained an elaborate inner courtyard, which demonstrates the prosperity of this area of Tiberias during the later stages of the Early Islamic period.

Inside the walled area and north of the gate another residential area was excavated, in which a large building was located to the east of the *cardo*. Its construction was dated to the sixth century, and the building continued to be used in the seventh and eighth centuries. The later users of the building, which contained a broad hall oriented east-west, had to support its roof with additional pillars. Stacey suggested that during the Early Islamic period this building was in public use, and proposed identifying it with the *Masjid al-Yasmin* mentioned by Nasir-i Khusraw.²⁰² Unfortunately, no other features in this building can support its identification as a mosque.

The stratigraphic analysis of this area suggests that there was extensive construction and expansion of large residential buildings during the late ninth and early tenth centuries. The spacious new buildings with central courtyards provide further evidence for the wealth of the central and southern sections of the city. Stacey related this stage of construction to the intensification of commercial connections between Palestine and Egypt, which further increased the prosperity of Tiberias.

¹⁹⁹ Hirschfeld 2004a, 132.

²⁰⁰ The results from the Roman and Byzantine levels have only been published in preliminary form, see Foerster 1977. For the comprehensive publication of the results from the Early Islamic levels, see Stacey 2004.

²⁰¹ Stacey 2004, 30–6.

²⁰² Stacey 2004, 79–80.

The expansion of the city to the south was accelerated after the eighth century with the construction of new residential areas south of the Byzantine city wall. A bridge was constructed above a small stream immediately to the south of the city gate, to facilitate movement between the central part of the city and its southern districts.²⁰³ South of the gate and along the road to Hammat Tiberias, another residential quarter was excavated, and the remains of several central-courtyard buildings were unearthed.²⁰⁴

It has been suggested that the main expansion of the urban area south of the Byzantine wall did not occur until during the ninth century.²⁰⁵ This was based on the fact that at least two of the residential buildings in this area were constructed on top of earlier Islamic graves.²⁰⁶

Recent excavations in several areas farther to the south revealed another well-planned residential quarter with several long north–south streets and a network of large buildings constructed along these arteries.²⁰⁷ A number of spacious inner-courtyard houses were excavated, all built to the same ground plan as the houses in the central part of the city: a large inner courtyard surrounded by rooms and built along straight north–south alleys. The excavations revealed a continuous grid of streets and houses connecting Tiberias with the southern neighbouring town of Hammat, and extending even farther to the south. It seems that between the second half of the eighth century and the eleventh century Tiberias and Hammat became one large city. The Byzantine city wall was extended to the south and was united with the wall of Hammat Tiberias²⁰⁸ (See Fig. 2.8).

Earlier excavations at Hammat Tiberias revealed the remains of two synagogues, one near the hot springs of Hammat, and the other about 500 m to the north. The southern synagogue revealed a number of superimposed buildings, the earliest dating from the fourth century.²⁰⁹ Although the excavation report stated that the latest synagogue was damaged by the 749 earthquake and never repaired,²¹⁰ a re-evaluation of the finds suggested that the synagogue might have been reconstructed following the earthquake and have been in use until the tenth century.²¹¹ The northern synagogue was found in 1921.²¹² It seems that this synagogue was built after the abandonment of the southern synagogue of Hammat Tiberias, and was in use until the second half of the eleventh century, when it was abandoned with the collapse of the Early Islamic city.²¹³

²⁰³ This might be the bridge mentioned by al-Muqaddasi in his description of Tiberias: al-Muqaddasi, 161. The bridge was discovered in 2008 by M. Hartal: see Hartal *et al.* 2010.

²⁰⁴ Stacey 2004, 52–64. ²⁰⁵ Stacey 2004, 67. ²⁰⁶ Stacey 2004, 56.

²⁰⁷ These rescue excavations were conducted in 2008. For a preliminary note, see Hartal 2009.

²⁰⁸ Stepansky 2005, Stacey 2004, 9, plan 2.1. ²⁰⁹ Dothan 1983, 2000.

²¹⁰ Dothan 2000, 37. ²¹¹ Stacey 2002, 258–9.

²¹² Slouschz 1921; additional excavations were conducted at the site in 1969 (Oren 1971) and 1983, but the results of these remain unpublished. See Stacey 2002, 259, 2004, 13–14, for a short discussion of these excavations.

²¹³ Stacey 2002, 259–60.

The southern limit of Early Islamic Tiberias was defined through recent excavations conducted to the south of Hammat Tiberias, which revealed additional extensive residential areas. As in other sections of the city, the southern neighbourhood was inhabited between the ninth and eleventh centuries and was abandoned in the second half of the eleventh century.

It is interesting to note that, although Tiberias is mentioned in the historical sources as a centre for the production of textiles, mats, and metalwork, the number of industrial installations revealed by the excavations is relatively small. The excavations near the southern gate revealed a structure in which a metal workshop might have existed.²¹⁴

A number of pottery kilns excavated in the southern section of the city²¹⁵ suggest that pottery production was one of the major branches of the local economy. Yet these finds are not part of a larger network of local production, and unlike Ramla and Beth Shean, which contained a large number of industrial installations within the residential districts, it seems that in Tiberias the volume of industries was smaller. This might be related to the fact that the crowded residential areas of the city and the steep topography that limited the urban open spaces could not maintain large-scale industry.

Another aspect of the Early Islamic city is its water consumption, which was based both on private water cisterns in residential units that collected rainwater from the roofs of the buildings, and on the public aqueduct leading to the city from the south. The aqueduct brought water from the springs of Yavn'el south of Tiberias and deposited it in a large reservoir on the western outskirts of the city (Figs. 2.8: 9). This pool, constructed probably in Roman times, was in use until the Early Islamic period.²¹⁶ The aqueduct fell into disuse in the last period of construction in the residential area above the theatre, perhaps in the ninth–tenth centuries. The reason for constructing such a large aqueduct near the largest freshwater lake in the country is unclear. It is noteworthy that both al-Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khusraw mention that the water consumption of the city came directly from the Sea of Galilee,²¹⁷ and it seems that during their times the aqueduct was no longer used. Perhaps it was originally designed according to the strict rules of Roman engineering and aimed to provide water to the public buildings of Roman and Byzantine Tiberias. The accelerated development of the city in the Early Islamic period did not include the constant maintenance of the aqueduct and therefore it fell into disuse.

²¹⁴ Stacey 2004, 37. ²¹⁵ Oren 1971; Stern 1995.

²¹⁶ Stepansky 2005; Winogradov 2002.

²¹⁷ al-Muqaddasi 161, tr. Collins 1994, 137; Nasir-i Khusraw 13, tr. Thackston 2001, 22.

A multicultural society

Several religious buildings emphasize the position of Tiberias as a flourishing urban centre for a mixed population of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The main congregational mosque in the city centre (Fig. 2.8: 2), the large church on the summit of Mount Berenice, three identified synagogues—one in the northern part of the city, and two in Hammat Tiberias—all indicate that the three religious communities lived together under Islamic rule.²¹⁸

Although there is no clear archaeological evidence of segregation between the areas in which the different communities lived, there are some indications of the concentration of specific communities in different parts of the city. Finds in the residential areas in the northern, central, and southern parts of Early Islamic Tiberias point to some ethno-religious division of the local population: a considerable number of artefacts with Christian symbols were discovered in residential areas in the central sections of the city, mainly in the Roman theatre area and in the sewage plant processing area. These included architectural fragments with crosses inscribed on them, small pendants ornamented with crosses, and a number of Christian coins, all of which point to the owners' Christian origin.

This is reinforced by Christian burial sites and tombstones unearthed throughout the city.²¹⁹ Christian coins and pendants discovered in the prosperous houses over the theatre and within the bronze hoard at the 'House of the Bronzes' point to the wealthy status of the local Christian community.²²⁰ It has also been suggested that the evidence of wine production found at the southern residential quarter is another indication that Christians lived in this area,²²¹ but this seems to be a speculative interpretation, as wine was also produced by other ethno-religious communities.²²²

The Jewish community of Tiberias seems to have been concentrated near the northern synagogue, where an adjacent house with a *miqve* was found, and also near the southern synagogues of Hammat. The discovery of Jewish tombs in the northern cemetery of Tiberias further indicates that a Jewish community was concentrated in this area. Unfortunately no information exists about possible Jewish tombs in the cemeteries of Hammat Tiberias.

The increased impact of the newly arrived Muslim population is represented by the construction of the congregational mosque and by occasional finds of Arabic inscriptions, mainly epitaphs.²²³

²¹⁸ For a summary of historical sources on the population of Tiberias, see Gil 1992, 147–56 [284–98].

²¹⁹ Yellin 1921; Stepansky 2008. ²²⁰ Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 2008, 25–30.

²²¹ Stacey 2004, 82–5. ²²² This topic is discussed in Ch. 4.

²²³ See e.g. Stepansky 2005, Cytryn-Silverman 2010*b*.

The collapse of Early Islamic Tiberias

The sequences of habitation revealed in the excavations, dated by pottery and glass assemblages and a relatively large number of coin hoards, show that Tiberias was almost deserted in the 1070s and 1080s. It seems that the combined effects of the 1033 and 1068 earthquakes, the political instability caused by the Seljuk raids into Palestine,²²⁴ and the deteriorating economic and environmental conditions put an end to the once flourishing Early Islamic capital of Jund al-Urdunn.²²⁵ In 1047 Nasir-i Khusraw was still able to depict Tiberias as a large and prosperous city, even larger than the city described by al-Muqaddasi eighty years earlier, but a decade or two later the signs of a rapid decline were already visible.

The evidence of hoards is especially indicative of the deterioration of Tiberias in the second half of the eleventh century. Seven large hoards from this period were discovered in excavations, containing coins, jewellery, and metal vessels. The largest and richest is the hoard of c.1,000 bronze vessels from the 'House of the Bronzes' near the city centre. The latest coins in this hoard suggest that it was hidden c.1070–1080, perhaps in connection with the Seljuk conquest.²²⁶ Another collection of bronze vessels was found nearby, in the sewage plant excavations.²²⁷ The excavations at the southern part of Tiberias revealed another small hoard deposited in a small jug hidden under the floor of a private house. This hoard contained jewellery and coins from the tenth and early eleventh centuries, the latest of which was dated to 1024.²²⁸ Two additional hoards were found in the northern part of the city, both consisting of a mixture of coins and jewellery. The latest coins in these hoards are from 1063, which suggests that it was concealed shortly after this year.²²⁹ The recent excavations of the residential quarter above the Roman theatre revealed two additional hoards from the eleventh century hidden in the floors and walls of buildings.²³⁰

These finds raise the question of the circumstances of the abandonment and collapse of the thriving city of Tiberias. Internal political instability and the fear of raids were possible reasons for the hiding of the hoards in private residences.²³¹ All the hoards were found in private houses. After the hoards were concealed the houses were abandoned, and it seems that the local inhabitants planned to return and recover their valuables, but apparently they never did.²³² The fact that most hoards were concealed in the second half of the

²²⁴ Gil 1992, 397–418; Stacey 2004, 247.

²²⁵ Ellenblum (2012) has recently provided a new hypothesis that connects the decline of urban societies in the Near East to deteriorating environmental conditions. See the discussion in Ch. 5.

²²⁶ Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 2008, 25–30; Bijovsky and Berman 2008, 81–2; see also Gil 1992, 414–18 [608–9] for the violent Seljuk conquest of Tiberias.

²²⁷ Lester 2004a, 62–7. ²²⁸ Berman 2004, 224–6. ²²⁹ Onn 1991; Brosh 1998.

²³⁰ Atrash 2010. I thank W. Atrash for the information on specific hoards.

²³¹ See e.g. Stacey 2004, 3–7; Bijovsky and Berman 2008, 81–2.

²³² See also the discussion on hoards in Ch. 5.

eleventh century is another indication of the calamities that swept Tiberias during this period, leading inevitably to its collapse. It seems that the cumulative effect of earthquakes, political instability, and deteriorating economic and perhaps environmental conditions had a large impact on the resilience of local society. Large segments of the local population abandoned Tiberias, leaving their belongings behind.

The residential districts bear clear evidence of this desertion: the openings of buildings were deliberately sealed, and valuables were sometimes concealed under the floors or within inner walls. Both the stratigraphic and ceramic evidence and the reliability of dated hoards indicate that Tiberias was almost completely deserted in the later decades of the eleventh century, and by the last quarter of the century not much remained of the once flourishing capital of Jund al-Urdunn. When the Crusaders invaded Palestine in 1099, Tiberias was a half-ruined town. The Crusader town and fortress were constructed on a much smaller scale, and were concentrated in the northern area of the Early Islamic city.²³³

The hinterland of Tiberias

The hinterland of Tiberias during the late Byzantine and Early Islamic times was predominantly Christian, with villages and monastic compounds spreading mainly around the Sea of Galilee. In his recent study of settlement patterns in the lower Eastern Galilee, Leibner suggested a massive decline of settlements in the fourth or fifth centuries,²³⁴ reinforcing this dating from his recent excavations in the Jewish village and synagogue at Horvat Hammam.²³⁵ While a pattern of continuity was revealed in many Christian villages, the decline of others might have started during the Byzantine period.

The Early Islamic ‘palaces’ at Minya and Sinnabra, established to the north and the south of the city, seem to be incorporated within the existing hinterland of Christian settlements.

Particularly important for the understanding of settlement processes around the Sea of Galilee are the results of the extensive excavations at **Capernaum**, which revealed evidence of a village which flourished in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. The Byzantine village presented a unique coexistence between a monumental synagogue and an octagonal Christian church. It seems that Jewish–Christian confrontations in the fourth century ended with a massive penetration of Christian elements into the Jewish village of Capernaum and the construction of a new church which has been identified as the ‘House of St Peter’. Opposite this church a magnificent synagogue was erected in the fourth

²³³ Razi and Braun 1992; Stepansky 2004, 179–81.

²³⁴ Leibner 2009.

²³⁵ Leibner 2010; for a different opinion, see Magness 2007.

century.²³⁶ The common view is that both structures declined by the end of the Byzantine period and were deserted even before the Arab conquest.²³⁷ However, excavations in the domestic areas of the village show that Capernaum was not destroyed and abandoned during the Arab conquest, and that the Christian settlement expanded further in the Early Islamic period. This is particularly evident from the excavations in the Greek Orthodox church area, in the north-eastern section of the site.²³⁸ The remains of a large village (about 2.5–4 ha), consisting of a number of large residential units were discovered here. This village continued to be inhabited throughout the Early Islamic period, and was abandoned only during the eleventh century (Fig. 2.11).

A massive building found close to the shore (area D) consisted of pools flanking a raised platform, and was apparently used for storing fish. Another public building was partly excavated in the south-eastern part of the site (area C), and five phases of use between the seventh and the end of the tenth century were revealed. In area B a building with similar stratigraphy was found. Two large residential complexes were excavated at the top of the hill, facing the Sea of Galilee (area A) and consisting of rooms built around a central courtyard. An east–west oriented street was discovered between the buildings.

Five phases of habitation were defined in the village: stratum V represents the Byzantine period remains and stratum IV ends with the 749 earthquake. After the earthquake the plan of the settlement underwent fundamental changes. In strata III (late eighth and early ninth centuries) and II (late ninth and early tenth centuries), the number of rooms in the buildings increased, while their size was reduced. The street in area A was blocked by walls, forming additional dwellings integrated into the residential complex. In stratum I (late tenth and early eleventh centuries) the village declined, and was abandoned before the Crusader conquest.

This chronological and stratigraphical sequence was revised by Magness, who, on the basis of the analysis of the pottery finds and a comparison with the chronology of Pella, convincingly suggested a later chronology for the Early Islamic village.²³⁹ Accordingly, stratum V was dated to 700–750, and stratum IV from 750 until the second half of the ninth century. This revised chronology suggests that a large Early Islamic village was established at the site in the second half of the eighth century.

Thus, the evidence from Capernaum, which was supported by the results in other sites in the lower Galilee, contradicts previous claims of decline after the Arab conquest or the middle of the eighth century.

²³⁶ There are fundamental disputes about the date of the construction of the synagogue and the nature of its coexistence with the church. See Runesson 2007 for the main arguments.

²³⁷ For a summary of the excavations in the Synagogue area, see Loffreda 1993.

²³⁸ Tzaferis 1988. ²³⁹ Magness 1997.

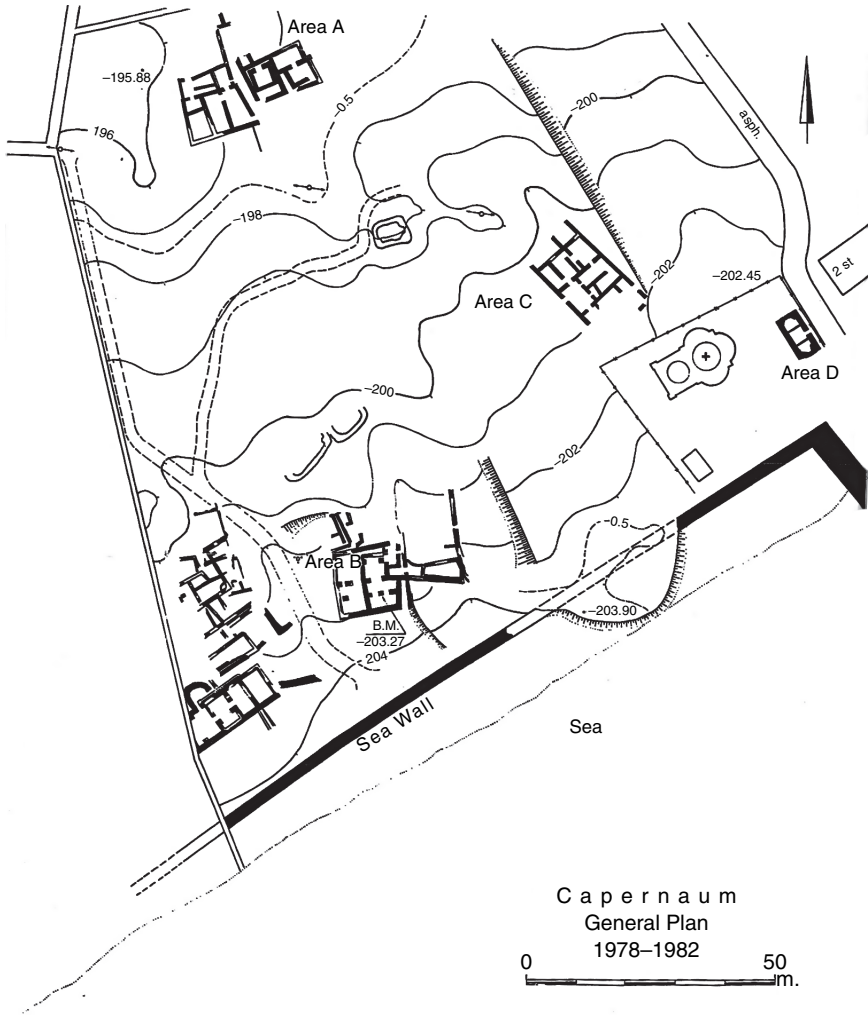


Fig. 2.11 Capernaum: plan of the Early Islamic village (Tzaferis 1988, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

It is worth noting that the Christian village of Capernaum was located only 4.5 km north-east of *Khirbet Minya*, where a large estate was constructed in the early eighth century, as an inscription mentioning the caliph al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik confirms. This monumental complex, located on the shores of the Sea of Galilee 9 km to the north of Tiberias, consisted of a rectangular fortified compound measuring 73×67 m with round towers in its corners and semicircular towers in the centre of each wall (Fig. 2.12). A monumental dome-roofed gate was built in the eastern wall. The southern section of the

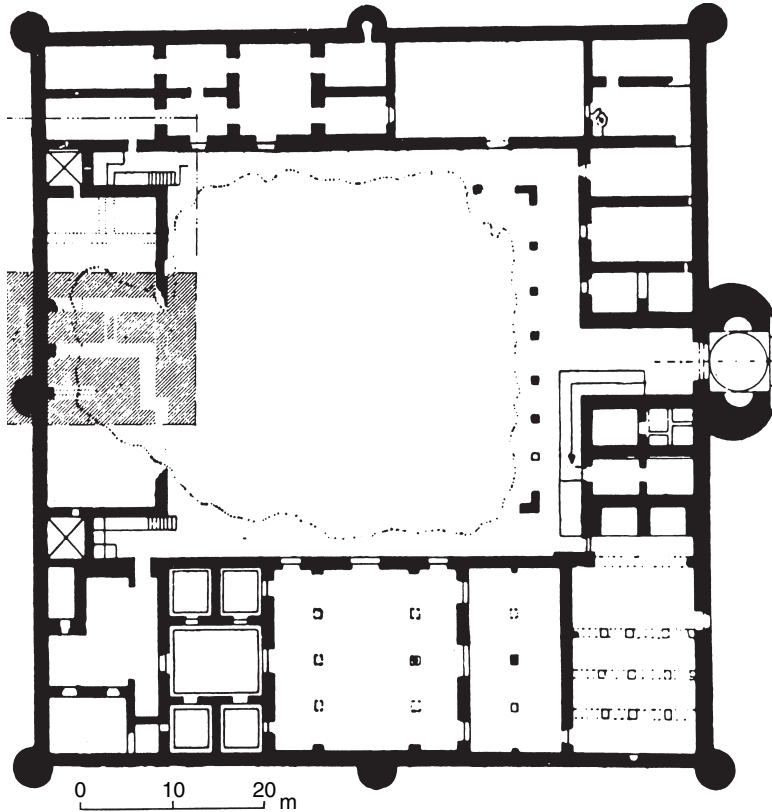


Fig. 2.12 Khirbet Minya: plan of the Early Islamic 'palace' (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

building included several large halls decorated with geometric mosaic floors and a mosque near its south-eastern corner. The northern section contained a row of smaller rooms.²⁴⁰ Additional structures, among them the remains of a bathhouse, were discovered nearby, forming a larger complex of buildings. It seems that the establishment of this fortified estate, inhabited by Muslims, was directly associated with Tiberias becoming the provincial capital. Nevertheless, the estate domain, which probably included large agricultural areas, did not affect the further development of the nearby Christian village of Capernaum.

²⁴⁰ The site was excavated in 1932–1939 by A. Mader and A. Schneider but there was only a preliminary publication of the results. See Schneider and Puttrich-Reignard 1937, Creswell 1969, 381–9. Further excavations were conducted on a limited scale in 1959 and 2004; see Grabar *et al.* 1960, Rosen-Ayalon *et al.* 2005.

The other large Muslim estate was located at **Sinnabra**, near the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee and *c.*5 km south of Tiberias. The early excavations at the site, the results of which were never published properly, exposed segments of a large fortified rectangular structure (*c.*65 × 75 m), similar in size to the one in Khirbet Minya, with square towers in its four corners. The inner space contained an apsidal structure facing south-east, which was erroneously identified as a synagogue.²⁴¹ A small bathhouse was installed next to the southern section of the enclosure. North of this complex an apsidal church was excavated and dated to the Byzantine period, with a later building above it which was labelled the ‘Arab building’.²⁴² The inadequate publication of the results prevents a clear phasing of the remains from the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods, but it seems that the fortified complex and the adjacent structures were constructed in the early eighth century south of the still-standing Byzantine apsidal church. It is unclear whether these religious structures functioned together. However, the location of the ‘Arab building’ on top of the church indicates a possible later stage in the development of the Muslim complex.²⁴³ Recent excavations at the site identified the fragmentary remains of the Early Islamic fortified enclosure walls, which suggests that the walls and segments of decorated mosaic floors were indeed part of the monumental construction of the eighth century. Two phases of settlement were identified in the fragmentary sections studied, both from the Early Islamic period.²⁴⁴

The connection between the newly founded capital of Jund al-Urdunn and the Early Islamic estates in Minya and Sinnabra is evident, and it seems that both monumental structures were used by the Umayyads to reinforce their presence in northern Palestine. Each estate was surrounded by agricultural fields which might have been cultivated either by the Muslim newcomers or by Christians living in the villages nearby. It is worth noting that both structures were located in the middle of a wealthy agricultural area inhabited by Christians, but there is no sign of animosity between the two populations sharing the same area in the hinterland of Tiberias.

The continuity of Christian settlement on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee is evident in **Kursi**,²⁴⁵ where a large monastery forming a square compound with an apsidal church on its eastern side was established in the Byzantine period. The published excavation report suggests that the church and monastery were severely damaged by the Persian conquest in 614. In the seventh century the site was resettled by a much smaller squatter-type settlement. However, the large number of pottery vessels, oil lamps, and glass artefacts found there indicate that the monastery continued to operate in the Early Islamic period, and cast doubt on the suggestion it was destroyed by the Persians.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Reich 1993; Whitcomb 2002, 3–4. ²⁴² Delougaz and Haines 1960.

²⁴³ As reconstructed in Whitcomb 2002. ²⁴⁴ Greenberg and Paz 2010.

²⁴⁵ Tzaferis 1983. ²⁴⁶ See the discussion in Ch. 5.

The last stages of use are dated to the second half of the eighth century, and it seems that the monastery was not abandoned before the ninth century.

A different case is provided in nearby **Hippos-Sussita**, which shows considerable decline following the earthquake in 749. Located on a high, steep spur facing Tiberias on the east of the Sea of Galilee, this small but complex town prospered in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.²⁴⁷ It contained at least four churches constructed along its main *decumanus*. Sussita was heavily damaged by the earthquake of 749, from which it never recovered, and was completely abandoned in the ninth or tenth centuries.

Although the excavations point to the decline of the town after the earthquake, it should be noted that Islamic historical sources list the town as an important settlement in one of the sub-regions of Jund al-Urdunn as late as the middle of the ninth century.²⁴⁸

JARASH-GERASA

Although not a district capital, Early Islamic Jarash emerges as one of the largest cities in Jund al-Urdunn, showing a clear pattern of continuity from Byzantine times. Early excavations at the site unearthed impressive remains from the Roman and Byzantine city and revealed patterns of constant urban growth. This large city, which covered an area of c.85 ha encircled by walls, was constructed in the monumental Roman style of the second and third centuries (Fig. 2.13). It contained wide colonnaded streets flanked by public buildings, a *nymphaeum*, a large agora, two large bathhouses, two main pagan temples—the Artemis and the Zeus compounds—and two theatres in the northern and southern parts of the city. A large hippodrome was located south of the city walls. Gerasa's urban landscape further developed during the Byzantine period, when no fewer than fifteen churches were constructed within its walled area, about half of them dated to the sixth century.

Like Beth Shean, Gerasa went through a process of urban change which started in Byzantine times. The large monumental temples and public institutions of the Roman period were gradually abandoned in the fifth and sixth centuries, but not destroyed. Private constructions of different sizes and functions were incorporated within their massive walls. For example, the lower terrace of the temple of Zeus was occupied in the sixth century by houses and industrial installations.²⁴⁹ A considerable number of new buildings, mostly residential units, were constructed throughout this century in various sections of the city, and the foundation of additional new churches

²⁴⁷ Segal and Eisenberg 2007.

²⁴⁸ Elad 1999.

²⁴⁹ Rasson and Seigne 1989.

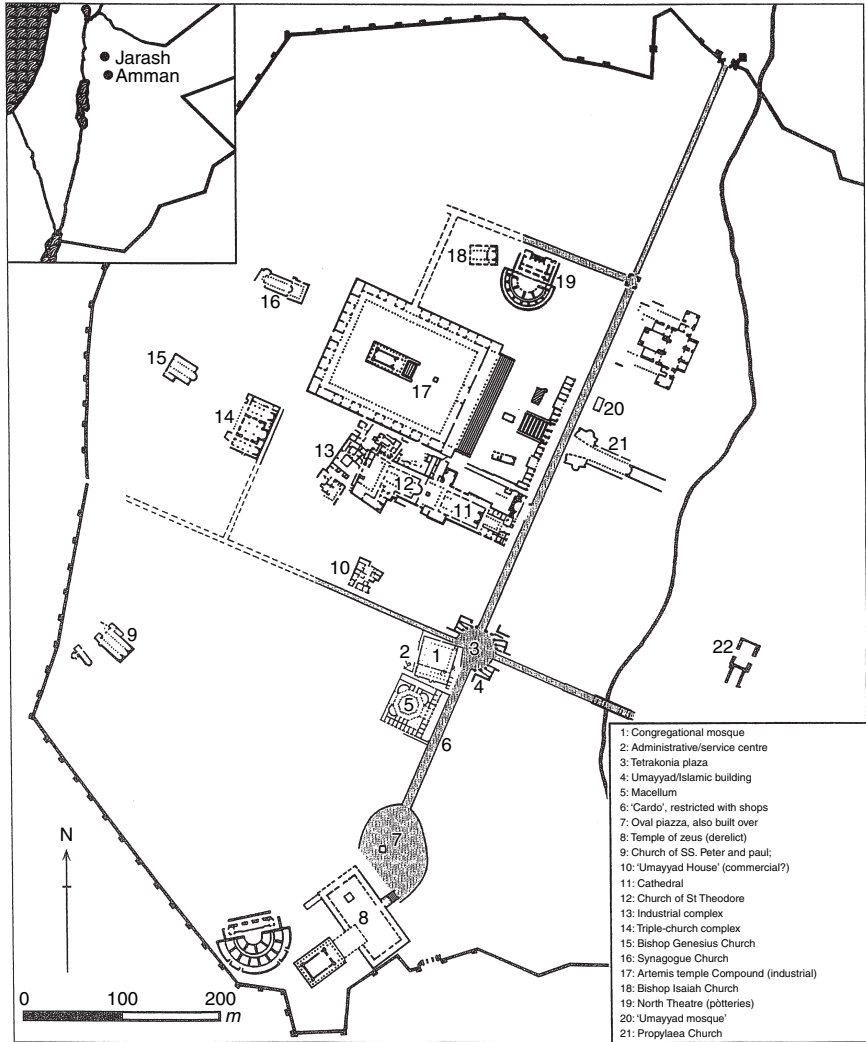


Fig. 2.13 Jarash: map of the Byzantine and Early Islamic city (after Walmsley *et al.* 2008, courtesy of Alan Walmsley).

continued into the seventh century. Although it has been suggested that Byzantine Gerasa declined in the second half of the sixth century,²⁵⁰ recent excavations point to an uninterrupted continuity into the Early Islamic period. Gerasa was conquered by the Arabs in 635. After a short period of stagnation it prospered, preserving its Christian character and introducing new Islamic

²⁵⁰ e.g. Liebeschuetz 2001, 62. See also Kennedy 1985a.

elements. The large congregational mosque identified in the heart of the city and recently excavated,²⁵¹ together with the continuous use of some of its Christian churches in the eighth century and beyond, reveals the multicultural society that characterized Jarash in the Early Islamic period.

Jarash was explored at the beginning of the twentieth century, and thoroughly excavated between 1928 and 1934.²⁵² These excavations focused on the monumental remains of Roman temples and Byzantine churches, and practically ignored the presence of Early Islamic remains. Only the second wave of excavations, starting in the 1980s, revealed that the city continued to flourish during Early Islamic times.²⁵³ For example, a careful examination of the excavated churches shows that most of them continued to function at least into the eighth century and perhaps even later, and none of them was abandoned or damaged in the course of the Arab conquest.²⁵⁴

The discovery of a large congregational mosque and its adjacent buildings in the city centre shows that urban change in Jarash continued beyond the Byzantine period. The mosque was constructed near one of the main urban intersections, between the *cardo* and the southern *decumanus*. This large structure (39 × 45 m) was incorporated into the monumental framework of Byzantine Gerasa. The mosque had colonnaded porticoes on three sides and a broad, triple-aisled hall facing its southern wall, where the *mihrab* was installed. The main entrance to the building was in its northern wall, facing the *decumanus*. An additional entrance was created in the eastern wall, leading to the *cardo*, which served in the Early Islamic period as the central market place of the city.²⁵⁵

It is worth noting that the new mosque was accommodated within the existing Byzantine-period city centre and was adjusted to its main arteries. It was located near the junction of the *cardo* and *decumanus*, and the alignment of its *qibla* wall—slightly to the south-east—necessitated the adaptation of the new building to the existing urban grid. This was done by constructing a row of shops on its eastern side. The location of the congregational mosque at the very heart of the city and its connection to the urban thoroughfares points to the prosperity of Jarash in the eighth and ninth centuries. This economic prosperity encompassed the introduction of commercial and industrial facilities both into the wide colonnaded streets and next to the mosque. Additional new structures were built along the southern part of the *cardo*, at the southern *decumanus*, and on the oval plaza, and these were carefully accommodated into the existing urban framework.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ Walmsley and Damgaard 2005; Walmsley 2007a, 80–6; Walmsley *et al.* 2008.

²⁵² The excavations were conducted by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, the American School of Oriental Research, and Yale University. See Kraeling 1938.

²⁵³ See Zayadine 1986, 1989; occasional excavation reports have been published in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*. For a recent evaluation, see Simpson 2008.

²⁵⁴ Schick 1995, 315–22. ²⁵⁵ Walmsley 2007a, 84–6.

²⁵⁶ Walmsley *et al.* 2008; Blanke *et al.* 2010; Simpson 2008, 116–17.



Fig. 2.14 Jarash: small Early Islamic mosque in the northern section of the city.

Excavations at a row of shops located between the mosque and the *cardo* revealed abundant finds, indicating a lively commercial area that functioned at least until the ninth century. Particularly noteworthy are two marble tablets in secondary use, containing Arabic inscriptions which relate to the shopkeepers' accounts of customers' names and amounts owing.²⁵⁷

The newly constructed mosque and its adjacent market provided a vivid expression of the central position of Jarash as a regional centre for the villages in its hinterland. The expansion of markets into the public areas of the city was connected with the growth of economic activities in Jarash and its hinterland during the seventh and eighth centuries. Construction of churches intensified in the seventh century in at least two large villages near Jarash. **Rihab**, a large village to the east of the city, contained no fewer than eight Byzantine churches. Two of the churches were dedicated in 635, the year of major battles between the invading Arabs and the Byzantine army in northern Jordan. Two other churches were established shortly before the Arab conquest.²⁵⁸ **Khirbet es-Samra**, a nearby village, revealed similar finds. It contained at least eight

²⁵⁷ Walmsley *et al.* 2008, 122–6.

²⁵⁸ The church of St Stephen was dedicated in 620, the church of St Peter in 624, the Prophet Isaiah church in 635, and the Menas church in the same year. See Piccirillo 1980, 153–6, Schick 1995, 442–3.

churches, and in two of them new mosaic floors were laid in 635–640.²⁵⁹ It seems that major construction at this site was undertaken in the first half of the seventh century, and settlement continued at least into the eighth century.²⁶⁰

As in Beth Shean, the overall picture of change in Jarash and its hinterland between the sixth and ninth centuries is more complicated than previously suggested, testifying to a constant decline of urban structures starting in the second half of the sixth century.²⁶¹ Changes in monumental construction in the city indeed began in the sixth century and, as in Beth Shean, were expressed in the contraction of the wide colonnaded streets, additions to existing monuments, and a more liberal attitude to private buildings in public spaces. However, these were not a sign of decline but rather indicated a change in values and attitudes to the urban landscape. The private buildings and the expansion of industrial and commercial facilities into the city centre indicated urban vitality and the increased prosperity of the local population, not a decline. Although several public buildings in Jarash were abandoned by the middle of the seventh century (for example, the areas around the Temple of Artemis), in other areas of the city construction was intensified.²⁶² As in Beth Shean, a network of pottery workshops was installed between the northern and southern *decumani*, with two large workshops located in the precincts of the deserted Temple of Artemis and the northern theatre. These were in use at least until the ninth century.²⁶³ The construction of a small mosque in this area (Fig. 2.14) is further evidence of its vitality in the Early Islamic period.

It seems that this process of growth and expansion of local industries continued in the eighth and ninth centuries, when Jarash and its hinterland went through a period of economic prosperity fostered by the local civic authorities, who made public spaces available for light industry and commercial facilities.²⁶⁴ The decline of several large public buildings in the city was not a sign of the demise of the urban landscape, but rather an indication of a conceptual change in the focus of activities, which was expressed in an increase local commercial networks. These changes were instituted by the late sixth and early seventh centuries, and were formalized in the eighth century with the installation of the new congregational mosque.

The existence of the congregational mosque, together with the continuing operation of a number of churches, provides additional evidence of the multicultural character of society in Early Islamic Jarash. As in Tiberias, Jarash

²⁵⁹ A new mosaic floor was laid in the church of St George around 640, and the church of John the Baptist had a mosaic laid over the original stone pavement around 635. See Humbert 1990, Schick 1995, 377–8.

²⁶⁰ These conclusions are also supported by the excavations at the village cemetery, which yielded many inscriptions from the 7th and 8th cents. See MacAdam 1994, Nabulsi 2007.

²⁶¹ Kennedy 1999, 229; Liebeschuetz 2000, 47–50, 2001, 295–8.

²⁶² Walmsley 2007b, 334. ²⁶³ Schaefer and Falkner 1986.

²⁶⁴ Walmsley 2007a, 81–7, 2007b, 335–8.

was inhabited both by its existing Christian population and by the newly arrived Islamic elements. The location of the congregational mosque did not prevent the churches from functioning in other parts of the city. The mosque was not constructed near an existing church, but in the city centre, by its main urban intersection. Like the congregational mosques in Tiberias and Ramla, it was associated with the lively commercial activities in the markets that developed along the major arteries of Jarash.

FROM POLIS TO MADINA?

This comprehensive picture of urban change in the main cities of Palestine and Jordan provides a firm basis from which to observe the transformation ‘from Polis to Madina’ as defined by Kennedy in his seminal 1985 article.²⁶⁵ Based on the archaeological findings that have been accumulated in the last thirty years, a new insight into the process of change in cities emerges. The abundant new data provide some useful tools for addressing the question of urban change in cities of the Near East in the second half of the first millennium.²⁶⁶

Before going into the interpretation of archaeological findings it will be worth examining two historical sources that relate to the realities of daily life in cities during Byzantine and Early Islamic times: the writings of Julian of Ascalon from the sixth century and the Geniza documents from the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Julian of Ascalon, an architect living in the southern coastal city of that name around the middle of the sixth century, provided one of the most detailed references to the domestic components of Byzantine Ascalon in his *Laws and Customs of Palestine*.²⁶⁷ The detailed information on the physical aspects of the city provided by Julian relates to daily life, residential buildings, industry and commerce, urban services, and infrastructure.²⁶⁸ He included vast amounts of information about the size and shape of buildings, such as the description of building façades, the number of storeys, details of doors and windows, and even the location of hearths and fires in private bathhouses.

The residential houses of sixth-century Ascalon are described either as single-storey family homes or multi-storey (up to three- or four-storey high) apartment blocks. The description included details about balconies, roof terraces, gutters, latrines, and cisterns, which are also found in the archaeological record.²⁶⁹ Commercial buildings included warehouses and shops, some

²⁶⁵ Kennedy 1985a.

²⁶⁶ The following section is an expanded and updated version of Avni 2011a.

²⁶⁷ Geiger 1992; Hoffman 2004, 36–43. ²⁶⁸ Hoffman 2004, 39.

²⁶⁹ See the detailed discussion in Hakim 2001.

of them installed in residential areas. A number of buildings shared residential functions with commercial and industrial functions. Sometimes the same courtyard was divided between living quarters and an industrial workshop. The streets were usually flanked by shops located on the ground floor of residential buildings. Commercial activities were extended into the public thoroughfares, and local legislation was required to control this penetration into public domains.

Sixth-century Ascalon emerges from Julian's descriptions as a lively, crowded city, packed with industrial and commercial activities. The encroachment onto main thoroughfares because of increased population pressure on the densely inhabited areas of the city was one of the main aspects of urban life in Ascalon during this period. The relationship between private and public domains became more problematic with the penetration of buildings and installations into the wide colonnaded streets of the Roman period. Yet public domains of the sixth-century city included the streets and porticoes, water and waste drainage system, and open areas and gardens. One of the main tasks of local legislation was to protect the public areas from infiltration by the neighbouring population that inhabited the dense residential quarters.

An interesting aspect of Julian's description is his reference to the location of industrial activities within the city. He listed a number of industrial installations that were incorporated within the residential areas of the city: dyers, glass and pottery manufacture, oil presses, launderers, rope makers, cheese makers, gypsum kilns, and limekilns. The location of these polluting installations in relation to residential areas seems to be of major concern to the city's inhabitants. Many highly polluting industries, such as pottery kilns and limekilns, dyeworks, and glassworks were located in the urban areas. It seems that the municipal authorities were trying to maintain control over the location of these industries, placing them in peripheral areas and not in densely inhabited districts. In later periods these installations penetrated widely into the residential areas.

Additional service buildings were included in the urban areas: taverns, brothels, stables, and animal pens. Specific rules were designed to minimize the disturbance caused to the neighbouring population.

Julian's detailed descriptions show that the process of penetration by commercial and industrial installations into the urban living quarters was fully present in the cities of the sixth century, and the municipal authorities tried to restrict and control it, apparently with little success.²⁷⁰ The coexistence of both commercial and residential functions represents the beginning of a long and slow process of transformation from the rigid principles of the Roman classical city, in which a strict separation between public and private domains

²⁷⁰ This attitude is well expressed by Kennedy (1985a) and in the detailed work of Saradi (2006).

existed, to the lively, crowded, and somewhat chaotic Byzantine and Early Islamic city.

A comparison of the urban realities in sixth-century Ascalon with sources describing the city life of the tenth and eleventh centuries reveals a strikingly similar picture. Among the most detailed sources on daily life in cities during this period are the documents from the Cairo Geniza, which give information on many aspects of urban societies. The thorough studies of Goitein, relating mainly to the city of Fustat in Egypt, as reflected in the Geniza documents, provide a comprehensive source for the study of urban life in the tenth and eleventh centuries.²⁷¹ Like the descriptions of Julian of Ascalon, the Geniza documents detail the physical environment of the city and its houses. The textual data are complemented by the results of the large-scale archaeological excavations conducted in Fustat during the twentieth century.²⁷²

Three types of house were defined by Goitein on the basis of textual evidence,²⁷³ and these can be linked to structures discovered in the excavations. The first, the 'Family House', which is the most frequently mentioned place in the Geniza documents, is remarkably similar to many houses discovered at Fustat. It contained a single structure or compound belonging to one family, and included a network of rooms flanking a central courtyard.²⁷⁴ The second, the 'Bazaar House', is a combined commercial and residential building, which consists of stores or commercial spaces in the ground floors and living apartments in the upper floors. This type was similar to a number of complex buildings excavated in Fustat.²⁷⁵ The third, the 'Apartment House', is the largest type, consisting of a large building, three or four storeys high.²⁷⁶

One of the most striking aspects of the comparison between sixth-century Ascalon and eleventh-century Fustat is the similarity in the description of houses and commercial-industrial installations, and their location in the urban context. Large mansions of wealthy people were located near the bazaars and industrial zones, and the basic form of central-court house with rooms flanking an inner courtyard was continuously maintained in the cities and towns of the Byzantine and Early Islamic period. The division between residential areas and commercial-industrial zones in Fustat was further blurred in comparison with Ascalon.

²⁷¹ Goitein 1978, 1983, 47–150.

²⁷² Large sections of Fustat were excavated in 1920, but the results were not fully published. Additional excavation took place from the 1970s. See, for the main publications, Bahgat and Gabriel 1921, Scanlon 1994, Kubiak 1987, Gayraud 1991; the following description refers mainly to the discussion in Hoffman 2004, 43–9.

²⁷³ Goitein 1978, 11–13.

²⁷⁴ Goitein 1978, 11–13; see also Hoffman 2004, 46 and fig. 2.12.

²⁷⁵ Bahgat and Gabriel 1921: Maison VI and Groupe I. Hoffman 2004, 44 and fig. 2.11.

²⁷⁶ The archaeological evidence for this type is questionable, as no finds of upper floors were made in Fustat. One large house (Maison II) might be related to this type. Hoffman 2004, 47–8 and fig. 2.13.

This similarity calls for a reconsideration of the existing paradigms for development, change, and decline in cities of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. This question has been widely discussed, in accordance with Kennedy's model of urban change.²⁷⁷ Revising previous assumptions and establishing the framework for a new paradigm for urban transformation in Syria, Kennedy summarized his thesis with the following statement:

The picture that emerges from this study suggests that the urban change in the Middle East took place over a number of centuries and that the development from the *polis* of antiquity to the Islamic *madina* was a long drawn out process of evolution. Many of the features which are often associated with the coming of Islam, the decay of the monumental buildings and the changes in the classical street plan, are in evidence long before the Muslim conquest. We should perhaps think in terms of a half millennium of transition.²⁷⁸

A reconsideration of some of his main arguments through the prism of the accumulating archaeological data leads to an insight into the process of change in the cities of Palestine and neighbouring areas. The central role of the city in both Byzantine and the Early Islamic societies, one of the main arguments on which Kennedy's model is based, was much reinforced by the extensive exploration of the cities of the Near East. It is evident that Islamic society, like that of Byzantium, was oriented around the city. Urban structures in Syria-Palestine continued to exist, in contrast with their decline in the Western Roman Empire.²⁷⁹ While previous research saw the 'Islamic city' as a degeneration of the classical planned cities that were designed according to orthogonal principles,²⁸⁰ Kennedy emphasized that similar principles of urban planning were applied both in the Hellenistic-Roman cities and in the newly established Early Islamic settlements.²⁸¹ These were designed in a clear pattern of planned enclosures (for example, in 'Anjar and Qasr al-Hayr East), and the Muslim town planners adopted the principles of their predecessors in Roman and Byzantine times.²⁸²

It seems that the evidence from the excavations in the cities presented above strongly supports this argument. The urban continuity and development of Beth Shean, Tiberias, Caesarea, Jarash, and other cities which were based on the former urban tradition of the Byzantine period, show that the central role of the city in local societies did not change between Byzantine and Early Islamic times.

²⁷⁷ Kennedy 1985a, b. ²⁷⁸ Kennedy 1985a, 17.

²⁷⁹ Kennedy 1985a, 4. See Liebeschuetz 2001, 295–310, Ward-Perkins 2000, 2005, 123–37, Whittow 2003, Wickham 2005, 613–26, Cameron 2012, 151–62.

²⁸⁰ See e.g. von Grunebaum 1955, Alsayyad 1991, 14–22, for a summary of traditional ideas.

²⁸¹ Kennedy 1985a, 16.

²⁸² The same planning concepts applied in the large Abbasid cities of Sammara and Baghdad, which revealed precise orthogonal planning patterns. See Rogers 1970, Leisten 2003, Northedge 2006, Lassner 2000, 153–79.

A major point in Kennedy's argument is the chronology of urban change. He claims that the Byzantine–Islamic urban transformation in Syria was a long-term process, which started as early as the sixth century. This transformation was the product of a profound social and economic change, in which the coming of Islam was only one aspect. The large-scale Justinianic constructions in cities like Antioch and Jerusalem were the very last efforts of monumental Roman construction in the Eastern Roman Empire.²⁸³ In other cities no monumental construction was conducted after the mid-sixth century and existing buildings suffered from continuous neglect, which resulted in long-term decline.

While the results of excavations in Beth Shean seem to support Kennedy's argument that urban change started in the second half of the sixth century, the connection between this change and long-term decline is questionable. The chronology of decline in Caesarea is debated and it seems that the city underwent decline only in the second half of the seventh century; Jarash continued to flourish into the seventh century and was reinforced with the construction of the congregational mosque in the eighth century; and in Jerusalem there are no signs of urban decline before the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁸⁴ Thus the concept of long-term *decline* starting in the sixth century should be reconsidered.

The accumulating archaeological evidence from the cities in Palestine and Jordan gives Kennedy's conclusions a different interpretation. While the process of change indeed spanned a long period of time, the connection between change and long-term decline is not evident. There are no better words than those of Kennedy himself to warn against this type of value judgement:

We should avoid making inappropriate value judgments. The development of the Islamic city is often seen as a process of decay, the abandonment of high Hippodamian ideals of classical antiquity and the descent into urban squalor. On the contrary, the changes in city planning may, in some cases, have been the result of an increased urban and commercial vitality.²⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that, although Kennedy uses the term 'change' rather than 'decline', he concludes that the outcome of these changes in cities was a constant decline in their political status, economic stability, and physical resilience. The contraction of the Roman-style, wide colonnaded streets (in Apamea, Damascus, Palmyra, Jarash, and other large cities); the abandonment of theatres; the conversion of large bathhouses to buildings designed solely for the functional purpose of bathing and not as social gathering places; the change of the location of markets from the main city squares to a linear pattern along the streets—all were viewed by Kennedy as indicators of decline in cities.

²⁸³ Kennedy 1985a, 17.

²⁸⁴ See the discussion in Ch. 3.

²⁸⁵ Kennedy 1985a, 17.

Tsafrir and Foerster, on the basis of their excavations at Beth Shean, stated more explicitly that the changes in the city's layout, which started in the sixth century, inevitably led to decline. They describe in detail the changes in the principles of building and street construction that affected the city shape and were related to the adjustment of the new buildings to the principles of 'comfortable disorder':

The archaeological evidence from the civic center of Scythopolis reveals a flourishing city whose citizens respect the architectural achievements of the past but at the same time give priority to the practical and utilitarian needs . . . the execution of new projects was inferior in the quality of architecture and ornamentation to that of the earlier Roman monuments . . . The planners of early sixth century did not hesitate to design curved streets and to change the width of the streets according to their needs.²⁸⁶

They define the narrowing of the wide arteries and the loose style of buildings not as decline, but rather as indicating a change in values, a preference for the practical approach to the design of the urban landscape to the aesthetic perfection of the former period.²⁸⁷ However, they conclude that this process inevitably led to decline:

There is a certain stage in the process of change when we are obliged to use terms such as 'decline' or 'deterioration' of the city. We believe that this arrived when the streets were narrowed to lanes.²⁸⁸

It seems that the distinction between 'change' and 'decline' as indicated in the archaeological record remains vague. Evaluations of urban landscape in the Near Eastern cities are much influenced by the concepts of Roman building tradition. Thus, contraction of streets and abandonment of monumental architecture are regarded as signs of decline. In their discussion of the meaning of urban changes in Beth Shean, Tsafzir and Foerster refer precisely to this issue:

What is merely a 'change' in the concept of urbanism and the priorities of urban life? How can we discern a 'decline' or a 'deterioration' of a city? When can we speak about the 'disintegration' of the town and its institutes? At what stage do we declare the 'demise' of the ancient city? Are scholars justified in interpreting the occupation of the porticoes along the streets by tradesmen and peddlers with their makeshift stalls as a sign of deterioration, or, on the contrary, should they see it as an indication of commercial prosperity and social activity? We have no clear answer, but there is no simple correlation between the deterioration of the city's monumental architecture and urban decline.²⁸⁹

In his evaluation of the mechanisms of physical change in cities, Kennedy found that demands for building space in the city centres, which in many

²⁸⁶ Tsafzir and Foerster 1997, 120–1.

²⁸⁷ Tsafzir and Foerster 1997, 116.

²⁸⁸ Tsafzir and Foerster 1997, 141.

²⁸⁹ Tsafzir and Foerster 1997: 141.

places were triggered by expanded commercial activities, were the main reasons for the contraction of streets into narrow alleys.²⁹⁰ Streets were also narrowed because of the disappearance of wheeled transport in the Near East. When donkeys and camels replaced chariots, there was no practical need for wide streets.²⁹¹

The change was also expressed in the role of local industries and commerce in the city. In the Byzantine period most economic systems were based on the agricultural and industrial hinterlands that provided services to the consumer city, while in the Early Islamic period commerce and industry became the dominant factor in the urban economy, and the cities of Palestine and Jordan became centres of production and trade.²⁹²

This process was also connected with changes in the involvement of the central or municipal governments in planning and development in cities. While, in the Byzantine period, the municipal authorities strictly prevented private construction in public domains, Islamic rule brought a more liberal approach, and in many cities the local authorities did not intervene when private construction spread into public spaces.²⁹³ Whittow connected this process with the decline of the city's *curiale* during the sixth century. Imperial patronage, which replaced the local nobility, was not politically and financially strong enough to support public development in the cities.²⁹⁴

While developing the argument that the contraction of streets did not reflect a decline in urban vitality, but rather showed an increased economic activity, Kennedy stressed the major role of both human and natural catastrophes as agents of change, weakening local societies and infrastructure.²⁹⁵ The effects of the Byzantine–Persian wars, the bubonic plague of 542, and a number of earthquakes were suggested as the main triggers of change and decline in the role of cities as centres of political power. When the Arabs came, this change (which was obviously also expressed in decline) was already fully in motion, and many cities did not survive the combined effects of these catastrophes.²⁹⁶ Kennedy's view was adopted by other scholars, who claimed that the decline in the cities of Syria-Palestine between the sixth and eighth centuries was an outcome of the combined impact of catastrophic events, which turned the cities into pale shadows of their former Byzantine greatness.²⁹⁷

The processes of 'change' and 'decline' are associated with the wider question of the differences between the urban centres of the Western and Eastern Roman Empire. This led to two opposing views among historians and

²⁹⁰ Kennedy 1985a, 21–2. ²⁹¹ Kennedy 1985a, 26; see also Bulliet 1975.

²⁹² Walmsley 2000. ²⁹³ Kennedy 1985a, 25.

²⁹⁴ Whittow 1990; Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 120. ²⁹⁵ Kennedy 1985a, 18.

²⁹⁶ According to Kennedy, only a few cities, e.g. Damascus and Aleppo, continued to flourish between 550 and 750, but these were the exception and not the rule. See also Foss 1997.

²⁹⁷ e.g. Liebeschuetz 2001, 295–8; Northedge 1999, 1083–5. For the contraction of the economy from the middle of the 6th century. see Morrisson and Sodini 2002, Laiou and Morrisson 2007. See also the opposing view of Morony 2004.

archaeologists, who were labelled by Ward-Perkins as ‘catastrophists’ and ‘continuists’.²⁹⁸ While the former were influenced by the ‘decline and fall’ process of cities in the western Mediterranean in the fifth century, the latter focused on the continuity of urban centres in the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East after the sixth century, and saw both late antiquity and the rise of Islam as a single continuous process.²⁹⁹

The extensive archaeological research on Byzantine and Early Islamic cities in Palestine and Jordan over the past thirty years calls for a revision of many existing concepts, clearly supporting the ‘continuist’ approach. No substantial evidence has been revealed to support the idea of massive damage to cities as a consequence of the Byzantine and Persian wars or the bubonic plague.³⁰⁰ On the contrary, in many cities construction continued throughout the period. Even in areas that displayed a temporary decrease in the number of urban public constructions,³⁰¹ this was complemented by an increase in the construction of churches and monasteries in towns and villages. The concept of continuity of settlements during the late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods is reinforced by stratigraphic and ceramic sequences retrieved from numerous sites, and it seems that the urban and rural communities of the fifth and sixth centuries continued uninterrupted into the Early Islamic period.³⁰²

The growing impact of archaeological findings requires a different approach. The urge for a new concept, emphasizing continuity and change, was clearly outlined by Averil Cameron in her recent study:

Much too much emphasis is still placed on the ‘collapse’ of the Roman Empire and the ‘transformation’ of the classical world and too little in long-term continuities . . . Changes in late antique urbanism have received enormous attention as indicators of decline or transformation; yet cities in antiquity, like cities now, did not exist in a steady state but were constantly being remodeled and adapted . . . it is these changes taken together which have misleadingly been labeled ‘decline’.³⁰³

Thus, it seems that the change ‘from *Polis* to *Madina*’ should not be connected with sudden political changes or rapid transformations in the concepts of urbanism. It was a very prolonged process that started with gradual changes in the common conceptual and esthetic values of Roman classical urbanism and ended with the milder Byzantine attitude of ‘comfortable disorder’ in urban planning. The process of change was intensified by the gradual introduction of industries and commercial activities into the urban areas, a process which was already evident in the sixth century, as Julian of Ascalon described.

²⁹⁸ Ward-Perkins 1997.

²⁹⁹ See, in particular, Bowersock 1990, 71–82, Bowersock *et al.* 1999, Cameron 2012, 210–12.

³⁰⁰ See the discussion in Ch. 5.

³⁰¹ As Di Segni 1999 suggests.

³⁰² See the discussion in Ch. 4.

³⁰³ Cameron 2012, 210–11.

This process produced a gradual but constant change in the outer shape of the city between the sixth and the eleventh centuries, but it did not involve a radical alteration to the residential areas of cities and towns. The dwellings of the tenth and eleventh centuries were built with the same planning concept as those of the fifth and sixth centuries, as is demonstrated by both the historical descriptions and the spacious private residences excavated in various cities in the region.

The transformation from Roman to Byzantine–Early Islamic concepts, and from monumentality to functionality, by no means implies that the Roman city was a rigid, extravagant structure lacking the vitality of commercial and industrial activities. This issue has been recently addressed by Marlia Mango:

Monumentality is itself a mark of economic vitality. The pomposity of monuments is a conscious display of economic success. . . . The two, therefore, are not mutually exclusive, although the first can bankrupt the second and the second can overwhelm the first.³⁰⁴

The position of the Roman city as a lively commercial hub and intellectual meeting place at the centre of a large network of villages was well-maintained during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. The main components of the Roman city, such as paved streets, well-organized markets, large public baths, and central secular and religious monuments to the political and religious regimes, were preserved to a great extent in the later periods. The conceptual change was expressed in the balance between monumentality and functionality, and between public and private initiatives. The liberal approach of governmental and municipal authorities gradually allowed the penetration of utilitarian structures, many of them based on private initiatives, into the public domains, and supplied the fuel for the changing concepts of urbanism.

The seeds of this process of change in the cities can be discerned as early as the late fourth century. The slow and gradual transformation of cities, which included the abandonment of the rigid Roman construction principles, was visible in the sixth century, and it continued to develop for another half millennium, until the eleventh century. The Early Islamic cities of Palestine and Jordan showed a similar orthogonal street grid to their Roman and Byzantine predecessors, evincing a gradual process of change. In fact, the emergence of the medieval *madina* in many regions of the Near East was visible only in the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries.

This long-term transformation and preference for the concept of ‘change’ over the concept of ‘decline’ is well-presented in the urban processes that occurred in Jerusalem and Ramla, which are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

³⁰⁴ Mango 2011*b*, 239.

A Tale of Two Cities: Jerusalem and Ramla in the Early Islamic Period

Among provincial towns none is bigger than Jerusalem . . . The buildings of the Holy City are of stone, and you will not find finer or more solid construction anywhere. . . . The markets are clean, the mosque is the largest, and nowhere are Holy Places more numerous.

Al-Ramla delightful and well-built . . . is a city. The water is good to drink and flows freely. Fruits are abundant and of every possible kind . . . Trade here is profitable and the means of livelihood easy . . . it possesses elegant hostelries and pleasant baths . . . spacious houses, fine mosques, and broad streets.¹

These lively descriptions of Jerusalem and Ramla, written by al-Muqaddasi in the second half of the tenth century, emphasize the central position of the two cities in Early Islamic Palestine. Jerusalem, the main religious centre for Christians, Muslims, and Jews, became a multicultural city, preserving its former Byzantine urban layout. The city underwent a slow and gradual transformation, maintaining its major monuments and introducing the new Islamic centre in and around the Haram al-Sharif. Ramla, the capital of Jund Filastin and the only large city in Early Islamic Palestine which was established *ex nihilo*, became an administrative centre and commercial hub, introducing a new concept of settlement and urbanism hitherto unknown in this region. Although located only 50 km apart, the two cities, while in close contact, represented two different entities. Much the same as with Jerusalem and Caesarea in Byzantine times, and with Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in modern times, the clear division of functions between the sacred and profane was also evident in Early Islamic Jerusalem and Ramla.

Jerusalem kept its leading religious position, while developing into a multicultural centre shared between Christians, Muslims, and Jews, who lived together. The city was supported by a large investment of funds from both Muslim and Christian sources. Pilgrimage remained a major source of income,

¹ al-Muqaddasi, 166–7, 164; tr. Collins 1994, 140, 139.

and the large network of Christian monasteries and pilgrim hostels continued to function in and around the city. Although it has been suggested that the city declined in the Early Islamic period,² archaeological findings show that political and religious change did not affect the city's layout. No destruction or abandonment of churches and monasteries was observed in the three centuries following the Arab conquest, and only in the tenth and eleventh centuries can stagnation and decline be determined by the contraction of its urban area and the reduction of its population.

Ramla, in contrast, had no former historical legacy or religious significance. Its central position in Palestine was the direct outcome of an administrative decision taken by caliph Sulaiman b. 'Abd al-Malik in 715 to create a new capital for Jund Filastin by building a completely new city to replace Caesarea as the governmental centre of Palestine.

Like the differences in origin and form of Early Islamic Jerusalem and Ramla, the pace of archaeological research in the two sites is fundamentally distinctive. While Jerusalem has been the focus of large-scale surveys and excavations in the last 150 years which have made possible the reconstruction of its urban layout in Byzantine and Early Islamic times, Ramla has received only limited scholarly attention, and its urban layout was a *terra incognita* until the 1990s.

In the last thirty years both cities have been subject to extensive archaeological research, an outcome of accelerated modern development. Excavations in Jerusalem, conducted both inside the Old City and in areas surrounding it, have revealed an extensive picture of its urban development in Byzantine and Early Islamic times, and made possible a better understanding of the mechanisms of urban change. The thorough work on the city's hinterland uncovered a large network of villages, farmsteads, and Christian monasteries which were established during the Byzantine period and continued to function in Early Islamic times. Large-scale archaeological exploration did not begin in Ramla until 1990, but since then c.200 rescue excavations have been conducted throughout the modern town, exposing significant segments of the Early Islamic city and providing an opportunity to establish a chronological framework of its development and expansion between the eighth and eleventh centuries.

With the evaluation of the processes of urban development in both cities, a complicated picture emerges, adding new perspectives on settlement patterns and cultural changes in Early Islamic Palestine. Wide-ranging questions of continuity and change between the seventh and eleventh centuries are brought out by the comparison of the two cities.

² See e.g. Gil 1996, Linder 1996.

BYZANTINE AND EARLY ISLAMIC JERUSALEM

Byzantine Jerusalem, the main Christian religious centre in the Holy Land, reached a zenith in urban development and population growth in the sixth century. The city's prominence was augmented by the large-scale prosperity of Palestine between the fourth and seventh centuries, and it has been suggested that its urban expansion in Byzantine times was even greater than in the first century CE.³

The large-scale constructions in Byzantine Jerusalem were directly connected with its central position in the Christian world and with the constant yearly flow of thousands of pilgrims. Many of them stayed in the city for a prolonged period and some became permanent residents.⁴ This extensive pilgrimage brought economic prosperity and demographic growth, and was one of the triggers for the expansion of the urban area beyond the previous city limits. The city wall, constructed in the late third or early fourth century, was extended in the fifth century to include the areas of the City of David and Mount Zion to the south⁵ (Fig. 3.1). The construction of numerous churches and monasteries in and around Jerusalem was intensified in the fifth and sixth centuries, when the city became the seat of a patriarch.⁶

The Church of the Ascension on the top of the Mount of Olives, which had been built by the fourth century, marked the future extension of the city limits to the east. In the centuries that followed a number of Christian institutions were established in this area, along the Jerusalem–Jericho road, and to the north of the Damascus Gate. Major urban development was conducted in Jerusalem in the sixth century under Justinian. Especially notable were the renovation of the *cardo* to a wide colonnaded street extending to the southern part of the city and the monumental construction of the New Church of Mary the Mother of God (the Nea Church).⁷

The outline of Jerusalem with its main public buildings is depicted in the Madaba Map from the second half of the sixth century, showing a detailed oval-shaped east–west bird's eye view of the city. The map presents the city's urban layout, emphasizing the central position of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre within the urban landscape⁸ (Fig. 3.2). It shows the western and eastern *cardines* as wide colonnaded streets and depicts a large number of churches within the walled area. The city was surrounded by a massive wall with numerous towers and several gates. The main gate shown at the left

³ Tsafirir 1999, 285; Kloner 2003, 54*–5*.

⁴ Walker 1990; Wilken 1992; Sivan 2008, 187–229.

⁵ Tsafirir 1999, 285–95.

⁶ Sivan 2008, 219–25; Ashkenazi 2009, 70–153; Rubin 1991, 229–32.

⁷ Tsafirir 1999, 307–10; Gutfeld 2012.

⁸ Avi Yonah 1954; Donner 1992; Tsafirir 1999, 342–51.

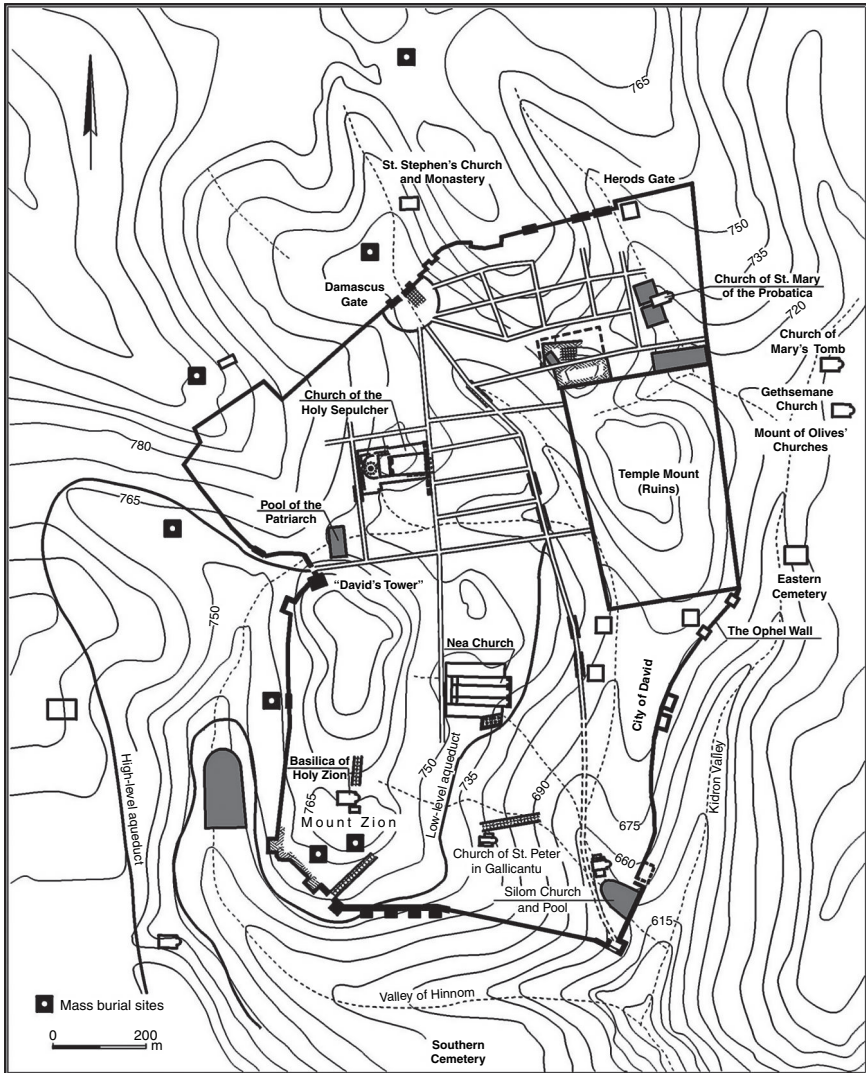


Fig. 3.1 Jerusalem: map of the city in the sixth and early seventh centuries, indicating the mass burial sites of the Persian conquest in 614.

(northern side) is St Stephen's Gate (the present-day Damascus Gate), which opens into a large square with a pillar in its centre, leading to the two north-south main arteries of the city. The two largest churches of Jerusalem—the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Nea Church—are represented along the western *cardo*, and the Church of Holy Zion is shown in the right (south) section of the map. A number of additional churches are represented, some of which have been identified with ones mentioned in historical sources. It is interesting to note that



Fig. 3.2 Depiction of Jerusalem in the Madaba Map, second half of the sixth century.

the large open compound of the Temple Mount is hardly noted on the map. This was probably an intentional act to emphasize the triumph of Christianity, represented by its magnificent churches, over Judaism, represented by the now ruined and deserted Temple Mount.⁹

Another visual depiction of Jerusalem appears on the mosaic floor of the Church of St Stephen in Umm el-Rasas, Jordan, laid in the second half of the eighth century.¹⁰ Jerusalem is represented among other cities of Palestine and Jordan in a rectangular panel that depicts its main monuments (Fig. 3.3). The city is shown from a north–south perspective, with the Damascus Gate flanked by two towers in its foreground. The Rotunda (or aedicule) of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is depicted at the back, and behind it another two large churches, probably the Nea and the Church of Holy Zion.

In both representations, from the second half of the sixth century and from the second half of the eighth century, Jerusalem appears as a thriving city adorned with many churches, a vivid manifestation of the continuity of the Christian presence in the city after the Arab conquest.

⁹ Eliav 2005, 125–50.

¹⁰ Piccirillo and Alliata 1994, 217, tav. X; and see Ch. 4 for the description of the site.

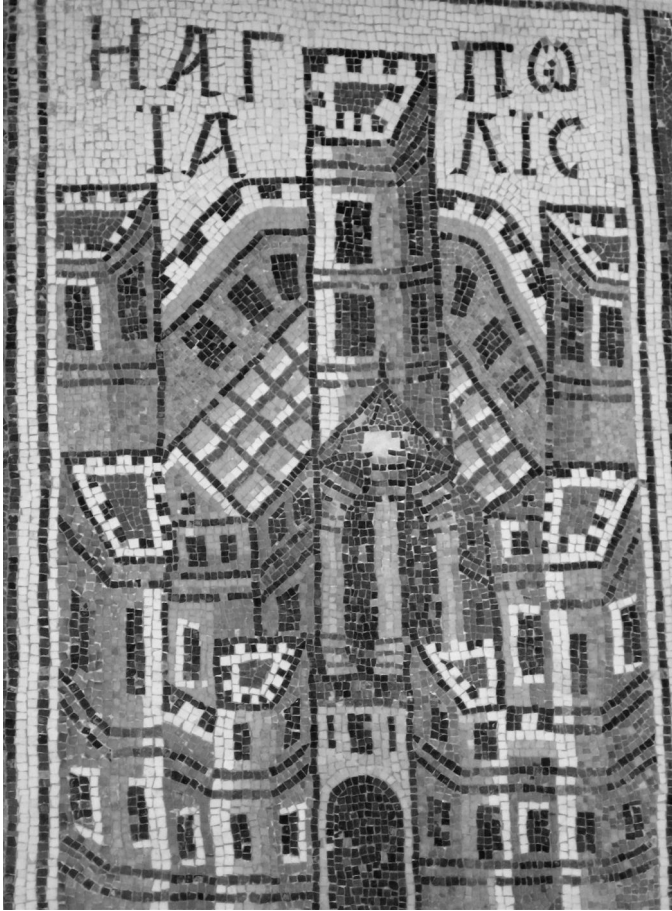


Fig. 3.3 Depiction of Jerusalem in the mosaic of the Church of St Stephen at Umm al-Rasas, eighth century.

Further information on Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem is provided by descriptions of pilgrims.¹¹ A typical pilgrim itinerary would include, apart from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a number of main attractions: the Nea Church, which dominated the skyline of the city from the time of its construction in the sixth century; the Church of Holy Zion on Mount Zion; the churches and monasteries on the Mount of Olives and along the Kidron Valley; and the monastic compounds to the north of the Damascus Gate. The ruined Temple Mount was included in the itinerary, as Christian pilgrims identified in

¹¹ See e.g. the descriptions of the Piacenza Pilgrim and Arculf in the Prologue. For other descriptions of Jerusalem, see Wilkinson 2002, Aist 2009.

its south-eastern corner the place where James, the brother of Jesus, was martyred.¹²

When Jerusalem was taken by the Arabs in 638, surrendering under a treaty, it could have been expected that the Christian presence in the city would be restricted, but apparently the dramatic change in the political and religious leadership did not affect the city's landscape and its Christian population.

The Umayyad rule over Jerusalem was marked by the large-scale constructions on the former Temple Mount (now renamed al-Haram al-Sharif) and its surroundings during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. The construction of the Dome of the Rock, the al-Aqsa mosque, and the monumental buildings to the south and west of the Haram created a new Muslim hub, opening the way for a clear definition of urban zoning: the Islamic section dominated the eastern part of the walled city, while the previous Christian centre remained in its western and northern parts and around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This new urban zoning, which also included a renewed Jewish presence in Jerusalem (see below) did not prevent Christian institutions from also flourishing under Islamic rule. Jerusalem preserved its urban limits, forming a thriving society dominated by Christians, who maintained their religious institutions. The Christian presence declined only in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when churches and monasteries on the outskirts of Jerusalem were abandoned. The city limits contracted, and the line of Byzantine fortification in the south was also abandoned. Nevertheless, the detailed descriptions of al-Muqaddasi (c.965) and Nasir-i Khusraw (1047) attest to the relatively wealthy position of Jerusalem in the tenth and early eleventh centuries.

The second half of the eleventh century was marked by instability and decline. Although not in a state of collapse, Jerusalem became a smaller city. The Crusader conquest of 1099 was launched against a city that had undergone much deterioration, in which only a few monumental buildings preserved the aura of what had formely been the main city in Palestine.

While Byzantine Jerusalem was identified with the two monumental churches—the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Nea Church that dominated its skyline—Early Islamic Jerusalem was marked by the monumental constructions of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque. These two magnificent monuments shifted the focus of religious orientation in Jerusalem back from the Western Hill to the former Temple Mount platform. In his seminal book, *The Shape of the Holy*, Oleg Grabar proposed an interesting equilibrium for urban zoning in Early Islamic Jerusalem. He suggested that the city was symbolically defined by two pairs of monumental buildings, facing each other from the Haram compound in the east and the Western Hill in the

¹² Eliav 2005, 140–6.

west. The Dome of the Rock was constructed to face and challenge the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the religious hub of the city. Further south, the al-Aqsa mosque was constructed as a monumental congregational mosque facing the Nea Church, the largest Christian building in Jerusalem. The tension and competition between these two pairs of monumental buildings was visible in the city's skyline.¹³

The Haram area attracted the attention of scholars from the beginning of modern research on Jerusalem in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Numerous studies viewed the renovation of the ancient sanctuary and its adaptation to the new Islamic rule as a landmark of the transition of Jerusalem from a Christian city to a major Muslim centre. Several studies were specifically devoted to the architecture and historical context of the Early Islamic monuments,¹⁵ and various interpretations were suggested for the political and religious background of the major Islamic shrines.¹⁶ Unfortunately, as no archaeological excavations were allowed within the Haram, the reconstruction of its architectural development is based mainly on studies of the monuments still standing.¹⁷

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a major destination for pilgrims, was described time and again by travellers. The detailed modern study of the church began in the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth century it was accompanied by a number of limited-scale excavations at the church compound conducted by archaeologists working with the blessing of the Christian religious authorities.¹⁸ As in the study of the Haram, most scholarly work concentrated on the history and the architecture of the church and little attention was paid to neighbouring areas of the Christian quarter.

Archaeology and the urban transformation of Jerusalem

Modern research on the urban layout of Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem has traditionally been based on the integration of historical descriptions and on architectural studies of those monuments still standing. A number of references to monumental buildings within the city are found in pilgrim itineraries and ecclesiastical sources,¹⁹ and these provided the basis for modern detailed observations on their architecture.²⁰ Only a little attention was given to studies on

¹³ Grabar 1996, 160–73.

¹⁴ See Avni and Seligman 2006 for a summary of the history of the research.

¹⁵ e.g. Creswell 1969; Grabar 1959; 1996; Rosen Ayalon 1989; Kaplony 2002.

¹⁶ Raby and Johns 1992; Johns 1999; Elad 1992; Kaplony 2002, 2009; see also Elad 1995, 147–62 for a summary of the research.

¹⁷ Richmond 1924; Hamilton 1949; Creswell 1969.

¹⁸ Avni and Seligman 2006, 269–74. ¹⁹ Wilkinson 2002; Walker 1990.

²⁰ e.g. Corbo 1981, Biddle 1999 on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; and Creswell 1969, Rosen-Ayalon 1989, Grabar 1996 on the Haram.

urban development and changes in the city and its hinterland, and most scholars ignored the fact that the urban layout of Jerusalem in the Early Islamic period was not much different from that of the Byzantine period. Urban zoning between the different communities was also neglected, as was the archaeological study of residential areas in the city.

With the expansion of excavations throughout the city and its surroundings, other aspects of the city's layout were considered. Comprehensive archaeological research in Jerusalem since the 1970s contributed the lion's share to the reshaping of our knowledge of its urban development during the second half of the first millennium. A detailed archaeological survey and scores of rescue excavations supplemented hundreds of earlier excavations conducted in and around Jerusalem from the middle of the nineteenth century.²¹ While earlier excavations and studies concentrated mainly on the study of the major monuments, recent research yields references to household archaeology, the urban necropolis, the agricultural hinterland, and the sophisticated water installations in and around the city. The evaluation of the abundant data from surveys and excavations provided the basis for the reconstruction of the city's layout and surroundings in Byzantine and early Islamic times.

Large-scale excavations in Jerusalem provided a valuable contribution to the reconstruction of its shape and major monuments. Particularly notable were the excavations in several areas: the upper parts of the City of David by Crowfoot and Fitzgerald in 1925–1927 and Ben Ami in 2006–2012; the western and southern walls of the Temple Mount by Kenyon in 1961–1967, Mazar and Ben Dov in 1968–1978, and Reich in 1994–2000; the Western Wall plaza by Weksler-Bdolah in 2005–2009; the Jewish quarter by Avigad in 1968–1982; the citadel by Johns in 1934–1947; and the Damascus Gate and north wall by Hamilton in 1937–1938.²² The data on Byzantine and Early Islamic remains were also based on numerous small-scale excavations and probes along the city walls and in the alleys of the Old City, which provided further information on the city's fortifications and ancient street system.²³

Many rescue excavations conducted around Jerusalem in the last thirty years have supplemented data for a comprehensive reconstruction of the settlement picture in the Jerusalem region. Excavations in a number of villages, farmsteads, churches, and monasteries in the vicinity of the city added information on the expansion of Jerusalem beyond its walls and on its rich

²¹ It is estimated that between 1853 and 2010 about 1,700 excavations were conducted in and around Jerusalem. See Galor and Avni 2011 for updated evaluations; see Kloner 2003 for summaries of the archaeological survey of Jerusalem. See also the comprehensive survey of sites by Bieberstein and Bloedhorn 1994.

²² A good summary of excavations in Jerusalem is provided in Geva 1993; and see, for an update until 2005, in *NEAEHL* v, s.v. Jerusalem.

²³ See e.g. Gutfeld 2011 for the Byzantine streets of Jerusalem and Weksler-Bdolah 2006–2007 for the Byzantine city wall.

agricultural hinterland during the periods in question.²⁴ The accumulating archaeological findings point towards an urban expansion in and around Jerusalem between the fourth and the seventh centuries.²⁵ New constructions expanded the urban area far beyond the city walls, especially to the north and east.²⁶ This urban expansion persisted throughout most of the Early Islamic period, and only in the tenth and eleventh centuries was a considerable decline noticed.

The city walls

The city walls of Jerusalem are well represented in the Madaba Map and in the mosaic of Umm el-Rasas. Arculf (c.680) described them as consisting of eighty-four towers and six main gates.²⁷

A number of excavations within the Old City and along the Ottoman city walls have revealed the chronology and development of the fortifications.²⁸ The Late Roman wall, constructed at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century,²⁹ was extended to the south in the fifth century to include Mount Zion and the City of David. The extension of the walls, initiated by the empress Eudocia, was one of the largest construction projects of Byzantine Jerusalem.³⁰ The western and northern sections of the wall remained unchanged from the time of construction in the late third or early fourth century. These sections went through several stages of alteration in the Early Islamic period, and were probably renovated and partly rebuilt in the eighth century.³¹ They show a clear pattern of continuity from Byzantine to Early Islamic times with no signs of destruction.

The city limits of the Byzantine period were maintained throughout most of the Early Islamic period, and only at the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century was the urban area reduced to its present-day city-wall limits³² (Figs. 3.4, 3.5). The northern section continued in use until the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem;³³ the eastern and southern sections surrounding the Haram were probably renovated with the construction of the Islamic monuments during the seventh and eighth centuries;³⁴ and the southern wall continued to delimit the core of the urban area up to the second half

²⁴ Adawi 2010; Seligman 2011. ²⁵ Tsafirir 1999, 285–95, 330–42.

²⁶ Kloner 2003. ²⁷ Wilkinson 2002, 168. ²⁸ Weksler-Bdolah 2006–2007, 2011.

²⁹ Tsafirir 1999, 135–42; Geva 1993, 693; see also a different interpretation by Weksler-Bdolah 2006–2007.

³⁰ A few sections of the southern wall were excavated in the late 19th century: Bliss and Dickie 1898, 1–47. Recent excavations at the site (2007–2009) fully exposed a section of this wall. See Zelinger 2010. For a suggested date for the Byzantine southern wall, see Weksler-Bdolah 2006–2007.

³¹ Hamilton 1944; Magness 1991; Weksler-Bdolah 2011.

³² Bahat 1996, 37–41. ³³ Hamilton 1944; Weksler-Bdolah 2011.

³⁴ Ben Dov 2002, 174–82.

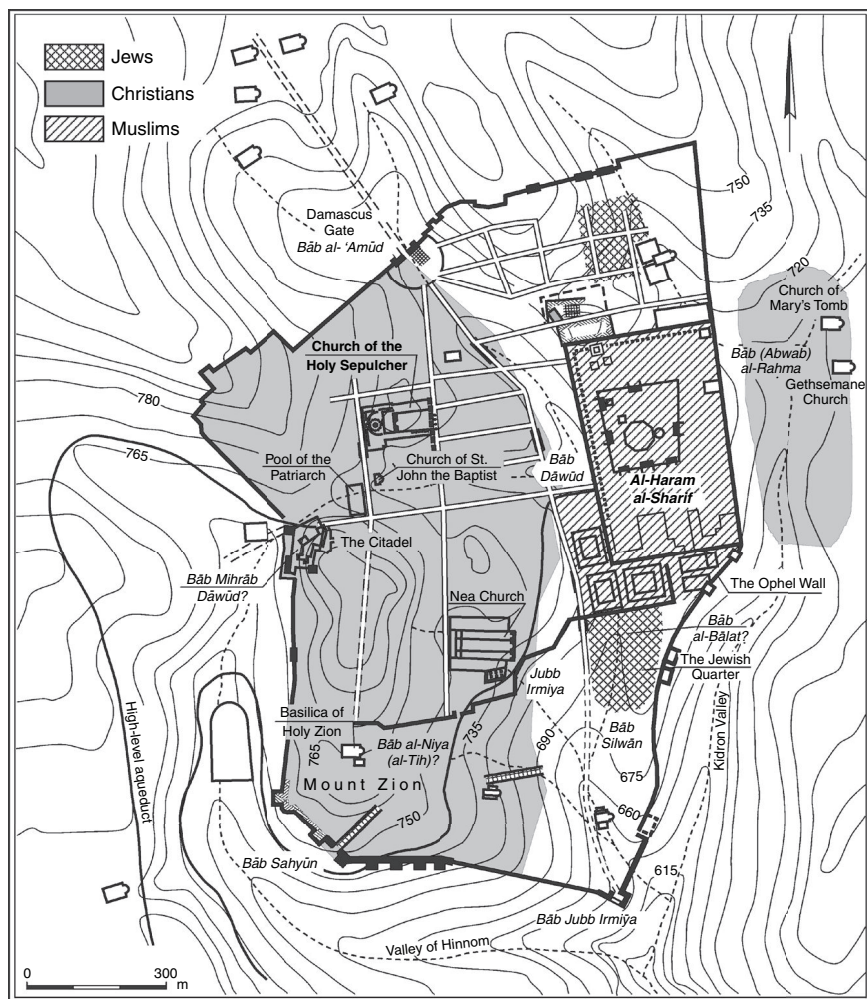


Fig. 3.4 Jerusalem: map of the city in the eighth–ninth centuries indicating the Christian, Muslim and Jewish areas.

of the tenth century,³⁵ the beginning of the eleventh century,³⁶ or even as late as the second half of that century.³⁷

The abandonment of the southern wall is associated with the overall decline of Jerusalem in the eleventh century. It has been suggested that one of the last restorations of the city walls, by caliph al-Zahir after the 1033 earthquake, did not include the southern section of the city, leaving Mount Zion and the

³⁵ Vincent and Abel 1914–1926, 942; Tsafirir 1977.

³⁶ Bahat 1996, 43–9.

³⁷ Ben Dov 2002, 187–92.

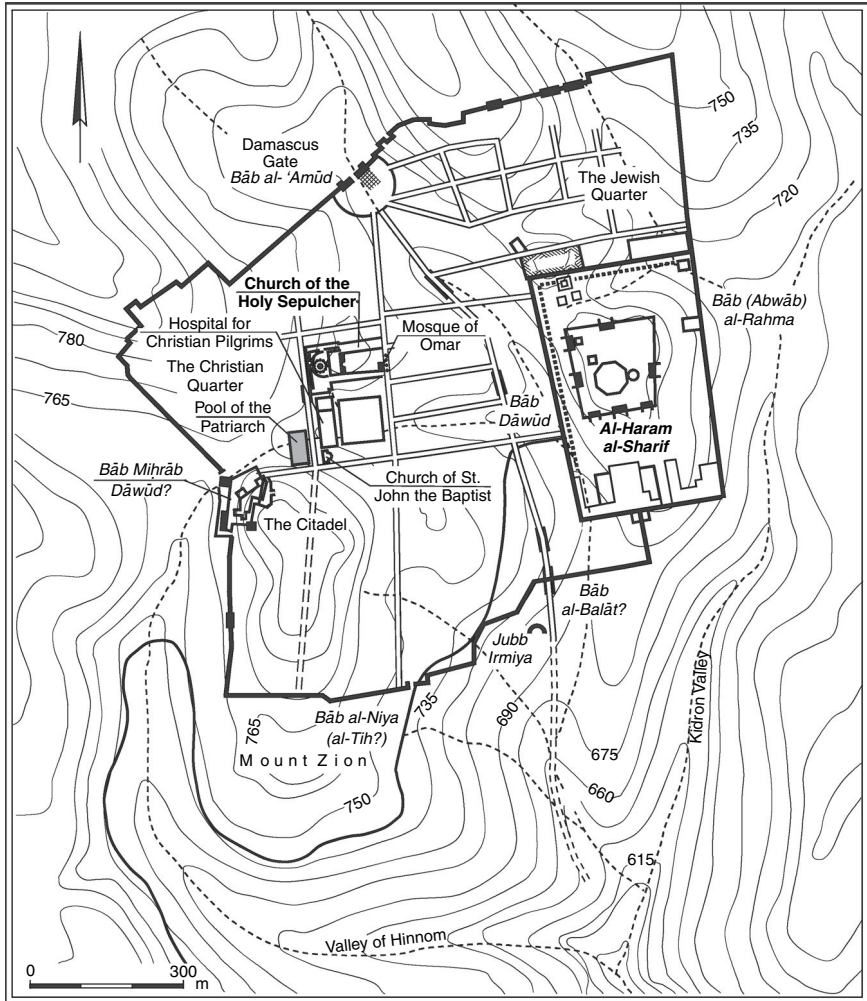


Fig. 3.5 Jerusalem: map of the city in the eleventh century.

City of David outside the walls.³⁸ As a consequence, these residential areas were eventually abandoned. This last effort to restore the city walls involved the destruction of churches in the outer periphery of Jerusalem and the use of their stones for the restoration work. When Nasir-i Khusraw visited Jerusalem in 1047, he described the walls as well built, but following the contracted limits of the city.³⁹

³⁸ Bahat 1996, 45.

³⁹ Nasir-i Khusraw 19, tr. Thackston 2001, 27–9.

A number of sources mention several gates incorporated in the city walls.⁴⁰ The main entrance to Jerusalem from the west was through the David Gate, located east of the present day Jaffa Gate, and the main northern access was from the Damascus Gate, referred to by Arculf as the St Stephen Gate and by al-Muqaddasi as Bab al-‘Amud. An additional gate mentioned frequently is the Jericho Gate or the Benjamin Gate, located in the eastern wall, to the north of the Haram compound. Several gates are mentioned in the southern wall, but their exact location is disputed by scholars. These were placed either along the southern wall extended in the Byzantine period or along the contracted wall of the eleventh century.⁴¹

The citadel, located on the top of the Western Hill, to the south of the present-day Jaffa Gate, presents an interesting case. Following the excavations at the site it was suggested that this area was fortified as an urban stronghold as early as the Early Islamic period. This dating was based mainly on the remains of a single large, round tower with which segments of two walls were associated.⁴² Johns related this tower to the Early Islamic Governor’s Palace, locating the palace in the Western Hill. However, no further remains associated with this tower were found. The suggested reconstruction of the stronghold is based only on this tower and its relation to the local topography, which creates a very narrow and irregular compound of $c.40 \times 15\text{--}20$ m.⁴³ Such a hypothetical structure could not have accommodated within it a large palatial or military building and seems to be highly speculative. In addition, the discovery of the large network of monumental buildings to the south and east of the Haram compound suggests that a more reasonable location for this palace should be within these monumental constructions (see the discussion below). It seems from a reconsideration of the archaeological finds and historical sources that during the Early Islamic period the western city wall of Jerusalem continued along its old line, and the first citadel on the Western Hill was established only after the Crusader period.⁴⁴

Streets, markets, public buildings, and residential area

It is widely accepted that the present-day street system of the Old City is based on the urban street layout of Aelia Capitolina which was formalized in the second century. This network of streets and alleys was continuously used during the Byzantine, Early Islamic and later medieval times.⁴⁵ A number of

⁴⁰ Bahat 1996, 46–9.

⁴¹ See the discussion in Tsafirir 1977, Bahat 1996, 47–9.

⁴² Johns 1950, 160; see also Geva 1983, Bahat 1996, 40 for a suggested reconstruction. See also Busse 1994 on early Christian and Muslim traditions.

⁴³ See Bahat 1996, 40.

⁴⁴ Ellenblum 2007b.

⁴⁵ Wilkinson 1975, 118–36; Bahat 1996, 49–52; Tsafirir 1999.

probes conducted in the main alleys of the Old City, in which the large stone pavements of the Late Roman and Byzantine streets were unearthed directly underneath the present-day streets, provided further evidence of this continuity.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, as the finds from many of these probes have not been fully published, it is not possible to determine the exact date of construction and renovations of the ancient streets. While most historical sources have no direct references to the streets of Jerusalem, Nasir-i Khusraw, in his description of the city in the mid-eleventh century, mentioned that the streets of Jerusalem are well built and constructed of stone slabs.⁴⁷ His description may suggest that at least a few of the elaborate Roman and Byzantine streets were still in use at the time of his visit to Jerusalem, some 800 years after their construction.

The main colonnaded streets of the city, the *cardo* and the *decumanus*, were narrowed and filled with shops and other commercial buildings in the course of the Early Islamic period, as was common in other cities of the Near East.⁴⁸ A clear indication of the changes and the contraction of the eastern *cardo* was recently found in excavations at the Western Wall plaza. A 45 metre long section of the *cardo* was exposed here forming an 11-metre-wide colonnaded street, paved with gigantic limestone slabs (Fig. 3.6, a–b). The street dates to the period of Aelia Capitolina, and it was constructed at the time of the establishment of the Roman colony in the second century. The excavation revealed a detailed sequence of superimposed streets, showing the development and changes of the *cardo* from the time of its construction to the twentieth century.⁴⁹ The Roman street was flanked by colonnaded *stoas* and rows of shops which created a 24-metre-wide artery. The section exposed was part of the elaborate street that extended from the Damascus Gate in the north to the City of David in the south. At least two intersecting east–west streets, both leading to the Temple Mount, were identified along its course. It seems that the eastern *cardo* functioned throughout the Byzantine and the beginning of the Early Islamic periods at its original width. It was contracted dramatically in the eighth century, becoming a lane of only 4.7 metre-wide. A large building (30 × 18 m.), consisting of a central courtyard flanked by rooms, was constructed on its western side, covering part of the street and the row of shops to its west. This building was damaged by an earthquake in the late eighth or early ninth century, but then repaired and continued in use into the tenth century. In its later stages it was converted into several large elongated halls, each with an entrance facing the street.

⁴⁶ Tsafirir 1999, 142–56, 295–300; Gutfeld 2011; Kloner and Bar Nathan 2007; Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009.

⁴⁷ Nasir-i Khusraw, 28, tr. Thackston 2001, 28.

⁴⁸ Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009. See also Kennedy 1985a, 11–13 for a general evaluation; for examples from specific sites: Beth Shean—Tsafirir and Foerster 1997, 138–40; Gerasa—Kraeling 1938, 116–17; Palmyra—Al-As'ad and Stepniowski 1989.

⁴⁹ Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009.

Although the function of this building is not clear, it may have been used as a public market during the Early Islamic period. Its central location along the city's main artery, close to the Haram, may hint at commercial use.⁵⁰ Opposite the building, on the eastern side of the street, another row of shops was constructed in the eighth century, and it seems that the whole area was converted into a commercial hub.

The location of this section of the street in one of the focal points of Early Islamic Jerusalem, to the north of the large monumental buildings (the 'palaces', for which, see below) and near one of the main entrances to the Haram, may explain the contraction of the wide colonnaded street into a narrower, but more practical commercial street flanked by shops. It seems that the demand for private commercial spaces created large-scale pressure on public domains, and the colonnaded streets became irrelevant for such a crowded city. The contraction of public streets and the installation of shops along them is another indication of the vitality of Early Islamic Jerusalem.

The former eastern *cardo* and the buildings along it were damaged sometime in the ninth century, probably by an earthquake.⁵¹ This part of the street was temporarily abandoned, covered by a thick fill, and remained in ruins for a considerable period of time. It is interesting to note that no contemporary destruction levels were found elsewhere in Jerusalem. On the contrary, the ninth and tenth centuries seem to have been periods of relative prosperity, and this ruined section of a main street is an exception in the urban layout. However, a ruined and temporarily abandoned section of a lively city was not uncommon in the Early Islamic period. Short-term neglect of streets or residential areas was also found in Ramla (see below), and a number of references in the Geniza documents mention ruined areas in the city of Fustat.⁵²

Additional segments of minor streets were unearthed in other parts of the city, for example in the Christian quarter, on the slopes of Mount Zion, and in the City of David. These were laid in the Byzantine period and continued to function during the Early Islamic period, keeping the same street levels.⁵³ This pattern of continuity in the use of streets is evident in all parts of the city. For example, a Late Roman and Byzantine street exposed under the present-day Christians Street remained on the same levels until Crusader times. Sections of streets discovered in the Tyropoeon Valley show similar continuity, but with a considerable rise in street levels,⁵⁴ and a contraction of the wide streets into narrow lanes flanked by commercial and industrial installations, similar to the ones revealed in the eastern *cardo*,⁵⁵ is known from other sections of the city.

⁵⁰ I thank Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah for discussing these issues.

⁵¹ Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009.

⁵² Goitein 1983, 21–3.

⁵³ Gutfeld 2011, Bahat 1996, 51–2.

⁵⁴ Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929, pl. 22.

⁵⁵ Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009.



Fig. 3.6 Jerusalem: excavations at the Western Wall plaza: a. general view; b. detail of the eastern Roman cardo (Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).



(b)

Fig. 3.6 continued.

One aspect of the change in the concept of urbanism in Jerusalem was the location of public markets within the city. While in the period of Aelia Capitolina commercial activities were concentrated in a nearby compound in the forum area, the Byzantine period witnessed the development of linear markets along the main arteries of the city. Markets gradually developed along the eastern *cardo* and the adjacent streets leading to the Temple Mount platform. This process was further intensified in the eighth–tenth centuries with the contraction of the main colonnaded streets and the introduction of commercial activities into them. The role of the markets in the local economy is evident both from historical sources and from archaeological findings.⁵⁶ Major structural changes in the markets of Jerusalem have been dated to the ninth and tenth centuries. For example, the encroachment of the western *cardo*, originally a 22-metre-wide artery, created three parallel crowded and narrow alleys, each flanked by small shops, which still exist today. This change occurred as early as the ninth century, and not in the Crusader period as was previously believed.⁵⁷ It seems that the impact of local markets on the urban fabric was much stronger in Jerusalem compared with other cities in Palestine, as they were used both by the local population and by a large number of pilgrims.

⁵⁶ Elad 1982*b*; Weksler-Bdolah *et al.* 2009; *contra* Gil 1992, 407; Grabar 1996, 139.

⁵⁷ Elad 1982*b*.

As they are today, the bazaars along the main urban arteries were a meeting place for local inhabitants from different communities, as well as for foreign visitors.

Scholarly attention traditionally focused on the numerous monumental public buildings in Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem, rather than on comprehensive studies of the residential areas. While only a few private buildings are known from early excavations, the study of the residential areas has been aided by recent excavations in which segments of residential areas have been exposed in several areas in the city.⁵⁸ These include the remains of central-courtyard houses facing narrow streets, which present a continuous sequence of use from the end of the Byzantine period to the tenth and eleventh centuries. Within this long period, buildings were repaired several times by changes in interior space and the elevation of floors. The excavations at the City of David, in the Tyropoeon Valley, on the slopes of Mount Zion, and in the Jewish quarter show that the southern areas of Jerusalem were densely inhabited, and that the Byzantine-period private buildings continued in use throughout the Early Islamic period, with few changes and modifications. The excavations in the 1920s in the City of David exposed a considerable area in which the remains of several private houses were revealed. These were first dated to the Byzantine period, but the excavation report made no clear reference to pottery finds.⁵⁹ A re-evaluation of stratigraphy and finds shows a continuous sequence from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period, with no evidence of destruction.⁶⁰ Some of the houses seem to have been used for a long period of time, and it is suggested that an uninterrupted phase of occupation in this area continued into the eleventh century. A similar sequence of houses was revealed recently in the renewed excavations in the Tyropoeon Valley, south of the Dung Gate,⁶¹ and on the eastern slopes of Mount Zion.⁶² These residential areas also extended to the central and southern parts of the City of David, where a more spread-out urban layout was identified, with open spaces between the dwellings used as small agricultural plots. In addition, several industrial installations were constructed between the houses, which shows that the southern parts of the City of David were on the fringe of the more dense urban areas to the north.⁶³ Additional private buildings were exposed in the north-eastern section of the city, near Herod's Gate. These were inhabited in

⁵⁸ For the City of David, see Macalister and Duncan 1926; Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929; Ben Ami and Tchehanovetz 2010; for Herod's Gate, see Avni *et al.* 2001; Baruch *et al.* 2008.

⁵⁹ Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929, 58–60; Macalister and Duncan 1926, 137–45.

⁶⁰ Magness 1992. ⁶¹ Ben Ami and Tchehanovetz 2008a, 2010.

⁶² These were excavated in the 1970s and the results remain unpublished. A renewed excavation in this area is currently being conducted by S. Gibson. I thank him for this information.

⁶³ Bahat 1996, 68–70.

Byzantine and Early Islamic times, some of them continuously until the eleventh century.⁶⁴

Urban zoning

The urban zoning in Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem, based on division into ethnic communities, was exceptional compared with other cities in Palestine and Jordan.⁶⁵ Jerusalem became a Christian domain during the fourth and fifth centuries, pagans were Christianized, and Jews were not allowed to settle in the city. Apart from a possible small Samaritan community, Jerusalem was transformed into a monolithic Christian city by the sixth century. Its population consisted of a mixture of native inhabitants and Christians from abroad who, following their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, settled temporarily or permanently in the Holy City.⁶⁶ Urban development in Byzantine Jerusalem was much influenced by the presence of these newcomers and by the large funds allocated to the construction of churches, monasteries, and pilgrim hospices.⁶⁷

This homogeneity of the Christian presence in Jerusalem came to an end following the Arab conquest, when Muslims settled in the city and Jews were allowed to resettle in restricted areas. This created urban zoning according to religious and ethnic affiliations.⁶⁸ The Christian population was concentrated mainly around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and in the outer areas of the city. The newly constructed Islamic centre in and around the Haram al-Sharif was the focus of the Muslim presence; and the Jewish community was settled in between, at first in the southern part of the city and then probably in the north-eastern section (Fig. 3.4).

The Christian quarter and beyond

The crystallization of the Christian community of Jerusalem and its division into several denominations was also reflected in the physical separation into different zones in and around the city.⁶⁹ This urban division had already been formalized in the Byzantine period, and was further developed in early Islamic times, with almost every sect being represented in the Holy City. These sub-communities were identified by ethnic, geographical, and political characteristics. Members of each ethnic community preferred to segregate themselves

⁶⁴ Baruch *et al.* 2008, 1820.

⁶⁵ See Ch. 2 for the discussion on Caesarea, Beth Shean, and Tiberias, and Ch. 4 for other towns.

⁶⁶ Di Segni and Tsafrir 1999, 263–4.

⁶⁷ Sivan 2008, 187–229.

⁶⁸ Bahat 1996, 53–65.

⁶⁹ Linder 1996, 121–2.

within a distinctive area, as is common with the modern Christian communities of Jerusalem.

The Melkite Greek Orthodox community contained the largest segment of the local population, and was spread all over the city. It consisted of a mixture of local inhabitants who had converted to Christianity and of newcomers from outside Palestine.⁷⁰ Among its members were several well-known Church Fathers who contributed to the monastic institutions in the Judean Desert.⁷¹

Other Christian communities in Jerusalem were confined to specific areas. The Latins, who originally did not form any part of the local population, became more dominant with the increased pilgrimage to the Holy Land during the fifth century. The Latin community was concentrated on the slopes of the Mount of Olives and to the south of Jerusalem, where several monasteries were established by pilgrims from the West.⁷²

A smaller Armenian community was established around the fifth century by pilgrims who settled around churches and monasteries on the Mount of Olives and north of Damascus Gate.⁷³ The establishment of the present-day Armenian quarter dates to the Crusader period, when the Cathedral of St James was transferred from the Georgians to the Armenians to form the hub of the new Armenian quarter.

A Georgian presence in Jerusalem is documented from the early Byzantine period, continuing throughout the Early Islamic period. References to Georgian monks in the churches of Mount Zion and among the hermits on the Mount of Olives are found in numerous sources. The establishment of the Monastery of the Cross, south-west of Jerusalem, in the mid-eleventh century as a Georgian pilgrim centre further indicates the continuous presence of the community in and around the city. The monastery's domain included large agricultural fields surrounding it.⁷⁴

The Georgian (Iberian) community of the Byzantine period was concentrated in the western part of the city, as is evidenced by a reference to an Iberian monastery in the area of the 'Tower of David'.⁷⁵ A Georgian inscription in Greek from the 440s discovered west of the Jaffa Gate mentions the tomb of the Episcopos of the Iberians and the monastery that was bought by the Iberians.⁷⁶ A Georgian presence is also mentioned in the area of the Mount of Olives.⁷⁷ Other recent evidence of a Georgian monastic compound was found in Umm

⁷⁰ Ashkenazi 2009, 265–304; Levy-Rubin 2003. The name Melkite ('of the king') indicates that this community regarded itself as part of the imperial church.

⁷¹ Di Segni and Tsafirir 1999, 270–1.

⁷² Di Segni and Tsafirir 1999, 265–7; e.g. the large female monastery established on the Mount of Olives by Melania 'the Elder' in 432.

⁷³ Di Segni and Tsafirir 1999, 272–3; Amit and Wolff 2000.

⁷⁴ Linder 1996, 148–9, and references there.

⁷⁵ See Linder 1996, 147–52, for the development of the Georgian community in Jerusalem.

⁷⁶ Iliffe 1935. ⁷⁷ Linder 1996, 148.

Leisun, to the south of Jerusalem, where a dedication inscription in ancient Georgian script was found in the crypt of a chapel.⁷⁸

The Arab conquest and the transfer of government did not affect the continuity of Christian communities in Jerusalem, but it changed the delicate balance between the Christian denominations. Besides the large Greek Orthodox community, the presence of secessionist congregations—Nestorians, Jacobites, Copts, and Armenians—increased throughout the city and its surroundings.

The small Coptic community of Jerusalem expanded gradually during the Early Islamic period as a result of increasing contacts between Palestine and Egypt and the considerable numbers of Coptic pilgrims who settled in the city. That was also the case with the Armenian community, which extended its presence in the city, as is evidenced by the references to Armenian churches and monasteries in the ninth and tenth centuries.⁷⁹

A number of historical sources mention churches, monasteries, and Christian welfare institutions which continued to function in Jerusalem and its vicinity during the Early Islamic period.⁸⁰ The establishment of direct contacts between the Patriarch of Jerusalem and Charlemagne in the early ninth century was followed by a massive investment of funds for the construction of public buildings, particularly in the Christian quarter.⁸¹ A detailed list of Christian monuments in Jerusalem and its surroundings, known as the *commemoratorium*, was presented to the emperor Charlemagne in 808, with the purpose of obtaining financial assistance for the local Christian community. It details the names of various institutions and the number of clergy serving in them.⁸² Among the churches and monasteries listed are the Holy Church of Zion on Mount Zion, the New Church of Mary the Mother of God (Nea), the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu, the Church of St Stephen to the north of the Damascus Gate, Mary's Tomb in the Kidron Valley, and many others.⁸³ Especially interesting is the mention of a monastery at Akeldama, south of the city, which was constructed in the early ninth century with direct financial support from Charlemagne.⁸⁴

Historical documentation of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and its environs during Early Islamic times has been supported by archaeological findings. While early excavations, which did not include a detailed presentation of the finds, labelled most relevant sites as 'Byzantine' with no reference to later occupational phases, recent excavations show time and again a continuous sequence of use into the Early Islamic period. The excavations at the Church of the Holy

⁷⁸ Seligman and Abu Raya 2002. ⁷⁹ Linder 1996, 158.

⁸⁰ For a summary of known Christian churches and monasteries, see Bahat 1996, 87–95; Schick 1995, 325–59.

⁸¹ Bahat 1996, 61–3.

⁸² *Commemoratorium*, tr. McCormick 2011.

⁸³ Schick 1995, 105–7.

⁸⁴ Bahat 1996, 63 and references there.

Sepulchre and at the monastic compounds to the north of the Damascus Gate and on the slopes of the Mount of Olives have yielded particular evidence of this continuity.

The focus of the Christian presence in Jerusalem was around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Although it was continuously inhabited by Christians, it is not clear when this area was formally proclaimed as the Christian quarter of Jerusalem. According to William of Tyre it was defined as such 'when the Latins entered Jerusalem, and, in fact, many years previous to their arrival'.⁸⁵ He also described in detail the boundaries of the quarter, which match those of the present Christian quarter.

The Muristan area south of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was one of the sections which underwent extensive development in the early ninth century, but unfortunately the archaeological evidence for this construction is meagre.⁸⁶ Additional renovations were conducted in this area in the eleventh century.⁸⁷ It has been argued that this section of the city was further fortified in 1063, when the Latins contributed to the restoration of the city wall between the Jaffa Gate and the Damascus Gate.⁸⁸ Further evidence of the predominance of the Christian presence in this area is found in pilgrims' descriptions of the north-western section of the walled city as the domain of the local Christian communities.⁸⁹

The large-scale construction of Christian institutions in this part of the city shows that the local Christian community maintained its leading position in Jerusalem well into early Islamic times. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, its religious hub, remained physically unchanged and continued to attract thousands of pilgrims, as in Byzantine times. It seems that the church was not violently destroyed during the Persian invasion of Jerusalem in 614 or the Arab conquest in 638.⁹⁰ Evidence of the continuity of the Christian presence in the church and its surroundings has been found in recent surveys and excavations.⁹¹ Archaeological, architectural, and epigraphic finds show that considerable construction and renovations were conducted both in the church and in the adjacent compounds throughout Byzantine and Early Islamic times. Particularly significant is a recent study of the capitals of the Byzantine church, which contained monograms of Emperor Maurice (582–602). This suggests a large-scale renovation during his time, which included the replacement of structural columns and capitals in the church.⁹² The capitals were slightly damaged by fire, perhaps during the sack of the church by the Persians in 614,

⁸⁵ Quoted in Bahat 1996, 59.

⁸⁶ Several probes conducted in this area show scant remains of the Early Islamic buildings. See Kenyon 1974, 275.

⁸⁷ Bahat 1996, 60–5; Patrich 1984.

⁸⁸ Prawer 1980, 87.

⁸⁹ Wilkinson 2002.

⁹⁰ Avni 2010, 42–3.

⁹¹ Avni and Seligman 2003.

⁹² Di Segni 2011.

or when it was severely damaged in 1009, but they were left in position, which shows that the main church functioned throughout the Early Islamic period.

Additional data on the continuity of the Christian presence around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre have been revealed by recent excavations north of the church, where the remains of a hitherto unknown chapel were found in the cellars of the Coptic Patriarchate building⁹³ (Fig. 3.7). The chapel consisted of two aisles and a central nave and was roofed by a dome supported by four massive columns. Pottery and glass fragments found under small patches of its floor date the use of this chapel to the ninth and tenth centuries. It was probably demolished during the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by caliph al-Hakim in 1009.⁹⁴ This destruction, believed to be a disastrous event in the history of the church, did not affect the continuity of the Christian presence in this area. Although most sources claim that the church was totally destroyed by the caliph's order,⁹⁵ recent investigations have proved that significant parts of the original fourth-century building were left intact.⁹⁶ It seems that the damage was repaired in a relatively short time, and Christian liturgical practices and ceremonies were restarted.⁹⁷

Additional data have been retrieved from the areas south of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A Byzantine-period building known as the Church of John the Baptist remained intact and preserved its original Byzantine shape until modern times, with no evidence of destruction or changes.⁹⁸ Recent excavations at the site suggest that this was originally a Late Roman public building, perhaps a bathhouse that may also have been used during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods.⁹⁹

The development of the Christian quarter continued in the eleventh century. Close contacts between the Jerusalem community and the major European powers enabled the restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre following its partial destruction by al-Hakim. The works were conducted with financial support from Latin communities in Europe. Merchants from Amalfi were granted permission to build in Jerusalem and they constructed or restored a number of buildings in the Muristan, forming a monastery, a pilgrim hospice, and a hospital.¹⁰⁰ This area was further rebuilt in Crusader times, with the establishment of two large churches and other public buildings. The remains of these churches were still visible in the middle of the nineteenth century, before the construction of the present-day Muristan area.¹⁰¹

Although many scholars have regarded the period of the Christian presence in Early Islamic Jerusalem as one of turbulence and decline,¹⁰² it seems that the

⁹³ Avni and Seligman 2003.

⁹⁴ Avni and Seligman 2003, 158–9.

⁹⁵ Canard 1965.

⁹⁶ Biddle 1999; Avni and Seligman forthcoming.

⁹⁷ Biddle 1999, 72–3.

⁹⁸ Vincent and Abel 1914–26, 652–68; Tsafirir 1999, 302.

⁹⁹ Humbert 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Bahat 1996, 63–4.

¹⁰¹ Patrich 1984; Bahat 1991, 83–92.

¹⁰² e.g. Linder 1996; Gil 1992.

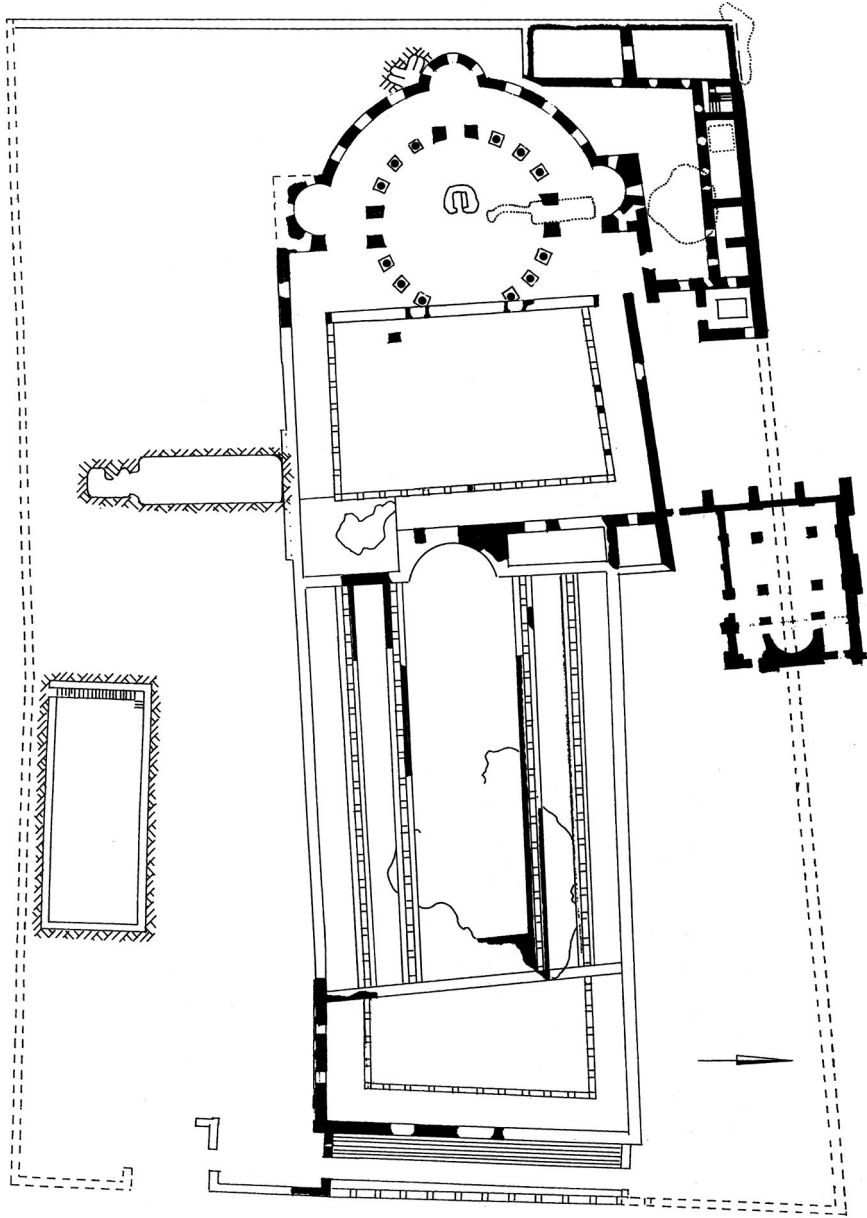


Fig. 3.7 Jerusalem: plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the tenth century, including an adjacent chapel to the north of the main church.

predominance of the Christian population was maintained throughout the Early Islamic period. Particularly significant is al-Muqaddasi's description of Jerusalem in c.965, in which he included a short statement complaining that despite three centuries of Islamic rule the majority of the population was still Christian.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, there are indications of a gradual Muslim penetration into the areas where Christians lived, for example the construction of the 'Umar mosque next to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (perhaps c.935). This mosque was probably located in the south-eastern section of the compound, as is evidenced by an Arabic inscription discovered in 1898, forbidding all non-Muslims from entering it.¹⁰⁴ The construction of a mosque near the main Christian centre of Jerusalem indicated the expansion of Muslim population and its penetration into areas that were previously an exclusively Christian domain.

Additional Muslim institutions were constructed around the Christian quarter in the eleventh century. Following the destruction of churches by al-Hakim in 1009, the Christian community was further oppressed, many churches and monasteries were abandoned,¹⁰⁵ and the contraction of the city walls affected the delicate balance between Christian and Muslim communities. Byzantine financial support for the restoration of the city walls in 1063 was stipulated in the fortification of the Christian quarter and the segregation of Christians living within it.¹⁰⁶

It seems that the shift in the demographic balance between Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem intensified during the second half of the eleventh century. Christians were confined to living only within their own quarter, while Muslims predominated in other areas of the city and its surroundings. The Seljuk conquest of Jerusalem in 1073 further reinforced the Islamic elements in the local population, and during their short-term rule in the city many Islamic institutions were developed.¹⁰⁷ The description of Jerusalem by Ibn al-'Arabi in the 1090s emphasizes the increased Islamic cultural and religious domination over Jerusalem.¹⁰⁸

The Islamic centre in the Haram al-Sharif

Early Islamic Jerusalem has been traditionally identified with the monumental buildings on the former Temple Mount and its surroundings, initiated by the Umayyad caliphs 'Abd al-Malik and al-Walid. The construction of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque in the late seventh and early eighth

¹⁰³ al-Muqaddasi, 167, tr. Collins 1994, 141; see also the Prologue.

¹⁰⁴ Clermont-Ganneau 1898, 302–62; Van Berchem 1925, 59–62; Bahat 1996, 59–61.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. the Kathisma Church (Avner 2006–7), and the monastery of Akeldama. See also Linder 1996, 139–42.

¹⁰⁶ Prawer 1980, 87; Gil 1996, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Gat 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Drori 1993; Gat 2002, 13–15.

centuries marked a major urban change, recreating the religious and administrative centre of the city in and around the Haram al-Sharif.¹⁰⁹ The main monuments on the Haram and the large administrative buildings to the south and west of the compound formed a separate quarter in the city. The identification of this area as the seat of the Muslim government, in sharp contrast to the Christian urban core to its west, emphasized the urban zoning separating Christians and Muslims.

The Temple Mount esplanade preserved its original size and shape from the Roman period. It is widely accepted that this area was deserted in Byzantine times,¹¹⁰ but occasional recent probes conducted in the northern part of the compound have revealed segments of walls from the Byzantine period, which may represent some construction activities in the Temple Mount esplanade during the fifth and sixth centuries.¹¹¹

The monumental constructions in the late seventh and early eighth centuries dramatically reshaped the large compound and included surrounding it with porticoes, with the exception of the eastern side. The central section of the esplanade was elevated and the Dome of the Rock was constructed in its centre. The Al-Aqsa mosque, located at the southern part of the lower esplanade, became the main congregational mosque of the city¹¹² (Fig. 3.8).

The construction of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque represented an outstanding manifestation of Islamic rule over Jerusalem. While the Dome of the Rock has maintained its original form and shape to the present day, the al-Aqsa mosque was destroyed by earthquakes and renovated several times. According to historical sources the first congregational mosque at the site was constructed shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem in 638. Arculf described it in detail:

Near the wall on the east, in that famous place where once there stood a magnificent Temple, the Saracens have now built an oblong house of prayer, which they pieced together with upright planks and large beams over some ruined remains. This they attend, and it is said that this building can hold three thousand people.¹¹³

Although no material evidence of this first mosque has been found, it is reasonable to assume that it was built on the southern part of the platform, at the same place as the later al-Aqsa mosque.

¹⁰⁹ For comprehensive summaries, see Creswell 1969, Grabar 1959, 1996, Rosen-Ayalon 1989, Elad 1995. Several interpretations of the political and religious background that led to the establishment of the new Islamic centre have been suggested; see Elad 1995, 147–62 for a summary of previous research.

¹¹⁰ See e.g. Eliav 2005, 125–50.

¹¹¹ I thank Y. Baruch for providing me with these unpublished data.

¹¹² The Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque have been extensively described and analysed. For comprehensive evaluations, see Le Strange 1890, 87–202, Creswell 1969, Grabar 1959, 1996, Rosen-Ayalon 1989, Elad 1995, Kaplony 2002, 2009.

¹¹³ Adomnani, *Locis sanctis* 225, 14; tr. Wilkinson 2002, 170.

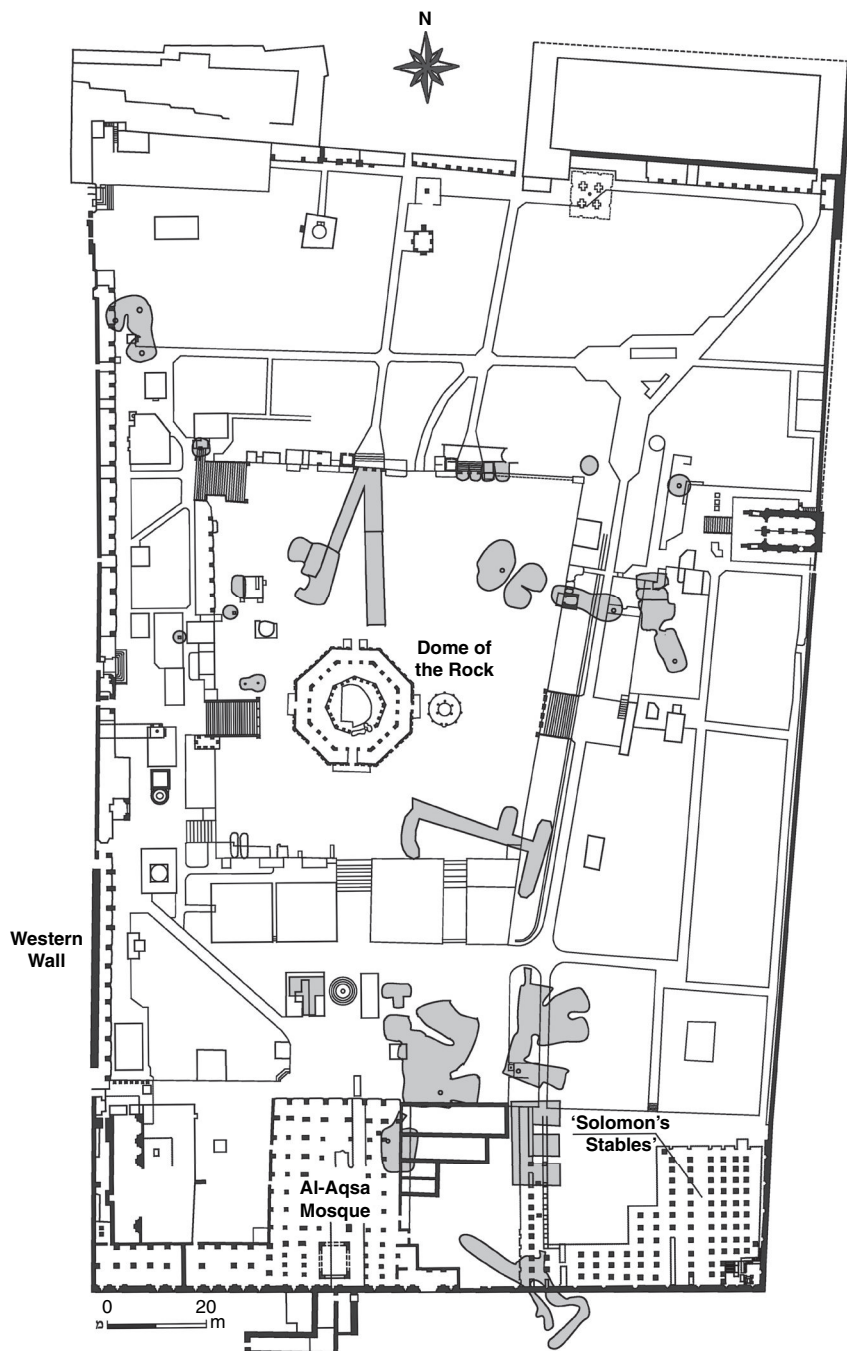


Fig. 3.8 Jerusalem: plan of the Haram al-Sharif in the Early Islamic period.

The first monumental mosque, of which only the southern portion remains, was constructed in the time of al-Walid, and since then its construction it has been damaged time and again by earthquakes. Large-scale restorations were required in the mosque following the 749 and 774 earthquakes, and it was further damaged by the 1033 earthquake. The present form of the mosque was derived from additional renovations following the 1065 earthquake.¹¹⁴

The excavations south and south-west of the Temple Mount revealed the previously unknown remains of four Early Islamic monumental buildings, identified as 'Umayyad palaces' or administrative centres¹¹⁵ (Fig. 3.9). It is widely accepted that these were founded during Umayyad rule in Jerusalem as part of the monumental constructions of the Haram. This large-scale construction involved extensive levelling of the area to the south of the Temple Mount and the covering of earlier residential buildings.

The massive square and rectangular buildings consisted of large open courtyards surrounded by halls and rooms to a height of two or three storeys. The largest building (II) was identified as the governor's palace (*Dar al-'Imara*) and it included direct access from its roof to the southern wall of the al-Aqsa mosque.¹¹⁶ Building III, in the west of the complex, faced the eastern *cardo*. This building contained large underground halls which were probably designed for the storage of goods.¹¹⁷ A monumental entrance led from the street to the building, crossed its inner courtyard, and continued east to another gate leading to building II. Building IV—adjacent to the western wall of the Haram—contained an inner courtyard surrounded by large halls and a bathhouse in its western part.¹¹⁸ The western wall of this building faced the eastern *cardo*, and its northern wall was recently discovered near the southern edge of the Western Wall plaza.¹¹⁹ The area north of building IV has not been explored, but it is reasonable to assume that another large square building existed here.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ See Hamilton 1949 for the architectural history of the mosque; see Bahat 1996, 80–3 for a summary of its chronology.

¹¹⁵ The excavations were conducted by B. Mazar and M. Ben Dov in 1968–1978 and by R. Reich and Y. Billig in 1994–1996. See Mazar 1971, 1975, Ben Dov 1985, 273–321, Reich and Billig 2000. For the interpretation of the buildings, see Rosen-Ayalon 1989, 8–11, Grabar 1996, 128–30.

¹¹⁶ For different suggestions on the identification of this building, see Grabar 1996, 128–30, Bahat 1996, 70–4, Rosen-Ayalon 1989, 8–12; see also Prag 2008, 157–61 for a comprehensive summary.

¹¹⁷ Reich and Billig 2000. The renewed excavations have raised the possibility that at least some large-scale construction had commenced in this area during the Byzantine period: see Baruch and Reich 2000.

¹¹⁸ Mazar 1971; Ben Dov 1985, 293–321. For recent excavations at the bathhouse, see Baruch 2002.

¹¹⁹ I thank H. Barbe for this previously unpublished information.

¹²⁰ The probable location of an additional building is supported by the results from the recent excavation in the Western Wall plaza. I thank S. Weksler-Bdolah for her valuable insight on this issue.

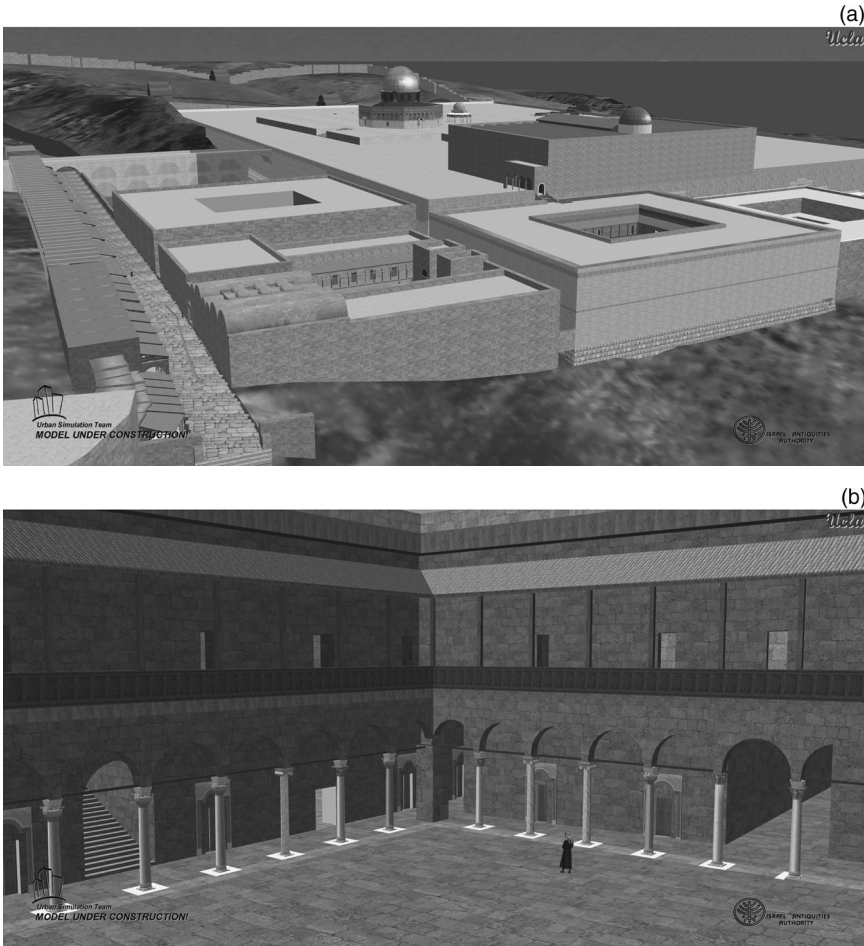


Fig. 3.9 Jerusalem: virtual reconstruction of the Haram al-Sharif and the 'Umayyad Palaces' in the Early Islamic period: a. general view from the south-west; b. detail of the inner courtyard of the building (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

The creation of a new religious and administrative centre in and around the Haram represented a dramatic functional change in this area. The Umayyad monumental constructions, extending from the Haram compound in the east to the eastern *cardo* in the west, delimited the area of the new Islamic governmental and administrative centre. On the basis of the historical context and the archaeological findings it is widely accepted that the monumental constructions south and west of the Haram were started by al-Walid in the early eighth century.¹²¹ A possible indication of the construction of a palace in

¹²¹ See Gil 1996, Elad 1992, Rosen-Ayalon 1989, Kaplony 2009.

Jerusalem is provided by several references in the Aphrodito papyri in Egypt that mention workers sent to Jerusalem for the construction of a mosque and the palace of the *Amir al-Mu'minin*.¹²²

The construction of an orthogonal, well-planned governmental complex in Jerusalem resembles similar Early Islamic centres established in other areas of the Near East. These sites, known as *misr*, were formed as square or rectangular fortified compounds, similar in plan to Roman military camps. They functioned as military, administrative, and political centres, and were later developed as provincial administrative centres.¹²³ According to Whitcomb, Islamic Jerusalem may have been developed as a *misr* in its first stages, with the Haram and its surroundings designed to accommodate both the army and the ruling and administrative elements.¹²⁴ However, it seems that the Muslim rulers incorporated the new Islamic compound into the already existing Christian city, taking care not to damage other areas of the city inhabited by non-Muslims. The large esplanade of the former Temple Mount, which was not significant to the Christians, was chosen as the core for the new Islamic section of the city. The monumental construction on its southern and western sides was made in order to avoid large-scale intervention within the more crowded areas of the city. It seems that the establishment of the new Islamic centre was not dictated by the principles of *misr* construction. Rather, it adopted the existing urban fabric and developed within it a new urban complex, or *madina*, which served the local ruler and his administration next to the religious centre in the Haram. Thus, Islamic Jerusalem was formed, but it tolerated other segments of the local population, mainly Christians and Jews.

The fate of the administrative centre with its monumental buildings remains obscure. It was believed that it was severely damaged in the 749 earthquake, and the area was deserted until the ninth century, when it was resettled with smaller houses that reused architectural elements from the buildings.¹²⁵ However, the detailed publication of Kathleen Kenyon's excavations in this area shows that the buildings continued to function following the 749 earthquake, and were transformed into a residential quarter only in the tenth or eleventh century.¹²⁶ This is further supported by the brief mention of Early Islamic pottery finds in the gutters of the monumental buildings, which prove that the buildings were in use at least during the ninth century and perhaps even later.¹²⁷ However, as there is no reference to these buildings in

¹²² Bell 1911–1913, ii. 383 (no. 1403), iii. 137 (no. 1414), iv. 93, (no. 1453); see also the discussion in Bahat 1996, 72, Elad 1995, 26, 36–9, 2008, 210, Prag 2008, 160–1. For a different, highly controversial interpretation, see Sharon 2009.

¹²³ Whitcomb 1994, 1996, 2011a; see also the discussion in Ch. 4.

¹²⁴ Whitcomb 2011a.

¹²⁵ Mazar 1971, 21; Ben Dov 1985, 270–6; Bahat 1996, 97.

¹²⁶ Prag 2008, 484–6; see also Magness 2010a for a similar dating.

¹²⁷ Ben Dov 1985, 276; Prag 2008, 158; Magness 2010a.

the descriptions of al-Muqaddasi or Nasir-i Khusraw, it may be that in the tenth and eleventh centuries they were not used any more as large monumental structures, and were converted into smaller residential units.

The areas south of the Haram were further neglected following the 1033 earthquake and the contraction of the southern city walls. Several limekilns and industrial installations were constructed on top of the deserted buildings, which indicates that this area was abandoned in the second half of the tenth century.¹²⁸ A small cemetery discovered on top of building IV outside the south-western corner of the Haram suggests that the building was deserted in the later part of the Early Islamic period. The meagre finds have not allowed a precise dating, but it has been suggested that the cemetery is connected to the Seljuk invasion of Jerusalem in 1073.¹²⁹

To conclude, the evaluation of the archaeological findings south and south-west of the Haram suggests that this area was not abandoned following the 749 earthquake. The monumental buildings continued to function in the second half of the eighth and in the ninth centuries. In the course of the tenth century they were gradually converted into residential buildings of much inferior quality, and this section of Jerusalem declined and was abandoned only during the second half of the eleventh century.

A Jewish quarter

The re-establishment of a Jewish quarter in Jerusalem following the Arab conquest is widely accepted by most scholars, although its location is debated. Jews had been excluded from permanent residence in Jerusalem in the Late Roman period, and this restriction was maintained in the Byzantine period. Shortly after the Arab conquest in 638, the Muslim authorities granted permission to seventy Jewish families from Tiberias to settle in Jerusalem.¹³⁰ Historical sources and occasional archaeological findings indicate that the Jewish community settled in the southern part of the city, mainly between the City of David and the southern wall of the Haram. Vivid testimony of a change of ownership in an existing building was revealed during the excavations south of the Temple Mount. A lintel decorated with a depiction of a Menorah, which covered an earlier depiction of a cross, was found in a residential house.¹³¹ The two superimposed religious symbols may indicate that the house owners in its first stage, during the Byzantine period, were Christians, and that they were replaced by Jewish owners in a later stage. It seems that this change occurred in the seventh century, when Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. The Jewish presence in this particular house

¹²⁸ Prag 2008, 141–8. ¹²⁹ Mazar 1971, 21; Bahat 1996, 73.

¹³⁰ Bahat 1996, 53, and references there.

¹³¹ Ben Dov 1985, 260–7; Mazar 2003, 163–86.

was short-lived, and the house was abandoned and covered by the levelling of the ground before the construction of the 'Umayyad palaces'.¹³² Additional evidence of a Jewish presence in the upper part of the City of David was revealed when fragments of a Hebrew inscription were discovered within a house dated to the eighth–tenth centuries.¹³³

Several documents from the Cairo Geniza mention the Jewish quarter in Jerusalem as located in the southern area of the city. Particularly interesting is a reference to Jewish residences situated between the Pool of Siloam and the Priest's Gate, one of the gates leading to the Haram.¹³⁴ In addition to the Jewish quarter, several sources mention a Karaite quarter, which was located in the same area, either on the eastern slopes of Mount Zion or within the City of David.¹³⁵

Crusader sources that mention the existence of a 'Juiverie' in the north-eastern part of the city raise the possibility that the Jewish community moved to a new location in northern Jerusalem sometime before the Crusader conquest. This may have occurred as a result of the abandonment of the southern walls of the city and the contraction of its urban areas.¹³⁶

Both southern and northern locations place the Jewish quarter between the Christian quarter to the west and the Islamic governmental and religious centre to the east (Fig. 3.4).

The extramural quarters

The expansion of Jerusalem's extramural urban area was much intensified during the Byzantine period, with large-scale constructions to the north and south of its fourth-century city walls. The extension of the urban area to the south and the building of a new wall in the fifth century incorporated the already constructed areas of Mount Zion and the City of David within the walled city. Jerusalem reached a zenith in area and population in the sixth century, forming a vast metropolis inhabited by c.50,000–70,000 people.¹³⁷ The spread of extramural areas during this period was noted particularly to the north

¹³² E. Mazar proposed that the house was settled by Jews following the Persian conquest of 614, but no concrete evidence has been found for this dating. See Avni 2010 for a discussion.

¹³³ For the houses in this part of the city, see Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929, 58–60, Magness 1992. For the recent excavations, see Ben Ami and Tchekhanovetz 2008*a, b*, 2010, Shukron and Reich 2005, Shukron forthcoming, Avner 2008*b*. For a marble plaque with fragment of a Hebrew inscription, see Shukron and Reich 2005.

¹³⁴ For the different opinions on the identification of places mentioned in the documents, see Gil 1982, Bahat 1996, 53–6.

¹³⁵ See Bahat 1996, 56–8 for the problem of the exact location.

¹³⁶ Bahat 1996, 53–4; for a different opinion, see Gil 1982, 1996, 171–4.

¹³⁷ For various estimations of the population in Byzantine Jerusalem, see Broshi 1979, Tsafir 1996. A much lower estimate of c.15,000 inhabitants is suggested in Geva 2007, 59–60, but it includes only the city within the walls, and seems to be much too low.

and east of the walled city, while in the western and southern parts of Jerusalem it included mainly monastic and agricultural compounds.¹³⁸ Expansion eastwards beyond the walls continued with the establishment of a large network of churches and monasteries on the Mount of Olives, and extended as far as the village of Bethany on the Jerusalem–Jericho road. Churches and monasteries were also constructed north and west of the city walls. Particularly impressive was the urban expansion north of the Damascus Gate, which created a dense network of ecclesiastical institutions and private residences that extended far beyond the city walls.

The accumulating evidence from a number of excavated sites shows that Byzantine outer neighbourhoods, farmsteads, churches, and monasteries continued to function during the Early Islamic period, some of them surviving until the ninth and tenth centuries.¹³⁹

For example, a large network of Byzantine monasteries revealed north of the Damascus Gate presents substantial evidence for urban expansion between the fifth and ninth centuries.¹⁴⁰ It consisted of at least four enclosed compounds located along the main road from the Damascus Gate to the north. Each contained a chapel or small church, a residential area for monks and pilgrims, and burials in underground crypts and open-air burial grounds (Fig. 3.10). A number of monasteries were further developed during the seventh and eighth centuries, with the construction of additional buildings and the laying of new decorated mosaic floors. They continued to function as Christian institutions under Islamic rule and were gradually abandoned only in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The ethnic and communal affiliation of their inhabitants was revealed through a number of inscriptions found at each monastery. Along with the common Greek inscriptions, several ancient Armenian inscriptions indicated the affiliation of one of the monasteries to the local Armenian community.¹⁴¹ This monastery was probably founded in the fifth century as a consequence of the growing phenomenon of pilgrimage in the Byzantine period, and continued to function without a break at least until the ninth century. The size and elegance of the monastery emphasizes the strong position of the Armenian community in Jerusalem under Islamic rule. Especially notable is a small funerary chapel, known as the ‘Birds Mosaic’, which contained a decorated mosaic floor with depictions of birds, and an Armenian inscription

¹³⁸ Avni 2005; see also Seligman 2011 for the limits of the hinterland.

¹³⁹ Schick 1995, 325–59; Bahat 1996, 87–95. The question of continuity has been much clarified by the numerous rescue excavations conducted in recent decades in the modern neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. For an updated summary of selected excavations, see *NEAEHL* v, s.v. Jerusalem, 1825–1835.

¹⁴⁰ Byzantine churches and monasteries are known in this area from the 19th cent. See Lagrange 1894; Vincent and Abel 1914–1926, 743–801. For recent excavations, see Amit and Wolff 2000; Tzaferis *et al.* 1994; Tsafirir 1999, 336–42.

¹⁴¹ Stone and Amit 1996.

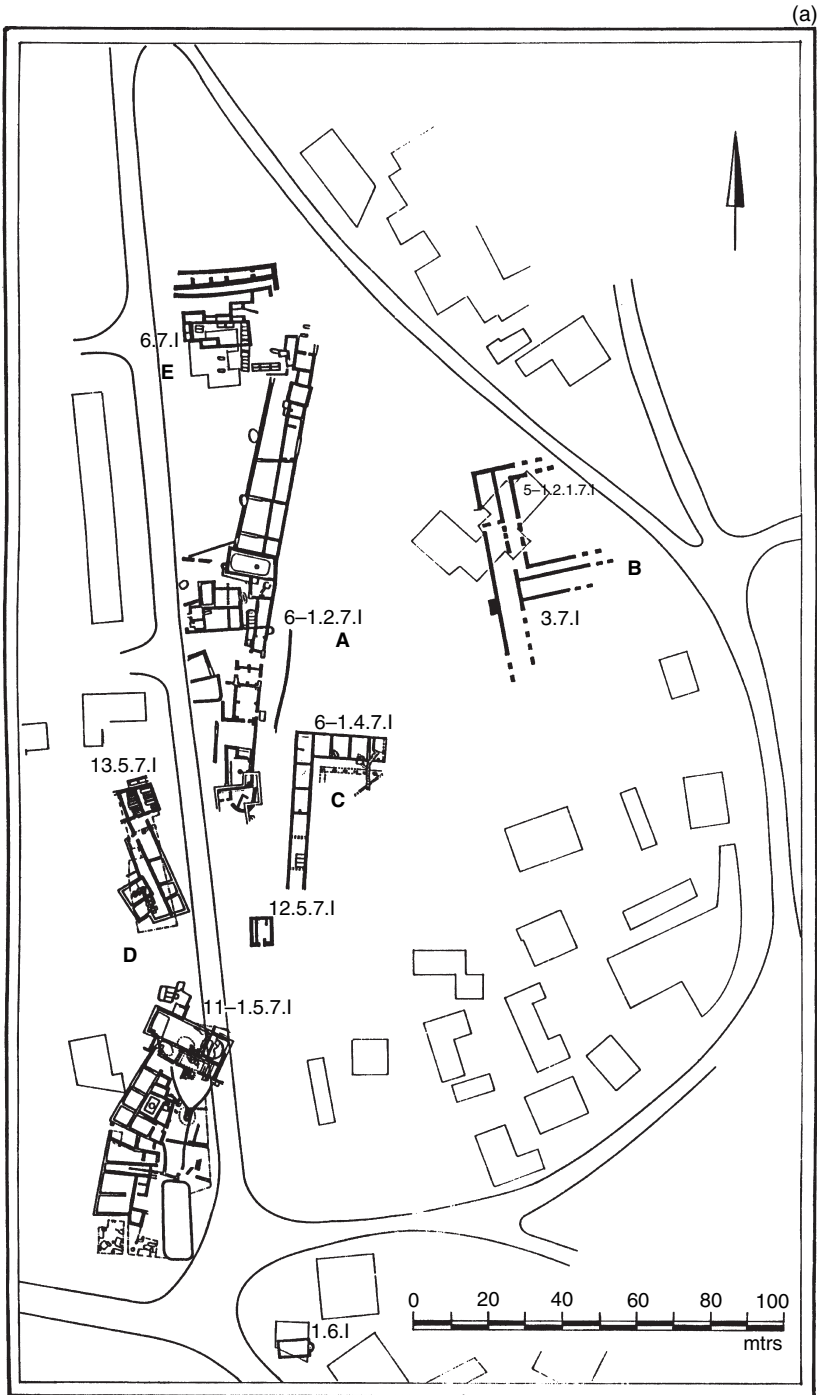


Fig. 3.10 Jerusalem: the monastic compounds north of the Damascus Gate: a. plan; b. view (courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Balage, after the exhibition catalogue 'Cradle of Christianity').

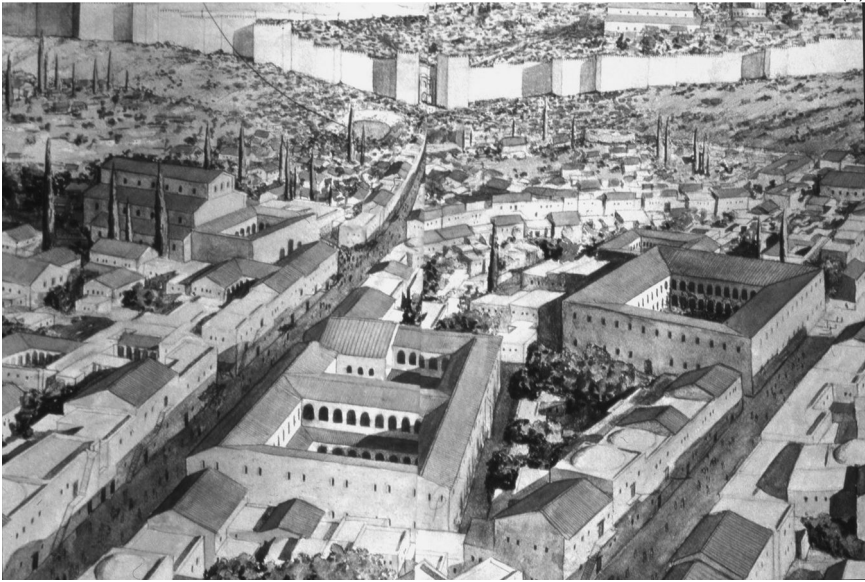


Fig. 3.10 continued.

dedicating the chapel 'to the memory and salvation of all those whose names only the Lord knows'.¹⁴²

Large-scale construction of extramural monastic compounds was also noted to the east of the walled city, extending from the western slopes of the Mount of Olives to Bethany on the edge of the Judaean Desert.¹⁴³ The churches of Gethsemane, the Tomb of Mary, Dominus Flevit, the Ascension, Eleona, and eastward to the Church of St Lazarus in Bethany, all established in the Byzantine period, continued well into the Early Islamic period. Most excavations in these sites, conducted in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, were not adequately published and give only little reference to finds and stratigraphy. It is, therefore, almost impossible to date accurately the sequence of habitation on the basis of the finds. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the incomplete reports shows evidence of continuity and even of new constructions in the seventh and eighth centuries. In contradiction to the conclusion that the Persian conquest of 614 caused large-scale destruction to the churches and monasteries on the Mount of Olives, it seems that damage was minor in scope, and this event had no long-term impact on the Christian presence in this part of

¹⁴² Kloner 2003, 139; Tsafirir 1999, 338 and references there.

¹⁴³ Bagatti 1956: 240–70; Bagatti and Millik 1958; Schick 1995, 350–9.

Jerusalem.¹⁴⁴ The monastery of Dominus Flevit, for example, was constructed in the sixth century and continued into the ninth century with no destruction layers observed.¹⁴⁵

Similar continuity of habitation in Christian monasteries was noted south-east of Jerusalem, along the Kidron and Hinnom Valleys, where numerous ancient rock-cut burial caves were reused by monastic communities,¹⁴⁶ and also west of the city, where a number of large Byzantine monasteries continued to function in Early Islamic times.¹⁴⁷ However, the archaeological data on these sites are inadequate.

Of particular interest is a monastic complex discovered on the eastern slopes of Mount Scopus, near the ancient road to Jericho (Fig. 3.11). A large monastery and a pilgrim hostel were excavated here, and a distinctive chronological sequence was revealed: the monastery, dedicated to 'Theodorus the priest and Hegumen and Cyriacus the monk' (both indicated in a mosaic floor inscription), was founded in the fifth century, and continued to function at least until the ninth century.¹⁴⁸ The complex, covering an area of 0.5 ha surrounded by a wall, included an apsidal church, the monks' living quarters, and a hostel for pilgrims. An elongated hall with cist graves, probably containing the interred remains of the monastery's clergy, was revealed near the monastery. Another section of the compound contained an olive press, which indicates that the local monks were engaged in agricultural production. An elaborate water-collecting system was installed in the monastery. It included two large open-air pools hewn in the rock and four underground cisterns constructed under the buildings and supported by rows of arches. A large network of channels collected water from the roofs and diverted it into the large pools and to agricultural plots in the vicinity of the monastery.

Pottery, glass, coins, and additional artefacts found in the excavations indicated that the development and extension of the monastery continued in the Early Islamic period, and that the site was abandoned only in the ninth or tenth century.¹⁴⁹

The location of the monastery near the main Jericho–Jerusalem road, just in front of the steep climb to Mount Scopus, suggests that it also served pilgrims on their way to the holy city. The occupation of the monastery up to the ninth or tenth century provides further indication that Christian pilgrims continued to travel in large numbers during the Early Islamic period.

Burial grounds

The cemeteries of Jerusalem, located around the walled city, provide additional indications of the transformation of the local society. The sepulchres of

¹⁴⁴ Avni 2010; see also the discussion in Ch. 5. ¹⁴⁵ Bagatti 1956.

¹⁴⁶ Barkay 1994; Ussishkin 1993, 346–59. ¹⁴⁷ Illife 1935.

¹⁴⁸ Amit *et al.* 2003. ¹⁴⁹ Amit *et al.* 2003, 146.

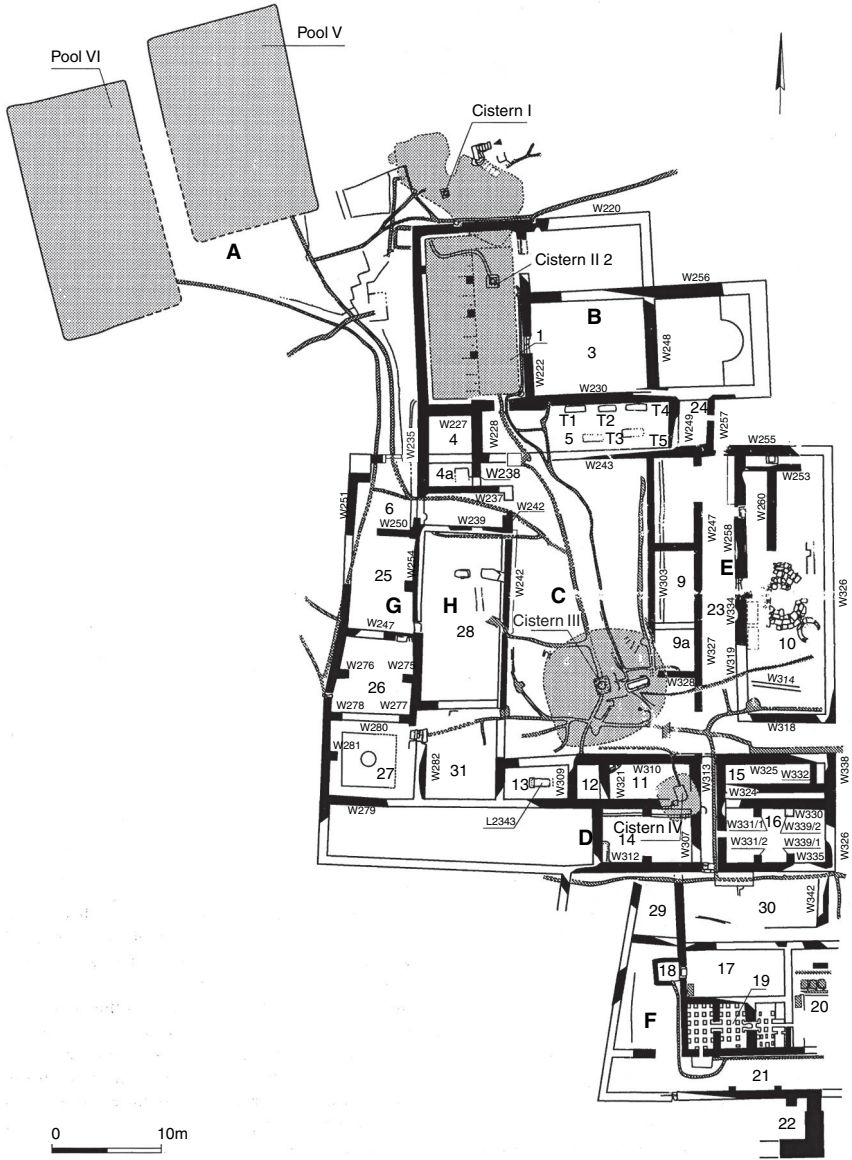


Fig. 3.11 Jerusalem: the monastery on Mount Scopus (Amit *et al.* 2003, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

the Byzantine period formed the last link in a long tradition of rock-cut family burial caves.¹⁵⁰ A typical cave, used by a single family for a prolonged period, consisted of a small burial chamber with burial troughs in its walls or floor. Numerous caves of this type were excavated around Jerusalem, all containing multiple burials in which scores of people were entombed over a long period of time. Grave goods found bear a clear indication of the religious affiliation of the deceased. Common finds were pendant crosses and oil lamps decorated with Christian motifs and inscriptions. No Jewish or pagan ornamentation was found in burials of the Byzantine period, which provides another indication that the population of Byzantine Jerusalem most probably consisted only of Christians.

Unlike the strict separation that had been observed between the city and its necropolis in the Roman period, urban cemeteries in Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem were embedded in the extramural residential areas. Some graveyards were installed within the monastic compounds, and other open-air cemeteries bordered the residential areas. Special attention was given by local authorities to the burial places of pilgrims who passed away during their stay in Jerusalem.¹⁵¹

Rock-cut family burial caves predominated among local Christians until the ninth and tenth centuries. A gradual but constant change in burial architecture was notable from the eighth century, with the replacement of family burial caves by simple individual cist graves dug in the ground, each containing a single body with very few associated burial offerings. Many of these graves were arranged in defined burial grounds in which typical Muslim burials were presented: all graves were oriented east–west, and the deceased was laid facing south, to the holy city of Mecca.

The replacement of family rock-cut burial caves with cist graves may indicate a gradual increase of the Muslim population in Jerusalem. Yet, individual cist graves spread from the ninth century onwards among the Christian and Jewish population of Jerusalem too. Unlike the Muslim burials, which faced east–west, Jewish and Christian graves revealed no preferred alignment of the deceased.

The development of large open-air Muslim cemeteries outside the walled city is dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries, which indicates the increased impact of Islamic elements among the local population in the later part of the Early Islamic period.

The largest cemeteries were located on the slopes of the Kidron Valley east of the Haram, north of the Damascus Gate, and at Mammila, west of the Jaffa Gate. The latter originated in the ninth or tenth century, and was used extensively after the Crusader period.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Avni 2005.

¹⁵¹ Avni 2005, 377–81.

¹⁵² Da'adli 2011.

Water supply

The sophisticated water-supply system of Jerusalem, which was in use during Roman and Byzantine times, continued to function in the Early Islamic period.¹⁵³ Several large reservoirs were designed to provide drinking water both for the local population and for the numerous travellers and pilgrims residing in Jerusalem. Aqueducts from springs in the Hebron Hills provided a permanent water supply to the city, distributing it to large pools in the western part of the city and to rock-cut underground cisterns in the Haram platform. Both al-Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khusraw mention these aqueducts, together with the springs of Silwan and Bir Ayub, as the main source of public water supply to Jerusalem.¹⁵⁴ In addition, a number of large public cisterns were constructed near the city walls in the Early Islamic period. Especially notable are two large cisterns built in front of the Damascus Gate,¹⁵⁵ and a huge cistern near the Jaffa Gate, which was later incorporated within the medieval citadel of Jerusalem.

In addition to the public water systems, Jerusalem was honeycombed with many small rock-cut cisterns constructed in the courtyards of private houses. Residential areas in the City of David and Mount Zion contained numerous water cisterns, supplying the yearly needs of local residents. It seems that only in years of drought, when the annual precipitation was too low to fill all private water cisterns, did the population supplement its consumption from public pools and cisterns.

The outer hinterland

Farther from the city, an outer ring of villages, farmsteads, and monasteries spread to a distance of c.5–15 km from Jerusalem. These settlements are known from extensive surveys and numerous rescue excavations, which revealed c.400 sites from the Byzantine period.¹⁵⁶ Clear evidence of continuity into the Early Islamic period was found in many of them.¹⁵⁷

The development of an extensive agricultural hinterland was a direct outcome of the special position of Jerusalem in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods as a city which consumed vast resources and served a large non-productive population, major segments of which were connected to ecclesiastical institutions. Apart from its permanent population, large numbers of pilgrims and travellers frequented the city, some of whom became permanent residents. A survey of pilgrim itineraries reveals that the average period of stay

¹⁵³ Mazar 2002, 239.

¹⁵⁴ al-Muqaddasi 168; Nasir-i Khusraw 22.

¹⁵⁵ Hamilton 1944, 21.

¹⁵⁶ For an updated summary, see Kloner 2003, Adawi 2010, Seligman 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Kloner 2003, 50*–8*; Adawi 2010.

of a pilgrim in Jerusalem was from several weeks to a few months.¹⁵⁸ This large number of temporary residents contributed to an exceptionally large consumption of goods by a non-productive population. The rich agricultural hinterland around the city provided the food supply to this large number of consumers.¹⁵⁹

The areas around Jerusalem were praised as centres of agricultural production up to the eleventh century, as Nasir-i Khusraw describes:

The outlying villages and dependencies of Jerusalem are all in the hills, and the cultivation—olives, figs, and so on—is totally without irrigation, yet prosperity is widespread and prices cheap. There are villagers who collect each up to five thousands maunds of olive oils in pits and tanks to be exported all over the world . . .¹⁶⁰

The hinterland of Jerusalem supplied the urban population with a variety of agricultural goods. It is reasonable to assume that such a large city also consumed goods from more distant sources. The Judaeen Lowlands region was one of the main areas supplying food to Jerusalem in the Roman and Byzantine periods, and it seems that it continued to serve the population of Jerusalem at least until the ninth century, providing the city with wheat, oil, and wine.

Two main types of settlements predominated in the outer hinterland of Jerusalem: a large number of monastic compounds, each constructed as a close unit with extensive agricultural areas around it, and a smaller number of villages and farmsteads, usually separated from the monasteries. Both types were embedded within agricultural fields and terraces which covered up to 70 per cent of the open areas around Jerusalem.¹⁶¹ The limits of the hinterland are defined in the following regional description according to the distance of the settlements from the city and their possible connection to other centres of consumption.

The settlements in the hinterland spread mainly to the north of Jerusalem, with a vast network of churches and monastic compounds south of the city. East of Jerusalem, the arid environment of the Judaeen Desert prevented massive development of agricultural villages and estates. Instead, an extensive network of monasteries was established there in the Byzantine period. This created a unique type of hinterland which penetrated deep into the desert.¹⁶² The western periphery of Jerusalem seems to have been settled less densely, containing only a few villages and farmsteads.

North of Jerusalem: Excavations in a number of settlements located 4–8 km north of the walled city revealed an extensive network of villages and farmsteads surrounded by terraced fields.¹⁶³ For example, in *Khirbet ‘Adasa*, located 5 km

¹⁵⁸ Wilkinson 2002, 35. ¹⁵⁹ Seligman 2011.

¹⁶⁰ *Nasir-i Khusraw* 19, tr. Thackston 2001, 27.

¹⁶¹ Gibson 1995; Seligman 2011; for the construction of terraces in the Early Islamic period, see Davidovich *et al.* 2012.

¹⁶² On the Judaeen Desert monasteries, see the comprehensive summary of Hirschfeld 1992.

¹⁶³ Kloner 2002; Arav *et al.* 1990; Gibson 1985–6; Avner 2000; Seligman 2011.

north of Jerusalem, a section of a small Early Islamic village was excavated. The site was already inhabited in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and on the basis of the results of a preliminary survey, it was concluded that it was abandoned after the Byzantine period.¹⁶⁴ However, recent excavations have revealed a clear sequence of use in Early Islamic times, showing that the village was resettled at the end of the Byzantine period and further expanded during the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁶⁵ Several structures in the eastern part of the village, including a residential unit and probably a stable, were established in the second half of the seventh century or the early eighth century and continued in use until the tenth century. The village was abandoned in the eleventh century and was resettled in the Mamluk period.

A different type of settlement was explored at **Ras Abu Ma'aruf**, about 1.5 km south of Khirbet'Adasa and 4.5 km north-east of Jerusalem, in the border region between the Judaean Hills and the steppe areas of the Judaean Desert.¹⁶⁶ Two large farmsteads were excavated here; they contained residential areas and several large industrial oil and wine presses. The total production capacity of these installations was far beyond local consumption needs, and it seems that the oil and wine produced here were for supplying Jerusalem. The main phase of habitation was dated to the Byzantine period, but the settlement continued at least until the eighth century. Unlike the village of Khirbet 'Adasa, no extension or enlargement of buildings was noted here during the Early Islamic period.

Besides villages and farmsteads, several monastic compounds have also been identified in this area, all situated within agricultural fields. Most monasteries contained oil and wine presses, which show that the local monks were involved in agricultural production. A typical settlement of this type was excavated at **Ras Tawil**. This monastery, founded in the fifth or sixth century, continued to function in the Early Islamic period, with a considerable expansion of its buildings.¹⁶⁷ A coin hoard discovered in a cave underneath one of the buildings dates the last phase of use of the monastery to the late eighth or ninth century.

A similar monastic compound was excavated in nearby **Deir Ghazali**.¹⁶⁸ It included a rectangular compound (35 × 25 m) in which residential buildings were incorporated with industrial oil and wine presses. The identification of the site as a rural monastery was based on the remains of a chapel constructed in the second storey of the complex. Two chronological phases were distinguished, dated to Byzantine and Early Islamic times. The finds, including abundant pottery of the Mafjar type, indicated that the site was inhabited until the ninth and tenth centuries.

An identical settlement pattern of villages, farmsteads, and monasteries was revealed north-west of Jerusalem. One of the largest sites, dominating the

¹⁶⁴ Kloner 2002, 23, site 45.

¹⁶⁵ Khalaily and Avissar 2008.

¹⁶⁶ Seligman 1999.

¹⁶⁷ Gibson 1985–1986.

¹⁶⁸ Avner 2000.

main road to the coastal plain, was **Nabi Samwil**, the traditional burial place of the prophet Samuel, located on top of a prominent hill facing Jerusalem. A road station and a monastery were extensively excavated here to reveal a long sequence of use.¹⁶⁹ The monastery was fortified in the sixth century, and the settlement continued uninterrupted after the Arab conquest.¹⁷⁰ During the Early Islamic period the site was a centre of pottery production. Excavations exposed four pottery kilns with dozens of storage jars bearing seal impressions in Arabic with the inscription ‘Deir Samwil’.¹⁷¹ The stamped vessels were distributed to other areas of Palestine, and were discovered in a number of sites in Jerusalem, Ramla, Caesarea, and elsewhere.¹⁷² It seems that the seal impressions were stamped on jars that probably contained wine and oil for export.

Fragmentary remains of another small monastery were discovered along the main road from Nabi Samwil to Jerusalem. A mosaic floor in the monastery’s chapel contained a dedication inscription dated of the year 785.¹⁷³ It seems that this monastery was inhabited until the tenth century.

South of Jerusalem: A different pattern of settlements was revealed south and south-east of the city. A number of monastic complexes excavated between Jerusalem and Bethlehem presented an extensive network of ecclesiastical institutions, but only occasional finds indicated the existence of villages and farmsteads. It seems that the Jerusalem–Bethlehem route and its vicinity, deeply rooted in the Christian tradition and closely connected to the Judaean Desert monasteries, were extensively developed as a ‘monastic landscape’.

One of the few agricultural villages in this area is **Umm Tuba**, located 5 km south-east of Jerusalem. It presents a good example of a continuous sequence of settlement from the Byzantine period to the tenth century. The Byzantine and Early Islamic village, which is probably to be identified with the *Metopa* mentioned in historical sources,¹⁷⁴ is hidden under the modern village of Umm Tuba. Recent surveys and excavations at the site revealed two phases of settlement—from the fifth and sixth centuries and from the Early Islamic period. The latter contained two subphases: the first dates from the seventh to the middle of the eighth century, on the basis of pottery finds and two coin hoards from the first half of the eighth century.¹⁷⁵ The latest phase of the village was dated to the ninth and tenth centuries. Excavations revealed a number of residential units and a few architectural elements that point to the Christian affiliation of the local population. Several Corinthian capitals decorated with crosses may indicate that a church or a monastery functioned at the site.

¹⁶⁹ Magen and Dadon 2003.

¹⁷⁰ The site and its monastery are mentioned in the 10th century: al-Muqaddasi 188, tr. Collins 1994, 158.

¹⁷¹ Magen and Dadon 2003, 128. ¹⁷² Sharon 1999, 254–9, 2004, 122–34.

¹⁷³ Arav *et al.* 1990. ¹⁷⁴ Tsafirir *et al.* 1994, 184–5. ¹⁷⁵ Adawi 2010, 114–38.

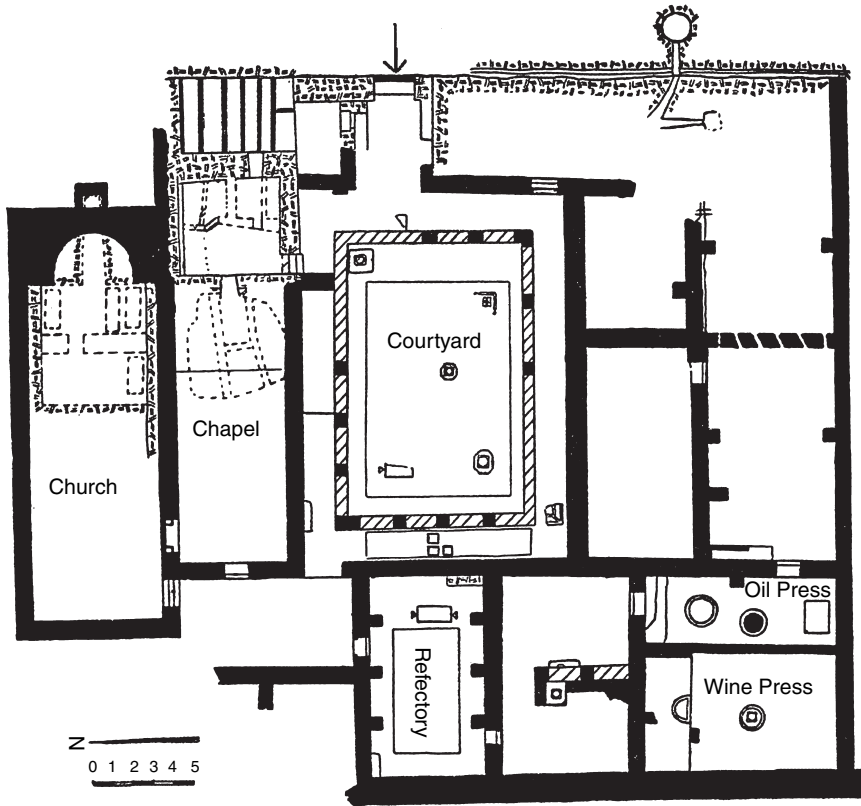


Fig. 3.12 Bir el Qutt: plan of the monastery (Seligman 2011, after Corbo 1955, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

Another small monastery was excavated nearby at **Bir el Qutt**, 6 km south-east of Jerusalem and 2 km north of Bethlehem. The monastery was composed of a square compound (c.35 × 30 m) with a central courtyard flanked by a small church and adjacent chapel, a dining room (*refectory*), and oil and wine presses (Fig. 3.12). The construction of the monastery, dedicated to St Theodoros, has been dated to the sixth century.¹⁷⁶ A re-evaluation of the finds shows that it was inhabited until the ninth or tenth century.¹⁷⁷ A mosaic floor containing a Georgian inscription identified the inhabitants of the monastery as Georgian monks.

Similar evidence for a Georgian presence was found in other locations south-west of Jerusalem, for example at the nearby monastery of Umm Leisun, and at the large Monastery of the Cross. It seems that Georgians present not only in

¹⁷⁶ Corbo 1955, 112–34.

¹⁷⁷ Adawi 2010, 85–8.

Jerusalem, but also occupied a number of monastic settlements in the southern regions of the Jerusalem hinterland.

A Byzantine village and monastery were explored at **Ramat Rahel**, 4 km south of Jerusalem. Early excavations at the site dated the settlement to the Byzantine period, and led to the conclusion that it was destroyed and abandoned in the Arab conquest.¹⁷⁸ The last phase (stratum I), was dated to the Early Islamic period. It was attributed to squatters and thus reflected the decline and collapse of the settlement. This followed the common view of a rapid collapse of settlements following the Arab conquest. A re-evaluation of the finds has refuted these conclusions and showed that both stratum IIA and stratum I belong to the same phase, which shows the continuity of the Byzantine remains at least until the mid-eighth century.¹⁷⁹

The renewed excavations at Ramat Rahel revealed further evidence of the continuity of the settlement into the eighth and early ninth centuries,¹⁸⁰ The monastery was constructed in the second half of the sixth or the first half of the seventh century and continued into the eighth or ninth century. The connection between the Byzantine village, identified as Bethofor Pago, and the nearby Kathisma church was established.¹⁸¹ A decline in the settlement was not observed until in the eighth century, but habitation continued until the tenth and eleventh centuries. It is not clear whether the settlement, in its last phase, functioned as a Christian monastery or was converted into a farm.

The remains of the monumental octagonal church of Paleo-Kathisma were discovered a short distance west of Ramat Rahel, providing further evidence of a significant continuity of the Christian presence in this area well into Early Islamic times. The church, constructed by the ancient Jerusalem–Bethlehem road in the fifth century to commemorate the resting place of Mary on her way to Bethlehem, was accidentally discovered during modern road constructions and thoroughly excavated¹⁸² (Fig. 3.13). The octagonal church consisted of two concentric corridors surrounding a domed hall, in the centre of which a sacred rock was presented to the worshippers. Several phases of use were revealed in the church, which showed a clear continuity into the Early Islamic period. The building was restored and repaved with mosaics in the eighth century. A small rounded niche was installed in one of the rooms along the southern wall of the inner octagon, blocking an inner passage and indicating the *mihrab* of a small indoor mosque. A new mosaic floor was laid beside the rounded niche, depicting palm branches. The stratigraphic sequence and finds

¹⁷⁸ Aharoni 1964; see also the Prologue for reference to the flawed interpretation of the site.

¹⁷⁹ Magness 1993, 90. ¹⁸⁰ Liphshits *et al.* 2009, 15–17, 2011, 43–6.

¹⁸¹ Liphshitz *et al.* 2011, 44; Seligman 2011, 446–8. ¹⁸² Avner 2003, 2006–2007.

show that this installation was made in the first half of the eighth century.¹⁸³ The incorporation of a Muslim shrine within an existing church represents one of the most interesting early examples of mutual Islamic and Christian worship. It seems that the two cultic installations functioned together for some time, with both Christians and Muslims praying in the same site.¹⁸⁴

East of Jerusalem and the northern Judaeen Desert: Most studies have suggested that the flourishing monastic communities of the Judaeen Desert declined after the Arab conquest and that many monasteries were abandoned.¹⁸⁵ However, although no detailed references have been provided for the last phase of use in most excavated monasteries,¹⁸⁶ a careful investigation of the finds from excavations of monasteries in the northern Judaeen Desert show that a number of them continued to function into the Early Islamic period.

Excavations at the **Martyrius Monastery** (Khirbet el-Murassas), 8 km east of Jerusalem, revealed an elaborate compound of $c.79 \times 70$ m that contained a central church, living quarters for monks, a large dining hall (*refectory*), a bathhouse, and stables for horses. A large pilgrim's hostel was found adjacent to the monastery¹⁸⁷ (Fig. 3.14). The areas around the monastery were extensively cultivated, and it seems that, in spite of its location on the edge of the desert, agriculture was practised by the local monks.

The preliminary excavation report suggested that the monastery was heavily damaged during the Persian conquest in 614, and was abandoned after the Arab conquest, to be replaced by a small agricultural farm with humble residences.¹⁸⁸ The date of abandonment was questioned by Magness, who reviewed some of the finds and suggested that the monastery continued to function at least until the early eighth century.¹⁸⁹ Further re-evaluation of the finds indicated that it continued even further into the Early Islamic period, and was replaced by the farm only in the late eighth or ninth century.¹⁹⁰

This late dating concurs with the results of excavations in the nearby **Euthymius Monastery** (Khan el-Ahmar). This monastery was established in 428 as a hermit laura, and developed in the late fifth century into a large compound of $c.65 \times 54$ m, containing a church, living quarters for monks, and a sophisticated water-collecting system.¹⁹¹ The monastery was destroyed by an earthquake, probably in 659, and then reconstructed at the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century. The church was rebuilt and paved with new mosaics and shows several phases of use. It continued to function

¹⁸³ Avner 2003: 180–1.

¹⁸⁴ See the discussion in Ch. 5.

¹⁸⁵ Hirschfeld 1992; Magen and Talgam 1990. See also the discussion in Ch. 4.

¹⁸⁶ This is referred to only in passing. See Hirschfeld 1993a, 152, Patrich 2001a, and the recent discussion in Patrich 2011b.

¹⁸⁷ Magen and Talgam 1990. ¹⁸⁸ Magen and Talgam 1990, 93.

¹⁸⁹ Magness 2010c. ¹⁹⁰ I thank Y. Magen for this previously unpublished information.

¹⁹¹ Hirschfeld 1993b and references there.

(a)

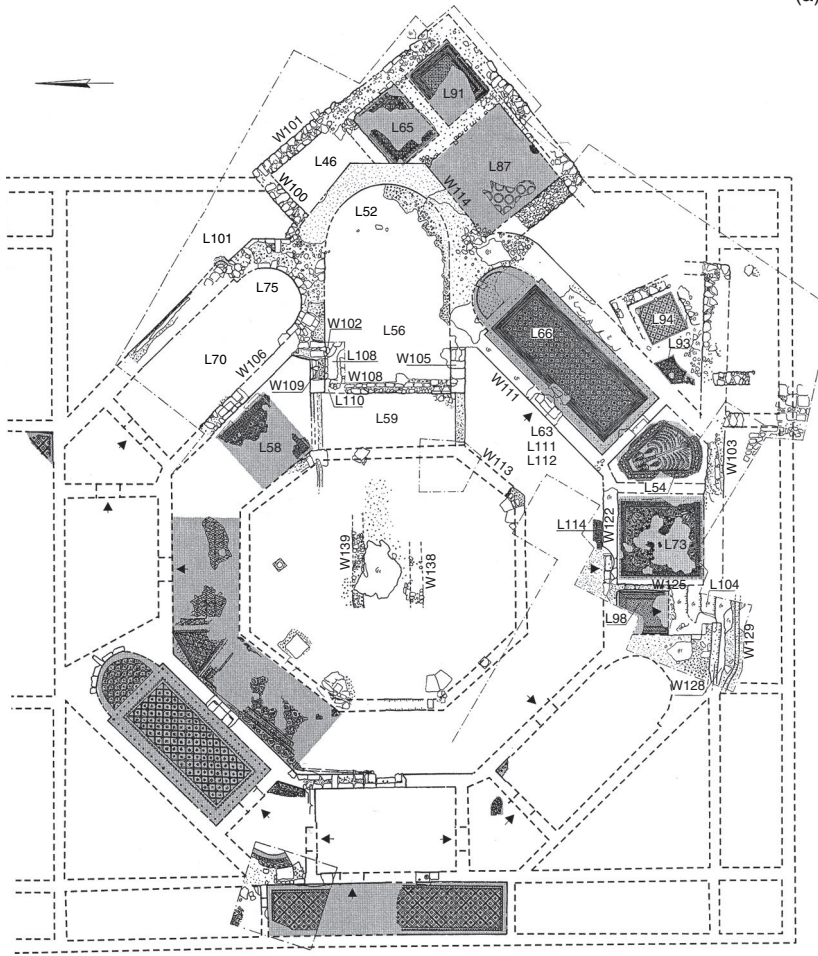


Fig. 3.13 Kathisma church: a. plan of the octagonal church; b. detail of the Early Islamic mosaics (Avner 2003, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

throughout the Early Islamic period and in the Crusader period, and was abandoned only in the late twelfth century.

The continuity of Christian monasticism is also shown by historical sources, which describe the large monasteries of Mar Saba and Theodosius, east of Bethlehem. Both continued to function throughout the Early Islamic period, containing large monastic communities, and resisting a number of Bedouin raids in the early ninth century. The monastery of Mar Saba was partly destroyed by these raids, but later rebuilt, and functions to the present day.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Patrich 2011b.



Fig. 3.13 continued.

The finds from these central monasteries show that monastic activity in the Judaeian Desert continued during the Early Islamic period, although to a lesser degree than in the Byzantine period. The monasteries in the northern Judaeian Desert had close ties with the ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem, and this interaction strengthened the resilience of the local Christian communities during Early Islamic times.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ See Schick 1995, 96–101 on the connections between the monastic communities and the city.

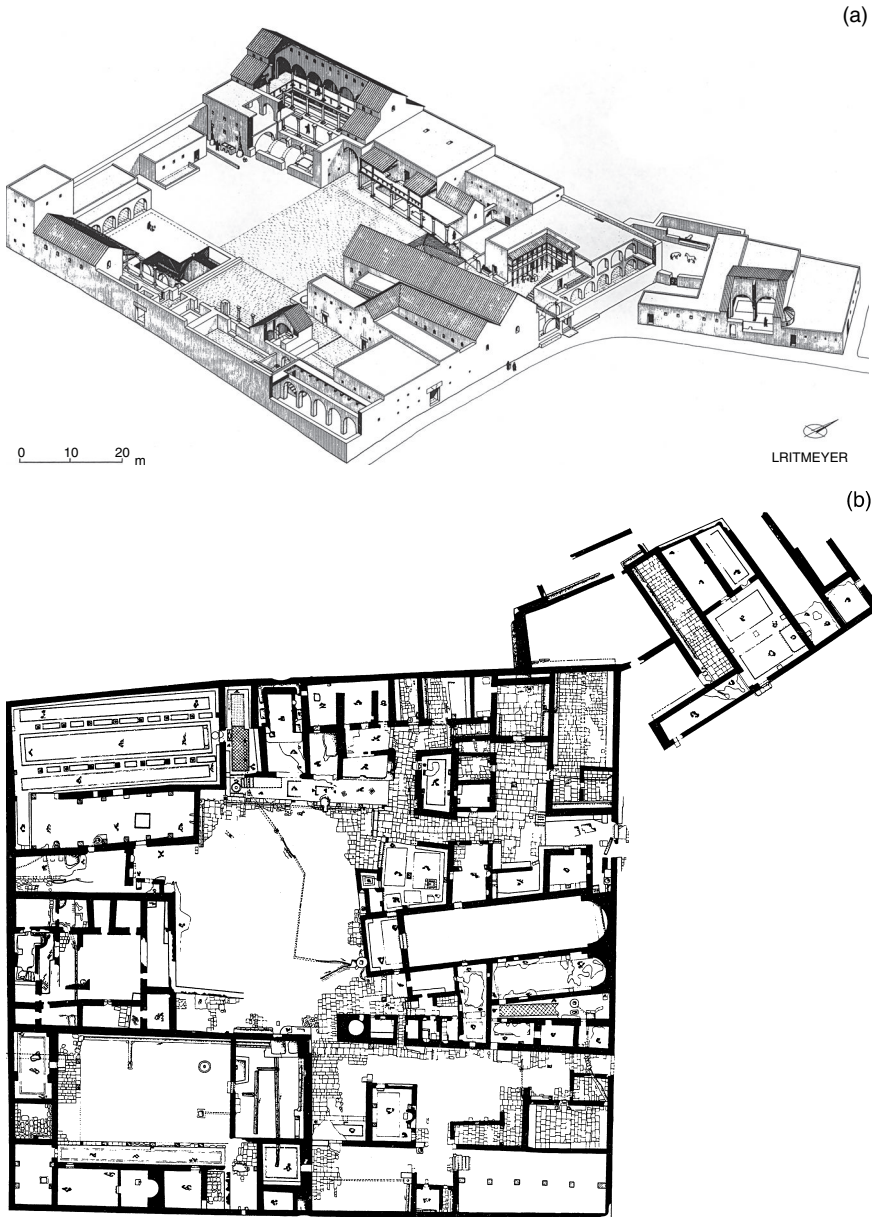


Fig. 3.14 Martyrius Monastery: plan and isometric reconstruction (courtesy of Yitshak Magen).

The northern Judaeian Desert provides an interesting case study for the question of the penetration of the nomadic Arab population into the Jerusalem area. Several sources indicate that Arab tribes had already settled near Jerusalem by the fifth century. Cyril of Scythopolis mentions that Petros Aspabetos, the

chief of a tribe that migrated to Palestine from Mesopotamia, converted to Christianity and settled in 'the camps' (*Parembolai*) east of Jerusalem. He maintained close contacts with the local Christian leadership in Jerusalem and with the monasteries of the Judaeen Desert.¹⁹⁴ The presence of Arabs of nomadic origin in the northern Judaeen Desert is mentioned sporadically in other sources of the Byzantine period, and it seems that these Bedouin tribes lived in coexistence with the monastic communities and agricultural villages on the fringes of the desert.

Further evidence on the penetration of Arab nomads into the Jerusalem area in the seventh and eighth centuries was provided by the excavations in **Khirbet Abu Suwana**, 7 km east of Jerusalem. This settlement, located to the south of the Martyrius Monastery, was founded in the early eighth century, probably by a nomadic population that penetrated into the region following the Arab conquest.¹⁹⁵

The settlement contained a dense network of residential units arranged in several clusters, each with small square and rectangular rooms flanking an open courtyard (Fig. 3.15). The largest unit (A) contained twenty-two rooms arranged in two rows around a central courtyard. Other units were arranged as single or double rows of square rooms (areas C, B4). It is interesting to note that a similar arrangement of structures was found in settlements in the vicinity of Ayla in the southern Negev, where they probably represent the penetration of an Arab nomadic population from north Arabia.¹⁹⁶

A rectangular open-air mosque, measuring 7.8 × 3.2 m, was constructed adjacent to the largest residential unit (A).¹⁹⁷ On the basis of the size of the mosque (it could have accommodated up to fifty-four people in three rows), and the number and size of dwellings in the settlement, it has been estimated that the village population reached some 200 inhabitants.

The finds indicate that the local economy was based on a combination of agriculture and animal husbandry. More than ten large open animal pens were found within and around the village. Scattered concentrations of terraced fields in the vicinity of the settlement indicate that the inhabitants practised seasonal agriculture as well.

The excavations at the site identified two phases of construction: the first from the second half of the seventh century to the first half of the eighth century, and the second from the second half of the eighth century to the first half of the ninth century.¹⁹⁸ This chronology was revised following a careful reading of the finds. The establishment of the settlement and the construction of the open-air mosque were redated to the early eighth century, and the second phase to the ninth and the first half of the tenth centuries.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Tsafir and Di Segni 1999, 264; Cyril of Scythopolis, 18–24, 24–5; Shahid 1989, 181–91.

¹⁹⁵ See Sion 1997 for the excavation report.

¹⁹⁶ See the discussion in Ch. 4.

¹⁹⁷ Sion 1997, 184.

¹⁹⁸ Sion 1997, 190–3.

¹⁹⁹ Magness 2004, 13–15.

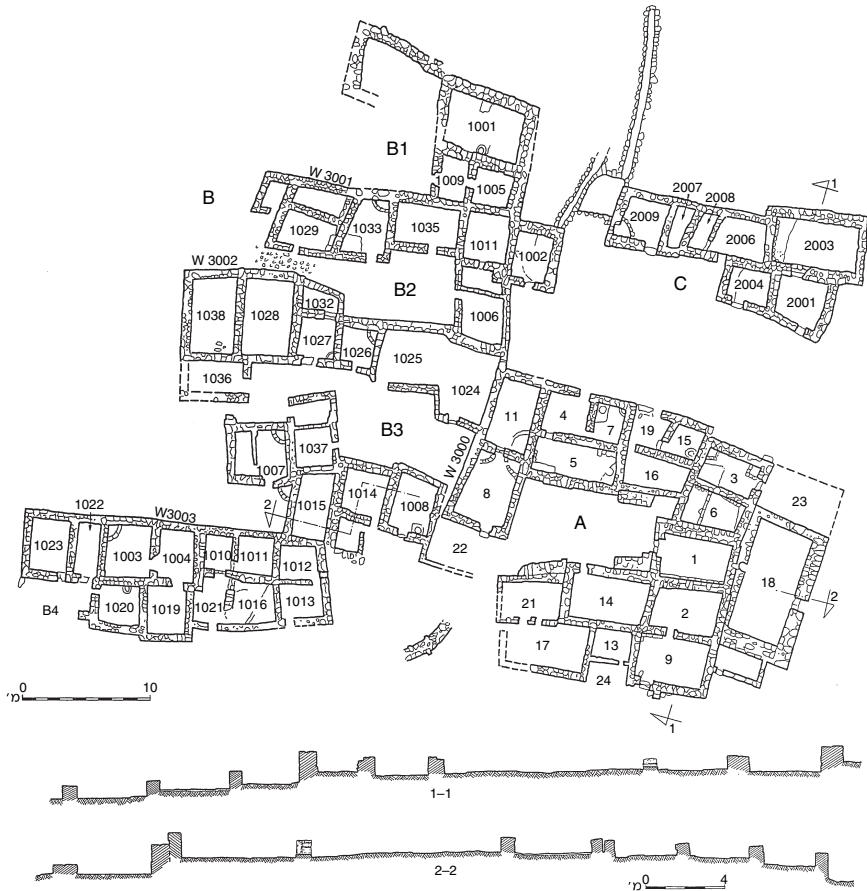


Fig. 3.15 Khirbet Abu Suwwana: plan of the settlement (Sion 1997, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

The settlement at Khirbet Abu Suwwana differs in structure and architecture from neighbouring villages and farms. The arrangement of buildings within the site, the large number of animal pens around it, and the existence of an open-air mosque point to a new population that penetrated into the region following the Arab conquest. Similar sites from the Early Islamic period were surveyed to the north of Khirbet Abu Suwwana, which probably indicates that this type of site was common on the fringes of the Judaean Desert. However, no such sites are known from other regions in the central hill country, and it seems that the archaeological evidence is too meagre for a far-reaching conclusion on a massive penetration of Arab tribes into Palestine in the Early Islamic period. While the excavations revealed evidence of the establishment of the settlement

after the consolidation of Islamic rule on Palestine, the site might equally well represent a process of sedentarization of the local nomads, as has been suggested for the Negev Highlands.²⁰⁰

Conclusion: urban development and change

The archaeological evidence from Jerusalem and its surroundings presents a clear pattern of continuity from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period, with a very slow and gradual process of change, and it does not support previous suggestions that emphasized Islamic sovereignty in the city and a constant decline of the Christian population.²⁰¹ Christian predominance in Jerusalem did not end with the Arab conquest, and the continuity and even the expansion and construction of new churches and monasteries after the conquest are well expressed in the urban layout of Early Islamic Jerusalem. The city wall maintained its former layout, at least until the tenth century; domestic architecture was only gradually altered, and Christian religious institutions still flourished for at least three centuries after the Arab conquest. Major components of the former Byzantine city were preserved, with Christian institutions still dominating the urban landscape.

Although early Islamic Jerusalem was very much identified with the monumental Muslim constructions on the Haram al-Sharif, this was the only area of the city in which a dramatic change occurred. Most other areas evinced a slow and gradual transformation, and the material culture of daily life revealed by the archaeological findings does not represent a monolithic Islamic domination.

The continuity of settlements on the periphery of Jerusalem was much clarified by the large number of salvage excavations. While previous studies claimed a sharp decline and a massive abandonment of sites following the Arab conquest, excavated sites reveal a continuity of settlements until the ninth and tenth centuries. An extensive network of monasteries and farmsteads was constructed around the city, creating a vast suburban area. Further afield a dense system of agricultural villages and monasteries supplied the city with goods consumed by local residents and foreign pilgrims.

Jerusalem presents a special case of urban change, with large-scale constructions conducted in several cycles: in the fifth century the city walls were extended and a number of monumental public buildings were established in the initiative of the empress Eudocia. About a century later, Justinian's rule in the city was marked by the construction of the monumental Nea church and the extensive renovations of the streets of Jerusalem. Further constructions were

²⁰⁰ Avni 1996. See also the discussion in Ch. 4.

²⁰¹ E.g. Linder 1996, 122–4, Gil 1996, 109–11.

undertaken by Maurice in the second half of the sixth century, such as the renovations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A new wave of construction in the late seventh and early eighth centuries was initiated by the Muslim caliphs, who built their new religious and administrative centre in the Haram al-Sharif and its surroundings. It seems that in the eighth and ninth centuries, the Islamic presence was maintained only in this part of the city, while in the tenth century it gradually penetrated into the predominantly Christian areas around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Unlike other cities in Palestine and Jordan, in which no clear segregation of religious communities was observed, the urban zoning in Jerusalem, defined by the ethno-religious communities, had already been established by the late seventh century. It was evident in the establishment of the Islamic centre in the Haram, the continuous presence of Christians around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and elsewhere in Jerusalem, and the re-establishment of a Jewish community that settled in between the two. The predominance of Christianity in Jerusalem during Early Islamic times was maintained until the eleventh century by a constant flood of pilgrims and by the close ties of the local community with the major European powers, particularly in the time of Charlemagne, but also later in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

In spite of many historical references to atrocities committed by Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem and to the damage and destruction of churches and monasteries, the archaeological findings present a picture of much greater tolerance on the part of the Muslim authorities towards other communities in the city. Christians were not prevented from conducting their religious rituals. Several pilgrimage sites, like the Tomb of Mary and the Kathisma church, were even shared between Christians and Muslims, as the small and humble mosques constructed within the Christian churches show. The permission given to Jews to resettle in Jerusalem opened the road for the establishment of a permanent Jewish community that concentrated in segregated areas within the city.

Yet a gradual but constant change did take place in the size of population and the division of urban properties in Jerusalem. Both historical sources and archaeological findings present a gradual decline in population between the seventh and the eleventh centuries. While in the sixth century Jerusalem was a very large city of *c.*50,000–70,000 people,²⁰² in 1047 Nasir-i Khusraw estimated its population at *c.*20,000.²⁰³ It seems that the decline occurred relatively late, in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The traditional view, which claims that the Arab conquest triggered a rapid change in urban infrastructure, which led to decline, is challenged by the accumulating archaeological evidence. The finds support a view of stability and show that changes both in the urban area and in its rural hinterland were

²⁰² See the different estimates in Linder 1996, Tsafirir 1996.

²⁰³ Nasir-i Khusraw, 27. See also Grabar 1996, 138.

slow and gradual. The transition from a large city to a medium-sized town and from Christian to Islamic predominance in Jerusalem took more than 400 years.

EARLY ISLAMIC RAMLA

The urban development of Early Islamic Ramla is fundamentally different from that of Jerusalem. While Early Islamic Jerusalem was deeply rooted in the Roman and Byzantine urban traditions, Ramla, the new capital of Jund Filastin, founded 5 km south of Lod-Diospolis, presented a new concept of an urban landscape. All the sources connect the creation of Ramla with Sulaiman b. 'Abd al-Malik, who shortly before being appointed as caliph in 715 initiated the foundation of the new city.²⁰⁴ Sulaiman's father, 'Abd al-Malik, and his brother al-Walid were famous for their large-scale construction enterprises in Jerusalem and Damascus, and the foundation of the new 'princely city' was undertaken by the future caliph in order to place him among the great Umayyad builders.

The foundation of Ramla, as described in historical sources, is imbued with a legendary flavour. Jhashiyari (d. 942) described the circumstances of the foundation of the new capital:

There was a man from Filastin called Ibn Bitrik [other sources call him Batrik b. al-Naka (or Baka)] who wrote [to Sulaiman] and advised him to build al-Ramla. This was because Ibn Bitrik had asked the men of Lod to give him a parcel of land that was in a church [near the church] where he wanted to build a house. Being refused he told them: By god, I shall ruin it [the church].²⁰⁵

A different version is presented by Fadl Allah al-'Umari (d. 1349). According to this story, Sulaiman himself tried to acquire land in the centre of Christian Lod but was refused by a senior cleric of the Church. The furious prince wanted to execute the Christian, but he was calmed down by Raja b. Haywa, an official of the Umayyad administration who had been appointed by his father 'Abd al-Malik as his personal adjutant and adviser.²⁰⁶ Raja took Sulaiman for a horse ride outside Lod. When they reached the site of future Ramla, they saw a solitary tent and a beautiful woman inside it. As they rested in that place, which was

²⁰⁴ The foundation story is described by a number of sources, the earliest of which is al-Baladhuri (d. 892) (*Futūh*, 143). It was repeated by a number of sources, among them Ibn al-Fakih (d. 903), and Yakut (d. 1223). See Luz 1997, Pringle 1993–1998, 181–99.

²⁰⁵ Al-Jhashiyārī, 148; tr. Luz 1997, 47.

²⁰⁶ Raja b. Haywa, a native of Beth Shean, is known for many other achievements. Among other things, he was in charge of the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem; see Elad 1995, 45.

apparently where the white mosque was built, Raja suggested Sulaiman build his new city at this spot and establish within it both the White Mosque and a Christian monastery. As a princely city, it would be provided with protection for whoever built his house there, and the new city would be a much better place to live in than Lod.

Legends aside, the reason for the foundation and development of Ramla lies in the local geopolitical situation. It seems that the aim of the Umayyad rulers in creating a new district capital was to replace the Byzantine governmental centre in Caesarea, as a statement of Islamic sovereignty over Palestine.

The foundations for the new city were laid by Sulaiman around 715, probably before he became caliph. Historical sources mention several main buildings constructed in Ramla in its earliest stage:

The first building raised here was the palace (*qasr*), and the house called Dar al-Sabbaghin (House of the Dyers). In this last he constructed a huge cistern to store water. Then Sulaiman planned the mosque, and began to build it, but he succeeded to the caliphate before it was completed.²⁰⁷

... and Sulaiman dug for them [the people of Ramla] the water channel which went by the name of Baradah. He dug also wells of sweet water ...²⁰⁸

Five monumental structures formed the core of the new city: *Dar al-ʿImara*—the caliphal residence; the House of the Dyers (*Dar al-Sabbaghin*), an enigmatic building of industrial nature; a large water cistern; the White Mosque, the congregational mosque of Ramla; and the *Barada*, the aqueduct leading water to the palace and adjacent buildings.

The person appointed by Sulaiman to be in charge of the construction of Ramla was a Christian named al-Batriq b. al-Naka (or Baka). The construction of the White Mosque was probably not finished during the reign of Sulaiman, and according to al-Muqaddasi, it was the caliph Hisham (724–743) who completed the construction.

Ramla is mentioned time and again in historical sources as the political and commercial hub of Palestine. Located near a main road between Palestine and Egypt and in a wealthy and densely populated agricultural zone, the city expanded rapidly. In the second half of the tenth century al-Muqaddasi described it as a vast city, extending over an area of one square mile, and containing large buildings, extensive markets, and a city wall with eight gates:

It is a delight and well-built city. The water is good to drink and flows freely; fruits are abundant, and of every possible kind. It is situated in the midst of fertile rural areas, splendid cities, holy places and pleasant villages. Trade here is profitable,

²⁰⁷ al-Baladhuri, *Futūh* 143.

²⁰⁸ Yaqut, *Muʿjan Buldan* II, 817.

and the means of livelihood easy. There is not in Islam a splendid mosque than that here, no more delicious or excellent than its white bread. . . . It possesses elegant hostelries and pleasant baths . . . spacious houses, fine mosques, and broad streets.²⁰⁹

The local population was predominantly Muslim,²¹⁰ but the city also contained Jewish, Christian, and Samaritan communities. Historical sources mention a number of churches and synagogues in the city, and its affluent Jewish community is largely attested to in the Cairo Geniza documents.²¹¹

Archaeological research in Ramla

In spite of its leading position in Early Islamic Palestine, Ramla remained *terra incognita* for archaeologists until 1990. Archaeological research in the modern town included only a preliminary survey of existing monuments²¹² and a few small-scale excavations in the area of the White Mosque²¹³ and on the western outskirts of the modern town.²¹⁴ Scholarly reconstruction of Early Islamic Ramla was based mainly on historical evidence, with little contribution from archaeological material.²¹⁵

This situation has dramatically changed since 1990 when, following accelerated development in modern Ramla, scores of rescue excavations were conducted throughout the town, revealing fragmentary remains of the previously invisible ancient city, and providing substantial archaeological data for the reconstruction of its topographical layout and chronological sequence. Large-scale excavations were carried out to the north and west of the Old City and to the north and south of the White Mosque. Other excavations were conducted on the southern and western outskirts of Ramla, delimiting the area of the Early Islamic city. Especially notable was the large excavation to the south of Ramla, in which evidence for the southward extension of the Early Islamic city or for the existence of an outer residential and industrial quarter was revealed²¹⁶ (Fig. 3.16). In addition, the course of the early Islamic aqueduct from the springs at Tell Gezer was traced and examined.²¹⁷

²⁰⁹ al-Muqaddasi, 164, tr. Collins 1994, 139. ²¹⁰ Gil 1992, 302–3 [425–35].

²¹¹ Gil 1992, 173–5 [282–5]; Gat 2003; see also the section on urban zoning, pp. 176–80.

²¹² De Vogue 1912; Petersen 1995.

²¹³ Unfortunately only short preliminary reports of these excavations have been published to date; see Kaplan 1959, Ben Dov 1984, Rosen Ayalon 1996, 253–4.

²¹⁴ Rosen-Ayalon 1996, 254–6.

²¹⁵ Rosen-Ayalon 1996, 250–63; Luz 1997; Gat 2003; Whitcomb 1995a, 491.

²¹⁶ Tal and Taxel 2008. For preliminary publications for other areas, see Gorzalczy 2008a, 2009b, Gorzalczy *et al.* 2010.

²¹⁷ Zelinger and Shmueli 2002; Gorzalczy 2008b, 2011.

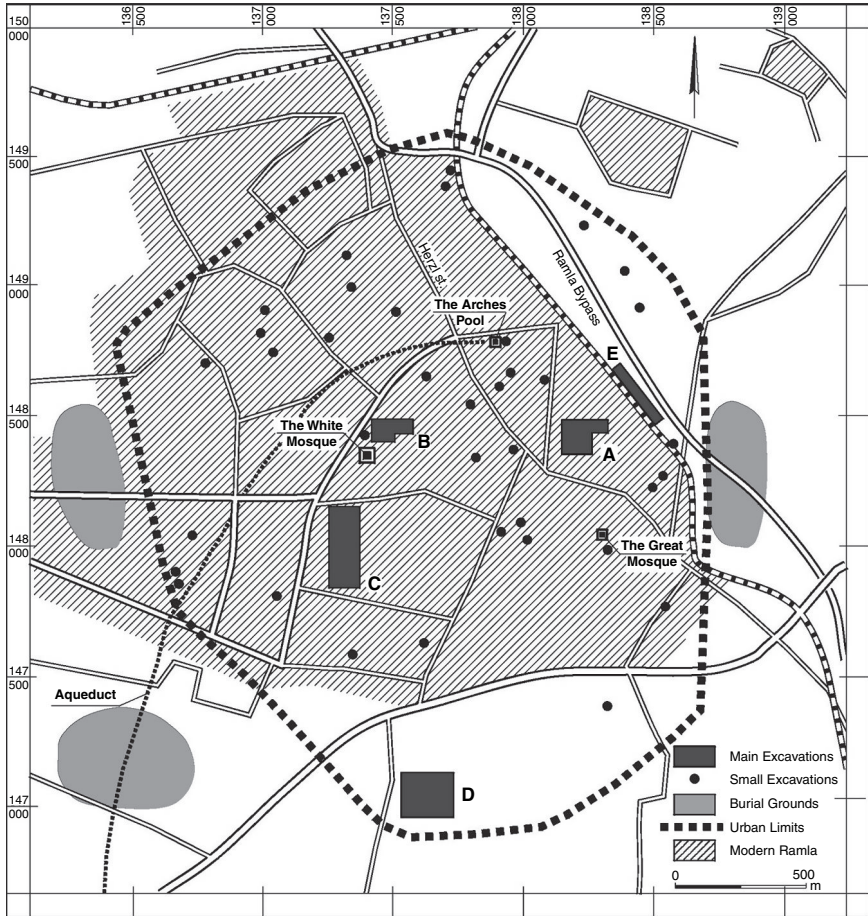


Fig. 3.16 Ramla: map of the main excavations and the limits of the Early Islamic city.

This revolutionary change in the archaeological exploration of Ramla is well represented by the number of excavations conducted in recent decades: only six between 1949 and 1990, four of them on a very limited scale, and *c.*200 between 1990 and 2012, some of them extending over large areas and exposing a continuous sequence of habitation. This large number of excavations has enabled the reconstruction of the layout of buildings and residential areas in the ancient city.

The main problem in excavating Ramla is the poor preservation of architectural remains, because of the massive looting of stones. As a consequence, only the foundation trenches of walls indicate the layout of ancient buildings (Fig. 3.17). With the exception of two impressive standing monuments, the White Mosque in the city centre and the 'Arches Pool' in its northern section,



Fig. 3.17 Ramla: detail of a typical excavation.

all other public buildings of early Islamic Ramla were completely demolished in medieval and early modern times to leave only scant architectural remains, which were covered by modern construction. Thus, in spite of the large number of excavations, the reconstruction of large architectural units is difficult because of the fragmentary character of the remains. An exceptionally large number of industrial installations was identified within the residential areas. These were better preserved, as they were usually dug into the ground, paved with stones, and coated with plaster.

Ramla's urban core: the White Mosque and its surroundings

The focus of large-scale excavations at Ramla has been the area around the White Mosque, located in the centre of the early Islamic city. Most standing remains at the mosque compound are dated to the thirteenth century, but excavations and architectural studies have showed that an early mosque was established here in the eighth century and functioned as the main congregational mosque of the city.²¹⁸

The mosque, of a plan typical of the Umayyad mosques in Damascus, Tiberias, and Jerusalem,²¹⁹ was a square compound measuring 93 × 84 m and facing north–south, with a slight deviation to the east. It consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by porticoes and a rectangular prayer hall facing

²¹⁸ Luz 1997, 34–5; Gat 2003, 89–95; Rosen-Ayalon 1996, 2006.

²¹⁹ Cytryn-Silverman 2009.

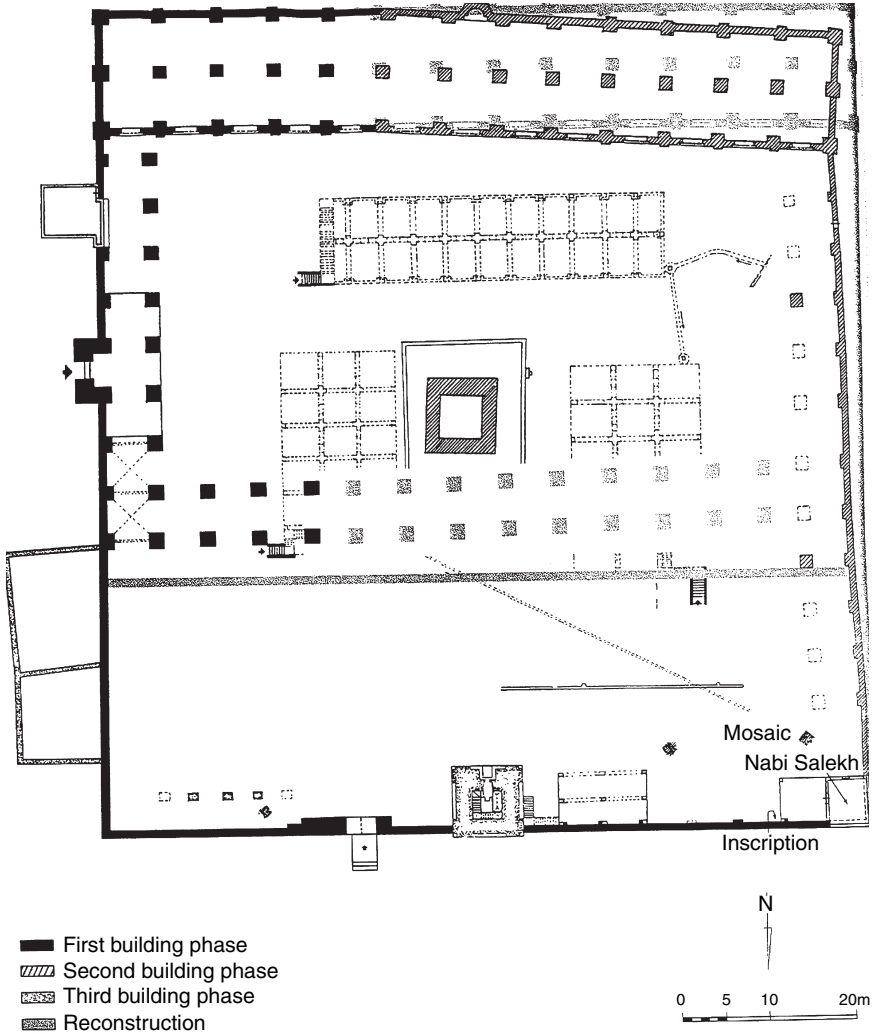


Fig. 3.18 Ramla: plan of the White Mosque (Kaplan 1959, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

the southern *qibla* wall (Fig. 3.18). Three large cisterns were installed under the courtyard.

A number of phases were identified within the building, the earliest of which was from the first half of the eighth century. Dating of the first mosque was based on several probes conducted in the inner courtyard and near the walls of the compound and on the interpretation of its architectural remains.²²⁰

²²⁰ Kaplan 1959; Rosen-Ayalon 2006; Ben Dov 1984; Shmueli 2009, 42–53.

Kaplan, who conducted the only excavation within the mosque, dated the first mosque to the foundation of Ramla in 715, and proposed that it was in use throughout the Early Islamic period and was enlarged to its present dimensions in the twelfth century.²²¹ The recent reconstruction by Rosen-Ayalon suggested four phases of development for the mosque, the earliest consisting of a smaller mosque attributed to the Sulaiman–Hisham construction in the first half of the eighth century. This mosque was destroyed by the earthquake of 749 and replaced by a larger second mosque, which included the underground water cisterns. As these cisterns are remarkably similar to the ‘Arches Pool’ (see below), the exact date of the construction of which is known, it has been suggested that both complexes were constructed in the end of the eighth century, during the reign of Harun el-Rashid.²²²

Another excavation along the northern wall of the mosque compound revealed several construction phases, the earliest from the eighth century.²²³ A 45 m wall oriented east–west, with a slight deviation to the south, was discovered here, which suggests that this may have been the northern wall of the earliest mosque. Another parallel wall was found above it and dated to the ninth and tenth centuries, which may represent the second mosque. Additional excavations in this area discovered a 9-metre-wide paved street, which ran parallel to the mosque’s northern wall.²²⁴ As this is the only clear section of a wide street discovered around the White Mosque, it may have been the main east–west artery of Ramla, which intersected with a major north–south street near the White Mosque.²²⁵

The finds from these excavations support the chronology suggested by Rosen-Ayalon: the first mosque was constructed by Sulaiman and completed in the time of Hisham. It was destroyed in the earthquake of 749 and then renovated on a much larger scale in the time of caliph Harun el-Rashid. This splendid mosque, which was described by al-Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khusraw, was damaged or even abandoned following the 1068 earthquake. The subsequent construction of the mosque which has given it its present-day dimensions is dated to the thirteenth century.²²⁶

The context of the White Mosque within the urban layout of early Islamic Ramla was clarified by a number of excavations conducted to the north and south of the compound (Fig 3.19). Large-scale excavations have been carried out south of the White Mosque, covering an area of about 4,500 sq. m.²²⁷ An uninterrupted sequence of buildings was exposed here containing five main construction phases from the eighth century to the second half of the eleventh

²²¹ Kaplan 1959, 114–15. ²²² Rosen-Ayalon 2006, 74–82. ²²³ Ben Dov 1984.

²²⁴ This section was excavated by Yannai and Rosenberg in 1991 and a report on it has not yet been published. See Shmueli 2009, 49–52.

²²⁵ Shmueli 2009, 55–60.

²²⁶ Cytryn-Silverman 2008. For a slightly different reconstruction, see Pringle 1993–1998, 185–7.

²²⁷ See Avni *et al.* 2008, Avni and Gutfeld 2008 for a preliminary report.

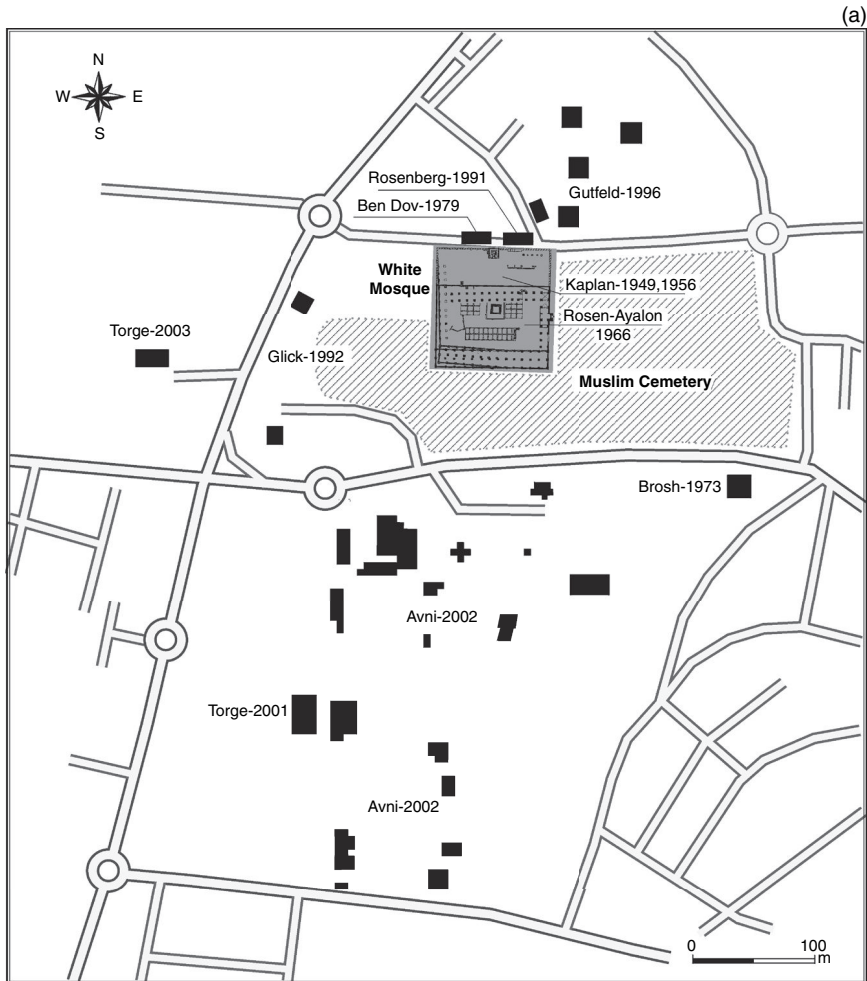


Fig. 3.19 Ramla: a. map of the excavations around the White Mosque; b. aerial view of the White Mosque and the excavated areas.

century. All the excavated areas yielded remains of a complex urban network composed of dwellings, some of them luxurious, industrial installations, and an elaborate system of cisterns and water channels. Alongside the densely built residential neighbourhoods were open areas in which no buildings were discovered. This area was abandoned after the earthquakes of 1033 and 1068, never to be settled again.

The closest excavation south-west of the White Mosque (about 80 m from the mosque compound) revealed a fragmentary section of a large building dated to the eighth century. Built on the sand, its walls were constructed of massive ashlar stones that survived in places to a height of three courses.

(b)



Fig. 3.19 continued.

A vaulted chamber discovered under one of its floors, perhaps a cellar or cesspit, was filled with dumps containing masses of pottery and glassware from the eighth century, including richly decorated lustre-type glass vessels with figurative representations and Arabic inscriptions.²²⁸ The richness of the finds indicated that they originated from an opulent mansion or even a palace that was abandoned or altered in the ninth or tenth centuries, which perhaps might link it to the *Dar al-‘Imara* that according to historical sources was constructed adjacent to the White Mosque.²²⁹

South of this structure, a well-planned residential quarter was revealed. Excavations in this area provided a clear stratigraphical and chronological sequence of buildings ranging from the second half of the eighth century to the middle of the eleventh century. It is noteworthy that no architectural remains from the foundation phase of Ramla were identified. The earliest building exposed included a central hall oriented north–south, paved with a high-quality mosaic floor decorated with floral and geometric designs in the Byzantine tradition.²³⁰ The hall was surrounded by smaller rooms that were only partially preserved. This building was constructed in the second half of the eighth century and functioned until the ninth century. The circumstances of its

²²⁸ Gorin-Rosen 2008.

²²⁹ Unfortunately it was not possible to extend the excavation northwards to the White Mosque, as this area is today covered by a modern Muslim cemetery.

²³⁰ Avner 2008a.



Fig. 3.20 Ramla: typical mosaic in a residential building south of the White Mosque.

abandonment are not clear, but it might have been destroyed in an earthquake. Above it were the remains of smaller dwellings from the ninth century. One of them consisted of a network of rooms facing an open central courtyard with a water cistern.

The upper phase of occupation contained several large and elaborate buildings from the tenth–eleventh centuries. Each building consisted of a number of inner courtyards surrounded by rooms, some of which were decorated with mosaic floors containing geometrical and floral motifs (Fig. 3.20). In and around the buildings were a number of cisterns, small pools, and water channels. One of the largest buildings in this area contained an open courtyard surrounded by rooms, and a sophisticated water system which had pools with red-plastered floors and channels. An octagonal pool with an ornamental fountain fed by clay pipes was installed in the centre of the courtyard. This building was completely destroyed in the second half of the eleventh century, apparently by the 1068 earthquake.

The discovery of two decorated mosaic floors south-east of the White Mosque provided additional evidence of the elegance of the private residences in this area.²³¹ The mosaics were first dated to the eighth century, but a more plausible later date has recently been suggested.²³² It seems that they were installed

²³¹ The mosaics were discovered in 1973 by M. Brosh and a report on them was published by Rosen-Ayalon 1976.

²³² Avner 2008a.

in the ninth or tenth century and form part of the same network of rich private buildings exposed in the excavations to the south of the White Mosque.

This residential quarter reached its maximal expansion in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when a network of large buildings was constructed on top of much smaller earlier buildings. These large residences, most of them lavishly decorated with mosaic floors, indicate that the areas to the south and west of the White Mosque were the affluent residential quarters of Ramla at its zenith. This was a well-planned district, with all buildings facing streets aligned in accordance with the orientation of the White Mosque compound. Thus, the streets south of the mosque were oriented north–south, with a slight deviation to the east, as was the *qibla* wall of the mosque. This orientation prevailed throughout the city and dictated the urban layout of early Islamic Ramla.

Excavations north and west of the White Mosque revealed further evidence of large-scale constructions. The foundations of a large building adjacent to the White Mosque were found here,²³³ but the fragmentary architectural remains prevented a reconstruction of the building's layout and its function. It has been suggested that its construction dates to the first half of the eighth century, but the pottery from foundation trenches points to a later date in the second half of that century.²³⁴ A large drainage channel was discovered nearby, probably part of the public urban drainage system. In another excavation to the north-east of the mosque, the foundations of several large rooms, perhaps an additional wing of the same building, were discovered.²³⁵

The two possible candidates for such a building are the *Dar al-Imara* mentioned above, or the 'House of the Dyers', which was described in historical sources as having been built near the mosque, but the fragmentary nature of the finds prevents a clear conclusion.²³⁶

Segments of massive walls discovered west of the White Mosque were interpreted as a fortification, perhaps a city wall,²³⁷ but it seems that these were the remains of a cistern or open pool constructed along the main aqueduct leading to the city.²³⁸

Further north-west of the White Mosques, the remains of dwellings and industrial installations were excavated, some of them providing evidence of a metal industry. The remains included well-built water channels, smelting ovens, and debris containing large quantities of metal production waste.

The excavations around the White Mosque make it possible to reconstruct the chronological development of this area during the Early Islamic period. This was 'virgin soil' for the first builders of Ramla, as no evidence of Roman or Byzantine period remains was discovered here. It seems that massive construction in this part of ancient Ramla took place no earlier than the

²³³ Gutfeld 2010. ²³⁴ Cytryn-Silverman 2010a.

²³⁵ The report of the excavation, conducted by D. Glick, has not yet been published.

²³⁶ Shmueli 2009, 49–55.

²³⁷ Sion *et al.* 2009, 156–8.

²³⁸ Shmueli 2009, 54.

second half of the eighth century. The foundation and early development of Ramla, between 715 and the earthquake of 749, are not well represented in the archaeological record, which provides only isolated installations or pottery vessels from this period. The reason for this remains unclear, as in the southern section of Ramla a clear sequence of construction from the first half of the eighth century was identified (see below).

A possible explanation of the meagre remains from the earliest period of Ramla in the areas around the White Mosque is that the first constructions included only the monumental buildings: the *Dar al-Imara*, the 'House of the Dyers', and the mosque. Residential quarters were introduced into this sector only when the second mosque was constructed in the second half of the eighth century. These residential areas, containing clusters of luxurious houses, were developed in a relatively short time. The second stage of large-scale construction in this sector, in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, represents the zenith of Ramla's urban expansion and population increase. The city of this period was composed of clusters of houses interspersed with open spaces, courtyards, and gardens, as al-Muqaddasi and Nasir-i Khusraw have described.

The residential areas of Ramla were constructed according to a pre-planned scheme, with all buildings facing grid-pattern streets, which were aligned in accordance with the White Mosque compound. As the *qibla* wall of the mosque was oriented to the south, with a small deviation towards the east, it also dictated the alignment of the nearby residential quarters.

Residential quarters in the eastern, western, and southern sectors

Excavations in the north-eastern part of modern Ramla revealed a similar pattern of spacious residential units, and uncovered houses (most of them traced only in small sections because of the massive looting of stones), industrial installations, and water cisterns.²³⁹ Also found there were the remains of an oil press and a mosaic pavement decorated with geometric motifs intertwined with figures of animals: birds, donkeys eating dates from a tree, and a tiger.²⁴⁰ Another typical find was a number of underground silos dug in the earth and roofed with barrel vaults. Their outer walls were constructed of fieldstones bonded with mortar and the inner walls were plastered. Several rectangular plastered pools with traces of red paint might indicate a dyeing industry. Around the pools were extensive networks of drainage channels, sewage systems, and cisterns. Thirteen cisterns with a ramified system of channels that drained run-off water from the roofs of the nearby houses were uncovered.

²³⁹ The main excavations in this area were conducted in 1995–1997 by D. Glick and F. Vitto, but the results have not yet been fully published. For preliminary notes, see Glick 1997, 1999, Glick and Gamil 1999, Vitto 2000.

²⁴⁰ See Avner 2008a for a detailed description of this mosaic.

The stratigraphic sequence revealed here was similar to the one around the White Mosque. The beginning of settlement was dated to the late eighth or early ninth century; it reached a zenith in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and was abandoned in the second half of the latter.

The eastern limits of Early Islamic Ramla were further established by the excavation of one kilometre long section (c.5 m wide) along the railway line to the east of the modern town (Fig. 3.16, E). The findings included many water installations and scattered buildings,²⁴¹ but no remains of the city walls were identified in this area, in spite of the great length of the section excavated.

An interesting find from a salvage excavation on the eastern outskirts of Ramla shed light on the involvement of the central government in the construction of roads and bridges leading to the city. A monumental inscription on a marble plaque was revealed, mentioning the construction of a bridge by Muhammad b. Tughi Abu Bakr al-Ikhshid, who was appointed governor of Egypt in 935. The inscription cites the emir, commander of the faithful, who ordered the construction of the bridge in 942–945.²⁴² Further excavations in this area revealed the foundations of a bridge and segments of a road.

The south-eastern sections of the city provided data on a pre-planned residential quarter. A small-scale excavation revealed two phases of fragmentary remains of buildings facing an alley.²⁴³ The alignment of buildings, as in all other parts of Ramla, was north–south, with a slight deviation to the east. A number of column bases and drums in secondary use were incorporated into the buildings, one of them bearing a cross. These were probably taken from a church in the vicinity of Ramla and reused in the domestic construction of the ninth and tenth centuries. Several marble slabs with Arabic burial inscriptions on them were incorporated into a pavement or used as building material in the upper phase of the buildings. These were probably taken from one of the city's burial grounds, located south-west of Ramla.

The southern limits of the ancient city have recently been studied in large-scale excavations south of modern Ramla, in which a continuous sequence of buildings and industrial installations was revealed (Fig. 3.16, D). The excavations, conducted in conjunction with the construction of a major road, covered an area of c.500 × 200 m and provided a rare opportunity to study a large continuously inhabited area. Unlike in the excavations in and around the urban core of Ramla, a clear indication of a pre-Islamic settlement was discovered here, providing a continuous sequence of habitation from the Roman and Byzantine periods to Early Islamic times.²⁴⁴ The Byzantine period

²⁴¹ Sion *et al.* 2009, 149–56; Haddad 2010.

²⁴² Gorzalczy 2009c.

²⁴³ Kletter 2005.

²⁴⁴ Excavations in this area were conducted by A. Onn and A. Gorzalczy on behalf of the IAA and by O. Tal and I. Taxel on behalf of Tel Aviv University. See Gorzalczy 2008a, 2009b, Gorzalczy *et al.* 2010, Tal and Taxel 2008. I also thank A. Onn for providing me with details of his as yet unpublished excavation report.

levels included the remains of an agricultural village located within the territory of Lod-Diospolis. This village was probably affected by the foundation of Ramla and was incorporated into the industrial area constructed to the south of the new city during the eighth century.

A well-planned industrial quarter was developed here in the seventh and eighth centuries. Many installations were incorporated into and between the buildings. They consisted of plastered pools, probably intended for industries that required large amounts of water (perhaps dyeing installations), and glass and pottery kilns.²⁴⁵ The finds date the beginning of industrial use in this area to the seventh century, before the foundation of Ramla. One large building was dated to the Byzantine period, with a final stage of use in the second half of the seventh century, and it is not clear whether it was abandoned in the eighth century.

The site reached its peak of prosperity in the first stage of the Early Islamic period. A large square compound of $c.70 \times 70$ m was constructed in its centre, sometime in the late seventh or eighth century, and divided into internal structures with central courtyards. It contained a north–south central street with intersecting alleys, showing an alignment similar to that found in other sections of Ramla. The buildings were usually two storeys high and contained shops with commercial activities on the ground floors. The areas around the main compound contained predominantly industrial installations and cisterns, some of which were exceptionally large and deep. All the pools were coated with hydraulic plaster of fine quality, which indicates the use of liquids and a possible link with dyeing industries.²⁴⁶ Two small bathhouses were found at the site, both dated to the seventh and eighth centuries, when the industrial activities intensified.²⁴⁷

A unique indication of the destruction of buildings by the 749 earthquake was found here. The remains of houses with distinctive destruction levels on their floors were detected, as well as stratigraphic evidence of tectonic activity.²⁴⁸ The effects of the earthquake were noted mainly in the southern part of the settlement, and included cracks along the walls of buildings and installations, collapsed walls, and sunken floors. A number of storage rooms were destroyed by the earthquake and a large collection of smashed storage jars was found on the floors. It is interesting to note that the destroyed area was rapidly restored, and by the second half of the eighth century it was functioning again.²⁴⁹ With the restoration of the collapsed buildings, industrial activities were renewed and the settlement expanded further. As in other sections of Ramla, it reached a zenith during the tenth century. The periphery of the site seems to have begun its

²⁴⁵ Gorzalczy *et al.* 2010.

²⁴⁶ Tal and Taxel 2008.

²⁴⁷ Gorzalczy 2009*b*.

²⁴⁸ Gorzalczy 2009*b*; see also Marco *et al.* 2003.

²⁴⁹ Gorzalczy 2009*b*; see for similar restoration of the 749 damage in Beth Shean, see Ch. 2 and in Pella, see Ch. 4.

decline in the later part of that century, but the central section, including the living areas of the large square compound described above, which now perhaps functioned as a caravanserai, continued at least until the beginning of the eleventh century.²⁵⁰ The site was abandoned in the second half of that century, as is indicated by a jewellery hoard concealed in one of the buildings when the local tenants left their houses, sometime in the 1080s.²⁵¹

The intensive settlement on the southern fringes of the city shows that Ramla's urban area was much larger than previously predicted. It has been suggested that this was an outer quarter of the city, located along the road from Ramla to Gaza and Egypt.²⁵² Alternatively, it has been identified with the village of Bila'a/Bali'a mentioned in historical sources.²⁵³ However, it seems more plausible that this site was an integral part of Ramla, as the nature of the construction and the alignment of buildings and alleys resemble other parts of the city.

The city wall: an unsolved question

The city wall of Ramla is mentioned in several historical sources. Al-Muqaddasi provided a detailed description of the city wall and specified its eight gates by name. Nasir-i Khusraw mentioned a strong wall of great height and thickness, built of stone and mortar and containing a number of iron gates.²⁵⁴ Several reconstructions were suggested on the basis of these descriptions,²⁵⁵ but no trace of the wall has been found in spite of the numerous excavations of the outer areas of Ramla.²⁵⁶ Thus, the presumed location of the wall can be deduced only from historical sources and from the reconstructed urban limits (Fig. 3.16).

According to historical descriptions, the wall, probably constructed in the eighth or ninth century, was restored in 1029, and then damaged by the 1033 and 1068 earthquakes.²⁵⁷ The recovery from the 1033 earthquake included the repair of the wall, as it is mentioned by Nasir-i Khusraw in 1047. The damage of the 1068 earthquake was apparently severe, but it seems that the city wall was again repaired. In his description of Ramla on the eve of the Crusader conquest, William of Tyre mentioned that the city was surrounded by a wall and towers, and its gates remained open when the Crusaders conquered it in June 1099.²⁵⁸

The archaeological invisibility of the city wall might be connected to the massive looting of stones during the Crusader and Mamluk periods. The

²⁵⁰ Tal and Taxel 2008, 210–11. ²⁵¹ Lester 2008a. ²⁵² Tal and Taxel 2008, 210.

²⁵³ Gat 2003, 82–4. ²⁵⁴ al-Muqaddasi, 165; Nasir-i Khusraw, 26.

²⁵⁵ Whitcomb 1995a; Luz 1997, Gat 2003, 80–2.

²⁵⁶ See the suggested reconstruction in Sion *et al.* 2009, which was refuted by Shmueli 2009, 86–9.

²⁵⁷ Gil 1992, 398; Pringle 1993–1998, 182.

²⁵⁸ Ehrlich 2002, 42–4.

ruined city was systematically destroyed, and its stones were taken to other sites in the coastal plain, with only the foundation trenches of the walls left as an indication of their previous layout. The solid stones of the city wall might have been the first target of this massive looting.

Urban burial grounds

Excavations on the outskirts of Ramla revealed some evidence of the urban necropolis. Clusters of simple cist graves were found south, east, and west of the city (Fig. 3.16). All burial grounds were located outside the urban limits, in observation of the rule of separation between the living and the dead. A large concentration of simple cist graves was recently found on the south-western outskirts of the city,²⁵⁹ and this may have been one of Ramla's main cemeteries. In addition, a number of epitaphs on stone slabs were discovered, many of them in secondary use. Inscribed tombstones were found near residential areas in the south-west and north-east sections of Ramla,²⁶⁰ indicating the presence of urban cemeteries in nearby locations.

All burials were of the common type prevailing in Muslim cemeteries: the deceased were laid in simple cist tombs dug in the ground, the body oriented east-west and the head facing south, towards Mecca. No evidence of Jewish or Christian burials has been found, although several epitaphs bear indications of specific segments of the local population, mainly Christians. It seems that Jews and Christians were laid to rest in a separate section of the urban necropolis.

Water supply

One of the most remarkable features of early Islamic Ramla is the tremendous effort dedicated to the development of public and private water-supply systems. The problem of water supply was indicated by al-Muqaddasi, who stated that

The wells are deep and salty, and the rainwater is held in closed cisterns; hence the poor go thirsty and strangers are helpless and at a loss what to do. In the baths a fee must be paid so the attendants will turn the water wheels.²⁶¹

A sophisticated water-conveying system was created in order to improve the inadequate water supply to the city. It included the main aqueduct from the

²⁵⁹ This find has not yet had its results published. I thank A. Onn for providing this information.

²⁶⁰ Kletter 2005; Glick 1997; Gorzalczy 2009b. Additional tombstones were found by A. Nagorsky and their inscriptions have not yet been published. I thank her for permission to mention this discovery.

²⁶¹ al-Muqaddasi, 165.



Fig. 3.21 Ramla: the 'Arches Pool' (photograph: David Silverman).

Gezer springs, c.12 km south-east of the city, along with a ramified system of cisterns and small water channels within the city, and a large number of clay pipes that drained rainwater into the many private cisterns in the courtyards of houses.

Several segments of the main aqueduct from Gezer to Ramla were excavated. Its width was c.1.5 m and it was built of a foundation of fieldstones bonded with cement and two parallel walls of dressed limestone masonry.²⁶² The aqueduct's final destination was the large cistern known as the 'Arches Pool' (*Birket al-'Anaziyya*), in the northern part of the city (Fig. 3.21). The construction of this monumental stone-built and vaulted cistern has been dated to the end of the eighth century, as a dedication inscription engraved in the plaster covering its upper part indicates. It contains the name of the caliph Harun el-Rashid and the date of construction, in the year 789.²⁶³

Drinking water was also provided through deep wells dug down to the aquifer. Several such wells have been revealed in excavations throughout the city, usually installed in the open central courtyards of private houses. The most common water installations in Ramla were the hundreds of cisterns dug into the sandy ground, paved with stone and carefully plastered, to store the rainwater collected from nearby roofs.

²⁶² Zelinger and Shmueli 2002; Gorzalczy 2008b, 2011.

²⁶³ De Vogue 1912; Rosen-Ayalon 1996, 259–62, 2006. For recent excavations, see Toueg 2010.

Urban zoning

The common reconstruction of Ramla's urban layout presents a square or rectangular city surrounded by a wall and containing four main gates and four secondary gates. Sourdel, Luz, and Gat compared the layout of Ramla to the planned square enclosures of 'Anjar in Lebanon and Ayla in southern Palestine, which constituted a typical example of the Early Islamic *misr*.²⁶⁴ However, Ramla was much larger in area and population, and its urban network of roads shows a much more complicated planned pattern than the one revealed in 'Anjar and Ayla.

The large number of excavations in Ramla and their random distribution provide comprehensive data for the reconstruction of the city's layout and its urban components. As described in the historical sources, the White Mosque and its immediate surroundings formed the urban core of Early Islamic Ramla. However, while the mosque's compound is known from archaeological and architectural studies,²⁶⁵ the adjacent buildings—the *Dar al-'Imara* and the 'House of the Dyers' (*Dar al-Sabbaghin*)—were not clearly identified, perhaps because of their fragmentary state of preservation and the absence of excavations in the areas adjacent to the White Mosque. The immediate area to the south of the mosque, where the *Dar al-'Imara* is supposed to be located, is covered by a Muslim cemetery and no excavations can be conducted there. The closest excavation to the mosque revealed hints of monumental architecture and finds which may be connected to a palatial building (see above), but this fragmentary evidence cannot prove the existence of a palace south of the White Mosque. The areas west of the mosque were only partially excavated, and a large network of industrial installations, which might have been connected to the 'House of the Dyers' was revealed, but again, no conclusive architectural evidence of the existence of such a large building was found here.

While the evidence of monumental constructions in the vicinity of the White Mosque is meagre, archaeological findings provided abundant data on the residential districts around the mosque compound, especially to its south and west. These were composed of large buildings which faced a network of intersecting streets and formed a unified plan consisting of spacious houses with central courtyards surrounded by rooms and halls. A similar planning scheme with consistent alignment of buildings and streets was revealed in other sections of ancient Ramla, including its outer neighbourhoods.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Sourdel 1981, 391; Luz 1997, fig. 3; Whitcomb 1995a, 492, fig. 3, 1995b; see also Gat 2003, 71–90.

²⁶⁵ Mainly Kaplan 1959 and Rosen-Ayalon 1996, 2006.

²⁶⁶ E.g. Glick and Gamil 1999, Kletter 2005, Gorzalczany 2008a, 2009b, Toueg 2007. See Shmueli 2009 for a comprehensive discussion of the urban plan.

The large number of excavations makes it possible to reconstruct the urban layout of Ramla as a grid-patterned city containing intersecting streets which delimited square or rectangular *insulae*. A number of residential units were constructed within each *insula*, consisting of a central-court house with a single entrance leading to a street or alley. Similar grid patterns were found in other early Islamic towns, for example at Caesarea, where the inner harbour area revealed a well-planned grid of buildings and alleys.²⁶⁷

The source and inspiration for the architectural plan of Ramla are unclear. Previous suggestions, comparing Ramla and 'Anjar, based on the same construction date of the two sites,²⁶⁸ are not confirmed by recent finds. Alternatively, it seems that Ramla was influenced by the large urban centres of the Islamic world. The consistent plan of *insulae* is paralleled on a much grander scale in the large cities of Iraq, rather than in the small rectangular compounds of 'Anjar and Ayla.²⁶⁹

Industries and commerce

A major urban component in ancient Ramla was the numerous industrial installations incorporated into the residential areas of the city, pointing to a high degree of industrial activity, the nature of which has not been entirely ascertained. The large number of water installations (plastered pools, cisterns, and clay pipes) indicates that these industries involved the use of large amounts of liquids. The installations, particularly the plastered pools, some of them containing remains of red paint, could be linked to the linen dyeing industry. This was a well-known industry in Lod-Diospolis during the Byzantine period,²⁷⁰ and it seems that it was also widely practised in Early Islamic Ramla.²⁷¹ A different interpretation connects the industrial installations in Ramla to the processing of flax into textile fibres.²⁷² This is based mainly on historical sources describing the cultivation of flax in the hinterland of Ramla, which provided its products to Egypt, and on the wide distribution of flax as one of the main agricultural crops of the region until the modern period. Other main crops included cotton and linen, olives, and fruit for local consumption. Olive oil was used for the local soap industry and the products were exported from Palestine.²⁷³

The vast industrial activities revealed in Ramla provide an excellent example of urban change, from the strict separation between residential areas and industrial zones in the Roman and Byzantine periods to the crowded surroundings of

²⁶⁷ See the description in Ch. 2.

²⁶⁸ E.g. Luz 1997, 38–42, Gat 2003, 73–7. For 'Anjar, see Hillenbrand 1999.

²⁶⁹ For a summary of the archaeological research in Samarra, see Northedge 2005, 2006, Leisten 2003.

²⁷⁰ E.g. Schwartz 1991, 271.

²⁷¹ Gat 2007, 47–8.

²⁷² Tal and Taxel 2008, 123–4.

²⁷³ Gat 2007, 44–7.

the Early Islamic city, which witnessed a massive penetration of commercial and industrial zones into the residential districts.²⁷⁴

Another interesting aspect of the urban layout of Ramla is the presence of agricultural plots within the city. Such areas, located between the well-planned clusters of buildings, have been identified in a number of excavations throughout the city. The presence of small vegetable gardens within the city is mentioned in one of the Geniza letters.²⁷⁵ It seems that, as with the penetration of commerce and industry into the built-up areas, agriculture was also practised in small plots in between the buildings.

The central location of Ramla as a regional commercial hub between Palestine and Egypt is frequently mentioned in the Geniza documents. The discovery of an epitaph of an Egyptian cloth merchant who was entombed at Ramla on 18 July 918²⁷⁶ provides further indication of these connections. Another indication of local commercial prosperity is the Ramla mint, probably established shortly after the foundation of the city, which was the largest in the country. Coins labelled 'Ramla Filastin' were widely circulated in Palestine and in neighbouring regions.²⁷⁷ Ramla's position as a commercial centre in Palestine is attested by a unique find of a hoard of gold coins, containing 376 coins of a wide geographical distribution, from the Maghreb to Iran (but with no coins from the mint in Ramla!). The coins, minted between 761 and 979, were probably the property of a local money changer.²⁷⁸

Ethnic composition

The urban layout of Early Islamic Ramla as a planned city, containing well-defined quarters with grid-patterned streets, emerges from the archaeological excavations. Ramla was a multicultural city, but unlike Jerusalem, where a clear division of quarters according to the ethno-religious affiliation of the population was established, it seems that no such segregation existed in Ramla.

As the newly founded district capital and administrative centre of Palestine, with its large congregational mosque prominently located in the centre of the city, Ramla contained a predominantly Muslim population. The central position of the local Muslim community is indicated by references in historical sources to its numerous governors, judges, and government officials and administrators. Many Muslim scholars are known to have originated from, or lived in, Ramla.²⁷⁹ The predominance of Muslims in the city is further attested by a *waqf* inscription from 913, which mentions the existence of a public hostel (*Funduk*) supported by the local Islamic administration.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ See the discussion in Ch. 2.

²⁷⁵ Gil 1992, 144 [283]; see also the detailed narrative below.

²⁷⁶ Gorzalczyński 2009c. ²⁷⁷ Gat 2007, 59–60. ²⁷⁸ Levy and Mitchell 1965–6.

²⁷⁹ Gil 1992, [425–35]; Gat 2003, 187–90. ²⁸⁰ Sharon 1966.

Apart from its majority Muslim population, Ramla contained large Christian and Jewish communities. Early historical sources mention that Christians from Lod settled in Ramla from its foundation.²⁸¹ Later sources name at least two churches in the city, an 'upper' and 'lower' church, the locations of both of which are unknown.²⁸² A number of Christian theologians are associated with Ramla, and one of them, Stephen b. al-Hakim al-Ramali, who lived in the city during the second half of the ninth century, was especially notable.²⁸³ Nevertheless, occasional confrontations occurred between Christians and Muslims in Ramla, which resulted in the destruction of churches in the years 923 and 940. But the churches were rapidly reconstructed and the Christian community continued to flourish.²⁸⁴ No archaeological evidence of ethnic segregation in the residential districts was found, and the fragmentary findings prevent a definition of the ethnic affiliation of particular houses or sections of the city. A number of architectural fragments found in the excavations, mainly columns and capitals with Christian symbols on them, hint at their provenance from public buildings, perhaps churches, but none of these was found *in situ*. Additional evidence of Christians in Ramla is provided by a burial inscription from 943, in which a Christian citizen named Jabur is mentioned.²⁸⁵

The Jewish community is well attested by the Geniza documents, with letters describing the commercial activities of local Jews and their connection with the Jewish community of Fustat.²⁸⁶ The location of Ramla on the main pilgrim road to Jerusalem and its position as the commercial and administrative capital of Palestine attracted Jews to settle there, and it has been suggested that the Jewish community of Ramla was even larger than that of Jerusalem.²⁸⁷ The Geniza letters mention at least three synagogues, and a document from 1039 describes a religious festival of Purim attended by several hundreds of people, Jews and Karaites. Other letters mention the selling of oil, soap, cloths, linen, and other commodities by Jewish merchants. One of the Geniza documents describes an incident in which the head of the local police was called to a synagogue in order to settle a dispute within the Jewish congregation.²⁸⁸

Apart from the Jewish and Christian communities, a small Samaritan community inhabited Ramla, and it has been mentioned that 500 tax-paying Samaritans lived in the city in the middle of the tenth century.²⁸⁹ Possible archaeological confirmation of this population is the large number of 'Samaritan Lamps' found in the excavations, particularly in the southern section of the city.²⁹⁰ The abundance of this type of lamp in Ramla and in other sites in

²⁸¹ Luz 1997, 53.

²⁸² See the story of Stephen of Ramla: Griffith 1985*a*, *b*; Gat 2003, 214–18.

²⁸³ Griffith 1985*a*.

²⁸⁴ Gat 2003, 222–5. However, Gil suggests that this destruction of churches occurred in Jerusalem and not in Ramla (Gil 1992, [710]).

²⁸⁵ Sharon 1978.

²⁸⁶ Gil 1992, 173 [283]; Gat 2003, 30.

²⁸⁷ Gat 2003, 201.

²⁸⁸ Gil 1992, 174.

²⁸⁹ Gat 2003, 228.

²⁹⁰ Tal and Taxel 2008, 212.

its vicinity, in contrast to their small number in Christian villages, has raised the possibility that they may indicate the ethnic affiliation of their users. However, the use of these lamps as an ethnic marker is disputed by some scholars, as they may represent a specialized local workshop with no ethnic affiliation to a specific community.²⁹¹

The historical and archaeological evidence suggests that urban zoning in Ramla was not defined by the religious affiliation of the local population. Members of all religious communities lived side by side, sharing the same neighbourhoods, and it seems that a relative tolerance existed between them. A number of incidents described in historical sources reinforces this conclusion. For example, the provocative act of ‘Abd al-Masih al-Nagrani, a Muslim living in Ramla who converted to Christianity and declared in public, inside a Muslim shrine, his dedication to the Christian faith, was not followed by anti-Christian reaction from local Muslims.²⁹² Occasional damage to Christian churches in Ramla caused by Muslims was quickly repaired by orders of the local government. This relative tolerance compared with other cities in Palestine brought Christian church officials from Jerusalem and Ascalon to seek refuge in Ramla from persecutions in their hometowns during the eleventh century.²⁹³

The relationships between Jewish and Muslims neighbours are presented in several Geniza documents. A letter from 1035 describes a complaint about a certain Ayub, probably a Muslim, who built a small house next to one of the synagogues in Ramla and grew vegetables in an open plot which was the synagogue’s property.²⁹⁴

These occasional incidents reinforce the picture retrieved from archaeological excavations, which shows that there was no ethnic segregation in the residential districts of Ramla, where Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Samaritans shared the same areas.

Life cycles of Early Islamic Ramla: foundation, expansion, and collapse

The foundation of a new city

Archaeological findings reinforce the story of the foundation of Ramla as it has been presented in the historical sources: the city was established *ex nihilo*, on a plot of land which had not been settled before.²⁹⁵ Excavations in the urban

²⁹¹ Sussman 2002; see also the discussion in Ch. 4.

²⁹² See the detailed story in Griffith 1985b. ²⁹³ Gil 1992, [704–10].

²⁹⁴ Gil 1992, 174 [283].

²⁹⁵ On possible references to Ramla in the Byzantine period, see Luz 1997, 28–9, Gat 2003, 20–31. These have not been confirmed by excavations.

core of Ramla have proved that the first settlement was founded on the natural sand dunes or local *hamra* soil. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the presence of an earlier site on the southern outskirts of the city. This area, forming an extension of Ramla, was at first a separate settlement or suburban quarter and was only later incorporated into the city.

The first 70 years

Historical sources attest to the details of early monumental construction and mention the four major buildings erected during the foundation of the city: the palace, the 'House of the Dyers', the congregational mosque, which was completed only in the time of Hisham, and the main aqueduct leading to the newly established city.

Unfortunately the archaeological record provides only partial evidence of these early large-scale constructions. The earliest standing remains are related to the White Mosque, suggesting that the first mosque was constructed in the first half of the eighth century and probably destroyed in the 749 earthquake. No substantial archaeological evidence has been found for the nearby monumental buildings of the *Dar al-Imara* and *Dar al-Sabbaghin*. These were either covered by later constructions or badly damaged by the 749 earthquake and then completely obliterated. It is interesting to note that Nasir-i Khusraw, who in 1047 described the city in some detail, did not mention these buildings, and praised only the White Mosque and the markets of the city. This lacuna raises the possibility that during his time the palace and the 'House of the Dyers' no longer existed. The obliteration of these monumental constructions in the latter stages of the Early Islamic period is similar to the situation in Jerusalem, where the monumental constructions around the Haram are also absent from the descriptions of the city from the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Excavations in other areas of Ramla have revealed no architectural evidence from the first half of the eighth century. The earliest substantial remains of buildings to the south and west of the White Mosque have been dated to the second half of the eighth century. The reason for this might be the poor preservation of buildings from the first stage of the settlement, in contrast to the extensive construction and expansion of the city from the late eighth century onwards.

Growth and expansion

Major expansion of Ramla occurred in the ninth and tenth centuries. It seems that the development of urban spaces was not affected by the unstable political situation in Palestine, and, in spite of years of turmoil, the city continued to expand and flourish. Most of the finds in the residential areas are from this

period, including lavish mosaics that were previously dated to the eighth century.²⁹⁶

Archaeological finds throughout the city are consistent in dating the zenith of the urban growth of Ramla to the tenth and early eleventh centuries. The urban limits expanded to form a well-planned city with many affluent and spacious residential areas. Ramla became the largest city in Palestine in spite of the political turmoil and the fact that the city was stormed time and again by foreign powers—Ikhshids, Fatimids, and Qaramatis—and by the local Bedouin. It seems that these events had little effect on the physical shape of Ramla or its constant urban growth.

How big was Early Islamic Ramla at its zenith? Al-Muqaddasi mentioned that the built area of the city covered one square mile.²⁹⁷ Several evaluations of the urban limits of Ramla have been presented on the basis of his description and of the archaeological findings. Luz, Petersen, and Gat estimated the urban area of the Early Islamic city as approaching 1.5 square km.²⁹⁸ Whitcomb suggested that the walled city was a bit larger, around 2 square km,²⁹⁹ and Shmueli, in his updated study based on the spatial distribution of finds in excavated areas, proposed an area of 2.5×2.2 km.³⁰⁰

The discovery of a densely built-up area to the south of Ramla raises further questions about the actual size of the city and its periphery. It seems that 'greater Ramla' of the tenth and early eleventh centuries was even larger than the area defined by both al-Muqaddasi and modern scholars. The spatial distribution of buildings presented by the updated archaeological studies, including the cemeteries presented above, shows that at the zenith of its urban expansion Ramla extended over an area of $c.2.5\text{--}3 \times 2.5$ km.³⁰¹

As in other large cities of Early Islamic times, the definition between the urban area and its hinterland was blurred. The expansion of Ramla to the north, for example, met similar expansion of the neighbouring town of Lod to the south, so that the two settlements formed one large urban complex.

The connections formed between Lod and Ramla present an interesting case of conflict and coexistence. Lod-Diospolis was one of the major inland towns on the road between Caesarea and Jerusalem during the Byzantine period. The city was inhabited throughout the Early Islamic period, containing a mixed population of Muslims and Christians. It gradually declined in the eighth–tenth centuries, and was finally incorporated into the urban periphery

²⁹⁶ See Avner 2008*a*; contra Rosen-Ayalon 1976.

²⁹⁷ al-Muqaddasi, 165. The Islamic mile of the 9th century was calculated as ranging between 1.5 and 2.5 km; see Elad 1999.

²⁹⁸ Luz 1997, 40–1 and fig. 3; Petersen 2005, 101 and fig. 53; Gat 2003, 74.

²⁹⁹ Whitcomb 1995*a*, fig. 92. ³⁰⁰ Shmueli 2009, 89.

³⁰¹ It is interesting to note that the same dimensions were suggested for the inner city of Baghdad. See Lassner 2000, 156–62.

of Ramla.³⁰² Nevertheless, it is mentioned in a number of sources as a Christian city. It is depicted in the mosaic floor of the Church of St Stephen in Umm el-Rasas, showing the Church of St George as its main Christian monument.

The tension between Ramla and Lod is described in the historical sources relating to the foundation of Ramla. It was believed that the prosperous Byzantine centre in Lod was damaged, declined, or was even abandoned following the construction of Ramla, and that people from Lod were forced to settle in Ramla.³⁰³

As with Ramla, Lod has benefited from large-scale archaeological activity in recent decades.³⁰⁴ A number of salvage excavations exposed sections of the late Roman and Byzantine city, showing also substantial constructions during the ninth and tenth centuries, which seem to have been associated with the expansion of Early Islamic Ramla. The reconstruction of the urban expansion and contraction of Lod during the Early Islamic period shows a temporary decline in the eighth century, perhaps as a consequence of the establishment of Ramla, followed by a renewed expansion in the ninth and tenth centuries. During this period the town became part of greater Ramla, enjoying the economic prosperity of the region and functioning as an outer neighbourhood of the large city.

Collapse

Early Islamic Ramla collapsed in the second half of the eleventh century. The White Mosque compound was deserted and residential areas throughout the city were abandoned. The city's decline was associated both with the deterioration of political stability and the effects of two earthquakes, on 5 December 1033 and on 18 March 1068.³⁰⁵ While the first caused considerable damage, the impact of the 1068 earthquake on Ramla was devastating. After this earthquake, which levelled most of the city's buildings, the southern and western sections of Ramla were deserted and not resettled until modern times. It seems that the city dramatically contracted, but it was not totally abandoned, and a few sections were still inhabited during the Crusader conquest in 1099.³⁰⁶

After the Crusader conquest the remaining Muslim population departed for Ascalon. The ruined Early Islamic city was massively looted and the walls of buildings were stripped of their stones, which were taken for the construction

³⁰² Schick 1995, 389–91.

³⁰³ See Luz 1997, 47–8.

³⁰⁴ See e.g. Haddad 2008. I thank E. Haddad for sharing the results of his latest excavations in Lod.

³⁰⁵ Gat 2003, 52–6.

³⁰⁶ Ehrlich 2002, 42–7.

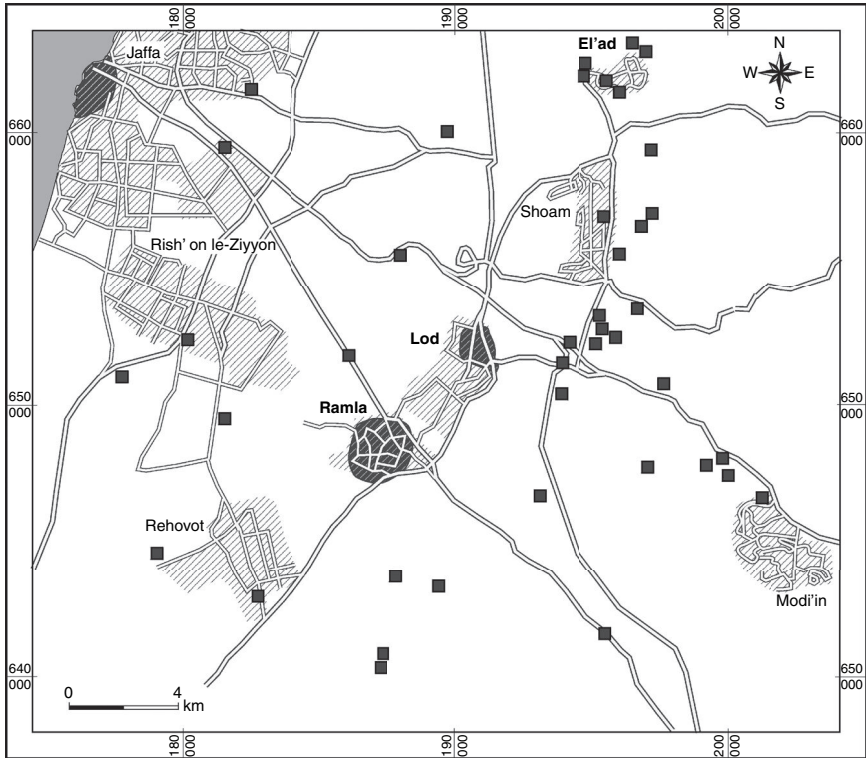


Fig. 3.22 Map of the hinterland of Ramla.

of the Crusader and Mamluk town. The area of Ottoman Ramla was much smaller, and the city did not regain its former glory.

The hinterland of Ramla

The growth and expansion of Early Islamic Ramla had an immediate effect on its hinterland (Fig. 3.22). This was not an empty land, and in the early eighth century it consisted of a dense network of villages and farmsteads from Byzantine times, forming the hinterland of Lod-Diospolis. The rural areas of the central coastal plain were much developed between the fourth and the seventh centuries, with the increased importance of Diospolis as a local centre and a significant pilgrimage site between Caesarea and Jerusalem.³⁰⁷ The establishment of Ramla and its development as the major administrative and commercial centre of Palestine triggered the growth of existing settlements in

³⁰⁷ Schwartz 1991, 124–30.

its hinterland, as well as the establishment of new ones, to supply the city with agricultural goods.

Al-Muqaddasi indicated that Ramla was situated in the midst of fertile rural areas and pleasant villages.³⁰⁸ Excavations in a number of sites in its vicinity support his description, showing that the rich and well-populated hinterland continued to flourish in Early Islamic times, consisting of a dense network of villages and farms inhabited mainly by Christians and Samaritans.³⁰⁹ Especially notable are Sarafand el-Kharab to the west of Ramla and Khirbet Duran to the south of the city. These two villages, founded in the Byzantine period, expanded in area and population following the foundation of Ramla. They continued to flourish until the eleventh century. Their decline and abandonment in the second half of that century is connected to the collapse of Ramla.

Another village mentioned in historical sources, but not yet identified, is Bali'a. According to al-Muqaddasi it was located south of Ramla, as is indicated by the name of one of the southern gates of the city. This village is associated with an episode from the time of caliph Hisham, which remained well-known locally and was described by al-Muqaddasi more than 200 years later:

I have heard my uncle say that when the caliph (Hisham) was about to build the mosque it was reported to him that the Christians possessed columns of marble, then buried beneath the sand, which they had prepared for the church at Bali'a. Thereupon, Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik informed the Christians that they must either reveal them to him, or he would demolish the church at Lod, so as to build his mosque using its columns.³¹⁰

The same village is mentioned in the story of the Christian martyr 'Abd al-Masih, who was executed in Ramla and whose body was thrown into a cistern at Bali'a.³¹¹

As a result of the excavations south of Ramla described above, it was suggested that the Byzantine remains found there should be identified with Bali'a.³¹² But as this site was incorporated within Ramla and became an integral part of the city, it seems more reasonable to locate the village further south of the outskirts of Ramla, perhaps in **Khirbet Duran**, c.8 km to the south of the city. This large Early Islamic village, built on top of a small ridge, covered a smaller Roman and Byzantine site. Salvage excavations conducted at the site revealed remains of domestic architecture and industrial installations, with two main stages of use between the eighth and the tenth–eleventh centuries.³¹³ A few buildings consisting of square rooms around a central courtyard were dated to the first stage in the eighth century. Industrial installations were found between

³⁰⁸ al-Muqaddasi, 165.

³⁰⁹ Tal and Taxel 2008, 79; see also Taxel 2013 for an updated survey of sites.

³¹⁰ al-Muqaddasi, 165, tr. Collins 1994, 139. ³¹¹ Griffith 1985*b*.

³¹² Tal and Taxel 2008, 81. ³¹³ Kogan-Zehavi 2007; Buchennino 2007.

the buildings, among them a smith's workshop containing an oven for metal-work. Fragmentary remains of an oil press were located near another building in this area.

In the second stage, dated to the ninth and tenth centuries, a large building (21 × 14 m) was constructed at the site. It consisted of an open courtyard surrounded by rooms. The pottery and glass finds indicate that the site might have continued into the eleventh century, when it declined and was abandoned with the collapse of Ramla after the 1068 earthquake.

Another possible identification of Bali'a is with a large Byzantine village excavated south-east of Ramla, c.4 km from the city, where a significant decline was observed following the Byzantine period, including an abandonment or destruction of the local church.³¹⁴ Unlike other villages in the hinterland of Ramla, this village was abandoned in the eighth or ninth century.

A different type of settlement was excavated in **Sarafand al-Kharab**, south-west of Ramla. Like other villages in the region, it was founded in the Byzantine period and expanded greatly in Early Islamic times, in a way that correlates with the growth and expansion of Ramla. It declined with the collapse of the nearby city in the eleventh century, but, unlike other villages in the region, was also inhabited during the Crusader period.³¹⁵ The excavated remains included residential structures and industrial installations of the type prevailing in Ramla. A nearby village, Sarafand al-'Amar, reached its peak between the eighth and eleventh centuries, extending over c.8 ha.³¹⁶

The largest concentration of agricultural villages in the hinterland of Ramla was found east and south of the city. The areas to the east were especially notable for their dense network of villages and farmsteads. This is well represented by a large village excavated at **Shoham**, c.10 km north-east of Ramla.³¹⁷ A large section of the Byzantine village was revealed, containing clusters of residential units and an adjacent monastery with an apsidal church paved with colourful mosaics (Fig. 3.23). An underground rock-cut crypt beneath the atrium of the church contained the accumulated burials of more than one hundred deceased. The finds, among them coins, oil lamps, and glass vessels, indicated the early seventh century as the time of entombment. Two hoards of gold coins from the reign of Heraclius were found hidden under the floor in one of the monastery's rooms. The burials and the coin hoards point to the Persian conquest of 614, but no evidence of violent destruction was found at the site. The settlement and church continued to flourish after the Arab conquest and were abandoned only in the tenth century. The prosperity of the village in the Early Islamic period is indicated by the finding of three oil presses and a wine press, which continued to function until the ninth or tenth century. The village underwent many changes during this period: additional

³¹⁴ Kol-Ya'aqov 2010; Zelinger and Di Segni 2006; Taxel 2013, 175.

³¹⁵ Gorzalczany 2004.

³¹⁶ Taxel 2013, 175-6

³¹⁷ Dahari and 'Ad 2008.

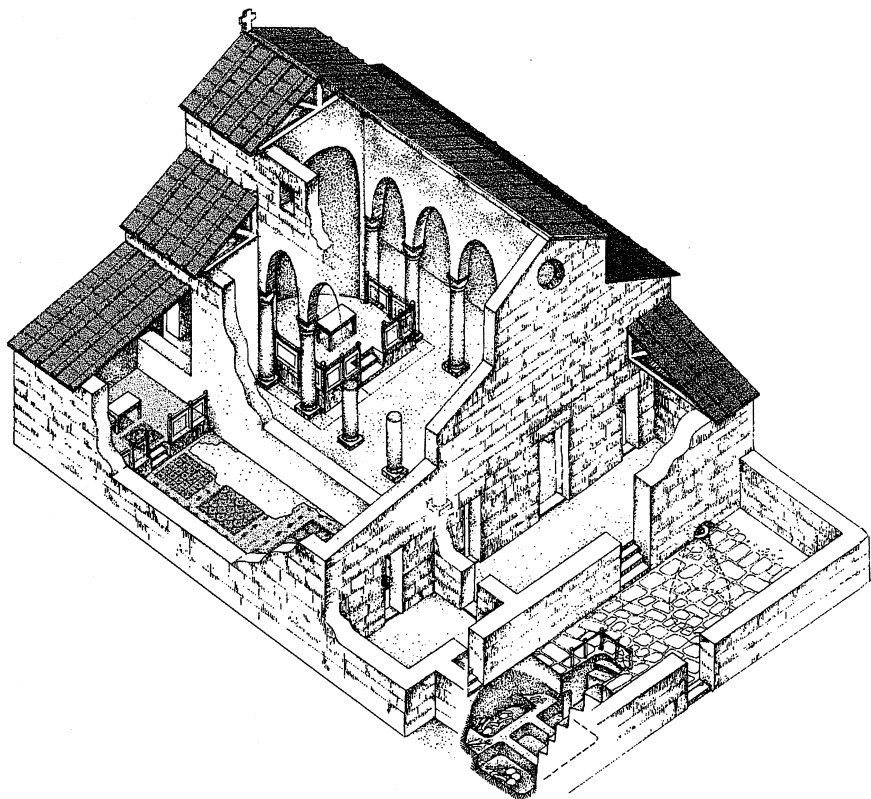


Fig. 3.23 Shoham: isometric reconstruction of the Byzantine and Early Islamic chapel (Dahari and 'Ad 2008, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

buildings were constructed on its outskirts, rooms were divided into smaller units, and courtyards and inner passages were blocked. The wealthy country residences from the Byzantine period were transformed into a smaller but dense network of dwellings. The style of buildings was changed with the replacement of the typical tiled roofing of the Byzantine period with domed roofs supported by piers in the Early Islamic period.

The village and the church were abandoned in the later part of the tenth century, and a smaller settlement was built above their ruins in the eleventh century, and was probably inhabited by Muslims.

Another Roman and Byzantine village which continued into Early Islamic times was excavated in **Horvat Hermeshit**, 12 km east of Ramla. This village declined earlier in the Early Islamic period, and was abandoned around the ninth century.³¹⁸ The remains of a monastery from the Byzantine period,

³¹⁸ Greenhut 1998; Taxel 2013, 172-3

which continued into the ninth and ten centuries, were discovered east of the village.³¹⁹ It has been suggested that the monastery was abandoned in the seventh or eighth century and then resettled as a farmstead, with some of its structures converted into humble dwellings. An oil press was installed in the compound, which functioned until the tenth century.

Additional small farmsteads were excavated in this area, and extensive remains of terraced fields and agricultural installations from Byzantine and Early Islamic times were revealed. The latest datable pottery found in these areas points to the ninth century as the date of their decline.³²⁰

Further south, the agricultural areas around **Tell Gezer** were extensively inhabited in the Early Islamic period. Early excavations in this area failed to define the early Islamic remains, but recent explorations show that the Roman and Byzantine settlements continued to flourish at least until the ninth century. Further evidence of the continuity of settlement has been provided by a number of burial caves with distinctive Early Islamic oil lamps.³²¹

A large village was recently excavated at **Mishmar David**, south of Tell Gezer, and a continuous sequence of use in Byzantine and Early Islamic times was revealed. The Early Islamic village was particularly large and contained several clusters of residential areas and at least three public buildings.³²² The settlement was damaged by the 749 earthquake but continued to function in the ninth and tenth centuries. Like other villages in this region, it declined in the eleventh century, in parallel to the decline of Ramla.

The picture of Ramla's agricultural hinterland is supplemented by scores of additional small villages and farmsteads that were identified in surveys and limited-scale excavations. A number of sites were excavated to the north-east of Ramla,³²³ and others were revealed along the main road from Ramla to Jaffa. This dense settlement system, which extended and developed with the growth of Ramla, was the main source of agricultural goods produced in villages and farmsteads and supplied to the large city. The extensive agricultural settlements around Ramla were also the source of a mass growing of cotton for the textile industries described by al-Muqaddasi, and part of their production was exported, mainly to Egypt.³²⁴

³¹⁹ Eisenberg and Ovadiah 1998.

³²⁰ Kogan-Zehavi and Zelinger 2007.

³²¹ For the early excavations in Gezer, see Macalister 1912. The catalogue of finds from Byzantine burial caves around the site contains many Early Islamic oil lamps, e.g. Macalister 1912, pls. 101–13.

³²² Taxel 2013, 179–83. I thank E. Yannai for providing unpublished information from his excavations.

³²³ E.g. Messika 2006.

³²⁴ Gat 2007, 51–6.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

The detailed descriptions of Jerusalem and Ramla present some interesting comparisons between the two cities. The *ex nihilo* establishment of Ramla in 715 was a challenge to the central position of Jerusalem, one of the ancient cities in Palestine. As with the establishment of Caesarea by King Herod, seven hundred years earlier, Jerusalem faced the rise of a new political, administrative, and commercial centre in the coastal plain.

Nevertheless, the Jerusalem and Ramla of the Early Islamic period coexisted, performing a clear-cut division of roles: Jerusalem maintained its main religious position as the third sacred site for Islam, the main focus of Christian pilgrimage, and the most desirable city for Jews, who were allowed to resettle near their most sacred site; Ramla developed rapidly, becoming the main administrative and commercial centre of Palestine, and maintaining an agricultural hinterland with a dense network of farmsteads and villages around it.

The extensive archaeological excavations in Jerusalem and Ramla in recent decades have exposed the dissimilarities between the two cities. Jerusalem preserved its Roman and Byzantine components, showing a slow and gradual change in its urban layout. The special position of the holy city as a major religious centre for the three monotheistic faiths had a direct impact on its urban characteristics. The Haram al-Sharif and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre formed the two religious centres of Islam and Christianity in the Holy Land, stressing the central role of Jerusalem as a spiritual city rather than as an administrative one.

The newly founded city of Ramla replaced Caesarea as the main administrative and commercial centre of Palestine, and was gradually developed as a new element in the urban landscape of the region. It did not follow the traditional Roman and Byzantine layout of cities, but represented a new planning concept, consisting of an orthogonal grid pattern of a well-planned city spreading loosely over a large area, with large houses incorporating industrial installations in between them.

It is interesting to compare Ramla's urban pattern with the one developed in other Early Islamic cities of the Near East. The layout of Fustat, for example, was strikingly different, in that it consisted of clusters of residential areas which were connected by winding streets. The large houses of ancient Fustat were not arranged according to a planned urban concept, and reveal no indication of overall systematic planning.³²⁵ A different type of a well-planned city is found in Baghdad, where the carefully designed inner city was influenced by the Sassanian concept of carefully planned round urban centres.³²⁶

³²⁵ Kubiak 1987; Scanlon 1994.

³²⁶ Baghdad is known only from historical sources, and no archaeological work has been possible, as the modern city covered and destroyed the ancient remains. See Lassner 2000, 153–77.

While Ramla provides a good case for evaluating the concept of Early Islamic urbanism, Jerusalem presents an example of a gradual process of urban change, which is typical of other Roman and Byzantine cities in the Near East and the Mediterranean. The detailed evaluation of the two cities enhances the paradigm of a complicated and long-term urban transformation, which represents continuity and change in the urban tradition of Palestine during the second half of the first millennium.

The Changing Land: Settlement Patterns and Ethnic Identities

The Byzantine period in Palestine and Jordan is associated with the mass expansion of settlements throughout the country, spreading from the Golan Heights, the Galilee, and northern Jordan to the remote corners of the Negev Highlands and southern Jordan. The evidence from surveys and excavations shows that the settlements of the Byzantine period were greater in number and size than at any other period. The country was dotted with cities serving as regional hubs, while clustered around them were villages, hamlets, and farmsteads of different shapes and sizes. The expansion of settlement reached its zenith in the sixth century, when the countryside flourished, and agriculture was practised as far as the desert fringes of the Negev Highlands.¹

Archaeological research in the countryside has revealed a complex picture of ethnic variability. Churches and synagogues were the main landmarks of the Christian and Jewish presence. Particularly notable are the numerous Byzantine churches and monastic compounds, many of which continued into the Early Islamic period, and showed the resilience of Christianity under Muslim rule. The continuity of the pagan population is also evident from the archaeological record, mainly in the fringe areas of the deserts. Samaritans were in the majority in the Samarian Hills and Lowlands until the sixth century, and were also present there in later periods. After the Arab conquest, the introduction of Islam was seen in the gradual penetration of mosques into cities, towns, and villages. The ethno-religious division of settlements in the Early Islamic period reveals complex relationships between the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic populations.

The study of the countryside did not attract much scholarly interest until the 1970s. Most excavations concentrated on the cities, while rural

¹ See in particular Avi Yonah 1958, 1966, Tsafirir 1996, Hirschfeld 1997*a*, Bar 2004, 2008, Seligman 2011. For the number of Byzantine sites in each region on the basis of systematic surveys, see Appendix. III.

societies in the hinterland were only sporadically studied.² The last fifty years have seen a fundamental change in this attitude, with extensive systematic surveys and numerous excavations of rural and monastic sites all over the country. On the basis of these abundant data, the major expansion of settlements in the Palestinian countryside was attributed to the fourth and fifth centuries.³ Hirschfeld suggested that many new villages and farms were established during this period as a result of the Late Roman and Byzantine imperial legislation known as *agri deserti*. According to these laws the ownership of previously uncultivated land was granted to persons who took responsibility for its development for agricultural production.⁴ In his opinion, the implementation of this legislation resulted in the mass growth of settlements in the countryside. Other scholars proposed a combination of a natural growth in the local population and the sanctification of the Holy Land, which triggered increased Christian pilgrimage, and also involved the introduction of new, foreign elements into the local population.⁵

The traditional view saw the coming of Islam as a clear indication of the stagnation and decline of the countryside in Syria-Palestine. This approach was developed in detail by Tchalenko, who, on the basis of his surveys in the northern Syrian massif, claimed that the Arab conquest and the coming of Islam were the direct causes of the collapse of the agricultural market economy, which inevitably led to the mass abandonment of villages and farms.⁶ His research had a major influence on the work of other scholars, such as Jones in his study of the later Roman Empire, who concluded that the agrarian system of the Roman East declined dramatically in the seventh century.⁷ These views prevailed in most studies of agrarian societies in Palestine and Jordan, and the common attitude was that the Byzantine-Islamic transition was marked by a sharp decline of the countryside.⁸

The claim that there was an overall decline of settlements in the seventh century is no longer valid in the light of recent research. The settlement picture that now emerges is complicated and different from one region to another: some settlements continued throughout the Early Islamic period, while others declined temporarily or permanently; in certain sites the continuity is more evident, while in others a gap in settlement is proposed.

On the basis of the systematic collection and analysis of the archaeological data that have been gathered in the past thirty years, this chapter evaluates the settlements in the countryside from their mass expansion in the Byzantine period to their decline in the later part of the Early Islamic period, discusses

² See e.g. Jones 1964, 767–829. ³ Tsafirir 1996; Bar 2004, 2008; Hirschfeld 2005.

⁴ Hirschfeld 2005, 533–4.

⁵ Wilken 1992; Wilkinson 2002; Patrich 1995; Bar 2008, 2–3 and references there.

⁶ Tchalenko 1953–8. ⁷ Jones 1964.

⁸ See in particular the surveys conducted in the central ridge country, e.g. Zertal 2004, 2008, Finkelstein 1988–1989, Finkelstein *et al.* 1997, Finkelstein and Magen 1993. See also Appendix. III.

the settlement processes in various parts of the country, and elaborates on the interaction between the segments of rural society. The traditional approach, which claims that the Near Eastern countryside declined by the end of the Byzantine period, is considered in the light of the abundant new archaeological material.

The discussion addresses the nature of change in each region: was it an internal process connected to the availability of resources or to the ethno-religious composition of the local population, or was the change influenced by external political powers? The main question addressed is the continuity of the flourishing countryside beyond the Byzantine period. How many of the cities, towns, villages, and farms continued to function after the seventh century? Was there a major decline during the Early Islamic period, and if that was the case, when precisely did it occur? Which sites and regions show continuity throughout the period, and what was the impact of the foreign population that penetrated into the region?

The establishment of a clear chronological framework for settlements in the countryside is fraught with difficulties. While the decline and abandonment of many sites had previously been indicated only by the inconclusive dating of finds to the Byzantine period, a re-evaluation of many excavations suggests continuity to the eighth century and beyond. Nevertheless, even in sites that show settlement continuity, the last stages of habitation were defined in many cases as those of squatters, and only rarely was continuity into the tenth and the eleventh centuries considered likely. As with the large cities discussed above, I suggest the continuity of many settlements, with gradual changes in types and styles of residential areas and public buildings.

The updated archaeological study of the countryside demonstrates in detail the processes of development and change. The picture emerging is of a long and gradual transformation, with considerable variability between sites and regions. While a number of settlements show direct continuity, others present temporary abatement followed by intensification and expansion. Some settlements declined and were abandoned during the eighth and ninth centuries, while others continued up to the second half of the eleventh century. The distinction between various types of settlement is significant for understanding the settlement processes between the sixth and eleventh centuries.

SETTLEMENT TYPES

The following section briefly describes the main types and characteristics of countryside settlements: cities, towns, and villages, farmsteads, agricultural fields, monastic compounds, and the newly introduced *ribatat* and 'Umayyad palaces'.

Cities, towns, and villages

Most of the population of the eastern Roman Empire resided in villages of variable sizes which formed a 'landscape of villages',⁹ and indeed both the historical sources and archaeological findings show a predominance of rural settlements in the Palestinian countryside.¹⁰ Nevertheless, these were tightly connected to cities which formed regional administrative and commercial hubs. Formal definitions of cities, towns, and villages are disputed by scholars, as they usually depend on their context, location, and economic, political, and administrative components.¹¹ The status of a settlement may have changed over time, as it was not uncommon for a large village to grow and expand into a regional centre, which then assumed urban functions.

The definition of Byzantine cities is connected to the *polis* of the Greek and Roman world, which had a formal status defined by its administrative and political position, and in some cases did not match its actual area or the size of its population. While the classical concepts of cities were still maintained in the Byzantine period, urban settlements gradually took on a new shape. Some preserved the former characteristics of a *polis* with only gradual conceptual change, many others introduced new elements previously unknown in urban landscapes, and a few were reduced to smaller settlements lacking the well-known components of a classical city.¹² Among the physical aspects of this change were the decline of public monuments such as theatres and hippodromes, and the replacement of the predominant Roman temples with Christian churches. Thus, cities in sixth-century Palestine and Jordan appeared very different from their Greek and Roman predecessors, both physically and ideologically.¹³ As a consequence, there has been a great deal of disagreement about the definitions of cities, towns, and villages, and on the nature of urban continuity.¹⁴

While there is no formal definition of towns in the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine administration, varied sources, both ancient and modern, consider as towns settlements containing urban characteristics and serving as regional hubs. These were usually inferior in area and population to cities, but were larger than villages. The ambiguity in terminology is particularly noticeable during the Byzantine period, with the growth and expansion of settlement. The diversity of settlements, particularly in the Eastern Roman Empire, provided a very complex arsenal of definitions, a few examples of which are mentioned here. In the *Onomasticon*, Eusebius of Caesarea divided the

⁹ See Decker 2009a, 33–44 for an updated summary of the research. See also Wickham 2005, 454.

¹⁰ E.g. the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius of Caesarea lists 85% of the settlements in Palestine as villages. See Seligman 2011, 422–9 for a detailed discussion.

¹¹ See Wickham 2005, 442–4, 591–5 for general definitions; see Safrai 1994 for towns and villages in Palestine.

¹² See also the discussion in Ch. 2.

¹³ Dan 1984, 51–67.

¹⁴ See Wickham 2005, 591–6, Saradi 2006, 448–62 for a detailed discussion.

settlements of Palestine into cities (*poleis*), towns (*polichnai*), large villages (*kōmai megistai*), and villages (*kōmai*).¹⁵ The list of sites from the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods in the *Tabula Imperii Romani* includes a division of urban centres into metropoleis (large cities), cities, towns, and villages, with a provisional division between a city and a town: Gadara, Gerasa, Dora, Sebaste, Emmaus, Lod-Diospolis, Ascalon, and Gaza are listed as cities, while Pella, Hippos-Sussita, Legio, Apollonia, Iamnia Paralios, and the Negev settlements appear as towns.¹⁶

Other sources from the Byzantine period list settlements as cities even when they are much reduced in area and population.¹⁷ For example, Byzantine Aila included only *c.*300 tax-paying men when it surrendered to the invading Arab forces, but despite its small population it was defined as a city in sixth-century sources.¹⁸ It seems that, while the formal status of *polis* was still granted to settlements by the imperial administration of the sixth century, this title did not necessarily indicate a central administrative or political position for the settlement.¹⁹

On the other hand, some very large settlements were defined as villages, for example, Androna/Andarin (*c.*160 ha) and Kapropera (*c.*75 ha) in northern Syria, and Umm el-Jimmel (*c.*50 ha) in Jordan.²⁰ This ambiguity is well attested in the Negev settlements discussed below. While referred to by many scholars as one of the Negev 'towns',²¹ Nessana was in fact a *kōmē*—a village in the district of Elusa.²²

The definition of settlements in the Jewish sources from the Byzantine period provides a different hierarchy, which includes cities, towns, and large and small villages. A town is defined as a settlement of between 350 and 1,000 families, covering an area of 3–10 ha and containing communal administrative and religious institutions such as synagogues. This classification defines many Jewish settlements as towns, but in non-Jewish sources they are listed as villages.²³

Cities were the largest consumers of agricultural products from the countryside, and, in fact, were dependent on their productive hinterlands. A symbiotic relationship between a city and its hinterland was emphasized in many studies. The Byzantine Near East was characterized by increased

¹⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Onomasticon*; Hirschfeld 1997a, 37; Taxel 2010, 28–32; Seligman 2011, 424.

¹⁶ Tsafirir *et al.* 1994; see also Apps. I and II for a comprehensive list of sites.

¹⁷ See e.g. the 6th-century administrative lists of Hierocles and Georgius of Cyprus: Hierocles, *Synecdemus*, 717–23; Georgius Cyprius, 997–1093.

¹⁸ Dan 1984, 63–4. ¹⁹ Claude 1969, 151; Dan 1984, 55–7.

²⁰ Mango 2011a, 94–7 and references there.

²¹ See e.g. Negev 1986, Shereshevski 1991, Dan 1984, 59.

²² Kraemer 1958; for the problem of the definition of large settlements as villages, see Hirschfeld 1997a, 37–9, and Decker 2009a, 33–4. Wickham 2005, 452–4 makes a clear reference to these sites as villages.

²³ See Safrai 1994, 17–19 for the different terminologies.

wealth in villages, and this is particularly evident in northern Syria and the Negev, which both presented a clear case for an increased investment in the villages of the countryside. The establishment of large monastic communities on the fringes of the settled areas and the growth and expansion of farmsteads in the hinterlands provide indications of the changing balance between urban and rural settlements, with landowners being shifted from the former to the latter. Yet cities and their hinterlands still formed interconnected networks of exchange throughout the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods.²⁴

A significant aspect of the definitions of settlements is the economic relationship between city and countryside. The city and its *chōra* or *territorium*, the rural hinterland, were viewed as a single unit. The wealthiest segments of society resided in the city, from where they administered the joint urban and rural territory. Some scholars have suggested that the concept of the city as separate from its hinterland should be abandoned altogether, as city dwellers were occasionally engaged in agriculture, and many cities contained agricultural areas within their territories.²⁵ Yet many studies of the Byzantine city still ignore the impact of the hinterland on cities.²⁶

With the political and administrative transformations of the seventh and eighth centuries, definitions of cities and towns were modified as well. The change from *polis* to *madina*, discussed in Chapter 2, included not only physical characteristics but also changes in the formal status of settlements. The basic addition of the Early Islamic system, in a development from the Roman and Byzantine one, is the inclusion of towns in the formal hierarchy of settlements, which was manifested in the tenth century in a formal division into four different categories of settlements.

The highest category, *amsar*, included cities that developed into the metropolises of the Islamic world and the capitals of the regions, for example Damascus in Syria and Fustat in Egypt. Second in rank, *qasabat*, were the district capitals, for example Tiberias and Ramla. The third category, *madina*, comprised cities of considerable size, and the fourth and lowest rank included towns of various sizes with urban characteristics.²⁷

In his detailed descriptions of the provinces of the Islamic world in the tenth century, al-Muqaddasi provide different criteria for each type of settlement, admitting that some of his divisions are provisional. He is often confused in this ranking system, particularly regarding the lower two ranks. In describing the urban patterns of al-Sham, for example, he states that 'there are villages in this province larger and more noteworthy than many of the chief towns in the Arabian Peninsula'.²⁸ The status of a town was also defined by its

²⁴ See the discussions in Rich and Wallace-Hadrill 1991, Burns and Eadie 2001, and Seligman 2011.

²⁵ Horden and Purcell 2000, 108–12. ²⁶ E.g. Saradi 2006.

²⁷ Wheatley 2001, 74–80; Whitcomb 2007; Milwright 2010, 75–90.

²⁸ al-Muqaddasi 155, quoted in Wheatley 2001, 75.

administrative role as a regional centre and its permit to mint coins. Al-Muqaddasi lists eleven towns in the district of Filastin and seven in al-Urdunn as regional centres.²⁹ Most of these were defined as cities in the Byzantine period.

While cities formed regional centres for administration and commerce, villages were 'one of the most striking features of the eastern provinces in Late Antiquity' and 'the major form of settlement and economic organization of the countryside'.³⁰ Regional studies have shown that each urban centre was surrounded by a network of villages and farmsteads, which created a vast and dense hinterland.³¹

In his study of the Palestinian countryside in the Byzantine period, Hirschfeld emphasized the fact that rural settlements, mainly villages and farms of various sizes, predominated throughout the country. He defined two structural types of villages: the 'introverted village', in which all houses are built close together and the alleys and passages between them converge in the centre of the village, and the 'dispersed village', where clusters of independent farmsteads with later building additions create a network of winding alleys.³² The built area of a typical village usually covered between 3 and 10 ha.

Cities were multicultural centres inhabited by Christians, Jews, pagans, and smaller minorities of Samaritans. Ascalon, for example, had a Christian majority, but contained a small Jewish community.³³ In Beth Guvrin-Eleutheropolis, the ethnic variety of the population is well reflected in the necropolis, which contained Jewish and Christian burials side by side.³⁴ The villages, on the other hand, were usually inhabited by a single ethno-religious group. The Galilee was almost evenly divided between the Jewish population in its eastern part and a Christian majority in the western Galilee.³⁵ Occasionally, adjacent villages were occupied by different types of populations, as were, for example, the neighbouring settlements of Shiqmona and Castra, located at the foot of the Carmel ridge: while Shiqmona was identified as a 'Jewish town' by the Piacenza pilgrim, Castra was inhabited mostly by Christians.³⁶ The same pattern of neighbouring villages of Jewish and Christian populations was found in the southern Hebron hills,³⁷ while the villages in the Samaritan Hills and Lowlands were of a predominantly Samaritan population.³⁸ The Negev

²⁹ al-Muqaddasi, 155, trans. Collins 1994, 132. The towns in Filastin are Jerusalem, Beth Guvrin, Gaza, Maiumas, Ascalon, Jaffa, Arsuf, Caesarea, Nablus, Jericho, and 'Amman. In al-Urdunn: Qedesh, Tyre, Acre, al-Lajjun, Kabul, Beth Shean, and Adhri'at.

³⁰ Cameron 1993, 180; Laiou 2005, 38. Both are quoted in Seligman 2011, 422.

³¹ Decker 2009a, 35–6. For a general overview of villages, see Wickham 2005, 442–518.

³² Hirschfeld 1997a, 41. ³³ Schwartz 1986, 134–44.

³⁴ Avni *et al.* 2008. ³⁵ Aviam 2004, 2007. ³⁶ See the discussion below.

³⁷ Particularly notable are the villages of Teqo'a (Christian), and Eshtamo'a and Susiya (Jewish). See Hirschfeld 1997a, 49.

³⁸ Magen 2002.

reflected a mixture of Christian and pagan populations living in the large settlements (towns or large villages) as well as in the hamlets and small farms in their vicinities.

Farmsteads

In addition to villages, hundreds of farmsteads were scattered all over the countryside, and they reflected the social stratification among the local agrarian society: small and modest farmsteads of a single dwelling and adjacent open courtyard, medium-sized farms that exploited larger fields around them, and elaborate compounds possessed by prosperous landowners and encircled by extensive agricultural fields. A typical small farmstead consisted of a single dwelling of 50–100 square m, divided into two or three rooms.³⁹ Large farms consisted of a more complex building of 150–300 square m, containing a well-planned house with several rooms flanking an inner courtyard and surrounded by large agricultural areas. The largest farms were built as manor houses, which usually contained closed compounds divided into rooms, halls, and open courtyards. Several farmsteads of this type were excavated in different parts of the country.⁴⁰ Especially notable was an estate at Mansur el-‘Aqab (Ramat Hanadiv) on the southern Carmel ridge, north-east of Caesarea, where a 530 square m manor house was discovered,⁴¹ forming one of the richest estates in the hinterland of Caesarea. It consisted of a closed compound containing a well-designed structure built around an inner courtyard. Several sections of the buildings were two storeys high, with stables and storage on the ground floor, and living quarters on the second floor.

Another large farmstead was excavated at Horvat Hazzan in the Judean Lowlands, built as a square enclosure of c.640 square m with a small private bathhouse and a fortified two-storey tower attached to the southern enclosure wall.⁴² A similar group of elaborate farmsteads was surveyed near Horvat Sa’adon in the Negev, where the farmsteads ranged in area between 500 and 800 square m and were surrounded by large fields given over to agriculture.⁴³

An exceptionally large agricultural estate was found in the midst of a fertile area north of Ascalon. Combining large dwellings and agricultural and industrial installations, it contained a large oil press, two wine vats, fish ponds, a pottery workshop with five kilns, and a residence with a number of large storehouses covering an area of c.2,000 square m.⁴⁴ This elaborate complex was perhaps owned by one of the affluent residents of Byzantine Ascalon. It

³⁹ Hirschfeld 1997*a*, 49–50, 2005, and references there.

⁴⁰ See Hirschfeld 1997*a* for selected sites. ⁴¹ Hirschfeld 2000.

⁴² Avni and Gudovitz 2009. ⁴³ Rubin 1990, 145–9; Hirschfeld 2006*a*.

⁴⁴ Israel 1993.

seems that such compounds were not exceptional near the large cities of Palestine.⁴⁵

The question of the continuity of the farmsteads into the Early Islamic period is debated. While the evidence from the hinterlands of Caesarea and Ascalon suggests that the large estates declined in the seventh century and were deserted by the eighth century, excavations at other small and medium-sized farms showed continuity into the eighth and ninth centuries.

The evolution of agricultural fields

Apart from the network of villages and farms, the countryside was extensively covered with terraced fields built on hill slopes and shallow valleys. These fields are to be found in practically every region, from the Galilee to the Negev Highlands and to southern Jordan. It is believed that the extensive expansion of terraces was conducted in the Roman and Byzantine periods as part of settlement expansion in the countryside.⁴⁶ However, this tentative dating was based mainly on the association of agricultural plots with nearby settlements and their similarities to fields in other regions of the Mediterranean, particularly in northern Syria and North Africa, where extensive terracing of hill slopes has been dated to the Roman period.⁴⁷

Previous research proposed a collapse of the agricultural regime in Palestine after the Byzantine period and a total abandonment of the heavily cultivated areas.⁴⁸ However, no accurate chronology has been established for the use of this extensive agricultural system, with the exception of the Negev Highlands, where detailed research has showed a continuous use of the fields between the third and the tenth centuries.⁴⁹ Preliminary evidence from other regions of Palestine and Jordan shows a similar pattern of continuity and even intensification in the use of fields during the Early Islamic period, particularly in the central hill country,⁵⁰ the Jerusalem area,⁵¹ and central Jordan.⁵² Recent research on agricultural fields in the Jerusalem area, on the basis of dating the fills within the terraces, has proved that major construction of terraces was conducted in the Early Islamic period.⁵³ The introduction of new irrigation techniques was identified in the Jordan and 'Arabah Valleys in relation to agricultural innovations in the Early Islamic period.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ Hirschfeld 1997a, 46; Decker 2009a, 54–7.

⁴⁶ See Bar 2008, 111–17 for an updated summary of research. See Dagan 2011, 319–40, Seligman 2011, 326–40 for the Jerusalem region.

⁴⁷ See Decker 2009a for the main works; for Syria, see Tchalenko 1953–1958; for North Africa, see Barker and Mattingly 1996; see also the comparative analysis of the regions in Rubin 1990, 163–80.

⁴⁸ E.g. Reifenberg 1955. ⁴⁹ Avni *et al.* 2013. See also the discussion below.

⁵⁰ Magen 2008. ⁵¹ Adawi 2010. ⁵² McQuitty 2005.

⁵³ Davidovich *et al.* 2012. ⁵⁴ Porath 1995.

On the basis of a detailed survey of crop species mentioned in Arabic sources, Watson suggested that the rise of Islam was followed by a 'Medieval green revolution' in large areas of the Near East and North Africa.⁵⁵ The intensification of agriculture was seen in the introduction of crops from India and South-East Asia that were previously unknown in the Mediterranean regions, and in the development of new agricultural techniques for specific crops like cotton and rice. Watson's approach was widely criticized by other scholars, who claimed that many of these crops had already been known in pre-Islamic times and were not introduced to the Near East after the Arab conquest.⁵⁶

The archaeological record from Palestine and Jordan provides some evidence for the introduction of new crops in the Early Islamic period, for example rice and sugar cane.⁵⁷ New innovative irrigation techniques were noted in the Jordan and 'Arabah Valleys, where new settlements were established in the seventh and eighth centuries. The hinterlands of Ramla and Beth Shean also utilized different crops from those of the Byzantine period, as is made clear by the descriptions of al-Muqaddasi.⁵⁸

The run-off desert agriculture was one of the main components of the rural countryside during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. It is particularly evident in the Negev Highlands,⁵⁹ and it was suggested recently that this method of cultivation and irrigation penetrated northwards to the southern Hebron Hills.⁶⁰

Ecclesiastical and monastic compounds

Ecclesiastical complexes were a significant component of the settlements in the countryside—more than 400 churches and monasteries are known in Palestine⁶¹ and c.150 in Jordan.⁶² Monasteries were spread throughout the region, located both in cities and towns and in the countryside, with large regional diversity, covering the urban, rural, and desert landscape. Jerusalem and Bethlehem formed a hub for the numerous monasteries in and around them. The hinterlands of Gaza and Ascalon flourished, with many monasteries spreading over vast areas, and so did the western Galilee, where many rural monasteries were found.⁶³

⁵⁵ Watson 1981, 1983.

⁵⁶ See Ashtor 1985, Amar 2000, 334–6, Decker 2009*b* for a detailed discussion.

⁵⁷ Amar 2000, 44–8. For sugar cane, see Peled 2009, 15–40.

⁵⁸ al-Muqaddasi, 162, 165, tr. Collins 1994, 137, 140.

⁵⁹ See the discussion below. ⁶⁰ Haiman 2007.

⁶¹ Tsafirir *et al.* 1994, 19 mention 335 sites. In the last fifteen years scores of additional sites have been discovered and excavated.

⁶² For recent data from Jordan, see Piccirillo 1993, Watson 2001 and references there.

⁶³ For a comprehensive summary, see Hirschfeld 2006*b* and references there. For an introduction to the Byzantine monasteries in Palestine, see Hirschfeld 1992, Patrich 1995,

Several regions were particularly renowned for their large number of monasteries, forming 'monastic landscapes'. The Judaeen Desert is the most notable example, providing a unique picture of a marginal region dotted with numerous monastic sites.

Monasteries were usually divided into communal (*coenobium*) and eremitical (*laura*) types, each defined by its physical characteristics. The *laura* consisted of a central church and hermit cells scattered over a wide area around it, while the *coenobium* was a closed compound containing a church, service buildings, and residences for a relatively large number of monks living a communal life and sharing the daily routines of prayer and work.⁶⁴

A typical monastery was usually located in or near a city or village, and built as a closed rectangular compound surrounded by a wall. Inside the monastery a church or a chapel (or both) were installed, and other structures included a dining room and kitchen, bakery, storerooms, stables, a cistern, and occasionally a hospice for pilgrims.⁶⁵ A number of large *coenobium* monasteries were closely connected to the urban communities, and provided basic food and lodging for the numerous pilgrims travelling in the region.

Rural monasteries or 'agricultural *coenobia*' were mostly located in close proximity to villages, and sometimes formed an integral part of the village.⁶⁶ These are known particularly in the Jerusalem area, the Samaritan and Judaeen Lowlands, and the vicinity of Gaza.⁶⁷ Some of the monasteries resembled large farmsteads in shape and size. They were associated with the agricultural fields around them, which shows that local monks were engaged in the cultivation and processing of crops. These monastic communities formed an integral part of the Mediterranean rural systems, providing agricultural products on a commercial scale to nearby villages and towns.⁶⁸ Almost every monastery contained an olive press and a wine press. Stables, animal pens, and animal remains found in excavations attest to the raising of sheep and cattle. The close ties between monastic communities and agricultural production made distinguishing between a monastery and a farm difficult, and some of these settlements were labelled 'monastic farms'.⁶⁹

The monasteries in the countryside were also involved in the large-scale agricultural production of oil and wine. As the volume of production was far beyond self-sufficiency, monasteries were clearly engaged in sale to nearby

Wilken 1992. For the Gaza region, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004. For the western Galilee, see Aviam 2002, 2004.

⁶⁴ Hirschfeld 2006*b*, 404. ⁶⁵ Hirschfeld 1992, 33, Taxel 2009, 194

⁶⁶ Taxel 2009, 194–8; Seligman 2011, 515–22.

⁶⁷ See Taxel 2009, 196–7 for a list of rural monasteries in Palestine.

⁶⁸ Taxel 2009, 185–201. For similar conclusions on northern Syria, see Decker 2009*a*, 51.

⁶⁹ E.g. the monasteries in the western Galilee—see Dauphin and Kingsley 2003 and the discussion below; Decker 2009*a*, 48–51.

settlements.⁷⁰ The production of wine is attested by a Greek inscription dated to the year 529 from a rural monastery near Tell Ashdod, which mentions the construction of a wine press by a certain abbot. It has been suggested that the wine press that operated within the monastery provided an important source of income to the local monks.⁷¹ And indeed, many rural monasteries had industrial wine and oil presses designed for mass production, which formed a major component of the local economy.⁷²

The chronological framework of the monastic communities in Palestine was assigned to the Byzantine period, but most archaeological studies on monasteries did not pay attention to the date of their abandonment, and generally linked it to the Arab conquest.⁷³ However, there is substantial evidence for the continuity of monasteries in various regions well into the Early Islamic period, although some of them were reduced in area and population. The thorough research conducted on the Judaeen Desert monasteries deals only briefly with the fate of the monastic communities after the Byzantine period.⁷⁴ It seems, however, that the large monasteries in this region continued to function at least into the eighth and ninth centuries, and perhaps even later.⁷⁵ The fate of the remote, small *lauras* is less clear, and it seems that some of them were abandoned and the monks concentrated in the larger monasteries.

Evidence from excavated monasteries in other parts of the country, particularly in the vicinity of Jerusalem and in the Samaritan and Judaeen Lowlands, shows clear continuity beyond the seventh century. In some of them, however, it is not clear whether in the latest phases of the settlement they were inhabited by Christian monks or by a different secular population.

New Islamic constructions: the *ribatat* and 'Umayyad palaces'

A new type of settlement appeared in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, with the construction of fortified and palatial enclosures associated with the Umayyad caliphate. The establishment of the *ribatat* and the 'Umayyad palaces' provides evidence of the penetration of a new foreign population into the region, which added previously unknown elements to the settlements of Palestine and Jordan.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Seligman 2011, 517–18. See also Taxel 2009, 210–11. ⁷¹ Di Segni 2008.

⁷² Kingsley and Decker 2001, 10–11. ⁷³ E.g. Hirschfeld 1992, 1993, 152.

⁷⁴ But see different attitudes in Griffith 1992, 1997, 2008.

⁷⁵ Griffith 1992. See also the recent discussion by Patrich (2011*b*), in which he suggests that, although many monasteries were abandoned in the course of the 7th century, the larger ones survived to the 9th and 10th centuries.

⁷⁶ See Creswell 1969, 498–606, Grabar 1973, 133–68, 1987, Hillenbrand 1982, 1999 for the 'Umayyad Palaces'. See Masarwa 2006 for the *ribatat*.

The *ribatat* were fortified strongholds established along the eastern Mediterranean coast and intended to protect the coastal plain from the raids of the Byzantine navy.⁷⁷ These square fortresses protected by walls introduced a new type of military architecture, and were represented in Palestine by the *ribatat* at Kafr Lab (Habonim) and Qal'at al-Mina (Ashdod Yam), and by a number of small watchtowers built along the coast. The location of Kafr Lab near Caesarea and Dora, and of Qal'at al-Mina on the coast between Jaffa and Ascalon, indicates the concern of Islamic caliphs to protect the weakest points of the coastal plain. The addition of watchtowers in other sites along the coast, in Tell Michal, Apollonia-Arsuf, and Mikhmoret, improved this network of military installations, which were built in the late seventh century.⁷⁸

The so-called 'Umayyad palaces' or 'castles' present a different type of extravagant residence, the sites of more than twenty of which are known throughout the Near East, most of them in Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. Their impressive architectural and artistic features made the 'Umayyad castles' a unique and outstanding phenomenon in relation to other settlements in the region. Many of these monumental complexes were located outside the main settlements, sometimes on the fringes of the deserts, and were connected to cultivated areas around them. A few were established within existing urban centres, for example in Jerusalem and Amman. Some are similar in form to the *ribatat*, and others show characteristics of palatial buildings. The most notable sites of this type were at Khirbet Minya and Sinnabra on the Sea of Galilee, Khirbet al-Mafjar near Jericho, the palatial complex in Amman, the monumental fortified enclosures at Mshatta, Qasr Kharana, and Qasr Hallabat, and the outstanding decorated complex at Qusayr 'Amra in Jordan.⁷⁹ Additional structures identified as *qusur* are known from Jordan, in Hesban, Umm el-Walid, Qastal, and other locations.⁸⁰ Many of them represent an aristocratic architecture which is rooted in the earlier traditions of the Roman military camp and villa rustica.⁸¹

The significance of these buildings has been much debated. A few have been directly connected to the Umayyad caliphs, perhaps having been built as winter residences. Others have been interpreted in various ways: as reflections of the new Muslim rulers' association with the desert; as a statement of ownership of their newly conquered lands; as a retreat for Muslim princes from the crowded and polluted cities; as part of the agricultural colonization of marginal lands; as caravanserai along trading routes and pilgrimage roads; or as a traditional meeting place for the Bedouin Islamic aristocracy.⁸²

⁷⁷ Elad 1982*a*; Khalilieh 1999; Masarwa 2006. For the term *ribat* and its use in the Arab sources, see Elad 1982*a*, 160–7, Masarwa 2006, 54–113.

⁷⁸ Masarwa 2006, 30–43, 2011, 159–67.

⁷⁹ See Grabar 1973, 133–68 for general description. ⁸⁰ See the discussion below.

⁸¹ Grabar 1973, 134. See also Genequand 2006 for an updated summary.

⁸² Grabar 1973, 136–7, 1987; Hillenbrand 1982; Genequand 2006, 3–6.

Recent suggestions see these elaborate structures as posts from which the Umayyad rulers maintained connections with, and authority over, the desert tribes, or as a manifestation of a new urban pattern for marginal regions.⁸³ In fact, many of the ‘castles’ are associated with a larger settlement around them, containing a mosque, a bathhouse, and a network of smaller buildings, agricultural fields, and hydraulic installations.⁸⁴ With the exception of the citadel in Amman and the monumental buildings in Jerusalem, all the other compounds were constructed in relatively isolated locations in the countryside.

Although they have been extensively discussed in scholarship of the Early Islamic period, it seems that these monumental buildings had only a marginal impact on the large-scale settlement picture of Palestine and Jordan.

The location of a few buildings within an already existing network of Christian villages and farms presents an interesting picture of mutual coexistence. For example, the ‘palaces’ of Minya and Sinnabra were constructed in the midst of a wealthy rural area dominated by Christians. This is well represented by the short distance between Khirbet Minya and nearby Capernaum and Magdala—both distinctive Christian villages.⁸⁵ A similar coexistence seems to have prevailed in the Jericho area with the establishment of the Hisham Palace at Khirbet al-Mafjar.⁸⁶ The splendid palace was located on the edge of the fertile Jericho oasis, which was densely inhabited by Christians and Jews. Excavations in this area have revealed the remains of a number of churches and monasteries. The Byzantine monastery of Qarantal, located on a high cliff above Jericho, dominated the western skyline and probably continued to function in the seventh and eighth centuries.

PATTERNS OF PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE

The unprecedented expansion of settlement in the countryside during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods was marked as the zenith of prosperity in Palestine and Jordan. Besides the densely populated areas, it included the exploitation of previously unpopulated regions such as the swamps of the coastal plain and the marginal areas of the Negev and the Judaeian Desert. This massive expansion involved a complicated commercial network, with many villages serving as production centres for agricultural goods both for local and regional consumption and for export to other areas of the Near East and the Mediterranean.

⁸³ Whitcomb 1995*b*, 1996, 2001, 2007.

⁸⁴ E.g. at Qasr Hallabat and Umm el-Walid. See Arce 2006, Bujard 1997.

⁸⁵ See the discussion in Ch. 3.

⁸⁶ For the palatial complex and its excavations, see Hamilton 1959, Creswell 1969, 571–96.

The prosperity of Palestine in the Byzantine period was traditionally linked to the increased religious significance of the Holy Land as a main pilgrimage destination. The large number of Christian pilgrims provided an influx of funds used for the construction of monasteries and churches throughout the country and for the maintenance of their religious communities.⁸⁷ According to this model, called the 'artificial economy' model,⁸⁸ the prosperity of the Roman East was associated with the political predominance of Byzantium as a Christian empire, together with the decline of the Western Roman Empire.⁸⁹ Recent studies, based on the vast amount of archaeological findings of the past fifty years, provide a more balanced view of the local agrarian economy. Apparently, the pilgrim traffic to the Holy Land was only one factor in the intensification of settlement. As in other areas of the Roman East and North Africa, the flourishing local economy was based on massive production of basic products such as wheat, olive oil, and wine. Palestine was known for its cloth and linen industries, and its products were used both for local consumption and for export.⁹⁰ Local economies were also based on the manufacture of pottery and glass vessels, as is evidenced by the large number of pottery kilns, especially in the regions of Gaza and Ascalon,⁹¹ and by glass workshops found near villages of the countryside.⁹²

One of the major landmarks of the Byzantine-period economy was the intensification of agricultural production through the extension of agricultural fields into valleys and the development of the terracing system for hill slopes.⁹³ In addition, hundreds of oil presses and wine vats dotted the countryside, spreading from the Galilee and the Golan Heights to the Negev Highlands.⁹⁴

A number of studies have calculated the local production capacities of olive oil, relying on the potential amount of oil produced by a single olive press and the number of olive trees needed to supply the presses. They concluded that the average production of oil presses was much larger than the demand from the local population operating them.⁹⁵ Such a calculation made for a single olive press belonging to a monastery in the Judaeian Lowlands suggested that the annual consumption of the local monks and the potential number of pilgrims residing there was c.1,000 litres of oil, while the annual production of the press may have been more than ten times larger, which left a surplus of c.8,000–14,000 litres. The surplus was circulated among villages in the area or exported to neighbouring regions. The large surplus of oil from the Golan villages, for example, may

⁸⁷ Avi Yonah 1958; Ashkenazi 2009, 209–31. ⁸⁸ Kingsley 2001, 45.

⁸⁹ Jones 1964, 824–72. ⁹⁰ Kingsley 2001; Decker 2009a; Bar 2008.

⁹¹ Kingsley 2001, 49–52. ⁹² Gorin-Rosen 2000.

⁹³ Safrai 1994, 104–87; Decker 2009a; see Ward-Perkins 2000, 352–4 for the intensification of agriculture.

⁹⁴ For a comprehensive survey of oil presses and wine vats, see Ayalon *et al.* 2009.

⁹⁵ Taxel 2009, 210–11 and references there.

have been exported to southern Syria and distributed in the Damascus and Hauran markets.⁹⁶

Calculations of potential wine production show similar results. Palestinian wine, especially from the Gaza and Ascalon area, was famous throughout the Mediterranean, and was widely exported.⁹⁷ Wine was produced locally in the villages of the countryside, and was a major source of income for the rural monasteries. The potential quantity of wine produced was much larger than the needs of the local population, and the large surplus was sold to nearby towns and cities. This mass production of wine decreased in the seventh century with the decline of international maritime trade and the export of wine to destinations around the Mediterranean. Yet the local Christian population continued to consume large amounts of wine during the Early Islamic period as well.

Calculations made for the potential volume of production of a single industrial wine press near Jerusalem show that the maximum annual production could have reached 210,000 litres, which would have required between 2.1 and 4.2 ha of vineyards to supply the press. The total volume of production of a larger area north-east of Jerusalem could have potentially reached 2,600,000 litres.⁹⁸ Extrapolating these calculations to the whole country produces an incredible total of several hundreds of millions of litres. The estimated annual consumption of the local population suggests that huge amounts of wine were consumed locally, reaching *c.*73 million litres of undiluted wines in Byzantine Palestine,⁹⁹ and leaving a very large surplus for export.

The continuity of wine production in Palestine during the Early Islamic period has been debated. Tchalenko's thesis on the decline of agricultural production following the Arab conquest has been adopted by other scholars. It suggests that wine production declined with the change from Christianity to Islam and the mass conversion of the local population.¹⁰⁰ This was based on the assumption that the Christian population in Palestine fell dramatically after the Arab conquest, and that there was a rise in a new Islamic population.

On the basis of extensive research in rural and monastic sites in Judaea and Samaria, Magen has suggested that wine production in rural Palestine ceased after the Arab conquest. Most wine presses were replaced by oil presses that functioned until the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁰¹ He concluded that the replacement of wine vats with oil presses represented the decline of the local Christian population and the increased influence of the newly arrived Muslim inhabitants, who practised mass production of oil instead of wine. While the

⁹⁶ Ben David 1998, 53. See also the detailed discussion in Seligman 2011, 341–79.

⁹⁷ Mayerson 1985, 2008; Kingsley 2001. ⁹⁸ Seligman 2011, 397–8.

⁹⁹ Kingsley 2001, 49.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. Watson 2001, 501, Magen 2008, Taxel 2009, 224–7, Seligman 2011, 392.

¹⁰¹ Magen 2008.

ceramic evidence from excavated sites supports the continuity of settlements to the ninth and tenth centuries, no evidence has been provided of a new population penetrating Palestine. It seems that the same settlements and population continued, increasing local oil production through the introduction of new oil presses.

Both the historical evidence and the archaeological findings attest to a continuous Christian presence in Palestine, and it is reasonable to assume that this population kept its former wine consumption habits. Moreover, in many villages and farmsteads there is evidence of continuity of wine production beyond the seventh century.¹⁰²

Archaeological evidence from various regions shows that the production of wine and olive oil, which increased greatly in the Byzantine period and became one of the main income sources of the rural population, continued to flourish for local consumption in the Early Islamic period. Wine presses were not replaced by oil presses but continued to function in and around existing villages. Astonishing evidence of wine production in an Islamic settlement was revealed in Khirbet al-Mafjar, where a recent excavation exposed a large press associated with the Early Islamic estate.¹⁰³

REGIONAL PATTERNS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The following section presents the countryside settlement map of Palestine and Jordan, concentrating on excavated sites in which clear sequences from the sixth to the tenth and eleventh centuries were found. The archaeological findings are given from a regional perspective, and the impact of transformation is evaluated in various regions: the Golan and the Galilee, northern and central Jordan, the coastal plain, the central hills and lowlands; a special section is devoted to a detailed study of the settlements in the Negev Highlands and the 'Arabah Valley, as they reflect a unique aspect of the Byzantine-Islamic transition.

Unlike the cities, in which large excavated areas revealed clear phasing, the data from the countryside are in most cases fragmentary and the observation of phases is not always clear. Nevertheless, numerous excavated sites provide a solid basis for a comprehensive reconstruction of settlement patterns in various regions, and enable a closer observation of the processes of intensification and abatement.

¹⁰² See Taxel 2009, 217 for a selection of rural sites.

¹⁰³ I thank D. Whitcomb for this previously unpublished information.

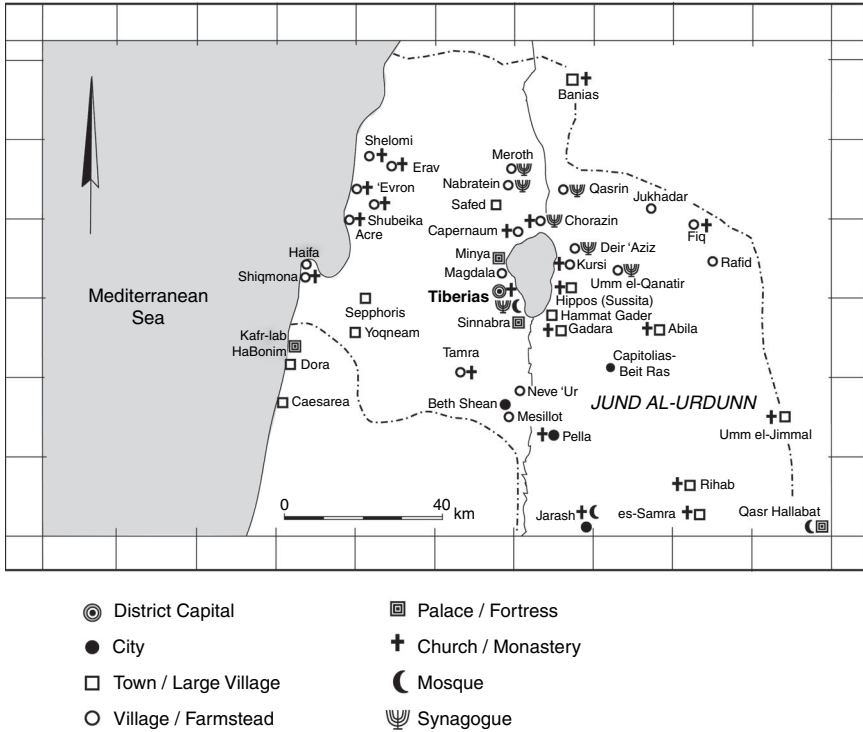


Fig. 4.1 The Golan and the Galilee: map of sites.

The Golan, the Galilee, and the Northern Valleys (Fig. 4.1)

The northern regions of Palestine were included in the territories of Palaestina Secunda, Phoenicia Maritima, and Phoenicia Libanensis during the Byzantine period, and formed a large section of Jund al-Urdunn and a smaller section of Jund Dimashq in the Early Islamic period. These regions were dotted with villages in which the ethnic identity of the local population was clearly manifested by a rich repertoire of religious buildings, mainly churches and synagogues.

As in other regions, the intensity of Byzantine-period settlements has been made clear by regional surveys. The Golan survey revealed 173 sites from the Byzantine period, most of them villages and farmsteads,¹⁰⁴ while the Upper Galilee survey discovered 194 sites from the Byzantine period.¹⁰⁵ Both surveys indicated a sharp decline in settlement density in the Early Islamic period, a conclusion which does not hold water in the light of the finds from the excavations.

A major feature of the settlements of the Galilee and the Golan is the clear ethnic boundaries between Jewish and Christian communities. While the

¹⁰⁴ Ma'oz 1993a, 538.

¹⁰⁵ Frankel *et al.* 2001, 114.

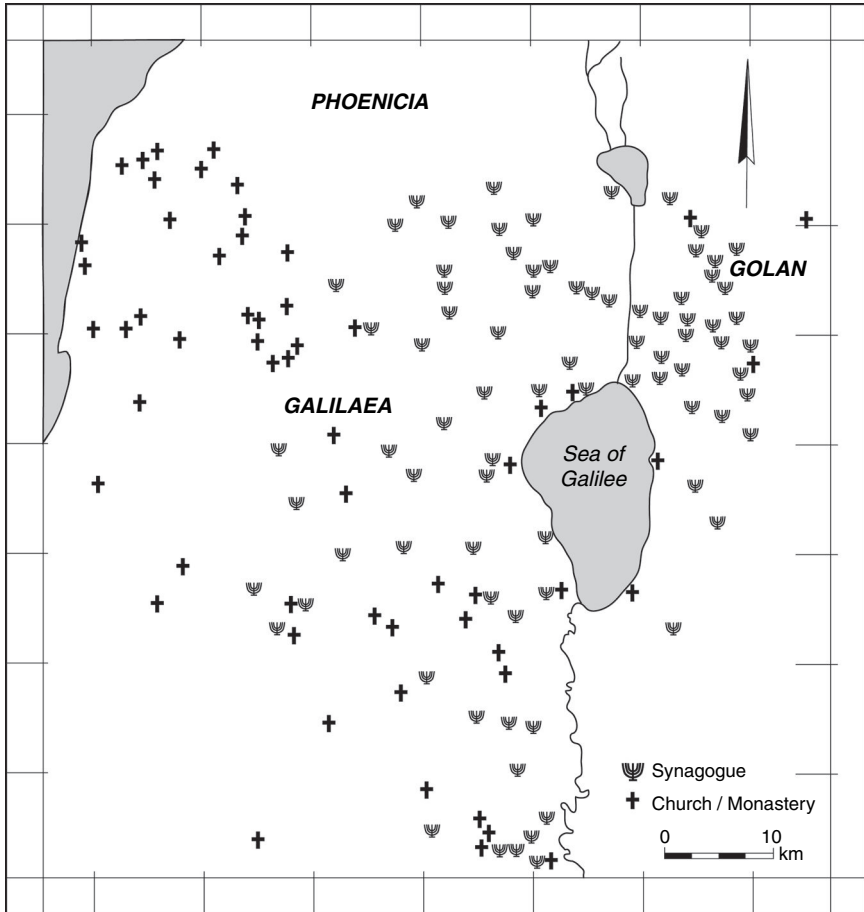


Fig. 4.2 The Galilee: regional distribution of Jewish and Christian settlements (after Aviam 2004).

western Galilee was a homogeneous Christian zone with many villages and rural monasteries and no evidence at all of Jewish presence, the eastern Galilee was dominated by Jewish villages.¹⁰⁶ A similar ethnic division was noticed in the Golan: Jewish villages predominated in the central Golan, while Christian settlements prevailed in the eastern and southern Golan, penetrating slowly into the northern Golan, an area populated by the Yaturians in Hellenistic and Roman times¹⁰⁷ (Fig. 4.2).

This segregation between Christians and Jews was maintained at least until the eighth century and perhaps even later. Very little evidence of the penetration of Muslims into the rural communities was found, and it seems that the

¹⁰⁶ Aviam 2004, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Ma'oz 1993a.

Islamic presence in northern Palestine was confined to the major cities, mainly Tiberias. The establishment of the 'palaces' at Minya and Sinnabra as Islamic settlements in the hinterland of Tiberias emphasizes the separation between the newly introduced Muslim elements and the existing Christian and Jewish communities living in the villages and farms nearby.¹⁰⁸ Unlike the situation in urban communities, no evidence was found of a shared presence of Jews and Christians in the same village.

The question of the continuity of Byzantine settlements in the Golan and the Galilee has been overlooked in most archaeological studies. Most scholars have seen the termination of settlement in these regions as a direct consequence of the Arab conquest.¹⁰⁹ A detailed study based on the archaeological surveys in the upper Galilee confirmed this conclusion and claimed that settlements were abandoned or dramatically declined following the conquest.¹¹⁰ However, recent excavations have detected a number of sites in which settlement continued well beyond the seventh century and in some places until the ninth or tenth centuries. A detailed survey of excavated sites in the Golan shows large variability in nearby sites regarding the date of their decline and abandonment. For example, the excavations at **Qasrin** in the central Golan revealed a typical Jewish village with a number of *insulae* containing square houses with central courtyards. A synagogue located in the centre of the village was thoroughly excavated, as were segments of three houses next to it. The excavations, which revealed a continuous sequence of use between the fourth and eighth centuries, showed that the site was not abandoned after the Arab conquest but continued in use for at least another century.¹¹¹ During the last phase of the village, in the eighth century, some of its buildings deteriorated, but were repaired with roughly hewn basalt rocks. It seems that the 749 earthquake damaged many buildings, and the village was abandoned soon afterwards.

While in most Jewish villages in the Golan the latest phase of settlement was dated to the mid-eighth century, a continuity of settlement into the ninth and tenth centuries was revealed in a number of excavated sites in the southern Golan. The small Jewish village of **Deir 'Aziz** was established in the Byzantine period and continued uninterrupted into the Early Islamic period. The excavations of the synagogue located in the centre of the village revealed a 17 × 11 m rectangular structure with benches around its walls¹¹² (Fig. 4.3). The synagogue was constructed in the mid-sixth century, destroyed in the 749 earthquake, then reconstructed in the late eighth or early ninth century, and was in use until the middle of the tenth century. Inscribed crosses on stones within the

¹⁰⁸ See the discussion in Ch. 2. ¹⁰⁹ See particularly Ma'oz 1993a and Aviam 2004.

¹¹⁰ Frankel *et al.* 2001, 116, fig. 5.1. See also Ma'oz 1993a, 545.

¹¹¹ Ma'oz and Killebrew 1993; Killebrew 2003. ¹¹² Ma'oz and Ben David 2008.



Fig. 4.3. Deir 'Aziz: the synagogue (courtesy of Haim Ben David).

site might show that in its latest stage the village was inhabited by Christians, who perhaps replaced the Jewish population in the latter part of the tenth century.

Excavations near the spring in the vicinity of the settlement revealed a number of plastered pools probably used for the manufacture of cotton products, one of the main economic activities of the local rural population in the Early Islamic period.¹¹³

Unlike the continuity of settlement in Deir 'Aziz, excavations at the nearby synagogue in **Umm el-Qanatir**, located only 3 km away, suggested that the building in its final form was destroyed by the 749 earthquake and never rebuilt.¹¹⁴

The survey of villages in the central and southern Golan presented a number of large sites in which a continuous Christian presence was noted. **Jukhadar**, a typical large village in the southern Golan, was shown to have been continuously occupied from Hellenistic to medieval times. The village was densely populated in the Late Roman period, and after a short period of abandonment in the fourth century, it was resettled in the Byzantine period. Large quantities of Early Islamic pottery indicate that habitation continued into the ninth and tenth centuries.¹¹⁵

Another still unexcavated large village is **Fiq**, which is located in the same region, on the road from Tiberias to Damascus. According to a number of sources this large village (or small town), part of the subdistrict of Hippos, was inhabited

¹¹³ Amar 2000, 331.

¹¹⁴ Ben David *et al.* 2006.

¹¹⁵ Maoz 1993b.

throughout the Early Islamic period, functioning as a major road station.¹¹⁶ Fiq is also mentioned in later sources from the Mamluk period, and it seems that the site was also inhabited in late medieval times. As no excavations have been conducted here it is impossible to support this dating with archaeological findings.

The detailed architectural survey of **Rafid** showed a wealthy Roman and Byzantine village with a large number of houses of the central-court type and several churches.¹¹⁷ It has been suggested that this village was settled in the sixth century by the Ghassanids, an Arab Christian tribe that became an ally of the Byzantine Empire, penetrated into southern Syria and northern Jordan, and founded its centre at Jabiya in the eastern Golan.¹¹⁸ It seems that, like other villages in the southern Golan and the Hauran, the settlement in Rafid continued well into Early Islamic times.

Settlement continuity throughout the Early Islamic period, with a penetration of Islamic elements into existing Christian villages, was noted in the neighbouring region of the Hauran. In the village of Mseikeh, for example, it seems that a church and a mosque functioned side by side after the Byzantine period.¹¹⁹

The position of the Golan during the Early Islamic period as a transitional zone between the district capitals of Tiberias and Damascus can be seen in the development of a regional road system. The main road from Tiberias to Damascus was reconstructed in the time of 'Abd al-Malik, as is evidenced by a number of inscribed milestones discovered along this road.¹²⁰

The massive investment in road construction and maintenance during the Early Islamic period reinforced the continuity of settlements in this region at least until the tenth century. However, it seems that the Islamic presence in the Golan was seen mainly in public works along the roads, and not in the establishment of new settlements. Christians and Jews continued to inhabit the same villages as in the Byzantine period. The density of their settlements gradually decreased after the eighth century, but a number of large sites were inhabited throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. These finds contradict the accepted reconstruction, which claims a dramatic decline of settlements in the Golan after the Arab conquest.

The rural settlements of the Galilee present a clear ethno-religious division between Jewish and Christian communities and this is well represented in the distribution of synagogues and churches in the region (Fig. 4.2). Archaeological excavations at Galilean sites traditionally concentrated on these

¹¹⁶ Elad 1999, 80–2. ¹¹⁷ Urman 2006.

¹¹⁸ Hartal, in Urman 2006, 288. On the Ghassanids and their territories, see Shahid 2002, 2009, Ma'oz 2008, Fisher 2011, 99–127.

¹¹⁹ Foss 1997, 254–5; Balty 2008, 234–63; see also the discussion on Syria below.

¹²⁰ Elad 1999.

public religious buildings, and only little effort was devoted to the excavation of domestic architecture. This preference affected the possibility of evaluating changes in the villages in which churches and synagogues were constructed, and in many cases prevented the establishment of a clear chronological framework for the villages' habitation.

Excavations conducted in the 1970s and 1980s at a number of synagogues in the eastern upper Galilee presented consecutive patterns of growth and decline: most buildings were established in the Late Roman or Early Byzantine periods, and declined in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹²¹ However, a re-evaluation of the finds in several Galilean sites suggests a much slower process of transformation, with continuity of settlements beyond the middle of the eighth century. The excavation report of **Nabratein**, in the eastern upper Galilee, for example, concluded that the settlement declined sharply in the seventh century,¹²² but a new chronology proposed by Magness has suggested continuity of both synagogue and village at least into the second half of the eighth century.¹²³

Evidence of a much longer continuity in the Early Islamic period and up to the Crusader period was found in the nearby village of **Meroth**, where excavations of the synagogue and related structures revealed several phases of use. The synagogue, originally from the Byzantine period, was rebuilt after the 749 earthquake and continued to function during the ninth–twelfth centuries.¹²⁴ A possible mention of the village in the Geniza documents further reinforces the continuity of the Jewish settlement throughout the Early Islamic period.¹²⁵

The chronological framework of settlements east of the Sea of Galilee is more problematic. On the basis of a detailed survey, Leibner suggested that rural settlements in this area had already declined by the fourth and fifth century and that during the Byzantine period it was only sparsely populated.¹²⁶ However, these results contradict the finds of flourishing settlements in the hinterland of Tiberias during the Early Islamic period.¹²⁷ Consequently, a temporary abatement followed by an intensification of settlement in the Early Islamic period may be suggested, but further research is required in order to establish a clearer chronology based on excavated sites.

The settlements of the western Galilee present similar chronological problems regarding the continuity of the rural population after the Arab conquest. Unlike in the eastern Galilee, settlements in this region were characterized by a Christian majority, with new villages constructed or expanded

¹²¹ See in particular the excavation reports of the synagogues at Meiron, Khirbet Shema, Gush Halav, and Nabratein: Meyers 1976; Meyers *et al.* 1981, 1990; Meyers and Meyers 2009.

¹²² Meyers and Meyers 2009. ¹²³ Magness 2010*b*.

¹²⁴ Ilan and Damati 1987; Ilan 1993*a*.

¹²⁵ Ilan and Damati 1987, 84–5. Other documents mention Jewish scholars of the 11th cent. in the nearby villages of Gush Halav and Dalton. See Gil 1992, 212–14 [321–7].

¹²⁶ Leibner 2009. ¹²⁷ See the discussion in Ch. 2.

in Byzantine times.¹²⁸ On the basis of several excavations at Christian sites in this area, Dauphin concluded that the Persian and Arab conquests resulted in the destruction of many churches and other ecclesiastical properties.¹²⁹ Following further excavations at a number of churches in the western Galilee, Aviam suggested that at least five rural churches were deliberately destroyed and abandoned in the early seventh century.¹³⁰

However, excavations at other sites in the region show a clear continuity of churches and monasteries from the fifth and sixth centuries to the eighth century and beyond. **Horvat 'Erav**, for example, was a village with two churches constructed in the Byzantine period. The western church, probably part of a monastery, was excavated, and the fill above its floors contained hundreds of typical Early Islamic oil lamps, including glazed lamps.¹³¹ It seems that this site was not destroyed and abandoned in the seventh century, but continued at least until the ninth or tenth centuries. The short preliminary excavation report does not provide any more details on the latest phase of settlement, and it is unclear whether the churches still functioned at this stage or were converted into dwellings.

Much clearer evidence for continuity was found in the nearby village of **Khirbet Shubeika**. The site, located in the low hills of the north-western Galilee, was identified as a village or a rural monastery.¹³² It was founded in the sixth century and continued into the Early Islamic period. The remains of a church were partly excavated in the southern section of the site, and five stages of use were revealed. The second stage contained a dated Greek inscription, dedicated to the repair of the church in the year 785. It seems that the church was constructed sometime in the seventh century and was in use at least until the ninth century.¹³³ Additional excavations at the site show continuous use, and further evidence for long-term habitation was revealed in a burial cave located within the compound, which contained numerous oil lamps from the late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods, the latest of which have been dated to the ninth century.

At a short distance from Khirbet Shubeika, the 'ecclesiastical farm' at **Shelomi**, excavated by Dauphin, revealed an interesting complex of buildings inhabited between the fifth and the tenth or eleventh centuries.¹³⁴ The section excavated included a large courtyard surrounded by rooms paved with a mosaic floor laid in 610, as a dated inscription indicated. The farm was destroyed by a massive fire in the first half of the seventh century, but was restored in the second half of the century and continued to function through most of the Early Islamic period.

¹²⁸ See Aviam 2004, Dauphin 1998, 629–40.

¹²⁹ See in particular for the churches at Naharia and Shavei Zion Dauphin and Edelstein 1993.

¹³⁰ Aviam 2002, 216. ¹³¹ Ilan 1993*b*.

¹³² Avshalom Gorni *et al.* 2002; Syon 2003. The authors suggest that this was a village in the centre of which a church was constructed, while Aviam proposed that it was a monastic compound.

¹³³ Syon 2003. ¹³⁴ Dauphin 1993; Dauphin and Kingsley 2003.

Consequently, it seems that the evidence from several excavated sites in the western Galilee calls for a revision of previous conclusions on the chronology of the decline and abandonment of Christian settlements. As in other regions, the Persian and Arab conquests were not associated with abandonment and decline, and it seems that many settlements continued to flourish in the Early Islamic period.

Similar evidence for the continuity of rural settlements in the lower Galilee was obtained from recent excavations in Tamra, to the south of Mount Tabor. A number of salvage excavations revealed segments of the Byzantine and Early Islamic village, presenting a long-term sequence of use. Particularly interesting were the remains of a church in the eastern part of the village. It contained a decorated mosaic floor with a Greek inscription dated to 725, indicating the restoration of the building.¹³⁵ The year indicated, 106, was calculated according to the Islamic *higra*, providing a rare example of the use of this dating system in a Christian church.¹³⁶ The church was restored in the early eighth century with the aid of local Christians, who were already accustomed to the chronology of the Islamic *higra*. This provides an example of the penetration of the new administrative system into Christian villages in the Galilee, but it seems that it did not have any Islamic religious significance.

This church was destroyed by an earthquake (perhaps in 749), but rebuilt according to the same architectural plan and continued to be in use until the ninth or tenth century. As the main public building in the village, it was adorned with imported decorative elements and underwent several stages of restoration during its long period of use.

Several domestic structures excavated in the village reveal a similar long sequence: they were constructed in the Byzantine period and continued at least until the ninth century.¹³⁷ New constructions took place in the Early Islamic period: a massive rectangular house was built in the eighth or ninth century and functioned for a considerable period of time. It seems that settlement in Tamra gradually declined in the ninth and tenth centuries. The site was temporarily abandoned during the eleventh century, to be renewed as a small village in the Mamluk period.

The remains of the Byzantine and Early Islamic village at Tamra represent the common rural settlement of the lower Galilee during this transitional period. These were modest villages, with relatively small and humble houses, all built from local stones. Most of these sites were already established in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and expanded in area and population during the Byzantine period. They continued uninterrupted into the Early Islamic

¹³⁵ Tepper and Di Segni 2004.

¹³⁶ For a similar dating in the baths of Hammat Gader, see Green 1982, Hasson 1982 and the discussion below.

¹³⁷ Alexandre 2009; Porat 2008.

period, gradually adjusting to the new administrative and political regime, and were abandoned in the later stages of this period.

This evidence of continuity in the rural settlements is supported by finds from excavations at a number of cities and towns in the lower Galilee and the northern valleys.

Sepphoris flourished as a multicultural pagan and Jewish centre in the Roman period, was transformed into a Christian city with a significant Jewish community in Byzantine times, and declined during the Early Islamic period.¹³⁸ Evidence of the change and decline of urban structures was found in the civic centre of Sepphoris, which was abandoned in the seventh or eighth century, its magnificent buildings deserted and their stones looted.¹³⁹ Humble private buildings replaced the elaborate public constructions of the Byzantine period.

A number of thoroughly excavated buildings in Sepphoris provide clear sequences that support this picture of decline. For example, the synagogue on the north-eastern edge of the city was in use until the early seventh century and then abandoned.¹⁴⁰ Two churches which were established in the late fifth or early sixth century along the *cardo*, near the intersection with the *decumanus*, were probably abandoned in the same period.¹⁴¹ It has been suggested that the decline of urban structures in Sepphoris was already evident in the course of the seventh century and that during the eighth century larger sections of the town were deserted and the town was transformed into a small village.¹⁴² However, as in Beth Shean and Jarash, the excavations of the *decumanus* revealed a later phase, when the wide colonnaded street was narrowed with the installation of shops. The street and flanking shops were in use throughout the Early Islamic period.¹⁴³ A number of dwellings in which *spolia* of the monumental Roman and Byzantine public structures were incorporated were also revealed in this area close to the modern surface. As the site was extensively cultivated in late medieval and modern times, it is possible that the latest phases of the archaeological sequence were obliterated.

A significant contribution to the question of the size and limits of Sepphoris during the Early Islamic period was recently provided by salvage excavations conducted on the southern outskirts of the Byzantine town. The humble remains of a number of residential units were revealed here, showing three phases of construction between the eighth and eleventh centuries.¹⁴⁴ These houses were part of a larger settlement that extended into the southern area of the former Byzantine city, outside the limits of the civic centre. It seems that, as in Beth Shean, the focus of the Early Islamic settlement in Sepphoris shifted to a nearby location, perhaps also after the 749 earthquake.

¹³⁸ Netzer and Weiss 1994; Weiss and Netzer 1997; Weiss 2010. ¹³⁹ Weiss 2005a.

¹⁴⁰ Weiss and Netzer 1997, 15–21; Weiss 2005b. ¹⁴¹ Weiss 2005a.

¹⁴² Weiss and Netzer 1997, 20–1. ¹⁴³ Weiss 2005a, 219–23. ¹⁴⁴ Tepper 2010.

The fact that considerable settlement in Sepphoris continued throughout the Early Islamic period is supported by historical sources which mention the town and list it among the settlements in Palestine which maintained a mint and produced their own coins.¹⁴⁵ It seems that the area of Early Islamic Sepphoris was reduced in size compared with the Byzantine city, but it continued to function until the eleventh century.

In contrast to Sepphoris, nearby **Yoqneam** presents an interesting case of a newly established settlement in the Early Islamic period. The site, located on top of the biblical Tell at the western end of the Jezreel (Esdraelon) Valley, was deserted during Byzantine times. It was renewed in the ninth century with the establishment of a large unfortified settlement on the top of the Tell. Excavations revealed a residential quarter featuring well-planned and meticulously constructed buildings and streets forming square and rectangular *insulae*.¹⁴⁶ Two construction phases were discerned, spanning the ninth to the eleventh centuries. The finds indicate that the settlement was established in the second half of the ninth century, and was abandoned in an orderly fashion in the course of the eleventh century. It has been suggested that the abandonment should be connected to the 1033 earthquake, but excavations failed to discover evidence of earthquake destruction.

The establishment of new settlements in the ninth century was not a common phenomenon in Early Islamic Palestine. The construction of Yoqneam was probably connected to other building enterprises in this region, such as the rebuilding of the harbour in Acre in the second half of the ninth century and the foundation of Haifa in the same period, which suggest increased local prosperity.

Northern and central Jordan (Fig. 4.4)

Excavations in northern and central Jordan have provided further valuable data for the continuity of settlements from Byzantine to Early Islamic times. Particularly significant for the establishment of an accurate chronology are the extensive excavations in Pella, Gadara, Abila, Umm el-Jimjal, and Madaba.

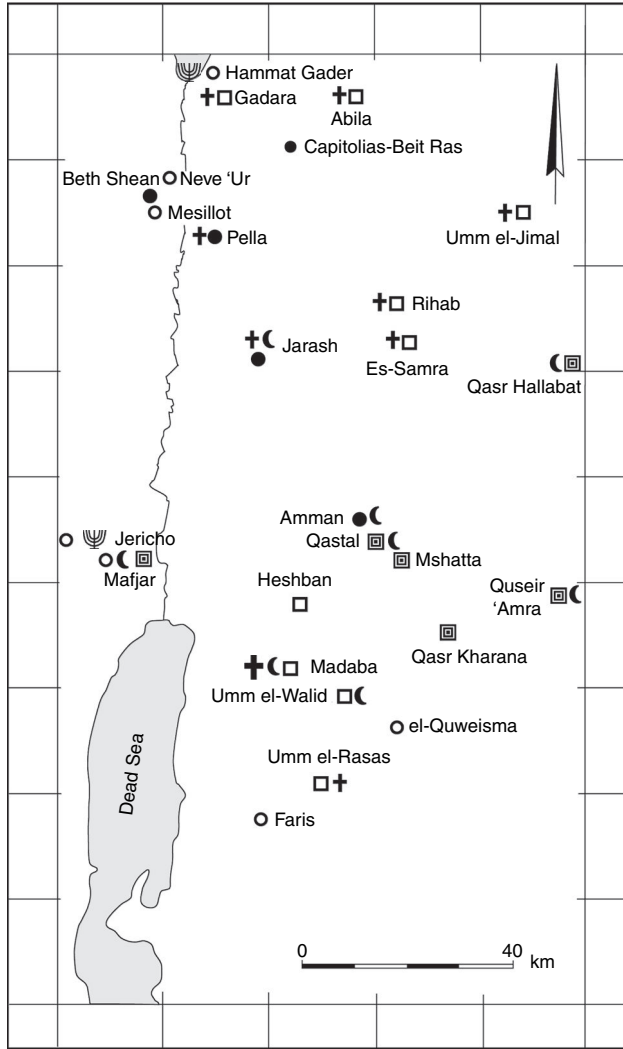
Pella, facing the rift valley south-east of Beth Shean, was a thriving Roman and Byzantine city and an episcopal centre. It contained three major churches, a small theatre, and several residential districts. Its prosperity reached a zenith in the sixth century, when the urban area was further expanded (Fig. 4.5).

Although earlier excavations at the site attributed a destruction layer to the 614 Persian conquest,¹⁴⁷ it seems that the city was affected neither by this

¹⁴⁵ Petersen 2005, 74; yet there is only very limited evidence for coins minted at Sepphoris.

¹⁴⁶ Ben Tor *et al.* 2001, 13–19.

¹⁴⁷ Smith 1973, 164; Schick 1992, 109; see also the discussion in Ch. 5.



- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| ⊙ District Capital | ◻ Palace / Fortress |
| ● City | ✚ Church / Monastery |
| ◻ Town / Large Village | ☾ Mosque |
| ○ Village / Farmstead | ⊚ Synagogue |

Fig. 4.4 Northern and Central Jordan: map of sites.



Fig. 4.5 Pella: the Cathedral Church at the civic complex.

invasion, nor by the Arab conquest of 635. Historical sources mention Pella as one of the cities taken by the Arabs through a surrender treaty.¹⁴⁸ The battle of Fihl, one of the major military clashes between the invading Arabs and the Byzantine army, was probably conducted somewhere in the hinterland of Pella, but did not affect the city proper.

Considerable damage might have been caused to Pella by the 633 and 659/660 earthquakes, but the urban infrastructure was quickly repaired.¹⁴⁹ The main churches and residential quarters continued uninterrupted at least until the 749 earthquake, although the quality of construction deteriorated. The 'Cathedral Church', constructed in the mid-sixth century, was destroyed by this earthquake.¹⁵⁰ Continuity into the eighth century was observed also in the excavations of the West Church (area I), a residential quarter in area IV, the East Church (Area V), and the Civic Complex and its church (area IX).

The residential districts of the seventh and early eighth centuries contained houses of the central-court type built along narrow streets and fronted in some places by shops. The main change observed after the 659/660 earthquake was the alteration of dwellings from continuous units along a street to independent units centred around open courtyards.¹⁵¹ The 749 earthquake was devastating for Pella. As in Beth Shean, large sections of the town were damaged,

¹⁴⁸ Hill 1971, 67, 72.

¹⁴⁹ McNicoll and Walmsley 1982; Walmsley 1988, 1992.

¹⁵⁰ McNicoll *et al.* 1992, 187–8.

¹⁵¹ Walmsley 2007a, 128–31, 2011, 137–41.

and many public buildings were destroyed. Archaeological evidence of the destruction was found in the excavations of the residential quarters, where a number of collapsed buildings revealed a rich assemblage of pottery and glass vessels. However, Pella was not abandoned or reduced to a small village following the earthquake, as had been previously concluded. As in Beth Shean, the smaller town was reconstructed and the civic centre was relocated outside the destroyed area. It was rebuilt from scratch in Wady Khandag, north-east of the devastated former civic centre. Two large compounds were excavated here, covering an area of $c.100 \times 50$ m and containing square buildings with a prominent central court flanked with shops and storage rooms.¹⁵² Two construction stages were identified in the eastern complex, showing continuity into the ninth and perhaps the tenth centuries.¹⁵³ Pella was further damaged by another earthquake in the ninth or early tenth century. Following this earthquake the town declined and contracted, and in the middle of the eleventh century it was reduced to a small village.

Built along a long spur north-east of Pella and south of the River Yarmuk, **Gadara-Umm Qeis** was another regional centre in northern Jordan. The city, covering an area of $c.1.7 \times 0.5$ km was built along a main colonnaded street, flanked by a number of public buildings. These included two theatres, a hippodrome, a bathhouse, and a large terrace west of the acropolis, on which a basilica was constructed. As in Beth Shean, the major urban development of Gadara has been dated to the Late Roman period, when a number of monumental buildings were constructed along its main thoroughfare. The city expanded further in the Byzantine period, when three or four churches were built along its main street. A large octagonal church was constructed west of the acropolis, and another five-aisle church was located in the western part of the city, near the main colonnaded street.¹⁵⁴

Urban change was evident in Gadara in the second half of the sixth century with the encroachment of streets and the introduction of residential buildings and industrial installations into the open areas around the monumental buildings. Several sections of the colonnaded street were narrowed with the installation of shops to create a linear market. The main east–west axis of the city continued to function, but the construction of new buildings at its northern and southern ends shifted the urban focus to other sections of Gadara. This ‘uncontrolled growth’ caused the dissolution of the Roman urban plan, as can be seen in other settlements in the region.¹⁵⁵

The sixth-century constructions in Gadara were viewed as the first stage of urban decline, but, as in Beth Shean, it seems that they represented growing economic activity and population pressure on the public areas of the city, rather than an indication of decline.

¹⁵² Walmsley 2007*b*, 347.

¹⁵³ Walmsley 1992, 2007*b*, 347–8.

¹⁵⁴ Bühring 2008, 101.

¹⁵⁵ Bühring 2008, 102; see also Wirth 2000, 34–8.

While the Arab conquest left no traces on urban structures at Gadara, no major constructions are attributed to the Early Islamic period. Churches, public buildings, and particularly the residential areas of the settlement continued to function throughout the seventh and the first half of the eighth centuries. Excavations at the western part of the site revealed a number of domestic structures constructed directly on the pavements of the main colonnaded streets.¹⁵⁶ The prosperity of Gadara as a Christian city is evident from the continuous renovation of churches at least until the middle of the eighth century.¹⁵⁷

The involvement of one of Gadara's officials in the renovation of the nearby large baths of Hammat Gader provides further evidence of the affluence of its population in the seventh century.¹⁵⁸ The baths, located 4 km north of Gadara, on the banks of the River Yarmuk, were surrounded by elaborate Roman and Byzantine buildings extending over an area of $c.60 \times 80$ m.¹⁵⁹ This complex was in use during the seventh and early eighth centuries, as a monumental inscription commemorating the restoration of the baths by the caliph Mu'a-wiyah in 662 indicates. Excavations dated the destruction and abandonment of the baths to the 749 earthquake,¹⁶⁰ but a re-evaluation of the stratigraphy and finds from the site suggests that the baths functioned until the eleventh century and were abandoned following the 1033 earthquake.¹⁶¹

The continuity of settlement in Gadara and the use of its thermal baths beyond the mid-eighth century are reinforced by the recent excavations in the village of Hammat Gader.¹⁶² The village, founded in the early Byzantine period, continued uninterrupted throughout the Early Islamic period and was not abandoned until the eleventh century. It was extensively developed in the seventh and eighth centuries, damaged by the 749 earthquake, and after a short period of abandonment it was renewed and inhabited until the eleventh century.

As in Pella, the 749 earthquake had a devastating effect in Gadara. Public buildings were destroyed and sections of the city were left deserted. The fate of the smaller town in the ninth and tenth centuries has not been studied properly yet, but it is evident that this was a period of decline.¹⁶³ A few areas show continuity, but with an inferior quality of construction. A small mosque was built above the Byzantine *propylon*, but its date is unclear. A Muslim cemetery in the western part of the town was in use from the seventh century until the Mamluk period.¹⁶⁴

Further evidence of settlement continuity was gathered at **Abila**, located east of Gadara on the high plateau above the River Yarmuk. The site faces the

¹⁵⁶ From the preliminary published reports it is not clear whether these predated the Arab conquest or were constructed in the 8th cent. See Tawalbeh 2002, 622–4.

¹⁵⁷ Vriezen 1992; Wagner-Lux *et al.* 2000, 425–30; Bühring 2008, 103–4.

¹⁵⁸ Green 1982. ¹⁵⁹ Hirschfeld 1997b. ¹⁶⁰ Hirschfeld 1997b, 6.

¹⁶¹ Magness 2010a. ¹⁶² Hartal 2010. ¹⁶³ Walmsley 1988, 1992

¹⁶⁴ Mehshen 1991.

suggested location of the famous battle of Yarmuk, where the Byzantine army was defeated by the invading Arabs in 634.¹⁶⁵ Byzantine and Early Islamic Abila extended over two hills, Tell Abila and Umm el-'Amad. Excavations were conducted in several sites in the city, and the remains of five churches were revealed.¹⁶⁶ It has been suggested that one of them (the church in area A) was destroyed by the Persians in 614 and that Abila was then abandoned and only resettled towards the end of the seventh century.¹⁶⁷ A re-evaluation of finds shows that this church was destroyed by the 749 earthquake (or perhaps by an earlier one) and not by a violent conquest.¹⁶⁸ Another Byzantine church was constructed above the ruins of the Roman theatre (Area G). Considerable construction was observed in the city during the seventh century, including a large church (the basilica in area D) that functioned until the 749 earthquake.¹⁶⁹

The fate of Abila in the following centuries is not clear, but it seems that the site was not deserted. Evidence of construction and continuous use was found in a number of excavated areas: the *decumanus* was maintained for another two centuries and residential buildings continued to be inhabited until the ninth and tenth centuries. A number of late constructions were clearly identified at the site. A mosque of an uncertain date was installed in the church in area G; a large building was constructed in the *cavea* of the Roman theatre; and evidence of additional use during the eighth and ninth century was found in the churches at Tell Abila.

Further to the south-east, at the edge of the Syrian Desert, **Umm el-Jimjal**, with its impressive standing remains covering an area of c.50 ha, presents a different case of settlement continuity. The Roman and Byzantine settlement was occupied continuously at least until the late eighth or early ninth century. Although earlier studies suggested that Umm el-Jimjal declined in the seventh century, excavations at the Roman *praetorium* revealed continuous use into the eighth century.¹⁷⁰ Additional excavations in complex 119, a large square building measuring 40 × 40 m, revealed two stages of use, from the Byzantine period and from the seventh and eighth centuries. The later stage included the addition of rooms in existing buildings.¹⁷¹ It seems that the settlement survived the 749 earthquake and continued in a reduced form into the ninth century.

Additional evidence of the continuity of settlements in northern Jordan was retrieved from the agricultural hinterlands, which were inhabited at least until the ninth century, supporting a large population through the production of wine and olive oil.¹⁷² Particularly noteworthy are the concentration of villages and agricultural fields on the periphery of Abila, Gadara, and Pella, which reveal a condensed settlement pattern.

¹⁶⁵ See Kaegi 1992, 113 for the location of the battleground, and the discussion in Ch. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Chapman and Smith 2009. ¹⁶⁷ Wineland 2001, 112–13.

¹⁶⁸ Chapman and Smith 2009, 526. ¹⁶⁹ Mare 1994. ¹⁷⁰ Brown 1998, 173–84.

¹⁷¹ De Vries 1995, 421–31. ¹⁷² Rose *et al.* 2007. For the hinterland of Jarash, see Ch. 2.

A similar pattern of continuity emerges from central Jordan, where a number of excavated sites show clear sequences from the Byzantine period into the ninth and tenth centuries. Other sites were established in the eighth century and functioned until the eleventh century. The settlements in this region were not severely affected by the 749 earthquake as the ones in northern Jordan were.¹⁷³

Madaba represents one of the best examples of the continuity of Christian settlements in the Early Islamic period. An exceptional concentration of 11 churches was revealed here, most of them constructed in the late fifth and sixth centuries and continuing at least into the second half of the eighth century.¹⁷⁴ Most churches were decorated with mosaic floors, the most famous of which is the 'Madaba Map'.¹⁷⁵ This mosaic, dated to the second half of the sixth century, presents an accurate depiction of settlements in Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt, with Jerusalem in its centre.

Several churches were excavated in the centre of the Madaba.¹⁷⁶ The 'Church of the Virgin' was constructed in the late sixth century north of the main street of the city, covering an earlier large building. A mosaic floor laid in a secondary stage of the church was dated to the year 662, but a revised dating suggested that it was laid a century later, in 766/7.¹⁷⁷ This late date implies that other churches in Madaba may have continued beyond the middle of the eighth century. The significant position of Madaba after the Byzantine period is also shown by its ecclesiastical status as the seat of a bishopric as late as the eighth century. Although the latest stages of Early Islamic Madaba were not clarified by archaeological excavations, it seems that it continued to function as a Christian settlement into the ninth and perhaps even the tenth century.

Further evidence for an uninterrupted sequence of settlement in Madaba was retrieved from the residential areas of the town, where excavations of a few houses show continuity into the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁷⁸ A large building (c.20 × 30 m) with interconnected rooms decorated with mosaic floors depicting floral and figurative motifs was excavated in the acropolis. This building was renovated in the seventh or early eighth century, and then abandoned in the later stages of the eighth century.

Another settlement showing continuity beyond the seventh century is **Umm el-Rasas**, located c.40 km south of Madaba and identified with *Kastron*

¹⁷³ Marco *et al.* 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Piccirillo 1993; Schick 1995, 393–8. The dated inscriptions from Madaba range from 562 to 767, and some of them provide the names of the local bishops.

¹⁷⁵ See Piccirillo 1993, 94 for the description of the church; see Avi Yonah 1954, Donner 1992, Piccirillo and Alliata 1999 for discussions on the map.

¹⁷⁶ Piccirillo 1989, 1993, 49–133; Schick 1995, 393–7.

¹⁷⁷ See Piccirillo 1989, 41–66, Schick 1995, 395 for the earlier date. See Di Segni 1992 for the later date.

¹⁷⁸ Foran 2007.

Mefaa. The site extended over an area of *c.*7.5 ha, consisting of a fortified rectangular compound and an open quarter of roughly the same size to the north of it. Like Madaba, it contained a flourishing Christian community that supported a large number of churches. Eight churches were revealed in Umm el-Rasas, among them a large interconnected complex of four churches in the centre of the town, two of which were richly decorated with mosaic floors.¹⁷⁹ Most of these churches were constructed in the sixth century and continued to function until the ninth century.¹⁸⁰

The church of Bishop Sergius (of Madaba) was built in 586. Its decorated mosaic floors suffered damage by iconoclasts, perhaps in the early eighth century, but were carefully repaired. The adjacent church of St Stephen was richly decorated with mosaic floors containing depictions of several cities and towns in Palestine (Jerusalem, Neapolis, Sebastia, Caesarea, Diospolis (Lod), Eleutheropolis, Ascalon, and Gaza), and in Jordan (Kastron Mefaa (Umm al-Rasas), Philadelphia ('Amman), Madaba, Hesbon, Ma'in, Aeropolis-Rabbah, and el-Kerak), as well as cities in Egypt, and two unknown places, probably in the vicinity of Umm el-Rasas, Limbon and Diblton. The mosaic was probably laid in the eighth century, as two dedication inscriptions from 785 (or 718), and 756 indicate.¹⁸¹ This church was probably abandoned by the ninth century.

A more ambiguous sequence of settlement was explored in **Hesban**, a biblical site in which Roman, Byzantine, and Early Islamic settlements were revealed. Excavations conducted in recent decades revealed considerable evidence of the Byzantine and Islamic levels.¹⁸² While previous research claimed that the site was badly damaged by the Persian and Arab conquest and abandoned shortly afterwards, recent excavations have shown no evidence of destruction. A number of churches at the site, including a large church at the acropolis, continued to function throughout the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁸³ LaBianca has suggested continuity with a gradual decline in settlement during this period, and a major decline following the 749 earthquake.¹⁸⁴ However, recent excavations have shown that the upper part of the Tell was inhabited until the middle of the ninth century. The continuous use of earlier structures was evident, while new buildings were added to create a fortified residence which was identified as an Islamic *qusur*.¹⁸⁵

The rural areas of central Jordan were dotted with small villages and farmsteads, only a few of which have been thoroughly investigated. In contrast to the traditional studies that claimed an overall decline of rural settlements in the middle of the eighth century, a recent chronology established for **Khirbet**

¹⁷⁹ Piccirillo and Alliata 1994. ¹⁸⁰ Schick 1995, 472–6.

¹⁸¹ For the different dating suggestions, see Schick 1995, 473.

¹⁸² LaBianca and Walker 2007. ¹⁸³ Schick 1995, 305–8.

¹⁸⁴ LaBianca 1990, 215–18.

¹⁸⁵ Walker and LaBianca 2003; LaBianca and Walker 2007.

Faris, and most probably applicable to other sites in this region, suggests that the agricultural regime of central Jordan and, in particular of the Kerak Plateau continued to maintain a considerable population throughout the Early Islamic period. The farmers of this area practised intensive agriculture until the end of the Mamluk period, with only slight changes in the layout of settlements and fields.¹⁸⁶ The residential buildings at the site, constructed during the fifth and sixth centuries in the typical form of the 'Palestinian House' of the Byzantine period,¹⁸⁷ were used throughout the Early Islamic period.

In *el-Quweisma*, another village in this region, two churches were excavated, one of which revealed a decorated mosaic floor with an inscription dated to 717–718, referring to the restoration of the building. Birds and animal depictions on the mosaic were mutilated by iconoclasts and then carefully restored. A nearby tomb contained Early Islamic oil lamps.¹⁸⁸ It seems that the settlement continued at least until the ninth and tenth centuries.

Early Islamic 'palaces' and *qusur* in Jordan

An interesting aspect of the settlement pattern of central Jordan is the interconnection between existing Christian towns and villages and the newly introduced Islamic 'palaces' and *qusur*. While the small towns, villages, and farms of the predominant Christian population prevailed in the Jordanian countryside, the establishment of a number of large monumental complexes in this area during the seventh and eighth centuries introduced new Islamic elements in settlement and architecture.

These wealthy residences, located mainly on the fringe of the desert, consisted of large square fortified enclosures with buttress towers and additional structures and agricultural installations around them. In Mshatta, for example, one of the largest buildings of this type, the 144-metre-square compound contained richly decorated façades around a central courtyard.¹⁸⁹ At Qasr Hallabat a rectangular *qasr* and a nearby mosque surrounded by agricultural fields and clusters of residential buildings were revealed to show a development from a Roman fort to an Early Islamic elaborated complex.¹⁹⁰ Other buildings reveal exceptionally rich artwork in wall paintings, stucco, and mosaics, for example at Qusair 'Amra and Khirbet al-Mafjar.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ McQuitty 2005, fig. 6. ¹⁸⁷ See Hirschfeld 1995. ¹⁸⁸ Schick 1995, 433–4.

¹⁸⁹ Creswell 1969, 578–606; Grabar 1987. ¹⁹⁰ Bisheh 1985; Arce 2006, 2007.

¹⁹¹ The detailed discussion of the architectural and artistic representations in the 'Umayyad Palaces' is beyond the scope of this work. For comprehensive summaries, see Creswell 1969, Grabar 1973, Hillenbrand 1982, 1999. Talgam 2004 is particularly important for the excellent evaluation of different artistic sources and traditions.

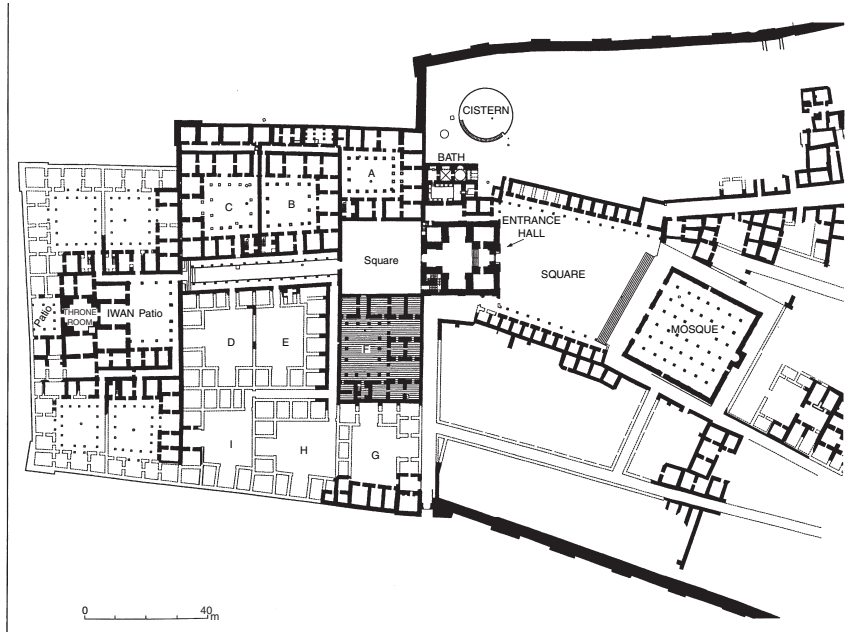


Fig. 4.6 Amman: plan of the citadel (courtesy of Ignacio Arce).

The most notable example is the large palatial complex constructed at the **citadel of Amman**.¹⁹² Built on the acropolis of the town over remains from the Roman and Byzantine periods, this elaborate complex contained a monumental entrance leading into a number of large square buildings, each constructed around a peristyle courtyard. The palace itself, on the northern edge of the acropolis, consisted of a network of similar buildings around a central throne room. A square 34×34 m mosque was located in front of the main entrance to the palatial complex¹⁹³ (Fig. 4.6).

It has been suggested that the site was heavily damaged in the earthquake of 749. A few sections, including the mosque, were restored after the quake and reused in the eighth and ninth centuries as domestic residences, before the abandonment of the site in the late ninth or tenth century.

Another Islamic architectural innovation introduced into this region in the early eighth century was the *qusur* settlements. One of the best examples was found at **Umm el-Walid**, 12 km south-east of Christian Madaba. This site, constructed on top of a deserted Roman and Byzantine settlement, consisted of three large square *qusur*, a small mosque, and a vast network of agricultural fields.¹⁹⁴ The eastern *qasr*, measuring 70×70 m, was reinforced by fifteen

¹⁹² Northedge 1992; Almagro and Arce 2001.

¹⁹³ Almagro 2000.

¹⁹⁴ The site was partly excavated between 1988 and 1996. See Haldiman 1992, Bujard 1997.



Fig. 4.7 Umm el-Walid: the main compound, the central courtyard of the eastern *qasr* (Photograph: Katia Cytryn-Silverman).

towers along its walls (Fig. 4.7). The nearby mosque was constructed in the late seventh or early eighth century and continued at least into the ninth century. Two large dams designed for collecting rainwater were constructed in the nearby wadi. The finds from the settlement show that it was continuously inhabited between the seventh and ninth centuries, with no evidence of interruption by the 749 earthquake.

Another typical *qasr* and mosque were found in nearby **el-Qastal**. This large site, which has only been explored and excavated in a preliminary way, is particularly notable for its mosque with the earliest recorded round minaret.¹⁹⁵ Built in the first quarter of the eighth century, the mosque is located near the large square *qasr* (c.60 × 60 m), constructed in the same form as at Umm el-Walid. The remains of an elaborate mosaic floor from the eighth century were exposed nearby, which suggests that this was a part of a large elaborate building resembling the one found in Khirbet al-Mafjar.¹⁹⁶

As in other areas of Palestine and Jordan, the establishment of the Islamic *qusur* and ‘castles’ did not interrupt the existing Christian settlements, which reinforces the view of a mutual coexistence between the two populations which

¹⁹⁵ Creswell 1969, 421–30; Carlier and Morin 1987.

¹⁹⁶ Addison 2000.

lasted throughout the Early Islamic period. The location of **Khirbet al-Mafjar**, in an area inhabited by Christian and Jewish communities at the Jericho oasis, is a good example of this coexistence. Like other 'Umayyad palaces', it consisted of a larger enclosed area, containing a square two-storeyed palace, an adjacent mosque, an elaborate bathhouse, and a large fountain house.¹⁹⁷ It seems that the construction of the Islamic complex did not affect the existing Christian and Jewish presence in this area. As a closed and isolated compound, the magnificent 'palace' was a foreign innovation separated from the nearby local villages, which exhibited continuity from the Byzantine period.

Jewish presence in Jericho is attested by a small Byzantine village in Tell el Sultan, which continued into Early Islamic times. The remains of a synagogue were found nearby, containing a rectangular building (10 × 13 m) with an apse facing Jerusalem.¹⁹⁸ It has been suggested that the synagogue was established in the seventh or eighth century, probably covering an earlier structure from the fifth century, and was in use until the ninth or tenth century.

Christian presence is evidenced through a number of churches and monasteries revealed in the Jericho area, which all continued to function during the Early Islamic period. A basilica church was found at Khirbet en-Nitla, showing several stages of use in the Byzantine and Early Islamic times. The last church was constructed following the 749 earthquake, and functioned at least until the ninth century.¹⁹⁹ Another Byzantine church was discovered in Tell el Hassan. It has been suggested that this church was converted during the eighth or ninth century into a residential complex, or perhaps a humble monastery.²⁰⁰

The plains east of Jericho towards the River Jordan were dotted with churches and monasteries, which formed a significant element of Judaeen Desert monasticism, and many of them continued into the Early Islamic period.²⁰¹ A small chapel revealed in one of these monastic complexes contained a mosaic floor with a Syriac inscription which has been dated to the ninth century, and it has been suggested that this was a Nestorian hermitage.²⁰²

It seems that the connections between the Islamic monumental complex in Khirbet al-Mafjar and the Christian monastic complexes around it provide another indication of the tolerance and coexistence maintained by the new Muslim authorities.

In contrast to this prevailing attitude, a rare example of a Christian settlement that was converted into a wealthy Islamic residence is found in **Humayma**, a desert caravan station in southern Jordan. A Roman fort was established here in the second century and abandoned in the early fifth century. It was replaced by a

¹⁹⁷ See Hamilton 1959 for the excavations; Creswell 1969, 545–77 for a general summary; Whitcomb 1988 for a revised chronology of the settlement. New excavations at the site have been conducted since 2011 by D. Whitcomb and H. Taha.

¹⁹⁸ Baramki 1938.

¹⁹⁹ Kelso and Baramki 1955.

²⁰⁰ Baramki 1936.

²⁰¹ Patrich 2011*b*, 214 and fig. 1.

²⁰² Baramki 1935.

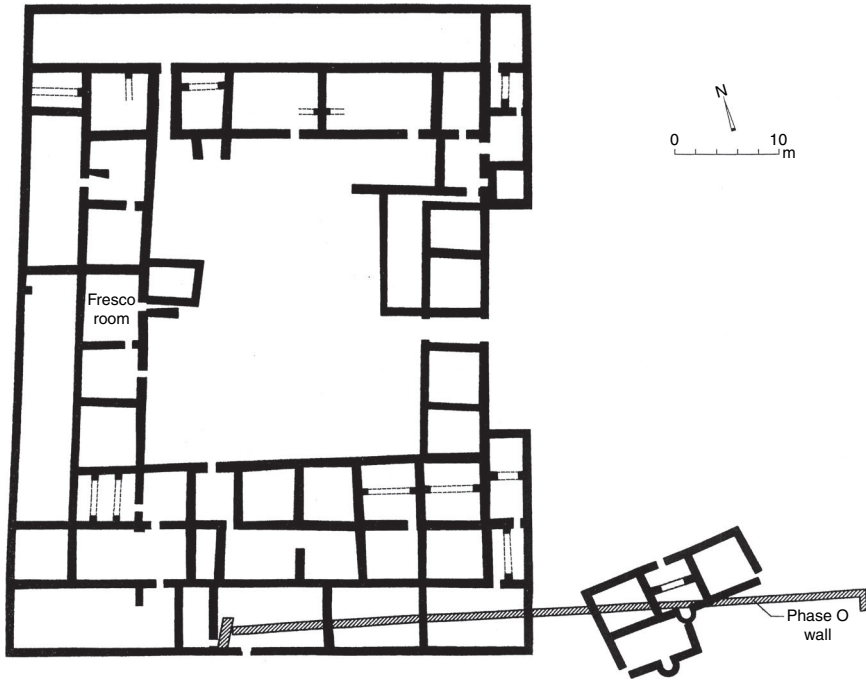


Fig. 4.8 Humayma: plan of the *qasr* and mosque (courtesy of John Peter Oleson and Rebecca Foote).

Christian village with several churches constructed at the end of the Byzantine period.²⁰³ These were abandoned after the Arab conquest, and some of them were reused as dwellings. In the year 687/8 the site was purchased by Ali b. Abd-Allah b. al-‘Abbas, who built a *qasr* and a mosque, establishing Humayma as the residence of the Abbasid family. Additional large buildings were constructed on the site during the second half of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth century, some of them on top of the abandoned churches.²⁰⁴ For example, a large rectangular complex (15 × 40 m), was built over one of the churches (B100) that was abandoned at the end of the seventh century. A small church (c.9 × 20 m) in the south-eastern section of the settlement, built in the mid-seventh century, was later converted into a domestic structure and used during the ninth and tenth centuries. The largest structure found is a rectangular complex measuring 61 × 50 m, believed to be the *qasr* of the Abbasid family (Fig. 4.8). It included a number of square rooms built around a central courtyard, creating an inner square compound. An additional row of long rectangular rooms was added to this compound at a later stage. This structure was in use from the late seventh or early eighth century until the ninth or tenth century.

²⁰³ Oleson 2007.

²⁰⁴ Foote 2007.

A small mosque found near the south-eastern corner of the compound was dated to the first half of the eighth century.

It has been suggested that the architectural style introduced by the Abbasid dynasty to Humayma originated in Arabia, providing a unique example of a large residence constructed by a non-Umayyad elite. The plan of the site, the architectural style of the buildings, and their inner decorations were influenced by Sassanian and central Arabian tradition, rather than by the Byzantine world.²⁰⁵ The rich finds attest to a luxurious mansion. One of the rooms was decorated with a non-figurative fresco and contained about 1,000 finely carved ivory fragments.

The agricultural fields around Humayma were installed in the Byzantine period and continued in use throughout the Early Islamic period. Historical sources mention that the Abbasid settlers planted an olive grove of c.500 trees.²⁰⁶

The northern coastal plain: from Acre to Apollonia-Arsuf

The coastal plain of Palestine, from Acre and the Phoenician coast in the north to Ascalon and Gaza in the south was a densely populated area with a number of settlement clusters. The picture emerging from excavations is complicated and diverse: while the hinterland of Caesarea showed stagnation and decline following the Arab conquest, other areas flourished, as is indicated by the growth and expansion of settlements in the hinterlands of Apollonia-Arsuf, Jaffa, and Ramla. Excavations in a number of villages and farms in these regions attest to a clear pattern of continuity. The expansion of rural settlements was an outcome of the increased prosperity of nearby urban centres.

The coastal areas of Early Islamic Palestine became the Muslim front line against the Byzantine navy. The archaeological findings from the towns and fortresses along the coast are of special significance to the Byzantine–Islamic transition as these sites were part of the new defensive system constructed by the Muslim caliphs against Byzantine threats. The new rulers made great efforts to fortify the coast, transferring the main urban and administrative centres inland. Most notable was the change of the capital of Jund Filastin from coastal Caesarea to inland Ramla.

The construction of the new strongholds along the coast, the *ribatat*, and the fortification of existing towns were immediately reflected in changing settlement patterns. Changes in shape, size, and populations were more evident in these settlements than in other areas of Palestine and Jordan.

Historical sources describe heavy damage to settlements along the coast in the course of the Arab conquest, and mention that large segments of the local

²⁰⁵ Foote 2007, 457–60.

²⁰⁶ Foote 2007, 464.

population escaped inland or emigrated. Particularly noteworthy are the descriptions of the siege and conquest of Caesarea and Ascalon.²⁰⁷ Following the conquest a newly arrived Muslim population was incorporated into the existing coastal towns, in order to enhance their affiliation with the new Islamic rule and administration.²⁰⁸ Among these newcomers were soldiers who were granted agricultural lands in the vicinity of the coastal towns.

While historical sources pay special attention to the military aspects of the coastal fortification, emphasizing the change in settlement and the introduction of a new Islamic population into these areas, the archaeological record presents a different picture. The *ribatat* at Kafr Lab-Habonim and Qal'at al-Mina-Ashdod Yam, which were thoroughly excavated but with only preliminary publication of the results, provide substantial evidence of the fortification of the coastal plain in the second half of the seventh century. The cities of Acre, Dora, Caesarea, Appolonia-Arsuf, Jaffa, Ascalon, and Gaza were directly affected by the political changes of the Byzantine–Islamic transition. Excavations in these sites have revealed continuous sequences of habitation in the Early Islamic period, together with a significant change in their character, and a considerable decline in their urban area. However, the introduction of a new Islamic population into these towns is not reflected in the archaeological record.

Early Islamic Acre is known mainly from the historical sources. Large-scale excavations conducted in the past twenty years have mainly exposed the remains of the Hellenistic and Crusader city, while the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods have been represented only in some excavations around the old city. These suggest that the Byzantine city continued uninterrupted into the seventh and eighth centuries, with only minor changes in its shape and size. The massive reconstruction of the harbour of Acre in the second half of the ninth century marks its central position in the maritime trade of Palestine during this period.

Excavations within the old city failed to uncover significant remains from the Early Islamic period, and it seems that the massive reconstruction of Acre during Crusader times removed all previous strata. Nevertheless, excavations in some areas south of the Crusader and Ottoman walls have revealed clear sequences of the Byzantine and Early Islamic city, which included considerable construction in the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁰⁹ It seems that Early Islamic Acre was not reduced in area and population and that settlement continued into the Crusader period. The evidence of coins issued from the local mint includes a small number of bronze coins of the seventh and eighth centuries and a number of gold *dinars* and silver *dirhams* from the eleventh century.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Gil 1992, [70–4]. For Caesarea, see Ch. 2. For Ascalon, see below.

²⁰⁸ For a summary of relevant sources on the conquest of the coast, see Elad 1982a, Gil 1992, 57–60, Donner 1981, 153–5, Levy-Rubin 2011a.

²⁰⁹ I thank E. Stern for providing me with this as yet unpublished information.

²¹⁰ Syon 2010, 70–3.



Fig. 4.9 Kafr Lab-Habonim: main entrance to the Early Islamic fortress (Barbé *et al.* 2002, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

Further south along the coast, the city of Dora and the *ribat* at Kafr Lab-Habonim present another interesting example of the fortification of the coastal plain and the interrelations between a new Islamic fortress and the nearby Byzantine city.

The Early Islamic fortress of **Kafr Lab**, located on a low ridge east of the coast, between Haifa and Caesarea, consists of a rectangular compound (c.46 × 62 m) fortified by a solid wall with round towers at its corners (Fig. 4.9). It was described in the nineteenth century by the early researchers on Palestine, who dated it to the Crusader period. However, recent excavations have revealed that the fortress was built in the early eighth century. Its inner part contained several halls and an open courtyard with a large water reservoir.²¹¹ Excavations outside the fortress have detected additional buildings, and it seems that the fortress formed part of a larger complex which functioned throughout the Early Islamic period. It was abandoned in the second half of the eleventh century, and following the Crusader conquest a church was constructed at the site, using a section of the now deserted compound.

It is noteworthy that Kafr Lab is not mentioned by al-Muqaddasi as a *ribat*, which implies that during the second half of the tenth century the site had another function, and perhaps was not used as a fortress.²¹²

The construction of the fortress at Kafr Lab marked a change in the settlement pattern of this region, which may have been affected by the decline of the agricultural hinterland of Caesarea in the seventh and eighth

²¹¹ Barbe *et al.* 2002.

²¹² Masarwa 2006, 51–2, 2011, 165–7.

centuries.²¹³ It was this decline that probably facilitated the change in the focus of settlement from villages and agricultural estates (which had been partly abandoned by their former population) to the defensive fortified compound intended to protect this section of the coast from Byzantine navy raids.²¹⁴

The construction of the fortress also affected the nearby Christian settlements. A large church with a unique clover-shaped apse recently excavated 1 km south of Kafr Lab provides evidence of a deliberate dismantling of its walls in the seventh century. It seems that this church, perhaps part of a larger complex, was abandoned after the Arab conquest, and its stones were used for the construction of the nearby Islamic fortress.²¹⁵

The nearby small city of **Dora**, located at the foot of Tell Dor, only 3 km south of Kafr Lab, flourished in the Byzantine period and continued to exist as a Christian settlement at least until the ninth century. This coastal city formed a regional hub for the rural settlements around it, and provided services to its small harbour, one of the very few natural anchorages on the Palestinian coast.²¹⁶ The large number of shipwrecks found, many of them dated to the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods, show the vitality of Dora as a centre of maritime trade. Byzantine Dora covered an area of *c.*7 ha, was probably surrounded by a wall, and was designed along a main north–south *cardo*, intersecting with an east–west *decumanus*. The remains of a small theatre were discovered in the northern section of the city, and a large apsidal church was located in its southern part. It was one of the largest episcopal churches of Palestine, covering an area of *c.*1,000 square m and designated to host large numbers of pilgrims arriving at the Dora anchorage on their way to the holy sites of Palestine.²¹⁷

The central position of Dora in the local religious administration at the end of the Byzantine period and at the time of the Arab conquest is emphasized by the appointment of its local bishop to represent the Palestinian community and replace Sophronius, the renowned patriarch of Jerusalem.²¹⁸

Unlike the metropolis of Caesarea, it seems that Dora continued to flourish during the seventh and eighth centuries. Its episcopal church was destroyed by fire only at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century. It is evident that the Christian settlement continued to exist for more than a century after the construction of the nearby Islamic fortress at Kafr Lab. The newly established fortress functioned as a stronghold protecting the coastline against sea raids, and did not gain control over large areas surrounding it, which were still inhabited by the former Christian population. The proximity and coexistence between the Muslim stronghold and the nearby Christian settlement indicate

²¹³ See the discussion in Ch. 2.

²¹⁴ Cf. Elad 1982*a*, Masarwa 2006, 44–50.

²¹⁵ 'Ad 2011. I thank U. 'Ad for sharing with me the details of his excavation.

²¹⁶ Dauphin and Gibson 1994–1995; Kahanov 2009.

²¹⁷ Dauphin and Gibson 1994–1995, 22–8.

²¹⁸ Dauphin and Gibson 1994–1995, 32.

that the defence of the coastline from Byzantine raids did not involve a dramatic change in the population and settlement patterns of this region.

Excavations at other sites in the northern coastal plain provide further perspectives on the transformation of settlements between the sixth and eleventh centuries. An interesting case is the excavations at three adjacent unfortified settlements (small towns or large villages, according to different sources) at the western foot of the northern Carmel ridge: Shiqmona, Castra, and Khirbet Tinani.

Shiqmona is mentioned in historical sources of the Byzantine period as a Jewish town.²¹⁹ Excavations at the site exposed a network of residential houses, segments of streets, and industrial installations. The settlement expanded in the sixth century and formed a well-planned grid of streets and *insulae*. A wealthy residential quarter was constructed in this period, from which several large buildings with mosaic floors have been excavated.²²⁰ Although early excavations at the site concluded that it was destroyed in the seventh century by the Persians or the Arabs, new research has proved that it was abandoned only at the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century, with no signs of violent destruction.²²¹ Excavations conducted on the fringes of the site have revealed more data on the settlement size at the end of the Byzantine period. The outer areas were inhabited only between the fourth and late seventh centuries, and it seems that Shiqmona covered an area of c.5 ha and was smaller than previously suggested.²²²

The ethno-religious identity of the local population is debated. Excavations north and east of the town have revealed the remains of at least two large compounds identified as Christian monasteries.²²³ These, together with two other nearby monasteries, may indicate a Jewish–Christian coexistence. The identification of Shiqmona as a Jewish settlement was questioned by Kletter, who suggested that it was inhabited by both Jews and Christians, and maintained a close relationship with Castra, its neighbouring Christian town.²²⁴

Castra is identified in Jewish sources as a gentile town, hostile to the nearby Jewish Shiqmona. The Piacenza pilgrim described it as ‘Castra of the Samaritans’ (*Castra Samaritanorum*).²²⁵ The large site (c.25 ha), on sloping terraces c.1.5 km east of the sea shore, was extensively excavated in the 1990s, but there has only been a preliminary publication of the results.²²⁶ The town plan, dictated by the local topography, was one of long streets from east to west and shorter ones from north to south. The excavations included a large area (3.2 ha, c.15 per cent of the settlement) in the centre of the town and revealed a densely populated urban section, which included residential units, two apsidal churches, and several other public buildings (Fig. 4.10).

²¹⁹ Hirschfeld 2006c, 141.

²²⁰ Elgavish 1993, 1994.

²²¹ Hirschfeld 2006c.

²²² Hirschfeld 2006c, 140–2.

²²³ Kletter 2010.

²²⁴ Kletter 2010, 176–7.

²²⁵ *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium*, ed. Geyer, 138; Wilkinson 2002, 169.

²²⁶ Yeivin and Finkielstejn 1999.



Fig. 4.10 Castra: plan of the settlement (Yeivin and Finkielisztejn 1999, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

Most residential units consisted of square or rectangular buildings with rooms surrounding a central courtyard. The two churches were located within the residential units. A remarkably large number of 14 wine presses and 12 oil presses were exposed, some within the dwellings and others in an industrial area in the western section of the excavated area. These agricultural-industrial installations (which probably represent only a fraction of the actual number in the town) indicate that a major source of income for the local population came from the exploitation of nearby agricultural areas on the Carmel ridge and the coastal plain. The large quantities of oil and wine produced were probably exported to destinations outside Palestine through maritime trade.

The excavations at Castra have established the chronological framework of the town between the fifth and seventh or eighth centuries. The site declined in the Early Islamic period, but was still partly inhabited until the eighth century.

It seems that the decline of Christian Castra was connected to the establishment of the neighbouring settlement of **Khirbet Tinani** in the Early Islamic period. This site, 3 km north of Castra and close to Shiqmona, is known mainly from surveys and several small-scale salvage excavations.²²⁷ The remains of fragmentary buildings and caves have yielded evidence of a larger site, which was inhabited between the eighth and eleventh centuries, and possibly

²²⁷ Yavor 1999.

formed part of Early Islamic Haifa, which is mentioned in Arabic sources from the ninth century onwards.²²⁸ The establishment of Haifa could thus be connected to the abandonment of Christian Castra and the decline of the Jewish settlement at Shiqmona. Several Arabic sources emphasize the growth and development of Haifa in the tenth and eleventh centuries: Nasir-i Khusraw described a small fortified town maintaining a harbour and a shipyard, and the Jewish presence in the town is mentioned in a number of documents from the Cairo Geniza.²²⁹

Farther south along the coast, a clearer case of continuity in settlement is presented in Apollonia-Arsuf and its hinterlands. Apollonia, located north of Jaffa, developed into a significant large settlement in Hellenistic and Roman times, and reached its maximal expansion during the Byzantine period, when it became the regional centre of a rich agricultural area in the southern Sharon.²³⁰ The city of the sixth and seventh centuries, now renamed Sozousa, was unfortified and covered an area of about 28 ha. A number of industrial installations were excavated in the northern and southern sections of the site, among them oil and wine presses and glass furnaces. The central section of the city included residential units, and in its south-eastern section the remains of a large church have been discovered.

The transition from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period was characterized in Apollonia-Arsuf by a continuity of urban features. No structural changes or destruction layers associated with the Arab conquest were detected in excavations throughout the site, and it seems that the Byzantine city preserved its former large size until the end of the seventh century. The same continuity is presented in the villages and farmsteads in its hinterland. Surveys and excavations in the southern Sharon show that the zenith of settlement in this region occurred in the sixth–eighth centuries, with no signs of violent destruction or decline during the seventh century.²³¹

The constant threat of the Byzantine navy in the second half of the seventh century triggered the fortification of Apollonia, now renamed Arsuf. Several historical sources connect this fortification to the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, as part of his massive construction activities in Palestine.²³² The western part of the settlement was encircled with a wall strengthened with outer buttresses and a moat, which thus reduced the size of Arsuf to c.8 ha, one-third of its area in the Byzantine period. Excavations of several structures adjacent to the city wall have revealed finds from the end of the seventh century and attributed them to ‘Abd al-Malik’s fortifications.²³³

The eastern part of the fortified town was reconstructed in a planned grid. A network of buildings excavated in this area was constructed along a narrow

²²⁸ Elad 1980. ²²⁹ Gil 1992, [302].

²³⁰ Roll and Ayalon 1987, 1989; Roll 1999, 2007.

²³¹ Roll and Ayalon 1989, 175–6.

²³² Elad 1982a; Masarwa 2011, 159–63.

²³³ Roll 1999, 37–9.

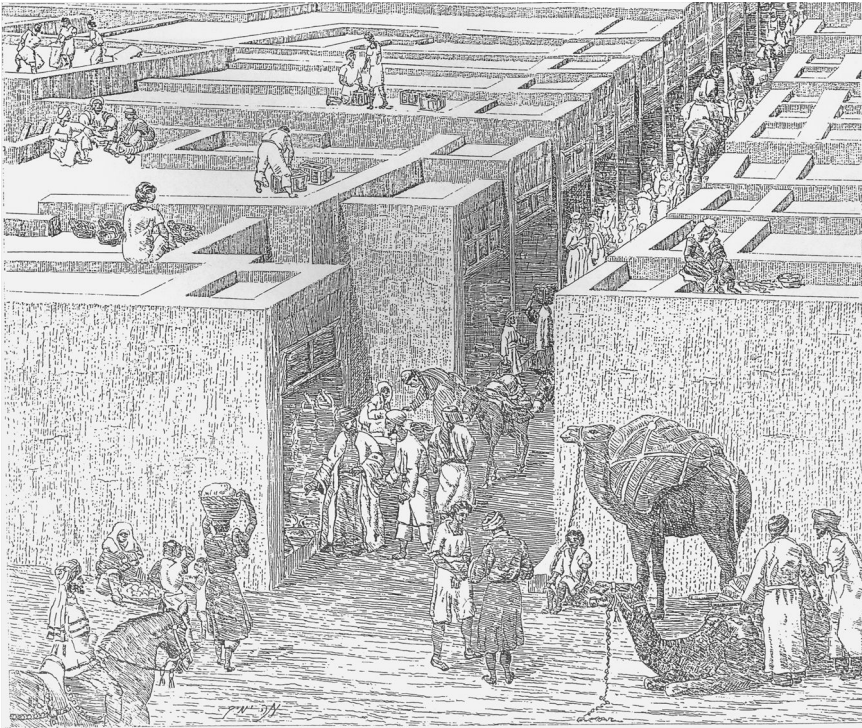


Fig. 4.11 Apollonia-Arsuf: an artistic rendition of the Early Islamic market street (courtesy of Oren Tal).

street (2.2 m wide) aligned north–south with a slight deviation to the east²³⁴ (Fig. 4.11). Eight phases of occupation were defined here, spanning the seventh and eleventh centuries. The chronological sequence shows that this section of the Early Islamic town was subject to comprehensive new urban planning, probably in the time of ‘Abd al-Malik. During the eighth and ninth centuries this was a market street flanked by stores or workshops. The area suffered great damage in the early ninth century (perhaps as a result of riots in 809) and was then reconstructed with minor changes. The street and the buildings on both its sides continued to function until the eleventh century, evincing a gradual decline in the standard of construction. The shops flanking the street consisted of small rectangular rooms, and the finds within them included large quantities of pig bones, which might indicate that this section of Arsuf was used by its Christian population. The orientation of the street and the flanking buildings, all facing towards the south with a slight deviation to the east, is similar to that found in other cities and towns of the Early Islamic period, such as Ramla and Yoqneam. This orientation was probably dictated

²³⁴ Roll and Ayalon 1987.

by the town's congregational mosque with its *qibla* wall facing south. The existence of such a mosque at Arsuf is indicated by historical sources, but its remains have not yet been unearthed.²³⁵

The central position of Arsuf in the tenth century is emphasized by al-Muqaddasi's description. He stated that, although smaller than Jaffa, Arsuf was well fortified and densely populated. He specifically praised the *minbar* of the mosque, which was originally designed for the large mosque in Ramla, but, being too small, was transferred to Arsuf.²³⁶ Al-Muqaddasi described a fortified tower constructed at the highest point of the town, facing the sea. And indeed, a fortified round tower was discovered within the area of the Crusader fort and predating it. It has been suggested that this provides evidence of the Early Islamic *ribat*, built in a design similar to that of the fortifications in Kafr Lab and Qal'at al-Mina.²³⁷

Although the archaeological evidence does not give a clear indication of the continuity of the former populations in Early Islamic Arsuf, it seems that Christians and Samaritans continued to predominate in the town. The large quantities of pig bones recovered from the excavations suggest a significant Christian population; the historical evidence indicates that the Samaritan population of this region was reduced only after the riots of 809.²³⁸

The later phases revealed in the excavations show that in the tenth and eleventh centuries Arsuf was still a prosperous town. The rich finds from these strata illustrate a variety of commercial and industrial activities. Large assemblages of imported pottery were discovered, which indicates extensive international commercial connections. This is supported by historical sources that mention the export of linen from Arsuf to Egypt.²³⁹ It seems that the prosperity of Arsuf continued until the end of the eleventh century. Unlike other towns in Palestine, it was densely populated and well fortified: it resisted the Crusader siege for almost two years and was only finally conquered in 1101.

In contrast to the decline of the rural hinterland around Caesarea, the villages and farms around Apollonia-Arsuf were continuously inhabited during the Early Islamic period, and some villages even expanded.²⁴⁰ One of the largest villages in the hinterland was **Kafr Saba**. It was established in the Byzantine period as a Samaritan village²⁴¹ and according to various sources continued to flourish in Early Islamic times. Recent excavations at the site have revealed the remains of several buildings and industrial installations from the seventh to the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁴²

A typical example of the continuity of rural settlements during the Byzantine-Islamic transition has been found in **Pardessiya**,²⁴³ a medium-sized village

²³⁵ Elad 1989. ²³⁶ al-Muqaddasi, 174, tr. Collins 1994, 146. ²³⁷ Roll 2007, 27.

²³⁸ Gil 1992, [941]; Levy-Rubin 2002. ²³⁹ Roll 2007, 28–30.

²⁴⁰ Roll and Ayalon 1989, 137–83; Tal 2009, 329. ²⁴¹ Ayalon 1998.

²⁴² Gorzalczyan 2009c. ²⁴³ Ayalon 2008.

east of Apollonia-Arsuf, where a Byzantine church from the fifth and sixth centuries was excavated. It has been suggested that the church was abandoned in the sixth or seventh century, perhaps following the Samaritan revolts or the Persian conquest, and then replaced by a farmstead containing oil and wine presses that operated until the eighth century or later.

Another large settlement north of Apollonia-Arsuf was **Umm Khalid** (within modern Netanya). Salvage excavation conducted at the site has revealed a thick accumulation of a residential building with several phases from the Early Islamic period.²⁴⁴ It seems that this village, built over a small site from the Byzantine period, expanded in the seventh and eighth centuries, and continued to develop until the eleventh century, when it was abandoned.

The southern coastal plain: from Jaffa to Ascalon and Gaza (Fig. 4.12)

Early Islamic settlement in this region was influenced both by the establishment of Ramla as the new district capital and by the continuity of the Byzantine cities of Ascalon and Gaza. All large cities maintained a network of villages and farmsteads around them and played a major role in the political and economic connections between Palestine and Egypt. Other cities and towns in the region showed continuity of settlement from Byzantine to Early Islamic times, but on a reduced scale. As in the northern coastal plain, the settlement pattern in the southern coastal plain was influenced by the fortification of existing settlements and the establishment of new strongholds along the coast in the time of 'Abd al-Malik.

Jaffa (Iopa), a prosperous walled city during the Byzantine period, was further fortified in Early Islamic times to protect its harbour from Byzantine incursions.²⁴⁵ A new fortress facing the harbour was constructed by Ibn Tulun at the end of the ninth century. Al-Muqaddasi described Jaffa as 'a small town . . . the port of al-Ramla. It is protected by a strong fortress, having gates covered with iron plate . . . the mosque overlooks the sea, the harbour is superb'.²⁴⁶

Early excavations in Jaffa failed to identify an Early Islamic phase, but a number of recent salvage excavations have detected a clear pattern of continuity from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period, particularly in the areas east of the biblical Tell.²⁴⁷ The Byzantine remains here included a number of wealthy residences paved with decorated mosaic floors, segments of a bathhouse, and several large agricultural and industrial installations, including wine presses

²⁴⁴ 'Ad 2009. ²⁴⁵ Gil 1992, [331]; Petersen 2005, 89; Foran 2011.

²⁴⁶ al-Muqaddasi, 174, tr. Collins 1994, 146. ²⁴⁷ Arbel and Peilstocker 2009.

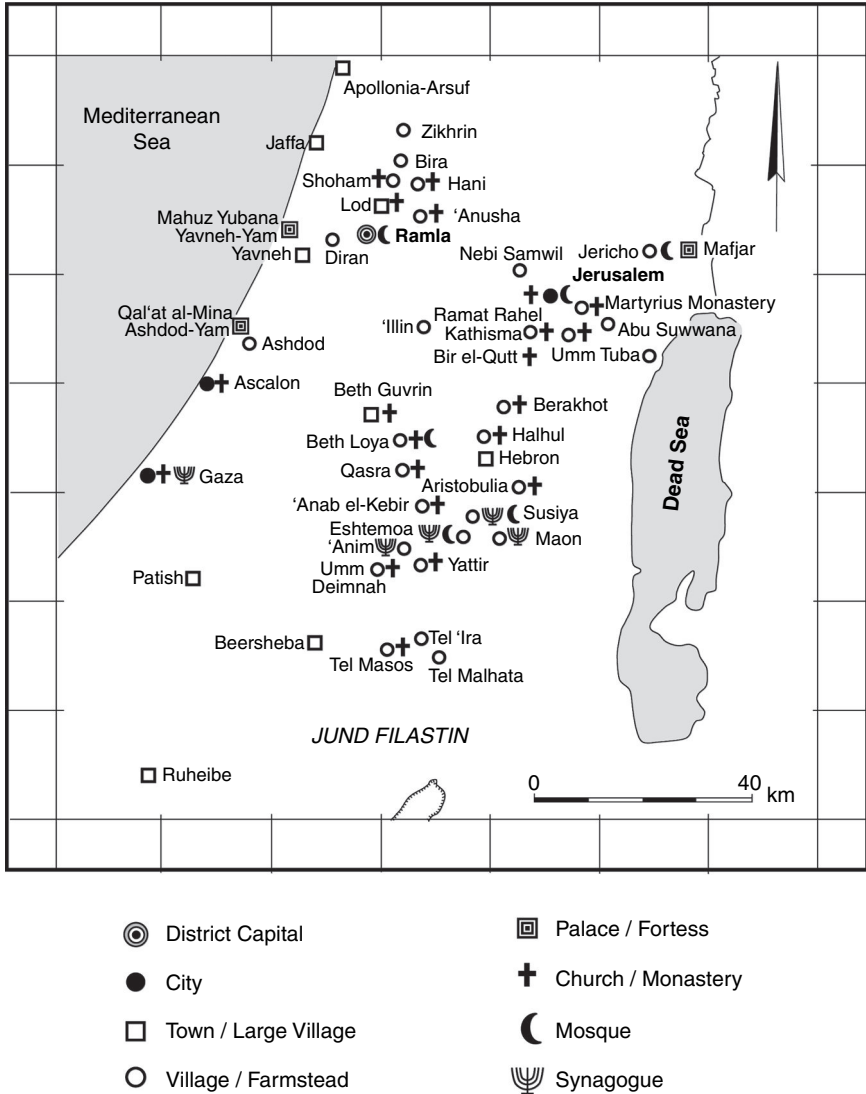


Fig. 4.12 The central and southern coastal plain, the Judaeian Lowlands: map of sites.

and plastered pools. The Early Islamic remains show a clear continuity in the residential areas and industrial installations, and it seems that the town preserved its former shape, with changes in the size of the residential areas and some reduction in the industrial installations. Evidence of several stages of construction was found in the lower city and south-east of the Tell.²⁴⁸

The harbour of Jaffa was used throughout the period, maintaining a major share in the commercial connections between Palestine and Egypt. Recent excavations in the grounds of the Armenian monastery located at the foot of the cliff facing the harbour have revealed a large defensive system of massive walls from the Early Islamic period, which points to a major fortification of the town and its harbour.²⁴⁹ The limited excavations have prevented an exact determination of the construction period, but these fortifications may be attributed either to the reinforcement of the coastal towns by 'Abd al-Malik at the end of the seventh century, or to the walls erected around the town in the time of Ibn Tulun in the ninth century.

Farther south on the coast, the Byzantine settlement of Iamnia Paralios Maoza (**Mahuz Yubna-Yavneh Yam**) served as a seaport for the much larger city of Iamnia (Yavneh), located inland. In the fifth century, Iamnia Paralios Maoza was the home of Peter the Iberian, the famous Monophysite bishop. Remains of two churches, a bathhouse, and several residences have been partly excavated at the site.²⁵⁰ The town continued throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, but its area was much reduced. The Byzantine bathhouse, for example, continued to function during this period, with coarse alterations of its mosaic floors. In the ninth century a fortified watchtower was built on the rock scarp above the sea, surrounded by several additional structures. These were probably the remains of the *ribat* known in Arabic sources as Mahuz Yubna. The site was abandoned in the second half of the eleventh century.

Yavneh-Iamnia-Yubnah, located inland at a distance of 10 km from Yavneh-Yam, is known only from few small-scale excavations.²⁵¹ The Byzantine city, mentioned in various historical sources and depicted in the Madaba Map, was of considerable size and extended to the east of the ancient Tell. The fate of the site in the Early Islamic period was considered an enigma, as no remains from this period were revealed in the upper part of the Tell or its surroundings. However, recent salvage excavations conducted south-east of the Tell have exposed extensive remains of a large planned settlement that was constructed in the seventh century and continued throughout the Early Islamic period, until the tenth or the eleventh century.²⁵² Several phases of construction were revealed, which included the remains of residential buildings of the central-court type. As in Ramla, the layout of the buildings and streets showed a persistent north-south alignment with a slight deviation to the east, probably dictated by the construction of a nearby mosque. The extent and limits of this settlement are still unknown, and it seems that, as with other towns in Palestine, Early Islamic Yubnah was transferred from the Tell to a nearby location. A reduction in its size in comparison with the Byzantine town was probably caused by the

²⁴⁹ Arbel 2010. ²⁵⁰ Fischer 2008*b*. ²⁵¹ Fischer and Taxel 2007, 230–45, 2008.

²⁵² I thank E. Yannai for providing me with this as yet unpublished information about his 2011 excavation of the site.

establishment of Ramla as the main city of the region. Yet Yubnah remained a secondary regional centre that maintained its own mint, which provided abundant issues under 'Abd al-Malik. Al-Muqaddasi mentioned the beautiful mosque of Yubnah, but its location and remains are still unknown.²⁵³ It seems that the local population in both the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods was predominantly Christian and Samaritan.²⁵⁴

Yavneh's hinterland during the Byzantine period displays a complicated picture of ethno-religious variability, composed of Christian, Jewish, and Samaritan villages,²⁵⁵ most of which decreased in size during the Early Islamic period, and some were completely abandoned. However, a rare find of a coin hoard of tenth-century Muslim *dinars*, discovered in a small village on the outskirts of Tell Ashdod, c.15 km south of Yavneh, indicates that settlements in this area were inhabited in the later stages of the Early Islamic period as well.²⁵⁶

Early Islamic settlement patterns in the southern coastal plain were affected by the establishment of the *ribat* at **Qal'at al-Mina (Ashdod Yam)**, a fortress remarkably similar to the one at Kafr Lab, described above. The fortress at Ashdod Yam, a rectangular enclosure measuring 60 × 40 m, was constructed in the late seventh or early eighth century at the site of the Byzantine Azots Paralios. Intensive excavations at the site have revealed its fortifications and ground plan²⁵⁷ (Fig. 4.13). The outer wall, preserved to a height of over 8m, was fortified with eight round towers, and had two symmetrical gates facing east and west. The interior of the fortress contained rooms along the wall, large halls used as stables, and a small mosque. An inner courtyard, in which two wells were installed, formed the central section of the fortress. A number of late seventh-century coins found in the earliest levels determined its date of construction.²⁵⁸ Other finds included household pottery and glass vessels, which indicate that the fortress was in constant use between the eighth and eleventh centuries. An outpost tower was discovered east of Ashdod Yam, which appears to have a similar date of construction and the same duration of use.²⁵⁹

The southern coastal city of **Ascalon**, a major regional centre and a hub of the rich and densely populated agricultural hinterland during the Roman and Byzantine periods, had its own impact on the changing settlement patterns of the Early Islamic period.²⁶⁰ It is estimated that the Byzantine city, built on top of earlier settlements from the Middle Bronze Age to the Roman period, covered an area of 57 ha.²⁶¹ It was inhabited mainly by Christians and contained at least three churches. A small Jewish community is evidenced from an inscription that mentions the existence of a synagogue.²⁶²

²⁵³ al-Muqaddasi, 176, tr. Collins 1994, 148. ²⁵⁴ Fischer and Taxel 2007, 239.

²⁵⁵ Fischer and Taxel 2008. ²⁵⁶ Bacharach 1980.

²⁵⁷ Nahlieli *et al.* 2000, Masarwa 2006, 18–26, 2011, 162–3. ²⁵⁸ Masarwa 2006, 24.

²⁵⁹ Masarwa 2006, 28–30.

²⁶⁰ Sharon 1997c, 131–4; Pringle 1993–8, 61–75; Hoffman 2004; Israel and Erickson-Gini 2013.

²⁶¹ Hakim 2001, 5. ²⁶² Schwartz 1986, 138–9.



Fig. 4.13 Ashdod Yam: aerial view of the Early Islamic fortress (Nahlieli *et al.* 2000, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

Ascalon was a major seaport for commodities from southern Palestine which were exported to many destinations around the Mediterranean. The wines of Gaza and Ascalon were renowned all over the Roman and Byzantine world, reaching even remote sites in the western Mediterranean and north-western Europe.²⁶³

The Byzantine and Early Islamic city is depicted on the Madaba Map and on the mosaic floor in the church of St Stephen at Umm el-Rasas, showing its *cardo* and *decumanus*, a city gate, multi-storey buildings, and part of a large church. Ascalon was the last city conquered by the Arabs, in 644. It was not damaged by the conquest and continued to prosper in Early Islamic times, as is mentioned in a number of Arabic sources. Following its partial destruction by a Byzantine sea raid in c.685, the city was fortified as one of the coastal defensive outposts against the Byzantine navy, and became one of the most important *thughur* (border cities).²⁶⁴ Al-Muqaddasi described a central mosque, thriving markets, strong fortifications, but a harbour which was unsuitable for large ships, and Nasir-i Khusraw noted its high buildings. The existence of the congregational mosque is evidenced from a monumental inscription dated to 771–772.²⁶⁵ A large Christian community lived in Early

²⁶³ Mayerson 1985, Kingsley 2001.

²⁶⁴ Masarwa 2006, 148–51; Sharon 1997c, 132–3.

²⁶⁵ Gil 1992, [303]; Sharon 1997c, 144–7.

Islamic Ascalon, as is evidenced by a number of historical sources which mention several churches in the city, and by the remains of churches revealed within its walled area.²⁶⁶ Ascalon is also mentioned in a number of documents from the Cairo Geniza, which shows the existence of a large Jewish community during the tenth and eleventh centuries.²⁶⁷

Excavations have revealed a continuous sequence of residential buildings from the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods.²⁶⁸ As in other coastal cities, no destruction layers associated with the Arab conquest were observed, and it seems that urban structures continued uninterrupted. A detailed analysis of five excavated houses, all built of rooms flanking a central courtyard, shows a slow process of transformation, with changes in the inner division of the rooms.²⁶⁹ Structure I at the northern part of the Tell was founded in the Byzantine period and continued to function in the Early Islamic and Crusader periods. Structure III, the largest one excavated, showed similar continuity with slight modifications, and included parts of two courtyards surrounded by rooms, some of them paved with mosaic floors. The house was in use throughout the Early Islamic period and continued into the Crusader period. Structure IV, in the central section of the city, is one of the best preserved, consisting of a number of square rooms around a central courtyard with a pool at its centre.²⁷⁰ Additional buildings were identified nearby, and it seems that this was a densely populated urban area both in the Byzantine and in the Early Islamic periods.

The domestic architecture in Ascalon shows long-term continuity from the sixth century to the eleventh and perhaps the twelfth centuries. Many modifications were made to the buildings in the course of this prolonged period of use, and some finds point to a decline of urban structures. For example, a bathhouse that went out of use following the Byzantine period was converted into a large kiln during the Early Islamic period. Yet it seems that these were the exceptions rather than the rule. Large-scale construction was conducted in Ascalon during the ninth and tenth centuries. The city was further fortified with the reinforcement of the neglected Hellenistic-period wall, located on top of the Middle Bronze Age ramp, and a number of large buildings were constructed inside the city.²⁷¹

It seems that Early Islamic Ascalon was similar in size to the Byzantine city, as all the buildings excavated, including the ones located near the city walls, showed long-term use. The continuity of settlement is particularly noticeable in the Eastern Church (Santa Maria Viridis), built within the city walls near the 'Jerusalem Gate'. The church was constructed in the fifth century as a large

²⁶⁶ Pringle 1993–1998, 61–8.

²⁶⁷ Gil 1992, [305].

²⁶⁸ See Stager 2008 for a general review of the excavations; Hoffman 2004 for the Byzantine and Early Islamic phases.

²⁶⁹ Hoffman 2004, 28–38.

²⁷⁰ Hoffman 2004, 34, fig. 2.7.

²⁷¹ I thank D. Master and T. Hoffman for this as yet unpublished information.

basilica supported by granite columns imported from Egypt, and was in use throughout the Early Islamic and the Crusader periods.²⁷²

The hinterland of Ascalon has been explored only to a limited extent, and is known mainly from archaeological surveys and some salvage excavations. The collected data present an impressive network of extensive villages, large farms, and industrial installations. Particularly impressive are the remains of a very large estate located 4.5 km to the north-east of the city, along the main road to the north,²⁷³ and representing the suburban rural estates (*proasteia*) which were inhabited by the affluent population of Ascalon.²⁷⁴ It contained a residential area with large storerooms, a large oil press, and a pottery kiln, pools for fish breeding, and two large industrial wine presses attesting to the flourishing industry of the region and to the large-scale production of wine both for local consumption and for export.

Archaeological findings point to a considerable decline in the farms and villages during the seventh and eighth centuries, probably as an outcome of the deterioration of international trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. The decline in wine exports resulted in the reduction of local production, which led to the shrinking of the large estates. Nevertheless, local markets continued to function and the pattern of rural settlements changed from large isolated estates to more compact agricultural villages.

A possible indication of the introduction of new settlements and population to the hinterland of Ascalon has been found near Tell el-Hesi. Arab historical sources mention a number of rural estates established in this region by 'Amr b. al-'As following the conquest. According to al-Baladhuri, after conquering the main settlements of central and southern Palestine, 'Amr acquired agricultural estates at 'Ajlan, somewhere between Ascalon and Beth Guvrin, where he frequently stayed upon his retirement.²⁷⁵

The possible location of these estates in the vicinity of Tell el-Hesi was already proposed during the early research at the site, and a recent intensive field survey identified clusters of Early Islamic sites west of the Tell.²⁷⁶ Large dams found in their vicinity suggest that the agricultural installations associated with these sites are not typical of this region, and may point to the introduction of a new population that practised different irrigation techniques. However, as the data on Early Islamic settlement are based on surveys only, further research is required in order to clarify the nature and chronology of these sites.

In any case, the establishment of new estates or settlements under Islamic rule indicates that there was no vacuum in settlement density in this area after the Arab conquest, and that the main change was expressed in the shifting of the market strategies of the hinterland from international export to local consumption.

²⁷² Pringle 1993–1998, 68.

²⁷⁴ Decker 2009a, 54–6.

²⁷⁶ Blakely 2010.

²⁷³ Israel and Erickson-Gini 2013.

²⁷⁵ al-Baladhuri, *Futūh*, 138; Lecker 1989; Sharon 1999, 115.

As in Ascalon, this change is noted in neighbouring **Gaza**, one of the largest cities in Palestine during Roman and Byzantine times, a thriving intellectual and commercial centre, and a major seaport for maritime trade in the eastern Mediterranean. The city was a stronghold of paganism in Roman times, and the destruction of its major temple, the Maraneion, in 408, marked the triumph of Christianity in the region. During the Byzantine period Gaza was a regional centre for the thriving network of villages and monasteries around it.²⁷⁷ A number of large churches in the city are described in historical sources, but none of them has been identified in the field. Excavations in the western part of the city have revealed the remains of a synagogue dated to the sixth century, located near the city walls.²⁷⁸

Unfortunately very little is known about Early Islamic Gaza. Excavations in a number of Byzantine churches on the outskirts of the city have revealed evidence of continuity of use into the Early Islamic period, and it seems that the churches and the settlements around them continued at least until the late eighth century.²⁷⁹ The continuity of Christian settlement is attested by a church excavated north of the city, in which a new mosaic floor was laid in 732.²⁸⁰ It seems that Gaza, like Ascalon, continued to thrive during this period, with a predominantly Christian population.²⁸¹

More than in any other region of Palestine, the settlement pattern that emerged along the Palestinian coastal plain following the Arab conquest presents a distinctive process of change. This change was introduced by the construction of the *thughr* and *ribatat* as strongholds against Byzantine sea raids and the encouragement of Muslims to settle in the existing cities. Yet these government-backed processes did not affect the previous population, with Christians still predominating and living together with the newly introduced Islamic population.²⁸² This is well evidenced in the relationship between Christian Dora and the nearby *ribat* of Kafr Lab.

The settlements in the hinterlands present a similar picture. In most areas the agricultural networks recovered following a short period of decline in the seventh century, shifting from production for export to providing for local consumption. The large-scale investments in the fortification of towns and the construction of fortresses in the coastal plain, together with the massive development and expansion of Ramla, provided the agricultural hinterlands with new local markets that replaced the flourishing international trade of the Byzantine period.

²⁷⁷ Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004; Moain-Sadek 2000. ²⁷⁸ Ovadiah 1993.

²⁷⁹ Humbert 2000, 87–97; Moain-Sadek 2000. ²⁸⁰ Humbert 1999.

²⁸¹ Levy-Rubin 2003.

²⁸² Levy-Rubin 2011a, 169–72 suggests that the non-Muslim population along the coastline virtually disappeared, but this is not supported by the archaeological evidence.

The Samaritan Hills and the Samaritan Lowlands

The areas east of the central coastal plain, and particularly the Samaritan Hills and Lowlands, which were the hub of the Samaritan population in Palestine, were characterized by a dense network of villages and farms. Extensive surveys and excavations in this area have shown a significant intensification of settlements during the Byzantine period, followed by a decline in the Early Islamic period. For example, surveys in northern and eastern Samaria have revealed 277 sites from the Byzantine period, while only 125 sites have been dated to the Early Islamic period.²⁸³ In central Samaria, 273 Byzantine sites have been revealed and only 49 Early Islamic sites.²⁸⁴ Farther south, the 'Land of Benjamin' survey identified 74 Byzantine sites and only 23 Early Islamic sites.²⁸⁵ It was believed that settlements in this area declined dramatically following the devastating Samaritan revolts in the sixth century.²⁸⁶ The fate of the settlements following the revolts and later under Islamic rule is unclear, but the common view is that most of them were abandoned, and that the Samaritan Hills became depopulated.²⁸⁷ Decline continued in the seventh century, when many Samaritans left the region following the Arab conquest.²⁸⁸ It has been suggested that the decline of settlement attracted a new foreign Muslim population that took advantage of the fertile land in the region.²⁸⁹

However, archaeological evidence from recent excavations and a re-evaluation of finds from previous surveys show that, although some decline is noticeable, many settlements continued to exist beyond the seventh century, with no evidence for the introduction of a new Muslim population. Particularly interesting are the numerous oil presses that display continuity of use into the eighth and ninth centuries,²⁹⁰ which contradicts previous views of a mass decline in settlements and population. The recent survey of sites containing oil presses in northern and western Samaria has suggested that the exploitation of olive oil in this region reached its peak during the Early Islamic period, particularly in the seventh–ninth centuries. New presses were installed in existing Byzantine villages such as at Qedumim, el-Khirbe, Deir Qal'a, and Deir Sam'an,²⁹¹ and other oil presses show continuity of use throughout the sixth–ninth centuries.

Magen has proposed that these oil presses were introduced by the recently arrived Islamic population, which replaced the previous Christian population and changed wine presses into oil presses.²⁹² This suggestion is very doubtful,

²⁸³ Zertal 2004, 64–5, 2008, 96–9.

²⁸⁴ Finkelstein 1988–1989; Finkelstein *et al.* 1997.

²⁸⁵ Finkelstein and Magen 1993.

²⁸⁶ Crown 1989, 71–9; Di Segni 2002; Magen 2002.

²⁸⁷ See e.g. Dar 1988.

²⁸⁸ See Crown 1989, 77–8 for the impact of the Samaritan revolts. See Levy-Rubin 2000, 2002, 27–43 and Ellenblum 1998, 235–76 for the transformation of settlements and population in this area.

²⁸⁹ Ellenblum 1998, 263–8.

²⁹⁰ Magen 2008.

²⁹¹ Magen 2008, 259–88.

²⁹² Magen 2008, 258–9, 327–9.

as is attested by the continuity of local pottery and glass repertoires and the construction of oil presses in the same style as in the Byzantine period. Yet a possible change from a Samaritan to a Christian population following the sixth-century revolts is evident in a number of sites in the region. These settlements were probably inhabited by a different population, which continued to exploit the rich agricultural areas in the region until the eighth or ninth century.²⁹³ In the light of these finds it seems that the suggested decline and abandonment of settlements following the Samaritan revolts should be reconsidered to take into account the continuity of many sites well into the Early Islamic period, and the possible change from Samaritan to Christian population.

A typical example of this process was found in **Horvat Migdal (Zur Nathan)**, a large village on the western slopes of the Samaritan Hills.²⁹⁴ The village, covering an area of c.5 ha, was inhabited during the Byzantine period by Samaritans, as a Samaritan synagogue found within it shows. It was heavily damaged during the revolts of the sixth century, and later reconstructed as a Christian settlement, containing a rectangular 30 × 30 m building, probably a monastery. Habitation continued into the Early Islamic period, but during the seventh and eighth centuries the village contracted and declined. The eastern part of the monastery still functioned in this period, and a rectangular structure was erected on top of a disused oil press. The finds, among them elaborate glass vessels from the eighth century, point to wealthy residents. It seems that the site was abandoned only in the late eighth or early ninth century.

Christian presence in the Samaritan Lowlands was discerned in several other sites. Excavations at **Khirbet Hani** (el-Burj el-Hanieh), east of Lod, exposed a nunnery constructed in the fifth century and occupied until the ninth century.²⁹⁵ It consisted of two units, a residential area and a church, paved with mosaic floors depicting animal and human figures. In its last stage of use, during the eighth century, the figures were deliberately mutilated, but the church continued to function for a while, until it was abandoned in the ninth century. The nearby Church of St Bacchus, located in a Byzantine village, was a medium-sized apsidal church, paved with mosaic floors decorated with geometrical and vegetal motifs. The finds indicate that it was in use between the fifth and eighth centuries. In its later stage an olive press was installed in one of the side rooms.²⁹⁶

Another small village or farmstead with clear indications of continuity is **Khirbet Bira**, at the foot of the Samaritan Hills, where three main stages of settlement were identified.²⁹⁷ A fourth-century Jewish manor house was replaced in the second half of the fifth century by a Christian farmhouse with a small church within it. During the Early Islamic period an oil press was added to the farmhouse, which continued to function until the ninth century.

²⁹³ Dar 1988.

²⁹⁴ Ayalon 2002.

²⁹⁵ Dahari and Zelinger 2008; Taxel 2013, 165-9.

²⁹⁶ Dahari 2008.

²⁹⁷ Dar and Safrai 2008.

Another nearby village of c.3 ha is **Khirbet Zikhrin**, overlooking the eastern basin of the Yarkon River.²⁹⁸ The village, of the introverted type, contained eight or nine dwelling complexes, each consisting of a central courtyard surrounded by rooms. Three complexes were unearthed, and a continuous sequence of use and modification from the Byzantine period to the ninth century was revealed. An apsidal church was located in the centre of the village and next to it the remains of a small bathhouse were found. Another rectangular complex (35 × 25 m) in the north-western part of the settlement was identified as a monastery from the fifth–seventh centuries. A number of large wine and olive presses were installed on the village outskirts.

The major phase of construction in Khirbet Zikhrin was dated to the Byzantine period, and significant additions and changes were introduced into the settlement in the Early Islamic period. Particularly interesting was the transformation of the monastery into residential units with the division of its central courtyard into smaller rooms and storage bins. The wine and olive presses at the site continued to function into the ninth and perhaps even the tenth centuries, when the village was probably abandoned.

The Judaeen Lowlands and the Hebron Hills

A different pattern of settlement is found in the Judaeen Lowlands, east of the southern coastal plain. This area was characterized by a dense network of villages and farmsteads, forming the largest rural area in the country. A clear continuity of Christian settlements from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period was found in many sites, with no decline following the Arab conquest. This continuity was particularly evident in the large number of villages, farmsteads, and rural monasteries around **Beth Guvrin-Eleutheropolis**, the regional urban centre of this dense agricultural network. The Byzantine city, founded in the third century, controlled large rural territories around it. Excavations in Beth Guvrin were limited in scope, as the Byzantine and Early Islamic site was covered by later settlements.²⁹⁹ Continuity of settlement beyond the Byzantine period has been proved by sporadic archaeological findings and by its description in Arabic sources, which mention an Early Islamic mint in Beth Guvrin.³⁰⁰ Eleutheropolis is also depicted in the mosaic floor at Umm el-Rasas, which indicates that it continued to flourish in the eighth and perhaps also in the ninth centuries.

The continuous occupation of Beth Guvrin by its Christian population is indicated by the excavations of a Byzantine church, perhaps part of a

²⁹⁸ Taxel 2005; Fischer 2008a; Hirschfeld 1997a, 47.

²⁹⁹ For general references to Beth Guvrin, see Kloner 1993, Sharon 1999, 109–33.

³⁰⁰ Sharon 1999, 109–14.

monastery, located north of the city.³⁰¹ The church, which functioned at least until the eighth century, was damaged by iconoclasm. In its latest phase, during the ninth and tenth centuries, additional walls were installed, but it is unclear whether the church was still used by Christians.³⁰²

Extensive research in the necropolis of Beth Guvrin has revealed a clear pattern of continuity in the use of family burial caves from the Byzantine period to the eighth and ninth centuries.³⁰³ In addition, a number of Arabic inscriptions have been found in the large underground quarries in the vicinity of Beth Guvrin, some of them associated with crosses.³⁰⁴ These recall the description of al-Muqaddasi, who specified the large 'marble quarries' of Beth Guvrin as the source for lime for the building of cities in the coastal plain.³⁰⁵

While only a small amount of archaeological data on the Byzantine-Islamic transition was found at Beth Guvrin, the villages and farmsteads in its hinterland reveal a more distinctive pattern of continuity, and in some cases even the expansion of existing settlements during the Early Islamic period. A typical village was *Khirbet 'Illin*, north of Beth Guvrin and near the modern town of Beth Shemesh. This small village, built on a slope of a low hill, contained several clusters of dispersed households, each inhabited by an extended family. Excavations have showed that it was founded in the late sixth century and expanded during the seventh century, with several stages of use,³⁰⁶ including the construction of new houses that were inhabited until the tenth century.³⁰⁷ The site was partially abandoned in the eleventh century.

A rural Byzantine monastery, located near the village of *Khirbrt es-Suyyagh*, has been thoroughly excavated.³⁰⁸ It was established in the fifth century, and continued to function in the seventh and eighth centuries. The monastery was abandoned for a short time in the eighth century, and then reused by new inhabitants, who established a small rural settlement using the existing buildings and dividing them into smaller dwelling units.³⁰⁹ The site was finally abandoned in the late ninth century.

The interaction between rural villages and neighbouring monasteries, as has been revealed in the Beth Shemesh area, seems to represent the typical pattern of rural communities during the Byzantine period and show that villages in this part of the country continued into the Early Islamic period. Some of them expanded between the seventh and ninth centuries with little change in their traditional economic basis. The nature of the interactions between the settlements and the nearby monasteries remains unclear, as both were concerned with agricultural production, and contained their own wine and oil presses. The archaeological

³⁰¹ Baramki 1972. ³⁰² Magness 2003, 108–9. ³⁰³ Avni *et al.* 2008.

³⁰⁴ Sharon 1999, 130–45. Similar caves with inscriptions in Arabic were found elsewhere in the Judaean Lowlands; see Sharon 1997*b*.

³⁰⁵ al-Muqaddasi, 174; Sharon 1999, 126–30. ³⁰⁶ Weksler-Bdolah 1996.

³⁰⁷ Greenhut 2004. ³⁰⁸ Taxel 2009. ³⁰⁹ Taxel 2009, 222–4.

evidence shows that the local population provided for its own consumption in agricultural goods and exported the surplus to neighbouring towns.

Similar continuity of settlement was revealed in villages south of Beth Guvrin and on the western edges of the Hebron hills. These Christian villages flourished in the Byzantine period, containing churches and monasteries within them. Two sites, Khirbet Beth Loya and Khirbet Qasra, revealed the remains of churches, perhaps parts of larger monastic compounds, which shows clear continuity of Christian presence in this area during the eighth and ninth centuries.

A large church with adjacent oil and wine presses was excavated at the western edge of the Byzantine and Early Islamic village at **Khirbet Beth Loya**. This elaborate church, probably part of a larger monastery, formed a basilica measuring 20.5×13 m with a single apse and a large atrium. Constructed in the early sixth century, it was in use at least until the ninth century.³¹⁰ The church was paved with richly decorated mosaic floors, depicting human and animal motifs, some of them mutilated by iconoclasm and then carefully repaired with patches, which blurred the images. The excavations at an adjacent burial cave revealed a large assemblage of Early Islamic oil lamps from the eighth and ninth centuries.

South of the church, a small mosque was recently found, containing an open courtyard which led to a small square praying room ($c.5 \times 5$ m) facing south-east with a deep *mihrab* niche in its southern wall.³¹¹ Two phases of use were distinguished in this mosque, the construction of the later phase included the use of architectural elements from another building as *spolia*. Among the finds on the floor were several pottery vessels and oil lamps from the ninth and tenth centuries. It is not yet clear whether the large church and the nearby small and humble mosque functioned at the same time, or whether the mosque was constructed following the abandonment of the church.

Further excavations in the village show a clear sequence of the Byzantine and Early Islamic phases, which indicates that the settlement continued well beyond the eighth century.³¹² To the north-east of the church, a small subterranean chapel was excavated, constructed in the fifth century and used at least until the eighth century. It seems that the village was abandoned in the latter part of the Early Islamic period and resettled in the Mamluk period.³¹³

Khirbet Qasra, a village south of Khirbet Beth Loya, revealed a similar pattern of continuity. An underground chapel was excavated here to reveal a large number of inscriptions which illuminated the rituals of the local

³¹⁰ Patrich and Tsafirir 1985.

³¹¹ The mosque was excavated in 2011 and results have not yet been published. I thank O. Gutfeld for the information given here.

³¹² For a preliminary report on the new excavations, see Gutfeld 2009.

³¹³ For the late date of abandonment see Magness 2003, 109.

Christian population during the Early Islamic period.³¹⁴ The chapel used a rock-cut burial cave from the Early Roman period, and enlarged one of its inner chambers to form a small hall with a carved chancel screen. Many graffiti of crosses and inscriptions in Greek, Arabic, and Syriac were engraved on the walls. A few of them mention the 'Shrine of Salome' and 'Holy Salome', probably a local saint venerated by villagers and pilgrims.³¹⁵ The finds from the chapel, mainly the oil lamps, indicated that it was in use between the seventh and ninth centuries. The numerous Arabic inscriptions provide a vivid example of the penetration of the Arabic language into the Christian communities of Palestine during this period.³¹⁶ It seems that the chapel was abandoned in the tenth or eleventh century, when the village was deserted by its Christian population.

Settlement continuity was also manifested in several villages in the Judean Hills, where a number of churches and rural monasteries have been excavated. They represent a clear transitional phase from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period. The latest stages of habitation in a few sites, during the ninth and tenth centuries, indicate a change in the religious affiliation of the local population, as churches were abandoned and covered by dwellings of inferior quality or by agricultural installations. A typical village of this type is **Khirbet Berakhot/Bureikut**, north of Hebron, which extends over an area of c.1.5 ha.³¹⁷ The Byzantine village shows continuity into the Early Islamic period, and a later phase of reuse in the Mamluk period. A small church (12.5 × 15.5 m) has been excavated at the southern edge of the settlement. It was constructed in the second half of the fifth or the middle of the sixth century, covering an earlier cave which became the crypt of the church.³¹⁸ The latest phase of use has been dated to the second half of the seventh century, when the church was abandoned and destroyed. A later Early Islamic phase has been identified above the deserted church, containing the remains of humble dwellings. However, a re-evaluation of the finds suggests a continuous use of the church and adjacent buildings until the ninth and tenth centuries.³¹⁹ Yet it is not clear whether in its later stages the site was occupied by Christians. A number of Kufic inscriptions found there, one of them containing pious Muslim invocations, may indicate a Muslim presence at the church in its later stages, perhaps preserving its old tradition of sanctity and converting it into a Muslim shrine. The site was abandoned in the eleventh century and resettled again in the Mamluk period.

³¹⁴ Kloner 1990.

³¹⁵ On the identification of Salome and other contemporary sites where she was commemorated, see Di Segni and Patrich 1990.

³¹⁶ See Griffith 1997 and 2008 and Wasserstein 2003 for the penetration of Arabic into Christian communities.

³¹⁷ Tsafirir and Hirschfeld 1979.

³¹⁸ The later date for the foundation of the church was suggested by Magness 2003, 109–11.

³¹⁹ Magness 2003, 110.

Further south, at **Khirbet ed-Dawwara** (the modern town of Halhul), a different type of village has been excavated. The site, established as a farm in the Late Roman period, was converted in the fifth century into a monastery which was incorporated within the existing village.³²⁰ It was inhabited continuously until the end of the eighth century, when it was destroyed by an earthquake. An oil press was introduced into the monastery during its latest stage of settlement, and it is not clear if at this stage the site was still inhabited by Christians.

The southern Judaeian Lowlands and the southern Hebron Hills have revealed a similar pattern of continuity in Christian villages to the one found around Beth Guvrin. A typical village is 'Anab el-Kebir, where a large apsidal church (38 × 20 m) adorned with mosaic floors has been excavated to reveal three phases of occupation between the sixth and the late eighth centuries.³²¹ The latest stage showed signs of iconoclasm which included the partial mutilation of birds and animal images in the mosaics. Nearby oil and wine presses have been associated with this phase. The complex was abandoned in the late eighth or early ninth century and resettled in the Mamluk period. Another Byzantine farmhouse has been excavated nearby at **Rujm Jerida**.³²² This square complex (32 × 27 m) was constructed in the sixth century around a fourth-century fortified tower. In its second stage, by the end of the sixth century, it was probably turned into a monastery (or just inhabited by Christians), and continued to function during the Early Islamic period. Between the seventh and ninth centuries the farmhouse was modified by the addition of an olive press and a wine press found nearby.

The church at **Khirbet Umm Deimnah** followed a similar chronological sequence: a fourth-century manor house, over which a monastery (c.35 × 35 m) was constructed in the sixth century and continued into the Early Islamic period. The chapel mosaic pavement, ornamented with animal figures, was partly mutilated in the eighth century, and later carefully patched. The monastery seemed to function with minor changes throughout the eighth century and fell into disuse during the ninth century, when buildings were used as residences and industrial installations, including an olive press in its southern wing. The site was deserted in the tenth or eleventh century.³²³

In **Khirbet Yattir**, a large Christian village from the Byzantine period, a basilica church (24 × 13 m) has been revealed. It was perhaps part of a monastery located outside the village.³²⁴ The nave and supporting columns were constructed from *spolia*, including Nabataean capitals from an unknown earlier structure. The floor was paved with two mosaic floors: the earlier decorated with figures of birds on medallions, and the later with geometric patterns, magical symbols, and a schematic depiction of a building with a gabled roof and three hanging lamps. This mosaic floor contained a

³²⁰ Batz and Sharukh 2008.

³²³ Magen and Batz 2008.

³²¹ Magen *et al.* 2008a.

³²⁴ Eshel *et al.* 1999, 2000; Magness 2003, 105–7.

³²² Magen *et al.* 2008b.

dated Greek inscription of 631/2. It is interesting to note that it was laid in a supposed period of turmoil, three years before the Arab conquest and during the first Arab raids into southern Palestine and Jordan.³²⁵ A second church, located at the top of a nearby slope, has been partially excavated. It contained a decorated mosaic floor which was covered with white plaster and industrial installations in its later stage, probably during the ninth and tenth centuries.

The settlement of Yattir and its churches continued throughout the Early Islamic period, as large quantities of domestic pottery indicate. The construction of industrial installations on top of the mosaic floors in the upper church suggests that the building functioned as a domestic unit in its later phases.³²⁶ The site was partially deserted in the Crusader period, and then rebuilt again, as the finding of a mosque from the Mamluk period indicates.

A different chronology has been revealed at **Khirbet Aristobulia**, a large Byzantine village.³²⁷ Excavations in the village church have revealed several mosaic floors containing a dedication inscription dated to 700/1 and indicating an affiliation to the bishopric of Eleutheropolis. The church was in use until the tenth century, when it was abandoned, but some of its rooms were inhabited in the eleventh century. The construction of this church in a Christian village in the early eighth century, when Islamic rule was solidly established in this region, provides another indication of the long-term continuity of Christian settlements in the southern Hebron Hills.

Contrary to Magen, who claimed that the massive introduction of oil presses into church and monastery compounds indicated the abandonment or mass conversion of the local Christian population, it seems that Christian presence in this area continued well into the ninth century, and in some cases as late as the tenth century. Additionally, the introduction of oil presses into existing monasteries should be associated with changes in local economy, which forced the local inhabitants to rely on their own production, rather than on external financial support as in Byzantine times. It seems that conversion to Islam before the Crusader period was minimal in this area, as in other regions of Palestine.

A number of Jewish villages, all located in the southern Hebron Hills, continued from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period. Jewish presence in this area was usually indicated by a synagogue located in the centre of the village. Particularly noteworthy were the synagogues of Susiya, Eshtamo'a, and Ma'on.³²⁸

Khirbet Susiya was a large village, spread over two low hills and covering an area of c.6 ha. The Byzantine village contained a number of spacious residences. Each was constructed as a rectangular building with an inner courtyard

³²⁵ See the discussion in Ch. 5.

³²⁶ Magness 2003, 107.

³²⁷ Peleg and Batz 2008.

³²⁸ For Magen's claim, see above, pp. 247–8. See Amit 2003 on the Jewish settlements in this area.

surrounded by rooms and containing water cisterns and subterranean rock-cut storage caves. The synagogue was located in the centre of the western section of the village.

Extensive excavations conducted at the site by several teams³²⁹ have revealed a long sequence of occupation from the third century to the ninth and tenth centuries. The synagogue was established in the Byzantine period and went through several phases of use until the eighth or ninth century. At some point in the Early Islamic period the building was converted into a mosque, but the exact date of this change is not clear. Early excavations concluded that the mosque was installed in the tenth century, and it was suggested that the synagogue was in use until the eighth or ninth century and then abandoned, destroyed, and replaced by a mosque. Several ink-written Arabic inscriptions have been found on the walls of the building, one of them dated to the early ninth century.³³⁰ Magness has suggested that the mosque was installed in the eighth century, when the synagogue was abandoned.³³¹

Continuity of settlement was well established by the excavations of a residential building on the southern edge of the village.³³² This house, probably occupied by a single family for a long period of time, was dated to the sixth–eighth centuries, but a re-evaluation of the finds shows that it was constructed in the seventh century and continued to function up to the ninth and tenth centuries.³³³ The suggested Jewish identity of the house owners is doubtful as it is not based on the finds but on the interpretation of a diagonal groove in the doorpost as a *mezuzah*.³³⁴

The religious identity of the Early Islamic population of Susiya was not made clear by the archaeological findings, but the replacement of the synagogue by a mosque and the continuity of settlement until the tenth century may suggest that a new Muslim population penetrated the southern Hebron Hills and settled in the Jewish rural areas, perhaps side by side with the existing Jewish population.

A similar installation of a mosque in an existing synagogue was found in the nearby village of *Eshtamo'a/Samo'a*.³³⁵ The date of this mosque is unclear but it may be associated with the construction of the mosque in Susiya. It seems that both Jewish villages experienced a new Islamic population inhabiting the region, perhaps between the eighth and tenth centuries.

It has been suggested that another mosque was installed in the synagogue at *Khirbet 'Anim*, on the *Eshtamo'a*–Beersheba road. This synagogue, located in the centre of the Jewish village, has been dated to the fourth–seventh centuries, but the evidence of pottery from the site shows that it continued in use in the ninth

³²⁹ See Magness 2003, 100 for detailed references.

³³⁰ Magness 2003, 100–1.

³³¹ Magness 2003, 101.

³³² Hirschfeld 1984.

³³³ Magness 2003, 101–2.

³³⁴ Hirschfeld 1984, 172.

³³⁵ Yeivin 2004; Magness 2003, 103.

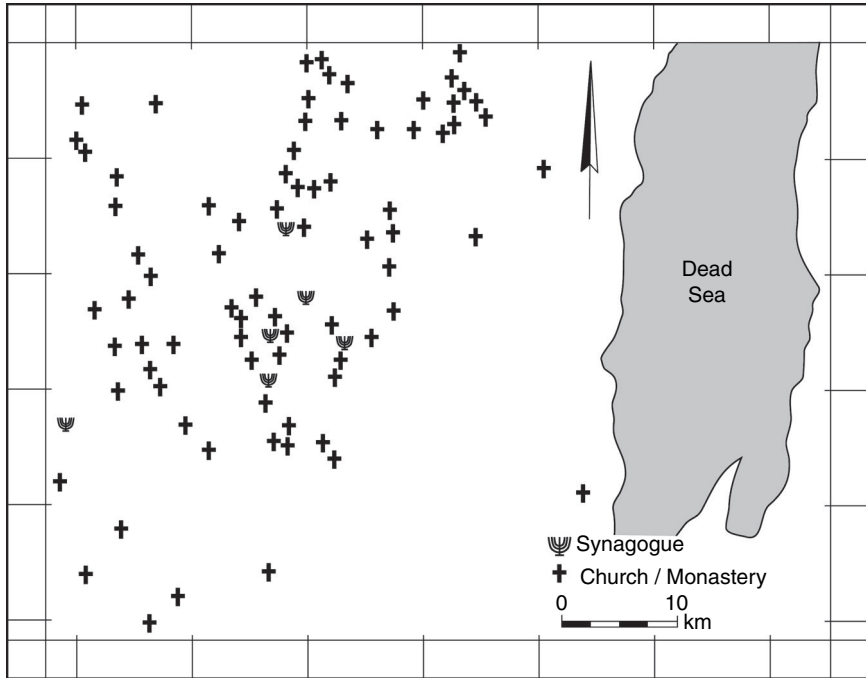


Fig. 4.14 Southern Hebron Hills: map of Jewish and Christian settlements.

and tenth centuries.³³⁶ The preliminary excavation report suggested that after the abandonment of the synagogue in the seventh century a small mosque was installed in the building, but the absence of a *mihrab*, together with the large amount of cooking and storage vessels found in the later structure, points to its domestic character.³³⁷

The settlements of the southern Judaeen Lowlands and the southern Hebron Hills provide a good example of the diverse religious orientation of the countryside during the Byzantine–Islamic transition. The existence of Jewish and Christian settlements side by side in this region is well documented both in the Byzantine sources and in the archaeological findings.³³⁸ Excavations and surveys have revealed 57 Christian rural settlements, most of them containing churches and monasteries, and forming one of the densest settled areas in the country.³³⁹ Nine Jewish villages have been found scattered in between the Christian settlements, and it seems that unlike in the Galilee, where a clear geographical separation existed between Jewish and Christian settlements, the villages of the southern Hebron Hills shared the same region, but with no interaction between the two communities within the same village (Fig. 4.14).

³³⁶ Amit 2003, 110–21; Magness 2003, 104.

³³⁷ Magness 2003, 116–17.

³³⁸ Bordowitz 2007.

³³⁹ Mader 1918; Bordowitz 2007, 201–21.

Christian settlements with their churches and monasteries, most of them constructed in the fifth and sixth centuries, continued to flourish at least until the early ninth century. In several sites new mosaic floors were laid in the seventh and eighth centuries, showing the vitality of the local Christian communities. Jewish settlements continued side by side with the Christian ones, and the same pattern of continuity to the eighth and ninth centuries is revealed. It seems that the introduction of Islam into this area was gradual and slow, and for some reason it was evidenced mainly in the Jewish villages. The installation of mosques in the synagogues at Susiya and Eshtamo'a constitutes the sole indication of a change, and it was not reflected in other aspects of material culture. It is reasonable to assume that both local Jewish and local Christian communities declined in the ninth and tenth centuries, but a number of settlements continued to exist on a reduced scale in later periods as well.

Beersheba and the northern Negev

The northern Negev presents one of the most variable settlement patterns of the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. This was a densely populated area in Roman and Byzantine times, dominated by the large urban centre of Beersheba-Birosaba, which was linked to the cities of Ascalon and Gaza in the west and Elusa in the south. The rural areas in between these centres were dotted with villages and farmsteads, and extended to the densely inhabited areas of the southern coastal plain and the Judaeen Lowlands.³⁴⁰

Both Beersheba and Elusa declined in the seventh and the eighth centuries, while some of the villages in their hinterlands, among them Patish/Futais and Shivta/Esbeita, continued to flourish throughout the Early Islamic period, relying on their rich agricultural surroundings. It has been suggested that the decline of the large settlements in the Beersheba region triggered the expansion of farmsteads and agricultural villages in their hinterland.³⁴¹ While the western Negev continued to flourish, the settlements in the north-eastern Negev showed a consistent pattern of stagnation and decline after the eighth century.

Beersheba, the regional centre of the northern Negev in Byzantine times, is mentioned in a number of historical sources and depicted in the Madaba Map.³⁴²

The site, covered today by the modern city, has been only partly excavated to reveal the remains of a Roman military camp, several churches, and

³⁴⁰ For the region of Gaza, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004; for the widespread wine industry in this region, see Mayerson 1985.

³⁴¹ Fabian and Gilead 2008; Fabian and Goldfus 2004.

³⁴² Di Segni 2004; Fabian and Gilead 2008; Petersen 2005, 54–6.

domestic structures.³⁴³ The area of the Byzantine city has been estimated at c.100–50 ha and its agricultural hinterland extended over an area of 4–6 km around it. It has been suggested that Beersheba contracted in size during the eighth century, and was completely abandoned by the tenth century. Although no direct evidence of Muslim presence has been revealed to date, excavations indicate that the site was occupied well into the eighth and perhaps even the ninth centuries. However, it is unclear whether the churches also functioned as late as this, or were abandoned in the early eighth century.³⁴⁴

An extensive network of agricultural farms was found north of the city, and excavations at a number of sites have revealed a relatively short sequence of use between the sixth and eighth centuries.³⁴⁵ Additional farmsteads have been excavated south and west of the modern city, at Nahal Beqa and Bir Abu Matar, all of them showing continuity into the Early Islamic period. In Abu Matar a large building of several phases has been partly excavated. It underwent two stages of occupation in the Early Islamic period, the latest from the eighth and early ninth centuries. North of the city, on top of Tell Beersheba, a small fort or way station from the Early Islamic period has been excavated.³⁴⁶

The eastern hinterland of Beersheba shows a similar pattern of continuity, but with a reduction in the area of settlements during the seventh century. Most of the villages and monastic compounds that flourished in this area during the Byzantine period were abandoned in the eighth and ninth centuries. A number of sites were located on top of or near large abandoned Iron Age settlements. For example, a Byzantine-period village and monastic compound were built at the Iron Age site of Tell 'Ira.³⁴⁷ It seems that the monastery functioned until the late seventh or early eighth century, when it was transformed into a residential area.³⁴⁸ Internal passages were sealed and rooms were added, and the previous monastery was incorporated into a small village which was inhabited for another two centuries. It is unclear whether this shift in settlement also indicated a change in its population. The site was abandoned during the ninth or tenth century and never settled again.

A similar monastery was found nearby in Tell Masos, a biblical site on the plain below Tell 'Ira.³⁴⁹ This monastery was identified as a Nestorian hermitage on the basis of several Syriac inscriptions which were discovered in it. It was established in the mid-sixth century and continued at least until the end of the seventh or early eighth century.

Another large village was established in the Byzantine period to the south of the Iron Age Tell Malhata. Large-scale salvage excavation here has revealed the

³⁴³ Fabian and Gilead 2008. See Petersen 2005, app. 1 for a partial list of these excavations.

³⁴⁴ See briefly on this issue Fabian and Gilead 2008, 348–50.

³⁴⁵ Fabian and Goldfus 2004. ³⁴⁶ Fabian and Gilead 2008, 355–6.

³⁴⁷ Magness 2003, 53–7 and references there. ³⁴⁸ Cresson 1999; Magness 2003, 54.

³⁴⁹ Fritz and Kempinsky 1983; see also the discussion in Magness 2003, 57–8.

remains of several buildings paved with mosaic floors, and hundreds of graves have been exposed around the village.³⁵⁰ The pottery indicates that the settlement continued well into the Early Islamic period. This continuity is reinforced by the discovery of an Early Islamic fortified building at the upper part of the Tell, perhaps similar to the one found in Tell Beersheba.

The western periphery of the Beersheba area shows a much clearer pattern of continuity and expansion of settlements from late Byzantine to Early Islamic times. In *Horvat Patish/Futais*, a town located on the north bank of Nahal Patish in the western Negev, a clear sequence of settlements has been revealed, spanning the sixth to twelfth centuries. Field surveys have estimated the circumference of the site at about 1.8 km, with clusters of built remains extending over 25 ha. Limited-scale excavations have revealed a sequence of six settlement phases. The settlement was not interrupted by destruction layers, and it seems that it reached its maximal development in the tenth century.³⁵¹ Recent excavations at other sections of the site have revealed a network of private dwellings, all consisting of rooms around an open courtyard.³⁵² Water was provided by several wells and many built cisterns, similar in form to the ones discovered at Ramla.

The growth and expansion of Patish/Futais in the Early Islamic period, with construction features similar to the ones found in Ramla, provides another indication of the prosperity of the western Negev between the seventh and the eleventh centuries.

Farther south, the case of *Elusa* is particularly noteworthy, as this was one of the largest cities in Palestine in the Byzantine period.³⁵³ Limited-scale excavations here have revealed several public structures, which were abandoned in the seventh century, either before or after the 659/660 earthquake.³⁵⁴ The theatre and the east church seem to have been destroyed by this earthquake. The last phase of use in the cathedral church, dated to the seventh century, shows that the stone pavement of the floors was plundered and squatters took possession of the basilica, using its architectural elements. However, the dating of the final destruction to the second half of the seventh century has not been proved, and perhaps decline and abandonment occurred in the eighth century. In any case, it seems that *Elusa* was not settled during the ninth and tenth centuries.

The demise of *Elusa* might have been connected to the changes in economic and commercial patterns in the Negev. The decline of international commercial routes in the seventh century affected the city's role as one of the major suppliers of wine and other commodities to the seaports of Gaza and Ascalon. However, as *Elusa* has only been explored to a limited extent, these

³⁵⁰ Eldar and Baumgarten 1993.

³⁵¹ Nahlieli and Israel 1988–1989.

³⁵² Paran 2000, I thank P. Fabian for discussing with me his as yet unpublished excavations.

³⁵³ Mayerson 1983.

³⁵⁴ Negev 1993*d*, Golfus *et al.* 2000.

conclusions might be refuted by future excavations of other sections of the site, as was the case in Sepphoris and Yavneh as we described above.

It is interesting to compare the transformation of Elusa in the Early Islamic period with that revealed at Petra, the renowned Roman and Byzantine centre of southern Jordan. While previous research concluded that Petra was gradually abandoned following the 363 earthquake and was completely deserted in later stages of the Byzantine period, recent excavation of the apsidal church in the northern section of the city show the continuity and prosperity of the Byzantine city. Particularly significant was the stunning discovery of a large collection of administrative documents known as the 'Petra Papyri' in one of the church chambers. The papyri, dated to between the years 537 and 598, reveal a flourishing settlement in Petra and its vicinity, which was based mainly on agricultural production, and was tightly connected to the populated areas of Jordan and Palestine. The Petra papyri show that the town continued to flourish at least until the end of the Byzantine period, and perhaps even later.³⁵⁵ A large number of Arabic inscriptions discovered at the site suggest that settlement continued beyond the seventh century, but on a much reduced scale.³⁵⁶

Additional evidence of settlement continuity around Petra has been found in the ecclesiastical complex at Jebel Harun, south of the city. The large 75 × 45 m church and adjacent structures discovered here show a clear continuity throughout the eighth or ninth centuries. The mosaic floors of the church were damaged by iconoclasm in the eighth century, but were carefully repaired and reused, perhaps until the ninth century.³⁵⁷

Other villages in the Petra region also continued to flourish during the Early Islamic period. It has been estimated that around 40 per cent of the sites revealed in surveys in this region continued from the Byzantine into the Early Islamic periods, and excavations in a few of these sites show continuous sequences up to the Crusader period.³⁵⁸ It seems that, like other regions in Palestine and Jordan, settlement in the Petra hinterland continued throughout the Early Islamic period.

THE CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN NEGEV: A CASE STUDY

The remote areas of the Negev Highlands, where a dense network of settlements has been documented, deserve special attention. The rich finds of large settlements, villages, and farmsteads and their excellent state of preservation

³⁵⁵ Fiema 2001, 2002; Caldwell and Gagos 2007. ³⁵⁶ al-Salameen 2010.

³⁵⁷ Fiema 2003. ³⁵⁸ Amr and al-Momani 2011, 306–8.

make the Negev a unique laboratory for the study of the changing settlement patterns between the sixth and eleventh centuries in the marginal areas of Palestine and Jordan. The fact that sites in this region were preserved and not obliterated by later remains makes an accurate evaluation of settlement distribution and characteristics possible. In addition, the detailed studies of the agricultural regime provide a further dimension to the settlement picture and its chronological framework.³⁵⁹

While early research and also some modern studies still regard the Arab conquest as the direct cause of the decline of the Negev settlements,³⁶⁰ the accumulated archaeological data present a different scenario, indicating a slow and gradual process of transformation. Excavations of the large settlements, of agricultural villages and farms, and of nomadic encampments, as well as extensive field surveys, provide abundant new data for the evaluation of the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule in this area.

The renewed excavations in the large settlements of the Negev have refined the existing chronological conclusions on the demise and abandonment of these sites, and the extensive surveys and excavations of small villages and farmsteads have provided abundant new data on the countryside. Particularly significant has been the 'Negev Emergency Survey', initiated in 1979 following the Israeli–Egyptian peace accord and the redeployment of the Israeli army to the Negev. In the course of the following decade approximately 1,500 square km were systematically surveyed, and more than 10,000 sites from different periods were revealed. Hundreds of agricultural and pastoralist sites from Byzantine and Early Islamic times were discovered and added many details to the comprehensive picture of settlement hierarchy and diversity between the sixth and eleventh centuries.³⁶¹ These new data suggest considerable changes in the previously accepted paradigms for the settlement processes in this region, stressing a more complex picture of intensification and decline with a large regional variability.

The Negev Highlands 'towns'

The early explorations of the Negev Highlands revealed the remains of five large settlements: Mamshit (Mampsis-Kurnub), 'Avdat (Oboda), Rehovot (Ruheibeh), Shivta (Sobota-Esbeita), and Nessana.³⁶² Shivta and Nessana

³⁵⁹ See particularly Mayerson 1960, Rubin 1990, Avni *et al.* 2013.

³⁶⁰ e.g. Woolley and Lawrence 1914–1915, Negev 1977, 1986.

³⁶¹ For various survey reports, see Avni 1992, Cohen 1981, 1985, Haiman 1986, 1991, 1993, 1999, Rosen 1994, Lender 1990, Baumgarten 2004; see Magness 2003 for a general evaluation of the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic sites discovered in the surveys; see also Appendix III for a summary of the number of sites in each region.

³⁶² For the early descriptions, see Musil 1907, Woolley and Lawrence 1914–1915. See also Shereshevski 1991 for a summary of previous research.

were extensively excavated between 1934 and 1937.³⁶³ The discovery of the Nessana archives, containing numerous administrative documents written between the years 512 and 689, provided a major source for understanding the local history of the Negev in that period.³⁶⁴ Additional large-scale excavations were conducted at Shivta, 'Avdat, and Mamshit during the 1960s but unfortunately their results were not fully published, and no data on the stratigraphy and chronology of the unearthened remains are available.³⁶⁵ The next wave of excavations, conducted at Mamshit,³⁶⁶ Rehovot,³⁶⁷ 'Avdat,³⁶⁸ and Nessana,³⁶⁹ is fairly well documented, but the results have not been fully published yet.

These extensive excavations exposed large segments of each settlement, concentrating on the public and religious buildings of churches and monasteries. All settlements were extensively developed during the Byzantine period, expanding in area and population and maintaining large agricultural networks around them.³⁷⁰ Although usually referred to as the 'Negev towns' these were in fact large villages that formed a centre for a dense agricultural regime.³⁷¹

Mamshit, located in the north-eastern Negev Highlands, developed in the second and third centuries along the Roman road from Aila to Beersheba and Jerusalem, and expanded further in the Byzantine period. Built on the edge of a high cliff facing the Mamshit wadi, it was a relatively small settlement extending over c.4 ha. The site was composed of a number of large buildings and two apsidal churches in its south-eastern and south-western sections. Mamshit was particularly noted for its large residential buildings, some of them extending over 1,000 square m and built with exceptional standards of construction.³⁷²

'**Avdat**, built on a high ridge in the central Negev Highlands, was a Nabataean caravan station in which a Roman military camp was installed, probably in the late third century.³⁷³ The Byzantine settlement contained an upper part on the high plateau and a lower part, which consisted of hundreds of man-made rock-cut caves with dwellings and industrial installations within them. The acropolis of the site, which has been extensively excavated, contained a closed compound surrounded by walls in which two apsidal churches were constructed. An elaborate bathhouse has been located to the west of the settlement, and extensive agricultural fields spread in the valleys south and west of 'Avdat.

Rehovot, the westernmost settlement south-west of Elusa, was also based on an earlier Nabataean site. The Byzantine town, which spread over c.10.5 ha, included a crowded residential area and four churches: an apsidal church in the centre of the town, another on its eastern side, and two others to the north

³⁶³ Baly 1935; Colt 1962. ³⁶⁴ Kraemer 1958.

³⁶⁵ For summaries of these excavations, see Negev 1986, 1993a, b, 1997.

³⁶⁶ Negev 1988; Erickson-Gini 2010, 83–7.

³⁶⁷ Tsafirir 1988 *et al.*; Tsafirir and Holum 1988.

³⁶⁸ Erickson-Gini 2010, 250–5. ³⁶⁹ Urman 2004. ³⁷⁰ Negev 1977, 1986.

³⁷¹ Hirschfeld 1997a, 39. ³⁷² Negev 1993b; Shereshevski 1991, 20–36.

³⁷³ Negev 1993a; Shereshevski 1991, 36–48.

and south of the settlement. The northern church, which has been thoroughly excavated, was a pilgrim's church located within a close compound, perhaps a monastery.³⁷⁴

Shivta, south-east of Rehovot, is the best-preserved ancient settlement in the Negev (Fig. 4.15). Extending over an area of c.8 ha amidst large agricultural fields, this enclosed settlement included three apsidal churches, a large central water reservoir, a number of spacious residential houses built around central courtyards, and several wine presses on its outer periphery.³⁷⁵ The site was preserved with only minimal looting of stones as it was located off the main roads, and after its abandonment in the tenth or eleventh century it was not frequently visited.

Nessana, the western settlement in the region is particularly famous for its papyrus archive discovered in the course of the early excavations at the site. The settlement, extending over an area of c.17 ha consisted of two parts: the upper section, which included the Byzantine fort, two churches, a small monastery, and a residential quarter on the southern slope, and a lower section in the plain along wadi Nessana, in which two additional apsidal churches were discovered³⁷⁶ (Fig. 4.16).

The extensive excavations at the Negev Highlands towns provide the basis for a closer observation of the fate of these large settlements during the Early Islamic period. The published reports show considerable diversity in the time of demise and abandonment of sites. While A. Negev's conclusion on Mamshit was that the town was abandoned well before the Arab conquest,³⁷⁷ and that 'Avdat was deserted shortly after the conquest,³⁷⁸ the archaeological evidence from Nessana and Shivta points toward a clear continuity up to the ninth or tenth century.³⁷⁹

The recent re-evaluation of the Byzantine and Early Islamic pottery sequences from the Negev suggests that in most sites settlement continued well into the Early Islamic period, and that settlements were not abandoned after the Arab conquest.³⁸⁰ For example, the ceramic evidence from Mamshit shows that the site was inhabited throughout the seventh century and was not abandoned before the conquest.³⁸¹ A large number of Arabic inscriptions found on the walls and columns of the eastern church show that the site was still inhabited in the eighth century, although the nature of the settlement is not clear.³⁸² 'Avdat was not destroyed and abandoned around 630, as has been previously claimed,³⁸³ and evidence of continuity of settlement during

³⁷⁴ Tsafirir and Holum 1988; Tsafirir *et al.* 1988; Shereshevski 1991, 94–102

³⁷⁵ Segal 1983; Negev 1993*d*; Shereshevski 1991, 61–82; Hirschfeld 2003.

³⁷⁶ Colt 1962; Shereshevski 1991, 49–60; for the recent excavations, see Urman 2004.

³⁷⁷ Negev 1988, 7–8. ³⁷⁸ Negev 1993*a*, 1165.

³⁷⁹ Baly 1935; Colt 1962, 21–4; Urman 2004, 105–10, 2008.

³⁸⁰ Magness 2003. ³⁸¹ Magness 2003, 188–90.

³⁸² These have not yet been published. ³⁸³ Negev 1997, 9.



Fig. 4.15 Shivta: town plan (after Hirschfeld 2003, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

the seventh century has been provided by recent excavations. The destruction of 'Avdat might have been caused by an earthquake in the middle of the seventh century, but certainly not by a violent conquest.³⁸⁴

The excavations at Rehovot show continuity of the settlement into the eighth century. Although the latest phase of occupation has been ascribed to squatters, and it has been suggested that the town had already been abandoned

³⁸⁴ Erickson-Gini 2010, 255.



Fig. 4.16 Nessana: settlement plan (courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society).

in the early eighth century,³⁸⁵ it seems that the occupation continued at least until the middle of this century.³⁸⁶

Firm evidence for long-term continuity of settlement comes from Shivta and Nessana. The fragmentary report of the excavations in Shivta³⁸⁷ shows that the occupation of the site continued uninterrupted from Byzantine to Early Islamic times. The churches were still in use during the eighth century, and burials within them continued at least until 679, as is evident from the latest burial inscription from the northern church.³⁸⁸ Architectural surveys at Shivta show no evidence of a violent destruction, but of a gradual abandonment which left the buildings and their architectural remains *in situ*.³⁸⁹ The accumulated evidence suggests that the town was continuously inhabited until the

³⁸⁵ Tsafirir *et al.* 1988, 8; Tsafirir and Holum 1988.

³⁸⁶ Magness 2003, 191–4.

³⁸⁷ Baly 1935; see also Negev 1993c.

³⁸⁸ Negev 1981, 47–67, 1993c, 1406–7.

³⁸⁹ Segal 1983; Hirschfeld 2003.

tenth century.³⁹⁰ A humble mosque was installed near Shivta's southern church, bearing witness to the penetration of Islamic elements into the local population.³⁹¹ It seems that both church and mosque functioned side by side during the Early Islamic period. A number of inscriptions in Arabic from the eighth and ninth centuries have been found on the walls and columns of the mosque.³⁹² A recent study of these inscriptions reveals extensive references to Qur'anic verses, and a mention of the mosque and nearby water reservoirs in a dedication inscription.³⁹³

The extensive excavations at Nessana have provided further evidence of the continuity of settlement. It seems that the most extensive construction of churches took place during the sixth and seventh centuries, with the intensification of the Christian presence at the site.³⁹⁴ It has been suggested that intensive building activity was conducted at Nessana at the beginning of the seventh century, and that the settlement continued until the mid-eighth century.³⁹⁵ However, recent excavations and the re-evaluation of previous finds show that Nessana was not abandoned in the eighth century, but continued to flourish until the ninth and tenth centuries.³⁹⁶ Excavations in the lower section of the site have revealed the central church—one of the largest apsidal churches in the Negev (45 × 37 m), which was constructed at the end of the seventh century, and was in use until the ninth century. The nave of this church was paved with marble slabs, some of them containing Greek inscriptions. The church complex included another chapel to its south and a baptistery on the northern side. Arabic inscriptions containing Qur'anic verses, prayers, and oaths were inscribed on some of the floor slabs. These have been dated to the early ninth century, and probably represent its last phase of use. As no deliberate destruction is evident in the church, the inscriptions might indicate shared use by Christians and Muslims, as has been found in Shivta. The construction of the central church before the end of the seventh century emphasizes the central role of Christianity in Nessana following the Arab conquest. Construction of churches continued in the seventh and perhaps even in the early eighth centuries, and some of them functioned throughout the eighth and ninth centuries. In addition, residential areas containing prosperous buildings were constructed in the sixth–eighth centuries and continued at least until the end of the ninth century. Some of these buildings were renovated at the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century.

A large residential building has been excavated in the south-western section of the upper town. It was constructed in the mid-eighth century and was in use until the mid-ninth century. Another large complex has been revealed to the south of the Church of St Mary (the southern church), and it has been suggested that this

³⁹⁰ Magness 2003, 185–7.

³⁹¹ Avni 1994, 90–1.

³⁹² Baly 1935.

³⁹³ Moor (forthcoming).

³⁹⁴ Urman 2004.

³⁹⁵ Colt 1962, 20–5; Kraemer 1958, 31–5.

³⁹⁶ Urman 2004, 2008; Magness 2003, 180–5.

was the residence of the church's priest and his assistants. Two phases of occupation have been identified in the building—the first from the end of the sixth to the end of the seventh century, and the second from the early eighth to the ninth century.

The picture emerging from the large-scale excavations in the Negev towns shows considerable diversity between sites. The Arab conquest left no impact on the settlements,³⁹⁷ and changes occurred as a long and gradual process, with regional variability between the eastern and western Negev Highlands. The eastern settlements, particularly 'Avdat and Mamshit, had already declined by the late seventh century, while Shivta and Nessana in the west were inhabited until the tenth century. This regional variability might be explained by the different pattern of earthquakes in this region: 'Avdat and Mamshit were closer to the Rift Valley, an area more liable to severe earthquakes, while Shivta and Nessana were less affected by earthquakes as they were located farther to the west of the Rift Valley.

Small villages and farms

Archaeological surveys in the Negev Highlands have revealed an extensive network of villages and farmsteads which were established at the end of the sixth century, inhabited for about 300 years, and abandoned by the ninth or tenth centuries.³⁹⁸

A typical village containing six structures and surrounded by agricultural terraces and dams has been excavated at **Nahal La'ana**, in the central Negev Highlands.³⁹⁹ Its main building contained nine rooms around a central open courtyard. A round *mihrab* was constructed in one of the rooms at a later stage of its occupation to convert it into a small indoor mosque. The pottery, coins, and radiocarbon dating from this building indicate that the structure was in use between the seventh and ninth centuries.⁴⁰⁰ Another farm has been excavated at **Nahal Mitnan**, in the western Negev Highlands.⁴⁰¹ It included a farmhouse surrounded by agricultural installations. The pottery and coins found dated it to the seventh and eighth centuries, with no clear indication whether it was established before or after the Arab conquest.⁴⁰² An inscribed glass weight bearing the name of 'Abd al-Malik b. Yazid, the Abbasid governor of Egypt in 751–753 was found in one of the rooms.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁷ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 5.

³⁹⁸ See Haiman 1995, Avni 1992, 1996, Rosen 1994, Rosen and Avni 1997, Nahlieli *et al.* 1996, Ben-Michael *et al.* 2004.

³⁹⁹ Nahlieli *et al.* 1996.

⁴⁰⁰ Magness 2003, 148–9.

⁴⁰¹ Haiman 1995, 39.

⁴⁰² Magness 2003, 154.

⁴⁰³ Lester 1990.

Another agricultural village of the same period was excavated in the upper part of **Nahal Besor**, near Sede Boqer⁴⁰⁴ (Fig. 4.17). It included five residential buildings spread over an area of 0.8 ha and consisting of several square or rectangular rooms built around an open courtyard. Two large units (areas A and C) have been partly excavated,⁴⁰⁵ and another small building (area B) was located between these units. A standing stone was found in one of the rooms in this building (room 14) positioned against the wall opposite the entrance. It seems that this room was used as a small pagan shrine, in which a local deity in the form of a standing stone was worshipped. Several Arabic inscriptions have been found near the site, one of them mentioning the name of Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik.⁴⁰⁶ The settlement was surrounded by agricultural fields and installations, animal pens, and threshing floors.

One of the largest Early Islamic villages in the central Negev Highlands was found at **Sede Boqer**. It contained c.80 dwellings spread out on the wadi banks and slopes facing the Zin plain (Fig. 4.18). An open mosque was constructed on the top of a nearby hill.⁴⁰⁷ It consisted of a rectangular prayer hall (5 × 12 m) with a square courtyard in front of it, facing to the south with a slight alignment to the east. A round *mihrab* was installed in the southern wall of the hall. The walls of the mosque were originally no higher than 1 metre. Hundreds of Arabic inscriptions incised on the local bedrock have been found in and around the mosque, most of them predating the time of its construction. An inscription dated to 782 was found directly under the walls of the mosque, indicating the *terminus post quem* of its construction.⁴⁰⁸

The nearby village was excavated by Nevo, who interpreted the architectural remains as cultic installations used by the local nomads of the Negev during the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴⁰⁹ On the basis of the style of buildings and the numerous inscriptions found around the mosque, he suggested that the Sede Boqer site was a regional cultic centre in the period of transformation from pagan to Muslim society. The site and its findings were used to support a revisionist approach to the development of Islam, which suggested that formative Islam evolved only at a very late stage, not before the eighth century.⁴¹⁰ Nevo's interpretation of the Sede Boqer site has been strongly rejected by most archaeologists working in the Negev. The similarity of the architectural components at Sede Boqer to other neighbouring villages and its well-defined agricultural features ruled out the possibility of a main cultic centre in which all the structures had a ritual function. The installations and pottery finds which were explained by Nevo as having cultic significance have in fact a clear

⁴⁰⁴ Ben Michael *et al.* 2004.

⁴⁰⁵ Ben Michael *et al.* 2004, 109*.

⁴⁰⁶ Sharon 1999, 174.

⁴⁰⁷ Cohen 1981, 62–7 on sites 92 (the settlement) and 94 (the mosque); Avni 1994, 88–9.

⁴⁰⁸ Sharon 1990, 9*; Nevo 1985, 5–9, 22–4.

⁴⁰⁹ Nevo 1985, 1991.

⁴¹⁰ Nevo and Koren 2003.

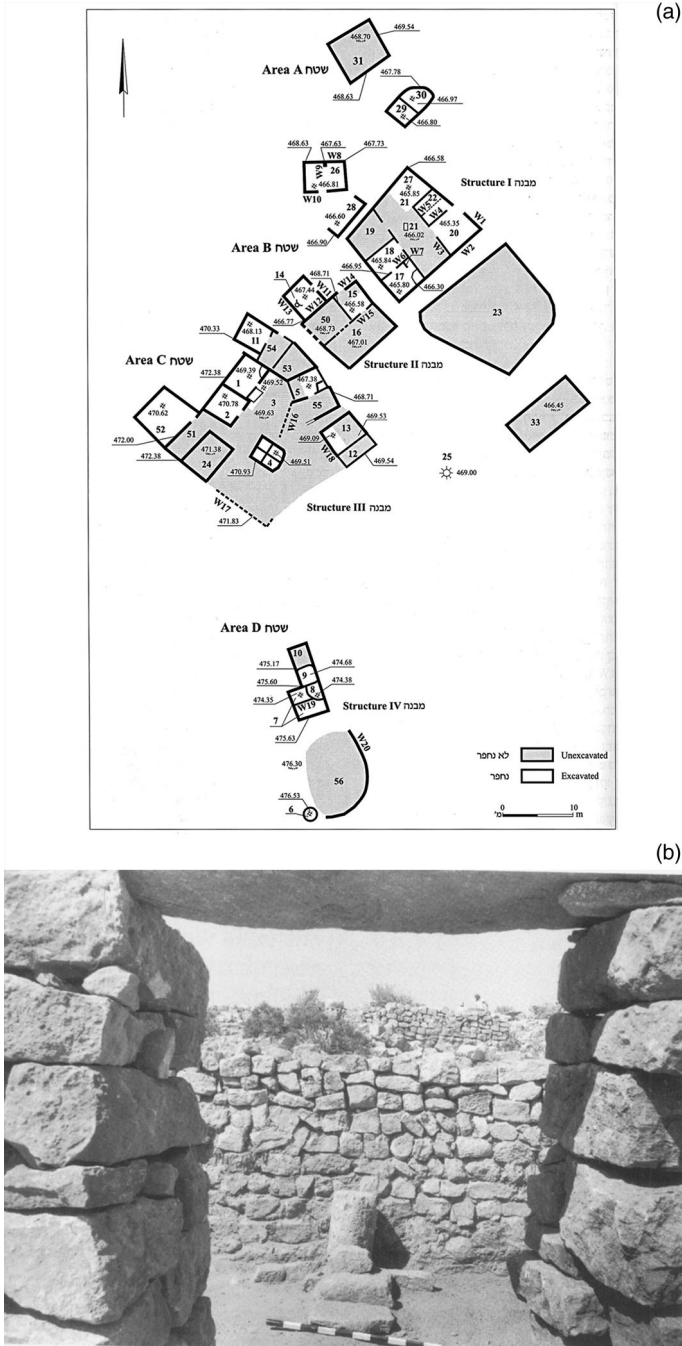


Fig. 4.17 Nahal Besor: a. map of the settlement; b. photograph of a standing stone (Ben Michael *et al.* 2004, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

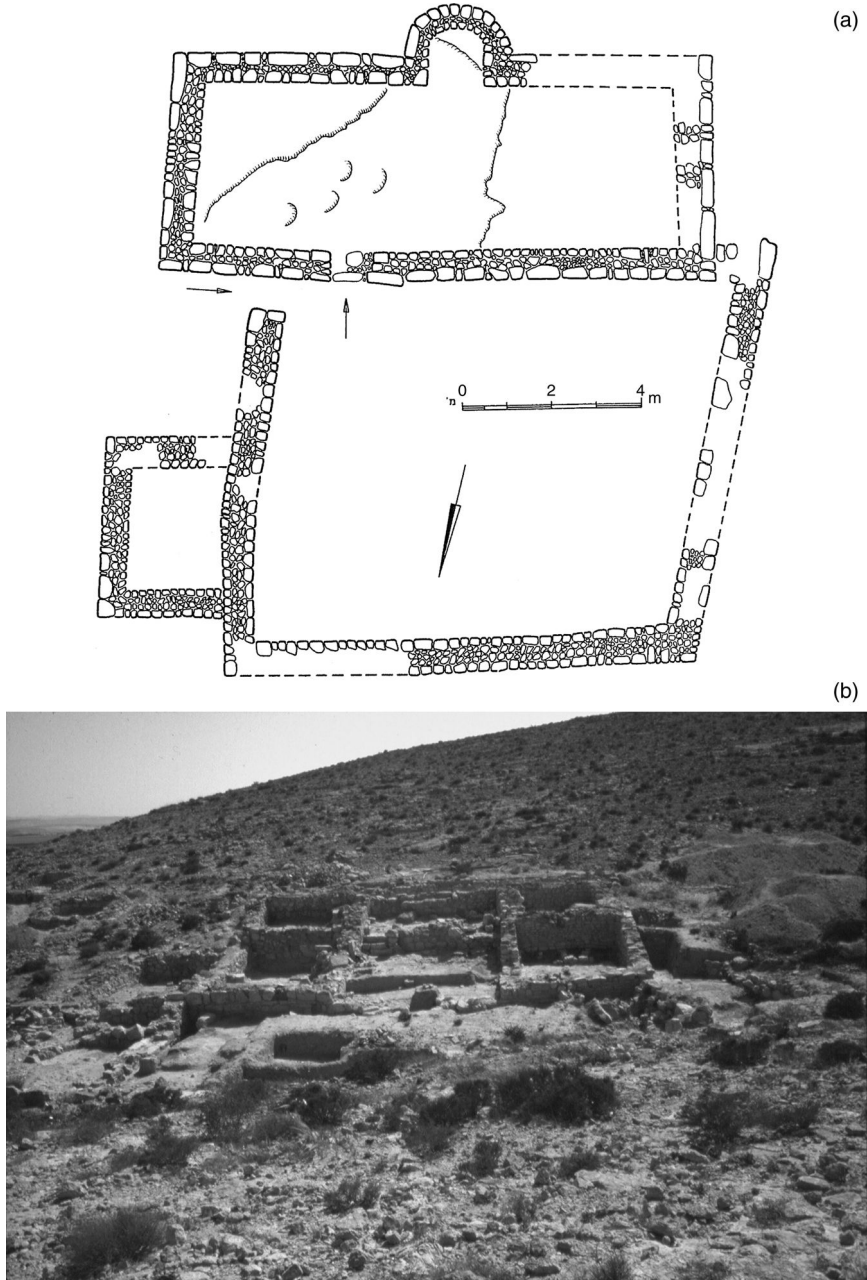


Fig. 4.18 Sede Boqer: a. plan of the mosque; b. a building in the Early Islamic settlement.

domestic or agricultural use.⁴¹¹ The pottery, coins, and inscriptions found at Sede Boqer show that the settlement was inhabited between the late seventh and ninth centuries.⁴¹² The mosque was constructed in the late eighth century, when most of the dwellings had been fully developed and inhabited for about a century.

Encampments of pastoral nomads

In addition to the numerous villages and farmsteads of the central and western Negev Highlands, hundreds of nomadic and semi-nomadic encampments have been explored on the southern fringes of the Negev Highlands.⁴¹³ Two of these sites, located south-west of Makhtesh Ramon, have been excavated to reveal a similar chronological sequence to that of the agricultural settlements to their north.⁴¹⁴ The Nahal 'Oded site extended over an area of 1 ha and contained several clusters of round and elliptical structures, each built from a stone wall up to 1 m high (Fig. 4.19). A large stone stele (0.8 m high and 0.6 m wide), flanked by two smaller stones, was installed near one of the round structures. Ash stains, organic matter, shards, and small fragments of glass found nearby indicate that this area functioned as a small cultic shrine in the village. Another installation of stelae was found on the top of a low ridge near the encampment. It contained three standing stones facing the slope to the north of the site. It seems that these cultic installations follow the long tradition of the desert standing stones common in the Negev, Sinai, and northern Arabia.⁴¹⁵

A small cemetery was found nearby on a higher terrace. It contained several simple shaft graves dug in the ground, oriented east-west, with the bodies of the deceased laid on their side and facing south, in a typical Islamic burial position.

An open-air mosque was constructed on a prominent hill south-west of the settlement, but unlike other mosques in the Negev Highlands, it did not include a round *mihrab* niche, but three standing stones located at the south-eastern wall, opposite to its entrance.⁴¹⁶

A similar site was excavated near Har 'Oded, to the east of Nahal 'Oded. It included 16 round and elliptical structures, the remains of a tent encampment, and an open mosque located on the top of a hill near the settlement.⁴¹⁷

The finds and radiocarbon dating from both sites indicate that the occupation started before the Arab conquest, sometime towards the end of the sixth century, and the sites were inhabited on a seasonal basis until the ninth

⁴¹¹ Haiman 1995, 49–50; Magness 2003, 139; Avni 2008.

⁴¹² Magness 2003, 140. ⁴¹³ Avni 1992, 1996; Rosen 1994.

⁴¹⁴ Avni 1996, 33–54; Rosen and Avni 1997. ⁴¹⁵ Patrich 1990; Avner 1999–2000.

⁴¹⁶ Avni 1994, 84, 1996, 40. ⁴¹⁷ Avni 1996, 41–4; Rosen and Avni 1997, 42–56.

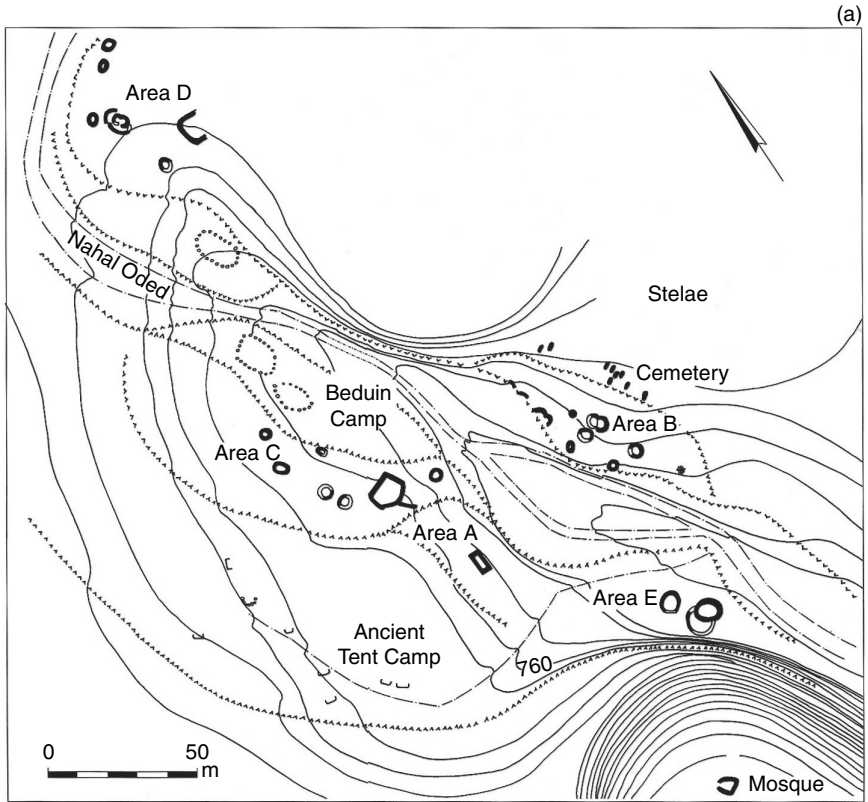


Fig. 4.19. Nahal 'Oded: a. plan of the settlement; b. the open-air mosque.

century.⁴¹⁸ The Oded sites represent the typical nomadic seasonal encampments that dominated the fringes of the permanent settlements in the Negev Highlands. In contradiction to previously accepted concepts of animosity between nomads and settlers,⁴¹⁹ the settlement pattern of the Negev Highlands presents a mutually beneficial relationship between the two segments of local society, emphasizing the dependence of the nomadic population on its neighbouring settler villagers.⁴²⁰ The finds point towards a stable coexistence between nomads and settlers during Byzantine and Early Islamic times.

The agricultural regime

The first Western travellers in the Negev during the second half of the nineteenth century were impressed by the wealth of ancient agricultural remains in this arid region.⁴²¹ With the intensification of archaeological research in the Negev, the ancient agricultural remains have been the subject of several comprehensive studies.⁴²² The systematic survey of the Negev Highlands in the 1980s further contributed to the knowledge of the ancient agricultural remains.⁴²³ The settlements of the Negev Highlands were surrounded by extensive networks of agricultural fields. These consisted of tens of thousands of hectares of cultivated plots dammed by stone-built terraces and fed by channels collecting run-off water from the hillsides and occasional floodwater from nearby wadis. The fields appear in different forms: some marked out by small dams across narrow stream beds, others consisting of large farmsteads delimited by formidable stone walls (Fig. 4.20).

Alongside the archaeological studies, the hydrological, geomorphological, and botanical aspects of the ancient agricultural fields have been thoroughly researched. These studies attempted to understand the mechanism of conveying water to the fields, the processes by which arable soil was accumulated in the fields, and the nature of the agricultural crops grown in them.⁴²⁴ The discovery of the Nessana papyri provided a most important source for the understanding of the social organization of the agricultural systems, the size of the agricultural fields, the division of water rights, and the types of crops grown.⁴²⁵

The traditional dating of the agricultural systems was based on pottery finds from the fields and their association with nearby settlements. Thus it was proposed that their initial invention be dated to the first century as part of the

⁴¹⁸ Rosen and Avni 1997, 85–6; Magness 2003, 164–7.

⁴¹⁹ e.g. in Reifenberg 1955. ⁴²⁰ Avni 1996.

⁴²¹ e.g. Woolley and Lawrence 1914–1915, 32–6.

⁴²² Mayerson 1960; Even Ari *et al.* 1982; Negev 1986, 130–45.

⁴²³ See in particular the work of Rubin 1990 and the surveys by Avni 1992, Baumgarten 2004, Haiman 1986, 1991, 1993, 1999, Lender 1990, Rosen 1994.

⁴²⁴ See Even-Ari *et al.* 1982. ⁴²⁵ Kraemer 1958; Rubin 1990, 73–100.



Fig. 4.20 The Negev Highlands: agricultural fields.

Nabataean cultures, their vast expansion to the Byzantine period, and their decline to the Early Islamic period.⁴²⁶

The revised chronology, based on the dating of depositional stages of loess in the terraces through optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) analysis, dated this innovation to the third or fourth century, and proved a continuous sequence of use in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods until the tenth century.⁴²⁷

The 'Arabah Valley and the hinterland of Early Islamic Ayla

The settlement pattern in the 'Arabah Valley, the southern section of the Rift Valley between the Dead Sea and the Eilat/'Aqaba Gulf, is fundamentally different from the one revealed in the Negev Highlands. While the Negev Highlands show a clear pattern of continuity between the Byzantine and the Early Islamic period, the 'Arabah had witnessed a new type of settlement introduced into the region in the eighth century. The settlement sites of the 'Arabah were characterized by architectural and technological elements not found in the Negev Highlands and the northern Negev, which suggests that they were either influenced or established by a non-local population. The residential buildings were arranged in long rows of rooms facing open courtyards

⁴²⁶ Negev 1986, 145; Rubin 1990, 73–127.

⁴²⁷ Avni *et al.* 2013.

and their walls were usually constructed from mud bricks and based on a stone foundation.

The 'Arabah sites consisted of two main types: small villages which contained clusters of simple rectangular buildings, and farmsteads which included a residential area surrounded by intensive agricultural fields. The irrigation of the fields presented a different technology compared with that of the Negev Highlands. It was not based on the collection of run-off from hillsides, but on the direct supply of water from aquifers through long underground water tunnels known as *qanats*.⁴²⁸ These tunnels, some of them several kilometres long, are visible as a line of vertical holes dug in the ground. These were used as manholes when digging the tunnels. The *qanat* system of irrigation, which originated in Iran during the first millennium BC, was introduced to other areas of the Near East and North Africa mainly in the Late Byzantine and the Early Islamic period.⁴²⁹ In the Jordan Valley and the 'Arabah it is clearly associated with the newly established settlements of the eighth century, and it supported the development of large-scale agriculture in the extreme desert conditions of this region.

Early Islamic settlements in the 'Arabah have been discovered in two main concentrations: in the northern 'Arabah, in the area of Hazeva and 'Ein Yahav, and in the southern 'Arabah, in Yotvata and 'Evrone, as part of the hinterland of Ayla-'Aqaba.

Five large Early Islamic sites were discovered in the northern 'Arabah, and one of them, at **Nahal Shahaq**, near the 'Ein Hazeva spring, has been excavated.⁴³⁰ The settlement consisted of ten rectangular buildings, all built of mud bricks on stone foundations. Finds included pottery, coins, lead ornaments, metal artefacts, stone and wooden vessels, and remains of textiles, mats, and ropes. A stamped bulla bearing an impression of an official seal with the name 'by Yazid' was found in a dump near one of the structures. The site was settled between the late seventh and ninth centuries, and it seems that its inhabitants had a mixed economy of agriculture and herding, cultivating the nearby arable areas of 'Ein Hazeva.⁴³¹

Further south, at **'Ein Yahav** ('Ein Zurayb), a different settlement has been partly excavated. It consisted of a large rectangular building (27 × 17 m), perhaps a farmstead, with a row of square rooms facing an open courtyard, and additional rooms to the north of it. The finds included pottery from the eighth–tenth centuries, including types of 'Mahesh Ware' and steatite stone vessels common in southern Jordan and northern Arabia.⁴³² Numerous Arabic inscriptions found scratched on the walls of buildings at the site have been dated to the eighth century.⁴³³ The settlement was surrounded by large agricultural

⁴²⁸ Porath 1995, Avner and Magness 1998, 46–9. ⁴²⁹ English 1968, Lightfoot 2000.

⁴³⁰ Israel *et al.* 1995. ⁴³¹ Magness 2003, 169–70.

⁴³² Porath 1995, 246–8. On the 'Mahesh Ware', see Whitcomb 1989.

⁴³³ Sharon 2004, 159–78. The attribution of the inscriptions to the abandonment phase of the site does not correlate with the finds which show occupation until the 9th and 10th centuries.

areas and a network of six *qanats*, all dug in the alluvial ground down to the underground aquifer.

The settlements of the southern 'Arabah were directly associated with the Early Islamic town of Ayla which acted as a regional centre in between the southern Negev and northern Arabia.⁴³⁴ Byzantine Aila, developed as an administrative and commercial centre following the transfer of the Roman tenth legion from Jerusalem to the south in the late third century, became a hub for the pilgrim traffic to Mount Sinai.

The Islamic *misr*, located south of the Byzantine settlement, was established by 'Uthman b. 'Affan in the middle of the seventh century, and Ayla continued to flourish throughout the Early Islamic period.

The site, which has been thoroughly excavated, consisted of a walled rectangular compound (165 × 140 m), containing four gates located in the centre of each wall and 24 round towers⁴³⁵ (Fig. 4.21). Two main arteries crossed the compound, dividing it into four quadrants, with a pavilion (A) at the central crossing. A monumental inscription from the eighth century, mentioning a verse from the Qur'an, was found near the 'Egyptian Gate'. The earliest stages of the settlement have been dated to the seventh and eighth centuries. During the ninth and tenth centuries the streets were narrowed and flanked with shops. A congregational mosque (F) was constructed in the north-east section of the town in the second half of the eighth century. The building had three entrances and possibly a minaret in its north-west corner. Most of the excavated residential buildings in the town were constructed in the eighth and ninth centuries and were expanded throughout the tenth century. A hoard of North African coins from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries attests to the wealth of the town and its international connections at this time. Ayla was abandoned in the second half of the eleventh century, probably following the 1068 earthquake.

The hinterland of Early Islamic Ayla consisted of a number of villages, farmsteads, and mining sites. Surveys and excavations in the Eilat mountains, Be'er Ora, and the Timna Valley have revealed a number of mining sites which yielded copper and precious metals.⁴³⁶ Several large agricultural farms, cultivated through the use of *qanats*, were found along the southern 'Arabah Valley.

A typical farmstead of this type has been excavated in 'Evrona, 12 km north of Ayla.⁴³⁷ The farm was established in the early eighth century, and was in use until the tenth century, showing several stages of occupation. It consisted of three buildings, the main one (26 × 29 m) with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms. All walls were built from mud bricks on stone foundations. One of the rooms, constructed in the early stage of the settlement, was converted into a domestic mosque in its second stage of use, with the addition of a shallow rectangular niche in its southern wall.⁴³⁸ A large reservoir was

⁴³⁴ Whitcomb 1994, 2006; Petersen 2005, 50–3. ⁴³⁵ Whitcomb 1994, 1995b.

⁴³⁶ Avner and Magness 1998. ⁴³⁷ Porath 1995, 251–5.

⁴³⁸ Similar to the mosque found in the farm at Nahal La'ana—see above, p. 267.

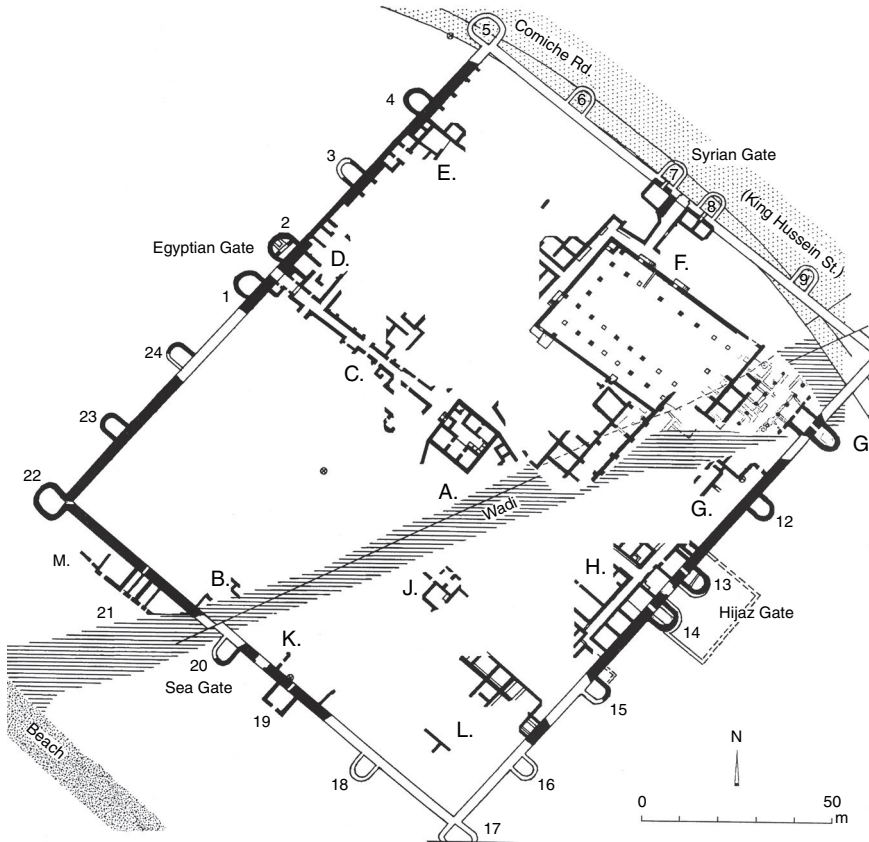


Fig. 4.21 Ayla: map of the settlement (courtesy of Donald Whitcomb).

constructed near the farmstead, and an extensive system of *qanats* irrigated the fields which extended to the north and south of the site. The agricultural terraced fields around the farm, covering *c.*750 ha, were irrigated by *qanats* connected to a well located 3 km to the north of the settlement.

The plant remains found in the farmstead and fields included dates, olives, and peach stones, which shows the diversity of the crops. The large-scale agricultural production at the site is also evidenced by an Arabic inscription from the ninth century which mentions a list of names and the sums paid for their labour, perhaps in the fields.

Another large site which yielded evidence for an extensive Early Islamic settlement is *Yotvata*, *c.*30 km north of Ayla. The site, located near one of the few permanent water sources of the 'Arabah Valley, was inhabited in Late Roman times, when a fortress and nearby village were established at the end of the third century. The fort was abandoned in the fourth century and replaced by a small village in the Byzantine period. The settlement was intensified in

the seventh or eighth century with the construction of additional buildings at the site, among them a large square structure (35 × 35 m) identified as a farmstead or a caravanserai, surrounded by additional buildings, including a small bathhouse.⁴³⁹ The Roman fort was also resettled during this period, and a number of residential units were constructed within its walls.⁴⁴⁰

The largest system of *qanats* in the southern 'Arabah was found around this settlement. It consisted of more than twenty tunnels covering an area of several square km and irrigating the fields around Yotvata. The settlement functioned between the eighth and tenth centuries, forming part of Ayla's hinterland.

Early Islamic villages of a different type have been surveyed and excavated in the western side of the 'Arabah Valley, at the foot of the Eilat Mountains. Six villages have been found in this region, three located in the southern 'Arabah (Be'er Ora, Nahal Shehoret, and Eilat), and three along the shore of the Eilat/Aqaba Gulf (Wadi Taba, Wadi Tweiba, and Wadi Merakh).

The **Eilat** settlement contained over thirty square and rectangular structures, arranged in several clusters⁴⁴¹ (Fig. 4.22). The settlement was established in the eighth century and was inhabited until the tenth or eleventh century. Four residential complexes have been excavated, each consisting of one to three rooms arranged on an east–west axis and opening onto a common courtyard. Various storage and cooking installations were found near the buildings. The architecture shows the rural character of the village, and the finds indicate a mixed economy of agriculture, herding, and mining.

Apart from agricultural villages, the hinterland of Ayla contained a large number of sites associated with local mining activities. Copper production areas have been found in Be'er Ora and Nahal 'Amram, and two gold production sites are known in the Eilat Mountains.⁴⁴² The quarrying of precious metals and particularly the production of gold were associated with similar production centres in northern and central Arabia.⁴⁴³

In **Be'er Ora** several clusters of sites have been surveyed and excavated, providing evidence that the nomadic population of this area was engaged in animal husbandry and mining activities. One of the sites, scattered over a large area to the north and south of modern Be'er Ora, contained a number of round and oval structures similar in style to the ones found in Nahal 'Oded (see above, pp. 271–3).⁴⁴⁴ Four structures have been excavated to reveal scant finds from the eighth to the tenth centuries. A small open-air mosque has been found nearby, and another mosque has been located near a mining camp not far from the settlement.⁴⁴⁵

⁴³⁹ Porath 1995, 249–51; Avner 2008, 1709.

⁴⁴⁰ Davies and Magness 2008.

⁴⁴¹ Avner 1998, 105–6; Avner and Magness 1998, 40.

⁴⁴² Avner and Magness 1998; Avner 2008.

⁴⁴³ Morony 2002, pp. xvi–xviii.

⁴⁴⁴ Israel 2009.

⁴⁴⁵ Sharon *et al.* 1996; see also below, p. 284 on the interpretations of religious transformation that have been connected to this mosque.

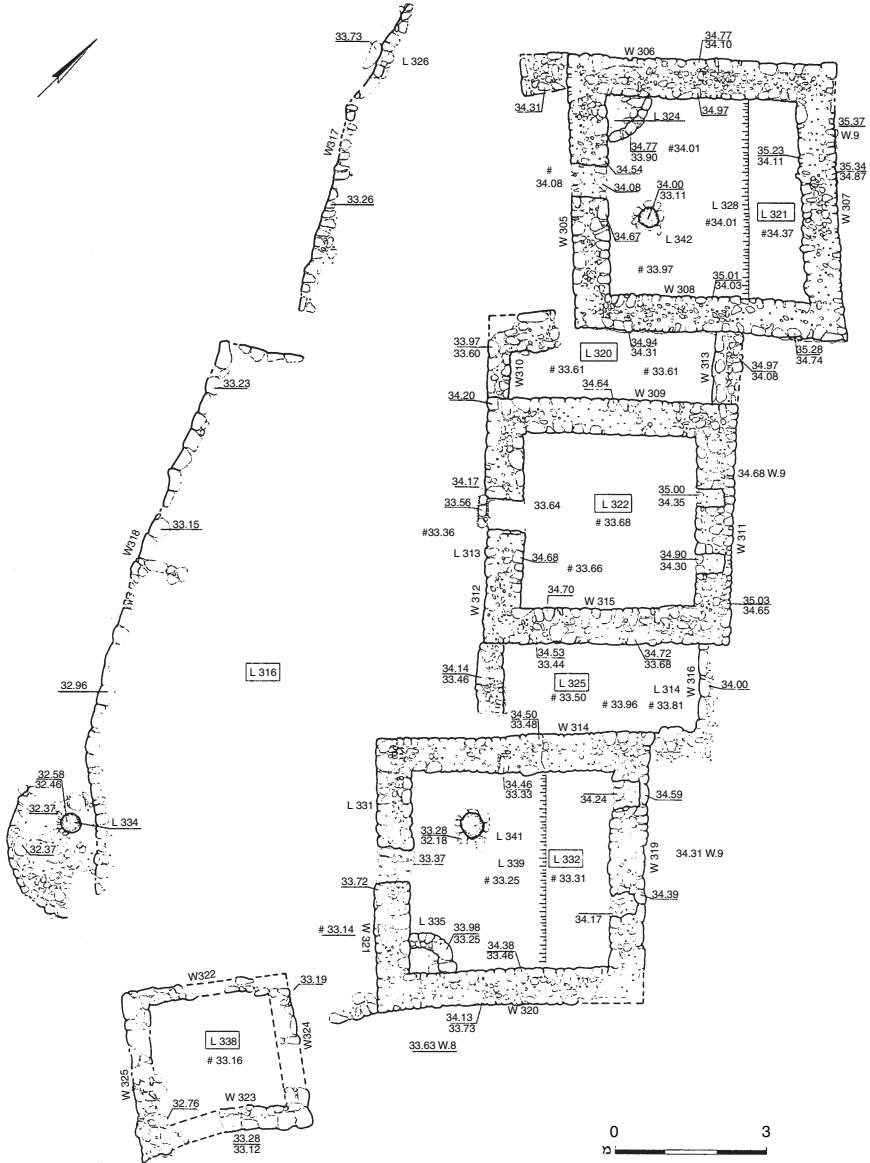


Fig. 4.22 Eilat-Eilot: plan of a section of the settlement (Avner 1998, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).



Fig. 4.23 Wadi Tawahin: gold production site (courtesy of Uzi Avner).

A gold production site was discovered at **Wadi Tawahin** in the Eilat Mountains. It consisted of round structures with an abundance of grinding stones and installations within them⁴⁴⁶ (Fig. 4.23).

Archaeological findings from all the settlements in the southern ‘Arabah conform to a similar chronological framework. They were established in the late seventh or early eighth century, contemporaneously with the *misr* at Ayla, and were inhabited until the tenth or eleventh century, forming an integral part of its hinterland. It seems that the variety of sites—large farmsteads supported by extensive agricultural areas and clusters of small villages and encampments that were based on animal husbandry, mining, and limited-scale agriculture—reflect two different settlement systems. The establishment of the farmsteads was a pre-planned government-supported action in order to create an agricultural and industrial hinterland for the newly established Islamic town, while the dispersed villages emerged as an outcome of the foundation of Ayla, and reflect the process of sedentarization of the local nomads.

⁴⁴⁶ Avner 2008, 1710.

Nomads and settlers in the Negev: a mutual coexistence

The diverse settlement pattern revealed in the Negev, consisting of a network of large villages, farmsteads, and nomadic encampments, provides an opportunity to consider the relationship between settlers and nomads in this area during Byzantine and Early Islamic times. Different approaches to nomad-sedentist interaction in the fringe areas of the Near East may be classified under two main configurations: ongoing conflict and symbiotic coexistence. The first approach, which envisages a continuous battle between nomadic and sedentary populations, was traditionally adopted by many scholars. It attributed the demise of urban and rural settlements in marginal regions to violent attacks waged by nomads. The Arab conquest was viewed as another cycle of this endless struggle between the desert and the sown.⁴⁴⁷ The second, much enhanced by modern anthropological studies, emphasizes coexistence and symbiosis between nomads and sedentists.⁴⁴⁸ It claims that the balance between the two societies was much in favour of the sedentist communities, and that nomads were dependent for their very existence on nearby rural and urban communities. The nomads of the periphery would never have had enough power to enter into direct conflict with the sedentary population. The evidence from the Negev strongly supports this latter paradigm of a mutually beneficial relationship and coexistence. There were perhaps occasional local clashes between nomads and settlers, but these had no effect on the long-term relationship between the two communities sharing the same areas.⁴⁴⁹

Early studies on the relationship between nomads and settlers in the Near East following the rise of Islam pointed to a dramatic increase in pastoralism in the marginal areas, and even defined specific regions in which the herders of the desert predominated.⁴⁵⁰ In contradiction to these arguments the evidence of the Negev shows that the pastoralists living on the fringes of settled societies were absolutely dependent on their nearby sedentary communities. This relationship, which developed in the Byzantine period, continued to exist after the Arab conquest, with no evidence of a dramatic increase in pastoralism or its penetration into areas farther north.⁴⁵¹ The evidence from the Negev seems to reflect the situation in other areas of the Near East during this period. In northern and central Arabia, for example, urban communities continued to exist side by side with pastoral nomads living on their fringes.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁷ E.g. Reifenberg 1955, Muir 1898, Hitti 1951, 22; see also Avni 1996, 75 for further references.

⁴⁴⁸ See Khazanov 1984, Marx 1967 for the Negev; Banning 1986 for southern Jordan; Barth 1973 for other areas of the Near East.

⁴⁴⁹ Avni 1996, 76. ⁴⁵⁰ See e.g. Morony 2002, p. xix and references there.

⁴⁵¹ Avni 1996, 78–83. ⁴⁵² Morony 2002, p. xxi.

The expansion of agricultural settlements into the southern and western Negev Highlands in the seventh and eighth centuries has been explained by two alternative models. Haiman has suggested that it was indicative of a designed settlement enterprise embarked upon by the Umayyad central government. This was done in order to reinforce the southern border of Palestine and to create a barrier of permanent agricultural settlements in peripheral regions.⁴⁵³ An alternative explanation, supported by the archaeological findings, suggests that the expansion of settlements was the outcome of internal regional processes associated with the complex relationships between settlers and nomads, and not a consequence of an outside intervention.⁴⁵⁴ Thus, the extensive network of agricultural and nomadic settlements in the southern and western Negev Highlands was the outcome of local interactions between the nomads and the settlers. Whereas during the Byzantine period the nomads supplied some of the meat consumption of the large permanent settlements, and provided a temporary labour force for these settlements, this fragile coexistence was weakened with the decline of the settlements of the eastern Negev. The Negev towns no longer provided the economic base for the subsistence of the nomadic tribes living on their fringes, which forced them to adopt agriculture as an alternative strategy for survival. The agricultural farms in the remote corners of the Negev Highlands were the product of the sedentarization of nomads and the adoption of agriculture.

Settlement growth in these regions was an outcome of the change in the delicate balance between settlers and nomads. The nomads had to settle and support their needs by agricultural production in order to survive. Thus, the preferred model of development and change in the Negev Highlands settlements is a bottom-up model, in which all changes were triggered by internal processes rather than by an external influence.⁴⁵⁵ The settled nomads copied the architecture and irrigation technology of the permanent settlements. Their newly established villages and farmsteads were inhabited between the seventh and the tenth centuries, and with the final collapse of the Negev settlement they were abandoned and not settled again until the modern period.

The process of change in the Negev Highlands was internal, gradual, and slow, and nowhere in the excavated sites is there evidence of an intervention from central government. This slow change is reflected also in the religious practices of the local population in the fringe areas, as will be shown in the next section.

The 'Arabah Valley went through a different process. The settlements there were supported by governmental resources and benefited from the growth of

⁴⁵³ Haiman 1995.

⁴⁵⁴ Avni 1996, 75–91; Rosen and Avni 1997, 87–91.

⁴⁵⁵ Avni 1996, 86–9. A similar model has been suggested for the transformation of the region in the 3rd and 4th centuries, triggered by internal processes rather than by an outside political intervention; see Erickson-Gini 2010.

Early Islamic Ayla. The intensification of production in the hinterland of Ayla was seen in the extensive agricultural farms with their vast fields, which were irrigated by the newly introduced *qanat* system. This was not an internally driven process, but a well-designed enterprise supported by the Islamic political powers, which also involved the introduction of a foreign population from northern and central Arabia. It was accompanied by a local process of sedentarization of nomads and the construction of new settlements that involved both pastoralism and small-scale agriculture, as has been revealed in the village of Eilot. Other settlements, like the one at Be'er Ora, were oriented towards mining activities rather than agriculture.

The transformation of cult: paganism, Christianity, and Islam

In contradiction to the common view, which proposes a rapid penetration by formative Islam into southern Palestine, the archaeological evidence from the Negev points towards a much slower process between the seventh and ninth centuries. This gradual transformation was isolated from the major geopolitical and religious turmoil in other areas of the Near East, and is considered here within various local and regional spheres.

The different religious affiliations of the Negev inhabitants in Byzantine and Early Islamic times are distinguishable through the archaeological record. The change from paganism and Christianity to Islam has clear regional patterns. While Christianity was formally introduced into the Negev towns during the Byzantine period, the ancient cultic traditions of stelae and standing stones were still practised in rural and nomadic areas. Churches and monasteries were constructed only in the Negev towns, and as no evidence of Christian practices has been revealed to date in the agricultural and pastoralist sites on the fringes, it seems that the impact of Christianity on this marginal population was minimal. Continuity of pagan cultic practices and idol worship among the inhabitants of small villages and nomadic encampments has been clearly demonstrated,⁴⁵⁶ and the discovery of a number of Early Islamic open-air mosques in the Negev indicates a process of a religious and cultic transformation.⁴⁵⁷ However, most of these mosques were established relatively late, when the settlements had long been in existence. For example, the mosque at Shivta was installed near the functioning southern church.⁴⁵⁸ It seems that the mosque was in use no earlier than the eighth century, and continued to function during the ninth and tenth centuries. The open-air mosque at Sede Boqer was constructed at the end of the eighth century,⁴⁵⁹ and the small indoor mosques at Nahal La'ana and 'Evrone represent a late stage of use, probably at the same time.

⁴⁵⁶ Avner 1999–2000.

⁴⁵⁷ Avni 1994.

⁴⁵⁸ Baly 1935; Avni 1994, 87–8.

⁴⁵⁹ Avni 1994, 88–9.

A clear indication for a transitional stage from the traditional stelae cult to the open-air mosques can be seen in the Nahal 'Oded site above (see, p. 278), where the stelae cultic installations were replaced by an open-air mosque with a standing stone in place of the *mihrab*. A similar transformation is evident at the Nahal Besor site: the standing stone in one of the dwellings probably shows continuity of an earlier desert cultic tradition, which was transferred to the open-air mosque found nearby at the Sede Boqer site.

Another open-air mosque, erroneously interpreted as representing an early Islamic religious transformation, was found in Be'er Ora in the southern 'Arabah.⁴⁶⁰ This mosque, no more than a marking on the ground with lines of stones, has in it two round niches facing to the south and to the east. It has been suggested that this structure constitutes an early open-air mosque in which the direction of the *mihrab* was converted from the eastern side to the southern side of the structure, which would make it the first find of a change in the direction of prayer in early Islamic religious practices.⁴⁶¹ However, excavations at the site have not been able to confirm this suggestion.⁴⁶² The fragmentary nature of the structure and the fact that it was constructed in a remote desert site should restrict any far-reaching conclusions based on this single find. It seems more plausible that this was another peripheral desert mosque, probably constructed no earlier than the second half of the eighth century and representing the local cultic traditions.

It seems that the transformation from the stelae cult of standing stones to the open-air mosques in the Negev indicates the gradual transition from the old pagan cultic traditions of the desert to formative Islamic religious practices. In contrast to Nevo's far-reaching interpretation of this process,⁴⁶³ the transition from Christian and pagan to Islamic rituals in the Negev should be considered within its local context. It seems that the religious transformation that evolved in the northern areas of Palestine and Syria gradually penetrated into the remote areas of the Negev towards the second half of the eighth century, and not in the early stages of the spread of Islam.

The evidence from the large Negev settlements shows a different pattern of transformation: during the fourth and fifth centuries the preceding Nabataean cult had been abandoned and replaced by massive church construction. As in other parts of Palestine and Jordan, this religious transformation was manifested in a predominance of Christian symbols. At the same time a number of Christian monks and missionaries spread the new faith among the pagan inhabitants of the Negev and Sinai.⁴⁶⁴ The impact of the Church in the Negev

⁴⁶⁰ Sharon *et al.* 1996.

⁴⁶¹ Sharon 1988, 230–3; see also on the reflections on this suggestion in Bashear 1991, who pointed to the possibility that the structure was used for prayer by both Christians and Muslims.

⁴⁶² Sharon *et al.* 1996. ⁴⁶³ Nevo 1985, 1991; Nevo and Koren 2003.

⁴⁶⁴ Most notable among them was St Hilarion, who was born in a small village near Gaza in 291; see Trimmingham 1979, 105–8, Mayerson 1963, Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004.

towns during the Byzantine period is attested particularly by the Nessana papyri.⁴⁶⁵ However, different patterns of religious affiliation distinguished the Negev towns from the nomadic sites on their periphery. While Christianity was dominant in the towns, it was almost non-existent among the nomads on the fringes, who continued to practise their millennia-old cult of standing stones.

The coming of Islam had no immediate impact on these cultic practices. Christian presence in the towns prevailed for at least another 150 years and, at Nessana and Shivta, as late as the ninth and tenth centuries. At the agricultural and pastoralist sites on the fringes the traditional standing stones were gradually replaced by open-air mosques. Both installations were similar in concept, but the standing stones faced a nearby hill, while the open-air mosque faced southwards. This transitional stage is clearly presented at Nahal 'Oded, where the stelae installations were replaced by an open-air mosque with a standing stone marking the *mihrab*, probably during the eighth century.

It seems that the change in shape and orientation of cultic installations was not the outcome of a profound religious change. The common characteristics of the ancient standing-stones cult and the open-air mosques cast doubts on the nomads' motivation to change their traditional cultic practices. In fact, it seems that the conversion of nomads to Islam did not signify a spiritual change in their pagan belief, as they continued to practise their time-honoured traditions.⁴⁶⁶

The continuity of Christian presence in the Negev towns resembles that found in other regions of Palestine and Jordan, and was not affected by the spread of Islam. The correlation between the open-air mosques and the standing-stones cult that links the nomadic population of the Negev to previous desert cultures—mainly the Nabataean—paves the way for a wider perspective on the interrelations between the local pastoralists and the invading Arab tribes. The pattern of change emerging from the archaeological finds in the Negev may serve as a model for other fringe areas of the Near East, in which regional transformation from paganism and Christianity to Islam occurred following the Arab conquests.

The Negev and the outside world: local markets and international trade

The Byzantine Negev was densely inhabited, maintaining large settlements which served as regional hubs for villages and farmsteads around them. Archaeological findings suggest a massive intrusion of Mediterranean agriculture into the semi-arid zones of the Negev Highlands, with similar agricultural technologies to those of other marginal areas of the Roman and Byzantine

⁴⁶⁵ Kraemer 1958, 9–18.

⁴⁶⁶ Crone 1987, 241.

world. The striking similarities between the agricultural regime of the Negev and the one in North Africa point to common technological resources that were available in both regions.⁴⁶⁷ The local economy was based on agriculture and its products, mainly wheat, oil, and wine, with an autarkic market that produced and consumed goods within the region, and exported its surplus to other areas in Palestine.⁴⁶⁸

The role of the Negev settlements as agricultural production centres is connected to the debate on the continuity of large-scale international trade from Arabia to the Mediterranean during the Byzantine period. Archaeological evidence indicates that the major international trade routes that crossed the Negev were already declining in the fourth century.⁴⁶⁹ Settlements were transformed from trading posts to agriculture-based villages and farms which produced a variety of products, mainly for local consumption.⁴⁷⁰ The Negev settlements became suppliers of the large-scale wine industry, exporting its products outside Palestine through the seaports of Gaza and Ascalon.

The Byzantine-period roads crossing the Negev served mainly the pilgrim traffic from Palestine to Sinai, and were not designed as international trading routes. For example, in a survey conducted along Darb el-Ghaza, the desert road from Aila to Gaza along the western ridges of the Negev Highlands, no evidence of major commercial activity in the Byzantine and Early Islamic period was found.⁴⁷¹ This route, consisting of networks of desert paths, was used mainly by Christian pilgrims on their way to Mount Sinai.⁴⁷² The very few Byzantine sites in the 'Arabah Valley, mostly nomad encampments, show no evidence of commercial activity in the sixth and seventh centuries, and it seems that during this period the 'Arabah route was used only by the local inhabitants of the region.

These findings contradict the historical sources claiming that large-scale trade between Arabia and the Mediterranean coast existed in pre-Islamic times. The problematic aspects of this presumed trade were presented by Crone, who argued that there was no such trade on the eve of the Arab conquest.⁴⁷³ The archaeological findings from the Negev seem to support this view.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁷ Rubin 1990, 163–80; Barker and Mattingly 1996.

⁴⁶⁸ For the Gaza region, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004; for the wine industry, see Mayerson 1985, for agricultural regime in the Negev Highlands, see Mayerson 1960, Rubin 1990, Shereshevski 1991; see also Kraemer 1958 for the evidence of the Nessana papyri.

⁴⁶⁹ See Erickson-Ginni 2010 for an updated summary of research.

⁴⁷⁰ This is well reflected in the Nessana papyri, which relate to a variety of crops; see Kraemer 1958, Rubin 1990, 86–103.

⁴⁷¹ Meshel 1981.

⁴⁷² See e.g. Nessana papyrus 89, which is a partial account of the income and expenditure of a caravan travelling from the Negev to Southern Sinai and back: Kraemer 1958, 251–8; Avni 1996, 78–9.

⁴⁷³ Crone 1987; but see, for an opposite opinion, Serjeant 1990, and Crone 1992 for a response; see also Crone 2007 for an alternative suggestion of trade in leather and other pastoralist products supplied to the Roman army in southern Syria.

⁴⁷⁴ Avni 2008, 11–14.

The penetration of Arab military forces into southern Palestine in 633–634 and the major geopolitical events in the region during the seventh and eighth centuries had no impact on the local settlement processes in the Negev. The Arab raids, which are mentioned briefly in historical sources, are not visible in the archaeological record. Archaeology provides no evidence of a break or change in settlements between Byzantine and Islamic rule, but rather shows a clear pattern of continuity.⁴⁷⁵ New agricultural villages and farms were constructed in the seventh century, and the process of sedentarization of nomads was accelerated.

Demise and collapse of the Negev settlements

The continuity of settlements in the Negev raises the question of the chronology of their abandonment. As has been shown above, the date of abandonment varies according to region: while in the eastern Negev Highlands the large settlements declined in the eighth century, the western Negev Highlands settlements continued up to the ninth and tenth centuries. Similar continuity is evident in the rural and pastoralist sites of the western and southern Negev Highlands. The settlements of the 'Arabah Valley that show continuity up to the eleventh century were abandoned by the second half of that century. This chronological framework is confirmed by the recent dating of the agricultural fields in the Negev Highlands, which show that terraced plots were extensively cultivated until the tenth century. It seems that, although it was related to the major decline of the settlements in the north, the collapse of the Negev settlements had its own internal mechanism.

The large-scale raids by Bedouins from central and northern Arabia who penetrated Palestine and Syria in the tenth and eleventh centuries had a devastating effect on the now deteriorated Negev settlements.⁴⁷⁶ Unlike the Arab conquest of the seventh century, these raids disrupted the delicate balance of the Negev villages and farms and triggered the migration of the local population northwards to the southern coastal plain and northern Sinai. This process was intensified in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, and by the second half of the eleventh century the Negev settlements were completely deserted.

CONCLUSION

Intensification and abatement of settlements

The survey of excavated sites presented above shows large-scale variability between different regions of Palestine and Jordan. While in some areas the

⁴⁷⁵ See the discussion in Ch. 5.

⁴⁷⁶ Fraenkel 1979.

settlement continued uninterrupted and even intensified during the seventh and eighth centuries, other areas showed a temporary decline followed by renewal and expansion of settlements in the eighth and ninth centuries. The reasons for this regional variability are not entirely clear, as the rural population was hardly affected by seventh-century political changes. In contradiction to previous approaches that claimed a major decline and even a collapse of the agrarian society in Palestine and neighbouring regions,⁴⁷⁷ the picture emerging from archaeological excavations indicated continuity of settlements with minor regional variations. This pattern is also valid for areas in which a major decline after the Byzantine period has previously been suggested.⁴⁷⁸

The following summary presents this regional variability and emphasizes particular aspects of settlement continuity and change:

The Galilee and the Golan showed the largest diversity in settlement patterns. These regions were not affected by the Persian and the Arab conquests and saw no abatement following the Byzantine period. Most settlements continued at least until the 749 earthquake, although some decline occurred during the seventh century. The evidence derived from a number of urban centres is particularly compelling: while Tiberias of the Early Islamic period was much larger than the Byzantine city, Sepphoris shows a decline in the seventh and eighth centuries with a change in the location and shape of the settlement. The villages of the countryside show similar ambiguity: while a seventh- or eighth-century decline has been tentatively suggested in many of them, excavations in selected sites like Jewish Deir 'Aziz and Meroth and Christian Capernaum and Tamra show that they continued to be inhabited until the ninth and tenth centuries.

Settlements in northern and central Jordan show a clear pattern of continuity until at least the end of the eighth century. Northern Jordan was severely affected by the 749 earthquake,⁴⁷⁹ but in many sites, for example at Pella and Jarash, the damage was rapidly repaired and the settlement continued into the ninth and tenth centuries, sometimes shifting its centre to a nearby location. Similar continuity is also evident in the rural settlements, and it seems that they continued to function, with dwellings changing from large and spacious residential buildings to smaller, denser ones. Some of these villages, like Khirbet Faris, continued throughout the Early Islamic period, while others declined during the ninth and tenth centuries.

The coastal plain of Palestine shows a different settlement pattern with abatement in Caesarea and Ascalon and their hinterlands and intensification in the central coastal plain as a result of the establishment of Ramla. The

⁴⁷⁷ See Avi Yonah 1958, 1966 for Palestine; Tchalenko 1953–1958 for northern Syria; Morrisson and Sodini 2002, Laiou and Morrisson 2007 generally for the Byzantine Empire.

⁴⁷⁸ E.g. at the Galilee and Golan, in which the flawed picture of a major decline is still maintained in recent publications, e.g. Frankel *et al.* 2001.

⁴⁷⁹ Marco *et al.* 2003.

construction of *ribatat* along the coastline and the penetration of new Islamic elements changed the demographic balance in this region, but it seems that Christian and Muslim communities coexisted side by side throughout the Early Islamic period. The growth of Ramla was reflected in the expansion of existing villages in its hinterland and in the establishment of new ones. The increased number of Muslims in this area, more than in any other area of Palestine and Jordan, is attested by the number of congregational mosques mentioned in the historical sources of the tenth century. Out of nineteen settlements that possessed congregational mosques, twelve were located in the coastal plain.⁴⁸⁰

Samaria and the Samaritan Lowlands are yet a different case. The Samaritan revolts of the sixth century caused a considerable decline in settlements in central and northern Samaria, including the destruction and abandonment of villages and agricultural infrastructure. After a short period of stagnation it seems that these areas were resettled, as many sites revealed an occupation phase from the seventh to the eighth and ninth centuries. The Samaritan population was not excluded from these regions, but gradually stagnated. The chronicle of Abu I-Fath showed the unstable security conditions in the central Samaritan Hills during the eighth and ninth centuries.⁴⁸¹ However, archaeological evidence suggests that settlements in this region were not abandoned on a massive scale, and some of them were inhabited throughout the Early Islamic period. Consequently, no substantial archaeological evidence has been found of the penetration of new Muslim elements into Samaria, or of a mass conversion of local Samaritans.⁴⁸²

Settlements in the Judean Lowlands and in the southern Hebron Hills functioned up to the ninth and tenth centuries, with considerable stability. The decline of Beth Guvrin as a Christian town is evident in the eighth and ninth centuries, but other sites in the region, such as Khirbet Beth Loya and Khirbet Qasra continued to preserve their Christian identity, while accepting new Islamic elements within the villages. This picture of continuity is reversed in the north-eastern Negev, where many sites declined in the course of the eighth century. However, some settlements in the north-western Negev continued to the ninth and tenth centuries.

The Negev Highlands show varied patterns of intensification and abatement: while the Byzantine settlements in the eastern Negev Highlands declined in the course of the seventh and eighth centuries, the western Negev Highlands settlements continued to exist up to the ninth and tenth centuries. In the 'Arabah Valley, in contrast, new settlements were established in the

⁴⁸⁰ Petersen 2005; Levy Rubin 2011a, 171. Mosques are mentioned in Acre, Caesarea, Arsuf, Ascalon, Gaza, Ramla, Lod, Kafr Saba, Akir, Yubna, and Kafr Sallam.

⁴⁸¹ Levy-Rubin 2002.

⁴⁸² As Ellenblum 1998 and Levy-Rubin 2000, 2002 have suggested.

seventh and eighth centuries, some of them continuing until the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Changing patterns in economy and trade

The comprehensive survey of sites and regions in Palestine and Jordan presented above provides a firm basis for the evaluation of local and international networks of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange in Byzantine and Early Islamic Palestine. Two basic levels of commercial networks are distinguishable: long-distance international trade, the most famous of which was the export of wine from the Palestinian seaports to numerous destinations around the Mediterranean,⁴⁸³ and the local networks of production and exchange within and between regions.⁴⁸⁴

The international trade in wine, and to a lesser extent in oil and cloth, was centralized along the coastal plain, and particularly around Gaza and Ascalon, which were renowned in the Byzantine period for their wealthy hinterlands. In addition, the hundreds of industrial wine presses revealed throughout the country indicate that the wine industry predominated, producing enormous amount of wine for both local consumption and export.⁴⁸⁵ The wine was transported by sea in large amphorae, and the distribution of Palestinian amphorae around the Mediterranean, particularly in seaports and shipwrecks, is a clear indication of this large-scale international trade.⁴⁸⁶ Particularly noteworthy are the wide distribution of amphorae in the Western Mediterranean and the presence of merchants from the Eastern Mediterranean in the consumption centres in Gaul and Spain.⁴⁸⁷

Large-scale trade between the Eastern Mediterranean and the West conveyed a number of commodities over considerable distances. This is indicated, for example, by the presence of Eastern Mediterranean amphorae of the fifth to seventh centuries at the tin production centres in Cornwall, which suggests commercial connections between the eastern Mediterranean and south-west Britain, perhaps with tin being exchanged for oil and wine.⁴⁸⁸

Similar trade networks were developed between Byzantium and remote destinations in the east, such as south Arabia, the kingdom of Aksum, India, and even China, with Alexandria in Egypt serving as a main commercial and industrial hub for the production and distribution of goods.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸³ See Kingsley 2001, 2003. ⁴⁸⁴ Walmsley 2000; Wickham 2005, 772–4.

⁴⁸⁵ Kingsley 2001, 48–51. ⁴⁸⁶ Kingsley 2001, 51–5.

⁴⁸⁷ See in particular Pieri 2005, 148–60 and fig. 102, indicating the presence of Greek, Syrian, and Jewish merchants in Gaul.

⁴⁸⁸ Mango 1996, 143–4.

⁴⁸⁹ Mango 1996, 149–62, 2009, fig. 1.1; Rodziewicz 2009.

The question of continuity in international trade during the seventh and eighth centuries has been extensively debated, and it is unclear whether Byzantine trade in the Mediterranean ceased or only temporarily abated.⁴⁹⁰ In contrast to traditional views that argue for a discontinuity of trade, McCormick's detailed study on the origins of the European economy, which documented hundreds of records of the long-range connections in the Mediterranean between the years 609 and 968, suggested the continuous existence of the sea trade.⁴⁹¹

Within this broad picture of international trade, the amphorae finds indicate that maritime trade in wine between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean decreased dramatically in the seventh century, with a resultant decline in production along the Palestinian coastal plain.⁴⁹² Yet it seems that the decline in wine production for export was not a direct outcome of the Arab conquest, but rather a prolonged response to the cultural and political changes around the Mediterranean. The dissolution of the Western Roman Empire led to decreased demand in markets, and the difficulties of maritime trade prevented the large-scale transportation of commodities.⁴⁹³ The Byzantine navy raids on seaports in the Eastern Mediterranean further disrupted long-distance maritime connections.⁴⁹⁴

A number of studies suggest a decline in international trade around the Mediterranean in the seventh century.⁴⁹⁵ However, it seems that this was only a temporary abatement, and trade was renewed in the eighth and ninth centuries with a gradual shift in commercial contacts from west to east. Contrary to previous assumptions, the seaports of Palestine did not stagnate in the Early Islamic period, but rather changed the focus of their commercial contacts: goods were no longer shipped *en masse* to destinations around the Mediterranean, and Egypt became the major consumer of products from Palestine and Jordan. The development and expansion of the major harbours of Acre and Tyre in the ninth century, and the continuous use of the smaller harbours of Dora, Apollonia-Arsuf, and Jaffa, show that the ports of Palestine and Syria enjoyed a modest prosperity between the eighth and eleventh centuries.⁴⁹⁶

The same goes for the use of amphorae for transporting goods, as has been evidenced in many excavated sites, among them Beth Shean and Pella. The introduction of Egyptian amphorae is another indication of the shifting directions of international commerce.⁴⁹⁷

The interpretation of archaeological finds provides a firm basis for a clearer reconstruction of regional and international commercial networks between

⁴⁹⁰ Mango 2009. ⁴⁹¹ McCormick 2001, 852–972.

⁴⁹² Kingsley 2001; Ward-Perkins 2000, 369–77. ⁴⁹³ McCormick 2001, 786–98.

⁴⁹⁴ See the discussion in Ch. 5.

⁴⁹⁵ See e.g. Ward Perkins 2000, Kingsley and Decker 2001.

⁴⁹⁶ Walmsley 2000, 297–8. ⁴⁹⁷ Walmsley 2000, 328.

the seventh and eleventh centuries: while exports from Palestine to the West declined in the seventh and eighth centuries, new markets were opened in Egypt and Iraq, which became major consumers of agricultural and industrial goods.⁴⁹⁸ Following a short period of abatement, international trade was renewed in the second half of the eighth century, with Egypt and Iraq replacing the Western Mediterranean as the main destinations for commercial goods.

At the same time, local networks of consumption and exchange were reinstated. This enhanced the development of local production centres of pottery, metalwork, and glass. The intensification of agriculture provided a larger variety of products, both for local consumption and for export to foreign destinations.

The inland regions developed local patterns of production and demand, with rural areas providing oil, wine, and wheat to the main cities. Networks of production and consumption were particularly evident in the distribution of ceramic types. Pottery workshops in Jarash and Beth Shean distributed their products within the region and as far as 100–50 km from the centre of production.⁴⁹⁹ Glass and metalwork were also produced locally in a number of workshops in the various cities, and exchanged in local markets.⁵⁰⁰

Pottery and coins provide the most common indication of the local and long-range networks of exchange. The increased demand for pottery resulted in the manufacture and development of new types of fine wares, which were distributed locally, gradually replacing the imported tableware that characterized the Roman and Byzantine periods.⁵⁰¹ The most popular type, known as 'Fine Byzantine Ware' or 'Palestinian Fine Table Ware', predominated between the sixth and ninth centuries. It has been suggested that its centre of production was in the Jerusalem area, and from there it was distributed over distances of up to 150 km.⁵⁰² Another type, known as 'Red Painted Ware', was distributed mainly in Jordan from the second half of the eighth century.⁵⁰³

A dramatic change in the ceramic repertoire of Palestine and Jordan occurred in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, and it was clearly connected with the shift of commercial power eastwards.⁵⁰⁴ The introduction of new types, particularly the 'Islamic Cream Ware' known also as 'Mafjar Ware', marked a profound change in consumers' tastes and preferences. The late eighth and early ninth centuries also witnessed the first massive penetration of glazed wares into the local repertoires (for example, 'Coptic Ware'), providing further evidence of the growing impact of connections with Egypt

⁴⁹⁸ For growing demand in Iraq, see Kennedy 2011.

⁴⁹⁹ Schaefer and Falkner 1986; Walmsley 2000, 305–9, 2007*a*, 49–59; Bar Nathan and Atrash 2011, 71–89.

⁵⁰⁰ For glass workshops, see Gorin-Rosen 2000. Walmsley 2000, 307–8 indicates a number of glass and metal workshops in Beth Shean, Caesarea, Pella, and Jarash.

⁵⁰¹ Magness 1993; Walmsley 2000, 321–31.

⁵⁰² Magness 1993, 166–71.

⁵⁰³ Walmsley 2000, 324–5.

⁵⁰⁴ Walmsley 2000, 329–32, 2007*a*, 52–9; Magness 2010*c*.

and Iraq. A similar revolution in types is evident also in glass vessels of the late eighth and early ninth centuries.⁵⁰⁵

The numismatic evidence gives another indication of commercial networks, both at the local and the long-distance levels. The continuity of Byzantine coins into the second half of the seventh century, together with the introduction of new local coinage, has been seen in coin finds in many sites throughout the region. The monetary reform of 'Abd al-Malik at the end of the seventh century introduced new issues minted in a number of cities and towns throughout Palestine and Jordan.⁵⁰⁶

The study of coin finds in Jarash and Pella provides useful information on local and long-distance commerce, indicating an increase in commercial activities in the eighth century. While in previous periods the lion's share of coins discovered in these sites was from local mints, mostly from Jund al-Urdunn, the post-reform coinage showed a wider distribution, with a considerably large proportion of coins originating from mints far away, which shows that commercial contacts focused on the west and north-east.⁵⁰⁷ Long-distance commercial contacts were also evident in a number of hoards which contained coins minted in many remote locations, from the Maghreb to Iran.⁵⁰⁸

Another indication of the significance of long-distance trade in the Early Islamic period was the extending of commercial contacts to far away destinations in the East. Contacts between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and Indian Ocean had already been developed in the Roman and Byzantine periods. Amphorae from Gaza were probably shipped through the Byzantine seaports of Aila and Clysma to destinations in south Arabia and east Africa, such as Aksum and Qana.⁵⁰⁹ Imports from the East included silk, ivory, and precious stones. Particularly significant is the presence of imported silk in Nessana and 'Avdat in late Byzantine contexts.⁵¹⁰ The presence of coins from Aksum, or their imitations, is well known throughout Palestine, mainly at Christian pilgrimage sites.⁵¹¹

It seems that, after a short period of abatement in the seventh century, contacts between the Eastern Mediterranean and the markets to the East were renewed and intensified. Growing trade in the Indian Ocean is evident both in finds, mainly ceramics from the East,⁵¹² and in the continuity and intensification of maritime trade from Ayla as the seaport to the Indian Ocean.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁵ Gorin-Rosen 2010.

⁵⁰⁶ See the discussion in Ch. 1. See also Walmsley 2000, 332–40, 2007*a*, 59–64; for basic general discussions, see Walker 1956, Bates 1986, Foss 2008*a*.

⁵⁰⁷ Walmsley 2000, 334–6. ⁵⁰⁸ Walmsley 2000, 339–40.

⁵⁰⁹ Mango 1996, 153–7; Tomber 2008, 166 and table 3.

⁵¹⁰ Mango 1996, 145 and references there. ⁵¹¹ Hahn 1994–1999.

⁵¹² E.g. Chinese porcelain found in the excavations at Ramla. I thank M. Avissar and A. Gorzalczy for this as yet unpublished information.

⁵¹³ Walmsley 2000, 295–7. For the Indian Ocean trade, see Chaudhuri 1990. For the connections between Europe and the Indian Ocean during this period, see Hodges and Whitehouse 1983.

The late eighth and early ninth centuries were characterized by a major expansion of commercial activity throughout the Islamic world, and the creation of new commercial opportunities to the east (Indo-China), west (the Mediterranean coast), and even the remote northern regions of Russia and north-western Europe.⁵¹⁴

This was also a period of rapid change in the local patterns of production and exchange in Palestine, as an outcome of the expanding commerce with Syria and Iraq. These changes, which were connected with the political transition from Umayyad to Abbasid rule, were seen in the penetration of new ceramic and glass types into the local repertoire, as well as in the development of the road system connecting Palestine eastwards with Syria and Iraq.⁵¹⁵

The intensification of commercial contacts between Palestine and Egypt is reflected in the increased presence of Egyptian pottery and glass at numerous sites. Excavations throughout the country have revealed many Egyptian pottery vessels, which probably served as containers for imported goods.⁵¹⁶ The large volume of trade with Egypt is seen both in finds from excavations in Ramla, and from the many references to merchants from Ramla in the Geniza documents.⁵¹⁷

The intensification of trade with Egypt and Iraq should be viewed in the framework of the long-term processes of growth and expansion of the urban centres in these countries. The vast growth of settlements in Iraq and the increased population in its main cities enhanced a massive development of local production of commercial goods, and intensified trade connections with both the Mediterranean in the West and Indo-China in the East. At the same time, Egypt kept its traditional position as a commercial hub for the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, as the Geniza documents indicate. Palestine and Jordan remained marginal to these global processes, but were influenced by the growth and expansion of international commercial networks focusing on the East.

It seems that the archaeological findings reinforce the view that, after a period of abatement in the seventh century, commercial connections in the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean were renewed in the ninth century.⁵¹⁸ The previous scenario of a rupture caused by the Arab conquest was, indeed, too simplistic. In fact, the conquest opened the way for long-term processes to create new networks of exchange, which, in the centuries that followed, gradually shifted the balance of commercial networks from the West to the East.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁴ Noonan 1986; Walmsley 2000, 339–41.

⁵¹⁵ Walmsley 2000, 299–303; Gorin-Rosen 2010.

⁵¹⁶ Taxel and Fantalkin 2011. ⁵¹⁷ See Ch. 3.

⁵¹⁸ See in particular McCormick 2001, and Cameron 2012, 202–10 for a summary of recent views.

⁵¹⁹ See Horden and Purcell 2000, 153–72 for a wider view.

Similarities with Syria

A comparison between the regional settlement patterns in Palestine and Jordan, and those revealed in Syria and northern Mesopotamia, brings out interesting similarities. While early surveys and excavations in the latter regions concluded that the settlements of the Byzantine period were damaged and destroyed by the Persian and Arab conquests, with a consequent rapid decline and abatement of their hinterlands and agricultural regimes, recent research shows a clear pattern of settlement continuity.⁵²⁰

The northern Syrian massif, between Antioch and Aleppo, yielded the impressive remains of about 780 villages of the Roman and Byzantine periods. This area has been studied extensively since the middle of the nineteenth century, and most scholars have suggested a dramatic demise of settlements in the early seventh century, linked to the Persian and Arab conquests.⁵²¹ Particularly significant was the detailed survey conducted by Tchalenko in the 1930s, which produced a comprehensive synthesis of the remains, their geographical settings, and the relevant historical sources.⁵²² On the basis of the epigraphic record, which shows that large-scale construction of public buildings ceased in the early seventh century (the last dated building inscription in this area dates from 609/10), and on the basis of the historical circumstances of the Persian conquest, Tchalenko concluded that the flourishing settlements of the Syrian massif were not violently destroyed, but rapidly abandoned. The local rural population lost its economic basis of exporting their agricultural goods to the markets in the west, and moved away from the region, leaving their wealthy residences behind.

These conclusions were challenged in the 1970s by Sodini and Tate, who renewed research on the villages in the northern Syrian massif by conducting small-scale excavations in the village of Dehes, east of Antioch.⁵²³ Excavations in several houses at this village revealed, for the first time, clear stratigraphic and ceramic sequences. They dated the zenith of the settlement to the sixth century, with decline and stagnation starting in the second half of that century, but with a clear indication of continuity beyond the Byzantine period and up to the ninth and tenth centuries. These later stages of occupation, however, showed clear signs of abatement, with no new building construction. The old buildings were maintained throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, and the later stages indicated that they have been inhabited by squatters.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁰ See Foss 1997 for a detailed analysis and updated research.

⁵²¹ See Foss 1995, 213–16 for a short summary of the history of research in this region.

⁵²² Tchalenko 1953–1958, 431–8.

⁵²³ Sodini *et al.* 1980, Tate 1992; see also Foss 1997, 197–204, Wickham 2005, 443–51 for a summary.

⁵²⁴ Foss 1997, 204.

In her recent re-evaluation of the Dehes excavation report, Magness has gone further in refuting Tchalenko's conclusions, showing that the excavated houses in the village were first constructed as late as the second half of the sixth century and the early seventh century, and were continuously inhabited until the ninth or tenth century.⁵²⁵ The rich assemblages of pottery and glass vessels showed, in her opinion that the people of Early Islamic Dehes continued to enjoy a similar prosperity to that of the Byzantine period. In the later stages of occupation the quality of construction declined and large buildings were divided into smaller units, but with no indication of rapid abatement.

Other recent studies in the region show a similar pattern of continuity. For example, the large Byzantine ecclesiastical complex of Qal'at Sem'an, established in the fifth century, was continuously inhabited between the seventh and the tenth centuries, and was not abandoned as Tchalenko has suggested.⁵²⁶ The site was further reinforced in the tenth century with the building of a new fortified enclosure (*kastron*).⁵²⁷

The re-evaluation of Tchalenko's research to indicate a continuity of settlement beyond the Byzantine period has shed new light on the later remains found in the villages of the north Syrian massif. In fact, some sites provide evidence of subsequent continuity into the medieval period. Several mosques and a number of Syriac and Arabic inscriptions indicate that some sites were inhabited for a long period, and that the area was not depopulated shortly after the Persian and Arab conquests.⁵²⁸ As in the settlements of Palestine and Jordan, economic patterns in northern Syria were transformed from large-scale production of oil and wine to local production of goods that supplemented the demands of the local markets.

The recent excavations at the large site of Androna/Andarin have revealed strikingly similar components to those found in the settlements of Palestine and Jordan. This very large village (c.160 ha), located on the eastern fringes of the north Syrian massif, included monumental public buildings, among them at least 11 churches and two bathhouses. A major phase of construction has been dated to the sixth century, and to the second half of this century in particular.⁵²⁹ The bathhouses were constructed around 560 (the Byzantine bathhouse) and in the late seventh–early eighth century (the Umayyad bathhouses). The village was set in a vast agricultural zone which was extensively cultivated and irrigated by large water reservoirs and underground *qanats*.⁵³⁰ The excavations indicated

⁵²⁵ Magness 2003, 196–206.

⁵²⁶ Tchalenko 1953–1958, 242. See Biscop 2006, 75, Sodini *et al.* 2002–2003, Sodini and Morrisson 2011 for the discussion of the later remains at the site.

⁵²⁷ Biscop 2006.

⁵²⁸ Tchalenko 1953–1958, ii, pls LXIII, LXXIX–LXXXII, CL, CLIV–CLV, iii, 109–28. I thank M. Mango for drawing my attention to this detail.

⁵²⁹ See Mango 2010, 2011a for a summary of excavations.

⁵³⁰ Mango, 2010, 257–78, 2011a, 103–7.

that the village declined in the seventh and eighth centuries, and OSL analysis of the deposits in the water reservoirs dated their abandonment to the eighth and ninth centuries.⁵³¹

The main cities of northern Syria, and particularly Antioch and Apamea, revealed a somewhat similar sequence of development and abatement to that found in the cities of Palestine and Jordan. Consequently, the later stages of habitation in both cities were inadequately identified in the course of early excavations.⁵³² Antioch, the largest urban centre in the Roman East, was devastated by a large fire and severe earthquakes in 525–528. This was followed by further damage caused by Persian raids on the city. It was massively reconstructed by the imperial government under Justinian, and was believed to have declined after the Arab conquest. Yet, it seems that, like Beth Shean and Jarash, large sections of Byzantine Antioch survived, gradually declining in the seventh and eighth centuries, with streets narrowed and the public areas filled with private construction.⁵³³ The evidence of coins indicates lively commercial activity in the city, now renamed Antakiah, during the late seventh and eighth centuries under the caliphs ‘Abd al-Malik and Hisham. Furthermore, the large numbers of Abbasid coins show that commerce continued to thrive up to the tenth century. Historical sources of this period noted that the city wall and many buildings in the city were still standing and in use.⁵³⁴

A similar process of change occurred in Apamea, on the southern fringes of the massif. The city contracted during the seventh and eighth centuries, with the narrowing of the monumental colonnaded streets into alleys.⁵³⁵ A Christian presence was well-maintained under Islamic rule, and the introduction of a small mosque in the northern section of the city, perhaps in the eighth century, is the sole testimony of the penetration of new Islamic population.⁵³⁶ As in Antioch, the evidence of pottery and coins suggests continuity into the ninth and tenth centuries, but in deteriorating urban surroundings.

In his evaluation of the settlement sequences in the northern Syrian massif, Foss has concluded that the gradual process of decline started in this region in the second half of the sixth century, as a result of natural disasters such as earthquakes and droughts, and the Persian raids. Nevertheless, the rural population seems to have remained numerous well into the seventh and eighth centuries.⁵³⁷

The evidence from Hama, also in northern Syria, shows uninterrupted settlement continuity from the sixth to the ninth and tenth centuries, with no evidence of destruction or decline as in Antioch and Apamea. A substantial Muslim presence was recorded here, including the possible transformation of

⁵³¹ Mango 2011*a*, 105, 122.

⁵³² See Foss 1997 for a comprehensive summary of the excavations and finds.

⁵³³ Foss 1997, 194–6. ⁵³⁴ Foss 1997, 196; Le-Strange 1890, 366–7.

⁵³⁵ Foss 1997, 206–26. ⁵³⁶ Foss 1997, 217. ⁵³⁷ Foss 1997, 204.

a church into a mosque (or, alternatively, the secondary use of materials from the church in the construction of the mosque) during the seventh century.⁵³⁸

This settlement picture is complemented by similar results from surveys and excavations in Diyar Mudar and the Balikh Valley in northern Mesopotamia. Settlements in this region peaked in the late eighth and ninth centuries as a consequence of the development of the hinterland of Raqqa, the main city in the region, which became the capital of the Jazira.⁵³⁹ The development of large villages in the Balikh Valley during this period was enhanced by the increasing demands of the growing urban centres of Raqqa, Baghdad, and Sammara. The port of Raqqa was probably used to ship large agricultural and industrial commodities downstream along the Euphrates to Baghdad.⁵⁴⁰

A similar intensification of settlements has been indicated in the Middle Euphrates Valley where surveys have located twenty-two sites from the Byzantine period, while the Early Islamic period has yielded 103 sites, with a dramatic decline in settlement during the tenth century.⁵⁴¹ It seems that the intensification of agricultural settlements in both areas was generated by the emergence of huge new markets for grain in Iraq.⁵⁴²

The southern regions of Syria displayed a similar continuity of settlement, as has been revealed by research in the southern Hauran, where later phases of habitation have been clearly distinguished in Byzantine-period villages. The detailed survey and excavations in Mseikeh, for example, have documented a large village with several Byzantine churches that probably continued to function into the Early Islamic period.⁵⁴³ During this time several mosques were added within the built area of the village, but it has not been established whether these functioned alongside with the existing churches. Yet, it seems that the occupation of Mseikeh and other villages in the Hauran continued without interruption throughout the Early Islamic period, with an additional phase of construction during the Mamluk period.⁵⁴⁴ The precise chronology of settlement changes has not yet been determined, but the continuity or resettlement of Byzantine-period villages is clearly distinguishable. This can be clearly seen in the village of Deir el-‘Adas, where a mosaic floor decorated with agricultural scenes was laid in a church in the year 722.⁵⁴⁵

An interesting case of settlement transformation and Islamization is provided by Bostra, the former capital of Provincia Arabia, where a large mosque, named after Umar, was constructed in the eighth century. A dedication

⁵³⁸ Foss 1997, 230–6. For the possible introduction of the mosque into an existing church, see Creswell 1969, i. 17–21.

⁵³⁹ See Bartl 1996 for the Balikh survey. See Heidemann 2006, 2008 for Raqqa and Heidemann 2011 for a comprehensive summary of the rise and fall of the agricultural hinterland in the region.

⁵⁴⁰ Heidemann 2011, 49–51.

⁵⁴¹ Kennedy 2011, 190–4.

⁵⁴² Kennedy 2011, 189–97.

⁵⁴³ Claus-Balty 2008.

⁵⁴⁴ Claus-Balty 2008, 259–61.

⁵⁴⁵ Foss 1997, 255.

inscription dated to 720 refers to the construction of its minaret.⁵⁴⁶ Yet, the existence of the mosque did not obliterate the Christian presence in Bostra, and it seems that the cathedral church continued to function at least until the mid-eighth century, when it was converted into domestic installations.

Recent archaeological research in both northern and southern Syria shows that the settlement processes in these regions were fundamentally different from those suggested in earlier studies. Settlements did not decline abruptly or gradually following the Arab conquest and both regions continued to be inhabited well into the Early Islamic period. The existence of mosques and the relatively large repertoire of Arabic inscriptions suggest the continuous prosperity of the local population.

The similarities in settlement sequences demonstrated in Syria, northern Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Jordan suggest that detailed studies in other regions of the Near East may obtain similar results. Data from large-scale regional surveys and excavations, together with a careful observation of settlement processes and chronology, may indicate that while many settlements continued into the eighth–tenth centuries, a gradual process of change in settlement and society was taking place throughout the Early Islamic period. Observations on the nature of this change as reflected in archaeology can provide a useful tool for a more comprehensive evaluation of the transformation of the Near East from Christian to Muslim rule. The nature of these processes and the role of various agents of change in Palestine and Jordan are evaluated in the next chapter.

⁵⁴⁶ Foss 1997, 242. For the inscription, see Sauvaget 1941a.

The Transformation of Settlement and Society: A Synthesis

Herein lies the fault: interpreting settlement archaeology solely from monument-based archaeology. Rather, the need is to adopt new strategies that adequately and accurately identify evidence of continuing cultural and economic activity without the necessity of monuments, and to apply appropriate models that explain, and not only dismiss, the evidence so recovered. As ceramic typo-chronologies and other dating tools improve for the long 'gap' period after the fall of the Umayyads, the major obstacle today to a more useful understanding of the archaeological data is one of perception, in which the nature of site occupation is evaluated free of stereotypical judgments such as 'squatter'.¹

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the gaps in our knowledge of post-Byzantine, and particularly post-Umayyad times, are being bridged by an influx of new archaeological data. Walmsley's call for new strategies and models for this period, put forward only a few years ago, is being heeded, and the changes in society and settlement patterns have been illuminated by recent findings. For a fuller understanding of the process, however, we must take a close look at the various 'agents of change': military and political events, specifically the Persian and Arab conquests, but also the Umayyad–Abbasid transition and the frequent regime changes between the ninth and eleventh centuries; earthquakes and their impact on the continuity of settlements, particularly in the large urban centres; and environmental and climatic factors. How did these variables affect the *longue durée* process of change during the second half of the first millennium?

That settlements in Palestine underwent a transformation between the sixth and eleventh centuries seems clear from our account in the preceding chapters. An evaluation of individual sites, from large urban communities to small villages and farmsteads, shows that the traditional approach, positing a drastic

¹ Walmsley 2007a, 145.

change following the Arab conquest, requires rethinking. While the starting and end points of this transition period are clearly manifested in the archaeological record—unprecedented prosperity in the sixth century versus near collapse in the eleventh century—the chronology and pace of change are debatable. Was it indeed a process of decline beginning in the second half of the sixth century and reinforced by the Persian and Arab conquests, the 749 earthquake, and the Umayyad–Abbasid transition that turned Palestine into a neglected backwater? I argue in favour of a lengthier historical process that varied from region to region and involved several stages of intensification and abatement. Archaeological evidence in cities, towns, and villages around the country paints a picture of continuity despite the striking variance in settlement density and distribution from the start of this period until its end.

AGENTS OF CHANGE

Military conquest and political upheaval, mainly the Persian raids of 614 and the Arab conquest of 634–40, are traditionally cited as the trigger for rapid and profound changes in Palestine and Jordan in the seventh century. According to this paradigm, the military confrontations between the Byzantine and the Persian-Sassanian empires, in which both major powers were weakened, opened the way for the Arabs to emerge from Arabia and conquer the Near East within a few short years.² In this widely accepted historical narrative, the Byzantine Empire was weakened by the wars against Persia, which followed the devastating effects of the bubonic plague in 542. The combined effects of epidemic and war facilitated the rapid Arab conquest and the subsequent changes in settlement and society.³

This monolithic view has been adopted without question in historical and archaeological studies of Byzantine and Early Islamic Palestine.⁴ Yet recent excavations at many sites show no interruption in the everyday life of the local populace in the first half of the seventh century. The construction of churches, monasteries, and public buildings continued unabated throughout the years of the Persian and Arab conquests. On the pages that follow, we will discuss the effects of events perceived as catastrophic for Palestine and Jordan: the Persian conquest of 614 and the Arab conquest of 634–640; the bubonic plague in 542; and the earthquakes of 749, 1033, and 1068. The long-term impact of environmental and climatic change is also considered, to address the claim that

² See the discussion in Ch. 1. For background on the political history of the 7th century and the rise of the Arabs, see Donner 1981, 2008.

³ See Ostrogorsky 1980, 82–111, Haldon 1990, Kaegi 1992, Kennedy 1985*a, b*, Foss 1997.

⁴ See e.g. Hitti 1951, Avi Yonah 1966, 124, Negev 1986, 124–30, 1997, 6–9.

settlement decline was climate-related. Were these formative events that changed local society profoundly, or were they short-lived episodes in the *longue durée* process of transformation?

The Persian conquest

In modern historical and archaeological research, the Persian conquest has been seen as a turning point in the history of Palestine and the onset of the country's political and administrative decline. Although the Persian domination was very brief, lasting only fourteen years (614–628), it was claimed that its devastating effects left their mark on the landscape for many years to come.⁵

Palestine and Jordan were conquered by the Persians in the later stages of a long Byzantine–Sassanian campaign that began far to the north of Palestine. When the Byzantine emperor, Maurice, was murdered in 602, King Chosroes II of Persia launched a campaign against the Byzantine Empire which engulfed the Near East in a lengthy war considered the last great war of antiquity by some historians.⁶ Chosroes' army attacked Armenia and northern Mesopotamia in 603. After dragging on for years, the war ended in Persian victory. The Persian forces moved southwards, encountering fierce resistance. Edessa, the provincial capital, surrendered to Persia in 609. The Persians took advantage of the inner turmoil in the Byzantine Empire following the accession of Heraclius in 610 to penetrate the southern provinces further. In October 610 they conquered Antioch, capital of the diocese of Oriens and the largest city of Roman Syria. The Persian advance was temporarily halted by Byzantine counter-attacks, but in 613 the military campaign resumed, and with the surrender of Damascus, all of Syria was in Persian hands. The road to Palestine was now open, and no Byzantine resistance arose. The Persian forces, led by Shahrbaraz, swept the Galilee and the Jordan Valley, and took Caesarea, the capital of Palaestina Prima.⁷

Some historical sources have stressed the devastating nature of the Persian conquest, and this claim has been repeated by archaeologists. The tone was already set in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the Russian art historian Kondakov wrote:

The Persian invasion immediately removed the effects of the imported Greco-Roman civilization in Palestine. It ruined agriculture, depopulated the cities, destroyed temporarily or permanently many monasteries and lauras, and stopped

⁵ See the discussion in Ch. 1. On the Persian conquest, see Foss 1997, 262–4, 2003; for a typical view by modern scholarship, see Laiou and Morriison 2007, 40.

⁶ Foss 2003, 151 and references there.

⁷ On the details of the war in Palestine, see Avi Yonah 1966, 121–5, Schick 1995, 20–48, Foss 2003.

all trade development. From now on the cultural development of the country ended.⁸

On the basis of this premise, archaeological studies have dated the decay or destruction of settlements in the Near East to the early seventh century, relying on the historical narrative rather than findings on the ground. A typical example is Tchalenko, whose study of villages in northern Syria attributed the abandonment of many sites in this region to the Byzantine–Persian wars. He postulated that the wars dramatically reduced the production of oil and wine, which led to a steep decline in exports to markets in the West and the collapse of the rural economy.⁹ Mayerson envisaged a similar impact on settlements in southern Palestine. He maintained that the Persian conquest and the havoc it wreaked on Jerusalem were also devastating for the Christian communities of the Negev and southern Palestine.¹⁰ On the basis of their excavations in Beth Shean, Tsafrir and Foerster concluded that the loss of contact with the sources of authority in Byzantium as a result of the Persian conquest led to a complete breakdown of the local administration. Public structures were neglected and squatters took over public squares, buildings, and sidewalks, sometimes dismantling monuments to reuse as building materials.¹¹

This view of the Persian conquest was summarized by Foss:

The Persian occupation of the Near East has been held responsible for widespread destruction, the breakdown of settled condition, undermining the existing social structure or at best isolation of the conquered territories from their natural markets with consequent economic decline. The unstated implication of all this is that the Persians, by fatally weakening the entire region, lay the ground for the rapid Roman collapse before the advancing Arabs, facilitated the Muslim conquest, and pushed the Near East into an inexorable decline.¹²

Seen through the prism of archaeological findings, the Persian conquest was considerably less violent than its portrayal in historical sources. Evidence of mass destruction and abandonment is almost non-existent. Destruction phases at some sites have been attributed to the conquest, but none show clear stratigraphic or chronological links to the early seventh century. Caesarea is particularly noteworthy in this regard. The Persian domination of the city is described in detail by Anastasius the Persian, who was arrested by the governor of Caesarea in 627 after a religious debate with Persian soldiers in the city.¹³ Anastasius was interrogated in the *praetorium* of Caesarea and imprisoned in the *kastron*, probably the fort near the now deserted theatre.

⁸ Tr. and quoted in Foss 2003, 149.

⁹ Tchalenko 1953, i. 433–5. But see the discussion in Ch. 4.

¹⁰ Mayerson 1964, 191–2.

¹¹ Tsafrir and Foerster 1997, 145; see also the discussion in Ch. 2.

¹² Foss 2003, 150. ¹³ Kaegi 1978.

Soon after, he was taken to Persia and executed. His bones were returned to Caesarea after the city fell to Heraclius, and a chapel was constructed in his memory near the *tetrapylon* in the city centre.¹⁴ Archaeological finds in Caesarea show that the Persian conquest had almost no physical impact on the city.¹⁵ The Persians did not destroy Christian monuments and Christian religious life continued. Claims of archaeological evidence dating to the Persian occupation are tenuous¹⁶ and not supported by stratigraphic proof.

A similar picture of settlement continuity is evident in other excavated sites in northern Palestine and Jordan. Early excavations in Pella associated burnt layers in churches and residential quarters with the Persian conquest. However, further exploration refuted these conclusions and showed that the early seventh century was a period of continuity in settlement.¹⁷ The same was true for Abila. Although it has been suggested that the church in area A was destroyed by the Persians, after which the site was abandoned and resettled only towards the end of the seventh century,¹⁸ it seems more plausible that the church was toppled by an earthquake.¹⁹ The large monastery of Kursi on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was also said to have been razed during the Persian conquest,²⁰ but this is not supported by archaeological evidence. On the contrary, continuity of settlement until the ninth century is well represented by coins and pottery that predate the later phases of settlement by squatters.

Another part of the country linked to the Persian conquest is the western Galilee. Damage to a number of excavated churches and monasteries has been attributed to this conquest.²¹ However, the archaeological evidence is not conclusive. Only preliminary reports have been published and no stratigraphic and chronological sequences are available. A typical example is the 'ecclesiastical farm' excavated at Shelomi,²² where several phases of occupation in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods were identified. Other settlements in the area show clear signs of continuity.²³

Other parts of the country show only sporadic evidence for a link between archaeological findings and the Persian conquest. In the monastery at Shoham, a crypt beneath the atrium of the church was found to contain a large number of human bones along with pottery and coins dating to the early seventh century, which suggested a connection to the Persian raids.²⁴ But again, the evidence was inconclusive and archaeologists could not establish whether the

¹⁴ Kaegi 1978, 179–80.

¹⁵ See the description in Ch. 2.

¹⁶ See Patrich 2011a.

¹⁷ Smith 1973, 64; see Ch. 4.

¹⁸ Wineland 2001, 112–13.

¹⁹ Schick 1995, 239; Mare 1994.

²⁰ Tzaferis 1983, 4; see also the discussion in Ch. 2.

²¹ See Dauphin 1998, 339–42, Dauphin and Edelstein 1993.

²² Dauphin and Kingsley 2003.

²³ E.g. the church and settlement in Kh. Shubeika; see Syon 2003.

²⁴ Dahari and 'Ad 2008; see also Ch. 4.

dead were victims of a single violent event, had been buried in a crypt that had been in use for a long time, or had died in an epidemic.

In the wake of this lack of evidence, some scholars have begun to tone down the claims of devastating destruction and now say that the impact on settlement in Palestine was relatively mild. This is particularly true for Foss, who in earlier studies emphasized the destruction caused by the Persian invasion of the Near East,²⁵ but presents a more moderate and balanced picture of events in his recent work.²⁶

Persian conquest of Jerusalem

Mentioned extensively in historical sources, the Persian capture of Jerusalem is of special interest. Accounts of the conquest of the city, the massacre of its Christian population, and the wide-scale destruction of churches and monasteries appear in numerous texts.²⁷ Following the capture of Caesarea, the Persian commander Shahrbaraz marched on Jerusalem and demanded its unconditional surrender. City officials, joined by the Patriarch Zacharias, opened the city gates and surrendered peacefully, but a local Christian group staged a revolt in which Persian soldiers were killed. The Persians retaliated fiercely with the aid of siege towers. After a short battle, the walls were breached and the city was retaken. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was set on fire, the relics of the cross were seized, and Zacharias was apprehended and exiled.

The most detailed account of the atrocities perpetrated by the Persians is that of Antiochus Strategius (also known as Ostratius), a monk from the monastery of Mar Saba.²⁸ According to Strategius, the dead were buried by a man named Thomas in thirty-five locations around Jerusalem, some of which have been identified near the city walls.²⁹

While the narrative of violence and destruction has been traditionally accepted in archaeological circles, a study of finds in Jerusalem does not reveal destruction layers that are clearly attributable to the Persian conquest. At many sites the evidence is ambiguous, and burnt layers have been associated with the Persian conquest without a firm ceramic or chronological basis.³⁰

²⁵ Foss 1997, 262. ²⁶ Foss 2003.

²⁷ Couret 1897; Clermont Ganneau 1898; Peeters 1923–24; Garitte 1960, 1973–1974; Milik 1960–1961; Avi Yonah 1976, 261–5; Baras 1982, 328–40; Schick 1995, 33–9; Ashkenazi 2009, 154–70; Magness 2011.

²⁸ The original Greek version has been lost, but Strategius' account has been preserved in translation, in Georgian (Garitte 1960) and Arabic (Couret 1897, Garitte 1973–1974). For an English translation, see Conybeare 1910; for a commentary on the Arabic version, see Clermont-Ganneau 1898. Baras (1982, 302–4) evaluated the credibility of the different sources.

²⁹ Milik 1960–1.

³⁰ See Avni 2010 for a detailed discussion of the archaeological evidence from the different sites.

Excavated sites in Jerusalem and its environs show evidence of mass burials but no trace of destruction or damage to churches and monasteries. Byzantine burial sites around Jerusalem have turned up large concentrations of human bones, but these are not the ordinary urban burials of the Byzantine period, in single graves or family tombs.³¹ They are intentional gatherings of multiple corpses in a cave, water cistern, or existing family tomb. Seven such sites have been identified in Jerusalem, all located outside the walls of the Old City and dated to the Byzantine period.

The most notable of these is a rock-cut cave in Mamilla, approximately 120 m west of the Jaffa Gate, in which hundreds of human bones have been found. At the entrance to the cave was a small chapel with a mosaic floor decorated with three crosses. A four-line inscription in a *tabula ansata* contained a prayer 'for the redemption and salvation of [the dead], God knows their names'.³² An anthropological analysis of the bones has indicated that the deceased were relatively young, and that women outnumbered the men.³³ All this suggests that the deceased met a sudden death. Finds inside the cave include cross-shaped pendants, candlestick oil lamps, and about 130 coins, the most recent of which is a gold issue of Emperor Phocas (602–610). The evidence thus points to a mass burial of Christians in the early seventh century that coincides with the Persian invasion.³⁴ The location of the cave correlates with the site near the Mamilla pool mentioned by Strategius as one of the places where the Christians of Jerusalem were massacred and hastily buried:³⁵ 'Those whom they found they collected in great haste and with much zeal, and buried them in the grotto of Mamel'.³⁶ The Mamilla cave thus matches up with the literary references geographically and chronologically. The chapel was probably constructed shortly after the massacre, while the Persians were in power (614–628) or after Byzantine rule was restored under Heraclius (628–636).

An analysis of other large concentrations of human bones from the Byzantine era in the Jerusalem area reveals six more mass burial sites. During construction work some 300 m north-east of the Mamilla pool, abundant skeletal remains were discovered along with pottery from the sixth and seventh centuries.³⁷ The bones appear to have been tossed into an existing cistern or quarry. Anthropological examination has suggested that the corpses or bones had been transported there from other places. Another heap of bones has been found in an ancient cistern south of Jaffa Gate, outside the Old City walls.³⁸ The cistern probably dates from the Byzantine period, as this was the only time when the western extramural reaches of Jerusalem were densely inhabited. Additional proof of early seventh-century activity comes from two lead bullae bearing the name 'Modestus Presbyter' unearthed outside the walls,

³¹ Avni 2005. ³² Reich 1996, 29–30. ³³ Naggar 2002.

³⁴ Reich 1996, 31–3. ³⁵ Milik 1960–1, 182–3. ³⁶ Conybeare 1910, 508.

³⁷ Kloner 2003, 137–8. ³⁸ Avni 2010, 37.

between the Citadel and Mount Zion, and attributed to the period of the Persian conquest.³⁹ In a mass burial site identified farther south on Mount Zion, a thick layer of human bones was scattered over the remains of a plastered surface that may have been part of a larger sepulchral installation from the Byzantine period. An estimated 300–500 people were buried in what has been described as an ‘immense charnel house’.⁴⁰ Another accumulation of human bones has been found nearby, on the floor of a large cave under the Greek Orthodox cemetery.⁴¹ These bones have not been clearly dated, but we know that the Mount Zion area was densely populated in Byzantine times.

Skeletal remains have also been discovered in two burial structures north of the Damascus Gate. One of them, located approximately 40 m north of the gate, was a vaulted burial chamber with fifteen shaft tombs dug into the floor. In and around this structure human bones have been found along with oil lamps, coins from the sixth and seventh centuries, and a number of pendant crosses.⁴² Farther north, a large cache of bones has been found in a Byzantine burial cave on the grounds of the Albright Institute. Over one hundred dead were stacked up here, one on top of the other. Among the artefacts found were Byzantine-era oil lamps and glass vessels. The latest burials appear to have been conducted with particular haste, with large numbers of bodies brought to the cave within a short period of time.⁴³

The connection to the Persian conquest is reinforced by Strategius, who lists thirty-five locations around Jerusalem where ‘Thomas the Grave Digger’ buried massacre victims.⁴⁴ The largest burial site was Mamilla pool, west of the Jaffa Gate. Different manuscripts offer conflicting figures for the number of dead, from 4,518 and 4,618 to 24,518.⁴⁵ Another place mentioned by Strategius is the ‘Gates of Zion’, where he writes that 2,250 people hiding in a church were slaughtered by Persian troops.⁴⁶ The victims were reportedly buried nearby, possibly in one of the two mass burial sites discovered on Mount Zion.

While the archaeological record provides substantial evidence of the massacre of Christians in Jerusalem in 614, no such evidence has been found for the destruction and abandonment of buildings and residential quarters in the city. Despite attempts to connect archaeological sequences to the Persian conquest, a careful study of relevant excavations in Jerusalem does not support such a link. In the 1920s, excavations on the upper slope of the City of David unearthed part of a Byzantine-period street lined with dwellings that was said to have been severely damaged during the conquest.⁴⁷ However, a re-evaluation of the published data has showed that the street and homes had been used

³⁹ Barag 1988, 55–6.

⁴⁰ Merrill 1903.

⁴¹ Pierotti 1864, 213–16, pl. XLVI.

⁴² Dunkel 1902.

⁴³ Burrows 1932, 34–5.

⁴⁴ Milik 1960–1961.

⁴⁵ Milik 1960–1961; see also Avni 2010 for a detailed discussion.

⁴⁶ Milik 1960–1961, 143.

⁴⁷ Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929, 52–5.

continuously from Byzantine to Early Islamic times, and abandoned only in the medieval period.⁴⁸

The large-scale excavations south of the Temple Mount have unearthed several imposing structures from the Byzantine period. A recently published report claimed that the Byzantine levels were severely damaged in the Persian conquest and a large building south of the Temple Mount, close to the 'Triple Gate', identified as a monastery, was burnt down.⁴⁹ However, contrary to the reconstruction suggested by E. Mazar, it appears that this part of Jerusalem remained untouched by the invaders and the dwellings existent at this time continued to be used without interruption during the Early Islamic period. Magness challenges their proposed date of destruction and shows, through the continuity of pottery types and coins, that habitation continued after the Persian and Islamic conquests. Only with the construction of the grand 'Umayyad palaces' in the early eighth century were the Byzantine buildings sealed or demolished.⁵⁰

The same continuity is borne out by an excavated building known as the 'House of the *Menoroth*' near the south-western corner of the Temple Mount. A lintel above one of its inner rooms, originally engraved with crosses, was later covered with white plaster and inscribed with *menoroth* (seven-branched candelabra). It has been suggested that, after the Persian conquest, the Christian occupants were replaced by Jews, who turned one of the rooms into a synagogue.⁵¹ This phase did not last long, however, and the building was abandoned by the end of the seventh century.

Other areas of Jerusalem show similar continuity of settlement and no signs of damage or destruction that can be attributed to the Persian conquest. For example, a row of dwellings inhabited continuously from the fifth to the eleventh centuries has been excavated east of Herod's Gate.⁵² One building that does appear to have been targeted by the Persians has recently been excavated south of the Dung Gate.⁵³ In one of its rooms, a hoard of 264 new gold coins from 610–13 was discovered, all of them issued by the same mint, probably in Constantinople. The hoard is believed to have been hidden by the owners of the building on the eve of the Persian conquest and the building itself destroyed during the invasion.

Mass destruction of churches in Jerusalem in the wake of the conquest is mentioned in numerous sources.⁵⁴ Strategius, for example, writes:

⁴⁸ Magness 1992.

⁴⁹ Mazar 2003, 3–67, 243. The identification of this complex as a monastery has been rejected by other scholars: see, e.g. Murphy O'Connor 2005.

⁵⁰ Magness 2010a, 2011; see also Ch. 3.

⁵¹ Mazar 2003, 163–86.

⁵² Avni *et al.* 2001; Baruch *et al.* 2008; Weksler-Bdolah 2006–2007.

⁵³ Ben Ami *et al.* 2010.

⁵⁴ See the discussions in Baras 1982, Barag 1988, Schick 1995, 20–47, and Ashkenazi 2009, 154–70.

Holy churches were burned with fire, others were demolished, majestic altars fell prone, sacred crosses were trampled underfoot, life-giving icons were spat upon by the unclean . . . When the people were carried into Persia and the Jews were left in Jerusalem, they began with their own hands to demolish and burn such of the holy churches as were left standing.⁵⁵

A number of published reports from excavated sites in Jerusalem and environs often attribute the destruction or abandonment of churches and monasteries to the Persian raids.⁵⁶ However, none offer conclusive archaeological evidence of this. Many sites supposedly destroyed by the Persians continued to be used into the Early Islamic period. The Church of St Stephen, for example, located north of Damascus Gate, was said to have been destroyed during the conquest,⁵⁷ but this is not borne out by archaeological findings. The claim seems to be based mainly on the location of the church, close to the place where the Persians allegedly tunnelled under the walls in order to penetrate the city.

Recent exploration of other Byzantine monastic complexes north of the Damascus Gate has turned up no proof of destruction or damage in the early seventh century,⁵⁸ and the network of monasteries established north of the city walls appears to have functioned uninterrupted until the ninth century.⁵⁹

Churches and monasteries east of Jerusalem reveal a similar picture of continuity. According to Eutychius, the churches of Eleona and Gethsemane on the slopes of the Mount of Olives were the first to be destroyed by the Persians and still lay in ruins in his day ('to this time').⁶⁰ However, no conclusive evidence for this was found in the sparsely documented excavation at Gethsemane in the early twentieth century.⁶¹ Two churches were discovered at the site, the earlier from the Byzantine period and the later from the Crusader period. From the presence of an Early Islamic oil lamp,⁶² it seems that the early church survived the Persian era and continued to operate as a Christian place of worship into the Early Islamic period.

The same was true for the New Church of Theotokos (Nea Church), built in the sixth century, the second largest church in Jerusalem after the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Despite claims that the Nea was damaged in the Persian conquest,⁶³ no signs of destruction, or even repairs of any kind, have been detected, and the church was active well into the Early Islamic period.⁶⁴

The Church of the Probatica, north of the Temple Mount, was said to have been vandalized by the Persians and later restored.⁶⁵ It appeared in Strategius' list, and historical sources state that 2,107 people were massacred there.⁶⁶

⁵⁵ Conybeare 1910, 507–8.

⁵⁶ See Schick 1995, 325–59 for a list of sites.

⁵⁷ Schick 1995, 342–3.

⁵⁸ Tzaferis *et al.* 1994; Amit and Wolff 2000.

⁵⁹ Avni 2011*b*.

⁶⁰ Burtin 1914, 415; Schick 1995, 34, 352–3.

⁶¹ Orfali 1924.

⁶² Orfali 1924, 15, fig. 9.

⁶³ Schick 1995, 34, 332–3; see also Ben Dov 1985, 241.

⁶⁴ Gutfeld 2012; see also the discussion in Ch. 3.

⁶⁵ Schick 1995, 333–4.

⁶⁶ Milik 1960–1961, 136–7.

Excavations conducted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revealed several phases of use in the Byzantine period but no Persian destruction layer or evidence of subsequent repair. The scant archaeological findings show that the church continued to function in the Early Islamic period and was probably destroyed only in the tenth or eleventh centuries.⁶⁷ Continuity of use is also attested to by eighth- and ninth-century sources that mention the church.

The Church of Holy Zion on Mount Zion was reportedly burnt by the Persians and restored by Modestus.⁶⁸ Many Christians were said to have been killed there and the remains of two mass burials were found nearby. Yet sections of the church excavated in the early twentieth century did not yield any pottery findings or evidence of structural harm.⁶⁹ As it is mentioned in numerous Early Islamic sources as one of the main churches of Jerusalem, the most likely explanation is that the building suffered only minor damage, which was repaired shortly after the conquest.⁷⁰

This brief survey would not be complete without the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is mentioned in many historical sources.⁷¹ The church was reportedly set on fire and badly damaged, and later restored by Modestus with the aid of substantial donations. Additionally, three sites inside the church were listed by Strategius as places of Christian martyrdom.⁷² The burning of the church and the exile of the Patriarch Zacharias have been cited as symbols of the Christian defeat by Persia. However, a detailed archaeological study of the church has not found confirmation of widespread damage or reconstruction during this period.⁷³ Furthermore, the church's monogrammed capitals, which were removed when the building was repaired in modern times, appear to have been installed by the emperor Maurice (582–602), who carried out major renovations several years before the Persian conquest.⁷⁴ Di Segni concludes that these capitals remained intact throughout the Persian era and the church was only lightly scorched during the sack of Jerusalem.

Comparing the historical sources and archaeological evidence for the Persian conquest of Jerusalem, we thus find a clear contradiction: vivid descriptions of the massacre of local Christians and the destruction of churches and monasteries, versus physical evidence of mass burials but no large-scale devastation of residential areas or ecclesiastical compounds. This conflict between the textual and archaeological findings leaves two options. Either the historical accounts are deliberately falsified and misleading, or repairs took place soon after the invasion, obliterating all traces of damage from the archaeological record.

⁶⁷ Vincent and Abel 1914–1926, 672.

⁶⁸ Milik 1960–1961, 142–5; Schick 1995, 335–6.

⁶⁹ Vincent and Abel 1914–1926, 431–40.

⁷⁰ Schick 1995, 335.

⁷¹ For a summary, see Schick 1995, 37–8, 327–30.

⁷² Milik 1960–1961, 157–60.

⁷³ Avni and Seligman 2003, forthcoming.

⁷⁴ Di Segni 2011.

If no evidence for damage or destruction was found in many sites, and the assumption is that building damage was quickly repaired, questions arise about how discernible short-term changes are in the archaeological record. Praise for the restoration work in Jerusalem after the conquest appears in several texts. Would it be possible for such repairs to escape detection in excavations or architectural analysis? Certainly, if churches and monasteries had been abandoned entirely, this would have left some trace in the archaeological record. So even if the buildings were damaged and quickly restored, the scope of the damage must have been minimal.

In fact, the archaeological evidence points to two different outcomes. In the short term, the slaughter of Christians, filling mass graves in and around the city, was a devastating blow. Even if Strategius' figures are exaggerated (tens of thousands of victims—almost equal to the population of Jerusalem—seems highly unlikely), the immediate trauma was no doubt considerable. In the long run, however, the Christian presence in Jerusalem was not greatly affected. Churches, monasteries, and residential districts do not appear to have been wantonly destroyed, and when the Persians departed fourteen years later, they did not leave major wreckage in their wake.

In a wider context, the archaeological evidence provides vivid proof of the resilience of the local Christian community. Although the historical sources emphasize the disruption of life in Jerusalem and other parts of the country, it seems that in the *longue durée* the Persian conquest had a negligible effect on settlement and society. A more significant urban change came only with the consolidation of the new Islamic presence a century later.⁷⁵

The Arab conquest

Twenty years after the Persian invasion, the Arabs took the Near East by storm. The Arab conquest has been perceived as a trigger for profound change in settlement and society: it marked the end of nearly one thousand years of Western influence under Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine rule. Nevertheless, modern scholars describe it as an 'easy conquest',⁷⁶ and sometimes even an 'invisible conquest'.⁷⁷ Some towns and cities surrendered peacefully and signed treaties with the Arab conquerors, as in the case of Ayla, Tiberias, Beth Shean-Scythopolis, and Jerusalem,⁷⁸ while others were conquered through siege and violent battle. The most notable example is Caesarea Maritima, which endured a seven-year siege and was eventually taken by force.

⁷⁵ See the discussion in Ch. 3.

⁷⁶ Hitti 1951, 153. This term is based on al-Baladhuri's description of the conquest.

⁷⁷ Pentz 1992. ⁷⁸ Hill 1971; Gil 1992, 43–5; Levy-Rubin 2011*b*.

The Arab conquest of Palestine has been described in detail in several historical sources, each of which provides a slightly different narrative.⁷⁹ Yet all were written at least 150 years after the event, reflecting the views of later historians in their own cultural and political milieu.⁸⁰ As there are no eyewitness accounts, the sequence of events is not clear and even the locations of some of the main battlefields have not been identified.⁸¹

The early raids into southern Palestine began in September 629, when the Arab forces invaded Mu'ta, south-east of the Dead Sea. They were defeated by the Byzantine army and their three commanders were killed. Bedouin tribes in northern Arabia that were allied with Byzantium were also attacked. The next raid on southern Palestine and Jordan was conducted in 632, and was aimed at southern Jordan and the 'Arabah Valley, where Bedouin tribes lived on the fringes of sedentary settlements. These incursions did not advance into the settled areas and ended in retreat to avoid an all-out confrontation with the Byzantine army.⁸²

A full-scale invasion was launched in the winter of 634 under the command of the first Muslim caliph, Abu Bakr. The Arabs advanced in two main directions. One force, under 'Amr b. al-'As, crossed the Negev towards the city of Gaza on the southern coastal plain,⁸³ and the other advanced through southern and central Jordan. Kaegi claimed that 'Amr b. al-'As led his troops across the 'Arabah Valley, destroying wells and settlements along the way.⁸⁴ Mayerson suggested several alternative routes from Ayla to Gaza. He concluded that the troops did not cross the eastern 'Arabah Valley or use Darb el-Ghaza, the westbound road from Ayla to Gaza,⁸⁵ but chose less well-known desert routes that went deep into Sinai and headed northwards to the district of Gaza.⁸⁶

In the course of this raid, several Arab tribes allied with Byzantium joined the advancing forces. The Christian chronicler Theophanes may have been referring to them in his account of how the Byzantine system of paid border guards collapsed.⁸⁷

Some of the neighboring Arabs were receiving small payments from the emperors for guarding the approaches to the desert. At that time a certain eunuch arrived to distribute the wages of the soldiers, and when the Arabs came to receive their wages according to custom, the eunuch drove them away, saying: 'The Emperor

⁷⁹ The main texts on which modern scholarship is based appear in al-Baladhuri's *Futūh al-Buldan*, and al-Tabari's *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*.

⁸⁰ The accuracy of Islamic sources is beyond the scope of the present work. For the main references, see Donner 1981, 2008, Kennedy 1986.

⁸¹ See detailed discussions in Donner 1981, Kaegi 1992, and Sharon 2001.

⁸² Gil 1992, 30–2; Kaegi 1992, 66–87.

⁸³ Donner 1981, 114–17; Kaegi 1992, 88–94; Gil 1992, 49; Mayerson 1964.

⁸⁴ Kaegi 1992, 93. ⁸⁵ Meshel 1981. ⁸⁶ Mayerson 1964, 192–9.

⁸⁷ Mayerson 1964; 192–9; Gil 1992, 37.

can barely pay his soldiers their wages, much less these dogs!' Distressed by this, the Arabs went over to their fellow-tribesmen, and it was they that led them to the rich country of Gaza, which is the gateway to the desert in the direction of Mount Sinai.⁸⁸

Reaching the Mediterranean coast, the Arab forces fought the local Byzantine army at Dathin, a village near Gaza, on 4 February 634. The Byzantines lost and their commander was slain.⁸⁹ Other Muslim forces took an eastern route through Tabuk into Edom and the Moab mountains (al-Balka). They reached the Jordan Valley, but their advance was halted by the Byzantines in the battle of Marj Suffar, an unidentified location probably in the northern Jordan Valley.⁹⁰

Khalid b. Walid, who commanded the invasion of Iraq, was called in to support the forces in Palestine. He led his troops across the Syrian Desert and in July 634 attacked the rear flanks of the Byzantine army in southern Syria. Under Walid, most of Syria was conquered and his men advanced southwards to unite with 'Amr b. al-'As.

The Islamic conquest of Palestine involved several major battles. The first was in July 634 at Ajnadayn, an unidentified site believed to be somewhere between Ramla and Beth Guvrin, or possibly further north, near Lajjun.⁹¹ The defeat of the Byzantine army in this battle was followed by the swift conquest of all the major towns and cities in Palestine.

The occupation of Palestine was largely completed by the end of 634. The few territories that remained under Byzantine rule were gradually conquered in the years that followed. Evidence of the beleaguered state of the Christians during this period can be seen in a sermon delivered by Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, on Christmas Day of 634, in which he laments the looting of cities, monasteries, villages, and fields by invading Saracens.⁹² The last major battle occurred in August 636, north of the Yarmuk River.⁹³ The Byzantine army amassed all its remaining troops in a bid to stop the advancing Islamic forces but suffered a resounding defeat and retreated entirely from Syria. The way was now open for the conquest of the last Byzantine strongholds in Palestine. Jerusalem surrendered peacefully in 638, Caesarea was taken in 640 after a long siege, and Ascalon fell to the Arabs in 644.

⁸⁸ *Theophanes* 335–6, tr. Mango and Scott 1997, 466.

⁸⁹ Kaegi 1992, 88–94; Donner 1981, 115; Gil 1992, 49–50; Mayerson 1964, 166–9. For a different view of the battle, see Nevo and Koren 2003, 98–100. The location of Dathin is unknown. It has been suggested that the site is located in northern Samaria and not near Gaza. See Palmer 1993, 19.

⁹⁰ Gil 1992, 34. For a revisionist interpretation, see Sharon 2001.

⁹¹ Gil 1992, 41–3.

⁹² De Goeje 1900, 174; Schick 1995, 34–40; Griffith 2008, 25–6; Hoyland 1997a, 67–74.

⁹³ Kaegi 1992, 112–46.

As in the case of the Persian conquest, the gap between the historical narratives and the archaeological evidence is striking. The traditional view of the Islamic conquest as the catalyst for a political and cultural revolution has been dramatically revised over the last thirty years. However, there is still a tendency to associate archaeological layers with well-known historical events rather than rely on the evidence of pottery, glass, and coins from stratigraphic sequences. In the past, a major obstacle to accurate reconstruction of the archaeological sequence was the inadequate study of pottery finds.⁹⁴ Since the publication of pottery assemblages from Pella,⁹⁵ Caesarea,⁹⁶ and Jerusalem,⁹⁷ the situation has much improved. Finds from large-scale surveys and excavations in the hinterlands of the large cities and the fringes of the desert have provided further data on the impact of the Arab conquest on settlement and society.

As the invaders' first encounter with the local population was in the Negev, one would expect some evidence of this interaction in the archaeological record. The large number of sites investigated and their excellent state of preservation allow for a more effective evaluation of settlement trends than for regions farther north. But the picture that emerges from this extensive research into Negev settlements and agriculture is one of continuity.⁹⁸ The Arab conquest seems to have had no direct impact on settlement or society, with gradual administrative changes taking place only several decades later. Earlier exploration led scholars to conclude that 'Avdat was partly or completely destroyed in the Arab raids,⁹⁹ and Mamshit was abandoned even before the Islamic conquest,¹⁰⁰ but these theories have been refuted by recent findings. 'Avdat was apparently hit by an earthquake sometime in the early seventh century and certainly not destroyed by violent conquest.¹⁰¹ The situation at Mamshit is less clear, but the new archaeological evidence does not support the earlier abandonment theory.¹⁰²

According to these findings, not a single Negev site was affected by the Arab conquest: the region shows an uninterrupted pattern of settlement throughout the seventh and eighth centuries. Construction of public buildings and private dwellings continued in the first half of the seventh century and did not stop when the Arabs arrived. This is evident from several dated inscriptions, including a stone pavement in the southern church of Shivta from 639, and a burial inscription from the same year in the town's northern church.¹⁰³

⁹⁴ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 1.

⁹⁵ McNicoll *et al.* 1992.

⁹⁶ Lenzen 1983; Arnon 2008*a*, 2008*b*.

⁹⁷ Magness 1993.

⁹⁸ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 4.

⁹⁹ Negev 1997, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Negev 1988, 7–8.

¹⁰¹ Erickson-Gini 2010, 87–97. According to her interpretation the site was severely damaged by an earthquake sometime in the 620s. It is based on a clearly dated destruction layer in one of the excavated houses. I am grateful to her for allowing me to mention this as yet unpublished information.

¹⁰² Erickson-Gini 2010, 83–7. See also Magness 2003, 188–90.

¹⁰³ Negev 1981, 56–8.

Small villages and farmsteads reveal a similar picture. The expansion of small-scale agricultural settlement in the western and southern Negev Highlands intensified in the second half of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century, and these sites functioned without interruption for at least 300 years.¹⁰⁴

The archaeological data enable a fairly good reconstruction of the distribution of settlement in the first half of the seventh century. No damage or destruction was found that could be directly attributed to the conquest, and changes in the density and distribution of settlements were related either to internal processes, as suggested for the Negev Highlands, or to the long-term effects of administrative change, a decline in pilgrimages, and a deteriorating relationship with other regions of the Mediterranean.

Moving towards Damascus, the Arab invaders embarked on an eastward route that crossed Jordan. Two of the main battles with the Byzantine army were fought near Pella/Fihl and the River Yarmuk.¹⁰⁵ The location of another important battle site, Ajnadayn, has not been conclusively identified. Sharon has challenged the common view that it was in western Palestine, and proposed northern Jordan or southern Syria as more plausible.¹⁰⁶ Because of the geographical uncertainty about where the battles took place, it has not been possible to apply the methodology of 'battleground archaeology', which argues that large battlegrounds leave their mark on the terrain.

Archaeological research has found no traces of military confrontation in the sites of northern Jordan.¹⁰⁷ The two major battles between the Byzantines and the Arabs, at Fihl and Yarmuk, have left no visible impact on the nearby cities and towns of Pella, Abila, Umm el-Jimnal, and Jarash. The large-scale excavations at Beth Shean and Hippos-Sussita reveal a similar lack of findings.¹⁰⁸ These sites were not even slightly damaged in the course of the invasion. Other towns in central and northern Jordan enjoyed a surge in public and private building during the first half of the seventh century.

While earlier excavations in the region turned up a destruction layer attributed to the Persian and Arab invasions,¹⁰⁹ the continuous sixth–eighth century stratigraphy at Pella suggests that the town was not damaged by these military events.¹¹⁰ The evidence for continuity of settlement is supported by the historical sources: Pella was one of the cities that surrendered to the Arabs

¹⁰⁴ See Haiman 1995, Avni 1992, 1996, Rosen and Avni 1997, Lender 1990, Nahlieli *et al.* 1996, Ben Michael *et al.* 2004, and the discussion in Ch. 4.

¹⁰⁵ For descriptions of the Yarmuk battle, see Kaegi 1992, 112–49 and Gil 1992, 45–8.

¹⁰⁶ Sharon 2001.

¹⁰⁷ For the main evaluations, see MacCadam 1994, Schick 1992, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ Beth Shean: Tsafir and Foerster 1997, Sussita: Segal and Eisenberg 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Smith 1973, 164; see also the discussion of Schick 1992, 109.

¹¹⁰ See the detailed description in Ch. 4.

by treaty.¹¹¹ The battle of Fihl apparently took place on the outskirts of Pella and did not wreak havoc on the town itself.

Like Pella, Gadara, located just on the other side of the Yarmuk River, was also undamaged by the conquest. Its octagonal church was destroyed in an earthquake after the conquest, and other churches were used continuously throughout the seventh century.¹¹² The same is true for Abila, located near the deep gorge of the Yarmuk River, opposite the site of the famous battle. Again, a clear pattern of continuity emerges that is borne out in other towns and villages in northern Jordan, among them Umm el-Jimal, Jarash, and Madaba. In this respect, Rihab and Khirbet es-Samra, in the hinterland of Jarash, are particularly interesting: major construction projects continued even in the midst of the Islamic onslaught. Two churches in Rihab were built or renovated in 635 as battles between the invaders and the Byzantine army were being waged nearby. Two other churches were dedicated on the eve of the conquest, during the period of Persian rule.¹¹³ New mosaic floors were laid in the churches of Khirbet es-Samra in 635–640.¹¹⁴

Further evidence of peaceful life during the time of the Arab conquest is provided by tombstone inscriptions, which contain no reference to violent events or unusual circumstances that might have led to an upsurge in burials. Several inscribed tombstones discovered at various sites attest to the fact that life went on as usual during this period and was not disrupted by the advancing Arab army or battles going on nearby.¹¹⁵

The conquest of Caesarea Maritima has been described in some detail. The city was besieged for seven years, and then stormed by the Arabs. A comparison of the major sources provides a relatively clear picture of events.¹¹⁶ The siege of Caesarea was begun in July 634 by ‘Amr b. al-‘As. The most detailed account, by al-Baladhuri, relates that it was not a continuous siege, and the Arab forces were called away to fight in more pressing battles with the Byzantines.¹¹⁷ The siege was renewed in 639 under the command of Mu‘awiyah and the city finally fell in October 640 or early in 641.¹¹⁸ According to al-Baladhuri, the Arabs were assisted by a local Jew who led them into the city through a ‘tunnel’. This tunnel may have been the Roman aqueduct that

¹¹¹ Hill 1971, 67, 72. ¹¹² Schick 1995, 478–9.

¹¹³ Piccirillo 1980; Schick 1995, 442–3; see also Ch. 2.

¹¹⁴ The Church of St George had an inscription dating its mosaic floor to c.640, and the Church of John the Baptist had a mosaic laid over the original stone pavement around 635; see Humbert 1990, Schick 1995, 377–8.

¹¹⁵ Schick 1994, 138–42.

¹¹⁶ For general summaries of the siege and conquest, see Gil 1992, 58. For a detailed evaluation of the historical sources and the archaeological evidence, see Patrich 2011a. For the Samaritan sources, see Levy-Rubin 2000, 2002.

¹¹⁷ Hitti and Murgotten 1916, 140–3, 156–63; Hill 1971, 75–84; Donner 1981, 153, 323; Gil 1992, 58.

¹¹⁸ See the brief summary and comparison of sources in Patrich 2011a, 52–8.

entered the city from the north.¹¹⁹ Other sources mention a secret postern in the north-western part of the city wall that was discovered by the Arabs and facilitated their entry into the city. Once inside, they opened the city gates for their comrades.¹²⁰ The bloody fight went on for three days. Many of the city's Christian defenders were killed, and a large number of prisoners were taken to Arabia.¹²¹

Various sources emphasize the damage caused to urban infrastructure and the steep drop in population after the conquest.¹²² During the lengthy siege, many of the Christian and Samaritan inhabitants were said to have fled the city for Byzantium.¹²³

In contrast to the clear-cut historical narrative, the archaeological record shows no direct evidence of damage or destruction. The only excavated area of Caesarea that may have been affected in the siege was the Byzantine city wall, which reveals signs of being reinforced in the first half of the seventh century.¹²⁴ Archaeological findings suggest that the decline and abandonment of large parts of Byzantine Caesarea were a gradual process that lasted several decades. It began years before the conquest and gained momentum with the exodus of the Christian and Samaritan population. However tempting it may be to correlate the historical narrative and the archaeological findings, the data now available do not attest to physical damage incurred as a result of siege and conquest.

The changing view on the impact of the Arab conquest on Caesarea is summed up by Holum:

... the dating evidence in the 'destruction' layers in Caesarea lacks the precision necessary to associate these layers with one another in a single episode of destruction by hostile forces. Accidental conflagration or natural collapse is therefore an equally possible etiology.¹²⁵

Thus it is possible that isolated layers of ash found in several parts of the city might have resulted from the operation of kilns for pottery and glass, for example, rather than violent conquest.¹²⁶

The impact of the conquests

An examination of the archaeological record makes it clear that the Persian and Arab conquests did not have the kind of impact and long-term consequences

¹¹⁹ al-Baladhuri, 141, Hitti and Murgotten 1916, 217–18.

¹²⁰ Levy-Rubin 2002, 52–3.

¹²¹ A total of 7,000 people were killed and 4,000 taken prisoners. See *Theophanes* 341, Hitti and Murgotten 1916, 218, Patrich 2011a, 57–8.

¹²² Horton 1999, 381. ¹²³ Patrich 2011a, 52–3; Levy-Rubin 2002, 51.

¹²⁴ Reich and Peleg 1992; Magness 2003, 211; see also the detailed discussion in Ch. 2.

¹²⁵ Holum 1992, 83. ¹²⁶ Horton 1999, 387.

that have been widely attributed to them, particularly when compared with other violent military conquests in the history of Palestine and Jordan. Archaeologists have not found evidence of catastrophic destruction in any of the sites in question, despite historical narratives to that effect. A re-evaluation of several sites said to have suffered extensive damage in these conquests has produced alternative explanations for the changes in settlement.

This dilemma is related to the broader methodological problem of how a one-time political or military event is manifested in the archaeological record. Traditional archaeology has tended to focus on the destruction of settlements by conquest. One of the prime examples is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions in 70 CE.¹²⁷ The city was burnt to the ground and abandoned, and excavations around the Temple Mount and in the Jewish quarter clearly attest to its violent end as a Jewish city.¹²⁸ But this well-known historical event seems to be an exception: the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem, for example, described in the literature as brutal and bloody in the extreme, has left no discernible physical traces.¹²⁹

Thus, the visibility of a military conquest is a factor that must be treated cautiously. The long-term consequences of conquest are not only a function of physical damage but of local resilience and the ability of the populace to invest resources in rapid restoration and reconstruction. Thus, the Persians may have damaged buildings in Jerusalem, but the urban fabric was not destroyed, the city was not abandoned, and any structural damage was repaired within a short period of time.

In modern times, there are many examples of cities that have been devastated by war and quickly rebuilt in a way that left no evidence of destruction. The 1991–1992 war in the Balkans, for example, ripped apart the old town of Dubrovnik in Croatia. Out of 824 buildings, 563 were badly damaged, and nine historic structures were reduced to rubble.¹³⁰ Restoration work began immediately after the war. In less than five years, most of the damage was repaired, and no physical trace of what had occurred was left.

As for many other political or military events in history, the problem here is the paucity of archaeological findings. Unless an act of conquest or political upheaval is accompanied by wide-scale destruction, the ability of the archaeological record to pinpoint the event is seriously weakened. In her study of public and private space in Capitolias-Baieit Ras, Lenzen acknowledged this difficulty:

An event *recorded* in text acquires significance without regard to site, place or specific space. As a consequence, the recording becomes the event and the archaeological ‘facts’ are placed within the framework of the *recorded* events.¹³¹

¹²⁷ See Levine 2002 for an updated summary.

¹²⁹ Praver 1991.

¹³⁰ Zacknic 1992.

¹²⁸ Levine 2002, 406–11; Reich 2009.

¹³¹ Lenzen 1995, 238.

Many archaeological assessments of change and decline in settlements succumb to this kind of flawed thinking. While archaeology and history are clearly interconnected, the conflict between textual evidence and archaeological data may signal the need for other explanations. In the case of the Persian and Arab conquests of Palestine, the historical descriptions do not mesh with the ‘facts on the ground’: the archaeological record shows a long process of peaceful evolution of settlements rather than a dramatic change caused by violent conquest. Yet the chronology proposed in publications of many excavated sites continues to adhere to the traditional narrative of destruction and abandonment as a direct consequence of conquest.¹³²

In order to gain a true understanding of what happened in Palestine during the Arab conquest we must look at the large number of cities and towns that surrendered peacefully to the invading Arabs through treaties.¹³³ The process of peaceful transition of political and religious leadership is rarely visible, and effects on material culture become noticeable only a generation or two later. The archaeological record thus reinforces the view of a ‘peaceful’, ‘invisible’, or ‘silent’ invasion which did not involve destruction or sudden changes in the material culture.

Military campaigns, sea, and land raids

From the late seventh century to the Crusader conquest in 1099, Palestine and Jordan witnessed a large number of military events. Particularly noteworthy were the Byzantine sea raids on the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean, the raids by Bedouin tribes who stormed the peripheral regions time and again, and numerous military campaigns that swept over the country, part of the ongoing struggle between the major political powers in Egypt and Iraq. It was believed that this military and political turmoil had a long-term impact on the resilience of the local population, creating havoc and disorder.

Raids by the Byzantine navy on the Eastern Mediterranean shores began in the second half of the seventh century as a delayed response to the Arab conquest. According to al-Baladhuri, the Byzantines raided the coast of Palestine in 669 and again in 683.¹³⁴ The threat from the sea triggered the massive fortification of settlements along the coast with the construction of the *ribatat* and *thughur* as coastal defences, and the transformation of the coastal region ‘from a highway into a frontier’.¹³⁵ Additional preventive measures were

¹³² E.g. Watson 2001.

¹³³ See Levy-Rubin 2011*b* for a comprehensive study of surrender agreements.

¹³⁴ al-Baladhuri, 142–9. ¹³⁵ Masarwa 2011; see also the discussion in Ch. 4.

undertaken, the most significant of which was the establishment of inland Ramla as the capital of Jund Filastin to replace coastal Caesarea.

The historical sources present contradictory descriptions of the attitude of the Muslims to the sea, stressing both distrust and some experience in naval seafaring. Their natural animosity and fear of the sea, rooted in their inland origin and their inferiority in maritime wars, were soon replaced by the realization that, in order to control the coastal shores of the conquered lands, they must develop a navy. While most early sources emphasized the coast as part of the border of the Islamic state, they also described the rapid development of the Islamic naval forces.¹³⁶

Fleets under Muslim command were able to challenge the well-established naval power of the Byzantine Empire only two decades after the conquest. Naval bases were established in Egypt and later in Syria and North Africa, using the main existing port, as in Alexandria, and the governor of Egypt was also 'in charge of the sea'.

The new Arab navy under Mu'awiyah attacked Cyprus in 649, and a naval expedition was sent to Sicily in 652, plundering settlements along the coast. Arab naval superiority was made clear in the 655 'Battle of the Masts', off the Lycian coast, where the Byzantine navy was defeated in one of the largest maritime battles in the history of the Mediterranean.¹³⁷ This battle ended the hegemony of Byzantium in the Eastern Mediterranean. The *Mare Nostrum* was transformed in less than two decades into a 'theatre for a fierce and destructive naval confrontation'.¹³⁸

This Arab naval supremacy triggered a more ambitious expedition against Constantinople in 674. A large Arab fleet under Yazid blockaded the Byzantine capital from its seafront for about seven years, but was finally defeated by the Byzantine defenders and forced to withdraw.¹³⁹ On their way back to Syria, many ships were lost in a storm off the Pamphylian coast. This loss opened the way for the renewal of Byzantine naval supremacy. The Byzantine navy launched massive sea raids on the coast of the Eastern Mediterranean, causing considerable damage to settlements along the shore. Particularly destructive was the raid of 683, which devastated Ascalon, Caesarea, Acre, and Tyre.

In response, the Muslim rulers dedicated large efforts to the fortification of the coastal settlements. A newly arrived Muslim population was encouraged to settle in the coastal towns, which were defined as *thugur*, border fortified settlements. Large-scale state funding was allocated to fortifying existing settlements, such as Apollonia-Arsuf and Ascalon, and to the establishment

¹³⁶ Elad 1982a, 146–52; Sharon 1999, 260–4; Kennedy 2007, 324–38; Pryor and Jeffreys 2006, 24–7.

¹³⁷ See Kennedy 2007, 327–30 for a description of the battle

¹³⁸ Kennedy 2007, 327–30, 325. ¹³⁹ Pryor and Jeffreys 2006, 26–7.

of new strongholds, the *ribatat*. Most notable was the construction of new fortified enclosures in strategic locations on the coastal plain.¹⁴⁰ These fortifications were maintained throughout the Early Islamic period, and were specifically referred to by al-Muqaddasi in his description of the coastal towns during the second half of the tenth century.¹⁴¹

However, it seems that the overall impact of the Byzantine sea raids on the Eastern Mediterranean was not a devastating one, and it did not prevent the expansion of Islamic rule over Palestine and Jordan. The Arab response, expressed in the development of a line of fortifications along the coast, diminished the potential influence of the raids on the daily life of the local population. In fact, many settlements in the coastal plain were further developed through the investment of governmental funds in the protection of the seashore.

Yet the Byzantine raids also had a long-term impact, which became very significant after the eighth century: the transformation of the coast from a highway into a frontier was another step in the *longue durée* process of changing the orientation of the Near East from the West to the East. While in the Byzantine period Palestine and Jordan were bonded by commercial and cultural ties to the West, in the eighth century the wheel turned, and Eastern connections predominated, both in the political spheres with the establishment of the Abbasid government in Baghdad, and in increased commercial and cultural ties with the East. The Byzantine raids on the coastal plain may have been another stage in the long-term change, shifting the orientation of Palestine from the West to the East.

Along with the troubles in the coastal regions, the first indications of internal political unrest were evident in the second half of the eighth century, following the consolidation of Abbasid rule and the transfer of their capital from Damascus to Baghdad. Conflicts between local Bedouin tribes were recorded at the beginning of the ninth century, particularly between 807 and 810. Several sources attest to the destruction of major settlements, among them Beth Guvrin and Gaza, and large-scale damage to churches in Jerusalem and the Judean Desert monasteries, including the central monastery at Mar Saba in the Judean Desert.¹⁴²

The annexation of Palestine and Jordan to Egypt by Ibn Tulun in 878, which severed the link with the seat of political power in Baghdad, brought with it a period of relative peace and prosperity. Ramla and Tiberias grew in wealth and influence, and large-scale building, including the construction of new fortifications, began in Acre and Jaffa.¹⁴³ This prosperity was not long-lived. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Palestine and Jordan again became

¹⁴⁰ Elad 1982*a*; Masarwa 2006, 138–41, 2011, 158–67.

¹⁴¹ al-Muqaddasi, 177, tr. Collins 1994, 148–9.

¹⁴² Gil 1992, 292–4 [410].

¹⁴³ See the detailed descriptions in Ch. 2 and Ch. 4.

the battleground for political intrigue in Egypt and Iraq. Repeated attempts by the Abbasid army to reconquer the region and sporadic raids by the Qaramatis into northern Palestine created long periods of political unrest interspersed with brief intervals of comparative peace. Between 906 and 935 the Abbasids regained control of Palestine. This brought a short period of stability that led to a flurry of construction and economic activity, as a number of building inscriptions unearthed in Jerusalem and Ramla confirm.¹⁴⁴

Another period of political unrest, which triggered riots and revolts, occurred in 968–978 with the Fatimid conquest of Palestine. The conquest was preceded by years of Qaramati raids on northern Palestine, followed by their advance further south to conquer Ramla. For almost a decade the region was plagued by fighting between the Fatimids, Qaramatis, and Ikhshidid, with Fatimid rule not established until in 979. The Fatimid army invaded Palestine four times in this turbulent decade, but each time it was defeated and forced to retreat to Egypt. Only on its fifth attempt was Palestine finally conquered and Fatimid rule established over large areas of southern Syria, Palestine, and Jordan.¹⁴⁵ Throughout the years of Fatimid rule, the country was plagued by raids and uprisings by the local Bedouins, the Qaramatis, and the growing Turkish military force in Damascus. A military threat was also posed by the Byzantine Empire.

These regional political changes were documented in local historical sources. Particularly interesting is the chronicle of Abu l-Fath, which describes the events in Palestine from the perspective of the local Samaritan community. Abu l-Fath writes in detail about the calamities of the late eighth and ninth centuries in Samaria and its environs, and traces the outbreak of violence between Arab forces struggling for control over Palestine, which caused great hardship to non-Muslim populations.¹⁴⁶

However, all these military campaigns and raids left no trace in the archaeological record of Palestine and Jordan. There was no massive destruction of cities and towns, and settlement patterns in the countryside did not change in any noticeable way. Ramla was besieged and attacked several times in the ninth and tenth centuries. Between 970 and 979, the city was said to have been raided repeatedly, with massive damage caused to buildings and infrastructure. Yet none of the dozens of excavations in Ramla has turned up destruction or burnt layers that could be dated to the second half of the tenth century.¹⁴⁷ On the contrary, accelerated construction of private mansions and wealthy residential neighbourhoods has been noted in Early Islamic Ramla, particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries, when the city reached a peak in urban expansion. Military raids and conquests did not affect the city's layout, and minor damage to buildings seems to have been rapidly repaired. The same goes for Tiberias,

¹⁴⁴ Gil 1992, 315 [470]; Sharon 1997b.

¹⁴⁶ Levy-Rubin 2002, 31–2, 62–75.

¹⁴⁵ Gil 1992, 335–40 [543–50].

¹⁴⁷ See the detailed discussion in Ch. 3.

where no archaeological evidence has been found for destruction during the tenth century.

The accounts of Bedouin raids on Jerusalem in the ninth and tenth centuries also conflict with the archaeological findings. The absence of structural damage or a halt in building construction in this turbulent period clearly attests to the resilience of the local population, particularly in the cities, which preserved their economic strength and continued to provide stable living conditions despite the political turmoil.

Hoardings as an archaeological index

A large number of coin or jewellery hoards concealed in private homes or public buildings could be an indication of a community living under threat, usually one related to war or political upheaval. An opposing view is that hoards were linked to times of prosperity, when large denominations were issued and private citizens needed to store their unused currency.¹⁴⁸ However, in periods of political instability, hiding valuables would be done out of fear of domestic or foreign violence. Several scholars have pointed out the connection between an increase in the number of hoards and political instability.¹⁴⁹ As the date of concealing the hoard is usually determined by the most recent coin, hoards may serve as an archaeological index for external or internal threat to the site in question. A combination of political instability and fear of robbers and thieves led people to hide their valuables, mainly in or near their own houses. Hoarding was based on the opinion that the troubles were temporary and they could later return to live in their homes.

A collection of 152 hoards from Palestine dating to Roman and Byzantine periods shows a clear pattern of hoarding in periods of war and political turmoil, for example, during the Jewish revolts against the Romans in the first and second centuries CE, the Galus revolt in the fourth century, and the Persian and Arab conquests.¹⁵⁰ The local population hid their valuables when they felt personally endangered. Most of the hoards were found in private homes, hidden under floors or packed into walls. It is unclear why the owners did not come back to retrieve their property. In cases where the archaeological findings do not support the claim of the total destruction of settlements, the presence of hoards indicates that some homes may have been permanently abandoned or their owners killed in the violence.

¹⁴⁸ See Duncan-Jones 1994.

¹⁴⁹ E.g. Walmsley 2000, 269, 2007a, 46–7. For an updated discussion, see Bijovsky 2011, 427–40.

¹⁵⁰ Waner and Safrai 2001.

Another detailed list of fifth–seventh century hoards from Palestine and neighbouring regions includes 167 hoards, some of them classified as foundation deposits, and others showing connection to periods of turmoil.¹⁵¹

The increase in the number of coin hoards in the years preceding the Persian conquest attests to political unrest and the loss of personal security. Of eighteen coin hoards in Syria and Palestine dated to the early seventh century, fifteen are believed to have been hidden in 602–12, on the eve of the Persian conquest.¹⁵² Of special interest is a hoard found in Jerusalem containing imperial gold coins of a single mint, probably operating in Jerusalem, all dated to 613 and linked to the Persian invasion in 614.¹⁵³ It may have been an attempt by the Byzantine government to support the local administration in Jerusalem in light of the looming military threat.

The Arab conquest was not accompanied by a notable increase in hoarding: only five hoards were unearthed from the 630s, which reinforces the theory that it was a ‘peaceful conquest’.¹⁵⁴ A number of additional hoards are known from the second half of the seventh century, for example in Beth Shean and Neapolis/Nablus.¹⁵⁵

An upsurge in hoards was also evident in the second half of the eleventh century, when Ramla, Tiberias, and Caesarea were declining. There seems to be a solid connection between the number of hoards and the abandonment of these sites: two major hoards from Tiberias and Caesarea have been dated to the 1060s and 1070s.¹⁵⁶ Other coin and jewellery hoards from this period have been found in Ramla,¹⁵⁷ Beth Shean, and other small towns.¹⁵⁸ The increase indicates that the local population was threatened, either externally or internally. A connection to the Seljuk occupation of Palestine in the 1070s has been suggested. In Ramla and Tiberias, for example, which have been extensively excavated, no evidence has been found of dwellings being deliberately razed or burnt during this period. But the mass abandonment of private homes all over the country during the second half of the eleventh century was not reversed quickly. Cities, towns, and villages shrank dramatically. The abandoned homes were never resettled and the valuables concealed in them were not retrieved. The fact that the owners did not go back to fetch their property raises questions about why they left and what became of them.

¹⁵¹ Bijovsky 2011, 467–85. ¹⁵² Walmsley 2010; Bijovsky 2011, 427–34.

¹⁵³ Ben Ami *et al.* 2010; Bijovsky 2011, 416–20; see also the discussion above.

¹⁵⁴ Waner and Safrai 2001, 78–9; see also Walmsley 2000, 332–40, Bijovsky 2011, 434–40, 449.

¹⁵⁵ Walmsley 2000, 332.

¹⁵⁶ Caesarea: Arnon *et al.* 2008; Tiberias: Brosh 1998, Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 2008; see also Ch. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Levi 1965–1966; Lester 2008a. Additional hoards have been found in a number of excavations but the result have not yet been published. I thank R. Kool for this information.

¹⁵⁸ For Beth Shean, see Kool *et al.* 2011.

Earthquakes

While military raids, internal uprisings, and political changes are hardly noticeable in the archaeological record, earthquake damage is one of the most easily observable features. The correlation between earthquake destruction and historically known seismic events has been used as a chronological benchmark at many sites throughout the region. Several large quakes were recorded in Palestine and Jordan in the period under discussion,¹⁵⁹ the major ones in 551, 659, 749, 1033, and 1068. Mild quakes were recorded in 633, 756, 859, and 1016.¹⁶⁰

The most visible of these earthquakes was that of 18 January 749, which struck hardest in the northern Jordan Valley and around the Sea of Galilee.¹⁶¹ Beth Shean, Pella, Gadara, Abila, Hippos-Sussita, Tiberias, Kursi, and Capernaum sustained damage, although sites farther south were less affected, and the impact on the Jerusalem area and the coastal plain appears to have been minimal.¹⁶² Vestiges of earthquake damage are especially noticeable at the Beth Shean and Pella excavations. The city centre of Beth Shean was badly hit in the quakes of 551 and 659. Although it was partially restored in the first half of the eighth century, the 749 earthquake was devastating and led to the abandonment of monumental buildings in the centre and a shift in urban focus to the southern plateau. The civic centre of nearby Pella was also destroyed, and this prompted a move to a location nearby.¹⁶³

Jerusalem and Ramla were not hard hit by the 749 earthquake. Despite earlier claims of widespread destruction south of the Temple Mount, the buildings on the mount and south of it do not seem to have suffered much damage. The large administrative buildings located there continued to function and were abandoned only after the 1033 earthquake.¹⁶⁴ Any other damage in Jerusalem was minor. The archaeological evidence in Ramla is also vague and limited to a single location south of the city.¹⁶⁵ Some houses and columns collapsed, and anomalies were detected in floors, but new buildings were soon built over the ruins. No traces of this earthquake have been found in other parts of Ramla, even though the city has been extensively excavated.

¹⁵⁹ Several lists of earthquakes documented in historical sources have been published. For Palestine and Jordan, see in particular Amiran *et al.* 1994, Russel 1985. Amiran's updated list is based in part on Michael Avi Yonah's unpublished list of earthquakes mentioned in historical sources, which was compiled in 1942.

¹⁶⁰ Russel 1985; Amiran *et al.* 1994.

¹⁶¹ For the date of this earthquake, see Tsafirir and Foerster 1992. For an alternative view claiming two consecutive earthquakes in 747 and 749, see Karcz and Elad 1992, Karcz 2004, 779–781.

¹⁶² Marco *et al.* 2003; Karcz 2004, 778–9.

¹⁶³ See the detailed description in Ch. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Prag 2008, 101–243.

¹⁶⁵ Gorzalczy 2008a, 2009b.

A map of the distribution of sites hit by the 749 earthquake shows that the epicentre was in northern Palestine and possibly the northern Jordan Valley.¹⁶⁶ Thus, damage is much more visible in the north than at sites around Jerusalem and in the coastal plain. So, again, the historical narrative and the archaeological evidence are conflicting: while sources depict the event as uniformly catastrophic,¹⁶⁷ the archaeological record reveals a more regionally diverse picture, with some places suffering greater devastation than others. An overall survey of the archaeological findings attests to earthquake damage in settlements in northern Palestine and Jordan, but also to a rapid recovery and reconstruction of wrecked buildings and infrastructure. Cities and towns decreased in size, but they continued to function and after a short period of decline, some even flourished and expanded.

Jerusalem and Ramla are classic examples of this discrepancy: the earthquake hit them both, but little evidence is detected in the archaeological record. Damage was quickly repaired and no long-term impact on the shape of the city was noticed. Even badly damaged Beth Shean and Pella sprang back to life after relocating nearby. Nevertheless, modern researchers still cite earthquakes as a major factor in changing the settlement patterns in Early Islamic Palestine. The 749 earthquake is said to have been the impetus for a massive decline in settlement and population. The theory that this seismic event was the final blow to Byzantine urban life in Palestine has been proposed by several scholars, who point to archaeological evidence from cities such as Beth Shean as proof.¹⁶⁸ The collapse of various industries and economic activity have been attributed to the earthquake, and it has been suggested that Umayyad coins were no longer issued because the mints had been destroyed.¹⁶⁹

However, an evaluation of the archaeological finds suggests that claims of a devastating long-term impact are much exaggerated. Excavations show that damage in central Palestine and Jordan was minimal. Sites that were supposedly destroyed and abandoned, such as Khirbet al-Mafjar, were restored soon after the earthquake.¹⁷⁰ A close look at the archaeological phasing of a number of sites reveals that damaged buildings were either repaired or rebuilt in another part of the settlement.¹⁷¹ Sometimes the whole urban centre was shifted to avoid the arduous task of building on debris, and the old stones were reused.

Three hundred years later, in 1033 and 1068, another two earthquakes struck. The 1033 quake consisted of a series of tremors. The epicentre appears to have been in the Jordan valley, with major damage recorded at Ramla, Jerusalem, Hebron, Ascalon, and Gaza.¹⁷² A letter found in the Cairo Geniza

¹⁶⁶ Different opinions are presented in Marco *et al.* 2003 and Karcz 2004, fig. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Karcz 2004, 778–87. ¹⁶⁸ See Tsafir and Foerster 1994, Tsafir 2009, 82.

¹⁶⁹ Schindel 2006. ¹⁷⁰ Whitcomb 1988.

¹⁷¹ E.g. in Pella; see Walmsley 2011. ¹⁷² Amiran *et al.* 1994, 296–8.

contains an eyewitness account of the 1033 earthquake in Ramla. A resident of Ramla wrote to a friend in Fustat about the large-scale destruction in the city, which included wreckage of dwellings, the collapse of 'fortified buildings', and a heavy toll of human life.¹⁷³ Many other cities, from Gaza to Haifa, felt the quake, and aftershocks in the northern coastal plain triggered a tsunami that pounded Acre and Tyre. Jerusalem was also affected: the south-eastern section of the Haram al-Sharif compound collapsed and the 'Umayyad palaces' were heavily damaged and abandoned.¹⁷⁴

The second major earthquake in the eleventh century, which struck in May 1068, virtually demolished Ramla. According to one source, only two streets (or houses) remained untouched.¹⁷⁵ The epicentre of this earthquake appears to have been the 'Arabah Valley, as it destroyed Ayla and caused destruction in other parts of southern Palestine.¹⁷⁶

Interestingly, the 1033 and 1068 earthquakes left fewer traces in the archaeological record than the one in 749. Many urban societies were already in a state of decline in the eleventh century, and the earthquakes apparently dealt them a final blow. This is particularly evident in Tiberias and Ramla. According to the historical accounts, almost all of Ramla was destroyed and abandoned in the 1068 earthquake, but archaeologists have not found evidence for earthquake destruction in the final phases of the Early Islamic city. A possible explanation lies in the poor state of preservation of the ruins and the fact that stones from older buildings were plundered in later periods. In Tiberias, which is better preserved, dwellings abandoned in the 1070s were carefully blocked up and earthquake damage remains hard to identify.

Although they are less visible in the archaeological record, it seems that the 1033 and 1068 earthquakes had a more wide-ranging impact on settlements and society than the earthquake of 749. Many inhabited sites ceased to exist, not so much because of the powerfulness of the quakes but because society was less resilient and lacked the necessary resources to recover and rebuild. The trauma of earthquakes only intensified the fragility.

Thus, earthquakes cannot be seen as playing a major role in altering regional settlement patterns. In the Early Islamic period, as in many other historical eras, earthquake damage was repaired and was not a primary reason for the disappearance of settlements. Archaeological findings show that the decline of eleventh-century settlements was not due to the earthquakes themselves, but rather to a combination of political instability and economic hardship that made it more difficult to overcome the disastrous effects of two earthquakes. Changes in settlement and economic life were long-term processes that were only marginally affected by this type of calamity. It was not the temporary closure of production centres that ruined the economy, but a whole set of factors.

¹⁷³ Gil 1992, 399 [595].

¹⁷⁵ Gil 1992, 408 [602].

¹⁷⁴ Seligman 2007, 39*–40*.

¹⁷⁶ Amiran *et al.* 1994, 298–300.

Plagues and famine

The impact of plagues on settlement and society in Palestine between the sixth and tenth centuries is a subject that has been touched on only briefly, usually in the context of plagues and famine in the Mediterranean as a whole.¹⁷⁷ Particular importance has been ascribed to the bubonic plague of 542, which is believed to have killed close to one-third of the population in and around the Mediterranean. The outbreak is believed to mark a turning point in the history and economy of Byzantium, contributing to the breakdown of local societies and the shrinking size of cities.¹⁷⁸ Carried by rats on ships crossing the Mediterranean, the disease spread rapidly from Ethiopia and Yemen to the coast of North Africa. Vessels sailing from Alexandria and Pelusium carried it to Constantinople and the Western Mediterranean. Within a short time, it was all over the Mediterranean and Near East. Asia Minor and Egypt were particularly hard hit.¹⁷⁹ This outbreak was followed by a series of local epidemics. The most relevant to Palestine occurred in 639 and is known in Arabic sources as the plague of 'Amwas. It took the lives of some 25,000 Arab soldiers garrisoned at 'Amwas, between Lod and Jerusalem.¹⁸⁰ Two additional outbreaks were documented in Syria in 698 and 743. While the first pandemic of bubonic plague in the Near East is believed to have run its course by 750, accounts of pestilence persist in the following centuries.¹⁸¹ Michael the Syrian wrote that a third of the population of Palestine was wiped out by a plague in 841–843. As many as 500 people died in Ramla on a single day, and their corpses were thrown into ditches because there was not enough time to dig graves. Many villages in the countryside were deserted as a direct consequence of the plague.¹⁸² The large numbers of dead (the estimate of 'one-third of the population' is cited for both 542 and 841) raises questions about the disposal of corpses. As ordinary burial was not possible, many were interred in communal pits on the outskirts of settlements.¹⁸³

Plagues and famine were related: during outbreaks of contagion, farmers could not cultivate their fields. The 542 plague was followed by eight years of famine due to crop failure. This scenario repeated itself after the 744 plague.

Unlike earthquakes, which resulted in architectural damage and the relocation of settlements, evidence of plagues is almost non-existent in the archaeological record. The only clue is an increase in number of sepulchres or communal graves. As none of these is clearly evident in Palestine and Jordan, the direct impact of plague and famine is hard to gauge. This is not to say that the figures

¹⁷⁷ See e.g. Stathakopoulos 2004.

¹⁷⁸ Horden 2005; Laiou and Morrisson 2007, 38.

¹⁷⁹ Stathakopoulos 2004, 110–54; Morony 2007; Horden 2005.

¹⁸⁰ Conrad 1986; Dols 1974, 376. ¹⁸¹ Morony 2007, 67–8.

¹⁸² Morony 2007, 68. ¹⁸³ Morony 2007, 74.

in the historical sources are exaggerated, as a number of scholars claim, but it does show the limitations of archaeological research. The discovery of several tombstone inscriptions in the Negev dated to 542 has been cited as evidence of bubonic plague, but the total number—six from Nessana, three from Rehovot, and one from 'Avdat—is too small a sample to justify such a conclusion.¹⁸⁴ Another burial inscription from Funon in Jordan mentions the year of the plague (542) as a time when one-third of the world's population perished.¹⁸⁵ While this shows that the local populace was aware of global events, it does not prove that Palestine and Jordan were directly affected.

Plagues were accompanied by a marked decrease in population and a long-term halt in public and monumental construction. However, the archaeological and epigraphic records from Palestine indicate only a temporary decline. A reduction in public construction was noticed in the 540s and attributed to the effects of plague and famine,¹⁸⁶ but, in the second half of the sixth century and first half of the seventh century, building resumed. A long-term drop in population figures is contradicted by the archaeological findings, which show an expansion of settlement into desert fringe areas during the second half of the sixth century along with continuity and urban growth in northern and central Palestine. Thus, bubonic plague and successive outbreaks of pestilence in the sixth to eighth centuries appear to have had only a limited effect on the resilience of local societies. Even if the number of victims mentioned in the historical sources (one-third of the population) is accurate, the economy recovered within a decade or two and the settlements continued to flourish.

The impact of plagues was not the same for urban as for rural populations: large cities in the Mediterranean suffered much more than the countryside and peripheral regions.¹⁸⁷ The common assumption of a major decline in population as a result of plague or other causes of mass mortality in the eighth century, which was compensated for by the importation of foreign populations into Syria and Palestine,¹⁸⁸ is not borne out by the archaeological findings. The evidence of the stability of the local population in Palestine and Jordan seems to indicate that plagues and famine were not as catastrophic as they were for other parts of the Mediterranean.

Indications for climate change?

The impact of climate change on settlements and society in Palestine during the second half of the first millennium has been widely debated for over a

¹⁸⁴ Tsafirir *et al.* 1988, 161. ¹⁸⁵ Di Segni 2006, 590–2. ¹⁸⁶ Di Segni 1999, 164.

¹⁸⁷ Chavarria and Lewit 2004, 20. See also Fisher 2011, 186–93 for the Golan and Hauran.

¹⁸⁸ As has been suggested by Morony 2007, 85.

century. Ellsworth Huntington claimed in 1911 that major changes in the history of human societies and settlements have been triggered by changes in the environment.¹⁸⁹ Some of his arguments related directly to Palestine. He suggested that the spread of settlements into arid zones in Roman and Byzantine times was a direct consequence of climatic amelioration, and that their presumed demise after the Arab conquest was the result of climatic deterioration and the desertification of large areas of the Near East.

This theory of 'climatic determinism' was adopted by Issar, who drew a link between desiccation in the fifth to tenth centuries, mass abandonment of settlements, and the coming of Islam. He speculated that the Arab conquest, followed by the penetration of tribes from central Arabia into the Mediterranean and the abandonment of the peripheral regions in the Near East, was triggered by this climatic change.¹⁹⁰ Hirschfeld also drew a connection between the decline of settlements in the Negev and the deterioration of climatic conditions which caused wells and springs to dry up. In his view, the climate of Palestine and Jordan was more humid before the early sixth century, and then became hot and dry.¹⁹¹ Several studies on the water levels of the Dead Sea have also noted a shift towards desiccation after the fifth century.¹⁹²

However, linking climate changes and the expansion and contraction of complex societies, especially in the Roman and Byzantine periods, has been criticized by many scholars, who attribute these transitions to political factors, not climate.¹⁹³ Nor does the cumulative archaeological evidence support climatic and environmental fluctuations as a critical factor in settlement transformation. Surveys and excavations in the fringe zones of the settled lands show constant growth and expansion into arid areas throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, the period when drought conditions were supposedly setting in. One of the best case studies for evaluating the influence of environmental factors is the Negev. The deterministic view of climate change in the second half of the first millennium is challenged by detailed archaeological and geomorphological studies which show that environmental conditions in the Negev during Late Antiquity were similar to those of today.

A comprehensive evaluation of data from several regions in the Near East by A. Rosen presents a clear picture of climatic stability in Late Antiquity and even a somewhat better distribution of rains in desert fringe areas.¹⁹⁴ Her conclusions are supported by the intensive surveys carried out in the Negev Highlands, and particularly by the re-evaluation of the chronology of agricultural fields, which shows continuity of settlement and agricultural production in the Early Islamic period. The cultivation and irrigation of fields using run-off rainwater

¹⁸⁹ Huntington 1911.

¹⁹⁰ Issar 1998, 122–5; Issar and Zohar 2004, 212–15.

¹⁹¹ Hirschfeld 2004*b*.

¹⁹² For a brief summary and references, see Decker 2009*a*, 8–10, Rosen 2007, 181–95.

¹⁹³ Rosen 2007, 18, Rubin 1989.

¹⁹⁴ Rosen 2007, 165–71.

continued until the ninth and tenth centuries with no indication of desiccation or climate change.¹⁹⁵ These finds totally contradict the view that climate was a major factor in settlement distribution and density in the sixth to tenth centuries. The theories of Huntington and Issar are not supported by empirical data from the Negev, and environmental conditions in Palestine and Jordan do not seem to have changed much since Late Antiquity.

However, the rapid decline of settlements in the eleventh century has been recently attributed to environmental factors. Ellenblum sees the frequent droughts in Egypt and Palestine during the second half of the eleventh century as pivotal in settlement decline.¹⁹⁶ Cumulative evidence found for exceptionally harsh climatic conditions in other parts of the Near East is used to explain the fall of the Abbasid dynasty and the rise of the Seljuks. This approach views climate as a major agent of change in the Near East and beyond. As the archaeological findings do show that settlements were on the verge of disintegration in the second half of the eleventh century, it is a tempting explanation.

Nevertheless, a more interdisciplinary approach is needed that will combine mentions of droughts and floods in different parts of the Near East in historical sources with geomorphological, botanical, and palaeoclimatic evidence. In the final analysis, viewing environmental factors as the catalyst for cultural and political changes must be treated with caution. While earthquakes, droughts, and other environmental disasters may have been present during the period in question, the archaeological record paints a more complicated picture. The environment was probably one of several agents of change and became a more potent force as society lost its economic, social, and political resilience. This was probably the case in the eleventh century, when Palestine and Jordan were exposed to the combined effects of political instability, military incursions, a plummeting economy, and successive earthquakes, all of these topped off by climate change. It was presumably the combination of all these factors that pushed local societies over the edge.

EVIDENCE OF RELIGIOUS SEGREGATION AND ISLAMIZATION

While the role of wars, earthquakes, climate change, and environmental factors in the transformation of settlement and society remains archaeologically vague, the slow, complex process of religious and cultural change is ultimately traceable.

¹⁹⁵ Avni *et al.* 2013.

¹⁹⁶ Ellenblum 2012. For similar conclusions on Iran, see Bulliet 2009.

The Near Eastern transition from Christianity to Islam has long been debated. The traditional view is that Islam spread rapidly thanks to the infiltration of Muslims from Arabia and the conversion of the local Christian population. Some scholars have found support for rapid Islamization in the imposition of a poll tax on non-Muslims, even if this constitutes only partial evidence. An alternative view posits a much slower pace of change that continued into the eleventh century or even later. A common assumption is that the bulk of the population had already converted by the ninth century, although some say the process was not complete before the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁹⁷ Yet another view is that the population of the Levant was evenly divided between Christians and Muslims in the eleventh century, while Gil maintains that Christians were in the majority until the twelfth century.¹⁹⁸

The urban communities of the Byzantine period were characterized by a multicultural population. The large cities of Palestine and Jordan (Caesarea, Beth Shean-Scythopolis, Tiberias, Gerasa, Pella, Sepphoris, Beth Guvrin-Eleutheropolis, Lod-Diospolis, Ascalon, and Gaza) had mixed populations of pagans, Christians, Jews, and Samaritans. The discovery of churches and synagogues has been the main archaeological index of ethno-religious life, although religious affiliation has also been deduced from inscriptions and religious symbols. However, limited attention has been paid to ethno-religious segregation in these cities. Despite extensive excavations, archaeologists have not established which neighbourhoods were used by the different religious groups.

It seems reasonable to assume that the Christians lived near their churches and the Jews clustered around their synagogues. This was the case in Beth Shean and Caesarea, for example, where a correlation can be seen between ethnic clustering and the location of churches and synagogues. The penetration of the Islamic population probably introduced further segregation, although no archaeological evidence has been found for physical separation between the communities. The shape and size of dwellings was more an indicator of economic status than ethnic affiliation.

Apart from the large public institutions—churches, synagogues, and mosques—religion and ethnicity can be distinguished by other findings. A Jewish population can be identified through the presence of a ritual bath (*miqve*) inside a domestic compound. An Islamic presence is indicated by small indoor or open-air mosques.¹⁹⁹ Various inscriptions, particularly epitaphs, can reveal religious identity, as well as religious symbols on houses, such as crosses for Christians and a *menorah* for Jews.

¹⁹⁷ E.g. Bulliet 1979; Lev 1988.

¹⁹⁸ Gil 1992, 170–2. See also Ellenblum 1998, 20–2 for further references.

¹⁹⁹ E.g. in Beth Shean: Agady and Arubas 2009; in the Negev Highlands: Avni 1994.

The historical sources say nothing about the segregation of ethno-religious communities in the cities. Neither Julian of Ascalon's description of his Christian city in the sixth century nor documents in the Cairo Geniza relating to the Jewish population of eleventh-century Fustat make any mention of distinct ethnic or religious quarters in the city. Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Fustat appear to have lived together in the same neighbourhoods, and differences in housing were related to socio-economic stratification and not religion. Various textual references show that the Jews had Christian and Muslim neighbours, and sometimes owned houses which were leased to Christians or Muslims.²⁰⁰

Even so, it is quite possible that such segregation existed. The discovery of synagogues, churches, and mosques in a particular neighbourhood is a good indication that members of that ethnic group lived in the vicinity. In Tiberias, for example, the distribution of churches, synagogues, and mosques bears out this theory. However, complete segregation of the Jewish community in separate quarters or closed compounds, as in Safed and Hebron, did not begin until the later Middle Ages.²⁰¹

Jerusalem was unique in the settlement mosaic of Palestine in that it served as a hub of three religions. In the Byzantine period, the city was a Christian metropolis. It attracted a constant stream of Christian pilgrims and its population was predominantly Christian. In the Early Islamic period, it became a multicultural religious centre, home to Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Unlike in other cities in Palestine, religious groups began to reside in separate neighbourhoods at this time. The Christians lived on the western side of the city, and around the monasteries and churches to the north and east of the walled city, while the Muslims were concentrated on the eastern side, close to the Haram al-Sharif. When the Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem under Islamic rule, they settled in the buffer zone between them, in the upper part of the City of David, and west and south of the Temple Mount.²⁰²

The ethno-religious composition found in the villages of the countryside differs from that in the urban centres. While the cities and towns contained a mixed population of Jews, Christians, pagans, and Samaritans, the countryside was segregated into different ethnic communities, each confined to its own regions and living in its own settlements.

A geographical division between Jewish and Christian villages was evident in a number of regions, and particularly in the Galilee and the Golan.²⁰³ The Samaritan hills were home to a Samaritan population, which also occupied

²⁰⁰ Goitein 1983, 21–2.

²⁰¹ The segregation of European Jewish communities in ghettos, defined as areas of cities in which members of a minority group live, especially because of social, legal, or economic pressure, began only in the 11th century.

²⁰² See the detailed discussion in Ch. 3.

²⁰³ Aviam 2004, 2007 for the Galilee; Ma'oz 1993a for the Golan; see also Ch. 4.

many villages in the Samaritan Lowlands and the coastal plain. Christian villages and monastic compounds were spread all over the country, forming a network of a well-defined Christian presence.

The religious-ethnic division was clear-cut: villages were populated by one dominant religious group and members of the same religion tended to settle close by. In the eastern Galilee and the Golan, for instance, there were clusters of Jewish villages, while Christian settlement was mainly in the western Galilee. More clusters of Jewish villages could be found in the southern Hebron hills, alongside Christian villages, while central and northern Samaria was largely monopolized by the Samaritans. Christian monasteries were another dominant feature of the Palestine landscape. The monasteries of the Judean Desert were particularly famous, but there were also clusters of monasteries in Samaria, Galilee, and the Judean Lowlands, and on the outskirts of the large settlements in the Negev.

The religious-ethnic identity of these rural settlements remained stable throughout the Early Islamic period, with the geopolitical changes in the region not affecting them directly. The division into Jewish and Christian villages still existed at this time, but the boundaries grew hazier in the second half of the period. By the ninth and tenth centuries, life in the rural sector had taken a downturn. Distinctions between Jewish and Christian sites were no longer as clear, and the sharp decline and dwindling of the Samaritan presence is worthy of note.²⁰⁴ Even so, central and northern Samaria was not empty. The area continued to be inhabited, possibly by Christians or Muslims who settled in the Samaritan villages.²⁰⁵ Excavations in Samaria have not yielded archaeological proof of the conversion of the Samaritans which is mentioned by Abu l-Fath.²⁰⁶ It has been suggested that villages in central Samaria were abandoned by their Samaritan inhabitants and resettled by Muslim nomads,²⁰⁷ but surveys and excavations show that many villages continued to be inhabited throughout the Early Islamic period.²⁰⁸

Very few changes in the ethnic composition of settlement in the countryside were observed following the Arab conquest. Newly founded Arab settlements are mentioned in several locations, for example the agricultural estates established by 'Amr b. al-'As in the southern coastal plain,²⁰⁹ but most of these are known only from historical texts and are not visible in the archaeological record. Other historical sources mention the penetration of Arab tribes and the establishment of new settlements in Palestine and Jordan in the seventh and eighth centuries,²¹⁰ but only sporadic archaeological evidence has been found for these settlements, which were usually located on the fringe areas of settled communities. The settlement of nomads on the eastern outskirts of

²⁰⁴ Levy-Rubin 2000, 2002.

²⁰⁵ See the discussion in Ch. 4.

²⁰⁶ Levy-Rubin 2000, 2002.

²⁰⁷ See Ellenblum 1998, 245–52.

²⁰⁸ Magen 2008.

²⁰⁹ Lecker 1989.

²¹⁰ Gil 1992, 114–39.

Jerusalem, as has been revealed at Khirbet Abu Suwwana,²¹¹ provides archaeological proof of an Islamic nomadic settlement, and rare evidence of the penetration of nomads and their sedentarization within the existing population of Palestine. However, these isolated examples do not indicate a massive penetration by Arab tribes into Palestine during the seventh and eighth centuries.

Although the preservation of religious and cultural identity was a hallmark of rural settlements, a shift from Judaism to Christianity and even Islam can be seen in some of them. In Susiya, for example, the synagogue was abandoned and replaced by a mosque in the late Early Islamic period. In its later stages of occupation, Deir 'Aziz, shows signs of transition from a Jewish settlement to a Christian one. Detecting a shift from Christianity to Islam is more difficult. Despite the gradual decline of rural settlements in the tenth and eleventh centuries, archaeological evidence has not been found for the Islamization of the local inhabitants, who apparently clung to their religious beliefs until the Crusader era. The establishment of new settlements in the rural sector that were visibly Islamic was relatively rare. The Muslim population was confined to the 'Umayyad palaces' in the Jordan Valley, eastern Jordan, and around the Sea of Galilee, the *ribat* fortresses along the Mediterranean coast, and farms in the north-western Negev.²¹² In addition, a few villages which have been dated to the seventh and eighth centuries were built in a non-local style that suggests their establishment by outsiders.²¹³ However, one area where the infiltration of a foreign population is unequivocal is the 'Arabah Valley, where several farms employed the *qanat* irrigation system, which was introduced into Palestine at the beginning of the Early Islamic period.

Unlike in the urban centres, the Muslim newcomers usually did not settle in the midst of Christian and Jewish communities in the countryside. This is particularly evident in the areas around the *ribat* and 'Umayyad palaces'. These monumental compounds contained mosques that served their own closed communities, while the villages around them were dominated by Christians and Jews. A survey of sites in the Jericho area and around the Sea of Galilee shows the isolation of the Islamic settlements in relation to the surrounding communities. The Christians and Jews maintained their own religious and cultural identities and were only marginally influenced by the Muslim newcomers.

However, coexistence of Christian and Islamic worship has been observed in several locations. In Jarash and Tiberias for example, Christian churches operated beside the newly constructed mosques. At the monumental Kathisma church south of Jerusalem a small indoor mosque seems to have been added sometime in the eighth century, so that Islamic worship was

²¹¹ See Ch. 3.

²¹² See the discussion in Ch. 4.

²¹³ E.g. in Neve Ur near Beth Shean, see Ch. 4.

conducted inside the church.²¹⁴ In the Negev, a simple mosque was constructed near the southern church of Shivta in the eighth century and the two religious structures appear to have functioned together.²¹⁵ In the churches of Mamshit, Islamic inscriptions were added on the church columns.

The contribution of archaeology to the debate has become more significant with the detailed survey of Early Islamic sites. In contrast to previous assessments that mass conversion was complete before the eleventh century, the survey of sites shows that most Christian settlements in Palestine and Jordan preserved their identity up to the Crusader period. The large number of churches and monasteries that continued to function in the Early Islamic period attests to the vitality of the local Christian communities.²¹⁶ Churches and monastic complexes dating to this period have been found all over the country. Despite the language change from Greek to Arabic, the majority clung to Christianity until Crusader times.²¹⁷ Islamization gained real momentum only after the conquest by Saladin in 1187 and the expulsion of the Franks.²¹⁸

Archaeological evidence for the religious transformation of the local population is based mainly on the chronology of churches, synagogues, and mosques and the kind of changes made over time to their interior. The use of these buildings in their later stages, before they were abandoned, sheds light on the fate of the community. For example, churches or synagogues converted to mosques may indicate a change in the religious affiliation of the community. Only a few such cases have been documented, but one of the most notable is the congregational mosque of Damascus, previously a Byzantine church commemorating John the Baptist. For a short time during the reign of Mu'awiyah, a small mosque operated side by side with the church, but it was demolished by al-Walid in the early eighth century to make way for a large congregational mosque.²¹⁹ The synagogue at Susiya is an example of a Jewish-Muslim transformation. Certain Byzantine churches in northern Jordan may also have been converted into mosques, although the date of this secondary use is not clear.²²⁰

The construction of new mosques is one of the main indicators of the transformation of the religious landscape. Large congregational mosques sprouting in the main cities, together with smaller village or in-house mosques, show that society was changing. However, the establishment of these mosques may point to an influx of newcomers rather than the

²¹⁴ Avner 2003, 2006–2007; see also the description in Ch. 3.

²¹⁵ Avni 1994, 2008; Moor forthcoming.

²¹⁶ See the detailed evaluation of Christian settlements in Schick 1995, and Ch. 4 for specific sites.

²¹⁷ See Griffith 1992, 1997, 2008.

²¹⁸ These finds reinforce the chronology suggested by Gil 1992 and Ellenblum 1998.

²¹⁹ Burns 2005, 85–97; Creswell 1969, 151–96; Cytryn-Silverman 2009, 49–50.

²²⁰ King 1983a.

conversion of local Christians and Jews. The imposing mosques built in Tiberias, Jarash, Beth Shean, Jerusalem, and possibly Caesarea were not evidence of mass conversion to Islam but of the arrival of a new Islamic population. Situating these mosques in the city centres was a way of highlighting the victory of the Muslims over a formerly Christian city. This was particularly true in Jerusalem, but also in Tiberias and perhaps Caesarea. In Ramla, the situation was different: the construction of the White Mosque may have been a symbol of the new government, but the whole city was newly established and unlike in other parts of Palestine, Muslims constituted a large segment of the population. Some of the mosques constructed in smaller towns and villages, such as Umm el-Walid in Jordan and Shivta in the Negev, were built to serve the newly arrived Muslim population. The open-air mosques on the outskirts of the Negev and southern Jordan were used mainly by pastoral nomads adapting their pagan practices: standing stones were replaced by a mosque with a *mihrab* facing Mecca.²²¹

Other archaeological parameters proposed for evaluating the rate of conversion to Islam should be mentioned, although their credibility seems doubtful. It has been suggested, for example, that the shift from wine to olive oil production in the Early Islamic period was an indicator of the rapid penetration of Islamic practices in Palestine and hence evidence of large-scale conversion to Islam. On the basis of his in-depth survey and excavation of agricultural farms, Magen speculated that wine presses were abandoned in favour of the olive oil industry because of a mass conversion to Islam and its prohibition on drinking wine. However, this transition in agricultural installations, if occurred at all, was probably motivated by economic factors and connected with a drop in market demand for wine in the Mediterranean rather than a result of Islamization.

The conclusion, based on archaeological data, is that Christianity continued to prevail in large parts of Palestine and Jordan until the eleventh century, and Christians remained the largest religious community in the region. The penetration of Islamic religious institutions was slow but steady, and they gradually made their mark on cities, towns, and villages throughout the country. However, evidence of entire communities converting to Islam, as has been claimed in historical sources, is not borne out by archaeological findings. On the contrary, new churches were established throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, and other churches around the country were restored and repaved with new mosaics. The scope of Christian religious activity diminished only slightly, and the religious and economic power of the church appears to have been preserved under Islamic rule.²²²

²²¹ See the discussion in Ch. 4.

²²² Griffith 2008.

A CHANGING LAND: PALESTINE AND JORDAN IN THE SIXTH–ELEVENTH CENTURIES

The overview of sites and the evaluation of the agents of change opens the way for summarizing the Byzantine–Islamic transition as reflected in the archaeological record. The following section explores the chronology of settlement change in Palestine and Jordan.

The sixth century

While scholarly consensus exists for the zenith of urban and rural settlement in the sixth century, there is no such agreement on the start of urban decline, which some say began in the second half of the century.²²³ Furthermore, scholars disagree on whether this decline also affected villages and farmsteads, as part of the general downturn in the Byzantine economy.²²⁴ Some suggest that the rural sector prospered as the cities emptied out and the population moved to farms and villages.²²⁵

The detailed survey of sites presented in this book shows that the second half of the sixth century was a time of prosperity for Palestine and Jordan. Cities continued to flourish and expand, rural settlements dotted the countryside in greater density than at any previous period, new churches and monasteries were built, and the Church established itself as an economic power in the Holy Land. A steady stream of Christian pilgrims travelled the roads between the coastal plain, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, the Galilee, the Negev, and Sinai. There was no dramatic change in settlement patterns and distribution during this period, although certain minor events took place, such as the decline of the Samaritan settlements after the suppression of the Samaritan revolts in the sixth century. Settlement density fluctuated in some areas. The eastern Galilee may have been one of the places affected, following an economic or political crisis in the fourth and fifth centuries.²²⁶ But most scholars agree that the rural settlements of Palestine reached a high point in the first half of the sixth century, and the proposed decline in the second half of the century does not correspond with the archaeological evidence. Changes during this period were more conceptual, involving a shift in values or building preferences, and not a matter of physical decline.

²²³ Kennedy 1985a; Tsafirir and Foerster 1997; see also Fiema 2001, 2002, and the discussion in Ch. 2.

²²⁴ E.g. Laiou and Morrisson 2007, Walmsley 2007b, Wickham 2005, 442–65.

²²⁵ E.g. Tsafirir 1996, Di Segni 1995, 1999.

²²⁶ As has been suggested by Leibner 2009; see also Bar 2004.

The seventh and eighth centuries

The patterns of urban and rural settlement in Palestine were not disrupted by the dramatic geopolitical changes during the first half of the seventh century. The atmosphere was one of continuity, and the damage caused to buildings or infrastructure during the Persian and Islamic conquests left few traces. The archaeological record does show a certain decline in specific locations: in the course of the seventh century, Caesarea lost its status as a major city and government centre, after which it shrank greatly in size and population. However, this was not a direct consequence of its conquest in 640. It was the culmination of a lengthy process set in motion by the regime change and the move of the district capital to Ramla. The city was now physically smaller, but it continued to function as a regional commercial centre.

The regression of settlement in the seventh century thus appears to have been connected to long-term changes in Mediterranean economics: a decrease in the volume of trade in the Mediterranean and a market transition from mass production for export (especially wine) to commerce on a regional and local level. In the cities, this was reflected in a certain slowdown in public construction and an upswing in private construction. The rural sector, however, showed stability and continuity, as is evident from the ongoing construction of churches even during the Persian and Arab conquests.

Any abatement in settlement was temporary. The second half of the seventh century and first half of the eighth century were years of recovery for cities and towns all over the country. Monumental building projects during Umayyad rule, chiefly in the time of ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Walid, are clear proof of this. The establishment of a government centre in Jerusalem, the *ribatat* on the coastal plain, the grand ‘palaces’ or estates in the Jordan Valley and around the Sea of Galilee, the resumption of road construction between Jerusalem and the coast and between Tiberias and Damascus—all were testimony to the strengthening of Islamic rule in Palestine and Jordan.

This surge of growth also extended to the large cities of the Byzantine period. We see this in the construction of the large marketplace in Beth Shean in the time of Hisham and in the increase in private building in the city in the early eighth century. In Caesarea, the residential neighbourhood adjoining the inner harbour was restored at this time, and in Jerusalem the great building projects in and around the Haram al-Sharif began to take shape. The establishment of Ramla as a well-planned major city in the time of Sulaiman was also part of the renaissance.

The second half of the eighth century is cited in many studies as a period of decline set off by the earthquake of 749, the fall of the Umayyad dynasty, and the rise of the Abbasids, who moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad. Indeed, this is the generally accepted narrative. Archaeological

findings, however, show that it was a period of settlement continuity. Many settlements were hit by the earthquake, but the damage was not long-lasting. Cities and towns, both large and small, were quickly restored. Inscriptions discovered in Beth Shean attest to the flurry of public building commissioned within a few years of the earthquake. Excavations in Ramla have found evidence of toppled buildings that had been torn down and rebuilt on the same spot. In some of the cities that were badly damaged, the urban centre was moved to a site nearby.

While the latter half of the eighth century was marked by continuity, there were also changes taking place that heralded a new era in the history of Palestine. From the monumental building style of the Roman period, with its rigid architectural principles, and the 'comfortable disorder' of the Byzantine period, we see a growing preference for functionalism over aesthetics, with commerce and industry penetrating into the hearts of cities and towns. The urban centres of Palestine and Jordan took another step towards a profound conceptual change that altered both the architecture and the division of urban space. In the wake of this change, a few cities in Palestine were left small and shrunken, but Ramla and Tiberias flourished, experiencing unprecedented urban growth and the development of agricultural hinterlands.

Rural settlement on the periphery, especially the Judaeian Lowlands and the Negev, enjoyed stability in the seventh and eighth centuries, with a shift from dwellings in the style of ornate Roman villas to the functional architecture of agricultural villages. Large buildings were partitioned into smaller units but continued to be used. It has been claimed that many agricultural villages were abandoned in the second half of the eighth century, but a re-evaluation of the finds shows that many of them were inhabited into the ninth and tenth centuries. At the same time, there is a noticeable deterioration in building standards, building size, and the use of interior spaces.

Farming and agricultural industries flourished throughout the eighth century, mostly supplying local demand but with some exporting to neighbouring regions. From the second half of the century, changes are discernible in the material culture. New types of pottery and glass were introduced, with a wider variety of local wares, a sharp decrease in imports of household pottery from the Mediterranean, and more utensils from Iraq and Iran. This eastern influence is also noticeable in agriculture, industry, and art.

Two parallel processes were thus discernible in the seventh and eighth centuries: continuity in the majority of settlements, the preservation of religious-ethnic character, and minimal evidence of newcomers, but also significant change in living patterns and material culture (particularly pottery and glass vessels), especially in the second half of the eighth century.

Ninth and tenth centuries

During this period, which was fraught with political instability and changes of government that sometimes erupted into violence, continuity of settlement prevailed despite early hints of unrest and economic fragility. Cities and towns throughout Palestine remained largely untouched by the political turmoil. In particular, the new administrative centres in Ramla and Tiberias continued to grow. Military incursions, internal strife, and a shift from Abbasid to Fatimid rule left no lasting scars on these cities. On the contrary, building went on, with new residential neighbourhoods added throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. Stability was also evident in other towns in Palestine, although the building quality was lower, especially in the public sector. In most settlements, it became the custom to build private homes in designated residential zones (as in Yoqneam, Caesarea, and Pella).

Villages on the periphery gradually declined in vigour and size, and some faded into oblivion in the ninth century. Others, particularly on the outskirts of Ramla, continued to flourish during this period. By the tenth century, settlement abatement was already visible in various regions. Although building continued in the majority of agricultural settlements, the pace was slower and construction was of poorer quality. The economic and social strength of urban and rural societies was on the wane. This is not to say that Palestine had become a wasteland: the country was still dotted with agricultural settlements with well-developed farms alongside them.

In contrast to the comparative stability that reigned in the first half of the tenth century, the 970s were a time of chaos and upheaval. The Fatimid conquest of Palestine with its military campaigns, compounded by Bedouin raids on towns and cities, left the population feeling vulnerable and insecure. Historical sources and documents in the Cairo Geniza attest to a sense of distress that grew stronger in the eleventh century.

Eleventh century

By the end of the Early Islamic period, and particularly in the second half of the eleventh century, settlements in Palestine were in dire straits. In the decades leading up to the Crusader conquest, the network collapsed altogether. Decline was mainly visible in the agricultural periphery. Most of the villages in the Galilee and Golan were abandoned in the eleventh century, and a similar fate befell the Negev farms and run-off agriculture. While historical accounts of the first half of the century, especially the travelogue of Nasir-i Khusraw in 1047, still admire the majestic architecture in the cities and the thriving agriculture, it seems that most infrastructure was in a state of

serious decline by this time. This slump was particularly evident in rural settlements and villages on the periphery. Entire regions, among them the Negev Highlands and the Judaeian Desert, were abandoned by their inhabitants, and broad swathes of farmland were left untended. Hoards of coins, jewellery, and metal artefacts in Ramla, Tiberias, and Caesarea show that the settlement crisis peaked in the third quarter of the eleventh century. Although large settlements were not abandoned completely, they diminished greatly in size and population. The physical dimensions of Jerusalem also shrank, although sources dating to the end of the eleventh century describe a city with a still bustling religious and social life.²²⁷ While Caesarea's residential and industrial quarter remained intact until the Crusader era, and Apollonia-Arsuf managed to withstand the Crusader siege in the early twelfth century, Ramla and Tiberias became virtual ghost towns. These cities, which had been densely populated until the second half of the eleventh century, were abandoned and never resettled.

What led to this downhill spiral that culminated in the virtual collapse of settlement in the second half of the eleventh century? This subject has not been adequately studied, but it appears to be linked to a combination of factors clearly evident in the archaeological record. Political insecurity, protracted wars between the Fatimids and the Abbasids, and a flurry of Bedouin raids served to weaken and eventually destroy the foundations of urban and rural life in Palestine. The role of the Bedouin tribes from central Arabia and North Africa who infiltrated many parts of the Middle East from the tenth to eleventh centuries is worthy of special mention.²²⁸

Another factor in the decline was a series of severe earthquakes that hit Palestine, especially the earthquakes in 1033 and 1068, which had an immediate impact on the disintegration of the urban network. While previous earthquakes left considerable damage in their wake but did not lead to the complete abandonment of the cities, the social and economic decline of the eleventh century created a situation in which the local populace did not have the resources to rebuild and get back on their feet. In addition to the earthquakes, Palestine also experienced many years of drought. The problem was particularly severe between 1050 and 1070. According to Ellenblum, it was this combination of natural disasters that triggered the collapse of human settlement in the Middle East in the second half of the eleventh century.²²⁹

Archaeology illustrates the powerfulness of the blow. Apart from the big cities and a few surrounding villages that remained in existence, though smaller and with simpler buildings, rural settlements all over the country

²²⁷ Drori 1993; Gat 2002.

²²⁸ See Fraenkel 1979 for Palestine and Jordan; Decker 2007 and Heidemann 2008 for northern Syria.

²²⁹ Ellenblum 2012.

were abandoned *en masse*. The Negev settlements and the agricultural systems on their outskirts lay deserted. The Judaeen Lowlands, Palestine's traditional breadbasket, almost emptied of inhabitants. The same was true for rural settlement around Ramla and Jerusalem. In the Galilee and the Golan, the decline that began in the tenth century picked up speed in the eleventh century, culminating in the abandonment of most of the settlements in the region. By the second half of the eleventh century, the network of settlements in Palestine and Jordan had reached the point of collapse. The Seljuk conquest in 1071–3 came as a further blow to the ailing system. The last quarter of the century seems to have been particularly difficult, despite the efforts of the new government to initiate building projects, especially in Jerusalem. When the Crusaders reached Palestine in 1099, its towns and cities were in such dire straits that conquest was made that much easier. Writing about Jerusalem on the eve of the Crusades, Goitein observed that the Crusaders destroyed a city that was already destroyed.²³⁰ Many other settlements in Palestine apparently fit that description.

²³⁰ Goitein 1980, 24.

Conclusion

The issues now emerging for Late Antique historians and archaeologists alike . . . demand a different kind of chronological and subject division, one which can trace change over a longer period of time, and in so doing allow for a deeper appreciation of its complexity.¹

Until the 1980s, not much was known about the settlement patterns in Palestine and Jordan between the sixth and eleventh centuries. The fog has dissipated in the wake of intensive archaeological research over the past thirty years. Pains-taking stratigraphic and ceramic analysis of finds from several major sites has helped to sharpen the focus. From this research we see that the process of change in urban and rural societies was not uniform, but laden with regional differences. While isolated sites show evidence of settlement decline, most of the Byzantine-era settlements continued to flourish, preserving the character of their populations but with some physical modifications. In some regions, towns and cities experienced growth during the Early Islamic period, and new settlements were established. The view embraced by archaeologists today is that the transformation was not abrupt but was a gradually evolving process with many more gradations and nuances than scholars previously assumed. In light of this new research, the validity of the old paradigms has been called into question.

Foundational historical events that swept the region altered the character of local settlement only marginally. The Persian conquest in 614, the Arab conquest in 634–640, and the transition from Umayyad to Abbasid rule in the second half of the eighth century did not change cities or populations overnight. The epidemics documented in historical sources did not leave archaeological footprints or affect the vitality of settlement. Sites that suffered physical damage were usually restored quickly and life went on. While opinions differ on the impact of climate change and frequent dry spells, these conditions do not seem to have weakened settlement significantly until the second half of the eleventh century, when their combined effect did, in fact, lead to collapse.

¹ Cameron 2003, 18.

Numerous finds from excavated sites and regional surveys provide ample cause for reconsidering the conventional view of settlement and society in the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic period. The focal point of this conceptual change is a redefinition of continuity and decline in urban and rural settlement. The traditional approach, which regarded deviation from the rigid principles of monumental Roman architecture, the encroachment of private building and commerce into urban public space, and the blurring of boundaries between the public and private domain as evidence of the disruption of public order and looming decline, is not borne out by the archaeological findings.²

ABRUPT CHANGE OR GRADUAL DECLINE?

Was the transformation abrupt or gradual? The answer to that is critical for understanding what happened to the towns and cities of Palestine in the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. Did settlement decline because the populace lost its ability to cope? Did it decline because regime change undermined the operation of local government? Or was the change conceptual, emanating from a search for the optimal form of living?

Archaeological research in recent years has paved the way for a new approach that sees these changes as evidence of vitality and economic power rather than deterioration and decline. The settlements changed physically in response to the needs of a growing population that required more living space and a larger food supply—not because of an economic slump. The archaeological data underscore the gradual nature of these changes and emphasize that they were not a sign of decay.

A careful examination of the settlements by type, from large and mid-sized cities to rural villages and nomadic encampments on the periphery, indicate a number of parallel trends: a clear erosion of political and administrative strength in the metropoleis of the Byzantine period, especially Caesarea and Beth Shean, versus prosperity, attested to by archaeological finds, in the new district capitals, Ramla and Tiberias. Elsewhere, the picture was more diverse. Some cities preserved their urban character even as the balance of private and public construction shifted, while others dwindled in the course of the Early Islamic period and faded away.

In contrast to previous assessments, this study emphasizes the continued prosperity of settlements in Palestine during the second half of the first millennium while allowing for regional differences. It was not a uniform process: there were clear distinctions between different parts of the country.

² See the discussion in Ch. 2.

Villages in the eastern and Upper Galilee, which declined in strength and population density, fared differently from those in Jordan, where some Christian towns continued to prosper long after the Islamic conquest. Settlements on the coastal plain were affected by the network of fortifications built by the Muslims to keep the Byzantine navy at bay. So, while farms declined, the new Muslim fortresses and sentry outposts boosted urban settlement in the region. The rapid development of Ramla during the Early Islamic period brought economic wealth and increased settlement in the agricultural hinterlands of the city. The Judaeian Lowlands continued to serve as the country's main breadbasket, and settlement in the Negev Highlands continued into the ninth and tenth centuries, although the fates of individual settlements varied.

From the analysis of agents of change in Chapter 5, we see that change in settlement patterns, religious affiliation, and culture in these periods cannot be attributed to a one-time military incursion, political incident, or natural catastrophe, but must be viewed as a process. The Byzantine–Islamic transition, according to this approach, was a slow process that went on for hundreds of years, gradually transforming the face of settlements and the people who inhabited them, over a long period of time.

New finds have enabled us to expand the chronology of this transition to a period spanning almost 700 years, and to trace a developmental continuum from the fourth century into the Byzantine era and Early Islamic times. The major manifestation of this change was a shift from monumental to functional architecture. If the development of urban construction in the early Hellenistic and Roman period can be defined as a move from 'function to monument', from in the fourth century, and especially from the seventh century onwards, the move was clearly in the opposite direction, from 'monument to function'.³

During the Byzantine period, we do see attempts to return to the principle of monumental construction embraced by the Romans. In the sixth century, for example, Justinian built colonnaded streets and magnificent edifices in Jerusalem, Antioch, and other parts of the East. However, these stood out as exceptions in a steady stream of construction that was functional in character. That is not to say that monumental architecture was non-existent: during the Early Islamic period, construction in this style included grand mosques in Jerusalem, Ramla, Tiberias, and Damascus, sumptuous palaces and estates in the Jordan Valley and in eastern Jordan. Nevertheless, the general trend was clear. In both big cities and small towns, extravagant public building was seen less and less.

Many scholars have linked the process of urban change and the birth of the 'Muslim city' to the Arab conquest and the rise of Islam. A prime example is

³ Following Segal 1997, who has studied monumental Roman architecture in the Eastern Empire.

Henri Pirenne, who cited the Arab occupation as the reason for settlement and demographic change in the Mediterranean and Western Europe in the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴ This approach has been widely criticized,⁵ and archaeological finds from various sites in the Eastern Mediterranean have challenged its validity.

In part, the debate is rooted in the traditional view of the monumental Roman city as the epitome of human achievement, as opposed to the perception of the Middle Eastern 'Muslim city' and the medieval cities of Europe as built on the ashes of Hellenistic and Roman culture.⁶ Both the Renaissance-inspired idealization of the Greek and Roman *polis* by scholars of the classical period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the colonial image of the Middle Eastern city shaped by French researchers in North Africa and Syria in the first half of the twentieth century, have been rejected by modern research.⁷ Nevertheless, many scholars cling to the belief that monumental Roman architecture is an expression of technological progress and stylistic excellence, whereas the more modest building of the late classical period and early Middle Ages signifies architectural and cultural decline. There is no doubt that, in grandeur, Roman architecture eclipses virtually every other period in the settlement history of the Mediterranean Basin. Yet this style of architecture, with its accent on massive public buildings and meticulous planning, was not necessarily linked to prosperity. The Byzantine era, marked by a break from the rigid Roman design code, was an unprecedented period of settlement expansion. Archaeological finds indicate that this trend continued into the Early Islamic period, when a more relaxed style and a disregard for planning became even more pronounced. One sees this clearly in the penetration of industrial buildings into urban space, sometimes forming a dense cluster of residences, commercial markets, and workshops, all side by side. This went against the principles of Roman design whereby services and industry were always kept separate from monumental buildings (both civilian and religious). By late antiquity and medieval times, these principles were no longer heeded.

This fundamental change does not seem to have been accidental. The transition from imperial Roman architecture, emphasizing monumental construction, careful planning, and a uniform architectural code, to the principle of 'practical disorder', which gave builders more leeway and freedom of design, was evidence of a profound change of mindset. At the beginning of the Byzantine period, the principles of Roman planning were still in force, but, as time went on, the practical approach gained the upper hand, building

⁴ Pirenne 1939. ⁵ E.g. Hodges and Whitehouse 1983.

⁶ For basic studies, see Pirenne 1925 and Mumford 1966, 282–361. For criticism of this approach, see e.g. Laurence 1994. For traditional studies of the 'Muslim city', see e.g. Marcais 1928 and Sauvaget 1941a, 1949.

⁷ For a critical view of this approach to the Muslim city, see Reynold 1994 and Abu Lughod 1987.

quality deteriorated, and less attention was paid to proportions and details. In her book about the sixth-century Byzantine city, Helen Saradi traces the roots of this approach back to the fourth century.⁸

While Kennedy, followed by Tsafir and Foerster, dates the onset of settlement decline to the second half of the sixth century,⁹ we see it as a long-term evolutionary process of conceptual change that commenced with the abandonment of Roman design principles in the fourth century and ended only in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Decline and collapse came only in the very late phases of this period.

A NEW URBAN REALITY

In practice, the intensification of this approach created a new urban reality that was especially pronounced in the new cities established in the Early Islamic period, such as Ramla and Fustat. In these cities, private construction was given precedence over public buildings and large squares built according to a strict plan. While the old narrative linked this phenomenon to the Arab conquest and the rise of Islam, there is no evidence of a direct connection between these developments and geopolitical changes in the Middle East.¹⁰ The urban design of Ramla, for example, reveals a medley of influences from other Byzantine cities in the area, along with certain innovations, but it cannot be defined as a new model of settlement devised by the Muslim regime.¹¹ The spacious houses of the central-court type and the grid-patterned streets and *insulae* followed models introduced in the Mediterranean in Hellenistic and Roman times.

By the same token, we must reject the conclusion that the new look of the cities was a product of economic decline and administrative problems that prevented the construction of monumental buildings in the city centres and countryside.¹² The great congregational mosques erected in the major cities show that there was no lack of money or technical expertise. Further proof are the 'Umayyad castles' and *qusur* in the region, which combine the monumental architecture of the Roman world with the aesthetic values of early Islam. The influence of Roman architecture is evident at many sites of this type, among them Khirbet al-Mafjar and Khirbet Minya, as well as in the monumental structures in 'Amman and Mshatta in Jordan and 'Anjar in

⁸ Saradi 2006. ⁹ Kennedy 1985a; Tsafir and Foerster 1997.

¹⁰ See the discussion in Ch. 2.

¹¹ See Whitcomb 1996, 2007, 2011a for foreign influences on architecture and urban construction in the late Byzantine era.

¹² See e.g. the conventional views of von Grunebaum 1955, Lapidus 1969, and others.

Lebanon. However, these buildings, which have attracted much attention from architectural and archaeological research, were exceptions to the rule. They were not representative of the trend in cities, villages, and farmsteads, where functional buildings composed of small, closed spaces were favoured over grand edifices.

The wealth of archaeological findings from Early Islamic sites not only attests to settlement continuity and new building, but also to a thriving economy. This is borne out by a significant rise in commerce and industry. Pottery, glass, and metalwork industries discovered in Beth Shean and Ramla point to a growing local demand for these products, which may also have been produced for export. The subdivision of large buildings into smaller residential units reflects both a change in the value system, with monumental Roman architecture deemed extravagant and irrelevant in the new social reality, and a surge in urban population growth. At the same time, open fields were found in some cities where crops were grown within the city limits. This was true for Ramla, Pella, Caesarea, and other cities. Thus, we cannot conclude that all cities in the region suffered from overcrowding, and here again, it seems there were differences from one city to the next.

Construction in the Early Islamic era was not meticulously planned and the standard of building was not as high as in the Roman and Byzantine era, but there was no significant drop in city size and population, and in some cases, there was visible growth. The cities in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages were thus havens of diversity, with a mix of residential districts, markets, industrial enterprises, and farms, and a broad swathe of farmland on their outskirts.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN RURAL SETTLEMENT

The rural sector evolved in much the same way as the cities. Many sites show clear signs of continuity from the Byzantine era to early Islamic times, and there is no evidence of catastrophic destruction in the wake of the Persian and Arab conquests. Regional patterns can also be traced: for example, a certain decline in settlement in the Galilee, Golan, and Samaria, while villages thrived in the Ramla hinterlands, the Judaeian Lowlands and the southern Hebron Hills, the western Negev Highlands, and Jordan. As a rule, the rural sector, like the cities, was not harmed by the transition from Byzantine to Muslim rule, and life continued without interruption until the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the countryside, too, there was a move towards greater functionalism and modesty in architecture in comparison with the spacious buildings erected in Roman and Byzantine times. Dwellings grew smaller and large existing structures were sometimes subdivided. Again, this seems to have been caused by changing perceptions of the home, with built-up space utilized to the maximum and adapted to create smaller living quarters. The changes in the

physical layout of villages were not a reflection of deterioration but of a different approach to living space.¹³

Excavated villages have yielded abundant proof of economic stability. The villagers cultivated large stretches of land and sold the produce in local markets, becoming a powerful economic factor. Al-Muqaddasi's account of the region in the tenth century highlights the role of agriculture and agricultural processing, citing the flax, cotton, rope, and sugar-cane industries as especially important for the local economy. The villages seem to have been major suppliers of the raw materials for these industries. In contrast to previous assessments that the scope of agriculture declined significantly in the Early Islamic era, current research shows that agricultural activity actually increased and new crops were added. Even if this was not an 'agricultural revolution', as Watson has defined it,¹⁴ the intensification of agriculture in the Middle East during the Early Islamic period is backed up both by historical sources¹⁵ and archaeological findings. The data make it clear that farming in Palestine and Jordan did not diminish, but became even wider in scope during the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule.

The distribution of settlements in the agricultural hinterlands of the major cities and their chronology, as those have been deduced from excavation findings, shed further light on the development of various regions during the Early Islamic period. The agricultural hinterlands of Ramla, for example, which consisted of Byzantine-era villages that flourished until the tenth and eleventh centuries, as well as new settlements founded during the Early Islamic period, experienced a great surge of growth at this time. These villages and the agricultural installations around them were abandoned when Ramla fell from its pedestal in the eleventh century. Rural settlements on the outskirts of Jerusalem followed a similar pattern: they reached a peak in the eighth and ninth centuries but dwindled in the eleventh century. By contrast, the decline of villages in the Caesarea region began in the seventh and eighth centuries, which corresponds with Caesarea's loss of importance after the Arab conquest.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRENDS

Behind these changes in the urban and rural fabric were complex social and economic processes. International trade, an important component of the local economy in the Roman and Byzantine periods, was replaced in the Early Islamic era with regional commerce revolving around agriculture and cottage

¹³ Ward-Perkins 2000; Tsafirir 1996; Kingsley 2003.

¹⁴ Watson 1983.

¹⁵ Al-Muqaddasi's writings, for example, contain many descriptions of the farmlands and the large variety of crops.

industries. However, Palestine remained a magnet for European pilgrims and part of the Mediterranean marketplace.¹⁶

Signs of impending economic change were already visible in the Late Byzantine period. The main indication was decreasing government involvement in planning and building, and an increase in private initiatives.¹⁷ This private building tended to encroach on public space, but the authorities were either unable or unwilling to curb it. Again, this was not necessarily evidence of decline, and could, in fact, be interpreted as a sign of economic strength: it shows that the local population had cash reserves and the financial means to build. The upswing in private donations to public building projects further accelerated the privatization of public assets.¹⁸ Another factor that boosted private initiatives was the waning power of the Church, which had controlled large tracts of land. Private individuals now stepped into the vacuum, taking over and administering property in the urban and rural sectors.

Private entrepreneurship significantly altered the relations between cities and their hinterlands. Throughout the Roman period and most of the Byzantine era, municipal territory was strictly separated from the agricultural lands around it. The city served as a market for the farm products and industrial goods produced on its rural outskirts.¹⁹ Glass vessels, for example, were manufactured on the outskirts of Caesarea, and many pottery workshops operated in the vicinity of Ascalon. This began to change in the late Byzantine era, and even more so in the Early Islamic era, when industrial installations for processing agricultural produce and even farms were established within the city limits.²⁰

RELIGIOUS CHANGE AND ISLAMIZATION

In what way do the archaeological findings contribute to our understanding of the changes in religious affiliation during this time, the creeping Islamization, and the relations between religious communities? As we saw in Chapter 5, the transition from a predominantly Christian society, as manifested in government and religious institutions, to a multicultural society under Muslim rule, was a gradual one. Throughout the period, Christians were the majority population group in both the cities and villages. The penetration of Islam was slow, and mainly expressed in the formation of government elites and the

¹⁶ On the highly developed pilgrimage and trade networks of the Mediterranean at this time, see McCormick 2001.

¹⁷ Whittow 1990. ¹⁸ Saradi 2006; Di Segni 1995, 1999.

¹⁹ See Ward Perkins 2000, Walmsley 2000, Wickham 2005, Kingsley 2003.

²⁰ This was especially visible in Beth Shean, Jarash, and Ramla. See Chs 2 and 3.

architecture of isolated buildings such as the *ribatat* along the Mediterranean coast and the 'Umayyad palaces' in the Jordan Valley and eastern Jordan. Of the new settlements established at this time, only a few differed in character from those of the Byzantine period, which makes it likely that foreign populations settling in the country built them.

Historical sources of the time speak of the harassment of the Christian population by the Islamic authorities, the imposition of heavy taxes on non-Muslims, and the deliberate sabotage of religious institutions, mainly churches and monasteries. However, in hundreds of excavated sites across the country, many of them containing remains of Christian and Jewish religious structures, archaeological evidence of violent rampages or the deliberate destruction of shrines is almost non-existent. Nor is there evidence for a significant decline in the status of Christians in Palestine and Jordan. In reality, it seems there was more tolerance of religious minorities than is reflected in the written sources, which were sometimes biased. Similarly, claims about the religious conversion of the local populace, including the mass conversion of Samaritans, are not borne out by the archaeological findings. On the contrary, we see notable evidence of the coexistence of Muslim and Christian shrines and religious sites, as in the Kathisma church south of Jerusalem, Shivta in the Negev, and possibly other locations. The shared usage of these sites thus attests to the tolerance of the new Muslim rulers, who permitted the inhabitants to continue their religious observances. This attitude also extended to the Jews, who enjoyed much greater cultural and religious freedom than they did in the Byzantine period. The Jews were allowed to settle in Jerusalem, for example, and villages that were distinctly Jewish in character continued to exist throughout the countryside.

CONCLUSION

In view of the complex picture presented by the archaeological findings, it seems that settlement changes in Palestine and Jordan during the period in question may be best categorized as 'intensification and abatement', in keeping with the paradigm proposed by LaBianca for Hesban.²¹ In this paradigm, the process of change is seen as a cyclical pattern of rise and decline, with each site proceeding at its own pace. Each settlement and region has thus been studied individually to chart the length of time they prospered, the changes that occurred over time, the onset of decline, and the dates when they were abandoned.

²¹ LaBianca 1990.

In some regions, settlements declined in size and stability in the seventh century, but recovered and experienced a resurgence of growth in the second half of the eighth century that accelerated in the ninth and tenth centuries. Other settlements were characterized by continuity followed by gradual decline. Yet others increased in strength and size.

This paradigm of long-term intensification and abatement of settlements, spanning over half a millennium, gives new meaning to cultural and religious changes in the Near East. It paints a much milder picture of the interaction between ethnic communities during this significant period in its history.

The settlement map of Palestine and Jordan changed dramatically between the sixth and the eleventh centuries. The sixth-century map revealed an urban and rural society at its height, while that of the eleventh century showed a declining, troubled society that was economically and physically stagnant, veering towards collapse. So where was the turning point? If we allow for regional variability, settlement and society began their downward slide as late as the eleventh century, particularly in the second half of it. The accumulating impact of political and economical instability together with a series of natural calamities in the shape of earthquakes and droughts brought on a state of crisis that was more than the local inhabitants could bear. With their resilience worn thin, decline and fall inevitably followed.

Compared with other parts of the Middle East, the hundreds of sites excavated and surveyed in our region provide an extraordinarily powerful picture. The abundance of data enables us to sharpen regional observations and trace important historical and settlement processes that unfolded during this turbulent period. The story that emerges from the archaeological data, even if it diverges at times from the accounts of the historians, constitutes a tangible record of the richness and diversity of settlement, culture, and religion that reigned in the Middle East as Christian dominion gave way to Muslim rule.

APPENDIX I

Cities in Byzantine Palestine, Phoenice, and Arabia

The list of cities in the provinces of Palaestina Prima, Secunda, and Tertia, Phoenice, and Arabia is based on the geographical lists of settlements which appear in historical sources and on the compilation of the settlement map of Palestine in the *Tabula Imperii Romani*.¹ It includes cities known archaeologically from excavations and surveys. Indications are given of the periods of settlements from the Hellenistic to the Early Islamic (EI) periods and to the area of the city at its zenith according to archaeological excavations or estimations based on surveys.²

Palaestina Prima

City	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Urban Area at Zenith (ha)
Caesarea	Roman–Crusader.	130
Dora	Hellenistic–EI	7
Apollonia	Hellenistic–Crusader	28
Antipatris	Hellenistic–Byzantine	12
Lod–Diospolis	Hellenistic–EI	10
Emmaus–Nicopolis	Byzantine–Crusader	40
Jaffa–Joppa	Hellenistic–Crusader	4
Yavneh Yam–Iamnia	Hellenistic–EI	10
Paralios Maoza		
Yavneh–Iamnia	Hellenistic–EI	50
Ashdod–Azotus Hippenos	Roman(?)–EI	12
Ashdod Yam–Azotus Paralus	Hellenistic–EI	40
Ascalon	Hellenistic–Crusader	52
Gaza	Hellenistic–EI	90
Anthedon	??	90
Jerusalem	Hellenistic–Crusader	140
Neapolis	Hellenistic–Byzantine	30
Sebaste	Hellenistic–Byzantine	77
Beth Guvrin–Eleutheropolis	Roman–EI	65

¹ Tsafirir *et al.* 1994.

² See Broshi 1979, Tsafirir 1996. Also included is data from the Archaeological Survey of Israel archives.

Palaestina Secunda

City	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Urban Area at Zenith (ha)
Beth Shean-Scythopolis	Hellenistic–Crusader	130
Pella	Hellenistic–EI	60
Gadara	Hellenistic–EI	40
Abila	Hellenistic–EI	35
Capitolias-Beit Ras	Roman–EI	??
Madaba	Hellenistic–EI	12
Hesban-Esbus	Hellenistic–EI	??
Hippos-Sussita	Hellenistic–EI	8
Tiberias	Roman–Crusader	40 (Byz.) 160 (EI)
Sepphoris	Hellenistic–EI	60

Palaestina Tertia

City	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Urban Area at Zenith (ha)
Petra	Hellenistic–Byzantine	20
Elusa	Hellenistic–Byzantine	35
Beersheba-Birosaba	Roman–EI	60
Aila	Roman–EI	4?

Phoenice Maritima

City	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Urban Area at Zenith (ha)
Banias-Diocaesarea	Hellenistic–EI	75
Acre-Ptolemais	Hellenistic–Crusader	80??

Arabia

City	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Urban Area at Zenith (ha)
Bostra	Roman–EI	
Gerasa	Hellenistic–EI	84
Philadelphia-Amman	Hellenistic–EI	25??

APPENDIX II

Early Islamic Settlements in Palestine and Jordan

This list includes excavated sites at which evidence for occupation in the Early Islamic period was found, with relevant stratigraphical and chronological results indicated. Chronological definitions are given according to published reports, but in some cases, particularly for sites that were excavated up to the 1980s, different dates are indicated in the light of the redating of the occupational phases. As a consequence, the time of abandonment or decline suggested might in some cases be different from the one proposed in the publications. The list is arranged according to the administrative division into provinces in the Early Islamic period, with the type of settlements indicated: large cities, towns, villages, farmsteads, churches and monasteries, and nomadic settlements. Within the provinces, sites are listed from north to south; sites in the Jerusalem area are included in a separate list. References indicate the chapter in which sites are discussed or specific publications of excavations.

I. *Jund Filastin*

Cities and Towns

Site	Type	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Abandonment/ Decline	References
Jerusalem	Major city	Continuously	Declined in 11th cent.	Ch. 3
Ramla	Capital city	715–1068	1068	Ch. 3
Lod	Town	Continuously	Declined in 11th cent.	Ch.3
Caesarea	Town	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus.	Declined in 7th cent.	Ch. 2
Dor (Dora)	Town	Rom., Byz., EI.	Abandoned in 9th cent.	Ch. 4
Apollonia-Arsuf	Town	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus.	Declined in 11th cent.	Ch. 2
Jaffa	Town	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus.	Continuously	Ch. 4
Yavneh, Yubna	Town	Rom., Byz., EI	?	Ch. 4
Yavneh Yam/ Mahuz Yubna	Town and fortress	Byz., EI	11th cent.	Ch. 4
Beth Guvrin/ Eleutheropolis	Town	Rom., Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Ascalon	Town	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus.	Continuously	Ch. 4
Gaza	Town	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus.	Continuously	Ch.4
Beer Sheva	Town	Rom., Byz., EI	8th–9th cent.?	Ch. 4
Kh. Patish/Futais	Town?	Byz., EI	11th–12th cent.	Ch. 4
Elusa	City	Rom., Byz., EI?	7th–8th cent.?	Ch. 4

Shivta	Negev 'town'	Rom., Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Nessana	Negev 'town'	Rom., Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
'Avdat	Negev 'town'	Rom., Byz., EI	7th–8th cent.	Ch. 4
Mamshit	Negev 'town'	Rom., Byz., EI	8th cent.	Ch. 4
Rehovot/Ruheibe	Negev 'town'	Rom., Byz., EI	8th–9th cent.	Ch. 4

Other settlements

Site	Type and Ethnicity	Relevant Period of Settlement	Abandonment/Decline	References
Mansur el-'Aqab	Farmstead	Byz., EI	8th cent.	Ch. 2
Tell Tanninim	Village, Christian	Rom., Byz., EI	8th cent.	Ch. 2
Kafr Lab-Habonim	<i>Ribat</i> , Muslim	EI	11th cent.?	Ch. 4
Qedumim	Village, Samaritan	Rom., Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Magen 2008, 259–65
Kh. Migdal (Zur Nathan)	Village and monastery	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Umm Khalid (Netanya)	Village, Christian	Rom., Byz., EI	11th cent.	Ch. 4
Pardessyia	Village, Christian	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Ch. 4 and Ayalon 2008
Kafr Saba	Large village	Byz., EI, Crus., Mam., Ott.	Continuously?	Ch. 4
Kh. Deir Sam'an	Village/farm, Christian	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Magen 2008, 269–71
Kh. Bira	Village, Christian	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Zikhrin	Village, Christian	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Shoham	Village, Christian	Byz., EI	12th cent.	Ch. 3
Kh. Hani	Monastery	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Dahari and Zelinger 2008
Kh. Tinshemet	Rural church	Byz., EI	8th cent.	Dahari 2008
Kh. Leved	Village	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Sion <i>et al.</i> 2007
Kafr Jinnis (Lod)	Village	Byz., EI	11th cent.?	Messika 2006
Gezer	Village	Rom., Byz. EI	10th cent.	Ch. 3
Be'er Ma'ona	Village	Byz., EI, Mam.	11th cent.	Kletter 2007

(Continued)

Site	Type and Ethnicity	Relevant Period of Settlement	Abandonment/Decline	References
Mishmar David 'Abud	Village, Christian Village with churches	Byz., EI Byz., EI, Crus., Mam.	9th cent.? Continuously	Taxel 2013. Schick 1995, 240–1
Kh. Duran	Large village	EI	11th cent.	Ch. 3
Sarafand al- Harab (Ness Ziona)	Village	EI	11th cent.	Ch. 3
Kh. 'Ilin	Village, Christian	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Herodium	Churches	Rom., Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Netzer <i>et al.</i> 1993
Giv'at Arnon	Village	Byz., EI	10th cent.?	Paran 2009
Tell Ashdod	Village	Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Ashdod Yam	<i>Ribat</i> , Muslim	EI	11th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Berakhot/ Bureikut	Village and church Christian and Muslim	Byz., EI, Mam.	9th cent., church 8th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. ed-Dawwara (Halhul)	Village and monastery	Rom., Byz., EI	8th–9th cent.	Ch. 4
'Anab el-Kebir	Church	Byz., EI, Mam	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Aristobulia	Village and church	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Umm Deimnah	Village and church	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Beit Loya	Village, church, and mosque	Rom., Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Qasra	Village and church	Rom., Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Eshtamo'a/ Samo'a	Village, synagogue, and mosque	Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Susiya	Village, synagogue, and mosque	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Rujm Jerida	Farmhouse, Christian	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Yattir	Village and church	Byz., EI, Mam.	10th–11th cent.?	Ch. 4
Kh. 'Anim	Village and synagogue	Byz., EI, Mam.	11th cent.?	Ch. 4
Tell 'Ira	Village	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Tell Malhata	Village and fortress	Byz., EI	8th cent.?	Ch. 4
Tell Masos	Monastery	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Sede Boqer	Village and mosque, pagan, Muslim	EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Nahal Besor	Village pagan, Muslim	EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Nahal La'ana	Village and mosque	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Nahal Mitnan	Farm	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Nahal Oded and Har Oded	Nomadic encampment	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4

Nahal Shahaq	Village and farm, Muslim	EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
‘Ein Yahav	Village and farm, Muslim	EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
‘Evrona	Farm	EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Eilat-Eilot	Villages and farms	EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Be'er Ora	Mining site and mosques	EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4

II. *Jund al Urdunn* (including relevant sites in *Jund Dimashq*)

Cities and Towns

Site	Type	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Abandonment/ Decline	References
Tiberias	Capital city	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus.	11th cent.	Ch. 2
Acre	Town	Hell., Byz., EI, Crus.		Ch. 4
Yozneam	Town	EI, Crus.	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Sepphoris	Town– village	Rom., Byz., EI	10th cent.?	Ch. 4
Hippos- Sussita	Town	Rom., Byz., EI	749?	Ch. 2
Pella	Town	Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Gadara	Town	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Ch. 4
Abila	Town	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Ch. 4
Capitolias- Beit Ras	Town	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Lenzen 1995; Lenzen and Knauf 1987
Umm el- Jimmal	Town	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Jarash	City/town	Rom., Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Amman	Town and palace	Rom., Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Hesban	Town	Rom., Byz., EI	11th cent.?	Ch. 4
Madaba	Town	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Umm el- Rasas	Town	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Petra	Town	Rom., Byz., EI	8th–9th cent.?	Ch. 4
Ayla	Town and <i>Miṣr</i>	Rom., Byz., EI	11th cent.	Ch. 4

Other settlements

Site	Type and Ethnicity	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Abandonment/ Decline	References
Qasrin	Village and synagogue	Byz., EI	749?	Ch. 4
Deir 'Aziz	Village and synagogue	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Umm el-Qanatir	Village and synagogue	Byz., EI	749?	Ch. 4
Horvat 'Erav	Village and churches	Byz., EI, Mam.	11th cent.?	Ch. 4
Kh. Shubeika	Village and church	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. 'Uza	Village	Hell., Rom., Byz., EI		Getzov 2009
Kursi	Monastery	Byz., EI	8th–9th cent.	Ch. 2
Capernaum	Village, Christian	Byz., EI	11th cent.	Ch. 2
Kh. Minya	Muslim estate/ 'palace'	EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 2
Sinnabra	Muslim estate/ 'palace'	EI	10th cent.?	Ch. 2
Hammat Gader	Baths	Rom., Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Neve 'Ur	Village	EI	10th cent.?	Ch. 2
Messilot	Village	Byz., EI	10th cent.?	Ch. 2
Achihud	Village	Byz., EI	10th cent.	IAA archives
Tamra	Village and churches	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Shunem	Village	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	IAA archives
Ramat Yishay	Village	Byz., EI, Mam.	11th cent.	Hana 2010
Castra	Large village, Christian and Samaritan	Byz., EI	8th cent.	Ch. 4
Shiqmona	Large village, Jewish? Christian?	Byz., EI	8th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. Tinani	Village, Muslim?	EI	10th cent.?	Ch. 4
El-Quweisma	Village and churches	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Schick 1995, 433–4
Qastal	'Palace' and mosque	EI	10th cent.?	Ch. 4
Qasr Hallabat	'Palace'	Rom., Byz., EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4 and Arce 2006
Rihab	Large village and churches	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Ch. 2
Kh. Es-Samra	Large village and churches	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Ch. 2
Ma'in	Village and churches	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Schick 1995, 398–400
Mt. Nebo	Monastery	Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.?	Schick 1995, 408–9
Dhiban	Village	Rom., Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Schick 1995, 287–8
Ghor es-Safi	Village, Jewish and Christian	Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Politis 2005

Jericho	Village, Jewish and Christian	Rom., Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Ch. 4
Kh. al-Mafjar	‘Palace’	EI	10th–11th cent.	Ch. 4
Umm el-Walid	<i>Qūṣur</i> and mosque	EI	10th cent.	Ch. 4
Jebel Harun	Church	Byz., EI	9th cent.	Ch. 4
Humayma	Christian village and Muslim estate	Rom., Byz., EI	10th cent. ?	Ch. 4

III. Jerusalem area

Site	Type	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Abandonment/ Decline	References
Ras el-Tawil	Farm and monastery	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Gibson 1985–1986
Kh. ‘Adasa	Village	Rom., Byz., EI, Mam.	10th–11th cent.	Khalaily and Avissar 2008
Ras Abu Ma‘aruf	Village	Rom., Byz., EI	8th cent.	Seligman 1999
Deir Ghazali	Farm and monastery	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Avner 2000
Kh. Ka‘kul	Large village	Rom., Byz., EI, Mam., Ott.	11th cent.	Seligman 1999
Ramot	Monastery	Byz.? EI	10th–11th cen	Arav, Di Segni, and Kloner 1990
Nabi Samwil	Farm, monastery, and pottery kilns	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus., Ott.	Continuously	Magen and Dadon 2003
Abu Gosh	Village	Byz., EI, Crus.	Continuously	Abel 1925, <i>NEAEHL</i> I
‘Ein Hanniya	Village and church	Byz., EI	10th cent.?	Schick 1995, 290–1, Baramki 1934
‘Ein Karim	Village and churches	Byz., EI, Crus.	Continuously	Schick 1995, 293
Mt. Scopus	Monastery	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Amit, Seligman, and Zilberbod 2003
Bethany/el-‘Azariah	Village and monastery	Rom., Byz., EI, Crus., Mam., Ott.	Continuously	Saller 1957, Schick 1995, 262
Kh. Abu Suwwana	Nomadic settlement	EI	10th–11th cent.	Sion 1997; Magness 2004
Martyrius	Monastery	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Magen and Talgam 1990
Euthymius	Monastery	Byz., EI, Crus.	12th cent.	Hirschfeld 1993 <i>b</i>
Ramat Rahel	Village and monastery	Rom., Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Lipschitz <i>et al.</i> 2009, 2011
Kathisma church	Octagonal church	Byz., EI	10th cent.	Avner 2003, 2006–2007

Site	Type	Relevant Periods of Settlement	Abandonment/ Decline	References
Umm Leisun	Village and monastery	Byz., EI	9th cent.?	Seligman and Abu Raya 2002
Kh. Siyar el-Ghanam	Monastery	Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.?	Corbo 1955
Bir el Qutt	Monastery	Byz., EI	10th–11th cent.	Corbo 1955, 113–39
Kh. Luka	Monastery	Byz., EI, Mam., Ott.	9th–10th cent.	Corbo 1955
Umm Tuba	Village	Byz., EI	9th–10th cent.	Adawi 2010
Bethlehem	Village/town	Byz., EI, Crus.	Continuity	Schick 1995, 266–9
Shepherds' Field	Village and monastery	Byz., EI	8th cent.?	Tzaferis 1975
Beth Saffafa	Farm	Byz., EI	8th–9th cent.?	Feig 2003

APPENDIX III

Regional Surveys: Byzantine and Early Islamic sites

This list presents the number of Byzantine and Early Islamic sites discovered in regional surveys. It is based on the data from the Archaeological Survey of Israel's published surveys¹ and on reports of regional surveys in the Palestinian territories and Jordan. Most survey reports maintain a schematic division between the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (see also the discussion in Ch. 1 on the accuracy of the survey results). In the Negev Highlands, where the problematic aspects of this rigid division were first acknowledged, sites from this period were referred to as 'Byzantine–Early Islamic'.

Regional survey	Byzantine	Early Islamic	Byz.–EI
Akhziv, Hanita (1, 2)	45	3	
Naharia-'Amka (5)	34	6	
Rosh Pina (18)	20	14	6
Achihud (20)	34	11	6
Haifa West (22)	45	10	
Haifa East (23)	32	12	
Shefar'am (24)	55	3	
Atlit (26)	15	6	
Yagur (27)	120	16	
Nahalal (28)	83	35	
Dor (30)	126	13	
Dalia (31)	70	6	
Mishmar Ha'emek (32)	106	49	
'En Dor, Har Tavor (41, 45)	74	12	
Gazit (46)	37	0	
Binyamina (48)	86	19	
Regavim (49)	87	26	
Michmoret, Hadera (52, 53)	86	13	
Ma'anit (54)	65	11	
Herzliyya (69)	43	18	
Rosh Ha'ain (78)	77	26	
Lod (80)	106	28	
Northern Samaria ²	277	125	
Southern Samaria ³	276	49 ⁴	
Land of Binyamin ⁵	74	23	

(Continued)

¹ See specific references in the Bibliography. The Archaeological Survey of Israel maps are now published digitally. See <http://www.antiquities.org.il/survey/newmap.asp#>

² Zertal 2004, 2008. ³ Finkelstein 1988–1989; Finkelstein *et al.* 1997.

⁴ Including Crusader and Mamluk sites. ⁵ Magen and Finkelstein 1993.

Regional survey	Byzantine	Early Islamic	Byz.-EI
Ashdod (84)	75	40	
Gedera (85)	50	17	5
Nizzanim (87,88)	146	60	
Ziqim (91)	111	77	
Lachisch (98)	158	35	
Jerusalem	317	61	
Nes Harim (104)	98	20	
Herodion (108/2)	46	8	
Deir Mar Saba (109/7)	43	29	
Ramat Beth Shemesh ⁶	419	73	
Amazia (109)	573	156	
Nirim (112)	42		
Urim (125)	120	19	
Nahal Yattir (139)	89	13	
Tel Malhata (144)	67	4	
Horvat 'Uza (145)	34	5	
Revivim (159)	63	6	
Shivta (166)	181	4	
Sede Boqer West (167)	57	11	
Sede Boqer East (168)	45	9	
Har Nafha (196)	233	12	
Har Hamran South-west (198)			118
Har Hamran South-east (199)			107
Mizpe Ramon South-west (200)			157
Har Ramon (203)	27	39	
Makhtesh Ramon (204)	95	19	
Har Saggi (225)			95
Har Karkom (229)	65	83	
Wadi Hasa ⁷	125	6	
Kerak Plateau ⁸	295	82	
Hesban Region ⁹	126	41	
East Jordan Valley ¹⁰	76	51	
Southern Ghors and North-east 'Arabah ¹¹	63	2	4
Wadi Hasa North Bank ¹²	37	37	
Tafila-Busayra ¹³	54	8	4

⁶ Dagan 2011.⁷ MacDonald 1988.⁸ Miller 1991.⁹ Ibach 1987.¹⁰ Yassine *et al.* 1988.¹¹ MacDonald 1992.¹² Clark *et al.* 1994.¹³ MacDonald *et al.* 2004.

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